# HOLDING ONTO THE SILVER GREYHOUND'S TAIL

## FOREWORD

I wrote this account of the Overseas Courier Service fifty years after the incidents themselves. My daughter's curiosity sparked it. Her high school history class was concerned with World War I. Aware of this, her mother gave her a photo from my scrapbook of me with a group of Overseas Couriers in front of the Hôtel de Crillon, Place de la Concorde, Paris in December 1918. Scrapbooks and diaries were not encouraged in the Armed Forces at war, but I was determined to keep my scrapbook. My daughter requested more information, as did her teacher. I looked over my scrapbook with its sketches, photos and memorabilia and then turned to my typewriter to comply. I enjoyed the experience, as it provided a bond for a father whose daughter is 61 years his junior. Once launched by that Fay Lady of the Lake upon waters of romantic recollection, the adventures came very much alive.

**Wallace F. Hamilton, La Jolla, California, May 1968**

Our young country, with characteristic impetuosity and enthusiasm, had plunged into World War I, playing the self-appointed role of "Champion of World Democracy". Bold we were, and brave, but we were not too well prepared, from the standpoint of military logistics, to engage in armed conflict 3,000 miles away.

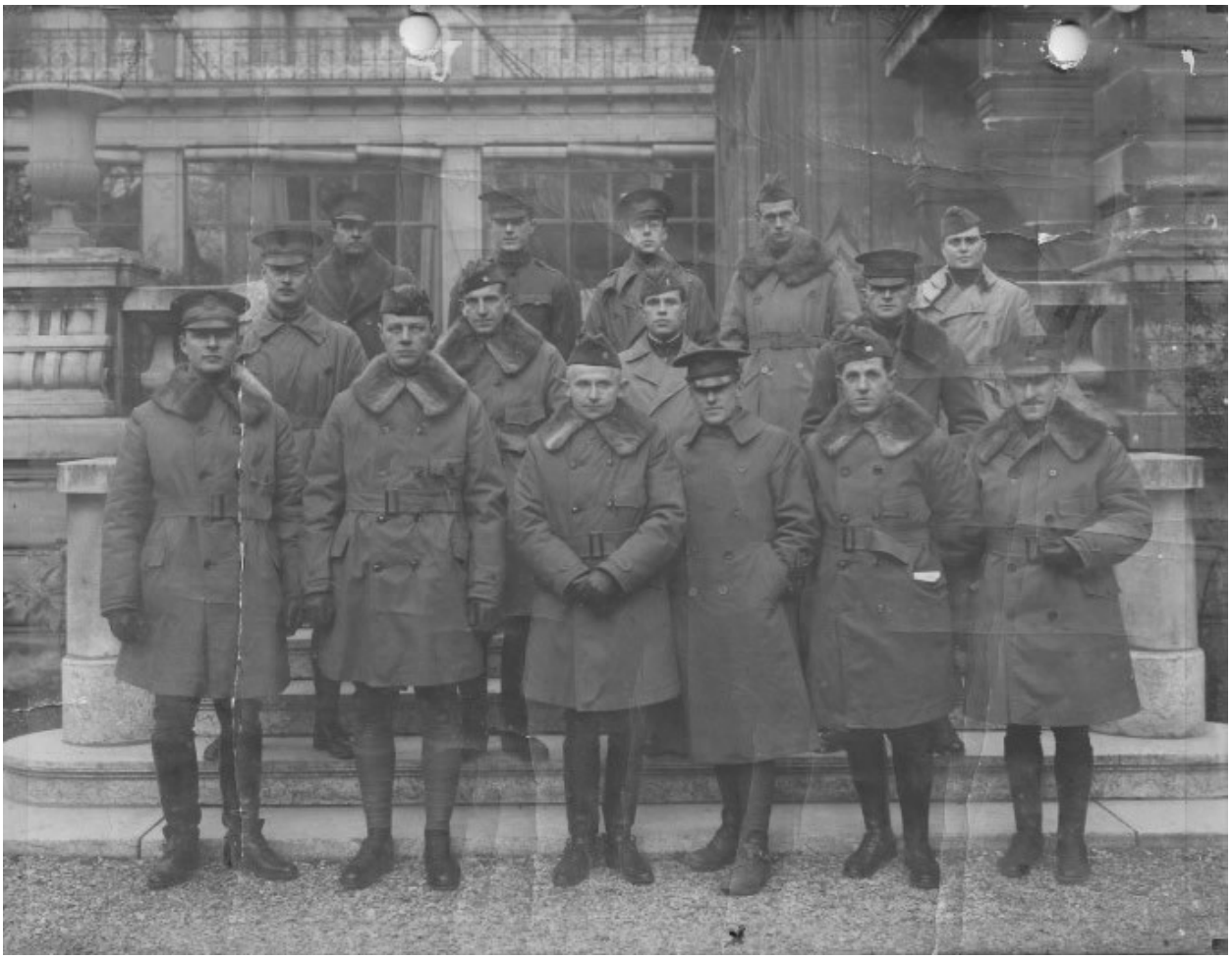
One lack, which soon made itself felt, lay in the vital area of communications. As the American Expeditionary Forces (AEF) grew ever larger, armed convoy by armed convoy, both in England and in France, there appeared a serious void. General Washington could throw a dollar across an American river but General Pershing, fine soldier that he was, could not send thought waves across the Atlantic to the Secretary of War, nor could he receive any. The situation demanded something more realistic. Transatlantic cables existed, though few-in-number, and with extremely low sending capacity. They were, of course, swamped. Otherwise, communication was by the coming and going of boats. Carrier pigeons were ruled out, at least for long flights.

Having in mind the overpowering communications existing today, the present generation will find it hard to comprehend the frightening lack of it in 1917 when General John J. "Black Jack" Pershing arrived in Paris with his staff on June 13, 1917. So much was at stake. Within ten years after the war, there were 21 operating cables compared to just three when America entered the conflict. With more cables came faster transmission of messages – 2,400 words per minute in contrast to 15 words per minute, and with fully automated handling. The messages of 1917 were handled at least six times before they reached their destination.

Although long range telephone and telegraph made rapid advances, they were not ready for service in World War I. The thermionic valve and the audion tube promised great things to come in radio and radar. I saw an experimental radio under test at the USA Field Artillery School at Ft. Sill, Oklahoma, where I reported for training in July 1917. No radio that I know of ever reached the Front. An important step came in early 1918, when the U.S. Army erected the Lafayette Super High-Power Radio Station at Croix d'Hins Airfield near Bordeaux, France for transatlantic wireless communication.

It must be regarded an important factor, when considering the need for an Overseas Courier Service, that transatlantic flights did not start, even in an exploratory way, until June 1919, when British aviators John Alcock and Arthur Brown crossed the Atlantic from Newfoundland to Ireland nonstop in a Vickers Vimy bomber. Theirs was considered the first transatlantic airmail flight.

With cables going out 15 days late, we turned to our allies for help for their sophisticated experience. For centuries, England had maintained a “King’s Messenger” service. [Charles II of England had broken four silver greyhounds from a bowl and given one to each courier. A silver greyhound thus became the symbol of the OCS]. Correspondingly, the French had their strong and effective “Courier Francois”.



The original “Silver Greyhounds” Overseas Courier Service, December 1918, in front of the Hôtel de Crillon, Paris. Wallace Hamilton is standing to the right of Major Peaslee with no belt on his trench coat, hand in pocket.

Our mentors knew what we wanted and needed, and graciously and amply supplied it. They helped us organize the Overseas Courier Service under the Ordnance Corp of the U.S. Army. Amos J. Peaslee, was the key figure in the plan. He was not “Regular Army”. In fact, he was a New York lawyer, highly regarded by the Bar, who won a commission as Captain of Ordnance. [Captain Peaslee sailed from New York in early April 1918 to establish an officer courier service to connect the headquarters in Washington with the General Headquarters of the

American Expeditionary Forces in Europe.] His quiet skill and poise, along with a natural ability to organize and promote, attracted General Pershing's attention. Further promotion to the rank of Major was not long in coming. Peaslee held the respect and friendship of many persons in high places, especially in the diplomatic coterie. Hard bitten Army regulars at Staff level felt his ability and persuasive charm and seemed to throw a curtain of power around his swift and decisive movements. Elements of supply appeared from nowhere and fell into the pattern of Peaslee's expanding program. Within the great wheel of the AEF, little wheels began to mesh and whirl. Dispatches were assembled. An officer Courier and his non-commissioned officer assistant appeared center stage with pouches, looking determined but a bit perplexed. An Army Cadillac whizzed them off to an unknown port and onto a boat, the skipper of which hoped to elude the German submarines in off shore waters. Sinkings ran high.

My first meeting with Captain Peaslee was at Tours, France on a very wet afternoon in early August 1918. As headquarters for the Services of Supply, Tours seethed with activity. The savage German drive for Paris had been thrown back on July 18. The lovely Valley of the Loire perked up with the good news and looked less bedraggled. Although German guns had staged a concentration of power such as the world had never known, their attacks had failed. The 42nd American Division had fought so well as to be cited by General Henri Gouraud, Commander of the French Expeditionary Corp. The Germans knew their big drive, designed to conquer before American power could be felt, came too late.

Peaslee had a comforting manner. I was not in a very elevated area of thought when we looked each other over and shook hands. Although commissioned a Cavalryman, I had a graduation certificate from the School of Fire for Field Artillery at Ft. Sill in my pocket. I knew how to wage war with a "French 75mm". I had been at the Front and the opportunity to fight was being denied me. Peaslee seemed to understand. "Your disappointment, Captain Hamilton, is gain for me." He gave me a disarming smile. "By the way, we leave for London in an hour. We'll go as far as Paris in my car."

Ardennes Region, 1918

Well, at least this would be a change from avoiding artillery caissons galloping out of the rain-soaked forest at night's darkest hour, side swiping my pup tent and kicking unexploded German shells around, as the 77th Field Artillery got its baptismal fire in the Forêt de Fère near

Fère-en-Tardenois. The sector I had so reluctantly departed was a place of unburied dead, artillery duels, captive balloons, flies, yellow jackets and lost bedrolls. Evening mess was on the enemy – we captured his rolling kitchens and food cache. [This fighting would become known as The Aisne-Marne Counter Offensive, Phase II of the Second Battle of the Marne, July 18 – August 17, 1918.]

My orders had been to leave the Front and take the first available transportation to Tours. But after a night in the saturated ruin of a Chateau Thierry bakery, shelled regularly almost on the hour, I wasn't seeing so clearly. The only transportation I saw was my old outfit climbing the hill out of the Marne Valley. The adjutant was nowhere in sight. I simply found a place in the moving column of bedraggled soldiers and went along.

German Soldier, Fère-en-Tardenois, August 1918

In a drizzle, on a sloppy high crowned road, with a background cannonade, an orderly who knew me brought me a horse. From up ahead came the cry "Keep those units closed up!" This command I repeated, and heard it echo all the way back to the hastily constructed pontoon bridge across the Marne. And so forward we moved through trodden wheat fields and shell mangled trees. We passed horse bodies and smashed escort wagons with upset wheels still spinning. German shell and food dumps seemed everywhere, hastily abandoned by an enemy whose stubborn resistance to the advancing American surge proved in vain. The Germans took a whipping and they knew it.

After two days, the regimental adjutant found me and saw to it personally that I got on a truck bound for the rear. Before this could happen, I saw part of the bitter, brutal battle on the Ourcq River between American infantry and the elite German Guard. It was hand to hand, with no quarter asked or given, in and out of towns that changed possession many times before the Yank units held.

General James Harbord, brilliant at Chateau Thierry [in the bloody contest at Belleau Wood in June 1918], had been tapped by General Pershing in July of 1918 to be the

Commanding General of the Services of Supply at Tours. [The Services of Supply had moved from AEF Headquarters in Chaumont to Tours in February of 1918 to be closer to the Front.] Cavalry officers tended to hang together. I had served him once as Acting Sergeant Major at San Ysidro on the Mexican border. The officer he sent to talk with me was also Cavalry and had also been on the border. He said "You were due here three days ago. What were you doing at the Front, drawing pictures?" "Some", I admitted. "But what I want is a battery and to go back up there." "You'll get the chance", he promised. "Meanwhile you're needed here for duty with the Courier Service. It has top priority. The General thinks you can be useful to the man in charge, Captain Peaslee."

Word had spread around Army men that it was impossible to get to Paris. We had circled around the city en route to the Front. Yet, here was I, practically there. Perhaps I should rejoice over this turn of events rather than gripe, drawing special duty instead of being up there killing people. After Captain Peaslee had briefed me, telling me of what we sought to accomplish, as well as of the obstacles standing in the way, I warmed to the prospect. "Failure", he assured me, "is out." Our first stop on the way to Paris was an excellent dinner. The region of Vouvray is not just a place. It is a rare vintage that will not ship but lives only a golden moment in the Loire atmosphere to impart that certain appeal of a masterly French "omelette", impossible either to describe or forget.

Champagne Country, 1918

We dodged French, English and American motor lorries and camions all the way up the Loire to Orleans and then more of the same, northward to Paris. Startled not to be rained on, I spoke of the night's autumnal beauty. "Quite so" observed Captain Peaslee dryly. "Beauty that may mean trouble." Prophetically, we had no more moved within the walls of Paris than an "Alerte!" sounded, sending us flying to the nearest "Abri" for shelter from falling anti-aircraft shells returning to earth in fragments. My first contact with a Parisian crowd smelling of perfume, garlic and wine! It would not be my last.

Encouraged by a large moon and tempting targets, German planes hammered away for an hour. After the "All Clear!", we went on to the Continental Hotel in the Rue de Rivoli for the night, noting fires here and there. Next morning, Captain Peaslee showed me all the important

military set ups in Paris useful to know about to expedite courier functioning. I felt grateful for this. Paris could feel frighteningly lonely and frustrating.

Arriving with Captain Peaslee in London, I found Base Section 3 of the U.S. Army to be another world. The English have their own way of doing things, like tea at 4:30 pm. The Overseas Courier office was in the main post office in the charge of an American field clerk. I could understand the language – most of it. Cockney and culture alike were difficult.


Marne Campaign, French 75mm Field Gun, 1918

The more I learned about my new assignment, I came to realize that all the lively wartime action would not be confined to the Front. Dodging subs in the Channel and train bombings on the Continent made for excitement enough. The Overseas Courier Service could be deadly too. I could sense the need to be resourceful, daring and willing to stick my neck out, if need be, for the good of the cause, come what may.

My admiration for Captain Peaslee grew with the travel acquaintance. I found he knew many people in high places and how best to get along with them. Perhaps General Harbord was right since, knowing my way around in the military, I could be of some use. Working together,

we might well expect to survive the storms of trampled authority caused by our need to get the job done.

The ways of modern organization being as they are, it was not long after the Overseas Courier Service really commenced to roll, that I learned of a movement within the Army command to bring it under tighter control – to subordinate it. For quite a few weeks during those impromptu preliminary activities, one might say that Peaslee "was" the Overseas Courier Service. It thrived on his outstanding ability and cohesive thinking. The officers Captain Peaslee selected entered into their tasks in the same spirit of determination that characterized our commander. All were intensely loyal and eager to please.

The head of the Overseas Courier Service had almost unlimited authority and initiative which he used with great tact and consideration for the rank and problems of others. He maintained close contact with his superiors while practically living in his Cadillac, visiting Courier offices as they came into being, striving to make everything taut ship and efficient under adverse conditions. After the Armistice, Major Peaslee usually took some distinguished visitor with him, one who was interested in the reconstruction of war-torn Europe.


Ouvrage Fortification, French 155mm Field Gun, 1918

Human restraints demanded by Overseas Courier Service rules seemed to bring out the "sacred cow" in those personalities who claimed authority and felt themselves privileged, civil and military, within the AEF. Refusing to let them use our services only whetted their determination. They wrote indignant letters to members of Congress and sought the influence of diplomats. Fervid appeals went to officers of high rank in the Allied cause. Resorting to fraternal ties and even the use of feminine charms played a part. But, for once, at least, all these selfish devices failed.

Within the Army – that portion of it at least assigned to the European Front, stories of the Overseas Courier Service spread rapidly, many of them inaccurate and exaggerated. It was rated as a chosen instrument, an elite service, a lively, moving way to serve the country, offering

plenty of action, danger and excitement in an ever-shifting locale, and with a dash of romance. Requests to somehow get into the Courier Service came from all over the place. When requests came in just to make one trip to the States, as a matter of personal emergency, Captain Peaslee gave these requests every consideration. If the applicant, by his record in the AEF, could assure of his ability to get the dispatches through, a place was made for him.

One Captain had convinced us of his resourcefulness and spunk. He had been sent from the Front in charge of a sizable group of German prisoners traveling by train. At times, the train stopped and the Germans, under guard, got off to relieve themselves in the French tradition. For some unknown reason, the engineer started off without the prisoners. Our Captain ran over the tops of cars and forced the engineer at pistol point to back up and pick up the prisoners. It was thought he could be trusted to get the dispatches through and he did. In Washington, the pressure was put on for the benefit of the one-trippers. Finally, it got to be routine that every inbound Courier from America was a new face.

To make clear just how the Overseas Courier Service immediately improved the communication system, use of transatlantic cables was restricted to messages of a vital or critical nature, high priority stuff. Anything that could wait seven or eight days in transit was entrusted to the Courier Service both to and from Washington, assuming, that is, that we could function at this unprecedented pace. Ordinary mail took from 22 days to a month on the way, as most ships moved east and west in armed convoys to protect themselves from enemy submarines. As to the propriety of a Courier Service, three important phases demanded thoughtful analysis. First, how to set up and maintain, under war time conditions, a seven-day schedule between General Pershing's headquarters at the AEF in Chaumont, [150 miles southeast of Paris, in operation since September 1, 1917], and Washington, as well as to and from London. Second, the number of registered documents that could be carried by an officer Courier with an enlisted assistant per trip each way. Third, who should be authorized to use this exclusive service with, of course, the corollary question, how to control the contents of the special, sinkable pouches. (The rule: sink pouches; let nothing fall into enemy hands.)

At the disposal of the U.S. Transport Service (our secret contact) were super vessels fast enough to outrun subs – the Great Northern, the Leviathan, the British Cunard Olympic, the George Washington, and a few others. (The George Washington carried President Wilson on both his European trips to Paris after the Armistice.)

American dexterity and French amazement mingled as changes went on. It was a "hell bent for leather" movement, no doubt about that, along with the wonder and mystery of French trains. French and English trains were basic and the cause of many complications due to the

exigencies of war. There was intense resistance, but we squeezed in the Couriers somehow. At our disposal were Cadillacs, Dodges, motorcycles with sidecars, and an occasional plane. (After the Armistice, more of the latter helped us out.)

At ports where American officers commanded, we were harshly dealt with – that is, at first. One outraged general officer shouted, "What the hell is the Overseas Courier Service?" True, Courier demands were peremptory, couched in civil terms, insistent upon unyielding priority. The officers were in a strange land and cautious. Once they got the picture and the need, they became unbelievably efficient.

American engineers built entire railroads, vast, modern dock facilities manned by battalions of Negro stevedores who set new records in loading and unloading ships. Among transplanted wonders was the American Telephone System with trained operators, an exclusive Corp of brave women ["Hello" Girls], quickly hidden away from questing male eyes and stoutly guarded. (Over the phones, however, we rejoiced at their lovely voices.)

The Military Postal Express Service (PES), [established on June 15, 1918 under the command of Lieutenant Colonel Thorndike D. Howe], was part of the Services of Supply at Tours. As the result of many complaints, the PES had been beefed up, expanded, and had moved into the Hôtel Le Mediterraneen on Rue de Charenton near the Quai de la Rapée on the Right Bank of the Seine River in Paris, taking over the entire building. No longer to be the free and glorious thing it was, the Overseas Courier Service was attached to the Postal Express Service. If the Couriers were a little sensitive about this transition, it was only because their pride of achievement was dulled by the perfectly awful showing the PES had made in getting just the ordinary mail to the troops. Perhaps I realized, as many did not, that the PES was in great part the victim of circumstances dictated by the war itself.

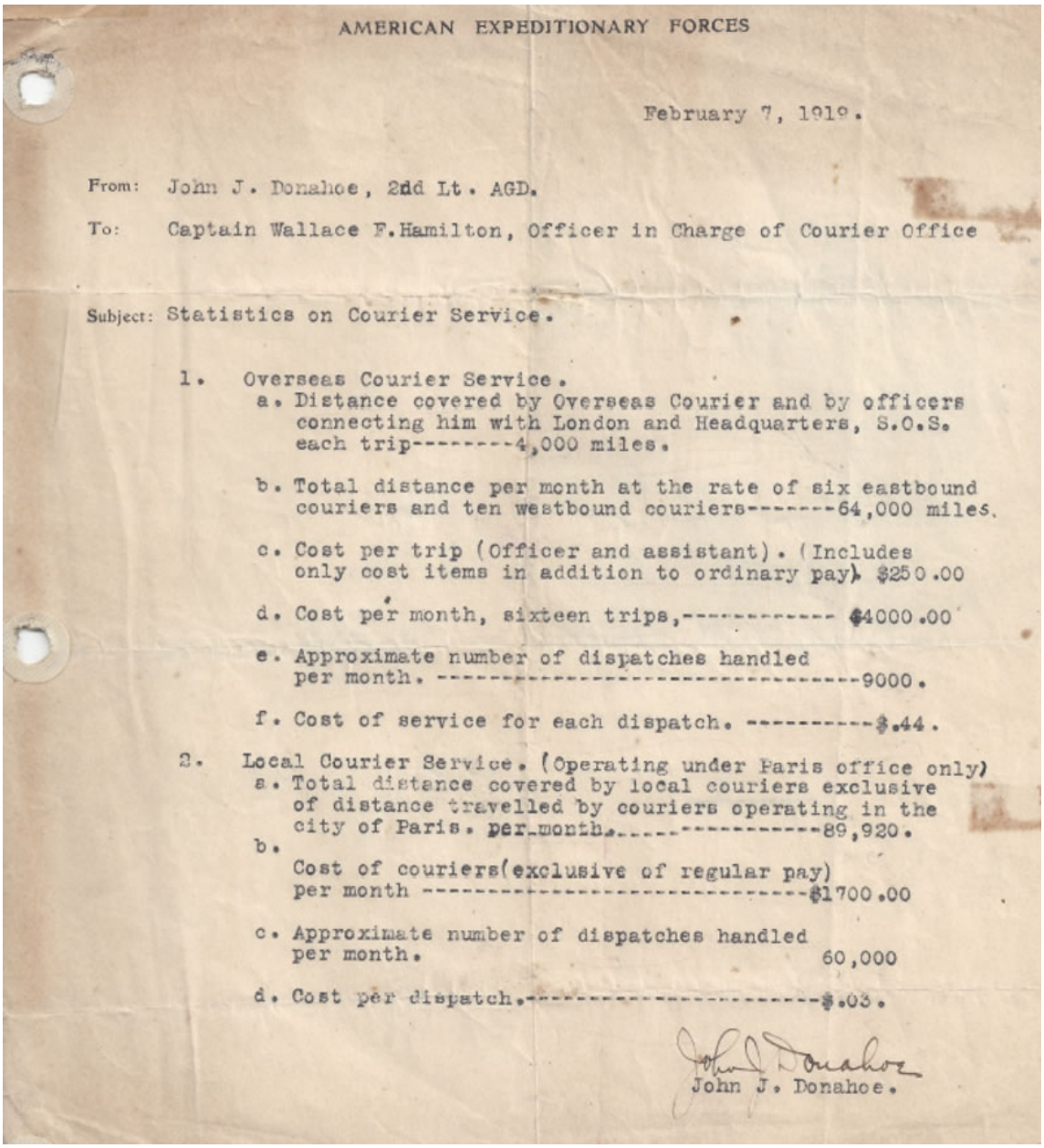
The PES had been slow getting the trained men badly needed in the very beginning of their outsized enterprise. This was corrected. Private mail was censored both at troop or company level, as well as by the Base Censor in the Hôtel Le Mediterraneen. Our American troops had been scattered to several Fronts which needed bolstering up and, even when regrouped and under American command, the offensive fought forward so rapidly that getting their mail to them was all but impossible and inevitably delayed. Nonetheless, PES was roundly and profanely denounced in military circles. Of course, there had to be censorship which slowed the handling of mail. The boys wanted to tell the folks back home many things they shouldn't have. The Base Censor called me into his office one day. His staff had intercepted a letter written by a soldier to his mother, enclosing a cluster of live "cooties" [lice]. We enjoyed a refreshing

laugh. “Cooties, I said to the Base Censor, “were about the only things we hadn’t removed from Overseas Courier pouches.”

Signal Corps made phone arrangements incredibly swift and satisfactory. The phone on my desk upstairs at the Hôtel Le Mediterraneen tied me instantly with every echelon of power and authority where Americans held sway and, moreover, with everyone of importance to Courier functioning. To a large degree, this was true of the French and English hook-ups, which were remarkable. I do not hesitate to say that without this kind of communication support, Overseas Courier Service could not have prevailed.

Ship information came to my Paris office in code by telephone from Transport Service. The officer chosen to make the trip was named, departure dates set and all those who were entitled to use the Overseas Courier Service were notified by telegraph or direct by phone with a written confirmation. These would be: AEF General Headquarters in Chaumont; Services of Supply in Tours; Allied Supreme War Council at Versailles; President Wilson’s personal representative, Colonel Edward House, at the American Embassy in Paris; Colonel Charles Dawes, American Commander in Paris; Ed Stettinius at Base Section No. 3 in London; the Signal Corps Photographic Section at Vincennes; the *Stars & Stripes*, official AEF newspaper and, of course, certain others in high places by special dispensation. If I had my choice of three ships, one at Liverpool, one at Brest, and one at Bordeaux, I chose the fleetest, however inconvenient. I usually went along until I had the Courier safely aboard ship. Plans could change abruptly when submarine danger dictated. This challenge put everyone on alert. After war’s end, this grim threat ceased. This was the France to Washington procedure. Trips from Washington to France were arranged in the U.S., but cooperation was tight and subject to AEF control, though AEF often had to prove it. My office in Paris was the center toward which, hub-like, the dispatches moved as the spokes of a wheel. At times, I merely guided the officer Courier’s movements through the confusion of intricacies, relying on his resourcefulness.

Looking back in fond recollection at the statistics, what we hoped to achieve and what we actually did, including moments of dismay and moments of monumental satisfaction, it must be admitted the Overseas Courier Service did not make that seven-day goal. There was just too much confusion. Frustrations and limitations and human frailty overwhelmed our earnest purpose. Our record time stood at seven days and 20 hours. Our average turned out to be nearer 11 days. But with all those crossings over the Atlantic, with their risks and bizarre happenings, not a dispatch was lost. Each Overseas Courier trip covered 4,000 miles, with six eastbound and ten westbound Couriers in motion each month, handling a total of 9,000 registered dispatches. In one way or another, let come what may, the OCS came through.



AMERICAN EXPEDITIONARY FORCES

February 7, 1919.

From: John J. Donahoe, 2dd Lt. AGD.

To: Captain Wallace F.Hamilton, Officer in Charge of Courier Office

Subject: Statistics on Courier Service.

1. Overseas Courier Service.
   a. Distance covered by Overseas Courier and by officers connecting him with London and Headquarters, S.O.S. each trip--------4,000 miles.
   b. Total distance per month at the rate of six eastbound couriers and ten westbound couriers-------64,000 miles.
   c. Cost per trip (Officer and assistant). (Includes only cost items in addition to ordinary pay) $250.00
   d. Cost per month, sixteen trips,---------- $4000.00
   e. Approximate number of dispatches handled per month. ----------9000.
   f. Cost of service for each dispatch. ----------$.44.

2. Local Courier Service. (Operating under Paris office only)
   a. Total distance covered by local couriers exclusive of distance travelled by couriers operating in the city of Paris. per month.----------89,920.
   b. Cost of couriers(exclusive of regular pay) per month ----------$1700.00
   c. Approximate number of dispatches handled per month. 60,000
   d. Cost per dispatch.----------$.03.

John J. Donahoe.

Never-before seen statistics of the Overseas Courier Service activities compiled in February 1919

The firing pin of an army Springfield rifle is a vital part. Services of Supply was short of them. All very secret, a drive to overtake St.-Mihiel Salient, [an area between Verdun and Nancy held by the Germans since the fall of 1914], was to start at 1:00 am, September 12, 1918. Now, for the first time, a ready American army was to throw its power into an attempt to retake it. Hence, rush the crates of firing pins over by Courier.

The Courier Service was ready. The vessel bearing the Courier from the States and his precious cargo was too large to dock at the French port of Brest. When the anchor dropped, we

had a “lighter” [flat bottomed barge] alongside. One crate worked loose from the sling, fell and hit the rail of the lighter. It split open and a cascade of firing pins went into the sea. Thus, we knew for sure what had long been rumored. We like to think the Courier Service aided that successful drive. Whether it did or not, we certainly sped those crates to the Front “tout de suite”.

The unexpected always seemed destined to happen. The Courier Service had to adjust and somehow find the right answer. On one occasion, a distinguished Captain was perhaps too gallant. In any case, he caused the officer Courier and his assistant to be removed from the cabin reserved for them, when a shortage of space showed up. Protests notwithstanding, the pouches of dispatches were chucked into the ship’s hold, the Couriers got Navy hammocks, and two charming Red Cross nurses enjoyed the cabin. When news of this mischance reached Courier headquarters in Paris, the sparks flew. The pouches were recovered at the Philadelphia General Post Office and rushed frantically to official Washington.

It fell to my lot one night in late September 1918, to take the Courier pouches from Paris to London. The Gare du Nord was crowded with Allied soldiers and civilians. Out on the train platforms, all was confusion and angry cries. An intuitive sense had warned me to go much earlier than usual. Indeed, there was a slip up somewhere and no compartment had been reserved, despite profuse assurance that it had. Because I had arrived early, I managed a few minutes with the Guard du Place alone. From my musette bag, I drew forth soap, cube sugar, cigarettes and a 10 Franc note. My companion raised his shoulders, closed his eyes and exclaimed “It is impossible, mon Capitaine, but come with me.” The lines of his handsome face deepened. In 15 minutes, it would have been impossible. He locked me in a compartment, warned me not to unlock the door, even for a moment, no matter what happened. And then he was gone, his pockets bulging with my enticements. No sooner had he exited than a swarm of excited Frenchmen burst into the corridor, trying all the compartment doors. The Guard du Place appeared and drove them out, whereupon he went about seating first class passengers in the compartments for which they held tickets.

Just before the train pulled out, a press of second-class travelers poured in, looking hopefully into each compartment. Beholding five unoccupied places surrounding me, they howled with indignation, wrestling with the door lock and pounding the windows. “Courier American” I bawled, pointing to the pouches on the floor and then said “Dieu et mon droit!” [“God and my right!”], which was the only French phrase I could recall at that moment. It won me a Bronx cheer in the best Gaelic tradition. The train moved. I heard the Guard du Place ordering them out. Protesting, everyone left but one man. He addressed himself with great bitterness in both French and English to the train official who stood strangely quiet and meek

before the tirade, trying to appear innocent and sad at the same time. The vestibule door banged. I guessed the train man had all he could take. I opened the compartment door and looked out. What I saw made me feel very contrite. A British Colonel with his musette bag stood there looking both exhausted and distraught. No doubt about it, this elderly soldier had just come from the Front and was bound for home and family in "blimey". Thanks to the connivance of the American Courier, this gallant old English warrior had "'come a cropper".

I moved close to my distinguished companion and saluted. "Please come with me, Colonel", I urged with a polite bow. "I'm the American Courier. It maybe that I'm exceeding my authority – my orders are to travel alone. Will the Colonel do me the honor to share my compartment?" Surprised and pleased, this Britisher drew himself up smartly, returned my salute and said simply "The honor is mine, Captain, thank you."

During the long ride to North Sea French port of Boulogne, interrupted by German bombings and the agonizing delays of many detours, my guest and I talked long and earnestly of many things. Sleep was all but impossible, but we could comfortably recline, each on his side of the compartment, and relax. The train was not heated but there were no broken windows.

The Colonel opened the way for doing the Courier Service a favor. We had discussed the American Courier Service setup. He knew of its extreme youth, as compared with the King's Messengers. "We have our problems, Colonel," I explained. "The British are one of them". I had piqued his curiosity. "That is easy to believe," he added laughing shortly. The English and the Americans go at things differently, but what's your problem, Captain?" "Getting Couriers on the British Staff train leaving Charing Cross Station at noon from London to Folkestone." "I shouldn't wonder", the Colonel commented. "Boarding that train is like trying to get into Buckingham Palace". After a moment of thought he asked, "When do you want to ride the Staffer?" When I said that I would return to Paris day after tomorrow, he promised "I'll have a look into it. Perhaps it can be arranged to care for the American Couriers on the Staff train."

An early sun brightened the port of Boulogne, A British Staff car drove the Colonel to the hotel for breakfast. I hustled up a French porter with a cart. The Guard du Place gave me a friendly wave. The English Channel, always rough, seemed to calm down somewhat. My stay in London was pleasant – dinner at Simpsons-in-the-Strand at Trafalgar Square and another visit to see Oscar Asche and his wife Lily Brayton in "Chu Chin Chow" at the Hay Market Theatre.

At Charing Cross Station on my way back to Paris, my name was called. A British Major, uniformed and with many campaign badges and some medals, handsome and exceedingly solicitous, escorted me and my pouches to the Staff train. An interesting trip, that one; distinguished persons – the man I rode beside later became England's prime minister.

At times, the Overseas Courier Service appeared to coincide with that of the local Marine Courier, though quite separate, especially on the Paris to London run. This could prove embarrassing due to differing demands on the respective Couriers, and in the way each went about solving little problems that arose. For instance, one evening I returned to Paris from Liverpool, whence I had gone to get the Overseas Courier officer and his sergeant assistant on board the Leviathan bound for New York. The Marine Courier, who had just arrived in Paris from London, entered my office and informed me "Captain, I've just been relieved from duty as Courier and got a bawl-out along with it – I don't know why!" "I know why," I said. "But don't let it bother you. I'm the Courier they want. Come on, let's go up and talk to Colonel Howe." That day's Overseas Courier passage through the port of Boulogne, the one during which the Marine Courier was wrongly accused, had been a little unusual. The port was operated jointly by the French and English. Four fast destroyer-type channel boats, carrying English officers and enlisted men to and from the Front, were maintained there, and the Overseas Courier had permission to use the Officer's leave vessel, which took off first, early in the morning.

Getting aboard ordinarily was just a lively routine of breakfast at the hotel, securing a French porter and his cart, and having our travel orders stamped or validated. One must hustle, of course, but there were no complications. This time was different. In the name of His Majesty the King, the Port Authority, the English part of it, entertained and held ceremony in honor of a visiting Japanese prince. The Major in charge observed quite casually, "You Courier chaps must take a later boat." Inwardly fuming but outwardly polite, I pointed out to this unperturbed gentleman, in the name of the American government, that my orders were to get the Overseas Courier to Liverpool on time for him to sail on the Leviathan. No excuses would be accepted. "So sorry, Captain," he again replied casually, "but there's nothing you or I can do about it, really." This Major stamped my papers and, with a wave of his hand, indicated the quay where a platoon of British soldiers took formation, ready for the visitors who I could also see.

My motto in dealing with Courier difficulties, one adopted early in August when nothing seemed to develop as planned, was "Meet every situation as its master." I found it not a bad idea to add to this assumption a bit of prayer. In Army schools, I learned the importance of tactical reconnaissance. Had Napoleon obeyed this simple military precept, he might not have lost his splendid cavalry and the battle of Waterloo in a sunken road.

Two things I noted quickly, as I cleared my thought of any sense of resentment. Our boat - the Officer's Leave boat - was moored abreast three other leave boats of the same type and used for the same purpose. She was secured to seaward and, therefore, must cast off first. Her passengers were on board and the crew stood to loosen lines. The other advantageous factor was

that the Military Police were not at their usual posts due, no doubt, to the royal ceremony now under way. The Japanese prince, an impressive figure, distinguished looking in gold braid, medals and service ribbons, followed by an equally resplendent retinue, passed between two lines of British soldiers, themselves snappy and crisp and militarily correct. The formation and unfolding ceremony were to the left of the moored vessels and perhaps 50 feet from the water. A British band played Tipperary and all was serene.

To my companions, I disclosed my plan. The Courier and his enlisted assistant were immediately caught up in the daring of the act. The French porter, however, appeared on the verge of deserting us. A generous tip helped hold him in line. He did not seem too reassured. Meanwhile, I kept my eye on the boat crew. I saw them shake off the stern lines. I gave the signal to go. The ground sloped to seaward, which helped us roll. Long side the first boat, we stopped, heaved the sacks of dispatches over the rail and leaped aboard. Surprised Military Police came over on the run. They didn't bother me now – I felt we had it made.

We sprang from boat one to boat two, then three, tossing the sacks ahead of us and clearing the rail of the Officer's leave boat just as the bow came free and swung out to sea. Clearly, our Porter was in trouble. A group of Military Police led him and his empty cart away. He gesticulated wildly in our direction, then shrugged and, as though his remark cleared everything up, "Those crazy Americans!".

As no official effort was made to call the vessel back, we relaxed. Our present company watched us with obvious interest; officers of all ranks, colors and ages, belonging to His Majesty's Armed Services throughout the British Empire, going home on leave or to be mustered out. When we had identified ourselves and what we sought to do, and which many had witnessed, the consensus was "Good show, Yank!"

However, as fortune would have it, we had not yet escaped the trip wire of British tradition. Safely off the ship and pressing to board the London train, the impediment now was an elderly, slightly crippled porter wearing service medals, who, even with the aid of the three of us, threatened to be unable to get from quay to train on time. Desperate, I took the dolly from his gnarled hands, gave him some folded English currency and a wide smile, and made off with our pouches. "Where's the hurry, Guv'nor? The blasted war is over!" In answer, we put on a burst of speed. That remarkable person in high hat and tails known as the "Train Starter", facing us but quite intent on his job, seemed unmindful of our shouts and whistles. I knew just what to expect. He turned to trot toward the engine, having completed his inspection, whereupon he blew his whistle and the train moved. Favorable to our need, its movement was slow. We raced alongside the train of cars until we discovered an open window. The compartment, I noted at a glance, was

not full. In went our pouches, one at a time. Rather nimbly it seemed to me, the officer Courier, his enlisted assistant, and I jumped through the opening, landing practically and unceremoniously in the lap of an outraged English gentlewoman. By the time the Train Starter had recovered his poise, the train moved safely away. Of course, the train could have been stopped but it wasn't. Perhaps the one with authority to stop it understood our dilemma and tolerated it. "Well," cried the lady, with an impatient glance at the only other passenger in the car, most likely her scared speechless traveling companion. "Do something, Cynthia!" Wiggling into a seat, I breathed deeply to recover my wind and voice and began to relax into a mood of satisfaction. We made it! As Cynthia did not respond, I explained "We are American Couriers, Madam, and mean no harm, like your King's Messenger Service. We ran a race with the Train Starter and almost lost." Our English traveler recovered her sense of humor. "I seem to recall," she said primly, "our government asking us to feel amiable toward our American cousins and ally, but this is going a little too far, isn't it, plunging through a window and into a lady's lap?" My reply was more stuffy than sympathetic. "If you are hurt," I replied "you can file a claim. Have your solicitor call upon me. He will find me at 9 Chesterfield Gardens which, as you know, is Lord Leconfield's townhouse." "Indeed", she interrupted dryly. "I do hope you will remember to use the front door. But I'm not hurt, thank you, only startled. Now that the formalities are over, suppose you tell us all about America."

That wasn't hooey about my London residence that night. Though the gracious member of the English peerage knew nothing about it, he had loaned his residence for an officer's club (a little on the sniffy side). My card of membership read: "At the request of General Biddle [Major General John Biddle, Base Section 3], The President, Field Marshal H R H, The Duke of Connaught, and the Executive Committee of the American Officer's Club, take pleasure in extending to Capt. Wallace F. Hamilton the privileges of the Club for the period of the War." A most pleasant retreat after rough Channel crossings. I felt toward the "Lord of the Manor" a sense of gratitude and still feel it.

So, when I had related my story to Colonel Howe, with the Marine Courier listening in some surprise, he asked but one question. "Were you rude or profane in fulfilling your job, Captain?" My word to the contrary was accepted and the incident closed.

Later that week when Captain Peaslee and I were at dinner, I recounted the adventure for his information. He was vastly amused and interested. He said not to worry, that an Allied Commission sat continuously somewhere just to assuage or indemnify hurt feelings or damaged property among members of the Alliance, including, I hoped, the Japanese government. Certainly, no affront was intended. There was no backlash. I was well treated next time I went

through the port of Boulogne, enjoying full cooperation. Apropos of this international incident, let me say that during my sojourn abroad, I learned the value of a determined but polite attitude, fortified by a kind word and a smile. I hope to be forgiven for certain other persuasive deeds done to achieve desired (imperative) ends.

The Overseas Courier Service sought to be impressive and to render an outstanding service. We were rather proud that our Couriers bettered the time of the Courier carrying the pouch for the American Embassy in Paris. As a result of our success, we were asked to carry a pouch for the Embassy. President Wilson was to return to Washington, with a stop at Boston to make a League of Nations speech. He wanted a Bill he had just signed to arrive in Washington before he himself got there. Ah, Overseas Courier Service would see to that! In fact, we boasted to Herbert Hoover, the President's private secretary, just how we would insure the fulfilling of official expectations.

Our fastest ship, the Great Northern, bore the Courier with the Bill and we were set to make a record run. In an impenetrable fog, this proud vessel ran aground on Fire Island in New York Harbor. The ship's captain, unimpressed by the Courier's pleas, refused to put him and his pouches ashore. We stirred up enough of a ruckus at the Paris end to change the captain's mind. He finally put the Courier ashore in a breeches buoy. But it was too late to service the President's purpose.

Facing Mr. Hoover at the home of Prince Murat of the House of Bonaparte, where President Wilson and his charming wife lived during their Paris sojourn, was far less devastating that we feared. He proved congenial and quite forgiving. The displaced Embassy Courier, however, had himself a good laugh.

While the fighting raged, that is to say before the Armistice altered the theatre of war, we of the Courier Service charged with this responsibility, managed pretty well to control what matters went into the Courier pouches. When hostilities ceased, supervision tended to relax. There was evident a disposition to take liberties with rigid rules. This could provoke serious repercussions. Our locked pouches were not subject to Customs inspection. But we supplied Customs with a manifest of documents, each one identified and numbered. While Customs was compliant, nonetheless it was very alert for violations.

To protect ourselves, we removed many unauthorized items from the Courier pouches – lingerie, perfumes, jewelry, private correspondence – these were frequent offenses. One incident loomed particularly large. Though the motivation was in the national interest, it appeared, on the surface, to be a deliberate violation of U.S. Customs laws and a breach of faith on the part of the Overseas Courier Service. It was political propaganda compiled by a private corporation.

Whilst the Big Four of the Peace Commission – President Wilson, Prime Minister Lloyd George of England, Prime Minister Clemenceau of France, and Prime Minister Orlando of Italy - matched wits and sought to resolve into workable form Wilson's theory of "Self-Determination of Nations", the high authority of the American Commission to Negotiate Peace, now forming in Washington, engaged the service of Hearst International News Reels to take pictures of the Peace Commission at work in the name of "open agreements openly arrived at" for the enlightenment of the American people.

When ready for release, these films were handed to me to go to Washington by Overseas Courier, at the request of the Executive Officer of the Peace Commission. Matters decided at that level are obeyed without questions. I entertained qualms and tried to locate Peaslee (now a Major) but it was some time before we got in touch. Meanwhile, I was placed under arrest by cable. Customs asked the Courier with the films, "Who gave you these?" His reply, "Captain Hamilton in Paris." The charge against me was violation of the Customs laws. Toward evening that day, I met Peaslee at the Hôtel de Crillon, home of the U.S. Peace Commission. "How do we handle this one?", I asked. By way of an answer, my friend and superior showed me a very official looking paper. Peaslee had taken the precaution (which I didn't think of) to get the orders in writing to transport the films from Gerald Patterson, aid to Joseph Grew at the helm of the State Department.

Peaslee could smile and at the same time look very serious from his eyes. I didn't know just what to expect. "How about having dinner with me, Captain – how about the Tour d'Argent?" We went out into the Place de la Concorde where his Cadillac and driver waited. I felt somewhat relieved. "By the way," he remarked casually with a grin, "You're not under arrest any longer." The flying buttresses of Notre Dame, in the rose glow of the late evening sun, looked beautiful once more.

Echos of the Courier Service are long sounding. I refer, in a momentary aside, to one that rebounded off Ft. Rosecrans in San Diego in 1939. A lawyer friend who was a Major in the Army Reserve, asked me to speak to his fellow officers at lunch, my subject was the Overseas Courier Service. My talk caught the attention of retired Major-General Ralph Van Deman, sometimes known as the father of American Military Intelligence. I remembered him from Paris when, as a Colonel, he had signed my American Peace Commission pass. The way this officer corroborated my Courier story was entertaining and startling. Moreover, he added something on his own. His story concerned an attempt to smuggle a famous jewel collection from Berlin to Paris by duping the Courier (who didn't fall for it) and how the matter was discretely handled to

avoid an international scandal. I could not have had better support. [For a detailed account by a fellow Courier see "**Mystery of the Royal Jewels**"]

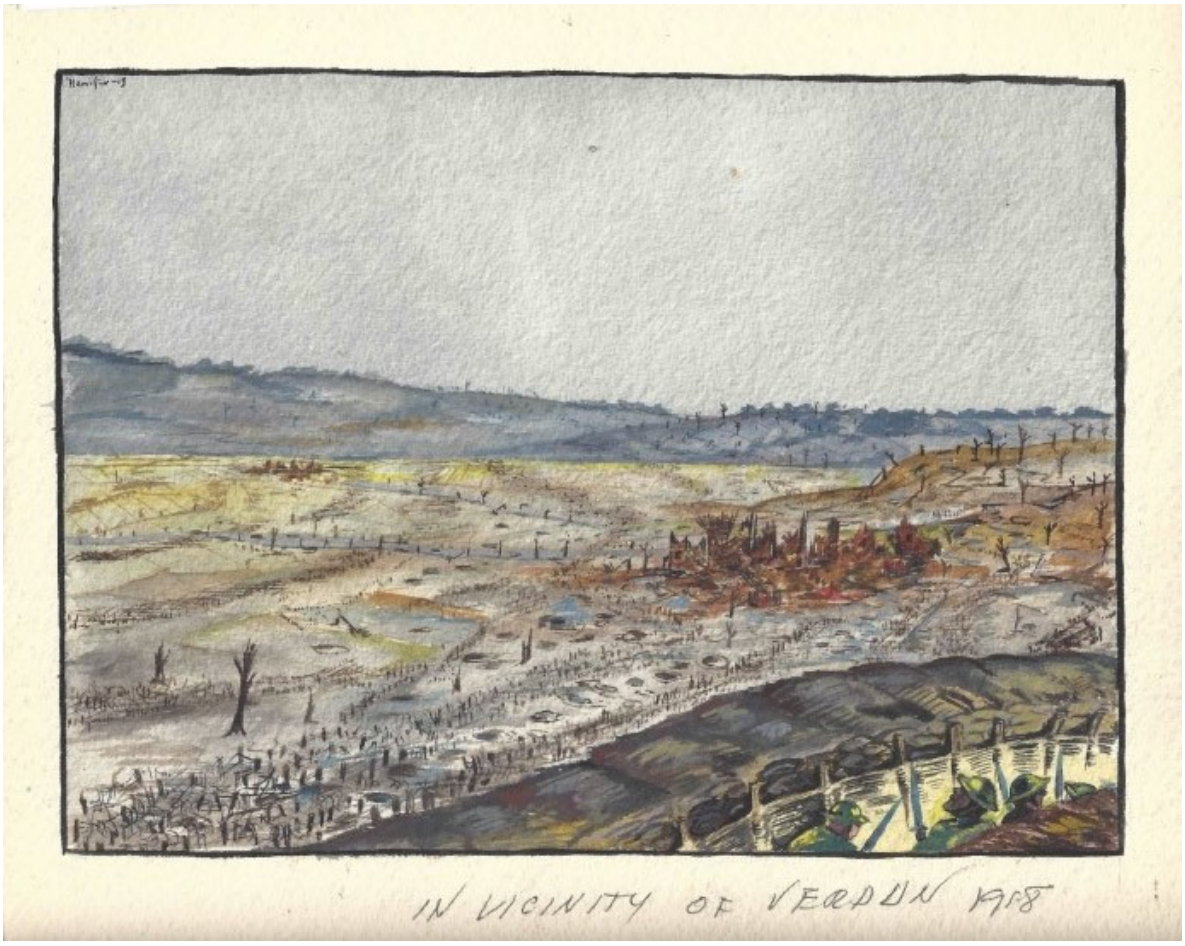
Glancing back for a moment, it seemed the hilarious, woozy week-long celebration of Armistice Day, November 11, 1918, had scarcely terminated before the Overseas Courier Service entered into a new phase, even more demanding. Major Peaslee disappeared from his usual haunts for a few days in early December, an event that defied all my efforts to get in touch. When he returned, he assembled everyone not otherwise engaged to disclose that the American Commission to Negotiate Peace would need, once established in Paris, an elaborate extension of the Courier Service, embracing all Europe. "Gentlemen," said Major Peaslee, "All that has been asked of you, you have done and done well. But the task ahead will dwarf our previous efforts, if we are to succeed. There will soon be many more of us – so many we may never all meet. As of now, we have combed the AEF for officers who can speak the language of the country we want him to make his way to. Some report for duty every hour. We will move them out as soon as they arrive. But this is not all. Herbert Hoover's Commission for Relief in Belgium, having the task of getting food to the starving people of Europe, will join our system of communications in their overall plan now shaping up. Included also is the Inter-Allied Economic Commission where so ever it may function."

One learns to take news calmly in the Army, sort of in stride. Major Peaslee's news had us strangely astir. We who had endured the stresses of war time experiences, could envision the complications. All of Europe was in a state of dispirited confusion and was, in places, really chaotic. Outright anarchy was rampant and unforeseeable. Bandits roamed and pillaged at will. Train service – if any – was spotty, uncertain, and unscheduled. Castle & Cooke's famous travel bureau, so dependable and well informed, had folded up in tears. An American Courier demanding a ticket to dangerous territory was regarded by railroad officials as mad – "Crazy Americans".

Major Peaslee disclosed a startling bit of information. To the utter dismay of the State Department, contact with its embassies, legations and military attaches were practically severed by the isolating contingencies of war. "Do something about it – and do it now!" This order had purpose, power, and unlimited resources to back it up. We were forced to say to those brave officers as we sent them forth "We can't tell you how to get there – Odessa, Sofia, Constantinople, Jerusalem, as it may be. It's up to you to find out. Bring back the information the Peace Commission needs. Do it somehow." And they did just that, though some imperiled their lives! At the Hôtel de Crillon, we were assigned a very large, round table. There, the returning Couriers lunched. The stories these men related were fantastic – and hard to document. The wife

of an American Consul on the Black Sea had asked for American cigarettes, which the Courier pouch contained. The information her husband sent back to Paris with the Courier, on the other hand, may have contained information on which the fate of empires rested.

Long before the presidential party and the commissioners arrived in France aboard the George Washington in December 1918, American Couriers, with but little to go on save their wits and courage, fought their way to remote destinations. At that moment, no praise was officially given, and none expected. It may be seen how important to the making of peace would be information from these isolated areas, about which so little was known. In the case of the outgoing Couriers, surely it was pardonable to stuff the pouches with the necessities of life, including newspapers, in some instances not received in over a year. On Courier business, I was sent to Germany, England, Switzerland, Italy and Belgium, in addition to many parts of France and Alsace Lorraine and the "Graustark" country of Luxemburg. Comparatively, my experiences were tame. [Graustark was a fictional country in Eastern Europe used as a setting for several novels first published in 1901 by Indiana writer George Barr McCutcheon]




Vicinity of Verdun, 1918

Up on the Rhine, the American Army of Occupation went into a period of intense training. Armies of our allies had well drilled, thoroughly trained elite units. General Pershing wanted his combat troops made into something comparable. Up to now, his Americans were too busy fighting. In Paris, we heard much about the Army of Occupation and how that grand Cavalryman "Black Jack Pershing" built up, day by day, the finest body of soldiers that America ever had! Major Peaslee took me with him part of the way on an inspection trip to Berlin, passing through the German cities of Trier, Coblenz and Cologne.

Peaslee and I had marveled at Verdun, a frightfully battered monument to French courage and grim grit. The ruin of Rheims cathedral was depressingly sad, a wreck of tinted glass and carved stone. A joyous post war family reunion was going full blast in our Luxemburg hotel, the concierge said. No sleep that night, though I tried. I observed with some surprise that no effort was made to bed down the children, even the babes in arms.

We stood amazed at the systematic extent of the Army of Occupation headquarters at Trier, since so little time had passed since the Armistice. I noted too how the streets of the Rhine cities are laid out in half circles or rings. I recall the beauty of the Moselle River and the sinister solemnity of the Black Forest. I thought the wall beds and huge eiderdown pillows would be a good idea to adopt at home.

In the shadow of Cologne's great cathedral, we separated. Major Peaslee went to Berlin in his car and I to Brussels by train. There, some innovative GI's had things pretty fouled up by passing United Cigar coupons off on the locals as U.S. currency. It concerned me only indirectly because it appeared to involve the Courier Service in the fraud. A German barber who served me in Cologne seemed very friendly before I took the train in the morning. We had worked for more consideration from train officials for traveling Couriers. Our request had been met with the familiar response, "The war is finished, why bother?"

Brussels turned out to be a beautiful city, its bakeries loaded with French pastries that were still scarce when I left Paris. I could not but note the dancing and gaiety at the hotel, with the orchestra in the ballroom playing American jazz and the Allied officers dancing happily. There seemed no lack of pretty, well dressed women who, I was slyly informed by an American attached to the Belgian Embassy, had danced in gay compatibility with German officers not too long ago.

No sooner had I arrived back in Paris which, as memories of war receded, slowly resumed its normal activity and air of insouciance, Colonel Howe called me into conference. He had a startler. All the transportation of the PES and Courier cars in the Paris area had been turned over to me. "Look, Colonel," I protested, "I've still got more than three hundred thousand

dollars-worth of military equipment hanging over my head…" "Well, a little more won't hurt you" he interrupted without a trace of sympathy. I sighed and said to him, "The editor of *Stars and Stripes* has suggested, and others who know agree, that we should recommend a Distinguished Service Medal for Peaslee. Can't you swing it?" "I doubt it.", he replied, "They're not just throwing them around. You fellows are politicians, not heroes, Peaslee especially. He's been under GHQ. They should handle it but, I'll try." To make doubly sure that Major Peaslee would be considered for this decoration, I put in a good word at Chaumont while arranging for my separation from the Army and the trip home. All to whom I talked gave high praise, but I detected a passing of the buck from the Army to the Peace Commission.

While that tremendous ovation Paris gave President Wilson on December 15, 1918 still echoed from the Arc de Triumph to the Place de la Concorde, the Overseas Courier Service spread its power and capabilities to transport the vast array of crates and barrels that the American Commission to Negotiate Peace had entrusted to it. All of it must be taken from the ship's hold onto lighters, then on the Brest quays to waiting French boxcars, two Couriers directing a platoon of French porters, with all the activity under the alert eyes of the Marine Guard.

Anyone who knows how French freight cars are bumped to a stop will understand a happening on the night journey from the port to Paris. A barrel was thrown against the car wall with sufficient force to split it open. It bore the marking "Confidential Documents". It turned out that the contents were bottles of a fine brand of Kentucky Bourbon whisky. In France, Scotch was plentiful, and Cognac also, but just try to buy a bottle of Bourbon. I assume this fact was known by the planners in Washington, who took steps to meet the contingency. However, every bottle was accounted for and the entire shipment was signed for by an official at the Hôtel de Crillon. Within this noble structure, Major Peaslee had set up a Courier Service office entirely separate from the Overseas Courier Service. However, the two similar branches maintained very close coordination and very often functioned interdependently. The Hôtel de Crillon management labored most graciously to meet every demand of the hustling Americans, even to the extent of doing some rooms over to please the Commissioner's ladies.

As I said, pressures, while the hot war raged, and even more so when hostilities ceased, were brought into play heavily for some well-placed officers to be sent to France and return as Overseas Courier. These were captains, usually, with desk jobs and staff duty, who managed somehow to convince Courier headquarters in Washington that a trip by them was necessary to their military service. However, as an interesting variation, a full Colonel arrived with his dispatches in Paris. I met the gentleman with my military car and driver, at Gare Montparnasse

late on a night that was cold for Paris, half rain, half snow. This unexpected officer impressed me most favorably. He was young, handsome, bore himself well militarily, possessed blue eyes and stood erectly tall.

This Colonel all but floored me when he said with obvious relief "Here are your pouches, Captain. I'm turning them over to you – you take 'em to Chaumont. I'm going out to see Paris." "Pardon me!" I had stiffened in astonishment. "Colonel, you don't seem to know what you are demanding. This is France, not Washington, this is…read your orders! And carry them out! If you get out of line over here the Military Police will throw you in the 'Bastille' and a man's rank doesn't bother them much." (This was a much-used place of confinement, given a famous name by the GIs.)

The stern expression on the Colonel's face changed to surprise, indeed he wore a puzzled look. But he came through like a gentleman. "Perhaps I've got something to learn, something I couldn't learn in Washington, Captain Hamilton." He followed this remark by saying "Where do we go from here?" My sergeant driver, who had stood by with bugging eyes and open mouth, now looked to me for instructions. I pointed to the pouches. A tall, smartly dressed Military Police Sergeant came over to where we stood on the platform. I had seen him on duty there many times. Possibly he noted we were not showing the usual speed in getting out of there.

"Everything alright, Sir?", he inquired. "Fine, Sergeant, thank you", I replied. "We are just about to make the usual dash across Paris to catch the Chaumont train." I presented the two men. "The Colonel is the Courier this time." The Military Policeman saluted smartly. "Welcome to Paris, Colonel. Hope you had a pleasant trip." He turned to me, catching up a couple of pouches. "Here, let me give you a hand, Captain."

The situation had changed in a flash of authority. Within minutes we had the car loaded with pouches and passengers and had moved out into the stormy Paris night, skidding about on the cobbles, leaving the Left Bank for the trip across the city to the Gare de L'est. Overseas Courier Service used six railroad stations. Getting from one to another on schedule was routine yet something of a thrill. Paris was full of Allied military cars intermixed with the carts, bicycles and taxis of French traffic. Accidents were almost continuous. Damage suits descended on Army Headquarters at 10 Rue St. Anne like snowflakes. Strict orders not to run faster than ten miles an hour were far more than a gesture. To disobey meant military court martial.

Coming out of a skid, my night driver aimed the Dodge for an opening between a motor lorry and a Paris taxi without slowing speed, which was much more than ten miles per hour. But we came clear. "Always drive like this, Captain?" "Have to, sir" I explained "to make train connection. Not so bad now – used to have to run in the dark," to which he replied "What

happens if you miss…" "So far, we haven't missed, Colonel." My companion looked at me. "I thought I heard that taxi driver shout something in English" he commented. "You probably did, Colonel,", "Crazy Americans!". A French taxi driver is a master of imprecation but usually winds up using that convenient expression. Seems to relieve his chronic exasperation in some way. Possibly it is more fitting than we care to admit. The French know we Americans like to make rules and then break them."

With the Colonel and his pouches safe within the Courier compartment, I ventured to suggest "When you have delivered your pouches, ask the officer in charge at Chaumont for a short leave in Paris. I'll be glad to show you around, Colonel." We shook hands. "I just may do that" he replied. Walking through the crowded station, my driver and I paused for coffee and doughnuts at the smiling invitation of a crisply clean Red Cross worker who tried hard not to show how cold she was. "Better have a cup yourself," I suggested. "Thank you, Captain, coffee is running out my ears, but I warm my hands on the cups." "Well, Captain, remarked my driver, "You won that round with the Colonel." Yeah, Sergeant", I agreed, "but he still has me worried. He may pack a lot of weight."

The judgement to be made concerning this incident as to whether I should report it was taken out of my hands. Our Colonel must have talked. A staff officer phoned me from Chaumont. He explained, "Colonel X is on his way to Paris with a couple of day's leave. He'll appreciate it if you will meet him and show him every courtesy. Take him any place he wants to go." After that call, I saw and heard from my office window an American military band marching along the quay. They played "It's a Long Way to Tipperary". I would have liked it better if they had played "California Here I Come". California seemed a long time away.

The Colonel proved to be a delightful host when we were again united and free from a sense of responsibility. We dined on Filet de Sole at Ciro, Lobster Thermidore at Maxim's and Duck a l'Orange at Tour d'Argent. He was quite eager to pick up the tabs – until he had a look at the amounts. "Are they soaking us?", he exclaimed. The pained look left the Colonel's face when I flashed my Luxury Coupon Book and explained "No, they aren't soaking us – at least, not so hard. This is a cushion. It represents the difference between the menu price and what they charge their allies."

Colonel X found quarters at the Hotel Ritz on the Place Vendôme and did some looking around on his own. This was just as well since I did have certain Courier duties to attend to. Of course, he must see the Folies Bergère, which overflowed with Allied soldiers and was colorful and carefree. Maxim's lured him also. I think he was disappointed not to see more "Merry Widow" atmosphere. For some reason, Maxim's had become the favorite spot of South

Americans. The war years had shattered some of the theatrical glamour. At one distinguished spot, L'escargot, where we dined, the Colonel refused to try the famous snail dish. I came to the realization that my companion had quizzed me endlessly about the AEF, its operation and impact on the French and their reaction – on and on. The play period ended, and Colonel X took his pouches back to the States, along with my answers. He might have been from the Inspector General's office. I will never know.

The tempo of the Courier Service quickened as it spread over Europe. Major Peaslee was pacemaker and pathfinder, showing his Couriers the way and providing the means. He was not unlike a trenchcoated magician, pulling new Courier stations out of an Army bedroll or the glove compartment of a Cadillac. Moreover, he was modern Jason, sowing service records instead of dragon's teeth in France's bloodied soil, from whence sprang to his aid as fine a cast of officers and gentlemen ever gathered together to serve their country under duress. Every passing moment and bitter experience was a testing time – there were no failures. That great round table with the majestic periphery at the Hôtel de Crillon, around which outgoing and incoming Couriers met to relate almost unbelievable adventures, made me rejoice to be there!

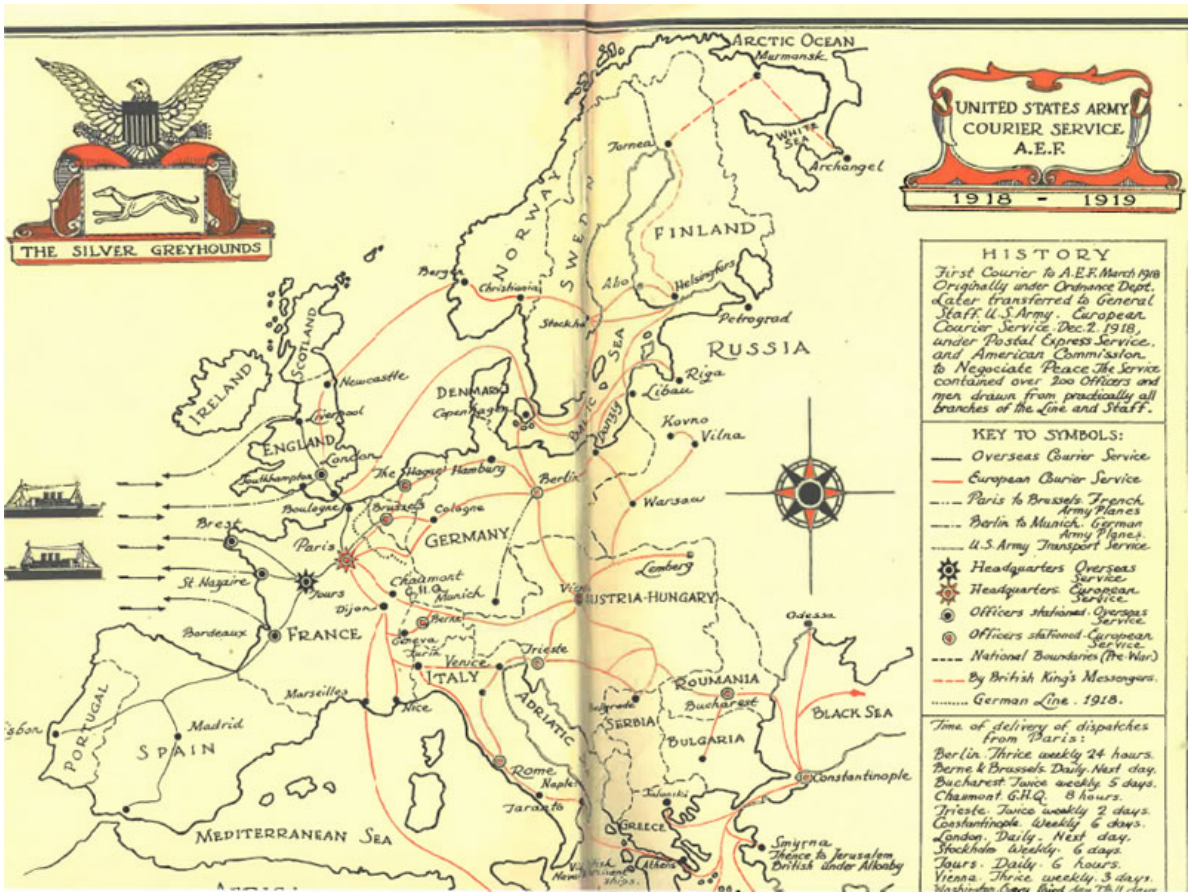



Illustration of OCS courier routes by courier Joseph P. Sims, published in "Three Wars with Germany" by Admiral Sir W. Reginald Hall and Amos J. Peaslee, G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1944

My office was moved from upstairs to a large room on the main floor of the Postal Express Service quarters in the Hôtel Le Mediterraneen. From somewhere, a full company of U.S. Marines appeared, commanded by a Lieutenant, all Class B men who had fought, been wounded and survived, and were able to serve elsewhere than at the Front. They were to be Couriers, operating on daily set schedules, traveling "just a little bit of all over" as one Marine remarked. Their territory ranged from Base Section No. 3, London, to a tie-in on the Continent with the Motor Dispatch Service, which, in turn, blazed its motorcycles everywhere in France and Belgium, the Army of Occupation in Germany - any place, in fact, where U.S. military personnel were stationed. These men did a great job and were a pleasure to work with.

The day that President Wilson arrived in Paris in December 1918 will be forever etched in my mind. There had been no Couriers to tend to that day until 6:00 pm when the Courier officer coming from overseas was to alight at Gare Montparnasse, by which time I sought relief from the emotional strain of the day. By wangling a bit, I got a card for my windshield that was potent enough to crash police and gendarme restraints but with no effect upon the unbroken lines of French "Poilu" that formed the human channel through which the Presidential party passed.

These gallant sons of France (war had removed a million of them) impressed one mightily. They called to mind Eugene Field's toy soldier verse "sturdy and stanch he stands". Paris traffic that day left description tongue tied. A British Colonel in a snazzy staff car and my humble Dodge, driven by a sergeant who had guided me safely all over France, side swiped each other coming off the crowded ramp of a Seine bridge. Our drivers managed to be civil as they looked over the cars. We both bore in mind we were Allies. We exchanged salutes. "My humble apologies, Captain, are you hurt?" "Accept my apologies, Colonel. Are you alright?" No serious car damage, no personal injuries. We reentered our cars and moved off barely in time to escape the uncontrolled swerve of a motor lorry that overturned in the spot where we had just been.

From the General Post Office in Paris, our foster parent, word had gone forth that each GI would be allowed to receive one small Christmas package in 1918 (3" x 3" x 9"). The Red Cross would swing it in the States and PES would make the deliveries in the AEF. To this day, I can envision those huge motor lorries of sacks containing Christmas packages arriving in Paris or moving from there in a fan-out to the troops. Could the packages be delivered by Christmas? Apparently not, from the wails of disappointment that went up. Yet, let me say it was a mighty and deserving try, both by the Red Cross and the Military.

The day after Christmas, 1918, I went to my office. The General Delivery window was open as I passed through the lobby. I said to the non-com on duty "How about my Christmas package, Sergeant?" "You too, Captain?!" He turned to point at the pile of hundreds of sacks of

packages behind him, filling the room from floor to ceiling. “Tell me where it is, and I’ll get it for you.” On impulse, I indicated a sack on the floor nearest him. “Open it,” I said. “My package will be the first one on top.” And it was! Who knows why? I have the wrapper in my scrapbook with a notation as to what had happened. The story got around the Post Office. The consensus was that “Hamilton is just a lucky guy.”

In early Spring of 1919, a cable from my girl, who lived in the Orange Belt east of Los Angeles, stirred me to action. I could not see a career in the Army in peace time. My resignation was on file. In the mail came a promise of a reporting job on a San Diego paper. I did a bit of sightseeing in Paris, places I had not had time to visit while awaiting orders. Suddenly, the post war turmoil, overcrowded travel and living accommodations, friends leaving for home, no pressures of excitement and danger, all seemed antithetical. True, I must have thought only of myself and but little of the problems of European readjustment in an atmosphere of mixed joy and tragedy. The French wearied of American presence, no doubt about it.

Major Peaslee tried to change my decision up to the very day I left Paris that April. What a tempter he turned out to be. The bond of our long and exciting association, to which he added the suggestion that I accompany him to Trieste by way of the delightful French Riviera in his Cadillac. At Trieste, he would put me aboard J.P. Morgan’s yacht, Corsair, which was still operated by the Navy. She would take me to Constantinople. “Stay there three months,” urged Amos. “Then I’ll bring you back to Paris.” I was aware of his problem. The drift of thought was homeward; officers were hard to get. It was a sad parting, but I stood firm. My resignation from the Regular Army was tentatively accepted. I could reconsider after a leave period in the U.S.

Twice during my Courier adventure did I feel upon my sleeve the gentle touch of a lovely American woman from out of the past. The first time, in Paris, one pleasant late October afternoon in 1918 on the crowded Boulevard des Italiens, just about the hour for the outdoor café seats to fill, her gloved fingers touched my arm and she called my name. The atmosphere was gay – good news came from the Front. Neither Maeve Cosgrove nor I took the accidental meeting calmly. We had met in San Francisco, where she posed for covers of a magazine I edited in the Fall of 1913. I guided her to a table and listened as she told of her marriage to a Canadian officer. She had been in the South of France but had found a way to get to Paris so that on his leave periods they could be together. Now, she wanted my help. Our meeting, she observed with a happy smile, was an answer to prayer. Within the vast reaches of the French capital, a war correspondent for the *Saturday Evening Post* temporarily resided. She needed to find him. A telegram from her husband urged her to make the contact. A whimsy of fate had thrown the two men together the previous week on an official exploration of the Canadian Front. The

correspondent would have a special message for her. Paris American Army Headquarters located the man for me. I escorted Maeve to the journalist's hotel, introduced them, and listened to a most interesting account. It was all very mysterious.

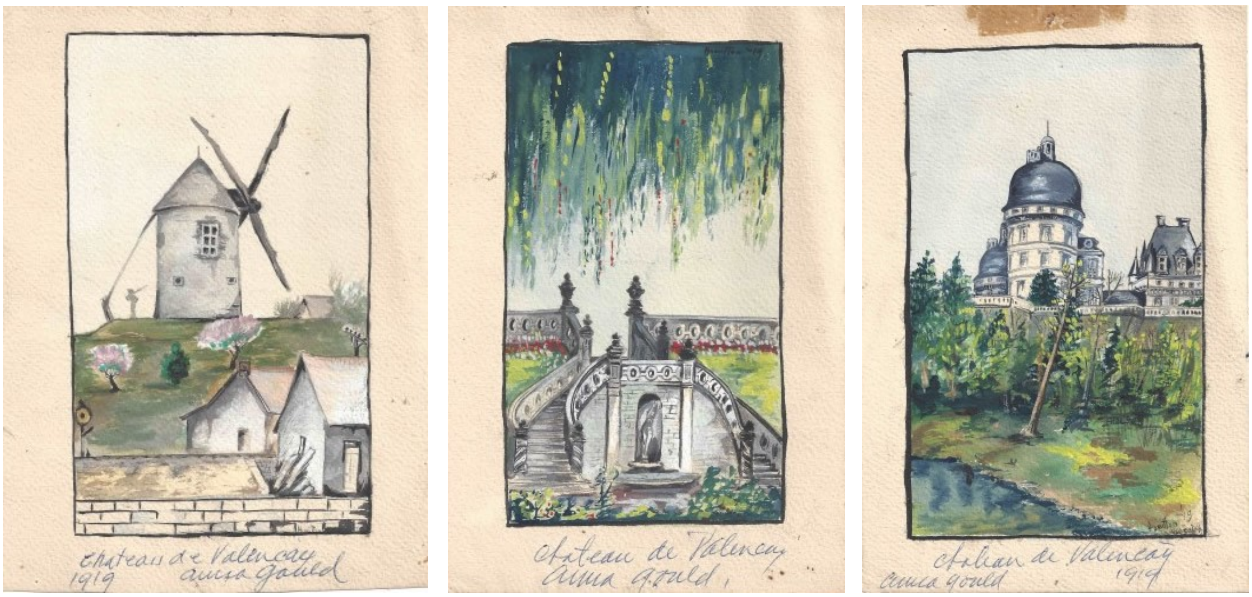
Something conclusive was in the wind; he would join her in Paris at a date in early November. Courier headquarters had word that war's end was close, so her husband was hinting at this as well. I left her at her modest dwelling, a very attractive pension near the L'etoile. She phoned me Armistice morning, reunited with her husband, and invited me to dine with them at the Grand Hotel. I was able to dine with them two nights later, as I was quite unable to fight my way through that delirious mob of shoulder to shoulder celebrants filling the streets of Paris.

The second instance took place on my way home in the Spring of 1919, in the French countryside at the former home of heiress and socialite Anna Gould. This gracious American lady had married into the family of Lord Tallyrand, Napoleon's foreign minister, who built Château de Valençay in Touraine at Napoleon's suggestion, as a place to entertain prominent guests. She had made a wing of the Chateau available to American officers to luxuriate in on the way home, detached from troops. Even wild boar hunts were provided. Every detail of the rich, tasteful décor – rugs, tapestries, paneling, period furniture, statues, art objects, paintings, bespoke a master touch. I was, at that moment, lost in admiring a painting of great charm and delicacy. Again, that soft tactile contact on the sleeve of my tunic, more a mental impression on my consciousness. Just to hear my name called and to recognize the voice – the surprise! Everything combined to shape a thrilling experience.

I venture the guess that every youth at one time or another, as his manhood unfolds, is smitten by a girl a few years his senior. Ah, and here, smiling at me, was she who had done the smiting. The ensuing decade had been kind to Margaret Cobb, her pleasing maturity enhanced by the smart uniform of a Red Cross officer she wore becomingly. I had been the "nice kid", socially acceptable, who cheered her depressed spirit. I had lunched with her and her grandmother at a lovely home on Chicago's North Shore, followed by a matinee at the Studebaker Theater starring actress Fritzi Scheff. The scene in due course shifted back to old times in the Idaho mountains and adventures with friends in 1908 vintage automobiles, a camping trip with relatives deep in the heart of Lodge Pole Pine country on Crooked River, and stimulating rides over Saw Tooth terrain on sure-footed horses. Out of the past there was much to laugh over. One night when camping out, I had made a deep, soft, fragrant bed of fir-brows on the ground beside a river. We had enjoyed a "sing" around a roaring, pitchy fire, the embers of which still glowed. My sister shared her bed with Margaret. In the still of night, their screams amused rather than alarmed me. "Just a couple of softies startled by a hobbled horse nosing

around," I thought. I was wrong. It turned out to be a bear, which fled into the forest when stuck by their hat pins.

Our impromptu meeting, after such a long time, came about through a gracious invitation sent by our Chateau hostess to the Red Cross ladies stationed nearby. We chatted before a great French fireplace in the lounge of Red Cross quarters. We had dined well and over coffee found much to talk about. I had always admired her sense of humor and ready wit. Now she seemed more subdued and pensive. She always managed a brave demeanor. She said little, but I knew the tragedy of her first romance, the man she loved who was blown from his bed by the same bomb that assassinated Idaho Governor Frank Steunenberg at his home in 1905. She had seen her share of tragedy during her time in France as well.




Château de Valençay, Loire Valley, home of American heiress Anna Gould, April 1919

I saw men die in battle. I saw many more carried off ships at all Allied ports in wooden boxes, victims of Spanish Flu. Tragic fate of friends was made known to me in every letter from home. I had faith to sustain my spirit. To bolster her faith, I suggested "To my sense, my dear, death is an illusion from which our loved ones awake and carry on. Beyond our present comprehension now, they do the will of the loving Father. Life has *got* to be eternal." "You and your faith," she scoffed gently. "Captain, you are still a boy!"

Time to go and we were still laughing. She recalled a cartoon created by my pen that had been published on the front page of the Idaho Daily Statesman, a newspaper owned by her father, on Christmas Day 1908. I laughed only because she did. Actually, I was deeply attached to that artistic effort. I was a mother defending her first child, although, in all honesty, it was not a very

sophisticated creation. A silence fell, and we stared at each other soberly. To her I was still a boy with a boy's devotion. The French night, fragrant with blossoms and fresh verdure of unfolding spring peculiar to the Valley of the Loire, lay hold of my imagination. For the first time in our diverse and fragmented experiences, I felt her lips meet mine, the door closed, and she was gone.

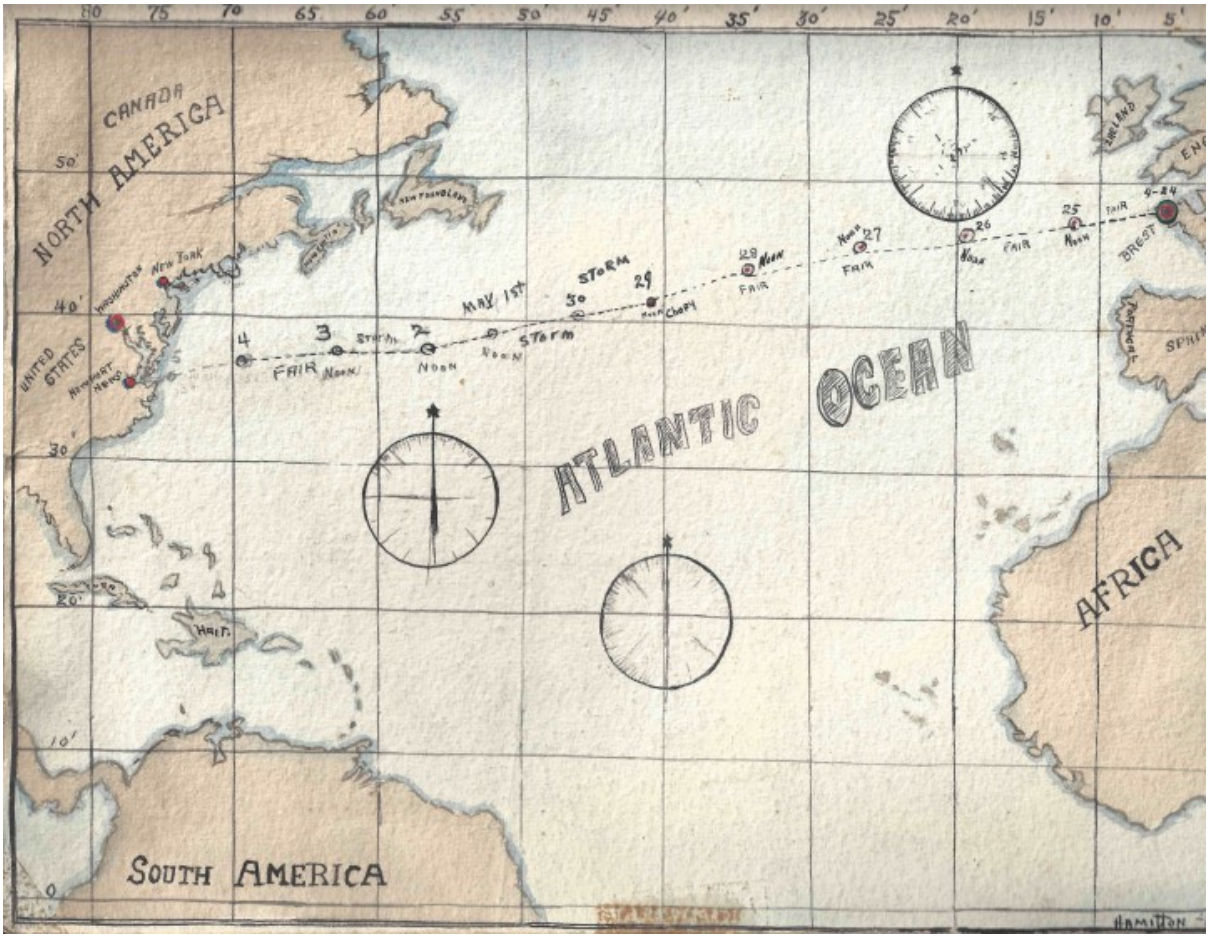
Brest, my port of embarkation, was, when I arrived the next day, a place of rain, duckboards, mud and, of course, swarms of American soldiers eager to depart La Belle France. All were willing to travel on anything that would float them "tout sweet" across the Atlantic and home. When I learned the name of the American officer in charge of the Port of Brest, I entertained visions of going home on a cattle boat by way of South Africa. In the work for the Courier Service just completed, I trod several times on his military toes. I confessed as much to a naval officer friend in the Transportation Office. "It surprises me," he observed, "that you didn't send yourself home as a Courier on a choice boat, the Olympic, for instance." "Don't think I didn't try," I replied ruefully. "Well, anyhow, Captain, you and Amos helped many officers over a tough spot. Don't worry, you're in luck! You, and a dozen other "casuals" [officers] are to leave this morning on the U.S. Battleship Connecticut, Fighting Bob Evans old flagship [Rear Admiral Robley D. Evans]. She's set her course direct to Newport News."

And that's how it was. No duties, a band concert in the Wardroom with meals, movies, a personally conducted tour through the ship. Steady as she goes, the old battlewagon rode out a mid-Atlantic storm with a convincing show of power. No one objecting, I climbed the swaying ladders in the basket mast to the forward fighting top – even up on its roof. With an arm around the mast, I took the pitch and roll high above a heaving, frothy sea. Why hadn't I gone for a hitch in the Navy? With a color box before leaving Paris, I had begun a series of sketches which I now finished during the voyage. I also made a chart on which I recorded the "noon fix", based on information displayed in the Wardroom.

Through the great base of Newport News, Virginia, went major supplies for Great Britain, France and Italy, as well as being the port of debarkation for U.S. forces. The roadstead brimmed over with ships unloading military personnel. That night, which was fair, a movie screen flashed on every quarterdeck, the largest outdoor theatre I ever saw. I rejoiced when allowed to go ashore. I saw men kissing the earth.

I was sent to St. Petersburg, Florida, after a fantastic delousing operation, for reassignment. The Army in the U.S. had no record of my resignation. Perhaps my superiors thought that, once back in the States, I would reconsider and stay on. I could try for a higher rank and stay with the service. Kind, indeed, but I wanted none of it. I had missed an opportunity to attend the U.S. Army Cavalry School at Ft. Riley, Kansas. It was becoming clear, however, that

the future of the Cavalry was mechanization. I wrote out another resignation. This time it stuck. Now, all that remained was to terminate in San Francisco, where I had entered the army in 1914.




Trip home on the USS Connecticut April 24 – May 4, 1919

Visiting my parents in Indianapolis on my way to San Francisco, I noted the absence of war excitement. It simply couldn't have vanished that quickly! During my visit home in the Fall of 1917, the city had seethed with troops. Now, in the Spring of 1919, one had to hunt for a uniform. My people thought I should put on "civies" and desert California for a job in what was once home. My great grandfather had settled there in 1834, when people jumped from stump to stump on Washington Street to escape flood water and mud. A certain nostalgia tugged at me. Even the joy of a home visit fretted me until I saw once again California's eucalyptus trees on the Colorado's western bank at Needles. The smell of orange blossoms lay not far off.

First thing I did in San Francisco was to help turn the cable car at Powell and Market and then ride her over the hump to Fisherman's Wharf. There was a slight delay over my papers at

Army headquarters. This gave me an interval in which to catch the Castro Street Trolley and then the "Switchback" to my cousin's home on Corbett Road in Twin Peaks. She was a nurse at the Isolation Hospital. It had shocked her Calvinistic moral sense when my work back in 1913 had taken me at times to the Barbary Coast, for I lodged with her family when I first arrived in San Francisco as employee of the Remy Electric Company. The 1906 earthquake and fire had rendered their home a shamble, leaving her and her parents to live in Golden Gate Park for quite a time. On this trip, I gave her a generous check and won her blessing. She expressed the hope that my military associations and the ugliness of war had not unduly warped my character.

It wasn't far from their house over to the Golden Gate Panhandle and the tennis courts. I once walked it every morning. Almost seven years before, I had known a young woman who loved to play tennis and who lived close by the courts. We played sets as early in the morning as we could see. Fog rolled and dripped in from the Bay Heads, peacocks screamed at our intrusions and we laughed when we hit at where we thought the ball was. She had such a nice way of serving hot chocolate and doughnuts along with double faults. Why had I returned to the park? She was married and had gone away. Boy, had I gotten around since those days!

My terminal papers warmed my pocket on June 15, 1919, as I departed Army Headquarters, still in uniform. A citizen, moved by curiosity, stopped to inquire as we passed in the lobby of the St. Francis Hotel "Pardon me, Captain, what's the meaning of that silver greyhound on your shoulder patch?" I explained that it was my job to get confidential messages as quickly as possible from one place to another. "Did you say, 'Courier Service'?", he responded. "Funny, I never heard of it."

## AFTERWORD

That day back in April on the trip home on the Battleship Connecticut, I had clung to my exposed perch on the roof of the ship's fighting top, where a slip of hand or foot might bring an end to living. I compared the powerful forces in raging conflict before my gaze to the Peace Conference in Paris from whence I had just come, wondering about the outcome. Some forces you saw, like the upheaved waves, tossed every which way in wild abandon, the hard, glittering pathway of ionized air where, recklessly loose, lightning bursts split cloud masses into weird formations, followed by blindness, the fantasy of the ship's shattered wake, dripping shrouds and a deeply buried prow, lifting through froth as a submarine surfacing with each forward surge. Far below human eye's penetrant power moved the tides, the currents, quite unmindful of the surface torment, obeying the Mind creating and sustaining them, long before time was. The majestic power of the ship's engines, unseen but which throbbed in unison with every heartbeat, bespoke

mortal man's useful achievement of momentum, observable only in effect. We shivered and shook to wind's errant blasts, but we could not see them.

Those "surface forces" had been in evidence in the sweeping demonstration, a manifestation from their souls, that the people of Paris rendered unto President Wilson, appearing persuasive enough to convince even the most skeptical that a new political day had dawned. There had been an 8-column wide banner in the European edition of the New York Herald the next day proclaiming, "Paris meets President and takes him to her heart."

Long before war's end, from out of time's negligent limbo, its surface covered with a hoar front of futility, President Wilson had come up with one of his "Fourteen Points", the centuries old idea of a general association of nations to prevent war. Wilson insisted this "League of Nations" must be part of the peace treaty. A majority of the Democrats followed the President. Had Wilson seen the necessity for compromise, the United States would have joined the League. He compromised abroad but not at home.

With journalist and publicist George Creel's help, President Wilson made World War I "a Crusade to make the world safe for democracy". He tried to lead the world toward a lasting peace and his country toward service to humanity. He signally failed. He said, before passing on, "within another generation there will be another world war."

In his fight for unconditional ratification of the treaty, President Wilson traveled 8,000 miles, making 37 formal speeches. He was enthusiastically received, and public opinion swung his way. Right here in America, while the Couriers raced all over Europe, and to and from the US, the President bucked a communication difficulty he couldn't lick. Could he have won this fight had he been able to address the people by radio?

President Wilson, a sense of personal victory in his heart, had returned to a hostilized America to face his swelling horde of foes in June 1919. As Wilson entered the White House, I pushed into the Local Room of the Scripps-Howard San Diego Sun, a busy, plain room, too small for a growing staff and tending to overflow. I got the reporting job promised me.

I had not been in San Diego since late March 1917. I had joined the U.S. First Cavalry back in 1914 and was serving at the headquarters of the Southern California Boarder District at Calexico when our unit fell under the command of the California National Guard and was ordered to move to the Armory in Exposition Park in Los Angeles. Still a Corporal, waiting for my commission as Second Lieutenant to arrive, they had me booked as acting Sergeant Major. Leaving San Diego, we only paused for lunch at the Golden Lion Tavern [Fourth Street, in San

Diego's Gaslamp District], with no opportunity to visit old haunts of 1915 Panama Exposition days. I had always meant to come back!

Now, back home in San Diego, people seemed more intent upon local problems than in disturbing foreign affairs. All the national news was depressing. They did agree to schedule the Grey Castle Stadium [now San Diego High School's Balboa Stadium] as one of those 37 cities where the President spoke, trying to "sell" the Peace Treaty as his man George Creel had "sold" the people the war. Nearly thirty thousand people listened and cheered Wilson. Interviewing him was a strange and impressive experience. So often I saw him in Paris coming from those endless secret meetings with conferers who challenged his every move, the sort of closed meetings he deplored. I was destined to interview in San Diego and Coronado many important people I had recently left behind in Paris.

## ONE MORE THING

Legal matters kept Amos Peaslee in Europe for many years. He later became an assistant to President Eisenhower, followed by an appointment as Ambassador to Australia. A great career. I kept in touch with Amos through my first cousin, George Maurice Morris, a Washington attorney who went on to become president of the American Bar Association. Amos and George were friends. George and his wife, Miriam, an authority on early American antiques, had offered Washington society their home, the Lindens, as backdrop for many diplomatic and social occasions. It is now famous among American "Great Houses". I loved the large guest room where the "Duke" had slept, the red damask drapes and deep window embrasures. I loved the thick wooden floors put down with dowels and painted with hex half circles to keep the witches away, and bedrooms true to their period next to modern bathrooms of hand painted tile, cut glass and silver. The original owner had built the house in Danvers, Massachusetts in 1754. Walter Mayo Macomber, restorer of Williamsburg, Virginia for the Rockefellers, was commissioned by my cousin in 1934 to take it apart, one board at a time, and have it reassembled in D.C. on Kalorama Road at the edge of beautiful Rock Creek Park, French block wall paper and all! Read more about The Oldest House in Washington, DC.

President Wilson, while in Paris, had lived in the house of Prince Murat. I was there upon occasion. There and elsewhere I saw the comely, beautifully proportioned Edith Gault, whom Wilson had married. I saw her again, 24 years later, under different circumstances. The year was 1943 and I had flown up from my job with Pan American Airways in Miami to attend the wedding of George's oldest daughter Patricia to Kenneth Young of the State Department and later Ambassador to Thailand. At this gay Washington function, after the ceremony at the

National Cathedral, refreshments were served in the great early American kitchen, which ran the full length of the house basement. Between the reception room and the library was a small circular stairway originally designed to enable the family to escape if attacked by Indians. George stationed me at the top of the stairs with instructions to send guests down them to the kitchen. Presently, a lady came to me, took one look at the stairs, gave me a startled glance and asked, “Heavens! Is that the only way down?” I realized at once the nature of her problem. She had put on too much weight ever to make it. Instead, I guided her to a wider stairway leading down from the family kitchen. Upon my return, my cousin was regarding me with amusement. “Know who that lady is?”, he asked. I shook my head no. “It’s President Wilson’s widow.”