

Letter from Merrill Denison to His Mother

With the American Ambulance Somewhere in France

March 24th, 1917.

Dear Little Min:

Last night, yesterday, and the day before have been good days—a pair of days of the rare breed that come only once in six months or so, and then having come, make you feel that the greyness of the six months was needed to carry as a background, the soaring smash of the gold and purple they brought.

It began on duty up in the woods, where four of us wandered about observing the effect of shell fire, and prying about scenes of old destruction for bits of éclat and pieces of shrapnel.

That night, after the four had played hearts for a couple of hours, and had gone to bed, little expecting to be called up in the night, for there had not been a night run there for over a week.

I was driving a new car, 475—Bundles 11 by name—old 184 being left to the tender mercies of a nouveau, with Don as my orderly. The tale concerns Don more than anyone else, and for the purpose of letting you climb Olympus again in retrospect with me, I'll go back to the time I arrived in Paris.

He had come over on the boat preceding me, and when I arrived in the glacial surroundings of 21 rue Raynourd, he was waiting to go out to the front.

I noticed him, a fine clean looking fellow, well built, with a crop of blond hair that fitted him and made him look like an angel, especially when he smiled as he won a hand of poker.

He was playing with three or four other men when I saw him, and of the group he was the only one I remember. Perhaps I spoke to him three or four times before he left Paris, but apart from remarking him as an attractive chap, he doesn't seem to have made much of an impression on my consciousness.

It was with him that I made my first trip to the front, and as I recall my impressions of that night, he seemed only a reserved man, who knew much more about zone "C" than I did.

On our trip out, we went "en ponne," with transmission trouble, another car was called up to relieve us and I swung over to it as orderly. Who was driving has escaped me.

We were never on the road together again while working Hill 304, but back in camp, I saw quite a bit of him, for his room was one of the store-equipped places which I frequented and exchanged entertainment for hospitality.

It was a fair exchange and, "The young man from the country," "Escapades from the life of Hildred," "The lamentable affair of the Chinese wonder," and a recountal of Bill welcoming the guests at Bon Echo, always drew the whole camp around me, and on those rare occasions on which I announced my intention of shaving, and so signalled a night of reminiscences—based, I must say on fact, but not bound by it—Don usually had a front seat.