

AMERICANS, from La Fayette to Lorette

LONG LIVE America! On 13 June 1917, around two hundred American soldiers and civilians disembarked in Boulogne-sur-Mer. At their head was General Pershing, commander-in-chief of the American Expeditionary Force. America was ready to "finish the job in Europe", and its participation in the Great War would be one of the keys to the Allied victory. On 11 November 1918, a total of two million "Doughboys" or "Sammies" – nicknames for soldiers from the U.S.A. – were in France, a million of whom had already seen combat; and Foch, Pétain and Pershing already had plans for the involvement of four and a half million men in 1919. By the end of the war, more than 100,000 Americans had lost their lives, and 200,000 had been wounded, in places such as Saint-Mihiel, Château-Thierry, the Argonne, Marne and Meuse. This "official story" has somewhat eclipsed the participation of American volunteers in the conflict well before the U.S.A.'s official entry into the war in the spring of 1917.

In August 1914, a few days after the German attack on Belgium, 43 young Americans started their training with the famous Foreign Legion. Their motivation? Quite simply, their love of France, and the defence of their beloved freedom... plus, of course, a taste for adventure! These Americans, the majority of whom were either intellectuals, students or artists (such as the poets Alan Seeger and Henry Farnsworth), found themselves alongside Spanish, Greek and Swiss (including the writer Blaise Cendrars) volunteers. Why the Foreign Legion? This was the only option that would ensure that they kept their American citizenship,

given that the United States was not yet at war with the German Empire. These volunteers would see action in some of the bloodiest battles of the Great War, including the French offensive which began on 9 May 1915 (Neuville-Saint-Vaast, Carency, La Targette, Les Ouvrages Blancs) and culminated in the capture of the Notre-Dame-de-Lorette hill.

The Rockwell brothers

Asheville, North Carolina, in a valley in the Appalachian moun-



Kiffin Rockwell, on the left, and fellow legionnaires in the trenches.
Photo: www.scuffaballs.mallchow.com



tains. War is declared in Europe. The Rockwell brothers, Paul and Kiffin, buoyed by a spirit of "liberty, equality and fraternity", write to the French consul general in New Orleans in order for them "to pay their share of the debt to Lafayette and Rochambeau". They didn't wait for the reply which was a long time coming and took the first available ship, to Liverpool, on 3 August 1914. From here they travelled to Le Havre and Paris, and quickly on to the French Legion on 30 August. Training followed in Rouen, Toulouse and the Mailly camp, before they were "plunged" into the trenches. Wounded at the Chemin des Dames, Paul left active service

and became the war correspondent for the Chicago Daily News. In 1925, he fought in the Rif War and served in the American army during the Second World War. Born in 1892, Kiffin was wounded for the first time in December 1914. Having recovered from his injuries, he joined up with the Moroccan Division and was wounded a second time, this time in the leg, during the charge on La Targette on 9 May 1915. Six weeks of convalescence followed. Kiffin was transferred to air duties and, along with his compatriots Thaw, Cowdin, McDonnell, Prince, Hall and others, he became part of the famous "Lafayette squadron". On 18 May 1916, he shot down his first German plane over Alsace. Kiffin Rockwell was to become "the king of the skies" as a result of his 141 successful combat missions, which earned him the Military Medal and the Croix de Guerre. On 23 September, he was killed by an explosive bullet during an aerial duel near the place where he enjoyed his first victory. In a letter to his brother, Kiffin wrote: "If France should lose, I feel that I should no longer want to live".

From Loos to the Bounty

An adventurer, soldier, fighter pilot and writer who lived in Iowa, London, Loos-en-Gohelle and Tahiti: this is the incredible life story of James Norman Hall, born in Colfax, Iowa, in 1887. In August 1914, he found himself in London, where he passed himself off as a Canadian in order to enlist as one of Lord Kitchener's very first volunteers. In September 1915, he took part in the Battle of Loos, where his company was decimated.

Whilst on leave, it was discovered that Hall was American, which resulted in his demobilisation. This soldier-author was quick to relate his terrible experiences in a book, "Kitchener's Mob". He returned to France as part of the Lafayette squadron and covered himself with glory as a captain in the U.S. Air Force, receiving the Légion d'Honneur. In 1920, James Norman Hall and his friend Charles Nordhoff left for Tahiti, embarking on one of the most famous collaborations in American literature as the authors of the "Mutiny on the Bounty" trilogy.

Weeks mother and son

Kenneth Weeks was born in Chestnut Hill, a suburb of Boston, on 30 December 1889. He was educated at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology then the Beaux-Arts in Paris, and planned to make a career in architecture. Kenneth loved writing, Paris and France; on 21 August 1914, he enlisted in the Foreign Legion, spending the winter of 1914 in the trenches. On 17 June 1915, the American was reported missing near Souchez, and his body was recovered on 25 November and buried in the cemetery in Écoivres, near Mont-Saint-Éloi. His mother, Alice Standish Weeks, lived in Paris from 1915 onwards, providing a lodging in her home for volunteers on leave, and writing to them on a very regular basis. Some of this correspondence from "Maman Légionnaire" (Mother of the Legion), as she was affectionately known, was subsequently published.



James Norman Hall, from the Battle of Loos to the Mutiny on the Bounty.
Photo: D.R.



A 'Doughboy' with a determined look.
Photo: Hugues Chevalier documentary collection

From Massachusetts

Far from the somewhat romantic image of the "American colony in Paris", many U.S. citizens signed up with British or Canadian regiments prior to 1917, often using a pseudonym and recruited via Canadian and British missions. This is how, for example, W. Chadwick from the 2nd Battalion of the Royal Welsh Fusiliers, killed in action on 15 September 1918, came to be buried in the Five Points Cemetery in Léchelle. He was just 15 years old. Fifteen! Research has uncovered the identity of this "teenage soldier", who was William Hesford, born in Massachusetts, and without doubt the youngest American soldier to die in the Great War. Several hundred soldiers from Massachusetts have also been identified.

Metcalf from Maine

In August 1914, the mother of 20-year-old William Metcalf learnt that he had left Waite, in Maine, and crossed the nearby Canadian border in order to enlist in the army. She immediately contacted the authorities for them "to return her son". Upon disembarking in England, William was called by the American ambassador. Are you the young man whose mother is waiting for you at home in Maine? "I'm not that man", William replied. "I'm from New Brunswick!" – a statement confirmed by his colonel. The ambassador was powerless to do anything. Four years later, on 2 September 1918, William Henry Metcalf, one of the heroes of the Battle of the Drocourt-Quéant Line, was awarded the prestigious Victoria Cross. Following the Armistice, he returned to his native Maine, where he embarked on a career as a mechanic. He died in South Portland on 8 August 1968.