

CHAPTER XLIX

COLLEGE AND THE WAR

By Charles

August of 1914 Grandfather rented a cottage at North Truro, Massachusetts, a little town about ten miles from the tip of Cape Cod, where Provincetown is located. When you come to study history, you will learn that the World War began that month.

George and Charles were very much interested in the descriptions of how the armies were mobilizing in Europe. Grandfather was so excited he could scarcely sleep at night. The Boston newspapers arrived at Provincetown by boat every afternoon from Boston and every day we drove down and waited at the pier for the boat and the papers it carried.

Grandfather, George and Charles were waiting on the pier and Grandfather was explaining to us about the situation in Europe and what a far-reaching matter such a war must inevitably be, when an old fisherman who was sitting on the pier listening to our conversation, asked Grandfather what war he was talking about. "What war!" said Grandfather, "why, man, the entire continent of Europe is in arms!" "Europe, eh? Well, I guess that don't affect us none" and the old fellow resumed his fishing. Little did he know.

Grandfather tried to persuade the Truro newsdealer to order him an evening newspaper. "I never have sold evening newspapers," was the reply, "and I won't begin now." "But the Kaiser had declared war and I'll gladly pay you a fancy price in advance for an evening paper for a week in advance." "No, by gum," says the dealer, "I'm glad the Kaiser is so far away. I never have sold evening newspapers and won't begin now." That is the reason that every afternoon we had to drive to Provincetown to get a paper.

The happening of the next months and years you will eventually study in school. The question was always whether we would enter the fray or remain neutral. President Wilson was constantly writing notes first to one side and then the other. In November, 1916, he was re-elected on the basis of the campaign slogan "He kept us out of war". But it was impossible to stay out longer and in April 1917, President Wilson called the Senate into session and read them a message and Congress declared war on Germany. Immediately steps were taken to recruit an army.

Charles was then in his Sophomore year at Penn and eighteen. George was sixteen and was in his Senior year at high school. The first call was for officers' training camps with the age limit of twenty-one. Later recruiting offices opened for enlistments for privates with the age limit of eighteen. The question was whether to enlist or return to college for my third year.

At just that time President Wilson issued an appeal to all students to return to college. If we were needed for his army or navy, he would call us. The draft was being organized on a thorough basis. The war was to be a long one and he would later need young men with training.

But that third year at college was a trying one. Everywhere the talk was of the war and it was hard to maintain an interest in the studies. From our classrooms we could see the tracks of the Pennsylvania Railroad and day after day the long troop trains would go past, hurrying soldiers from the West to the embarkation ports. The soldiers were always singing or yelling, and the railroad cars were always decorated with big signs - "We'll get the Kaiser!" or perhaps "Berlin or Bust." It was almost impossible to study and George and Charles had decided that they had better enlist rather than go back the following year. President Wilson apparently found out that

practically all the college students in the country had decided not to return to college, so that summer he organized a new branch of the army - the Student Army Training Corps - and proposed to enlist in this branch all the students who were physically eligible for military service.

Just at this time George had a chance to enlist in the Motor Corps and Charles had a chance to enlist in the Heavy Artillery, so we did. We were afraid that President Wilson, if he got us in college under military orders, might keep us there indefinitely.

Because Charles had studied trigonometry, he was almost immediately sent to the officers training camp at Fortress Monroe. There, the first morning, all of us new recruits were marched to a big hall and given a four-hour examination in trigonometry. Those who passed went the next day to the officers school; those who failed were sent over to the kitchens and peeled potatoes and washed dishes for the rest of the war. You see, in the army you have to do what you are ordered to do and not what you think you would like. Charles was fortunate enough to pass.

The school was very strenuous. We were learning to command the biggest cannons, the ones mounted on railroad flat cars which would shoot as far as 75 miles. Of course, you could never see the thing you were shooting at, so all aiming would have to be figured out by mathematics. Aiming, when you are shooting 75 miles, is very difficult. There are very elaborate mathematical formulae which tell in general the curve which a shell will take when the cannon is tipped at a given angle. Then you must study the wind, how hard it is blowing and in what direction. Also the shell spins around and around as it goes through the air and thus causes it to curve in much the same manner that a pitcher curves the baseball by spinning it as it goes through the air. Also the air pressure and the amount of moisture in

the air must be taken into consideration. All these require courses in trigonometry and calculus which some of you may some day take in college, particularly any of you who may be planning to be engineers.

One hour each day we spent learning to work the big guns, how to load them and chain them. One hour we spent drilling and learning how to direct and manage a company of soldiers, because the theory was that each of us would some day be in command of a company of soldiers and one of these enormous guns. The rest of the time, from the bugle at 5:30 a.m. to taps at 10:00 p.m. we worked at mathematical problems. The officers in charge of the school kept loading on more work and more work. Some of the slower workers found it impossible to keep up and were dropped from the school and set to building roads or fixing fences.

Officers said those men would never get to France, so the rest of us worked all the harder trying to do all the work which was assigned. Some worked so hard and became so nervous they could not sleep nights and then got sick and were dropped. And yet they gave us more problems and work until it became impossible for any of us to complete the day's assignments.

Later Charles found that this was the way the army had of testing our nerves. They wanted officers who would not get excited and nervous but who would keep their heads and do what they could under the circumstances. When we were small and would get discouraged because we could not do something that was too much for us, Grandmother sometimes used to say, "If you have done absolutely the best you can, you have done all the angels could do." I would often think of this as I went to bed and it would quiet my discouragement and let me sleep and come up full of energy and enthusiasm the next morning.

But even if our work was hard, we had some fun. Charles was about

the youngest member of the company. There was one man that we all agreed was too old and Charles is sorry to say some of us made fun of him behind his back. Also the officers were not nice to him. In our drill one day we practiced scaling high fences. Two of us would run toward the high fence and when we got there one would stand on the other's shoulders, grab the top of the fence and pull himself up; then lean over from the top of the fence and take the hands of the man below and pull him up. That was fun for us younger ones, but this man could not get up and our officers all laughed at his hopeless efforts.

One day, however, he had his revenge. Each day one of our company was selected to act as captain for the day and put the rest through the drill on the parade ground. One day the officer in charge of the school, a fellow who had graduated from West Point a few years before, announced with a grin that this man would act as officer in charge of the drill the following day. We all figured that he would be as clumsy in giving orders on the drill field as he was in getting over the high fence. But not so. He strutted out onto the field that morning with a row of medals on his coat. He walked past the officers who had been so mean to him with head up and an air of "I don't see any medals on your chests, young men" and proceeded to bark orders at us in such a military manner that we realized we were being drilled by an expert. It seems he had been a colonel in the Spanish American War but, because he was over the age limit, could get his commission back only by starting in again at the bottom.

As the fall passed, we all became very enthusiastic. We were to get our commissions November 15th. Then we were to get two weeks furlough to visit our families, then sail for France to take charge of the big guns

which were being manufactured by the Bethlehem Steel Corporation. Our constant talk was "Thanksgiving dinner at home; Christmas dinner in Paris, New Year's dinner in Berlin." We figured that one week's peppering with our big guns and the Germans would quit. And then on November 11th came the Armistice. We were so busy working that we didn't read the newspaper and nobody told us about it until several days later.

The commander of the post then told us that the war was over but that the school would continue for those who wanted to finish, although no more men or big guns would be sent over. On completion those who were of age would get their commissions and those who were under age would get (because of peace time regulations now automatically in force, prohibiting a man under twenty-one being an officer) a certificate of proficiency. Charles was only twenty and this seemed very unfair to him. Charles had ranked at the top of the company and yet he was about the only one who, on graduation, would remain a buck private. So he went home, joined his old class at Penn, made up the work he had missed and graduated the next June.

One of the men who slept in the same barracks with Charles at Fortress Monroe and with whom Charles got well acquainted was Paul MacPherson. Later Charles went into law and MacPherson went into the diamond business, but they kept in touch with each other. Camilla and Charlie may be interested to know that the diamond their mother wears was selected by their dad with the help of his old army friend.