



A Good Idea of Hell: Letters from a Chasseur à Pied (Williams-Ford Texas A&M University Military History Series)

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Echoing from the mountainous Vosges front of World War I come the rare accounts of an elite French foot soldier—a chasseur à pied. Robert Pellissier, born in France in 1882, had grown up in the United States and was teaching at Stanford when the Great War broke out in his homeland. Returning as a volunteer, he saw uninterrupted months of trench warfare in the Vosges mountains of Alsace, the only region where French troops actually captured German territory, a sector largely neglected in World War I literature.

Pellissier's diary and his letters to relatives in America show a panorama of this ghastly war: from the horror of being under fire with three thousand German shells falling on the French troops every day to the monotony of long quiet hours spent in cold, wet trenches. He writes of the grinding and indecisive character of the fighting in the Vosges and of the almost ritualistic shelling and limited tactical offensives, such as the attack at Steinbach in December 1914. His later letters were written from the hospital, from officer training school, and from the front at the Somme. He relays news of all the major battlefields—Flanders, Verdun, Russia, Austria, Gallipoli, Italy, Serbia, and the Suez. He also comments on the new technology that changed the nature of war: the machine gun, new airplanes, Uboats, improved artillery, barbed wire, and poison gases.

Drama and a sympathetic human voice combine to make this account of a little-reported French front a valuable addition to the literature on World War I. Whether visiting the battlefields of Europe, researching the history of the war, or sitting in an armchair at home, readers will find Pellissier a reliable and personable guide.

The greatnephew of Robert Pellissier and a minister by profession,

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