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## BAND SLAUGHTERED AS IT LED CHARGE

French Composer Tells of Musicians Playing "Marseillaise" Till All But One Fell

## WROTE MARCH IN TRENCHES

Decreus, Here as Guest of Ex-Senator Clark, Describes Death of Collignon

Having served as a volunteer in the army until incapacitation through rheumatism brought about his honorable discharge, Camille Decreus, a well-known French composer and pianist, who two years ago made a tour of this country with Ysaye, the violinist, has just arrived here, and is a guest of ex-Senator William A. Clark at the latter's country place near Greenwich, Conn.

M. Decreus was a member of the same regiment with Collignon, former Prefect, General Secretary to the President of the Republic, and Councilor of the State, who at the age of 58 enlisted, insisted upon remaining a private, and whose memory, as told recently in THE NEW YORK TIMES, is now perpetuated at every roll call of the gallant Forty-sixth Regiment of infantry, as is that of La Tour d' Auvergne, First Grenadier of the Republic.

M. Decreus knew Collignon, and after the latter's death, in the intervals of duty, he composed the funeral march which was a feature of the memorial service held at Fontainebleau recently, and which M. Decreus had arranged.

"I was at Juvisy with my friend Tourret when the war broke out, and we had been guests of Senator Clark at his chateau of Ivry, at Petitboug, near by," said M. Decreus yesterday. "I had never been in the army. When my class was first called to the colors I was rejected because of failure to pass the physical examination. But when our country was threatened, my friend Tourret and I, unlike many French artists and musicians who flocked to this country and who have, I fear, created an Impression In America that a Frenchman following such a profession places it above patriotism and military service, felt we owed something to France, and volunteered. They rejected Tourret, but they took me.

Describes Life in the Trenches

"In two days we were at Soissons, and immediately we were sent to the trenches. That was in August. Now at that point I must confess that life in the trenches was not very exciting. Since September both sides have held about the same positions, with the exception of the incident in January, when the river rose, carried off a bridge, and left part of our force on its further side. The Germans immediately attacked, and forced the French back over to the main body.

"It should be explained that one reason for the apparent inactivity at Soissons was the fact that in their march on Paris German engineers had taken the precaution to prepare trenches in the quarries, situated on a high plateau. Granite trenches are something whose taking would require the sacrifice of a tremendous number of men. The French Generals, following Joffre's policy of saving his soldiers and wearing out the enemy by nibbling, think that, in time they will be able to surround the plateau.

"Most of the while in the trenches in those days it was a case of making the time pass. We played cards to the accompaniment of shells screaming overhead or tearing up the earth in the trench. Whenever the explosion would bury some of our soldiers we would dig them out again and resume our occupations, the effort being always to keep in good humor. We became hardened to the visits of the shells, and used to crack jokes and make wagers about where they would land. In

fact, at one point we were so near the German trenches that we used to crack jokes with the Germans. A feeling of human solidarity grew up.

"One day I got lost in a 'voyau,' or communicating trench, and came near not being here. I had been sent back to the third line to bring food and the first thing I knew I found myself in the open country. Immediately shells began to burst about me. Now, when I was first drilled, I was instructed that the important thing about screening one's self was to be able to take advantage of any accidental shelter afforded by a rock. It seems Incredible, but a stone six times as big as one's fist will absolutely hide your body if you lie behind it, and at 300 meters an observer cannot detect you. I threw myself flat and began to cast about for a stone that large. It was remarkable how few rocks were on the surface at that point. Finally I discovered one, and dragged myself behind it.

#### Safe Behind a Stone

"I cannot tell you how long I lay there, but when I discovered I was still alive, I began to drag myself away by the elbows, and finally found myself in a trench again. My comrades did not recognize me. Exhaustion and rheumatism, the latter acquired through lying there wallowing my way back in the mud, invalidated me back to the depot for a fortnight's rest.

"Then they gave me a job as distributor of munitions, food, clothing, and other things meant for the men in the front line. These things were unloaded at a certain distance back. In that capacity I went to the Argonne, and was at the battle of Vauquois, at the end of February. I had come to know Collignon very well. I know that Collignon was repeatedly offered a commission, but he wanted to carry the colors of the regiment. He was a splendid figure, with his white beard, and the rosette of the Legion of Honor on his breast. He could not wear the military shoes, and most of the time he went barefooted. Later he wore sandals. It was at Vauquois that he was killed. Our men had sought shelter in the cellars of ruined houses in the village. In a heavy rain of bullets from machine guns, Collignon rushed out from such a shelter to rescue a comrade who had fallen wounded. A shell burst near him and killed him.

"He was buried at the front, and it was not until after my 'reformation', or honorable discharge, that the memorial service took place at Fontainebleau. I had composed my 'March Funebre' between trips from the depot to the front trenches.

"It was at Vauquois that happened an incident that I suppose stands alone in this war. The charge of a regimental band at the head of troops. Nowadays the bands are usually kept at the rear. But a critical moment came. Our men had three times attacked the Germans, and had thrice been repulsed. The Colonel felt that a time for supreme effort had arrived. He summoned the leader of the band.

" 'Put your men at the head of the regiment, strike up the "Marseillaise," and lead them to victory,' he commanded.

"The bandmaster saluted. He called his musicians, and told them what was expected. Then the forty of them took their positions. Our line reformed. The bandmaster waved his baton.

"'Allons, enfants de la Patrie!' rang out, and the men took up the song. France was calling upon them to do or die. The band started out on the double-quick, as if on rapid parade. The Germans must have rubbed their eyes. No musician carried a weapon. But they were carrying the 'Marseillaise' against the foe. Then came the continuous rattle of the machine guns. The band marched on, their ranks thinning at every step. The leader went down. The cornetists followed him. The drummers and their instruments collapsed in the same volley. In less than five minutes, every man of the forty was lying upon the ground, killed or wounded, that is, with one exception. That was a trombone player.

## Instruments Shot Away

"His whole instrument was shot away except the mouthpiece and the slide, to which his fingers were fastened. He did not know it. He still blew and worked the slide. It was only a ghostly 'Marseillaise' he was playing, but the spirits of his dead comrades played with him, and at the head of the regiment, and with that fragment of a trombone, he led the way to victory. The trench was taken. Half of the band had died on the field of honor.

"You have perhaps read statements that the Germans were lashed to cannon. Of that I have no proof, but with my own eyes I have seen German soldiers bound to machine guns with chains. We took several of these prisoners at the battle of Vauquois, and we found several dead still lashed to their guns. Their officers had lashed them there, with instructions to keep turning the crank.

"Not a Red Cross flag came near our front but what the Germans fired at it. This cannot be disproved. We found the German prisoners we took in absolute ignorance of where they were. They had been told invariably that they were within a few miles of Paris.

"I finally had a breakdown, due to rheumatism, and the doctors sent me back to Fontainebleau where, after a thorough examination, I was honorably discharged on May 4.

"M. Decreus wears a diamond horseshoe scarfpin, presented to him by his regiment. Indicative of the spirit of comradeship prevailing between officers and men is a note he carried from his Colonel. M. Decreus sent the commander a card of congratulation when the latter was made an officer of the Legion of Honor, and the Colonel wrote an appreciative reply with his own hand. He also has a letter from General Sasset-Schneider, commander of the first and second subdivisions of the Fifth Corps, commending him as a "good patriot who had discharged his duties to his country until his strength had given way," to all representatives of France abroad.