



RICHARD STEVENS CONOVER, 2D

1909-1917

RICHARD STEVENS CONOVER, 2d, son of Mary Bowman Coit and James Potter Conover ('72-'77) was from birth a St. Paul's boy, being born on March 18th, 1898, at the Lower School. In this home of hockey his father put skates on him before he was five years old, and he was soon skating around like a veteran.

Dick Conover was one of St. Paul's greatest athletes. He played for four years on the first Old Hundred football team, and for two years pulled a strong oar in the first Halcyon boat, his last crew holding the present record for the course. But it was at hockey that he really shone. He played on the School Team for four years, being captain the last two. A remarkably graceful skater, he possessed

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extraordinary speed and carried the puck perfectly. In a criticism in the *Horae Scholasticae* in 1916 he is called "the fastest man on the ice since Hobey Baker," and he still holds this rank.

Dick had a good mind but was handicapped by being a slow worker. He was utterly faithful and thorough, however, and these qualities would have given him sure success. Besides his capacity for work he had a very real feeling for beauty in books and in the world about him. In 1916 he was awarded the Stewart Douglas Robinson scholarship.

In the life of the School he was an extraordinary combination of silence and power. He was like a sphinx, but a sphinx that radiated goodness. Modest and shy, as captain on the ice he spoke very little, yet was an adored leader. What he said to his intimates became known through the School. But better than concrete expression was the silent influence of the modesty and sweetness of character which was clear to all who even looked at him.

One thinks of Dick as an outdoor man, a lover of the woods and of the edge of things. At School he took long solitary walks and runs. When still a very small boy he learned to row and sail a boat skillfully, showing an adventurous spirit that sometimes alarmed his family. When later he grew up to a twenty foot knock-about, he loved to cruise for days, either alone or with one companion. He had the pioneer spirit that finds its expression in fearless adventure in the great outdoors. What an explorer he would have made!

In 1916 he attended a military camp at Plattsburg. On April 23rd, 1917, he left School to join the American Field Service in France. He drove a camion for six months, taking ammunition to the French front. He then enlisted in the United States Army at Gondrecourt, France, November 20th, 1917. After joining the machine gun company of

the Eighteenth Infantry at Bonnet-sur Meuse, he went to the trenches on January 14th, near Verdun. In February he was made a corporal with the promise of soon being sent to an officers' training camp. He remained in active service at the front, being killed on May 27th at Cantigny, just after having successfully repulsed a German raid with the machine gun under his command. An account of Corporal Conover's last action from a letter of his lieutenant follows:

"At the time of his death we were in the front line, and Corporal Conover was in charge of a gun. The night had passed with the usual shelling, and at 4:45 A. M. the Germans put a barrage down that lasted forty-five minutes. I was with his crew and he and I took turns in keeping watch. When the barrage lifted we saw them coming and he soon had his gun in action. It was a raid, for the Germans wanted prisoners for information, and they succeeded in getting into our front line and taking two infantry men. When the Germans started back with the two American prisoners, Corporal Conover and the crew picked up rifles and we all started to pick off the Germans who were taking the Americans back. We succeeded and no prisoners reached the German lines. It was while we were trying to save those two men from being captured that Corporal Conover was shot. I was lying next to him on the parapet and he was cool, enthusiastic and was doing good work.

"He asked me once if I saw that one go. After a few minutes I looked around and I missed him. He was lying in the trench. A man from his crew and myself asked if he was hurt. He saw his man without a rifle and he said, 'I'm through, take my rifle.' That was the last . . . he had a smile on his face and he died with the knowledge that he had done his utmost in performance of his duty."

Another lieutenant writes: "His moral qualities were

of the highest, and he stood among his comrades as a perfect soldier."

His platoon sergeant says: "As his platoon sergeant and coming from the same part of the country, I became well acquainted with your son and assure you of my sincerest admiration of Richard, as a man and soldier. Although but recently in the service and giving promise of rapid advancement he gladly and willingly offered up his life on the altar of his Country and died with a smile, as honorable in death as in life."

His father tells this almost miraculous incident: "In France, after many visits to the battlefield where he fell, I finally stood on the very spot of his fall, according to a drawing given to me by one of his companions whom I found in hospital, and there I picked out of the mud my last letter to him, which closed with the words: 'in spite of all the turmoil and death in which you are living, you can be at perfect peace in the arms of your Heavenly Father.'"

#### Citations.

"The Brigade Commander cites for gallant conduct the following officers and men of the First Infantry Brigade, who courageously met their death while in combat with the enemy during occupation of the Montdidier-Noyon sector. . . . . Corporal Richard S. Conover."

"The Division Commander cites the following officers and soldiers for gallantry in action and especially meritorious services:

Corporal Richard S. Conover, M.G. company 18th infantry, who was killed in action near Cantigny, France, May 27th, 1918."