



THOMAS ROBERTS REATH

1909-1915

THOMAS ROBERTS REATH was born at Riverton, N. J., July 5th, 1897, the son of Theodore Wood and Augusta Meade Reath. He spent four years at the William Penn Charter School in Philadelphia, where he organized the first football team for small boys, on which he played quarter-back.

He entered the first form at St. Paul's School in the autumn of 1909, that year playing quarter on the second Old Hundred team in the Lower School, of which team he was captain. During three later successive years he was captain and quarter-back of the fourth, third and second Old Hundred teams respectively. This record is very striking when one remembers that physically Bob was a little boy

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all through school. Though not possessing the physique necessary for a great athlete, in football we find him as the captain and director of a group of boys bigger and stronger than himself.

Bob's leadership was not confined to the football field. There was always his "gang" which worshipped him, and what a good gang it was, and how his extraordinary energy permeated it. They delighted in genial "rough-house," where Bob was like a friendly tiger-cat. They loved the real out of doors and knew the country for miles around the School. As he and his crowd grew older, he led them into the Forestry Club, then a very busy organization, where he proved himself a hard worker and keen woodsman.

The gang and its leader were busy during the summer too, as this anecdote shows. With Dick Stedman and Jack Wintersteen as partners, Bob negotiated the purchase of a motor-boat at York Harbor the summer he was fourteen. It was quite a craft, being a rebuilt canoe with a very small engine, and how to get enough money to buy oil and gas was always a problem. They finally solved it by running as a ferry between York Harbor and the country club, which was about a mile up river. *Only male passengers were charged.* Being adventurous and desirous of learning just what their craft could do, they took her out to sea one day and found out. The ground swell was too much for them. They got back safely, and as they said, "of course."

Bob was a good student, though not brilliant at his books, working hard for what he got. Moreover he was too happy in the running, wriggling life of a big school to wish to be a high-ranking scholar. Such a one is generally a somewhat lonely boy, and Bob was far from lonely.

It is interesting to analyze this character of natural leadership. There was charm about him that attracted his

fellows as well as his elders, there was talkativeness: he always had an opinion on every subject: there was the aggressive courage of a boy who felt himself bigger and stronger than he was. There were the restlessness, curiosity and enthusiasm of a keen mind, and there was the rare power among conventional boarding-school boys of deciding what to do next independently of what others thought. And all through his life his decisions were made without a trace of self-interest. Perhaps he was not more unselfish in the literal sense than most normal boys, but he either had or unconsciously developed a habit of thinking of his relationships with others and with life and of his duties in terms of the problem and without self-interest.

After graduating from St. Paul's he entered the University of Pennsylvania in the class of 1919. In his sophomore year he went out for the Track Managership. In April he enlisted and in June, while he was in the Marines and shortly after he had sailed for France, his appointment as assistant manager was announced. He was given a degree from the University posthumously. The Athletic Association of the University has given three silver cups in memory of Bob Reath and two other track men who fell in the war, and the annual spring handicap track and field is to be held in their honor every year.

He enlisted in the Marine Corps at Philadelphia, April 27th, 1917, was promoted to be corporal August, 1917, sergeant April 1st, 1918, and had been recommended by his company commander for a commission as second lieutenant at the time of his death. He began his service at the Philadelphia navy yard and sailed for France June 11th, arriving at St. Nazaire July 3rd, 1917. He was assigned to the 43rd company, fifth Marines. They trained with a regiment of Alpine Chasseurs during the summer and autumn of 1917. The Marines began their fighting on

March 16th, 1918, with trench warfare from which they went out to rest at the end of April. They went into action again in the Belleau sector before Verdun on May 27th. He was with them through all their fighting till killed by a shell in the Bois de Belleau action on June 12th, 1918. His colonel gives this account of his death:

"He was killed in the Bois de Belleau by a shell, shortly after bringing his captain out who had been wounded in an attack we were making. The day before he went into a quarry and brought out about sixty Germans as prisoners, singlehanded. Such an act speaks for itself."

His captain writes: "I wish to mention a few facts about your brave and noble son Roberts. Sergeant Reath was one of the very best and bravest non-commissioned officers I ever served with. On June 12th, 1918, in an attack, I was wounded in both legs and could hardly walk and Reath assisted me to the rear. Had it not been for his heroic work I could not have been living to-day. Later on the same day he was killed. Reath died so others might live, and you should be very proud to have had such a brave son. I certainly was very proud to have such a non-commissioned officer as he."

The following quotation from a letter of the Commandant of the Marine Corps tells the kind of soldier that Bob Reath made:

"Physically, morally and mentally he stood so high in the ranks that his company commander recommended that he be appointed second lieutenant, for the reason that he possessed the 'natural qualities of leadership, aggressiveness, initiative and cheerfulness and had excellent education.' The stress of conditions under which our forces are operating have been such that this recommendation had not yet been acted upon when he nobly laid down his life. I know that you will cherish this information with the other fond recollections of the boy of whose life you can be so proud; for I feel that his career with

us, though short, expressed but a page in the good life that he led and that he would have achieved success in any calling had he been longer spared to you."

Though full of the promise of great things, his was already a life singularly complete. The fire of high purpose, the strong power of leading along the right road, heroic deeds, the love of friends, the joy of life, all were here. His soldiering was the perfect fruit from the flower of his school days.

"So he passed over, and all the trumpets sounded for him on the other side."

#### Citations.

1. "For distinguished and exceptional gallantry at Bois de Belleau on June 8th, 1918, in the operations of A. E. F., in testimony thereof and as an expression of appreciation of his valor, I award him this citation June 2nd, 1919.

JOHN J. PERSHING,  
Commander-in-Chief."

2. "For extraordinary heroism in action near Belleau Wood, France, June 11th, 1918. During the advance of the 43rd Company of Marines, Sergeant Reath, with great coolness and devotion to duty, attacked an enemy machine gun nest, killing three of the enemy, captured the two remaining members of the crew, thus enabling his company to continue the advance. This heroic deed was performed by Sergeant Reath under intense machine gun fire and greatly inspired the members of his company."

3. "On June 12, 1918, in Belleau Wood, France, his company was under a heavy and devastating fire of artillery and machine guns. The Company Commander was endeavoring to send an important message to his Battalion Commander. Several messengers had been sent, none had returned, all having been killed or wounded in the endeavor to pass the intervening open ground. Knowing all this, Sergeant Reath volunteered to try to get the message through. In the performance of this duty he was killed."