

"Major to Mayor" John R. Southam

Dan Southam Major to Mayor? Easy, Grins Berean__John R. Southam, D. S. C., of Flanders Fame Leads Cupids Chock Battalion Now__Editor's Note – What has become of the men who served with unusual gallantry in the World War? Ten years have past since they laid down their arms and entered into that trying period of readjustment. This is the second of a series of stories of the deeds of men of Greater Cleveland and northern Ohio who dragged muddy boots along the road that led to the great red dawn.__By Roelif Loevland__There were grim lines around the mouth of Maj. John R. Southam. His eyes were red-rimmed holes in his head. His lips were gray. Stubble covered his chin. For eight days the 145th Infantry, Ohio National Guard, had been advancing in the Argonne. When one advanced in the Argonne in those days one did not walk gently. One killed the machine gunners, and then one walked – unless the machine gunners got you. Or unless the shells got you.__Eight days without sleep! Eight days without sleep! The men might snatch a minute now and then – but for John Southam, battalion commander, no sleep. No sleep for eight days! It wasn't so bad now. He didn't feel sleepy. He just felt dead. Dead in his boots. John Southam, dead in his boots, in the Argonne.__His men were dead, too. Dead in their boots. Too tired to scratch cooties. Too tired to feel cooties. Nothing to eat but German hardtack. Remember those sweetish squares of German hardtack about the size of lump sugar? Nothing to do but eat 'em. Rather look down at one's feet and laugh. Sort of a silly laugh. The sort of laugh a man laughs after eight days without sleep in the Argonne. Funny things, feet. Damned funny things. Wonder who they belong to? Wonder if the toes would wiggle? Better to save the energy for the next machine gun nest. Wonder what makes 'em turn black?__They remembered with slight pleasure that they had captured the crown prince's dugout on Monthaucon. There were pictures on the walls, tapestries, rugs, upholstered chairs and a piano. But best of all several cases of beer on ice. But the beer was gone now – all gone. The boys enjoyed the beer. The major didn't drink. He just stood and watched them, out of the bloodshot holes in his head. There was a little song they had heard. There were glad. It didn't apply to their major. It went: __If you want to know where the officers were_I'll tell you where they were:_Down in their deep dugout,_I saw them. I saw them._Down in their deep dugout. I saw them_Down in their deep dugout.__BzzzzzzZZZZZZWHAM!!!! - and John Southam's men were calling for first aid. Calling feebly for first aid there deep in the Argonne. Another and another. But the shells were coming from the rear. FROM THE REAR!! __"Go back," ordered Maj. Southam, "and tell that fella he's shelling American troops."__The runner went back to the major in charge of the infantry, there. The major it seemed had seen men moving in the woods, though they were Germans and asked aid of the artillery in cleaning it out.__"But they're men from the 145th," said the runner.__"Well they have no business there," snapped the major. "They're ahead of the line."__This was quite true – the battalion was several miles ahead of the line. The shelling continued. The orderly reported back to Maj. Southam__John Southam took out his pistol.__"I'm going back and see that man." He said grimly. Back he went with his automatic in his hand. When he returned, the major was dead. A German shell had finished him before the avenging angle appeared to exact payment for the lives of his men.__In an extremely dangerous position, John Southam held his line until troops arrived on his right and left – and the government awarded him the D. S. C.__The 145th had been in Texas shortly before it was mobilized for the World War. In June, 1918, men of the regiment left Camp Lee with their overseas equipment bound for the big show. It was a good looking outfit – strapping young chaps with leathery faces. They landed at Brest, slept on duckboards at the Pontanazen barracks to keep out of the mud, and trained at Gondrecourt. Learned how to throw grenades without wrecking their arms – dug "enough trenches to fill the Panama Canal."__First, near Baccarat to

the Lorraine sector. Firing back and forth. A few raids. A full complement of rats and cooties. The men didn't use the dugouts. Wanted to be on deck if the Germans raided. Scooped out little shelters in the side of the trench. Not too deep, or the thing would cave in from concussion. __Camions took 'em up to within twenty miles of the Argonne. From there they hiked into hell. But when they were relieved, they had advanced 50 kilometers, captured several thousand prisoners, machine guns and artillery. Just to show their versatility, they turned the captured 77's around – and fired 'em at the Germans. __Leads Assault__At St. Mihiel, Maj. Southam was made a lieutenant colonel and placed in command of the regiment. There the Germans threw over H.E.'s and plenty of gas. Casualties were heavy – 75 percent of the total strength. The last of October, the 145th went into the Ypres-Lys sector and took over the drive at the town of Olsene, Belgium. A full colonel was placed in command of the regiment and Col. Southam, whose specialty was commanding assault battalions, went back to the second. On the morning of Oct. 31, they went over the top. __Forty-five minutes after "E" company started out with 250 men and five officers, there were left: 30 man and one second lieutenant. The Germans rained shells, sprayed machine gun bullets. "But after the first hour it was just like a promenade on a spring morning." They made twenty kilometers that day and drank Belgian milk and ate Belgian bread before night. They cam to the Scheldt River. German machine guns and artillery were on the other side. __The American artillery was miles back of the infantry – and there was only a distance of about 300 yards between the intended target (the Germans) and Col. Southam and his men. Artillery was needed to dislodge the Germans, yet if a shell fell short, the Americans would get it. Col. Southam knew the chance he was taking when he sent back and asked for a barrage. On the third volley a shell dropped short – picked out the battalion headquarters. Six were killed, six wounded. __Col. Southam was seriously injured in the back. Both his legs were shattered. The surgeon tore a couple of boards from a barn and improvised splints. They carried the colonel in the barn and laid him on a bundle of rye straw. He had lain there five hours when an ambulance mysteriously appeared. It developed that Lieut. Ben Robinson who suffered a broken arm when the shell exploded, had gone exploring for an ambulance to remove the more seriously injured men. He found one but the driver said he had to go to another sector. __"You'll come right this way, please," said Robinson pleasantly, shoving his pistol into the ribs of the startled driver. __They loaded four of the wounded into the ambulance. When they arrived at their destination, they removed three dead men and Col. Southam, the latter smiling faintly. France honored him with the croix de Guerre "For conspicuous gallantry and bravery tin leading his battalion in the Flanders offensive, forcing a crossing of the Lye and Escaut Rivers, Oct. 31 to Nov. 4, 1918." __John Southam, mayor of Berea, O., limped into his office. He spent almost five years in various hospitals after the war. His left leg is four inches shorter than his right. His last operation was a year ago, in Walter Reed Hospital, Washington. __"How long will it be," Southam asked, "before I can feel sure I've had my last operation?" __"Well," said the surgeon encouragingly, "last week I took a bone out of a fellow who was wounded in the civil war." __"And so," said Mayor Southam grinning, "It's a hard question to answer. But just take a look at this marriage certificate. Ain't it a dandy?" Bill Zoul gave it to me. I'm going to perform my first marriage ceremony this afternoon." __(Source: Cleveland Plain Dealer, 20 Feb 1928)