

6 - American Writers in the American Volunteer Ambulance Corps

I'm going to leave Lester Johnson for a while, but don't forget him. He will be reappearing "in the local news" in the future.

I mentioned earlier that American poet E. E. Cummings also joined the American Ambulance Corp in 1917 before the USA entered the war. I just finished reading, *The Enormous Room*, an account of his experiences in a French detention center when he was picked up with a friend who was charged with espionage. It was interesting both in reading about the conditions he was forced to live in for several months and in his often satiric perspective of the situation and the war. I do wish I had taken French in school, because it is liberally sprinkled in throughout his book.

A year after graduating from high school, Ernest Hemingway responded to a Red Cross recruitment effort in Kansas City and signed on to become an ambulance driver in Italy in 1918. I have just enjoyed rereading his novel, *A Farewell to Arms*, which incorporated his experiences.

The next book on my reading list is by another well-known American writer, John Dos Passos. He was also a member of the American Volunteer Motor Ambulance Corps in Paris and in Italy. He later joined the U.S. Army Medical Corps. In 1921 he wrote *Three Soldiers*, which is considered a classic of the realist war novel genre. Critic H.L. Mencken wrote "No war story can be written in the United States without challenging comparison with it—and no story that is less meticulously true will stand up to it....It changed the whole tone of American opinion about the war; it even changed the recollections of actual veterans of the war."

I invite you to join me in downloading *Three Soldiers* for free from the Gutenberg Project – or you can request the book from your local library.

