

OBSERVATIONS ON THE UNIFORMS OF ACCREDITED WAR CORRESPONDENTS, AMERICAN EXPEDITIONARY FORCE, 1917-1919

by

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Accompanying the American Expeditionary Force when it went "over there" were 18 "accredited correspondents." The most famous of these people seems to have been Floyd Gibbons of the *Chicago Tribune*.¹ Also included among these "accredited correspondents" was Ralph Tyler, an Afro-American. In addition, Peggy Hull of the *El Paso Times* went overseas too but she, unfortunately, never received accredited status.

Our article deals then with the issue of whether or not these men, who became "accredited correspondents", officially wore a proper uniform. From the evidence we will present, we feel they did.

Our case begins with the policies of the British Expeditionary Force. We know that in June of 1915 official British correspondents first appeared at BEF's General Headquarters. These men were described as "in officer's uniforms, without badges or insignia of rank (although they had honorary status as captains), and wore a green band on the right arm. . ."²

The question which arises then from this is what would be the policy of the AEF on war correspondents? A U.S. memorandum issued by the Depot Quartermaster in Atlanta, Georgia on 11 July 1917 gives some preliminary indication of how this issue would be handled. According to this memorandum, field clerks should be regarded as officers and so uniformed "as against newspaper correspondents and others who may be with troops in the field [and] are not in the military service."³ Yet, our evidence will indicate that once the A.E.F. was in Europe, a new policy was set.

The answer seems to lay, at least initially, with General John J. Pershing. We know the newspaper correspondents that accompanied Pershing and his staff abroad were subjected to strict accreditation requirements and were, at first, to wear no uniforms but only a green armband with a large red C.⁴ However, by 9 June, while in Paris, General Pershing recommended that War Risk Insurance be granted to war correspondents.⁵ This suggests an attitude change away from the 11 July 1917 memorandum which led to the uniforming of war correspondents in France.

A strong case can be made particularly for Floyd Gibbons where we do have photographic evidence to document his uniform dress.⁶ Gibbons went to Europe on the ship *Laconia* and was aboard her when she was torpedoed off southern Ireland on 25 February 1917.⁷ After surviving this event, Gibbons eventually went



FIG 1

Floyd Gibbons, Accredited War Correspondent, ca. 1918. Drawing based upon a photograph of him shown recovering from wounds after Belleau Wood. Illustration by Alan Archambault.