I would rather have you four stand at Armageddon even than stand there myself. You, personally, are now in the position of the greatest danger; but when the trumpets sound for Armageddon only those win the undying honor and glory who stand where the danger is sorest.

—TR to Theodore Roosevelt Jr., March 1918

In Flanders and France, the Allied and American forces were only too aware that a great blow was about to be delivered by an enemy greatly strengthened by troops freed from the Russian front; the only question was where the German onslaught would fall. Before this occurred, however, on March 12 Archie became the first of TR’s sons to be bloodied in the war when he had his left arm broken and left knee seriously injured by shrapnel bursts as he led his platoon on a raid of the German trenches. For this action, in which he gave several commands and stayed on his feet for some time until being knocked down by the second wound, Archie received a Croix de Guerre from a French general while he was on the operating table.¹

Roosevelt, who was notified in cables from Ted and the War Department, wrote to Archie that the family was “divided between pride and anxiety, beloved fellow.” He hoped “dearest Eleanor was with him now” and offered any needed services he could render.

At lunch after receiving the news, TR reported to his son, Edith ordered the opening of a bottle of Grandfather Isaac Carow’s old Madeira—an unheard of occurrence, as Archie well knew—and the company “filled the glasses and drank them off to you.” Then his mother, “her eyes shining, her cheeks flushed, as pretty as a picture, and as spirited as any heroine of
romance, dashed her glass on the floor,” declaring “that glass shall never be
drank out of again,” and the rest followed suit. They now knew, he went on,
“what it feels like to have a hero in the family!”2 In a lighter mood, TR wrote
to Kermit that it would have been fine to see Archie receiving his medal,
and he imagined “that iron-natured young Puritan’s aspect when the French
general kissed him on both cheeks!”3

An old Rough Rider at the front, John Greenway, reported to Roosevelt
about Archie that he had seen Colonel Stark, the commander of the Medical
Corps, the day before and was told that the “brave kid” would be all right in
four or five months. He added that he was “too delighted” the Colonel was
also “mending.”4 War Secretary Newton Baker, on a tour of the front, vis-
ited Archie in the hospital, accompanied by a train of reporters. When Baker
asked him what he could do for him, Archie, making sure the newsmen were
listening, replied that he did not need anything but, if it was not too much
trouble, would love some guns and ammunition for his men.5 Greenway
passed along to TR that Baker seemed to “think the war will shortly be over.”
The Colonel’s old friend could not see it that way. He believed the German
drive had not started, because they were waiting for dry roads and wanted
to get things in the Ukraine and Romania in “safe condition” first, and he
looked for their attack in the next sixty days. Greenway added that another
Rough Rider there, Bill Davidson, had commented that “with Roosevelt
sick—Wood wounded” and the famous ex-heavyweight champion and friend
of TR John L. Sullivan dead, the country “was in a bad way.”6

Though he continued to be denied a fighting command in France, Leon-
ard Wood had been allowed to go to the front on an inspection tour with the
other training camp commanders. There he was severely wounded when a
trench mortar exploded and killed several soldiers, decapitating a French offi-
cer standing next to the general. John J. Pershing had promised Wood soon
after he arrived that if he could avoid controversy during the tour he would
be given an AEF command. But when Wood was lionized by the French
as “America’s Greatest Fighter,” he was unable to keep his mouth shut, at
one dinner calling Woodrow Wilson “that rabbit,” and his indiscretions were
reported in the foreign press. A furious Pershing reported to Army Chief
of Staff Peyton March that Wood was still “the same insubordinate man he
has always been” and told Newton Baker that Wood was physically unfit for
command.7

Once he returned home, Wood further alienated the administration by
writing a series of reports underlining the War Department’s failures in
supplying adequate arms and equipment, in particular airplanes, which the
administration had promised to deliver in tens of thousands to sweep the
enemy from the sky and save American lives on the ground via air power.
An astounding $649 million had been committed to building an enormous
air fleet, and the effort was put under the dual command of Major General
George Squier and Howard Coffin, vice president of the Hudson Motor
Car Company. Wood reported to Senator George Chamberlain’s outraged
Military Affairs Committee that, despite hundreds of millions already spent,