Richard Eric Holttum, *Croix de Guerre*

A Note

by

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Holttum's autobiographical note in *Flora Malesiana Bulletin* 28 (1975): 2477-500 contains an omission, in part at least self-effacing, but I am sure its honourable nature is of sufficient interest to bring it to the attention of his friends and colleagues. He refers very briefly to his service in the Friends' Ambulance Unit during the Great War of 1914-18. He went up to St. John's College, Cambridge, in October 1914 and took Class I Honours in the Natural Sciences Tripos, part 1, in June, 1916. A normal university curriculum would lead on immediately to the completion of the degree course in the following year. But conditions were not normal and instead he broke the university timetable to join the Friends' Ambulance Unit for service in France, his university career being completed only after peace had been restored. His service records, preserved in the Library of the Religious Society of Friends in London run: date of joining 12/7/1916; training at Jordans 12/7-1/8/1916; ward orderly, St. George's Hospital, London, 3/8-16/12/1916; in France: posted to Headquarters Instructional School 2/7/1917; cook Section Sanitaire Anglaise 19 27/1/1917; steward, S.S.A. 19 25/9/1918; left unit 7/1/1919. This service with the French Army was recognised by the French Government by decoration with *La Croix de Guerre*, the citation for which reads:

**ECKERSLEY, STANLEY, B.; HEALD, ALFRED; HOLTUM, R. ERIC; JONES, JAMES; WILSON, ANTHONY L.; WILMOT, HERBERT R.; WRIGHT, HERBERT**

Ordre du Régiment 20 Janvier 1919

'Convoyeurs à la Section Sanitaire Anglaise 19, ont fait preuve en toutes circonstances sous le feu de l'ennemi de courage et de dévouement aux blessés aux cours des opérations auxquelles cette section a pris part. (Flandres, 1917; Somme — Mars-Avril, 1918; Marne — Mai, Juin et Juillet, 1918; Champagne — Octobre, Novembre, 1918.)'


The bibliographic list in *Flora Malesiana Bulletin* 28 gives 1921 as the year of his earliest publication. In fact, the period of his service in France in the Friends' Ambulance Unit was the scene for his first published article: *Social Life of the Convoy*, pp. 91-95 in Herbert Wright's book cited above, predating all others by two years. It is an interesting note on how he and his colleagues lived in France, and makes light of time that must have been to a very large extent one of tedium, squalor, fear and fortitude. The article shows an amateur theatrical group called 'The Duds', but unfortunately he can not be recognised amongst them.

I am grateful to Mr. Malcolm Thomas of the Society of Friends for his help in finding this information.