

MEMOIRS
OF THE HARVARD DEAD
IN THE WAR
AGAINST GERMANY

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JEAN SANCHEZ ABREU

CLASS OF 1914

THE parents of Jean Sanchez Abreu, Dr. Domingo Sanchez Toledo and Rosalia Abreu y Arenchia, were Cubans by birth and descent, but, owing to the unsettled conditions in Cuba at the time their son Jean was born, October 11, 1892, were then living in Paris. "Thus it was," says his brother Pierre (Harvard, '11), writing about him for a 1914 Class Report, "that Jean Sanchez Abreu spoke

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French from his very childhood, and received the brand of French culture and civilization before any other influence. In 1899, at the close of the Spanish-American War, he returned to Cuba with his family, but his education was for many years entrusted to French governesses. From his thirteenth to his seventeenth year, he studied at his home in Cuba with American tutors who prepared him for an American college. Then he spent a year at 'La Villa,' a boarding-school situated near Lausanne, Switzerland, and finally entered Harvard College in the fall of 1910."

The records of his time at Cambridge do not show that he took an active part in undergraduate life, beyond serving as secretary of the Cercle Français. He must have pursued his studies to good purpose, for he received his bachelor's degree in February of 1914. Of the work that brought him to this point, and of all that followed, the brother's report, already quoted, presents an excellent summary:

Taking advantage of the very broad selective system which was still in vigor, he followed courses on the most varied subjects, wishing to complete in the most general possible sense his eclectic and cosmopolitan training already acquired. However, his interest in economic subjects gradually increased with his college years, and brought him to a practical specialization in them towards the close of his college career.

After obtaining his degree in three years, he returned to France, where in the meantime he has spent most of his summers, and entered the Law School of the University of Paris. There the war found him in 1914, and urged by his love for France, he immediately tried to enlist in the French Army. As he was a Cuban citizen, however, he found the regular ranks closed to him, and that he could only join the *Légion Étrangère*. He preferred offering his services to the French Red Cross, for which he drove a motor during the first six months of the war,

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until the French Government opposed having foreigners within the military zone.

Jean Sanchez Abreu then resumed his interrupted studies of law, and by a very courageous effort managed to pass his second year examinations in 1915. But his desire to help France in the life struggle in which she was engaged urged him to join her armies. The Lafayette Flying Squadron had been formed with American elements officially engaged in the *Légion Étrangère*, but who had been directly employed in the Air Service, and in this he enlisted.

He was a very experienced motorist, having always owned and driven a car since his freshman year. He quickly became a very skilful pilot of airplanes. At the Chartres Military Flying School he astonished his teachers by the speed with which he progressed, and finally, on May 23, 1917, he passed with high marks the practical examinations and trials for the degree of military pilot. On the next day he obtained the customary leave of absence granted to newly brevetted pilots, and decided to spend it in Paris. But instead of taking the train, he decided to motor over, with his "Itala" Grand Prix racing car. Maurice de Ganay, a close friend, and comrade at the Chartres School, who had also finished his training on the twenty-third, accompanied him. For some as yet unknown reason, probably a broken steering gear, the car hit three trees in succession on a stretch of straight road, and toppled over and over. Both its occupants were instantly killed. Jean Sanchez Abreu's mangled remains were brought to Paris, and buried in the Cimetière du Nord.

Since Abreu's death his library, more than a thousand volumes on the history of Cuba and on French literature, has been presented by his family to the Library of Harvard College.

In all the long Roll of Honor the name of Jean Sanchez Abreu stands alone as that of one in whose person Spain was identified with Harvard and with the Allies.