The Stars and Stripes

FRIDAY, NOVEMBER 15, 1918
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GUNS ALONG MEUSE ROAR GRAND FINALE OF ELEVENTH HOUUR

Cheers and Flares Succeed Momentary Silence at Last Zero

FINAL WEEK NO JOY RIDE

Private George W. Legion Reaches Front to Find It's All Over but the Shouting

At the eleventh hour on the eleventh day of the eleventh month hostilities came to an end from Switzerland to the sea. Early that morning, from the wireless station on the Eiffel Tower in Paris, there had gone forth through the air to the wondering, half-incredulous line that the Americans held from near Sedan to the Moselle the order from Marshal Foch to cease firing on the stroke of 11.

On the stroke of 11 the cannon stopped, the rifles dropped from the shoulders, the machine guns grew still. There followed then a strange, unbelievable silence as though the world had died. It lasted but a moment, lasted for the space that a breath is held. Then came such an uproar of relief and jubilance, such a tooting of horns, shrieking of whistles, such an overture from the bands and trains and church bells, such a shouting of voices as the earth is not likely to hear again in our day and generation.

When night fell on the battlefield the clamor of the celebration waxed rather than waned. Darkness? There was none. Rockets and a ceaseless fountain of star shells made the lines a streak of glorious brilliance across the face of startled France, while, by the light of flares, the front and all its dancing, boasting, singing peoples was as clearly visible as though the sun sat high in the heavens.

Germans Celebrate as Well

The man from Mars, coming to earth on the morning of November 11, 1918, would have been hard put to it to say which army had won, for, if anything, the greater celebration, the more startling outburst, came not from the American but from the German side. At least he could have said—that man from Mars—to which side the suspension of hostilities had come as the greater relief.

The news began to spread across the front shortly after the sun rose. There was more or less of an effort to send it forward only through military channels, to have the corps report it calmly by wire to the divisions, the divisions to the brigades, the brigades to the regiments, the regiments to the battalions and so on down to the uttermost squad, quite as though this were an ordinary order and nothing to get excited about.

There was the effort. But it did not work very well. The word was sped on the kind of wireless that man knew many centuries before Marconi came on earth. It spread like a current of electricity along the shivery mess lines, hopping up and down and sniffling and scuffling as they waited for the morning coffee. It spread along the chains of singing road menders, along the creeping columns of camions. Driver called it to driver and runners tossed the word over their shoulders as they hurried by. Now and again a fleet of motorcycles would whizz along through the heavy mist.

Hard to Get at First

"The guerre will be finee at 11 o'clock. Finee la guerre."

You could hear it called out again and

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again.

"What time?"

"Eleven o'clock."

A pause.

"Say, you, what time is it now?"

They took it a little incredulously at first. That was old stuff, that rumor. They had heard it again and again during the past fortnight.

"Well, the captain says it's so."

"Hell, who's he? I'll wait till Foch comes and tells me himself."

Why, the preceding Thursday night—that was the night the envoys came over from Spa—news that what the doughboy seems to prefer calling the "armistice" had been signed spread like the Spanish flu from Grandpré to the Meuse.

That night the flares inflamed the skies, the rockets streaked the night, bands burst into long-suppressed music, and the headlights twinkled all along the road. It did not last long, this little unbidden flurry, and there was much scolding; but, as a matter of fact, nothing much more demoralizing to the enemy could well have been staged than this spectacle of the First American Army celebrating something he had not heard.

All along the 77 miles held by the Americans the firing continued, literally, unto the eleventh hour. At one minute before 11, when a million eyes were glued to the slow-creeping minute hands of a million watches, the roar of the guns was a thing to make the old earth tremble. At one point—it was where the Yankee division visiting, at the time, with a French corps was having a brisk morning battle to the east of the Meuse a man stationed at one battery stood with a handkerchief in his uplifted hand, his eyes fixed on his watch. It was one minute before 11. To the lanyards of the four big guns ropes were tied, each rope manned by 200 soldiers, cooks, stragglers, messengers, gunners, everybody. At 11 the handkerchief fell, the men pulled, the guns cursed out the last shot of the battery. And so it went at a hundred, at a thousand, places along the line.

Probably the hardest fighting being done by any Americans in the final hour was that which engaged the troops of the 28th, 92nd, 81st and 7th Divisions with the Second American Army, who launched a fire-eating attack above Vigneulles just at dawn on the 11th. It was no mild thing, that last flare of the battle, and the order to cease firing did not reach the men in the front line until the last moment, when runners sped with it from fox hole to fox hole.

Then a quite startling thing occurred. The skyline of the crest ahead of them grew suddenly populous with dancing soldiers and, down the slope, all the way to the barbed wire, straight for the Americans, came the German troops. They came with outstretched hands, ear-to-ear grins and souvenirs to swap for cigarettes, so well did they know the little weakness of their foe. They came to tell how pleased they were the fight had stopped, how glad they were the Kaiser had departed for parts unknown, how fine it was to know they would have a republic at last in Germany.

"No," said one stubborn little Prussian, "it's a kingdom we want."

Whereat his own companions mobbed glasses. The young officer at his elbow asked him to look due west. What did he see? Well, not much—the road to the forest full of traffic, no shell fire, a crippled airplane in the field below.

"Lord, Lord, what good are those glasses? Why, without them, I can see a little house in Kansas City. There's a nursery on the second floor and the sun, shining in the window, just touches a cradle there. Inside that cradle, man, is my daughter. I have never seen her before. She was born since I sailed for France."

Meanwhile, on the roads below, the Engineers were working with a will. No time to celebrate, for the roads must be

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kept in shape. But they sang as they worked.

Send the word, send the word over there
That the Yanks are coming, the Yanks are coming—

The words, in that hour, had acquired a new significance. While here and there across the devastated land where Yanks were at work, you could hear a knot burst into song. And the burden of all the songs was this:

It's home, boys, home, it's home we ought to be,
Home, boys, home in the land of liberty.

So came to an end the 11th of November, 1918—the 585th day since America entered the war.

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