

# The **ARMISTICE**



**S**T. NAZAIRE, 1918. It was eleven in the morning when we first heard the news. A piercing whistle from one of the steamers in the harbor, a sudden blast so loud and so startling that even the nurses in their rest camp in La Baule fifteen kilometers away could hear it. A whistle that made everyone sit up. Was it another false alarm? One hardly dared hope. Deceptions and mistakes had made us cautious. We poured into the streets; shopgirls from the Galleries and the small stores along the Rue Ville-es-Martin, doughboys and wounded on crutches from the Base Hospital, workers from the docks, French soldiers on leave, and Y girls in uniform. No, it was not false. It was true. There was the poster. A weary little old man in a cap was sticking it against a wall with a brush and a pot of paste:

L'ARMISTICE EST SIGNÉ.

That single shriek now became a roar. This was the real thing. You could distinguish the various elements composing the roar—the big steam crane on the pier which could pick up a ten-ton locomotive as you pick up a fork, the huge liners like the *Aeolus* and the *Martha Washington* unloading in the shipyard, motorcars, trucks, dock engines, the tiny tramp steamers discharging coal from Cardiff and iron from Wales, the small boats in the Bassin—all joined in the increasing din.

By magic every house now blossomed into color. Flags were at every window, flags of

# 2 The ARMISTICE



France and the Allies, flags of the United States and France. The posters appeared on every street corner. They invited the populace to "pavoiser" and informed them that a parade would take place at three in the afternoon. Messieurs the citizens were requested to take part. As the streets filled with a delirious mob the noise increased. A truck load of German prisoners rolled past, apparently quite as happy as the rest of us. A big motor bus from Montoir loaded with colored stevedores, its horn tied down, careened through the Rue Thiers, missed a lamp post, almost ran down the excited traffic officer in the Place Carnot, and narrowly missed a sour-faced major general who stalked disconsolately across into the Rue du Croisic. After all, his job was through.

By noon the entire town was outdoors. Despite regulations every café in the city was open and doing business. After lunch there was a concert on the Boulevard de l'Océan by French and American bands, the latter obliging with "Where Do We Go From Here?"—a number that made a pronounced and immediate hit with the doughboys. Then came the parade. An American band led the line, next the mayor with several high American officers, then the town officials all dressed in their Sunday black. After them a heterogeneous mass of humanity. Men and women and children all carrying flags, all singing different songs at the same time in two different tongues. Some were even sober.

Up at the Base Hospital we had to be in early, Armistice Night or not. But all through the long evening I could hear them under my window as they passed along the Rue de la Paix, French and American, black and white, sailors from the ships and poilus from the big caserne on the Guerande road, women from the upper part of town and women from the buvettes and bistros of the port, all kinds, all races, drunk and sober, noisy and noisier, but everyone happy, happy, happy. Exultantly their voices rang through the misty darkness of the French twilight.

"Madelon, Madelon, Madelon . . . and I sez to her, I sez, voulez . . . mérité bien de la République . . . boy, yo' all ain't gwine get home fo' Christmas . . . Madelon . . . sure the Medical Corps'll be the last to leave . . . and I sez I'll be there at neuf heures . . . the Y. M. C. A. they won the war, hooray . . . mon fils, il est mort sur la Somme . . . what the hell if you ain't got no francs, she'll trust you . . . mais oui, chérie, mais oui . . . oh boy, oh joy, where do we go from HERE . . . Madelon, Madelon, Mad. . . . c'est Clemenceau qui a fait ça . . . she would like hell, she . . . that old goof the Colonel, gosh, you might think he won the war himself . . . et maintenant, il faut aller jusqu'à Berlin . . . the rotten old tub can't do more than ten knots, so the skipper he said . . . had a cognac and six glasses of vin blanc, that's all . . . I gotta girl at Beachmont, about twenty minutes out by trolley . . . damn gyrenes sticking their ugly mugs into . . . Madelon . . . Madelon . . . MADELON . . .



(Armistice Day images added ~ THE EDITORS)

