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PREMATURE ARMISTICE

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doubtful if any other news ever travelled so swiftly or so widely in the United States of pre-radio days.

Telephone exchanges became mad-houses. Telegraph offices were swamped. Offices and businesses were deserted. New York's luncheon crowd never went back to business. Impromptu parades were started and grew to gigantic proportions. Lower Broadway in New York invented its first artificial snowstorm. Ticker tape, telephone books, office stationery, and waste-basket contents provided the "snow." None who participated in the American celebration will ever forget it. Those who did not see it will probably never appreciate its magnitude, its spontaneity, or its unquenchability. Germany was known to be beaten. For all practical purposes the war was over. For a fortnight the emotions of America had been under compression and on the verge of explosion. A 20-word news bulletin furnished the detonating spark.

After the first shock of having been "scooped" on one of the biggest stories in American history, the newspapers which did not receive United Press dispatches began to recover and issue extras of their own denying that the war was over, or that the Armistice had been signed. Their newsboys were in many instances mobbed and their papers destroyed. In the minds and the conviction of the American public the war was over, even if the formalities had not been concluded. People wanted to celebrate. The excuse for a celebration had been furnished. They would permit no kill-joy to function. Washington denials that the Armistice had been signed were hooted. News services and correspondents that questioned the authenticity of the United Press bulletin were ridiculed. Joy was unconfined. Mixing of the milk of human kindness with alcohol in various forms continued far into the night. The boss and the staff in thousands of businesses banished formality and rank and continued their celebrations into the wee hours. America awoke on the morning of November 8, 1918, with what was probably the greatest national headache in history.

But a good time had been had by all. There were few regrets and less bitterness on the part of the public. Possibly a correspondent and a press association and some hundreds of newspapers had made a slight mistake as to the signing of some formal paper, but in the minds of the public the war was over and the celebration had been to signalise an actuality. Any incomplete formality was of no consequence.

Proof of this was furnished four days later when, on November 11, the official signing having taken place and been formally announced, the resulting celebration throughout the country turned out to be but a pale imitation of the spontaneous outbursts of November 7.

Still a Mystery

What or who caused the premature report?

After over a score of years the answer to that question is still a mystery. There are many people who still believe that an armistice of some sort actually was signed on November 7. They cite the never officially denied report that German emissaries crossed the French lines at daybreak on the morning of Thursday, November 7; that the terms of the Armistice were already drawn at that hour; and that they had probably been agreed to in advance by the Germans. For a time it seemed to me that such a theory might be plausible. However, as the years passed and no confirmation of such a situation ever became public, the plausibility of the theory that an armistice had actually been signed on November 7 gradually diminished. In my present opinion, the explanation probably lies in a different direction.

In the official records of the State Department covering the war period, which were made public in 1933, there appears, on page 483 of Volume I, for the year 1918, the following dispatch:

"Special Representative (House) to the Secretary of State.
(Telegram-extract.)

Paris, November 8, 1918, 7.00 p.m.
(Received November 8 — 5.10 p.m.)

"Yours 16, November 7, 4.00 p.m., I have investigated this matter, and I understand Embassy is reporting fully concerning it. My information coincides with that given Embassy. Most of the officials in Paris, and practically every non-official person here, believed yesterday that the Armistice had been signed. Captain Jackson, Naval Attaché at the Embassy, sent Admiral Wilson at Brest a wire to that effect. Wilson showed wire to Roy Howard at Brest and sent an aide with him to cable censor so that Howard would be permitted to send through a dispatch stating that the Armistice had been signed. It is perfectly clear that the United Press was not at fault in this matter, and that the fault, if any, lies with Jackson or the French official who started the rumour."
(Signed) EDWARD HOUSE."

In the identity of the "French official" who started the rumour lies, in my opinion, the answer to the mystery of the false armistice of November 7, 1918. Investigation at the Embassy in Paris revealed that a secretary had received a phone call from the French Foreign Office during the afternoon of November 7, via the Embassy's private Foreign Office wire. The "French official" had announced the signing of the Armistice, the hour of the cessation of hostilities, etc., and had requested that the information be communicated to Ambassador Sharp. To the secretary the call was

routine, and the message arrived via a channel regarded as strictly private and official.

But in my opinion no "French official" ever phoned the news of an armistice to the American Embassy on November 7. In my opinion, which is based largely upon conversations I have since had with American and French intelligence officers, the bulletin communicated to Ambassador Sharp was phoned by a German secret agent located in Paris. It seems logical to believe that this agent had successfully tapped the private wire connecting the American Embassy and the Quai d'Orsay—that he may have had it tapped for months—and, when the situation warranted, he merely rang the Embassy, announced himself in perfect French as speaking for the Foreign Office, and communicated his message.

The objective of the manoeuvre and its value from a German point of view are not difficult to understand.

It was known that Foch would be ruthless in his terms. It was believed that he, in common with most of the Allied leaders, preferred to follow the retreating German armies right into Berlin. The Germans wanted an armistice desperately—and wanted it quickly. They were faced with starvation, anarchy, and civil war. Time meant everything. They were fearful that there might be fatal delays.

But the Allies, though triumphant, were war weary also. Those behind the Allied lines were also eager for peace and the return of their soldiers. The urge for peace was in the hearts of all peoples. The Germans knew this. They feared the Allied military leaders, but they knew that even these leaders would not be deaf to the demands of their nationals. If these nations could just be told that an armistice had been signed, that the war and the killing were actually finished, it was reasonable to suppose that their joy would be so great that no Power would risk continuance of the war in view of the recognition that all necessary objectives had already been attained.

The thing to do, therefore, was to announce peace and dare the Allied military commanders to delay it longer. In my opinion, that was what was done, and if ever the "French official" who, in my belief, was in fact a German secret agent working in Paris, tells his story, or if his official report in the German War Office is ever made public, the secret of the false armistice will be revealed—but not otherwise.

To-day with Aesop

THE pithy sayings of Aesop are household words to-day, but how would the old writer of fables have reacted to a modern domestic tangle? The answer will be found in a presentation of *To-day with Aesop*, a series of dramatic tales of modern home life based on fables themes. These will commence at 12B on April 9, 22B April 23, 32B May 7, 42B May 21, and 22A on June 4.

LISTENERS to 42B's children's session will shortly be able to hear *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs* in dramatised form. Adapted and produced by Peter, and acted by the 42B Dramatic Radio Players, the story will be presented in 13 chapters. The starting date will be announced from 42B.

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