

The Stars and Stripes

FRIDAY, FEBRUARY 7, 1919.

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A.E.F. NEWSPAPER JUST A YEAR OLD; MEET VOLUME TWO

**Fifty-Third Number, Half
Million Strong, Goes
Out Among Army**

FIRST ISSUE UNDER 30,000

**Loan from General Staff Set The
Stars and Stripes Going—
Yes, It's Paid Back**

This issue opens the second volume of THE STARS AND STRIPES. It was a year ago tomorrow that the first number made its somewhat nervous appearance in the then not very populous regions of the A.E.F. Today's issue celebrates the anniversary—our first birthday.

THE STARS AND STRIPES has grown like a mushroom. In one short, crowded year it has become one of the best known and most widely circulated newspapers in the world. The difference between its lowly beginning and its present state can be measured and explained only by the difference between the A.E.F. of February, 1918, and the A.E.F. of February, 1919, an A.E.F. at the end of a year which saw the war won and its own strength expanded from less than 300,000 to the greatest expeditionary force that ever crossed the seas.

That first number came out on borrowed money and on borrowed paper and ran considerably short of the 30,000 it was brazenly supposed to be. Almost every line of it was written between errands by one buck private working in the office of field press headquarters at Neufchateau. Its cartoons were done at odd times on still odder scraps of paper up in Damblaine, where the Marines were somewhat engrossed with the preparations for their first invasion of the trenches.

Over Half Million Mark

The last number of Volume One, printed in one of the most perfectly equipped plants in existence, ran over the half million mark, and the only reason it did not run over the million mark is because enough white paper for such a riot of circulation is simply not to be had. Nearly 100,000 copies were circulating on the Rhine next day and as many more were waiting in the pouches at the base ports for a chance at the home-going cargo space. Other batches of that issue are in every neutral or Allied European capital by this time, and copies, already on the way, will reach the Murman coast next week for the Yanks in Russia.

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The present office, over the American Chamber of Commerce in Paris, seems like Madison Square Garden when compared with the first office of THE STARS AND STRIPES, where, in a hall bedroom in the Hotel St. Anne, the original five got out the early numbers, with a cavalryman as the treasurer, counting over the first francs on one beer table and Wally drawing his dern cartoons on another. There the small staff wrote the pieces for the paper, wrapped and addressed the papers, and then carried them off to the train.

It was after the paper began to flourish like the green bay tree that there bobbed up here and there claimants to the distinction of having proposed it. It is probably true that to every American newspaper man in France, whether he was commanding a battalion or peeling a potato, there had occurred from the start the obvious need of a newspaper for the A.E.F.

Born of A.E.F.'s Needs

It is certainly true that THE STARS AND STRIPES—its purpose, its policy and its very name—was proposed and put through by Guy T. Viskniskki, formerly identified with the Wheeler Syndicate in New York and then a second lieutenant, detached from the 80th Division and serving as censor at American Field Press Headquarters, Neufchateau. THE STARS AND STRIPES was born of the needs of the A.E.F. and the energy of Captain Viskniskki. That energy broke down every obstruction and brushed aside the multitude of people (high and low, well-meaning and otherwise) who said it couldn't and shouldn't be done.

To Captain Viskniskki, who remained as officer in charge until after the armistice

***WELL, IT'S PROBABLY
THE ONLY BIRTHDAY
WE'LL EVER HAVE***

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was signed, it was pointed out that the same thing had been tried without success by every other army in Europe. The undiscouraged answer was that, given a public of American soldiers, a lively, slightly irreverent, plain-spoken newspaper, which did not smell to Heaven of propaganda and which was not choked up with deadly official utterances, could be established in France, and, by all that was holy, should be.

So, with a shoestring, some nerve, a few francs dug up from O.D. pockets, and later with 25,000 francs borrowed from the General Staff, the paper was started. That working capital was long ago repaid, and a neat bank balance of lots more than a million francs can be fondled by the Inspector General whenever he feels like it. We have often been asked why we charged anything for our newspaper. There are several answers. To begin with, it would have been a long and uncertain project to start the paper unless it had promised to be self-supporting. Then the fact that the dough-boy paid his ten cents for every issue made it possible for us to remind all and sundry from time to time that the paper was his and that every one else in the world could keep hands off. Finally, no American ever did or ever will respect reading matter that is thrown at him like a department store bulletin. Already vast sums have

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gone to company funds on our subscription system, and literally hundreds of company funds were started in that way. What will be done with the bank balance when the day comes for us to take down our sign and close the shop remains for the A.E.F. to decide.

With a Single Purpose

It would be well if we could ever find out what disposition of this fund the enlisted man of the A.E.F. prefers. The paper belongs to him. From the start it was dedicated to him. Practically all of it has been written by enlisted men, and its present somewhat violent managing editor may be a first-class private some day, but he is not yet.

THE STARS AND STRIPES had and has but one purpose—to give the Army a voice and thereby to stimulate the morale of the American Expeditionary Forces. Here, at its start, was a green and none too self-confident Army, scattered to the winds of Europe, and in serious danger of losing all sense of belonging to a single army. To write for the Yanks training with the British, the Yanks brigaded with the French, the Yanks loaned to Italy, and the Yanks venturing a bit on their own northwest of Toul—to tell each separate part and group that the others were helping—that was the idea.

And, as Yanks are all sceptics who can smell bunk a mile off, it was decided that the truth must and should serve. What we should have done had the A.E.F. failed, just how we should have extricated ourselves from our policy if the American troops had gone in for strategic retreating, we don't know.

But, thanks to the combat divisions, the problem never arose. From that electric day in May, when the breathless squads from the 7th Machine Gun Battalion jumped into the fighting in the streets of Chateau-Thierry, the task of THE STARS AND STRIPES became easy. The editorial staff just hung on to the coat-tails of the irresistible doughboys and was carried to glory. Any group of scribes who could not have got out a readable newspaper, with the American Infantry providing the news, would properly have been shot.

The Distribution Problem

If the editorial problem of THE STARS AND STRIPES had its curious features, this was doubly true of the business department. Here, for once, was a newspaper that did not care two sous about making money and that could look any damned advertiser in the face and tell him to go to hell.

Then why have ads at all, you ask. Because it was desirable to keep the paper financially independent and because advertisements are not merely a kind of reading matter every American craves, but they seem to give a newspaper an air of success. However, we have never been able to accept the volume of advertising matter submitted.

This problem was solved by Captain Richard H. Waldo, formerly business manager of the New York Tribune, who brought up the business department of THE STARS AND STRIPES in the way it should go, and stayed with it long enough to establish the coupon system.

After many anxious weeks, when it must often have seemed likely to bewildered on-lookers that THE STARS AND STRIPES was going to blow up and fail to appear at all, it gradually gathered momentum and proceeded under its own steam. Then, in the course of time, the hopeful editorial staff began to receive intimations that it was getting out a real newspaper.

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"Constant Reader" Appears

We suspected as much when the ruler of one of the most wonderful countries in the world sent a special emissary to hint that we were not giving that country quite the attention it deserved. Our suspicions deepened when the daily mail bag began to burst with denunciations from "Constant Reader" and "Indignant Subscriber."

They took on the tinge of certainty when a Captain in the Rainbow—the doings of which magnificent division have been chronicled in these columns at least as fully as those of any other—recently flared up with the allegation that we had not given his outfit enough write-ups and on that ground sternly refused an obviously needed bath to one of our field agents.

However, not even this incident convinced us. What convinced us were the dark threats from occasional men, some of them of international reputation, who, although it was known this paper was published by and for the enlisted men, were bound we should print just what they wanted just the way they wanted it. If we did not, they said, they would run and tell their dear, close, easily-managed friend—General Pershing.

Then we knew we were a real newspaper at last.

"THE STARS AND STRIPES is up at the top o' the mast for the duration of the war." So ran an editorial in the first issue. It is still there, and there it will stay till its job is done. Then it will be folded away, never to be taken out again.