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Does FRANCE FORGET?

PARIS.

DEAR HARRY:

You ask me point-blank, like the hard-boiled sergeant you once were, if France has forgotten the A. E. F., and my reasoned, sincere reply to the question is—"Not yet!"

Perhaps, in distant decades to come, France will forget. I don't know. But I doubt it. In this plain-spoken letter, I shall stick to the present tense; and as of today, I can testify that the word *forgetfulness*—with regard to the A. E. F.—has been effectively banished from the French language.

You, Harry, are remembered individually and symbolically, if you get what I mean, for what you were yesterday and for what you represent today in many a French mind. The Lacoste family in St. Marc-sur-Seine, just north of Dijon, still recalls your one-time slimness, your noisy vocalizing, your eloquent if execrable French, and your devotion to Solange, that tiny six-year-old "sweetheart" of yours. (She's married now and has a Solange of her own.) They try to visualize the getting-fattish and growing-grayish-baldish American lawyer that you have since become, and they'd like to know you better in your present, civilian incarnation.

French schoolboys decorating graves in one of the great American cemeteries—Bony, in the Somme area, where 1832 soldiers are buried

Your rating as a letter-writer is very low, about as bad as their own—no runs, no hits, and lots of muffed balls; but, despite your silences and theirs, their affection for and their interest in you have survived the years.

True, there are physical factors in St. Marc to stimulate such remembrance. For the Lacoste family possesses what I call a diminutive A. E. F. museum. Your 1919 photo still hangs in the parlor, with our divisional insignia underneath. The snapshot of Harry Junior, his mother, and yourself has been duly placed in the family album. There are picture postcards from America, and on the piano is a Y. M. C. A. song book of the vintage of 1918 which, I suspect, you pilfered from the Y in Dijon. Should fortune or fate ever permit you to drop in for a visit, a hilarious homecoming awaits you chez Lacoste. Solange will insist on playing "Little Gray Home in the West" and "Missouri Waltz" and "Smile a While." And Grandpa Lacoste will ask if, by any chance, you have ever run into Cousin

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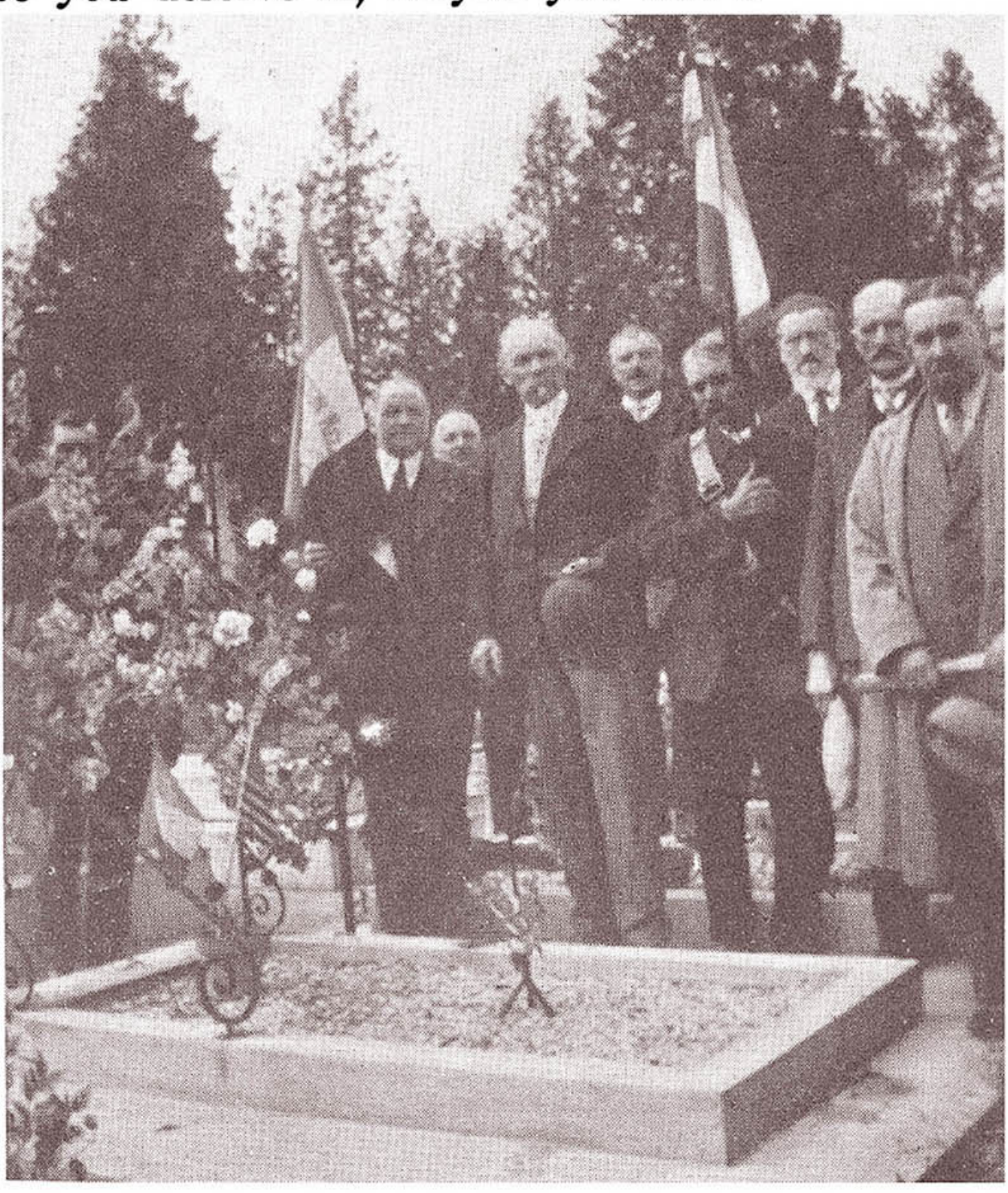
Emile (or Brother-in-Law Raoul) who runs a pastry shop in New Orleans . . . it's just around the corner from Cincinnati, n'est-ce-pas? Further, you will be urged to call upon Doughboy What's-His-Name (he numbers several hundred in provincial France) who lives, with his French wife and Franco-American offspring, just seven and one-half kilometres down the route nationale.

In defiance of the fading years, in a thousand and one St. Marcs where Yanks were billeted, there are French families to cherish the bon sŏuvenir of some particular A. E. F. soldier who wore the olive drab. This souvenir—and the word has spiritual implications in France—has been reinforced by friendly if infrequent messages from the United States. These letters are linguistic curiosities, supposedly written in French which—by intuition and guesswork—it has been necessary to "translate," sometimes with amusing and bizarre results. At all events, real friendship pierces the obscurity of ungrammatical passages, and so these messages, regardless of the date, are understood and appreciated.

So, you see, you have not been forgotten; but I warn you, they think of you most frequently, if I diagnose the situation rightly, as a symbol of the A. E. F. Don't let that go to your head; maybe you deserve it, maybe you don't.



An all-French group in solemn attendance at the solitary grave of James Pine, American soldier, at Fleury-en-Bière last Memorial Day

Anyhow, the fact persists that, in their thinking, you have become the human expression of the joyous youthfulness, the heroism, and the sacrifice of the A. E. F. And this is something which it is impossible for them to forget.

"Blarney!" I hear you protest. "Stop kidding me! Exaggeration!" Not at all; just a plain, factual statement of the situation as I have found it. Nor are you alone; that is what makes it really significant. For there are other symbolic doughboys, hundreds of them scattered all over the U. S. A., and every French hamlet has a Lacoste family to keep their remembrance alive. This is true whether the Yank in question be husking corn in Nebraska or running a linotype in New Hampshire; whether he be sleeping in Belleau Wood or Romagne-sous-Montfaucon. Wherever he may be, whether he survived or not, I can certify that he is not forgotten.

Of course, since the A. E. F. folded its tents and vanished, official America (this is no news to you) has had bitter disagreements with official France; she still has. Heated accusations and poisoned adjectives have been flashed, in both directions, across the Atlantic. Even today, serious differences on matters of principle remain to be compromised between Paris and Washington. And yet, I can assure you that the real France, the France of a thousand and one villages in which we were billeted; the France of Lorraine peasants, of Picardy craftsmen, of Burgundy winegrowers—remembers, with gratitude, the

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A. E. F. and its contribution to the Allied victory. No matter what the peanut politicians may do (and France, alas, has her share just like the United States), no matter what the prejudiced, partisan press may print, the real France guards its fidelity, its ancient admiration, and its enduring friendship for John W. Doughboy of Hometown, U. S. A.

Ceremony in honor of the A.E.F., French in conception and execution, at St. Quentin, in the Somme area

These workaday, frequently inarticulate friends of yours and mine, who are the backbone of France, don't know anything about war debts; it's just a confusing, complicated crossword puzzle to them. They know nothing about tariff duties and import quotas, and consider both a botheration. But let me read this into the record, they have somehow come to know and to understand the significance of Cantigny and Château-Thierry, of St. Mihiel and the Argonne. Further, they sense the sacred meaning of the 30,000 crosses of white Carrara marble, with an A. E. F. soldier underneath each, that punctuate the blood-soaked soil of northeastern France.

Madame Victor Boret, Saumur school teacher who on every Memorial Day places flowers on the grave of Pvt. Peter D Schmitt of Merrill, Wisconsin

To prove my point, I could cram this letter with quotations, eloquent, sincere, and pertinent, from official speeches. I shall not do so. Instead, I shall emphasize the unofficial, little-known and usually unpublicized events, ceremonies, and other evidences which show the A. E. F. is not forgotten.

anything out of it, in prestige or glory or anything else; I'm sure she doesn't. The only explanation is a genuine thankfulness to a Wisconsin artilleryman who died while helping to chase the invader from France.

French gratitude, please note, makes no distinction between Lieutenant Roosevelt and Private Schmitt. On Memorial Day the French abolish military rank and civilian caste. The "Officers Only" sign has been destroyed; the sleeping heroes are equal—equal in death, equal in their sacrifice.

Thus, every Memorial Day a ceremony is arranged by the French and held in Versailles for Colonel Herman H. Harjes, but since somebody might object that he was a colonel, also an influential banker, let's restrict ourselves to privates, cooks, etc., for the time being. For example, there is Raymond H. Runner of Indianapolis, private of the 29th Provisional Aero Squadron. He sleeps in the military plot of Chateauroux cemetery. Once a year, on May 30th, he rates a ceremony—French in conception and execution, with no Americans in attendance—and also the salute of a French general. I don't know how many generals Runner saluted before he went west; I don't know how he felt about this saluting business. Now, once a year, he is on the receiving end of the salute; and the officer who gives it is the commanding general of the Chateauroux military district.

Although there are no American graves in Rouen, America's contribution is remembered regularly.

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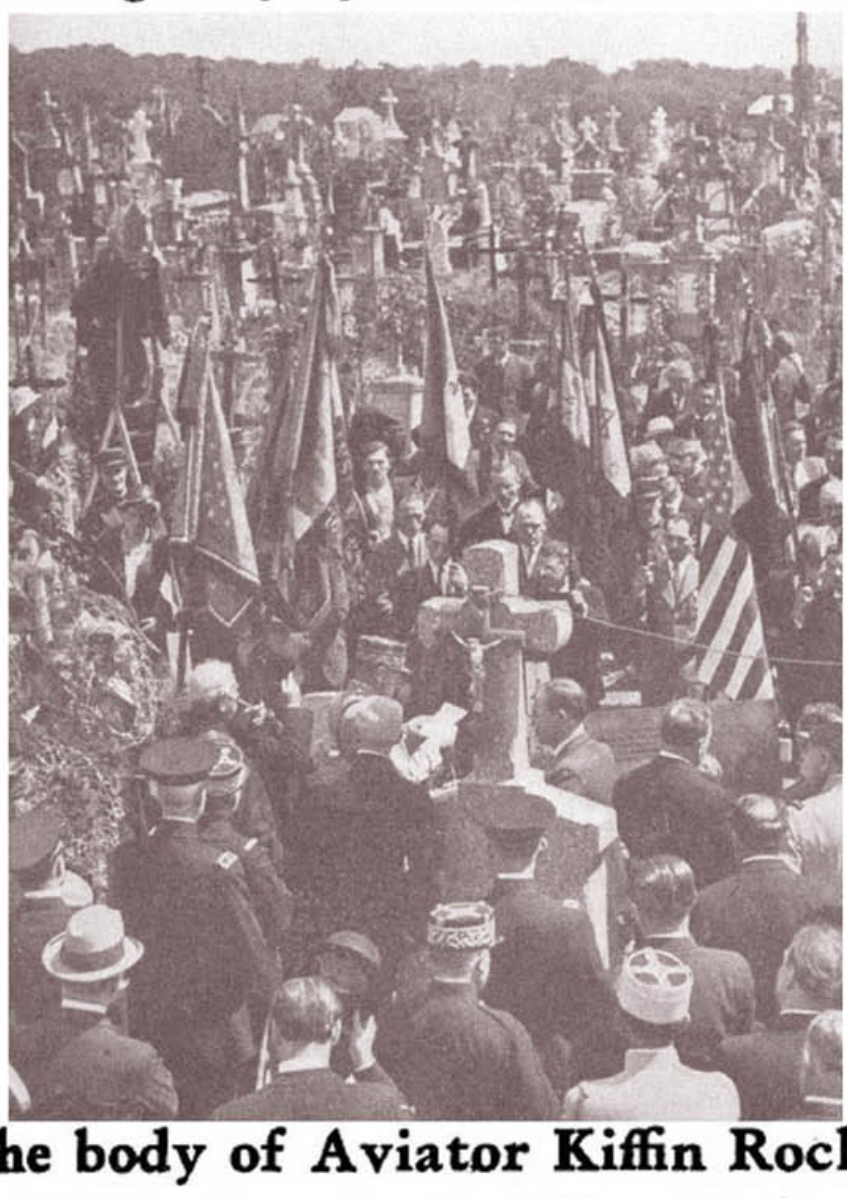
I don't say that every private's grave is decorated by a general; there wouldn't be enough generals to go around. But I do say that every grave—whether it be that of a private, a sergeant, a captain or a colonel—is decorated by somebody; by Americans, when it is possible for us to do it; if not, by the prefect or the mayor, by the village priest or the president of the *anciens combattants*. It doesn't matter if the soldier's name be Levy or Murphy, Johnson or Agostini, Bernitzky or Kalmanowitz; these names are all authentic; each represents an A. E. F. soldier who sleeps in an isolated grave "somewhere in France". The Catholic chaplain and his Protestant colleague are honored; even Jules Antoine Biron, one-time chief cook attached to the Commander-in-Chief, who for some unknown and unexplainable reason sleeps in the Freethinkers' Section of Cannes cemetery; but he rates his poppy, his Tri-Color, his American flag just the same.

Volunteer firemen of Lagery dip their standard in honor of Lieutenant Carter L. Ovington, who died in the flames of his airplane above their village

Kiffin Rockwell, American aviator killed in Alsace while with the French Army, in Luxeuil-les-Bains; Grace L. Malloch, nurse, in Ecrouves (Meurthe-et-Moselle); Virginia Branon, Y. M. C. A. secretary, in Lamalou-les-Bains; James J. Murphy, private, in Ancy-le-France—each receives the same decoration, each is equal on Memorial Day with Rear Admiral William Plummer Day, who sleeps in Nice, and Colonel Mitchell Chance Bryant, in St. Germain-en-Laye.

Unless I stop this enumeration of names, my letter will develop into a young encyclopedia, and so I'll call a halt. One final figure, however. There are 267 isolated A. E. F. graves in France; two-thirds of them are decorated regularly by the French.

Sometimes, the French beat the Americans to it. We arrive and find the grave already decorated. This is what happened to an American consul last Memorial Day. He had graciously promised to decorate six isolated graves, including that of Lieutenant Gustave H. Kissell in the British cemetery of Pont-du-Hem, near Arras. When he reached the Kissell grave, he found it covered with flowers; upon inquiry, he learned that the mayor and the schoolmaster, accompanied by 125 schoolchildren of a neighboring village, had held a memorial service of their own. The mayor spoke; the schoolmaster read Victor Hugo's matchless lines about those who die for home and fatherland; the children sang, and there was a minute of silence. Mind you, this ceremony had not been "suggested" from above; there was nothing or stage-managed about it; the mayor expected—and got—no publicity. It was simply a unit of the real France honoring an American soldier.



The body of Aviator Kiffin Rockwell lies in a typical French cemetery at Luxeuil-les-Bains, and his isolated grave is decorated regularly

MORE examples? Here is another; it is the story of a French hamlet, near Château-Thierry, which stages a unique ceremony every May 29th in memory of Lieutenant Carter Landram Ovington,

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A. E. F. aviator whose first flying was with the Lafayette Escadrille. His grave cannot be decorated, for he has no grave; he perished, literally, in the flames of his airplane. The exact spot is unknown, but it is somewhere near the small town of Lagery.

Only a short distance away, at a cross-roads, his mother has had erected a memorial which joins the practical to the artistic; it is a large, roomy, and comfortable armchair in stone, for three or four persons, properly inscribed, where passers-by may rest themselves. On May 29th (anniversary of Ovington's death) the village of Lagery holds a ceremony on this spot; his fifty flights across the enemy lines, his Croix de Guerre, and General Gouraud's citation of him are all recalled. The village band plays; the children sing; the local firemen salute, and flowers are placed about and above the memorial chair.

All of France, I repeat, remembers the A. E. F., but as we enter the battlefield zone, gratitude to the U. S. A. increases (as is normal), especially in the hamlets which were liberated by the forward surge of the American troops.

I was in Saint Mihiel last year when this Meuse city celebrated the 75th anniversary of General Pershing's birth by planting a "Pershing Oak" in the public garden. (A score of other communities, also "redeemed" by the A. E. F., did likewise.) Well, let me tell you, Harry, that an American amounts to something in Saint Mihiel; he is more than so many pounds of brawn and brain; he is a liberator, a conqueror, almost a savior.

We, that is The American Legion delegation to this "Festival of Deliverance," which is held every September, received a salute from every soldier; a friendly *bon jour* from every man; a charming smile from every winsome *demoiselle*, plus fattened chicken, *foie gras*, and "laughing water" from Rheims.

All along the one-time battle line, La Chalade, Montfaucon, Nantillois, Imecourt, Buzancy (I'm sure you remember them all, Harry,) the same brand of welcome awaits the A. E. F. visitor; it is even more tangible in the communities where the American military cemeteries are located.

Memorial Day at any of them (you should arrange your next trip to spend May 30th in France) is a moving spectacle and an unforgettable experience, whether at Bony or Belleau or Romagne. I was singularly privileged, last Decoration Day, to be in Thiaucourt, where 4,152 of our buddies await the bugle call of resurrection. It was a holy day in Thiaucourt, as oldster and youngster priest and peasant, deputy and doctor, evoked the sacrifice of the A. E. F. dead. There was no work in Thiaucourt that morning; the schools were closed; everybody went, first, to church, and then the entire village walked to the American cemetery. The program? A few sincere speeches; but no politics, no pompous eloquence, no platitudes; just a plain but heartfelt "Thank you" on the part of Thiaucourt to its deliverers.

Please, Harry, don't get the impression that the French remember us only on

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Decoration Day; that would be wrong. They do so on All Souls' Day as well. In France, All Souls' is called Le Jour des Morts, and its observance goes beyond patriotism and religion; on this day the entire nation, regardless of class or creed, goes thoughtfully to the cemeteries, adorns the tombs, and communes with the beloved dead. Do you recall that phrase in the credo about "the communion of saints"?

WELL, on the first of November, France communes with the saints, I presume, but chiefly with thousands of others who make no claim to sainthood, with the near and dear who have passed on, with respected forefathers and the embattled youth of 1914-18. And included in the latter are the Yanks who sleep in France. Their graves are decorated, and their sacrifice recalled, just like that of the comrades who wore horizon-blue.

Then, ten days later, on November 11th, the A. E. F. is remembered once again. Armistice Day has two phases in France; the first evokes the glory of the dead; the second celebrates, often with hilarity, the Allied victory of 1918. Since the French possess an uncommon sense of proportion, they are able to effect the transition with tact, discretion and dignity. Last Armistice Day, for example, I represented our Division at Ancy-le-France; I helped to decorate the grave of a Blue Ridge comrade; later in the day, with Major Clifford V. Church, our judge advocate, I was the guest at the annual banquet of the former fighters of the town. We were astonished to find two other A. E. F. veterans in attendance, two of Pershing's "orphans" living in near-by villages, and a third, we were told, was absent because of illness. If the Ancy banquet were an exception it would not be worth mentioning, but it is typical of several hundred similar banquets with A. E. F. veterans in attendance. Indeed, the *anciens combattants* make it a point to invite American ex-soldiers, if any are to be found within a radius of ten or fifteen kilometres.

By this time you have probably noticed the big role which French children invariably play in these tributes to the A. E. F. This is not an accident; it is part of a definite plan to teach the youngsters the significance of 1914-18 and our part in it. A Franco-American ceremony without children would be impossible; they are always part of the scenery. Further, in the schools—especially on April 6th, anniversary of our entrance into the war—there are special lessons dealing, in accurate fashion, with America's contribution to the Allied triumph.

And the history books—well, to be absolutely sure of my facts, I draft the services of Jacqueline, my daughter. (By the way, Jacqueline claims that Harry Junior owes her a letter, and she adds, which is a very grave charge, that she hasn't yet received the photo of Shirley Temple which he promised her.) Jacqueline brings me a copy of Mallet's *Contemporary History*, the standard textbook in the French schools. I quote a single paragraph only:

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French Gratitude

The grave of Quentin Roosevelt is visited faithfully on the anniversary of his death by Legionnaires and folk from the surrounding countryside

Memorial Day at Surèsnes Cemetery, near Paris. The "assistance" is about eighty percent French. Away from Paris it is even greater

The United States brought economic, military, and moral reinforcements of inestimable value. The great American army was rapidly organized, and by the summer of 1918, almost 1,000,000 men were in the front line under Pershing. The Americans fought the war as if it were a holy crusade, a crusade for Right and Liberty.

Jacqueline, who is happy to aid in the preparation of this letter, also points out this quotation, signed Raymond Poincaré:

America's valiant battalions sped to the combat with such a male contempt for danger and death that we, with our greater experience of the war, were inclined to counsel prudence . . . The American soldiers have every right to contemplate with pride the work accomplished by their courage and their faith.

That, Harry, is what France (more quotations on tap, if you want them) is teaching her young. Yvonne and Pierre, Raoul and Leontine are not going to be allowed to forget. If it were banquet oratory (at the Thanksgiving dinner of Paris Post, for example), I wouldn't

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blame you for discounting it; after all, the "communicative warmth" of banquets inclines even the most sober of us to exaggeration. But Jacqueline has been quoting from a matter-of-fact text-book, conceived in a scientific spirit, which had to pass the standards of the Ministry of Public In- (*Continued*)
struction, and so we must accept it at its face value. It represents the reasoned, sincere thought of France, and I guess it answers your query as to whether the A. E. F. has been forgotten.

The boat train carrying mail for America leaves in an hour, and so I'll omit all that French stuff about "perfect consideration" and "devoted friendships." Drop me a line and . . . *au revoir!*

Cordially,

BARNEY

P.S. I got to squeeze in a final bit of evidence. It is from Henry Dunning, "chief of staff" of the permanent FIDAC organization. He tells me that every year he receives 150 letters from French families asking him to look up A. E. F. veterans who have been lost, strayed or stolen. He quotes a typical letter:

> For many years we have been corresponding with T. O. P. Sergeant of Middletown, Pennsachusetts, when all of a sudden his letters stopped. For six months, we have heard nothing from him. We wonder what has happened, if he is ill, or what. Then again (may the Good God forbid!) he may have died. At all events, we are writing to ask you to find him, since we do not want the friendship, begun in 1918, to be broken.

Dunning informs me that one of these letters (maybe he was trying to pull my leg or yours) came from St. Marc and was signed J. Lacoste. Which proves, I wager, that if you haven't been forgotten you deserve to be.

By
BERNHARD
RAGNER

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