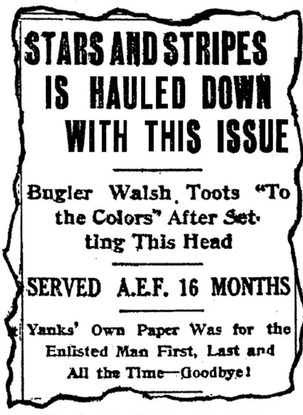
The AMERICAN LEGION Weekly

AUGUST, 1919

The End of the "Stars and Stripes"

An Appreciation of a Great Newspaper that Died with the A. E. F.



STARS AND STRIPES IS HAULED DOWN WITH THIS ISSUE

Bugler Walsh Toots "To the Colors" After Setting This Head

SERVED A.E.F. 16 MONTHS

Yanks' Own Paper Was for the Enlisted Man First, Last and All the Time—Goodbye!

The Issue of June 13, 1919

THE *Stars and Stripes,* official newspaper of the A. E. F., is a memory. There never was a paper like it before. There never will be a paper like it again. It was created to fill a definite need among the men of the A. E. F. It rose to greatness as the A. E. F. rose. It passed when the A. E. F. passed, which was fit and proper, since it was the A. E. F. newspaper.

"The American Expeditionary Force has made three unique contributions to the art of war," said Secretary Baker, speaking last May to the staff of the *Stars and Stripes,* at its office of publication, 32 Rue Taitbout, Paris.

One of these unique contributions, as Mr. Baker had chosen them, was the *Stars and Stripes* itself—a newspaper of, by and for the men who wore the khaki. The other two were the American soldiers' university at Beaunne, France, and the great plan of entertainment to which, under army supervision, the various welfare organizations contributed.

Of the three, the soldiers' newspaper was the first in the field, the others developing after the signing of the armistice. The *Stars and Stripes'* first issue appeared February 8, 1918. For sixteen months it was as much a part of the American army in France—and later, in Germany—as slum or "squads right." At the height of its circulation more than 500,000 copies were being circulated each week. The highest number ever printed was 526,000. In June, 1919, when the paper was discontinued, it was still necessary to print something like 185,000 copies. And a few days later after the last issue was out it was apparent that many thousands more could have been disposed of, for everybody wanted a copy both for a souvenir and for an historical record. Proud is the doughboy who can say that he sent the *Stars and Stripes* home every week, that his folks received and kept every copy, and that hence the family archives contain a complete file of "the official newspaper of the A. E. F.," which

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THE END OF THE "STARS AND STRIPES"

were the words printed each week to the left of the heading. To the right appeared the words "by and for the soldiers of the A. E. F."

THE *Stars and Stripes* was no less unique as a contribution to the art of journalism than to the art of war. Never before had such a newspaper rolled from a press. Never again will such a newspaper go flooding through the mails. Perhaps never again will a newspaper have such a circulation in a country whose native population is unable to read it. Such another staff of newspaper workers will never be gathered together again for the business of producing and distributing printed pages.

The *Stars and Stripes* was born of the need of the A. E. F. In an editorial in its first issue it proclaimed itself "up at the top of the mast for the duration of the war." Its last issue came from the press just a few days before the date set for signing the treaty of peace. The signing was delayed a week or more, but there will scarcely be any question but that the soldiers' newspaper, like the soldiers themselves, fulfilled the duration-of-war contract.

As an expression of America-at-war the *Stars and Stripes* was about everything that William Hohenzollern, now visiting in Holland for his health, could not have desired. If the paper found its way across, as it surely did, into the hands of the German intelligence officers—if that's what they could be called—it must have given them something to ponder about. How could they have reported anything favorable to the ears of the German high command after having perused this defiant and determined manifestation of doughboy psychology?

"Mein Gott, what an army!" some worried Herr Lieutenant might have exclaimed, after he had scanned the sheet a while, trying to discover any mite of comfort for the kaiser.

Here was any army, he could have deduced, which, lacking a newspaper and recognizing the value of newspapers as a factor in morale, had created just what it needed and wanted in the way of a newspaper. Here was a newspaper which each week told two million men the things they wanted to know about each other and the big business in which they were all engaged. Here was a newspaper that reflected, not the wishes of a high command or a general staff, but the wishes of the soldier himself. Here was what the soldier wanted in the way of news and humor, including cartoons depicting his affairs with the top sergeant and his experiences with cooties, K. P. and the like. The serious purpose was never neglected, but if something funny happened to a doughboy at Brest or Bordeaux, a doughboy correspondent would send it to the *Stars and Stripes* and the next week the doughboys getting ready to go in at Chateau-Thierry, or clearing up machine gun nests in the Argonne, or holding the fort at Ehrenbreitstein, would be laughing about it.

IT was the doughboy's paper, first, last and all the time. G. H. Q. kept a paternal eye on the *Stars and Stripes,* but it was recognized from the first that this was the soldier's own largest contribution to his own morale, and editorial and news columns went free and unfettered, governed by its staff's own notion as to what should or should not be printed.

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THE END OF THE "STARS AND STRIPES"

At one time, indeed, when someone raised the question as to whether the paper was going to be run for the enlisted man or not, a memorandum came from G. H. Q. through proper military channels which said in substance:

"The style and policy of the *Stars and Stripes* are not to be interfered with."

"Why," said James J. Montague, a New York newspaper man who was a correspondent in France, "the *Stars and Stripes* would print stuff right along that I wouldn't have dared try to put on the cable. It had a different idea of news altogether than the censor, and it seemed to follow its own idea without let or hindrance."

In May, 1919, General Pershing called on the staff of the *Stars and Stripes* in Paris, and thanked them for their contribution to the success of American arms in the great war, and announced the early suspension of the paper—for the reason that it had fulfilled its mission and completed its work.

The commander-in-chief spoke very feelingly of the value of the paper—he sent citations, by the way, to several of its workers—and said that no one who had the good of the publication at heart could wish to see it continue beyond its time of usefulness.

"We feel," he said, "that rather than have the *Stars and Stripes* continue until such a time as it might become a reproach, that it is better to chop it off, so to speak, in the height of its strength."

AND so, with Volume 2, No. 19, June 13, 1919, a front-page headline announced, "*Stars and Stripes* Is Hauled Down With This Issue," and the story, repeating the metaphor, said that "the *Stars and Stripes* finds itself being reverently hauled down, to be as reverently laid away."

The editorial and business staffs of the paper, including field agents, distributors and correspondents—141 men in all, with two officers—arrived at New York on the U. S. S. *Pretoria,* in July, and were sent to Camp Mills, Long Island, whence they were sent to camps in all parts of the country for discharge. They are now scattered all the way from Texas to North Dakota, from Massachusetts to Oregon.

The *Stars and Stripes* is a memory. It has gone with the A. E. F., for how could it survive without its army?

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