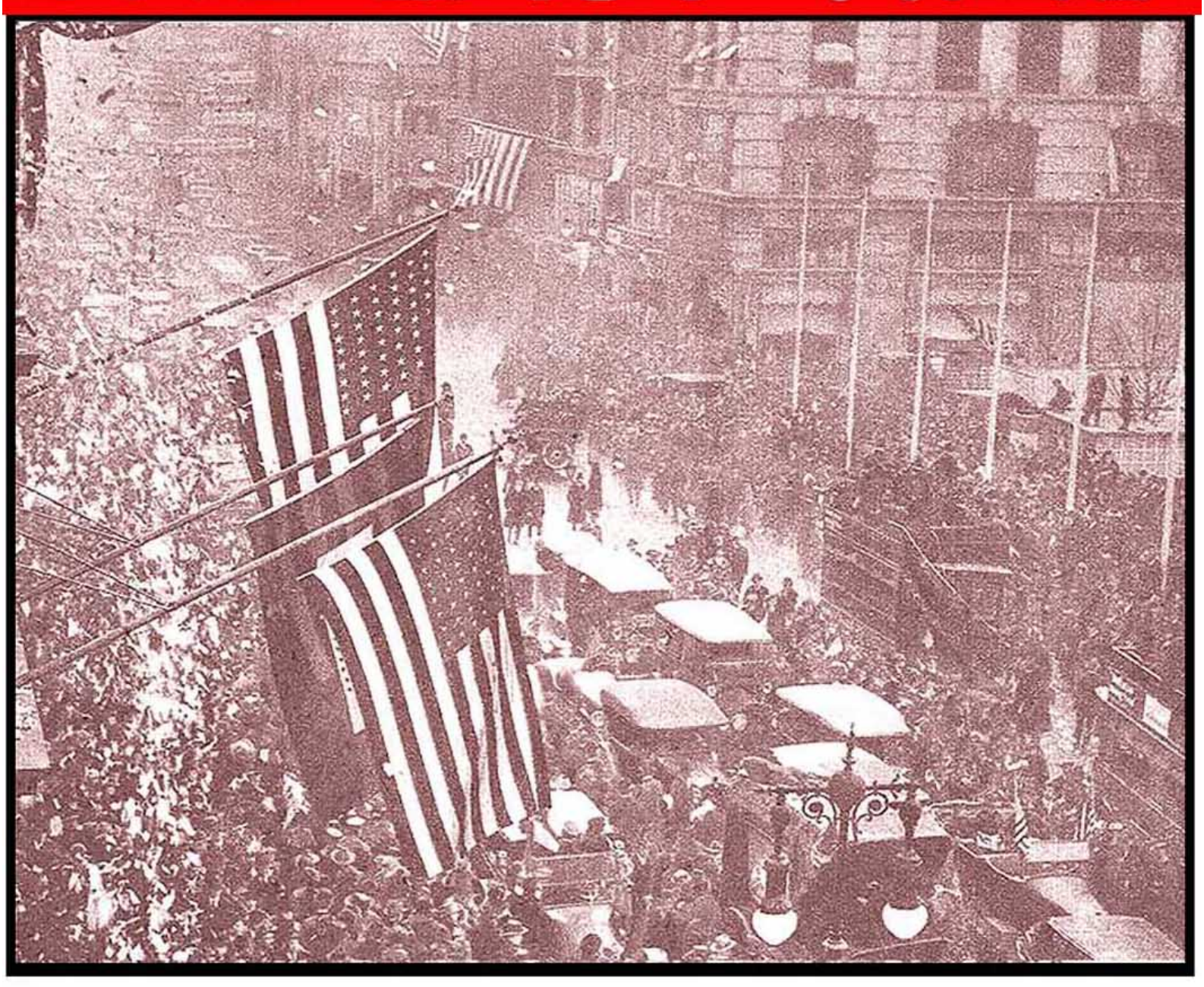
THE LAST TIME



This was the real Armistice Day - on November 11, 1918. Here on Fifth Avenue in New York were the flags, the impromptu parades, the traditional ticker tape floating down as people shouted and screamed their joy.

At the end of the first world war, there were two celebrations—just the same as now.

THE armistice that ended the first world war, like the surrender that ended this one, was celebrated on the home front twice. Last time, again like this time, it was generally believed that the Germans had been seeking peace terms for at least a month before the war actually ended.

When United Press flashed word to its client papers in the U.S. that an armistice was signed Thursday, Nov. 7, 1918, homefolks in hundreds of cities didn't doubt the report. The premature news reached the States at 11:56 A.M. Radio sets being almost unknown in those days, word was spread chiefly by the newspapers. Extras were printed all through the day.

Factories, boats and railroad locomotives tied down their sirens and whistles. Workers poured out of shops and offices, which closed for the day. In New York and Chicago, on the West Coast, from the Gulf Stream to the Great Lakes, people came out on the streets to hold impromptu carnivals. Only food stores and essential means of transportation kept going.

The Secretary of State, Robert Lansing, denied the armistice report in Washington and newspapers began to print the denial late in the afternoon. This had small effect on dampening the public spirits.

The United Press didn't concede that day that it had erred. There have been many versions of how the mistake occured. According to one version a United Press reporter in France apparently mistook a temporary cease firing order (issued to let the German armistice commission pass through the fighting lines to confer with Marshal Foch, Commander in Chief of the Allied forces) as the signing of the armistice.

Persistent denials by government officials didn't quiet the celebrations until late evening. By that time scores of parades had been held; scores of mayors had addressed victory rallies. Thousands of citizens had got drunk and some newspapers were complaining of hooliganism. The premature celebration was confined to the U.S. The false report had not been circulated in other countries.

FOUR days later, Nov. 11 at 2:45 A.M., while the country slept, the word of the real armistice arrived in Washington. Newspapers rolled out extras. Sirens started again—the second time in four days. At first people were hesitant to believe the news, genuine this time. Then as the realization spread that the war had ended at last, that this armistice report had been announced by Washington, the country went into a wild celebration.

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When day came, people joined with the same spontaneity in the official celebrations. Schools closed. Business shut down. In almost every village and town victory rallies were held. Churches were crowded.

As the night of Nov. 11 came, the clamor quieted. In most cities the streets cleared. People went to their homes. Twice in less than a week the country had experienced a great emotional turmoil.

During the day Allied capitals also had celebrated. In London, throngs massed in front of Buckingham Palace where they were greeted by King George and Queen Mary.

Paris turned out in riotous carnival. Gen. John J. Pershing, Commander in Chief of the American Armies, described the scene in his book, "My Experiences in the World War":

> "It looked as though the whole population had gone out of their minds. The city turned into pandemonium. The streets and boulevards were packed with people singing and wearing all sorts of odd costumes. The crowds were doing the most clownish things. One could hardly hear his own voice it was such bedlam.
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> "It was next to impossible for our automobile to make any headway through the mass of humanity. We were two hours in crossing the Place de la Concorde the crowd was so dense. It happened I was recognized before we had gone very far and French men and women boarded the car, climbed on top of it and got inside and no amount of persuasion would prevail upon them to let us pass. Finally, a group of American soldiers who were enjoying the hilarity came along and seeing our helpless condition took charge and succeeded in making an opening sufficiently large to permit the car to move a yard or so at a time until we got free. If all ridiculous things done during those two or three days were recorded the reader could scarcely believe the story. But it was Paris and the war was over."

THE armistice climaxed negotiations which had been opened by a note from the German high command to the Allied high command on Oct. 5. The great Allied offensive designed to end the war had been opened Sept. 26. Before this massive onslaught the Germans were falling back everywhere. The Germans were running out of food and ammo. Most of all they were running out of soldiers.

Open mutiny spread in Germany. On Oct. 29, German sailors rebelled at Kiel. By Nov. 6, 40,000 armed Germans seized Hamburg, Bremen, Hannover, Brunswick and Cologne.

Field Marshal Ferdinand Foch was authorized by the Allies Nov. 5 to sign the armistice for the Allies. The German armistice commission met Foch Nov. 7. Foch gave the German commission the Allied terms and warned that these terms must be accepted or rejected within 72 hours.

Field Marshal Paul Von Hindenburg told Kaiser Wilhelm he could not guarantee the Kaiser's safety. On Nov. 9, the Kaiser renounced the throne. Early on the morning of Nov. 10, the Kaiser fled to Holland.

At 5:00 A.M., Nov. 11, in Foch's railway car near Rethondes, France, the Germans signed the armistice terms. A German officer said to Foch, "A nation of 70 millions suffers but does

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not die." Foch shrugged, replied: *"Tres bien"* (very well).

The word of armistice reached the troops sometime after 6:35 A.M., sped to every battle front as fast as jubilant men could flash the historic news. The war that had begun on July 28, 1914, was over.

YANK

MAY, 1945

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