

la
12 May, 1945

How tell about these last few days?

First, they all seem to collapse into one long day - one whole time, - largely because we did almost the same things, or variations on the same things each night, going back over the same routes, visiting the same little out-of-the-way quarters, trying to get to a certain place by a certain time before the fountains went off, or the dancing stopped. And there was a marked crescendo of activity. Monday it was unofficial and mostly G.I. localized in the Madeleine area, very funny and rather drunken, - coralling and stopping of cars, rocking them like great cradles, and then sending them on their way, the occupants all shaken and hysterical and sometimes very annoyed. Tuesday was the great celebration with full effects; lights and flags and fountains, and yet still it was too new to be credible and so Wednesday's gaiety was even more unchained and wholesale and joyous. Thursday night somehow it was all over, the boulevards not blacked out any more but back to normal lighting, - normal modified lighting, that is, because, except for the Rue de la Paix, and some other old streets that had kept their ancient gas reverberes, the Rue de Rivoli, for instance, with its endless string of pearly gloves, every third or fourth one missing now, except for these that always had a special diffused glow, the large modern lighting system had been changed away back in 1939 to a deflected arrangement that cast all the light downward. With a uniform all-over diffusion then, and no more fountains, and everyone tired, and the bars cleaning up and closing, one seemed to understand, and went home to bed.

I slept two different times during the whole sixty hour period but mostly by day when it got hot and glarey on the streets.

To begin at the beginning, then: the first evening had taught me the dangers of going about in a car. The springs on my poor old Chang Kai Chek couldn't have taken the human cocktail treatment so I decided to stay way out on the perimeter of the crowded area, or else leave the car at home.

Tuesday afternoon, after a late lunch with Florence at the Maurice (I can now reveal that this is my home!) we went to the Place de la Concorde, slowly, of necessity, for the crowds. There was no organized parade and yet little sporadic groups formed and marched together singing and waving flags. Where there were no flags they just carried "NO PARKING" signs, or branches of trees, and marched behind them. No vehicles were visible, but all over were shapeless mounds of crowded, clutching humanity, entire living pyramids that eased along at snail's pace, and somehow, somewhere inside these shouting, waving, gesticulating masses was a man at a set of controls directing the things along. Lord only knows how! In the general direction of the Arc de Triomphe. Although the jeep is by no means the largest of cars, it seemed to be able to carry the biggest load: plenty of flat standing and sitting surface, I guess, and no springs. The only final limiting factor was the little square mudguard that eventually touched the wheel, and burned the tire, and then some sort of control had to be exercised. One way to shed extra personnel from the juggernaut was to put on the brake suddenly and everyone fell off forwards, or else to start up bruskiy, in which case everyone toppled off behind like the White Knight in Alice in Wonderland. Closed cars were less picturesque although the figures along the mudguards in Michaelangelesque position were surely the most comfortable of all. Trucks were absolutely behemotnic! I saw one coming down the Rue Royale that looked like a grandstand on the move, a whole section of a football stadium ambulant. And it was remarkable that the groups were invariably mixed, old and young, civilians and military, all nations, all branches of the service, but especially military and babes, - these last as often as possible dressed in red or white or blue, or all three. Florence and I just sat on the stone coping that runs

around the Concorde for hours on end watching the ebb and flow of the crowd toward the Etoile, where DeGaulle was due to say something over the Unknown Soldier. The sky was full of planes dropping coloured streamers and flares and zooming the square, - irregular cannon salvos shook the earth, the water from the fountains doused the crowd as the wind shook it, and countless flags flapped and fluttered against the light blue sky.

Remark that nothing was planned, nothing was organized, nothing was policed. Near us on the pavement was a G.I. who had removed his blouse and folded it into a neat pillow and was sleeping peacefully on it through the whole fracas! From time to time a loud speaker would announce what was going on at the Arc, or would play a nice gay record (once it was "If you Go In" from Iolanthe!) I wasn't aware of any military music at all. And it was a strange crowd. It never seemed to jam. There were always spaces in it, it moved at any speed it wanted, it formed into circles for dancing purposes, or columns for marching, or wedges to clear the way for a loaded vehicle, or just ambled. There were girls in peasant costumes, Alsaciennes with big black bows on their heads, Bretonnes with tall white lace cylinders. One could see that the children's clothes were mostly hand-me-downs. - nothing seemed to fit. At one point a woman was knocked over by a passing car, was picked up red and groaning, placed in the car that had smacked her down and trundled away. A group of East Indians carried a black Ghoom on their shoulders, and a phalanx of Foreign Legionnaires was topped by a couple of young Russian officers who were handling bottles like Indian Clubs. Complete silence fell over one section when a convoy of lumber trucks with German Prison laborers abroad passed rather rapidly through a corner of the square. Only faint whistling and boeing could be heard, and although the Jerries lay very low on the trucks they were not mobbed, although they looked as though they expected it. They just didn't fit into the picture. There were plenty of newly returned prisoners in evidence with a big K O painted roughly across their backs, "Kriegs Gefangene", two paratroopers wore American Beauties in their shirtfronts with the stems protruding. One little kid wore a G.I. helmet, proudly, I am sure, because he wouldn't quit it; but he must have seen very little of what went on because it came down to his shoulders all around, and when his mother called him he had to struggle up out of it to answer. At one point I heard an American ask a Frenchman if he might kiss his girl, and the Frenchman said, "Certainly, go ahead, ne vous genez pas! faites, Mons faites!" But he did stand there a little nervously and looked a couple of times at his watch while the soldier ate her up. Finally while our heads were buzzing and we felt hot and thirsty, we started over toward the Rue Boissy d'Anglas, past the American Embassy to the Club Interallie. In the embassy window, on an upper floor was a fine looking, clean, shiny man in khaki shirt smiling and waving. Florence said: "Looks like Eisenhower!" and, of course, it was Eisenhower. The word got around rapidly: "C'est lui, le general A-i-sen ha-u-e-r!" and he was given such a hand that he finally withdrew, tears streaming down his smiling cheeks, or he might have stolen the show.

We recuperated in the deep cool green garden of the Interallie, drinking champagne until dinnertime. Afterwards, with a reinforcement of Russell and Ernst we took the car and started down along the quais to be near Notre Dame when the lights first came on. There on the Ile St. Louis, we came across the first old-style sidewalk bal musette with Rene Clair decorations and a lot of children dancing in groups of twos and threes and fours. One single electric light bulb hung high in the middle of the narrow street, illuminated the scene; and the garlands of tiny flags hung like an arbor from house to house, and two small bistros furnished chairs for the onlookers. We pitched in, and after a few rounds of jvas with miscellaneous partners (Russell at one time, protestingly in the arms of a big fat man) we were hailed into one of the bars and given white wine. A few women brought their husbands

to us, recently returned deportees looking somewhat "beat-up" but happy, and every one congratulated everyone else, and kissed everyone else, and the children climbed all over us and hung confetti in our hair. It finally got a little hot and close, so after one or two go's at the "Carpet Dance" we took off over the river to the spot on the quay where Notre Dame can best be seen.

The great banks of searchlights went up while the sky was still a rich limpid blue, and the cathedral suddenly seemed to be made of old ivory. The bells began to peal loudly and continuously, and everyone went "Ah!" The L.O.'s delivering food up the river drew up along the quais so the sailors could see, and they cheered and were cheered.

As night fell we slowly made the rounds; the Pantheon, serene and isolated on its hilltop, only the dome illuminated; the Luxembourg warm and pinkly lit, its battle scars scarcely showing; the Invalides, always one of my favorite monuments, flashing gold against a deep blue sky, the Chaillet daisy and evenly poked out by a battery of searchlights way over on the Eiffel Tower, its fountains, relics of the World's Fair, arching powerfully and deafeningly across the gigantic court.

The whole center artery of Concorde-Champs Elysees presented such a hazard that we had to come at the Arc de Triomphe by way of the Bois! But it was worth while, for surely it was the most beautiful of all. In the simplest way the "Big Five" flags hung loosely inside the arch, the tri-color in the center, flanked by the Union Jack and the Stars and Stripes, with the large red fields of the Chinese and Russian framing them. They must have each been the size of a tennis court and the whole soft waving mass was illuminated by a super searchlight beam that must have been visible for miles, - a beam that wavered and varied like Northern lights as the flags shifted in the wind. Everyone was struck by the symbolism of this colorful cluster of flowing flags, one after another appearing, predominating, and then resuming its place as the evening breeze billowed them out over the unknown soldier. After a few more Bistro pauses we edged our way around the outer boulevards to the heights of Montmartre, and there in the narrow streets we abandoned the car and let ourselves be swept along by the human river; sometimes it was almost frighteningly packed into the winding alleys, but we didn't lose one another and all reached the dark terrace where we could look down on the vast city. It was like one of those old maps they used to publish that show only the famous monuments. The buildings were like tiny toys pin-pointed with light in a black field, and a dim roar and hullabaloo rose from the city like the purrings of a gigantic cat.

I can't remember quite how we got down that time, as we did much the same thing the next night, but I recall passing the Opera which was lit-up while on the surface and red behind the arcades, and the Vendome column, with an absurd bouquet of waving people on that vertiginous balcony that runs around the top, like a Bemelmans drawing. The party broke up and I "gared" the "Voiture", and pushed off on foot to further integrate, we call it in the Air Component, getting to bed sometime around daybreak.

The next night it seemed to last until still later, and there were bonfires and bonfire dances in a quarter that I can't even identify now; and I shall remember always a very young infantryman with a wound not more than a week old in his shoulders, standing, crying, in front of a bonfire. He asked me if one could still get a drink, and I found a bar that didn't close until very late, so we had a few, and he tried to express how he felt, but didn't do very well. He was still in a prolonged shock and the peace seemed to him to

have come too soon and to be meaningless. I had fun pretending to the girls I was with that I didn't speak a word of French.

Thursday, Florence and I went to St. Cloud and just lay in the long grass and slept and read, and I did a very shaky watercolor that will be, at least a souvenir.

This account is being written in a high wind and a blinding glare on the Meurice roof, and it is becoming more exhausting than the festivities themselves, so I shall cut it short.

Last night, a fine performance of the Faure Requiem. It seems to me the whitest music, and so beautiful!

Thanks for all the magazines. I would love to have some salted nuts. In spite of the good news it looks as if our jobs would go on for quite a while here. In a roundabout way I heard about someone called Allen, "Peaceful" is his nickname- going to call on you. Is it so? I can just place him. He was in OCS I think with me two years ago. Thank Louis for the radio. It hasn't arrived yet but will be very welcome. Lots of love -

Jerome



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