

Henriette Louise Dessez

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French Are Calm As Enemy Nears

Miss Henriette Louise Dessez Pays Tribute to Soldiers and Citizens of France

Most Excited People In Europe, Americans

Pays Visit to Paris Before Returning and

Was There When Bombs Are Dropped on City

"The most excited people I saw in Europe were some Americans," declared Miss Henriette Louise Dessez of the office of the disbursing officer of the Department of Commerce, speaking yesterday of her experiences in the war zone, from which she returned recently. Miss Dessez was in Europe from the last of June until the last of August. She witnessed the Swiss and French mobilizations, traveled through the heart of France when the German army was within hailing distance of Paris, and was in the French capital the day the bombs were dropped into the city from the German dirigibles. In speaking of her experiences, Miss Dessez spoke entirely of what she saw and heard in France and Switzerland. The war as seen through a woman's eyes is what she tells.

"You have always heard of the excitable French nature," she said. "Why I never saw people so calm. What impressed all of us was the absolute calmness of the soldiers. They would sit smoking and drinking in the cafes and never make the slightest demonstration. The soldiers did not stand at the bulletins at all but seemed indifferent. The most excited people in Europe were some Americans."

Dessez and party landed in Naples, June 29. They traveled through Italy, and were in Geneva on the day the Crown Prince of Austria was assassinated.

"I sat in the shade and watched the street sweepers buying extra papers on that day," said Miss Dessez. "There was great excitement throughout the city. Later, when I was at Ringzenberg, which is about three miles from Interlaken, I received the first intimations of the war. For several days there had been slight runs on the banks, and when war was officially declared this tendency became a regular run."

Saw Swiss Mobilization

Miss Dessez witnessed the mobilization of the Swiss troops to preserve the neutrality of their country and tells of the companies of Swiss yodling in unison as they passed through the town. At Bern she saw a tremendous display of soldiery.

About this time the Queen of Holland sent a special train for her people and it was on a train that went out parallel to it that Miss Dessez and her party left Geneva for Paris.

"At Geneva the Cook's office had closed. The railroad office was closed for the day. Everything was in charge of troops. The stores were closed for all the men had gone to the border, and the women were doing all the work. Cook's sold us tickets saying, 'Perhaps you can get to Paris.'

"We went to our hotel for rest and were called at 1 o'clock in the morning, we were so afraid of missing the train," continued Miss Dessez. "Soldiers were everywhere. But we had our papers and that was all that was necessary. At 5:30 o'clock, the train began to pull out of the station going very slowly. Belgrade at the frontier was the first stop. The soldiers did not collect our tickets."

Here Miss Dessez produced the identical ticket as evidence that the soldiers, acting as trainmen, never collected tickets.

"At all our stops we were invariably switched off the main line, sometimes for hours, it seemed, to allow troop trains to go through. We arrived at Lyons at 1:30 o'clock in the afternoon Sunday. The city

was filled with troops French dragoons, zouaves, and the famous mountain artillery by the trainload with their guns."

Miss Dessez spoke of the calmness of the troops and their apparent indifference to the war bulletins. She said the French soldiers are not undersized as is commonly thought.

All Quite In Paris

"We arrived in Paris Monday, August 24, and found everything quiet. The women, girls and boys selling papers were making the most noise. The newspapers seemed to try to be impartial in presenting the news. The papers consisted of only one sheet, because no one wanted anything except war news. Women read them eagerly -- you would see them come out of their houses and buy the papers, read them and go in again without the slightest manifestation of excitement.

"The dropping of the bomb on the city caused no especial excitement. One bomb was aimed at one of the principal railroad stations that was a route for supplies to the frontier, it hit a house nearby and demolished it, and we heard a woman and two girls were killed.

"When we were in Switzerland we thought no one could treat Americans any better than the Swiss did, but in Paris we -- and all Americans -- received the same kindly treatment. Paris was even then on a sort of rations. There were no French rolls even -- all the bread was baked in one shape -- with a sort of groove in it.

"There were in Paris at the time we were there about 2,000 English, Irish and American volunteers going to the front. They passed down the street, not in uniform, headed by three French soldiers in uniform. The middle soldier carried a huge bouquet of American beauty roses, and the other two soldiers carried the colors.

"If you want to have a thrill you should hear the Irish sing Vive la France!" smiled Miss Dessez. "The Louvre, a great department store of Paris, sent 2,000 men to the front. All the large stores, instead of transacting business as usual, had girls and women employed all day long sewing for the soldiers. No gasoline was sold to private individuals. It was all kept for the use of the government.

Girls Sew for Soldiers

"The girls sewing for the soldiers were served soup at the long tables where they worked. And somebody discovered that soldiers march better in wool socks than in ordinary cotton, so the women of Paris all set to work knitting, too.

"We saw a great truck hauled by two enormous horses and driven by a little Frenchwoman. All our stay in Paris we never heard a bitter word spoken of the Germans. I never saw such splendid self-control in my life. Despite the great worries of the hour, the French people were always gallant in the extreme, especially to the Americans, who themselves were not always courteous. The courtesy of the French under such pressure was wonderful.

"The boys of Paris were crazy to enlist. We saw one young boy volunteer his services to an officer. "The officer said: 'Young man, you are not old enough.'

"'Please take me! Please take me! I am nearly fourteen,' the boy responded.

"All during our stay the searchlights on Eiffel tower played throughout the night, searching for possible invaders from the skies. We left Paris for Havre September 1.

"That morning! I will never forget it! We got up at 5 o'clock. With some trouble we got a cab. When we finally arrived at the station we had to stand for three hours in one spot and we didn't dare move. After awhile the crowd got so bad that the police called the soldiers. They finally got the place cleared and we managed to get to our compartment.

Whole Day Going to Havre

"Imagine leaving Paris, one of the great capitals of the world, carrying water, provisions, passports, permits to leave the city, railroad tickets, suitcases, etc., all in one hand, almost!

"As we passed from Paris we saw the outlying suburbs which had been ordered razed on the near approach of the German troops to the capital. We passed trains of soldiers, who always cheered us and showed the best good humor. They never seemed excited. It took us the whole day to get to Havre, when it usually takes but five hours.

"When we finally got aboard La Flandre of the French line, that night, they gave us something to eat! They gave us something to eat, mind you! We sailed at 5 o'clock the next morning, but were stopped out in the ocean for five hours, for some reason we never knew. We never felt sure we were really on our way for a long time.

"English war vessels were evidently picketed clear across the Atlantic, for we sighted them all the way to New York, every now and then, but they were always away off -- you could hardly see them." Mrs. Dessez told of the happy mood of the returning Americans aboard the Flandre, which was making its first voyage from Havre to New York, she being a South American boat. The stewards were not regular stewards, but were volunteers, who, on their return to France, would immediately enlist.

"A great many of the voyagers," concluded Miss Dessez, "were in what was called the ameliorated steerage. It was also called the glorified steerage, but I should have called it glorified storage."

Dessez, Henriette Louise. On Monday, July 12, 1954, Henriette Louise Dessez, aunt of Capt. J.H.S. Dessez, Miss Lizabeth Dessez, Miss Eunice Dessez, Charles V. Dessez, Brig. Gen. L.A. Dessez, Mrs. W.A.P. Martin, Mrs. Remser Johnson, Maj. John R. Dessez and Mrs. Paul Cassard. Mass will be offered at St. Matthew's Cathedral, Connecticut and Rhode Island aves. n.w., on Thursday, July 15 at 9 a.m. Interment Congressional Cemetery. The family requests that flowers be omitted.

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Henriette Dessez, 91; Taught Indians in Wild West Days

By Carter Gorski

Miss Henriette Louise Dessez, who spent three years in the West teaching school on Indian reservations and collected enough memories to last her the rest of her 91 years, died here Monday.

She had outbluffed a mountain lion when her life was at stake, ridden on a stagecoach when it was held up and went several days into the mountains chasing two truant Indian pupils before she caught them.

She could ride and shoot (except when she faced the "soft brown eyes" of a deer) and had a knack for keeping little Indians in the classroom. When they got restless she adjourned school long enough for everyone to do "half a dozen turns in high speed around the school house."

Tracked Down Truants

Once when two little Klamath Indians played hookey, Miss Dessez got their fathers and together they tracked them into the Oregon mountains. The trip lasted several days by pack-canoe. When they came to a falls, the Indians told her, "White squaw get out," But Miss Dessez's feet and ankles were so swollen through her shoe laces that she couldn't move. "White squaw get drowned." the Indians told her, but she shot the rapids with them anyway and survived.

The Indians called Miss Dessez "the big tall lady in black." She always wore black out of respect to her father, Leon Dessez, a Confederate soldier and French engineer who died in 1895 just before she began teaching among Apache, Pimo and Klamath tribes.

The West had great respect for a woman, Miss Dessez used to tell her family. And she would illustrate this with the time she was the only woman on a stagecoach in Arizona that was held up by five

men. She was carrying several hundred dollars in gold coins and was the only passenger who wasn't robbed.

She used to tell about the Indian who conferred in great detail with her about setting up a store. He would spend weeks getting gold in the hills, exchange it for store goods, and then give away everything off his store shelves to other Indians.

Only One Returned

Only two white men offered the storekeeper gold certificates if he would show him where he got his gold. He refused. The two men followed the Indian on his next trip into the hills. The white men never returned, Miss Dessez said. Later their bodies were found.

Miss Dessez was born in Morgantown, N.C. As a small child she was in Richmond during the Civil War siege and was in Paris when World War I broke out. She was graduated from Wilson Normal School and formerly worked for the Commerce Department. For many years she lived at the Ontario Apartments.

Miss Dessez had a large collection of Indian baskets and pottery. She donated part of the collection to the Smithsonian Institution and the Museum of the American Indian in New York and the rest was scattered among her family.

Active in Church Groups

She was active in the Christ Child Society, Little Sisters of the Poor and other Catholic charitable groups.

Survivors are nieces and nephews, including retired Marine Brig. Gen. Lester A. Dessez, 409 Harwood road, Bethesda, Md.; Army Maj. John R. Dessez, Ontario Apartments; Retired Navy Capt. John H.S. Dessez and Miss Elizabeth Dessez, both of 3815 Jenifer street N.W.; Charles V. Dessez, 2950 Legation street, N.W., and Miss Eunice Dessez, All States Hotel.

Services will be at 9 a.m. tomorrow at St. Matthew's Cathedral, of which she was a member. Burial will be in Congressional Cemetery.