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Veterans Day turns 100 How did Montana celebrate the end of WWI?

BY DENNIS GAUB
STAFF WRITER

The 11th month. The 11th day. The 11th hour.

That's the famous phrase used for a century to capture the emotions felt by hundreds of millions of people around the world who heard the announcement that The War to End All Wars, or The Great War, had ended.

One hundred years ago this Sunday, on November 11, 1918, church bells rang, cars honked, fireworks soared into the sky, mine whistles blew as Americans learned of the signing of an armistice that stopped what is now called World War I. Montanans, including Gallatin County residents, woke up on a balmy fall day to news of peace, a halt to more than four years of combat that represented the bloodiest conflict the world had experienced.

Butte, Montana's largest city at the time and the most populous place between the Twin Cities and Seattle, fittingly trumpeted the news in a style befitting its prominence.

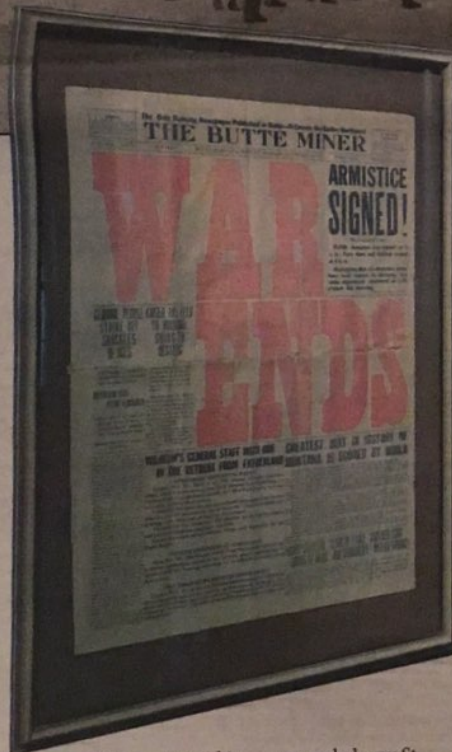
"Greatest Beat In History Of Montana Is Scored By Miner," read a headline in the Butte Miner. Better known now as a scoop, the story with the headline said the Miner published an extra edition with the end-of-war news at 1:25 a.m. on November 11, 1918.

Miner readers got "the first authentic news" of the armistice that would take effect later that morning, from an Associated Press report of an announcement from the State Department. It took one minute after word from Washington for the Miner to get it, setting in motion the wheels for its extra, the paper said.

"The beat is made all the greater because of its official nature and stands out prominently as one of the greatest accomplishments in American newspaper circles, brought into the limelight more strongly because of the fake dispatch sent out by the United Press and its attempted foisting upon the people of Butte by an afternoon



Dennis Gaub
and Gallatin
Historical
Society



Troops, above, march down Main Street in Bozeman. The Butte Miner was the first to publish the news of the end of World War I.

(newspaper)," the paper said in a flamboyant fashion typical of American journalism at that time.

Butte newsboys "reaped a harvest" as they hawked a sell-out print run of 40,000 copies of the extra.

Mining companies asked to be notified when word of the armistice came from the nation's capital, "and within five minutes of the receipt by the Miner of this historic news, every mine and locomotive whistle in the district was in full blast."

The Greatest Hill on Earth became the scene of a celebration that equaled, and maybe

exceeded, any St. Patrick's Day party since.

"Everybody in Butte turned out, and the streets became black with people. They sang, they paraded, pounded cans and everything within reach which give forth a noise, fired revolvers, sent up balloons and shouted themselves hoarse," the Miner reported.

Fortunately for the revelers, prohibition hadn't taken effect, so spirits easily could be had.

A throng of "easily 60,000 people" packed Butte streets, "which resembled rivers of

WWI has lasting meaning

BY DENNIS GAUB

A war that ended 100 years ago may seem like ancient history with no lessons for today, but World War I and its troubled end carries lasting meaning, according to a Montana State University professor.

Dale Martin, adjunct professor of history whose specialties include World War I, said world leaders, especially U.S. President Woodrow Wilson, hoped to achieve lofty wartime goals.

They included "self-determination for national and ethnic groups formerly under imperial rule, for example, Czechs and South Slavs; equality and respect for marginalized minorities (such as) African-Americans and Native Americans in the U.S.; and (Asian) Indians in South Africa, led by Mohandas (Mahatma) Gandhi," Martin said in an email.

When peace was achieved, leaders hoped to reduce the chances for war as costly in human lives and financial ruin as the 1914-1918 conflict. They envisioned tools such as international, multilateral diplomacy institutionalized by treaties, organizations like the League of Nations and disarmament, Martin said.

Those hopes were dashed quickly. The war left shattered European empires – Germany, Russia and Austro-Hungary – and Russia was wracked by revolutions and civil war. Revolts and failed revolutions (inspired by the Bolsheviks in Russia) occurred in Germany, Austria and Hungary. Russia invaded Poland, and the Greeks invaded western Turkey. The Ottoman Empire collapsed, allowing Saudi expansion within Arabia.

Even Great Britain, hub of an empire upon which the sun never set, suffered a key setback when the Irish war of independence and then civil war set Ireland on its own way.

Martin said World War I brought a sense of loss of faith.

"Before the war, many people believed that humans could and should act with educated reasonableness and widely accepted restraints on violence and cruelty. The industrial destructiveness

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waying patriotic color," according to the Great Falls Tribune. By noon on Armistice Day, businesses had closed and impromptu parades were common. Bonfires blazed atop Timber Butte and Big Butte.

The Tribune said Butte deserved a gala since it probably contributed more manpower to the war effort than other city in the state, "and the celebration throughout the past 24-hour period truly typifies the sentiment aroused here when the Hun enemy collapsed."

Other Montana cities and towns rejoiced, too, according to the Tribune, including:

- Livingston, where "hundreds" of joyous residents stayed up all night to celebrate with songs and cheers
- Havre, where word of the Armistice arrived at 5 a.m. via the Great Northern Railroad, prompting whistles, bells, horns and guns to make "an unearthly noise." Marching units formed, the Havre City Band played, flags of all Allied nations flew and the largest parade in city history took place. No one showed up for work at the Great Northern shops.
- Fort Benton, where the Civil War-vintage cannon parked at the courthouse to help recruit soldiers was loaded with explosives and "did some more barking tonight."
- Malta, where flags, bunting and a parade put residents in a mood to celebrate after they learned the news from an extra published by the local newspaper, the Malta Call.

In Billings, a crowd of 15,000 people gathered near St. Vincent's Hospital. They "surged and milled and churned and howled their happiness at the final defeat of Germany," according to The Billings Gazette.

Ordinances to limit disturbing the peace? Forget it. Automobiles with blaring horns and mufflers open pressed through the crowd, firecrackers exploded at people's feet, "torpedoes" cracked

"Oh, we were in the barracks. It was lights out one night, and all sudden there was a tremendous lot of racket and yelling and a bunch of girls from town came and were serenading us: 'The war is over.'"

against buildings, and people whirled torches.

A fireworks display that cost thousands topped the celebration and received approval from visiting Canadian Army Sgt. T. A.P. Frost, a Western front veteran, who said Billings was "no place for any person expecting to escape shell shock.

"This is a real celebration. No town in this great and democrat land can hold a candle to it. Accept my word for it, old top," he said.

One local veteran, interviewed years for a Bozeman oral history project, learned to be skeptical about news of peace in Europe.

"Oh, we were in the barracks. It was lights out one night, and all sudden there was a tremendous lot of racket and yelling and a bunch of girls from town came and were serenading us: 'The war is over,'" said Paul Davidson, then a college student in Bozeman. That, however, was the "false armistice," announced by the United Press news service (which later became United Press International) on November 7, 1918.

The UP retracted the story the next day. Four days later, "the real armistice came and Bozeman had to have some kind of celebration," Davidson said. It was staged by the College Reserve Officer Training Corps (ROTC) unit at Montana State, or Students Army Training Corps (SATC) as it was called then. People said the acronym stood for "Stick Around 'Till Christmas."

"So, we had learned enough to march in a column by that time. We formed companies - three companies, I think - (and) marched downtown, down Main Street and that the big patriotic celebration for Armistice Day"

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of the war for four year years, the effectiveness of propaganda that fueled nationalistic prejudices, and the heavy tool of the war on civilians (including the Ottoman Empire's mass murder of Armenians) left many with a much darker view of human behavior."

A young Austrian named Adolf Hitler served in Kaiser Wilhelm's army and sustained a poison gas attack by the Allies. He came away from World War I believing that Germany was victimized by a so-called stab in the back, a sentiment that he successfully used to lead the Nazi rise to power in the 1930s.

"Many Germans believed that Jews in

Germany contributed to that nation's defeat in the war, through subversion and undermining the military effort," Martin said.

The U.S., because it participated in the war about one-third of its length, from April 1917 to November 1918, did not suffer the scale of death and destruction of European and Asian countries. Still, American involvement inspired literary accomplishment, such as the words these words, which Martin quoted, from F. Scott Fitzgerald's novel, *The Beautiful and the Damned*:

"Here surely the victory had come in time, the climax had been scheduled with the uttermost celestial foresight. The great rich nation had made triumphant war, suffered enough for poignancy but not for bitterness."