



## The Armistice Glades

military-Earth thinking notebook

le Général d'armée (2S) Pierre de PERCIN-NORTHUMBERLAND

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**The Cahiers continue to make their modest contribution to the commemoration of the Great War. In this context, General de Percin evokes here a place so full of history, which has become a place of meditation, that of the signing of the Armistice.**

### L'Armistice of 11 November 1918

November 7, 1918 Marshal Foch, Commander-in-Chief of the Allied armies, accompanied by his chief of staff, General Weygand, leaves his headquarters in Senlis with Admiral Wemyss, the first lord of the Admiralty and Commander-in-Chief of the Allied armies at sea. He will reach the clearing, improperly called "de Rethondes" since it is located on the territory of the city of Compiègne.

A sorting spike had been built there from the railway tracks of the Rethondes station. It was there that the marshal decided to begin the Armistice talks; the isolation of the clearing provided the calm and silence that was necessary to ensure the respect, desired by the marshal, for the defeated adversary.

It had also appeared to him that it was not reasonable to begin negotiations at Senlis, where the German army had committed terrible acts of violence in 1914, shooting many hostages, including the mayor, Mr Odent.

Marshal Foch's lounge car has never been used; the marshal's train is in place in the clearing on the evening of November 7.

At the same time, the German delegation, led by Minister of State Ersberger and General von Winterfeldt, former military attaché in Paris and commander of the Legion of Honour,

crossed the French lines at Haudroy, in The German plenipotentiary car is the salon car of Emperor Napoleon III.[1] The German plenipotentiary car is the salon car of Emperor Napoleon III.

**On 8 November 1918**, at 9 a.m., Marshal Foch received the plenipotentiaries in his wagon; General Weygand read them the text of the Armistice conditions, as they had been agreed at Versailles by the Allies on 4 November.

After this reading, Mr. Ersberger requested the suspension of the fighting; the Marshal refused, demanding before any cessation of hostilities the acceptance of the conditions of the Armistice.

Captain von Helderff, a member of the German delegation, was charged with taking the text to Marshal Hindenburg at his headquarters in Spa; he reached Spa at the cost of many difficulties in crossing the German lines [2].

During his journey to Spa, Emperor Wilhelm II had abdicated, Chancellor Max of Baden had resigned, the republic had been proclaimed, the "direction of affairs" being entrusted to Deputy Ebert (in fact, to Marshal Hindenburg as far as the negotiations were concerned).

On the **9th**, the Germans submitted comments on the conditions of the Armistice; the Marshal welcomed them with the same firmness.

He sent message n°5828 to the army commanders:

"The enemy, disorganized by our repeated attacks, gives way on all the front; it is important to maintain and to precipitate our actions..."

**Finally, on November 10, between 7 and 8 p.m., two messages arrived by radio:**

"The German government accepts the terms of the Armistice."

"Minister of State Ersberger is authorized to sign the Armistice."

**On 11 November at 2.15 a.m.** the last sitting opened. General Weygand read out the final text; it was signed at 05.30 a.m. **It takes effect for a ceasefire at 11a.m.**

The last French soldier killed, Augustin Trébuchon, will be killed at 10.45 a.m. near Charleville.

The German delegation leaves the clearing at 11.30 a.m.

## **The interwar period**

Soon after the war, there was concern about what was going to be called "the Armistice Glades". At the instigation of Reserve Lieutenant Binet-Valmer, of the league of section

chiefs and Mr Fournier-Sarlovèze, mayor of Compiègne, the clearing was designed and created as we know it today, to be inaugurated by Messrs Millerand and Poincaré on 11 November 1922.

As for the wagon, exposed in the cour des Invalides, it was, after restoration, installed in a shelter in the immediate vicinity of the clearing; the inauguration ceremony took place on November 11, 1927, in the presence of Marshal Foch and General Weygand.

In the centre of the clearing, a large slab in the shape of a tomb bears the inscription: "Here, on November 11, 1918, died the criminal pride of the German Empire, defeated by the free peoples he wanted to enslave". Two smaller slabs, marking the position of the two trains, are built on either side of the central slab.

Overlooking the alley leading to the clearing, a monument symbolizing "the eagle shot by the sword" was donated by national subscription.

Finally, on 26 September 1937, an imposing statue of Marshal Foch was inaugurated.

All these monuments, with the exception of the statue of Marshal Foch, were dismantled and brought to Berlin, together with the railway carriage, after the armistice of 1940.

## **21 and 22 June 1940**

In anticipation of his arrival on June 21, Hitler took the wagon out of its shelter. It was placed in the location it occupied on November 11, 1918. A battalion was on hand to do the honours in the clearing, and photographers and reporters were present in large numbers. The contrast is striking if one compares this great publicity contest with the respect for the defeated Marshal Foch. Arriving with his staff (Rudolf Hess, Ribbentrop, Goering, Admiral Raeder, Generals Keitel and Brauchitsch), Hitler got into the wagon, settled in the place of Marshal Foch, then received the French delegation led by General Huntziger and Ambassador Léon Noël [3]. After Keitel read out the armistice text, Hitler left the wagon. The armistice will be signed on June 22nd by Keitel and General Huntziger.

## **The clearing and the memorial today**

**On November 11, 1950**, the clearing was completely restored. The monuments, found in Berlin, were reassembled; the wagon, accidentally destroyed, was replaced by a wagon of the same type, installed in a reconstructed shelter; the furniture that had served Marshal Foch, fortunately saved, found its place there.

Extending the shelter of the wagon, a memorial was built. It recalls the sacrifices of the soldiers during the two world wars. A rotunda makes it possible to look at some of the 8,000 stereoscopic views taken between 1914 and 1918 and held by the memorial. A crypt is there for meditation.

Two rooms devoted respectively to each of the two armistices complete the memorial.

In the coming months, a new extension should be erected. It will present the evolution of the three English, German and French societies between the two wars, all marked by the influence of the veterans.

Outside, finally, a "space of remembrance" has recently been created in memory of soldiers who died in external operations. It has taken the name of Augustin Trébuchon.

[1] It is currently in the car museum of the château de Compiègne.

[2] After several unsuccessful attempts to cross the German lines, it was transported by plane.

[3] Léon Noël was the first president of the Constitutional Council.

General (2S) de PERCIN-NORTHUMBERLAND recently left the presidency of the Memorial of the clearing. Managed by an association, these places of remembrance welcome each year more than 50,000 visitors, a third of whom are foreigners.

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<b>Title :</b>	le Général d'armée (2S) Pierre de PERCIN-NORTHUMBERLAND
<b>Author (s) :</b>	le Général d'armée (2S) Pierre de PERCIN-NORTHUMBERLAND
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