



REFLECTIONS OF FRENCH STUDENTS WHO PARTICIPATED IN THE 2017 SPIRIT OF '45 MEMORIAL DAY MARCH OF HEROES

Erwan PAQUET, 13 years old: Once in the Naval Heritage Center, we entered Burke Theater. We then discovered that each of the nearly 300 velvet seats was bearing the large portrait of a young American who had lost his life in World War II. We were going to carry some of these portraits during the National Memorial Day Parade. At that moment, I started to capture what the Parade would be like, and its deep significance became more concrete to me. ...

Anna CLEMENT, 12 years old: The Boy Scouts and Girl Scouts we were going to parade with introduced our group to the audience. They were so kind as to offer cookies to us!

Clarisse GARY-SCHWEITZER, 13 years old: These American Boy Scouts and Girl Scouts made me want to become one myself. Through their contact, I understood young people were able to undertake things that could change the World.



Flora PICQUENOT, 13 years old: We were the only foreigners in this theater. I was so proud ... I had the sensation the image and the greatness of France rested on our frail shoulders.



Ophélie BRAGEOT, 13 years old: While we were getting ready for the Parade, I was torn between excitement and anxiety. I was eager to march, but I dreaded walking too fast or too slowly, or even worse stumbling! I was very proud to carry the portrait of "my" American sailor, John Canada Jr. Doing so, I was in a way bringing him back to life and telling him he was not forgotten.

Ophélie BRAGEOT, 13 years old: We arrived on Constitution Avenue. It is there, in front of the National Archives Building and before TV cameras, that the Parade was officially beginning. My stress suddenly vanished. We were not American, but we were all proud of being part in this major Memorial Day event. All along the way, I witnessed great American patriotism: a lot of people filmed us. We were also cheered by the spectators who were waving patriotic flags.



Mathias ARDEVEN, 13 years old: When we began marching, my legs trembled. I had never taken part in a parade before, and this one was before hundreds of thousands of people, and the crowd was applauding us! The parade was unforgettable and magic. It was broadcast live on television, and millions of Americans were thus witnessing the tribute we were paying while marching.

Adrien DELLUC, 15 years old: When we were asked to move forward, a smile appeared on my lips.

Mathilde BIANVET, 13 years old: The parade was gigantic and magnificent. It combined re-enactors, brass bands, flower-decked floats and military vehicles. I am proud to have carried the portrait of Wesley V. Emery, K.I.A. on December 7th, 1941, during the attack on Pearl Harbor.



Tilyann MONDEJAR, 13 years old: The feeling of national union that I had perceived the night before at the Memorial Day Concert was renewed at the Parade. I did not know which way to turn, because in France, as far as I know, we do not have any festive large-scale event to honor Memory

Anna CLEMENT, 12 years old: I had the portrait of US Marine Dorsey Carl Bridgewater under my wing.

(Dorsey Carl Bridgewater was born in rural Kentucky. On his 17th birthday in January of 1944, he enlisted in the Navy. He boarded the USS KIDD at Espiritu Santo just four months later on May 30, 1944. During his time aboard ship, the KIDD saw action at Saipan, Guam, the Philippines, and Okinawa. Dorsey was killed on April 11, 1945, when a lone Japanese kamikaze aircraft struck the ship's forward fireroom. He was buried at sea the following day on Thursday, April 12, 1945, along with his shipmates.)

While we were marching, I was very pleasantly surprised to see the spectators applauding or waving their American flags vigorously. As for us, we marched proudly, smiling to the crowd while making sure we remained well aligned. We just radiated with joy to be part of this Parade. We were certainly honoring dead service men, but joyfully.

Océane LAPEYRIE, 13 years old: I carried the portrait of Jack L. Walsh. He was proudly wearing his sailor hat. Once back home, I did some research. I wanted to know more than just his full name and rank. He was killed in the Pacific, on the USS KIDD on April 11th, 1945. He was 23 years old.

Romain OSSARD, 13 years old: Just imagine our pride when, ahead of a brass band, we were marching on Constitution Avenue with our French and American flags and "our" portraits in our hands! On both sides of the avenue, the crowd did not stop clapping and sometimes joyfully yelled: "Oh, French people!"





Erwan PAQUET, 13 years old: I first felt insignificant in this beautiful parade, but little by little, I realized I was doing something important. Yes, I had the feeling I was a modest but important link in the chain of Remembrance.

Emma REIFF, 12 years old: I was holding the portrait of Cliff Hoeff, who had been killed four days before turning twenty. I was flabbergasted by the infectious joy of the spectators all along the way. And my parents were most surprised to see me live on their TV screen thanks to the Internet!

Adrien DELLUC, 15 years old: I was proudly carrying a French flag in my left hand, near my heart, and in my right hand, I had the famous Stars & Stripes. During the entire Parade but also before it started, brass bands played music loudly. I understood that if Memory was not to fade, then it could not be silent.

Cheers also resounded all along the way. I prayed that this clapping was not dedicated to us, but to the men whose portraits were being carried. Once again the transmission of Memory was taking another dimension I had never witnessed in France, where silence and somberness overtake cheerful music and joy.

Ophélie BRAGEOT, 13 years old: At the end of the parade, we headed to the National World War II Memorial. Flowers were handed out to us. I laid mine on a U.S. Navy wreath which had been laid down in the morning. I chose this wreath to honor “my” sailor, John Canada Jr, whose portrait had accompanied me throughout the Parade.

Clarisse GARY-SCHWEITZER, 13 years old: At the end of the Parade, I was tired, but happy to have brought back to life these noble warriors and shared this moment with so many people. We were all united to defend a common cause. And also, I was proud to have carried the colors of France.

