

2-FEP201

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MAN OF THE HOUR -  
MENDES-FRANCE

About four months ago, at the Arc de Triomphe, our cameras filmed an event that was to be a turning point for France. Prime Minister Laniel and Defence Minister Plevin attended a ceremony to honour the thousands of French soldiers who had died in Indo-China. Then the crowds led by war veterans, began to demonstrate against the Government's handling of the Indo-China campaign - it was the beginning of the end for Laniel.

At the Quai d'Orsay, following elections, the new government posed for the cameras, a government formed of many parties, led by M. Mendes France, here with President Coty. Mendes France was a new name to most of us. But now that he was Premier, it wasn't long before the world realized that here was a man of action, a man who made bold decisions and kept to them. The small, modest car, which he drove himself, symbolised one aspect of the small, modest man - he was a Premier without pretensions. It was in the National Assembly that he made his boldest move - he pledged that he would bring about the end of the Indo-China war within a month, by July the 20th - or resign. The man, chosen by France as her 20th. Prime Minister since the war had courage.

Within minutes of making his pledge the Premier met America's Mr. Bedel Smith, and told him of his target.

Mr. Eden too was told of the Premier's plans. Pierre Mendes France, during the war, fought in the resistance movement, and, later in the Free French Air Force. His biggest tussle was to come - with Mr. Molotov at Geneva, and he had to succeed before July the 20th. Meanwhile he met Mr. Dulles in Paris, to calm America's fears that France, in her eagerness for peace, might give way to the Reds too easily.

Later, with Mr. Eden, but without Mr. Dulles, the Premier left for Geneva. July the 20th was not far off. In Paris, they followed the progress of the talks.

At last came the day. But there was still no decision. In Geneva two meetings were held. Peace hung in the balance. And then, not long before midnight, the news came through - Mendes France had won. In the conference rooms at Geneva, the war in Indo-China has ended. With Chou En Lai, the Chinese Communist Premier, Mendes France had agreed the terms of armistice.

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In Pierre Mendes France, our friends across the Channel have found a forceful, determined leader - a true "Mr. France".

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