

# HE CHANGED FRANCE'S MIND

Frenchmen were apprehensive when a young banker, Douglas Dillon, was appointed U.S. Ambassador. But tact, skill and the Dillon vineyard all helped melt the French doubts

by Barrett McGurn

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THE AMBASSADOR: Dillon keeps France informed on U.S. policies — in good French

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PARIS

ON MAY 5, France officially completed her part in approval of the Paris agreements by filing the documents of ratification. Thus, West Germany was at last enabled to enter the North Atlantic Treaty Organization as a sovereign — and armed — nation.

During the two years leading up to the vote Allied unity had been in jeopardy many times. France see-sawed between its desire to stay tied to its traditional Atlantic allies and its dread of German militarism.

Many Frenchmen flirted with the idea that peace could still be built on a Franco-Soviet pact.

The credit for France's choice goes to many men and their votes, but not a little of the honor belongs to a patient, skilled American diplomatic team in Paris and to the young ambassador who leads it, C. Douglas Dillon.

For months Dillon and his aides labored behind the scenes to calm French fears of American "aggressiveness" on the one hand and to post Washington on the reasons for French hesitancy on the other.

It is no secret that many French were dismayed when President Eisenhower in 1953 nominated 43-year-old Doug Dillon new chief of our French mission, the important post held by men like Franklin and Jefferson. Like Winthrop Aldrich, who was sent to Britain, Dillon was a Wall Street banker and, in addition, young. He was a relative unknown outside financial and Republican political circles and apparently the very personification of what Frenchmen doubted in the new administration.

As if these handicaps weren't enough, an interlude of bad health sent Dillon back to America for treatment in his first year. In all, he was away from his Paris desk four months in 1954, three months this year. Despite it all, Dillon is no longer a *bête noire* but a success.

Wise reliance on a good team, including

career diplomat Ted Achilles, one of the planners of the Atlantic alliance, has been part of it. Individual qualities have helped, too. Still another factor has been a series of happy accidents of personal history.

One of these accidents is now part of diplomatic folklore. In a nation where every seventh man grows wine, Dillon soon became known as a member of the family that owns one of the very finest French vineyards, the Château-Haut-Brion of Bordeaux.

Château-Haut-Brion is undoubtedly the wine Samuel Pepys spoke of in his diary three centuries ago when he mentioned a fine new wine at the Royall Oak tavern in London. It was, said Pepys, "a sort of French wine called Ho Bryan," with "a good and most particular taste that I never met with before."

### "You Must Be a Friend"

The taste is still "good and most particular," especially the vintage of 1934. Paris political figures who have received Christmas cases of it from Doug Dillon can testify to that. So can such Americans as Allen Dulles, head of the Central Intelligence Agency, who generally refuses wine, but made an exception for Haut-Brion 1934.

Dillon's father Clarence, a spectacular stock operator of the 1920's, bought the Château-Haut-Brion property from its aged and childless French owner in 1935, after two years of negotiations.

"You are a wine grower, wine is France, so you must be a friend of ours," many Frenchmen have told the American ambassador. The wine alone did not guarantee Dillon success but it is clear that it was certainly no hindrance.

Another accident in Dillon's background is that his first cousin is Seymour Weller, possibly the only native of the United States ever to become mayor of a French village. Weller, a childhood friend of the ambassador, passed so much of his childhood and middle years in France that he became a naturalized Frenchman in 1939. He still speaks French with the faintest of American accents, but his conduct during the German occupation was so outstanding that his fellow villagers chose him their mayor.

Weller's village is Neaufles-St. Martin, a town of 700, 50 miles northwest of Paris. Through his visits to Neaufles and especially through Weller, Dillon has had a glimpse of French character which embassy-bound diplomats in Paris might easily miss altogether.

No one is more convinced of the value of Neaufles-St. Martin as a weather vane of the French mentality than Weller himself. Parisians are not France, Weller insists. Parisians are city folk, but France has so few other large cities that it is safe to say more than 80 per cent of all Frenchmen

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DAUGHTER'S WEDDING: Ceremony brought flowers from Méndes-France

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are essentially country villagers.

Crops, the family, thrift and getting early to bed are the dominant concerns in Neaufles. Deputies to the parliament, like mayors for the village, are elected on face value. All this Dillon has been able to observe.

Another of Dillon's happy circumstances was his parents' warm affection for France, a liking they transmitted to their son. Dillon was born in Geneva, but for most of his life his parents have maintained a Paris apartment on the Left Bank.

As a youth, the ambassador-to-be toured Normandy on a bicycle, polished the French he learned from a governess, studied art and in general got to know the country he considers a second home.

As ambassador, Dillon has not been content with his adequate command of the French tongue. He was dissatisfied with his control of tricky French verbs, so for months he devoted the first hour of each day to being tutored. He uses no interpreter in his talks with premiers, past and present, or the scores of other top officials he knows. Most of his speeches are in French.

**On the Exchange**

DILLON's parents chose Groton School for their son's preparatory years. He was graduated with high honors. At Harvard he majored in American history. He learned Wall Street finance in the years before World War II (occupying a Stock Exchange seat bought for him at a reported \$185,000).

During the war he was graduated first in his class for Naval Reserve officers. Since the war he has been an emerging figure in Republican politics and social and welfare activities. He was one of the early Eisenhower boosters in New Jersey.

At the time of his ambassa-

dorial appointment Dillon as chairman of the board of Dillon, Read & Company. He resigned to take his present diplomatic post.

Aides on Dillon's embassy staff were impressed during his first weeks with the swift way he was able to "get the flavor" of complicated French-American problems. As assistants bring him the file of cablegrams from and to the State Department, "he gets the essentials almost by flipping through the cables," one of them told me.

**Feverish Schedule**

THE ability to think and act quickly has enabled the ambassador to crowd together a feverishly active schedule while preserving a never-ruffled calm. Scores of travelers each week decide that a chat with the American ambassador is one of the experiences they want. But there are only so many hours even in an ambassador's day.

A dozen or so callers, including big names of French press, manage to see the ambassador on a typical day (10 a.m. to 6 p.m., five days a week), but other callers, who seem to think he has nothing to do but "shake hands with duchesses all day," as one aide expressed it, are steered to staff members.

Dillon has certainly needed every bit of the background and quality he has brought to his post. French-American relations hit a low point last August when the French killed the European Defense Community plan.

The French ratification of West German sovereignty and rearmament removed the greatest threat to Franco-American unity. But French weariness with the cold war and eagerness to divert less of the nation's wealth to armaments remain realities. Dillon's task in Paris will continue a delicate one. *The End*

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