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'Don't You Know There's A War?' Gets Unanimous Civilian 'Yes'

Subdued by Casualty Lists, Nation Feels Intensified Conflict in Scarcities, Restrictions

At long last the impact of total war had bruised the American consciousness. Despite the initial successes of General of the Army MacArthur on Luzon and of the Russians on the eastern front, the first three weeks of 1945 had brought the nation face to face with the realities ahead as at no time since Pearl Harbor.

To no single factor could this metamorphosis be attributed, but it was plain that the stark lists of casualties abroad and the growing hardships at home had contributed to it.

Last week the nation had these unpalatable facts before it:

¶ Casualties: The toll was growing proportionately larger for American boys, not smaller. In December alone the German Wehrmacht, rosily consigned to defeat in official predictions a few short months ago, had inflicted casualties totaling 74,788 Americans killed, wounded, and missing (see page 30). And from Prime Minister Churchill himself came the additional fact that American armies had borne the brunt of the German counteroffensive. He estimated 60 to 80 Americans lost "for every one of ours."

¶ Weapons: Reports continuing to sift through indicated that Allied ingenuity in perfecting new weapons had not kept pace with that of Germany, particularly in the categories of tanks, jet planes, and all-weather rocket bombs.

¶ Food: In Italy and France the evidence mounted that the Allies had not yet sufficiently organized their supplies to prevent serious and politically dangerous food shortages in the liberated countries (see page 50). On the home front the food pinch grew tighter daily with every prospect that it would become worse. Meat was scarcer than ever and the resulting drains on meat substitutes—poultry, fish, and frozen foods—shrank supplies of them, particularly in large industrial centers. (In New York, Mayor Fiorello La Guardia called for two "meatless" days a week and promised they would be "rigidly enforced.")

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1945: War Weariness

¶ Manpower: With the increasing fury of the war, the drafting of men into the armed services at the rate of 150,000 a month was in prospect (December rate: 60,000), thus further tightening the civilian manpower market, and threatening the maximum production of food. (Congress continued its struggle with the problems of work-or-fight legislation and measures to provide for the drafting of trained nurses.)

¶ Fuel and clothing: The order for 68 degrees* maximum temperature in heating private and public buildings and the curb on illuminated advertising brought directly home the drain on coal stocks. (Mrs. Roosevelt, for one, said her White House bedroom was so cold she had to put "everything but the kitchen stove" on her bed.) Government officials frankly warned that clothing will become increasingly more difficult to obtain because of requirements in liberated countries. Rationing of infant wear appeared likely.

¶ Transportation: The halting of conventions by government request dramatized the problem of overtaxed railroads, airlines, and housing facilities. (So acute was housing in Washington that ten congressmen still had found no place to live.)

¶ Education: The possibility that the war may last through 1946 brought warnings from prominent educators that colleges are already in dire financial straits and many of them will probably be closed within another two years.

¶ Luxuries and amusements: The cigarette famine brought forth a proposed distributor-policed rationing program last week. (At St. Charles, Va., 600 coal miners went on strike when the company-owned store refused to sell them cigarettes.) An increased shortage of soft drinks and further cuts in liquor supplies were forecast. Floor coverings, draperies, and furniture grew increasingly difficult to obtain. Professional sports managers and theater directors feared that drafting of 4-F's would severely curtail their already scanty talent lists.

Yet whatever the heartaches, the hardships, and the inconveniences of 1945, one phenomenon stood out. While shortages continued to be a No. 1 topic of conversation, the complaints and bickerings of 1942-43 had paled into sheepish insignificance in contrast to the grimness of 12,000,000 American youths risking far more than personal comfort to beat back a badly underestimated enemy (see Roland C. Gask's Western Front story, page 28).

Thus, wartime America came of age.

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*A Washington Times-Herald photographer could not let pass an opportunity to snap a picture in the Solid Fuels Administration office of a thermometer reading 74 degrees.

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