

AUGUST 31, 1945: P. 8

## MANHATTAN

**T**HE population of Manhattan—the number of people, that is, who live on the 14,211-acre island more or less permanently—was officially estimated last July 1 to be 1,902,000, which is a tidy little figure in itself. It's small potatoes, though, compared to the more than 2,500,000 people who were moving in and out of the community during any given weekday this summer.

The combined daily average of passengers arriving at and departing from Grand Central Terminal and Pennsylvania Station alone has been something like 544,000, the equivalent of about 36 Army divisions. Traffic on subways, trolleys, busses and elevateds has also become badly swollen. Hardly a day has gone by when at least one troop ship hasn't steamed up the Hudson, loaded to the Plimsoll mark with GIs, many of whom planned to hit the big town for at least a brief spell once they got their furloughs. On top of that, an average of 20 large transport planes have been sweeping down on LaGuardia Field each day, disgorging hundreds of veterans—privates and five-star generals alike—in from the ETO and other overseas theaters.

All these comings and goings to and from the island for which old Peter Minuit paid the Indians 60 guilders, or 24 bucks, may give you some idea of the tempo of the town these days. Always a nervous, high-strung, cluttered-up place, Manhattan in 1945 is more restless, jangling and garish than ever before.

You can tell it's busier than it used to be by the number of people who are up and around early in the morning. Generally speaking, in the old days the city slept late; 9 A.M. was considered a good early hour at which to get to work and 10 was okay in lots of firms. Now by 7:00 A.M. crowds of people are swarming up out of the subways and making for their jobs.

Early-bird taxi drivers clean up on these workers. Over on the far West Side in the vicinity of 57th Street and the Hudson River, for instance, there's a lot of war work going on and it's a tough neighborhood to reach early in the morning when the crosstown busses are few and far between. So dozens of taxi drivers have taken to lining up their cabs each morning at the exit of the Independent subway at Eighth Avenue and 57th Street, four long blocks from the river. The workers, many of them carrying their lunches in paper bags, cram into the taxis, six or eight to a vehicle, splitting the fare and tip, which come to maybe 30 or 35 cents for the whole lot. It's cheaper than the bus and, with good breaks in traffic, each driver can manage several round trips, so everybody's happy.

As a result of a Government order, there are 15 percent fewer busses in operation than there used to be, and because just about everybody is working more people are trying to get on what busses there are. Consequently, they are jammed most of the time, and so are the trolleys, subways and the Third Avenue El. It's a slow business trying to get anywhere unless you've got the dough for a taxi, and even that's not a sure answer because, after three years of wear and tear with practically no replacements, Manhattan's cab fleet is badly beat-up. It almost makes you feel sorry for the old wrecks when a light turns green and a batch of them struggle to get under way, their motors gasping, piston rods knocking and differentials clanking.

It's a small thing, to be sure, but to one just back on Manhattan after a couple of years overseas, a very noticeable change that has come over the town is a tendency of drivers of all kinds of vehicles—taxis, busses, private cars, anything that runs on gasoline—to sneak an extra block after the traffic lights turn red. Just



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because the light is with a pedestrian is no reason for him to assume he's safe in crossing a street since drivers think nothing of keeping going half a minute or so after the signals have turned against them. "War nerves" is the way one apparently placid taxi driver explained this phenomenon as he coolly jockeyed his hack through a red light.

The sight of an Army convoy streaking through Manhattan is really something. The military frequently rates a motorcycle escort of civilian cops who obviously regard their mission as strictly of the life-or-death variety and go barging through traffic as if the trucks behind them were loaded with reinforcements for the Ardennes instead of with nothing, as is frequently the case.

Another odd but pretty commonplace sight is that of some fairly high-ranking Army officer gone completely domestic. No matter how much of a chicken, spit-and-polish gent a major or colonel may be while on duty, once home on leave he is likely to become just as docile a husband as the GIs he is accustomed to browbeat. If the little woman, just back from the grocer's, moans that she forgot to get a loaf of bread or a bottle of soda, it's up to her brass-studded husband to drag-tail down to the corner and buy whatever is needed. And the same goes for airing the dog. It would do any paddlefoot's heart good to see his CO standing on a Madison Avenue curb, self-consciously looking the other way while hanging onto the leash of an undersized pedigreed pooch as it lingers at a hydrant.

As a rule, there's no saluting on Manhattan, although naturally you can always be called on it if some piece of brass happens to have a peeve on. The other day a young corporal, just back from the Pacific, was walking along First Avenue in the Fifties with his mother and dad when he saw a colonel approaching. The officer had his arms full of bundles, so the corporal thought that surely no salute would be expected. The colonel, however, thought otherwise, called the soldier back and bawled him out, right there with the kid's folks standing by.

The town is full of Army and Navy stores advertising combat jackets and making you pay through the nose for insignia and decorations. (A theater ribbon and a three-inch strip of Hershey bars will set you back \$1.78 at one 42d Street shop.) The honorable discharge button seems to have made the public button-conscious and nearly all civilian males now wear something in their lapels, even if it only testifies that they were never late to Sunday School when they were kids.

You realize that there's a manpower shortage when you're eating in some place like the Automat and some kid of 12 or 14 peers up over the edge of your table and turns out to be the bus boy. A few gin mills, but not many, employ girls behind their bars, at least during the day. There is still an adequate supply of old gaffers on hand up at the Plaza to drive sightseers through Central Park in Victoria carriages, which is quite a popular pastime with servicemen in good weather.

There are shortages of almost everything but there is hardly any real lack of anything. It's a catch-as-catch-can existence you live in Manhattan today, whether it's a meal you want, or a butt, or a babe. If you happen to hit town on a Tuesday or Friday and figure you'll splurge on a restaurant meal with a good hunk of meat, you'll soon find that not even a topkick's overseas pay will get it for you because Mayor LaGuardia has declared Tuesdays and Fridays meatless.

On other days of the week your chances of getting a really good meal aren't too hot, either, because restaurants sell out quickly and unless you get there early you don't get much. Three or four overseas stripes and a couple of combat stars help a lot, by the way, when it comes to getting a table at the overcrowded eateries.

Just wearing a plain uniform, without hardware, is good for a package of Luckies or Chesfields in plenty of cigar stores on days when civilians can't get the proprietors to part with a



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ck of even Lady Hamilton's or Lions. As for the date problem, it's every man for himself, just as it was in civilian days, although here, too, a chestful of decorations won't slow your progress any. When it comes to raw sex, there are plenty of towns in the States that are a lot more wide-open than Manhattan. The cops don't hesitate to give Times Square commandos the bum's rush and you can no longer get even a second-hand kick out of a burlycue because the mayors run the hot-strip dames out of town and the eaters they used to peel in are now grinding out double-feature movie programs.

There's been considerable conversion to war industry on the island, though nothing very sensational has occurred. Scores of inconspicuous shingle. The other day in a Second Avenue bar a 4-F who had been sailing with the Merchant Marine for the past two or three years was being kidded by a friend about not having shipped out recently. The guy, although he had actually merely been on a binge, said he was trying to get work in a war factory but couldn't find a job.

"Nuts," replied his friend. "I'll bet I can walk out of this dump right now and land you a job in the first doorway I turn into."

The ex-sailor said it was a bet, whereupon the other led him out across the street, stopping at random in front of an unlikely looking shop whose front window was all blacked over. Pushing the door open, the two discovered 50 or 60 men, making filters for Army field kitchens. The foreman hired the 4-F on the spot, not even giving him time to shake off his hangover.

Then there's the garment industry, operating for the most part within some six or eight blocks just north of Penn Station between Sixth and Eighth Avenues. Ninety percent of the men's-garment workers on Manhattan, or roughly 30,000 of them, have turned to the production of uniforms. In the women's-garment field there has been only a 5 percent conversion to military production but so huge is the industry that even this small proportion means that about 15,000



Getting a closeup of the Empire State Building after a B-25 crashed into it.

women's-garment workers on Manhattan are busy turning out parachutes, haversacks, mosquito nets, uniforms for Waves and Wacs and other equipment for the services.

Wandering around town, though, you naturally don't notice such things much. What does hit you is that, war or no war, Manhattan is still a pretty good place to be in when it comes to kicking the old gong around. Geographically, it is the



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smallest of the five boroughs that comprise New York City, yet it has traditionally provided 95 percent of the high-jinks for which the town is famous.

Far from going grim for the duration, Manhattan has, if anything, stepped up its production quotas in the field of professional fun-making. It would be a mistake, however, to conclude from this that the island has assumed a flippant or indifferent attitude toward the war. On the contrary, it is merely putting on the kind of performance that its visitors want and expect of it, and the point is that during the war the visitors have largely been in uniform—men and women shipping out, getting back, or sweating it out in dreary posts in the States.

Suppose you found yourself (and, points or no points, you probably will someday) at the corner of Seventh Avenue and 52d Street. It's early evening, say, and you've got a pocketful of folding money and plenty of time on your hands. Okay, so you head east along what has come to be known as Swing Lane. In the next two blocks, ending at Fifth Avenue, you'll encounter no fewer than 29 places itching to relieve you of a sizeable portion of your cash, 14 of them night-clubs, 13 restaurants (mostly with bars) and two just plain saloons. To begin with, there's the Hickory House, which is still going full blast with its bandstand in the middle of its oval bar. The Hickory operates on the theory that if music is loud enough it's sure to be good and the bands it hires dish the ditties out that way.

Then there's Kelly's Stable, another hot-music joint where you can absorb your liquor and your rhythm either at the bar or at a table. Next comes the Pick-a-Rib, a restaurant specializing in spare ribs and radio people from nearby Rockefeller Center. After that there's Barry's Bar & Grill, on the corner of Sixth Avenue, a good old-fashioned saloon where the swing comes from a juke box and a man can raise a thirst.

It's not until you get east of Sixth Avenue, though, that the places really start elbowing each other for breathing space. Before you've walked hardly halfway down the block to Fifth, you'll have passed, among many others, the 3 Deuces, the Club Downbeat, the Club Samoa, the West Side Tony's, the famous old Onyx (moved to the north side of the street now and currently featuring Stuff Smith and Hot Lips Page), Jimmy Ryan's, the Bayou Club, the Spotlight Club, the Swing Club, the 18 Club, and Leon & Eddie's, another of the more durable institutions of this region. And so we say farewell to not-so-beautiful Hangover Alley.

Turning down Fifth Avenue, you come to Rockefeller Center, which looks just the same as it always has, with its carefully-tended flower gardens, its crowds of sightseers taking pictures of each other, and its knockout roof-top view. Just across Fifth Avenue, St. Patrick's Cathedral proudly displays a large service flag with the figure 152,026 on it, representing the number of Roman Catholic men and women from the Archdiocese of New York who have put on uniforms.

As always, however, the Times Square district remains the big show when it comes to crowds. It's lit up again these nights and there are several electric signs going, but some of the biggest ones, like the block-long Wrigley job, are missing. On a traffic island, right where Broadway and Seventh Avenue cross, there's a recruiting station for the Merchant Marine. It's decorated with this newly-painted slogan: "Bring the Boys Home!"

The permanent statue of Father Duffy in his rugged battledress as a front-line chaplain of the last war stands in the middle of Longacre Square, facing south toward a temporary statue of the Marines on Suribachi in the equally rugged battledress of front-line fighters of this war. Four big signs dominate the north end of the square and are devoted to reminding you that you ought to drink Four Roses Whiskey, Kinsey Whiskey, Ruppert Beer and Pepsi-Cola.

Two big bars that have a terrific GI following and are therefore frequent ports of call for the MPs during the evening are Diamond Jim's, on the northwest corner of Seventh Avenue and



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42d Street, and the Crossroads, so named because it is situated right spang at the intersections of Broadway, Seventh Avenue and 42d Street. If all the campaign ribbons seen in those two hang-outs during any given 24 hours were placed end to end they might not circle the globe but they'd make Hitler and Hirohito wonder why they ever got into this business in the first place. There's no shortage of liquor on Manhattan now, although sometimes bars run dry of this or that particular brand. Rye in Diamond Jim's costs from 32 to 37 cents and Scotch runs from 47 to 57 cents, which is just about what most bars and grills around town charge.

All of which amounts to just a look-see. It wouldn't be possible within the limits of a single piece to give any real picture of the complex activities, many connected with the war and others not, that keep Manhattan rocking along month after month. Take shipping, for instance. So far as civilians are concerned, only those who work on the docks or whose home or office windows look out on the harbor have more than a vague idea of the vast numbers of men and machines and supplies continually going through this port.

It is only when you get away from the mid-town area—get away from the skyscraper office buildings and the tall apartments, the movie palaces and the theaters, the night clubs and the bars, the shooting galleries and the flea circuses—that you begin to realize that Manhattan has made its most significant contribution to the war in precisely the same way every other American community has. Service flags hang in the windows of homes in almost any part of the island where the natives live together in large numbers, and nowadays gold stars aren't the rarities they once were. You hardly ever come across a civilian who hasn't someone in his or her family overseas and to whom the theater in which that someone is stationed isn't the most important place on earth. On Manhattan in this late summer of 1945 it's not at all surprising to hear two plump housewives, their arms full of groceries, knowingly discussing on an Eighth Avenue bus the PW rules of the Geneva Convention or the details of the terrain on Okinawa.

Physically the place appears to be pretty much the same as it always was. The skyline is virtually unchanged; indeed, thanks to war shortages, about the only new objects on the scene are a giant replica of the Statue of Liberty and the one of the famous flag-raising episode on Mount Suribachi, which have been set up temporarily in Times Square as part of a War Bond drive.

Perhaps the war has made Manhattan look a bit more fly-specked and down-at-the-heel than it once did, but the war has also made everybody seem more casual, easygoing and, especially in their relations with GIs and men wearing discharge buttons, more friendly.

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