

YANK

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VE-DAY IN AMERICA

TO GET an over-all view of VE-day in America, YANK asked civilian newspapermen and staff writers in various parts of the country to send in eye-witness reports. From these OPs the reports were much the same. Dallas was quiet, Des Moines was sober, Seattle was calm, Boston was staid.

In some towns crowds gathered and tried to think of something to do to celebrate. Mostly, they didn't seem able to focus their thoughts. Two weeks of spectacular rumors and even more spectacular events had taken the edge off the official victory over Germany. And the press and radio kept saying: "There's still one war to go."

From Portland, Ore., came a report of a conversation between a Broadway street car conductor and a young woman passenger wearing a service star.

"So this is VE-day," the motorman said. "But we'll have to lick the little yellow men before I go on a toot."

The young woman said: "And my husband will have to come home before I go on a toot."

In Cleveland crowds stood on downtown corners and moved aimlessly along streets where hawkers were selling flags, pompoms, lapel buttons and tin horns. The streets were littered with torn papers and long streamers dangled from office windows and hung from trolley wires—all this the evidence of a brief, wild hubbub following President Truman's 8 A.M. radio announcement on May 8 that victory in Europe really had come.

A man in the Cleveland suburb of Parma painted a fireplug red, white and blue; girls in a candy store threw candy kisses to the crowd; Hitler was burned in effigy at Lakeside and East 9th Street; girls danced on the sidewalk; church bells rang; factory whistles blew. But on the whole it was a quiet day, ending with well-attended services in all churches.

New Yorkers milled around the Wall Street district and Times Square, and over a loudspeaker Mayor Fiorello H. LaGuardia told them to behave themselves. In a bar a man said: "I betcha they act like this only in New York and Chicago and San Francisco. "Back in Vermont, where I come from, I betcha they're acting different. I betcha the people are behaving decent, and going to church and praying and not carrying on."

In Chicago a gray-haired man weaved up to the woman behind the cigar counter in the Stevens Hotel lobby. "Aren't you going to celebrate?" the man asked. "Celebrate what?" the woman said. "My two boys are on Okinawa."

In Atlanta the big Bell bomber plant that turns out B-29s operated full blast. Officials said there was no increase in absenteeism.

Des Moines old-timers noted that it was a lot different from the way it had been 27 years before. On Armistice Day, 1918, rioters had filled downtown streets and overturned automobiles, dancing and singing to celebrate the U.S. Army's first victory in Europe. This time, except for a truckload of boys with musical instruments touring the heart of town, there was no revelry.

St. Louis church leaders held services in Memorial Plaza, Emerson Electric Manufacturing, Scullin Steel, Monsanto Chemical and other plants said full crews showed up. Retail stores closed and so did most bars and taverns.

Rain fell in Baltimore during President Truman's speech and streets were as empty as they usually are when it rains at 9 A.M. In the harbor there were impromptu celebrations aboard Norwegian and British vessels.

In Boston office girls sang "Hi, ho, the Merry-O" in Liberty Square, and workmen tearing down the old New England Mutual Building in Post

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Office Square tolled the bell in the tower. It was the first time the bell had rung in 2 years.

Minneapolis sounded its central air raid warning siren atop the Northwestern National Bank when President Truman officially proclaimed VE-day. For 17 minutes the pigeons in the Loop area wheeled in a capricious wind. Till mid-day the police and fire department kept extra men on hand in case of celebration trouble, but when it was clear that there wasn't going to be any celebration the extras were sent home. Schools and colleges continued classes, and appointments at the Red Cross blood-donor center were kept.

Springfield, Mass., stores barricaded their show windows with American flags to protect them from VE-day crowds, but there weren't any crowds. The Springfield Armory took down the "Help Wanted" sign which had become almost a landmark at State and Federal Streets. Officials said demands for the Garand rifle had fallen and that lay-offs were expected.

In Thomaston, Conn., an employee of the Seth Thomas clock factory, which has been converted to war production, said: "I don't like to be a fussy budget, but this 'doesn't mean much to me. When I stop making fuse parts for shells and start making lock parts again, that will be a wonderful day."

Some German prisoners interned at Fort Oglethorpe, Tenn., near Chattanooga, broke down and cried when they heard it was all over. There was no other display of emotion and no disturbance inside the compound. The post commandant, Col. Howard Clark, made a brief talk at a special retreat ceremony. Thirty minutes later he learned that his son, Lt. William A. Clark, had been killed in action on Luzon on April 18.

Flags were still at half-mast for FDR.