

1945 August 13-19

It's Over!

The stunning news that the United States had dropped an atomic bomb on Hiroshima on August 6, followed by another on Nagasaki on August 9, brought hopes for a Japanese surrender soon.

The world, including La Crosse County, was primed for a celebration when the war finally ended. On Sunday night, August 12, a false radio report that the Japanese had surrendered touched off a premature celebration. The loudspeaker at the Burlington railroad station on State Street in La Crosse at 8:40 p.m. carried the false announcement as a crowd of people waited for the Zephyr to arrive. "More than 100 automobile horns sounded and train-welcomers hopped from their cars, shouting," reported the *La Crosse Tribune*. Some theaters also made the announcement, and movie-goers ran shouting into the streets. But the celebrants soon learned that the report of peace was a hoax, and they quickly quieted down.¹

Even so, county and city authorities had been on alert since Saturday to prepare for a victory announcement. On Saturday morning, barricades were placed on downtown city street corners in preparation for closing off the area to vehicle traffic.² Churches announced plans for special services at 8:00 p.m. if peace was announced during the day, and at 6:00 p.m. the following evening if the announcement came at night.³

Monday passed with no news.

On Tuesday morning, two buses carrying 70 La Crosse County men left for the Milwaukee armed forces induction center. Half of them were to go through pre-induction procedures and return home. The other half was going to be inducted into the armed forces. The group was to report at the induction center at 7:00 a.m. on Wednesday.⁴ They were just another group of thousands who had made the same journey to the unknown throughout the war.

Then on Tuesday evening at supper time came the official announcement that that much of the world had been wanting to hear for years. World War II was finally over.



Japs Surrender

WASHINGTON—(AP)—President Truman announced at 7:00 p. m. EWT Japanese acceptance of unconditional surrender terms.

They will be accepted by General Douglas MacArthur when arrangements can be completed.

Mr. Truman read the formal message relayed from Emperor Hirohito through the Swiss government in which the Japanese ruler pledged the surrender on the terms laid down by the Big Three conference at Potsdam.

(La Crosse Tribune, 1945 August 14)

It was 6:00 p.m. in Wisconsin when the announcement, for real this time, reached the war-weary citizenry. The *La Crosse Tribune* described the reaction:

At least 10 minutes passed before the calm that lay over the city was jarred by bursts of sounds as people began to realize the full meaning of the announcement.

Then, as the church bells rang and the whistles blew, one car after another took up an accompaniment of honking horns, and gradually the traffic began to converge on Fourth and Main streets.

No one had any particular plan, except just to walk or ride about, feeling gay and carefree, and also prayerful. Some, tired of standing or walking sat on the curbstones; in a few of these groups songs were started.

In factories and on locomotives whistles were tied down to run until steam was exhausted. Then more steam pressure was raised to renew the blasts.

Cars of people with smiling faces were driven around the streets, horns tooting in joyous rhythm. . . .

As an overtone to all the noise of hilarity and jubilation came the church bells and chimes sending reminders of prayer and devotion.

Newsboys, pedalling (sic) furiously on their bicycles hurried *La Crosse Tribune* extras to the streets where people were eager to see for themselves in black and white that the news was true.

In the meantime the entire city police force was ordered out, squad cars called to central station and patrolmen quickly set up the barricades on all streets leading to the business section. Cars caught in the section formed the nucleus of the honking, shrieking jam which quickly collected at Fourth and Main Streets to proclaim the news to the heavens and all territory lying this side of that goal. . . .

Long into the night 40 men of the Wisconsin State Guard supplemented county and city police forces in an effort to keep the celebrants under control. Sporadic bonfires cropped up like mushrooms up and down Main street and kept the ever-vigilant firemen on the jump quelling one after another.

Spontaneous parades originated here and there, one of which was a group of men and women in fancy dress carrying lighted candles. . . .

In the residential districts many children formed little parades of their own, marching with flags, beating pans and covers and blowing whistles, while others tied tin cans (flattened

ones, still suitable for salvage) together on ropes and ran around the blocks, for once being able to make all the racket they wanted to without being told to stop.

A journey around the outlying districts an hour after the long-awaited news came found neighbors talking across fences and standing in groups in the yards, while others were on their way down town (sic) to join in the general celebration. . . .

The countryside was quiet and calm, with placid cattle munching at the grass; here and there a family was gathered at an outdoor table for a picnic meal.⁵

The Veterans of Foreign Wars drum and bugle corps took to the streets of La Crosse that evening for impromptu parades with crowds of people. The *La Crosse Tribune* appealed for a more organized parade to gather at Fourth and Main streets at 2:00 p.m. on Wednesday.⁶



—Tribune Photo

Taking Part In The Impromptu Parade Tuesday night were Mrs. Constance Nack, 1929 Adams; Mrs. Meta Colby, 1720 Johnson; and Mrs. Nettie Standiford, 922 State, members of Women's Relief corps No. 2.

(*La Crosse Tribune*, 1945 August 15, page 2)

One elderly couple drove around La Crosse with the husband straddling the hood and ringing a bell attached to the car's radiator cap while his wife drove.⁷

Japanese-American enlisted men Raymond Fiyio, Allan Katsura, Roy Suga, and Vorio Shimozon played Hawaiian songs on guitars and ukuleles at Fifth and Main streets. The crowd sang along until 11:30 p.m.⁸ The soldiers, stationed at Fort Snelling, Minnesota, were in La Crosse visiting families who had shown hospitality to their brothers when the 100th Battalion was training at Fort McCoy.⁹

Movies in local theaters were interrupted by an announcement that the war was over. Following clapping and yelling by the audience at the Fifth Avenue theater, there was a moment of prayer and the singing of "The Star-Spangled Banner." People in the Wisconsin theater "screamed and applauded loudly" as the movie continued to play without interruption. The same thing happened at the Hollywood theater, but it was noted that there was no reaction by the crowd at the Rivoli.¹⁰

The *La Crosse Tribune* put out its second extra edition of the day. Thanks to 48 carrier boys who volunteered for extra duty, the victory extra was out on the street twenty minutes after the official announcement came over the teletype.¹¹

Some stores in downtown La Crosse immediately put up window displays commemorating the news. Barron's put up twelve American flags in its window at Fifth Avenue and Main street. Window trimmer Silas Nelson was still working on Doerflinger's corner window at 2:00 a.m. on Wednesday. That display included a dove with an olive branch, an American flag, as well as the biblical quotation, "And they shall beat their swords into plow shares."¹²

A more subdued celebration took place in churches from 8:00 to 9:00 p.m. Families went to give thanks for the end of the war and pray for lasting peace.¹³

Even with all the activity, it was a relatively quiet night for the 47 La Crosse police officers (the entire force), military policemen, county police, and Company M the Wisconsin State Guard. There were only a few intoxicated people because taverns had closed. The one ambulance call of the night was for a man in downtown La Crosse who fractured his ankle after stepping on a pebble. There was heavy traffic on county roads but no accidents. Chief Ivan Wright and six other county officers were on duty until 3:00 a.m. regulating traffic.¹⁴



Victory-Busy Dreads Jammed Street intersections in the business district within a few minutes after the V-J announcement was made. There was no program, but an impromptu parade by the VFW drum corps and the Women's Relief corps No. 2 went up one street and down the other for about an hour. This picture was taken at Fourth and Main from a second-floor State Bank building office. There were similar crowds at Third and Fifth on Main. Groups stood in other streets in the business district to discuss the V-J situation, being unobscured by traffic as the entire area had been barricaded.



Boxes, Paper, Anything That Would Burn went into heaps in the center of street intersections Tuesday night for bon-fires. This one was at Fourth and Main. Fire department equipment was hauled out to put out five of the fires. The young folks shouted and formed rings to dance around some of the blazes. The streets in the business district had been barricaded against traffic.



Lt. Ralph Crisp, Dell Rapids, S. D. tells Reporter Jean Stavrus he is glad the war is over and is happy he can attend a union church service with hundreds of La Crosse families. All churches holding services Tuesday night were crowded.



Jubilant Were These Workers at the Northern Engraving and Manufacturing company's plant as they look off a couple of moments when the official word sounded through the building that President Truman declared V-J Day. They returned to their jobs again to work for another hour before joining the throngs in the city's celebration of the occasion.



Too Busy To Take Time-Out when the official announcement from Washington of V-J Day spread throughout the plant, this worker on a punch press at the Northern Engraving and Manufacturing company's Fourth and Vine factory didn't look up when the cameraman's flashlight beam illuminated. The workers remained at their jobs until 7:30 p. m. under a pre-arranged plan.



Though VICTORY stared her in The Face, celebrations didn't start for Dorothy Robinson, 1424 Broadway, until 7:30 p. m. when her shift finished its day's work at the Northern Engraving defense factory. For a year, since she was graduated from Central high school, she has been inspecting slabs on the second floor of the plant. Here she had the news for her is that her brother, S. Sgt. Morris Robinson, is home from the Aleutians.



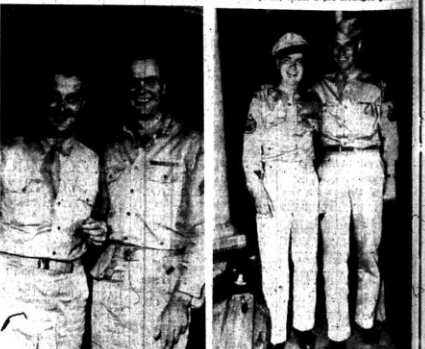
Teletype Room Of The La Crosse Tribune was crowded with newshounds for more than one hour before the official V-J announcement. When the word came, it was the signal for them to automatically run to their press-room quarters to grab the papers missing off the presses and hurry to their street selling post.



"I Just Can't Believe It" was the expression of these GI's, but their faces show they're happy about the V-J announcement and the possibility of their release from the army. They are Pfc. William T. Cowell (left) and Pfc. Fred E. Mustler, both of Minneapolis.



Main Guardsmen Responded To The Call of city-police Tuesday night in helping patrol streets since street barricades and direct traffic. Pfc. Myron Rippling, Green Acres, is shown at the Third and Main barricade.



"I Won't Be Loner Now" might well be the thoughts of these soldiers, who were in La Crosse Tuesday night when President Truman announced receipt of the Japanese surrender document. In the picture at the left are Pvt. William Adridge (left) of Los Angeles and S. Sgt. Jim Beilly, who comes from Montana. In the other, taken at the bus depot, are S. Sgt. Walter E. Palm (left) of Oak Wing, Minn., and Corp. Edward Behrend of Minneapolis.

—ALL TRIBUNE PHOTOS

The official observance of V-J Day was set for Wednesday, August 15. Most stores, offices, and factories closed for the day. Taverns and every other store that sold liquor and beer were also closed. City officials asked that restaurants stay open, however, to prevent a repeat of the V-E Day problem of people not being able "to find food, going hungry." ¹⁵ Wednesday was described as "quiet as church on a weekday." People were resting after the Tuesday night celebrations and getting a feel for a world finally at peace.¹⁶

In Onalaska on Tuesday night, car horns blew and church bells rang. Children paraded in the streets with kitchen pans, drums, and anything else that would make noise. Factories, businesses, and the post office were closed on Wednesday. Churches held special services on Thursday evening.¹⁷

The reaction in West Salem to V-J Day was described as quieter than the celebration at the end of World War I. At 6:30 p.m. on Tuesday night, the fire siren, the old fire alarm bell, the creamery whistle, and church bells created "a noisy salute to the long-awaited word of the war's end." Just as they did in La Crosse and Onalaska, children paraded with flags while beating on pans and drums on both Tuesday night and on Wednesday. There was some honking of automobile horns and noisy yelling downtown, but otherwise, the reaction was subdued. Restaurants and all but two of the town's taverns closed immediately. Most businesses closed all day on Wednesday. By Wednesday evening, the taverns reopened for business as usual. The Salem theater took the night off. Churches held services at various times on Wednesday, except for Christ Lutheran whose pastor just returned from vacation late on Wednesday.¹⁸

The bell in the belfry of the West Salem village hall rang wildly on Tuesday night until its rope broke. The same bell had rung at the end of World War I in 1918 until the clapper broke. Some people climbed the tower and beat the bell with a hammer in November 1918, but apparently, nobody risked the climb on August 14, 1945.¹⁹

The sounds of church bells and celebrations could also be heard in the rural areas of the county. The Mindoro Lutheran Church held a special service on Wednesday evening.²⁰ All Mindoro businesses closed on Wednesday.²¹

The weekly edition of the *Bangor Independent* noted: "In Bangor the news was taken quietly and with restraint but in a spirit of deep thankfulness. Joy was tempered by thoughts of the terrible sacrifices of those who will not return home and those, too, who live but are maimed in body or mind."²²

One of the reasons for that somber reaction was the knowledge that 157 men from La Crosse County had died during the war.²³ Many more would never be the same after the experience. Nor, in many ways, would our country.

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 2020 August 23

Sources & Notes:

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- ⁵ "City's Supper Hour Calm Shattered By V-J Decree; Thousands Throng Streets In Celebration Of Event," *La Crosse Tribune*, La Crosse, Wisconsin, 1945 August 15, page 1.
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- ⁷ *La Crosse Tribune*, 1945 August 15, "V-J Day Sidelights."
- ⁸ "V-J Day Sidelights," *La Crosse Tribune*, La Crosse, Wisconsin, 1945 August 15, page 2.
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- ¹⁰ *La Crosse Tribune*, 1945 August 15, "V-J Day Sidelights."
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- ¹⁸ "War's End Officially Proclaimed to World, *The Nonpareil Journal*, West Salem, Wisconsin, 1945 August 16, page 1.
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- ²¹ "Mindoro," *The Nonpareil Journal*, West Salem, Wisconsin, 1945 August 16, page 8.
- ²² "War Is Ended--Nation Turns To Reconversion," *Bangor Independent*, Bangor, Wisconsin, 1945 August 16, page 1.
- ²³ "157 La Crosse County Men Died in Service," *La Crosse Tribune*, La Crosse, Wisconsin, 1945 August 15. This number included those killed in action, declared dead after being missing for one year, killed in accidents, or died of illnesses.