

1945 May 7-13

V-E Day in La Crosse County

The La Crosse Tribune V-E EXTRA
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Germans Quit!

Joy Of Victory News Tempered By Realization Pacific Fight Remains

Yankees Free Blum, Schacht, Rev. Niemoller

WITH THE 8TH ARMY IN FRANCE, May 4 (Continued)—(AP) Gen. Eisenhower today announced that he had ordered the release of all fighting forces of the German army who had been captured by the 8th Army and who were being held in the American custody.

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Temper Joy, Goodland Plea

JOHN J. GOODLAND, president of the La Crosse County Chamber of Commerce, today urged the people of the county to temper their joy at the news of the German surrender with a realization that the Pacific fight remains.

Goodland said that the German surrender was a great victory for the Allies, but that it was not the end of the war. He said that the Pacific fight was still on and that the Allies must continue to fight until they have won a complete and unqualified victory.

Charles Timm Is Liberated

CHARLES TIMM, a member of the 10th division of the German army, today announced that he had been liberated by the American forces.

Timm said that he had been captured by the American forces in the Pacific and that he had been held in a prisoner of war camp. He said that he had been liberated by the American forces and that he was now free to return to his home.

Had To Quit, No Matter What Terms, Says Krosigk

LONDON—(AP)—German Foreign Minister Joachim von Ribbentrop today said that the German people had no choice but to surrender unconditionally.

Ribbentrop said that the German people had been fighting for six years and that they had suffered great hardships. He said that they had no choice but to surrender unconditionally and that they would accept any terms that the Allies might offer.

GROWTH AND DECLINE OF HITLER'S EMPIRE

Area Included Within The Heavy Black Outline On The Map Above, taking in most of Europe and part of northern Africa, is Hitler's empire of conquest at its highest. Beginning of theebb is symbolized by the dotted line of Salzgitter, where loss is considered by many to be the turning point in the future's fortunes.

(La Crosse Tribune, 1945 May 7, page 1)

Once the December 1944 German offensive in the Ardennes had been stopped and then rolled back, it was just a matter of time, and lots of hard fighting in the air and on the ground, until Nazi Germany was crushed between the irresistible forces of the Allies closing in from both the East and the West. There was already talk, and some strategic jockeying, about what post-war Europe would look like.

This inevitability was also felt on the homefront early in 1945.

At the end of March 1945, a committee of citizens in La Crosse created a plan to celebrate V-E Day or Victory in Europe. The igniter was to be the *La Crosse Tribune* transmitting official word of the German surrender to the main fire station. The main fire station would send a signal to all the sub-stations, and "aerial bombs" (presumably large fireworks) would be launched from each fire station. One hour later, there was to be a victory parade starting from Market Square and ending in Riverside Park, where there would be speeches by Mayor Verchota and clergy, along with musical numbers and singing. Stores were to close immediately if the official announcement occurred before 5:30 p.m. If the announcement came after 5:30 p.m., stores would be closed the entire next day. Taverns were to close immediately, and they were to remain closed for 24 hours. Churches, on the other hand, would open immediately for individual prayers, and special church services would be held in the morning or evening. The Army made an official request to Wisconsin Governor Walter Goodland for the following:

- "Prohibition of blowing victory whistles."
- Programs in schools and factories to keep students and workers off the streets.
- Emphasis on prayer and "thanksgiving for victory and a day of solemn observance."
- Closing of department stores and taverns, and prohibiting the sale of alcohol.
- Reinforcing police and fire departments with auxiliaries and reserves to keep order.
- "Enlistment of active support of radio, newspaper, industrial plants, service organizations and other media for frequent and strong appeals to the public."¹

It appears they were afraid the celebration would get out of hand, but there was also the factor of the war against Japan that still had to be won.

Just a few days later, the planned victory parade was scrapped. The committee had second thoughts about having a victory parade when only half the victory was won. They emphasized again that V-E Day should be "a solemn occasion" with the realization that it may take many more months, or even years, to defeat Japan.²

The La Crosse Area Church Federation had its own strategy for V-E Day. As soon as the war in Europe was officially over, all churches would be open for "meditation and prayer." If the announcement came before 7:00 p.m., there would be "a union service of thanksgiving" beginning at 8:00 p.m. If the announcement came after 8:00 p.m., this service would be at 8:00 p.m. the following evening.³

On Monday, May 7, 1945, at about 8:56 a.m. local time, [the announcement](#) came that Germany was giving up. For the soldiers on the front lines, their attitude was demonstrated by Bill Mauldin's cartoon of his war-weary GIs "Willie" and "Joe" hearing the news. Nobody wanted to be the last soldier to die in Europe.

UP FRONT WITH MAULDIN V-E DAY



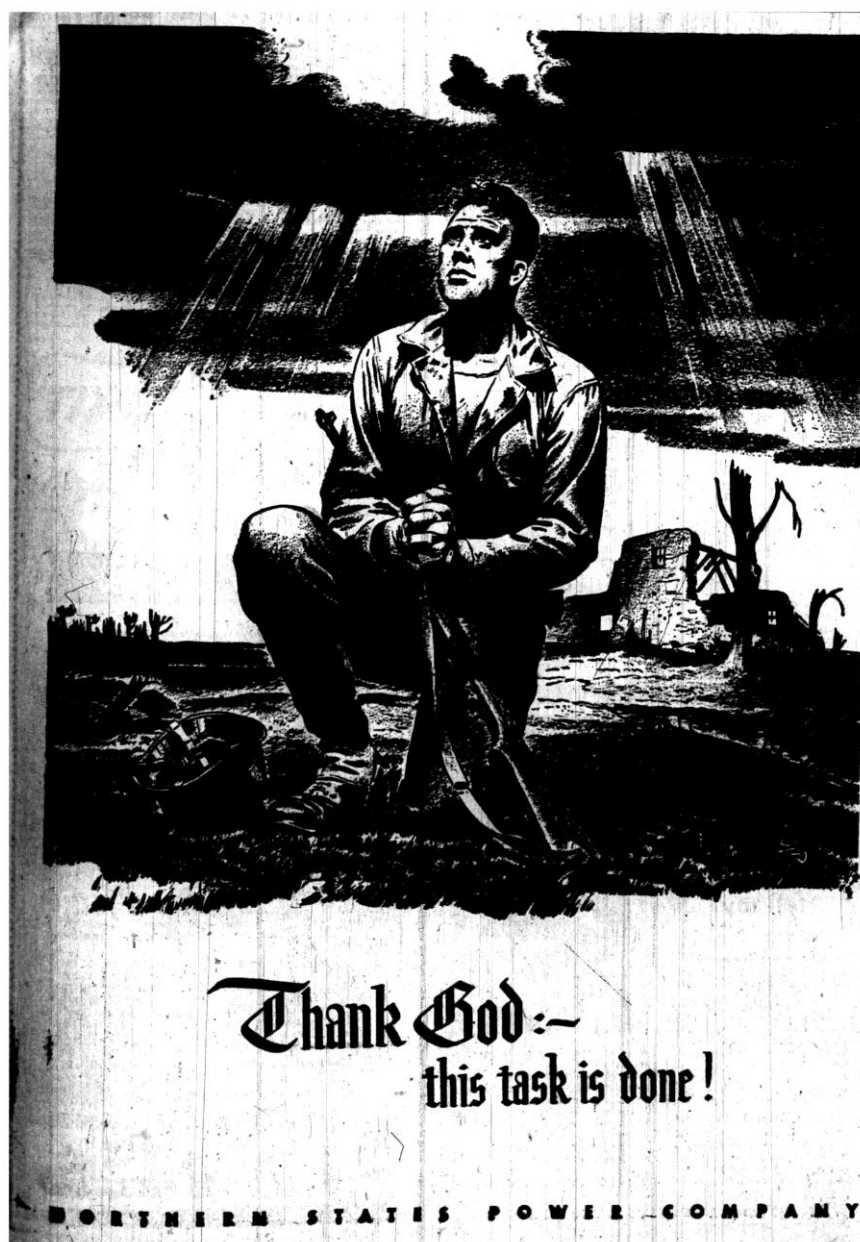
"Th' hell with it. I ain't standin' up 'till he does!"

(*La Crosse Tribune*, 1945 May 7, page 9)

The La Crosse Telephone Corporation switchboard was immediately swamped with calls. From 9:00 a.m. to 10:00 a.m., 28 operators, two chief operators, and all the supervisors managed a flood of 15,200 calls. Each operator handled an average of 546 calls in that first hour; a normal average was 300 calls per hour. The call volume was still high at 11:00 a.m.⁴

In La Crosse, the aerial bombs were launched and went off as planned from the city fire stations. Church bells and chimes rang, and the organ at the First Congregational Church added to the fanfare with patriotic songs. La Crosse police and the Wisconsin State Guard blocked streets leading to downtown so

automobiles could not get through. There were "clusters of people on every street corner." One cocky youth boasted, "They must have heard I got my induction papers today." A man hoped that gas rationing would be eased. Another announced his intention to celebrate like he never had before, but a bystander shot down that idea by reminding him, "I don't know how you're going to do it. Everything's closed." Many businesses, including taverns, and industrial plants closed for the day. Protestant churches opened immediately, and evening "union" services were held at the Congregational and St. John's Reformed churches on the south side and the Presbyterian church on the north side. Catholic and Lutheran churches held their services in the evening too.⁵ All churches were "packed" with people.⁶



(La Crosse Tribune, 1945 May 8, page 5)

All offices in the federal building closed, and the post office closed at noon.⁷

Industrial plants had planned to remain operating during the day, but nobody's mind was on work. The management of Electric Auto-Lite, Trane, and Northern Engraving decided to close before noon.⁸



Workers at Electric Auto-Lite celebrate V-E Day
(*La Crosse Tribune*, 1945 May 7, page 5)

City schools had all-school assemblies to announce the news and conduct a commemorative program. At Central High School, the program consisted of Richard Coldren, John Jones, Ben Overton, Ronnie Gillmeister, and the Rev. Fred Hyslop, as well as the school choir. Logan High School's program featured Principal Carl A. Halmstad, Sea Scout Jerry Neuman, and Dr. C. O. Pederson of Trinity Lutheran Church. A special guest speaker was Logan graduate First Sergeant Howard Blank who was on furlough after three years with the 32nd Division in the South Pacific. The board of education directed schools to dismiss students for the rest of the day. The La Crosse State Teachers College followed suit by canceling classes for the day. Students streamed out into the streets and toward downtown.⁹



Students At Lincoln Junior High School were jubilant Monday morning at a special assembly at which they were told of the victory in Europe. Immediately after the program school was recessed.

Lincoln Junior High School students celebrate V-E Day
(*La Crosse Tribune*, 1945 May 7, page 5)

La Crosse Boy Scouts roamed the streets passing out V-E Day souvenir tags: "Don't forget America needs your energy for the big job still ahead." "Don't let celebration cause you to lose your head." "V-Day in La Crosse! Don't be destructive! There is still a war to be won."¹⁰

The *La Crosse Tribune* put out a "V-E Extra" edition (see the front page above) with just news and no advertising. The newspaper did list the advertisers that had been scheduled to appear. The newspaper staff had originally planned a larger edition to celebrate the end of the war in Europe, but directives from government agencies and newspaper associations, and restrictions on the supply of newsprint, precluded that.¹¹

In fact, the War Department insisted that "V-E" was a "'newspaper' term" in a memo that made the rounds in the Pentagon. To the people who ran the war, it was known as "R" day, meaning "readjustment" of their main effort to the Pacific Theater.¹² The term "V-E Day" was coined in the fall of 1944, according to the Library of Congress.¹³

Company M of the Wisconsin State Guard was called out at 9:00 a.m., and they were at their assigned stations by 9:45 a.m. to help control the celebration. Captain Ted Garder commanded the group. They were served lunch and dinner at the local USO under the supervision of Mess Sergeant Ralph Larson. The Coast Guard Reserve relieved them at 2:00 p.m., but the State Guard was back on duty in the

evening operating in pairs and carrying nightsticks.¹⁴ Among them were R. Jaeger, Selmer Hogan, James Russell, William Eckart, and William Wolters.¹⁵

The extra help keeping order was appreciated, but it appears to have been unnecessary. The La Crosse Police Department reported Monday evening was the "quietest in a long time. There was not a single call involving violence." Street barricades in the downtown area were taken down at 6 p.m.¹⁶

Victory Day Accidents Are Jinx For Keeler

Ray M. Keeler, 54, 519 South 16th street, believes Victory days are his jinx.

As a La Crosse Tribune reporter during the World war I armistice celebration, he was hit with a load of buckshot.

Monday he was driving down town after hearing of the V-E reports and at Eighth and Cass streets was hit by a truck driven by Robert J. Bakalars, 16, the vehicle owned by J. B. Mulder, 828 Fifth avenue south.

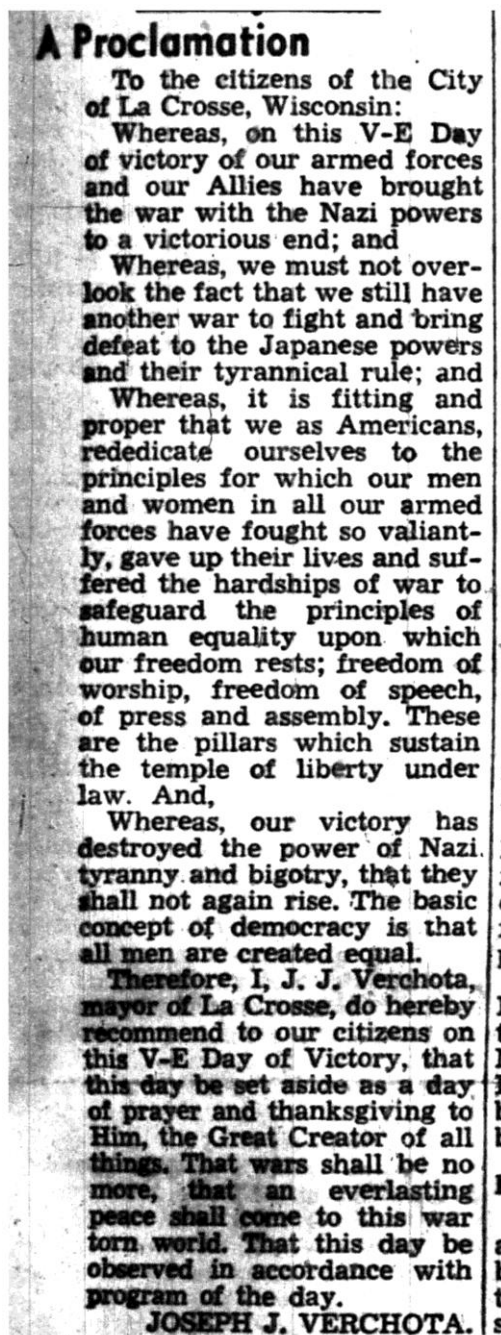
Keeler learned the truck had the same last name as the person hitting him with buckshot in 1918.

(La Crosse Tribune, 1945 May 8, page 2)

About the only businesses that remained open were movie theatres.¹⁷ Within a few days, movie theatres in La Crosse were screening the Army film "Two Down and One to Go," (alluding to Germany, Italy, and Japan) showing how the Army was going to redeploy to the Pacific Theater.¹⁸

The Pacific Theater played a role in the range of emotion experienced by some individuals that day. Mrs. Archie Geiwitz of 1215 South 17th Street had a double reason to rejoice because she received the

official word that her son, Sgt. Francis Sawyer, had been released from a Japanese prison camp in the China-Burma-India theater. A man was in the *La Crosse Tribune* office submitting an article for publication when he heard the news. His apathetic reaction was understandable; the article he brought in told of his son's death on Luzon.¹⁹



(*La Crosse Tribune*, 1945 May 7, page 1)

The celebrations in other La Crosse County communities were similar in their content and character.

In far northern La Crosse County, Mindoro schools and businesses closed on Tuesday. The Lutheran and Presbyterian churches had special V-E Day services.²⁰

The Rev. H. J. Wein of La Crosse addressed a crowded Holmen Lutheran Church on Monday evening. There were prayers, readings, hymns, and the girls' chorus of Joyce Johnson, Evelyn Skogen, Margie Stark, Dorothy Olson, Claudia Nelson, Constance Wall, Helen Larson, and Joanne and Marian Haug.²¹

The church in New Amsterdam had a service Monday evening. It was noted that there were eighteen stars on the church service flag representing men in both theatres of war.²²

West Salem had a quiet celebration. Schools let out and most businesses closed. The high school band played downtown over the noon hour. Attendance was good at the three churches in town for their special services. The fire siren, along with the ringing of church bells and the old fire bell, marked the official V-E Day on Tuesday.²³

It was virtually the same in Bangor. Business places closed at noon on Monday and Tuesday afternoon. Some churches had services on Monday evening or Tuesday morning. The editor of the *Bangor Independent* captured the mood of the day:

Throughout the United States there seemed to be little disposition toward revelry or joyful celebrating. It seems as though the impact upon the emotions of the momentous events of the past month or so have drained people's emotions dry. . . . We are tired mentally and dulled emotionally for the time being. In years to come we shall see these world-shaking events in sharper focus than we do now and in retrospect shall realize them more vividly than now.²⁴

Celebrations were subdued by the grim reality that the job was just half done. The terrible battle for Okinawa had been going on for over a month with horrendous casualties on both sides. The Japanese gave no sign of giving up even as their Pacific empire was being hacked and sliced from the outside in.

The editor of the *La Crosse Tribune* wrote: "Japanese defeat, utter and complete, is certain, but how or where it will come and the will of Japanese armies and people to continue the fight is beyond calculation."²⁵

Even though there were no advertisements in the V-E Extra edition of the *La Crosse Tribune*, the advertisements soon after expressed the essence of the moment.

A high-contrast, black and white illustration of a muscular man, likely a professional wrestler, in a dynamic pose. He is wearing a wrestling singlet, a headband, and wristbands. The style is reminiscent of classic comic book art, with bold lines and dramatic shading. The man is shown from the waist up, leaning forward with his arms raised, suggesting a powerful move or a celebratory gesture. The background is dark and textured, adding to the overall intensity of the image.

*Are you going to walk out on him now...
or will you stay at your battle station too?*

STICK to your WAR JOB!

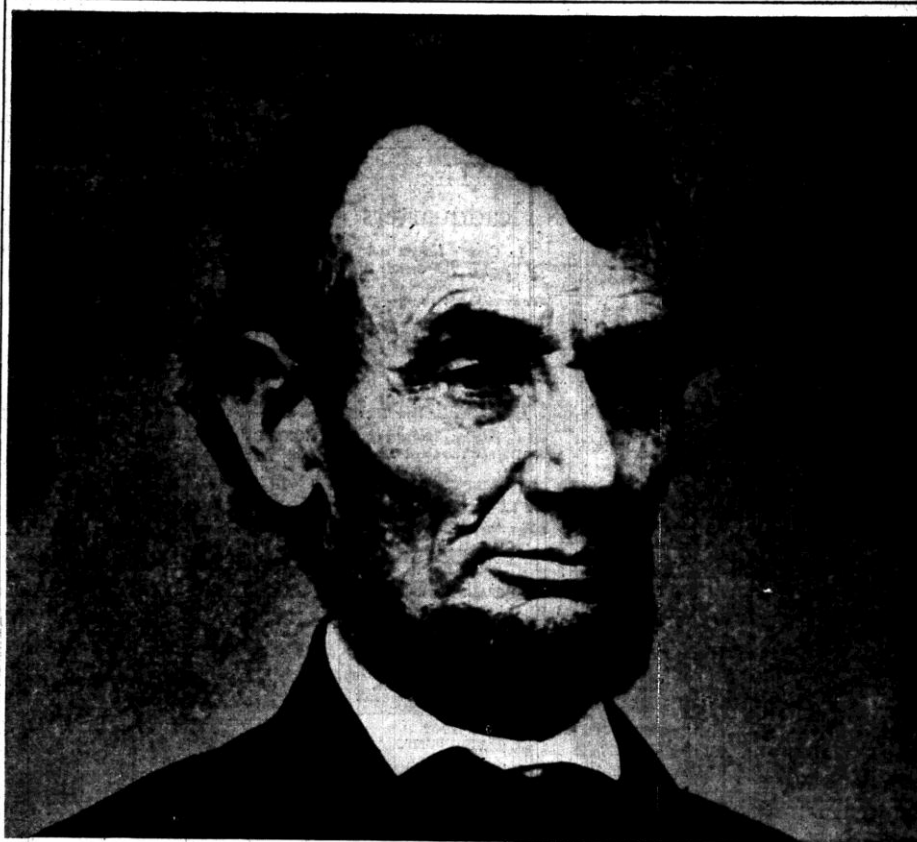
(This Advertisement from the Local United States Employment Service of the W.M.C.)

This Page Is a Contribution to America's All Out War Effort by the Following Committee for Victory...

[illegible]

WRITTEN FOR 1863 . . . AND 1945

*"It is rather for us to be here dedicated
to the great task remaining before us."*



ABRAHAM LINCOLN'S immortal words at Gettysburg are worth recalling on this unforgettable day in 1945. For they are as timely now as they were when he uttered them — more than eighty-one years ago.

Then as now, the nation was engaged in a long and bitter war.

Then as now, a great victory had brought the country closer to peace.

Then as now, there were more battles to be won,

more hardships and suffering to be borne before final victory.

Lest we at home forget, let us again heed the words of Abraham Lincoln. For the sake of those who go on fighting in the Pacific, let us dedicate ourselves to the successful prosecution of the war against Japan — and to the days of peace ahead.

ALLIS - CHALMERS

MILWAUKEE, WIS. • BOSTON, MASS. • LA CROSSE, WIS. • LA PORTE, IND. •
NORWOOD, OHIO • OXNARD, CALIF. • PITTSBURGH, PA. • SPRINGFIELD, ILL.

A 1878

(La Crosse Tribune, 1945 May 8, page 12)

Monday was for subdued celebration; Tuesday was back to war work.

Jeff Rand
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 La Crosse Public Library
 jrand@lacrosselibrary.org

Sources & Notes:

- ¹ "Citizens' Committee Outlines V-Day Observance Plans Here," *La Crosse Tribune*, La Crosse, Wisconsin, 1945 March 28, page 10.
- ² "Cancel V-Day Parade Plans," *La Crosse Tribune*, La Crosse, Wisconsin, 1945 April 1, page 6.
- ³ "Church Federation Plans V-Day Rites," *La Crosse Tribune*, La Crosse, Wisconsin, 1945 April 10, page 10.
- ⁴ "V-E Sidelights," *La Crosse Tribune*, La Crosse, Wisconsin, 1945 May 7, page 2.
- ⁵ "Business Places, Industries, Schools Here Close After Firing of 'V-E' Aerial Bombs," *La Crosse Tribune*, La Crosse, Wisconsin, 1945 May 7, page 1.
- ⁶ "Overflow Crowds Attend V-E Services in City's Churches," *La Crosse Tribune*, La Crosse, Wisconsin, 1945 May 8, page 1.
- ⁷ *La Crosse Tribune*, 1945 May 7.
- ⁸ *La Crosse Tribune*, 1945 May 7.
- ⁹ *La Crosse Tribune*, 1945 May 7.
- ¹⁰ *La Crosse Tribune*, 1945 May 7.
- ¹¹ "No Advertising In Publication," *La Crosse Tribune*, La Crosse, Wisconsin, 1945 May 7, page 1.
- ¹² "It Was 'R' Day," *La Crosse Tribune*, La Crosse, Wisconsin, 1945 May 13, page 12.
- ¹³ Matt Barton, "VE-Day--Take One," *Library of Congress*, 2020 May 7, <https://blogs.loc.gov/now-see-hear/2020/05/ve-day-take-one/>. The author searched *Newspapers.com* and found "V-E Day" referred to as early as September 1944 in multiple newspapers.
- ¹⁴ "State Guard Helps Police," *La Crosse Tribune*, La Crosse, Wisconsin, 1945 May 7, page 2.
- ¹⁵ "Members of Co. M. Wisconsin State Guard," *La Crosse Tribune*, La Crosse, Wisconsin, 1945 May 8, page 12.
- ¹⁶ *La Crosse Tribune*, 1945 May 8.
- ¹⁷ *La Crosse Tribune*, 1945 May 7.
- ¹⁸ "Official Army Film Showing At Theaters," *La Crosse Tribune*, La Crosse, Wisconsin, 1945 May 10, page 2.
- ¹⁹ *La Crosse Tribune*, 1945 May 7.
- ²⁰ "Mindoro," *The Nonpareil Journal*, West Salem, Wisconsin, 1945 May 10, page 8.
- ²¹ "Victory Service in Holmen," *The Nonpareil Journal*, West Salem, Wisconsin, 1945 May 10, page 8.
- ²² "New Amsterdam," *La Crosse County Record*, Onalaska, Wisconsin, 1945 May 10, page 5.
- ²³ "Town Topics," *The Nonpareil Journal*, West Salem, Wisconsin, 1945 May 10, page 1.
- ²⁴ "Main Street Musings," *Bangor Independent*, Bangor, Wisconsin, 1945 May 10, page 1.
- ²⁵ "The End--In Europe," *La Crosse Tribune*, La Crosse, Wisconsin, 1945 May 7, page 6.