



Thousands shouted together when news of Jap surrender came to Times Square in New York.

NEW YORK CITY At 7:30 A.M. on Friday, August 10, 1945, the thermometer in New York City read 66 degrees, the sun was shining, the humidity wasn't bad, and all in all it was one of the town's better summer mornings. The atomic bomb and Russia were in the war now, and the 7:30 news broadcasts were much concerned with the accomplishments of these new allies.

A moment later it came. Japan, according to the Tokyo radio, wanted out. Word of the momentous broadcast spread quickly, but in New York there was no immediate sense of jubilation. Instead, a mood of trance-like suspense prevailed. Nothing was official, nothing was definite, no one could do anything but hope.

Thin lines of earnest people gathered almost at once in Times Square to await developments as they were flashed on the electric news sign running around the Times Tower Building. They didn't know it then, of course, but they were the advance guard of a host of New Yorkers who would be keeping vigil there for five days and nights to come.

"Whadya say, sarge?" said one GI to another in the ranks of an expectant throng listening to a sidewalk radio in the entrance to a newsreel theater on East 42d Street. "Kinda quiet, ain't it, for a big deal like this? People seem to be walking around in a dream. Yep, that's what the whole thing seems like—a dream."

Among the first in the city to act on the news were the proprietors of establishments in the Times Square area who feared for the safety of their plate-glass windows. By 8 A.M. Toffenetti's Restaurant, on the southeast corner of Broadway and 43d Street, had a crew of carpenters busy putting up barricades as a precaution against crowds, and the Astor Hotel and other vulnerable spots were quick to follow suit.

And so the long morning wore on. Civilians stopped GIs in the streets, offering to buy them drinks, but by and large the GIs didn't seem inclined to accept. Everything was still too uncertain to get party-minded. Down in Wall Street, where ticker tape can be counted on to fly at the first sign of exuberance in the big town, there wasn't so much as a shred of paper in the gutters. A recruiting station for Waves, situated in front of the Sub-Treasury Building at the corner of Wall and Nassau, remained open for business, but there were no customers.

Word went out that President Harry S. Truman was calling a Cabinet meeting at 2 P.M. Somehow or other this was distorted in Manhattan's garment center into a rumor that he had accepted the Jap peace offer, and a celebration, as cock-eyed as it was short-lived, began. Seventh and Eighth Avenues from 34th to 40th Streets and the side streets in the area became a crazy quilt of bits and patches of brightly colored cloth thrown from the windows of buildings by excited dressmakers. Vendors popped up from nowhere to peddle VJ-Day buttons at two bits per button. The Department of Sanitation rushed sprinkler trucks around to wet down the mess, but not in time. In the midst of all the excitement, some of the pieces of cloth on Eighth Avenue caught fire from a cigarette butt, and traffic had to be stopped because of the danger to gasoline tanks. "In the garment center, we've always prematured our celebrations," said one disgusted elevator operator.

During the afternoon, 5,000 policemen were stationed in the midtown area to handle anticipated crowds, but at 3:30 P.M. came an announcement that the White House would have no further news until morning and the cops were called in. And so the restless, indecisive day petered out. In the theater district that night there were no more than the usual summer crowds and local radio stations hammered home this message at frequent intervals: "If you have a war job, keep plugging. The war is not yet over."

Nor was the war over during the long weekend that followed. Saturday it was hot—sunny again, and hot. Just after dawn the *Queen Elizabeth* came in with 14,800 GIs from the ETO, a lot of whom figured that now they wouldn't have to take another free ocean ride on Uncle Sam, as they'd been expecting to. By afternoon the streets were all but deserted and from one end of the city to the other girls sprawled on tenement roofs in skimpy bathing suits, picking up suntans for their legs in place of the silk stockings they couldn't buy. The Japs, the radio said, had been told that Hirohito could stay but that we'd be the boss, and everyone realized it would now be some time before we'd have an answer to this. That evening the West 54th Street police station reported fewer people in Times Square than there usually are on a summer Saturday night. There was nothing to do but wait. (continued)

The skies were clear again Sunday, as indeed they were throughout the five days of waiting that seemed like a century, and the thermometer was in the low 80s, making it a fine day to go to the beaches. Thousands turned up at Coney Island and Orchard Beach, toting portable radios along with them so that they could keep up with developments, of which there were none. Learned commentators went on the air to explain what was holding up Japan's surrender, although they obviously had no more idea than their listeners of what the deal was. A mass of thanksgiving for the peace that had not yet come was held at St. Patrick's Cathedral on Fifth Avenue. Mayor F. H. LaGuardia broadcast this plea: "Do not celebrate unless there is good reason to celebrate."

Then, as it apparently must at the end of any war, came the phony report of surrender. At 9:34 P.M. the United Press sent out this flash: WASHINGTON—JAPAN ACCEPTS SURRENDER TERMS OF THE ALLIES. Two minutes later came the countermanding order: EDITORS—HOLD UP THAT FLASH. But by then it was too late. Radio stations had already broadcast the false news and thousands upon thousands of people had dashed from their living rooms out into the streets.

The U. P. later explained that it hadn't sent out the report and it put up a \$5,000 reward for information leading to the identification and conviction of the culprit who in some manner had managed to slip the hot but screwy dope out over its wires. By that time, however, crowds were whooping it up in Times Square, a bit synthetically, to be sure, since all they had to do was to look up at the electric news sign and read that the war was definitely not over. Most of the hullabaloo was kicked up by kids of bobby-sox age just raising the roof for the hell of it. By midnight it was way past their bedtimes and, utterly pooped out, they straggled home.

Monday was a stinker. The weather was hot and humid and a sweating city was fretfully sweating the surrender out. Whereas at first everyone had more or less taken it for granted that Japan would accept our terms, now as the hours passed people began to fear that it wasn't over yet by any means. The day dragged on, a day on which most New Yorkers had thought they would be celebrating and on which they instead had to return reluctantly to their routine chores. Then, that evening at 6:25, came a radio report that a broadcasting station in Brazzaville, Africa, had picked up an announcement from Tokyo that Japan would have an important announcement to make at 8 o'clock the following morning. That made it look as though the situation would remain on ice for the rest of the night and a large slice of New York City's sweltering populace nursed itself to bed early with cooling drinks.

That was the last sleep for a lot of people for a lot of hours. Tokyo jumped the gun and at 1:49 Tuesday morning broadcast a statement that Japan would accept the Allied surrender terms. Throughout the city late stay-uppers hopped on the phone to rouse their friends and tell them the good news. Some made immediately for Times Square, setting off a celebration that was to last well over 48 hours. It was still going strong at dawn and carried on right through the day and the next day as more and more yelling, laughing, horn-tooting thousands poured into the area.

By Tuesday noon there was still nothing official, but from the way the crowds carried on you would never have suspected that peace wasn't yet defi-



A sailor and a Wac tore up the sidewalk on Broadway with a swinging, strutting victory jive.

nately in the bag. Frenzied babes rushed through the crowds kissing servicemen, and wolves, in uniform and out, prowled about mousing any and every likely-looking number while the cops looked on, grinning indulgently. At 3:17 in the afternoon a sailor and his honey were to be seen lying flat on the pavement necking furiously as the throngs shuffled about them. Traffic was barred from the Times Square area all day so that the mob, which ultimately numbered 2,000.-000, could run loose.

All the way from Staten Island to Van Cortlandt Park, from the Hudson River to the remotest outposts of Queens, the streets were littered with tons of paper torn up and scattered about by New York City's seven and a half million elated citizens. In Chinatown, where the residents have relatives in the land the Japs first tried to overrun, they put on the sacred dragon dance ordinarily staged only on the Chinese New Year. Up in Harlem there was jive and jitter-bugging in the streets. Flatbush Avenue and Fulton Streets, two of Brooklyn's main drags, were jammed.

Frantic and madcap as the shindy was by day, however, it was nothing compared to what it became at night after President Truman made his 7 o'clock announcement that the war was over. This, at last, was the official end, and at once the whole city, already a seething turmoil, seemed to explode. To the blasts of automobile horns and the shrilling of whistles the *Queen Elizabeth*, docked in the Hudson, added the deep, throaty boom of her horn. Some of the bars around Times Square closed down, unable to cope with the crush, but it was a cinch to get a drink since scores of people were wandering around carrying quart bottles of the stuff and all were in a generous mood.

On, on, on it went into the night and the next night as the biggest city in the world went its way toward picking up the biggest hangover in its history. It was a hangover few would ever regret.

—Sgt. SANDERSON VANDERBILT