

REMEMBERING V-J DAY

August 15, 1945



The celebrations on V-E Day (Victory in Europe), May 8, 1945, were spontaneous and joyful, yet everyone knew that the end of the War in Europe gave the world only partial peace. The War in the Pacific raged on with increased savagery. On August 6th, 1945, facing the prospect of an invasion of the Japanese home islands, President Harry Truman ordered the dropping of the newly-developed atomic bomb on the Japanese city of Hiroshima. In a single flash, four square miles of the city were destroyed and 130,000 people were killed. Three days later a second atomic bomb was dropped on the city of Nagasaki. This bomb killed between 65,000 and 75,000 people. On the same day, forces of the Soviet Union invaded Japanese-held Manchuria.

On August 14th, 1945, facing armies and new weapons they could never hope to overcome, the Japanese government accepted defeat. The next day, August 15th, 1945, was proclaimed Victory over Japan (VJ) Day, although the signing of the official instrument of surrender was not to occur until September 2nd, 1945, aboard the USS Missouri, in Tokyo Bay. There, representatives of nine Allied nations were present to accept the Japanese surrender.

Throughout the day of August 14th, anticipation mounted as people listened to the radio or called their local newspaper for the latest word. *The New York Times* announced that its revolving news sign in Times Square would remain on continuously during the wait. Many people lingered below the sign, knowing the biggest celebration of all would occur there. The waiting gave cities throughout the country time to announce their plans. Every town and city expected crowds larger than those for V-E Day.

Back in Times Square expectant crowds gathered. Why was it taking so long? Was this another false alarm? All eyes darted nervously toward the Times Tower news sign. Then at 7:03 p.m. these words flashed: OFFICIAL - TRUMAN ANNOUNCES JAPANESE SURRENDER. The crowd of 2 million people exploded with a roar that rolled across the city like a wave. In San Francisco, thousands of extra police and shore patrolmen were deployed within minutes of the President's announcement with the orders to "let the people do anything within reason, and keep property damage down." Across the Pacific, a soldier on Guam knew the end had come when he heard that the officer's club would be open until one o'clock. "Nothing but the end of the war would make our officer's club open up after hours." In London, Winston Churchill lit a new cigar and said, "At last the job is finished." In Washington, soldiers formed a human ring around the White House gates as the crowd shouted, "We want Harry!" President Truman finally came out and acknowledged them, saying, "This is a great day for democracy."

From the millions in Times Square to the hundreds in main streets everywhere, people celebrated the moment. Friends, relatives, and total strangers sang, danced, and embraced. They had worked, fought, sacrificed, and suffered together and now the end had come at last. The war was over.