

Carroll County Times "Carroll's Yesteryears" Articles

Carroll's Yesteryears
21 April 1991

Memories of another war's end
by Jay Graybeal

When President and Mrs. Harry S. Truman moved into the White House with a single truck load of furnishings on May 7, 1945, it took twenty trucks to remove the late President and Mrs. Roosevelt's possessions. On the following day Truman announced that the long awaited Victory-in-Europe Day had arrived, marking the unconditional surrender of Nazi Germany. In his V-E Day speech Truman praised the victory but girded the nation for the final battles:

"Our victory is but half-won. The West is free, but the East is still in bondage to the treacherous tyranny of the Japanese. When the last Japanese division has surrendered unconditionally then only will our fighting job be done."

Throughout the country Americans celebrated the defeat of fascism in Europe. Festivities at the White House were doubled since May 8 was also the President's sixty-first birthday. Although exuberant, the celebrants were tinged with the sadness the F.D.R. had not lived to see the victory. Carroll Countians greeted the news by ringing church bells at 9:15 a.m. Later area churches were filled to capacity for special afternoon and evening services.

The annual Westminster Memorial Day parade on May 30 took on a special significance. Parade Marshall John N. Magin formed a long line headed by military units followed by fraternal and civil organizations for the march from Belle Grove Square to the Westminster Cemetery. J. Albert Mitten presided over the program which included placing memorial wreaths, an address by the Rev. James A. Richards and singing America and the National Anthem. Company C fired a volley and played taps.

While Americans celebrated the victory in Europe the war raged in the Pacific. Local residents got a small taste of the war when Westminster hosted an infantry demonstration at the Municipal Playground on the evening of June 19. The event highlight was a mock battle in which American infantrymen attacked a simulated Japanese pillbox with bazookas, flame throwers, rifles, machine guns and mortars.

During the first week of August Truman made the decision to use atomic weapons against Japan. The Emperor agreed to an unconditional surrender on August 14. The nation erupted with wild Victory-over-Japan Day celebrations. Carroll Countians reacted with a deafening cacophony of noise. Sirens, whistles, church bells and horns signaled the end of the war. Tin cans, drums and other devices were tied to cars and trucks which paraded through Westminster until three o'clock in the morning. The Westminster Band entertained strollers from in front of the fire station.

Although many Americans knew that the Japanese surrender would not bring long lasting world peace, on that hot summer evening V-J Day meant that the war was finally over, that the men

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and women would soon be coming home, and that Pearl Harbor, Bataan and Corregidor had been avenged.

Photo credit: Courtesy of Historical Society of Carroll County

Photo caption: Westminster firefighter Floyd Gamber rides in the department ambulance on V.J. Day, August 16, 1945.