

1945 May 7-13

V-E Day in La Crosse County

The La Crosse Tribune V-E EXTRA

VOLUME XL, NUMBER 364 FOUR PAGES LA CROSSE, WISCONSIN MONDAY MORNING, May 7, 1945 PRICE FIVE CENTS

Germans Quit!

Joy Of Victory News Tempered By Realization Pacific Fight Remains

Yankees Free Blum, Schacht, Rev. Niemoller

A Proclamation

Charles Timm Is Liberated

Temper Joy, Goodland Plea



Here's General Eisenhower, who had the rare opportunity to put to use his own World War strategy, drawn up in Washington. He brought it to a close in Germany today—but he was not in on the signing.

Doenitz Orders Laying Down Of Arms By Nazis

REIMS, France (AP)—Germany surrendered unconditionally to the western Allies and Russia at 2:41 a. m. French time today.

(This was at 7:41 p. m., Central war time Sunday.)

The surrender took place at a little red school house which is the headquarters of Gen. Eisenhower.

It was also signed by General Ivan Susloparoff for Russia and by General Francois Sevez for France.

The surrender which brought the war in Europe to a formal end after five years, eight months and six days of bloodshed and destruction was signed for Germany by Col. Gen. Gustav-Jodl.

Jodl is the new chief of staff of the German army. General Eisenhower was not present at the signing, but immediately afterward Jodl and his fellow delegate, General Admiral Hans Georg Friedeburg, were received by the supreme commander.

They were asked sternly if they understood the surrender terms imposed upon Germany and if they would be carried out by Germany.

They answered yes.

LONDON (AP)—German broadcasts said today "All fighting German troops" had surrendered unconditionally.

An announcement on the wavelength of the Flensburg radio, which has been carrying German communiques and orders for several days, said:

"German men and women! The high command of the armed forces has today, at the order of Grand Admiral Doenitz, declared the unconditional surrender of all fighting German troops."

The announcement was attributed to the new German foreign minister, Count Schwerin von Krosigk.

Crowds gathered in the flag-decked street of London and crowded about microphones. Prime Minister Churchill had arranged to go on the BBC with the official Allied announcement whenever it was ready. It was announced last week that King George VI would broadcast to his empire at 9 p. m. (2 p. m. CWT, on V-E day.

Shortly after the broadcast attributed to von Krosigk, the German communique was broadcast on the Flensburg wavelength.

This said "bitter fighting continues in the area of Olmuetz" in Moravia where the Germans have been opposing the Russians. This communique usually has related the events of the previous day.

An order of the day attributed to Doenitz ordered German U-boats to cease fire.

"After almost six years struggle we have succumbed," the Krosigk broadcast said.

"Our sympathy firstly goes out to our soldiers. Nobody must deceive himself on the harshness of the terms which our enemies have imposed on the German people.

"Nobody must have any doubt that heavy sacrifices will be demanded from us in all spheres of life.

"We must take them upon us and stand loyally to our obligations." "On the other hand," the broadcast continued, "we must not despair. From the collapse in the past we must keep in mind one thing: The idea of our unity, the idea of front comradeship, the idea of assistance to each other."



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 August 31, 1941. Beginning of theebb is symbolized by the Battle of Stalingrad, whose loss is considered by many to be the turning point in the Fuhrer'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.

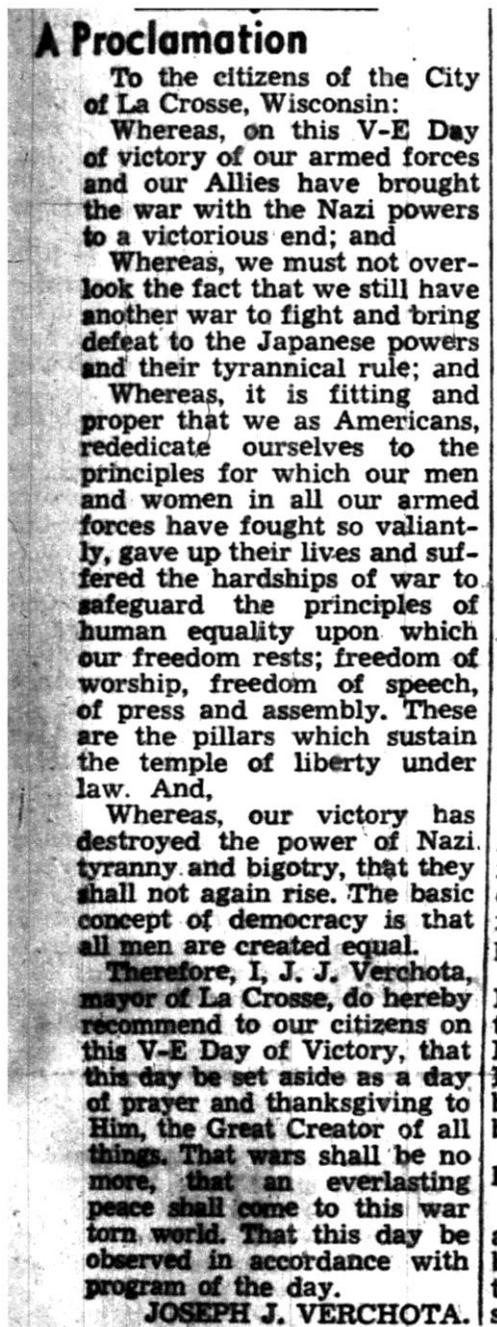
Keeler learned the truck had the same last name as the person hitting him with buckshot in 1918.

(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

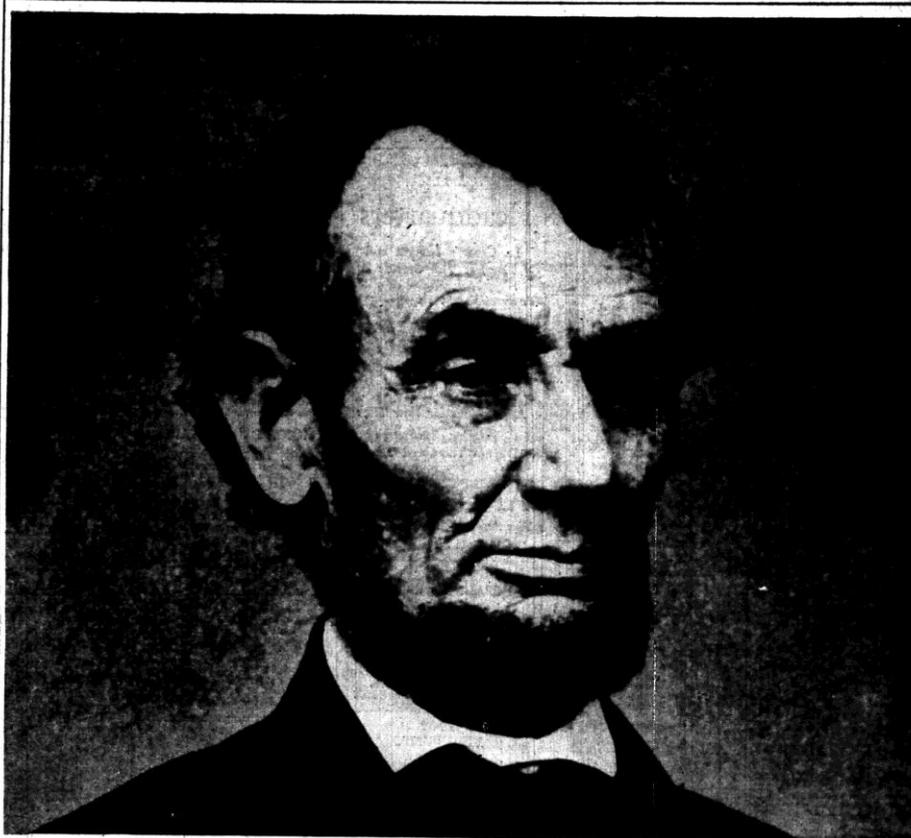
Celebrations were subdued by the grim reality that the job was just half done. The terrible battle for Okinawa had been going on for over a month with horrendous casualties on both sides. The Japanese gave no sign of giving up even as their Pacific empire was being hacked and sliced from the outside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

WRITTEN FOR 1863 . . . AND 1945

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



ABRAM 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 1270

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

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

Jeff Rand
 Adult Services Librarian
 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.