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Washburn Community Affairs:—

1940-1948:— The war ends

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After over three and 1/2 years of war, it all came to an end in the summer of 1945. That Germany would soon be defeated was obvious long before it formally surrendered on May 8, as Allied armies from the west and those of the Soviet Union from the east rampaged across the country, crushing any resistance with overwhelming power.

But Japan's collapse was unexpected. An immense force was being readied for the invasion of the home islands, and a long, drawn-out struggle against fanatical resistance by the entire population was anticipated with enormous American casualties. But the atomic bombs at Hiroshima and Nagasaki quickly led to Japan's surrender, on August 14.

In Washburn, Victory in Europe, or VE Day, passed quietly without celebration, for everyone realized that only half of the battle had been won.

The surrender of Japan, announced by President Harry S. Truman at 6 p.m. on Tuesday, August 14, meaning that the war was over at last, "set off a riotous nationwide celebration and Washburn was no exception to the national rule," observed the Times.

The bells of Christ Lutheran Church, St. Louis Catholic Church, and Walker School were rung, the city fire siren was sounded, and people honked automobile horns and beat on pots and pans, "creating a city-wide din."

Festivities in the lo-



Lars Larson

■ has been a guest columnist for The County Journal for many years.

cal taverns continued far into the night with every one "jammed with merry-makers, including many who had never been seen in them before but who apparently felt that VJ night was an exception."

The celebration continued through Wednesday, officially VJ Day, with the stores and the Du Pont plant closed, but died out on Thursday.

The official celebration of the end of the war was a Victory Homecoming in the summer of 1946, held from Wednesday, July 31, to Sunday, August 4. The five-day program included the usual events: sports and games; a water fight between the fire departments of Washburn and Ashland, which Washburn lost; dances and balls; bicycle and tricycle races; and a homecoming queen contest in which two girls were declared winners.

On Sunday morning, there was a homecom-

ing parade with floats, "little girls wheeling doll buggies," a unit of veterans, the Washburn High School band, the American Legion drum and bugle corps from Superior, and "various commercial floats and comedy entries."

The climax of the homecoming was a picnic at Memorial Park in the afternoon, attended by "Hundreds of homecomers and present Washburnites." A program featured "Two Washburn boys who 'made good' — Elmer N. Oistad, an insurance executive, who served as master of ceremonies, and Ellsworth Alvord, an attorney, who delivered the "principal address."

About the only special recognition in the homecoming received by the veterans, who had sacrificed the most to achieve the victory which inspired the event, was "a Jeep carrying some disabled veterans and a Red Cross worker" in the parade.

The final act of the war for Washburn was the burial, in 1948, of the remains of two of its soldier sons, Robert L. MacDonald and Stance Guski, who were killed in action on faraway, already forgotten battlefields.

From 1940 to 1945, 2,091 men, or 24% of the 1940 Bayfield County male population, served in the armed forces, along with 87 women, for a total of 2,178, which was 14% of the 1940 total county population.

Fifty-nine men were killed in action, or died from other causes,

including eight deaths among men from Mason and seven each from Oulu and Washburn.

World War II was a necessary and just war, fought to defeat a great evil that threatened to swallow the entire world. This view of World War II as a "good war" emerged as the war faded from immediate reality to a distant golden memory, becoming popular during the "bad war" in Vietnam.

But recent critical scholarship suggests that this portrayal of World War II as a "good war" for the United States is, at least in part, a myth. According to this perspective, while it is true that the war made the nation rich and powerful, it did not make it a better nation, for all of the old prejudices and injustices — against minorities, women, the poor, the socially unacceptable — remained largely intact after the war.

The people of Washburn probably shared this view of World War II as a "good war," a war to which they had made an important contribution of blood, treasure and hard work.

But while the war made the nation richer, it did not bring lasting prosperity to Washburn. Employment at the Du Pont plant, about 600 during the war, was reduced to less than 200 within a month after the war ended, while the burst of entrepreneurship along Bayfield Street soon faded.