

# OUR CENTURY

## 1945

### AT A GLANCE

#### Feller's pitching arm intact after war

Clevelanders knew normalcy had returned on Aug. 24. That's when Bob Feller traded his Navy uniform with its eight battle stars for an Indians uniform and walked out to the mound at the Stadium to face the league-leading Detroit Tigers. But could he still pitch? Forty-six thousand throats roared out the answer when he struck out the first batter, Jimmy Outlaw.

With two out, Doc Cramer tripled and Hank Greenberg came to bat. It was the first Cleveland appearance of the future Hall of Famer since his release from the Army, and the fans gave him a big hand. They cheered even louder when Feller struck him out. Feller went on to pitch a four-hitter, striking out 12. Pat Seerey hit a first-inning home run and the Tribe won 4-2. For the abbreviated season, Feller had a record of 5-2, including his sixth career one-hitter, but the Indians finished fifth, 11 games behind the Tigers.

The Postwar Planning Council, appointed by Mayor Frank Lausche, recommended that the city deal with its growing racial problem. Members were influenced by the 1943 Detroit race riot and by Gunnar Myrdal's 1943 book, "An American Dilemma," which argued that the country's treatment of black citizens no longer could be reconciled with the democratic ideals proclaimed by wartime leaders.

In February, Law Director Thomas A. Burke and Councilman William O. Walker introduced legislation to establish a Community Relations Board.

Councilman Leonard Franks, from the Broadway area, called the board "Frankenstein, a monster that will kill you. Such a board," he protested, "will make Cleveland race-conscious." He was the lone opponent as Cleveland created the first official city agency in the country dealing with intergroup relations. Burke himself was chairman, with Dr. D.R. Sharpe, executive secretary of the Cleveland Baptist Association, as vice president. Frank Baldaou, director of industrial relations for National Smelting Co., was named executive director.

The board quickly tackled complaints about the inability of black lawyers to rent offices downtown and police inattention to attacks on Jewish men and black youths.

It was a big year in Cleveland sports. The Barons had the best record in the American Hockey League, and in April defeated the Hershey Bears for the Calder Cup. Tommy Burlington, Lou Trudel and coach Bun Cook were first-team All Stars, with Les Cunningham, Danny Sprout and Dick Adolph on the second team. The Cleveland Buckeyes dominated the Negro American League with a 53-16 record and swept the Homestead Grays to win the World Series. They were led by catcher-manager Quincy Troupe and outfielder Sam Jethroe, who led the league with a .393 batting average.

The Rams were back in action after a two-year hiatus, led by a sensational rookie quarterback named Bob Waterfield. On Dec. 15, they won their first National Football League championship, 15-14, over the Washington Redskins. Waterfield threw touchdown passes to Jim Benton and Jim Gillette, but the deciding points came early in the game on a fluke play.

Sammy Baugh, the Redskins' quarterback, attempted a pass from his end zone and hit the goal post, which was then on the goal line. Baugh fell on the loose ball in the end zone, but it went as a two-point safety.

More than 80,000 packed the Stadium in November when Notre Dame and Navy played to a 6-6 tie, and a week later, Cathedral Latin defeated St. Ignatius, 13-7, before 56,000 in The Plain Dealer Charity Game. Fans looked forward to seeing two pro teams in 1946 — the Rams and a team in the new All-America Conference. It would be named the Browns in honor of its coach, Paul Brown, who had led Ohio State to a national championship in 1942 before entering the Navy.

Burke never had run for office when, at the beginning of the year, he succeeded Frank Lausche, who had been elected governor. In November, Burke won a full term by a record 65,000 votes over Councilman Ray C. Miller (no relation to former Mayor Ray T. Miller). He went on to win three more terms and when Robert A. Taft died in 1953, Burke was named by Gov. Lausche to take Taft's place in the U.S. Senate. Another ex-mayor moved up in September when President Harry Truman named Sen. Harold Burton to the U.S. Supreme Court.

Nathan Weisenberg, described by police as "czar of the slot machine racket in Cleveland," was murdered by a blast from a shotgun as he sat in a car near his home in Cleveland Heights. The wife of Louis Dolin, "widely known gambling figure," was slain in her home. Police Chief George Matowitz, widely criticized as ineffective, was suspended by Burke but exonerated by the Civil Service Commission.

#### Celebrants take to the streets; postwar anxieties begin to rise

By Fred McGunagle

The announcement came from the White House Aug. 14 at 7 p.m. By 7:45, Euclid Ave. was jammed. "Traffic on the street was almost at a standstill," The Plain Dealer reported. "Automobiles barely moved, and every one blasted with its horn. Confetti and paper streamers came swirling out of buildings. . . . Whistles blew, until downtown Cleveland resembled a madhouse."

V-E Day — victory in Europe — had caused little celebrating in May; there was a war still to be won. But this was V-J Day — victory over Japan. The war was over. The boys were coming home.

For the first time in four years, Clevelanders went "joyriding" — including Garfield Heights safety forces. "The suburb's fire trucks and police cars heralded the surrender news by racing through the streets with sirens screaming wildly."

But the main throng was downtown, where vendors selling noise-makers were surrounded by eager buyers. "Convertibles full of cheering people circled the streets. Scores of Kroger employees passed The Plain Dealer building riding on top of a huge truck and shouting like all get-out."

Public Square was impassable; streetcars were blocked by cars and pedestrians. Alarmed birds circled wildly above the noise.

Bars were ordered to close as soon as the word came, but Clevelanders didn't need alcohol to celebrate. Members of a Parma Veterans of Foreign Wars post snake-danced through downtown hotels. Union Terminal, The Plain Dealer reported, "seemed filled with kiss-minded military men." One downtown building was an exception to the noise: "St. John Catholic Cathedral was so crowded it was almost impossible to get inside."

The celebrating continued past midnight, into the official V-J Day proclaimed by President Harry S. Truman. Truman, who had taken office when Franklin D. Roosevelt died in April, declared the following two days national holidays. Gasoline rationing ended. For the first time in four years, Clevelanders said, "Fill it up" and headed for the country.

Most night-shift workers got a five-hour head start on the two-day holiday, dropping their tools when they



PLAIN DEALER FILE

Jubilant celebrants on Public Square the night it was announced Japan surrendered.

heard the news. Many joined the celebrators with mixed feelings: They knew their jobs were about to end.

More than half of the gross national product had been war production, with Cleveland the fourth-largest defense city. The Navy canceled \$6 billion in contracts within hours of the war's end. The Cleveland Ordnance District ordered a 95 percent reduction in contracts.

Truman's industrial reconversion director predicted unemployment would reach 5 million within three months and might be 8 million in 1946. Cleveland was expected to face 120,000 layoffs, nearly one-third of the work force. The Ohio Bureau of Unemployment Compensation announced it would expand its Cleveland office. The city relief division braced for a flood of applicants.

Truman ordered an immediate cut in the draft from 80,000 men a month to 50,000, and said 5.5 million servicemen would return to civilian life — and civilian jobs — by 1946. Nationally, layoffs reached 600,000 before the week was over. The U.S. Civil Service Commission announced veterans and war widows would be given

preference for government jobs. Teenage factory workers were told to go back to school.

The "return to normalcy" after World War I had included a wrenching recession and civil disturbances. Americans remembered all too well what life had been like before war contracts lifted the nation out of the Depression of the 1930s. Truman faced the situation in his otherwise joyful announcement of the war's end. "The emergency is as great," he said, "as it was on Dec. 7, 1941."

By Sept. 11, the U.S. Employment Service reported that 75,000 to 80,000 Clevelanders had been laid off, but 15,000 to 20,000 had returned to work or found other jobs. Working wives returned to being full-time homemakers. War plants quickly converted to producing the automobiles, appliances and spare parts, for which there was a four-year pent-up demand. Home-building boomed.

There was another pent-up demand: for raises by workers who had been denied them by the War Manpower Board. Those who had escaped layoffs found their paychecks reduced by an end to overtime while prices continued to creep up.

#### The war's toll

About 160,000 Clevelanders served in their country's armed forces in World War II. Nearly 4,000 of them died in action. Peak strength of U.S. military forces, reached in July 1945, was 12.4 million; a total of 16.4 million served at one time or another. Of those, 292,000 were killed. Worldwide war deaths were 15 million military and 38 million civilians.

Some unions had staged illegal walkouts even before the end of the war. In January, Illuminating Co. workers struck, threatening war plants, streetcar service and food in refrigerators. Mayor Thomas A. Burke appealed to Washington for help. The Army took over the company and the Selective Service threatened to draft the strikers. They went back after 20 hours, promising no more strikes for the duration. Three weeks before V-J Day, Republic Steel strikers briefly shut down three furnaces.

With the war over, strikes increased. Projectionists shut down 73 movie theaters in September. A Greyhound bus strike stranded commuters in November. Nationally, the number of days lost to strikes rose from 8,700 in 1944 to 38,000 in 1945.

Yet as the year ended, the city and the country were making the conversion to a peacetime economy with surprising ease. Veterans were returning steadily. Clevelanders looked forward to the scary but exciting "Postwar Era."

McGunagle is a Cleveland freelance writer.



PLAIN DEALER FILE

This woman, identified as Betty Davis, reads the news of V-J Day with a curious onlooker.



PLAIN DEALER FILE

Traffic was "jammed on Euclid Ave. . . as thousands of Clevelanders celebrated the official Japanese surrender. Happy paraders climbed aboard bumpers and running boards of the procession of automobiles that crawled along at a snail's pace," according to the Associated Press.

#### LOOKING AT A YEAR

**Jan. 27:** Soviet troops liberate the Auschwitz death camp.

**Feb. 11:** Franklin Roosevelt, Winston Churchill and Joseph Stalin meet in Yalta to discuss postwar Europe.

**Feb. 14:** Allied air strikes level Dresden.

**Feb. 23:** As the bombing of Tokyo intensifies, American troops capture Iwo Jima.

**March 23:** American troops cross the Rhine River.

**April 12:** Roosevelt dies. Harry Truman becomes president.

**April 28:** Mussolini is executed in

Italy.

**April 30:** Hitler commits suicide.

**May 7:** Germany surrenders.

**June 26:** Fifty nations form the United Nations.

**Aug. 6:** An atomic bomb ravages Hiroshima. Two days later, the U.S. drops an atom bomb on Nagasaki.

**Aug. 15:** Japan surrenders.

**Nov. 20:** The Nuremberg war crimes trial begins in Germany.

**Born:** Eric Clapton, George Lucas.

**Died:** Gen. George Patton, Adolf Hitler, Benito Mussolini, German physicist Johannes Geiger.