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PASADENA "A hospital is one hell of a place to be in when a war ends."

That was the majority opinion of the men ranging from private to two-star general who found themselves, on the day of Japan's surrender, patients in the Army hospital which was formerly the swank Vista del Arroyo Hotel. There was bedlam in the hospital, according to Lt. Helen Span, ANC, of Savannah, Ga., when the radio at 4 p. m. brought the official word from the White House.

"They went wild," Lt. Span said of her patients. "They slid down banisters, they chinned themselves on the hospital's chandeliers. The remark most of them made was, 'No Pacific trip now!'"

WAC Sgt. Rayetta Johnson, a former San Diego policewoman, was on MP duty at the hospital's door when the news broke. She held the door open for Maj. Gen. Thompson Lawrence, for the past two years commanding general of the Replacement Training Center, Camp Roberts, Calif., and Mrs. Lawrence. The general, carrying a barracks bag and a suitcase, was entering the hospital as a patient. Leaving off the "sir," Sgt. Johnson said to the general, "It's all over."

The general dropped his bags and grabbed Sgt. Johnson; he and his wife told her that they had two sons in the Pacific.

The hospital rang with shouts, and convalescing patients scurried through the corridors, their maroon robes trailing after them. "All I want," a nurse commented, "is a discharge and some nylons."

"Wotta place to be," moaned a staff sergeant who had been a prisoner in Germany for several months after his B-17 exploded in a raid on Munich. He had come home all in one piece, got his furlough and then banged himself up riding a motorcycle.

Passes were hard to get at the hospital, surrender or no surrender, but the WAC lieutenant who was officer of the day slyly said that as soon as the news came in she had resigned herself to a large number of AWOLs and to much smuggling-in of liquor by visitors. Typical of the pass-less patients was Pvt. Ted Chuinski of Chicago, back from 14 months in Europe. He sat dejectedly on the front steps, calling out to passing GIs to lend him some clothes. "I couldn't get far in this goddam bathrobe," he said glumly.

—Sgt. LARRY McMANUS