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The War Was Over

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IN the dayroom of the 108th General Hospital, a few boys were playing checkers, not listening to the radio. The radio was announcing the official end of the war.

There were two soldiers sitting right next to the radio, listening very intently, as if they wanted to make sure they got every word.

After Churchill had finished speaking, I asked one of the soldiers how he felt about it. He turned around to stare with wide-open eyes and then his words came out so slowly as if it was painful for him to talk, as if he had to drag every word out separately. He said:

"I have no feeling at all."

Then he pointed to his head. "I got hit on the head with a dud," he said. "I don't remember too much. I was with the First Division. I don't even remember what battalion. I don't even remember what my rank is. I think I'm a T-5 but I'm not sure. Isn't that funny?"

The other soldier was Pvt. Ernest Kuhn of Chicago. He had just been liberated after five months in a Nazi PW camp. He still had some shrapnel in his throat.

"I listened to Churchill talk and I kept saying to myself that I was still alive. The war was over and I was still alive. And I thought of all the boys in the 28th Division band who were with me in the Ardennes who are dead now. We used to be a pretty good band."

The nurse told how all the patients crowded to the balconies the night before to watch the planes drop the flares and how some of the planes spotted the hospital red cross and all the crowded balconies and how they came back and buzzed the hospital again and again, wiggling their wings, dropping so many flares that it looked like daylight. Then somebody started singing "God Bless America," and everybody joined in and some of the soldiers looked like they were crying.

In one of the wards, Pvt. Junior H. Powell of the 78th Division told how he felt:

"It's a great thing all right," he said, "but I kinda wish it'd all happened a month ago."

Then he pointed to his missing leg.