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V-WHITSUN

1946

The Air Ministry's fine weather forecast lay inches deep in London gutters sending V-Parade celebrators helter-skelter for shelter as Wetsunide dissolved into the great washout that spoilt the afternoon of Victory Day.

There was going to be Folk Banding and Ballet on the grass with open air singing thrown in, but the weather left them all high and anything but dry.

Unique occasion of the evening was a dinner given to 157 British and Empire V.C.'s. Holders of the World's most coveted decoration for bravery they and their wives were feasted and honoured. From veterans of the Boer War down to the Youngsters of the Last, they were united in the Brotherhood of the Red Ribbon.

And then, at ten at night, the dark tide-swollen waters of the Thames saw the pageantry of the Royal Barge as it passed from Chelsea to come alongside the landing stage at Westminster.

Crowds lined the floodlit stretches of London's waterfront, as the Royal Party went ashore to take their places at the window of the Lord Chancellor's apartment. From there, they were to watch the most spectacular display of fireworks, floodlighting and many-coloured brilliance that Britain had every seen.

And then the pop, bang and rattle of the show. Rockets by the thousand, red, white and green, went up over a wildly rejoicing city. The last time London saw skies like these, shell-bursts provided the light - and searchlights were not used in fun.

Familiar landmarks have a new beauty in the glare of the floodlights.

From the bonfires in the little streets to the massive illuminations of the river, this was you on Victory night. You'd had the parade and you'd dodged the rain and from then on, it was all aboard for an all-night celebration.

Crowds took over the West End. Magnet for the roadside revellers, it challenged V-E night for crush and gaiety.

Illuminated ships and barges gave old Father Thames something new to roll along with.

Millions at play. Good humour, laughter, queues and worries forgotten for a few hours with a never-ending galaxy of colour. Victory marchers, watchers, Mr. and Mrs. and the Kids - in a hats off, knees-up fling under the blazing Victory Sky.

For the seaside towns it was Whitsun fun with Victory flavouring. South coast sun-seekers got a chilly reception. Ice cream was there, but finding no takers in weather that called for lashings of hot tea. And just to make mother feel at home it turned out more of a Q-Holiday than a V one.

Ramsgate, Rottingdean, Hove, Brighton - it was the same story. It may have been near Midsummer Day but the thermometer hadn't heard of it. Only warm spots in the South were the pleasure parks and frillaceous stargrounds.

Peace, it's wonderful.

They say the sea but it didn't go to their heads. Up to the ankles was enough and the inevitable holiday map was there to prove they did go in.

Sea winds flapped the empty deck chairs in a week-end that brought more gooseflesh than sunburn. For the Southerners, V-Whitsun was wild, wet and windy.

Prize-winner in the weather stakes was Glasgow where crowds packed Kelvin Grove Park for a sample of the open-air dancing that Lendener's missed.

Local concert parties collected their biggest ever audiences. Coloured coons were missing but the banjo rattled up the seaside atmosphere.

Still holiday-bound, Pathe took the high road that leads to Loch Lomond. Whitsun there was quiet and bracing, with steamer-trips bringing the beauty of the Loch to town-tired folk from Scotland's big cities.

From the henny, benny banks, the vacation picture goes to the heart of every Scotoman. And for the lads and lasses of Lancashire there's always bounding, bustling, Blackpool where the Tower looks down on shrimps, chips and winkles and a fifty-year tradition of giving a "right good time." In these parts the hand that guides the cradle holds the rock.

Southport was well in the bad-weather belt. This was Whitsun on the Lake.

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While V-celebrators packed London's hub of Empire, Manchester's Fiscoadilly took time out for a holiday rest. Only parader at the Genstaph was a veteran with every medal since Waterloo. News of food cuts and favoured Germans scumped the jam off the bread ration, and plans for synthetic beer knocked the froth right off the holiday spirit. We may have to put up with No this and No that - but we're not going to pretend to be pleased about it. Mr. Chad puts the situation in a nutshell.

*W. A. G. R. H.*