

LIFE'S REPORTS

REPORT FROM THE NATION

by ROGER BUTTERFIELD

The following article has been condensed from special reports that were written by 25 "Time" and LIFE correspondents, telling about what people said, thought and did all over the U. S. during the month of January 1944.

The first weeks of 1944 saw a wave of unseasonably warm weather sweep across almost all the U. S. It was like June in central Iowa; bees buzzed over the fields and houseflies settled on the farmers' window sills. Some people actually cut hay in January, and in Waukon, Iowa, a blue racer snake came out and sunned himself in the village park. Kentucky had the warmest January on record, accompanied by bursting maple buds and hyacinth tips pushing up above the soil. Montana had only a little snow and the thermometer rose as high as 57° in Minnesota. A happy householder in Madison, Wis. boasted that he had burned only three tons of coal. The abnormal lack of snow threatened a water shortage in Nebraska, but toward the end of January a light fall broke the long dry spell and also put an end to the gorgeous red-dust sunsets that Nebraskans had been enjoying. All over the country it got colder as the calendar moved on into February, and the people realized that spring was still far off.

During those warm early weeks of the year people back home in the U. S. talked about a great many things: about politics and Willkie and Dewey and Roosevelt, and about the Japanese atrocities and how they couldn't buy whisky or Camel cigarets or little girls' rubber panties, in some places, and about the change-over of factories to peacetime production. People in Louisville heard of one plant that got permission from Washington to make 30,000 minnow buckets and another that was allowed to start 250,000 new compacts. Detroit auto makers suddenly blossomed out with a series of statements indicating that if the war ended at noon tomorrow, they could start the new cars rolling right away. Benjamin F. Fairless, the president of U. S. Steel, made a speech in Pittsburgh warning that city it might lose out in the postwar battle for steel supremacy. There was lots of prosperity everywhere. The Mississippi State Legislature was salting away \$21,000,000 to wipe out the state debt completely and in Madison, Wis. the War Chest announced it had saved \$204,330 for "postwar charities." In Portland, Ore. two women fainted and had to be carried away in ambulances when they saw the size of their March 15 income-tax payments.



Already the wartime look of the country was changing in many ways. Over Seattle new Boeing B-17 bombers left off their coats of camouflage paint and flew over the city with the sun glinting from their silver sides. War plants were closing and even being torn down; near Rosemount, Minn., wrecking crews tackled the multi-million dollar Gopher Ordnance works with orders to level it to the ground. Ordnance plants closed in Geneva and Williamsport, Pa., St. Louis and elsewhere. Indianapolis went off the critical manpower-shortage list and in Oklahoma migratory workers again began applying for relief in numbers, as jobs seemed to grow scarcer. In Mississippi, where 350,000 soldiers and sailors were training a year ago, there were less than 100,000 left. The rest were overseas or on their way. But the pressure for fighting men seemed greater than ever; in many cities the draft of pre-Pearl Harbor fathers was the main topic of conversation. President Roosevelt's call for a universal service draft, however, caused almost no excitement; people in Georgia, according to one reporter, talked about it as "something that came out in the papers, like the Bolivian revolution."

The long-delayed reports on Japanese atrocities against U. S. prisoners in the Philippines were the sensation of the month. People walked around cursing the Japs in a boiling, seething, frustrated rage. But a considerable number thought the news had been released late in order to help the Fourth War Loan drive. People said that in New Haven and Minneapolis and Harrodsburg, Ky., one of the small American towns that lost a whole national guard company on Bataan. The Harrodsburg relatives said they just couldn't believe the stories at all—that even the Japs weren't that bad. They couldn't admit it, even to themselves. And there was talk that the loss of

Bataan and the way the prisoners' story had been handled would affect the way some people vote in 1944, although no one came right out and said it was a political issue. In New Orleans unprintable atrocity stories involving Red Cross nurses circulated by word of mouth, and in Arizona people gathered at the gates of Japanese internment camps to "demonstrate." A blonde stenographer in Seattle said: "I'll tell you what the girls in business say. They say kill the little yellow bastards, each and every one. Kill the big ones, kill the little ones, kill the medium-sized ones." But out in the Marshall Islands, where Americans actually laid hands on Japanese prisoners for the first time after the atrocities were published, they didn't kill them—they fed them and gave them medical attention.

Farmers in the Far West wanted more prisoners (not Japs) to come and work for them and ease the labor shortage. In California, Italian soldiers were happily picking oranges in the shadow of Henry Kaiser's new Fontana Steel Plant. Montana heard it was getting 7,000 prisoners for this year's wheat and beet crops. It looked like another great bumper year in the Middle West breadbasket, but most farmers expected lower prices for hogs and corn. Oklahoma wheat bins which have been holding a surplus for years, suddenly stood empty because of the demand for grain feed, and flour mills had to close down for lack of wheat. There were all kinds of food available in Iowa, lots of butter and meat and canned goods; outside Cedar Rapids the Fruchauf Brothers, Roy and Harvey, who have made millions building truck trailers, went into the hog-raising business in a big way, with an air-conditioned hog house that is supposed to be the biggest and fanciest in the world.

In cities like New Orleans and Pittsburgh and Jersey City people had to worry about garbage collectors' strikes, and in most cities this kind of municipal service was deteriorating because of a labor shortage. Women war workers made news in several places; in Oklahoma City Mrs. Amy Lee Jones gave birth to a baby girl 11 hours after coming off the swing shift, and in Seattle a girl aircraft worker got 39 orchids from her husband, a marine who hasn't seen her for two years. It was the 39th month they had been married. Up in Boston a judge refused to turn over three children to their mother in a divorce case unless she promised to quit her war-plant job and take care of them.