

Truman gave the signal, and a White House usher opened the office door. Newspaper reporters charged through. "Good morning," Truman said, rising from his seat. "I sure made you all get up this morning, didn't I? [More laughter.] Yes, indeed . . . Still at it, I see . . . Still coming, I see . . ."

The room was jammed tight. A voice shouted, "All in," and Truman began his remarks.

"I want to start off by reading you a little statement," he said. "This is a solemn but glorious hour. General Eisenhower informs me that the forces of Germany have surrendered to the United Nations. The flags of freedom fly all over Europe. It's celebrating my birthday, too — today, too."

Voices shouted, "Happy birthday, Mr. President!"

Truman hushed the crowd. "Our rejoicing is sobered and subdued," he continued, "by a supreme consciousness of the terrible price we have paid to rid the world of Hitler and his evil band. Let us not forget, my fellow Americans, the sorrow and the heartache which today abide in the homes of so many of our neighbors."

The president gave a clear message to the enemy: "We are going to be in a position where we can turn the greatest war machine in the history of the world loose on the Japanese." He demanded unconditional surrender of the enemy in the Far East.

When he finished, the news reporters made a mad scramble for the door. "Did you ever see such a rush!" Senator McKellar said to the president. Merriman Smith of the United Press — one of the nation's most revered Washington correspondents — tripped and fell to the floor, fracturing his arm. But still the stampede continued. Truman headed to the Diplomatic Reception Room, where he was going to read his statement again over the radio.

"Our victory is but half-won," he said. "The West is free, but the East is still in bondage to the treacherous tyranny of the Japanese." Millions heard these words, huddled around their radios. Among them, in her home in Hyde Park, New York, Eleanor Roosevelt listened in. "I can almost hear my husband's voice make that announcement, for I heard him repeat it so often," she wrote of this moment in her newspaper column. She could not celebrate, for Americans were still fighting and dying for the cause. "Some of my own sons," she wrote, "with millions of others, are still in danger."