

39 April in Georgia



Much wartime propaganda, like this American postcard, was meant to reassure the troops, and the folks at home, that their efforts were succeeding and the war was worth fighting.

The madmen who run Japan and Germany refuse to give up. They talk of leading their nations in a fight to the death. Terrible fire-bombs are dropping on Tokyo and Dresden. Hundreds of thousands of people are dying. Just as a fist

squeezes its contents, so British, American, and Russian troops are squeezing Germany. In the Pacific theater we are making plans to invade Japan. Everyone expects that invasion to be bloodier than the one in Normandy.

The Allies will win this war—that now seems clear—but the German and Japanese leaders are making it very difficult. Like ancient rulers who had their followers killed and buried in their tombs, these leaders seem determined to kill their own people.

The president knows of something that might end the war quickly. It is that secret weapon that almost no one else knows about. Partly because of this, he feels he can relax and catch up on some paperwork. He is exhausted. He has just turned 63, but he looks much older. The war has been a terrible strain: he has traveled around the world, he has run for a fourth term

Where is Tokyo? Where is Dresden?

This statue seems to be contemplating the firestorm set off in Dresden, Germany, by Allied bombing in February 1945.





The exhaustion brought on by the war years shows plainly in FDR's face as he arrives in the Crimea for the Yalta conference. He was a sick man.

On the island of Okinawa, the U.S. Army suffers some 80,000 casualties. Japanese losses total 120,000.

Roosevelt is planning to attend a Jefferson's birthday celebration. Do you remember another famous party for that occasion? It was attended by Andrew Jackson and John Calhoun. (See book 6 of *A History of US* for details.)

as president, he has been active as commander in chief of the armed services, he has been an inspiring leader. He needs to take it easy for a few days. He makes plans to go to Warm Springs, Georgia. He first visited Warm Springs years earlier, when he was recovering from polio. The waters are healing. He has been back many times, and has grown to love the slow-paced gentleness of the South.

In Georgia, wild violets are blooming; so are purple-blue wisteria and sweet-smelling honeysuckle. It is springtime—

April 12, 1945—and, at Warm Springs, cooks are preparing a picnic. The smells of barbecued beef and chicken fill the air. As the president works, an artist sits nearby, making sketches for a watercolor portrait.

Almost exactly 80 years earlier, another American president had decided to relax and go to the theater, knowing that a terrible war was coming to an end.

Like that other president, Roosevelt is concerned about the peace that is to come. He wants this war to have meaning. Soon after the war began, he met with Winston Churchill and signed a document called the *Atlantic Charter*. It says that after the war, nations will be free to choose their own forms of government. That is called "self-determination." Roosevelt wants to end the old, before-the-war imperialist ways. Then, a few European nations ruled much of the world. Sometimes they ruled well; sometimes not well. To Roosevelt, that doesn't matter now. People should be free to govern themselves. Great Britain still controls India and Burma. France expects to regain control of Indochina (which includes Vietnam). Japan has attempted to become an empire. The United States rules the Philippine Islands.

Roosevelt thinks imperialism—even well-meaning imperialism—is wrong. He will show the world: America has no desire for other lands. We will begin by granting independence to the Philippines. He is planning to go to the independence ceremonies himself.

Russia is a worry. The Russian people have fought magnificently. They have been brave allies. But they aren't a free people. Stalin is a dictator. Winston Churchill believes that Stalin cannot be trusted.



The president on the porch of his home in Warm Springs, known as the Little White House. It is still there.

WAR, PEACE, AND ALL THAT JAZZ

Roosevelt is beginning to have worries about Stalin, too.

At Warm Springs he works on a speech to be given at the dinner to honor Jefferson's memory. This is part of what Roosevelt writes:

The once powerful, malignant Nazi state is crumbling. The Japanese war lords are receiving, in their own homeland, the retribution for which they asked when they attacked Pearl Harbor.

But the mere conquest of our enemies is not enough.

We must go on to do all in our power to conquer the doubts and the fears, the ignorance and the greed, which made this horror possible...If civilization is to survive, we must cultivate the science of human relationships—the ability of all peoples, of all kinds, to live together and work together, in the same world, at peace....

The work, my friends, is peace. More than an end of this war—an end to the beginnings of all wars. Yes, an end, forever, to this impractical, unrealistic settlement of the differences between governments by the mass killing of peoples.

The president is sitting in a leather armchair; he turns to the artist. "We've got just 15 minutes more," he says. Some cousins of his and a friend are in the room. They are quiet. The president is studying papers. The 15 minutes are almost up when he raises a hand to his temple. "I have a terrific headache," he says. They are the last words he will ever speak.



The August 1941 meeting between Roosevelt and Churchill aboard the U.S.S. *Augusta* that paved the way for America's entry into World War II.

Malignant means "harmful."
Retribution is "punishment."

Our only hope will lie in the frail web of understanding of one person for the pain of another.

—JOHN DOS PASSOS, DECEMBER 1940

What do you think Dos Passos means by that? Do you agree?

The last family photo taken before Roosevelt's death: FDR, Eleanor, and their 13 grandchildren at the White House on Inauguration Day, 1945.

