

VE Day

What is VE Day?

VE Day stands for Victory in Europe Day, and is celebrated on the 8th May. It marked an end to the six years of suffering, misery but also endurance that defined the Second World War in Europe. Although it was not the end of the Second World War, it was the end of conflict in Europe.

How did it happen?

Hitler was the dictator of Germany, who had instigated the Second World War. After Hitler's death on 30th April 1945, the German President of the Third Reich, Grand Admiral Donitz, ordered that General Jodl go to the American General Eisenhower's Head Quarters based in France and surrender to the Western and Russian officers, agreeing to all their demands, on the 7th May.

The Announcement

The British people began celebrating as soon as they heard the news, although no official announcement had been made. Bell ringers in the churches around the country, were put on standby ready to ring out the good news when an official notice was given.

Joseph Stalin, the leader of the Russian's Communist Party, was reluctant to announce the surrender but the British Prime Minister, Winston Churchill, did not want to give Stalin the satisfaction of holding up what everyone already knew anyway! Churchill made the following announcement at 19.40, 7th May:



"In accordance with arrangements between three great powers, tomorrow, Tuesday, will be treated as Victory in Europe Day and will be regarded as a holiday."



The Effects of War

In Britain, during the war in Europe, half a million homes were destroyed, thousands of civilians killed and millions of lives had been disrupted.



Bring on the Celebrations!

People took to decorating the streets with banners, bunting and ribbons. They organised impromptu street parties where neighbours shared food, which was still rationed, and listened to the wireless news broadcasts.

King George VI and the Queen appeared eight times on the balcony of Buckingham Palace, and their two daughters, Princess Margaret and Princess Elizabeth – who is now Her Majesty the Queen – mingled amongst the crowds! Churchill told the crowds, "This is your victory!"

Churchill attended a celebratory lunch with King George VI then addressed the nation, reminding them that although Japan still

had to be defeated, Great Britain "May allow ourselves a brief period of rejoicing. God Save the King!"

The End of the VE Day

At 21:00, King George VI made a final broadcast to the nation. Buckingham Palace was lit up in floodlights for the first time since the start of the war, and two searchlights formed a V, the sign of peace, above St Paul's Cathedral in London.

All the illuminations were turned off the next day.



Although everyone was relieved that the war in Europe had ended, for many the celebrations would have been bittersweet. The loss of many loved ones, either fighting abroad, captured by the enemy or those who died in air raids, meant that many people felt a certain anti-climax after the celebrations.

Questions

1. Which negative words have been used to describe some of the effects of the fighting in Europe?

2. What prompted the German surrender, and why do you think this was?

3. Explain what it means when it says the bell ringers were "put on stand-by".

4. What were some of the lasting effects on Britain, from the war?

5. Explain how Stalin affected Churchill.

6. What word has been used that means 'unplanned', and how does it relate to the sentence it is used in?

7. Explain what the paragraph in italics is about.

8. Why do you think it unusual that the princesses 'mingled with the crowd'?

9. What two things did Churchill do on VE Day?

10. How do you think people felt on the 9th May? Explain your thoughts.
