

VE Day

Victory in Europe Day, otherwise known as VE Day, is the day that marks the end of the Second World War. On 7th May 1945, Germany **surrendered** to the Allied Forces, which included Britain, Russia and France. The day after this, the first VE Day was held. It is now celebrated by many countries in Europe and worldwide.

What Led up to the First VE Day?

By April of 1945, the German military had lost their leader. German forces were weakened and their defeat was approaching. Supreme Allied Commander General Eisenhower, the chief of the Allied forces, accepted the full surrender of all German forces on 7th May at 2:41 a.m. Germany's surrender was expected and many people in Britain were waiting for the news. Winston Churchill, the Prime Minister of Britain, announced that the war had ended in Europe over the wireless (a type of old-fashioned radio) on 7th May. A news **bulletin** interrupted regular programmes to announce that the following day would be called Victory in Europe Day and would be a national holiday.

What Happened on the First VE Day?

On 8th May, there were many celebrations around the country. Many festivities were organised, including parades, church services and street parties. People danced in the streets and shared what food they could. Pub hours were extended, dance halls were open until midnight and bonfires and fireworks were lit up and down the country.



"This is your victory!"
- Winston Churchill

Did You Know...?

New Zealanders celebrate VE Day on the 9th May, due to the time difference.

Winston Churchill's Address

Winston Churchill played an important role in the defeat of the German forces. He made a national broadcast at 3 p.m. on VE Day and later appeared on the balcony of the Ministry of Health building. He made an improvised speech to the thousands of cheering people below.

Royal Celebration

Around 20,000 **revellers** went to Buckingham Palace to catch a glimpse of the King. Many people were dressed in red, white and blue. King George VI and his daughters Princess Elizabeth and Princess Margaret came out on the balcony to greet the crowds. It is believed that Princess Elizabeth, now The Queen, secretly joined the crowds outside and chanted and shouted for the King. She often says that VE Day 1945 was one of the most "memorable days of her life."



What Happened after VE Day?

Although VE Day meant peace in Europe, it was not the end of the war. Many people were still sent to fight in Japan, where the conflict continued until August. The day Japan surrendered is marked by VJ Day. It is celebrated on 15th August in the UK. Even after the war, life continued to be a struggle in Britain. Many people were deeply affected by the terrible loss of life. War was also very expensive so the country had to rebuild and recover slowly.

How Do People Celebrate VE Day Today?

VE Day is an important celebration. It is a day where we take the opportunity to remember all of the people that sacrificed their lives or were badly injured during the war. It is also a chance for us to celebrate the day that brought peace to Europe after a long and difficult six-year conflict. All over the country, people hang up red, white and blue bunting and hold street parties and parades to mark the event.

Glossary

bulletin: A short official statement or broadcast summary of news

revellers: People who are enjoying themselves in a lively and noisy way.

surrender: To stop fighting and admit you have been beaten.

Questions

1. Which country surrendered in 1945? Tick one.

- ☐ Britain
- ☐ Germany
- ☐ France
- ☐ Russia

2. What day is VE Day celebrated in New Zealand? Tick one.

- ☐ 2nd September
- ☐ 8th May
- ☐ 9th May
- ☐ 15th August

3. How was the first Victory in Europe day announced?

4. Read the section titled **Winston Churchill's Address**.

Find and copy a word that means the same as 'on-the-spot'.

5. How did people celebrate on the first VE Day? Write **two** ways.

6. Why do you think people were expecting Germany to surrender?

7. What do you think 'VJ Day' is short for? Explain your reasoning.

8. Summarise what life was like after VE Day.
