

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. The event is celebrated by many countries in Europe and worldwide.

Events Leading up to the First VE Day

The leader of the German army had died in April 1945. Berlin was surrounded, German forces had weakened and defeat was imminent. Supreme Allied Commander General Eisenhower, the chief of the Allied forces, accepted the full surrender of all German forces on 7th May. The document was signed by General Alfred Jodl from the German forces at 2:41 a.m. in Reims, France, the Headquarters of the Allied Forces. Germany's surrender was eagerly anticipated. Winston Churchill, the Prime Minister for Britain, made the announcement that the war had ended in Europe over the wireless, an old-fashioned type of radio, on the evening of 7th May.

What Happened on the First VE Day?

Understandably, some people didn't wait until 8th May to begin to celebrate. Bonfires were lit on the evening of 7th May, following the announcement, and pubs were filled with people until late into the night. On 8th May, many festivities were organised around the country, including parades, thanksgiving services and street parties. People danced in the streets around Britain and shared what food they could, although it was limited. Pub hours were extended and dance halls were open until midnight. Around 50,000 revellers squeezed around Piccadilly Circus in London and social norms were disregarded with people hugging and celebrating with strangers.

Winston Churchill's Address



"This is your victory!"
- Winston Churchill

Prime Minister Winston Churchill played an important role in the defeat of the German forces. He was a charismatic leader who made inspirational speeches that helped to motivate the people of Britain. He was also well known for his military and political decision making. Churchill made a national broadcast at 3pm on VE Day and later appeared on the balcony of the Ministry of Health building in London. He gave an unscripted speech to the thousands cheering below, in which he proclaimed, "This is your victory!" The crowds replied, "No - it's yours!"

Royal Celebrations

Around 20,000 people went to Buckingham Palace to catch a glimpse of the King, who came out on the balcony to greet the crowds with his daughters. It is believed that Princess Margaret and Princess Elizabeth, now The Queen, secretly mingled with the crowds outside and joined in with the chanting and shouting for the King. The Queen often says that VE Day 1945 was one of the most "memorable days of her life."

Mixed Feelings

VE Day was a difficult day for many people. Those who still had family members fighting abroad or that had been injured in the war continued to feel very anxious, while others who had lost loved ones found it very difficult to cope with the cheering and celebrations around them.

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 16th August. Even after the war, life continued to be a struggle in Britain. Many people were deeply affected by the devastating loss of life and, as the war was very expensive, the country had to rebuild and recover slowly.

How Do People Celebrate VE Day Today?

VE Day is an important occasion. 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. Retired soldiers often attend these events in uniform and can sometimes be found visiting schools around the country sharing their experiences.



Questions

1. Which of these countries was not part of the Allied Forces? Tick one.

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

2. What does the word **commemorate** mean? Tick one.

- ☐ forget
- ☐ remember
- ☐ understand
- ☐ discuss

3. Where was the headquarters of the Allied Forces?

4. What is a wireless?

5. Read the section called **Events Leading up to the First VE Day**.

Find and copy a phrase which shows that British people were looking forward to Germany's surrender.

6. Explain why you think social norms were disregarded on the first VE Day.

7. Why do you think people claimed VE Day was Winston Churchill's victory?

Explain your reasoning using evidence from the text.

8. Name **two** ways the Royal Family participated in the celebration on the first VE Day.

9. If you were a retired soldier attending a VE Day celebration, how do you think you might feel?

10. Summarise how people have celebrated VE Day in recent years.
