

VE Day

What is VE Day?

VE Day stands for Victory in Europe Day and is celebrated on 8th May. It was the end of six years of suffering, misery and courage during the Second World War in Europe. Although it was not the end of the Second World War, it was the end of warfare in Europe.

How did it happen?

On the morning of 7th May, 1945, following Hitler's death in the April, the German President of the Third Reich, Grand Admiral Donitz, gave orders that General Jodl should go to the American Head Quarters based in France. Jodl surrendered on behalf of the Germans, to the Western and Russian officers, and agreed to all their demands.

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 on standby to ring out the good news when an official notice was given.

Joseph Stalin, the leader of the Russians, was taking his time to announce the surrender, but the British Prime Minister, Winston Churchill, did not want to give Stalin the chance to hold up what everyone already knew! 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 ordinary people were killed and millions of lives had been torn apart.



Did you know ...?

The three great powers were Britain, France and the Soviet Union, now known as Russia.

Bring on the Celebrations!

People began decorating the streets with banners, bunting and ribbons. They organised street parties where neighbours shared food, which was still rationed, and listened to the radio 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 – walked amongst the crowds! Churchill told the crowds, “This is your victory!”

Churchill spoke to the nation, reminding them that although Japan still had to be defeated, and the war was not yet over, for now 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 lights were turned off again the next day.



Although everyone was pleased the war in Europe had ended, for many the celebrations would have been a sad reminder of the loss of many loved ones. They would have been fighting abroad, caught by the enemy or died in air raids attacks. This meant that many did not completely feel the lasting joy of the time.

Questions

1. In detail, explain why the VE Day ended.

2. What did General Jodl do?

3. What does 'the bell ringers were on standby' mean?

4. Explain, in your own words, the effects of war in Europe, on Britain.

5. What did Stalin do, and how did this affect Britain?

6. What date was VE Day?

7. Name two ways people might have lost loved ones during the war in Europe.

8. Describe how people celebrated VE Day.

9. Why do you think the author has used an exclamation mark when commenting on the princesses walking around in the crowds in London?

10. Was this the end of the war? Explain your thoughts.

11. Why do you think two searchlights were lit in the shape of a V?
