

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.

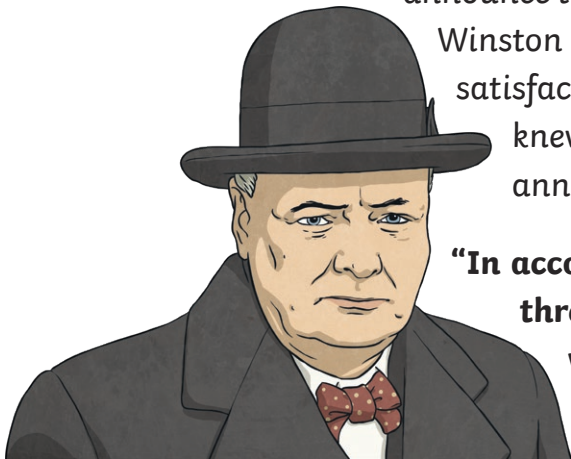
How did it happen?

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.



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.

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 victory, above St Paul’s Cathedral in London.

All the illuminations were turned off the next day.

A Special Celebration

To celebrate 75 years since the original VE Day, the May Day bank Holiday has been moved for the second time in history. Although it’s usually on a Monday, this year, the May Day Bank holiday will be on Friday 8th May to coincide with the anniversary of VE Day.



Buglers have been invited to play The Last Post and Reveille from their homes at 2:55 p.m. This will be followed by a 'Nation's Toast to the Heroes of World War II' at 3:00 p.m. Here, people at home can raise a drink of their choice and say the following:

"To those who gave so much, we thank you."

The thought is that as a nation, the UK will toast their remembrance, together.

Bugler: Someone that plays the bugle – a horn-like instrument used by soldiers to send signals and orders.



Questions

1. What date is VE Day?

2. Tick the boxes to say whether the statements below are **true** or **false**.

Sentence	True	False
VE day marked the end of the Second World War.		
The British people began celebrating before the official announcement.		
General Jodl ordered Grand Admiral Donitz to surrender.		
VE Day stands for Victory in Europe Day.		

3. Who were put on standby?

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

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

6. What three things happened at 21:00 on VE Day?

7. What time is the Nation's Toast to the Heroes of World War II? Tick **one**.

- 2:55 p.m.
- 3:55 p.m.
- 2:00 p.m.
- 3:00 p.m.

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

9. Why were the celebrations bittersweet for some?

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

Answers

1. What date is VE Day?

8th May

2. Tick the boxes to say whether the statements below are **true** or **false**.

Sentence	True	False
VE day marked the end of the Second World War.		✓
The British people began celebrating before the official announcement.	✓	
General Jodl ordered Grand Admiral Donitz to surrender.		✓
VE Day stands for Victory in Europe Day.	✓	

3. Who were put on standby?

The Bell ringers in the churches were put on standby to announce the good news.

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

The Germans surrendered because Hitler had died. He was the leader of the Germans and had started the Second World War. Once he had died I think they knew they would not win so they had to surrender.

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

The word 'impromptu' means 'unplanned'. It relates to the sentence it has been used in because people were not expecting VE Day so the parties would have been unexpected and unplanned.

6. What three things happened at 21:00 on VE Day?

King George VI made a final broadcast to the nation, Buckingham Palace was lit up in floodlights and two search lights formed the sign of victory above St Paul's Cathedral in London.

7. What time is the Nation's Toast to the Heroes of World War II? Tick **one**.

- 2:55 p.m.
- 3:55 p.m.
- 2:00 p.m.
- 3:00 p.m.**

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

On VE day, Churchill had a celebratory lunch with King George VI and talked to the nation, reminding them that the war wasn't over, but for that one day, the British people could allow themselves a "brief period of rejoicing".

9. Why were the celebrations bittersweet for some?

The celebrations would have been bittersweet for some, because their families or friends may have been killed during the war, so although they were happy to hear the fighting in Europe was over, they might also feel sad that it hadn't ended sooner so their friends or family were still alive.

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

Answers will vary