

# VE Day

Victory in Europe Day, otherwise known as VE Day, is the day that marks the end of the Second World War. On 7<sup>th</sup> 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 celebrated by many countries in Europe and worldwide. This year is the 75<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the event, an important **milestone** to honour.

## Events Leading up to the First VE Day

The leader of the German army had died in April 1945. German forces were weak and their coming defeat was very clear. Supreme Allied Commander General Eisenhower, the chief of the Allied forces, accepted the surrender of all German forces on 7<sup>th</sup> May. The surrender document was signed by the leader of Germany's forces, General Alfred Jodl. Germany's surrender was expected and many people in Britain were waiting for the news. Winston Churchill, the Prime Minister for Britain, made the announcement that the war had ended in Europe over the radio on the evening of 7<sup>th</sup> 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?

Understandably, some people didn't wait until 8<sup>th</sup> of May to begin to celebrate. Many bonfires were lit and pubs were filled with people until late into the night. On 8<sup>th</sup> May, celebrations were organised around the country. People danced in the streets around the country and shared what food they could. Pub hours were extended and dance halls were open until midnight. Around 50,000 revellers squeezed around Piccadilly Circus in London.

### Did You Know...?

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



### Winston Churchill's Address

Prime Minister Winston Churchill played an **instrumental** role in the defeat of the German forces. He made a national broadcast at 3pm on VE Day and later appeared on the balcony of a ministry building in London. He made an **unscripted** speech to the thousands of cheering people below, in which he stated, 'This is your victory!' The crowds replied, "No – it's yours!"

"This is your victory!"

- Winston Churchill



### 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. It is believed that Princess Margaret and Princess Elizabeth, now the Queen, secretly **mingled** with the crowds outside. 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. People 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. Conflict continued in Japan until August. The day Japan surrendered is marked by VJ Day. It is celebrated on 16<sup>th</sup> August. Even after the war, life continued to be a struggle in Britain. Many people were deeply affected by the terrible loss of life and, as the war was very expensive, the country had to rebuild and recover slowly.

### Why Should We Still Celebrate VE Day?

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.

**Glossary**

<b>surrender:</b>	To stop fighting and admit you have been beaten.
<b>milestone:</b>	An important event in the history or development of something.
<b>bulletin:</b>	A short official statement or broadcast summary of news.
<b>instrumental:</b>	Someone or something that is of great importance in making an event happen.
<b>unscripted:</b>	Something that is said or delivered without a prepared script.
<b>mingled:</b>	To mix among others and socialise.



# Questions

1. Who was the leader of the Allied Forces in 1945?

- Adolf Hitler
- Commander General Eisenhower
- General Alfred Jodl
- Winston Churchill

2. Number the events below to show what order they appear in the text.

The first one has been done for you.

- Around 20,000 people went to Buckingham Palace to catch a glimpse of the King.
- 1 The leader of the German army had died in April 1945.
- The day Japan surrendered is marked by VJ Day.
- Pub hours were extended and dance halls were open until midnight.
- It is also a chance for us to celebrate the day that brought peace.

3. Read the section titled **What Happened on the First VE Day?**

Why was it understandable that people celebrated early?

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4. How many people went to Piccadilly Circus to celebrate?

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5. Read the section titled **What Happened on the First VE Day?**

Find and copy a word which means the same as 'partygoers'.

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6. How do you think the people of New Zealand felt about waiting until 9<sup>th</sup> May to celebrate VE Day? Explain your answer using evidence from the text.

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7. Compare the celebrations of Winston Churchill and King George VI. How are they similar and how are they different? Explain your reasoning using evidence from the text.

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8. Explain why there were mixed emotions on VE Day.

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9. Why do you think it is important to celebrate VE Day? Explain your reasoning using evidence from the text.

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