

## 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 now celebrated by many countries in Europe and worldwide. This year, on 8<sup>th</sup> May 2020, will be the 75<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the event, an important **milestone** to honour.

### 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 7<sup>th</sup> May at 2:41am. 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 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?

On 8<sup>th</sup> 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.

### Winston Churchill's Address



Winston Churchill played an important 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 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 15<sup>th</sup> 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

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

**milestone:** An important event in the history or development of something.

**bulletin:** A short official statement or broadcast summary of news

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

# Questions

1. Which country surrendered in 1945?

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

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

- ☐ 2<sup>nd</sup> September
- ☐ 8<sup>th</sup> May
- ☐ 9<sup>th</sup> May
- ☐ 15<sup>th</sup> August

3. Read the section titled **What Led up to the First VE Day?**

Why do you think a news bulletin interrupted normal programmes?

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

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

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

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

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

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8. Summarise what life was like after VE Day.

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# Answers

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- ☐ Britain
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3. Read the section titled **What Led up to the First VE Day?**

Why do you think a news bulletin interrupted normal programmes?

**It interrupted because the announcement was so important.**

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

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

**improvised**

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

**Accept any of the following: church services, street parties, parades, dancing until late, dancing in the street, sharing food, fireworks and bonfires.**

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

**Pupils' own responses, such as: I think people were expecting Germany to surrender because they had lost their leader and their army was weak.**

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

**Pupils' own responses, such as: I think VJ Day is short for Victory in Japan Day, because it marks the end of the conflict in Japan, just like VE Day marks the end of the conflict in Europe.**

8. Summarise what life was like after VE Day.

**Pupils' own responses, such as: Life was difficult after VE Day, even though the war was over in Europe. There was fighting still going on in Japan and many people were still upset about the loss of their family and friends in the war.**