

VE Day

Reading comprehension

What is VE Day about?

VE stands for Victory in Europe. It formally marks when Germany surrendered to the Allied Forces. VE Day is celebrated annually on 8th May. Allied Forces had been fighting Nazi Germany all over Europe for several years, but had finally beaten them. After D Day, Allied Forces had been able to advance west towards Berlin, which was the centre of the Nazi regime. The Soviet Union attacked from the east, meaning the Nazis had no other option than to surrender. They surrendered on 7th May 1945.



It is worth noting, however, that VE Day does not mark the end of World War Two as fighting was still taking place in Asia. Many British soldiers were sent to fight against Japan, who did not surrender when Germany did. However, VE Day marked the end of fighting in Europe.

How was VE Day celebrated in the UK in 1945?

VE Day was a special day for the whole nation and a day that people had been patiently waiting for. There had been a lot of death and destruction across Great Britain, so people were very relieved when the fighting stopped. There were 1000s of celebrations and street parties all over the country that day. Over a million people partied in the streets. All over the country, people lit bonfires as they had not been allowed for the previous six years during the war.



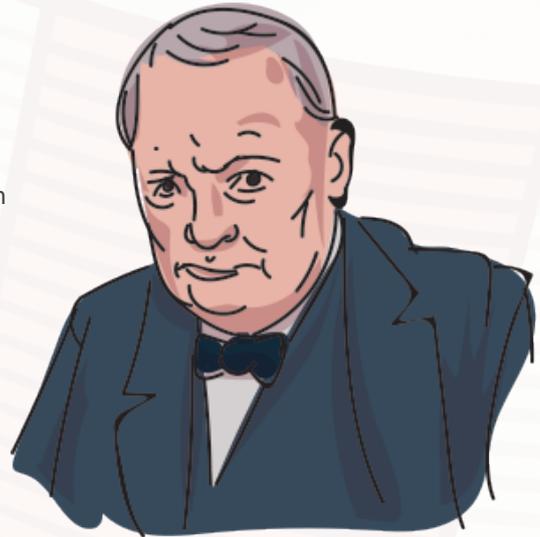
Church services were held across the country, so that people could thank God for the victory. St Paul's Cathedral in London held ten special services, which thousands of people attended. In London, tens of thousands of people gathered outside Buckingham Palace. They were decked out in red, white and blue to show their national pride and gratitude to all those who had fought for our nation. King George VI and his family greeted the crowds to great excitement and applause. The Royal Family appeared on the balcony at Buckingham Palace eight times to join in the celebrations alongside the crowds. Winston Churchill also accompanied them on the balcony.

Interesting fact!

Did you know that our current Queen (Elizabeth II) was a princess and daughter of the King at the time? She and her sister secretly left the palace to take part in the public celebrations around London on VE Day. It is reported that this was one of the most memorable days of the Queen's life.

Who was Winston Churchill and why is he important?

Winston Churchill was the British Prime Minister at the time. On VE Day at 3pm, he addressed the nation over the radio to tell them the war in Europe had finally come to an end as Germany had surrendered the day before. He famously said: "We may allow ourselves a brief period of rejoicing, but let us not forget for a moment the toils and efforts that lie ahead".



How is VE Day celebrated now?

Every year, the nation honours VE Day and remembers all those soldiers who fought for us to have the peace and freedom we still have today. The 70th anniversary of VE Day in 2015 was marked with three days of commemorations including parades, street parties, a service of thanksgiving and a concert in central London.

This year (2020) we will celebrate the 75th anniversary of VE Day. As in other years, there will be a two minute silence at 11am to commemorate those who fought and lost their lives in the war. There are plans to replicate the street party mood from 1945 –people will join with their neighbours at a social distance and have picnics in their front gardens. There will be a televised address from the Queen at 9pm (the exact time her father gave a similar address 75 years prior). There will also be a national sing along of Dame Vera Lynn's 'We'll Meet Again'.

Did everything go back to normal after VE Day?

Even though VE Day marked the end of fighting in Europe, it did not mean that life went back to normal for people in Great Britain. Rationing of food and other essential goods carried on until 1954 – there was still plenty of hardship in the country. The war had cost the country a lot of money - cities like London and Liverpool had been significantly ruined from bombing -so the rebuilding cost a lot of money and took time.

A moment of reflection

Despite all the celebrating on VE Day, there was much to reflect upon. It was a bittersweet end to war - millions of people had lost their lives and many families mourned the loss of their loved ones. There were still many soldiers away from home fighting in battles in Asia where World War II continued. Also, many people were being held captive as prisoners of war. Millions of people had lost their cities, homes and families because of the war.