



VE Day 65

## 20 things to know about VE Day

1. Victory in Europe Day (VE Day) was **8 May 1945**. On 7 May, the German Leader, General Alfred Jodl, announced that Germany would sign the official surrender the following day and the British Leader, **Winston Churchill**, announced that it would be a public holiday.
2. Germany's wartime leader (and leader of the Nazis) was **Adolf Hitler**. He committed suicide on 30 April 1945, as the Allies and German Forces were fighting in the streets of Berlin to take control. It was left to the remaining German generals and politicians to negotiate the surrender.
3. Karl Doenitz (1891-1980) took over as the German Leader after Hitler committed suicide. He was an Admiral in the German Navy and had served in World War I and World War II. He was the President of Nazi Germany's Flensburg Government (the new interim government) for about 20 days, until the final surrender to the Allies. After the war, he was convicted of war crimes at the Nuremberg Trials and served ten years in prison.
4. German and Axis Forces surrendered in NW Europe and in Italy at the beginning of May before the official surrender was declared.
5. In London, crowds massed in Trafalgar Square and along The Mall to Buckingham Palace, where **King George VI** and **Queen Elizabeth**, accompanied by Prime Minister Winston Churchill, appeared on the balcony of the Palace. Spontaneous parties appeared across the whole of the country.
6. The surrender was signed at Reims in France and at Berlin in Germany. It was unconditional – which meant that Nazi Germany admitted total defeat.
7. At Reims, General Jodl and Admiral Doenitz, signed the act of unconditional surrender of all German Land, Sea, and Air Forces in Europe to the Allied Expeditionary Force, and simultaneously to the Soviet High Command. General Bedell Smith, Chief of Staff of the Allied Expeditionary Force, and General Francois Sevez signed the document on behalf of the Supreme Commander of the Allied Expeditionary Force, and General Susloparov signed on behalf of the Russian High Command.

At Berlin, Air Chief Marshal Tedder, Deputy Supreme Commander of the Allied Expeditionary Force, and General de Lattre de Tassigny signed on behalf of General Eisenhower. Marshal Zhukov signed on behalf of the Soviet High Command. The German representatives were Field-Marshal Keitel, Chief of the High Command, and the Commanders-in-Chief of the German Army, Navy, and Air Forces.

8. The Allies had been pressing in on all sides of Nazi Germany through 1944 and into 1945, in a series of air and land battles, with heavy fighting right up until the end. Even after the surrender was declared, some small groups of Germans tried to carry on fighting.
9. The Battle for Berlin, which marked the end of the war in Europe, started on the 20 April 1945 and continued until 2 May. Everyone knew it was over when the Allied Soviet Forces raised the flag over the German Reichstag building in Berlin.
10. In the United States, the President, **Harry Truman**, dedicated the victory of the war to the memory of his predecessor, **Franklin D Roosevelt**. Roosevelt had been the US President throughout the war and after a long illness had died of a cerebral hemorrhage on 12 April 1945, less than a month before the war officially ended.
11. The Nazi Forces had more tanks available for use at the start of 1945 than they had in 1940, but fuel shortages meant that most of them could not be used.
12. Russia celebrates VE day on 9 May.
13. Despite the war ending, food rationing went on in the UK until 1954 – a further 9 years. Clothes were rationed until 1949.
14. For some, the end of the war meant a massive clear-up operation as aid and relief workers went to the former Nazi camps of Europe to try and help those that had been imprisoned by the Nazis, often for nothing more than being a different faith, colour, ethnicity, belief or for politically opposing Nazism. The world found out what had really been happening under Nazi rule.
15. The only part of the British Isles captured by Nazi Germany was the Channel Islands off the south coast of Britain. Although large parts of Western Europe were out of Nazi hands from as early as 1944 (after D Day), the Channel Islands were not officially liberated until 9 May 1945.
16. In May 1940 the British Army was approximately 1,650,000 men; by 1945 it was 2,920,000 men.

17. For many people, the end of the war was a sad day as they remembered all those that had been injured and killed. Thousands from Britain alone. It was a war that transformed the World.
18. The Official agreements for ending the European part of the war were held two and a half months after VE Day. The conference was held at Potsdam, just outside Berlin, from 17 July - 2 August. One of the outcomes was the Nuremberg Trials that put the Nazi regime on trial for crimes against its own citizens in the Third Reich, as well as international crimes. Many Nazi officials were found guilty and imprisoned and some were hanged. However the chaos of the end of the war meant that many people accused of being war criminals had managed to escape.
19. For Allied troops fighting in Southeast Asia and around the Pacific, the war was not over. Japan, the leading Axis nation in that area, did not surrender until August after the dropping of 2 atomic bombs on Japanese cities (Hiroshima and Nagasaki).
20. After the war, Germany was divided into 4 zones: British, French, American (western zone) and Russian. The Cold War meant that those zones became permanently separated as West Germany and East Germany, until the collapse of the Berlin Wall and the reunification of Germany in 1990.