

English for Life in the UK

10 June 2020

Transcript for : Episode 22 Victory in Europe Day

(Mark) Hello and welcome to the podcast English for Life in the UK. This podcast is for intermediate-level learners of English and it is produced by a group of volunteer teachers from the St Augustine's Centre, in Halifax, Yorkshire, where we provide a range of support and advice to those in need, particularly to asylum seekers, refugees and migrants. Now, normally, we run a course at our Centre, which this podcast supports, but since the lockdown, we are now recording these podcasts from our homes. As a result, the quality of the sound is not quite as good as we would hope.

We hope that this podcast will be helpful to anyone wanting to improve their English and at the same time, learn more about life in this country. We choose subjects that we hope will be of interest and will help those who may want to become British citizens and will need to take a British citizen test.

You can find links to other episodes and the transcript - that is the written version - of this podcast in a few days' time, on our website;

www.staugustinescentrehalifax.org.uk

Here you can also find more information about the Centre, other support that is available and for any of those who can afford it, how to make a donation, to help to keep our work going, particularly in these difficult times.

Today's episode, which is about VE Day, is brought to you by myself, Mark, and John.

(Music)

(2:15 minutes)

(M) OK, John, so, a few weeks back, we had a day that was called "VE Day" when normally there would have been quite a few celebrations but because of lockdown, we weren't able to do much. But there was certainly a lot in the newspapers, and on the television, about VE Day. So, tell us: what is that?

(John) Well it was a big occasion this year, Mark, because it was the 75th anniversary of VE Day. VE Day stands for "Victory in Europe Day" - so it was the day, 8th May 1945, when Nazi Germany surrendered to the allied forces in Europe, so it marked the end of the Second World War in Europe.

(M) So what was going on in Europe at that time, then, with the war?

(J) Well, the allied forces had invaded Western Europe in 1944, on D-Day, and the Soviet forces had fought their way into Germany, on the Eastern front. On 30th April 1945, Adolf Hitler had committed suicide in his bunker in Berlin. He handed over power to Admiral Donitz - Karl Donitz - who signed the "Instrument of Surrender", which was signed on 8th May 1945, which commanded all German military, naval and air forces to cease fighting, at 23.00 hours on 8th May 1945. So that is why VE Day in the UK is celebrated on the 8th May, but in the former Soviet Union, it's celebrated on the 9th of May, because that took place on 9th May 1945.

(M) And er, so what happened, back in Britain on that day?

(J) There were We've seen this in the news, and the newspapers recently, they showed the clips of the newsreels at the time: there were huge crowds celebrating all over Britain. King George VI ('the sixth'), and Queen Elizabeth appeared with Winston Churchill, the then Prime Minister, and the Government ministers, on the balcony at Buckingham Palace, in front of crowds of millions of people. There were huge celebrations across the UK, and across the United States and the British Empire. In the United States there were famous scenes in Times Square in New York. Obviously, the Americans and the Soviets, and everybody in the British Empire - there were celebrations everywhere to mark VE Day.

(M) I noticed one of the TV programmes I was watching this year, was saying that ..er ... Queen Elizabeth, who, of course, wasn't Queen Elizabeth at that stage, I suppose she was "princess" at that stage - she went out and actually celebrated with the crowd - as it were, anonymously.

(J) So I believe. Princess Elizabeth - as she was at the time - and Princess Margaret, were out celebrating with the crowds around Trafalgar Square, yeah, while the King and Winston Churchill were on the balcony at Buckingham Palace. Yeah.

Celebrations in the UK and America were tempered by the fact - as President Truman put it - "This is a victory only half-won". And Winston Churchill told the British public that we now allow ourselves a brief period of rejoicing, as Japan remains un-subdued. So it wasn't actually the end of World War 2; it was, as 'VE Day' indicates - victory in Europe. But the end of the Second World War didn't come while later on in 1945.

(M) So what happened in between VE Day and what I think we then called, VJ Day?

(6:25)

(J) Yeah, VJ Day, which was August 15th 1945. The Nazi forces in Europe had been defeated but their allies, the Japanese Empire, continued to fight on in the Far East. So American, Empire and British forces were still fighting against the Japanese in places like Malaya, Singapore, China.

Erm, this led up to the American forces dropping two atomic bombs on the cities of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, on August 6th and 9th, which brought about fairly quickly the final surrender of the Japanese forces. So VJ Day, Victory in Japan Day - is marked on August 15th.

(M) Yeah, well - reflecting back, it's interesting isn't it? Here we are in lockdown, and have the current crisis around the coronavirus, and we feel as if we've been in this crisis for quite some time - but what it must have been like, to have had 6 years of being at war.

(J) Well, that's - yeah, obviously the jubilation that we saw in the newsreels, was understandable. It's hard to .. for us to grasp what the relief and the celebration that people must have felt - after being at war for six years. A terrible experience for millions of people - I think somewhere between 70-85 million people killed, which was 3% of the world's population, were killed, globally. Er .. the United Kingdom lost 450,000 people, including 67,000 civilians who were killed in the bombing of London and other cities.

The Soviet Union: obviously it's a huge ... still a huge celebration in the Soviet Union - they lost somewhere between 20 and 27 million, dead. China: 15 - 20 million dead - so the whole of Europe for 5 or 6 years had been under the tyranny of the Nazis - we'd seen horrendous events - of the holocaust in concentration camps. So to finally put that to rest, to defeat the Nazis, to liberate Europe and then to go on and to liberate Asia from the Japanese armies. You know the sense of relief must have ... must have been an amazing thing to experience.

(M) Yeah, yeah- as you say, it's very hard for us to imagine but it is important that we remember the significance of those events and er .. hopefully, hopefully work for a world where that kind of thing will never happen again.

(J) Absolutely.

(9:14)

(M) Though one of the things that's always puzzled me is - I think it was only a couple of months after the end of the war in Europe, Churchill who had been the British Prime Minister through most of the war, and who most of the people regard as having been a tremendous war leader who sort of led us to victory, was then defeated in the General Election, only two months after the end of the war in Europe. How do we explain that?

(J) It's hard to imagine when you think that he was one of what was referred to as "the big three" - Winston Churchill, Joseph Stalin, until his death, Franklin D. Roosevelt. He was the figurehead of our resistance to Nazi-ism, he led us through the Second World War, and he's, y'know, he's recognised as one of the greatest British politicians for his role as a war leader; within two months, was kicked out of office and the new Labour Government came into power. Part of the reason for that was ... erm ...it wasn't a Conservative government during the Second

World War, it was a government of National Unity, so there were many politicians from the Labour Party were in Government as well as Churchill and his Conservative colleagues. People like Clement Attlee, who had deputised for Churchill when he were abroad, Herbert Morrison, Ernie Bevan: people like that, so they gained a lot of experience in government. They also put forward a plan for reorganising Britain after the war, that people found much more appealing. So people who had lived through the Depression before the war, had lived through the rationing, all the hardships and the plan that Labour put forward for the welfare state and the National Health Service, nationalisation of key industries, seen by many - especially many of the servicemen - as providing a brighter future. So in many ways, Churchill was seen as the man to lead them in the time of war; but in time of peace, people were much more amenable to the ideas of a Labour Government. So, yeah - within 8 weeks of, arguably, his finest hour, he was put out of office and replaced by Clement Attlee, as prime minister and a Labour Government.

(11:45)

(M) I know some historians have argued that part of it was the fact that the average fighter - the person who'd been fighting for the country out there - was of course, the ordinary working man, but meanwhile, back in England, as well, many women were now doing the kind of work that men had done before and so all these people felt they had a stake now in what happened next and maybe the kind of privileged politician that Churchill was, and a number of the other people in the Conservative Party at that time, really didn't chime with the notion of the other future for all of the people of the country and that, y'know, people wanted change.

(J) Absolutely. It's ... When you look at the mass conscription, we effectively had a citizens' army that fought throughout the world er .. and it was seen very much as a collective effort. With rationing, with as you say, women working on the land and in the factories, and that chimed more with the ideas that the Labour Party put forward at that - the collectivism and, as I say, the privations that people had undergone during the Depression, people wanted to see that quite radical change in British politics. So, yeah - Churchill was on his way, and we elected a Labour Government in 1945.

(M) Yeah. - Very interesting John, and I guess one of the things to reflect on at the end of this current crisis - this Covid-19 crisis - whether or not we get some significant long term change in the country and indeed in the world, as a result of this. That will be interesting to see.

(J) That remains to be seen.

(M) It does. Thank you very much, John.

(J) Thank you, Mark - see you again soon.

(13:45) **(Music)**

(M) Language Support

In this part of the podcast, I pick a few of the words and phrases used in this episode and explain them. So, early on, John talked about the 'Instrument of Surrender' - this is something that happened at the end of the war with Germany - there was an "Instrument of Surrender". Now, an 'Instrument' is usually a piece of equipment, for example - a musical instrument, is anything that plays music - a guitar, a violin, etc but in this case, the 'Instrument' means an 'official document', so the official document of the surrender and the surrender is Germany giving up fighting, accepting that it had been defeated.

Then John talked about the 'newsreels' that showed some of the celebrations going on. Newsreels were something that happened in the cinema because this was in the days before television and it would be a short film about the news of the day.

John said that the celebrations on VE Day were 'tempered' by the fact that the war was still going on with Japan - so to be tempered is reduced, softened, moderated. So they couldn't celebrate completely because there was still the war going on, in another part of the world, so the celebrations were tempered.

And then eventually when Japan was defeated, John used the phrase the Japanese were 'subdued' - to be subdued is another way of saying, in this case, to be defeated.

We talked about the jubilation that took place, as a result of the winning of the war - jubilation is great happiness and celebrations.

And finally, when we were talking about Winston Churchill having been defeated in the election just after the war, we said that the ideas of the Conservatives didn't 'chime' with the ideas of the ordinary people. Now, to chime is something that usually happens with a bell or musical instruments and it's a melody, a pleasant sound, that goes with that instrument, but in this case, if you say somebody 'chimes with the ideas', that means it's in agreement with - it matches the ideas of somebody else - so in this case, the ideas of the Conservative Government didn't chime with the ideas of the ordinary people - they were not in agreement - they didn't match the ideas of ordinary people, and that was one of the reasons they were defeated.

That's it for this week - I hope this has been helpful - the transcript will be on our website, in a few days' time - and we look forward to joining you again for another episode in the near future. Goodbye for now.

(Music)

(17:55)

