

VE Day in 1945

Travel back in time to May 1945. Most of the world was caught up in World War II, although Nazi Germany were quickly losing ground across Europe.

Following the death of Adolf Hitler on 30th April 1945, German troops were surrendering across Germany in almost every single city. Karl Dönitz, who took over as President of Germany after Hitler's death, finally gave word to General Alfred Jodl to officially and unconditionally surrender all German forces on 7th May 1945.

At 2.41am, General Alfred Jodl, signed the Act of Military Surrender in Reims, France alongside General Walter Bedell Smith (on behalf of the Allied Expeditionary Force). General Ivan Susloparov and General François Sevez also signed the act as witnesses and the surrender was then agreed to start at 11:01pm CET on May 8th.

Things didn't go as planned though as the text of this surrender act hadn't been approved by General Antonov (of the Soviet High Command) and supposedly, General Ivan Susloparov didn't have the authority to act as a witness to the signing.

Other historians have argued that the Soviet Union wanted a grander occasion for such an important historical event. The Soviets also believed that the signing should have taken place at the centre of Nazi Germany, Berlin.

During this period of confusion, Nazi troops were taking full advantage of the remaining 48 hours left of war, increasing their efforts to attack the Eastern front.

On 8th May 1945, high-ranking commanders from different German armed services were flown to Berlin ready to sign a new Act of

Surrender. However, French, Soviet and American Generals had difficulty deciding who would be the two witnesses to this historic signing.

It was finally agreed that Marshal Georgy Zhukov of the Soviet Union, Sir Arthur William Tedder of the Allied Expeditionary Force, Field Marshal Wilhelm Keitel of the German Armed Forces, General-Admiral Hans-Georg von Friedeburg of the German Navy and Colonel-General Hans-Jürgen Stumpff of the German Air Force would sign the official Act of Surrender. Both General Carl Spaatz of the United States and General Jean de Lattre de Tassigny of France signed as witnesses to the historic event.

It wasn't until 9th May 00:16 that the document was officially signed, which they then backdated to comply with the 48-hour surrender terms set out in Reims.

As you can imagine, the media were very excited to release the details of an official surrender, but due to these complications were banned from printing about it until it was official. The Associated Press in Paris broke these rules and printed anyway on the night of 7th May, meaning the headline all over the news on 8th May was Germany's surrender. This is why most of Europe celebrates VE Day on 8th May, yet Russia doesn't celebrate until 9th May.

On the most part, the surrender held up and this news was welcomed around the world. Troops were returning home, families were reunited and people rushed out onto the streets to celebrate.

On 8th May 1945 at 3pm, Winston Churchill, prime minister of the United Kingdom announced the details of the surrender over the radio. He later travelled to Buckingham Palace and stood on the balcony alongside King George VI and Princesses Elizabeth (our current Queen) and Margaret to celebrate the end of the war. Celebrations went on into the night and every year since it has been a celebrated date throughout the world.