

# **VE and VJ Days**

Enquiry: When was the turning point of the Second World War?

Ms Dawson



In April 1945, the Nazis were in a radically different position from five years earlier. Berlin was surrounded. The USA, the USSR, and Great Britain were ready to capture it. Adolf Hitler killed himself on the 30<sup>th</sup> April 1945 rather than face capture. A man named Grand Admiral Karl Dönitz was named as the President to stand in for Hitler. Dönitz's main role was to negotiate the end to the war with the Allies. On May 7, 1945, the Allies accepted the **unconditional surrender** of Nazi Germany. The next day, May 8<sup>th</sup>, was to be known as VE (Victory in Europe) Day. In streets across the world people celebrated with parties, embracing each other and sighing with relief. An estimated 50,000 people crowded into Piccadilly Circus to celebrate into the night. The conflict had lasted for six years and killed millions, soldiers and **civilians** alike. At 3pm, Winston Churchill gave a national radio broadcast where he said: 'We may allow ourselves a brief period of **rejoicing**; but let us not forget for a moment the toil and efforts that lie ahead.'



When Churchill said that Britain could only rejoice for a brief period, he meant to remind the people that the war was not completely over. Japan had not surrendered, so there was still a war raging in the Pacific. Now that the problem of Germany had been solved, Britain, the USA, and the USSR had to work out how to defeat Japan. The Japanese had suffered heavy losses in the Pacific, but they refused to surrender. The Allies had all but destroyed Japan's navy and air force. The Allies had also used a **naval blockade** in order to prevent supplies reaching the country. They had also won a series of battles including the Battle of Iwo Jima and the Battle of Okinawa. These were bloody battles with heavy losses on both sides, but Okinawa was the 'final stop' for the American forces before attacking mainland Japan. The capture of Okinawa was important as now the Americans possessed an island from which they could attack the mainland.



The Allies demanded an unconditional surrender in July of 1945, but the Japanese Prime Minister refused to do so. The Japanese were on the brink of defeat. But another attack on Japan would have claimed many more Allied lives and cost huge amounts of money. The Allies now, however, possessed another option. The late President Franklin D. Roosevelt had secretly agreed plans for the Manhattan Project. This was the code-name for the development of a new and powerful weapon: the **atomic bomb**. It used nuclear energy and was more powerful and deadly than any bomb in existence. The atomic bomb was first successfully tested in July of 1945 in the Mexico desert: the blast was 40,000 feet high. This was a weapon with the potential for mass destruction.



The Western allies decided to use their new weapon to end the war against Japan, even though it would mean the killing of thousands of innocent people. On 6<sup>th</sup> August 1945, the United States dropped an atomic bomb on the city of Hiroshima in Japan. Approximately 70,000 civilians were killed. Three days later, they dropped another bomb on the city of Nagasaki, killing 40,000 more people. Thousands more people died in months and years after the dropping of the bomb, due to **radiation sickness**. This unprecedented attack on civilians forced the Japanese to surrender on 15<sup>th</sup> August 1945. This date became known as VJ (Victory over Japan) Day.



# Glossary

**Unconditional surrender:** A surrender where the side who surrenders are given no guarantees or special protections in exchange for their surrender.

**Civilians:** Ordinary people, not soldiers.

**Rejoicing:** Celebrating.

**Naval blockade:** Using ships to surround and block a territory, preventing supplies getting in or out.

**Atomic bomb:** A heavily destructive weapon developed in 1945, which can cause high amounts of damage through heat, blast, and radioactivity.

**Radiation:** The after-effects of the atomic bomb, which caused people to become very sick or die.



## Comprehension questions:

1. When did Germany surrender to the allies?
2. How did people celebrate VE Day?
3. Why did Churchill say that Britain could only briefly rejoice?
4. What tactics had the allies used in order to try and get Japan to surrender before July of 1945?
5. What secret weapon had America developed by July of 1945?
6. What damage was caused by the atomic bomb?

Challenge: Why did the allies use the atomic bomb if it was going to cause the deaths of thousands of innocent civilians?

Sentence starter: The allies used the atomic bomb because...

Evidence to support this is...

This meant that...





# Extension Question

What was the turning point of the Second World War?  
Use the sentence starters and key words below to help you.

Sentence starters:	Key words
<i>The turning point of the Second World War was...</i>	Retreat
<i>This was a moment which decisively changed the direction of the war because...</i>	Defeat
<i>Some people may argue that... was the turning point of the Second World war because...</i>	Alliances
<i>However I would argue that it was not as important as... because...</i>	Victory
	Territory
	Advance
	Casualties

