

75th anniversary of Victory in Europe Day is a day celebrating Nazi Germany's surrender on 08 May 1945



Activity

Look at the image. Close your eyes and imagine what it might have felt like to be at the celebrations on VE Day.

On 8 May every year Britain remembers VE Day as a moment of victory and celebration. But in mainland Europe, memories are sometimes a little more complicated. On that day in 1945, huge crowds took to the streets to drink and dance, to laugh, shout and sing until the late at night in Paris, Brussels and London. All young people felt “exuberant” (cheerful) according to the French newspaper *Libération*. Among the older generations in Europe journalists report there was, instead, “an air of indefinable melancholy”. They are happy, just feeling free and happy. But not everywhere people were that happy. And today is the same way. People are looking on the events through the lens of their own history, experience and their education. There are differences for different nations.

In Germany people also waited for this moment for years as this war continued 6 years of endless dying! This day was not full of glory. It seemed to be absolutely pointless. German dreams of an empire were stolen and broken. They were no able to celebrate the victory of who destroyed them. This day for them was like a jump in the darkness and sinking in blindness or even worse – the feeling of senselessness.

When we celebrate this big day today, we usually focus on the celebrations in Britain and the USA, but what is more interesting is how it was different for everybody for every single person and for every nation. Even across nations who fought on the same side in the war, there are sharp differences.

If I was there attending these celebrations in 1945 I am not sure what I would feel and how. One thing I know for sure and it is that no matter if this day is finding me as a winner or not, it is a big relief to know there won't be bombs, attacks, famine, insecurity and violence anymore.

Activity

How do you think returning soldiers felt about coming home?

In war soldiers only worry how to survive, to stay alive, and not to die. They don't have to worry about paying rent, bills, food, children health or education and all the other small things of the routine everyday of civilians. Many lost their families, parents, siblings, wife and children. Many more lost their houses and found their properties destroyed. Almost all experience so called ‘survivors guilt’ and mental disorders. They still live with the feelings and fears they used to in the military. A number of them returned with visible

and invisible disabilities. And there are some that were not able to or don't want to go back home. I can say it is somehow similar to the issues with the refugees today. The definitions of 'homeland' and 'home' have changed for these people.

Activity

1. *What does displaced mean? Look it up in the dictionary or Google it.*
2. *How would it feel to not be able to go back to your home?*

'Displaced' means to force (someone) to leave their home. This typically happens because of war, persecution, or natural disaster. Usually people who are displaced are forced to move. It is not their choice, not their will or wish. And almost always their direction is one way, no chances for returns. Not to be able to go to your home means you will be a foreigner forever. There is a quote which states 'once immigrant, forever immigrant.' And it is quite right not only for immigrants, but for refugees, for asylum seekers and for all displaced people around the world. Unfortunately the main reason producing the highest numbers of displaced people are wars. In the end of WWII there were approximately 40 million refugees scattered across Europe and only in Germany - around 17 million displaced people including approx. 300,000 Jews.

Activity

1. *People living in countries who had fought on the other side of the war also had a lot of rebuilding to do – how might they have felt?*
2. *What kinds of challenges might people have had to face during this time trying to rebuild their lives?*

The reconstruction of Germany after WWII was a long process. Germany and her allies had suffered heavy losses during the war, both in lives and industrial power. Germany was heavily bombed and agricultural production was only 35% of what it was before the war. As they lived with hope they will not lose the war, it was very hard for them to accept the reality. There is something dramatically important about post-war Germany. Germans accepted collective responsibility for the horrors of the Nazi era. It wasn't just Hitler and his officers. Germany did horrible things. This has been part of the rationale for providing help to the victims and their descendants. Only few years ago, in 2015, Germany 'invited' Syrian refugees. That was a result of their feeling of national guilt regarding the crimes they did with Jews in the WWII.

During this time trying to rebuild their lives people faced all kinds of challenges Syrian people will face as soon as the criminal regime of Bashar Assad will be changed. I don't know when exactly that will happen, but I hope it will be during my lifetime. And Syria should be rebuilt the same way as the post-WWII Europe was. Eventually a big financial aid can be provided mainly from the EU and Turkey. There will be issues with planning, water drilling and infrastructure. It is not only about buildings and homes, but about historical reconstruction of few of the oldest cities in the world as Aleppo, Homs, Idlib, Deir-el-zor and Raqqa. ISIS-fighters damaged enough of the world and Middle Eastern heritage which is irreversible that same way that happened during WWII. For example the Cathedral of Dresden in Germany was reconstructed with British help.

As somebody who is interesting in design technology and travel and tourism I feel excited waiting that time to come. It will be hard work for years and years ahead.