

Statement by Winston Churchill (London, 8 May 1945)

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Yesterday morning, at 2.41 a.m. at General Eisenhower's headquarters, General Jodl, the representative of the German High Command and of Grand Admiral Dönitz, the designated head of the German State, 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 United States Army, and General François Sevez signed the document on behalf of the supreme commander of the Allied Expeditionary Force, and General Sousloparov signed on behalf of the Russian High Command.

Today this Agreement will be ratified and confirmed at Berlin, where Air Chief Marshal Tedder, deputy Supreme Commander of the Allied Expeditionary Force and General De Lattre De Tassigny will sign on behalf of General Eisenhower. General Zhukov will sign on behalf of the Soviet High Command. The German representatives will be Field Marshal Keitel, Chief of the High Command and the Commanders-in-Chief of the German Army, Navy and Air Forces.

Hostilities will end officially at one minute after midnight tonight, Tuesday the 8th of May, one minute after midnight tonight, Tuesday the 8th of May. But in the interest of saving lives, the ceasefire began yesterday to be sounded all along the fronts and our dear Channel Islands are also to be freed today.

The Germans are still in places resisting the Russian troops but should they continue to do so after midnight, they will of course deprive themselves of the protection of the laws of war and will be attacked from all quarters by the allied troops. It is not surprising that on such long fronts and in the existing disorder of the enemy, the commands of the German High Command could not in every case have been obeyed immediately. This does not, in our opinion, with the best military advice at our disposal, constitute any reason for withholding from the nation the facts communicated to us by General Eisenhower of the unconditional surrender already signed at Reims, nor should it prevent us from celebrating today and tomorrow, Wednesday, as victory in Europe day.

Today perhaps we shall think the mostly of ourselves; tomorrow we shall pay a particular tribute to the heroic Russian comrades whose prowess in the field has been one of the grand contributions to the general victory.

The German war is therefore at an end. After years of intense preparations, Germany hurled herself on Poland at the beginning of September 1939 and in pursuance of our guarantee to Poland and in common with the French Republic, Great Britain, the British Empire and Commonwealth of Nations declared war upon this foul aggression.

After gallant France had been struck down, we, from this island and from our united Empire maintained the struggle single-handed for a whole year until we were joined by the military might of Soviet Russia and later by the overwhelming power and resources of the United States of America.

Finally, almost the whole world was combined against the evil doers, who are now prostrate before us. Our gratitude to all our splendid allies goes forth from all our hearts in this island and throughout the British Empire.

We may allow ourselves a brief period of rejoicing, but let us not forget for a moment the toils and efforts that lie ahead. Japan, with all her treachery and greed, remains unsubdued. The injuries she has inflicted upon Great Britain, the United States and other countries and her detestable cruelties call for justice and retribution. We must now devote all our strength and resources to the completion of our task both at home and abroad.

Advance Britannia! Long live the cause of freedom! God save the King!