

THE
NEWSLETTER
SPRING 2020

BR0753

THE ROYAL BRITISH
LEGION



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VE DAY 2020

When VE Day dawns on 8th May 2020 it will be 75 years since the guns fell silent at the end of the war in Europe. Years of carnage and destruction had come to an end and millions of people took to the streets and pubs to celebrate peace, mourn their loved-ones and to hope for the future, but not forgetting those still in conflict until 15th August when it was announced that Japan had surrendered unconditionally to the Allies, effectively ending World War II.

To commemorate VE Day our government moved the first May bank holiday from Monday to Friday the 8 of May to accommodate a three day VE 75th international celebration - However, in light of the terrible Caronavirus emergency and consequent Government guidance, our Branch and the Town Council took a decision to cancel or postpone the community celebrations possibly until August, which would then include VJ Day (Victory over Japan)

However, not to let the auspicious date go unrecognised, the Henley and Peppard Branch of the Royal British Legion would like you to join them in turning the town Red, White, and Blue - the colours of our National Flag which is a symbol of unity. As it did during WWII, the Country is seeing a similar spirit that kept everyone going during the war.

We are all in this together

Please help us make this happen, share this as far and wide as you can to your families or neighbours, and on Friday 8th May at 9pm – you can join in with the BBC Commemorations of VE Day by joining us all to sing 'We'll Meet Again' which in these uncertain times is quite an apt choice.

Dates for your Diary

Meetings are held on 3rd Monday of the month unless otherwise advised.

Venue – The Christ Church Centre

Talk 11.30 (please be seated by 11.20) Lunch 12 for 12.30

Meeting & Talks 2020

By now we are only too aware of this wretched virus and the effect it is having on all our lives.

This is just to clarify where we stand with regard to planned Branch activities: -

The scheduled of events listed below have been unavoidably cancelled

7 May - An Evening with Kipling cancelled

8 May - John Hudson - 'Honorable Artillery Company's Light Horse Cavalry'

27 May - Battle of Cassel - Presentation at the Army Cadets' Drill Hall

Although these talks have been cancelled, there is every hope that we can reschedule them in the future. Going forward there will be no further talks planned until the Government give the all clear.

Until then please keep safe and well

The Duncan Cup



For the second consecutive year the Henley and Peppard branch of the Royal British Legion has received an award for achieving the highest increase in membership in Oxfordshire last year.

Branch chairman John Green attended the 95th county conference and was presented with the Duncan Trophy and a certificate by David Mason, president of Oxfordshire Royal British Legion.

The branch now has 126 members, having recruited 24 people last year while many other branches have been experiencing a decline.

John attributed the success to Mollie Jeffrey, the branch's membership secretary, and the social offering of its monthly meetings.

He said: "Mollie's dedication and hard work has been largely responsible for this achievement against the national trend."



A Trek in the Simien Highlands of Ethiopia

John Green, Chair of the Henley & Peppard Branch of the Royal British Legion undertook a 10 day trek in the Simien Highlands in Ethiopia to raise money for the Poppy Appeal. Most of the trek was above 10,000 ft and he hoped to reach the highest mountain Ras Dashen at 15,000 ft but managed to scale to the summit of Bwahit at 14,600ft.

John, no stranger to trek challenges, was invited by Rebecca Stephens MBE, the first woman to climb Everest, if he would like to join the group. John leapt at the chance and so began his biggest challenge.



The timing of the trip was difficult for John as it meant he would miss both the Remembrance Sunday service and the Armistice Day events in Henley. However, John stopped the walkers to observe the two-minute silence to remember the fallen.

After the trek John visited the Commonwealth War Cemetery just outside Addis Ababa to lay a memorial cross on the grave of Warrant Officer John Dodd of the Worcestershire Regiment who died in 1944. John's own regiment, the Sherwood Foresters, merged with the Worcestershire Regiment in 1970.



On entering the National Park, sleeping under canvas and with the guides helping to carry the baggage, John endured three days of 10 hour treks both up and down hill. On one day descending 1800 metres down narrow rock strewn tracks requiring great concentration. On another, avoiding a swollen river after a lot of rainfall, added 4 hours to their trek before arriving at the camp just before dark.

John loved the wonderful sights of Lake Tana and the Blue Nile Falls, the Highland's majestic beauty abounding with rare wildlife such as the rare mountain Ibex Colourful bird life and many families of baboons. John said he was surprised to see the lush green lowlands tilled by ox-drawn wooden ploughs and grain reaped by sickle as in Biblical times. "The people despite much poverty are welcoming and do not hesitate to invite you into their humble dwellings to make what must be the best coffee in the world."

Though losing 3 kilos in weight on what he called "an unforgettable experience", John is delighted that with the help of many friends and supporters it has helped to raise over £3000 for the Poppy Appeal to help those damaged mentally and physically by war and unable to have the life that most of us enjoy.

Turn Your Window Red, White and Blue for VE Day 75

VE Day this year is going to be different for us all, many plans that were made have had to be cancelled due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

While our situation isn't quite as bad as what the WWII generation went through, there are many similarities. Some families are separated, some families have lost loved ones, some families are suffering financially. All similar to the affect that WWII had on our Country – The United Kingdom.

As it did during WWII, the Country has seen the similar spirit now that kept everyone going during the war.

On VE Day, Friday 8th May 2020 it is the 75th Anniversary of the formal acceptance by the Allies of World War II of Nazi Germany's unconditional surrender of its armed forces. Many soldiers began returning home shortly after, many more didn't return until much later and many more did not return at all. Millions of lives were changed forever.

In a show of Unity, Remembrance, Respect, Commemoration and Celebration the Henley & Peppard Branch of the Royal British Unionn are asking you to turn your window Red, White and Blue on 8th May 2020. With our Union Jack and bunting

Do take a picture of your window and send it to our webmaster at 2anne.evans@sky.com and they will be posted on our website and the South East Midlands Royal British Legion Facebook page. A good selection will be printed in this Newsletter and in the local press.

Let's turn Henley, Peppard and surrounding villages red, white and blue and show that we appreciate and support those who went and never came back and those who went but came back to a different world as different people.

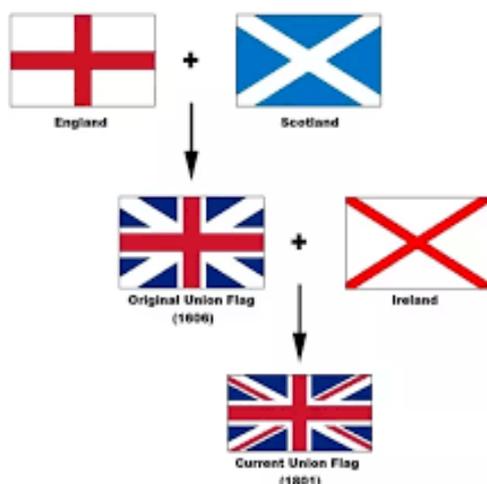
Further on you will find information for Children about WWII and other activities you can get them to do as well as a WWII recipe that really is simple. We hope that you enjoy what we have put together for you and your families.

As it was in WWII – We are all in this together – Stay Safe and Keep Smiling

Fun for the whole family

The Union-Jack is made up of 3 flags. In 1606 The England Flag (cross of St George) and the Scottish Flag (White Saltire of St Andrew) were combined to create The Kings Colours Grand Union Flag.

In 1801 there was a Union of Great Britain and Ireland and the Red Saltire of St Patrick was added which then created the Union Jack that is still our National Flag of the United Kingdom to this day. Our flag is over 200 years old



Fun for the whole family

A fun task for all the family. Turning our town Red, White and Blue by drawing the Union Jack, one for each member of the family, colour it in and put it up in your windows.

Don't forget to take a picture of you and your window and email it to our webmaster - 2anne.evans@sky.com.

We will put it up on our website and send the best ones to the local Press.

PS be careful to put the flag up the correct way. Its a sneaky trap for the unwary !

Games that Children Played in the 1940's

Some of the games that children played in the 1940's were really simple things. There weren't many toys around in those days.



They collected 'Conkers' that had fallen from the Horse Chestnut trees and took off the shells to reveal the shiny brown conker. Then they got an adult to poke a hole through the centre of the conker and threaded a string through it. The game of Conkers simply involved two players taking it in turns to try to hit the other's conker and smash it to smithereens! One child would dangle their conker on its string at about chest height. The other would line up their own conker with the string taut and would get one attempt to hit and damage the other. If a conker managed to smash another off its string, it became a "one-er" then a "two-er" and eventually a "king-er".



Jacks were another popular game - they consisted of a small red ball and some jacks. To decide who goes first, use a method of "flipping"; place the jacks in cupped hands, flip them to the back of the hands, then back to cupped hands. The player who holds the most jacks goes first. That player scatters the jacks into the playing area with a throw from one hand. The first round, "Onesies," means that the player throws the ball in the air and picks up one jack then grabs the ball after it bounces once. The player must pick up all jacks this way without missing the jack or letting the ball bounce more than once. If that happens, it becomes the other player's turn and the first player is back to the beginning of Onesies. If all the jacks are picked up successfully, the player moves on to Twosies (pick up 2 jacks per throw), then Threesies, and so on. The winning player is the one to pick up the largest number of jacks at once to get to the highest round.

Another game was Red Light, Green Light.

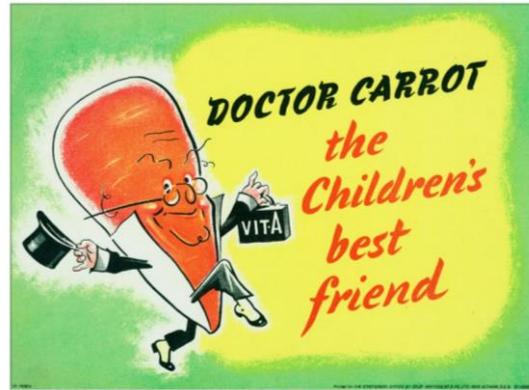
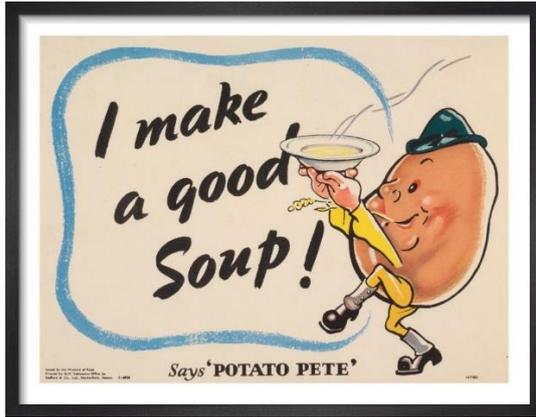
One person is chosen to be 'It' (the traffic light) and he/she stands a good distance away from the other players (5+ metres) with his back to them. The other players stand in a line facing It.

When It calls 'Green Light,' the other players move towards him until he spins around, calling 'Red Light.' When they hear the red light command the other players must freeze on the spot. Any child seen moving must return to the starting line. The children must remain frozen until the next 'Green Light' command is given.

Play continues in this manner until someone reaches and tags It. The tagger becomes the new It and the game begins again.

Can you imagine not having computers, Xbox's, iPads or even a TV and having to make up your own games. That's what all children in the 1940's had to do. Aren't we lucky now? We have so much more than those Children and their families ever had.

During World War II - food was rationed and what little food people had, had to last a long while. During the war there were 2 Character's created - Potato Pete and Doctor Carrot.



Potato Pete even had his own recipe book. One of the easiest recipes from this book is Potato Piglets. This fed 6 people during the war.

All you need is: 6 medium, well scrubbed potatoes
 6 Skinned Sausages
 Cooked Cabbage lightly chopped

Method: Remove the centre of the potato with an apple corer, so that the potato has a circle all the way through.

 Fill the centre of the potato with the sausage meat and bake in the oven as you would a normal baked potato.

 Serve it on a bed of the cooked cabbage.

During the war, the parts of the potato that were removed, were then used to add to soup. No food went to waste.

Children didn't have lollipops or ice creams during the war, as these were rationed. What they did have were Carrots. Many Children didn't get Easter Eggs, instead they got Carrots on sticks. See the picture below - this was a children's treat at the time. Imagine not having chocolate.



So, the next time your Mum or Dad tell you to eat your carrots - just think that carrots were once a treat for Children during WWII. Also, remember what Doctor Carrot said - he's the Children's best friend because carrots are good for you.



BRIAN WILLIAM HUGHES BEM

Brian Hughes aged 86 died peacefully on Sunday 19th April at the Wallingford Community hospital.

Brian was renowned throughout Henley and beyond for his stoical fundraising for the Royal British Legion (RBL) Poppy Appeal in all weathers, either house-to-house or standing for many hours in Market Place.

In this role he raised individually over £60,000. A proud native of Henley, he and his late wife Ursula were inseparable and together supported the RBL for over 25 years.

Brian was educated at the former Henley Infants School, Trinity School, and the former National School. He started work in 1947 at Hammants of Henley and, apart from National Service, stayed in their employment for 50 years.

In the 1950's Brian served his National Service with the Royal Electrical and Mechanical Engineers (REME) holding the rank of Corporal, and was awarded the General Service Medal for his time in the Suez Canal Zone.

On his return from Suez Brian met and fell in love with local girl Ursula Russell. They were married in 1957. Daughters Deborah and Gillian arrived in 1961 and 1963 respectively and Brian settled into family life in Henley.

He became involved with the Royal British Legion after his family had flown the nest and he needed a project that would enable him to give something back to his home town.

In his 50's Brian also took up running and participated in many half marathons, including The Great North Run and the Reading Half-Marathon. He raised funds for Sue Ryder and other local charities.

Despite her ill health, Brian and Ursula celebrated their 60th Wedding Anniversary in February 2017. Ursula passed away in December 2017.

Brian was RBL Oxfordshire County Standard Bearer for 13 consecutive years and Henley Branch Standard Bearer for more than 20. He attended 79 repatriations at the John Radcliffe Hospital 'final corner' to honour the 175 service personnel killed in recent conflicts.

He was very much an 'old soldier' in turnout and bearing, and despite deteriorating health carried out his role well beyond the call of duty. This was recognised in 2010 by the award of the RBL Gold Badge. In 2015 he received the prestigious award of the Henley Town Medal in appreciation of his work in the community.

Finally in 2017 in the Queen's birthday honours list Brian was awarded the British Empire Medal (BEM) which was presented to him with great ceremony in the Town Hall by John Howard, Vice Lord Lieutenant of Oxfordshire, before a large and enthusiastic audience of well-wishers.

Brian will be long remembered as a modest, true and gentle man.

RIP

Members share their memories of VE Day and more.....

I was four years of age when my family moved to Shirley near to Croydon in 1938. Croydon, and its surrounding districts so close to London and near Croydon airport, bore the brunt throughout the war of the German air raids on the capital. Our house, which was brand new, survived with only minor damage although six houses in the next road were completely demolished by a flying bomb.

My father, who was awarded the Military Medal in the Royal Field Artillery in WW1, was too old to serve in WW2. He was responsible for Air Raid Precautions on the London and North Eastern Railway and continued to work in London throughout the war whilst the rest of the family evacuated firstly to North Wales and then Devon in 1940 and finally to Berkhamsted. We returned in 1944 in time for the "Doodlebug" flying bomb raids and then the V2 rockets. When VE day came it was a great relief to know the raids would be over although for a neighbouring family they had to wait for VJ Day (Victory over Japan) for the husband to return from his awful experiences in a Japanese prisoner of war camp.
Malcolm Lewis

Whenever the Alert was sounded my grandfather, retired Indian Army and at that time Air Raid Warden, had the job of opening the air raid shelter, situated under that small triangle of land between Rupert's Elm and Rupert House School - in those days St Joan's School - at the Northfield End bit of Henley. To this day I can remember the difference in sound between the Junkers Jumo engines of the Heinkels and Dorniers and the noise made by the engines of our aeroplanes. *Peter Blaker*

I was in the fourth or fifth day of my first term at my outstanding prep school near Guildford. My memory of VE Day is us all dancing round a bonfire on which we stuck photographs of members of the Nazi hierarchy, *Peter Blaker*

I was born in Birmingham in January 1935 and was 10 on VE Day. Dad was an engineer making pieces for Spitfires at Castle Bromwich down the road. My friends in 1944/45 included many Australian Air Force guys who frequently spent leaves with us under the hospitality scheme for visiting service men. They included Ron Jacobs DFC, a Pathfinder Bomb Aimer /Navigator and Jack Kronberg skipper of a Lancaster bomber aged just 20. Another was Harry Carpenter a Rear Gunner who earned a Caterpillar Badge for bailing out of a blazing Lancaster. My own contribution on VE Day was lighting thunder-flashes kindly supplied by the Aussies. *James McConville*

I was in the fourth or fifth day of my first term at my outstanding preparatory school near Guildford. My memory is of us all dancing round a bonfire on which we stuck photographs of members of the Nazi hierarchy. *Peter Blaker*

I was 10 old and living in Sheffield. On hearing the news I rushed-up to our attic to find a flag to fly. All I could find was a French tricolour which I duly nailed to my scout pole and went out into the street only to be chastised by a passerby with the words 'Why are you flying the French flag we won the war not the French!' I took no notice and helped to build a huge bonfire on a vacant lot at the end of the street. Great jollity that evening. No sweets available but someone hit on the idea of making a 'dip' combining Andrews liver salts and cocoa! *John Green*

When VE day came it was a great relief to know the raids would be over although for a neighbouring family they had to wait for VJ Day (Victory over Japan) for the husband to return from his awful experiences in a Japanese prisoner of war camp. In the evening of VE Day the residents in our road held an impromptu party and lit a bonfire in the road. Food and alcohol were rationed but as if by magic it was quickly produced and good fun was had by all. Next day there were concerns about the road surface which had melted with the heat of the bonfire and attempts were made to patch it up with cement but we never heard from the Council who eventually did some proper resurfacing.
Malcolm Lewis RD

An email conversation between committee membersperhaps showing, when the conversation turns to wartime food, that this strange time we are living in is beginning to take its toll!

John Green "I recall corned beef hash was a favourite of mine. The brand was Fray Bentos my father referred to it as Fray Carthorse!! Basically mashed potato, baked beans on the corned beef and some cheese if available, then put in the oven. Later splashed with HP sauce. We also enjoyed spam fritters! Very healthy diet!

Peter Blaker I remember dried eggs and being given American K Rations - and once, to the horror of my mother, being given chewing gum! I remember too my grandmother on one occasion putting a milky concoction outside the door on a frosty winter's night to try, vainly, to make ice cream in those days before we had refrigerators....
.....and in those days a child could ride a bicycle up and down the Fair Mile in Henley without fear of being run over!

John Green Peter, vintage memories indeed! Were you forced like me to take a tablespoon of Codliver oil and malt every day? Yuck!

Nicholas Launders I enjoyed Codliver oil and malt - it was sticky and sweet with a malty taste! Or did you mean plain cod-liver oil? This was indeed yucky and is still available! The other interesting substance was the orange juice in the same sort of bottles? I quite enjoyed this and preferred it to the doubtful postwar orange squash!

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My grandmother Elsie Dorothy Jones, will be 100 on August 13<sup>th</sup> and these are her memories of VE Day. She is taking the lockdown in her stride in Niagara Road, Henley where she lives independently.  
*Angelina Jones*

### Memories of V.E Day 1945 from Elsie Dorothy Jones - born in 1920

In 1945 I was 25 years old, living in Stoke Talmage, a tiny village in Oxfordshire.

My husband George was overseas serving with the Royal Air Force and we had two children, Peter who was 4 years old and Valerie who was nearly 2 years old.

My husband had been sent overseas soon after Valerie was born, so you can imagine how I longed for the war to be over and for us to be reunited as a proper family.

In those days we thanked God for Winston Churchill and the radio which kept us up with the news.

Then in May 1945 it came. What a day!! The whole country was ready to celebrate.

My village had plans for a fete with shared rations etc. However, as fate would have it, our two children (and others) had developed measles. As it was very contagious a doctor advised me to keep them away from the light, especially baby Valerie, as their eyes could very easily be affected by measles.

So be it, I was indoors with the children and could hear the celebrations going on across the fields and the joyous sound of aircraft (our own) flying overhead.

My husband George was finally de-mobbed in 1946 after serving for 6 years and went on to join the police force.

## Blow by Blow Account of VE Day

**2am GMT:** Scores of ships in Southampton Docks are sounding their horns, and a searchlight is flashing 'V for Victory' in Morse code. The war in Europe is over.

**7am:** Excitement had been building overnight since announcements on the wireless yesterday that the Allied victory was to be celebrated today.

Two hundred Lancaster bombers are bringing 13,000 PoWs home from Europe today



**8am:** In Kanchanaburi PoW camp in Thailand, British officers are listening to the news of VE Day on a secret radio. They must keep their elation to themselves, as their Japanese guards will kill them if they discover they have a radio.

**10.55am:** A message is being received at Downing Street from Winston Churchill's wife Clementine, who is in Moscow on a mission for the Red Cross. 'All my thoughts are with you on this supreme day, my darling. It could not have happened without you,' the telegram says. Her husband is sitting up in bed at No.10 working on his victory speech. The Prime Minister earlier received assurances from the Ministry of Food that there's enough beer in London for the celebrations. **11.30am:** At the Savoy Hotel in London they have started serving a special VE Day themed lunch, including La Coup Glacée des Allies and La Citronette Joyeuse Déliverances.

**12.00:** A message arrives at 10 Downing Street from President Harry S. Truman, 'With warm affection, we hail our comrades-in-arms across the Atlantic.' Today is the President's 61st birthday. In a few hours he will write to his mother with news of the German surrender, 'Isn't that some birthday present?'

**1pm:** Twenty-Three-year-old Corporal Eckart Oestmann — part of a German Army reconnaissance unit stationed in the Bavarian Alps — has spent all morning burning confidential papers so they don't fall into the hands of the Russians. His phone with a direct link to Headquarters is ringing. Oestmann picks it up and receives his last order of the war. 'From now on the Hitler salute will be replaced by the former salute where the right hand touches the cap.' Oestmann angrily throws the receiver across the room.

**1.30pm:** In Norway, Captain Vidkun Quisling, the hated leader of the pro-Nazi puppet government, is giving himself up to members of the Norwegian resistance who have arrived at his home.

Quisling is assured he will be given a fair trial. 'I know that the Norwegian people have sentenced me to death and that the easiest course for me would be to take my own life. But I want history to reach its verdict,' he tells his visitors. Quisling starts packing his personal belongings. In October he will be shot by firing squad having been found guilty of treason, embezzlement and murder.

**2pm:** Guards officer Humphrey Lyttelton is among the crowds in front of Buckingham Palace. He left his Caterham base this morning and took a train up to London armed with his trumpet — he's always up for an impromptu 'blow'. Lyttelton plays wartime hits such as Run, Rabbit Run and We're Going To Hang Out Our Washing On The Siegfried Line.

**2.30pm:** Outside the Cabinet Room where in September 1939 Chamberlain had announced the declaration of war, a large number of typists and private secretaries are eavesdropping on Winston Churchill's rehearsal for his broadcast to the British people.

'What are you doing?' they hear the PM bark at a BBC engineer.

'They are just fixing the microphone, Sir.' Churchill then blows his nose loudly

**3pm:** From the Cabinet Room, Churchill begins his speech to the nation. He announces that hostilities will officially finish at one minute past midnight tonight, and goes on to say, 'We may allow ourselves a brief period of rejoicing, but let us not forget for a moment the toil and effort that lie ahead . . .' When he says 'almost the whole world was combined against the evil-doers', a crowd listening via speakers in Parliament Square gasp at the phrase.

From the White House, President Truman is addressing the American people. 'We must work to bind up the wounds of a suffering world, to build an abiding peace.' Then he warns, 'Our blows will not cease until the Japanese military and naval forces lay down their arms in Europe'

**3.10pm:** At the bottom of a lift shaft in a salt mine in the Thuringian Forest in Germany, an army radio is broadcasting Churchill's speech. Close by, a team of Allied experts known as the Monuments Men is struggling to force a metal casket into the lift cage. In the casket are the remains of the Prussian king Frederick the Great.

Three weeks ago, the Nazis hid Frederick the Great's body for safe-keeping in the mine along with Frederick William, the so-called 'Soldier King', and the body of Field Marshal Von Hindenburg and his wife. They hoped that future generations would rally around these symbols of Prussian might.

**3.20pm:** His broadcast over, Winston Churchill is being driven in an open car the short distance from Downing Street to the Commons. The crowds are so large and enthusiastic that mounted police are having to clear the way.

Churchill is standing on the front seat of the car next to his detective and shaking hands with the crowd as the car inches forward. The engine isn't running — it's being pushed by the people all around the car.

In Heemstede, near Haarlem in the Netherlands, eight-year-old John Schwartz is having a piano lesson at his teacher's house when one of her neighbours bursts in: 'the war is over!' People immediately rush into the street waving orange flags. They set up tables and, using flour which has been air-dropped in the last week by Allied Forces, people start cooking pancakes and feasting.

John Schwartz's cousin, and future Hollywood star, 15-year-old Audrey Hepburn, has spent the end of the war hiding with her mother in her grandparents' cellar. She has become very malnourished, and makes herself ill eating a whole can of condensed milk.

**3.45pm:** Churchill in the House of Commons is reading to the chamber the speech he has just made on the BBC.

**4pm:** At German industrialist Oscar Schindler's factory in the Sudetenland, 1,200 of his workers have assembled on the shop floor. Most of them are Jews who he has protected during the war years. They have heard reports of Churchill's speech and can hear gunfire nearby and they know the war is almost over, but they are terrified that their SS guards will take them on a death march to escape the Allied armies.

Some of the workers are discussing the possibility of using a secret arms cache to attack the guards.

Schindler makes a speech telling them to act with restraint and not vengeance. He reminds them how he has protected them and promises to wait with them until five minutes after midnight, by which time the SS will have left the camp and the ceasefire Churchill promised will have come into effect.

Schindler also gives instructions for everyone to be given from his stores three metres of fabric, one litre of vodka and some cigarettes.



**4.45pm:** Churchill is back in his car on his way to Buckingham Palace where the King wants him to look over the text of the speech he is due to make at 6 o'clock. Then the Prime Minister realises that he has forgotten his cigars and tells his detective Walter Thompson to go back to Downing Street to get one. Churchill knows it is his trademark. 'I must put one on for them,' he says to Thompson, 'they expect it.'

**5.40pm:** Forty minutes late, Churchill is on the balcony of the Ministry of Health in Whitehall. 'This is your hour. This is your victory!' he declares to the thousands below him. 'One deadly foe has been cast to the ground, and awaits our judgment and mercy, but there is another foe who occupies large portions of the British Empire — the Japanese.' The crowd of 20,000 boo loudly.

**6pm:** The King is speaking to the nation from Buckingham Palace. 'Much hard work awaits us in the restoration of our country after the ravages of war . . .' His words are broadcast around the world and via tannoys across London. In and around Victoria Station, where 100,000 people are listening, the crush is so extreme that women are fainting and are being carried over the shoulders of the crowd.

At the former Panzer training school next to Bergen-Belsen concentration camp 13,000 former inmates are being treated, British medical staff are listening to the King's broadcast. British soldiers fire anti-aircraft guns in celebration,

**8pm:** The blackout over, across the country people are turning their house lights on, pulling back their curtains and standing in the street to see what it looks like. Firework parties for children who never knew Bonfire Night are starting. In Oxford there is a bonfire by the Martyr's Memorial and in the High Street where students are bringing out wood from the colleges to burn — antique furniture and even a piano are thrown into the flames. Some children are eating oranges for the first time. Teenager Peter Bennett is sick after eating orange peel — he had no idea that you threw that part away.

Princesses Elizabeth and Margaret are allowed to mingle with the crowds in front of Buckingham Palace accompanied by two Guards officers. 'Poor darlings, they've not had any fun yet,' the King will write later in his diary.

**9pm:** The crowds in front of Buckingham Palace have spilled into Green Park. Deckchairs and park benches are being passed along a human chain and being thrown into a massive bonfire.

In Berlin, 26-year-old Russian intelligence agent Yelena Rzhevskaya is clinging on to a red box. Word has got out that the Germans have surrendered to the Western Allies and Russian troops in Berlin have started to party. Rzhevskaya is pouring drinks with one hand, but she won't let go of the box. She has been told that she will pay with her life if the contents are lost. The box contains Hitler's charred jaw bone. Eight days earlier, the Fuhrer had poisoned and shot himself in his bunker and his body had been burned by his staff.

**10pm:** In Berlin discussions between the Allied and the German delegations about the final formal unconditional surrender of German forces has come to an end. 'I ask you, have you read the document on unconditional surrender? Are you prepared to sign it?' Air Chief Marshal Sir Arthur Tedder asks the German delegation. Field Marshal Keitel, Chief of the Combined General Staff, replies: 'I am prepared to sign,' and removes his right glove to adjust his monocle. As soon as the signing is over the Western Allies start shaking hands as the Russians exchange bear hugs. Gunfire sounds out across the city and Marshal Zhukov of the Red Army starts to dance.**10.05pm:** St Paul's Cathedral is floodlit, and behind its dome the sky glows red from the bonfires in the East End. A telegram is being sent from Downing Street to the British Chargé d'Affairs in Moscow

**10.30pm:** For 22-year-old Alfred Kantor, one of the survivors of a death march which set out from Schwarzheide concentration camp on April 18, the night is being spent in one of two open railway carriages which have been at a standstill in the German countryside for two days. Now the SS guards suddenly leave. Kantor counts the survivors and will later record that there were 175 out of the 1,000 men who set out three weeks before. A Red Cross truck appears and collects the weakest. Kantor is one of those who remains behind. The war is over. It feels like a dream.

Midnight: After celebrating VE Day in front of Buckingham Palace, Noel Coward is walking back to the Savoy Hotel (where he's lived since his home was bombed in 1941) with his friend, the composer Ivor Novello, who has a flat nearby. Coward writes in his diary later: 'I suppose this is the greatest day in our history.'