

EASTERN EUROPE 1939–1945: BERLIN

Extract from British Prime Minister Winston Churchill's statement officially announcing the defeat of Germany 1945

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Hostilities will end officially at one minute after midnight to-night, Tuesday, 8th May, but in the interests of saving lives the "Cease Fire" began yesterday to be sounded all along the fronts, and I should not forget to mention that our dear Channel Islands, the only part of His Majesty's Dominions that has been in the hands of the German foe, are also

to be freed to-day. The Germans are still in places resisting 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 that the orders of the German High Command should not in every case have been obeyed. This does not, in our opinion, constitute any reason for withholding from the nation the facts communicated to us by General Eisenhower of the unconditional surrender already signed at Rheims, nor should it prevent us from celebrating to-day, and to-morrow—Wednesday—as Victory-in-Europe Days, and I think that to-morrow it may be specially desirable for us to emphasise the debt we owe to our Soviet Ally, whose main celebrations will be taking place to-morrow.

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What is this source?

This source is an extract from Prime Minister Churchill's official announcement to the British Parliament that the war against Germany was over.

The official date was May 8th 1945 and it became known as VE-Day, that is, Victory in Europe Day.

What's the background to this source?

After Hitler's early successes in 1940 only Britain and her Empire allies stood against Germany. However, Hitler attacked the USSR in 1941 and gave Britain an ally. Throughout the war Britain, and then the USA, supplied the USSR with supplies and equipment by air and by dangerous sea convoys. They also played their part in defeating Germany by invading occupied France in June 1944 and then advancing on Germany. However, there is little doubt that the USSR actually took on the major share of the fighting against German forces and also suffered the highest casualties.

One of Hitler's key aims in WW2 was to invade and destroy the Soviet Union and build a German empire in Eastern Europe. He invaded the USSR in June 1941 and at first it looked like he would succeed. However, he was stopped by the Russian winter in 1941 and then by stubborn Soviet resistance in 1942–3. By the start of 1943 the tide began to turn against the Germans. By 1944 all German forces were driven out of the USSR. By 1945 the Red Army was moving into Germany and it took Berlin in May 1945.

It's worth knowing that...

Before the war Churchill was a bitter opponent of the USSR's Communist system of government and he made no secret of the fact that he did not trust Stalin. However, once they became allies the relationship between Churchill and Stalin improved. They did admire each other. Even so, it was doubtful whether they ever really trusted each other.

In 1943 Churchill commented in an official telegram about the activities of the USA and British forces in the Mediterranean. He declared that: 'Our present activities in the Mediterranean, important though they are, could only be regarded as an inadequate contribution compared with the efforts which Russia was making'.



Learning Curve

WORLD WAR II

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How will you use this source?

1. What was Churchill announcing?
2. Why was the ceasefire not being followed in all areas?
3. What does Churchill say about the Soviet Union?
4. What does this tell you about the Soviet contribution to Germany's defeat?
5. Are there any parts of this source you could use in your script for your task using the starter source film clip?