

How might Churchill have replied to this telegram?

Sailors celebrate VE Day in London, May 1945

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What is this source?

This photograph was taken on May 8th 1945 to show how people in Britain celebrated VE-Day. It shows two British sailors and their girlfriends wading in the fountains in Trafalgar Square, London.

VE-Day was Victory in Europe Day. It marked the defeat of Nazi Germany.

WESTERN EUROPE 1939–1945: END OF THE WAR

What's the background to this source?

The Second World War began in September 1939 when Germany invaded Poland. By the summer of 1940 it looked as though Germany would overrun all of Europe. In 1941 matters got worse for Britain as Japan invaded her possessions in the Far East. However, in 1942 the tide gradually turned, especially after the Soviet Union and the USA entered the war in 1941. By 1945 Germany was defeated and Japan surrendered early in September 1945.

As this image was taken people knew that the defeat of Germany was close. However, there had been many disasters and disappointments and so people waited for the official announcement before they really started to party. The war had a huge impact on British life, not just for the troops. Government control had been extremely strict. The most obvious example of this was food rationing but the government also controlled information through censorship and propaganda.

It's worth knowing that...

As the war came to a close British people were eager to see an end to these restrictions. The next big challenge for the government was to work out how this would be done. The other big challenge was for the government to understand the mood of the people. Perhaps this image shows that some of the barriers in British society had broken down in wartime. Society was more informal and relaxed. Governments would have to accept that times had changed.

One of the problems facing a British government after 1945 was that wartime restrictions and control could not just be dropped instantly. For example, scrapping rationing would mean a rush for food in the shops and prices would probably rocket. A new government would have to find ways to gradually phase out government controls.

How will you use this source?

1. Describe the scene in this photograph.
2. Do you get the impression from this image that the British people think that the wartime job is done?
3. What would you say to these people if you were Churchill?
4. What have you learned from this source that would go into Churchill's reply to the telegram?

You could use this framework for Churchill's reply.