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**THE ROYAL BRITISH LEGION ANTWERP BRANCH**  
Tweemaandelijkse newsletter mei - juni 2025

Verantwoordelijke uitgever:  
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Dear members

It's been a while since our last newsletter, but April and May have been extremely busy for this newsletter editor :-). In any case, I'm now pleased to present you with another jam-packed newsletter - with some exciting activities for you to take part in and - hopefully - interesting articles for you to read.

You will also find a report on this year's annual conference which was attended by our chairman Sid and myself. We can only encourage people to consider going to conference. It's great to meet up with other branches and exchange experiences, and the atmosphere is ever so friendly. The fact that the Branch got a mention in the opening address of the Director General Mark Atkinson for our work during last year's Liberation weekend followed by a round of applause of the attendants was only the icing on the cake :-)

We are very happy to welcome Martje on our committee - she will be in charge of entertainment from now on - with the help of the rest of the committee and of Suzy. Welcome Martje to the team and thank you for taking on this job!

Also, feel free to suggest topics for the newsletter, or even activities that you would be interested in. The committee is always open to new ideas and suggestions! But for now, enjoy your newsletter, and we hope to see you all soon!

Best regards

Inge

*Newsletter editor ad interim*

## RBL OPEN EVENING

Every first Thursday of the month, from 8 pm onwards  
 Café Highlander, Stadswaag 21, Antwerp  
**Join us for a chat and a drink!**



**RBL Antwerp Branch HELPLINE: 0486 646 941**  
 (Mary Ann Marinus)

If someone is ill, or needs a visit, please **DO** give us a call.

## DATES FOR YOUR DIARY

DATE & TIME	LOCATION	WHAT
Sat 15 June	Ypres Ekeren	3 pm 100th anniversary of the RBL Ypres Branch 2 pm: Memorial Lancaster crash
Sat 21 June	St. Boniface	Investiture new RBL chaplain - King's birthday - BBQ
Sun 6 July	Rivierenhof	Summer brunch
Sat 12 July	London	91st commemoration ceremony at the Cenotaph
Sat 6 September	Antwerp	Liberation of Antwerp <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Police monument</li> <li>• Annual Tank Ceremony</li> <li>• Naval monument</li> </ul>
Sat 25 October	Meir	Poppy appeal
Sun 26 October	Basiliek	AGM + poppy lunch
Sat 13 December	Basiliek	Christmas lunch

## RBL TANK CEREMONY

### ADVANCE WARNING!

At the request of the city, we are moving our annual tank ceremony to **SATURDAY 6 September at 1 pm**, rather than our usual spot on Sunday. You will receive an official save-the-date in the next couple of weeks.

The schedule for the liberation weekend:

#### Friday 5/9

Antwerp City ceremony at the future Names Monument (timing TBC)

#### Saturday 6/9

- 10:30 hrs: Ceremony Police monument (Kiel)
- **13:00 hrs: Tank Ceremony (Antwerp Expo)**
- 15:00 hrs: 5th Liniereregiment ceremony (Stadspark)
- 17:30 hrs: Ceremony Dag der Zeelieden (Loodswezensite)



## VOLUNTEERS WANTED FOR HOME AND HOSPITAL VISITS

We are looking for volunteers who would be happy to visit Branch Members who are not mobile, well, or in hospital, as part of the Branch Community Support Scheme.

No special training is needed just common sense and a sense of humour.

### Interested?

Please contact

Mary Ann: 0486 646 941 (evenings)  
or e-mail: [Maryann.marinus@hotmail.com](mailto:Maryann.marinus@hotmail.com)



## INVESTITURE NEW RBL CHAPLAIN & BBQ - 21 JUNE 2025

We are extremely happy to inform you that the Antwerp Branch will soon have a new Chaplain. Father Stephen Graham, the Chaplain at St. Boniface Church, has very kindly volunteered to become our Branch chaplain.

It is therefore our greatest pleasure to invite you all to a short investiture ceremony at St. Boniface on Saturday 21 June where we will present Father Stephen with the official RBL stole. And to celebrate the occasion, Father Stephen has kindly offered us the use of the vicarage garden for a barbecue. Our barbecue master Urbain has agreed to be in charge of all the meat-grilling :-)

To offset the cost, we will be charging 15 euros for the BBQ (including 2 drinks).

At the same time we will be raising a glass to the health of King Charles on the occasion of His Majesty's official birthday.

**So please do join us on Saturday 21 June from 5 pm onwards!**

### PRACTICAL INFORMATION

<b>Date</b>	Saturday 21 June (ceremony: 5 pm, bbq: 6:30 pm)
<b>Location</b>	St. Boniface Church, Gretrystraat 39, Antwerp
<b>BBQ</b>	15 euro (incl. 2 drinks) Please let us know if you want a vegetarian option
<b>RSVP</b>	Before 18 June by mail to either Inge (Antwerp.secretary@rbl.community or call 0478 297 687) or Martje (martjed54@gmail.com or call 0486 101 484)

### Want to help?

As the branch will be running the bar and barbecue, it would be great to have some helping hands! Are you willing to help at the bar for an hour or so or happy to make some side dishes? Do let Inge or Martje know.

All help will be greatly appreciated!

## SUMMER BRUNCH - 6 JULY 2025

Last year, we had our first Summer Brunch at the Kasteel Rivierenhof. As everyone that joined will tell you, it was really good fun - good food, great company :-)) So we thought we'd do it again this year!

Join us for brunch with bubbles, a chat and a laugh on Sunday 6 July at 11:30 am!



<b>Date</b>	Sunday 6 July 2025, at 11.30 am
<b>Location</b>	Kasteel Rivierenhof in Deurne
<b>Cost</b>	30 euro for members, 33 for non-members to be paid into the RBL bank account BE53 9730 0871 2553
<b>RSVP</b>	Before 2 July by mail to martjed54@gmail.com or call Martje at tel. 0486 101 484.

Please note that cars are not allowed in the park. Information on how to get to the castle and where to park you can find here: <https://kasteel-rivierenhof.be/contact/#geenwagens>

## NATIONAL ARBORETUM - BRANCH OUTING

The National Memorial Arboretum is a British site of national remembrance at Alrewas, in Staffordshire. It is designed to help people reflect, celebrate lives lived and commemorate lives lost in service.

A beautiful and inspiring place, the 150 acres of the Arboretum form a living landscape, and is the home to more than 400 memorials nestled amongst lush maturing woodland. Military and civilian associations are represented alongside tributes for individuals. Rich in design and symbolism and sympathetic to the landscape they inhabit the memorials and their stories are waiting to be discovered.

For many it's a wonderful place to stroll and enjoy the trees; for others it's a peaceful and beautiful place to remember loved ones, particularly those who made the ultimate sacrifice for their country.

Sounds interesting? It is! That is why the Antwerp Branch would like to organise a trip to the National Arboretum in April of next year.

However, before we go off renting mini-buses and finding hotels, we would first like to check with you whether there is a) interest and b) how many people would want to join. Depending on numbers we can decide whether it would be better to take a couple of cars or rent a mini-bus.

The plan is to go over the weekend of **24-26 April 2026** - i.e. leave on Friday 24 April, spend the day at the National Arboretum on Saturday 25 April (guided tours and buggy tours are available), return journey on Sunday 26 April.

Please let us know by completing this form:

<https://forms.gle/fFLFaVZLZrdveTRM6>

or mail/call Inge at [Antwerp.secretary@rbl.community](mailto:Antwerp.secretary@rbl.community) / 0478 297 687.

More information: <https://www.thenma.org.uk/>

*Please note: for this trip you will need a valid passport and an ETA.*



## STEVE COOK

*On Thursday 10 April we had to say goodbye to our dear friend and committee member Steve Cook.*

Steve was a proud veteran of the 2nd Parachute Regiment and served as our Entertainment Chairman for many years.

Born in London on 2 March 1947, Steve followed in his fathers' footsteps by joining the Army, as a boy soldiers at 16. Steve joined the Parachute Regiment in Rhyl, Wales. After his training, he went straight to Germany to join the British Army of The Rhine, which was formed to run the military government of the British zone of Allied-occupied Germany after the war and was later in place to counter the threat from a Soviet Union invasion of western Europe. Steve served in Paderborn and Gutersloh including as Physical Training Instructor.

Steve only spent around 7 years in the Army, but during that time he certainly saw the world. He deployed to Palestine, and from there was involved in the Aden Emergency, including the evacuation of the British Embassy. On the domestic front the Paras were deployed to Northern Ireland a couple of times during his service. For Steve these tours were low points in his career as the troops were hated.



“Grief is the price we pay for love.” - Queen Elizabeth II



He also served in Singapore and underwent jungle warfare training, before being posted to Hong Kong where he carried out border patrols which entailed ejecting Chinese nationals back over the border. He returned the UK and became a recruiter and trainer in Plymouth. He then ended his military career and joined British Rail as a train driver.

Love brought him to Antwerp, which is where he also joined the Royal British Legion. His dedication, warmth, and tireless commitment to the Legion were second to none. Well-known and much-loved within the many associations he was a member of, Steve was a familiar face at countless commemorations and ceremonies, where he represented The Royal British Legion with pride and honour. But much more than that – he was a good friend with a heart of gold, whose kindness touched so many. Steve will be deeply missed by all his friends at the Antwerp Branch.



Rest in peace Steve. Forever in our hearts.

## SHOAH COMMEMORATION

On Thursday 8 May 2025 we celebrated the 80th anniversary of VE Day, and as is customary in Antwerp the Jewish community held its annual commemoration of the end of WWII. During the ceremony, 6 symbolic candles are lit to remember the 6 million Jewish victims of the Shoah.

As usual, the Antwerp Branch attended the ceremony. Thank you Urbain, Martje, Frans and Ian!



## WWII COMMEMORATION IN GIERLE

On Sunday 11 May 2025 the town of Gierle remembered the end of WWII. Gierle was particularly badly hit in WWII - on 11 May 1940 by German bombs and at the end of the war when 4 allied planes came down in the town.

Thank you Urbain, Martje, and Frans for attending the ceremony!



# OPERATION DYNAMO

**Operation Dynamo, also known as the Miracle of Dunkirk, was the amphibious evacuation of Allied troops from the beaches of Dunkirk, France, during World War II. From May 26 to June 4, 1940, over 338,000 British, French, and Belgian soldiers trapped by German forces were rescued.**

Towards the end of May 1940 during the Second World War, the British Expeditionary Force (BEF) along with Allied troops, a third of them French, had been forced by the German army to make a fighting retreat to the coast of northern France.

Allied military commanders had fatally underestimated the strength and strategy of the enemy. Over 338,000 men were now trapped in the French port of Dunkirk where they faced surrender and capture.



Immediate evacuation by sea was the only option. On 20 May Britain began

planning Operation Dynamo. The evacuation was masterminded and directed by Vice-Admiral Bertram Ramsay, who Prime Minister Winston Churchill brought out of retirement, working within a network of deep subterranean tunnels under Dover castle.

From 20 May 1940, Ramsay and his staff made urgent plans to rescue the thousands of exhausted BEF and Allied soldiers from Dunkirk –



unilaterally and without reference to the French. The troops, short of food and water, some injured, were now trapped – crammed in Dunkirk’s streets, buildings and on the beaches – sitting targets for German air attacks and artillery.

## KEY NUMBERS

- Dates: 26 May - 4 June 1940
- Number of troops rescued: 338,226, including 224,320 British
- Ships involved: 933
- Ships lost: 236

Just before 7pm on 26 May 1940, Winston Churchill – who had been Prime Minister for only 16 days – ordered the start of Operation Dynamo.

933 vessels of all sizes took part in the evacuation, from the Royal Navy, Merchant Navy and civilian owners, supported by French, Belgian, Dutch and Norwegian naval ships.

Dunkirk’s 10-mile beach shelved gently into the sea making it difficult for large warships to approach, except to pick up soldiers from the sea wall – the ‘Mole’ – that extended into deep water.

Time was of the essence as the massive German advance pushed towards the Channel ports. Ramsay and his team realised they needed to speed up the evacuation and use small boats that could get close to the shore.

Evacuation began in earnest on May 27, and the situation became still more urgent the next day when Belgian King Leopold III – his troops



## OPERATION DYNAMO - cont'd

everywhere in retreat and millions of civilian refugees caught in the "Flanders pocket" - surrendered his army.



An urgent Admiralty order went out for small civilian boats with shallow draft to help with the evacuation – pleasure steamers, private yachts and launches, lifeboats, sailing barges, fishing boats, passenger ferries. Many were requisitioned; others taken without their owner's knowledge. These boats were dubbed the 'Little Ships.'

Very few owners, except for fishermen, took their own vessels. The Little Ships were mainly crewed by Royal Navy personnel from Chatham and Portsmouth.

Operation Dynamo was no orderly evacuation. It was an extraordinary feat of military improvisation, but chaotic and dangerous.

The Luftwaffe and German artillery launched a ferocious assault to disrupt the evacuation, dropping high explosives and incendiary bombs on Dunkirk, strafing soldiers on the beaches and bombing the rescue ships. U-Boats attacked vessels. The sea was sown with enemy mines. Fighters from the Royal Air Force flew over 3,500 sorties, engaging in dogfights with the Luftwaffe to protect the troops and vessels.



## CHURCHILL'S DUNKIRK SPEECH

The following are extracts from Winston Churchill's speech, delivered to the House of Parliament, at the successful conclusion of Operation Dynamo.

In the speech, he sought to curb the mood of national euphoria, while simultaneously boosting morale and, as Britain now stood alone against Germany, making a clear appeal to America for support:

'...our thankfulness at the escape of our Army... must not blind us to the fact that what has happened in France and Belgium is a colossal military disaster... We must be very careful not to assign to this deliverance the attributes of a victory. Wars are not won by evacuations...'

But he went on to deliver these iconic words:

'...We shall fight in France, we shall fight on the seas and oceans, we shall fight with growing confidence and growing strength in the air, we shall defend our island, whatever the cost may be. We shall fight on the beaches, we shall fight on the landing grounds, we shall fight in the fields and in the streets, we shall fight in the hills; we shall never surrender...'

## OPERATION DYNAMO - cont'd

338,226 soldiers were rescued from Dunkirk in what was the biggest military evacuation in history. Most of the BEF – the only trained and experienced army Britain had – returned home, the majority via Dover and Folkestone. If they had been lost, the Allied cause would have collapsed and Germany would have triumphed.

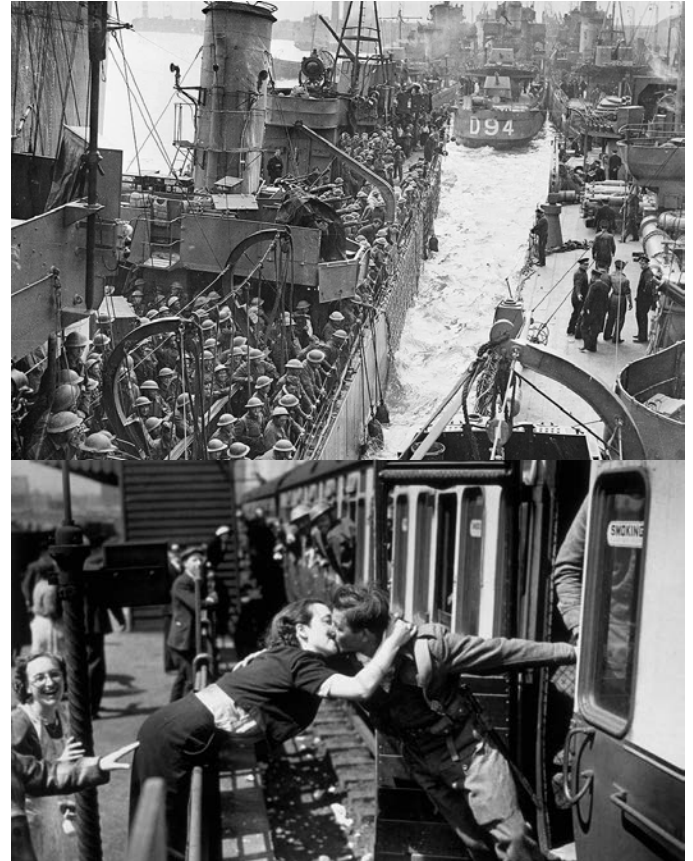
### HIGH TOLL

But Operation Dynamo took a high toll. Around 68,000 men of the BEF were unable to escape during the retreat and evacuation – 11,000 were killed and many of the rest made prisoners of war or were missing. Around 40,000 French troops were captured by the German army when Dunkirk fell at 9.30 am, on 4 June 1940.

236 vessels were lost – around one quarter of the over 900 that took part – including six Royal Navy and three French destroyers. Hundreds of soldiers and sailors drowned. Over 60 vessels were put out of action.

The BEF destroyed and abandoned colossal amounts of military equipment – nearly 64,000 vehicles including over 440 tanks, 2,500 guns

including heavy artillery, 20,500 motorcycles, 76,000 tons of ammunition and over 400,000 tons of stores.



## BATTLE OF WATERLOO - 210 YEARS AGO

On 18 June 1815, in Waterloo, Napoleon made his final stand in a battle that forever shaped history. With his army, he attempted a daring gamble: to separately defeat the forces of Wellington and Blücher before the coalition launched its offensive. For more than 10 hours, 180,000 men clashed to change the fate of Europe.

Do you want to relive the Battle? You can! To commemorate the 210th anniversary of this significant event, you can join two spectacular reenactments of the battle, featuring over 2,000 soldiers in uniform, 100 horses, and 25 cannons. In addition, you can explore the historical bivouacs: visit the French camp at Napoleon's Last Headquarters and the Allied camp in the orchard of Hougoumont Farm, where you can discover the fascinating daily life of soldiers. 50 craftsmen will demonstrate the skills of now-forgotten professions, creating an authentic atmosphere at this historic site. Meet the basket weaver, clog maker, ropemaker, lace maker, wood turner, potter, spinner, blacksmith, surgeon, and many more.

While you're there, explore the Waterloo Battlefield Domain with its museum, Panorama, Lion's Mound, and Hougoumont Farm.

**Dates** Saturday 28 and Sunday 29 June, Waterloo  
**Tickets and info** <https://www.bataillewaterloo.com/en/>

## ANNUAL CONFERENCE

The Annual Nation Conference is regulated by the Royal Charter and includes the following: annual accounts report, the Director General's address and voting on motions brought by delegates from their branches and counties. In addition, it includes the Women's Section Forum, the Overseas Forum and Standard Bearers Competition. It is also a great opportunity to catch up on Royal British Legion news, meet fellow members and RBL teams as well as an Exhibition Hall which houses many contributors.

Inge, our branch Secretary, and I attended the 2025 National Conference on behalf of the Branch, which took place at the Harrogate Convention Centre in North Yorkshire. Inge was our Delegate and I was a visitor.

We arrived at Harrogate the day before conference and were well rested before the start. After registering on 16 May, we were straight into the Overseas Forum. This is always a lively forum and after an informative introduction from Dusty Miller, the Overseas Membership Rep, many things were discussed. The main take aways were the fact that overseas branches are struggling at Remembrance because we cannot access the Poppy Shop and have limited access to items provided from the Poppy Appeal team in the UK. The team promised to look at future deliveries and to see what (if anything) can be done to allow the Poppy Shop to deliver to Overseas Branches. The renewing of membership and new members were discussed and it would appear that members are encountering less issues with the online method of joining, it was pointed out that we still have some issues, again the team promised to look at this and see what can be done to simply online membership.

Unfortunately, we could not attend the Standard Bearers Competition as this was held at the same time as the Overseas Forum.

On Saturday, after the opening ceremony, we had the RBL corporate updates from Jason Coward, the National Chair and Mark Atkinson, the Director General (including a mention for the Antwerp Branch and the work we do!) and other senior officers. Probably the most important take away from this section is Our Strategy 2025-2035, which you should all have received. It is a 10 year vision that which will allow us to modernise and have a 10 year plan for the Legion going forward. It is quite ground-breaking and I firmly believe it is a step in the right direction for the future of the Legion

The Annual report can be found at the link at the end of this report. In the afternoon, we got to the important work of voting on this years motions to conference. You all have the details for the motions, but here is how conference voted on them:

### FESTIVAL OF REMEMBRANCE - NEW TICKETING SYSTEM

If you are thinking of going to this year's Festival of Remembrance at the Royal Albert Hall, remember that there is a new way of getting tickets. Instead of tickets being bought on a first-come-first-served basis, you will have three weeks to enter a ballot for a chance to secure tickets through an online platform. To enter the ballot you need to have your membership number at the ready.

Unique links will be issued to successful members, and then you will be able to select your seats (max. 2 for either afternoon or evening performance).

The ballot will open on Wednesday 4 June and will close on Tuesday 24 June. If you were successful you will receive a link on Thursday 10 July.

Use this link if you want to enter the ballot:  
<https://www.britishlegion.org.uk/get-involved/events/remembrance-events/festival-of-remembrance>

Good luck!

## ANNUAL CONFERENCE - cont'd

- Motion 1 Lippe Branch, Seconded by: Bergen-Hohne Branch  
FOR: 123 (39.03%), AGAINST: 192 (60.95%)                      MOTION FAILED
- Motion 2 Lancaster Branch, Seconded by : Lancashire County  
FOR: 268 (85.62%), AGAINST: 45 (14.38%)                      MOTION CARRIED
- Motion 3 Lancaster Branch, Seconded by: Lancashire County  
FOR: 271 (87.14%), AGAINST: 40 (12.86%)                      MOTION CARRIED
- Motion 4 Lancaster Branch, Seconded by: Lancashire County  
FOR: 293 (94.52%), AGAINST: 17 (5.48%)                      MOTION CARRIED
- Motion 5 Addlestone Branch, Seconded by: Malden Coombe & Kingston Branch  
FOR: 167 (53.70%), AGAINST: 144 (46.30%)                      MOTION CARRIED
- Motion 6 Worksop Branch, Seconded by: Mansfield Branch  
FOR: 260 (84.14%), AGAINST: 49 (15.86%)                      MOTION CARRIED
- Motion 7 Frecheville Branch, Seconded by: Dinnington & District Branch  
FOR: 284 (92.3%), AGAINST: 28 (8.97%)                      MOTION CARRIED
- Motion 8 Guiseley Branch, Seconded by: Horsforth Branch  
FOR: 285 (92.23%), AGAINST: 24 (7.77%)                      MOTION CARRIED
- Motion 9 Hondón Valley Branch, Seconded by: Rushden Branch  
FOR: 42 (13.46%), AGAINST: 270 (86.54%)                      MOTION FAILED

The motions were all strongly backed by arguments For and Against. Inge voted on your behalf as per the results of the poll we asked you to fill in some time ago. However, the Branch Committee has also now decided that our future delegates will be able to amend the Branch vote dependent on the arguments presented, as there may be information included that was unknown at the time of the motions being sent out.

After the Motions section, the Annual Awards Ceremony took place, I collected the 2nd place certificate of the Noel Rogers Trophy - on behalf of the Ypres Branch - Awarded to the officially recognised Royal British Legion Overseas Branch/Club which, during the period Official Poppy Appeal Launch 2024 to 31st January 2025 donates to the Poppy Appeal the greatest sum per branch/club member. The recipients of the other awards can be found on the RLB website: <https://www.britishlegion.org.uk/get-involved/membership/members-hub/annual-conference>

On Saturday Evening we were entertained by the Humberside Police Band and their Corps of Drums at the beautiful Harrogate Royal Hall. They played a very diverse musical set which was thoroughly entertaining.

The first item on Sunday morning was the march to the local War Memorial and Act of Remembrance. There were around 200 Standards and 500 members on Parade. We formed up about half a mile or so away and marched to the Memorial where wreaths were laid and the Exhortation observed. Once we were back at the Conference Centre we were into the Membership Forum. This is always a lively affair with various questions from the floor or those participating online. A full report on this will be sent out by the HQ membership team.

All that remained was the closing Ceremony which includes the appointment of new officers. This included Jason standing down as the National Chair and Lynda Atkins taking up the post for the next three years.

All in all it was a very enjoyable and informative conference.

[https://storage.rblcdn.co.uk/sitefinity/docs/default-source/default-document-library/legion-annual-report-2024\\_lowres\\_singles55dd14359fad4a72a5e2e03af8c4706a.pdf?sfvrsn=2a705e2d\\_0](https://storage.rblcdn.co.uk/sitefinity/docs/default-source/default-document-library/legion-annual-report-2024_lowres_singles55dd14359fad4a72a5e2e03af8c4706a.pdf?sfvrsn=2a705e2d_0)  
(Please note the Chairman and Secretary funded their own visit to conference.)

# VJ-DAY - VICTORY OVER JAPAN

**The 80th anniversary of VJ Day (Victory over Japan) takes place on Friday 15 August 2025, commemorating the end of the Second World War.**

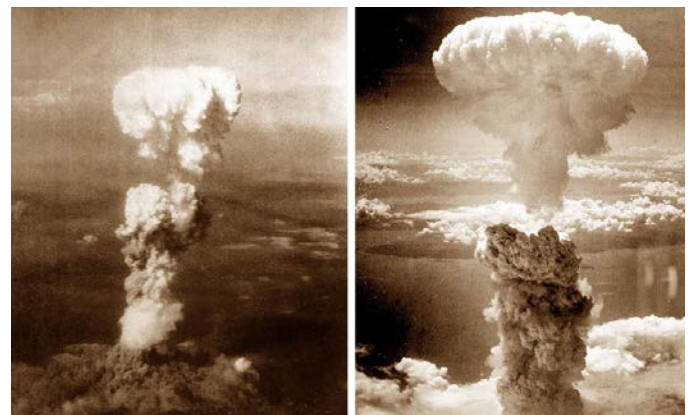
While VE Day marked the end of the war in Europe in May 1945, many thousands of Armed Forces personnel were still engaged in fighting in the Far East. Victory over Japan would come at a heavy price, and VJ Day marks the day Japan surrendered on 15 August 1945, which ended the Second World War.

Fighting in the Asia-Pacific took place from Hawaii to North East India. Britain and the Commonwealth's principle fighting force, the Fourteenth Army, was one of the most diverse in history – more than 40 languages were spoken, and all the world's major religions represented. The fighting in Europe ended in May 1945, but many soldiers, sailors and airmen from the Allies - which included the UK, USA and USSR - were still fighting against Japan in east Asia.

Following the end of the fighting in Europe, the US, Britain, and the Allies issued an ultimatum to Japan on 26 July 1945, demanding the unconditional surrender of Japanese forces or face 'prompt and utter destruction', i.e. the so-called Potsdam declaration. But the Japanese government ignored the ultimatum and the deadline passed.



Due to Japan's refusal to end the war, and with Allied consent, the US dropped two atomic bombs on Japan. The Japanese city of Hiroshima was bombed on 6 August and the city of Nagasaki was targeted three days later, on 9 August. On the same day that the bomb fell on Nagasaki the Soviet Union also launched an attack on Japanese territories in Manchuria, having only declared war on Japan the day before.



Japanese defeat was inescapable. The idea of surrender, in Japanese military culture, was unacceptable. The idea that the Emperor might bear any guilt for the sufferings of his country or the crimes of which his officers were accused, was unthinkable. The scale of Japanese deaths, past and future, was unimaginable. The prospect of occupation by the victorious powers, particularly the US, was bewildering. The future seemed puzzling, uncertain and bleak.

In the wake of atomic bombs, there was an increasing expectation that the war would soon be over. However, the negotiations between the Japanese and the Allies about the nature of the surrender had however stalled. The Japanese government were deadlocked about accepting the

## VJ-DAY - VICTORY OVER JAPAN cont'd

occupation of Japan by Allied forces and the proposal to reduce the status of the Emperor. Personal intervention by Emperor Hirohito confirmed Japan's decision to accept unconditional surrender.

### Winning the peace

At 7 o'clock on the evening of 14 August, The President of the United States, Harry Truman, announced the cessation of hostilities. By that time, it was midnight in London, so the recently elected Prime Minister, Clement Attlee, made a radio broadcast 'Japan has today surrendered. The last of our enemies is laid low.'

For many British people, the first knowledge they had of the war ending, was from newspaper headlines, which read "Japan Surrenders!" There were scenes of celebration redolent of those which Britain had experienced on VE Day.



The formal signing of the surrender terms by Japan did not occur until 2 September, aboard the United States' battleship Missouri.



'Our hearts are full to overflowing, as are your own. Yet there is not one of us who has experienced this terrible war who does not realise that we shall feel its inevitable consequences long after we have all forgotten our rejoicings today.'

*King George VI, in a broadcast from his study at Buckingham Palace at 9 pm on 15 August 1945*

The news that Japan had surrendered, brought a feeling of relief to Allied servicemen. They would no longer be risking death or injury in combat. Many who had been serving in the Pacific and Burma cherished the hope that they would soon be able to return home to their loved ones.

For many of the Allied prisoners of war held by the Japanese, the physical and emotional impact of a brutal captivity would continue for the remainder of their lives.

### VJ-day in Japan

In Japan, the population was still experiencing the emotional shock, and physical destruction, caused by the dropping of the atomic bombs.

The numbers killed by the immediate effect of the bombs have been estimated at 66,000 in Hiroshima and 39,000 in Nagasaki.

In the subsequent months and years thousands of people suffered cancer and leukaemia due to radiation poisoning. Other civilians endured horrific burns, from the firestorms which swept through the cities – caused by the intense heat and propelled by hurricane-strength winds.

On 15 August 1945, Emperor Hirohito took the unprecedented step of personally broadcasting to the Japanese people. The Emperor's voice had not previously been heard by his subjects – who regarded him as an incarnate divinity.

The situation faced by Japan was stated as follows, 'Moreover, the enemy has begun to employ a new and most cruel bomb, the power of which to do damage, is indeed, incalculable, taking the toll of many innocent lives. Should we continue to fight, it would not only result in an

## VJ-DAY - VICTORY OVER JAPAN cont'd

ultimate collapse and obliteration of the Japanese nation, but also it would lead to the total extinction of human civilisation.'

The Japanese population had experienced extreme food shortages during the latter part of the war, due to the sinking of merchant ships by the United States Navy. The government in Japan had been advising people how to prepare meals from acorns, grain husks, sawdust, snails, grasshoppers and rats!



The repatriation of demobilised Japanese soldiers exacerbated these starvation conditions. In a letter Sherwood R. Moran, of the US' Navy wrote, 'Tokyo, the first war casualty I've seen, is a devastated, immodest mess, but the silence is what gets me most...'

### Legacy of the war against Japan

Of course VJ Day was a cause for celebrating the end of the war. But the way it ended, and in particular the use of the atomic bomb, meant that the legacy of the war against Japan would remain complex and contested.

90,332 British troops were casualties in the war against Japan, of which 29,968 died and 12,433 were held as prisoners of war. Of the Allied forces, the U.S. suffered the greatest losses, with more than 100,000 killed in action. Estimates put Chinese losses both civilian and military, at approximately 20 million, others suggest the figure could be as high as 50 million. Over 2.6 million Japanese people lost their lives including a million civilians killed as a result of military action, disease or starvation.

Ever since 1945, the memorialising of VJ Day has been the trigger for controversy, guilt and sadness, as well as for grateful recognition of the service of those who fought.

## STANDING IN LINE (from: *Amazing and extraordinary facts - London at war*)

In January 1940, bacon, butter and sugar were rationed, and rationing of further food categories was introduced during the months that followed. Although bread and vegetables were not rationed during WWII itself, as a result of a poor wheat harvest, bread was rationed from the middle of 1946 to 1948. During the war a number of foods upon which the diets of the poor depended, including bread itself, flour, potatoes, oatmeal and eggs, were actually subsidised by the government.

The existence of rationing did not, of course, eliminate the need for queuing. Indeed queuing became a national pastime for Londoners and the rest of Britain during this time, with people occasionally joining queues without knowing what they were queuing for - just with the hope that at the head of the queue there would be some rare and unusually unavailable substance. Indeed, it

was reported that one housewife arrived home in a state of high excitement because she had managed to buy some boiled sweets and a tin of evaporated milk.



The rationing of clothes caused particular anguish. In London, an assistant working in a Bond Street store wrote to the novelist George Orwell that her customers were already so well supplied with clothes that rationing didn't affect them as much as it did the poor who had few clothes, especially warm ones. In response Orwell argued that clothes rationing should continue after the war until everyone was equally shabby!

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