

Victory in Europe - 75 Years Later

On Tuesday, 8 May 1945 the Allies formally accepted Nazi Germany's unconditional surrender of its armed forces, effectively ending World War II in Europe. This year we celebrated the 75th anniversary of that event. Adolf Hitler had committed suicide on 30 April during the Battle of Berlin. The surrender was authorized by Hitler's successor Karl Donitz and signed by Field Marshal Wilhelm Keitel. In England, Prime Minister Churchill appeared on the balcony of Buckingham Palace with King George and Queen Elizabeth before a huge crowd. In the US, the event coincided with President Truman's 61st birthday who dedicated the victory to his predecessor FDR who had died less than a month earlier. Both Truman and Churchill warned people that victory was only half won, that we still had a war against Japan. Because the surrender document stated that all hostilities must cease at 23:01 8 May, in Russia that would have already been 9 May so that day has been celebrated in the former Soviet Union states. In Germany today, many Germans go to Berlin to commemorate relatives who fought against Nazism in the German Resistance and lost their lives in WWII. For the 50th anniversary in 1995, Great Britain celebrated with a Lancaster bomber dropping poppies in front of Buckingham Palace.

Sixteen million Americans served during WWII with only an estimated 250,000 Veterans still alive today. Fold3.com, a part of Ancestry.com has an on-going project to record stories and events about US Veterans. They currently have over 130 million individual records. This is very important for the preservation of WWII stories due to a fire at the National Personnel Records Center when a large number of military records were destroyed. About 80% of the WWII Army files were destroyed. Some of the record collections at Fold3 include an Air Force photo collection, a war diaries collection which includes daily reports for many Navy and Marine Corps units, a European Theater Army Records collection and a Red Cross in Europe collection. In the Red Cross report, one can read about the challenges faced when soldiers requested to get married to a non-US citizen. Also at Fold3, there are WWII records from Great Britain, including our neighbors to the north, Canada.

On 8 May, please take a moment to remember all of our Veterans who served in WWII, perhaps visit a cemetery where some of those Veterans are buried and take the time to do some research into family members who served in WWII and at other times.

The VA recently announced an on-line reporting tool to track the pandemic among Veterans treated by the VA health care system. Here are some numbers as reported on 5 May 2020 at 0600. The total number of COVID-19 cases was 9,691 with 770 deaths. Minnesota (St Paul and St Cloud) had 96 cases and 12 deaths, North Dakota (Fargo) had 13 cases with 3 deaths.