
Remarks on the Meaning of the 70th Anniversary of VE Day

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“VE Day” means “Victory in Europe Day,” the day the WWII ended in Europe. To understand the end of the war, however, one has to understand its beginning.

History books (and Wikipedia) tell us WWII started on September 1, 1939 when the *Wehrmacht*, the German army, stormed into Poland. However, the terror that ended 70 years ago today, started years before. On January 30, 1933, after 15 years of political maneuvering, lies and thuggery, Adolf Hitler was appointed Chancellor of Germany, planting the seeds of the cancer vine¹ that was to consume the entire continent.

It first took root within the *Blut und Boden* (“Blood and soil”) of Germany’s borders.

Books considered “un-German,” were set ablaze in a nation-wide book burning frenzy. Following the “perverted science²” of Eugenics, physicians registered all cases of hereditary illness. Then the Nazi party eliminated any vestiges of opposition in a series of political assassinations known as “The Night of the Long Knives.”

Finally, on September 15, 1935, the Nuremberg Laws stripped Jews of their rights as German citizens, starting the legal process (because of course it had to be “legal”) that eventually stripped Jews of their rights as human beings.

Having consumed Germany, the Nazi cancer became a plague, erupting over the Germany frontier.

On March 12, 1938, Hitler annexed Austria in a move called the *Anschluss*, the “unification,” in direct violation of the Treaty of Versailles that ended WWI. The world watched with casual indifference.

On September 30, 1938, British Prime Minister Neville Chamberlain signed the “Munich Agreement” and declared “Peace for our time” in a pathetically misguided attempt to appease Hitler by willingly conceding the German speaking portion of Czechoslovakia, the “Sudetenland,” to German control. Feckless world leaders believed this would contain Hitler’s territorial aggression and bloodlust. But his was an insatiable appetite.

Almost immediately, the Nazi’s went on the *Kristallnacht*, “crystal night,” rampage. This state-sponsored race riot, also called the “Night of Broken Glass,” devastated what little remained of pre-war Jewish institutions.

Just six months later, Germany simply bullied its way into what was left of Czechoslovakia after the debacle of the Sudetenland, laying bare the fantasy of security the Munich Agreement supposedly ensured.

¹ Laurence Levine, “The Cancer Vine,” *THE BUD THAT STAYS*, Ridgeway Press, Roseville, Michigan, 1994, page 21

² Winston Churchill, June 18, 1940, in a speech to the House of Commons generally referred to as “Their Finest Hour.”

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Still this was not enough. Germany insisted it required *Lebensraum* or “living space.” It was therefore entitled to the land and resources of its “racially inferior” neighbors. So, on September 1, 1939, the now emboldened Fuhrer launched a surprise *Blitzkrieg* or, “lightning war” attack that sent Poland reeling. A cunning secret pact with the Soviet Union who simultaneously attacked, doomed Poland. This time, however, in anticipation, European powers, having finally learned their lesson, had treaties in place to respond and engage. And so the war officially began.

Soon the creeping Nazi shadow fell over Scandinavia and the Low Countries. When France fell on June 22, 1940, Britain stood alone in Western Europe, the sole impediment to Hitler’s de-ranked Messianic prophecy of a 1000 year reign. The British *braced themselves to their duties*³ in the face of the *Blitz*, a brutal air campaign against civilians by the *Luftwaffe*, the German Air Force. *They defended their island*,⁴ believing that if they could *stand up to Germany, all Europe could be free*,⁵” It was indeed their “finest hour,”⁶ but Europe could not yet be free. That deliverance would require resources beyond the reach of the old world.

The arsenal that would bear those resources was unleashed ... when...on “December 7, 1941, a date which will live in infamy – the United States of America was suddenly and deliberately attacked by naval and air forces of the Empire of Japan,”⁷ catapulting a previously neutral and reluctant United States into the war.

While Hitler, Mussolini and Stalin divided up the remainder Europe, Britain was transformed into the staging area for the greatest amphibious invasion in history. On June 6, 1944 D-Day, *Soldiers, Sailors and Airmen of the Allied Expeditionary Force embarked upon their Great Crusade to bring about the destruction of the German war machine, the elimination of Nazi tyranny over the oppressed peoples of Europe, and the security of a free world*.⁸

Their task was not an easy one. The enemy was well trained...well equipped...and fought savagely.⁹ After nearly four months of combat in hedgerows, farmlands and towns, aided by men like our next speaker, Henri Nussbaum, Paris was liberated on August 25, 1944. Things got a little easier. There even was talk of being home for Christmas.

Then on December 16, 1944, Germany mounted a massive counter-offensive, a death rattle, that resulted in what came to be known as the Battle of the Bulge. In the Ardennes Forrest, during coldest winter in over 100 years, Henry Malec, who is also here today, smeared Vaseline on his face to keep it from freezing. Slowly, inch by inch, the Allies reclaimed the territory Germany had overrun.

³ Churchill, “Their Finest Hour,” revised for contextual grammatical purposes.

⁴ Winston Churchill, June 4, 1940, in a speech to the House of Commons generally referred to as “We Shall Fight on the Beaches,” revised for contextual grammatical purposes.

⁵ Churchill, “Their Finest Hour,” revised for contextual grammatical purposes.

⁶ Churchill, “Their Finest Hour.”

⁷ Franklin Roosevelt, December 8, 1941, in a speech to a joint session of Congress generally referred to as “A Date Which Will Live in Infamy.”

⁸ Dwight Eisenhower, Order of the Day, June 6, 1944, Supreme Headquarters Allied Expeditionary Force, distributed to the 175,000-member expeditionary force on the eve of the invasion, revised for contextual grammatical purposes.

⁹ Eisenhower, Order of the Day, June 6, 1944, revised for contextual grammatical purposes.

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The final push began March 15, 1945. The 63rd Infantry Division *smashed the Siegfried Line, the God of the Rhine*,¹⁰ Germany's supposedly interpretable western wall. Now, it was only a matter of time before the Allies slogged their way to Berlin.

Before it was over on April 28, 1945, as he battled his way to Berchtesgaden and Hitler's "Eagle's Nest" retreat, Don Burgett of Howell Michigan, encountered the barbed wire of the Landsberg concentration camp. There he bore witness to the pure naked evil of the "Final Solution" in scenes so unimaginable that words simply do not exist to adequately describe the depth of their depravity. To call the actions of the Third Reich "Extermination" "Genocide" or "Annihilation," is far too genteel. In the end, the blood of 11 million stained the hands of Nazi Germany: Poles, the disabled, homosexuals, communists, Gypsies, other "undesirables" and six million Jews.

One of those six million was a young girl from Frankfurt Germany who would not see her 16th birthday. Anne Frank hid with a small group of family and friends in a "secret annex" behind a building in the western quarters of Amsterdam. On August 4, 1944 ... they were betrayed and captured. They were then herded onto the very last of the trains that sucked Holland's Jews into the blackness of the Nazi death machine.

Just a few days earlier, on July 16, only weeks after the promise of D-Day, behind dusty curtains fearful of even steeling a glance at the moon lest she be spotted behind dirt-caked windows and all too aware of the loss of her carefree...contemplative years, she wrote the following, that I have asked another young girl, Jesse Handelsman, who recently *celebrated* her 16th birthday to read.

In spite of everything I still believe that people are really good at heart. I simply can't build up my hopes on a foundation consisting of confusion, misery, and death. I see the world gradually being turned into a wilderness, I hear the ever approaching thunder, which will destroy us too, I can feel the sufferings of millions and yet, if I look up into the heavens, I think that it will all come right, that this cruelty too will end, and that peace and tranquility will return again.¹¹

She was right Peace and tranquility returned May 8 1945, VE Day, 70 years ago, today.

¹⁰ Laurence Levine, 63rd Infantry Division, memoirs of war experience, undated.

¹¹ THE DIARY OF A YOUNG GIRL, Anne Frank, first published in English 1952.