WARTIME SNAPSHOTS

75th Anniversary of the end of The Second World War

"Fellow Citizens - the war is over."
Prime Minister Ben Chifley,
15 August 1945

Background

On the morning of 15 August 1945, Australian Prime Minister Ben Chifley made a nation-wide address. Japan had accepted the Allies' surrender conditions. The Second World War was over. Victory in the Pacific (VP) Day was declared a national holiday on this day and is commemorated every year.

Around the country, people poured into the streets in celebration. For years they had lived with rationing and austerity, they had worked hard and for long hours, been anxious for loved ones on active service and feared a Japanese invasion. They had seen the country change as thousands of women enlisted in the armed forces or joined the civilian workforce to labour on farms and in factories. Tens of thousands of United States servicemen had been based in or passed through Australia, clear evidence that traditional ties to Britain were weakening. The war had left people exhausted. Its end was met with relief and unbridled joy.

The Melbourne press reported revellers waging 'a battle against any show of dignity, or austerity and gloom'. A young boy saw a neighbour in a line of singing revellers, a lady who never missed Mass and always seemed serious but who on VP Day celebrated as she had likely never celebrated before, knowing that her son would soon be coming home. In the New South Wales country town of Dubbo, said a Sydney paper, people behaved in a manner 'that would be deemed incredible in normal life.' On the far side of the country in Perth, some 100,000 people crowded into the city.

There were conga lines, civilians and men and women in uniform dancing together, strangers embracing, streets littered with confetti, flags flying. Police ignored games of two-up and the kind of revelry that would normally invite arrest. An elated population was swept up in celebration.

Chifley announced a two-day holiday. He thanked the service men and women of the Allied nations, and he thanked the millions who had worked so hard for the war effort on the home front. The Australian people, said Chifley, 'may be justly proud of everything they have done'. On a day that could never be entirely without sorrow, he also asked Australians to remember the dead and the bereaved. Some 40,000 Australians had lost their lives in the winning of this victory. On 16 August, crowds gathered around the country for thanksgiving services, and to more sombrely remember those who would not be coming home.

VP Day brought an end to years of fighting and the return home of hundreds of thousands of Australians from theatres of war around the world. It meant the passing of a half-century darkened by global conflict and financial depression, and the dawn of an age both prosperous and fraught with peril – as the Cold War begun in the Second World War's shadow dominated the half-century that followed.

Wartime Snapshot – 75th Anniversary of the end of The Second World War

1. **Look at the images and read the text on the four VP Day Posters.**
   A. What types of people do you see? Do they have anything in common?
   B. The word PEACE! features at the top each of the VP Day Poster. What do you think this word meant to the people in the poster images?
   C. How did Australians on the home front react when Prime Minister Ben Chifley declared that the Second World War was over on 15 August 1945?

2. **Using the background information and the link below, describe the different ways Australians on the home front had devoted themselves to the wartime effort.**

3. **Read the background information.**
   A. How many people gathered in Perth to celebrate the declaration of peace?
   B. Describe the types of public celebrations people enjoyed together.
   C. What types of activities did police ignore that would normally invite arrest?

4. **Use the background information and the link below;**
   A. What two day holiday did Prime Minister Chifley declare? Why do you think he did this?
   B. How did the Prime Minister say the Australian people should feel about all they had done during the Second World War?
   C. How many Australian service men and women had lost their lives during the course of the Second World War?

5. **The declaration of peace and the end of the Second World War meant thousands of Australian men and women would return home from years of service overseas. Using the links below identify locations where Australian service personnel saw action during the Second World War.**

6. **Imagine you were serving in the Army, Navy or Air Force when the war ended on 15 August 1945. Write a diary entry describing your reaction and the reaction of those around you.**
   Or
   Imagine you are a family member of someone who has been away serving in the war. Write a diary entry describing how you feel and what you did to celebrate on the first VP Day.

Activity Links

Q2. anzacportal.dva.gov.au/wars-and-missions/world-war-ii-1939-1945/resources/all-australian-homefront-1939-1945

Q4 **(a)** awm.gov.au/articles/encyclopedia/vp_day/name

Q5. **(a)** anzacportal.dva.gov.au/wars-and-missions/world-war-ii-1939-1945/events/libya-and-siege-tobruk-1941/bardia

   (b) anzacportal.dva.gov.au/wars-and-missions/world-war-ii-1939-1945/events/beachhead-battles-papua-1942-1943/battle-beachheads/bens-diary

   (c) anzacportal.dva.gov.au/wars-and-missions/world-war-ii-1939-1945/events/war-sea-1939-1945/landings

Sources

Paul Hasluck, *The Government and the People, 1939-1941, Australia in the War of 1939-1945*, vol. 1, Australian War Memorial, Canberra, 1952.

Paul Hasluck, *The Government and the People, 1942-1945, Australia in the War of 1939-1945*, vol. 2, Australian War Memorial, Canberra, 1970.

'*Home front: Second World War*', Australian War Memorial, awm.gov.au/articles/encyclopedia/homefront.

Gavin Long, '*The Six Years War, Australia in the 1939-45 War*', Australian War Memorial and Australian Government Publishing Service, Sydney, 1973.

Richard White, '*War and Australian Society*', in M. McKernan and M. Browne (Eds.), *Australia Two Centuries of War and Peace*, Australian War Memorial with Allen and Unwin, Canberra, 1988.