

Victory Order of the Day, 1945

Introduction

In March 1945 American and British forces moved eastward into Germany in large numbers, stopping at the Elbe River in mid-April in accordance with pre-negotiated agreements with the Soviet Union. The Red Army, meanwhile, had moved westward, reaching Berlin by late April as Adolf Hitler committed suicide in his bunker on April 30. On May 7, Allied efforts forced Germany's unconditional surrender, ending the war in Europe after nearly six years of fighting.

Future president Dwight D. Eisenhower, then commander of the Allied Expeditionary Forces in Europe, issued this Victory Order of the Day to commend the victorious Allied troops.

While Eisenhower encouraged troops to celebrate their hard-won victory, he also urged them to recall the horrific casualties and universality of destruction wrought by the war: "As we celebrate Victory in Europe let us remind ourselves . . . of comrades who could not live to see this day." Between America's entrance into World War II in 1941 and V-E Day on May 8, 1945, more than 300,000 American soldiers had died in combat. Other Allies also suffered even greater combat losses, with nearly 500,000 British troops and a staggering 7.5 million Soviet troops dying in battle. Hoping to preclude factionalism among the Allies, Eisenhower emphasized the shared nature of both Allied losses and ultimate victory: "The route you have travelled through hundreds of miles is marked by the graves of former comrades. From them has been exacted the ultimate sacrifice; blood of many nations—American, British, Canadian, French, Polish and others—has help to gain the victory."

Excerpt

Men and women of the Allied Expeditionary Force:

The crusade on which we embarked in the early summer of 1944 has reached its glorious conclusion

"Your accomplishments at sea, in the air, on the ground and in the field of supply, have astonished the world. Even before the final week of the conflict, you had put 5,000,000 of the enemy permanently out of the war. You have taken in stride military tasks so difficult as to be classed by many doubters as impossible. You have confused, defeated and destroyed your savagely fighting foe. On the road to victory you have endured every discomfort and privation and have surmounted every obstacle ingenuity and desperation could throw in your path. You

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did not pause until our front was firmly joined up with the great Red Army coming from the East, and other Allied Forces, coming from the South.

Full victory in Europe has been attained.

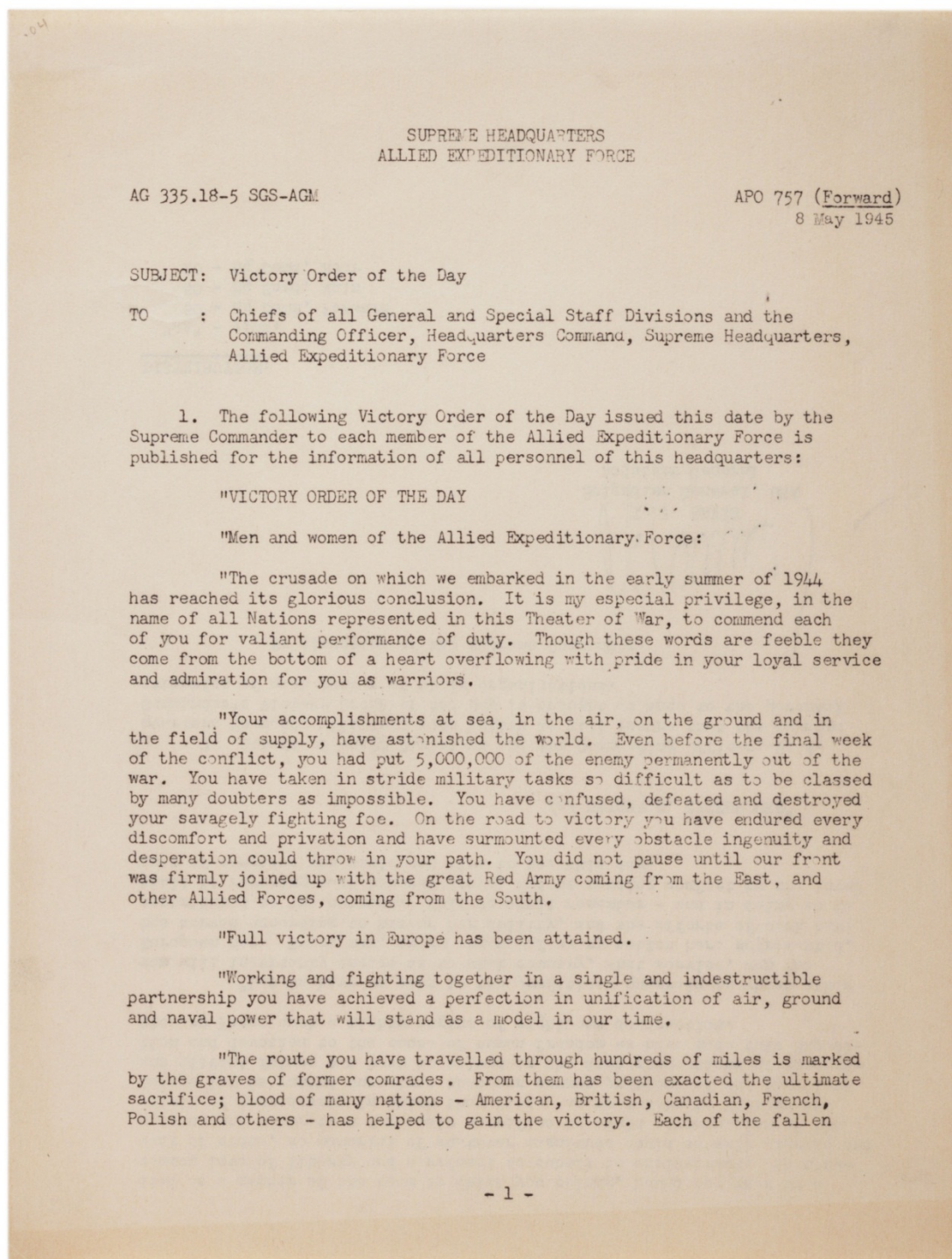
Questions for Discussion

Read the document introduction and transcript and apply your knowledge of American history in order to answer these questions.

1. Why did General Eisenhower use this document to specifically mention the partnership and cooperation of the victorious forces?
2. Early in the document, General Eisenhower compared the effort of the Allies to a crusade. How appropriate was the use of that term?
3. How does Eisenhower acknowledge the contributions of the Soviet forces? Can you detect in his message any concern about the future? Explain your answer.

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Image



Dwight D. Eisenhower, "Victory order of the Day," May 8, 1945. (Gilder Lehrman Collection, GLC05622.04)

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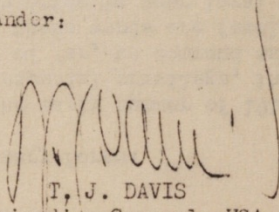
died as a member of the team to which you belong, bound together by a common love of liberty and a refusal to submit to enslavement. No monument of stone, no memorial of whatever magnitude could so well express our respect and veneration for their sacrifice as would perpetuation of the spirit of comradeship in which they died. As we celebrate Victory in Europe let us remind ourselves that our common problems of the immediate and distant future can best be solved in the same conceptions of cooperation and devotion to the cause of human freedom as have made this Expeditionary Force such a mighty engine of righteous destruction.

"Let us have no part in the profitless quarrels in which other men will inevitably engage as to what country, what service, won the European War. Every man, every woman, of every nation here represented, has served according to his or her ability, and the efforts of each have contributed to the outcome. This we shall remember - and in doing so we shall be revering each honored grave, and be sending comfort to the loved ones of comrades who could not live to see this day.

/s/ DWIGHT D. EISENHOWER"

2. Chiefs of Staff Divisions and the Commanding Officer, Headquarters Command, will take such action as will insure that the Supreme Commander's Victory Order of the Day is brought at once to the personal attention of each member of their organizations.

By direction of the Supreme Commander:


 T. J. DAVIS
 Brigadier General, USA
 Adjutant General

DISTRIBUTION:

"AA" - plus:
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 50 - Hq Comd, Main
 25 - Hq Comd, Rear

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Transcript

Dwight D. Eisenhower, "Victory order of the Day," May 8, 1945. (Gilder Lehrman Collection, GLC05622.04)

SUPREME HEADQUARTERS

ALLIED EXPEDITIONARY FORCE

AG 335.18-5 SGS-AGM

APO 757 (Forward)

8 May 1945

SUBJECT: Victory Order of the Day

TO : Chiefs of all General and Special Staff Divisions and the Commanding Officer,
Headquarters Command, Supreme Headquarters, Allied Expeditionary Force

1. The following Victory Order of the Day issued this date by the Supreme Commander to each member of the Allied Expeditionary Force is published for the information of all personnel of this headquarters:

“VICTORY ORDER OF THE DAY

“Men and women of the Allied Expeditionary Force:

“The crusade on which we embarked in the early summer of 1944 has reached its

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glorious conclusion. It is my especial privilege, in the name of all Nations represented in this Theater of War, to commend each of you for valiant performance of duty. Though these words are feeble they come from the bottom of a heart overflowing with pride in your loyal service and admiration for you as warriors.

“Your accomplishments at sea, in the air, on the ground and in the field of supply, have astonished the world. Even before the final week of the conflict, you had put 5,000,000 of the enemy permanently out of the war. You have taken in stride military tasks so difficult as to be classed by many doubters as impossible. You have confused, defeated and destroyed your savagely fighting foe. On the road to victory you have endured every discomfort and privation and have surmounted every obstacle ingenuity and desperation could throw in your path. You did not pause until our front was firmly joined up with the great Red Army coming from the East, and other Allied Forces, coming from the South.

“Full victory in Europe has been attained.

“Working and fighting together in a single and indestructible partnership you have achieved a perfection in unification of air, ground and naval power that will stand as a model in our time.

“The route you have traveled through hundreds of miles is marked by the graves of former comrades. From them has been exacted the ultimate sacrifice; blood of many nations – American, British, Canadian, French, Polish and others – has helped to gain the victory. Each of the fallen

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[2] died as a member of the team to which you belong, bound together by a common love of liberty and a refusal to submit to enslavement. No monument of stone, no memorial of whatever magnitude could so well express our respect and veneration for their sacrifice as would perpetuation of the spirit of comradeship in which they died. As we celebrate Victory in Europe let us remind ourselves that our common problems of the immediate and distant future can best be solved in the same conceptions of cooperation and devotion to the cause of human freedom as have made this Expeditionary Force such a mighty engine of righteous destruction.

“Let us have no part in the profitless quarrels in which other men will inevitably engage as to what country, what service, won the European War. Every man, every woman, of every nation here represented, has served according to his or her ability, and the efforts of each have contributed to the outcome. This we shall remember – and in doing so we shall be revering such honored grave, and be sending comfort to the loved ones of comrades who could not live to see this day.

/s/ DWIGHT D. EISENHOWER”

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By direction of the Supreme Commander:

T.J. Davis

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Notes: This document is printed on official stationery and all hand-written text is underlined.