

We will meet again: government honours VE Day with UK first-ever skytyping display

News story

'We Will Meet Again' and 'Thank You' messages commemorate those who served during World War II and thank those working on the frontline during the coronavirus outbreak.



- first-ever UK skytyping display commissioned to honour the 75th anniversary of VE Day
- the messages 'We Will Meet Again' and 'Thank You' were seen from over Henstridge airfield in Somerset this morning, capturing the feelings of the nation
- the phrases serve to commemorate those who fought in World War II, as well as those currently on the frontline and keeping the country going during coronavirus

The Department for Transport granted a special exemption for the first-ever UK skytyping display today (8 May 2020) to honour the 75th anniversary of [Victory in Europe \(VE\) Day](#).

The display over Henstridge airfield in Somerset could be seen for up to 20 miles, and saw the messages 'We Will Meet Again' and 'Thank You' etched 10,000 feet above the ground. The messages were to commemorate those who served during World War II, and to thank all of those working on the frontline, and keeping the country going during coronavirus.

The display was the first since a recent law change introduced by the Transport Secretary, to allow skytyping and skywriting. Skywriting has a strong British history, after being inadvertently discovered by a Royal Air Force (RAF) pilot during World War I, when oil accidentally found its way into a hot exhaust and vapourised, creating a vast and dense cloud of white smoke. British pilots then put the discovery to use, by using it to confuse attacking planes*.

Today's display was conducted by military veterans from the RAF, French Air Force, British Royal Marines and the Royal Navy.

Grant Shapps, Transport Secretary, said:

Victory in Europe Day will always be a landmark in British history and it is an honour to have commissioned the first skytyping display in the UK to mark the occasion.

With its strong British history, stemming from the creation of skywriting, it seems an entirely fitting way to honour all those who fought for our freedom while also thanking those keeping the country moving during this challenging time.

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[A message to Austria from Foreign Secretary Dominic Raab on the 75th Anniversary of VE Day](#)

[A message from Foreign Secretary Dominic Raab to Austria](#)

Transcript:

"Today we commemorate the 75th anniversary of the end of the Second World War in Europe. The 8th of May 1945 is embedded in our collective memory. It brought an end to what many hoped would prove to be the war to end all wars. It was a sobering moment across Europe and across the rest of the world where our nations grieved the millions of people who lost their lives including members of my own family who couldn't escape from Czechoslovakia and perished after the Nazis invaded.

So it's with pride and gratitude that we will always remember the sacrifice and the heroism of those who fell on the battlefield, those who died fighting to defend the freedoms that we cherish today. And it's with the heaviest of hearts that we will never forget the innocents who played no part in the fighting but were taken from our families too often with unspeakable brutality. Today those emotions and those instincts continue to inspire our pursuit of peace, freedom and the international rule of law around the world.

Of course VE day didn't just mark the end of war. It also marked a new era. For Austria, for the UK, for the rest of the world too. VE day gave us hope, it was a new beginning. Built on a promise of peace and stability with a

resounding commitment to “nie wieder”, never again.

And I am proud of how the United Kingdom supported Austria through the difficult times after 1945. Tens of thousands of British troops were stationed in Austria from 1945-55, and they played an essential role in helping rebuild Austria's infrastructure.

Britain and Austria have been working together for 75 years since VE day and we will continue to work together to strengthen a friendship nurtured by common values and the experience of everything that we have been through together. So it's fitting today that we stand together in the very deepest solidarity and friendship to honour those lost during the bleakest chapter of history but also to look to a brighter future working side by side as a force for good in the world.”

German Translation:

Heute gedenken wir des 75sten Jahrestages des Ende des Zweiten Weltkriegs in Europa. Der 8 Mai 1945 ist in unserem kollektiven Gedächtnis verwurzelt. Er endete das, was in der Hoffnung vieler der Krieg war der alle Kriege beenden sollte.

Es war ein ernüchternder Moment in ganz Europa und dem Rest der Welt an dem unsere Länder um Millionen Menschen trauerten, die ihr Leben verloren hatten, darunter auch Mitglieder meiner eigenen Familie, die nicht aus der Tschechoslowakei fliehen konnten und starben nachdem die Nazis einmarschiert waren.

Mit Stolz und Dankbarkeit werden wir uns immer an die Opfer und den Heldenmut jener erinnern , die auf den Schlachtfeldern gefallen sind, die gestorben sind im Kampf um die Freiheiten die wir heute hoch halten.

Mit schwerem Herzen werden wir auch die Unschuldigen nie vergessen, die keinen Anteil am Kampf hatten aber dennoch viel zu oft mit unbeschreiblicher Brutalität von ihren Familien getrennt wurden.

Diese Emotionen beflügeln heute unser Streben nach Frieden, Freiheit und internationaler Rechtsstaatlichkeit. Natürlich steht der 8 Mai nicht nur für das Ende des Krieges. Er begann auch eine neue Ära. Für Österreich, für das Vereinigte Königreich und auch für den Rest der Welt. Der 8 Mai gab uns Hoffnung, es war ein neuer Anfang. Gebaut auf dem Versprechen von Frieden und Stabilität mit einer klaren Verpflichtung zu “nie wieder”. Ich bin stolz wie das Vereinigte Königreich Österreich während der schwierigen Zeit nach 1945 unterstützt hat. Zehntausende Britische Soldaten waren in Österreich zwischen 1945 und 1955 stationiert und sie haben für den österreichischen Wiederaufbau eine wichtige Rolle gespielt.

Das Vereinigte Königreich und Österreich haben die vergangenen 75 Jahre seit dem 8 Mai 1945 zusammen gearbeitet und wir werden weiter gemeinsam daran arbeiten eine Freundschaft zu stärken, die auf gemeinsamen Werten und geteilten Erfahrungen basiert. Es ist daher gebührend, dass wir heute gemeinsam und in tiefer Solidarität und Freundschaft stehen um jene zu ehren,

die wir im dunkelsten Kapitel der Geschichte verloren haben, aber auch um einer aussichtreichen Zukunft entgegen zu blicken, in der wir Seite an Seite für das Wohl der Welt arbeiten.

[British Gurkhas and UK Government rescue mission to help stranded Brits in Nepal](#)

A rescue mission to retrieve more than 100 British travellers stranded in remote parts of Nepal was carried out with military precision – when the British Gurkhas Nepal were called in.

109 British nationals, and a further 28 foreign nationals, were stuck in isolated parts of Nepal when the coronavirus crisis broke out, severely reducing transport routes in the country.

Their remote locations, and the strict lockdown measures, meant the travellers were unable to reach the three charter flights sent to repatriate British nationals back to the UK last month.

Mobilising the British Gurkhas Nepal network, based in Kathmandu, Pokhara and Dharan, and using their local knowledge, UK Embassy staff and soldiers mapped out where the stranded British travellers were, and devised a plan to reach them.

Over three weeks, the soldiers, embassy staff and locally employed drivers, travelled more than 4,000 miles through the Himalayas to 13 different districts, negotiating river crossings and landslides, to reach the tourists scattered across dozens of mountainous towns, villages and national parks.

In some instances, the soldiers and drivers were forced to set up camp for the night on the side of the road because of the long and hazardous journeys.

[The British Gurkhas rescue Brits stranded in Nepal](#)

Sergeant Prakash Gurung, of 29 Regiment, Royal Logistic Corps, rescued a British national from Manang, located in north-west Nepal, before driving the solo traveller nine-and-a-half hours back to Kathmandu to catch a UK charter flight.

Sgt Gurung, who by day is a postal operator, volunteered to complete the nine-and-half hour drive to Manang, which nearly had to be aborted part-way through due to a landslide, traversing single-track, treacherous roads to reach the stranded traveller.

Sgt Gurung, who has completed three tours of Iraq, as well as serving in Afghanistan, the Middle East, Kenya and Germany, said:

I stepped up to volunteer because I thought it was a part of my job. Helping people in dire situations gives me a sense of satisfaction. The gratitude people expressed in messages has encouraged me to do more of this sort of work.

Her Majesty's Ambassador to Nepal, Nicola Pollitt, said:

Getting British nationals home in such an unprecedented time is a huge challenge around the world, but in a country like Nepal, with such extreme conditions, it would have been impossible to get everyone back without the close collaboration of the Embassy and British Gurkhas Nepal.

We have been able to reunite more than 700 British travellers with their families in the UK, and that would not have been possible without the tireless work of our Embassy and Gurkha team.

Lt Col Peter Wettenhall, Deputy Commander, British Gurkhas Nepal, said:

British Gurkhas Nepal has a long and proud history of operating in Nepal regardless of circumstance. It is both fitting, and in keeping with the role of the Armed Forces that when called on for assistance that we do our very best to support those in need.

We are delighted that we were able to assist the British Embassy, British Nationals and our soldiers and families in Nepal through this trying time.

As well as bringing home British travellers on the charter flights last month, around 70 soldiers and their dependants from different Regiments of the Brigade of Gurkhas and wider British Army, who were in Nepal on leave and holiday, returned to the UK to join the fight against coronavirus.

Notes to Editors:

- The soldiers involved in the rescue mission were:
 - Cpl Sujan Moktan and LCpl Khopjung Gurung of the 1st Battalion the Royal Gurkha Rifles, Sir John Moore Barracks, Kent
 - Cpl Bimal Rai and LCpl Narendra Rai of the 2nd Battalion the Royal Gurkha Rifles, British Forces Brunei
 - Sgt Prakash Gurung of the 29 Regiment, Royal Logistic Corps, Duke of Gloucester Barracks, South Cerney, Cirencester
 - Capt Khagendra Pun, Cpl Sunil Gurung, Cpl Khagendra Gurung and Cpl Amrit Gurung of 30 Signal Regiment, 250 Gurkha Signal Squadron,

- Gamecock Barracks, Bramcote
- SSgt Sanjay Rai, LCpl Prakash Tamang and LCpl Dinesh Ghale of the 247 Gurkha Signal Squadron, Stafford, Staffordshire
 - W02 Yogendra Limbu of 10 QOGLR, St Omer Barracks, Alison's Road, Aldershot, Hampshire
 - SSgt Sagar Limbu from the Gurkha Staff and Personal Support, HQ Brigade of Gurkhas, RMA Sandhurst, Camberley
 - W02 Matthew Bavington of the RHQ Royal Electrical and Mechanical Engineers, Prince Phillip Barracks, MOD Lyneham, Chippenham
- The Gurkhas also assisted foreign nationals from France, Australia, Ireland, India, Spain, Canada, Germany, Italy, the US and Switzerland.
 - More than 20,000 British travellers, on 83 Government charter flights, will have returned to the UK from across South Asia by 7 May.
 - To find out more about The Gurkha Welfare Trust visit – <https://www.gwt.org.uk/>

Further information

Marking 75 years since VE Day

Today, the nation will unite to mark 75 years since the end of the Second World War in Europe, and the thoughts of people across Scotland will be with our wartime generation.

Victory in Europe is one of the most significant moments in Britain's long history, a crucial milestone on the road to peace.

By 8 May 1945, Britain had lived through six years of global conflict. We had seen terrible losses, and huge sacrifices made at home and abroad. So many lives lost, so much suffering, so many families torn apart.

But we also saw huge courage and unbelievable fortitude. People made enormous sacrifices – that to most of us today seem unimaginable – all to put King and country first.

Those years of courage, pain and loss secured the freedoms and way of life we enjoy today. We would be living very different lives if we had not liberated Europe from fascism.

It is only right that today we take time to honour those who served, including those who continued to fight in the Far East until the August of 1945. In due course we will mark VJ day, of course, and thank them again for their service.

We must also remember those – including so many from Scottish regiments – who continued to fight in the Far East until the August of 1945. In due course we will mark VJ day, and thank them again for their service.

Scottish regiments fought bravely throughout the conflict, including in the D-Day landings. We must also thank all those who fought on the home front. Communities faced onslaughts by the Luftwaffe as they tried to destroy our shipbuilding and munitions capacity. Clydebank was almost destroyed, and thousands of its citizens killed. But the Scottish people refused to be bowed, instead strengthening their resolve to defeat the enemy and fight for our country's freedom.

Hundreds of Scottish children were evacuated to live with families in the countryside. They were kept safe, and many made lifelong attachments to their foster families. But they dearly missed, and were dearly missed by, their own families.

We are, of course, in the middle of a current, unprecedented, battle to control coronavirus. NHS staff, care teams and a vast army of key workers and volunteers have gone above and beyond for the common good. , and I believe we now feel a greater empathy than ever with the generations who witnessed VE Day in May 1945.

Unfortunately, due to the current emergency, communities across the UK will no longer be able to mark this important anniversary in quite the same way as we initially planned.

I know the British people will mark this historic occasion in new ways, to show our deepest gratitude and respect for those that gave so much to bring peace, freedom and prosperity to Europe. So, throughout today, there will be a thoughtful programme of events in which people can safely become involved while staying at home.

The official commemorations will begin at 11am when his Royal Highness The Prince of Wales will lead the nation in a two minute silence. We will remember the fallen, and give thanks for those who came home to friends and family. People can join this national moment of reflection in whatever way is right for them – that might be sitting quietly inside, standing at your window or stepping outside your front door.

At 3pm, extracts from Sir Winston Churchill's victory speech will be broadcast across national television and radio, to recreate the moment the end of the war in Europe officially was announced on 8 May 1945.

The Prime Minister will read the recently discovered Edmund Blunden poem 'VE Day'.

Later in the day, there will be a broadcast of The Prince of Wales reading extracts from King George VI's diary, relating the experiences of his grandfather on VE Day in 1945, including the King's relief that the war in Europe was over.

In an uplifting aerial display, the Royal Air Force will provide breathtaking flypasts across the UK's capital cities – modern RAF Typhoon jets fly over Edinburgh. People are encouraged not to gather to watch the flypast but continue to follow public health guidelines and enjoy the coverage from home.

We are all encouraged to join in a nationwide rendition of Dame Vera Lynn's 'We'll Meet Again'. Open your windows or front doors and sing along with your neighbours.

Then, as a fitting finale, Her Majesty The Queen will send a special message to the nation at 9pm, the exact moment her father, King George VI, gave a radio address in 1945.

We are living through difficult times just now, of course we are. But we will get through them. We will get through them together. Now, more than ever, we can all learn from the bravery, the resilience and the optimism of our wartime generation.

[Nation falls silent to mark VE 75](#)

- His Royal Highness The Prince of Wales, accompanied by HRH The Duchess of Cornwall, will lead the nation in a two minute silence at 11 o'clock ☐
- The Royal Air Force will carry out flypasts across the UK, including the Red Arrows.☐

Today, the nation will unite to mark 75 years since the end of the Second World War in Europe.

Government has now announced further plans for the day, building on a programme of activity and celebrations announced last week.

His Royal Highness The Prince of Wales, accompanied by Her Royal Highness The Duchess of Cornwall, will lead the nation in a two minute silence from Scotland, broadcast across national television and radio stations at 11am.

Yesterday the Prime Minister visited Westminster Abbey to pay his respects, and today from Downing Street he will be observing the two minute silence and speaking with a Second World War veteran via a video call.

Later in the day, there will be a broadcast of The Prince of Wales reading extracts from King George VI's diary, relating the experiences of his grandfather on VE Day in 1945. This will include the King's relief that the war in Europe was over, the family's iconic appearances on the Buckingham Palace balcony, and having lunch with Sir Winston Churchill.

And in an uplifting aerial display, the Royal Air Force will provide breathtaking flypasts in England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland's capitals. The Red Arrows will fly over London, and modern RAF Typhoon jets will appear overhead in Edinburgh, Cardiff and Belfast. The British public is encouraged not to gather to watch any flypast but continue to follow public health guidelines on social distancing and enjoy the coverage from their homes and

gardens. ### Prime Minister Boris Johnson said:

Seventy-five years ago today, the people of this country celebrated victory against Hitler's aggression. On the frontline, they fought with courage, ingenuity and endurance, and on the Home Front, women defended our cities against air raids, worked the factories and ran the hospitals. This country triumphed thanks to the heroism of countless ordinary people, and because of this, hundreds of millions of people now live in peace and freedom today.

Today we must celebrate their achievement, and we remember their sacrifice. We are a free people because of everything our veterans did – we offer our gratitude, our heartfelt thanks and our solemn pledge: you will always be remembered.

Culture Secretary Oliver Dowden said:

Victory in Europe was a defining moment in Britain's long history, so today we pause to remember all those who fought overseas and battled hard on the Home Front.

As we stay home to protect the NHS and save lives, I know the British people will mark this historic occasion in new ways to show our deepest gratitude and respect for those that gave so much to bring peace, freedom and prosperity to Europe.

Across the UK, people will be decorating their homes with bunting, researching their family history on Ancestry.co.uk, tuning into the national commemorations on television and radio, and throwing a 1940's themed afternoon tea in the safety of their own homes.

Museums and libraries are among those organisations across the country who have also come up with creative and innovative ways for families to celebrate and learn more about the history of the day, including:☐☐

- The National Army Museum, the Royal Air Force Museum and the National Museum of the Royal Navy will be hosting their first tri-services celebration with the Virtual VE Day 75 Festival taking place online from Thursday to Saturday, including a live Swing Dance Class a sing-along concert with the Bluebird Belles and highlighting objects and stories from the their Collections.☐☐☐
- The #LibrariesFromHome initiative from Libraries Connected brings together a huge array of local offerings from libraries across the UK. These include recordings of 1940s songs from a local band in Windsor, a Facebook Book Chat discussion in Staffordshire on war novels, and a "bake along" with wartime recipes being posted throughout May organised by Wokingham library.☐☐☐
- The Imperial War Museum's four-minute soundscape "Voices of War" brings

together first-hand accounts of VE Day from IWM's vast sound archives. Examples include a Jamaican aircraftman who emigrated to the UK aboard the Empire Windrush in 1948 and a Jewish man from Berlin who spent six weeks in Sachsenhausen concentration camp.□

Defence Secretary Ben Wallace said:

The UK Armed Forces will start the 75th anniversary of VE Day with sunrise commemorations and will continue to honour their predecessors throughout the day and across the country.

Although we cannot celebrate that precious connection with our veterans on the scale we had planned, we should all pause and reflect on their inspirational achievement. As Churchill said, 'god bless you all, this is your victory'.

The full plans for the day are as follows:

- The Red Arrows will fly over London, and modern RAF Typhoon jets will fly over Cardiff, Edinburgh and Belfast.
- A national two minute silence will take place at 11am, led by His Royal Highness The Prince of Wales.
- The Archbishop of Canterbury has recorded a message of reflection which will form part of the programming around the two minute silence.
- At 3pm, extracts from Sir Winston Churchill's victory speech will be broadcast across national television and radio to recreate the moment the end of the war in Europe officially was announced on 8 May 1945.□
- The Prime Minister will read the recently discovered Edmund Blunden poem 'VE Day'.□
- Extracts from the diary of King George VI will be read by His Royal Highness The Prince Of Wales, as part of the afternoon's commemorative activity.
- At 4pm, historian Dan Snow will broadcast the last of his special VE Day inspired history lessons live on YouTube's Timeline channel.
- At 9pm, Her Majesty The Queen's message to the nation will air.□
- This will be followed by a national singalong of Dame Vera Lynn's 'We'll Meet Again' where the public are encouraged to open their front doors and sing along in their front gardens.
- The public are invited to host an afternoon tea from the comfort of their living rooms. The Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport has produced a template pack so that the public can hold a 1940s style afternoon tea party at home complete with homemade VE Day bunting, original recipes, games, and educational and creative activities for children.
- As part of a partnership between the Government and Ancestry, the platform will be free throughout the Bank Holiday weekend to give people the opportunity to uncover personal stories of the Second World War.□