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10 DOWNING STREET

From the Private Secretary

15 January 1985

Dear Richard,

Commemoration of the Fortieth Anniversary of VE Day

Robin Butler's letter of 14 January recorded discussion by Ministers of various options for commemoration of the Fortieth Anniversary of VE Day. Len Appleyard's letter of 15 January gave a line for Prime Minister's Questions. I now enclose the text of the Prime Minister's answers.

It is, I think, for the Ministry of Defence to come forward with some specific proposals for discussion by Ministers. I should be grateful to receive these as soon as possible.

I am copying this to Len Appleyard (Foreign and Commonwealth Office), David Morris (Lord Privy Seal's Office), Janet Lewis-Jones (Lord President's Office), Alex Galloway (Paymaster General's Office) and Richard Hatfield (Cabinet Office).

Yours sincerely
Charles Powell

Charles Powell

Richard Mottram Esq
Ministry of Defence.

CONFIDENTIAL

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PRIME MINISTER'S REPLY TO GEOFFREY RIPPON MPV E DAY

I know that there is a good deal of feeling that we should have a national celebration of VE Day. I understand that feeling and believe that we should celebrate not only victory but peace with freedom and the fact that for some forty years we have had peace with freedom across Europe. We are considering the form of a national commemoration which will honour the dead and point to the reconciliation and re-construction that has been achieved. We shall make an announcement in due course.

PRIME MINISTER'S REPLY TO JOHN CARTWRIGHT, MP

I believe that we are entitled to national celebrations and I have said that we shall be bringing forward some proposals. I hope that these will celebrate the victory of freedom over tyranny and that they will also celebrate forty years of peace with that freedom. It will, therefore, be a celebration with two aspects to it.



CABINET OFFICE
70 Whitehall,
London SW1A 2AS
Telephone 01-233 3340

15 January 1985

Dear Robin,

CELEBRATION OF THE ANNIVERSARY OF VE DAY

The Paymaster General has seen your letter of 14 January to Len Appleyard.

As you know, Mr Gummer is strongly of the opinion that we should celebrate VE Day. He has asked me to underline his belief that a clear role for the Church in Thanksgiving ought not to be avoided, although the exact form this takes should protect us as far as possible from unseemly wrangles.

I am sending copies of this letter to Len Appleyard (Foreign Secretary's Office), Janet Lewis-Jones (Lord President's Office), Richard Mottram (Defence Secretary's Office), David Morris (Lord Privy Seal's Office) and to Richard Hatfield (Cabinet Office).

Yours ever,

Alex Galloway

A K GALLOWAY
Private Secretary

F E R Butler Esq
10 Downing Street

Depne : VE day 10/84

GARNET OFFICE
2nd Floor
2nd Floor
2nd Floor



15 JAN 1985

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10 DOWNING STREET

From the Principal Private Secretary

15 January, 1985.

Will you please thank the Lord Privy Seal very much for his letter of 15 January, and for the extracts from the Chips Channon and Harold Nicholson diaries. I have passed these on to those who are considering the alternatives for the commemoration of VE Day.

David Morris, Esq.,
Lord Privy Seal's Office.

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10 DOWNING STREET

From the Principal Private Secretary

15 January, 1985.

In my letter of yesterday, I mentioned the service in St. Margarets, Westminster, arranged by members of the House of Commons on VE Day 1945. I enclose copies of extracts from the diaries of Chips Channon and Harold Nicholson which refer to this service.

I am copying this letter to Len Appleyard (Foreign and Commonwealth Office), David Morris (Lord Privy Seal's Office), Janet Lewis-Jones (Lord President's Office), Alex Galloway (Paymaster General's Office), and Richard Hatfield (Cabinet Office).

E. E. R. BUTLER

Richard Mottram, Esq.,
Ministry of Defence.



PRIVY COUNCIL OFFICE
WHITEHALL, LONDON SW1A 2AT

15 January 1985

Dear Robert,

I think the enclosed extracts from the Henry Channon and Harold Nicholson diaries will give an idea of the Service of Thanksgiving on May 8 1945.

May 8 1985 will be a Wednesday, and quite a suitable day for a morning service.

It seems the favoured term was "German domination" and not "Nazi domination".

JOHN BIFFEN

F E R Butler Esq
PPS/Prime Minister
No 10 Downing Street

HAROLD NICOLSON'S DIARIES

DIARY

7th May, 1945

At 3 comes the news that an hour ago Schwerin von Krosigk¹ had spoken on the wireless from Flensburg.² He has said that Germany was obliged to surrender unconditionally, crushed by the overwhelming might of her enemies. Ben and I dash to tell Vita who is in the courtyard. The three of us climb the turret stairs, tie the flag to the ropes, and hoist it in the soft south-west breeze. It looks very proud and gay after five years of confinement.

I decide to go up to London. The news of Schwerin's broadcast has apparently spread. In Staplehurst we see a handful of children fluttering little flags. When I get to London there are flags everywhere. At Cannon Street I see the B.B.C.'s Chief Engineer, Noel Ashbridge, escaping exhausted from London. He says that everything is completely tied up, that we cannot get Moscow to agree to a time for a simultaneous announcement and that everything is to be postponed until tomorrow.

I dine at Pratts, which is empty and dull. Coming back, I find a few instances of celebration. A Jewess in a paper cap is strolling down St James's Street turning a rattle. A few drunken soldiers.

H.N. TO N.N.

8th May, 1945

Sissinghurst

The normality continued in the morning. I attended a meeting of the *Institut Français* and lunched at the Beefsteak. By that time things began to liven up. There was some cheering in the streets and crowds in Leicester Square. But when I had finished my luncheon, I found a very different scene. The whole of Trafalgar Square and Whitehall was packed with people. Somebody had made a corner in rosettes, flags, streamers, paper whisks and, above all, paper caps. The latter were horrible, being of the comic variety. I also regret to say that I observed three Guardsmen in full uniform wearing such hats: they were *not* Grenadiers; they belonged to the Coldstream. And through this cheerful, but not exuberant, crowd I pushed my way to the House of Commons. The last few yards were very difficult, as the crowd was packed against the railings. I tore my trousers in trying to squeeze past a stranded car. But at length the police saw me and backed a horse

¹ He had been Minister of Finance continuously since his appointment by von Papen in 1932, and was Foreign Minister in the Doenitz Government.

² The town on the Danish border where Doenitz had set up his rump Government.

V. E. DAY

7th May, 1945
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into the crowd, making a gap through which, amid cheers, I was squirted into Palace Yard. There I paused to recover myself, and seeing that it was approaching the hour of 3 pm., I decided to remain there and hear Winston's broadcast which was to be relayed through loudspeakers. As Big Ben struck three, there was an extraordinary hush over the assembled multitude, and then came Winston's voice. He was short and effective, merely announcing that unconditional surrender had been signed, and naming the signatories. (When it came to Jodl, he said 'Jodel'¹.) 'The evil-doers', he intoned, 'now lie prostrate before us.' The crowd gasped at this phrase. 'Advance Britannia!' he shouted at the end, and there followed the Last Post and *God Save the King* which we all sang very loud indeed. And then cheer upon cheer.

8th May, 1945
Sissinghurst
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I dashed back into the House and into the Chamber. After the roar and heat outside, it was like suddenly entering an Oxford quadrangle on Eights Week night. Cool and hushed the Chamber was, with P. J. Grigg answering questions as if nothing unusual were impending. The clock reached 3.15, which is the moment when Questions automatically close. We knew that it would take Winston some time to get to the House from Downing Street in such a crowd. We therefore made conversation by asking supplementary questions until 3.23. Then a slight stir was observed behind the Speaker's chair, and Winston, looking coy and cheerful, came in. The House rose as a man, and yelled and yelled and waved their Order Papers. He responded, not with a bow exactly, but with an odd shy jerk of the head and with a wide grin. Then he started to read to us the statement that he had just made on the wireless. When he had finished reading, he put his manuscript aside and with wide gestures thanked and blessed the House for all its noble support of him throughout these years.

Then he proposed that 'this House do now attend at the Church of St Margaret's, Westminster, to give humble and reverend thanks to Almighty God for our deliverance from the threat of German domination'. The motion was carried, and the Serjeant at Arms put the mace on his shoulder and, following the Speaker, we all strode out. Through the Central Lobby we streamed, through St Stephen's Chapel, and out into the sunshine of Parliament Square. We entered St. Margaret's by the West door which was furthest away from us, and that meant a long sinuous procession through a lane kept open for us through the crowd. I had expected some jeers or tittering, since politicians are not

¹The Chief of Hitler's Operational Staff of the Wehrmacht.

HAROLD NICOLSON'S DIARIES

popular and in the mass they seem absurd. But not at all. Cheers were what we received, and adulation. The service itself was very short and simple, and beautifully sung. Then the Chaplain to the Speaker read in a loud voice the names of those who had laid down their lives: 'Ronald Cartland; Hubert Duggan; Victor Cazalet; John Macnamara; Robert Bernays'—only the names of my particular friends registered on my consciousness. I was moved. The tears came into my eyes. Furtively I wiped them away. 'Men are so emotional', sniffed Nancy Astor, who was sitting next to me. Damn her.

Then back we streamed into the House and adjourned for the day. Winston made a dash for the smoking-room. When he was passing through Central Hall the crowd there broke into loud clapping. He hesitated and then hurried on. A little boy dashed out: 'Please, sir, may I have your autograph?' Winston took a long time getting out his glasses and wiping them. Then he ruffled the little boy's hair and gave him back his beastly little album. 'That will remind you of a glorious day', he said, and the crowd clapped louder than before. In the smoking-room Kenneth Pickthorn produced a bottle of champagne and we clinked glasses.

Then came an anti-climax. I was taken out in a police-car to beyond Kensington to lecture to a Police course. They were very intelligent for bobbies, and I quite enjoyed it. And then, with great difficulty because the streets were blocked, I was taken back by the police-car to the Travellers where I dined with Robin McDouall and a nice naval friend of his called Wyndham Goodden. We had champagne and then went downstairs to the inner room to listen to the King's wireless address.

I went on to a party at Chips Channon's. Why did I go to that party? I should have been much happier seeing all the flood-lighting and the crowds outside Buckingham Palace. But I went and I loathed it. There in his room, copied from the Amalienburg, under the lights of many candles, were gathered the Nurembergers and the Munichois celebrating *our* victory over *their* friend Herr von Ribbentrop. I left early and in haste, leaving my coat behind me. A voice hailed me in Belgrave Square. It was Charles, seventh Marquess of Londonderry,¹

¹ Lord Londonderry was Secretary of State for Air, 1931-35. He was severely attacked in England by Labour and pacifist circles for opposing the abolition of bombing aircraft by international agreement. He met the Nazi leaders in 1936 and 1937. Ribbentrop came to stay with him. He died in February 1949, as the result of a gliding accident in 1947.

A GRIN ON BIG BEN'S FACE

Hitler's friend. As we walked towards his mansion in Park Lane, he explained to me how he had warned the Government about Hitler; how they would not listen to him; how, but for him, we should not have had the Spitfires and 'all this', waving a thin arm at the glow above a floodlit Buckingham Palace, at the sound of cheering in the park, and at the cone of searchlights which joined each other like a maypole above our heads.

Enraged by this, I left him in Park Lane and walked back through the happy but quite sober crowds to Trafalgar Square. The National Gallery was alive with every stone outlined in flood-lighting, and down there was Big Ben with a grin upon his illumined face. The statue of Nelson was picked out by a searchlight, and there was the smell of distant bonfires in the air. I walked to the Temple and beyond. Looking down Fleet Street one saw the best sight of all—the dome of St Paul's rather dim-lit, and then above it a concentration of searchlights upon the huge golden cross. So I went to bed.

That was my victory day.

As soon as the war with Germany was over, the thoughts of Parliament turned towards the General Election. In the previous October, Churchill had suggested that an Election should be held within a month or two of the defeat of Germany. Now he changed his mind. He considered that the Coalition should remain together until after the defeat of Japan, and that the death of Roosevelt and the disquieting attitude of Russia since Yalta made a unified British Government all the more essential. The Labour Party took a different view. The present Parliament, they argued, was already ten years old, and the urgency of certain social reforms was already in dispute between the Parties. On 23rd May Churchill therefore announced that Parliament would be dissolved on 15th June and that Polling Day would be on 5th July. In the interval, he formed his 'Caretaker Government', composed of Conservatives and Independents only.

As Harold Nicolson records, the Japanese war aroused little interest in Britain. The fall of Rangoon to General Slim's 14th British Army on 2nd May had not even been mentioned in his Diary, nor was the fierce fighting by the Americans for Okinawa in April, May and June. Apart from the mounting Party battle at home, attention was focused on the behaviour of the Communists in Europe and of France in the Middle East. The most critical situation developed at Trieste and in southern Austria, which Tito's victorious partisans claimed as their own, although

CHANNON

THE END OF THE WAR

6 May

The Wavells have now been here over six weeks. Will they never return? Their visit was ill-timed, even tactless. HMG was against it but Wavell whilst a scholar, a good man, and a great soldier, is no politician. He has been blundering and a bore to both Winston and the Cabinet. I am sorry for him, as he is in real jeopardy. To be dégomme after only a year and a half of Vice-royalty would be a tragedy, but Rab Butler thinks that he may survive.

8 May

VE Day, at last.

The night before war was declared, I was in the Cabinet Room of 10 Downing Street, watching Neville Chamberlain, who looked broken-hearted, and running errands back and forth from the FO and telephoning to Nevile Henderson, and coping with Red Boxes, when a thunderstorm broke – a storm such as I have never seen.¹ It did not stop and Peter Loxley and I had to sally forth, and arrived home drenched. There was rain as if the very gods were weeping (only once had I known a storm like it in England – the night Mme Fahmy murdered her husband at the Savoy, while I, the Prince of Wales and Prince Paul were dancing at Mrs Rupert Beckett's ball).

Early this morning, too, I was awakened by the rain – intense, Wagnerian rain, which lasted for a long time; the noise brought back, as nothing else could, that September night of 1939. . . .

Before lunch I walked through the Ritz, which was beflagged and decorated: everyone kissed me, Mrs Keppel, the Duchess of Rutland and Violet Trefusis all seized me alternately. . . . The streets were almost empty, as there is a bus-strike, and taxis refused to go out – there were a few singing people, that's all.

At the House, Questions lasted interminably, and there was an atmosphere of expectancy in the crowded Chamber. Every seat was occupied; the Ambassadors were all present, peers queued up. At three o'clock, in the Whips' Room, I heard the PM make the official announcement over the wireless that the war in Europe was at an end. I then returned to the Chamber, but owing to the ovation Winston was having in the streets, he was delayed, and for a few embarrassed minutes we had nothing to do. Members, amused, asked desultory questions, keeping their eyes on the door behind the Speaker's chair. The Serjeant-at-Arms was in Court Dress, the Speaker wore his robes with gold braid, etc. (I have never seen this done before – though I suppose it was done at the Coronation.) At last Winston, smiling and bent, appeared, and had a tremendous reception. Everyone (except the recently elected cad for Chelmsford) rose and cheered and waved handkerchiefs and

¹ See pp. 212-4.

CHIPS, THE DIARIES OF SIR HENRY CHANNON

Order Papers . . . Winston smiled and half bowed – as he often does, and turning towards the Speaker, read out the same short announcement of the surrender of Germany which he had already given over the wireless. The House was profoundly moved, and gave him another great cheer; but his reception, even at a supreme moment like today, did not equal Mr Chamberlain's great ovation after Munich. Then Winston, in a lower voice, added his personal thanks and praise for the House of Commons and the Democratic System: some Members wept, and the PM moved that we repair to St Margaret's to offer thanks to Almighty God using the identical phraseology employed by Lloyd George in 1918. The Speaker headed the procession, followed by Winston, who walked with Arthur Greenwood. We walked through St Stephen's Hall and outside, where there was a terrific crowd, the sun was shining. There were bells, police carved a way for us, and we must have looked like a picture by Giovanni Bellini as we filed, 500 strong, into St Margaret's for a short and impressive service.

10 May

It is my private opinion that the PM is universally admired but little liked, which is sad. But for the last few days he has certainly enjoyed his moment of triumph, and his car has been frequently mobbed: people climbed all over it on the way to the House on Tuesday and thus delayed him, and I am told that last night he stood on top of it outside the Ministry of Health. Today in the House, he was buoyant and gay, and later in the Smoking Room, when he was sitting with Jay Llewellyn he smiled at me, and I murmured a few conventional words of congratulation. He thanked me, but, as always, made me feel shy. As I walked away I thought of Coronation evening, and how he had telephoned and proposed bringing Mrs Churchill and two of his daughters to Belgrave Square, which he duly did, and stayed half the night¹ . . . how much has happened to us all since then.

13 May

I went to St Paul's for the great Thanksgiving Service, very hot in my morning clothes: the great cathedral was crowded, and I watched all the notabilities of the earth come in, and listened to the cheers of the crowds outside. At length the procession of clergy moved to the door to receive the Sovereigns who then proceeded up the aisle. Their Majesties looked young and smiling – though the King looked drawn, but he has the Windsor gift of looking half his age. Behind him walked Queen Mary whom I had not seen since before the war. She looked magnificent – even beautiful, and was gloriously arrayed and bejewelled

¹ See p. 122.

*Above Chips
Hellenes and
Right With*

[15 JAN 1985]

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