

Commemorating VP Day at your school

15 August 2020 is the 75th anniversary of VP Day, for “Victory in the Pacific”. It is also known as VJ Day, for “Victory over Japan”.

The war in Europe had ended in early May 1945, but Japan fought on. Australians were fighting major campaigns on Bougainville and Borneo. The invasion of the Japanese home islands seemed imminent and heavy Allied casualties were expected. But on 6 August the atomic bomb was dropped on Hiroshima; on 9 August a second was dropped on Nagasaki. The same day the Soviet Union declared war on Japan and invaded Manchuria. On 15 August 1945 the Japanese surrendered.

The surrender was greeted with jubilation around the world. For Australia it meant the return of peace after six long years and tens of thousands of deaths. In the words of Prime Minister Ben Chifley, “Let us remember those whose lives were given that we may enjoy this glorious moment and may look forward to a peace which they have won for us.”



AUSTRALIAN WAR MEMORIAL

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Figure 1 Crowds in King William Street, 16 August 1945. <https://trove.nla.gov.au/newspaper/page/2652562>

How to commemorate VP Day in 2020

Your school has many options for commemorating VP Day. Commemorative activities could be undertaken by a few students, by a class, or in a school assembly. Some options are:

- Find (or write) a commemorative poem.
- Find online photographs and make a collage. The Australian War Memorial and Imperial War Museum are good sources.
- Visit a local war memorial and lay poppies or rosemary.
- Research servicemen and women who appear on local war memorials. The Virtual War Memorial Australia is a good source, and you can add your research.
- Chalk the names of local servicemen or women on bricks or paving stones at school.
- Create a short video sharing the names of servicemen and women who were former students of the school or from the local area.
- Use the VWMA Timeline (accessible as the blue Timeline button at vwma.org.au) or the various Campaign pages (under Conflicts > World War 2) to identify Australians killed in the Pacific theatre and tell their stories.
- Use the VP Day Resource page (LINK) to find some VWMA stories about the Pacific War, from the bombing of Darwin to the POW experience. Use these for class work or school assemblies. There are some great stories there, which are useful for improving historical skills such as chronological reasoning, understanding perspective and analysing sources. They also exemplify good referencing practices.