

This Day in History... July 19, 1941

“V” for Victory Campaign

On July 19, 1941, British Prime Minister Winston Churchill officially established the “V” for Victory campaign. The letter “V” became a rallying cry for people in occupied nations as well as Germans who opposed the Nazis.

The idea of using “V” for Victory was developed by Victor de Laveleye, the former Belgian Minister of Justice. In January 1941, he was director of the Belgian French-language broadcasts on the BBC. During one of his broadcasts on January 14, 1941, he suggested that people in Belgium paint a “V” for Victory everywhere as a symbol to stand up against Germany. He chose this because it could represent *victoire* (French for “victory”) and *vrijheid* (Dutch for “freedom”).



WWII Win the War stamp with an eagle whose wings form a V.



“V” for Victory was originally conceived by a Belgian refugee.

It wasn't long before the letter “V” was found on buildings and roads throughout Belgium. Other Allied nations adopted the symbol as well. Part of the expanding “V” for Victory campaign included the use of the opening notes of Beethoven's Fifth Symphony at the start of BBC broadcasts. This was because the Morse code for “V” is dot-dot-dot-dash, and the song begins with the same rhythm. Some took joy in the fact that the Allies were using German music as a rallying cry against their German enemies.

British Prime Minister Winston Churchill had learned of the far-reaching support of the “V” for Victory idea. On July 19, 1941, he launched an official “V” for Victory campaign. Churchill announced, “The V sign is the symbol of the unconquerable will of the occupied territories and a portent of the fate awaiting Nazi tyranny. So long as the people continue to refuse all collaboration with the invader, it is sure his cause will perish, and Europe will be liberated.”

The V for Victory idea spread even farther and faster after Churchill's announcement. After the US joined the war, the phrase was used on posters promoting the war effort. Around the world, people tapped out the Morse code for “V” and flashed the “V” for victory hand gesture. Most photos of Churchill after his announcement showed him making the famous “V” gesture.

The Nazis hoped to combat the campaign, claiming that “V” stood for “*viktoria*,” and that by making the “V” symbol, civilians were showing their support for a German victory.

During the Vietnam War, the hand gesture came to represent peace.



Churchill was often photographed making the “V” for Victory hand gesture.

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