**Peace in our Time**

Said Neville Chamberlin when he arrived back from appeasement talks with Adolf Hitler in 1938. Little did he know that almost exactly eleven months later, he’d be declaring war on Germany, he’d resign, Germany would drop bombs on Britain for nearly 5 years, USA would split the atom and finally on 8th of May 1945, there would be peace in our time…in Europe…for now.

I often wonder of the mass elation and deep exhale the allied citizens felt and did after holding their collective breath for so long. I wonder how that must have felt. I wonder what realisation came first? Did they first think that they or their loved ones or their friends or their neighbours no longer would have to die? Did they think first that their military would come home soon? Did they think first about rebuilding everything the Germans had destroyed just the way it was? Did they think first of the possibilities available as they worked towards whatever semblance of normality that would newly be available in their lives? As word came through that the Germans had finally surrendered as it looked as though the west would have to shake Russian hands as they met in the middle, what did people think?

I read and watch documentaries and lectures by historians and the first thought that enters my head is that this day may well be the greatest achievement and day in our great countries rich and great history. That, during a period when France had fallen in weeks to the crushing brilliance of blitzkrieg, the UK and its colonies was all alone. I wonder whether the great and towering leadership of Winston Churchill was damaged. It was suggested to him by a member of his war cabinet to pursue peace with Germany through Mussolini during this time but Churchill’s instinct was to fight on. It was Neville Chamberlin who supported him until Chamberlin died soon after. I wonder whether Churchill truly believed that peace could be achieved with Hitler at that time. I wonder whether he believed that peace would ever be achieved at that time or any other time as the deeds of the NAZIs became ever more evident. Was he continuing to fight on because there was ever the possibility in his mind that they could win? Was he fighting on because he believed it was the right thing to do morally? There was no USA to fight alongside of and the might of the USSR had not been forced by Hitler’s expansion enthusiasm. It was up to little Britain to lead its colonies by example. People from all across the world picked up arms to fight off the advances of the Italians, the Germans and the Japanese military across the African continent and across the Asian continent as the men in the sky fought unbelievable odds to prevent German air superiority over the English channel. They came with bombs dropped from planes and when that didn’t work, they came with the V1 bomb, a self-flying bomb which sounded like the drone of a bumble bee. When it was bumbling wasn’t the time to fear. It was when the bumbling stopped that people would run, hide and cover for their lives. When the V1 didn’t do the trick, they hit London with the V2 bomb, a self-flying bomb which was the first thing anyone would ever describe as a rocket. It broke through the atmosphere and was the first projectile into space on the way to killing more than 2000 people. The methods the NAZIs created to kill is truly astonishing.

To leave it there would be disrespectful to their true genius of killing. An interesting fact about Adolf Hitler is that he was very sensitive to the emotion of disgust. So when Hitler first gained his political power, one of the first things he did was to clean up the factories and hospitals which had a large issue with vermin, particularly rats. The same poison the Germans used to clean up the rat issue had the same chemical compound as the poison used to clean up the Jewish problem. That should tell you something about what Hitler felt towards the Jewish people he intended to eradicate. He felt disgust towards them. Another interesting fact about Hitler is that towards the end of the war and on several occasions, Hitler had to choose between sending resources to the death camps or to the ever enclosing front lines of the war effort. On every occasion, he chose the death camps. That’s the kind of human being and ideology the allies were dealing with. It was more important to clean up the Jewish problem than to win the war.

Of all of the risks that were taken and I think of D-Day the most. It wasn’t guaranteed to be a success. In fact, it was much more a guarantee to fail. Dwight D. Eisenhower, the Supreme Allied Commander in Europe and the Supreme Allied Commander of the Allied Expeditionary Force had written a press release in preparation for the failure of the D-Day landings and it was unbelievably close. Only God could have made such a thing a success. There were plans to bomb the coast line to reduce German resistance but the pilots were given orders to wait a few seconds when they were over the beaches so that they wouldn’t accidently drop on naval ships. They dropped too late and missed most of their targets. Paramilitary were dropped in high wind and ended up miles from their targets. They were under machine gun fire. Some floated down into enemy capture. Somehow, they and the French resistance movement achieved most of their goals. The Utah beach military landed on the wrong beach. Luckily, Theodore Roosevelt Jr. landed there and decided to “start the war right here” after deciding it was a better beach than the one they were supposed to take. Amphibious vehicles designed to transport light tanks sunk. They were tested in swimming pools but they couldn’t withstand the choppy sea. The bloody British weather couldn’t produce a decent day at the end of spring. 90% of the Americans in the first wave at Omaha beach were slaughtered by sprays of machine gun fire. It was almost doomed to failure but finally, with Hitler making poor decisions about tank divisions and people unwilling to wake him, and naval ships providing covering fire at the German bunkers, and the Germans truly believing due to the work of double agents that the landing was coming at Calais, and the paramilitary and French resistance holding key targets, the western allied forces of USA, UK and Canada landed successfully on the beaches of Normandy and the end was in sight. As the military advanced through and liberated France, Belgium, the Netherlands, and Luxembourg, the day came ever closer of the German surrender. Pushing across the German countryside as the soviets pushed on to Berlin, the feeling rose from the very depths of the allied citizens, rising until it reached a crescendo on May 8th 1945.

Nazism hasn’t been seriously regarded since as a political concept; its evils evident for the world to see. Hitler has rightly been considered one of the most evil figures in history. Names like Churchill and Franklin D. Roosevelt, who died before seeing the war end or seeing Nazism defeated, have been raised above all. They’ve been given a status as sub-deities. Not gods or prophets but the best of those who could be presented to God as human. It was the end of an evil subplot in the human story. As our history becomes lessened by those who would reduce it to acts of evil, or take away the magic of our nation’s achievements with caveat, qualification and ‘yeah but’s, we should remember what our parents did and their grandparents did, our grandparents did and their grandparents did as they stood in the street and shouted up at the Luftwaffe to “come and get us!” and wrote on their roofs insults aimed at Hitler, and they stood together to face down evil and tyranny. They were unbelievable.

May 8th 1945 was the greatest day in our history.