



0. Victory in Europe: End of WWII - Story Preface

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Much of Caen—a town in Normandy, France—became a rubble heap during July of 1944. The month after D-Day, Allied forces bombed the area before troops-on-the-ground advanced to take-back the French town from German occupiers. Image online, courtesy Wikimedia Commons.

*Seldom if ever has a war ended
leaving the victors with such a sense of uncertainty and fear,
with such a realization that the future is obscure
and that survival is not assured.*

Edward R. Murrow

The war in Europe was over when Allied leaders gathered in Potsdam, a Berlin suburb, during July of 1945. Meeting to talk about Germany's future, the decision-makers—Winston Churchill, Joseph Stalin and Harry Truman—had differing points of view on a number of issues.

Discussing how to govern the defeated nation, and divide power in that ravaged country, the "Big Three" leaders were also thinking about the rest of Europe. Just two months before, in a May 14th speech in London, Churchill rhetorically asked what Europe had become.

In light of the estimated statistics—55 million people who died, 45 million who were homeless and countless more who were suffering from starvation—he gave a grim answer:

It is a rubble-heap, a charnel house, a breeding ground of pestilence and hate. (Quoted in *Truman*, by David McCullough, page 667.)

The ending of WWII differed little from the ending of WWI. As G. J. Meyer observes in *A World Undone*:

...the great War [another name for WWI] was a process by which all the great powers, victors and vanquished alike, transformed themselves from bastions of prosperity into sinkholes of poverty and debt. Financially as in so many other ways, the war was a road to ruin. (See *A World Undone*, 2007 paperback edition published by Delta, at page 486.)

How could three men, and their staff personnel, really determine what was best for countries in which they neither lived nor ruled? What did they consider as they made decisions impacting all of Europe?

What the negotiators decided would change the world for decades to come.

See Alignments to State and Common Core standards for this story online at:

<http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/AcademicAlignment/Victory-in-Europe-End-of-WWII>

See Learning Tasks for this story online at:

<http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/AcademicActivities/Victory-in-Europe-End-of-WWII>

Why Start a War When All that Follows Is Death and Destruction?

What did Churchill mean when he described Europe, at the end of World War II, as "...a rubble-heap, a charnel house, a breeding ground of pestilence and hate."

What did Edward R. Murrow, a highly respected journalist, mean when he observed that "the victors" of WWII had "a sense of uncertainty and fear?" What would cause such feelings?

Media Stream



Leaders Gathered for the Potsdam Meetings

Image online, courtesy the Harry S. Truman Library and Museum.

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The Principals at Potsdam

Image online, courtesy the Harry S. Truman Library and Museum.

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War-Ravaged Germany

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