

# This Day in History... August 25, 1944

## Liberation of Paris

On August 25, 1944, Allied troops liberated Paris, France after four years of Nazi occupation. In May and June 1940, German forces swept across France, overpowering the defenders and inflicting some 360,000 casualties. By the time they reached Paris on June 14, they occupied the capital city unopposed.

French and German leaders met and agreed to sign an armistice – the Second Armistice at Compiègne. Adolf Hitler specifically chose the Compiègne Forest as the meeting place, because it was where the Germans had signed the 1918 armistice ending World War I.

With the signing of that new armistice, Germany officially occupied north and west France while Italy took over the southeast. That left a small unoccupied area led by the French Vichy government.

Over the next four years, the war continued around the globe. Small pockets of resistance arose throughout France, but to little avail. Then, in June 1944, the Allies landed at Normandy with the goal of driving the Germans back to the Rhine River and reaching Berlin before the Soviet Army. However, they didn't intend to liberate Paris. American General Dwight Eisenhower knew that Hitler had given the order to bomb the city until it was "lying in complete debris" if it came under Allied attack. And Paris was too culturally and historically significant to risk such a devastating attack.

In spite of this, the French resistance, led by Charles de Gaulle, began planning to retake Paris. On August 15, Paris Metro workers and police went on strike. Postal workers followed them the next day. By August 18, workers in all fields throughout Paris were on strike, leaving the city at a standstill.

Meanwhile, the resistance forces hung posters encouraging citizens to take arms. They called on police, guards, and patriotic Frenchmen ages 18 to 50 to join "the struggle against the invader" because "victory is near." On August 19, German vehicles drove down the Champs-Élysées in retreat.

In the coming days, the resistance fighters and city residents took the streets attacking the German occupiers. On August 20, the resistance forces prepared for a siege, building barricades and digging trenches into the pavement. Men, women, and children transported materials between barricades with wooden carts and painted their personal vehicles in camouflage to aid the resistance cause.



Allies in Normandy, D-Day, June 6, 1944

*Stamp depicts troops coming ashore at Normandy based on War Department photographs.*

On August 24, the Free French Army of Liberation and the US Third Army, led by General Patton, arrived to reinforce the resistance. By the following day, the Germans were overwhelmed. Many remaining Germans fled and the rest waited to surrender. Though they were instructed by Hitler to destroy the city before turning it over to enemy hands, the German commanders chose to surrender.

Later that day, Charles de Gaulle, president of the Provisional Government of the French Republic, retook his office. He then delivered a rousing speech:

*"Why do you wish us to hide the emotion which seizes us all, men and women, who are here, at home, in Paris that stood up to liberate itself and that succeeded in doing this with its own hands?"*

*"No! We will not hide this deep and sacred emotion. These are minutes, which go beyond each of our poor lives. Paris! Paris outraged! Paris broken! Paris martyred! But Paris liberated! Liberated by itself, liberated by its people with the help of the French armies, with the support and the help of all France, of the France that fights, of the only France, of the real France, of the eternal France!"*

*"Well! Since the enemy, which held Paris has capitulated into our hands, France returns to Paris, to her home. She returns bloody, but quite resolute. She returns there enlightened by the immense lesson, but more certain than ever of her duties and of her rights."*

*"I speak of her duties first, and I will sum them all up by saying that for now, it is a matter of the duties of war. The enemy is staggering, but he is not beaten yet. He remains on our soil."*



*Stamp pictures a procession of troops in front of the Arc de Triomphe in Paris.*

*"It will not even be enough that we have, with the help of our dear and admirable Allies, chased him from our home for us to consider ourselves satisfied after what has happened. We want to enter his territory as is fitting, as victors."*

*This is why the French vanguard has entered Paris with guns blazing. This is why the great French army from Italy has landed in the south and is advancing rapidly up the Rhône valley. This is why our brave and dear Forces of the interior will arm themselves with modern weapons. It is for this revenge, this vengeance and justice, that we will keep fighting until the final day, until the day of total and complete victory."*

*"This duty of war, all the men who are here and all those who hear us in France know that it demands national unity. We, who have lived the greatest hours of our History, we have nothing else to wish than to show ourselves, up to the end, worthy of France. Long live France!"*

The next few days were filled with parades and celebrations. In fact, some German snipers had held out in spite of the surrender and fired on the parade.



Allies free Rome, June 4; Paris, Aug. 25, 1944

*From the 1994 WWII stamp sheet*



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