



Prime Minister *SP*

MO 27/5/1

A helpful paper which comes down in favour of:

- 1) a commemorative service in either Westminster Abbey or Albert Hall. *MH prefer Westminster Abbey*
- 2) not on either VE or VJ day but a date in between, preferably a Sunday in early July.
- 3) no military parades.

PRIME MINISTER

40TH ANNIVERSARY OF THE END OF THE SECOND WORLD WAR

I agreed at Cabinet to bring forward proposals as to the form which a national celebration of the 40th Anniversary of the end of the Second World War might take.

2. I attach a note which has been prepared by officials of my Department. I am quite clear in my own mind that a commemorative service in Westminster Abbey should be the principal event; that the actual anniversaries of VE Day and VJ Day should be avoided for the reasons set out in the note, and that a military parade would not be an appropriate means of celebration.

3. Subject to your views, I could circulate the attached paper to Cabinet colleagues for discussion on Thursday; alternatively I could put round a very short note setting out firm recommendations.

*WJH*  
Ministry of Defence  
29th January 1985

Agree that Defence Secretary should circulate brief recommendations to Cabinet? (on which you would subsequently consult the Queen)

*SP*  
29/1



10 DOWNING STREET

Prime Minister

The Defence  
Secretary will raise  
this as an oral  
item in Cabinet.

You will wish  
to make your point  
about the date.

CD?  
30/11



DRAFT

ANNEX A TO  
D/D Pers/17/17/1  
DATED 18 JAN 85

40TH ANNIVERSARY OF THE END OF THE SECOND WORLD WAR

BACKGROUND

1. Government policy until recently has been:
  - a. No official national celebration.
  - b. Support bodies such as the Royal British Legion (RBL).
  - c. Use international fora such as the Economic Summit in Bonn.
  - d. Emphasis on reconciliation, peace and looking forward not backwards.
  
2. Following press interest, on 15 January the Prime Minister announced that there would be a national celebration of VE Day. The specific reference to VE Day throughout statements so far should be noted.

PRECEDENCE

3. There was no major national event to celebrate the 25th anniversary in 1970. The following events took place:
  - a. A reception in Lancaster House for 400 members of the Resistance. The Prince of Wales attended and the event was organised by Airey Neave.
  - b. Service of Commemoration in Saint Clement Danes for the Resistance.
  - c. A number of local regimental celebrations.

THEME

4. As brought out in the Prime Minister's statement the national commemoration should honour the dead and point to the reconciliation and reconstruction that has been achieved. It



should commemorate the achievement of restoration of peace 40 years ago, the achievement of reconciliation and 40 years of peace since then and our commitment to preserve peace in the future.

5. The British Legion feel most strongly that the emphasis must be that of "peace and reconciliation etc." and not on celebrating victory. They believe in this connection that the overall significance of 1945 in creating peace should be commemorated without any specific direction at either VE or VJ Day. Indeed the date should be neutral in order to avoid resentment by VJ veterans if there were a VE day event, and to avoid coincidence with the anniversaries of the dropping of atom bombs on Japan. The British Legion stresses the need to avoid militarism, a view they have repeated in the press.

6. This is the generally held view of the Service Departments and FCO, and leads to the approach that military pageant and martial display by either serving forces or veterans should play second place to the commemorative aspects and should be avoided. It is thought that this is in accord with the Prime Minister's feelings.

#### FORM OF COMMEMORATION

7. Possible ceremonies are listed below with comment:

a. A Thanksgiving Service in St Pauls (2400 capacity).

This was suggested by No. 10 but was not favoured by them following the controversy over the Falklands Thanksgiving Service held there and possible procedural difficulties.



Additionally it is to be used for the South Atlantic Memorial service on 14 June.

b. Westminster Abbey (2000 capacity) is thought more appropriate because:

- (1) The Tomb of the Unknown Warrior is there.
- (2) It might be easier to arrange.
- (3) It has an appropriate national place in the minds of people.

c. A Service in St Margarets Westminster, the MPs Chapel.

- (1) This would be seen by the public as too low key an affair and aimed at too narrow a congregation.
- (2) Should MPs wish to hold a service to commemorate their previous thanksgiving in 1945 that should be in addition the national event.

d. A Joint Session of Parliament in Westminster Hall.

(capacity 2000 seated + 1000 standing)

- (1) This might be seen as too politically oriented. It is thought not to be appropriate and unlikely to meet the wishes of the broad masses calling for the commemoration. A parliamentary occasion could be additional to another commemorative event.
- (2) In any event a recommendation on this as a form of commemoration might be inappropriate from the MOD.

e. The Annual British Legion Festival of Remembrance in the Albert Hall. (capacity 6400)

- (1) The RBL are strongly opposed. This is a traditional Legion-only affair held in Remembrance of our Dead of all wars, not just WW2. It is not therefore an appropriate occasion.



(2) RBL would also be averse to anything tied in with the Cenotaph ceremonies which equally remember all wars. They have fought to preserve the tradition of the Remembrance Day celebrations throughout the country and would not wish to change that position.

f. Open Air Service on Horse Guards Organised by the Armed Forces. This is a possibility but again the RBL were concerned about the "militaristic setting". Furthermore there could be problems over weather, fatigue for the elderly, and security.

8. The Requirement for a Parade or Rally.

a. The desirability of some sort of parade or rally in conjunction with a service was considered:

(1) There is a strong view that military parades either alone or in conjunction with a service are not appropriate.

(2) The parading of RBL and Association banners either after a service or in a rally in Hyde Park is felt to be bordering on the jingoistic and may conflict with the commemoration of peace. The RBL feel that the veterans are more vulnerable to fatigue and the event would be hostage to the weather.

(3) Security is a factor which becomes a greater problem in an outside event.

9. Other Possibilities

a. The use of the Army Wembley Musical Pageant (21/22 June) as an already planned and more jolly commemoration occasion:



(1) The participation could be changed to exclude foreign bands and to make it a tri-Service affair.

(2) The use of a pre-planned event would not satisfy the public clamour for a national commemoration in its own right.

b. A service could be held in the Albert Hall (capacity 6400) thus combining a commemorative service with the participation of maximum numbers of veterans (perhaps including banners etc.) with official participants:

(1) The idea is generally favoured and the flexibility in planning possibilities appreciated.

(2) There is a view that a service not in a church does not have the same meaning.

(3) A parade of banners inside the Hall allows the active participation of Veterans Associations in a less conspicuously military way.

(4) It might be felt to be too much like the RBL Poppy Festival in November.

10. Summary.

a. A commemorative service should be the principle event.

b. Preferred venues:

Westminster Abbey or the Albert Hall

c. There should be no outdoors parade even of Association banners as not appropriate to the theme of peace. If the Albert Hall is chosen then there is an option to bring the banners into the form of service.

DATE

11. There should be only one commemorative day to mark the end of the War in 1945, and Wed 8 May and Thu 15 August should therefore be avoided.



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| DEPARTMENT/SERIES<br>..... <b>PREM 19</b> .....<br>PIECE/ITEM ..... <b>1435</b> .....<br>(one piece/item number) | Date and<br>sign                           |
| Extract/Item details:<br><br><b>SCPL C43(13) page 6, para 12 to 16</b>   |  |
| CLOSED FOR ..... YEARS<br>UNDER FOI EXEMPTION  |  |
| RETAINED UNDER SECTION 3(4)<br>OF THE PUBLIC RECORDS ACT 1958  |  |
| TEMPORARILY RETAINED   | <b>19 November 2013</b><br><b>@Wayland</b> |
| MISSING AT TRANSFER  |  |
| MISSING  |  |
| NUMBER NOT USED  |  |



CONFIDENTIAL

20. The FCO expect pressure from the Soviet Union to attend ceremonies there which will require consideration and consultation with Allies. Soviet ceremonies will be so different from our own that precedence is unlikely to be set, ie they are celebrating victory. Other nations' events may pose a problem of precedence but as ours is a domestic national day, Ambassadors would be the right level of foreign representation.

FINANCE

18. No estimate of costs can be made until decisions are taken on the various options outlined above. Once a decision is taken it will be necessary for a detailed budget to be drawn up, and for this to be approved as a proper charge on defence votes. However, costs should be relatively small, particularly if a church service is chosen, and should largely consist of travel and subsistence costs of Service and official civilian personnel attending; if the Royal Albert Hall were to be chosen as the venue, hire costs would also be incurred. Costs should lie where they fall. The RBL have agreed that any veterans attending should pay their own way. If, as is expected, the commemoration is a state occasion, with senior Royalty attending, police and security costs should not be a charge to MOD.



DEFENCE: Celebration of  
VE day: Oct 1984,