

THE HIDDEN CIRCLE GAZETTE

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MUSIC

V for Victory

BY CURT WOODMAN — 2024-06-06



Today, June 6th, is a day of remembrance. Eighty years ago to the day, the Normandy landings signified the start of the liberation of Western Europe from Nazi occupation. No piece of music is more associated with this day than *Beethoven's Fifth Symphony*. Most people will remember it as the main theme used in the 1962 movie *The Longest Day*.

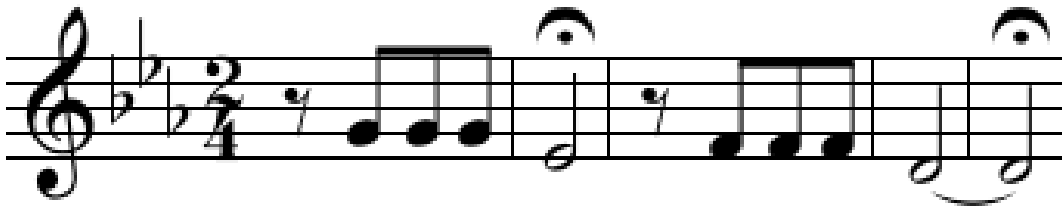
Watch: <https://youtu.be/gZ7hYEJt2UY?feature=shared>

This association goes back much further in time though. I was surprised to learn that in fact it all started with a countryman of mine, the exiled Belgian politician Victor de Laveleye¹. In 1941, while being a guest at the BBC, he proposed to use the letter V as a symbol of resistance. Initially only thinking of the Belgians under nazi occupation, he called for Vs to be chalked everywhere to show the occupiers the power of the resistance.

The idea caught on like wildfire and soon the V sign was everywhere, not just in Belgium but also in the Netherlands and France. Realising the propaganda value, the BBC launched their own campaign called *V for Victory*. Nobody made a bigger impact in this campaign than Winston Churchill, who started using the V sign as a hand gesture.

¹https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Victor_de_Laveleye

The letter V in morse code is di-di-di-dah, so it was only natural that soon it combined forces with Beethoven's 5th Symphony, the starting notes a perfect match:



This simple tune became part of everyday life during the war. From simple knocking on doors, to calling the waiter in a restaurant, teachers clapping to silence children, even church bells. Beethoven's 5th was everywhere! Most importantly, it was broadcast by the BBC all over the world, sending the *di-di-di-dah* hundreds of times every day! Before long, it became the universal symbol of the Allied war effort. Listen to this audio recording of the original BBC signal:

Listen: <https://new.thehiddencircle.com/media/2024/06/recording-1.mp3>

Nazi Germany, always clever and crafty with propaganda, could not manage the situation. Initially they banned the V and even considered using it as sabotage. More annoying was the fact that now Beethoven, whom the Nazis tried to use as a symbol of German power and creativity, was on the other side!

Watch: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7eOaliHB58U>

With thanks to Popular Beethoven².

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²<https://www.popularbeethoven.com/beethovens-fifth-symphony-in-world-war-ii/>