

1943

FORBIDDEN love is punished

On January 20, 1943, a young Polish farm worker from Ebersbach, near Wurttemberg, Germany, was hanged because of sexual relations he had with the farmer's daughter. All slave workers from five kilometres around, were rounded up and brought in to witness the penalty for such a crime. About the same time, ten German women in Augsburg were jailed for terms of four to ten months for having sexual relations with French prisoners of war. In Duisburg, a twenty-two year old woman was sent to a concentration camp for the same crime; her twenty-six year old Polish friend was sent to the camp at Neuengamme and hanged on June 18, 1942. Between May and August, 1942, the Gestapo dealt with 4,960 cases of forbidden relations between Germans and foreign slave workers.

handicapped DEPORTation

On January 21, 1943, a train carrying 1,000 Jewish adults from a mental institution in Apeldoorn, departed Holland for the east. Also on the train were 74 boys and 24 girls from a nearby home for the physically handicapped. Fifty Jewish nurses accompanied the transport under a promise they would be returning to Holland after the delivery of their patients. The promise was never kept. Every single one on the train met their death at Auschwitz.

CAMP VUGHT

There were four major concentration camps set up in Holland during the Nazi occupation. The camps at Westerbork and Vught were used mainly as transit centres for Jews being sent east to the extermination centres in Poland. Amersfoort and Ommen were penal camps for Jews and Dutch political prisoners and hostages. All prisoners experienced extreme violence during their incarceration in these camps. At the lesser known Camp Vught, also known as Concentration Camp s'Hertogenbosch, received its first prisoners on January 13, 1943. Half a mile outside the camp, located amongst trees, was the shooting range where on during September 4 and 5 a total of 117 prisoners were executed by firing squad. One notorious train transport left Vught on June 5, 1943. On board were 1,266 children, whose parents were sent east some days before, all met their deaths at the extermination camp at Sobibor in Poland. As the Allied armies approached the town of Vught the camp was hastily evacuated. The remaining male prisoners were put on a train for Sachsenhausen, the female prisoners, 600 in number, were sent by train to Ravensbrück. The SS guards then fled north leaving the camp to be liberated by the British on the evening of October 26, 1944. At Westerbork, located near Assen, around 12,000 Jews, including 2,000 children, were transported to the death camps in Poland. On April 18, 1990, a museum was opened as the National Monument Camp Vught on the exact location where the camp once stood. The Westerbork camp was completely demolished in the 1970s and is now a World War II Memorial. (During its short duration from January, 1943, to September, 1944, a total of 749 men, women and children died from various causes in Camp Vught.)

NO ESCAPE

Between 1942 and 1944, a total of 25,257 Jews were shipped out of Belgium on twenty eight train convoys. Among them were 5,430 children under the age of sixteen, the youngest only thirty-nine days old. At the end of the war only 1,207 were still alive when the concentration camps in Poland were liberated. A further 5,034 Jews managed to escape across the border to seek refuge in France. They had fled to France to escape Nazi persecution in their own country. Unfortunately these were rounded up after the fall of France in 1940 and deported, via Drancy, to Auschwitz. They were the first Jews to arrive there. Of these, only 317 survived. The main assembly point for the Belgian Jews prior to their transportation to Poland was in the Dossin de Saint-Georges Barracks in the town of Meline where the SS had set up their headquarters. The Dossin Barracks is now a National Memorial but renamed the 'Hof van Habsburg'. It was inaugurated on May 7, 1995, by King Albert II. (The site of the Auschwitz concentration camp was added to the UNESCO World Heritage List in 1979.)

PROTECTION OF JEWS

Five countries, including Hungary, initially resisted German demands to deport their Jews but when the Arrow Cross assumed power the round up of Jews increases. On December 28, 1944, the Hungarian provisional government declared war on Germany. In Finland, only eight Jews were deported before a public outcry resulted in the Finnish Cabinet stopping all further deportations. In Denmark, King Christian X urged all Danes to help save their Jews. Before the deportations were carried out, Danish fishing vessels ferried 7,906 endangered Jews

to the safety of neutral Sweden. Sadly, around 80 of these Jews were caught sheltering in the church in the fishing village of Gilleleje and were transported to the concentration camp at Theresienstadt. Almost all survived the war. Jewish homes in Denmark were not looted by their neighbours as in other countries but in fact were taken care of. Some 686 of these Danish citizens were Christians married to Jews.

In Italy, no Jews were deported while Mussolini ruled the country but after the armistice, when Germany occupied the country in 1943, the round-up and deportation of Jews commenced. At 5.30 am on October 16, 1943, a forty-four man SS unit under the command of SS Captain Theodor Dannecker, rounded up 1,259 Jews in Rome. Many of these were baptized Christians and following a protest from Pope Pius XI some 218 were released. The other 1,041 were put on a train to Auschwitz and at war's end only fifteen survived to return home to the Holy City. Others, around 4,238, were in hiding in hundreds of monasteries, convents, private homes and church institutions in and around Rome. To protect other Jews from the same fate the Vatican opened its doors and gave shelter to 477 men, women and children. In the whole of Italy some 32,000 Italian Jews and about 12,500 foreign Jews lived in fear of their lives. Before the Italian surrender a total of 8,369 of these had been arrested and deported. Only 979 survived the death camps. The majority of Jews who survived in Italy were saved by the Italian people themselves who risked their own lives in helping them hide or flee across the border into Switzerland.

In Bulgaria an agreement between the Bulgarian Commission for Jewish Affairs and the Reich Security Office had already been signed for the deportation of 48,565 Bulgarian Jews. Thousands had already been interned in March, 1943. The Bulgarian people and the church leaders raised such a protest against the deportations that the interned Jews were released and the deportation order rescinded. When the war ended, the Jewish population of Bulgaria was larger than it had been before the war.

RESISTANCE

Jews were active in all national resistance groups formed in countries overrun by the German military. Many thousands of Soviet Jews joined the Soviet partisan movement and 113 received Russia's highest award for bravery, 'Hero of the Soviet Union'. In Yugoslavia, 1,318 Jewish partisan fighters were killed in action. One partisan member, Dr Rosa Papo, became the first woman general in the Yugoslav army after the war. In France, over 1,000 Jews were executed for their part in the French resistance.

STALINGRAD (February 2, 1943)

After a 199 day siege the German Sixth Army, under the command of Field Marshal Friedrich von Paulus, surrenders to the Soviet Union's superior forces.

1. Around 147,200 German and Romanian soldiers were killed.
2. 91,000 were taken prisoner including 24 Generals and 2,500 other officers.
3. About 5,000 of these prisoners survived the war.
4. 14,000 sick and wounded were evacuated by air.
5. 1,000 crewmen and 488 transport planes were lost in the supply and evacuation effort.

After the surrender, Germany began a three day period of mourning and Paulus became a member of the Free Committee for a Free Germany, a puppet organization of Soviet Russia. He settled in the former Soviet controlled East Germany after his release from a Soviet prison camp in 1953 and died on February 1, 1957, in Dresden. (The grave of Friedrich Wilhelm Ernst Paulus, 1890-1957, the first German Field Marshal in history to surrender, is located in the local cemetery at Baden Baden.)

BERLIN WOMEN PROTEST FOR THE JEWS

For one whole week starting on February 27, 1943, German women in Berlin staged the only public protest against the deportation of its Jews. This was something unheard of in Hitler's Germany. During the 'final roundup' of Berlin's Jews, around 10,000 were arrested and within days transported east to the death camps in Poland. Among those arrested were about 1,700 male Jews who were married to non-Jewish German women. They were separated from the others and incarcerated in the Jewish Community Centre at 2-4 Rosenstrasse in the Berlin suburb of Mitte. When the wives of these Jews realized what was happening they gathered in force in front of the Centre shouting "give us back our husbands!" Each day the crowd grew larger and even in the face of SS thugs armed with machine-guns they refused to give up.

Exasperated at the turn of events, Joseph Goebbels, Hitler's propaganda minister, realized he was facing a public relations nightmare and ordered the release of all intermarried Jews in the Centre. These unsung heroes, German women married to Jews, won an astonishing victory over the deportation of their Jewish husbands. Almost all of the released Rosenstrasse Jews survived the war. Over 90 percent of German Jews still alive after the war were married to non-Jewish Germans.

GYPSIES TARGETED

Persecuted since they first arrived in Europe from India, these people were nomadic and not tied to land. They used the collective name Gypsies which stems from the old belief that they originated from Egypt. Under the Nuremberg laws of the Third Reich, Gypsies were defined as non-Aryan and thousands were arrested, sterilized and sent to concentration camps. In 1942, Himmler ordered all German Gypsies to be sent to Auschwitz where a special camp (Birkenau, Section B11e) was constructed. In 1943 a total of 20,943 Gypsies were registered in the camp and by September of that year around 7,000 had died. On the nights of August 2 and 3, 1944, a total of 21,000 Gypsies died in the gas chambers of Auschwitz. In 1941 around 5,000 Gypsies from Austria, including 2,600 children, were transported to the Lodz Ghetto. A year later, all those still alive were deported to the death camp at Chelmno and gassed. It is estimated that over 200,000 Gypsies from all occupied countries were put to death during World War II. Unfortunately today, hatreds towards Gypsies have resurfaced and these people are still considered outcasts in many European countries. Very little publicity has been devoted to the Gypsy problem compared to that of the Jews. Next to the Jews and Russian P.O.W.s the Gypsies suffered most during the Holocaust.

FREEMASONS TARGETED

Among other groups selected for 'special treatment' by Hitler were the Freemasons. They were also hunted down, arrested and in many cases executed in Franco's Spain, Mussolini's Italy and in Stalin's Soviet Union. It is estimated that around 80,000 Freemasons died in Nazi concentration camps. These victims came from all countries occupied by Germany and from Germany itself. On October 28, 1934, the Reich Minister of the Interior Wilhelm Frick issued a decree defining Masonic Lodges as 'hostile to the state' and on August 17, 1935, he ordered all lodges dissolved and their assets confiscated.

OPERATION 'GUNNERSIDE' SINKS NAZI ATOM HOPES

On the night of February 27 / 28, 1943, one of the most daring undercover operations of WW II took place in southern Norway. The destruction of the heavy water plant at the Norsk Hydro Electric factory at Verne was given highest priority at headquarters of the Special Operations Executive (SOE). The first attempt (Operation Freshman) ended in failure when two Halifax bombers, both towing gliders with thirty-four commandos on board, crashed in bad weather over Norway. Forty-five men lost their lives, some in the crash, the others were shot in cold blood after capture by German forces.

Another attempt (Operation Gunnerside) was made by SOE, this time by parachuting a commando force of volunteers, trained in Scotland, on to the frozen surface of one of the lakes on the 3,500 square mile Hardanger Plateau. A fourteen man Norwegian Army Commando group eventually reached Verne and forced entry into the seven storey factory building through windows on the first floor and placed explosives near the eighteen electrolysis cells in the basement. Mission accomplished, the saboteurs retreated back the way they had come. At 1.15 am, the explosion did not destroy the building but about a ton of heavy water was released to pour down the drains. Two months production was lost. On 17th of April the plant started production again. It was now the turn of the US 8th Air Force when 140 bombers attacked the plant causing immense damage and killing twenty-two Norwegian and German workers. Production at the plant stopped for a second time.

In February, 1944, the heavy water apparatus was then dismantled and placed on board the railway ferry 'Hydro' prior to being transported to Germany. This included 157 electrolysis tubes containing 607 kilos of heavy water packed into thirty-nine large drums. Members of the Gunnerside team, which had been hiding in the snow covered mountains throughout the past year, and with help from local partisans, placed explosives on board the ferry which was docked at Meal ready to sail next morning. At 10.30 the ferry blew up half way across Lake Tinnsjø. Fourteen Norwegian civilians and four Germans went down with the vessel. Twenty-seven persons were rescued. Four drums of the heavy water were salvaged by the Germans and taken to Berlin.

THE MARTIANS

This was the code name for a large intelligence group located in a large department store in London's famous Regent Street. It was the Martians who kept the Allied commanders in the field fully informed about the activities of the German Wehrmacht. Most of their intelligence came from Ultra intercepts which by mid 1943 were between 2,000 and 3,000 per day. These signals showed where each enemy division was located and what its strength in battle would be. Never in the history of war was a planning staff better informed of the enemies intentions.

TREASON?

When the SS announced on March 3, 1943 that an SS Division was to be formed in Latvia to fight the Russians, around 32,000 Latvians volunteered. They formed the 'Waffen Grenadier Division der SS (No.1)' During the winter offensive they fought bravely against the Soviets. Pulled out of the battle zone to avoid encirclement, they were sent back into Prussia. Gradually pushed westward by the advancing Red Army they eventually surrendered to the British. Not so lucky was the 'Waffen Grenadier Division der SS (No.2)' formed soon after the first. It failed to escape to the west and was overtaken by the Red Army. As Latvia was annexed by the USSR, they were classed as Soviet citizens and therefore guilty of treason and being guilty of treason, all were executed.

CROWD CATASTROPHE

On March 3, 1943 In Victoria Park, near the Bethnal Green underground station in London's East End, an army defence unit was using a new type of rocket launcher. The whining noise they made sounded like falling bombs. The air-raid alert sounded at 8.17 pm and hearing this many families in the area rushed to the underground tube station for safety. At this time it was being used only as an air-raid shelter and already over 500 people had entered. A woman carrying a baby tripped and fell at the bottom of the nineteen step dimly lit staircase. The rushing crowd behind, in sheer panic, was unable to stop and fell in a heap on top of her and the baby, suffocating each other. In all, 173 persons died, crushed under the sheer weight of bodies. The dead included 27 men, 84 women and 62 children.

THE BAUM GROUP

This Berlin group was composed mainly of young Communist Jews and operated in Central Berlin and in the districts of Kreuzberg and Neuköln. Their main activity was the distribution of anti-Nazi posters and helping the slave workers who worked in the Siemens factory. In May, 1942, Hitler's propaganda minister, the 5ft 4ins Joseph Goebbels, had organized an anti-Russian exhibition called 'The Soviet Paradise'. As an act of protest, the group decided to set the buildings on fire. However, the resulting fire was soon put out by firemen and a few days later the Gestapo succeeded in arresting 27 of the participants.

Brought before the Peoples Court on the Potsdamer Strasse, they were found guilty of treason and on May 27, 1943, were executed. Three women members of the group received prison sentences and sent to Auschwitz from where they never returned. Herbert Baum, the leader of the group, died in prison after being tortured by the Gestapo but he never betrayed his comrades. A monument, bearing the names of all twenty-seven members stands at the western entrance of Berlin's Weissensee Jewish Cemetery on Herbert-Baum-Strasse where some of the group lie buried.

STALIN'S SON CAPTURED

Stalin's son, Yakov Djughashvili, from his first wife Ekaterina, now a 2nd Lieutenant in the artillery corps, was captured on May 16, 1942 and interned in the Sachsenhausen Concentration Camp where he was later shot while trying to escape. (Some sources say he committed suicide by throwing himself at the perimeter fence to force the guards to shoot him.) In 1943, an attempt was made by the Germans to exchange Yakov for Field Marshal Paulus who was captured after the fall of Stalingrad. The request was refused by Stalin. (original name, Josif Jugashvili, he changed it in 1915 to Stalin) Although he grieved for his 36 year old son he is quoted as saying "I will not exchange a private for a Field Marshal".

Over two million Soviet prisoners of war were liberated by the Red Army. All were to suffer at the hands of Stalin who always maintained that Russia had no P.O.W.s in German hands. All were considered traitors to the Motherland for allowing themselves to be captured.

WILHELM KUBE

Kube, Gauleiter of Brandenburg, anti-Semite and deputy in the Prussian State Assembly, was removed from office in 1936 for suggesting that Frau Buch, Martin Borman's mother-in-law, was half Jewish. During the war he became District Commissioner in the Occupied Eastern Territories where, as head of the civil administration in western Belarus, he reported on July 31, 1942, that fifty-five Jews had been executed in his district. A year later, on July 31, 1943, he was murdered by his White Russian housekeeper, Yelena Mazanik, who had placed a bomb under his bed. Mazanik was a member of the Belorussian partisan movement. The reprisals were swift and horrific, whole villages being wiped out and around 1,000 males were rounded up and either shot or hanged. (Wilhelm von Kube is buried in the cemetery at Berlin-Lankwitz.)

STARVATION IN CHINA

Nearly three million people died of starvation in the Honan province of China during 1942 and 1943. Due to drought, the crops of 1942 failed. Another factor was the war with Japan and the uneasy alliance between the Chinese Nationalists and the Chinese Communist forces. Hungry peasants raided the homes of the wealthy seizing anything they could eat in an effort to stay alive.

BOMBING ERROR

The bombing of the Minerva car factory in Antwerp on April 5, 1943, turned out to be one of the major tragedies of World War II. The Erla factory was converted to repair workshops for Luftwaffe planes and therefore on the priority list for attention by the US Eighth Air Force. The bombing run was poor, due to evasive action being taken to avoid German fighters and ground missiles. Two bombs hit the factory killing many workers but the rest of the bombs were released too late and fell on the residential part of Mortsel, a suburb of Antwerp, over a mile away from the target.

A total of 936 civilians were killed including 209 schoolchildren. Only 18 children survived the bombing of the St. Lutgardis school at No. 30, Mechelsesteenweg (which still stands). In all, 342 people were injured and 220 houses destroyed. On March, 27, 1945, the last of the German V2 rockets fell on Mortsel killing twenty-seven people. It was here in Mortsel that Lieven Gevaert built his photographic film factory later known as Agfa-Gevaert.

SABOTAGE ATTEMPT

On April 21, 1943, a Wellington bomber took off from Hendon en route to Glasgow. On board was 6ft 4in tall General Charles Andre Joseph Marie de Gaulle. On the runway, the plane failed to respond to the elevator control. The pilot, Flt. Lt. Peter Loat, DFC, brought the plane to a halt. It was then found that the control rod had been burned through with acid. Another plane was selected and De Gaulle arrived safely in Glasgow. He returned to London by train and never flew in Britain again. It was De Gaulle, who in 1934, first suggested the theory of Blitzkrieg (Lightning War) a tactic used with great success by the Germans in the opening stages of the war against Poland and France.

OPERATION 'MINCEMEAT' (April, 1943)

One of the war's great deception schemes, launched to convince the German High Command that the Allied landings would take place on Sardinia and not on Sicily, the obvious choice. The body of an unknown man who had died recently was dressed in the uniform of a major of the Royal Marines and given the name of Major William Martin. A briefcase was attached to the body containing highly confidential documents that foretold future Allied war plans in the Mediterranean. Major Martin's body was transported from Loch Ewe in Scotland by the submarine HMS Serap to a point just off the coast of Spain and there committed to the sea. It eventually washed ashore and into the hands of German intelligence agents. Within days the contents of the briefcase was being analysed in Berlin. Winston Churchill, then in the United States, received the coded message 'Mincemeat swallowed whole'. The body of 'Major Martin' lies buried in the Roman Catholic Cementerio de la Soledad at Huelua, Spain. For decades the gravesite has been maintained by a Spanish lady, Dona Naylor de Mendez whose British father initiated the practice of putting a flower on the grave every Remembrance Day. This she did with other graves of British airmen buried nearby and in 2002, when she was 69 years old, Britain awarded her the MBE (Member British Empire) for her devotion and work.

Official files on 'Operation Mincemeat' are not searchable until 2043 but in November 1995, some of the top secret files were released to reveal for the first time in 52 years, the true identity of 'Major Martin'. He was a Glyndwr Michael, born February 4, 1909, in Aberbargoed, a small mining village in Wales. A vagrant

alcoholic he had committed suicide by taking rat poison containing phosphorus when sleeping rough in a disused London warehouse and died from chemically induced pneumonia.

The real Major Martin, whose name and identity was used for the deception, moved to the USA after the war and settled in Virginia. He died there on December 10, 1988, his ashes scattered over the Gulf Stream so that eventually they would arrive at his country of birth, Scotland.

THE MAFIA

Prior to the invasion of Sicily, the head of the American Mafia, Lucky Luciano, was promised his freedom in return for contacting the Sicilian Mafia and to obtain their help when the invasion took place. They gave extensive aid to the US troops, 15 % of whom were of Sicilian origin deliberately selected on the orders of US Intelligence. This co-operation however went too far, the Mafia leaders, already in prison were set free. Within weeks most towns in Sicily had Mafia mayors. In the British zone of operations, Scotland Yard men were sent out to round up the worst of the Mafia gangsters, a stark contrast to US policy.

THIRSTY GI'S

Three complete Coco-Cola bottling plants were brought ashore when the US Army landed in North Africa. In 1939 the company had only five overseas bottling plants but by 1945 this had risen to sixty-four.

SAD POLISH LOSS (General Wladyslaw Sikorski: 1881-1943)

Poland's former Prime Minister and Minister of Defence, set up the Polish Provisional Government in London. When the Soviet Union was invaded he tried to persuade Stalin to release the thousands of Polish officers captured by the Soviets in 1939. (their bodies were later found at Katyn) Stalin remained silent on their fate and broke off all dealings with Sikorski. The Soviets then set up their own puppet government in Poland.

Weeks later, General Sikorski and some of his staff, including his daughter, were killed when their plane, a Liberator, crashed seconds after take off from Gibraltar, en-route to England, on July 4, 1943. The body of the General was laid to rest in the newly established Polish Cemetery at Newark, Nottinghamshire. The pilot, Flt. Lt. Edward Prchal of the Czechoslovakian Air Force, was the only survivor. The body of General Sikorski's daughter, Zofia, Chief of the Polish Women's Auxiliary, was never found. The remains of General Sikorski were returned to his beloved Poland in 1993. His cap and uniform, recovered from the sea at the site of the crash, is displayed in the Sikorski Museum, in the Polish Institute at 20, Princess Gate, London.

Flt. Lt. Edward Prchal died in 1984 in Calistoga, California, and his ashes interred in the Czechoslovak plot in the Brookwood Cemetery in England.

FAMOUS 'DAMBUSTERS' RAID on the RUHR (May 16, 1943)

On this day in 1943, nineteen Lancaster's of RAF Squadron 617, bombed the Mohne, Eder, and Sorpe dams in the Ruhr. The main attack on Mohne was led by Wing Commander Guy Gibson, his aircraft carrying the new 'bouncing bomb' invented by Dr Barnes Wallis. The Lancaster's had to skim the water at the near impossible height of 60 feet to release their bombs. The breach in the walls caused flooding which drowned around 1,294 people, including 749 Russian (Ukrainian) prisoners of war whose camp was washed away in the flood at the Eder Dam. Eight aircraft crashed or were shot down. Fifty-three crew members died, three became prisoners of war. Thirty-three decorations were awarded including the Victoria Cross to Guy Gibson.

Eighteen months later, on September 19, 1944, Guy Gibson and his navigator, Squadron Leader Jin Warwick, were returning from a night mission over Germany when their Mosquito was shot down in a friendly fire incident by the rear gunner in a Lancaster from 61 Squadron who mistook it for a Junkers Ju 88. Both planes, the Mosquito and the Ju 88, bear a striking resemblance to each other. Guy Gibson and Jim Warwick were both killed.

Sir Barnes Wallis died in 1979, aged 92.



Germans examining an unexploded 'bouncing bomb' found after the famous Dambusters raid.

FIRST SURRENDER CAUSED BY BOMBING (June 11, 1943)

Blockaded on May 14, the small 83 square kilometre volcanic island of Pantelleria, in the Mediterranean, was first subjected to heavy bombardment by the Royal Navy (Operation 'Corkscrew') and then bombed by planes of the North-West African Strategic Air Force under the operational control of US General Carl Spaatz. The Italian Admiral Gino Pavesi, in charge of some 12,000 troops and 10,000 civilians on the island, surrendered to troops of the British 1st Infantry Division on June 11, after 6,250 tons of bombs fell on the island in six days. Fifty-six of his troops were killed and 116 wounded, A total of 11,621 Italian and 78 German troops were taken prisoner. This was the first time a surrender had been achieved through bombing. Another island bombed into submission was the island of Lampedusa in the Strait of Sicily where 4,600 troops surrendered on June 13.

GOMORRAH

The code name for the bombing of Hamburg during the ten days of July 24 to August 3, 1943. Around 3,000 British and American bombers dropped 9,000 tons of bombs on the city destroying some 277,330 dwellings including some 16,000 multi-storeyed buildings. It produced a fire-storm, the first in history, in which the flames reached a height of three miles above the city. Temperatures in the centre of the conflagration reached 1,400 degrees F (800 degrees C) and as the inferno sucked in more oxygen, winds reached an incredible 150 miles an hour. Thousands were caught in this heat, their bodies exploding in a ball of flame. The city suffered more casualties than the total Britain was to endure throughout the entire war. After the raid, over one million people fled the city for the comparative safety of the countryside, in fear of further bombings.

After the war, the terrible toll was revealed, 30,482 people had died but the most regrettable fact was that 5,586 children had also died in the flames. (During the war around 63,000 men from Hamburg died while serving in the German armed forces.)

GENERAL HANS CRAMER

Last German Commander of the Afrika Korps was captured in May 1943. Imprisoned in a P.O.W. camp in Wales, his deteriorating health caused him to be repatriated to Germany through the Swedish Red Cross. He was brought from Wales to the London Cage, the route taken brought him through the south and south-western area of England. He was allowed to see the massive build up of tanks, planes and ships getting ready for the D-Day invasion. What he didn't know was the exact area of England he was being driven through. He was told it was southern and eastern England and this is what he reported to his seniors in Berlin when he arrived there on May 23, 1944, adding emphasis to the Allied propaganda that the invasion would take place in the Calais area.

THE LONDON CAGE

The name given to the headquarters of the War Crimes Investigation Unit and the Combined Services Detailed Interrogation Centre located in three sixty year old mansions on the corner of Kensington Palace Gardens and Bayswater Road, London. Commanded by Lieutenant Colonel A. P. Scotland, all high-ranking German prisoners were interrogated here after their capture. The interrogation teams consisted of British Army officers and sergeants of German-Jewish stock who spoke the language fluently. Secretly bugged, the private conversations between these prisoners were recorded. Here, between 1940 and 1946 it was run under the supervision of MI.19, the office responsible for gathering information from P.O.W.s. Used partly as a torture centre where many officers were treated abominably to extract information. Of the 3,573 prisoners that passed through the Cage over 1,000 were 'persuaded' to give statements regarding war crimes. These interrogations continued up till 1948. As one prisoner later complained "I spent two years in a Gestapo prison and not once did they treat me as badly as the British."

ASSASSINATION ATTEMPT

On March 13, 1943, General Henning von Tresckow and his ADC, Fabian von Schlabrendorf, placed a bomb on board Hitler's plane (after his visit to the Russian front) Disguised as two gift wrapped bottles of Cointreau liquor, they were intended as a gift for General Helmuth Stieff at Hitler's HQ. When news of Hitler's safe arrival reached the plotters, Schlabrendorf immediately flew to the HQ and retrieved the package and exchanged it for two genuine bottles. It was found that the detonator became defective in the high altitude cold air. From September 1938 to July 1944, there were some seventeen major assassination attempts plotted against the German Führer.

RESISTANCE IN GERMANY

The anti-Hitler movement inside Germany, which included German communists and Jehovah's Witnesses, was the largest indigenous resistance movement of any country during the whole war. Only in Germany was an attempt made to assassinate their leader. Around 800,000 persons were sent to prison at one time or another for active resistance to the regime. These groups included the European Union, White Rose, The Red Orchestra, Solf Circle, Freiburg Circle, Schwartz Kapella and the Kreisau Circle. Kreisau was the name of the estate in Silesia of anti-Nazi lawyer, Helmuth von Moltke, whose mother was English.

While the western allies did all in their power to help other resistance movements, i.e. in France and the Netherlands, they did nothing to help or encourage the movement in Germany which in all probability could have ended the war sooner. But the Allies were intent on unconditional surrender and refused to make any deals at all with Germans. Accordingly, the Allies viewed all Germans as bad, not only Nazis.

PALM SUNDAY

On April 18, 1943, fifty one Luftwaffe tri-motor air-transport planes and sixteen escorting fighters, were shot down in a little over ten minutes by a group of seventy US and British fighters. The pilots were guided to their flight path by messages received from the German enigma codes ('Ultra'). The slow Junker 52 transports were on their way with supplies to the German Army in North Africa. This disaster became known as the Palm Sunday Massacre. Seven Allied planes were also lost.

COINCIDENCE

On July 30, 1943, a Sunderland flying boat, U for Uncle, from the Australian 461 Squadron, spotted and attacked a German U-boat in the Bay of Biscay. The U-boat, commanded by Korvkpt. Wolf-Harro Stiebler, sank taking the lives of 53 of her crew. There were fifteen survivors. (By a strange coincidence, the submarine was the U-461.)

THE BATTLE OF KURSK (July 12/23, 1943)

The 50 day battle of the Kursk Salient was the greatest defensive battle of the war. Operation Zitadelle (Hitler's plan to encircle and destroy five Soviet armies operating in the area) was fought near the village of Prokhorovka, near the rail town of Kursk in central Soviet Union. Like Stalingrad, this was a major turning point in the German/Russian war and the last major offence mounted against the USSR. About 572 tanks and assault guns were deployed by both sides. In this vicious clash of military armour the Germans lost 54 tanks and 20 self-propelled guns. The Soviets lost around 334 tanks and assault guns, their T-34 tanks being dug into the ground with only their turrets showing. The Germans gained just over five miles and lost about 2,500 dead. By July 23,

German forces involved in the Kursk salient offences were pushed back beyond their starting positions eighteen days before. Combatants were, on the Soviet side, the 18th and 29th Tank Corps. On the German side were the SS Liebsstandarte Adolf Hitler, SS Totenkopf and Das Reich SS divisions including Panzer Grenadier Division Deutschland. After a week of combat, Germany never regained the initiative after Kursk and no further major offences were undertaken. Zitadelle had been an appalling disaster. It ended in a victory for the Red Army and the German generals realised then that the war was lost. As the German forces retreated they destroyed everything in their wake, whole towns and villages were reduced to piles of rubble. Exact figures for the losses has never been officially established. The battle is described by many historians as the 'greatest tank battle in history.'

The German Sologub Cemetery, located seventy kilometers from St Petersburg, is the biggest German military burial ground in the USSR. It contains around 80,000 dead, most killed in the Battle Of Kursk.

PEUGEOT CAR WORKS

The Peugeot car factory at Sochaux, near Montbéliard in France, was bombed by the RAF on the night of July 14, 1943. The raid caused little damage but over 100 French civilian workers were killed. After the German takeover of the factory the owner, Rudolphe Peugeot, was compelled to turn his factory over to the production of turrets for tanks and also to the manufacture of aero-engine parts. British SOE agent, Harry Ree, (Code name 'Henri') operating in the area, contacted Monsieur Peugeot and suggested a plan to sabotage the factory. He reluctantly agreed and on November 5, 1943, much of the vital machinery, including the power station and the main transformer, was destroyed by explosives smuggled inside the factory which put production out of action for three months. Two months later the aircraft parts section of the factory was blown up but soon replaced by the Germans using forced labour only to be destroyed again by Ree and his French resistance saboteurs. In the end the Peugeot Works proved of little value to the Nazi war machine.

DISASTER AT PORT MORESBY

In September, 1943, three battalions of US paratroops and some Australian gunners were dropped near Lae on the Huon Peninsula and secured the airfield at Nadzab. Back at Port Moresby, the major Allied air-base in the region, a US Liberator bomber crashed and exploded among troops of the Australian 7th Division waiting to be airlifted to Nadzab. This disaster took the lives of 59 soldiers and wounded 92.

BRITISH FREE CORPS

Also known as The Legion of St. George. The idea that British P.O.W.s be recruited to form an infantry SS unit was first put forward by the self-styled fascist, John Amery, son of a minister in Churchill's war cabinet. In 1943 the SS expressed interest in the idea and the Legion of St. George was created to fight only against communists on the German-Finish front. Despite promises of an easy life of luxury, only about thirty prisoners responded, a far cry from the Battalion they had hoped to form. Lieutenant William Shearer was the only officer to volunteer but was soon diagnosed as a schizophrenic and repatriated to England on medical grounds. The unit included three Canadians, three South Africans, three Australians and one New Zealander. Many changed their minds and were returned to their P.O.W. camps. By March, 1943, only six remained as part of the 11 SS Panzergrenadier Division 'Nordland'. After the war, John Amery was tried for treason and received the death penalty. He was hanged on December 19, 1945. The remaining members received periods of imprisonment ranging from six months to fifteen years.

TOP SECRET UNDERGROUND FACTORIES

Fifteen kilometres north-west of Frankfurt-an-der-Oder in the former East Germany, lie the remains of a massive underground factory built by the Ordnance Department of the German Wehrmacht in the late 1930s for the manufacture of the nerve gas Tabun. In 1943 the manufacture of a later generation of nerve gases, Sarin and Soman, was started and during its operational life about 25 tons of chlortifloride for the gas was produced. Fortunately, no gases were ever used operationally by the Germans during World War II.

The five-storied factory, 20 metres underground and containing 650 rooms and large chambers 80 by 40 metres in length and width, in which was assembled some of the deadly V-weapons, was captured by the Red Army in February, 1945, as they advanced through the thickly wooded Falkenhagener Heide. In the 1970s, the Soviets converted the whole factory, the ventilation towers filled with filters in case of a biological attack and installing massive steel doors, half a metre thick, for use as a command bunker in the event of a future nuclear or

biological war. Abandoned by the Russians in 1992, the whole complex is now left to crumble away by the forces of nature.

In 1946 and 47, the British military dumped around 40,000 tons of poison gasses, including Tabun, into the Baltic Sea. Thousands of tons of this material were uncovered in Austria as the war drew to a close.

SINGLE BIGGEST USAF LOSS

The single biggest loss to the US 8th Air Force was when 291 B17s and B24s raided the German ball-bearing factories at Schweinfurt, fifty miles northwest of Nuremberg on October 14, 1943. This was the second raid by US Flying Fortresses on the five factories producing ball bearings. The first was on August 17 involving 229 bombers. In the first attack the Americans lost 36 bombers, in the second attack a total of 60 planes were shot down or crashed on returning to base. A total of 599 airmen were killed and 40 wounded in the largest and most sustained air battles of the European war. The bomber crews claimed to have shot down 288 German aircraft. The actual figure, obtained after the war, was ... 27. In Schweinfurt, 276 civilians were killed. In all, Schweinfurt suffered sixteen air raids, the Americans by day and the British by night.

SINGLE BIGGEST RAF LOSS

The single biggest loss for the Royal Air Force was on the Nuremberg raid of March 30, 1944, when, of the 795 aircraft taking part, 62 were shot down by German fighters, 14 shot down by flak, 2 were lost in collisions and 16 listed as missing. Of the total aircraft lost, 64 were Lancasters and 30 were Halifaxes. In the city itself, 74 people were killed and 122 injured. Of the RAF crew members, 545 were lost. This was a casualty rate of 11.9% and totally unsupportable. The bombers were completely outgunned, their point 303 machine guns were useless against the German night fighters' cannon shells. Next day Göring proclaimed triumphantly "The enemy has been dealt the heaviest nocturnal defeat so far in his criminal attack on our beloved homeland." Surviving crew members became very bitter and angry at those who had planned the raid as they viewed the many empty seats at the breakfast tables. There was no doubt in their minds that the German Luftwaffe had been warned beforehand that the raid was to take place.

DEATH BEFORE DISHONOUR (November 10, 1943)

A macabre incident involving the American destroyer USS Spence occurred just south of Bougainville. The crew spotted a raft with four live Japanese on board. As the Spence drew along side to attempt a rescue, the Japanese opened fire with a machine-gun. Rather than face the shame of surrender the Japanese officer in charge of the raft then put his pistol in each man's mouth and blew out the back of each man's skull. He then turned the gun on himself and pulled the trigger. All four bodies fell into the water to be devoured by sharks. The Japanese Bushido creed dictated that surrender was shameful and instilled in the soldier that self-destruction was preferable to capitulation. To be captured was a fate worse than death according to the Japanese code of honour. In the town of Bayombong in Luzon, men of the US 37th Division entered a ward in the local hospital and found all the patients dead. They were wounded Japanese soldiers who had been killed by their own comrades rather than have them suffer the humiliation of capture.

DEATH RAILWAY

By the end of 1943, the 15,000 Australians imprisoned in Changi had left for slave labour on the Burma-Siam Railway. The first group, 'A' Force, consisting of some 3,000 men, boarded the Japanese hell-ships Tohohashi Maru and Celebes Maru. Packed like sardines they could neither stand nor lie. Soon most were suffering from diarrhoea and the smell and conditions can only be imagined.

The prisoners were unloaded at Margui and Tavoy in Burma. Ahead lay a 35 km walk to the base camp at Thanbyuzayat many prisoners dying on the way. Within weeks around 61,000 Allied prisoners, Dutch, British, Australian and Americans (700 men from the USS Houston) were scattered in camps throughout Burma (Myanmar) and Siam (Thailand) near the 265 mile long railway they were about to construct. It was completed in October, 1943, after 14 murderous months. For every mile of track, 393 men died. Also in the workforce were around 200,000 Asian labourers. Work on the railway and the building of the two bridges (one wooden and one steel) over the Kwae Noi River, took its toll, estimates putting the Asian death toll as high as 80,000. The Allied death toll was nearly 13,000. Today, three beautifully laid out cemeteries lie along the route of the railway line. At Kanchanaburi lie the remains of 6,982 P.O.W.s including 1,362 Australians. At Thanbyuzayat there are 3,771 graves and at Chungkai 1,329 graves. The names of those with no known grave are commemorated on memorials in Rangoon, Hong Kong and in Singapore.

THE BURMA ROAD

The 681 mile long winding road over the mountains from Burma into China was constructed by the British and thousands of Chinese coolies during the undeclared Sino-Japanese war of 1937-39. To enable the Chinese to continue the war against Japan, whose forces already occupied the coastal regions, allied ships crammed into the docks at Rangoon bringing lend-lease war supplies for the start of the long journey up the Burma Road to Kuming. A small US convoy reached Kuming on January 20, 1945, after a 16 day drive from Myodynia. The first full Allied convoy to reach China was on February 4, 1945. This enormous flow of supplies was protected from the air by famous American squadron the 'Flying Tigers' whose volunteer pilots were paid \$500 for every Japanese plane they shot down. These pilots first enrolled as civilians in the Chinese Air Force, American Volunteer Group-AVG, under the command of Colonel Claire Chennault and later incorporated into the US Army Air Force as the 23rd Pursuit Group. During a major attack by the Japanese on the port of Rangoon on February 25/26, the AVG claimed 217 kills for the loss of 16. The RAF claimed 74 kills for the loss of 22 aircraft. The Japanese then stopped trying to close the port by air effort. Rangoon was ultimately captured by the Japanese army on March 8.



A portion of the Burma Road in China. The winding road is 681 miles long and constructed through rough mountain country. Building it was a remarkable engineering achievement.

THE STILWELL ROAD

When Burma fell to the Japanese in 1942 and the Burma road closed, fuel and supplies had to be flown over what was called the 'Hump' (the Himalayan mountains) from India to China. A new road was then built, at a cost of almost 149 million US dollars, this time constructed by African-American Service Units and around 50,000 coolies. Around 1,100 Americans died during its construction. This new road from India to the Chinese border where it met the Burma Road, was 478 miles long and opened on January 31, 1945. Initially called the Ledo Road it was later renamed the Stilwell Road by Chiang Kai-shek in honour of the American General Stilwell who had worked so hard for it to be built. (General Stilwell died at age 63 on October 12, 1946. He was cremated and his ashes scattered over the Pacific Ocean.)

PUBLIC EXECUTION (December 19, 1943)

Three German Gestapo officers and a Russian accomplice, were hanged in the market square of Kharkov in the USSR. Captain Wilhelm Langheld, Hans Ritz, Reinhardt Retelav and Mikhail Bulanov were found guilty of war crimes by a Russian Military Court. A crowd of around 40,000 watched as lorries on which they stood were driven away, leaving them hanging from the scaffold. The Nazis themselves often used this method for executions in the

Soviet Union as in the case of Kieper and Kogan, two members of the Russian Regional Court who were hanged on August 17, 1941, at Zhitomir. Forced to watch the hangings, 400 Jews were rounded up in the city. After the executions, the Jews were taken outside the town and shot into a pit ten to fifteen metres wide and four metres deep.

GRATEFUL

After the Italian armistice on September 3, 1943, around 100,000 Italians volunteered to help the Allied cause. The surrender was signed by General Eisenhower and Badoglio aboard the British battleship HMS Nelson. After a slow transition period, from being a defeated enemy to being a willing ally, some 150 Italians actually enlisted in the US Army landing force at Anzio as ammunition carriers and interpreters. On April 18, the Italian Liberation Corps was formed. Consisting of 25,000 men, the Corps occupied such important towns as Chieti, L'Aquila, Teramo and Ascoli Piceno. The eastern side of the Italian Peninsula, including cities such as Bologna and Venice, were freed by Italian troops under Allied command. On October 13, 1943, Italy declared war on Germany. The first unit to enter the conflict was the Italian 1st Motorized Group, incorporated into the US Fifth Army. About 600,000 disbanded Italian soldiers from the German occupied north of Italy were crammed into cattle cars and transported to Germany for forced slave labour. In 1944, the Italian Co-belligerent Air Force was formed and equipped with US and British-built planes. Its primary function was to support the Italian troops fighting in Greece and Yugoslavia and to attack German ships sailing in the eastern Mediterranean Sea.

By April, 1945, around one million Italian soldiers, sailors, airmen and partisans were taking a direct role in the Allied war effort. A total of 17,400 were killed in action against Germany. Around 480,000 Italians died from all causes during the war.

BIGGEST DISAPPOINTMENT

By the middle of 1943 approximately 90,000 British and Allied soldiers were incarcerated in P.O.W. camps throughout Italy. When the Allies invaded the south of Italy, members of the Italian underground took this opportunity to arrest the fascist dictator, Mussolini (Italy's King Victor Emmanuel had dismissed Mussolini on July 25, 1943) whom they found living at the Hotel Albergo-Rifugio on the Gran Sasso mountain.

A new government, headed by Marshall Badoglio was formed and immediately sued for peace with the Allies. In P.O.W. camps all over Italy cries of 'finito, finito, viva Badoglio' could be heard loud and clear. Prisoners now prepared to await their imminent release. On September 12, SS Colonel Otto Skorzeny and his soldiers rescued Mussolini (Operation Eiche) from his mountain retreat on the Abruzzi Apennines where he was imprisoned and by the end of the month had re-established his authority in Northern Italy as Hitler's puppet ruler. Allied authorities ordered all prisoners to 'stay put' for the time being. A few days later the P.O.W.s awoke to find German soldiers everywhere. Marched to various train stations they were soon on their way to Germany to undergo a further eighteen months, in some cases under appalling conditions in P.O.W. camps and in concentration camps in Germany and Poland. There can be few examples of utter disappointment on such a massive scale as that of the Allied P.O.W.s in Italy.

CAPTURE OF MUSSOLINI

After his rescue from the mountain top hotel, Mussolini took up residence in the Villa Feltrinelli on the western shore of Lake Garda. Here he ruled over the newly formed Fascist Republic of Salò. Guarded by thirty SS men his every movement and decision he made was scrutinised by the Germans. He considered himself not so much a resident but more a prisoner. However he found solace with his mistress, Claretta Petacci, who had been moved into the Villa Fiordaliso nearby. On April 18, 1945, he and Claretta left the villa for the last time but on April 28 they were captured by local partisans near Lake Como. Both were executed. Two days later, men of the US 10th Mountain Division took possession of the Villa Feltrinelli without a shot being fired. Most of Mussolini's possessions were 'souvenired' including his precious Stradivarius violin and eventually made their way back to the USA. (The Villa Feltrinelli is now the Grand Hotel Villa Feltrinelli.)



The abused bodies of Mussolini and barefooted Claretta, strung upside down, on gruesome display after their murder by partisans. These ghastly images shocked Hitler. He concluded that to avoid such a fate for himself and Eva Braun—should the war ultimately be lost—that neither of them, nor their dead bodies, could ever be allowed to fall into the hands of their enemies.

ITALIAN P.O.W.s

The Italian soldiers transported to Germany after the armistice, were treated abominably and had to survive on starvation rations. Hundreds died of hunger and overwork, tuberculosis and pneumonia. Their living quarters were primitive, 250 men in barracks designed for 100. Those still loyal to the Fascist government of Mussolini were treated far better in the camps. The worst cases of TB were sent back to Italy but when the Italian mothers saw their sons, living skeletons and dying, their hatred for the Germans knew no bounds. Back in the internment camps volunteers were asked for to form an SS Division and thousands volunteered encouraged by the promise of better food and clothing. When the Italian SS Division finished its training it was sent to Italy to try and stem the Allied advance. Once in Italy, the volunteer soldiers deserted in their thousands and joined the partisans.

MUTINY AT SALERNO

On September 20, 1943, one of the saddest episodes in British military history took place: a mutiny by some 300 replacement troops from the 51st Highland Division and the 50th Northumbrian Division. These veterans of the North African campaign had been convalescing in a hospital in Tripoli while their parent Divisions were returned to the UK. Sent to Salerno as replacements, they believed that their officers had broken a promise to them that they would be sent to Britain to rejoin their own regiments. Disembarking at Salerno they sat down on the beach and three times refused to report to their assigned units. The Corps Commander, General Richard McCreery, addressed the men and some agreed to join their assigned units but 192 men still persisted on disobeying. They were put under arrest and sent back to Constantine where they were court martialled. The three leaders of the mutiny, all sergeants, were sentenced to death, but the sentences were later suspended.

The others were given jail sentences ranging from 7 to 10 years. These sentences were also later suspended. (The trial papers, originally ordered to be kept secret for 75 years, have only recently been released.) In the Official British History of 1943, the Salerno Mutiny is not even mentioned but is reported in Hugh Bonds book 'Salerno' published in 1961.

THE BARI DISASTER

The port of Bari, on Italy's east coast, suffered the most devastating air raid of the war since Pearl Harbor. On December 2, 1943, about thirty German JU-88s blasted the harbour to smithereens and in the process sank seventeen ships and damaged six others. About thirty ships were in the harbour waiting to unload war supplies. One American merchant ship, the SS John Harvey, whose cargo included 2,000 M47-A1 mustard gas bombs, (intended for retaliatory use in case the enemy started using it) exploded, killing all 74 persons on board. A total of 628 military personnel were hospitalized in the 98th British General Hospital and the 3rd New Zealand Hospital. Within a month, sixty-nine patients had died from the effects of the gas. In the town of Bari (pop. 200,000) hundreds of civilians became casualties but the number of deaths is not known for certain, although some sources put the death toll at around 1,000. The harbour was closed for a full three weeks after the bombing.

EMERGENCY LANDINGS

In 1943, when an increasing number of British and American planes were returning crippled and low on fuel, Britain built a special Emergency Landing Ground (abbreviated to E.L.G.) in the county of Suffolk. Named RAF Woodbridge E.L.G., it handled a total of 4,115 emergency landings by the end of the war.

1943 BRITISH CASUALTIES

Air raid victims for the first three months of 1943 were 973 killed and 1,191 injured. For April, May, June and July, 1,237 killed and 1,607 injured. The next five months, till the end of December, 1943, casualties were 247 killed and 561 injured. The month of September saw the lowest casualty list since the bombing began, only 5 killed and 11 injured. By the end of the war a total of 60,595 civilians were killed in air raids and rocket attacks. This includes 148 civilians killed by Cross-Channel guns. A complete Roll Of Honour, in four bound volumes, can be seen in Westminster Abbey. Over one volume a light is kept burning and every day a new page is turned.