

1944

MONASTERY BLUNDER

On February 15, 1944, US bombers dropped 427 tons of bombs on the mountain top monastery of Monte Cassino in Italy. The operation was planned by the US General Ira Eaker at the request of the Allied ground forces, believing the monastery to be a German stronghold. Very few enemy troops were there at the time but over 300 women and children from the town of Cassino, who had fled the fighting and taken refuge in the monastery, were killed. By the time that the Polish 12th Podolski Lancers, under General Anders, raised their regimental flag on the ruins of Monte Cassino at 9.30am their casualty rates were 3,779 killed or wounded. The flag was hastily sewn together from pieces of a Red Cross flag and soldiers' handkerchiefs. The Monastery was rebuilt after the war and reconsecrated by Pope Paul VI in 1964. (General Wladyslaw Anders lies buried in the Polish Cemetery at Monte Cassino.)



The ruins of the Saint Benedict Monastery on Monte Cassino.

OPERATION 'JERICHO' (February 18, 1944)

Code name for the bombing of Amiens prison in northern France. Precision-attacked by thirteen Mosquito aircraft, the bombs blasted a hole 3.5 metres wide in the high wall of the prison. Of the 717 inmates a total of 258 escaped. Sadly, 87 prisoners were killed and 182 were recaptured. Many were due to be executed next day, mostly members of the French resistance, which was why the daring attack had to be made exactly when and as it was.



The necessary repairs made to the prison wall can still clearly be seen today.

INCREDIBLE ESCAPES (1944)

On the night of 3/4 May, 1944, RAF Sgt. Jack Worsfold, aged 19, was a tail-gunner on a Lancaster of 101 Squadron. Its mission was the bombing of German tank concentrations in France prior to D-Day. A total of 300 Lancasters took part and Worsfold's plane was hit by flak and set on fire. The plane then blew up killing the rest of the crew. The tail section, with Worsfold inside, was seen by civilians on the ground to fall some 7,500 feet, hit some high-tension wires then bounce on to a fir tree before hitting the ground near the village of Aubeterre. Jack Worsfold crawled out with a broken thigh and rib fractures. Captured by German soldiers he spent the rest of the war in prison camps.

In a bombing raid against Stuttgart a Lancaster was hit by an 88 mm ack-ack shell which tore through the fuel tank engulfing the fuselage in flaming petrol. The tail-gunner, RAF Sergeant N. Alkamade reached for his parachute only to find it a mass of flames. He had no other option but to jump and threw himself into the night at 18,000 feet. The next thing he remembered was opening his eyes to find himself lying in deep snow in a pine forest. Looking up he noticed broken branches on the trees that had reduced his speed, the snow did the rest. Soon he was taken prisoner by the locals who refused to believe his story. An investigation was carried out and he was released. When he eventually arrived home he carried in his pocket a certificate signed by a German colonel attesting to the fact that he had fallen three and a half miles without a parachute.

FIRST GERMAN GENERAL EXECUTED March 22/23, 1944

The first German General executed to be executed after the war was General der Infanterie Anton Dostler. On during a small scale operation behind enemy lines in northern Italy, a group of 15 Italian-Americans of the US 2677th Headquarters Company were on a mission to blow up an important railway tunnel but were captured and taken prisoner before the mission (Operation 'Ginny') was completed. They were summarily shot on the instructions of 55 year old General Dostler who had simply passed on the order from higher authority (Hitler's Führerbefehl of October 18, 1942) which stated that all enemy encountered in Commando actions were to be executed. The plea of "following superior orders" did not save Dostler from the firing squad. After a five day trial he was found guilty of a War Crime and sentenced to death. On November 27, 1944, the Mediterranean Theatre Commander, Lieutenant General Matthew B. Ridgeway, confirmed the sentence. At 8 a.m. on the morning of December 1, 1944, General Dostler was tied to a stake on the firing range of the 803rd Military Police Battalion located near Aversa, Italy. A black hood was placed over his head, a white marker pinned to his chest and the order to fire was given to the 12 enlisted men of the US Army who composed the firing squad. (General Anton Dostler lies buried in the German War Cemetery at Pomezia some miles south of Rome.)



General Dostler receives the Last Sacrament.

HUNGARIAN JEWS

After Hitler's armies occupied Hungary on March 27, 1944, (Operation Margarethe) its government actively supported the Nazis in the deportation of its Jews. Up till 1944, the Hungarian Regent, Admiral Horthy, had steadfastly refused Hitler's offer to resettle the Hungarian Jews. But after the occupation, and after Eichmann and his SS units moved in, the deportations began on May 15, 1944, the first train reaching Auschwitz on the 17th. The pro-German Government co-operated by ordering its policemen to escort their deportees to Auschwitz. When their uniforms were seen by the Hungarian prisoners already in the camp, scenes of "unbelievable jubilation were witnessed as the prisoners ran to the wire cheering and sobbing in the belief that their policemen had come to rescue them." Around 365,000 Hungarian Jews were transported to their deaths after the occupation of their country. The majority of women and children were murdered within hours of their arrival. Fit and healthy men were spared for a while for slave labour. Over 300,000 were still in Hungary awaiting their doom. This included just over 70,000 in the Budapest ghetto (fortunately all these survived the war). French Vichy police also collaborated in the rounding up of Jews. Starting on August 27, 1942, they arrested 9,872 Jews in Vichy-controlled Lyon and transported them to Drancy, near Paris, prior to deportation to Auschwitz.

In an effort to negotiate with the Allies the SS offered to exchange Jews for 1,000 trucks. This offer was rejected and as a gesture of good faith the SS allowed a train, containing 1,684 Hungarian Jews to leave Budapest for the safety of Switzerland. The train eventually ended up at the Belsen Concentration Camp near Hanover. There, the Jews were kept for about six months before being allowed to proceed to Switzerland. This must be the only recorded case where the SS actually saved Jews.

(Between 1933 and 1938 a total of 453,721 Jewish refugees from Europe were settled in 27 different countries. The Jewish population of Europe in 1939 was 7,870,700.)

LITTLE BROTHER

Although not generally known, Albert Göring, the younger brother of Reich Marshal Hermann Göring, was an outspoken anti-Nazi. Arrested several times by the Gestapo, each time being released by the intervention of the Reich Marshal. Albert was born near Mauterndorf in 1900 and became a successful businessman and in later life the Export Director at the Skoda Armament Works in Czechoslovakia. During his work there he helped many Jews escape the horrors of the Holocaust by forging his brother's signature on their travel documents. The Jewish wife of composer Franz Lehár was one of those helped by Albert. Returning to Germany after the war he was everywhere shunned just because of his name. Living on a government pension he married his housekeeper as a sign of gratitude so she could receive his pension after he died. One week later, in 1966, he died,

SWISS NEUTRALITY

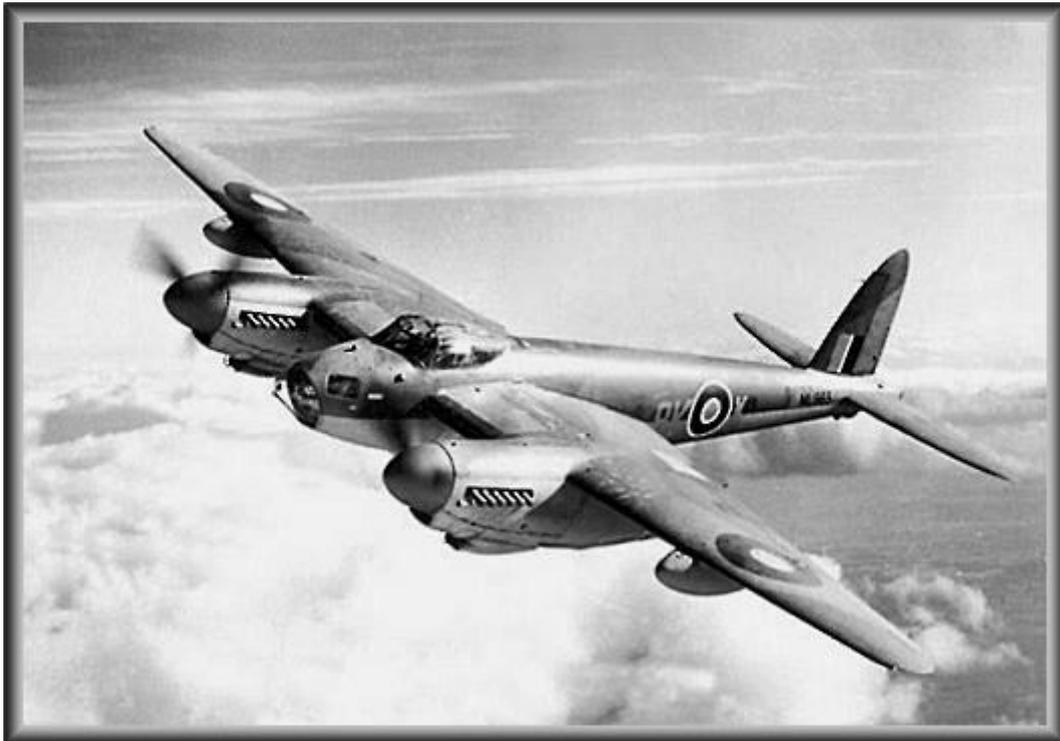
On a bombing raid on German military installations near the German/Swiss border on April 1, 1944, a force of 23 B-24 bombers from the USAF 392nd Bombardment Group, on its 59th mission, inadvertently entered Swiss airspace and owing to a navigational error mistakenly bombed the Swiss town of Schaffhausen. Fifty Swiss civilians were killed. The real target was to have been the chemical works at Ludwigshafen, 120 miles away. In 1949, the US agreed to pay \$64 million in compensation. This was an attempt to secure Switzerland as an ally in the 'Cold War'. The greedy Swiss demanded that interest be paid on the \$64 million, claiming that the damaged property had not been able to earn any money since the bombing. This demand was rejected.

The British Royal Air Force also flouted Swiss neutrality a couple of times and attempted to bomb a ball-bearing factory in Basel suspected of producing ball bearings for the German Army but both times the bombs missed the target. During the war a total of 167 American bombers and 12 British bombers made emergency landings in Switzerland. Severely damaged in combat over Germany and unable to return to their bases in England their only alternative was to head for neutral Switzerland. In one day, on March 18, 1944, no less than eleven American bombers made emergency landings at the Dubendorf airfield. The crews were interned by the Swiss authorities in camps at Adelboden, Grippen, Les Diablerets and in the notorious punishment camp at Wauwilermoos (for escapees). They were supposed to be treated like P.O.W.s under the rules of war but in many cases living conditions were little better than German concentration camps.

In all, around 1,500 American servicemen were interned in neutral Switzerland.

HIGHEST NIGHT PHOTO

The highest night photograph of the war was taken on April 18, 1944, over Osnabruck. The RAF Mosquito crew used a target indicator flash and took the picture from 36,000 feet.



An RAF Mosquito, the most versatile plane of WWII, flying at great altitude.

AIR TRAGEDY

An old B24 Liberator bomber, stripped of all equipment and fitted with a radio control system to be operated from a 'mother' plane after the B24 crew had baled out, blew up in mid-air during a trial flight in preparation for 'Operation Aphrodite' the code name for the bombing of the flying bomb sites on the Continent. An electrical

malfunction triggered the explosion killing the pilot and co-pilot. The pilot was Lieutenant Joseph Kennedy, the older brother of John F Kennedy the future President of the USA.

INACCURATE BOMBING

December 6, 1942. Operation 'Oyster' The RAF daylight bombing raid on the Philips Radio Works at Eindhoven, Holland, now under Nazi control. Fourteen planes were lost but sadly 148 Dutch civilians lost their lives.

March 13, 1944. In a raid on Le Mans, France, by RAF Bomber Command, some of the bombs were dropped short of the mark, killing some 100 civilians. Fifteen locomotives and around 800 railway freight cars were destroyed. The killing of innocent civilians during raids on specific targets became an increasingly severe problem for bomber crews.

April 9/10, 1944. The attack by 186 RAF bombers on the rail yards at Lille-Deliverance, France, killed 456 civilians and destroyed over a thousand homes. At the rail yards around 2,000 freight cars were destroyed.

April 10/11, 1944. One hundred and twenty-two Royal Canadian Air force Halifax's dropped 600 tons of bombs on the Merelbeke-Melle rail yards at Ghent, Belgium. Unfortunately, the rail yards being located in a built-up area, 438 Belgian civilians were killed.

April 19/20, 1944. Around 200 bombers, mostly Canadian Halifaxes from 46 Group, attacked the rail yards at Noisy-le-sec near Paris. Many bombs fell on a built-up area of the town destroying over 700 houses and killing 464 civilians. Some 370 were injured.

March 3, 1945. Over 500 inhabitants of the suburb of Bezuidenhout, a suburb of The Hague, Holland, were killed when Allied bombers missed their intended target, the V-2 launching sites in the Hague Forest, and dropped their bombs on Bezuidenhout.

vital officers: BIGOTS

As D-day approached a special security procedure was put in place to protect all documents concerning the time and place of the invasion (D-Day). It was the highest security classification of all. General Eisenhower had ordered that no one with any knowledge of D-Day be sent on operations where there was the slightest danger of being captured. Those with such information were called 'Bigots'. The word is derived from the two words 'To Gib' which was stamped on papers and baggage of all officers being sent to Gibraltar prior the invasion of North Africa in November, 1942. The letters were reversed to form the code-word 'Bigot' and used to list all persons with the secret information about D-Day. During 'Operation Tiger' ten officers were known to be Bigots. Top priority was given to find and identify the bodies. Fortunately all bodies were recovered and the secrets of D-Day were safe.

JEDBURGHS

The code name given to the teams of specially trained men who were parachuted into France before and after D-Day. Their mission was to link up and co-ordinate the resistance groups in sabotage and guerrilla warfare against the German occupying forces prior to and during the Normandy invasion. Men were selected from the British SOE, the American OSS and the Free French, Belgian and Dutch armies. The name Jedburgh comes from the southern Scottish town of Jedburgh where most members did their initial training before moving on to Milton Hall in Cambridgeshire, England. In all, around 280 'Jeds' were formed into teams of three men, one British, one American and one French. After a punishing period of physical training they were dropped behind enemy lines from planes of 38 Group squadrons to begin work with the Maquis. (The story of the Jedburghs only became public after records became de-classified in 1985.)

DISASTER DURING 'OPERATION TIGER' (April 23-30, 1944)

In preparation for the D-Day landings on Utah beach, the US Forces were conducting a series of exercises on a stretch of beach called Slapton Sands, near Plymouth. In an area comprising around 30,000 acres a total of 3,000 people (750 families) 180 farms with livestock were evacuated. This enormous task had to be completed in six weeks.

During the actual exercise, while manoeuvring for position in Lyme Bay on the night of April 27 the landing ships were attacked by nine German motor torpedo boats, E-boats, from Cherbourg in France. Two of the landing craft, LST 507 and LST 531 were sunk and others damaged. On board the two landing ships the casualties were severe, 638 men killed (197 sailors and 441 soldiers) and hundreds injured. This was more than ten times greater than the casualties sustained in the real assault on Utah Beach on June 6 (43 Americans killed, 63 wounded). Altogether, including casualties from other ships and those killed by friendly fire on shore, a total of 946 Americans gave their lives during Operation Tiger.

CARELESS TALK

In spite of all precautions taken to protect the secrets of D-day, some officers still engaged in 'Careless Talk'. One such case was that of US Major General Henry Miller, chief supply officer of the US 9th Air Force, who, during a cocktail party at London's elegant Coleridge's Hotel, talked freely about the difficulties he was having in obtaining supplies. He added that things would ease after D-day declaring that would be before June 15. (When Eisenhower learned of this indiscretion he ordered that Miller be reduced to the rank of colonel and sent back to the US where shortly after, he retired from the service.)

MILLION-TO-ONE

Around midnight on June 5, 1944, Private C. Hillman, of Manchester, Connecticut, serving with the US 101st Airborne Division, was winging his way to Normandy in a C-47 transport plane. Just before the jump, Private Hillman carried out a final inspection of his parachute. He was surprised to see that the chute had been packed by the Pioneer Parachute Company of Connecticut where his mother worked part time as an inspector. He was further surprised when he saw on the inspection tag, the initials of his own mother!

D-DAY

D-Day stands for Designated Day, the actual day on which an operation would begin. H-Hour, the starting time for the attack to begin. This expression was first used on September 20, 1918, during World War I. The US First Army issued Field Order No 8 which read, "The First Army will attack at H-Hour on D-Day with the object of forcing the evacuation of the St. Michael Salient." After the landings on June 6, 1944, many believed that the D stood for 'Deliverance.'

On June 28, 1943, a conference code named 'Rattle' was held in a hotel in Largs, Scotland. It was attended by around 20 Generals, 11 Air Marshals, 8 Admirals, 15 high ranking Americans and 5 equally high ranking Canadians. Presided over by Admiral Lord Louis Mountbatten. It was at this conference that the uppermost question of where the Allied armies would land in Europe, was settled.

D-DAY LANDINGS (June 6, 1944)

- Utah Beach - 23,250 American troops were landed. US 1st Army and 5th and 7th US Corps.
- Omaha Beach - 34,250 American troops were landed. 29th and 1st US Div.
- Gold Beach - 24,970 British troops were landed. 50th Division, British 2nd Army.
- Juno Beach - 21,400 Canadian troops were landed. 3rd Canadian Div.
- Sword Beach - 28,845 British troops were landed. 3rd British Div.

By June 12, 326,000 troops were on the beaches, plus 54,000 vehicles. By July 2, another 929,000 men and 177,000 vehicles were put ashore. The ship armada at Normandy totalled 6,939 vessels of all kinds. In the 10 days after D-day (June 6 to June 16) a total of 5,287 Allied soldiers were killed. The number of French civilians killed during the landings has never been established but must number in the hundreds. From D-Day till the end of the war, British casualties were 30,280 dead and 96,670 wounded.

The only American General to land with the initial seaborne assault at Utah Beach was Brigadier General Theodore Roosevelt, Jr, assistant commander of the US 4th Division. At age 57 he was also the oldest soldier to come ashore. Sadly he died in France a month later of a heart attack.

The German surrender was signed 337 days after the D-Day landings.

PIGEONS AT WAR

Thousands of carrier pigeons accompanied the troops to Normandy on D-day and brought back essential details to Allied Headquarters in a capsule tied to their legs. A special loft was erected at the secret code deciphering centre at Bletchley Park. Considered vermin by many, these pigeons, were first used as early as the year 1150 AD and played an important part in both world wars. News of Wellington's victory at Waterloo first came by pigeon post. Many of these birds were specially bred in Belgium prior to 1939. Often used as a distress signal from downed aircraft, a pigeon named 'Winkie' escaped from a bomber after coming down in the English Channel in 1943. It flew back 120 miles to its base at RAF Leuchers in Scotland in time for rescue boats to reach and save the crew of the stricken bomber. Winkie was awarded the Dickin Medal (the animal version of the Victoria Cross) the first pigeon to be awarded with the medallion. Many of these pigeons were dropped by specially designed parachutes to be picked up by members of the French resistance. They were soon on their way back to Britain with important information. At this time the Germans were training Falcons to intercept the pigeons while in flight and many were killed this way. In all, thirty-two animal VCs were awarded to pigeons during WWII. Founded by Maria Dickin in 1943, the Dickin Medal was awarded to any animal, bird or dog, displaying conspicuous gallantry during war. Other Pigeons so awarded were, to use their code names, William of Orange, the hero of Arnhem, Mary of Exeter, Duke of Normandy and Paddy, to name but a few. Managed by the elite division MI-14, the office in charge of Pigeon operations, these pigeons were responsible for the saving of thousands of military lives.

The city of Colvi in Italy was occupied by British troops on October 18, 1943, at 10am, well ahead of schedule. The US Air Force was to bomb the city an hour later to help the British entry. Attempts by radio to cancel the raid failed. A pigeon, GI Joe, borrowed from the Americans at the nearby airfield to accompany the troops, was released with the important message to cancel the raid, tied to its leg. It arrived just as the bombers were about to take off. It is estimated that around a thousand British soldiers could have died if the raid had proceeded. GI Joe was the only bird or animal in America to receive the Dickin Medal. It died on June 3, 1961, aged 18, and can be seen today, mounted, in the Historical Centre at Fort Monmouth, New Jersey.

WRONG AIRFIELD CHOICE

On June 21, 1944, a large force of Allied bombers attacked the German capital, Berlin. Included in the force were 184 American planes which, after they had dropped their bombs, decided to continue on to Poltava, the US shuttle base in the Soviet Union. Later that night the airfield was attacked by German fighters inflicting heavy damage. A total of 47 B-17s were destroyed and 19 severely damaged. On September 13, these shuttle bases were closed as the advances of the Red Army placed them too far from the front.

FIRST USE OF NAPALM

First used on July 17, 1944, when US P-38s attacked a fuel depot at Coutances, near St Lo. The next use of napalm was on April 15, 1945, when American bombers attacked the Atlantic coast town of Royan at the mouth of the Gironde. In the Pacific, napalm was used when US forces invaded the island of Tinian in the Marianas. It was also used in the bombing of Tokyo. This jellied fuel became the standard fuel explosive, later used widely - and notoriously - during the Vietnam War.

GÖRING'S VERMEER

In 1944, Hermann Göring paid £165,000 for the painting 'Woman Taken in Adultery' by the rarest of all Dutch painters, Vermeer. The painting was found in Emma Göring's home in Austria. It was later proved to be a forgery by Hans Van Meegeren. In 1945, Van Meegeren was arrested by Dutch authorities and sentenced to one year in jail. He died just nineteen days after his jail sentence began. Today, Göring's fake Vermeer is hidden away in the strong room of the Dutch State Collection in the Hague, never to be shown to the public or sold.

FIRST D-DAY CASUALTIES

It has been generally accepted that Lieutenant Den Brotheridge of the Oxfordshire and Buckinghamshire Light Infantry Regiment, British 6th Airborne Division, became the first British soldier to be killed in the invasion of Europe (D-Day, June 6, 1944) while he led his platoon of twenty-one men on the attack on the Orne Canal bridge at Benouville, he was hit in the neck by a bullet fired from the guns of the German sentries defending the Pegasus Bridge. Seconds before, a burst of fire from Brotheridge's Sten-gun killed one of the sentries, seventeen year old Private Helmut Romer, who became the first German to die in the defence of Hitler's 'Fortress Europe'.

It has since been discovered that when Lieutenant Brotheridge's glider landed near the bridge, 29 year old Lance Corporal Fred Greehalgh of the Oxfordshire and Buckinghamshire Light Infantry, drowned when exiting

the glider. This would make him the first D-Day casualty. Just months before the 50th anniversary of the landings, the Pegasus Bridge was demolished and part of it was rebuilt and placed in the nearby Pegasus Bridge Museum where visitors can now walk walk over it.

Meanwhile, over the town of Sainte-Mare-Eglise, the first town liberated on D-Day, twenty eight year old Lt. Robert Mason Mathias of the 508th Parachute Regiment, US 82nd Airborne Division, was preparing to jump from his C-47 Dakota, when he was wounded by a shell burst. In spite of the wounds in his chest he commanded his men to 'Follow me' and hurled himself from the aircraft. Some time later, his men found his dead body, still strapped in his chute. Lt. Mathias was the first American soldier killed on D-day. Also at Sainte Mare-Eglise, Private John Steele found himself hanging from his parachute from the Church of the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary. After some hours he was rescued by one of the German defenders, a Rudolf May.

US CHUTE'S DEADLY DELAY

The 957 men of the US 82nd Airborne Division suffered a 16% casualty rate on landing among the Normandy hedgerows. Twenty five men were killed, fourteen missing and 118 wounded. Everything depended on a quick dispersal after landing and to get to the nearest cover. The delay caused by the difficulty of getting out of their chute harness proved fatal to many. In later drops, the buckles were dispensed with and the British quick-release mechanism was adopted.

AIR-POWER JOKE

The failure of the German Luftwaffe to appear over the D-day beaches caused the Wehrmacht soldiers to quip "if a plane in the sky is silver, it's American, if it's blue, it's British, if it's invisible, it's ours!"

THE TRAGEDY OF VERCORS

The Vercors Massif is a limestone plateau surrounded by many cliffs, ridges and valleys, its highest point being the 2,346 metre high Grand Veymont. Situated not far from Grenoble in central France it became the scene of the greatest and most tragic battles involving thousands of men of the French resistance. Just after D-day these men had rallied to Vercors to assist the Allies by slowing down the German forces on their way to Normandy. Completely surrounded by the enemy (estimated at 10,000 under the command of General Karl Pflaum) these brave resistance fighters hoisted high the French Tricolour, to be clearly seen from the German headquarters at Grenoble, and proclaimed the plateau the Free Republic of Vercors - the first democratic area of France since the start of the German occupation in 1940. On July 22/23, 1944, about twenty enemy gliders landed and out poured some 500 SS soldiers who began shooting everyone in sight and raping all females regardless of age. Houses were set on fire with whole families inside. Ground troops then attacked the town of St Nizer and by nightfall some ninety-three houses were smouldering ruins. The air support promised from Algiers never arrived. In the town about forty wounded maquisards were captured, all proudly wearing an armband with the letters FFI (Forces Francaises de Interieur) then tortured and shot. The men of Vercors fought heroically to the bitter end when on August 18 the last of the German troops pulled out of Vercors when the Allied landings began in the south of France. Some 840 people had been killed on Vercors (639 FFI and 201 civilians) since the first day of the German assault. On August 13, the first American tanks rumbled through the crowded streets of Grenoble. (The whole sad epic of Vercors is detailed in the book 'Tears of Glory' by Michael Pearson.)

G.I. RAPIST HANGED

The first Allied soldier to be hanged after D-Day was Private Clarence Whitfield, a black US soldier of the 494th Port Battalion. He was convicted of the brutal rape of Aniela Skrzyzniarz, a Polish farm girl working on a farm at Vierville Sur Mer, just behind Omaha Beach, on June 14, 1944. On August 14, Private Whitfield was hanged on a gallows that was erected in the garden of the Chateau at Canisy, five kilometres south of Saint Lo.

GRIM REPLY

General Fritz Bayerlein, commander of the Panzer Lehr Division, when ordered by Field Marshal Von Kluge to hold the line at all costs, replied angrily "out in front every one is holding out. Every one. My grenadiers and my engineers and my tank crews, they are all holding their ground. Not a single man is leaving his post. They are lying silent in their foxholes, for they are all DEAD."

SURRENDER OF US TROOPS

During the Ardennes Offensive (aka The Battle of the Bulge) troops of the US 106th Infantry Regiment suffered 564 killed and 1,246 wounded before being taken prisoner. Around 7,000 men fighting on the pine covered hills of the Schnee Eifel were forced to surrender. This was the biggest surrender of American troops since the American civil war. The Battle of the Bulge delayed the Allied offensive by six weeks.

JAPANESE MASS SUICIDE

On July 8, 1944, American troops were stunned by the discovery of some 8,000 Japanese troops and civilians who had committed mass suicide in the final battle during the invasion of the island of Saipan in the Pacific. Pushed back into Marpi Point at the northern tip of the island, they were told by the Japanese commander, Lt. General Saito, that they would be "tortured and killed by the Americans." Hundreds of women then threw their children over the cliffs before jumping themselves. Thousands of bodies were found floating in the pounding surf, and thousands more piled up on the jagged rocks. Lt. General Saito committed ritual suicide (hara-kiri) his body was then burned by his aides. His ashes, when found by the Americans, were given a military funeral.

CASUALTIES IN ITALY

Allied losses in Italy amounted to 31,886 killed, 19,471 of them were Americans. US losses for Italy and Sicily (1,233) combined were 36,169 dead. British and Commonwealth casualties in the 39 day Sicilian campaign were 2,721 men killed.

FREE FROM COMMUNISM

As Hitler's armies advanced on Stalingrad they overran the Cossack regions of the Don, Terek and Kuban. Hundreds of thousands of Russians willingly enrolled in the German army to form a Cossack Army under the Russian General Krasnoff. Hitler promised that they would be settled in "lands and everything necessary for their livelihood in Western Europe". Their new homeland was to be in north-east Italy in the valley of Carnia on the plain of Udine where they would live their national life free from the confines of Bolshevism.

Italian families in the area were ejected from their homes which were then used to house the Cossack soldiers and their families who had arrived in fifty trains during July and August 1944. To the Cossacks this was paradise far removed from their dreary life in the Ukraine. Hitler had named this new independent state 'Kosakenland'. Many atrocities were committed by these Russians against the Italian civilians, particularly the women, causing one Archbishop to write to Mussolini "It is terrible to think that Friuli will be governed by these illiterate savages". Discipline was soon restored when General Krasnoff himself arrived. Cossack officers were under no delusions, they knew they were there to shed blood for the Nazi cause. With the Allied armies approaching from the south and Tito's IX Yugoslav Corps approaching from the east, the 'Free Republic of Carnia' soon disintegrated and the Cossacks and their followers forced to trundle north towards Austria and internment by the British.

USAF ACCIDENTAL DEATHS DISCLOSURE

On October 4, 1944, the US War Department discloses that a total of 11,000 men of the US Air Force have been killed in 5,600 fatal air accidents since the attack on Pearl Harbor.

V WEAPONS HIT LONDON

The V1 weapons were Argus As 014 pulse-jet powered, not rocket. The first attack on Britain started on the night of 13 / 14 June, 1944, and ended on March 29, 1945. A total of 10,500 missiles were launched and 3,957 were destroyed by defences, 3,531 reached England and 2,353 fell on London. The death toll from these missiles was 6,184 killed and 17,981 persons were seriously injured. The last of the V1s (Doodlebug) was destroyed over Sittingbourne in Kent on March 27, 1945.

The V2 rocket attack saw a total of 1,115 rockets arrive over England of which 517 fell on London, killing 2,754 people, 6,523 were injured. The V2 rocket attack lasted seven months starting on September 8, 1944, the first destroyed the home of Mr and Mrs Clarke at No 1, Staveley Road, London. On November 25th, 164 people were killed when another V2 rocket hit the Woolworth's store in South London. The last V2 rocket to fall on England fell at 4.45pm on March 29, 1945, on the town of Orpington in Kent. Hitler had planned to destroy the whole of Britain with V-weapons. In charge of the entire missile project was Dr Hans Kammler, later promoted to SS Major General. On September 8, 1944, at 6.48 pm, the first of Kammler's V2s exploded on London. In the closing days

of the war, a search for Dr Kammler was launched but he was never found. To this day, he remains perhaps, the only German general to have disappeared without trace.

LONDON AUXILIARY AMBULANCE SERVICE.

During the bombing of London in 1940-41 and the later attacks by V1s and V2s in 1944-45, the men and women of the LAAS, another neglected branch of war-time services, worked 12 hour shifts for a wage of around £2 per week. Driving an ambulance through London's blacked-out streets with bombs falling all around called for courage of the highest order. To recover the dead and dying, some with appalling injuries, and transporting them to hospitals or First-Aid Stations was no mean feat. Dismembered bodies, bundled into body bags, were taken to the largest refrigeration system in London, the Billingsgate Fish Market, there to await some form of identification. Land mines, dropped by parachutes, were another hazard. One ambulance unit, when entering the Thermionic Club, a gentleman's club in Portland Place, just after a mine exploded, found several headless gentlemen still sitting in their armchairs, their heads having been blown off by the blast. There were 139 Auxiliary Stations in and around London employing some 1,200 full-time and 883 part-time personnel, the majority being female. Others were men too old or sick for military service and also quite a few conscientious objectors. For their courage and devotion to duty, three members of the LAAS were awarded the George Cross and nine were awarded the British Empire Medal.

V WEAPONS HIT ANTWERP

The city to suffer most from Hitler's vengeance weapons (the V1s and V2s) was the Belgian port of Antwerp. After four years of German occupation the city was now to suffer the agonies that London had endured, only this time much worse. The first V2 rocket struck the city at 9.45am on Friday, October 13, 1944, killing 32 people. On October 28, a V1 killed 71 persons and destroyed forty homes. On November 27, a V2 impacted on Teniers Square as an Allied military convoy was passing through. The explosion killed 157 persons including 29 Allied soldiers.

The worst disaster of all was on December 12, 1944, when a V2 rocket hit the REX CINEMA in Antwerp killing 492 people, mostly British troops. Another 500 were injured. Over a period of 175 days and nights a total of 106 V1s and 107 V2s hit the city killing 3,752 civilians and 731 Allied soldiers. Some 3,613 properties were destroyed.

COINCIDENCE

On July 20, 1944, a flight of Heinkel 177s, commanded by Obstlt. Horst von Riesen, was circling the Masury Lakes near Hitler's HQ in East Prussia, when the engine of one plane caught fire. An order to jettison the bomb load was given. By pure coincidence the bombs exploded at exactly the same time as Stauffenberg's bomb went off in the Führer's conference room. On landing, Von Riesen was arrested and faced a court martial but was released some hours later when the bomb plot was confirmed.

GAY GORDON'S BATTALION LOSSES

During the eleven month campaign, from Normandy to the Baltic, Scotland's 51st Highland Division's battalion the Gay Gordon's had suffered 986 casualties among its ranks. On top of this, seventy five officers had been killed or wounded. This amounts to almost a complete turn round of the famous battalion.

UPRISING IN WARSAW

A rebellion against the Nazi occupiers of Poland's capital city started on August 1, 1944. The Polish underground army (AK, Home Army) started the operation to liberate the city from the invaders and enable them to act as hosts to the approaching Red Army. The operation which was to last an incredible 63 days and cost the AK around 6,000 lives with some 50,000 wounded. The Red Army stopped its offensive just miles outside the city just to let the Poles and Germans fight it out amongst themselves hoping no doubt that the Germans would annihilate the anti-communist Polish Home Army, thus saving the lives of many Russian soldiers. The AK, under the direction of Polish General 'Bor', Komorowski was forced to capitulate on October 2. He was interred in Colditz Castle as a POW .

COWRA BREAKOUT (August 5, 1944)

The greatest prison break in history took place from the Prisoner of War camp No. 12 at Cowra situated in the Lachlan Valley in New South Wales, Australia. The compound contained Japanese and Italian P.O.W.s. On the night of 4/5th August, 1,104 Japanese prisoners broke out of Compound B believing that dying while attempting to escape would wipe out the shame of capture. In the wholesale indiscriminate shooting that took place during the breakout, 231 Japanese prisoners were killed and 107 wounded. Only four Australian camp guards were killed and four wounded. Eighteen of the twenty-odd huts were set on fire in which 20 prisoners had already committed suicide. In all, 334 Japanese escaped from the camp and in the hunt that followed, 25 died by shooting and suicide. All those recaptured were punished with up to twenty-eight days solitary in the Old Melbourne Gaol.

Fearing reprisals against Australian P.O.W.s in Japanese prison camps, the whole incident was kept top secret for over six years. The Japanese Cemetery at Cowra contains the graves of 522 Japanese nationals who died in Australia during World War II. A similar incident happened at the Japanese P.O.W. camp at Featherstone, New Zealand, when during a stand off between prisoners and guards, the prisoners rushed the guards, who opened fire with machine guns killing 48 Japanese and wounding 74 more.



The Cowra Breakout was alarming news to wartime Australians.

DUKLA PASS BATTLE (September 8/October 25, 1944)

The Dukla Pass cuts through the Carpathian Mountains on the border of Slovakia and Poland. Five days after the Slovak National Uprising began (a rebellion against the German occupation of their country) Soviet troops attacked the area around the Polish town of Dukla in an effort to break through and link up with the 5,000 members of the Slovak insurgents and together overthrow the pro-German government and expel the Nazi troops from the territory. The 50 day battle, in terms of casualties, became the bloodiest ever fought on Slovakian soil. It is also perhaps the least known of all battles fought in Europe during World War II. The Soviet 38th Army had 10,491 men killed and 64,743 wounded. In the 1st Guards Army another 10,500 men were killed and 24,200 wounded. Casualties among Slovak soldiers were 1,100 killed and 4,330 wounded. On the German side an estimated 52,000 men were killed, wounded or missing. Clearing the area of mines continued up 1960 during which 78 Army engineers and 289 civilians lost their lives. Soviet troops took a total of 31,360 prisoners. Today the battle area, covering 20 square kilometres, is an open-air battlefield museum in which dozens of T-34 tanks and various artillery pieces are strewn all over the area. A look-out tower has been built giving visitors a panoramic view of the whole battlefield.

OPERATION 'ASTONIA' (September 10-12, 1944)

Code name for the attack and capture of the French port of Le Havre. The ports of Dieppe and Ostend had been captured by the Canadian First Army but Le Havre was assigned to the British 1 Corps under Canadian command. Prior to the actual attack the town was subjected to a massive co-ordinated bombardment by British naval guns and RAF bombers leaving 80 per cent of the town in ruins. The attack on Le Havre took the lives of 5,126 civilians including 2,053 civilians killed during the bombardment. This in spite of a request by the German commander, Oberst Eberhard Wildermuth, to be given a two-day armistice to evacuate the residents from the besieged city. He had earlier rejected the British demand of unconditional surrender. The attack on Le Havre lasted 48 hours in which 11,302 German soldiers were captured and around 600 killed. British losses were less than 500. After VE-Day an estimated 3,675,000 American troops had passed through the port on their way home.

TUNNEL TRAGEDY

A freight train carrying hundreds of civilians, who had jumped on board because no other transport was available, stalled in a tunnel near Salerno, Italy, on December 18, 1944. Toxic fumes from the engine filled the tunnel and within a short time a total of 426 people died from carbon monoxide poisoning.

AIR CRASH

A US 8th Army Air Force B-24 Liberator bomber crashes into the Holy Trinity School in Lytham Road in Freckleton, Lancashire, on August 23, 1944, killing 38 children. Twenty-three others, including teachers, civilians and the three man bomber crew, also died. This was the worst aircraft crash in Britain during the war. The bomber, from the American Base Air Depot No. 2 at nearby Warton, was on a test flight when the pilot received a radio signal to land immediately as an electrical storm was heading their way. The B-24 never made it back to base but at 10.30 am crashed in heavy rain into the village school. The village centre was turned into a sea of flames as nearly 3,000 gallons of aviation fuel ignited.

COPY CAT

In 1944, three of the most advanced strategic bombers to date, the B29 Superfortress, made a forced landing on Soviet territory after a raid on Japan. Stalin ordered that they be impounded. Two were dismantled completely and rebuilt in every last detail. The Soviet version made its first appearance after the war as the Tupolev TU-4.

HORSES

Horses have played a significant role in warfare since the 19th century BC when they were used in Chariot warfare. The last major use of these animals was in Poland when the Polish cavalry used them in a last-ditch attempt to defend their country against enemy tanks. The total number of horses captured by the Allies in France, Belgium and Holland amounted to 10,794. These animals were all disposed of to farmers, except those used for work at the Antwerp docks. In the German army a key element in the field of transport was horses. Non-motorized infantry divisions were allotted 4,800 horses. When the war began the German ground forces had well over half a million of these animals and at war's end a total of 2,700,000 horses had served in the war. This was twice the number used by Germany in the Great War of 1914-1918.

JEEP

Nearly 649,000 of these vehicles were produced during WWII, 631,873 were delivered to the US Army and Air Force. Mostly used to support the Allied armed forces in war. In 1939 the US Military asked 135 companies to submit designs for an all-purpose vehicle. Only three companies responded to the request, Willys, Ford and Bantam. Willys-Overland was granted the manufacturing contract. The word 'Jeep' comes from the code letters GP the G meaning Government and the P a code letter meaning '80 inch wheelbase reconnaissance car' the name given to the Ford prototype and adopted by Willys as their trade mark. When slurred together the letters GP sounds like 'Jeep'. Peak production at the Willys-Overland plant in Toledo, Ohio, was one Jeep every 80 seconds.

VOLKSWAGEN

The 'Peoples Car' designed by Dr. Ferdinand Porsche in 1934 and promised to German workers through the 'Strength Through Joy' (Kdf) scheme. Known originally as the Kdf Wagen, subscriptions amounted to around 280 million German Reichmarks from 336,668 subscribers who were encouraged to save five marks weekly. Not one subscriber received the car. In 1944, 650 Jewish women were transferred from Auschwitz to work at the Volkswagen plant to manufacture bazookas and mines. To house these workers a satellite camp was established at Neuengamme. In 1945, the factory was captured by the US 102nd Infantry Division and as the site lay within the British zone of occupation, the British took over the badly bombed factory, fifty-eight percent of which lay in ruins. A Military Government team, led by Major Ivan Hirst of the Royal Electrical and Mechanical Engineers, got production going and produced the first post-war Beetle Volkswagen car in early 1946. In March of that year the 1,000th Volkswagen rolled off the production line and by the end of the year a total of 9,871 were built. It soon became one of the world's most popular cars. In the museum at the Volkswagen Works at Wolfsburg, near Hannover, you can see the original Prototype No 3 Kdf Wagen with a astonishing 400,000 kilometres on the clock. In 1970, the 14 millionth 'Beetle' was presented to the United Kingdom.

SHELL SHOCK

The US Army suffered a total of 929,307 cases of 'Battle Fatigue' during the war. In June alone, in Normandy, an alarming 10,000 men were treated for some form of battle fatigue. Between June and November, 1944, this amounted to a staggering 26% of all US casualties.

COURT MARTIAL

During the battle for Normandy, four British officers and 7,018 other ranks were court martialled for desertion. Fifty-nine officers and 3,628 other ranks were court martialled for other offences.

THE LOST DIVISION

This was the name given to the American soldiers who had deserted in France and in Germany at the end of 1945. They numbered around 19,000, many living on farms and working as labourers, as black market racketeers, or in safe hiding places in their new found girl friends' houses. By 1948, about 9,000 had been found. In 1947, the British Government announced an offer of leniency for British deserters and 837 gave themselves up.

NITRO BLAST

During the Allied assault on the Scheldt Estuary on (October 20, 1944) (Operation Switchback), the British 248 Armoured Assault Squadron of the Royal Engineers took up position in a field near the village of Ijzendijke. No. 3 troop was assigned the task of operating a mine-clearing device known as a Condor, a 300 foot length of canvas hose launched empty across a minefield and then pumped full of liquid nitro-glycerine which was then detonated, clearing a wide path through the minefield. While unloading the nitro-glycerine from three Canadian lorries, a tremendous explosion rocked the area sending shock waves that flattened everything in its path. Trees, farm buildings and military vehicles were set on fire or completely wrecked by the blast. The three lorries carrying the glycerine simply disappeared leaving three large craters on the site. This accidental explosion, the largest in North-west Europe during WWII, took the lives of 26 British and 15 Canadian soldiers and wounding 43 others. Fifty-three years later, in 1997, a memorial was unveiled on the site commemorating the victims. The ceremony was attended by over a hundred British and Canadian veterans.

JAPAN'S NEW IMPERIAL HEADQUARTERS.

In the mountainous region of Nagano on the island of HONSHU, construction began on 11th November, 1944, to build Japan's new Imperial Headquarters and accommodation for Japan's 124th ruler, Emperor Hirohito and his wife. From here, Japan's last stand in WW11 would be directed. About 120 families were evacuated from the area before work began. To build this vast complex of underground bunkers and tunnels some 7,000 to 10,000 Korean workers were forcibly brought to Honshu as slave labourers. These workers toiled under gruesome conditions. Tunnels were bored that stretched for kilometres under the mountain peaks of Mount Maizuru, Mount Zozan and Mount Minakami at 95 metres below ground. At Maizuru there were 20 main tunnels parallel to each other and measured 4 metres wide and 2.7 metres high with a total length of 6 kilometres. It is estimated that around 1,500 of these slave workers perished during construction. At the end of hostilities on August 11, 1945, all work ceased leaving the complex 75% completed. After the war, what was meant to be Hirohito's palace was converted to an orphanage. Today some of these tunnels are now open to visitors. It was through General McArthur's benevolence that Hirohito was never brought to trial for war crimes. Instead he was

asked to acknowledge in public that he was indeed a mortal being and not divine being. This he did on August 15, 1945, when the Japanese people heard his voice for the very first time. He then proceeded on a tour of Japan's devastated cities. He died on January 7, 1989, after a 62 year reign. He was 88 years old.

In 1990, Japan published a list of 90,804 Korean slave workers who were forcibly brought to Japan during WW11.

EXPLOSION (November 27, 1944)

The large underground gypsum mines at RAF Station, Fauld in Staffordshire, was being used as storage for three and a half thousand tons of high explosive bombs. Within were 22 miles of railway track. At 11.10am on the morning of November 27, the bombs exploded en masse claiming 70 lives, including 7 Italian P.O.W.s who were brought in to help, and injuring another 22. It left a crater 80 feet deep and covered an area of twelve acres on which lay 200 dead cattle. An official explanation has never been issued as to the cause of this, the greatest explosion ever in the United Kingdom. A memorial, erected in 1990 lists the names of all seventy dead, and states that eighteen of the bodies were never recovered.

GLEN MILLER DISAPPEARS WITHOUT A TRACE

On December 15, 1944, an American Dodge staff car, driven by Staff Sergeant Edward McCulloch of Oceanside, California, entered the small grass airfield at RAF Twinwood Farm near London and deposited his two passengers near a waiting plane piloted by a 25-mission pilot, Flight Officer Johnny Morgan. His passengers were a Lieutenant Colonel Norman Baessell (General Goodrich's Executive Officer) 2nd Lieutenant Don Haynes, the band's executive officer (there only to see the plane off) and the American band leader, Glenn Miller. At 13.55 PM, the small UC-64A single engined Norseman plane with its three occupants took off on a flight to Paris. Nothing was ever heard of the plane again. In Paris, members of the band waited in their Hotel des Olympiades for news, only to be told that Glen Miller was missing. (On Christmas Eve the band was greeted with wild enthusiasm as it played its first concert without their leader.)

On the same day, December 15, a force of 138 RAF Lancaster bombers was returning from an aborted raid on Siege (east of Cologne). Carrying a full bomb load, the Lancaster was a difficult plane to land, and in such circumstances all bombers had to jettison their load over the Channel in an area designated as the 'Southern Jettison Area'. While jettisoning their bomb loads, the crew of a Lancaster from 149 Squadron saw a small plane crash into the sea below them. Forty-two years later, when the Lancaster crew were traced and contacted in New Zealand, they swore that the plane they had seen was a Norseman. The mystery remains to this day. Did the Norseman stray off course into the prohibited area only to be downed by bombs falling from the Lancaster bombers above? The chances of finding the small plane on the bed of the Channel are a million to one against.

Glenn Miller gave his last concert at the Queensbury All Services Club in Soho, London, on December 12, 1944. Later, in 1945, one of the venues for a band concert, without their leader, was at Nuremberg Stadium. Performed in front of thousands of cheering GIs on the same field where many Hitler Youth ceremonies took place. Today, the control tower at Twinwood Farm has been completely refurbished and dedicated to Major Glen Miller and the American Band of the AEF. For full details of the Glen Miller Band during their six months stay in Britain, see Chris Way's book "Glen Miller in Britain Then and Now." Chris Way died in July 2013 and his ashes scattered by John Miller, Glen's nephew, over the grass in front of the restored tower at Twinwood Farm from where Glen Miller departed on his last flight.



THE FAMOUS LANCASTER BOMBER. First flown on January 9, 1941. As the Lancaster was vulnerable to attacks from below, some later versions were equipped with a mid-under .5 machine gun mounted over a hole in the underside of the fuselage, the gunner sitting on a small wooden seat. Several 622 squadron Lancaster's were equipped in this manner.

WAR DIARY

General Eisenhower's talents did not greatly impress the British General Montgomery. At the end of Montgomery's war diary, a special note, written by the famous general, stated "And so the campaign in Northwest Europe is finished. I am glad; it has been a tough business ... the Supreme Commander had no firm ideas as to how to conduct the war and was 'blown about by the wind' all over the place ... the staff at SHAEF were completely out of their depth all the time. The point to understand is if we had run the show properly the war could have been finished by Christmas, 1944. The blame for this must rest with the Americans. To balance this it is merely necessary to say one thing, i.e. if the Americans had not come along and lent a hand , we would never have won the war at all."

ROYAL AIR FORCE CASUALTIES

During the first six months of 1944, out of each 1,000 bomber crews who had flown missions during that period, 712 were reported killed or missing and 175 were wounded ... an 89 percent casualty rate.

BRITISH AIR RAID CASUALTIES IN 1944

In the first four months 1,493 persons were killed and 2,871 injured in air raids. In April, for the first time in four years, there were no casualties reported. In June, Hitler's V1 flying bombs killed 1,935 persons and wounded 5,906. In July the V2 rockets killed 2,441 and injured 7,107. In the next five months, casualties amounted to 1,548 deaths and 6,055 wounded. (There were 60,595 British civilian deaths from air raids and rocket attacks during the war, this included 25,399 women and children. Some 86,182 were seriously wounded.