

This Week in History - The Daily Notes, Canonsburg, PA

On to the Rhine.



WESTERN EUROPE After weeks of stalemate because of floods, the American First and Ninth Armies hammered toward the Rhine River beyond the Roer with more than 220,000 men. Town after town was falling to the Allies as the western front broke open, spilling a flood of American armor and infantry into the western edge of the Ruhr Valley less than eight miles from Cologne, which was being shelled by 155-mm guns of the First Army. On the north and south the Canadian First and American Third Armies were rolling up the German flanks with increasingly heavy blows. On 2 March the Ninth Army reached the Rhine, cutting the German western front in two. German troops were fleeing across the river by ferry, barge and bridge through Allied bombs and shells.

American bombers struck deep into the Reich again on Monday, the 14th day of a sustained offensive against disrupted communication lines and other vital targets. German broadcasts indicated that Berlin had been hard hit again.

PACIFIC/ASIA

At the start of the week, American Marines were cleaning up the last few yards of Iwo Jima's central airfield. Almost half the island was in their possession. They had knocked out about half of the Japanese garrison of 20,000, and were now within a mile and a half of the north coast, but the fighting continued to be yard by yard.

In the Philippines, the Americans occupied Verde Island off Luzon, giving them control of the western edge of the central Philippines water passage. Fighting still proceeded on Luzon, but MacArthur had turned over civil

administration of the island to the commonwealth government. American forces were driving eastward beyond Manila in sharp fighting.

The US invaded Palawan Island in the Philippines, a key location on the routes to both Borneo and French Indochina, only 600 miles from the latter.

EASTERN FRONT

Soviet armored forces drove toward the Baltic through Pomerania on a 15 mile front. The drive was designed to slice off northwestern Germany, the Polish Corridor and the Free State of Danzig. Heavy air battles were reported over the front east of Berlin.

HOME FRONT

Navy Secretary Forrestal appealed to the American people at home for more and more munitions to save the lives of their men fighting on the far-flung battlefronts of the world. He used Iwo Jima as an example of the urgent need for ordnance: it was bombed for 70 successive days, shelled for three straight days by naval vessels, and hit intermittently by carrier planes, all at the cost of a storm of metal thrown at the tiny island.

In the most dramatic home front directive by the War Mobilization Director since the ban the previous month on horse racing, a midnight curfew went into effect Monday night coast-to-coast. The restriction was meant to save fuel, transportation, and manpower, and would probably remain in effect for the duration of the war in Europe. There was considerable grumbling from bars, restaurants, nightclubs, and the entertainment industry over the ban.

The Army uncovered a sensational new jet fighter, the P-80 "Shooting Star," which was capable of approaching the speed of sound. Developed by Lockheed, it was said to be faster than any Japanese or German plane, including the tailless Messerschmitt 163 rocket interceptor.

President Roosevelt made a report to Congress on the Yalta Conference, which was broadcast simultaneously to the nation. He was inspired by the Big Three's progress toward a durable peace, but felt that Germany and Japan may have to be on trial for perhaps fifty years before being readmitted into the society of nations. Meanwhile, they must be restrained by force if necessary. He stressed that Great Britain, the US and the Soviet Union were agreed unanimously to press the war against Germany until "unconditional surrender." He was looking forward to the upcoming United Nations conference in San Francisco in late April, and asserted the importance of the US concerning itself with the political problems of the rest of the world. His address met with the approval of most of both houses of Congress, from Republicans as well as Democrats.

(Photo courtesy newspapers.com, Canonsburg Daily Notes) ~