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The last great battle of The War: Okinawa.



WESTERN EUROPE

Armored columns of the American First and Ninth Armies completed the encirclement of the Ruhr, depriving Germany of its last major industrial area and trapping up to 100,000 Nazi soldiers. The Germans were fighting savagely to break out of the Ruhr Basin northeastward. There were indications that the remnants of the German armies were massing along the River Weser or possibly into Bavaria for a final stand. Meanwhile Patton's Third Army probed to within 90 miles of Berlin.

1,277 starving Americans captured in the Battle of the Bulge were freed from a prison camp near Siegenhain, Germany. They had lost 25 to 40 pounds in three-and-a-half months of a semi-starvation diet. In addition, thousands of other troops were freed, including Britons, Russians, Serbs, Slovaks and

Senegalese. The Sixth Armored Division also freed 900 Jewish women who had been imported by Germany from Hungary as slave laborers. Yanks riding tanks toward Berlin were not seeing signs of a scorched earth policy, but they were witnessing former slave laborers wrecking or looting their late employers' shops, properties and war plants.

Nazi radio announced the formation of German "Werewolf" guerillas to fight against the Allies and German collaborators. The werewolves "must become the symbol of the struggle for liberation from the foreign invaders; flaming examples for ruthless resistance by our entire people such as the world has never yet seen."

PACIFIC/ASIA

On Easter Sunday, 1 April, infantrymen and Marines invaded Okinawa Island, 360 air-miles south of Japan, in what was termed the greatest operation of the Pacific War. Okinawa was significant as the focal point of an arc from which American aircraft could dominate the East China Sea, the Japanese home islands as far as Tokyo and vital shipping lanes between enemy home ports and the mainland of Asia. Landing on the west coast at 8:30 AM, almost unopposed, by nightfall the Americans were within eight miles of Naha, a city of 65,000. Up to 100,000 US troops were believed involved in the operation. Within days the island had been cut in two against scattered resistance, and Marines were breaking through to the two-mile wide isthmus that joins the northern and southern halves of the island. The Japanese were fighting back in the first real clash since the landings as the Americans pressed on toward heavily defended Naha. Army troops of the 24th Corps were within five miles of the city at week's end.

200 Japanese civilians had committed mass suicide with grenades or by hanging on an island near Okinawa. Afraid they would be tortured and their women violated by the Americans, many fathers strangled their families, then held grenades to their own bellies and pulled the firing pin, or hanged themselves. When it was all over, the survivors were amazed to find the Americans gave them good medical care, food and shelter.

A large force of B-29 Superfortresses from Saipan dropped explosives and incendiaries on the Nakajima aircraft engine plant on the outskirts of Tokyo. It was the first low-level attack on the big factory, although it had been the target in high-altitude raids.

On 5 April the Russian government denounced its four-year-old neutrality pact with Japan, and directly accused the Japanese of aiding Germany in its war with the Soviet Union. News of the Russian stroke was met with jubilation in Washington, as it cleared the way for Soviet participation in the Pacific war.

America's two top Pacific strategists, General Douglas MacArthur and Admiral Chester Nimitz, were named by the US Joint Chiefs of Staff to conduct the final assault on the military power of Japan.

EASTERN FRONT

Early in the week, massed armor of two Soviet armies closed on Vienna, driving to within 22 miles of the capital on the south. Threatening a pincer move on Vienna, the Russians also sheared through crumbling Nazi defenses within eight miles of the industrial city of Wiener Neustadt, and were only 2-1/2 miles from Bratislava, the capital of Czechoslovakia. By 5 April Bratislava had fallen, the Red Army was smashing into the Vienna outskirts, and the latter capital's radio had gone off the air.

HOME FRONT

A nationwide coal strike was averted when the president of the United Mine Workers wired his leaders to urge 400,000 soft coal miners to keep on working for another month. This was at the request of the Secretary of Labor and the War Labor Board. The UMW was asking for a 25% salary increase for some 72,000 workers, and a “soft” strike had shut down 15 Pittsburgh blast furnaces.

The US Senate killed Administration hopes of freezing war plant workers in their jobs by law after V-E Day. The outcome was expected, but the size of the opposition vote was unexpected.

James Stewart, former film star, had been promoted to full colonel. He had been in the European theater for 18 months, and had flown 20 combat missions.

(Photo courtesy newspapers.com, Philadelphia Inquirer)