

This Week in History - Another Monster Gone

WWII Weekly Front Pages

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Another monster was gone.



EUROPE

Death still stalked Dachau, the concentration camp near Munich. As many as 100 men were dying daily, and another 3,000 were almost hopeless cases. The corpses left by the Nazis had been cleaned away, but their places

had been taken by new rows of bodies; typhoid, typhus and dysentery and the effects of a starvation diet were taking their toll. Adding some balance to the ledger, on 24 May Heinrich Himmler, the once-dreaded Gestapo hangman, committed suicide in a British military prison to escape trial and an almost certain execution. He had swallowed a fatal dose of cyanide when he was brought before British Army doctors for a routine examination. Himmler was buried secretly in a nameless grave in Germany. British soldiers carried the blanket-swathed body to the grave as an Army chaplain said last rites.

In a major development in a dispute between Yugoslavia and Austria, 20,000 Yugoslav troops were withdrawn from Austrian Carinthia as a “hopeful sign.” Another optimistic sign was seen by Marshal Tito, the leader of Yugoslavia, saying that his country was willing to negotiate on the disputed presence of Yugoslav troops in Italy’s Venizia Giulia province. The Yugoslavs blanched at remarks by the supreme Allied commander in the Mediterranean that the moves by the country were “all too reminiscent of Hitler, Mussolini and Japan.” Meanwhile, British and American forces in northeast Italy began moving east toward the Yugoslav border and the city of Trieste, in effect infiltrating Yugoslav lines in the disputed Italian province. Peaceful occupation appeared likely.

PACIFIC/ASIA

Early in the week three American divisions virtually encircled Shuri, keystone of the Japanese line in southern Okinawa, and cracked its outer ring of defenses. The final assaults on Naha, the capital, were apparently being held up while the American command hurled all available strength against Shuri, in the center of the line. The First Marine Division was within 200 yards of Shuri, and the 77th Army Division was within 900 yards of the town. Field reports said that three divisions had broken through Shuri’s defense perimeter but had not penetrated the town itself. The Japanese appeared determined to defend the city at all costs. Late in the week organized Japanese resistance had cracked in southeast Okinawa but Japanese airborne suicide units had struck back on Okinawa, with a surprise landing on two American-held airdromes. Okinawa dispatches said that the Japanese appeared to be pulling out of Naha.

Japan reiterated its denial of peace feelers and had mobilized 20 million students for the defense of the homeland. Premier Suzuki stated that Japan’s “immutable aims and policy of continuing to wage the war” will bring “security and peace with both justice and humanity.”

American carrier planes spread the air war against Japan to the southern island of Kyushu after a record attack by more than 550 Superfortresses on Tokyo. About 180 Navy planes bombed airbases on the island soon after several square miles of Tokyo’s industrial waterfront had been left in flames by the B-29s, which dropped 4,500 tons of fire bombs. Late in the week came another massive fire bombing of the capital by 500 Superforts, braving the most violent defenses ever put up by the Japanese. Huge conflagrations destroyed the greater part of the emperor’s palace and laid waste to the remainder of the city. The Japanese were hurling their new Baka bombs, rockets with suicide pilots, against the Superfortress fleet. The stubby-winged Baka mixed with enemy fighters in fierce, sweeping attacks on the huge, silvery bombers.

In the Philippines, the cleanup of Mindanao and Luzon gathered speed. American troops in Mindanao were advancing almost unopposed, and the 38th Division on Luzon were burning the Japanese out of their positions in the hills east of Manila with flame throwing tanks and barrels of jellied gasoline hurled by a catapult device.

HOME FRONT

Japan had been sporadically attacking the western US mainland with balloon-borne bombs, according to the War Department. It was said that no property damage had resulted. The Department’s word for the Japanese attempt to visit long-range destruction on the US was “fantastic.”

The Selective Service announced indefinite deferment for men 30 and over who are contributing to the war effort or are doing “useful” community work. Local draft boards were also instructed to review the cases of men in the 18-25 age group who had been disqualified on physical grounds. Overall, the monthly draft would be reduced to 90,000 starting July 1, a drop of 25%.

On 23 May Prime Minister Winston Churchill resigned and was commissioned by King George to hold office until a general election could be held, expected on July 5. This would be Britain’s first in ten years.

(Photo courtesy newspapers.com, Franklin & Oil City News-Herald)