

—DEUTSCHLAND IN RETREAT—

This Is How D-Day Looked From The Other Side

NOTE—When the Allies swarmed ashore on the French coast, a young German artillery officer was busy training green replacements for the defense of Hitler's Atlantic Wall. In this third of four eyewitness articles commemorating D-Day, Horst Fluegge—now in the Associated Press staff in Germany—recalls the momentous events from a German viewpoint.

By HORST FLUEGGE

BOON, Germany (AP)—We had waited for the phone call for a long time. It came around 8 o'clock on June 6. A sergeant picked up the receiver. He listened for a while, then turned to us and said, "They have landed."

That was D-Day, 15 years ago. I was a lieutenant stationed with a German army mobile artillery unit at Avranches, 60 miles from the main Allied beachhead at Cherbourg on the Normandy coast of France.

I didn't see what happened at Cherbourg that morning, for we were marshaling the curious mixture of youthful veterans of the Russian front and the kids and old men hastily recruited for the defense of the Atlantic Wall.

TWO-DAY MARCH

We marched for two days until we reached the Orne River near Caen and there we ran into the powerful barrages of the Allied naval vessels that lay offshore.

We were an exhausted, defeated bunch, the men of Artillery Unit 112. We knew we had lost the war, but there was nothing to do but fight it out. To us it did not appear honorable to surrender.

I remember standing among the batteries of inferior Italian long-range guns and Russian material confiscated on the Eastern front

and listening to our staff chief. "Maybe they'll smash our artillery in a hurry and we'll get new stuff," he observed laconically.

Another artillery officer, a man with whom I had made the long retreat from the heart of Russia, had this cynical observation: "We might as well start the counter-attack. Then we can retreat faster."

It's difficult to remember what I thought and felt then. I was tired, worn out from four years in Russia and from trying to train our inexperienced replacements. Normandy was a long way from Berlin where I had been studying philosophy at the university when the war began.

From the middle of May I had been adjutant to the commander of Artillery Unit 1124 in Avranches. I was moved there with our other officers from the Eastern front.

Our men were mostly young, stars and old men who had held staff jobs in Berlin. They were inexperienced and unable to cope with the superior weapons and manpower of the enemy.

NO SURPRISE

We were not at all surprised that the Allies struck at Cherbourg. The coastal area of Normandy was the most vulnerable region in the Atlantic Wall whose defenses had been planned by Field Marshals Rommel and Von Rundstedt.

Our main forces lay 60 miles from the coast and we had to rush men to the beaches to combat the Americans, British and Canadians who stormed ashore.

From the first it was clear that the Allies had air superiority, more than the Russians had managed in the East. And the naval artillery on the Allied ships had

greater range than our big guns. They could hit us while our shells fell far short.

Never during the war, including the dismal days in Russia, did I find the morale of our troops as low as it was in the first days of the Allied invasion.

I remember talking to our staff chief in those first invasion days and hearing him say with a defeatist grin: "Let's take a Messerschmitt and go off to Spain."

On July 20, 1944, the plot to assassinate Hitler took place and

failed. Word got around fast and we felt then that the war would last until we were driven back into Germany.

SIGNS OF TIMES

I remember the signs at the railway stations in the early days of the war. "The wheels must roll for victory," the signs said. After July 20, there was a new twist to that: "Heads roll for victory—of the other side."

Near us was one of Hitler's

crack SS divisions, the Leibstandarte. The morale in that division was much higher than the morale in the regular army divisions. But in talks with officers of the division I was surprised to find so few dedicated Nazis.

FOUGHT HARD

We fought hard, though it is difficult now to explain why. We fell back slowly before the advancing American and British tanks. On Aug. 11 we underwent a particularly severe attack. Most of

the men of Unit 1124 were killed or taken prisoner. I was hit in the side by a tank machinegunner and removed to a hospital in Holland. When the Allies moved into Holland I was shipped back to Germany and eventually found myself in command of a newly organized artillery unit on the Eastern front. I was in Czechoslovakia when the war ended in May, 1945.

Tomorrow: Closeup of the Rangers.



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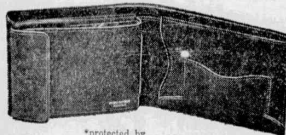
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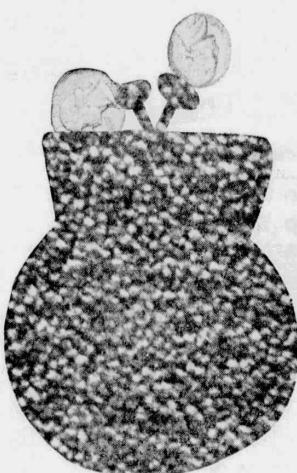
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