

THE ROT SETS IN

Brilliant beyond anything imagined hitherto was the role played by the First Airborne Army in the greatest of all victories achieved in the west. 1,300 gliders carried the multifarious paraphernalia of mechanised war to the east bank of the Rhine. The march of events quickened to a gallop, took on the speed of flight and finally dazed the imagination of free men throughout the world. The airborne army was on its mettle, bent on delivering a master stroke, privately determined to avenge the partial defeat of Arnhem. For the third testing time in this war there was complete faith in the motorless craft.

Tug pilots and glider men were fully briefed. Air Marshal Conyngham, noting the weather report, had said, Let's go.

It was a naval occasion too. Over to Antwerp and other ports went great numbers of landing craft specially selected for the task of crossing the Rhine, ~~some of them expressly designed for it.~~ Gigantic craft, some of them, yet having to make the last stage of the journey by road. Nothing was left to chance in this assault of the Rhine. In a war ^{with} whose mass and variety of material we have grown accustomed, here was effort on a scale staggering indeed.

Winston Churchill, with Eisengower, ~~and~~ Montgomery, ^{and Alan Brooke}

^{so} the drama unfold itself on the west bank of the historic river.

~~(24 Monty Brooke)~~ ^{victory} The long laid plans, made in the far off days of bitter defeats, had come to fruition. British troops were going over the Rhine.

^{so} They went with every safeguard conceivable, ~~in time of war.~~ RAF medium bombers of the 2nd Tactical Airforce crippled the enemy ahead of zero hour.

~~Bombs were spent lavishly; life was preserved. That is the allied way.~~

Bombs were spent lavishly, that in the allied armies life should be saved. Vast areas behind the German front were blasted into chaos.

It was not only the Tactical Airforce. Bomber Command surpassed its previous achievements, than which there could be no greater praise. The devastating night attack on Wurzburg, Bavaria, is a case in point. A quiet university town in peacetime, Wurzburg had ~~now~~ ^{successfully} become important; for as a rail junction with Frankfurt and Nuremberg it was choked with supplies. ~~Its destruction~~ further disorganised the ~~now~~ crumbling forces of the ~~enemy.~~ ^{timed} ~~Well deserved indeed~~ was Field Marshal Montgomery's ~~message of thanks to Ginger Harris.~~

(45, 2nd Ch) Under cover of that ^{deafening} barrage troops of the 21st Army Group - Monty's nem - went over the river, so peacefully, in most of the crossings, and in such victory weather, that it was more like a holiday than war.

(Ch Brk) The men who planned this operation saw it go through according to the plan. On this side of the river the hard crust of the German army had been cracked. Beyond the crust, believed the allied leaders, there would be little or nothing. Only a fortnight before, Churchill had said that one good heave would see it over. This was the heave.

Rocket firing typhoons pin-pointed troublesome batteries, divisional headquarters, anything that was being a nuisance.

He would not be Winston Churchill if he had not crossed the river himself at the first opportunity. He and the army leaders must have thought of the days when all the world outside the British Commonwealth ~~was~~ ^{is} believed we could not escape defeat. Now it ~~was~~ the Germans who must blow their bridges. This one at Wessel was under fire but the ^{ever youthful} Prime Minister wanted to have a look.

Already the airborne army ^{is striking} had struck its blow. Dakota troop carriers headed for the assigned landing fields.

Dead on the minute the first paratroops made a mass jump - warfare as the Russians conceived it, as Germans first used it - here reaching perfection.

(after Ch) It was war and therefore there were some mishaps. One damaged Dakota made a crash landing - ~~an almost terrifying~~ spectacle.

Now came the most enthralling ^{spectacle} ~~sight~~ of all - the head of the 250-mile glider-train was going over the Rhine. The German airforce, beaten out of the sky, could do nothing. Flak, and not much of that, was all the defence the enemy could put up.

Tow ropes were cast off and the great gliders planed down.

Not all made safe landings, but the ^{of} majority did.

In the breath-taking sweep of subsequent events the Rhine crossing recedes from the forefront of the mind.

But it was here that the ~~moment~~ ^{triumph} was made certain; here that the fighting men gave the one big heave, here that they ~~fully~~ justified the all-conquering faith of the architects of victory over Germany.