

The Final World War Two Operation In Europe – Op Blackout

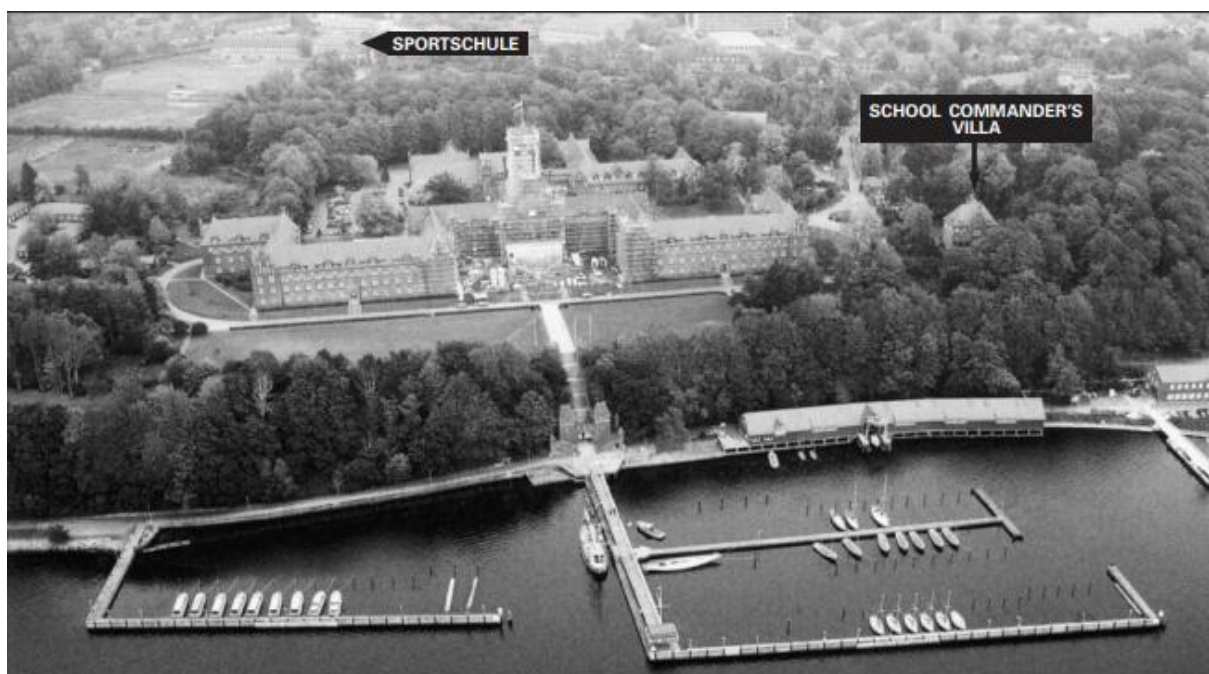
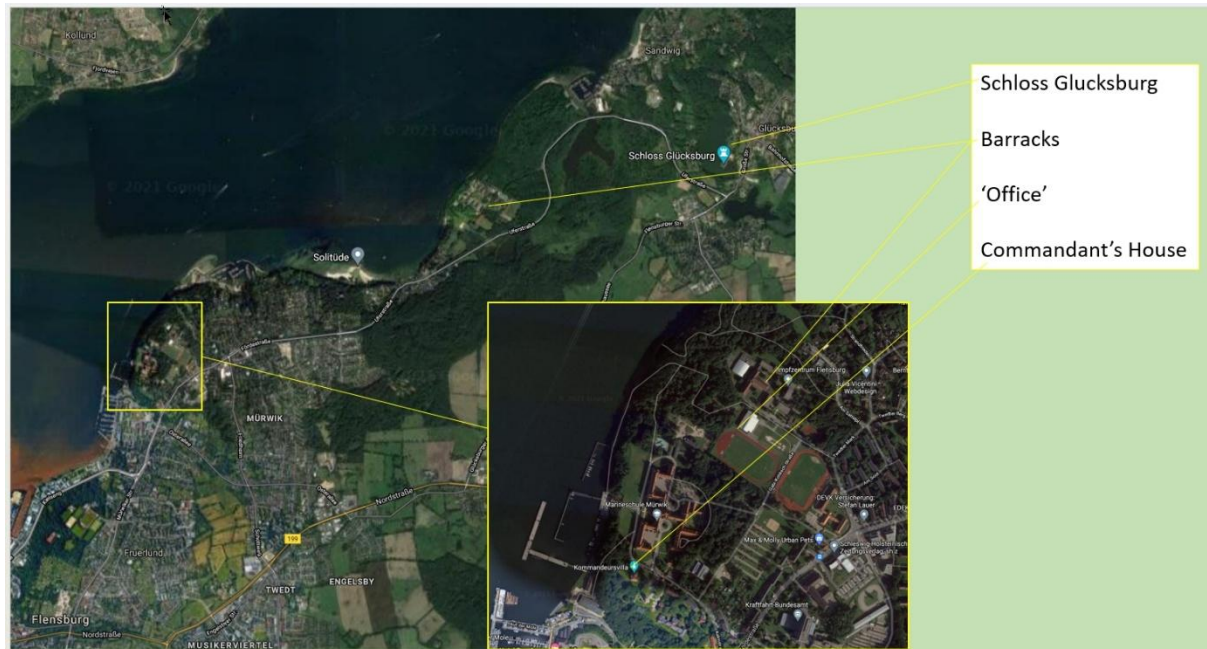
The advance of Allied Forces eastwards after the invasion of Normandy in June 1944, had progressed and by April 1945 much of occupied western Europe had been liberated and much of western Germany occupied. From the East Soviet Forces were at the gates of Berlin; it was clear the Third Reich under Adolf Hitler was defeated. Hitler's hope was for the West to join forces with Germany and wage war against communist Russia - this was clearly delusional. Hitler's 'strategy' was to fight for every inch of Germany and pursue a scorched earth policy to make the battle too costly for the Allies to call a victory. However Hitler could not prevail against the inevitable and he committed suicide in his bunker underneath the Reichstag in Berlin on 30 April 1945.

Hitler had nominated Grand Admiral Karl Doenitz as his successor. Doenitz set up his government in a German Navy Officer Cadet School at Flensburg, North Germany on the Baltic Coast. Doenitz was more realistic, and recognised that Germany was defeated and wanted to sue for peace. He wanted to negotiate a surrender 'with honour' and also to *save* as many German troops in the East from falling into Russian hands. He deliberately delayed negotiations but his terms were totally unacceptable and his negotiating position weak, and only an unconditional surrender was acceptable to the Allies and on 4 May Admiral Von Friedberg and General Kinzel signed the document of surrender with FM Montgomery on Lunenburg Heath. The formal surrender of all German troops took place on the 7 May and the 8 May was declared as VE (Victory In Europe) Day.



The Allied Troops could at last relax - to a degree - there were still Nazi extremists intent on following Hitler's instructions. The Herefordshire Regiment had landed over the beaches of Normandy on D+6 and had fought through France, the Low Countries and Germany, ending the war on the Danish border. Soon after VE Day the Herefords moved to Flensburg.

The Allies at first were content to let Doenitz' government remain in place as they thought it could be a good instrument to help transition to peace. However it soon became clear that some members of the government still had strong Nazi sympathies and were taking an arrogant and obstructive stance; this aggrieved the Allies (especially the Russians!) and the decision was made that the Government was to be 'dissolved'. The German Government occupied a naval complex at Flensburg; it was guarded by armed German soldiers and was a semi no-go area for the Allies.





Soldiers of the Herefordshire Regiment enjoying some 'beachtime' with the Naval HQ and Doenitz's Government location in the background.

A broadcast had been made from the site claiming that the German Government was 'the authority' and not the Allies – clearly this was unacceptable and Brig Churcher had the transmission station dismantled.

There were refugees, displaced persons, released PoWs, freed slave workers, uncontrolled military moving and marauding everywhere - often armed and/or desperate - the security situation was tense. There were thousands of German troops moving from the north – Norway and Denmark – and returning 'home' on foot and uncontrolled. Additionally there were high ranking Nazis, wanted as war criminals free in the country – some trying to 'escape' north to Denmark. William Joyce (Lord Haw Haw) was captured in the woods on the border and Brig Churcher, on a visit to the Barracks was convinced he had seen Himmler.

Brig Churcher was given orders to 'liquidate' the Doenitz government. He implemented OP BLACKOUT on the morning of the 23 May. The 15/19 Hussars put in a cordon around the barracks and the Cheshire and Herefordshire Regiments entered the site to make the arrests.

The German military leaders - Doenitz, Jodl and Friedeberg – had been summoned to the Allied Control Commission HQ established on the liner Patria in Flensberg Harbour. It was hoped that without these military leaders the German masses would not present any resistance; Brig Churcher was determined to avoid conflict and bloodshed.

The Herefords moved off from their barracks at 0930hrs and were ready in position just outside the area 5 minutes before zero hour at 1000hrs. On the code word being given by Brig Churcher, all units made a simultaneous pounce.

The leaders were arrested on the Patria. On the day The Herefords were providing the 24 hour guard on the ship; the officer in charge of the guard was Lt Ken Crockford. The party when they arrived were given 'normal' compliments, but instructions were that they were not to receive these when

departing; as such one enterprising soldier of the Herefords removed Admiral Doenitz' pennants from his car. (These remain in the Regimental Museum to this day.)



GAdml Doenitz with his staff officers leaving the Patria. Note Herefordshire Regiment soldier behind the Military Policeman.

Very soon after 1000hrs large numbers of prisoners began to pour into the compound which had been hastily prepared for them, and there they were segregated into their various categories. This was not an easy task, but the Field Security personnel were of great assistance as they could almost smell a man's category before asking for his name or his papers.



Lined up for questioning

During the searching of the marine barracks, all those in the buildings were paraded in the corridor with their faces to the walls whilst the rooms were searched. Since many had been caught napping the state of their attire did not in all cases comply with the normal convention, and two or three Herefords were lucky enough to find a bevy of German WRNS having a shower. The beauties did not resent this intrusion a bit, although according to the men's story, the Hereford's beat a hasty retreat.



As was usual in those days when searching the German HQ, large stocks of hams and wines were discovered and it was interesting to note the ruse adopted by the high German officials to conceal small personal belongings about their person. Reichminister Schwerin Von Krosink, for example produced his watch from a shoe and a very small tight fitting wallet containing important papers from underneath his vest.

The leaders were permitted to return, from the Patria to their billets in the barracks to collect their personal belongings; they were to be escorted by Allied officers, but the leaders were too quick, re-entered their cars and departed the dockside before their escorts could get to their vehicles to escort them. When they arrived at their billets they were un escorted; Officers of the Herefords and Cheshires knew they should be under arrest and therefore 're-arrested' them.

Admiral Friedberg whist un escorted committed suicide.

It was also thought that many members of the Nazi Party hierarchy could be 'holed up' in Schloss Gluckesberg (a grand schloss and home of the Duke of Mecklenberg, a cousin of King George VI) about 3 miles to the north of the Barracks, and the cordon and search of this was included in Op Blackout. Many party officials were apprehended including Dr Albert Speer.

The operation was a complete success. There was no bloodshed; the Germans had been taken completely by surprise, and during the day a total of 756 arrests were made, amongst them many high Nazi officials.



Doenitz is 're-arrested' by The Herefords – Maj Crofts OCA Company at base of steps

The principle players were escorted (by the Herefords) to 159 Bde HQ which had been established in the Police HQ in Flensburg. Here they were exposed to the international press.

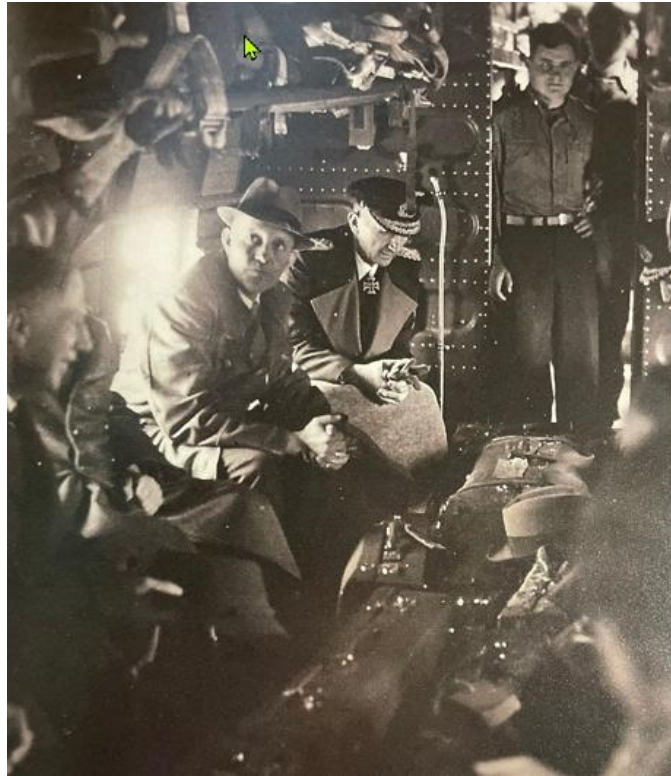




Speer, Doenitz and Jodl at the Police HQ in Flensburg

Following this they were escorted to the local airfield and flown to the Allied Internment camp at Bas Mondorf in Luxembourg for interrogation and to await trial. Doenitz, Jodl & Speer were all tried as war criminals. Jodl was sentenced to death and hung; Doenitz received a sentence of 10 years and Speer 20 years.





Doenitz on board the flight to captivity

Other lesser personalities were transported to the Patria for questioning. They were allowed one suitcase – which they had to carry themselves – and were transported in the back of a 3 ton truck – many complained (unsuccessfully) against these indignities!



Detainees being transported for questioning



Doenitz car pennants