

Op Blackout, 23 May 1945

After Hitler's suicide on the 30 April and the German surrender on 8 May 1945, Germany was in total chaos. Grand Admiral Doenitz had been nominated by Hitler as his successor and formed a 'puppet' government and established it in a German Naval barracks in Flensburg. The Allies at first thought this was a good move with a compliant German government being able to bring order to Germany and the Government was initially condoned by the British authorities. It was soon realized, however, that the Doenitz administration was not particularly efficient, and that dangerous hard line Nazi elements existed within it.

In consequence Op Blackout was conceived, the object of which was to liquidate the 'puppet' government, and also the OKW¹ administration, with a single stroke. 1st Battalion the Herefordshire Regiment was to carry out this operation in conjunction with 1st Battalion the Cheshire Regiment and 15th/19th Hussars, all units of 11 Armoured Division. Each unit was provided with a long list of 'wanted' persons, divided into four categories according to their importance. The two infantry battalions were to search for and arrest these people, while 15th/19th Hussars were to assist in sealing off the area to prevent any people escaping.

The Herefords moved off at 0930hrs from their barracks and were ready in position just outside the area five minutes before zero hour (1000hrs). On the codeword given by Brigadier JB Churcher, who was commanding 159 Infantry Brigade, all units made a simultaneous pounce.

Gd Adml Doenitz, General-Admiral Von Friedeburg and Colonel-General Jodl were among the first to be captured, and they objected strongly to being taken away in an ordinary three-ton lorry. They were transported to the *Patria*, a ship used for the headquarters of the Allied Commission, for a conference with the Allied leaders, after which they requested permission to collect their personal belongings. Adml Von Friedeburg took the opportunity thus provided to end his short career as commander-in-chief of the German Navy by committing suicide in the lavatory. Very soon after 1000hrs, some 5,000 '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.

During the searching of the naval barracks, all those in the building were paraded in the corridors with their faces to the walls while the rooms were searched. Since many had been caught 'napping', the state of their attire did not in all cases comply with normal convention, and two or three Herefords were *lucky* enough to find a bevy of German Wrens having a shower. The women did not resent this intrusion, although, according to the men's story, the Herefords beat a hasty retreat! As was usual in those days when searching a German headquarters, large stocks of ham and wines were discovered, and it was interesting to note the ruses adopted by the German high officials to conceal small belongings about their persons. Reichminister Schwerin von Krosigk, for example, produced his watch from a shoe, and a very small, tight-fitting wallet containing important papers from underneath his vest.

The operation was a complete success, as the Germans had been taken completely by surprise, and during the day a total of 756 arrests were made, among them many Nazi high officials.

Gd Adml Doenitz's car pennants were acquired by an enterprising Hereford soldier and now are proudly displayed in the Herefordshire Light Infantry Museum.

¹ - Oberkommando der Wehrmacht was the High Command of the Wehrmacht (armed forces) of Nazi Germany

Photographs

The arrest of Gd Adml Doenitz



Gd Adml Doenitz, Gen Jodl and Dr Speer under arrest



Op Blackout came as a surprise to some



Those arrested were moved to a holding ship under arrest



Gd Adml Doenitz's car pennants

