



THIS MONTH in MILITARY HISTORY

- 1770 Several citizens are shot and killed by British Soldiers in the Boston Massacre.
- 1779 Congress establishes the Corps of Engineers.
- 1864 Ulysses S. Grant is appointed Commanding General of the Union armies.
- 1916 Pancho Villa attacks across the border in Columbus, New Mexico.
- 1942 MacArthur leaves the Philippines.
- 1945 First firebombing of Tokyo takes place.
- 1965 First American intervention occurs in Vietnam.
- 1973 Last U.S. combat troops depart Vietnam.
- 1995 Operation *Restore Hope* ends in Somalia.
- 2003 The assault to removed Saddam Hussein from power begins.

TRIVIA

- 1 What was the Army depot established in 1918 that was subordinate to Rock Island Arsenal?
- 2 What year were atomic artillery rounds finally removed from U.S. military inventory?
- 3 On what date did the last active German garrison surrender during World War II?

ANSWERS FOR FEBRUARY 2020 QUESTIONS

- 1 What rank did John Armstrong achieve in the U.S. Regular Army?
➤ **Brigadier General**
- 2 How many people in total served in both the Continental Congress and Confederation Congress?
➤ **66**
- 3 Who was the newspaper publisher who sensationalized the USS Maine's sinking 1898?
➤ **William Randolph Hearst**



SGT Alexander Drabik receives the Distinguished Service Cross for his actions on the Ludendorf Bridge at Remagen.



For answers to trivia, information on this month's artifact spotlight, digital copies of old newsletters and more, visit the ASC History Office website at:

<https://aschq.army.mil/About-Us/History>



First to Cross the Rhine

In almost every major military campaign there are defining moments that shape history and are marked for their impact. Caesar's crossing of the Rubicon, the Battle of Waterloo, Lee's Surrender at Appomattox, the Battle of Midway and the invasion of Normandy just to name a few. On 7 March 1945 the American Army would add one more to this list, the crossing of the Rhine River with the capture of the Ludendorff Bridge at Remagen. A *Stars and Stripes* combat correspondent was the first reporter to note the bridge's capture. That reporter was named Andy Rooney and he later wrote that the capture of the bridge was one of the top five events of the entire European war, alongside D-Day. General Eisenhower would describe capturing the bridge as "one of those rare and fleeting opportunities which occasionally arise in war and which, if grasped, have incalculable effects on determining future success." He further commented that "we were across the Rhine, the traditional defensive barrier to the heart of Germany was pierced. The final defeat of the enemy, which we had long calculated would be accomplished in the spring and summer campaigning of 1945."

The campaign to the Rhine had been long and difficult for the Allies, starting with the invasion of Europe at the beaches of Normandy. Despite obstacles such as the French hedgerow country, battle for the Hurtgen Forest, and the fight for the city of Aachen, the Allied armies managed to carry on. Following the German Counterattack, known as the Battle of the Bulge, the Western Allied armies launched a massive front-wide assault in separate offensives toward the Rhine. The goal was to pierce the last major boundary to the heart of Germany, hopefully hastening the end of the war. The largest offensive was Operation *Plunder* under the Command of Field Marshal Montgomery which would rival the Normandy Invasion in size and complexity. Eventually *Plunder* would involve more than a million Soldiers and it was planned to cross the Rhine in late March and invade central Germany. The American led Operation *Lumberjack* was further south from Plunder and was designed to prepare the way for Montgomery.

For Operation *Lumberjack* the main objectives were to

capture the German cities of Cologne, Bonn, and the Koblenz sector as well as to capture a large number of German Soldiers. The intent was to secure these strategic cities to eventually cross the Rhine River at points that would allow rapid advance into the heart of Germany. American Soldiers under the command of LTG Hodges' First Army took the city of Cologne on 7 March after several days of intense fighting. However, all of the bridges within the strategic city had been destroyed and fighting was heavy enough to slow crossing the river by pontoon bridge. The continued push south along the Rhine River found Soldiers from the 9th Armored Division entering the city of Remagen also on 7 March. To the Soldiers' surprise, they found the Ludendorff railroad bridge still standing. Soldiers from Company A, 14th Tank Battalion under their new commander (as of one day) 1LT Karl H. Timmerman were able to successfully cross and capture the bridge intact. These Soldiers, with SGT Alexander Drabik in the lead, had the distinction of being the first Soldiers, during a time of war, to cross the Rhine River since the Napoleonic War.

The speed of the American advance to Remagen on 7 March, completely caught the Germans by surprise and they were unprepared to defend the bridge. This action caused a sudden burden on the German defenses and multiplied their confusion. They had been expecting a build-up of forces along the Rhine before attempting to cross at Cologne. The breakthrough at Remagen meant that the beleaguered German forces lost a much-needed chance to regroup east of the Rhine. The Ludendorf Bridge would collapse 10 days later from the strain of damage caused during the initial attack and relentless German attacks. However, more than 25,000 Allied troops had crossed the Ludendorff Bridge which also allowed for the construction of three additional tactical bridges in the area above and below Remagen. General Eisenhower would comment "The whole Allied force is delighted to cheer the First Army whose speed and boldness have won the race to establish the first bridgehead over the Rhine. Please tell all ranks how proud I am of them." The capture of the Ludendorff Bridge and crossing of the Rhine River shortened the war in Europe by weeks or even month and reduced Allied casualties as a whole.

Operation Plunder

Operation *Plunder* was an Allied military offensive devised by British Field Marshal Bernard Montgomery to be the first to cross the last major natural obstacle in Germany, the Rhine River. Once across the Allied forces would put pressure on German forces all along the Rhine River and continue into the heart of Germany. Planning for this offensive was compared in scale to the Normandy invasion. Overall 1.2 million Allied Soldiers would be involved in *Plunder* and the supporting Allied airborne offensive, Operation *Varsity*, would be the largest single day airborne operation ever to take place with more than 16,000 paratroopers involved. The airborne forces were to be dropped across the river in advance of the amphibious crossing to secure a foothold. *Plunder* was planned to take place on 24 March 1945.

However, Operation *Lumberjack* and the American Army, beat Field Marshall Montgomery to his goal of being the first to cross the Rhine. The U.S. 9th Armored Division under the command of the U.S. First Army successfully captured the Ludendorff Bridge at Remagen on 7 March 1945.

Operation *Plunder* did take place successfully on 24 March and by the 27th, despite stiff resistance, the bridgehead was firmly established with a front 35 miles wide and 20 miles deep.



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Presented to you by your friendly ASC History Office. Feel free to call or stop by our office for any of your history needs.

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