

# January 1944 – World War II at 80

By Ronald P. May  
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ANZIO, Italy — In January 1944, combat operations in World War II had been ongoing for two years for Americans and almost four years for Europeans.

Late in 1942, U.S. forces landed in North Africa and helped the British defeat the German tank forces there in 1943.

U.S. and British armies then spring boarded from North Africa into Sicily in July 1943 and reached the boot of mainland Italy in September, all the while engaging enemy German forces.

At the start of 1944, U.S. and British forces of the Allied VI Corps made another bold amphibious landing on Italian shoreline. This one was near the western coastal cities of Anzio and Nettuno, located 35 miles south of Rome.

The date for the landing was Jan. 22, 1944. And the codename was Operation Shingle.

The goal of the operation was to break the stalemate in southern Italy between German and Allied forces by flanking the enemy and piercing their Gustav Line of defense before moving on to Rome.

This worthy effort, however, bogged down quickly with the defensive resistance of the German forces, which kept the Allies pinned down to the beachhead for the next four months.

Meanwhile, Allied operations in the South Pacific were making progress at the start of 1944.

Japan had reached its zenith of territorial expansion two years earlier in 1942.

Allied advances against Japanese naval and air forces had begun with a stalemate in the Coral Sea in 1942, followed by a victory at Midway Island in 1942. Guadalcanal was brought under Allied control by February 1943 and Tarawa, in the Gilbert Island chain, fell in November 1943.

At end of 1943, the Allies began pressing northwesterly from Guadalcanal into Japan's southern empire. The island of Bougainville was in their path. It had been occupied by Japanese forces since 1942.

Bougainville was less than 1,000 miles north of Australia and less than 600 miles east of Papua New Guinea.

The 3rd Marine Division landed on Bougainville in November 1943. Army Divisions arrived on the island in January 1944 to relieve the Marines.

## A local soldier

Carl Hawkins was one of the Army infantrymen arriving there.

Born in 1923 in Trafalgar, Hawkins was trained as a combat infantryman and truck driver and assigned to the 132nd Infantry Regiment in the Americal Division.

In January 1944, the 132nd arrived on the island of Bou-

gainville for operation Cherry Blossom. Their mission was to hold and extend the perimeter against the Japanese forces.

The operation was ultimately a success, but Hawkins was injured during combat. While in his foxhole, he was hit in the back of the head with shrapnel or a bullet fragment. He turned around and was then hit again, this time on the side of his mouth.

He was sent to a hospital in the Philippines and, following his recovery, returned to combat. But a nasty scar marred his upper lip. He grew a moustache to hide it.

It was a moustache that he would wear for the rest of his life.

After two years of service abroad, which included combat duty in the Solomon Islands and the Philippines, Hawkins returned to the U.S. in November 1945. The Purple Heart recipient received his honorable discharge and came back to Indiana.

While getting discharged, Hawkins met Ruth Esther Hacker from Morgantown, who was working at Camp Atterbury as a cook and nurse's aide. The couple dated for 10 months and were then married in October 1946.

Their daughter Virginia Jean was born a short time later. She was their only child.

Hawkins worked as a mechanic for International Harvester in Indianapolis before buying into Standard Oil and operating a service station in Paragon for 30 years, retiring at the age of 60.

In retirement, and following his wife's death, he moved to Florida and enjoyed 10 years in the warmth and sunshine.

Hawkins' daughter moved her father to Martinsville in 1993 to be close to her after he suffered an aneurysm.

Carl W. Hawkins died in 2003.

## Normandy preparations

England was also busy in January 1944. The massive amphibious landing at Normandy was only six months away.

General Eisenhower, who was appointed the Supreme Allied Commander by President Roosevelt a month earlier, was in England finalizing the plans for Operation Overlord with the other members of the Supreme Headquarters of the Allied Expeditionary Forces.

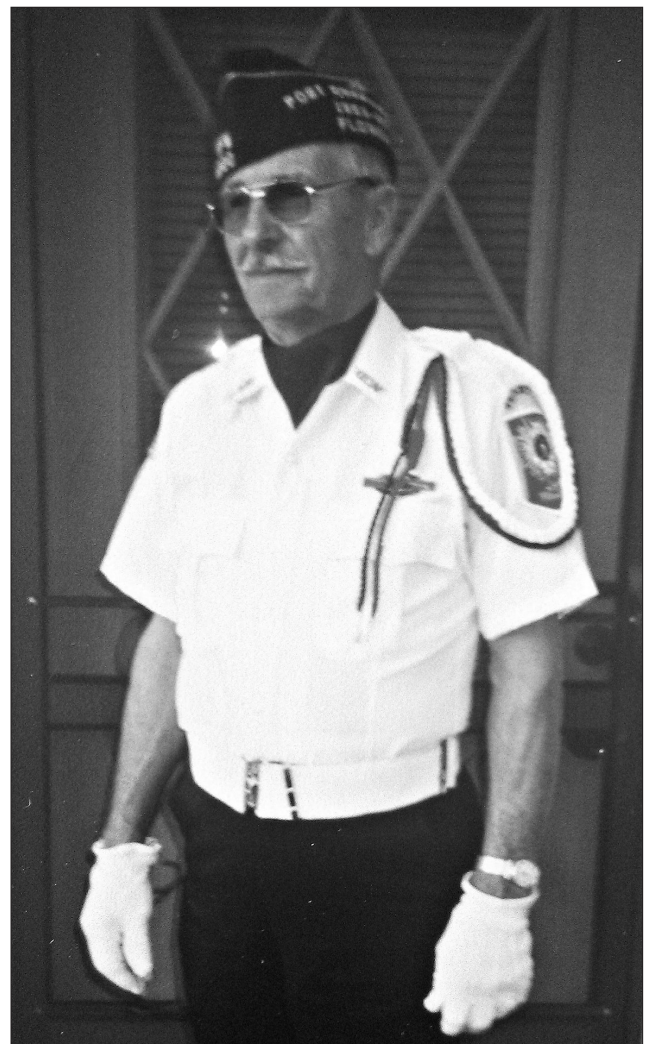
That same month, British midget submarines crossed the English Channel and secretly landed at the Normandy Beaches. The mission was to gather sand samples that were tested to determine if the chosen beaches would support the weight of tanks and other vehicles that the Allies intended to offload during the invasion.

Preparations for the Normandy invasion were also taking place from the air in early 1944 as British and U.S. aircraft began secret drops of weapons and supplies to resis-



ABOVE: Morgan County resident Carl Hawkins in his service uniform. Hawkins was wounded in combat before making his return back home. (Virginia Holsapple courtesy photo)

RIGHT: Carl stands in his VFW uniform back in 1992 at the age of 70. (Virginia Holsapple courtesy photo)



Troops and equipment come ashore on U.S. Fifth Army beachhead near Anzio on Jan. 22, 1944. (National Archives public domain photo)

tance groups in the occupied countries of France and Holland for their fight against the Germans.

*Next Time: "February 1944"*

*Freelance writer Ronald P. May, author, historian, and public speaker on World War II, begins a new article series today: World War II at 80. Each article will review the most significant events that took place in that month of the war 80 years ago, as well as feature a story from a Morgan County veteran who was there. Learn more about May's books at <https://ronaldpmay.com> or contact him at [ron@ronaldpmay.com](mailto:ron@ronaldpmay.com). View his videos at his YouTube channel: World War II History & Stories with Ron May.*



U.S. soldiers help clear the Pacific island of Bougainville, after relieving the U.S. Marines who had been fending off Japanese for two months. (National Archives and Records Administration)

# Morgan County's jails over the years

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When thinking about the early days of any new settlement in a wilderness area, there are many elements that we take for granted in our lives today that had to be established for safety and to allow the fledgling area to flourish. One of those things is law enforcement. Not all of the early pioneers were God-fearing and mindful of the rights of their neighbors. "Keeping the peace" was a necessity.

The former Morgan County Jail, located just west of the courthouse square in Martinsville, is a building that could tell many stories since its construction in the 1800s.

This wasn't the first jail in Morgan County, but in December of 1890, this was the fifth correctional facility to be utilized by Morgan County and considered to be a state-of-the-art jail at the time. The first jail was a small log structure built in 1824, which was destroyed



The old Morgan County Jail and Sheriff's Residence — as seen in this 2011 photo — was in need of some repair work but still structurally sound. Its original construction was completed in 1890, and it was used as the county jail for more than 100 years. It has since been refurbished and repurposed, now serving as senior living apartments. But many of the bars on the windows remain in place as homage to its former purpose. (Earl Leatherberry courtesy photo)

by fire in 1826. A brick jail was constructed where the courthouse now stands. A third log structure was then built 10 years later in the northeasterly portion of the town. The fourth jail was housed inside the Morgan County Courthouse, start-

ing between 1857 and 1859. During renovation of the courthouse, the original jail cell was discovered within the walls of the Treasurer's Office. It was decided to separate the correctional facility from the courthouse and the current remaining

structure was completed in December of 1890. It was also built to hold 40 inmates. It was listed on the National Historic Register in 1996. John Dillinger's first crime of robbing a grocery in Mooresville placed him

in the jail in 1925 or 1926, awaiting trial for which he was found guilty and then sent to prison. This is a jail that Dillinger did not escape from.

The jail also held the convicted murderer Steven Judy. He waved all appeals and when he was executed in 1981, he was the first person executed in Indiana in more than 20 years. The jail also contained a residence for the Morgan County Sheriff. It continued to be used until the new jail was built in the 1990s.

The former jail now has been converted into senior apartments, allowing the outside integrity of the building to remain — complete with steel bars on certain windows — but still be functional today, as opposed to being demolished.

Flaherty and Collins (the same group that converted the Martinsville Sanitarium building into apartments) refurbished it, which now includes five apartments. Safety requirements dictated that the original cell-

block at the rear of the building be sealed off and remain unused. It still remains attached as a reminder of the building original history.

The building holds a protective covenant by Indiana Landmarks to make sure the exterior of the building is kept to its 1880 Italianate architectural integrity.

Now don't worry if you are contemplating a brush with the law in the near future. Sheriff Rich Myers has accommodations at the new Morgan County B&B (Bars and Bunk).

The late Randy Manley compiled a history of the Morgan County Sheriff's Dept. and it makes for interesting and well worth reading. It can be found at [in.gov/sheriffs/morgan/files/history-sheriffs-office.pdf](http://in.gov/sheriffs/morgan/files/history-sheriffs-office.pdf).

We are grateful to all those peace officers who have gone through those jailhouse doors over the years and for those who continue to keep Morgan County safe and in order.