

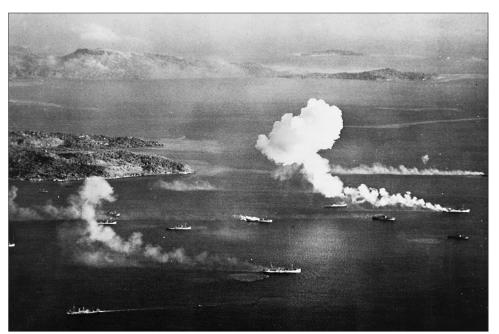
Smoke billows from the Ploiesti oil refineries of Romania during a bombing run by Allied Forces in May 1944. (Public domain photo)



In late April 1944, Exercise Tiger took place along the shoreline in southwestern England. The eight-day exercise was designed as a dress rehearsal to prepare U.S. Army forces for landing at Utah Beach in France. (Public domain photo)



Morgantown resident Arthur Brown served on the USS_Enterprise for 28 months, from late 1942 Japanese ships anchored in Truk Lagoon are bombed by U.S. Navy aircraft in February 1944. through early '45. He worked mostly in damage control. (Public domain photo)



Allied forces returned in April for the final blow. (Public domain photo)

April 1944: World War II at 80

By Ronald P. May MCC Contributor

The tempo of the war intensified at the start of the second quarter of 1944.

April saw a return of bombing missions over the Ploiesti oil fields in Romania. A major source of oil for the German forces, the oil fields in Ploiesti produced 60 percent of the crude oil used by the German military.

Ploiesti's oil fields were first attacked by 172 allied aircraft flying from Libya, Africa, on Aug. 1, 1943.

While the attacks significantly damaged the oil refineries, the Germans anti-aircraft guns and fighter aircraft brought Disaster along down 52 of the bombers. Only 88 returned safely to Libya. More than 310 aviation crew members were killed or missing.

By April 1944, odds had shifted slightly in the Allies' favor. The Army Air Force bombers could reach Ploiesti from captured airfields on the southern Italian peninsula, cutting the earlier distance of 1,200 miles from Libya to a more manage-

able 600 miles. The April 5 raid was conducted by the new 15th Air Force, which was headquartered in Italy and now boasted new P-51 Mustang fighters to escort the bombers to Romania and defend them

from air attack. While the Germans again stubbornly defended the refineries and shot down many bombers, they began losing the war of attrition. They were unable to replace their planes and pilots lost in defending Ploiesti.

The oil refineries and supply network were significantly damaged, denying the Germans the full amount of oil needed to sustain their war machines. That meant a reduced number of planes flying, tanks moving, and trucks transporting.

Eighteen more bombing attacks on Ploiesti's oil refineries took place between April 6 and Aug. 19, 1944. The price of the raids was the steep loss of 223 bombers and fighters. But the cost to steeper. As a result of the tinued with their island had to be fixed or down



Arthur Brown (Arthur Brown courtesy photo)

raids, oil production was reduced by 80 percent. That meant a reduced number of German planes flying, tanks moving, and trucks driving.

the English Coast

Meanwhile, their final preparations ing on France in June.

In late April, *Exercise* nese assets on the island. Tiger took place along was designed as a dress rehearsal to prepare U.S. Army forces for landing

at Utah Beach in France. Several German S-boats (fast torpedo boats), tipped off by German intelligence via reconnaissance planes, snuck undetected into town, Ind., Brown was a the coastal waters where ship fitter sailor on board Allied ships were waiting to unload troops on the shore. The German pated in both raids. vessels fired upon U.S. LST's (Tank Landing Ships), sinking two of them. Up to 700 soldiers and sailors were killed during the attack by drowning, hypothermia, burns or injury.

The tragedy was kept a military secret to protect U.S. public morale and to ensure that Germany would not know the significance of damage or loss of life from their at-

It was an ominous reminder of the danger that lurked ahead for the Allies who would soon be hitting the beaches of France and stepping into heavy German defenses.

On the other side of ing went to heck or somethe Germans was even the world, the Navy con-thing down in the galley

Truk came under attack.

Island chain in the Central Pacific, Truk Island (today known as Chuuck Island), an atoll, had been occupied and used as a launching point for Japanese expansion.

The Japanese built five airfields on the island and parked 500 aircraft. The island's deep-water lagoon was even more impressive and widely thought to be the most formidable of Japan's Naval assets. It moored 1,000 ships that were ready to deploy when needed.

In February 1944, the U.S. Navy attacked the island by surprise with battleships, aircraft car-Allied riers, cruisers, destroyforces amassing in En- ers and submarines. The gland were beginning operation — codenamed "Hailstone" — was sucfor the amphibious land- cessful in delivering a major punch to the Japa-

Navy ships and Army the Slapton shoreline in Air Force bombers resouthwestern England. turned April 27-30 for The eight-day exercise the knockout blow, which resulted in 70 Japanese ships sunk and 400 air-

craft destroyed. Arthur Brown got a prime view of the devastating February and April attacks on Truk Island. An Iowa native and a later resident of Morganthe USS Enterprise aircraft carrier that partici-

Brown watched Japanese ships get hit by the U.S. planes as they tried

to escape from the base. "When the Jap ships came out of there (the base), we would detach our battleships or cruisers," he recalled. "I could see them shooting at those ships over there. I could see 'em smoking to beat the band and, just like you took a knife and cut it, sunk them. I could see it, just like watching television off the ship."

Brown served on the Enterprise for 28 months, from late 1942 through early '45. He worked mostly in damage control.

"We put the fires out," Navy raids in the Pacific Brown said. "Any plumb-

raids in the Pacific. On there where the doctors making critical repairs. April 29-30, the island of operate and everything We had to go down der frequent attack from

> worked all over the ship." plenty of opportunity to of her dedicated crew. hone their skills in put-

The Enterprise was un-Located in the Caroline there and plug stuff. We Japanese planes, ships Brown and the other hit on numerous occa- at

progress continued on the path to victory.

Next time: May 1944.

Learn more about Ronand submarines and was ald P. May and his books https://ronaldpmay. crew members assigned sions. She was kept afloat com or contact him at to damage control got only through the efforts ron@ronaldpmay.com. View his videos on his Such dedication from YouTube channel: World ting out fires, plugging all the branches of ser- War II History & Stories holes in the hull and vice in April ensured that with Ron May.

