

June 1945 – World War II at 80

(Part 1)

First Month of Peace in Europe

By Ronald P. May

The month of June was the first month of peace in Europe after almost six years of war.

The Berlin Declaration

On June 5, the Supreme Allied Commanders of the four victorious western nations: the United States (General Eisenhower), the Soviet Union (Marshal Georgi Shukow), the United Kingdom (Field Marshal Bernard Montgomery), and France (General Jean de Lattre de Tassigny) were in Berlin for the signing of the Berlin Declaration.

The instrument of surrender signed on May 8 produced the capitulation of Germany's armed forces, but there was still the need for a document to ensure the Germany's agreement to the authority of the four occupation armies.

The Berlin Declaration ensured that Germany was now officially under the governing authority of the four nations that occupied it.

2nd Lieutenant Harold W. "Pada" Weaver

The end of combat allowed some service members to finally enjoy the personal achievements in their military service.

Harold W. "Pada" Weaver savored wearing the shiny gold bars of a newly commissioned 2nd Lieutenant in the Army.

A Morgantown native, Weaver was a 1938 graduate of Morgantown High School.

Enlisting in the Army in 1941, he served with the 27th Infantry Division for 13 months in Hawaii.

He must have had his sights on flying with the Army Air Corps because after his time in Hawaii he began the arduous training as an aviation cadet.

It is not known whether he washed out or opted out of the program, but he returned to an infantry regiment at Camp Shelby, Mississippi four months later.

He was reassigned to the Army's newly activated 65th Infantry Division, 261st Regiment, F Company which deployed to Europe, arriving in France in January 1945.

And it was with this unit that he “flew” to different heights, advancing from the enlisted to the officer ranks.

His promotion came as a battlefield commission in recognition of his outstanding leadership in combat during the division’s 700-mile advance into Germany from January – May 1945.

Weaver, who had earlier in January risen in the enlisted ranks to First Sergeant, became the acting platoon leader after his Lieutenant was killed in March at the battle of Saarlautern in the Sarr region of Germany.

For the next 10 weeks, the division endured 60 days of combat.

On one occasion, after the division crossed the Danube River in Germany at the end of April, Weaver and his platoon endured 18 consecutive hours of intense fire from the Germans.

For his outstanding leadership during combat in Germany, Weaver was promoted from First Sergeant to 2nd Lieutenant in a battlefield commission held in Austria on May 9.

Weaver returned home to his wife, Jean, and their two daughters in Morgantown and lived a full life, dying at the age of 85 in 2004.

Major Hugh Couch

The end of the war in Europe did not lessen the work for Major Hugh Couch of Martinsville.

A Staff Judge Advocate with the Army Air Forces, Couch had arrived in central Italy in February 1945 to begin service with the 49th Bomber Wing, part of the 15th Air Force.

Born in Tipton, Indiana, in 1913, his family later moved to Mooresville where he graduated from Mooresville High School in 1930.

Couch was commissioned as a 2nd Lieutenant upon graduating from Indiana University’s ROTC program in 1934. He then graduated from the IU School of Law in 1937 and began practicing law in Martinsville.

He was called to active duty in August 1941 and, for the next several years, served at Kessler Field in Mississippi as Assistant Judge Advocate and then as Staff Advocate at the Air Force Technical Training School in Gulfport, Mississippi.

He was then assigned as the Staff Judge Advocate, 49th Bomber Wing, 15th Air Force in Italy, arriving in February 1945.

The 49th Bomb Wing flew B-24 Liberators and was headquartered at Castelluccio, Italy, located 125 miles northeast of Rome.

Couch, who was a Major at the time, was later promoted to Lieutenant Colonel in October 1945.

During his ten months of service in Italy (February-November 1945) he served as the principal legal advisor to his commander.

His work included providing legal advice on military bombing operations, advising on court-martial proceedings, ensuring his bombardment wing complied with the law of war and rules of engagement, and offering legal assistance to members of his wing in wills, powers-of-attorney, and legal problems.

He returned to the U.S. in December 1945 and was honorably discharged in March 1946.

He resumed his practice of civilian law, serving as the prosecuting attorney for Morgan County from 1947-51.

He was deputy attorney general for the state of Indiana at time of his death in June 1972 at the age of 58.

Lieutenant Richard Ayers

Although the war had ceased in Europe, the danger of flying had not.

Lieutenant Richard (Dick) J. Ayers of Martinsville tragically died during a plane crash in Ireland in June.

A 1941 graduate of Martinsville High School, Ayers enlisted in the Army Air Forces in July 1942.

He began his flight training in February 1943 and officially earned his wings at Freeman Army Airfield in November 1943.

Following further training in Alabama, Arkansas, Texas, Nebraska, and North Carolina, he arrived overseas in March 1944 and began serving as a pilot with the troop carrier command, first in England and later in Metz, France.

Ayers had taken part in the D-Day invasion, dropping paratroopers behind German lines and ferrying the wounded back to hospitals in England.

He had also participated in the invasion of Holland, the crossing of the Rhine, and other engagements.

At the war's end, Ayer flew freight cargo as well as wounded men to hospitals and POWs back to Allied bases.

His death occurred during an aircraft incident near Belfast in North Ireland on June 19, 1945.

Word of his passing was received on June 29 by telegram to his parents.

Adding to the tragedy, the news of his death came one day after the announcement of Ayer's engagement to Miss Phyllis Lockhart of Martinsville.

Even in peace, the cruel aftermath of war was still claiming victims.

Next time: June 1945 (part 2) – Victory at Okinawa

Learn more about Ronald P. May and his books at <https://ronaldpmay.com> or contact him by email at ron@ronaldpmay.com. Check out his videos on YouTube at: *World War II History & Stories with Ron May*.