

IN THE FLICKERING NIGHT BARRAGE WHICH PRECEDED THE CROSSING OF THE ROER, THE FLASHES OF EXPLODING SHELLS LIGHT UP A PILLAR OF WHITE-PHOSPHORUS SMOKE

THE ALLIES DRIVE FOR THE RHINE

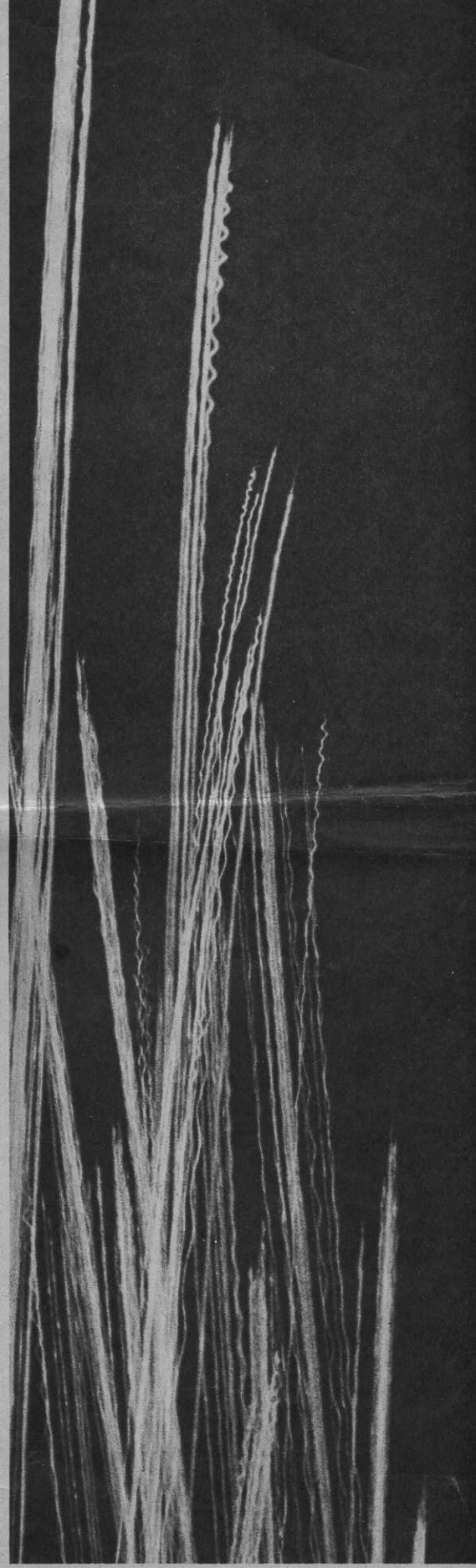
Since December the U. S. First and Ninth Armies had been building up strength behind the swollen little Roer River. On Feb. 23 they let it go with a stunning night barrage (*above and below*). The Germans at the river were quickly overpowered. Beyond the river the rigid framework of their Rhineland defense began to break down. A week after the first gun had been fired at the Roer, the Ninth had arrived at the Rhine opposite Dusseldorf. The men of the Ninth exchanged shots with the Germans on the other side.

Lieut. General William H. Simpson, commander of the Ninth (*see cover*), had been waiting for this drive to the Rhine. If the river was to be crossed by his army, the smooth crossing of the Roer was a battle rehearsal. For weeks the muddy little stream had been an obsession with the men of the Ninth. They prepared and planned to cross it early in February, in coordination with drives by the Canadians and General Patton's Third Army. But on the eve of the crossing the Germans opened the gates in the big

earth dams of the upper Roer, partly flooding the cabbage land of the lower valley. General Simpson was forced to postpone the crossing while his engineers calculated when it would be possible.

The engineers, watching the flood diminish, told the general the crossing could be made on Feb. 23. The Ninth began to get ready again. The men and tanks and portable sections of pontoon bridges moved up to the river. At 2:45 A.M. the barrage began and a smokescreen drifted over river to cover the crossing.

UNDERNEATH STRIATED LINES OF TRACER SHELLS, SMOKE GENERATORS ON THE WEST BANK OF THE ROER MAKE A LOW WHITE CLOUD TO HIDE THE MEN CROSSING THE RIVER

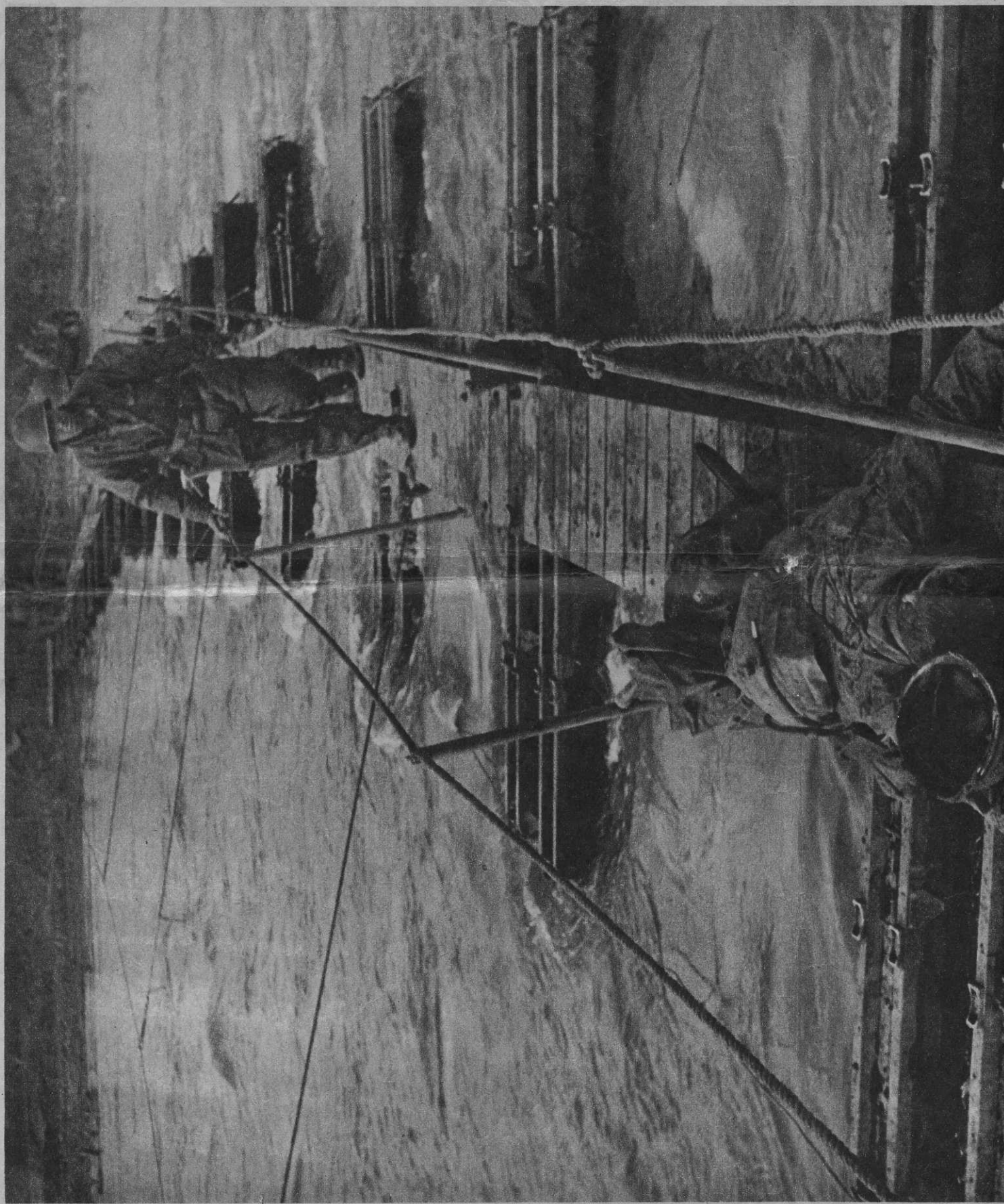




AS THE MORNING SUN SHINES THROUGH THE OPEN ROOF OF A HOUSE IN JÜLICH, NINTH ARMY INFANTRYMEN DASH ACROSS ROER UNDER GERMAN MORTAR AND MACHINE-GUN FIRE.

THE U.S. BREAKTHROUGH BEGINS WITH THE CROSSING OF THE ROER

The Ninth Army's crossing of the Roer was a short, violent struggle against the Germans and the river. Forty-five minutes after the night barrage had begun, assault boats and amphibious tractors started across in a great wave. In some of the boats were combat engineers, ferrying cables to moor their pontoon bridges in mid-stream. It was an excruciating few hours for the engineers. The flood had lessened but the current was still swift and strong. Runaway boats and pontoons careened





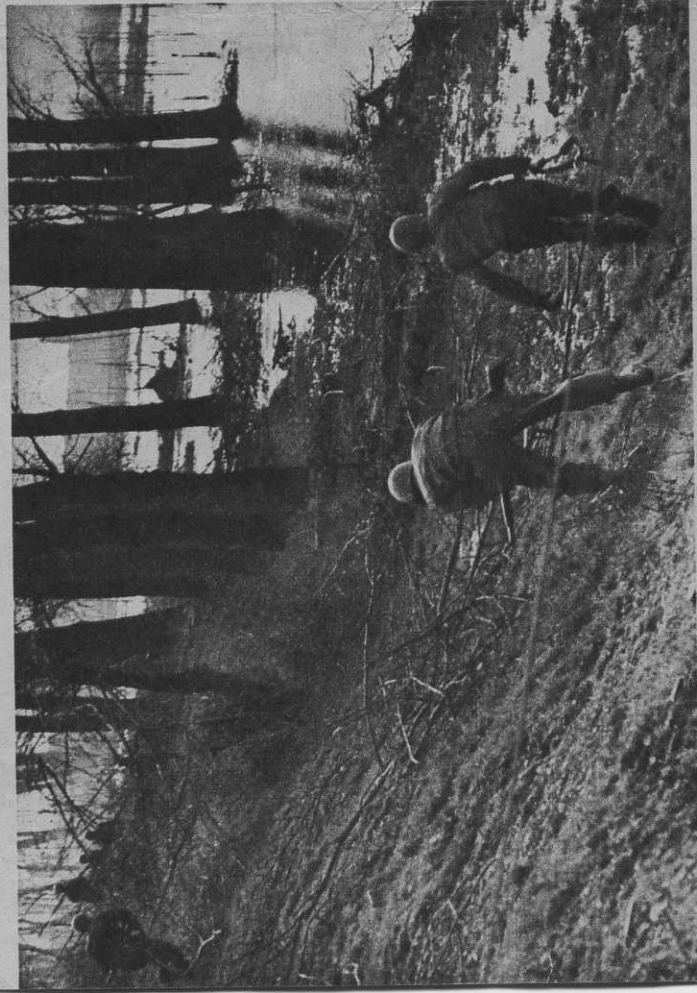
ON ANOTHER ROER FOOTBRIDGE LIES THE BODY OF AN AMERICAN SOLDIER WHO WAS HIT BY GERMAN MORTAR-SHELL FRAGMENTS WHEN HE WAS ONLY 50 FEET FROM EAST BANK

downstream, crashing into bridges as they were being built. As the work went on the Germans kept up a blind but deadly machine-gun and mortar barrage through the smokescreen. But in spite of difficulties there were two footbridges across the Roer in the morning. Later the engineers put in bigger bridges for trucks and tanks.

The hardest crossing on the Ninth Army front was made by the veteran 29th Division at Jülich, which appears on the far side of the river on the opposite page.

The wreckage along the Roer at Jülich was reminiscent of Normandy. All of Jülich except the ancient moated citadel was taken by afternoon, freeing the 29th to join the power drive across the Cologne plain. But even after the entry into Jülich, the crossings of the Roer were places of danger. The Germans still had the river under observation and shelled it heavily. The little bridge above and the dead soldier on it were principals in a grisly little drama which is unfolded on the following pages.

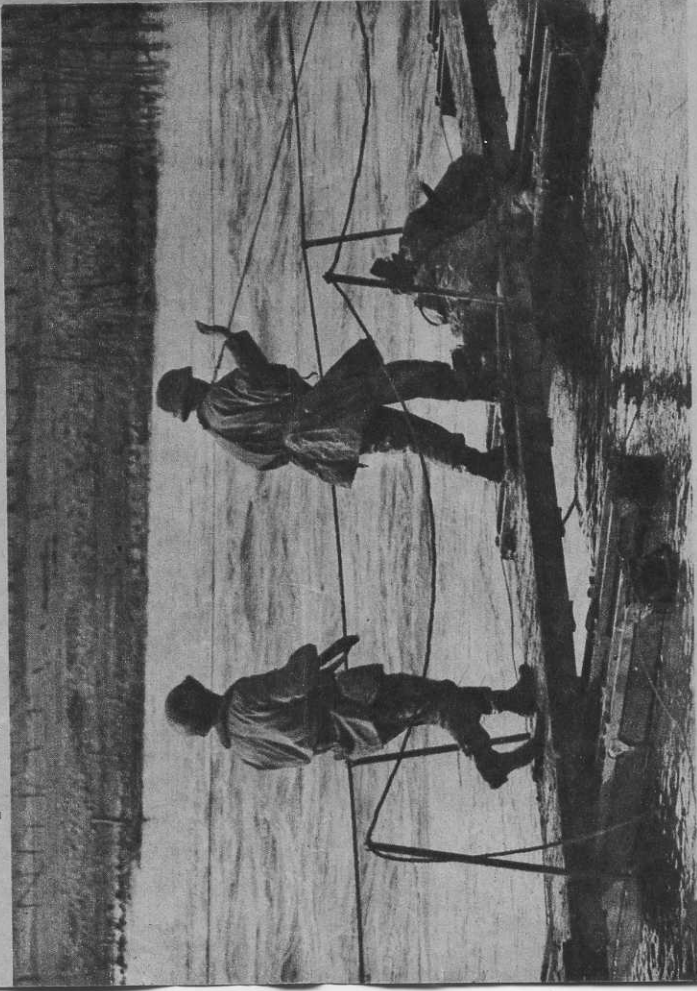
LIFE PHOTOGRAPHER GEORGE SILK RECORDS GRIM LITTLE INCIDENT



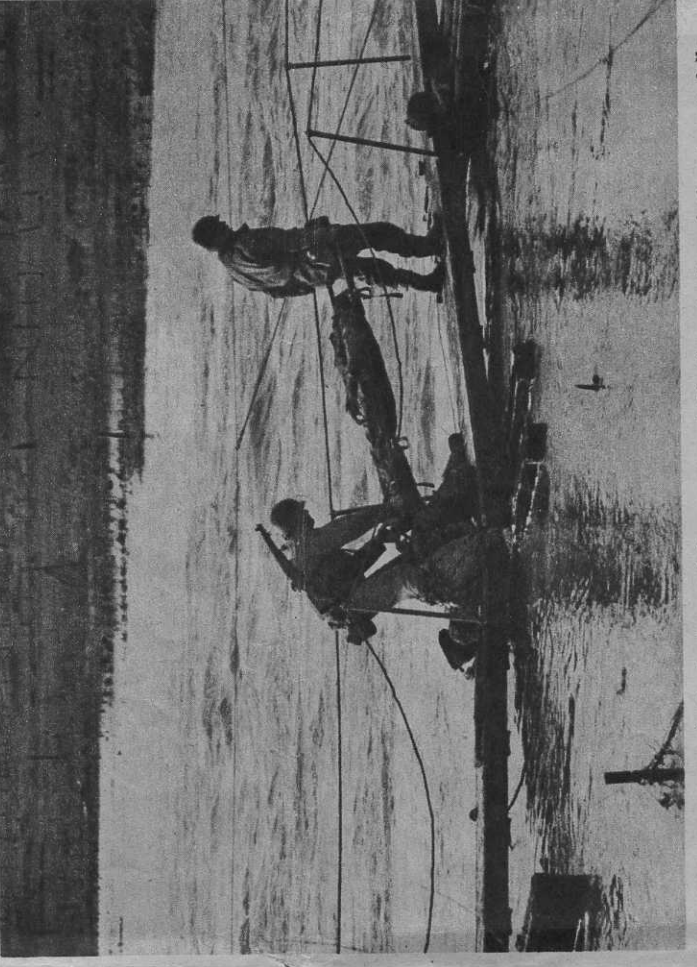
1 On the east bank of the Roer, engineers edge toward a little pocket of Germans left behind by the main advance. The Germans were sniping at the engineers on the bridge.



2 Some of the Germans walk out holding their handkerchiefs as white flags. The others, still undecided about surrendering, were killed when they fired a few halfhearted shots at the engineers.

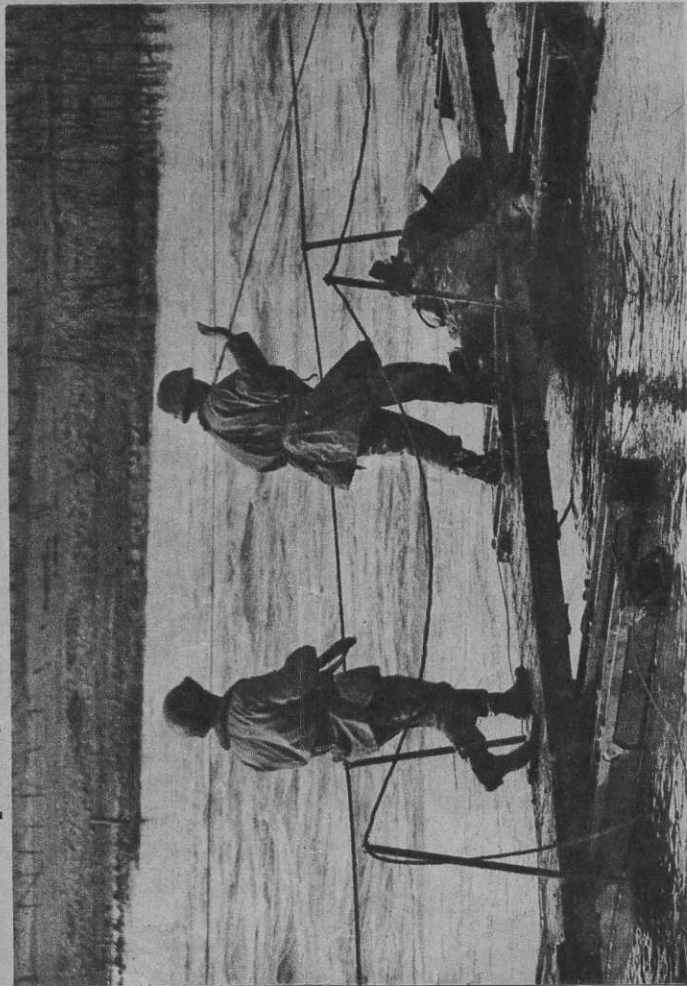


5 Walking across the bridge under guard, one of the prisoners hesitates as he picks his way over the body of the dead American shown in the picture on the preceding page.

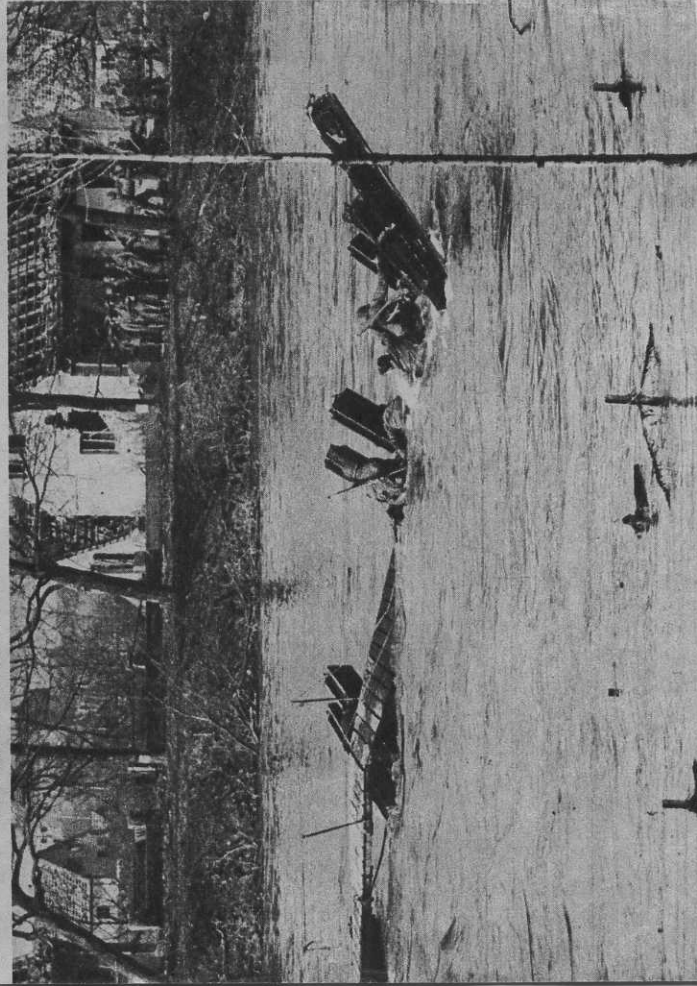


6 Stretcher-bearers bringing back one of the men wounded in the grenade explosion step carefully over the body. While they were crossing mortar shells began to fall in the water around them.

On the east bank of the river, engineers edge toward a main pontoon of German-made pontoons held in place by the main advance. The Germans were sniping at the engineers on the bridge.

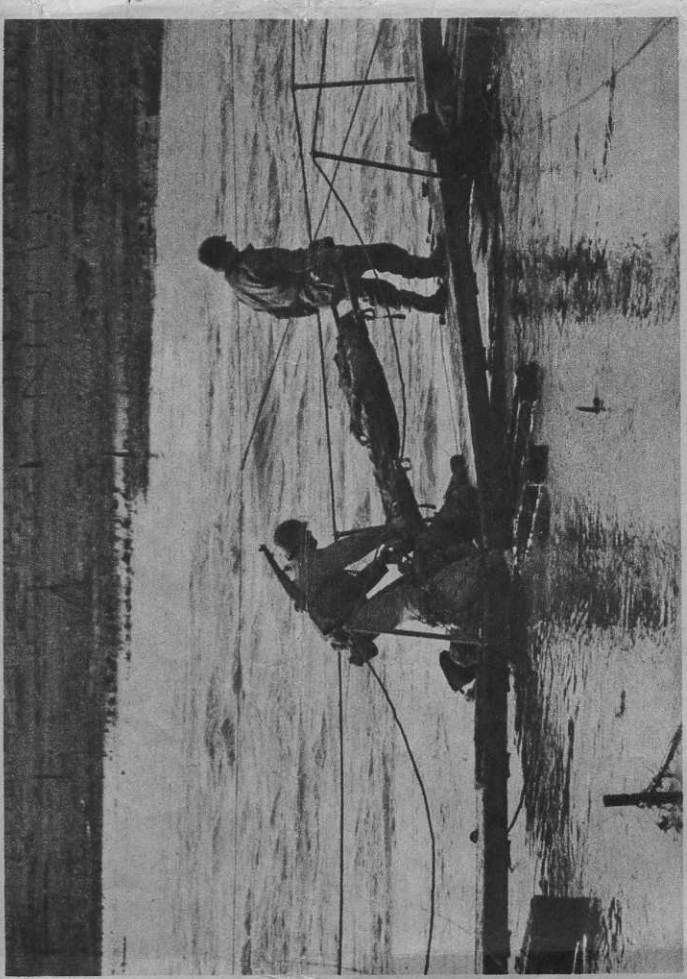


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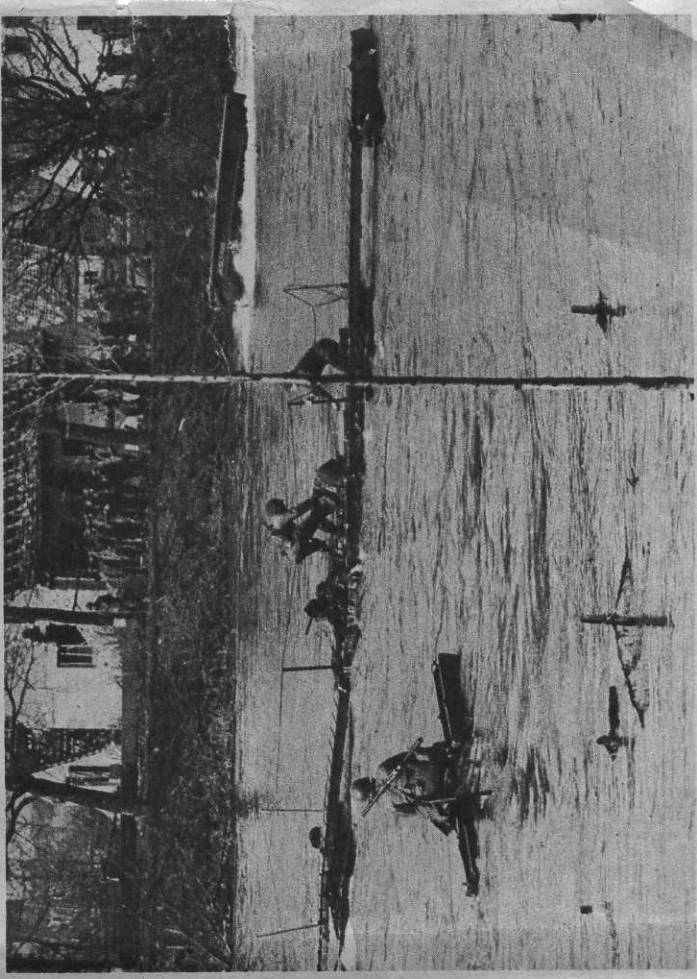


9 A pontoon capsizes when the fourth man climbs on to help the stretcher-bearers and the wounded man. On the west bank in the background other men look on transfixed.

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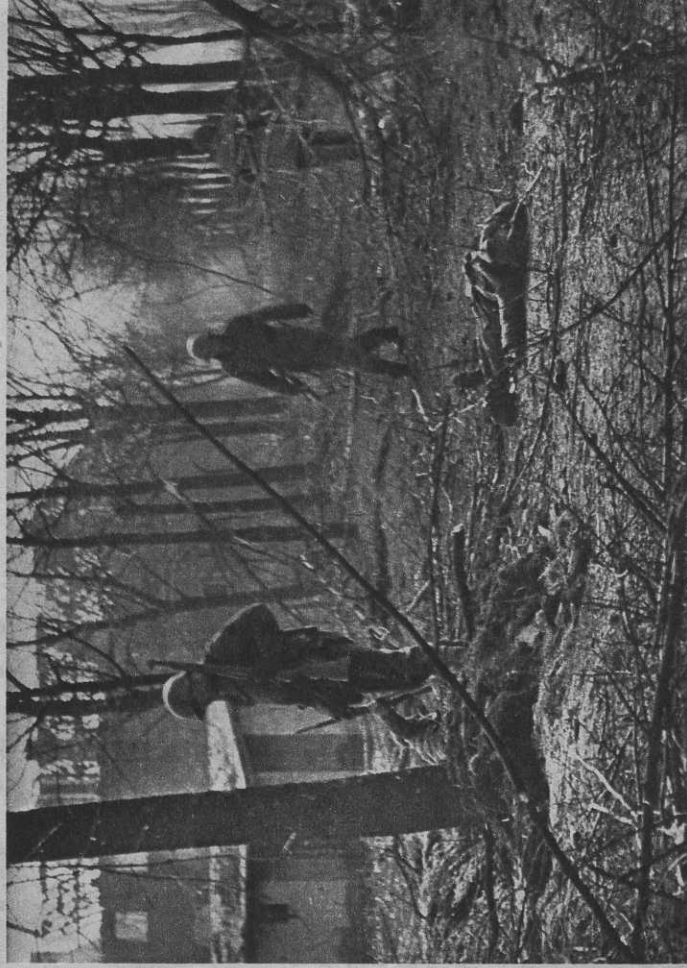
6 Stretcher-bearers bringing back one of the men wounded in the grenade explosion step carefully over the body. While they were crossing mortar shells began to fall in the water around them.



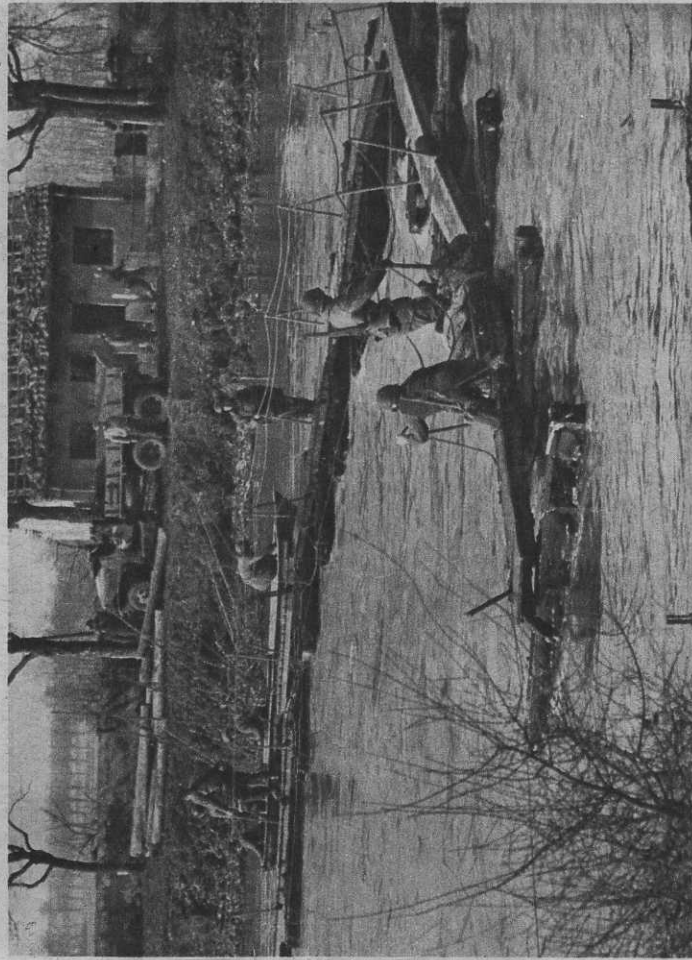
10 As the bridge rights itself, one of the stretcher-bearers pulls wounded man out of the water. The other floats downstream on a pontoon broken loose. The dead man still lies on the bridge.



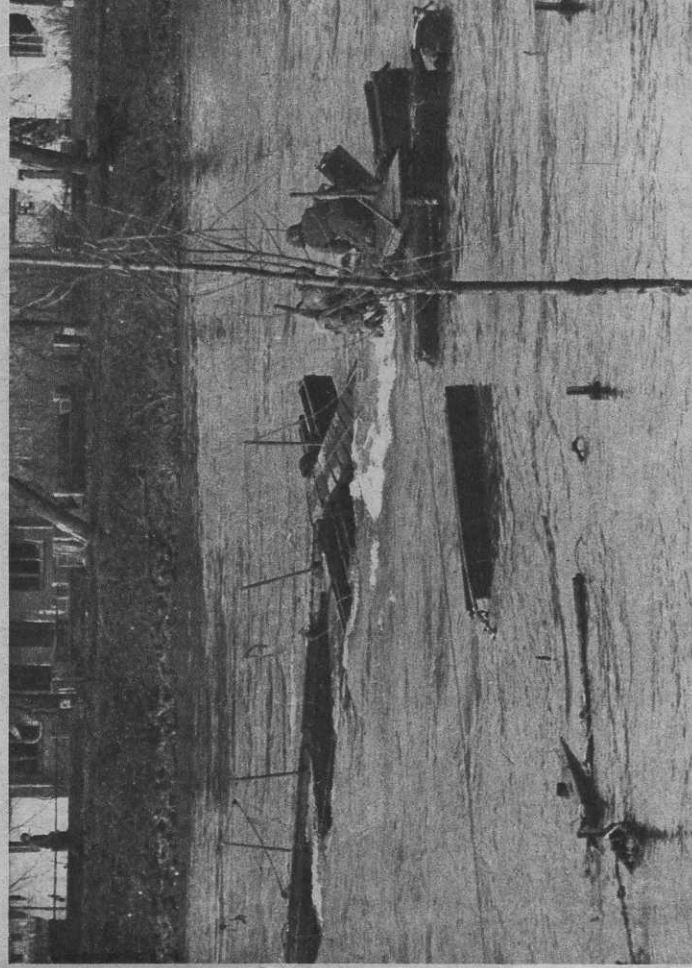
3 Two engineers herd the prisoners back to the bridge. Just after LIFE's George Silk made this picture, one of the prisoners pulled a live grenade out of his pocket and tossed it to the ground.



4 Dazed men stagger after explosion. The German who threw grenade lies dead (center). Two men at the left, one on the ground, are badly wounded. Silk was hit in leg.

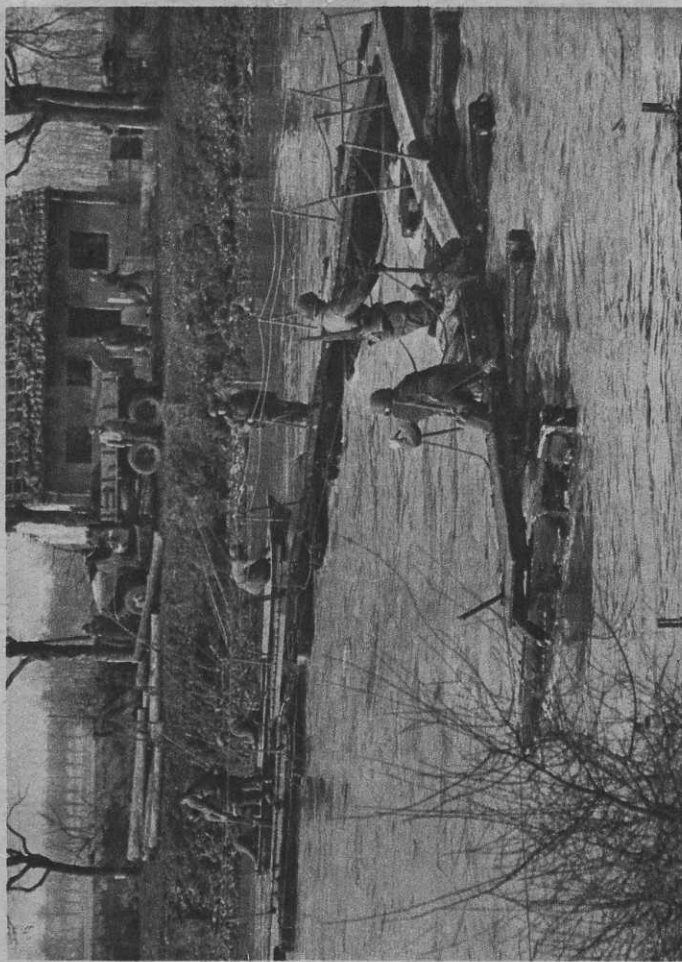


7 Cut by a mortar shell, the bridge swings downstream. Stretcher-bearers with another wounded man stand helplessly over the body on the bridge. Man in middle stands stunned by accident.



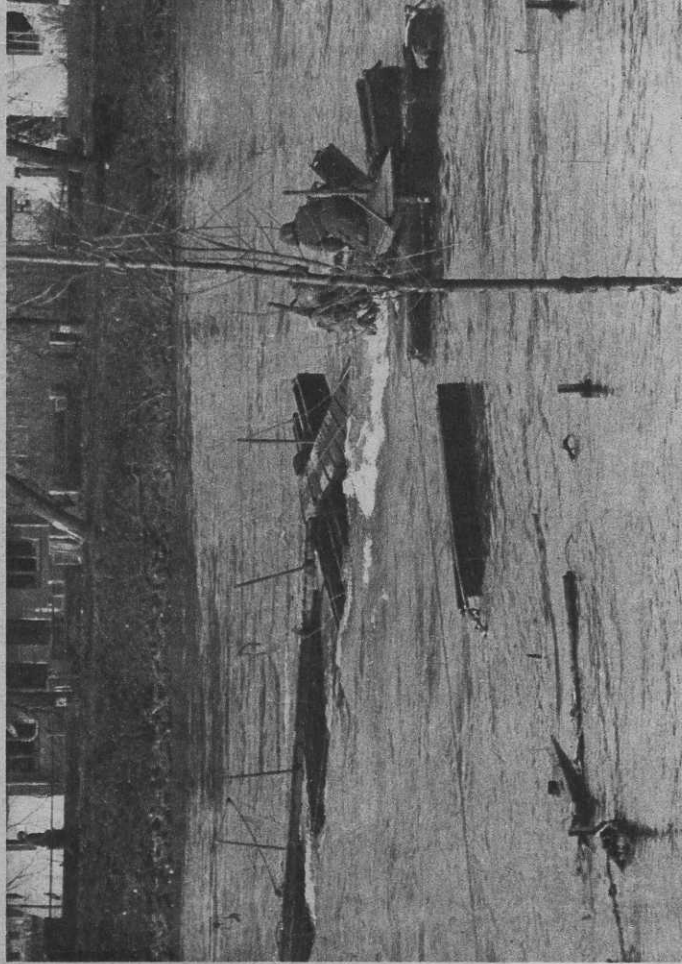
8 A splash of foam by the bridge marks where one of the men has dived in to help the stretcher-bearers, who are trying to keep the wounded man from falling into the river.

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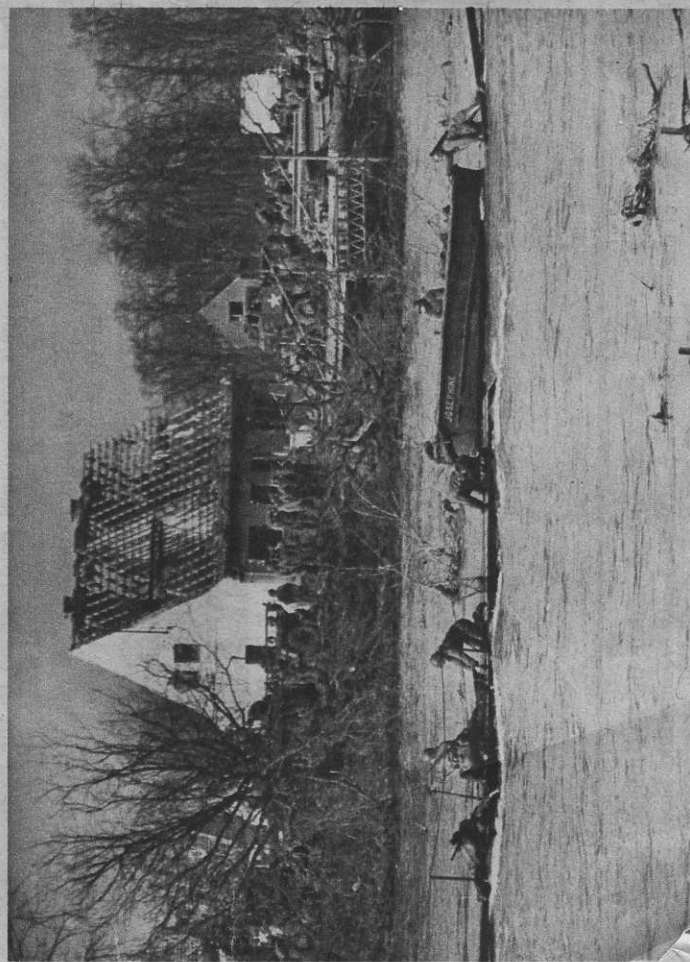


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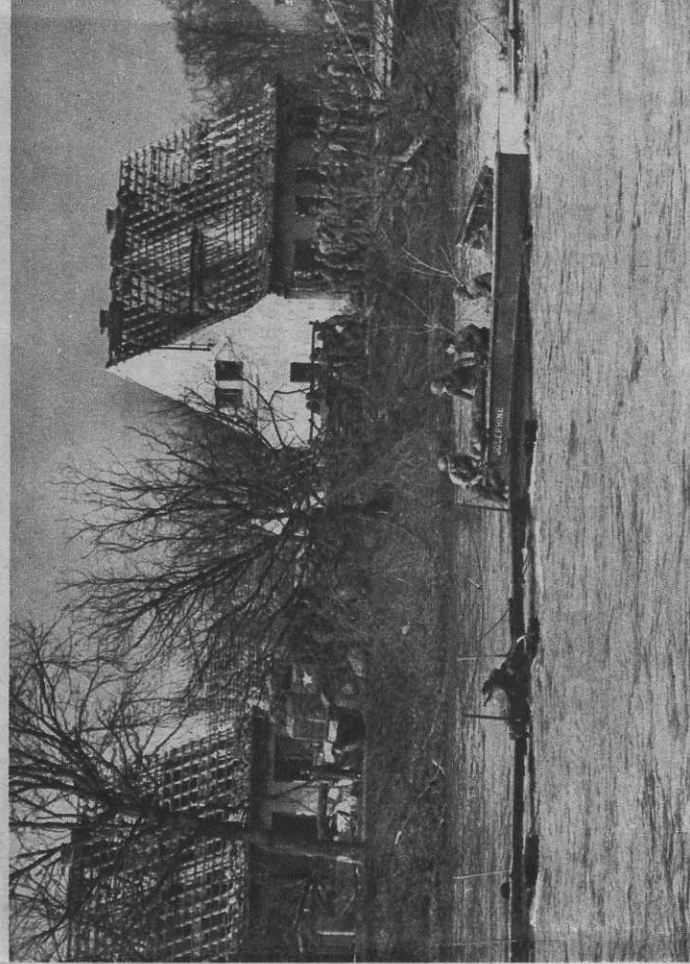
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11 Motorboat comes up and the man who had been floating away on pontoon climbs in at right. Man who had dived in and had been hanging on to bridge, now climbs out of water in center.



12 Everyone is taken aboard motorboat except the dead man. Bigger bridges had been built upstream, so little bridge was left swinging with dead man for the rest of the day.

U. S. ARMED MIGHT

WE DOMINATE THE SEA AND AIR AND OUR SPECIALTY IS RANGE

Every so often, the U. S. citizen should take a longer-than-usual look at the state of the war and of America's part in it. The news that American troops are on the Rhine and that the Marines are bloodily winning Iwo Jima, is more than a headline; it is a reason to consider the meaning of the military force that made these exploits possible and to ponder where it leads next.

In Europe the war is in its final stages. Eisenhower's current offensive may not pause until the main source of German industrial might, the Ruhr Valley, is destroyed. Since her secondary industrial sources in Silesia have already been overrun by the Russians, the end of effective German resistance cannot be many months off. Secretary Stimson warned last week that there are no signs of a "general collapse of morale" in Germany, and Eisenhower is prepared to fight for every mile of German soil. But at some point the battle for Germany, though it lasts, a long time, will become a mopping-up operation.

Perhaps the most significant recent development in the European war is the coordination of the Eastern and Western Fronts. Several weeks before the Yalta Conference, Moscow and SHAEF exchanged liaison representatives, and AAF-RAF bombings of Germany have been coordinated with the Russian advance since the middle of January. Nazi supply centers such as Dresden, Chemnitz, Leipzig, Cottbus, Stettin, Nurnberg and, of course, Berlin itself have been heavily bombed by Lieut. General Spaatz's fliers to make a path for the armies of Konev and Zhukov. Then, when the Russians paused to mop up the Baltic coast, AAF and RAF swung their main strength to cover Hodges, Patton and Simpson along the Rhine. That is coordination. As the President told Congress last week, such de-

pend solely on time and on whether the U.S. home front is willing to man and support them. They will prove far more difficult and costly than the invasion of Europe. It is a striking fact that the Fifth Fleet, which handled the landing of 40,000 marines on Iwo Jima, was equal in size (some 800 vessels) to the entire Anglo-American armada of the 1942 North African invasion. The Fifth Fleet, 8,000 miles from its supply base in the U.S., carried enough fuel oil to fill a solid train of tank cars reaching from Chicago to Detroit, and enough food to feed the city of Columbus, Ohio for a month. Too few civilians appreciate the size of the effort it will take, and the drain on our resources to fight the main Japanese army ashore. Yet it is our choice now, not Japan's. To have won the choice is itself a great military achievement.

How did we do it? Two recent reports give a large part of the answer: Secretary Forrestal's annual report on the Navy and General Arnold's special report on the Army Air Forces. They show how mighty we have grown on sea and in air. More than half of all Americans in uniform are in the Navy or the AAF.

Logistics and Interdiction

Six years ago the U.S. Navy was a rather stiff-necked club of some 120,000 men, jealous of its salt-water traditions, of its 23 battleships and of its British cousin. Today the carrier, not the battleship, is its pride; it no longer feels obliged to compare itself with the British or any other Navy; and of its 3,600,000 men and women, 87% had never smelled salt before Pearl Harbor. Topside it is honeycombed with energetic landlubbers. With the help of an advisory committee of civilian industrialists, it has revolutionized its logistical habits to keep pace with its

original Nazi blitzkriegs, so its neutralization made the Nazi defeat inevitable. General Arnold dates the turning point from February 1944, when AAF and RAF began their strategic round-the-clock raids on Nazi aircraft production. Readers may recall Charles J. V. Murphy's account of this turning point: *The Unknown Battle* (LIFE, Oct. 16). These raids cost our side 244 heavy bombers in five days, but the Luftwaffe never recovered. By May it "could not prevent us from attacking any part of the Reich." Nor did it show up on D-day, despite the rich target. Instead, AAF and RAF "sealed off" northern France for a battlefield, so that German supply lines were disorganized. One panzer division which came from Galicia to eastern France in five days took two weeks getting from there to the front. "No such degree of interdiction has ever before been seen," says Hap Arnold.

Americans are flying everywhere all the time in this war. An ATC plane crosses the Atlantic every 13 minutes. ATC planes fly 51,000,000 miles a month, the equivalent of 70 circumnavigations of the globe every day. Another dimension of our airpower: enough steel runway surfacing has been produced (and most of it sent overseas) to lay a four-lane highway from New York to San Francisco. Another: 525,000 sick and wounded men were evacuated by plane in 1944, of whom less than 40 died in flight. Another: the 7th Air Force, whose forward bases moved 2,200 miles nearer Tokyo during 1944, controlled an area five times that of the U.S.

The Meaning

General Arnold calls airpower "our first line of defense." Secretary Forrestal says "seapower is the foundation, though not the final element, of victory." It is the

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Our Choice, Not Japan's

The news from the Pacific is just as heartening. When the American flag went up on Mt. Suribachi, it unfurled over the entire Western Pacific Ocean. Except for the inner seas west and south of Japan, there is now no corner of that ocean where the U.S. Navy cannot move freely and no corner beyond the reach of U.S. land-based bombers. Taken together with the Philippines, the conquest of Iwo Jima means that American arms are now able to overrun any Pacific island we want to pay the human price for.

Including the islands of Japan? Yes, sooner or later. From Iwo Jima we can hold Honshu under regular reconnaissance as well as under more intensive bombing. Landings, either in Japan or the China coast, de-

a large part of the answer. Secretary Forrestal's annual report on the Navy and General Arnold's special report on the Army Air Forces. They show how mighty we have grown on sea and in air. More than half of all Americans in uniform are in the Navy or the AAF.

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Still more spectacular has been the expansion of U.S. airpower. In 1939 the air force of the U.S. Army had 28,000 men, 2,250 planes. It finished last year with 2,600,000 men and its Air Transport Command had delivered 40,000 planes overseas (a figure which does not include thousands sent by ship).

In aerial combat against Germany and Japan, the AAF by last year's end had lost 8,100 planes while the enemy lost at least three times that number. In every theater where Americans are fighting, the AAF and its allies have undisputed control of the air.

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The Meaning

General Arnold calls airpower "our first line of defense." Secretary Forrestal says "seapower is the foundation, though not the final element, of victory." It is the ground troops, of course, who do the dying and who (if they can get there) ultimately enforce one nation's will on another, the object of war. Yet it appears, as of 1945, that sea and airpower are likely to remain America's predominant contribution to the keeping of world peace and to our own defense.

Some military experts, those who contemplate another war, think of our sea and airpower as a substitute for allies, claiming this power can buy us as much time to prepare as did China, Britain and Russia in this war. But that is a shortsighted reading of power's meaning. The unique characteristic of seapower and airpower is *range*. They are at home in any waters, any skies; and they seek the horizon as naturally as an eagle seeks height. In peace, their natural function is to extend and police the channels of trade, travel and communication among all the nations. America's interest in the world is henceforward as universal as our far-wandering planes and ships.

for a talk designed to formulate the Republican position on a postwar security organization. Said Stassen, "The U.S. has left isolation behind."

Minnesota. On Feb. 27 Commander Stassen visited Governor Thomas Dewey, titular head of the party, at the Executive Mansion, Albany, N.Y.

PICTURE OF THE WEEK:

One of three Republicans selected for the coming United Nations Conference in San Francisco is Commander Harold Stassen, former governor of