

Welcome to *After the Battle*



The pictures which set me off on the I-wonder-what-it-looks-like-now trail back in the 1950s. In 1911, Winston Churchill was the Home Secretary, this well-known picture of him being taken during the Siege of Sidney Street in East London.

Since I launched the magazine in August 1973, many people have asked me how my interest in the Second World War evolved and what were the circumstances which led me to create 'ATB'. So here goes.

Our lives are shaped by many events and experiences, particularly during our 'formative' years and two things stick out in my memory. The first was that while I was still at school I wanted to visit the scene of the Siege of Sidney Street (in Whitechapel in East London) to see what No. 100 looked like. The fact

that a six-hour battle, between the army and police against two, or maybe three, anarchists, had taken place in an ordinary street in the East End in January 1911 had captured my imagination after reading about it in the 1935 Silver Jubilee publication *25 Years*, and I took the book along with me one day in the school holidays — it must have been around 1954-55. Then, the house was still standing but I remember being disappointed not to find it covered with bullet holes. (It was demolished in 1956 — see *The East End Then and Now*.)



Little did I know then that some 40 years after my schoolboy visit to Sidney Street, I would be standing in my namesake's place on the exact anniversary of the siege in 1997. From *The East End Then and Now*, page 258



On our way . . . above: Normandy 1944 below: the same spot in 1973.

The second influence on me was the BBC television series of 1959 in which war correspondents returned to the battlefields (which I describe in more detail in my editorial in issue 25). Unfortunately, the BBC tell me that they no longer hold a copy of *After the Battle* programmes but I can distinctly remember one scene where the wartime film merged into the scene today, 'then' becoming 'now'. So I actually went to France to try to see if it was possible to find and match up pictures taken during the war. I pinched the name and the rest, as they say, is history!

The idea of a return visit to Normandy to coincide with the anniversary of D-Day — June 6 — had taken shape the month before. What was to make this trip special was the decision to travel in a wartime-vintage Willys Jeep, restored to its former glory after several months hard work, which I hoped I could photograph in the locations of the 1944 inva-



sion. Several dozen pictures had been obtained from the Imperial War Museum in London and I wondered, in spite of the vague captioning, if one could still find the locations and, using our Jeep as 'set dressing', take 'then and now' comparison photographs.

During the trip it was evident that it was possible — with effort — to find the wartime locations and from this developed the germination of an idea for a new magazine about the Second World War based on the theme of comparison photographs. What made publication easier was the fact that since 1958 I had been running the family printing business in East London, so I felt that I could justify the time spent on research because it was helping to fill machine time on the presses.



Who would have believed that this Churchill AVRE assault tank lay buried beneath a minor road (top) just off the invasion beaches?

Some of the discoveries we have made along the way have since become history in themselves, like the buried Churchill tank we pinpointed in 1973 in Normandy (issue 1) being dug out by the British Army three years later in the presence of two of the original crew (issue 15). Many places have changed dramatically over the intervening years, like the junction where Reinhardt Heydrich was assassinated in Prague in 1942, almost unchanged when we showed it in a major feature in issue 24 but later altered out of all recognition (issue 39), or like the area around the famous Remagen bridge over the Rhine in issue 16 — left much as it was up to 1975 but since having undergone considerable change.

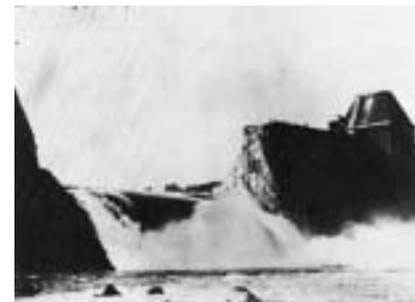


The first bridge captured intact over the Rhine at Remagen. We pictured what was left of it in issue 16.

The search for the original location of the places depicted in some wartime photographs has meant much detective work, for often the censor deliberately deleted the location for obvious reasons. At other times the photographer concerned either gave an inaccurate description or was misled as to where he really was. Even in England, all is not straightforward and we illustrated a typical example in issue 50.

Sometimes the caption writer altered the meaning of the event shown — either for propaganda purposes or through ignorance — and many times the facts have only been established by visiting the town or village in question to find out what really happened. A good illustration was given in issue 25 where the American censor 'transformed' one picture of GIs looting a wounded German soldier into that of giving him first aid!

Several times photographs have been found to be reversed — the sort of error easy to miss if there is nothing in the picture to show left from right but only



Just how did the famous places of World War 2 look today . . . like arnhem (top) issue 2 for the Ruhr dams (right) visited in issue 3? After the Battle has spent the last 15 years finding out — these comparisons (below) at Dunkirk are also from issue 3.



found out by visiting the place concerned. We showed a Canadian photograph with this fault when we visited the Falaise battlefield in issue 8. In the same edition we were able to find the location of several previously uncaptioned photographs taken of the terrible death and destruction in the Corridor of Death where German troops were concentrated, trying desperately to escape from the Falaise pocket.

Even as a schoolboy in the 1940s I had often wondered what the battlefields were really like. One read of the exploits of Guy Gibson bombing the Dams (issue 3); commandos landing at Dieppe (issue 5); of the horrors of Dachau (issue 27) or the terrible massacres at villages like Oradour sur Glâne (issue 1) in France and Bande in Belgium (issue 30) . . . and wondered. What were those places really like? Now thirty years later here I was visiting and photographing each of them and standing on the very same spot where Hitler spoke to the masses at Nuremberg (issue 2) or Mussolini's corpse swung from a garage forecourt in Milan (issue 7).



And what did those famous personalities do during the war? We have covered these individuals and many others in various issues of the magazine.

I have also had the opportunity to meet many famous personalities who told me their war stories like Lieutenant-Colonel David Niven (*issue 4*); Captain Douglas Fairbanks Jnr (*issue 6*); Lieutenant Richard Todd (*issue 5*), and Oberjäger Max Schmeling the German ex-boxer-cum-paratrooper (*issue 13*).

It was fascinating to research the background to the stupid road accident which fatally injured the flamboyant American

General, George Patton, and visit the place where it happened in December 1945 (*issue 7*) and even more so to visit the spot where his British contemporary, Field-Marshal Sir Bernard Montgomery, had accepted the German surrender on Lüneburg Heath just a few months earlier (*issue 48*). Was the old monument recording the event still on the mound that Monty christened 'Victory Hill', I wondered? I was disappointed.



Tracking the 'Wolf' to his lair. Where was the Wolfspalaast Hitler used in 1940 and what was it like. We gave the answer in *issue 19*.

Hitler's house — the famous Berghof— or more accurately the remains of it on Obersalzberg, we visited in 1975 and presented in *issue 9*; two years later came the opportunity to visit

all his headquarters' — the secret Führerhauptquartiere from which the war in Europe had been conducted throughout its various phases. All the HQs were illustrated as they were and as





From one of the first of Hitler's headquarters to the remains of his last, visited by *After the Battle* for the first time since it was sealed.

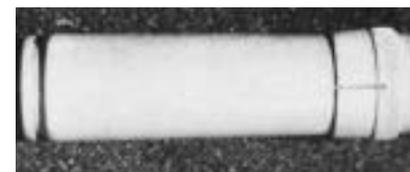
they can be seen today in *issue 19*, but the holy of holies, the bunker in Berlin, eluded us, situated as it was in the no man's land behind the Wall and buried under a mountain of earth and rubble.

Yet even there the impossible came true in 1988 when we were, exceptionally, granted permission to witness and photograph the exposure of the suicide bunker and its destruction (*issues 61 and 62*).



The relics: Barnes Wallis's unique 'bouncing bombs' designed to breach the Ruhr dams — these dropped during practice were found on a Kent foreshore (*issue 25*).

The relics of the battles were equally as fascinating. In Malta (*issue 10*) we were privileged to hold in our hands the famous George Cross awarded to the island for its fortitude under fire, and in Scotland we tracked down weapons and radio sets carried by German spies into Britain (*issue 11*), and still in the possession of the police officers who arrested



The phial in which Hermann Göring hid his suicide pill is now in a private collection in America (*issue 31*).

them. When we followed up the suicide of Heinrich Himmler (*issue 14*), who would have guessed that, 45 years after he was captured by British troops, the very attaché case, comb and nail-file he was carrying at the time would come into our hands.

Ever since I heard the original BBC recording by the 'British sergeant-major who saw him die', the bizarre death of the Gestapo chief had held my interest. Where was that room where they 'threw a blanket over him and left him'? Thirty

A female form which once smiled down on American flyers of the Eighth Air Force was still to be seen at their derelict airfield in East Anglia (*issue 30*).



The search for the truth behind the well-known photos of the war. We discovered that this picture of a surrendering Frenchman in 1940 had been taken at Denée and is most probably a recreation made later by the Germans (*issue 51*).

years after the event I knew the answer, yet an amazing sequel led me to return to Germany a year later with two of the soldiers who had dug his secret grave in a nearby forest (*issue 17*).

In trying to present a cross-section of stories which would interest our increasing world-wide readership, we travelled further afield. Our first venture to the Pacific was in *issue 15* when we described the bloody battle to capture Tarawa Atoll against an enemy whose greatest honour was to die in battle

rather than be captured to live a life of shame as a prisoner-of-war. Certain stories have warranted devoting whole issues to them as one cannot tailor history to fit a specific number of pages without robbing the event of interesting detail — Pearl Harbor (*issue 38*) and Okinawa (*issue 43*) being prime examples. For the latter issue an ex-Marine returned to the sights and scenes of the awful battle fought in 1945 to capture the first piece of Japanese home territory — with all the horrors that entailed.



The deliberate re-creations by film makers after the war are covered in many features on the making of war movies. In *Angels One Five*, Jack Hawkins was filmed outside a real-life Battle of Britain operations room at RAF Kenley (*issue 30*).



In-depth coverage in our first three hard-back books: the men and machines of Britain's 'finest hour', the bases of the US Eighth Air Force in Britain, and the battlefields of the First World War.

Although our camera has ranged around the world, events at home have not been neglected. Britain's own battle in 1940 was considered of such importance that a mere magazine article would never do it justice; our response being our 800-odd page book *The Battle of Britain Then and Now* published in 1980 (now in its seventh edition). Our previous two books covered the First World War battlefields in *Before Endeavours Fade* in 1976, and the wartime bases of the USAAF in Britain in *Airfields of the Eighth Then and Now* published in 1978, both since reprinted several times.



Before Endeavours Fade: where men fought . . . and where men died.

Various aspects of crime during the war have been examined: a mutiny in Lancashire in **issue 22**; the alleged shooting of German airmen in Sussex in **issue 23**; the ill-treatment of American GIs in Staffordshire, **issue 27**; the execution of a British soldier for murder on the very morning of D-Day in **issue 45** and the infamous Rüsselsheim 'Death March' in Germany (**issue 57**) being some of the crimes covered.

Several features have reported on the recovery of the mortal remains of servicemen long after the battle's end, one of our most significant discoveries being the spot where the German panzer ace Michael Wittmann lay buried. Prior to our research he had been posted simply as missing in action but his remains and those of his crew were found in a French field by the German War Graves authority and accorded a decent burial amongst their fellow-Servicemen who had been killed in Normandy in 1944 (**issue 48**) as a result of our research into his last battle. This story was also subsequently featured in 1983 in our book *Panzers in Normandy Then and Now* which covered the efforts by the Panzertruppen to stem the tide of the Allied invasion.



Crime in wartime. We have presented investigations into incidents involving all nationalities, this particular picture being taken at Webling in Germany in 1945 and included in **issue 27**.



It has been a pleasure to bring together former adversaries — in the case of these two airmen, on the exact spot in France where they had first met in 1941 (**issue 46**).



In situ. Some relics can still be seen virtually intact (*above in issue 1*); others are now merely battered remnants of battle (*below in issue 33*).

Of things more temporal, a wide variety of wartime relics have been preserved and pictured, including a relic of the Long Range Desert Group, recovered from the North African desert in **issue 44**; a midget submarine from Norway in **issue 17**; a Japanese fighter, **issue 28**; a Churchill tank in Britain, **issue 46** and big guns from Gibraltar, **issue 33**. One amazing recovery, described in **issue 20**, was of a genuine Panther tank found in a south London scrapyards in 1977, and now restored and running in Germany.

To cater for the increasing interest in the restoration and preservation of military

vehicles, in 1982 *After the Battle* launched a sister magazine titled *Wheels & Tracks*. We had already covered several stories with a preservation theme — a Royal Artillery Quad in **issue 13**, a RMASC Centaur in **issue 18**, Monty's wartime caravans in **issue 20** — with others on the expanding collections of military vehicles to be seen in England (**issue 1**), Holland (**issue 9**), Malta (**issue 10**), Australia (**issue 11**), and Belgium (**issue 32**). Now a separate magazine was to devote its entire contents to a subject which was to become an absorbing hobby for enthusiasts throughout the world.





Soem relics have been pulled from the sea like the recovery of this Sherman DD from off the Normandy beaches featured in *issue 34* . . .

Possibly the 'tallest' story we have included was that in *issue 39* when we climbed an 8,500-foot mountain in the French Alps to the place where an Avro York had crashed in November 1944. The aircraft was carrying Air Chief Marshal Leigh-Mallory — the Allied air command-

er for D-Day — to a new posting in South-East Asia. The plane never arrived and its loss was a mystery until the snow melted in June 1945 to reveal the sad end. Thirty-seven years later we picked up the pieces — literally — in recounting events which led to the plane's discovery.



. . . or rescued from the Sahara sands in *issue 44*.



'Then and now' comparisons are the central theme of *After the Battle*, whether in the countryside like this pair from *The Battle of the Bulge Then and Now* . . .

A sortie behind the Iron Curtain was made in 1983 to Hungary (*issue 40*) for a story which included Otto Skorzeny's dramatic raid on the Burgberg in Budapest in October 1944. We had already published other accounts of operations masterminded by Germany's

world famous commando leader when he rescued Mussolini (*issue 22*) and in the Battle of the Bulge (*issue 4*) where his men fought behind the lines in American uniform. So much interest was generated by the publication of the latter issue in 1974 that we decided to cover the wider





... in the cities like these taken in Paris in 1944 in *issue 14* ...

story of the German attack in the Ardennes in 1944 in hard-back form, *The Battle of the Bulge Then and Now* appearing on the 40th anniversary of the battle in 1984.

Just when and where British commandos carried out raids against the United Kingdom was included in another of our hardback books *The War in the Channel Islands Then and Now* published in 1981. In it we visited all the islands on a grand photographic tour to show the only part of Britain occupied by the Germans — even down to the place where they set up the only concentration camp on British soil.

For more than ten years access to the Eastern Front was denied us, but with the 40th anniversary of the end of the Second World War in 1985 came an official invitation to visit the Soviet Union (*issue 50*). This was followed up in 1988 (*issue 63*) with another visit behind the Iron Curtain to the most famous of all prisoner-of-war camps — Colditz — where we traced the routes of all the well-known escape attempts in and around the castle. Rudolf Hess and his

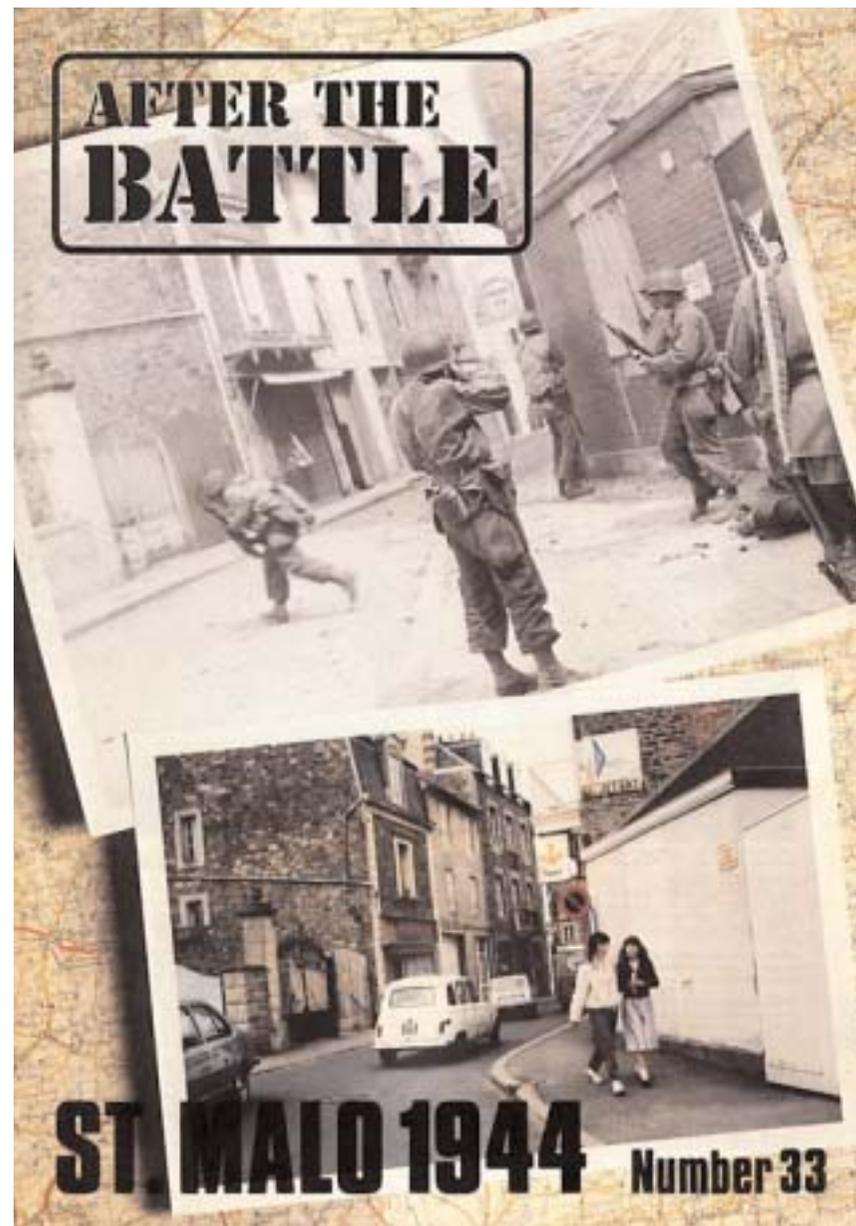
strange flight to Britain in 1941 came in for detailed examination in *issue 58*, the route he took being followed from his now-demolished home in Munich ... to Scotland ... to London ... to Wales ... and back to Germany to his death in Spandau 46 years later.

Another project which involved detailed research over a time span longer than the actual period it describes, covers the Blitz on Britain. From September 1939 to May 1945, in three volumes every significant event is depicted, and day-by-day accounts in *The Blitz Then and Now* bring back an era when war came home to every household in Britain.

During the last thirty years it has been your editor's intention to bring history to life by presenting it in a form which relates directly — through the photographs — to the present day. To have walked in the footsteps of the famous and not so famous; to have stood on the ground where battles have been won and lost, and where men have lived and died for their ideals, has been an experience of a lifetime which you can share with us in *After the Battle*.



... or suburban streets as in Croydon in *issue 40*.



A typical front cover of *After the Battle*. This issue (No. 33) showing the main story of *St. Malo 1944* — Cezembre and A town is reborn and also containing features on *Preservation* — Spur Battery dismantled and *Sequel* — The Commandos Return.