11.14: The Monuments Men and Women

Overview to German surrender

-- General Eisenhower commanded the Allied invasion at Normandy. Surprised the Germans, who believed the invasion would come at the narrowest point in the Channel, at Calais. Also had been fed false intelligence.

 --100,000 men landed in the first two days

 --within 3 months another 2 million joined them (WA, 240)

--World at War clip, mins 15-32. Vol 17, “Morning.” Will hear soldiers’ first hand accounts.

Brutality also clear in first 15 mins of Saving Private Ryan.

--Allied forces also moved north from the Mediterranean and Paris was liberated in late August 1944.

--but the Allies would continue to face significant battles. Germans had their own defensive line called the Siegfried Line, mirroring the Maginot Line, and had a force of 10 million men, calling up all those of fighting age, 16 to 60. Eisenhower didn’t want to wait out the winter and launched offensive across the Rhine.

--But allied supplies were running low, faced challenges of winter weather, Hitler launched a successful counteroffensive in Dec. 1944, created a bulge in Allied Lines, known as the Battle of the Bulge.

--but the Germans were weakened. Running low on soldiers and supplies. Allied tactics also greatly undermining morale. Dresden was flattened by British fire bombing Feb. 13-14, 1945, during which 135,000 people were killed. This is where we see massive civilian casualties in military operations.

--from the east, Soviets they reached the borders of Poland and Romania by the summer of 1944. Poland was caught between advancing Soviets from the east, and Germans retreating to the West.

--The Polish government in exile, headquartered in London, called for an uprising in Warsaw in August 1944, which lasted until October, brutally repressed by Germans, at cost of 200,000 Polish civilian lives. W and A point out that this was “the last German victory.” (242)

--A particularly tragic angle of this story is that the Soviet forces could have intervened to stop carnage but let the Germans decimate the Polish opposition, aiming to replace Germans as dominant power there.

--in the final push to defeat Germany, the Western Allies broke through the Siegfried Line in Feb 1945. That month, the Big Three again met, at Yalta in the Crimea, on the Black Sea, to make final plans for defeat of Germany. They also discussed how the Allies would manage their occupation of defeated Germany. SU would be allowed to take Berlin, which meant they also would occupy Poland—recognition of successes since 1943.

--Eventually, the Soviets reached Berlin, April 30, 1945 – the day that Hitler and his companion, Eva Braun, committed suicide in his bunker, after having hastily married.

Germans surrender to Western Allies, May 8, 1945; May 9 to Soviets—that’s the VE day they recognize.

An estimated 35 million killed in Europe. 17 million soldiers, 18 million civilians.

Roosevelt died in April 1945, succeeded by Truman.

Britain carried out Dresden firebombing.

The Real Monuments Men and Women

On Rorimer: challenges faced by MM as trying to save European heritage?

Continual lack of personnel, supplies, vehicles. George Stout used sheepskin coast at Alt Aussee Austria to protect paintings because he didn’t have packing supplies.

An estimated 5 million works of art, books, Judaica, manuscripts, other cultural objects were recovered and sent to countries of origin. Each national government then managed restitution to rightful owners.

Rose Valland: needed to be sure she could trust Rorimer before she gave him her notes.

Stunning example:

Heilbronn: 10k square yards used for storage, 20 square miles of minable salt there. Concerned about water seeping in. Was pooling about 100k gall per day. 3 million gallons had collected before removal began.

Kochendorf mine, p. 147

Theft from Laufen mine

Hungarian crown—Col Pajtas was commander of the Royal Hungarian Guards. [Major Kubula, American] Pajtas had buried the crown. Ended up going to the US, restituted to Hungary under Carter presidency.

Works of art didn’t always go to rightful owners. Thousands were sold and resold, some were held by governments of liberated countries. Restitution issues still continue today, questions over legal ownership due to multiple sales. Is an aspect of the Holocaust that allows some heirs to seek belated justice for their families, but legal procedures are expensive and it tends to be wealthier families who are willing to make that investment.