

An artistic illustration of three Supermarine Spitfires flying in formation over a green, hilly landscape under a blue sky with wispy clouds. The aircraft are dark blue with yellow and red roundels on the wings and fuselage. The top plane has 'ON OY' on its tail, the middle one 'ON OH', and the bottom one 'ON OF'.

# READER'S DIGEST WAR STORIES

Daring first-hand accounts of World War II  
*from the magazine archives*

FOREWORD BY LORD JOCK STIRRUP

Reader's  
Digest

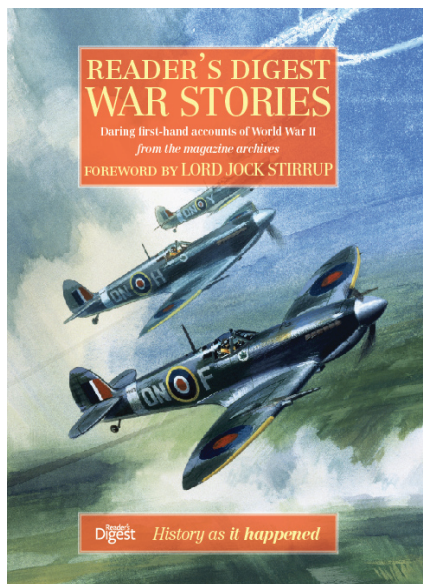
*History as it happened*

## READER'S DIGEST WAR STORIES

Daring First-Hand Accounts of World War II

*Reader's Digest*

**ISBN-13:** 978-1-78020-101-6  
**Imprint:** Reader's Digest  
**RRP:** £9.99  
**Format:** Hardback



### MARKETING POINTS

Foreword by Lord Jock Stirrup,  
former Chief of the Defence Staff

Nostalgia title published for  
Father's Day

First person accounts of  
World War II from soldiers and  
civilians across the globe

Includes articles by Cornelius Ryan  
and Harry Secombe

### SPECIFICATIONS

Size (HxW): 184 x 132mm  
 Extent: 160pp  
 Illustrations: 40 colour and b/w  
 Edition: First  
 Word Count: 55,000

### PUBLICATION DATE JUNE 2012

First Published: 2012  
 Rights Available: UK & Eire  
 Category: Travel UK  
 BIC Code: HBWQ/WQN

### DESCRIPTION

This compelling anthology has been drawn from the archives of Reader's Digest magazine, and features first person accounts of adventure, courage, horror and triumph. This is the story of the war as experienced by soldiers and civilians – ordinary people caught in extraordinary times – whose tales give a powerful insight into the the conflict that changed the world. *My Ride on a Torpedo*, by the captain of the destroyer *St Laurent* in 1940, describes how his quick thinking saved an entire ship when a 600-pound warhead of TNT broke loose on deck; *Night Train to Chittagong* tells of a dangerous railway journey from Bengal; in *Christmas Eve at Frontstalag 122* a leader of the French underground network tells how a cold-hearted Nazi prison guard melted before his charges' makeshift crèche.

The facsimile articles offer a fascinating and nostalgic glimpse of the personal side of war, all recounted in inimitable *Reader's Digest* style.

**Air Chief Marshal The Lord Stirrup** was Chief of the Defence Staff from 2006 to 2010. Earlier in his career, as an RAF fighter pilot, he saw action himself in the Dhofur War. Since his retirement, he has sat in the House of Lords as a crossbench peer.

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### OTHER TITLES

**Reader's Digest & the Royals**  
978-1-78020-100-9

Distributed in the UK and Europe by  
 F&W Media International LTD  
 Brunel House • Forde Close  
 Newton Abbot • TQ12 4PU • UK  
**Tel:** 01626 323200 • **Fax:** 01626 323319  
 email: enquiries@fwmedia.co.uk  
 website: www.fwmedia.co.uk  
 F&W Media International LTD is a subsidiary of  
 F+W Media, Inc.

# Untold Stories of D-Day

BY CORNELIUS RYAN

The momentous events of June 6, 1944 are remembered now with pride, nostalgia and a kind of reverence. Individual experiences make this day synonymous with courage



C. E. TURNER/ILLUSTRATED LONDON NEWS

WHEN I completed *The Longest Day* in 1959, I thought I had little more to say. To detail the awesome 24 hours of that historic invasion of a coastline Hitler claimed to be impregnable, I had leafed through volumes of research, read everything I could unearth on the subject and, with Reader's Digest editors and researchers, contacted or interviewed German and Allied D-Day veterans all over the world. But I soon discovered there was no end

to the longest day. The book triggered an avalanche of mail—some 20,000 letters over the years—which has not ceased even now.

Written in various languages, many of the letters are anguished or pathetic. In particular, there are those from German families seeking information on the fate of a son, husband or other relative. The sister of Lieutenant-Colonel Hellmuth Meyer, the German intelligence officer who discovered the invasion date by deciphering a message intended for the French resistance, learned from *The Longest Day* that he was alive, and brother and sister were eventually reunited.

Perhaps the most heart-warming letter I ever received came from the daughter of a D-Day veteran. In 1970, she wrote: "I am 27, and I never knew my father. He was killed on Omaha Beach. For years I hated him because I was tired of Mother talking about the war and what a hero my father was." Then, reading about Omaha Beach, she found her attitude changed.

"My father became real to me," she continued. "I cried because I love him and he might have loved me. I cried too because his life was over before mine ever really began, yet he gave me my life. Thank you for giving me my father after all these years." That letter alone made

*Based on eye-witness observations, this painting shows the establishment of the first beach-head on Normandy's shores*

# The Ship That Saved Malta

By GEORGE POLLOCK

*Ohio's* convoy had to breach the Axis blockade—the course of the war hung on it

WHEN the tanker SS *Ohio* was 12 hours out from the River Clyde, Captain Dudley Mason mustered his crew to read them the contents of a sealed envelope. This envelope, embossed with the Admiralty crest and marked “Not to be opened until under way,” contained a letter that bore no less a signature than that of the First Lord.

The date: August 3, 1942. *Ohio* was one of 14 merchant ships in convoy WS 21S, a code number

indicating that they were ostensibly bound for Suez via the Cape of Good Hope. But long before they weighed anchor, *Ohio's* crew—52 hand-picked officers and men of the Eagle Oil and Shipping Company—suspected bluff. Too much had happened for this to be a routine voyage.

First, *Ohio* was no ordinary ship. Although flying the red ensign of the Merchant Navy, she was American-owned, on loan to Britain at top-level request for just

one voyage. Only two years old, of 14,000 tons and enormously strong welded construction, she had a maximum speed of 18 knots, half as fast again as any British tanker. Her steam pipes and machinery had been elaborately shock-proofed, and 24 army and navy gunners had come on board to man the nine anti-aircraft guns now mounted on *Ohio's* decks—a significant armament for a merchantman.

The entire crew, from 46-year-old Scots Chief Engineer Jimmy Wyld

to the 17-year-old apprentices, Wilkinson and Bulmer, knew their suspicions were justified when Captain Mason read the First Lord's letter revealing *Ohio's* true destination: “Malta has for some time been in great danger. It is imperative that she should be kept supplied. She has stood up to the most violent attack from the air that has ever been made, and she needs your help in continuing the battle. Her courage is worthy of yours.”

Convoy WS 21S was, in fact, to

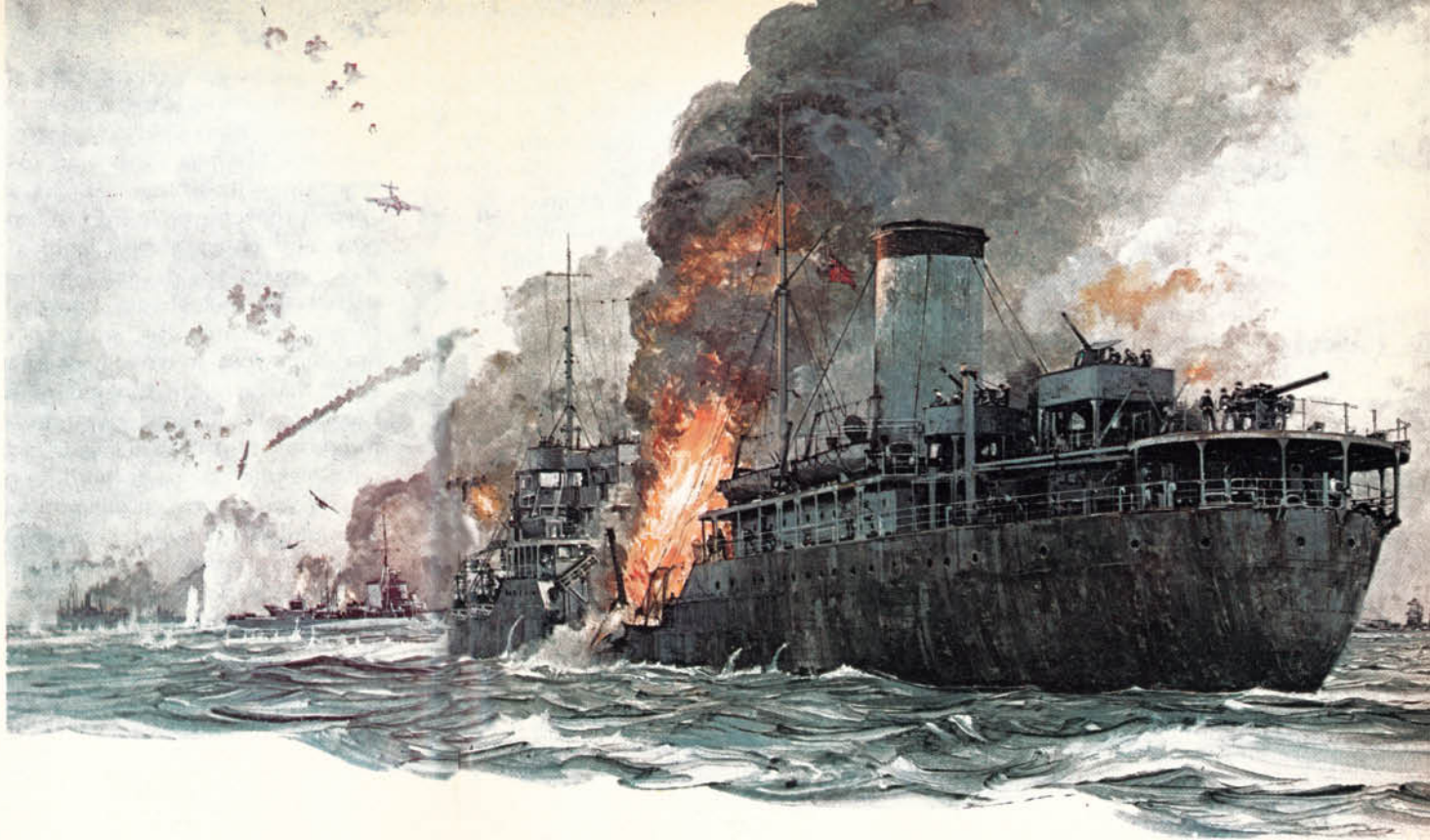


ILLUSTRATION: CHRIS MAYGER

As our Lancaster neared Berlin on the night of March 24–25, 1944, we could see the long fingers of searchlight beams probing the sky. Closing in, we spotted the sparkling red and green markers laid down for us by our Pathfinders ahead. Plane after plane made its bombing run, and fireworks erupted below us: golden incendiary fires, brilliant white and red explosions and the orange flashes of ack-ack guns. Then . . .

Bombs away! Our own 4,000-pound "cookie" and three tons of incendiaries hurtled downwards. Through weaving searchlight beams we turned for home, keeping a sharp watch for Jerry night fighters. I could see them at work in the distance. A flash of white light would burst into a great red-and-orange ball of fire, to arc across the sky towards the black earth below. Some poor "Lanc" had got it, and some of my chums would not return to base.

We were somewhere over the Ruhr when suddenly a series of shuddering crashes raked our aircraft from nose to tail, then two terrific thunderclaps as two cannon shells exploded on my turret ring mounting. The plexiglass blister shattered and vanished—one large fragment slicing into my right leg.

Luckily my turret had been facing astern. I quickly depressed my guns and stared out. Not more than 50 yards from me was the shadowy outline of a Junkers 88 fighter, his leading edge a line of brilliant white

flashes as he blazed away at our wounded ship. I aimed point-blank and squeezed the trigger of my four banked 303 Brownings. They fired simultaneously and the Junkers was transfixed by four streams of fiery tracers. He peeled off, his port engine trailing flame. I did not watch to see his fate; I was too concerned about my own.

Flaming fuel from our tanks was streaking past me. On the intercom I started to report to the captain that the tail was on fire, but he cut me short with, "I can't hold her for long, lads. You'll have to jump. Bale out! Bale out!"

Flicking the turret doors behind me open with my elbows, I turned and opened the fuselage door beyond—and stared for a horrified instant into a giant cauldron. Flame and smoke swept towards me. I recoiled, choking and blinded, into my turret. But I *had to get my chute!* I opened the doors again and lunged for the pack.

Too late! The case had been burnt off and the tightly-packed silk was springing out, fold after fold, and vanishing in puffs of flame.

In the turret I took stock. Here I was, only 21 years old, and this was the end of the road. Already oil from the turret's hydraulic system was on fire and flames seared my face and hands. At any moment the doomed aircraft might explode.

Should I endure this roasting hell or should I jump? If I was to die, better a quick, painless end by

diving into the ground . . . Quickly I hand-rotated my turret abeam, flipped the doors open and, in an agony of despair, somersaulted backwards into the night.

OH, THE blessed relief of being away from that shrivelling heat! Gratefully I felt the cold air against my face. I had no sensation of falling. It was more like being at rest on an airy cloud. Looking down I saw the stars beneath my feet.

"Must be falling head first," I thought.

If this was dying it was nothing to be afraid of. I only regretted that I should go without saying good-bye to my friends. I would never again see Pearl, my sweetheart back home in Loughborough. And I'd been due to go on leave the following Sunday.

Then—nothing. I must have blacked out.

IN SLOW stages my senses returned. First there was an awareness of light above me which gradually became a patch of starlit sky. The light was framed in an irregular opening that finally materialized as a hole in thickly interlaced boughs of fir trees. I seemed to be lying in a deep mound of underbrush heavily blanketed with snow.

It was bitterly cold. My head throbbed and there was terrible pain in my back. I felt all over my body. I found I could move my legs. I was all in one piece. In a sudden up-welling of unworthiness and of delight,

