

THE BJs

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Toward midnight on 8 September 1943, two U.S. Naval officers climbed down the side of the destroyer U.S.S. Knight and into a motor whaleboat. They carried carbines, and they wore the wicked knives, steel helmets, and easy grace of amphibious fighters. A handful of enlisted men, similarly equipped, followed them in. There were a few muffled commands, the motor sputtered and the party was on its way. They headed for the west coast of Italy and the Isola di Ventotene.

It was a strange craft and a stranger mission. This night - D minus 1 in the Salerno landings - the enemy was in for its first full dose of the Beach Jumpers, the Navy's hush-hush boys, the outfit nobody knew.

The Fifth Army was about to invade the Italian mainland and the Beach Jumpers were setting the stage. Officially, their Operations Order called for: creating large scale threats ^{out} and diversions on the northern flank of the main assault; neutralizing and destroying enemy shipping encountered in that area; raiding the mainland; occupying islands adjacent to Naples and thus denying the enemy bases from which he could sortie with E-Boats, destroyers and other warcraft. Part of this job was to capture the strategically-placed Island of Ventotene and its radar station, (setting up a ground beam) for paratroopers who would be fixing on it just two hours after the BJ landing. This had to be precision plus. Another part, which was being handled simultaneously by other BJ elements, was to cause a violent stir in the Gulf of Gaeta, to the end that the enemy would falsely conclude that a big invasion was about to be launched on the beaches north of Naples. All this was to be accomplished per Beach Jumper style, which meant few men, few boats and a big bagful of tricks.

In the wake of the whaleboat came other craft, a ghostly file filled

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with OSS officers, Beach Jumper specialists, and amphibious scouts and commandos of several Allied nations. The Lieutenant in the whaleboat, tall, strong-featured and keen-eyed, tugged unknowingly at his cartridge belt. From the Ventotene shore he saw a single flare rise, then another, and a third.

"Looks like they've decided to surrender, sir." The Lieutenant addressed the Captain watching intently from his position at the rudder handle. As he spoke a second series of flares lit the sky. This was followed by a third.

"What the hell?" said the Captain, "if they want to surrender why don't they do it as instructed?"

A ^{over} (Beach Jumper) loud speaker system had broadcast a surrender demand to the Ventotene garrison not many minutes earlier, suggesting that a strong force lay outside the harbor. The "strong force" consisted of the U.S.S. Knight, a creepy Dutch gunboat called the Flores, and an odd lot of U.S. Air-Sea Rescue boats, British light motor gunboats (MGBs) and 85 foot motor launches, ^(MLs) motor torpedo boats (MTBs—which were the same as the MGBs except that they mounted torpedoes forward in place of 5 pounder guns), and a lone PT—about 30 all told. But on the screen of the radar at Ventotene these small craft, to which were attached ^{gadgets} (Top-Secret radar countermeasures) that magnified their sizes, looked like cruisers and battleships. The surrender instructions called for three flares.

"I'd say the local citizenry aren't taking any chances," said the Lieutenant.

"You mean they don't want us mistaking their intentions?"

"Yes, sir."

"I guess you're right. So far, everything seems to be moving okay. How much time?"

"We ought to hit the quay in three minutes. If this surrender is on the

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level there won't be such to write home about."

"If it isn't I'll be glad to take over the landing party," offered the Lieutenant.

"It's a deal," said the pleasant-faced Captain. "If there's trouble it's all yours. We'll see what a planning officer can do with a landing party."

The Lieutenant laughed. "You forget, sir," he said, "that I commanded a commando flotilla six months before I went in for planning."

The Captain hadn't forgotten. As a matter of fact, they were two of a kind. By rights Capt. C. L. Andrews Jr. who commanded the ^{only} (Diversionsary) Task Group under which the Beach Jumpers operated that night, should have remained on his Flagship, the U.S.S. Knight. And Lt. Douglas Fairbanks Jr. who as Special Operations Officer for Vice Admiral H. K. Hewitt, ComNavNav (Commander, United States Naval Forces, North African Waters), had dreamt up and prepared this night's work, had no business leaving the Flagship nor leading a combat party ashore. They both had an affinity for action. Lt. Fairbanks had a habit of wangling temporary duty with the Beach Jumpers after he had planned them into a hot operation. He had volunteered for the whole combat operation, and was starting out with Ventotene.

Ahead, the quay loomed still and black. When the whaleboat was fifty yards off, a sheet of flame seared the pier and an explosion made the clumsy craft rock. Machine gun bullets and mortar shells splattered the water.

"Down," yelled the Lieutenant, and ducked low. He was taking over. When the boat touched the quay he sprang out, his men close behind. A small gunboat, flying a Nazi naval ensign, lay burning and partially destroyed. In the shadows of the dock buildings he saw a Nazi Naval Warrant Officer, grenades in hand, and he forced his surrender.

Mortars and heavy machine gun slugs were cracking through. The Lieu-

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tenant deployed his men and, selecting a few, led a reconnaissance party through the village, establishing pickets at key points to clear the way for the handful of troops that would follow. By now the enemy fire had slowed, although snipers kept the party cautious. Reports were coming in. The surrender was genuine, so far as the Italian population and armed Fascist Militia were concerned, but four German officers and 97 men handling the radar and signal stations for the Luftwaffe had holed up in a fortified spot and decided to fight it out. Intelligence hadn't mentioned their presence. In fact, the report read that Ventotene was clear of Nazis.

At this juncture a lot of things were happening. (A half-dozen OCS men, who often worked along with the Beach Jumpers, were all over the Island. They were a big help. Lt. (jg) Henry Ringling North, (OCS naval representative) and as amazing as his family's circus, rounded up and joyously disarmed the Fascist Militia, helped (Lt. Fairbanks) post pickets, and organized the defense of the Island, meanwhile picking up stray bits of valuable Intelligence. (Capt. Frank Tarallo, AUS, ex-football captain at the University of Alabama, headed the OCS group.) He located a local priest and went to call on the Germans. They were agreeable to talking business, particularly since (Capt. Tarallo) didn't correct their impression - as shown on their radar - that a battle force of capital ships was engaged in the Ventotene assault. When the U.S.S. Knight and its accompanying "spit-cat" fleet steamed in some hours later with 1800 reinforcements, there wasn't much to do except herd the 91 Germans aboard, dismantle the Nazi radar for shipment to the U.S., and release political prisoners from a nearby Island. (Capt. Andrews, Lt. Fairbanks, Capt. Tarallo, and Lt. North) all signed the unconditional surrender agreement with the Italian commander. A few days later, when the Islands of Capri surrendered in another Beach Jumper coup, (Lt. Fairbanks) accepted the surrender on behalf of General Eisenhower and Admiral Hewitt. The Italian Colonel, contacted at a secret

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rendezvous, was overwhelmed at the privilege of capitulating to such notables.

In the Gulf of Gaeta, still on D minus 1, another Beach Jumper group was having a big time. Their diversionary efforts, true to Admiral Hewitt's directive, had succeeded in setting enemy coastal and AA batteries roaring. In no time the coast, far from the actual landing zones around Naples, was in a dither. And why not? Here is what the enemy heard and saw.

The bright flares seen from the shore resembled powder charges leaving the muzzles of big guns. The heavy smoke screens presumably hid battlegroups. High fidelity speakers broadcast the recorded sounds of battle roars. Real five inch beach barrage rockets heightened the illusion. [Via their radios] the enemy picked up combat conversation between ships, not knowing that in Air-Sea Rescue Boats men were reading what was broadcast from prepared scripts. Paratroopers - 16 inches tall and made of plaster - were dropped in self-inflating parachutes. Most conclusive of all, the coastal radars "saw" the huge fleet. There was no mistaking the big blobs on the screens. [What the enemy didn't see was the strange paraphernalia strung from the balloons fastened some 500 feet above the little boats.] Included were strips of foil 13 feet long and two inches wide called "Angels." They created a spot on a radar screen that corresponded in size to a carrier. There were weird wire cages known as "Chickens" that became cruisers on the screen. And there were "Corner Reflectors", looking like the framework for box-kites, fastened directly to the boats. "Reflectors" loomed up the size of battleships or cruisers.]

All this decided the commander of a nine-ship German convoy harbored off Naples to head for the open seas at top speed. In the process his F-Lighters, Siebel Ferries, and E-boats, all well-armed, crossed the course of two British motor torpedo boats attached to the Beach Jumper diversionary force. These boats were engaged the first night, in one of the innumerable secret jobs that befell the Beach Jumpers, this one calling for putting five

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OSS civilian agents ashore behind enemy lines. They were under the command of Lt. Cmdr. John Kremer Jr., USNR., later killed while leading a Beach Jumper operation off Luzon. A middle-aged mortgage company president from Newark, N.J., Cmdr. Kremer was fabulous in combat and was the subject of several remarkable reports by Combat Correspondent John Steinbeck. Cmdr. Kremer ordered his MTBs to halt, and taking advantage of the early morning darkness, they lay in wait. After ten minutes a large object showed dimly 800 yards to starboard and Cmdr. Kremer ordered four torpedoes fired. Forty seconds later, as the MTBs slowly crawled away from the center of enemy traffic, a double explosion shook the silence and across the well-lit water the Beach Jumpers saw a bulky ammunition ship go down. The ensuing enemy barrage was terrific, but under cover of blackness Cmdr. Kremer's MTBs managed to sneak back to the U.S.S. Knight and help out for another eight days and nights until the BJ's had completed its chores.

This was extra-curricular adventure. Intelligence told of more important results for the whole operation a few weeks later. Allied Force Headquarters credited the Special Operations and Diversionary Task Group with contributing heavily to the success of the main landings. And the vaunted 15th Panzer Division had been glued to the Gulf of Gaeta for a crucial 10 days instead of moving as originally planned to Salerno, where its presence certainly would have turned the tide.

During the Italian landings there were more Ventotenes and more secret chores. The Beach Jumpers executed a Commando raid on San Martino Harbor, Capri, Ischia, and Procida, strategic islands commanding the entrance to the Gulf of Naples, were occupied; bread and water were carried to the near-starved people of Ponza; small-boat operating bases were established ahead of the Allied advances; secret agents were landed. In nine days nine islands

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were captured, four raids were executed against the mainland and enemy shipping and combat reserves were immobilized. All this while the success of the main landing hung on a thread.

They came into their own with the Salerno campaign. A few months earlier, when they had tried a diversion during the Sicily Invasion - their first combat test - everything had gone wrong. But with the Salerno operations they had official commendations to their credit and they knew that top echelon officers, the brass hats at COMINCH who issued their directives, and ComNavNav for whom they worked operationally, were watching them eagerly. The commendations didn't mention the outfit by name, they were Top Secret and strictly off the record, but the signs were enough to show them that they were considered something special.

Something special they were all through the spring and summer of 1944, when the war in Europe was reaching its climax. One unit helped pin down eight Axis divisions in the Adriatic and gave considerable aid to General Tito. A number of operations indirectly assisted the Normandy Invasion. Beach Jumpers figured prominently in the French recapture of Elba. Then, to top everything they'd done before, they helped make the Southern France Invasion look easy - though it was anything but that - in a series of action-packed diversions.

As it turned out, the Beach Jumpers proved a whopping success. If they had fizzled, a certain live-wire lieutenant might have burned. For it wasn't Navy custom to give a young junior officer as much control over a major project as Lt. (later Lt. Cmdr. and then Cmdr.) Fairbanks had over the BJ's. But they didn't fizzle and the lieutenant didn't burn. He did pretty well for himself, with the Legion of Merit, the Silver Star Medal, the British Distinguished Service Cross, the French Legion of Honor, and the Croix de Guerre with Palm, plus a flock of swell-reading commendations, to show for his efforts.

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Any one of these spelled an exceptional combat career. The Legion of Merit, particularly, is a Navy vanity, with only about 600 out of 350,000 reserve officers earning them in this war.

All this was more than poetic justice, for there wasn't much connected with the Beach Jumpers that didn't stem straight from (Lt. Fairbanks). He had conceived the idea of forming a unit within the Navy that could carry out (organized diversions) in support of overall operations. He had sold it to the Navy late in 1942. Then he had proceeded to build it, step by step. He was the sparkplug, the mainspring, the fond father and whatever else you choose to call an officer who puts his whole soul into his outfit.

(The germ of the idea had occurred to Lt. Fairbanks in England in 1942.) Following a turn of rough Murmansk and North Atlantic convoy duty, he had gone to England as a member of the Combined Operations Command Planning Staff and there found himself participating as a naval commando, in such postimes as the Dieppe raid and several smaller but comparable secret landings. The thought, sponsored by Lord Louis Mountbatten, at that time Chief of Combined Operations, was that the British, then lacking full military strength, ought to annoy the Nazis with offensive feints and thrusts, capitalizing on whatever weaknesses were uncovered. As a logical step in such exploitation the British had established, in Scotlan , a sonic deception school which paraded under the misleading name of "Light Scout Car and Training Center". By the time Fairbanks visited it, visual deception (camouflage, dummy tanks, dummy aircraft, and the like) had been added to the curriculum. This business was so important to the British "Brass Hats" that, in order to prevent tipping its hand, it ordered General Alexander to discontinue use of dummy camouflage in his fight against Rommel in the West African Desert.

(Lt. Fairbanks) opened his campaign for a diversionary setup by writing voluminous reports to Washington, trying to interest the right people via

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"channels." He didn't make much headway until he returned to the U.S. late in 1942 and was ordered to the staff of Vice Admiral H. K. Hewitt, then ComAmphorLant (Commander, Amphibious Forces, U.S. Atlantic Fleet), who had just come to Norfolk from North Africa to repair and reprovision a large part of his fleet. He was big and heavy-set, a brilliant mathematician, with the reputation for being a young-minded admiral who might sponsor a promising experiment. He listened well during several sessions with (Fairbanks) and to the Lieutenant's proposal to set up a training school near Norfolk he memoed briefly, "A fine idea." Evolving new doctrines on amphibious landings, raiding procedure, assault craft under fire, smoke screens, was his responsibility, and he liked (Fairbanks) approach to the subject. He assigned the Lieutenant to the Experimental and Developmental Section, with an added training function, and designated him a Naval Commando expert. [He arranged top echelon liaison with COMINCH (Commander in Chief), thereby cutting through channels in developing the secret diversionary devices recommended by Fairbanks. The whole activity was labelled top secret and restricted to a few men.]

From January to March 1943, (Lt. Fairbanks) molded his new organization in his head and on paper. He wanted a set up that would not only make the enemy think something but would make him do something, and when he did something to force him into the wrong move. To accomplish this you needed radar counter-measures, dummy paratroops, high speed smoke, dummy landing craft, and other special devices, as well as a large order of know-how on naval tactics and strategy. This was work for COMINCH's scientists, in collaboration with the National Defense Research Committee set up by President Roosevelt. Private companies came into the picture, but (Lt. Fairbanks) never even saw them as the development continued in an atmosphere of deep secrecy behind Marine-guarded doors.

During one of these sessions (Capt. Jeff Metzel) USN, Chief of the Read-

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ness Division of COMINCH, trouble-shooter extraordinary, and the man who put rockets on landing craft, gave the Beach Jumpers their name. He had been working with (Prof. Harold Burris-Meyer) and ex-college professor and (Cmdr. Vincent Mallory,) formerly of Bell Telephone Labs., to develop sounds that would collapse walls, drive men berserk and accomplish other useful military ends. During the process they developed a sonic deception machine which went by the code name of ("Heater") conversationally referred to as "BJ". This was in recognition of what (Capt. Matzel called its "By-Jesus" qualities. (Lt. Fairbanks) outfit struck him the same way, so he called it "BJ", too. Later the initials were expanded to Beach Jumpers, to hide its real purpose.

When the Beach Jumper school started operating in March its 50 students were a handpicked lot. (Lt. Fairbanks) and a couple of assistants had canvassed 1,000 trainees at Princeton, Harvard, Notre Dame, and a half dozen Naval Officers' Schools, initially warning them that if they repeated anything said during the interview, they were ripe for a court martial. But what the men learned during those sessions only indicated that there was something big and exciting afoot. They surmised this from the fact that they were asked to volunteer for unidentified, extra-hazardous duty, to do commando-like physical training, and to be extra-special security-conscious on all matters concerning the unit. The 50 selectees were specialists in radar, radio communications, engineering, boat handling, navigation, gunnery, camouflage, or similarly useful skills. Their I.Q. had to be high and their record had to show imagination and resourcefulness.

(Lt. Fairbanks) ran the school for a few weeks, then was relieved by a higher ranking officer, when he moved to the Mediterranean, along with some of the initial BJs, to unloose a diversionary for ComNavNew preliminary to the Sicily landing. The respite from training seemed like a vacation, for

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the men had been getting up at 2 a.m. for a course that took in everything from ~~Commando~~ and rough sea training, to math and physics. Most of the time (Lt. Fairbanks) was on their heels to see that they knuckled down.

In his spare time at Norfolk (Fairbanks) planned the Sicily raiding operations, rehearsing with the units. But until they hit the staging area the men didn't know what for, except that it was to be an actual invasion.

A possible clue to the Beach Jumpers' mediocre showing at Sicily was the non-employment of radar countermeasures. Since this proved to be the only poor BJ operation, and coincidentally, the only one with radar activity, the inference seems likely. Radar hocus-pocus was the weapon that fooled the enemy most in later episodes.

Between operations (Lt. Fairbanks) was one of the busiest men in the Fleet. (He was in on all secret planning) and when it came to a Beach Jumper job he had to "scrounge around" for the men and material. The PTs, MTBs, MGBs and the other craft used in BJ operations were always scarce. He had to keep the radar specialists, boat handlers, scouts, raiders, communications teams, and rocket experts, who were always hell-bent-for-leather gents, happy between actions and keyed for them when they came. He worked with everybody, and in the course of a morning he might huddle with a bunch of AAF radar personnel scheduled to drop "window" in support of his next diversion, then leave them to call on the Admiral. Sometimes he had to circumvent channels. He had to work guardedly and he had a memo from the Admiral, another from COMINCH and a third from Lord Louis Mountbatten to help him along. They all said about the same thing: "It is requested that those concerned will give him every possible assistance. [For security reasons he will not always be able to give full explanations of the duties which he is performing.]"

After Salerno he was ordered to England where he lent a hand in deception planning and special operations for the Cross-Channel Invasion. The Beach

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Jumpers as such never engaged directly in "Overlord", the code name for the Normandy campaign, but they helped out indirectly. A sizeable fleet of small craft, minesweepers and MLs executed a Beach Jumper (planned) diversion for five days off the Pas de Calais. Throughout the early part of 1944 they built up a series of jobs and distractions suggesting that the Invasion of Southern France might come before Normandy and that the Adriatic might be the scene of an assault. The net result was to hold troops in Italy and elsewhere in southern Europe, who might otherwise have been more profitably employed by the Axis in the north. When 6 June 1944 rolled around the Beach Jumpers were mutually represented by hundreds of demolition-charged dummy paratroopers that General Eisenhower had ordered dropped onto the Peninsula. The inflatable rubber dummies, five feet tall and equipped with self-opening parachutes, had been designed by Lt. Fairbanks as a Beach Jumper diversion.

After the British huddles the busy Lieutenant flew to Washington to forage for the things needed to keep the Beach Jumpers functioning. On behalf of Admiral Hewitt he picked up additional teams and a wide assortment of ordnance and special devices. Included were specially designed dummy landing craft; electrically-driven inflatable surfboats; "Drone" boats, radio controlled, that exploded with heavy demolition charges; dummy aircraft; dummy paratroops in two sizes; smoke rockets; and radar countermeasures devices that had left the laboratories for the first time.

Business was booming when the Lieutenant (newly promoted to Lt. Cmdr.) returned to the fold. He took temporary command of the Special Operations Task Group to which the BJ's were assigned and put the boys through a stiff training schedule pending the return of Capt. Andrews from a visit to MacArthur and Nimitz in the Pacific. On off days he journeyed to Naples, Taranto, Bari, Caserta, Cassino and even to the Adriatic to dope out new actions, then returned home to Ferryville, Tunisia to do the planning. He'd talk things over

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with (Capt. R. A. J. English) Admiral Hewitt's War Plans Officer (who had been with Byrd at the South Pole) and if they thought there was anything to it, another action was on the books. There weren't many others who knew what was cooking, but back on busy Constitution Avenue in Washington, COMINCH was kept fully advised.

A fast motor trip to the hideaway Italian headquarters of a Commando-GSS-Partisan Force which controlled Balkan operations down to the northern Greek border led to a five month string of adventures in the Adriatic. The place was Bari. The date was 28 March 1944. [In a planning report labelled "Top Secret" Cmdr. Fairbanks reported, in substance, as follows:

Brig. Miles (Commander of the force), and Gen. Stowell (head of Special Operations Mediterranean) met him. They were both already acquainted with U.S. Navy Special Operations and were most enthusiastic for whatever assistance could be occurred. Their main interest was in participation that would promote a badly needed conviction that Allied Forces in the Adriatic were strong and getting stronger.

Cmdr. Fairbanks advised them that directives from Washington restricted the employment of U.S. devices to operations of importance and that any ad-lib use was unauthorized. But he added that there were other means of aiding even small shows and described certain special tactics and the employment of non-secret materials, like rockets, smoke, rubber boats and of such personnel as scouts and Raiders.

Cmdr. (Fairbanks) was then told that, in addition to small sorties, two specific operations - one in 3 weeks time and the other in 6 weeks - were definitely scheduled. They were the capture of one strategic island and the establishment of a temporary beachhead to run in supplies for Tito. The joint Balkan Force was faced with the political and strategic necessities of carrying these out while lacking sufficient forces for their comfortable execution. So

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Fairbanks was invited to propose, roughly, a plan of diversionary tactics in place of the heretofore straightforward raiding.

The General and Brigadier appeared pleased with Cmdr. (Fairbanks') outline of proposed action. But he warned them that he had no authority to give (planning on) operational assistance on his own, that ComNavNAW would have to be satisfied that BJ activities in the Adriatic would not handicap his plans and operations in the Western Mediterranean.

They discussed logistics. It was tentatively decided that men and equipment would try to make a convoy from Bizerti to Bari. The men would base at Monopoli and stage at the Island of Vis, off the Dalmatian Coast. Here Commando and Special Operations Headquarters did tactical planning. Further details were to be ironed out by an advance party from the Special Operations Task Group.

This was action in the making. Several weeks later Beach Jumper Unit #4 was up to its neck in Adriatic excitement and Lt. C. H. "Pappy" Osborne, Special Operations Group executive officer, was in the vanguard. Tall, slow-moving easy-going "Pappy" had taken 20 rocket-bearing Beach Jumpers ashore on the German-held Island of Solta. While the Partisans and Commandos slid ahead on one side of the beach, "Pappy" and his rocket-bearing detachment foiled the defenders into thinking the big push was on their flank. Ship-borne rockets in shore action was something brand new, and the Beach Jumpers made the most of the surprise. ("Pappy") liquidated some strong points and drew most of the fire away from the main Commando and Partisan forces. The Beach Jumpers were used to that "fire drawing" role. They specialized in being foils for the main forces. After 24 hours there weren't any Germans left on Solta, but Lt. Osborne didn't feel too happy. He had seen one of his officers two feet away cleanly decapitated and stand wavering on his feet for a full five seconds afterwards.

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There was plenty to do around Vis in support of General Tito. High fidelity speakers called ("Heaters") blared surrender speeches across stretches of water at German garrisons on the Adriatic Islands of Korcula, Brac and Hvar. The Beach Jumpers, with Capt. Andrews and Cdr. Fairbanks coming over occasionally from their more important assignments around Italy, ferried agents to the mainland; assisted in prisoner escapes, mostly AAF and RAF men who were trying to take a southern route to freedom; carried supplies to the Partisans; made "recon missions;" tagged along with the Commandos on occasional assaults. Back at the 8th Fleet big things were brewing and Admiral Hewitt wanted Unit #4 back. But the British sector commanders in the Adriatic said they couldn't function without it, and so Unit #4 stayed for five months, averaging about two operations a week, and helping keep a whole string of axis divisions glued to that relatively unimportant front.

There were still three other Beach Jumper outfits of some 15 officers and 75 men each for general utility, and now they were spilling with work. During the last week of May 1944 they put on their "giant fleet act" by flying radar countermeasures gear and faking a radio program for the benefit of the Panzer troops being held at Civitavecchia. The Nazis were awaiting a contemplated Allied assault and the Beach Jumpers convinced them that they were in the right spot. But while the Panzer divisions idled, the Allied 5th Army, not many miles away at Cassino, was breaking through to the long-stalemated forces at Anzio, and together the two drove on Rome and captured it.

By June, after some nine months of leading the enemy astray, the Beach Jumpers were as hot as a professional football team that has mastered the tricky T formation. They were ready for Elba. This was largely a French show - the first French effort to recapture land conquered by the Nazis - but it was flavored heavily with Beach Jumpers.

(Cdr. Fairbanks) had stewed over the diversionary planning, and mapped

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out a scheme that had the BJ boat-handlers landing 70 French Special Service troops from PTs early on the morning of D-day. Several hours later, coincident with the real assault, a fleet of BJ radar spoofers was scheduled to simulate an attack on the northern part of the seventeen mile island while the French invaded from the south.

He went along and saw his handiwork translated into results. At 0300 on 17 June he stood on the deck of a PT watching special units of the Battalion de Choc, Free French Army, enter rubber rafts and paddle toward the rocky shore. It was an uncomfortable spot. Some two hundred yards away were large, hostile searchlight emplacements and two batteries of 6-inch guns. As the PTs started their engines the searchlights caught them and suddenly the blackness was full of flashes, splashes, explosions and the whines of shells. The unit commander dished out some high speed smoke and behind this welcome curtain they raced away.

The diversionary section was fired on, too. It flew its balloons, with all their anti-radar appendages, all the way from Corsica, and therefore its presence was not unexpected. But the enemy was looking for a capital fleet and probably never was convinced they didn't face one. At any rate, they stayed put on the north end of Elba while the French landed unmolested in the south. The Beach Jumpers added to the general confusion by coming in close with their 5 inch beach-barrage rockets, laying smoke thick and low over the towns, and jamming the enemy radars in an obvious attempt to keep its battle-ships from being seen.

The whole business turned out eminently successful, with the Beach Jumpers coming in for high-sounding praise in action reports written by a British admiral and a French general. The only regrettable phase of the operation was the fact that the 800/900 garrison troops on Elba, as estimated by Intelligence agents, turned out to be 3000, which meant many more French

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casualties than had been expected. But the neat diversionary thrusts kept casualties down at that.

Elba was a good warmup for the biggest operation of all, the Invasion of southern France on 15 August, when all the planning lore and amphibious experience that Cmdr. Fairbanks had acquired, and all the secret devices he could muster, were brewed into one grandiose diversionary pattern.

This was planning on all cylinders. The tactical program called for a high degree of cooperation between the Navy, the Mediterranean Allied Air Forces, Allied Force Headquarters, the 7th Army under General Patch, OSS and (FTI) French Forces of the Interior representatives, plus a half dozen other organizations. The Normandy diversions on 6 June, two months and nine days earlier, had called for more men, but this was more intricate.

On one side of the ocean, at Naples, (Cmdr. Fairbanks) was closeted for days with (Capt. H. C. Johnson) quiet, efficient new commander of the Special Operations Group. Between them - and aided by two of (Cmdr. Fairbanks') assistants who were expert in matters of small-boat logistics and tactical communications deception - they pieced the puzzle together.

On the other side, at Ocracoke, North Carolina, Capt. (Tony Rorschack), a veteran officer under Adm. Hewitt who had been put in charge of the Beach Jumpers' Rear Training Base, sweated extra teams into shape and shipped them out. And in Washington, at COMINCH Headquarters, (Capt. Jeff Metzel) and his associate, (Capt. "Jimmy" Thach), Chief of New and Secret Weapons in the Readiness Division, saw to it that the [Top Secret] devices - the latest radar countermeasures, the electrically-driven surfboats, the demolition-laden "Drones", the paradummies - were rushed to Naples with no one the wiser. The Beach Jumpers, for all their handful of men, were destined for a key role in the Invasion.

This was one show that every Beach Jumper wanted in. For example, hard-

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working, likeable Ensign Ernest Wehmeyer, chunky as a watch-fob quarterback-who had been with the Beach Jumpers since the day Lt. Fairbanks had interviewed him at Little Creek Training Base early in 1943. (Ernie) was proficient in all the BJ arts. He was an expert boat-handler, technician, communications officer, and smoke operator. But unfortunately for his combat ambitions he was also a gifted administrator, and on the operations invariably found himself keeping the home-fires burning. He made the grade this time, going along as assistant to (Cmdr. Fairbanks), who, beside planning the Fleet and Group Operations, headed one of the two-man task units, and he got his fill of action. He proved invaluable, too, keeping his eagle eye on every boat every minute. He came out with a neat commendation.

(Lt. Daniel S. Low,) USNR, was another of the original BJ's who talked himself into a temporary role in the operation. He was Commanding Officer of Aircraft Rescue Boat Squadron One, which, so far as the BJ's were concerned, did everything but rescue work. He had learned his lessons well. His commendation read: "His craft were obliged to mount a great deal of special gear, including rocket-racks, smoke generators, electronic equipment, etc. Tactically, they were required to conduct offensive operations inshore of enemy held strongly defended coasts. The maneuvers planned had to be followed with meticulous detail as to timing and position, further complicated by the fact that they had to operate in the dark and behind smoke screens. The high state of efficiency shown by the boats and their crews for the entire four day period of operations in enemy waters were reflections of the splendid work done by (Lt. Low)"

(Cmdr. Fairbanks) for his part, was cited for the Combat Legion of Merit, with these words: "For exceptional meritorious conduct in the performance of outstanding duties as Planning Officer for Commander Special Operations Group and for extraordinary heroism and devotion to duty in action against the enemy

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while commanding a Special Operations Task Unit during the Allied landings in Southern France, August 15/18, 1944."

At 1030 on D-minus-1 the officers on the docks at Ajaccio, Corsica, shook hands all around, called "God Speed" and similar goodbyes, boarded the 30-plus small craft anchored impatiently in the harbor, and sailed away in two serpentine groups. They were manned by three units of Beach Jumpers. But, in addition, there were, in the Special Operations Group, amphibious scouts, commandos, Raiders, OSS officers, French diversionary troops, and a variety of French, British, and American officers aboard.

The Eastern Diversion Group steamed toward Genoa, which, reedied by carefully-planned rumors, already was in a state of invasion jitters. Nineteen PTs, MGBs, MTBs, and a single Air Beacon ship made up this task force, headed by Cmdr. (Fairbanks). The Western Diversion Group sailed toward Marseilles. This outfit was comprised largely of 15 Air-Sea Rescue Craft, with a few Fighter Direction ships, motor launches, and a destroyer, the U.S.S. Endicott, skippered by the legendary Lt. Cmdr. John M. Bulkeley, USN, to help them out. The idea was to convince first one sector, then the other, that the big assault was to strike in its locale. In the meantime the main force -- some 2,000 ships -- steamed straight down the middle to the actual assault area at St. Raphael - St. Tropez halfway between. It was neatly camouflaged by radar countermeasures.

Both groups moved ahead of the real fleet, flying balloons with radar countermeasures appendaged in circus style. [A British radar development called "Moonshine" had joined the parade.] [It had been flown Top Priority from the United Kingdom just before sailing time and had the unique characteristic of showing up on an aircraft radar as five ships instead of the single one to which it was appendaged.]

Aboard the Royal Navy Motor Launches were 22 AAF technicians who operated

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radar jammers. These they skillfully manipulated to hide nearly everything from prying enemy radar eyes, while allowing enough to show through to reveal where the two units were heading. On Corsica a giant land-based jammer aided the (deception). The whole picture had the earmarks of an invasion fleet trying to hide, and to enhance the (deception) the Mediterranean Air Force cooperated by bombing enough coastal radars out of existence to convince the enemy that the two diversions carried real weight.

At about 2200 Cmdr. (Fairbanks) ordered his ships to cut in abruptly between Nice and Cannes, alerting that portion of the coast. At 0000 hours he assisted the sneak landing at Pointe des Deux Freres of 75 French officers and men - the first Frenchmen to return to their homeland in the Invasion - bent on severing coastal transport and communication lines leading to the main assault objectives. Naval Scout Lt. (jg) (Joseph Mandell), USNR, and Capitaine de Frigate Roland Seriot, 50-year old commander of the French contingent, investigated the landing zones for a full hour from an electric-motored inflatable surfboat before signalling the men ashore. Though the French accomplished their mission the BJs had alerted the Coast almost too well, and in addition a hidden minefield blocked the way. The casualties were 40%.

At 0330 the Eastern Diversion was subjecting the shore between Nice and Cannes to a Naval bombardment and racing screening-PTs off Nice Harbor. The PTs were decoys for the gun boats and motor launches that were doing the bombardment and getting some terrific 155 mm. fire in return. MAF planes bombed for four hours and dropped strips of "Window" to help baffle German radars. In the Bay of Cannes flares were dropped, automatic barrages were fired, and sonic devices gave good imitations of a fleet in action. At 0400 aircraft dropped 800 life-sized dummy paratroopers into the thick smoke screen laid down by the midget fleet. This was all very confusing to the Nazis. At 0600, as Cmdr. Fairbanks withdrew, the German radio was loudly announcing that a

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convoy six miles wide and ten miles long was on its way to Marseilles.

With the Eastern Diversion Group now with drawing to the west, and the Western Group pointed straight for Marseilles, there was reason for alarm in that area. But at 0100, Lt. Cmdr. (Artie L. Williams,) Lt. Cmdr. ("Pappy" Osborne) and the others commanding the left flank "fleet" made a 90 degree turn into the Baie de La Ciotat, 70 miles west of the main invasion beaches. This was considered the heaviest defended portion of the French Coast, including Normandy and Brittany. Here they put on a stirring diversion.

The Ciotat assault consisted of racing the 13 virtually unarmed Air-Sea Rescue Craft, masked in smoke, to within 400 yards of the shoreline in three waves 15 minutes apart. Each wave discharged its quota of beach-barrage rockets into the city's fortifications, dropped smoke pots and time delay demolition charges, and withdrew. In order to accomplish this it passed through heavy mine fields, harbor warning loops, searchlights, star-shell illumination, and a hail of machine gun and cannon fire. In the meantime the AAF dropped a heavy tonnage of bombs on the beach between Marseilles and Toulon and, at about 0400, a squadron of troop-carrier planes tossed several hundred demolition-charged duxies into the area northwest of Toulon.

The Ciotat diversion ended abruptly. The attackers hoaxed the Nazis, who they knew had their ears glued to combat communications, into thinking the hot defense had driven them off.

"We're moving out," said Voice A on the BJ channel.

"Hell. And just when I'm beginning to enjoy myself," said B.

"It's too rough now," said A, "but you'll get another crack soon."

The buildup was designed to accomplish what it did: keep the enemy away from the real invasion beaches, pin him down in the west and north awaiting the return visit.

And over the German radio came interesting reports. The Allied invasion force, it was announced, had stumbled into the Ciotat mine field and sustained

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heavy losses. They were withdrawing. Then came the breathless announcement that "thousands of paratroops" were landing. The next report revealed these to be demolition-charged paradummies described as "cunning and diabolical devices conceived in the sinister Anglo-Saxon mind." An hour later, when real paratroops landed, the defenders were caught flat-footed.

All the while Admiral Hewitt's gigantic invasion fleet - 2000 strong - went practically unmolested about its debarkation not many miles away.

As long as the enemy was expecting another Ciotat assault the Beach Jumpers hated to disappoint. At 0300 on 17 August, D plus 1, they returned for the repeat performances.

This time the two diversion task forces merged. Cmdr. (Fairbanks) brought up his combined Anglo-American unit of MGBs and MLs; the PTs had, for the most part, been diverted to other tasks. While Cmdr. (Williams), Cmdr. (Osborne) and the other assault commanders threw their scant units against the intense shore barrages in what approximated a suicidal mission, the bombardment boats worked valiantly to draw the coastal fire.

The close-in assault lasted 90 minutes. On the way out to sea an Air-Sea Rescue Craft ran smack-dab into two large German destroyer-corvettes. The ASRC's were cannon fodder for the enemy's 4.7 inch radar-controlled guns, but Cmdr. (Williams) calmly twisted and turned - though he was losing distance - until his teammates came to the rescue.

Cdr. (Fairbanks) arrived first. He engaged the enemy at 10,000 yards with his two gunboats. HMS Aphis and HMS Scarab, ordered the MLs to screen him to seaward against E-boats and submarines, then closed to 4,000 while the enemy fire became increasingly intense and accurate. He was now in a bad way with his electric power gone, the radio antennas all shot away, a few holes in the hulls and superstructures from near misses, and some of the main batteries

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immobilized by heat and age, when he resorted to an old Beach Jumper trick - a smoke screen. Emerging in a new position he scored the first direct, crippling hit of the engagement.

An hour and a half after the battle started, Cdr. Bulkeley's destroyer came steaming up at 36 knots. Three of its four main battery guns were out of commission due to crew casualties incurred during the shore bombardment a bit earlier. So he closed quickly to a point where the U.S.S. Endicott's automatic weapons would be most effective. At 1400 yards he raked the enemy vessels with murderous 20 and 40 mm. fire, loosed two torpedoes, and was generally helpful - along with Cdr. (Fairbanks') gunboats - in sending the two Nazi warships under. The action had lasted two hours.

By now the enemy along the coast was convinced that a major naval battle was in progress and so far as is known, they never did discover the diversionary ruse.

Naval Intelligence submitted a glowing appraisal of the Beach Jumpers' worth at Southern France. Admiral Hewitt remarked on the damage inflicted on Giotat by BJ rockets and guns, and on the miracle of the diversionary units' escape with slight casualties. But it remained for the late Lt. Gen. A. M. Patch, whose 7th Army had done the ground work, to render the Army opinion:

"We learned from German generals through our Interrogation Center," he wrote, "that the place of landing in Southern France came as a distinct surprise to the enemy. I have always accepted that knowledge as factual evidence of the great effectiveness of your special planning and the most successful execution of your Special Operations Group."

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