

History Hinges on These Two Rivers

Two continents apart, the Yalu and the Rhine wind down to the sea. But in the continuing struggle of freedom against Communism, they share the common role of destiny



Boats of the American Rhine River Patrol cruise watchfully along the river that for generations has been strategic target in Europe's wars

IN TODAY'S struggle between the East and the West, two of the most sensitive, strategic water lines in the world are the Yalu and Rhine Rivers. The Yalu is on the border between the battleground of Korea and the Chinese Communist stronghold of Manchuria. The Rhine is one of Western Europe's greatest natural defense barriers.

A few months ago 500 B-29s, in the greatest bombing raid since World War II, plastered a huge \$40,000,000 hydroelectric plant on the Yalu. The bombs fell just 1,000 yards from the river border. Four other plants in the area were also hit. The

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attack, which appeared to be the opening of a new "get tough" policy on the part of the UN, deprived industrial plants in and around Mukden in Manchuria of power. At the same time factories in North Korea lost 90 per cent of their electrical energy. This major assault on Communist power plants along the Yalu was the prelude to further bombings which have continued since then. But the Pentagon points out that UN forces are not hitting targets on the Chinese side of the Yalu, thus avoiding a war-spreading incident. Just the same, the gloves are off as far as the Yalu is concerned for the first time since the Korean war began.

At that same time, 11,000 miles away, American, British, French and Dutch patrol boats cruised along the historic Rhine. Large-scale amphibious maneuvers were also taking place. NATO (North American Treaty Organization) troops in landing barges raced from east to west across the choppy waters to disgorge men, tanks and equipment supposedly to "reinforce" beleaguered Western troops. For although the Rhine does not touch Communist territory, it would be a major defense line for the forces of the West in case of war. And nobody knows this better than the men in the Kremlin.

Of the two rivers, perhaps the Yalu is of more immediate concern, for behind its 500 miles of coursing waters stand the bulk of the Red forces under Red China chief Mao Tse-tung.

Few people had heard of the Yalu until the Korean war began in June, 1950. But it gained world-wide prominence in November, 1950, when 200,000 Chinese Reds came pouring across its bridges to aid the North Koreans as they retreated before UN troops who had driven to the river's bank. The Yalu then became the great question-mark to the Western World.

One of the reasons for the removal of General Douglas MacArthur from his command in the Far East was his advocacy of bombing Communist bases in Manchuria to "neutralize the sanctuary protection given the enemy north of the Yalu."

General MacArthur's superiors voted him down. Such action, they contended, might officially bring Red China into the war and perhaps spark a world conflagration.

In Europe, the Rhine is a challenge and source of tension of a different sort. Traditionally the symbol of German patriotism, the Rhine (from the Latin name for the river Rhenus) travels more than 820 miles from its source in Switzerland, through Germany, the Netherlands and into the North Sea. And although the Rhine does not come closer than about 90 miles to the Soviet zone of occupation, the river bustles with military activity. The number of NATO divisions stationed on its banks is a carefully guarded military secret.

To the Germans, ever since the rise of their nation as a military power in the late nineteenth cen-

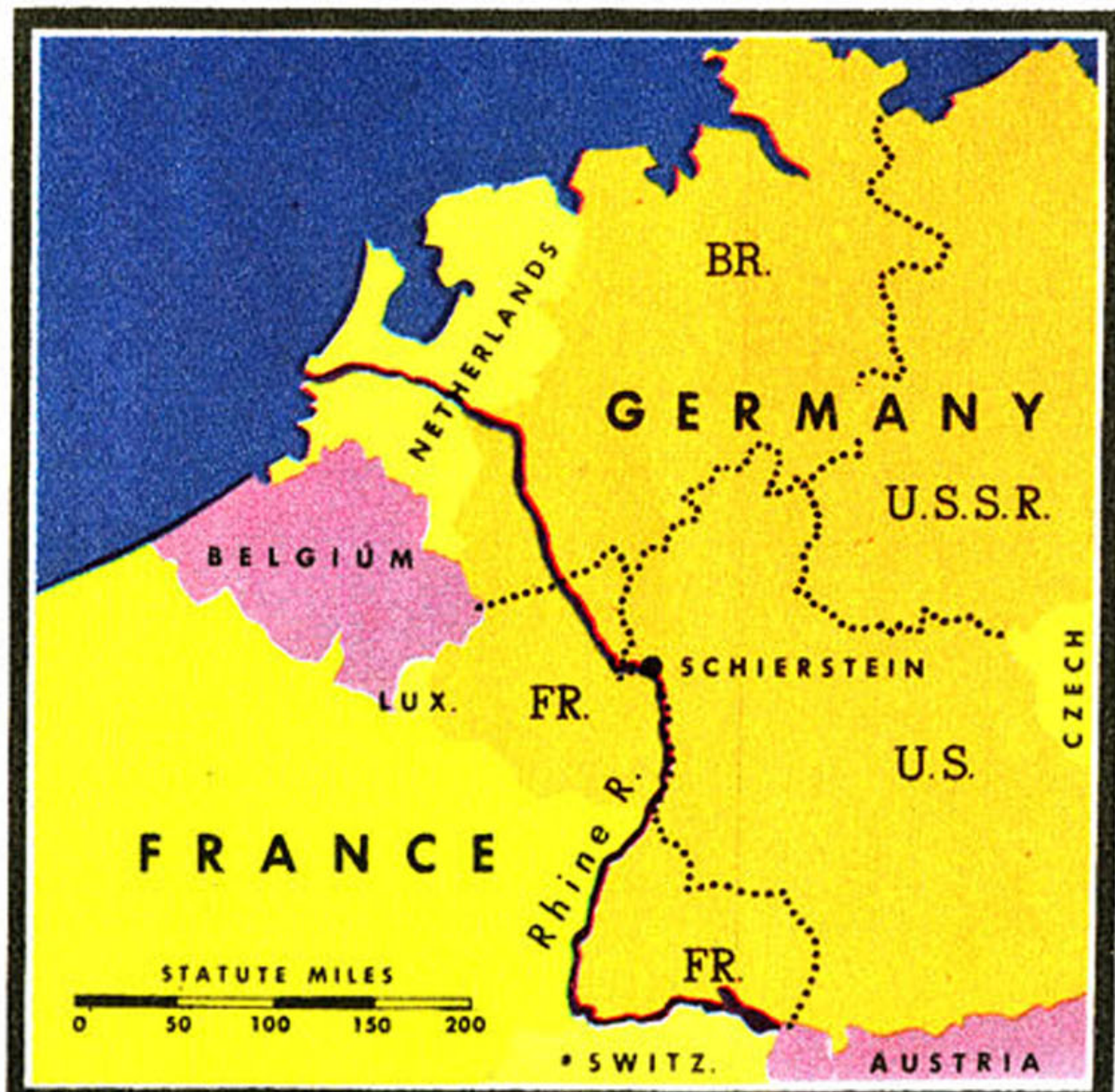
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ture, the Rhine has always been considered a natural bulwark of defense. But in the last days of World War II, onrushing Allied troops broke through German defenses and forded the Rhine at numerous points.

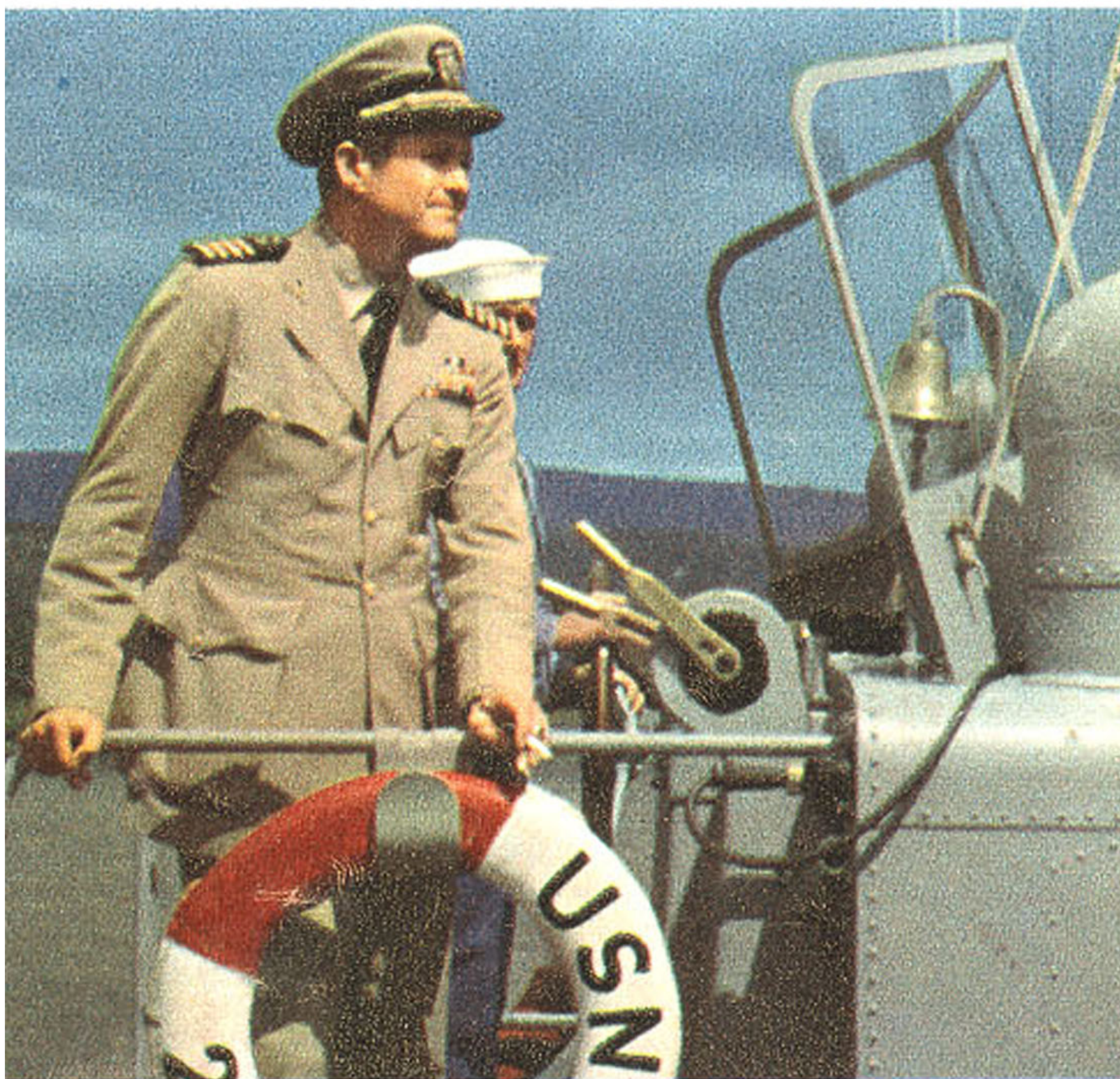
"An unfordable river is a military obstacle of importance," noted the Military Review, a publication of the U.S. Army's Command and General Staff College, in analyzing the German setbacks in 1945. But, the analysis continued, a river is only an obstacle if the defenders keep it unfordable by maintaining frequent patrols and by having enough fire power and mobile reserves on hand to thwart any possible attack. The Western powers, while not by any means forgetting what happened to France's Maginot line, are determined to make the Rhine a bastion of defense. In the struggle against Communism the Yalu and the Rhine have become frontiers for the forces of the free world. And certainly history hinges on what occurs on these two rivers in the immediate future.



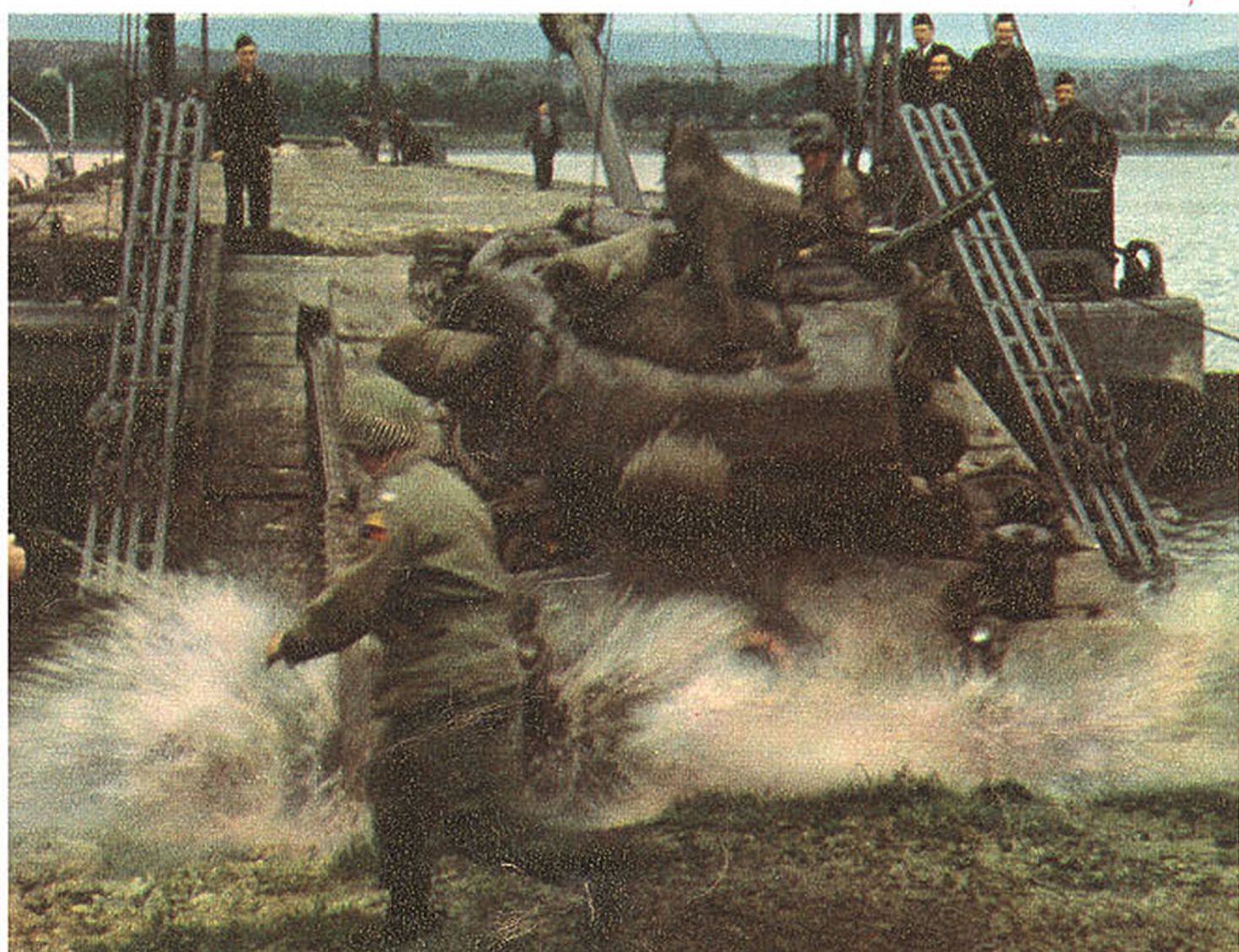
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Capt. S. A. Robbins, Jr., commander of the Navy's tiny, but tactically vital Rhine River Patrol, directs maneuvers from flying bridge of boat



Medium tank splashes ashore from Landing Craft Utilities (LSU). One of patrol's top jobs is lightning-paced movement of heavy equipment

A**FTER** World War II, an official Army report described the Rhine River as the "greatest barrier of all in Western Europe." Today, if war should ignite that section of the world, a tiny unit of the U.S. Navy might well decide whether that "greatest barrier" remained steadfast or fell before the might of the aggressor. The American Rhine River Patrol, under the command of Captain S. A. Robbins, Jr., of Los Angeles, dominates about 100 miles of the river, while the British, French and Dutch are watchful in their sectors to the north and south.

If future hostilities follow the pattern of World War II, the 384 American sailors and the 125 carefully screened Germans who work with them would sweep their sector of all shipping, then go about the grim task of systematically demolishing anything that blocked the efforts of our forces or aided the enemy.

Thus today, while tugs and barges and excursion boats ply the swift waters of the Rhine, Robbins is continually putting his force of 75-foot former German torpedo recovery boats through their paces, familiarizing his men with the river and practicing amphibious landings and evacuation operations.

"Our worry," says Robbins, "is defense, not occupation."



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A Rhine River Patrol boat knifes through the water at full speed. The U.S. patrols 100 miles of river; French, British, Dutch share the rest