

Two weeks after Adolf Hitler committed suicide, German troops and American soldiers fought together to rescue a group of high profile French prisoners in the final days of the war.

The true story is one of the lesser known tales from World War II but reads like the plot of a Hollywood movie.

It was the only time Allied forces fought alongside German soldiers during the six year war.



American and German troops fought together during World War II to defend a Castle Itter, pictured



The unlikely alliance was formed to defend a group of high profile French prisoners from an advancing SS unit

Historian Stephen Harding's book 'The Last Battle' recounts the unlikely alliance that was forged to save a group of mainly French politicians who had been held captive at Castle Itter in Austria since the German invasion of France.

The group included former French president Albert Lebrun, former prime ministers Édouard Daladier and Paul Reynaud, military generals Maxime Weygand and Maurice Gamelin and even a famous tennis star called Jean Borotra.

Fourteen American soldiers, with just two tanks and limited ammunition, teamed up with about 20 German Wehrmacht troops to defend the castle from an oncoming SS unit.

Over two days, the bizarre alliance, led by 27-year-old New Yorker Captain Jack Lee, managed to withstand an SS bombardment until Allied reinforcements arrived.

The battle was one of the last of the war.

Harding's book is the culmination of 20 years of research on the battle fought in early May, 1945.

It began after the guards at Castle Itter in Austria's North Tyrol fled on May 4, as the German army became increasingly leaderless.



Former French Prime Minister Paul Reynaud, left, and tennis player Jean Borotra, far right, were both held prisoner and fought in the Battle for Castle Itter

The castle was run as a subcamp of Dachau concentration camp but the VIP prisoners were held in relative luxury and were given access to the library and housed in individual guest rooms.

Once the guards had fled, the inmates armed themselves with weapons including submachine guns and rifles left behind in the castle as they waited for Allied forces to rescue them.

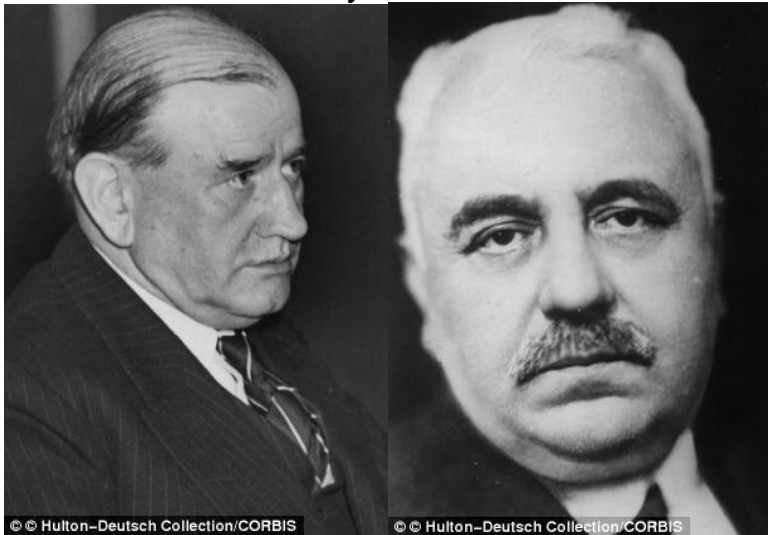
On May 5, 1945, troops from the American 103rd Infantry Division liberated the castle.

They had teamed up with a German unit, which had been persuaded to help the prisoners by inmate Zoonimir Cuckovic, who had left the castle to try to find the nearest Allied unit.

Harding wrote in [Historynet.com](https://www.historynet.com) that the unit, led by 'surrender-minded' German Major Josef Gangel, decided to help as they after 'realising that aiding in their rescue would reflect well on him and his men.'

Capt Jack Lee, then ranked as a first lieutenant, had volunteered to lead a patrol to the castle.

His men included six members of the all-African American Company D, 17th Armored Infantry Battalion.



Anti-fascist French politician Édouard Daladier, left, and former Italian prime minister Francesco Saverio Nitti, right, were also held captive



Former French president Albert Lebrun (centre) was also held captive at Castle Itter during the war

Within hours of the alliance reaching the castle, it was attacked by Waffen-SS troops.

The Nazi troops used antitank guns, which destroyed parts of the castle, and attacked with submachine guns.

Harding said that the French VIP prisoners, including Michel Clemenceau, son of World War I prime minister George, also took up arms.

He wrote that as the SS bombardment intensified, Capt Lee's solution 'was literally medieval: the defenders and the French notables would withdraw into the castle's massive keep.

'They would use their few remaining rounds of ammunition, their bayonets, and—if necessary—their fists to make the SS men fight for every stairwell, every hallway, every floor.'

However, the surviving castle defenders were saved when American 103rd Infantry Division troops finally arrived.

Major Gangel, who is regarded as a hero of anti-Nazi resistance in Germany and Austria for his action, died during the battle after being shot by a sniper.

Jack Lee won the Distinguished Service Cross for his efforts defending the castle.

Read more: <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-2323949/The-World-War-II-battle-Americans-Germans-fought-SAME-Incredible-true-story-fight-save-Austrian-castle-weeks-Hitler-committed-suicide.html#ixzz4XMUFFBRq>

Follow us: @MailOnline on Twitter | DailyMail on Facebook