

A German general describes his actions and experience in an invasion of Britain in 1940.

CAMPAIGN IN BRITAIN 1940-41

An Alternate History Novel

by Anthony Genualdi

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Campaign in Britain: 1940-41

AN ALTERNATE HISTORY NOVEL



Anthony Genualdi

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This book is a work of fiction. It mentions some incidents of World War II, and some real historical figures and places but, for the most part, are changed to remove any resemblance to anyone living or dead.

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CHAPTER ONE

Preparing to land

I found out how close we were in the late summer of 1940 to not having the needed air superiority to get across to England. A friend of mine on the staff of *Reichsmarschall* Goering told me that during a briefing in early August, Goering had told the *Fuehrer* that Number 11 Group, RAF Fighter Command was nearly wiped out. The *Fuehrer* then said we should switch to bombing London to terrorize the English into making peace. Usually on such occasions, Goering would just say, "Yes, my *Fuehrer*," and do it, but my friend told me Goering surprised everyone by saying, "No, we aren't ready to do that, my *Fuehrer*." My friend said you could have heard a pin drop, and Hitler looked ready to blow up.

Goering hurriedly explained that Number 11 Group was *nearly* destroyed, and would need one more great effort to be annihilated. That would be the great attack Goering had planned for the next two weeks, in mid-August. We could then proceed with the landing.

Hitler calmed down and regained a normal color, then told Goering to proceed. My friend told me Goering just said, "Yes, my *Fuehrer*," and hurried out. No doubt Goering went off and took a big shot of morphine.

As we know now, that last great last *Luftwaffe* effort was what it took. The airfields of Number 11 Group were blown up, hangars, planes and all. I had never built an airfield myself, but my fellow engineers tell me how tough it can be to replace them once they are smashed thoroughly. The *Luftwaffe* reigned supreme over southeast England, and through the end of August to mid-September bombed and strafed anything they could find.

On 1 September, 1940, the leaders of Army Group A met outside of Calais to go over their parts in the coming endeavor. We found that 16th Army would take on the big job of landing between Dover and Hastings. My corps, XIII Corps, got the Dover landing. I would take the 17th and 35th Divisions, as well as 2nd Battalion of the 14th Flak Regiment from the *Luftwaffe*. We would set down on the beaches between Folkestone and Dover, and push inland, take the towns, and link up with paratroops dropped to the north of us on bombed out airfields and crossroads. It would be in the darkness of early morning, and by first light, we had to be far enough inland to accommodate our second wave, which for me would include XXXI Corps, which had our panzers, heavy guns, and our motorized troops, including two of the elite regiments of Germany. These were the *Grossdeutschland* and the *Leibstandarte-SS Adolf Hitler*.

Both of these motorized regiments were special to me. The *Grossdeutschland* because, unlike the European tradition of regiments all being of men of the same region, this unit had men from throughout the *Reich* in its ranks, and the *Leibstandarte* because of my brother. Heinrich had moved through the ranks with the *Leibstandarte* from Poland through Holland and France, and was now *Obersturmbannfuhrer* (SS-Lieutenant Colonel), commanding the 1st Battalion.

Our intelligence people told us that our opposition would likely come from British XII Corps, under Lieutenant General Andrew Thorne, who was considered a very able commander, and V Corps, under Lieutenant General Bernard Montgomery, who was considered mostly a big band of wind. We were also told we'd have to deal with an Australian brigade, which would be no fun at all.

My Operations Officer, *Generalleutnant* Fritz Harnisch, and I, went over maps and lists with our staff, and had to prioritize the landing order, and how fast we could offload our

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men and equipment, so we could get inland, and not be worried about what should happen if the Royal Navy should break through our mine barrage. I had been hoping our navy would be better prepared, but most of our big units, like the battlecruisers, were still in drydock, and most of our fire support would come from two old coal burning battleships, who would not stay with us for long in any case.

S-Day, the landing day, would come on the 15th of the month.

CHAPTER TWO

S-Day

At 0400 on 15 September, 1940, the guns of the two old battleships and several destroyers sounded the opening of “Sealion,” the greatest invasion Germany ever mounted. My infantry and combat engineers got out of their landing barges and onto the beaches as day was breaking.

Just before those guns sounded, our paratroops were dropping at three places behind the invasion area. In the west, near Folkestone, they formed a roadblock and engaged enemy Vickers Mark VI tanks with grenades and antitank rifles. In the center, behind the city of Dover, they came down on the runway of a wrecked RAF base. They beat back several attacks by British and New Zealand troops, and set up a radio to direct our planes as day broke. The third group landed northwest of Whitfield, where they tried and failed to dislodge an Australian roadblock. They suffered heavy casualties and had to wait until about 1000, when reinforcements could be dropped to them, to reform and to make contact with our landing force.

I and my staff made it ashore between the first objective towns about Noon, when our first wave was fully ashore and had moved some five or six kilometers inland. We settled in a bunker which had its seaward wall blown off by one of the old battleships. It was then, with the old battleships sailed off to the west for Brighton, that we intercepted a message from one of our destroyers. They were engaging a British force of minesweepers, destroyers, and a cruiser.

Wonderful! Not all of our landing ships had offloaded, and the destroyers and torpedo boats wouldn't be enough. We frantically radioed the *Luftwaffe*, “Rape! Enemy ships closing

from the east! Help!” We picked up one last message from a minelayer that managed to reinforce the barrage, that the enemy cruiser and a destroyer were coming. The cruiser, which we later identified as HMS *Emerald*, and a *Tribal*-class destroyer, showed up about 1230. The destroyer kept going, while the *Emerald* slowed down and started shelling the area. They mostly shelled our towed artillery, a battalion of 105mm howitzers, that had landed between Dover and a blockhouse to the east of town, with our gunners engaging the enemy on either side over open sights. She threw some shells in my direction for good measure, but didn't kill my staff.

After about five minutes of this, which felt like an hour, we looked up at the beautiful sight of two wings of Stukas coming in. Another wing of them headed west for the destroyer which was shelling our men at Folkestone. General Harnisch had broken out a of bottle of cognac that he'd been saving to drink in London, and we passed it around as the spectacle unfolded.

The Stukas peeled off, with their sirens blaring, and dropped their bombs on the *Emerald*. The first couple missed, but they started scoring hits and we cheered as if it were a football match. They knocked out the forward guns, and the bridge and the stern. The seventh plane in line got his bomb right down her stack, and the *Emerald* blew up with a glorious flash. A cheer went up and down our line as if our star striker had completed a hat trick.

We got word from Folkestone that the destroyer had also been eliminated. Unlike with the *Emerald*, some British sailors managed to survive and swim ashore. Unfortunately for them, they came ashore where the SS were, and they didn't take kindly to being shelled. My brother Heinrich told me about it later. His men had done this since France, and didn't even bother to line them up, but shot them down in the surf. I suppose part of me can't blame them.

By the 16th, we had our second wave fully ashore, with our self-propelled assault guns, the *Sturmpanzer I*'s, all ashore to deal with stubborn British resistance. Their 150mm guns were ideal for engaging enemy strongpoints at point blank range. We were able to declare Dover fully secured by nightfall of the 20th. The *Leibstandarte* had the town of Lympne on our western flank secured on the 19th and moved on the way to making contact with our forces that had landed at Brighton. We secured Whitfield on the 20th as well. With our panzers ashore and the paratroops reinforced, we were able to flank and destroy the Australian roadblock on the 21st, as well as a supply depot near it. We were able the next day to turn northeast and engage the garrison of the port of Deal. We had that garrison subdued by the end of the next day, and had our lodgment secured by 25 September, S-Day plus 10.

CHAPTER THREE

Breakout

Between 25 September and 12 October, 1940, the German and British armies in southeast England tried to probe each other's lines, bring in more equipment and manpower, and searched for the initiative to drive back the enemy. The Germans also had to deal with guerilla warfare. From the outset of the invasion, we had to deal with small bands of men who would snipe at our traffic, attack our supply dumps, and go after our planes parked out in the open.

We dealt with two main types of these guerillas. There was the Home Guard, who would fight us with everything from rifles and shotguns, to clubs, blunderbusses, and even a broadsword. They had uniforms and armbands to distinguish themselves from regular British soldiers trapped in our rear who would carry on with the fight. The more insidious second type were called the Auxiliary Units. These were the specially picked and trained men who lived in holes in the ground and would come out at night to kill sentries, blow up various of our fighting materials, and snipe at officers. It was because of these men that the *Waffen-SS* brought in anti-partisan units. They had cut their teeth in Poland and France, and now brought their special brand of pacification to the English countryside. They stayed busy for the duration of the campaign.

Our move to break the stalemate came in the early hours of 12 October, as our paratroops dropped at Canterbury to capture a bridge across the Stour River. We started attacking right after that. From west to east, we tried to storm the British line, making headway here and there, but not making big dents in the line. Our air operations were hampered by that shitty

English weather, with rain on the 13th and blizzards on the 14th. But on the 14th we did close in on Canterbury, where our paratroops were just holding on.

On 15 October, we did break through to Canterbury and relieve our paratroops. More paratroops were dropped, but this time behind the British line on our left flank, where the *Leibstandarte* was hard pressed to hold west of Folkestone. I had to commit the *Grossdeutschland* regiment to help them. I was also happy to find that our navy had finally committed U-boats to go after the Royal Navy units shelling our right flank.

We finally started making westward progress on the 16th. I had sent most of our second-line units, which had captured French tanks, over there to support the *Leibstandarte*, who with the paratroops dropped in the west, managed to take St. Mary's Bay. Its little harbor had been thoroughly wrecked by the retreating enemy, so it was just a milestone for us. This day saw more success on our right, as our *Gebirgsjäger*, our mountain troops, destroyed a roadblock leading to Ramsgate. We also managed another crossing of the Stour River below Herne Bay, and made an advance on Ashford. We took Ramsgate on the 17th, cleared Herne Bay of the enemy, and pushed toward Faversham.

The rain came again on the 18th, but it didn't keep us from taking Ashford, as well as engaging the enemy at Rye and getting closer to Faversham. The rain was replaced by clouds the next day. We made some gains around our sector, but the most noteworthy thing was taking Ashford's airfield. There was no major action on the 20th.

On 21 October, there was action on all fronts with our drive in the east on Maidstone, and the *Leibstandarte* in the west, driving on Hastings. We also engaged a roadblock near Gillingham, which we managed to flank and destroy with infantry and some French made armored cars the next day, all the while dealing with another English downpour. We also

managed with the *Gebirgsjäger* to take care of a roadblock leading into Maidstone.

The 23rd saw the big gains coming in Sussex. Hastings fell to the *Grossdeutschland* and *Leibstandarte* regiments. My brother was later to bitterly recount for me how “those Army pricks” took some shortcuts and bypassed resistance to be the first to put up the *Reichskriegsflagge* at the town hall, and deny the SS the glory. I had to laugh and remind him that I’m an “Army prick” too. At the same time, near Ashford, a marauding group of British Matilda I tanks was loose in our rear. A group of our captured Char B1 bis tanks took complete care of them.

The 24th saw our panzers finally heading into Maidstone, as well as our forces penetrating into Chatham. In east Sussex our *Grossdeutschland* regiment closed in on Bexhill and Battle. It was here that the legendary Battle of Hastings was fought 874 years earlier, and on the following day the British hit us there on that bloody ground with their Matilda II’s which, with their heavy frontal armor, we fought to a standstill with Stukas and 88’s. The 25th also saw our navy making a cameo appearance on the Sussex coast, with a destroyer shelling Eastbourne as the *Leibstandarte* and paratroops closed in. We also took heavy losses at Gillingham trying a frontal assault.

Rain came again on 26 October, with the only noteworthy thing that day being the securing of Chatham. The 27th saw the skies clear again, and under this refreshing sunshine, our enemy sent a destroyer up the River Medway to support beleaguered Gillingham. The howitzer battalion that bravely fought on S-Day over open sights did so again on this day, and once they got the range, silenced the destroyer’s guns, and with an almost leisurely precision, sent her to the bottom with only her mast showing at the end. While this was happening, our bridging column threw up a span west of town, and I watched us flank and take Gillingham and its airfield.

The skies stayed clear on the 28th. We were finally closing in on Gravesend and started shelling with our self-propelled artillery. We also took time to clear the blockhouses west of Gillingham to secure our flank, and in Sussex, the paratroops and *Leibstandarte* finally attacked Eastbourne from the east and north, respectively. On the 29th, Eastbourne fell, and my brother gleefully recounted to me by radio that, “At least the *Luftwaffe* has manners,” and “let” the SS put up the *Reichskriegsflagge* over the city. This day also saw our flag go up over Gravesend and Wrotham.

All seemed so right with the world. Surely, the English will give up soon, we thought. Even Churchill must be sweating, and the *Fuehrer* must be smiling. That’s when a single sniper bullet comes like a bolt from the blue to ruin everything.

At about 1800 hours on the 29th, I got an urgent call to report to 16th Army headquarters with my operations officer, General Harnisch. Upon our arrival, we were taken to *Generaloberst* Busch. He gave us a perfunctory welcome and starting pacing behind his desk. He slapped his hands behind his back. That’s never good, I thought. Busch finally said, “Field Marshal von Rundstedt has been murdered. A cowardly English sniper killed him at his desk, shooting through his window.”

Harnisch and I looked at each other. “*Mein Gott*,” he exclaimed. After a moment I turned to General Busch, “That sums it up for me too, *Herr Generaloberst*.”

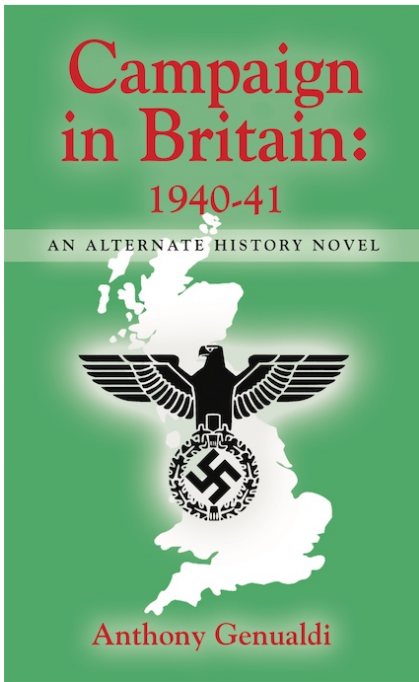
Busch stopped and looked at me, “You were friends with him like I was.” He sat down and continued, “I’ve ordered the SS to find and punish the cowards who did this. In the meantime, I’ve been moved up the chain to take his place at Army Group A. My operations officer will come with me. I’m ordering you to take my place here. Your corps has performed brilliantly from the start, and I know you can continue that

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here. My staff will give you everything you need. I've worked with them for over a year, and they always come through for me."

"May we go back and collect our gear," I asked, "and I can say good-bye to my men?"

Busch nodded, "Certainly, von Halen. I will wait for your return before moving to Army Group." He rose and shook my hand. "Good luck, von Halen."



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