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Cover: Tuskegee airman Edward C. Gleed of the 332nd Fighter Group stands in front of P-51/D Mustang "Creamer's Dream" at Ramitelli airfield, Italy. See story page 30. Photo: Library of Congress

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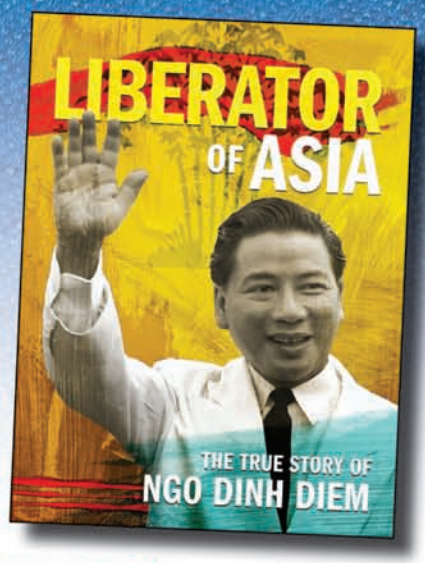

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A tragic loss of life, a tragic loss of history

I've always had a soft spot in my heart for prop-driven airplanes, especially World War II warbirds. I guess it began when my parents took me to an airshow back in the early 1950s. And my uncle was a crewman on a Navy B-24 in the Pacific.

One of the highlights of my life came in the '90s when I was flying as a fully and authentically outfitted member of the crew of a B-17 (the Commemorative Air Force's "Sentimental Journey") at an air show here in Colorado that was arranged for by my friend Rob Barnes, head of the Colorado-based Association of Living History.

Flint Whitlock

Members of the Association of Living History authentically outfitted and ready to fly in the CAF's B-17 "Sentimental Journey." Your editor is in the front row, second from left.

Once inside the B-17, I was struck by three things that no movie had prepared me for. One was how small the inside of the B-17 is—no wider than your average sedan. The other was how noisy it was inside with all four engines going full blast; I could not hear a word from the person next to me shouting into my ear.

The third surprise was how, even when the plane was making a gentle turn, how the centrifugal forces plastered me against the bulkhead, making movement impossible. I flashed on wartime footage of disabled B-17s and B-24s, spiraling in their death dives toward the ground. It is not hard to imagine trapped, immobilized crewmen screaming in terror during their final moments of life.

All that went through my mind a couple of weeks before last Thanksgiving when I received the awful news of a mid-air collision between a B-17 named Texas Raiders and a Bell P-63 Kingcobra at the Dallas Executive Airport.

How the accident happened is a mystery at this writing; the day was clear and sunny, and video showed the P-63 simply gliding slowly right into the left side of the bomber. News reports said that six persons died—five in the B-17 and one in the fighter. My heart aches for their friends and family, for the men in the planes were doing something they loved for the enjoyment and education of the public.

Texas Raiders was one of only 45 surviving B-17s, and one of the few still flying; it was hangared in Conroe, Texas, near Houston. The Kingcobra was even rarer. Supplied mostly to our Soviet allies, there are only about 13 or 14 still in existence, most of which are in museums and not flyable.

A news release said, "More than 12,000 B-17s were produced by Boeing, Douglas Aircraft and Lockheed between 1936 and 1945, with nearly 5,000 lost during the war, and most of the rest scrapped by the early 1960s. About 3,300 P-63s were produced by Bell Aircraft between 1943 and 1945."

The disaster will remain forever etched into the minds of the thousands of spectators—children included—who witnessed the tragic collision and crash.

—Flint Whitlock, Editor
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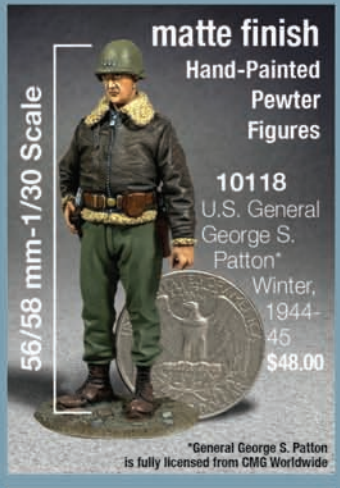

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Inventive military engineer Oberstleutnant Alfred Becker developed several mobile artillery vehicles that wreaked havoc on the Allies.

Students of World War II know the name Percy Hobart—a British general who raised and trained several armored divisions and who invented all sorts of unique and unusual weapons of war—swimming tanks, flail tanks (for exploding landmines), a flame-throwing tank, a tank that laid down its own roadway, and many other odd-but-useful devices. The Germans had Alfred Becker, their own version of Percy Hobart.

Becker started the war as a senior noncommissioned officer in a Wehrmacht artillery regiment, and rose to the rank of lieutenant colonel commanding a unit that was a major factor in stopping Operation Goodwood in Normandy using guns that he built.

Alfred Becker was born in Krefield, Germany, located northwest of Düsseldorf, on August 20, 1899. He volunteered for service shortly after the beginning of World War I (at the age of 15) and ended the war as an artillery officer. He was awarded both the Iron Cross First and Second Class.

Following the war, he returned to Krefield and earned a degree as a mechanical engineer. He worked in the textile industry and became a part owner of Volkmann & Co. in Krefield and formed his own small manufacturing firm, Alfred Becker AG in Bielefield.

With the Second World War imminent, Becker was called up for active service on August 29, 1939, and was assigned to the 227th Infantry Division as a senior noncommissioned officer. The division did not participate in the Polish campaign and was stationed in Silesia guarding the western border.

During the next six months, Becker was promoted to first lieutenant and became the commander of the 12th Battery, a heavy howitzer battery with four 15cm howitzers, 185 men, and over 175 horses.

Wikimedia

ABOVE: Major Alfred Becker, an artillery officer with a genius for creating mobile weaponry. RIGHT: Field Marshal Erwin Rommel (right) inspects members of an assault gun battalion standing in front of their guns—10.5cm leFH 18 (Sf.) auf Geschützwagen 39H(f)—a self-propelled howitzer designed by Alfred Becker—in Normandy, France, a month before the Allied invasion. Only 48 were produced during the war.

Bundesarchin Bild 101I-300-1865-06; Photo: Speck

Becker's first combat experience in World War II took place on May 10, 1940, with Germany's invasion of France and the Low Countries; Becker's unit engaged the Dutch Army. During this campaign, Becker came upon an abandoned Dutch mechanized artillery unit equipped with Brossel Tal artillery tractors. Becker replaced his horse-drawn equipment with the captured tractors, allowing his battery to be ahead of the rest of the division's artillery regiment throughout the remainder of the campaign.

For his initiative and fearless conduct as a forward observer, Becker received the clasp to his Iron Cross Second Class and the clasp to the Iron Cross First Class.

While using artillery tractors improved the mobility of Becker's battery, he felt that it still took too long to prepare the guns to go into action, so he conceived the idea of mounting artillery weapons on the vehicles directly, thus increasing their mobility immensely.

After the French campaign, Becker encountered many abandoned British Vickers Mk VI and VIb light tanks and converted these vehicles in self-propelled guns by mounting a 10.5cm howitzer at the rear of the vehicle with an armored combat compartment.

However, the recoil of the gun on such a light vehicle would cause the vehicle to move. Becker solved this problem by attaching a spade that could be lowered at the rear of the vehicle to absorb the recoil forces.

After testing a prototype vehicle in June 1941, Becker used his connections with manufacturers of stainless steel products in the Krefield area to procure armor plating.

Becker's men then built the final version of the self-propelled guns while they still performed their normal duties. The work was completed in July 1941 and the battery held a successful test firing at the Beverlo artillery range in Belgium.

In addition to the seven self-propelled guns, Becker's staff also produced six artillery observation and communication vehicles, 12 ammunition carriers, and a maintenance vehicle using the Vickers Mk VI.

In October 1941, the 227th Infantry Division was transferred to the Eastern Front and assigned to Army Group North. It participated in the siege of Leningrad, and was assigned to positions in the forests south of Lake Ladoga. The unit was organized into three platoons of two guns each; the seventh gun was designated as a command vehicle.

It was at this time that Becker's unit designation was changed to the 15th Battery. The unit was not deployed as a unified unit but was deployed with each platoon assigned to an infantry regiment within the 227th.

This battery of self-propelled guns was the first one within the German infantry artillery units. Panzer divisions and motorized infantry divisions relied on motorized artillery units while the infantry divisions relied on horse drawn artillery. Both required that the gun crews prepare the site before the guns could be brought into action. However, Becker's battery could drive to a location and almost immediately start firing. German commanders quickly recognized this huge advantage and came to depend on the battery to act in a "fire

Wikimedia

Using his French facilities and workers, Becker converted 170 armored vehicles into Jagdpanzer Marder I tank destroyers with 7.5cm guns from July to August 1942.

brigade" role, quickly transferring it to areas needing artillery support.

Beginning in mid-October 1941, Becker's battery was continually in action, supporting not only the 227th, but other divisions as well. This situation continued through the winter.

But these actions exposed problems. These guns were meant to provide indirect fire support, but the vehicles were often used in direct fire support of the infantry, a role to which they were not suited. In February 1942, three guns were lost in a battle where they tried to engage Russian KV-1 tanks with direct fire. The guns' armor-piercing rounds could not penetrate the Russian tanks' armor.

Becker's four remaining vehicles continued to provide support to the infantry units fighting around Leningrad through the spring of 1942. They continued to suffer losses due to providing close support; the last gun was destroyed in late spring/summer 1942.

The German units supported by Becker's vehicles praised their performance. The guns' chassis were found to be reliable and capable of being used in extreme conditions. The vehicles' low fuel consumption was also viewed as an asset.

Becker was wounded twice while in Russia, the first time in October 1941, and his actions during this campaign earned him the German Cross in Gold, presented to him on May 13, 1942. Becker was also promoted at this time to the rank of captain.

The glowing reports of "Becker's Battery" in Russia attracted the attention of the OKH (German Army High Command). As a result, Becker was recalled from the Eastern Front and assigned to work with Alkett, a major German manufacturer of armored vehicles, to modify obsolete French equipment into useful fighting vehicles.

He first focused on the Lorraine 37L, known to Germans as the Lorraine Schlepper. Similar to the Vickers Mark VI, the driver was at the front of the vehicle while the engine was located in the middle, allowing an armored compartment for the gun and crew to be built at the rear.

These reports also came to the attention of Adolf Hitler, who requested a demonstration, which was held on May 23, 1942. Hitler was pleased and expressed his support for the type of weapons demonstrated—and was amazed that they had been built by troops in the field. He saw this as an opportunity to improve the effectiveness of his troops for minimal cost.

Hitler was aware that the Germans had captured vast quantities of French armored vehicles two years earlier, but were not able to use them because the French vehicles did not lend themselves to German tactics.

Hitler directed that all of the currently available Lorraine Schleppers be made into self-propelled guns, mounting either a 7.5cm anti-tank gun, a 10.5cm howitzer, or 15cm howitzer. He further ordered that 30 of the vehicles mounting 15cm guns be built by the end of June for shipment to Erwin Rommel's Afrika Korps. Becker continued to work with Alkett to construct these initial 30 vehicles, which were completed in July 1942.

Becker then received a commission from Hitler through Reich Armaments Minister Albert Speer to return to France with following tasks: 1) take an inventory of all remaining captured British and French armored vehicles; 2) determine which vehicles were useful; and 3) collect the vehicles and convert them as necessary. The order required Becker to create enough usable equipment to equip "at least" two panzer divisions.

The order was enormous and to carry it out required personnel that had metalworking skills. Fortunately, Becker knew

of a group of men with whom he had prior experience—the men of his old battery. Becker could provide instructions to these men with confidence that they would successfully complete the tasks. With the destruction of their artillery pieces during combat around the Leningrad area, they had been sent to infantry units.

Strict German Army regulations forbade the transfer of able-bodied soldiers from the Eastern Front back to France. To bypass these regulations, Becker worked out a deal with Maj. Gen. Friedrich von Scotti, commander of the 227th Infantry Division. The commander would send 10 soldiers a week back to Germany for rest and recreation. However, instead of reporting back to the 227th, the men would instead report to Becker's unit in France. This allowed Becker to transfer the majority of his old unit back to France by the end of 1942. In return, Becker sent 20 armored vehicles to the 227th Infantry Division.

Becker established his headquarters (Baukommando Becker) at Maisons-Laffitte, on the northern outskirts of Paris. His command utilized three former French automobile factories: Matford, Talbot, and Hotchkiss, all near Paris.

Becker sent his men out throughout the French countryside to retrieve every French vehicle, no matter its condition, and bring it back to the collection site at the Hotchkiss factory. There, Becker's staff would determine whether to scrap the vehicle or to use it. All useful parts were removed from scrapped vehicles.

Becker's production process was simple: his unit would produce a prototype using plywood, which was then used as templates to construct the armored superstructures. The vehicles were then produced in batches primarily by Becker's staff, but at times by French workers under the supervision of skilled group leaders from Becker's staff.

For his work at Alkett and Baukommando Becker, Becker was awarded the War Merit Cross First Class with Swords on September 1, 1942.

In 1942, Germany was concerned about an invasion of German-occupied France from Britain. To counter this, they planned to develop a highly mechanized army that could rapidly be deployed; the "Schnelle Brigade West" was one of the units developed. Colonel Edgar Feuchtinger was assigned as the commander of the unit. He previously commanded Artillery Regiment 227, Becker's old unit.

Feuchtinger was ordered to continue to strengthen the Schnelle Brigade West. However, he was unable to use standard German equipment to do this since all of that was earmarked for the other operational areas. So he worked with Becker to provide the vehicles needed.

At this time, Becker was appointed the commander of Gepanzerte Artillerie Abteilung (Sfl.) z.b.V., which was part of Schnelle Brigade West. He had to not only oversee the construction of vehicles for the Wehrmacht, but he was required also to organize and train a combat unit. The men who were assigned to his construction command also were incorporated into this unit.

On May 6, 1943, Hitler ordered that the 21st Panzer Division be reactivated after its loss in North Africa. On June 27, OKH ordered Field Marshal Gerd von Rundstedt to upgrade Schnelle Brigade West to a

panzer division and designate it the 21st Panzer Division (New). An important provision in this order was that no German equipment would be assigned to the division, with the exception of communications equipment and a dozen 8.8cm Flak guns; Colonel Feuchtinger would have to make do with material from captured stocks.

The equipment restriction meant that the 21st Panzer Division had to rely on Baukommando Becker for much of its equipment. Becker's unit delivered over 550 armored vehicles to the Wehrmacht, with over 400 going to the 21st Panzer Division. These vehicles basically provided the mobile armored resources for the division's panzergrenadier regiments, the artillery regiment, the combat engineer regiment, and the communication section, as well as Becker's own unit, Sturmgeschütz Abteilung 200.

During this time, Becker was promoted to major.

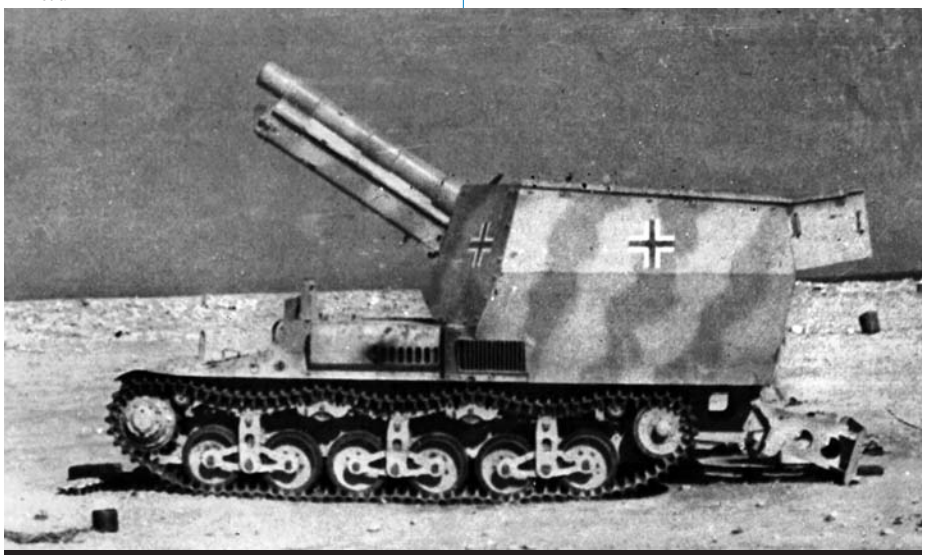
Becker's unit was unique within the organizational structure of a panzer division. Becker described his unit as being a trial unit with the purpose of obtaining concentrated fire while in action. Each battery was furnished with six 7.5cm guns for direct fire and four 10.5 cm guns for direct and indirect fire. The latter guns were positioned 500-1,000 kilometers behind the 7.5 anti-tank guns. All guns of the battery would be directed by radio by the battery commander from his scout vehicle, located in a forward position.

The radios were of the latest design and allowed the operators to escape detection because they used very low frequencies that were not scanned by the Allies. Their range was limited, though, requiring that messages be relayed through many tanks. This organization was made to alleviate the weak anti-tank capability of Becker's assault artillery battery displayed in Russia.

By June 1, 1944, Becker's unit was organized into five batteries. The first four had four anti-tank guns and six howitzers each while the fifth battery had only two anti-tank guns and four howitzers. The headquarters company was assigned one anti-tank gun and six flak guns.

At that time, the elements of Sturmgeschütz Abteilung 200 were stationed near Caen in Normandy with Batteries 1 through 4 stationed near Cagny, southeast of Caen and east of the Orne River, and Battery 5 in training north of Caen, near Epron and west of the Orne River.

Wikimedia



A Becker-designed 10.5cm leFH-18/40 auf Geschützwagen Lorraine Schlepper(f) self-propelled artillery gun. "Schlepper" means "tractor," and the (f) indicates the chassis was French. These armored vehicles were fast enough to keep pace with panzer units.

On June 6, the Allies launched Operation Overlord, the cross-Channel invasion of Normandy. Becker's unit was placed on alert at 2 a.m. At 10 a.m., Sturmgeschütz Abteilung 200 was ordered to support the German counterattack on Benouville (the site of Pegasus Bridge, captured by British glider forces), on the west side of the Orne River. This required most of the unit to go through the bombed-out remains of Caen; the fifth battery was to join them there.

Half of the unit had crossed the bridge into Caen when new orders arrived telling them to turn around and support Panzergrenadier Regiment 125 east of the Orne River; the unit did not arrive in its new position until nightfall. Thus, Sturmgeschütz Abteilung 200 did not fire a shot until the night of June 6.

Becker's unit supported Panzergrenadier Regiment 125 for the next six weeks, and Becker managed to keep the losses of men and vehicles to a minimum. During this time his unit claimed to have destroyed at least 21 Sherman tanks and captured two more.

By the middle of July, the Allies had been battling the Germans in Normandy for six weeks, but had, as yet, been unable to break out of the invasion bridgehead. Field Marshal Bernard Montgomery ordered plans be developed for a new operation, called "Goodwood," with the British attack force consisting of three armored divisions (the 11th Armoured Division, the Guards Armoured Division, and the 7th Armoured Division) totaling over 900 tanks.

Monty's plan called for 11th Armoured to attack first from Hérouvillette, with the objectives of screening Cagny on the left flank and capturing the villages of Bras, Hubert-Folie, Verrières, and Fontenay-le-Marmion on the right. The Guards Armoured Division would then follow and capture Cagny and Vimont. The 7th Armoured—the "Desert Rats"—would advance last and would move south of the Garcelles-Secqueville ridge, with the ultimate objective of Falaise. British and Canadian infantry would attack to protect the flanks of the armored assault.

The British began staging these divisions into the Orne bridgehead on the night of July 16/17 in an attempt to mask the British intentions. But German observers spotted the preparations and alerted Rommel's headquarters, which sent out an alert for a counterattack starting on July 17.

The German forces defending this area of battlefield consist of the 16th Luftwaffe Field Division and 21st Panzer Division, both under the command of Lt. Col. Hans von Luck, commander of Panzergrenadier Regiment 125.

Becker was in the field, north of Cagny, at 4:30 a.m. on July 18 in his armored scout vehicle. He was located between his third and fourth batteries and was in touch with his mobile command post. He had positioned his batteries as follows: Battery 1, commanded by Captain Eichorn, was located on the northeastern side of Demouville: Battery 2, commanded by Captain Foerster, was on northern end of Giberville; Battery 3, commanded by Captain Noesser, was located in Grentheville; Battery 4, commanded by Captain Roepke, was located on eastern side of Le Mensil Frementel; and Battery 5, commanded by 1st Lt. Schreiner, was located near Le Prieure.

Operation Goodwood opened with the most concentrated aerial bombardment of the war for a ground operation. At 5:35 a.m., the complex aerial bombardment began and lasted for over two hours. Bombers from the RAF Bomber Command, the U.S. Eighth Air Force, and the U.S. Ninth Air Force dropped over 8,500 tons of bombs on German positions all over the battlefield.

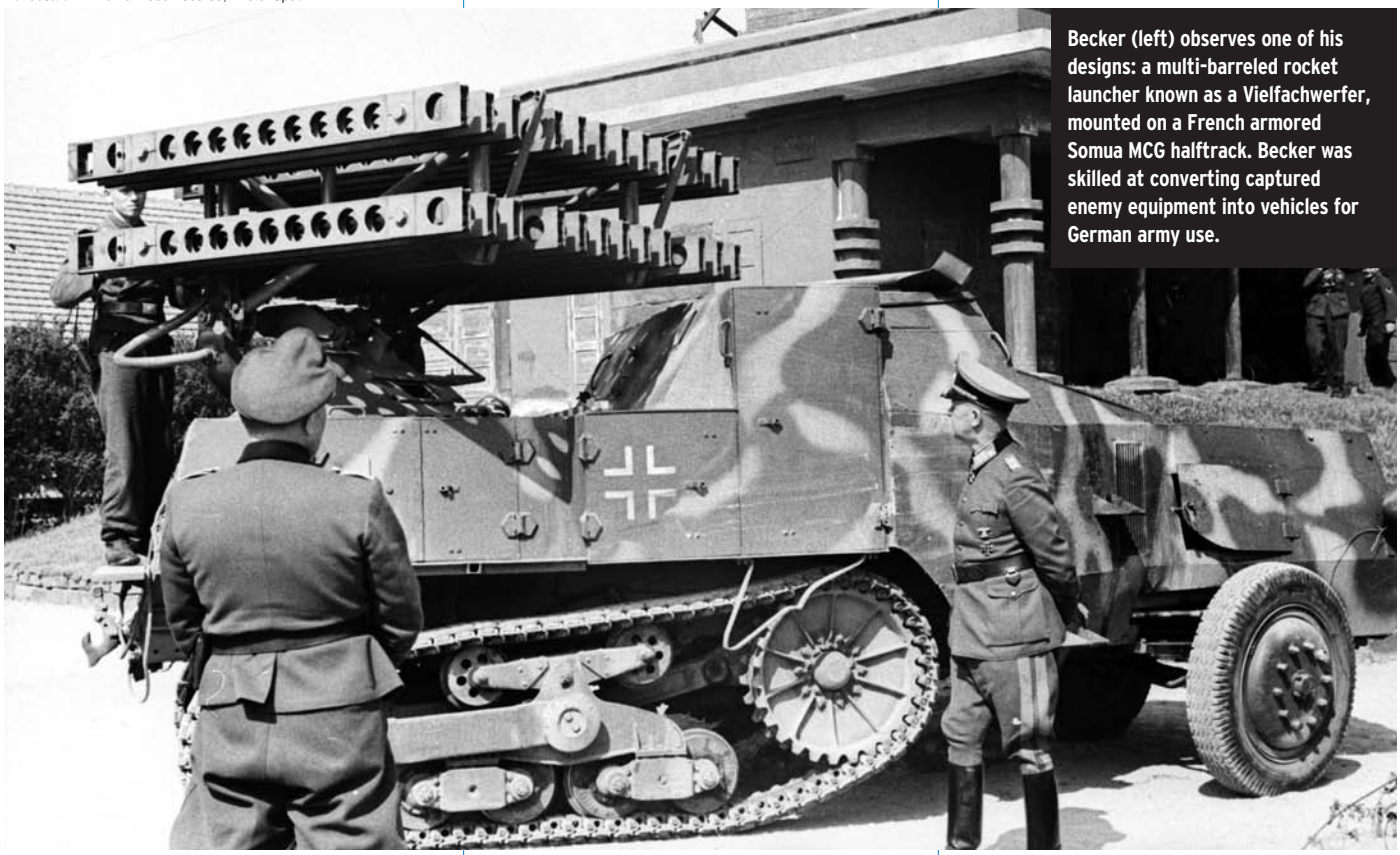
The effects of the bombing were devastating for the Germans. Those not killed or wounded were incapacitated and surrendered to the advancing tanks. Perhaps the most serious result to the Germans was the loss of their tanks. Panzer Regiment 22 and Schwere Panzer Abteilung 503 were positioned close to the front line and were devastated by the bombing. Those tanks not destroyed required considerable work to become operational again.

This was difficult since the bombing wiped out maintenance facilities accompanying the tanks. Luck's anti-tank capability on his right flank was reduced to a few anti-tank guns and Becker's batteries.

The air bombardment also impacted some of Becker's batteries. When it began, Becker realized that an attack was imminent. His primary focus was to keep in contact with Eichorn's battery since that battery appeared to be the one that would be closest to the route of the attack.

However, Becker lost contact with Eichorn around 7 a.m. as a result of the American air bombardment. He heard nothing more from Eichorn until later that morning when the captain reported to

Bundesarchin Bild 101I-300-1863-30; Photo: Speck



Becker (left) observes one of his designs: a multi-barreled rocket launcher known as a Vielfachwerfer, mounted on a French armored Somua MCG halftrack. Becker was skilled at converting captured enemy equipment into vehicles for German army use.

Becker at his command bunker that all his armored fighting vehicles were lost due to the bombing. Only his command vehicle, which was located forward of the battery position, survived the aerial assault.

The second battery sustained some damage, with two anti-tank guns being immobilized. Becker also had trouble maintaining contact with this battery initially.

Following the air bombardment, the British tanks of the 11th Guards Division started to advance behind a rolling artillery barrage. The first unit to advance was the 3rd Battalion of the Royal Tank Regiment (RTR), heading to west of Grentheville and advancing to the Bourgesbus ridge.

By 8:45 a.m. the tanks had reached the Caen-Troarn railway line. While the tanks were able to cross the line easily, their supporting vehicles were bunching up because they required a level crossing, which resulted in some units being unable to keep up with rolling barrage. Still, the advance was going forward with few difficulties.

After the tanks crossed the railway line, they then veered southwest to the Caen-Vimont railway line and then the Bourgebois ridge.

The next tank unit to advance was the 11th Guards' 2nd Fife and Forfar Yeomanry. Its objective was to advance east of Grentheville and on to Soliers, but its drive was held up at the Caen-Troarn railway line waiting for RTR to cross. As a result, they, too, could not keep up with the rolling barrage.

Finally, the tanks of the 23rd Hussars started to advance. Despite the delays, the attack seemed to be going well.

The initial German response to Goodwood was confused. The 3rd Battalion of the RTR was able to advance across the Caen-Troarn railway line, through the 2,000-yard corridor between Demouville and Sonnerville in the German lines, and then the Caen-Vimont railway line without encountering any resistance; the defenders were just emerging from their bombardment shelters, and there was so much dust in the air, the German defenders could not see the tanks. The following tanks were not so lucky.

At around 9 a.m., Lt. Col. Luck arrived at his command post at Frenouville, returning from leave in Paris. He quickly became aware of the British attack; climbing into his command tank to reconnoiter the battlefield, he was horrified when he got Cagny to see that 40-50 tanks were crossing the Caen-Vimont railway west of Cagny. Luck was then informed that his tanks were either destroyed or inoperable.

While in Cagny, Luck discovered a Luftwaffe flak battery and commanded it to fire on the second wave of British tanks. Shortly thereafter, the first tanks from the Fife and Forfar Yeomanry tried to cross the Caen-Troarn railway and four Shermans were quickly set ablaze. Twelve more tanks were soon knocked out from the concentrated fire from this battery and from Becker's third and fourth batteries.

Luck then returned to his command post to find Becker already there. The major informed him that his first battery at Demouville had been destroyed and that the second battery at Giberville had sustained damage but was still operational. The other three batteries were intact.

Becker now began to move his batteries to provide vital anti-tank defense. These movements were undertaken as a series of position changes that allowed the Germans to ambush the British tanks and then move to another location and set up another ambush.

The second battery moved to new positions south of the Caen-Troarn railway. It withdrew through the tunnels of the Caen-Dozule railway and eventually took up positions near Hubert-Folie. Here, it still supported the defenders of Giberville, but the battery's retreat under pressure allowed the British to capture Giberville.

Meanwhile, the third battery remained in Grentheville. Because the British attacked using tanks without infantry support, they were forced to bypass Grentheville on both the west and east sides; the third battery hit the tanks on both sides. At approximately 3 p.m., the battery abandoned Grentheville and relocated to positions south of Soliers.

The fourth battery initially offered resistance to tanks of the Fife and Forfar Yeomanry that were trying to cross the Caen-Troarn railway but lost a 10.5cm gun to the heavy British artillery bombardment. The battery was then forced to withdraw and take up new positions.

The fifth battery provided artillery support to the 2nd Battalion, Panzergrenadier Regiment 125, as they resisted the advance of the British infantry attacking Touffreville. Before Le Priere could be captured, the battery withdrew to new positions near Le Poirier.

The resistance put forth by Becker's batteries was crucial to the German defensive measures in that it allowed the Germans time to bring up reinforcements. The first reinforcements were the tanks of the Panther Abteilung of SS Panzer Regiment 1. These were followed by the troops of 2nd and 3rd battalions of SS Panzergrenadier Regiment 2. The Panther tanks, together with 3rd and 5th Batteries, repulsed an attack of the 23rd Hussars east of Soliers; elements of the 12th SS Panzer Division arrived later in the afternoon.

Effectively, the British attack had stalled by this point and there was to be no breakthrough; the British withdrew their forces to the Caen-Vimont railway line to reorganize them. The Germans had contained the advance while inflicting severe losses on the attackers. The 11th Armoured Division, which led the attack, had lost 126 tanks by the end of the July 18. It must be remembered that this was done without the initial

Imperial War Museum

Infantrymen of the 3rd British Division ride atop tanks of the Staffordshire Yeomanry, 27th Armoured Brigade, at the start of Field Marshal Montgomery's Operation Goodwood, July 18, 1944. Becker's mobile artillery batteries stalled British attempts to break out of the Normandy beachhead.

use of the Germans' primary weapon, its armor, which was rendered inoperable by the British aerial bombardment.

The arrival of German reinforcements allowed the 21st Panzer Division to be relieved. Late in the afternoon, the 3rd Battery moved from Soliers and joined forces with the 2nd Battery near La Hogue. The next day, Becker's batteries fought in the area from Frenouville to Bourgbus, and that night Sturmgeschütz Abteilung 200 was replaced by other units and ordered to go to positions around Troarn.

Goodwood would continue for the next day and a half. On July 20, inclement weather deprived the Allies of their air superiority, forcing Montgomery to halt Goodwood.

The failure of Operation Goodwood to break out resulted in Montgomery having to do damage control. He later stated that the operation was not to break out but to tie down the German armor. General Dwight D. Eisenhower was very unhappy with gains achieved versus the amount of material expended and losses incurred. There was talk of replacing Montgomery, but that talk vanished with success of the American Army's Operation Cobra.

The 21st Panzer Division, which had been fighting for over six weeks, was ordered to be relieved by the 272nd Infantry Division on July 27, although parts of the division, including Sturmgeschütz Abteilung 200, were placed under the command of the 272nd Infantry Division. This respite was short-lived.

On July 30, Montgomery initiated Operation Bluecoat to create another hotspot that required a German response. He chose the area where there was little German armor—on the western flank of his army south of Caumont and west of Villers Bocage. He moved the armored divisions that were involved in Goodwood from the Orne bridgehead south and east of Caen to this western sector.

Operation Bluecoat commenced 6 a.m. with carpet bombing of selected targets and an artillery barrage. The British ground troops then advanced. At first, the German line held, but soon breakthroughs were being made in the German defenses. Panzergruppe West committed the 21st Panzer Division to the battle at 4 p.m. on July 30, and Sturmgeschütz Abteilung 200 was ordered to new positions south of St. Martin. The unit would not reach its position until the next afternoon.

Part of Sturmgeschütz Abteilung 200 was used to help secure areas south of St. Martin and the rest of the unit assisted in

securing areas southeast of the Foret l'Eveque. Soon after arriving, the unit was drawn into combat. The Guards Armoured Division was ordered to advance through St. Martin towards the village of Le Tourneur. Parts of the division suddenly appeared in the evening south of St. Martin before Hills 192 and 238.

Resisting their advance were elements of the German 326th Infantry Division, Feld-Ersatz Battalion 200, and Sturmgeschütz Abteilung 200. Heavy fighting ensued, with Hill 192 and the village of Le Val changing hands several times.

Meanwhile, a more serious threat was developing for the Germans. A British reconnaissance unit advanced through a gap in the German lines, finding an unguarded bridge over the Souleuvre River and taking possession of it. They reported this success at 10:30 a.m. The 11th Armoured rushed to exploit this opportunity.

Six Cromwell tanks moved through the Foret l'Eveque towards the bridge. A fight ensued between these tanks and self-propelled guns from Sturmgeschütz Abteilung 200 which had just arrived. Tanks from the 23rd Hussars soon followed and joined in the battle; British infantry finally secured the bridge at 8 p.m. The 1st Battalion of Panzergrenadier Regiment 125 was brought up to cover the Germans' exposed left flank, allowing the Germans to temporarily stabilize their front.

After this, Sturmgeschütz Abteilung 200 continued to support Panzergrenadier Regiment 125 through the first three weeks of August, sustaining heavy losses in the process. By August 19, Feuchtinger reports that Becker's unit had only four assault guns remaining. Becker and his men were now involved in the battle of the Falaise Pocket. Becker and some of his men were able to escape the deadly pocket, but just barely.

After the battle of the Falaise Pocket, Becker initially established his headquarters in Belgium at Fosses la Ville in the castle of Taravisee; on September 3, he moved the headquarters due to the American advance. At this time, he and his surviving men began to reconstitute the Sturmgeschütz Abteilung 200 by creating more vehicles. On October 1, 1944, the

Continued on page 90

An 81mm mortar crew from the 3rd Infantry Division's 15th Infantry Regiment fires at enemy positions during the division's drive on Campobello, Sicily, July 1943. Of the 40 Medals of Honor awarded to men of the 3rd, two were earned during the month-long campaign for Sicily.

Robert Craig

ABOVE & BEYOND

Disregarding their own safety, 40 men of the U.S. 3rd Infantry Division earned the Medal of Honor in World War II.

BY MASON B. WEBB

The U.S. 3rd Infantry Division has one of the longest legacies in the United States Army. Originally formed in November 1917 at Camp Greene, North Carolina, it gained a reputation for toughness. Because of its heroic stand in July 1918 along the Marne River in France, where a massive German attack was threatening to break through the Allied line, it fought back fiercely, earning its motto, "The Rock of the Marne."

To the casual observer, it might seem that the men of the 3rd Infantry Division accomplished little of importance during WWII. They did not storm the beaches of Normandy. They did not capture a bridge across the Rhine. They did not liberate a Nazi concentration camp. They did not shake hands with the Russians at the Elbe.

What they did accomplish, however, has put the 3rd Infantry Division on a pedestal as one of the greatest combat divisions of the war. They had 531 days in combat—from North Africa to Czechoslovakia.

They blazed a trail of victories from Morocco to Sicily to Italy to southern France, and across southern Germany. And, along the way, 40 men of the 3rd earned the Medal of Honor—America's highest award for valor in combat. Seventeen of the men did not live to receive their medals and the homage of a grateful nation.

After landing in French Morocco in November 1942 as part of Operation Torch, the 3rd Division quickly overran half that country. A sterner test awaited them during Operation Husky—the invasion of Sicily on July 10, 1943. A change of command brought them under Maj. Gen. Lucian K. Truscott, Jr., who would prove to be one of the great commanders of the war.

Sicily

It did not take long for the first acts of extraordinary bravery to be recognized. On July 11, Scottish-born 2nd Lt. **Robert Craig** (15th Infantry Regiment), who had been living in Toledo, Ohio, was scouting for an enemy machine gun near Campobello, Sicily, that had halted his company's advance about nine miles north of the division's landing beach at Licata. Two other officers had already tried and had been wounded. Crawling to within 35 yards of the machine-gun nest, Craig charged the position and, with his carbine, killed the three crewmen.

With the obstacle eliminated, the company continued advancing and was moving down the forward slope of a hill when it came under fire by about 100 of the enemy. As his Medal of Honor citation says, "Electing to sacrifice himself so that his platoon might carry on the battle, he ordered his men to withdraw to the cover of the crest

National Archives / INSET: Congressional Medal of Honor Society

Both: National Archives

ABOVE: Third Infantry Division troops guard German soldiers taken prisoner at Artena, Italy, near Rome in May 1944. Rudolph Davila earned his Medal of Honor during this action. OPPOSITE: Third Division troops march past two knocked-out German Tiger tanks during the division's advance on Cori, Italy, during the Allies' breakout from the Anzio beachhead, May 1944.

while he drew the enemy fire to himself.

"With no hope of survival, he charged toward the enemy.... He killed five and wounded three. While the hostile force concentrated fire on him, his platoon reached the cover of the crest. 2nd Lt. Craig was killed by enemy fire, but his intrepid action so inspired his men that they drove the enemy from the area, inflicting heavy casualties on the hostile force."

Italy

Once Sicily fell to the Allies in July, the 3rd next took part in Operation Avalanche—the Fifth Army's invasion of Italy at Salerno. After fighting its way ashore and moving northward up the mountainous spine of Italy, the Allied advance bogged down.

In order to breach the Germans' Gustav Line that ran the width of Italy, the Allies had to cross the swift Volturno River. On October 13, 1943, Captain **Arlo L. Olson** of South Dakota was spearheading the 15th Regiment's drive across the river. Leading his company, Olson waded across the Volturno's chest-deep water, survived volleys of machine-gun fire, climbed the opposite bank, and killed the gun crew with grenades.

When another gun 150 yards away opened fire, Olson advanced upon the position. Although five Germans threw grenades at him at close range, Olson killed them all and continued forward. Closing on another position, he killed nine and seized the position.

Throughout the next 13 days, Olson led combat patrols, acted as company scout, and maintained unbroken contact with the enemy. On October 27, Olson led a platoon attack on a strongpoint, crawling to within 25 yards of the enemy, and then charging the position. Despite continuous machine-gun fire, Olson killed the crew with his pistol. When his men saw their leader's courageous attack, they followed and overran the position.

Continuing the advance, Olson led his company to the next objective: a mountain summit. Furious automatic and small-arms fire was poured down on Olson's company, but he ignored it and led his men charging into the enemy, driving them off.

Later, while making a reconnaissance to find defensive positions, Olson was badly wounded. Ignoring the pain, he refused medical aid but died as he was being carried down the mountain.

The autumn weather in the mountains of Italy turned wet and cold—conditions that did not seem to bother Pfc. **Floyd K. Lindstrom** of Colorado. On November 11, 1943, he was part of a platoon providing machine-gun support for a rifle company attacking a hill near Mignano when the Germans counterattacked, forcing the riflemen and half the machine-gun platoon to pull back.

Seeing that his small section was alone and outnumbered five-to-one, Lindstrom immediately deployed the few remaining men into position and opened fire with his single gun, which drew a heavy response. Unable to knock out the enemy position from his original location, Lindstrom lugged his own machine gun up the barren, rocky hillside to a new position, completely ignoring enemy small-arms fire that was kicking up dirt all around him.

From this new site, Lindstrom engaged the enemy gun in an intense duel. Realizing that he could not hit the Germans who had taken cover behind a large rock, he charged them under a steady stream of fire, killed both gunners with his pistol, and dragged their gun down to his own men, directing them to employ it against the enemy.

THE CONGRESSIONAL MEDAL OF HONOR SOCIETY: Most of the photographs of the soldiers awarded the Medal of Honor in this article come from the Congressional Medal of Honor Society. Chartered by Congress in 1958, the Society's membership is comprised of those who wear the Medal of Honor, our nation's highest military award for valor. The Medal of Honor Recipients are committed to serving our country in peace as they did in war by championing the values of courage, sacrifice, integrity, commitment, patriotism, and citizenship. The nonprofit Society preserves their stories and shares their values through Outreach and Education initiatives and its Medal of Honor Museum.

Floyd Lindstrom

Lloyd Hawks

His citation reads, "Pfc. Lindstrom demonstrated aggressive spirit and complete fearlessness in the face of almost certain death."

With the fighting stalled along the Gustav Line, anchored by the imposing, German-held Monte Cassino, the Allies looked for a way to skirt the German defenses and came up with Operation Shingle—an end run around the line that brought them ashore at the twin resort towns of Anzio and Nettuno. Truscott's division comprised part of the invasion force.

Shortly after landing, the 3rd moved northward in an attempt to take the key town of Cisterna that controlled a network of roads that would be needed for further operations in the advance on Rome. On January 28, a remarkable soldier performed a remarkable deed. Tech. 5 **Eric Gunnar Gibson**, a Sweden-born, Chicago-raised cook (Company I, 30th Infantry Regiment) was part of the advance on Cisterna.

A few miles from Cisterna, German troops launched an attack against Gibson's company. Although not an infantryman, Gibson saw the danger that the assault posed to his unit's right flank, swiftly organized a small group of green replacements who had not been in combat before, grabbed a Thompson submachine gun, and rushed toward the danger.

During his ad hoc squad's assault, Gibson personally killed five Germans and took two others prisoner. Not yet finished, he then went running, leaping, and dodging through machine-gun fire to single-handedly wipe out another position.

The cook continued his assault, moving down a ditch and keeping pace with his company's advance toward other German positions even though enemy shells and bullets were falling all about him.

Gibson killed one German before an explosion knocked him flat. He continued on—firing, advancing, firing again, reloading, and firing some more. Halting his men before going around a bend in a ditch, Gibson went forward alone to reconnoiter. There he was hit and killed.

Two days after Gibson's heroics, Medic Pfc. **Lloyd C. Hawks,** from Minnesota, was trying to rescue two wounded men when the Germans counterattacked. Hawks crawled 50 yards through a veritable hail of machine-gun bullets and flying mortar fragments into a small ditch, administered first aid to a fellow medic who had sought cover there, and continued toward the two wounded men.

A bullet knocked Hawks' helmet off, momentarily stunning him; 13 bullets punctured his helmet as it lay on the ground next to him. Undeterred, Hawks crawled to the casualties, administered first aid to the more seriously wounded man, and dragged him to a covered position 25 yards distant.

Braving continuous fire from nearby positions, and shells that exploded around him, Hawks returned to the second man and administered first aid. As he raised himself to obtain bandages from his medical kit, a burst of machine-gun fire tore into his right hip; a second burst splintered his left forearm.

Despite severe pain and his bloody, dangling left arm, Hawks completed bandaging the casualty and, with superhuman effort, dragged him to the same ditch to which he had brought the first man. He then crawled back 75 yards to reach his company and get

National Archives

ABOVE: During the Anzio breakout in May 1944, a 3rd Division machine-gun crew fires on enemy positions near Cisterna, Italy. During the Italian campaign, 16 3rd Division men earned the Medal of Honor, nine of them posthumously. OPPOSITE: A three-man patrol from Company I, 15th Infantry, picks its way through the rubble of Mignano, south of Cassino, November 1943. Before Cassino and the Gustav Line fell, the 3rd spearheaded the Anzio invasion.

more aid for the wounded men.

While Hawks survived his wounds, another 3rd Division soldier, Sergeant **Truman O. Olson**, did not. On the night of January 30, 1944, during the continued fighting for Cisterna, Olson, a machine gunner with Company B, 7th Infantry Regiment, saw his unit being decimated.

After a 16-hour assault on enemy positions, in the course of which over one-third of Company B became casualties, the survivors dug in behind a small hill. Olson and his crew, with the one available machine gun, were placed forward of their lines and in an exposed position to bear the brunt of the expected German counterattack.

Although exhausted, Olson stuck grimly to his post all night while his gun crew was picked off one by one by accurate enemy fire. At daybreak, weary from over 24 hours of continuous battle and suffering from an arm wound, Olson manned his gun alone, meeting the full force of an all-out enemy assault by approximately 200 men supported by mortars and machine-guns.

Olson knew that only his weapon stood between his company and complete destruction; he refused evacuation. For 90 minutes after receiving a second and fatal wound, he remained at his gun, killing at least 20 of the enemy, wounding many more, and stopping the enemy assault. By sacrificing his life, Olson saved his company from certain annihilation.

Pfc. **John C. Squires**, of Company A, 30th Infantry, was serving as his platoon's messenger when, at the start of his company's attack on strongly held enemy positions in and around Spaccasassi Creek, near Padiglione, Italy, on the night of April 23-24, 1944, he braved intense artillery, mortar, and antitank fire on a reconnaissance mission.

Squires reconnoitered a new route of advance and informed his platoon leader of the alternate route. On his own initiative, he then rounded up stragglers, organized a group of lost men into a squad, and led them forward. When the platoon reached Spaccasassi Creek and established an outpost, Squires placed the men in position.

After his platoon had been reduced to 14 men, Squires twice brought up reinforcements. On each trip he went through barbed wire and across an enemy minefield while under intense German fire.

Squires's outpost was attacked three times the next morning. Each time, Squires ignored the enemy's attempts to kill him, and fired hundreds of rounds of rifle, BAR, and captured German machine guns at the enemy, inflicting numerous casualties and materially aiding in repulsing the attacks.

Later, Squires moved 50 yards south of the outpost and engaged 21 Germans in individual machine-gun duels at point-blank range, forcing the enemy to surrender and capturing 13 more machine guns. He then placed the captured guns in position and instructed other members of his platoon in their operation.

The next night, during another attack, he killed three and wounded several more with captured grenades and fire from his captured gun. Squires was killed a month later during the breakout from the beachhead that took place on May 23, 1944. The Allies, who had been stuck at Anzio since January, combined with the other Allied forces along the Gustav Line in one overwhelming, violent push toward Rome.

Also on that same first day of the breakout, near Ponte Rotto, Pfc. **Patrick L. Kessler** and his Company K, 30th Infantry, came under intense German fire. Acting without orders, Kessler formed an assault group to destroy a machine gun that had killed five of his comrades and halted the advance of his company.

With three men laying down fire, Kessler crawled to within 50 yards of the enemy machine gun before he was discovered, whereupon he plunged headlong into the furious German automatic fire.

Reaching the emplacement, he stood over it and killed two men and captured a third. After taking his prisoner to the rear, Kessler saw others in his company being killed and wounded while assaulting an enemy strongpoint.

Kessler grabbed a wounded man's BAR and rushed toward the strongpoint, 100 yards away. Although two machine guns concentrated their fire directly at him and exploding

shells knocked him down, Kessler crawled through a minefield to a point within 50 yards of the enemy and engaged the machine gunners in a duel.

When an artillery shell burst close to him, Kessler advanced upon the position in a slow walk, firing his BAR from the hip. Although the enemy fired at him, he continued his advance, killing the gunners and capturing 13 others.

While taking his prisoners to the rear, two snipers fired on him. Several of his prisoners attempted to escape, but Kessler fired on either flank of them, forcing them to ground, and then engaged the snipers in a firefight, and captured them. With this last threat removed, Company K continued its advance, capturing its objective without further opposition. Pfc. Kessler was killed two days later.

The division's 15th Medal of Honor went posthumously to Sergeant **Sylvester Antolak**, from St. Clairsville, Ohio. On May 24, near Cisterna, he single-handedly engaged a German machine-gun nest by running 30 yards ahead of his squad from Company B, 15th Infantry. As he ran, bullets struck him three times, knocking him to the ground, but each time he got up and staggered forward.

With his right arm shattered, he switched his Thompson sub-machine gun to his left hand and continued his attack. He closed within 15 yards of the enemy strongpoint, where he opened fire, killing two Germans and capturing the remaining ten.

Antolak reorganized his men and, refusing to seek the medical attention he so badly needed, led the way toward another strongpoint 100 yards distant. Completely disregarding the bullets aimed at him, he stormed ahead toward the strongpoint when he was instantly killed by enemy fire.

Inspired by his example, his squad went on to overwhelm the enemy troops. By his supreme sacrifice, superb fighting courage, and heroic devotion to the attack, Antolak was directly responsible for eliminating 20 Germans and clearing the way for his company's advance.

On to Rome

In early June, the Allied forces at Anzio had broken through the German encirclement and were on their way to Rome, which the Germans had declared to be an "open city." But some German units were loath to give it up without a fight. Two 3rd Division men from the same unit would both earn the Medal of Honor during the same action, but both would lose their lives in the process.

At 1 a.m. on June 3, Privates **Herbert F. Christian** and **Elden H. Johnson**, Company E, 15th Infantry, were part of a night patrol near the mountain town of Valmontone, southeast of Rome, when the patrol was ambushed by an overwhelming force of approximately 60 riflemen, three machine guns, and three tanks from positions only 30 yards away.

Flares illuminated the scene, and Christian, from Steubensville, Ohio, signaled for the patrol to withdraw while he remained to fight. A 20mm shell then blew off his right leg but Christian advanced on his left knee and the bloody stump of his right

National Archives

John C. Squires

Herbert F. Christian

Robert B. Maxwell

John J. Tominac

National Archives

thigh, firing his Thompson and killing three enemy soldiers. Despite excruciating pain, Christian continued on his self-assigned mission, leaving a bloody trail behind him. He made his way forward into intense fire and killed another German.

Nearby, his buddy Johnson, from New Jersey, was hit in the stomach by machine-gun bullets, but he and Christian kept up a brave fusillade that enabled the rest of the patrol to escape.

Reloading his weapon, Christian fired directly into the enemy, who seemed to be enraged at his audacity and concentrated all their weapons at him. Still on his knee and stump, Christian fired his weapon to the very last. Just as he emptied his Thompson, enemy bullets found their mark and Christian fell dead, beside Johnson.

Operation Dragoon

Two days after the Allies took Rome, Operation Overlord, the Normandy invasion, was launched. A second invasion of France, named Operation Dragoon, took place on August 15—and the 3rd Infantry Division was transferred from Fifth Army command to Seventh Army for the initial landing.

Two days after the landings, S/Sgt. **Stanley Bender**, of Company E, 7th Infantry, climbed atop a knocked-out tank near La Londe-les-Maures, France, in the face of heavy machine-gun fire that had halted the advance of his company, in an effort to locate the source of this fire. Although bullets ricocheted off the tank, Bender nevertheless remained standing upright in full view of the enemy for over two minutes.

Spotting muzzle flashes from the enemy machine guns 200 yards away, he ordered two squads to cover him while he led his men down a ditch, and ran a gantlet of intense machine-gun fire that completely blanketed 50 yards of his advance and wounded four of his men.

While the Germans hurled grenades into the ditch, Bender stood his ground until his squad caught up with him, then advanced alone, in a wide flanking approach, to the rear of the knoll. Walking 40 yards without cover, he reached the first machine gun and knocked it out with a single short burst.

He then ignored bursting hand grenades and made his way toward the second machine gun, 25 yards away. Miraculously, he was not hit; reaching the edge of the emplacement, the Chicagoan dispatched the crew. Signaling his men to rush the rifle pits, he then continued on to kill another enemy rifleman and returned to lead his squad in the destruction of the eight remaining Germans in the strong point.

His display of courage so inspired the remainder of the assault company that the men charged out of their positions, shouting and yelling, to overpower the enemy roadblock and sweep into town, knocking out two antitank guns, killing 37 Germans, and capturing 26 others. The attack also resulted in the capture of three bridges over the Maravenne River and command of key terrain in southern France.

By early September 1944, Seventh Army drive had advanced up the French-Swiss border to Alsace-Lorraine, where the 3rd met ever-increasing resistance by Germans determined to prevent an invasion of the Nazi homeland. At Besançon on September 7, Tech. 5 Robert D. Maxwell, HQ Company, 7th Infantry, and three other soldiers, armed only with .45-caliber pistols, defended the battalion observation post against a platoon of

heavily armed Germans.

Maxwell aggressively fought off advancing enemy elements and, by his calmness, tenacity, and fortitude, inspired his comrades to continue the unequal struggle. When an enemy grenade was tossed in the midst of his squad, Maxwell unhesitatingly threw himself on it, using his body to absorb the explosion. This heroic act permanently maimed Maxwell, but saved the lives of his comrades and allowed for the temporary withdrawal of the battalion's forward headquarters.

On September 12, 1944, 1st Lt. **John J. Tominac**, from Conemaugh, Pennsylvania, a platoon leader in Company I, 15th Infantry, was engaged in a battle near Saulx de Vesoul, France, north-northeast of Besançon. Tominac seized the initiative to take out a German roadblock; he ran alone across 50 yards of open ground while being targeted by a machine-gun crew.

Killing the crew with a burst from his Thompson, he then led one of his squads to wipe out another strongpoint, killing about 30 of the enemy. Reaching the outskirts of the small village, he and a Sherman tank proceeded to attack a 77mm self-propelled gun, but the SP gun knocked out the tank and a fragment from the blast wounded Tominac.

Shaking off the wound, he climbed onto the burning tank and used its .50-caliber machine gun to neutralize the German position. Although painfully wounded, he allowed a sergeant to dig shrapnel out of his shoulder but refused further medical attention. He then led his unit in a grenade attack against a fortified position occupied by 32 Germans and compelled them to surrender.

His display of courage and leadership resulted in the destruction of four successive enemy defensive positions, the surrender of a vital sector of Saulx de Vesoul, and the deaths or capture of at least 60 of the enemy. Tominac survived his wounds and went on the serve in Korea and Vietnam.

National Archives

ABOVE: Soldiers of the 7th Infantry Regiment surround a house near Guiderkirch, in the Alsace-Lorraine region of France, where German snipers are holed up, March 1945. OPPOSITE: During Operation Dragoon, the invasion of southern France on August 15, 1944, 3rd Division troops hug the sand near resort town of St. Tropez. Twenty-one members of the division would earn Medals of Honor during the campaign for France, seven posthumously.

On September 17, 1944, at Raddon-et-Chapendu, France, (not far from Besançon), a determined German assault on 3rd Division forces took place. Squad leader Sergeant Harold O. Messerschmidt, Company L, 30th Infantry, was with his men holding the high ground when the Germans attacked.

Seriously wounded during the firefight, Messerschmidt, from Chester, Pennsylvania, killed five attackers and wounded several others with his Thompson. With the rest of his squad dead or wounded, Messerschmidt held off the enemy by using his sub-machine gun as a club until he was overwhelmed and killed.

S/Sgt. **Clyde M. Choate**, Company C, 601st Tank Destroyer Battalion, was commanding an M-10 tank destroyer in the Vosges Mountains near Bruyères, France, on October 25, 1944. With 3rd Division infantrymen occupying a hilltop position, a panzer and an infantry company attacked, threatening to overrun the Americans and capture a command post.

Choate's TD was set afire by two hits. After he and his crew abandoned it and reached comparative safety, Choate returned to rescue comrades trapped inside, braving enemy fire which ripped his jacket and tore the helmet from his head.

Completing the search, and seeing the panzer and its supporting infantry overrunning GIs in their shallow foxholes, he grabbed a bazooka and ran after the panzer, firing a rocket from a distance of 20 yards, immobilizing it but leaving it still able to fire its cannon and machine-gun.

Obtaining another bazooka, he reached a position 10 yards from the tank. His shot shattered the turret; with his pistol he killed two of the crew as they emerged. Then, charging the crippled tank while enemy infantry sniped at him, he dropped a grenade inside to complete its destruction.

With their armor gone, the enemy infantry fled. Choate's great daring in assaulting an enemy tank single-handed, his determination to follow the vehicle after it had passed his position, and his skill and thoroughness

Gus Kefurt

Russell E. Dunham

National Archives

in the attack prevented the enemy from capturing the battalion CP and turned a probable defeat into a tactical success.

Fighting was still raging near St. Die on November 7 when Pfc. **William F. Leonard**, a squad leader in Company C, 30th Infantry, faced the test of his life. Although his platoon was reduced to eight men, Leonard was leading the survivors in an assault over a wooded hill that the Germans blanketed with automatic-weapons fire.

Ignoring bullets that pierced his pack, Leonard killed two snipers and destroyed a machine-gun nest with grenades. Though momentarily stunned by an exploding shell, Leonard relentlessly advanced, knocking out a second machine-gun nest and capturing the roadblock objective.

Leonard, from Lockport, Washington, did not receive the medal until 28 years after his death, when President Barack Obama presented it to his three daughters in 2014.

On December 23, S/Sgt. **Gus Kefurt** and his Company K, 15th Infantry, were attacking near Bennwihr, France. Kefurt jumped through an opening in a wall—only to be confronted by 15 Germans. Although outnumbered, he opened fire, killing 10 and capturing the others.

A panzer soon rolled up, but Kefurt destroyed it by calling for an artillery strike. When night fell, he maintained a three-man outpost in Bennwihr in the middle of the German positions, and successfully fought off several German attempts to eliminate his position.

Assuming command of his platoon the following morning, he led it in hand-to-hand fighting through Bennwihr until blocked by a panzer. Using rifle grenades, he forced the surrender of its crew. He then continued his attack from house to house against heavy enemy fire.

Advancing against a strongpoint that was holding up the company, his platoon was subjected to a counterattack and infiltration to its rear. During this time he killed approximately 15 of the enemy at close range. Although severely wounded in the leg, he refused treatment. Although suffering heavy casualties in their exposed position, the men remained steadfast due to Kefurt's personal example of bravery, determination, and leadership.

When the forces to his rear were pushed back three hours later, he refused to be evacuated but, instead, during several more counterattacks, moved painfully about under intense small-arms and mortar fire, stiffening the resistance of his platoon by encouraging individual men and by his own fire until he was killed. As a result of S/Sgt. Kefurt's gallantry, the position was maintained.

On December 27, 1st Lt. **Eli Whitely** and his platoon from Company L, 15th Infantry, were engaged in savage house-to-house fighting through Sigolsheim. While attacking a German-held house, his unit came under heavy machine-gun and mortar fire and he was wounded in the left arm and shoulder.

Despite his wounds, he charged alone into the house and killed its defenders. Hurling smoke and fragmentation grenades, Whitely reached the next house and stormed inside, killing two and capturing eleven. He continued leading his platoon in the extremely dan-

gerous task of clearing hostile troops from strongpoints along the street.

Despite the fact that his left arm was useless, the bespectacled Texan led his men in assaulting the buildings and rooting out the defenders. Armed with a bazooka, he blew a hole in one house and, after trading the bazooka for a Thompson, charged inside through a curtain of bullets.

With the Thompson, he killed five Germans and forced another 12 to surrender. As he emerged to continue his attack, he was again hit. In agony and with his right eye pierced by a shell fragment, he shouted for his men to follow him to the next house. He remained in command of his platoon until forcibly evacuated.

By disregarding his personal safety, his aggressiveness while suffering from severe wounds, his determined leadership, and superb courage, 1st Lt. Whiteley spearheaded an attack that cracked the core of enemy resistance in a vital area.

Whitely survived the war and went on to teach at Texas A&M University.

The new year saw no let-up in the fighting for the 3rd Division, and deadly combat was still continuing in the snow-covered Colmar suburb of Kaysersberg. On January 8, T/Sgt. **Russell E. Dunham**, Company I, 30th Infantry, was taking part in an attack on Hill 616. Carrying a carbine, 12 carbine magazines, and a dozen grenades, he set off to eliminate three machine-gun nests that were keeping his company pinned down.

Supported by two machine guns and, with the rest of his platoon behind him, the sergeant from Illinois crawled 75 yards under heavy fire toward the timbered emplacement shielding the machine gun on the left. As he jumped to his feet 10 yards from the gun and charged forward, bullets slashed a 10-inch gash across his back, sending him spinning 15 yards downhill into the snow.

When Dunham renewed his one-man assault, a grenade landed beside him. He kicked it aside and, as it exploded five yards away, shot and killed the German machine gunner and assistant gunner.

Dunham jumped into the emplacement and captured the third member of the gun crew. Although his back wound was intensely painful, Dunham ran 50 yards through a storm of enemy fire to attack the second machine gun.

He resumed his attack, throwing two grenades and destroying another gun and its crew; he then fired down into the supporting foxholes, dispatching and dispersing the enemy riflemen. Not yet finished, Dunham continued toward enemy positions farther up the hill. With grenades exploding around him, and coming under machine-gun fire to his front, he hit the ground and crawled forward. At 15 yards range, he jumped up, staggered a few paces toward the timbered machine-gun emplacement and killed the crew with grenades.

An enemy rifleman fired at point-blank range, but missed him. After killing the rifleman, Dunham drove others from their foxholes with grenades and carbine fire. By killing nine Germans, wounding seven, and capturing two, T/Sgt. Dunham, despite his painful wound, spearheaded a spectacular and successful diversionary attack.

On January 25, 1945, Pfc. **Jose F. Valdez**, from Pleasant Grove, Utah, and a BAR man with Company B, 7th Infantry, was on a patrol with five others near Rosenkrantz, France, when the enemy counterattacked with overwhelming strength. From his position near some woods 500 yards beyond the American lines, he saw an approaching

National Archives

ABOVE: Dressed in white camouflage uniforms, men of the 15th Infantry Regiment advance along a snowy road near Colmar, France, December 1944. LEFT: On September 9, 1944, a 3rd Division mortar squad blasts the enemy near the Swiss border in the Rigney, France, area. The Germans made a furious stand to keep the Americans from entering Germany. OPPOSITE: After landing at St. Tropez, members of the 3rd Division advanced swiftly northward, ultimately driving the enemy back across the German border and writing a new chapter about courage with each mile.

Jose F. Valdez

Michael J. Daley

National Archives

Enduring a storm of hail instead of bullets, 3rd Division infantrymen ride atop Sherman tanks past a hospital in the Bavarian city of Augsburg, Germany, April 1945.

panzer and raked it with automatic rifle fire until it withdrew.

Soon afterward, he saw three Germans stealthily approaching through the woods. Scorning cover as the enemy soldiers opened up with machine-gun fire from a range of 30 yards, he engaged in a firefight with the attackers until he had killed all three.

The enemy then launched an attack with two full infantry companies, blasting Valdez's position with concentrations of automatic and rifle fire and beginning an encircling movement that forced the patrol leader to order a withdrawal.

Despite the terrible odds, Valdez immediately volunteered to cover the maneuver, and, as the patrol withdrew under fire American lines, he fired burst after burst into the swarming enemy.

Three of his companions were wounded in their dash for safety and Valdez was hit by a bullet that severed his spinal cord. Paralyzed from the waist down, Valdez fell into a firing position and delivered a protective screen of fire until all others of the patrol were safe.

By field telephone he called for artillery and mortar fire, correcting the range until shells were falling within 50 yards of his position. For 15 minutes he refused to be dislodged by more than 200 of the enemy. Then, seeing that the barrage had broken the counterattack, he dragged himself back to his own lines. He died of his wounds three weeks later.

Through his valiant stand that cost him his life, Pfc. Valdez was directly responsible for repulsing an attack by vastly superior enemy forces and made it possible for his comrades to escape.

The 36th member of the 3rd Division to earn the Medal of Honor is undoubtedly the division's most famous. 2nd Lt. **Audie L. Murphy**, of Kingston, Texas, was commanding Company B, 15th Infantry, near Holtzwihr, France, on January 26, 1945, when the unit was attacked by six tanks and waves of infantry.

Murphy ordered his men to withdraw to prepared positions in a forest while he remained forward at his CP and continued to give fire directions to the artillery by telephone. Behind him, to his right, a U.S. tank destroyer received a direct hit and began to burn; its crew escaped.

With enemy panzers closing in, Murphy climbed onto the burning TD, which was in danger of exploding at any moment, and employed its .50-caliber machine gun against the enemy. With Germans attacking from three sides, Murphy continued firing, killing dozens of Germans and causing their infantry attack to waver. The enemy tanks, losing infantry support, began to fall back.

For an hour the Germans tried eliminating Murphy, but he stayed at his gun, wiping out a squad creeping up on his right flank. Overall, his directing of artillery fire, and action on the machine gun, killed or wounded at least 50 Germans.

Wounded in the leg, Murphy continued firing until his ammunition was exhausted. Making his way back to his company, he refused medical attention and organized a counterattack that forced the German withdrawal.

Murphy's courage and his refusal to give ground saved his company from possible

encirclement and destruction, and enabled it to hold the woods which had been the enemy's objective.

Audie Murphy became the most-decorated American soldier of World War II. After the war, his wartime exploits and boyish good looks brought him fame as a Hollywood movie star.

Into Germany

German resistance in Alsace-Lorraine finally ended, and the U.S. Seventh Army, including the 3rd Infantry Division, crossed the border into Nazi Germany. After fighting its way through towns, villages, forests, and across rivers, it reached Nuremberg in mid-April 1945.

The scene of Hitler's huge and dramatic Nazi Party rallies in the 1930s, Nuremberg was considered the citadel of Third Reich fanaticism and was stubbornly defended by some of the most hard-core troops that Germany had left.

1st Lt. **Frank Burke,** the 1st Battalion, 15th Infantry's transportation officer, was looking for a place for the battalion motor pool when he decided to perform more than his assigned duties and participate in the fight.

Advancing beyond the front lines and, detecting Germans preparing for an attack, he rushed back to a nearby American unit, secured a machine gun and ammunition, and daringly opened fire on this superior force, which deployed and returned his fire with machine pistols, rifles, and rocket launchers.

A German machine gun fired on him but the lieutenant from New Jersey killed this gun crew and drove off the survivors of the unit he had originally attacked. Out of ammunition, he picked up a rifle, and dashed more than 100 yards through enemy fire when a sniper in a cellar only 20 yards away nearly hit him, but Burke ran to the basement window and fired a full clip into his would-be killer. Burke then secured grenades and continued to hunt Germans.

At one point, he pulled the pins from two grenades and, holding one in each hand, rushed toward an enemy-held building, tossing his explosives just as the enemy threw a grenade at him.

In the simultaneous triple explosion, the Germans were wiped out and Burke was dazed. His citation reads, "He emerged from the shower of debris that engulfed him, recovered his rifle, and went on to kill three more Germans and meet the charge of a machine-pistolman, whom he cut down with three calmly delivered shots. He then retired toward American lines and there assisted a platoon in a raging,

Continued on page 90

These 17 Additional MoH Recipients Inspired Their Comrades

In addition to the heroic deeds described in this article, 17 other men of the 3rd Infantry Division performed equally courageous acts that earned for them their nation's highest award for valor:

SICILY:

Waybur, 1st. Lt. David C.
15th Infantry Regiment,
July 17, 1943, near Agrigento

ITALY:

Britt, 1st Lt. Maurice L.
30th Infantry Regiment,
November 10, 1943, north of Mignano

Knappenberger, Pfc. Alton W.
30th Infantry Regiment,
February 1, 1944,
near Cisterna di Littoria

Dutko, Pfc. John W.
30th Infantry Regiment,
May 23, 1944, near Ponte Rotto

Schauer, Pfc. Henry
15th Infantry Regiment,
May 23, 1944, near Cisterna di Littoria

Mills, Private James H. Mills
15th Infantry Regiment,
May 24, 1944,
near Cisterna di Littoria

Davila, S/Sgt. Rudolph B.
7th Infantry Regiment,
May 28, 1944, Artena

FRANCE:

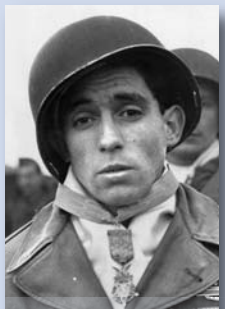
Connor, Sergeant James P.
7th Infantry Regiment,
August 15, 1944,
Cape Cavalaire

Zussman, 2nd Lt. Raymond
756th Tank Battalion,
Sept. 12, 1944,
Noroy le Bourg

Schwab, 1st. Lt. Donald K.
15th Infantry Regiment,
September 17, 1944, Lure

Harris, 2nd. Lt. James L.
756th Tank Battalion,
October 7, 1944, Vagney


David Waybur


James P. Connor

Kandle, 1st Lt. Victor L.
15th Infantry Regiment,
October 9, 1944,
near La Forge

Adams, S/Sgt. Lucian
30th Infantry Regiment,
October 28, 1944,
near St. Die

Ross, Private Wilburn K.
30th Infantry Regiment,
October 30, 1944,
near St. Jacques

Murray, Jr., 1st. Lt. Charles P.
30th Infantry Regiment,
December 16, 1944,
near Kaysersberg

Ware, Lt. Col. Keith
15th Infantry Regiment,
December 26, 1944,
near Sigolsheim

Peden, Tech. 5 Forrest E.
10th Field Artillery Battalion,
February 3, 1945, near Biesheim

BY DANTE BRIZILL

Tuskegee Airmen tell how they defeated Nazis in the skies—and Jim Crow on the ground.

African American Ai

BLASTED BAR

The African American Tuskegee Airmen took the fight to a well-trained and deadly enemy with a ferocity and tenacity that World War II aerial combat required. They had to overcome segregation, endless training, racism, a delayed deployment to combat operations, obsolescent planes initially, and attempted sabotage by some in the chain of command before their greatness could be truly displayed. Willie Ashley, Jr., Harold H. Brown, and Charles McGee were just three of the men who carved their legacy in the sky:

On July 3, 1942, Willie Ashley, Jr., of Sumter, South Carolina, graduated as a member of the Single Engine Section Cadet Class SE-42-F at Tuskegee Army Air Field, in Tuskegee, Alabama. He was among the first to fly solo, receive his pilot's wings, and earn his second lieutenant bars. Serving with the legendary 99th Fighter Squadron, he became one of the first Tuskegee Airmen to engage enemy fighters in the Italian theater.

Lieutenant Harold H. Brown of Minneapolis, another Tuskegee graduate, struck enemy targets on the ground and protected American bombers in the air. Being one of America's first trained African American pilots, he flew with the famed 332nd Fighter Group. Shot down on his 30th mission over enemy territory, he safely bailed out of his stricken P-51 and survived months as a prisoner of the Germans.

Born in Cleveland, Ohio, in 1919, Charles McGee was an engineering student at the University of Illinois when he decided to serve his country, becoming a part of the famed 332nd Fighter Group. He got his start with the Tuskegee Airmen—and went on to become a general.

Brown, Ashley, and General McGee are a small snapshot of the heroism, courage, and devotion to duty of the men of the Tuskegee Airmen. Deemed an "experiment" by many of the military brass, these men proved to each other, doubters, and

Painting by Richard Taylor © The Military Gallery/www.military gallery.com

rmen RIERS

In Richard Taylor's striking new painting, the Tuskegee "Red Tail" pilots of the 332nd Fighter Group are shown escorting a damaged B-17 Flying Fortress of the 483rd Bomb Group to its home base in Italy, summer 1944. Skin color made no difference to the bomber pilots when their "little friends" came up to escort them on their bombing missions.

Both: National Archives

ABOVE: Before they were issued P-51 Mustangs in June 1944, the African American pilots of the 332nd Fighter Group flew obsolescent, shark-nosed P-40s, shown here, and then P-47 Thunderbolts. INSET: Captain Benjamin O. Davis poses with his training aircraft during instruction at Moton Field, Tuskegee, Alabama. Davis would later command the 99th Pursuit Squadron and 322nd Fighter Group.

their country that they were worthy of the trust that was placed in them. These men also changed perceptions of the fighting ability of African American men.

This fact alone would have profound changes on the post WWII military and American society for years to come. Being called an "experiment" seems ridiculous today, but was a reflection of the little faith placed in the fighting capabilities of African Americans at the dawn of World War II, and well into the war.

In the Beginning

As war clouds engulfed Europe in late 1939, a need arose over the next two years to prepare the United States for a war footing, particularly in aviation. The previous year, President Roosevelt expanded the civilian pilot training program in the United States, and the Army Air Corps, a forerunner of the U.S. Air Force, stepped up pilot training.

Black leaders, Black newspapers, and civil rights organizations demanded that African Americans be included. Segregation was the norm in the U.S. military at the time, and the intelligence and competence of African Americans were questioned.

Blacks had fought in every armed conflict in the United States since the Revolutionary War. They served with distinction in the Civil War and World War I, but the military reflected American society at the time, which deemed African Americans as second-class citizens and incapable of front-line service.

An infamous Army War College study released in 1925 seemed to influence post-World War I beliefs about the fitness, courage, and intelligence of Black soldiers. It stated in no uncertain terms that Black soldiers were inferior and should not be in combat or leadership roles. It even went as far as to describe the anatomy of the Black brain as being smaller than those of whites.

This report was widely accepted by the military and reflected the role that they envisioned for Black soldiers when the U.S. entered World War II—suitable only for menial jobs and nothing requiring intelligence and courage. By the time America became involved in the war, the Black press and civil rights leadership challenged these assumptions and put enormous pressure on the military and the Roosevelt administration to open its doors. One of those doors would be the right to fly.

By September 1940, after much pressure and lobbying, the Army Air Corps announced that it would begin training black pilots at Moton Field, the soon-to-be constructed airfield in Tuskegee, Alabama. This fulfilled a campaign promise President Roosevelt had made. This small rural town in the heart of the Jim Crow South, with only around 4,000 residents, was home to Tuskegee Institute, a prestigious Historically Black College established in 1881, whose first President was Booker T. Washington and who served in that capacity until 1915.

Booker T. Washington was a former slave and one of the most well-known and

admired African American educators of the late 19th and early 20th century. In 1940, First Lady Eleanor Roosevelt visited Tuskegee Institute and took a flight over the campus with the chief flight instructor, Charles Alfred "Chief" Anderson, against the wishes of her aides. Anderson, who was a self-taught pilot, established the flight program at the school in 1939. (He is known today as "the Father of Black Aviation.") A photo of the two of them appeared in newspapers around the country.

It was not a surprise that the First Lady, to the chagrin of the Secret Service, took the flight; she was ahead of her time in terms of promoting racial equality and progress. Anderson believed that this gesture by Mrs. Roosevelt brought positive attention to Black aviation. Her actions did not start the program, as has been mistakenly cited, but she did use her influence to help raise money to finance the building of Moton Field.

Applications flooded into Tuskegee from all over the country once the new pilot training program was announced. Many of these applicants had college degrees or were undergraduates. Some scored so high on their entrance exams that cheating was suspected and retakes ordered. The program also trained mechanics, maintenance workers, and ground crewmen at Chanute Field in Rantoul, Illinois, to service the planes the pilots would fly. Over a dozen black nurses were assigned to the base, including 1st Lt. Della Raney, the first Black woman commissioned in the Army Nurse Corps.

An Extraordinary Commander

The Tuskegee Airmen, and the original unit—the 99th Pursuit Squadron—might not have happened without their extraordinary commander, Benjamin Oliver Davis, Jr. His father, Davis Sr., would become the nation's first African American general, promoted to that rank on October 25, 1940. Benjamin O. Davis, Jr's. journey to Tuskegee started as a youngster who was enamored at what he witnessed at an air show in his home town of Washington, D.C.

With his father in the military and that profession's constant reassignments, Davis Jr. graduated from high school in Cleveland and attended three colleges: Western Reserve (later Case Western Reserve) University, the University of France, and the University of Chicago.

Following his father's wishes, Davis pursued an appointment to West Point, passing the required entrance exam, and entering in 1932. As the lone Black cadet, he was not welcomed there and ostracized during his four years, eating alone and having no roommate. His fellow cadets even refused to speak to him, but he persevered and graduated in 1936, ranking 35th out of 236.

Prior to his graduation, he spent some time at an Army Air Corps base and obtained some flying experience, which convinced him that he'd rather be in the air than in the infantry. He applied that fall for the Army Air Corps and passed all the requirements, but his application was rejected; there were yet no plans for Black pilots.

But Davis Jr. never gave up on his dream to fly. The Army clearly had no idea what to do with a talented young Black officer on the eve of World War II, and did not realize the potential he possessed. Instead, they assigned him to the all-African American 24th Infantry Regiment at Fort Benning, Georgia. Later, he was assigned to the Tuskegee Institute to teach military tactics to Black civilian pilots.

While teaching at Tuskegee, he was not far from Kennedy Field where the Black civilian pilots were being trained. After a brief stay at a Kansas post with his wife, Agatha Jo Scott Davis, he got his dream assignment.

National Archives

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RIGHT: Major James Ellison (left) reviews the first class of cadets at Moton Field on January 23, 1942. The men faced harsh discrimination by whites, both on and off the base. ABOVE: Lieutenant Carl Luetcke, Jr., a flight instructor at Tuskegee, describes the method of banking to Captain (later General) Benjamin O. Davis, Jr., January 1942.

Library of Congress

In early 1941, the Roosevelt administration ordered the War Department to create an all-Black flying unit. Captain Davis was released from his previous duties and began pilot training at Moton Field, the new airfield for Black pilots at Tuskegee.

His dreams of being a flyer were starting to come to fruition. In July 1941, he entered training with Tuskegee's first aviation class, graduating in March 1942 with Captain George S. Roberts, 2nd Lt. Charles DeBow Jr., 2nd Lieutenant Mac Ross, and 2nd Lieutenant Lemuel R. Custis. These men would be America's first African American military pilots.

In July, Davis was promoted to lieutenant colonel and named commander of a new unit: the 99th Pursuit Squadron.

By July 1942, the fourth class of pilots had graduated from the training program and the 99th Pursuit Squadron was now up to full strength. The men were ready to fight and put all of their months of training to use. Unfortunately, there were no immediate plans to deploy the men into combat.

This was typical of the experience of many African American units in the war. They had to wait for orders that might or might not come. To add insult to injury, being based in a Jim Crow town in the Deep South that was openly hostile and violent toward the men and women of color stationed there did not help matters. A Black MP was beaten in the town by two Alabama Highway Patrol officers. A black nurse stationed at the base, Lieutenant Norma Greene, trying to get back to the base after a shopping trip before her shift started, refused to leave a bus in Montgomery that she was told was for "whites only." The bus driver called the police and she was arrested and beaten.

News of these acts of violence made their way around the base, the Black press, and the NAACP, and sparked understandable outrage. Colonel Frederick von Kimble, the commander of the base who took over in January 1942, strictly enforced segregationist policies on the premises. The menace of not fighting and being subject to racism on and off the base took a toll on the morale of the men, which fell to a dangerously low level. White pilots with similar training and preparation were sent overseas; Blacks were not. But better days were coming.

By 1942 the Allies were on the offensive. The invasion of North Africa in November (Operation Torch) had been a success and the war was shifting to the Italian peninsula. Control of the air over the Mediterranean was key to Allied operations in the region. Finally, there would be an opening for the Tuskegee Airmen to prove their mettle.

Off to War—At Last

Good news arrived on April 1, 1943. The 99th was shipping out—the wait was over. The men boarded a train in Tuskegee and traveled to Brooklyn, New York. On April 15, they boarded a troop ship, the USS *Mariposa*. Two weeks later, they landed in Casablanca, Morocco. Soon they would get the chance for which they had trained so hard.

By the time the 99th arrived in North Africa, the Italians and Germans had either surrendered or had evacuated to Sicily. The men of the 99th set up camp next to a dirt run-

way in the desert and quickly went to work. The pilots soon got better planes–P-40 Warhawks that were faster than the BT-13 monoplanes they had trained in.

The 99th spent the month of May training with the nearby all-white 27th Fighter Group that welcomed them. They practiced dogfights and honed their skills. Then, on June 2, 1943, the 99th flew their first combat mission. It took place over Pantelleria, a small Italian island in the Mediterranean Sea, between Tunisia and Sicily.

Filled with Axis troops, pillboxes, and underground hangars, Pantelleria was in a key strategic location that needed to be secured, as Lt. Gen. Dwight D. Eisenhower, Supreme Allied Commander in the Mediterranean, and the Allies prepared to open the Italian campaign.

BELOW: The wreckage of German and Italian aircraft, destroyed by the 99th Fighter Squadron in June 1943, lies strewn across the Pantelleria Airdrome. BOTTOM: First Lt. Charles B. Hall, in the cockpit of his Curtiss-Wright P-40L Warhawk fighter, points to the swastika that represents a Luftwaffe Fw 190 he shot down on July 2, 1943, over Pantelleria. Hall was the first pilot of the 99th to down an enemy plane. OPPOSITE: Lieutenant Roscoe Brown, right, observes as mechanic Marcellus G. Smith works on the engine of Brown's P-51 Mustang "Tootsie" before a mission at the 15th Air Force Base at Ramitelli, Italy, March 1945.

Both: National Archives

Eisenhower, who believed that air power would be sufficient to secure Pantelleria, directed Lt. Gen. Carl "Tooey" Spaatz to use the Allies' Northwest African Air Forces (NAAF) to do the job. Dubbed Operation Corkscrew, this would be the 99th's baptism of fire.

Davis and his unit would be a part of this critical mission. This was notable, because it would be the first time African American pilots would be used in combat by the U.S. Army. In early June, while attached to the all-white 33rd Fighter Group, the 99th took out enemy machine-gun positions, dive bombed, escorted bombers on raids, and patrolled the Mediterranean skies.

A week into their first mission on June 9, 1943, the 99th encountered the dreaded German fighter, the Me109. As described by Tuskegee Airmen Charles Dryden, "Instantly, without any hesitation, six P-40s wheeled around 'on a dime' in a gut-wrenching, 180-degree tight turn to confront the enemy, the pilots flicking their gun switches and gun sights 'on' as they prepared for this first air battle with the enemy by any of the 99th pilots. Suddenly facing the 36 .50-caliber machine guns of our flight, the attacking planes scattered. So did we, as we took off after them."

Three weeks later, on July 2, their first kill was recorded over Sicily by 1st Lt. Charles Hall, a pre-med student prior to joining the Army Air Corps. "It was my eighth mission, but the first time I had seen the enemy close enough to shoot at him," Hall said. This was front-page news among Black newspapers across the country. General Eisenhower wanted to meet the man "who shot down that Jerry," as he greeted the 99th on their return to base.

The news would prove to be bittersweet as two of their men did not return from the mission. Lieutenants Sherman White and James McCullin were killed in a midair accident. Black war correspondents embedded with the unit proudly reported on their triumphs to their readership and lamented how, maybe, the success of these airmen would reduce prejudice at home for African Americans.

Davis, the pilots, the mechanics, and the

National Archives

ABOVE: Though smiling for this photo, 99th Pursuit Squadron pilots Lieutenant W.V. Eagleson (in cockpit of his P-40) with Captain Lemuel R. Curtis, Lieutenant Charles B. Hall, and Lieutenant Willie Ashley and the rest of the Tuskegee Airmen were often frustsrated at being considered less capable then white pilots. OPPOSITE: Private John Fields, an armorer with the 332nd Fighter Group, loads .50-caliber ammunition belts into the wings of a P-51 Mustang before a mission escorting 15th Air Force bombers over Germany.

ground crews knew that the pressure to perform at a high level would only increase due to the fact that they were finally contributing to the war effort after months of training and waiting, that millions of Black Americans took pride in their achievements, and that there were still doubters about their fitness to serve.

On June 11, 1943, the Italian and German garrison of 11,200 on Pantelleria surrendered, shortly before Allied troops were scheduled to take it by amphibious assault. The air strategy championed by Eisenhower worked. The 99th no doubt contributed to this key victory.

Before they could enjoy their triumph, however, the Tuskegee Airmen would be called upon to defend their honor. Colonel William Momyer was the commander of the 33rd Fighter Group to which the 99th was assigned. As one of the airmen recalled, he was not thrilled with this arrangement, and made no secret about his disdain for having black pilots under his command.

He repeatedly sought ways to embarrass the unit and undermine confidence in their ability. Briefings were moved up without notice to the Black pilots so they would appear late. Davis, being the West Pointer that he was, was outraged by this, knowing how much punctuality and being early to briefings were ingrained in the officer code—being "on time" actually meant being late.

After Sicily was secured in late July (the 99th was attached to the all-white 324th Fighter Group during Operation Husky and for the first time began flying bomber-escort missions), Momyer only assigned white pilots to fly missions up the Italian peninsula to notch more victories and keep the Black pilots away from combat missions. Clearly, he was setting them up for failure that he would later gleefully report to his superiors.

Unfavorable Report

In September, Momyer wrote to Maj. Gen. Edwin House, Commanding General of the 12th Air Support Command, to recommend that the 99th be returned to coastal patrolling duties. He accused them of being the worst squadron under his command and questioned their stamina, fighting ability, and "desire for combat."

Momyer's unfavorable report made its way up the chain of command and was accepted as fact without question. Some of the same racist assumptions that were in the infamous 1925 report mentioned earlier were repeated once again. The Momyer report was leaked to *Time* magazine, prompting an angry response from Colonel Davis's wife, who strongly defended her husband and his unit.

In October 1943, Davis was summoned home to defend the 99th before a War Department committee. Despite being angry at what Momyer had done, Davis kept his composure and calmly corrected the record of his men. He let it be known that his unit had had no combat experience before Pantelleria, and that he had fewer pilots than the white units, resulting in his pilots having to fly more missions, thus addressing the stamina issue head on. He made it clear that everything that was asked of the 99th in combat was performed.

Davis's testimony worked, and the "experiment" was allowed to continue. Naturally, the Tuskegee Airmen were angry at their combat ability being questioned. "Here I was, fighting for my country, and I was just an experiment!" one of the airmen noted.

After testifying before the committee, Davis was assigned to command the 322nd Fighter Group, composed of the 100th, 301st, and 302nd Fighter Squadrons, then in training at Selfridge Field, near Mount Clemens in southeast Michigan. There, Davis was able to impart the combat knowledge he had gained in the Mediterranean to the new pilots of the 322nd.

Although Selfridge was a military installation in Michigan and not the Deep South, the segregated base had its share of racial problems. The base commander, Colonel William T. Colman, had given specific instructions that no Black soldier was to be assigned to him as his chauffeur, but someone didn't get the memo; somehow, Colman, apparently drunk, shot and twice wounded the Black driver, Pfc. William R. McRae. The colonel was brought up on charges of careless discharge of a firearm. He was court-martialed and had his rank reduced to captain.

In the Skies Over Italy

After Operation Avalanche, the Salerno invasion in September 1943, the Italian campaign bogged down and the Germans fought stubbornly for every foot of ground. To break the growing stalemate, Operation Shingle, an end run around the Germans' Gustav Line, was launched in early 1944 at Anzio.

On January 27 and 28, 1944, a week after the initial Shingle landings, Luftwaffe fighter-bombers raided the crowded Anzio beachhead. The pilots of the 99th, attached to the 79th Fighter Group, shot down 11 enemy planes, led by Captain Charles B. Hall, who claimed two, bringing his aerial victory total to three.

Another Tuskegee man, Lieutenant Charles Bailey, was cited in a report: "At 1425 hours on the afternoon of January 27, 1944, Lt. Bailey caught a FW-190 headed in the general direction of Rome with a 45-degree deflection shot. The pilot was seen to bail out."

The eight fighter squadrons defending Anzio claimed 32 German aircraft shot down, while the 99th claimed the highest score among them with 13, thus earning a Distinguished Unit Citation.

The 99th would earn its second Distinguished Unit Citation in Italy on May 12–14, 1944, while attached to the all-white 324th Fighter Group, attacking German positions on Monte Cassino and helping the Allied ground forces eventually overcome the enemy entrenched along the Gustav Line.

The 332nd Arrives

In early February 1944, Davis and the 332nd had left Michigan and sailed for Italy, where they were assigned to the Twelfth U.S. Air Force. The 332nd was based at Ramitelli Airfield, north of Foggia on the Adriatic coast of Italy, above the "spur" of the Italian "boot." There they would be joined by the 99th.

Upon arrival, the 332nd initially flew obsolescent Bell P-39 Airacobras that were too slow to chase German fighters, so the group was assigned to escort convoys, protect harbors, and fly armed reconnaissance missions. They would soon get better planes—Republic P-47 "Thunderbolts"—and then, in June 1944, P-51 Mustangs.

The Tuskegee Airmen worked closely with an all-white unit, the 79th Fighter Group. The Black pilots patrolled the air over the Anzio beachhead to provide cover for the Allied ships. Over a two-day period, flying a dozen P-40 fighters led by Captain Clarence Jamison, the 99th Fighter Squadron and 332nd Fighter Group shot down 12 enemy planes that were in route to attack Allied shipping.

The endless training and waiting had finally paid off as critics and skeptics suddenly changed their tune. The same *Time* magazine that published the report critical of the men, now wrote that "any outfit would have been proud of the record.... These victories stamped the final seal of combat excellence on one of the most controversial units in the Army, the all-Negro 99th Fighter Squadron."

New Mission: Germany

The P-47 didn't have the range for deep missions from Italy into Germany, which allowed German fighters to feast on the bombers as they made their runs. Davis was summoned to meet with General Nathan F. Twining, the commander of the Fifteenth Air Force.

Twining needed fighter escorts for his bombers, so he agreed to equip the men with P-51 Mustangs, which could fly

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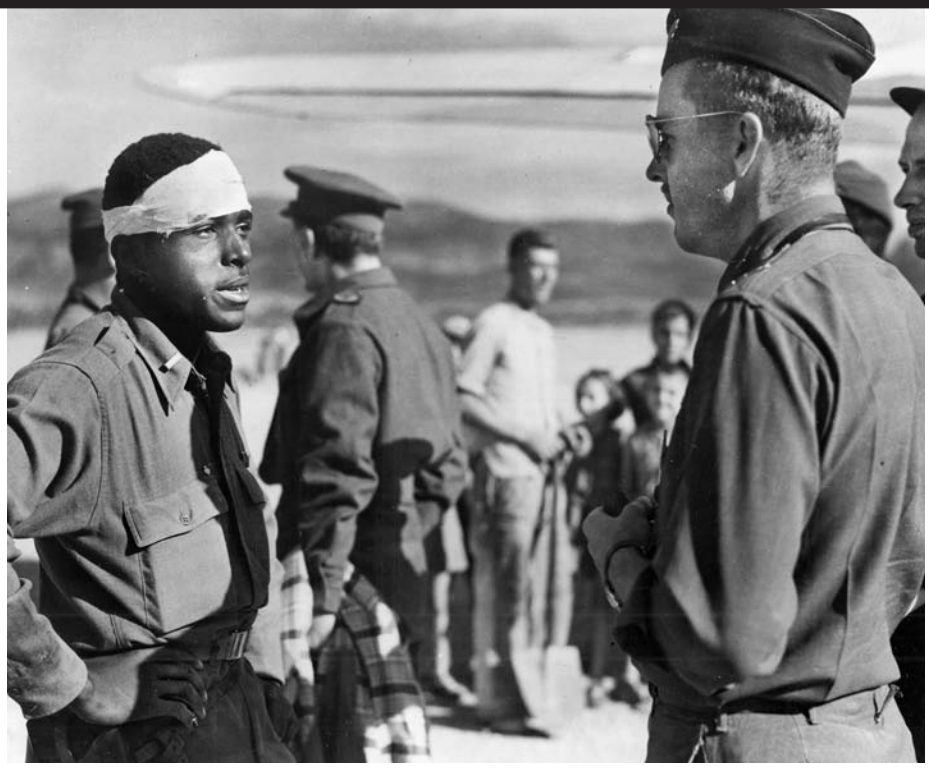


Second Lt. Andrew D. Marshall, left, a member of the 301st Fighter Squadron, was shot down during a strafing run over Greece in October 1944. He was hidden by Greek partisans until British airborne forces arrived; he later died when shot down over Germany.

roughly twice as far at the Thunderbolt, easily making it into Germany and back.

By the end of June, the 332nd began getting the new P-51 Mustang fighter, the best fighter in the American arsenal. It flew faster than the P-47s but was not as durable; however, it was decisive in the air war over Europe. The P-51 soon became a favorite of the pilots with its ability to maneuver and use its speed to evade and attack the enemy. Not satisfied with the color of the tails of the planes, the ground crews painted the tails red; hence the term "Red Tails" became associated with the 332nd.

Davis's 332nd Fighter Group started escorting heavy bombers into Czechoslovakia, Austria, Hungary, Poland, and Germany. The 332nd was a force to be reckoned with, racking up more kills on escort missions with a low bomber loss. They even managed to sink a German destroyer in the Adriatic Sea. The honors for this went to Captain Wendell Pruitt and Lieutenant Gwynee Pierson.

In a 2019 interview in the *Cleveland Plain Dealer*, Lieutenant Harold H. Brown of Minneapolis told a reporter, "You join up [with the bombers], fly your mission, eager beaver, you were hoping that you would run into enemy aircraft. We always used to say: If enemy aircraft come up, that's 'DFC Day,' Distinguished Flying Cross Day. We're going to get some victories."

While on low-level, ground-support strafing missions, things would get a little hairy. "You know there's a risk involved, but that's in the back of your mind," Brown said. "You're strafing ground targets, blowing up locomotives and all the rest of it, and it isn't that you enjoy doing it, but you're doing your job."

Brown said the pilots were aware of the risks but ignored them. "We generally thought we were invincible. 'No, they'll never shoot me down—I can out-fly any of them.' "

The Tuskegee Airmen's training and experience made good use of the Mustangs, which proved to be a game changer in the air war of Europe. Lieutenant Clarence "Lucky" Lester downed three German fighters over Italy in six minutes on July 18, 1944. He reported, "I saw a formation of Messerschmitt Bf 109s straight ahead, but slightly lower; I closed to about 200 feet and started to fire. Smoke began to pour out of the 109 and the aircraft exploded. I was going so fast I was sure I would hit some of the debris from the explosion, but luckily I didn't.

"As I was dodging pieces of aircraft, I saw another 109 to my right, all alone on a heading 90 degrees to mine, but at the same altitude. I turned onto his tail and closed to about 200 feet while firing. His aircraft started to smoke and almost stopped.

"My closure was so fast I began to overtake him. When I overran him, I looked down to see the enemy pilot emerge from his burning aircraft. I remember seeing his blonde hair as he bailed out at approximately 8,000 feet. By this time I was alone and looking for my flight mates when I spotted the third 109 flying very low, about 1,000 feet off the ground. I dove to the right of him and opened fire.... As I did a diving turn, I saw the 109 go straight into the ground."

Tangling With Jets Over Germany

On March 24, 1945, over three dozen P-51s, led by Colonel Davis, escorted B-17s deep into Germany to attack the Daimler-Benz tank factory in Berlin. There, in addition to the Fw 190s, they encountered some rocket-powered jets: the Me 262s. This was the first time in history that a jet was used in aerial combat, but that did not faze the skilled pilots of the 332nd.

During that March 1945 mission over Germany, Lieutenant Harold H. Brown, in a P-51C, got on the tail of one of the Me 262s. He followed the jet down to tree-top level but an anti-aircraft battery disabled his P-51 and forced him to parachute to safety.

As he floated to earth, he was surrounded by angry German civilians with a rope who seemed ready to lynch him. A German policeman intervened and transported him to a multinational POW camp, where a popular joke among the captured Tuskegee aviators was that the prison was the first time they had experienced integration. (Brown was

one of 32 Tuskegee Airmen to be captured during the war.)

After the war, Brown stayed in the Air Force, served in Korea, then attended Ohio State University and earned a doctorate in education. In 2017, his book, *Keep Your Airspeed Up*, was published.

As Daniel L. Haulman wrote in his 2015 monograph "Tuskegee Airman Chronology," that "the total number of escorted bombers shot down was significantly less than the average number of bombers lost by the six other fighter escort groups of the Fifteenth Air Force.

"On the longest fighter-escort mission from Italy, on March 24, 1945, to Berlin, three Tuskegee Airmen each shot down a German jet aircraft that could fly significantly faster than their own red-tailed P-51 Mustangs. When the 332nd Fighter Group returned from Italy, it had proven that black fighter pilots could fly advanced aircraft in combat as well as their white compatriots or their enemies."

Library of Congress

ABOVE: P-51 Mustangs of the 332nd Fighter Group fly in formation over their base at Ramitelli, Italy. BELOW: Pilots (L-R) Captain Clarence Jamison, Lieutenants Harold H. Brown, Charles McGee, and Lee Archer distinguished themsleves with outstanding acts of courage in combat.

The Me 262 was faster than anything the Allies had in their arsenals, but the Tuskegee Airmen fought them tenaciously. In spite of their speed (maximum 540 mph), the German jets were easy pickings for pilots Charles Brantley, Earl Lane, and Roscoe Brown.

In an official report, 1st Lt. Roscoe Brown described how he downed one: "I pulled up at him in a 15 degree climb and fired three long bursts at him from 2,000 feet at 8 o'clock to him. Almost immediately, the pilot bailed out from 24,500 feet. I saw flames burst from the jet orifices of the enemy aircraft. The attack on the (U.S.) bombers was ineffective because of the prompt action of my flight in breaking up the attack."

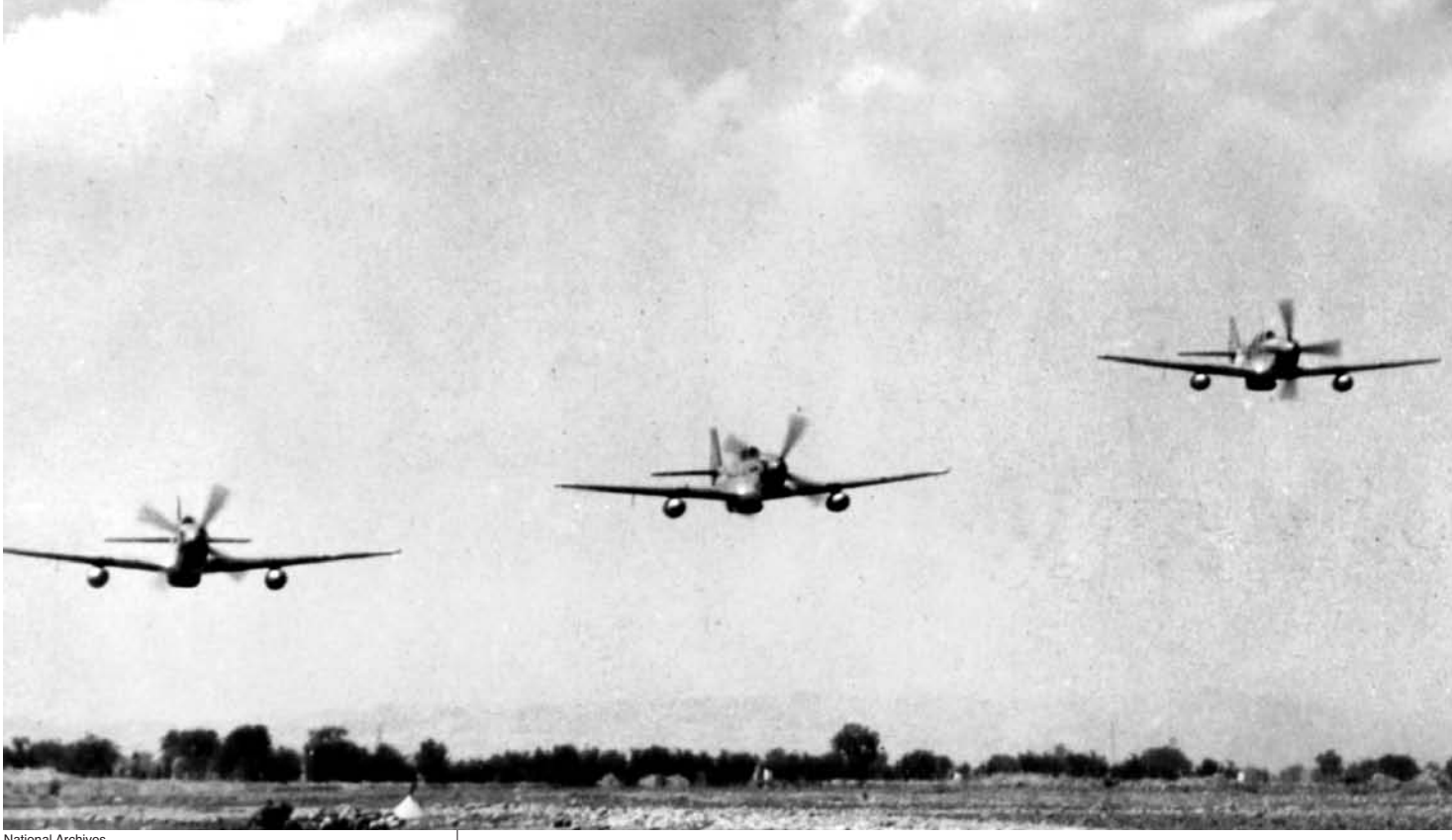
As Roscoe Brown (who was valedictorian of his 1943 graduating class at Springfield College in Massachusetts) would describe years later in an interview, "We knew the German jets were faster than we were. Instead of going directly after them, we went away from them and then turned into their blind spots."

Impressive Record

The Tuskegee Airmens' performance in World War II was impressive. The 332nd earned 96 Distinguished Unit Citations. They criss-crossed all over central and southern Europe during the course of the war, wreaking havoc on the Luftwaffe planes and pilots they encountered.

They put to bed any idea of the inferiority of African Americans' ability to serve with distinction and perform tough combat assignments. Nearly 1,000 men trained in the Tuskegee pilot-training program from 1941-46. Of the 355 men deployed overseas, 84 paid the ultimate sacrifice, 68 in combat. A total of 2,845 missions were flown for the Twelfth and Fifteenth Air Forces.

Their bomber-escort record is nothing short of exemplary. Of their 179 bomber-escort missions, they only lost bombers on seven missions, for a total of 27, compared to the average of 46 for other fighter groups. This dispels the popular myth that they never lost a bomber, but their record stood out, and bomber crews began to



National Archives

request that the Red Tails escort them. They destroyed 112 enemy planes in the air and 150 on the ground while damaging 148 others; 950 rail cars and trucks were destroyed, along with 40 boats and barges.

The pilots of the Tuskegee Airmen were some of the best ever produced by the U.S. Fighting the twin enemies of racism and the Nazi foe, they had the motivation and drive to prove their skeptics and doubters wrong. Enduring many months of waiting and training, their skills were refined and sharpened.

Facing a well-trained and clever enemy, the Tuskegee Airmen entered the war at a crucial time when the air war over Europe was still very much in doubt, with American bombers taking unacceptable losses. These brave men helped to reverse that tide. In short, they helped this nation win that war.

The Struggle Goes On

Unlike today, the Tuskegee Airmen did not immediately receive the recognition from white America that they deserved for their exemplary record during the war and the immediate years following it. There were no parades like those that welcomed the return of many white units. It was the Black press, their friends, and family that kept their stories alive. They returned home to a segregated America, the very thing that they and Black servicemen hoped would have changed.

But it didn't. The highest scoring Tuskegee Airman from the war, Captain Lee Archer, with four victories to his credit, was refused service in a railroad dining car with his wife, while traveling to his next military assignment. Therefore, he and many of these men and Black veterans overall were active in the civil rights movement that followed the war.

Amongst themselves, they formed an organization called Tuskegee Airmen Inc. to keep their legacy alive. It was not until 40 years after World War II that a movie was made about them via HBO.

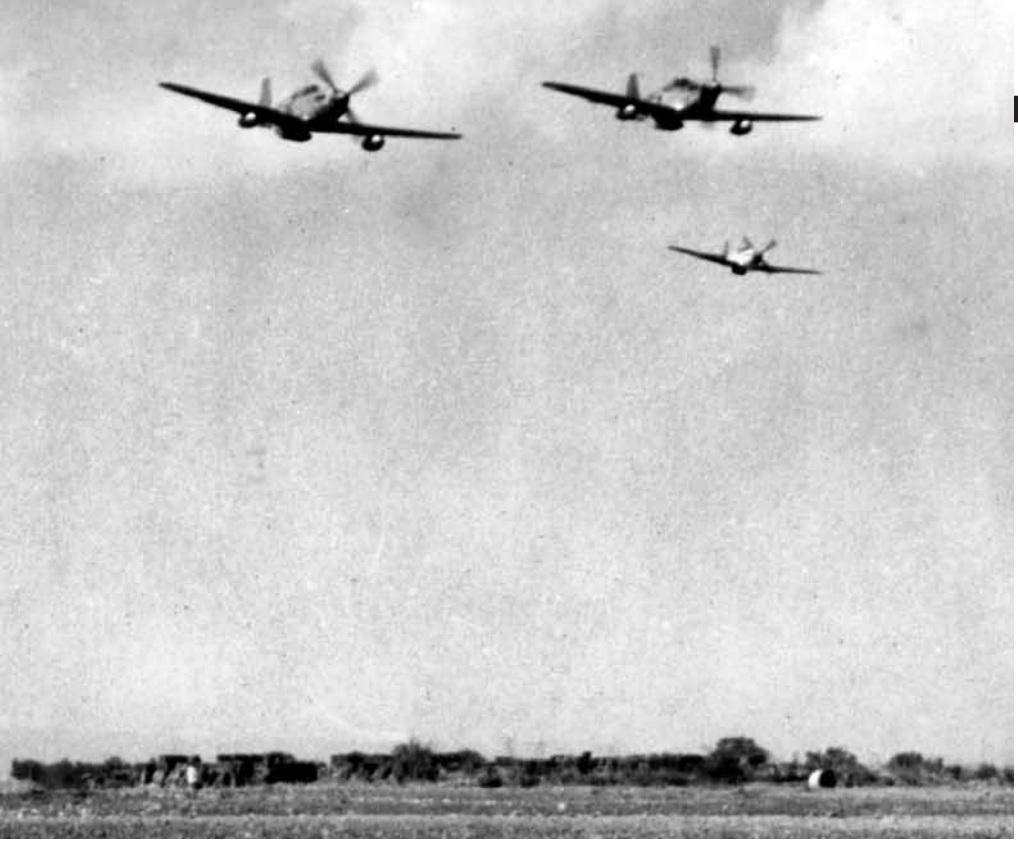
The performance of African Americans in the war and in particular the performance of the Tuskegee Airmen was influential in President Truman's decision in signing Executive Order 9981 in 1948 to desegregate the military. This, coupled with the well-publicized violence against African American veterans in the South such as Isaac Woodard (who was beaten by South Carolina police and left permanently blind just hours after he was honorably discharged from the Army), and political pressures forced President Truman's hand.

In another example, a recent *Atlantic* magazine article said, "Sadly, the Tuskegee Airmen continued to experience racism, even after their heroic exploits in the skies over Germany. Some 160 pilots were arrested and three Tuskegee pilots were court-martialed for walking into an officer's club at Freeman Field, Indiana, in 1945, despite a direct order from Washington that all pilots, regardless of race, were to be given access to the club.

"The records of the pilots were not cleared until 1995, even though the 'Freeman Field Mutiny,' as it was called, was considered a critical step in the Civil Rights Movement and the integration of the armed services."

Civil rights leaders such as A. Phillip Randolph warned the president and Congress that African Americans would resist any future military draft that would perpetuate segregation, determined to pressure the federal government to integrate the military, continuing the work he started during the war with his threatened march on Washington.

The desegregation of the military took place six years before the famous Brown vs. Board of Education decision by the Supreme Court that banned segregated schooling,



White House

ABOVE: Dr. Roscoe Brown, Jr., former Tuskegee fighter pilot, receives the Congressional Gold Medal from President George W. Bush in a ceremony at U.S. Capitol, March 29, 2007. LEFT: Equipped with wing tanks for a long-range mission over Germany, P-51 Mustangs of the 332nd Fighter Group buzz their base at Ramitelli, Italy.

and 16 years before federal law banned segregation nationwide in all areas of public life.

Going to war with a segregated armed forces harmed the opportunities of African Americans and was inefficient logistically to maintain duplicate service units, but the military did provide opportunities after the war that were not available to African Americans in the civilian world.

By 1949, the Air Force had deactivated all-Black flying units, allowing white and Black pilots to train together.

Despite being snubbed by the white mainstream press, Hollywood, and popular culture for decades, the postwar years in the military were good for the careers of many of the Tuskegee Airmen. Quite a few stayed in the service and served with distinction in the Korean and Vietnam wars as high-ranking officers.

The first Black Air Force generals and squadron commanders were Tuskegee Airmen. Others went on to achieve advanced degrees and had rewarding careers in science, engineering and academia. In 2007, they were collectively awarded the Congressional Gold Medal by President George W. Bush. In 2009, they were invited to the inauguration of President Barack Obama.

As for Ashley, Brown, and McGee, they continued to serve their country as they went on to greater rank and honors. After the war, Willie Ashley Jr. returned home and continued to serve in the Air Force Reserves, earned masters and doctorate degrees, retired as a lieutenant colonel, served in the U.S. government, and taught at Howard University. Retiring with the rank of lieutenant colonel, Ashley was buried with honors at Arlington National cemetery in 1984.

Harold H. Brown went on to serve his country in the Air Force for an additional 20 years, retiring as a lieutenant colonel in 1965. Brown would later earn his Phd. and serve in higher education. As of this writing, he was still alive.

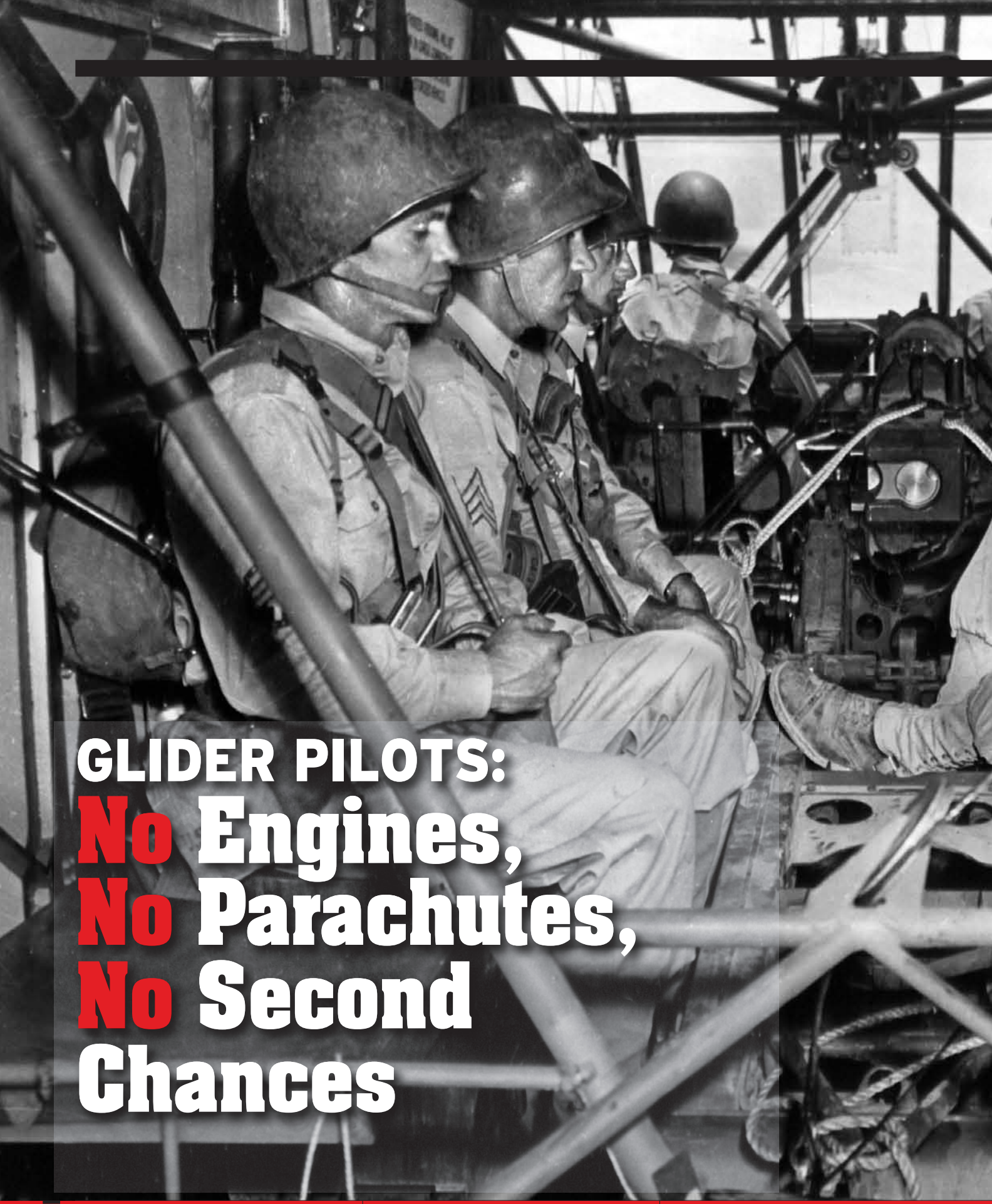
After World War II, Charles McGee flew missions in Korea and Vietnam, totaling 409 combat missions. A recipient of the Distinguished Flying Cross, Bronze Star, and later the Congressional Gold Medal, he escorted B-24 Liberators and B-17's Fortresses over Germany, Austria, and the Balkans. In 2020, he was promoted from colonel to brigadier general. He died in January 2022 at the age of 102.

To this day, the Tuskegee Airmen continue to be honored and recognized for their service in public appearances, books, magazines, documentaries, and in numerous publications. Finally, a grateful nation was catching up to what these men knew about themselves the moment they stepped into a cockpit.

Today, Americans look back in shame at how these men were treated at a time when the nation needed every able-bodied man and woman to do their part for the war effort. Yet, Americans can feel pride at how these men never gave up the drive to achieve their goals and earn the respect and gratitude of their countrymen.

The story of the Tuskegee Airmen is a story of perseverance through adversity. Despite the obstacles thrown their way, racist policies, and outdated and insulting pre-war thinking, they proved the skeptics wrong. It is what makes their story timeless—a story that continues to inspire new generations of Americans to achieve greatness." ■

Dante Brizill has been a Social Studies educator and speaker for the past 19 years in Maryland and Delaware. He is the author of the Greatness Under Fire *series available on Amazon. He resides in Townsend, Delaware.*



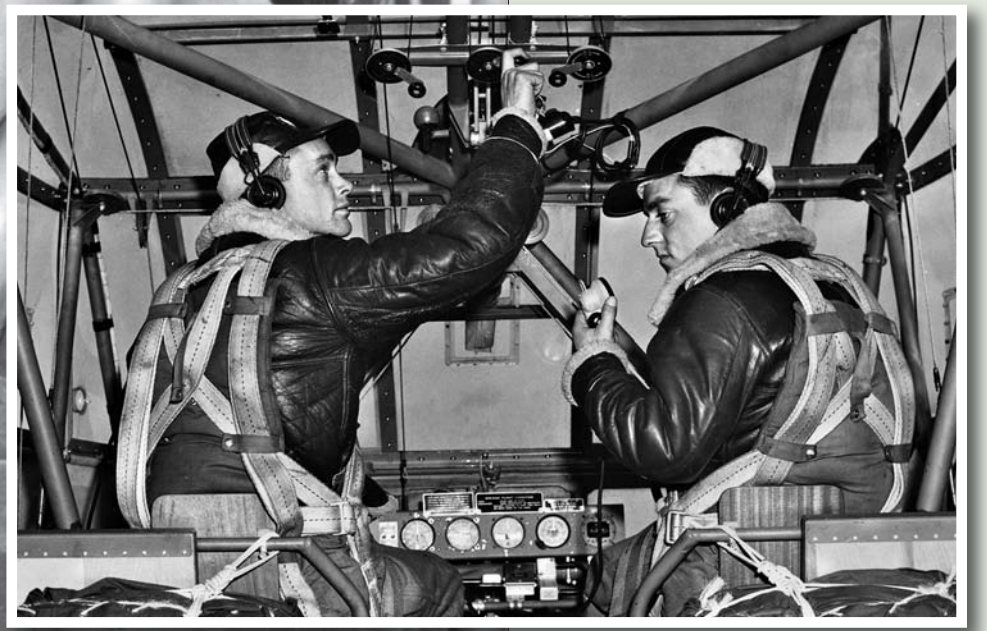
GLIDER PILOTS: No Engines, No Parachutes, No Second Chances

LEFT: National Archives; INSET: Courtesy of the Silent Wings Museum

All soldiers going into battle had to have courage—none more so than the glider pilots of World War II.

BY SCOTT McGAUGH

During the decade of the U.S. Army's experiment with gliders in war, nearly as many glider pilots died in training as they did in combat. The Waco CG-4A gliders, fabric-wrapped metal tubing with a wooden floor, were nicknamed by others as "Death Crates," "Tow Targets," "Plywood Hearse," and "Flying Coffins." Given the conditions for its deployment, the aircraft performed surprisingly well—a one-way mission behind enemy lines with no motor, no parachutes, and no second chances. American glider pilots had flown perilous missions at the tip of the Allied spear all across Europe and many felt slighted by a lack of recognition or awards after the war. They had left as innocent young men who had seen little more than a fistfight. They returned hardened, many haunted, some bitter, and a few



Five 82nd Airborne troopers, plus a pilot and co-pilot, are photographed with a 1,439-lb. 75mm pack howitzer inside a CG-4A "Waco" glider during training in Morocco prior to the June 1943 invasion of Sicily. The glider forces sustained heavy losses during Operation Husky. INSET: Volunteer glider pilots were exposed to enemy fire on three sides through Plexiglas as they landed. They often were released at about 500 feet and had only seconds to land.

alcoholic. Such is the legacy of war. Crippling scars. Nightmares. Sights and sounds that remain as fresh as yesterday.

Joseph had been bound for medical school. Sam was working in a logging camp; Stephen on neighbors' farms. Lawrence hated his Navy posting in Puerto Rico. On the eve of World War II, they were among thousands of young men who dreamed of becoming a fighter pilot. Instead, they were destined to climb aboard a motorless aircraft not yet invented.

They would become combat glider pilots, led by a man who had been the second choice of both his father and the U.S. Army when he applied for admission to West Point. Henry "Hap" Arnold, from Gladwyne, Pennsylvania, a wealthy Philadelphia suburb, was a likable fellow, prone to pranks, and later admitted he was a minimal-effort cadet. He graduated 66th in a class of 111.

Arnold's prospects for an Army career were dim at best, and at one point he suffered from a profound fear of flying. But by the mid-1930s, he had developed a reputation for aircraft research and development—and surprisingly cheerful, cooperative, and inspirational leadership skills. In 1938, Arnold, now a general, took command of a moribund Army Air Corps at the start of the pre-war's aviation arms race.

Arnold ordered the study of combat gliders three years later, with the notion that they would deliver troops and light armament to the battlefield, that glider pilots would be the Sherpas of World War II.

The glider design approved in 1942 was 48 feet long with a wingspan of nearly 84 feet—about the size of a B-25 medium bomber. Reinforced fabric wrapped around metal tubing and a wood floor. There were no engines, no defensive guns, and no parachutes for the two pilots. Comprising 70,000 parts, it was a squarish and remarkably strong design with a payload of about 3,700 pounds of men or equipment. Compared to a fighter, its controls were about as sophisticated as a go-kart.

The rushed program was riddled with missteps, false starts, and second-class treatment compared to powered aircraft. Once the Waco CG-4A glider design was approved, manufacturing became a circus. In fact, one manufacturer literally tried to build a glider in a circus tent. Four builders had no aircraft manufacturing experience. Another was accused of "gross mismanagement." At one facility, 90 percent of glued parts failed.

On one occasion, an instructor leaned against a wing during his lecture and it fell off the fuselage. Tragically, glider wings sometimes separated in mid-flight. In one accident, 10 people, including the mayor of St. Louis and other civic leaders, were killed during a public demonstration when metal components failed under pressure. Later, the glider fleet would be grounded for inspections due to shabby manufacturing in some cases.

Meanwhile, glider-pilot training schools were established in deserts, farm fields and prairies. Many students were "flunked-out aviation cadets, men who were too old for flight crew training ... men who wanted adventure ... brawlers who detested discipline and lived only for combat," wrote one glider pilot. Others wrote to their families, glossing

National Archives

Courtesy of the Silent Wings Museum

ABOVE: Glidermen attach the tow rope before the invasion of Sicily. Towed at about 120 mph for hours, the glider pilots' tow rope—attached to the cockpit—was less than one inch in diameter. OPPOSITE: Officers inspect the wreckage of a 101st Airborne glider that flipped upon landing during training in Tennessee, June 1943. The men inside reportedly parachuted to safety.

over the tragedies of classmates dying when their gliders slammed into the ground.

Finally, in late 1942, the training regimen began to take shape as the first gliders arrived at the schools. Soon students would earn wings with a "G" at its center. Not for "Glider," the new pilots said. It stood for "Guts."

America had already been at war for nearly a year. And Nazi Germany had successfully used glider-borne troops to capture Eben-Emael fortress during the invasion of Belgium on May 10, 1940.

America was behind the curve. American glider pilots did not become test pilots for the Army Air Corps until early 1943 as the Allied invasion of Sicily approached. The amphibious assault—the Allies' largest air-sea operation up to that point of the war—would entail more than 3,000 ships, 150,000 ground troops, and 4,000 aircraft, including 144 gliders. The Allied glider plan for the night of July 9 smelled of disaster from the beginning.

British glider pilots had flown very little in recent months. Many would have to train to fly the American CG-4As in place of the British Horsa gliders. Further, there were not enough British glider pilots for the gliders assigned to the mission. Twenty-four American glider pilots—with no combat experience—volunteered to fly as copilots. They would be towed by American C-47s crews, also inexperienced in combat. More than a few American glider pilots were furious with the mission plan, they later admitted.

In fact, the mission plan would have frightened combat veterans. The glider pilots would take off in Tunisia at night and in high winds, cross the Mediterranean in stormy weather, release far from shore, glide across 3,000 feet of ocean, pass over the Allied naval fleet, and then the beach under enemy fire from three sides, and finally look for their landing zones.

Disaster unfolded in slow motion. Several tow planes with gliders attached turned back to base shortly after takeoff when glider loads shifted. Three other gliders broke free and vanished into the sea without a trace. Two tow planes got lost and turned back. By the time the remainder approached the wind-whipped coast of Sicily in the dark, chaos reigned.

Debates erupted between glider and towplane crews as enemy fire appeared up ahead. Dozens of gliders were released prematurely, guaranteeing they would never make it to shore. Some glider pilots took friendly fire from Allied ships staged offshore during the next day's assault. The lack of Allied naval communication and coordination infuriated some glider pilots for the rest of their lives.

Long before the sun rose, dozens of glider pilots and their glider infantrymen clung to floating wreckage, debating whether to swim for shore or hold on and wait for

search parties. Some swam toward the beach and disappeared. Many drowned throughout the night before the survivors were rescued at dawn.

The glider corps' portion of Operation Husky had become an unmitigated disaster. Only five of 144 gliders made it to their landing zones; 69 gliders were released too far out at sea to reach the shore. Of 24 American glider pilots, only two made it ashore and six were killed in action. Overall, 605 officers and men were lost, more than half due to drowning.

Although the Allies captured Sicily less than six weeks later, questions about the use of airborne tactics lingered. General Dwight D. Eisenhower, Supreme Commander in the Mediterranean, openly questioned the wisdom of massive airborne operations. It appeared that gliders could be combat-effective only at an exorbitant cost in casualties and resources. Their Sicily performance certainly did not bode well for the volunteer glider pilots as the invasion of the continent loomed.

As Eisenhower contemplated the fate of gliders and the airborne, the surviving glider pilots vented their horror and revulsion in letters and after-action reports.

But the glider forces learned fast. Hours before the 4th Infantry Division waded ashore on Utah Beach nearly a year later on June 6, 1944, nearly 200 glider pilots had landed about six miles inland. Engaging portions of Germany's 42 divisions along the French coast, slowing the movement of enemy troops, seizing causeways, and delivering supplies for thousands of paratroopers, they were the first of six waves of more than 500 gliders in the first 24 hours of the airborne's Operation Neptune in support of Operation Overlord.

They arrived on a mission that Air Chief Marshal Sir Trafford Leigh-Mallory had called "unsound in principle," in part due to their long approach over enemy territory, low altitude, and little hope of surprise after a three-hour flight over the English Channel. Arriving under a full moon or in daylight, he had feared casualty rates of as much as 70 percent in the morning and sunset sorties on D-Day, plus the glider sorties the morning of D+1.

Operation Overlord

Indeed, surprise had vanished as the sky lightened on June 6. As they approached their landing zones, glider pilots braved a pyramid of enemy crossfire. One glider pilot believed a German fighter strafed his glider, shooting away his right aileron control and hitting his tow rope, causing it to unravel. When groundfire blew off the rudder control, he was within seconds of disaster as he separated from his tow plane. Others followed suit.

As Allied troops came ashore a few miles away, it seemed nearly every glider landing resembled a gymnast's floor routine. Hard landings with a thud. Stopping a glider up on its front skids and risking a somersault. Catching a wingtip and cartwheeling. Caroming off a tree that ripped away a wing. A concussion likely was proof of a "good landing." For many, battle sounds at first were fuzzy, yelled conversations, unintelligible.

Every field in Normandy became a separate battlefield. Recon photos taken earlier at midday failed to depict the height of hedgerows separating the fields. Instead of the bushes as they appeared to be in the photos, many were five-foot-high dirt embankments that separated the fields. Bramble thickets covered most embankments, along with dense stands of mature trees.

Glider pilots discovered Normandy was a checkerboard of tiny battlefields. Some glider wrecks were not easily spotted from the air. Here and there, a tail revealed where a glider had burrowed into trees. Some gliders were piled on top of others, or flipped onto their tops. Others sat forlornly in a clearing, alone and on their bellies—their wings mangled, tails shot away, as if a giant bird had been shot high in the sky and then had belly flopped onto the ground, spread-eagled and silent. Open doors hinted that perhaps glider pilots and passengers had somehow survived.

Combat brought new horrors. "It was then that I learned the true meaning of the word, 'terror,'" glider pilot Richard Libbey later wrote. "I could not think … we started moving … the first [glider pilot] I saw was Ben Winks' copilot.

"Where's Ben?"

Courtesy of the Silent Wings Museum

ABOVE: Operation Husky, the June 1943 invasion of Sicily, was a disaster for glider forces. Hundreds of paratroopers and glidermen lost their lives. Here, only the charred metal frame of a CG-4A remains in a Sicilian field. The fate of those aboard is unknown. OPPOSITE: Gliders on the runway, attached to their C-47 tow planes on their flanks, prepare to take off for the invasion of Sicily.

National Archives

"Ben's dead."

"I'll never forget those words as long as I live. He had so much confidence. He was so sure he was coming back." Similar nightmares would haunt Normandy glider pilots for a lifetime, shared only in a few letters, journals and at reunions.

Although less than 50 glider pilots were killed in Operation Neptune, the casualty rate among the glider infantry they carried approached 11 percent—a high price. Yet the glider pilots delivered more than 4,000 men to the battlefield, nearly 100 pieces of artillery, almost 300 vehicles, and 300 tons of cargo.

The fabric-covered gliders proved far tougher than most observers would have predicted and their durability kept occupants alive, but at a price. Approximately 97 percent of the gliders in Operation Neptune were too badly damaged to use a second time. "Left to rot," wrote one glider pilot. Meanwhile, the troops coming ashore with glider support suffered fewer casualties than those who did not.

Yet the lessons were painful. Recon photos were of dubious value. Night missions were nearly suicidal. Releasing gliders at a higher-than-designated altitude dispersed glider landings. Tow planes were vulnerable to enemy fire. Pathfinders were critical to securing landing zones before the gliders' arrival.

Operation Dragoon—the invasion of southern France—was less than two months away. Would gliders be used then—or ever again?

Operation Dragoon

"Christ what a mess!" Dragoon glider pilot Jack Merrick wrote after the war. "Everywhere I looked, there were gliders in free flight or still tagging along behind tow planes taking evasive action trying not to run into each other.... I watched one glider come whistling in at about 100 miles per hour, hook a wing, and go cartwheeling down the field like a cheerleader at a football game. I later heard stories about a glider in free flight just being missed by a falling jeep and even some being shot at by ships in our own invasion fleet."

Confusion was the enemy in Operation Dragoon, on August 15, 1944. Long anticipated by the Germans, 2,500 Allied ships would bring 145,000 troops ashore. If successful, the Allies would be positioned to advance on Marseilles, a critical port. A giant pincer attack from the Riviera north and from Normandy southward could cut off Hitler's troops in western France.

Meanwhile, 10,000 airborne troops would be delivered inland, generally in the Argen Valley, in the span of 15 hours. Glider pilots again would play a key role, with 76 gliders scheduled for an early-morning arrival (Operation Bluebird), followed by 348 gliders about 10 hours later (Operations Dove and Canary).

Once again, mission planning and the fates joined the Germans as enemies of the glider forces. Early morning fog blanketed the landing zone. The Americans' CG-4As pressed ahead, even as one glider suddenly lost a wing and plunged into the sea. The remainder achieved a remarkable record when 33 of 37 gliders set down in their prescribed LZs (landing zones), likely the best single serial success rate of the war.

But chaos took command later in the day. Deep dust clouds hid landing zones, turning Operation Dove's approach into a rodeo as planned separation, altitude, and timing all broke down. At one point, dozens of gliders were in free flight in broad, descending circles. As if they were over a drain, drawing closer with each passing second, one glider pilot after another dove out of the converging pattern when he spotted a clearing.

Not only did recon photos fail to distinguish grape vines in some landing zones, but many clearings, farm fields, and cow pastures had been mined, flooded, or studded

with upright tree trunks, up to about a foot wide and 10 feet tall—a mutant picket fence nicknamed "Rommel's Asparagus"—to demolish gliders skidding to a stop.

Most of one glider pilot's right wing broke away when it collided with another glider as both simultaneously landed, sounding like "an implosion of a giant wooden match box," and then much of the other wing disappeared in a tangle of vines. The bottom of the glider disintegrated, plowing dirt into the fuselage filled with glider infantry. But it stopped before reaching the trees. "Nice landing, lieutenant," one of the soldiers yelled to the glider pilot.

Spacing glider serials only 10 minutes apart proved more deadly than a broken-down Germany army that offered minimal resistance. Even more so than over Normandy, inflight delays and changes in the flight plan forced gliders pilots out of their planned approaches and anticipated release at 600 feet. Some were stacked far higher than that, and others nearly overflew gliders that had taken off ahead of them.

Yet, for all the confusion that marked glider operations, Operation Dragoon was an overwhelming success. By the end of the first day, every combat unit of the VI Corps was ashore. Within hours, Allied advancements inland were ahead of schedule against modest German resistance.

Meanwhile, not a single glider that had landed inland could be recovered for later use. Gliders littered the countryside, shattered, broken, and sometimes still containing glider pilots' equipment and supplies. Yet somehow, only 11 glider pilots were killed and just 32 wounded, a remarkably low casualty rate among the 675 glider pilots.

Operation Market Garden

Operation Market Garden in Holland would commence only one month after Dragoon, on September 17, 1944. The largest glider mission of World War II, more than 1,900 gliders would need pilots from every corner of America, including some who had just pinned their wings on their chests for the first time.

Like the others before it, Market Garden was a plan riddled with risk—an Allied invasion from Belgium up through eastern Holland near the German border to seize the town of Arnhem and its strategic bridge. If successful, the Allies could then flank the northern end of the Germans' defensive Siegfried Line, and drive into the heart of the Ruhr industrial region while Allied bombers pounded the gun and tank factories there; it would be a dagger into the heart of Germany. To accomplish that, Field Marshal Bernard Montgomery proposed the largest airborne operation to date.

American airborne troops would seize about 50 miles of Highway 69—a narrow two-lane road—running north from the Belgian border, in two sectors near Nijmegen (82nd Airborne) and Eindhoven (101st Airborne) farther south. That would enable the British Second Army's XXX Corps to drive from the Belgian border up Highway 69, through Eindhoven and Nijmegen, and link up with the British attacking at Arnhem farther north. Massive glider sorties would support the 82nd and 101st with glider infantry, supplies, ordnance, and artillery.

BELOW: A wrecked glider in a Normandy field near St. Mere Eglise fell victim to "Rommel's Asperagus" — posts in the ground to destroy landing gliders and their cargo. INSET: Left to right: Glider pilot Richard Libbey discovered "the meaning of terror." Elbert Jella earned a Silver Star after landing his glider when he disabled an enemy tank with his bazooka and forced it to withdraw. Curtis Goldman thought he had run over a paratrooper when landing.

National Archives

Courtesy of the Silent Wings Museum

TOP: Two C-47s tow gliders to landing zones during the Normandy invasion, June 6, 1944. Nearly 900 British and American gliders were employed during the operation. ABOVE: American airborne troops who died in the crash landing of their glider on D-Day, near Utah Beach.

It was an ominous plan from the beginning. The "go decision" came only a few days before the mission, making it the first major airborne mission of the war without significant rehearsal training. The mission would require so many glider pilots that glider infantry would sit in the copilot seats, after about 10 minutes' "training" just before takeoff. After crossing the English Channel, two glider approach corridors from the north and south crossed into enemy territory before reaching the landing zones—in daylight and, following more than 30,000 paratroopers, with no element of surprise.

But, beginning on d-day, September 17, 1944, bad British weather and then heavy concentrations of German artillery shredded Montgomery's plan. For three days, fog and rain plagued the Allied air bases surrounding London and over the North Sea, forcing airborne departure delays, route changes, and cancellations. Meanwhile, on the battlefield, the British assault in Arnhem stalled, the 101st and 82nd met stiff resistance, and glider pilots flew into hell.

Their long approach to landing zones became a war film played in fast forward: flashing images outside the cockpit, the "kha-whumps" of artillery shells, bullets splitting the air inside the fuselage, grisly smells filling nostrils until the movie ended with a glider belly down in a field.

After landing, some glider pilots were horrified at the enemy fire that their infantry passengers had taken. In one glider, an infantry corporal slumped with a hole the size of a softball in his chest. Not far away, three others looked like they had been shot through with a single slug, probably a 20mm that hadn't exploded before exiting under the wing. The glider pilots' postwar memoirs laid bare the sorrow and horror of glider warfare in Holland.

On D+1 and D+2, approximately 1,500 intrepid glider pilots delivered infantry, anti-tank, antiaircraft, engineer, and recon personnel to the 82nd and 101st. They braved flak so thick that it reminded one pilot of "crows over a tree." On D+2, the most brutal enemy artillery fire of the mission forced many to fly lower than expected and risk midair collisions. "Rush

National Archives

ABOVE: A CG-4A cargo glider of the 439th Trooper Carrier Group lifts off from an airfield in France to resupply besieged troops around Bastogne during the Battle of the Bulge, December 27, 1944. OPPOSITE: Gliders litter a frozen field near Bastogne during the Battle of the Bulge. Despite horrific losses, glider pilots delivered 100,000 pounds of cargo in one day to the surrounded troops at Bastogne. Sliding to a stop on frozen farm fields was a harrowing experience.

hour" in the air forced some glider pilots to be released an untenable 15 miles from their intended landing zones.

At one point, a glider pilot glanced down at the floor near his seat. His glider infantry had lined the bottom of the cockpit near him with their flak jackets, because "if anything happens to you, we're gone," said one infantryman. Another glider pilot watched a wing fall away from his buddy's glider. At 500 feet, it turned nose down. His good friend slammed nose-first into a ditch, crushing everyone and everything inside.

On D+6, the sun finally greeted glider pilots. But Operation Market Garden had failed and the attacking British had retreated from the strategic bridge. The plan had targeted "one bridge too far."

With no glider command structure on the ground, glider pilots were largely left to find their own way back to base. Some took a few extra days to sightsee, adding to a general reputation of glider pilots as rapscallions. Yet they had delivered 8,500 men into battle as well as 900 tons of supplies. Glider pilots amounted to five percent of the men on the ground at the end of Market Garden, the equivalent of a regiment but with only modest combat training at best.

Meanwhile, letters written by glider pilots who did not return were forwarded to families back home. Others received missing-in-action telegrams, offering a sliver of hope.

Only three months later, a rescue mission would turn deadly over frozen ground.

"Some of the wounded had been in there for days. It looked like the Atlanta station scene in *Gone with the Wind*." The only glider rescue mission of World War II comprised perhaps its most overlooked operation: the Battle of the Bulge.

Winter had iced the war in December, 1944, along a 75-mile stretch in the Ardennes Forest in the southeastern third of Belgium. Biting winds, temperatures approaching zero degrees Fahrenheit, and heavy snows had arrived. It was a time to dig in, hunker down, and replenish as the weather allowed.

But on December 16, the snow had crackled under thousands of German soldiers' boots two hours before sunrise. The vanguard of approximately 1,000 German tanks headed west toward the Meuse River in central Belgium, breaking through Allied defenses.

Two days later, the 101st Airborne Division mobilized with only two days' rations as reinforcements headed for Bastogne aboard almost 400 trucks. They joined approximately 18,000 American troops in the Bastogne area who became surrounded by an estimated 45,000 Germans.

For the first time in World War II, glider pilots would not lead an amphibious invasion in Europe. They would not deliver glider infantry and battle supplies to paratroopers behind enemy lines. This time, rescue was the priority.

After several desperate pleas from the 101st, 11 gliders surprised the Germans late on December 26, delivering surgeons, medical supplies, and tank fuel at 5:30 p.m. Only 40 minutes earlier, the lead tank of General George S. Patton's rescue troops reached the outskirts of the 101st perimeter.

Once again, mission planning contributed to making the next day one of the deadliest glider missions of the war. There were no trained copilots on this mission when their

commanding officer decided the cargo of high-explosive ammunition was too dangerous to risk two trained pilots per glider. They also would fly the same route as the gliders flew the day before, even though command learned at the last minute the route Patton's tanks had blazed was now a safer option.

Remarkably, only three of the first 25 gliders failed to reach the landing zone. But 18 of the next 25 glider pilots either did not reach the landing zone, were killed, or taken prisoner. Of the last 12 glider pilots in Operation Repulse, eight became prisoners of war. Three others were killed. Only one returned to base.

"You can't imagine what it was like. You know how a goose feels when he flies over a bunch of hunters and they start shooting?" a glider pilot years asked after the war. "[Flak] so black ... it reminded me of a black summer storm cloud," wrote another glider pilot.

By percentage, the flights to Bastogne on the 27th was the costliest glider day of the war for some units. Thirty-two percent of the glider pilots that day were killed or captured. By comparison, historian Rex Shama noted that of the 2,933 glider pilots in Operations Neptune and Market Garden, 114 were listed as killed or missing, a loss of less than four percent. Losses on December 27 proportionately were eight times greater than World War II's two largest glider missions to date.

Yet the glider pilots delivered 100,000 pounds of cargo on that final day, and the surgeons and medical supplies they delivered on both days likely saved untold lives.

Glider pilot scars from Operation Repulse ran deep. "Not enough enemy position information furnished." "Need timely and accurate information on enemy positions and AA." "No flak suits or parachutes—and we were carrying gasoline." "Glider operations very poor, no flak suits in glider. Briefing very poor, news 48 hours old."

Glider warfare remained a work in progress.

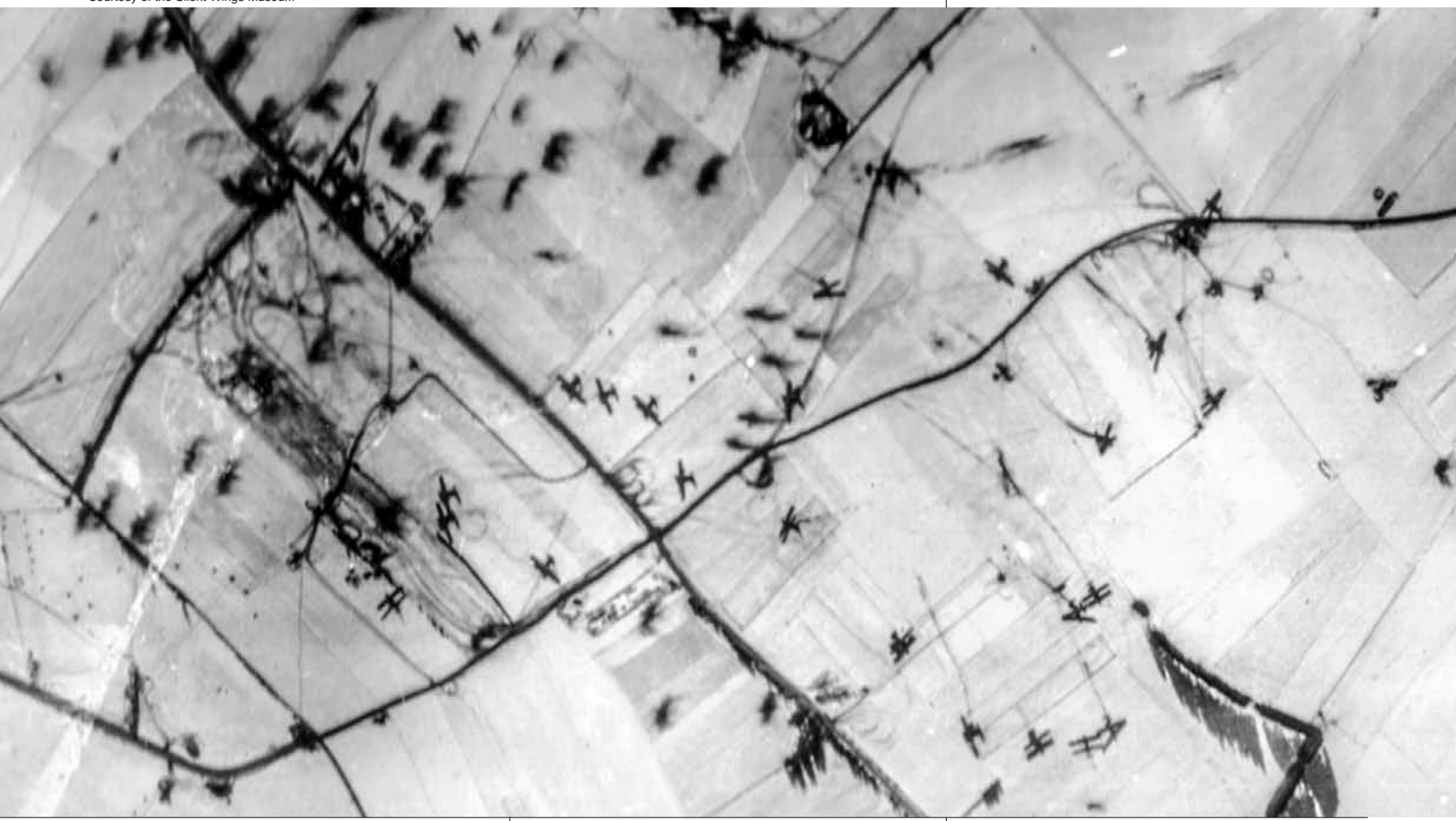
Varsity—One Final Mission

In early 1945, the Allies had reached the western bank of the Rhine River. The Western Front now stretched 450 miles from the Swiss Alps to Holland. The inevitable thrust into Germany would come in March, a few miles northwest of the German city of Wesel.

Three Allied armies would ford the river, supported by the U.S. 17th and British 6th Airborne Divisions that would fly over the Rhine to drop troops, supplies, and release gliders about six miles into Germany near the Issel River. Operation Varsity would be the largest ground and airborne assault since Normandy. The airborne assault would include more than 1,800 powered aircraft, 900 American gliders, and nearly 450 British gliders—so many gliders that one would be taking off every 12 seconds for nearly three hours.

Veteran glider pilots flying their last combat mission of the war recognized lessons from earlier assignments. No night flight like Normandy. No multi-day missions

Courtesy of the Silent Wings Museum



Courtesy of the Silent Wings Museum

over a prepared enemy as Holland had been. Unlike Market Garden, there would be plenty of rehearsal exercises before the real thing.

Regardless, maintaining preordained separation between the serials again proved impossible on March 24, 1945. Clean, clear landing zones remained more wish than reality. Prevailing winds pushed chemical smoke ordered by Montgomery to conceal the river crossing drifted over the landing zones and enveloped visual landmarks.

"Flying blind" wasn't part of the plan as gliders released from their tow planes, turned in a broad circle like eagles looking for prey, and then disappeared down into the smoke, according to one glider pilot. Some of the most vicious enemy antiaircraft artillery fire of the war greeted the gliders.

Horror abounded. One glider pilot thought he had run over a paratrooper when he landed but learned later the paratrooper had already been shot dead as he had descended. Another glider pilot suffered burns on his right arm, right foot, ear, the top of his head, neck, and face. Nearby his copilot was on fire. He had managed to exit and then had fallen to the ground. He died where he fell. Postwar accounts by the pilots who survived reek with remorse, sorrow, and sometimes survivor's guilt.

Meanwhile, for the first time some glider pilots had been given ground combat orders. The 435th Provisional Glider Pilot Infantry Company (188 glider pilots) had received additional combat training for roadblock duty the night of March 24. Shortly before midnight, an estimated 200 Germans approached their position.

The firefight erupted when an enemy tank approached their position. Red tracers from every direction revealed positions and targets. Hours later, sunrise revealed 15 dead Germans, more than 20 wounded enemy prisoners, and 80 others taken prisoner after what became known as "The Battle of Burp-Gun Corner."

Glider pilots paid a horrific price for the successful thrust into Germany. Every nine minutes, a glider pilot on approach was killed by enemy fire or in a mid-air explosion, was crushed in a mangled glider, or died from shrapnel or gunfire. That amounted to nearly 40 percent of all the glider pilots killed in World War II and more than the glider pilot deaths in Operations Neptune and Market Garden combined.

But now "the road to Berlin" was clear. It had crossed Normandy, then up through southern France, and across Belgium into Holland—and now, into the Fatherland. America's glider pilots had flown at the tip of the Allied spear across the width and breadth of the European Theater of Operations.

In only nine months.

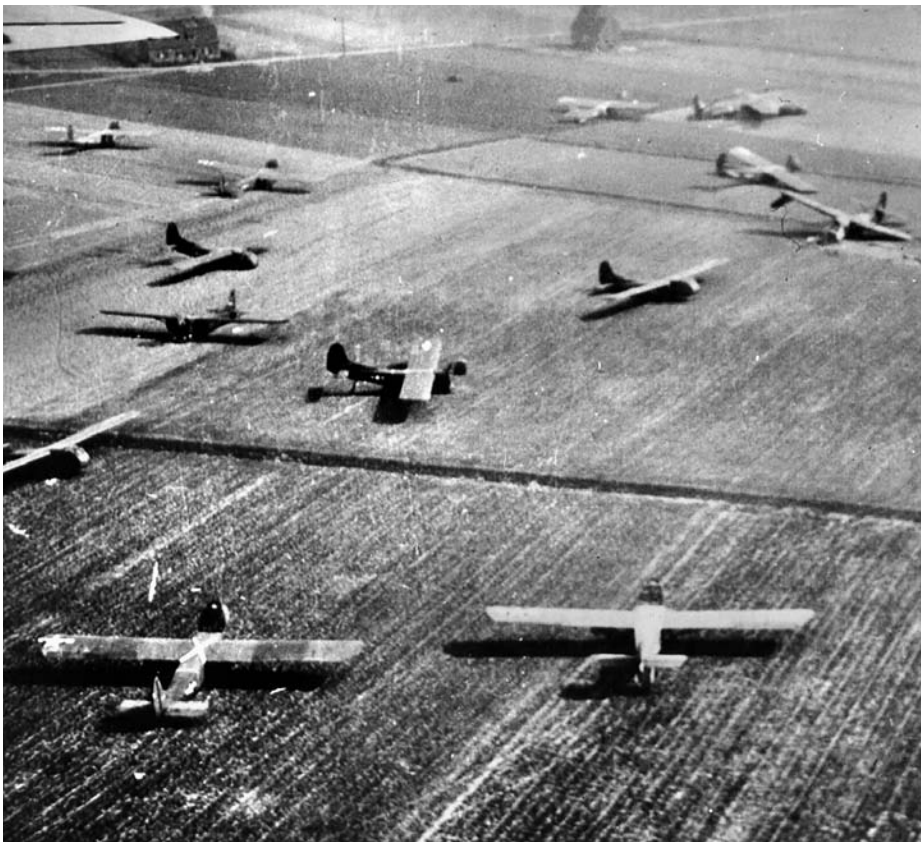
Future Operations?

The invasion of Japan loomed over the western horizon. Soon glider pilots began testing various techniques for landing in rice paddies, a far cry from French vineyards and hedgerows. Hiroshima ended that mission preparation and assured the gliders' obituary.

A few postwar training exercises and rescues took place, using gliders to supply Canadian troops above the Arctic Circle and to rescue aircrews after plane crashes in Greenland and the Yukon Territory.

But in 1952, the U.S. Air Force's Joint Airborne Troop Board wrote, "Gliders, as an airborne doctrine, are obsolete, and should no longer be included in airborne techniques, con-

Both: National Archives



TOP: Broad, open fields in Germany made for ideal landing zones during Operation Varsity. Over 1,300 U.S. and British gliders took part. ABOVE: Due to the high attrition rate, very few gliders could be reused. Here, in what is called a "snap take-off," a C-47 attempts to hook the tow rope of a CG-4A and retrieve it from a field in Normandy. OPPOSITE: Operation Varsity (March 24, 1945) involved the extensive use gliders. Here, a Waco glider has made a crash landing in a field near Wesel, Germany.

cepts and doctrine, or in references thereto."

Hundreds of glider pilots had given their lives, nearly equally divided between combat and in training in World War II. In fact, when paratroopers had preceded them into enemy territory alerting the enemy, glider pilots paid a disproportional price from the lack of surprise.

Though many glider pilots resented their lack of post-war awards and public recognition, many were delighted decades later when NASA called its Space Shuttle a "high-tech glider" that slowed from 17,300 miles per hour to 250 when landing. A far cry from combat gliders slowing from 100 to 60 miles per hour under fire.

The innocent young men they had been were long gone, replaced by the hardened, often bitter or haunted survivors they had become. One pilot never forgot the words of a military doctor: "All men who go to war die, son. Anyone who comes back, comes back cheated."

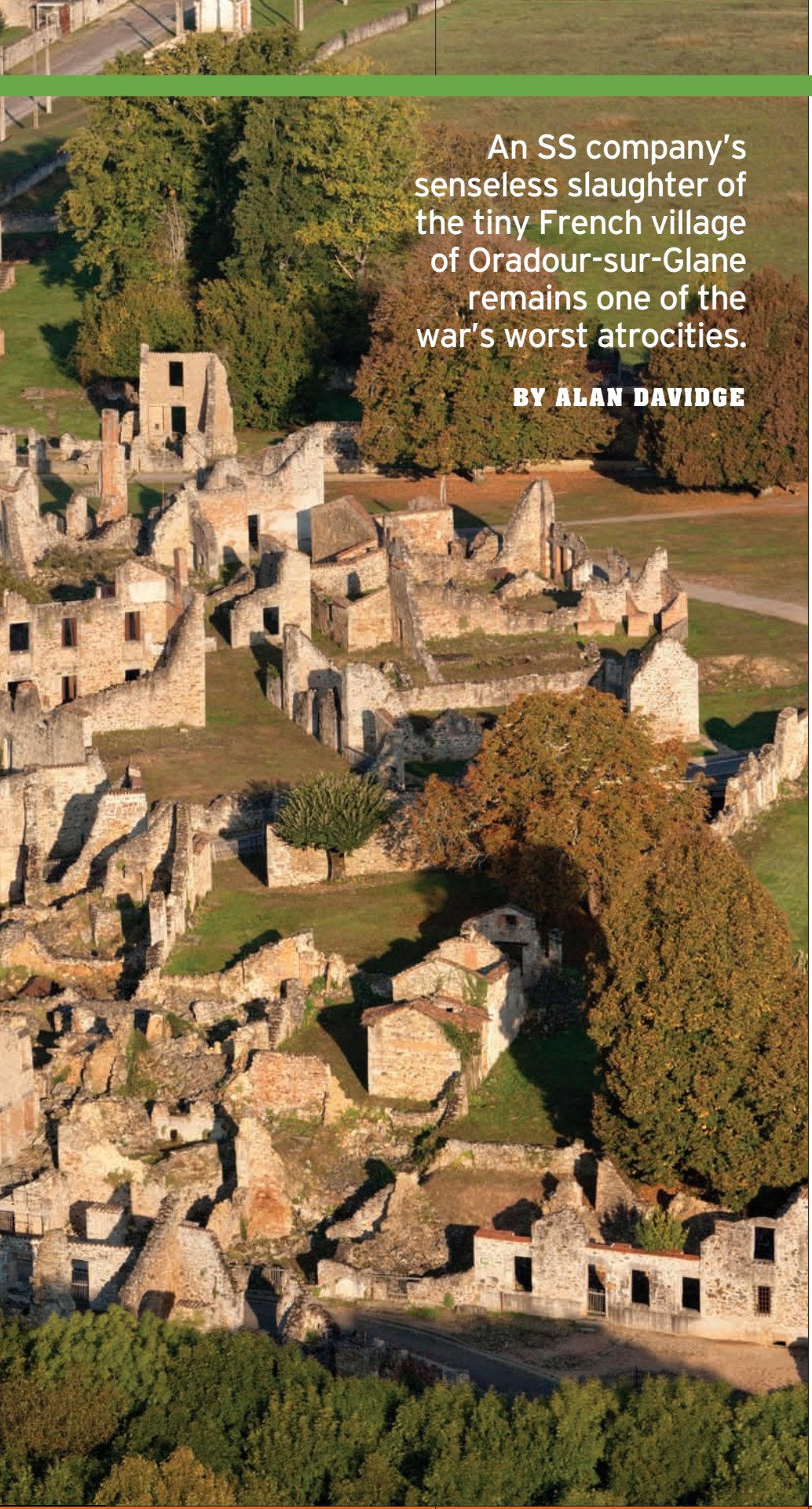
Only in the last decade of their lives did some glider pilots finally share their combat experience, perhaps sanitized from war's true reality. "I keep getting flashbacks of things that happened ... I had high school friends, college friends, frat brothers, but I never put them close to the category that I do of those glider pilots ... courage that you would never believe," one glider pilot acknowledged decades after the war.

Today, few members of the glider corps remain among us. Yet their legacy remains—in their journals, letters, and sometimes sheepish oral histories—whenever service to America calls for a full measure of guts. ■

Scott McGaugh is a New York Times *best-selling author. His latest book,* Brotherhood of the Flying Coffin, *from which this article is adapted, is based on WWII volunteer glider pilots' largely unknown personal accounts of their one-way missions into enemy territory—where they faced unimaginable horrors and brutality, yet survived with courage, camaraderie, and even compassion on the battlefield. For more information, go to www.scottmcgaugh.com.*

Oradour today looking southeast along the Main Street, Rue Desourteaux. On a hot summer afternoon, 200 SS soldiers drove up unannounced from the St Julien road (bottom right) sealed off the town and rounded up its inhabitants into a central recreational area. The townspeople were then bombed, shot or burned to death. The Germans then set the town ablaze, with the exception of the house of a cloth and wine merchant, which was looted and occupied until around 10 p.m.

The Execution of ORADOUR-SUR-GLANE



An SS company's senseless slaughter of the tiny French village of Oradour-sur-Glane remains one of the war's worst atrocities.

BY ALAN DAVIDGE

Known throughout France as the Village des Martyrs—"Village of Martyrs,"—the pillaged remains of Oradour-sur-Glane have stood nearly eight decades now as a memorial to the dead and reminder of the atrocities of war. Everything has been kept as it was on June 10, 1944 when some 642 men, women and children were shot and burned to death. The places of execution and other points of significance where the nearly 600 unidentifiable bodies were found, are respectfully signposted.

A sign at the entrance, in English, says simply: "Remember."

Marguerite Rouffanche, 46, her two daughters and grandson, were among the 250 women and 200 children packed into the church as a group of young men in SS uniforms carried a heavy box and placed it in front of the high altar. Soon after the men locked the front door, the box exploded with an almighty roar, shooting debris throughout the church. It blew out the stained-glass windows and filled the sanctuary with suffocating smoke.

Those who were still mobile, headed for any source of fresh air. Their pressure on the sacristy door to the left of the altar caused it to give way and provided some temporary relief—but not for long.

Soldiers waiting outside then burst through the main doors and opened fire at anyone still standing. Through the sacristy windows came a further hail of bullets, one of them mortally wounding Andrée, Marguerite's married daughter, in the throat. As bodies fell around her, Marguerite dropped and feigned her own demise. Further firing from the basement of the sacristy and grenades thrown through the shattered windows attempted to finish off the survivors.

As Marguerite lay in purgatory among the dead and dying, straw and other combustible material was thrown over the bodies and set alight. Her second daughter, Amélie, was one of those consumed in the inferno. The confusion created by more smoke and flames gave Marguerite a chance to make a move. She crept behind the altar and considered her

Alamy

options. A short ladder used for accessing the church candles was within reach and a few seconds later she was on her way out of the largest of the damaged windows behind the altar.

Marguerite jumped 10 feet into the brambles below and, hearing a voice from behind, saw her friend Mme Joyeux, with her seven-month-old baby, Réné, climbing out behind her. She cried out for Marguerite to catch Réné, threw him to her, and leapt out herself. The baby's cries alerted German soldiers stationed on the road opposite who turned round and shot the mother and her child.

Marguerite launched herself forward to take cover in the rectory garden next door, but before she hit the ground, she had taken five rounds herself. Believing that was enough to dispatch anyone, the soldiers left her for dead.

Slowly and painfully, with a smashed shoulder and four leg wounds, she crawled into the rectory garden where she was rescued by friends the following afternoon. Marguerite was later to discover that she alone had survived out of all the 453 women and children who had been herded into the church of Saint Martin in Oradour-sur-Glane, to be bombed, shot, or burned to death on the afternoon of June 10, 1944.

Prior to June 1944, the town had not been directly affected by the war. Many of its menfolk had suffered the horrors of 1914-18 and a memorial in the church reminded its congregation of the names of 101 men who hadn't returned. But after the signing of the armistice with Germany on June 21, 1940, Oradour found itself in the relative peace of the Unoccupied Zone, subject to the puppet government installed by Germany in the central French town of Vichy.

Unlike Paris and the towns on the Normandy coast, there was little in the area of strategic interest for the Führer, and there was no history of Résistance activity or provocation of the Germans. In fact, the last time a German had been seen in Oradour was in late 1942.

Those who lived there in 1944 saw few visitors during the week except for the regulars who traveled via the tram service from the nearby city of Limoges, which began in 1911. Adults used the service to commute; for teenagers, it was the chance to meet up and enjoy liaisons in the evening before returning home.

During the last week in August, the annual festival took place. The fairground in the center of town was set up for roundabouts, stalls, and other amusements which were eagerly anticipated by members of all generations.

Daily life was predictable and peaceful in Oradour-sur-Glane. Only about a quarter of its 1,500 residents lived in the town. The rest were in outlying hamlets and farms. Oradour was well appointed with shops, restaurants, garages, and cafés that provided a chance for local workers to meet and exchange gossip after work or during their long lunch breaks. For the children, there was a boys' school near the tram station, a girls' school in the center, and a nursery school on the road out of town.

When the Germans had crossed the French border and occupied Alsace and Lorraine in 1940 (which they had lost in the post-WWI Treaty of Versailles), many of the locals fled to France; a small community of refugees from the Moselle area of Lorraine established themselves in Oradour. For their children, who brought with them their own teacher, Monsieur Gougeon, a special school of their own was established.

The Alsatians and Lorrains were largely welcomed, as were the Jews and Spaniards who had sought refuge from conflict elsewhere, but the complicated status of Alsace and Lorraine created waves that continued to reverberate across France.

Located on the eastern French border, the area had been seized by Germany from France at the end of the Franco-Prussian War in 1871, and then France took it back after 1918. This was a predictable move politically but confusing and tiresome for the inhabitants, some of whom aligned themselves with France and others with Germany.

Most spoke Alsatian as their first language, which is more akin to German. More sin-

ABOVE: Oradour's daily life concentrated on Rue Desourteaux, their Main Street. Bars, cafés and restaurants spilled outside to welcome visitors and life proceeded at a leisurely, rural pace. Photographers had no problem getting people to smile. OPPOSITE: Drapers, hairdressers and hat makers provided their services to ensure that everyone was well dressed and presentable when the situation demanded. Oradour was a proud, clean and respectable town.

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ister was the fact that, once it was "liberated" again by Germany in 1940, the male population who had not fled could be pressed to serve in the German army, with their loyalties tested to the limit. Those conscripted became known as "malgré nous," a French phrase literally translated as "in spite of us" and signifying that they were wearing German uniforms despite being French.

The SS Division "Das Reich" was one unit which drafted Alsatians into its ranks. It had suffered serious casualties on the Eastern Front in 1943, and began to make up its numbers from countries that Germany had conquered and occupied. The division had a tough and brutal reputation and was already responsible for several civilian atrocities, such as Kharkov in the Ukraine, which they left in flames in early 1943 with civilians hanging from balconies.

The division was moved to Montauban in southwestern France in April 1944 under a new commander, General Heinz Lammerding, a personal friend of Heinrich Himmler, with a fearsome reputation of his own. His task was to bring the division up to fighting strength and deal with Résistance activity in the area. New recruits, including those from Alsace, would, in turn, have to be brought up to the same ruthless standards or suffer severe punishment themselves.

The key personnel in this division of 18,000 men who were subsequently to play leading roles on June 10 at Oradour-sur-Glane included Colonel Sylvester Stadler, responsible for the Der Führer Regiment; the Kommandant Major Adolf Diekmann, in charge of its 1st Battalion; and Captain Otto Kahn, who led its Third Company with his deputy 2nd Lt. Heinz Barth.

During the time they were stationed down in Montauban, the Das Reich Division seized every opportunity to terrorize the population and execute Résistance members. They were assisted in this by the Milice, the French secret police set up by the Vichy régime after the armistice with Germany to spy upon their fellow Frenchmen. (After the Germans were forced out of the zone, many of the Milice became victims of the same kind of rough justice themselves).

On June 5, General Lammerding persuaded his superiors to agree to a new repressive program which was similar to their actions against partisans on the Eastern Front. By punishing ordinary civilians for attacks on the German army by the Résistance, it was hoped to turn the population against them. For every German wounded, five civilians would be hanged and this figure would double for every German killed.

It was in Montauban that they heard the news of the D-Day landings in Normandy on June 6 and suddenly everything moved into a higher gear. The Résistants, emboldened by the belief that they would soon be liberated, began damaging railway tracks and lines of communications, often displaying too much bravado for their own good, but, having waited four years, this was understandable.

Many groups undertook selected attacks on the enemy. The Germans, in turn, carried out even more brutal reprisals. On June 8, the entire Das Reich Division was ordered north, initially to deal with Résis-

Bundesarchiv Bild 146-1983-077-13A; Photo: Koll

ABOVE: German soldiers arrest a French communist Résistance organizer. In Oradour, Martial Machefer, known locally as a communist sympathiser, was questioned by an SS soldier on the road outside town before the round-up and luckily allowed to leave. OPPOSITE: The Milice, a secret police force set up by the puppet Vichy government when France signed the armistice with Germany in 1940, arrest suspected Résistants. Four Milice were suspected to have helped Das Reich plan the Oradour massacre. After the Libération, many Milice were summarily executed as traitors by the French Résistance.

tance activity in the area of Tulle (which had been temporarily liberated the day before) and the city of Limoges. They expected their ultimate destination to be Normandy to fight off the invaders.

Das Reich encountered hostility along the road but decided to make a stop at the small town of Rouffillac. At some point, Diekmann entered a bakery and asked a woman to make some crepes for him and his men. She refused. His response was to lock her and 15 others in the building and set fire to it. There was a skirmish with some résistants, and Diekmann continued north to Tulle. Here, on June 9, they met sustained opposition from the men who had liberated the town two days before.

Sadly, the French were outgunned and outnumbered, and over 100 were captured. Reprisals were swift and, by the end of the day, the Germans had executed 99 Frenchmen by hanging them on lampposts in the town. Das Reich was taking on the semblance of a mobile execution squad with a penchant for committing atrocities among civilians. Heaven help the people further along the road.

By the morning of June 10, Diekmann and his men had moved further northwest to the town of St. Junien, where he learned that his friend, Major Kämpfe, the officer in charge of a reconnaissance battalion, had been captured by the local Résistants. Diekmann met with his senior staff, the head of the Limoges Gestapo, and four members of the French Milice in the Station Hotel to plan their next move.

Even without the news that Kämpfe had been captured, it seems clear that a decision had already been made to undertake an operation that would teach the French a lesson and so shock the local communities that nobody would dare to make any further attacks on the division.

It is possible that the order came down from General Lammerding himself, but in the trial after the war Captain Otto Kahn, the officer in charge of the 3rd Company of the 1st Battalion of the Das Führer Regiment stated that it was Diekmann, his company commander, who had singled out Oradour-sur Glane as the target and appointed Kahn to take charge.

This would have come as no surprise to the more experienced soldiers in the regiment as atrocities such as this had been commonplace on the Eastern Front. Many of the men who had served in this campaign were now dead, and the challenge for Kahn was to produce similar results with their recent replacements. It would be a test of his mettle as well as that of his 3rd Company. His deputy, 2nd Lt. Heinz Barth, was heard to say "It's going to heat up. Let's see what the Alsatians are capable of ."

It may have been Oradour's innocence rather than its complicity in recent events that resulted in its selection. There were no known Résistants in the town to cause a problem, it was easy to access and contain, and it was relatively affluent compared with its neighbors, which gave it some potential for looting.

The evidence for what took place next is largely dependent on the eye-witness accounts provided by a handful of survivors, and these have been pieced together in a generally accepted narrative. The German troops involved did their best to destroy any evidence, and those who were eventually brought to a war-crimes trial in 1953 could not be relied upon to tell the complete truth, as their lives depended on the outcome.

At about 1:45 p.m., Robert Hébras, a 19-year-old garage mechanic who worked most of the week in Limoges, was discussing the town's next soccer match with his friend Martial Brissaud on the road outside his house in Oradour when two German halftracks appeared from the south road. This unnerved Martial, who had recently received conscription papers and ignored them, more than Robert, who regularly saw Germans in Limoges.

Martial took off in the direction of home, north of the town by a route off the beaten track and hid in the attic. (Robert Hébras is, at the time of this writing, 98-years-old and the last surviving survivor. He has devoted his life to narrating the events of June 10, 1944, and keeping alive the memory of his friends and neighbors.)

A small number of others also ran and hid that day, some successfully, when they saw the Germans, especially those who had escaped from POW camps or who today would

be referred to as "draft dodgers," knowing that capture by the SS could have very serious consequences.

The two halftracks had heralded the arrival of the 3rd Company of the 1st battalion, Der Führer Regiment of the Das Reich Panzer Division—around 200 in number. The remainder of the division was traveling northwards via other routes. Each of the two vehicles carried a dozen armed soldiers in camouflage uniform.

They headed north as if they were passing through the town, but a few minutes later they reappeared minus the troops who had occupied strategic positions to guard the roads out of Oradour, thus surrounding the town and preventing anyone from leaving.

Despite the fact that they hadn't had any trouble with the Germans before, a number of people were suspicious of what was happening. Among them was Hubert Desorteaux, who owned the garage on the main road. He was able to hide in the corner of an unoccupied house nearby while other family members crawled into hen houses or sought shelter in the vegetable garden. Some were lucky enough to make it past the guards on the outskirts.

Martial Machefer, a local communist and already known to the Milice secret police, was stopped by a French-speaking (and probably Alsatian) German soldier to whom he showed his wounded veteran's ID card and revealed his wounds from the Great War. In a rare display of compassion he was advised to make haste out of the town.

As the rest of the 3rd Battalion began to arrive in the town, Adolf Diekmann summoned the mayor, Dr. Desourteaux, father of Hubert the mechanic, and demanded that everyone assemble in a central place. The mayor then asked the town crier to announce this. The reason given was that it was a routine check on ID and papers.

Slowly, the townspeople began to collect in the fairground area, a place normally associated with much happier gatherings. Men were on one side, women on the other. They were hurried along by troops who marched into shops and houses, got everyone to stop what they were doing and hasten to join the swelling assembly, often with a rifle butt between the shoulders as an encouragement.

Men arrived from the barber's shop half shaven, car repairs were cut short in the garages, children left schools with their lessons still on the blackboards and an anxious pastry chef expressed concern about his half-baked cakes. He was told they would be taken care of. The clocks were stopping in Oradour, and would be stopping forever.

This Saturday was a school day and arrangements had been made for a medical inspection. The town authorities were concerned that the privations of war should not interfere with their children's health.

In the refugee school for children whose families had fled from Lorraine was seven-year-old Roger Godfrin and his two older sisters, neighbors of the Hébras family. Robert Hébras recalls little Roger's mother

Bundesarchiv Bild 146-1989-107-24; Photo: Koll

always telling him to head for the woods and hide if he ever saw Germans.

Despite his age, Roger was a regular daredevil, an "enfant terrible" among his classmates. As the Germans started throwing their weight around, bullets began to hit the walls of the school and the teacher ordered everyone to take cover under their desks. When the situation worsened, Roger and his sisters ran outside to the infant school along the road.

The Germans then began ordering the children and teachers outside the school and Roger tried to convince his sisters to escape with him but they were too scared. Then, seeing the guard distracted by a teacher, he left the room and climbed out of a window. He intended to follow his mother's instructions to the letter.

He had not run very far before he was shot at. He dropped to the ground and played dead. His assailant kicked him but he did not move. As soon as it was safe, he was up and running again but came face to face with another soldier. This one turned his back and told Roger to keep running. As he reached the riverbank, he was spotted by six men in a halftrack who opened fire, hitting a dog that had followed him but missing Roger.

This remarkable child then swam fully clothed across the River Glane to safety. On the other side, he was later picked up by a local road worker who took him to a house in a neighboring village for safety. (He was still there on Sunday evening when rescuers brought in Marguerite Rouffanche. Although badly wounded, she was able to tell him what had happened in the church and broke the news that none of his family had survived. Sadly, his mother would never know that her words of advice had saved her son's life. (Roger lived till 2001 and was the sole survivor among the schoolchildren.)

After the forced evacuation of the schools, it started to get even nastier. The pregnant headmistress of the girls' school, who was on sick leave, was forced out of her house in her pajamas to join the other women. Some isolated shots were heard but for the moment their origins were uncertain. It later became clear that, under orders, the troops

ABOVE: There were three schools in Oradour, one each for girls, boys and the Lorraine refugees. By the time the inferno in the church had extinguished itself, all the children were dead except plucky little seven-year-old Roger Godfrin, who had swum the River Glane to escape his captors. OPPOSITE: St Martin's Church where all the women and children of Oradour were incarcerated, prior to being bombed, shot or burned to death. Only Marguerite Rouffanche survived.

were summarily dispatching anyone who was bedridden and could not leave their house. Then more halftracks appeared, carrying families from the outlying farms.

The assembly was completed about 2:45 p.m. The day had turned out to be a very hot one and the crowd was becoming uncomfortable. Diekmann's next instructions were translated by an Alsatian SS soldier. They had been informed that there was a cache of arms and ammunition in Oradour and, if it was not found, the SS would begin setting fire to houses. Anyone who owned a weapon was asked to step forward. Nobody moved. They were peaceful people.

Getting no response, Diekmann then told the mayor to appoint 30 hostages, which he refused to do. Confident of his townspeople, M. Desourteaux then boldly offered himself and his family as hostages. This was treated with derision by the German kommandant.

At around 3 p.m., the women and children were led away from the rest of the group amid heartbreaking family farewells, taken to the church of St. Martin and locked inside. The men were then told that searches would be carried out and were given a final chance to say where the arms were hidden.

The request for ID and the suspicions about an arms cache made sense to everyone. They had heard how the Germans operated and were aware that in other local towns there were resistance cells and Maquis camps in the forest, but not in Oradour. They looked forward to being exonerated.

After an hour, the 180 adults and young men over 14 were divided up and taken to six separate, selected locations in the town. These were three barns: Laudy, Milord, and Bouchoule, plus the Denis wine cellar and the Desourteaux and Poutaraud garages. The size of the groups varied; the largest, about 60 in number, were assembled in the Laudy barn.

The men remained patient, confident in their innocence and refrained from making any false moves as the troops had set up machine guns pointing at them from the road outside. In the midst of this, at 3:40 p.m., a tram on a test run with three engineers from Limoges arrived. One of them stepped off and was promptly shot, his body thrown in the River

Glane. The other two had their papers checked and were sent back to Limoges.

At about 4 p.m., Lieutenant Kahn discharged his automatic pistol into the air and the report echoed across the town. It was a signal. The machine guns, most likely the deadly MG 42s capable of firing 1,200 rounds per minute, that were leveled at the men of Oradour opened up in unison.

Marcel Darthout, one of the Laudy barn survivors remembered: "We heard the sound of a detonation coming from outside, followed by a burst of automatic weapons. In a few seconds I was covered with corpses and I heard the moans of the wounded. When the bursts had ceased, the Germans approached to exterminate us at point-blank range."

He and another survivor confirmed that the first bursts were directed at their legs so there was no chance of rushing the guns or escaping. The last words that Robert Hébras heard from the father of his friend Martial Brissaud, who had lost a leg in WWI, was that the Germans had shot off his other leg. This fact was confirmed at the subsequent war-crimes trial by measuring the height of the bullet holes and the wounds of the victims.

While the atrocities were taking place, a group of seven cyclists from Limoges, having a day out in the summer sunshine, had the misfortune to arrive in Oradour. They were taken to the Beaulieu Forge, beside the barn of the same name where some of the executions took place. They, too, were gunned down. They had simply turned up in the wrong place at the wrong time.

Robert Hébras also found himself under a pile of bodies, getting soaked by their blood. He was uninjured until a soldier, patrolling through the victims and looking for sources of life that he could extinguish, finished off one of his friends and the bullet entered Robert's arm. He could not afford to move, or he would be next. Hay and firewood were now being thrown on the bodies. Then he heard something totally bizarre: music. The Germans had found a radio and turned it on to accompany their killing spree!

This was cold-blooded, planned annihilation. The SS hadn't been interested in their papers and had created this pretext and the story of the arms cache to facilitate rounding up the townspeople who in turn had accepted the inconvenience and expected to resume their daily activities as soon as the misunderstanding had been cleared up.

In each platoon there were a handful of men who did not take part in the executions. They ransacked the town, looting anything of value and drinking bottles of wine, beer, and brandy. They also collected poultry, pigs, sheep, and calves to feed the battalion. Once the execution of the men had been completed, buildings were systematically set on fire, which flushed out some of those who had successfully hidden from the Germans.

Others who lived in more isolated dwellings, having heard the commotion and anxious to collect their children from school, also appeared on the scene, and suffered the same fate.

Once the hay in the Laudy barn had been

Dennis Nilsson / Wikimedia

ABOVE: Possibly the most unlucky person in Oradour. Garage owner Pierre-Henri Poutaraud, like Robert Hébras and his friends, also survived the inferno of the Laudy Barn but he was spotted and shot in the back as he tried to escape along the road to the woods. OPPOSITE: The middle of the three windows behind the church altar provided Marguerite Rouffanche with an escape route where she jumped ten feet into brambles. A mother and child followed her which alerted sentries who sprayed them with automatic fire and left them for dead.

set alight, the Germans decided it was getting too hot to stay around, so they left to join in the looting of the town. Robert hung on as long as he could in the heat and smoke before crawling out of the carnage and was relieved to discover that the assassins had moved on. He ran through a small door that led into a yard but it was a dead end. He returned to the flames and found a way into a stable.

The sight of a shadow and the sound of voices brought fresh terror until he realized it was Marcel and three other people he knew: Matthieu Boris the stonemason; Yvon Roby; and Clément Broussadier. Most of them had bullet wounds in their arms or legs. They were still trapped but Matthieu used his skills to pick a hole through a wall, which allowed access to another section of the barn; he and Robert hid in a woodpile while the other three headed for the loft.

Two SS men appeared, and seizing an opportunity for further arson, set fire to the straw and the roof. Once again, Robert and his friends hung on until the heat forced them out into a yard. This was opposite the fairground road that was being patrolled, so they hid in the first of three vertical hen houses till it caught fire, moving along sequentially till the third was ablaze at about 7 p.m. and most of the Germans had disappeared.

As the evening passed, each member of this brotherhood forged in the heat of the Laudy barn made his bid for freedom—all except Marcel, who felt that his four bullet wounds would slow down his friends; he resigned himself to his fate and stayed put.

Yvon Roby and Clément Brossadier headed for the cemetery and the fields beyond with Clément getting wounded along the way. Not wanting to take any further chances, they spent the night in the open. Marcel's selfless gesture paid off, as he was eventually rescued and able to give evidence at the war-crimes trial several years later, finally passing away peacefully at the age of 91. Like Robert Hébras, he devoted as much of his later years as possible to educating the world about Oradour.

Mathieu Borie suggested he would also try to make it to the cemetery and from there seek the cover of the woods. Robert followed him and together they continued beyond the trees into the safer realms of the outlying hamlets, found shelter and water to drink and did their best to explain to their horrified neighbors what had happened to their little hometown that was now ablaze and lighting up the evening sky.

A handful of others who had hidden before the fairground roundup managed to escape under cover of darkness but the sporadic gunfire heard after the mass executions suggested that the sentries were still in action. One of the unluckiest was garage owner Pierre-Henri Poutaraud, who had also escaped from the Laudy barn but whose bullet-riddled body was found the next day hanging on the fence by the cemetery.

There was to be no better news from the church, where Marguerite Rouffanche and all the other women and children had been incarcerated after being separated from their menfolk. Following the initial fire and explosion from which only she had been able to escape, one of the soldiers took a stack of explosives to the top of the tower which, when detonated, brought down the whole roof and created a fire fierce enough to melt the church bell (which still remains in a corner of the ruins as a testimony to the horrors in a church that had suddenly become a crematorium).

Ironically, one of the SS men who had placed the explosives in the church was unable to exit fast enough and was himself caught in the blast. Untersturmführer Knug was the sole German fatality at Oradour on June 10.

Around 6 p.m., Jean Pallier, a railway engineer on the way to Oradour in a truck, was stopped by guards 300 yards from the town. He was then joined by passengers from the Limoges tram. They were prevented from crossing the field to see what had happened in the town, which was now completely ablaze. After having their papers checked they were released and told, "You can say that you are lucky. The slaughter is over."

There is evidence to suggest that Diekmann's superior, Colonel Sylvester Stadler, who commanded the Der Führer Regiment, had intervened by early evening to prevent further killings. After the executions of the men and the atrocities in the church, Diekmann drove to Limoges to deliver a report to regimental HQ.

Stadler was shocked and felt that this time he had gone too far. One report quotes him as saying "Diekmann, this may cost you dearly. I am going to ask the Division court at once for a court-martial investigation. I cannot allow the Regiment to be charged with something like this!"

An in-house investigation was held when they arrived in Normandy. As word spread among senior officers, Field Marshal Erwin Rommel himself offered to preside over the court-martial, having reputedly said to Hitler, "This kind of thing dishonors Germany."

The Germans left Oradour sometime between 9 and 10:30 p.m., leaving behind a guard section. After the killing and looting, some had installed themselves in the Dupic family house on the north side of town to drink their way through M. Dupic's fine wines and champagne. It was the last to be set on fire. They had also set up a giant spotlight for surveillance although the light generated by the burning town was enough to expose any survivors who were still capable of escaping.

One witness who saw the troops leave later stated, "Among the military trucks was the car belonging to M. Dupic, the merchant and cloth dealer. There was also the wine merchant's van. On one of the trucks, a German was playing the accordion." The trucks were heavily loaded with bags, bundles, and bottles from the looting.

Some locals did manage to get inside the town the next day and what they found was to haunt them forever. Those first on the scene were already aware of the atrocities inflicted on innocent women and children in their place of worship, but the church had a further shock in store for them. On top of one pile of charred remains was the naked body of a young woman who showed all the signs of having been violated before being murdered and thrown among the other victims of this unspeakable crime.

Dennis Nilsson / Wikimedia

It was also clear that whatever the women were going through, they were putting their children first. Behind the altar were a large number of children's bodies. When the blast blew out the windows, through one of which Marguerite had escaped, it allowed some oxygen to get in and the mothers had selflessly given their children the best chance of survival while they suffered the smoke.

Beyond the church and the six places of execution were other bodies, a couple in a wheelbarrow, several in wells, and what appeared to be human remains in a brazier at the bakery. Throughout the town were the poignant and pathetic signs of everyday lives that had suddenly been cut short, like the suitcases and children's toys scattered at a plane-crash site. The clocks really had stopped in Oradour.

A German burial detail actually returned on Sunday to take care of the bodies and posted guards who fired at anyone who approached from the woods. As was their practice on the Eastern Front, they also tried to make identification of the remains impossible. The plan had been to dig two mass graves, one near the church and the other near the Denis wine store, one of the execution spots, but it soon became obvious that the size of the task was overwhelming.

Word of the massacre had spread far and wide and there was little point in trying to cover up the evidence, so late on the Tuesday after the massacre, the soldiers left and continued northwards in accordance with their previous orders.

French aid workers, together with some of the locals, then moved in to recover and identify the victims, exhuming the hasty German burials and collecting any other bodies they could find, together with their personal effects.

The hot summer sun made the gruesome task unbearable, but it was the least that they could do for the ones who had suffered so much and for their families who waited anxiously for any news that would bring them some sort of closure. It was eventually agreed that the dead numbered 642 but only 52 of these could be positively identified. The remainder had to be officially classified as "missing," because there

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Aid workers, investigators and local villagers arrived on the scene as soon as the Germans left. They found two mass graves, a poor attempt to conceal the evidence, and were faced with the task of exhuming the charred remains, identifying them and giving 642 men, women and children, of whom only 52 could be identified, a decent burial. The work was carried out in high summer temperatures. Villages on the Eastern front in Russia and the Ukraine had suffered the same fate at the hands of the Division Das Reich.

was nothing left to identify.

Immediately after the massacre, the survivors found temporary accommodation and did their best to get on with their lives. None of them would have heard of, or have known how to deal with, post-traumatic stress disorders, yet they had experienced horrors that a seasoned soldier would have had difficulty coping with.

As the war drew to a close, the survivors cherished the hope that they would see justice for these crimes, and this helped to keep them going. Oradour could not be resurrected, but its people felt it should be kept as a memorial, a view shared by General Charles de Gaulle when he visited the ruins on March 4, 1945. A new town was built nearby which became home to survivors and a new generation of Oradouranes.

The Pursuit of Truth and Justice

It was not until 1953, in the city of Bordeaux that a war-crimes tribunal sat in judgment over Oradour. As simple country folk, they found this time scale mystifying and unacceptable, but they were at the mercy of international law and post-war politics. To begin with, the French war-crimes law could not apply to French citizens and some of those involved in the massacre were from Alsace, which had still been part of France. This law was not changed till 1948.

Then there were issues of collective responsibility—what blame could be attributed to low-ranking soldiers acting under orders and who faced death themselves if they disobeyed? Furthermore, the Germans had been guilty of war crimes themselves by pressing young Frenchmen from Alsace into service with the SS.

It became clear that even when the law was sufficiently clear on procedures, it would be difficult to pursue justice in a way that was acceptable to all. The situation was clear to many people from Oradour who wanted punishment for those involved in the massacre. But Alsace also wanted justice for its young men who had been forcibly and illegally conscripted into the SS, which forced them to commit acts of barbarism against their own people.

Lorraine, normally supportive of Alsace because both areas had been overrun by Germany, saw the situation differently. Forty-four of those murdered on June 10, including a school full of children, had been refugees from the Moselle département of Lorraine, from the towns of Charly and Montoy-Flanville, and if some of their killers had been from Alsace, why should they be treated any differently than the Germans?

When the trial started, there was a major confrontation over whether the Alsatian soldiers should be tried separately from the Germans. This and other issues sparked demonstrations and widespread media activity, which would put further pressure on the pursuit of truth and justice within the courtroom. It was looking like a "no-win" situation from the start.

(The story of the trial is meticulously described in *Oradour: the Final Verdict*, a 2007 book by retired American lawyer and local French resident Douglas W. Hayes after sifting

through all the relevant documentation, and presents a most-detailed analysis and conclusion of what took place in the Bordeaux courtroom).

Identifying those responsible for the massacre was to present challenges. For many of the 200 men from the 3rd Company of the 1st battalion, Der Führer Regiment, present on that day, karma had already intervened, spectacularly so in the case of Kommandant Adolf Diekmann, who was decapitated by a shell from a Sherman tank soon after the regiment arrived in Normandy.

The whole division had suffered huge losses in engaging the D-Day invaders, the failed counter-attack at Mortain and in the Falaise-Chambois pocket where they were surrounded and mown down as they tried to exit the Normandy battlefields.

Of the 28 Alsatians known to be present at the massacre, 15 had been killed in action by the end of the war. The remaining 13 were identified to be sent to Bordeaux for trial. Some of them had risked their lives and those of their families back home after the Oradour massacre by deserting and even joining the French Résistance, and two had been held in custody since the end of the war. They did their best to distance themselves from the SS and demonstrate, very bravely in many cases, that their allegiances lay with France, but they could not deny where they were on June 10, 1944.

Finding the Germans present on the day was more difficult, and 44 of them, including Captain Kahn and Lieutenant Barth would eventually be tried in absentia, because they could not be traced or because of extradition difficulties. Seven had been held in POW camps where they were kept pending trial. But the long wait created opportunities to fabricate alibis and shift the blame, when questioned, to the men who had already been killed and others outside the courtroom. The indictment that was finally read out in court did not name either the division commander, General Lammerding, or the regimental commander, Colonel Stadler.

German defendants, lower right, listen anxiously to the evidence at the War Crimes tribunal at Bordeaux in 1953. Among them was the Alsatian George Boos, who decided to forsake his technically French heritage, volunteered to join the SS and chose, without remorse, to be tried as a German soldier.

The trial provided confirmation of much that was already known, and revealed more detail concerning individual responsibilities on the day. The only German officer present, the adjutant Karl Lens, had occupied a more administrative role and did not appear to be directly involved in the massacre.

In contrast, much detail was provided by George Boos, the only Alsatian to actually admit to having volunteered for the SS and who, significantly, was seated with the German defendants during the trial. Whereas the other Alsatians (who identified themselves as malgré nous, fighting in a German uniform despite being French) pleaded that they had been forcibly conscripted, Boos presented himself as a German soldier.

He confirmed most of the details presented by other defendants but denied his involvement in the executions at the Desourteaux garage, which stood opposite the bakery. It was felt that he was trying to distance himself from one of the most hideous allegations—that a child was burnt alive in the brazier of the bakery.

In different ways, the defendants in the courtroom tried to play down their roles in the massacre, especially the Alsatians, but several of the latter had to admit they had been members of firing squads or helped to generate the fires which had burned some of the victims alive. Most shielded behind the fact that they were under orders. One of them who had admitted, when he returned home after the war, to shooting a woman outside of the town was tried and technically sentenced to death but remained in prison until the trial.

One of the most harrowing stages of the trial was the testimony of the witnesses who had lived through the ordeal. All five of the band of brothers from the Laudy barn were present, as were those who had hidden in lofts and corners of buildings where they could hear or see what was happening.

Little Roger Godfrin, now a strapping 16-year-old, manfully won the attention of the courtroom, but it was Marguerite Rouf-

Continued on page 89

A SON'S MEMOIR

Surviving the CBI's 'Aluminum Trail'

"Over the Top of the World" by Roy Grinell. Pilots flying this treacherous route over the Himalayas kept Allied supply lines open. INSET: First Lieutenant Frank D. Martin, whose letters to home offer a glimpse into the experience of those who flew supply-laden military transport aircraft from India to China over the infamous "Hump."

Flying the dangerous 'Hump' supply route over the Himalayas, American pilots faced bad weather, unreliable aircraft, and Japanese fighters.

BY FRED T. MARTIN

Winston Churchill called it, "An immense laborious task, unlikely to be completed until the need for it has passed."

Churchill was referring to the construction of the Ledo Road out of the Assam province at the eastern extremity of India, to connect with the Burma Road, the ancient high-mountain pathway to the interior of China. Allied air bases there needed massive shipments of supplies and fuel for the B-29s attacking Japan.

Twenty thousand engineers and 35,000 natives labored for two years to open the Ledo Road. When completed, it took truck caravans over a month to cross the 800 miles to China, over grades up to 17 percent, and under Japanese air attacks. Churchill wasn't far off—the road was done less than a year from the war's end.

This project would not have been needed but for the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor, which thrust the United States into the war. With Japan swiftly gobbling up islands and nations in and along the Pacific Rim—including China—there was suddenly a need for America's unprecedented ability to achieve the seemingly impossible.

Late into that grim December 1941, Japan was poised to move next against India. If they cut off access to the Burma Road from the seaport of Rangoon, the Allies could not supply China. On Christmas Eve 1941, Japan attacked British Burma and seized Rangoon.

The Asian theater turned to chaos. Churchill's eastern British empire was collapsing. An American-British-Dutch command was hastily formed to defend the region. American commanders immediately demanded bomber air bases in China and the strengthening of Chinese resistance forces. China was made an ally and General Chiang Kai Shek became Allied Supreme Commander for China.

With many Pacific islands, and now Rangoon, under Japanese control, these bases could only be supplied from eastern India. So, with the Burma Road cut off from the sea, the massive Ledo Road project was required to connect the Assam Valley to the Burma Road in the north.

By April 1942, the truck caravans could not meet the enormous demands of the China bases. Ground transport on the Ledo Road was not practical. The transport problem would be solved only by airlift flying over the highest terrain on Earth. The "Hump" airlift operation was thus created.

The India-China Airlift, or Himalayan Hump Operation, was the highest-loss, highest-risk air transport mission of World War II. Pioneering aviators carried thousands of tons of gasoline and materiel over the world's tallest mountains to supply the bases deep in the interior of China to support early bombing missions on Japan.

Flight operations in alpine conditions at this altitude had never been attempted, much less on a year-round, all-weather basis. Winds aloft were often measured at over 250 miles per hour, and downdrafts were encountered of over 3,000 feet per minute. Average terrain levels on some routes were over 20,000 feet above sea level, and airfields were carved out of forests. Navigation aids were scarce. Add to that the intensely hazardous payload of thousands of gallons of gasoline carried on many of these flights.

As operations accelerated, over 10,000 tons were carried across the Hump per month. In all, 650,000 tons were delivered over the Himalayas. It is estimated that, on average, a flight crewmember was lost for every 500 tons. More than 1,300 aircrew and 600 aircraft were lost due to weather, malfunctions, and Japanese fighters. There were nearly 1,200 bailouts over the Hump; 345 men were never found and were listed as missing in action.

General Claire Chenault, the region's air commander, said that only men of special caliber could live up to the demands of the Hump. They were the swashbuckling pilots of the India-China wing.

The Hump operation completed the longest materiel supply line in the world. After the 12,000-mile ocean voyage from the U.S. to Karachi or Bombay (Mumbai), shipments traveled 1,500 miles on India's dilapidated main rails to connect with the ancient Bengal-to-Assam rail line.

ABOVE: Men transfer naval stores from a truck into the nose of a Consolidated C-87 for shipment to China. The nose of this plane provides cargo space for three drums of gasoline and a 500-pound bomb or its equivalent. RIGHT: Major Louis E. Scherck, Houston, Texas, 40th Bomb Group, XX Bomber Command in China, "pitches in" and rolls empty gasoline drums to trucks waiting to haul them to another area. OPPOSITE: Curtiss C-46 Commando in the snow-capped Himalayas between India and China. Every two and a half minutes, the India-China Division of ATC puts a plane across this route.

That route, called "The Toonerville Trolley" (from a popular newspaper cartoon feature of the day) by American personnel, had been built to haul tea, and changed gauges three times on the way to a barge crossing at the Brahmaputra River. Then, as one commander put it, "every bean and bullet" had to be flown from bases in Assam over into China. General Chennault estimated that for every ton of bombs delivered to China, 18 tons of materiel had to be flown over the Hump.

The air route to China rose out of the Brahmaputra River valley from air bases at about 200 feet above sea level, out to the northeast over the 10,000-foot Naga Hills (named for the head-hunting tribe that lived there). It then crossed the gorges of the Irrawaddy, Salween, and Mekong Rivers, and on up to the backbone of the Hump—the Santsung Ranges of eastern Sichuan and Tibet.

Pilots referred to the route as "the aluminum trail" because of the number of airplanes lost along it. (Clayton Kuhles of MIARecoveries.org conducts heroic modern expeditions into the high mountains to locate wreckages of Hump aircraft. They have found 27 miss-

ing aircraft and 279 personnel, some listed for decades as missing in action.)

Hump crews flew pioneering aviation routes over regions never before seen by human eyes. My father, Frank D. Martin, often flew alongside Minya Konka, the highest peak in eastern Sichuan, standing 1,000 miles east of any mountain of comparable height.

This area was long a blank spot on the map until the 1930s, when a National Geographic expedition estimated that Minya Konka might be higher than Everest—no one knew. Fewer than 60 alpinists have climbed it and 16 have died in the attempt.

Many histories often overlook the heart and soul of the human being who experienced war. So, for my father and mother and many other veterans I have studied, the personal story of war is where the core meaning of history is best revealed.

I first heard of the Hump Operation when I was a young man fishing with my father on a remote Canadian lake. Dad had never told many war stories, but that day, between hooking walleyes, he spontaneously, and uncharacteristically, began telling me of aerial gasoline tanker crashes at his World War II air base in India.

He was suddenly recalling, in obvious anguish, how he had to watch helplessly as friends perished before his eyes, the flailing of those men's bodies as they were consumed by the flames and the pouring black smoke, and how they slumped over, still buckled in their seats as the cockpit exploded and he was powerless to rescue them.

I was stunned and awkwardly turned away to the tackle box in silence. But then I turned back from the fishing gear and promised him that, one day, I would write his biography.

Seven years after his passing, remembering my promise, I dug into his scrapbook records. Yet, the clippings in those shoeboxes were entirely from his post-war years with the Cessna Aircraft Company. He became Vice President of Marketing. I have told that story in another book, *Reminiscences Over Old Airplanes*.

His lengthy autobiographical notes offered little about the war. What he wrote about all his World War II experiences—everything I write about in my book, *Among Stars Above the Storm*, and all that I tell here—was a total of six sentences.

After the war, my father was like many of his World War II contemporaries, eager to return to a new life away from the war they were weary of. When they might have been ready to talk about it, there were few who had not been to war who could understand. Also, among veterans, there was an ethic against tale-telling braggadocio. Most believed that the only heroes of any merit, and the only ones who deserved to have their stories told were the ones who did not return.

During my boyhood time with him, my father did recount a few stories that provided key recollections for my book, but he was too busy living in the post-war world as an explorer, aviator, and businessman, to look back at the past, and he spoke very little about the war. So, this story would have been lost.

But several years later came a blessing within a life tragedy. I had to move my brilliant, high-achieving mother into an Alzheimer's-care facility. After the war, my mother, Sarah E. Martin, had her own illustrious career in the Federal Government, becoming Secretary to the Director of the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA).

When she moved to the care home, I

cleaned out her house, discovering her most secret possessions. Deep in a lower drawer, hidden beneath old clothing, were loose-leaf binders of 211 letters my father had written to her during his nine months in India. That was nearly a letter a day, each one lengthy, hand-penned from a jungle hut or from a freezing cockpit high above the most remote mountain reaches of the Earth.

My parents divorced when I was six, so these letters, which revealed a love story of a grandeur that reflects the world war it was set within, were of great value to me. Here, I had the secret window on their war-parted love affair. The letters, when correlated with the pilot log books, allowed me to assemble the details of event-filled flights between India and China, and daily life in India.

They reveal my father's intensifying stress and emotional state as his time in India wore on. Mother also saved notebooks of his Army orders and teletype war reports from all over the world that had come into her office where she worked, remarkably, as Secretary to the Commander, New Castle Army Air Base, in Wilmington, Delaware.

This was the base of departure for my father's trans-Atlantic flights delivering B-17 bombers to the Eighth Air Force in Europe, and from where he departed on his long flight around the world to India; to the Hump. In all the intervening years, she had never revealed that she had these letters. Dad never mentioned them and had likely assumed Mother had not kept them after their divorce.

Finally, in 2007, I opened old cigar boxes of 3x5 black-and-white photographs, curled, faded, and crumbling, along with a brown case of carefully labeled color Kodachrome slides. At that time, these photos were over 65 years old! In their original deteriorating condition, they had never much caught the family's eye. Yet after computer restoration and enlargement, the composition and quality of many of the photographs was astonishing.

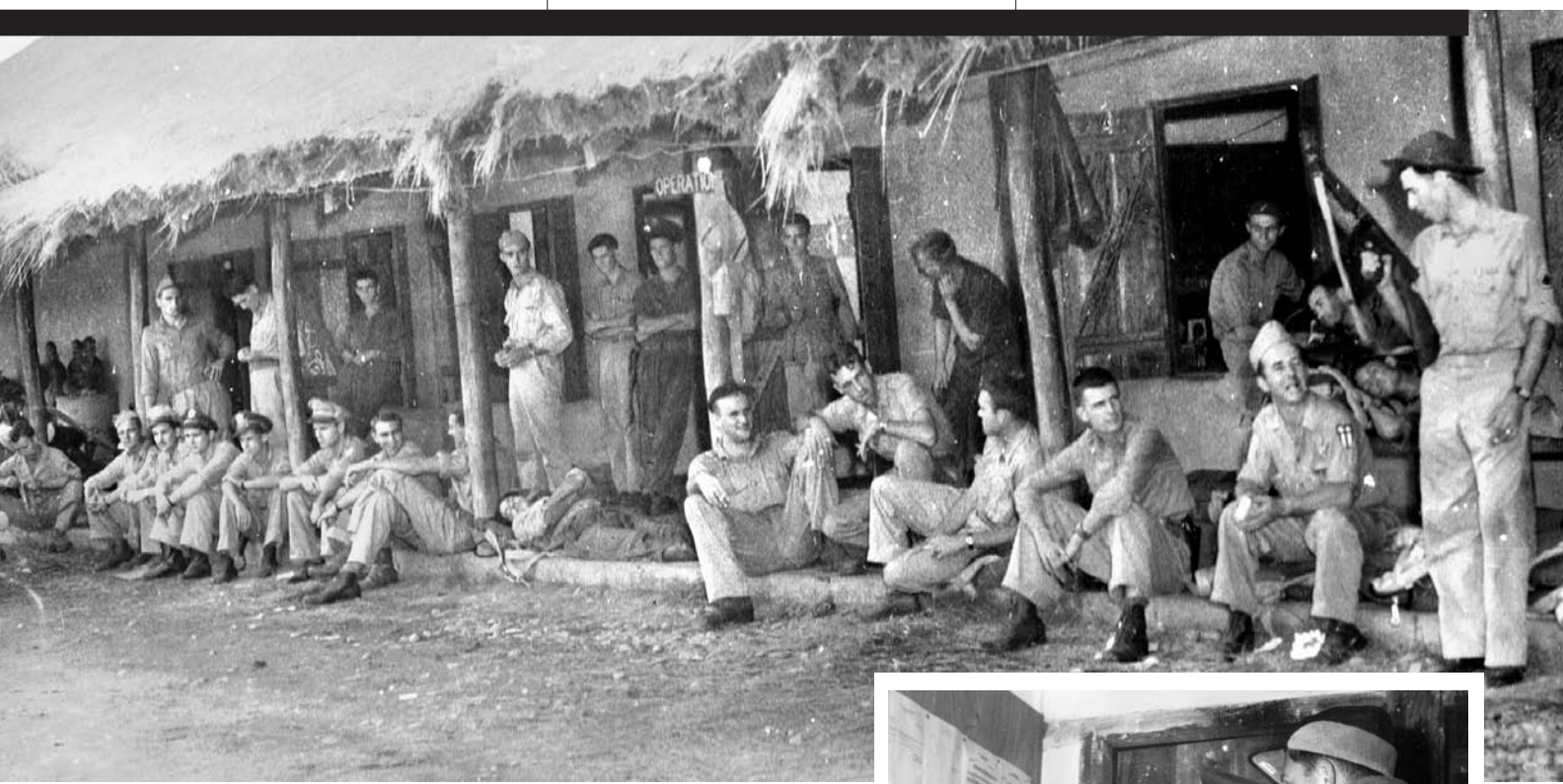
Many revealed that Dad had quite a knack for composition, along with a compassionate eye for his subjects. And these were subjects of historic proportion. I had discovered another treasure that illumined the first, and brought the letters from India vividly alive.

My father arrived in India on April 30, 1944. He had been assigned to deliver a twin-engine C-47 from Wilmington, Delaware to Sookerating, India. It is illustrative of the enormity of operations required to move thousands of U.S. aircraft around the world during the war that Dad's flight to India took 22 days and 95-1/2 flight hours. The trip proceeded across the Caribbean, down the coast of Brazil, across the Atlantic to Ascension Island, across North Africa, the Arabian Peninsula, and across the breadth of India.

Shortly after he arrived, Dad went to watch a movie at the air base outdoor theater. He saw a familiar face that turned out to be his cousin, Frank Osborne, a boyhood companion from the mountains of southwest Virginia. Neither man knew the other was in the war. Osborne was a P-40 fighter pilot passing through on his way home from China. His P-40 squadron had been defending the China bases at the other end of the Burma Road as part of General Chennault's famous Flying Tigers.

Flights over The Hump began with the twin-engine C-47, the military variant of the Douglas DC-3, but there would be a number of aircraft types involved in the operation. The larger twin-engine C-46 was famous over the Hump, along with the four-engine C-54. My father flew the transport derivatives of the four-engine B-24 bomber platform, the C-87 and C-109.

My study has focused on technical details of those airplanes. The C-87 was hastily developed in early 1942 as a heavy cargo and personnel transport with longer range and better



ABOVE: Pilots and crews wait in front of the Air Transport Command Operations building for a briefing, prior to flying a mission over the "Hump" in July, 1943. RIGHT: Checking "ceiling reports" is Operations Officer Lt. Jack O. McReynolds, Dallas, Texas, and a group of pilot officers. OPPOSITE: Cargo plane of the India-China Wing Air Transport Command, in flight on its return from China to its home base in India. These planes do not fly in formation.

high-altitude performance than the C-46 or C-47. It was converted from the B-24 bomber by deleting gun turrets and other armament, and the installation of a strengthened cargo floor running through the bomb bay. A door was added on the port side, and windows were fitted along the sides of the fuselage. The C-87 could carry up to 25 passengers or 12,000 lbs. of cargo.

With war production shortages, many C-87's were fitted with turbo superchargers with lower boost pressure than those fitted to B-24s destined for combat use, so ceiling and climb rate were adversely affected. Yet, over the Hump, the C-87 was the only readily available American transport with adequate high-altitude performance to fly this route with a large cargo load.

But the C-87 was plagued by numerous problems. Ernest K. Gann, a C-87 pilot who hated the airplane, wrote in his book, *Fate Is the Hunter*: "They were an evil bastard contraption, nothing like the relatively efficient B-24 except in appearance."

The plane had a clumsy flight-control layout, frequent engine problems, hydraulic leaks, and a disconcerting tendency to lose electrical power in the cockpit during takeoff and landing. The C-87 did not climb well when heavily loaded, a dangerous characteristic when flying out of the unimproved, rain-soaked airfields of India and China. Many crashed soon after takeoff.

Gann himself had a near-collision with the Taj Mahal in a C-87 in a takeoff mishap. He wrote, "The assembly of parts known collectively as a C-87 would never replace an airplane." The aircraft's auxiliary fuel tanks were linked by improvised and often leaky fuel lines that crisscrossed the crew compartment, choking crews with noxious gasoline fumes and creating an explosion hazard.

The C-87 also had a tendency to enter an uncontrollable stall or spin in the event of inflight airframe icing, a frequent occurrence over the Himalayas. Gann said the C-87 "could not carry enough ice to chill a highball."

The C-87 also had center-of-gravity problems due to improper cargo loading. Unlike other cargo transports designed from the start with a contiguous cargo compartment and safety margin for fore and aft loading variations, the bomb racks and bomb bays in the B-24 design were fixed in position, greatly limiting the aircraft's ability to tolerate improper loading.

This problem was made worse by the failure of the Air Transport Command to instruct loadmasters in the C-87's peculiarities. The C-87's roots as a bomber were also considered the cause of frequently col-

lapsing nose gear. Its strength was adequate for a B-24 that dropped its payload in flight before landing, but it was a weak design for C-87s making repeated hard landings on rugged unimproved airstrips while heavily loaded.

Another much-hated plane was the C-109—a dedicated fuel transport version of the B-24 platform. It is considered the first U.S. aerial tanker. It carried 2,900 U.S. gallons of aviation fuel in several internal fuel tanks in addition to the 2,800 gallons in the wing tanks. These planes burned three gallons of fuel for every gallon delivered.

The C-109 was even more unpopular with its crews than the C-87. The aircraft had unstable flight characteristics with all storage tanks filled, and proved very difficult to land fully loaded. At least 80 C-109s were lost in flying the Hump airlift. A crash landing of a loaded C-109 inevitably resulted in an explosion and crew fatalities.

Indeed, at the Tezpur base, aircraft were crashing regularly on takeoff in horrific fireballs. Flights were frequently lost enroute to Japanese attackers and for reasons unknown. In early June, 1944, the ship of the chief pilot was reported missing, then another colleague crashed.

My father wrote to Mother, "He's in the hospital with broken bones. Some of his crew were not so fortunate. Our safety record here has just gone flop the last few days. Two crews lost, one definitely all killed, the other missing. Hainey still in the hospital in China, Bill Schonessee is OK except for missing most of his teeth.

"Sure wish the enemy would just fold up, but I can't see it for a mighty long time. To listen to Jap broadcasts from Shanghai you would think that they are going to win."

The India-China airlift was a non-combat operation, and that imparted an added sense of tragedy to the frequent crashes. If an airline or any transport operation suffered such multiple crashes each week, with many right at the airport, then what pilot would continue flying—and what passenger or crew member would ever board the aircraft?

On takeoff in a loaded tanker, the airplane is sluggish, barely airborne, balanced on a tight wire of airspeed wherein single mile-per-hour increments make all the difference between a climb beyond hill or trees, or mushing back to the ground. A backfiring engine, a downdraft, a payload slightly off center of gravity, a momentary lapse in concentration—these were only some of the factors that could bring down the airplane and its 6,000-gallon load of gasoline.

Early in 1944, the commander of operations issued a directive that no flights were to be canceled or delayed because of weather. This order was widely referred to as the "There will no longer be weather" decree, and pilots quipped that if the weather could be thus ordered away, perhaps a similar order could be issued to the Japs. Weather had closed the route to China half the time.

Air bases on both sides of the Hump were built employing native labor. Entire families worked on India bases, while in China, rock crushers, mostly women, broke gravel using hammers, then carried it to the airstrip in baskets on their heads.

Up to 100,000 coolies worked on each China base. Construction equipment was scarce. Ox carts were used to haul rock. Hand-drawn rollers pulled by 100 coolies or more flattened the field. The result was a bumpy airfield about 6,000 feet in length.

My father's experiences flying the Hump were similar to most crews in the operation. Comparing the dates of his letters home to those of his pilot flight logs best illustrates the arduous, unrelenting pace of flight operations.

Dad's August 14 trip was typical: a 10.5-hour round robin to Chengtu, back over to Sookerating, and down to Tezpur. Then he was called out at 4 a.m. for another flight—a seven-hour, 40-minute round trip back to Chengtu.

He wrote Mother that night: "Now it's after 10 and I just got through talking to Buddy and other guests. I am so tired and dopey that I really don't know what I am doing half the time. It sure gets dark out over that thousand miles of stone at night. That is, until we hit the roughest weather yet last night, and the storms lit things up like day. We were barely getting over the top of the thunderclouds, and when we broke clear, we were flying among stars above the storm." That's the passage that gave the title for my book.

The pace of operations intensified. On September 3rd there was a 10.5 hour trip to and from Chengtu. The next day, the flight was nine hours, 45 minutes to and from Pengshan. The next day: 11 hours to Kwanghan, then, Kwanghan again on both the next two days.

There was no time to worry over the deaths of other pilots. The most imminent enemy was crushing fatigue. A single trip over the Himalayas was a flight of expeditionary proportion at this time in aviation history.

Two days later, Dad flew his 40th trip over the Hump to Pengshan. The next day he flew back to Pengshan and Sookerating. The next day, 10-and-a-half hours to Kwanghan, then another round trip to Kwanghan on the same day! That was an unimaginable 22 hours of flying the Himalayas in one 24-hour period, after one night off in 10 consecutive days of such flights.

The next day, Dad wrote Mother a letter about those 22 hours of flying: "Dearest Sally [his name for her]: Had a long trip yesterday and didn't get to bed until 2 a.m. today. Flew 35 Chinese back to India last night and landed them at another base. So was late getting home."

These were Chinese Nationalist soldiers under Chiang Kai-shek. Most had no boots, only straw sandals. The bedding issued to some units was one blanket per five soldiers, and pay was so low even officers could not afford any more food than rice. They were plagued by dysentery, smallpox, and typhus to such a degree that some units had 40 percent losses without entering combat.

Dad wrote of his passengers that night: "You have never smelt a real odor." Because of censoring, what Dad could not mention in this letter is that several of these Chinese soldiers had died in his airplane. It had been a six-hour flight over the mountains with no oxygen at sub-zero temperature. Years later, that day while we were fishing together, Dad wondered if the families of the dead ever found out what had happened to them, or if the soldiers who had survived the flight had ever found their way back home across the Himalayas.

A few days later he wrote Mother, "I need a good cry tonight but just can't. One of our finest friends; one of the best fellows I have met, was killed last night. His ship crashed and burned right after takeoff."

Two days later, another ship crashed on takeoff killing three in the crew, with one badly hurt survivor. "Can't tell you how I feel right now," Dad wrote. "If I only had you to talk with sometimes, I could stand things so much better." The funeral for their friend was the next day and then the survivor of this latest crash died in the morning. It had been the young man's first Hump mission.

After another flight to Kwanghan, Dad wrote, "Did you hear?! We bombed Japan yesterday! It was B-29s from our theater!" This is what the massive effort was all about: hauling all this gasoline over the mountains.

He went on, "I can't answer your question about where the B-29s are. It's secret. No one but the Japs and a couple million other people know where they're based. They sure are big, though!" He had no idea at that moment that he would be a B-29 commander in 10 months.

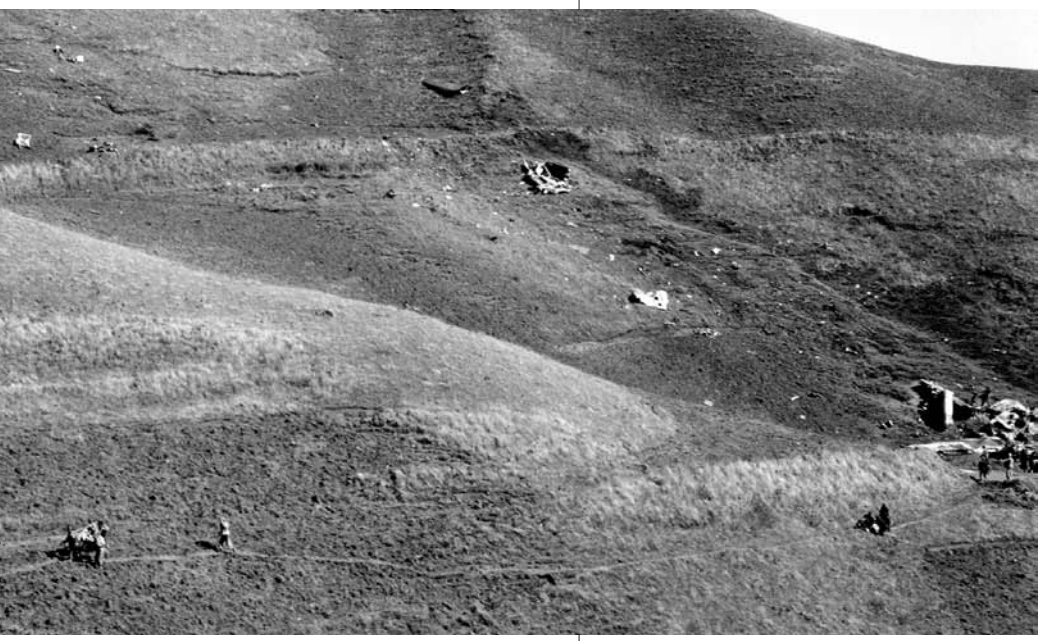
These B-29 missions through Kwanghan defy belief. Flying from Calcutta over the Hump, they landed in Kwanghan to refuel and load ordnance. Then, the incredible round trip to bomb Japan, back to refuel in Kwanghan, and then return to Calcutta, where the bombers were safer from Japanese attack.

ABOVE: In 1943, at a base in Kunming, China, "coolies" unload a shipment of bombs and miscellaneous freight that came over the mountains from Chabua, India. LEFT: Long lines of "coolies" pass back and forth loading and unloading baskets on the airstrip. OPPOSITE: The emptied gas cargo ship, a C-109 (a converted B-24J Willow run production) takes off from Myitkyina, Burma (now Myanmar).

On October 7, my father and his co-pilot took off toward China. Heading into the mountains, they encountered turbulence so severe that a man's head would be smashed on the ceiling of the cockpit if not for the shoulder harnesses holding them to their seats.

A fuel barrel burst and 55 gallons of gasoline spilled out on the deck. This was the era of many arcing electric relays and red-glowing vacuum-tube radios. The co-pilot began frantically tugging on his harness releases wanting to get up and get his chute on. He preferred bailing out in a thunderstorm over the Himalayas to dying in a fireball.

Releasing the shoulder harness would have been enough to kill him. Eventually, they broke out in the clear and set a return course for Tezpur. They shut down all the electrics they could, and planned their landing of the heavily loaded freighter. The landing gear could be cranked down by hand, but they were going to have to use the electric landing flaps to stop the airplane on the jungle strip, and there would likely be a small electric arc when they hit the switch.



Dad winced as he reached for the flap switch, he hesitated, and then lowered the flaps. He wrote, "There was no reason the aircraft didn't explode." For security reasons, pilots included few details of flights in their logbooks. Dad's log entry for this flight has the rather understated notation: "Returned with leaky gas drum."

Two nights later, Dad was supposed to fly to China, but another ship crashed on the field and he went to visit the hospital. "There were five aboard," he wrote Mother, "all real badly hurt. I gave a transfusion to the pilot, so I can't fly again for another day. He died a few minutes later, which doesn't speak too well for my blood, but he was so badly mangled and broken, it's a miracle he lived even a minute. Another one is being operated on for multiple skull fractures and chances aren't too good.

"But the doctors have pretty high hopes for the other three. Somehow this crash doesn't bother me a bit, but the last one I told you about had me pretty upset. Several ships have just disappeared in route, the Japs have gotten a couple, and with all the crashes going on, you get so that it's just another one."

The next night Dad mailed his letter and went out for another flight. He had a new co-pilot he had known on the North Atlantic runs. It was the fellow's first trip over the Hump. It was foggy that night, so visibility was obscured as they held short in the rumbling tanker waiting for clearance. Dad took the runway and accelerated. Halfway down, another tanker came looming out of the dark fog head-on.

The other pilot was taxiing, and he kicked his rudder pedal hard and turned his ship off the runway into a ditch that ran alongside. That ship's nosewheel dropped into the ditch and the big double rudders cantilevered up in front of Dad's accelerating airplane. There was no time to react, and no space to maneuver in.

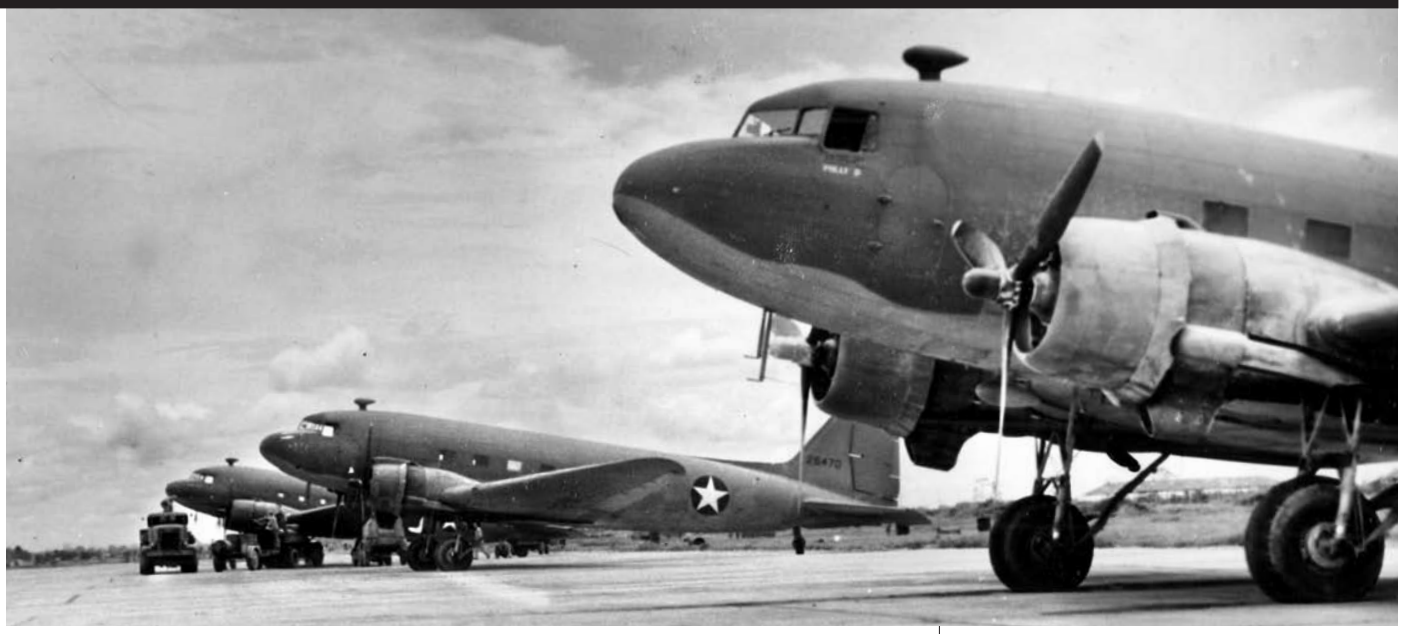
His ship had not reached liftoff speed, but Dad pulled back hard on the control column and the gasoline-laden C-109 wavered off the ground, with one of the main landing gear striking a rudder on the other aircraft. Dad's ship yawed wildly, but somehow remained in flight and clawed out over the trees.

After gaining a stable flight attitude, they had to make a decision. The landing gear must have been bent or broken, they reasoned. Surely the tire must have been blown out. The co-pilot went back to look out a window; he tried to assess damage with a flashlight. Nothing was apparent, but it was impossible to know. Should they return for landing in Tezpur overloaded with gasoline, or try retracting the gear and burn off their wing tanks flying to China, where they might not be able to lower the gear, but would be lighter for landing?

Their duty was to deliver the fuel to China. They retracted the gear and had a very anxious flight to Kwanghan. Fortunately, the landing there was without incident. A hearing was later convened about this runway accident. The field controller that night charged that Dad had taken the runway without a clearance. Dad's testimony was simply honest: "I was so tired and sleepy, I really can't tell you if I had a clearance or not."

Two other pilots listening on the field frequency that night testified they had heard the clearance. Perhaps they heard it, perhaps they were covering for a colleague. Either way, all knew it was senseless to court-marshal a desperately needed pilot. The hearing was closed.

The next night after this harrowing flight, Dad went to relax at the outdoor movie



ABOVE: Douglas DC-3 ships standing on the runway at Sookerating Air Base in India. Every ship has a schedule which keeps it in the air the maximum number of hours. The planes that fly over the "Hump"are unloaded a few minutes after landing and take off again for another trip. If possible, each plane must make three trips over the "Hump" each day. OPPOSITE: The remains of a Consolidated C-87 which crashed in the vicinity of Kunming, China. All crewmen were killed in the crash.

before his next departure scheduled for the early morning. The movie was *Shine On Harvest Moon*, starring Ann Sheridan and Dennis Morgan, but it was cut short when there was an explosion and the sky lit up like day. Another tanker had crashed a mile after takeoff, not as fortunate as Dad had been the night before.

"It all seems so insane and useless to me," he wrote Mother. "It isn't the Hump that's dangerous, but the rushing and assigning of unqualified personnel." He returned to his basha (a hut typically made of bamboo and grass) late that night from the crash scene. The chaplain and several others were on the porch conversing in low tones. They gave him more bad news. The young pilot who lived next door was missing. They found the wreckage in China the next morning.

Dad wrote, "Four more dead—all of them. Penny-wise and pound foolish the way the Army does things, and it sure makes you sick.

"We have a cute little puppy now named 'Ding How.' The young man who was killed last night brought her back from China and raised her on an eye dropper. Now that he's gone, she seems to have adopted us."

The central story my father would have wanted told was about people. He actually took few photos and wrote little about airplanes and operations. His real story is that he fell in love with the people of India, and most of what he wrote was about his growing fondness for the people of Assam.

He became close to one family in particular and spoke of the most peaceful family life and the most beautiful children in the world. He wrote, "They gave me coconuts and pineapples. If I had taken it, I would have had enough food for a week and they didn't have enough for themselves."

Between most of his flights, even when he was severely fatigued or ill with chronic fevers, he escaped on his bicycle to spend time with his Indian family. He wrote of "the most beautiful children in the world" and a more peaceful and loving family life than he had ever imagined.

But he also wrote, "The filth these people live in is unbelievable. At one home today, there were 12 kids and three generations living in a basha smaller than mine." Yet, as his connections to these people quickly grew, he saw beyond their living conditions and preferred to go alone to their villages because others from the base would remark at the uncleanliness and insult his friends or fear catching a disease.

"When I am alone, I get much closer to them and really learn how they live and what they think," Dad wrote. He said there were many things they could teach Americans.

One morning after a 10-hour flight, he packed up some candy and his camera and started through the jungle trails. He toured a Hindu temple, a tea plantation, and the local boy's school. Then he went to the homes of Hindu families. His letter said, "Had some very interesting visits with several families and saw the cutest children. I thoroughly enjoyed the afternoon and wish you could have been with me. They gave us tangerines and coconut milk to drink. It was so peaceful and pleasant sitting there in their yard with little kids all around me, that I hated to come back to camp.

"There is nothing wrong with India that a few intelligent, unselfish people couldn't cure. Of course, if I said that openly here at base, I would be called the most stupid one yet. But I have seen more and asked more questions among the natives than others here. Since I have looked around over here, there are some beautiful places, and if I had you with me, I would be satis-

fied to stay here.

"But, stop me! I sure spend a lot of time dreaming of that post-war home you write about." Amidst such daily stress from the intense flight schedule and war, my father was finding peace and beginning to imagine a life among the people of Assam.

He wrote often about his bearer, or house servant, Abdoul. When Mother sent Abdoul a gold watch from the States, he ran outside so as to not be seen crying. He thought my mother looked beautiful and plenty healthy, but he wondered why she never came to visit.

Dad bought a Victrola record player from a departing pilot and Abdoul took command of it, playing his favorites, which were opera. When his tour ended, Dad gave Abdoul a month's pay and the gold pen he had written all the letters with. Abdoul ran from the basha so as to not be seen crying.

Dad's roommate was the base chaplain he called "The Preacher." He wrote mother, "He keeps the drinking and the women parties down," though the Preacher much enjoyed that Dad would pack bottles of beer in the bulkheads of his airplane that would freeze over the mountains so he could serve ice-cold beer back in the hot jungle.

The Preacher also stowed away on flights to China, and Dad gave him flying lessons over the Himalayas. Dad wrote, "He was like a little kid at the controls, on the adventure of his life." Dad also visited families in China and wrote, "Went to a remote place and the women still bind their feet and they're no larger than their hands. Is this the 20th Century?"

It was becoming cold in China but still swelteringly hot in Tezpur. Dad was visiting the infirmary regularly with flu symptoms. By early December 1944 another crew was lost and pilots were refusing to fly. Dad wrote, "There are several who are afraid to fly the Hump, and some of them we used to think of as rocks. One captain was court-martialed when he refused, and got a dishonorable discharge. We lost a ship the other day, or I should say, another one, and everyone is jittery. I don't enjoy this, but the scariest part for me is working with crew members who are afraid. You never know what to expect from them."

In late December, just before Dad's 66th and last flight over the Hump, Tokyo Rose, the Japanese radio propagandist, said in her broadcast that pilots crossing the Hump would die and never return. Dad wrote Mother about what Rose had said and remarked, "Now you better start worrying about me."

His final trip over the Hump was flown amid a flurry of enemy alerts on the day after Christmas 1944. On that flight, they had to circle Chengkung for four hours waiting for a Japanese attack on that base to end before finally receiving landing clearance. Back in Tezpur, as he taxied in and shut down the empty C-109 for the last time, I imagine that he walked away with very little regret. Along with most Hump pilots and crew, my father was awarded the Distinguished Flying Cross and Air Medal.

It was Christmas, 1944. Dad's duties flying the Hump were completed, but the war continued. The war news was disheartening. The Japanese were still advancing in China. The Navy and Marines had returned McArthur to the Philippines after terrible losses, yet a long siege of Japan was anticipated. Predictions of American casualties in an invasion of Japan ranged to the hundreds of thousands.

In Europe, the Battle of the Bulge was underway as Germany stood its last vicious defense. Dad wrote, "I am anticipating the fall of Germany every day. Guess our big

In Kunming, China, September, 1944. After being transported by rail and barge from Budge Budge, India, gasoline was then transported by Consolidated C-109's of the 7th Bomb Group, 10th Air Force from Kurmitola, India, from a C-109 by the pumping unit at the left, to the storage tank in the background.

bombers really knocked Formosa for a loop, and that gives me a little encouragement and feeling of accomplishment."

The Dresden firebombing that killed tens of thousands was to come in February 1945. The fall of Berlin came three months later when the Russians captured the Reichstag. Until then, Germany had been under terrible bombardment by Eighth Air Force B-17s. Those operations very likely included several of the bombers that Dad had delivered to Europe in 1943.

In answering Mother's 265th letter with his 199th (she wrote 275 to him that are lost), Dad's New Year's Eve letter reflects the uncertainty felt by many around the world on that night: "If we were together in a quiet place, I could do lots of philosophizing about the passing of the old year. Am happy to have one more year of this unnatural existence behind us, but it is hard to become enthused over the life we face in the new year. However, if we do our part in living our lives properly, I feel confident that we will find the peace and happiness that so often seems to have vanished from the earth."

Mother had written joyfully that he would be returning soon since he had said he would not need any more instant coffee and other supplies sent by her. But he wrote back that he had no idea when he would be home; he narrowly avoided an assignment that would have held him in India another 18 months. A colleague had been stuck in that duty.

There were more rumors that the flying requirement would be extended by another 100 hours. He wrote, "Don't get any ideas of when I will return, until you hear me on the telephone, as that is as long as it will probably be."

The Army was slow to send pilots out of theater and Dad waited another month for orders home. Getting back to the states was a challenge in itself. He flew to Lucknow in north-central India for a week of touring, and made a side trip to the Taj Mahal. Letter number 211 was written from Karachi, where Dad was waiting for a flight out of India.

He left Karachi by hitch-hiking a transport on January 25, 1945. He rode through Abadan, Persia; Cairo; Tripoli; Casablanca; the Azores; then a long flight from there to Newfoundland, New York, and home to Delaware on January 28.

There are many important postscripts to these letters and stories. Warriors suffer many losses far from the battles, long after the war is over. My father contracted multiple sclerosis years after the war. He had thought the cause was his long exposure to carbon monoxide and fuel fumes in old airplanes. The Mayo Clinic, where he received his treatment, had suggested that.

Yet, more recent research has also theorized a viral cause of neurodegenerative diseases, and suggests that a cold virus originating on the Indian sub-continent might be a common cause of both MS and Alzheimer's Disease. This has caused me to consider a possible implication of my father's chronic viral illnesses over those months in India, as viral epidemics had been associated with both MS and Alzheimer's in those regions. Once the virus infects, it may lie dormant for many years and then find a venereal transmission pathway. My mother also died from Alzheimer's.

When I was young and both my parents were vibrantly alive, I did not know enough to ask for old war stories. The letters written to Mother from Dad in India are a treasure I did not discover until she was moved to a nursing home in the 1990s. She had kept them to herself, hidden away, deep in a secret drawer.

Written from a lonely basha in a Brahmaputran jungle, and from a freezing cockpit high above the Himalayas, they chronicled the heroic experiences my parents shared, and a once true-love cast in the midst of the world at war. And years later, I discovered my father's photographs.

Early in his India tour, Dad had written that he was surprised and happy to learn that Mother was saving his letters. He wrote to her, "Who knows, maybe someday they will become a diary of all this." So, here, my parents have come together finally, to tell this story to you. ■

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LECLERC: FREE FRANCE'S GREATEST GENERAL

Jacques-Philippe Leclerc's victories in Africa and France did much to restore the pride of the French army—and defeat Germany.

BY WILLIAM G. DENNIS

All photos: National Archives

Général d' Armée Jacques-Philippe Leclerc's service to France during World War II made him one of the few heroes to be admired by the whole country. France was divided between those who refused to give in to Germany, those who obeyed the collaborationist government at Vichy, and the communists who opposed both.

Leclerc graduated from Saint-Cyr Military Academy with remarkably high marks, and graduated first in his class from the Cavalry School at Saumur. He was first posted to France's colonial cavalry, the 8th Regiment of Spahis in Morocco, and later served with a Goum unit in the High Atlas Mountains of Morocco.

His service to the Allied cause that made him a hero began when he escaped from German captivity in 1940. At that time, most of France was occupied by Germany and the rest was governed by an unsavory collaborationist regime from its capital at Vichy. It rounded up Jews at the behest of the Nazis and even sent Frenchmen to work as slaves in German factories.

Under Marshal Petain,Vichy still ruled France's colonial empire, including much of North Africa. The rest of North Africa was divided between Britain, Italy, and Spain. Italy and France were latecomers who had seized their colonies in the latter half of the 19th century and the early twentieth. Their colonies were restive and required armies made up of European troops and native units to keep them under control. Skirmishes with rebels were endemic and some major campaigns took place.

Leclerc was born Philippe Hauteclocque. After his escape from France, he sought to divert the Vichy government's attention from his family so he took his nom de guerre, arriving in England on July 25, 1940, to join Charles De Gaulle who, with British help, was working to bring France's African colonies over to the Allied side.

It was an opportune time for the move. As France was falling, Italy declared war on the Allies and attacked British-controlled Egypt. On June 14, 1940, British, colonial, and commonwealth troops had defeated the Italians and crushed their forces in North Africa with Operation Compass.

Leclerc was well equipped for that task. Decorated for valor during his years of service in North Africa, he was fluent in Arabic, proficient in Berber, and well grounded in conducting long-range desert operations on a logistical shoestring budget.

Leclerc based himself in Chad, where he began assembling existing forces and recruiting new troops. He had little equipment—and most of that was obsolete. Still, Allied strength was slowly growing. The British were supplying obsolescent Blenheim bombers and Bedford trucks that were better suited to desert warfare than anything the French had.

A patrol of the British Long-Range Desert Group came in from Egypt looking for bases from which to strike Italian positions in western and southern Libya—strikes designed to divert Italian troops from the fighting along the Mediterranean coast.

The first action mounted from Chad was an Anglo/French raid on the Italian outpost

Major General Walton Walker, left, commander of U.S. XX Corps, greets Maj. Gen. Philippe Leclerc, commander of the 2nd French Armored Division, after the division landed at Utah Beach, Normandy, on August 1, 1944. The French division was then attached to Maj. Gen. Wade M. Haislip's XV Corps, a part of George Patton's Third U.S. Army. From Normandy, Leclerc would lead his men triumphantly to the liberation of Paris by the end of month. The 2nd French Armored Division notably took part in the Battle of the Falaise Pocket, the Battle of Dompaire, the Colmer Pocket and the push into Bavaria in May 1945.

at Murzuk, the most important town in the Libyan desert. The garrison held an Ottoman-era fortress and positions at the local airfield. While one group put suppressive fire onto the fortress, another attacked the airfield, destroying airplanes and a fuel dump. The raiders succeeded in spite of scant training and little support.

Encouraged, Leclerc struck at Italian communications with East Africa by raiding Kufra—an important way point for air travel to Italian possessions further east. Leclerc started by testing Italian defenses with a reconnaissance–in–force.

Initially, there were air attacks and scouting by camel-mounted troops, followed by ground action. Leclerc assembled an attack echelon of 100 Europeans and 300 Africans mounted in 55 trucks and supported by two armored cars and a pair of 75mm mountain guns. A second echelon of 100 trucks and 150 men handled supply and logistics.

The Italians were alert, but the advance group of this force reached the village of El Giof on the outskirts of the town without detection. Leclerc slipped into the headman's house and learned that the Italians pulled their outposts into the fort and buttoned up during the night. An attack on the unguarded airfield destroyed two aircraft. The attackers melted into the desert, where camouflage and dispersal kept Italian bombers from finding them the next day.

Meanwhile, the British were advancing into Libya and the way was open for Leclerc to move north. The plan was to capture Kufra and link up with the advancing British. Leclerc's forces moved out on February 17, 1941. The first objective was to defeat the Italian Sahariania (locally raised troops) guarding the town. Acheiving that, the focus of the battle shifted to the mud-walled fort; 75mm shells punched through the walls before they exploded and 81mm mortar shells dropped inside them. The Italians surrendered on March 1.

This was Free France's first real victory and Leclerc led his men in swearing not to put down their weapons until the tricolor flew over the cathedral of Strasbourg in Alsace. The provinces of Alsace and Lorraine had been lost to France in the Franco-Prussian war, regained at the end of WWI, and lost again in 1940.

ABOVE: Smoke rises as Leclerc's Free French force and the British Long Range Desert Group assault the Italian garrison at Murzuk, February 1941. LEFT: Leclerc, right, meets with two colonial Free French officers after a 2,000-mile desert journey from Chad to Tripoli, February 1943. Leclerc would soon depart for Britain to take command of the 2nd French Armored Division. OPPOSITE: An American-supplied M4 Sherman tank rolls out of LST 517 onto the French soil of Utah Beach, Normandy, August 1, 1944.

General Erwin Rommel arrived in Libya in February 1941 at the head of a mechanized force—the Afrika Korps. Together, the German and Italians in northern Libya threw back the British. With German troops now in Libya, Leclerc's troops were no longer strong enough to move any further. His supply line from the West African ports stretched a thousand miles and gasoline was so scarce that it was carried to forward bases by camels.

But the situation began to improve when Germany invaded the Soviet Union, allowing the British to reinforce their garrison in Egypt. A trickle of new equipment and supplies for Leclerc's forces began to arrive. The equipment was welcome, but British rations must have been depressing to the gastronomes among the French. At that time, the Eighth Army in North Africa was being fed mostly bully beef, choke-dog biscuits, peas porridge, and oatmeal—over and over again.

For the next nine months, the battle moved to and fro across North Africa's Mediterranean coast. Leclerc no longer faced only poorly armed and badly led Italians, so capturing and holding Italian positions closer to the coast was not a good option. But raids against Italian positions in southwestern Libya, the Fezzan, were feasible. In Operation Fezzan I, Leclerc deployed a force of 500 men divided into several parties.

The raids began on February 15, 1942, and lasted for 15 days. They cost the French eight killed and 15 wounded but destroyed four Italian forts, captured 50 Italians, and destroyed aircraft and supply dumps. A U.S. liaison officer with Leclerc described him as "a remarkable soldier, young, energetic, and absolutely adored by his officers and men."

Leclerc and his command waited out the summer of 1942 as both sides built up their strength and the Italians reoccupied the Fezzan. The Eighth Army had a decisive victory at El Alamein in October; in November Anglo/American armies landed in North Africa

(Operation Torch). With the German and Italian armies locked in battle with the main Allied armies, Leclerc's small force could move against Italy's vulnerable southern flank.

For Fezzan II, his force numbered 3,500 men, including a strong, if diverse, artillery component. Leclerc's men moved in mid-December 1942 and, by mid-January 1943, had eliminated the Italian positions in the Fezzan, reached Tripoli, and linked up with Bernard Montgomery's British Eighth Army—a 2,000-mile journey.

Monty recognized the man in the dusty, worn-out French uniform as a capable and seasoned desert campaigner. The British supplied Leclerc's troops with British uniforms and gear, traded British weapons for most of their Italian arms, and replaced their worn-out vehicles. It was still a lightly-armed force best suited to fighting in rough terrain.

The British designated Leclerc and his troops as "Force L." The 13th Demi-Brigade of the Foreign Legion, made up mostly of anti-fascist Spaniards, had served with the Eighth Army. It joined Leclerc's command, as did a small Greek force. British engineers and an anti-aircraft unit were also attached.

The British faced an Italian/German force along the Tunisia-Libya border. Montgomery posted Force L to the desert flank of the battle line and tasked it with holding mountain passes against an attempt to flank the Eighth Army. The German Fifth Panzer Army commander, Hans-Jürgen von Arnim, aimed the last major Axis offensive against the Eighth Army at Force L. When he learned the strength of the attack, Montgomery attempted to get Leclerc to retreat, but the Frenchman had confidence in his plan. When the battle ended, the Axis forces retreated with heavy losses.

The U.S. committed to equipping three French armored divisions and four infantry divisions to be organized on the American model. The armored divisions had three major subordinate commands that the Americans called "combat commands"—similar to infantry regiments—that also controlled the maneuver and artillery battalions.

The tank battalions were primarily equipped with M-4 Shermans, with one company per battalion equipped with Stuart M-3A3 light tanks. Its three infantry battalions were mounted in reliable American halftracks. Leclerc's anti-tank unit was equipped with M10 tank destroyers (TDs)—lightly armored tracked vehicles mounting a high-velocity cannon in an open-topped turret. Its three battalions of artillery were equipped with 105mm howitzers mounted on M7 carriers (modified Sherman tanks). Belton Cooper, author of *Death Traps*, considered them to be one of the best pieces of U.S. equipment in WWII.

There were several departures from the American table of organization. Each firing battery had nine guns instead of six, as in an American armored division. This gave it 81 guns instead of 54; each gun team had a halftrack with trailer a to carry ammunition. Another departure was to strip down six-by-six trucks and mount a 40mm Bofors anti-aircraft gun on the bed instead of towing it. Leclerc also organized two subordinate headquarters within each combat command so that each could be smoothly split into subgroups.

In a May 13, 1944, ceremony in Algeria, Force L became the 2e Division Blindée—the 2nd French Armored Division. The division is still in active service and its infantry component is officially known as "The Regiment that Marched from Chad."

Turning Force L into a full armored division involved much recruiting and reorganization. The black Africans were transferred to units that would garrison France's

new protectorate in southern Libya. There had been a steady trickle of "evades"—young men that had slipped out of France and ended up in Africa. Most were assigned to a temporary holding unit along with anti-fascist Spaniards and Italians. It was not enough, so some regiments from the French army in Algeria were transferred to the 2nd Armored. Moroccan horse cavalry also was assigned and motorized with T-17 "Staghorns" and M-8 "Greyhound" armored cars.

The division included a medical battalion organized and equipped like an American unit, but its personnel were a definite departure. There were two detachments of female ambulance drivers commonly referred to as the "Rochambelles" and the "Marinettes." The ambulance drivers also included a unit of British Quakers that Leclerc persuaded the Eighth Army to transfer to him.

The oddest part of the division was its antitank regiment. The British Royal Navy had fought a series of successful actions to keep French ships out of Axis hands. The regiment was formed mostly of men who had been captured in these actions and frequently spent months in prison camps alongside captured U-boat crews. Eventually, it became clear to many of them that, whatever their hatred of the Royal Navy that had so often humiliated them, the real enemy was Germany. A thousand of them volunteered to become French naval infantry. Being mostly technicians and gunners, it was not their first choice. But being aboard TDs—ships of the land, so to speak—fit them well. The regiment was augmented with crewmen off of French ships sunk or disabled during the invasion of North Africa. They became the Régiment Blindée des Fusilier Marins."

There were few officers in any army that could have quickly pulled such a disparate group into the fine fighting force that the 2nd became. With such a diverse group and little time for training Leclerc's history and personality played a big part in building his division into an effective force.

Eventually, enough men were found, most of the equipment arrived, and the troops were trained to use it. Once the division passed the American Rearmament Commission's training and tests, on the equipment that was available, it was on to England to get ready for the Normandy invasion.

The division began arriving in Yorkshire in late April and most of it was there for the next two months. It was a time for a last stint of intense training. Most of the tanks had arrived late, and simulators were a poor substitute.

It was becoming clear that the newer panzer models outclassed the M-4, and that the only answer to that was to make good use of what the division had and support them with artillery and air. That meant training to take advantage of terrain, using the Sherman's speed and maneuverability to its maximum—and shooting well. By June 12, the division's tankers had passed the training.

On July 29, eight weeks after D-Day, the division landed in Normandy. The people of the devastated countryside were delighted to see French troops and recruits began to stream in. Among the first was Leclerc's nephew.

The 2nd French Armored was part of the spearheads Lt. Gen. George S. Patton's Third Army sent attacking north and easterly behind the German lines and moving much faster than the German troops could. It had become a war of movement and cavalrymen like Patton and Leclerc were loving it. The Allied goal was to link up Third Army with the British and Canadian armies thrusting down from the north near Alençon and catch what remained of the German forces in Normandy in the Falaise Pocket.

Leclerc's division was part of Major General Lee Haislip's XV Corps, which was moving to seal the pocket. The country was still the frustrating Norman bocage, with its hedge-lined sunken roads around small fields interspersed with forests. It was good defensive territory but at least the Germans now had little time or inclination to dig in and, at close quarters, the nimble American armor could acquit itself well against the heavier panzers.

Leclerc's people were encountering scattered forces and roadblocks. The plan was for armored spear points to roll over the German forces. If that did not work, flank them and leave them for the artillery and following infantry. Leclerc seemed to be everywhere in the front-lines, demanding action and urging subordinate commanders on.

His being so close to the front horrified his subordinate commanders. When he drove up to the command post of one of his leading battalions, its commander, Lt. Col. Rouvillois, called out that he was in full view of German tanks. "You have no right to take such risks. If you are killed, who will command the division?" "Rouvillois will," Leclerc told the startled battalion commander. "You do your job and I will do mine."

But being so far forward paid off in an unexpected way. Driving from Mamers toward Alençon late at night, he met a kubelwagen coming toward him. Leclerc and his aide opened fire, killing two Germans and capturing one. The men were carrying orders for what was left of the 9th Panzer Division to move to Alençon.

This confirmed that the front lines had ruptured and that the town did not have well-organized defenses. The faster his troops got there, the more easily Alençon would fall. An audacious thrust on Alençon the night of August 11 paid off early the next morning when his troops captured the city with the bridges over the Sarthe River intact. It also enabled Leclerc to block the roads the Germans were intending to use. Prevented from occupying Alençon, 9th Panzer took up positions north of it in the Écouves Forest.

A warning from a resistance fighter that the forest contained strong German forces led to Leclerc's most controversial move. Haislip's orders were for Leclerc to bypass the forest on the west while the American 5th Armored bypassed it on the east. Instead, Leclerc sent only one combat command west of the forest, one through the western fringe of the forest and one east of it into the operational area of the 5th Armored.

A combat command of the 5th had already cleared the town of Sées and was waiting for a gasoline resupply. Leclerc's troops caused a traffic jam in the town that delayed the fuel trucks.

The 5th's combat command had been tasked with capturing Argentan. By the time the

attack took place, the Germans had strengthened the defenses of that town and the attack made little progress. Had it succeeded, many more Germans who escaped the Falaise Pocket might have been captured.

The TDs with the column that passed west of the forest had the incredible luck to come upon a column of tanks and trucks from the 9th Panzer. The crews were resting on the grass nearby. The TDs were on them before they could remount. Those who tried were killed and many others captured.

Recon troops in the same column had a similar experience finding the German crews of heavy, eight-wheeled armored cars resting beside their vehicles. The French had just captured the men and their machines when a Panzer IV and a Panther arrived. Both were destroyed by the Greyhound's 37mm guns.

Audacity paid off in other ways. After the failure of the German counteroffensive at Mortain, Hitler ordered another attack into the weakly-held west flank of Third Army. The rapid advance of Third Army and its threat to close off the Falaise Pocket made it necessary for the Germans to instead commit the forces to slow that advance.

After a few weeks in combat, it was clear that Leclerc and his cadre had put together a very effective fighting force. Once in combat, their learning curve remained steep and their already satisfactory performance continued to improve.

They were receiving plentiful American-supplied equipment whose quality was a far cry from the obsolete and sometimes barely functional gear they struggled with in Africa. American C rations were also an improvement and, better yet, the rations included coffee and cigarettes. Even the Cs could be traded for the occasional rabbit or chicken. More recruits poured in and were sent to England to be quickly trained, equipped, and sent back to the division.

Leclerc's division had repeatedly prevailed against German forces fighting desperately for their survival. During the Normandy campaign, it captured 8,800 prisoners and claimed to have destroyed more than 100 tanks, another hundred artillery pieces, and 700 other vehicles.

Major General Jacques-Philippe Leclerc's 2nd French Armored Division prepares to go into action against the Germans in the Falaise Pocket. Determined to liberate Paris, Leclerc was reluctant to get bogged down at Falaise.

What followed was a confusing period during which Allied troops north and south of the Falaise Pocket gingerly moved forward, attempting to close off the German escape routes without friendly-fire casualties. The 2nd French Armored and the rest of the Allies moving north were ordered to halt at Argentan. Leclerc the cavalryman hated it. Also, he was becoming preoccupied by the lure of Paris.

When one of his combat commands was detailed to support the attack intended to finally close the pocket, he grudgingly complied, but not before annoying Patton's chief of staff, Maj. Gen. Hugh Gaffey, with his insubordination. Gaffey planned to seal off the pocket with an attack by the 90th U.S. Infantry Division, supported by a combat command from Leclerc's division.

Leclerc saw serious flaws in the plan, but Gaffey would not accept Leclerc's criticism

that the plan was "inexecutable." (The attack was suspended but later revived by the 2nd's new Corps commander, Maj. Gen. Leonard Gerow, in a much better thought-out form.)

With the breakout and the collapse of the pocket, it seemed to Leclerc and the rest of the Free French that the time had come for them to liberate Paris.

The Allied high command had trouble understanding their urgency. De Gaulle and Leclerc knew that the communists with their decades of experience in underground operations had, in many places, become the strongest faction in the French Forces of the Interior (FFI). Their hostility to the rest of the FFI led them to shoot up chateaus, simply because they were occupied by "aristos" (aristocrats). If they got control of public buildings in Paris, it might ignite a civil war that would cripple the Allied effort.

The communist leadership declared they were willing to see 200,000 Parisians killed if it gave them control of Paris. There was also the threat that if Parisians revolted prematurely, Hitler would order the city destroyed, as he had done with Warsaw.

Leclerc began planning to liberate Paris with or without authorization. French supply officers began accumulating gasoline for the march. Leclerc formed an advance guard by inconspicuously withdrawing a few men and vehicles from each of his combat commands and quietly sent them off toward Paris while he lobbied his chain of command for orders to send the division.

While Leclerc was lobbying, the Paris police went on strike and the insurrection in Paris began with a rising by those police who occupied the Préfecture of Police. The communists soon joined and began attacking individuals and small groups of Germans. The next day the Germans began to prepare to recapture the Préfecture. A truce was negotiated. It held less than 24 hours before the communists denounced it and the fighting resumed.

Meanwhile, Gaullists in the city convinced Eisenhower in a meeting on August 23 that the Allies needed to support the insurrection. Leclerc was on his way.

He formed his division into two main

ABOVE: Oblivious to snipers and wearing his trademark kepi, Leclerc enters Paris on August 25, 1944, and issues orders from his halftrack on the Boulevard Montparnasse. OPPOSITE: With winter coming on, an M10 Wolverine tank destroyer of Régiment Blindé de Fusiliers Marins, rolls down a muddy road toward the front near Halloville, France, November 1944.

columns to attack from the southwest and south. Aided by locals who knew the minor roads and byways, the division moved out. By the morning of August 25, the division had spread through the western part of the city attacking scattered German forces; simultaneously, the American 4th Infantry Division was moving into the city from the southeast.

At one point, a Sherman at one end of the Champs Élysées was fired on by a Panther at the far end. The commander ordered the gunner to set his sights for 1,500 yards. The gunner, a Parisian, knew the park was 1,800 yards long. He set his sights accordingly and hit the panzer with his first round. Late that day, the German commander, General Dietrich von Choltitz, formally surrendered the city.

Paris was not won cheaply. The march on the city and the action there cost Leclerc's division 14 percent of its men killed or wounded—more than the rest of the campaign in France.

The 2nd French Armored—and the French divisions that had landed on the Mediterranean coast—would serve with distinction in the liberation of eastern France. Leclerc's best days as a field commander were still ahead of him. But the 2nd's liberation of Paris began the rebirth of the French Army's pride that had been shattered in 1940.

The 2nd spent a few days giving new recruits basic training while maintaining, repairing, and absorbing new equipment, including a consignment of Gnome et Rhône motorcycles originally intended for the Wehrmacht. The factory workers had made sure they would quickly break down and the division was soon calling frantically for spare parts.

De Gaulle wanted the 2nd to stay while he consolidated his control over Paris, but any delay would give the Germans time to reorganize. So, after a few days, the 2nd moved north and east toward the Marne River—the right flank of Patton's Third Army.

The division advanced with the 79th U.S. Infantry Division on its left, its right flank in the air. The main opposition was from over-age guard troops and security battalions. The Germans hoped to stabilize the front long enough for the Fifth Panzer Army to mount a counterattack, but the Americans and the French were defeating the scattered defenders in detail. Something had to be done. On September 12, a new German unit, Panzer Brigade 112, entered the battle.

Panzer brigades, ad hoc brigade-sized units, had served on the eastern front since early in the war, sometimes with considerable success. In the fall of 1944, Hitler decided that rather than sending all the new armored vehicles to depleted panzer divisions where experienced panzer crewmen were often without tanks, he would create new panzer brigades.

Units made up mostly of tanks could sometimes be successful in places like the plains of Russia or when winter weather had grounded air support. But in WWII, tanks were usually best employed as part of a combined-arms team that contained artillery, tank, and infantry battalions in roughly equal numbers. The 112th had two battalions of tanks, and a battalion of panzer grenadiers, but there was no reconnaissance unit, engineers, field, or air-defense artillery, and only a limited tank-recovery and repair unit.

The brigade was ordered to wheel around the right flank of Third Army and roll it up. On a rainy September 12, it headed south in two columns. The western column was the brigade's Panther battalion and 40 Mark IV Specials. The eastern column had the rest of the brigade's Mark IV battalion and the bulk of the infantry. To send this unit out with no possibility of significant air support and into an area where both the RAF and American Army Air Corps had powerful ground-attack units was an exceptionally bad decision.

By evening, the western column had reached the village of Dompaire. There was only one road passing through it and it is surrounded by hills which are impassable to vehicles. The inexperienced troops sent out no patrols and set no guards.

Part of Colonel Paul Landglade's combat command moved in around them. He was badly outnumbered but he had artillery and air support. His plan was to use some of his force to block a German retreat while he attacked down the road toward the other end of the village. He still had a small reserve to guard his rear.

A reconnaissance party that included four TDs drew first blood and hastily withdrew. A feint by armored infantry caused the Panthers to deploy and move forward. They were driven back by heavy fire from Landglade's tanks and artillery, then blocked from withdrawing by the reserve force to their rear. There was no escape.

The 2nd's air-support officer called in four air strikes during the course of the battle. After each strike, the French troops moved forward to tighten their hold on the Germans. Eventually they reached a rise on the north edge of Dompaire from which they were able to dominate the whole battlefield.

The commander of the Panthers called for support from the eastern column, but the postmistress of Pierrefitte spotted the approaching column and telephoned Landglade. He ordered his reserve of tanks and TDs to block that advance. In the midst of the German attempt to dislodge that force, an airstrike hit the eastern column which broke up the attack. An assault by the grenadiers was also driven back.

Leclerc sent Landglade reinforcements that arrived late in the day. But when the French attack resumed the next morning, the attackers found the village empty of Germans, the Germans having abandoned their remaining vehicles and fled on foot during the night. The French found 33 burned-out Panthers and four others intact. Together with the losses the eastern column had suffered, the panzer brigade was essentially destroyed.

The war continued to move further north and east. The first tenuous link up with Lt. Gen. Alexander Patch's Seventh Army that had landed on the Mediterranean coast, was accomplished soon after the battle at

Dompaire. The XV Corps was transferred to it. The First French Army under General Jean de Lattre de Tassigny (a.k.a. de Lattre) landed at the same time. Together with the Seventh, they formed the 6th Army Group under General Jacob Devers.

The Vosges Mountains the Allies were approaching are such a serious barrier that there had been no contested crossings in modern times. The northern part of the range, the Low Vosges, is less rugged than the High Vosges to the south, but the range makes up for it by being wider. The Germans were trading space for time while they prepared positions in the mountains.

The defenses were concentrated around the few good routes through them. At the juncture of the High and Low Vosges is the Saverne Gap. It is a narrow valley, easily blocked. To open it, the hills around the pass needed to be taken. Further south in the High Vosges, another route follows the Saales and Hantz passes. The area to the south and east of the High Vosges is open and fairly level until the Jura Mountains in Switzerland are reached.

Near the west end of the Saverne Gap is the city of Baccarat. The German positions around the city blocked access to the Saverne Gap and the 2nd French Armored was ordered to capture it.

The excellent intelligence that always characterized Leclerc's operations was never more evident when he was planning this operation and the one that followed. As usual he was getting good information from the area's inhabitants and now he had an additional source.

Beginning with the 1942 invasion of the U.S.S.R., Germany had taken heavy casualties. Just since the invasion of France, the western Allies and the Soviets together had inflicted about 2,200,000 casualties on Germany and bottled up another 200,000 troops in coastal garrisons. As a result, Germany had become very elastic about who was a German and therefore subject to conscription. Anyone from any of the areas annexed by Germany—or anyone in the occupied areas who was arguably of German stock—even if the family spoke no German, was liable for call up.

Few of those conscripted out of any of these areas had any reason to be loyal to Germany and, in the west, many deserted. Those that deserted here brought with them detailed knowledge of German positions. One Ukrainian "German" gave them the precise location of over 30 machine guns. Leclerc had a clear picture of the German defenses.

The Mondon Forest to the north of Baccarat was good tank country in the dry season but by the end of September, Western Europe was beginning to experience its worst winter in living memory. The valleys in the forest were flooded and the few roads were saturated, so German defenses were concentrated south of the city where the access was better.

A careful reconnaissance of the forest identified potential routes that stayed on the relatively dry hillsides. Tracks were cut through the forest along those routes while storms obscured the sound of the work.

Following a feint from the south and an extremely heavy artillery barrage, troops stormed out of the forest and took the German positions from the rear. The attack carried through the town and captured the bridge over the Meurthe river.

For once, a battle plan had survived contact with the enemy. The 2nd made it look so easy that it was referred to as the "ballet héroïque." The truth was that the victory was the result of meticulous reconnaissance and planning.

Meanwhile, other 2nd Armored troops moved north out of the Mondon Forest and cleared the area for several miles. The whole operation cost the French 120 casualties. German casualties, not including deserters, were about six times that.

By this time, the 2nd was recognized as an elite unit and was getting plenty of recruits who received good training. Leclerc had the training cadre that the division had established in Yorkshire moved to an area near Paris.

The attack at Baccarat was part of Operation Dogface—the effort to clear the area

ABOVE: Popular with his men, Leclerc talks to the crew of a Sherman tank. In 1931, Leclerc was injured in a horse-riding accident and thereafter walked with a cane. OPPOSITE: Leclerc, center, reviews his U.S.-uniformed troops in Strasbourg's Place Kléber on November 23, 1944. His armored division had just liberated the Alsatian capital from the Germans.

immediately to the west of the Vosges. Attacks by VI Corps units cleared the middle section of the area facing the High Vosges and the First French Army did the same further south. The Germans took heavy casualties attempting to hold the area in front of the Vosges while the defenses in the passes were completed, but too few men were left to adequately man the mountain defenses.

With the objectives of Operation Dogface achieved, it was time to force the Vosges passes. As part of the operation's planning, Leclerc ordered a plaster terrain model of the whole area sent from Paris. Interrogations of prisoners and interviews of the local resistance continued to build his intelligence. Most of these mountains are heavily forested but they contain a few small hamlets accessed by second- and third-rate roads. Those were easily blocked by mines, a few fallen trees, or a man with a rocket launcher. Leclerc and his staff made an intense study of these roads before the fighting started.

At the Saverne Gap, XV Corps' 44th Infantry Division would drive through the hills to the north of the pass while the 71st Infantry Division cleared the hills to the south of it.

After the fall of Baccarat, the weather continued to deteriorate. Heavy rains were followed by blizzards. Most streams were flooded and the mud seemed bottomless. The 44th and 79th Divisions jumped off early in the morning on November 13.

They were facing three small Volksgrenadier divisions, deployed in depth in scattered roadblocks and strongpoints; there was no mobile reserve. When a strongpoint was encountered, the first echelon of attackers was to mount a hasty attack. If that did not roll over the position, it was to be bypassed and left for those following. The challenging aspect of the plan was that the rugged terrain could make bypassing difficult.

Leclerc's men would initially screen the advance on the north and south. When the German positions began to collapse, the 2nd would become the Corps' exploitation force and attack the retreating Germans.

The 324th and 71st Infantry Regiments of the 44th attacked on the north side of the gap. They only advanced a mile that day and were not doing even that well the next. With gaps between German positions and no mobile German reserve, the 44th's commander sensed an opportunity. On the 15th, the division's reserve regiment, the 114th Infantry, slipped between the German front-line positions and swung north, attacking German positions from the flank and rear.

By the next evening, the regiment, aided by a cavalry group, was mopping up German positions and the rest of the division was on the move. On November 18, the attack picked up speed as the German defenses fell. By November 19, the 44th had broken through. That day, the 71st Infantry Division in the lead advanced nine miles.

The 79th's attack, on the south side of the pass, started forward at the same time as the 44th's with the 314th Infantry on the left and the 315th on the right. By the next day, they were threatening to drive a wedge between the 553rd and 708th Volksgrenadier Divisions facing them. The 708th moved up its reserve to make a strong counterattack. But elements of the American 315th Infantry, supported by tanks and tank destroyers, assaulted the German assembly area, dispersing the Germans and destroying most of the 708th's assault guns. The Germans' other counterattacks were equally ineffective.

On November 16, elements of the 2nd French Armored were committed to provide flank security and speed the attack. South of the Saverne gap the 2nd's screening force encountered a small force of German alpine troops which held them up

overnight. At dawn, an artillery barrage and a tank-infantry assault drove them off.

By November 19, German forces were falling back, unable to hold defensive positions in the face of Allied pressure. Haislip authorized the 2nd to switch to exploitation; its attack began on November 20.

Leclerc's careful reconnaissance and planning paid off. Each combat command was divided into its two subgroups; each subgroup was assigned primary and alternative routes through the mountains. The movement was so rapid that his troops got behind the German positions at the east end of the gap. By that time, there was a 10-mile breach in the German lines. German weakness encouraged Leclerc to widen the breach further.

One of his columns swung further north through La Petite Pierre and out onto the Alsatian Plain. By the time the German troops realized what was happening, 2nd Armored troops were seizing the exits from the mountain passes on both sides of the gap. Others were headed for Saverne.

To the south, VI Corps was moving down the eastern slopes of the Vosges. Further to the south, the First French Army successfully deceived the Germans about the location of their own attack and, in hard fighting, cleared the lower third of the range. They then advanced north along the Alsatian plain nearly to the city of Colmar.

Early on November 23, the 2nd started for Strasbourg. One subgroup screened to the north and the reconnaissance regiment to the south. The rest of the division, minus a reserve, started for the city by several routes. Saturated soil and scattered German defenses made it hard going to the west and south of the city. But, by 9:30, the troops moving in from the north crossed into the city boundary—a move reminiscent of the liberation of Paris, with jubilant chaos and Germans in enclaves scattered through the city.

The campaign was costly for the Germans. The 2nd Armored alone claimed 2,000 killed and 12,500 captured, with hundreds of tanks and other vehicles destroyed.

The 2nd fought one more major action and, for the first time, it worked closely with other French units that had a very different experience from the 2nd. Leclerc's troops had always worked with American formations and drew their rations and other supplies from American supply sources while much of the supplies for the rest of the French units were offloaded at Mediterranean ports and turned over to the French.

The collapse of the German forces in western and southern France had suddenly moved the front hundreds of miles from those ports and made keeping Allied troops in northeastern France supplied much more difficult.

All of the units in northeastern France were experiencing shortages. Patton's divisions fighting to the west of Devers's 6th Army Group were receiving about 300 tons of supplies per division a day; the allocation should have been around 900 tons. The French were sometimes allocated less than similar American units. The French resented that—and that the 2nd was better supplied. As General de Lattre chided one of Leclerc's officers, "There must be no more of the 2nd getting twice as many cigarettes as First Army."

There were other sources of friction. The commanders and their staff lived well while the troops were hungry and ill clad. Many Free French despised the leaders that had remained loyal to Vichy. In particular, Leclerc despised de Lattre. This appears unfair since he was the only Vichy commander who ignored Vichy's order not to oppose the German takeover of southern France; he joined De Gaulle soon thereafter.

And finally, Leclerc had his own training establishment and recruits pouring in. With most of the pre-war French Army prisoners in Germany, the rest of the French units were having a difficult time replacing their heavy losses with reliable troops. De Lattre was reduced to integrating whole units of FFI troops, which had little training or discipline, into existing divisions. Equipment shortages were so severe the undertrained 10th (Paris) Infantry had to be armed with captured German weapons.

When the Allies forced their way across the Vosges, the Germans retained control of the area around the city of Colmar—the "Colmar Pocket" as it became known. Ike wanted the whole west bank of the Rhine cleared before crossing that river, but the pocket was a tough nut. Hitler had poured troops, including a panzer brigade and more artillery, into the perimeter. Being so close to the Saar industrial area meant that, for once, their artillery was well supplied. The French, still at the end of a long shaky supply line, were not.

Devers left the task of capturing the pocket to the First French Army, but that force simply did not have the power to dislodge the Germans. As the winter continued, heavy casualties and growing problems with sickness ground French strength down. After the Battle of the Bulge, Ike insisted it was time to clear the pocket.

The plan was to focus attacks from north and south in the areas nearest the Rhine River. The 2nd French Armored was assigned to attack from the north as part of Lt. Gen. Joseph Monsabert's II French Corps.

It is not good tank country. It is laced by streams and canals and there were enough forested areas to cloak German anti-tank guns and counterattack assembly areas. More infantry than the 2nd's three battalions were needed. As they pushed a finger southward, taking heavy losses, Leclerc became concerned about his men's exhaustion and the long, poorly guarded flank that was growing on his right.

Leclerc insisted to General Monsabert that his troops were too worn down to clear woodland on his flank. He needed at least two battalions of fresh infantry to do that job. Monsabert disagreed and demanded Leclerc put his objections in writing.

De Lattre was furious, and his tirade at Leclerc was remarkably petty. Leclerc declared that he would no longer serve under him and got permission to take the matter to Jake Devers, the 6th Army Group's commanding general.

It became clear to Devers that the French alone were too weak. Devers left the French 2nd next to the Rhine and moved two American infantry divisions in between it and the rest of the French troops.

It remained a tough conflict. Hitler had issued one of his fight-to-the-last-man orders

that had cost Germany so many unnecessary casualties. The awful weather grounded the Allies artillery spotter planes that usually directed American counter-battery fire, so the German artillery could fire with impunity. But by February 7, the remaining German troops were surrounded and cut off from the Rhine. When the surrender came, 80 percent of the German troops who had held the pocket were either killed or captured.

But before this happened, the Germans launched their last major offensive in the West: Operation Nordwind. The 2nd was one of the units pulled into reserve to meet it. The offensive ultimately failed, but not without causing a major command crisis. Ike did not at first understand the importance to French morale of holding Strasbourg, and ordered Devers to withdraw his troops back to the Vosges Mountains. De Gaulle, Churchill, and even Patton questioned his decision until Ike finally agreed that Devers should stop the Germans well short of the city.

After Nordwind, the 2nd French Armored went into reserve near Paris for rest and rebuilding. While fighting continued along the German border, other French units were cobbled together to keep contact with German garrisons holding French ports on the Atlantic. The French were mostly content to pin the Germans in their fortifications.

The exception was the Gironde Estuary, where de Gaulle wanted to open a port to help revive French overseas trade. A battle group of the 2nd was assigned to provide artillery and armored support to the attackers. The German garrisons surrendered on April 18; Germany surrendered May 8, so the sacrifice of lives is questionable.

The 2nd Armored's last action in WWII involved overrunning Germany as the last defensive lines crumbled. There was no pressing military need to add it to the forces moving across Germany, but the division deserved to be in on the kill.

Leclerc continued to serve France until his death on November 28, 1947, in an airplane crash in Algeria. But he is best known for creating a unit that had a proud record of achievement. ■

Oradour-Sur-Glane

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fanche, the sole survivor of the church, who generated the most emotion. Hospitalized for almost a year and mentally scarred for life, she detailed the agony of her story. Despite her traumas, she battled through to the age of 91, but the lone name on her tomb in Oradour cemetery suggests that the remains of her husband, her daughters and her grandson were not sufficiently identifiable to share the family grave.

After 32 hours of distressing questioning and testimony in the courtroom, a verdict was announced at 2:30 a.m. on Friday the 13th. The hour chosen was an attempt to reduce possible demonstrations outside the courtroom as emotions were running high while the trial continued.

The verdicts were: death to all the Germans tried in absentia and to the German adjutant Lenz, as the only officer to be rounded up, and to George Boos, the Alsatian who had volunteered for the SS. For the rest of the defendants, the sentences comprised several years of hard labor. The verdicts were unanimous except in the case of the Alsatian malgré nous. One more judge voting in their favor would have resulted in their acquittal.

The results were not received favorably in the Limousin region, or in Alsace, but for different reasons. There was a resurgence of the animosities present at the start of the trial and a bill was presented to the legislature for an amnesty that would acknowledge that the Alsatians were innocent by virtue of their enforced conscription.

This was eventually voted through, resulting in violent demonstrations in Limousin, including the return of the Légion d'Honneur presented to the people of Oradour by the President of France, and war memorials were covered in black cloth. The survivors and victims of Oradour felt betrayed.

No death penalties were ever applied to the defendants. The sentences imposed on Karl Lenz and Georges Boos were commuted and within six years they were free men. The divisional and regimental commanders, General Lammerding and Colonel Stadler, who claimed that the massacre was Diekmann's decision were never extradited.

The company commander, Captain Otto Kahn, despite being condemned to death for another war crime, was also never extradited and lived until 1977. His deputy, 2nd Lt. Heinz Barth was eventually arrested in 1981, and his death sentence was commuted to life imprisonment. He was released in 1997 on age and health grounds, but survived another 10 years, when he died at the age of 86.

Oradour today

Today, as in 1944, Oradour is well off the beaten track for tourists. For a determined visitor, an internal flight to Limoges and a 12-mile drive by taxi or rental car from the airport will provide the easiest method of access. The site is managed by the Centre de la Mémoire, which acts as a museum and information center. Visitors walk through the center and emerge from a tunnel facing the gates of the ruined town.

Everything has been kept as it was on June 10, 1944 except for the inconspicuous building supports placed in strategic places for safety reasons. The places of execution and other points of significance are respectfully signposted. Rusting cars and blackened walls add to the drama of the place. Visitors who may have walked through the town of Pompeii, now excavated after being overwhelmed by the volcano Vesuvius in Roman times, cannot fail to make a comparison with another community where life was cut short.

It was definitely the correct decision to leave the town where it fell and turn it into an open-air museum to remind us of what the human race is capable of doing to itself in wartime. Hundreds of thousands of visitors pass through its gates every year, despite its out-of-the-way location and then discover the new community that has risen phoenix-like beside the ruins.

It takes more than guns and bombs to kill a town like Oradour. ■

The author, who lives in Normandy, is a frequent contributor to WWII Quarterly.

Personality

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21st Panzer Division reported that Becker's unit has six 7.5cm Pak 40 vehicles mounted on the Hotchkiss chassis.

During October 1944, Sturmgeschütz Abteilung 200 was detached from the 21st Panzer-Division. At the end of November, Sturmgeschütz Abteilung 200 was reorganized into a standard assault-gun battalion with 22 Sturmgeschütz III (a fully tracked assault gun) and nine Sturmhaubitze (a version of the assault gun, armed with a 105mm light field howitzer). The six Hotchkiss anti-tank guns were transferred to Panzerjäger Abteilung 200 in the 21st Panzer Division.

During this time, Becker received his final commendations. On October 24, 1944, he received the Wound Badge in Silver for being wounded the fourth time in the war on August 1, 1944. On July 2, 1944, the 21st Panzer Division recommended Major Becker for the Knight's Cross of the War Merit Cross with Swords. It is not clear when he received this award as the original request was lost and had to be resubmitted in November. During this time he was also promoted to lieutenant colonel.

Alfred Becker was captured by the Allies in December 1944. He was released weeks after Germany surrendered in 1945, and asked the British authorities overseeing Krefeld for permission to reopen his textile plant. Permission was granted due to his outstanding war record and his treatment of French workers who worked at Baukommando Becker. The company is still run as a family-owned business today.

Becker kept extensive records concerning his experiences and projects during the war. In 1979, the British Ministry of Defense produced a training film concerning Operation Goodwood. They made use of these records and mentioned Becker and his unit extensively in the film. The film highlights how an inferior force can use defensive tactics and innovative weapons to thwart a much larger attacking force.

Alfred Becker died on December 26, 1981. ■

3rd Infantry Division

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30-minute fight against formidable armed hostile forces.

"In four hours of heroic action, 1st Lt. Burke single-handedly killed 11 and wounded three enemy soldiers, and took a leading role in engagements in which an additional 29 enemy were killed or wounded. His extraordinary bravery and superb fighting skill were an inspiration to his comrades, and his entirely voluntary mission into extremely dangerous territory hastened the fall of Nuremberg in his battalion's sector."

In a wooded area a few miles north of Nuremberg, on April 18, Private **Joseph F. Merrell,** from Staten Island, New York, was involved with his unit's (Company I, 15th Infantry) attempt to take a German-occupied hill. The company was pinned down by brutal fire.

Entirely on his own initiative, Merrell began a single-handed assault. He ran 100 yards through concentrated fire, somehow barely escaping death at each stride, and at point-blank range engaged four Germans, killing them all while bullets ripped through his uniform.

Continuing on, a sniper's bullet smashed his rifle, leaving him armed only with three grenades. Without hesitation, he zigzagged another 200 yards through heavy fire. Reaching a machine-gun nest, he hurled two grenades and then jumped into the gun emplacement, where he grabbed a Luger pistol and killed several Germans that had survived the grenade blast.

Rearmed, he crawled toward the second machine gun 30 yards away, killing four men in foxholes on the way, but himself receiving a critical wound in the abdomen.

And yet on he went, staggering, bleeding, disregarding bullets that ripped through his clothing and glanced off his helmet. He threw his last grenade into the second machine-gun nest and stumbled on to wipe out the crew just as an enemy bullet killed him.

His citation says, "In his spectacular, one-man attack, Pvt. Merrell killed six Germans in the first machine-gun emplacement, seven in the next, and an additional 10 infantrymen who were astride his path to the weapons which would have decimated his unit had he not assumed the burden of the assault and stormed the enemy positions with utter fearlessness, intrepidity of the highest order, and a willingness to sacrifice his own life so that his comrades could go on to victory."

The 3rd Division's 40th and final Medal of Honor was earned by 19-year-old 1st Lt. **Michael J. Daly** of Southport, Connecticut. Commanding Company A, 15th Infantry, Daly was leading his men through the shell-battered, sniper-infested wreckage of Nuremberg when a sudden burst of machine-gun fire caught his unit in an exposed position.

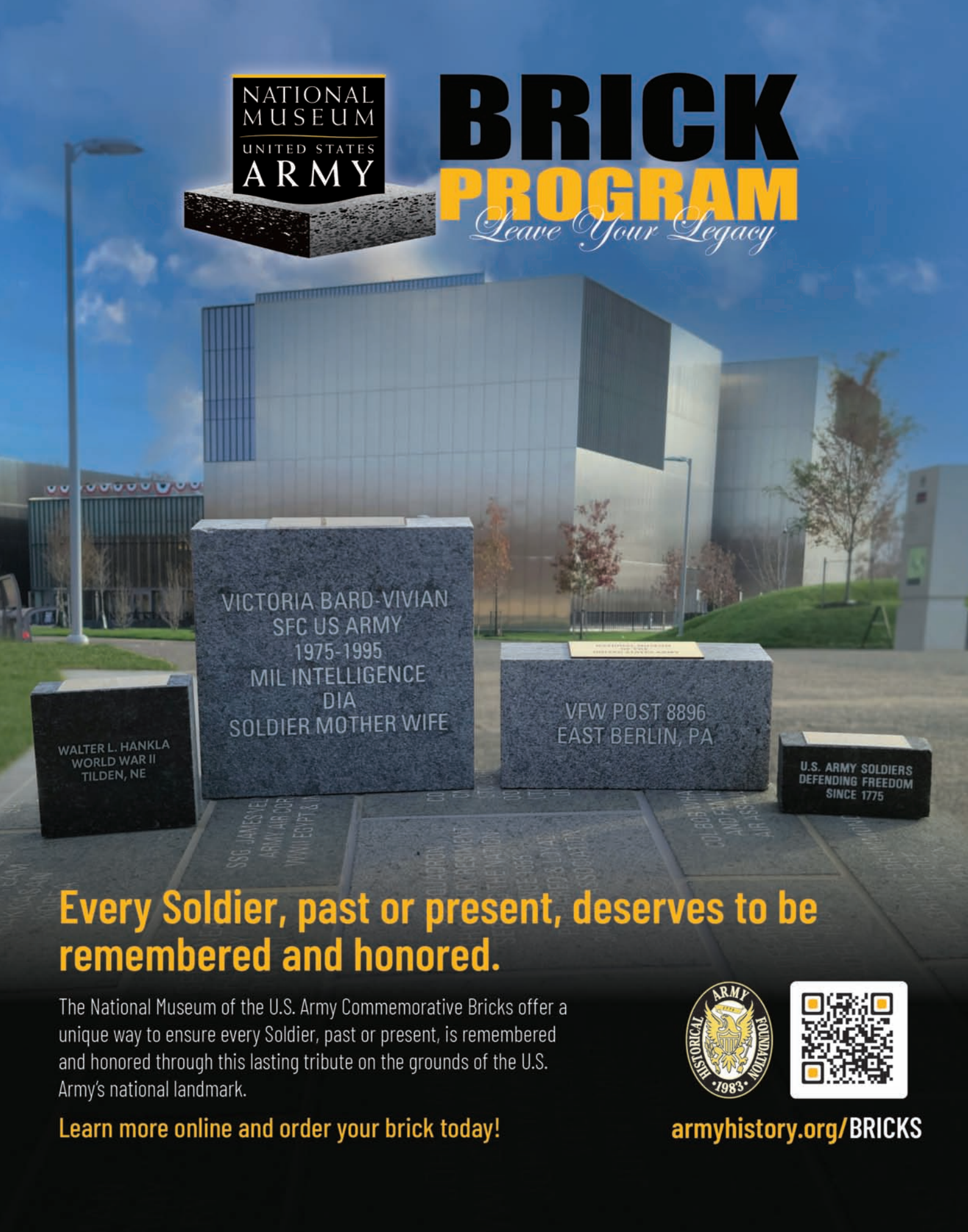
Ordering his men to take cover, Daly dashed forward alone, and, as bullets struck about him, shot the gun crew. Resuming the advance, he located a six-man enemy patrol armed with rocket launchers, which threatened friendly armor.

He again went forward alone to engage the patrol but became the target for their concentrated fire. Despite the danger, he calmly fired at the patrol until he had eliminated them all.

With his company struggling to keep up, Daly entered a park where a machine-gun crew, lying in wait, opened fire. Daly shot the gunner, then directed his men to take out the rest of the crew; they did.

In a final duel, Daly wiped out a third machine-gun emplacement with rifle fire at close range. By fearlessly engaging in four single-handed firefights, Lieutenant Daly, voluntarily taking all major risks himself and protecting his men at every opportunity, killed 15 Germans, silenced three enemy machine-guns, and wiped out an entire rocket-armed enemy patrol. His heroism during the lone bitter struggle with fanatical enemy forces was an inspiration to the valiant Americans who took Nuremberg.

Such was the heroism of the men of the 3rd Infantry Division, who performed their missions above and beyond the call of duty—often at the cost of their lives. ■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