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A U.S. Marine dashes up the beach on Okinawa. Photo courtesy of the National Archives. See photo essay on page 56.

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Three's a Charm.

WELCOME TO THE third issue of *WWII Quarterly*. We have put together an eclectic (and electric) line-up of features that we are sure will be of interest to all WWII buffs, no matter what your primary area of interest may be.

Within these pages, you'll find Al Vannoy's story of the constructing of Hitler's supposedly impregnable "Atlantic Wall" that he hoped would prevent an Allied invasion of Nazi-controlled Europe; a photo essay from author Eric Hammel's extensive collection of U.S. Marine Corps photographs; and Henrik Lunde's in-depth examination of the exceptionally violent but little-known 1944 victory by Finland and Germany over the Soviet Union.

Also here is a look at the courageous actions of a handful of American troops to capture the last intact bridge over the Rhine, along with an insightful article by Leila Levinson who was on a mission to discover why, even more than 65 years later, so many of the GIs who stumbled upon the Nazi concentration camps and liberated the living skeletons still find it so difficult to deal with the memories.

We have also included an article by Will Stroock on the controversial British commander "Mad Mike" Calvert and his 77th Chindit Brigade's hard-fought victory in Burma; a first-person look at racism in the U.S. Navy by Joseph LaNier II; and Mason Webb's update of the facts and rumors surrounding Deputy Führer Rudolf Hess's mysterious 1941 flight to Scotland—and his equally mysterious death at age 93 in Berlin's Spandau Prison.

Rounding out the issue is a look at the National World War II Museum in New Orleans—the first of a series of articles about the hundreds of military museums around the world devoted to preserving the artifacts and telling the history of World War II.

Just a little something for everyone—which is what we promise to do with each coming issue.

The broad spectrum of stories in this issue reinforces the fact that there is such a depth of intriguing, interesting information still out there about the war just waiting to be explored. While some of the information is familiar, much of it remains new and startling.

After all, just seven decades ago, hundreds of millions of people were greatly affected by the world's costliest, widest ranging, and most destructive man-made cataclysm of all time. Tens of millions of people served in uniform on one side or the other, and all of them have their own stories to tell about their experiences.

Flint Whitlock, Editor

ON THE BEACH

In September 2009, I was invited by the National Geographic Society to be the "military expert" accompanying a weeklong D-Day tour of southern England and northern France to visit sites related to the Allies' 1944 Normandy invasion.

While I had been to the area on several previous occasions, I was privileged to be allowed access to some sites I hadn't seen before, and to share information about the massive Operation Overlord with the 20 or so people on the trip, many of whom were visiting the sites for the first time.

We saw the places where the plans were made and the orders given. We stood on the wharves of Portsmouth harbor and could feel the great armada that set sail for the beaches of Normandy 65 years earlier. We crossed the same Channel that was once hull-to-hull with warships and stood on the sands where thousands of men fought their way ashore--or died trying. We wandered the quiet lanes of Ste. Mère-Église, where once American paratroopers dropped. We walked across Pegasus Bridge, held by a handful of British glider troops in the early, desperate hours of June 6, 1944. And we walked down the long, silent corridors between the graves of the young German, British, and Americans who died in the battle for Normandy.

Through the tour participants' eyes and questions we gained a new perspective on this, the largest combined air-and-amphibious combat assault of all time. We could see how awed they were by the enormity and complexity of the operation, and by the stories of the courage of the young men who risked (and sometimes gave) all in order to ensure (or, on the other side, prevent) an Allied victory.

As always, when visiting sites where world-changing events have taken place, one comes away feeling just a little more humble, and a little more grateful, because of what others accomplished for the sake of future generations.

In this, the 65th anniversary of the end of the most widespread and destructive war in human history, we hope that everyone will find a moment to think about those who served and fought for our precious freedoms--as well as for those young men and women who are fighting even now in the Middle East to preserve the blessings of liberty and end the tyranny of those who seek to destroy them.

Flint Whitlock

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Retired U.S. Army Colonel Henrik "Hank" Lunde was born in Norway and came to the U.S. as a young boy following World War II. After graduating from the University of California with a degree in history, he served in the Army and had three combat tours in Vietnam, where he received several awards for valor. He also was involved in the negotiations that ended the Vietnam War. He has authored several books and articles on military topics and is the author of Hitler's Pre-emptive War: The Battle for Norway, 1940 *(Casemate, 2009).*

Will Stroock is a professional writer with more than 45 publishing credits to his name including a novel, A Line Through the Desert, *about Operation Desert Storm. He is one of the editors of the Alexandrian Defense Group, a think tank dealing with insurgency and counterinsurgency issues. He is also an adjunct professor of history at Raritan Valley Community College. Stroock lives in northern New Jersey with his wife, Jenica, and their two daughters, Meriam and Lillianna.*

Allyn Vannoy writes from his home in Hillsboro, Oregon, where he works on wireless products for a large computer processor manufacturing company. When not hiking in the Cascades, he is a prodigious writer of military history. His previous works include co-authoring Against the Panzers: United States Infantry Versus German Tanks, 1944-1945: A History of Eight Battles Told Through Diaries, Unit Histories and Interviews.

Steven Weingartner writes from La Grange Park, Illinois. Portions of this article first appeared in Faithful Warriors: A Combat Marine Remembers the Pacifc War, *by Lt. Col. Dean Ladd, USMCR (ret.) and Steven Weingartner (Naval Institute Press, 2009). The author wishes to thank Naval Institute Press for allowing him to use the text extracted from that book, and the family of Larry Wade, especially Steven Motsinger, for their help and support in the writing of this article.*

Was Rudolf Hess Murdered?

IN 1979, DR. HUGH THOMAS, a British physician, came out with a highly controversial book that made the startling claim that Nazi Germany's Deputy Führer, Rudolf Hess, did not commit suicide in Berlin's Spandau Prison in 1987, but actually died in 1941, and that the man who died in prison was, in reality, Hess's double!

Since 1979, more research has been done regarding Thomas's astounding assertions, and a fresh look needs to be taken at the controversy.

First, who was Rudolf Hess? He was born in Alexandria, Egypt, the son of a German importer/exporter, on April 26, 1894. Moving back to Germany in 1904, the young Hess was schooled in Switzerland and was being prepared for a career in business. But the Great War derailed those plans. Hess enlisted in the 7th Bavarian Field Artillery Regiment and was sent to the front, where he earned the Iron Cross, second class. He suffered a chest wound and, after recuperating, was transferred to the Imperial Air Corps. He became a pilot in a Bavarian squadron and was promoted to lieutenant a few weeks before the war ended.

Greatly upset by Germany's capitulation, and still of a military mind, Hess settled in Munich and joined two paramilitary organizations. After hearing upstart Adolf Hitler speak in 1920, Hess joined the Nazi Party and became a devoted follower of Hitler, earning the future Führer's trust.

After Hitler and the Nazis tried and failed to overthrow the Bavarian government in November 1923, Hess and Hitler were both jailed at Landsberg Prison. There Hitler dictated his autobiography and vision for the future to Hess, who became his secretary.

Deputy Führer Rudolf Hess (left) and brownshirt chief of staff Victor Lutze watch SS troops marching by as Adolf Hitler gives the Nazi salute from his Mercedes-Benz 770K, Nuremberg, 1938.

After their release from prison, Hess, along with Heinrich Himmler and Hermann Göring, became one of Hitler's closest associates. It was Hess who would introduce Hitler at Nazi Party rallies, stirring up the masses to a fever pitch with prolonged shouts of "Sieg, Heil!" ("Hail, Victory!") like some demented cheerleader.

Shortly after Hitler became German Chancellor in January 1933, Hess was elevated to the position of Deputy Führer, but the title was more ceremonial than substantive, for the beetle-browed Hess, who often appeared to be nothing more than Hitler's dim-witted stooge, lacked the intelligence and cunning necessary to be a force within the Third Reich hierarchy. William Shirer, author of *The Rise and Fall of the Third Reich*, lumped Hess in with the "weird assortment of misfits" that characterized the leadership of Nazi Germany.

Yet Hitler was as faithful to his loyal follower as Hess was to him, and proclaimed that, should anything happen to both him and Göring, Hess would be next in line to become Führer.

After Germany invaded Poland on September 1, 1939, and France and Great Britain both declared war on Germany, Hess became agitated, because he had hoped that Britain would join Germany in a war against their common foe, the Soviet Union.

In May 1941, a month before the surprise invasion of the Soviet Union, Hess decided to take matters into his own hands and embark upon a secret mission that not even Hitler knew about or had authorized.

Taking off from the Messerschmitt factory airstrip in the Bavarian city of Augsburg on May 10, Hess flew a twin-engine Messerschmitt Bf 110E solo to Scotland in an attempt to negotiate peace with Britain. When he learned about Hess's flight, a furious Hitler dispatched German fighters to intercept him, but Hess had escaped German airspace.

After a four-hour journey of almost 1,000 miles, Hess crossed the British coast




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over Ainwick in Northumberland, managed to avoid being shot down by the RAF, then flew on toward his Scottish objective, Dungavel House, home of the pro-peace Duke of Hamilton. With his fuel supply running low, Hess parachuted out over Renfrewshire at 11 PM and broke his ankle upon landing at Floors Farm near Eglesham. A farmer took Hess into custody at the point of a pitchfork.

Detained by the local Home Guard and then transferred into Army custody, Hess asked to see the duke, whom he hoped would be sympathetic to his efforts to reach Prime Minister Winston Churchill; their meeting came to nothing.

Hess explained later to various interrogators that the purpose of his unannounced visit was simply to seek peace between Britain and Germany. Churchill derided Hess's naïve efforts as those of someone without all their mental faculties, and Hitler, too, issued a statement saying that Hess was mentally disordered and "a victim of hallucinations."

Remaining in custody throughout the war, mostly at Maindiff Court Military Hospital in Abergavenny, Wales, Hess became increasingly paranoid, believing that German agents were trying to kill him by poisoning his food.

In 1946, he was tried with the other surviving high-ranking Nazi officials by the International Military Tribunal at the Nuremberg War Crimes Trials, where he showed signs of amnesia and mental illness. He seemed to take little interest in the proceedings, often making incoherent statements and exhibiting odd behaviors in the courtroom.

Found guilty of "crimes against peace" and "conspiracy with other German leaders to commit crimes," he was sentenced to life in prison at Spandau Prison where, despite several requests for release on humanitarian grounds, he remained until his suicide in 1987.

The official news release about Hess' death said, "Rudolf Hess hung himself from the bar of the window of a small building in the prison garden, using the electric cord of a reading lamp. Efforts were made to resuscitate him. He was rushed to the British Military Hospital, where, after several further efforts, he was pronounced dead at 4:10 PM local time."

Such a factual statement should have been the end of the story but, as we shall see, a new chapter was just beginning.

Hess's strange attempt to bring about peace negotiations, the odd behavior at his trial, and his subsequent lifelong imprisonment have given rise to many bizarre explanations about his motivation for flying to Scotland, his long incarceration at Spandau as "Prisoner Number Seven" (the last two inmates held at Spandau, except for Hess, were former Third Reich Armaments Minister Albert Speer and former Hitler Youth leader Baldur von Schirach; they were freed in 1966), and questions surrounding his death. Conspiracy theories abound.

Dr. Hugh Thomas, who had been a physician at Spandau and had personally examined Hess closely on several occasions in 1973, has an explosive explanation: Spandau Prisoner Number Seven was actually a "double" for the real Hess!

It is now known that some high-ranking political and military figures in World War II used doubles—stand-ins who resembled the famous person. The use of look-alikes, "political decoys," or doppelgänger had several advantages; first, a double could attend functions such as social gatherings or review parades while the actual person attended to more important business. Second, enemy spies could be fooled into thinking the real person was in one location when, in fact, he would be entirely elsewhere. Third, in the event of an assassination attempt, it would be the double who would be killed or wounded, not the actual person.

British Field Marshal Sir Bernard Law Montgomery had a double who bore a striking resemblance to him—an Australian actor named M.E. Clifton James (he later wrote a book and starred in a movie with the same title, *I Was Monty's Double*). Winston Churchill apparently did not have a "body double," but, as rumor has it, had a "voice double"—Norman Shelley—whose manner of speaking was so close to Churchill's that some believe he made broadcasts over the BBC pretending to be the real prime minister. In Germany, SS chief Heinrich Himmler allegedly had a double, and Adolf Hitler also reportedly had several men who performed "double duty" from time to time.

In his book, Dr. Thomas said that he first became suspicious when he examined Hess and could find no sign of the scarring that Hess's World War I wounds would have left on his torso. According to Thomas, Hess's medical records said that he had been shot through the left lung, the bullet entering just above the left armpit and exiting between the spine and left shoulder. Such a wound would have left a visible mark, but Thomas found none.

(This finding of no scars appeared to be confirmed during the two separate autopsies that were performed on Hess's body; however, when Hess's full medical records were released, it was revealed that the bullet wound was in a different place than Thomas had claimed, and that scarring from the clean shot was likely minimal.)

Next, Thomas said that the prisoner had frequent bouts of sudden diarrhea whenever he was questioned by the authorities, and that he acted at other times as if he had amnesia. He refused to allow his wife and son to visit him until 1969—perhaps another sign, said Thomas, that Prisoner Number Seven was not, in fact, Hess; they would have immediately noticed dissimilarities between the real Hess and the double; the intervening 28 years would have dulled their memories.

Even the eventual visits by his family members brought no signs of recognition by the prisoner. Thomas said that such behavior is explainable because a double would not necessarily know all the details of the life of the person he is portraying; faking amnesia would absolve the double of his inability to recognize names, dates, and places brought up in conversation.

With suspicions about Prisoner Number Seven's true identity raising red flags in his mind, Thomas looked deeper into Hess's background. He reproduced a photograph in his book that purported to show Hess taking off from Augsburg on his fateful May 10 flight. The Bf 110E is shown without long-range drop-tanks, leading Thomas to surmise that the twin-engine plane could not have flown the entire distance from Bavaria to Scotland without refueling—and there is no indication that Hess landed to refuel.

That calculation led Thomas to another theory: that two aircraft were involved.

As "proof" of the latter supposition, Thomas cites the fact that the tail number of the photographed plane in which Hess allegedly flew from Augsburg was not the same as the tail number of the Messerschmitt that crashed in Scotland (today that tail is on display in the Imperial War Museum in London).

However, there is no assurance that the photo in the book of Hess supposedly taking off was a photo of his actual departure; he apparently took some 20 training flights in Bf 110E aircraft before departing for Scotland, so this photo could have been taken of any of them. And if he had flown in a Bf 110E with drop-tanks, he would have had a more-than-adequate range of 1,560 miles.

ABOVE: Rudolf Hess stands in the cockpit of the Me-110 he flew to Scotland prior to a test flight. OPPOSITE: While serving sentences in Landsberg Fortress prison for the 1923 Putsch, Hitler (left) and Hess (second from right) pose with fellow Nazi prisoners.

Thomas speculates that, once Hitler learned of Hess's flight (a flight he viewed as an act of treachery), he ordered Luftwaffe planes to shoot down the Deputy Führer. With the real Hess dead, Hess's double was then dispatched in a different plane from northern Germany and continued on to Scotland.

Of this theory, one author notes, "The claim is only credible if Göring and others had advance knowledge of the Hess flight, and opposed it, which raises the question of why Hess was allowed to take off from Augsburg in the first place. In the same vein, some have claimed that it would not have been possible for Hess to have flown over German territory without prior authorization, but this is convincingly countered by Roy Nesbit and Georges Van Acker in their book, *The Flight of Rudolf Hess* (1999)."

Further, in a postwar statement in his 1955 memoir, *The First and the Last,* Adolf Galland, the future Luftwaffe fighter ace, said that early in the evening of May 10, 1941, he and his entire group had been ordered by Göring to shoot down Hess's plane. Galland said that he sent up only a token force in response and that Hess was not shot down.

Eight years after Thomas's book came out, another bombshell struck: Hess and/or his double didn't commit suicide. His supposed double was murdered on August 17, 1987, to cover up the fact that he, the double, wasn't Hess!

It all started with a BBC broadcast on February 28, 1989, in which Abdallah Melaouhi, who had been Hess's medical attendant at Spandau since August 1982, contradicted the official suicide statement. Melaouhi said that when he entered the temporary summer house in the garden where Hess was said to have hanged himself, he saw that "everything was topsy-turvy, yet the [lamp] cord was in its normal place and still plugged into the wall." Two Americans in uniform were also there, further arousing the Tunisian orderly's suspicions.

Also throwing more fuel on the fire were Hess's son, Wolf Rüdiger Hess, and Alfred Seidl, Rudolf Hess's lawyer at the Nurem-

Continued on page 94

BUILDING *the* ATLA

Hitler did all in his power to create an inpenetrable "Fortress Europa" and prevent an Allied invasion—but it wasn't enough.

BY ALLYN VANNOY

THE POPULAR IMAGE of Hitler's Atlantic Wall (Atlantikwall) is one of massive bunkers and huge artillery pieces recessed in concrete casemates stretching the length of the Reich's coastline. It was anything but that.

Yet, while it was hardly a continuous series of defensive structures, or as formidable as Allied planners thought it to be, the Wall did give them pause when planning the assault on Fortress Europe.

Three elements constituted Germany's defenses along the Atlantic coast: fire-power, fortifications, and manpower. However, none of these could have been effective without proper leadership.

Much of the Wall's lethality was only added in the six months prior to the D-Day landing, due to the efforts of two men—Field Marshals von Rundstedt and Rommel.

The Wall included an estimated 15,000 reinforced-concrete structures: munitions bunkers, flak bunkers, troop shelters, infantry and artillery combat bunkers, communication bunkers, depot bunkers for storing supplies and crew-served weapons, combat headquarters bunkers with staff quarters, observation and command bunkers, battery fire-control positions, and support bunkers for machinery, searchlights, and power generators.

The Germans themselves came to think of the Wall primarily as that portion on the Dutch, Belgian, and French coasts, while defenses along the Norwegian, Danish, and German North Sea coasts consisted mainly of a series of separate fortresses or heavily protected gun emplacements.

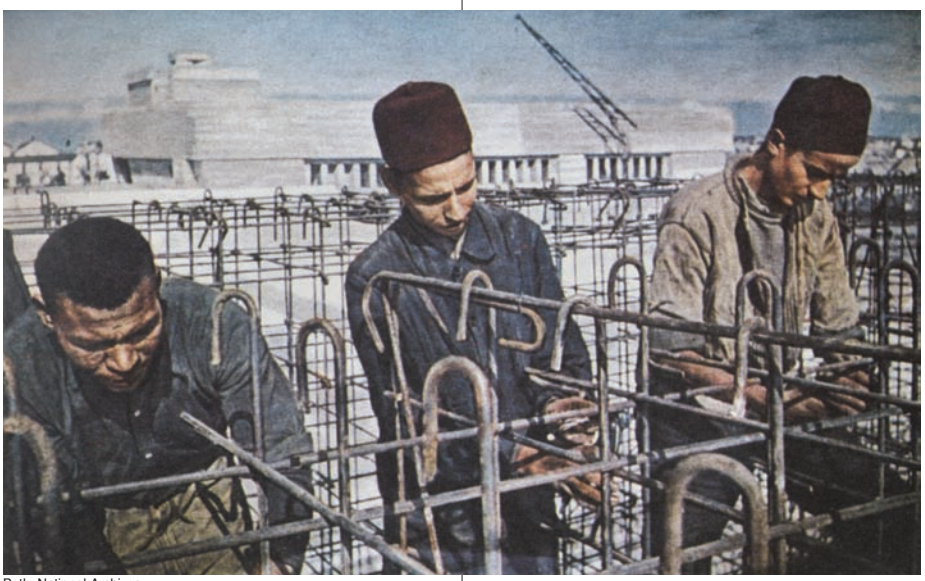
The core of the Wall was its coastal gun batteries. The number of batteries deployed by 1944 included 22 in Germany's Helgoland Bay, with 78 guns of over 150mm; 70 batteries along the Danish coastline with 293 large caliber guns; 225 batteries in Norway with approximately 1,000 guns of 100mm or larger caliber (42 of them of 240mm or larger), and 343 batteries along the French coast, which included 1,348 guns of 150mm or larger.

The Germans often published pictures of their Atlantic Wall fortifications for propaganda purposes in hopes of dissuading the Allies from invading. This dramatic photo of a daunting 406mm naval gun at Battery Lindemann, between Calais and Cap Blanc-Nez, appeared in *Signal*, the German Army magazine.

NTIC WALL

Some 495 artillery casemates or other emplacements were built for heavy artillery of 150mm or larger in the area of the German Fifteenth Army, north of the Seine River; about 200 in the Seventh Army area (Normandy and Brittany); and 65 in the First Army area, along the Bay of Biscay. The batteries included over two dozen different calibers of weapons ranging from 76mm to 406mm. Many were captured French guns, but also included Russian, British, Czech, Yugoslav, and Dutch as well.

The Atlantic Wall evolved in phases as the war took on changing circumstances for Germany. The first, or pre-Wall phase, lasted from the late summer of 1940 to December 1941, when reverses on the Eastern Front forced Hitler to alter his timetable for the war. Defensive efforts were confined mainly to protecting submarine bases and to guarding against possible British commando raids.



Both: National Archives

The second phase lasted from December 1941 to October 28, 1943, and was marked by the creation of the Atlantic Wall concept. It involved setting up a system of fortifications that would make it possible for the Wehrmacht to free up troops for tasks elsewhere—defensive installations and firepower serving as substitutes for manpower.

The third phase began in October 1943, following Field Marshal Gerd von Rundstedt's situation report to the Führer on the West's defenses, and lasted until the Normandy landing in June 1944. By then, the Germans, in spite of their dwindling resources, had assembled a fairly impressive force behind a substantially improved line of coastal defenses—a system that they hoped would be sufficient to turn back an invasion.

The third element of the Atlantic Wall was the manpower or units deployed to defend it. From 1940 through 1941, Army Group D, under Field Marshal Erwin von Witzleben, had a small number of divisions stationed in the Netherlands, Belgium, and occupied France.

In the spring of 1942, when Field Marshal von Rundstedt took over command, the number of divisions in the area began to increase; however, many of the units were sent there primarily to rest and rebuild after suffering heavy losses on the Eastern Front.

Von Rundstedt complained that the Atlantic Wall was nothing but a gigantic bluff, a "propaganda wall." After the war, he made a number of damning remarks about the Atlantic Wall: "The enemy probably knew more about it than we did ourselves." He did believe that it was a formidable barrier from the Scheldt to the Seine, "but further than that—one has only to look at it for one's self in Normandy to see what rubbish it was."

He also described the Wall south of the Gironde toward the Spanish border as "a dreary situation" because "there was really nothing at all there." Gloomily, he stated that, "It doesn't suffice to build a few pillboxes. One needs defense in depth."

Von Rundstedt was less concerned about the unfortified stretches of beach than about the number and quality of his troops to defend the wall, and the strength of his reserves. "Moreover," he said, "the requisite forces were lacking—we couldn't have manned them, even if fortifications had been there."

With a few exceptions, the coastal divisions were at less than full strength and of inferior quality, made up of untrained youth, men in their late 30s or older, and others deemed unfit for frontline combat duty. They were supplemented by Volksdeutsche—ethnic Germans from across Europe—and by non-Germans recruited from the occupied territories, as well as Soviet prisoners-of-war.

Foreign troops taken into the German forces from Russia, called Osttruppen, included various ethnic groups—Cossacks, Armenians, Georgians, Ukrainians, Azerbaijanis, and Turkomans. They were formed into battalions separated by religion and ethnicity and placed under German officers, and were generally treated as second-class soldiers. By the end of 1943, there were one or two Ost battalions in almost every German coastal unit.

The coastal divisions' weapons and equipment were also less than first rate, much of it foreign made and obsolete. There was also a severe shortage of tanks, and many units were designated "static divisions," as they lacked even horse-drawn transport.

ullstein bild

To make matters worse, von Rundstedt commanded only Army troops; he had no authority over the few assets of the Luftwaffe and Kriegsmarine in the West, or over Waffen-SS units.

Preliminary work began on the Atlantic Wall in the late summer of 1940 as the Luftwaffe and Kriegsmarine established defenses at key ports and airfields to protect facilities for Operation Sea Lion, the planned invasion of Britain, from air raids and possible naval bombardment. The Army also brought up heavy batteries to the Pas de Calais with orders to clear mine-free paths for the planned invasion crossing and to protect the coastal area.

During September 1940, construction began on the first of three large, concrete-dome bunkers for heavy rail guns in the Pas de Calais area. These bunkers were built with armored doors and were large enough to house two 280mm guns and a locomotive.

One such bunker was situated northwest of Calais, about one kilometer from the coast. Another was sited at Vallée Heureuse, about four kilometers east of Marquise, almost halfway between Calais and Boulogne, some six kilometers from the coast. A third was placed one kilometer north of Wimereux, five kilometers north of Boulogne, near the coast. A fourth bunker, larger than the others, was built later to house a rail-gun battery not far from the first dome bunker near Calais.

As guns were transferred from German coastal positions along the North Sea and Baltic, and from the border-guarding Westwall, the first concrete mounts were completed in November 1940. Most of these weapons were installed in huge casemates or mounted on concrete emplacements. Heavy naval guns were mounted in turrets with some placed in concrete casemates with their turrets. Defensive support or protective combat bunkers and munitions bunkers were also built to service the guns.

ABOVE: Not all the workers were willing. Here, conscripted laborers from a German-occupied country are put to work in May 1942. OPPOSITE TOP: More than a quarter million foreign workers, such as these Turks tying together reinforcing steel bars, provided much of the manpower to construct the fortifications. OPPOSITE BOTTOM: Dr. Fritz Todt (left) and Albert Speer supervised construction of the Atlantic Wall. Todt died in a mysterious plane explosion on February 8, 1942.

Technical work on facilities and structures was the responsibility of the Organisation Todt (OT)—a civil and military engineering group responsible for the design and construction of the prewar Autobahn system and the Westwall (Siegfried Line) along the French-German border. OT was later absorbed into the Ministry for Armaments and War Production (Reichsministerium für Rüstung und Kriegsproduktion).

Construction work along the coast in 1941 was primarily devoted to the building of coastal batteries and U-boat bases. Most of the concrete used went into submarine pens and the second largest amount to Luftwaffe airfields and installations.

On March 28, 1942, Führer Directive No. 40 called for the creation of the Atlantic Wall. Long-range coastal batteries were to be placed to protect important harbors as well as military and industrial targets in coastal areas. In addition to preventing landings, importance was also placed on safeguarding the sea entrances of protected

ullstein bild

ABOVE: Another view of one of the 406mm naval guns while being installed at Battery Lindemann. The gun had a range of between 29 and 34 miles. OPPOSITE: A type 671 casemate, holding a 105mm gun, disguised to look like a seaside home. Note the detailed false windows, curtains, balustrade, and corner stones.

waterways. The concern was that any interruption of coastal shipping could have serious consequences.

Von Rundstedt, the commander of the German Army in the West—Ob West (Oberbefehlshaber West), issued orders during May 1942, based on Directive No. 40, which established the organization of the coastal defenses in a hierarchy from *Festungen* (fortresses) with heavy and super-heavy guns placed in reinforced concrete structures, then *Verteidigungsbereiche* (defense sector), followed by *Stützpunkt-gruppen* (strongpoint group), *Stützpunkt* (strongpoint), down to *Widerstandnester* (resistance nest, or WN).

A "strongpoint group" consisted of two or more strongpoints of either infantry or artillery types. An infantry strongpoint consisted of several infantry positions with crew-served weapons, while artillery strongpoints consisted of a battery of artillery or anti-aircraft weapons.

The strongpoint included concrete works for various types of weapons, munitions storage, command posts, and troop shelters. Large strongpoints could include more specialized types of bunkers such as for medical facilities or a communications center. The strongpoints were designed for all-around defense, protected with barbed-wire obstacles and minefields. They were normally occupied by a reinforced platoon, some by company-size formations. These positions were stocked with sufficient supplies to operate for about two weeks without resupply. A strongpoint group could generally accommodate a battalion-size force and held enough stores to maintain operations for up to four weeks.

The layout and structures varied among strongpoints. One strongpoint group consisted of an infantry position with an 88mm gun casemate, a 75mm gun casemate, a 50mm antitank gun casemate, three Tobruk or Ringstände (a small open circular position, dug-in flush to the ground and camouflaged) mortar emplacements, two field positions for mortars, two machine-gun bunkers, three Tobruks for machine guns, one

concrete machine-gun emplacement, and 10 field positions for machine guns. In addition to mines and barbed wire, the group included an antitank wall that barred the exit from the beach.

Another strongpoint infantry position consisted of a Renault tank turret mounted on a concrete bunker, two field positions for 75mm guns, four concrete mortar emplacements, a field position for a machine gun, another for an antiaircraft gun, and six stationary flamethrowers—all surrounded by an assortment of mines and wire barriers.

In contrast, a strongpoint artillery position included five concrete emplacements for 155mm guns, six field emplacements for 75 to 155mm guns, an observation post, two concrete mortar positions, seven Tobruks for machine guns, and a searchlight.

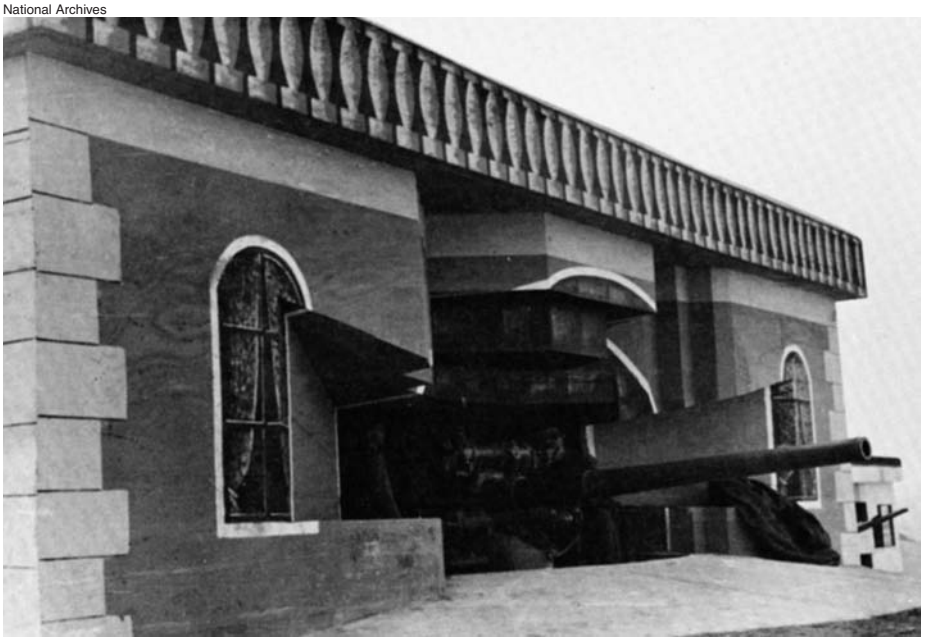
The *Widerstandnester* was the smallest defensive position. It could be found alone or as part of a defense sector or fortress. Resistance nests included infantry positions garrisoned by one or two infantry squads with enough supplies to hold out for a week. They might include at least one antitank gun, several machine gun and mortar positions, and usually a few concrete bunkers. They were set up for all-around defense with barbed-wire, minefields, and trenches.

Another fortress was built around Cherbourg, one of the largest ports in France. Its batteries included guns ranging in size from 105mm to 240mm. The city's vintage forts on the mole were integrated into the German defenses.

In August 1942, the Canadian 2nd Infantry Division and British Commandos assaulted the French port of Dieppe in a large-scale raid. While the raid failed to achieve many of its objectives and suffered heavy losses, it caused Hitler to direct changes in the number of Atlantic Wall positions. He ordered the completion of 15,000 positions before the summer of 1943, but OT engineers reported that only 40 percent of this number could be achieved by the target date. By December 1942, about 5,000 structures had been completed, and by June 1943 the number would reach over 8,000.

Construction proceeded apace. By April 1943, seven times as much concrete was poured on Atlantic Wall sites as in May 1942 (780,000 versus 110,000 cubic meters), a month that had seen the amount double from March 1942 (50,000 cubic meters). But U-boat pen construction consumed 80 to 130,000 cubic meters a month during this period, despite complaints from the Army.

National Archives



Each of 15 defense sectors in Western Europe were centered around key locales. In France, these included Royen, La Pallice-La Rochelle, St. Nazaire, Lorient, Brest, St. Malo, Le Havre, Boulogne, Calais, and Dunkirk.

Ostend served as the key defense sector in Belgium. On the Belgian coast, the area around Zeebrügge was heavily protected by several heavy batteries that included 155mm, 170mm, 203mm, and 280mm guns.

The Dutch coastal defense sectors included Vlissingen, encompassing the islands of the Scheldt Estuary, the Hook of Holland (Hoek van Holland), Ijmuiden, and Den Helder, and contained some of the Wall's heaviest defenses. Verteidigungsbereiche Den Helder had two batteries of 120mm guns, one battery of French 194mm guns, and several 105mm guns. The next most heavily defended area was at Ijmuiden, a *Festung* with several batteries of naval guns ranging from 120mm to 170mm.

The old fort of Hoek van Holland contained several batteries from 120mm to 280mm. Behind the fort, to the south, was Battery Brandenburg, which had two 240mm guns in turret-mounted casemates. Battery Rozenburg, to the rear of Battery Brandenburg, had three 280mm guns from the battle cruiser *Gneisenau*, mounted individually in turrets on casemates. The battery's strongpoint included a range finder mounted on a tower about 30 meters high. It also had three munitions bunkers, troop shelters, searchlight bunkers, and positions for close defense. The fortress itself included about 14 strongpoints and 40 resistance nests. Many of the strongpoints had an artillery battery and supporting positions, while

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ABOVE: After Field Marshal Erwin Rommel (with baton) was appointed to command Army Group B in late 1943, he had responsibility for defending 1,300 miles of coastline. OPPOSITE: The Todt Battery, a German heavy defensive battery on the Channel coast, named after Fritz Todt, Reich Minister of Armaments and Munitions.

most of the resistance nests consisted of from two to over a dozen bunkers. The resistance nests contained troop shelters and bunkers for close defense—casemates for machine guns and antitank guns.

Of the islands at the mouth of the Scheldt and Rhine Rivers, Walchern was the most heavily defended and included a number of medium artillery batteries as well as a couple of heavy batteries.

Gaps between defense sectors all along the line were to be covered by strongpoint groups, strongpoints, or resistance nests. The area between the mouth of the Somme and the Belgian border consisted mainly of side-by-side defense sectors.

It was France that had the longest coastline and thus the greatest number of installations. The Pas de Calais, between Dunkirk and Étaples, was one of the most heavily defended portions of the Wall and included three sectors under LXXXII Army Corps. One sector included Festung Dunkirk with several heavy batteries, over 20 strongpoints and more than 10 resistance nests.

In the sector between Dunkirk and Boulogne, there were nine positions with dome bunkers for heavy railway guns, most of which were 280mm. In addition to the guns were some of the largest super heavy artillery in the West. East of Calais was Battery Oldenburg with two 240mm guns, Bastion II with three 194mm French guns, Battery Prinz Heinrich with two 280mm guns just outside Calais, and Battery Lindemann with three 406mm guns between Calais and Cap-Blanc-Nez. The Lindemann guns were emplaced individually in turrets, protected by massive concrete casements four meters thick. By 1944, these guns had fired some 2,226 shells at Dover.

In the vicinity of Gris Nez was the massive Battery Todt with four 380mm guns and Battery Grosser Kurfürst with four 280mm guns. At Fortress Boulogne were several batteries, mostly medium, and Battery Friedrich August had three 305mm guns, over 20 strongpoints, and more than 15 resistance nests. To the north, the fortress was anchored at the coast by three strongpoints forming the La Crèche position.

Farther down the coast, in the Fifteenth Army sector, was the fortress at Le Havre. Its heaviest battery, the naval battery of La Corvée, located at Bléville, on the north side of Le Havre, was planned to consist of three 380mm guns in casemates; however, only one piece was ever mounted. The fortress did consist of many strongpoints and resistance nests, including over 20 resistance nests forming Stützpunktgruppe Nord and Ost, which covered the landward side of the fortress.

Stützpunktgruppe Ost encompassed a large flooded area with most of the area on its flanks protected by large minefields. The front of Stützpunktgruppe Nord included a very large minefield running across half its length, with an antitank ditch extending from one side of the minefield to the coast. Another antitank ditch covered a gap from the first

minefield and the minefield of the Ost group. Stützpunktgruppe Süd covered most of the coastline of the fortress.

Next, at Le Tréport, were several strongpoints that included two batteries of three 170mm guns each, as well as radar for detecting ships and for fire control of the batteries.

Farther west, Battery St. Marcouf, with Czech 210mm guns at Crisbecq, protected the east side of the Cotentin Peninsula.

Another fortress was built around Cherbourg, one of the largest ports in France. Its batteries included guns ranging in size from 105mm to 240mm. The city's vintage forts on the mole were integrated into the German defenses. Old forts surrounding the city were used to form an inner defense belt. Fort Roule, on a large hill overlooking the city, was heavily defended and below it was a battery of 105mm guns in casemates built into the hill. It wasn't until 1944 that the Germans began to work on defenses on the landward side—on the outer belt—which was to serve as the primary defense line. This belt followed the crest of the surrounding heights; however, only a scattering of positions were completed.

The west side of the Cotentin Peninsula was protected by the Channel Islands—Guernsey, Jersey, and Alderney, which the Germans had taken from the British in 1940. On Guernsey was the heavy Battery Mirus with four 305mm guns, and a few batteries with 210mm and 220mm guns. Jersey also had 210mm howitzer batteries and a 220mm gun battery, while Alderney's heaviest battery was one of 170mm naval guns. By the summer of 1944, over 300 bunkers for artillery, observation, fire control, munitions, machine guns, and a tunnel system were built on the islands. Several kilometers of concrete antitank walls and old granite seawalls protected the beaches.

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The next group of heavy defenses began in Brittany near St. Malo. St. Malo, Brest, and Lorient were heavily defended fortresses. Brest, where the Germans used the old fortifications and added numerous strongpoints and resistance nests, was probably one of the most heavily protected fortresses in France. Lorient, one of the most important U-boats bases on the Atlantic, was also heavily fortified. The mouth of the Loire was covered by a number of artillery batteries, and at St. Nazaire a huge naval fortress occupied both sides of the river to guard against naval incursions against the submarine pens and the world's largest drydock.

The remainder of the French Atlantic coast, under the First Army, included fortifications at La Pallice-La Rochelle. A *Verteidigungsbereich* was built that included not only the area around the city and port, but also the islands of Ré and Oleron. Few of the batteries along the First Army coast were heavier than 155mm. The most heavily fortified point was the mouth of the Gironde, which had a fortress on each side to protect the port of Bordeaux.

On paper, the Atlantic Wall looked more than formidable—it looked impregnable. If both the Germans and the Allies believed it to be so, it is not hard to image why.

German building programs slowed during the second half of 1943. Part of the reason was due to the shifting of OT laborers to other projects, including repairs to bombed dams in the Ruhr and the construction of a bauxite mine in southern France.

Development of the Wall was also affected as OT favored focusing on building single, large defense projects because it did not have enough motor vehicles to move men and equipment from place to place. This lack of vehicles also made OT officials reluctant to undertake projects away from major supply centers and railheads. The Army did not have direct control over OT, so Army planners could only suggest projects.

Construction was also impacted by interservice frictions between the Army and Navy over the positioning and command of the coastal artillery batteries during 1941 and early 1942. Directive No. 40 provided clarification in that Ob West was to select a commander for each coastal sector. In most instances, this meant that a local Army division commander was put in charge, but in certain areas, especially at naval strongpoints, Kriegsmarine officers assumed control.

During 1943, Ob West ordered the creation of positions up to 15 kilometers behind the coastal defenses. Existing defenses extended no more than three to five kilometers in depth, even in the most heavily defended sectors. Von Rundstedt disagreed with Hitler, who expected the enemy to be destroyed at the landing site either by defeating him before he achieved a foothold or, failing that, by launching an

immediate counterattack. The field marshal did not believe that the initial invasion would be smashed on the beaches and felt that mobile reserve forces should be able to concentrate and defeat the enemy after he moved inland.

To effect this, von Rundstedt wanted to create secondary positions, which would consist mainly of support points and strongpoints that could be used to contain the enemy and allow time for an effective counteroffensive. However, insufficient manpower was assigned to the building of these secondary positions and so construction proceeded very slowly.

One of the keys that impacted the Atlantikwall's development was von Rundstedt's situation report to the German Armed Forces High Command (OKW) of October 28, 1943—a critical report that cited a number of shortcomings of the Wall and the Reich's defenses in the West.

Von Rundstedt's report evaluated how the Wehrmacht might best make use of its defenses when faced with an enemy who possessed both naval and air superiority. Even though permanent fortifications—built out of concrete and well constructed, camouflaged, and field-type installations—were essential for the impeding battle, von Rundstedt warned that the German High Command should not be deluded into thinking that these obstacles made the Atlantic Wall impregnable. He felt that by making his forces more mobile he could minimize the probably of an Allied success in the West. The report also emphasized the need for more and better equipped personnel.

In terms of numbers, von Rundstedt declared that the strength of the Kriegsmarine and the Luftwaffe formations was clearly insufficient to counter growing Allied air and sea superiority. Furthermore, naval and air force artillery units, whose crews were working in close conjunction with the Army, lacked sufficient ammunition and equipment.

He asserted that the Army units available were weak and needed to be revitalized, and that there was too much area to cover with the forces available. By October 1942, 22 infantry divisions had been deployed along the coast. All these units had been well equipped and most of them had three full-trained regiments and a full complement of 36 artillery pieces. In reserve were seven panzer and motorized divisions of excellent quality, plus six more infantry divisions.

In October 1943, although 27 divisions were now stationed along the Atlantic coast, plus 400 miles of French Mediterranean coastline, many of the formations were much too weak in artillery and consisted of only two inexperienced and largely immobile infantry regiments. Of the reserve forces, all six panzer and motorized divisions were still in the process of being formed or were being refitted after service on the Russian Front. The seven infantry units in the interior consisted of only two reserve divisions of marginal value, two divisions forming, and three reinforced regiments.

Dr. Fritz Todt, Germany's Construction King

Born in Pforzheim, Germany, on September 4, 1891, Fritz Todt was the son of a small-factory owner. Showing an early aptitude for engineering and mathematics, he studied engineering in Karlsruhe and then at Munich's School for Advanced Technical Studies.

When World War I broke out, he joined the infantry and then became an observer with the air force, earning the Iron Cross. After the war, Todt resumed his engineering studies before joining the firm of Sager and Woerner, a company that specialized in building roads and tunnels.

In 1922, Todt joined the Nazi Party and later the SS. In 1930, a paper he published, "Proposals and Financial Plans for the Employment of One Million Men," impressed Hitler and, when he became German Chancellor in 1933, he appointed Todt to head a new, state-owned corporation that was given the task of creating a revolutionary national highway system, the Autobahn. This massive construction project did much to alleviate the effects of the Great Depression in Germany and put millions of unemployed Germans back to work, further solidifying Hitler's early popularity.

Todt knew that the Autobahn network was something important and spectacular. He said, "In these highways, our engineering will reflect the National Socialist movement. These roads do not serve transportation alone; they also bind our Fatherland."

With more government contracts arriving monthly on his desk, in 1938 Todt created Organisation Todt (OT), a huge engineering and construction enterprise that combined government firms, private companies, and the Reichsarbeitsdienst (RAD).

Then, with war on the horizon, Hitler directed Todt to begin designing and constructing the Westwall–what the British and Americans called the "Siegfried Line"–a connected system of bunkers and strongpoints along Germany's borders with France, Luxembourg, Belgium, and Holland that would rival France's Maginot Line.

In 1940 Todt was appointed Reich Minister for Munitions, and in 1941, after the invasion of the Soviet Union, was given the responsibility of restoring the road and rail system in the USSR. Hitler also made him head of the Main Office for Technology, and all of the Third Reich's major technical, engineering, and construction projects that involved Germany's war effort fell into his hands.

As a reward for Todt's achievement in building both the Autobahn and the Westwall border defenses, Hitler awarded him the very first "German Order" medal, specially created by Hitler to recognize individuals who had rendered "special services to the German people."

But Todt's growing importance within the Third Reich and his closeness to Hitler were not favorably regarded by Hermann Göring and Martin Bormann; an intense rivalry sprang up.

Not long after OT was given the contract to begin work on the Atlantic Wall, the largest defensive system since the Great Wall of China, Fritz Todt met an untimely and mysterious end. He died on February 8, 1942, when the plane in which he was riding exploded shortly after taking off from Hitler's "Wolf's Lair" headquarters in East Prussia. He was replaced as Minister of Munitions by Albert Speer who had, at the last moment, cancelled flying on the same plane as Todt.

Were Göring and Bormann somehow responsible for Todt's death? The world may never know. □

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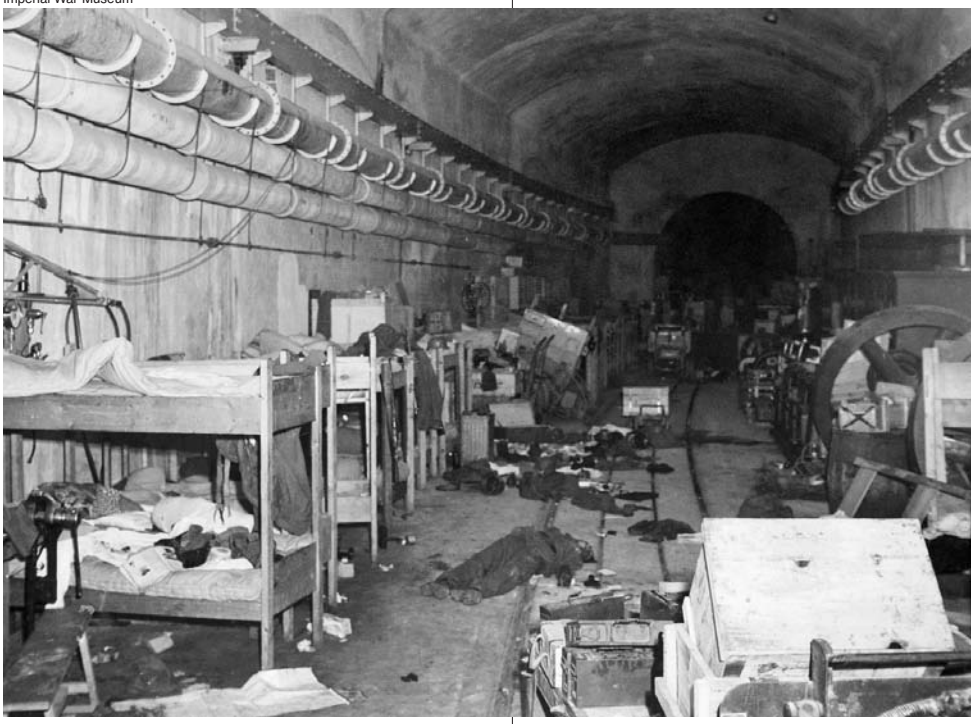

Even reinforced concrete several yards thick was often an insufficient defense. Here, several German soldiers lie dead inside the underground sleeping quarters at the Cherbourg fortress, June 27, 1944.

Von Rundstedt concluded his report by stating that the divisions manning the coast had to be strengthened to the normal complement of three regiments, sufficient antitank weapons needed to be provided, adequate supply personnel had to be added, and, finally, substantial portions of these divisions needed more vehicles to be made mobile.

On November 3, 1943, a week after von Rundstedt's report was submitted, Hitler issued Directive No. 51, which resulted in a flurry of activity among German planners during the last two months of 1943. Ob West made plans for making the coastal divisions mobile, as well as for upgrading the panzer formations in the theater.

Also set forth was an ambitious building program for 1944 that included the erection and improvement of numerous permanent and field-type fortifications. The Kriegsmarine also took steps to add more ships, mines, and artillery pieces to its defensive arsenal.

Following an inspection tour of German coastal defenses as directed by the Führer, Field Marshal Erwin Rommel was assigned to command Army Group B, subordinate to Ob West, covering the French, Belgian, and Dutch coastlines, and work on the Atlantic Wall took a new direction and greater urgency. The gaps between the defense zones were to be closed. By this time, major construction work on large concrete structures, such as submarine pens, had almost come to an end, but the amount of labor from the OT and RAD (Reichsarbeitdienst—the National Labor Service) and the availability of construction materials was severely curtailed.

Damage caused by the Allied bombing campaign in 1944 had increased the demand for labor and material at home for repairs and maintenance of infrastructure, leaving little for the West. Allied air attacks against transportation lines and communications centers also prevented the few available resources from reaching the West in a timely manner. Much of the concrete available was also earmarked for the construction of V-weapons' launching sites. Despite this, Rommel was able to push construction to highs not seen since mid-1943.

To Rommel, the main line of resistance had to be the coast. The invading enemy was to be engaged in force on or near the coastline and prevented from establishing a bridgehead. To accomplish this, Rommel advocated a number of measures, including extensive use of naval and land mines, beach obstacles, as well as continuing to strengthen strongpoints. Also, Panzer divisions were to be placed as far forward as possible so that they could launch an immediate counterattack against any major Allied assault.

Rommel and von Rundstedt realized that if the Atlantic Wall were to have any chance of success they would have to do more than just strengthen the existing coastal fortifications—they would need a substantial upgrade in the number and quality of personnel and weapons. Any one of these undertakings presented a formidable task at this stage of the war.

Despite this, they managed to realize considerable progress during the first five months of 1944, and the improvements would have been greater had there not been the demands of other high-priority projects and a series of crises in other theaters.

The buildup was most noticeable in terms of coastal fortifications. One plan consisted of improving the existing permanent defenses. A second program was to construct a system of secondary defenses some 15 to 25 miles inland from the coast. And a third program—the one with which Rommel became most closely associated—called for a substantial increase in the number of field fortifications being placed on or near the beaches, thus making the Wall a comprehensive system of fortifications.

In terms of permanent fortifications, the Germans continued to concentrate a substantial portion of their heavy construction work near the major ports. Hitler went so far as to declare 11 of the ports "Fortresses" (*Festungen*) on January 19, 1944.

Singled out were Ijmuiden and the Hook of Holland in the Netherlands; Dunkirk, Boulogne, and Le Havre in the Fifteenth

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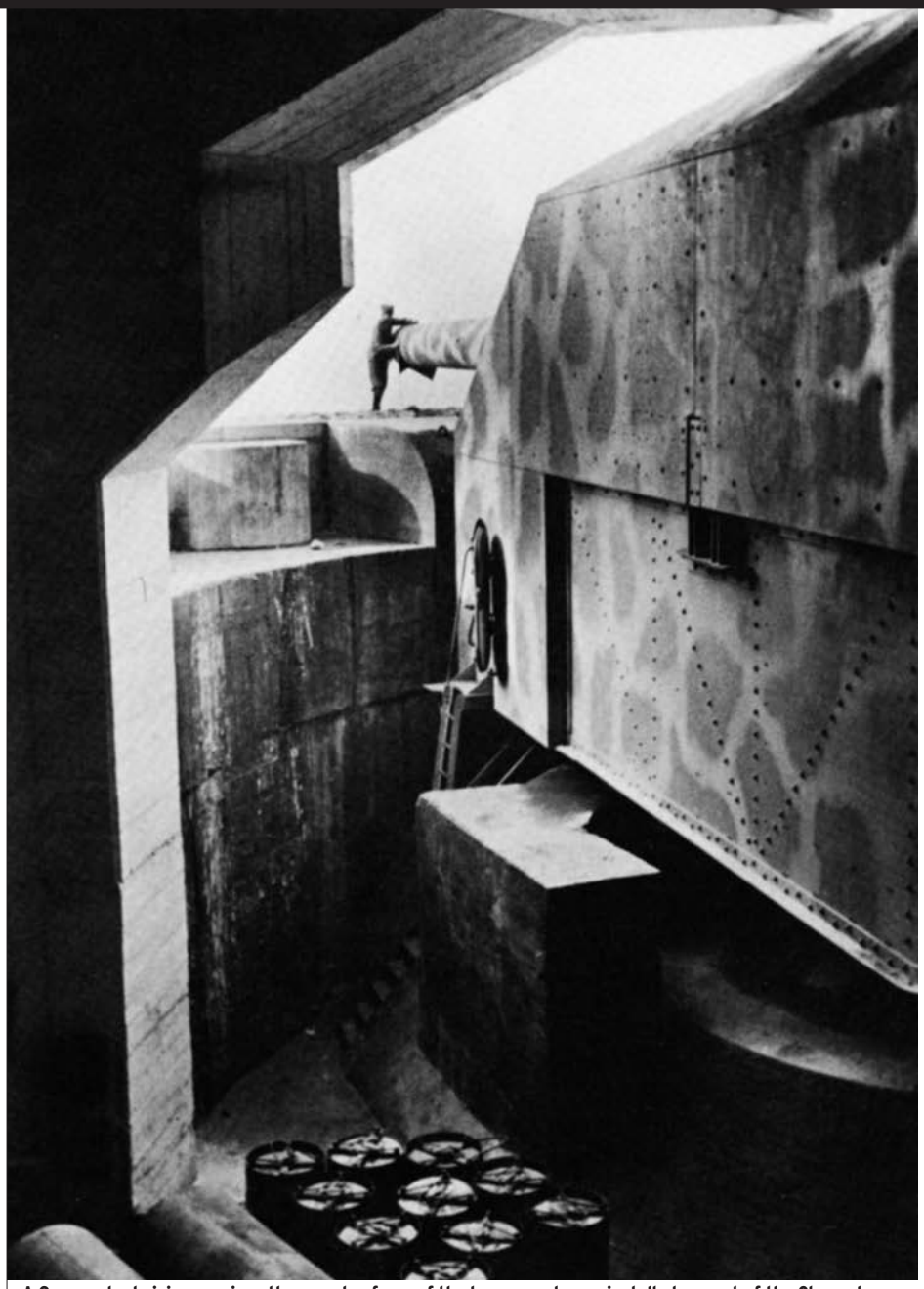

A German technician services the muzzle of one of the large naval guns installed as part of the Channel coastal defenses. Note the cased shells in the foreground.

Army sector along the Channel; Cherbourg, St. Malo, Brest, Lorient, and St. Nazaire in the Seventh Army area; and the Gironde River estuary that led to Bordeaux in the First Army area.

During February and March, OKW added three more—the Channel Islands and the harbors of Calais and La Pallice-La Rochelle. Designation as a *Festung* was rather hollow since most of them had already been declared defense areas in 1942, and had therefore already been given considerable attention.

Inside both the fortresses and the coastal strongpoints, engineering troops and OT workers proceeded to improve the heavy infantry weapon positions, the command posts, and even machine-gun nests as well as many of the coastal artillery batteries that were exposed. OT also began moving artillery pieces to make the guns less susceptible to Allied air and ship bombardments, and worked to camouflage existing batteries and construct dummy positions.

Local commanders lent a hand by reducing the number of hours that troops spent in combat training and had them assist in construction efforts. The soldiers worked to improve strongpoints using sea walls, ship canals, and old ramparts—filling in the gaps between with field defenses, preparing real and bogus minefields, setting up barbed-wire entanglements, and digging antitank ditches.

By effectively utilizing the men and materiel at their disposal, the Germans made considerable strides in building up defenses prior to the Allies' D-Day. During the first four months of 1944, the number of cubic meters of concrete laid by OT doubled from 357,000 to 722,100 per month. From 1941 to the end of 1943, the Germans had erected some 8,478 concrete structures along the Channel and Atlantic coasts, but from January to May 1944, over 4,600 hardened fortifications were erected, including those on the French Mediterranean coast.

Rommel also introduced his own ideas about beach obstacles, which were to be covered by light and medium guns and machine guns in order to turn every foot of shoreline into a killing ground. He placed a premium on laying minefields and beach obstacles based on the impressions that had been made on him by the British defensive positions along the Gazala Line in Libya in 1942.

Rommel promoted a program that stressed the use of field hindrances, which von Rundstedt supported, and included a variety of measures to disrupt an Allied landing, such as laying large numbers of land mines, flooding low-lying areas, and placing foreshore obstacles and tall stakes called "Rommel asparagus" just behind the coast.

The latter were simple antiairborne and antiglider devices made from a pointed pole driven into the ground and spaced so that the flat, open terrain was turned into a field of deadly wooden spears.

Rommel's most important upgrade of the Wall's defenses was the use of foreshore

obstacles. Placed along the beaches, these obstacles were designed to fill the gaps between strongpoints, protect the more remote beaches, and delay an Allied landing, even if only for a short time.

Rommel ordered underwater obstacles planted in three to six rows along the beaches to disrupt an amphibious operation, whether at high or low tide.

The obstacles consisted of various devices. The simplest was an 8- to 10-foot wooden stake or concrete pole driven into the beach sand and angled toward the sea. Some of the stakes had mines or grenades attached, and all of them, when submerged, could rip open the hull of a landing craft.

Beside causing logisitics problems after the landing, the Wall dissuaded the Anglo-Americans from directly attacking the Pas de Calais and convinced them not to undertake a cross-Channel invasion until 1944.

The same was true of numerous V-shaped ramp-like structures, which the Germans sloped toward the sea and armed with mines or artillery shells designed to explode on contact.

A third type of obstacle was the concrete tetrahedron. This pyramid-shaped object was six feet high, weighed nearly a ton, and could also be mined to sink a landing craft.

Another hindrance was the "hedgehog" tank obstacle. It was made of three seven-foot steel girders welded together in the middle so that the beams presented three points angled 120 degrees apart.

Finally, there were Belgian gates—heavy steel antitank structures resembling gates, about nine feet high, and nine feet across, a few with waterproof mines attached.

A tremendous amount of progress had been made. From 1941 to October 30, 1943, the Germans had laid 1,992,895 mines in the West; by May 30, 1944, the number had increased to 6,508,330. Yet, this figure fell far short of Rommel's estimated need of 50 million.

By mid-May 1944, there were 517,000 foreshore obstacles on the Channel beaches, 31,000 of them fitted with mines. Farther out to sea were a variety of shallow-sea naval mines.

But, at the beginning of June, only three of the six rows of obstacles Rommel wanted had been placed along the Normandy beaches. This lack was due in part to a shortage of material in April.

Yet, during the first half of 1944, there was a steady rise in personnel. On October 4, 1943, Ob West listed 38 divisions ready for combat and 13 additional divisions in the process of forming. The number of ready divisions toward the end of December increased to 41, with seven more being formed or refitted. By April 1944, the total figure had climbed to 54 divisions and would reach 58 just before D-Day.

Forty-six of the 58 divisions were positioned along the coast. The Fifteenth Army had 18; the Seventh Army had 14; First Army, on the Bay of Biscay, had four; the Nineteenth Army, on the French Mediterranean coast, had seven; and there were three in the Netherlands; two reserve divisions were located in the interior of France.

The remaining 10 divisions were armored formations. Three panzer divisions were stationed north of the Seine, three between the Seine and Loire Rivers, and the other four in the south of France.

These forces possessed 3,300 artillery pieces, 1,343 tanks, and 1,873,000 troops. Complementing the ground forces were five Navy destroyers in the Bay of Biscay, four torpedo boats, 29 motor torpedo boats, and 500 small patrol boats and minesweepers. Thirty-five small submarines were located at Brest and other Atlantic harbors. The Luftwaffe's Third Air Fleet had 919 aircraft, of which 510 were operational as of late May.

But the chances of Rommel or von Rundstedt beefing up the Atlantic Wall defenses even more was at an end. On the cold, gray dawn of June 6, 1944, time had run out.

The Atlantic Wall achieved at least a partial success. Almost from the Wall's inception, the Wehrmacht regarded the Allied capture of an important harbor as a necessary prerequisite for sustaining an invasion front so, by June 1944, the Germans had transformed the harbors into fortresses. Cut off and dependent on their own resources, many of these beleaguered German garrisons held on tenaciously before finally surrendering. These actions helped to produce a logistics crisis for the Allies during the late summer and fall of 1944.

Though the Wall was weak in many places, there were enough artillery pieces distributed in key locations to possibly impede an invasion. All the major ports were defended to some degree against an attack from the sea and most were prepared with all-around defense. None of the large or medium-size ports were so vulnerable that an invasion force could capture them easily.

Beside causing logistics problems after the landing, the Wall dissuaded the Anglo-Americans from directly attacking the Pas de Calais and convinced them not to undertake a cross-Channel invasion until 1944. Given just a bit more time and a few more resources, it could have been much worse for the Allies.

Yet, in spite of all the money, manpower, and effort expended, in the end, thanks to information provided by British intelligence and the French Underground, a bit of luck, and many determined soldiers, the Allies breached the "impregnable" Atlantic Wall in a matter of hours on June 6, 1944.

They found its weaknesses, exploited them to drive wedges into the openings, and then rapidly forged their beachheads. □

My War ON TWO FRONTS

BY J. (JOSEPH) CONKLIN LANIER, II

An African American Seabee recalls his battle with the Japanese—and Jim Crow.

HOW I, THEN a teenager of African descent, found myself thousands of miles away from my placid, rural Mississippi home and on a dangerous volcanic island known as Iwo Jima in the middle of the Pacific Ocean, where tens of thousands of men met violent deaths, is a journey at which I still marvel today, some 65 years later.

In many ways, my journey from small-town youth to a member of one of the U.S. Navy's Seabee (Construction Battalion) units is not all that remarkable. After all, some 1,150,000 blacks served in the United States military during World War II. On the other hand, what I and these other 1,150,000 men and women in uniform went through certainly helped to profoundly change the course of history in this country.

To understand how all this came about, let us start at the beginning—my beginning.

I was born to J. (Joseph) Conklin LaNier I and Savilla Barnett Roberts LaNier on March 25, 1926. In 1935, when I was nine, my folks moved from Memphis Town, where my father rented about 40 acres of land, into Columbus, Mississippi, which was the county seat of Lowndes County and was then a community of maybe two or three thousand persons. It's located between Tupelo and Tuscaloosa.

Columbus was then a completely racially segregated society, one black, one white. There was no middle ground. All facilities in the Deep South, private and public, were segregated. There was no mistaking this separation of the races; all facilities such as drinking fountains and restrooms and hotels and barbershops and restaurants were marked either "WHITE" or "COLORED"—ditto public transportation. If you were black, you sat in the back of the bus; if you were white, you got to sit up front. In many of the white-owned clothing stores, a black person could not try on an article of clothing, and if you bought it, you owned it; you could not return it.

There was no "mixing" of the races, except when blacks were hired to perform menial labor for whites. Although we silently resented the situation, there was no arguing about it. That's just the way it was. Tradition. The status quo. The Jim Crow laws. Apartheid. Segregation.

This is not to say that the North was void of segregation. This was

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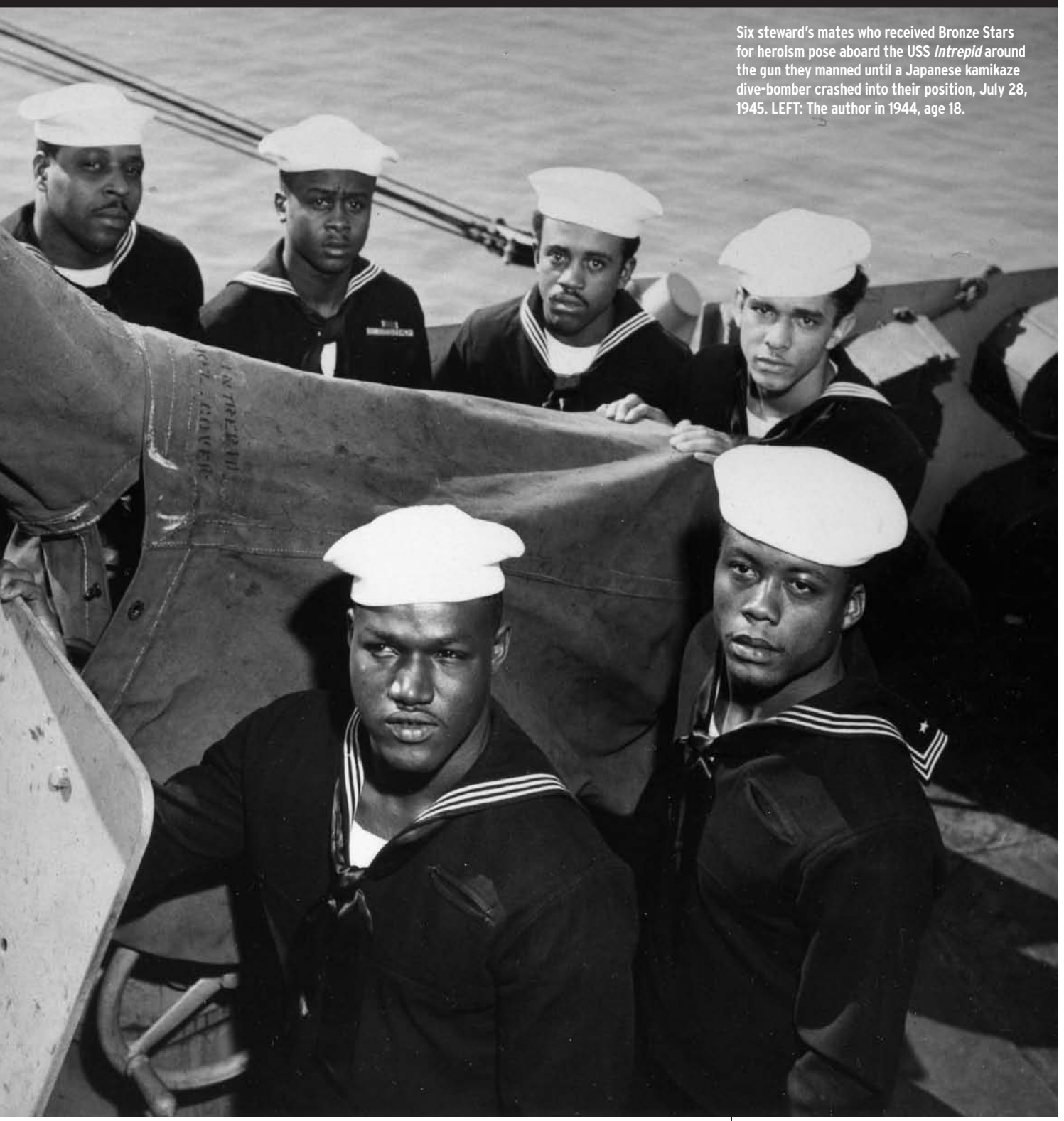

Six steward's mates who received Bronze Stars for heroism pose aboard the USS *Intrepid* around the gun they manned until a Japanese kamikaze dive-bomber crashed into their position, July 28, 1945. LEFT: The author in 1944, age 18.

in America, the supposed Land of the Free, in the first half of the 20th century.

On October 27, 1940, my mother died at age 49. My father was left with two daughters, Ruth, 11 years of age, and Gladys, nine years of age, myself at 14, and my older brother Ira, at 25. Our father never remarried. He did not have a job, so he became a handyman.

On December 7, 1941, as everyone knows, the Japanese attacked the U.S. naval base at Pearl Harbor, Hawaii, and the United States was suddenly thrust into what became World War II. Other than the news accounts, it didn't mean much to me. The segregation was so complete; "patriot" was not part of my vocabulary.

Doing all he could to care for his family, Papa (that is what southern blacks called their father) was not home very often. I dropped out of school when I was in sixth grade. My father was not happy about it; he had had a sixth-grade education, too, but he knew if his children had any chance of breaking out of poverty, education was the key.

Nonetheless, I got a job delivering groceries to white families—my salary, two dollars a week. Later, I got a job washing dishes for $3.50 a week, 12 hours a day, seven days a week, with one meal a day. After I was there for a while, I felt I had earned a raise to what the rest of the guys were paid. I asked the owner for a raise to $5.00 a week—she fired me.

Both: National Archives

ABOVE: Black recruits at the Manhattan Beach, New York, Training Station. RIGHT: Steward's Mates joke as they dry silverware in the wardroom of the USS *Ticonderoga,* November 1944. OPPOSITE: Enlisted men serving on Espiritu Santo in the New Hebrides place 6-inch shells in magazines at the Naval Ammunition Depot.

I understood I needed to go back to school and, at 17 years of age, I knew I had to do something to help my father, who had been out of work. To this day I cannot describe what caused me to take the next step that I took. I had seen the posters and advertisements about the United States armed forces, so I went to the Navy recruiting office and asked to sign up. I had no particular reason to choose the Navy. At the time (early 1944), I was not aware that, if I was accepted, I would be among the first blacks to be inducted into the Navy with the rating of seaman, for the U.S. armed forces were then about as segregated as Columbus.

Prior to my enlisting, blacks could only be steward's mates in the Navy, which meant you were a waiter for the officers. I had simply decided to go into the service; what I would be doing did not matter. At 17, I needed parental approval to enlist, so I asked my father if he would sign the release. I assured him I would send him a monthly allotment to help him financially with my sisters; at that time, Navy pay was $51a month. An allotment to my father would be $37 a month—$22 deducted from my pay and another $15 added by the government.

He agreed and, on February 2, 1944, I became an apprentice seaman. I had nine days before I had to report to the Naval Office in Jackson, Mississippi. Even there, total segregation was still in force. They couldn't put me up in a hotel; I had to be housed with an approved colored family.

As with all recruits, I had to go through an initial period of training to see if I was physically and mentally capable of being in the military. After all, the lives of your comrades and the accomplishment of your unit's mission often depends on your being able to do your job properly. My initial training, or "boot camp," would take place at the Great Lakes Naval Training Center, north of Chicago.

When I arrived in Chicago, I was awestruck. Back in Mississippi, my entire world was about 15 square miles. I had never seen tall buildings before, and the sheer size of the place was beyond my imagination. Even more amazing, I saw black people and white people riding together on the streetcars and on the "L," and there were no separate seats for blacks. There were no separate facilities for whites and blacks anywhere that I could see; it was like seeing something in another world.

When I arrived at the Great Lakes Naval Base, I went through the normal things every serviceperson must go through—a physical examination (including a "short-arm inspection" to check for venereal disease), the issuance of uniforms and shoes, assignment to a barracks, etc. We lived in a part of the base called Camp Robert Smalls, which was set aside exclusively for the training of black sailors.

Through all this I did not see any white people other than officers, some of whom were also doctors. Then I attended an orientation where I learned the name of the person in charge of the base, a Commander Armstrong. Next, it was time for my G.I. haircut. During this era, black males wore their hair cut short except in the front; the hair in the front that was kept long was called a "top knot." There was a scented pomade (grease) to "slick" it back and hold it down. This process was very important to your "manhood." So when I got to the barbershop and it became my turn, the barber asked me if I wanted to keep it. I was very proud of my topknot, so I said, "YES!" His response was, "Catch it," which meant within seconds my topknot was gone.

For the next two months we trained. We learned the discipline needed to survive the kind of war being waged in 1944. For me, I had to learn to swim. Except for a few shallow swimming holes, there was no place for us to learn how when I was growing up.

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In the swimming pools at Great Lakes, I quickly learned that if you got tired you couldn't stop, stand up and rest, and then resume swimming. You just had to keep going.

We also marched, marched, and marched. It didn't make any sense to me then, but I eventually learned it was a method of teaching us discipline, among other things. On the other hand, I felt we were not really being trained for war. We black sailors were sort of a "show" because our marching formation was not "ramrod straight." Racism was still rampant and open. We did all kinds of funny steps that would not be tolerated, for instance, at the Naval Academy. The white officers would come to watch us do "our thing." It was like, "These colored guys don't have to be professional; they're here for our amusement. They have a rhythm white guys don't have. Besides, they're here to do the "scut" work."

During this period, the first black officers (11 of them) had been commissioned in the Navy. They all came by our camp at Great Lakes to give us hope that we could now have dreams of a naval officer career. I recall the pride I had meeting these officers. I remember thinking, so much for the vow President Roosevelt's secretary of the Navy, Frank Knox, took at an earlier time: "The Navy will remain lily white."

One of the black officers, Ensign Samuel Lee Gravely, Jr., was the first African American to be commissioned as an officer in the Navy and went on to become the first black admiral. I remember his response to a question in *Ebony* magazine later about not enough blacks being promoted to admiral: "It takes twenty-seven years to make an admiral. We just have not been in business that long for that to happen frequently." I also remember my wanting to be a naval officer after I met those ensigns. Later I learned that, with less than a ninth-grade education, there was no way that would happen unless I went back to school.

After boot camp, we were all given the rating seaman, second class; that had never happened to blacks before. We then got a nine-day leave. My father was not an emotional man, but during those nine days, he was visibly proud of his son. Everybody in our neighborhood made me feel proud that I was in uniform. W-e-l-l, almost everybody. The girl I liked was not impressed.

Before I went into the Navy, I had worked in a laundry as a presser, so I went by the shop to visit the people who were still there. When I entered, the owners were happy to see me in uniform. I went back to the pressers' area and there was a new foreman, a white man. I introduced myself to him and when he asked a question, I answered with "Yes." His response was, "You say 'yes, sir' to me, and don't you forget your place." Truly, I knew better then to say simply "yes" to him, but I had not had to do that to a white person other than officers for two months. I truly forgot. It was a grim reminder to me that, in uniform or not, I was still not equal.

I must add here that all of this humiliation to this point in my life and the same humiliation I would encounter later as I moved forward in my life was, and is, hurtful, but I don't remember it being surprising to me. I never allowed it to rise to the emotion of hate. For that I give credit to my father; he never taught us to hate.

When I returned to Great Lakes from my leave, I learned that we would be leaving the next day for California. Our new commanding officer, a Lt. J.G., assembled us the next morning to introduce himself. He told us we were going to do whatever we needed to do to kill "Japs."

Then he said these words (and I repeat them verbatim): "I am from Georgia and I want you all to know that there are two kinds of niggers—a good nigger and a dead nigger—and we don't want any dead ones." There were three older men in our group who went to the base commander and protested this officer's behavior. This officer was removed from our unit and we were told he was "busted" to seaman first class. We never had any confirmation of that and, frankly, I have always doubted it, though it could have happened.

In any case, a chief petty officer, a short little guy, was promoted to Lt. J.G. and assigned to our unit. We all knew him; he accompanied the officer of the day on his rounds of inspection when we were in boot camp. If your bunk was not made up properly, your mattress was pulled off your bunk and the officer would walk on it and

you would get extra duty. The chief petty officer would hand out the extra duty, thus his nickname, "Extra-Duty Shorty."

The next day we boarded a train to California.

On our train ride to California, two things stand out in my mind. One, we stopped in North Platte, Nebraska, for dinner. The Red Cross ladies—all white—had prepared dinner for us at the train station. The dinner was real class, white tablecloths, and flowers on the tables. Plus, there were no signs over the water fountains or restrooms that read "Colored" or "White." And the ladies were so friendly; they even casually touched us. I had never witnessed this before from white people, especially female. This was such a change from what I had known; it is like a stamp on my mind that brings back a pleasant memory that has never gone away.

The second memory was when our troop train was passing the Great Salt Lake. I had never seen so much water. I was told that there was so much salt in the lake that a person could not sink. I thought, how wonderful that would have been the two times I almost drowned in the swimming hole back home.

When our troop train arrived in Oakland, California, buses took us to Camp Shoemaker, about 40 miles east of Oakland; we were there for about three weeks. We stood muster every morning and for the rest of the day we did nothing. Some days it was difficult to find even "nothing" to do.

Every weekend we got liberty and, in addition to taking in all the beauty of the countryside, I got to see and participate in the nightlife of San Francisco. And when I saw the ocean for the first time, it was just breathtaking. When I saw the Great Salt Lake I thought that was a lot of water, but when I saw the ocean, I thought the Great Salt Lake looked like a puddle.

I had the opportunity to mingle with all kinds of people in Oakland and San Francisco. I must admit, when I needed to use the facilities, I would find myself looking for the sign marked "Colored" to be sure I didn't go into the wrong place. It took some time for that cautiousness to go away. I was fascinated taking in all the newness of almost everything I saw and experienced. Especially this new FREEDOM I was experiencing that allowed me to engage with people of different races and ethnicity than myself, and I didn't have to say "Yes, sir" or "Yes, ma'am"—and if I didn't, there was no fear I would get a closed fist in my face.

Then came time to sleep. None of us could afford a hotel; since my pay of $29 per month didn't go very far, even in 1944. My hotel became the San Francisco train station waiting room. I should point out I wasn't the only serviceperson to use that "hotel."

At the end of our stay at Camp Shoemaker, our commanding officer told us that the next morning buses would take us to the pier, where we would board the ship that would take us to our unknown destination. After we boarded ship (an old merchant ship converted to a troop ship), we moved out to sea. Even this was an adventure for me, as I had never been on a ship before. As a matter of fact, before Great Lakes, I had never seen a ship.

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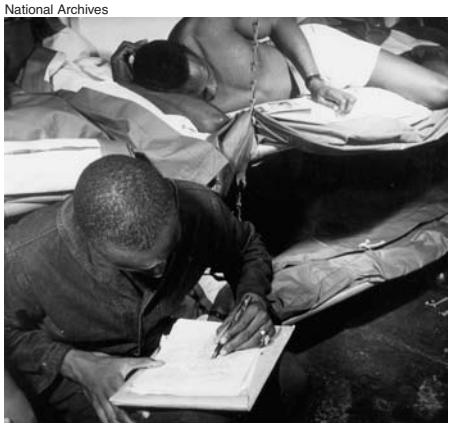

Uppermost in my mind was winning the war so we could continue to live in a land where the rule of law keeps us free to keep working on making a more perfect union.

As we moved from the pier, I stayed on deck to watch San Francisco fall behind the horizon. It was an experience I have no words to describe. I don't know where I thought San Francisco had gone; I just know it scared me. I could not imagine being detached from the United States.

My second experience, this one unpleasant, was becoming seasick. I was as sick as I have ever been. No one had told me about it and I had no idea why I could not eat and, when I tried, I'd throw it up. There was nothing the doctors could do about it, and it went on for almost three days.

For over six days I saw nothing but our ship and the Pacific Ocean. On the seventh day we saw land; we were told it was Honolulu, Hawaii. Diamond Head was pointed out to us. I remember thinking that did not look like a diamond to me. I had never heard of Hawaii, but at least now I knew where we were and I could get off this rolling object.

Honolulu was different for me. Since I had never heard of the place, I did not have a preconceived notion of what I was seeing. After we disembarked, we were taken to a building at Pearl Harbor where we "waited around." There is a lot of "waiting around" in the Navy.

Finally, we were taken to the mess hall for lunch; afterward, we marched to our barracks. One of the things I noticed as we "waited around" was, in addition to the Navy personnel, most of the civilians I saw cleaning the floors and taking out the trash were Hawaiian or Asian, not white. That was a huge difference from what I was used to, a different kind of discrimination. Even though the civilians were not black, it was clear to me they were doing the kind of "scut" work blacks did back home.

After a day or two, our commanding officer gave us our assignments. Mine was at

the boathouse. I was to report in my white uniform. I thought I might be learning to repair boat motors, but it was confusing to me wearing my white uniform to do that.

When I reported to the boathouse, I learned why I wore my white uniform. There were two ways you could travel across the bay from Pearl Harbor to Honolulu. You could catch the ferry, which had a regular schedule to leave Pearl Harbor, or you could ride in small boats to cross the bay to the city. The advantage of the small boats was that they didn't have a regular schedule. They would go across the bay, let off passengers, and return to Pearl Harbor for more passengers. Those small boats had to have someone to tie them up at the dock on both sides of the bay. Yep, you guessed it—my assignment was to tie and untie the small boats. And that is why I wore my white uniform to the boathouse.

I was disappointed, but I really did not resent this assignment. I saw my duty as doing whatever it took to make a contribution to victory. Someone had to perform the duty I performed; in this case, it was me. As far as my being assigned to less than brain-stimulating duties, this was the system I knew and had grown up with. I learned early that if you allow yourself to be an angry person, no one is miserable but you. And you need to find the avenue to extricate yourself from what you are not happy with. Uppermost in my mind was winning the war so we could continue to live in a land where the rule of law keeps us free to keep working on making a more perfect union.

I do not now remember how long I performed this duty before I was transferred to the laundry. For the remainder of my time in Hawaii, I worked in the laundry. Nothing spectacular happened there. I enjoyed working with the native Hawaiians. Two people I remember are Sadie and Nancy. Sadie was kind of the "mother hen" of the laundry. I remember Nancy because she was curious about my hair and was surprised that I spoke English; she thought I spoke a language from Africa.

Another young lady there, Mary, was about my age and beautiful. We often had conversations with each other and I thought our "chemistry" was good—until I made my move. She rejected me and it was clear she would never allow herself to become involved romantically with a black man.

I don't know why I was surprised to learn that about the separation of the races. When the white male was, or would be, involved with a female of any color, no black male need apply. That really bothered me. Not because it happened, but rather because the lady was not white and I had butted up against separation of the races, even across an ocean. So when I got liberty, I went into Honolulu, down on Hotel Street (the "red-light" district), and I drank rum

BELOW: Members of an all-black Seabee battalion practice disembarking from an LCP(L) (Landing Craft Personnel, Large), December 1942. OPPOSITE: On the eve of the Battle of Manila, one sailor looks at photos of his family while the other writes a letter home, USS *Ticonderoga,* November 4, 1944.

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Photo courtesy of Eric Hammel Collection

and Coke to a fair-thee-well. I don't remember getting back to the barracks. What I do know, I was sicker than I was when I was seasick. And to this day, with the little drinking I do, I don't drink rum.

In early January 1945, our commanding officer assembled our group. He called out several names, mine included, and told us we were being transferred to the 23rd (Special) CBs. I didn't know what the CBs were, but it sounded to me like another adventure, and I welcomed it.

"CB" stands for "Construction Battalions" and they are roughly like the engineers in the Army. They build whatever the Navy needs—roads, airfields, ports, you name it. They also load and unload cargo. Our 23rd (Special) CB, or "Seabee" unit was attached to the 3rd Marine Division. We had about 20 officers and almost a thousand enlisted men in the battalion.

We learned that our primary job was not to build roads and airfields and ports. Our job was to unload ships and boats full of cargo and deliver it either to supply dumps or directly to the Marines under fire. Records show we were 75.5 percent black. Our commander, H.W. Heuer, was white, as were our officers and most of the NCOs.

We were moved to Iroquois Point, Oahu, where we remained for about three weeks. Then, at the end of January 1945, we boarded a ship to another destination unknown. We stopped at the Marshall Islands, Guam, Saipan, and Tinian, which had all been captured in 1944, but none of us left the ship at any stop.

On February 24, when we arrived at Iwo Jima, it was D+5, which means the operation to capture the island had begun five days earlier. A few words about Iwo Jima. The name means "Sulfur Island." It's located about a thousand miles due south of Tokyo. On maps, Iwo Jima looks like a huge ship in the Pacific. It's about two-and-a-half miles wide and about four-and-a-half miles long. The Japanese had been there for many years and had turned it into a massive fortress laced with underground tunnels, command posts, hidden gun positions, sniper holes, and bunkers.

There was also an airfield there, and the United States wanted to take the island in order to use the airfield as a base for our B-29 bombers. The Japanese, naturally, did not want to give it up because the loss of Iwo Jima would mean more and more heavy bombing raids against their home islands. Iwo Jima was of vital, strategic importance to them. And to us.

So they beefed up their defenses there by increasing the garrison to nearly 23,000 men who were given a "stand or die" order and told that there was no hope of rescue or reinforcement. Each man was expected to fight to the last bullet and take as many Americans with him before he himself died for the emperor and for Japan. Defending Iwo Jima was a suicide mission, a land-bound kamikaze attack.

The American plan of attack was for the 4th and 5th Marine Divisions, with the 3rd Division in reserve, to land on the southern beaches to the east of Mount Suribachi, take the mountain, and move inland to capture the airfield, all the while pushing the Japanese into the northern part of the island where they could be finished off.

For three days, starting on February 16, 1945, dozens of American warships stood off the island and barraged every inch of it with high explosives while carrier-based fighters hit it from the air. After this pounding, the Marines would go ashore to wipe out any opposition that hadn't already been wiped out. Unfortunately for the Marines, most of the defenders, hiding safely deep in their underground fortress, hadn't been wiped out. They were ready and waiting to strike back at the invaders.

From the 19th to the 24th of February, when we arrived, the Marines and Japanese had been slugging it out, with no quarter asked and none given. When the defenders refused to come out of their fighting holes or bunkers, Marines with flamethrowers burned them out. It was slaughter on a mass scale. The Marines suffered greatly, too. In the 35-day battle for Iwo Jima, more than 6,800 of the 30,000 Marines who came ashore were killed and over 19,000 were wounded. It was the greatest single loss of life

in Marine Corps history.

I understand that, of the island's 22,780-man Japanese garrison, only a little over 200 survived. Many committed suicide rather than surrender. So brutal was the fighting that, afterward, Admiral Chester Nimitz said, "At Iwo Jima, uncommon valor was a common virtue." He was right; 27 Marines and sailors were awarded the Medal of Honor. Twenty-seven.

Black troops on Iwo also performed with bravery. Two black Marines from the all-black 36th Depot Company were awarded the Bronze Star.

When we left our ship and came ashore on the 24th, we dug foxholes into the soft, volcanic soil at the base of Mount Suribachi. At the top of the 500-foot mountain, a squad of Marines had planted the American flag there the day before, but we couldn't see it from where we were dug in. The fighting was still going on. It was so fierce, we had to stay in our foxholes for days. I remember living in a foxhole for two months.

The famous photograph of the flag raising was taken by Joe Rosenthal. What one may not know is that photo was of the second raising of the flag. The first flag was too small, so, with grave danger to themselves, the Marines got a longer pole and a bigger flag and raised it again. The photo was not posed or staged. It just happened.

Three of the men in the photo were killed during the next month on Iwo. The Marine at the left side of the photo, with hands not quite touching the pole, was a Pima Indian from Arizona whose American name was Ira Hayes. After the photo was published, he and the other five Marines were called heroes, but Hayes did not want to be considered a hero. But America insisted he was one, and he was ordered back to the States to appear at war-bond rallies.

He was never able to accept that he did anything other than what he needed to do to defend his country and his buddies. In the end, he could not endure the demands on his time and being thrust into a spotlight he felt he didn't deserve. In addition, he could not forget all the death he saw in battle and the maiming of people. He became a homeless alcoholic who died a lonely death at the age of 32 in a dried-up ditch on his dried-up reservation. The sad part of his story is that most of America never understood why he just fell apart.

But, in my mind, Ira truly was a hero, just like the Nisei—the Japanese-Americans—who volunteered to do their part to defend their country, America, even though their families had been uprooted and forced out of their homes by the government and put into concentration camps. Their unit, the 442nd Regimental Combat Team, became the most decorated unit in U.S. military history.

Then there were the Navajo Indians who used their native tongue to transmit messages between Marine Corps units; the Japanese never broke that code.

Yes, we had segregated units and discrimination against black Americans, Native Americans, and Japanese Americans who could have been bitter but were not. I can tell you, on the battlefield, neither segregation nor discrimination exist; their presence could cost you your life. In battle we don't need to burden ourselves by trying to remember incidents of prejudice. To my mind, the Ira Hayeses, the Dorie Millers (a black mess steward who won the Navy Cross at Pearl Harbor), and the Nisei of World War II are right up there with George Washington and Alexander Hamilton and Thomas Jefferson. If the contributions of these men do not make them patriots, then the word has no meaning.

On Iwo Jima, the inside of Mount Suribachi was dug out and resembled an underground hotel. There was a tunnel with a huge gun on railroad tracks that harassed our ships day and night on both sides of the island. Our ships and planes couldn't hit it.

Even after we had secured that southwest part of the island, Japanese soldiers

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ABOVE: The 34th Seabees work on purifying their water in the Solomon Islands, August 1945. OPPOSITE: Black and white Marines work to extinguish an ammo dump fire on Iwo Jima, February 1945.

were still inside the mountain. They had lots of food and water stored there, so starving them out took a long time.

The commanding general of the Japanese at Iwo, Tadamichi Kuribayashi, had been the military attaché for Japan in Washington, D.C., from 1928 to 1930. He had been invited on a number of occasions to tour U.S. military facilities, so he had a good idea of our strengths and weaknesses. And that is why the island was so well fortified with bomb-proof pillboxes, miles of interconnecting tunnels with multiple entrances and exits, large mortar and rocket launchers, howitzers, and tank guns on the beach. He told his troops: Let the enemy land and make small progress, then open up and hit them where they stand. They did a good job of that.

We learned there were five primary rules for the Japanese soldier:

1. Obey without question
2. Always take the offensive
3. Surprise the enemy whenever possible
4. Never retreat
5. Never surrender

Kuribayashi also had a rule: "Each man has a duty to kill ten of the enemy before dying. Until we are destroyed to the last man, we shall harass the enemy with guerrilla tactics."

The battle, which began with the naval shelling and aerial bombardments on February 16, officially ended on March 26, although I read somewhere that a few Japanese soldiers were found still alive on the island several years later.

My unit, the 23rd (Special) Construction Battalion, was mainly a black stevedoring unit, but even off-loading cargo was a dangerous job; you never knew when the enemy would lob a mortar round or artillery shell into your area. Two of our companies, A and B, received unit citations for performing their duties "under extremely hazardous conditions." As far as I was concerned, it was all hazardous. There wasn't a spot on that island that was safe.

After the fighting died down a little, we moved from our foxholes to tents we set up farther inland. Finally, the Marines secured the island, but enemy shelling and air raids continued sporadically, and Tokyo Rose still broadcast her propaganda to us.

At that time, I was working in the carpenter shop, which was where we cut the lumber for the floors for our tents. Anything that needed building, this is where we did it. I was a helper there.

Before we left Iwo, however, one incident of humiliation occurred at the carpenter shop. An officer came by and was having a conversation with one of the white carpenters as I stood nearby. The officer had a fast speech delivery. As he spoke, he realized he was not giving the other person time to respond. He said, " Geez, I'm behaving like a nigger."

Instantly he realized I had heard his remark. I walked away. Later, I asked to speak with him, and he granted my request. I told him what he already knew; I heard what he had said to the carpenter. I went on to tell him how humiliated I was to hear such a word from an officer. He admitted he was in error and gave me an apology. It was clear to me his apology was real. I felt good that I had accepted his apology, and that I understood no human being is perfect. I don't remember that officer's name or his rank, but I remember his face and his genuine apology as if it happened yesterday.

The Military's Racial (and Racist) Policies

It is with no little irony that the United States fought World War II against one of the most racist regimes of all time--Nazi Germany--whose twisted theories of racial superiority and inferiority resulted in the worst crimes against humanity ever perpetrated.

Yet, the United States, despite its Constitution that declared all men were created equal, continued its own policies of inequality and racism, including within the segregated armed forces. But things were about to change, albeit slowly.

In September 1940, after meeting with a group of African American (or Negroes, as they were called then) civic leaders, President Franklin D. Roosevelt promised to give "colored" servicemen and women better treatment and greater opportunity in return for the leaders' support of his rearmament program and his reelection bid in the November presidential election. Ever the shrewd, consummate politician, Roosevelt won reelection with the help of blacks (mainly in the cities of the North, where blacks could vote). He managed to do this without antagonizing the southern segregationists in Congress whose support he needed for his anti-Nazi foreign policy.

The armed services, however, were strictly opposed to racially integrating their ranks. None of the rest of American society was integrated, they argued, so why should the military break with tradition? For example, the U.S. Marine Corps' policy had banned Negroes from its ranks ever since its founding in 1798. In April 1941, the commandant of the Marine Corps, Maj. Gen. Thomas Holcomb, went so far as to declare that, as long as he had anything to say about it, no blacks would ever be allowed to become one of the few and the proud. "If it were a question of having a Marine Corps of 5,000 whites or 250,000 Negroes," he said, "I would rather have the whites."

But, in June 1941, Roosevelt, still under pressure by the black leaders, issued an executive order that banned racial discrimination in hiring by defense industries under contract to the federal government, and established the Fair Employment Practices Commission to monitor compliance. Roosevelt also pushed the reluctant armed forces to provide broader opportunities to blacks.

The Army, for one, was not enthusiastic, for the common belief was that blacks did not make good soldiers, despite nearly two

By spring of 1945, Iwo Jima was completely secured and America's methodical move to the invasion of Japan was continuing. Despite the good intentions of some in the armed forces, each branch of service was still segregated. Since my branch was the Navy, I can only speak to what I saw there. All black servicemen who were in the Navy were in totally black units. The one exception was "Headquarters," which was code for white officers and enlisted personnel who interpreted military policy by which the unit operated.

In the Navy, there were ratings of second class seaman, first class seaman, and then chief petty officer. Unlike the Army, Air Corps, or Marines, there were no corporals, sergeants, or other different ranks. In all of the time I was in the Navy, I met only one black chief petty officer. And he was clearly in a clerical position. So the entire makeup of headquarters in our unit was white. At that time, there was no talk of integrating the armed services. That didn't happen until President Truman issued an executive order in 1948.

About the middle of August 1945, we left Iwo for another unknown destination—this time in a large, flat-bottomed, ocean-going ship known as an LST (Landing Ship, Tank), which could dock right up on the shore. We sailed for about a month and we didn't know until we were almost there that we were landing at Okinawa.

When we arrived, about half of the island was secure. Compared to Iwo Jima, Okinawa was huge. After we got settled, it was time to get our assignments. I was one of those guys on "general duty." I did whatever, whenever.

One time I was assigned to truck-driving duty and was carrying a load of ammunition to the front line. When I passed the sentry post, there was no one there, so I just kept going. I couldn't have been more than a hundred yards past the post when, suddenly, enemy fire went across my truck. I backed out as quickly as I could. By this time the guard was back at the sentry post. I asked him why he wasn't there to tell me I was going up the wrong road. His reply: "I figured you'd find out soon enough," or words to that effect. That is the kind of humor we dealt with in the heat of battle. I didn't get angry with him; I understood where he was coming from.

Another night I was waiting at the dock to have my truck loaded with supplies. You could not drive with lights on—almost everything had to be done in the dark. While I was waiting, two soldiers approached my truck and in perfect English said, "Joe (all military persons were called Joe), can you tell me where Yellow Beach is (colors were code for beaches we had secured)?" I told them where Yellow Beach was.

As far as I could tell, they were American soldiers, as they were in American uniforms. It turned out they were Japanese educated in America. About 20 minutes later they were captured. I have often thought that they could have put a bullet in my head. I think they didn't because it would have meant instant capture.

On Okinawa I mostly worked in the mess hall. Of all the duties I was assigned, I liked the mess hall the least. I don't remember how long I worked there, but they needed a waiter in the officer's mess, so I was chosen to fill that vacancy. My rank was not changed to steward's mate, but I performed that function. I was not enthralled with the assignments given me; I recognized that black sailors were not thought of by the powers that be as "real" sailors, but the reality was, it didn't mat-

centuries of evidence to the contrary. Although most black soldiers served in segregated support units during the coming war as truck drivers, warehousemen, and other non-combat specialties, two all-Negro infantry divisions (the 92nd and 93rd) would be formed. In the Army Air Corps, the 332nd Fighter Group ("Tuskegee Airmen") ultimately proved they were just as good, if not better, as their white American counterparts or German foes.

The U.S. Navy was slightly more tolerant—but only slightly. The Navy had admitted Negroes in small numbers, but only to serve as stewards or cooks in officers' messes. Roosevelt, who had been an assistant secretary of the Navy during World War I, decided not to antagonize the Navy by insisting that it completely integrate "at one fell swoop" but rather gradually ease into offering greater opportunities for blacks.

As late as the summer of 1941, though, Secretary of the Navy Frank Knox continued to oppose integrating his branch, except for low-level "servitude" positions. But Roosevelt continued to prod until Knox told the Navy's General Board that they would need to plan on recruiting 5,000 blacks for general service in the Navy and Marine Corps.

In January 1942, while the Navy's General Board mulled over Knox's proposal and the president's pressure, General Holcomb, the Marine Corps commandant, remained adamantly against integration, baldly stating that Negroes trying to join the Marines were "trying to break into a club that doesn't want them."

On April 7, 1942, Secretary Knox advised the uniformed heads of the Navy, Marine Corps, and Coast Guard (a component of the wartime Navy) that they would have to stop dragging their feet and accept blacks for general service. Some six weeks later, the Navy Department publicly announced that, on June 1, the three services would begin enlisting about 1,000 African Americans each month, and that the Marines would organize a racially segregated 900-man defense battalion.

As the war went on, and casualties mounted among white combat formations, a few all-black companies and battalions were quietly slipped into the front lines to serve alongside white units. For the most part, the black units performed well. It was not until President Harry S. Truman's Executive Order 9981, signed on July 26, 1948, that the American military ended its long-standing policy of segregation and began admitting blacks to serve in previously all-white units. □

ter. The situation "was what it was," and I needed to make the best of it and be proud of whatever contribution I made to my country, even if it was just waiting on white officers.

I was 19 years of age now, the war in Europe was over, Japan had surrendered, and it was time for me to make a decision about what I wanted to do with my life. The Navy was asking men to reenlist, and I heard there was a program where you could reenlist and choose your theater, guaranteed. I always wanted to see Europe so I decided I would reenlist and ask for Europe. When I asked to sign up for France, I discovered the guarantee was not really guaranteed; I was told there were no openings in Europe.

I was now back to square one; I had no Plan B. Then I heard about the G.I. Bill of Rights and decided to check it out. On my day off, I went back to the main camp and got an explanation of what the G.I. Bill of Rights was. Any serviceperson could go to school and the government would pay for tuition and books and pay the serviceperson $90 a month equal to the number of months served. I could find no reason not to do this, and if one did, one had to be toting water around in a leaky bucket.

I have to say that when Japan surrendered, I was not all that happy. Joining the Navy had been the best thing that had ever happened to me. I had visited places I didn't know existed. I got to travel the world and I enjoyed almost every minute of it. I remember how awed I was when, on the way to Iwo Jima, we crossed the equator and the International Date Line, and I remembered the ocean waters being as smooth as a mirror. I really looked forward to going to Japan, but then the war ended; I wanted to see what Japan looked like. All those emotions notwithstanding, on December 5, 1945, we boarded ship to return to the United States of America.

Just as I had watched with fear as San Francisco dropped behind the horizon almost two years before, there was nothing but joy in me when I saw America show up on the horizon as we arrived HOME. Our converted Merchant Marine ship traveled up the river to Portland, Oregon, to our destination. I was not aware that such a large ship could navigate river waters.

When we disembarked, we were taken to a huge warehouse to get all kinds of shots to protect our health and the health of the people we would come in contact with, and were quarantined for about a week.

It was such a joy to finally get liberty and explore Portland. I met some wonderful people at different entertainment places there. When we were given our 30-day leave, it was New Year's Eve, 1946. I did not want to be on a train on New Year's Day, so I decided to remain in Portland. I met a very nice family there that let me stay in a spare room they had until I left on January 2.

I had a three-hour layover in Denver, Colorado—another place I had never heard of. I went to a drugstore that had an ice cream counter and booths. I ordered an ice cream cone, but I was not sure I was welcome to sit. The white female clerk sensed my hesitation and suggested I sit and enjoy my cone. I can't tell you what a relief that was. This is the first time I had been alone in a city outside the South, and I had no idea about its customs.

I went to a movie and it was the first time I had gone to a movie theater outside the South and I saw no signs directing me to go upstairs to seats set aside for blacks. (At home we called the balcony the "crows' nest.") And, as I observed the neighborhoods, I noticed they were washing the streets. I had never seen that. I was so impressed, I made the decision that after I was discharged I would come back to Denver and make it my home.

After being separated from the Navy on February 2, 1946, I returned home to Mississippi; nothing had changed. Total separation of the races was still in force. I found myself becoming restless there. I would buy a ticket on a bus and go to places I had no reason to visit. When I look back on it, I attribute that restlessness to all the wonderful places I had visited, courtesy of the Navy, for two years.

After that visit, I realized I had to make a decision about what I was going to do with my life. I spoke with Dr. Allen, who operated the lone black drugstore in Columbus. I had given some thought to becoming a physician, but here I was, almost 20 years old, and had not yet finished the ninth grade. He encouraged me to "get with it" and finish high school.

To make a long story short, I enrolled in high school in Holly Springs, Mississippi. While I was in Holly Springs, there was a parade through the downtown area. I was part of it; I wore my Navy uniform and proudly carried the United States flag.

I can truthfully say, as terrible as the war was, World War II and my service with the Navy provided me with opportunities that I most likely would never have experienced otherwise.

The town voter registrar's office was open for voting, for what election I don't remember. Having served two years in the United States Navy, I knew I had a right to vote. It was a spur of the moment decision; I had no agenda. When I entered the office, dressed in my Navy uniform, the white registrar seemed surprised to see me. I told her that I wanted to register to vote. In a stern voice she told me "Niggers don't vote" and invited me to leave, which I did. As I left, I remember thinking, I volunteered for the Navy to preserve the right of freedom in this country and still I have not earned the right to vote. It was a humiliating experience. And to this day I cherish the right to cast my vote and I consider it very private.

Photo courtesy of Eric Hammel Collection

Members of an all-black Marine Corps stevedore unit take a break during a lull in the fighting for Peleliu, September 1944.

After graduating from high school, I then followed Dr. Allen's advice and enrolled in pharmacy school at Xavier University in New Orleans in September 1948.

I had never been to New Orleans and I didn't know what to expect when I arrived. I did know that the city was in the South, so I expected it to be segregated; I was not disappointed. The university was segregated, too, but today it is integrated.

After the first semester of my second year in the School of Pharmacy, I struggled to keep my grades up. The nuns knew we black students came from inferior high schools, so they put on classes at night and on the weekends so we could get special help. I took advantage of all of the classes I needed because I was behind.

In my senior year, in order to graduate, I had to take 27 semester hours, a crushing load. The pharmacy school dean did not want me to do that, but I told him I had to finish that year (1952) because there was no way I could come back for a fifth year; he reluctantly allowed me to go forward. I made better grades that semester than I did when I was taking regular hours. That gave me an insight into my resolve. I learned that I seem to do better when I am under a deadline.

After graduating, I moved to Denver and had a variety of responsible positions as a pharmacist with various hospitals (including being director of pharmacy at several, and even owning my own drugstore for a while). In 1957, I married Eula Inez Long and we had two wonderful children, Lisa Downing and Joseph III, now grown. As of 2010, Eula and I will have celebrated 52 years of married life. I was involved in efforts to end discrimination in housing in Denver and I'm pleased to say that, today, everybody can buy and live anywhere they can afford.

The next step is to bring about more perfect relationships. As I see it, we as a people, as Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., once put it, must learn to judge each other by the content of our character, rather than by the color of our skin. That might very well take longer to achieve than the time we have spent on the bumpy road we have already traveled.

I can truthfully say, as terrible as the war was, World War II and my service with the Navy provided me with opportunities that I most likely would never have experienced otherwise.

And whenever I see an American flag, I am always reminded of the one that was raised on top of a mountain on a small, bloody island in the Pacific Ocean. And I am grateful. □

BEATING

How little Finland (with Germany's help) stopped a second Soviet invasion.

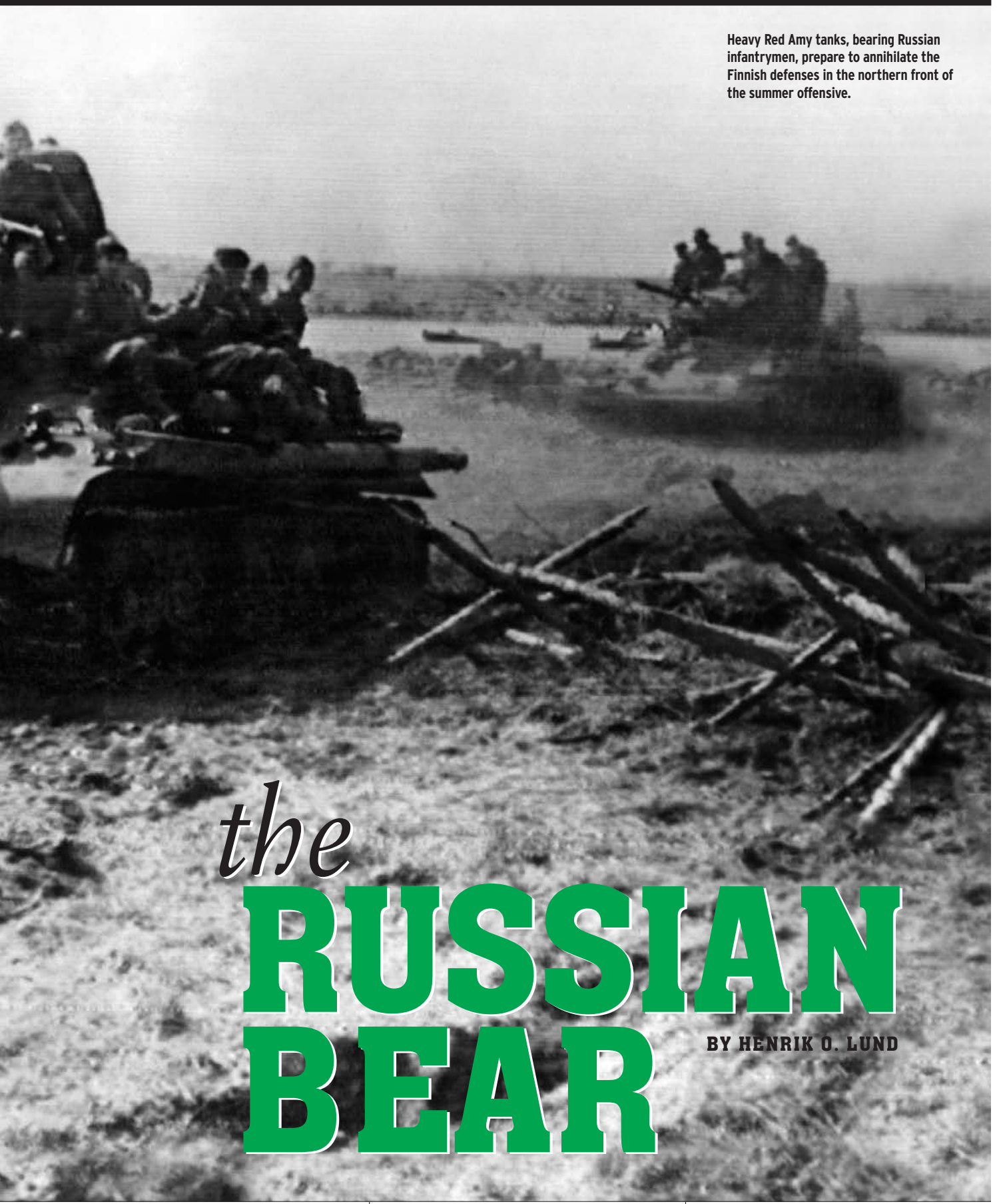
IN 1941, FINLAND joined Nazi Germany in its attack on the Soviet Union, resulting in the third war with its giant eastern neighbor in 23 years.

Democratic Finland had two reasons for aligning itself with totalitarian Germany. First and foremost, Finland wanted to recover the territories lost in the 3½-month Winter War against the Soviets, November 1939-March 1940. Second, the Finns wanted to conquer East Karelia. The Karelians were linguistically and culturally related to the Finns but East Karelia had never belonged to Finland.

The anomalous coalition between a democracy and a dictatorship presented numerous problems, but the most serious resulted from the failure of the two countries to orchestrate their war aims and to develop plans for its prosecution beyond the opening phase.

The spectacular initial German victories in World War II had led everyone to believe that the war would be short, that long-term planning was unnecessary. The anticipation of a quick victory at the side of Germany appears to have blinded the Finns to the obvious implications of a failure by Germany to achieve its war aims. Such a failure meant that Finland had to count on a day of reckoning with the Soviet Union.

In 1941, Finland, in a large and well-exe-

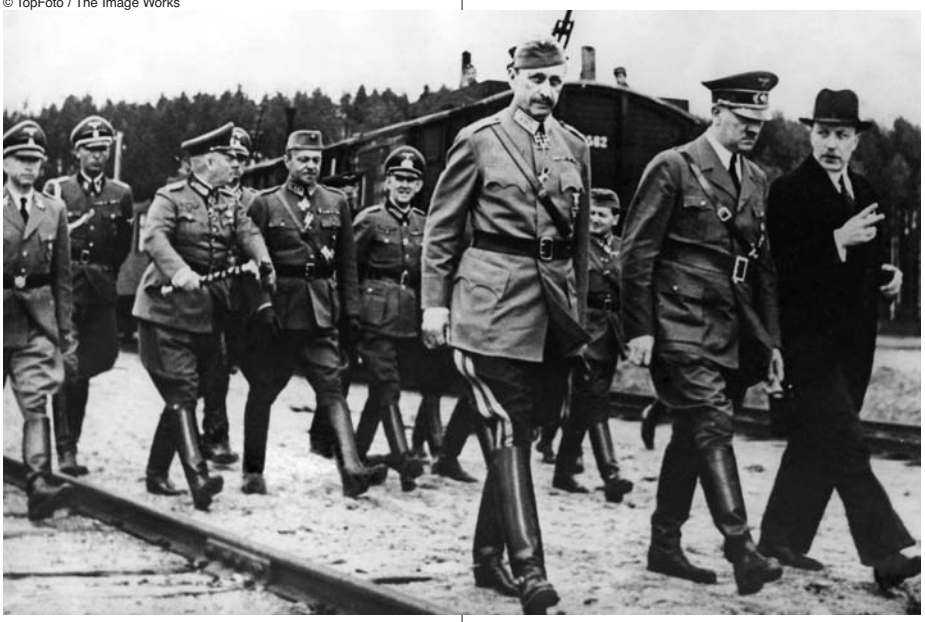


Heavy Red Amy tanks, bearing Russian infantrymen, prepare to annihilate the Finnish defenses in the northern front of the summer offensive.

the RUSSIAN BEAR

BY HENRIK O. LUND

cuted offensive, quickly recovered its lost territories and went on to conquer most of East Karelia. The Finns then adopted a defensive posture for 2 1/2 years and repeatedly refused to assist the Germans in their attack on Leningrad. The Germans had brought an army from Germany and Norway to central and northern Finland for the purpose of capturing Murmansk or severing its rail connection to the rest of the Soviet Union. This was vital in stopping the flow of Lend-Lease supplies to their common enemy, the Soviets. However, the Finns, largely because of pressure from the United States (which still maintained diplomatic relations with the Finns), declined to assist the Germans in this venture. The war in Finland then stabilized into trench warfare with little activity on either side.



Field Marshal Carl Gustav Emil Mannerheim (center), commander in chief of Finland's Defense Forces, secretly met with Hitler, June 17, 1942.

Popular support for the war in Finland dropped dramatically when, after the Soviet victory at Stalingrad, the war turned decisively against the Germans and the Finns realized that the conflict would not turn out as they had anticipated. The Finns began tp put out serious peace feelers through third parties in 1943, but the last Soviet offer was found unacceptable by the Finns in April 1944. The stage was set for renewed conflict.

When they met at Teheran in December 1943, Roosevelt, Churchill, and Stalin had agreed to coordinated offensives against Germany in the summer of 1944. In view of that agreement, it is important to understand why the Soviets launched a massive offensive in a secondary theater against Finland in June 1944. This article does not address Soviet offensives in East Karelia but focuses exclusively on their offensive on the Karelian Isthmus and the final Finnish stand at the so-called VKT Line.

There were at least two reasons for the Soviet decision and the timing of the offensive against Finland. First, Stalin was still skeptical about the planned American/British landing in France. Spending some time dealing with Finland after the landing would give him a chance to see how the operation in France developed before beginning the planned large-scale offensive against the Central Army Group in Byelorussia.

Probably more important was Stalin's strong desire to have the Finnish question decided without Western interference. Finland still enjoyed considerable sympathy in the West and Stalin wanted to settle things with Finland alone and not let it become part of the wider settlement of issues after the war.

The Soviets began planning an offensive against Finland as soon as Finland rejected their peace offer in April 1944. The objective was rather simple. The Finnish Army was to be destroyed, forcing Finland to capitulate. To achieve this, Stalin demanded that the attack be exceptionally violent and quick.

General Leonid Aleksandrovich Govorod, commander of Soviet forces on the Karelian Isthmus, was given two armies—the Twenty-first and Twenty-third (later also the Fifty-ninth)—consisting of seven corps. The Soviets expected to defeat the Finnish forces on the isthmus and capture Viipuri, the capital of Karelia, within 12 days. They would then press on north and west and have the capital of the country in their hands by the middle of July.

General Krill Meretskov, who was responsible for operations in East Karelia, also had two armies at his disposal—the Thirty-second and Seventh. The East Karelian offensive was planned to begin around June 20, 1944, its mission to trap the Finnish forces in that area and keep them from interfering with the operation on the Karelian Isthmus.

Some of the troops allocated against Finland were needed in the offensive the Soviets planned against German Army Group Center in Byelorussia starting on June 22. Soviet planners felt confident that they could achieve their objectives in Finland before the start of that offensive. The troops had trained and prepared for their missions for several weeks.

The strength of the Finnish Army in June 1944 was about 450,000 men. However, less than one-third of the army was located along the most likely Soviet avenue of approach on the Karelian Isthmus. Large forces were stationed in East Karelia along the Svir River and in the Maaselkae sector north of Lake Ladoga.

The poor positioning of Finnish forces for dealing with an offensive along the most likely avenue of approach and the unsatisfactory condition of defensive positions are some of the most hotly debated issues in Finnish military history. While some strength-

Finnish soldiers from an infantry regiment, printed in the April 1943 issue of *Signal*. Note that the Finnish helmets were almost identical to German helmets.

ening of the forces on the Karelian Isthmus had taken place in the spring of 1944, and the construction of fortifications speeded up, it was too little and too late.

The long period in a static defensive posture and rumors of peace initiatives may have led to a lowering of morale and a loss of the fighting élan so evident in the Finnish Army in the 1941 offensive. The troops and their leaders appear to have become somewhat complacent. This is reflected in the lack of vigorous training, a lack of urgency in the construction of fortifications, and a slackening in aggressive intelligence gathering.

The defense of the Karelian Isthmus was based on three defensive lines. The first represented the front occupied by the Finns on June 9, 1944, and it coincided roughly with the 1939 border. The second line, referred to as the VT (Vammelsuu-Taipale) Line was 14 to 30 kilometers behind the front. The third line (VKT Line) ran roughly from Viipuri to Kuparsaari and then along the Vuoksi River to Taipale. Construction of defensive positions on this line were not begun until six months before the Soviet offensive and was far from complete.

There were also several serious deficiencies in armaments, particularly for defense against enemy armor. The lighter Finnish antitank weapons were ineffective against modern Soviet heavy tanks, and the heavier ones were difficult to move around on the battlefield. More suitable German infantry antitank weapons were requested on a rush basis only after the start of the Soviet offensive.

The Finns believed that a Soviet offensive against Finland would not take place because the Soviet objectives would be achieved with the defeat of Germany. This view may have caused the Finns to keep the bulk of their forces in East Karelia, possibly hoping its possession would give Finland a bargaining chip in the settlement following a German defeat.

This outlook may have influenced Finnish failure to heed repeated intelligence warnings. On June 1, 1944, the Finnish intelligence service warned the general staff that a Soviet offensive should be expected within 10 days. The Soviets also launched company-size probing attacks and imposed radio silence on their forces four or five days before the offensive—sure signs that something big was afoot.

But the Finnish general staff was not convinced and no steps were taken to bring in reinforcements from East Karelia. As historian Olli Vehviläinen correctly notes, the "highly motorized Red Army hungry for victory was met by an army ill prepared in both morale and equipment for confrontation on the massive scale that was being fought in 1944."

The stillness of the Karelian Isthmus was shattered on June 9, 1944, by a fury that is hard to imagine. Over 1,000 Soviet aircraft carried out saturation bombing of the Finnish front line; it was accompanied by a massive artillery preparation and followed by a ground assault at 5 AM on June 10—a day that Marshal Gustav Mannerheim described as "the black day of our war history."

The Soviets threw two armies—the Twenty-first and Twenty-third—against the Finnish line on the Karelian Isthmus, which was held only by two corps (IV and

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Finnish shock troops take a Soviet position during the Continuation War when Finland was allied with the Nazis, June 1, 1942.

III). The main thrust was directed at the 10th Finnish Infantry Division holding the right flank of the Finnish IV Corps along the Gulf of Finland.

The Karelian Isthmus front was only 70 kilometers wide and, in this relatively narrow sector, the Soviets employed 270,000 troops, 1,660 pieces of artillery, 620 tanks, and 1,500 aircraft. The quantitative advantages enjoyed by the Soviets on the Karelian Isthmus were overwhelming: troops 4:1, armor 5:1, artillery 6:1, and aircraft 15:1.

As they had done so often against the Germans, the Soviets concentrated their offensive on a narrow front to achieve a quick breakthrough and then exploited that breakthrough with a pursuit by several corps operating abreast. The quantitative advantages at the point of main effort were therefore vastly larger.

The preparatory fires were exceedingly violent. It was the heaviest of the war, surpassed only by the storm unleashed in the Soviet crossing of the Oder River in their final drive on Berlin in 1945. It is reported that the Soviets deployed 200 to 400 pieces of artillery for each kilometer of front. The 13-14-kilometer-wide front of the 10th Finnish Division was hit by 220,000 artillery shells within a couple of hours and the 17-kilometer-wide front of the 2nd Finnish Division was smashed by 60,000 shells.

The main effort of the 21st Soviet Army against the Finnish 10th Division had predictable results. The pulverizing effect of the Soviet fire destroyed the Finnish front-line trenches. The avalanche of exploding shells buried soldiers under tons of sand, earth, and debris. Protective minefields and barbed-wire entanglements were destroyed. Units lost contact with their headquarters as the rain of high-explosive shells severed telephone lines; radios were virtually useless due to the incredible noise created by the continuous explosions. Mannerheim writes that the noise from the battlefield could be heard both in Mikkeli—the location of his headquarters—and in Helsinki, respectively 220 and 260 kilometers from the battlefield.

The hell-on-earth situation in which the Finnish soldiers found themselves had a paralyzing effect. The debris and smoke from thousands of exploding shells reduced visibility to only a few meters. The losses were heavy and rising. Panic developed in many areas, and when the Soviet infantry reached the Finnish trenches, they sometimes found them empty except for dead and wounded.

The weight of the Soviet attack by three corps (109th, 30th, and 97th) fell on the Finnish 10th Division and particularly on the regiment at Valkesaari, commanded by Colonel Viljanen. The regiment was annihilated in the massive assault by three Soviet divisions, and a steady stream of enemy tanks and artillery batteries pushed through the breach. By midnight on the first day of the offensive, the Soviet Twenty-first Army had penetrated the IV Finnish Corps sector to a depth of 30 kilometers and widened the salient to an equal distance.

Mannerheim and his staff realized the magnitude of the Soviet offensive on June 11. The 3rd Infantry Brigade and the 4th Infantry Division were ordered to the Karelian Isth-

mus. Mannerheim also requested German support in the form of ammunition, air support, assault guns, antiaircraft artillery, light infantry antitank weapons, and aircraft for the Finnish air force.

Lieutenant General Erik Heinrichs, chief of the Finnish General Staff, told General Eduard Dietl, the commander of German forces in Finland (20th Mountain Army), that plans were to give up the Svir and Maalekae fronts if the VT Line could not be held. This would make two or three divisions available to bolster the VKT line. Dietl urged Heinrichs to carry out that plan quickly, but he considered it possible that, in their reluctance to give up East Karelia, the Finns would procrastinate so long that the withdrawal would be jeopardized. Dietl believed the Finns could hold out indefinitely in a shorter line and thereby spare the Germans a withdrawal to Norway.

A large stretch of the VT line was already under attack on the morning of June 12. Mannerheim ordered the transfer of the 17th Division and the 20th Brigade by rail from the Svir Front to the Karelian Isthmus. Even with these reinforcements it appeared doubtful that the Finns would be able to hold the VT Line in view of the avalanche of men and matériel the Soviets poured into their offensive.

Since more and more Finnish units were on their way to or had received orders to move (the 11th and 6th Divisions) to the Karelian Isthmus, Mannerheim decided to appoint a single commander of the Karelian Isthmus; Lt. Gen. Karl L. Oesch was brought from the Lake Onega area for that purpose.

The situation grew critical again for the Finns on June 14 and 15. Full-scale Soviet attacks against the VT Line from Siiranmaki to Vammelsuu tore up the Finnish western front over a 13-kilometer stretch despite stubborn Finnish resistance.

The Finnish High Command was convinced by June 15 that they could not hold the VT Line because reinforcements from East Karelia had not yet arrived. Some thought was given to occupying the old Mannerheim Line from the 1941 Winter War rather than withdrawing directly to the VKT Line, but General Oesch recommended making a stiff fighting withdrawal directly to the VKT Line since he did not think there was sufficient time to occupy the Mannerheim Line, and because it was in poor condition. His recommendation was accepted.

The Finnish political leaders panicked when the VT Line was lost and were prepared to make peace quickly and on almost any terms. The presidency of Finland was offered to Mannerheim since he was viewed as acceptable to the Soviets and was the only person capable of keeping the country together after the expected harsh peace conditions. The civilian leaders also wanted to proceed with peace discussions with the Soviet Union. Mannerheim refused the presidency but agreed the country should seek peace. This was on June 15 when things looked rather gloomy for the Finns.

By the next day, the VT Line had been penetrated to a depth of over 10 kilometers and all hope of restoring the front was lost. The Finnish infantry had great difficulty coping with the Soviet tanks, and so the Finnish High Command made an emergency request for German light antitank weapons. This request was acted on immediately.

The enemy was obviously heading for Viipuri but the Finns had no forces available to stop them. The greatest Finnish worry was that the Soviets would, for the time being, bypass the city and head for the 27-kilometer-wide isthmus between the Bay of Viipuri and the Vuoksi River. The Soviets had a good chance of reaching that isthmus before the III and IV Corps were in place. Such an event could be decisive since it would prevent the occupation of the western part of the VKT Line.

With his army under continued heavy attacks, Mannerheim ordered a withdrawal to the VKT Line on June 16. He also ordered a fighting withdrawal from the forward positions in East Karelia to the vicinity of the 1940 border, thus freeing up more combat units.

Soviet attacks and Finnish retreats continued unabated on June 16 and 17, and the Finns slowly retired in the direction of the VKT Line.

Soviet pressure was strongest along the Gulf of Finland coast. Some of the early reinforcements from East Karelia were now arriving. The 4th Division was directed to the lake country between Viipuri and the Vuoksi River.

According to the Soviet plans, Lt. Gen. A. Tjerepanov's Twenty-third Army initially had the mission of binding the Finnish forces in its sector while the Twenty-first and Twenty-third Armies conducted the main attack farther west. Later, these armies were to attack the Finnish III Corps and cross to the eastern bank of the Vuoksi River. Because of its more limited tasks in the offensive, the Twenty-third Army was assigned only two corps initially; plans were to add another corps as operations progressed.

The Twenty-third Army was faced with the III Finnish Corps, consisting of one division and one brigade, under Lt. Gen. Hjalmar Siilasvuo. Because its area of responsibility overlapped the sector of the Finnish IV Corps, Twenty-third Army also faced the Finnish 2nd Division belonging to that corps.

Since the VKT Line bent south along the Vuoksi River to Taipale, the III Corps did not have as far to withdraw as IV Corps. The fighting was nevertheless brutal and costly.

With the expected arrival on the Karelian Isthmus of the 11th and 6th Divisions from East Karelia, the Finns had switched the preponderance of their forces from East Karelia to the Karelian Isthmus. The main elements of the 4th Division and the 3rd Brigade arrived on June 16. The 17th Division and the 20th Brigade arrived between June 18 and 20. The 17th Division was split: its 13th Regiment was assigned to the IV Corps and two battalions of that regiment took part in the fighting in the 4th Division sector. The rest of the 17th Division was moved to the Kilpeenjoki area as part of the strategic reserve.

To command the increasing number of Finnish forces on the Karelian Isthmus, the headquarters of Finnish V Corps under

Maj. Gen. Antero Svensson was moved from the Svir front to the Viipuri area. On June 22, Svensson's V Corps took over the reinforcements assembling in this area, including parts of the 17th Division, 20th Brigade, and a number of smaller units.

The VKT Line was the last defensive line on the Karelian Isthmus. The 20th Brigade was responsible for the defense of Viipuri on a five-kilometer-wide sector. It tied into the 3rd Brigade in the east, which also held a sector of approximately five kilometers. To its east was the 18th Division which held a 10-kilometer sector, followed by the 3rd Division which held the sector to the Vuoksi River where it tied into the 2nd Division of III Corps.

The reserve consisted of the Armor Division, the 10th Division, the Cavalry Brigade, and the 17th Division minus one regiment. These were all located near Viipuri. The 10th Division and the Cavalry Brigade had already been badly mauled and had lost most of their artillery and heavy equipment, while the 6th and 11th Divisions were still on their way to the Karelian Isthmus.

General Govorov, remembering the Mannerheim Line's tenacious defense in the Winter War, had expected it to be heavily defended. Therefore, when Soviet forces reached this line and pushed through with virtually no opposition, they took it as an indication that the Finnish Army was finally destroyed. Govorov was quickly promoted to Marshal of the Soviet Union in anticipation of receiving a delegation of Finnish officers, who would acknowledge their defeat.

The Soviet advance continued and their troops soon reached Tali, northeast of Viipuri. Their order of battle was impressive: There were two corps in the vicinity of Viipuri and another six corps between Viipuri and the Vuoksi River. These corps contained 20 infantry divisions, three artillery divisions, four armored brigades, five to seven armored regiments, and seven self-propelled assault gun regiments. Against these, the best the Finns could hope for, by using all their reserves, was a force of ten divisions and four brigades.

Viipuri, the Karelian capital, fell quickly to the Soviets on June 20 after a short fight within the scheduled time frame laid down in Soviet plans. Had the Soviets bypassed Viipuri and directed their offensive a little farther east, against the narrows between Viipuri and Vuloksi, they could have frustrated Finnish efforts to establish themselves in the VKT Line, an area where they stopped the Soviet advance in 1940.

On the evening of June 21, General Oesch ordered Lt. Gen. Laatikainen to send elements of the 17th Division from Juustilla, north of Viipuri, to the northern coast of Viipuri Bay at Tienhaara to prevent the Soviets from crossing that bay; a crossing there would have outflanked the VKT Line from the west. These forces were in place in the afternoon of June 22.

German aircraft then carried out bombing attacks against the amphibious craft assembled by the Soviets on the other side of the bay. Following a heavy artillery barrage, troops from two Soviet divisions attacked across the bay in the evening of June 22. The attack was repelled but new attempts were made throughout the night and for the next three weeks.

Marshal Govorov decided that trying to cross the Bay of Viipuri would be too costly and time consuming. The Soviet troops involved were relieved by other forces and moved to the main operational theater in the Juustilla-Ihantala area.

Despite having frustrated Soviet attempts to cross the Bay of Viipuri, things were far from bright for the Finns. Having captured Viipuri, the Soviets could direct their offensive both westward along the northern shore of the Gulf of Finland against the harbor city of Hamina and northward to Ihantala and Lake Saimaa from Lappeenranta to Imatra. After reaching these areas, the terrain opened up and the possibilities for an armorled advance were excellent. The Finns knew that the decisive fight was close at hand.

Irritated by Finnish flirtations with their common enemies, in April 1944 Hitler had placed an embargo on military and food aid to the Finns. As soon as the magnitude of the Soviet summer offensive became evident, the Finnish military leadership realized that a catastrophe could only be averted with German help. The only other alternative was to seek peace with the Soviet Union. Both avenues were tried—simultaneously.

The two were actually linked, since the Finns had concluded that the only way to get acceptable terms from the Soviets was through stabilizing their fronts. In their desperate situation, the Finns were prepared to use German aid for purposes that were against the interests of their brothers-in-arms. Even if the Germans realized what the Finns were doing there was not much they could do about it except condition their aid, which was resumed as soon as the Soviet offensive began, on a firm commitment by the Finns to stay in the war. Not providing the requested aid would only lead to Finland being promptly knocked out of the war.

The Germans responded quickly to Finnish requests for assistance despite their own precarious situation. German torpedo boats brought in 9,000 shoulder-fired antitank weapons known as *Panzerfauste* ("tank-fist"). Mannerheim also requested a large number of the even deadlier *Panzerschreck* ("tank-terror") weapons, as well as ground support aircraft. The Finnish request stated that the VKT Line could be held only if these requests were approved and delivery expedited. Five-thousand *Panzerschrecks* were airlifted to Finland on June 22.

General Heinrichs asked General Waldemar Erfurth, chief of the German liaison staff in Finland, late on June 19 if the Germans were prepared to provide aid other than weapons. He specifically asked for six divisions to take over the front in East Karelia so the Finns could concentrate their efforts on the Karelian Isthmus. The formal request was made by Mannerheim on June 20.

The German answer came quickly: It was impossible to provide the six divisions Mannerheim requested but other help was promised. This was a sensible answer in view of

ABOVE: Soviet and Finnish positions during the initial breakthrough, the front line, and the VT line. RIGHT: With the aid of the Germans, Finland expelled the Russians at the end of the 1918 Finnish Civil War. The Soviets were back in 1939, and the Finns allied with the Germans again.

Germany's own force requirements at the time. However, setting these aside, it made little military sense to send a large German force to East Karelia. The Germans already had their strongest army tied up in central and northern Finland, contributing virtually nothing to the war effort. It would be folly to send an equally strong force to be isolated in East Karelia where there would also be great difficulties keeping it supplied.

The German High Command (Oberkommando der Wehrmacht—OKW) promised significant help as long as they were assured that the Finns were determined to hold the VKT Line. Besides weapons, ammunition, and supplies, the Germans offered the 122nd Infantry Division from Army Group North and the 303rd Assault Gun Brigade.

OKW also agreed to make Luftwaffe units available. Air Group Kuhlmey (named for its commander, Kurt Kuhlmey), consisting of fighters and Stuka ground-support aircraft, were quickly flown to Finland. These 70 aircraft were stationed at Imola Airfield outside Helsinki. The air support was immediate and German aircraft flew 940 sorties in support of the Finnish Army on June 21.

This was substantial aid considering the desperate situation in which the Germans found themselves in the middle of 1944. The Western Allies had landed in Normandy while the greatest Soviet offensive of the war, Operation Bagration, was expected to be launched any day.

Mannerheim was, by now, obviously in a pessimistic mood—understandable as the VT Line had been lost, his troops were retreating, and reinforcements were not in place. He urged that the proposed steps be undertaken quickly since it was not a matter of days but of hours. He soon had a change of heart, probably as a result of promised German assistance and the fact that his troops were fighting successful delaying actions that provided the time needed for reinforcements to arrive.

He concluded that it was risky to burn the bridge to Germany by discussing peace terms with the Soviets until the front had been stabilized. Mannerheim's changed attitude may also have been influenced by Soviet demands on June 21 that amounted to unconditional surrender.

Joachim von Ribbentrop, the German foreign minister, had arrived in Helsinki on June 22 to enter into negotiations for German assistance. He demanded, in return for aid, that Finland enter into a written agreement with Germany and issue a public statement that it would not seek a separate peace with the Soviet Union. This Ryti-Ribbentrop agreement was reluctantly agreed to by the Finns and resulted in an immediate breach of diplomatic relations with the United States.

Operation Bagration, the massive Soviet offensive against Army Group Center

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RIGHT: A Finnish Assault Gun Battalion. ABOVE: A Finnish radio operator on long-range patrol does his job.

which began on June 22, Allied advances in Normandy, and the British-American offensive in Italy imposed a crushing drain on German resources. Nevertheless, the help provided to Finland by Germany was effective. The shipments of *Panzerfausts* and *Panzerschrecks* greatly increased the Finnish Army's ability to thwart Soviet armor attacks and were instrumental in restoring the fighting morale of the Finnish infantrymen who had previously felt helpless against Soviet tank attacks.

Claims that German aid was only provided as a result of the Ryti-Ribbentrop agreement are not true. The deliveries of infantry light antitank weapons were provided before June 22 without preconditions, as were 150,000 hand grenades. The 303rd Self-Propelled Assault Gun Brigade reached Finland by ship on June 23 and was committed on the front to the east of Viipuri four days later; the 122nd Infantry Division arrived in Finland on June 28. Seven hundred thousand rounds of artillery ammunition, as well as antitank and assault guns, were either sent or ready in German ports for shipment.

Help from the German 20th Mountain Army was out of the question, though. That army was required to guard a long front in northern Finland and the forces were just sufficient for that task. The greatest service it could provide to the Finns was to remain in position and keep the Soviets from penetrating the waistline of Finland and thus threaten the Karelian Isthmus from the north.

The Finnish requests for aid kept coming. On June 30, Mannerheim asked for another German division as well as one additional assault gun brigade. This was followed on July 3 with an urgent request for a speedy delivery of rifles and submachine guns.

Mannerheim's request for another German division came at a time when the central German front in Russia had collapsed. OKW answered on July 5 that it was not possible to accommodate Mannerheim's request; OKW only agreed to provide heavy weapons and to double the number of assault guns in the 122nd Division.

After Mannerheim protested, Hitler promised two more assault gun brigades, plus tanks and artillery. However, the promise was hollow; the two self-propelled assault-gun brigades ended up being sent to the Eastern Front, one on July 17 and the second on July 18.

In less than two weeks, the Soviets had punched through two of the three Finnish defense lines and were closing in on the third. This represented a serious loss of terrain on the critically important Karelian Isthmus. The Finns now found themselves in the last defensive line before the Soviets reached the open country north of Viipuri—terrain well suited for mechanized forces. The decisive battle for the VKT Line was at hand.

Public Domain

The Finnish troops had fought well against overwhelming odds. Their morale had not completely broken despite heavy losses and continual retreats. Reinforcements had arrived on the Karelian Isthmus from East Karelia and this bolstered their morale.

Finnish historian Matti Koskimaa attributes the loss of ground to lack of operational mobility, inadequate radio communications, and ineffective antitank weapons. He could have added that the failure of the General Staff to recognize the many signs of an imminent Soviet offensive and an unfortunate delay in giving up the forward positions in East Karelia contributed to the loss because reinforcements from there were slow in arriving. However, tough defensive fighting by the Finnish soldiers bought the time required for reinforcements to arrive from East Karelia and for assistance from Germany to help stabilize the situation.

The decisive battle between the Finnish Army and the Red Army was about to start in the Tali-Ihantala area on the isthmus between Viipuri and the Vuoksi River. It is often referred to as the largest battle in Nordic history.

The Soviets had suffered significant losses and their troops were beginning to show signs of fatigue. But they had large reserves that allowed them time to rest and reorganize. The elite XXX Guards Corps, for example, had basically rested between June 12 and 24. However, the time was nearing when these Soviet troops would be needed in the great offensive against the Germans. Marshal Govorov received orders on June 21 to be on a line from Lappeenranta to Imatra no later than June 28. He had a short week to accomplish this task.

Govorov's simple objective was to defeat the Finnish Army in a final battle and then penetrate the defenseless interior of the country. This time he found his task much more difficult. With the arrival of the reinforcements from East Karelia, the Finns had 11 divisions (including the 122nd German Infantry Division) and four brigades on terrain

favorable for defensive operations.

When in position, these divisions were deployed as follows: The 10th and 17th Divisions, the Cavalry Brigade, and the Gulf of Finland Coastal Brigade were located in the area north of the Bay of Viipuri under V Corps. The 20th Brigade and the Armored Division were located north of Viipuri. The 18th, 4th, and 3rd Divisions were in line from Tali to Kaupasaari in that order from west to east. The 6th and 11th Divisions were just arriving in the area north of Viipuri. The 2nd and 15th Divisions and the 19th Brigade of III Corps were deployed in that order from north to south along the Vuoksi River.

Having received marching orders from Moscow, Marshal Govorov quickly concentrated his troops in the area to the northeast of Viipuri. The plan was for the Fifty-ninth Army and the Twenty-first Army to drive north; the Fifty-ninth Army was expected to capture Lappeenranta, while the Twenty-first Army turned west north of Viipuri in the direction of Miehikkaela and Hamina. The Twenty-third Army would strike farther to the east with the main force heading for Imatra while part of the army would turn east toward Hiitola.

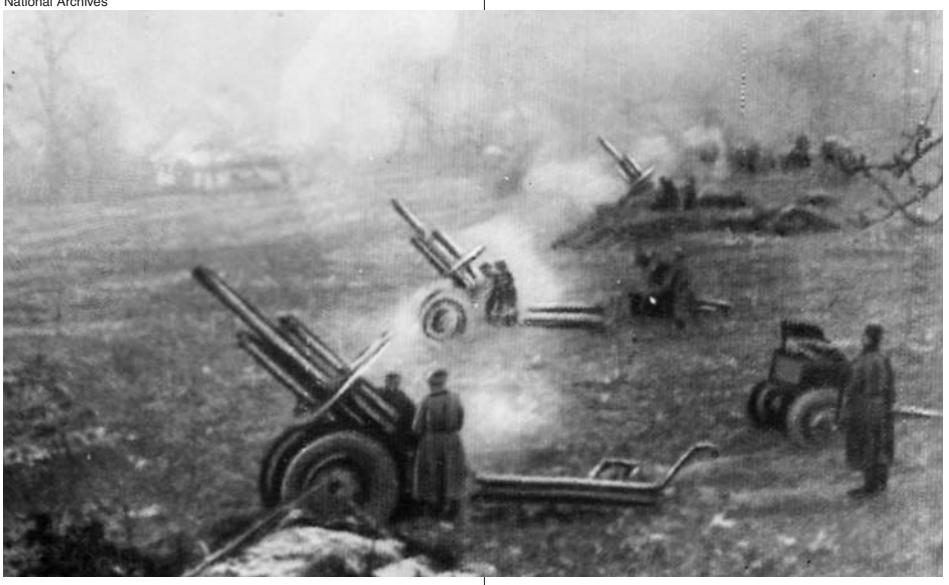
In the initial phase, the Finnish 18th Division, under Maj. Gen. Paalus, along with the 3rd Infantry Brigade and some miscellaneous battalion-size units, faced the 97th and 109th Soviet Corps and the 152nd Tank Brigade. These Finnish units put up a strong defense that gained the time needed for reinforcements to arrive on the scene.

There was heavy fighting at Tali, east of Viipuri, from June 22 onward, in terrain that was well suited for tank operations. A Soviet breakthrough here could bring about the collapse of the Finnish front.

The Soviet attack on the isthmus between Viipuri and Kuparsaari was intensive. For example, on a 15-kilometer-wide sector, the Red Army concentrated 14 divisions, three or four tank brigades, and 70 12-gun artillery batteries. There was an artillery piece every five meters in the areas of the main attacks.

These troops attacked on the morning of June 25 with the main effort along an axis from Tali to Ihantala. The smothering fire from almost 400 tubes of artillery and rocket batteries was directed at the defenders' front line and as far in the rear as Portinhoikka.

National Archives



Soviet howitzers in action against Finnish positions, June 1944.

The attack by the 30th Guards Corps tore open the Finnish front between the lakes of Leitimojaervi and Karstilaenjaervi. The Finnish units in the path of this steamroller were the 48th Infantry Regiment and the 3rd Battalion of the 13th Infantry Regiment.

The Soviet infantry, exploiting the intensive artillery preparation, had only to occupy the Finnish lines, as there were no soldiers left alive to offer any resistance. Soviet infantry followed the tanks in a deep penetration that, by the end of the day, had captured Portinhoikka and from there reached halfway to Ihantala.

A Soviet tank spearhead continued in the direction of Juustilankangas but was stopped by a unit of heavy Finnish tanks from the armored division; units from the 18th, 17th, and 4th Divisions joined in the counterattack. The Soviets were thrown back and the Finns reoccupied Portinhoikka in the evening.

In four days of heavy fighting, the Finns—reinforced by fresh units and the 303rd German Assault Gun Brigade—succeeded in sealing the Soviet penetration. However, they were not able to restore the front. The Soviets also reinforced with the 108th Corps.

The Finnish units on the battlefield had become scattered and these were quickly organized into two battle groups, led by Colonels Puroma and Bjørkman. These two battle groups tried to encircle four Soviet divisions and a guards tank brigade that had broken through east of Leitimojaervi. The Soviet divisions established hedgehog positions near Talinmylly and the Finnish attempt at encirclement failed. Throughout the operation, German and Finnish aircraft provided excellent close air support and hammered the Soviet lines of communication.

Although the bold attack by the two battle groups failed, it bought the defenders a sorely needed 72 hours that allowed the 6th and 11th Finnish Divisions to make their appearance on the battlefield. Nevertheless, the Soviets held a dangerous salient near terrain north of Tali that was favorable for tank operations and mobile warfare. Finnish losses were also mounting. By the end of June, Finnish losses had reached 18,000. Only 12,000 of these could be replaced.

The tough defensive fighting of the 18th Finnish Division and the bold actions of Battle Groups Puroma and Bjørkman had

Finnish soldiers of Infantry Regiment JR 12, II Division, advance past the still-smoking wreckage of a Soviet T-34 tank on the Imatra Road in Tali-Ihantala. Some carry German-made panzerfausts, while the soldier in front also carries a Finnish-made Suomi M-31 sub-machine gun.

stemmed the Soviet offensive long enough for reinforcements to arrive in the form of the 6th and 11th Divisions. The 18th Division was helped immeasurably by counterattacks launched by the Finnish armored division. The arriving 11th Division took over some of the sectors for which the 18th Division had been responsible, and the 4th Division took over defensive positions on the 11th Division's left flank.

The front line, which had stabilized somewhat over a period of several days of hard fighting, contained several sealed penetrations. For example, a substantial wedge had been driven into the Finnish defensive line north of Repola and the Finns had not been able to eliminate it by counterattacks. Because of the resulting zigzag front, larger forces were needed to man it. General Oesch recommended to Mannerheim that the front be straightened by withdrawals in some sectors and his recommendation was accepted.

Noticing what was happening, the Soviets began a new series of attacks to frustrate the Finnish plan. Consequently, the relief of forces could not be carried out as planned and the straightening of the front was only partially successful. The responsibility for defensive operations on the most northerly front against the center of the main Soviet thrust fell to the 6th Division under Maj. Gen. Einar Vihma.

Despite repeated Soviet tank and aerial assaults, the 6th Division fought a remarkable and tenacious defensive battle, and the Red Army was driven back. German and Finnish aircraft also bombed and strafed bridges and the lines of communication of the forward Soviet troops but Soviet infantry attacks continued with the support of tanks, artillery, and aircraft.

A report by the Finnish General Headquarters on July 1 describes Soviet air formations of up to 200 aircraft and takes note of the destruction of 57 enemy tanks in the Tali area. The Finns were beginning to reap the benefits of their shortened defense line. The Soviet penetration of the Finnish front was limited to a depth of seven kilometers and there was no breakthrough.

A Finnish intercept of Soviet radio traffic on July 3 indicated that several elite Guards and tank units were preparing a decisive attack in the direction of Ihantala. The Finns massed all their artillery fire—from about 250 pieces—and saturated the area where the attack formations were assembling just before the attack was to be launched.

This heavy artillery barrage was followed by attacks by Finnish aircraft and 26 German Stukas from Group Kuhlmey. The heavy defensive curtain of fire completely frustrated the planned Soviet attack, but failed to stop it.

For almost a week, the Soviets continued to carry out combined arms attacks with air support against the 6th Division sector. These attacks were repelled, primarily by excellent use of artillery and mortar fire. The Finnish losses were also great. Among those who were killed was Maj. Gen. Einar Vihma, the division commander. Only minor penetrations of the Finnish line took place and the front was restored through counterattacks.

The fighting that took place in the Tali-Ihantala area northeast of Viipuri over a three-week period ended in a Finnish defensive victory that impacted later political developments. The fighting was carried out successfully against an enemy superior in both men and matériel but the margin between success and failure was often razor thin. It is ironic that the Soviets were stopped in the same general area as they had been stopped in 1940.

In his book, *Bitva zu Leningrad 1941-1944,* Lt. Gen. S.P. Platonov does not try to hide the Soviet failure: "The enemy succeeded in significantly tightening is ranks in this area and repulsed all attacks by our troops … the forces of the right flank of the Leningrad front (Marshal Govorov's) failed to carry out the tasks assigned to them on the orders of the Supreme Command issued on June 21."

Several elements came together to make Finland's defensive victory possible. Reinforcements from East Karelia arrived just in the nick of time to prevent a decisive Soviet breakthrough. Finnish defensive operations had become firm and this must, in large measure, be attributed to their new technique in the use of artillery. Like the Soviets, the Finns massed their artillery in the threatened sectors and this had a devastating effect on the attackers.

Also, the new antitank weapons received from the Germans demonstrated their effectiveness even against the heaviest Soviet tanks. The Finnish Air Force, reinforced by Group Kuhlmey, also proved its effectiveness. Finally, the legendary toughness of the individual Finnish soldier had been restored.

On July 13, 1944, Marshal Govorov was ordered to transfer five fully equipped divisions to Leningrad because they were needed in central Russia, and thus he ordered his troops to end their attacks in the Ihantala sector. Finnish intelligence noted that, although Soviet strength on the Karelian Isthmus had grown to 26 infantry divisions and 12 to 14 tank brigades, some of the best Guards units had begun withdrawing and were replaced by less experienced troops.

While the Soviet attacks ended northeast of Viipuri on July 9, the operations on the flanks of the VKT Line continued for a while in the Bay of Viipuri and at Vuosalmi.

A week earlier, on July 2, the commander of the Soviet Fifty-ninth Army, Lt. Gen. Ivan Korovnikov, received orders to cross the Bay of Viipuri with two divisions, one armored brigade, and one naval infantry brigade. The assault troops numbered about 20,000, and were well supported by artillery and close-support aircraft. The initial objective of the amphibious operation, after securing a beachhead, was the town of Tienhaara. The Soviets were obviously trying to develop a threat against the right flank of the IV Corps.

After capturing some islands in the bay, Korovnikov's Fifty-ninth Army launched the main attack against the northern shore. The Finnish defenders were reinforced by the timely arrival of the 122nd German Infantry Division, and it was in this unit's sector that the main attack fell along a 10-kilometer-wide front. The 122nd Division had just moved up to relieve the Finnish Cavalry Brigade. The decisive battle in this area was fought from July 8 through July 10.

The tenacious Finnish defense of the VKT Line secured that country's continued existence as an independent nation, much as their defense in this area had done in 1940.

The Soviet operation was a complete failure as the Germans attacked and drove the landing force into the sea. The defensive operations by the Finns and Germans in the Bay of Viipuri became a victory when Korovnikov received orders to cancel his attacks.

The III Finnish Corps withdrew to its sector of the VKT Line without serious interference from the enemy. The 2nd Division had been transferred from IV Corps to III Corps and it reached its assigned segment of the VTK Line in the Vuosalmi area. Four battalions of this division—belonging to the 7th Infantry Regiment—were left in a small bridgehead on the western bank of the river while the rest of the division went into positions on the eastern bank.

The commander of the Soviet's Twenty-third Army, Lt. Gen. Tjerepanov, deployed his forces so that two divisions had the mission of seizing the west bank of the Vuoksi River at Ayrapaa. The fighting for the bridgehead on the west bank of Vuoksi River developed into a fierce battle, Tjerepanov was replaced by Lt. Gen. V. I. Sjvetsov, and the army was reinforced by another corps.

The Soviets launched new attacks on July 3 and 4, but it was not until July 9 that the Finns were forced to give up their positions on the west bank of Vuoksi south of Vuosalmi. The eastern bank of the river also came under attack that day after a heavy artillery bombardment and the employment of several hundred aircraft. Under cover of this strong supporting fire, the Soviets crossed the river in assault boats on a two-kilometer front, seizing a one-kilometer-deep bridgehead on the eastern bank. The Finns lacked the strength to eliminate the bridgehead and could only resort to containment.

Within a short time, however, the Soviets widened the bridgehead to such an extent that they were able to deploy one infantry division supported by tanks. A Jaeger Brigade and assault guns from the Finnish Armored Division were moved from the Tali-Ihantala area to reinforce the III Corps. The Soviets expanded their bridgehead despite these Finnish reinforcements.

Nevertheless, the defenders ultimately limited the dangerous penetration and prevented a breakthrough. The Soviets are reported to have lost 15,000 troops in the Vuosalmi area. Finnish losses were also

Continued on page 97

No armchair general, the Enfield-toting Brigadier "Mad Mike" Calvert (left) personally directs operations of his "Chindits" during the fight for a Burmese village.

CLEADING

CONTROVERSIAL, outspoken, and sometimes insubordinate, British Brigadier Michael "Mad Mike" Calvert was also the boldest and most effective commander in Operation Thursday, the daring 1944 British airborne assault on northern Burma.

During the month-long battle, Calvert's 77th Indian Infantry Brigade established multiple roadblocks astride Japanese lines of communication, disrupted the flow of supplies, and drew some of the best units in the Japanese Army into a fight they could not win.

In the brutal close-quarters fighting that followed—which often involved bayonets, hand grenades, and flamethrowers in the terrible heat and humidity of the spring and summer of 1944—the 77th Brigade destroyed several Japanese infantry battalions. Calvert's greatest achievement was the taking of Mogaung, a road junction and railhead without which the Japanese could not hold northern Burma.

In December 1941, four Japanese divisions based in Thailand crossed the frontier and drove the British and Chinese out of Burma. By the spring, the British Army had been routed, the Burma Road, China's only link to the Allies, had been cut, and the Japanese Army rested on the banks of the Chindwin, threatening to invade India. Even in the midst of such an embarrassing defeat, there was never any question about liberating Burma. General William Slim, commander of XIV Army, set about the task of assembling and training an army to retake the colony. Slim also looked for unorthodox ways to strike at the Japanese. One of these was the Long Range Penetration Group (LRPG),

All photos: Imperial War Museum

from the FRONT

"Mad Mike" Calvert led the 77th Indian Infantry Brigade—the Chindits—to a stunning victory in North Burma.

BY WILLIAM STROOCK

in which columns of British soldiers would march or be airlifted behind enemy lines and be resupplied by air, thereby allowing them to operate in Japanese territory without having to maintain a line of communication with the rear.

The LRPG was the brainchild of Orde Wingate, a general who already had a great deal of experience in unconventional warfare. When stationed in Palestine in the 1930s, he worked closely with the Haganah, the militia of the Jewish Agency, training them to battle Arab terrorists in small, aggressive groups. He later combined his Haganah paramilitaries with British soldiers to form a trio of units. The Special Night Squads, as Wingate called them, were the bane of Arab guerrillas. They forced the Arabs to stop harassing Jewish towns and British installations in Palestine.

Seeing Wingate's success in Palestine, in 1940 the Army sent him to the Sudan where he organized Sudanese soldiers and Ethiopian refugees into a special strike group called Gideon Force, which attacked Italian posts in central Ethiopia. Gideon Force's operation there was highly successful; it took several Italian forts and fought some sharp battles with the Italian Army. "With many of his ideas I was in agreement," Slim wrote, though he did express skepticism that they could work as well against the Japanese.

Wingate had shown himself to be a good organizer, able tactician, and brave leader of men. As the British position in Burma collapsed, General Archibald Wavell, the British C-in-C in the Far East, sent for Wingate in the hope that he could start a guerrilla war behind Japanese lines.

After touring the front and visiting the summer capital at Myanmo, Wingate went to the Bush Warfare School (a cover name; the school was actually a Chinese training camp) in India, and it was here that he met Major Michael Calvert, the school's commander. The pair discussed Wingate's ideas, to which Calvert gave his enthusiastic support. "Once having met, there was no further need to struggle for one's ideas. He would do the fighting and I would follow," said Calvert in his memoir, *Prisoner of Hope*.

Follow he did. Calvert trained the men who in turn trained Wingate's 77th Brigade in the art of jungle warfare. Later, during Wingate's first foray against the Japanese, called Operation Longcloth, Calvert commanded one of the two columns that set out from the British base at Tamu, in northeast India in mid-February 1944, and marched through the difficult mountainous jungle and into Burma between the Chindwin and Irrawaddy Rivers.

While the 77th Brigade did little long-term damage to the Japanese during Longcloth, the unit became a sensation throughout the Empire simply because they marched into and fought their way back out of Japanese-held Burma—something thought impossible after the many seemingly super-human feats accomplished by Japanese soldiers during their conquest of Asia. "This first operation proved that the European soldier, as of old, can shake off the shackles of his civilized neuroses and inhibitions and live and fight as hard as any Asiatic," Calvert wrote.

In the aftermath of Longcloth's success, Wingate argued for and was given an oversized force of six brigades. Designated the 3rd Indian Division (which he nicknamed the Chindits—a corruption of the Burmese word for "lion")—the division was augmented by the 1st Air Commando, a wing of several dozen light and heavy transport aircraft and gliders.

For an encore to Longcloth, Wingate concocted Operation Thursday, a bold plan to open a second front in northern Burma. Employing gliders and parachutes, Wingate would drop five of his brigades behind Japanese lines and establish several strongholds. From these strongholds, resupplied by air, Wingate would attack Japanese forces and cut communications all along the railway from Indaw north to Myitkyina.

While Wingate battled the Japanese for

control of the railway, the American General Joseph Stilwell would lead a mixed Sino-American force down the Hukawng Valley and take Myitkyina. By taking the town, Stilwell would turn the Japanese right flank and, more importantly from the American point of view, enable the Allies to reopen the Burma Road to China.

Given his close relationship with Wingate and success in Longcloth, Calvert was an obvious choice to command a brigade and Wingate placed the 77th Brigade under his charge. Under Calvert, the 77th Brigade comprised five infantry battalions (3rd Battalion, 6th Gurkha Rifles; 3rd Battalion, 9th Gurkha Rifles; 1st Battalion, Lancashire Fusiliers; 1st Battalion, King's Liverpool Regiment; 1st Battalion, South Staffords, each divided into two columns), an artillery battalion, an antiaircraft battalion, four independent infantry companies, a headquarters company, and company of engineers.

His brigade would be transported in 54 gliders pulled by 26 C-47s to an open field code-named "Broadway" and clear a landing strip. Then the 77th Brigade would "cut all rail, road and river communications of the Japanese 18th Division." His specific targets were the railway running south of Mogaung, the River Katha, and the road running south from Myitkyina.

The brigade was well equipped for the close-quarters fighting that lay ahead. The men carried small, easily portable 3.2-inch mortars, PIAT antitank grenade launchers, and flamethrowers that would prove invaluable against fanatical Japanese soldiers. He would also have ample air support in the form of American P-51 Mustangs that would be crucial during the campaign. "They used to come over cheerfully again and again [on the radio] with the quiet drawl, 'What's the target?'" Calvert wrote of them.

Operation Thursday began on the night of March 5, 1944. Past midnight, the first wave of six gliders took off from India for the Broadway airstrip. Contained inside were 77th Brigade's headquarters company, a security platoon, and engineers. General Mike Calvert, of course, went in

Calvert (touching the visor of his cap) and Brigadier Orde Wingate, commander of the 3rd Indian Division (second from right, in pith helmet), brief their staff officers on Operation Thursday before take-off from the main base at Sylhet, Assam, then part of India.

with this spearhead group. The landing was rough and several American engineers were killed. As Calvert got his HQ set up, the surviving engineers went about the task of clearing the gliders, filling in ditches, improving the airstrip, and lighting petroleum flares for the incoming aircraft.

But before the task was complete, the second wave of 54 gliders began arriving, with the result that several gliders crashed into a trio of gliders that had not yet been removed from the landing zone; follow-on gliders crashed into these, causing a massive pileup in the clearing. The end result was 30 killed and 21 wounded. Of the original 54 gliders, only 37 made it to Broadway, with the rest being scattered throughout northern Burma.

But this dispersal was a blessing in disguise. Calvert noted that "the landing of gliders all over North Burma thoroughly confused the enemy, and it was not for some time that he knew our whereabouts and our strength."

By dawn, Calvert had 350 effectives at Broadway. All through March 6, the American engineers scrambled to get the strip ready to receive aircraft. That night, 63 Dakotas flew in with the rest of the brigade's support elements, plus four infantry battalions.

As soon as the airfield was established, Calvert set his brigade upon the Japanese. He left Colonel Claude Rome, a trusted subordinate, in command at Broadway with the 3/9 Gurkha. One column (composed of Lancaster Fusiliers) marched east and established a roadblock south of Mohinyan. Another column—the South Staffords and Brigade HQ—established a block in the hills above the village of Henu. The block was a thumb-shaped pocket 100 yards long by roughly 800 yards wide, and the ground outside the block was laced with booby traps and trip wires.

Calvert occupied a good position among several hills, including one featuring a pagoda that overlooked the town. He established his headquarters on a hill to the east; 3/6

Gurkhas remained there with him. Calvert also deployed a "floater company" outside of the stronghold's defense to bring down on the Japanese during an attack.

Skirmishing began that night as Japanese forces out of Mawlu (5th Railroad Battalion) probed the Chindits' position; they were easily turned back by a mortar barrage. Heavy fighting erupted the next day and Japanese forces infiltrated the block, getting into Henu and atop Pagoda Hill. From these positions, the Japanese attacked the Staffords' roadblock.

Calvert personally brought four platoons forward to reinforce the Staffords and then led the combined force in a bayonet charge against the Japanese positions atop Pagoda Hill. To his astonishment, the Japanese rose from their entrenchments and charged down the slope at Calvert and his men. "This definitely was not in the book," he later wrote.

The British and Gurkhas won the melee in the middle, worked their way up the hill, and easily took the Japanese positions. The Gurkhas then pursued the fleeing enemy into Henu. House-to-house fighting broke out, which the Gurkhas and Staffords ended with flamethrowers.

Calvert's men suffered 23 killed and 64 wounded in exchange for the destruction of a Japanese battalion. More importantly, the block had been firmly established in the hills east of Henu. Calvert called it "White City," because of the parachutes hanging in the trees from the first air drops.

The engineers quickly built a pair of airstrips along the railway, one for light aircraft, another for Dakotas. The South Staffords took up positions in the north and east, while the 3/6 Gurkhas dug in along the south, on the river, and west, overlooking the airstrips and railway. Headquarters was on a hill in the middle.

After destroying a railroad bridge north at Mahwun, engaging in some firefights with Japanese forces, and intercepting traffic along the Irrawaddy, the Fusiliers moved west but remained in the jungle outside the stronghold in the role of a "floater company."

By the night of March 18, elements of the Japanese 53rd Division were coming up from the south and probing White City's perimeter. But a serious attack did not develop until the 21st, this time in the north. While Calvert was establishing the White City block, the Japanese 3rd Battalion, 114th Regiment and 18th Division had been coming south. The Japanese launched a ferocious assault against the Staffords' position, penetrating it in two spots and establishing outposts within the perimeter. These held on even as the rest of the assault was turned back.

A few hours later, the Japanese attacked again. As the attack developed, Calvert ordered the floater company to hit the Japanese in the flank. The Japanese were prepared for such a move and threw the counterattack back with heavy losses. Calvert then brought forward a pair of flamethrower-armed platoons. These rooted out the Japanese outposts and stabilized the line.

As the Japanese reformed a few hundred yards to the north, Calvert called a Mustang airstrike down on them. The strikes inflicted heavy casualties and prevented the enemy from renewing the attack. Instead, they withdrew to the north.

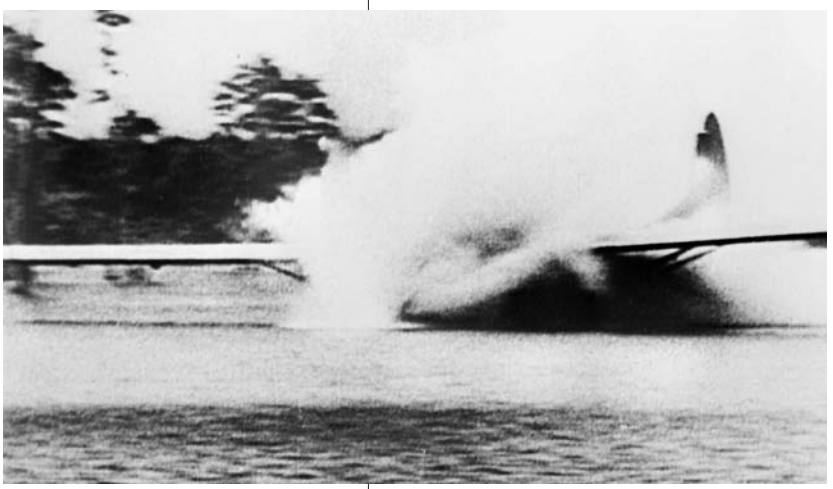
Captain W.F. Jeffrey, a platoon commander with the Fusiliers, wrote that the Japanese "used the same approaches night after night, which greatly helped our mortar crews." The Japanese had been badly mauled in the first serious attack; prisoners revealed that most of their officers had been killed. Calvert lost 36 dead and 42 wounded in the engagement.

Having stopped the Japanese assault on White City, Calvert elected to attack enemy positions to the south at Mawlu. The village was defended by a company of the 2nd Battalion, 113th Regiment—part of the 18th Division. On the village's right flank was a series of rice paddies. To the south was the village of Sepein.

Two columns, one from the Staffords, the other from the Gurkhas, marched south while a third, the Lancaster Fusiliers, occupied the east end of the rice paddies. The plan was for the main attack force to drive the Japanese out of the village and into the Fusiliers' position.

The ensuing night attack went well, with the two northern columns driving the Japanese out of the village. As planned, they fled into the rice paddies where they came under withering fire from the Fusiliers. Despite the heavy casualties, the Japanese were able to extract themselves from the paddies and head south.

When their comrades retreating from Mawlu arrived in Sepein, Japanese troops there panicked and fled; the two groups retreated all the way to Indaw, 25 miles down the rail line. Calvert noted, "We now occupied the first sizable Burmese town to be retaken from the Japs."



A glider makes a heavy landing at Broadway during Operation Thursday, March 1944.

While Calvert was consolidating his position at White City, the original landing area at Broadway came under heavy Japanese attack. Broadway was defended by the 3/9

Gurkhas, six 40mm Bofors antiaircraft guns, and five Spitfires that had been specially flown in for the task. A series of large Japanese air raids, some numbering as many as 30 aircraft, commenced on March 17. The Spits and Bofors shot down five aircraft on the first day.

The attacks continued for several days and the Japanese were able to do light damage to the aircraft at Broadway but, because of the hard work of the engineers, were unable to permanently wreck the airfield. Despite the air attacks, reinforce-

ments for the defenders did not stop. The 6th Nigerian Rifles and one battalion from the 111th Brigade were flown in and sent on down the rail line.

On the night of March 26, local Kachin tribesmen reported that a Japanese battalion, later identified as part of the 18th Division, was closing in from the north. Major Rome sent half a platoon north to find the approaching Japanese. When they located them the next day, the platoon laid an ambush that inflicted several casualties. The platoon then pulled back inside Broadway's defenses.

The Japanese fought back with a major attack that night, hitting the defenses in various places along the northern perimeter. However, they were unable to battle their way through the Gurkhas. Near dawn, two platoons from the floater company arrived on the scene. Their counter-

ABOVE: British soldiers manning a field gun watch as a C-47 drops supplies in Burma. LEFT: An RAF wireless operator attached to a Chindit column sits with his equipment in a jungle clearing in Burma.

attack forced the Japanese to temporarily pull back. Elements of the King's Liverpool Battalion also arrived but ran into stout resistance from well-entrenched Japanese infantry.

The Brits attacked again that day, this time with flamethrowers in the lead. The Japanese pulled back into the jungle having suffered more than 200 casualties in the course of the fighting. The King's pursued but were unable to catch up to them. Still another battalion from the elite Japanese 18th Division had been badly mauled.

Calvert followed up his victory at Broadway with an attack on Sepein, calling it "a nodal point in the enemy's organization for his attack." The town was a road-and-rail hub and headquarters for Japanese operations in the vicinity of White City. The attack was executed in stages, with the 3/6 Gurkhas seizing a pair of Japanese-held villages between White City and Sepein. Then, the village of Thayaung, farther east, was taken by the Fusiliers.

At dawn on the 13th, the 3/6 Gurkhas struck the town proper. Supported by 25-pounder guns based in the stronghold, the Gurkhas initially made good progress, advancing to the village outskirts where the Japanese had several trenches among the thick brush. The Gurkhas were unable to advance further. Air strikes and a follow-up attack by the 45th Reconnaissance Regiment (which had been loaned from the 16th Brigade) were also unable to dislodge the Japanese.

With no more reserves to commit (after the initial success, Calvert dispatched his Nigerians south to Mawlu), Calvert broke contact and pulled back to Thayaung. Overall, the assault force lost 16 killed and 35 wounded. Calvert contented himself with establishing a temporary block to the north in the vicinity of Tonlon.

Trouble now loomed to the south, where the Japanese 24th Mixed Brigade had fought past Chindit forces (14th Brigade) outside of Indaw and pushed north to the outskirts of White City. The stronghold was now defended by the 12th Nigerian Battalion, which threw back a concerted Japanese effort, counterattacked, and pursued them into the jungle.

On the morning of April 17, Calvert set out from Thayaung with the Reconnaissance Regiment and the 3/6 Gurkhas in the hopes of getting behind the Japanese and pinning

them against White City. Calvert struck on the 18th, with the Reconnaissance Regiment leading the way and pushing north until they reached a small stream called the Mawlu Chaung (river). With the Japanese pinned in place, Calvert sent one Gurkha company each around the right and left flanks, but both of these efforts were stopped by fanatical Japanese resistance.

Now it became a slug match, with the Reconnaissance Regiment pushing its way across the stream against fierce Japanese opposition. The Japanese counterattacked, hitting the Gurkhas on the right flank and nearly breaking them. Only a Mustang strike and Calvert's appearance on the battlefield prevented a complete rout. After this, Calvert decided to pull back.

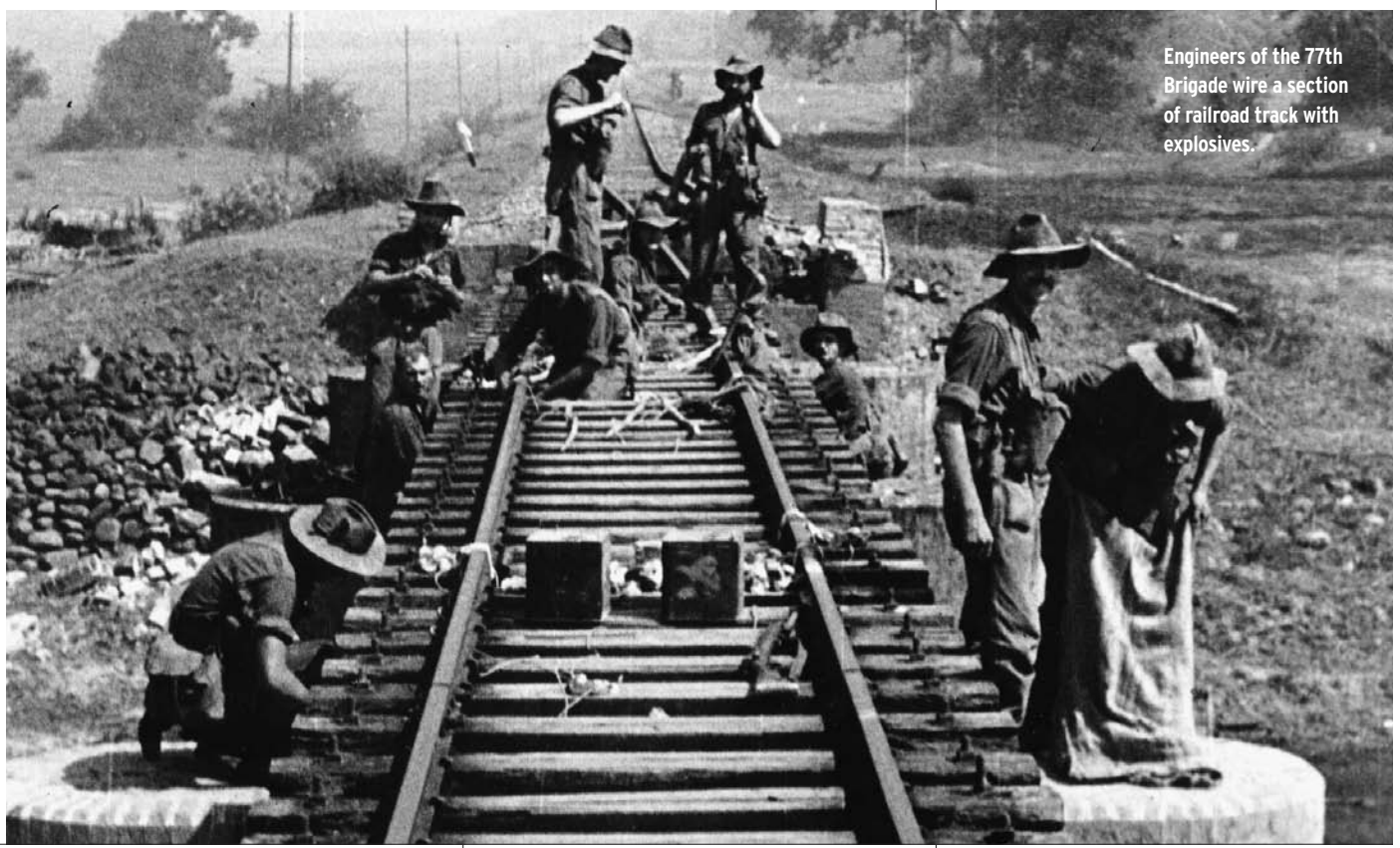
The brigade had suffered about 70 dead and 150 wounded, though they had stopped the Japanese attack on White City. "The Japs never attacked the block," he wrote. Several hundred Japanese bodies were found on the battlefield. "The Japanese morale after that, coupled with the effect of our counterattack, wilted right away, and they started to straggle back."

Though it had virtually destroyed the Japanese 24th Mixed Brigade, the battle for White City had sapped the strength of the 77th Brigade. As the 14th Brigade had failed to take Indaw, General Joe Lentaigne, who had taken command after Wingate was tragically killed in a plane crash on March 24, felt that Calvert should abandon White City and Broadway and move north to the vicinity of Mogaung. The town was a road-and-railhead about 20 miles west of Myitkyina and by taking it, Lentainge hoped to aid Stilwell, who had slowly pushed his way southeast against a determined Japanese resistance.

Calvert detested the idea. His 77th Brigade was exhausted from several weeks of hard fighting and, in his opinion, should have been flown out of Burma. Calvert sent several messages to Lentaigne protesting the order which he said was "borderline insubordinate." Lentaigne had to threaten to remove Calvert to get him to shut up.

The attack was to be a two-pronged effort. The 111th Brigade would establish a stronghold south of Mogaung, called "Blackpool," to block reinforcements while Calvert and 77th Brigade would attack the town from the east (this stronghold would not figure on the final push on Mogaung, as the Japanese brought much pressure to bear and forced the 111th Brigade to abandon it). He would have help, though, as a Chinese infantry regiment was ordered south from Mytikyina.

White City was turned over to the 14th Brigade and elements of the 3rd West African Brigade while Calvert, still fuming over Lentaigne's order, moved north. By early May, he was in the vicinity of Mogaung with his three battalions deployed in an arc south of the town. Across the valley was the new stronghold of Blackpool and the 111th Brigade. The stronghold was placed on the east bank of the Namyin Chaung and bracketed in the north by the village of Loilwaw and in the south by the village of Pagunyang. To the east was a sharp ridgeline. Between the two lies an open plain, the road and rail



Engineers of the 77th Brigade wire a section of railroad track with explosives.

line to Mogaung. Just east of the rail line, on the banks of the Wetthauk Chaung, lay the village of Pinhmi. A second road to Mogaung ran through the village. The Pinhmi Bridge, northwest of the village, was the only way across the river.

Knowing that the Japanese were expecting an attack from the south, Calvert, on the advice of Major Rome, sent a couple of battalions east around the Japanese flank. Calvert left a company and an RAF spotter at the village of Lamai from which the whole valley could be observed. The force slowly worked east, village by village. On June 1, they seized the village of Lokum at the base of the ridge's east slope. The next night they pushed on to the village of Ngakahtawng. From there, Calvert sent a platoon north to the Tapaw ferry on the Mogaung Chaung to secure a crossing for the Chinese.

Calvert now had a strong screen east of Mogaung. The next task was to push up the ridge. By then, however, it was strongly defended by a Japanese infantry company. Calvert's attack began on the night of June 2. As the Staffords and Gurkhas started up the ridge, they were met by heavy fire that temporarily stopped the advance. One platoon of Fusiliers managed to reach the crest and rolled up the Japanese flank while the rest of the battalion moved up with machine guns and brought the enemy positions under fire.

One platoon commander with the Fusiliers described the fighting: "We took the ridge, then the next, and the next, and so we continued all day, loading and unloadin', marching and fighting." With mortars and PIAT grenade launchers, the British systematically cleared out the ridge as far north as Lokum, about halfway to the Mogaung Chaung.

Considerable obstacles still lay ahead. The ground between the ridge and Mogaung was marshy. A river named the Wettauck Chaung ran through the center. At the foot of the ridge was the village of Pinhmi and, beyond, the crucial Pinhmi Bridge.

There were several smaller villages as well. From north to south these were Naygygion, Ywathitkale, and Mahaung (south of Mogaung). All were occupied by the Japanese. Calvert planned to come down from the ridge and push his way across the Wettauk Chuang via Pinhmi. The first task was to clear the rest of the ridge. Calvert mounted a two-pronged assault, with the Staffords running along the crest of the ridge while the Gurkhas advanced along the east slope. A night of heavy fighting cleared the ridge for about a quarter of a mile north, until they were opposite Pinhmi. Next, Calvert advanced north to Gurkha Village (an old land grant village given to Gurkha soldiers in the 19th century); the village was taken without incident. The way to Pinhmi was now open.

In preparation for just such an attack, the Japanese had dug a series of bunkers under Burmese homes, and also on the west bank of the river. These preparations would prove to be all for naught.

The Fusiliers launched the first attack on Pinhmi. They spent the night fighting their way through the jungle scrub, only reaching the village outskirts by the next morning. The next day was spent clearing Pinhmi. A hospital, ammunition dump, and several prisoners were taken during the effort.

Major General W.D.A. "Joe" Lentaigne took command of the operation after Wingate died in a plane crash.

With the village in friendly hands, Calvert ordered a frontal assault on the bridge. The Fusiliers suffered heavily and had to pull back to Pinhmi. Calvert later wrote simply, "I should not have ordered this attack." A few days later, the Gurkhas gave the bridge a try. The Japanese repulsed the first attack, but a second effort succeeded. While one company attacked the bridge head on, a second company waded through waist-deep marsh to the south and around the Japanese flank. The bridge and village had at last been captured, but the attacks on Pinhmi cost the 77th Brigade 130 dead and wounded.

There were still two important Japanese positions to take: the Court House Triangle, an enemy position just up the road from the Pinhmi Bridge, and Naugkyaiktaw, a Japanese-held village about 400 yards down the river. The job fell to the Fusiliers who pushed the enemy out of the triangle after a day of heavy fighting.

At the same time, the Staffords launched an attack down the banks of the Wettauk Chaung. The attack secured 77th Brigade's southern flank, enabling Calvert to plan for a further advance on Mogaung. He did not attack right away though. Instead, he dug in his tired battalions (they were down to a combined strength of about 550) along the Wettauk Chaung and ordered them to harass the Japanese with aggressive patrols in the no-man's-land between the two forces and even into Mogaung proper. "We usually got the best of these night encounters," Calvert said.

This phase of the fighting culminated with a night attack on Naugkyaiktaw. The assault opened with a mortar barrage and ended with the aggressive use of flamethrowers against dug-in Japanese. Calvert's machine gunners mercilessly cut down the enemy as they tried to flee north. "We joined the shooting, standing on chairs to kill off any Japs seen crawling away," he noted.

As Calvert contemplated how to attack Mogaung, the promised Chinese reinforcements finally arrived. These were the 1st and 2nd Battalions of the 114th Regiment. The 114th was a well-trained and battle-hardened force ably commanded by a colonel named Li who worked closely with Calvert during the upcoming attack. Li's first action was a

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Hearing the sound of gunfire, a Chinese soldier moves quickly through a section of jungle during an engagement in Burma, 1944.

successful attack on the village of Loilaw. It was "a sharp little engagement," in Calvert's words, which gained the town and several of the enemy's antiaircraft guns and trucks.

With the southern route now open, Calvert ordered a two-pronged assault. The Gurkhas would advance along the Mogaung to the railway bridge while the Staffords pushed through toward the rail embankment in the center of town. The Fusiliers and flamethrower unit stood in reserve. The Chinese would attack from Loilaw.

Calvert softened up the Japanese in Mogaung with mortar barrages and air strikes; 70 sorties were mounted on one day alone. Then, in the early morning hours of June 23, the attack got under way. As they advanced across the open ground, the British suffered heavy casualties. Even so, the Gurkhas took the railway bridge, but had to leave several Japanese strongpoints behind. These were dealt with by flamethrower teams, who literally poured fire into the tight bunkers.

By dawn, the Staffords had reached the embankment but came under heavy fire from the left, as the Chinese had made only a light probe and failed to follow this up with a concerted assault. Calvert ordered the Fusiliers into the fray and brought all his machine guns and mortars to bear on the Japanese. Under this cover fire, the Staffords closed with the Japanese positions and systematically cleared them out, using PIATs to blow holes in the occupied house; hand grenades and flamethrowers followed.

Despite being cut off, the Japanese in the west of Mogaung, supported by mortars on the far river bank, fought on. Calvert called in air support on the various bunkers. He unleashed a pincer attack on the 25th, with the Fusiliers advancing from the east while the Chinese came up from the south. The Fusiliers pressed their attack but were turned back in no small part because the Chinese gave up the attack early on. Calvert later learned this was a clever ruse by Li, who left two men behind in the rubble. All night the pair watched the Japanese positions, noting when and where men emerged for meals and other needs. By morning, they had pinpointed every Japanese bunker. Armed with this information and their deadly flamethrowers, the Gurkhas cleared out the rest of Mogaung over the course of the next two days.

After the fall of Mogaung, the 77th Brigade was down to 300 able-bodied men and was finished as an effective fighting force. Calvert handed the town over to Colonel Li and hoped to get his troops back to India. Incredibly, General Lentaigne ordered Calvert to send a company down the rail line to Hopin, but Calvert flat out refused to do so.

Then Stilwell demanded that Calvert send his few remaining troops to help the Marauders at Myitkyina. When Calvert said he couldn't, Stilwell, true to his nickname of "Vinegar Joe," accused Calvert and his men of malingering or worse. Calvert eventually met with Stilwell and smoothed things over. Soon thereafter, the battered, exhausted men of 77th Brigade were flown out of Burma for a well-deserved rest.

Having established several blocks, destroyed at least five Japanese battalions, and taken Mogaung, Calvert's 77th Brigade was easily the most effective Chindit force.

Of the final victory at Mogaung, Calvert simply wrote, "Elation! I had no elation, no satisfaction, no positive emotion—just to lie down for a while and rest."

Calvert returned to England in 1945 for medical reasons. His postwar career was rather checkered. He commanded an SAS Regiment during the Malay Emergency but saw little success there as his troops were poorly selected and of questionable loyalty.

Calvert was then posted to Germany where his wild, alcohol-fueled conduct led to a charge and court-martial conviction for "gross indecency with male persons," though it should be noted the evidence used in his trial is highly suspect. After leaving the Army in 1952, he wrote extensively on guerrilla warfare and the Chindit campaigns in Burma. He died in 1998.

Of Calvert, the British historian John Keegan said, "Calvert was a great warrior who was also opinionated, dangerously outspoken and, at times, verging on the insubordinate. His men loved him; the military establishment did not."□

Bougainville, November 1943.

A PHOTO ESSAY BY ERIC HAMMEL

Faces of War

Kwajalein Atoll, January 1944.

A collection of World War II Marine Corps photographs bears witness to the effect of war on the young combatants.

NOTED CHRONICLER OF the Pacific Theater Eric Hammel recently spent three years sorting, scanning, cleaning, selecting, and captioning United States Marine Corps World War II photos for six pictorial books.

The project netted a collection of thousands of digital images, most of them never before even considered for publication. Along the way, Hammel found a few hundred that stayed in his memory because of the sheer emotional impact of what they have to say about war and its effect on people, especially the combatants.

Among the most impressive of these select photos is a relatively small number in which the faces alone of the then-young men being memorialized on film have the most to say. According to Hammel, nothing other than where and when the photos were taken is needed to explain what is captured in them.

Eric Hammel is the acclaimed author or co-author of 36 books of military history, most of which deal with the U.S. Marine Corps and the Pacific Theater. His most recent book is Islands of Hell: The U.S. Marines in he Western Pacific, 1944-1945 *(Zenith Press). He resides in California.*

Tarawa, November 1943.

New Britain, December 1943.

Saipan, June 1944.

New Britain, January 1944.

Peleliu, September 1944.

Iwo Jima, February 1945.

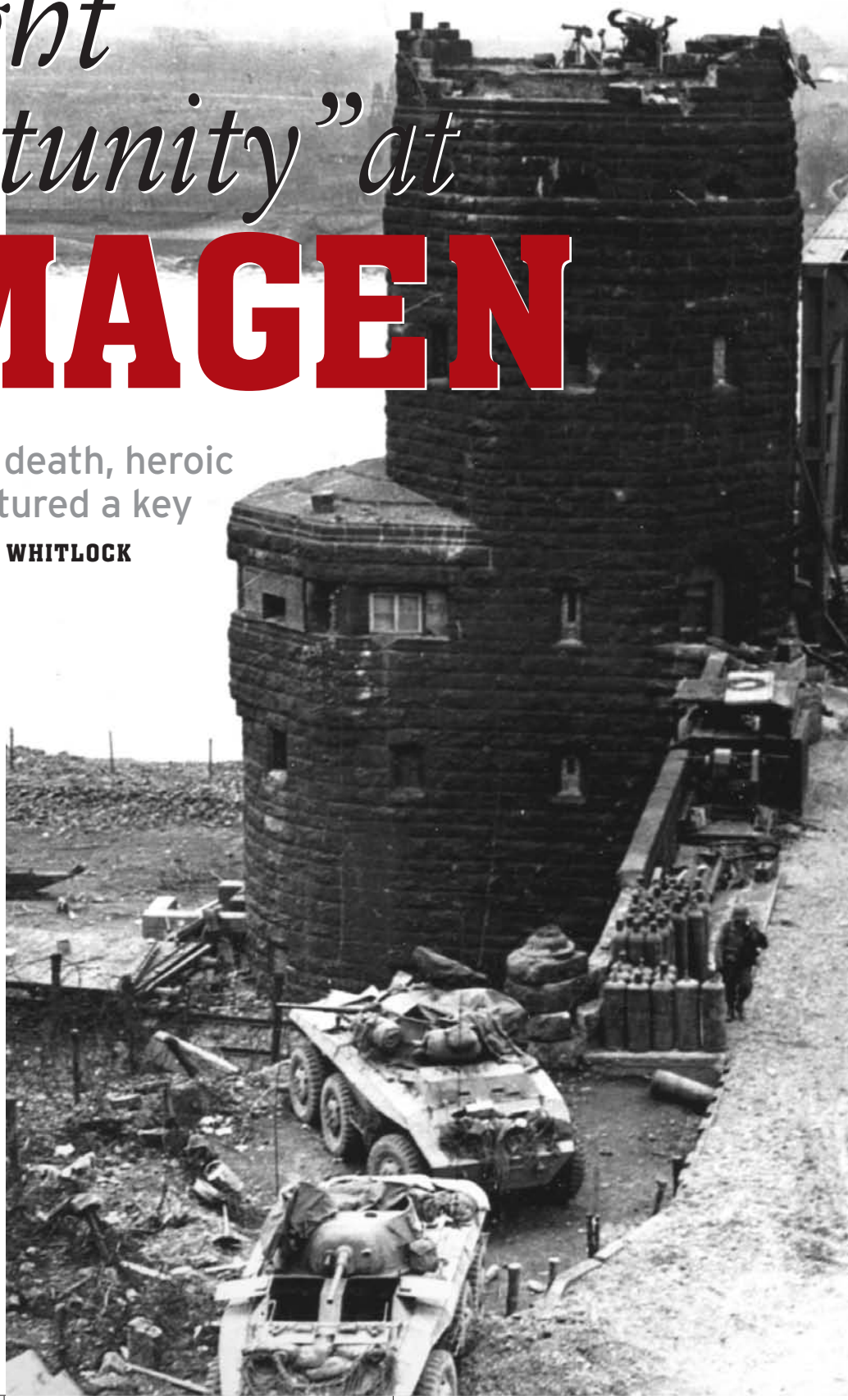
Iwo Jima, February 1945.

Okinawa, April 1945.

Iwo Jima, February 1945.

Okinawa, May 1945.

A "Bright Opportunity" at REMAGEN



In the face of certain death, heroic American troops captured a key Rhine bridge.

BY FLINT WHITLOCK

IT WAS MARCH 7, 1945—a gray, overcast day with a nasty chill in the air, the kind of day in which a soldier at the front wished he could relax in front of a toasty fire with a canteen cup full of hot coffee and think about home.

Instead, the members of 2nd Lieutenant Karl H. Timmermann's Company A, 27th Armored Infantry Battalion, Combat Command B of the U.S. 9th Armored Division were lying in the mud and wet weeds at the edge of the Rhine River, staring at a 1,056-foot-long stone and steel bridge that had death written all over it.

Timmermann had been promoted to company commander just hours before, after the previous commander, Captain Frederick F. Kriner, became a casualty during the fighting at Stadt Meckenheim, a few miles west of Remagen, the previous day.

His division, nicknamed the "Phantom Division," had been in Europe ever since arriving in France on October 3, 1944. It had seen heavy combat during the December German counteroffense in the Ardennes, and elements of the division had

The battered Ludendorff railroad bridge at Remagen, photographed at 11:00 AM on March 17, 1945. It collapsed into the Rhine a few hours later.

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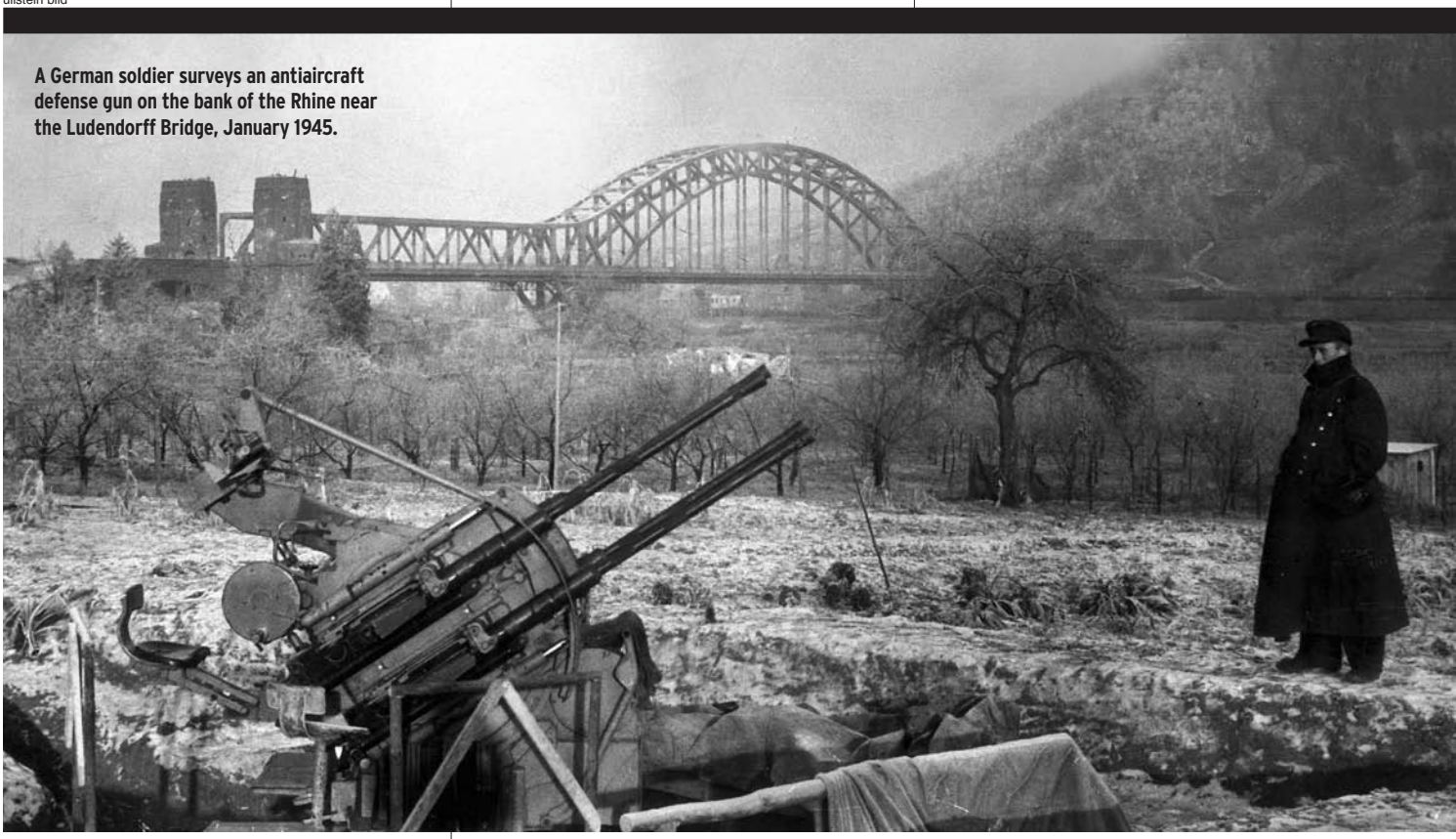


A German soldier surveys an antiaircraft defense gun on the bank of the Rhine near the Ludendorff Bridge, January 1945.

taken part in the defense of St. Vith and Bastogne. In late February 1945, under III Corps control, the 9th had participated in Operation Lumberjack, the Allied drive out of the Ardennes/Eifel area and into Germany. Although their time in combat had been relatively brief, the men were worn out and battle weary.

They were wary, too, for it seemed that the retreating German army they had been pursuing was on the verge of collapse. It seemed foolish, even stupid, to take any unnecessary risks now that the war was as good as over.

Yet, here was their company commander, a German-born, 22-year-old resident of West Point, Nebraska, telling them they had to get up from their places of relative safety and start across this structure that just smelled of an ambush, a trap. At the near and far ends of the span, dark, medieval-looking stone towers stood watch, almost beckoning the Yanks to come across, like the mythical Lorelei of the Rhine, leading sailors to their doom.

What would happen then, the soldiers wondered. Would hidden machine guns suddenly burst to life, raking the exposed troops with deadly bullets? Were tons of explosives emplaced below the girders, with the firing mechanisms set to go off as soon as the entire company was in the center of the bridge? Was an artillery barrage about to be unleashed upon the unprotected men?

But orders were orders. The division commander, Maj. Gen. John W. Leonard; the Combat Command B (regimental) commander, Brig. Gen. William M. Hoge; and Timmermann's battalion commander had all given the word: Take that bridge at all costs.

It wasn't that bridges along this stretch of the Rhine were in abundance. Those that had been standing had become the only escape route for the retreating German forces. But all of them were now nothing but rubble.

Since the beginning of warfare, rivers, oceans, and mountains have presented natural obstacles for advancing, or retreating, armies. By World War II, this was still true, but nature had, to a great extent, been conquered by technology and man's ingenuity.

Germany is striped vertically by an abundance of rivers than run, generally speaking, from south to north: the Ahr, Ruhr, Roer, Kyll, Main, Mosel, Nahe, Neckar, Erft, Ems, Elbe, Weser, Oder, Donau (Danube), and, most importantly, the Rhine.

In Roman times, the Rhine was considered the northernmost frontier of the Empire (excluding Britannia), and divided Gaul from Germania.

The Rhine, Germany's longest river and its great natural barrier in the west, begins as a swiftly moving stream at the Rheinwaldhorn Glacier, more than 11,000 feet above sea level, near Andermatt in the Swiss Alps, and flows north and east for approximately 820 miles, until it empties into the North Sea at Amsterdam. Five hundred miles of it is navigable by large boats and ships. By the time it reaches Germany, the Rhine is a broad waterway a mile wide in places.

After Nazi Germany's costly failure in its last major counterattack in the west known as the Battle of the Bulge, what was left of the Wehrmacht was rolling eastward into the heart of the Fatherland, hoping to put the mighty Rhine between it and the advancing British and Americans.

But the Americans and British had come to Europe prepared. The U.S. Army had within its organization specialized brigade- and regiment-size engineer units whose job it was to build bridges—whether of the Bailey or pontoon variety—across otherwise impassable rivers and streams. Other engineer units carried with them collapsible rowboats that could be powered by paddles or outboard engines. But crossing wide rivers presented a special challenge, and commanders always preferred to capture a bridge intact rather than have to spend the hours or sometime days to construct one from scratch. That the Allies failed to do so at Holland's Rhine bridge at Arnhem the previous September was testimony to the ferocious defense the enemy was expected to put up.

Aware that the Rhine posed the last major geographic obstacle to Allied troops, and aware that he still had substantial numbers of forces west of the Rhine, German dictator Adolf Hitler ordered the bridges over the river destroyed.

Unfortunately for the Germans, their unwieldy command structures were often confusing and contradictory, making a coordinated defense unlikely. At Remagen, Captain Willi Bratge was the so-called combat commander of the area; his authority, however, was only valid in the event of emergency. Another captain, Karl Friesenhahn, was the technical and bridge commander, in charge of blowing up the structure to prevent it from falling into enemy hands. Major Hans Scheller, adjutant of LXVII Corps, which controlled the Remagen area, had authority over both Bratge and Friesenhahn.

An antiaircraft unit commander—a member of the Luftwaffe, who was not under the authority of either Bratge or Friesenhahn—had the responsibility of guarding the bridge against Allied air forces. Further, Volkssturm forces (a paramilitary organization made up of armed, minimally trained civilians) in the area were controlled by Nazi Party officials.

To add another layer of bureaucracy on top of the already convoluted situation, the U.S. Army's official history of the ETO campaign says, "Prior to March, responsibility for protecting the Rhine bridges had rested entirely with the Wehrkreise (military districts). Troops of the Wehrkreise were responsible not to any army commander but to the military arm of the Nazi party, the Waffen-SS, and jealous rivalry between the two services was more the rule than the exception."

Recent command changes at the army and army group levels, and an exchange of zones of responsibility (including the responsibility for the Remagen bridge), also negatively affected the Germans' ability to meet the growing threat.

But try they did. Some 750 German soldiers were at or near the bridge and Friesenhahn's demolition experts had installed several hundred pounds of explosives at critical points in the bridge's superstructure and foundation and wired the explosions to control boxes. But Friesenhahn was under orders not to blow the bridge until the very last moment; thousands of German troops to the west of the Rhine needed it to cross the river and set up defensive positions.

During the first week of March 1945, Lt. Gen. Omar N. Bradley's 12th Army Group continued to push inexorably eastward through the Eifel region in what was dubbed Operation Lumberjack—a move to capture strategic cities such as Cologne and Bonn and give the Allies a foothold along the west bank of the Rhine.

Bradley was told to be careful not to push too far and too fast, for SHAEF and General Dwight D. Eisenhower, the supreme Allied commander, wanted to keep the front line Bradley shared with Montgomery's 21st Army Group to the north more or less straight.

Besides, Monty, despite being quietly blamed for the still-bitter failure of his ill-fated Market-Garden offensive the previous September, was about to launch the massive Allied thrust into Germany, an operation scheduled for March 23 and code-named Plunder (which included Operations Turnscrew, Widgeon, and Torchlight—the assault crossings of the Rhine at Rees, Wesel, and south of the Lippe River by the British Second Army—Operation Flashlight by the U.S. Ninth Army, and Operation Varsity, a combined British-American airborne and glider assault). Any sudden or dramatic moves by Bradley's group could

ullstein bild

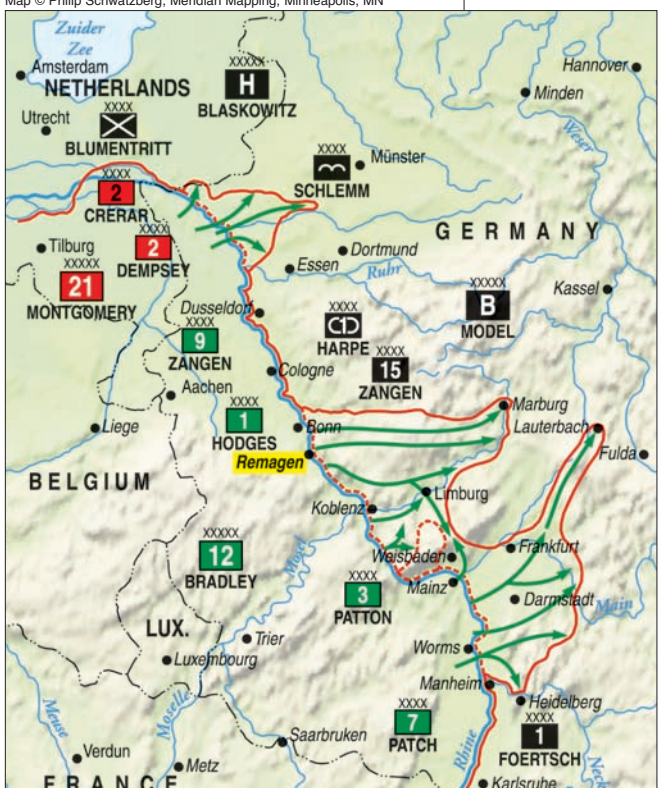
After its capture on March 7, 1945, the Ludendorff Bridge is shelled by the Germans who are trying to prevent any more American First Army troops and supplies from moving across.

tarnish the sheen of glory that the British-led advance would bestow on Monty's ego.

Additionally, no one on the American side realistically expected any bridges to be standing by the time the Yanks reached the Rhine.

In his memoir, *A Soldier's Story*, Bradley wrote, "Farther north, Collins' VII Corps had turned south from Düsseldorf toward Cologne where Terry Allen's 104th Division picked its way into the ruins of that stricken city. [The Allied] Air [Forces] had miraculously spared its ancient Gothic cathedral and, beyond its twin spires, the

Map © Philip Schwatzberg, Meridian Mapping, Minneapolis, MN



As the Americans thrust toward the Rhine, Lieutenant General Courtney Hodges's First Army had the good fortune to find an intact bridge across the river.

Rhine washed through the fallen girders of Cologne's [Hohenzollern] Bridge. This mile-long span had been demolished by the retreating Germans as our troops dodged warily into the outskirts of Cologne. Only its four ugly towers remained to mark its demise."

He added, "From Düsseldorf to Coblenz a score of heavy bridges collapsed into the Rhine as crews touched off their demolitions. In Düsseldorf the bridges were blown just as American vanguards reached their western approaches. Although eager to secure a Rhine river bridgehead, we had despaired of taking a bridge intact. As far back as England I had resigned myself to the necessity of an assault river crossing."

Still, in the unlikely event that such an opportunity presented itself, corps and division commanders were given carte blanche to attempt to grab one.

On the morning of March 7, the same day that American troops were moving into the shattered ruins of Cologne, advance elements of the 9th Armored Division reached the heights overlooking the Rhine and the town of Remagen, 15 miles south of Bonn.

From their lofty perch, the Yanks were stunned to see a major bridge—the Ludendorff Bridge—still standing. A quick check of the maps showed that the railroad bridge connected the villages of Remagen and Erpel on opposite sides of the river.

Designed by Karl Wiener and built during World War I by the firm Grün und Bilfinger, the Ludendorffbrücke allowed the Kaiser's troops quick access to invade Belgium and France.

Named for the German World War I general Erich Ludendorff, one of the bridge's proponents (and, as it turned out, an early Hitler supporter), it was one of three railroad bridges built over the Rhine during the Great War—the other two being the Hindenburg Bridge at Bingen and the Urmitz Bridge near Koblenz.

The Ludendorff Bridge was 1,056 feet long, with two rail lines and a walkway; the tracks recently had been planked over to provide a roadbed for vehicular traffic. It had three spans of 278, 513, and 278 feet in length, with two heavy stone towers at each end that contained embrasures for machine guns; the four towers could house a full battalion of men.

The Ludendorff Bridge had often been under fire during the past few months. On October 19, 1944, a raid by 33 planes of the Ninth Air Force hit the bridge and erroneously reported they had destroyed it. On December 29, another raid damaged the western, or Remagen, end of the bridge. (At Remagen, the Rhine briefly curves to the west, then resumes its flow to the north. The "west" bank, then, becomes the "south" bank and the "east" bank is now "north"; the bridge runs north and south here, but for purposes of clarity, we shall use the terms "west" and "east.")

The structure was hit again on January 2, 1945, and once more 26 days later. The Germans were experts at repairing bomb damage, though, and the bridge was quickly put back into operation after each raid.

From atop the bluffs above Remagen, the officers of the 27th Armored Infantry Battalion could see a long line of German vehicles and troops working their way toward and onto the bridge to escape the American advance and thus called for artillery strikes to interdict the traffic. Luckily, artillery support was not forthcoming. When the 27th contacted Brig. Gen. William Hoge, commanding Combat Command B, he immediately drove to the town, surveyed the situation for himself, and ordered the 27th and the 14th Tank Battalion to advance into Remagen in preparation for seizing the bridge.

The town was taken without incident. At 3:15, Company A of the 27th, led by Lieutenant Timmerman, moved cautiously toward the elevated approach to the bridge. The lieutenant had only one question: "What if it blows up in my face?"

At the opposite end of the span, where the tracks disappeared into a large tunnel beneath the hill known as the Erpeler Ley, Captain Friesenhahn saw the Americans

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After its capture, First Army pushes troops over the bridge to establish a bridgehead on the eastern bank of the river. Here infantrymen and M4 tanks move across on March 11.

advancing and ordered a demolition charge detonated; it blew a 30-foot crater in the elevated roadway.

While Timmermann's men took cover from the flying debris and from bullets pouring from the gun ports in the towers, Major Scheller gave Friesenhahn the order to blow the bridge.

But, as Ken Hechler detailed in his excellent 1957 book, *The Bridge at Remagen,* nothing happened when Friesenhahn turned the key that activated the ignition charge; a tank shell must have cut the line. He called for volunteers to dash out into the hail of bullets and shells and light the primer cord for the emergency demolition charge. At first no one volunteered; finally a Sergeant Faust said he would do the job. After crawling nearly a hundred yards to the fuse, Faust set it off and there was a series of tremendous blasts.

It appeared to Timmermann and his men that the bridge had been torn loose from its foundations and would topple into the gray-brown water at any moment. From their prone positions, many of the GIs no doubt breathed a sigh of relief; they had received a reprieve from crossing the deadly bridge.

Within seconds, however, as the smoke cleared, it became obvious that the bridge was still intact. (Only 300 kilograms of the expected 600 kilograms of explosives was available to Friesenhahn, and it was a weaker industrial grade, not the standard military issue. It was also later determined that two Polish conscripts in the German Army had tampered with the fuses, thus reducing the full force of the explosions.)

As small-arms and tank fire from a platoon of M-26 Pershing tanks blasted the far side of the bridge, and smoke shells were dropped in to conceal the movement, Timmermann gave the dreaded order to cross the bridge. Squad leader Sergeant Alexander A. Drabik turned to his men and said: "Okay, who's going with me? I'm going across."

Summoning all of their courage, Drabik and his men, followed closely by Timmermann, dashed onto the planked-over tracks, ducking instinctively as machine-gun bullets from the opposite bank pinged off the steel framework.

Drabik, from Ohio, was the third-oldest man in the company but he ran the entire length, more than three football fields long, like a halfback, dodging bullets the entire time.

Simultaneously, three other men—Lieutenant Hugh B. Mott and Sergeants Eugene Dorland and John Reynolds from Company B, 9th Armored Engineer Battalion—crawled under the bridge and began cutting the wires that led to some of the demolition charges.

Clemon Knapp, a young soldier from West Virginia, had a Sherman tank with a blade in front of it, known as a "tank dozer." Under fire, he quickly brought the "dozer" forward to fill in the crater in the approach ramp.

Meanwhile, the tunnel at the eastern end of the bridge was filling with cowering soldiers, civilians, foreign workers, and even animals, as bullets and shell fragments ricocheted off the rock walls. Leaving Bratge in command, Major Scheller exited the tunnel by its rear opening to report to headquarters the failed attempt to blow the bridge.

As the Yanks neared the center of the bridge, German marksmen in a barge on the river opened up on them. Timmermann ran back and ordered a tank to knock out the barge, which it did.

After several minutes that seemed like hours, Sergeant Drabik and his men finally reached the far end miraculously

unscathed. Drabik said later, "It wasn't a historical moment for me. I was too busy running. I didn't think about the bridge blowing or anything. I just wanted to get to the other side."

Once Drabik got there, a young German soldier pointed his rifle at him. "The kid looked behind me and saw my whole company coming," Drabik said, "so he threw down his rifle and surrendered."

Right behind Drabik was Sergeant Joseph DeLisio, leader of the third platoon. Despite shells from 20mm antiaircraft guns being pumped at them, DeLisio reached one of the towers, burst through the door, and ran up the stairs, taking the two-man gun crew prisoner. DeLisio threw the gun out the window as three of his men entered the other tower and silenced the machine gun there.

With the towers secure, Sergeant Drabik and his squad turned left up the river road and went about 200 yards before they took up defensive positions in a series of bomb craters.

As this was happening, Timmermann sent DeLisio and four of his men into the darkened railroad tunnel. DeLisio fired two shots into it and several German soldiers emerged with their hands up. Not realizing a much larger force lay farther within, along with numerous civilians, DeLisio informed Timmermman that the tunnel was clear.

Timmermann called for reinforcements and higher command responded by sending tanks and more infantry across. But, due to damage to the bridge's planked roadway, the first tanks would not cross until midnight, after engineers had plugged the holes.

The engineers had also followed Timmermann's company to find and cut any other lines leading to the explosive charges. Sergeant Dorland saw a thick cable and tried but failed to sever it with a small pair of wire cutters so, unslinging his carbine, he fired three shots into the line, blowing it apart.

By now, around 4:00 PM, Timmermann had about 120 men across, but the high ground above the bridge's eastern terminus was still, as far as he knew, in enemy hands. He ordered 2nd Lieutenant Emmett J. Burrows to take the second platoon up the steep Erpeler Ley. Climbing was difficult, and several men were injured when they slipped and fell on the loose rock. Enemy shelling also caused a number of injuries and only a few of Burrows's men reached the top. Once there, they cleared out snipers in a house on the hillside and saw groups of Germans in nearby foxholes, with many more in the neighboring towns down below, possibly preparing for a counterattack. Burrows and his men suddenly came under terrific artillery and mortar fire; to the GIs, Erpeler Ley became known as "Suicide Cliff" and "Flak Hill."

Taking the bridge had been a close-run thing; had the Germans mounted a serious counterattack with tanks and infantry, Timmermann and his men might have been wiped out.

In the meantime, the Americans had something new to worry about.

The first aerial counterattack came at 4:45 PM on the 7th. Three obsolescent Ju-87 Stuka dive-bombers and one Me-109 fighter made a low-level pass at the bridge. Major Ben J. Cothran, the S-3 of the 9th's CCB, described the action:

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"That afternoon the first planes came in for the bridge. But Pappy [Captain Carlton G. "Pappy" Denton, commander of Battery D, 482d AAA Battalion (AW/SP)], who had done wonders in the Bulge, had got his anti-aircraft battery together somehow, brought it through all the snarled traffic and was there. Because of high hills … the planes had to make a straight run up the river for the bridge. Four tried it that afternoon. Pappy's lads got all four."

Although Cothran attributed the anti-aircraft success to Battery D, some of it was provided by Battery A.

Thirty minutes later, the gunners got another opportunity to demonstrate their marksmanship skills. Eight more Stukas swooped down single file. The shrieking dive-bombers that had helped the Germans conquer many a nation plunged nearly straight down, almost guaranteeing a perfect strike.

But the pilots hadn't figured on the accuracy of Yanks sitting behind their guns. These AA units had been battling the enemy—in the air and on the ground—since the middle of June when they came ashore at Normandy. They had supported the tanks and infantry across France, into Paris and Belgium, and had refused to yield when Hitler threw his massive December counteroffensive at them during the Battle of the Bulge. By this stage of the war, the gunners were "old hands" at the game and not easily panicked by the sight and sound of enemy warplanes.

As the eight Stukas approached from the south, cruising above the river at 3,000 feet, the gunners' radar easily picked them up and the 90mm guns and quad-50s opened up. Despite the storm of AA fire, the bombers came in straight and level, taking no evasive action. Some jettisoned their bombs before reaching the bridge, and one bomb fell on the western approach to the bridge—that would be as close as the Luftwaffe would come to hitting the structure. The gunners knocked all eight aircraft out of the sky. Battery B, 413th AA Battalion, was credited with four kills.

Also on that same day, the Luftwaffe used its jets—Me-262 fighters and Arado AR-134 bombers— against the bridge for the first time. Because the jets flew at speeds of

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Half-track-mounted antiaircraft guns stand guard on a partially demolished bridge downstream on March 17. The Ludendorff Bridge, visible in the distance, collapsed that day after being weakened by aerial assaults, artillery barrages, and V-2 rocket attacks. OPPOSITE TOP: Company A's commander, German-born Karl H. Timmerman, led the attack on the bridge. OPPOSITE BOTTOM: Sergeant Alex Drabik is credited with being the first American soldier across the bridge.

around 400 miles per hour, the AAA gunners had difficulty acquiring and tracking them. Fortunately for the Americans, the jets were ineffective.

At about 5:30 PM, as the last aerial attack of the day was ending, Timmermann and his men guarding the eastern end of the bridge were startled to see Captains Bratge and Friesenhahn and their men emerge from the tunnel in no mood for a fight; they were all taken prisoner and marched back across the bridge to captivity.

That night a group of German engineers counterattacked with the hope of blowing the bridge with their explosives, but all were killed or captured by GIs from the 9th Infantry Division who had crossed on the heels of Timmermann's company.

As the consolidation at the eastern end of the bridge was taking place in the gathering twilight, Hoge reported to his division commander, Leonard, "Well, we got the bridge," and the news of its capture was passed up the chain of command.

That evening, while in a meeting with Maj. Gen. Harold R. Bull, the SHAEF operations officer, Bradley was interrupted by an urgent call from Lt. Gen. Courtney Hodges, commander of First Army.

"Brad, we've got a bridge," Hodges said excitedly.

"A bridge? You mean you've got one intact on the Rhine?"

"Yep. Leonard nabbed one at Remagen before they could blow it up."

"Hot dog, Courtney!" Bradley exclaimed. "This will bust him wide open. Are you getting your stuff across?"

"Just as fast as we can push it over," Hodges replied. "Tubby's [Brig. Gen. Truman C. Thorson, First Army operations officer] got the navy moving in now with a ferry service and I'm having the engineers throw a couple of spare pontoon bridges across to the bridgehead."

"Shove everything you've got across it," ordered Bradley.

Bull was not all that thrilled by the news, realizing that the effort to take advantage of this unexpected development would disrupt SHAEF's long-awaited, carefully crafted operation that called for Montgomery and his 21st Army Group to make the major Allied crossing of the Rhine in the Ruhr industrial area (Operation Plunder). As usual, Montgomery was taking his sweet time, meticulously planning for the operation, building up his forces, and preparing to siphon off units from Bradley's army group for his own use. Such a change in plan was sure to anger him.

"Sure, you've got a bridge, Brad," Bull said, "but what good is it going to do you? You're not going anywhere down there at Remagen. It just doesn't fit into the plan."

"Plan, hell! A bridge is a bridge and mighty damned good anywhere across the Rhine!"

Bradley saw that a Rhine crossing at Remagen most likely would distract the German command and cause Field Marshal Gerd von Rundstedt, commander in chief of German forces in the west, to pull units from the area of Montgomery's planned attack to counter the Remagen crossing.

For his part, Bull knew that, while Eisenhower had not yet decided to restrict the number of Rhine crossings, Ike favored Montgomery conducting the main attack farther north. When Bull brought this up, Bradley fumed, "What in the hell do you want us to do—pull back and blow it up?

To settle the matter, Bradley called Ike at his headquarters in Reims, France. "When he reported that we had a permanent bridge across the Rhine," Ike wrote in his 1948 best-selling memoir, *Crusade in Europe,* "I could scarcely believe my ears. He and I had frequently discussed such a development as a remote possibility but never as a well-founded hope."

Ike asked, "How much have you got in that vicinity that you can throw across the river?"

"I have more than four divisions, but I called you to make sure that pushing them over would not interfere with your plans."

"Well, Brad, we expected to have that many divisions tied up around Cologne and now those are free. Go ahead and shove over at least five divisions instantly, and anything else that is necessary to make certain of our hold."

"That's exactly what I wanted to do, but the question has been raised here [by Bull] about conflict with your plans, and I wanted to check with you."

National Archives

Pfc. Richard Schrame, with his quad-.50 caliber weapon, scans the skies for enemy aircraft near the Remagen bridge.

Ike noted, "That was one of my happy moments of the war…. This was completely unforeseen. We were across the Rhine, on a permanent bridge; the traditional defensive barrier to the heart of Germany was pierced. The final defeat of the enemy … was suddenly now, in our minds, just around the corner."

Ike also said, "Here [III Corps] encountered one of those bright opportunities of war which, when quickly and firmly grasped, produce incalculable effect on future operations."

Bradley realized that the Remagen area would soon become congested, and thus vulnerable to air attack, and told Hodges that he could expand the bridgehead 1,000 meters per day to prevent the Germans from digging in on the opposite bank, extensively mining their perimeter, or bringing in any sizable reinforcements. Hodges began hurriedly diverting resources to Remagen.

American units swarmed into the area. After the 9th Armored Division and 9th Infantry Division crossed, then came the 78th and 99th Infantry Divisions, with more on the way. Leo J. Ghirardi, a sergeant with L Company, 394th Infantry, 99th Division, had vivid memories of the night his unit marched south from Cologne and crossed the bridge: "We walked most of the night along the banks of the river. However, as we approached the bridge at Remagen, the Germans were firing their 88s over to our side of the river.

"I wasn't alone when I felt the fear of death as those 88s kept coming in so near to my platoon. I will never forget jumping into a ditch of water and soft mud in an attempt to get away from them. There I was, covered with mud from head to foot. That I could live with. But when I discovered my M-1 rifle filled with mud, I knew I had to find a clean one and fast. I got one from a jeep driver as we crossed the river. I was still afraid that I would not be able to hit a target with it because I had never zeroed this rifle in.

"After that eventful dip in the ditch, we soon were approaching the embankment that led to the rail line. Believe it or not, I thought we would make a mad dash across the bridge, but our company commander gave orders for us to walk across and to be sure to keep our distance. Try to imagine having a migraine headache all day and then finding you have to cross a bridge like this under heavy fire."

With typical GI humor, someone attached a large sign to one of the towers: "CROSS THE RHINE WITH DRY FEET COURTESY OF 9TH ARMD DIVISION." (The sign is on display at the Patton Museum of Cavalry and Armor at Fort Knox, Kentucky.)

Within the first 24 hours after the bridge's capture, over 8,000 GIs and hundreds of tanks and other vehicles indeed crossed the Rhine with dry feet, while combat engineers worked frantically to repair the damaged and weakened structure.

In addition, not knowing how long the unstable Ludendorff Bridge might remain standing, the engineers began building a pair of floating pontoon treadway bridges alongside the main structure. The first bridge was installed in just 10 hours and 11 min-

utes, and Ike gave a couple cases of champagne to Colonel Mason J. Young, head of the VII Corps engineers, as a reward for his men's timely work.

In actuality, more than "a couple of cases" arrived. A member of the 899th Tank Destroyer Battalion recalled that an entire trainload of champagne showed up at the Remagen railroad station. "I got my ration," the soldier noted, "—a box of twelve bottles wrapped carefully in straw. Since we did not have a basic load of 90mm rounds stored in our M-36 tank destroyer, I found space in the ammunition racks for several bottles of French champagne."

Yes, the Americans had secured a foothold on the east bank of the Rhine, but it was a tiny, tenuous foothold, and no one could predict how long it could last.

The Germans were about to try and take it back.

One of the primary tasks for the Americans was to discourage German air attacks. To this end, Bradley called upon nearly every antiaircraft artillery unit under his command to rush to Remagen and blanket the countryside with AAA guns. If the Luftwaffe tried again to destroy the bridge, they would have to fly through a wall of flying lead and steel to do it.

By dawn on March 9, less than 30 hours after its capture, there were five antiaircraft artillery battalions defending the Remagen bridge.

On that day, the Germans came at the bridge with a variety of different planes—everything from FW-190s and Me-109s to Me-210s and He-110 bombers. The Germans also changed their tactics. They intensified their artillery bombardments to coincide with their air attacks. Seventeen aircraft attacked singly and randomly, taking evasive action as the AAA fire commenced. Some aircraft skimmed in just above the river; on another occasion two FW-190s and one Me-109 circled the bridge at 1,200 feet before diving and releasing their ordnance, then climbed up into the clouds. The pilots missed the bridge.

Still, it was not until March 10 that the number of antiaircraft artillery pieces and machine guns approached an overwhelming number. Some planes, however, still managed to penetrate the screen.

As the M-36s of Company B of the 899th rumbled across the bridge on March 10, the champagne-toting TD man noted, "German artillery blew up a truck ahead of us and the one-way traffic was blocked. At high noon I looked up into the sky and saw a lone Stuka dive-bomber release a bomb angling for the bridge. I stood up in the open turret of the TD and filled my canteen cup with champagne and said, 'Drink up men ... this is it.' The bomb missed. One of the rounds of 14 antiaircraft battalions blew up the Stuka a hundred feet over the bridge.

"I filled my canteen cup two more times, and repeated the same toast. Two more bombs were aimed at the bridge; they missed over or under. Two more Stukas were blown up over the bridge. We crossed the bridge that afternoon. I was glad I didn't have to drive the TD, let alone load the gun, since, as the TD crew's 90mm weapons leader, I was well 'loaded.'"

By the 14th of March, the ring of anti-aircraft weapons in the vicinity of Remagen reached its peak: 16 gun batteries and 33 AW batteries, for a total of 672 anti-aircraft fire units. The Luftwaffe had sent in 367 planes to destroy the bridge; none succeeded, and 106 of them were shot down. Over the course of the next three weeks, the stalwart defense of the Remagen bridge ranks as one of the greatest antiaircraft artillery successes in American military history.

In fact, there might have been too much antiaircraft fire. One officer reported, "The volume of fire was so great … there were over 200 friendly casualties from the AAA .50-caliber rounds returning to the ground. They had accomplished their mission; the German Air Force never touched the bridge."

On March 12, the Ludendorff Bridge had become too dangerous and unstable to use and, with the success of the two pontoon bridges, it was closed while engineers from the 51st and 291st Engineer Combat Battalions worked to strengthen it.

National Archives

A mass of twisted steel is all that is left of the bridge when it fell into the river on March 17, killing 28 Americans.

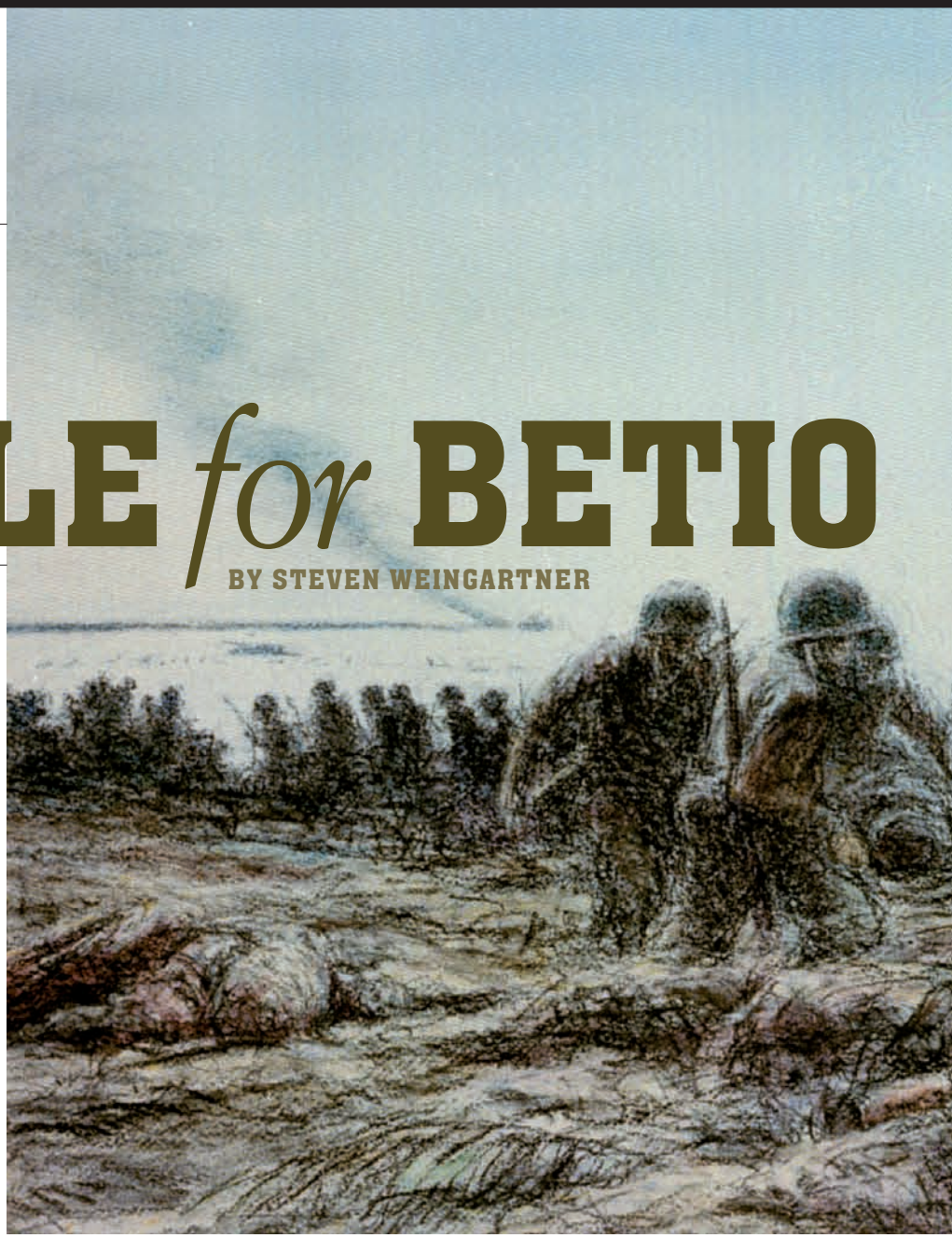
Desperate to destroy the bridge and stop the unending olive-drab flow of American

Continued on page 98

A Navy boat driver remembers Tarawa's biggest fight.

Brutal BATTLE *for* BETIO

BY STEVEN WEINGARTNER



BETIO IS THE MAIN island of the Tarawa Atoll in the Central Pacific nation of Kiribati, formerly known as the Gilbert Islands.

On the morning of November 20, 1943, it was also the main objective of Operation Galvanic, the American campaign to seize the Gilberts. A force of 35,000 men was set to take part in the operation.

Betio (pronounced "bay-shio") is tiny, less than three miles long and 700 yards across, and nowhere more than ten feet above sea level. But it was strategically located in the path of the American advance, and capturing it would enable the Americans to control the region even as it provided a springboard—with, not incidentally, a completed airstrip—to continue their westward drive into the Marshall Islands and on to Japan.

In recognition of Betio's importance, the Japanese had fortified the island and garrisoned it with some 3,000 troops plus 2,000 Japanese and Korean workers. Their strategy to contest an attack at the water's edge was pretty much dictated by the island's diminutive size, which precluded a defense in depth as well as tactical maneuver. So confident was he that his position was impregnable, Admiral Keiji Shibasaki, commanding the island's garrison, boasted, "A million men cannot take Tarawa in a hundred years."

The Americans, for their part, believed that the combination of massive firepower, primarily in the form of a pre-assault air and naval bombardment, and the fighting spirit and capabilities of the U.S. Marines of the 2nd Marine Division would enable them to quickly overcome the Japanese with acceptable, perhaps even negligible, losses.

Shortly before Operation Galvanic, in a preinvasion staff briefing at Efate in the New Hebrides Islands, a U.S. Navy admiral announced that it was not the Navy's intention merely to neutralize the defenses on Betio: "Gentlemen," he told the assemblage, "we will obliterate it."

At the same briefing, a battleship captain declared, "We are going to bombard at six thousand yards. We've got so much armor we're not afraid of anything the Japs can throw back at us."

Major General Julian C. Smith, commander of the 2nd Marine Division, was incensed by what he regarded as a cavalier attitude on the part of the battleship captain. "Gen-

Corpsmen attend to a wounded Marine while others bring another wounded man up the beach at Betio. Illustration by Kerr Erby.

tlemen," he retorted, "remember one thing: when the Marines land and meet the enemy at bayonet point, the only armor a Marine will have is his khaki shirt."

Following a four-hour pounding by U.S. Navy aircraft and warships, the first assault waves started toward the island at 9:00 AM on November 20. Ablaze with countless fires started by the naval bombardment, and billowing black smoke, Betio seemed inert and lifeless, a literal dead zone for anyone caught in the pulverizing firestorm of high-explosive ordnance hurled against it. To the hopeful Marines in the landing craft that were then approaching the devastated shore, it appeared that the bombardment had fulfilled its purpose of destroying the defenses and killing most the Japanese who occupied them.

But these appearances were deceiving. As events would soon prove, the bombardment was astonishingly ineffective. The fortifications were mostly intact, and most of the men inside them were very much alive. Now they waited with their weapons at the ready as 2nd Marine Division amtracs churned toward them. The Marines were just minutes away from engaging in what would be one of the most savagely fought battles in World War II.

As the coxswain of LCVP #13 (Landing Craft Vehicle, Personnel, popularly known as a "Higgins Boat" after its inventor, Andrew Jackson Higgins) off USS *Heywood* (APA-6), Boatswain's Mate Third Class Larry Wade was involved in the battle for Betio from the very start.

Born in Wolf City, Texas, in 1924, and raised in Abilene, Texas, Larry was a high school senior when the Japanese attacked

U.S. Navy

National Archives

U.S. Coast Guard personnel pass the protruding hull of a sunken American light tanker as they bring supplies to the Betio beachhead.

Pearl Harbor on December 7, 1941. He enlisted in the Navy on December 15, 1942, shortly after his 18th birthday. Following 12 weeks of boot camp, he attended Landing Craft School and was promoted to the rank of coxswain upon graduation.

In May 1943 he was given command of his own LCVP in the operation to retake Attu in the Aleutian Islands from the Japanese. Subsequently, he was sent to New Zealand and assigned to *Heywood,* one of four troopships—along with USS *Sheridan* (APA-51), *La Salle* (AP-102), and *Monrovia* (APA-31)—that would transport the 8th Marines of the 2nd Marine Division to Tarawa and Betio.

Larry's LCVP was selected to be one of the control boats that would help organize and guide the LVT amphibious tractors (amtracs) to the beach in the initial assault on November 20. The first day's invasion flotilla comprised three waves of amtracs followed by two waves of LVCPs carrying the three battalions of the 2nd Marines and the 2nd Battalion of the 8th Marines, which embarked on *Heywood*. During the final run to the beach the amtracs conducting the initial assault were to be arrayed in three waves or rows, with 42 LVT-1s in the first wave, 24 of the newer LVT-2s in the second wave, and 21 LVT-2s in the third wave.

Two-and-half hours after casting off from their transports, the assault waves began leaving the staging area near the transports to begin the 10-mile trek to Betio. The amtracs and LCVPs crossed Tarawa's outer reef and entered the inner lagoon on a bearing that took them east and slightly south, roughly parallel to the island. The flotilla reached the line of departure, demarcated by the minesweeper *Pursuit,* roughly 9,000 yards from shore.

Larry and the coxswains in the other patrol boats, which were leading the way, stood on their engine hatches and gave the "flanker movement" signal—one arm up and one out, pointing at the island like a semaphore, signaling that the amtracs should execute a right turn and head for the beach. Larry in turn stood on the engine hatch of his boat and gave the same signal to the amtracs behind him. The time was 8:24 AM.

The plan was for the boats of the first wave to go in, deliver their troops to the beach, and then turn around and come back out to pick up more troops from the follow-on waves of LCVPs standing farther out in the lagoon. The waves were supposed to be separated by300-yard intervals and while the first-wave boats were returning the second wave would go in, and then the third wave. This series of movements would be repeated until all the units assigned for the first day's assault had been landed.

But it didn't work that way. The entire group, all three waves, 25 to 30 yards apart, swung around to get into position for the landing. There was no firing from the island at that point. Larry recalled: "Then I gave the flanker movement for the first wave to go, everybody—all three waves—started to go, and suddenly I saw all these amtracs, 120 of them, coming right at me. Instead of three separate waves, there was only one wave

now, everyone racing to see who could get there first."

They passed by his boat and churned on toward the reef. Larry tried to separate the waves, driving among the amtracs, coming up alongside them and yelling at the drivers to maintain their intervals or to open them back up. To no avail: the drivers and the Marines aboard the amtracs yelled back at Larry, using what might euphemistically be termed "colorful" language to communicate their noncompliance.

About the same time that Larry was engaging in these lively conversations, the flotilla began taking fire from long-range automatic weapons, particularly antiaircraft guns. Airbursts from those guns blossomed nosily overhead but did no damage to the control boats and amtracs, and injured no one.

The flotilla reached the reef, where the control boats turned aside and halted. The amtracs plodded on by, clambering up and over the reef into the shallower water beyond. As the force drew near the hulk of the *Nimonoa,* a freighter half-sunk on the landward side of the reef, enemy fire suddenly increased in volume, intensity—and variety.

Shells screeched through the air and everywhere around them waterspouts erupted, hundreds of them. Near misses raised tall columns next to Larry's boat, dousing him and his two crewmen. Any one of those shells could have destroyed a boat or amtrac, but they all missed. So far, so good. But not for long.

The Japanese opened fire and began to score hits on the amtracs, "blowing them to pieces," according to Larry, who drove his boat right down the middle of the amtrac assault waves, weaving around the shattered boats and past the bobbing Marines who had spilled into the water. They were crying out, "Stop! Help! Wait!" Larry shouted back that he couldn't stop, "and they told me in good four-lettered words what they thought of me."

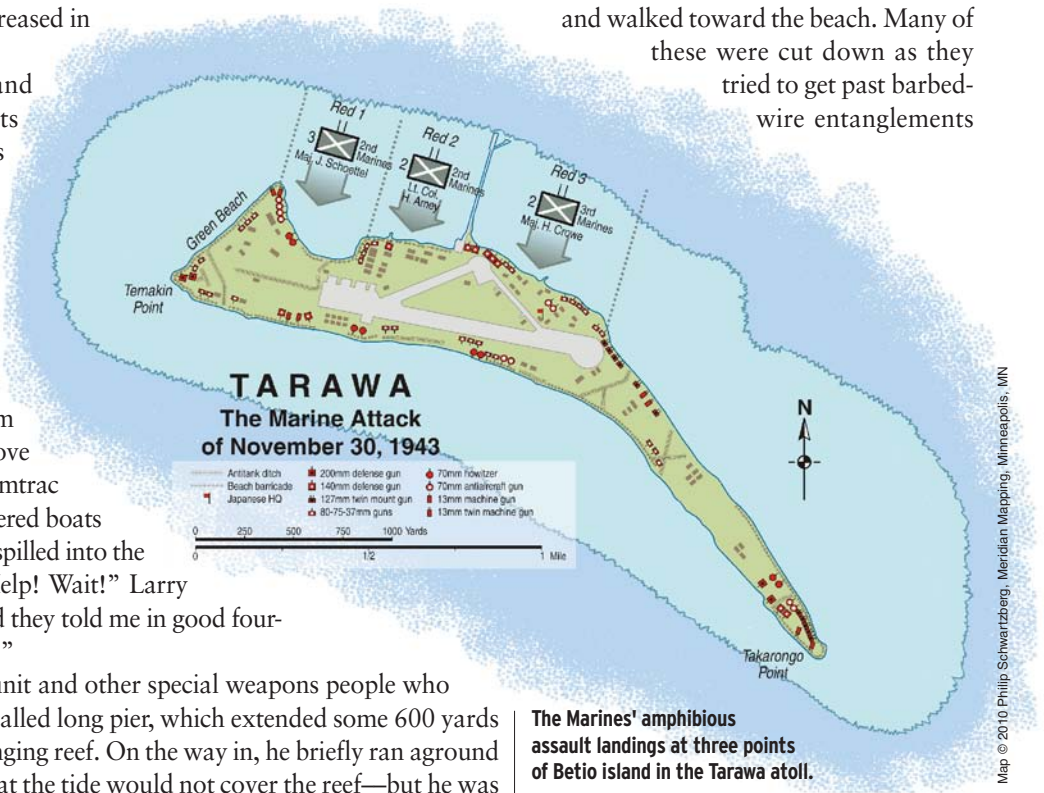
Larry's boat carried a flamethrower unit and other special weapons people who were to be landed on the end of the so-called long pier, which extended some 600 yards from the shore all the way out to the fringing reef. On the way in, he briefly ran aground on the reef—this was how he learned that the tide would not cover the reef—but he was able to get the boat over the reef and continue to the pier.

The boat came under heavy fire as it approached the pier; bullets were flying everywhere and the noise was deafening. Then the cable mechanism for lowering the ramp was hit and after that Larry was unable to lower the ramp all the way down, so he cranked it all the way up. The boat struck bottom a few yards short of the pier and the men piled out over the side and pushed on to the pier. Some were cut down but most made it; several darted for cover under the pier.

Larry then paused briefly to get his bearings and in doing so he looked off to his right (west) at the battle zone encompassing the inner lagoon (inside the fringing reef), Red Beach 2 nearest him, and Red Beach 1 beyond.

Unfolding before him in that area was a spectacle of unimaginable violence and carnage. The Japanese guns, firing into preregistered zones, were scoring many hits on the charging amtracs. Larry saw amtracs that were completely obliterated upon being hit several times simultaneously from different directions. He saw the projectiles from the enemy's bigger guns, balls of fire flying through the air, hitting the amtracs one after the other, producing fiery explosions that filled the air with an acrid reek and clouds of thick smoke. Marines with their clothes ablaze were leaping from these damage craft, only to be shot down instantly upon hitting the water.

He heard the splat-splat-splat of machine-gun bullets hitting the water near him and he watched as many Marines ducked under to avoid them. He also watched as other Marines, exhausted or past the point of caring, simply stood up and walked toward the beach. Many of these were cut down as they tried to get past barbed-wire entanglements



The Marines' amphibious assault landings at three points of Betio island in the Tarawa atoll.

Map © 2010 Philip Schwartzberg, Meridian Mapping, Minneapolis, MN

in the shallows near the shore; that barrier was shortly festooned with dead and wounded Marines.

The wounded men screamed and begged for help but in most cases none was forthcoming—the corpsman who tried to help them being killed in the effort—and virtually all of them perished in the utmost extremes of misery and pain, draped over the wire or hanging from it, their bodies ripped open by the razor-sharp barbs and by the bullets striking them, spilling blood and guts—entrails and viscera, and any other internal organs so violently dis-

lodged—into the reddening water.

Larry also watched in horror as other amtracs crawled up on the narrow beach and the Marines jumped out—even as the Japanese came storming out of their bunkers to engage them. There, on that narrow strip of sand in front of the seawall, the adversaries battled each other like dueling heroes in an epic poem, stabbing and slashing with knives and bayonets, clubbing with rifle butts, grappling with their bare hands, choking and punching and kicking.

What Larry saw on the beach and in the water around him changed his life forever. The savagery, the slaughter, and the transcendent heroism of both the Marines and the Japanese opened a spiritual door, permitting him to look directly into the vast mystery beyond. Many years later he explain it thus:

"I've been a minister for 40 years. And in my faith we believe God actually speaks to men: God calls men to the ministry. And I felt that when I was very small I was supposed to be a minister. Of course, I wasn't living too good a life when I was in the service! But at Tarawa I remember driving along and first one of those amphibious tractors and then another would be hit. Some of them would explode and burst into flames and the guys were jumping overboard with their clothes burning—and we couldn't even help them. We couldn't go back.

"I remember talking to the Lord, and I said, 'What about this idea of my being a minister?' You know, you can't have a 17-year-old talking to the Lord God of the Universe! But I was talking to him, and I was telling him, what about this thought of mine of being in the ministry? It seemed like I had the understanding that I would be a minister. And I said, 'What if I'm shot? How could I minister if I couldn't talk? How could I minister if I didn't have any legs? What about a long recovery from being badly wounded to the head?' And the Lord said to me: 'Give me your faith.' And, you know, I took courage from that."

Larry Wade would need all the faith and courage he could get. After his passengers disembarked, he was supposed to get clear of the fire-swept zone. But when he saw all those wounded Marines struggling in the water, he decided to disobey orders, back the boat out, and pick up wounded men. Other coxswains, seeing Larry's example, joined the rescue effort. It was then mid-morning, about 10:00 AM.

A number of Marines who had been wounded in the lagoon managed to struggle into the reef and now stood on that coral shelf beckoning or calling for help. Larry went cruising along the reef, stopping to rescue each and every wounded man he encountered. He had a corpsmen on the boat and this man had his hands full, working hard and courageously. Some of the wounded they just plucked out of the water; it was a matter of simply cranking the ramp down as far as it would go and pulling them in, up and over the lip of the ramp.

Many of the wounded had been hit in the legs because they were standing up as they waded in and the enemy machine guns were set to graze just above the water's surface. By the time Larry and his crew pulled them aboard, they had more or less stopped bleeding, the salt water having stanched their wounds. Sometimes Larry and the corpsman would wade out into the water with a stretcher and grab a man who was shot up and bring him in. They'd pull the wounded man aboard and the corpsman would cut the seam of his dungarees with a pocket knife all the way to the top, slicing through the belt loops, laying the dungarees open.

Some of the Marines were so badly torn up there wasn't much they could do for them by way of applying bandages. If, for example, a Marine had a large hole in his chest, the corpsman stuffed it with gauze and sulfanamide.

Larry recalled picking up one Marine who had gashed his thumb on barbed wire. He was bleeding profusely and "carrying on about it," so Larry packed the wound with sulfanamide powder, bandaged it, and gave him a shot of morphine. In the minutes that followed, he picked up more men, some terribly wounded, in agonizing pain, and close

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The water along the Betio landing beaches is filled with landing craft, both active and disabled.

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Wounded Marines are transported back to a troopship in a landing craft for transfer to a base hospital. One Marine lies on the bottom of the boat while another is on the hatch cover, his face covered to keep the flies off his wounds.

to death. Larry even took on the role of corpsman, treating them as best he could, administering morphine to each one.

Inevitably, he began to run low on morphine syrettes, and when the Marine with the injured thumb cried out for another shot, Larry yelled at him: "You just shut up! This morphine, by God, is for the badly wounded!" The wounded Marine didn't say anything after that.

Larry watched as another amtrac loaded with Marines approached the end of the pier, billowing smoke from a hit to the engine housing. The amtrac's coxswain, fearing that his machine was about to burst into flames, ordered his passengers into the water. He no doubt saw other Marines wading in waist-deep water alongside the pier and must have concluded that the water at the end was equally shallow. But in fact it was considerably deeper there because the bottom had been dredged to accommodate the unloading of bigger boats. Larry knew this and, as the Marines climbed onto the gunwales to jump, he cried out, "No! Don't do it!" At the same time he began turning the crank that lowered his ramp.

Too late: the Marines jumped feet-first into the water and sank instantly under the weight of their clothing and gear. Some 18 Marines were on that amtrac and Larry said that every one of them drowned. Their unbuckled helmets came off and Larry watched helplessly as one of them descended, blond hair streaming, looking up at Larry with blue eyes anguished and puzzled.

"I see this guy just about every night in my dreams," said Larry. "I've seen him every night for over 60 years, watching him go down, down, down, looking up at me through the water with his blue eyes, his blond hair just flying."

When his boat was filled with wounded, Larry took them back to the troopship *Heywood*. Among the wounded was a sergeant who had lost his left leg about six inches below the knee. Larry offered him a stretcher to lie on, but he refused it, saying he didn't want to lie down. "Save those stretchers for guys hurt worse than me," he said. So he just stood there—stood—leaning against the side of the boat; he had tied off the stump with a tourniquet made from his boot laces, and every now and then he would twist the tourniquet with his bayonet blade. He hobbled on his one remaining leg all the way back to *Heywood,* and when they arrived at that ship he waited until everyone else had been taken off the boat before he got off, the last man off Larry's boat.

Larry returned to the reef to resume rescue operations and made innumerable trips back and forth between the reef and *Heywood*. Late in the day, before nightfall forced a halt to his efforts, he came upon an LCM some distance beyond the reef, carrying a Sherman tank and heading toward the beach. Suddenly, one of the boat's engines malfunctioned and the

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ABOVE: On Red-3, Major Jim Crowe stands behind LVT-23, using a field telephone to run the battle. OPPOSITE: Marines wade through the water off Betio to reinforce the Marines who had already landed.

coxswain made a U-turn to get out of the kill zone and make the necessary repairs. While he was just sitting there, tinkering with the damaged engine, somebody in his boat found what looked like a five-inch shell on the deck. It had passed clear through the side of the LCM, just above the water line, just above the engine, which was covered by a flap made of corrugated metal.

Larry pulled his boat alongside the LCM. "You guys are pretty low in the water," he told the coxswain.

The coxswain said, "Yeah. We've been hit, but I think we can make it. I've got to unload this tank."

"Well, let me take a look at it," said Larry.

Larry climbed aboard the LCM and found that the bottom was flooded; water was within two or three inches of covering the engines. The tank was in the well deck and the crew had put a chock of wood about six-by-six feet on both sides behind each track to keep the vehicle from sliding into the bulkhead. "While I was looking around, all of a sudden I heard this sound like a gun—BAM!—and the chocks popped out from under the tracks. The pressure had gotten so bad from slipping back in the boat, because the stern was starting to go down. The LCM's three-man crew said they weren't going to abandon their boat. But the Marine tank crew, they said, 'We don't care what this Navy crew does, we're getting off!' "

Larry felt the same way. The Marines started piling into Larry's boat and he went with them, pulling his boat away from the LCM. Then the LCM's crew started yelling at him to come back so he returned and took them off, too. No sooner had crewmen gotten into Larry's boat than water gushed into the LCM. The tank settled back and the boat went down stern first. The LCM settled almost vertically onto the bottom with its ramp sticking up out of the water. Shortly thereafter, someone set a bright green light on the part of the ramp that was above the surface—a signal to keep other boats from running into the LCM during the night.

On his final trip to *Heywood,* Larry was ordered to report to *Sheridan,* where he took aboard a unit of the 8th Marines. Around dusk, he joined the other boats carrying the rest of the 8th Marines in the vicinity of the green light on the ramp of the sunken LCM.

Nightfall brought no end to the horrors of the day, only a change in the form those horrors took. "That first night—and the second night, too—I could hear guys screaming," Larry said, "guys that were in the water, screaming in the black of the night: and I know sharks were tearing them all to pieces."

At around 2:00 AM on November 21, an LCP (Landing Craft, Personnel), also designated #13, came alongside Larry's boat. Smaller and speedier than the LVCP, but lacking a bow ramp, this craft was commanded by Lt. (j.g.) Edward Albert Heimberger, a 34-year-old movie actor known to the American public by his stage name, Eddie Albert.

Eddie was the salvage boat officer aboard *Sheridan,* responsible for controlling the ship's landing craft. The job of salvage-and-control would be broadly interpreted at Betio; it would be accurate to say that his job entailed salvation as well as salvage, and that many Marines were the beneficiaries of his good work in that regard.

Eddie had spent the day with the 8th Marines' boats, which had been lowered into the water in the late morning and early afternoon and had loitered just outside the line of departure while the assault waves were battling on the island. Now he told Larry that he had an LCVP loaded with ammo and medical supplies but that the crew was unwilling to take it in to the pier: would Larry and his crew do the job? Larry said they would, volunteering without hesitation. Eddie led them over to the other LCVP and, while Larry and his crew climbed aboard, the crew of that boat boarded Larry's craft. Once the transfer was complete, Larry headed into the end of the pier.

They arrived at the pier but before they could tie up and start unloading, they began taking fire from an enemy machine gun. "It was aimed right at us," said Larry. "That was the first time I was aware that someone was trying to kill me, specifically!"

Tied up alongside the pier, about 12 feet from the end, was a Japanese landing barge, a craft similar in configuration to the Higgins boat but with a distinctive round conning tower for the helmsman. The Japanese had been using it to haul diesel fuel and the bottom was awash in oil. Larry was trying to find a place to tie his line and, as he was doing

so, a burst from the Japanese machine gun sprayed the pier. Startled, Larry lost his footing and he fell into the barge, landing on the oil-covered deck.

His uniform soaked in oil, Larry clambered back aboard his boat and secured it to the pier. He and his crew then began unloading their cargo. At one point, while they were passing ammunition from his boat up to the Marines on the pier, the fire got so intense that they got out of his boat and ducked under the pier for protection. When the fire slackened somewhat, they got back in and resumed unloading.

After they had finished emptying the boat, Larry and his crew climbed up onto the pier. There was more firing, coming from a wrecked amtrac in front of them, about 50 yards away. Evidently, a Japanese soldier had swum out to the vehicle and was spraying them with its machine gun.

Larry recalled, "You could see him plain as day, because all the island was on fire and the light from the burning fires illuminated the whole area. "And this one sergeant said, 'Look, you guys, if you're going to be here getting in the way, get a rifle and use it.' So they handed me a rifle, and when this Jap in the amtrac started shooting at us, spraying us with a machine gun, I started firing back. Everybody on the pier started firing back."

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The Japanese machine gunner was finally silenced. Larry loaded all the wounded who would fit on board his boat and took them out to *Sheridan*. Then Eddie Albert came by and took him and his crew back to their original boat, #13. They found it near the green light beacon, lashed to another LCVP, filled with Marines but missing its crew. The Marines were in a miserable state.

Larry recalled, "The boat was a mess because so many of them had gotten seasick. They were shitting in their pants, urinating, vomiting. They would puke or shit in their helmets and sometimes they would throw the mess over the side but sometimes they'd just dump it in the boat. Making matters worse, the boat smelled like a slaughterhouse from all the wounded we'd been hauling around. This made everyone sicker, and the fact that they didn't have anything to eat didn't stop them from getting sick, and they were just splashing around in the mess at the bottom.

"One of them Marines was lying on the bottom and had rigged a headrest using a water can and a hand grenade. The water can shifted because of the movement of the boat and the pin came out of the grenade and the grenade armed itself and started to fizz. But the Marine just took off his helmet and slammed it over the grenade and in that way he somehow contained the blast and nobody got hurt. The blast kind of seeped out under the helmet, to the side. I thought surely it would blow a hole in the bottom of the boat, but it didn't. Instead, it blew the stock off his rifle. He was worried about that—about not having a rifle when he went onto the island. But the other guys, they just said to go on in; there'd be plenty of rifles lying around."

Just before dawn, Eddie Albert came by again in his control boat and said to Larry that they would soon be landing the 8th Marines in the center of the island on Red Beach 2. "It's about time," Eddie added. "These guys have already been through hell."

At daybreak, the LCVPs carrying 8th Marines headed for the island, with Eddie's boat leading the way. Upon reaching the designated line of departure, Eddie stood on his engine hatch and gave the flanker movement; Larry followed Eddie's lead and gave the same signal to the boats behind him. The flotilla turned right and started for the shore. The Japanese opened fire and Larry watched as near misses raised tall columns next to Eddie's boat, dousing him and his two crewmen.

Larry remembered: "My boat was one of the few that had been involved in the actions of the day before, so I had an advantage—I knew what to expect. When we got the order to form in line abreast and head in, I knew we were going to hit that reef. My boat was on the extreme left as we went in. We hit the reef and, again, because the ramp couldn't be lowered, the guys piled out over the side; this probably resulted in fewer casualties than guys who went straight out on the ramps of their boats. They were close to the pier, and they headed right for it and found some protection there."

After they disembarked, Larry was able to back his boat off the reef without any difficulty: "It just slid right off." Because he was from another ship—*Heywood,* not

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Sheridan—he felt that he was now relieved of his responsibility for taking men in. And because he had not reported to his ship since the beginning of the operation the day before, he headed out to find *Heywood*. When he got to the ship, he was given four drums of gasoline and told to take them back to the pier. He said:

"But we didn't quite make it there. Eddie Albert, he had been picking guys up off the beach, and his propeller had been bent. And he saw my boat come chugging along and he waved me over to his boat. He said, "We're going to have to take your boat." And I said, "No, you're not going to take my boat." I said, "I'm the captain of the boat, I'm in charge of it." He says, "Well, I'm the salvage officer." I don't know what he was salvaging; it ended up he was salvaging bodies more than anything else. Anyway, he said, "We have to have your boat. And I said, "Well, then, I'll go with it." And he said, "That's fine." We decided that we would not exchange crews. So Eddie climbed aboard my boat along with two or three corpsmen, and his boat, with his crew aboard, took off and headed back toward *Sheridan* to get the prop fixed.

It was now about mid-morning and the 8th Marines were in the water, taking a terrible beating. Eddie told Larry, "We've got to go pick up guys out of the water; they're all around, they're dying in the water." There were several other boats in the area and Eddie boarded one of them. Then the boats rushed in together to pick up the wounded. "But the Japanese recognized what we were doing," said Larry, "and they opened up on us and it was just like all hell was breaking loose.

"They were firing at us point blank. Meanwhile, in the midst of this fire, Eddie would point to this wounded man and that one, directing us to them, and we would pull up alongside the man and haul him aboard. We'd take them over the side: remember, I couldn't lower the ramp because the mechanism was damaged. But even if the ramp had been in working order, I couldn't have lowered it because the boat was too heavily weighted by those four gasoline drums we were carrying and sitting too low in the water as a result."

All the while, as they pulled wounded Marines in over the side, Larry could hear bullets striking the metal armor plate on the outside. Some of the rounds were armor-piercing and came right through the side of the boat and would spin around on the deck. Some hit the gasoline drums but, luckily, passed right through them without igniting the fuel. Meanwhile, Larry's machine-gunner was blasting away with his twin-thirties at Japanese machine-gun nests in the wrecked amtracs and aboard *Niminoa*. The enemy machine gunners on *Niminoa* were actually behind and above Larry's boat, shooting down at it.

The "gang approach" of going in with several boats all at once to pick up the wounded didn't work out. "The Japs just poured fire into us," Larry noted. "The fire was so intense that Eddie yelled to the other guys, 'Get out of here!' And they got out, driving out beyond the range of the enemy's machine guns. With his boats all gathered together, Eddie told his coxswains that they were going to have to go in one boat at a time and pick up whatever wounded they found and bring them out and load them into the LCVPs or LCMs waiting out of range.

Eddie organized a shuttle system whereby each boat, when it was fully loaded with wounded, transferred its charges to another boat that took them to *Heywood*. Eddie's LCP was smaller than Larry's LCVP, so when his boat was filled he would come alongside Larry's boat and transfer over his wounded Marines. Usually the transfer was made beyond the reef—and beyond the range of Japanese guns—but not always.

Larry recalled that at one point, "After we had picked up quite a few guys, and Eddie had transferred a load of wounded from his boat to mine, he shouted across to me, 'Well, I think we've done pretty well. None of the crews have been hit.'

"At the time we were under heavy fire and I yelled back, 'Well, be careful—and don't move!' And he said, 'Why?' I said, 'Well, look down between your legs.' The construction inside the boat was plywood; the metal was on the outside. His boat and mine were just then taking hits: armor-piercing rounds were tearing through the metal and ripping up the wood, scattering it all over the boat—even as we were talking, the debris was just flying, the wood is splintering from rounds piercing the side of the boat, and the rounds are flying around in the boat and they're still hot. I told Eddie that he'd better not move or he would be singing soprano in the choir! I don't know how in the world we both avoided getting hit. I think it was the Lord who was protecting us."

It was on one of Larry's rescue trips that 1st Lt. Dean Ladd, a platoon commander in B/1/8, had been hit in the abdomen several hundred yards from the beach. Two of the

American casualties and wrecked landing craft are strewn at the seawall on Betio.

enlisted men in his platoon had helped him reach Larry's boat.

Ladd remembered that several wounded men and their rescuers were clustered in front of the partially raised ramp. He said, "One by one, the wounded men were half-pushed, half-flung over the top of the ramp, after which they rolled down the ramp onto the deck. The man next to me was a big fellow with a ravaged face. His wound was terrible, worse than mine. I motioned for him to go before me and he was boosted to the top of the ramp. Then it was my turn and the two privates from my platoon lifted me. I was groaning, really hurting, and my helpers couldn't quite get me over the top of the ramp: I was limp and heavy, a bulky sack of flesh and bone with a hole in it, and they just couldn't manage to raise me high enough. Then the Marine with the ravaged face reached down and grabbed me, and one-armed me into the boat."

Dean tumbled, groaning, down onto the deck alongside the man with the bloody face. "The deck was covered with maimed and wounded men, their bodies bandaged and bloody, many writhing in pain, many groaning just like me."

The last Marine Larry rescued on this particular trip to the reef was Ken Desirelli, a 19-year-old private first class from C Company. After jumping off the ramp of his LCVP, he had headed toward the distant beach in waist-deep water, hunched over to make himself a small target. But not small enough.

He had gone about a hundred yards when he was hit. "I felt like somebody had walloped me in the right shoulder with a baseball bat," Desirelli recalled. "And I said to myself, 'What the hell's that?!' Then I saw that I was bleeding and I knew I'd been hit."

But he pressed on—"because that's what

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ABOVE: Overworked Navy corpsmen, always the unsung heroes, were credited with saving many lives during the battle. OPPOSITE: With amtracs in short supply the day after the landing, wounded Marines are transported from the pier on a rubber assault boat to the reef, where landing craft, such as Larry Wade's, would take them to nearby ships.

I was supposed to do. Then I began to think, jeez, I wanna go to sleep. I wanna lie down. But I didn't stop and I still had my rifle because I knew that I'd be charged fifty bucks if lost it. That was the main thing that worried me at the time.

"Meanwhile, I'm getting sleepier by the second and my gear is getting heavier. I slipped it off my back and dropped it in the water. I kept going. I wasn't feeling any pain. Now I'm thinking, jeez, it sure is a long ways in there. Then, for no particular reason, I began to wander off toward my right, toward the *Niminoa*. I was just wandering about, standing upright, and I saw bullets hitting the water all around me and I couldn't care less about them. They didn't seem to matter much because they weren't affecting me at all." Then he looked around and saw a Higgins boat—Larry Wade's boat—with its ramp halfway down and he thought, "Maybe I ought to go over to it."

But the boat seemed so far away and Ken wasn't sure he could make it—he wasn't sure he wanted to make it. He was becoming increasingly lethargic and indifferent to his fate: death was creeping over and through him. He later speculated that "it would have been easy for me to just give up and die at this point. I was bleeding a lot and in shock and all I wanted to do was lie down and go to sleep. But I made my way over to the boat and, as I got close to it, I could see that they were getting ready to raise the ramp. And I hollered, 'Hey, wait! Give me a ride!'

"I went over to the ramp but I couldn't pull myself up because my arm wasn't working. So I put my rifle on the ramp and this big guy reached down and grabbed me and lifted me aboard. He was wounded in the face and head and he was all bandaged and bleeding a lot. But he just grabbed me with one arm and picked me up and pulled me in. With one arm! I rolled down the ramp and passed right out." His rescuer was the same badly wounded Marine who had hauled Ladd aboard.

Larry delivered Ladd, Desirelli, and the other stricken Marines in his boat to *Sheridan,* then returned to the battle zone to pick up more wounded. His boat still had the gasoline drums aboard and he took them into the end of the pier to unload them. Just as he was unhooking the ramp catch on his boat, a sniper round struck his helmet and knocked him down into the well deck. The bullet made a hole in his helmet but, incredibly, did not penetrate his skull; he was okay. "But I was addled for about 30 minutes after that."

Wade continued to work. In the afternoon, the tide started coming in and he took his boat up the channel alongside the pier to the shore to fetch a load of wounded from the island itself. He landed right about where the pier juts out from the land and walked up on to the beach, stepping over the dead bodies at the waterline. He came across maybe 50 stretchers, all with corpses on them and all with red tags with "DEAD" attesting to their state.

But as he walked past the stretchers he distinctly heard a voice say, "I need a drink of water. I need a drink ... need a drink ... need a drink." He stopped and looked around but the dead men on those stretchers remained silent and unmoving. Later, when he recounted this incident to his buddies, they told him he must still have been in shock from the bullet that hit his helmet and that he had been hallucinating. Larry admitted that this might be the case, but he could never be sure: the clarity of the voice as it spoke to him—and which would haunt his thoughts for the rest of his life—argued for another explanation.

Larry spent the rest of the day helping to load wounded Marines into rubber rafts and then walking the rafts down the channel to LCVPs that waited out there for them. There was no shortage of wounded and Larry and others worked as fast as they could, "just piling guys on those rafts."

At some point during his endeavors, he saw a bloody 1st Lt. William Deane Hawkins standing by a big bunker, talking with some of his fellow officers. Hawkins was the commander of the 2nd Marines' scout-sniper platoon, which had seized the long pier

at the start of the battle, in advance of the landings on the assault beaches. While leading his unit in attacks on Japanese pillboxes and strongpoints, Hawkins had suffered multiple wounds from shrapnel and had been shot through the chest. He had also personally wiped out nine pillboxes or machine-guns nests while suffering from his wounds.

Larry could hear his subordinates urging him to go to an aid station, but Hawkins refused and Larry moved on. Hawkins died from his wounds shortly thereafter. His commanding officer, Colonel David M. Shoup, who earned the Medal of Honor at Tarawa, later called Hawkins an "inspiration," and said, "It's not often you can credit a first lieutenant with winning a battle, but Hawkins came as near to it as any man could."

Hawkins was posthumously awarded the Medal of Honor for his heroic actions on Betio, as were First Lieutenant Alexander "Sandy" Bonnyman Jr., and Staff Sargent William James Bordelon

The battle ended anticlimactically for Larry Wade. By first light on the third day, he still had not gotten any sleep since the operation began and was running on adrenalin and nervous energy.

Larry doesn't remember what happened during most of the third day—he thinks he was still in shock from having been struck in the helmet by a bullet. The next thing he remembered was that it was late afternoon and his boat was just sitting off the end of the pier. A group of 6th Marines came down the pier and asked Larry for ride to the small island just east of Betio. Larry took them over and, by the time he returned to Betio, the battle was well and truly over. He spent the night in his boat.

National Archives

The next day was Thanksgiving and even then most of the Marines were gone. A calm had settled over the island. "I remember taking a bath, just washing off, on the beach, a nice, quiet, sandy beach," said Larry. "Somebody had taken a load of foodstuff over, and there was canned salmon and canned tomatoes, and we ate them all."

At length he took his LCVP back to *Heywood*. When he boarded the ship, the captain took Larry and his crew down into his quarters and started crying. Larry recalled that the captain said, "I thought you guys had been killed. I never have lost anybody." He wanted to know what they had been doing for the past three days, and Larry filled him in.

The next day Larry, still woozy from his head injury, transferred to the USS *J. Franklin Bell* (APA-16). "Somebody took me over there—I don't know even how I got there. All of my seabag and everything had been packed up for me. For some reason, I had to go to sickbay; I still don't remember why. I remember there was a cut on my head. Evidently that bullet had done something. In my service record it says that I had a concussion. Anyway, I found out that [the *Bell*] was to be my home. And we were going to operate salvage operations from there."

When Eddie Albert finished taking the last of the wounded out to the ships, he got his boat back; the propeller had been repaired. But by then the action was over. (After the war, Eddie Albert went back to Hollywood to continue making films—including such war films as *The Longest Day, Attack!, Bombardier,* and *Captain Newman M.D.*—and the television series, *Green Acres*. He passed away in 2005.)

On Eddie Albert's recommendation, Larry subsequently received the Navy Commendation Medal for "Bravery and Outstanding Performance" during the battle for Betio.

"Coxswain Wade was wonderful!" Eddie later said. "Without any armor protection, under heavy enemy fire, he

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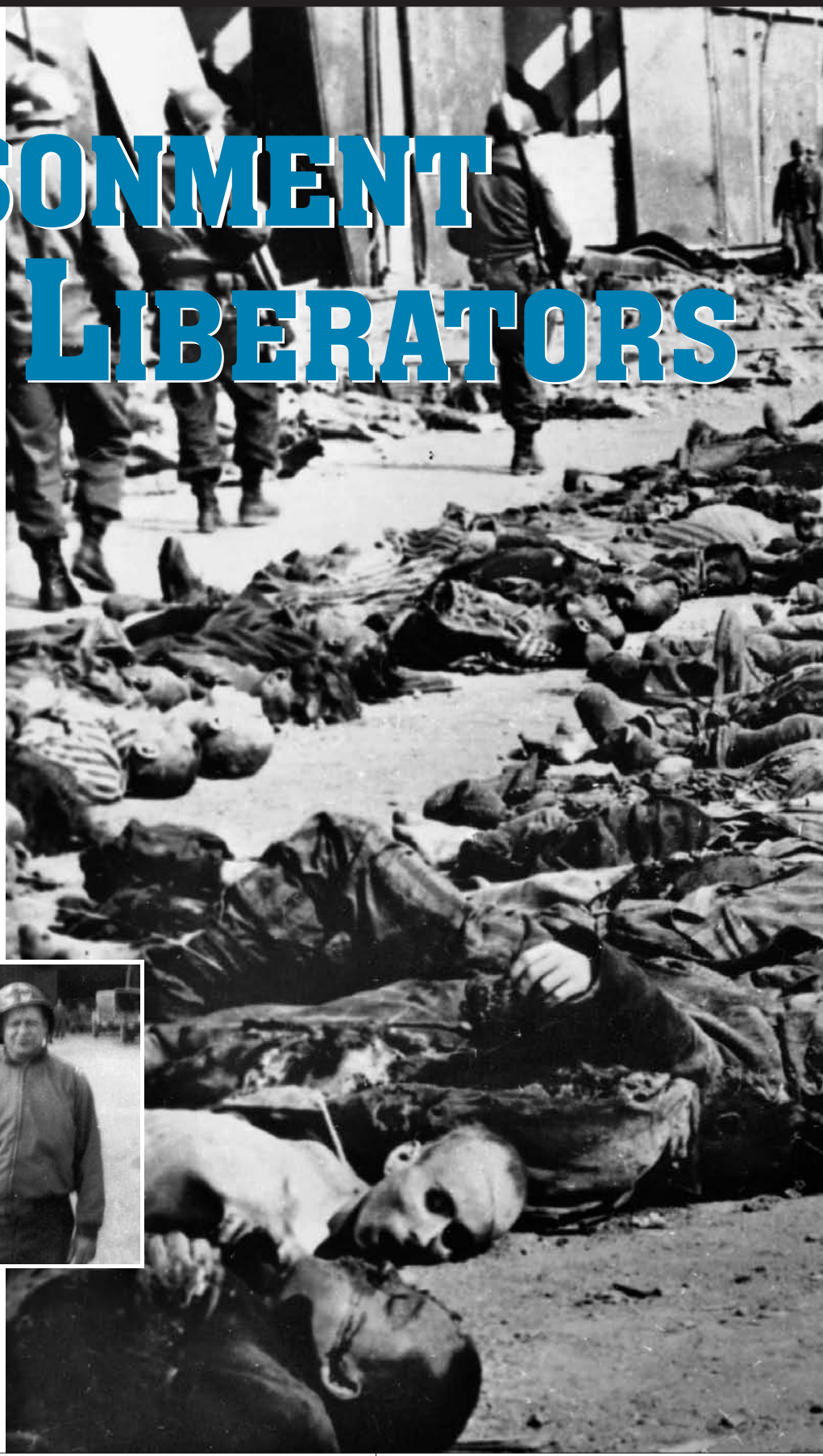
The IMPRISONMENT *of the* GI LIBERATORS



After liberating the Nazi concentration camps, many veterans are still dealing with the psychological aftermath.

BY LEILA LEVINSON

DOWN IN THE basement of my father's medical office a Nazi helmet stood guard. It sat on top of the pea-green Army trunk, CAPT R LEVINSON stenciled in white letters under a beaten-up leather handle. Throughout my childhood, whenever my father took me to the office while he did paperwork, I snuck down the basement stairs to stare at the trunk. It magnetized me, but I could not reach past the German helmet, with eagles on both sides grasping in their talons strange Xs that bent up at the ends at 90-degree angles. Only after my father's death, when my brother, Alan, and I needed to empty the office, did I finally open the latches.

R. Levinson photo, courtesy of Leila Levinson

On top lay the dark green Army jacket my father was wearing in the portrait that hung in the family den. A Roman numeral

ullstein bild/The Granger Collection, New York

Hundreds of corpses lie on the ground at Boelcke Kaserne, where the slave-laborers who built the V-2 rockets at nearby Mittelbau-Dora were housed. The deaths were actually caused by an Allied bombing raid on Nordhausen that missed the target. INSET: The author's father, Dr. Reuben Levinson, at Mittelbau-Dora.

"VII" within the shape of a seven-point star decorated one shoulder. An odd gold pyramid surrounded by blue adorned the other.

Under the jacket sat a Florsheim shoebox, big enough to hold boots. Out spilled photographs as I took off the lid. Hundreds of photographs. One showed endless ocean, faint ripples the only clue that the empty expanse was water, lit by a cloud-shrouded moon. My father's seismographic handwriting noted on the back: "The English Channel, June 2, 1944. Prelude to the Invasion."

Other photos showed GIs lying on the ground, white bandages on their heads, their arms, their thighs. Soldiers wearing Red Cross armbands. The Clearing Station on Utah Beach, Normandy, June 8, 1944. Huge circus-sized tents, emblazoned with enormous red crosses. Lines of GIs holding plates and cups. Mountains of rubble next to the remains of churches and homes. Fields covered in snow, tanks and bodies covered in snow. Fields covered with white crosses and occasional Stars of David. The boys who died in the Ardennes. Another: A lad in our battalion.

National Archives

An American soldier surveys a pile of corpses outside the Buchenwald crematorium.

I flipped through the photos, repetitive with war's destruction, until, at the bottom of the box, blurred stripes seized my eyes. Rows and rows of blurred stripes that cascaded into a wave. A foot emerged from the chaos, a leg. Many legs. Grotesque, frozen faces. My fingers pinched the top corner and turned over the photo. Nordhausen, Germany. April 12, 1945.

Nordhausen. What was Nordhausen? Another photo, more focused: a long canal-shaped ditch filled with bodies. Body after body, all in a row. An endless row of bodies. The burial of the concentration camps victims. April 15, 1945.

I dumped the photos back into the box and ran up the stairs, up and out into the hallway, the smell of rubbing alcohol relaxing my lungs, letting me breathe. I rested my forehead against the wall.

"Those photographs were intense," Alan said as we drove back to our family home. What were those photos doing in my father's trunk? Why had he made notes on the back of them—as if he had been there—as if he had seen a concentration camp. But that wasn't possible. He had told us (granted, just in passing, never with any details) that he had been a surgeon for the Army and had landed on Utah Beach right behind the first wave of troops on D-Day. He tended the wounded of the VII Corps all across France and into Germany, including the Battle of the Bulge. But he had never mentioned a concentration camp. He never talked about the Holocaust at all.

I first learned about the genocide of Europe's Jews at age 15 when I went to the Jewish Community Center and saw a movie, *Night and Fog*, by Alain Resnais. It showed endless lines of people being marched onto trains, then behind barbed wire.

I ran home, trying with each breath to push away the images. I rushed into the den and poured out my anguish to my parents. My father responded, "Don't think it can't happen here," as he wagged his finger before walking up the stairs and closing the bedroom door.

I might never have looked at the photographs in the shoebox again if my brother hadn't shipped the trunk to me 12 years, a wedding, and two sons later. One afternoon, my sons came running into the house, "Mom, the UPS man is bringing us a trunk!" They hung over me as if I were opening a pirate's chest. "Wow! Look at those buttons!" While they reached for my father's jacket, I slipped the shoebox out of the trunk and under the couch.

By uncanny coincidence or providential design, my older son, Ray, was studying World War II and the Holocaust in his sixth-grade class.

"I can't believe your dad fought the Nazis!" he said at dinner.

"He was a surgeon for the Army."

"Did he see the Holocaust?"

My husband, Burke, turned and looked at me, waiting to see how I would answer. My tongue lay cemented to my jaw.

"I … I'm not sure," I finally said.

That night I opened the shoebox and spread the photographs over my bed. The photographs of Nordhausen were blurred, the endless skeletal bodies staggering. My father's hands had been quivering, I realized. He had been overwhelmed. He had seen the worst.

I learned that Nordhausen is how the GIs referred to the slave labor camp the Nazis

Courtesy of Leila Levinson

Another view of mass death at Boelcke Kaserne, photographed by the author's father in April 1945.

called Mittelbau-Dora. A subcamp of Buchenwald situated three miles outside of the town of Nordhausen, its purpose was to produce the V-1 buzz bombs and V-2 long-range missles after the Allies discovered and bombed the testing facility at Peenemunde. The Nazis then transferred prisoners from Buchenwald and Dachau to Mittelbau-Dora, forcing them to carve tunnels through the Harz Mountains with hand chisels and dynamite. Then the prisoners had to live within the dank caverns and assemble the rockets.

When they could no longer work, the Nazis shot and burned them in a crematorium built at the camp once the bodies became too numerous to transport to Buchenwald. At the end of the war, not wanting to "waste" bullets, the Nazis built a warehouse called Boelcke Barracks on the far side of town. There they locked up the sick and weak prisoners and left them to starve to death. It was this warehouse, unintentionally bombed by the Allies two days before its liberation, that my father photographed.

"Oh, yes," my Aunt Joan told me, "your father had the bad luck of being assigned to treat the survivors at a camp. It affected him terribly. He didn't talk about it."

Joan was a British "war bride" who met my father's brother, Leon, in London during the war. Perhaps, I thought, he had revealed more to one of his siblings. I asked his 86-year-old sister, Mildred, what she knew about his time at Nordhausen.

"He spent two weeks there taking care of survivors," she told me. "He had a nervous breakdown after seeing that place, and the Army sent him to the Riviera for R&R. We couldn't understand why, six months after all the other boys were back, Rube was still over there. "

Remembering the photographs in the shoebox of him on the Riviera, I was too stunned to ask more.

Books on the liberation of the camps do not address the quivering minds and hearts of the liberators, the consequences of bearing witness. But that is what I needed to know if I was to understand what the photographs might be telling me about my father. Perhaps they were clues to his steely silence, his melancholy and detachment.

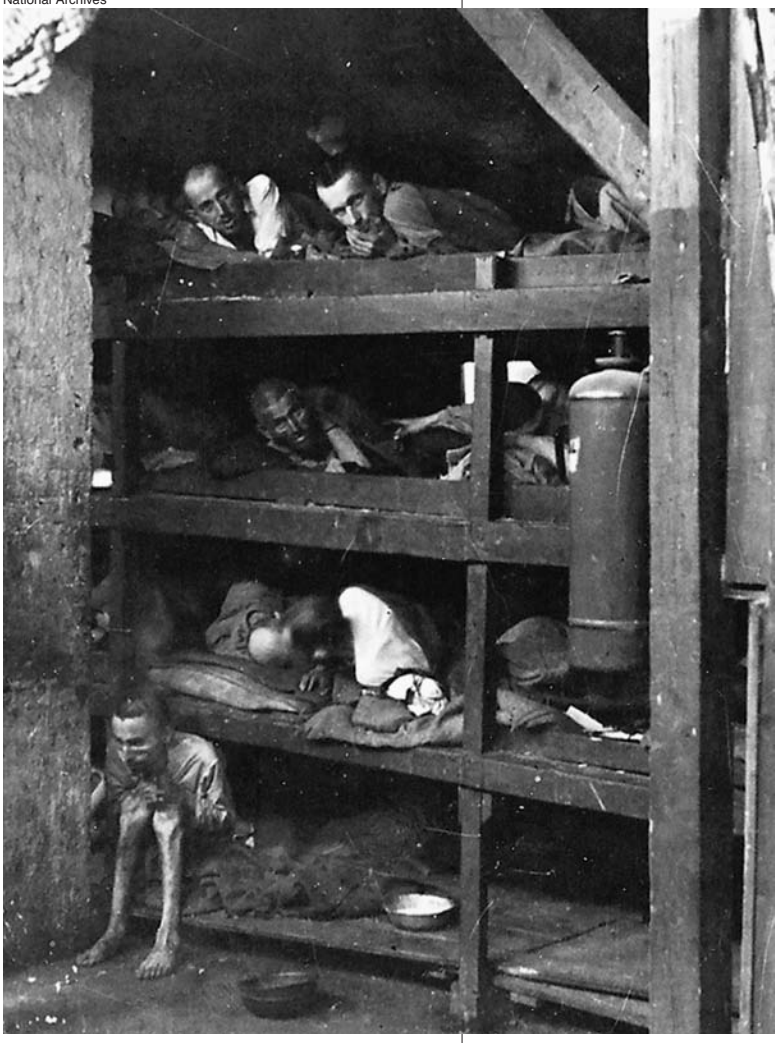
The one way I could understand what the photographs were showing me was to find and talk with veterans who had also helped to liberate the camps.

I learned thousands of GIs had participated in the camps' liberations. They liberated 39 camps, so if a division had 14,000 soldiers and one, if not two, divisions liberated each of those camps, tens of thousands of GIs witnessed them.

In the spring of 2007, in the former Eastern bloc, researchers discovered Nazi documents that established the existence of hundreds of subcamps for each of the listed camps. So, once subcamps are factored in, the total number of camps increases to more than 5,000, placing the GIs who witnessed

a camp in the range of 250,000, especially if the number includes auxiliary troops like my father's medical battalion that were brought in to help survivors. In addition, General Eisenhower ordered soldiers from every battalion within 50 miles of a discovered camp to send soldiers to be witnesses. He had the prescience to anticipate "Holocaust deniers" and wanted as many eyewitnesses as possible to view the horrors of the death and concentration camps.

National Archives



Through luck and persistence, I identified and located 42 men and one woman who had been GI liberators and wrote them letters requesting interviews. Within 10 days I had set up 10 interviews for the end of the summer, when my family and I would be driving back to Texas from northern New York State. My husband and sons agreed that we would extend the return trip so we could stop along the way for my interviews all along the Eastern Seaboard. I did not anticipate how having my family with me and how concentrating the interviews within a 10-day span would intensify my response to meeting the veterans and what they would tell me. Because, even though I taught a course on literature of the Holocaust to college students, I was unprepared for the stories I heard and the emotions I saw.

"It was as if I had entered hell," George Kaiser told me in his brightly lit living room in Winthrop, Massachusetts. Mr. Kaiser entered Dachau, outside of Munich, with the 42nd Infantry Division at the end of April 1945, and came upon hundreds of prisoners in barracks lying on shelves, four or five high, just covered with a couple pieces of straw.

"They were too weak to get up," he said. "Some just turned their heads. Others lay there. Their eyes were the only indication they were alive. Some banged their tin cups on the side of the bunks because they were too weak to get up. The smell was so overpowering I got sick and ran out."

He stared down at his hands that were twisting over and over each other.

"You just couldn't believe it; you just couldn't believe it," he went on. "Out in the courtyard, I couldn't move. My mind froze; the shock was complete and total. Especially when we saw the crematoria—it was still hot, with these piles of bodies, stacked five bodies high…."

His voice, which had been getting quieter and quieter, broke off. He put his head down into the cup of his palms, his shoulders shaking. Then he excused himself and left the room. I raised my hands up around my glasses to hide my tears. His words, "My mind froze…" overwhelmed my thinking.

Mr. Kaiser returned with an armful of letters. "These are from children whose classes I spoke to. I thought you might like to see them." Schoolchildren he had told about Dachau, but not his own children. "I guess even after all this time, I can't open up."

He walked me to the corner where Burke and the boys were waiting in the car. When we shook hands goodbye, his eyes brimmed with sorrow. As we pulled away, I turned around and waved, and just before we turned the corner, Mr. Kaiser was still waving back.

As we headed south, toward Rhode Island, I saw Mr. Kaiser's eyes seeing things invisible to me. Seeing more than he could bear.

When he remembered, he was back in that moment, as if it was still happening.

I learned over the next several days that, for every one of these veterans the moment of entering the camp, of walking through the gate is still happening.

It did not help that the GIs received no warning at all about what they would encounter in the camps. In my interview the next day, Nat Futterman told me, "We didn't know where the hell we were." He served with the 10th Regiment, 5th Infantry Division, that is not listed as an "official" liberating unit but, because he was a radio operator, an officer enlisted him for a drive to a "camp" up the road.

"We grunt soldiers didn't know what we were doing, where we were going. It was a

day-by-day thing. Certainly the officers didn't explain anything, just: do your job, carry the radio. We didn't know where the hell we were. When we got outside of Weimar, you could smell that something was wrong. Smell it. The thing that got me was when I looked at the leaves on the trees. I said what the hell is the matter with them? The leaves were gray. I rubbed one, and it was covered with ash. And, you know, wha, wha, what is this? And then when we walked through the gates…."

He stopped talking and spread his hands out before him, as if they could block the image.

"That's why he doesn't talk about it," Mrs. Futterman looked at me. "Doesn't talk about it."

"It's very hard to even think about it because it was so overwhelming when you walked through those gates…," Mr. Futterman managed to say. "It was overpowering. We didn't know what to do. Nobody knew what to do. Some started feeding their rations to the prisoners, and I said, 'That'll kill them; don't do that.' And then, and then …"

He paused and took a deep breath, his whole body shuddering.

"And then they came over and kissed our feet; and they, they were—it was…." Tears began running down his cheeks; his voice cracked. "The images—this has to be hell, this cannot be this world, can't be, ah, jeez." His hands pushed at the air as if he might push away the images. "But then you get angry, you know, the anger was so intense."

Eli Heimberg opened the door before I even knocked. "The boys aren't staying?" he asked, his voice revealing his disappointment. "I set up the den so they could watch television."

After I assured him my husband wanted to take them to the beach, Mr. Heimberg led me into his study, which he had made into a museum of the 42nd Infantry Division. Books filled the shelves, a map detailing the division's route through Europe hung over the couch. Photographs surrounded us of Mr. Heimberg as the 22-year-old assistant to Rabbi Bohnen, one of the 42nd Division's chaplains. Mr. Heimberg's first words echoed those of Mr. Futterman.

"We knew to expect horrible things when we came upon Dachau, but nothing like what we found. There was no way to prepare ourselves for it. More horrifying than the ovens were the bodies in boxcars on the track leading into the camp. One man, who must have been trying to extricate himself, was reaching out from among the bodies. He was frozen in death, as if asking, 'Why me?'

"We went into the barracks of the Jewish inmates, most of them too weak and close to death to stand. They were lying on these wooden shelves, hundreds of them side by side. When Rabbi Bohnen told them 'Ich bin ein rebe American' ('I am an American rabbi'), there came a wail as though they were letting out all their emotions they had pent up for years."

National Archives

ABOVE: American medics check for signs of life in a railroad car left on a siding outside the Dachau concentration camp, April 29, 1945. Over 2,300 dead victims were found on the train, which had come from Buchenwald. OPPOSITE: Many liberators are haunted by the faces of those survivors they found within the unbelieveable squalor of the camp barracks.

At the memory, Mr. Heimberg broke off and tucked his chin down into his chest.

Mr. Heimberg did not want to speak about Dachau. He wanted to tell me about his work at a displaced-persons camp where he asked to be posted after the liberation. How he helped to make the survivors' time there more comfortable and facilitated their developing self-governance. He mentioned one child, a girl to whom he had offered a candy bar. "She bit the whole thing, paper and all, and I realized she had never seen candy before."

At the end of our conversation, I asked him if he ever had nightmares.

"No, but sometimes I have a recurring dream. I'm driving up to the DP camp in a big truck, and the entire bed is full of candy bars."

My appointment the next day was in Maryland. When I woke up and remembered another interview awaited me, exhaustion flooded my body. What had I been thinking to plan these back to back?

"Come on, Mom, come on," my sons said, running in the room, impatient for me to wake up. I realized how lucky I was to have them with me.

I learned from that day's interview and many others that none of these veterans had shared with their children their experiences of witnessing a concentration camp. They had hardly spoken of it at all to anyone.

"I didn't talk about it for 40 years," said Dr. George Tievsky, as he showed me photographs he had taken at Dachau. They were meticulously organized and tied with a yellow ribbon. Dr. Tievsky had been a physician with the 66th Field Hospital, attached to the 42nd Division. He had served the liberated prisoners as my father had—trying desperately to keep them alive.

"Nobody knew it—just my wife, Priscilla. I couldn't talk about it; I couldn't talk about it because there were no words that could describe … the horror, and words would almost be sacrilegious … a disservice to those who survived."

Another reason the veterans did not speak about their experience for decades was that when they first returned from Europe, no one wanted to hear about it.

"I don't think anybody wanted to hear about it," said Kay Nee, who served in the war as a USO entertainer for the troops of V Corps. "Life was tough enough without putting something more into it. And, so I … it was interesting, I kind of buckled up then, and when I went home, I discovered nobody there wanted to hear about it. Even my own mother would say, 'Now, Kay, that's all behind you. Forget about it, don't even talk about it.' And so I sort of shut up."

Al Hirsch, who fought with the 89th Infantry Division, found not only a lack of interest in hearing but an unwillingness to believe what he had witnessed at Ohrdruf, a Buchenwald subcamp.

Courtesy of Leila Levinson

Residents of the town of Nordhausen are forced to view the mass burial of the slave laborers who died at Boelcke Kaserne. Photographed by Dr. Levinson on April 15, 1945.

"People seemed so oblivious, unconcerned," he said. "'Oh, those concentration camps couldn't have been that terrible.' I heard them say more about going to a bad movie. 'Wasn't that picture terrible!' I just couldn't understand that they couldn't understand how terrible it was."

George Kaiser presented another reason for keeping silent about his role at Dachau: "We had survivors from the camps here in Winthrop [Massachusetts], so I just sort of divorced myself from it, because I figured, what have I got to add? They were the ones who went through hell." These men and women compared their situation to that of survivors of the camps, making the veterans' pain seem inconsequential and irrelevant.

But as I sat with Al Hirsch and his daughter Lisa in the kitchen of their suburban Baltimore home where Lisa had grown up, the deepest reason for their silence revealed itself: their desire to protect the children. "My family's security was always my goal," Mr. Hirsch told me, and I thought of my father, taking out a notebook whenever I visited him at the office so he could show me the list of stocks he had bought for me, "so you always have that cushion, that security."

None of these veterans had shared their experiences as liberators with their children, even those men who had begun speaking to schoolchildren and other groups. At a commemoration of the liberation of the camps I organized for the university where I taught in Austin, Texas, Mr. Futterman said, "What I've said tonight is more than what I've ever told my wife, sitting there, in the front row, and my children, whom I love very much."

How could they expose their family, their reason for continuing, to even the memories of the worst evil? Better to lock them away, hoping they would stay in deep storage along with the photographs almost all of them had taken with their stowed Kodak

Brownie or "liberated" Leica. Better to subject only themselves to the nightmares than let the memories ruin their family's innocent happiness.

"Oh, he buried it all those years," the wife of Maurice Paper told me about her husband's memories of Dachau. General Eisenhower, remembering Paper's fluency in Yiddish and German from his having served in Africa on the general's staff, ordered him to Dachau to serve as an interpreter for the prisoners and liberating GIs. Paper found himself not only having to convince the skeletal Jews that he himself was Jewish but to tell them that they could not leave the camp and would have to wait 48 hours before medical care, food, and clothing would arrive. His words brought terrible wails of frustration from the newly liberated prisoners.

"He never said a word," Mrs. Paper said, "not a word, even though I knew from letters he wrote home right afterwards that it had been awful. So he wrote he had seen it, that it was unbelievable, that he couldn't begin to describe it to me, and then I saw a few photos he had taken. But he never said a word once he was home, and I didn't want to cause any more pain by bringing it up."

The forward gaze of the 1950s, the need to work and get on with life, reinforced the liberators' urge to lock away their memories of the camps.

But the images, the smells and sounds of those memories surfaced in nightmares, or when a neighborhood ballpark relined its fields with lime, or when a photograph appeared in the newspaper or on the evening news.

Recognizing the Liberating Divisions

According to the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, many of the American divisions (not to mention the British, Canadian, French, and Soviet divisions) in the European Theater came across or liberated dozens of Nazi concentration camps and their subcamps in Germany, Austria, Czechoslovakia, France, and Poland, including the following:

U.S. 1st Infantry Division (liberated Zwodau and Falkenau-an-der-Eger, both Flossenbürg subcamps); 2nd Infantry Division (Leipzig-Schönefeld, a Buchenwald subcamp)); 4th Infantry Division (a subcamp of Dachau); 8th Infantry Division (Wöbbelin, a Neuengamme subcamp); 26th Infantry Division (Gusen, a Mauthausen subcamp); 29th Infantry Division (Dinslaken, a civilian labor camp); 36th, 63rd, and 103rd Infantry Divisions (Kaufering, Dachau subcamps); 42nd and 45th Infantry Division (Dachau); 65th Infantry Division (a Flossenbürg subcamp); 69th Infantry Division (Leipzig-Thekla, a Buchenwald subcamp); 71st Infantry Division (Gunskirchen, a Mauthausen subcamp); 80th Infantry Division (Ebensee, another Mauthausen subcamp); 83th Infantry Division (Langenstein (a Buchenwald sub-camp); 84th Infantry Division (Ahlem and Salzwedel, both Neuengamme subcamps); 86th Infantry Division (Attendorn, civilian labor camp); 89th Infantry Division (Ohrdruf, a Buchenwald subcamp); 90th Infantry Division (Flossenbürg); 95th Infantry Division (Werl, a prison and civilian labor camp); 99th Infantry Division (Dachau subcamps); and 104th Infantry Division (Dora-Mittelbau).

American armored divisions involved in liberations include: 3rd Amored (Dora-Mittelbau); 4th Armored (Ohrdruf); 6th Armored (Buchenwald); 8th Armored (Halberstadt-Zwieberge, a Buchenwald subcamp); 9th Armored (Falkenau-an-der-Eger); 10th Armored (Dachau subcamp); 11th Armored (Gusen); 12th and 14th Armored (Dachau subcamps); and 20th Armored (Dachau).

In addition, two American airborne divisions also took part in liberations: 82nd (Wöbbelin) and 101st (a subcamp of Dachau).

For a division to be recognized as a "liberating unit" by the USHMM Center of Military History, official unit records had to show that the division arrived at the site within 48 hours of the initial division's encounter. □

We the children sensed that our fathers or mothers kept some part of themselves unavailable and distant. After conveying great affection for his father, Paul Lenger, who helped liberate Ohrdruf with the 89th Infantry Division, Steven Lenger went on to say, "Even with our closeness, there was a part of him that was like a dark closet he couldn't open up. And that came from seeing Ohrdruf," one of the first concentration camps the GIs liberated.

Nicholas Nash, whose father was among Mauthausen's liberators, felt his father trained him and his sisters "not to ask, as asking might reawaken things…. There was always something that lay behind the eyes that you knew you'd never get to." But the son did have some idea of what his father was hiding, because his war photos sat in an album in the den bookcase, and when at age 14 Nicholas first opened the album, he found piles of bodies, the words "Mauthausen Concentration Camp" written on the photographs' backs.

More often than not the children of GI liberators learned where their parents had been and what they had seen there through photographs their veteran parents had taken—photographs either left sitting in albums in the den bookcase or stored away in Army trunks. But though we have learned what our parents saw, what has been more difficult to determine is how that experience affected our parents and through them, ourselves.

"I was never the same. I was never the same," Maurice Paper said as he kept his eyes on his hands. "I couldn't go back to school. I had every chance in the world to go back to college. I had every intention to go. I couldn't do it."

"Times I wondered," Al Hirsch said, more to himself than to me, "did you ever change, did you ever change back [after Ohrdruf]?"

Witnessing the ghoulish scenes of death, the until-then unimaginable evil, not only changed the GIs; it imprisoned them. At first I thought repressed grief was holding them hostage to the experience. But in my very last interview—the one with Kay

Nee—as I packed my tape recorder into my bag, I discovered the real prison guard.

In May 2003, nine months after my interviews of veterans in the northeast, I flew by myself to Minneapolis to interview Mrs. Nee. She and another USO entertainer had driven across Belgium and Germany in a two-and-a-half-ton truck to entertain the troops wherever they were camped. The truck was their stage as well as transportation: the side pulled down, with a piano rolling out on a pulley; one woman played while the other sang. Many times they found themselves in the thick of the action—Paris the day after its liberation, Bastogne the day the Germans broke through the Bulge, and Buchenwald a few days after it was liberated.

As she sat drinking coffee outside of Weimar one day in mid-April 1945, troops began passing by. "Hey, you want to come with us to a camp up the road?" a GI yelled.

"Sure," she answered, thinking a camp might be a place full of hungry and homeless people needing help. At the gates, walking skeletons collapsed at her feet. A man died in her arms, his last words, "But I am dying a free man."

"I went into complete shock," she told me, describing the ovens with burned skeletons in them. "It was at that point that I sort of went into a shock, a protective shock, so that as I went through the rest of the camp, while I was horrified, I somehow—the reality of it was kept from me, so that I could go on."

While the horror behind the gates of the death camps did not threaten the lives of the GI liberators, it did destroy their sense of moral order, of humanity, of a universe directed by an ultimately divine benevolence. It annihilated the possibility of ever feeling safe again.

National Archives

Eisenhower requested that American newspaper editors visit the liberated camps as witnesses to the atrocities. Here, the editors take notes at Buchenwald on April 25, 1945.

Even though she later took her five children to Europe to show them where she had been during the war, she did not take them to Buchenwald. She showed them Dachau but kept silent about her role at another camp's liberation.

"It was as if the person who saw Buchenwald was somebody other than myself," she told me, "as if I were looking at it from the outside. I tried very hard to forget the whole thing. Because I couldn't go on thinking about it. I had to put it behind me. Be careful that it didn't come to the front. I don't know why. Maybe it's a fear."

I composed myself and tried to sound calm as I asked, "A fear of what?"

"Of the memories destroying me."

Trauma results from an overwhelming threat of annihilation. On some deep level a traumatized person believes that recalling the moment of trauma will physically annihilate him. Unresolved trauma, then, is living terror of immediate death. One wrong turn, a slip of the thoughts, and the image of the trauma, the destroyer, will slip out of the vault, hurling one back through time into the jaw of devastation.

And while the horror behind the gates of the death camps did not threaten the lives of the GI liberators, it did destroy their sense of moral order, of humanity, of a universe directed by an ultimately divine benevolence. It annihilated the possibility of ever feeling safe again.

Mrs. Nee opened my eyes to what sat right before me all along, ever since my first interview with George Kaiser, how when he began talking about Dachau, the corpses and ovens appeared before him, his remembering took him right back into the crema-

torium. That was the moment he lost influence over his composure, his fear as well as his pain surfacing. "I can't get too graphic," he had said. He meant those words literally. He could not remain with the image. Nat Futterman could not go through the gate. Carold Bland who, with the 12th Armored Division, liberated Landsberg: "But if I try to get too graphic, it's pretty hard to keep talking…." Edgar Edelsack who liberated Mauthausen with the 11th Armored Division: "The pictures I took were so emotionally disturbing that I gave them away. I couldn't face looking at them."

My father tried to lock his away in the trunk.

Even if the GI liberators succeeded in locking away the photographs, they could not lock away the fear that the memories might slip through, whether in a dream or awake, triggered by the odor of lime or by hearing the word "cordwood." Now I knew how the veterans most reminded me of my father: a palpable distancing, signaled by the sudden speaking of themselves in the second person. "Did you ever change back?" Al Hirsch had asked of himself. In my father I had mistaken this distancing from emotion as indifference.

But it had not been indifference. He was doing all he could to lock away the terror. So he could keep my brothers and me safe.

The night after I spoke with Kay Nee, alone in the motel room, forgiveness for my father opened within me like a door opening into a new part of my heart, a place of compassion and empathy, of understanding, and release.

We need to acknowledge how the GIs who liberated the Nazi death camps have suffered terribly from what they witnessed. We need to put into the record of history that by stumbling upon the camps without any preparation, these men and women would be haunted for the rest of their lives by the images and smells of the Final Solution's gruesome last moments. These veterans are Holocaust victims we have yet to recognize. By not doing so, we place yet another obstacle between them and peace. □

Was Rudolf Hess Murdered?

Continued from page 11

berg War Crimes Trials. They noted that the elder Hess was in poor shape, medically speaking, and that the arthritis in his fingers was so bad that he could not even tie his shoes, let alone fashion a noose made from a lamp cord. They also asserted that a suicide note was forged.

In addition, in their minds, the two Americans in uniform were, in fact, two secret British MI6 agents who strangled Hess to death.

In May 1989, the conspiracy theory gained new legs. That month, the respected French weekly magazine *Le Figaro* published an article by Jean-Pax Méfret that suggested Hess's death was something other than suicide. Méfret based his story on a meeting he said he had had the previous year with an unnamed "Allied officer" stationed in Berlin who told him that Hess did not commit suicide.

The next day, this same officer told Méfret to forget what he had told him, saying that the summer house in which Hess had apparently killed himself had burned down within 48 hours after the event. "Even the cord which Hess supposedly used to hang himself has gone up in smoke," said the officer. "No one will ever be able to prove that this old Nazi didn't kill himself."

The Hess family, too, remained suspicious about the official story of how the 93-year-old prisoner died, and so hired Dr. Wolfgang Spann to perform a second autopsy. Spann's detailed examination of the marks on Hess's neck reportedly revealed a different cause of death than that of the Four Powers' pathologist, J.M. Cameron. Spann's report noted that Hess had died from strangulation, not by hanging with an electrical cord! However, Spann publicly stated, "We can't prove a third hand participated in the death of Rudolf Hess."

If Hess was murdered as the result of some conspiratorial plot, what could have been the motive? Certainly the issue of the cost of keeping him locked up could have been a factor. The price tag for maintaining Spandau Prison, with its 600 empty

Rudolf Hess at the Nuremberg trials.

cells, 100 full-time employees, guard detachments provided by Berlin's governing Four Powers—France, Great Britain, the Soviet Union, and the United States—and only one prisoner was more than $100 million annually.

For years, France, Great Britain, and the United States wanted to close the prison and release the aging Hess, but the Soviets would have none of it. Rudolf Hess would stay in Spandau until he died, they insisted.

But why murder a 93-year-old man who was reportedly in poor and failing health? How much longer could he be expected to live? Anyone consulting an actuarial table would conclude that his continued existence would not be a financial burden on the governments of the Four Powers for much longer.

It was only later, when Soviet reformist President Mikhail Gorbachev was in power, that the Russians changed their tune. According to Hess's son, after the Soviets relented and said that Hess should be released, the British would not allow it, and hatched a plot to do away with his father. But why? To cover up the fact that Prisoner Number Seven was actually a double? Wouldn't such a disclosure bring about extreme embarrassment for the British, as well as for France and America?

Others began taking pot-shots at Thomas's theories immediately after the book's publication and coming up with their own. Since Thomas's controversial book came out, a plethora of others have been written on the subject (*Hess: Flight for the Führer* by Peter Padfield; *Ten Days That Saved the West* by John Costello; *Churchill's Deception* by Louis Kilzer; *British Secret Service and 17F: The Life of Ian Fleming* by Donald McCormick; *Double Standards* by Picknett, Prince, and Prior; and *Hess: The British Conspiracy* by John Harris and M.J. Trow), each one filled with more conjecture and counter-theories than the last and calling into question the theories advanced by the other authors. They make for fascinating reading but whether or not any of them get any closer to the truth of the matter is debatable.

Perhaps the most authoritative account of Hess's death came from Lt. Col. Tony Le Tissier, the former British Governor at Spandau Prison. In his 2008 book, *Farewell to Spandau*, Le Tissier contradicted medical orderly Melaouhi's statement by pointing out that there were four reading lamps in the summer house and, therefore, more than one cord. The two men in American uniform were medics, not nefarious MI6 agents, who had been called to assist with the attempts to resuscitate Hess, and the "topsy-turvy" furniture had been pushed aside in the course of their previous efforts to revive the prisoner.

As for Hess's medical condition and supposed debilitating arthritis, Le Tissier said that the prisoner wore a truss and probably found it restricting when bending over to tie his shoelaces, but he could write legibly and thus tie a knot, proving that arthritis did not preclude him from hanging himself.

Perhaps the truth is that there was no conspiracy, no double, no second plane, no murder, no deeper, hidden motive. Perhaps Rudolf Hess, already mentally ill and sick with fear in 1941 about what might happen to his beloved country if Germany invaded the USSR, had only one goal in mind—that of reaching Britain in hopes of making peace. Could such a simple, unadorned explanation be correct, after all?

The official British files relating to Hess that have been kept secret for decades are scheduled to be released to the public in 2016. Perhaps then the world will finally learn the truth about Rudolf Hess. □

Battle for Betio

Continued from page 83

had to stand up and steer the boat, keeping her steady against the strong current, and avoid grounding on the coral. If that wasn't enough, he had to carefully hold the boat off the wounded men who had dragged themselves alongside to be lifted aboard. If it weren't for Wade, a tall, young squirt from Texas, I don't think we would have saved a man."

Larry stayed on Betio for eight months. "Any time they needed a crew—coxswain, motor machinist, seaman—they'd tell us ahead of time and a C-47 would take us to our destination. If they needed us in the Marshals, they'd come get us. And we'd join the invasion, and make the landing. I was in two different landings in the Marshalls. And I was at Saipan. I was taken off of Saipan and flown to Hawaii and put aboard an LST to make the landing at Leyte. I was in danger 17 times, but Tarawa was the roughest operation."

For its duration, Operation Galvanic and the battle for Tarawa was one of the bloodiest and most savage operations of the Pacific campaign. The U.S. Marine Corps lost 990 men killed and 2,296 wounded during the three-day fight, and 687 U.S. Navy personnel died. Of the 5,000 Japanese and Korean defenders, all but 147 perished. Many American commanders felt that Tarawa was a costly battle that didn't need to be fought, that it could have been bypassed and left to "wither on the vine," to quote Marine General Holland M. Smith.

Like the Marines who stormed ashore protected by nothing but a khaki shirt, brave sailors—like Larry Wade—who crewed the landing craft that carried the Marines into battle, were equally exposed to the hazards of battle, equally unprotected, and equally courageous.

In an interview with the author nearly 60 years after the war, Larry observed that "everybody at Tarawa who was there in any capacity was a hero—whether he wanted to be or not."

Larry was too modest and too humble to include himself in that assessment; his intention was to pay tribute to sailors and Marines with whom he served. But the record speaks for itself, and there can be no denying it: at Betio, Larry Wade was a hero.

Lawrence Hugh "Larry" Wade passed away on November 8, 2007, in Norman, Oklahoma. Speaking at his funeral, Larry's son-in-law, Steven Motsinger, observed that Larry was a hero three times over: "A hero to his country, a hero to his faith, a hero to his family."

One would be hard pressed to come up with a more fitting epitaph for the "tall, young squirt from Texas" who saved so many lives in one of this nation's most difficult battles. □

The National World War II Museum brings the war alive through maps, photos, and artifacts, even a C-47.

WHILE SOME PEOPLE regard museums as dry, dull, and dusty places, such is not the case with the National World War II Museum in New Orleans, Louisiana, where the full history of the war comes alive.

Spearheaded by the late University of New Orleans history professor and author Dr. Stephen Ambrose, it opened its doors on June 6, 2000, the 56th anniversary of the Normandy invasion, as the "National D-Day Museum," but changed its name and mission in 2003 when the U.S. Congress officially designated the facility "America's National World War II Museum."

Since then, the museum has ambitiously expanded not only its focus but also its facility. A $300 million fund-raising effort has resulted in the addition of several new gal-

Photos provided by the National World War II Museum

leries and features (such as the Solomon Victory Theater, Stage Door Canteen, and The American Sector restaurant), with even more on the horizon. Special exhibits, USO-style entertainment shows, guest speakers, and panel discussions are held on an ongoing basis.

The museum building itself is several stories high. Visitors begin their self-guided tour on the top floor and work their way down toward the ground floor. The museum is organized in chronological order, with the top floor discussing the political, social, and economic conditions that led up to World War II and the relative military strengths of major nations at the beginning of the war.

Maps, photos, descriptive panels, and well-organized displays of artifacts (including a C-47 transport plane, landing craft, and armored vehicles) give visitors a comprehensive, easily understood overview of the entire conflict.

The average visit takes about 2½-3 hours. A gift shop is on the premises, and the facility is handicap-accessible.

After surviving 2005's Hurricane Katrina with minimal damage, the museum today is bigger and better than ever, with even more exciting plans for the future.

Location
945 Magazine Street (at Andrew Higgins Drive), New Orleans, LA

Phone
(504) 528-1944

Website
www.nationalww2 museum.org

Admission
Admission fee charged; see website for pricing

Hours
Open seven days a week,
9:00 AM–5:00 PM (Closed Mardi Gras Day, Thanksgiving Day, Christmas Eve, and Christmas Day

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heavy, primarily in the 7th and 49th Infantry Regiments; these two regiments had 2,296 casualties. The combat activity eventually lessened and the front took on the aspects of trench warfare.

Serious fighting on the Karelian Isthmus ended by mid-July but went on for some time in East Karelia until the Finns managed to frustrate the Soviet drives in August 1944. The final operation of the campaign took place east of Ilomantsi where Maj. Gen. E. Raappana, with two brigades and two infantry battalions, succeeded in encircling two Soviet divisions—the 176th and 289th—and brought about their virtual destruction. While most of the encircled troops escaped they abandoned their equipment. That operation ended on August 10.

In the period June 18-20, the Finns received information confirming that the Soviets were withdrawing forces from the Karelian Isthmus and transferring them to the area of Army Group North. Some of the forces were replaced with new infantry divisions and fortress units. The Finns estimated that the Soviet forces confronting them now consisted of 29 infantry divisions, two light infantry brigades, 10 armored brigades, and a number of fortress units. These forces were certainly capable of carrying out further offensive operations.

The Germans recalled Air Group Kuhlmey and returned it to the 1st Air Fleet supporting Army Group North on July 21. The Finns had been promised that an additional assault gun battalion would be added to the 122nd Infantry Division, but they were informed on July 22 that this battalion would not be coming.

Finnish alarm increased on July 29 when Hitler ordered the 122nd Division back to Army Group North. The OKW explained that the quiet situation in Finland was the deciding factor in the division's withdrawal and that the Germans would come to Finland's aid in the future if they were needed. The sector held by the 122nd Division was taken over by the Finnish 10th Division.

Aside from dwindling German assistance, the gravest problem facing the Finnish Army in the middle of July 1944 was lack of manpower. Their losses had continued to rise at an alarming rate, reaching 32,000 by July 11 and 44,000 by July 18. Older members of the reserve were redrafted and year groups 1902-1908 were called to the colors. However, these measures produced only 31,700 troops as replacements for the 44,000 who were lost.

Soviet losses were considerably larger than those for the Finns, but an accurate number is difficult to establish since casualty figures for the Leningrad Front do not distinguish between the Karelian Isthmus and other sectors of the front. It is estimated, however, that Soviet losses in the first four days of the offensive against Tali-Ihantala came to about 22,000 killed, wounded, and missing. They are also reported to have lost 300 tanks in the Tali-Ihantala area.

The stabilization of the front provided the prerequisite that Mannerheim had laid down for an approach to the Soviets for an armistice. The Soviets continued to withdraw forces from the Finnish fronts and on the Karelian Isthmus they were reduced to 10 infantry divisions and five tank brigades by the middle of August. Mannerheim also accepted the position of president.

The reversal of Finnish policy started with a repudiation of the agreement it had made with Germany six weeks earlier, followed by a petition to the Soviet Union for peace. The Germans had no power to influence events.

On August 29, the Soviet Union sent its conditions for accepting an armistice delegation. First, Finland had to make an immediate public declaration that it was breaking diplomatic relations with Germany. Second, Finland had to publicly demand that Germany withdraw its troops from Finland by September 15. Any German troops remaining in the country after that date should be disarmed and handed over as prisoners to the Soviet Union. Finland accepted these armistice terms and the guns fell silent on September 5, 1944.

The tenacious Finnish defense of the VKT Line secured that country's continued existence as an independent nation, much as their defense in this area had done in 1940. There is little doubt that Finland would have shared the fate of the Baltic States, Poland, Romania, Bulgaria, Hungary, and Czechoslovakia if the VKT Line had not held. However, there were other factors at play.

Aid from Germany was instrumental in successful Finnish delaying actions and the stabilization of the front along the VKT Line. The outcome would have been different if it were not for German matériel and manpower assistance at a time when Germany needed all available resources for its own fronts.

Stalin had undertaken the offensive against Finland as a means of filling the time before the scheduled massive offensive against Army Group Center in western Russia. He wanted to see how the Allied landings in France developed before launching this offensive. When the Normandy landings were successful and the Allies began their breakout from the beachheads, the most important Soviet objective was to meet the Americans and British as far west as possible. The offensive in Finland took a distant second place to this objective. Having driven the Finns back to the VKT Line afforded the Soviets an opportunity to offer the Finns acceptable armistice terms, but terms that still left the country within the Soviet sphere of influence.

This does not distract from the splendid achievement of the Finnish soldiers who sacrificed so much for their country against overwhelming odds in June-July 1944. The loss of almost 50,000 soldiers in a nation with a population of only four million speaks for itself. And as they had so often in the first half of the 20th century, the Finnish soldiers had demonstrated their mettle. □

Remagen

Continued from page 71

troops across it, over the next two weeks the Germans increased their air raids and the area came under repeated ground attacks by the German 9th and 11th Panzer Divisions and was bombarded by 88mm guns and the huge 540mm self-propelled "Karl" siege howitzer. It was even targeted by 11 V-2 missile attacks launched from the Hellendoorn area of the Netherlands, about 120 miles north of Remagen, destroying a number of nearby buildings and killing at least six American soldiers. But the shells and missiles all missed the bridge, and the panzers and accompanying infantry could not penetrate the ever-growing perimeter the Americans had thrown around the area.

On March 17, the battered old bridge finally succumbed to its wounds and all the near misses. At about 3:00 that afternoon, there was heard a terrible sound of steel screeching and rivets popping as the bridge twisted and collapsed into the icy waters of the Rhine, carrying with it engineers and members of the 639th AAA Automatic Weapons Battalion. Twenty-eight of the 200 men working on the bridge were killed and 93 others were injured.

That night, six specially trained German frogmen, using oil barrels as flotation devices and carrying underwater explosives, floated downstream with the intent of destroying the pontoon bridges, but powerful searchlights picked them up before they reached their objective and they were captured.

In the aftermath of the "Miracle of Remagen," General Eisenhower's chief of staff, Lt. Gen. Walter Bedell Smith, termed the Remagen bridge "worth its weight in gold." Combat Command B of the 9th Armored Division was awarded the Presidential Unit Citation and both Timmermann and Drabik were awarded the Distinguished Service Cross for their heroic deeds.

Time magazine called it "a moment in history" and Ike declared, "The whole Allied force is delighted to cheer the First Army whose speed and boldness have won the race to establish the first bridgehead over the Rhine. Please tell all ranks how proud I am of them."

On the other side, on March 10, 1945, an enraged Hitler appointed Generalleutnant Rudolf Hübner head of Fliegendes Sonder-Standgericht West, or "Flying Special Court-Martial West," and ordered the arrest, trial, and execution of those officers he thought responsible for the loss of the Ludendorff Bridge. The next day, Majors Hans Scheller, Herbert Strobel, and August Kraft, along with Lieutenant Karl-Heinz Peters, were summarily court-martialed, lined up in front of a firing squad in the woods near Rimbach, and executed.

Hitler also sacked Field Marshal von Rundstedt, replacing him as commander in chief in the west with Field Marshal Albert Kesselring (who declared with uncharacteristic pessimism, "We have suffered unnecessary losses and our present military situation has become nearly catastrophic."). General Richard von Bothmer, the commandant of the Bonn and Remagen area, committed suicide.

Only Bratge and Friesenhahn survived, as they had been captured by the Americans before they could be arrested.

The victory at Remagen was not cheap. In the 17 days that the "official" battle lasted (March 7-24), the combined casualties for III and VII Corps were about 860 killed, a nearly equal number missing, and 5,700 wounded.

During that same period, the Germans had even heavier casualties, including more than 11,700 taken prisoner.

The Army's official history of the operation says, "The capture of the Ludendorff railway bridge and its subsequent exploitation was one of those coups de theatre that sometimes happen in warfare and never fail to capture the imagination. Just how much it speeded up the end of the war is another question."

But author Hechler said, "The surprise crossing of the Ludendorff Bridge probably saved 5,000 American lives that otherwise would have been lost by an assault crossing of the river."

Although some historians have downplayed the tactical and strategic value of the seizure of the Ludendorff Bridge, it undoubtedly had a great psychological impact on the Allies and a decidedly negative one on the Germans. In less than two months, Hitler would be dead by his own hand, Nazi Germany would collapse, and the war in Europe would at last be over.

A brief epilogue is called for. In the bridge towers on the Remagen side is located a peace museum that is open daily from March through mid-November. A small plaque in German near the museum commemorates the bridge and those who fought to both defend and capture it. Translated, it reads: "Built for war, destroyed in war. The towers will always remain. Here fought soldiers of two great nations. Here died heroes from near and far."

As for the two main American heroes, Lieutenant Timmermann died of cancer in 1951 and Sergeant Drabik was killed in a car crash in Kansas in October 1993—ironically while en route to a reunion of his old unit, Company A, 27th Armored Infantry Battalion, 9th Armored Division. He was 82 years old.

After the war, ex-Captain Karl Friesenhahn asked the author Ken Hechler if Timmermann and Drabik had received any awards from the U.S. Army and was told that they had both received Distinguished Service Crosses. Friesenhahn replied, "They deserved them—and then some. They saw us trying to blow that bridge and by all odds it should have blown up while they were crossing it. In my mind, they were the greatest heroes in the whole war." □

Flint Whitlock, editor of WWII Quarterly, *is the author of several books and numerous articles about the war. He lives in Denver, Colorado.*

Experience history first-hand.

Stephen E. Ambrose always said that the best way to understand history is to study the places where it was made. Whether visiting Omaha Beach with D-Day veterans to pay homage to their fallen, following the path of Lewis and Clark down the Missouri River, or tromping the battlefields of the Civil War, Dr. Ambrose sought to enlighten, entertain and educate with his tours. Since 1979, when he began leading informal tours to Europe, Stephen Ambrose has introduced generations, young and old, to the American heroes—citizen soldiers—who fought and won a nation's freedom.


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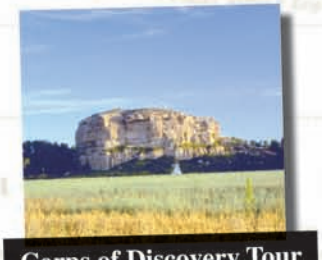
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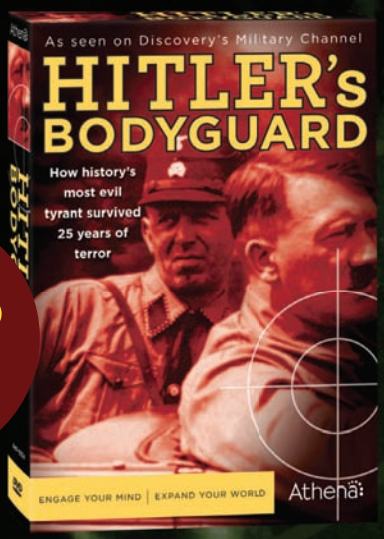

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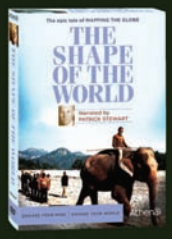

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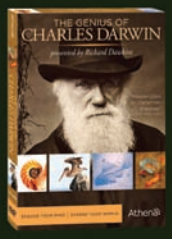

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