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WWII HISTORY ■ MARCH 2012 Volume 11, No. 3


**John D. Hoptak | Instructor, School of Art & Humanities**

John D. Hoptak is an American and Civil War historian and educator. Author of *The Battle of South Mountain*, *Our Boys Did Nobly*, *First in Defense of the Union*, and *Antietam: September 17, 1862*, Hoptak brings to life the riveting conflicts that divided a nation. Hoptak's laboratory is the Antietam National Battlefield, where as a Park Ranger he shares his vast knowledge about the bloodiest day of battle in U.S. history.

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WWII HISTORY


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Cover: A young German soldier slings his MG 42, not far from the front in France, Summer 1944. See story page 38

Photo: Bundesarchiv

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# The Filthy Thirteen

## BY ARTIST JOEL ISKOWITZ

### THE BRAND NEW ART PRINT HONORING WORLD WAR II'S LEGENDARY PARATROOPERS


For the first time ever this famous band of renegades, from which the movie *The Dirty Dozen* was made, comes together in a full life art print as these men prepare for their D-Day jump into Normandy, June 5th, 1944.

Never before has there been a presentation of this famous squad together as a unit prior to their jump. By the next morning, more than half of this stick would be killed or captured during their D-Day mission.

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# Editorial

## Unexploded bombs remind a city of its violent past.

**NEARLY 70 YEARS AFTER THE CONCLUSION OF WORLD WAR II, CIVILIZATION** has changed greatly. Communism in Eastern Europe has risen and fallen. Empires have crumbled. The specter of terrorism has emerged as the new enemy of global peace. In the meantime, the cities of Germany have been rebuilt, the German nation has served as a staunch ally of NATO, and the enmity of the Nazi era has been relegated to an ugly chapter of the past.

Reminders of that period of total war, however, sometimes rise up like visitors from another age, warning signs from a horrific past that will, hopefully, never be repeated.

Recently, a prolonged period of drought in Western Europe caused a number of rivers and lakes to reach their lowest water levels in decades. Even the mighty Rhine, the European father of waters, had ebbed substantially. So much so that at Koblenz, a city in west-central Germany at the confluence of the Rhine and Moselle Rivers whose name actually comes from the Latin word for "the meeting of the waters," the bed of the great Rhine was exposed.

A large drum-like canister became visible, and shortly thereafter it was determined that the foreign object was an unexploded bomb dropped sometime between 1943 and 1945 by a bomber of the British Royal Air Force. No doubt, the discovery conjured up images of RAF Avro Lancasters flying in darkness high above the city, some bracketed by flak, chased by night fighters, and illuminated in the stabbing beams of searchlights, intent on delivering their cargoes of death.

Estimates are that as many as 250 bombs of the type discovered were dropped on Koblenz during the period. And these were no ordinary bombs. The high-explosive "Blockbuster" weighed an extraordinary 1,800 kilograms, or 4,000 pounds, and had been designed to destroy buildings and facilities in and near urban areas. Nearby, a second unexploded bomb, delivered by an aircraft of the U.S. Eighth Air Force, was found. Substantially smaller, this bomb weighed 125 kilograms, or 275 pounds, and was also capable of delivering a tremendous blast. A smoke grenade canister was also unearthed.

The discovery of unexploded ordnance in German cities during the postwar era is not unusual. Estimates indicate that approximately 600 tons of silent and potentially lethal bombs and artillery shells are discovered each year. Actually, in the summer of 2010, three people were killed in the city of Göttingen in Lower Saxony when a 500 kilogram (1,100 pound) bomb was accidentally detonated during the construction of a sports stadium. The significance of the Koblenz incident is simply that it is one of the largest such discoveries.

Authorities cordoned off an area of 1.25 miles and evacuated 45,000 people, slightly less than half the population of the city. Trains were stopped, traffic was halted, and 12,000 beds were made available at shelters. Hundreds of police officers stood by along with ambulances and rescue vehicles.

The smoke canister was detonated in a controlled explosion. Then, the high drama of the defusing process followed. Standing water was pumped from around the bombs, and a mountain of sandbags was stacked around the Blockbuster to absorb some of the blast should the unthinkable occur. One official speculated to a BBC reporter that if the Blockbuster had exploded it would have hurled shrapnel a distance of 1.5 kilometers, nearly a mile. Doors and windows would have been shattered or blown open by the shockwave and the high-pressure displacement of air.

One woman told the German newspaper *Die Welt* that her elderly relative had lived through the bombing of Koblenz during World War II and the flurry of activity related to this incident had brought frightening memories flooding back. For those of us who did not experience a World War II air raid, it is difficult to comprehend that the subject Blockbuster and the smaller bomb were merely two of many that rained down on German cities during World War II.

Bomb disposal experts successfully disarmed the relics during a nerve-wracking three-hour operation, and a local official related, "We are relieved." It was a classic understatement.

*Michael E. Haskew*

WWII HISTORY

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# The axe came down. The clay vessel shattered. And 1650-year-old coins spilled out.


*Each coin over 1650 years old! No two are exactly alike.*

In the spring of 1895, workmen on a wealthy British estate in Bishop's Wood, England dug into a wooded hillside behind a church. One of their pick axes suddenly shattered a large clay vessel—causing thousands of 1650-year-old ancient Roman bronze coins to spill out on the mossy ground. After carefully excavating the site, a trio of earthenware jars were uncovered—containing 17,550 Roman bronze coins struck from 307–361 A.D.

The mystery of why such a rich treasure trove of ancient coins would be buried in a sleepy British forest confounded the public. Scholars eventually confirmed that the treasure site appeared to be the treasury of a Roman Legion who had occupied Britain at that time. It was actually a common practice to bury military treasuries in those days. The large Roman army required a lot of money for supplies and soldiers' pay—and there were no banks. So just before entering into a battle, the entire hoard of coins would be buried in a secret place known only to a few members of the legion. Of course, if the army was defeated in battle, hidden hoards such as this one could languish forgotten for centuries. In the case of the Bishop's Wood treasure, most of the 1650-year-old coins were as perfectly preserved as the day they were buried.

The owner of the Bishop's Wood estate was a British Colonel. A personal friend of Prince Albert who owned racehorses and yachts, Col. Harry McCalmont considered this historic discovery as the perfect opportunity to give back to his beloved homeland. He donated 90% of the treasure to universities and museums throughout Britain—and as far away as Australia. But at the prodding of friends and family, the Colonel kept 1,661 of the finest coins in the treasure and they proudly remained in the family's care for the next 115 years.

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# Dispatches

## Late Fall 2012 Cover

Dear Editor:

I have being reading your magazine for several years and I would like to congratulate you on the fine job you are doing. However, in the Late Fall issue I noticed a small mistake. On the cover of the magazine you feature the picture of a Marine in Saipan. If you want to find the truth about his identity then you should probably check www.helleniccomserve.com/angelokloni. It is a long story but all I can say is that the soldier in the picture is named Angelo Klonis. He was a Greek immigrant who came to the USA before World War II and settled in Santa Fe, New Mexico. He served in the U.S. Army during the war.

Ioannis Athanasopoulos
Athens, Greece

## Masterstroke in the Desert

Dear Editor:

Congratulations on that wonderful article by Jon Diamond about General Richard O'Connor (Early Winter 2012 issue). His desert offensive beginning at Nibeiwa on 9 December 1940 is one of the classic campaigns of World War II. Here were three British generals we seldom read about [Richard O'Connor, Archibald Wavell, and Eric Dorman-Smith] putting their heads together and coming up with a master plan to attack an Italian army many times their size. It was, as Diamond suggests, a "Masterstroke."

Richard O'Connor's and Dorman-Smith's tactical plans for the battle were brilliant. Their artillery and a few battalions of infantry would begin the attack from British positions in the east by creating a huge display of firepower, intended only to create a diversion and to focus Italian attention on their eastern flank. His main attack would be led by heavy British Matilda tanks and the main body of his infantry which had been trucked around behind the Italians. The main British attack would come from the west, the same direction as their supply vehicles. An excellent plan, displaying a sound grasp of unit movement and a thorough understanding of combined arms tactics.

Jon Diamond correctly gives General Eric Dorman-Smith most of the credit for this very original plan. Dorman-Smith was one of the most intelligent and innovative officers in the British Army. Richard O'Connor also played a part in the planning process. I would like to add the name of Colonel A.H. Gatehouse to this list. According to Correlli Barnett, Colonel Gatehouse was second in command of 7th Armored Brigade at the time, and the chief armor umpire for exercises that deployed forces for a normal setpiece battle while attacking from the west. These exercises were held prior to finalizing plans for Nibeiwa. Both Gatehouse and Dorman-Smith argued against a two-hour delay in the armored attack while British artillery pounded Italian positions. It was this argument against the time delay that forced a change in plans and resulted in the plans to attack the Italian rear while British artillery was engaging the Italians from the west.

In one of the war's great ironies, Generals Eric Dorman-Smith, Richard O'Connor, and A.H. Gatehouse were all gifted commanders. They were all comfortable with mobile battlefield operations and combined arms tactics. The man who replaced them in North Africa, General Bernard L. Montgomery, had neither of these gifts. Combined arms tactics remained a mystery to him throughout the war. For want of a better description, he was said to be the "Master of the Set-Piece Battle."

William Weidner
Grand Junction, Colorado

## 516th Quartermaster Truck Regiment

Dear Editor:

My grandpa, J.C. (Jake) Parker, was a World War II vet with the 516th Quartermaster Truck Regiment that was trained at Camp Van Dorn near Centreville, Mississippi. The camp was named after American Civil War General Earl Van Dor whose raid on General Grant's supply depot caused Grant to once again give up his attempt to take Vicksburg.

My grandpa was sent to Iran as a truck driver taking supplies to the Russian Army through the Persian Corridor. He passed away in 2002, leaving me the 784 photographs he took while at Camp Van Dorn, Iran, and several other locations in the Middle East. Included in the photo album are photos of President Roosevelt arriving at Camp Amirabad in a jeep convoy to speak to the troops and some of the "Big Three" at the Teheran Conference.

Over the last few years I've located and become friends with several of the brave men of the Persian Gulf Command. They call themselves the F.B.I. (Forgotten Bastards of Iran).

There were 30,000 brave American troops in the Persian Corridor and little to no books or documentaries have appeared on the very hard job they performed in supplying 60 Russian divisions that helped our American boys on the front lines by keeping it a two-front war. I'm sure I'm not the only one who would love to see their story told.

Even though it was not a combat zone, those boys suffered extreme heat and danger and I think their story should be told. They deserve it. If anyone else out there has any information or is interested in what I know, please contact me. I have group photos with names for the 516th Quartermaster Truck Regiment and another group photo of Drivers Training School Second Army Special Troops that has the U.S. Army Signal Corps logo on the bottom right corner.

And, to all the men of the Persian Gulf Corridor: You are not forgotten. I am very interested in your story and would love to hear about it.

Jacob Smith
P.O. Box 372
Summit, MS 39666
601-248-0599
kravin74@gmail.com

## Our Polish Allies

Dear Editor:

The story about General Sosabowski (Early Winter 2012 issue) epitomizes the turbulent history of Poland, incredibly neglected in American historical awareness. We glorify and respect our erstwhile implacable enemies, the Germans and the Japanese, and out nemesis, the former Soviet Union (witness the ads for German memorabilia and histories, many of the latter fabricated in the Hitler era, especially the Luftwaffe and Panzer biographies, in your magazine), but generally ignore or minimize the histories of our truest ally, Poland. Poles, though defeated by the overwhelming might of both Germany and the Soviet Union, continued to fight until the last shot of World War II rang out. Polish forces in both the West and East were the fourth largest contingent of Allied troops (after the United States, Soviet Union, and Great Britain). There were no formations of Poles fighting alongside the Germans as there were from most other European countries, such as France, Hungary, Romania, Holland, Italy, and so on. Not one unit ... not one American died from a Polish bullet. And yet all these countries are held in higher esteem and respect than hapless Poland, which was betrayed by her allies (especially FDR and Churchill) into almost 50 years of Communist hell.

Professor Aiello omits one very significant fact in his account, namely, "...300 Poles from General Sikorski ... appalling condition ... from concentration camps." Who were they? Where did they come from? He should have mentioned they were former Polish POWs arrested in Poland in 1939 when the Soviets invaded Poland with the Germans and started World War II. In 1942, when the Germans turned on and invaded the Soviet Union, the Reds became instant allies of the West. How could they imprison their allies, the Poles? Thus some of them were lucky to be released. Many were not. Most of the Polish officers were shot in the back of the head in Katyn, Kharkov, Miednoje, and other hell holes in 1940. The remaining officer corps, some 400, did everything they could to leave the inhuman land that was the Soviet Union and, with the help of the Brits, they managed to leave, some 120,000 men and some women and children. Their saga is another unbelieveable story that should also be given wider publicity in the United States.

Recently, one such history appeared: *When God Looked the Other Way* by Wesley Adamczyk.

Mitchell (Mieczyslaw) Moos
Grants Pass, Oregon

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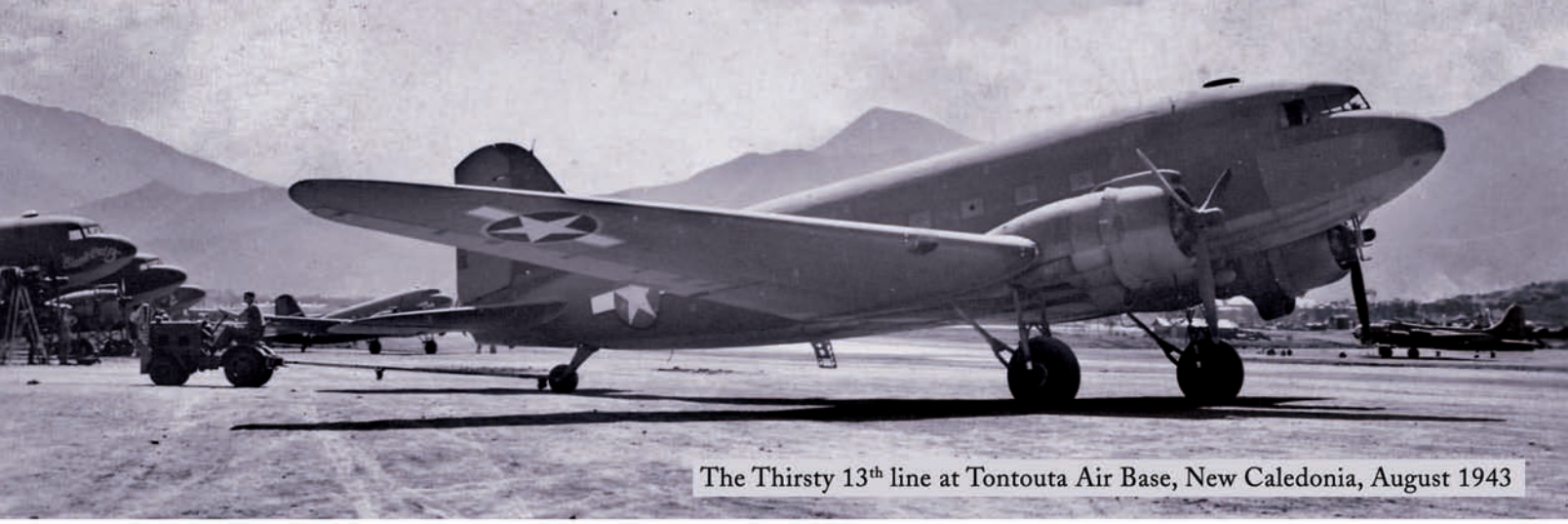
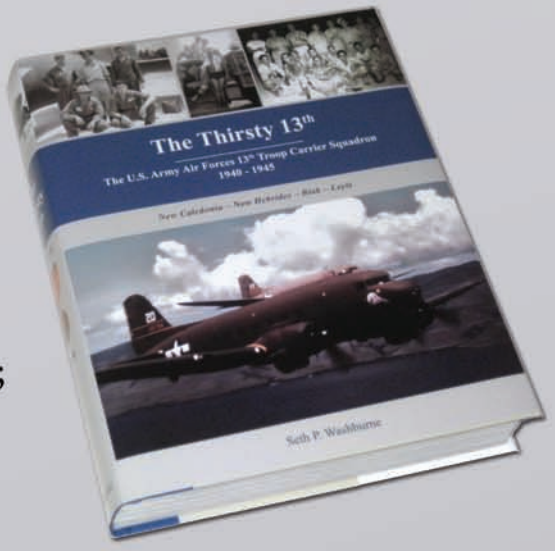
*Note: Opinions expressed in "Dispatches" do not represent those of the writers, editors, or staff of* WWII History *or Sovereign Media.* WWII History *welcomes your letters which must be signed and include a telephone number for verification. Letters must be brief and of general interest to our readership. Write to: WWII History, 6731 Whittier Avenue, Suite A-100, McLean, VA 22101-4554; fax to 703-964-0366, or e-mail:* ***dispatch@ wwiihistory magazine.com.***



The Thirsty 13th line at Tontouta Air Base, New Caledonia, August 1943

# Your knowledge of WWII is not complete - unless you know about troop carrier squadrons!

Newly-released book *The Thirsty 13th* follows the 13th Troop Carrier Squadron – perhaps the best ever – from formation in 1940 through four U.S. camps and eight South and Southwest Pacific bases (mapped below left), with then-and-now photos of each.




You will learn about:

- the organizational chart of all troop carrier squadrons;
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- dozens of South Pacific airfields; and
- hundreds of other details.


*The Thirsty 13th* has 800 pages, over 2,000 photos, maps, or tables, large 12-point single-column text, color on almost every page, and attractive page layouts. It is the culmination of three years of intense research, including from the National Archives, the Air Force Historical Research Agency, scrapbooks of 100 squadron members, interviews with 73 members, and scores of other sources. *The Thirsty 13th* is available for $125 plus $12 shipping and handling at: **www.thirsty13th.com**, or **(212) 289-1506**.

***"The reader gets a real sense of what life was like…in such a readable way."***
– S. Schauer, Fairborn, Ohio

See review on page 71.

By Michael D. Hull

The Military Gallery

# Scourge of Falaise

## The Hawker Typhoon wreaked havoc on German troops in the deadly pocket in eastern France.

**FROM THE SUPERMARINE SPITFIRE TO THE NORTH AMERICAN P-51 MUSTANG,** and from the Soviet Yak series to the Vought F4U Corsair, the Allies were able to field a formidable array of fighter planes against the Axis powers in World War II.

There were a number of other first-rate fighters that proved to be more than a match for their German, Italian, and Japanese foes. Yet, one of these Allied planes, which emerged as among the deadliest during the second half of the war, ironically almost never entered service because of myriad problems in its development.

This was the big British Hawker Typhoon, a low-wing, all-metal monoplane with a powerful single engine, bubble canopy, and the capacity to carry machine guns or 20mm cannons, plus bombs and rockets. Few Allied planes in World War II overcame more teething troubles or were initially more unforgiving, yet which aspired to a combat role in which they performed more spectacularly. Though the Typhoon failed to make the grade as a pure fighter, it brought a new concept to air warfare.

Design of the Typhoon was initiated by the tall, irascible Sir Sydney Camm, one of the great aircraft designers of all time. A Windsor-born, self-taught carpenter's son, he worked for the Martinsyde Company before joining Hawker Aircraft and becoming its chief designer in 1925 at the age of 32. Camm designed several highly successful single-engine aircraft for the Royal Air Force, most notably the Fury, Hart, and Demon biplanes and the famous Hurricane, and from then on, Hawker rose to the forefront of the British aviation industry.

Camm anticipated in 1937 that the Air Ministry would soon be seeking a successor to the Hurricane, which was to distinguish itself in the Battle of Britain and other theaters of operation. Well aware of the ascendancy of German air power, it was reasoned in Whitehall that the RAF needed a new generation of interceptor, a 12-gun fighter with an engine promising to deliver twice the power of a Rolls-Royce Merlin.

In January 1938, the far-sighted Air Ministry issued Specification F.18/37 calling for a replacement aircraft for both the Hurricane and Reginald J. Mitchell's legendary Spitfire. The new plane would have, above all, a top speed exceeding that of contemporary bomber types (over 400 miles an hour) at altitude. Its armament would consist of no fewer than a dozen 7.7mm Browning machine guns. Hawker Aircraft Co.'s early interest in the project was rewarded with a contract for two designs, each of which would have two prototypes.

One of these was powered by Rolls-Royce's new X-configuration Vulture, and the other by a Napier H-type Sabre powerplant. Both engines were large, 24-cylinder designs expected to produce about 2,000 horsepower. Both airframes were all metal with tubular framework for the front half of the fuselage and an alloy monocoque at the rear. An equally robust one-piece

**In this painting by artist Robert Taylor, Hawker Typhoon ground attack aircraft of Royal Air Force No. 247 Squadron speed away from the target area near Falaise after attacking German troop concentrations with cannon fire and rockets.**

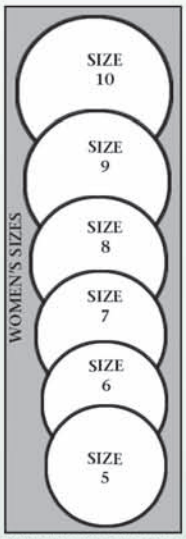

# The Sigh Heard 'Round the World

***One soldier's incredible true story about the top secret operation that took his wife's breath away.***

It was an American soldier in Iraq who showed me the true power of a piece of jewelry. He wrote to tell us that shortly after marrying his sweetheart he received orders to return to active duty as part of Operation Iraqi Freedom. Like a true romantic, he wasn't about to let 7000 miles (or a war) ruin their first Christmas as husband and wife. He found the perfect gift from Stauer and asked his new bride to call him when it arrived.

"So far away, I would not be able to see her reaction, but I wanted to hear it," he wrote. On the day the package arrived, she called as promised. With her husband listening, halfway around the world on the end of the line, she opened the box and slowly lifted the lid.

"As soon as I heard her breath stop, I knew she'd seen it", the soldier wrote. Even though they were oceans and continents apart, in that instant the newlyweds were reunited. Romance wins again.

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**Your satisfaction is guaranteed.** We invite you to sample the ***Emerald-Cut Diamond*Aura® *Gial Ring*** for 30 days and if you aren't completely captivated, return it for a full refund of your purchase price. We're sure that it will leave her breathless and at under $150, it's very affordable... even on a soldier's salary. But don't take our word for it. Order yours today and then... wait for the sigh.

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wing was supported by a sturdy widetrack undercarriage. The wingspan was 41 feet, seven inches.

The main differences between the two prototype aircraft were related to their differing engines. The first Vulture-engined machine, named Tornado, had a Hurricane-type ventral radiator, while the Sabre-engined Typhoon had the characteristic "chin" radiator arrangement. The Vulture development proceeded at a faster pace, and the Tornado was the first to fly, on October 6, 1939, a month after the outbreak of war. The Typhoon prototype took to the air for the first time on February 24, 1940.

But powerplant and other problems soon emerged. A routine test of the first Typhoon prototype on May 9, 1940, almost ended in disaster when the fuselage suffered a structural failure in flight. A month's development work was lost before an investigation and remedial action put the prototype back on the flight line.

Orders were placed for 500 Tornados, 250 Typhoons, and another 250 of whichever type proved the most successful. Though both were dogged by problems with engine reliability, planning went ahead for production by Gloster Aircraft Co. (Typhoon) and A.V. Roe Co. (Tornado). But Britain soon had her back to the wall as German forces overran the Low Countries and France in the spring of 1940. Development of the critically needed interceptors had to take second place while the Air Ministry demanded the manufacture and delivery of Hurricanes, Spitfires, and Merlin engines for the fateful Battle of Britain that summer, when RAF Fighter Command defeated the German Luftwaffe and staved off the planned invasion of England.

The first flight of the second Typhoon did not take place until May 3, 1941. This plane incorporated several improvements, including four 20mm cannons in place of machine guns and a larger fin and rudder to increase directional stability. Progress was made, and a production Typhoon flew later that month. Built by Gloster Aircraft at its Hucclecote, Gloucestershire, plant, this was the first of 110 Typhoon Mark IAs, equipped with machine guns due to a shortage of cannon-feed mechanisms. All subsequent Typhoons—there would be 3,205 in all—would be cannon-armed Mark IBs.

Meanwhile, the Tornado program was cancelled after being plagued by serious engine failures. Only one production machine was ever completed.

Tactical trials with the Typhoon were started in September 1941. In comparative flights with a Spitfire Mark VB, the Typhoon reached a top speed that was 40 miles an hour faster at 15,000 feet and faster still at lower altitudes. The new fighter was less agile than the smaller, lighter Spitfire, but it was felt that its speed would make up for the deficiency.

The Granger Collection, New York


**A trio of Hawker Typhoon fighter bombers flies above Western Europe in 1943. Although the initial design presented challenges, these were overcome and the Typhoon became one of the finest ground attack aircraft of the war.**

The first production Typhoons began to enter RAF service with No. 56 Squadron in September 1941. They were operational from May 1942. But soon after the deliveries it became apparent that the Typhoon still had flaws, some serious and some minor. Fatigue failure at a rear fuselage joint was responsible for the loss of the complete tail units of an alarming number of planes. Carbon monoxide leaking into the cockpit was blamed for a fatal crash in November 1941. Though the cockpit sealing was improved, the fumes were never fully eradicated, and Typhoon pilots had to fly with oxygen masks in place.

The plane had poor rearward visibility that was eventually corrected with a new teardrop canopy. Meanwhile, as more accidents claimed both RAF fliers and Gloster test pilots, the Typhoon was still plagued by the unreliability of its Sabre engine. This was attributed to deformed sleeve valves that caused engine seizures, and a solution was not found until mid-1943.

Some officials at the Air Ministry suggested that the Typhoon be withdrawn from service, while the former Hurricane and Spitfire pilots assigned to it were not happy. Most of them agreed unanimously that the Typhoon had an abysmal rate of climb and disappointing high-altitude performance.

Squadron Leader H.S.L. "Cocky" Dundas, a 21-year-old decorated veteran of the Battle of Britain and the Bader Wing flying sweeps over France, took over command of No. 56 Squadron just before Christmas 1941. He reported, "I was, of course very excited to be commanding the first squadron to get the great new fighter, but I must say I was slightly horrified, perhaps that's too strong a word, but was astounded by what I found. It seemed like an absolutely enormous airplane compared with the Spitfire. One sort of climbed up, opened the door, and walked in!"

Dundas was alarmed with the Typhoon's oil, starter, and rear-view visibility problems and explained them during a Fighter Command conference at Duxford Airfield attended by Air Ministry officials and the plane's designer. "Sydney Camm was very put out when I was arguing so vehemently that this was a bad design and we couldn't go into action with it. I remember him saying something to the effect, 'My bloody airplane's so fast you don't have to see behind you!' Things got quite heated, I remember."

Dundas got his way, and the Typhoons went back, one by one, for modifications. "They gradually got the oil business more or less right during the early months of 1942," he said. "Then came the trouble with the tails."

Pilot Officer J.G. Simpson of No. 198 Squadron found there was the chance of the Typhoon's engine catching fire when it was started. "The real problem," he said, "was the size of the propeller, and the torque resulting from opening the throttle, and the fact that she swung like hell to the right as you charged down the runway."

Another experienced pilot who admitted to being intimidated by the new fighter was

Sergeant A. Shannon of No. 257 Squadron. He reported, "I remember the Typhoon as being a hairy machine, and the wind would put you up long before you ever met it…. The engine was quite a huge thing … and frightened the life out of me when I just got in and opened the throttle. I felt, after the takeoff which didn't disturb me too much, that I was up to 15,000 feet before I knew it—before I started to think! It was frightening, and I rather think it flew me rather than I flew it, for a while."

Eventually, after more modifications and cockpit experience, pilots were able to acknowledge the Typhoon's qualities. Pilot Officer Simpson said, "However, after a few hours it [the plane's performance] seemed quite normal, and once you had mastered the problem of not opening the throttle too quickly, it was quite easy to fly and very stable. In fact, as an aircraft to go to war in, it was a magnificent gun platform."

Nevertheless, the performance of the Typhoon left much to be desired. Its engine was unreliable and still down on power, and the plane lacked maneuverability and speed above 15,000 feet, largely because of its thick wing section and high wing loading. Yet the trouble-plagued fighter proved fast and surprisingly agile at low levels.

By September 1942, several Typhoon squadrons were stationed across southern England for defense. The threat of German daylight bomber raids had evaporated, but hit-and-run intrusions by Luftwaffe fighter-bombers, particularly the deadly Focke-Wulf 190, persisted that autumn. Typhoons went up to intercept them. The actions often finished up at low levels, where the Typhoons frequently caught and overhauled the FW-190s. Within a week of being transferred to Manston Airfield in Kent, No. 609 Squadron destroyed four FW-190s.

The RAF had finally found a plane capable of beating the FW-190, one of the most effective machines in the Luftwaffe arsenal, which, ironically, closely resembled the Typhoon. The successes kept the Typhoon operational while Camm and his Hawker team worked frantically to cure its shortcomings. During this period, a Typhoon was fatally lost when its tail broke free from the fuselage. Similar disasters followed, forcing Hawker to strengthen the joint between the fuselage and empennage. This failed to eliminate the problem, and elevator flutter was eventually identified as the actual cause. The ultimate cure involved the fitting of an enlarged tailplane.

Clearly seen as ideally suited to low-level combat, the Typhoon gained bomb-carrying capability in late 1942. The aircraft of two squadrons were eventually equipped to carry two 250- or 500-pound bombs, or two 1,000-pound bombs. Meanwhile, in 1943, Typhoon squadrons became increasingly active in offensive sorties over Nazi-occupied northern Europe. Carrying rocket projectiles, the Typhoons soon gained fame as train busters, destroying as many as 150 locomotives a month on the French and Belgian railroads. In its first few months of such operations, No. 609 Squadron accounted for 100 locomotives while losing only two planes.

Typhoons of Nos. 174, 181, 245, and 609 Squadrons ranged over France and the Low Countries, playing havoc with German installations, supply dumps, and communication lines. The British fighters' low-level, high–speed capability gave them a high degree of immunity from both enemy fighters and antiaircraft batteries. By the end of 1943, the Typhoon had realized its full potential.

Operating in conjunction with other fighter-bomber groups based along the English south coast, Hawker Typhoons mounted with a lethal combination of rockets, bombs, and machine guns blasted German shipping in the English Channel, road convoys, bridges, tunnels, rail and highway junctions, and radar stations on the French coast. The sorties increased in frequency and severity as Allied preparations for Operation Overlord, the invasion of Western Europe by the British, American, and Canadian Armies, intensified in late 1943 and early 1944.

By D-Day, 26 Typhoon squadrons were in action with the British 2nd Tactical Air Force led by handsome, Australian-born Air Marshal Sir Arthur "Mary" Coningham, an innovative, outspoken veteran of World War I and the North Africa, Sicily, and Italy campaigns in 1941-1944. His hard-fighting air force was in the forefront of Allied softening-up operations against the Germans before and after the massive June 6, 1944, invasion. With about 1,800 frontline aircraft and 100,000 men from seven nations, the 2nd Tactical Air Force played a crucial aerial support role in the Normandy landings, the breakouts in the summer of 1944, and the drive into Germany.

Sorties by Hawker Typhoons made a crucial contribution to the success of the Allied landings in Normandy by knocking out enemy radar stations that would have provided advance warning of the invasion fleet. On June 2, Typhoons of Nos. 98 and 609 Squadrons attacked and destroyed the radar site at Dieppe-Caudecote, while others demolished all six of the long-range radar stations south of Boulogne before D-Day. Fifteen other stations were left

Imperial War Museum

**Ground crewmen service a Hawker Typhoon of RAF No. 175 Squadron near Colerne. Dummy bombs are shown in the foreground for practice loading on the plane's underwing racks.**

unserviceable so that much of the Channel coast was left without radar.

When the Allied assault troops went ashore on the five invasion beaches, Typhoons were among the first planes overhead. Forming the offensive backbone of the 2nd Tactical Air Force's combat wings, they came into their own in Normandy as they mauled enemy defenses daily along with Allied high-level bomber formations and P-47 Thunderbolts and other fighters of the U.S. Eighth and Ninth Air Forces. Much credit for the Germans' initial failure to build up swiftly behind the Allied beachheads was given to Coningham's Typhoon squadrons. Operation Overlord and the hard-fought campaigns that followed proved to be the Typhoons' finest hour as they harassed the German Army by night and day.

The first call for help from the Typhoon units on D-Day came at 7:43 AM when the British 21st Army Group requested an attack on the headquarters of the German 84th Corps at Chateau la Meauffe, near St. Lo. A squadron responded immediately, bombing the target and killing most of the occupants. Three days later, on June 9, Typhoons of Nos. 174, 175, and 245 Squadrons blasted the enemy radar station at Joubourg, overlooking the Normandy beaches. Meanwhile, other Typhoon squadrons were busy on D-Day and afterward hitting German headquarters locations, troop concentrations, gun batteries, and fast E-boats threatening Allied landing craft in the English Channel.

As the British, American, and Canadian Armies broke out of the northern perimeter, more Typhoons operated close to the advancing units. The tactical concept of close air support was brought to a new height of effectiveness. Typhoon pilots were instructed to maintain standing patrols, nicknamed "cab ranks," at an altitude of about 10,000 feet over the front lines. The planes were then called down by RAF officers attached to the ground forces to strike specified targets with guns, bombs, and rockets as the need arose. The support was lauded by the Allied soldiers struggling to dislodge stubborn enemy defenders from the tangled Normandy bocage country.

By mid-June, Typhoon squadrons were operating from hastily laid airstrips close to the front lines. Few German fighters tackled the Typhoons, but the 2nd Tactical Air Force suffered considerable losses from enemy ground fire and damage from clouds of dust that plagued radiators and engines. This necessitated the Typhoons' withdrawal for repair and the fitting of special filters. There was a rapid turnover of aircraft, and many battle-damaged planes had to be returned to civilian repair shops in England.

After the Allied armies had shored up their beachheads and broken out, worsening weather limited air operations and slowed the advance. Despite the weeks of bitter struggle through the bocage and the regrouping of enemy defenses, footholds had been gained by the Allies. There was no turning back.

By the beginning of August, the breakout had been consolidated, although the crucial Goodwood offensive, started on July 18 by General Sir Miles Dempsey's British Second Army, had ground to a halt to the east and south of the strategic city of Caen. U.S. forces began their thrust, Operation Cobra, from defensive posi-

tions on July 25. After a massive aerial bombardment, General Omar N. Bradley's U.S. First Army assaulted the German line west of St. Lo. Making the main effort, three infantry divisions of General Joseph Lawton Collins's Seventh Corps breached the enemy line between Marigny and St. Gilles.

Within five days, the American spearhead reached Avranches, turning the western flank of the German front and opening the door to the Brittany peninsula. The American breakout was made possible because the bulk of the German armor was now firmly emplaced in the east, opposite the British front around Caen. The town, only nine miles from the coast and a D-Day objective, was the scene of the bitterest fighting in the Normandy campaign.

The Germans launched a powerful counterattack through Mortain toward Avranches on August 6, in a bid to trap General George S. Patton Jr.'s U.S. Third Army in Brittany. Collins wheeled eastward to help defend Mortain. The Third Army, meanwhile, pushed through the Avranches gap, scoured Brittany, and then turned southward toward the River Loire, heading eastward. The British captured Mont Pincon on August 6, while Canadian, British, and Polish units moved southwest toward Falaise and Trun. Almost every day, the Typhoons were lending vital support, blasting panzers and strongpoints. On August 7, the "Tiffies" flew no less than 294 sorties. The town of Falaise, south of Caen, was a major objective that would open the way to Argentan.

The enemy counterattack at Mortain made early gains of a few miles against General Courtney H. Hodges's U.S. First Army and three corps of Patton's Third Army, but a southeastward thrust toward Falaise by the Canadian First and British Second Armies threatened to envelop the whole German armored force, SS General Paul Hausser's Seventh Army, the Fifth Panzer Army, and General Heinrich Eberbach's Panzer Group West, in a pocket between Argentan and Falaise. Elements of the U.S. First and Third Armies advanced northward, and the Allied pincers were closing by mid-August 1944.

Allied misunderstandings, delays, and lost opportunities contributed to the maintenance of a gap through which the disorganized German Seventh and Fifth Panzer Armies fled eastward toward the safety of the River Seine bridges. But the enemy forces, in general retreat, found the escape route through the Falaise-Argentan pocket perilous indeed as Allied tanks, artillery, and air power reacted in fury. Columns of panzers, field guns, trucks, and horse-drawn transport choked the roads

and lanes, raked by Canadian, Free French, Polish, and American tanks and shellfire. Few enemy vehicles could move, and the pocket became a smoking holocaust of blazing transport, exploding ammunition, stampeding horses, and heaps of dead and wounded men.

While U.S. P-47s attacked enemy concentrations elsewhere in the area, the Battle of the Falaise Gap proved to be a field day for the Typhoons. Speeding from their cab ranks, they incessantly scourged the retreating Germans with rockets, bombs, and blazing machine guns. Flight Lieutenant H. Ambrose of No. 175 Squadron reported, "Some of the German Army did escape, of course, but the Typhoons and some Spitfires made mincemeat of the German Army at Falaise. They just blocked roads, stopped them moving, and just clobbered them. You could smell Falaise from 6,000 feet in the cockpit. The decomposing corpses of horses and flesh—burning flesh, the carnage was terrible. Falaise was the first heyday of the Typhoon."

Wing Commander Desmond J. Scott of No. 486 Squadron gave a vivid report of his attack on a retreating German column: "The road was crammed with enemy vehicles—tanks, trucks, half-tracks, even horse-drawn wagons and ambulances, nose to tail, all in a frantic bid to reach cover. As I sped to the head of this mile-long column, hundreds of German troops began spilling out into the road to sprint for the open fields and hedgerows. There was no escape. Typhoons were already attacking in deadly swoops at the other end of the column, and within seconds the whole stretch of road was bursting and blazing under streams of rocket and cannon fire. Ammunition wagons exploded like multi-colored volcanoes…."

"The once-proud ranks of Hitler's Third Reich were being massacred from the Normandy skies by the relentless and devastating firepower of our rocket-firing Typhoons."

Air Vice Marshal J.E. "Johnny" Johnson, one of the RAF's best known heroes, called the Falaise Gap "one of the greatest killing grounds of the war."

Extensive though the slaughter was, the stoic Germans did not allow themselves to be trapped completely, with more than a third of Hausser's Seventh Army eluding the Allied trap. There was no mass surrender or capitulation. Many thousands of retreating troops escaped before the corridor through St. Lambert was closed, and a goodly part of their armor got away. But little of this crossed the Seine. Despite the Allies' slowness in closing the Falaise Gap, the Wehrmacht suffered its greatest disaster there since Stalingrad. Its losses were 10,000 dead, 50,000 captured, and at least 500 tanks and assault guns destroyed. Several thousand vehicles were also left wrecked and burning.

Despite missed opportunities and some timidity, the Battle of the Falaise Gap was a major Allied victory, the climactic event in the struggle to drive the enemy out of France. Two enemy armies, the Seventh and the Fifth Panzer, were literally destroyed as effective fighting units, and the Germans were not able to muster a strong defense until the Allies approached the border of Germany itself.

Falaise proved costly for the 2nd Tactical Air Force during that fateful August, with Typhoon losses reaching an all-time high mark of more than 90.

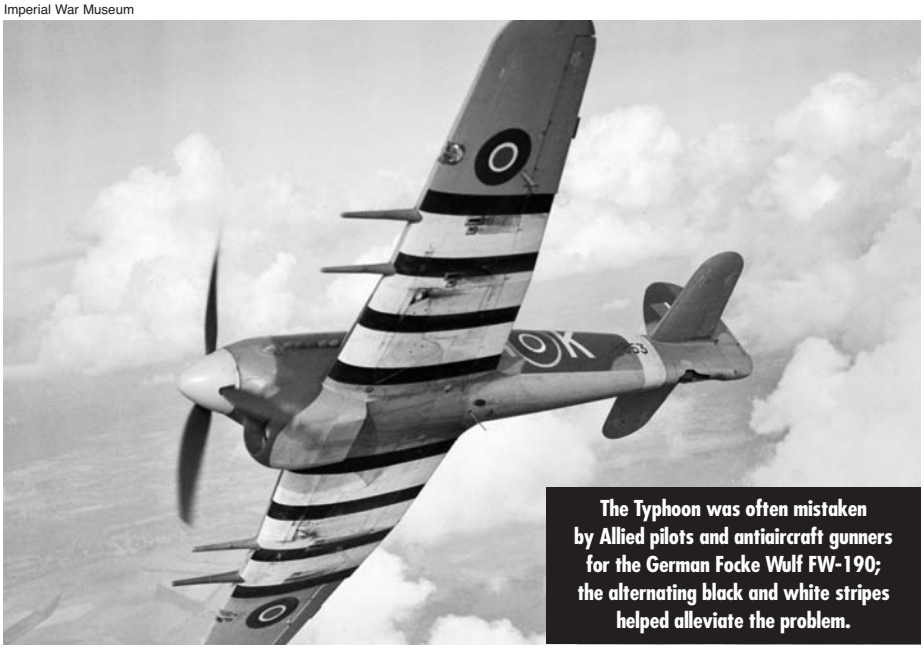
After the battle, the devastation in and around Falaise shocked all who witnessed it. General Dwight D. Eisenhower, the Allied supreme commander, recorded, "The battlefield at Falaise was unquestionably one of the greatest killing grounds of any of the war areas. Roads, highways, and fields were so choked with destroyed equipment and with dead men and animals that passage through the area was extremely difficult. Forty-eight hours after the closing of the gap, I was conducted through it on foot, to encounter scenes that could be described only by Dante. It was literally possible to walk for hundreds of

yards at a time, stepping on nothing but dead and decaying flesh."

It was during the Falaise action that Sir Sydney Camm's Typhoon performed spectacularly as a close-support fighter-bomber second to none. The plane that had such a troubled development and almost never become operational proved itself as perhaps the deadliest fighter in the Allied arsenal. Typhoons were in action for the rest of the European war as the Allied armies crossed the River Rhine and pushed into Germany. Soon, however, their season was over. Production was ended in 1944, with 3,205 Typhoons having been built. All but about 20 were produced by Gloster Aircraft Company.

Meanwhile, the Typhoon's successor, the faster, high-performance Hawker Tempest, had already been giving sterling service in the RAF. The first 50 Tempest Vs were delivered to No. 85 Group at Newchurch, Kent, in April 1944. Tempests took part in the Normandy invasion buildup, flew cab-rank patrols supporting Allied ground forces in France and Belgium, and proved immediately effective against German flying-bomb attacks on England. Between June 13 and September 5, 1944, they shot down 638 V-1 buzz bombs out of the RAF's total of 1,771. Tempests also engaged Messerschmitt ME-262 jet fighters and downed 20 of them before VE-Day.

Imperial War Museum



**The Typhoon was often mistaken by Allied pilots and antiaircraft gunners for the German Focke Wulf FW-190; the alternating black and white stripes helped alleviate the problem.**

When production ended in August 1945, a total of 800 Tempest Mark Vs had been built. Too late to see wartime service, Tempest IIs were operational in occupied Germany, Hong Kong, India, and Malaya. The Tempest Mark VI was flown by RAF squadrons in Germany and the Middle East, and Tempest IIs remained operational in the Middle East until they were replaced by jet-propelled De Havilland Vampires in 1949. □

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By Mark E. Hubbs

# A Memento of Terror

## A sun helmet serves as a lasting memorial to men who died on Wake Island.

**GLEN BINGE BROUGHT HIS HELMET HOME AT THE END OF WORLD WAR II. THE** helmet bears the names and addresses of more than 50 of his comrades. This was not an unusual thing. Many soldiers kept their helmets as souvenirs. But Glen Binge was not a soldier, or a Marine. He was an American civilian who had beaten the odds to survive one of the most famous battles of World War II and three and a half years as a POW in Japan's most infamous prisoner of war camp.

The cloth-covered fiber sun helmet that survived and came home with him is a puzzle. How could such a fragile item survive the rigors of combat and a brutal captivity, especially when over half the men who signed it died at the hands of the Japanese? This is the story of the Wake Island men who signed Glen Binge's helmet.

At 51, Logan Kay was too old to be scrambling through coral gravel dodging Japanese bombs. That is where he found himself on the morning of December 8, 1941. A force of 27 Japanese bombers struck Wake Atoll within a few hours of the attack against American military installations in the Hawaiian Islands. Wake is 2,300 miles west of Honolulu and across the International Date Line. It was December 8, where Logan Kay of Clearlake Park, California, and his friend Fred Stevens of Sioux City, Iowa, struggled to find shelter. Stevens had a bad case of food poisoning contracted the day before. "Scotty," as his friends called Kay, helped Stevens to a large steel dredge pipe where they would shelter for the next few days.

The Pan American Airways hotel on Peale Island was in shambles. (Wake Atoll is made up three islands: Wake, Peale, and Wilkes. The V-shaped atoll is nine miles long from tip to tip.) Japanese bombs put it out of business and killed 10 of its Guamanian staff. The China Clipper seaplane, floating at the hotel dock, survived the bombing. Soon, all the Caucasian Pan Am employees and five passengers were in the air, fleeing to Hawaii. Jesus "Seuese" Garcia of Agana, Guam, acted as spokesman for the surviving 35 Guamanian hotel employees who were left behind. They could only stand and watch as the big seaplane winged away. Garcia marched his Chamorros to the island commander to offer their services to defend the atoll.

For the following 15 days, the Marine garrison on Wake held out against repeated Japanese air and naval attacks. Many of the civilians on the island assisted the Marines in both logistics and combat roles, Logan Kay and Fred Stevens along with them. They were among 1,150 civilian contractors employed by the Morrison-Knudsen Company, part of a cooperative of eight construction companies called the Contractors Pacific Naval Air Bases (CPNAB). The CPNAB was contracted to build an airfield, seaplane base, and submarine base and to dredge a channel into the lagoon to allow access for submarines.

The garrison endured daily air attacks and on December 11 repelled a naval and amphibious assault with its heavy seacoast guns. A larger, more determined invasion force arrived two days before Christmas, and the well-trained force of Japanese Special Landing Force troops finally overwhelmed the garrison after heavy fighting. In the early hours of December 23, 1941, the Japanese captured 1,621 Americans with the fall of the atoll.

A pair of U.S. Marines defending Wake Island against a Japanese invasion during the opening days of World War II seeks cover from enemy's hellbursts. The first Japanese attempt to capture Wake was repulsed by the U.S. Marine garrison and civilian workers pressed into service.

"Come out and give up. The island was surrendered at 7:20 this morning." Twenty-three-year-old carpenter Rodney Kephart heard the call from his hiding place. Kephart, from Boise, Idaho, assisted in the defense of the island during the long siege by tending the wounded and digging trenches. He admitted after the

*Investors…*

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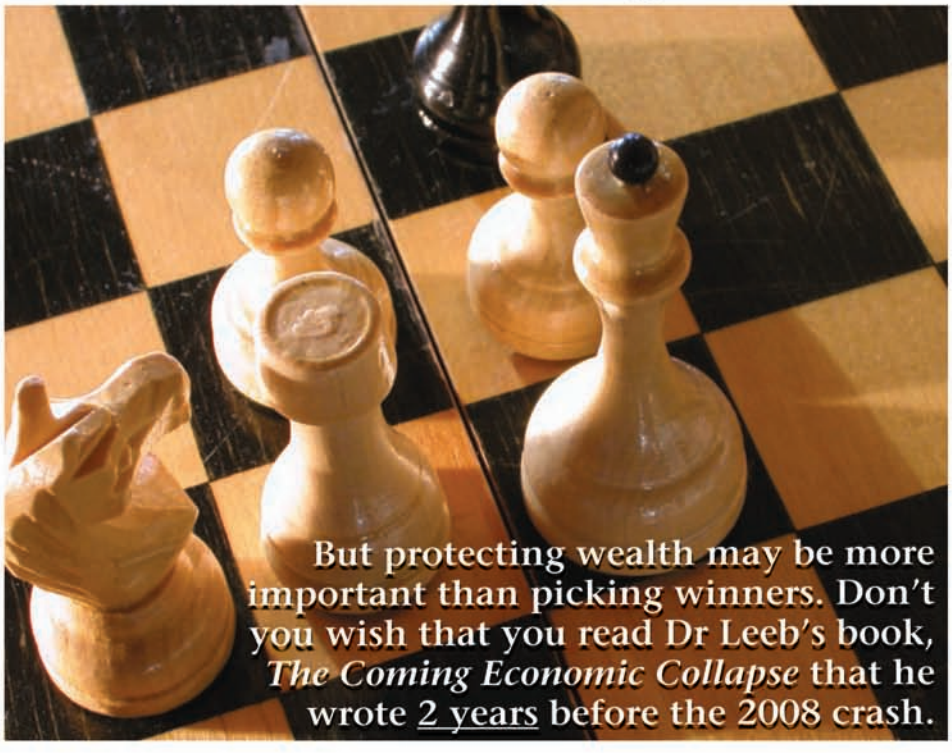


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war, "It certainly was a relief to be free from the suspense of it all, and to be through dodging hell in small parcels."

As resistance ceased on Wake, the U.S. Marines, sailors, and contractors were marched to the runway and seated in rows facing a line of Japanese machine guns. Logan Kay and Fred Stevens were the only men who avoided capture. They hid in the bush, certain that those surrendering were to be murdered. Indeed, this was the plan of the Japanese troops who held them. Only the intervention of Rear Admiral Sadamichi Kajioka, who commanded the invasion force, prevented the slaughter.

After Kajioka arrived, an interpreter read a proclamation to the prisoners that said, in part, "The Emperor has gracefully presented you with your lives."

An unknown voice bellowed from the crowd of Americans: "Well, thank the son-of-a-bitch."

With the exception of a handful of senior military officers and contractors held indoors, the captives remained three days and two nights on the rocky runway. Leal Henderson Russell of La Grande, Oregon, wrote in his otherwise optimistic diary: "23 December—...Rocks hard, rain, wind, no cover and few clothes. Bread and water. Very uncomfortable night." 24 December—"Still on the rock-pile. Very hard on the unclothed men and those who are ill. Many have dysentery.... Men hard to control while food and water being passed out. Act like wolves...."

Courtesy the Glen BInge Family

**Photographed in 1946 following his return from captivity in Japan, Glen Binge seems to show the strain of life as POW.**

Tensions of the previous days relaxed a bit on Christmas morning. One contractor remembered that they were allowed to retrieve clothing, food, and tobacco from their dugouts. Russell recalled that the POWs were allowed to bury their dead and were fed well for the first time. They were marched to the north end of Wake Island and put into the barracks they had used before the beginning of hostilities. Several 40-man barracks were packed with 150 men each, but the men had shelter at last. He recorded on December 27: "Japanese treating us with reasonable consideration."

Kephart remembered: "We slept so well even the screaming of the Japs didn't disturb us—that was indeed a welcome Christmas present."

Three weeks after the fall of Wake, the POWs awoke to see a large vessel, the *Nita Maru*, standing off the southern shore. She had arrived to transport the POWs to camps in China. "About 350 including the key men were selected and were supposed to stay," wrote Russell. He became the ranking civilian POW when the *Nita Maru* sailed away. Another of the Morrison-Knudsen men recorded in his diary on January 12, "All but 360 of the contractors have been sent to Japan today. [He incorrectly assumed the destination was Japan]. Also the service men except 21 Marines who are too badly wounded to go."

Forty-seven-year-old Glen Binge was like many other men on Wake. The promise of well-

paid work during a bleak economy lured him far from his Galesburg, Illinois, home. It would be almost four years before he would see his children again. Binge arrived at Wake on October 27, 1941, on a nine-month contract. He came ashore with 175 other men from the USS *Curtis* (AV-4), a seaplane tender that shuttled men and equipment between Honolulu and Wake Atoll.

Sometime after January 12, Binge began to have men sign his helmet. Binge's sun helmet was not unusual. Hundreds of the white sun helmets were issued by the CPNAB to its Wake Island men. The Marines issued similar sun helmets that were tan and bore the Globe & Anchor emblem on the front. There is evidence that many men recorded names of comrades or had their mates sign their helmets as mementos, but the Binge helmet is the only one known to have survived. It has been a family treasure for 60 years, but its existence has only been brought to light outside the family in the past year.

All of the American names inscribed are from those men who remained on Wake after the departure of the *Nita Maru*. The 360 contractors who remained were chosen because of their skills in operating heavy equipment. They would continue the military buildup of Wake Island with the same supplies and equipment that they had used for the U.S. Navy. This time, however, the new architects of the island defenses were the Japanese.

National Archives

**Japanese soldiers stand at attention on Wake Island during a ceremony to honor their comrades who fell in the brief but vicious battle to take control of the small spit of land.**

Kay and Stevens remained hidden in the scrub brush of Wake Island. They scavenged for food and moved every few days to avoid the Japanese. On March 10, after living in the bush for 77 days, the fugitives stumbled upon 67-year-old Ted Hensel of Burbank, California. "You can't be living men. You're already identified as dead and buried!" Hensel retorted. "You two look terrible. Better give yourselves

National Archives

**Prisoners of the Japanese, U.S. military and civilian personnel are marched to the waiting transport ship *Nita Maru* on Wake Island on January 12, 1942. Several of the prisoners are wearing sun helmets similar to the one brought home by Glen Binge.**

up. The Japs won't hurt you. They're treating us fine." Hensel persuaded the ragged, starving men to surrender.

Russell paints a relatively optimistic picture of his life as a POW. His keen eyes recorded the daily coming and going of bombers, fighters, and ships from Wake as well as the weather and day-to-day activity of the Japanese garrison. He seemed to be very interested in his captors and cultivated cordial relationships with some, even arranging dental work for one of the Japanese with the U.S. contractor doctor.

Russell surely was aware of the suffering that was going on around him. His tone is upbeat in the diary, however, and he refrains from recording adversity except in extreme cases. One such case was the execution of one of his men who had broken into the Japanese canteen and gotten drunk on stolen alcohol. On May 8, Russell wrote, "After breakfast I found that they had arrested Babe Hoffmeister who was out of the compound during the night. Okazaki told me later he had broken into the canteen.… I also heard he was drunk. It is apt to go very hard on Babe as he had been repeatedly warned."

Two days later, the Japanese gave Hoffmeister a hasty trial. He was found guilty, blindfolded, and marched to his grave. Kay recorded: "The Japs made Hoffmeister crouch on his hands and knees. A Jap officer took his sword, laid the blade on his neck, brought it back like a golf club and then down on his neck, severing his head with a single blow."

Russell wrote: "May 10th—Julius 'Babe' Hoffmeister was murdered this morning. Nearly all foremen and dept. superintendents were called to witness it. Possibly it will serve as a warning to some who still feel that they have some rights here."

The next morning, with Babe's murder fresh on their minds, the Japanese evacuated 20 Marines and sailors, who had been recuperating from wounds. One of these men was Pfc. Richard L. Reed of South Whitney, Indiana. Reed was the only Marine to sign Glen Binge's helmet. Reed and the other recovering Marines sailed away on the *Asama Maru,* bound for camps in China. Only the civilian contractors remained to toil for the enemy.

The Japanese did not observe the Geneva Convention restriction on using POW labor for war-related projects, and the workers toiled at various military projects on all three islands of the atoll. Extensive antitank ditches, protected by slit and communication trenches, were dug on the outer and inner periphery of all three islands. Barbed-wire entanglements and land mines provided protection on potential landing areas. Inshore from the narrow beaches, an elaborate system of concrete defenses provided interlocking fire at almost any point on the atoll. An estimated 200 concrete and coral pillboxes, bunkers, bomb proofs, and command posts were constructed with POW labor.

Only the occasional U.S. bombing raid or Japanese holiday (when no work was performed) punctuated the monotonous life of the POWs. Russell wrote: "Washington's Birthday on Wake Island and still prisoners of the Japanese. No change at all. We work, we eat, we sleep, and then we get up and do it all over again.… Rumors fly but even they grow tiresome."

The rumors of prisoner evacuation became reality on the last day of September 1942. Two hundred and sixty-five captives, including Glen Binge and 21 of his friends who autographed his helmet, were loaded aboard the *Tachibana Maru* and sent to Yokohama, Japan. Ninety-eight Americans were chosen to stay and continue their work on construction projects.

Most of the men were jubilant that they were leaving Wake. They could not know that their lives as POWs on Wake for the previous nine months had been relatively easy, and that true hell awaited them.

Japanese sailors herded the 265 Wake Island men aboard a crowded train when they reached Yokohama. Soon after they pulled away from the station the train halted long enough for Russell and four others to be taken off for interrogation. Russell was never reunited with his crew. He was liberated on September 15, 1945, at Ohashi, Japan.

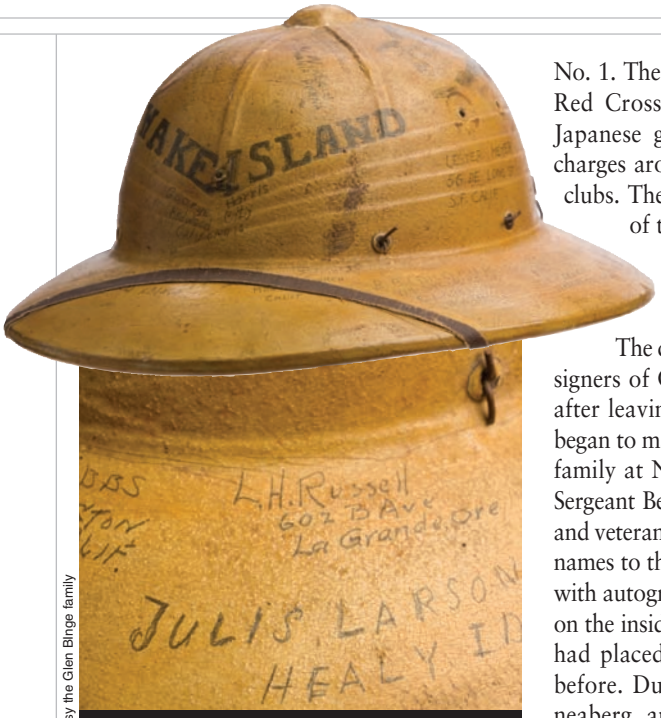
Fukuoka No. 18-B became the new home for the remaining 260. This camp, near Sasebo, Japan, was established to provide slave labor for the construction of Soto Dam. The work was backbreaking and the rations slim. Three small bowls of soupy rice per day was the standard fare. One inmate confessed, "I ate garbage while at Camp 18. A man will do anything for food if he is really hungry."

The meager diet was enforced even if additional rations were available. The Japanese pilfered or withheld Red Cross packages and punished men for "garbaging," trying to steal offal and vegetable peelings from Korean laborers. One inmate who was six feet four inches tall was reduced to 110 pounds. "I ate anything to stay alive.… I ate toads, roots, grasshoppers—you string 'em on a wire and throw them in a fire, then eat 'em like peanuts."

A series of heartless commanders and senseless beatings by brutal guards exacted a horrible toll on the Wake Island men. The slightest infraction of the rules brought extended beatings with clubs and baseball bats. One survivor was hit repeatedly on the forehead with a rock by a Japanese guard. "I thought my brains were going to explode," he remembered.

Jesus Garcia, the Guamanian who had worked at the Pan American Hotel, barely escaped with his life. He was pushed from a guard tower and then beaten on the head with bamboo club for an hour.

The first of the helmet signers to die was John F. Niklaus of Germania, Pennsylvania, on January 26, 1943. Japanese records claim he died of "acute pneumonia." Julius Larson of Healy, Idaho, was next on February 18. James H. O'Neal of Worland, Wyoming, followed on February 27. The Japanese listed the cause of death for O'Neal as "cardiac beri beri." Acute




Both: Photos Mark Finkenstaedt, courtesy the Glen Binge family

**TOP: The sun helmet belonging to Glen Binge was made from pressed fiber and covered with cloth. The helmet was originally white, but varnish added to preserve the 70-year-old signatures has yellowed the surface. ABOVE: A close-up of the helmet depicts the autographs of L.H. Russell and Julis Larson, who died while a prisoner of the Japanese.**

pneumonia also claimed Andrew Nygard of Long Island, New York, on March 13.

Thirty-one-year-old Lester Meyer of San Francisco, California, failed to salute a Japanese guard. He was beaten with clubs and rifle butts off and on for three days. He died on April 29, 1943, as a result of this torment. The Japanese listed Meyer's cause of death as "right pleurisy."

The next to die was Ted Hensel on May 5, 1943. Norman Hill of Clarkston, Oregon, succumbed to "malnutrition" on June 4, 1943. The last of the helmet signers to die at Fukuoka No. 18-B was Lloyd Kent of Burbank, California, who passed away on March 3, 1944.

Thirty-seven-year-old Oreal Johnson of Boise, Idaho, served as the chaplain and lay preacher for the Wake Island men. He provided a short service for each funeral and sang "I Need Thee Every Hour." Johnson and other men of the burial details were rewarded for their loathsome duties with extra food. The guards enjoyed tossing the rice balls among the starving men to see the melee that would ensue. By April 17, 1944, when the Wake Island men were moved to the Fukuoka No. 1 camp, 53 of the original 260 were dead.

Fukuoka No. 1 was a large camp that housed American, Australian, British, and Dutch POWs. Conditions improved to some degree at No. 1. The rations were still sparse, but some Red Cross packages did get through. The Japanese guards more often slapped their charges around instead of beating them with clubs. The biggest difference was the nature of the work. They built a new airfield at No. 1 and avoided the back-breaking labor that had killed so many men at the Soto Dam.

The death rate plummeted, and no more signers of Glen Binge's helmet met their end after leaving Fukouka No. 18-B. Binge also began to make friends outside his Wake Island family at No. 1. Gunner William Davis and Sergeant Benjamin Regan, both from London and veterans of the Royal Artillery, added their names to the helmet. The outside was covered with autographs, so they scrawled their names on the inside of the crown next to where Glen had placed his own mark so many months before. Dutch soldiers, H. Buys, W.F. Zonneaberg. and P. Van Veen, signed near their British allies. By enlarging his network of friends, Binge also broadened his potential access to resources. This may have contributed to his survival.

During the last year of the war, the surviving men who were evacuated from Wake in September 1942 were being separated. Labor details were dispatched away from Fukouka No. 1 without regard to the men's original organizations.

In late August 1945, red, white, and blue parachutes began floating to earth above food cartons at Fukouka No.6 near Orio, Japan. The Japanese had surrendered, and hostilities ceased on August 15. American bombers began parachuting food and clothing to the starving Allied POWs at camps all across Japan. On the morning of September 1, 1945, several of the officer POWs approached Rodney Kephart with an armload of silk canopies.

"Can you make us an American flag so we can have an official raising of the colors at the same time the Japanese sign the surrender tomorrow morning?" they asked. The POWs had learned that the official surrender ceremony was to take place the following day. Kephart was the only man who knew how to operate a temperamental Japanese sewing machine at the camp. Kephart and another POW worked 16 hours straight to have the flag ready in time. He was too exhausted and overcome with emotion to attend the ceremony. He lay in his bunk sobbing as his flag was raised over the camp.

Kay and Stevens, the men who hid out for so long on Wake, somehow managed to remain together. They were liberated on September 19,

1945, at Camp No. 23 at Izuka, Japan. George Weller, a war correspondent for the *Chicago Daily News,* accompanied the liberation teams and met Kay at Camp No. 23. Weller recorded Kay's remarkable story and transcribed the diary he kept while on Wake. Weller and Kay were photographed with a white sun helmet that bore the names of Wake Island dead. Much like Glen Binge, Kay had saved his own souvenir helmet that bore the names of scores of Wake Island men. That photograph was published in the *Chicago Daily News* with the caption "Memento of Terror."

As the survivors of the hell camp at Fukouka No. 18-B began their long journeys home to the United States, they did not know that all 98 of their comrades left on lonely Wake Atoll had been dead for almost two years.

The day-to-day record of POW life at Wake ended when Russell clambered aboard the *Tachibana Maru*. The routine of the remaining 98 did not change, however. Only increasing U.S. bombing raids and the loss of one of the 98 interrupted the monotony. An American was caught stealing food in July 1943. After a brief investigation, a Japanese lieutenant wielded the sword that removed the head of the unknown American. Captain Shigimatsu Sakaibara, the new island commander who had been whisked ashore by an Imperial Navy bomber from Kwajalein in December 1942, presided over the murder.

The U.S. Navy also was tightening a noose around the atoll. Extensive submarine patrols harassed all shipping coming in and out of Wake. This increased attention aggravated the island commander. Sakaibara and his subordinates were certain that an invasion was imminent. In reality, the United States had no intention of forcing a landing on Wake. As with most Japanese-held islands that did not have a tactical or strategic role for further campaigns, they were merely isolated from their source of supplies and left to wither on the vine. Bombings were designed only to deprive the enemy of the use of their airfield, seaplane base, and port facilities.

A U.S. carrier task force, which included the USS *Yorktown* (CV-10), arrived offshore on October 5, 1943. During the following two days the task force dropped 340 tons of bombs on the atoll, and the accompanying cruisers and destroyers hurled 3,198 eight-inch and five-inch projectiles. The raid did extensive damage to the infrastructure on the atoll, and 31 Japanese planes were destroyed on the ground. This was the largest U.S. raid on the atoll up to that time. Sakaibara was certain that the armada assembled offshore included a landing force. He decided that the troublesome prisoners must be killed to eliminate the threat they might pose during the coming invasion.

National Archives

**Admiral Shigimatsu Sakaibara surrendered Wake Island to U.S. forces on September 4, 1945. Subsequently, he confessed to the murder of 98 American prisoners on the island.**

The Headquarters Company commander, Lt. Cmdr. Tachibana, was ordered by Captain Sakaibara to move the prisoners from their compound to an antitank ditch on the northern tip of Wake Island. There, in the waning afternoon light of October 7, 1943, Lieutenant Torashi Ito, of the Headquarters Company, had the Americans lined up and seated along the ditch facing the sea. They were blindfolded with their hands and feet bound. Three platoons of Tachibana's company assembled behind them and opened fire with rifles and machine guns.

A Korean laborer who witnessed the massacre testified later, "All prisoners, both dead and wounded, were bayoneted." The names of 19 of the dead men appear on Binge's helmet.

The bodies of the Americans then were unceremoniously dumped into the ditch and covered with coral sand. The indignity suffered by the prisoners was not complete, however. The following day, a report from an enlisted man that he saw one of the prisoners escape during the confusion of the massacre prompted the disinterment of the bodies. The corpses were dug up and counted, then hastily reburied. The sailor had been correct; one American was missing. The Korean laborer also saw the man flee and recognized him as "Mr. John," his favorite among the Americans. That man, whose full name has never been discovered, was recaptured a week later. Captain Sakaibara personally beheaded the lone escapee. There were two men named John among those murdered by the Japanese. One was John Martin of Pomeroy, Washington, who autographed Glen Binge's helmet many months before.

The mass grave on Wake lay forgotten for two years despite several unanswered queries from the International Red Cross to Japanese officials. When news reached Wake in August 1945 that the United States had prevailed, the Japanese, for some reason, felt it necessary to disturb the grave of the POWs once more. They clumsily extracted the bones from the ditch and moved them to the U.S. cemetery that had been established on Peacock Point after the battle. The remains were dumped into a small, single grave. The cemetery was roped off, and wooden crosses were erected and painted in preparation for the expected arrival of U.S. forces.

When questioned about the last 98 Americans left on Wake, each of the Japanese told an identical rehearsed story. The Americans had been placed in two bomb shelters to protect them from their countrymen's bombs. One of the shelters had received a direct hit, and all the occupants had been killed. Those in the other shelter panicked, killed a guard, and fought their way out of their compound. They had been cornered on the beach at the north end of Wake Island, and all had fought to the death.

Soon after the Japanese surrendered Wake Island on September 4, 1945, Captain Sakaibara and 15 of his officers and men were arrested and sent to Kwajalein to stand trial for the murder of the 98 POWs. Two men committed suicide en route and left statements that implicated the captain and others. While being held during the trial, Lieutenant Ito also killed himself and left behind a signed confession. After being confronted with this statement, Sakaibara finally confessed that he had ordered the murder of the 98 Americans and stated that all responsibility should rest on his shoulders. The trial concluded with a sentence of death for Captain Sakaibara and Lt. Cmdr. Tachibana.

Eventually, a reprieve was granted for Tachibana, whose sentence was commuted to life in prison. Sakaibara, however, was transported to Guam to await his fate. There, on June 19, 1947, he was executed by hanging along with five other Japanese war criminals. Sakaibara's last statement was filled with Japanese stoicism: "I think my trial was entirely unfair and the proceeding unfair, and the sentence too harsh, but I obey with pleasure."

The war was over, the murders had occurred more than three years previously, and the public had already been outraged with the news of similar massacres in the Philippines and in the European Theater. No national acknowledgement of the Wake Island massacre ever materialized.

In Section G of the Punchbowl National Cemetery in Honolulu, Hawaii, lies a large, flat, marble gravestone. At 5 by 10 feet it is the largest in the cemetery. On it are listed the names of 178 men. This common grave holds the remains of all the unidentified military and civilian burials repatriated from Wake Island in 1946. Many of these men were killed during the siege, and circumstances did not allow proper burial and identification. Of these names, 98 represent the men who were murdered by the Japanese in October 1943. After several years of unsuccessful attempts to separate the remains and identify them, they were interred together during a ceremony at the Punchbowl in 1953.

I visited Wake Island for the first time in 1994. The bland black-and-white newsreels of the Pacific War that had burned into my psyche did not prepare me for the Technicolor paradise that I encountered at the Wake Island Launch Center air terminal. A large sign declares, "Wake Island Airfield, Where America's Day Really Begins." Indeed it does, as Wake is on the west side of the International Date Line. It was difficult to imagine Wake as the desolate hell that it was in 1941.

I drove past the end of Wake Island, across the causeway to Wilkes Island, to a point on the map that said "POW Rock." A shiny new sign read: "POW Rock, no vehicles allowed beyond this point." A coral gravel walkway led to the shore of the lagoon where a four-foot-high dome of coral thrusts its way up among smaller boulders. Here, an anonymous American chiseled a brief but poignant message that has come to symbolize the sacrifice of all 98 men.

As the afternoon sun tinged the lagoon with a warm yellow glow and the surf crashed in the distance, I traced a roughly chiseled inscription in the rock with my finger, "98 US PW, 5-10-43." Morrison-Knudson had installed a bronze tablet that lists the names of the 98 nearby. This tablet and boulder with its simple inscription have become the island's memorial for a mass murder that took place nearly 70 years ago.

The sun helmet is also a memorial to all Wake Island defenders, but specifically to those men who autographed it for their comrade, Glen Binge. The fragile cardboard and cloth headgear's survival is testimony to the perseverance of those men who came home, and a cenotaph for those men who died at the hands of a brutal enemy. □

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By Herb Kugel

Imperial War Museum

# The Falcon of Malta

## Canadian pilot George Beurling earned fame defending the tiny island in the Mediterranean.

**IN SEPTEMBER 1943, CANADA'S TOP AIR ACE, THE "FALCON OF MALTA," FLYING** Officer George Frederick Beurling, was faced with two problems. He disliked his new cap and he disliked his wing commander. The first problem was easily solved. Beurling, unhappy with the cap because he felt it made him look like a rookie, pitched it into the air and put a blast from his shotgun through it. He felt this made the cap suitable.

Luckily, Beurling failed in his attempt to solve his second problem. Beurling was serving with 403 Wolf Squadron, Royal Canadian Air Force (RCAF), based at Headcorn, Kent, England. He saw his wing commander flying overhead in a De Havilland Tiger Moth and blasted away at the plane with his shotgun. While the wing commander was unhurt and never knew what happened, his ground crew was baffled by the small holes that had appeared in the bottom of the plane's left wing. Only George J. Demare, one of Beurling's ground crew, knew of the shotgun blasts; he did not report Beurling. Demare's loyalty was understandable. If Beurling disliked officers, he liked and was generally liked in return by his ground crew.

Beurling's behavior was not altogether unexpected. Air historian Dan McCaffery wrote of him: "They called him 'Screwball,' 'Buzz' and the 'Falcon of Malta' [and] he was the greatest Allied fighter pilot of the Second World War. [He] was a complex, even paradoxical individual.... He craved fame but cared nothing for promotions. He loved attention but had little use for intimacy. And when he died, he was remembered as Canada's most successful and tragic combat hero of World War II."

Beurling was a loner, a difficult man who twice rejected an officer's commission. There was something shadowy and forbidding in him. It showed in his eyes.

George Beurling was born on December 6, 1921, in Verdun, Quebec. He grew up in the Plymouth Brethren, an extremely conservative

Canadian Dept. of National Defense

**ABOVE: This portrait of Flying Officer George F. Beurling was taken in February 1943. LEFT: In this painting by Denis A. Barnham, the cockpit view of a British Supermarine Spitfire fighter is filled with the underside of a German Messerschmitt Me-109 fighter escorting a flight of Junkers Ju-88 bombers over the island of Malta. George Beurling earned a fearsome reputation as a fighter pilot in the skies above the Mediterranean island.**

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religious group that had absolute and literal faith in the Bible. Daily Bible reading was mandatory; alcohol, tobacco, and virtually all pleasures were forbidden. Even owning a radio was initially rejected. Because of this background, Beurling never swore, drank, or smoked. Although he was athletic and became a good swimmer, he never participated in team sports. While he was a loner from early childhood, he did have one constant passion. He wanted to fly.

"Ever since I can remember," he recalled, "airplanes and to get up in them into the free sky had been the beginning and end of my thoughts and ambitions."

The "free sky" was everything to Beurling. He had few friends; his school grades were mediocre. The only books that interested him were about aviation, especially about World War I combat flying. He repeatedly studied the air battles and tactics reported in these books. He regularly skipped school and spent every moment he could at the local airport. Just before his 11th birthday, on his way to the airport, he was caught in a violent rainstorm and given shelter in a hangar. A kindly pilot, feeling sorry for the drenched little boy, offered to take him up for a spin if he obtained parental permission. Beurling's mother, thinking it was a joke, agreed, but it was no joke to her son. He flew and was hooked for life.

Beurling was treated coldly by his parents. He was strapped and banished to his room for playing hooky from school and going to the airport. He did not mind the banishment. He spent hours, always alone in his room, carefully building model airplanes. He sold the models and used the money he made from their sale and doing odd jobs or selling newspapers on street corners to pay for weekly flying lessons, which cost $10 per hour. He was 12 when he first took the controls of an airplane in 1933, and then soloed in the midwinter of 1938, probably just after he turned 17. He passed all the examinations for a commercial pilot's license but was refused the credential because he was too young.

The refusal did not stop him. He dropped out of high school, jumped onto a railroad boxcar, and rode the rails to Gravenhurst, Ontario, where he managed to get a job carrying air freight into the bush for mining companies. He worked as the navigating co-pilot, something he could evidently do without a pilot's license. The work was dull, but he picked up a great deal of air experience. Because of this, he was soon able to obtain his pilot's license.

Beurling then headed west to Vancouver, British Columbia, where he hoped to obtain a commercial license and then join the Chinese Nationalist Air Force in its battle against the Japanese invasion of China. Wanting to fight in the air was his only passion; it remained so for the rest of his life. He entered a flying competition in Edmonton, Alberta, that included several RCAF pilots. Beurling won the event and, as he accepted his trophy, he told a stunned crowd that Canada was in serious trouble if the RCAF pilots in the competition were its best. He believed these words came back to haunt him.

Imperial War Museum

**Beurling poses with the rudder and unit emblem cut from a crash-landed Italian Macchi MC.202 fighter of 378ª Squadriglia/51º Stormo CT, one of four enemy aircraft he shot down over Gozo, Malta's sister island, on July 27, 1942.**

Beurling attempted to go to San Francisco from British Columbia. He thought that once in San Francisco, he could somehow get to China. He attempted to sneak into the United States as a stowaway on a tramp steamer but was caught and arrested as an illegal immigrant. He spent two months in a U.S. jail and was then dumped at the Canadian border. Back in Canada, he drifted aimlessly eastward.

When World War II began on September 1, 1939, Beurling suddenly found a new purpose. He was three months short of his 18th birthday. He immediately tried to enlist in the RCAF but was rejected because of his mediocre school record. Bitterly disappointed, he felt the real reason for his rejection was speaking out at the air show in Edmonton. He resented the RCAF for the rest of his life because of this rejection.

Beurling became even more compulsive in his obsession to fly in combat. He wanted to go to Finland and join the Finnish Air Force in its fight against the Russian invasion but was blocked when the Finnish Embassy insisted that, because of his age, he must obtain written permission from his parents. His parents refused.

Beurling then signed on to a munitions freighter and sailed for England. He was determined to jump ship and join the RAF, but in England the recruiting officers informed him that they needed to see his birth certificate. Unfazed, Beurling returned to his ship and sailed back to Canada for his birth certificate, which he brought back to England. While many of the ships around Beurling were attacked by German submarines, he was unhurt.

He was overjoyed when the RAF accepted him. However, he began his training by buzzing a control tower and knocking a sentry over a railing with the force of his plane's prop wash. Repeated wild flying such as this earned him the nickname "Buzz." In spite of his bizarre behavior, Beurling performed brilliantly in training and was offered a commission. He turned it down. He said he distrusted officers and wanted to live and work with the sergeant pilots.

After completing his training, Beurling was posted to 403 Squadron, where he was again offered a promotion, which he again rejected. His squadron commander thought little of him and gave him a "Tail End Charlie" flight position. This meant that Beurling would bring up the rear, and since the German pilots generally attacked from the rear, Tail End Charlie was usually the first plane to be hit. During this period, the RAF was using flights of four aircraft, three flying in a V, while a fourth plane, Tail End Charlie, flew slightly above and behind the others, theoretically weaving back and forth in the V while looking for Germans. It was an impossible formation and cost the lives of many pilots before the RAF abandoned it.

On March 23, 1942, when the squadron was participating in a sweep over northern France, Beurling, despite his fighter inexperience but with wonderful eyesight, was the first to observe some German Focke Wulf FW-190 fighters diving out of the sun on his squadron. Beurling radioed "Bandits!" but was ordered to maintain radio silence, and moments later he had three 190s on his tail. Tracer bullets were striking inches from his cockpit. His engine hood was shot away.

"I was dead meat until I suddenly got a brainstorm," he later recalled.

He dropped his Spitfire's landing gear and wing flaps. The plane slowed, and the three

German fighters overshot him. Beurling managed to get his plane back to England where he raged at his flight commander, furiously denigrating him in front of the entire squadron. While Beurling was justified in attacking his commander's stupidity, doing so in no way aided him. Shortly after this, he was transferred to 41 Squadron. There is a certain irony in Beurling's transfer, as 403 Squadron was being transformed into an all-Canadian unit. Beurling, being a member of the RAF, would therefore have been transferred to another RAF squadron anyway.

In 41 Squadron, Beurling was again forced to fly the hated Tail End Charlie position. In spite of this, he managed his first kill. He was flying 24,000 feet above Calais when his flight was attacked by five FW-190s. Once again, his tail-end position Spitfire took the brunt of the attack. German cannon shells slammed into both wings, knocking out his two cannon but leaving his four Browning machine guns intact.

Again, Beurling's flying skill saved his life. He zoomed straight up into the sun. The Germans followed him and, losing sight of him in the blinding yellow glare, they streaked past him. As they roared by, Beurling fired his machine guns at the middle FW-190. The blast ripped both wings away from the fuselage, which split in two. Beurling, believing the German pilot died instantly, expected to be congratulated when he landed. Instead, he was given a tongue lashing for breaking formation.

Beurling, in a rage, snapped back defiantly. "Six of us broke formation," he retorted. "Five Jerries and I [sic]."

Two days later, Beurling was again flying Tail End Charlie over Calais. Once more, thanks to his incredible vision, he spotted attacking German fighters before anyone else did. He radioed a warning and was again ignored, but this time he did not care. He left formation without permission, attacked the incoming German planes, shot down their leader, and received yet another reprimand for disobeying orders. Beurling had been correct on each of his three missions; his officers were wrong. Whatever their other reasons for disliking him, it appeared they were jealous of his flying skills, amazing vision, and extraordinary shooting ability.

No matter what the reasons for their dislike, Beurling had had enough. Disgusted with the stupidity of his commanding officers, he offered to take the place of a married pilot who did not want to be sent to Malta. Beurling's request was promptly accepted.

On June 9, 1942, George Beurling was not yet 21 when he flew a Spitfire V from the deck of the aircraft carrier HMS *Eagle* to Malta and

Canadian Dept. of National Defense

**"There's a lot of room there for a lot more," quipped Beurling as he painted crosses on the fuselage of his Supermarine Spitfire fighter on October 15, 1943.**

landed at Takali Airport. He came down in the middle of a raid on the airfield. Beurling was instantly part of a desperate British defense against a vastly superior armada of German and Italian airplanes, which sometimes outnumbered the British 10 to 1.

Malta had been under Axis siege since June 11, 1940, the day after Italy declared war on Great Britain. On that day, the island endured eight separate air attacks by the Regia Aeronautica, the Italian air force, and that was just the beginning. Malta was critically important; it is crucially located in the Mediterranean, 180 miles from the North African coast. Thus, it was an ideal location for launching sea and air strikes against Axis ships carrying supplies to the Italian and German forces in North Africa. Sicily is only 70 miles from Malta, and extensive German and Italian airpower was based there.

Beurling was posted to 249 Squadron, where his reputation as a troublemaker preceded him. However, few expected what happened. Laddie Lucas, his wing commander, writing four decades later, reported, "Beurling was untidy, with a shock of fair, tousled hair above penetrating blue eyes. He was high strung, brash and outspoken.... I suspected that his rebelliousness came from some mistaken feeling of inferiority. I judged that what Beurling needed ... was not to be smacked down but to be encouraged. His ego mattered very much to him, and from what he told me of his treatment in England, a deliberate attempt had been made to assassinate it. I [promised] that I would give him my trust and that if he abused it he would be on the next aircraft out of Malta. When I said all this those startling blue eyes peered incredulously at me as if to say that, after all his past experience of human relations, he didn't believe it. He was soon to find out that a basis for confidence and mutual trust did exist. He never once let me down."

Beurling never once let Lucas down during his time at Malta. He became a Canadian national hero through his amazing shooting. On June 12, he shot down his first Messerschmitt Me-109 fighter by blowing its tail surfaces away with a single burst of his guns. Since nobody saw the plane crash, Beurling was credited with only damaging it, although it is impossible to imagine the plane flying home without its rudder.

A lull followed, but while other RAF pilots relaxed, Beurling spent countless hours working out the principles of deflection shooting, that is, how far ahead of the enemy he had to shoot for the targeted plane to fly into his bullets. Beurling struggled with this and mastered the technique, but one of his learning tactics was not pleasant for Malta's lizards. He often stood motionless with his .38 pistol, waiting for a lizard to approach and fill his field of vision at about the size of a German fighter at 250 yards. Often enough, he hit the lizard with one bullet.

Beurling's self-training worked. On July 6, flying three sorties, he was credited with three confirmed kills: two Italian Macchi 202 fighters and an Me-109. When these kills were added to his two victories before coming to Malta, Beurling became an ace but there was no celebration party. His fellow pilots snubbed him as a loner. Beurling, if he celebrated at all, celebrated alone.

Beurling's marksmanship was becoming legendary. On July 27, he shot down the Italian ace Furio Doglo Nicolt and his wingman. On July 29, he shot down another Me-109. By the end of July, he was credited with 17 confirmed kills, 15 of them during his "July Blitz," the period from July 6 through July 29. He was awarded a Distinguished Flying Medal (DFM) for eight victories and a bar at the end of the month for his 17 victories. He was becoming famous.

The air battles over Malta were attracting worldwide attention. Reporters demanded to know more about England's top ace, George Beurling, "The Falcon of Malta," as the press called him. The RAF responded to Beurling's growing fame by ordering him promoted, something he still did not want. He was made a Flying Officer (F/O) on July 30. The reason the RAF forced a promotion on Beurling was embarrassment. It would look terrible for the RAF if it became known that their "Falcon" refused to be an officer. Nevertheless, Beurling ignored his promotion and continued to live and eat with the sergeant pilots.

It was about this time that Beurling received the nickname "Screwball," earning it through behavior that might be labeled "psychotic" by modern standards.

In his book *Malta,* Laddie Lucas recalled, "He possessed a penchant for calling everything and everyone—the Maltese, the Bf-109s, the flies—those goddam screwballs.... His desire to exterminate was first made manifest in a curious way. One morning, we were on readiness at Takali, sitting in our dispersal hut in the southeast corner of the airfield. The remains of a slice of bully-beef which had been left over from breakfast lay on the floor. Flies by the dozen were settling on it.... Beurling pulled up a chair. He sat there, bent over this moving mass of activity, his eyes riveted on it, preparing for the kill. Every few minutes he would slowly lift his foot, taking particular care not to frighten the multitude, pause and—thump! Down would go his flying boot to crush another hundred or so flies to death. Those bright eyes sparkled with delight at the extent of the destruction. Each time he stamped his foot to swell the total destroyed, a satisfied transatlantic voice would be heard to mutter "the goddam screwballs!"

As the air war over Malta continued through the summer and into autumn, the fighting became more brutal. Atrocities were committed by both sides. Although Beurling always car-

ried a Bible with him when he went into the air, he nevertheless shot and killed Axis pilots who were bailing out or were parachuting from their burning planes. He justified this brutal behavior by telling a reporter, "The way I figure it, he might get down, get back to Germany, and come back to shoot me down."

Beurling also pointed out that his shootings were an act of revenge. A Spitfire pilot had been shot dead while parachuting down. The stress on everyone grew worse, but Beurling just wanted was to keep flying and fighting. Lucas wrote, "He [was] … exhausted by the physical demands of fighter combat, stress, heat, poor nutrition and a form of dysentery they called "the Dog." [He] had lost 50 lbs since arriving in Malta…. He was bed ridden for a week, but managed to drag himself into the air to battle the Messerschmitts that circled Malta. Several flights of Bf-109s jumped him. He managed a short burst that brought down a German, but his comrades shot Beurling's plane to pieces. He crash landed in a field because his parachute was too loose for him to jump out. By the end of August he collected a shared victory over a Junkers Ju-88 that had been separated from its fighter escort.

Beurling was awarded the Distinguished Flying Cross (DFC) in September. His "October Blitz" gave him eight victories in five days. On October 10, Beurling flew his last mission over Malta. It was spectacular. He led three Spitfires in an attack on eight Junkers Ju-88 bombers protected by 50 fighters. He shot one bomber, but seconds before it crashed into the Mediterranean, bullets from its tail gun struck him in a finger and forearm. Beurling, ignoring the blood pouring from his wounds, went on to attack and damage a Messerschmitt Me-109, but two Messerschmitts had closed behind him. The cannon fire from one shredded his Spitfire's tail and wings. Bullets from the second Messerschmitt shattered the canopy of his cockpit. He dove for the water, plunging at 600 miles per hour, and managed to lose the two German fighters. As he pulled out of the dive, he spotted a Messerschmitt and shot it down, but doing this attracted more German planes.

Beurling later related what happened: "A Messerschmitt nailed me from behind…. A chunk of shell smashed into my right heel. Another went between my left arm and body, nicking me in the elbow and ribs. Shrapnel spattered into my left leg. The controls were blasted. The throttle was jammed wide open and there I was in a full-power spin, on my way down from around 18,000 feet. I threw the hood away and tried to get out, but the spin was forcing me back into the seat. 'That is it,'

U.S. Air Force

**The Italian Macchi 202 Folgore (Thunderbolt) was a high-performance aircraft that was respected by Allied pilots in the Mediterranean. The Folgore was armed with 12.7mm and 7.7mm machine guns.**

I said to myself. 'This is what it's like when you're going to die.' I didn't panic. If anything, I was resigned to it. What the hell, this was the way I'd always wanted to go. Then I snapped out of it and began to struggle again.

"The engine was streaming flame but I managed to wriggle out of the cockpit and onto the port wing from which I could bail into the inside of the spin. I was down to 2,000 feet. At about 1,000 I managed to slip off. Before I dared pull the ripcord I must have been around 500. The chute opened with a crack like a cannon shell and I found myself floating gently down, the damnedest experience in contrasts I'll ever have.

"I caught my breath, pulled off a glove and dropped it to get some idea of the distance between me and the sea. A breeze caught it and the glove went up past my face. I laughed like a fool, then tugged off my flying boots and dropped them. Just as I did I hit the water."

Beurling was rescued by a shore launch. When the rescuers reached him, he was floating in blood-stained water, mumbling about the Bible his mother had given him. The rescuers, searching his pockets, found the Bible. The words of L.G. Head, one of Beurling's rescuers, report what was going through Beurling's mind: "He told us he would not fly without his Bible…. Before we got ashore, he was most adamant that he was going to fly and fight within a few hours…."

No matter how much he wanted it, Beurling was too badly injured for a quick return to combat. He was awarded a Distinguished Service Order (DSO) for his 28 victories over Malta and was patched up as well as possible and then readied for evacuation to Gibraltar. He did not want to go. Nevertheless, at about 2:30 AM on November 1, 1942, Beurling was one of many pilots and civilians who boarded a standard four-engine Consolidated B-24 Liberator bomber. The Liberator was without passenger seats, but virtually no one seemed to mind because it was flying to Gibraltar and then on to England. Everyone else was looking forward to getting out of Malta, but Beurling was miserable.

While Beurling lived for air combat, he also seemed to have a sixth sense. Perhaps he was aware that what he felt was his shining psychological moment coming to an end. He began talking about going to China when World War II ended because he felt there might be a war there.

Beurling called Malta "the fighter pilot's paradise."

To make things worse, the Liberator on which Beurling was flying crashed while landing in Gibraltar. There were many casualties, but Beurling survived. Despite being weighed down by a heavy plaster cast on his foot, he managed to swim 160 yards to shore. While Beurling's stay in a Gibraltar hospital was short, it seemed to make him reflective.

"I lay abed that night and looked out the window on the lights of Gibraltar," he wrote. "So this was how it had to end. You fly and fight and live for the minute, and you team up with guys who know nothing about you and about whom you know nothing. All you know is the other guy is full of guts and does the job. Then the break comes and you all fly away together, each to go his own way at the journey's end, but each with something to share with the others that none of you will ever forget…."

Beurling was a contradictory person. On July 10, one of the squadron's Spitfires had gone down over water. The squadron commander, hoping the pilot might be alive and drifting in a life raft, ordered a search for him, but Beurling went off on his own to hunt for enemy planes instead. He found two Macchi fighters and shot them both down in seconds. He fired just two bursts and hit both planes in the fuel tanks. While he abandoned his part in the search for the missing pilot, he also conscientiously and diligently honored another pilot's request to deliver a Maltese lace tablecloth to the pilot's mother in Moose Jaw, Saskatchewan, a delivery he made when he was sent back to Canada.

Beurling did not have much time for reflection. A new set of problems was coming, since he was now famous in his home country. He was ordered by Canadian Prime Minister William Lyon Mackenzie King to return to Canada and campaign on behalf of the Third Victory Loan Fundraising Drive. Beurling must have been aware of the irony; while he had been rejected by the RCAF, he was now Canada's most celebrated hero.

Exhausted, his wounds not completely healed, Beurling returned to Canada and to a personal public relations debacle. He was still

*Continued on page 77*

By John Brown

National Archives

# Raid on Rommel

## An attempt to capture or kill the Desert Fox failed, but the effort made a hero of Geoffrey Keyes.

**BY EARLY APRIL 1941, LT. GEN. ERWIN ROMMEL'S GERMAN AFRIKA KORPS,** combined with Italian units, had cleared the British from Libya except for the seaport of Tobruk. The Australian 9th Division had fallen back on Tobruk, and General Archibald Wavell, commander of Commonwealth forces in North Africa, asked that Tobruk be held for two months, until he could reorganize and, with reinforcements, go back on the attack.

The Tobruk garrison, commanded by Australian Maj. Gen. Leslie Morshead, comprised Morshead's Australian 9th Division of three brigades of infantry plus the 18th Brigade of the Australian 7th Division, together with the British 3rd Armored Brigade and four regiments of British gunners—field artillery, antitank, and antiaircraft. There were also several thousand base troops—British, Australian, Indian, and others—31,000 men in all, 24,000 of them combat troops.

On April 12, Rommel mounted his first attack on Tobruk. It was driven back. From then on he attacked again and again, but Tobruk held, not for two months but for eight months.

A year earlier, from May 28 to June 4, 1940, a crippled British Expeditionary Force landed back in England from the beaches of Dunkirk. A week later Prime Minister Winston Churchill, determined that the British Army would not lapse into the defensive mentality that had led to the collapse of France, sanctioned the raising of a dozen self-contained, specially trained, and well-equipped raiding units of up to 1,000 men each to harry the Germans along the Channel coast. At that stage, it was the only way the British Army could fight.

The task of organizing these units was given to Lt. Col. Dudley Clarke, a Royal Artillery officer gifted with unusual imagination. Imagination was in short supply at the beginning of World War II, when the officer corps was described as the most hidebound and orthodox in the Empire's history. Military historian Correlli Barnett noted that the British Army "was an anachronism, peasant levies led by the gentry and aristocracy."

Clarke realized this. He had grown up in South Africa and served in Palestine in the 1930s during the Arab rebellion where he had seen guerrilla warfare in action. He called his units "Commandos" after the fast-moving Boer guerrilla Kommandos of the South African war and laid down that they must be volunteers, as physically fit as the finest athletes, trained to the highest standards in the use of infantry weapons, and capable of killing or capturing the enemy quickly and silently. They would operate in darkness more than daylight, be able to work in small groups and individually, think independently, and use their initiative. "The commando," he declared, "should think of warfare solely in terms of attack."

Several commando units were raised in England and one in Scotland, the 11 (Scottish) Commando. Its commander was Lt. Col. Dick Pedder, a 35-year-old martinet from the Highland Light Infantry. Its establishment included 10 troops of 50 men, each with a commander and one or two other officers. One of the troop commanders was Captain Geoffrey Keyes of the Royal Scots Greys. Keyes was not obvious commando material, but he had a valuable asset. His father was Admiral of the Fleet Sir Roger John Brownlow Keyes, a lifelong friend of Prime Minister Churchill.

**Field Marshal Erwin Rommel, the famed Desert Fox, scans the trackless North African desert through binoculars. Rommel was the target of a British commando raid led by Lieutenant Colonel Geoffrey Keyes in November 1941.**

Geoffrey Keyes had never been physically robust, and his poor eyesight had precluded his entry into the Royal Navy, to which he had aspired. His hearing was also deficient, and he had been forced to give up boxing and rowing during college at Eton due to potential damage to his ears and

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curvature of the spine. Already disappointed that his son had failed to follow him in the Navy, Admiral Keyes was further dismayed with Geoffrey's commission in the Royal Scots Greys, whose officers were typically the sons of businessmen, instead of the elitist Life Guards.

Winston Churchill had brought Sir Roger Keyes out of retirement to become director of combined operations, with responsibility for the recruitment and deployment of commandos. One of his first acts as DCO had been to wire Scottish Command to request that his son, acting Captain Geoffrey Keyes, be transferred from the Greys to the new commando force. Geoffrey was quickly inducted into 11 Commando.

Training was ruthless. Many volunteers, officers and other ranks, could not make it and were returned to the units from which they came. Geoffrey Keyes was one casualty. He fell out on a 100-mile forced march in full battle kit but was saved by virtue of his social position. He went on to commando training in earnest: advanced field craft, infiltration behind enemy lines, street fighting, silent killing, navigation and route selection, and training in night sense and night confidence—revolutionary stuff for soldiers of the British Army of 1940.

Toward the end of January 1941, 11 Commando was combined with 7 and 8 Commandos and part of 3 Commando into a brigade, 1,500 men in all; the commander of 8 Commando, Lt. Col. Robert (Bob) Laycock, was appointed acting brigadier. Laycock belonged to the old school of officer privilege. His officers in 8 Commando were all from the right schools and belonged to the right London clubs. They included Winston Churchill's son, Randolph. The brigade sailed for Egypt at the end of January and arrived at Suez on March 7.

In April, 11 Commando was deployed on Cyprus while the rest of the brigade was sent to Crete to try to contain the German assault on the island. By the end of that battle, more than 600 of the 800 commandos under Laycock's command were killed or captured. Of the 156 who escaped, 23 were officers, including Laycock.

In early June, the 485 men of 11 Commando left Cyprus by ship to take part in the invasion of Vichy French-held Syria. Keyes was now second in command.

The commandos' task was to capture French positions on the Litani River and hold them long enough for the 21st Australian Infantry Brigade, advancing from Palestine to the south, to reach the river and build a pontoon bridge over it. The landing on the beaches just north of the mouth of the Litani River was delayed, and instead of landing in the dark it was made after dawn in full view of the French and under fire from their guns. It was 11 Commando's baptism of fire.

Imperial War Museum

**Lieutenant Colonel Geoffrey Keyes was an unlikely candidate for service with the elite commandos. However, he led the audacious raid against Rommel in the autumn of 1941.**

The commandos captured all the French positions and linked up with the Australians, but the price was heavy. Of the 379 men who actually landed, 130 were casualties, including the commander, Lt. Col. Richard Pedder, who was shot dead. Throughout the action, Keyes performed well. He was awarded a Military Cross. The commandos returned to Cyprus, which was still under threat of invasion, with Keyes promoted to acting lieutenant colonel and commanding in place of Pedder.

Throughout the summer of 1941, Rommel built up his forces and supplies and continued his attacks on Tobruk while the British, commanded now by Lt. Gen. Sir Claude Auchinleck, who had replaced Wavell, were building up the Eighth Army with the intention of invading Libya and relieving Tobruk in November.

By now Rommel's name had made headlines. He was becoming legendary, not only among his own forces but also among the British where, as one soldier commented, "We all thought he was a bloody good bloke."

This "Rommel cult" among his own troops worried Auchinleck; not only did they think more highly of the German general than of their own generals, they also regarded his ability to run rings around them as humorous. Auchinleck, therefore, sent out a directive to all his commanders: "I wish you to dispel by all possible means the idea that Rommel represents anything more than an ordinary German general. The important thing now is to see to it that we do not always talk of Rommel when we mean the enemy in Libya. We must refer to 'the Germans' or 'the Axis powers' or 'the enemy' and not always keep harping on Rommel."

What Auchinleck feared most was that Rommel would take Tobruk. With Tobruk behind him as a supply base, the German general could push directly into Egypt, seize Alexandria, Cairo and the Suez Canal, and battle into Palestine, Syria, and the oilfields of the Gulf. Rommel was, in fact, planning just that.

Rommel flew to Germany at the end of July to present his plan to Hitler and his top commanders. The plan was rejected. Hitler was preoccupied with the war in Russia and considered the campaign in North Africa of minor importance. He believed the British would begin an offensive in Libya in the latter part of the year, and Rommel's priority must be to repulse such an offensive. When that was done, he could safely take out Tobruk.

But Rommel was obsessed with Tobruk. He was convinced that Auchinleck would not mount an offensive in Libya until the outcome of the Russian campaign was decided. However, Hitler was right. Auchinleck was planning a major offensive in Libya for November. The British commander knew through Ultra intercepts of German coded messages that Rommel was planning a major attack on Tobruk. He must have wondered how he could get rid of his German opponent but was too much of an officer and gentleman to think of direct action.

In August 1941, 11 Commando moved from Cyprus to Egypt to begin the process of disbandment, returning some officers and men to their parent units, some to special forces such as the Long Range Desert Group (LRDG) or the fledgling Special Air Service and Special Boat Service (SBS). Keyes, now age 24 and determined to hang on to some of his commandos and do something to show he was worthy of his promotion to lieutenant colonel, obtained permission through his father to retain a small cadre of 110 volunteers while he looked around for something to do that would vindicate the existence of his unit.

In September, Keyes heard from an officer he had known in the Royal Scots Greys who was now with the Special Operations Executive (SOE) that Rommel had been seen by Arab agents at an Afrika Korps headquarters in Beda Littoria on the escarpment of the Jebel al-Akhdar, 18 miles inland from the Cyrenaica coast of Libya. Beda Littoria was 250 miles behind the German-Italian lines but, landed from the sea, a commando unit could strike quickly at the headquarters and destroy it, even take Rommel prisoner or kill him.

In early October, Keyes went to see Lt. Gen. Sir Alan Cunningham, commander of the Commonwealth Western Desert Forces, at his head-

quarters near Alexandria. Keyes's father was a personal friend of Cunningham's brother, Sir Andrew, commander of the Mediterranean Fleet, and of Winston Churchill, so the extremely busy general made time to see the unlikely looking commander of 11 Commando.

Keyes laid out his plan to decapitate the German-Italian forces by capturing or killing Rommel and destroying his headquarters. Cunningham was impressed; if the raid were successful it would demolish the Rommel cult, boost British morale, and cause confusion at the beginning of planned November offensive. He said he was in favor of the plan and would look into it. Keyes was elated. He told his 21-year-old adjutant Tommy Macpherson, "If we get this job, it is one people will remember us by."

Captain John "Jock" Haselden was one of a dozen SOE agents operating behind enemy lines in Libya. These agents were taken into Libya and brought out by contingents of the LRDG. Haselden, born and raised in Egypt of an English father and Egyptian mother and schooled in England, was fluent in a number of Arabic dialects and in French and Italian. In manner, he was the typical Englishman, but with his swarthy good looks and dark eyes inherited from his mother and his fluency in Arabic he could pass easily as an Arab.

Haselden was an outstanding operative, and many stories about him were passed around. One contemporary remembered "how he would wander into Italian-occupied towns disguised as an Italian officer; how, dressed as a Bedouin and with a radio under a blanket beside him, he would sit by the roadside counting vehicles in Italian convoys; how he once drove a flock of sheep over an Axis airstrip under the eyes of Italian guards to pace out its dimensions."

In October, Haselden and an Arab NCO from the Libyan Arab Force were in the hills and ridges of Cyrenaica's Jebel al-Akhdar. One of his agents in the town of Slant confirmed previous intelligence reports that Rommel had been seen using a headquarters in the town of Sidi Rafa, now named Beda Littoria by the Italians, and using a villa half a mile away as a home.

While Haselden was still in the Jebel al-Akhdar, Tommy Macpherson went in by submarine to reconnoiter a beach in Cyrenaica for a commando landing to take place in three weeks' time and to check a night route up the escarpment of the Jebel, roughly a mile from the beach. Two officers and an NCO from the SBS accompanied him.

A few nights later, the submarine surfaced three miles off Ras Hilal, one of the two sites marked for Keyes's landing. The team went in aboard two canoes and found a route up the escarpment of the Jebel, but when they returned to the rendezvous point, the submarine did not appear for the pickup. It did not appear the next night, or the next. A navigation error had put the submarine in the wrong bay.

Imperial War Museum

**Colonel Robert Laycock accompanied the Keyes raiding party in the operation against Rommel's headquarters.**

The team hid its canoes near the beach and began the long walk to Tobruk. Close to Derna, the British were captured by an Italian patrol. Another Italian patrol had found their canoes at Ras Hilal. Although they did not talk under interrogation, it was obvious they had been on a reconnaissance for some future operation. A landing by Keyes and his commandos at Ras Hilal was now compromised.

The British invasion of Libya, Operation Crusader, was scheduled to begin on November 18. General Cunningham planned to lure Rommel into a trap where his forces would be decimated by much superior numbers of British tanks. He had included in his battle plan two operations by commandos. One was to be by 60 commandos of David Stirling's parachute unit, the forerunner of the SAS, who would on the night of the 17th drop near five enemy airfields in Cyrenaica and destroy as many aircraft as possible with incendiary bombs.

The drop was made in high winds and an electrical storm in which many of the containers carrying equipment, explosives, detonators, and fuses were blown across the desert. Many of the commandos had sustained broken bones and lacerations on landing, others were carried away by their canopies and dispersed, and one man was never seen again. The operation was a failure.

The other was Keyes's amphibious operation, code-named Flipper and timed to coincide with Stirling's airdrop. This would destroy the German headquarters and communications at Beda Littoria and, if possible, take out Rommel.

While Keyes was delighted with his chance for glory, his commanding officer, Brigadier Bob Laycock, was not enthusiastic. He noted that if the raiding party did capture Rommel the Germans would be in hot pursuit and they stood almost no chance of being evacuated. The attack, even if successful, meant almost certain death for those who took part in it.

Laycock had already decided to accompany the operation as an observer and to hold the beach while Keyes led the attack. Under a cloud for his action on Crete six months earlier, Laycock hoped that being involved in the operation would help salvage his reputation.

Before leaving for the Jebel al-Akhdar, Tommy Macpherson noted, "Laycock was in our eyes a society cavalryman with a close and exclusive interest in his own career; he was a bullshitter of the highest order. For him the Rommel raid was a no-lose situation. If it was successful then by going along he would get credit, and if it wasn't, then by staying on the beach he would almost certainly be in a position to get out."

When the submarine returned to Alexandria without Tommy Macpherson and the SBS men, it was assumed they were captured or dead and the Ras Hilal landing site could not be used. Keyes decided that the landing would take place at his second choice, Khashm al-Kalb. When Laycock stated his reservations, Keyes asked him not to repeat them in front of General Cunningham as he might cancel the operation.

On November 7, Jock Haselden and three other SOE agents, all in Arab dress, and two Senussi Arabs of the Libyan Arab Force were taken by a patrol of the LRDG into the Jebel al-Akhdar. The vehicles were hidden about 20 miles from Mekili, and Haselden went on alone to Slonta, where he met with his agent. From there, with a guide provided by his agent, he set off for Khashm al-Kalb, the beach where Keyes and his commandos would make their landing.

In the late afternoon of November 10, two submarines, the *Torbay* and *Talisman,* left Alexandria harbor and headed for the Cyrenaica coast. Crammed into them were Keyes and Laycock and 57 commandos and eight SBS men. With their arms, equipment, explosives, and supplies and 28 rubber dinghies and four SBS canoes called folbots, there was little room to spare.

On November 12, Keyes called the commandos in *Torbay* together. Laycock was in the *Talisman.* The commandos already knew that the operation was intended to inflict maximum damage on an enemy headquarters, installations, and communications and that it involved four primary tasks to be carried out by four detachments.

Detachment 4, commanded by Jock Haselden, who would meet up with the landing party from

the submarines and then rejoin his SOE agents and Libyan Arab Force NCOs, would sabotage communications at the headquarters of the Italian Trieste Division near Slonta. Detachment 3, 12 commandos under Lieutenant David Sutherland, would attack the Italian headquarters at Cyrene and destroy the communications cable mast at the Cyrene crossroads. Detachment 2, 11 commandos commanded by a Lieutenant Chevalier, would sabotage the wireless station and the Italian Intelligence Center at Apollonia. Detachment 1, including two officers and 22 commandos led by Keyes, would hike the 18 miles over the escarpment to Beda Littoria and assault the Afrika Korps headquarters.

In the submarine, Keyes now revealed the unknown part of their mission: to capture or kill Rommel. In stunned silence, he added, "If he comes quietly, we'll bring him along. If he doesn't, we'll knock him off."

Keyes was too realistic to suppose a man like Rommel could be captured and marched 18 miles across country to embark on a submarine. He would have to be killed. His men quickly realized this, too, and a number of them cursed quietly. It was a suicide mission. Keyes himself did not expect to get back from the operation.

On November 13 and 14, the two submarines examined the landing beach at Khashm al-Kalb through their periscopes. After lunch on the 14th, the commandos cleaned and oiled their weapons—.303 Lee Enfield rifles, Bren guns, Thompson submachine guns, pistols, and daggers—and checked their equipment and ammunition. Then they rested while the sailors stacked tins of gelignite, rations, and water below the gun tower hatch.

At dusk the submarines surfaced in rough seas and rising winds, heralding late autumn storms that would bring the worst cloudbursts in 60 years. Then, in response to a signal light from Haselden on the beach, *Torbay* moved in closer while commandos and sailors climbed out on to the submarine's deck and began inflating the dinghies and loading them.

In winds and heaving seas, men and dinghies were swept off the submarine and had to be hauled back. What should have been an hour's routine takeoff became nearly a six-hour nightmare. Finally, half an hour past midnight, Keyes signaled *Talisman* from the beach that, except for two who did not make it, his group had landed. *Talisman* then struggled inshore, but by 4 AM only Laycock and a dozen commandos had managed to land.

With the commando landing under way, Haselden left to rejoin his group and sabotage communications near Slonta. This operation was carried out successfully, and the group was picked up by the LRDG.

Imperial War Museum

Imperial War Museum

**This pair of photos illustrates the rigorous training endured by those British soldiers selected for duty with elite commando units. Physical stamina, proficiency with a variety of weapons, and superb skills in hand-to-hand fighting were developed at training locations in Scotland.**

The commandos moved off the beach to hide in a wadi, a scrub-flanked gully, where, wet and shivering, they waited out the rest of the night and the next day. Because little more than half their number had made it ashore, Keyes and Laycock modified the orders for the operation. Instead of three detachments of commandos striking at three targets, now there would only be two detachments and two targets. Keyes would lead the main force against Rommel's headquarters while Lieutenant Roy Cooke led six commandos to sever telephone and telegraph lines at the crossroads south of Cyrene. Laycock would remain at the wadi with three commandos to guard supplies and secure the beach for evacuation.

That evening, as Keyes briefed the men and handed out gelignite and ammunition, the sky became overcast, it began to rain, and the temperature dropped. For a second time, Laycock advised Keyes to delegate the job of leading the raid to a junior officer, but Keyes refused. He appeared confident and cheerful as, at 8 PM in pouring rain, they set off into the black night.

Keyes's heavily laden assault force, following a local guide provided by Haselden, climbed the two steep terraces up to 1,200 feet. When they reached the top, the guide refused to go any farther and disappeared into the night.

They hid out during the day in a cave about five miles from Beda Littoria. It rained all day, and the commandos shivered in their sodden uniforms. When darkness fell, they were glad to get moving again even though the weather worsened. The rain was now coming down in torrents, winds blew bitterly cold, thunder rolled, and lightning streaked the sky. The goat tracks were liquid mud. Finally, in flashes of lightning they could see an Arab village and beyond it the outline of a large building, the German headquarters. They had reached Beda Littoria; it was nearly midnight.

The commandos halted while Keyes surveyed the scene in the lightning flashes. Beyond the Arab village and market, a low hedge and a barbed-wire fence surrounded the building. To its left was another building, the town hall, and behind that was the carabinieri barracks. Nearby were a grain tower and a number of small Italian villas.

They moved in closer until they were among some Arab dwellings 100 yards from the headquarters, a six-floor building with lights showing on some of the floors. Taking one of the commandos with him, Keyes went off on a reconnaissance of the building; the others waited in the pouring rain. When they returned, Keyes sent Lieutenant Cooke and his detachment to wreck the communications near Cyrene and gave his instructions for the assault on the headquarters.

Four commandos were to head to the transport pool to cover the assault party from outside the grounds; seven commandos spaced themselves around the perimeter of the building to kill anyone who came out of it through the windows. Keyes and three commandos would, covered by two more commandos, go in through the front door and carry out the assault. When it was over, explosive charges would be set around the building, power plant, and transport pool, and everyone would retreat to the Arab dwellings and from there fall back to the wadi at the beach.

At about this time, midnight on November 17, a coded message from London was received

in Cairo advising that General Rommel was on his way back to Libya from Rome, where he had spent the past three weeks. Even if Rommel had returned to Libya earlier than that, he would not have been at Beda Littoria. The headquarters Keyes had reconnoitered was actually that of a Colonel Schleusener, the chief quartermaster of Panzergruppe Afrika.

Rommel had apparently visited the site sometime in September, but his operational headquarters was close to Tobruk. The chief quartermaster, who was in the hospital at the time of Keyes's assault, and the chief medical officer at the headquarters were both of the same build as Rommel and wore the same type of uniform. Either could easily have been mistaken for Rommel by Haselden's spies. Rommel actually returned to his headquarters near Tobruk late on the 18th.

It is now known that the SOE had learned through Ultra on November 2 that Rommel had left for Rome, and by November 14, when the commandos were last in contact with Cairo, no word of his return had been received. This information was not passed to Keyes.

There are several conflicting accounts, both British and German, of what went on during the assault on the German building. What apparently happened was that Keyes and his three commandos, covered by the other two, went in through the front door. Inside, Keyes found himself faced by a German guard. Keyes pointed his pistol at him but hesitated to shoot him, probably not wanting to alert the rest of the occupants of the building. The German deflected Keyes pistol and shouted warnings as they struggled furiously while the commandos behind Keyes could not get around him to stab the German. As the noise being made by now was alerting the Germans, Keyes' second in command, Captain Robert Campbell, shot the German with his pistol.

Keyes then moved to the open door of an office and fired two shots from his pistol into the room. Beside him, one of the commandos fired a burst from a Thompson submachine gun into the room. Then Keyes fell back, hit by one bullet. A commando threw a grenade into the room, and they dragged Keyes outside. He was dead.

The German occupants were now awake and beginning to use weapons. A burst of fire at the back of the building sent Campbell, thinking it might be Rommel escaping, running around the outside until he was shot in the right leg, most likely by one of his own men.

At the back of the building, where several commandos were trying to break in, a German lieutenant jumped out of one of the windows

*Continued on page 76*

# Key to the Normandy

BY CLEVE C. BARKLEY

**The darkness held** a terror of its own—any false movement or unwarranted sound could easily betray the presence of the 16-man patrol that crept ever closer to the enemy lines. It was barely past 11 PM, and so far the patrol had slipped up to the German strongpoint undetected and now deployed along the base of one of a series of troublesome hedgerows that had been dubbed "Kraut Corner." The corner—a position that bristled with German machine guns and mortars—had been ferociously defended during two previous attempts to take it the preceding month and had been the source of grievous casualties. Now, in the late hours of July 6, 1944, the patrol, led by 1st Lt. Ralph Winstead of Company E, 38th Infantry, had the mission of not only harassing and disrupting the enemy but also garnering information regarding the mini-fortress's weapons disposition.

Just minutes earlier the patrol had bellied over its own hedgerow under cover of a heavy artillery and mortar concentration to mask its approach. The enemy lines were in such close proximity that they reached their destination within five minutes. From behind the shaggy barrier was heard the occasional flash and thump as enemy mortars fired. Elsewhere, bright tracers stitched the darkness as a machine gun released chilling, sporadic bursts.

On command, the patrol's demolitions men pitched their explosives over the hedgerow wall in an effort to stun the defenders. Just as one of the demolition men, Pfc. Louie, rose to drop his satchel charge, a German machine gunner opened up from a firing slit directly below him. Bullets flashed between Louie's straddled legs at 1,200 rounds per minute. He later admitted that his heart was lodged squarely in his throat as he released his charge. As one, the satchel charge and a Bangalore torpedo lit up the night, followed a moment later by a second satchel charge. Then the assault team sprang into action.

In a flash they were among the enemy, firing rapidly and creating havoc. The shocked Germans responded with unbridled fury. A point-blank firefight erupted as gunshots and explosions rent the night. Within a half hour, the patrol scrambled back to the American lines, assisting three wounded comrades in the process. Upon his return, Lieutenant Winstead reported excellent results: an estimated 11 enemy soldiers had been killed or wounded; two mortar emplacements had been identified as well as the locations of several machine-gun positions—information coveted by intelligence officers as plans were made for an upcoming all-out assault. The objective of the attack would be Hill 192, the commanding height that guarded the city of St. Lo, the prize of the campaign.

Celebrated as the Winstead Raid, the foray of July 6 was but one of many attempts to inflict damage on or gain knowledge of the German defenses on the dominant height. Because of an ever vigilant enemy, Winstead's patrol was the only one that achieved any semblance of success. All previous incursions had been termi-

A German Fallschirmjäger, or paratrooper, mans an MG42 machine gun somewhere in Normandy in July 1944. Crack troops of the German 3rd Parachute Division defended Hill 192 outside St. Lo.

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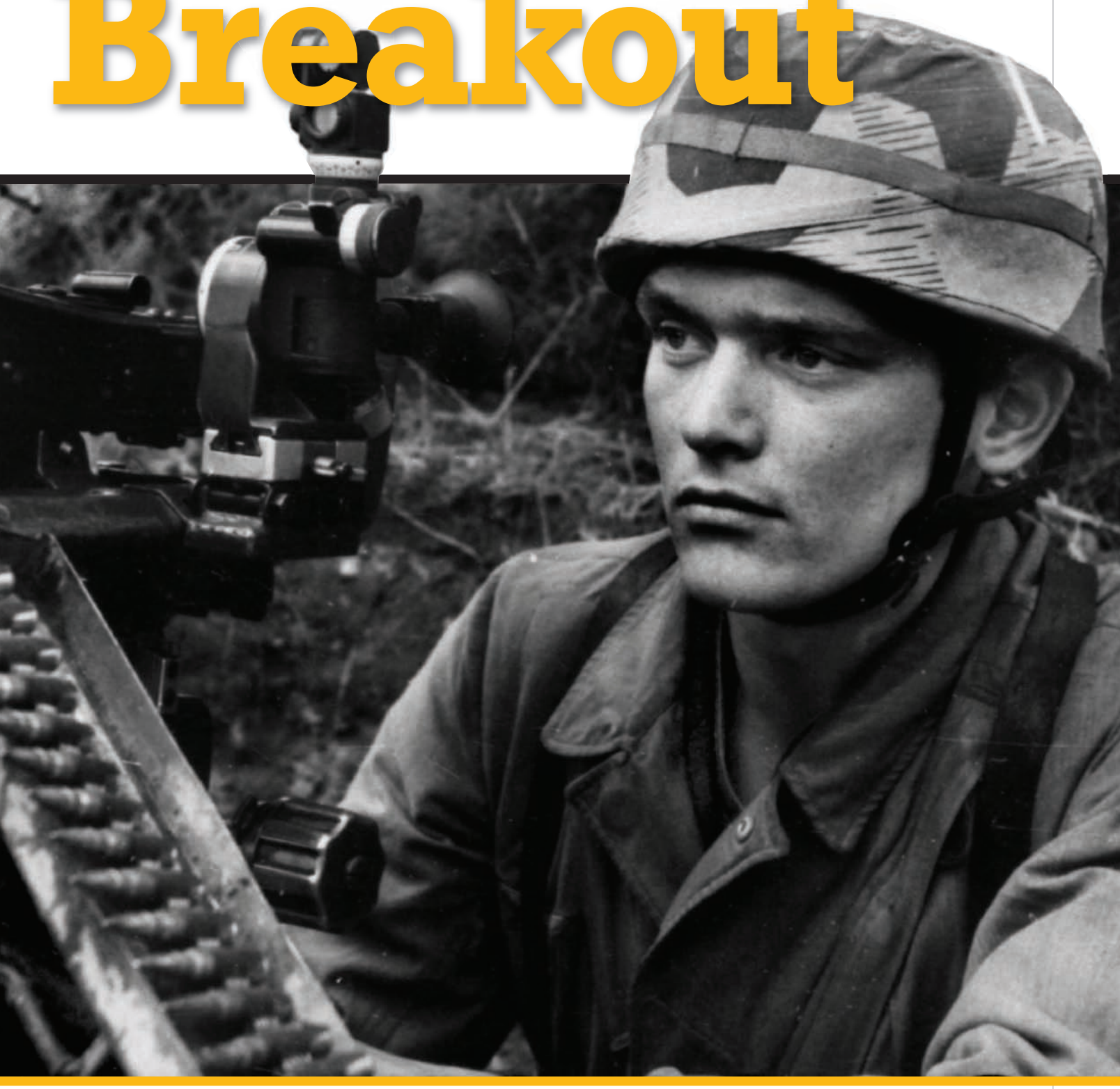
If the city of St. Lo was the lock that kept the First U.S. Army penned in its shallow Normandy beachhead, then Hill 192 was surely its key.

# Breakout



nated by a deluge of machine-gun and mortar fire. To the GIs of the 2nd Infantry Division entrenched in its shadow, Hill 192 seemed impregnable.

"Take St. Lo," General Patton had boasted, "and we will be in Paris within two weeks." It was early July 1944, and the Allies were in a virtual stalemate with hundreds of thousands of soldiers boxed in along their narrow Normandy beachhead. The grand push inland following the June 6 D-Day assault had quickly petered out and had lapsed into a grueling war of attrition among the dreaded hedgerows. Fought to a standstill, the First U.S. Army dug in, stymied by the Norman terrain.

St. Lo, lodged on an elbow of the Vire River, was a prime objective for First Army. Its military significance lay in the fact that St. Lo was a hub for a radiating network of highways and

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railroads leading to all parts of Normandy and the interior of France. The Germans could easily counter Allied threats in any sector, shifting their forces by means of these connecting roads. Conversely, by taking St. Lo the Americans would not only split and disrupt the German Seventh Army, but also gain control of the road net that was vital to the planned breakout and drive into the heartland of France.

Before the city could be taken it was necessary for the Americans to capture the commanding heights that surrounded it, and the prevailing height was Hill 192, located a few miles to the east. From its peak the Germans held the perfect surveillance post and had even built an observation tower from which they could not only monitor Allied movements in the immediate vicinity, but as far back as the English Channel. As a consequence, the Americans could not move without drawing fire. It was essential that Hill 192 be taken.

As an obstacle, Hill 192 was not very daunting, rising rather gradually to its flattish summit perhaps 55 yards or so above the surrounding countryside. The problem lay in the fact that like all of Normandy it was covered by the ubiquitous hedgerows. These solid earthen dikes ranged anywhere from four to nine feet in height and several feet thick, each completely covered by shaggy vegetation with trees sprouting from their crests, obstructing view into the next field. Each tiny Norman field was enclosed by these ancient walls and became a veritable fortress for the defending Germans. Although every field was not occupied, the defenses were mutually supporting and deployed in depth.

General Joseph Lawton Collins, a veteran of the Pacific Theater, remarked that the irregular patchwork terrain was as bad as anything he had seen on Guadalcanal. American tanks could not penetrate the thick walls; therefore, they could not accompany infantry attacks. As a result, the infantry was compelled to go over the top, just as their fathers had done from the trenches of World War I, in near suicidal frontal attacks.

The forces that held the hill were elements of Maj. Gen. Richard Schimpf's 3rd Fallschirmjäger (Parachute) Division, one of Germany's best. Trained for the assault and honed to the point of fanaticism, the paratroopers were well equipped and armed with mortars and automatic weapons. While roughly equal to the Americans in manpower at the company level, the parachutists boasted 20 machine guns and 43 submachine guns per company, while a U.S. rifle company was equipped with only two light machine guns and nine Browning Automatic Rifles (BAR). Furthermore, the Germans had preregistered virtually every yard of the forward slope for expert mortar and artillery concentrations. The GIs at the front swore that a German mortar team could easily drop a shell in one's back pocket. It is clearly evident how a German company could be stretched over a wide front but still maintain a cohesive defense against a numerically superior foe.

Entrenched at the northern foot of the hill were men of Maj. Gen. Walter M. Robertson's 2nd Infantry Division. The men who wore the Indianhead shoulder patch had been embroiled in the tough hedgerow fighting since landing on Omaha Beach on D-Day+1. They held no illusion about gaining the hill easily. In two previous attempts in June the division had sustained 1,253 casualties in three days. The battle would definitely be rough.

The staff at division headquarters produced an intricate plan of attack. In preparation, each assault squad trained with a Sherman tank from Lt. Col. Robert Skaggs's 741st Tank Battalion and a team of four engineers. The engineers would remove satchel charges from a special rack welded to the tank's rear deck and blow a gap in the impeding hedgerow large enough for a tank to pass through. Upon entering the field the tank would become the base of fire, employing its 75mm gun to blast suspicious corners of the next hedgerow while its machine guns sprayed the far embankment. Then a pair of scouts would dash forward under covering fire from the tank with their squad mates following soon after. Once the squad secured the hedgerow they would signal the tank forward and the entire procedure would be repeated, field after field, until the hill was taken. To facilitate infantry-armor communication an EE-8 field phone was attached to the rear of each tank, thus solving a problem encountered earlier in the campaign. In addition, each assault company would have the added support of a pair of tank dozers fitted with massive earth-moving blades.

The jump-off time was set at 6 AM on July 11, 1944, with the final objective set at the St. Lo-Berigny Highway beyond the reverse slope, some 1,500 yards away. To soften the enemy, eight battalions of artillery were to pound the hill for 20 minutes prior to the attack, then advance their fire by predetermined increments upon request of the infantry platoon leaders. Air strikes were also planned for nearly 200 Republic P-47 Thunderbolt fighter-bombers.

Three battalions, the 1st and 2nd of the 38th Infantry and the 1st of the 23rd Infantry, were to make the main assault supported by demonstrations from the balance of the 2nd Infantry Division deployed to their left.

Of tactical significance were three villages and two draws. On the right flank sat Cloville, about 500 yards beyond the line of departure with the tiny hamlet of Le Soulaire perhaps another 500 yards farther and on the reverse slope. Leading up to Cloville was a draw that angled from the right and was guarded by the brutish strongpoint known as Kraut Corner. After horrendous casualties in earlier assaults it was dubbed Dead Man's Gulch. All of these were in the zone of the 2nd Battalion, 38th Infantry.

On the far left flank and actually straddling the front line was St. Georges d'Elle, a town that had changed hands on numerous occasions, but for now was mostly within the American lines except for a few houses on its southern fringe and farther up the hill. Of additional concern was a deep draw that intersected the route of the 1st Battalion, 23rd Infantry near St. Georges d'Elle.

There were also two forests, each suspected of hiding enemy forces. The larger, designated Ford Woods, was diamond shaped and roughly 900 yards wide by 500 yards deep; it spilled over the southeastern slope from a point east of the peak. With the exception of the far eastern corner, the bulk of this forest lay in the zone of the 1st Battalion, 38th Infantry. The other, which lay in the path of the 2nd Battalion, 38th Infantry, was much smaller and situated near the peak, just west of Ford. It was called Dodge Woods.

The morning of July 11, 1944, was cool and misty. The assault troops had been pulled back several hundred yards at 4 AM as a safety precaution against any short rounds of the planned barrage. At precisely 5:40 AM, a deep-throated rumbling came from the rear as eight battalions of artillery hurled the first massive salvo upon the hill. Many more followed.

Since the extreme right flank of the 38th Infantry was echeloned farther back because of the contours of the hill, it was decided that 1st Lt. Robert Larson's Company E of Lt. Col. Jack Norris's 2nd Battalion would make the first move. Larson launched his attack at H-hour, 6 AM, while Captain Vincent Wallace's Company F would wait until H+20. The 20-minute delay would allow time for the left flank of Company E to come abreast of the right flank of Company F, thereby permitting the battalion to advance up the hill on a unified front. Company G would follow as reserve since it was well under strength due to a severe mauling during a June 16 attempt on the hill.

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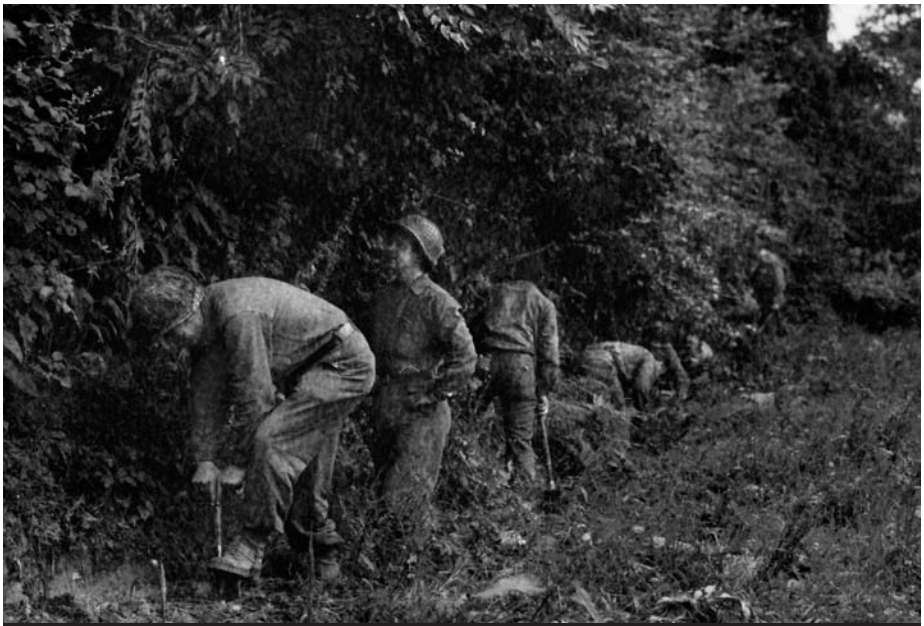
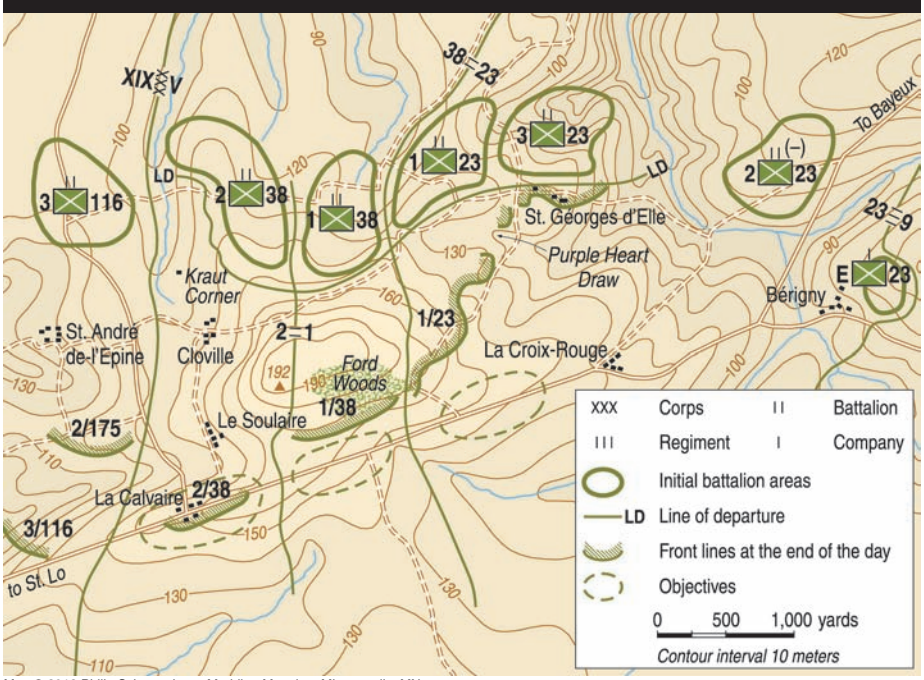


**ABOVE: The hedgerows of Normandy, imposing earthen structures that had grown over the centuries to separate fields, presented obstacles to the movement of troops and armored vehicles. In this photo, American soldiers dig temporary defensive positions along the base of a hedgerow in July 1944.**
**BELOW: The American attack on Hill 192 on July 11, 1944, involved assaults on stoutly defended German positions. The opposing soldiers fought at close quarters, sometimes separated by only a few feet.**
**OPPOSITE: The rugged contest for Hill 192 took its toll on the American soldiers of the 38th Infantry Regiment and the German defenders of the key position alike. Possession of the hill allowed the Americans to advance on the town of St. Lo.**




Map © 2012 Philip Schwartzberg, Meridian Mapping, Minneapolis, MN

The first disappointment came when the planned airstrikes were called off due to overcast skies. The next occurred within minutes of H-hour when Company E was greeted by the abrupt stuttering of automatic weapons even before they reached the line of departure. Unknown to them, a number of Germans had noticed the early morning withdrawal and had sneaked forward to occupy the abandoned American positions. As a result, not only did they escape the preliminary barrage but forced Company E to fight its way to its jump-off point. Fortunately, the infiltrating paratroopers were few and quickly routed and the attack resumed.

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**ABOVE: Taking cover along a hedgerow, an American soldier trains his tripod-mounted light machine gun in the direction of an unseen enemy. BELOW: A German Fallschirmjäger prepares ammunition for several shoulder-fired antitank Panzerschreck weapons shown to his left. An assortment of other weapons is also visible in this image. The German parachute troops were known to be well armed and typically had an advantage in firepower over their Allied adversaries. OPPOSITE: An M4 Sherman tank equipped with a bulldozer blade rolls down a dirt road in Normandy. Specially equipped Shermans were also modified with a series of blades resembling teeth that allowed them to push through the thick Norman hedegerows.**

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Initially, Company E managed to gain two or three hedgerows with relative ease by employing the new tank-infantry-engineer tactics. But then things worsened. As one, numerous machine guns cut loose all across the front, driving men to ground. Then the dreaded mortars began to fall with uncanny accuracy. Company E had run headlong into Kraut Corner, the formidable fortress that anchored the enemy's western defenses.

Mortar shells continued to crash with measured cadence, flinging shrapnel in every direction while individuals stumbled forward in the face of galling fire, only to drop again as bullets ripped the ranks. Immediately, Winstead's 2nd Platoon became pinned down. The 1st Platoon on the left, commanded by 2nd Lt. Charles Curley, faced the same devastating fire, but Curley took the initiative and led his men forward through heavy mortar fire.

One squad reached the enemy hedgerow only to be bombarded by a shower of concussion grenades. Enraged, Staff Sergeant Melvin Kuhlow scrambled to the hedge top and commenced firing rapidly at the defenders below only to fall back dead, riddled by enemy bullets. Desperate GIs flung their own grenades over the earthen dike only to have them come sailing back before they exploded. Noting this, Technical Sergeant Edward Perry of the light machine gun section held his grenades for an interminable three seconds before tossing them, but even that had negligible effect. The accompanying tanks added their heavy firepower to each squad's effort but with little result. The 3rd Platoon, originally in reserve, was quickly committed on the right but was also pinned and the attack ground to a halt. Company E was being shot to pieces a mere 300 yards from the line of departure.

Recognizing the problem, a sergeant from the 741st Tank Battalion suggested that Lieutenant Curley bring up one of the supporting tank dozers to knock down the hedgerow before them. In short order Sergeant John Brewer's tank dozer rumbled to the front. After receiving instruction from Curley, Brewer revved his engine and crashed effortlessly through the hedge wall, then pivoted left with his blade lowered to rout the defenders. Terrified, a number of enemy soldiers flung down their weapons and came out shouting, "Kamerad! Kamerad!" About the same time a few intrepid GIs penetrated the enemy stronghold, flinging grenades and firing wildly, but even then many paratroopers held their ground until killed or wounded. Three fanatics continued to fire their machine gun into the flanks and rear of passing GIs and did not stop until Brewer's blade buried them alive. Now, with Americans building up on Kraut Corner's eastern flank the position began to crumble and the enemy grudgingly pulled back. The fight for Kraut Corner had taken a precious hour and a half.

While Company E struggled for Kraut Corner, Captain Wallace's Company F was having considerably better fortune. Having crossed the line of departure at 6:20, the company conducted vigorous attacks on the enemy's weaker flank and made good progress with the aid of the tanks. By 7:30 they had made contact with the 1st Battalion, 38th Infantry to their left and continued a slow but steady advance, battling from one field to the next as heavy artillery paved the way.

The success of Company F was greatly aided when the weapons platoon leader, Lieutenant John Dumont, brought his machine guns up even with the leading squads to provide direct fire support. At one point Dumont's audacity almost cost him his life. In his zeal to bring his guns forward he had leaped through one hedgerow opening only to discover that he was facing nine enemy paratroopers. Caught off guard he simply commenced screaming at the top of his lungs. The startled Germans immediately threw up their hands in surrender. Dumont later declared, "I was too scared to do anything but yell."

By 8:20, Company F was already a couple of hundred yards ahead of Company E and receiving sniper fire as it approached Dodge Woods. Captain Wallace sent his 2nd Platoon to clear them out. As these men struggled for Dodge Woods, Lt. Col. Norris became acutely aware of the ever widening gap between his assault companies. Fearing a repeat of the June 16 fiasco, he urged Company E, which was just then closing on Cloville, to step it up so that he would not be forced to commit his reserve.

Cloville, a tiny hamlet of perhaps 10 houses, had been reduced to rubble by the pre-assault bombardment. Company E began its attack at about 8:45 but was again stopped cold by heavy machine-gun fire. Then a self-propelled 88mm assault gun appeared at a road junction west of town, rocked to a halt, and fired. Almost instantaneously the gun of Staff Sergeant Paul Ragan's tank swung around to meet the behemoth and the duel was on. A second Sherman joined the fray, and the German self-propelled gun was quickly eliminated when Ragan's gunner slammed home a killing shot. As this vehicle blazed, a German Mark IV tank joined the fight from the shattered village, but Sergeant Ragan's gunner again zeroed in and repeated his feat. With the armor threat neutralized, the infantry rose up to assault the village. By 11:30 the company command group was occupying the ruins.

While the leading companies ascended the hill, Lt. Col. Norris followed with his forward command group. They had hardly advanced 300 yards when they came under fire from an enemy 75mm self-propelled gun situated near the tiny hamlet of Le Parc to their left. Seven or eight rounds struck the group and inflicted numerous casualties. Among those killed were 1st Lt. Michael Wichrowski of the weapons company and his communications sergeant. Also hit was 1st Lt. Bertrand Warner, commander of Company G, the reserve unit. First Lieutenant Baxter "Lucky" Lawson was then given command of the company, but before he could receive his orders, he too was struck down and command of Company G passed to 2nd Lt. William Harman, its third commander within a matter of minutes. Company G would continue to receive varying amounts of artillery fire as it followed the assault.

About the time Cloville was taken, the cloud cover broke, offering the opportunity for one of the planned P-47 airstrikes, but by noon the clouds had again sealed the sky. Still, a number of aircraft made their sorties only to have one bomb fall near the battalion command post and another close to Company G. Fortunately, there were no casualties, but the airstrikes were hurriedly cancelled for the remainder of the day.

Having secured Cloville, Company E moved into the fields beyond where it finally caught up with Company F, which by then had cleared Dodge Woods. Now the 2nd Battalion advanced as one battle line. Although not yet committed to battle, Company G performed mop-up operations, often resulting in tense standoffs with bypassed enemies. On more than one occasion, GIs peered nervously into the depths of an earthen bunker and called for the occupants to surrender. Often as not the reply would be an extended burst of gunfire followed by a stream of guttural obscenities. The situation was generally resolved when a grenade or two was tossed inside. An exception, however, was Sergeant Wayne Parker who would dive unarmed into a cavernous dugout to drag out a snarling, wounded paratrooper—an incredible feat knowing the fanatical nature of the foe.

With the loss of Kraut Corner, Cloville, and Dodge Woods, the enemy was now forced to conduct a fighting withdrawal. American artillery continued to pummel each successive hedgerow as both companies moved steadily forward, sweating snipers and eliminating last-ditch pockets of resistance. German artillery responded in kind, spraying shrapnel on cringing, frightened soldiers. Battle sounds rose to such a deafening roar that one soldier later remarked that "so much stuff was flying around" that they could not judge the effectiveness of their own mortars.

By then the tank-infantry-engineer teams were again working flawlessly, and by noon the battalion was nearing the crest and preparing to drive the enemy down the reverse slope. At one point Lieutenant Winstead's platoon was pinned down by machine-gun fire from the right, but within an hour the dilemma was resolved when the frustrated lieutenant simply ordered his men to rise up and charge forward and away from the menacing gun. It worked, and the assault continued. By mid-afternoon the battalion was clearing snipers from the village of Le Soulaire situated midway down the reverse slope. At this time the tanks accompanying Company E ran into increasing antitank fire as well as rough, wooded terrain and were diverted into F Company's sector where more favorable ground was found.

With the western slope of Hill 192 in American hands enemy resistance broke, and by 5



PM leading elements had reached the battalion objective on the St. Lo-Berigny highway. Private Abraham Kalmikoff, a weapons platoon runner for Company F, sprinted across the road in search of a suitable route for the tanks and was promptly killed by a sniper. At about the same time Staff Sergeant Leonard Katzber and Pfc. Sam Woods, also of Company F, made their crossing. Soon after, men of 2nd Platoon, Company E infiltrated over the highway by ones and twos and by 6:20 PM both companies began to consolidate their gains in and around the junction town of La Calvaire while Company G peeled off to cover the right flank. As the men put their shovels to work, five enemy tanks approached from the direction of St. Lo

Both: National Archives

but were halted by an avalanche of artillery shells. Later, Company E repelled a brief counterattack that also included armor, but when the tanks of the 741st knocked out another self-propelled gun the threat dissipated. By 10 PM, all was relatively quiet.

The 2nd Battalion, 38th Infantry had reached its objective—the only assault battalion to do so that day. The battalion history recorded a loss of two officers and 20 enlisted men killed; eight officers and 150 enlisted men wounded. Enemy casualties were estimated at twice that number.

In the central sector, Lt. Col. Frank Mildren's 1st Battalion, 38th Infantry jumped off at 6:20 using the Cloville-St. Georges d'Elle road as the line of departure. First Lieutenant Harold Shepherd's Company C on the right had the mission of crossing the actual peak of Hill 192, while Captain Roy White's Company A was to take the greater part of Ford Woods, the large diamond-shaped forest that covered much of the reverse slope. As with the 2nd Battalion, the march to the line of departure was contested by infiltrating Germans. Within minutes of jump-off, Medic Lester Robbins of Company A assisted the first of many casualties to the rear. It took more than a half hour to reach the Cloville road.

No sooner had the battalion crossed the line of departure than it was met by withering fire augmented by preregistered mortars and artillery. Within 30 minutes all six tanks in the first wave were hit by antitank weapons. Two were left flaming on the forward slopes, one of which was destroyed when a mortar round fell squarely on the TNT-laden rack on its rear deck. The force of the ensuing explosion knocked the entire turret from the chassis and flung a length of tread high overhead until it wrapped around a tree in Company E's sector, hundreds of yards to the right.

Other tanks were hit as well, including one that had its main gun damaged and another that struck a mine, and before long the few surviving tanks pulled back. Captain Cecil Thomas of Company A, 741st Tank Battalion reported to his commander that not only had he lost a good number of tanks but that the surviving ones could not maneuver over the rough, muddy terrain. Colonel Skaggs gave Thomas permission to find a different route to the top, and the tanks lumbered off to the right, leaving the infantry on its own.

Stripped of tank support, each company was forced to conduct brutal frontal attacks against each hedgerow, the same old tactic that had proved so costly in the past. After taking several fields, the leading elements of Company A were brought to a standstill by intense fire emanating from a three-sided defense centered on a group of four fields occupied by at least two platoons of paratroopers. Time and again soldiers closed in only to be driven back by automatic weapon and rifle fire supplemented by rockets. Mortars pounded the fortress as another assault surged forward, covered by automatic weapons. The staccato hammering of machine guns was answered by the rapid buzzsaw rip of German weapons, and again the attack faltered. Eventually, all three platoons were committed, but without tank support the situation seemed hopeless. By 9 AM, the company had lost so many men that it was deemed combat ineffective.

While Company A battled for this stubborn position, Company C to the right faced lighter opposition and had pushed its attack farther up the hill. By 11 AM, the company had distanced itself from Company A by some 150 yards, presenting the Germans an enticing open flank. Almost immediately, heavy machine-gun fire ripped from the four-field strongpoint with predictable results. Again, a vexing situation developed. Desperate to plug the gap, Mildren committed his reserve, but through miscommunication Company B crossed into the zone of Company A, causing confusion. As fortune would have it, the Germans holding the four-field strongpoint believed they were being outflanked and pulled out. Upon occupying the fortress, the GIs found the position littered with many corpses and abandoned weapons and equipment.

By then, casualties in the assault companies had become so heavy that the medics of the 3rd Battalion, 38th Infantry were sent to assist in the removal of the wounded. One of these, John Gill, recalled how his four-man team had to make heart-wrenching decisions as to who to evacuate and who to leave to die. At one point Gill's litter team had carried one bloody soldier halfway down the hill when he died, so they unceremoniously dumped the body and

**ABOVE: The fighting around the town of St. Lo in July 1944 was remembered for its savagery by those who were there. Aid stations were instrumental in providing care to wounded soldiers near the battlefield. OPPOSITE: A pensive German Fallschirmjäger outside St. Lo holds a pair of field glasses while momentarily looking away from the direction of an anticipated attack.**

returned for other wounded.

With Company A shot up, Company B assumed the lead on the 1st Battalion's left. By 1:30 they were in Ford Woods, now smoldering and denuded of much of its foliage by the intense artillery bombardment. Still, strong opposition was feared, so a skirmish line was formed to sweep through the forest's western half.

Meanwhile, Captain Thomas of the attached tank company had found an alternative route for his remaining Shermans and joined Company C between Dodge and Ford Woods on the right. Now the engineers resumed blowing gaps in the hedgerows and again tanks surged forward with all guns blazing. With the resumption of the tank-infantry-engineer tactics, the right wing of Company C reached the hilltop against moderate resistance. At the same time, the company's left wing cautiously entered the extreme western portion of Ford Woods.

By mid-afternoon the entire battalion was moving through the forest of the reverse slope with the depleted Company A now trailing. Fortunately, because of the severe pounding by artillery only a few snipers were encountered and systematically eliminated, but when the leading elements emerged from the shattered tree line resistance again stiffened and things began to bog down. General Robertson cautioned Mildren that daylight was running short and ordered him to step it up, but by 7 PM the battalion had barely advanced beyond the tree line. At that time the order was given to "button up." Although Mildren's men had secured the coveted peak of Hill 192, the rifle companies remained 200 yards short of their objective of the St. Lo-Berigny highway.

The far left wing was assigned to Lt. Col. John M. Hightower's 1st Battalion, 23rd Infantry, tasked with traversing the easternmost slope of the hill. As with the 38th Infantry, the line of departure would be the Cloville-St. Georges d'Elle road. The chief obstacle here was a deep draw situated anywhere from 200 to 400 yards from the line of departure, running east to west for several hundred yards with banks so steep that it would be a barrier for the tanks of Company C, 741st Tank Battalion. Well covered by preregistered mortar and artillery concentrations as well as cross-firing machine guns, it would soon be referred to as "Purple Heart Draw."

At 6 AM, the infantry moved forward following a rolling barrage while the tank-engineer teams blasted through the first tier of hedgerows. After pushing the enemy from two or three fields, Captain Porteous's Company A on the left came upon the draw. As the men of 1st Platoon scrambled into its depths they were sickened by the sight of a number of bloated corpses of comrades who had fallen in previous actions. The four accompanying tanks, under the command of Staff Sergeant Malcolm Reynolds, wisely avoided the steep bank, opting instead to spread out along its northern rim to provide covering fire.

The moment the infantrymen reached the bottom of the draw, the enemy unleashed hell on earth. Artillery and mortar shells plunged with a vengeance while several machine guns cut loose with murderous fire from a pair of houses overlooking the draw to their left, joined by another gun concealed at a nearby bridge that spanned the gorge. Other machine guns swept the vale from the opposite bank, raking the hapless soldiers with perfect crossfire. Officers rallied men who put up a great deal of return fire but were beaten down. The 1st Platoon was trapped.

Sensing disaster, Captain Porteous sent his 2nd Platoon hooking around through several fields to the right in an effort to flank the draw from the south. A pair of tanks accompanied the maneuver with the additional mission of blasting the menacing houses near the bridge, adding their firepower to that of the four tanks that remained above the draw's northern bank. Meanwhile, the beleaguered souls in the gully's sump continued to sustain casualties at an alarming rate.

The flanking attack inched forward but eventually stalled amid thumping mortars and the searing rip of machine guns. Frustrated, Porteous threw in his reserve platoon, the 3rd, on a route that traced that of the 2nd to press the attack. With this added pressure the two accompanying tanks pushed forward while 88mm shells screamed all around them. Eventually, each ground to a halt within 30 yards of the troublesome houses and fired point blank with their 75s, crumbling the walls. That seemed to do the trick. At about the same time the enemy noted the advance of 3rd Platoon as well as the fact that Company C farther to the west was gaining ground, threatening their left flank. Realizing that their defense was compromised, the Germans reluctantly withdrew a field or two under cover of a delaying force.

By the time the draw was cleared, Company A had suffered severe casualties, yet had barely advanced from 300 to 400 yards. All but 13 men of the 1st Platoon were killed or wounded, including the platoon leader and platoon sergeant. The objective was still well over 1,000 yards away, and it promised to be a very long and difficult day.

While all this occurred, Company L, 23rd Infantry conducted a hard-fought limited objective attack to gain one to two hedgerows beyond St. Georges d'Elle. Due to the patchwork terrain, the 2nd Platoon advanced one hedgerow farther than the right platoon and was exposed to flanking machine-gun fire. Ten men of the two assault squads were mowed down by a single machine

*Continued on page 78*

Author's Photos

Navajo code talkers Peter MacDonald, Sr. (top), Bill Toledo (middle), and Frank Chee Willetto (bottom) gathered in New York for a Veteran's Day parade and recalled their experiences during World War II.

OPPOSITE: Photographed in November 1943, this Navajo code talker speaks into his radio while holding an M-1 carbine in his left hand. The Navajo proved an invaluable asset in communicating on the battlefield with a virtually unbreakable code system.

# Talking Code with the NAVAJO

## Survivors of the celebrated Native American unit remember their service in World War II.

BY PETER SUCIU

**There is an old saying** that the pen is mightier is the sword, but try telling that to anyone under fire and they will likely disagree. They might also say that a war of words does not go far in a firefight but then explain how communicating with comrades while under fire can change the situation quickly. Ever since man went to war, there have been codes, ciphers, and other ways to protect valuable information from falling into enemy hands. In World War II, while the Germans relied on the advanced technology (at least for the day) of the Enigma Machine, code breakers were able to unscramble the information and oftentimes had the dispatches almost as quickly as they went out.

But this never happened with the United States Marine Corps, using the Navajo code talkers in the Pacific Theater. Movies and TV shows have shed some light on their activities, but with less than 50 of these former soldiers still with us, their story has not been told completely.

Three of the surviving members, Peter MacDonald, Sr., former chairman of the Navajo Nation and code talker with the 6th Marine Division; Frank Chee Willetto, former code talker with the 2nd Marine Division; and Bill Toledo, former code talker with the 3rd Marine Division, ventured to New York City some months ago to march in the annual Veterans Day Parade. Following the event, they sat down for a candid interview about what it meant to be a real warrior with words and to describe how they hope to preserve their legacy with a museum devoted to the men and the code.

**Peter Suciu: Growing up in the southwestern United States, did you ever expect to see as much of the world as you did serving as code talkers with the United States Marine Corps?**

MacDonald: Not me. You can ask Frank here.

Chee Willetto: Well, young people, or at least most young, think about what they'll actually be doing. For my part, I was just going to school, and many of my friends were leaving to go into the service. I couldn't leave because I was under age and I had to finish the eighth grade at the time. That was why I feel that it was mostly my buddies leaving, which was why I also wanted to join. But I found out that I couldn't do it because I was completely under age, and they wouldn't accept me anyway. However, I finished the eighth grade and had gotten a job in 1943, and six months later I was drafted, but only because I had lied about my age so I could be drafted.

Toledo: For me, yes. When I was recruited I was told I'd get to see the country and the world, which I did.

**You saw these places obviously in very hostile situations, so did you ever get to return and see any of the places where you had fought after the war?**

Toledo: No, not really. But I did get to visit Japan in 1993 as a tourist. I went over there with my daughter. She had been invited by another teacher to make a presentation and spent three weeks there. We were very well received, but I did meet one Japanese veteran who served in World War II, and I asked him what he thought of the Navajo code talkers and how the Navajo language was used. He gave me a really hard look and just got up and left. I can understand why.

MacDonald: Well, those of us who were in World War II—I'm talking about Navajo—grew up in a world that was nothing but Navajo. Until I was nine years old I didn't know anyone but Navajo lived in this universe. This was until I began to see white men with whom we traded from time to time. And from time to time you would see

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other tribal members. But other than that, my thought was that this world was made up of nothing but Navajos. And so we did our thing: herded sheep, took care of the animals, raised cattle, and farmed. We practiced our ceremonies and our religion and tradition and things like that.

But I didn't think of the Navajo as Indians. We watched cowboy and Indian films, and I didn't think of Navajo as Indians. At least I thought of the Indians as some other people with feathers, because the Navajo didn't wear feathers. And we didn't dress in buckskin, like you see the typical movie Indian. So my thought was that I was a Navajo and those were Indians, and they are different. They live different and they talk different, and of course they fight with the cowboys and cavalry. We all wanted to be the Lone Ranger, and no one wanted to be Tonto.

Courtesy of the Navajo Code Talker Foundation

**Navajo code talkers were students first, learning the Navajo code and other communications skills in the classroom and completing basic training prior to assignment with Marine units across the Pacific.**

**When did that begin to change for you, and what were your experiences with the larger world actually like?**

MacDonald: It was when we were exposed to education. I was put in a day school, and from morning to about three o'clock I was in school. My parents and I thought it was to learn and write the English language, period. Then when I was in ninth grade I was put in boarding school. It was a government-run boarding school with the objective to "civilize" us, to get us out of our traditions and culture and things that we were accustomed to. So, one of the things they were using to so-called "civilize" us was for us not to speak our language. They prohibited us from speaking Navajo, and every time we spoke Navajo we were punished terribly. So no one wanted to accidentally slip in a word or two. And that went on. It was kind of a like being in the military. We marched everywhere.

But when the war came on, after the Japanese bombed Pearl Harbor, that's when things changed. One of the boys at school had a radio, and we heard about the war, and finally Pearl Harbor. But never in my mind up until that point did I think I would be in the military. Although, like any kids, we played soldier and other games. I was 15 years of age when I joined the United States Marines in 1944.

Obviously, the first group of Navajo went in for the purpose of developing a special code, a military code, back in 1942, shortly after Pearl Harbor. Then, of course, when it was realized that the Navajo code was very successful, they started recruiting more and more Navajo to join the Marines. When I joined in 1944 I began to see there was much more beyond the Four Sacred Mountains where we lived.

It was something seeing the outside world. There were cities with skyscrapers that looked like the canyons in our world, and of course all sorts of different people, black people, Chinese people, and white people. Most strange for me at the time was that the languages were all so different. And, of course, the Marine Corps language was also different! It was a military language and we had to learn all of that.

**Did you expect to be a code talker from the beginning?**

Chee Willetto: I didn't volunteer. I was drafted, but I lied about my age so that I could be drafted. When I was drafted, a sergeant came up to me and asked if I was a Navajo; I said yes and he told me to come with him. I was sent to a Navy doctor for the physical, but it wasn't really much of a physical, because he only asked me four or five questions and he said, "You passed the physical." That's how I got involved in San Diego and got to be in the Marine Corps.

**So for you everything really happened quite quickly?**

Chee Willetto: Yes. After that I went to basic training for eight weeks, and after that went to Camp Pendelton, and I found myself with more Navajos in the barracks. And then I found out that we'd be carrying communications equipment. At that time I did not know we were going to use our own language. I later heard that the first 29 Navajo who volunteered had made the code, and I had to be taught the code.

**What was the training like to learn the code?**

Chee Willetto: The first thing was that there was no paperwork; everything had to be memorized. We couldn't go back to our barracks with anything. Nothing. So after another eight weeks, I found myself on a ship to go overseas to the South Pacific. We were shipped out to Hawaii, where we spent more time, and then we went north to the island of Saipan.

MacDonald: We were segregated to learn the code. The Navajo language itself is difficult to learn but was coded [by the Marines], so that not even a Navajo who had not gone through code school could tell what we were talking about. That was why a place was set aside at Camp Pendleton, which was under guard all the time, like the Manhattan Project. Those of us who went in and learned the code couldn't take notes out of the classroom. That was why the code was never broken by anyone, particularly the Japanese, who could never decipher it. But more than that, it was very efficient.

You could write something down in English, but when the code talker starts reading it in Navajo he is coding it. On the other end, the Navajo hears Navajo words coming in and he decodes them as he is hearing them. The speed and efficiency of this is fantastic, as opposed to other methods of coding and encrypting a message. Sending a messaging and deciphering it with a machine can take anywhere from half an hour to 40 minutes, maybe even an hour or more. But our system using the Navajo code was very fast. It might take us only 30 seconds using the regular system.

**Unlike some of the other codes that were used during World War II, which relied on technology such as the German Enigma machine—and its code that was broken once the machines were captured—the Navajo code was never compromised. What do you make of that?**

MacDonald: I don't know anything about the German machine. The Navajo code was never broken until 1968 when it was declassified.

The thing to understand is that it was a special language and a code. We talk Navajo, but that's not the military code. There was a special code using the Navajo language and that remained a secret up until 1968. Only then did we become aware of how valuable our language and our work had been to the greater war effort.

**Were you surprised to be reminded of your efforts?**

MacDonald: By that time, many of us had forgotten about the whole thing. Then the code was declassified and headlines went across the country and announced how it was used and how code talkers used their language. We had to remember what we did.

**The military already had other codes in use. What made the Navajo code so special?**

MacDonald: Why was a special code even

needed? No one really even talks about that part of it. The Japanese were intercepting and decoding all of the military codes that were in use at the time, particularly in the Pacific. They knew exactly where we were going to be at a certain time and what sort of equipment we were going to be delivering and using. And they'd be waiting for us at the other end. It was difficult to spring any sort of offensive maneuver without the enemy knowing about it.

So, they needed a code that the Japanese could not understand, and more importantly was unbreakable. So they searched and came upon the Navajo language. Why did the Marines choose the Navajo language as opposed to the Cherokee language or some other language? The Navajo language was chosen by the United States Marine Corps and the United States Navy because they were having all the problems with the Japanese in the Pacific. Once it was decided, the first 29 Navajos that went in just a few weeks after Pearl Harbor developed a code that not even another Navajo could understand. That became a successful code, and more and more Navajo were recruited as the war went on. At the height of the war there were over 400 of us who learned the code and used it.

**So it was used throughout the Pacific Theater in World War II?**

MacDonald: It was used all the way from Guadalcanal to Tarawa to Palau, Bougainville, Saipan, Tinian, Guam, Iwo Jima, and Okinawa. In all those major invasions the Navajo code was progressively used by the military, from ship to shore, shore to ship, and ship to ship. In some cases it was even used from behind enemy lines. It was used to relay back to headquarters, and to direct gunfire, report battlefield conditions and the other situations out there that were critical.

Of course, we didn't know how effective it was until much later. It is a story that deserves to be told.

**Many people only got this story from the movies and TV, notably John Woo's film *Windtalkers*. Have any of those gotten your story even close to the actual truth?**

Chee Willetto: No. Many books were written, but they don't really tell the whole story.

MacDonald: The movies, such as *Windtalkers,* only tell maybe one-tenth of the story of what Navajo code talkers are about. There are also many documentaries out there, and they are fine, but they only tell a small part of the story.

**What are you doing to get the story of the Navajo code talkers finally told in its entirety?**

MacDonald: What we are working on right now is a national Navajo code talker museum.

Both: National Archives


**ABOVE: The first 29 Navajo code talkers are sworn in at Fort Wingate, New Mexico. BELOW: A number of Navajo code talkers and support personnel landed with the first wave of Marines on Saipan in the Marianas in June 1944. Shown from left to right are Corporal Oscar B. Iithma of Gallup, New Mexico; Pfc. Jack Nez of Fort Defiance, Arizona; and Pfc. Carl C. Gorman of Chinle, Arizona.**

We want to tell everything. A lot of the way the code was developed was cultural, and it is part of our traditions, and that isn't being told. Today we live in a different world than what we lived in back in the 1920s and 1930s. So the times have changed. If you tried to develop a Navajo code today you might not be as successful as the code talkers were back in the 1940s. That needs to be told.

People need to be told why it was developed, how it was developed, how it was used, and, most importantly, how effective it was in terms of saving lives and helping to shorten the war in the Pacific. We want this museum to help tell that story. We also want the museum to be a learning center for our young people today.

**So again, you never thought about the notion of code talkers until later?**

National Archives

**While operating on Bougainville in December 1943, Navajo code talkers Corporal Henry Bake, Jr., (left) and Pfc. George H. Kirk establish communications by radio from a clearing in the jungle they have hacked out with machetes.**

MacDonald: During our service they referred to us as radiomen, and we didn't know we were "code talkers." We carried radios like everyone else, and we were in the communication system for the Marines. Some of the men were using English to transmit. The difference was we were using our language and a code to transmit messages.

**During your time in the service, you were also more than just code talkers, of course. You were first, last, and always riflemen, as is every Marine.**

Chee Willetto: I wasn't treated as a communication man, but I was treated as an infantryman. Being educated as a communication man I thought, "Why should I be carrying that light machine gun?" Of course, for the first eight weeks we had to learn how to use the equipment just like any other Marine, and then after that we went to the code school. As code talkers we were being used everywhere, so we were Marines, and we were also code talkers. We did what we were needed to do.

**Where did you use the code?**

Chee Willetto: My first encounter using the code was when I arrived in Saipan. I later took part in the invasion of Okinawa, and while we were doing that my legs and ankles got swollen and I couldn't even move them.

My sergeant found out what happened, and finally I was on the ship and floating around for two weeks. They were doing a good job over there, so I returned to Saipan where I was sent to the hospital, and I was still there when a whole lot of shouting went out until a guy came in and said, "The war is over."

**While the movies and books may have gotten some of the facts wrong, do you think this has at least given attention to what you did during the war?**

MacDonald: Absolutely. It has brought up more questions. More requests for appearances to hear our story have come about. Now, unfortunately, there are less than 50 of us left. And we're older now. I'm 83 and probably the youngest of the group—there are guys who are 95 years old. So there are less than 50 of us, and we want to tell our story.

And this brings us to back to why we want the museum to house our story. This is a Navajo legacy; it is an American treasure and an American legacy. Our children and your children need to know this story and how this

## NATIVE AMERICAN CODED LANGUAGES DID NOT ORIGINATE IN WORLD WAR II.

THANKS TO the movies, the story of the Navajo code talkers is well known, but truly misunderstood. The surviving code talkers are telling their story, but one part of the tale that is not fully told is that the Navajo were not even the first Native Americans to be selected as "code talkers" for their unique language abilities. In fact, the first use of "code talkers" occurred a generation earlier during World War I, when the American Expeditionary Force used Choctaw speakers with some success in the late war campaigns against the Germans.

A generation later, the United States Marine Corps again considered using less commonly spoken languages along with a code as a way of relying messages. One suggestion was actually not even native to America at all; it was based on the language from the Basque region of Spain. The down side to this was that there were many Basque speakers living in China and the Philippines, and even a colony of Basque Jesuits in Japan. This fact, along with the shortage of those who could actually speak the language in the United States, resulted in the Marines focusing their linguistic programs on other languages.

The Nazis had known about the use of Choctaw speakers in World War I, but the diversity and sheer number of Native American languages made it difficult for the Germans to successfully combat this threat. Regardless, the use of Native American code talkers in Europe during World War II was still limited as a result, with the U.S. Army using just slightly more than a dozen Comanche code talkers with the 4th Infantry Division.

The U.S. Marine Corps chose the Navajo language on the recommendation of Philip Johnston, the son of a missionary, who was

code was developed, why it was needed, and how it was used. We also want to honor and pay tribute to all veterans who served with us, because it was not just the Navajo language or the Navajo code talkers, there were many others who served with us in every battle across the Pacific. There were Navy, Army, Coast Guard and, of course, Marines.

So, this is to honor them and those who never came back—who died on the beaches and battlefields out there. We are asking for help, and we are asking for volunteers, just as we volunteered to help back in 1942 to preserve freedom and liberty. And that's why we're asking for help with this project.

**Where will the museum be located?**

MacDonald: It is going to be within the Four Corners area. The Navajo nation encompasses the four states of Utah, Arizona, Colorado, and New Mexico. Our sacred mountain is within those four states, and the museum is going to be right on the eastern edge of the reservation in New Mexico.

Chee Willetto: The Navajo code talker museum will be built on 240 acres of land that the Chevron mining company gave to the code talkers, not just to the Navajo nation. It will include a veterans center, where veterans can come in and meet with other people. Veterans that served together can finally meet up again.

We think this is something that can certainly happen. We helped the United States when it was threatened, and we think that this is a story that needs to be remembered. The museum will be a place where the code talkers can share their stories. It is easy to think that every code talker who served in the military had the same story, but they all did something different. You can't just walk in and talk to one code talker and think that tells the whole story.

**We hope all of the 50 remaining code talkers are there to see the opening.**

MacDonald: We pray that all 50 of us will be there as well, yes! And we hope to honor those who went on before us. They did something important too!

**You came to New York for the November 11 Veterans Day Parade. How was that experience?**

MacDonald: Very good. It was very exciting, exhilarating, and simply stupendous. The crowds were just unbelievably thankful of the all the veterans who served and who are now serving. I think that is a real good picture of what America is all about. We enjoyed it. At least I did.

Toledo: Someone passed the word, and we were very well received, and I really enjoyed it. I saw people carrying signs that said, "Thank You." That was very nice.

Chee Willetto: There was so much response from the streets that I had never seen before.

MacDonald: Coming to New York gave us a good feeling about why we served, and the sad part of the whole thing, at least from my point of view, is that so many with whom we served were not there to enjoy this honor and tribute. I only wish they were here. They passed on, and too many of them are still on those faraway islands in the Pacific. □

*Author Peter Suciu is an expert on military headgear and a resident of New York City.*

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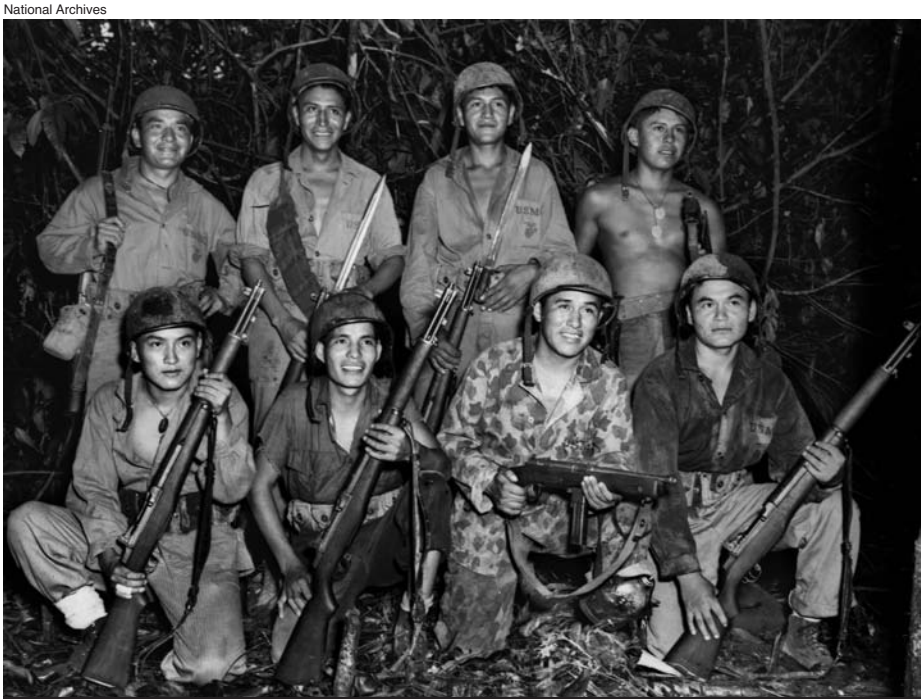


**Serving with a U.S. Marine signal unit on Bougainville in December 1943, these Navajo code talkers were Marines in every sense of the word.**

Library of Congress

**Photographed with the U.S. flag, these Choctaw served as code talkers with the American Expeditionary Force in Western Europe during World War I.**

one of the few nonnative speakers of the language. The Navajo language was ideal as it was unwritten, extremely isolated, and, most importantly, had a very complex grammar. The first 29 Navajo recruits to the Marine Corps were charged with creating the Navajo code, which they did in 1942 at Camp Pendleton, California. But it was not merely translating English to the language. Instead, a unique code was developed, making it even harder for the enemy to understand any communication, even if they managed to translate it.

After World War II, the Marines continued to rely on the Navajo code, which was used during the Korean War and in the early part of the Vietnam War. It was finally released to the public in 1968, when it was officially declassified.

Hopefully, through the words of the surviving code talkers, the truth will be revealed. More importantly, the Navajo Code Talkers Foundation has a vision to establish a museum that would continue to tell the story even after these men are gone. This is the Navajo Code Talkers Museum & Veterans' Center Project (www.navajocodetalkers.org). Scheduled for completion in 2012, the museum will help tell the story of these men, who were little more than teenage boys when they enlisted during World War II. But it was these boys, serving alongside many others, who helped win the war in the Pacific. □

# Hot CHOW

## GIs at home and abroad enjoyed hot meals from time to time.

BY KEVIN M. HYMEL

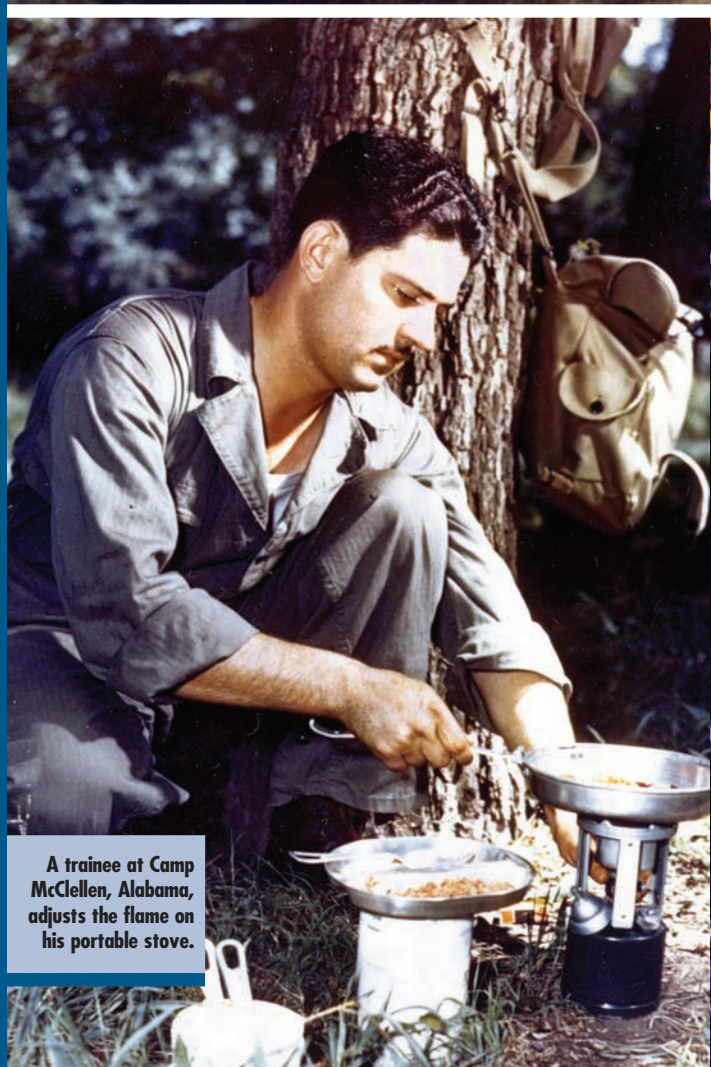
**From the training** grounds to the battlefront, soldiers and Marines usually dined on C and K rations. But the soldier's diet was more diverse than candy bars, crackers, and canned meats. Hot food and coffee sometimes made it to the battlefront and filled soldiers' bellies. It was a great morale boost.

Whether served from a mobile kitchen or an open fire, soldiers lined up for a chance at hot chow. Cooks filled mess kits and the men returned to their foxholes to dine. Experienced officers, concerned that crowds drew fire, allowed only five or six men to line up at a time. Some enterprising cooks tied tarps over their fires to dissipate the rising smoke, preventing the enemy from spotting them. One cook explained why he fried all his meals: "Trying to bake on those diesel stoves was impossible, you had no control."

A mess sergeant gives food to two small Italian girls.

Spam was the cornerstone of most menus. Made of shoulder of pork and ham, the canned meat could be fashioned in many ways. Cooks cut Spam into cubes or strips and mixed it into different foods for varying tastes and textures. Other ingredients added to Spam included flour, pancake batter, egg batter, mashed potatoes, macaroni, potato salad, fried eggs, and cornflakes. Mmmm.

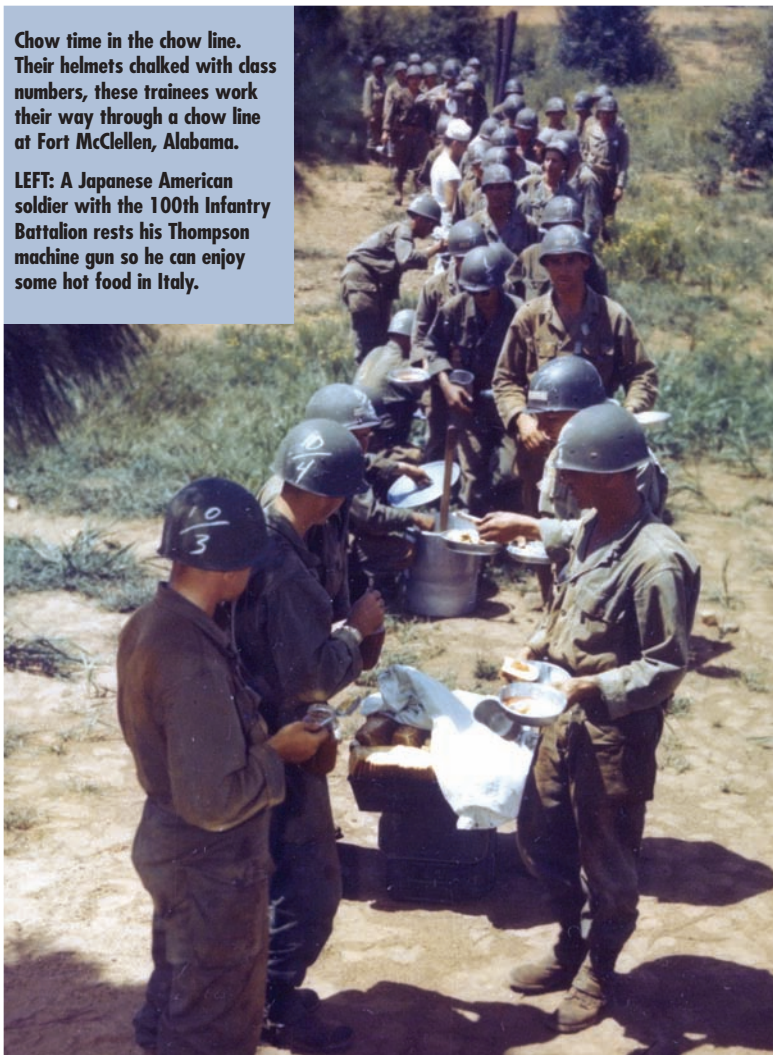
While GIs loved to gripe about the taste of their meals, it took the Germans to demonstrate their quality. During the Battle of the Bulge, German soldiers stormed American bivouacs and wolfed down any food they found. The result: the Germans passed out. Their bodies were unused to such rich food. Others enjoyed the benefits of American hot chow: all around the globe, Americans in uniform shared their bounty with the locals, who understood their liberation mostly through American generosity.



A trainee at Camp McClellen, Alabama, adjusts the flame on his portable stove.

Soldiers make bread at an outdoor mobile bakery.

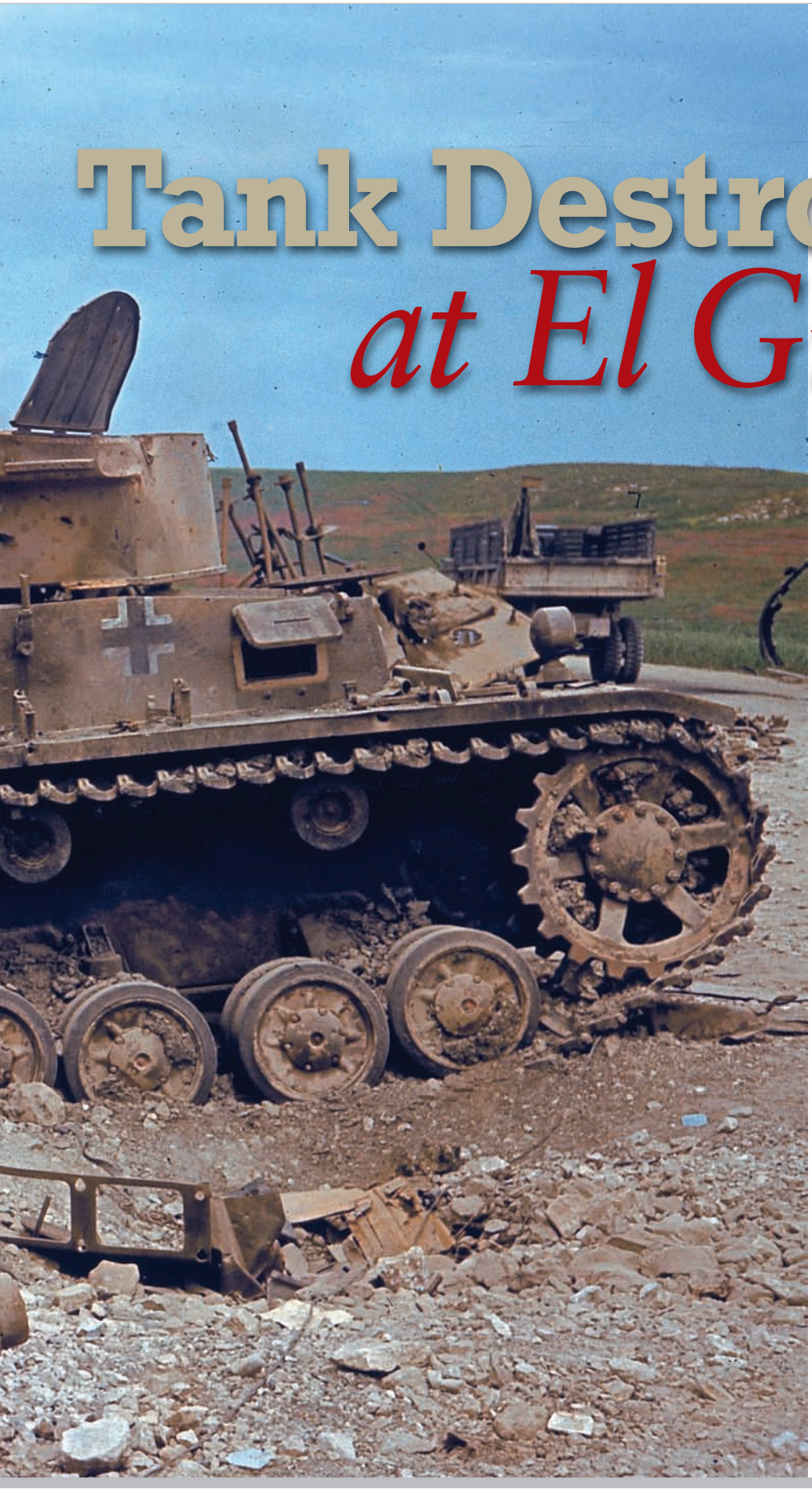
RIGHT: A soldier with the 1st Special Service Force cooks his lunch in an improvised dugout at Fort William Henry Harrison in Montana.



Chow time in the chow line. Their helmets chalked with class numbers, these trainees work their way through a chow line at Fort McClellen, Alabama.

LEFT: A Japanese American soldier with the 100th Infantry Battalion rests his Thompson machine gun so he can enjoy some hot food in Italy.

**U.S. soldiers inspect an abandoned German PzKpfw. IV knocked out during the battle of El Guettar. The version of the German tank shown is designated interchangeably as the Ausf. F2 or early Ausf. G that entered service in 1942 and was rarely seen in the North African desert. The variant mounted a high-velocity, long-barreled 75mm cannon. A second example is shown in the background.**



BY CHRISTOPHER MISKIMON

# Tank Destroyers at El Guettar

## The U.S. 601st Tank Destroyer Battalion faced down the German 10th Panzer Division in the hills east of the Tunisian town.

**In the early** morning hours of March 23, 1943, the U.S. 1st Infantry Division was preparing to attack. The unit was arrayed east of the Tunisian town of El Guettar, roughly 50 miles south of the now famous Kasserine Pass, where the U.S. Army had suffered a sharp defeat just a month earlier.

Kasserine had been a heavy blow to the novice American Army, determined but still learning its deadly trade through costly lessons. Now, that Army had its feet under it again and was on the move. Advances over the previous week had left it in possession of El Guettar and now the division was poised to advance farther. To the southeast, the British Eighth Army, under the command of Field Marshal Bernard Montgomery, had chased the Axis forces all the way from Egypt and now was being held up at the Mareth Line, a stoutly defended fortified position.

To relieve pressure on the Eighth Army, the U.S. 2nd Corps, of which the 1st Infantry Division was a part, was ordered to attack down Highway 15, a road leading east from El Guettar toward the enemy-held town of Gabes. At worst, this would draw some Axis troops away from Mareth and make it easier for the British. At best, if the Americans could break through to the sea it would cut off large numbers of German and Italian soldiers from their comrades to the

Both: National Archives

**LEFT: The early U.S. M3 tank destroyer consisting of a lightly armored half-track mounting a 75mm cannon is shown during training in the United States. Later M10 and M18 half-tracks were considerable improvements but retained the open turret and light armor that presented high risk to the crews.**

**BELOW: On the morning of March 21, 1943, soldiers of Company D, 18th Infantry Regiment dig slit trenches in preparation for combat with the German 10th Panzer Division south of El Guettar.**

north in Tunis. So it was that the "Big Red One," as the 1st Infantry Division was known, was poised to attack on the morning of the 23rd.

Attached to the division was the 601st Tank Destroyer Battalion, there to bolster the infantry's ability to engage the German tanks that had been so skillfully used against the Allied forces. On this day it would find itself fighting for its life against the battle-hardened 10th Panzer Division as it launched a preemptive spoiling attack against the Americans. (A spoiling attack occurs when the enemy, anticipating an offensive move, attacks first, thus "spoiling" the impending assault.)

The 601st would prove instrumental in beating off this move, showing that the U.S. Army was in fact learning its lessons, honing itself into the weapon it needed to be to inflict final defeat on Nazi Germany.

The 601st was a standard tank destroyer battalion for its day. Commanded by Lt. Col. H.D. Baker, the unit was equipped mainly with the M3 Gun Motor Carriage (GMC), a standard M3 half-track hastily converted into a tank destroyer with the addition of a 75mm M1897 cannon, the "French 75" of World War I fame. The vehicle had been intended only as a stopgap weapon to train American troops until a purpose-built design could be produced.

When Operation Torch, the Allied invasion of North Africa in November 1942, found the Army still short of weapons, several tank destroyer battalions, including the 601st, nevertheless went into action with it. The M3 was a reliable vehicle, and its cannon packed a good

punch, able to penetrate three inches of armor at 1,000 yards, respectable at that point in the war. On the down side, the vehicle had thin armor and the gun was not fully enclosed. The crew was protected only by a thin gun shield, leaving it vulnerable to artillery and flanking fire.

The battalion had a few M6 GMCs as well. This was a Fargo ¾-ton truck mounting a 37mm light antitank gun on the bed. The 37mm weapon was obsolete by this stage of the war, and the crew was likewise dangerously exposed. Most commanders had learned to keep them in the rear out of harm's way. On March 23, the 601st had 31 M3s (out of 36 assigned) and five M6s serviceable. The rest had been lost during previous actions. The tank destroyers were thus divided into three companies, A, B, and C. The battalion also had logis-

tical and reconnaissance elements to round out its strength.

In the preceding few days, the 1st Division had taken Gafsa and El Guettar before seizing the hills immediately east of the latter town. Also attached to the division was the 1st Ranger Battalion under the command of Colonel William O. Darby. The Rangers, along with the Big Red One's 18th Infantry Regiment, had cleared Axis troops from the area. That done, the division commander, General Terry Allen, readied his command for its next advance toward Gabes.

The 1st and 2nd Battalions of the 18th were sited south of Highway 15 on the Djebel Berda. The rest of the division's infantry battalions were deployed along the Keddab Ridge, which rose from the ground just north of the road. The 3rd Battalion of the 18th, 3rd of the 16th Infantry, and the 26th Infantry Regiment were set up from south to north, respectively. The rest of the 16th was either in reserve in El Guettar or back in Gafsa. The road essentially went between Djebel Berda and Keddab Ridge before curving northwest to El Guettar. South of the town was the Chott El Guettar salt lake. Its eastern side bordered an expanse of marshy ground impassable to vehicles. Just north of the road was Hill 336, also called Wop Hill. The 18th Regiment's command post was there.

The 601st was positioned just north of the road overlooking it, assigned to protect two artillery battalions moved forward to support the advance. Baker deployed his B and C Companies in front of the artillery positions and placed Company A overlooking the road from the hillside to the north. A line of outposts in front of B and C Companies were occupied by two reconnaissance platoons backed up by two M3s and several of the M6s. The various units seemed ready to continue their attack.

Unfortunately, the Germans were also prepared to attack, and they landed their punch first. They had perceived the damage an advance down Highway 15 could cause and sent the 10th Panzer Division forward. The 10th Panzer was one of the strongest units the Axis had left, though it was hardly at full strength with only 57 tanks and about the same number of lighter armored vehicles, such as half-tracks and armored cars. The tanks were supported by both infantry and artillery, and some air support was also available to the Germans.

The first sign of the impending assault came at 0445, when a German motorcyclist rode into the line of reconnaissance platoon outposts and was captured. When questioned, he stated the 10th Panzer Division was going to attack at 0500. Word was quickly passed up to the division headquarters, and the tank destroyer men prepared to receive this attack in the scant few minutes they had left.

Baker was concerned about his deployments. He had set out his companies to protect the artillery primarily against infantry deployments, not a concerted attack by armor. Still, he kept his soldiers where they were. The enemy could not come down the road without exposing itself to the fire of A and B Companies, and the marshy ground near the salt lake would keep any armored vehicles from moving out of range. If the Germans moved off the road to the north, then C Company could engage as well. There really was no time to make any movements anyway.

**WITHIN A FEW MINUTES, THE MEN IN THE OUTPOST LINE BEGAN TO HEAR SOUNDS OF ARMORED VEHICLES APPROACHING FROM THE SOUTHEAST. THEIR EYES STRAINED IN THE MOONLIGHT TO SEE ANY OTHER SIGN OF THE ENEMY.**

Within a few minutes, the men in the outpost line began to hear the sounds of armored vehicles approaching from the southeast. Their eyes strained in the moonlight to see any other sign of the enemy. Finally, they spotted 16 German tanks bearing down with several hundred infantry in support. The Americans held their fire as the mass of armor and men bore closer,

## EL GUETTAR PROVIDED A RARE EXAMPLE OF TANK DESTROYER DOCTRINE GONE RIGHT.

IN ADDITION TO THE overall American success in the defensive battle at El Guettar, this engagement is one of the few examples where the flawed American tank destroyer doctrine was used in its intended manner.

At the beginning of the war, as still neutral America watched the Nazi juggernaut sweep through Europe, much thought in the Army went to how the United States might combat the seemingly unstoppable panzer divisions. The solution was the tank destroyer force. Its essential doctrine centered on a concentrated force of highly mobile antitank guns. This force would wait for an enemy tank attack then rush to the point of that attack and aggressively maneuver against it, destroying the opposing armor before it could penetrate deeply into friendly positions.

Unfortunately, this doctrine was flawed, making numerous assumptions about the enemy and battlefield conditions that simply did not hold up. The first mistake was an incorrect evaluation of the Blitzkrieg. Its success was not due to the simple massing of tanks but was rather a combined arms effort in which tanks, infantry, artillery, antitank guns, and air support all worked together to achieve a breakthrough. While tank destroyer field manuals did stress working with other arms such as infantry, there was initially little real thought or practice at true combined arms operations with friendly units.

Battlefield conditions made doctrinal use of the tank destroyer nearly impossible. Theory assumed the enemy's main attack could always be deduced—a dangerous assumption. It also neglected to consider that a tank destroyer force would have to make its way to the enemy point of attack over roads that already would be crowded with other combat and support units trying to carry on the battle.

If it had freedom of movement, a tank destroyer unit was a powerful asset, a mobile force of self-propelled guns (though some units used towed guns) liberally equipped with machine guns and reconnaissance assets. Once battle was joined, few leaders could afford to simply let that much firepower sit idly by waiting for an armored attack that might not come.

Instead, the tank destroyers found themselves parceled out to myriad diverse missions. Early in the North African fighting, units were assigned to conduct solo assaults with little or no support. Tank destroyer battalions also found themselves being used as makeshift artillery or split up with their platoons and companies parceled out to infantry units to bolster their firepower. This made them more akin to assault guns than specialized antitank units. Admittedly, they did prove useful in this capacity.

The defensive phase of El Guettar is, therefore, one of precious few examples of a tank destroyer unit being used more or less according to its doctrine. The 601st met the main thrust of a German armored attack and was instrumental in repulsing it. Though the tank destroyer branch would be disbanded after the war, this unit's hard-won victory would survive in the annals of the U.S. Army. □

**ABOVE: U.S. artillerymen load and fire a 155mm howitzer during action to hold the line against the German counterattack at El Guettar on March 23, 1943. BELOW: Captain Michael Paulick, commander of the Reconnaissance Company, U.S. 601st Tank Destroyer Battalion, discusses plans for deployment on the battlefield with a Lieutenant Gloia. Captain Paulick stands beside his M2A1 command half-track on March 23, 1943, near El Guettar on the day of the battle.**

Both: National Archives

then opened point-blank fire at a mere 200 yards. The reconnaissance platoons had been liberally issued with machine guns, and they now used them, pouring fire into the enemy infantry. Several of the truck-mounted 37mm guns on the M6s joined in, firing canister rounds at the foot soldiers and armor-piercing rounds at the tanks.

While the German infantry took heavy casualties, the tanks kept moving forward, impervious to the rounds fired at them. They replied with their own guns, the experienced Afrika Korps soldiers seeking out American vehicles with tracer fire from their machine guns. It was a proven tactic. They would fire the coaxial machine guns aboard their tanks in a wide arc. When the bullets struck the metal of an armored vehicle, the tracer rounds mixed in would ricochet up into the air, revealing its presence. The Germans would then open fire with their main gun. Two half-tracks were hit in short order. As the pressure became too great, both American platoons fell back, stopping twice to fight delaying actions before retreating to the Company A position on the hillside.

Dawn was beginning to creep over the eastern horizon. The German force split, with some branching off to attack the B and C Company locations while the main force continued along the highway toward El Guettar. Thirty German tanks were counted in the main group, while the Americans estimated a total force of over 100 tanks. This was, of course, more than the 10th Panzer Division had available. In the Americans' defense, during the swirling chaos of combat it is really quite easy to overestimate the size of an enemy force. With the dust and smoke of firing and the mental stresses involved, an armored car, half-track, or even a truck can be easily mistaken for a tank.

That force must have appeared large indeed to the men of B and C Companies as it advanced toward them, the sun at its back. Each company had placed two platoons forward in line with the third platoon in reserve. The tank destroyers were hidden behind the low, rolling hills of the area. Forward observers relayed to them the approaching direction and distance of the Germans. When a crew was ready to shoot, the half-track was driven to a firing position at the top of their hill or ridge. As quickly as possible, it would fire at the enemy tank before backing down the slope out of view to await another target.

It became a deadly game of cat and mouse as the German tankers tried to seek out the continually moving American destroyers. As the Germans hunted, the accompanying infantry moved through the hills attempting to infiltrate the U.S. position. When they appeared, the Americans would fire at them with machine guns, Thompson submachine guns, and the occasional crash of a high-explosive shell from the 75mm cannon. All the while, enemy artillery crashed into the hillsides, raising huge clouds of dust and smoke. More dust was raised by the half-tracks themselves as they alternated firing positions to keep from being zeroed in on by the Germans.

The scene quickly devolved into the hell of combat, the booming of cannon, the chatter of machine guns and Thompsons, the screams of the wounded and dying, everything obscured by dust and haze. The action soon became so intense that to keep up their fire on the closing German tanks, the tank destroyer crews were increasingly forced to stay in one firing position too long. This allowed the enemy easier

shots, and one after another, tank destroyers were hit, many of them burning.

One of Lt. Col. Baker's platoon leaders, a Lieutenant Yowell, was in command of B Company's Third Platoon during this action. His report highlighted the confusion and closeness of the fighting. As the Germans approached at dawn, they closed to within 1,000 yards but were largely hidden by the terrain. Yowell repositioned several of his M3s to new firing points to better engage them.

He wrote, "Sergeant Raymond maneuvered his gun and destroyed a Pz VI [Tiger I] with six rounds, four of which bounced off the heavy armor. Sergeant Raymond fired one more round, at the same range, at a following tank, Pz IV, and it caught fire immediately. His halftrack was destroyed before he could fire another round."

Raymond's tank destroyer was hit three times and caught fire; he had made the mistake of firing seven times from the same location, though with the intensity of the fighting he likely had little choice. The crew bailed out and reported to Yowell, who sent them to the rear on foot. The other three M3s of his platoon kept up their fire on the Germans.

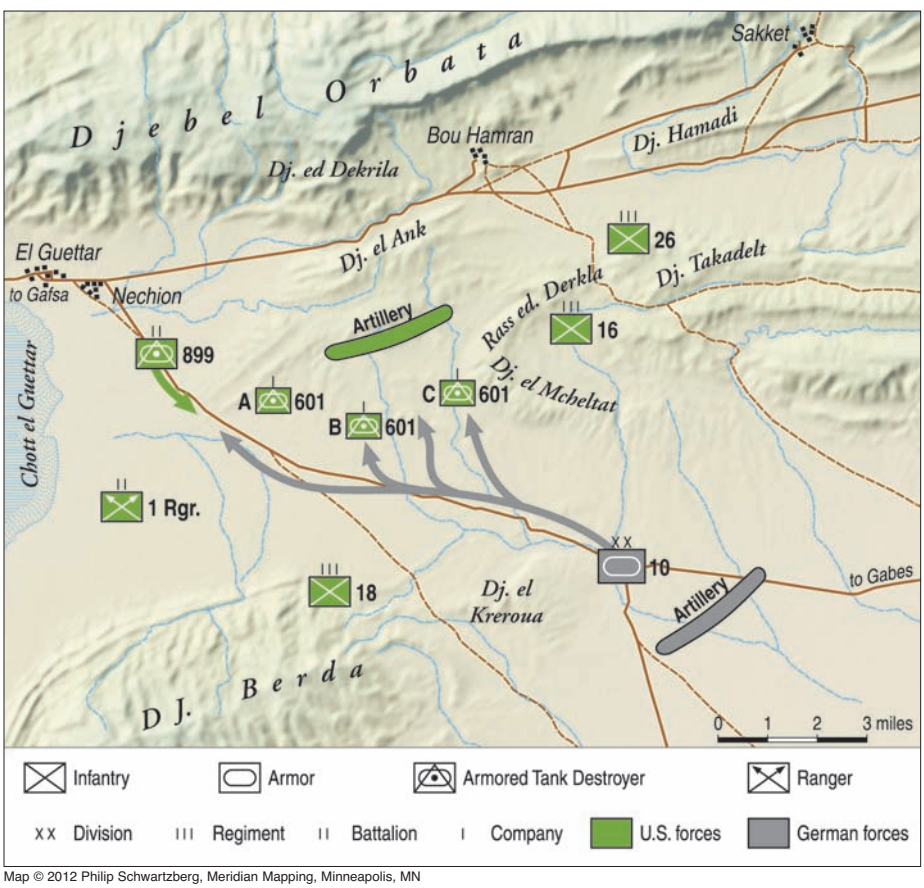
"I saw Corporal Hamel destroy a Pz IV, and Sergeant Nesmith knocked the turret off a Pz IV at about one thousand yards range," Yowell reported. "Enemy infantry came in very close and their tanks were laying smoke while they brought up line after line of tanks. I estimated from four to five lines, with fifteen to twenty tanks in each line. There were tanks in groups of sixes and a column of tanks along the southeastern ridge, also. There were over one hundred tanks. I am sure of this."

Yowell's account illustrates the chaos of the engagement; his identification of the Pz VI Tiger tank indicates that a company of the German 501st Heavy Tank Battalion, attached to the 10th Panzer, was present at El Guettar that day. The other platoons of B and C Companies fought in much the same manner over the course of the morning, exchanging fire with platoon-sized elements of German tanks and fending off their infantry with a combination of machine-gun and cannon fire.

The American artillery just behind the two tank destroyer units was engaged mainly in supporting the infantry in the surrounding hills, but the guns were able to occasionally fire into the Germans advancing in front of them. The shellfire was ineffective against the tanks but it did force the armored vehicles and infantry to spread out.

As this action was taking place, the main Axis force of 30 tanks was moving toward El Guettar, clustered around Highway 15, moving past B and C Companies and into the range of A Company. The German tank crews spotted the Americans on the hillside and called on their artillery, which fired a thick barrage of smoke rounds onto A Company. When the cloud dissipated, the German armor was still 2,200 yards away, extreme range for the M3s.

**ABOVE: This German photo shows tanks of General Erwin Rommel's Panzerarmee Afrika making their way across the Tunisian desert in early 1943. By the spring, Rommel had been recalled to Germany and Axis forces in North Africa had capitulated. BELOW: This map of the El Guettar battlefield shows the deployment of the American 601st Tank Destroyer Battalion and other units along with the German 10th Panzer Division.**




Map © 2012 Philip Schwartzberg, Meridian Mapping, Minneapolis, MN

The enemy column was getting too close to El Guettar and the supplies the division had stockpiled there. Baker ordered the company to open fire despite the distance, hoping to repel the Germans before they could threaten the town.

Things now began to go badly for the Germans. Though they managed to hit one tank destroyer, the incoming fire was too heavy for

them and they began to skirt farther to the south in an attempt to get out of range of the Americans on the hill. When they did so, they ran into two obstacles: the marshy ground south of the road and a minefield laid earlier in a dry lake bed. Their momentum ruined, the Germans started to withdraw, pausing to hook tow cables to half of the eight burning or wrecked tanks that now littered the ground below Company A.

Baker noticed with respect the superior German ability to recover their losses on the battlefield and under fire, something his unit was as yet unable to do. The remaining tanks, dragging their disabled fellows behind them, limped away to the east. The threat to El Guettar was, for the moment, over.

Time & Life Pictures/Getty Images

**The wreckage of a German tank, lost to American artillery and anti-tank fire, lies on the floor of the valley at El Guettar. Weeks after the defeat at El Guettar, those Axis forces that could not be evacuated from Tunisia surrendered.**

The fleeing Germans were not completely done, however. Those tanks that were still battleworthy turned north and joined their brethren who were still attacking B and C Companies. Yowell watched them.

"They fanned out and started toward us. All this time, Staff Sergeant Shima was keeping a steady stream of .50 caliber machine gun bullets on the infantry. He also pointed out tank targets with his tracers…."

Sergeant Nesmith's half-track was hit but could still move. One of his men was killed, and the rest of the crew was wounded. Within moments it was hit again, knocking it out of action for good. Another M3 was hit shortly afterward but without casualties. Yowell ordered the crew to transfer its ammunition to one of the still operational tank destroyers. As the two crews busily passed 75mm rounds, the receiving M3 was hit as well. Yowell was down to two working half-tracks and very little ammunition. He pulled them back to the next ridge and continued the desperate fight.

Above the valley floor, soon to be christened "Death Valley" by the Americans, Captain Sam Carter of the 1st Battalion, 18th Infantry Regiment had watched the entire battle unfold from before dawn. "There were red, white and blue tracers being fired.... Soon these colors were joined by green, purple, yellow and orange tracers. Soon after this the larger guns began firing. It appeared that every time there were point ricochets these would be followed by the large caliber guns. It was very dark at this time and nothing could be seen except the source of this large volume of fire slowly moving westward ... daylight started breaking and before us in the valley was an entire panzer division."

As Carter watched, the tanks moved toward the American lines in a giant armored square, mixed in with other armored vehicles and infantry. Once the sun rose over the eastern horizon, the artillery fire started and he had a ringside seat to the 601st's fight for its life.

"Soon the valley was just a mass of guns shooting, shells bursting, armored vehicles burning and tanks moving steadily westward," Carter would later write. "We sat in awe watching the attack…." At the same time, he and his men were worried; if the German attack succeeded, the battalion would be cut off. Fortunately, Carter also got to see the German tanks run into the minefield and take the flanking fire of the tank destroyers.

Finally, at about noon the remaining German tanks gave up the fight and withdrew, a few of them taking up hasty defensive position to the east, out of range of the tank destroyers. Carter also saw the German tank crews dismount to recover their disabled vehicles. "This was done in the midst of artillery fire which did not seem to faze those working outside the tanks at all," he commented.

After a while, a number of M10 tank destroyers, improved models with a 3-inch gun mounted in a turret, came moving down the road from El Guettar. The German tanks that had taken up defensive positions quickly moved to hull-down firing points, only their turrets showing. Several of the M10s were quickly knocked out, and the rest fled to cover. At about the same time, Carter saw a group of German prisoners being led in. Many of them were crying. When the American officer asked them why they were weeping, they told him this battle had been the first time they had ever been stopped by mere artillery and infantry.

Down below, the field now became quiet as the fighting seemed to pause. The 601st had taken heavy losses in both men and vehicles. Both the artillery battalions they were screening had been forced to spike their guns and retreat. Shortly after noon, some of the tank destroyer men saw an American half-track towing a small gun approach. Thinking it a separated group of U.S. troops, they held their fire. When it was still 400 yards from the 601st line, the half-track stopped and seven Germans jumped out. As they started to set up their cannon, a tank destroyer crew scrambled to its own gun. The Americans fired three rounds, setting the captured half-track ablaze and killing five of the enemy soldiers. The remaining two fled but were found hiding in a ditch and taken prisoner.

Little else happened until 1500, when a swarm of German planes appeared overhead and began strafing and bombing the American positions. The 601st replied with its few .50-caliber machine guns. Shortly afterward, a message came down from the division headquarters. A German message had been intercepted

ordering another attack for 1600 hours. Shortly afterward, another message informed of a delay to 1640 so that German artillery could get into position. The now depleted battalion prepared to meet the enemy for a second time that day.

When the appointed time came, men of the 601st saw what looked like two battalions of infantry advance with tanks behind them. In actuality, it was two battalions of panzergrenadiers along with a motorcycle battalion and the remains of two tank battalions behind them. The artillery battalion that had caused the delay had arrived and was in support. The enemy infantry moved forward smartly, but the tanks held back. Baker guessed they were waiting for the infantry to clear the way. They would never get the chance; the Americans were ready for them.

The German foot soldiers had closed to 1,500 yards when the U.S. artillery opened fire, raining down a hell of exploding steel. Both 105mm and 155mm guns went into action, their shells armed with time fuses set to detonate above the ground. This spread the shrapnel in a wider, deadlier arc. The incoming rounds burst in puffs of black smoke directly over the heads of the attacking Germans. Scores of them fell.

The 601st joined in with its remaining weapons. Machine-gun fire raked the enemy, 75mm high explosive shells dropped on them, adding to what the field artillery was already doing. Baker watched as one of his sergeants "bracketed rapidly and fired as fast as he could, making 5-mil deflection changes. He dropped high-explosive shells at 7-yard intervals across the German lines."

Soon, the Nazi troops could take no more; they ran for the cover of a ridgeline behind them. That placed them safely out of the tank destroyers' fire, but the American artillery was not done yet. It continued to fire onto the reverse slope of the ridge and finished the job. The few survivors stole off to rejoin the tanks and retreat. For the 601st, the day's fighting was over.

As darkness spread over the battlefield, the 601st took stock of its situation. Fourteen men had been killed. Of the 31 M3s that had started the battle, 21 had been knocked out. Only eight of them were repairable. One of the tiny M6s had been lost also, as well as nine trucks and four regular half-tracks. Several of the trucks had been hit while scrambling across the battlefield to deliver ammunition. Besides those losses, the unit's ammunition expenditure showed how intense the fighting had been. The battalion's normal load of 75mm ammunition was 2,844 rounds. It had expended 2,740, as well as nearly 50,000 rounds of small-arms ammo.

To show for it all, 37 German tanks had been knocked out or disabled, with the 601st getting credit for 30 of these. The rest were attributed to mines and artillery fire. The tank destroyer unit was also credited with 200 of the German infantry casualties. On a battlefield as chaotic as that of El Guettar, the exact cause of casualties or destroyed vehicles is open to speculation, but there is no doubt the 601st did its share of the work that day. General Allen gave the battalion credit for protecting the 1st Division's vulnerable supply lines.

The German spoiling attack at El Guettar was a difficult fight for the Americans. Not everything had gone well, and losses had been sustained. They had taken the Afrika Korp's best shot, however, and they had not given way. It was an impressive display after the previous defeats at Kasserine and elsewhere. While preparing for an offensive move, the 1st Infantry Division and the attached 601st had itself been attacked and forced on the defensive by a heavily armored enemy force.

German Field Marshal Erwin Rommel had once expressed a fear that the American, while new to war, would learn quickly. This fear was borne out in the hills east of El Guettar. The U.S. Army was learning its lessons. Soon it would be ready to teach a few of its own. □

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**Taken from an observer's position on March 23, 1943, this photo depicts American artillery rounds landing among the tanks of the German 10th Panzer Division during the Battle of El Guettar.**

National Archives

# *Taking* TINIAN

## The capture of Tinian in the Marianas provided bases for log-range Boeing B-29 Superfortress bombers to attack Japan. BY NATHAN N. PREFER

THE MARINES were tired, eager for a rest the opportunity to get themselves and their equipment back into battle condition. But it was not to be, at least not yet. After spending a month fighting one of the bloodiest and most decisive battles of the Pacific War on the island of Saipan in the Marianas, the Marines of the 4th and 2nd Divisions were once again going into battle in a campaign that Admiral Raymond A. Spruance called "the most brilliantly conceived and executed amphibious operation in World War II."

Marine Lt. Gen. Holland M. Smith, who had trained both Army and Marine Corps units for amphibious operations and commanded most of those conducted in the Central Pacific, asserted that the operation to capture the neighboring island of Tinian was "the perfect amphibious operation of the Pacific War."

It was a foregone conclusion that Tinian had to be taken. When the Americans had decided to seize the Marianas, Saipan, Tinian, and Guam, were selected because of their size and adaptability to the development of airfields, which would put the home islands of Japan within bombing range of American aircraft. Acquiring such airfields was a major objective of the Marianas campaign, and Tinian, barely three miles from Saipan, had some of the best terrain in the entire island chain for airfields. Maj. Gen. Harry Schmidt's V Amphibious Corps was ordered to capture Tinian.

In retrospect, the planning for the invasion of Tinian seems almost haphazard. While the plans for the capture of Guam and Saipan were developed months before the actual assault, the planning for Tinian was put off until the earlier efforts were concluded. A Japanese naval offensive that resulted in a resounding defeat in the Battle of the Philippine Sea further delayed the planning for Tinian. Vice Admiral Harry W. Hill, who commanded the naval amphibious forces for Tinian, later remarked that plans for the landings were in effect "playing by ear."

Intelligence gathering had begun early. Maps, photographs, and charts of the island were acquired and distributed to the assault units. During a stopover at Eniwetok, the V Amphibious Corps developed a tentative plan for the Tinian attack. This was submitted to General Smith who, concerned about the two other attacks he was responsible for, decided to hold the plan until the Saipan operation was well under way and he could get a better view of developments. The Tinian plan lay dormant during the first weeks of the Saipan operation.

Once southern Saipan had been cleared, American planes began routine flyovers of Tinian to gather intelligence on terrain and enemy defenses. Ships of the covering forces cruised offshore to gather even more data, particularly on possible landing beaches. Soon the entire enemy order of battle on Tinian was known to the Americans, as were the location of the major defensive positions. Even natives of Tinian who were caught on Saipan when the Americans invaded that island provided useful information on the terrain and reefs at Tinian. Later the claim would be made that all but three of the major enemy defensive positions on Tinian were known to V Amphibious Corps before the actual invasion.

Those defenses were well equipped. They included six 70mm guns, 12 75mm guns, six 37mm high-velocity cannons, 12 tanks, 10 140mm coast defense guns, and 10 120mm dual-purpose mobile artillery guns. There were additional coast defense guns, antiaircraft guns and more than 100 machine guns available to the defenders. Concrete pillboxes defended the expected landing beaches.

Manning these defenses was a conglomeration of units placed there by fate and circumstance. As was common on these Central Pacific islands, the garrison was a mixture of Imperial Japanese Army and Imperial Japanese Navy troops. The largest single unit was Colonel Keishi Ogata's 50th Infantry Regiment. The regiment had served in Manchuria from 1941 to 1944 before being transferred to Tinian in March. Ogata, as the senior Japanese Army officer, nominally commanded the entire defense. The rest of the regiment's parent unit, the 29th Infantry Division, was about to be annihilated on Guam.

The 50th Infantry Regiment was a standard Japanese infantry regiment with three infantry battalions, a 75mm mountain artillery battery, and a company each of engineers, signal, and medical troops. It also contained one antitank platoon armed with six 37mm guns. Attached was the divisional tank company equipped with 12 light tanks, a vehicle platoon, and a detachment from the 29th Infantry Division's hospital. In many respects it mirrored an American regimental combat team. Colonel Ogata also had available the 1st Battalion, 135th Infantry Regiment, which had been training in amphibious assault tactics on Tinian when the Americans invaded Saipan, thereby separating it from its parent unit. Ironically, had the American invasion been delayed

All images: National Archives

Three days after the landing on Tinian, a U.S. Marine searches the jungle for Japanese snipers. Tinian became a primary base for American long-range Boeing B-29 Superfortress bombers that raided the home islands of Japan. OPPOSITE: The crew of a 75mm pack howitzer of the 4th Marine Division takes aim in counterbattery fire against Japanese guns. The subsequent action resulted in the howitzer silencing the enemy artillery.

for a week or more, Ogata and his command may not have been on Tinian at all, as they were under orders to move to Rota, another island in the chain, the same day that the Americans landed on Saipan.

The Imperial Japanese Navy was also well represented on Tinian. In fact, the highest ranking officer was not Colonel Ogata, but Vice Admiral Kakuji Kakuda. Kakuda was an unusual flag officer for the Imperial Japanese Navy. Physically, he was taller than six feet and weighed over 200 pounds. He was also an alcoholic. He had previously led Japanese naval air forces against Balikpapan and Borneo. Later he commanded the 2nd Carrier Striking Force in the attack on Dutch Harbor, Aleutian Islands. He had also fought in the naval battles around Guadalcanal until posted to command the 1st Air Fleet on Tinian.

The major unit of the Imperial Japanese Navy on Tinian was the 56th Keibitai, or Naval Guard Force. Commanded by Captain Goichi Oya, its members believed that they were under Admiral Kakuda's command, but Oya hid the fact that Admiral Kakuda had relinquished any and all command responsibilities and that in fact the entire island defenses were under Ogata's command. The 56th Keibitai was a base defense force, not unlike the U.S. Army and Marine Corps base defense battalions then garrisoning islands farther east that had recently been conquered by the Americans. Its power lay in its fixed artillery and antiaircraft weapons. On Tinian it controlled three British-manufactured 6-inch coast-defense guns and 10 140mm coast-defense guns. Among many antipersonnel weapons available were three 120mm dual-purpose guns like those that had wreaked havoc during the 2nd Marine Division's invasion of Tarawa the year before.

There were two other forces defending Tinian. The stranded air and ground crews of the 1st Air Fleet were added to the defenses. Although untrained in infantry tactics, they added numbers. Finally, the Japanese had organized a home defense militia, known variously as the Civilian Militia, Home Guard, or Youth Organization. These latter groups played no part in the battle to come, instead seeing to the safety of their families.

As was typical of the Japanese military at this stage of the war, neither the Imperial Japanese Army or Navy worked well with their opposite number. Colonel Ogata discounted the assistance the 56th Keibitai could provide and gave few orders to Captain Oya after assigning him a defensive sector. Similarly, Oya took little notice of sectors outside his own and continued to pretend that his orders came from Admiral Kakuda, who spent his time trying unsuccessfully to escape the island by submarine. Ogata was not particularly innovative and still believed in the standard Japanese response to amphibious assault: defense at the water's edge. Although this theory was fast losing credibility among Japanese leaders after the failures at Tarawa, the Marshall Islands, Guam, and Saipan, Ogata maintained his faith in the tactic. In fact, his water's edge defense of Tinian would be one of the last times it was practiced in the Central Pacific.

General Smith had earlier divided his staff into two groups, the Red Staff and the Blue Staff. The Red Staff was given responsibility for planning the Saipan and Tinian invasions. Saipan and Guam would be invaded first, then once those islands had been secured, Tinian would be taken.

One aspect of the early Marine plan had the Americans landing on Tinian's north shore with artillery on nearby Saipan available for initial support. Fifth Amphibious Corps had used this tactic earlier during the invasion of the Marshall Islands when the 4th Marine Division and 7th Infantry Division had placed their artillery on small offshore islands.

**LEFT: Admiral Kakuji Kakuda, the ranking Japanese officer on Tinian, quietly gave up direct command of the garrison and later attempted to slip away by submarine. RIGHT: Lieutenant Colonel Evans F. Carlson, previously commander of the Marine Raiders, was a member of the planning staff of the 4th Marine Division at the time of the Tinian operation. LEFT: The initial waves of U.S. Marines churn toward the beaches of Tinian aboard landing craft and amtracs.**

Once it was clear that Saipan was falling to the V Amphibious Corps, planning for Tinian gained momentum. By late June, General Smith had turned over command of V Amphibious Corps to Maj. Gen. Harry Schmidt, who in turn gave command of the 4th Marine Division to Maj. Gen. Clifton B. Cates. The naval support forces came under the command of Rear Admiral Harry W. Hill, who had previously commanded the close-support naval forces at Saipan.

Both Admiral Hill and General Schmidt were unhappy with the initial planning for Tinian. Intelligence identified only two beaches, one on the east and the other on the western side as suitable for a landing. Both were obvious landing sites and therefore well defended by the Japanese. Schmidt preferred a plan developed by his planning officer, Lt. Col. Evans F. Carlson, the former Marine Raider now on the staff of the 4th Marine Division, who advocated a landing on the northern beaches to avoid heavy casualties and more losses in already scarce

equipment. Carlson, in his early days as a Marine Corps Raider battalion commander, had studied Tinian as a possible target of one of his raids. Although it never came off, the earlier planning had directed Carlson's attention to the small northern beaches as possible landing sites, avoiding the enemy's main defenses on the eastern and western beaches. Another planner, Brig. Gen. Graves B. Erskine, chief of staff of V Amphibious Corps, believed that the northern beach plan was the product of a combined effort of the Fifth Amphibious Corps planning staff. Whatever the facts, the American planners were now interested in the northern beaches. It remained to be seen whether they could get a large amphibious assault force across those same beaches effectively.

With Navy and Marine Corps planners in general agreement, the commanders turned to finding out if these beaches, now christened the White Beaches, were feasible to land the two Marine divisions. From aerial reconnaissance it was known that White Beach One was 60 yards wide while White Beach Two was 160 yards wide, far smaller than the usual 1,000-yard width that was standard for American amphibious assault doctrine at this stage of the war. Exits off the beaches were unknown and had to be investigated. The defenses at these beaches had to be researched, and the weather, reef, and tide conditions all taken into consideration before a decision could be made.

There was another problem to be addressed. The assault forces for Tinian would be under the command of Vice Admiral Richmond Kelly Turner, an experienced amphibious force commander whose nickname, "Terrible Turner," stemmed from his often irascible temper in extreme situations. Turner had decided that the assault force would land at the Sunharon Bay, or Tinian Town beaches, which were known to be the most heavily defended on Tinian.

Admiral Hill had suggested the White Beaches to Admiral Turner only to be rebuffed. Undeterred, he decided to circumvent Turner's order to concentrate planning on the Sunharon Bay Beaches by creating two planning staffs. One would follow Turner's order. The other, however, would investigate the feasibility of a landing over the northern White Beaches. Hill and Schmidt arranged for a combined reconnaissance of the White Beaches. The V Amphibious Reconnaissance Battalion of the Marines and the Navy's Underwater Demolition Teams 5 and 7 would together reconnoiter the two White Beaches.

On July 10-11 the Navy swimmers and Marine reconnaissance men actually landed on Tinian at the White Beaches and made their observations. After some dangerous moments, including a contrary tide that endangered the UDT men's return to their boats, they completed the mission and reported to Admiral Hill and Generals Smith and Schmidt. A second operation the following night verified the earlier findings.

With the reconnaissance report in hand, Hill once again went to Admiral Turner. He later recalled of Turner, "He simply would not listen, and again ordered me in very positive terms to stop all White Beach planning and to issue my plan for the Tinian Town landings, which had already been prepared." But this time Admiral Hill was equally determined. Instead of returning to his flagship, he went ashore on Saipan and sought out General Smith. He quickly secured General Smith's agreement to the White Beach plan and then sought out Admiral Spruance, commander of the entire operation and Turner's immediate superior.

Spruance was impressed with Admiral Hill's plan and called a conference for that same afternoon, July 12, 1944. Meanwhile, General Smith, as anxious as Hill to avoid unnecessary casualties among the Marines, sought out Admiral Turner and demanded that the White Beach plan be accepted. Both men were drinking, and the conversation turned loud. At one point Turner bellowed for all to hear, "Holland, you are not going to land on the White Beaches. I won't land you there."

"Oh yes you will," replied Smith. "You'll land me any goddamned place I tell you to. I'm the one who makes the tactical plans around here. All you have to do is tell me whether or not you can put my troops ashore there."

The argument continued for some time but the only result was that Turner agreed to postpone a final decision until all the data on the White Beaches had been reviewed. Despite this and other disputes, Turner later remarked, "I consider Holland Smith a very fine tactical general and able administrator and I consider him one of my very best friends."

Turner also called a final conference for July 12, and Spruance attended this conference, canceling his own. Once again General Smith threatened to take up the White Beaches issue with Admiral Spruance. But after the White Beach plan was presented, and with Hill's views already well known, Turner calmly announced his agreement with the White Beach plan. Spruance then had no disagreement to referee. The Marines would invade Tinian over the White Beaches. Turner later said that he maintained his opposition only because all the information necessary to evaluate the White Beach plan had not been compiled and once it had been he ruled in favor of it.

On Jig Day, July 24, 1944, General Cates's 4th Marine Division landed on the White Beaches. In addition to the innovative landing plan, Tinian also saw the first use of napalm against entrenched enemy positions across the

**One of the guns of a Japanese artillery battery protrudes from its emplacement in a cave on Tinian. The 6-inch guns of the battery inflicted damage on the battleship USS *Colorado* and the destroyer USS *Norman Scott*.**

**ABOVE: A U.S. Marine LVT-2 Water Buffalo landing craft loaded with troops moves steadily toward an invasion beach at Tinian. More than 15,000 Marines eventually landed on the island in the strategically important Marianas chain. RIGHT: Occupying trenches that were originally dug by the defending Japanese, Marines remain wary of a potential Japanese counterattack.**

island. Further, some Landing Craft, Infantry (LCI) usually used to transport assault troops to the beach were armed with 40mm guns to provide close fire support to the leading assault waves of Marines. Neither of the weapons innovations worked well. The napalm test was inconclusive, and the LCIs bounced too much on the rough seas to deliver accurate supporting fire.

Supporting the landing, the battleship USS *Colorado* opened fire on the enemy coastal guns at Faibus San Hilo Point. These British-manufactured guns were the largest enemy weapons on the island. Captain William Granat controlled the fire of the *Colorado*'s 16-inch main battery and destroyed the enemy position. Near Tinian Town, UDT swimmers conducted a feint to draw Japanese attention away from the north of the island. Later, the 2nd Marine Division would also feign a landing in the area.

The 4th Marine Division embarked at Tanapag Harbor on Saipan in a confident mood. Although they had just completed a month of heavy fighting on Saipan and their ranks were thinned from the loss of 6,612 battle casualties in that campaign, the Marines had been promised that Tinian would be "short and sweet." Supporting this claim was the fact that their equipment consisted only of a weapon, ammunition, rations, spoon, poncho and a pair of clean socks. Their packs, bedding rolls, and gas masks had been left behind on Saipan as unnecessary. One Marine remarked, "It's a silly picnic kit."

Colonel Franklin A. Hart's 24th Marines would land on White Beach One and Colonel Merton J. Batchelder's 25th Marines would hit White Beach Two. Colonel Louis G. DeHaven's 14th Marine Artillery Regiment would land its light battalions behind the assault troops, with its heavy battalions coming in later. Colonel Louis R. Jones's 23rd Marines were in reserve. The first into the fight were Commander Draper L. Kaufman's UDT Team 5, whose mission was to destroy obstacles and mines at the beaches. Difficult conditions made this task dangerous, but Kaufman and his swimmers accomplished their mission in spite of difficult tides and surf. Fortunately, the Japanese had neglected to maintain their mines, and nearly all had been rusted to ineffectiveness. For leading this dangerous mission, Kaufman received his second Navy Cross. Supported from Saipan by the Army's XXIV Corps Artillery, the Marines moved ashore.

Meanwhile, at Tinian Town the 2nd Marine Division, short by 6,170 Saipan battle casualties, was feigning a landing on the expected beaches. Colonel Ogata believed the diversion was real and opened fire on the transports and their supporting warships. A previously undisclosed 6-inch gun opened up on *Colorado*, quickly scoring 22 hits and killing or wounding dozens of the ship's crew. Seaman 1st Class Raymond M. Roberts, a gun captain aboard the battleship, was one of the seriously wounded, but he remained at his gun until he was mortally wounded by a second hit. He received a posthumous Navy Cross.

Gunners Mate 2nd Class Albert Daniel Stredney received the Navy Cross for heroically fighting fires that threatened to ignite a devastating explosion. Captain William Granat, who kept his ship in action despite her serious wounds, also received that award. Immediately, the destroyer USS *Norman Scott* moved between the battleship and the enemy gun. Captain Seymour Dunlop Owens risked his ship to protect the wounded battleship and fought the enemy gun until he was killed at his post. He was awarded a posthumous Navy Cross. Eventually, both damaged ships withdrew. Two days later, gunfire from the battleship USS *Tennessee* destroyed the enemy gun.

This costly diversion had worked, however. Colonel Ogata remained fixed at Tinian Town and up north both the 24th and 25th Marines came ashore. They could only land eight tractors at a time on White Beach One and 16 at White Beach Two. Opposed by a machine gun and a 40mm anti-aircraft weapon, the 25th Marines landed at 7:50 AM. Dust and smoke obscured much of the area, but Captain Jack F. Ross Jr.'s Company E of Major Frank E. Garretson's 2nd Battalion, 24th Marines landed right in the middle of the beach defenses. Already understrength, they had other troops delayed by the need to climb out of the landing craft on nearby reefs and coral ridges, since there was not enough room for all to land on the beach at once.

On White Beach Two, Lt. Col. Lewis C. Hudson's 2nd Battalion, 25th Marines pushed

ahead despite all obstacles and soon the beachhead was secured against light opposition. Alongside, Lt. Col. Justice M. Chambers's 3rd Battalion, 25th Marines also faced mines and booby traps made from bottles of beer, watches, and other items sure to attract the unwary American soldier or Marine. The 25th Marines were in their third assault landing and these deadly items held no attraction for them.

A few vehicles were destroyed by the mines, but the advance continued without pause. Behind the combat Marines, engineers of the 4th Marine Engineer Battalion and the 1341st Army Engineer Combat Battalion were already struggling to clear the beaches for following waves of troops and supplies. Lt. Col. Richard K. Schmidt had tanks and bulldozers of his 4th Tank Battalion ashore by afternoon, clearing exits from the two small beaches. The 2nd Battalion, 24th Marines had reached the edge of the first enemy airfield before dark.

The 4th Marine Division had achieved what many thought impossible. They had secured a usable and defendable beachhead over the small White Beaches of northern Tinian. Now it remained to be seen if they could use it to clear the rest of the island. Colonel Ogata, surprised by the landing behind his main defenses, immediately ordered a counterattack to push the Marines back into the sea. His only option was to drive them off Tinian with a strong and decisive counterattack.

Ogata sent the 1st Battalion, 135th Infantry and his own regiment's engineers to counterattack. Joining them were 1,000 airmen from the defunct Naval Air Corps and some of Captain Oya's men who were in the White Beach area. Japanese tactics were good, using darkness to assemble and move men, thereby avoiding American air reconnaissance and attack. Artillery and tank support was arranged. However, Ogata had no intelligence on the American force and remained unaware that his 2,000 men were already facing over 15,000 Marines, with more to come. Concerned that the landing on the northern beaches was a feint, he held his remaining battalions in their defensive positions at the eastern and western beaches.

It was a dark and rainy night when the Japanese soldiers and airmen came up against Lt. Col. Otto Lessing's 1st Battalion, 24th Marines. Led by air officers wearing white gloves, the 600 attackers were blasted by the dug-in Americans who knew that an attack was inevitable. Tanks of Company B, 4th Marine Tank Battalion added their weight to the destruction. At dawn some 476 dead Japanese were found on the field.

Private First Class Cecil R. Tolley manned a machine gun with Company A, 1st Battalion, 24th Marines during the attack. When enemy grenades wounded all other members of his crew, Pfc. Tolley, despite painful wounds of his own, remained at his post, going through more than four boxes of ammunition and protecting his wounded companions. He finally passed out from loss of blood as the counterattack faded away. He survived to wear his Navy Cross home to Calhoun City, Missouri.

Map © Philip Schwartzberg, Meridian Mapping, Minneapolis, MN


**The 4th Marine Division landed on narrow invasion beaches at Tinian, and the debate over where to land caused delays in planning.**

Captain Irving Schechter, a reserve officer from New York, had commanded Company A, 24th Marines since the division was first organized in 1943. His company had been attached to Major Garretson's 2nd Battalion, 24th Marines for the landing, and his men had been among the first on the beach. He remembered, "As I waded in, I turned to give some orders to my radio operator only to see the poor guy floating in the surf. He had been hit in the head by a bullet."

Schechter led his company that night in the defense of a flank position against repeated attacks. Three attacks came in, and each one was repulsed. By dawn, only 30 of the 100 men of Company A that had landed on Tinian were still on their feet. Schechter received a Navy Cross. Later, some 500 enemy dead were counted in front of the 25th Marines lines.

More than 100 of those dead were the result of the stand of Corporal Alfred J. Daigle and Pfc. James C. Yeaple of the 25th Marines. These two machine gunners stood their ground when

*Continued on page 76*

By Al Hemingway

# Parallel Lives

**Although opponents, Rommel and Mongomery possessed strikingly similar leadership skills on the battlefield.**

**IN THE ORIGINAL 1960S *STAR TREK* SERIES, A ROMULAN COMMANDER** says to James T. Kirk, captain of the starship *Enterprise,* "I regret that we meet in this way. You and I are of a kind. In a different reality, I could have called you friend."

Although a sci-fi television show set in the future, the quote does illustrate a good point: enemies on the battlefield can come from vastly different backgrounds but possess the same qualities in leadership that lead them to victory in war. And, in the case of German Field Marshal Erwin Rommel and British Field Marshal Bernard Montgomery, even learn to respect one another.

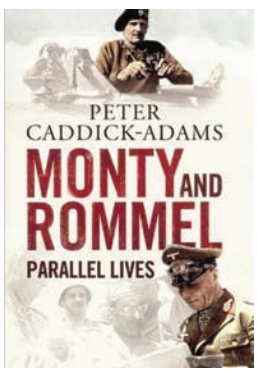
In his new book, ***Monty and Rommel: Parallel Lives*** (The Overlook Press, New York, 2012, 640 pp., maps, photographs, notes, index, $35.00, hardcover), military historian Peter Caddick-Adams makes such a point when he examines the lives of Rommel, the Desert Fox, and his British counterpart, Montgomery. Both men had similarities in their upbringing, schooling, and personal lives that helped shape their strategy and bold thinking while leading their troops in battle.

Four years senior, Montgomery was born in 1887 and learned to be a good communicator largely because of his father, who was a bishop. Rommel, likewise, developed a talent for connecting with his troops because his father was a schoolteacher and eventually passed the attribute on to his son. Neither individual came from a family with a military lineage, so each had to earn the respect of their fellow officers and push themselves that much harder as they rose in rank in their respective armies.

Both excelled on the athletic field and were strong proponents of remaining physically fit throughout their careers. Sports were an avenue of acceptance among the officer corps and could certainly assist a young lieutenant in his climb up the promotional ladder.

When they received their baptism of fire in 1914 at the outset of World War I, each of them witnessed significant combat. Both were wounded while fighting in challenging terrain that earned Rommel the reputation of being a risk taker, especially when he succeeded in seizing Mount Matajur on the Austrian-Italian border in 1917 (some later claimed he overemphasized his part in the assault), a trait that he would carry with him into North Africa.

Monty served in a number of staff positions as well, honing the proficiency that he would put to use in the next world conflict. World War I had a hardening effect on both Monty and Rommel. The war took its toll on their relationships with their families as each was totally devoted to their profession and often absent from their wives and children for long periods of time. Monty became even more distant after the death of his wife, who was bitten by an insect while vacationing, eventually lost both legs, and later died in his arms.




German Field Marshal Erwin Rommel (left) and British Field Marshal Bernard Montgomery were enemies on the battlefield but came respect each other.

Between the world wars, Monty learned about counterinsurgency warfare after a tour of duty in war-torn Ireland. Rommel was also busy studying and even wrote a book entitled *Infantry Tactics* in 1937. It was widely read by many, including Montgomery and Germany's new leader, Adolf Hitler. Rommel's writings soon catapulted him into the Führer's inner circle, and by the beginning of World War II he found himself commanding a panzer division in the invasion of France in 1940.

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# Do the Jews Have the Right to a State in the Holy Land?

## The question is not whether the Palestinians are an "invented people," but rather why Arabs deny Jewish history and Jewish rights to a state in Israel.

The recent brouhaha about whether the Palestinians are an "invented people" misses the point. The real question we should ask is, "Why do Palestinian Arabs repudiate 3,000 years of Jewish history in Palestine and the rights of Jews to a state in their ancestral homeland?" Can peace really be achieved if the Palestinians teach their people the lie that Jews are newcomers and Palestinians were the original inhabitants of the Holy Land?

### What are the facts?

**Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas stood before the United Nations General Assembly** in September, 2011 and said, "I come before you from the Holy Land, the land of Palestine, the land of divine messages, ascension of the Prophet Mohammed (peace be upon him) and the birthplace of Jesus Christ (peace be upon him)." What's missing in Abbas's description of the Holy Land is any mention of its Biblical founders, the Jewish people, or the fact that Jesus was a Jew. So brazen is the Palestinian effort to turn history on its head that Abbas's predecessor, Yassir Arafat, often claimed that "Jesus was the first Palestinian martyr."

*The Palestinians deny virtually every fact of Jewish life in Palestine before and after Biblical times.*

Indeed, rewriting the history of the land of Israel in order to deny Israel's right to exist is central to the Palestinian Authority's PR strategy. This rewriting has two dimensions: First to erase the 3,000-year history of the Jewish nation in the Holy Land; and second to invent ancient Palestinian, Muslim and Arab histories in the region.

**The Palestinians deny virtually every fact of Jewish life in Palestine before and after Biblical times.** Dr. Jamal Amar, a lecturer at Bir-Zeit University states that in the Holy Land after "60 years of digging . . . they've found nothing at all, not a water jug, not a coin, not an earthen vessel . . . absolutely nothing of this [Jewish] myth, because it is a myth and a lie"—this despite the discovery of tens of thousands of Hebrew coins, texts, pots, buildings and seals carrying Biblical references. Likewise, despite definitive archeological findings from the Temple Mount in Jerusalem and exhaustive scholarly confirmation of two Jewish Temples, the Palestinian Authority (P.A.) categorically denies the existence of any Temple.

What's more, the P.A. claims that since the Jews had no history in the Land of Israel, Zionism was a colonialist movement fabricated by Europeans to get rid of Jews. Another professor at Bir Zeit University, Samih Hamouda, asserts that President Abbas's student research proves "the Zionist movement is not Jewish . . . Rather it is an imperialist colonialist movement which sought to use the Jews . . . to further western colonialist plans."

**To prop up claims that only Arabs have valid rights to the Holy Land**, the P.A. and its academics have fabricated histories of Palestinians, Arabs and Muslims before Biblical times. Of course this is impossible, since the term Palestine was coined by Rome in 136 C.E.—after the time of Jesus. Islam was established much later in 610 C.E., and Arabs first arrived in Israel with the Muslim invasion of 637 C.E.

We witness more such distortions and outright lies in a 2005 Palestinian Authority video documentary that claims the ancient, vanished Canaanites were Arab, as were the Biblical Hebrews, and that the religion preached by Moses was Islam.

**In the face of these fabrications, it's fair to ask: Are the Palestinians an invented people?** The Associated Press headline responding to the question announced, "Palestinians 'invented people' is truth." But this is nothing new. The fact that the Palestinians are a made-up people has been established by all manner of historical research and acclamation, even by Arabs themselves.

We know that never in history was there a Palestinian state. We also know that nearly all the cities in Israel, the West Bank and Gaza have Hebrew names—like Bethlehem, Nazareth and Hebron—and their current Arabic names are translations of these names.

More importantly, back in 1937, the Arab leader Auni Bey Abdul-Hadi proclaimed to the Peel Commission, "There is no such country [as Palestine]. Palestine is a term the Zionists invented." Then in 1977, Zahir Muhsein, a member of the PLO Executive Committee said in an interview that "The Palestinian people does not exist. The creation of a Palestinian state is only a means for continuing our struggle against the state of Israel . . . Only for political and tactical reasons do we speak about the existence of the Palestinian people."

**To say that the Palestinians are a fabricated people, however, is *not* to say that they don't deserve their own state.** Rather, the problem arises when the P.A. invents *not only* their peoplehood but *also* a false history that justifies permanent jihad against the Jewish people and denies their rights to self-determination and a Jewish state in their homeland.

Israel has long accepted the idea of two states for two peoples—the Palestinians and the Jews. But the Palestinian Authority refuses to embrace this solution. As Mahmoud Abbas lashed out just a few months ago, "Don't order us to recognize a Jewish state. We won't accept it." Clearly, until this fundamental issue is resolved, the Palestinians will not achieve their goal of statehood. The fact that this outcome is based on falsehoods makes it a shame and a tragedy.

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*Facts and Logic About the Middle East*
*P.O. Box 590359 ■ San Francisco, CA 94159*
*Gerardo Joffe, President*

FLAME is a tax-exempt, non-profit educational 501 (c)(3) organization. Its purpose is the research and publication of the facts regarding developments in the Middle East and exposing false propaganda that might harm the interests of the United States and its allies in that area of the world. Your tax-deductible contributions are welcome. They enable us to pursue these goals and to publish these messages in national newspapers and magazines. We have virtually no overhead. Almost all of our revenue pays for our educational work, for these clarifying messages, and for related direct mail.

Monty was also leading an infantry division that participated in the fighting in France and, ultimately, had to retreat at Dunkirk. However, there was a difference with Monty's men. Because they were well trained, they departed French soil in an orderly fashion.

The author goes into great detail on the see-saw action in North Africa and both battles of El Alamein that resulted in the ultimate defeat of the Desert Fox. The author also focuses on the Allied assault in Normandy and subsequent combat.

Caddick-Adams has done an admirable job exploring each man's inner feelings and writing about what made them tick as people as well as field commanders.

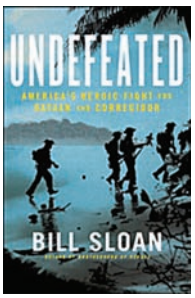
Both had the uncanny ability to inspire their troops. Each led by example, exposing themselves to danger and possible death on many occasions. Although imbuing their soldiers with an esprit de corps, they remained aloof and cold toward their staffs. Both spoke their minds, no matter what the consequences.

They were both naïve when it came to politics and dealing with their respective leaders. Each would disobey their superiors to do what they believed was the right thing to do.

"Thus Monty is as unlikely to have flourished in the German army as Rommel in the British," the author writes. "They were creatures and the products of their respective societies."

And, in the end, the irascible Montgomery would be forgiven by Prime Minister Winston Churchill. Rommel, unfortunately, was not so lucky. Hitler had him eliminated.

Rommel's untimely death, however, may have been a blessing for him. If he had lived, and witnessed the destruction of his beloved Germany, it may have been a fate worse than death for the immortal Desert Fox.

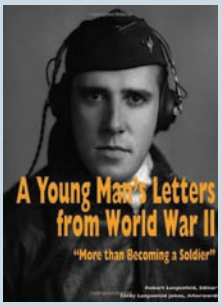



***Undefeated: America's Heroic Fight for Bataan and Corregidor*** by Bill Sloan, Simon & Schuster, New York, 2012, 416 pp., maps, photographs, notes, bibliography, $28.00, hardcover.

In his latest book, military historian Bill Sloan pays tribute to those individuals from all branches of the service who defended the Philippines against the Japanese during the dark, early days of the war in the Pacific. It is no secret—Sloan alludes to the fact in his account—that President Franklin Roosevelt had relegated the Pacific Theater to secondary status, shifting the priority to the fighting in the

# SHORT BURSTS

***A Young Man's Letters from World War II: "More Than Becoming a Soldier"*** edited by Robert Langenfeld, ELT Press, Greensboro, NC, 2011, 234 pp., photographs, $20.00, hardcover.




Nothing brings home the boredom, frustration, and horror of war like letters from a serviceman to his family and friends. They tell the personal side of the conflict, everything from the mundane to the terrifying experiences each person encountered.

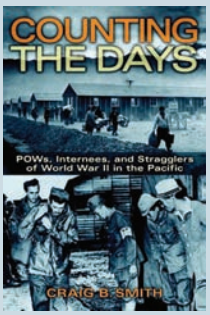
*A Young Man's Letters* tells the story of Lieutenant Robert E. Langenfeld, the pilot of a B-24 Liberator bomber in the Eighth Air Force stationed in England during World War II. The letters, edited by his son, trace the elder Langenfeld's journey from raw recruit at Jefferson Barracks, Missouri, to his pilot training and eventually his overseas duty.

Langenfeld's account of his missions over Germany depicts the realism of the conflict. He wrote about a mission on March 25, 1945, during which his aircraft flew at low altitude delivering supplies to Allied forces, describing it as "everyone for himself" after the supplies were dropped.

"You could see everything," he wrote. "Germans surrendering, dead on the ground. We were right in the thick of the battle. We got several holes in our ship from German infantrymen's rifles. Once again we were lucky. None of my crew was wounded, though our losses were fairly heavy."

For those with an interest in the air war over Germany through the eyes of someone who was there, this book would make a good addition to any home library.

***Counting the Days: POWs, Internees, and the Stragglers of World War II in the Pacific*** by Craig B. Smith, Smithsonian Books, Washington, DC, 2012, 264 pp., maps, photographs, bibliography, notes, $27.95, hardcover.




The author traveled the world to gain a sense of what POWs on both sides of the war in the Pacific had to endure just to survive their horrifying ordeal. Those who have read of the harsh treatment of Allied prisoners by the Japanese know how cruel they were. Smith, however, has also recorded acts of incredible bravery and compassion in his book.

There is an interesting account of an American couple who resided in the Philippines and fled into the jungle when the Japanese invaded the islands. Their tale is incredible indeed; they faced danger, starvation, and possible capture as they eluded the enemy.

Another section deals with the internment of Japanese-Americans, most of whom were U.S. citizens, by the Roosevelt administration when the war broke out. Although they were not mistreated, they were still imprisoned, said one of the internees at Manzanar in California. Today, ironically, the Manzanar site has been preserved by the National Park Service and is a tourist attraction.

This is a well-researched book depicting the hardships of people, both civilian and military, on both sides who want no pity and "most defiantly, want no sympathy. They are the survivors."

***Steel Cavalry: The 8th (New Brunswick) Hussars and the Italian Campaign*** by Lee Windsor, Goose Lane Editions, Fredericton, New Brunswick, Canada, 2011, 199 pp., maps, photographs, index, $18.95, softcover.


Lee Windsor, a former member of the regiment, has done a superlative job of tracing the lineage of the 8th New Brunswick Hussars during the fighting at Cassino, the Liri Valley, Metfa Crossing, the Ceprano, and a host of other battles in World War II.

Trading in their mounts for tanks, the unit saw its baptism of fire at Ortona, after its

European Theater.

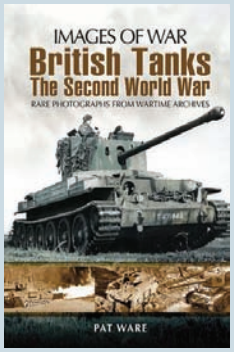
Sloan goes into detail on the mistakes made by the politicians and military brass in Washington. He also points out that General Douglas MacArthur, U.S. commander in the Philippines, deserves a lion's share of the blame himself, especially during the period immediately after the attack on Pearl Harbor until Christmas Eve, 1941.

MacArthur's inexcusable inactivity, resulting in the loss of planes and lives at Clark Field, about 60 miles north of Manila, was an unmitigated disaster. His hesitation in allowing Maj. Gen. Lewis Brereton, commander of the Far East Air Force, to order his bombers airborne to strike Japanese bases on Formosa led to the eventual destruction of the airfield and loss of life.

MacArthur's intense hatred of the Marine Corps because of the publicity showered on the Corps during World War I would not permit him to place Colonel Samuel Howard's battle-tested 4th Marines, who had arrived from Shanghai, China, to help against the Japanese onslaught.

Despite MacArthur's indecision, the "Battling Bastards of Bataan" and the troops on Corregidor fought tenaciously against a numerically superior enemy equipped with better weapons and air superiority. In the end, MacArthur was ordered out of the Philippines and General Jonathan Wainwright was left holding the bag. Although Wainwright put up a spirited defense, he was forced to capitulate in May 1942.

Sloan provides graphic detail of the horrific atrocities committed against U.S. and Filipino prisoners, as well as the civilian population, during the 60-mile trek to Camp O'Donnell after their capture. The horrendous ordeal has




initial landing at Naples in late 1943. It was not long before the 8th Hussars were in the thick of the fighting as they rolled up the Liri Valley. On a single day in May 1944, the regiment destroyed or seized 11 enemy antitank guns, two self-propelled howitzers, six gun tractors, one 105mm artillery piece, numerous machine guns, and one Panther tank.

"Following the path the Hussars took to Coriano, then, will add much to our knowledge of the men New Brunswick, and Canada, sent off to win the Second World War," he writes.

who told their stories for the book. The squadron carried everything from oil to gasoline, bombs, and ammunition, and even evacuated wounded. For their dedication, the 13th received two Presidential Unit Citations and seven battle stars. The coffee table-sized book is chock full of personal photographs taken by the crew members during their three-year stint in the Pacific. It is not only a great tribute to the 13th but also to all the troop carrier squadrons who risked their lives to deliver essential supplies to the infantrymen on the front lines.

***The Thirsty 13th: The U.S. Army Air Forces 13th Troop Carrier Squadron, 1940-1945, New Caledonia-New Hebrides–Biak–Leyte*** by Seth P. Washburne, Thirsty 13th LLC, 2011, 800 pp., photographs, index, $125, hardcover.

The 13th Troop Transport Squadron, nicknamed the "Thirsty 13th," had the distinction of being the first such unit stationed in the South Pacific in the early phases of World War II. The pilots wasted no time and swung into action supporting the Marines who were fighting desperately on Guadalcanal in the Solomons. Their aircraft lifted off in the wee hours of the morning and flew nearly 800 miles before reaching their destination, delivering much-needed supplies to the beleaguered leathernecks.

The author interviewed 73 crew members,

***Images of War: British Tanks, The Second World War, Rare Photographs from Wartime Archives*** by Pat Ware, Pen & Sword Books, South Yorkshire, England, 2011, 144 pp., diagrams, photographs, $24.95, softcover.

Historian Pat Ware, an expert on military vehicles, has written a well-researched book about the history and development of the British tank during World War II. From the outset of the conflict in 1939 until its completion in 1945, the Brits studied nearly two dozen tank designs. One company, Vickers-Armstrong, contributed 25 percent of the tracked vehicles produced for the war effort, including the popular Valentine model.

The book offers great illustrations depicting the history of the tank design and development from the British point of view. □

since been called the Bataan Death March.

Amid the historical background, Sloan does a marvelous job of interjecting personal accounts of the survivors, many of whom he interviewed personally. Sloan has penned a great book that is a must-read for all World War II Pacific history buffs.

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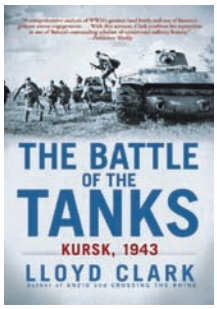



***The Battle of the Tanks: Kursk, 1943*** by Lloyd Clark, Atlantic Monthly Press, New York, 2011, 468 pp., maps, photographs, notes, index, $30.00, hardcover.

Although the Battle of Kursk, about 300 miles south of Moscow, was the largest tank and infantry battle in the history of warfare, it has received limited attention from Western military historians. When Hitler launched Operation Barbarossa, the invasion of the Soviet Union, in 1941, his blitzkrieg poured through the Red Army defenses, sending them reeling in retreat.

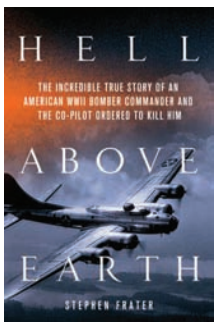
By the summer of 1943, however, the Germans had failed to capture Moscow and suffered a staggering defeat at Stalingrad. As the Wehrmacht withdrew westward, a great salient, or bulge, developed in the Soviet lines. This bulge was centered in the area of Kursk, and Hitler was determined to eliminate it.

The scale of the combat at Kursk was massive with the opposing armies fielding about four million men between them, as well as 69,000 artillery pieces and mortars, 13,000 tanks and self-propelled guns, and nearly 12,000 aircraft.

The Red Army had reaped benefits since its initial clashes with German forces. In July 1943, when the Germans initiated their effort to eliminate the Kurst salient with Operation Citadel, the Soviets had substantially recovered from their losses early in the war, and the German effort was eventually defeated.

In terms of casualties, the Russians bore the brunt with more than 860,000 dead, wounded, and missing. During the months of July and August, German casualties were 500,000.

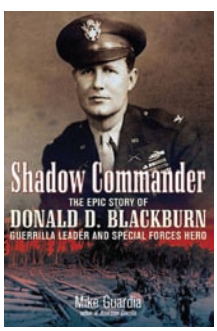
Clark's book rings with an authentic feel when he writes about the fighting and the leaders, possibly because he actually walked the battlefield and spoke to survivors. In doing so, he has given the reader an excellent account of the Kursk operation.




***Hell Above Earth: The Incredible True Story of an American WWII Bomber Commander and the Co-pilot Ordered to Kill Him*** by Stephen Frater, St. Martin's Press, New York, 2012, 320 pp., photographs, bibliography, notes, $25.99, hardcover.

Although Captain Werner Goering was an exceptional U.S. pilot and was patriotic and believed in destroying the Nazis who were ravaging Europe, he did have one thing against him—he was the nephew of Hermann Göring —chief of the German Luftwaffe.

Werner's father had immigrated to the United States immediately following World War I and settled in Salt Lake City, Utah. At first the family was extremely proud of their relative's meteoric rise to leadership in the German government. However, when Germany invaded Poland in 1939 and Hitler's true intentions were discovered, Werner's family and the German-American community as a whole were ashamed.




Eager to fight for America, Werner Goering became a B-17 bomber pilot, flying numerous missions over Germany. He even took part in a raid over Cologne, where his relatives resided.

What Goering did not know was that the FBI was closely watching him because of his ties to his infamous uncle. What he also did not know was that the FBI had ordered his co-pilot, Jack Rencher, to kill him if he attempted to defect to the other side.

*Hell Above Earth* is a riveting tale that will keep readers on the edge of their seats. It not only tells of the dangerous missions that bomber pilots and crews had to endure, but has an added twist of mystery and intrigue.

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***Shadow Commander: The Epic Story of Donald D. Blackburn, Guerilla Leader and Special Forces Hero*** by Mike Guardia, Casemate Publishers, Havertown, PA, 2011, 216 pp., maps, photographs, bibliography, index, $32.95, hardcover.

The name Donald Blackburn should be prominent in any discussions about the history of the U.S. Army Special Forces. As a young lieutenant stationed in the Philippines in World War II, the Florida native successfully escaped the Japanese when Bataan fell and, with fellow Special Forces legend Russell Volckmann, made

his way deep into the fetid jungles of northern Luzon to continue the fight against the enemy by conducting a guerrilla war.

The Japanese, however, were not the only enemies that he had to contend with. Malaria and the questionable allegiance of the indigenous tribes were further obstacles he had to overcome. Together, the two organized an effective fighting force that harassed the Japanese until the Allied invasion of October 1944. Soon, the young lieutenant had about 5,000 under his command and the unit became known as Blackburn's Headhunters. Because of his enormous success, Blackburn rose to the rank of colonel at just 29—the youngest colonel in U.S. Army history.

The author, who also wrote a great biography of Volckmann, follows Blackburn's career into the early stages of the Vietnam War in the 1950s and his part in planning the ill-fated Son Tay Raid in North Vietnam in 1970.

In this absorbing, well-written book, Guardia gives long overdue recognition to a true hero and pioneer of the Army's Special Forces.

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*Women Wartime Spies* by Ann Kramer, Pen & Sword, South Yorkshire, Great Britain, 2011, 160 pp., photographs, index, $39.95, hardcover.


Although the first few chapters of this book deal exclusively with female spies during World War I, the majority of it focuses on women who ventured into occupied countries, especially France, during World War II. Many of these brave ladies were captured, tortured, and executed, but not before they had performed remarkable duty behind the lines to help the Allied effort.

During the war, approximately 3,000 women were part of the British Special Operations Executive and recruited from the Female Aid Nursing Yeomanry, a "fiercely independent all-woman organization."

Kramer gives a good background of the training and duties of the field agents. She also gives biographical sketches of some of the better known female operatives, whom she describes as "committed, idealistic, thoughtful, patriotic, and brave."

This is a must-read that deals with the heroic women who risked their lives in Nazi-occupied territory, performing dangerous clandestine operations to help defeat fascism in World War II. □

By Joseph Luster

## *AIR CONFLICTS: SECRET WARS* BRINGS DOGFIGHTING TO CONSOLES.

*Air Conflicts: Secret Wars* is the perfect example of a game for which there's a ton of competition on PC and very little comparable action on consoles. We've covered the title leading up to its cross-platform release, but have since had the chance to spend a healthy amount of time with the retail version on Xbox 360. Can this dogfighter compare with its contemporaries, regardless of platform?

The answer depends on how hungry you are for air combat. On one hand, *Air Conflicts* controls smoothly and provides a variety of mission types throughout its campaign, as well as fairly straightforward but fun competitive multiplayer. It may not stand proudly atop the hill when it comes to any individual aspect of the package, but the point is it works and isn't a clunky, broken mess. Controls come in two flavors: Arcade and Simulation. The former makes it easy for pretty much anyone to hop in the cockpit and start shooting down bogeys left and right, while the latter offers some more refined control for maneuvering the aircrafts.

Options are even more plentiful when it comes to the camera perspective, but I found it really difficult to pilot planes and accomplish much of anything outside of the default third-person view. It can be a bit easier to aim when in the straight-up cockpit mode, but it's not worth the sacrifice of other functions, and switching constantly between views makes for a dizzying volley of zooms and swoops. In other words, you're more likely to crash switching angles at a few thousand feet than you are zipping along within inches of treetops and buildings.

*Air Conflict*'s story is typical of the genre, with a hotshot female (!) pilot protagonist being one of its few unique offerings. Things start off simple, with delivery missions that help acclimate the player to flying around and taking down the occasional enemy. Between missions, our heroine, Dorothy "DeeDee" Derbec, frequently expresses her misgivings about her role in the war, and whether or not the ends justify the often horrific means. She wishes to be neutral, taking on jobs like smuggling arms and whiskey, but her story is ultimately fated to intertwine with that of her father and the truth behind his disappearance.


**PUBLISHER**
bitComposer Games

**DEVELOPER**
Games Farm

**SYSTEM(S)**
Xbox 360, PlayStation 3, PC

**AVAILABLE**
Now

Outside of missions, the narrative plays out through a still, comic frame-style presentation, which would work fine were the rest of the execution not so dull. *Air Conflict*'s environments and aircraft look decent enough in action, but the stilted animations and poor texture work show their true colors during the cutscenes.

The worst offender, however, is the voice acting, which couldn't be more emotionless if it tried. It's like hearing an incredibly detached person's recollection of World War II, and the yawning manner in which it's read doesn't reflect the urgency of the words that appear in the script. When DeeDee is under fire, she utters the occasional expletive with all the energy of a sleeping, dreamless dog. The supporting cast isn't much better, but when readings with this little enthusiasm are the takes that made the final cut, one would imagine everything left on the cutting room floor is just about as unfit for human ears as can be. If there is anything on the cutting room floor, that is.

It's a good thing most people don't come to games like this for the story, though it would-

n't kill a developer to really give it their all in that regard. I'd love to see a great character-driven narrative in more of these flight titles. One needn't devote bottomless wells of cash just to put a little more heart into the stories, and the same goes for the way said stories are portrayed. Still comic frames are fine and dandy, but back them up with some solid performances from actors who sound like they believe in what they're reading.

Regardless of how poor its execution may be, the story does take players through some interesting combat scenarios, and there's a decent amount of variety in each. DeeDee wrestles with profit and the past versus her own morals across the Siege of Tobruk, Fall Blau, Operation Black, Operation Belt, Operation Overlord, the Slovak National Uprising, and the final days of the war from October 1944 to April 1945. There are plenty of straight-up seek and destroy bombing runs as well as protection, stealth missions, and more.

The Stealth missions are a great idea, but right off the bat the execution is a bit puzzling. On one hand, it's fun to remain undetected, but it also mostly entails laying low and keeping your eye on the radar to avoid the big white circles that represent an enemy plane's field of detection. Once busted, all the "being seen is not an option" talk is thrown out the window, and it's time for some dogfighting. Missions can still be successfully completed, thankfully, but more often than not, there's little reason to actually remain undetected when it's so easy to bump right into that circle and initiate combat.

There are some other frustrations along the way, especially as you make your way deeper into the campaign. Checkpoints are plentiful and relatively forgiving, unless you happen to get battered along the way, in which case loading the checkpoint will keep your plane in the same tattered, hopeless condition. Should the situation prove inescapable in that state, it's best to start the mission over from scratch, which is particularly annoying in the longer sorties. Naturally, getting better at the game helps, but some situations are hopeless. One, for instance, has DeeDee outmaneuvering Russian planes on the way to off a target. The enemies aren't marked on the radar since it's just an evading mission, and once you make it to the target you essentially have to circle the area for two minutes as you wait for him to take off so you can shoot him down. It's tedious, to say the least, and even more so when it comes time to flee the area in your Swiss cheese aircraft.

Online multiplayer deathmatches are actually really fun if you can find a lobby with enough people in it (the console version supports up to eight at a time). Fighting one-on-one—which I ended up doing quite a few times due to lack of players—quickly becomes a game of circling one another until the timer runs out or someone gets bored, but get a full lobby and there will be plenty of careening, screeching rockets and close calls. There's also the option of linking systems for those who prefer to fight in the same room.

The only aspect of *Air Conflicts: Secret Wars* I was unable to test out is the 3D compatibility, but those able to fully enjoy that function are few and far between. As many negative things as there are to say about it as a whole, I still find myself coming back for the occasional airborne showdown, even after completing the campaign. PC gamers can probably skip this one, but those looking for some dogfighting action on relatively flight-starved consoles might want to give its open skies a shot. Just consider muting the game's dreadful dialogue and predictable, one-note war game orchestrations. □

## top secret

*Continued from page 37*

and was shot dead. The commandos were unable to break in and missed the opportunity to destroy all the documentation concerned with Rommel's logistics. This would have been a serious blow for Rommel.

With one officer dead and the other out of action, Sergeant Jack Terry was trying to reorganize the commandos. At the transport pool the commando detachment was trying to blow up vehicles, but the wet detonators and timers for their explosives would not work. The commandos had better luck with the generator; they put it out of action with explosives set off by grenades. As guards from the nearby barracks began to move in, Terry ordered the commandos to regroup at the Arab dwellings prior to withdrawing to the beach.

The commandos wanted to carry the wounded Captain Campbell back to the beach, but he refused to be carried.

The commandos began their withdrawal, but only a mile from Beda Littoria Terry decided that to go any further and attempt to descend the escarpment in the dark and rain was foolhardy. So they spent the rest of the night huddled together and soaked to the skin. Still believing that Rommel had been in the building and that they had failed to capture or kill him, depression added to their discomfort.

Ten miles from Beda Littoria, at the crossroads a mile from Cyrene, Lieutenant Cooke and his commandos studied the cable mast they were to destroy: four massive wooden posts supporting an array of terminals and wiring with lines going off in four directions to Derna, Slonta, Bardia, and Benghazi. Some of the commandos climbed the posts and cut wires so that when they destroyed the posts the structure would fall, but when they came to blow up the posts they found that the fuses for the explosives were wet and useless. Finally, using grenades as fuses, they managed to create some explosions, but they were not enough to put the site out of action permanently.

The next day, the commandos hid in a cave while Italian and German troops with tracker dogs searched for them. Two Italian soldiers entered the cave. The commandos shot one of them but the other, wounded, raised the alarm. Grenades were thrown into the cave, and the commandos decided to make a break for it. They raced out of the cave and found themselves facing two heavy machine guns. It was hopeless. They put up their hands. They were taken as prisoners to Benghazi.

Back at Beda Littoria, the wounded Captain Campbell was interrogated by the Germans but would say nothing. He was given medical treatment and sent to a hospital in Derna. On November 19, Keyes and the four Germans killed in the raid were buried with full military honors in the local churchyard.

Sergeant Jack Terry and his commandos descended the escarpment and rendezvoused with Colonel Laycock and his commandos in the wadi near the beach. Twelve commandos, including Roy Cooke's group, were still missing.

The submarine *Talisman,* unable to land its full complement of commandos, had returned to Alexandria, but *Torbay* had remained in place off the headland. That night Laycock contacted *Torbay* by Aldis lamp, but the sea was too rough for the commandos to be ferried out to the submarine that night.

Around noon the next day, the commandos came under fire from a large group of Italian carabinieri. After a couple of hours of sporadic firing and knowing the Italians would have called up reinforcements, Laycock gave the order to go into escape and evasion—every man for himself. They broke away in small groups, leaving behind one wounded man and a medical orderly.

The Italian and German manhunt for the commandos was not very successful until, with a price on their heads, all the British except Colonel Laycock and Sergeant Jack Terry were betrayed by local people. They were befriended by Senussi tribesmen at different times and survived for more than a month until on Christmas Day 1941, they met with forward troops of the British Eighth Army near Cyrene. Laycock, Terry, and a SBS man who had survived alone in the Jebel were the only ones to return safely from the abortive mission to capture or kill Rommel.

On his return to Cairo, Laycock recommended both Geoffrey Keyes and Jack Terry for the Victoria Cross. The dead Lt. Col. Keyes, son of an admiral of the fleet, was granted the award, but the 19-year-old Sergeant Terry, a butcher's son, who had faced the same odds as Keyes and brought the commandos back to the beach, was awarded a Distinguished Conduct Medal.

When Rommel heard about the raid on the headquarters at Beda Littoria, he was deeply indignant, muttering words to the effect: "How could the British have ever imagined I would have my operational headquarters 250 miles behind my own front line?" □

*Author John Brown has written numerous times for* WWII History. *He resides in Queensland, Australia.*

## tinian

*Continued from page 67*

all around them had been killed or wounded. Despite direct fire from enemy small arms, mortars, and grenades, they held their position until the enemy attack overwhelmed them both. Each received a posthumous Navy Cross.

The Tinian beachhead had been secured. Marines of the 24th and 25th Regiments destroyed the bulk of the attacking Japanese forces. Despite desperate resistance, the battle for Tinian had been won. Schmidt's V Amphibious Corps conquered Tinian in a nine-day campaign at a cost of 328 killed and 1,571 wounded. Two Medals of Honor and additional Navy Crosses were awarded to Marine and Navy participants. Having been outflanked by the unexpected landings at the White Beaches, Ogata's men, their prepared defenses now facing the wrong way and useless, reverted to cave warfare with the occasional counterattack. As always, such fighting was deadly to the attacking Marines. It was equally deadly and unproductive to the defenders as over 9,000 Japanese soldiers and sailors fell defending the island.

With a killed in action ratio of 27 to 1, Tinian was certainly one of the most successful island campaigns of the Pacific War. Were it not for the planning and the courage of the experienced, although tired and depleted, Marine units that carried it out, the American losses would no doubt have been far greater. Tinian's most significant contribution to the war effort took place almost exactly one year later, when the Boeing B-29 Superfortress bomber *Enola Gay t*ook off from the island bound for Hiroshima with an atomic bomb.

General Harry Schmidt and his V Amphibious Corps went on to more battles, including one of the war's deadliest fights at Iwo Jima. The Marines were preparing to invade Japan when the *Enola Gay* left Tinian. The 2nd Marine Division remained in the Marianas for months, mopping up Japanese stragglers on Saipan and Tinian before returning to Hawaii. The 8th Marine Regiment of the division participated in the Okinawa conquest and it, too, was preparing to invade Japan when a second B-29, *Bock's Car,* took off from Tinian, bound for Nagasaki with a second atomic bomb.

The "perfect operation" had finally come full circle. □

*Nathan N. Prefer is an independent historian who has published three books on the war in Europe and the Pacific. He resides in Fort Myers, Florida.*

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in pain as he began to campaign on behalf of the Third Victory Loan. He was a poor public speaker; he said so at the beginning of many of his speeches. He had no feel for socializing or public relations. He was openly hostile to a group of Girl Guides who honored his kills by presenting him with red roses. Similarly, he was antagonistic when a reporter asked about bond sales and replied: "If I were ever asked to do that again I'd tell them to go to hell or ask for a commission on the bonds that I sold."

Behavior such as this resulted in Beurling being quietly but quickly sent back to England. The RAF made him an instructor, but Beurling had neither aptitude nor patience for teaching. He demanded to join a combat squadron, a demand the RAF initially rejected. An angry Beurling applied for admission into the RCAF, which, still embarrassed by having rejected him in 1939, eagerly accepted him. He was posted first to 403 Wolf Squadron, RCAF, which was engaged in regular combat sorties over France. The Allies were sending as many as 50 Spitfires over enemy territory at one time and only one in four of these sorties met Luftwaffe resistance. This type of air war was not what Beurling craved. He could not win glory.

Beurling began breaking formation and going off on his own in search of German fighters, but in doing this he left his wingman exposed to great danger. It was during this period that he fired his shotgun at his wing commander's Tiger Moth. He shot down one FW-190 while serving with 403 Squadron and later was posted to 412 Squadron, RCAF, where he shot down another FW-190, his last kill in World War II.

Beurling's constantly worsening behavior became intolerable to the RCAF. Events reached a climax when Beurling flatly refused a direct order to stop buzzing the squadron headquarters. "You can't tell me what to do," he snapped at his commanding officer, then immediately went up and buzzed the headquarters again. Any other pilot would have been court-martialed immediately, but Beurling was Canada's top ace. He was quietly sent home and given an honorable discharge.

Suddenly rudderless, Beurling tried to join the United States Army Air Forces (USAAF), but the Americans rejected him. They did not want a misfit either. He had married Diana Whittall, a Vancouver debutante he had met while on his Victory Loan Tour, but the marriage was doomed to failure. One reason for this was the interest Beurling showed in other women while still on his honeymoon. He tried various jobs and failed at them all. No commercial aviation company would consider him. He was too wild. For a time, Canada's greatest air ace, a pilot with 32 confirmed kills, begged on the streets of Montreal.

However, in 1948, Beurling's luck apparently turned. The newly formed state of Israel, under attack by its Arab neighbors, was struggling to create an air force. It was searching the world for planes and pilots. Beurling volunteered. At first there was some Israeli reluctance to taking him, but he was accepted. How this happened tells a great deal about the "Falcon of Malta."

In the spring of 1948, Beurling offered his services to Ben Dunkelman, the Jewish agent in Montreal responsible for recruiting aircrew. When questioned, Beurling agreed to fly for standard pay and affirmed his sincerity with biblical teachings.

"I told him we had no money to pay him, no uniforms, and no airframes except for a few Piper Cubs," recalled Dynkelman. "He said he didn't care about the money. He already had offers from three armies who wanted him. He told me: 'The Jews deserve a state of their own after wandering around homeless for thousands of years. I just want to offer my help.'"

Beurling even suggested he lead a group of pilots to Malta in an attempt to steal Spitfires from an RAF base. Despite some misgivings, Dunkelman believed Beurling truly cared about the cause rather than just the fight and signed him up.

Beurling never flew a fighter for Israel, however. On May 21, 1948, the Canadian-built Noorduyn Norseman aircraft he was taking to Israel crashed at Urbe airport near Rome. The reason for the crash was never really determined, but there was speculation that it was caused by sabotage. Beurling died in the crash and was buried in Rome, but his body was moved to Israel in 1950. He is buried along with four other Christian Canadian veterans who died fighting for Israel.

Whatever Beurling's behavior, he should be remembered for what he accomplished to earn the name "The Falcon of Malta." He flew his first Maltese mission on June 12, 1942, and his last mission on October 10, 1942. In 121 days, Beurling, while often flying more than one mission a day and suffering from malnutrition, illness, and exhaustion, was credited with 28 confirmed kills.

The "Screwball," buried in a hero's grave in Israel, was Malta's top gun. □

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*Author Herb Kugel writes from his home in Granville Ferry, Nova Scotia.*

*Continued from page 45*

gun. Furthermore, a platoon of Company I had the mission of protecting the 1st Battalion's left flank and was all but annihilated moving the 300 yards from the church at St. Georges d'Elle toward the bridge. Despite the cost, these actions kept the Germans from shifting forces to assist those defending the hill.

While Company A was coping with disaster, Lieutenant Vere McClement's Company C on the right, aided by the tank-engineer teams, was having appreciably better success since resistance in this sector was less severe. Still, there were numerous spirited actions. In one instance, Sergeant Clem Turpin had machine-gun bullets slashing between his prone body and the earth. When he was finally able to rise, he discovered that while he remained unscathed his cartridge belt had been shredded. Later, after a heated exchange of gunfire, Turpin captured the crew of an antitank gun and then turned the weapon to fire five rounds at an enemy position farther up the hill. Elsewhere, several enterprising soldiers put their rifle grenades to good use when they twice managed to loft fragmentation grenades into the treetops above stubborn machine-gun nests. The explosions rained steel fragments on the gunners, mimicking the effects of tree bursts. Such actions contributed greatly to the company's success.

For a while, C Company's advance was hampered by lack of contact with the 1st Battalion, 38th Infantry to its right. Fearing an open flank, the company held up until contact could be regained. Once established, the attack continued with much more confidence. About noon, the attached tanks approached a house near Ford Woods where the Americans discovered a Mark IV tank lying in ambush from a sunken road. Fortunately, a pair of steel-nerved riflemen crept along the hedgerow opposite the tank and peeked over its crest. The tank commander was standing in the open turret with his back to them. Both sneaked up with grenades ready. One shot the commander. Then both pitched their bombs down the open hatch, followed by two more. The ensuing explosions destroyed the tank.

Meanwhile, things remained in a state of confusion back at the draw. In the course of neutralizing the German strongpoints on the left flank, all three platoons of Company A were now facing east. The attack was supposed to be toward the south and over the hill to the St. Lo highway. After a great deal of radio communication and map consulting, the situation was rectified and the attack resumed. Initially, there was concern over the loss of platoon leaders in both the 1st and 3rd Platoons, but fortunately Sergeant William Stanley of the 3rd Platoon managed to integrate the remnants of the decimated 1st Platoon into his own. Once organized, he pushed them halfway to their objective, often under heavy mortar fire. At one point Stanley was so fired up that he radioed back that he was not going to stop until he reached Berlin! Such was the spirit of assault in the 2nd Infantry Division.

Still, every step of the attack was vigorously contested. Lt. Col. Hightower became so disturbed by the slow progress of his battalion that he eventually committed his reserve, Company B, which swung out on the battalion right to sweep through the eastern point of Ford Woods.

As the GIs gradually gained the upper hand, the enemy resorted to blatant treachery. On one occasion, a group of about 25 paratroopers waved a white flag as they approached the left flank of Company A. Suddenly, they dropped the flag and dashed into a nearby farmhouse from which they continued the fight. Angered by the ruse, the Americans called artillery on them, but the paratroopers held out for the remainder of the day, only withdrawing under cover of darkness. Other truces were attempted elsewhere, but the wary men of the 23rd Infantry would have none of it.

Earlier, when the heavy losses in Company A were realized, the regimental commander, Colonel Jay Loveless, ordered elements of his 2nd Battalion forward at noon to continue the attack on the left. However, it was nearly 5 PM by the time this force reached the battlefront, almost too late to be of appreciable assistance. Still, Captain George Duckworth of Company F noted that when the attached tanks smashed through a hedgerow the enemy, though dazed by the incessant bombardment, came out full of fight. "It was a fierce, no-quarter-asked, no-quarter-given battle," he recalled, "often man-to-man with rifle butts, bayonets, and trench knives."

By then darkness was fast approaching, and soon all offensive operations ceased. Although the 1st Battalion, 23rd Infantry had conquered its assigned section of Hill 192 with a gain of 1,500 yards, it too fell short of its objective. The exhausted soldiers dug in along a road that ran diagonally northeast from the eastern tip of Ford Woods to St. Georges d'Elle, facing a sizable pocket of defiant paratroopers. The battalion's ultimate goal, the St. Lo-Berigny highway, remained some 400 yards beyond its reach.

Having lost their lofty observation post of Hill 192, the Germans withdrew that evening to the south side of the highway and immediately began preparing for the next assault. The following day, July 12, both of the American battalions that had halted on the reverse slope continued their attacks against mild resistance and were soon across the St. Lo highway where they dug in with the enemy again only one or two fields away. The Battle for Hill 192 was officially over.

The Germans had suffered mightily during the July 11 assault. One cannot discount the effects of the preliminary bombardment or the barrages that preceded each phase of the attack. A surviving German paratrooper later wrote: "When one hears for hours the whining, whistling, and bursting of shells and the moaning of the wounded, one does not feel too well. Altogether it was hell."

The American artillery had dropped more than 20,000 shells on the hill. Still the Germans emerged to man their posts and fought tenaciously. The 3rd Battalion, 9th Parachute Regiment on the western slope and the 1st Battalion, 5th Parachute Regiment on the eastern slope bore the brunt of the attack and were decimated—losses that could scarcely be replaced. It was reported that the commander of the 9th Parachute Regiment wept when he learned of his losses. In the course of the battle, the two defending battalions were reinforced by the 12th Parachute Gun Brigade and the 3rd Parachute Reconnaissance Company. As the men of the Indianhead Division gained ground the Germans tossed in the 3rd Parachute Engineer Battalion as a last resort, but all for naught.

For the Americans it had been a strenuous but extremely successful operation. Casualties had been fewer than anticipated: 69 killed, 328 wounded, and eight missing. Prior to this day the division had suffered many times that number in two previous attempts to take the hill, not to mention those lost on the many raids and reconnaissance patrols that had scoured the forward slopes.

With Hill 192 now in American hands, the stage was set for the capture of coveted St. Lo the following week, ending 17 days of grueling combat that had cost the First Army 40,000 casualties for a gain of seven paltry miles. Seven days after the fall of St. Lo, Operation Cobra was launched, unleashing the armor of Lt. Gen. George S. Patton's Third Army on its whirlwind drive through France. Within four weeks the Allies were in Paris. The Normandy stalemate had been broken. The hated hedgerows were now nothing more than a bad memory. □

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*Author Cleve C. Barkley resides in Loraine, Illinois. This is his first contribution to* WWII History.

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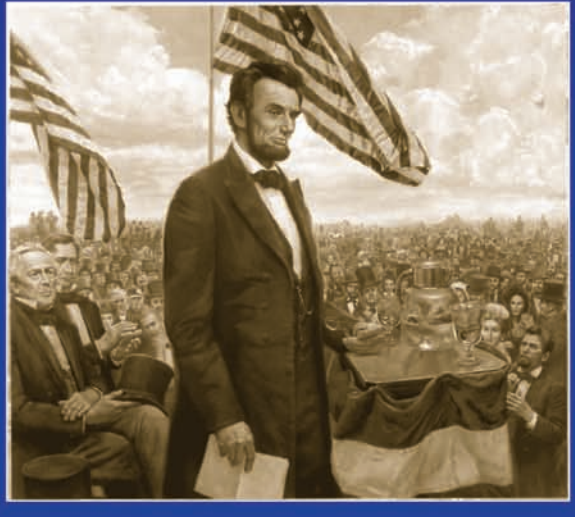

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