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Cover: An American tank travels along a country road in Normandy as U.S. troops move up to new positions during Operation Cobra, which began July 25, 1944. Photo courtesy of the National Archives.

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## Piper Bill Millin leaves behind a legend.

**THE IMAGE OF THE SCOTTISH PIPER STANDING ERECT UNDER FIRE WAS** commemorated in the film *The Longest Day* nearly two decades after the D-Day landings of June 6, 1944. Truth is often, as it turns out, stranger than fiction. To the surprise of many, the incident actually occurred.

At the age of 21, Private Bill Millin played the bagpipes on Sword Beach, walking along and skirling “Heilan’ Laddie” as bullets splashed into the water around him. The man behind him was hit, but Bill was undeterred. He was following orders. Piper Bill, as he was affectionately known, passed away in a nursing home in Dawlish, Devon, last August at the age of 88.

Millin had trained as a commando at Achnacarry and by chance met Simon Fraser, 15th Lord Lovat and commander of the 1st Special Service Brigade. When he was offered a position on Lovat’s staff, he refused. Instead, Lovat did persuade him to become the commander’s personal piper. Following World War I, the British Army had banned pipers from the battlefield due to fearful casualties. When Millin pointed out that fact, Lovat replied, “Ah, but that is the English War Office. You and I are both Scottish and that doesn’t apply.”

On D-Day, the only weapon Millin carried was a ceremonial dirk tucked into his stocking. His pipes began to blare as the invasion armada left port in England, and those soldiers who heard the music raised a cheer. When they reached the beach, the piper did his duty, miraculously remaining unhurt. Several captured German soldiers later stated that they had not shot at Millin because they believed he had lost his mind.

“He was what we would nowadays call a celebrity,” Ken Sturdy, a 90-year-old Royal Navy veteran of D-Day and chairman of the Torbay and South Devon Normandy Veterans Association, told *Guardian News and Media*. “Among all the noise and bedlam going on I could hear bagpipes. I thought I had imagined them, and it wasn’t until later that I realized I really had heard them. Bill marched boldly with his pipes in a situation that was quite unbelievable. It was in the heat of battle, there was a lot of gunfire, and he was unarmed except for his pipes and his dirk. It was certainly heroic. People were dying around him and he was in the most alarming situation, so he must have been a very cool young fellow.”

Another D-Day veteran, Tom Duncan, acknowledged, “I shall never forget hearing the skirl of Bill Millin’s pipes. It is hard to describe the impact it had. It gave us a great lift and increased our determination. As well as the pride we felt, it reminded us of home and why we were there fighting for our lives and those of our loved ones.”

According to Telegraph Media Group, Millin was called upon several additional times to raise the morale of the men and steady their nerves. On the road to the village of Benouville near Pegasus Bridge, snipers fired at the British troops, and Lovat himself killed one of the Germans. When two soldiers confirmed that the enemy soldier was dead, Lovat leaned toward Millin and said, “Right Piper, start the pipes again.”

Once inside the town, Millin was asked to play for the men of 6 Commando as they advanced down the main street. One officer advised the piper to run, but Millin played “Blue Bonnets Over the Border” and walked ahead at a normal pace. Once they had reached Pegasus Bridge, Lovat ordered the piper to lead the men across. Knowing that the span was under sniper fire, he again stepped forward. Later, he remembered, “It seemed like a very long bridge.”

Millin participated in operations in Holland and ended the war in the town of Lubeck, Germany. He returned to Britain and worked on Lovat’s estate for a time, performed with a theater company, and trained as a psychiatric nurse. For the next 26 years, he worked at Langdon Hospital, Dawlish. Following his retirement in 1988, he returned to Normandy several times. In 1995, he played the bagpipes at Lord Lovat’s funeral.

Sometime during 2011, a statue of the famed D-Day piper is to be unveiled near the beach where he landed long ago. Such a permanent remembrance is fitting for a man who was indeed larger than life in 1944.

*Michael E. Haskew*

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## Nazi SS Handzar Division

Dear Editor:

As someone who has followed and written about the 1990's war in Bosnia, my attention was drawn to the article entitled, "Hitler's Recruits" (Insight, September 2010 issue). Although the Nazi connection to the Bosnian Muslim 13th Waffen SS Division is well known, few people know of the Arab world's connection to the unit known as the Hanjar Division. The name Hanjar is defined as "saber" from the Arabic and sometimes spelled Handzar, was also said to mean "slit the throat."

A Christian Activist for Israel article entitled, "The Arab/Muslim Nazi Connection" shows a photo taken in 1943 of the Grand Mufti of Jerusalem, Haj Amin el-Husseini, reviewing Bosnian Muslim troops—a unit of the Hanjar (Saber) Division of the Waffen SS which he personally recruited for Hitler. The article reported that "in 1943 the Mufti travelled several times to Bosnia, where on orders of the SS he recruited the notorious 'Hanjar troopers,' a special Bosnian Waffen SS company which slaughtered 90 percent of Bosnia's Jews and burned countless Serbian churches and villages." Unfortunately, the demise of the Hanjar Division after WWII was not permanent.

In a 2008 article "Revising Nazism," historian and Balkan expert Carl Savich writes of the Bosnian Muslim government's attempt to reestablish the Nazi SS Handzar Division in 1993. Savich reported the early planning for the Muslim unit: "The Bosnian Muslim faction had threatened to reform and to recreate the Handzar Nazi SS Division. In October, 1991, the Bosnian Muslim magazine *Novi Vox* in Sarajevo, in issue no. 3, well over half a year before the civil war broke out in 1992, published a front-cover illustration showing a Bosnian Muslim Nazi SS officer in the Handzar Division stepping on the decapitated and bloody heads of Serbian leaders, including Bosnian Serb leader Radovan Karadzic. The caption read: 'The Handzar Division is ready!' Another headline announced: 'The Fourth Reich is coming—Welcome!' This revival of Bosnia's Nazi and SS genocidal past was censored, suppressed, and covered-up in the U.S. and the Western media. But the Bosnian Serb population got the message very clearly."

From a strategic viewpoint, the reconstituted Hanjar Division had little actual military value; made up mainly of local extremists, it was soon renamed "el Mujahid" and was used mainly to terrorize Serbian villages. With Iran's sending in mujahedin from the entire Muslim world to fight the Christian Serbs; with a compliant Bosnian Muslim president, Alija Izetbegovic, who issued a passport to Osama bin Laden in his Vienna embassy in 1992 thus enabling the world's greatest terrorist to visit Bosnia and Kosovo on three different occasions; combined with a flawed Bosnian foreign policy by U.S. administrations in sup-

port of a jihadist government in Kosovo, one can safely say that with the U.S. adoption of the Islamic cause in Bosnia and Kosovo, the Handjar can proudly announce "Mission Accomplished."

Stella L. Jatras  
 Camp Hill, Pennsylvania

## Close Calls in a M-1 Helmet

Dear Editor:

I read the story about the M-1 helmet in your September 2010 issue. I couldn't help but send you the story of our G Company, 398th Mortar Section sergeant and the picture of his helmets:



"At the reunion in Lancaster we were all telling stories of our close calls during the battles in Europe. The winner, hands down, was John Crowley, our mortar section leader. He was hit in the helmet by rifle fire on two occasions, in the front (left) and out the back (right). The first was above Soucht, France, on December 4, 1944, at the start of our first attack in Bitche, and the second was near Jagstfeld, Germany, on April 6, 1945, after we had crossed the Jagst River. He had both helmets sent back to the States and they are now on display in his home."

James B. Hazen  
 Adrian, Michigan

## Horrors of the Holocaust

Dear Editor:

Regarding Richard Rule's "Infamous Mass Murderer" in the June 2010 issue, I can honestly say that that article was the most penetrating and emotional depiction of the Holocaust that I have ever read. I have been a reader of your magazine for several years, and as it is my habit to read every article, this one on Rudolph Hoess really bothered me.

Mr. Rule did an outstanding job in researching and presenting a story that must be told to every generation. It is unconscionable that the wartime leaders, civilian and military, of the victor nations did not move to stop the wholesale butchery. A stain, I might add, that will not wash off of the reputation of the nations and leaders involved in the European war.

Dave Solkovits  
 Northridge, California

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## General Percival's Legacy

Blamed for the British defeat at Singapore, General Arthur Percival endured harsh criticism.

**ON FEBRUARY 15, 1942, THE ISLAND FORTRESS OF SINGAPORE SURRENDERED** with 130,000 men, thus ending the defense of Malaya as one of the largest military disasters in the history of British arms since Cornwallis's capitulation to Franco-American forces at Yorktown in 1781 during America's Revolutionary War.

Lieutenant General Arthur E. Percival's surrender to the invading Japanese Army permanently destroyed Britain's military and colonial prestige in the Far East. Since Percival sought out the best terms with the Japanese, thereby refusing to participate in any "last stand" heroics, he failed to meet Prime Minister Winston Churchill's standard as a military commander.

Although Percival was humiliated in both the surrender ceremony and as a prisoner of war, analysis of his prewar assessment and plans for the defense of Singapore demonstrates that he was not entirely culpable for the Singapore garrison's defeat. Poor planning of the defensive aspects of the island coupled with an underequipped garrison to fight a modern battle with tanks and suitable aircraft ultimately may have been more causally related to the surrender than Army leadership.

**ABOVE LEFT: In this dramatic painting by artist Geoffrey Mainwaring, Australian troops fire a mortar and take up positions to use small arms against the invading Japanese at Singapore. ABOVE: During happier times prior to the Japanese offensive that captured Singapore, General Arthur Percival and Air Chief Marshal Sir Robert Brooke-Popham confer on aerial defenses in Malaya.**

One must wonder whether Percival was a convenient scapegoat for a wider failure of British leadership and responsibility.

Arthur Percival was born on December 26, 1887, in Hertfordshire, England. After schooling at Rugby, he became a clerk for an iron mercantile company. When World War I erupted, Percival enlisted as a private but was quickly promoted to second lieutenant. Within three months he was again promoted to captain. Wounded during the Battle of the Somme, he was awarded the Military Cross. Further promotions ensued along with a Croix de Guerre and a Distinguished Service Order. He was described in his confidential report as very efficient, beloved by his men, and a brave soldier, and he was recommended for the Staff College.

After the Great War, Percival served with the Archangel Command of the British Military Mission in 1919 in north Russia during the Russian Civil War. This was followed by a posting brutally fighting the Irish Republican Army as an intelligence officer in 1920-1921. It was during this service combating the IRA that he was brought to the attention of Winston



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Churchill, then a cabinet minister, and Prime Minister David Lloyd George.

Percival was selected as a student for the Staff College, Camberley, from 1923 to 1924, upon a recommendation of Lloyd George. Thereafter, he served as a major for four years in the Royal West African Frontier Force as a staff officer, culminating in a promotion to lieutenant colonel in 1929. After studying at the Royal Naval College in 1930, he became an instructor at the Staff College in 1931-1932. With the assistance of his mentor, General Sir John Dill,

Percival was given command of a battalion of the Cheshire Regiment from 1932 to 1936, becoming a full colonel in 1936.

Dill regarded Percival as an outstanding instructor and staff officer and wrote

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in his confidential report of 1932, “He has not altogether an impressive presence and one may therefore fail, at first meeting him, to appreciate his sterling worth.” Dill recommended that Percival should attend the Imperial Defense College in 1935. In 1936, his mentor again helped Colonel Percival become the GSO I Malaya Command, serving as chief of staff to General William G.S. Dobbie, the General Officer Commanding (GOC), Malaya.

In 1937, Percival returned home as a brigadier on the General Staff, Aldershot Command. However, it was during his posting with Dobbie that Percival made important observations about the defense of Singapore and conducted a detailed analysis of Singapore’s vulnerabilities not from the sea but rather from the Malay Peninsula. Again, however, critics would cite that Percival had a “gift for turning out neatly phrased, crisp memoranda on any subject.... He was excellent in any job which did not involve contact with troops.”

From 1937 to 1940, Dill enabled Percival to maneuver through a variety of staff and command positions, the latter including the 43rd (Wessex) Division and 44th Division. Then, as Chief of the Imperial General Staff (CIGS), Dill appointed Percival GOC Malaya with the rank of lieutenant general, promoted over the heads of many senior and more experienced officers. Dill’s support of Percival was based on his evaluation of his protégé as an intelligent, efficient, tireless, and professional staff officer.

Critics of Percival have claimed that he was a colorless character, more a staff officer than a commander and certainly not a natural leader. Furthermore, it was asserted that he played everything by the rules, however ludicrous these might be, and if he did not lack urgency, he certainly lacked passion. He was not a man for a crisis and certainly not a man for a desperate campaign.

Ironically, when General Sir Alan Brooke was appointed CIGS, he reflected on such appointments that “officers were being promoted to high command because they were proficient in staff work—which was quite wrong—and urged that fewer mistakes of this nature should be made in the future.”

As an example of Brooke’s concern about the future, it had also helped Percival that in 1937 he had written an appreciation of the defense of Malaya and Singapore. As CIGS, General Dill wanted more troops sent to the Malaya command; however, Churchill would not acquiesce to this request.

For over two decades, the combined British military establishment pondered how to best defend Malaya and the Singapore naval base.

National Archives



**Japanese soldiers escort General Arthur Percival and his staff to surrender discussions prior to the fall of Singapore. Percival commanded the British contingent in one of the most significant surrenders in Commonwealth military history. Approximately 130,000 British soldiers marched into captivity.**

Unfortunately, there was interservice rivalry, and often the Royal Air Force (RAF) disdained to consult the Army in regard to the placement of airfields along the Malay Peninsula.

In 1937, Maj. Gen. Dobbie, along with Percival as his chief of staff, looked at the problem of defense using the Japanese viewpoint as a new perspective. Percival and Dobbie had as an operational tenet that a British fleet could not arrive in fewer than 70 days to carry out relief. The pair began conducting exercises with troops in October 1937 and reported that, contrary to the orthodox view, landings by the Japanese on the eastern seaboard of the peninsula were possible during the northeast monsoon from October to March, and this period was particularly dangerous because bad visibility would limit air reconnaissance.

Both Dobbie and Percival warned that, as a precursor to their attack, the Japanese would probably establish advanced airfields in Thailand and might also carry out landings along the coast of that country. If the evaluation composed by Percival, under Dobbie’s oversight, was accepted, large reinforcements would be sent without delay. Percival’s evaluation was ignored.

Furthermore, in July 1938, when Japanese intentions were more obvious, Dobbie warned that the jungle in Johore (i.e., southern Malaya) was not impassable to infantry, but again he was ignored. By 1939, all Dobbie and Percival were able to wring out of the government was the sum of 60,000 pounds, most of which was spent on building machine-gun emplacements along the southern shore of Singapore island and in Johore. The prewar defense of northern Malaya was, incredibly, left in the hands of the Federated Malay States Volunteers.

A newly arrived Indian brigade was held as a reserve for the defense of Johore. Singapore island was entrusted to five regular battalions, two volunteer battalions, two coastal artillery regiments, three anti-aircraft regiments, and four engineer fortress companies. The six air force squadrons had a total of 58 aircraft. There were no tanks. It is no surprise that when Percival took up his new appointment he had little enthusiasm or confidence. He wrote after the war, “In going to Malaya I realized that there was the double danger either of being left in an inactive command for some years if war did not break out in the East or, if it did, of finding myself involved in a pretty sticky business with the inadequate forces.”

Upon his arrival, Percival discovered that the northern airstrips on the Malay Peninsula had not been situated in defensible positions, nor did they have sufficient men or planes to occupy them. Many of his troops, in fact, were dispersed to guard the RAF’s exposed airfields in northern Malaya. Construction of defense installations was stalled because of bureaucratic issues. There was not a single tank in the entire theater of operations. Apart from a few regular British and Australian army battalions, the remaining troops were of mediocre or low quality, undertrained and indifferently led.

The reinforcements still on the way were no better, and none had any idea of operating in the jungle. In fact, Dobbie’s recommendations of 1937 were still a plan rather than a realized defensive framework to fend off a Japanese Army attack from the north. Some of the other service chiefs had held erroneous beliefs that their meager resources and near-obsolete equipment would be sufficient to combat a battle-

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hardened Japanese war machine which was honed to a sharp edge after nearly a decade of conflict on the Chinese mainland.

Sir Robert Brooke-Popham, commander in chief Far East, remarked incredulously, "We can get on alright with (Brewster) Buffaloes out here.... Let England have the Super-Spitfires and Hyper-Hurricanes."

In Percival's defense, he had too many political and logistical obstacles to overcome to make a meaningful contribution to the area's defense. First, he tried to intensify training among his troops as well as obtain funding from the government to carry out defensive preparations. Second, he tried to construct defensive positions up north near the border with Thailand; however, local British business interests interfered, not wanting troops near their plantations or property.

Finally, when a plan—Operation Matador—was formulated to attack and seize potential Japanese troop staging areas in Thailand, both the detailed logistics and orders for advance were stalled. The government's policy was to refrain from any act of provocation and bore much similarity to the "Phony War" on the Western Front prior to the Nazi onslaught in May 1940.

This military vacillation continued until December 6, 1941, when it was known that the Japanese army was en route to its staging areas in Thailand. Thus, there was no realistic provision for a British attacking force to seize the Kra isthmus in southern Thailand to prevent a Malay invasion by the Japanese until that country had clearly demonstrated itself to be the aggressor. In fact, it was Brooke-Popham who finally cancelled the plan whereby the 11th Indian Division would have entered Thailand to seize the Kra isthmus.

At the command level, a vacuum of leadership developed at a crucial stage. Air Chief Marshal Brooke-Popham was replaced by Lt. Gen. Henry Pownall in November 1941. Pownall had served as Lord John Gort's chief of staff with the British Expeditionary Force in northern France and Belgium during the Phony War and amid the disastrous retreat to Dunkirk.

Pownall did not arrive in Singapore until December 27, 1941, and then command was further altered with General Sir Archibald Wavell being appointed to the American-British-Dutch-Australian Command, with Pownall becoming his chief of staff. Thus, Percival's chain of command was initially more illusory than extant. At the subordinate level, Percival had difficulties with Lt. Gen. Lewis Heath, commanding III Indian Corps, and Maj. Gen. Gordon Bennett, commanding the 8th Australian Division.

Heath's relations with Percival were acrimonious from the outset. Heath was senior to Percival and had commanded a victorious division in the Eritrean campaign. After fighting commenced with Japan in northern Malaya, Percival lost confidence in Heath as a corps commander but did not sack him. Bennett was a bitter, outspoken subordinate. As an Australian Army veteran of World War I, he was prejudiced against the British military hierarchy. Furthermore, like all commanding Commonwealth officers, Bennett had the option to discuss orders from Percival with the Australian government if he disagreed with them, thus giving him considerable freedom of action.

Bennett's view of Percival was: "He does not seem strong, rather the Yes man type. Listens a lot but says little.... My estimate of him was right. Weak and hesitant though brainy."

Although Percival had the opportunity to sack Bennett as well, he allowed him to continue commanding the Australian contingent. Finally, the relationship between Bennett and Heath was, to say the least, irascible. The recipe for disaster at Percival's command level was complete.

As Percival noted after the war, his evaluation made in 1937 under Dobbie's auspices did not differ from that adopted by the Japanese when they attacked Malaya in December 1941. Percival also claimed that when he had joined Dill at Aldershot in 1938 he had warned him that Singapore was "far from being impregnable and would be in imminent danger if war broke out in the Far East."

Some have speculated that after having composed the evaluation about Malaya and Singapore's defense Percival's outlook about the likelihood of repelling a Japanese invasion was quite realistic rather than being pessimistic.

Although the Chiefs of Staff in August 1940 recommended reinforcing Malaya and Singapore, Churchill vehemently objected. The prime minister's overriding concern was combating the Italians in the Mediterranean and Middle East, where he knew it to be the only theater in which he could actively combat Axis forces at that time. It must be remembered that the epic struggle between the RAF and the Luftwaffe was at its height and that the British Isles were bracing for a Nazi invasion just two months after the debacle at Dunkirk.

It may well be that the prime minister was incorrect on a number of different levels. First, Japanese military assets had always been undervalued by the Western democracies. Second, the presence of the battleship HMS *Prince of Wales* and the battlecruiser HMS *Repulse* was, by no means, a satisfactory replacement for a large British fleet with aircraft carrier fighter protec-

tion, nor could it deter aggressive Japanese movements long enough for additional vessels to arrive. Finally, Churchill had already decided to have the United States guarantee the safety of British garrisons in the Far East; however, America was waiting for Japan to act as the aggressor before taking an active military stance.

After hostilities commenced, the British strategy was always defensive and lacked any tactical brilliance. The Japanese were always advancing, thereby making Percival's plans to counter appear sluggish. To compound the operational dysfunction at Percival's headquarters, Wavell arrived on January 8, 1942, and accepted Bennett's, and not Percival's, plan for the defense of Johore. Pownall noted in his diary that Wavell was "not at all happy about Percival, who has the knowledge, but not the personality to carry through a tough fight."

Clearly, Percival had lost Wavell's vote of approval for his command style. To further exemplify this, on January 20, 1942, Wavell met with Percival on Singapore to plan for the island's defense since the outcome of a battle on the mainland appeared to be a foregone conclusion. This meeting was prompted by Percival's unwillingness to plan for a withdrawal of Commonwealth forces from Johore to Singapore despite communiqués from Wavell.

Once the decision to evacuate to the island fortress was made, there was further disagreement between Percival and Wavell, with the former opting for defense on the northeast coast and the latter acquiescing. Numerically, the defenders had more than enough strength on the island to repel the invasion, particularly as it came where Wavell had expected it.

On February 8, 1942, the Japanese attacked the northwest side of the island. Further tactical errors occurred, and Percival withdrew inland toward the city, but space was running out. After meeting with his commanders on February 15, 1942, Percival decided to surrender despite a personal message from Churchill to Wavell calling for a last stand by the numerically superior Commonwealth forces. For a personally brave man such as Percival, capitulation was a bitter step, but he chose to go himself in the hope of obtaining better treatment for his troops and the population.

Duff Cooper, sent by Churchill to coordinate interservice operations as the resident minister in the Far East, confided to the prime minister that Percival was not a natural leader and could not take a large view. Cooper went on, "It was all a field day at Aldershot to him.... He knows the rules as well and follows them so closely and is always waiting for the umpire's whistle to cease-fire and hopes that when the moment

comes his military dispositions will be such as to receive approval."

To his many critics, Percival also seemed to lack the requisite ruthlessness to prevail during a military crisis. So, was it appropriate to make Percival responsible for the disaster at Singapore? Many argue that ultimate responsibility for the failure to defend Singapore adequately rests with Churchill, who was often focused on the events in the Middle East and diverted important assets to that theater.

Dill once wrote to Churchill, "Egypt is not even second in order of priority, for it has been an accepted principle in our strategy that in the last resort the security of Singapore comes before that of Egypt. Yet the defenses of Singapore are still considerably below standard."

Even American military and naval experts endorsed the warning and expressed the view that Singapore should be given priority over Egypt. Factually, the desired air force strength of 300 to 500 modern aircraft was never reached in the Malayan theater. The Japanese invaded with over 200 tanks, while the British Army in Malaya did not have a single one. Indeed, Churchill himself had diverted some 350 older-model tanks from Malaya to the Soviet Union following the German invasion, as a show of good faith between the Allies. As these older infantry and cruiser tanks were more than a match for the light and medium Japanese tanks used in the invasion of Malaya, their presence could well have turned the tide of battle.

According to author Ronald Lewin, "Nobody can carp with any justice at an officer who is posted to a position for which he is not suited; the responsibility lies with his superiors or the military secretariat ... and it was a cruel fate that put him in charge of Singapore's defenses."

According to a very harsh critic, Henry Pownall, "There is no doubt we underestimated the Jap. But suppose we'd made a better show and got the Jap at his true worth, would it have made any real difference? I very much doubt it."

While other generals who were held captive by the Japanese, such as the American, General Jonathan Wainwright, had become public heroes, Percival found himself disparaged for his leadership in Malaya. Percival's memoir in 1949, *The War in Malaya*, like its author, was restrained and did not reverse the criticisms of many others. Unusual for a British lieutenant general, Percival was not knighted for his service to king and country. □

*Jon Diamond practices medicine and resides in Hershey, Pennsylvania. He is a frequent contributor to WWII History. He is currently working on a book, Britain's Military Pariahs.*

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## Six-Pounder Versus Panzer

The six-pounder was the first British antitank gun that could reliably pierce the armor of German panzers.

**SERGEANT CHARLES CALLISTAN LOOKED THROUGH THE SIGHTS OF AN ANTTANK** gun at an approaching enemy tank. His weapon, a six-pounder cannon, was in the perimeter of a surrounded British outpost named Snipe. The desert sun shone overhead and flies buzzed all around, but none of this mattered as much as the Axis artillery and machine-gun fire that sent hot metal flying through the air. Even worse was the force of nine Italian armored vehicles threatening to overrun the beleaguered English troops.

When the range had closed to only 600 yards, Callistan fired and knocked out his target. Five more armor-piercing rounds accounted for five more tanks in a row, but then the sergeant had a problem. Three enemy vehicles remained and he had only two rounds left.

Callistan's lieutenant, J.E.B. Toms, came to the rescue. He ran under heavy fire to his jeep, which held four boxes of ammunition. As Toms drove the jeep over, it was hit and burst into flames. The fire didn't stop Toms; the lieutenant got the boxes offloaded and replenished Callistan's dwindling supply. Taking careful aim, the sergeant repeated his earlier feat: three rounds, three armored vehicles out of action.

The six-pounder antitank gun was Great Britain's premier tank killing weapon

when it first appeared in the Western Desert, proving able to pierce the armor of any German tank the Afrika Korps could field. The technological arms race of World War II produced new tanks with ever thicker armor, however, and ultimately the six-pounder became ineffective well before war's end. This obsolescence made little difference for many of the Allied soldiers who used it; since there was no comparable replacement that worked better, the cannon was still in wide use when the war ended.

The development of the six-pounder actually began before the war although the gun did not enter production until 1941. The standard British antitank gun of the late 1930s was the two-pounder, a 40mm weapon that could penetrate 42mm of armor at 1,000 yards. This made it one of the premier antitank guns in the world when it was adopted in 1936, but by 1940 tank development had left it behind. The British Army was forced to quite literally leave its two-pounders behind as well; over 500 of them had to be abandoned in France when the British Expeditionary Force evacuated at Dunkirk.

In the frantic days to follow, an invasion of the British Isles was expected. So the two-pounder production lines were kept open to reequip the Army as quickly as possible. This desperate need led to a decision that kept the six-pounder on the drawing board until long after it was needed.

The original design work for the six-pounder began soon after the two-pounder's adoption and was completed in 1938. The larger gun was a 57mm weapon, a caliber chosen largely as a logical matter of economics. Six-pounder weapons had been in British service since the 1880s, so manufacturing equipment and experience already existed. In 1939 a prototype, the Mk1, was completed and test fired. Testing was successful, but even with the rumblings of war on the horizon the perceived need was low so the design was shelved for the time being.

After the fall of France in June 1940, the call for the six-pounder was finally recognized. However, the need for any antitank gun, even a less effective one such as the two-pounder, was so great the British decided they could not

afford to close the existing production lines down long enough to retool them for the six-pounder. There was also concern that the newer, bigger gun would require extensive retraining of gun crews already able to operate the two-pounder.

In this painting by Keith Rocco, soldiers of the U.S. 30th Infantry Division man 57mm antitank guns to stop German tanks intent on taking the key position at Hill 317. The 57mm gun was referred to by the British as the six-pounder.

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**ABOVE:** The British six-pounder could reliably pierce the armor of any tank the Germans could field in the deserts of North Africa. **RIGHT:** British troops move forward on the Argentan road in August 1944, with antitank weapons in tow. Heavier antitank weapons were welcome in combat against the German Mark V Panther and Mark VI Tiger tanks.

While an invasion of Great Britain never occurred, fighting did go on in the Mediterranean and North Africa with the increasingly ineffective two-pounder the only option against Germany's panzers. The British Army was well aware of the need, yet unable to act on it immediately. While the first order for 400 six-pounder guns was made in June 1940, production could not begin until November 1941.

The weapon the British Army eventually got was a marked improvement over its predecessor. The six-pounder Mk2 production model weighed in at 2,521 pounds, almost 800 pounds heavier than the two-pounder but still light enough for crews to manhandle it into position when necessary. It was mounted on a conventional two-wheeled carriage with "split" trails; that is, the two trailing arms that extended to the rear of the carriage could be separated to increase stability. The barrel on the six-pounder was 43-caliber, meaning the bore's length was 43 times its diameter of 57mm. The weapon could traverse 45 degrees to either side and elevate from minus five to plus 15 degrees.

When firing the standard six-pound armor-piercing round, the six-pounder had a maximum range of 5,500 yards with a muzzle velocity of 2,693 feet per second and could penetrate 74mm of armor at 1,000 yards. Over time, improved ammunition was developed, culminating in June 1944 with an APDS (Armor Piercing Discarding Sabot) round that had a

tungsten core. This increased penetration to 146mm at 1,000 yards. Tungsten was a valuable commodity in war production, so shortages meant there were never as many APDS rounds available as needed.

As Great Britain struggled to get the six-pounder into service, the United States was starting to rebuild its own war-making capacity. Woefully unprepared for a war many knew must eventually come, the U.S. Army began to search for a larger antitank gun to replace its standard M3 37mm weapon, whose performance was comparable to the ineffective two-pounder.

By February 1941, it was decided to adopt the British six-pounder design. This served a dual purpose; not only could the American Army improve its tank-killing capability, but using the British design meant the same gun could also be produced for the Lend-Lease program. To help the American effort, the British sent a pair of six-pounders with 100 rounds of ammunition. The six-pounder design was given final approval on May 15, 1941, becoming the 57mm Gun M1. Numbers were also supplied to the Soviet Union through Lend-Lease.

The American version initially had one major difference from that used by the British. The U.S.-built M1 had a barrel 16 inches longer; when the Mk2 entered production in England there was a shortage of suitable gun lathes for production of the longer barrels. The original

Mk1 prototype had the longer barrel, but the Mk2s were made with shorter length. Since there was no shortage of the longer lathes in America, the M1 could be made with the longer tube from the start. The added 16 inches made the M1 a 50-caliber weapon and increased muzzle velocity by about 100 feet per second.

When the English lathe shortage was solved, British production shifted to the longer barrel, designated the Mk4. The only other major difference between the two versions was in the carriages, largely having to do with the wheels and tires used.

While the Americans never mounted the 57mm on a tank, the six-pounder was also adapted as a tank gun. The turret rings in many

National Archives



early-war British tank designs limited the size of the cannon they could mount, but a few were able to accept a larger gun than the two-pounder, and these were fitted with the six-pounder Mk3 and later the longer barreled Mk5 version. Crusader, Valentine, and Churchill tanks were all up-gunned with six-pounders as quickly as possible.

Newer designs like the Cromwell began their service lives with a six-pounder before being upgraded to a 75mm cannon. The U.S. military did experiment with a few self-propelled mountings for the 57mm but only the half-tracked T48 version was produced in any numbers. When the U.S. Army decided it no longer wanted them, the few hundred made were transferred to England where, in the words of the noted English military author Ian V. Hogg, "I cannot imagine what we did with them." They were likely converted into something considered more useful."

The only British self-propelled six-pounder to see combat was the Deacon. This was a six-pounder encased in an armored shield mounted on the back of an AEC Matador truck. Some 175 were built and sent to North Africa. The

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An American 57mm gun fires at a German bunker near Saint-Malo, Brittany, in 1944.

vehicle was large and very easy to spot on the battlefield. After the defeat of the Axis in North Africa they were taken out of service.

As a towed antitank gun, the six-pounder/57mm was a much greater success. Once issued to British antitank units in the Western Desert, the six-pounder quickly developed a solid reputation for effectiveness against German armored vehicles. More than 100 guns were available when the weapon was first fired in anger at Gazala in May 1942, where it took a heavy toll of Axis armor. Panzer crewmen began to get a taste of their own medicine as they were effectively engaged at ranges far beyond what they were previously accustomed to.

Perhaps the best example of the gun's effectiveness was at the British battle position called Outpost Snipe during the Second Battle of El Alamein in late October 1942. Sergeant Callistan was not alone in his success; a total of 19 six-pounders were used in the defense of that outpost. While estimates vary somewhat, more than 50 German and Italian tanks were knocked out by British gunners that day, some 10 percent of Rommel's total panzer strength at El Alamein. This was a critical loss the Axis could ill afford during this pivotal battle. As the Afrika Korps withdrew from Egypt, the British gave chase with tanks armed with six-pounder guns and antitank units taking full part.

The Anglo-American invasion of French

North Africa, Operation Torch, took place in November 1942, and the Axis armies were now squeezed between the two advancing forces. The American units advancing into Tunisia were still largely armed with 37mm guns in their antitank units. Even tank destroyer battalions often still had a company of 37mm guns in their order of battle. Each American infantry regiment had 18 antitank guns assigned to it, but still used the 37mm. Some of this was due to a lack of availability, but many infantry leaders opposed using the larger 57mm on the grounds it was not portable enough. Many changed their minds after later seeing the small 37mm rounds bouncing off the armor of panzers even at close range. One infantry officer reported the 37mm useless at anything past 100 yards.

Even after the experience in North Africa, some still wanted to keep the 37mm, and some even made rather dubious claims about how to better employ it, but the writing was on the wall. On May 26, 1943, a new table of organization for the antitank company of the infantry regiment specified 57mm guns, though it would be 1944 before large numbers of them made it into the field. Until the new guns could get into their hands, many antitank gunners found themselves pulling other duties or acting as extra riflemen because their commanders felt sending them into a fight with 37mm weapons was not only

useless but quite likely fatal for them.

Still, the Americans did employ some 57mm guns and the British still used them widely, although a new 17-pounder gun started coming into service at the end of 1942. One problem quickly noticed by both armies was the lack of a high-explosive round for the six-pounder/57mm. This was a result of the rush to get the weapon into service as a tank killer. There simply had not been time or effort put into a high-explosive (HE) round.

The U.S. Seventh Army felt this lack sorely in Sicily, where its soldiers found themselves using the 57mm more often as an infantry support weapon, firing on buildings and fortifications where the armor-piercing round was much less effective. Indeed, one of the major criticisms of the two-pounder had been its lack of HE ammunition and one of the few advantages of the 37mm had been the existence of both HE and canister rounds for it. The absence of explosive ammo was quickly felt, and steps were rapidly taken to fill the gap. The British solved the problem much more quickly, while American gun crews did not begin to receive HE ammunition until after the Normandy campaign. With typical GI ingenuity, American units usually scrounged as much HE ammo as they could from British sources.

As the war ground on, German improvements to their armored vehicles made the six-pounder gradually less effective. American tank destroyer battalions preferred towed three-inch cannon and self-propelled guns, so the 57mm remained primarily in the hands of the infantry anti-tank platoons and companies where it served in the infantry support role. The British started using the powerful 17-pounder gun to stay competitive against the new Panther and Tiger tanks the Germans fielded from 1944 on. Besides these tanks, many self-propelled and assault guns based on the Tiger and Panther chassis were later encountered on the battlefield. The increased thickness and slope of their armor made it difficult for a six-pounder to get a decisive hit, especially in a frontal engagement. Even the highly effective APDS round could not guarantee a burning panzer.

The six-pounder/57mm did still find a home with airborne troops of both armies, however. The newer antitank guns had gotten much larger in order to be powerful enough to engage enemy armor. This naturally led to vast increases in weight, more than the aircraft, parachute systems and gliders of the day could handle. The six-pounder was light enough to be easily used by paratroopers, so it continued in their service until war's end.

The British manufactured a special light-

weight version of the gun specifically for airborne use, and the U.S. adopted it for its own airborne divisions. American paratroopers used these guns during the fighting in Normandy along with shoulder-fired weapons such as the bazooka, antitank grenades, and mines; these light weapons were all the airborne soldiers had to stave off German armor until a linkup with heavier units coming inland from the assault beaches could be achieved.

During Operation Market-Garden, the Anglo-American attempt to seize a series of bridges in Holland to open a fast path into Germany, British paras found themselves cut off at the bridge over the Rhine River in Arnhem. There, two SS Panzer divisions that had moved to Arnhem for rest instead pounded the lightly equipped paratroopers. After the Germans finally retook the bridge area from the paras, the British formed a perimeter around the nearby town of Oosterbeek. This was relentlessly pounded by the German troops in a series of attacks.

The 2nd Battalion, South Staffords Regiment, took up defensive positions in Oosterbeek near a white church. No sooner had they begun to dig in than Nazi tanks attacked. Twenty-one-year-old Lance Sergeant J.D. Baskeyfield commanded a six-pounder and

immediately opened fire on a pair of Tiger tanks, destroying both of them at a range of 100 yards. During this fight heavy fire fell upon his gun and crew. When the rest of the crew were killed or wounded, he continued to operate the gun alone until it was knocked out.

With his own gun destroyed, Baskeyfield manned another six-pounder whose crew was dead. Using this weapon he engaged a self-propelled gun at the same distance. After pausing a moment to treat an injured comrade, the young sergeant returned to his cannon and finished off the enemy gun. Tragically, he was killed moments later by a round from another enemy tank. For his bravery he was awarded a posthumous Victoria Cross.

By war's end the six-pounder and 57mm were still serving in the infantry support role since there was really nothing better to replace them with except weapons that were much larger, heavier, and already allocated to dedicated antitank units. When the conflict finally ended, the urge to replace them simply died and there was little desire to retain them in the post-war world. Curiously, the British Army did not declare the six-pounder obsolete until 1960.

The story was not quite over yet, however. American advisers equipped the fledgling South Korean Army with a few 57mm guns as their

sole antitank gun. These proved sadly ineffective against the Soviet-built T34/85 tanks the North Korean Army employed during the invasion of the South in 1950. The six-pounder also soldiered on in the various new nations that sprung from the dissolution of the British Empire.

When the fledgling Israeli Army came into being in 1948, it was desperate for weaponry to defend its new-found independence. Through various means the Israelis acquired a number of six-pounders and improvised mountings for them on surplus half-tracks. Today these are most commonly encountered in museums and private collections.

The six-pounder and M1 57mm cannon filled a gap in the Allied antitank capability during the middle of World War II, when the small-caliber guns in service were obsolete. Later in the war, six-pounders had been surpassed by heavier weapons but continued in widespread use. The weapon fulfilled its role as best it could, enabling Allied soldiers to tally some very impressive kills against enemy armor. □

*Frequent contributor Christopher Miskimon has served in both the infantry and field artillery branches of the U.S. Army. He resides in Denver, Colorado.*



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## The Silver Screen and the OSS

Actor Sterling Hayden rendered valuable covert service to his country during World War II.

**IT WAS A KILLER OF A ROLE, THAT OF BRIG. GEN. JACK D. RIPPER IN STANLEY Kubrick's famous film, *Dr. Strangelove: Or How I Learned to Stop Worrying and Love the Bomb*. Ripper, the mad Air Force general who launches a first strike of nuclear armed B-52 bombers against the Soviet Union, was played by none other than Sterling Hayden, a decorated combat veteran of World War II who was a PT boat commander, trained as a commando, then joined the Marines and joined the OSS. He ended up fighting with communist partisans in Yugoslavia.**

Hayden was raised in the seagoing traditions of New England, so at the age of 16 he dropped out of school and went to sea. By the time he was 22, he had been around the world and already earned his captain's papers. By chance, he was sitting in a New York bar when he just happened to meet a producer from Paramount Pictures. A screen test was ordered, and it led to the immediate offer of a seven-year contract. At 6 feet, 4 inches tall, the press releases acclaimed Sterling Hayden as a "Blond Viking god." And in May 1940, at the age of 24, he made two films, *Virginia* and then *Bahaman Passage*, both with Madeleine Car-

roll, whom he later married.

But the world was at war, and as it raged Hayden felt, "awfully silly ... war is the greatest adventure that ever happened and I'm here memorizing small talk."

So, on September 15, 1941, before Pearl Harbor, Hayden broke his contract with Paramount and decided to enlist. Fortunately, on one of his cruises he had met the son of Colonel William "Wild Bill" Donovan, the nation's coordinator of information, which would soon become the Office of Strategic Services, OSS (forerunner of the modern Central Intelligence Agency). Donovan preferred young men of high family and breeding, perhaps assuming that if his men already had money they would not be so easy to bribe. In fact, so many Mellons, DuPonts, and Morgans filled his ranks that it was once said that OSS stood for "Oh, So Social."

Donovan liked young adventurers he described as "calculatingly reckless of disciplined



daring..." Men like Hayden. Since spies are supposed to be inconspicuous, the movie star legally changed his name to John Hamilton.

The best combat training at that time was in England, so characteristically, instead of flying, Hamilton got there by shipping out on a merchant vessel and working his way across the Atlantic in a convoy to Glasgow. Once there, he trained with the Argyle and Sutherland Highlanders and took standard British commando training. He learned about small arms, knife fighting, hand-to-hand combat, and explosives. He learned how to organize and lead resistance units, but on his sixth parachute jump he broke his ankle and injured his knee and spine. His brief spy career was over.

**LEFT: Partisans unload small boats on an island off the Dalmatian coast. RIGHT: In this scene from the Cold War classic film *Dr. Strangelove*, Peter Sellers portrays RAF Group Captain Lionel Mandrake and Sterling Hayden performs as U.S. Air Force Brigadier General Jack D. Ripper. The film was released in 1964.**

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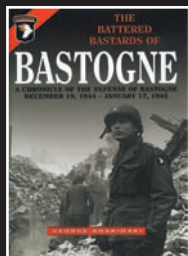
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Troops of Josip Broz Tito's National Army of Liberation enter the Yugoslavian capital of Belgrade to fight the Nazis alongside the Soviet Red Army on October 19, 1944. Sterling Hayden served with the guerrillas in Yugoslavia as an OSS operative.

Back in the States, he used his master's papers to get a job with the Elco Boat Works in Bayonne, New Jersey, testing the new PT boats. He was so impressed that he tried to enlist in the Navy, but with his lack of education they could offer him only the rank of ensign, in spite of his master's certificate and years at sea. He declined. Instead, he bought a small schooner and carried explosives and detonators around the Caribbean, the theory being that if a small ship was caught by U-boats not as much cargo would be lost as in a big ship.

It was on one such run that he met a group of Marines in South America. They got drunk and were thrown in jail together. And when Hamilton got out, he was so impressed he enlisted in the Corps. He graduated from Officer Candidate School on April 21, 1943, as a second lieutenant. At that time two men from each graduating company were selected for duty with the OSS, and Hamilton's previous experience made him an obvious choice.

He was eventually posted to the east coast of Italy, first at Monopoli then Bari, where the British Special Operations Executive (SOE) and MI-6 (Intelligence) were dropping supplies to the partisans in the mountains of Yugoslavia, Croatia, and Albania. A ship's captain with covert operations training was a natural to take supplies by sea. Captain Hans Tofte was in command of OSS operations at Bari, Lieutenant Robert Thompson was executive officer, Lieutenant W. Ellen was in charge of maintenance, and Lieutenant Hamilton (Hayden) was in charge of loading and dispatching. These four men arranged over 70 trips across the

Adriatic Sea, landing 6,000 tons of supplies for use behind enemy lines.

Hayden was in charge of about 30 old sailing schooners that had escaped the Nazis or been bought in Egypt. They could make only about seven knots and had a collection of makeshift weapons such as antitank guns lashed to their decks. A few mounted Italian, U.S., and Bulgarian machine guns, and sailors carried an assortment of small arms. The armor, if any, consisted of two boards filled with gravel on the gunnels. The small boats were crewed by 400 Yugoslavians, including 50 women.

Loaded with captured Italian supplies, the boats would leave at dusk, thread the Allied minefields, run the open waters of the Adriatic at night, and try to reach resistance outposts on the island of Vis before daylight. If they were lucky, they would make it to a small cove and lie camouflaged from patrolling Nazi aircraft. That night they would unload, lie hidden through the next day, and on the third night return home with wounded, always watchful for patrolling German E-boats. Sometimes the supplies were transferred at sea to smaller fishing boats for the run to the mainland itself and then carried by burro into the mountain refuges of Comrade Josip Broz, popularly known as Tito, the leader of the Yugoslav communist partisans.

Not only did Hayden's runs supply the partisans, but British and Allied agents as well. Sterling piloted a boat to an SOE outpost on Grama Bay near what is now Vlore, Albania. Two hundred feet above the water were several caves from which British and American agents were operating, including 22 Italian prisoners

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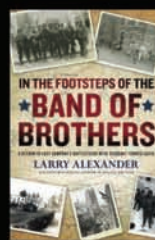
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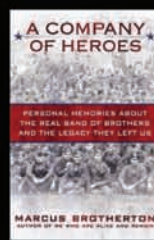
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**In this Hollywood publicity photo actor Sterling Hayden looks every bit the "blond Viking god," while actress Patricia Morison poses alongside him.**

(remnants of Mussolini's invasion). The British officer in charge had taken the time to plumb the depths of a nearby cove to ensure that a ship could get close enough to shore to not only unload quickly but accept the POWs as well.

Hayden refused to risk his ship and forced the transfer to be made laboriously in a collapsible canvas rowboat. The Brit cursed Hayden as a coward for not getting closer, but got nowhere. In one of those coincidences of war, the SOE officer was named Anthony Quayle, who would one day star in such films as *The Guns of Navarone* and eventually be nominated for an Oscar.

On another of Hayden's trips, his engine broke down and he and his crew were temporarily stranded in enemy waters. Fortunately, they found a detachment of about 30 communist partisans. Hayden was particularly impressed by the fierce Yugoslavs. Each knew exactly what he was fighting for and was dedicated to killing Germans. Orders were largely unnecessary. Hayden later recalled, "They fought with next to no food, and only the arms they could scrape from the backs of their foes."

While they waited, one of the partisan scouts spotted an armed German trawler tied up in a nearby cove. Without a word every man in the group stood up and marched off. Hayden went along as well, carrying his own hunting rifle and a .357 revolver.

The German ship was sitting quietly at anchor tied up to some trees. Quietly, the force took up positions directly above the unsuspecting craft and waited. It was well armed with several gun positions, but the sentries were relaxed. At last, one young seaman came on deck in his slippers and yawned. At that instant,

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**A British Handley Paige Halifax bomber serves in an air transport role, dropping supplies to partisans in Yugoslavia. The partisans kept large numbers of German troops occupied and away from the front; however, they were heavily dependent on Allied arms and material.**

every gun opened fire. Taken by surprise, the entire ship was peppered and not a single partisan was hurt.

By any standard, the fighting in the Balkans was some of the most vicious of the war. Not only did the guerrillas fight the Germans and Italians, but also dozens of their own internal political enemies. Civilian reprisals were swift and brutal. The Allies shipped supplies to everyone hoping that some of the materiel might actually be used against the Axis. It worked. After a while, many German and Italian garrisons refused to venture out at night.

By the summer of 1944, Hayden had parachuted inland to set up airstrips in the interior of Yugoslavia and organized rescue teams for downed air crews. Though they never met, Tito later awarded him the Order of Merit, the second highest decoration of the Yugoslavian government. Sick with jaundice and tired of fighting, Hayden was transferred to OSS headquarters in Naples and from there he got 30 days' leave in the States. He drank a lot.

On February 14, 1945, Hayden was promoted to the rank of captain and became part of the OSS detachment at First Army Headquarters in Belgium. The most unusual thing about his new assignment was the questions about his uniform, as it was rare to find a Marine in Europe. Sterling had dabbled with the communist party back in California, and his experience in Yugoslavia only cemented his relationship with it. Upon reporting to General Stuyvesant Wainwright II, Hayden had the temerity to give the general the raised, clenched-fist salute of the Communist Party. He was

immediately court-martialed.

He never made it to trial, though. Instead, he was given a six-man intelligence team. Each member spoke perfect German and was assigned to make contact with the resistance to the Nazis inside Germany. Most of the earlier resistance fighters had been rounded up by the Gestapo long ago, but among the flood of refugees fighting to leave the ruins of Germany and get to the West, they found many "resistance" fighters. They processed a lot of people but did not find much in the way of valuable intelligence. Sterling was in Marburg, Germany, when the war ended.

Afterward, with an OSS photographic unit that had been organized by Hollywood director John Ford, he spent the summer of 1945 photographing the ports of Germany, Denmark, and Norway. The United States had not done such work after World War I and was caught without basic information on European cities when World War II came along. Since there might be yet another European war, they gathered that intelligence now.

Hayden was discharged on December 24, 1945. He was awarded a Bronze Arrowhead for parachuting into enemy territory, two Bronze stars, one for Europe and one for Italy, a commendation for his air crew rescue work, and the Silver Star for gallantry. The Silver Star citation read, "John Hamilton, 022085 Captain, US Marine Corps Reserve, for gallantry in action in the Mediterranean Theater of Operations from 24 December 1943 to 2 January 1944. Captain Hamilton displayed great courage in making hazardous sea voyages in enemy infested waters, and reconnaissances through enemy held areas. His conduct reflected great credit upon himself and the US Armed Forces."

Hamilton/Hayden returned to Hollywood and continued his association with the Communist Party until he eventually became disillusioned and quit. In April 1951, Hayden became famous for his testimony before Joseph McCarthy's House Un-American Activities Committee, when during a three-hour session, Hayden proceeded to name (and spell) every one of his previous Hollywood communist associates. He would later refer to this as his "one-shot stoolie show" and regretted it deeply.

His career was not affected, however, and he remained popular in a series of respected films including *The Asphalt Jungle*, *Johnny Guitar*, *Dr. Strangelove*, *The Godfather*, and *1900*. He died in 1986. □

*Author Richard Hayes resides in Chicago and is working on a book about the OSS.*

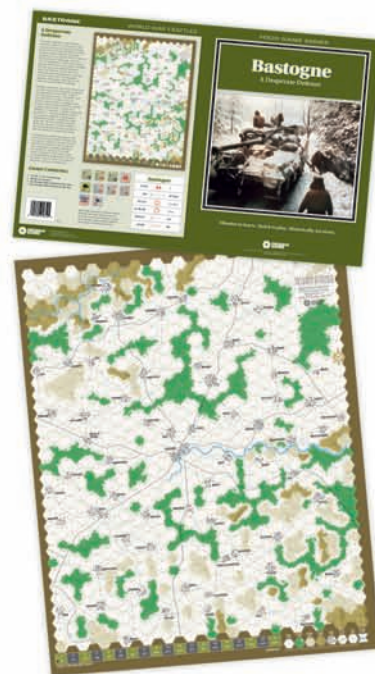
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## Daring Doolittle Raid Survivors

The five remaining Doolittle Raiders were killed or captured in action during the fighting in the Mediterranean.

**THE FIRST GOOD NEWS IN THE WAR FOR THE UNITED STATES HAD BEEN THE** Doolittle Raid on April 18. Sixteen North American B-25 Mitchell medium bombers led by Lt. Col. Jimmy Doolittle took off from the aircraft carrier USS *Hornet* and attacked industrial targets in the Tokyo area. None of the planes returned, but most of the aircrews survived by parachuting or crash-landing in China. The Chinese assisted them in escaping the Japanese.

The Doolittle Raid did little damage to the Japanese targets, but it proved to be a major morale booster for the home front as well as for the U.S. troops. Its most important effect, though, was on the decision of Admiral Isoroku Yamamoto, commander in chief of the Japanese Combined Fleet, to plan an operation that resulted in the Battle of Midway. Yamamoto conceived a three-pronged offensive—the invasion of the Aleutian Islands, capture of Midway Island, and then onward to the Hawaiian Islands. What he did not count on was a small U.S. Naval Intelligence group in Hawaii who just a few weeks earlier had broken the

Japanese naval code, JN-25. History has chronicled the great U.S. victory, a turning point in the war in the Pacific.

The 319th Bomb Group, activated at Barksdale Field, Shreveport, Louisiana, June 26, 1942, quickly assembled a cadre from the 17th Bomb Group and recent graduates of flight training and maintenance schools. The 17th Bomb Group was the oldest medium bomb group in the Army Air Corps, tracing its roots back to squadrons that had seen action in World War I. It had also provided the volunteer crews for the April Doolittle raid on Japan. Air Force Chief General Henry “Hap” Arnold urgently wanted to get the new Martin B-26 Marauder medium bomber into combat to support Operation Torch, the invasion of North

Africa planned for November 8, 1942.

Five of the Doolittle Raiders became members of the 319th Bomb Group. They were: Major David M. Jones (pilot), 1st Lt. Donald G. Smith (pilot), 1st Lt. Griffith P. Williams

During experimentation with the six-plane system in North Africa, a flight of Martin B-26 Marauder bombers takes off from an airfield. Several surviving participants of the Doolittle Raid on Tokyo later flew into action with the B-26.

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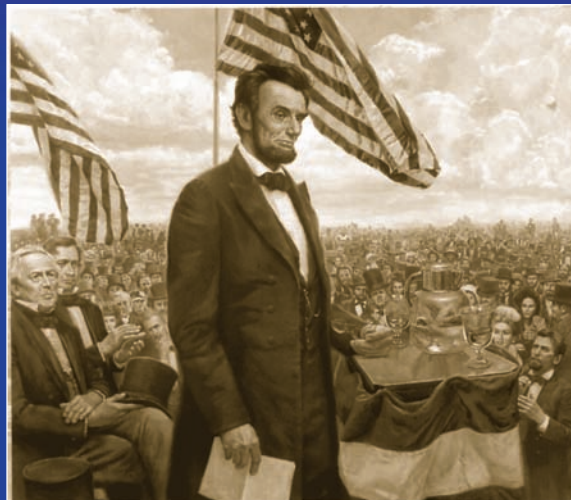


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Among the veterans of the Doolittle Raid on Tokyo who later served aboard the Martin B-26 Marauder in the Mediterranean were, left to right, Major David M. Jones, Lieutenant Richard E. Miller, Lieutenant Donald Gregory Smith, and Lieutenant Griffith P. Williams. OPPOSITE: Lieutenant Thomas C. Griffin was shot down and captured by the Germans after numerous missions. Griffin had participated in the Doolittle Raid and gone on to serve in North Africa as a navigator.

(pilot), 2nd Lt. Richard E. Miller (bombardier), and 2nd Lt. Thomas C. Griffin (navigator).

Their 319th comrades were in awe of the experiences and hardships the Raiders related to them on a few occasions when asked. All the others were proud to have them in the group but felt they had already fulfilled their obligation to their country. They looked upon the Doolittle Raiders as heroes and experienced B-25 airmen who had seen the fire of combat. Most of the other 319th pilots had only single-engine training, while a few had less than 10

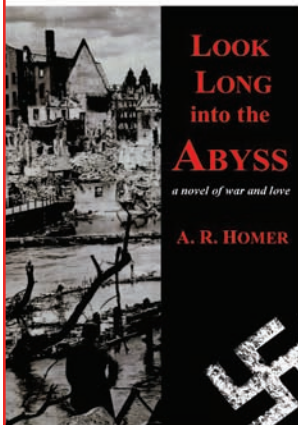
hours in the AT-9 twin-engine trainer. The rest of the 319th aircrews had received only machine-gun target practice and bombing practice with sand-filled bombs.

This understrength group quickly moved to Harding Field, Baton Rouge, Louisiana, on August 8, 1942, to operate under field conditions. Here the enlisted men would live in tents and the officers in temporary barracks. They immediately embarked on an intensive 24-hour training effort. The emphasis was on bombing and gunnery using low-level tactics, since the

Army planned to use the Marauder in an on-the-deck attack role. The Doolittle Raiders were particularly adept in this role from their training at Eglin Field near Pensacola, Florida, and subsequent Tokyo Raid experience.

Major Jones flew the initial evaluation flights on the B-25 aircraft which were specially equipped for the Tokyo mission. He also participated as a flight commander in the planning, training, and completion of the mission. He became commander of the 438th Squadron, one of four squadrons of the 319th Bomb

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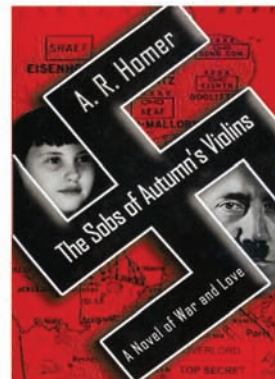
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Group, which also included the 437th, 439th, and 440th. The 438th Squadron later turned out to be the premier squadron of the group with six of the original members eventually moving up to operations officer and three of those to serving later as group commanders.

Jones believed strongly in low-level bombing. Because of his Doolittle Raid experience, Group Commander Major Alvord G. Rutherford



gave him the assignment to develop low-level bombing tactics and techniques for the group. Three of his fellow raiders, Griffith Williams, Thomas Griffin, and Richard Miller, were also assigned to the 438th Squadron. Williams served as squadron deputy commander, Griffin as squadron navigator, and Miller as squadron bombardier. The remaining raider, Donald Smith, was assigned to the 439th Squadron.

Training proceeded at a feverish pace. There was little time for pilots and aircrews to do more than learn to fly the B-26 Marauder. A shortage of instructor pilots delayed transition, and the new aircraft also experienced several bugs. The most critical problems were runaway propellers and collapsing nose wheels. The B-26 was soon dubbed the Widow Maker, the Flying Prostitute (because the short, stubby wings provided no visible means of support), and other disparaging names, but the crews loved their Marauders.

Under these adverse conditions, a number of accidents occurred, some ending in fatal crashes. The problems were troublesome, but through the ingenuity of the ground crew personnel and the Martin Company's support, they were able to solve them.

Because of these problems and the lack of airplanes, OTU (Operation Training Unit) training was shortened or not given. Nonpilot aircrew members—navigators, bombardiers, gunners, flight engineers, and radio operators—received some important ground school training but little flight training. The bombardiers and gunners had hardly dropped a bomb or fired a shot before the group was ordered overseas for Operation Torch. The Doolittle Raiders had a leg up from their raid experience and had little difficulty getting used to the B-26 aircraft and the schedule. The other aircrews adapted the best they could.

Before the month of August was out, the group was up to strength and ordered overseas. Its initial destination would be Attlebridge, Eng-

land. The group would move in three echelons: air support, flight, and ground. The air support and ground echelons would go by sea while the flight echelon would fly its new B-26s the northern route to England from the Baer Field, Indiana, to Presque Isle, Maine, to Goose Bay, Labrador to Bluie West 1, Greenland, to Rykjavik, Iceland, to Preswick, Scotland, and on to Attlebridge.

Commander Rutherford sent the squadrons in sequence (437th to 440th) to Baer Field, where they were given a list of equipment to load and take into combat. The list included all of the plane's equipment and more. Spare parts and tools were included along with other items to make them a self-sufficient group. It was a heavy load that required the aircrew to be reduced to four: pilot, co-pilot, navigator, and radioman. The remaining aircrew would be flown over by transport.

The 319th's B-26s were the first aircraft of their type to be maintained and outfitted by the Concentration Command at Baer Field. That command had no experience in the maintenance and rigging of the B-26s for combat. Jones pushed to get his 438th Squadron out on schedule by using his own flight engineers and one or two line chiefs who were smuggled aboard as passengers. By working around the clock one squadron at a time, they were able to get 14 planes ready for each of the 437th, 438th, and 439th Squadrons and off on time at three-day intervals. The 440th had to sit and wait for planes.

On September 20, Jones led his 438th Squadron on the first leg of their overseas trip. The weather would be frightful, and the northern route had already been closed to commercial traffic. When they arrived at Presque Isle they would be under the control of the North Atlantic Ferry Command. The trip to Attlebridge would be fraught with weather delays and some accidents. Weather held them up for three days before they could get off to Goose Bay and another three days before leaving for Greenland. On all of these flights they flew in formations of from three to seven planes, following a lead plane with a lead navigator on board.

Only seven got off from Goose Bay for Greenland on September 27, while the remaining B-26s had engine trouble. Jones led one flight of four ships followed by a second flight of three. They soon ran into some rough weather, which forced the three-plane forma-

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tion to turn back. Jones's flight faced a terrible challenge when landing at the Bluie West 1 airfield as noted from the diary of 2nd Lt. Robert Paulsen flying on Jones's wing:

"The fjord was too narrow to turn a B-26 around in. The soup was so low we couldn't see the tops of the mountains and the water below was full of icebergs. It was like flying into a cave! We flew up the fjord in single file and landed at the field which was surrounded by mountains and had one end of the runway at sea level and the other 85 feet higher with a mountain at the end so that you couldn't pull up and go around again."

All four planes landed safely with only one mishap. The landing gear of 2nd Lt. Victor Daniel's B-26 folded up on landing. No one was hurt, but the plane was completely washed out.

The heavier jackets and boots issued to the airmen on Greenland made life a lot easier. Their stay in Greenland lasted two weeks; in fact, Greenland and Iceland would be the major delay stations en route. During their stay on Greenland, the airmen endured two snowstorms with winds up to 150 miles per hour, requiring them to tie down the planes in the middle of the night.

Although the weather was bitter cold on Greenland, all was not bad. Hiking, hunting,

and fishing in the snow-covered mountains gave them exercise during the day, while card games at night tested their mental acuity. They ate well, too. Miller and Lieutenant Holly Grimm commented on the welcoming meal of thick steaks and strawberry ice cream upon their arrival.

By the time the weather had cleared for Iceland, 12 planes had already arrived in Greenland. The pilots were anxious to leave, but all would remember the fiery northern lights dancing across the sky with the huge Greenland glacier in the background, and the cracking sounds when icebergs broke away from it and floated into the sea. The airmen left for Reykjavik October 14, and all 12 planes arrived without incident. The next day they received a briefing on the trip to Scotland, but bad weather ahead would force them to stay another week.

They finally got the word to take off the next day. Before they could take off, the wings and engines of the B-26s had to be warmed up with ground-based heaters. They got up early because the weather report looked good, and after a last-minute briefing they were on their way to Prestwick. After about an hour, they ran into some rough weather: an unexpected front that ran from 50 feet above the water to high altitude.

The formation attempted to fly over it. At 16,000 feet, they still had not topped it, and the steering became mushy due to the heavy load they were carrying. Ice began to form on the wings, so they next attempted to fly under the front at 100 to 200 feet in an attempt to break the ice.

The ice thawed, but the visibility was poor. Fear of flying straight into the water drove them again to high altitude. The front was too broad to fly around, so they ended up flying through it. They ran into one thunderstorm after another. The trailing pilots felt terrific tension as they caught only brief glimpses of their lead ship. After seven hours and 45 minutes, they broke into clear sky and could see the coast of Scotland. When they arrived at the terminal they learned the other formation led by Colonel Rutherford had turned back because of the weather.

By the middle of October most of the aircrews of the 437th, 438th, and 439th had made it to Attlebridge. The 440th did not clear Baer Field until October 19, thus bearing the brunt of the severe weather on the northern route. The weather between Greenland and Iceland was so dreadful that three planes were lost without a trace. A number of the B-26s were forced back and later had to cross by the south-

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**B-26 bombers stay in formation as they hit a target somewhere in North Africa. The B-26 overcame a notorious reputation as being difficult to fly and served in both the Mediterranean and Northern Europe.**

ern route to join the group in North Africa. Lieutenant Griffith Williams, who earlier had transferred to the 440th, was in that group.

While quartered at Attlebridge, the group spent time gathering the remaining crews while more planes arrived over the next week. Numerous local flights were made to establish fuel consumption and for maintenance at Honington. The emphasis would be to hastily get as many planes operational as possible before the long flight to North Africa.

They had no time to fly a few missions with the Eighth Air Force over Germany to gain combat experience as originally planned. The air support echelon and ground echelon had already boarded ships and were in convoy in the Firth of Clyde, leaving for North Africa. Colonel Rutherford, eager to get into action, made a hasty but questionable decision in leading the first wave to North Africa after he learned the air support echelon had already gone ashore onto the beaches of Arzew east of Oran on November 8.

Ten B-26s took off through fog heading for Lands End on November 12. Five were lost, but the remaining five returned safely to their base. Killed were the 319th commander,

Colonel Rutherford, 439th squadron commander, Captain Tuttle, and their entire crews when planes got lost in bad weather and were shot down over the Cherbourg peninsula in German-occupied France. Captain Smith, one of the Tokyo raiders, crashed in England and his entire crew was killed. The other three planes that crashed on landing were seriously damaged, but their crews recovered. These incidents also took away five of the 35 planes that had now arrived in England, making only half of their original complement of 57 available for the initial Torch operation.

Major Jones, now the acting group commander, ordered the next nine planes to leave for North Africa in better weather on November 14. He had no plane of his own because his B-26 had been damaged. But he did have the authority to commandeer any plane he wanted. He chose Holly Grimm's plane, named Melba. Of course, Grimm could not complain. On these first flights to North Africa much rank was pulled. Higher ranking officers also took other planes. Some got additional planes later and others had to join the next convoy to North Africa.

The Twelfth Air Force ordered the 319th into

action, although only 16 of the 25 planes that had arrived from England were serviceable. They were flown to Maison Blanche airfield on November 24 to be in range of Axis targets. There was quite a scramble to get in on the first mission, set for November 28, but only nine planes could be readied for the low-level mission against the harbor facilities at Sfax, Tunisia. They included four from the 438th Squadron, three from the 437th, and two from the 439th. Jones led the mission and added the others on the basis of the availability of their planes and crews. The mission was a resounding success. The tank farms at the docks, warehouses, and railroad marshalling yards were severely damaged. The entire area was left in flames. Although intense flak was encountered, there were no losses, but planes were damaged and one gunner was wounded.

Jones led the first few missions because he felt a responsibility as group commander to launch his airmen into combat. On the next two missions, two B-26s crashed as a result of enemy fire, but with only one fatality, a tail gunner. Jones took newly assigned Group Commander Lt. Col. Sam W. Agee along as co-pilot when he led a flight of eight B-26s to bomb Bizerte, Tunisia, on his fourth mission. Tom Griffin also served as a navigator/bombardier on that mission. Eight Lockheed P-38 Lightning fighters accompanied as flight escort. The B-26s bombed Ferryville Harbor and the Bizerte Harbor area, hitting ships at anchor, a railway station, and oil storage tanks.

The flight encountered extremely accurate flak, which disabled Jones's aircraft. It was seen crash-landing on a beach northeast of the city.

Griffin navigated the return flight to their base, but they were attacked by four German Focke Wulf Fw-190 fighters as they left the target area. Two P-38s drove the Germans off and claimed one probable kill. Following that attack, the B-26s were threatened by two Messerschmitt Me-109 fighters, which were driven off by the P-38s, which claimed another kill. One of the P-38s was damaged and had to make an emergency landing in Algeria at the coastal town of Bone. After returning to base, they found out that, Agee, Jones and their crew were taken prisoner. Two of the 319th's five Doolittle Raiders had now been lost.

By Christmas, the 319th Bomb Group's losses from low-level bombing had mounted to the extent that on December 26, General Doolittle ordered all B-26s to bomb all land targets at medium altitude from 10,000 to 12,000 feet using the Norden bombsight. The low-level bombing could continue only as sea sweeps to attack German General Erwin Rommel's sup-

ply lines to his forces in North Africa. The operations officer, Captain Randy Holzapple, responded to this order on January 6 by moving seven B-26s east from Telergma to Biskra airdrome at the edge of the Sahara Desert. Lieutenants Miller and Griffin and their crews were in that group. They would conduct skip-bombing tests to develop the required bombing parameters and accuracy.

Holzapple modified the upper turret gun sight of the B-26 Marauder and mounted it on the co-pilot's dash to sight the bomb angle. For practice, he used defused 100-pound and 300-pound bombs against land targets nine feet tall by 25 feet wide. The pilot held the plane's air speed and altitude constant while the co-pilot operated the rudder pedals as he used his modified gun sight to zero in on the middle of the target. When the plane reached the drop angle sighted in his gun sight, he released the bomb. Passes were made at minimum altitude, 50 to 300 feet, in formations of two or three planes.

Captain Holzapple led a five-plane skip-bombing sea sweep in the early morning hours of January 22. The plan was for each pilot to select a separate target and drop the three 500-pound bombs. Captain Miller gave Holzapple a bearing toward the suspected location of the convoy and then entered the nose of the plane. After about an hour, Miller spotted a convoy roughly 50 miles northeast of Tunis. Holzapple waggled his plane's wings to signal the others. Then he descended to 50 feet above the water and held the nose on the cluster of ships until he could single out a target.

Miller could see the fireworks display of tracers arcing toward them as they closed within one mile of the ships. Holzapple lined up on a large freighter and held the plane's airspeed and altitude constant while his co-pilot, Lieutenant John Lichty, guided with the rudder pedals and aimed through the modified gun sight. The plane shuddered and lurched upward as it released its bombs. Just as they passed over the ship, the concussion from a tremendous explosion rocked the plane. They had hit the freighter!

Miller screamed in pain over the intercom. Holzapple immediately ordered Lichty to crawl into the nose and check on Miller.

Before Lichty could slide his seat back to enter the nose, the dreaded words "Fighters at 6 o'clock high" came over the intercom from the tail gunner, Sergeant D.D. Barnes. "There's a bunch of Me-109s after us and our trailing B-26s."

The Me-109s gave the group a running battle for the next 10 minutes before finally breaking off the encounter. The two trailing bombers were so crippled by enemy fire that both crash



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landed in Algeria near Bone. Holzapple's plane was heavily damaged as well, but was able to limp back to base.

Several of the crew members were wounded and later recovered, but Miller died of shrapnel wounds from the convoy's guns. A large freighter and cargo liner were confirmed sunk. Two Me-109s and two twin-engine Me-110 fighters were also confirmed destroyed by the B-26 gunners.

The very next day, a sea sweep by four B-26s was led by Captain Gilbert. Lieutenant Charles "Chuck" Meyers needed a navigator for his plane, and Lieutenant Holly Grimm volunteered on this his second mission as co-pilot. He had previously avoided flying co-pilot while waiting to be assigned his own plane. Grimm was really chafing because Jones had taken his plane, Melba, and lost it in combat. While at Biskra, though, he decided he would need to fly as co-pilot if he were ever to get his required number of 25 missions in to go home. He remembered the mission with Meyers this way:

"The engines were running smoothly and no enemy fighters had been sighted as we made our turn onto the final leg away from Sicily towards Bizerte. Suddenly on the horizon we saw our quarry, two large freighters. We got the signal from Gilbert to attack. Chuck and

our wingman, John Beard, took the freighter on the left while Gilbert and his wingman, Jack Nix, took the other one.

"Going in we got a lot of flak. Some initial heavy stuff nicked us as I zeroed in on the center of the ship with my modified gun sight. As we got closer, we started getting hit with the light 20mm stuff. Just as I released my three 500 pounders all hell broke loose. We got a direct hit on the windshield at the center support strip. The plane rocked violently as it lunged toward the sea. Chuck and I were both hit. He wiped the blood from his face and somehow we gained control, leveling the plane off at about 10 feet above the water.

"The right engine had been hit. We feathered it later. The left engine was leaking oil, so Chuck called the rest of the crew to come forward into the pilot's cabin. Navigator, Lt. Tommy Griffin, came up from the nose and immediately got out the first aid and began treating me. Flak hit my left eye and my left hand had been cut open to the bone. He bandaged me up with sulfur drugs and gave me a shot of morphine to ease the pain. In addition to his forehead, flak had hit Chuck in his right arm and in both thighs, mostly in the left thigh. Griffin also gave him first aid and gave us both sulfanilamide tablets.

"The flight engineer and tail gunner, Everett Hunt, said as they passed over the cargo liner he saw the bombs hit the ship and it broke in half and sunk [sic]. The other two planes sunk [sic] the other freighter too. He also said the rear of the plane was full of holes and half the rudder had been shot away and the elevators were damaged. The turret gunner, Richard Ferrill, reported the hydraulics shot out with the bomb bay doors stuck open and a big hole the size of his head behind the turret. The left engine began losing power so Chuck radioed Gilbert he was losing sight of the formation and would have to go in to shore and land somewhere near Bone. Gilbert acknowledged with good luck wishes.

"The left engine suddenly went dead. The plane yawed badly. Chuck cut the throttle and yelled, 'Here we go guys!' We were at about 250 feet altitude as she started toward the water. Chuck yelled at Sgt. Hunt and me to jettison the escape hatches over our heads before we hit the water. For a moment I thought they were going to stick, but I threw all my weight against them and they flew open. Just before we hit Chuck put the plane in a nose up slightly stalled position to lessen the impact. We hit the water with a terrific jolt. The plane began to sink nose down immediately. I pulled the inflate

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strings on my Mae West and when I came up to the surface I happily saw four more heads bobbing in the water. It took only 25 seconds from the time we hit the water till that moment, and only another 30 seconds for the plane to go under. I had a difficult time staying up. I paddled furiously and noticed flak had perforated my Mae West and it was only half filled. I needed help.

“We were about a half-mile from shore. Tommy and Sgt. Ferrill assisted me while Sgt. Hunt stayed close to Chuck. It took us an hour to swim to shore and we were glad to see a couple of Arabs who helped us across the rocky shoreline. Chuck and I were in pain from our wounds and we were all shivering, cold and in shock. The kind Arabs built a fire for us and we were grateful for the warmth. The Arabs, with the assistance of a British stretcher team, came to carry us over the mountains to a British field hospital.”

After completing 29 missions by February 1943 and incurring more losses, General Doolittle ordered the 319th to withdraw for a rest and regroup at Rabat-Sale Oujda, French Morocco. The 319th had lost 17 B-26 Marauders and 47 men killed or missing in addition to the nine aircraft and eight crews lost en route from the U.S. to North Africa.



This Martin B-26 Marauder bomber was damaged on the ground at Biskra airdrome in North Africa when bomb fragments hit its fuselage, a propeller, and the aircraft's nose. The attack was carried out by four German Junkers Ju-88 bombers on January 3, 1944.

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After March 5, many of the aircrews that had been forced to discontinue their flights across the northern route began to arrive in North Africa. Griffith Williams of the 440th Squadron had also arrived and had a tearful reunion with Thomas Griffin when he heard that their other three Doolittle Raider comrades had been killed or captured.

During the reequipping period, the group had received 45 improved B-26s with longer wings and taller rudders, thus gaining the nickname of the “Big Tailed Birds.”

During their reconstitution, the men of the 319th received intensive training in medium-altitude bombing. Holzapple had organized this effort and would later serve as the group commander of the 319th until the end of the war. He was determined that this group would develop the necessary skills and strategies so that they would never again suffer such devastating losses. During that training period, Captains Williams and Griffin assumed significant leadership roles. Griffin became the group nav-

igator and Williams a mission flight leader. On May 30, 1943, they were at their full strength of 64 aircraft and crews and were alerted for a return to combat.

The 319th would now focus its medium-altitude missions on the island fortress of Pantelleria and in support the invasion of Sicily. Griffin flew 12 more missions, and Williams flew an undetermined number in June. Williams flew as the flight commander on three of them: mission number 33 on June 6 against Pantelleria gun positions, mission number 37 on June 10 to Pantelleria, and mission number 43 on June 20 to the Trapani/Milo Airdrome in Sicily. Ironically, they would come together in the same aircrew on their final mission of World War II, Sunday July 4, 1943.

Thirty-nine B-26s took off at 11:45 AM from Djedeida on mission number 47 to bomb the Gerbini airfields at Catania, Sicily. Flight Leader Captain Williams had Group Commander Lt. Col. Wilbur W. Aring on board as flight commander. Griffin was also aboard as

group navigator. Eight of the planes returned early due to armament or engine difficulties, leaving 31 to execute the raid. The B-26s ran into intense, accurate, and heavy flak as they approached the target. Griffin had completed the major dogleg navigation direct to Malta then to the coast of Sicily on a 30 degree heading, and went into the nose to pick up the IP (Initial Point) of the bomb run, Lake Lintini, to turn on a 320 degree heading to the target.

Griffin immediately commanded the evasive action plan through the flak as he tried to line up on one of the airfields. As Griffin aimed through his bombsight Williams noticed over his pilot's window a large burst of pink flak. “Uh uh,” he announced over the intercom, “look for enemy fighters. That's their signal to come in.”

The gunners immediately saw about 50 enemy aircraft they identified as Me-109s with some Fw-190s, Me-110s, Me-210s and Italian Macchi 200 fighters coming up at them. They attacked the formation of bombers as they were making their bombing runs. Williams' lead plane and a second B-26 in his first flight were shot down over the target. Fortunately, he and the crew were able to bail out.

The fighter attacks continued all the way back to the coast and out to sea near Malta, crippling one more B-26 that had to make an emergency landing at Pantelleria. The B-26 gunners claimed to have shot down 19 enemy fighters. Observation was difficult, but it was also believed that many bombs hit the target area.

After the Allies captured Sicily, some prisoners were liberated, but Lieutenant Colonel Aring, Captain Williams and Captain Griffin were still held by the enemy and had been moved to prison camps in Germany for the duration of the war.

Now they were all gone. The 319th men were stunned at the loss of their last two Doolittle Raiders. General Jimmy Doolittle once said of his Raiders, “They were picked crews. They were crews that had the most experience with the airplane. And right from the start, they were absolutely top flight.”

To the men who served with them, those qualities were obvious. They became their “Fabulous Five” heroes all over again. Their role is legendary in the annals of the 319th Bomb Group. □

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*Joseph Connaughton, a bombardier/navigator with the 319th Bomb Group during World War II, served in the Mediterranean and Pacific Theaters. He is a retired engineer of the Research & Development Division of the Army Missile Command in Huntsville, Alabama.*

## SEVERAL OF DOOLITTLE'S RAIDERS HIT THEIR TARGETS AND SURVIVED.

The Doolittle Raiders took off from the flight deck of the aircraft carrier USS *Hornet* on April 18, 1942, with Tokyo their destination. Five survivors of the raid later joined the 319th Bomb Group in Europe and the Mediterranean.

Major David M. Jones, pilot of the fifth B-25 aircraft to take off from the carrier, scored direct hits on a power station, oil tanks, and a large manufacturing plant in the Tokyo area. He flew on instruments until in the vicinity of Chuhsien, China, where the crew bailed out without injury. They were the first Raiders to reach their Chuhsien goal.

Lieutenants Donald G. Smith and Griffith P. Williams, pilot and co-pilot of the 15th B-25 to take off, dropped their bombs southwest of Tokyo at Kobe on a large aircraft factory and around the dockyards. While flying on to China, Smith decided to ditch the bomber in waters near a small island off Sangchow. All crew members safely exited the aircraft and paddled to shore in a life raft. They were picked up by friendly Chinese and evaded the Japanese aboard a Chinese junk. Luckily, en route Smith learned of Ted Lawson's (pilot of the seventh B-25) serious injuries and traveled to meet him. The mission flight surgeon, Lieutenant T.R. White, who was also Smith's gunner, performed life-saving surgery on Lawson.

Lieutenant T. Hoover's B-25, with bombardier Lieutenant Miller on board, took off second, behind Colonel Doolittle's lead plane. He followed Doolittle until reaching the Japanese shore. Then, following Miller's directions, they veered off to bomb their own targets—two factory buildings and storehouses. They trailed Doolittle most of the way to China and made a wheels-up landing in a soft rice paddy. The crewmen walked for three days, were found by friendly guerrilla fighters, and were spirited away from the Japanese by boat, train and foot to Chungking.

Lieutenant Thomas C. Griffin, the navigator of the ninth plane, piloted by Lieutenant H.F. Watson, guided their plane to accomplish a highly effective bombing of the Tokyo Gas and Electric Company on the shore of Tokyo Bay. Flying in a heavy rain to China, Watson ordered his crew to bail out 100 miles south of Pyong Lake. Friendly Chinese recovered them and carried Watson, the only one injured, to Hengyeng. Watson was later hospitalized at Walter Reed in Washington D.C.



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# Armored Blitz to Avranches

THE U.S. VIII CORPS EXPLOITED OPERATION COBRA AND CRACKED A DOORWAY INTO BRITTANY. BY KEVIN M. HYMEL



Lieutenant General Omar Bradley had reason to be pleased by the last week of July 1944. His First Army had scratched out a substantial foothold on the Normandy coast, capturing three times more French territory than his British allies. He had cut off the Cherbourg peninsula to the west and pushed his army south. His carpet bombing of the German Army south of St. Lo, Operation Cobra, helped crack the enemy line. But his four corps, composed mostly of infantry, were still only inching forward. It had taken him almost two months to advance approximately 80 square miles. He needed to win the war faster than this.

To Bradley, the key to victory was capturing ports. With most of the Allied supplies coming across the beaches of Normandy, and only a trickle coming from the destroyed port at Cherbourg, he knew if he could push his army south, he could pivot to the west into Brittany and gain access to the ports of St. Malo, Brest, and

Lorient. And the key to Brittany was the mountaintop town of Avranches, with the See River crossing north of the town and the Selune River crossing south. If the Cherbourg Peninsula was the forearm of a raised left arm, the Brittany Peninsula would be the bicep and Avranches would be the inner crook of the elbow, a vital town indeed.

Bradley's First Army was becoming unmanageably large. So far in the war, American armies had usually consisted of two or three corps; the First Army now consisted of four. From east to west were the V Corps under Leonard Gerow, XIX Corps under Charles Corlett, VII Corps



Followed closely by a jeep, an American M4 Sherman tank passes a burned-out German half-track on a dirt road in Normandy. The tank rolled forward in support of Operation Cobra, the Allied offensive that began on July 25, 1944, and signaled a rapid advance across France and to the Rhine. INSET: Left behind by his fleeing comrades, a wounded German soldier is tended by an American corpsman. Large numbers of prisoners of war and stockpiles of equipment were captured during the rapid advance of Operation Cobra.

under Joe Collins, and the VIII Corps under Troy Middleton. Both the V and VII Corps had fought their way up from the Normandy beaches. The XIX and VIII were committed to the fight on July 3, but only managed to advance five to seven miles south in 17 days of fighting.

Behind Bradley, soldiers and weapons were pouring into Normandy. He knew that once he had more room, he would commit Lt. Gen. George S. Patton Jr.'s Third Army to the fight. Patton, who had led troops to success in North Africa and Sicily, was a proven commander who pushed men forward through a combination of leadership, smart tactics, personal exam-

ple, and profane language.

Major General Troy Middleton was relatively new to corps command but he was no stranger to combat. In 1915, he had fought in Mexico and led an infantry regiment in World War I as the youngest colonel in the Army, earning a Distinguished Service Cross. He left the Army in 1937 and later became the vice president of Louisiana State University. Called back into service in 1943, he successfully led the 45th Infantry Division through the capture of Sicily and into Italy. An arthritic knee sent him home, but he was called back to service by General Dwight Eisenhower, who needed his experience

to help liberate France.

"I'll take him into battle on a litter if we have to," Ike reportedly told General George C. Marshall, the Army chief of staff. Now Middleton's VIII Corps held the extreme right flank of the army with Joe Collins to his left and the Gulf of St. Malo to his right. At his disposal were four infantry divisions, the 8th, 79th, 83rd, and 90th, and two armored divisions, the 4th and 6th.

Infantry and armored divisions were two widely different weapons of war. In World War II, an infantry division consisted of three infantry regiments commanded by a colonel



Following the breakthrough at St. Lo, Operation Cobra proceeded with a major drive to the south. The capture of the city of Avranches would provide a major staging location for the U.S. Army to gain control of the Brittany and Cherbourg areas, isolating the great port of Cherbourg and potentially opening it for Allied use.

and supported by tank and artillery battalions, some 13,000 men. An infantry division moved at the pace of a soldier's feet. Tanks supported the infantry wherever the going got tough. Armored divisions also consisted of three formations, each commanded by a colonel. They were called Combat Commands and were designated either A, B, or R (for Reserve). Each one consisted of a tank battalion and an armored infantry battalion, with armored field artillery battalions sometimes attached.

In an attack, the tank battalion, consisting of

approximately 70 tanks, led the charge, followed by the armored infantry battalion, consisting of 1,000 soldiers riding in half-tracks, who dismounted to wipe out anything the tanks left behind. Armored divisions, with a total of more than 200 tanks, were designed for speed, maneuver, and hitting power.

But American armored divisions had yet to prove themselves in the war. In North Africa, the 1st Armored Division never got the knack for exploitation. In Sicily, the 2nd Armored Division was limited to supporting the infantry,

and in Italy, the 1st was restricted to the roads as it moved up mountainsides. In Normandy, Collins had already deployed his 2nd and 3rd Armored Divisions, but they fought in swampy areas and only partially committed to the fight.

Troy Middleton knew what an infantry division could do, but he was not so sure about tanks and openly expressed his reservations about using armor for exploitation.

Operation Cobra's ground attack kicked off on July 25, with Collins committing three infantry divisions into the breach made by the bombers. Despite poor gains, he committed his two armored divisions into the attack to speed things up. The 2nd and 3rd Armored Divisions were bigger than the rest of the other American armored divisions (they had been organized as "heavy," divisions with two large regiments before armored divisions were slimmed down to three smaller combat commands) and they had experience. Collins tasked the 3rd with capturing Coutances, the first major town on the route south to Avranches.

The next day, Bradley committed the VIII Corps to action but Middleton put the 8th and 90th Infantry Divisions into the van, advancing only a mile. Within 24 hours, Middleton realized that German resistance had crumbled, but minefields were holding up his infantry. Despite his reservations, he ordered his 4th and 6th Armored Divisions to lead the way.

The leaders of the 4th and 6th were two very different men. Major General John "P" Wood was an outspoken and passionate artilleryman who later became a tanker. He earned the nickname "P" for professor because he tutored so many of his fellow cadets at West Point. He served as an ordnance officer in World War I and attended the staff college at Langres in France with Patton before returning home. He served with Patton again at the Command and General Staff College at Fort Leavenworth, and later became Patton's artillery commander in the 2nd Armored Division.

An artillery specialist, Wood served in armored units from 1941 until he took command of the 4th Armored in May 1942. He endeared his men to him through his leadership, individual care of his soldiers, and by challenging superiors who found fault with his bold tactics. He was not above hugging his men when they did well, and he listened to them. When an officer told him that the white star on the front of American tanks was being used by the German tankers as a bull's-eye, Wood ordered all the stars on the 4th's tanks to be painted over black.

Stone-faced and businesslike Maj. Gen.

Robert Grow, like Patton, had begun his career in the cavalry. But, unlike Patton, he shifted to armor development in 1930, spending much of his time with the mechanized cavalry at Fort Knox while Patton returned to the cavalry. Yet, for all his hard work developing tank tactics, Grow had earned Patton's ire. During the Louisiana Maneuvers of 1941, where entire armies fought mock battles across the Cajun state, Colonel Grow told Patton how he had enjoyed a delicious oyster supper. Patton, knowing Grow's men were on the march toward an objective, chewed him out for irresponsible behavior. It was a lesson Patton hoped the younger officer would remember.

Before sunrise on July 28, 1944, these two division commanders led their troops through the infantry and charged the Germans. Waves of tanks pushed through the hedgerow country, filling the air with the deafening roar of engines and the smell of gasoline. Half-tracks followed, packed with soldiers. Bringing up the rear were mobile artillery, tracked tank retrievers, and supply trucks. The war of maneuver had begun.

The armored spearheads sliced through battered German defenses and raced south to Coutances. The men of the 6th found enemy resistance light and advanced some eight miles before noon. The 4th did even better. Despite being delayed three hours in a minefield, its tanks broke free and reached Coutances before noon, only to find the Germans still in force. Elements of CCB under Brig. Gen. Holmes Dager began pushing south through the city, wrestling for control. Tanks blasted buildings as armored infantrymen duelled with German soldiers hiding in the rubble. Unhappy with his division's progress, General Wood took the battle into his own hands.

Wood walked the town's street under fire and captured a German soldier; he maneuvered through a minefield, penciling a note to Dager to "send the infantry through after me." When he spotted a German 88mm artillery piece in an alley knocking out vehicles, he ran up to a nearby M18 Hellcat tank destroyer and ordered the crew, "Pull up in front of that damned alley and get rid of that gun!" The crew turned its 76mm cannon 90 degrees and raced to the alley entrance, where the driver hit the brakes. The sudden charge must have surprised the Germans because the Hellcat crew got off two shots, shattering the weapon.

"Thanks!" Wood told the crew. "Those damn Heinies were holding up the war."

The sun was setting by the time the 4th had fought its way through Coutances and cleared a string of mines at a bridge south of the town. The men began taking up defensive positions



**ABOVE:** Major General Robert Grow (left), commander of the 6th Armored Division, had once been chewed out by General George S. Patton; Major General John "P" Wood (center), a former artilleryman, led the U.S. 64th Armored Division during the drive to Avranches; Major General Troy Middleton (right) commanded the U.S. VIII Corps on the extreme right flank of the Allied advance during Operation Cobra. **TOP:** Festooned with camouflage foliage, Allied armored vehicles pass through the destroyed town of Coutances, France, in pursuit of the retreating Germans on July 31, 1944. Allied troops had laid siege to the town and forced the Germans to withdraw.

when tanks from the 3rd Armored rolled in to take their objective. The 4th had beaten the larger, more experienced unit to their goal.

Meanwhile, back at First Army headquarters, Bradley assigned Patton as the VIII Corps' temporary commander. Why he did this was never really explained. In his first memoir, Bradley explained that he did it because the corps would eventually become part of Third Army. Bradley also had a habit of committing units piecemeal to the front to get the troops "blooded." He may have been doing the same to Patton, who had been waiting almost two months to get back into action. Or Bradley may have just gotten tired of Patton pestering him about bringing Third Army into the war.

Patton learned of his new command around 6 PM. Bradley added that he wanted Patton to line up his XV Corps, which had been forming off the beaches of Normandy, next to the VIII immediately. It would be officially announced on August 1—the birth of Third Army on the Continent. Patton rushed to VIII Corps' headquarters with his staff but acted casually to keep Middleton's staff focused on the battle at hand. When he got back to his headquarters, Patton called Bradley and suggested dropping paratroopers around the Selune River dams. He was already thinking about Avranches.

Patton had more than a new command to be happy about. The day before, one of his subordinates said that General Marshall had told a correspondent: "Bradley will lead the inva-

sion, but he is just a limited-objective General. When we get moving, Patton is the man with the drive and the imagination to do the dangerous things fast.”

A very pleased Patton penned in his diary, “This is very fine if true.”

The next morning, July 29, Wood and Grow sought to keep pushing to the south. Grow was charged with capturing Avranches, while Wood was tasked with driving east of Avranches and blocking any German counterattacks. Grow had a tougher time of it. His 6th bulldozed ahead five miles south but stopped south of Coutances at the Sienne River. His intelligence reported that every bridge over the river had been destroyed by the retreating Germans. He drove to the river where he found Brig. Gen. James Taylor, the commander of CCA, and the two men spread out a map on the ground to search for a decent place to ford.

As this was going on, a command car pulled up and out stepped Patton, none too pleased.

at him. He ordered Grow to cross the river with his whole division, then he turned and left.

Grow complied. He supported Taylor’s river crossing with every gun in the division. Tanks and men splashed across the river and chased any remaining Germans up the heights of the hills on the opposite bank. Engineers soon began building a bridge for the rest of the division. Grow, humiliated and not looking for a repeat performance, ordered his CCB to take over the attack the next day in hopes for better success.

**Meanwhile, the soldiers of the 4th, flushed with their Coutances victory, slashed south so quickly that two artillery battalions had to leapfrog each other just to keep up with the vanguard. But the drive was not perfect. With so few roads south of Coutances, tanks from the 2nd Armored Division crossed near the 4th and came under friendly fire. It quickly ended when an officer of the 2nd radioed in and**

east and west. The eastern column, composed exclusively of armored infantry, encountered heavy German resistance. Panzers opened up on a line of half-tracks and quickly destroyed six of them. The Americans responded by bringing up their antitank guns, which knocked out one of the panzers. The Germans pulled back and then attacked again. They set up guns on high ground overlooking the American column, and an artillery duel commenced.

The Americans eventually knocked out enough German tanks to take the heights, but the battle took all day. The western column made much better progress, sweeping 10 miles south unopposed and unknowingly passing a forward headquarters for the German Seventh Army, forcing two enemy generals to escape by dashing across the road between the roaring tanks.

July 30 brought more frustration to the 6th Armored. Near the town of Brehal, the division’s armored reconnaissance squadron encountered a roadblock, with German infantry firing from the woods on both sides of the road. Light recon tanks engaged the attackers, swinging their turrets left and right, firing into the woods as they rolled on. At the edge of town the advance encountered another roadblock and called in P-47 Thunderbolt fighters to destroy it. After about a dozen strafing passes, the lead tank rammed the roadblock, opening passage for the rest of the division.

Tanks rolled into Brehal, shooting rounds into the town’s church steeple to suppress expected enemy fire. By the afternoon, tanks had pushed past another roadblock south of town and the road seemed open, but as a group of M8 armored cars and a half-track headed south they came under very accurate fire from a battery of German 88s. The M8s pushed forward only to discover more Germans setting up artillery pieces. The men began to think they had fallen into a trap until a group of Germans ran toward them with their arms raised in surrender.

The Americans lined the Germans up on one side of the road and were beginning to search them when an 88 opened up. The Americans dived for cover, but two Germans caught in the open were killed. Two M8s and the half-track also went up in flames. American artillery rounds eventually forced the German gunners to pull back, and the 6th Armored advanced another three miles before the sun went down.

The 4th also found itself in a tough fight. CCB’s western column pushed to the edge of Avranches, where it encountered a force of German tanks. Both sides opened fire and took losses until the Americans pulled back. The Germans now realized the importance of



He asked Grow what he was doing, and Grow explained that Taylor was looking for a place to cross. Possibly thinking that Patton needed him for something, he added that he, personally, was doing nothing. Patton, controlling his temper, asked Grow if he had been down to look at the river. When Grow abruptly responded “no,” Patton exploded, telling him that unless he did something he would be out of a job. Patton then turned and walked down to the shallow river, finding it only a foot deep with just a few Germans on the far bank, who did not fire a shot

threatened to call “P.” The men of the 4th recognized their commander’s nickname and stopped firing. The mood in the combat command changed when they got word from Wood. “Present mission cancelled—using any roads [in zone] ... move on Avranches ... to capture and secure crossings east thereof.” Patton, after his confrontation with Grow, did not relieve him of his job, but he did relieve him of his mission. The 4th Armored was now running with the ball to Avranches.

Dager’s CCB approached the town from the



**ABOVE:** Rapidly advancing through the city of Avranches in pursuit of the retreating Germans, U.S. forces rush down a dirt road through the center of the liberated town. In the foreground is an M3 Stuart light tank, which was often used for reconnaissance missions. **OPPOSITE:** During the Allied drive through Brittany, officers direct armored vehicles around a destroyed railroad bridge along the route to Coutances.

Avranches—that it was basically the cork in the bottle and to lose it would let the Americans flood into the heart of France. They were going to make the 4th Armored pay for its capture.

With CCB wrestling open the roads leading into Avranches, Wood ordered CCA to take the town. As the lead tanks roared up the road and into the mountaintop town, Luftwaffe fighters swooped down. Fortunately for the Americans, the pilots missed their target. The tankers pushed into town, engaging the Germans on the narrow roads and in alleys. Avranches, the American tankers were discovering, was a labyrinth of a town. Germans seemed to fire from every building while tanks seemed to lurk behind every corner.

A Hellcat commanded by Sergeant Joe Shedevy knocked out a German tank with a single shot. Just as the main gun fired, the crew spotted another enemy tank behind a hedgerow. The second German tank fired and missed. Shedevy's crew quickly turned its gun and dispatched the panzer, again with a single shot. The action flushed out two more German tanks that fled, only to have one destroyed by follow-up Hellcats.

A Sherman tank commanded by Captain Murray Farmer pushed through the city and came head-to-head with a German Mark V

Panther tank. Farmer immediately rammed the German broadside, blocking the transverse of the enemy gun. Farmer's gunner then shot four rounds into the larger tank, both tanks rocking from the point-blank discharge. The German tankers tried to escape, only to be gunned down by Farmer with a machine gun. By sundown the Americans were established in Avranches, but the fight was far from over.

As the tanks of the 4th charged south, they left large numbers of Germans in their rear. Most surrendered peacefully, but some did not. Artillery units had to repulse attacks all day long, and support units had to fight off ambushes on their way to the front. As night approached, Americans pushing to the front heard German voices all around them. Any German with some fight left in him was trying to make it to Avranches.

That evening, northeast of the city, American tanks stumbled into a German column jammed closely together. The tankers raked the column with fire, but the enemy fought back until almost 2 AM, when the decimated Germans pulled back. West of the city, a group of tanks was guarding a bridge over the See River when a column of German vehicles bearing red crosses rolled by. The Americans held their fire,

assuming the Germans were merely evacuating their wounded into Avranches. Suddenly, the Germans opened fire on the Americans. The tanks immediately returned fire, destroying some of the vehicles. German infantry poured out of the vehicles and summarily surrendered to the tankers. The trucks, it turned out, were filled with ammunition.

The German prisoners warned of another column behind them. Their prediction came true around midnight, as the Americans began to come under small arms fire. This time it was an American ammunition truck that was hit, setting it ablaze. The American commander, worried that his tanks were now silhouetted against the flames, ordered his unit to withdraw east, abandoning the bridge. What the Germans had failed to achieve with their Red Cross trucks, they now achieved with the destruction of a single American truck. Enemy troops retreating from the east now had a channel into Avranches.

The next morning, tankers in the northeastern part of the city woke to find they had bivouacked in the same field as the Germans. Men raced for their weapons and machines. The fighting was confused, but the Americans held the field. One German prisoner, who was actually a Pole forced into duty with the Germans, pointed out the location of six enemy howitzers. Sherman tanks descended on the area destroying the guns and capturing almost 100 prisoners.

On the other side of Avranches, the Germans



**ABOVE: A burned out Sherman tank lies abandoned in an open field near Avranches while the dry brush around it goes up in flames. BELOW: Their hands behind their heads, hundreds of German prisoners march into captivity near Avranches on August 2, 1944. Elsewhere, thousands of German soldiers and their equipment were trapped in a great pocket at Falaise.**



who had escaped across the See River bridge wound their way through the city and were heading south when they bumped into an American battalion of armored infantry. In the ensuing fight, Private William Witson, manning a .30-caliber machine gun, killed at least 50 Germans and destroyed 25 trucks, other vehicles and horses before the Germans cut him down. Later in the day, when Dager discovered the western approach to the city lay open, he dispatched other tanks to plug the gap.

Fighting continued in and around Avranches. German snipers flew a white flag from their position, but when the Americans exposed

themselves to accept their surrender, they opened fire. An American officer, searching for a bazooka, took a hit from a sniper but relayed the sniper's location as he lay exposed and dying. A tank rolled up and wiped out the nest with one shot from its main gun.

Avranches was declared secure by 1 PM, and by 4 PM a battalion of tanks raced south to secure the four bridges over the Selune River, the most important of which was the Pontaubault Bridge, the gateway into Brittany. The day before, planes flying over Avranches reported the vital bridge intact. It had survived U.S. bombing and escaped demolition by the Germans. Patton would later

claim the bridge dated back to the battles of William the Conqueror.

After plowing through some stiff resistance on the southern edge of the city, the tankers reached their objectives without incident. At one bridge, the battalion commander checked on his men's status. Finding everything fine, he roared off in his Sherman only to surprise a German tank lurking nearby. The American quickly fired three armor-piercing shells into the enemy. It was the first kill for Lieutenant Colonel Creighton Abrams.

On the same day, 6th Armored made great progress. It quickly advanced three miles to the coastal town of Granville. By that afternoon, Middleton ordered Grow to head for Avranches. Seeing that tanks and vehicles from both divisions would clog the roads, Grow ordered his men to drive only on the seaward side of the roads, leaving the other side for the 4th. He also contacted Wood, explaining the situation and figuring out bivouac areas for the two divisions.

By 9 PM, the 6th arrived in Avranches and headed south to relieve the tanks guarding the bridges out of Normandy. The destruction along the roads shocked Pfc. Harry Cruise. He saw dead horses, destroyed vehicles, and a dead American soldier with a pick axe in his back. "That's when I knew what war was," recalled Cruise.

When Grow saw the conditions of the town, buildings in rubble and streets filled with debris, he immediately ordered his bulldozers forward to clear the streets. Then he placed MPs along the roads to keep the traffic moving.

That night, Patton visited Middleton, who reported his corps' progress, adding that he had captured the bridges and dams along the Selune but had been unable to reach Bradley for further orders. Patton told him that throughout history it had always been fatal not to cross a river. While they were discussing the situation, word arrived that the Pontaubault was still intact. Patton, knowing a good omen when he saw it, ordered the 6th Armored across. He told Middleton that he wanted the 6th, along with the 79th Infantry Division, to head west for Brest and the 4th, with the 8th Infantry Division, to head south for Rennes. Patton's army would be born on the move.

On August 1, Third Army became operational. Middleton handed his new commander the perfect position to begin exploiting Operation Cobra's results. In four days, Middleton had advanced some 44 miles and ripped open the German left flank. His men had captured over 7,000 prisoners at the cost of only 700 American casualties and forced an entrance



**Smoke pours from the turret of a Mark V Panther medium tank that has just been destroyed by the wary American soldiers rushing toward it. Note the drooping 75mm gun, missing left tread, and open turret hatch.**

into Brittany. His corps had even advanced 15 miles farther than Collins's VII Corps, which had been tasked with the breakout.

Middleton joined the XX Corps under Walton Walker and XV Corps under Wade Haislip as Patton pushed his army south, west, and east, setting up the destruction of the Germans in the Falaise Pocket. All three corps commanders, as well as their army leader, found themselves working crossing guard duty in the rubble-strewn streets around Avranches. Their greatest duty became squeezing the Third Army through the town. They would eventually push seven divisions through in 72 hours.

While Grow's advance had been impressive, it was Wood who stole the spotlight from both the 6th and 3rd Armored Divisions. His upfront and at times fearless leadership kept his tanks and half-tracks aggressively driving forward and engaging the enemy.

**The 4th Armored Division proved itself in Brittany** and would find itself leading Patton's attack across France. It would later bull its way into surrounded Bastogne in one of the most celebrated actions of the Battle of the Bulge. Grow would perfect his battlefield leadership in his own race to Brest, but the 6th would soon be transferred to the Ninth Army.

Troy Middleton, not Patton, proved the success of armored divisional warfare. Historians have argued that Patton's unseen influence

could be sensed in the push to Avranches, but the records of the 6th and 4th Armored Divisions prove that Middleton ordered the tanks forward on the morning of July 28, while Patton found out about his temporary command of VIII Corps later that night. While Patton did exert his influence on General Grow at the Sienne River on July 29, he spent the next two days visiting rear echelon units, flying over St. Lo, and setting up Third Army headquarters while the battles raged. The fight for Avranches belonged to Wood and to Middleton.

The race for Avranches also brought an end to the Americans fighting in swamps and hedgerows for incremental gains. Beginning on August 1, the Third Army would run rampant across the French countryside, liberating towns at will, scooping up batches of confused and exhausted German prisoners, and running off the maps the men had been issued for the campaign. The army's historic drive would last until September, when supply problems behind the line overtook any enemy resistance in front of it.

In the end, Bradley got exactly what he was looking for: a way to win the war faster. The Americans raced across France for the next month. With the German left flank exposed, Bradley had the opportunity to repeat the Avranches operation and encircle the Germans in northern France, simply by turning east. But Bradley turned west and used his armored divi-

sions to capture Brittany's ports, while the Germans in the east were given a respite. The ports he so eagerly sought were but a mirage. The Germans defended them for months, while the bulk of the Allied supplies continued to come from the beaches of Normandy. The future five-star general did not appreciate what armor could do, nor did he understand the opportunity in front of him.

The Germans appreciated what Middleton had achieved. On the same day the 4th Armored declared Avranches secure, Field Marshal Guenther von Kluge, the German theater commander, told his chief of staff: "Someone has to tell the Führer that if the Americans get through at Avranches, they will be out of the woods. They'll be able to do what they please."

When Adolf Hitler got word of the catastrophe, he targeted Avranches for the first major counterattack on the Western Front. It would end in disaster. □

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Britain badly needed a victory.

As if to underline Britain's difficult fortunes, on May 21, 1941, the German battleship *Bismarck* and heavy cruiser *Prinz Eugen* dealt the island kingdom a serious blow by sinking the battlecruiser HMS *Hood* and severely damaging the new battleship HMS *Prince of Wales* during a furious engagement in the Denmark Strait.

While the naval clash had been a German victory, it left *Bismarck* badly damaged and caused her captain, Kapitän zur See Ernst Lindemann, to sail for St. Nazaire, France, and the repair docks there.

The Atlantic port of St. Nazaire is perhaps best remembered for its heavily defended submarine pens, but it was most famous before the war as having the world's largest dry dock and repair facilities. In fact, its largest dock was known as the Normandie Dock because that is where the world's largest passenger liner, the Normandie, docked between cruises.

But *Bismarck* never arrived at St. Nazaire. Launched on February 14, 1939, for the anticipated purpose of controlling the seas, the 50,000-ton battleship was attacked on the morning of May 27, 1941, by warplanes from the British aircraft carrier HMS *Ark Royal*. Aerial torpedoes jammed her rudder and left her vulnerable to a pummeling by the British fleet that included the battleships HMS *Rodney* and *King George V*, plus numerous destroyers and cruisers.

By 10 AM, *Bismarck*'s guns had gone silent and she slipped beneath the waves in 15,700 feet of water about 300 nautical miles west of Ushant, France. Of *Bismarck*'s crew of 2,200, a total of 1,995 perished.

Worried that *Bismarck*'s larger and even more powerful sister ship, *Tirpitz*, which was holed up in a Norwegian fjord, might someday reach St. Nazaire and use that port as a base for raiding Atlantic shipping, the British Admiralty, upon Prime Minister Winston Churchill's urging, decided that the facilities at St. Nazaire must be put out of action. If the port's repair facilities could be destroyed or seriously damaged, the Admiralty believed that *Tirpitz* would never venture out of her protective fjord.

Churchill was foresquare behind such an action. He knew he needed a major, spectacular victory to revive his nation's flagging spirits, and so he decided to rescind his previously announced ban on "silly fiascos" and mount a daring commando raid against one of the toughest targets in all of Nazi-controlled Europe: St. Nazaire's heavily defended Normandie Dock.

# Every Man

At first, it was thought that an air raid by the Royal Air Force (RAF) could render the port inoperable, but that plan was scrapped. Not only was St. Nazaire protected by a formidable ring of anti-aircraft weapons that had made a handful of previous raids ineffective, but a large civilian population lived in the nearby town and the British were reluctant to risk their lives in a raid that might prove to be less than pre-

cise. Another way would have to be found.

A sea-borne commando raid was then considered, but it, too, was seen as a high-risk operation—this time for the attackers. As Ken Ford, author of a history of the St. Nazaire raid writes, the port "is located five miles up the treacherous estuary of the River Loire and is only approachable from the sea by a single narrow channel, which, in 1942, was covered by

several batteries of coast defense guns."

But, in January 1942, Churchill gave Lord Louis Mountbatten, the British Chief of Combined Operations, the task of devising a plan to destroy the facilities. The plan that Mountbatten and his team conceived was brilliant but would rely on the steadfast courage and nerves of the men who would be asked to carry it out.

It was decided to use an old British destroyer,





German shells churn the waters of the harbor and searchlights play across the night sky as the old destroyer HMS *Campbeltown* barrels toward the huge Normandie dock at the French seaport of St. Nazaire. The only lock large enough on the Atlantic coast to accommodate the Nazi super battleship *Tirpitz* had to be destroyed.

# a Hero

BRITISH COMMANDOS PAID A HEAVY PRICE TO KNOCK OUT A KEY GERMAN INSTALLATION.

BY FLINT WHITLOCK

modify it to look like a German warship, and pack it with commandos and explosives with a time-delay fuse, then ram the dry dock's outer gates during the dead of night. The commandos would pour out of the ship and onto the docks to gun down German sentries and blow up the vital port facilities.

This would be timed with an RAF raid to further create havoc and confuse the defenders.

Before the Germans knew what hit them, the commandos, their mission accomplished, would be picked up by motor launches and returned to safety. Later, when the Germans would be going over the rammed ship and inspecting the damage to the lock, the time-delay fuse would detonate the explosives for maximum impact and casualties.

As author Ford says, "The plan was full of

imponderables and was hazardous in the extreme."

The scheme was initially met by the Admiralty with skepticism and negativity, but Mountbatten and his men were undeterred; they reworked the details and re-presented the plan, dubbed Operation Chariot. On March 3, Chariot was approved.

An obsolete British destroyer, HMS *Camp-*

*beltown* (which was formerly the USS *Buchanan*, given to the British in the Lend-Lease program) was selected to star in this drama.

Commander Robert E.D. “Red” Ryder, 34, was put in charge of the Royal Navy’s role in the operation. Ryder had already had a long naval career with service in submarines, an arctic exploration, and a stint as the commander of a frigate. It would be his job to transport the *Campbeltown* and accompanying flotilla of motor launches, similar in size and appearance to American PT boats, the 450 miles to St.

**All this careful planning and training rested on several wildly optimistic assumptions: that enemy opposition would be light or nonexistent; that the objectives would be identical or similar to the facilities on which the commandos had been practicing; and that, once the firing started, everything would go as rehearsed.**

Nazaire and to withdraw any surviving commandos back to Britain, all the while fighting off the expected German counterattack.

On March 10, 1942, *Campbeltown* sailed for Devonport to be superficially disguised as an enemy warship. Two of her four funnels were removed, and the remaining two were shortened and cut at an angle to resemble a German Möwe-class destroyer. Extra armor plating and armament was added in the event the Germans “smelled a rat” and took the ship under fire. Commanding the fake German ship would be a seasoned British officer, Lieutenant Commander Stephen H. “Sam” Beattie.

To provide enough explosive power to destroy the target, 24 Mark VII depth charges, each filled with 400 pounds of explosives, were loaded into a steel tank installed in the ship’s forward compartments, then sealed behind a wall of concrete. Pencil fuses with an eight-hour delay were inserted into the charges and would be primed by naval Lieutenant Nigel Tibbits just before the ship rammed the lock. Once activated, the acid in the fuses would dissolve the copper restraining wire, causing the detonators to explode the depth charges.

Meanwhile, a contingent of British commandos would undergo intense training for the mission.

In early 1942, there existed the Special Service Brigade made up of a dozen 500-man commando units, all volunteers. From this group of about 6,000 men, more than 200 of the toughest were chosen for Operation Chariot.

Lieutenant Colonel Augustus Charles Newman, head of Number 2 Commando, was

selected to command the ground forces. Newman was a building contractor by profession and had served in the Essex Regiment of the Territorial Army before the war. At 38, he was considerably older than most of his subordinates, but his leadership ability and the way he related to his men meant that he was popular and well respected.

Of primary importance was training in demolition procedures specifically tailored for the St. Nazaire operation. An expert in dockyard demolition, Bill Pritchard, a captain in the

Royal Engineers, was recruited as the instructor. Classes were carried out at the Cardiff (Wales) and Southampton docks on equipment similar to what the commandos were likely to encounter.

Although the teams did not use actual demolitions or live ammunition, their training was highly realistic. After learning as much as possible about the technical workings of locks, pumps, cranes, electrical equipment, and power stations, they were required to correctly place their dummy charges in the dark and often with only a few of their mates present—the others being considered casualties.

While half the force was being turned into explosives experts, the other half underwent strenuous training in the techniques of nighttime street fighting; they would act as the protection squads for the demo men and aid in the force fighting its way out of the port.

**In addition to honing their combat skills and becoming demolitions experts, the commandos spent untold time going over a detailed model of the port and continually rehearsing their assignments. No detail was left to chance, for the raid relied on split-second timing; if one element was delayed or failed, the entire mission would be placed in jeopardy.**

Here is how the whole scenario was supposed to come together: The *Campbeltown*, in its disguise as a German ship, and a flotilla of 18 motor launches, motor gun boats, and motor torpedo boats filled with commandos, would be accompanied to St. Nazaire by two Royal Navy destroyers, *Tynedale* and *Ather-*

*stone*. At about midnight of D-Day, in late March, the Royal Air Force, flying from British bases, would bomb the port, diverting the defenders’ attention and causing them to seek shelter. Simultaneously, the *Campbeltown* would enter the mouth of the Loire and swiftly move the six miles toward the port.

To assure that they could find the Loire in the dark, a submerged British submarine, *Sturgeon*, would position itself there as a navigational beacon.

As the flotilla reached the river’s entrance, the two destroyers would drop off and the force would adopt battle formation, with gunboat MGB-314 and its radar and echo sounder in the lead, guiding the force across the mudflats and shallows.

Flanking MGB-314 would be the motor torpedo boats ML-160 and ML-270, ready to fire their torpedoes at any vessel threatening the force. After that would come *Campbeltown*, trailed by two columns of motor launches on either side and to the rear. The port column would land its commandos at a lighthouse-crowned stone pier called the Old Mole, where a set of stone steps led down to the water; the starboard column would head for the Old Entrance nearby.

Three more motor launches, MTB-74, ML-446, and ML-298, would cover the rear of the column. MTB-74 would also keep station at the rear and, if ordered, would torpedo the small lock at the Old Entrance that led into the submarine basin.

Two pillboxes located near the Old Mole would be attacked by teams of commandos landed by six boats: ML-192, ML-306, ML-307, ML-443, ML-447, and ML-457. Most of the rest of the motor launches would then patrol up the Loire to engage shore targets and reduce the enemy’s ability to concentrate his fire on the commandos.

While the commandos were coming ashore to wreak havoc and confusion, the raid’s major act would take place. The *Campbeltown* would dash at full speed toward the southern lock gate of the Normandie Dock and ram the steel structure. The time fuse would set off the hidden cache of 9,600 pounds of explosive hours later.

Colonel Newman’s commandos were organized into three groups with three separate missions. The first group of six teams would disembark from its motor launches on the north side of the Old Mole jetty and lighthouse, then spread south along the East Jetty and onto the docks, where it would knock out the power station and destroy the gun positions, lock gates, swing bridges, and lifting bridges that led into the submarine basin.

The second group of five teams would land at the Old Entrance, fan out north and south, destroying swing bridges, lifting bridges, flak towers, and gun positions as they went.

The third group, made up of seven commando assault teams and two protection squads from the *Campbeltown*, under Newman's second in command, Major Bill Copland, would spread out across the northeast section of the dockyard and destroy the pumping house, both the northern and southern winding sheds, and the northern and southern caissons.

One of the seven *Campbeltown* teams, under Captain Donald W. Roy, would head west and secure the rendezvous site at the Old Entrance/Old Mole, where Colonel Newman, brought to shore by MGB-314, would set up his temporary headquarters. Roy's men were to seize a bridge by the Old Entrance and keep it open for the rest of the raiders as they made their way back to the evacuation site, then blow it so that the Germans could not follow.

Another of the *Campbeltown* teams, led by Lieutenant Christopher Smalley, would destroy the southern winding shed which controlled the mechanism that opened and closed the southern lock gates, while Lieutenant Stuart Chant and his team would enter the pumping house

and blow up the impeller pumps 40 feet below ground. Such an action would make it impossible to drain water from the dry dock.

Three other teams, under the command of Lieutenants Corran Purdon, Robert J.G. Burtinshaw, and Gerard Brett, also coming from the *Campbeltown*, had the farthest to travel. After exiting the ship, they would move along the dock to the northern winding shed and caisson where they would destroy them and thus render the northern lock gates inoperable.

Another team, under Lieutenant John Roderick, was assigned to knock out three gun positions between the Normandie Dock and the river, then set fire to the underground fuel storage tanks.

Once all the operations had been carried out, all the teams were to reassemble at the Old Entrance/Old Mole for evacuation.

Protecting the *Campbeltown* commandos with suppressing fire from their deck guns against shore targets would be three of the motor launches, ML-160, ML-270, and MGB-314. The motor launches would then pull back and wait in the river until the demolition tasks had been completed before moving in to shore to take on the commandos and the crew of *Campbeltown*.

The fact that all of these actions were to be undertaken right in the midst of the well-armed German garrison made Operation Chariot not only dangerous and daring in the extreme, but suicidal as well.

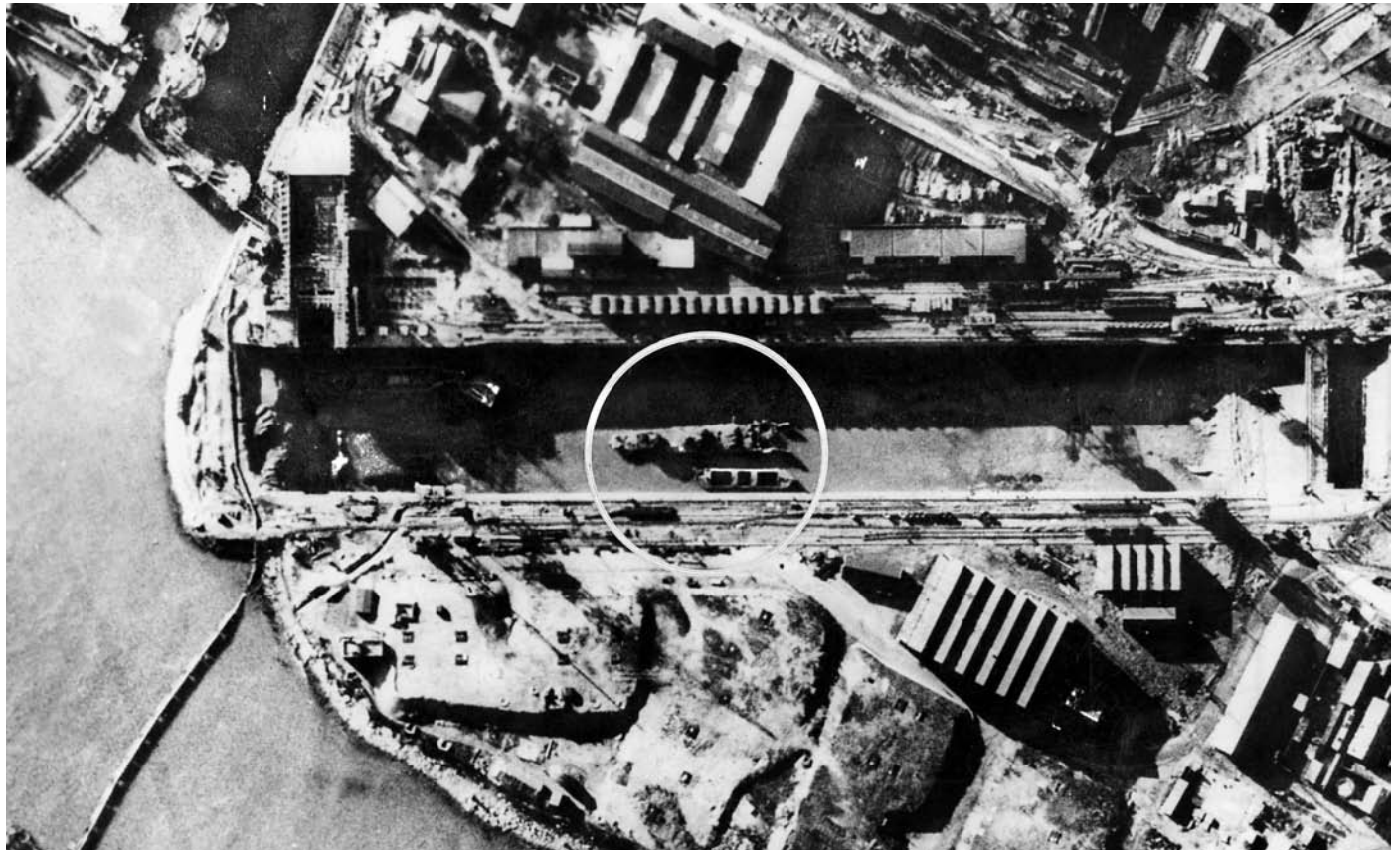
All this careful planning and training rested on several wildly optimistic assumptions: that enemy opposition would be light or nonexistent; that the objectives would be identical or similar to the facilities on which the commandos had been practicing; and that, once the firing started, everything would go as rehearsed.

With training completed, the Operation Chariot force of three destroyers and 18 motor launches left Falmouth Harbour, near England's southwest tip, at 2 PM on March 26, 1942, for the open-ocean voyage of over 400 miles.

The ships and boats sailed a diversionary course to make any enemy ship or aircraft believe the group might be headed to Gibraltar or perhaps La Rochelle, farther south of St. Nazaire.

A U-boat, the *U-593*, did indeed spot the group at 7 AM on March 27 and radioed its position to headquarters but made no effort to intercept it. The flotilla, however, fired at the sub and caused it to submerge, then dropped depth charges on it.

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Nine months after the St. Nazaire raid, an aerial reconnaissance plane snapped this photo of the Normandie Dock at St. Nazaire. The Germans have dammed the dock's lock gates, and the wreck of the HMS *Campbeltown* still lies inside.

Shortly thereafter, a group of French fishing boats was encountered. Commander Ryder sent Atherstone and Tynedale to investigate, for it was known that the Germans sometimes placed observers on French fishing vessels to spy on Allied shipping. No German observers were found, but the crews of two of the trawlers were taken aboard the destroyers, which then proceeded to sink the unarmed boats.

At 10 PM that night, the lead boat of the flotilla spotted the submarine *Sturgeon's* light, and Ryder and Newman knew they were exactly in the right spot. All the vessels cut their engines and began bobbing off the coast of France, waiting for the opening act to begin.

At about midnight, the Germans at St. Nazaire heard the low rumbling of a large formation of bombers growing ever louder. The air raid alarm was sounded. Soon came the whistling noise of bombs plunging downward, and the night lit up with the flashes of explosions.

Below decks aboard the *Campbeltown*, with its German Navy ensign fluttering at the aft end, Lieutenant Tibbitts activated the time-delay fuse that was connected to the 9,600 pounds of explosives, and the flotilla began moving cautiously forward into the Loire. Tension was building. The destroyer and accompanying motor launches slowly passed the radar station at Le Croisic without drawing any reaction.

It was now 30 minutes past midnight on May 28, and luck was riding with the raiders. The flotilla quietly passed the half-submerged wreck of the British Cunard ocean liner *RMS Lancastria*, sunk by the Luftwaffe on June 17, 1940. More than 1,730 people, British nationals and French troops, two weeks after the Dunkirk evacuation, lost their lives on the *Lancastria*, making it Britain's worst maritime disaster of all time.

**Onward the raiding party went, deeper and deeper into the river's mouth, until they were just two miles from their destination. Meanwhile, the German antiaircraft guns had stopped firing at the planes and the searchlights had been switched off after Karl-Conrad Mecke, the commander of the 22nd Naval Flak Brigade, became suspicious of the RAF's odd bombing pattern. Instead of simply dropping their bombs and heading for home, the planes were circling the port and dropping one bomb at a time. Thinking that perhaps the bombing signaled the start**

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**ABOVE: A British commando lies dead in the morning sun after the St. Nazaire raid, mute testimony to the bitterness of the fight during the predawn darkness. TOP LEFT: Able Seaman William Alfred Savage was awarded a posthumous Victoria Cross for heroism during the raid on St. Nazaire. Savage fired the deck gun aboard his small boat until he was killed by enemy fire. TOP RIGHT: Captain Bill Pritchard served as a dockyard demolition expert for the St. Nazaire raid and was responsible for setting explosive charges.**

of a parachute assault, he ordered the gun crews to be on alert for an airborne raid.

An hour later, a searchlight scanned the water close to the flotilla, but then, just as quickly, was extinguished. No shots were fired at the seaborne raiders.

But Mecke was on the alert. At 1:20 AM, after receiving reports of a mysterious group of approaching vessels that other commands had dismissed as improbable, he sent a message to all units in the St. Nazaire area to be on the lookout for a landing party.

Now a dozen or more searchlights that lined the banks of the river were switched on and played across the water. A few shots were fired across the *Campbeltown's* bow, and a signal light on shore blinked out a challenge. Ready for this, the signalman aboard the ship blinkered back in German, "Wait," then gave the call sign of a real German destroyer. This was followed by a fake message saying that the ship was damaged and requested permission to proceed "without delay." The Germans, evidently taking the bait, ceased firing and let the ship pass.

A Royal Navy lieutenant named Frank Arkle, aboard Sub-Lieutenant Mark Rodier's

ML-177, recalled, "At this stage, the [*Campbeltown*] was flying the German ensign and we were firmly ordered that we must not open fire at all until the ensign was removed and we could all fly our white [British Royal Navy] ensigns again."

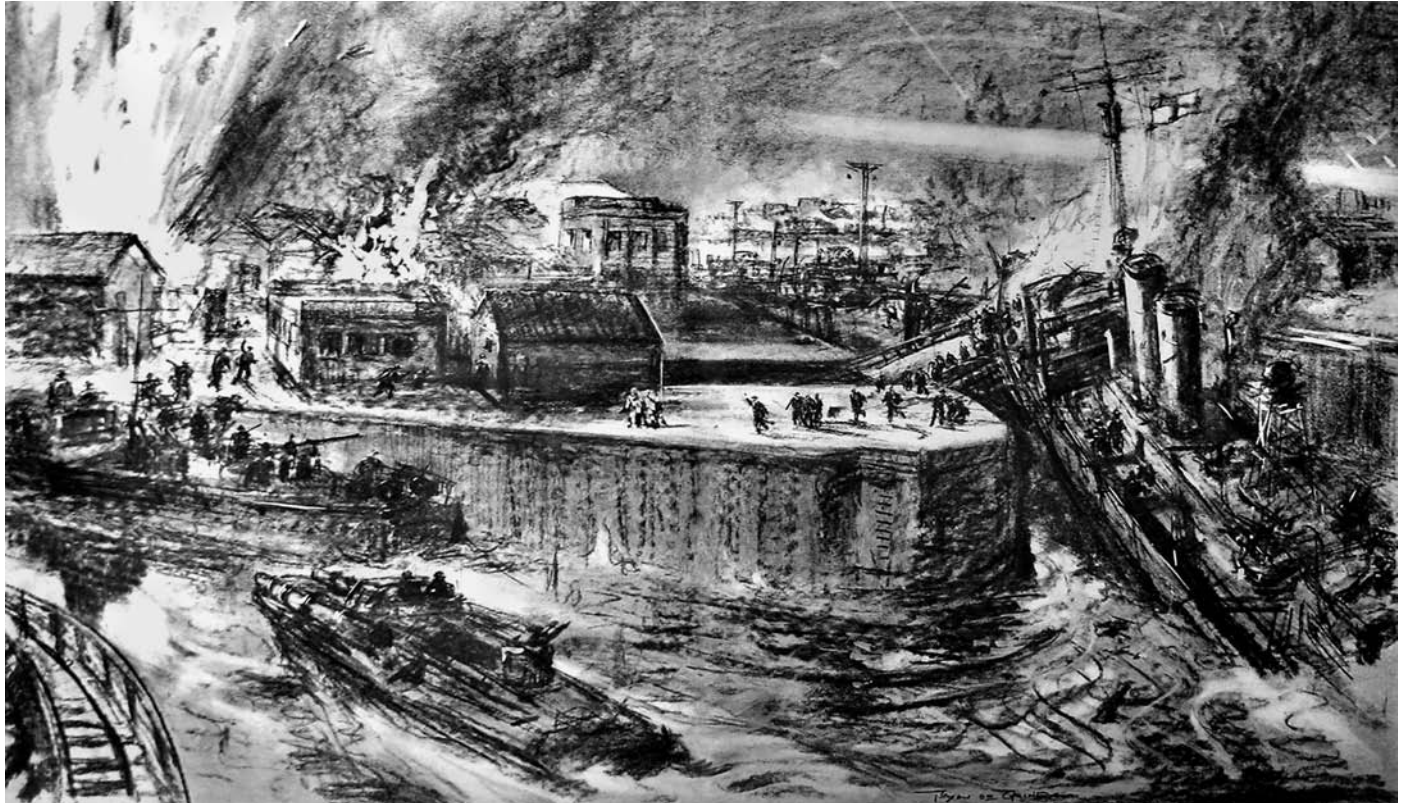
But only a few minutes went by before the Germans, realizing that they had been duped, began bombarding the vessels with fury. The *Campbeltown's* signalman flashed out: "You are firing on friendly ships," and the guns went silent again, but only briefly.

Once more the coastal defense artillery, along with machine guns and rifles, started blazing away, with tracers streaking through the night sky and tall spouts of water jetting into the air from the impact of the shells and bullets.

Now the commandos and naval personnel began firing back, the British ensigns appeared, and the captain of *Campbeltown* ordered full speed ahead. Dead ahead of her, a few hundred yards away, was the lock gate to the dry dock. At the outer harbor, a German guardship began pumping munitions at the passing flotilla when MTB-314, with Ryder and Newman aboard, flashed by and cut loose with her Oerlikon deck guns at near point-blank range. The German ship went quiet except for the sounds of moaning from her wounded and dying crew members.

Commando Lieutenant John Roderick, aboard *Campbeltown*, remembered, "The run-in was desperately exciting—the suspense over the haggling about who or what we were, the opening fire from the banks, the silence, and then the final opening up of all the guns. One was filled with admiration for the [*Campbeltown's*] gun crews who suffered severe casualties. Lying behind them, we were not entirely inactive as our Bren guns were fitted for this phase, with large pans of ammunition which we fired at as many possible targets as we could make out."

Lieutenant Arkle on ML-177 added, "There were tracer bullets going in every direction, a very colourful sight because the British tracers were all orange in colour and the Germans were all a blue green. Very pretty! The shells weren't quite so pretty when they started to fly around the place! Anyway, this went on for some time and the destroyer went to full speed ahead, aiming for the dock gates, but the port line of motor launches started turning in towards their landing spot which was mainly



**In this charcoal sketch of the St. Nazaire raid, the destroyer HMS *Campbeltown* has just rammed the Normandie Dock and British commandos are shown sprinting from the dock area to attack German installations.**

Old Mole on the dockside, and they started to get into some serious fire, and fire broke out on board on several of them, unfortunately.

“We were in the starboard line and when the destroyer hit the dock gates, which it did very accurately, we passed them to starboard, did a big circle round, and passed them under their stern. It was our duty to go into the Old Entrance to the dock where we went alongside and deposited our commandos.”

The *Campbeltown* became the focus of nearly every German gun surrounding the port, and her hull, deck, and superstructure were hit by the combined weaponry. Still, she did not slow down or falter as her skipper, Lieutenant Commander Sam Beattie, with dead and wounded crew members all around him, plunged forward at 20 knots, heedless of the danger. Ahead of him, MTB-314 was still firing back at the port’s defenders until, at the last moment, it veered off to the right, giving Beattie a clear run at the lock gates.

As author Ford writes, “Suddenly *Campbeltown* hit the antitorpedo net that protected the lock, but the rush of over 1,000 tons of warship tore through the steel mesh and the destroyer leapt forward unchecked. Seconds later, with a grinding low groan, the ship struck the center of the massive steel caisson and shuddered to a halt. It was 0134 hours; *Campbeltown* had reached her target just four minutes late.”

The destroyer smashed into the steel lock gate with such force that 35 feet of the *Campbeltown*’s bow was crumpled and the entire ship was stuck in an upward tilt of some 15 degrees. The ship’s complement of commandos began dashing through the smoke of the burning craft and leaping onto the dock, firing away with their Sten guns at anything that moved.

Lieutenant Roderick recalled, “Following the crash of the bows which came with surprisingly little jolting, I went quickly forward to reconnoitre the way off the ship; it was a bit of a shambles with many wounded chaps lying about the deck. The gun in the bow of the ship was looking somewhat cockeyed and I could see no obvious signs of life around it. [Major] Bill Copland gave us his usual morale boosting order as we quickly made our way off the *Campbeltown*.”

“Our bamboo ladders had been damaged by gunshot prior to getting off; Corporal [John] Donaldson had charge of one of them when he was killed. However, I managed to find a length of cable down which we clambered onto the dock gate, covering our actions as best we could.

“There was and had been a hell of a lot of firing going on that it was difficult to pinpoint where it was coming from. I cannot remember seeing gunfire coming from the first gun emplacement. I went forward with Corporal

Howarth and an explosive of some sort passed over my head and wounded him in the leg. We finished off the crew and moved on with [Lieutenant] John Stutchbury and his section covering fire in turn.

“We next had to clear the ground leading to and over the oil storage tanks. There was a number of Nissan huts into which we threw grenades with the most terrific bangs, and in another concrete building we killed a further batch of the enemy. There is no doubt we killed two more. There was, I believe, a light gun of some sort at the top but I did not go up and see; by this time we were advancing round the seaward side of the oil tanks. John Stutchbury was being given covering fire as he went forward to engage a third group of the enemy. We had quite a large area to cover and with our reduced numbers it was a full-time job keeping our eyes open to all around us.”

While the *Campbeltown* had been roaring, throttles wide open, for the southern lock gate, six motor launches, ML-156, ML-177, ML-192, ML-262, ML-267, and ML-268, had peeled off from the formation and were heading at full speed toward the Old Entrance to land their commandos. Confusion, chaos, and disaster would soon overtake the landing parties.

As the first boat, ML-192, commanded by

Lt. Cmdr. William L. Stephens, maneuvered close to the Old Entrance jetty, a large shell struck the craft. The explosion disabled the engine room, causing the craft to drift out of control and eventually come to a stop against the East Jetty with several casualties on board.

Captain Michael Burn, in charge of the 13 other commandos on ML-192, managed to disembark his men and lead them to their objective, two nearby flak towers, but found them unmanned.

George Davidson, a crewman aboard Stephens's boat, recalled, "ML-192 was the first ship to be hit. We were about to pass the Old Mole when we were completely stopped. I mean, the machinery stopped—the boat was still moving. The engine room was on fire and, instead of passing the Old Mole, we ran into it.

"On the Mole itself was the lighthouse, at the end, and then a tower with searchlights and closer to the shore, another flak tower. We stopped just short of the flak tower. The boat listed to starboard, which put the mast over the top of the Mole and I thought there was a prospect of getting ashore there. It was going to be difficult, but I thought I could climb the mast and drop onto the Mole. So, I climbed it, to a point when I could see two heads peeping out of the flak tower and I thought it was time to make a move. I think they were as frightened as

I was because they never fired at me. They were not expecting mast-climbing folk!

"When I came down again, the ship was well on fire and the skipper ordered us to abandon ship. I gave him a hand to launch a float and after we launched it for the benefit of the non-swimmers, I went over the bow to swim along parallel to the Mole and got up on the beach."

While this drama was taking place, the third craft, ML-262, commanded by Lieutenant Edward "Ted" A. Burt, approached, carrying Lieutenant Mark Woodcock's demolition party, whose mission it was to destroy the bridge across the Old Entrance and the two adjacent locks. But Burt was disoriented by the blinding searchlights and overshot his objective by several hundred yards. Behind him, Lieutenant Eric H. Beart, commanding ML-267, suffered a similar problem, and both craft swung wide and prepared to come around again.

**The fourth craft, ML-268, under Lieutenant Bill Tillie,** saw Burt and Beart miss their landing spots but did not repeat their error. As it got close to the Old Entrance's steps, Tillie's boat was torn apart by enemy shells and burst into flames, exploding within minutes. Only Tillie and half his crew, along with two of the 18 commandos on board, were able to reach land.

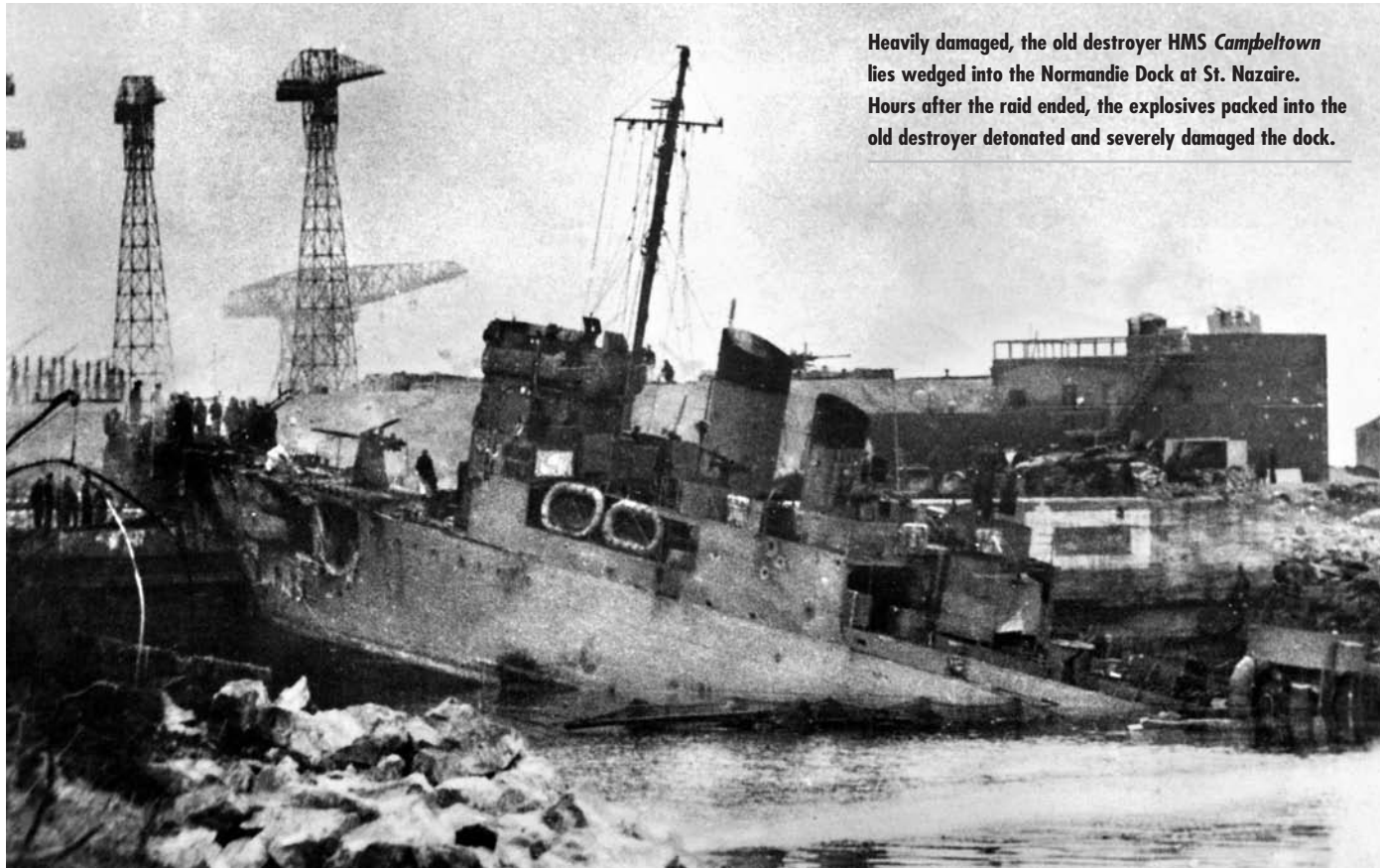
The fifth boat was Lieutenant Leslie Fenton's

ML-156, but it fared no better than those ahead of it. Fenton was wounded, along with Captain Richard H. Hooper, the commander of the 13 commandos aboard. The boat missed its mark and circled around again, all the while being subjected to accurate German fire. With the engines and steering damaged and casualties mounting, Fenton had no choice but to withdraw ML-156 from the landing zone and head back down the Loire. The crippled boat would later be scuttled.

The sixth and final boat to attempt a landing, ML-177, under Sub-Lieutenant Rodier, somehow survived the storm of flying lead and dropped off its party of 13 commandos, led by Troop Sergeant Major George E. Haines, on the southern side of the Old Entrance. Haines had orders to link up with Captain Hooper's group and knock out the enemy gun positions between the Old Entrance and the Old Mole, but the sergeant was unaware that Hooper and ML-156 had failed to land. Nevertheless, Haines ran his men through the darkened labyrinth of streets, sheds, and buildings, engaging in wild shootouts with surprised German troops who were doing their best to halt the attack.

Braving the fire, Robert Ryder's command boat, MGB-314, then managed to land Lieutenant Colonel Newman and his headquarters

© TopFoto / The Image Works



**Heavily damaged, the old destroyer HMS *Campbeltown* lies wedged into the Normandie Dock at St. Nazaire. Hours after the raid ended, the explosives packed into the old destroyer detonated and severely damaged the dock.**

staff at the steps of the Old Entrance, where the bullets and shells were still flying thick and fast. William Savage, an able seaman aboard 314, was firing a deck gun with great accuracy. Although he had no gun-shield and was in an exposed position, he continued blasting away until he was killed at his gun. His actions would earn him a posthumous Victoria Cross.

Royal Navy Lieutenant Frank Arkle, aboard ML-177, recalled, "At this stage, Commander Ryder came alongside us in his MGB and gave us the instruction to let go our lines and to go alongside the *Campbeltown* and pick up as many crew as we could and take them home to England."

Meanwhile, the commandos that had leaped from *Campbeltown* were still in the thick of the fighting on the docks. Lieutenant Brett (who was shot in both legs before starting his task) and his men were attacking the southern caisson of the dry dock, trying to disable it.

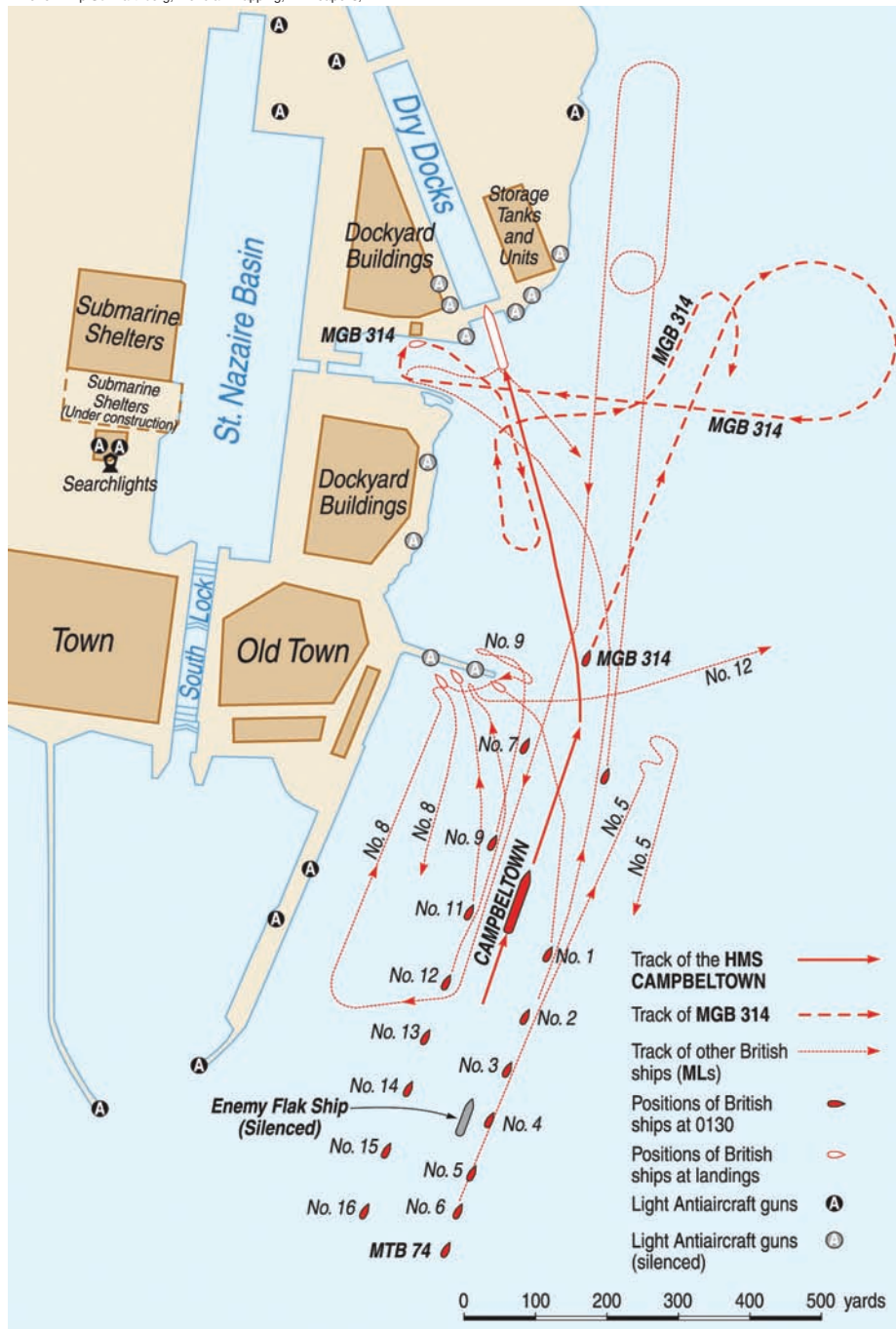
In their effort to reach the northern lock gate and caisson 300 yards away, Lieutenant Burtinshaw's men braved a fusillade of concentrated enemy fire only to discover that its design was different from the one on which they had practiced back in England.

Unable to enter the inner workings of the caisson, Burtinshaw's men strung the explosives as best they could, even while German machine guns and sharpshooters were raking the commandos. Burtinshaw himself went down mortally wounded. A sergeant named Carr took over for his fallen leader and detonated the explosives, causing serious damage to the northern caisson.

Lieutenant Chant, who had been hit even before he had disembarked from *Campbeltown*, carried on and, with his party, placed their charges 40 feet below ground beneath the pumping house, destroying it. Lieutenant Bill Etches, in overall command of both Lieutenants Smalley and Purdon, saw to it that those teams destroyed the two winding huts.

But the Germans increased the intensity and accuracy of their fire. The bodies of Burtinshaw and six other commandos had to be left where they fell, for the entire group faced annihilation if it did not immediately withdraw and make a run for the evacuation point at the Old Entrance, more than 300 yards away.

The two launches that had earlier overshot their mark—Burt's ML-262 and Beart's ML-267—returned to the Old Entrance and once again tried to make a landing despite the torrent of lead being poured into the confined area. Burt bravely landed Woodcock's demolition team along with Lieutenant R.F. Morgan's protection squad at the northern quay before being



**ABOVE:** Aroused German defenders poured heavy fire on the St. Nazaire raiders who were required to execute several simultaneous attacks on numerous important objectives within the harbor. Primary among these was the destruction of the Normandie Dock by the explosive-laden destroyer HMS *Campbeltown*.

forced to cast off.

But Morgan's squad had gone inland only a short distance when it came running back to the quay, demanding to be allowed to reboard the craft; one of the men had seen a German tracer round burn through the air and, mistaking it for the signal to retreat, had thought it was a flare ordering the landing party to pull back. Burt's craft, still being splintered by enemy fire, dallied long enough for Morgan's men to jump back on.

At about this same moment, Lieutenant Smalley's team appeared, having accomplished its mission at the northern caisson. Smalley and his men, rather than continuing on to the Old Mole as planned, saw Burt's craft and ran to it; Burt put back into the dock and let them scramble aboard. Trailing a cloud of smoke and exhaust, ML-262 roared off toward open water, but it again became the target for every German gun within range and Smalley was killed. ML-262, although badly shot up, barely escaped.

During the melee, Beart's ML-267 approached the Old Entrance to land its load of commandos, Newman's reserves, but no sooner had a few disembarked at the southern steps than the intensity of fire forced Beart to back off. The boat burst into flame and began to drift helplessly, and those on board abandoned it; many were raked by machine-gun fire while in the water. Lieutenant Beart, along with 10 of his crew and eight commandos, were killed.

Finally, MTB-74, one of the two motor torpedo boats under Lieutenant Mickey Wynn, entered the fray. Wynn torpedoed the lock gates that closed off the Old Entrance from the submarine basin (the time-delay fuses in the torpedoes would go to assist Ryder (MTB-314) and Rodier (ML-177) in evacuating the men from the crippled *Campbeltown*).

Beset by enemy fire and unable to set the underground fuel storage tanks alight, Lieutenant Roderick and his team fought their way toward the assembly point, Newman's temporary headquarters near the Old Entrance.

"Our movements were obviously being watched, as we had to move in between bouts of fire," Roderick reported. "It was while running for cover, carrying the Bren guns, that I was shot through my left thigh. It came as a complete surprise; I was only aware of being knocked head over heels and the Bren leaving my hands. I moved quickly behind a stanchion and eventually made my way towards Colonel Newman's assembly point where the rest of my party had foregathered."

Landing more commandos at the Old Entrance was impossible, so the following squadron of six motor launches decided to land at the nearby Old Mole, but without any better success.

Lieutenant T.D.L. Platt's ML-447 dropped off Captain David Birney's 14 men, but they were greeted by a withering stream of bullets from the bunkers there. The launch was hit and its Oerlikon guns and gun crews knocked out. Limping close to the Old Entrance, Platt tried to approach the stone steps, but the craft was then ripped apart by a large-caliber shell. Only a handful of men were able to make it to the steps; the rest were either killed outright by the blast or flung into the dark waters of the harbor where they drowned.

Luckily, Lieutenant Thomas Collier, commanding ML-457, was able to get right up to the steps and deposit his three teams of commandos. The first was a control party led by the dockyard demolition instructor, Captain Bill Pritchard, the second was Lieutenant Walton and his four-man demolitions team, and the

Both: Bundesarchiv Bild



**ABOVE:** Minutes before the explosive-laden HMS *Campbeltown* detonated at St. Nazaire, German soldiers are shown on the deck of the former Lend-Lease destroyer. A number of Germans were killed in the surprise explosion. **BELOW:** German soldiers watch British prisoners captured during the raid on St. Nazaire. A number of the prisoners heard the huge explosion that damaged the Normandie Dock and rocked the entire harbor. With that, they were aware that the raid was a success.



third was a four-man protection party under Lieutenant William H. "Tiger" Watson.

Following close behind Collier's boat was Lieutenant Norman Wallis' ML-307, carrying Captain E.W. Bradley and six commandos. But Wallis struck an underwater obstacle and became grounded; enemy fire now concentrated on the stranded vessel. Wallis skillfully managed to extricate ML-307 from its perch and, at Bradley's direction, began engaging the German guns and searchlights along the quays and jetties that were threatening to defeat the raid.

In ML-307's wake came ML-306 under Lieutenant Ian Henderson, followed by ML-443, commanded by Lieutenant K. Horlock, and ML-446 with Lieutenant Dick Falconar in charge. But the waters around the Old Entrance were choked with burning and disabled motor launches, wounded men, and flying lead, and the boats could not approach. The three skippers all made the decision to withdraw in hopes of finding another, less deadly place where they could set their commando teams ashore. It was a futile hope.

Aboard Rodier's ML-177, closing in to rescue *Campbeltown*'s survivors, Frank Arkle recalled, "In order to ram the dock gates as it had, the *Campbeltown* had had to go through some antisubmarine nets in order to get there, and a lot of these nets were still hanging off its sides as we were trying to come alongside; we had to be very careful of this in order not to get them tangled around our own propellers. However, we managed to get our bow alongside and took off a lot of the crew including the captain [Sam Beattie] and several of his officers, including the medical officer, a lot of the wounded, and some commandos."

Backing away from the destroyer's stern, Rodier headed seaward for safety, but it was a short journey. Arkle said, "We sped as fast as we could, which was a full 18 knots, down towards the open sea. We found ourselves coming more and more under fire from shore-based batteries, so we thought it was time to get our smoke screen working. We were just working on this when, unfortunately, the first shell hit us, which was into the engine room. It apparently shifted one of our engines right up on top of the other and they were both out of action.

"I was on the stern and Mark Rodier was on the bridge with Commander Beattie. Beattie came down towards the funnel and we were standing, the two of us, aft when another shell hit us. I can see to this day the funnel folding apart, what appeared to be quite slowly, and the shell bursting in the middle of it. To my benefit poor old Mark was standing exactly between me and the shell, and he took the brunt of the explosion which would have hit me if he hadn't been there. I was hit all down my left-hand side, but not anywhere else particularly, except my face.

"I felt my right eye on my cheek and I was convinced that my right eye had been blown out of my head and was hanging down my cheek, and I felt there was only one thing to do about this, so I plucked it out and threw it overboard. I then went down to the wardroom although we were on fire amidships and got something to put round my head as a sort of bandage over my wounded eye, and I was limping because my left foot was also mucked about quite a bit."

ML-177 was burning fiercely. Rodier was dead, as was Lieutenant Tibbitts, the man who had set the time fuse in *Campbeltown*. Both Beattie and Arkle agreed that nothing more could be done to save the craft, so the order was given to abandon ship. Arkle and a couple of commandos grabbed onto a piece of floating wreckage.

"We decided to swim for the nearest shore-

line,” he said, “but I soon realized that we were completely wasting our energy because we were just going round in circles. So I decided to try and get a flask of whiskey out of my pocket, a small pewter flask. I discovered, in the end, that my hands were so cold that I couldn’t undo the button on my hip pocket to get the flask out so I had to give up, and I think after an hour or two in the water, although we kept moving to try and keep our circulation going, we were beginning to get seriously affected by the cold.”

At about that time, a large vessel, an armed German trawler, found the floating survivors and put scramble nets over the side. Somehow, Arkle managed to climb up and get on board. “By this time I think I had lost rather a lot of blood from a large hole I had in my left hip. We were told to lie on the deck. There were German sentries with rifles keeping an eye on us and eventually one of them came with cups of ersatz coffee.”

Also taken prisoner was Commander Beattie.

Scenes of survival were also still playing out near the Old Mole. After abandoning the listing ML-192, George Davidson recalled that the Germans captured the crew and “marched us off in a southerly direction. On the way, there was a lot of gunfire. We were ducking and dodging, and I spotted some rolls of wire netting, like chicken wire, and so I slid in between them. I just laid doggo and they marched off without me. That was before two o’clock in the morning and I was still there by daylight. I knew I had to make a break for it, but ran into a bunch of Germans and was immediately taken prisoner.

“I was quite concerned because there were some trigger-happy ones amongst them, but fortunately the officer who was in charge of them seemed to be a steady type and ordered me to walk over towards the Mole and made me stand with my back to the parapet, and I thought it was curtains.” Luckily, Davidson was only taken prisoner and not shot.

Meanwhile, team after team of commandos withdrew toward the Old Entrance and, by 2:30 AM they had assembled at Newman’s headquarters, ready for evacuation by boat. But there were no more boats to be had. The small harbor was already a scene of mass devastation. The motor launches that had been lost with their crews on the way in bobbed helplessly about and burned fiercely. The smoking wreckage, interspersed with huge blazing pools of fuel and the floating bodies of dead sailors and commandos, were eerily highlighted by the searchlights.

As more and more groups piled into the headquarters, it became clear to Colonel Newman that the commandos were in an untenable



**A squad of German soldiers looking for any remaining British commandos passes the lifeless body of one St. Nazaire raider who did not return home.**

position. Most of those who arrived were wounded, some badly, and incapable of being moved. With the undiminished volume of fire outside, it also became clear that escape back to either the Old Entrance or the Old Mole was out of the question; Newman’s escape route was being swept by machine guns and large-caliber weapons. The only option, then, was to dash out of the building, cross the bridge into the city of St. Nazaire, disperse, and make a run for it and hope to disappear into the countryside. Perhaps some French underground groups would help the commandos get back to Britain.

Newman gathered his men and told them with typical British aplomb, “Well, chaps, we’ve missed the boat. We’ll just have to walk home.”

At 3 AM on March 28, the commandos, each supporting a wounded comrade, dashed out the door and, in one final display of selfless heroism, fought their way through the warehouses fronting the submarine bay and over the bridge into town.

**Lieutenant Roderick vividly remembered the breakout attempt.** He and his men made a dash toward the bridge, with Captain Roy, Lieutenants Len “Hoppy” Hopwood and Bill Watson, Sergeant Alf Pearson, and others acting as forward section.

“This stage was particularly exciting and fraught with surprises,” said Roderick, “as all house and street fighting must be. It was during one of these scuffles that Tiger Watson was shot through the humerus; I gave him an injec-

tion of morphine.

“On leaving Tiger as comfortable as possible, Hoppy Hopwood, Alf Pearson, and one or two others whose names fail me were searching through some warehouses, as attempts to get across the bridge at this time were suicidal. It was about this time I was wounded in the head by a grenade.

“It was decided that we should find a suitable place to hide and this we did, making a nest of full cement bags high off the ground. Alf Pearson had been badly wounded through the left shoulder and was out of active participation and we were, by this time, a pretty ropery lot. We did, however, have a very nice hideout and on a number of occasions in the next few hours, groups of Germans, who were by this time into the area in reinforcement, passed us by in their search parties.”

By early morning, German roadblocks had sealed off the streets and the commandos, low on ammunition, had run out of options.

Roderick said, “It was only in the light of day at about 10:30 AM that a German searching high up in a warehouse on the other side of the road saw a bandaged head or limb through some bomb damage in our warehouse wall and gave the alarm.

“In next to no time the place was alive and we surrendered ourselves. Opposition would have been simply futile and life was still very sweet. Our captors were not particularly pleased and pushed us against a wall and

*Continued on page 88*



# King as Pawn

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GEORGE VI VISITED THE UNITED STATES IN THE SPRING OF 1939 AS BRITAIN PREPARED FOR WAR WITH GERMANY. **BY ERIC NIDEROST**

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On May 6, 1939, King George VI of Great Britain and his wife Queen Elizabeth arrived in Portsmouth to board the liner *Empress of Australia*, which was to take them to Canada and subsequently to the United States. This was going to be the first time a reigning British monarch ever officially visited North America, which was exciting to the crowds that had gathered to watch the royal departure. The fact that Britain was on the brink of war with Germany gave the occasion a certain poignancy.

The king hoped for the best, perhaps an 11th-hour development would avert the looming conflict but privately he expected the worst. He wrote uneasily, "I hate leaving the country with the situation as it is." Yet the king was a man of principle to whom personal desires were subordinate to duty. The war, if it came, promised to be a severe trial. Britain needed the help and support of the Dominion of Canada, and, if lucky, additional aid from the United States.

The trip was also a way to salvage the reputation of the monarchy, tarnished by the abdication of George's older brother, Edward VIII, in 1936. Edward had triggered a crisis when he wanted to marry a twice-divorced American socialite, Wallis Simpson. Declaring he could not bear the

burdens of kingship without the "help and support of the woman I love," he stepped down in December 1936.

Edward married Mrs. Simpson and was created the Duke of Windsor, but controversy dogged him. The duke and duchess made an ill-advised excursion to Nazi Germany, a propaganda coup for Adolf Hitler. So, there was a lot riding on the new king's trip to America.

Queen Mary, George's mother, was also on hand at the departure, accompanied by her grandchildren, Princess Elizabeth and Princess Margaret. The old queen was the very personification of Britain's glorious Victorian past. Regal in bearing and ramrod straight, she waved a handkerchief at her departing relations. Margaret, only eight years old, started to cry, but 13-year-old Elizabeth took charge. "Wave," she admonished her sister, "don't cry!"

Originally, the Royal Navy battlecruiser *HMS Repulse* was supposed to have carried the king and queen over the ocean, but given the uncertainty of the times, it was ultimately decided that the ship had better stick to home waters. The *Empress of Australia* was an ironic replacement, since it was an old German-built ship that had been given to Britain as a reparations payment after World War I.

During their tour of the United States in the spring of 1939, King George VI and Queen Elizabeth pose for photographers on the platform of the royal train that transported them from event to event.  
OPPOSITE: Dressed in the full uniform of an admiral of the Royal Navy, King George VI rides in an open car with President Franklin D. Roosevelt as the motorcade travels down Constitution Avenue on the way to the White House in Washington, D.C.





Isolationist sentiment in America threatened the Roosevelt administration and the very survival of Great Britain, which depended on U.S. aid to fight the Nazis. This political cartoon, which appeared in the *Chicago Tribune*, gives voice to the isolationist movement.

The voyage started out well but soon ran into trouble. The ice pack was large that year and had drifted farther south than usual, into the North Atlantic. To avoid the icebergs the captain was forced to likewise sail farther south than usual. A thick, clammy fog also made the voyage potentially hazardous.

Queen Elizabeth wrote Queen Mary, "The fog was like a white cloud round the ship, and the fog horn blew incessantly.... Incredibly eerie, and really quite alarming. We very nearly hit a berg the day before yesterday." The fact that there was a survivor of the ill-fated *Titanic* aboard did nothing to lighten the mood.

While the king and queen were at sea the Duke of Windsor once again displayed his penchant for troublemaking. Edward made a radio broadcast to America, his text a seeming endorsement of appeasement. The broadcast was made from Verdun, France, site of one of the bloodiest battles of World War I, and a not too subtle reference to the horrors of war. Let Hitler have his way, the duke's message seemed

to say, or else face the consequences of another global conflagration. On one or two occasions Edward even gave the Nazi salute to appreciative German onlookers.

The voyage was supposed to last seven days, but fog and ice caused an additional two-day delay. Their majesties landed at Wolfe's Cove, Quebec, on May 17, 1939. It was the beginning of a month-long, 10,000-mile odyssey that would be both exhilarating and exhausting for the royal pair.

The trip was the brainchild of Canadian Prime Minister William Mackenzie King, who would play host to the royal couple and also accompany them to the United States as minister in residence. The American leg of the journey was largely added at the personal invitation of President Franklin Roosevelt. The Americans had wanted the monarchs to visit the United States in May, almost as soon as they disembarked, because the weather would not be as hot as in June. Mackenzie King, perhaps not wanting to be upstaged by the charismatic

Roosevelt, or make it seem as if the United States was more important than the Dominion of Canada, refused.

As a result, King George and Queen Elizabeth would tour most of Canada for three weeks, reserving only about five days for an American excursion. Roosevelt, ebullient as ever, agreed. According to First Lady Eleanor Roosevelt, the president "invited them to come to Washington largely because, believing that we all might be engaged in a life and death struggle, in which Great Britain would be our first line of defense, he hoped their visit would create a bond of friendship between the two countries."

True enough, but there were other reasons why the president pushed for a royal visit. The King of England would be a pawn in the game of political and diplomatic chess that Roosevelt was playing against isolationists at home and, more indirectly, against Hitler and others of his ilk. King George was considered colorless, but Queen Elizabeth was noted for her immense charm. Their visit would not only make a statement about Anglo-American solidarity in the face of fascist aggression, but also soften the isolationist attitudes that currently prevailed.

Isolationism ran deep in 1930s America, fueled by geography, the Great Depression, memories of World War I, and the fierce independence inherent in the American character. Roosevelt did not want to go to war, but he was also one of the first American leaders who recognized the threat that Hitler represented. Roosevelt the politician had to trump Roosevelt the statesman, at least for the time being. He had to proceed cautiously, or he might find himself out of office.

Geography played a major part in the isolationist attitudes. Before the age of satellite communication, jet travel, and the Internet, the world was a much larger place. To a wheat farmer in Kansas or an auto worker in Detroit, the mighty Atlantic and vast Pacific were oceanic "moats" that protected the Americas from the violence and machinations of the rest of the world.

The airline industry was, if not in its infancy, still struggling with adolescence. Most people traveled by train, in part because many still feared flying, but mostly because air fares were beyond the reach of the average person. In 1935, Pan American Airways inaugurated its fabled "China Clipper" service from San Francisco to Manila. In this service, flying boats island-hopped to Asia, taking about 60 hours one way to do so. Fares were \$375 one way (around \$4,000 in today's money) or \$675 round trip (about \$7,000 to \$8,000 today).

Most foreign travel was by ship. The British liner *Queen Mary* made a record crossing to New York in three days, 21 hours, and 48 minutes, but most vessels took about five days. Asia was even more distant, with most ships taking about 15 days to sail from San Francisco to Japan. Overseas travel was, in the main, for the wealthy. When average Americans viewed foreign newsreels, they might as well have been looking at pictures of the moon.

There was also a feeling that somehow America had been duped by the Allies into entering World War I. The United States had suffered over 300,000 dead and wounded, and yet the cause of world peace, so idealistically promoted by President Woodrow Wilson, was not advanced by the sacrifice. If anything, by the 1930s the world was much worse off. And as if to add insult to injury, the United States had loaned Europe billions of dollars after the war to help get it on its feet. Most of the collective debt was still unpaid.

Some isolationists even blamed the Great Depression, at least in part, on America's entry into World War I. They argued that American war profiteers had created an illusion of wealth in the 1920s, a bubble that finally burst in 1929. Disillusionment with the war turned most Americans inward. Europe was seen as irredeemably corrupt.

Isolationists applauded when America did not enter the League of Nations, precursor to today's United Nations. Politicians like Senator William E. Borah of Idaho, Gerald P. Nye of North Dakota, and Burton K. Wheeler of Montana became more and more rigid in their attitudes, not recognizing that the world was indeed changing, and that the Pacific and Atlantic moats were not going to be as effective as they were in the 19th century.

President Roosevelt felt all these trends keenly. In the first years of his presidency, he was occupied with the economic woes at home, but after 1935 foreign affairs came to the fore, beginning with Italian leader Benito Mussolini's brutal conquest of Ethiopia.

In response to the growing tensions in the world, Congress passed a series of Neutrality Acts, the last one issued in 1937. Among other things, if a war broke out anywhere in the globe, American ships would be prohibited from carrying arms to belligerents, and no loans, directly or indirectly, could be extended to warring parties. Even nonmilitary goods could be excluded, unless prepaid.

In late 1937, Congressman Louis Leon Ludlow introduced proposed legislation that would add an amendment to the Constitution. The amendment, if adopted, would make any con-



**Riding motorcycles along a street in the Czech capital of Prague, German soldiers are eyed by an astonished civilian population. Following the Munich Pact of September 1938, Hitler proceeded to occupy the entire country, although the original agreement ceded only the Sudetenland.**

gressional declaration of war illegal, unless the United States was physically invaded. If there was no armed invasion, Congress could only declare war if the action was confirmed by a nationwide vote, a national referendum. Luckily, enough congressmen realized how ludicrous the measure was and turned it down, but it showed the depth of isolationism in the country.

Roosevelt's main concern in the late 1930s was to outmaneuver the isolationists and bolster America's woefully neglected defenses. The president was not about to enter any war if he could help it, but given German and Japanese aggression, he realized the need to strengthen the U.S. armed forces.

Congress's "penny wise, pound foolish" neglect of the Army and Navy was yet another byproduct of the prevailing isolationism. In 1939, the U.S. Army was described by *Life* magazine as the "smallest and worst equipped" army of the great powers. Most of its artillery was World War I-vintage, and it was short of machine guns, howitzers, and personnel. The Army's strength was listed as 174,000, ranking it 19th in the world, sandwiched between Portugal and Bulgaria. But even this figure is misleading; if one counts the proportion of men under arms to the total population, about 130 million, the U.S. ranking was more like 45th.

The Republic seemed formidable, but the Army and Navy "arm" that wielded the

Republic's sword was atrophied, weakened by draconian budget cuts and purposeful neglect. Roosevelt wanted to strengthen the armed forces, and help victims of Japanese and fascist aggression, but politics tied his hands. His only weapons were the written and spoken word, but rhetoric would not stop Hitler's tanks.

Hitler's bullying had caused Britain and France to appease him in the infamous Munich Pact in late 1938. Abandoning even the pretense of moderation, Hitler marched into Bohemia and Moravia, in effect destroying the rump of what was left of the Czech Republic.

Roosevelt made his first overtures regarding a royal visit to America at the height of the Munich crisis. The president was often accused of being devious, even mendacious at times, but in this case the political climate demanded he proceed with the utmost caution. Eschewing the normal diplomatic channels, he wrote a personal letter to the king, inviting him to America, saying "it would be an excellent thing for Anglo-American relations."

Of course there were details to sort out, which required time. Roosevelt asked that all negotiations regarding the royal visit be kept secret, at least until plans were finalized and more definite. Hard-core isolationists like Senator Borah were always on the lookout for "foreign entanglements" and might consider the king's trip to be the beginning of an unwanted Anglo-American alliance.



**Upon arrival at Union Station in Washington, D.C., King George VI of Great Britain stands to the right of President Franklin D. Roosevelt who grasps the arm of his aide, Brigadier General Watson. To Watson's left stands First Lady Eleanor Roosevelt, and to her left is Queen Elizabeth, known later in life as the Queen Mother so as not to be confused with Queen Elizabeth II.**

To assure secrecy, Roosevelt had Joseph P. Kennedy, U.S. Ambassador to Great Britain, hand deliver the letter personally to the king. Kennedy complied, but later grew resentful when Roosevelt neglected to advise him of the negotiations and their progress. The president tried to mollify Kennedy, but the ambassador still felt his prestige was somehow compromised.

After the king and queen's visit was made public, a predictable variety of reactions ensued. Eleanor Roosevelt was determined to have the royals experience something that they could not get elsewhere, namely an authentic slice of real American culture. This put her in conflict with her domineering mother-in-law, Sara Delano Roosevelt. Since Springwood, the Roosevelt family estate at Hyde Park, New York, was going to be on the itinerary, the First Lady decided to stage a picnic for the royal couple. Sara Roosevelt, the imperious matriarch of the family, was aghast. The old lady was Victorian to the core, and something of a social snob to boot. The idea of serving "common" picnic foods like hot dogs was unthinkable. But in this battle of wills, Eleanor got her way.

Actually, the elder Mrs. Roosevelt was not alone in her opinion. "Oh dear, oh dear," Eleanor wrote with tongue in cheek. "So many people are worried that the dignity of our country will be imperiled by inviting royalty to a hot dog picnic!" One or two hot dog com-

panies then competed for the honor of having their brand consumed by the king and queen. In the end, none of the competing brands got the coveted prize.

Harry Johannson, 25-year-old son of Springwood's cook, Nellie Johannson, was the one who obtained the royal frankfurters. The young man traveled to Poughkeepsie, New York, and went directly to Swift and Company. He picked Swift because, quite simply, they were "the best."

Once the royal visit was announced, the isolationists in Congress accepted it as a fait accompli. They could not resist continuing their partisan sniping, however. Senator Borah, intransigent as ever, suggested that if there was a lull in the conversation the president might ask the king about paying the \$5 billion of war debt that Britain owed the United States.

**The king and queen's sleek streamliner entered the United States via the suspension bridge that spanned the border at Niagara Falls.** The royal train, its cars a dazzling blue and silver, stopped at the small brick station where dignitaries waited to extend an official welcome to their Britannic majesties. Floodlights bathed the platform, but there was no bunting, and only a small patch of red carpet. The only real sign that something unusual was going on was the presence of two small British and American flags and the unmistakable odor of fresh paint.

Secretary of State Cordell Hull and his wife were on hand to greet the royal pair, as was Sir Ronald Lindsay, the British ambassador. King George VI and Queen Elizabeth appeared on the observation car, but after a few hasty words of greeting, Hull and his party boarded the same train. The idea was to continue the trip overnight, riding through Buffalo and on to Washington, D.C. The Niagara Falls ceremony was spartan because it had to be. Neither the city of Niagara Falls nor the New York Central Railroad had enough money for elaborate decorations. One British correspondent, not knowing the financial realities, was impressed by American "simplicity."

As the train sped southward, Hull and the king had some private political conversations in the observation car before finally turning in for the night. Progress was swift, because the way was cleared and all signals flashed green. Every culvert railroad crossing and bridge had been thoroughly check by the Secret Service because there was a fear that radical Irish Republican Army terrorists might have planted a bomb in an attempt to assassinate the king.

Even the FBI or Secret Service could not inspect every mile of track, so a "pilot" train went ahead as a decoy and locomotive "guinea pig." If there were any explosives on the track, the pilot train would blow up first. The pilot train was filled with reporters, who no doubt were not enthusiastic about these arrangements! And, as if to add to their woes, their locomotive developed engine trouble and was forced to a siding in Pennsylvania. The royal train flew past, so the reporters came into Washington too late to cover the arrival.

President Roosevelt and a host of dignitaries met the royal couple at Washington's Union Station. It was the first time a president had greeted his guests outside the White House. Eleanor Roosevelt was all smiles, but she later admitted she dreaded such formal occasions. After the train pulled in the king and queen appeared, His Majesty wearing the full dress uniform of an admiral of the Royal Navy.

Roosevelt was also in formal attire, standing with the help of an aide. Leg braces weighing some 40 pounds were hidden beneath his pants legs. Secretary Hull formally introduced the two heads of state. "Mr. President," Hull intoned with his soft Tennessee drawl, "I have the honor to present their Britannic Majesties." Extending his hand, a beaming Roosevelt said "At last I greet you!" The king warmly shook the president's hand and replied, "It is indeed a pleasure for Her Majesty and myself to be here."

The Marine Band struck up "God Save the

King,” then followed with the obligatory “Star Spangled Banner.” This concluded the formal greetings, so the president and Mrs. Roosevelt escorted their guests to waiting limousines past a guard of honor. A motorcade formed up to take the king and queen to a reception at the White House.

The motorcade left the station and proceeded up Constitution Avenue as a nearby battery of artillery boomed out a 21-gun salute to honor the royal pair. An estimated 600,000 people



**ABOVE: A young Girl Scout describes one of her merit badges to Queen Elizabeth during a parade on the lawn of the White House. King George VI looks on at left. More than 3,000 Girl Scouts took part in the event. RIGHT: During a whirlwind visit to New York City, the King and Queen of Great Britain briefly toured the New York World's Fair. In this view, the mall leading to the Court of Peace is shown.**

lined the parade route, cheering lustily as the limos slowly drove by. The weather was unbearably hot, hovering somewhere around 94 degrees. The king must have been suffocating under his heavy uniform that was festooned with medals and dripping with gold braid, but he put on a brave face. Even Roosevelt looked parboiled in his cutaway coat and striped trousers.

Soldiers, sailors, and police were stationed every few feet along Constitution and Pennsylvania Avenues, partly for show and partly as crowd control for the enthusiastic, surging masses. Queen Elizabeth was the star of the show and would continue to dazzle throughout their American sojourn. She seemed radiant in spite of the heat, with brilliant blue eyes and a manner that oozed genuine grace and charm.

People who were watching from the tall buildings that lined the route were disappointed, because Her Majesty held a parasol to guard her delicate features from the sun's blistering rays. At one point, when Eleanor Roo-

sevelt waved to the crowd, a spectator impertinently yelled, “Put your hand down! Let's see the queen!”

The motorcade finally reached the White House, driving into the south entrance. There the king and queen were greeted by members of the diplomatic corps. There were some sticky moments that had nothing to do with the heat. Because of the rule of precedence, the Ambassador of Japan and the Ambassador of China stood next to each other, though the two nations were in the midst of a bloody war. The reception was short because of a scheduled garden party at the British Embassy.

That party was considered the event of the season, and invitations were much sought after by Washington's political and social elite. The temperatures were still high, and a smothering humidity added to the discomfort. The oven-like atmosphere produced some bizarre concessions to the weather. One senator wore a straw hat, while Sen-

Roosevelt returned the hospitality with a formal state dinner during which he toasted his royal guests, saying the United States “welcomes on its soil the king and queen of Great Britain, of our neighbor Canada, and of all the far-flung British Commonwealth of Nations.” For all of Roosevelt's bonhomie, he felt the British Empire was an antiquated institution and could not bear to mention it specifically.

After the formal dinner, guests were entertained by a varied lot of artists. Kate Smith belted out her rendition of “When the Moon Comes Over the Mountain,” but the rest of the program was decidedly rural in nature. North Carolina's Soco Gap Dancers did a rousing square dance, and the Coon Creek Girls from Pinchem-Tight Hollow, Kentucky, fiddled away the night, literally and figuratively, with country tunes.

African American opera singer Marian Anderson was the highlight of the evening. Anderson sang “My Soul's Been Anchored in the Lord,” “Tramping,” and “Ave Maria” in a beautiful contralto. The affair broke up about midnight, and everyone considered the visit to be a success so far.

Friday, June 9, 1939, was the second full day in Washington, with a schedule that included



ator Arthur Vandenberg of Michigan wore an ice cream suit.

Vice President John “Cactus Jack” Garner was an embarrassment to all concerned. The garrulous old Texan was famed for his description of the vice presidency as “not worth a bucket of warm piss,” though reporters had sanitized the quote to “warm spit.” Gardner lived up to his reputation by going up to King George and jocularly slapping him on the back.

10 engagements in 11 hours. But the king and queen considered a visit to Capitol Hill the most nerve-wracking of all. Virtually all of Congress would be on hand to meet them. The majority of Congress were rabid isolationists.

The timing of their visit was superb, or horrendous, depending on one's political views. The Bloom Bill had recently come out of committee, a proposal what would, among other

*Continued on page 90*

In the dramatic painting *First Ace* by artist Jack Fellows, First Lieutenant Boyd David "Buzz" Wagner got into a bit of a scrape flying low over a Japanese destroyer off the coast of the Philippines on December 12, 1941. Wagner escaped and went on to become the first U.S. fighter pilot to achieve ace status in World War II. **OPPOSITE:** Major Boyd D. "Buzz" Wagner.



# Early American Ace

## BOYD WAGNER AND HIS SQUADRON MATES FLYING P-40 FIGHTERS HELD THE LINE FOR A TIME IN THE PHILIPPINES. BY SAM MCGOWAN

Common wisdom has long held that Japanese pilots and aircraft, particularly their fighters, were superior to the American, Australian, and British counterparts they faced in combat in the Philippines and Southeast Asia in the opening months of U.S. involvement in World War II.

While it is true that some Japanese fighters, particularly the famous Mitsubishi-built Zeros, had achieved considerable success in China, they were not actually superior airplanes. These Japanese fighters were highly maneuverable and had superior high-altitude performance because of their lighter weight, but U.S. Army Air Corps pilots in the Philippines quickly learned that American fighters could more than hold their own in combat when their best features were exploited.



Courtesy of Jack Fellows

One pilot who made use of his background in aeronautical engineering to completely master the Curtiss P-40 Tomahawk was Lt. Col. Boyd David Wagner, commander of the 17th Pursuit Squadron based at Nichols Field near Manila. Wagner became America's first ace since World War I.

Boyd Wagner was a Pennsylvanian who hailed from a small town with the rather unique name of Nanty Glo. He graduated from Nanty Glo High School in 1934 then enrolled at the University of Pittsburgh as an engineering student. His major was in aeronautical engineering, but he left his university studies to join the Army after three years. Even though he was not awarded a degree, his knowledge of aeronautical engineering far surpassed the typical fighter pilot's of his day and led to his becoming America's first World War II ace.

Upon completion of the aviation cadet program at Randolph Field, Texas, in 1938, he was commissioned as a second lieutenant and assigned to a fighter squadron, reportedly the 27th Pursuit Squadron that was based at Selfridge Field, Michigan, not far from Detroit. Wagner quickly gained a reputation as an extremely skilled pilot and picked up the nickname "Buzz," although there are conflicting accounts as to the reason for the nickname. At the time of his death, a *Time* magazine article quoted other pilots as saying he was so good he "could take the camouflage off the roof of a hangar." Other sources attribute the nickname to his habit of "buzzing" unsuspecting aircraft—including commercial airliners—that he came across while out on training missions. Regardless, there is no doubt that Boyd Wagner was a highly accomplished pilot who could fly the wings off a fighter at both treetop level and higher altitudes.

By December 1940, Wagner had transferred from the 27th Pursuit to the 17th Pursuit. And when the latter was assigned to the Philippines, Wagner went along. At the time, the squadron was equipped with Seversky P-35s and Boeing P-26s which, while they were first-line fighters of the day, were already obsolete when compared to combat aircraft being produced by the Germans and Japanese.



Public Domain



**ABOVE:** When Japanese bombers attacked American installations in the Philippines on the first day of the war, a number of U.S. planes were destroyed on the ground. Among them were these obsolete A-27 aircraft of the 27th Pursuit Squadron at Nichols Field. **TOP:** The heavy Curtiss P-40 Tomahawk was built like a flying bullet and served as the most modern U.S. fighter plane in the Pacific during the early days of World War II. The P-40 was heavily armed with machine guns and could fly at a top speed of 350 miles per hour.

The arrival of the 17th Pursuit to the Army's Philippines Department brought U.S. fighter strength up to three squadrons. All were assigned to the 4th Composite Group, which included a bomber squadron (flying antiquated Martin B-10s) and an observation squadron. In May 1941, six months after the 17th Pursuit arrived in Manila, the squadron's commander, Major J.K. Gregg, took command of the 4th Composite Group. The new 17th Pursuit Squadron commander was none other than First Lieutenant Boyd D. Wagner.

Wagner assumed command of the squadron as all of its P-26s were being replaced with P-35s, which had been diverted to the Philippines from a planned sale to Sweden. As they were replaced, the P-26s went to the Philippines Air Force.

Shortly after Wagner took command of the squadron, the 17th Pursuit was moved to the tiny airfield at Iba, a grass strip on the western beach of Luzon just west of the Zambales Mountains. The Air Corps had established a gunnery range in the mountains, and the 17th's assignment at Iba was for gunnery practice. Iba

was a remote location, and the airfield was primitive at best. Transportation between the field and the Army Air Corps fields at Clark and Manila was poor. The pilots discovered that their guns were largely defective because of improper installation and adjustment. Every gun in the squadron had to be removed from its mountings and adjusted, and the mountings repaired. Faulty gun installations and operation would plague the fighter force when war finally came.

Wagner's assumption of command of the 17th Pursuit came as the United States was beginning to beef up the Philippines Department in response to Japanese aggression in China. Previously, the Philippines had been seen as a backwater command and had been essentially written off in U.S. military defense plans for the Pacific. But the rise of Japanese imperialism, particularly in China, caused President Franklin Roosevelt to reconsider U.S. options and to begin a military buildup in the Philippine Islands.

The plan was to establish a large bomber force consisting of Boeing B-17s and Consolidated B-24s, which were just entering the U.S. Air Corps inventory. They would serve as the main deterrent to Japanese aggression in the region, with several pursuit squadrons to serve as interceptors. A new pursuit command was established at Nielson Field with Colonel Harold George, who had recently arrived in Manila, as the commander.

The new importance of the Philippines led to the decision to equip the pursuit squadrons based there with the latest fighter plane, the Curtiss P-40. The first models began arriving in the islands in June and were given to the 20th Pursuit Squadron at Clark Field. Later models were already rolling off of the Curtiss production lines and were destined for the Philippines, but would not arrive until October.

In September, the 19th Bombardment Group transferred to the Philippines and took up residence at Clark Field. To make room for the B-17s, Wagner took his 17th Pursuit Squadron south to Nichols Field, where the squadron had previously been based.

A new organization, the 24th Pursuit Group, was activated to control the three pursuit squadrons. In October, the first complement of new P-40Es arrived and the 3rd and 17th Pursuit Squadrons began replacing their P-35s with the newer and more capable fighters. Two additional squadrons, the 21st and 34th Pursuit Squadrons, left California in early November by ship to join the 24th Pursuit Group. The 21st joined the 17th at Nichols Field and was commanded by First Lieutenant William E. Dyess. Since Dyess and Wagner were both

members of the pilot training programs at Kelly and Randolph Fields at San Antonio, Texas, at about the same time, it is possible that they already knew each other. Regardless, they quickly became friends at Nichols.

On December 6, Colonel George met with the young pilots at Nichols Field and advised them of the impending conflict with Japan. It was a somber meeting. George pulled no punches with the young pilots as he outlined their situation. A communiqué had gone out from the White House through the War Department the previous week that warned General Douglas MacArthur, who was in command of U.S. forces in the Philippines, that war with Japan was imminent.

George knew that if war came his young pilots would be facing overwhelming odds. He advised that while their situation was not suicidal, it was nearly desperate because they would be facing an enemy with comparatively shorter supply lines and far superior numbers. Yet, even he did not imagine just how severe the situation was going to be. A shipment of new P-40Es that had arrived at the depot some time before had been assembled and were replacing the P-35s that the men of the 21st had been given temporarily upon their arrival, and operational fighter strength was at 70 airplanes.

George told the fighter pilots that they would be able to make a good showing. All of the pursuit squadrons were on full alert, and had been since the message from Washington reached Manila advising that war was imminent. Nearly every morning the two squadrons at Nichols were alerted, and the pilots had taken to sleeping by their airplanes. Several reports of unknown aircraft over or near the Philippines had come in, and pursuit planes had gone up in attempts at interception.

While the number of operational airplanes George reported was accurate, the total was actually misleading. Ed Dyess's 21st Pursuit Squadron was just receiving its complement of new P-40Es, and none of the airplanes were truly combat-ready. Fresh from the factory, none of their engines had been broken in, or "slow-timed," and their guns had to be bore-sighted.

Wagner's squadron was operationally ready and would account for many of the Japanese aircraft that fell to American fighters during the opening days of the Pacific War.

The lieutenant led the first Air Corps attempted interception of the Japanese. Starting on December 2, a single unidentified airplane flew over Clark Field just before daybreak four nights in a row. No origin for the unidentified airplane could be found, and after it came over the second time on December 3, orders were

National Archives



**A pair of Curtiss P-40 Warhawk fighter planes is shown during a training exercise in Australia. The heavy P-40 could outdive the nimble Japanese Zero, and experienced pilots learned to take a single pass at the enemy fighters from a position above the target.**

given to intercept and force the airplane down. If the pilot committed any overt act, the airplane was to be shot down. On the night of December 4, Wagner took a flight of six P-40s from his squadron aloft, but their search was fruitless, largely because of the lack of an adequate air to ground communications system. A similar interception attempt by the 20th Pursuit Squadron the following night was also unsuccessful as the unidentified airplane again overflew Clark without being disturbed.

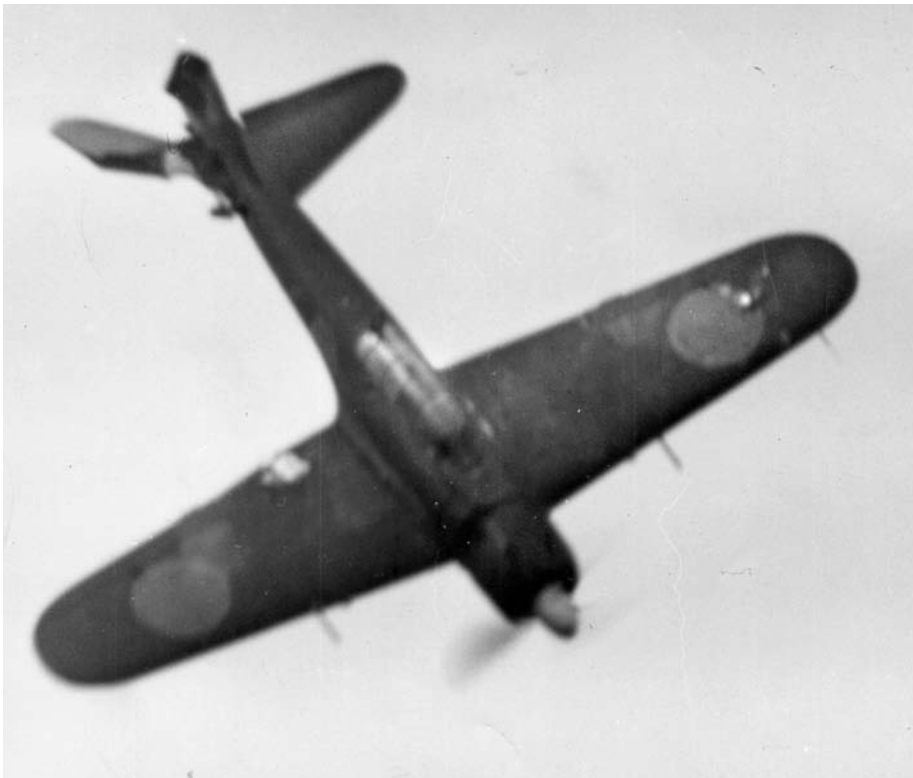
At 2:30 AM on December 8, the pilots of the 17th and 21st Squadrons were alerted and told to man their airplanes. It was the sixth successive day that they had been alerted. After about 10 minutes they were told to stand down. At about 4:30 AM the telephone in Ed Dyess's orderly room rang, and he received the first word of the attack on Pearl Harbor, which had taken place about two and a half hours before. Wagner was no doubt notified at the same time.

**Word of the attack spread quickly through the quarters, and the pilots soon were back at their airplanes, and either gathered in groups on the flight line or tried to get more sleep on the wings of their fighters.** At 8 AM, Wagner was ordered to take his 17th Pursuit Squadron aloft and to set up an air cover over Clark Field. Wagner set up a patrol line just north of Clark near the town of Tarlac. The 20th Pursuit, which was based at Clark, had taken up a line

farther north near the town of Rosales to defend against a formation of Japanese bombers that had been reported north of Luzon. The 19th Bombardment Group's Boeing B-17s began taking off at 8 AM to avoid being caught on the ground. Two of the 19th's squadrons were no longer at Clark. They had moved south to Del Monte Field on Mindanao a few days before.

As it turned out, the approaching Japanese bombers turned and attacked Baguio, a mountain town on northern Luzon. Wagner led his men back to Clark, where they were refueled and ready to go by 11 AM. At about 11:30 Wagner was ordered to take his squadron back into the air. A formation of enemy aircraft was reported to be headed toward Manila, so he was instructed to patrol over Manila Bay and the Bataan Peninsula.

The first Japanese attack came on the airfield at Iba, where the only operational radar station in the Philippines was destroyed, and on Clark Field, where the destruction was severe. The B-17s had been recalled to refuel and re-arm for an attack on Formosa, and the 20th Pursuit's P-40s were refueling after their unproductive mission that morning. The fighters were lined up in preparation to take off when Japanese bombs began falling on Clark. A few fighters on takeoff roll managed to get off the ground, but most of the P-40s were hit by shrapnel from exploding bombs.



Both: National Archives



**ABOVE: A P-40 Warhawk fighter plane kicks up a cloud of dust as it taxis along a dirt runway in Australia. Allied fighters were often stationed in Australia's Northern Territory within range of the "invasion coast" near the port city of Darwin, the seas of Timor and Arafura, and the Gulf of Carpentaria. TOP: With part of its tail shot away and obvious holes from cannon fire in both wings, a Japanese Zero fighter plane spirals toward the sea. The Zero was a maneuverable aircraft but could not withstand heavy punishment.**

A strafing attack by Japanese fighters destroyed or severely damaged all but three of the B-17s (all three of those, in turn, were destroyed in accidents caused by poor visibility over the next couple of days). The pursuit force fared far better than the bombers. Except for the ones that were on the ground at Clark when the attack came, only a handful fell victim to

Japanese guns. Nevertheless, a number were lost due to engine failure or to crash landings.

Because of the 17th's station well south of Clark, it was not involved in the hostilities on the opening day of the war. Late in the day, Wagner and Dyess were ordered to take their squadrons to Clark under the assumption that Nichols Field, which had been spared attack,

would be the next target. As it turned out, the 17th ended up at Del Carmen, the secondary base, because the dust over Clark caused such a melee among the arriving 21st fighters that it was nearly dark by the time the last one landed. Only one 17th fighter landed at Clark and then only because the pilot's radio had gone out and he had failed to get the word to divert to Del Carmen.

The order to reposition the two squadrons was timely—at about 3 AM on December 9 Japanese bombers struck Nichols Field and caused considerable damage. As the Japanese bombers approached Manila, a flight of four P-40s was ordered into the air, but one crashed on take-off and slid into another fighter, destroying them both. The other three patrolled over Manila but did not make contact with the Japanese attackers.

December 10, the third day of the war, was a red-letter day in the air battle for the Philippines. That morning the 17th Pursuit Squadron was assigned to fly top cover for a flight of B-17s sent to attack the Japanese invasion fleet, which had taken up station off of Vigan on Lingayen Gulf. Led by the 17th, the P-40s dropped down with a devastating strafing attack on the Japanese landing barges and effectively broke up the invasion, although the results were temporary.

That afternoon the 17th and 21st Squadrons were sent up against Japanese bombers escorted by fighters that attacked the naval base at Cavite. Although the Navy claimed later that no American fighters were present, they were there in force, but only a handful were able to penetrate the Japanese fighter screen and attack the bombers. Many of the P-40s had been launched almost an hour before the attack when Japanese aircraft attacked Del Carmen. They were hampered by having been aloft for some time before the action began, and even though they put on a good showing at the beginning of the air battle, they began running out of gasoline.

The pilots knew of their fuel problem before the battle but decided to attack and try to do as much damage as possible to the Japanese before their fuel ran out. An intense battle ensued, and the action was so fierce that none of the American pilots put in any claims for aircraft destroyed because they were unable to see what happened to airplanes they shot at. The action lasted for about 15 minutes before the P-40s began running out of gasoline and had to break off. Three P-40 pilots were killed, and at least eight others either crash landed or bailed out of airplanes that had run out of fuel. Every airplane was damaged, but most crashed

due to empty fuel tanks.

The air battle had begun with about 40 P-40s. By the end of the day the force had been substantially reduced. The fighters that did manage to limp back to their bases had all suffered varying degrees of battle damage that required repair before the fighters could be returned to service.

Japanese landing parties had come ashore at Vigan and Aparri, which created a need for aerial reconnaissance. With the fighter force dwindling away, MacArthur's headquarters decided that the remaining airplanes should be used for reconnaissance. That night an order came down through Far East Air Force headquarters that the interception would cease. The order was met with resentment among the fighter pilots, who felt that they were just getting the measure of the Japanese forces.

On the morning of December 11 (possibly December 12), Wagner took off from Clark Field on a solo reconnaissance flight to Aparri, on the northern coast of Luzon. Although no mention of his actions of the previous day is recorded, it is probable that he had achieved his first two kills during the melee near Cavite.

Wagner flew this mission above the clouds for more than 200 miles, navigating entirely by dead reckoning. When he estimated that he was about 10 minutes from his destination, he let down through the clouds on instruments. When he broke out, he found himself right over two Japanese destroyers, which opened up with a barrage of anti-aircraft fire.

Wagner dropped down to within a few feet of the waves and turned inland. As he realized he was near the airport at Aparri, he suddenly saw tracers zipping past him from above and behind. He looked back and saw two Zeros behind him and three more above him. He immediately pulled up into a steep chandelle into the sun and lost the two pursuers, then did a half-roll and came down on them from behind. They were close together, and he shot them both down almost immediately. He looked down and saw the enemy airport directly beneath him, so he made two strafing passes on the dozen or so fighters he saw on the field and destroyed at least five. As he pulled up from the second pass, he saw that the three fighters he had seen above him were diving toward him.

By this time he had realized that the P-40 was considerably faster than the Zero, so he dropped his empty belly tank and shoved his throttle forward and quickly outdistanced the pursuing airplanes. His mission completed, he turned back toward Clark. The next day, a proud General Douglas MacArthur sent out a communiqué describing Wagner's actions.

Wagner's account of his victories, reported by some to be the first of many, sounds almost unbelievable when considering the awe with which so many writers have treated the Japanese fighter pilots in the early part of World War II. Until the invasions of the Philippines and Singapore, Japan's finest had never fought modern first-line fighters or pilots with superior training. Its previous victories had been gained over China, against Chinese pilots with limited experience who were flying outdated airplanes.

While it is true that U.S. airpower in the Philippines had been severely depleted in the opening days of the war, the losses were due

several Japanese fighters. Walter Edmonds, on the other hand, stated that there was a tremendous air battle until the P-40s started running out of fuel and began disengaging, and that more Japanese aircraft were shot down than American. Apparently the 17th was heavily engaged in the action, so it may be that this was when Wagner actually got his first two kills, not on the December 11 mission as is commonly reported.

On December 16, Wagner was part of one of the most heroic missions of the war. Reconnaissance had revealed that Japanese aircraft were operating from an airfield just inland from

## WAGNER WAS A SUPERIOR AND KNOWLEDGEABLE PILOT WHO QUICKLY PICKED UP ON THE WEAKNESSES OF THE JAPANESE AIRMEN AND THEIR AIRCRAFT, AND HE KNEW HOW TO EXPLOIT THEM.

more to bad luck and bad timing than to the superior skill of the Japanese airmen.

Wagner was a superior and knowledgeable pilot who had quickly picked up on the weaknesses of the Japanese airmen and their aircraft, and he knew how to exploit them. P-40s were armed with six .50-caliber machine guns that could throw out a hail of lead. They caused the rather flimsy Japanese fighters to come apart if they were caught in the apex of fire. In the coming weeks and months, Wagner would prove time and time again that his first recorded kills were no fluke.

**Wagner's actions on December 11 were not his first.** He and Ed Dyess were eating lunch at Clark Field after a morning mission on December 10 when they were alerted to take to the air. They took off in a cloud of dust that was so thick they could not see each other. When they broke out of the overcast, the two squadron commanders were astonished that they had climbed through the dust clouds with their wingtips only inches apart!

Dyess had problems with his guns and had to land at an outlying field on the way to Manila, but Wagner evidently continued on and no doubt was engaged in combat.

The events of December 10 are somewhat confusing, as some authors have reported that the P-40s did not shoot down any Japanese airplanes while others recorded that they did. Noted aviation author Martin Caidin claimed that the P-40s were unable to penetrate the enemy fighter screen and attack the bombers, but does not mention that the P-40s shot down

the beach at Vigan, and Wagner's squadron was given the mission of destroying them. He picked Lieutenants Russell Church and Allison Straus to go with him on the mission. The Americans had taken off before dawn and began their attack on the airfield in the light of the breaking day while the Japanese pilots were just rising from their night's sleep. When they reached the vicinity of Vigan, Straus stayed aloft to keep watch for attacking aircraft, and Wagner went down with Church on his wing to strafe the airfield. Each fighter carried six 30-pound fragmentation bombs in addition to its six .50-caliber guns. Wagner counted 25 Japanese aircraft lined up alongside the landing strip. He made his first pass without taking a single hit, but Church was not so fortunate. Alerted by Wagner's pass, every antiaircraft gun on the airfield concentrated on Church's fighter and set it on fire just as he was beginning his dive. He could have pulled up and away from the target and gained altitude to bail out, but he elected to continue his run. He dove the burning airplane on the airstrip and dropped his bombs, then continued down the line in a strafing pass. He never altered his course, and the burning airplane continued on a straight line to crash in a flat field about a mile past the airfield.

Church's heroic death struck a chord in Wagner: Even with heavy antiaircraft fire rising up from around the airfield, he nevertheless made five strafing passes.

A single Japanese fighter got airborne, but Wagner throttled back and let it pass him, then shot it out of the sky. When the fighter first took off, Wagner could not see it because it

was below him, so he rolled his P-40 upside down to get a better view. When he saw the Japanese plane beneath him, he flipped upright and throttled back. It was an amazing piece of airmanship.

There is some question as to Straus's actions, or whether he was even part of the mission. Although the 24th Pursuit Group records had him on the mission and taking part in the strafing, no mention is made of him in the recommendations for the Distinguished Service Crosses that were awarded to Wagner and Church. Church was reportedly recommended for the Medal of Honor, probably by Wagner since he was an eyewitness and the squadron commander, but the recommendation was evidently downgraded. The Japanese buried Church's body with full military honors.

Several accounts show that Wagner became an ace with the shooting down of the lone fighter at Vigan. One source claims that he

officially credits him with becoming an ace on December 17 (U.S. time, December 16 Philippine time). If he only shot down two fighters over Aparri, then he must have reported two victories the day before in the big melee over Manila, but was erroneously credited for four the following day. The 24th Pursuit Group's records were written long after the fact and are not as accurate as they would have been had they been written at the time of the action.

Interestingly, not all of the fighter pilots who shot down Japanese aircraft were given credit for their kills. Ed Dyess, for example, is known to have shot down at least three Japanese aircraft but was never credited with any, probably because his squadron remained on Bataan, and the pilots became prisoners of war.

Sometime in December, Wagner was wounded. Details and even the exact date are not known, although the citation for the Pur-

pieces of Plexiglas. One piece entered his eye. He made it to safety, but the wound kept him out of the cockpit for some time.

Meanwhile, a few days before Christmas, General Henry "Hap" Arnold, the senior air officer in the U.S. Army, ordered the headquarters of the Far East Air Force out of the Philippines to Australia. The War Department was taking steps to carry out orders from President Roosevelt to effectively abandon the Philippines and establish a new Allied headquarters in Australia.

In late December Wagner and eight of his pilots were ordered out of Luzon to Australia, where they would form a new fighter squadron with the P-40s that had been diverted there.

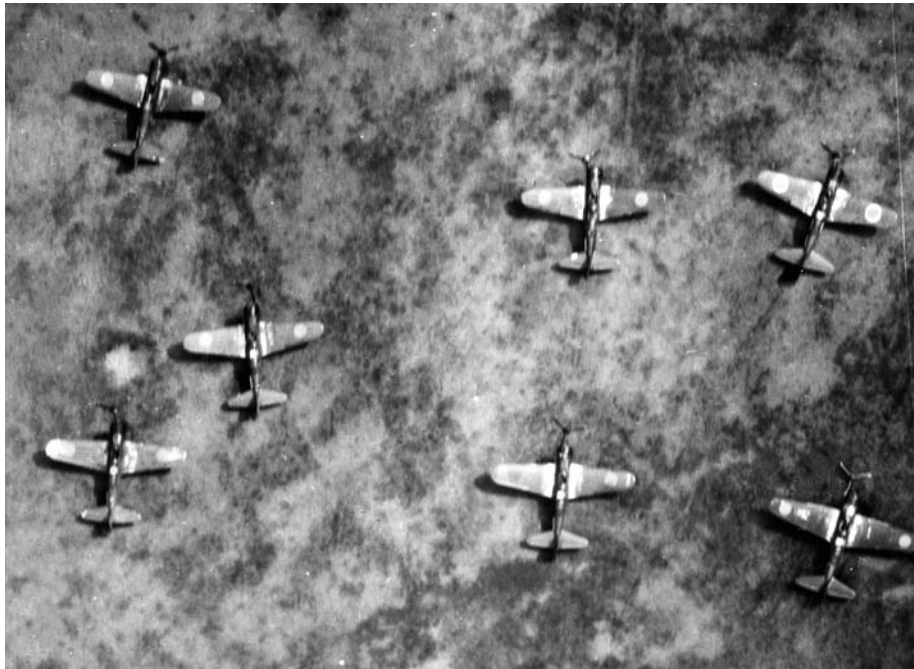
The pilots of the 17th Pursuit Squadron were part of a contingent of combat pilots that Colonel Harold George sent to Australia. The first of the fighter pilots departed Neilson Field on December 31; a second group left two days later from Bataan on January 2, 1942. Wagner was one of the men who departed on the latter date. The transport flew across Bataan at treetop altitude to avoid detection by Japanese fighters and made its way to Mindanao where the pilots spent several days working on the worn-out transport. They eventually landed at an airfield in Borneo but were unable to continue the flight because the right engine failed completely. A Navy PBY Catalina flying boat was sent to pick them up and take them to Java. They eventually made their way on to Australia where they joined the seven pilots who had come out ahead of them.

Although Wagner had commanded the 17th Pursuit at Nichols Field, he was outranked by Captain Charles Sprague, who had formerly been a member of Colonel George's staff at V Interceptor Command. It has been reported that when a new provisional pursuit squadron was formed with 17 (one of the fighters had been shipped without a rudder) of the 18 P-40s, Wagner and Sprague flipped a coin to see who would be in command.

Regardless of whether the legend is true, Sprague became commander of the newly organized 17th Pursuit Squadron. Sprague was authorized to pick any pilots he wished, except for Wagner, Captain Grant Mahoney, who was another Philippines legend, and two other pilots, all of whom were being held back by Far East Air Force to take command of new squadrons as they were organized. The pilots believed they were headed back to the Philippines, but when they reached Darwin, they learned that they were going to Java, where the Japanese had mounted an offensive.

Unfortunately, Sprague was lost in Java, as

National Archives



**ABOVE:** Photographed from an aircraft of the U.S. Pacific Fleet later in the war, these Japanese planes were situated at an airfield near Tokyo. Their propellers have been removed and are resting on the ground in front of each plane. **OPPOSITE:** A Bell P-39 Airacobra fighter plane is photographed from a neighboring aircraft during a flight from England to North Africa in the spring of 1943. The Airacobra was a disappointment as a dog-fighter but proved a capable ground-attack aircraft with its heavy armament and armored protection for the pilot. Note the 37mm cannon protruding from the nose.

actually shot down four fighters over Aparri. However, Wagner himself made no such claim in an interview he later gave to *Life* magazine reporter Carl Maydans. He mentioned only the two that jumped him as he came over the shore after breaking out of the overcast.

Edmonds mentions only the two fighters over Aparri in his highly acclaimed work, *They Fought with What They Had*. The Air Force

ple Heart he was awarded shows that the incident took place on December 18. The 24th Pursuit Group history shows the date as being December 22. Wagner was certainly wounded during one of two attacks against the Japanese beachheads on Lingayen Gulf where they were making their main invasion.

Wagner was wounded when a 20mm shell burst on his canopy and showered him with



were all of the P-40s. They were turned over to the Dutch as it became apparent that the Japanese would prevail. A shipment of 32 P-40s that was on the way to Java aboard the old aircraft carrier USS *Langley* was also lost. Another shipment of 27 fighters reached Java on another ship but were still in their crates when the Allies abandoned the islands.

**Wagner remained behind in Australia and,** fortunately, missed the debacle in Java. He and four other pilots from the Philippines were placed in charge of training newly arriving pilots who came in from the States. He was put in command of the new 13th Pursuit Squadron (Provisional) but was soon moved to V Interceptor Command headquarters. After this assignment, Wagner was quickly promoted and by April was a lieutenant colonel. During that month, reorganization led to the establishment of the Army Air Forces as the air combat element of the Army, while the Air Corps remained as the training element. The pursuit designation was changed to fighter.

In late April 1942, Wagner took two squadrons from the 8th Fighter Group (flying Bell P-39 Airacobras) north to Port Moresby, New Guinea, to relieve the Australian P-40 squadrons that had been operating from there. Wagner's new position was officially Director of Intercept for the Port Moresby area; his promotion reportedly made him the youngest lieutenant colonel in the Army. As soon as the pilots entered combat they began racking up a remarkable record that made them one of the most successful units in Air Force history. As

Wagner had done with the P-40, he thoroughly familiarized himself with the P-39 and knew it inside and out. Although it was not capable of high-altitude combat, he considered it to be an effective fighter against bombers up to 18,000 feet and against fighters at lower altitudes. The P-39 lacked in acceleration in comparison to the famed Zero, but it was actually faster in level flight and could pull away from the Japanese fighter after its initial burst of power.

On the afternoon of April 30, shortly after they arrived in Port Moresby, Wagner led 13 P-39s on a strafing attack on the Japanese airfields at Lae and Salamaua. The results were spectacular, and in the brief air engagement that followed the P-39s shot down four Japanese Zeros. Three of the enemy aircraft were claimed by Wagner himself, which brought his total score to eight confirmed kills, a record that would stand for some time. Wagner evidently picked up another piece of Plexiglas in his eye, which ended his combat flying.

Over the next several months Wagner's fighters proved more than equal to the task of defending Port Moresby even though they were flying an airplane that was considerably inferior to the Zero in overall performance. What the tiny P-39s lacked in performance, they made up for in rugged construction and survivability. Wagner ordered his men not to attempt to dogfight with the Japanese, but to use the P-39's superior speed to advantage and to attack from higher altitude in a single diving pass at an enemy formation. Because they lacked the performance to climb to high altitudes, the P-39s often failed to intercept approaching Japanese

bomber formations. Consequently, none of the P-39/P-40 pilots achieved ace status while flying Airacobras.

Even though their air-to-air combat record was less than spectacular, the P-39s wreaked a heavy toll on Japanese air power in New Guinea. Recognizing that an airplane destroyed on the ground is the same as one shot down in aerial combat, Wagner sent his fighters out on regular strafing attacks on the Japanese airfields around Lae. Losses in terms of equipment were heavy, but in terms of men they were light. In nearly every case when a P-39 or P-40 went down, the pilot survived. The 39th Fighter Squadron claimed 12 enemy aircraft for a loss of nine of its own, but lost only one pilot who bailed out at high speed and struck the tail of his airplane. All of the other pilots who were shot down managed to bail out of their planes or crash land and survive.

Wagner's leadership in New Guinea set the stage for the upcoming air war in the Southwest Pacific. Experience gained by the young pilots in the underpowered P-39s and P-40s paid dividends when they transitioned into the high-performance Lockheed P-38 Lightning beginning in late 1942. Wagner's own combat experience came to an end when he returned from Port Moresby in June.

Lieutenant General George C. Kenney arrived in Australia in late July to assume the role of MacArthur's "air boss," and one of his first actions was to relieve the Philippines veterans and send them back to the States for a well-deserved rest. Wagner protested the

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# *Britain's* Cossack Betrayal

AT YALTA, CHURCHILL AGREED TO TURN OVER TO STALIN ALL CAPTURED SOVIET COSSACKS THAT HAD BEEN FIGHTING ON THE GERMAN SIDE. SURELY HE KNEW WHAT THAT MEANT. **BY BLAINE TAYLOR**

An estimated four million Red Army soldiers were captured by the Germans during the six months after the launching of Operation Barbarossa, the Nazi invasion of the Soviet Union, on June 22, 1941.

Indeed, the chief of the German General Staff, Colonel General Franz Halder, wrote, “The Russians have lost this war in the first eight days! Their casualties—in both men and equipment—are unimaginable.”

He was both right and wrong as it turned out, and thus Adolf Hitler was not the only German who had underestimated the Soviets. The German field marshals and generals share in the blame for the debacle that was to come in the East.

The German Armed Forces High Command, the OKW, had originally counted on a 12-week war against the staggering Soviet Union, but under Stalin the Soviets rallied and came back stronger than ever.

The Blitzkrieg into Russia, featuring panzer armor divisions, was initially successful but ultimately failed. The Eastern Front war dragged on for four years and was characterized by unprecedented ferocity and loss of life, not only due to the war itself, but also to starvation, disease, slave-like working conditions, and the vast ethnic cleansing occurring under both Stalin and Hitler for different reasons.

The height of the Stalinist repression, the Great Terror, occurred in the late 1930s just prior to the German invasion. Minority nationalities inside the Soviet Union, including the Cossacks, were among those cruelly victimized during this period, especially those who posed resistance. Stalin ruthlessly expanded the collectivization program into an offensive against the peasantry. Millions were displaced, and millions were killed.

A significant number of Soviet citizens, including many of the Cossacks, therefore greeted the invading Germans as liberators. Thousands of ordinary Soviets became partisans in the German military.

Traditionally, the Cossacks derived mostly from the area of southern Ukraine. They had lived in clans that were designated by the name of the nearest major river, i.e., Don Cossacks, Kuban Cossacks, Ural Cossacks. Their superior horsemanship, proficiency with the saber, and colorful uniforms defined them. The great majority of them were loyal to the Romanov family, going all the way back to Catherine the Great. By the time of the last tsars, the Cossacks were widely viewed as a privileged military class.

During the Bolshevik revolution, sectors of the Cossacks put up some of the toughest resistance experienced anywhere by the Red Army. Therefore, after the Revolution, the Bolsheviks retaliated by destroying all feder-

In this photo from the German publication *Signal*, Cossacks dressed in German-issued uniforms tend their horses. Cossacks were delivered to Stalin's regime by the Western Allies after World War II.





**General Helmuth von Pannwitz poses on horseback with members of a Cossack division in 1944. Pannwitz was well respected among the Cossack fighters under his command.**

ated Cossack Republics in a terribly cruel manner, considering them all as part of “White Russia” (sympathetic to the tsar), though it wasn’t necessarily true.

Just after Russia’s poor military showing in the 1939 Russo-Finnish War, Stalin reintroduced the Cossacks into the Soviet military. Yet just 60 days after the beginning of World War II, the first major defection of Red Army soldiers to the German side occurred: It was a Cossack unit, the 436th Infantry, commanded by Major Ivan Nikitich Kononov. On August 3, 1941, fully 70,000 Cossacks went over to fight for the Germans. Another 50,000 joined them by October 1942. By that time, the German Army had established a semi-autonomous Cossack District from which they could recruit.

It should be emphasized that their defection to the German side was not done in favor of Nazism, but for the love of their homeland and for the cause of a second Russian Civil War. There was tremendous risk in going against the Red Army, however. Hitler declared that Russian soldiers would not be granted POW status, which meant captives would be treated as sub-human. Of the nearly six million Russians taken

prisoner after 1941, only 1.1 million lived to see the end of the war. Given the brutality of the Germans, it seems incomprehensible that so many of these people were still willing to don German uniforms. Such was their hatred of Stalin.

By February of 1945, when it was evident the Germans had all but lost the war, the Cossacks, under the leadership of German Maj. Gen. Helmuth von Pannwitz, wanted to surrender to the British Army in liberated Austria, to escape being returned to Stalinist tyranny. Negotiations were opened on this basis in good faith.

The fate of these Cossacks had already been decided, however, at Yalta in February, when British Prime Minister Winston Churchill, American President Franklin Roosevelt, and Russian Marshal Josef Stalin met to decide the final issues remaining from the war in Europe.

One issue on the table was called “reciprocal repatriation.” This discussion related to Allied prisoners in Germany liberated by Soviet forces and also to the prisoners of Soviet origin serving in the German Army, among whom the dissident Cossacks formed a major component.

A trilateral commission was established to

form an agreement acceptable to all three nations on issues including the displaced civilian populations.

Two basically identical agreements were signed on February 11, 1945, by the British and Americans. The British agreement stipulated that all Soviet citizens “liberated by the Allied armies—as soon as possible after their liberation—were to be separated from German prisoners of war and lodged in separate camps...” and “situated in camps or other localities to which the Soviet authorities responsible for their repatriation would have immediate access....”

“...The British authorities responsible would cooperate with their Soviet colleagues in the United Kingdom with a view to identifying all Soviet citizens who had been liberated and transferred to the UK.” The British would also “be responsible for the transport of Soviet citizens up unto the moment that said citizens would be handed over to Soviet authorities.”

As pointed out by noted authority Francois de Lannoy, “If there was nothing in the agreement that stated specifically the necessity of repatriating all Soviet citizens regardless of their wishes and—if necessary, by the use of force—it was well understood that from a legal point of view, that was what was intended.”

This, then, was the very crux of the thorny matter that would shatter the Cossack nation, bedevil the British civilian and military authorities in occupied Austria, and poison relations between the still anti-Red East and the West for decades afterward.

Concluded de Lannoy, “According to Stalin’s wishes, the contents of the agreements were kept secret, and did not figure in the final communiqué issued at the end of the Yalta Conference. It is evident, though, that had the details been published openly, those Soviet citizens serving the Wehrmacht who would’ve been well aware of their fate if returned to the Soviet Union (death, concentration camp, or deportation) would’ve taken all necessary steps to avoid falling into the hands of the Allies.”

“On Oct. 1, 1945, Gen. (later Marshal) Filip Ivanovich Golikov, responsible for repatriation of Soviet citizens after the war, announced that of 5,236,130 Soviets repatriated, 1,645,633 had found employment and 750,000 were waiting for a job. Of the remaining 2,840,367 of whom no further details were given, it is probable that they died in transit, were executed, or sent to concentration camps.

“At the time of the Yalta Conference, 100,000 Soviet soldiers serving the Wehrmacht had been captured by the Allied forces....The

Soviets ... had liberated 50,000 British POWs who had sought refuge in the Soviet Union, as well as far greater numbers of French soldiers...," most of whom had been captured by the Germans in 1940.

From the summer of 1941 through 1943, none of the top German political leaders involved with the Eastern Front wanted anything to do with Soviet POWs or Cossack turncoats fighting in German uniforms for the Third Reich. Then came the trio of crushing German defeats at Moscow, Stalingrad, and Kursk.

The first top Nazi to start changing his views of all Soviets as "sub-humans" was the Baltic-born German Alfred Rosenberg, Reich minister for the occupied Eastern Territories. He and his "Eastern politicians" were the first, besides the military, to realize that Nazi Germany could actually lose the war in the East. He also knew that millions of enslaved peoples saw themselves as fighting alongside the Germans, not for them, but were not willing to exchange the Red yoke for one of the swastika. It would have to be a genuine alliance.

As late as the summer of 1944, both Hitler and SS commanding general Heinrich Himmler denied this possibility, however, as did the powerful secretary to the Führer Martin Bormann and Prussian Regional Leader Erich Koch. Led by Rosenberg's ministry on the crucial theme of needed manpower, however, even they slowly changed their minds since it was evident that Nazi Germany would be drowned by Red Army hordes if they did not.

Meanwhile, even against Hitler's, the German Army in the East had begun training and equipping both dissident Cossacks and the so-called Russian Liberation Army (RONA) to fight the Soviets.

The man who really stepped to the fore of his own volition in September 1942 was the East German career cavalry officer, Helmuth von Pannwitz, who well knew that during the Russian Civil War Cossack "wolves" had taken no Bolshevik prisoners and were eager to kill them again.

It was Pannwitz who approached German Field Marshal Ewald von Kleist about accepting the Cossack offer to fight with the Germans, and he was given a tacit but cautious approval to start their recruiting, training, equipping, and arming.

Recruiting began with those who had already come over and continued with the masses being held in German POW camps. Pannwitz's goal was to build a first-rate cavalry division, while there remained an independent Cossack state within a self-governing Cossackia. This territory had been occupied by the Germans during

1942. He allowed his new charges to serve under their own officers and NCOs, over which was his hand-picked German cadre.

Asserted one eyewitness, "He did not intend to make Germans out of the Cossacks."

Pannwitz created a weekly newspaper titled *The Cossack Call* and insisted that his German cadres learn the more difficult Russian language. His former Soviet riders adapted to the German language far more easily.

He also restored unit church services and the recovery of dead bodies in the field for proper, Christian burial. Orthodox Russian chaplains were assigned to Cossack regiments, and the wearing of crosses and other religious ornaments was encouraged. Indeed, the Russian

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**A Cossack soldier trains with the German MG-42 machine gun. The MG-42 was known for its high rate of fire and distinctive sound on the battlefield. Bullets are being fed directly from the adjacent ammunition box.**

Orthodox Christmas was celebrated on January 6, 1944, with Pannwitz attending in full Cossack regalia.

Speaking at Hitler's military headquarters, General Wilhelm Burgdorf doubtless summed up the feelings of more traditional Army officers at Pannwitz's experiment saying, "Von Pannwitz looks quite savage with his crooked sword dangling in the scabbard down in front."

**Created a full Cossack general, Pannwitz was elected and re-elected as the field leader.** He also formed a personal Cossack guard. In addition, he managed to save the famous Cossack Museum until it disappeared at the end of the war. He formed the 1st Cossack Cavalry Division on April 23, 1943, and on March 31, 1944, he established the Cossack Central Administration.

Cossack weaponry, including captured Tokarev automatic pistols, was issued by the Germans. The Cossacks also carried shaska sabers and wore their beloved black burka capes and Astrakhan and Kubanka fur caps.

Despite his obvious affinity for them, Pannwitz ruled his men with typical German toughness, with penalties ranging from solitary confinement in darkened cells and flogging to execution for more serious offenses. Nevertheless, he was granted honorary Cossack nationality on March 21, 1944.

When Hitler personally awarded him a medal, the Führer asked Pannwitz slyly, "So how are things going with your Cossacks?" The Führer, despite the military's secrecy, was

well aware of what was going on.

The 1st Cossack Cavalry Division was ready to go into action and was assigned by the new chief of the General Staff, Colonel General Kurt Zeitzler, to fight in the Balkans. Noted one authority, "The sturdy Cossack horses were ideal for the Balkan mountains."

The main contribution of the Pannwitz Cossacks was soon to be freeing up German troops to fight elsewhere. Their Serbian-Croatian deployments included the September 1943 Operation Constantine to occupy areas formerly patrolled by the fascist Italian armed forces. Cossack units also took part in Operations Driving Hunt, Ball Lightning, and Autumn Storm.

Cossacks were deployed to Croatia and Bosnia in the autumn of 1943. They also fought the communist partisans in Northern Italy from

July 1944 to the end of the war. Stated one source, “The ‘North Croatian Fire Brigade’ emerged from the Cossacks.”

The regular German Army began changing its own initially poor assessment of the Cossack allies as they witnessed them fighting first as dismounted infantry and then as the mounted warriors they were justly famed to be. Still, the Cossack riders for the Reich had to wait until 1944 before being awarded the German military medals that they fully deserved and had earned in combat.

**Cossack forces were sent to fight Yugoslavian communist partisans in September, 1943.** With fully 270,000 men organized into 26 divisions, Tito was a threat that Nazi Germany simply could not ignore, especially as Churchill was then pressing for an invasion of southern Europe to forestall Stalin’s obvious drive to occupy the Balkans.

Pannwitz led his beloved riders into combat against the partisans in Operation Fruska-Gora on October 12, 1943, in their first real baptism of fire. After-action reports ranked them from performed “admirably” to “with mixed success.”

The Cossacks also took part in Operations Wild Sow, Panther, Santa Claus, and then Schach in March 1944, as well as Rosselsprung, the latter designed exclusively to either capture or kill Tito. In addition to these formal combat field operations, the Cossacks performed valuable service patrolling the railroad line from the Croatian capital of Zagreb to Belgrade, the capital of the German-occupied country. One report stated that the Cossacks “performed exceptionally well, inflicting heavy casualties on Tito’s forces.”

Another observer reported that they were “skillful in staging ambushes, executing flanking movements, and rear attacks in contrast to frontal assaults in a war of movement without front lines. Avoiding frontal attacks, they struck at the enemy’s rear.”

In August 1944, Himmler wanted to incorporate the Cossacks under Pannwitz and General Timotei Ivanovich Domanov into his own Waffen SS, and he officially sanctioned the Cossack cause despite the fact that he was vehemently anti-Slavic. He recruited first Ukrainians, and then Cossacks.

Indeed, as early as December 24, 1942, Himmler’s administrative chief, SS General Gottlob Berger, had proposed the formation of an SS Cossack police unit, but other top SS leaders balked so the plan was dropped. Gunther d’Alquen, editor of the SS newspaper *Das Schwarze Korps* (The Black Corps), also acted

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**Striking a regal pose, Colonel Ivan Nikitich Kononov sat for this portrait after receiving the German Iron Cross for bravery. Note his striking red cape and traditional headwear. Kononov commanded the 5th Don Cossack Regiment.**

as an agent of change to acquire the 1st Cossack Cavalry Division under the command of the ambitious Himmler.

Finally, on August 26, 1944, Himmler invited Pannwitz to meet with him aboard his personal command train to propose that the Waffen SS directly absorb all Cossack fighting forces. Taken aback, Pannwitz answered, “I have been in the Army since I was 15. To leave it now would seem like desertion.”

Switching tactics, the wily Himmler opted instead to have all Cossacks placed directly under Pannwitz’s command in a compromise agreement that would also see them set up in name only as the new SS XV Cossack Cavalry Corps, consisting of the old 1st and the new 2nd Divisions.

Thus, Himmler’s military vanity was at least partially satiated, and Pannwitz gained access to first-line SS supplies without actually making the Cossacks a part of the SS. It was, truly, a very fine distinction, and one that would not help either Pannwitz or the Cossacks when they fell under Allied control in 1945.

This shotgun marriage was consummated in September 1944; however, it was later characterized as “an unholy alliance that solved the supply problem” that had been dogging Pannwitz from the very start.

Valued by the Army for their scouting and reconnaissance abilities, the Cossacks jealously

guarded their authorization and command function against Himmler’s rapacious SS, and one general asserted, “The Cossacks must be ruthlessly exploited to the last and sacrifice their lives for us, the best they have to offer. They are just good enough for that!”

Ironically, the Cossacks fought but one battle against the Red Army, and this took place on Christmas Day, 1944, in Yugoslavia. In bitter hand-to-hand combat against the Soviet 133rd Infantry Division near the Drava River, the Cossacks routed the Russians. The 11th Luftwaffe Field Division had been assigned to fight alongside the SS XV Cossack Cavalry Corps.

By February 1945, Pannwitz could take pride in the fact that he had accomplished his original goal with the formation of yet a third cavalry division. In March, his expanded corps took part in Operations Forest Fever and Forest Devil.

In September 1944 the Germans moved Domanov’s Cossack forces west into Fascist-controlled Northern Italy. Fighting as they went, the Cossacks journeyed hundreds of miles across Poland, Germany, and Austria before they arrived at Gemona, Italy, in the Friuli region. Quartered around Tolmezzo, they numbered 24,000 men, women, and even children, a nation on the move.

On April 28, 1945, Domanov was confronted by a delegation of Italian officers who insisted that he surrender his arms and leave Italy immediately. The Cossack colonel balked at surrendering his men’s weapons but began the exodus to Austria the very next day. They entered Austria via the Plocken Pass, with colorful Cossack mounted units leading the way. Having reached the Austrian village of Mauth-Kotschach, the vanguard led the way to a settlement around Lienz.

Debating what to do next, it was mentioned that Field Marshal Alexander, who had been the British commander-in-chief against the Bolsheviks in 1918 in Courland on the Baltic Sea, might very well be the best and most sympathetic person with whom negotiations could be sought. Thus, a Cossack delegation of three men returned to Tolmezzo via the Plocken Pass route just traversed to meet with General Robert Arbuthnott, commanding officer of the British 78th Infantry Division.

Standing to deliver their plea, the Cossacks asked to be allowed to join General Andre Vlasov (of the Nazi-sponsored Russian Liberation Army) to continue fighting the Soviets. Startled, General Arbuthnott queried, “Who is General Vlasov?” After being told, the British general adhered to the Churchill-FDR demand of unconditional surrender enunciated at the

1943 Casablanca Conference: “You must hand over all your weapons without delay.”

He was then asked if the Cossacks would be considered Allied POWs. “No, that term only applies to those captured during the course of a battle,” the Britisher replied. British General Geoffrey Musson reiterated the same.

The next day, May 5, Musson visited Domanov, who was politely asked to move his masses to an area between Lienz and Oberdrauburg along the Drave (Drau) Valley, and under arms no less. This they did, willingly, during the second week of May, now after V-E Day. But some Cossack bands were still fighting five days after the German surrender.

Meanwhile, the Cossack high command simply ignored what little they did know of the Yalta agreements, merely assuming that the pre-1941 anti-Red Allies would welcome them in what they saw as the inevitable next phase of World War II—a joint Western Allied-Cossack holy war against land-hungry Communist Russia in Eastern Europe. If nothing else, the Cossacks were convinced that at least they would be granted political asylum by the democratic Western powers.

On VE-Day, May 8, 1945, two separate Cossack groups were being quartered in formerly Nazi Austria, close to the Slovenian border, then part of the former Yugoslavia that had been conquered by the Axis in April 1941. The initial group had been in northern Italy near Tolmezzo under the command of Ataman Domanov, with the second group of 18,000 of the XV SS Cossack Cavalry Corps dispersed across southern Austria under Pannwitz.

As the accepted overall leader of these Cossack units, Pannwitz prepared to negotiate with British Field Marshal Harold Alexander.

On May 17 Field Marshal Alexander asked for instructions from London about what to do with his newly acquired, ready-made army of anti-Bolsheviks so far from their native steppes. On the 18th, General Arbuthnott also visited the Cossack camp at Peggetz, touring the huts, laughing and joking, and even taking a special interest in the Cossacks’ young cadet corps.

This happy mood turned somber with a sudden jolt, however, when it was announced by Domanov that all of the Cossacks’ dearly beloved horses had been stolen, to which the British general officer dryly answered, “There are no Cossack horses here! All the horses now belong to His Majesty the King of England, and the Cossacks are his prisoners.” With this rude shock, the cat was truly out of the bag.

On May 24, British V Corps General Charles Keightley was instructed by higher

All: Author's Collection



**ABOVE:** Taking a firing position from behind his horse, a dismounted Cossack aims his rifle. The Cossacks saw the Germans as potential liberators from the oppressive communist regime of Josef Stalin. **BELOW:** Their skull and crossbones banner waving in the breeze, a band of fierce Cossacks charges with sabers drawn. The Cossacks proved to be highly mobile shock troops.



headquarters to hand over all Cossacks, without exception. “It is of the utmost importance that all the officers—particularly the most senior—are collected together, placed under guard, and that none of them escape.... The Soviet Forces place great importance on this, and consider without doubt—as a guarantee of good faith on the part of the British—that all the officers are handed over.”

Another put it more bluntly: “The officers will be shot,” by the NKVD, Stalin’s secret police.

A truckload of armed British troops arrived at the Cossack encampment on May 26 to seize all Cossack funds, some six million marks and an equal amount of Italian lire, deposited in the Lienz bank. The next day, May 27, the British demanded the surrender of all Cossack arms once more, and a rumor circulated across the camp that these would be replaced by British weaponry, a case of both self-denial and wishful thinking. More ominously, however, Arbuthnott issued an order declaring that all Cossacks found with weapons would be both

arrested and subject to the death penalty. Resistance would be met with the order to open fire.

Debate among the Cossacks centered on believing the British would protect them, doubting their good intentions, and a failed option of sending the women and children away from the camps to avoid any unexpected and hostile developments.

Pannwitz described the formal surrender scene in a letter to his wife, with enlisted soldiers laying down their weapons and officers allowed to keep their side arms, as per military tradition. Still, though, “the Cossack Corps was dead,” he lamented.

On May 28, Domanov ordered all his officers to assemble at Lienz and Peggetz in the belief that the British would return them there that same day. They were then conveyed away by cars, with 2,000 officers remaining in the Peggetz square. Some of the older ones wore their decorations earned fighting for their Little Father, the murdered Czar Nicholas II, in their part in the Great War, 1914-1916. Many wore the colorful and traditional Cossack garb.

These officers were put aboard a convoy of 60 British Army trucks. According to Huxley-Blyth, "The convoy consisted of four buses, 58 trucks, eight vans, and four Red Cross cars. The British escort consisted of 140 drivers and co-drivers, 30 officers, and five interpreters. To these must be added several jeeps with 25 light Bren machine guns and motorcyclists."

Shortly afterward, the convoy was also surrounded by tanks, allegedly to protect the officers from rogue German SS men in the nearby forests.

Meanwhile, Domanov reached the suburbs of Oberdrauburg at the headquarters of the British 36th Infantry Brigade, where Musson bluntly shattered whatever illusions he had left: "I have to inform you, sir, that I have received formal orders to hand over the Cossack Division in its entirety to the Soviet authorities. I regret having to tell you that, but it is an order. Good day!"

Later, even the ruthless NKVD secret police would cynically sneer, "They're a grand lot, the English."

Also on May 28, the officers were enclosed by barbed wire at an old former POW camp near Spital, where a full British regiment was stationed. The soldiers there had been ordered: "Any attempt at resistance will be firmly suppressed. If you are forced to open fire, you will shoot to kill. Any attempt at suicide will be prevented if it presents a danger to our men. If it does not, they will be allowed to commit suicide."

The Cossack officers quite naturally panicked, tore their rank insignia from their uniforms, and destroyed their personal papers in a vain attempt to somehow stymie the dreaded Red secret police, the NKVD of Laventi P. Beria, the man even Stalin had cynically introduced to Joachim von Ribbentrop at the Kremlin in August 1939 as "My Himmler."

That night, while Domanov dined with the British officers at their invitation, the first Cossack senior officer hanged himself.

The next morning, May 29, trucks again arrived to take the officers to their new jailers, but they sat on the ground refusing to budge. Noted Lannoy, "For several minutes, the (British) soldiers beat and kicked the Cossack officers, raining blows down on them with boots, rifle butts, and fists. Some of the victims were beaten senseless, and the British used the opportunity to prod them with their bayonets. This treatment proved effective, and loading commenced."

During the journey, several more officers killed themselves, while others escaped by jumping out of the trucks until after many

hours the convoy arrived at the border of the Soviet Austrian Zone of Occupation at Judenburg near Graz in the Mur Valley.

Unloaded from the trucks as more suicides occurred, it was here that the officers were finally joined by their overall commander, Pannwitz, elected by them to be their first and only foreign-born leader.

From Judenburg, all the senior officers were moved to Graz, then Baden outside Vienna, to the Red Army counterintelligence center for interrogations. Following that, they were transferred to Moscow's notorious NKVD Lubyanka Prison, where the captured survivors of Hitler's Berlin bunker also wound up, many for 10 years' imprisonment.

**After the seizure of the officers, an order was issued on the evening of May 28 for all of Domanov's NCOs to assemble at the Pegetz encampment the next day at 9 AM. A proclamation was read: "Cossacks! Your officers have betrayed and misled you. They have been arrested and will not be coming back. You no longer have to believe in them or submit to their authority. You can now denounce their lies and freely express your convictions and hopes. It has been decided that all the Cossacks will be returned to their country."**

Pandemonium immediately ensued as the enraged NCOs surged forward in a body, declaring, "No! Our chiefs are not traitors, and no one has the right to dishonor them! All the Cossacks love and respect their officers. May they come back, and we will follow them to the end of the world!"

Refusing to eat and throwing their foreign passports in the faces of the embarrassed British officers, the NCOs roared out, "How can you do this to us? We are not Soviet citizens! In 1920, you sent warships to the Dardanelles to save us from the Bolsheviks, and now you are going to hand us over to them!"

Black flags were hoisted in the camp, religious services were held, and the remaining horses were killed by their own grieving riders. On June 1, during and after the last religious service, a battalion of the Argyll and Sutherland Highlanders Regiment arrived with another convoy of trucks. "Armed with rifles and pickaxe handles," noted Lannoy, "the (Scottish) soldiers forced their way into the packed ranks, made a breach, and isolated about 200 Cossacks."

Noted Major Davies's official report, "The men formed a compact mass, tightly gripping one another, and it was necessary to force them apart one by one, starting at the extremities. The rest glued themselves even tighter together

... But then panic spread ... building a screaming pyramid that stifled those at the bottom... A man and a woman remained behind, dead by suffocation....

"Once loaded, the trucks set off ... and arrived at the railway line. There the Cossacks were unloaded and thrown into cattle cars with solid grills over the windows, and the doors were barred, while at the end of the train was a flat car on which were soldiers armed with machine guns."

One can only guess at how the individual British officers and enlisted men felt about carrying out such a loathsome task. As a second group at Pegetz was pushed toward the trucks, many Cossacks cried out, "Get back Satan, Christ shall triumph! Lord, have mercy upon us!" One woman and a Tommy had a veritable tug of war over her child's leg and body, "until, finally, the mother was exhausted, and the child was crushed against the truck.... The altar was overturned, and the priestly vestments ripped."

Stated one source, "The soldiers redoubled their violence, and the rifle butts hammered down indiscriminately on men, women, and children. The priests and their assistants were forced to the ground in their vestments.... All were convinced—not without reason—that life in the Soviet Union would be worse than death."

The first train left with 1,252 Cossacks aboard and many more to follow. According to a witness named Olga Rotova, "More than 700 Cossacks were dead as a result of those operations, either crushed underfoot, killed by the British, or committed suicide."

The enforced evacuations continued up to June 15, 1945, and "during those 15 days," asserted Lannoy, "22,502 Cossacks were packed into the cattle cars and sent into the Soviet Zone.... Several thousand managed to escape and sought refuge in the mountains, where they were mercilessly pursued by the British, who, helped by Soviet Special Forces, organized large-scale manhunts."

During three weeks in June, 1,356 Cossacks and Caucasians were recaptured, and of them, 934 were transferred to Judenburg and later to Graz, where, according to the British soldiers who escorted them, they were all massacred.

Meanwhile, the main body of Pannwitz's XV SS Cossack Cavalry Corpsmen suffered a similar fate. There were 20,000 assembled on May 8 at the time of the general Axis Pact surrender, about 80 kilometers east of the Domanov Cossacks, between Volkermarkt and Wolfsberg.

Sometime during May 9-10, British SOE (Special Operations Executive) officer Charles Villiers visited the headquarters of Pannwitz and immediately received the surrender of all

his armed men, with the sole condition that they not be turned over to the hated communists. One of Pannwitz's own staff officers had even served in Courland in 1918 against the Bolsheviks with the younger Harold Alexander, and thus all felt that political asylum among their former British allies in the Russian Civil War era was possible.

After sending the venerable field marshal a letter on May 9 and hearing nothing, Pannwitz decided to visit the latter's headquarters himself. He was told by a British major that all his men would have to surrender all their weapons on May 11, and this proceeded apace without incident. Piles of 1st Cossack Division rifles mounted at the area assigned to the British Army's 6th Armored Division at Feldkirchen, Austria.

On May 15, Pannwitz and his senior officers learned that it was rumored that all of them were to be handed over forthwith to the Red Army. Given a possibility of escape with his own German officers, Pannwitz had nonetheless decided to stay with his beloved Cossack horsemen. Having joined his Cossacks voluntarily for a certain death by execution at the hands of the hated Bolsheviks, "Der Pann" as he was nicknamed, still wore his colorful Kuban papacha cap.

True to form to his deeply held code of honor, he stated, "I have been with the Cossacks in the good times, and now I must remain with them in the bad."

A Major von Eltz later testified that Pannwitz even briefly believed, "They were going to send the cavalry corps to Iran to fight communists who were trying to seize control of Azerbaijan Province ... Pannwitz thought that the Cossack Cavalry Corps would be kept intact by the British, and transported to an island somewhere in the Pacific to be transformed into a sort of foreign legion." These illusions were shattered and rumors caused dissension among Pannwitz's own leadership cadre of German and Cossack officers. Nevertheless, on May 22 Pannwitz was reelected leader by his Cossacks.

**Meanwhile, British and Soviet officers met at Wolfsberg and hammered out an official, bilateral document that defined the Allied view of the doomed Cossacks: They are "a special unit belonging to the SS anti-Partisan forces and comprising a collection of White bandits and counterrevolutionaries paid by the Germans."**

At least 500 German officers and men escaped (some accounts assert with British connivance) before May 26, when the British informed Pannwitz that he had been removed from command. Pannwitz, 144 offi-

akg-images



**Cossacks confer during a lull in the fighting at the Cuba bridgehead in 1943. The Cossacks fought bravely against the Red Army and were eventually handed over to the communists by the Western Allies.**

cers, and 690 other ranks who were Germans were also arrested, but even some of them managed to escape.

On May 28, Pannwitz and his officers passed into Soviet hands along with Domanov's officers. Lieutenant V.B. English, guarding the bridge at Judenburg, described the scene: "Von Pannwitz was very tall. He got out of the car, drew himself up to his full height and looked around.... He understood what was going on. He then advanced very slowly toward the Russians, with everyone looking at him.... He saluted them. It was almost as if he was taking part in a film."

Another official account stated that, upon seeing the Russians, he raised his hands in the air and cried out, "My God!"

Taken to Graz on May 30, he arrived at Baden

on June 3, and then was taken by train to Moscow and his doom. Noted General Keightley afterward, "In the circumstances, our personal sentiments had to be disregarded. We had an enormous crowd of refugees on our hands, of all nations and in a critical condition."

Most Cossack senior officers were tried, convicted, sentenced to death, and executed. The remainder were imprisoned for long terms.

The six most senior Cossack leaders, among them Pannwitz, were all hanged in the Lubyanka Prison courtyard at 10:45 PM on January 16, 1947.

In all, according to one official report, "2,126 officers were handed over to the Soviets, 12 (all of them ex-generals in the White, anti-Bolshevik armies from the 1918-1920 Civil War) were

*Continued on page 89*

## THREE GAMES FOR BUDDING TACTICIANS

*Branching out into the Napoleonic Wars and Korea.*

There may not be a lot of big names in the modern warfare game coming out over the remainder of 2010 and the first few months of 2011, but that doesn't mean that WWII-based titles are completely off the radar. In fact, it's more or less business as usual on the PC front, especially when it comes to strategy-based takes on the war. With that in mind, we've highlighted a little bit of everything for all the budding tacticians out there, focusing on a few titles scheduled to hit between now and the first quarter of next year.

A couple of these titles also branch out to other classic contentions, from the not-so-distant "Forgotten War"—a subject rarely tack-

As the fifth in the *Total War* line—with *Shogun*, *Medieval*, *Rome*, and *Medieval II* preceding it—the real treat that *Empire* brought to the series was enhanced multi-player. While playing against others in real-time battles was already an established aspect of the franchise, *Empire* added a full campaign multi-player mode to the mix. This robust feature continued on in *Napoleon*, which also

tially dangerous gateway drug. Sure, you start by dabbling in some harmless Napoleonic action, but next thing you know you're knee deep in everything from barbarian invasions



led in games of any kind—to a spin in time back to the 18th century, where the building blocks of modern warfare continued to pile atop one another. Choose your sides carefully, and know that cutting-edge simulated glances into the crystal ball of war are constantly popping up on the horizon.

### EMPIRE: TOTAL WAR GOLD EDITION

The Creative Assembly has been working especially hard over the last year and some change, bringing both *Empire: Total War* in 2009 and *Napoleon: Total War* in 2010. Well, there's good news for anyone who slept on these real-time strategy gems, because Sega is publishing both together in a tight package dubbed *Empire: Total War Gold Edition*.

added a uniform editor for those that hold their combative carriage a crucial component to victory.

Critically, both *Empire* and *Napoleon* have lived up to the expectations set by the series' pedigree. It's the ideal destination for anyone looking for a full-flavored experience outside of the trappings of World War II. In that regard, consider *Empire: Total War Gold Edition* a poten-



<b>PUBLISHER</b>	Sega
<b>DEVELOPER</b>	The Creative Assembly
<b>SYSTEM(S)</b>	PC
<b>AVAILABLE</b>	Q4 2010

to the warring fiefdoms of 16th century Japan. Don't say we didn't warn you.

### PANZER COMMAND: OSTFRONT

As the title implies, Black Hand Studios' *Panzer Command: Ostfront* puts you in the shoes of a company-level commander fighting on the Eastern Front. You can choose to play on either the German or Soviet side in a series of turn-based tactical battles set on a variety of authentic historical campaigns.

*Ostfront* diverges from the pack in its customizability. Outside of the preset historical scenarios lies an infinite amount of randomly generated battles; sprawling fields on which you can wage war against an improved AI system. Of even more interest to fans of tinkering



**PUBLISHER**  
Matrix Games

**DEVELOPER**  
Black Hand Studios

**SYSTEM(S)**  
PC

**AVAILABLE**  
Q4 2010

on designs of their own construct is the Map Maker, which provides tools for the creation of maps ranging from 500m to 2km in size. This is just one of the aspects that lends the game a Mod-Friendly atmosphere, something that extends to unit models, scenarios, campaigns, and more. Though no word is currently out on whether or not *Ostfront* delivers all the promises made by



Black Hand Studios, the potential is certainly there. It's positioned to dance on an intermediate level of complexity, so it may be perfect for those looking for that "just right" bowl of porridge when it comes to how deeply intricate their strategy games are. We'll find out if these fights on the theater of the Eastern Front are truly worth waging later this year.

### THEATER OF WAR 3: KOREA

Even when we're trying our darndest to stay focused on World War II specifically, it's tough to ignore one of the very few times the Korean War has entered the gaming landscape; after all, they don't call it *The Forgotten War* for nothing. *Theater of War 3: Korea* is a fresh expansion of *Theater of War*, a series started by developer 1C Company in 2007. Since its release, 1C has developed quite the line of followups under the *Theater of War 2* moniker, including *Africa 1943*, *Centauro*, and *Kursk 1943*.

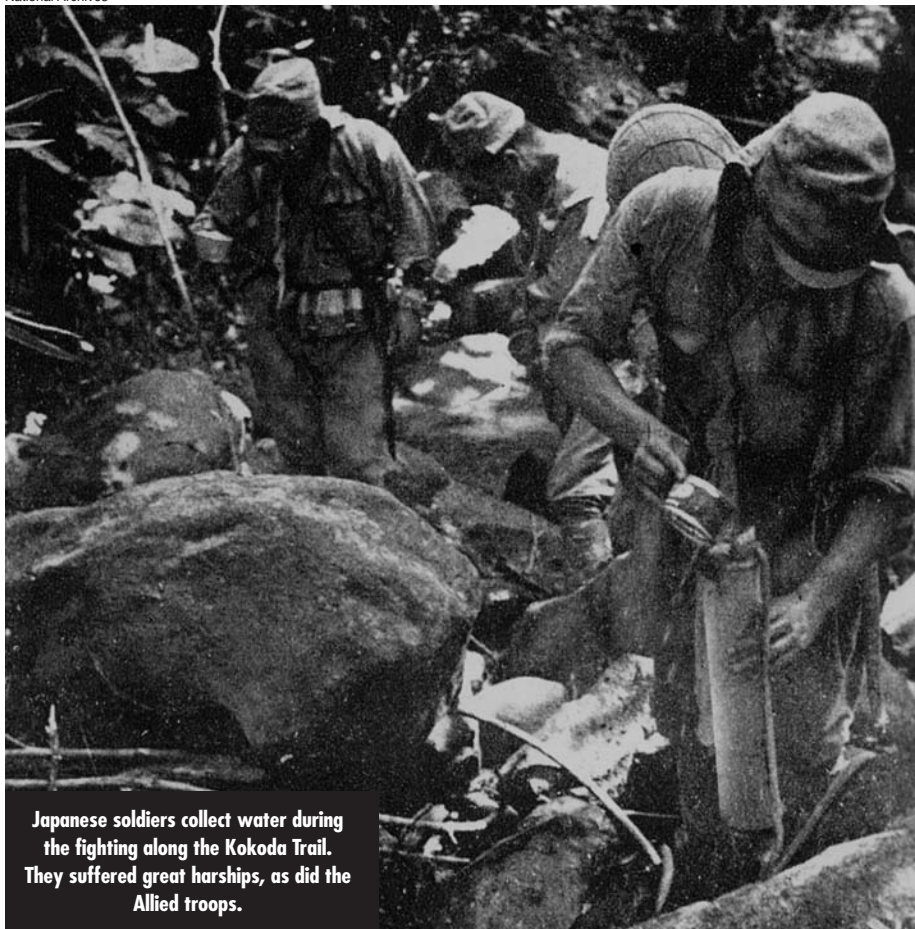
Those names alone show the experience 1C has in the theater of World War II specifically, so it's cool to see them branching out a little and zipping us ahead into the following decade. Both campaigns of *Korea* are set in 1950, and they concern the North Korean (June 25-August 20) and the American (September 15-October 8) sides. The battles in these campaigns will take players all over the Korean Peninsula, and involve strategies that run deep into resource management (reserves,



fuel, ammo supply, etc.) territory.

With nonlinear dynamic campaigns and a control system that focuses more on squads than individual soldiers, *Korea* should have something new in store even for those well-versed in *Theater of War's* previous entries. Interestingly enough, the game was originally known as *Theater of War 2: Korea*, but the name was changed thanks to some delays in development. Hopefully we'll get a chance to give it a spin sooner or later, or else we may end up previewing *Theater of War 4: Korea* in a future issue.

National Archives



Japanese soldiers collect water during the fighting along the Kokoda Trail. They suffered great hardships, as did the Allied troops.

## Skeletons Disguised as Humans

Authors take a new look at the Kokoda Trail campaign—from the Japanese perspective.

**JUST MONTHS AFTER GENERAL DOUGLAS MACARTHUR MADE HIS WAY** from Philippines via PT-boat to reach Australia, Allied forces, mostly composed of Australian and native troops, took the offensive against the enemy to New Guinea. From July to November 1942, a series of pitched battles and numerous skirmishes took place on the Kokoda Trail, or Track, as the Aussies referred to it.

In their new book, *The Path of Infinite Sorrow: The Japanese on the Kokoda Track* (Allen & Unwin, New South Wales, Australia, 2010, 324 pp., photos, maps, notes, index, \$24.95, softcover), Craig Collie and Hajime Marutani examine the Kokoda campaign with a fresh twist, from the viewpoint of the Japanese survivors.

The Kokoda Trail winds its way from outside Port Moresby on the island's southeast coast to Buna on the northeast shoreline. The distance of the single-file path is estimated to be anywhere from 40 to 60 miles, through the Owen Stanley Mountains, in some of the most rugged and treacherous terrain in the world.

Soon after the Japanese landings at Buna, Gona, and Sanananda, the two sides clashed. Ele-

ments of the 39th Battalion fought at Awala. A platoon from Captain Sam Templeton's Company B attempted to halt the Japanese advance but had to withdraw. The Kokoda airstrip was eventually seized by the Japanese after a spirited defense by the Australians. Soon, Australian units began to pour into New Guinea to reinforce the beleaguered 39th Battalion.

Despite the hardships faced by the Allies, the Japanese had it much worse during the campaign. Disease and malnutrition took their toll. As supply transports were sunk, the Japanese soldier was forced to do the unthinkable—eat the flesh from the dead—becoming a cannibal.

When Buna fell, the enemy camp at Giruwa was encircled and came under intense air and ground attacks. Their supply lines severed, one survivor of the battle described the horrific ordeal to the authors.

“No one who was at Giruwa could have survived that siege without eating human flesh,” claims (Private Kokichi) Nishimura, “and that was the truth of it. Nobody wanted to do it, but it was their last resort. It was eat, or die.”

By the beginning of 1943, Japanese resistance on New Guinea had ceased with the fall of Buna and Gona. It was not until March 1943, that the remnants of the once mighty 41st and 144th Regiments were evacuated by barge from the hellish fighting they had suffered in New Guinea. When one newly arrived Japanese officer complained that the survivors did not salute him, one individual remarked: “Well, we are no longer soldiers, just skeletons disguised as humans.”

The Japanese suffered an estimated 6,500 casualties during the six-month-long campaign. It was indeed brutal. The rules of the Geneva Convention were routinely disregarded—prisoners were usually summarily executed—on both sides. Some Japanese were convicted of war crimes after the war, including the murder of two female missionaries.

But it was the common foot soldier who endured incredible suffering during the struggle for control of the Kokoda Trail, with the Japanese infantryman experiencing the worst of it. Because of an ill-conceived strategy, their ranks were decimated.

When Corpsman Yori-ichi Yokoyama returned to New Guinea in 2005, he brought along 250 pairs of sandals in the memory of his fallen comrades. He dropped some in the Kumusi River, and one of the authors placed the



*You deserve a factual look at . . .*

## **The Unrelenting and Virulent Hatred of the Arabs**

### **Will peace ever be possible under those conditions?**

After more than sixty years of statehood, Israel is a lone outpost of Western civilization and its values. It is the staunchest ally of the United States in that part of the world – a bulwark of democracy. The Arab nations surrounding it are a swamp of terrorism, corruption, dictatorship, and human enslavement. But the hatred of the Arabs against Israel and against all Jews is so abiding and so virulent that peace, at least for the foreseeable future, seems unattainable and most unlikely.

#### **What are the facts?**

No “sacrifice” will overcome the hatred. There are those who still believe that the never-ending conflict between the Arabs and the Jews could be settled if the Israelis were willing to bring greater “sacrifices for peace.” Such “sacrifices” would include relinquishing ever-larger portions of their tiny country (less than half the size of San Bernardino County in California) to the Palestinians, dismantling the “settlements” in Judea/Samaria (the “West Bank”), handing the Golan Heights to Syria, and allowing the “return of the refugees,” a group that has grown miraculously from about 500,000 to somewhere around 5 million. The absorption of even a substantial fraction of them would signify the demographic end of the Jewish states.

Israel, ill-advisedly, vacated Gaza. It was rewarded with daily barrages of Qassam rockets. In the north, after Israel had abandoned its southern Lebanon buffer zone, Hizbollah (the “Army of God”) launched the second “Lebanon War.” It must now be clear to even the most confirmed “doves” that nothing that Israel could do, any further “sacrifice” that Israel would be prepared to bring, would satisfy the Arabs. The sad but irrefutable conclusion is that only the complete disappearance of Israel, the excision of this “cancer” could satisfy the Arabs and most of the Muslim world.

**Mortal hatred and the “Big Lie.”** The “Big Lie,” invented by the notorious Joseph Goebbels of Nazi infamy, is a mainstay of Arab hatred and propaganda. In Egypt and Jordan (the two Arab countries technically at peace with Israel), government-controlled news sources published that Israel had distributed drug-laced chewing gum and candy to

This bottomless hatred, a hatred that pervades the Arab world in all strata of society and is incessantly fomented by Arab governments, including those supposed to be “at peace” with Israel, cannot be assuaged by negotiation or by making any further “sacrifices for peace.” Nothing will suffice, except the destruction of Israel. The Arab states, having been unable in over sixty years and in many wars to defeat and exterminate the Jews, are now feverishly arming themselves with “conventional weapons” (easily purchased from the West, including, sad to say, from the United States), and are ardently pursuing the development of weapons of mass annihilation. Just as the suicide bombers do not vacillate to sacrifice themselves, one can safely expect that, once in possession of such weapons, the Arabs will not hesitate to sacrifice millions of their own people in order to destroy Israel. Israel’s only course in the face of this almost certain prospect is to assume its previous stance of unflinching deterrence and, as it once did in the destruction of the Iraqi atomic reactor at Osirak in 1981, not to be inhibited by “international opinion” to preempt resolutely if it appears necessary to assure survival of the country.

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# **FLAME**

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

kill children and to make women sexually corrupt. The Jews (Israelis) are being accused of having introduced foot-and-mouth disease in the Middle East. The age-old calumny of Jews using the blood of Christian and Muslim children in order to bake their Passover matzos is alive and well in Arab publications. Translations of Adolf Hitler’s “Mein Kampf” and the “Protocols of the Elders of Zion” are steady best-sellers in all Arab countries. Among other malevolent fabrications, it accuses “international Jewry” of “limitless ambition, inexhaustible greed, and hatred beyond imagination.” Schools, streets and plazas are named after notorious murderers of Jews.

In the controlled Arab press, Holocaust denial and accusation of the Zionists having been in cahoots with the German Nazis are regular features. Egypt’s government-sponsored *Al Akhbar* newspaper has expressed fervent thanks to Adolf Hitler for having taken advance revenge on the “vilest criminals on the face of the earth.” Still, it berated him for not having been thorough enough in his task of extermination. The Arabs do not consider Israel a normal country, but a creation of the devil, an excrescence, a malignant force of aggressors, murderers, infidels and barbarians. It should be destroyed, for the glory of God, no matter what sacrifices that might entail.

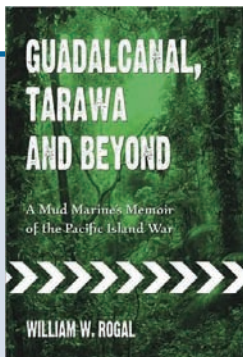
Mortal hatred against Israel and against the Jews is taught to Arab children from the very first grade. Children are encouraged to sacrifice themselves as martyrs and to become suicide bombers and human missiles, with promises that Paradise with unimaginable pleasures awaits those who sacrifice themselves in the holy cause of killing Jews.

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.

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## Short Bursts



**Guadalcanal, Tarawa and Beyond: A Mud Marine's Memoir of the Pacific Island War** by William W. Rogal, McFarland & Company Publishers, Jefferson, NC, 2010, 214 pp., photos, maps, index, \$29.95, softcover.

Retired attorney William Rogal has certainly seen his share of combat. As a member of Company A, 1st Battalion, 2nd Marines, 2nd Marine Division, he participated in some of the bloodiest campaigns of World War II—Guadalcanal, Tarawa, Saipan, and Tinian.

His chapter on Guadalcanal is most enlightening. Whenever historians write about the island campaign, all attention is usually given to the 1st Marine Division when the ground action is discussed. Rogal is quick to point out that the 2nd Marine Division also participated.

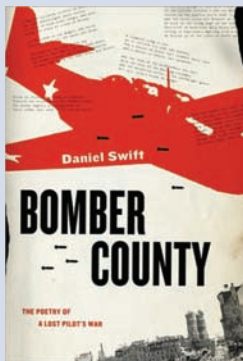
Rogal's autobiographical account provides a wonderful personal snapshot into the larger events occurring around him. It is a good addition to the collections of those particularly interested in the Pacific War, from the infantryman's point of view.



**Battle of the Bulge** by Steven J. Zaloga, Osprey Publishing, Long Island City, NY, 2010, 280 pp., photos, maps, \$25.95, softcover.

For more than two months in late 1944 and early 1945, German and Allied forces slugged it out in the bone-chilling cold of the Ardennes Forest in Belgium, Luxembourg, and France. The snow-covered region saw savage combat as Nazi troops attempted to stem the Allied drive deeper into Europe.

The enemy offensive enjoyed some early success when it began on December 16, 1944, especially when severe weather conditions prevented the Allies from supporting the ground forces around the small Belgian hamlet of Bastogne. However, when the skies cleared the full weight of the American and British juggernaut drove Hitler's army back to the Siegfried Line.



Osprey's latest offering includes numerous photographs of the fighting and three-dimensional maps of the area that will assist the reader in following the movements of the two armies.

**Bomber County: The Poetry of a Lost Pilot's War** by Daniel Swift, Farrar, Straus and Giroux, New York, 2010, 304 pp., notes, photos, \$26.00, hardcover.

While investigating the death of his grandfather in World War II, author Daniel Swift made the remarkable connection between poetry and war. In June 1943, James Eric Swift, a pilot with No. 83 Squadron of the Royal Air Force, took off in the inky blackness of the English night for a bombing raid over Munster, Germany.

Swift's Avro Lancaster bomber crashed, and his body later was washed ashore on the northern coast of Holland. Thirty-one other airmen from various countries also came on shore in the same manner after their aircraft went down.

The author discovered a link with the bombing campaigns of the war and the poetry written in an attempt to express the feelings of those who did the bombing and those who experienced it. It is an interesting point of view—and an absorbing account.

**Eisenhower & Montgomery at the Falaise Gap** by William Weidner, Xlibris Corporation, Bloomington, IN, 2010, 400 pp., photos, index, maps, \$29.99, hardcover.

The Battle of the Falaise Gap fought in August 1944 has often been referred to as the killing fields for the German Army. By destroying the bulk of the German Army in the West, the Allies opened the road to strike deeper into Europe and at the heart of Germany itself.

However, writer William Weidner strongly disagrees with this analysis of the events at the Falaise Gap, stating that some historians have purposefully whitewashed what really hap-

pened. He asserts that British General Bernard Montgomery "ordered the Americans to halt on the inter-Army Group boundary just south of Argentan." With this order, Weidner contends that "the Anglo-American military alliance was compromised."

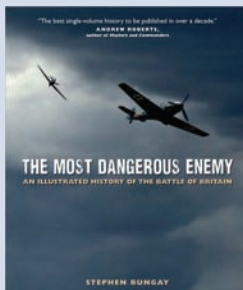
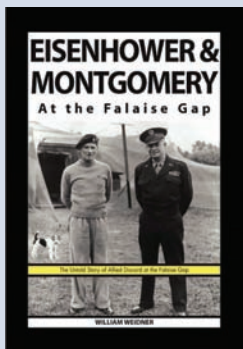
Weidner's book is a good read and focuses on the often rocky relationship between Montgomery and Supreme Allied Commander General Dwight D. Eisenhower. The eccentric British general possessed a strong dislike for Americans and often disobeyed orders. Eisenhower had to proceed with extreme caution when dealing with him so as not to incur the displeasure of the British government.

In March 1945, Eisenhower finally took back control of the U.S. Ninth Army from Montgomery, to whom its command had been given during the Battle of the Bulge, and gave priority to General Omar Bradley's U.S. 12th Army Group. This, in Weidner's opinion, brought "a swift end to war."

**The Most Dangerous Enemy: An Illustrated History of the Battle of Britain** by Stephen Bungay, Zenith Press, Minneapolis, MN, 2010, 272 pp., photos, maps, index, \$40.00, hardcover.

This coffee table book has some incredible photos and maps detailing the nearly four-month long air campaign commonly referred to as the Battle of Britain. Unit designations, types of aircraft, leaders, strategies, and the combat itself are all discussed.

With the defeat and humiliating evacuation of British forces from Dunkirk, German leader Adolf Hitler thought he had Great Britain on her knees. However, the maniacal Nazi dictator failed to appreciate the extraordinary will of the British people. Outnumbered and outgunned, RAF pilots took to the skies and battled the experienced Luftwaffe pilots over their homeland. By October, they had won. It was one of the major turning points of World War II. □





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## African Gem Cutter Makes \$2,689,000 Mistake...Will You?

This story breaks my heart every time. Allegedly, just two years after the discovery of tanzanite in 1967, a Maasai tribesman knocked on the door of a gem cutter's office in Nairobi. The Maasai had brought along an enormous chunk of tanzanite and he was looking to sell. His asking price? Fifty dollars. But the gem cutter was suspicious and assumed that a stone so large could only be glass. The cutter told the tribesman, no thanks, and sent him on his way. Huge mistake. It turns out that the gem was genuine and would have easily dwarfed the world's largest cut tanzanite at the time. Based on common pricing, that "chunk" could have been worth close to \$3,000,000!

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**In the decades since its discovery, tanzanite has become one of the world's most coveted gemstones.** Found in only one remote place on Earth (in Tanzania's Merelani Hills, in the shadow of Mount Kilimanjaro), the precious purple stone is 1,000 times rarer than diamonds. Luxury retailers have been quick to sound the alarm, warning that supplies of tanzanite will not last forever. And in this case, they're right. Once the last purple gem is pulled from the Earth, that's it. No more tanzanite. Most believe that we only have a few years supply left, which is why it's so amazing for us to offer this incredible price break. Some retailers along Fifth Avenue are more than happy to charge you outrageous prices for this rarity. Not Stauer. Staying true to our contrarian nature, we've decided to *lower the price of one of the world's rarest and most popular gemstones.*

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rest of the shoes along the trail.

“The demons in the far reaches of Private Yokoyama’s imaginings had been chased away,” they wrote. “By his gesture, the spirits of men in the 41st and 144th Infantry Regiments of the Imperial Japanese Army were now able to march freely back up the path of infinite sorrow to a better world.”

*The Hitler I Knew: Memoirs of the Third Reich’s Press Chief*, by Otto Dietrich, Skyhorse Publishing, New York, 2010, 242 pp., photos, \$24.95, hardcover.

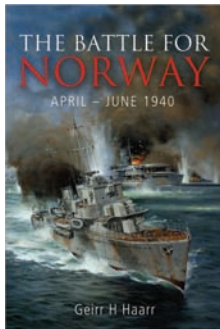
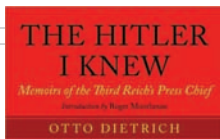
Here is a captivating book by a virtually unknown personality in Adolf Hitler’s inner circle. Otto Dietrich, a decorated World War I soldier, attended school after the conflict, but became disenchanted with German society and where it was headed. He became fascinated with the Nazi Party, joining its ranks. In 1931, he met and became a close associate and confidante to Hitler; it was a friendship that would last until the waning days of World War II.

Dietrich was captured by the British and was imprisoned for war crimes. His seven-year sentence was reduced to only 18 months, but he spent that time in isolation to pen this account of his intimate view of Hitler’s life. Dietrich did not want his manuscript to be published until after his death. He passed away in 1952, and his manuscript was finally released in 1955. It serves as an insight into the inner workings of the maniacal despot who took Germany to unmitigated disaster in 1945.

Hitler was a man of contradictions, according to Dietrich. A person who sent millions to their deaths in his infamous concentration camps, he had a strong empathy for animals. He forbade hunting on his estate and, at one point, forbade newspapers from even mentioning the subject.

Perhaps his favorite room in the Berghof, his home in the Austrian Alps, was the main salon. Here he frequently met with his high command to plot strategy and make military decisions. It was here, comments Dietrich, that the German leader witnessed his many victories—as well as his numerous setbacks and defeats. Nonetheless, this “imposing room” saw his emotions range from extreme ecstasy to violent outbursts.

Another fascinating point that Dietrich makes is Hitler’s lack of a family life. He states that his step-brother, who operated a restaurant in Berlin, could not be discussed in his



presence. His decision not to marry and have a family put him at a severe disadvantage with other people. His disastrous relations with females were another important aspect of the Führer’s life, and how he perceived his surroundings. “Of the six women who stood in a close relationship to him in his life, five died by suicide, or had attempted suicide,” writes Dietrich.

Historian Roger Moorhouse, who wrote the introduction, does criticize Dietrich for making scant mention of the Holocaust and his part in it. In his opinion, however, Dietrich skillfully examines Hitler’s personal and political life. There were two vastly different views of the man—one a father-like personality to the German people, the other a “diabolical megalomaniac.”

“Otto Dietrich was an important eyewitness from the period of the Third Reich,” says Moorhouse. “Representative of the middle-class, intellectual wing of Nazism, he was highly educated and politically aware, yet also one who clearly suffered from a profound moral myopia. His book is as fascinating for its observations, as it is for its omissions.”

*The Battle for Norway, April-June 1940* by Geirr H. Haarr, Naval Institute Press, Annapolis, MD, 2010, 458 pp., index, notes, photos, maps, \$52.95, hardcover.

Because of its dependence on iron ore, Germany considered Norway of vital importance during World War II. By seizing its seaports, the Nazis could ship the material to plants for their war machine. When the country was invaded, both Great Britain and France sent troops to the beleaguered nation to defend against the German onslaught. Unfortunately, when France was on the brink of collapse, the Allied expeditionary force was withdrawn, and Norway was left to face the enemy juggernaut on her own.

The author, Geirr Haarr, who resides in Norway, focuses on the naval campaign of the German invasion. It was dubbed Operation Weserübung by the Nazis and, as Haarr points out, it “was the first modern campaign in which sea, air

and ground forces acted together so decisively.”

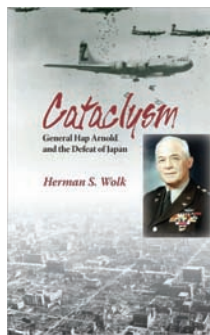
Unfortunately, the major events taking place in and around Norway were eclipsed by the subsequent fall of France and the hasty evacuation of Allied forces at Dunkirk. Nevertheless, the Norwegians fought bravely and, with the exception of the Soviet Union, they held out against their attackers for the longest period of time.

Although the invasion was very successful in terms of occupying the country, the German Navy suffered the loss of numerous vessels. Because of this, they could not reap all the strategic benefits from their victory. However, when Operation Barbarossa, the invasion of the Soviet Union, was launched in 1941, Norway was utilized as the jumping-off point for air and sea assaults to cut the Russian supply route. Ironically, the iron ore that Germany had so desperately wanted could now be procured in France.

Haarr has written an excellent account of his country’s struggle to repel the German forces despite the odds. It is a must-read for all who want to learn more about the often neglected Norwegian campaign.

*Cataclysm: General Hap Arnold and the Defeat of Japan* by Herman S. Wolk, University of North Texas, Denton, 2010, 300 pp., notes, index, photos, \$24.95, hardcover.

In his new book, retired U.S. Air Force senior historian Herman Wolk asks a very intriguing question: who was Hap Arnold? He was condemned by his critics for being very impatient, rigid in his thinking, and lacking education and sophistication. Yet, it was General Henry



Harley “Hap” Arnold who created the 20th Air Force, put General Curtis LeMay in charge of the unit and, helped shape the strategic bombing campaign against Japan with the new Boeing B-29 Superfortress bomber.

The controversy over strategic bombing, most notably the fire bombing of Japan, will always be argued among historians. Arnold staunchly believed that the country would capitulate by a massive air campaign and a naval blockade, and a ground invasion would not be necessary. Although ostensibly this strategy would definitely save American lives, Arnold had other ideas in mind. He very much wanted an independent air force. If the massive B-29 air campaign could prove successful, it just might become a reality, which it did in 1947 with the

National Security Act.

Arnold was indeed a visionary. He was always concerned about the opinion of the American people and, as Wolk writes, "Arnold had a genuine appreciation for the democratic process."

As Arnold once said: "Air Power will always be the business of every American citizen."

*The African American Experience During World War II* by Neil A. Wynn, Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc., New York, 2010, 163 pp., notes, index, photos. \$34.95, hardcover.

This is one book in a series that focuses on the experiences of African Americans in the U.S. military during World War II. Clearly, the black men and women who served during that time paved the way for the civil rights movement that was to engulf the nation two decades later.

Whether it was stateside or overseas, black service personnel were subjected to discrimination by their commanding officers and white soldiers. At times, the confrontations turned bloody.

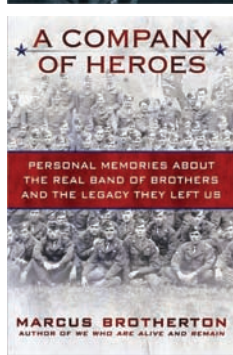
In the fall of 1942, soldiers from the 364th Infantry shot and killed one civilian in Phoenix, Arizona, and wounded 14 others. Two soldiers died in that incident. When the outfit was transferred to Camp Van Dorn in Mississippi, a local sheriff shot a black private. It was only when armed military police arrived on the scene, and with the involvement of the black chaplain, that further bloodshed was averted.

Despite being treated as second-class citizens, African Americans were proud to serve America during the conflict. Many viewed it as a way of escaping a civilian society that offered little in the way of advancement.

"If the war did not bring total, overwhelming, and complete change, it brought enough to establish the preconditions for another generation to demand that the United States indeed practice the very principles it espoused at home and continued to defend abroad," writes Wynn.

*Gladiator Ace: Bill "Cherry" Vale, The RAF's Forgotten Fighter Ace* by Brian Cull, Haynes Publishing, Newbury Park, CA, 2010, 256 pp., notes, index, photos, \$34.95, hardcover.

Born of military roots, his father a retired Royal Marine sergeant major, William Vale, or Cherry to his fellow Royal Air Force pilots, had



an extraordinary record in World War II. When the conflict erupted in 1939, he was dispatched to Egypt and became involved in aerial combat flying a Gloster Gladiator, the RAF's last biplane fighter aircraft.

While a member of No. 80 Squadron, Vale downed 10 enemy planes from July 1940 until February 1941. His aerial skills served him well over Crete, the Balkans, and in the skies over Syria, battling the Vichy French. In just a three-month span in early 1941, Vale also had another 20 kills while piloting the Hawker Hurricane, a single-seat fighter plane, used extensively by the Royal Air Force. For his heroic actions, Vale was presented with the Distinguished Flying Cross. Tragically, he was killed in an automobile accident in

November 1981.

The author has done a meticulous job of tracing Vale's early life and entry into the RAF. Cullen's account of Vale's life adds much to the history of the Mediterranean air campaign during World War II.

*A Company of Heroes: Personal Memories About the Real Band of Brothers and the Legacy They Left Us* by Marcus Brotherton, Berkley Caliber, New York, 2010, 352 pp., notes, index, \$25.95, hardcover.

Author Marcus Brotherton has paid a lasting tribute to the men of Easy Company, 506th Parachute Regiment, 101st Airborne Division. The elite unit was made famous by Stephen Ambrose's *Band of Brothers* and the HBO TV miniseries of the same name.

The author has collected 26 vignettes from the family members of the famed outfit. What is interesting with the format of this book is that the reader can skip from one oral history to another. Each of them are self-contained stories about that person's life during and after the war. Family members' reminiscences about their loved ones are quite frank, but the common denominator is they were all proud of their exploits as soldiers in the famed Screaming Eagles.

"This is a tribute book, yes, and it is meant to represent the men warmly," writes Brotherton, "but it's also about real people. It shows their lives, warts and all. This book is about the authentic Band of Brothers, who they truly were, how they lived, served, fought, worked, loved, and ultimately died." □

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**hero**

*Continued from page 57*

searched us. We thought we'd had it."

Almost all of the commandos were either killed or captured. Eventually, only five men would return to England.

After the motor launches had retired out to sea, the German destroyer *Jaguar* closed in to intercept the flotilla some 45 miles from St. Nazaire. Firing a burst at ML-306 and ordering it to halt, the *Jaguar's* commander was startled by the British reply: a blast of return fire from a Lewis gun being operated by 23-year-old commando Sergeant Thomas F. Durrant.

As a one-man assault party, Durrant kept the German ship at bay until, after a running gun battle, the sergeant was killed. His courage earned for him the Victoria Cross, posthumously. Durrant is one of very few men to have received their VC on the recommendation of an enemy officer, the destroyer's captain.

Of the 18 original raiding boats, only five craft were able to rendezvous with the two British destroyers: ML-306, ML-307, ML-443, ML-446, and MGB 314.

As the commandos who were still alive and had not been evacuated either fought last-ditch skirmishes, eluded the enemy, or were taken prisoner by the Germans, the last and most spectacular act of the operation took place.

By mid-morning on March 28, the battered *Cambeltown*, still beached at its upward angle atop the lock gates had drawn quite a crowd of spectators. Some had even climbed aboard her to marvel at the Brits' clever handiwork, while others were below decks inspecting the thick wall of concrete and no doubt surmising that the concrete was there simply to provide extra strength to the ship's prow that had been used as a battering ram. No one realized that, on the other side of the concrete slab, the acid in the pencil detonator was about to eat through the last bit of copper wire.

While the object of everyone's attention was drawing bemused glances, it suddenly vaporized in a blinding flash and mighty bang. Pieces of steel and human bodies were hurled everywhere. The lock gates split open, releasing a tidal wave of seawater into the dry chamber and causing two German tankers within to capsize and sink.

Lieutenant Roderick recalled that he and a few mates were being held captive on a small boat in the river when the *Campbeltown* exploded. "We were left with our guards but everybody else ran to see what it was all about. Shortly afterwards, we were bundled into a truck and taken into the town where we were

put into a private house prior to being moved to the hospital at Le Baule."

The damage was stupendous. For blocks around, windows were blown out and weak structures toppled. Vehicles were overturned and people knocked flat. Some buildings caught fire. Of the German defenders, scores were dead or wounded. The Normandie Dock was a shambles and was rendered unusable until 1947. There was no chance the *Tirpitz* or any other German ship would ever use it.

Operation Chariot had been a successful, if terribly expensive, raid.

Everyone who took part in the St. Nazaire raid, deemed by the British "the greatest raid of all," covered themselves with glory, even at the cost of their lives. Five Victoria Crosses, Britain's highest award for valor, were earned on the fateful night (by Beatty, Newman, Ryder, Savage, and Durrant). In addition, four Distinguished Service Orders, 17 Distinguished Service Crosses, 11 Military Crosses, four Conspicuous Gallantry Medals, five Distinguished Conduct Medals, 24 Distinguished Service Medals, and 15 Military Medals were awarded for the action at St Nazaire.

But the casualties were heavy. Most of the small craft were sunk or scuttled. Of 611 soldiers and sailors who took part, 168 were killed and 200 were taken prisoner.

This success, and the commando raid on the isle of Sark in the Channel Islands on October 3-4, 1942, prompted a furious Hitler to issue his infamous "Commando Order."

It decreed, "From now on, all men operating against German troops in so-called Commando raids in Europe or in Africa are to be annihilated to the last man." The protections of the Geneva Convention would not be extended to commandos.

More than six decades later, the British still consider the raid on St. Nazaire one of the most heroic and successful of the war; plaques and monuments in memory of the raiders have been erected at the port. A third of the British soldiers and sailors killed during the raid are buried at the Escoublac-la-Baule War Cemetery, 11 miles west of St. Nazaire.

Perhaps Lord Lovat, who would lead British commandos ashore at Sword Beach on D-Day, June 6, 1944, summed it up best when he wrote, "St. Nazaire was unquestionably the most spectacular sea-borne raid carried out in the Second World War." □

*Flint Whitlock, a frequent contributor to WWII History, has authored several books about the war and is editor of WWII Quarterly. He lives in Denver, Colorado.*

## cossack

Continued from page 79

sent to Moscow for trial, 120 never arrived at Graz; 1,030 disappeared between Graz and Vienna, 983 who arrived in Vienna subsequently disappeared.”

Overall, two million Russians, among them 50,000 Cossacks, were forcibly repatriated to the Soviet Union in what one observer termed, “An outright appeasement of the Stalin regime on the part of the U.S. and the U.K., a denial of political asylum on a mass scale.”

Conversely, asserted a Colonel Malcolm, “The political decision to repatriate the Cossacks was just, and the only one that could have been taken at the time.”

Others took the opposite view, as the controversy still resonates. One observer noted, “The Cossacks in German field gray who disappeared into the NKVD labor camps in 1945 took with them the remnants of a unique way of life. It will never again be resurrected.

“They disappeared into oblivion. Whether one saw them as patriots or traitors or simply as magnificent barbarians, it was indisputably the end of an era.”

British Field Marshal Bernard Law Montgomery said, “In the area occupied by 21st Army group, there were appalling civilian problems to be solved. Over a million civilian refugees had fled into the area before the advancing Russians. About one million German wounded were in hospital in the area, with no medical supplies. Over 1.5 million unwounded German fighting men had surrendered to 21st Army Group on May 5 and were now POWs, with all that entailed.”

Noted German author F.W. von Mellinthin gave this assessment of the Cossacks’ last wartime combat operations: “Theirs was a desperate struggle in the final hours of the war, when Gen. von Pannwitz’ work reached its zenith and was plunged to its destruction. To the bitter end, the Cossack Corps did more than its duty and frustrated every effort of the enemy to cross the vital Drava sector.”

Despite the 1947 Moscow trials and Lubyanka Prison hangings, there were, in fact, few Cossack war criminals. Even Pannwitz’s conviction was overturned by the Russians after the fall of the former Soviet Union in 1991. □

*Blaine Taylor is a Towson, Maryland, freelance writer who has published seven illustrated studies on the World War II period, most recently Hitler’s Chariots Volume 1: Mercedes-Benz G-4 Cross-Country Touring Car in 2009.*

## american ace

Continued from page 71

transfer and requested that he be allowed to remain in the theater and in combat, but his protests fell on deaf ears. Kenney realized that the Philippines veterans were worn out both physically and emotionally and considered them to be more of a liability than an asset. In Wagner’s case, Kenney recognized that the fighter pilot’s knowledge of the Japanese aircraft would be more beneficial back in the United States helping with the design of new fighters.

After his return to the States, Wagner was assigned as an engineering liaison officer to the Curtiss Aircraft plant in Buffalo, New York, where the company produced P-40s. Why he was assigned to a plant that was producing airplanes that were due to be replaced by newer types is unclear, although in 1942 the P-40 was still considered to be a top-of-the-line fighter.

In his new capacity Wagner flew P-40s around the country to fighter bases and talked to pilots about the airplane’s capabilities in combat. On November 29, 1942, Wagner took off from Eglin Field, Florida, for Maxwell Field at Montgomery, Alabama. He never reached his destination, and when no word was heard from him a search was initiated. Swampy conditions made the search difficult. Six weeks later, in January 1943, the crash site was finally located some 25 miles from his takeoff point at Eglin Field.

No determination of the cause of the crash was ever made public. The wreckage was found with the nose of the airplane buried deep in the ground, an indication that it was in a near vertical attitude when it crashed. The impact was so severe that only part of Wagner’s remains were recovered. The wreckage was left in the Florida swamps.

Although Wagner’s life came to an abrupt end, as did the lives of so many of the heroes of the early Pacific War, his legacy lives on. The 8th Fighter Group that he took to Port Moresby went on to become one of the most productive fighter groups of the war, as did the 35th Fighter Group that followed it. As the top-scoring ace of the early months of the war, his record was a standard that challenged the new pilots who came in to replace him. His name will always be associated with the early war in the Philippines, and Boyd D. Wagner will always be remembered as America’s first World War II ace. □

*Author Sam McGowan is also a pilot. He is a frequent contributor to WWII History and resides in the Houston, Texas, area.*

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things, alter neutrality legislation by lifting the arms embargo and allowing the “cash and carry” concept to go forward. That is, belligerents would be able to buy war materials from the United States for cash, not credit, and would be required to ship the purchases overseas themselves.

Earlier, Roosevelt tried to set a fire under Congress in support of the bill, confiding to Senator Tom Connally of Texas that he would “like to have the arms embargo lifted before their [the monarchs’] arrival.” But the stubborn solons would not move so fast. In fact, one congressman snidely called the bill “a present to King George.” When King George and Queen Elizabeth arrived at the Capitol the bill was set to be voted on the very next week. Its fate hung in the balance.

Congressmen assembled under the capitol’s vast and soaring dome, waiting for the royal arrival, and the air was abuzz with anticipation. Vice President Garner started telling “down home” stories and ribald jokes, evoking titters and then gales of laughter from those standing immediately beside him. Some of the more conservative senators gave him icy stares, but Garner was undeterred. He walked over to the door and peered out over the Capitol steps. Suddenly, he looked back to his colleagues and loudly proclaimed, “The British are coming!”

The “British” were indeed coming. King George and Queen Elizabeth’s motorcade had arrived, and within minutes they were standing in the rotunda ready to meet members of Congress. By accident or design, the royals were standing under a great canvas painting of Cornwallis’s surrender at Yorktown in 1781, the culminating battle of the American Revolution that gave independence to the United States.

The king and queen’s regal bearing, obvious charm, and genuine affection for the United States won many hearts, and perhaps even a few minds. Senator Borah, the arch isolationist, was wearing a formal morning suit he had not donned in 35 years. The king, usually deemed colorless and dull, surprised many when he called Ellison D. Smith of South Carolina by his nickname, “Cotton Ed.” Louisiana Congressman Robert Mouton kissed the queen’s hand. Elizabeth soon had everyone under her spell. Congressman Ned Patton remarked, “If America can keep Queen Elizabeth, Congress will regard Britain’s war debt as cancelled.”

The visit to the halls of Congress was a success, but there were many more stops on the royal agenda. There was a cruise down the

Potomac to visit George Washington’s estate and place a wreath at his tomb, a stop at a Civilian Conservation Corps camp, and a brief stay at Arlington National Cemetery to pay respects.

King George and Queen Elizabeth next departed Washington for a brief glimpse of New York and the World’s Fair that was being heavily promoted at the time. Their Majesties were greeted by New York Mayor Fiorello H. La Guardia and New York Governor Herbert H. Lehman, then were whisked off to the World’s Fair grounds at Flushing Meadow. New York had not seen an affair like this since Lindbergh’s flight in 1927; some three and a half million people turned out to see the king and queen.

The World’s Fair of 1939 was justly famous, but as the tour progressed the king seemed more and more agitated, even impatient. Finally, nature won over royal dignity. “Where is it?” the king asked with a note of real urgency in his voice. Fair promoter Grover Whalen finally got the hint, and the king was led to the men’s restroom.

After New York it was on to the last stop on the royal tour, a brief stay at the Roosevelt country home at Hyde Park. The president and First Lady had gone ahead, so they were sitting in the mansion’s library ready to receive their royal guests when they arrived. Sara Delano Roosevelt insisted that the king would want tea to drink, not a cocktail. For once ignoring his mother’s imperious demands, Franklin had the cocktail shaker primed and ready when the king and queen appeared.

“My mother thinks you should have a cup of tea—she doesn’t approve of cocktails,” the president confided. King George eagerly accepted a cocktail, adding, “Neither does my mother!”

That evening the president, King George, and Canadian Prime Minister Mackenzie King discussed political issues after the rest had turned in for the night. Superficially, the king and the president were a study in contrasts. Roosevelt was older, loved the limelight, and was almost always charming. The king was painfully shy, hated the limelight, and disliked being king.

Yet the pair also had things in common. Stricken with polio that made him a paraplegic, Roosevelt had overcome his disability, psychologically if not physically. King George had a terrible stutter, which made public speaking agony, though he managed to partly overcome the disability in time. Both men also were basically country squires at heart, but with a social conscience and a hatred of fascism.

In 1939, Roosevelt was mainly interested in the defense of the Western Hemisphere, not in entering a European war. He told the king that if war came he would try and relieve pressure

on the Royal Navy by guarding the approaches to the Americas himself. The president also hoped that, again if war broke out, the United States could acquire bases on British colonial soil, places like Bermuda and points around the Caribbean.

Roosevelt also confided that he hoped he could alter those isolationist neutrality laws and try to change American public opinion. The president was sincere in wanting to help Britain, as his later actions proved, but he also was guilty of some exaggerations. If London was bombed, Roosevelt assured King George, the United States would come in. Perhaps President Roosevelt felt he had to stretch the truth a little to reassure a potential ally that was on the brink of armed conflict. The three men talked until about 1:30 AM, when Roosevelt, noting the hour, patted the king on the knee and said, “Young man, it’s time for you to go to bed.”

The next day, Sunday, June 11, was devoted to divine services and the celebrated picnic lunch. After church, the royals were conveyed to Top Cottage, a cozy dwelling about four miles from the main mansion. There was a wide variety of food on the menu, including steak, smoked ham, and local Dutchess County strawberries. But it was the hot dogs that received the lion’s share of attention.

“What are these delicacies?” the king politely inquired. Once the concept was explained to him, he wolfed them down with gusto. He ate two but grew a little less enthusiastic when he spilled some mustard on his spotless suit. Later, the king seemed to favor the memory of smoked turkey, another American food that was new to him.

The king and queen departed from Hyde Park that evening. The president and Mrs. Roosevelt were at the train station to see them off. Once they boarded, the president called out, “Good luck to you! All the luck in the world!” As the train pulled out of the station, crowds who had assembled to see the royal visitors spontaneously started singing “Auld Lang Syne.” It was poignant because no one knew what fate awaited them as war clouds thickened over Europe.

The visit of King George VI and Queen Elizabeth reassured the British that America was, in spite of the strong strain of isolationism, a country that was a friend and possible future ally in the struggle against Hitler and fascist aggression. The royal visit was generally popular and played its part in the eventual weakening of isolationism in the United States. □

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*Author Eric Niderost is a college professor in Hayward, California.*

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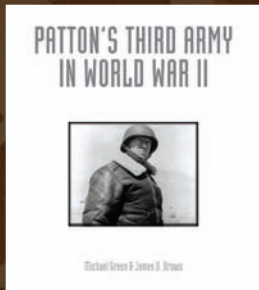
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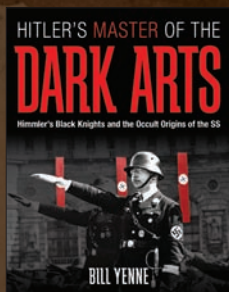
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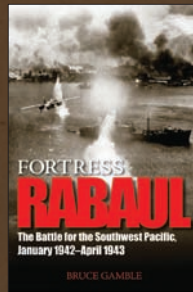
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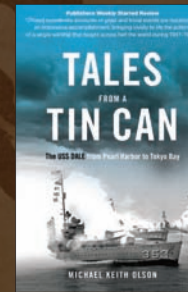
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