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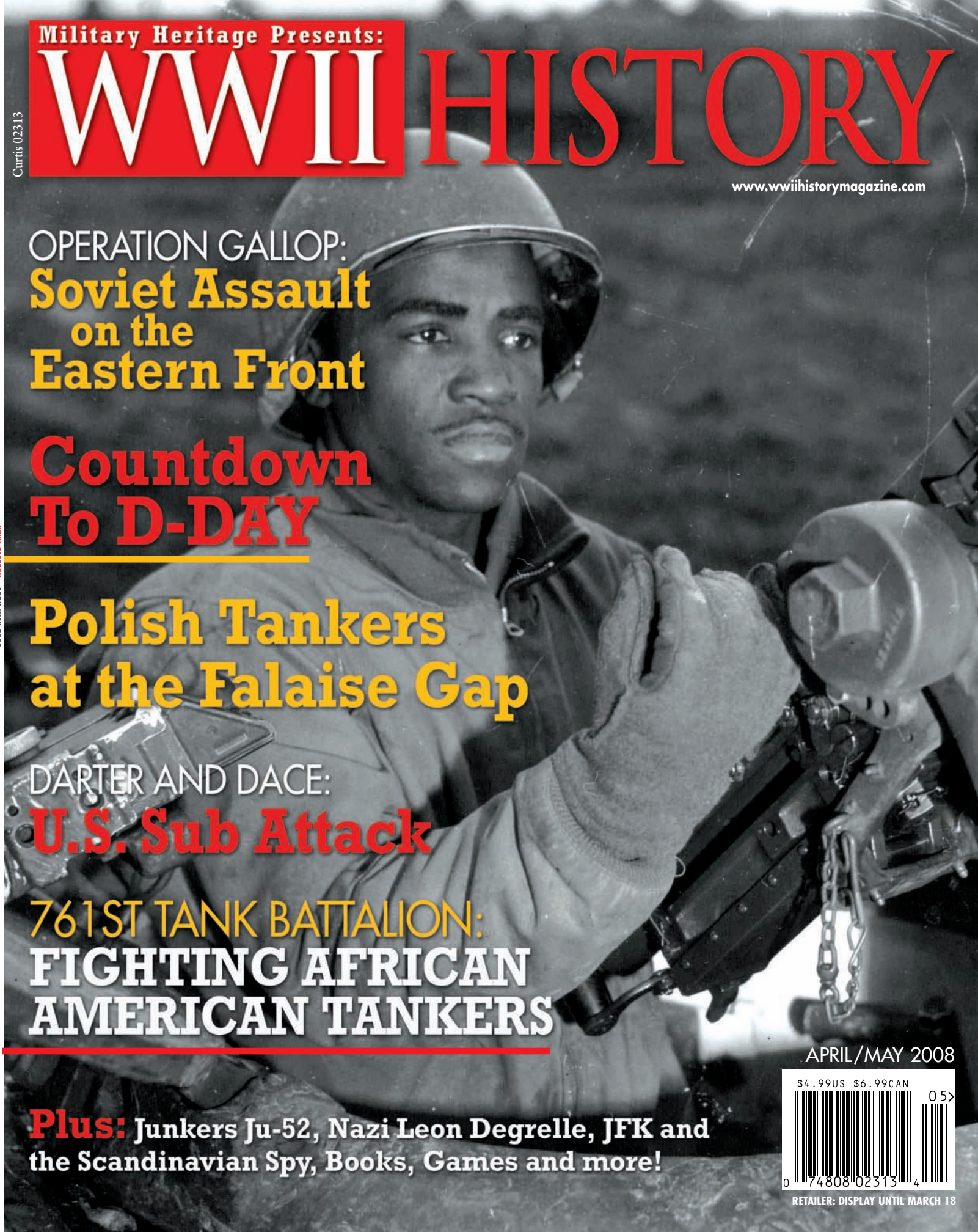

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Cover: Private L.C. Byrd of Tuscaloosa, Alabama, mans a machine gun on the turret of an M4 Sherman tank of the 761st Tank Battalion near Nancy, France, November 5, 1944. Photo courtesy of the National Archives.

Columns

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Editorial

Ruben Rivers and others helped end segregation in the U.S. military.

ON JULY 26, 1948, PRESIDENT HARRY TRUMAN ISSUED EXECUTIVE ORDER NO. 9981, which stated in part, "It is hereby declared to be the policy of the President that there shall be equality of treatment and opportunity for all persons in the armed services without regard to race, color, religion, or national origin."

Although some senior officers in the U.S. military establishment resisted such a monumental and fundamental change, the days of segregation were numbered. In the coming years, influenced by the onset of the Korean War, full integration was achieved. Although many of the injustices suffered by blacks and other minorities while serving their country are well documented, the heroism of a number of these fighting men in World War II remained overlooked and unacknowledged for decades. Only in relatively recent times have the exploits of the Tuskegee airmen, the drivers of the Red Ball Express, and hard-fighting Marines on the Pacific island of Peleliu been well publicized. Still, the exploits of others have remained virtually unknown.

Staff Sergeant Ruben Rivers was such a hero. Born one of 11 children on his family's farm in Tecumseh, Oklahoma, Rivers enlisted in the Army along with two brothers. When the 761st Tank Battalion became hotly engaged on November 8, 1944, his bravery earned him the Silver Star. The citation read in part: "Staff Sergeant Rivers courageously dismounted from his tank in the face of directed enemy small arms fire, attached a cable to the road block and moved it off the road, thus permitting the combat team to proceed. His prompt action thus prevented a serious delay in the offensive action and was instrumental in the successful assault and capture of the town…."

Just eight days later, Rivers was seriously wounded but refused to be evacuated. His commanding officer, Captain David Williams, remembered, "With the morphine needle in my right hand about a half inch from Sergeant Rivers' leg, I could have told my sergeant to hold him down. I said, 'Ruben, you're going back. You've got a million dollar wound. You're going back to Tecumseh. You're getting out of this.'"

When Rivers was killed in action on November 19, his condition had deteriorated, the leg wound sapping his strength and infection setting in. Still, his tank had assumed its customary lead position, and when the Germans were spotted, he engaged them. The following day, Captain Williams recommended that Rivers receive the Medal of Honor.

On January 13, 1997, more than half a century later, the family of Staff Sergeant Ruben Rivers finally got his long overdue medal. In a ceremony at the White House, President Bill Clinton presented seven Medals of Honor, six to the families of deceased recipients and one to a living veteran of World War II. During the war, more than 430 of the nation's highest combat decoration were awarded, but none of these were given to black soldiers.

Rivers's sister, Grace Woodfork, accepted the medal, and the accompanying citation noted, "Repeatedly refusing evacuation, Sergeant Rivers continued to direct his tank's fire at enemy positions through the morning of 19 November 1944. At dawn, Company A's tanks began to advance towards Bougaktroff, but were stopped by enemy fire. Sergeant Rivers, joined by another tank, opened fire on the enemy tanks, covering Company A as they withdrew. While doing so, Sergeant Rivers' tank was hit, killing him and wounding the crew. Staff Sergeant Rivers' fighting spirit and daring leadership were an inspiration to his unit and exemplify the highest traditions of military service."

Captain Williams, who championed the recognition of Sergeant Rivers for years following the war, attended the White House ceremony. During an interview with the *Tulsa World,* he was queried as to the reason for such delayed recognition for Rivers. Candidly, the captain answered, "It is obvious. He was a Negro."

The heroism and sacrifice of Sergeant Rivers and others like him evidenced their patriotism and hastened the coming of equality in the military. Theirs is indeed a noble legacy.

Michael E. Haskew

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Dispatches

More on Patton's Dyslexia

Dear Editor,

Please allow me to express my displeasure concerning the article in the January 2008 issue, "A Life Shaped by Dyslexia" by Jeansonne et al. My subscription to your magazine is only a year old and I can tell you I have otherwise enjoyed your scholarship immensely. I truly wish I had subscribed years ago. Nevertheless, Jeansonne disappoints me a great deal. He should know that most psychiatrists in America adhere to an ethic whereby they reserve diagnosis of mental illnesses, including dyslexia and ADD, to patients they have evaluated personally. This is done as much to preserve the reputation of the psychiatry profession as that of the client. In the case of someone no longer living, for Jeansonne and colleagues to use these diagnoses disparagingly of General Patton is highly offensive to me, and I suspect also to the medical and military professions in America. In my days at West Point, we cadets were taught early on to respect all Americans who made a decision to take up arms in defense of the nation, regardless of the intricacies of their life histories. Jeansonne et al. fall short of that. Has he or his fellows ever raised a weapon in defense of the nation? Does not sound like it to me. Diagnoses like dyslexia and ADD have been overused and abused by many, not uncommonly to the personal and unfair advantage of individuals. When they must be arrived at, it should be strictly for the honest benefit of the client and not for sensationalism, personal gain, or personal detriment.

General Patton, as controversial a figure as he was, is worthy of a higher respect than these writers have shown him. Jeansonne et al. show no credentials whatsoever as clinicians and perhaps little more in the way of historians. Please, in the future I ask that you avoid such articles, which detract unfairly from the reputation of heroes and as well sully the reputation of the mental heath profession.

James L. Spinelli, M.D.
Colonel, U.S. Army (Ret.); Psychiatrist
Columbia, South Carolina

The article on General Patton and the exploration of the possibility that he suffered from dyslexia and/or ADD in no way diminishes his contribution to victory in Europe or his stature as an icon in military history. The article is merely intended to explore the possibility of such conditions and their potential influence on his conduct and his personal and professional careers. Any public figure, military or otherwise, is potentially the subject of such a discussion. In fact, exercises of this type are a common component of the study of history. —Ed.

601st Tank Destroyer Battalion

Gentlemen:

As a regular reader of your magazine (from cover to cover) I enjoy all the articles and especially Dan Champagne's "Bloody Fight for Hill 351" in the January 2008 issue.

The 601st Tank Destroyer Battalion, in which I served, was attached to the 3rd Infantry Division on September 19, 1943, at Salerno, Italy, and supported the division for the remainder of the war. Landed at Anzio and after Anzio we landed with them in southern France then through France and Germany. It was a great division to serve with.

The 601st was one of the attached units of the 3rd and all attached units received the Presidential Unit Citation for action in the Colmar Pocket. Company B of the 601st supported the 15th Regiment and were the tank destroyers mentioned by Mr. Champagne. Also, it was one of Company B's knocked-out TDs that Audie Murphy was on for which action he received the Medal of Honor.

The picture on page 42 shows an armored vehicle and the caption reads that it is a Sherman tank. After spending some two years in one I know it is an M 10 Tank Destroyer and not a Sherman tank.

Bill R. Harper
Richardson, Texas

The Battle of Athens

Dear Editor:

Jon Latimer's account of the Battle of Athens in December 1944 ("Renewed Confrontation in Greece," November 2007 issue) was a grave disappointment. Mr. Latimer ignored the historical realities of those events 63 years ago, which have been thoroughly researched in Greek and international sources. Mr. Latimer does not address the following political and military dimensions of the battle:

1. The entry of the British forces in Greece in October 1944 was not only intended to liberate Greece from the Axis—the forces of Nazi Germany were already withdrawing from continental Greece since they were threatened with encirclement by the advancing Soviet armies in the Balkans. The British forces entered Greece with the political aim of enforcing the Winston Churchill-Joseph Stalin "spheres of influence" agreement that had been reached in Moscow on October 9, 1944. This agreement deprived the Greek population of its full democratic rights for self-determination, and set the stage for an armed conflict between the British, the forces of the Greek government-in-exile, and the leftist resistance movement of EAM/ELAS. Even Churchill's visit to Athens on December 25-28, 1944, while the battle was still raging, was intended to politically disenfranchise EAM/ELAS and return the pro-British monarchy to its throne.

2. Mr. Latimer repeats the historically flawed arguments that certain EAM/ELAS units had not militarily engaged the German occupation forces in 1943-1944, and unjustifiably denigrates Aris Velouchiotis (nom de guerre of Athanasios Klaras), the military leader of EAM/ELAS. As research by John L. Hondros has disclosed, German occupation forces suffered 2,369 killed, 4,202 wounded, and 1,810 missing between March 1943 and October 1944. More than 65 percent of these casualties were caused in June-October 1944, when only the EAM/ELAS resistance forces were active against the Nazis and their Greek collaborators. Mr. Latimer cannot explain why the Germans kept executing large numbers of Greek civilian hostages in reprisals for continuous EAM/ELAS attacks in 1944—including some of my own relatives—if these ELAM/ELAS attacks somehow "never happened."

3. Mr. Latimer brushes over the British motives to forcibly eliminate EAM/ELAS as a political and military force in Greece. He does not discuss that the British military forces in Greece during October-November 1944 had actively cooperated with Greek Nazi collaborationist officers of the notorious Security Battalions, and that such officers were being elevated to leadership positions in the Hellenic Army. The British also rearmed Greek Nazi collaborators of the Security Battalions and transported them from the Peloponnese region into Athens. EAM/ELAS forces under Aris Velouchiotis's personal leadership had aggressively attacked and defeated these Security Battalion units in the Peloponnese. During the December 1944 Battle of Athens, no less than 12,000 Greek Nazi collaborators of the Security Battalions fought with the British and Greek government forces against EAM/ELAS.

4. Mr. Latimer misrepresents the events of December 3, 1944, that kindled the Battle of Athens. Following the failed negotiations between the Greek government and the Communist Party of Greece (KKE). Greek police units without provocation opened fire against a popular and *unarmed* demonstration in the Constitution Square of Athens. At least 30 demonstrators were killed and 50 injured. The British 23rd Armored Brigade ascertained that the Greek police action was totally unjustified. The local Athens EAM/ELAS self-defense units reacted by attacking Greek police and gendarmerie stations, while *avoiding taking any action* against the British forces. The British forces *initially* also avoided taking any action against EAM/ELAS. British forces first peacefully disarmed the 2nd regular EAM/ELAS regiment on the night

of December 3, 1944. On December 5, British mechanized and armored units with RAF and Royal Navy support commenced offensive operations against EAM/ELAS forces both withing and outside Athens. By the end of December 1944 British forces in Greece numbered approximately 60,00 men who were fighting against their former allies of a leftist anti-Nazi resistance movement. Despite the ferocity of the Battle of Athens, EAM/ELAS made the political decision not to detonate half a ton of explosive charges that it had placed under the British military HQ of General Scobie at the Grand Bretagne Hotel. Contrary to Mr. Latimer's assertions, Aris Velouchiotis was not in command of the EAM/ELAS forces in Athens since he was situated in my former home city of Lamia, 141 miles northwest of Athens. KKE's political leadership was directly responsible for the EAM/ELAS political and military failures in the Athens area.

5. The overwhelming military superiority of the British and Greek government forces defeated EAM/ELAS in the Athens area, led to the Varkiza Agreement of February 12, 1945, and the disarmament of EAM/ELAS throughout Greece. The British government had secured its "sphere of influence" in Greece albeit at a high cost for Greece and its citizens. The Battle of Athens led to the 1945-1946 rightist "white terror" against the members of the EAM/ELAS. Despite the provision of the Varkiza Agreement, a large number of former EAM/ELAS members were imprisoned, tortured, and executed after summary trials and through extrajudicial killings. The dysfunctional operation of Greek democracy under British supervision prompted KKE's catastrophic decision to resort to armed struggle that plunged Greece into the Civil War of 1946-1949, the first "hot conflict" of the Cold War. The vast majority of the former members of the WWII EAM/ELAS leftist resistance movement did not support the disastrous decision of the KKE, and with U.S. military and economic assistance (Truman Doctrine), Greece remained a member of the Western Alliance.

Labros E. Pilalis, MPA, JD
Camp Hill, Pennsylvania

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By William E. Welsh

A Junkers Ju-52 transport aircraft is directed along the dirt runway by a ground crewman. The Ju-52 began its operational life as a passenger airliner. BELOW: A Junkers Ju-52 transport drops airborne troops and supplies during Operation Mercury, the invasion of Crete in May 1941.
(ullstein bild/Below: National Archives)

Iron Annie

The Junkers Ju-52 was versatile enough to meet the Luftwaffe's ever-shifting transport missions.

SHORTLY BEFORE DAWN ON MAY 20, 1941, A FLIGHT OF 500 TRANSPORT PLANES took off from seven airstrips on mainland Greece. As they climbed upward, the tri-motor aircraft emerged from reddish-orange clouds of dust into blue sky. The dust clouds were generated by the propeller wash from hundreds of engines sitting on unpaved runways as the planes prepared for takeoff. Inside each aircraft, a dozen German paratroopers sat hunched on canvas benches sweating profusely inside their heavy uniforms. Each one welcomed the cool air that swept through the cabins once the aircraft were aloft.

The planes lumbered in tightly packed formations at low altitude over the pale blue waters of the Aegean Sea toward their objective. Once they crossed the coast of enemy-held Crete, they were greeted by a storm of flak that rocked the planes as if they were trees in the wind. Ignoring the turbulence, the veteran paratroopers stood up, shuffled toward the cargo door, and flung themselves spread eagle toward the ground below. Once the flight crews had delivered their human cargo to its destination, they turned their aircraft back toward the mainland to load the next wave. Operation Mercury, the largest airborne invasion the world had yet seen, was without doubt the finest hour of the Junkers Ju-52 transport, known to its crews as "Tante Ju," or Auntie Junkers.

The Ju-52 was originally envisioned as a commercial venture in 1925 by Deutsche Lufthansa. The concept moved from paper to production when the project was turned over to Junkers in 1928. Its chief designer, Ernst Zindel, oversaw work on two concepts. One was a single-engine freight aircraft (Ju-52/1m) and the other was a three-engine commercial passenger plane (Ju-52/3m) built to carry 17 passengers.

The first single-engine Ju-52 made its maiden flight on October 13, 1930. It was followed six months later by the three-engine version's maiden flight in April 1931. After just a few years in service, production of the single-engine version came to an abrupt halt in 1934, but the three-engine version, which offered better safety and considerably more power, captured the interest of Lufthansa as well as international customers that used the aircraft for both passenger and freight purposes.

The Ju-52/3m had a wing span of 29.5 meters and measured 18.9 meters from nose to tail. The all-metal plane (80/20 magnesium/ aluminum) was easily recognized not only by its three-engine configuration but also by a box-like, corrugated fuselage that gave it an almost unfinished appearance.

Deutsche Lufthansa began

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ABOVE: German airborne troops are seated inside their Ju-52 transport plane en route to drop zones on Crete. The German paratroopers suffered horrendous casualties during the invasion but eventually secured the island after several days of hard fighting. BELOW: Aircraft such as this Junkers Ju-52/3m were utilized to keep German soldiers supplied on the Eastern Front until their airfields were within range of Red Army artillery fire or overrun by enemy troops. (Above: National Archives/Below: Amber Books)

flying the Ju-52/3m on heavily traveled commercial routes, such as Berlin to London and Berlin to Rome in late 1932. Twenty-five countries throughout Europe and North and South America purchased the aircraft for commercial use during the 1930s. For 13 years from 1932 to 1945, the Junkers German factories produced Ju-52 variants. It was during its first few years in operation that the Ju-52 earned the endearing nicknames "Tante Ju" and "Eisen Annie" (Iron Annie) because of its reliability and performance that resulted in few forced landings and the need for minimal repair work.

When Adolf Hitler was elected chancellor of Germany in 1933, the future German dictator instructed the Air Ministry to put a plan into action to build a 1,000-plane air force. He did this despite the fact that Germany was prohibited from having any military aircraft through the Treaty of Versailles. Rather than develop an entirely new transport aircraft, the ministry ordered the conversion of a large number of existing aircraft from civilian to military use.

Minimal alteration was required. The Ju-52/3m freight version had a hatch in the roof for loading by crane, a large cargo door on the starboard side just behind the wing, and a door for passengers on the port side. A new hole was cut into the roof to accommodate a dorsal machine gun, and the interior was reconfigured for different missions.

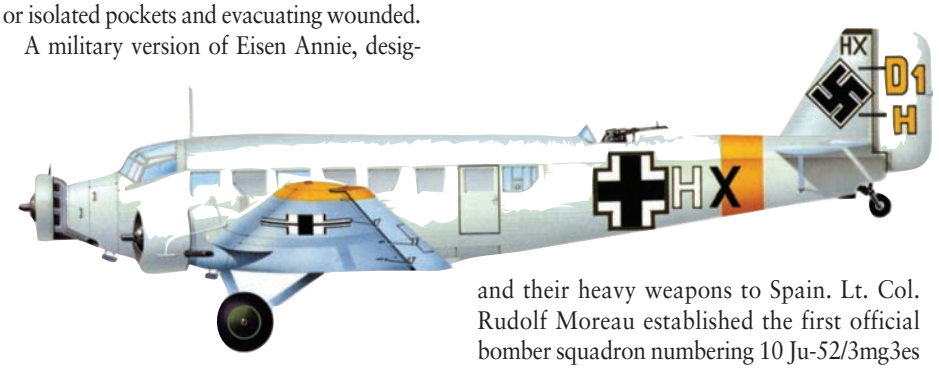
The Ju-52/3m began its military service as a bomber during the Spanish Civil War. During the blitzkrieg period of World War II from 1939 to 1941 it served in a support role by delivering paratroopers to their targets, towing gliders carrying assault troops, and transferring air landing troops to captured airfields. After the invasion of Crete in May 1941, the airplane was used primarily for delivering fuel, ammunition, and supplies to troops in forward areas or isolated pockets and evacuating wounded.

A military version of Eisen Annie, designated the Ju-52/3mg3e was ready for service in 1934. While a version designated the Ju-52/3m Sa3 was already operating for the Reichswehr in the role of personnel transport, cargo carrier, and pilot trainer, the g3e was intended as an interim bomber before more sophisticated bombers were available in 1936. The military version was powered by three 660hp BMW 132A radial engines and armed with dorsal and ventral 7.92 MG 15 machine guns, the latter of which was affixed to the aircraft's underside with a retractable dustbin attachment. When fully loaded, whether with troops or supplies, the aircraft had a top speed of 171 miles per hour and a cruising speed of about 120 miles per hour. The Ju-52/3m's round-trip range carrying a 1,984-pound load was 720 miles. This range increased to 900 miles with a lighter load (992 pounds) or decreased to 450 miles with a heavier load (3,306 pounds).

The Ju-52/3m was equipped with robust landing gear that enabled it to take off and land on dirt or grass strips as short as 400 meters that other aircraft could not use. What is more, the metal structure could withstand considerable punishment, which enabled the crews to complete their missions and limp back to safety when damaged.

Shortly after the Spanish Civil War broke out in July 1936, Hitler sent 20 Ju-52/3ms in September to support Nationalist General Francisco Franco in his struggle against the Republican forces on the Iberian peninsula. During the conflict, Eisen Annie served in a dual role of troop transport and interim bomber. Two years before, the Reichswehr (the Luftwaffe was not reconstituted until 1935) had requested that the Junkers plant at Dessau convert the Ju-52/3m to a bomber configuration (the g3e), and Junkers engineers had installed vertical magazines in its lower cargo bay to accommodate 3,306 pounds of explosives. The makeshift bombers operated with crews of five handling the positions of pilot, co-pilot, radio operator, dorsal gunner, and bombardier/ventral gunner.

Early in the conflict, the Ju-52/3ms played a key role in transporting 13,900 Moorish troops and their heavy weapons to Spain. Lt. Col. Rudolf Moreau established the first official bomber squadron numbering 10 Ju-52/3mg3es in November 1936 to support the Nationalist ground forces. During the course of the conflict, the Moreau squadron dropped more than 6,000 tons of bombs on enemy positions and enemy-held territory. However, the Ju-52/3m's bomber days were numbered not only because of its lack of speed and maneuverability but because it could not accommodate the horizontal bomb racks that were being installed on newer medium-range bombers in production. As the fighter threat grew more severe in the following months, the Ju-52/3mg3e's were replaced with more advanced bombers, such as



the Dornier Do-17 and the Heinkel He-111. While the Spanish Civil War raged on into its third year, the Ju-52/3ms functioning as bombers were converted back to transports.

The invasion of Denmark and Norway on April 9, 1941, known as Operation Weserübung, heralded the use of Ju-52/3ms to deliver paratroopers and air landing forces to the battlefield. During Weserübung, the transports performed a number of key roles, including dropping paratroopers, ferrying air landing troops to captured airfields, and delivering heavy weapons and supplies to paratroopers and other ground forces.

Weserübung involved the first paratrooper attacks in military history. On the first day of the invasion, the paratroopers seized the Vordingborg Bridge linking Copenhagen with its ferry terminal and two airfields at Aalborg in Denmark. The Ju-52/3ms also dropped paratroopers at three key airfields in southern Norway at the cities of Oslo, Stavanger, and Kristiansand.

As the battle progressed over the following days, the Ju-52/3ms played a crucial role delivering weapons and supplies to the German troops fighting Allied forces at the North Sea port of Narvik. A particularly daring mission involved the ferrying of a fully equipped mountain battery to a frozen lake 15 miles north of

ABOVE: German soldiers exit a Ju-52 which has just landed following a hazardous flight across the Mediterranean Sea from an airfield in Italy.

(National Archives)

Narvik with little chance of their returning due to the extreme conditions. The planes took off from Hamburg, refueled at Oslo, and proceeded to their destination. They remained on the frozen lake until they sank in the spring thaw. The lost planes, however, were only a small part of the Ju-52/3m losses incurred during the overall operation. The Luftwaffe counted about 150 transports destroyed or damaged beyond repair by the end of the affair. It was a taste of the heavy losses to come in campaigns ahead.

The Ju-52/3m had various types of landing gear to adapt to both snow and water. During the fighting in Norway, wheeled landing gear was replaced with floats to enable the planes to land in that country's numerous fjords. Similarly, skis replaced wheels when the Ju-52s had to land in the vast expanses of Russia during the cold months, whether at the front line or in rear areas. In addition, the service crews eventually removed the tear-shaped wheel covers from most planes serving on the Eastern Front when they discovered that mud collected quickly inside them.

Other modifications were made to accommodate paratroopers and to provide better protection against enemy fighter aircraft that attacked the Ju-52/3ms like sharks feeding on fish. The Ju-52 g4f included a reinforced cargo compartment floor, side, and loading doors. It could carry 12 to 13 fully equipped paratroopers and up to 18 air landing troops. In 1941, these planes were upgunned when the dorsal 7.9mm MG 15 was replaced with the 13mm

With a Ju-52 transport in the background, German Field Marshal Gerd von Rundstedt meets an Italian officer at an airfield. The Ju-52 carried personnel on long trips while also serving as the primary air transport for the resupply of the German Army. (National Archives)

MG 131. While the heavier gun afforded protection against attacks from the rear, the aircraft remained vulnerable to frontal attacks. For this reason, an additional MG 15 was installed in the roof of the cockpit and manned by the radioman. By this time the ventral dustbin had become impractical and was removed from many of the transports.

The Ju-52 also was employed as a minesweeper. At the start of the war, German scientists discovered that mines laid by British aircraft along German-held coastline could be detonated by a magnetic field. Thus, the Ju-52 g4f was outfitted with an enormous horizontal ring on the underside and wings. An electrical charge was fed into the aluminum ring by a battery. Since the mines were equipped with delayed fuses of seven seconds, the mines detonated about 200 to 300 meters behind the aircraft flying at low level. The minesweeper version was first deployed in 1940 along the Dutch coast and saw its greatest use along the coastline of occupied France.

The Junkers engineers designed two improved versions of the Ju-52 that were intended as replacements for the original design but never made it to full production. The Ju-252 had three Jumo 211 engines, was armed with the MG 131 dorsal gun placed directly behind the cockpit, and had nearly three times the load-carrying capacity of the Ju-52. It did not have the Ju-52's corrugated exterior, and it came equipped with a hydraulic rear loading ramp to make loading and unloading of weapons and equipment easier. After its maiden voyage in October 1941, roughly 15 were completed. The following year production began on the Ju-352. This variation was constructed of alternate materials, due to a shortage of metal, and featured three BMW-Bramo engines. The 352 made its maiden flight on October 1, 1943.

Following Weserübung, the Ju-52s had little time to be repaired and reoutfitted before they were delivering paratroopers to key objectives in Belgium and Holland the following month. About 430 Ju-52s participated in the operation. A group of 40 were assigned to tow DFS 230 gliders carrying assault troops who captured the Belgian fortress of Eben Emael, while the remaining 390 carried paratroopers and air landing troops to seize bridges and other objectives in Fortress Holland where the cities of Amsterdam and Rotterdam were located. The heavy attrition among the Luftwaffe's Ju-52 fleet continued in the Western Campaign with 167 of the aircraft involved destroyed.

An even larger, more significant airborne invasion took place almost exactly one year later. After the fall of mainland Greece, Hitler launched Operation Mercury to capture the island of Crete and deny the Allies the use of its three airfields. More than 500 Ju-52/3ms dropped the four parachute regiments of the 7th Air Division onto the island and also ferried the 5th Mountain Division to Maleme airfield, which was captured on the second day. It was the first battle conducted entirely by paratroops and air landing forces.

During the first day's assault, the Ju-52/3ms not only towed 75 gliders carrying the 7th Division's elite assault regiment but also delivered three regiments in two waves to seven separate objectives on the island's north coast. It was a costly battle in lives and equipment, with the Luftwaffe losing 271 of the 502 Ju-52/3m aircraft assigned to the operation. The thin-skinned fuselages and wings proved vulnerable to heavy antiaircraft fire from British and Commonwealth forces in strong positions. As a result of this experience and subsequent experiences on the Eastern Front, engineers made the air frames of a number of Ju-52s bullet-proof to protect the flight crews.

More than 50 Ju-52/3ms had been deployed in December 1940 to Foggia, Italy, to support Italian operations in Albania and North Africa. They transported 1,665 Italian soldiers to Albania and evacuated more than 8,730 wounded Italians back to Italy over the next five months until Greece fell in April. Three months later, General Erwin Rommel arrived in North Africa at the port of Tripoli, Libya, with his Afrika Korps. Ju-52s were an integral part of supply operations from the time Rommel landed until the Germans evacuated the last of their forces from Tunisia in May 1943.

After United States forces invaded Morocco and Algeria in November 1942, U.S. fighters regularly intercepted Ju-52s engaged in the evacuation of forces from North Africa to Sicily. In a stunning aerial battle on April 5, 1943, U.S. Lockheed P-38 Lightnings jumped an armada of more than 50 Ju-52s in the early morning off the western coast of Sicily. The U.S. fighters shot 14 out of the sky and damaged 65 parked on Sicilian airstrips. Another Allied victory occurred on April 18 when U.S. fighter aircraft pounced on an armada of 65 Ju-52s moving men and materiél and shot down 24 planes. Nevertheless, the Ju-52s left behind an impressive legacy, having flown 8,388 soldiers and ferried 5,040 tons of supplies to North Africa to support Rommel's campaigns.

The Junkers factories increased production of Ju-52/3ms from 388 in 1940 to 502 and 503 in 1941 and 1942, respectively. The increased production was necessary to literally feed the hungry stomachs of Germans soldiers on the Eastern Front. Five of the six air transport groups were shifted to occupied territories in the East to support troops operating hundreds of miles from the German frontier where partisans frequently disrupted supply lines and retreating Soviet forces practiced a scorched earth policy.

When their blitzkrieg ground to a halt a short distance from Moscow during the winter of 1941, large numbers of Germans were cut off in subsequent Soviet counterattacks. The only way they could receive supplies was by Ju-52s either landing on airstrips inside the pockets or dropping supplies from the air. The largest pocket resulting from the Soviet winter offensive of 1941-1942 resulted in the creation of the Demyansk pocket where nearly 100,000 German soldiers were surrounded by the Soviet Eleventh and Thirty-Fourth Armies. The forces trapped inside the Demyansk cauldron required about 300 tons of supplies per day. About 75 Ju-52s flew 33,000 sorties into the pocket, which existed from February 8 to April 21, 1942.

While the Ju-52s rose to the occasion in those situations, they would not be able to meet the impossible demands of supplying the German Sixth Army when it was surrounded at Stalingrad by four Soviet army groups in mid-November 1942. The success at Demyansk made Luftwaffe chief Hermann Göring and others believe it would be possible to supply the troops until they could be relieved. The daily requirement was 600 tons, which was twice that of the Demyansk pocket. This would require 300 Ju-52s. Even though all air transport resources on the Eastern Front were brought to bear, the number could not be mustered, and the actual number available steadily declined through battle losses. The greatest amount of supplies ever delivered on a given day was 289 tons, while the average was around 90 tons.

Photographed in flight from another aircraft, a Ju-52 transport plane laden with supplies wings its way to a destination near the front lines in North Africa. (National Archives)

When the last airfield (Pitomnik) inside the pocket fell to the Soviets in mid-January 1943, the transports resorted to dropping supplies from the air. By the time the Sixth Army surrendered on February 2, the Luftwaffe had lost the equivalent of 266 Ju-52s in a futile effort to supply the beleaguered forces.

Like the breadwinner who is devoted to feeding his family, the Ju-52 would supply troops with food and ammunition in other major pockets until the end of the war, including the Crimean peninsula in 1944-1945, Budapest, and Breslau. Of the 2,822 Ju-52/3ms produced from 1939 to 1944, only 190 were left in service when Berlin fell on May 7.

Although the Ju-52/3m was clearly inferior in terms of flight speed and payload to the U.S. Douglas DC-3 Dakota/C-47 Skytrain, it has earned accolades from military aviation experts for its versatile performance during the war. There is little doubt that it will be associated for a long time with both the highs and lows of the Third Reich in World War II. □

Vienna, Virginia, freelance writer William Welsh has written articles on conflicts from the Middle Ages to World War II. He is also a regular contributor to Sovereign Media's Military Heritage *magazine.*

By Richard Rule

Traitor or War Hero?

Leon Degrelle was the most famous foreign volunteer in the German Army.

LEON DEGRELLE WAS BORN IN 1906 IN BELGIUM TO A prosperous family in **the** French-speaking region of Wallonia. During the tumultuous years leading up to World War II, he was the Continent's youngest statesman, but as a soldier on the Eastern Front he became the most famous and highly decorated foreign volunteer in the entire German armed forces. This remarkable man who was a hero to some and a vile traitor to others would earn all stripes from private to general officer and in doing so forge one of the most distinguished careers from among the foreign legions of the Waffen SS.

In the early 1930s, Degrelle, who was an ardent Catholic, had become so disillusioned with the level of government corruption in Belgium that he formed his own Rexist Party, which in essence was a movement of Christian renewal and social justice. Heavily influenced by fascism, Degrelle and his supporters were fiercely anticommunist, anti-Semitic and antibourgeois and quickly capitalized not only on internal ethnic tensions within Belgium but also on the population's widespread dissatisfaction with the nation's governing parties.

Charismatic, intelligent, and handsome, Leon Degrelle's talent for self-promotion coupled with his brilliant oratory skills struck a chord with voters, and his party attracted an incredible 11.5 percent of the vote in the 1936 Belgian elections. It was tantamount to a revolution! At 29 years of age, Degrelle had been catapulted to prominence as the youngest political leader in Europe. His meteoric rise saw British Prime Minister Winston Churchill grant him an audience in London. He visited Italian fascist dictator Benito Mussolini in Rome, and Hitler received him in Berlin.

For two years Degrelle and his party rode the wave of political popularity with gusto, but it did not last. He had attracted many enemies among the political establishment with his bold style, but despite their efforts to undermine him, Degrelle's personal magnetism saw him reelected to the Belgian parliament in 1938. The Rexists, however, had lost support and fared badly in the polls, and within a few short years the movement would become a marginal political force of little consequence.

The fortunes of his party may have waned, but the volatile Degrelle still had a powerful voice. In the shadows of World War II, he strove to maintain Belgium's policy of neutrality. Viewing communism as the Continent's real enemy, he naively discarded much of his suspicion of Hitler's new Germany and in fact found much to admire. Fascism was certainly popular in parts of Belgium at this time, but Degrelle gradually alienated himself from the wider community with impassioned rhetoric that, while not directly supporting Hitler, often presented the Führer's actions in a sympathetic light. His failure to comprehend the true and evil nature of the Nazi regime would nearly cost him his life.

War once again came to Europe in 1939. The Phony War, which followed the Wehrmacht's stunning victory over Poland, ended at dawn on May 10, 1940, with Hitler's long-awaited offensive in the West. As German panzers steamrolled through the Low Countries, Belgium found itself embroiled in the conflict, and Degrelle was immediately arrested as a Nazi sympathizer and active collaborator. The young statesman was shunted from prison to prison ahead of the advancing German Army and was fortunate to avoid execution. Following France's capitulation, Degrelle was discovered in the French concentration camp of Vernet

TOP: Marching along on the Eastern Front at the head of his men, SS officer Leon Degrelle was a foreign-born politician who became a decorated military leader and saw extensive combat with German forces in World War II. ABOVE: SS Hauptsturmführer Leon Degrelle poses for an official portrait. The Knight's Cross is clearly visible at his throat.

(Top: ullstein bild-Granger Collection / Above: ullstein bild)

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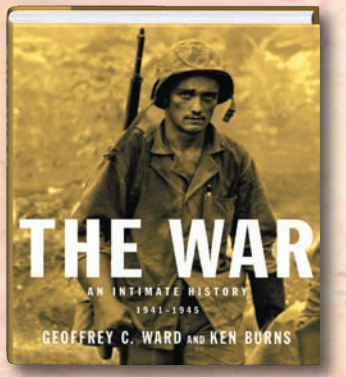

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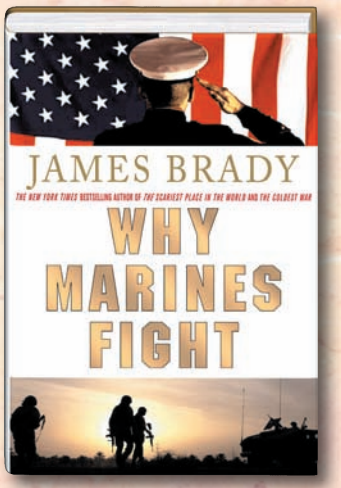

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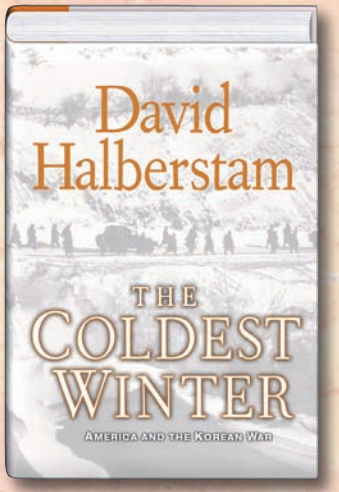

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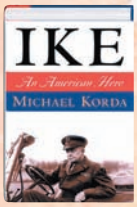

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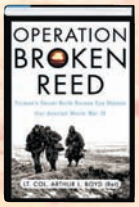

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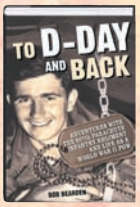

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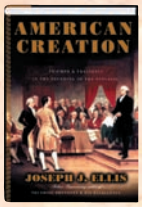

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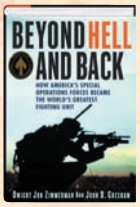

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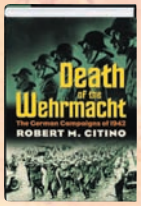

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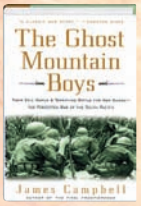

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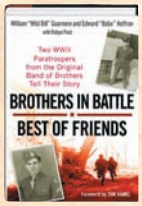

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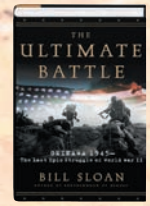

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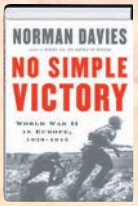

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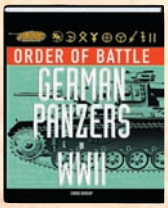

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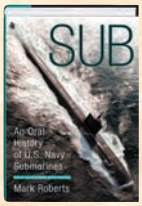

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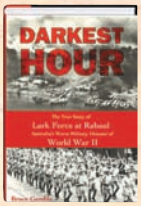

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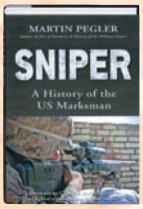

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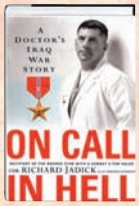

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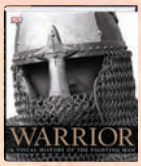

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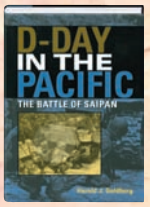

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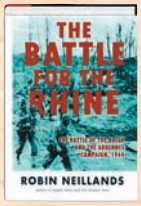

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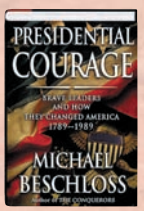

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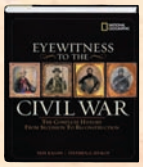

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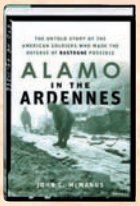

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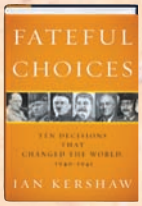

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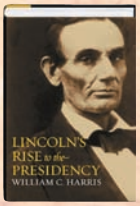

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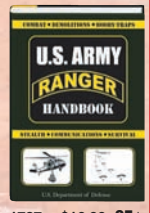

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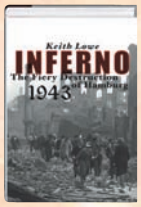

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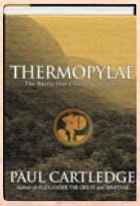

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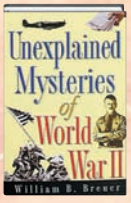

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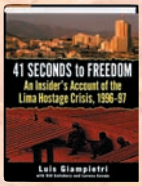

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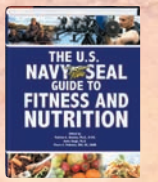

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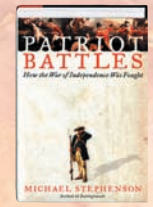

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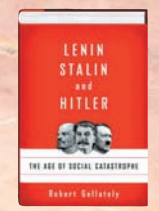

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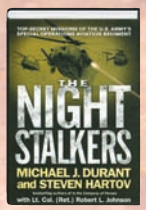

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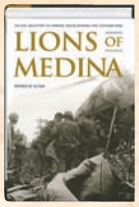

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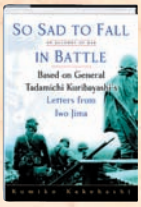

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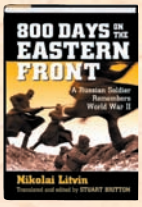

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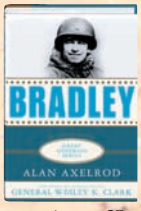

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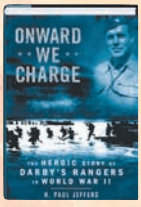

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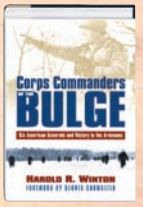

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by German officials and released.

Despite the harrowing ordeal of imprisonment, a reinvigorated Degrelle returned to Brussels with the firm belief that the occupying Germans would soon grant him substantial political power. He had been arrogantly confident of creating an independent Walloon state in southern Belgium but was frustrated to find that the Nazi authorities doubted his political reliability and had little interest in him or his party.

Following six months of ceaseless but ultimately fruitless maneuvering to gain German acceptance, Degrelle impulsively tried a different tact by making an unequivocally open declaration of pro-Nazi support in January 1941. It worked. With the patronage of the Nazis, the Rexist Party swiftly grew to become the principal francophone collaborationist group in Belgium—and the most powerful.

With Degrelle's political star again on the rise, he was ecstatic to learn of the German invasion of Russia in 1941. He quickly declared his unconditional support for the attack, and with rash enthusiasm offered to raise a volunteer battalion of his fellow French-speaking Walloons to join the fight against Bolshevism. Degrelle was convinced that such a military commitment would ensure a place of honor for Belgium in Hitler's vaguely defined "new order" for Europe. He was surprised, however, when many Rexists balked at fighting alongside the Germans and was even further dismayed to learn that the German military authorities in Belgium were less than enthusiastic about having inexperienced foreigners in the German Army. Perhaps in light of the propaganda value of such a unit or through pressure from higher authorities in Berlin, the Germans eventually granted Degrelle permission to raise a unit comprised only of Belgian volunteers. The unit, christened the Corps Franc Wallonie or Legion Wallonie, was to become a reality.

As the Wehrmacht tore across the Soviet Union at breakneck speed, Degrelle was chafing at the bit to get his unit on the ground in Russia to join the last battles prior to the German victory parade in Moscow—which seemed only a matter of weeks away. Details were yet to be ironed out in regard to uniforms, oath of loyalty, and many other issues, but Degrelle was already hard at work touring Belgium in search of legionnaire volunteers. With all his usual speechmaking skill, he appealed to the adolescent fervor of the times by announcing that the youth of Belgium were now poised to join the most glorious military campaign in world history.

Despite German propaganda and Degrelle's postwar writings boasting of the masses that flocked to join up, the reality was that very few other than Rexist Party members volunteered for service. Perhaps not surprisingly, most Belgians were horrified that Degrelle could contemplate wearing the military uniform of a conquering foreign power and completely ignored his call to arms.

Dressed in full combat gear and sighting a machine gun, SS officer Leon Degrelle is accompanied by a fellow Wallonien soldier on the Eastern Front. (© Rue des Archives/Tal-Granger Collection)

Faced with an embarrassing and very public shortfall in numbers, Degrelle needed to shore up support for the Legion. In a desperate move, he shelved plans to pursue his political career and announced on July 20, 1941, that he himself would volunteer for active service. Degrelle, now 35 years old, had never even fired a gun, but this dramatic gesture proved to be the turning point in the recruiting drive. Within days several hundred previously undecided Rexists followed the example set by their leader and signed on.

On the appointed date of departure, August 8, 1941, Degrelle and 849 other predominantly working-class volunteers assembled in the Place Royale in Brussels. The large crowd that gathered to see the recruits depart for basic training in East Prussia was viewed by Degrelle as a sign of Belgian support. His detractors claimed the crowd was filled mostly with family members, Rexists, or curious but unsympathetic onlookers.

Addressing his compatriots from beneath an enormous photograph of Adolf Hitler, Degrelle was at pains to dismiss the charges of treason being heaped upon them. He instead described the volunteers as "true patriots" who were ensuring a place of honor for the nation in the New Europe being forged in blood on the Eastern Front. While there is no doubt that Degrelle believed this to be the truth, neither the power of his oratory nor the eloquence of his words swayed many Belgians. Most viewed him as a mouthpiece for Nazi propaganda and regarded the forming of the Legion to fight for the Germans as an inexcusable act of betrayal. For reasons of idealism or self-interest, or both, Degrelle had eagerly taken up the poison chalice of political collaboration with both hands and drunk deeply. His fate, and the fate of those who followed him, was now irreconcilably manacled to that of the Third Reich. Most would not realize the lethal consequences of their actions until it was much too late.

As the 850 men of the Corps Franc Wallonie marched off in the fine, misty rain of that August morning in 1941, few would have believed that within four years all but three would be devoured in the blood-drenched maws of the Eastern Front. By the time basic training had been completed in early November 1941, the number of volunteers within the Legion had swollen to 1,500. Placed under the command of a retired Belgian colonial officer, the unit was dispatched by rail to the rolling wheat lands of the Ukraine in the southern sector of the Russian Front.

The wholesale destruction and endless columns of Russian prisoners they had passed en route gave every indication that the invincible armies of the Reich were on the verge of a resounding victory. The volunteers were not to know that the exhausted German spearheads operating along a vast front were in fact slowing down, blunted by hardening resistance, overextended supply lines, and autumn rains that had turned the battlefield into a sea of mud. There was, however, still great optimism among the Belgians that the war would be won

before the onset of winter.

Upon arriving at the front, the Legion was incorporated into Army Group South and allotted the replacement battalion identity of 373 (Wallonische) Infantrie Battaillone.

Degrelle and his comrades saw themselves as a continuation of the Belgian Army but were shocked to realize that the German military, already skeptical about the volunteers' reasons for fighting, had little regard for their capabilities. Dismissed as being merely a propaganda unit, the battalion was assigned to the rear areas to undertake antipartisan operations.

Upon enlisting, Degrelle's request for a commission had been denied by the German authorities due to his obvious lack of military experience, but to the surprise of many, Leon Degrelle had adapted to military life as a humble private with ease. This bon vivant made an implausible soldier, but he endured the hardships of the simple infantrymen without complaint and was good naturedly dubbed "Modest the First, Duke of Burgundy." During this unpalatable antipartisan phase of his service, Degrelle showed himself to be a courageous, inspirational soldier with a natural ability to lead men in combat.

Unlike many European collaborationist leaders who merely toured the front for propaganda, Degrelle actively participated in the fighting that occurred against the Russian guerrillas. The irregular partisan enemy with whom they were engaged adhered to no set order of battle or military doctrine, and the hit-and-run tactics they employed were difficult to counter or anticipate. The untried soldiers were thrown into an extraordinarily cruel type of warfare that often required them to shoot down women and children who were fighting alongside the men. These antipartisan duties, characterized by a ruthless barbarity considered too grisly for military journalists to report, was not the war the Belgians had envisaged or signed up for. The sobering fact was that there were no glorious battles, just endless terrifying skirmishes through forests and swamps.

Exposure to the terrifying brutalities of the front line with all its sickening horror, death, and sorrow had shaken the Belgians to the core. The shock of infantry warfare had been worse than any of the Walloons could have imagined, but their plight deteriorated further with the onset of the worst Russian winter in 150 years.

The combination of the marrow-chilling Russian winter, horrific casualties, and constant ridicule from their German counterparts saw the mood among the ill-prepared and ill-equipped Belgians shift between outright mutiny and abject despair. As temperatures plunged to

ABOVE: During a review of SS troops in a city square on April 2, 1944, SS officer Leon Degrelle walks past the ranks of Wallonien volunteers with SS Generals Josef "Sepp" Dietrich and Richard Jungclaus. OPPOSITE: During a visit to Berlin on July 7, 1944, Leon Degrelle talks with Belgian volunteer workers who have relocated to the German capital. (Above: Rue des Archives-Granger Collection / Right: National Archives)

42 degrees below zero, Degrelle tried to lift their demoralized spirits, but he could see that the future for the Legion as a fighting force appeared bleak. Degrelle was not a military strategist, but as the weeks passed he realized that Germany was not going to win the war in the East as quickly as he had first thought.

In fact, it seemed likely that there would be many long, agonizing months of hard fighting through blizzards, snow and subzero temperatures before there were any German victory parades through Red Square. As reports filtered through of the Wehrmacht's failure at the gates of Moscow in December 1941, he, like most around the world, had yet to grasp that this was the beginning of the end for the Third Reich. Looking beyond his own grim circumstances, he may well have sensed that the crusade he so enthusiastically embraced for himself and his fellow volunteers had soured. Most of the despairing men around him were convinced they were all going to die an agonizing death in the snow.

By February 1942, the German position in Russia was still precarious. The Wehrmacht had been driven back over 150 miles from Moscow, and the Russians attempted to vigorously exploit their success with a further breakthrough in the Donets Basin. This bitter struggle provided the scarcely blooded Walloons with their first taste of real combat in fierce defensive battles for the villages of Rosa Luxembourg and Gromovaya-Balka, which lay in the path of the Soviet offensive. Against overwhelming Russian forces, the heavily outnumbered Walloons showed remarkable combat prowess, courage, and grim determination fighting alongside Waffen SS troops in the see-sawing battle to ultimately hold the villages. Among those decorated was Degrelle himself, who was awarded the Iron Cross for his bravery and inspirational leadership during savage hand-to-hand combat.

This baptism of fire against Red Army troops came at a horrendous cost for the Legion. A third of its men and almost all of its officers had been killed or wounded. Despite the grievous losses, the fighting qualities and astonishing tenacity displayed by the Belgians finally earned them the admiration and respect of Wehrmacht troops. With the Walloons' reputation greatly enhanced, the thawing of relations with their German counterparts restored flagging morale, as did their considerable successes in the savage battles that awaited them during the autumn of 1942.

In time, even the Russians came to know of these Belgians and would often broadcast in French asking the volunteers to come over and fight for Free French leader Charles de Gaulle.

The steady loss of officers and NCOs had contributed to rapid promotion for Degrelle, and by May 1942 he was finally commissioned as a lieutenant. At this time the Legion was placed under the command of SS Obergruppenführer (Lieutenant General) Felix Steiner's famed SS Division Wiking in preparation for an attack aimed at regaining the territory lost the previous December. On June 28, 1942, the Wehrmacht launched its massive summer offensive in the Caucasus, which, having caught the Russians completely off guard, soon had them

fleeing in headlong retreat. With the Germans having regained the military initiative, Degrelle was convinced that this was the beginning of the final drive to victory.

With numbing fatigue their constant companion, the Walloons pushed ahead in stifling heat through countryside that had long since shaken off the white blanket of winter. Degrelle, whose tunic was now adorned with the Iron Cross both First and Second Class, drove himself and his men hard to stay in contact with the Soviet forces. Most of the enemy troops they saw, however, had already fallen victim to marauding Junkers Ju-87 Stuka dive-bombers, and thousands of their loathsome corpses lined the roadsides baking in the sun. There was no time to bury them. With a sense of pride, the

volunteers of the Legion strove forward day after day, week after week, not giving the enemy a moment's respite.

Fighting alongside the highly motivated Dutch SS troops of the Wiking Division had been a revelation for Degrelle. He was impressed with the spirit, ethos, and material conditions of these elite soldiers and decided that the future of the Legion would be better served within the ranks of the increasingly powerful Waffen SS.

Reichsführer SS Heinrich Himmler had already cast his covetous gaze over the now battle-proven Walloons, and, like Degrelle, considered them worthy of admission into his private army. The two men shared a common goal but seemingly little else. Degrelle did not trust Himmler, and the latter in reality saw Degrelle as little more than a convenient propaganda tool for winning over foreign recruits.

Nonetheless, the move to the SS was a popular decision among the officers and men of the Legion. Degrelle also believed his postwar future would be greatly enhanced in the SS. The personal prestige of having his Legion recognized as an elite military formation would carry a great deal of weight with the decision-making hierarchy of the Reich after the war.

In the spring of 1943, the Legion, boosted by an influx of new recruits, was transformed into the 5th SS Freiwilligen Sturmbrigade Wallonien with SS Hauptstürmfuhrer (Captain) Leon Degrelle as its chief of staff. Elevated to new heights of combat prowess, the 2,000 men of the fully motorized brigade were rushed to the middle Dneiper sector of the Ukraine in November 1943. With the runic SS symbol now adorning their collars, they were once again deployed alongside the SS Wiking Division as part of two German corps occupying a salient extending into the Soviet lines west of Cherkassy. A Russian offensive west of the Dnieper was soon massing around the salient, clearly revealing Soviet intentions to surround and destroy the German forces inside. Despite warnings from his generals, Hitler doggedly refused to allow a strategic withdrawal.

German troops desperately tried to keep an escape route open, but powerful Russian armor sealed the ring around the Kessel, or Cauldron, on January 28, 1944. Soon, the noose was tightening. More than 50,000 Axis troops were faced with complete annihilation, a fact eagerly anticipated by Degrelle's enemies at home and abroad. An armored relief force of the III SS Panzer Corps soon began battering its way through the Soviet ring from the southwest to link up with the besieged troops. The Walloniens and the Wiking Division, meanwhile, were given the unenviable task of defending against the Russian attacks at the extreme eastern corner of the shrinking pocket, while the bulk of the German forces prepared to break out to the west. In the face of furious Red Army assaults, the tenacious Walloniens held firm through 17 torturous days and nights of ferocious close combat.

During the bloody engagement, the brigade commander was killed, and it fell to Degrelle to quickly take command of what was left of the shattered unit. Degrelle's questionable grasp of military strategy was compensated for by his unflinching courage, cool head, and hard-won battle experience. At a time when the fate of the Walloniens hung by a thread, it was often Degrelle's qualities as a fighting leader that set the example for his men. Few of his troops would ever forget seeing Degrelle, in agony from a deep wound in his side, continue to personally lead them through fighting so ghastly that it was considered completely beyond the comprehension of anyone who had not lived through it.

Despite the hellish conditions, the Belgians not only managed to hold the Russians but eventually broke out of the trap themselves. Dragging their wounded with them, they fought alongside German units in a desperate rear-guard action through lethal Russian rocket and artillery fire. However, as Degrelle and the

exhausted remnants of the brigade closed on the German lines, they appeared certain to be overtaken and massacred by the pursuing Russians. In a heroic act of self-sacrifice, Wiking's few remaining panzers suddenly turned back to hold off the Red Army units until the Belgians had reached safety.

Degrelle had survived another close encounter, but the heroic stand in the Cherkassy Pocket had come at an appalling cost. Not only had all the Belgians' heavy equipment been lost, but of the original 2,000 men that began the siege, 1,300 had been left dead on the battlefield. In reality, the brigade had been ground to pieces. Still reeling from the effects of heavy combat, Degrelle was confirmed as the brigade commander and promoted to SS Sturmbannführer (Major). For his incredible bravery, he was flown out of Russia to be awarded the Knights Cross by Hitler, and as the two men went over the battle on a large map it was obvious that Hitler not only had a great personal interest in the progress of the brigade but also held Degrelle in high esteem.

With the German propaganda machine eager to promote the exploits of Degrelle to assist foreign recruiting, he returned to Brussels with approximately 160 survivors of the battle to receive the largest mass welcome in Belgian history. Thousands of Belgians lined the streets and boulevards of the capital to cheer the returning Degrelle as he rode in a tank accompanied by his children. Lavish receptions were held in his honor, and with all his customary skill and verve he delivered an impressive speech to more than 10,000 people in the Brussels Sports Stadium. The publicity surrounding Degrelle, however, failed to impress many veterans of the other largely ignored Belgian units who had also fought their way out of the Cherkassy Pocket. They would caustically remark that they too had paid a heavy price in the battle but did not have Degrelle, with his indefatigable talent for self-promotion, to recount their exploits.

By this stage of the war, Degrelle seemed to have little interest in the day-to-day affairs of the Rexist Party in Belgium. He even contemplated dissolving the party altogether to focus his energy on fighting the war. Degrelle toured German factories and prisoner of war camps recruiting for the brigade and spent time consolidating his prestige and stature with Nazi power brokers. Through an energetic combination of bluster, charm, and intrigue he fostered strong ties with key functionaries within the SS. He was highly regarded, but his efforts were slowly being undermined by Germany's looming defeat.

The Reich's military reversals in other theaters washed over Degrelle, but in February 1944, the massive Soviet offensive aimed at driving the Germans out of Estonia was not so easily ignored. With the force of a sledgehammer, Red Army units swamped the exhausted German forces of Army Group North, which included the volunteer SS formations of Steiner's III (Germanic) SS Panzer Corps. By May, following months of fierce and bitter fighting, the battle raged around the vital town of Narva near the Estonian border with Russia, but at that time Degrelle's shattered brigade was in Poland for badly needed rest and reorganization.

With the Estonian sector of the front buckling under Soviet pressure, the Germans needed men to fill the gaps in the line. Degrelle was in Belgium on leave for his brother's funeral when informed that the Germans had rushed 300 barely trained Wallonien recruits and 140 other troops from Poland to Estonia. Their instructors went with them to conduct further training during the deployment. The situation was so critical that the bewildered Belgian recruits were immediately thrown into the line near Dorpat to hold a Russian breakthrough. Most did not even know how to use their weapons.

Degrelle was absolutely furious that his recruits had been sent to the front. Defying Hitler's orders that he not return to the fighting, he immediately left for Estonia in search of the 440-man battalion. Degrelle and his men quickly found themselves deployed to meet the threat of a Soviet breakthrough at Pskov.

The situation in Estonia was chaotic as the line seemed ready to crumble under the hammer blows of Soviet armor and air strikes. The Russians were streaming through the region like a tidal wave. Using a French-speaking German officer to translate, Degrelle rallied panicked German troops in his sector. He grabbed others by the scruff of the neck and forced them back into the line. Degrelle knew how to fight the Russians, and standing completely exposed to the enemy he commanded an ad hoc force with incredible vigor, skill, and courage until the crisis had passed and the Russians were driven back.

In a remarkable feat of arms, Steiner's SS Panzer Corps ultimately held firm against vastly superior Russian numbers but had been bled white in the process. For three weeks during the Battle of Narva, Degrelle's mostly inexperienced Walloniens had been committed to heavy combat. Only 32 of the original 300 recruits survived to rejoin the brigade.

For his extraordinary courage and leadership on the Narva front, Degrelle was flown out of Estonia and once again brought before Hitler on August 27, 1944. He had the unique distinction of being one of the few nonethnic Ger-

mans to be awarded the coveted Oak Leaves to the Knights Cross along with the prestigious Close Combat Clasp in gold, awarded to men who had fought more than 50 days of close-quarter combat. Degrelle was a clear favorite of the German leader, and after an hour of conversation, Hitler took the Belgian's hand in both of his. "If I had a son," he said slowly," I would want him to be like you." Hitler then left, and they would never meet again.

Despite being virtually annihilated during its service in Russia and Estonia, the Wallonien Brigade was to be upgraded in September 1944 to form the 28th SS Division, commanded by SS Oberstürmbannfuhrer (Lieutenant Colonel) Leon Degrelle. New recruits were drawn from Belgians hoping to avoid labor service in Germany, Spanish veterans, Frenchmen, and criminals taken directly from Belgian and German prisons. Their numbers, however, would not meet the division's manpower needs, so a massive recruiting drive was launched to bring the division up to strength. The age limit for recruits was lowered, and the upper limit raised in an attempt to find more sorely needed men.

Following the successful Allied landings on D-Day, the appeal of joining an elite unit had soured as Germany's military fortunes plummeted. The Legion rarely rejected anybody by

Bedecked with medals and wearing a steel helmet, SS Sturmbannführer (Major) Leon Degrelle raises the Nazi salute on April 12, 1944. (National Archives)

this stage of the war, and many of the conscripts who were dragooned into the 28th SS Division Wallonia were generally of very poor quality. A sizeable number deserted at the first opportunity. Already severely hampered by a shortage of experienced officers and NCOs, the actual strength of Degrelle's command was barely 8,000 troops. Of these, only half had any military training. It was in reality a division on paper only and would reenter battle as little more than a reinforced brigade.

With Germany's armies retreating on all fronts, Degrelle clung grimly to his division and the troops he led. There was nothing beyond that. In front, he faced the all-conquering Red Army. Behind him lay a shattered political dream as the Rexist Party he had formed began crumbling to dust. With the Western Allies fast approaching Brussels, many high-ranking Rexists who had diligently aided the Nazis deserted their posts and tried to melt away to avoid reprisals.

Degrelle's shaken morale was lifted by the ambitious German offensive in the Ardennes in December 1944, which resulted in the Battle of the Bulge. By Christmas, however, the attack had ground to a halt and then collapsed with more than 80,000 casualties. In the wake of Hitler's disastrous gamble in Belgium, Degrelle's wavering belief in an improbable Nazi victory was only kept alive by rumors that wonder weapons would soon turn the tide. Like so many others, Degrelle seemed to have closed his eyes to the reality that the war was irrevocably lost. Only catastrophic defeat and the dispensation of hard justice awaited them all—particularly willing foreign servants of the Reich.

In late January 1945, Degrelle and his Walloons joined many other pitifully understrength SS units of Steiner's 11th SS Panzer Army for

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By Peter Kross

Mysterious Inga Arvad

An enigmatic beauty may have worked for the Nazis and involved a future U.S. president in a web of intrigue.

SHORTLY BEFORE PEARL HARBOR, AN ATTRACTIVE DANISH JOURNALIST arrived in the United States to pursue a writing career. A former beauty queen who had won numerous talent contests and was once called "the perfect Nordic beauty" by none other than Adolf Hitler, was courted by the top brass in Germany, including Hitler, Herman Göring, and Josef Goebbels. After landing a job with the isolationist *Washington Times Herald*, she began writing a weekly column on the most interesting personalities in Washington, D.C. Her questionable past, however, caught the attention of J. Edgar Hoover's FBI, and a full-scale, covert investigation into her daily activities took place. The woman who was the center of all this intrigue was Inga Arvad, a talented writer—and possibly a Nazi spy.

Inga Arvad was born on October 6, 1913, in Copenhagen, Denmark. Her mother, Olga, an English doctor, brought young Inga to England for her early education. Upon her father's death, the Arvad family moved to Paris, and Inga studied piano at the Conservatorium in Brussels. She later returned to Paris upon graduation. At age 16, Inga was crowned Beauty Queen of Denmark, contended for the Miss Europe crown, and at age 17 married an Egyptian diplomat named Kamal Abdel Nabi. The marriage lasted only two years and ended in divorce. After the breakup of her marriage, Inga returned to Copenhagen where she obtained a job as a correspondent with the *Berligske Tidene,* the largest Danish newspaper.

Inga was a stunning beauty and, using her good looks and talent, was sought after in both high society and politics. During her time with the *Berligske Tidene,* she traveled to Germany on numerous occasions and was able to interview the top brass of Nazi Germany. Inga made such an impression on Hitler that he invited her to his private box during the 1936 Olympic Games in Berlin. Inga even interviewed Hitler twice, as well has having discussions with Goebbels and Göring. These sessions were not related to politics, but were discourses about everyday matters such as food and their personal habits and interests.

It was from these early meetings with Hitler's henchmen that the FBI considered Inga Arvad to be a possible German espionage agent. According to a January 21, 1942, FBI memo to the Attorney General's office, "The combination of these facts indicates a definite possibility that she may be engaged in a most subtle type of espionage activities against the United States."

In 1935, at age 21, Inga met and soon married Paul Fejos, a noted movie director, and starred in a number of his films. During World War I, Fejos had served in the Hungarian Army as a cavalry officer and also found time to get his med-

TOP LEFT: Nazi Führer Adolf Hitler is seen attending the 1936 Winter Olympics in the Bavarian city of Garmisch-Partenkirchen. Hitler met Inga Arvad for the first time during the 1936 Summer Olympics, in Berlin. TOP RIGHT: Inga Arvad addresses a question from a reporter in Los Angeles on July 9, 1945.

(Left: © Lucien Aigner/CORBIS/ rRight: © Bettmann/CORBIS)

ical degree. Fejos came to the United States after the war and in 1929 became a naturalized American citizen. Inga and Fejos traveled to Southeast Asia, including the Malay Peninsula, the Dutch East Indies, and China.

In 1939, Paul Fejos and Inga Arvad went to visit his new employer, Axel Wenner-Gren, at his home in the Bahamas. Wenner-Gren had opened up his own bank branch in the Bahamas, where the banking laws were not subject to the usual tight inspection. He was friendly with the Duke and Duchess of Windsor, who had been embroiled in the controversy over an heir to the British throne marrying a commoner (the Duke was implicated as a Nazi collaborator by members of the British government). In 1941, the Internal Revenue Service (IRS) in the United States opened up a lawsuit against Wenner-Gren, and his company was put on a blacklist of firms not allowed to enter into U.S. commerce. Wenner-Gren was a man with a shadowy past and was also the subject of FBI surveillance. Fejos headed the Wenner-Gren scientific expedition to South America aboard his yacht, *Southern Cross*.

As FBI surveillance of Inga began to heat up, she was seen in Wenner-Gren's company in both New York and Washington at different times. In February 1940, Inga arrived permanently in the United States and was accepted to the Columbia University School of Journalism. FBI documents report, "Since her arrival in the United States, Arvad received approximately $6,000, $3,000 of which [were] received from AXEL WENNER-GREN. Arvad had in her possession a pamphlet of the Pan-American Highway and Relation to Hemispheric Solidarity; figures as to trip of Secretary Knox to the Hawaiian Islands; correspondence with JOHN KENNEDY, PAUL FEJOS, AXEL WENNER-GREN, and others sent out..."

The John Kennedy referred to was none other than the second oldest son of the former U.S. Ambassador to England, Joseph Kennedy. John Kennedy, then a young lieutenant serving with the Office of Naval Intelligence in Washington, D.C., would start a long and passionate relationship with Inga Arvad while she was married to Paul Fejos. That affair with a possible German spy would set off alarm bells at both the FBI, which was already following Arvad, and the Office of Naval Intelligence. Information gleaned from the dual investigation of Kennedy and Arvad went right to the Oval Office and into the hands of President Franklin D. Roosevelt.

The FBI kept a detailed account of the activ-

ities of both Paul Fejos and Axel Wenner-Gren and prepared an elaborate set of questions for Inga regarding both her husband and his employer. According to the FBI, "Although the principal reason for interviewing Miss Arvad is to explore the possibility that Miss Arvad was employed by Wenner-Gren as a private intelligence agent, Miss Arvad's social and political activities both in Europe and this country are so related to the theory that she was Wenner-Gren's agent that it would seem desirable to explore her entire adult life in considerable detail."

LEFT: While a young U.S. Navy lieutenant stationed in Washington, D.C., John F. Kennedy was reportedly carrying on a torrid love affair with the married Inga Arvad. RIGHT: FBI Director J. Edgar Hoover supervised an extensive investigation of Inga Arvad and a number of her associates.

(Both: National Archives)

Some of the bureau's questions read as follows: "Her relations to Paul Fejos. When and how did she first meet Fejos? What does she know about his background or previous employment? When did he first become employed by Wenner-Gren? ... Particularly, what does she know about Fejos' activities as leader of an alleged archeological expedition in Peru? What was the real purpose of the trip?

"Miss Arvad's relations with Wenner-Gren in 1937 and 1938. Was she herself employed by Wenner-Gren in connection with the cruise of the *Southern Cross* in the Pacific in those years? What activities did she observe Wenner-Gren engage in either aboard the yacht or in the various ports? ... Did she on any of the trips or at any time hear any stories of large amounts of cash being transported on the yacht? Did Fejos accompany Wenner-Gren on this trip? What were they doing during that time?"

After her graduation from Columbia University in June 1941, Inga moved to Washington, D.C., where she got a job with the *Times Herald* newspaper. Inga wrote a popular column in which she interviewed prominent people in business and government.

Inga shared an apartment with Kathleen Kennedy, the sister of John F. Kennedy. During their time as roommates, Kathleen (called "Kick"), introduced Inga to her brother. Young John Kennedy was instantly taken with Inga, a worldly woman some five years older than he, a person with charm, wit, and most importantly, the figure of a modern day goddess. Jack and Inga fell madly in love, and a heated sexual relationship soon began.

In June 1941, an incident concerning Inga's past became known to the *Herald*'s editor, Frank Waldrop. A person working in the paper's morgue came across a picture of Inga with Hitler at the 1936 Olympic Games. Soon, rumors began circulating that Inga might be a spy. Eleanor Patterson, the publisher of the *Herald,* was notified about Inga's past, and she told Frank Waldrop to look into the situation. Waldrop, accompanied by Inga and the woman who found the disputed picture, Page Huidekoper, went to FBI headquarters to tell their amazing story. The FBI, which had already known about Arvad's shadowy past, immediately began a covert investigation that included bugging her apartment located at 1600 Sixteenth Street in Washington, surveillance of her daily activities by field agents, tapping her home phone, and opening her mail.

During the FBI's probe of Inga Arvad, a young, lanky man was often spotted in her company. The two were obviously having an affair, as the young man would be seen arriving and leaving her apartment at all hours of the day and night. The only clue to his identity was that his name was Jack. The Jack in question, it turned out, was Ensign John F. Kennedy.

John Kennedy was working in the Office of Naval Intelligence reading rather mundane intelligence reports of no significant value. The Bureau informed the Navy, and a joint intelligence probe began. An FBI memo dated January 17, 1942, written by Agent G.C. Barton reads, "Mr. Kramer advised the writer that information had come to the Bureau that Inga Arvad has been carrying on an affair with a young ensign of the United States Navy reported to be the son of the former American Ambassador to London, Joseph P. Kennedy. Mr. Kramer instructed the writer to discreetly confer with ONI and determine if this were true and if it were true, to determine what action had been taken against the ensign. He called on the above date and stated that it had come to ONI's attention that Ensign Kennedy had been 'playing around' with Inga Arvad and that steps had been taken to put an end to the relationship. Lt. Horan stated that Kennedy would probably not be disenrolled but it was anticipated that he would be transferred out of Washington."

On ONI's advice, Kennedy was transferred to the naval base at Charleston, South Car-

olina, hoping that would put an end to the affair. It did not. With Inga's phone tapped, the Bureau had no trouble keeping tabs on her travels. She was followed on numerous trips by train to visit Kennedy at Charleston where they would check into the Francis Marion Hotel for heated lovemaking sessions, all recorded by the Feds. At one point, Kennedy affectionately referred to his partner as "Inga Binga."

Inga told Jack that she wanted a divorce from her husband and asked if he would marry her. Young Kennedy remained noncommittal, which infuriated Inga. In their conversations, Kennedy told Inga confidential information concerning diplomatic relations between the United States and England. The FBI reported in a February 6, 1942, memo to Director Hoover that "in another conversation, Arvad accused young Kennedy of telling someone that he had no intention of marrying her, that it was merely a passing incident."

Former U.S. Ambassador to Great Britain, Joseph P. Kennedy, shown here in 1961, ordered his son, the future President of the United States, to abruptly end his romance with Inga Arvad.

(National Archives)

FBI records include a January 27, 1943, letter from Inga Arvad to Clyde Tolson, J. Edgar Hoover's number two deputy. Inga writes, "I might as well be frank to start with. I am writing you because I need your help. I tried to call you on the phone this morning, but it was impossible to reach you. You did introduce me to Mr. Hoover once at a party in Washington, but I don't feel that I can write him and say please let me see you for five minutes … I would like to talk to Mr. Hoover about a personal matter, in which he is the only person who can help me. So, dear Mr. Tolson, please persuade Mr. Hoover to see me. Any time, any day and I shall come to Washington. If Mr. Hoover is going to be in N.Y.C. in the near future it would be wonderful but that is too much to hope for."

Why Inga Arvad, whom the FBI was investigating, would send a personal letter to the director of the FBI to discuss a personal matter remains a mystery.

Jack Kennedy's affair with Inga Arvad soon caught the attention of his powerful father, the ex-Ambassador to London. After a call from Director Hoover regarding his son's relationship, the elder Kennedy, in no uncertain terms, instructed Jack to break off their involvement. Within days after receiving his father's call, Ensign Kennedy told Inga they were through. Friends of Kennedy told stories that Inga Arvad was the love of Jack's life. However, for political and other considerations, their relationship was not allowed to last.

Kennedy was soon transferred to the South Pacific where he would gain fame as the commander of *PT 109*. Later, of course, he became the 35th president of the United States. But the investigation of Inga Arvad would take one more bizarre twist.

The investigation reached the Oval Office in a July 16, 1942, FBI memo written to Marvin McIntyre, FDR's personal confidant. "Some weeks ago the president sent to me a personal note indicating that we should keep a weather eye on Inga Arvad. There have been numerous rumors concerning her and her background, and we have been making a general check of her activities.

"I have just learned that one of her present, close associates is with Niles Bloch, residing in New York City. Niles Bloch is employed in the Foreign Language Broadcast Section of the Office of War Information (part of the early American intelligence-gathering apparatus). According to the Arvad woman, he will shortly be made the chief of the Scandinavian Section of that organization. He is engaged in air programs. The Arvad woman is herself considering an offer to accept a position with the Office of War Information in New York City. She has been spending the last several weekends with Bloch in New York City.

"In view of the general background concerning this woman, I thought I should let you know, as I thought the president might be interested in this matter."

The fact that Inga Arvad was spending so much time with Niles Bloch, a man who worked in a sensitive, intelligence-gathering agency, and was herself considering a job in the OWI should have sent shock waves across the establishment in Washington.

Over the years, Arvad hotly denied to friends that she was pro-German, but colleagues at Columbia University said she held virulent anti-Semitic views. Studying the declassified FBI documents on Inga Arvad, no smoking gun concerning her possible espionage activities for the Nazis could be found. But, as the saying goes, a good spy does not leave a trail. □

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By Michael D. Hull

The Road to Overlord

General Freddie Morgan directed the complex planning for Operation Overlord, the D-Day invasion.

SOON AFTER THE TATTERED BRITISH EXPEDITIONARY FORCE WAS miraculously rescued from Dunkirk in June 1940, planners at the War Office in London began dreaming of returning to the German-occupied European continent.

If a port could be captured in a surprise attack, troops and supplies could be poured into the bridgehead before the German defenders had a chance to draw breath. But the BEF had been shattered in France, abandoning its heavy equipment, and British resources were threadbare until the Army could be built up and re-equipped. It would not be until mid-1942 that any kind of offensive across the English Channel could be considered—an experimental amphibious assault.

The objective decided upon was the French port of Dieppe, north of Rouen, and the invasion force comprised 6,000 men—mostly British Commandos and untried Canadian infantry. But Dieppe was well defended, with seawalls blocking the raiders' supporting Churchill tanks, and the August 1942 operation swiftly turned into a costly disaster and a bitter lesson. Only 2,500 men of the raiding force returned to England. The War Office generals and planners realized that Continental ports were too easily defended and thus difficult to seize. Besides, British resources were still stretched thin, so any thoughts of a return to Europe had to be put on hold.

Attention was diverted to the ongoing struggle in North Africa, where British and Commonwealth forces were battling to bar German and Italian armies from Egypt and the strategic Suez Canal. British morale was given a welcome jolt on October 23, 1942, when General Bernard L. Montgomery's Eighth Army defeated Field Marshal Erwin Rommel's vaunted Afrika Korps at the second Battle of El Alamein, the first major British victory of World War II and one of its great turning points.

For most of the next two years, the Allies' gains were confined to the Mediterranean Sea area—destroying the Axis forces in North Africa, capturing Sicily, the gateway to Italy, and then pushing up the Italian boot in a strategic bid to pierce what British Prime Minister Winston Churchill termed "the soft underbelly" of German-held Europe. But there was no doubt in anyone's mind that, sooner or later, battles would have to be waged farther north if Germany was to be crushed. And that would unavoidably entail an invasion across the English Channel.

That British view was strongly supported by the United States, which, while battling the Japanese in the Pacific Theater, was anxious to bring an early end to the European war. In fact, as early as 1942, Soviet Marshal Josef Stalin and General George C. Marshall, U.S. Army chief of staff, had been pressing for a cross-Channel invasion. But Marshall, while a much admired staff officer and organizer, was not a strategist and failed to appreciate the paucity of Allied resources, particularly landing craft. There was no way the hard-pressed Allies could have mounted such an operation either in 1942 or 1943.

ABOVE: British Lieutenant General Frederick E. Morgan led the Allied effort to plan the invasion of the European continent. TOP LEFT: Soldiers drive jeeps onto waiting LCTs at a British port in preparation for the Normandy landings on June 6, 1944.

(Both: National Archives)

Shaken by the Dieppe debacle, Churchill resisted the idea of what he rightly considered a premature attack across the English Channel. He sought victory in the Mediterranean and was reluctant to commit thousands of troops to a new front with the slimmest chance of success. The British leader had nightmares in which he saw the bodies of young British and American soldiers piled high on French beaches.

In January 1943, Churchill and U.S. President Franklin D. Roosevelt met in Casablanca to plan the future direction of the war, and the British hesitantly accepted the principle of an invasion in Northwest Europe. They agreed to vague proposals for a "return to the Continent," though they knew the resources were still sorely lacking. The cross-Channel assault would be planned in London, so, with the agreement of the American war planners, it was decided that the British generals should look for someone to commence drafting an invasion blueprint. Although an overall invasion commander was not named, the chief planner would eventually become his senior administrative assistant—his chief of staff.

The man chosen for the daunting task—laying the groundwork for the biggest and most complex seaborne invasion in history—was Lt. Gen. Frederick Edgworth Morgan, a 49-year-old veteran of the bloody Ypres and Somme campaigns in World War I, twice mentioned in dispatches. Born in London, the son of a timber merchant, he attended the Royal Military Academy at Woolwich, and was commissioned into the Royal Artillery. Mustached, good-humored "Freddie" Morgan soldiered in India between the world wars, was a staff officer at the War Office and with the 3rd Infantry Division, served briefly with the BEF in France in 1940, and commanded I Corps of the British Home Forces.

He learned of his appointment on March 12, 1943, after stepping into a crowded elevator at New Scotland Yard in London while heading for a meeting at the headquarters of Combined Operations, commanded by Admiral Lord Louis Mountbatten. The handsome, dashing Royal Navy hero of the Battle of Crete jumped into the elevator at the last minute, greeted Morgan warmly, and congratulated him on his appointment as chief of staff to the supreme Allied commander (COSSAC). Thus, Morgan learned for the first time of the awesome assignment that was to tax all of his energies for the next year.

There were plenty of able senior officers serving behind the front lines in 1943, but the War Office was anxious to avoid depriving the Mediterranean Theater of a rising star, so it had settled on Morgan to plan the Allies' second front. With solid experience in both invasion planning and operations, he was the ideal choice. He was a self-starter with outstanding executive abilities. The capable but waspish Field Marshal Viscount Alanbrooke, Chief of the Imperial General Staff, who was lukewarm toward the cross-Channel project, told Morgan brusquely, "Well, there it is. It won't work, but you must bloody well make it."

Shown deployed along a Normandy invasion beach, this Mulberry artificial harbor allowed supplies and reinforcements to be offloaded in support of the Allied landings which took place on June 6, 1944. This aerial view provides a perspective of the size of the massive structure. (Imperial War Museum)

Like most senior British Army officers, not the least Montgomery, General Morgan had learned on the Western Front that in battle lives are spared by amassing enough men and resources to overwhelm the enemy. By early 1943, he had found himself planning potential invasions of Sardinia, Spanish Morocco, and Sicily. The first two plans were shelved and, after Morgan had completed preliminary work on the third, it was passed to officers in the field.

It was in mid-March 1943 that Freddie Morgan began planning the Allied assault on Northwest Europe, and it was April 26 before he was given his responsibilities from the Combined Chiefs of Staff and the official designation of COSSAC (taken from the initials of his new title). He was told that the Allies intended to "defeat the German fighting forces in Northwest Europe" and that he was to prepare plans for a full-scale assault on the European mainland at the earliest possible date in 1944, followed by a death blow delivered at the heart of Nazi Germany with a force of 100 Allied divisions.

In addition, Morgan was instructed to prepare an "elaborate camouflage and deception scheme" during the summer of 1943 with the aim of convincing the Germans that the invasion might yet come in that year and thereby pin down enemy forces in the West. Finally, he was to plan for an immediate return to Europe, with the forces then available, should Nazi Germany begin to collapse from within. This latter plan was known as Operation Rankin.

The acronym, COSSAC, also came to refer to Morgan's staff—about 50 British, U.S., and Canadian officers—which set up headquarters at the elegant Norfolk House in London's leafy St. James Square. The deputy COSSAC commander was 54-year-old Maj. Gen. Ray W. Barker of the U.S. Army, a field artillery veteran of World War I.

At first, the British chiefs of staff, preoccupied with operations in the Mediterranean, Burma, and Southeast Asia, did not always regard COSSAC's work as top priority. But Morgan was unperturbed, and he and his staffers set to work on their massive task with enthusiasm and energy. Though hampered by not having a supreme commander for whom to deputize, General Morgan toiled hard as COSSAC, even to the extent of sleeping on a folding camp bed in his office. Aware of the doubters and skeptics ready to detract from COSSAC's efforts, Morgan wryly warned his team, "The term planning staff has come to have a sinister meaning. It implies the production of nothing but paper. What we must contrive to do is to produce not only paper, but action."

The planning of the invasion, which preoccupied him and his team throughout 1943, was

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The Thunder of Operation Gallop

BY PAT MCTAGGART

WITH VICTORY AT STALINGRAD CLOSE AT HAND, THE SOVIETS LAUNCHED AN EFFORT TO LIBERATE THE LOWER DON BASIN.

As Adolf Hitler's vaunted Sixth Army lay in its death throes in the ruins of Stalingrad, German forces to the west of the city faced their own kind of hell. The inner ring of the Russians' iron grip at Stalingrad was tasked with the total destruction of German and other Axis troops within the city, but Soviet dictator Joseph Stalin wanted more. In conjunction with the Soviet High Command (STAVKA), Stalin set forth an ambitious plan designed to liberate the Don Basin from Kursk in the north to the Sea of Azov in the south, bringing the vital agricultural and mineral-rich area once more under Russian control.

Germany's allied armies were a shambles. The Hungarian Second Army and the Italian Eighth Army, positioned along the upper Don River, were shattered by General Filipp Ivanovich Golikov's Voronezh Front, causing a yawning gap south of the German Second Army, which was assigned to defend the Voronezh area.

Farther south, General Nikolai Fyodorovich Vatutin's South West Front, despite heavy opposition, moved toward Voroshilovgrad and Starobelsk. In the Caucasus and along the Donets River, the German troops of Heeresgruppe A (Army Group A) were in a race to the death to escape being trapped by advancing armies of the Trans-Caucasus and the Stalingrad Fronts.

In mid-January, Stalin and STAVKA saw a very distinct possibility of forcing the entire southern flank of the German Army in the east to collapse. With a victory at Stalingrad all but assured, Soviet military planners developed operations aimed at pushing the Germans back to the Dniepr River. The more optimistic planners, including Stalin, hoped for an even bigger push.

A two-pronged attack was finally approved. Operation Skachok (Gallop) would use Vatutin's South West Front to clear the southern Don Basin of the enemy and push him back to the Dniepr. On Vatutin's right flank, Golikov's Voronezh Front was ordered to

In the 1942 painting *Shell Fire Near Trench Position* by W. Rensellek, German soldiers duck for cover as a Russian shell explodes near their machine gun position. Dressed in white camouflage uniform covers, these Germans were subjected to fierce bombardment during the Soviet winter offensive.

(U.S. Army Art Collection)

ABOVE: During the catastrophic German defeat at Stalingrad, a Wehrmacht soldier peers from cover through a telescopic viewer. The distant Soviet Red Army tightened the ring of steel around the Germans at Stalingrad until they capitulated in February 1943. TOP: Uniformed against the cold, soldiers of the Red Army gather around a campfire during a lull in fighting on the Eastern Front. The Soviet effort to liberate the Don Basin, Operation Gallop, proved overly ambitious. (All Photos: National Archives)

take Kharkov and then follow the retreating Germans as far west as possible in an operation called Zvezda (Star).

The German forces facing Vatutin had been ground down by weeks of fighting and retreat. Lt. Gen. Fedor Mikhailovich Kharitonov's Sixth Army and Lt. Gen. Vasilii I. Kuznetsov's First Guards Army were fast approaching the Aydar River in the Starobelsk area, while the Third Guards Army under Lt. Gen. Dmitri Danilovich Lelyushenko was threatening to cross the Donets River west of Voroshilovgrad. South of Lelyushenko, Lt. Gen. Ivan Timofeevich Schlemin's Fifth Tank Army was also moving toward the eastern bank of the Donets.

Vatutin also had a combined arms group commanded by Lt. Gen. Markian Mikhailovich Popov, which contained nearly half of the South West Front's armor. In total, Vatutin had more than 500 tanks and about 325,000 men to fulfill his mission.

Facing the South West Front was a hodgepodge of German units in the process of trying to regain some kind of defensive line and command control. About 160,000 men and 100 tanks from several decimated divisions struggled to pull themselves into some kind of cohesive force to meet the advancing Soviet forces.

The First Panzer Army, commanded by General Eberhard von Mackensen, was just arriving from a grueling retreat from the Caucasus. It had about 40 combat-ready tanks and an estimated 40,000 troops. Army Abteilung Hollidt was a conglomeration of infantry and panzer division remnants. Commanded by General Karl Hollidt, the unit had about 100,000 men and 60 tanks. Another 20,000 troops came from various support and garrison units.

Aware of the enemy disorganization facing him, Vatutin planned his actions accordingly. Born in 1901, Vatutin joined the Red Army in 1920. He saw service during the Russian Civil War and then attended the Frunze Academy, graduating in 1929. Furthering his career, Vatutin attended and graduated from the General Staff Academy and served on the General Staff from 1937-1940. During the Battle for Moscow, he distinguished himself as chief of staff of the Northwestern Front, and in 1942 he was named commander of the South West Front.

Vatutin was considered a gifted strategist, and his opinions were highly valued. He was enthusiastic about the possibility of liberating the Lower Don Basin and destroying the German units defending it, and STAVKA gave him great latitude in forming his plan of attack, which he worked out with his army commanders and staff.

The main blow was to come from the First Guards and Third Guards Armies, which would take Stalino and then Mariupol on the Sea of Azov. This action, supported by Group Popov and the Fifth Tank Army, would trap most of the German units on the Donets River Line south of Kharkov. Divisions of the Southern Front, on Vatutin's left flank, would cooperate by advancing along the Sea of Azov to Rostov and beyond.

In theory, the plan was a good one. Intelligence reports indicated that the Germans were in a state of near panic. Other reports stated that enemy troops were hastily withdrawing from the entire area, which gave Vatutin the view that his operation was a means to crush a beaten and demoralized foe.

The Soviet assessments were wrong to a large degree. Although the Germans were disorganized, commanders were working together to retain a viable fighting force. German supply lines were much closer since the retreat from the Stalingrad sector, and the ability to form ad hoc units around regimental and divisional cadre was succeeding.

There was also another major factor work-

"WE WILL ALSO EVENTUALLY LOSE HEERESGRUPPE A. THE ALTERNATIVE IS TO ABANDON PART OF THE BASIN AT THE RIGHT MOMENT TO AVERT THE CATASTROPHE THREATENING TO OVERTAKE US."

ing for the Germans. Field Marshal Erich von Manstein was in command of the area slated for the Soviet offensive. Architect of the 1940 Ardennes strike against France and the conqueror of Sevastopol in 1942, von Manstein was regarded as having one of the best strategic and tactical minds in the Wehrmacht.

Although the divisions of his Heeresgruppe (Army Group) Don, which became Heeresgruppe Süd (South) in mid-February, were battered, the German commander was already planning a response for what he correctly assumed to be a major Soviet attack in the Don Basin. He knew the Red Army supply lines had greatly lengthened as his own decreased, making it difficult for Soviet armor to receive proper fuel and ammunition replenishment. He also knew that although the Russians had superiority in manpower and equipment their reserves were lacking in numbers for a prolonged attack and breakthrough.

Von Manstein was also lucky in another regard. While the debacle at Stalingrad was still being played out, he had managed to talk Hitler into allowing most of the German forces in the Caucasus to withdraw before being cut off. By the end of January, many of those units, including the First Panzer Army, were regrouping in the Don Basin. The Fourth Panzer Army, commanded by Col. Gen. Hermann Hoth, was also in the process of getting out of the Soviet trap.

As he pressed the issue of the vulnerability of the entire southern sector of the Eastern Front, von Manstein persuaded the OKW (Oberkommando der Wehrmacht–German Armed Forces High Command) to release six divisions and two infantry brigades from Western Europe and send them to Heeresgruppe Süd. Among the divisions released were three superbly equipped SS divisions, which had been resting and refitting after the hard-fought 1942 campaign.

On February 1, 1943, Golikov's Voronezh Front began its attack to liberate Kharkov. Excellent progress was made during the first days of the offensive, with General Ivan Danilovich Chernyakowskii's 60th Army taking Kursk on February 8. As Kursk fell, Golikov's 40th and 69th Armies, along with the Third Tank Army, advanced on Kharkov, slamming their way through the undermanned defenses of the German Second Army.

Two days before Golikov's offensive began, Vatutin launched Operation Gallop. On January 29, Kuznetsov's First Guards Army crossed the Aydar River and hit General Gustav Schmidt's 19th Panzer Division in the Kabanye–Kromennaya area along the Dnester River. Reeling under a series of hammer blows, the Germans were forced to retreat under a

Visiting the Kertsch Front on May 20, 1942, General Erich von Manstein takes stock in the condition of his troops. Manstein developed a reputation as a superb strategist and was one of the most respected generals in the German Army.

constant barrage of Soviet artillery.

On Kuznetsov's right flank, Kharitonov's Sixth Army, after crossing the Aydar, smashed into elements of Colonel Herbert Michaelis's 298th Infantry Division. With the bulk of the 298th dug in along the Krasnaya River, the forward elements of the division were brushed aside by the advancing Soviets.

Pursuing the retreating Germans, Kharitonov's 15th Rifle Corps made it to the Krasnaya before being stopped by the 298th's makeshift defenses on the western bank. Under heavy fire, the 350th Rifle Division forced crossings north and south of Kupyansk and established bridgeheads on the German side of the river, but further progress was retarded until reinforcements arrived on the scene.

January 30 found the First Guards Army crossing the Krasnaya near the town of Krasny Liman. Pleased with the progress of his assault troops, Vatutin ordered Group Popov to advance and form up at the juncture of the First Guards and Sixth Armies in order to exploit its positions on the eastern bank. From February 2-5, the 298th fought through Soviet units already in its rear before finally reaching a new defensive line around Chuguyev on the Northern Donets River.

Sixth Army units also forced General Georg Postel's 320th Infantry Division to retreat from the Krasnaya. While the Sixth Rifle Division attempted to surround Postel's division, the 267th Rifle Division and 106th Rifle Brigade drove on to Izyum, which would fall on February 5.

Sensing victory, Vatutin sent in Group Popov to act as the vanguard of the Soviet attack. A counterattack by some of the First Panzer Army's XL Panzer Corps, commanded by General Sigfrid Henrici, halted Popov's advance in several areas. Other elements of Henrici's corps struck the First Guards Army around Slavyansk, forcing Kuznetsov to halt his attack. Farther south, Lelyushenko's Third Guards Army had now crossed the Donets River near Voroshilovgrad

Wearing hooded camouflage uniforms, a pair of Red Army soldiers fires an antiquated machine gun at German positions. The winter weather created a no-man's-land of snow and ice between opposing lines.

any major breaches in the German line.

For the next few days, Vatutin continued to receive good news from the front. His planning of Gallop seemed to be validated as reports came from the First Guards Army stating that Kremennaya had fallen, the 19th Panzer Division was retreating toward Lisichansk to the south, and that Krasny Liman was also taken.

In the Sixth Army sector, Kharitonov finally crossed the Krasnaya River after the 298th Infantry Division, fearing encirclement by advancing units of the Sixth Army and the Voronezh Front's Third Tank Army, abandoned and was engaged in breaking through the defenses of Army Abteilung Hollidt.

The battle around Slavyansk was pivotal for the Germans trying to stop Vatutin's push westward. As long as the town was in von Manstein's hands, Vatutin would have to extend his forces to bypass it, lengthening his supply lines and offering his flanks to German counterattacks.

By February 4, Vatutin found himself facing an increasingly stubborn opponent. Elements of Henrici's XL Panzer Corps were clinging to Slavyansk, fending off the First Guards Army with vicious counterattacks. Kuznetzov threw more units into the battle for the town, but Henrici's men held firm.

About 55 kilometers east of Slavyansk, the First Guards Army's Sixth Guards Rifle Corps, commanded by General Ivan Prokofevich Alferov, was embroiled in a savage fight for control of Lisichansk. General Maximilian Fretter-Pico's XXX Army Corps was charged with the defense of the sectors north and south of the town.

General Karl Casper's 335th Infantry Division, newly arrived from France, was one of the divisions tasked with defending the area south of Lisichansk near the town of Krymskoye. Alferov's 44th Guards Rifle Division gained a small bridgehead on the western bank of the Donets and fought off repeated counterattacks by the 335th. Seeing that further assaults were a waste of manpower, Casper ordered his men to cordon off the bridgehead, hoping that reinforcements would be sent to break the Soviet line.

At Lisichansk, Alferov's 78th Rifle Division tried an end run. The 78th crossed the Northern Donets at several points, but once again German forces moved in to seal them off. For the moment, it was a stalemate.

Frustrated, Vatutin threw the 41st Guards Rifle Division into the Lisichansk battle. Defended by Schmidt's 19th Panzer, the Soviets had to clear the town street by bloody street. Aided by elements of the 78th Guards and 44th Guards Rifle Divisions, the Russians finally forced Schmidt's men out of the town to positions in the southwest. The Sixth Guards Rifle Corps followed fast on their heels, but Schmidt was able to work his units like a boxer, bobbing, weaving, and shifting constantly to frustrate any further breakthrough.

On February 6, Hitler called von Manstein to his headquarters at Zaporozhye. The German leader was surprisingly docile, almost apologetic, as he opened the conversation by taking full responsibility for the Stalingrad disaster. Von Manstein was taken aback by the statement because Hitler never blamed himself for any of the misfortunes suffered by the German Army.

With the surprising admission out of the way, the two men turned to the situation at hand. Von Manstein was blunt as he began explaining the position of his Army Group. He told Hitler that under no circumstances could the area between the Don and the Donets be held with the existing forces available.

"The only question is whether, in trying to hang on to the whole basin, we want to not only lose the area but also Heeresgruppe Don,"

he said. "We will also eventually lose Heeresgruppe A. The alternative is to abandon part of the Basin at the right moment to avert the catastrophe threatening to overtake us."

According to von Manstein, Hitler remained "utterly composed" during the ensuing conversation. Continuing, he told Hitler that trying to hold the entire Basin would allow the Soviets to send strong enough forces to slice through the thinly held German line and envelop the entire southern wing of the Eastern Front. Therefore, he proposed using the First Panzer Army and the Fourth Panzer Army, which were facing General Andrei Ivanovich Yeremenko's Southern Front, to form a strike force to intercept the forces that Vatutin undoubtedly already had in mind for his continued advance.

Moving the Fourth Panzer Army back from the Lower Don would mean giving up the area between the Lower Don and the Mius River to the armies of Yeremenko's Southern Front, but it would also shorten the German line. To protect the southern flank, Army Abteilung Hollidt would also have to withdraw to the Mius. It was a risky plan, but the alternative meant almost certain disaster.

When von Manstein finished, it was Hitler's turn. The Führer could find no flaws in the plan, but his aversion to giving up ground to the enemy was still paramount. He argued that every foot of land cost the Russians men and materials—much more than it cost the Germans. There were also political considerations, such as the effect such a withdrawal would have on Turkey, which was watching developments in Southern Russia very carefully.

Hitler promised reinforcements, cajoled, and used his famous charm and eloquence to convince von Manstein to remain on the Don, but von Manstein would not budge. The impasse went on most of the afternoon, but then Hitler suddenly gave in. Finally having the Führer's blessing, von Manstein hurriedly flew back to his Stalino headquarters to begin issuing orders for the retreat.

Unless an early thaw suddenly hit the area, armored and mechanized units scheduled to pull back would have little problem reaching the Mius ahead of the Soviets. The infantry units of the Fourth Panzer Army and Army Abteilung Hollidt were a different matter. Vulnerable to Russian armored and mechanized forces, the retreating infantry would have to leave a rear guard to conduct a fighting withdrawal while main elements of the division remained on guard against Soviet ambushes and armored raids.

ABOVE: General Nikolai Vatutin commanded the Soviet Red Army's South West Front during the fighting in the winter of 1942, which included Operation Gallop. TOP LEFT: General Sigfrid Henrici commanded the German XL Panzer Corps during Operation Gallop. TOP RIGHT: General Eberhard von Mackensen commanded the German 1st Panzer Army during the hard fighting on the Eastern Front in 1942.

The Soviets were by no means idle as the Germans prepared to withdraw to the shorter Mius Line. The South Front's 44th Army took the city of Azov-on-the-Don. Around Salvyansk, where fighting was still raging, Red Army units also took the town of Kramatorsk, some 15 kilometers south of the city.

The following day, February 8, Kharitonov's Sixth Army liberated Andreyevka on the eastern bank of the Northern Donets, about 50 miles southeast of Kharkov. The Soviet commander then turned his forces northeast to strike at Zmiyev, which was on the river's western bank. If Kharitonov could take the town and hold it, the way would be open for an attack on Kharkov from the south.

Kharitonov's spearhead ran headlong into the 2nd Regiment of the Leibstandarte SS Adolf Hitler (LSSAH) Panzergrenadier Division commanded by SS Standartenführer (Colonel) Theodore Wisch. Wisch's 1st Battalion, under SS Sturmbannführer (Major) Hugo Kraas, gave the advancing Russians a bloody nose at a small village northeast of Zmiyev. Supported by assault guns, Kraas's men counterattacked, driving the Soviets back.

Late morning found the Russians launching wave after wave of infantry against the village, but the SS held firm. The Soviets then proceeded to attack up and down the line of Wisch's regiment. Supported by assault guns, some panzer companies, engineers, and a flak unit, Wisch successfully held his positions while causing heavy casualties to the Soviet 111th Rifle Division.

Meanwhile, the battle for Slavyansk continued unabated. General Hans Freiherr von Funck's 7th Panzer Division was charged with holding the town. The division was down to only 35 serviceable tanks as it fought to defend Slavyansk against units of General Nikolai Aleksandrovich Gagen's 4th Guards Rifle Corps.

Born in 1895, Gagen was a tough no-nonsense commander who had fought in the brutal battles in the winter of 1941-1942 along the Volkhov River. He was determined to drive the Germans out of the town at whatever the cost. Gagen's 195th Rifle Division had been roughly handled by the 7th Panzer as it tried to fight its way into the eastern part of the town. The Soviet general threw in the 57th Guards Rifle Division in an attempt to take the town from the north and west, but the Germans continued to hold, counterattacking when the situation required it.

Overhead, Red Air Force bombers and ground attack aircraft roamed the skies over the embattled town. German flak batteries tried to drive them away, but the Soviet pilots pressed on, dropping their deadly cargo on von Funck's position. Red Army artillery also kept up a deadly fire, but the German panzergrenadiers and the engineers of the division were still able to hold the Russians at bay.

Holding Slavyansk helped give other units of the First Panzer Army a chance in their move westward. More of Henrici's XL Panzer Corps was already arriving in the area to bolster the 7th Panzer. Although General Hermann Balck's 11th Panzer Division had little more than a dozen tanks, it was a welcome sight to the men of von Funck's command. Colonel Gerhard Grassman's 333rd Infantry Division was in similar shape, having been savaged in earlier actions.

Both sides realized the value of the area between Slavyansk and Kramatorsk, where the German defenses ran along the Krivoy Torets River. If the Soviets could force the Germans from their tenuous positions, Vatutin could use Group Popov's forces to make a deep thrust to the southwest, which would basically cut off the First and Fourth Panzer Armies from the rest of von Manstein's Heeresgruppe. Accord-

Spread across the wintry landscape of the Soviet Union, German armored vehicles advance eastward toward the major cities of Russia. The German timetable was upset by tenacious Soviet defenses and then compounded by horrific winter weather.

ingly, Vatutin pushed more artillery units into the area to give his troops an added punch.

Henrici's XL Panzer Corps, weak as it was, defended the area with great skill. Coordinated attacks by the 4th Guards Tank Corps, 3rd Tank Corps, and the 4th Guards Rifle Corps were repulsed again and again. Balck's 11th Panzer brazenly counterattacked Soviet armor with its few remaining tanks, leaving several T-34s blazing furiously on the battlefield, while the 7th Panzer fended off combined armored-infantry attacks, leaving hundreds of Red Army soldiers dead in the snow.

Lieutenant Colonel Friedrich-Carl von Steinkeller, commanding the 7th Panzer's 7th Panzergrenadier Regiment, was in the thick of the fighting. Keeping on the move, von Steinkeller went from company to company urging his men to hold firm. An artillery observer followed him, ready to call in fire as the situation demanded. He would later receive the Knight's Cross, in part for his actions during the battle.

Popov's 4th Guards Tank Corps, commanded by Pavel Pavlovich Poluboyarov, succeeded in crossing the Krivoy Torets, threatening the rear of the 7th Panzer Division. Henrici immediately ordered Balck's 11th Panzer Division, supported by a regiment from the 333rd Infantry Division, to counterattack. The Germans were met with the blazing guns of Poluboyarov's tanks in front and from dug-in anti-tank weapons firing from the eastern bank of the Krivoy Torets.

Despite the Soviet fire, Balck and his infantry support were able to push the 4th Guards back along the river valley. Russian infantry accompanying Poluboyarov's tanks panicked and fled, forcing the armor to fend for itself. German sources indicate that 45 Russian tanks were destroyed during the fighting—a significant loss that could only partially be made good by the reinforcements that were trickling in after a grueling journey over extended supply roads.

Vatutin, fed up with the inability of his forces to take Slavyansk and the positions along the Krivoy Torets, reshuffled his units for an all-out assault. Kuznetsov's First Guards Army was ordered to coordinate with Popov for the attack, while Red Air Force units were given orders to support the operation at all costs.

The westward movement of German units, as per von Manstein's plan, had given Vatutin, Golikov, and STAVKA a false sense of optimism. Hitler never conceded territory—every Russian commander knew that. He had shown it by letting his army freeze at the gates of Moscow and the stubborn refusal to retreat from Stalingrad only reinforced that view.

To the Russian mind the retreat of Heeresgruppe Don from the eastern Don Basin could only be viewed as a somewhat panicked rout. The stubborn resistance around Slavyansk was seen as a desperate attempt to save the fleeing German divisions from being overwhelmed by troops of the South West Front and the South Front, and it was assumed that once the Krivoy Torets line was taken the enemy would collapse.

To crack the German defenses Vatutin ordered the First Guards Army to shift south toward the Krasnoarmeiskoya sector, about 60 kilometers southwest of Slavyansk, to threaten the enemy rear. While that move was taking place, the 35th Guards Rifle Division of Gagen's 4th Guards Rifle Corps forced units of the 333rd Infantry Division out of Lozovaya, a key rail center and supply dump located about 120 kilometers west of Slavyansk. Although the 35th Guards did not press their attack further, taking the town created a dangerous new bulge in the already extended and increasingly confusing lines of battle.

Part of Vatutin's plan was to use Popov's 4th Guards Tank and 3rd Tank Corps to smash their way into Slavyansk, paving the way for the 18th and 10th Tank Corps to strike southwest toward Artemovsk. With Slavyansk secured, the 4th Guards Tank and 3rd Tank Corps were to advance to link up with the First Guards Army at Krasnoarmeiskoye. Together,

the two tank corps and units of the First Guards Army would then move southeast to Stalino to trap German units retreating from the eastern Don Basin.

As Vatutin prepared his operation, he received new orders from STAVKA. Golikov's forces were making good progress toward Kharkov and, lulled by the belief that the Germans were indeed in the midst of a massive disorganized withdrawal to the Dniepr, Moscow saw a new chance to bag several enemy divisions in an even bigger pocket than Vatutin had planned.

Vatutin was therefore given the task of setting up blocking forces to prevent an enemy withdrawal to Zaporozhye and Dnepropetrovsk. At the same time, he was ordered to advance southwest to cut off German and Axis forces in the Crimea. The STAVKA plan was overly ambitious by a wide margin, considering that the South West Front had already been in combat for more than two weeks and had received little in the way of supplies or reinforcements.

With Kharitonov's Sixth Guards Army already supporting Golikov's drive on Kharkov, it would again fall to Kuznetsov and Popov, along with Lelyushenko's Third Guards Army, to accomplish this new mission. The First Guards Army would have the dual tasks of taking Slavyansk with Alferov's Sixth Guards Rifle Corps while other units continued on a westward drive toward Zaporozhye. While this was occurring, Group Popov would make a lightning strike to Krasnoarmeiskoye, taking the town's rail center and threatening the German rear.

Both Kuznetsov and Popov had voiced doubts about Vatutin's earlier proposal. Their units had been manhandled by the Germans, and losses in men and equipment had still not been made good. The two Soviet generals had even graver doubts about the new plan. Supplying their forces as they moved south and west would be a nightmare with the existing supply line, which was already stretched to the limit.

Popov, in making his dash to the south, would have a total of about 180 tanks spread between his four tank corps. He had enough fuel for one refueling and ammunition for two resupplies. The infantry units in his command were in even worse shape. Despite STAVKA's assertions that the Germans were on the run, the field commanders had a more cautious view of the situation.

Vatutin brushed aside his commanders' doubts. These were orders from Moscow and had to be obeyed. The consequences of disobedience were well known, and no Soviet general in his right mind would think about going against the Kremlin at this stage of the war.

Poluboyarov's 4th Guards Tank Corps was chosen to spearhead the new attack. In the early hours of February 11, the Soviet armor began its 85 kilometer charge to Krasnoarmeiskoye. Led by the 14th Guards Tank Brigade, Polubarov's forces cut through the German defenses and moved quickly down the one good road in the area. Following fast on the heels of the 14th were the 3rd Guards Mechanized Brigade, the 7th Ski Brigade, the 9th Guards Tank Brigade, and other corps units.

The deep thrust caught the Germans off guard, and by mid-morning the 14th Guards Tank Brigade had taken Krasnoarmeiskoye. With the town secured, the victorious Soviet troops helped themselves to the supplies left in a supply dump by the retreating enemy. The loot, especially the fuel and rations, was a welcome sight to the exhausted Russians.

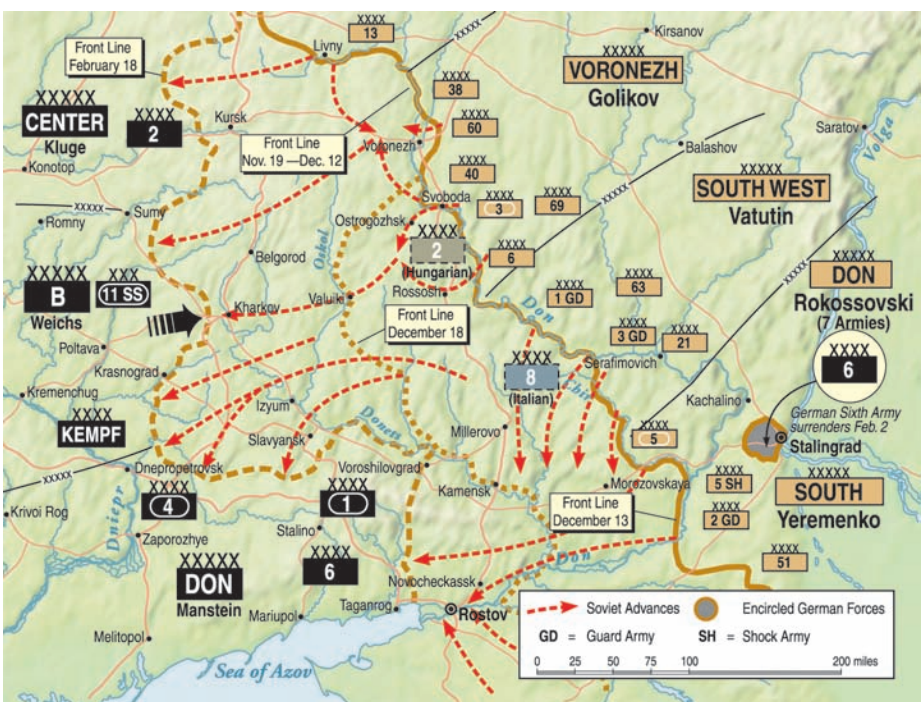
Another important benefit, not readily apparent to the troops at the scene, was the severing of a vital German supply and communications line. With the capture of Krasnoarmeiskoye, the important Dnepropetrovsk-Mariupol rail line was rendered useless, leaving units of the First Panzer Army and Army Abteilung Hollidt in dire straits.

Group Popov's dramatic march to Krasnoarmeiskoye threw German plans for defending the western Don Basin into disorder. The defense of Slavyansk was now in jeopardy due to the Soviet units to the south and west of the position. Von Mackensen was also in the midst of planning an attack to recapture Kramatorsk, but that too had to be put on hold in light of Popov's success.

Realizing the precarious position of the German troops holding the river lines to the east of Krasnoarmeiskoye, von Mackensen called upon the 5th SS Panzergrenadier Division Wiking. Commanded by SS Gruppenführer (Major General) Felix Steiner, the Wiking was a multinational division made up of Germans, Norwegians, Danes, Swiss, Finns, Walloons, and Estonians. It had just arrived in the Don Basin after an arduous retreat from the Caucasus, and its troops were exhausted.

As elements of the division were just passing through Stalino, Steiner received the following message: "PanzerArmy H.Q. to Division Wiking Urgent! Powerful enemy forces, Popov Tank Group, across the Donets near Izyum advancing southward toward Krasnoarmeiskoye. Wiking Division to immediately turn to the west. Attack toward Krasnoarmeiskoye. Contain the Popov Tank Group. (signed) von Mackensen"

Steiner immediately ordered his division to halt. His original orders were to head north from Stalino to the Konstantinovka area, and the advance units of his Germania Regiment were already headed in that direction. With his



Encouraged by their victory at Stalingrad, the Soviets attempted to free the Lower Don Basin. The Germans, many on retreat from the Caucasus, put up a stiff fight and were able to retake all of the territory they had lost early in the battle. (Map © 2008 Philip Schwartzberg, Meridian Mapping, Minneapolis, MN)

chief of staff, Steiner hastily issued new orders. Artillery was regrouped, and the Nordland Regiment was ordered to take the lead in the new westward advance while Germania turned its units around. The division's Westland Regiment was also readied to join in the mad race to stop the Soviets.

With Nordland's reconnaissance platoon leading the way, the regiment hastened toward Krasnoarmeiskoye. By the end of the day, the advance guard under SS Obersturmbannführer (Lieutenant Colonel) Wolfgang Joerchel had overpowered weak Russian forward positions and taken Hill 180, which overlooked the entire Krasnoarmeiskoye sector. Joerchel quickly sent for other battalions of the regiment, which deployed south and west of the town to contain any further Soviet expansion in those directions.

Much of Group Popov was spread out along the road from Kramatorsk to Krasnoarmeiskoye in defensive positions. Von Mackensen realized that Wiking did not have the capability to contain and destroy the Red Army units along the entire length of the road, so he issued new orders to other divisions of his command.

The occupation of Slavyansk was still of utmost importance. Shuffling his forces, von Mackensen ordered two regiments of the 333rd Infantry Division to make a forced march toward Krasnoarmeiskoye. As the weary infantry slogged toward its new goal, the 7th Panzer and 11th Panzer, which were fighting in the areas around Slavyansk and east of the Krivoy Torets River, were ordered to turn their units westward. The 3rd Panzer Division was ordered to extend its line to take over the defensive positions of the two departing divisions. Von Mackensen planned to use the two divisions to strike at Group Popov's extended supply line while Wiking and the two regiments of the 333rd kept up the pressure at Krasnoarmeiskoye.

The movements of the German divisions to their assembly areas were surprisingly fast, and the attack on the supply line began in the early hours of February 12. Soviet defense positions had been set up in each village along the supply road from Kramatorsk, and several strong antitank companies had been brought forward to reinforce the village bastions.

At Krasnoarmeiskoye Steiner planned to use the Germania to flank the town from the west. Supported by the two regiments of the 333rd, Germania was ordered to take the village of Grischino, northwest of the town. While the other Wiking regiments assaulted Krasnoarmeiskoye from the south, elements of von Funck's 7th Panzer would attack from the east and secure the town's northern flank.

Polubayarov, knowing his precarious position, had kept the units of his 4th Guards Tank Corps on high alert. Each subordinate commander was told to be ready for a German counterattack, and orders were given down to company level to fortify lines of approach that could be used by the enemy. Each soldier was to make the Germans pay for every meter of land, every house, and every hill that the Red Army had recently liberated on its valiant march to Krasmoarmeiskoye.

Motioning to his troops to follow quickly, a German soldier leads a detachment through a wooded area of Russia. The winter weather took a heavy toll on the unprepared Germans.

SS Standartenführer (Colonel) Jürgen Wagner commanded the Germania Regiment. His men stormed forward into a withering fire from the Soviet positions as they began the assault. Rifle and machine gun bullets slapped around them like angry bees, while tank and antitank shells tore into their ranks. Grenadiers fell, their blood turning the churned up snow a bright crimson, but Wagner continued to urge his men to attack.

The artillery commander of the Wiking, SS Oberführer (Senior Colonel) Herbert-Otto Gille, deftly moved his artillery battalions closer to support the attacks on Krasnoarmeiskoye and Grischino. Supported by flak units, Gille's artillery smashed one Soviet position after another, giving the Germans a chance to rush forward.

Wagner swung his regiment around Grischino and finally broke into the northern edge of the town. At the South West Front headquarters a frantic radio message, which must have been garbled in transmission, was received from the Russian commander defending Grischino. "Have been attacked by 5 SS Panzer Divisions, can only hold out with difficulty. Assistance urgently required. Long live Stalin!"

Once inside the town, Wagner's men found themselves bogged down in house-to-house fighting. It was the same for the other Wiking regiments at Krasnoarmeiskoye. In the close fighting, Gille's artillery was of little use. The lines were too close, and the Soviets used every house as a strongpoint. For the time being the battle for both towns was a stalemate.

North of Krasnoaremiskoye elements of the 7th and 11th Panzer Divisions drove westward in a forced march. The Germans ran headlong into the 10th Tank Corps and the 41st Guards Rifle Division. Heavy defensive fire from the Russians forced the panzers to slow and finally stop their attack. Seeing that the Soviets could not be broken, the divisions turned toward Kramatorsk to prepare for a new attack on that town.

At Grischino and Krasnoarmeiskoye the battle continued unabated. Wiking had now been joined by the two regiments of the 333rd, and Gille's artillery was hammering the Russian rear areas. In addition, the Soviets were now running short of supplies.

Although Henrici's XL Panzer Corps had its various units involved in several actions stretching from Kramatorsk to Krasnoarmeiskoye, he still had the opportunity to disrupt the supply line to the 4th Guards Tank Corps. Armored reconnaissance companies fought running battles with Soviet supply columns trying to make their way south, and the roads were soon littered with flaming trucks. The hit-and-run tactics of the Germans struck as the Russians were spread out in single file and usually ended with the destruction of most of the supplies.

Poluboyarov, growing desperate, ordered the 9th Independent Guards Tank Brigade to try and breach the closing ring around Krasnoarmeiskoye. The 9th hit the Westland Regiment north of Krasnoarmeiskoye near the village of Rovny. More than a dozen tanks with mounted infantry pierced the German line and made a push toward the center of the village.

The regimental commander, SS Sturmbannführer Erwin Reichel, had just taken over after SS Sturmbannführer Harry Polewacz was killed in combat. Reichel ordered a battery of 88mm guns supported by Panzergrenadiers into the center of Rovny as the Soviets approached. When the Russians reached the interior of the village, the 88s destroyed almost all of the tanks. The stunned Russian

survivors fled, leaving 12 blazing hulks and dozens of dead behind.

Vatutin was not about to give up on Group Popov. Gathering all available reserves, the Soviet general sent them to reinforce the spearhead at Krasnoarmeiskoye. When word was received that Russian reinforcements were headed south, new orders were sent to the scattered German forces of the First Panzer Army. The Wiking and the 11th Panzer Division were told to halt their attacks on February 14 and attempt to pin down the Russian forces at Krasnoarmeiskoye and Kramatorsk. Meanwhile, the battle to hold the Slavyansk area would continue. Von Mackensen also ordered Henrici to use whatever resources necessary to keep pressure on the supply columns following the reinforcements heading toward Poluboyarov's 4th Guards Tank Corps.

Henrici angrily replied to the order, "What am I supposed to use? My men are stretched to the limit already."

"Just do it," von Mackensen replied. "Throw everything in. I don't care how you do it—just get it done!"

While things were strained in the First Panzer Army, the situation around Kharkov was at a critical stage. By February 10, Golikov's 40th and 69th Armies were battling on the outskirts of the city, with the recently arrived II SS Panzer Corps putting up fierce resistance. Bitter fighting raged for the next five days, and Hitler personally intervened, ordering the corps commander, SS Obergruppenführer (Lieutenant General) Paul Hausser, to hold the city at all costs.

Infuriated at what amounted to a death sentence for his men, Hausser disregarded the order and pulled his SS divisions out of Kharkov, forcing other defending German units to disengage as well. On February 16, Golikov reported to Moscow that Kharkov was once again in Soviet hands.

Logistically, both sides were facing a quartermaster's nightmare and both the German and Soviet commanders were in dire straits. With Kharkov gone and the Russians occupying Grischino and Krasnoarmeiskoye, the only supply line open to the First Panzer Army and Army Abteilung Hollidt was the railway that ran through Zaporozhye. The task of supplying German units by this route was hampered by the fact that a main bridge spanning the Dniepr River, destroyed during the 1941 Soviet retreat, had not yet reopened. Supplies had to be unloaded from trains and reloaded to trucks and wagons before making their way farther eastward.

Group Popov was in a similar situation.

Battling the intense cold and winter weather as well as the invading Germans, a Soviet patrol and its armored half-track forge their way through a snowy field on the Russian steppe during the winter of 1942.

Reinforcements were trickling in to the 4th Guards Tank Corps but supplies were a different matter. Von Mackensen's orders to Henrici were being carried out by ad hoc units and units taken away from their parent regiments. Although the Soviet armored columns came under some fire as they strove to reach Krasnoarmeiskoye, the supply formations continued to bear the brunt of the German attacks.

Some good news came to Vatutin on February 16 when the rest of the 7th Panzer Division, finally ordered to give up its defense of Slavyansk, pulled out and headed toward Krasnoarmeiskoye. Units of the First Guards Army finally were able to occupy the entire town, but the victorious Soviets were in no condition to pursue the 7th. The 3rd Panzer Division quickly lengthened its lines to cover the 7th as it raced southwest to join elements of the division already engaging Gagen's 4th Tank Corps.

On February 17, Hitler flew to meet von Manstein at Zaporozhye. Not one to mince words, von Manstein laid out the situation as follows: "Army Abteilung Hollidt had just occupied the Mius River Line, followed closely by the South Front. For the time being, the line could be effectively defended."

The First Panzer Army had halted the Soviets at Grischino and Krasmoarmeiskoye, but the issue there had still not been decided. Von Mackensen's panzer army was also still involved in heavy fighting at Kramotorsk, Lisichansk, and the Slavyansk area, with the issue in all three sectors still in doubt. The forces retreating from Kharkov, now gathered under Army Abteilung Kempf, were withdrawing southwest toward Poltava and the Mozh River.

At first, Hitler refused to believe the seriousness of the situation. Already furious at the loss of Stalingrad, and then Kharkov, he could not believe that the Soviets still had the men and equipment to carry out another operation that could threaten the entire southern wing of his eastern armies. Von Manstein let him rant for a while before submitting a plan to save his threatened Heeresgruppe.

Von Manstein played his hand masterfully, laying out his formula to retake Kharkov. At the mention of recapturing the city, Hitler immediately calmed down and began to listen intently.

Kharkov could only be taken if the southern flank of the Heeresgruppe was secure, so von Manstein proposed consolidating Hausser's SS Panzer Corps into one striking force, taking it away from the Kharkov sector and sending it southeast toward Pavlograd. This action would prevent any further Russian advance on Dnepropetrovsk.

At the same time, Col. Gen. Hermann Hoth's Fourth Panzer Army, which had made the bitter retreat from the Caucasus, would concentrate its units west of Zaporozhye. Together, the two forces would strike the elements of the First Guards Army and the Sixth Army that were advancing toward the vital Dniepr crossings

while the First Panzer Army would once again take on Group Popov.

Throughout his briefing, von Manstein continuously played on the premise that the one condition necessary to retake Kharkov was the survival of the First Panzer Army and Army Abteilung Hollidt. When the Soviet threat in the southern Don Basin was eliminated, the Kharkov operation could begin.

Although Hitler was swayed by von Manstein's argument, he was not totally convinced of the plan. The following day, February 18, he again met with von Manstein to discuss the operation. Von Manstein was essentially calling for freedom to maneuver without micromanagement from Hitler or Berlin.

In another heated exchange, Hitler once again voiced his opinion that, although the number of Soviet units facing von Manstein looked impressive on paper, they were really burned-out shells of what were once divisions and brigades. Although he was partially correct, the armies that had taken Stalingrad were already on the move and the threat of the South Front bursting through Army Abteilung Hollidt's Mius River line would more than overpower the existing German forces in the southern Don Basin.

In the midst of the meeting, von Manstein received reports that units of the First Guards Army had taken Pavlograd and Novomosskovsk, bringing the Soviets to within 20 kilometers of Dnepropetrovsk. Army Abteilung Hollidt also reported several small enemy penetrations along its Mius River defenses. The report also indicated that the Russians were consolidating around Kharkov while sending spearheads farther westward.

A report from Krasnoarmeiskoye indicated that the newly arrived elements of the 7th Panzer Division were trying to break the 4th Guards Tank Corps. Overcoming fierce resistance from the 14th Guards Tank Brigade, units of the 7th succeeded in taking the town center before being stopped by a Russian counterattack. On the western side of the town the Wiking Division ran headlong into defenses set up by the 12th Guards Tank Brigade and was immediately stalled by heavy defensive fire.

Von Manstein used these developments to hammer home his ideas for destroying the Soviet incursion in the Don Basin. He pointed out that once the muddy season arrived operations at the front would grind to a halt and the Russians could use their rail lines to resupply and reinforce their divisions holding positions deep inside the German lines.

With their men and materiél built up once more, the southern German forces would be in even greater danger of being pinned against the Sea of Azov, and Kharkov would be virtually untouchable. The next day, Hitler suddenly gave von Manstein what amounted to a carte blanche for operations in southern Russia and then climbed aboard his transport plane and left.

The German field marshal wasted no time in implementing his plan. Krasnoarmeiskoye was hit hard by the 333rd Infantry Division and the Wiking Division, while the 7th Panzer Division swung north of the town. Poluboyarov's units in the town were now caught in a vise that could only be loosened by attacks from the outside. Popov had already ordered his 3rd Tank Corps to relieve the embattled forces in the town as quickly as possible, but that attempt was soon thwarted.

THE COMBINATION OF SOVIET AMBITION AND VON MANSTEIN'S BRILLIANT HANDLING OF THE BATTLE CULMINATED IN A BLOODY DEFEAT FOR THE RED ARMY.

While the 3rd Tank Corps was racing south, Balck's 11th Panzer Division moved into blocking positions south of Kramatorsk near the village of Gavrilovka. As the 3rd Tank Corps sped toward Krasnoarmeiskoye its flank was shattered by a full-scale attack from Balck's division. Burning Soviet tanks littered the landscape as the Russians desperately tried to regroup to meet the attack, but Balck's men had already achieved their objective of halting the rescue attempt.

By the end of the day, Krasmoarmeiskoye was all but in German hands, Grischino had fallen, and Poluboyarov's 4th Guards Tank Corps was nothing more than a skeleton of a unit with almost all of its tanks destroyed. Leaving the 333rd to mop up Poluboyarov's corps, von Manstein ordered the Wiking to join the 7th Panzer and head north toward the leading elements of Group Popov's 10th Tank Corps, which had moved into defensive positions around the town of Dobropolye.

February 20 was the final day for the Russian forces inside Krasnoarmeiskoye. Down to only 12 tanks, the Soviets could do little against the pressure brought to bear by the 333rd. In small groups, some of the Red Army soldiers were able to break through gaps in the German line and head north toward the 13th Guards Tank Brigade, which was guarding the area around Barvenkovo.

STAVKA's plan was falling apart, but no one seemed to want to face that reality. Krasnoarmeiskoye was once again in German hands, and the First Panzer Army was hammering away at the Soviet units stretched out on the road south of Kramatorsk. In the north, von Manstein had sent Hausser's SS Panzer Corps to link up with General Otto von Knobelsdorff's XLVIII Panzer Corps, which was part of the Fourth Panzer Army. Together, the two corps struck the Sixth Army near Krasnograd.

In the air, Field Marshal Wolfram Freiherr von Richthofen's Luftflotte 4 hit the Soviets with about 1,000 sorties that precluded any attempt by the Russians to form a coherent defense. The increasingly frantic calls from his commanders prompted Popov to ask Vatutin for permission to withdraw his forces. The request was forcefully denied.

Despite the troubling news coming from the Don Basin, Stalin and his general staff still believed they were on the verge of a great victory. New intelligence reports concerning German concentrations were ignored by STAVKA, which was still in a state of euphoria after the victory at Stalingrad. The unrealistic goals set for the Don Basin offensive were part of that euphoria, and it was now costing the Red Army dearly.

By February 21, it was clear to the Germans that the Soviets had been caught flat footed. Fretter Pico's XXX Army Corps moved toward Stalino, while von Knobelsdorff's XLVIII and General Friedrich Kirchner's LVII Panzer Corps advanced on Pavlograd and Lozovaya. Soviet forces around Pavlograd were also under pressure from the II SS Panzer Corps, Corps Raus, and elements of the Fourth Panzer Army. As long as Army Abteilung Hollidt vigorously defended the Mius River line, Vatutin's forces were going to be in a great deal of trouble.

On February 22, oblivious to the real situation, STAVKA ordered Kharitonov's Sixth Army and the Voronezh Front's Third Tank Army even farther westward. They were met head on by the full power of Hausser's panzers, which smashed Khartinov's center and right wing. Despite the pounding he was taking, Kharitonov ordered his mobile reserves into the

battle in a futile attempt to follow the orders from Moscow.

Meanwhile, Group Popov was reeling under the attacks from Henrici's XL Panzer Corps. Desperate for supplies, the Russians no longer had the fuel and ammunition to hold out against the German armored and infantry units. Air supply was tried by the Red Air Force, but von Richthofen's fighters shot the transport aircraft out of the sky at an alarming rate.

Khartinov's Sixth Army was in no better shape. His 25th Tank Corps, which had been ordered to advance in front of the main army, was stretched out almost 100 kilometers to the west when the Germans struck. On February 23, Khartinov was hit on both flanks by the 2nd SS Panzergrenadier Division Das Reich and the Sixth Panzer Division. Pounded by the Luftwaffe as well, the 25th Tank Corps disintegrated, its surviving personnel abandoning their equipment and fleeing toward the northeast.

By now, even STAVKA started to notice that something was going very wrong. Reports coming from Popov and Kharitonov painted a picture of panic among their troops, and their commanders begged for something to be done before they were all annihilated.

With his Sixth Army almost in ruins, Vatutin sent a rifle corps from the First Guards Army to support Kharitonov. To the north, Golikov, sensing the impending danger to his left flank, ordered his 69th and Third Tank Armies to swing southward to add to that support, but it was already too late to stop the German momentum.

On February 24, von Manstein sent the II SS Panzer Corps toward Pavlograd. The attack rolled over the 1st Guards Tank Corps and the 1st Guards Cavalry Corps, which had been sent to defend the town. They were Vatutin's last reserves. After a sharp battle, SS forces occupied the town and went on to pursue the fleeing Russians, who had left most of their equipment behind.

Now fully aware of the consequences of the German attacks, Vatutin ordered the Sixth Army to take a defensive posture. The sad truth was that Khartinov had little resources left with which to defend his sector. With Hausser's divisions surging forward, most of the Sixth Army was already in full flight.

During the next two days the units of the First Panzer and Fourth Panzer Armies retook much of the land lost in the early days of February. By February 27, Group Popov had all but been destroyed and the Sixth Army was on the verge of disintegration. The First Guards Army had also suffered heavily under continued German attacks.

ABOVE: Advancing through a deserted Russian town, German soldiers trek eastward toward the enemy and their crushing defeat at Stalingrad. Although their momentum was halted, the Germans still delivered a bloody repulse to Soviet Operation Gallop. BELOW: Assuming the offensive, Red Army soldiers exploit a breakthrough in the Germans lines as they ride aboard Soviet T-34 tanks.

It was now painfully clear to Moscow that Operation Gallop was finished. Orders were sent to the remnants of the Sixth Army and the First Guards Army to withdraw and set up new lines on the Northern Donets River. Any thoughts of renewing the attack in the near future were shattered in the first days of March, when the II SS Panzer Corps essentially destroyed the Third Tank Army.

The combination of Soviet ambition and von Manstein's brilliant handling of the battle culminated in a bloody defeat for the Red Army. The stage was now set for one of von Manstein's greatest accomplishments—the recapture of Kharkov—which would take place in mid-March.

That achievement has largely overshadowed the desperate February struggle for the Lower Don Basin. However, without the defeat of the Red Army on the Donets-Dniepr battlefield, the German reoccupation of Kharkov would probably never have been possible. □

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Patton's *Magnificent Panthers*

The 761st Tank Battalion, a black unit, fought with distinction and earned the praise of the flamboyant commander of Third Army.

Rolling across a muddy field in France, the Sherman tank of Sergeant Harvey Woodward and his crew heads for the front. Shortly after this photograph was taken, the tank was hit by enemy fire and the entire crew killed. OPPOSITE: Peering through the open hatch of an M4 Sherman tank, Corporal Carlton Chapman served as a machine gunner with a motor transport company near Nancy, France. (All photos: National Archives)

In the Academy Award-winning film *Patton,* the setting was all wrong when actor George C. Scott delivered General George S. Patton Jr.'s famous speech about making the "other poor dumb bastard die for his country." The real Patton presented that speech on October 28, 1944, in France to the soldiers of the 761st Tank Battalion, the first Negro armored unit in the history of the U.S. Army to see combat.

The 761st had paused after a breathless dash most of the way across France for final checkups and repairs prior to battle when Patton's entourage roared up. The general, wearing his notable ivory-handled pistols, vaulted to the hood of an armored car and shouted, "Men, you are the first Negro tankers to ever fight in the American army. I have nothing but the best in my army. I don't care what color you are, so long as you go up there and kill the Kraut. Everyone has their eyes on you and is expecting great things from you. Most of all, your race is looking forward to your success. Don't let them down, and, damn you, don't let me down. They say it is patriotic to die for your country. Well, let's see how many patriots we can make out of those German SOBs."

Prior to 1940, assumptions about the inferiority of black soldiers as combat troops dominated military thinking. Blacks were segregated into support and service units to provide cooks, stevedores, truck drivers, orderlies, and other noncombat personnel. Only five black commissioned officers served in the Army in 1941, three of whom were chaplains.

"As fighting troops, the Negro must be rated as second-class material," declared Colonel James A. Moss, commander of the 367th Infantry Regiment, 92nd Division, "this primarily [due] to his inferior intelligence and lack of mental and moral qualities."

"In future war," said Colonel Percy L. Miles, "the main use of the Negro should be in labor organizations."

Patton shared this view in a letter he wrote to his wife, Beatrice: "A colored soldier cannot think fast enough to fight in armor."

BY CHARLES W. SASSER

Nonetheless, the Selective Training and Service Act of 1940 stated, "In the selection and training of men under this act, there shall be no discrimination against any person on account of race and color." The White House immediately issued a policy statement saying that, regardless of the act, segregation in the armed forces would continue.

As war loomed on the horizon, all-black units commanded by white officers were quickly formed. Among these units were the 5th Tank Group, composed of three battalions of armor—the 758th, 761st, and the 784th. It was generally assumed that a white officer attached to a "colored" outfit was "safe" in that blacks would never be sent to war.

The 761st was activated at Camp Claiborne, Louisiana, on April 1, 1942. Major Paul Bates, who had received armor training under General Patton, assumed command of the battalion in May 1943. His ambition was to lead his battalion into battle.

ABOVE: Following the closing of the Colmar Pocket, two smiling French soldiers fill the hands of American troops with candy at Roufflach, France, on February 5, 1945. RIGHT: Field officers of the 761st Tank Battalion pause during preparations for upcoming action near Nancy, France, on November 5, 1944. The officers are (left to right) Captain Ivan Harrison, Captain Irvin McHenry, and 2nd Lieutenant James Lightfoot. BELOW RIGHT: In September 1944, company commanders of the 761st Tank Battalion gather around tables for lunch. The vast majority of officers who served with black units during the war were white.

Major Bates became visible. He was always out in front, training with his men—in the swamps and in the mud and in the steamy Louisiana drizzle that made a man feel like he was bathing in a pot of Cajun gumbo. Morale improved. The battalion developed an esprit de corps. Black men held their heads higher and affected a cocky tanker's walk with barracks cap tilted saucily to one side. Most still believed, however, that all the training was flash and polish toward no end.

"We ain't gonna see nothing but rattlesnakes in Louisiana until this war be over," said Private L.C. Byrd, whose comment was indicative of the sentiment that prevailed in the ranks of the black battalions.

Whites treated the black tankers with suspicion. The 761st tankers endured segregation down in "the swamp" where they were isolated from most facilities and had to walk a mile to the main gate and the bus station. Blacks waited until last to get on the buses when they received passes, and they always had to stand up at the back. Bus drivers wore pistols to enforce the rules and protect themselves from unruly blacks. If a black person failed to obey or committed some minor infraction, such as refusing to get up to let a white soldier take his seat, the driver stopped at the nearest MP station or law enforcement office where the offender was dragged away.

The 761st Tank Battalion trained for over two years at Camp Claiborne and at Camp Hood, Texas, before it finally received orders for overseas movement on June 9, 1944, only three days after the Allies made the D-Day landings in Normandy. Three months later, the battalion departed New York aboard the British troop transport *Esperance Bay,* coming ashore in Britain on September 8. Initially assigned to the Ninth Army, it was reassigned on October 2 to General Patton's Third Army.

According to a widely circulated story, Patton personally asked for the Black Panther Battalion, so-called because of the unit's shoulder patch showing a black panther and the motto "Come Out Fighting." Patton reportedly sent a message to the War Department requesting more tanks—the best available. The only tank unit left was made up of Negro troops.

"Who the … asked for color?" Patton shot back. "I asked for tankers."

Fully armed, the 800-man 761st was equipped with 54 M4 Sherman tanks in three companies and a "mosquito fleet" company consisting of 15 smaller M5 Stuart tanks.

The medium Sherman main battle tank was the primary U.S. and British weapon when it came to armor. It was equipped with a 75mm main cannon plus two .30-caliber machine guns and heavy .50-caliber machine gun mounted on top of the turret. The nimble Sherman's emphasis was on speed, mobility, and maneuverability. Powered by a 450 horsepower V-8 gasoline engine, it weighed 35 tons, including its five-man crew, and could reach speeds of nearly 30 miles per hour over a range of 100 to 150 miles.

Although the Sherman was faster, more reliable, and could fire at a faster rate than its enemy counterparts, the German Panther and Tiger tanks commanded greater accuracy and range with their main 75mm and 88mm guns. German armor was thicker, the tanks had wider tracks, and they burned diesel rather than gasoline fuel, which made these tanks less likely to explode and burn when hit. The British nicknamed the Sherman "Ronson" after the American cigarette lighter, which advertisements had claimed, "Lights the first time every time." The Germans called the Shermans "Tommy Cookers."

The 761st landed in Normandy on October 20, 1944, and dashed 400 miles across France in six days to catch up with Patton at Nicolas de Port. The Black Panthers were detailed to link up with Maj. Gen. Willard S. Paul's 26th Infantry Division as the Allies continued to squeeze an iron ring around Germany from every direction. It was a week before the attack on the fortress city of Metz that General Patton delivered his famous pep talk to his newest

tankers. As he finished and climbed down from the hood of the armored car, he noticed young Corporal E.G. McConnell standing at attention.

"Listen boy," Patton growled, "I want you to shoot every damn thing you see—church steeples, water towers, houses, old ladies, children, haystacks. Every damn thing you see. This is war. You hear me, boy?"

Corporal Howard Richardson turned to his company commander, Captain David Williams: "Sir, that old man is crazy as hell," he said. "Did you see the way his eyes roll around when he talks? That's no bullshit about him being a hornet. I'm more afraid of him than I be of them Krauts."

The rumored "big offensive" against entrenched German defenses kicked off at dawn on November 8. The 26th Infantry, with Patton's Panthers attached, would fight in the same sector where it had fought in 1918—on ground south of Chateau-Salins through Moncourt Woods to a hill northwest of Chateau-Salins. Opposing it were the German 11th and 13th Panzer Divisions.

Repeated Allied bombing had cracked the Dieuze Dam, flooding the valley of the Seille River and low-lying areas. The terrain was treacherous, and the area was a thoroughly miserable place for a battle. The duel began with the ear-piercing shriek of a German 88. Artillery explosions walked mushrooms of smoke across the lowlands as the Germans attempted by sheer weight of numbers and ferocity to knock off attacking American infantry and supporting tanks.

Captain Williams's cheery voice broke onto his company's radio band, speaking "Harlemese" although he, like most commanding officers at this time, was white: "Now, looky here, ya cats. We gotta hit it down the main drag and hep some of them unheped cats on the other side. So let's roll on down de Seventh Avenue and knock 'em, Jack."

An aid man with a medical detachment in the rear of the formation, rather than a tanker, became the battalion's first soldier killed in action. Private Clifford Adams was rendering aid to a wounded G.I. when a shell landed almost on top of him. No one expected him to be the battalion's first casualty.

Other events unfolding in the rear would affect the Black Panther Battalion as profoundly as anything the Germans threw at it on the assault line. While the fury of the opening battle rolled like thunder all along the length of the front line, a small enemy patrol crept through woodland thickets to where Colonel Paul Bates stood on the hood of his Jeep watching the fight. Submachine gun bullets splattered into the Jeep. A slug caught the colonel, knocking him, seriously wounded, to the ground. The commander the Panthers had trusted and depended on, who had developed their pride as a fighting unit, had fallen on the first day of battle.

A tanker called Smitty transported executive officer Major Charles Wingo to the front to assume command. Wingo did not last long. Smitty got out of his tank.

"Where's Major Wingo?" Corporal E.G. McConnell asked.

"He went nuts," was the response. "He might not be plumb chicken, but he sure got henhouse ways. He gets out and looks down there and starts shaking all over like a stray dog passing razor blades in the rain. He took off in a Jeep to the rear."

First, the colonel was seriously wounded. Now, the executive officer had deserted his men in combat, leaving the battalion without leadership when the men needed it the most. Although Wingo had not yet seen combat, he was evacuated for "combat fatigue" and never seen again. Lt. Col. Hollis E. Hunt transferred from another battalion to assume command.

In spite of some of the detrimental assessments of black soldiers in combat, the Black Panthers distinguished themselves almost immediately, even though they were not expected to perform as valiantly as white soldiers. During the approach to Morville, Charlie Company's tanks got bogged down behind a cleverly concealed antitank ditch 15 feet wide, four feet deep, and studded at the bottom with steel spikes. It was snowing heavily, and devastating mortar and artillery fire rained down on the exposed assault force. Buried mines erupted in a broad, deep swath among the American tanks and soldiers. Tracers cracked and wove designs across the white field. A number of tanks were hit in the initial volley of enemy fire. Several blazed brightly.

Tankers abandoned broken mounts and headed toward the rear, helping each other, dragging or carrying wounded. Others scrambled into the freezing muddy water at the bottom of the antitank ditch, which was soon filled with marooned and wounded tankers and infantrymen.

First Sergeant Sam Turley's tank was one of the first hit. Realizing that the soldiers trapped in the ditch were doomed unless they escaped right away, Turley ran up and down the ditch shouting for soldiers to head uphill toward higher ground where they might find cover. The last anyone saw of Turley, he had jumped out of the ditch to provide covering fire for escaping soldiers. He stood straight and tall behind the ditch, snow swirling around him, ammo belts thrown over his shoulders, a spitting .50-caliber machine gun held close to his hip to absorb its recoil.

Mute testimony to the bitter fighting that took place near Guebling, France, the battered hulks of four German tanks and two American tanks lie derelict on the field.

Turley continued to shoot until German counterfire ripped into his body. As he crumpled to earth, his finger froze to the trigger, and the gun continued to bang. A direct hit from an 88mm shell killed him outright.

Suffering heavy casualties, the men of the 761st drove on toward Metz, rough going against rain, mud, cold, snow, driving sleet, and a determined enemy. Sergeant Ruben Rivers, a farm boy from Oklahoma and now a tank commander, got out of his machine under heavy fire to attach a cable to a section of dragon's teeth obstacles and pull it out of the way so his platoon could proceed. A day or so later, a mine detonated underneath Rivers's

Sitting atop their Stuart light tanks, soldiers of the 761st wait for orders to enter the town of Coburg, Germany, to clean out pockets of stubborn German resistance.

tank and shredded the flesh of his leg. Medics cleaned and dressed the wound and attempted to administer morphine for pain. Rivers pushed them away and refused to be evacuated.

"Captain, you're going to need me," Rivers assured the Able Company commander, Captain David Williams. "We got a job to do."

Wounded though he was, Rivers led an echelon of tanks that blazed its way into a small village blocking the approach to the important rail and communications center of Guebling.

"Don't go into that town, Sergeant!" Rivers's platoon leader radioed. "It's too hot in there."

"Sorry, sir," Rivers responded. "I'm already through that town."

Rivers lost a second tank the next day. He commandeered another tank and remained in the fight. That night, a medic warned the sergeant that his wounds were getting gangrene. Rivers still refused evacuation.

"Tomorrow's going to be tough," he asserted. "Another day won't make any difference."

Fighting continued in and around Guebling. By dawn of the third day of battle, Rivers and his crew had destroyed at least two enemy tanks and killed over 300 Germans. Mark IV panzers and several German tank destroyers rumbled out of the fog.

"I see them!" Rivers radioed. "I'll fight them!"

Outnumbered and outgunned, Rivers and Technical Sergeant Walter James darted their two Shermans from cover and fought a delaying action that allowed Americans caught in the open to withdraw and regroup. A shell finally caught Rivers's tank and cracked it like an egg shell. A second armor-piercing shell finished the job. The tank commander who refused to withdraw was dead.

The enemy continued to bitterly contest every inch of ground. Third Army units spearheaded toward the Maginot Line and, beyond that, Germany's Siegfried Line. Black Panthers learned to live with war and its constant dangers. It was more terrible than anything they could have imagined.

Combat stripped away the everyday business of skin color, religion, and social class. White soldiers and black soldiers lived together, or at least side by side, in a common condition of discomfort and danger. Only in rear areas was race an issue.

After Corporal E.G. McConnell was wounded at Honskirch, he was evacuated to a field hospital where he was the only black man. One day, a major general paid a visit to cheer up the heroic wounded. He paused when he reached McConnell and asked in an attempt at humor, "What's wrong with you, boy? Got the claps?"

The remark, an echo of an old stereotype pertaining to supposed black promiscuity, cut McConnell like a rapier. He turned his head away and lay there in humiliation. He could hardly wait to get back to the front line. It may have been precisely because of such stereotypes and because of low expectations from white observers that Patton's Panthers became determined to prove they were warriors equal if not superior to their white comrades in arms.

Allied forces hit the French-built Maginot Line, now garrisoned by German troops, on December 9, 1944, and pushed through the defenses. The 761st rolled onto German soil. Sergeant Willie McCall got out of his tank and looked around. "So this," he said, spitting contemptuously, "is the home of superman?"

At precisely 5:30 AM on December 16, 1944, an American sentry in the quiet Ardennes Forest radioed headquarters to report innumerable "pinpoints of light" suddenly flickering all along the German line. The "pinpoints" were the muzzle flashes of hundreds of German artillery pieces. The ensuing roar and concussion of the German guns were the opening shots of Hitler's desperate Ardennes Offensive, which resulted in the Battle of the Bulge.

General Dwight D. Eisenhower, the Supreme Allied Commander in Europe, ordered Patton to break off his advance in the Saar and turn northward to relieve the besieged town of Bastogne, which was astride a key crossroads. The 761st, now commanded by Major John F. George, received orders to dash to the Ardennes with the rest of the Third Army. The 761st was assigned to support elements of the 87th Infantry Division in the recapture of the village of Tillet, which was located some 15 miles west of Bastogne and less than three miles from the Marche-Bastogne Highway, a major German supply route.

Fighting along broken roads and trails, the 761st and the 87th plowed through heavy opposition to cover the 25 miles toward Tillet during six days of combat. The Germans fought savagely to hold their ground, exacting a high price in American casualties.

The elite Begleit Brigade of the 13th Panzer Division, whom the Black Panthers had fought earlier in the Saar Basin, waged a grueling defense in the dense pine woods south and east of Tillet. Enemy fortifications were carefully planned and backed by numerous machine gun nests, self-propelled guns, mortars, and armor. Allied tanks, artillery, and infantry tried to take Tillet and end the seesaw battle to win the St. Hubert Road. All had failed, beaten back by stubborn German defenses.

On the night of January 4, 1945, Captain David Williams of Able Company sent a runner back to Major George with a message that he

feared the Germans might have surmised that his men were short of supplies and that they could launch a counterattack. He was not sure that Able Company could hold on if attacked in force. Williams was to have been reinforced by airborne units that had not yet arrived. George responded for Able Company to hold its ground and then to launch an attack of his own to capture Tillet the following morning.

Williams gathered his platoon leaders and noncommissioned officers in a house in the village of Gerimont. "I'm not going to mince words," he said, looking as tired, ragged, filthy, and unshaved as the other men in the room. "If the Germans attack us, we can't hold them. I guarantee you that if we resist, they'll kill us all. I'm the company commander, but I'm going to bow out of this one. This is one decision you guys have got to make. Do you want me to wave my underwear or do you want to fight it out?"

For a long minute no sound came except the low moaning of the winter wind. Finally, Sergeant Walter Lewis slapped his coffee cup on the table and stood up. "We can't give up, captain," he said. "It wouldn't be right. I say we fight it out."

That broke the tension. Nervous laughter filled the cottage, and the vote was unanimous. "Done!" Captain Williams concluded. "If Walter wants to fight it out, then we'll fight it out."

To Williams's relief, the airborne reinforcements arrived overnight, pulling into Gerimont over snow so frozen it cracked and popped under the pressure of the vehicles. The German counterattack failed to materialize. The first action against Tillet was launched at dawn. As tankers crept through early morning fog and snow, Axis Sally jammed American radio transmissions with her propaganda.

"Good morning, Negro soldiers of the 761st," she crooned. "I am sorry that you will die today in Tillet. Our fight is not with the Negroes in America, and your fight is not with us. Your fellow Negroes are rioting in Cleveland. Your commander, Captain Williams, is leading you to death and destruction. He is white and not one of you. Your battalion commander, Major George, is also white and not one of you. Leave your tanks now and return home to Cleveland where you are needed and you will not be killed."

Axis Sally played Louis Armstrong's "I Can't Bring You Anything But Love, Baby" to accompany Patton's Panthers into combat. During the fighting, notable for its raw savagery, it was never clear at any moment to the men of the 761st whether they were winning or losing.

"They've hit me three times!" tank commander Frank Cochran responded to an inquiry, "but I'm still giving 'em hell."

Crusty Captain Charles "Pop" Gates of the 761st personally led a successful 10-tank assault on a German-held hilltop outpost that proved to be the last obstacle to taking the town. Tillet finally fell on January 7, 1945. A German prisoner seemed stunned to see black men in uniform. "What are you doing here?" he asked Sergeant Johnny Holmes in English. "This is a white man's war."

Sergeant Holmes offered him a cigarette. "You ain't got no black or white when you're over here and the nation is in trouble," he replied. "You only got Americans."

Sergeant Ruben Rivers, a soldier of the 761st Tank Battalion, displayed incredible courage and ultimately lost his life in combat. Decades later, he was awarded the Medal of Honor posthumously. (Joe Wilson)

Colonel Bates had promised to return after being wounded during the battalion's first day of combat. He kept that promise and resumed command of the 761st on January 17. The battle-hardened battalion had changed considerably during his absence. Many of the old timers from the days at Camp Claiborne and Camp Hood were gone, some of them dead and many of them wounded. Over 30 percent of the outfit had been replaced since November.

After the Battle of the Bulge, the Black Panthers received orders to proceed to Saverne, France, and temporarily attach to the Seventh Army to break through the Siegfried Line. That fight began on March 20, 1945, and was a slugfest all the way.

The Germans had placed pillboxes and camouflaged artillery and machine guns in the woods and in the fields on both sides of narrow roads leading to key towns. Sherman tanks confronted the enemy head-on, while soldiers hastily dismounted whenever the columns encountered opposition and moved up through the high ground to root out the enemy infantry.

The important town of Silz occupied a vital crossroads at the bottom of a gradual decline. Charlie and Baker Companies, led by Captain Gates and Captain Johnny Long, were assigned to support infantry in capturing it. Artillery fire touched off a German ammunition dump, which erupted in a spectacular explosion and set the town afire. Flames licked back at the darkness as tanks led the attack, sweeping in so fast that German antitank positions were caught by surprise and captured without firing a single shot.

As Americans stormed into one side of the blazing town, a German column of at least 100 trucks, horse-drawn artillery, and antitank guns fled out the other side. Hitler's armies were abandoning the Siegfried Line and running for their lives. This was a rare opportunity to trap significant numbers of enemy troops and capture or annihilate them. Blood lust boiled through the veins of the men whose only thought was to pay back those who had been killing and wounding their comrades for months.

The tanks of the 761st caught up with the Germans where the road twisted into a series of S curves, devastating the enemy column. Debris, dead horses, shattered guns, artillery pieces, and vehicles were burning along the road, and dead enemy soldiers littered the scene. Bates ordered tank dozers forward to clear the road.

As part of Task Force Rhine, the 761st Tank Battalion crossed that great river in March. During the fight to the last great natural barrier on the German frontier, the tankers had destroyed 31 pillboxes, 49 machine gun emplacements, 29 antitank guns, and 11 ammunition trucks. Twenty antitank guns and seven towns had been captured, while 833 Germans had been killed and 3,210 taken prisoner. Five American tanks had been lost, and 300 tons of ammunition had been expended.

On March 30, 1945, the battalion arrived in Langenselbold, Germany. The end of the war seemed in sight. Patton's Panthers began a drive across the Reichland, cruising the Autobahn, overrunning airfields, and firing on enemy troops hidden along the highway. Refugees were always present, and the gaunt, gray-clad prisoners trudged toward the rear.

Charlie Company of the 761st captured Vehlenstein Castle in Neuhaus, Germany, reinforcing the G.I. belief that the war was nearly over. Hitler's Luftwaffe chief, Reichsmarshal

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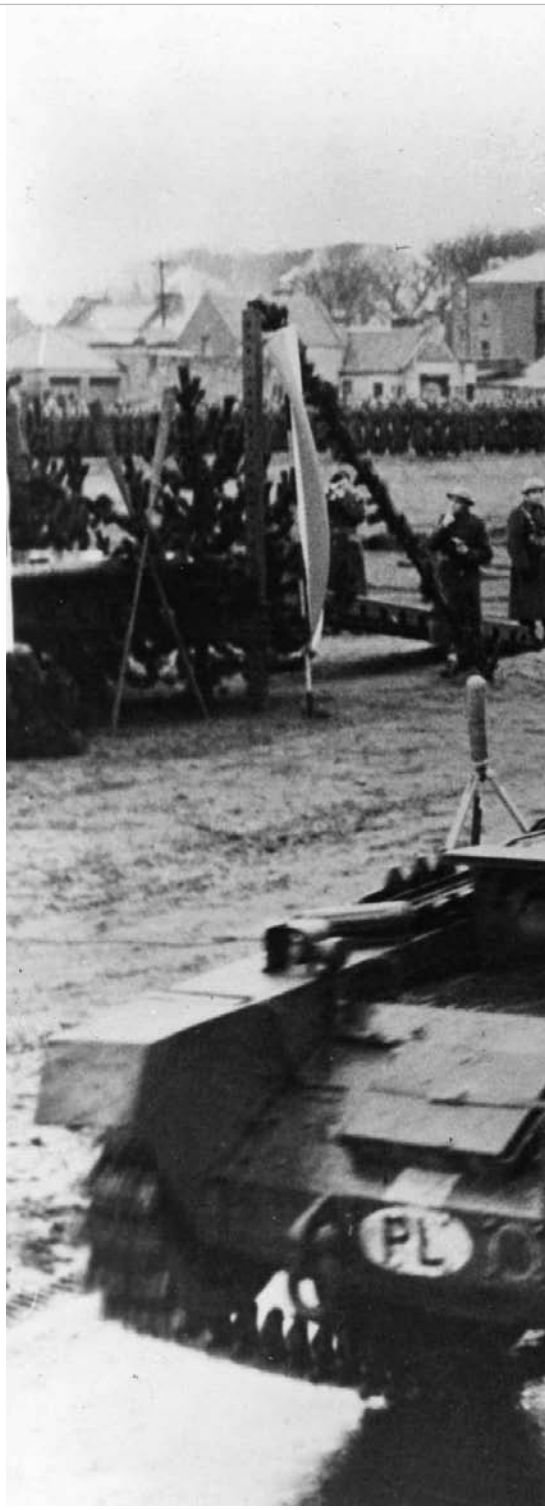
FREE POLISH SOLDIERS FOUGHT BRAVELY IN NORMANDY DURING THE CLOSING OF THE FALAISE POCKET.

The Poles in the West

BY MAJOR GENERAL MICHAEL REYNOLDS



The dismemberment of Poland by the German and Soviet armies in September and early October 1939 saw the temporary destruction of the Polish armed forces. Only three destroyers and two submarines reached British ports to continue operations against the Germans. Despite the carnage of the September campaign, many Polish soldiers and civilians managed to make their way to Syria and France via Romania, Hungary and the Baltic States, and by May 1940 some 84,500 Poles were under arms in those countries.

An infantry brigade was sent, as part of an Allied force, to help defend Norway, and two full infantry divisions, two partly organized infantry divisions, and an armored cavalry brigade formed part of the armies defending France. However, in the face of a second blitzkrieg by the seemingly invincible Wehrmacht, the remnants of these divisions, like the British Expeditionary Force, were forced to evacuate continental Europe during June. Only 24,000 Poles reached Great Britain to join hundreds of Polish airmen already there preparing to fight beside their British comrades in the forthcoming Battle of Britain.

When Hitler made his fatal mistake of invading the Soviet Union in June 1941, Stalin recognized General Wladyslaw Sikorski's Polish government in exile in London, and a Polish army was formed in Russia for use against the Germans. It was made up of thousands of prisoners of war Stalin had been holding since the 1939 campaign. Then, in 1942, he agreed to transfer a complete corps, under its commander General Wladyslaw Anders, to British command. At the same time, he kept what later amounted to another corps in the Soviet Union to fight on the Eastern Front. This it did with distinction, ending with the final battles for Berlin. The formation transferred to the British, known as the II Polish Corps, completed its training in Iran in 1943, and arrived in Italy in December of that year to fight alongside its British, American, and Canadian allies, most notably in the Battle of Cassino.

The 24,000 or so Poles who reached Great Britain in mid-1940 were quickly reorganized in Scotland to form the I Polish Corps—part of the overall defense forces of the United Kingdom. The corps was made up of the 10th Motorized

A Polish tank commander salutes as his unit passes in review during a ceremony in Scotland prior to deployment to Normandy. Polish units made a significant contribution to the Allied offensive in Western Europe. (National Archives)

Cavalry Brigade, the 16th Armored Brigade, and the Independent Highland Rifle Brigade, and it was soon to be reinforced by volunteers from Polish communities all over the world.

By February 1942, the threat of a German invasion had receded and the British agreed to a Polish request that a fully fledged armored division be formed from the existing corps units. General Sikorski, the Polish commander-in-chief and prime minister of the government in exile, appointed General Stanislaw Maczek to command the new division. He was an experienced soldier, having fought in World War I and the Polish-Bolshevik war of 1918–1920, but he had no real experience in armored warfare. Nevertheless, he was a popular leader. One of his most memorable sayings was, "The Polish soldier fights for the freedom of other nations, but dies only for Poland."

The new division, known as the 1st Polish Armored Division, comprised two armored brigades, each of six tank battalions, formed from the 10th Motorized Cavalry Brigade and the 16th Armored Brigade; a motorized infantry battalion taken from the Independent Highland Rifle Brigade; a reconnaissance unit; and the normal divisional administrative units. As such, it began collective training and during 1943 conducted several exercises in eastern England.

However, in that year the British decreed that armored divisions should have only one armored brigade; the other major combat component was to be an infantry brigade. The Poles had no option but to conform, and by early 1944 the 10th Armored Cavalry Brigade was made up of three armored regiments (battalions)—the 1st, 2nd, and 24th Lancers—and a mechanized infantry battalion, the 10th Dragoons. Also included were the 3rd Rifle Brigade comprising the Highland (Podhalan) Rifles and the 8th and 9th Rifle Battalions. The 10th Mounted Rifle Regiment (battalion) formed the divisional reconnaissance unit, and two field artillery battalions, one antitank, and one antiaircraft (AA) battalion were in direct support, together with engineer, signals, ordnance, supply, and medical units. The total strength was 885 officers and 15,210 men; equipment included more than 350 tanks, 48 field artillery howitzers, 48 medium and heavy antitank guns, and 54 medium AA guns.

The division was not involved in the D-Day landings or the initial fighting in Normandy, but at the end of July 1944, men and equipment embarked in the port of London and at Southampton. After uneventful voyages, the first Polish troops landed in France on July 30. The men, many of whom had waited four years for a chance to exact revenge on their conquerors, were about to have their battle worthiness severely tested in Operation Totalize, a breakout toward Falaise from the eastern side of the Normandy beachhead.

Field Marshal Bernard Montgomery's overall strategy of using the British and Canadians to hold the bulk of the German armor on the east flank in order to allow the Americans to break out in the west was working. The British and Canadians on the eastern flank were facing 14 German divisions, of which seven were armored with 600 tanks, while the Americans in the west were opposed by nine hodgepodge divisions, of which only two were armored with a total of just over 100 tanks.

ABOVE: Attempting to pinpoint the locations of German snipers hiding on the upper floors of nearby buildings, Canadian soldiers take cover amid the ruins of the embattled town of Caen. The initial plan for Operation Overlord called for the capture of Caen on D-Day. However, the city remained in German hands for another month. TOP LEFT: Lieutenant General Guy Simonds watches closely as the first tank of his Canadian II Corps crosses the River Seine in France. The II Corps also included the Polish 1st Armored Division. TOP RIGHT: British Field Marshal Bernard L. Montgomery (left) and Polish Major General Stanislaw Maczek confer with a group of staff officers. Maczek commanded the Polish 1st Armored Division.

(Above and Top Left: National Archives / Top Right: Author's Collection)

As the commander of the U.S. Twelfth Army Group, General Omar Bradley, described the situation in his book *A Soldier's Story:* "When reckoned in term of national pride, this British decoy mission became a sacrificial one, for while we tramped around the outside flank, the British were to sit in place and pin down Germans."

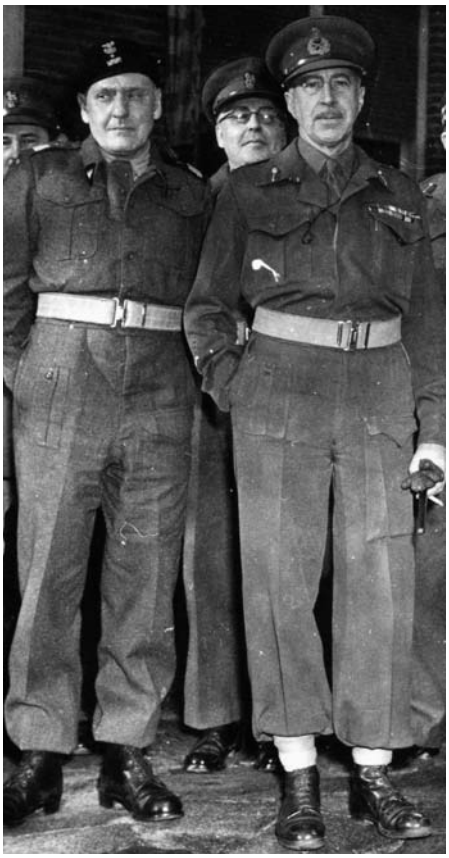
The American breakout—Operation Cobra—launched on July 25, was, not surprisingly, highly successful. On August 1, U.S. troops entered Brittany, and the German commander-in-chief, Field Marshal Günther von Kluge, warned Berlin, "The left flank has collapsed." A day later, Mortain was captured, and on the 3rd Bradley ordered General George S. Patton Jr. to leave minimal forces in Brittany and drive eastward. Rennes was captured on the 4th, and the same day Montgomery issued a new directive that ended, "The broad strategy of the Allied Armies is to swing the right flank towards Paris and force the enemy back to the Seine." Within two days, Patton's tanks were approaching Le Mans. It was now time for the British, Canadians, and Poles to begin their breakout toward Falaise.

August 8, 1918, marked the beginning of a great British offensive east of Amiens during World War I, which German commander General Erich Ludendorff described later as "the black day of the German Army in the history of the [First World] war." On the eve of the first major offensive by the First Canadian Army, of which the Poles were now a part, its commander, Lt. Gen. Henry Crerar, told his senior officers that he intended to make August 8, 1944, an even blacker day for the Germans.

The officer given this task was Lt. Gen. Guy Simonds, the commander of II Canadian Corps. He already had his own 2nd and 3rd Canadian Infantry Divisions and the inexperienced 4th Armored Division under command, but he was now given two British formations—the 51st (Highland) Infantry Division and the 33rd Tank Brigade—and the unblooded 1st Polish Armored Division. The latter was destined to play a short but dramatic part in the battle of Normandy.

Simonds brought new ideas to the forth-

RIGHT: Polish artillerymen prepare to load and fire their 25-pounder field gun during antitank exercises prior to embarkation for Normandy and their first test in combat. BELOW: Polish Major General Stanislaw Maczek (left) and British General H.D.G. Crerar pose for photographers during a visit to the headquarters of the First Canadian Army by General Dwight D. Eisenhower on November 29, 1944. BELOW RIGHT: Digging in to hold their position somewhere in Normandy, some of these Polish soldiers have stripped to the waist in the summer heat. The Poles fought tenaciously during the closing of the Falaise Gap. (All photos: National Archives)



coming battle. First, he decided to attack at night, without a preliminary bombardment. Second, by removing the 105mm gun from the U.S.-designed M-7 Priest self-propelled artillery vehicle, he created an open-topped armored personnel carrier called the Kangaroo, which gave some of his infantry both mobility and protection. Third, he decided to use Royal Air Force night bombers to saturate the flanks of his proposed penetration and American medium and heavy bombers in the breakout phase after first light.

Such a plan demanded extremely accurate navigation by both airmen and soldiers. A trial was carried out on the night of the 6th, which proved that the artillery could adequately indicate targets with marker shells, and various other technical aids were adopted to help the ground forces, including the use of radio directional beams, artificial moonlight, and tracer fired from AA guns along the flanks.

Simonds's plan was to obliterate the flanking areas of May-sur-Orne–Fontenay-le-Marmion on the right and la Hogue–Secqueville-la-Campagne on the left with RAF heavy bombers starting at 2300 hours on August 7, and then to seize Garcelles, the Cramesnil spur, St. Aignan, Gaumesnil, and the Caillouet features with two infantry divisions. Then, with the aid of a heavy daylight air bombardment, and while the same divisions went on to secure the flanks at Bretteville-sur-Laize on the right and the woods north of Cauvicourt on the left, the 4th Canadian Armored Division was to secure the area Fontaine-le-Pin–Potigny and the 1st Polish Armored Division the vital ground to the east of the Caen–Falaise road on the south side of the Laison stream. Facing this onslaught and sited in depth was General Sepp Dietrich's I SS Panzer Corps, severely weakened after two months of fighting but still fielding some one hundred 88mm and 75mm antitank weapons.

The 1,020 RAF night bombers began dropping 3,462 tons of bombs on their targets at precisely 2300 hours as planned, and according to the Canadian official history not one bomb fell among friendly troops. Ten aircraft were lost. Then, at 2330 hours the ground assault began and despite considerable confusion caused by the dust created by so many tracked vehicles and exploding shells from the friendly artillery barrage, the new tactics proved a success. By first light the initial objectives had been secured, and by midday Caillouet and Gaumesnil had fallen. Casualties were surprisingly light. All was ready for phase two, in which the Poles would participate with Cauvicourt as their first main objective. However, poor weather forecasts had indicated that the daylight bombers might have difficulty in identifying their targets and so the start time for the advance was delayed until 1355 hours.

Despite some serious delays and some confusion—the Poles, for example, had to move all the way from the Bayeux area during the night—the Allied formations were ready to advance as the first of the 678 American Boeing B-17 Flying Fortress bombers approached their targets at 1255 hours. Intense antiaircraft fire shot down nine B-17s, and for various reasons 181 did not carry out their attacks. The remainder dropped 1,487 tons on the three main targets. Unfortunately, tragic mistakes by two 12-plane groups caused an estimated 315 friendly casualties, including 44 Poles, one of whom was the commander of the Divisional AA Artillery Regiment, Lt. Col. O. Eminowicz.

The Poles crossed their start line a little precipitately at 1335 hours with their 2nd Armored Regiment on the left and 24th Lancers on the right, each with a company of 10th Dragoons (Motor Battalion) in support.

The 1st Polish Armored Division's operational report records that the 2nd Regiment came under heavy fire from the area two kilometers southeast of St. Aignan at 1425 hours and that the Lancers were under artillery fire. No casualty figures are mentioned.

At 1520 hours, the Polish report says, its 2nd Regiment was in a difficult position with enemy tanks on its left flank, and at 1610 hours II Canadian Corps logged a message from General Maczek's Headquarters to the effect that 20 Tiger tanks (almost certainly Mk IVs) were "covering with fire all country immediately over" the lateral road through St. Aignan. The Poles had in fact clashed head-on with a German armored counterattack. Obersturmbannführer (Lieutenant Colonel) Hubert Meyer, the chief of staff of the 12th SS Hitlerjugend Panzer Division, claimed later that the Polish 2nd Armored Regiment lost 26 of the 38 Shermans in its two leading squadrons, and since it is known that the regiment received 24 replacement tanks and crews the following day his figure seems very reasonable. With regard to the Lancers, their advance was barred by a shallow valley with a steep southern bank just to the southeast of St. Aignan. This tank obstacle was clearly marked on the 1944 map issued to Allied troops (the original still exists), but had obviously been overlooked by those planning the operation.

This enforced halt not only exposed the Lancers to the artillery fire already mentioned but also to flanking fire from Tigers counterattacking north from Cintheaux. The Germans claimed that the Lancers lost 14 tanks. Certainly, by early evening the Poles had withdrawn to the northwest of St. Aignan. A British gunner in a Sherman tank (and later a distinguished military historian and writer), Ken Tout, witnessed the Polish attack. He wrote later, "We could only watch, admire the Poles' bravery and be deeply saddened by the losses of our gallant allies. Later, British and Polish medical officers and orderlies tended each other's wounded."

The Canadians did little better. It was 1800 hours before the Germans were cleared from the tiny hamlet of Gaumesnil, and there their advance ended. The great armored push had been a dismal failure, and General Simonds was bitterly disappointed. Nevertheless, his plan for August 9 envisaged the Canadians advancing to Point 195, northwest of Potigny, while Colonel Tadeusz Majewski's 10th Polish Armored Brigade was to seize the area of La Croix and then Point 140 above the Laison stream.

The Canadian advance began at 0200 hours but proved a disaster when one armored/infantry group ended up on the Polish objec-

The hulk of a Sherman tank looming behind them, these Polish soldiers have apparently been distracted by something taking place in the distance. Note the fallen brick lying atop the tank, which seems to indicate that it was hit by enemy fire or has crashed through the wall of the building in the background. (National Archives)

tive—Point 140. It seems, as the unit war diary puts it, "High ground was sighted and we headed for it." The last radio message from what became an isolated and surrounded group came at 0849 hours, and at 0300 hours the following day only four officers with 44 infantrymen and five tank men escaped to reach Polish lines.

The Poles began their advance on the 9th toward Soignolles and La Croix much later—at 1100 hours. The Cromwell tanks of the 10th Mounted Rifles Armored Reconnaissance Regiment found enemy troops occupying St. Sylvain, and the 1st and 8th Infantry Battalions were tasked with clearing the village. By 1250 hours, the 1st Armored Regiment was on the western outskirts of Cauvicourt and the 24th Lancers were astride a wood 1,000 meters to its southeast. Each had a company of M-10 antitank guns in support. Soon after this they ran into German antitank fire, but by 1600 hours the Lancers had reached the outskirts of La Croix and Point 111 (west), and the 1st Armored Regiment, after passing behind them, was in the area of Point 111 (east), two kilometers northwest of Rouvres. From this position it, perhaps not unreasonably, fired on tanks visible on its next objective, Point 140; however, there was a problem—the tanks, as we have heard, were Canadian.

In addition, German antitank fire had taken a heavy toll of the Polish tanks—one report mentions 22 Shermans being knocked out. Whatever the true figure, the Poles withdrew to the Cauvicourt area. A report by a Canadian officer on Point 140 described how they cheered on the Polish advance, only to see them take severe tank casualties before they were forced to withdraw as "tank after tank blew up and brewed before the disappointed gaze of the doomed garrison."

The only real success of the day came at 1930 hours when, following a heavy air and artillery bombardment, the 1st Polish (Highland) Infantry Battalion on the left flank began its assault on St. Sylvain. By 2200 hours the village had fallen, and St. Martin des Bois was captured before midnight.

General Simonds's intention for the following day was for the Canadians to seize the high ground at Point 206, just to the west of Potigny, and then exploit toward Falaise, while the 1st Polish Armored Division was to capture the infamous Point 140 and then push on across the Laison to the hills directly north of Falaise on the east of the main highway. However, before there could be any thought of crossing the Laison it was essential to clear the Quesnay woods, and unfortunately for the Allies the Germans had made these woods the center of their whole defense. Maczek strongly resisted an order for his armored division to clear the woods and was proved right when the subsequent attack by a Canadian infantry division failed with 165 casualties, including 44 killed.

Meanwhile, the 3rd Infantry Brigade of the 1st Polish Armored Division under Colonel Marion Wieronski had been due to advance from the Estrées area, but the failure to clear the Quesnay woods combined with intense German artillery and mortar fire caused the attack to be delayed. Eventually, two infantry battalions and the 10th Mounted Rifles Armored Reconnaissance Regiment moved toward Point 111. By last light the Poles were established on the hill—but again only after suffering severe losses. The Germans claimed 18 Cromwell tanks knocked out during this fighting.

On August 11, Field Marshal Montgomery issued a new directive that emphasized the predicament of the Germans in Normandy and the urgent necessity to close the narrowing gap between Falaise and Alençon in order to cut them off. He ordered the First Canadian Army to "Capture Falaise. This is a first priority and it is vital it should be done quickly. The Army will then operate with strong armored and mobile forces to secure Argentan." However, despite the clear urgency expressed in this directive, that same day Simonds ordered his infantry divisions to relieve the armored divisions. Canadian infantry took over from the Poles on Point 111 that night, and they were placed in corps reserve in the St. Silvain–Cauvicourt area.

Maczek had no illusions about the failure of Totalize. He said later, "From the commanding officer to the lowest rifleman or lancer we had no experience in the art of armored warfare …What experience we had gained in September 1939 in Poland and in June 1940 in France was now obsolete … Experience is not gained in a day, it grows with the passage of months and years."

On August 13, Montgomery told the First Canadian Army to dominate the Falaise area "in order that no enemy may escape by the roads which pass through, or near it." He also directed that once the high ground north and east of Falaise had been secured, Simonds's Corps should exploit southeast and capture Trun as a matter of urgency.

> "WHAT EXPERIENCE WE HAD GAINED IN POLAND AND FRANCE WAS NOW OBSOLETE… EXPERIENCE IS NOT GAINED IN A DAY, IT GROWS WITH THE PASSAGE OF MONTHS AND YEARS."

The plan for Operation Tractable was more or less the same as for Totalize, including heavy aerial bombing. But there was one major difference.

ABOVE: Advancing quickly through the shattered town of St. Lambert, France, located on the River Dives between Trun and Chambois, Polish tanks roll toward a junction with other Allied troops to bag 60,000 Germans in the Falaise Pocket. RIGHT: Two Polish tankers peer from the turret of their armored vehicle as they rumble ahead. This image was taken somewhere in the Near East. Polish troops served in numerous locales during the war. (Both: National Archives)

It was to be launched in daylight with cover provided by smoke screens. The major blow was to fall on the sector east of the Caen–Falaise highway and was to be struck by two vast armored columns, each comprising one complete armored brigade. These were each to be followed by two infantry brigades. Maczek's division was given a secondary role. It was to follow up and clear the RAF target areas.

At 1135 hours on August 14, the Canadian guns fired marker shells for the 73 medium bombers, which hit the Germans in the Laison Valley. Five minutes later, the Canadian armored columns began to roll forward, and 12 minutes after that the guns began to lay the thick smoke screen designed to protect the attacking troops. Inevitably, there was chaos as the Shermans tried to negotiate the Laison—one squadron (company) lost 11 of its 19 tanks trying to find its way across. The heavy bombing by 417 RAF Avro Lancasters and 352 Handley-Page Halifaxes commenced at 1400 hours. They dropped 3,723 tons on the right flank of the advance, and although most of the designated targets were hit, 77 aircraft bombed short, causing 397 casualties to the Canadians and 93 to the Poles.

Not surprisingly though, by nightfall the German defense line on the Laison had collapsed. But even then, despite Simonds's instructions that the armored columns should keep moving at night, they did nothing of the sort and the Germans continued to hold the vital ground north of Falaise.

According to the First Canadian Army operational log dated August 14, some time that day Montgomery ordered Crerar to take the city of Falaise without delay. The only proviso was that this operation was not to interfere with the more important task of capturing Trun and linking up with the Americans coming up from the southwest.

The Canadians renewed their advance on the morning of the 15th, but despite extraordinarily weak forces in front of them they made little progress. Two tank battalions were bloodily repulsed when they tried to move to Hill 159, and it cost 160 casualties to take Point 168 to the southeast of Soulangy. At 1815 hours the town was finally taken, but a strong counterattack pushed the Canadians out and at the end of the day they were back where they started.

But what of the Poles? They finished their task of clearing the RAF target areas, including the Quesnay woods, during the morning of the 15th and then moved to the eastern flank via Rouvres and Maizières. The Germans managed to blow the bridges over the Dives at Vendeuvre and Jort, but by early evening elements of the 10th Mounted Rifles Armored Reconnaissance Regiment, reinforced with a company of M-10s and a motorized infantry company, had forded the river at Jort and moved on to the high ground just to the east of the village.

However, when the 1st Armored Regiment reached the high ground to the west of Jort it mistook the 10th Regiment's Cromwells for German Mk IVs and opened fire, causing some casualties. The Germans claimed three Polish tanks knocked out and five damaged. Similar attempts to ford the Dives south of Jort and at Vendeuvre failed, but the 9th Polish Infantry Battalion managed to wade the river during the night and establish a bridgehead that was soon reinforced and extended as far south as Barou and the eastern edges of Morteaux-Couliboeuf. However, instead of being allowed to exploit southeastward as the situation demanded—Trun was less than 20 kilometers away—the Poles were told to remain where they were until relieved by Canadian infantry.

On August 16, Simonds issued orders for the Canadians to clear the city of Falaise and for the 4th Canadian and 1st Polish Armored Divisions to cross the Dives and advance southeast from Damblainville and Jort, respectively. Montgomery had telephoned Crerar during the afternoon and warned him that the German divisions west of Argentan would try to break out between Trun and Falaise and that it was therefore vital to seize Trun and close the gap between the Canadians and Americans as quickly as possible.

By now the German retreat was in full swing with men and vehicles streaming back into the surviving salient to the west of the Falaise–Argentan road. Unbelievable targets were beginning to present themselves to the Allied fighter bombers, and it would not be long before artillery and even tanks would be able to participate in the slaughter. Despite Montgomery's directions, the advance of the First Canadian Army was to be painfully slow.

The attack against Falaise itself by the Canadians was finally launched at 1525 hours on the 16th, and although the northern section of

the city was cleared by midnight it was to be the early hours of the 18th before the fighting finally ended.

The Poles did rather better. At 0930 hours on the 17th their 10th Mounted Rifles Armored Reconnaissance Regiment reported a large German column moving east on the Crocy–Trun road and a generally chaotic situation with other German columns, comprising everything from tanks to horsedrawn carts, attempting to escape to the northeast. Even so, one of the Polish reconnaissance squadrons moving in the direction of Trun lost four Cromwells in under a minute to antitank fire in the vicinity of Point 107, two kilometers north of the town. This resulted in the 10th Mounted Rifles halting for the night northwest of Louvières.

In the meantime, a battle group commanded by Lt. Col. Stanislaw Koszutski and made up of the 2nd Armored Regiment, the 8th Infantry Battalion, and a company of antitank guns had been ordered to seize Point 259, while another battle group consisting of the 24th Lancers, 10th Dragoons (Motor Battalion), and an M-10 company was to take the adjacent hills two kilometers south of Grand-Mesnil. This latter battle group was commanded by Major Wladyslaw Zgorzelski, the commanding officer of the dragoons. Point 259, a very large, steep, and thickly wooded feature, was attacked at 1745 hours, and by 2245 hours the Koszutski battle group had completed its task, as had Zgorzelski's to its north. The rest of the Polish Armored Division closed up during the night.

Montgomery had personally telephoned Crerar's headquarters early on the afternoon of the 17th to demand more resolute action. His message is recorded in the First Canadian Army war diary as follows: "It is absolutely essential that both Armoured Divisions of II Canadian Corps … close the gap between First Canadian Army and Third US Army. 1st Polish Armoured Division must thrust on past Trun to Chambois at all costs and as quickly as is possible." Fortunately for the Germans, it was to take another 48 hours for this to happen and for the 10-kilometer gap to be closed. When the Canadians reached Louvières that evening, they inexplicably stopped for the night and made plans to attack Trun the following day.

By now, the Germans were presenting huge targets in the Falaise Pocket. On this day, the aircraft of the Royal Air Force's 35 Wing reported "a minimum of 2,200 vehicles of all types, including several concentrations so dense as to be uncountable." Allied aircraft flew 2,029 sorties on the 17th.

By first light on August 18, the bulk of the German Seventh Army had managed to cross the Orne River, and many support and supply units were already east of the Dives. But with the remnants of 13 divisions still inside the pocket, the German retreat toward Vimoutiers had yet to reach full flood.

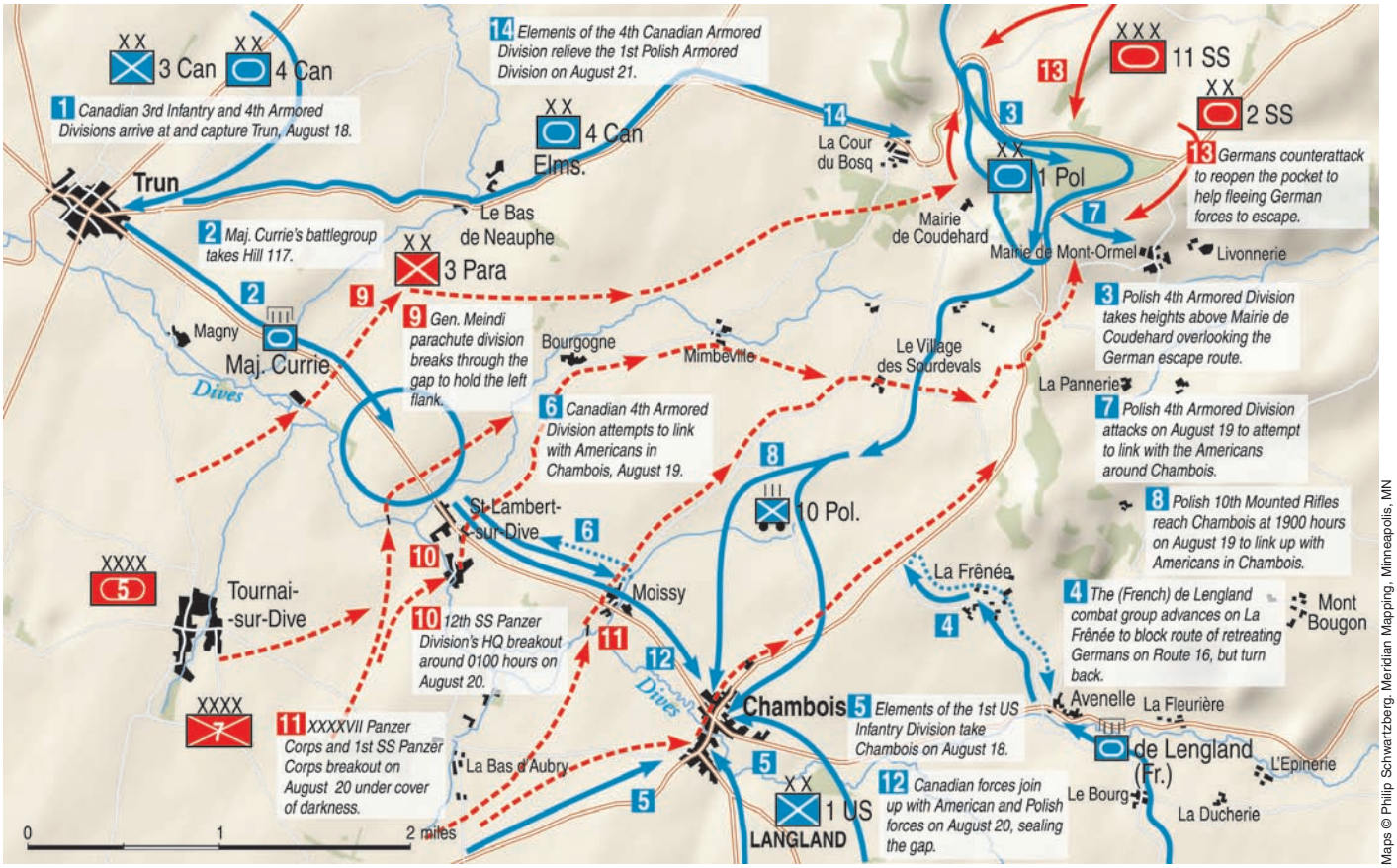
The combined Canadian and Polish thrust on the 18th, such as it was, came on the east side of the Dives. Despite the urgent order to link up with the Americans at Chambois, the maximum advance on this day was less than 10 kilometers. Although Simonds issued orders that afternoon for one Canadian infantry division to take care of the east bank of the Dives down to Trun and for the armored divisions to push on rapidly to Chambois, there seems to have been little real effort to coordinate the actions of the Canadians and Poles. Indeed, it would appear that at unit level neither had much idea what the other was doing or even trying to do during the critical period of August 18-20. Fortunately for the Germans, many of the Allied intermediate commanders thought the battle was almost over and all they had to do was mop up. Such was not the case, and as a result thousands of Germans escaped to fight another day.

The farthest penetration on the 18th was by a squadron of the Polish Armored Reconnaissance Regiment, which moved through Bourdon and reached the area immediately to the north of Chambois. However, after finding the town well defended and no sign of any other Allied troops, it was ordered back to the area of Point 259. Similarly, a Canadian armored reconnaissance squadron (company) reached the northern outskirts of St. Lambert-sur-Dives at about 1900 hours, but by 2000 hours two of its tanks had been knocked out and it was decided, again fortunately for the Germans, to wait until first light on the 19th to mount a coordinated attack with an a company of infantry. This allowed the Germans to use the bridges in the village during the night without direct interference. Amazingly, and despite the fact that there was no coherent German defense in the area, a complete Canadian armored brigade that had moved to the Trun–Vimoutiers road north of Neauphe by midnight was held inactive in a counterattack role.

What of the main Polish force? The 1st Polish Armored Division operational report states that General Maczek, from his headquarters near Norrey, ordered his Koszutski battle group to make "an immediate stroke at Chambois" at 1930 hours on the 17th. Lt. Col. Koszutski confirmed later that he received this order during his attack on Point 259 on the evening of the 17th but said that he decided to wait for fuel and ammunition before setting off. When he finally gave the order to move, at 0200 hours on the 18th, the fuel and ammunition had still not arrived.

The Auge countryside through which the Koszutski battle group was to advance in fog and at night was broken and hilly, with narrow twisting roads and tracks, few villages, and many scattered farms. Even today, in daylight with a

Pausing momentarily in the square of a deserted French town, a Panther medium tank and its 75mm high velocity cannon present a menacing profile. The Panther was designed by German engineers in response to the hugely successful Soviet T-34. (National Archives)



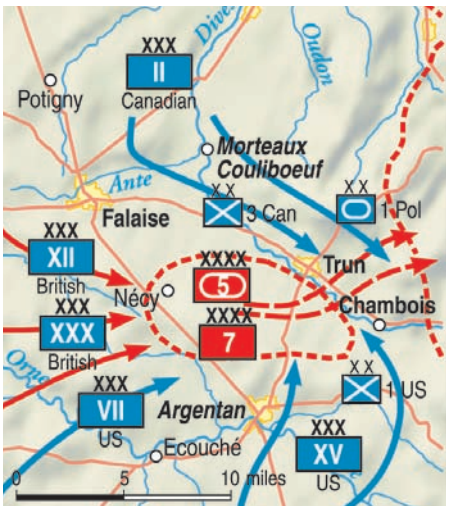
modern map, it is difficult to find one's way. It is hardly surprising, therefore, that, according to General Maczek, Koszutski employed a local Frenchman to guide his vanguard.

The 2nd Armored Regiment moved off from Point 259 on the correct road, heading east with the men of the 8th Infantry Battalion mounted on Shermans. On reaching the main Trun–Vimoutiers road the leading tanks ran into a German column of motorized and horse-drawn transport and there was a short, sharp engagement in which the Germans suffered badly. The Shermans then continued their move to the southeast in the general direction of Chambois, but shortly after crossing the main road and negotiating a steep hill that caused severe problems for some of the vehicles they mistakenly turned or were misdirected to the northeast and ended up, at 0600 hours, in the area of Les Champeaux, 10 kilometers north of Chambois and nowhere near their objective.

It has been suggested, not unreasonably, that in view of the similarity of the names—Champeaux and Chambois—the guide misunderstood the requirement and led the force to the wrong place. However, suggestions of a misunderstanding about the final objective by the relevant commanders can be discounted. The war diary of the British unit attached to Maczek's headquarters throughout the campaign and known as "Headquarters No. 4 Liaison, 21st Army Group," confirms the objective as "Chambois and the high ground to the north-east."

Les Champeaux was, and still is, a tiny hamlet lying on the side of a steep hill and consisting of little more than a church and a half dozen houses. Unfortunately for the Poles, the Germans were occupying the larger village of Hostellerie Faroult, a few hundred meters above and to the northwest of Les Champeaux, on the main Trun–Vimoutiers road. This was being used as a major German escape route. Not surprisingly, there was a sharp clash with casualties to both sides. However, fuel was by now an urgent necessity, and during its enforced wait at Les Champeaux Koszutski's force suffered further casualties when it was mistakenly struck by American P-47 Thunderbolt fighter bombers attacking German columns on the main road just above them.

Isolated behind German lines, harboring casualties, and unable to move, the battle group was in dire straits. The 1st Polish Armored Division operational report describes the battle group's situation at this time as "grave." It goes on to say that the 1st (Highland) Infantry Battalion was sent to help. Maczek's headquarters later reported "half the petrol being sent to 2nd



Armored Regiment was destroyed through bombing just after 1700 hours."

During this same day the highly experienced Maczek, whose eye for important ground was legendary, decided to block the exits from Chambois by seizing Point 137 near Coudehard and Points 262 (North), 252, and 262 (South) astride Mont Ormel on the main Chambois–Vimoutiers road. With this in mind, the Zgorzelski and 1st Armored Regimental battle groups were also ordered to advance on the 18th, and by 2300 hours they were blocking the Trun–Vimoutiers road and

holding the high ground on either side of Ecorches, filling the gap between their compatriots at Les Champeaux and the Canadians near Neauphe.

The division operational report speaks of the Polish battle groups being involved in "heavy fighting with enemy infantry and antitank guns" and of Allied air attacks preventing the 1st Armored Regiment from capturing its objective of Bourdon. Between crossing the Dives on the 16th and last light on the 18th, the Polish Division suffered a further 72 killed and 119 wounded.

Some idea of the scene which had by now developed at Trun was described graphically by one Allied artillery observer: "The floor of the valley was seen to be alive … men marching, cycling and running, columns of horse-drawn transport, motor transport, and as the sun got up, so more targets came to light … It was a gunner's paradise and everybody took advantage of it … Away on our left was the famous killing ground, and all day the roar of Typhoons went on and fresh columns of smoke obscured the horizon … We could just see one short section of the Argentan–Trun road, some 200 yards in all, on which sector at one time was crowded the whole miniature picture of an army in rout. First a squad of men running, being overtaken by men on bicycles, followed by a limber at a gallop, and the whole being overtaken by a Panther tank crowded with men and doing well up to 30 mph, all with the main idea of getting away as fast as they could."

Allied aircraft flew 3,057 attack sorties on the 18th.

The commander of the German Seventh Army, SS Oberstgruppenführer (Colonel General) Paul Hausser, ordered a final breakout from the Falaise Pocket for the night of 19th. This was designed to link up with a counterattack from outside the pocket by elements of the II SS Panzer Corps (2nd and 9th SS Panzer Divisions). The ordered withdrawal routes were through the St. Lambert sector with the main Dives crossing point halfway between St. Lambert and Chambois at Moissy. This route was soon to earn for itself the unforgettable title of "Corridor of Death."

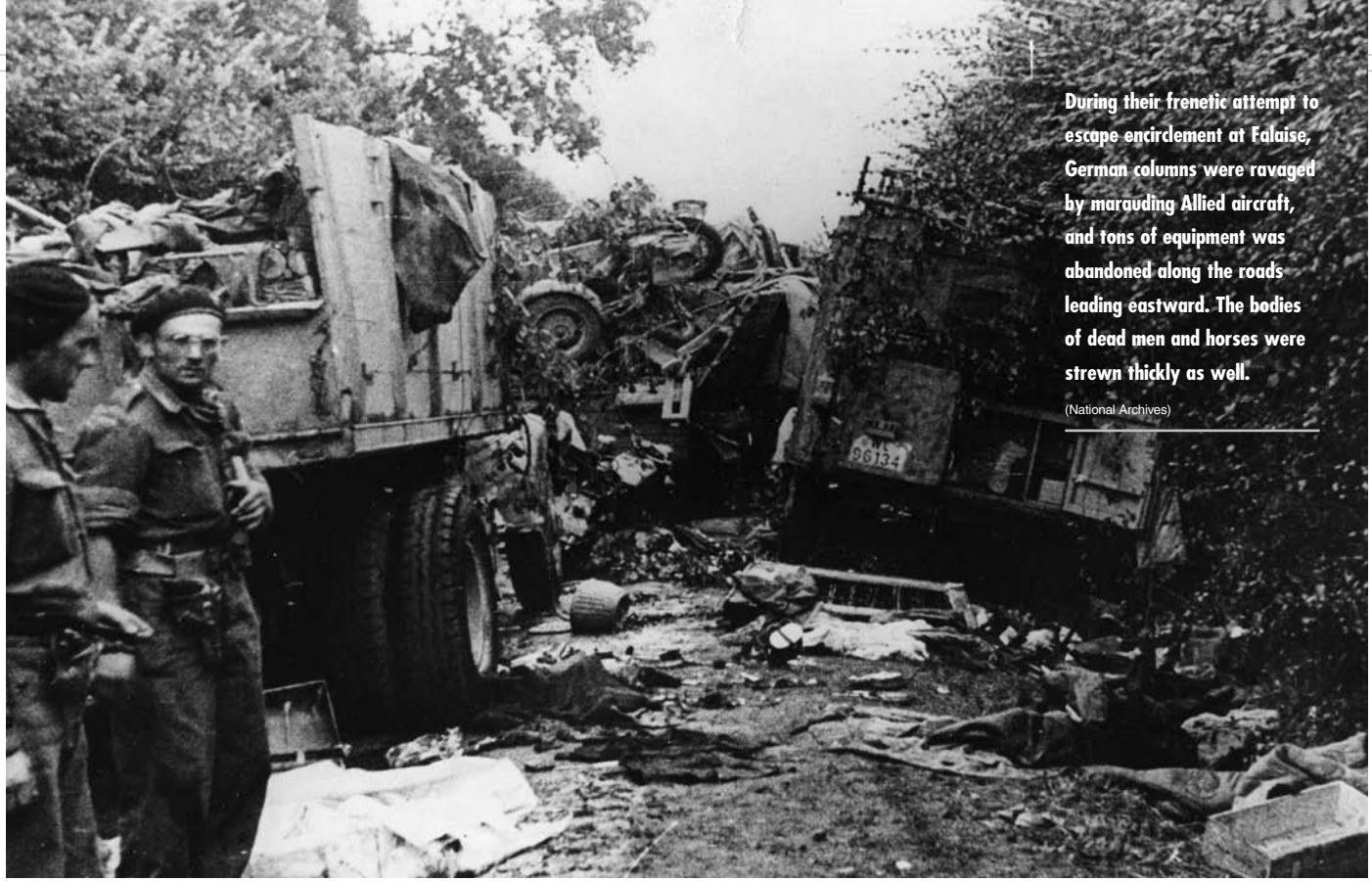
Meanwhile, the trap was closing—albeit slowly. Simonds issued further orders at 1100 hours on the 19th. One infantry division was to "strengthen its line and close all escape routes," and while a Canadian armored division was to cover the river from Trun to Moissy, the Poles would be responsible from Moissy to Chambois and Point 262 (South). Despite these clear orders, action on the ground again failed to reflect the urgency of the situation. Indeed, no Canadian or Polish infantry were moved on to the critical parts of the Dives, and the Allied failure to produce sufficient infantry at the right places was to prove a major blunder. To make matters worse, the Canadian armored brigade to the northeast of Trun remained idle all day. At Simonds's insistence, and against its commander's wishes, they were held there as a potential exploitation force for the expected pursuit to the Seine. It was not until the evening that they were told to move toward Vimoutiers.

The only significant Canadian action on the 19th had already started before the corps commander's new orders were issued. At 0635 hours a company of tanks with a weak company of infantry and a troop of four 17-pounder self-propelled antitank guns mounted an attack on St. Lambert. After six hours of fighting only half the village had been cleared, and despite being reinforced by two more weak infantry companies and eight more antitank guns later in the day, the Canadians could still not secure the southern part of the village. However, they would not give ground and made their famous stand against repeated German counterattacks, earning the group's commander, Major David Currie, a Victoria Cross. In the meantime, another company of tanks moved to Point 124, two kilometers east of St. Lambert, with the intention of linking up with the Poles.

In accordance with Maczek's orders, the Zgorzelski battle group secured Point 137, near Coudehard, by midday on the 19th, and the 24th Lancers then moved south toward Frénée. At about the same time, the 1st Polish Armored Regiment with the 9th Infantry Battalion and a company of antitank guns advanced toward the main Chambois–Vimoutiers road at Points 262 (North) and 252, five kilometers northeast of Chambois. This road was being used by the Germans as their main escape route, and when the leading Polish tanks arrived there just before 1600 hours they found it crowded with vehicles, horsedrawn transport, and two Panther tanks—one being towed by the other.

In a short, violent action the Panthers were knocked out and everything in sight destroyed.

ABOVE: Caught and knocked out by Sherman tanks of the 1st Polish Armored Regiment, a pair of German Panthers sits silent on Maczuga, August 19, 1944. LEFT: As the Germans grudgingly contest every inch of ground while withdrawing from a French village, Canadian soldiers learn the deadly art of urban warfare. Often forced to root the enemy out house by house and room by room, the Canadians became adept at such close combat. (Above: Author's Collection / Left: National Archives)



During their frenetic attempt to escape encirclement at Falaise, German columns were ravaged by marauding Allied aircraft, and tons of equipment was abandoned along the roads leading eastward. The bodies of dead men and horses were strewn thickly as well.

(National Archives)

Then, while one infantry company and some antitank guns occupied Coudehard Boisjos, 700 meters to the northwest, the Shermans and the rest of the infantry and antitank guns took up positions on Point 262 (North). The Chambois–Vimoutiers road was completely blocked with knocked-out vehicles and the bodies of dead men and horses.

By 1030 hours, the Koszutski battle group in the Les Champeaux area had been resupplied, and soon after midday it too set off for Point 262 (North). By 1700 hours it had established positions on the north and east sides of the feature. But while Point 262 (North) and Coudehard Boisjos became a Polish stronghold, no one occupied Point 262 (South).

The position on Point 262 (North) is often referred to as Mont Ormel after the nearby hamlet, but the Poles nicknamed it "Maczuga," the Mace, after the shape of its contours. From its summit they could enjoy spectacular views over much of the Falaise Pocket—but spectacular views are one thing and controlling the surrounding countryside is quite another. Point 262 (South) and its foothills obscured observation to the southeast, and the steepness of the ground, woods, and hedgerows made control of the ground to the west and southwest with direct-fire weapons difficult by day and impossible at night.

It was through this Coudehard area and Point 137 on the west side of Mont Ormel that many of the Germans (particularly the men of the 1st and 12th SS Panzer Divisions) emerging from the St. Lambert and Moissy crossings would inevitably pass. Fortunately for them, this large Polish force of more than 80 tanks, some 20 antitank guns, and 1,500 infantrymen remained on Maczuga within a perimeter of less than two square kilometers, controlling its immediate environment but little else. Nevertheless, it remained a major, if not the major, impediment to the German retreat.

Since the Poles on Maczuga were physically cut off from their divisional and brigade commanders with Maczek's divisional headquarters eight kilometers away to the northwest on Point 259 and Colonel Majewski's 10th Armored Brigade headquarters at Bourdon, three kilometers to the west, the senior unit commander, Lt. Col. Zygmunt Szydlowski, took command. Another serious problem was that the force, now behind German lines, was cut off from its supplies. Despite "strong representations made to Corps HQ on behalf of GOC Polish Armored Division" by the British No. 4 Liaison Unit, the answer came back that no aerial resupply could be arranged before the 21st.

By 1900 hours on the 19th, the Shermans of the Polish 24th Lancers had advanced to a blocking position 1,500 meters northeast of Chambois, where they linked up with the 10th Mounted Rifles Armored Reconnaissance Regiment and two M-10 antitank companies, which had in the meantime reached the area of Point 113, one kilometer north of Chambois. The most dramatic move on this day, however, came at 1930 hours when the Polish 10th Dragoons, after moving south from Point 137, entered Chambois and shortly afterward linked up with the 2nd Battalion of the American 359th Infantry Regiment. The noose, it seemed, had been drawn tight. But not so!

At the highest level there was a serious lack of coordination, both between the two wings of the Allied armies and within Simonds's II Corps. At the tactical level there were no Allied troops physically blocking the five kilometers of river between Magny and Moissy (a stretch that could be waded in certain places by men on their feet). The vehicle crossings at Magny, St. Lambert, and Moissy, although heavily interdicted by indirect fire, were still open.

This unsatisfactory situation was further exacerbated when part of the French 2nd Armored Division, which had advanced to Frénée and the Chambois–Vimoutiers road by early evening on the 19th, was withdrawn south of the Dives as darkness fell. Its commander's eyes were now firmly set on a much more attractive prize—Paris. The region north and northeast of Chambois was, therefore, far from sealed, and the trap was by no means closed.

Allied aircraft flew 2,535 sorties on the 19th, but thereafter the near impossibility of identi-

fying specific ground targets caused the air effort to be switched farther east to the Seine River and its approaches.

On the Allied side there were few significant moves on the 20th. A Polish plan to expand their Mont Ormel bastion by seizing Point 262 (South) was cancelled when strong German attacks began on their perimeter and attempts to get urgently needed supplies through to the beleaguered garrison failed with severe losses. The Poles on Maczuga were now in some difficulty themselves. They had been under fairly intense artillery and mortar fire ever since arriving there 24 hours before, but they were now being attacked from both inside the pocket and from outside by elements of the II SS Panzer Corps. The main attack from outside had started at 0400 hours and was launched on the north side of the Vimoutiers–Trun road.

At the same time, a second attack involving 21 tanks began on the south side. In one incident, five Shermans of the Polish 1st Armored Regiment on Maczuga were picked off in as many minutes by a single Panther firing from Point 239, about 1,500 meters to the north. The Polish situation was worsening by the hour as they were unable to evacuate wounded or prisoners, and ammunition and food were running low. By 1700 hours the Germans had broken into the northern part of the Maczuga perimeter, and it was 1900 hours before they were expelled with the loss of three medium tanks.

In the meantime, at about 1530 hours the Germans had managed to open up another escape route on the east side of the Vimoutiers–Chambois road through Survie and St. Pierre-la-Rivière. The seriousness of this threat caused the Poles to reinforce their motorized infantry in Chambois with tanks of the 24th Lancers.

Early on the 21st, the Polish Armored Reconnaissance Regiment tried to link up with the main force on Maczuga but was fired on by friendly forces and withdrew after two of its Cromwells were damaged. The last German attack against the Poles on Maczuga came at 1100 hours from the west. It was again repelled, but by then the Shermans were almost out of 75mm ammunition. Many of the tanks were immobilized due to lack of fuel and their infantry was exhausted and short of ammunition, food, and water. At 1330 hours, they heard the sound of more tanks approaching and feared the worst.

However, it turned out to be the Canadians bringing relief. They had begun their advance at 0800 hours and lost four tanks on the way while claiming to have knocked out four tanks and two self-propelled guns. The Canadian unit war diary records: "The picture at 262 was the grimmest the Regiment has so far come up against. The Poles had had no supplies for three days; they had several hundred wounded who had not been evacuated; about 700 prisoners lay loosely guarded in a field, the road was blocked by burned out vehicles, both our own and the enemy's. Unburied dead and parts of them were strewn about by the score … The Poles cried with joy when we arrived and from what they said I doubt if they will ever forget this day and the help we gave them."

The Poles lost 351 men killed and wounded and 11 Shermans during the bitter fighting on Maczuga.

By 2000 hours Canadian tanks were on Point 262 (South) and others had reached the northern outskirts of Chambois. The gap was finally closed, and the last battle of Normandy was over. Much later on, in November 1945, when addressing the men of the 1st Polish Armored Division, Monty, exaggerating a little, said, "The battle of Chambois was decisive. The Germans were trapped as if in a bottle; you were the cork in that bottle."

According to official Canadian records, the First Canadian Army suffered 12,659 casualties from August 1-23, 1944, including 7,415 Canadians, 1,374 Poles, and 3,870 British. However, General Maczek claimed later that Polish casualties for August 8-22, 1944, amounted to 1,441 officers and men. Certainly, more than 700 Poles are buried in a beautiful Polish military cemetery at Urville-Langannerie, roughly halfway along the road from Caen to Falaise. Equipment losses in the same period included 66 tanks and 10 antitank guns.

MONTY, EXAGGERATING A LITTLE, SAID, "THE BATTLE OF CHAMBOIS WAS DECISIVE. THE GERMANS WERE TRAPPED AS IF IN A BOTTLE; YOU WERE THE CORK IN THAT BOTTLE."

The 1st Polish Armored Division ended the war in the Wilhelmshafen area of northern Germany. By then it had been in action for 283 days, and its total casualties have been estimated at over 5,300 killed and wounded. Tank losses numbered an astonishing 265 Shermans, 51 Cromwells, and 24 Stuarts—almost its entire complement. Members of the division had been awarded one Commander's Cross, six Gold Crosses, and 349 Silver Crosses of the Order of Virtuti Militari, 16 British Distinguished Service Crosses, 21 British Military Crosses, five British Distinguished Conduct Medals, and 27 British Military Medals.

In view of the achievements of General Maczek's Division, it seems unbelievable that none of its representatives were invited to participate in the victory parade in London in June 1946, but despite protests by some senior British military commanders the postwar Labour government was not prepared to risk offending Stalin. The February 1945 Yalta Conference had redrawn the frontiers of Eastern Europe, and one third of the Polish territories had been ceded to the Soviet Union.

But worse was to follow. On September 6, 1946, the Communist government in Warsaw stripped General Maczek and 75 other Army, Navy and Air Force officers of their Polish nationality, and in the spring of 1947, Britain withdrew its recognition of the Polish government in exile in London. The Polish forces under British command were then demobilized and encouraged to return to Poland. Although the Communist government subsequently issued an amnesty covering those who had fought under British and American command, including the members of the 1st Polish Armored Division, they were in fact considered traitors and some of those who returned, particularly officers, were treated as such.

In the end, and in order to find a legal basis for those who had refused to return to a Communist Poland dominated by the Soviet Union, they were enlisted for two years into a Polish Resettlement Corps under British command. In this they received English language training and were taught skills fitting them for civilian employment. They were eventually allowed to settle in Britain or the countries of the British Commonwealth.

In summary, it can be said that, alone among the Allied powers, the soldiers, sailors, and airmen of Poland helped to win a war but lost the peace.□

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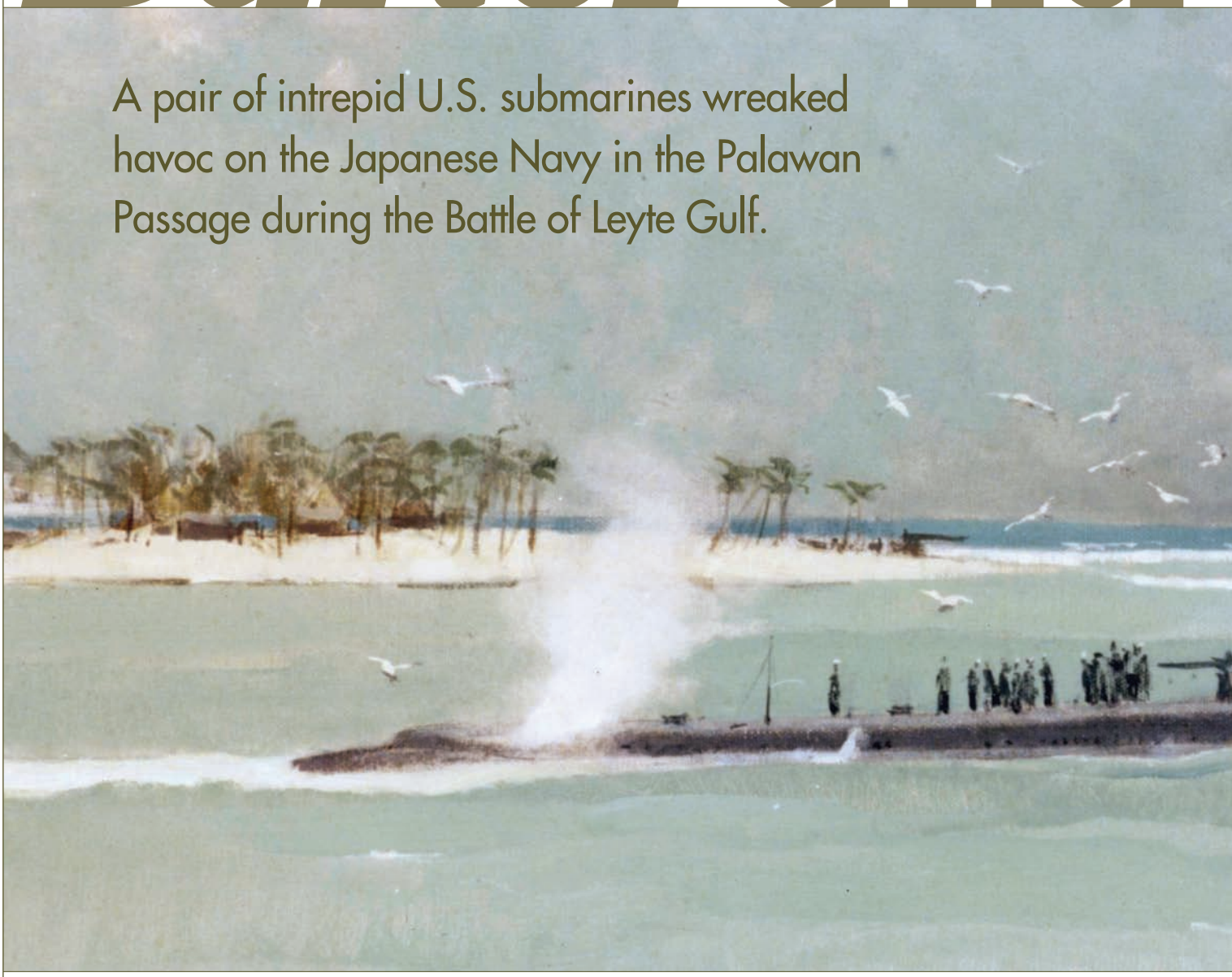
Darter and

A pair of intrepid U.S. submarines wreaked havoc on the Japanese Navy in the Palawan Passage during the Battle of Leyte Gulf.



As soon as he arrived on the bridge of the submarine USS *Dace*, Lt. Cmdr. Rafael C. Benitez, the vessel's executive officer, was handed a dispatch from USS *Darter, Dace*'s sister: "Fast ships on northeasterly course." Benitez knew exactly what it meant. "Fast ships" was shorthand for enemy warships, as opposed to the marus, the slow and bulky Japanese cargo vessels. *Dace* had already torpedoed two marus in a Japanese convoy on October 12, 1944, but now would be pursuing a much larger prey.

At 12:16 AM on October 23, the enemy fleet made its presence known as a huge blip on *Darter*'s radar screen. At first, the radar operator thought the contact was a rain storm at the southern entrance to the Palawan Passage near the Philippine Islands, but he very quickly realized what the radar had actually picked up. As soon as he read *Darter*'s dispatch, Commander Bladen D. Claggett, *Dace*'s captain, ordered a change of course to intercept at full speed.

Both submarines closed with the enemy at maximum speed on the surface, using diesel fuel at a prodigious rate. A U.S. Navy fleet submarine was actually a surface vessel that had the ability to run submerged for limited periods of time. "Minutes later," Benitez recalled, "the radar scope gave us a beautiful picture of many ships, and once again we knew that this was no ordinary convoy."

Dace's radar "conked out," in the words of the boat's radar operator, for about half an hour. But *Darter* remained in contact with the

Dace

Crewmen of an American submarine go about their business as their craft heads out on another combat patrol. U.S. submarines decimated Japanese merchant shipping in the Pacific and also sank a number of enemy warships during the course of the war. INSET: Commander Bladen D. Claggett, skipper of the submarine USS *Dace,* poses with his periscope aboard the vessel in September 1945.

(All photos: National Archives)

BY DAVID ALAN JOHNSON

enemy, as well as with *Dace*. The two submarines were close enough that the bridge watches were able to talk to each other by megaphone. *Darter* also began sending reports of the enemy contact to Rear Adm. Ralph. W. Christie at Submarines Southwest Pacific. Admiral Christie relayed this information to Admiral William F. Halsey, commander of the U.S. Third Fleet at sea off the Philippines. When *Dace*'s radar was repaired, the operator could make out two columns of enemy warships—11 heavy ships and six destroyers. The task force was steaming northeast at about 16 knots with no picket destroyers running ahead of the main force.

All through the early morning hours, *Darter* continued sending updated reports of the enemy's course and speed. Commander David H. McClintock, *Darter*'s captain, even supplied the enemy's zigzag pattern. The Japanese obviously suspected that American submarines were in the area, which made the absence of picket destroyers a curious omission. The plan was for the two submarines to track the enemy through the Palawan Passage, in the 25-mile-wide channel formed by uncharted reefs aptly called the Dangerous Ground. At dawn, after making visual contact, they would attack with torpedoes.

Darter and *Dace* had intercepted the main body of the Japanese Navy's First Striking Force, commanded by Vice Admiral Takao Kurita. Admiral Kurita's task force was enter-

ing Palawan Passage on its way to Leyte Gulf to attack General Douglas MacArthur's landings on the island of Leyte. A massive American flotilla of 420 transports escorted by 157 warships had put MacArthur's U.S. Sixth Army ashore at Leyte on October 20. MacArthur had been given the assignment of "liberating" the Philippines from two and a half years of Japanese domination. Kurita and a smaller force under Vice Adm. Teiji Nishimura were sent to execute a pincer movement against the American amphibious forces and destroy them.

Admiral Kurita decided to pass north of Palawan, go around the island of Mindoro and through the San Bernardino Strait, and approach Leyte from the north. Nishimura's force would steam south of Palawan and enter Leyte Gulf from the south, through Surigao Strait. A force of three cruisers and four destroyers under Vice Adm. Kiyohide Shima would come down from the north to reinforce Nishimura. If all went according to plan, these groups would converge on the American forces in Leyte Gulf at dawn on October 25.

This was to be the decisive battle—a phrase that often turns up in Japanese reports and dispatches—that would give the Americans a setback from which they would never recover. It would also allow Japanese troops in the Philippines to maintain contact with their bases in Malaysia and Indonesia, including Singapore. The plan was given the name SHO-1, phase one of SHO-GO, Operation Victory.

American naval intelligence was greatly relieved to receive *Darter*'s reports. Intelligence knew that Kurita's fleet had sailed from its base at Lingga Roads, a little over 100 miles south of Singapore off the east coast of Sumatra, but had no idea of its whereabouts. American forces could not afford to have an enemy fleet of that size at large and undetected. One reason that Kurita decided to bring his task group north of Palawan and through San Bernardino Strait was to keep beyond the range of enemy reconnaissance aircraft for as long as possible. Naval historian Samuel Eliot Morison said that *Darter*'s radio messages proved to be "the most significant reports of the Pacific war."

Actually, the information *Darter* had sent was incorrect. In fact, Kurita's task force consisted of five battleships, 10 heavy cruisers, two light cruisers, and 13 destroyers. Two of the battleships were *Yamato* and *Musashi*, the largest warships in the world, larger even than the American Iowa-class battleships. But the exact details of the enemy's strength were not all that important; the main thing was that Kurita's force had been located. Lt. Cmdr. Benitez commented that aboard *Dace* the crewmen "were not too concerned with the overall picture." Their primary thought was to get into firing position after *Darter* sent her contact reports.

Officers salute as a bugler plays during the commissioning of the submarine USS *Dace* at New London, Connecticut, on July 21, 1943. *Dace* went on to compile an impressive wartime record.

At 4:30 AM on October 23, *Darter* was about 20,000 yards ahead of Kurita's port column, which was led by the cruiser *Atago*, Admiral Kurita's flagship. *Dace* would attack the starboard column, while *Darter* went after the ships in the port column. The crews went to battle stations at about 5:00, at least those who had not gravitated toward their stations already.

Darter submerged at 5:10, disappearing from *Dace*'s radar. *Dace* submerged a few minutes later. The operators of the target data computers (TDC) on both submarines began asking for the range of the target the captain had chosen. When the TDC man was given the range, he entered it into the computer and gave the torpedo settings to the captain.

Darter fired her torpedoes first, at 5:32. Fleet submarines of the Gato class, which included both *Dace* and *Darter*, had six bow torpedo tubes and four stern tubes. Commander McClintock fired all six bow torpedoes at the leading cruiser, at a range of only 980 yards. After a very short running time, four of the six hit the target. The explosions were heard by everybody on board both *Dace* and *Darter*. McClintock's curiosity got the better of him; he looked through the periscope before going after the next target.

"Whipped periscope back to the first target to see the sight of a lifetime," McClintock noted in his report. "Cruiser was in so close that all of her could not be seen at once with periscope

Problems with torpedo malfunctions plagued the U.S. Navy early in World War II.

Any American submarine that had made contact with a Japanese task force a year or two earlier would almost certainly not have had the success that *Darter* and *Dace* had with Admiral Kurita's task force. It is very likely that the entire enemy fleet would have come away unscathed. The reason was that until late 1943, the U.S. Navy did not have a reliable torpedo.

Throughout 1942 and 1943, submarine commanders fired scores of the new Mk 14 torpedo at enemy targets without recording any hits. This was causing a severe crisis of morale in the submarine service, as well as a failure to damage the enemy's naval and merchant fleets. Lt. Cmdr. Frederick B. "Fearless Freddie" Warder was one captain who had his share of torpedo trouble. He had brought USS *Seawolf* through six war patrols, all of which were beset by faulty torpedoes. The seventh patrol was no improvement.

Warder came upon an 8,000-ton Japanese transport at anchor in Talomo Bay in the Philippines and fired four Mk 14 torpedoes at the stationary target. Every one either missed or did not explode. Warder then reloaded *Seawolf*'s tubes with the older Mk 10 torpedoes. The first Mk 10 exploded against the transport's stern. Another was fired from the stern tubes, which hit and sank the transport. This was evidence enough for him. He filed a forceful report to his superiors, complaining that the Mk14s were defective.

Tests were carried out to determine exactly what was wrong with the Mk 14s, which were supposed to be superior to the old Mk 10s. The tests concluded that the problems were threefold: the Mk 14s tended to run at least 10 feet deeper than the depth that was set, causing them to run underneath their targets; the magnetic detonators used with the Mk 14s were detonating prematurely, causing the torpedoes to explode before reaching their target; and contact detonators tended to jam when striking the side of the target vessel.

A new depth control valve solved the problem of the Mk 14's running depth. Solving the difficulties of the magnetic

in high power. She was a mass of billowing black smoke from No. 1 turret to the stern. Cruiser was already going down by the bow."

The cruiser was Admiral Kurita's flagship, *Atago*, which was going down quickly. By 5:40, only eight minutes after being hit by *Darter*'s torpedoes, the sounds of the ship breaking up could be heard inside *Darter*'s pressure hull. Thirteen minutes later, *Atago* sank bow first, taking 360 officers and men with her. Admiral Kurita and his staff survived but had to jump overboard and swim to their rescuers. Rear Adm. Matone Ugaki, aboard the battleship *Yamato*, assumed command of the task force until Kurita could transfer his flag—meaning until he had the chance to dry off and compose himself.

By this time, McClintock had already emptied his stern tubes at the next ship in the column, which was the heavy cruiser *Takao*. Two of the four hit at 5:34, blowing off the rudder and two propellers and flooding three boiler rooms. *Darter*'s crew heard the explosions and thought they had sunk *Takao* as well. But Japanese cruisers of that class had triple hulls and were said to be unsinkable. *Takao* certainly lived up to that description. She stayed afloat; escorted by destroyers, the badly damaged cruiser limped toward the naval base at Brunei at five knots. She would live, but she was out of the coming battle.

Through his periscope aboard *Dace*, Commander Claggett watched *Atago* sinking and *Takao* listing and badly damaged. "It looks like the fourth of July out there!" he shouted to everyone on the conning tower. "One is sinking and the other is burning. The Japs are firing all over the place. What a show!" Claggett then turned the periscope toward the enemy's starboard column. "Stand by for a set-up," he said. He allowed the first two ships to pass by. The third ship appeared to be a Kongo-class battleship; this would be the target. The ship Claggett had chosen as his target was, in fact, the heavy cruiser *Maya*.

The fire-control officers sounded ranges and bearings and angles on the bow. Benitez relayed everything to the captain. When the target was in position, Claggett ordered all six bow torpedoes fired, just as McClintock had done aboard *Darter*.

"The offensive phase was over," Benitez said after all torpedoes had been fired. "Now it was time to start running." Claggett ordered, "Take her deep." As *Dace* began her descent, the boat was shaken by explosions "as if the ocean bottom was blowing up." Four of her torpedoes had hit the cruiser, each carrying a warhead of more than 600 pounds. The explosions were followed by a noise that Benitez described as "Gruesome. It was akin to the noise made by cellophane when it is crumpled." The crackling noise was so loud that it sounded like the submarine was breaking up; Claggett had all of *Dace*'s compartments checked. To everyone's relief, all compartments reported no damage.

Waiting for the signal to board a small rubber raft for landing on Japanese-held New Guinea, an Australian intelligence agent and four native comrades pass the time aboard the submarine USS *Dace*.

Dace had not been damaged, but *Maya* had blown up and sunk immediately. On board *Yamato*, Admiral Ugaki watched as the cruiser blew up "and after the smoke and spray disappeared," he reported, "nothing of her remained to be seen." The loud crackling noises that had alarmed *Dace*'s crew had been *Maya*'s bulkheads imploding as the ship headed for the bottom.

While the sounds of *Maya*'s death throes faded astern and *Dace* settled down to a running speed, depth charges began exploding close by. *Dace*'s crew were surprised that the Japanese destroyers had not gone after *Darter* instead; her sister submarine was running ahead of *Darter* and would have presented a more convenient target. The sound man gave a running narrative of what was going on above. "Four of them are making a run now, Captain," was one observation. The Japanese destroyers "sounded like an electric razor at work on a two-day beard." The crew could hear them coming, but only the sound man could tell how many were coming.

The depth charge attack continued while the two columns of enemy warships left *Darter* and *Dace* behind and continued up the Palawan Passage. "They were going off all around us and they were close," Benitez recalled. The boat

The warheads of several American torpedoes are given final checks prior to loading aboard a U.S. submarine at its New London, Connecticut, base in July 1943.

detonator proved to be a lot more trying. After several inadequate and thoroughly frustrating attempts, it was decided to abandon the magnetic device in favor of the contact mechanism, but the contact detonator had its own set of problems.

Fortunately for the ordnance men who were running the tests, the solution turned out to be fairly simple. The detonator's firing pin was found to be too heavy. A 3,000-pound torpedo striking a target at a speed of 46 knots imposed too much inertial friction on the firing pin, which prevented the heavy pin from traveling fast enough and from striking the detonator's primer cap hard enough to cause detonation. Japanese ships were entering port with Mk 14 torpedoes sticking out of their sides below the water line. Workshops at Pearl Harbor designed and produced a new kind of firing pin.

In a note of irony, the Japanese Navy was instrumental in producing the new pin. The ideal metal for the project was found in the propeller blades of aircraft that had been shot down during the attack of December 7, 1941. The Japanese metal allowed the pin to be light enough to reduce all friction. It could now strike the primer with enough force to detonate the warhead. The modified torpedoes passed all tests and also succeeded against enemy shipping. Early on, the USS *Haddock* sank two ships with four torpedo hits, and her sisters also went on to prove that the new contact detonator worked—an increased number of hits and no duds. It had taken nearly two full years, but the U.S. submarine fleet finally had a dependable torpedo. ■

rocked; light bulbs shattered; locker doors flew open from the shock. Some of the destroyers made dry runs, dropping no depth charges. Their main intent seemed to be keeping *Darter* and *Dace* occupied while the rest of the task force got away.

After about an hour and a half, the destroyers joined the rest of Admiral Kurita's fleet and headed off to the northeast. The two submarines stayed deep for a while, making certain that the destroyers had gone before coming up to periscope depth. Both saw Takao dead in the water and also noticed two destroyers standing by as well as two aircraft flying cover over the badly damaged cruiser. "We attempted to get in another attack during the day," Benitez later wrote, but they could not get close because of the destroyers and the aircraft. The joint attempt by *Darter* and *Dace* to get into firing position lasted five hours.

It had been a frustrating time, but the crews of both submarines were not all that concerned. They held the cruiser in view at all times and would wait until after dark to finish it off. During the rest of the day, both crews managed to get some much needed rest. After sunset, *Darter* and *Dace* both surfaced and steered side by side again. The two captains conferred on how to go about finishing off *Takao*.

They decided to make a surface attack, but expected that the cruiser would be towed by the two destroyers. To everyone's surprise, *Takao* got underway under her own power. She began heading southwest at about six knots. This presented a new situation; torpedoing a moving target presented different conditions from shooting a sitting duck, even if the target was only moving at six knots. The two captains would split their attack—*Darter* would make her attack from the east while *Dace* made an end run around from the west. By midnight on October 24, the two submarines were still getting into position for their torpedo attack. *Darter* was making 17 knots, trying to attack before *Takao* could pick up more speed.

For the past 24 hours, both submarines had been navigating the Palawan Passage by dead reckoning only. Because they had spent so much time submerged during the daylight hours, navigators were not able to get a fix on the mountains on Palawan, which meant that they were not exactly certain of their position. Clouds obscured the stars after sunset, so they were not able to get a celestial fix, either.

To evade the screening destroyers, Commander McClintock planned to leave a margin of seven miles to Bombay Shoal, which is a coral reef on the western side of Palawan Passage. A quarter-knot error in estimating the current put *Darter* on a collision course with the reef. At 12:05 AM, *Darter*'s crew found out exactly why that stretch of water was called the Dangerous Ground.

Darter ran hard aground on Bombay Shoal with a tremendous crash. The noise registered on the sound gear of one of the enemy destroyers, which immediately began heading toward it. Fortunately for the grounded submarine and its crew, the destroyer was not able to detect what had happened. It closed to within 12,000 yards and turned away. "When the Jap destroyer faded on our radar screen we breathed a little easier," McClintock understated, "and went to work in hopes of floating her off at high tide." To lighten the boat, the crew threw everything movable overboard—anchors, food, furniture. The stern torpedoes were also fired, jettisoning several tons of dead weight. In an attempt to raise the bow, the crew gathered on the submarine's stern. Some of the men also tried to rock the boat free by running from port to starboard and back again. Nothing worked. *Darter* was stuck, high and dry.

Aboard *Dace*, Commander Claggett had no choice but to go to *Darter*'s assistance. Commander Benitez recalled, "It was hard to give up pursuing a ship that we knew would probably sink with one torpedo hit … It would have been doubly hard to abandon our comrades to certain death on the shoals of Palawan Passage."

The losses suffered by the Japanese Navy left it unable to support Japanese land forces in the Philippines, or even to defend Japan itself.

Dace moved slowly and cautiously closer to *Darter*; Claggett had no desire to run his own boat up on a reef in the dark as well. McClintock shared Claggett's fears. He shouted over to *Dace* not to come too close, to stay out a bit, and to watch out for the reef. *Dace* closed to within 50 yards of *Darter*'s stern, close enough to send over a line. There was no doubt that *Darter* was in a hopeless situation. Benitez observed, "She was so high that even her screws were out of the water—she seemed like a ship in drydock."

It became evident that *Darter* would never get off the reef. The crew began burning secret documents and destroying vital equipment, including the radar and radios, with sledgehammers. Both submarines inflated their rubber rafts; *Darter*'s crew began its slow transfer over to *Dace*. "In the darkness, gnome-like figures on the deck of *Darter* were seen to go down her side into rubber boats awaiting them below," Benitez recalled. "Minutes later, they reappeared at the side of *Dace*, where willing hands hoisted them aboard." Each raft held only six men. Two and a half hours were needed to transfer all of *Darter*'s crew. Benitez noted that McClintock was lifted aboard at 4:39 AM. He was the last man to leave the boat.

McClintock lost no time in reporting that he had set *Darter*'s demolition charges—50-pound devices that had been installed aboard every submarine for just such a situation. *Dace* moved away at full speed, not wanting to be damaged by the coming explosion. But only one of the charges went off, with a comical pop. *Darter* was still very much intact and would be of use to the Japanese if captured. It made no difference why the explosives failed to detonate—*Darter* still had to be destroyed, or at least be made unusable to the enemy.

Dace had four torpedoes remaining; these would be used against *Darter*. Two torpedoes were fired at her beam. Both hit the reef. Next, *Dace* came directly astern and fired her last two torpedoes. These also exploded against the reef—the submarine was too high out of the water. By this time it was about 5:30, and the sun was beginning to come up. The two captains decided to use *Dace*'s deck gun.

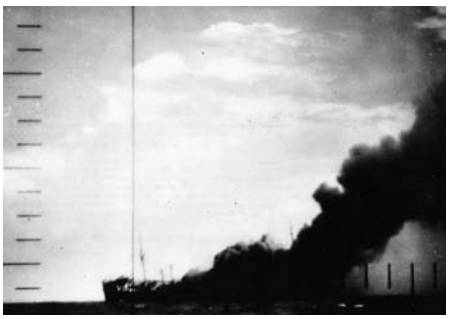
Firing *Dace*'s gun meant that the gun crew would have to be on deck during the surface action, which would be risky if a Japanese destroyer or aircraft appeared, but it was a risk that both Claggett and McClintock thought was worth taking. The gun crew opened fire and began scoring telling hits on *Darter*, according to Benitez. To be exact, *Dace*'s gunners hit *Darter* 21 times. The superstructure and the hull were holed repeatedly. *Dace*'s supply of ammunition was being quickly used up as *Darter* was systematically destroyed. The 25 or 26 men on deck were concentrating on the gunnery display when the radar operator shouted, "Plane contact—six miles." Claggett immediately ordered, "Clear the deck!"

The activity aboard *Dace* instantly went from the orderly firing of the boat's deck gun to a scene out of a Keystone Cops film. The only open hatch—which was about two feet wide—was on the conning tower. Everybody on deck made a frenzied dash for the hatch as *Dace* began to submerge. Some managed to climb down the hatchway, but others fell down sideways, dove down head first, or were pushed

down in a heap. The Officer of the Deck closed the hatch just a few seconds before the boat went under. There were more than a few bruised shins and mashed fingers, but everyone got below safely. In the course of both the rescue operation and the gun action, not a man from either *Darter*'s or *Dace*'s crew was lost.

The approaching plane spotted the two submarines—one dead in the water, the other submerging and making rapid headway. The pilot elected to attack the easier target. He did not realize that *Darter* was aground and had been abandoned. All he saw was a sitting target and went after an easy kill. He dropped his bomb on *Darter* and flew off, much to the relief of everybody aboard *Dace*.

Having done everything possible to make *Darter* useless to the enemy, *Dace* was set on course for Fremantle, Australia. On board were



81 officers and men from *Darter* along with *Dace*'s own compliment of 74. The boat was overcrowded. Life aboard a submarine was cramped and confined under normal conditions; now it was twice as crowded. The trip to Fremantle took 11 days but probably seemed a lot longer for the 155 men on board. Men slept on the empty torpedo skids and any place else that was not already occupied. During the last few days of the journey, the only food remaining was peanut butter and cream of mushroom soup. But the trip itself was uneventful, and *Dace* arrived at Fremantle on November 6. Everyone on board was relieved to get ashore, but also realized they were lucky to be alive.

Around noon on October 24, Admiral Kurita received a dispatch from Combined Fleet in Tokyo. It began: "It is very possible that the enemy is aware of the fact that we have concentrated our forces …" Kurita did not need any message from some staff officer in Tokyo to tell him that. He had lost three cruisers, including his own flagship, and could guess that the same American submarines that torpedoed his flagship out from under him had also radioed his position.

Tokyo was right. Admiral Halsey certainly was aware of Kurita's presence, thanks to *Darter*'s warnings. Kurita's force steamed

ABOVE: The cramped quarters of a U.S. submarine may be seen in this view of the torpedo room aboard the USS *Cero*. Submarine duty was among the most hazardous in World War II. LEFT: Seen through the periscope of the U.S. Navy submarine that has just successfully attacked it, a stricken Japanese warship lists to port and belches a heavy cloud of black smoke before plunging to the bottom of the Pacific Ocean.

through the Palawan Passage into the Sibuyan Sea. Alerted by *Darter*'s contact reports, Halsey ordered his aircraft carriers to launch air strikes against Kurita in the opening phase of the Battle of the Sibuyan Sea. The carrier-based planes sank the giant battleship *Musashi* with 19 torpedoes and 17 bomb hits. Also, the heavy cruiser *Myoko* was damaged and steamed for Brunei for repairs where she would join the torpedoed *Takao*. As the battle went against him, Kurita turned back toward San Bernardino Strait. By this time, he was seven hours behind schedule, and the Japanese timetable was in serious trouble.

Kurita's diminished but still powerful fleet encountered six escort carriers of Admiral Clifton A.F. Sprague on October 25 off Cape Engano. The six carriers, escorted by three destroyers and four destroyer escorts, were ridiculously outgunned by Kurita's battleships and cruisers. Sprague made smoke, launched his aircraft, and tried to get his escort carriers away from Kurita. The escorts attacked with torpedoes, damaging one cruiser and sinking another. Admiral Sprague lost one carrier, two destroyers, and two destroyer escorts to the overwhelming gunfire of the enemy. However, instead of continuing his advance, wiping out Sprague's undergunned fleet, and attacking the support vessels lying off the Leyte invasion beaches, Kurita chose to withdraw. Still shaken by the attack by *Darter* and *Dace*, he believed that Sprague's escort carriers and destroyers were part of a much larger task force. Kurita decided to play it safe and turned away.

The Battle of Leyte Gulf was decisive, but it had not gone the way Combined Fleet commanders had hoped. The fighting in and around Leyte Gulf, which lasted three days, was a catastrophic defeat for Japan. The losses suffered by the Japanese Navy left it unable to support Japanese land forces in the Philippines, or even to defend Japan itself. *Darter* and *Dace* played a vital role in that defeat.

One week after *Darter* ran aground, the submarine USS *Nautilus* bombarded *Darter* with 55 rounds from her deck gun. According to the captain's report, "It is doubtful that any equipment on *Darter* ... would be of any value to Japan except as scrap." That evaluation proved to be correct. *Darter* remained high and dry on Bombay Shoal, where the wind and weather took its toll over the years. To this day, sailors that travel along the Palawan Passage can see *Darter*'s hulk, ravaged by both gunfire and the elements. □

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a mind-boggling, unprecedented enterprise. Unlike Operation Husky, the Allied invasion of Sicily in July 1943, which began with most of the troops and supplies already within striking distance in North Africa, the assault on Northwest Europe had to be started virtually from scratch. It depended on the speculative dates when manpower and materiél would become available in the great quantities needed. But Morgan and his staff were able to draw on the fruits of work already carried out by the planners of Operation Roundup, the initial cross-Channel invasion plan, and Operation Sledgehammer, a contingency blueprint to launch an emergency landing to divert the Germans if the Soviet Army appeared near collapse. Some of these planners were now on the COSSAC staff.

COSSAC was also able to draw on British staff studies of the ill-fated Dieppe raid and on knowledge and experience built up from a series of raids on the enemy-held coasts. Lord Mountbatten's Combined Operations forces— primarily the Commandos and elite Royal Navy units such as the Special Boat Squadron—had, by mid-1943, amassed considerable skill and experience in small-scale seaborne assaults, had produced appropriate training manuals, had set up specialized training depots, and had developed landing craft that could be used in a major cross-Channel assault.

The Dieppe experience was to prove a vital lesson in the D-Day planning phase. As Sir Bernard E. Fergusson of Burma Chindit Brigade fame said later, "Though there are still some that dispute the value of what was learned on the beaches of Dieppe, they are not to be found among informed persons, or among any who bore high responsibility in the later stages of the war, except for Lord Montgomery." The official Dieppe history stressed, "Outstanding among the lessons learnt was the importance of overwhelming fire support in the initial stages of a seaborne landing." Therefore, a new bombardment technique was devised for Operation Overlord whereby weapons from all three services would be brought to bear on the enemy defenders, with Army artillery units firing at shore targets while still afloat.

Somehow, the COSSAC planners would have to produce millions of soldiers along with the millions of tons of offensive hardware, equipment, and supplies needed to keep them living, moving, and fighting. All this—and more— COSSAC had to accomplish under great pressure.

If the continental ports were well defended, the best alternative for Morgan and his team were poorly defended beaches. In response to a British Broadcasting Corporation appeal to the public in 1942, millions of snapshots and postcards of coastal Europe, from Norway to the Pyrenees, had been sent to the War Office. So, the COSSAC team sifted through them to find out the heights of seawalls and which beaches had gentle inclines and might be firm enough to support thousands of troops and vehicles. The pictures led to some early conclusions that were later adopted by Morgan in his draft proposals. These also incorporated volumes of research from British intelligence archives on terrain, subsoils, bridges, moorings, rivers, wharfs, and thousands of other intricate details. The proposals were hastily completed by March 23, 1943.

Morgan and COSSAC discarded old preconceptions in their search for an ideal landing area. They even considered such unlikely regions as the Atlantic coast of Portugal, the Dutch Frisian Islands, Norway, Denmark's Jutland Peninsula in the North Sea, and even Dunkirk. It was not just beaches they were looking for. Morgan reported later, "The landing beaches were just one X in an algebraic expression that contained half the alphabet. What was wanted was a lodgement area into which we could blast ourselves and from which our main bodies, having suitably concentrated themselves within it, could erupt to develop the campaign eastwards."

COSSAC's first problem, therefore, was where to attack. The Nazis held 3,000 miles of coastline in Western Europe, but the area of possible assault was eventually narrowed to the 300-mile stretch between Vissingen, Holland, and Cherbourg. This was the only sector believed to be lightly defended that could be adequately covered by Allied fighter planes based in southern England. Air cover was essential for the invasion.

So, after a full examination of French Resistance reports, aerial reconnaissance photographs, and tidal charts, Morgan and his staff were left with two options: the Pas de Calais and Normandy. While the former had the advantage that the English Channel is at its narrowest there, it was, in German eyes, the most likely landing point. Therefore, the Normandy coastline was tentatively selected. It was sheltered from the unpredictable Channel weather by the Cherbourg Peninsula, it featured wide and firm beaches offering suitable exits for vehicles, and there was open land lying beyond that could provide airfields.

"The Caen sector is weakly held," COSSAC concluded, "and the beaches are of high capacity and sheltered from the prevailing winds. Inland, the terrain is suitable for airfield development and for the consolidation of the initial bridgeheads. Furthermore, the nearest major port, Cherbourg on the Cotentin Peninsula, could be able to handle large amounts of materiél speedily. Normandy became the strike point." Morgan realized, however, that the scale of the landings would depend on the amount of amphibious shipping available. From the production forecasts, he calculated that the amphibious lift would provide for an initial landing force of only three divisions. They would go ashore north of Caen, and the next task would be to secure Cherbourg before advancing southward into Brittany and eastward across the River Seine.

Part of Operation Fortitude, designed to deceive the Germans, this inflatable three-ton truck was one of many placed in marshaling areas in Britain.

(National Archives)

The COSSAC team was aware of the danger of enemy reconnaissance planes discovering the Allied plan by spotting the increasing buildup of men and materiél in England, and perhaps guessing the target area. So, elaborate deception strategies were put in place. A mythical British Fourth Army was created in Scotland to make the Germans think that Norway was to be invaded, while in southeastern England, the bogus First U.S. Army Group (FUSAG), commanded by Lt. Gen. George S. Patton, Jr., was set up to hoodwink the enemy into believing that the Pas de Calais was the main objective and that a Normandy landing was merely a diversionary attack. Under the later adopted code name, Operation Fortitude, COSSAC endeavored to disguise the true Allied intentions. Along with the plans for the actual Normandy assault, Morgan's scheme emphasized Calais as the most logical place to invade. In fact, the Germans were deceived until several days after the Allied forces had landed.

Calais was defended by several panzer divisions, ruling it out as a realistic Allied target. But General Morgan hoped that if the Germans

could be persuaded that it was to be attacked, they might keep their strongest units there, well away from Normandy.

In May 1943, when Prime Minister Churchill sailed aboard the liner *Queen Mary* to the Trident Conference in Washington, he was accompanied by Brigadier K.G. McLean and two other COSSAC officers. One morning during the voyage, as Churchill lay in bed in his spacious cabin, the three officers set up a large map and "explained in a tense and cogent tale the plan which had been prepared for the cross-Channel descent upon France," the Prime Minister reported later. Said Churchill, "General Morgan and his advisers recommended the Normandy coast (over the Pas de Calais)…. There can be no doubt now that this decision was sound. Normandy gave us the greatest hope. The defenses were not so strong as in the Pas de Calais."

Dedicated, tireless, and easy to work with, Morgan virtually performed miracles in his year of toil and uncertainty. He had gathered a group of talented staff officers expert in all military fields and orchestrated their work with a maestro's touch. Originality sparked much of the COSSAC planning.

General Morgan was informed in May 1943 that the Combined Chiefs of Staff had selected May 1 the following year as the target date for the Normandy invasion, which had been codenamed Operation Overlord by Churchill. By that date, Morgan would have to have found all necessary resources, especially flat-bottomed landing craft. Early in the planning stages, he was allotted 653 LSTs (landing ship, tank), but on D-Day more than twice that number would be needed.

Morgan was told that fewer than 100,000 troops would be available for the early stages of the assault, including 12,000 British and American paratroopers. Because of his limited resources, the COSSAC plan envisaged three landing beaches compared to the five that would actually be used. Without the authority to demand more resources, General Morgan called repeatedly for the appointment of a supreme invasion commander. What was to become the most ambitious operation in military history was, in 1943, a rudderless ship without a captain.

Because of the lack of port facilities for the invasion, Morgan faced the problem of landing thousands of tons of equipment and supplies to sustain the invading army. This was solved by Royal Navy advisers and construction engineers drawing up plans, originally discussed in 1942, for two prefabricated harbors codenamed Mulberries, made up of massive concrete and steel caissons that would be towed across the English Channel and assembled on the Normandy coast, supported by sunken blockships. One harbor would serve the British and Canadian beaches (Gold, Juno, and Sword), and the other the U.S. sector (Omaha and Utah Beaches). Built in a round-the-clock effort at several British shipyards, the harbors constituted one of the great engineering feats of the 20th century.

Limited to a three-division assault by the lack of manpower, equipment, and landing craft, the COSSAC plan satisfied no one. Unfair criticism was leveled at General Morgan and his team for devising a plan that could never be accepted as the final blueprint for Operation Overlord. COSSAC was accused of "wishful thinking." Yet Morgan was well aware that his plan, no matter how meticulously crafted, was a groundwork that would be subject to significant refinements, which it was.

He submitted the first draft of his invasion plan to the British chiefs of staff in mid-July 1943, and it was accepted a month later by the Combined Chiefs of Staff meeting in Quebec, although the Mulberry harbor proposal was not approved until that September. COSSAC's draft was a brilliant achievement in just four months, as well as a solid foundation for ultimate success. However, the Allied commitment to the Mediterranean Theater was still depriving Operation Overlord of much-needed equipment, and neither extra landing craft nor a supreme commander were quick to appear.

Because U.S. troops would eventually outnumber the British and Canadians in the Overlord ground forces, Morgan suggested that the supreme commander be an American. By the autumn of 1943, rumors were circulating that the post would go to General Marshall, who had done a phenomenal job of building up U.S. Army strength. The dour Marshall, a World War I staff officer with no combat experience, badly wanted command of the Normandy invasion. He was recommended by Secretary of War Henry L. Stimson, but President Roosevelt considered Marshall indispensable and kept him in Washington. FDR told him, "Well, I didn't feel I could sleep at ease if you were out of Washington."

Only one other U.S. officer appeared to be capable of taking on such a challenging command: genial General Dwight D. Eisenhower, a talented longtime staff officer and Marshall protégé who now led the Allied forces in the Mediterranean. When FDR met Eisenhower in Tunis in December 1943, he told him simply, "Ike, you are to command Overlord." Ike arrived in London only five months before the

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invasion was due to jump off.

Ike and General Morgan formed a close working relationship, and the Briton came to admire the broad-shouldered Kansan whose easygoing manner concealed icy intelligence, towering ambition, and a genius for diplomacy. His infectious grin was "worth an Army corps in any campaign," noted Morgan. Overall command of the British, U.S., and Canadian ground forces was given to General Montgomery, a thrice-wounded veteran of the Royal Warwickshire Regiment in World War I and the victor of El Alamein. Eisenhower's first choice for this post was handsome, courtly General Harold L. Alexander, also a wounded World War I veteran and gallant survivor of Dunkirk, but Ike had been overruled. The Eisenhower-Montgomery relationship was to prove stormy at times.

Monty flew from Italy to London at the end of December 1943, and lost no time in telling COSSAC that its invasion plan was deficient. According to an observer, the highly professional but prickly Monty "stood up and demolished" the plan as unsound. He pressed for changes, and the seeds of a feud between him and Morgan were sown. Monty and General Eisenhower examined the plan and agreed that the three-division frontage was too narrow. They insisted, therefore, that the initial landings be made by five infantry divisions (two British, two American, and one Canadian), with three airborne divisions (two American and one British) deployed to secure the flanks of the beachhead, and that the 30-mile Normandy front be expanded to 50 miles. The additional amphibious shipping, particularly the LSTs, would have to be found somehow.

Of all the challenges faced by COSSAC during the invasion planning, none caused more anxiety than the specialized landing craft. At first sight, it seemed to be a problem of production. General Morgan had pointed out to the Joint Chiefs of Staff in August 1943 that the allocation of landing craft was inadequate. But the shortage continued and then became acute. Exasperated, Prime Minister Churchill was driven to exclaim, "The destinies of two great empires seemed to be tied up in some goddamned things called LSTs."

Production in the United States was stepped up to capacity, while in Britain a quarter of all the steel for new ships went into landing craft production. But it was still not sufficient. In the end, the Allied chiefs were forced to postpone D-Day for a month to allow the shipyards more time to increase the stocks of landing craft. Yet, the postponement of the greatest amphibious invasion in history could have been avoided. The shortage of landing craft was not so much a failure of production as of allocation.

On May 1, 1944, the originally planned D-Day, Admiral Ernest J. King, U.S. chief of naval operations, had at his disposal an estimated 31,123 landing craft, while only 2,493 were assigned to Operation Overlord. The capable but chronically acerbic King was single-mindedly stockpiling landing craft for the island-hopping campaigns in the Pacific, which had long occupied his energies to the exclusion of the more critical European war. Eventually, General Marshall had to order him to share the wealth.

The maintenance of tight security, from March 1943 right up to the June 6, 1944, invasion of Normandy, was of the utmost priority for General Morgan and his staff. In September 1943, it was decided that all personnel granted access to top-secret documents should be given identification cards stamped with the word "Bigot." It was reasoned that no one was likely to brag about such a classification. The date and location of the landings were closely guarded. Morgan warned his team, "If the enemy obtains as much as 48 hours' warning of the location of the assault area, the chances of success are small. Any longer warning spells certain defeat."

At his Norfolk House headquarters, Morgan installed a private bar so that his staffers could talk freely without the risk of being overheard by anyone not attached to COSSAC. Yet, security problems occurred. A copy of the invasion plan blew out of a window at Norfolk House in the summer of 1943 and was handed in by a man who said that his eyesight was so poor that he had no idea what it was. Then, in March 1944, the Federal Bureau of Investigation reported that papers marked "Bigot" had been discovered in an Army post office in the United States. The package had been addressed to the Army Ordnance Division but was delivered to a woman living in a German suburb of Chicago. Federal agents eventually learned that an Army postal clerk had mistakenly sent the documents to his sister.

On April 22, 1944, General Eisenhower was angered to learn that pre-invasion security had been compromised by a U.S. Army Air Forces major general who happened to be one of his former West Point classmates. Four days earlier, the man had offered bets on the date of the invasion during a cocktail party at Claridge's Hotel in London. He was promptly demoted and sent home.

But the most curious security lapse occurred in May 1944 when "Utah," the code name for the landing beach assigned to the U.S. 4th Infantry Division, appeared as an answer to a crossword clue in the *London Daily Telegraph*. Then, other key D-Day names showed up in the newspaper's crossword. "Omaha" appeared on May 22, "Overlord" on May 27, "Mulberry" on May 30, and "Neptune," the code name for the naval aspect of the invasion, on June 1, five days before the scheduled landings. MI5, the British security agency, cleared the crossword compiler, Sidney Dawe, of any wrongdoing, but there has never been a satisfactory explanation for the suspicious "coincidences."

Meanwhile, General Morgan soon realized that his authority as chief of staff to the supreme commander had been overtaken by events. When Ike decided to bring in his own chief of staff, the crusty, Indiana-born Lt. Gen. Walter Bedell Smith, Morgan was given a new post, as "Beetle" Smith's deputy.

Bedell Smith and Montgomery, who had set up his 21st Army Group headquarters at St. Paul's School in Hammersmith, London, where Monty had once been a pupil, met the COSSAC staff in January 1944 for a detailed briefing on Operation Overlord. Changes had been made to the COSSAC plan, and Morgan now found himself virtually sidelined. New faces arrived on the COSSAC team as the planning entered its final stages, and the same thing was happening at 21st Army Group headquarters as Monty replaced much of his original Eighth Army staff.

The Allied pre-invasion buildup had gained momentum, and southern and southwestern England had become a great armed camp, dotted with supply depots; stockpiles of rations, fuel, and ammunition; great stacks of landing craft; and columns of Sherman and Churchill tanks, field guns, supply trucks, half-tracks, tank destroyers, scout cars, jeeps, Bren gun carriers, ambulances, communications trailers, and command vehicles lined up in fields, parks, and secluded lanes. More than three million troops—British, American, Canadian, Free French, and Polish—were concentrated in closely guarded cantonments and marshaling areas around the major southern embarkation ports. The soldiers trained, played baseball and soccer, shuffled cards, wrote letters home, and waited tensely for the big day. Across the Channel, also awaiting the inevitable, about 20 German divisions stood to in gun emplacements and concrete bunkers along the French coast between Calais and Cherbourg.

General Morgan's detailed plan—much modified and expanded—was in place, and his work was done. One of the unsung heroes of the Normandy invasion, he had prevailed beyond all expectation, for an attack on such a scale could never be mounted had it not been

planned meticulously. The invasion proved successful, with beachheads gained on the first day and losses far below what had been feared, and much credit for this belonged to the modest and widely liked Morgan.

After being plagued by 11th-hour concerns about the fickle Channel weather, the massive invasion, preceded shortly after midnight by British and American airborne drops, got under way early on the chill, gray morning of Tuesday, June 6, 1944. In the space of 24 hours, a great Allied armada carried across the Channel 175,000 fighting men, 1,500 tanks, 10,000 other vehicles, and 3,000 artillery pieces. It was one of the most momentous events of the 20th century. Church bells tolled across Britain and the United States, citizens scrambled for newspapers, and President Roosevelt offered a prayer on national radio for victory over the forces of darkness. Freddie Morgan heard the BBC's invasion bulletin on his car radio while driving to General Eisenhower's headquarters at Southwick House near Portsmouth, Hampshire.

Ike would say later that General Morgan made D-Day possible, and General Marshall called the British officer a "wise and aggressive man." Yet, the irascible Montgomery would try to minimize Morgan's prodigious planning efforts and accuse him of selling out to the Americans. Monty wrote, "Morgan considered Eisenhower was God; since I had discarded many of his plans, he placed me at the other end of the celestial ladder." Montgomery also suspected Morgan of leading a vendetta to discredit him when Monty's offensive stalled in front of Caen, where the Germans had amassed the bulk of their panzer strength.

After being awarded the KCB (knight commander of the bath) in 1944 for his work, General Morgan headed the operations of the United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Administration in Germany in 1945-1946. He was dismissed after claiming that the agency was being used by Soviet agents to foment unrest in the Western occupation zones. Retiring from the Army in 1946, Morgan served as controller of Britain's atomic energy program in 1951-1954 and as controller of atomic weapons in 1954-1956. He also was colonel-commandant of the Royal Artillery from 1948 to 1958. He lived in Middlesex, received honors in the United States for his Operation Overlord work, but no more British decorations, and died at the age of 73 in 1967. □

Michael D. Hull has written extensively on the topic of World War II. He resides in Enfield, Connecticut.

By Mason B. Webb

Tragedy and Courage in a Storm-Tossed Sea

In December 1944, a typhoon ravaged the U.S. Third Fleet in the Pacific.

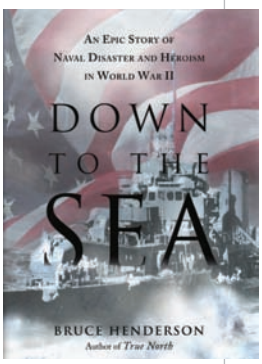
IN MID-DECEMBER 1944, BETWEEN GUAM AND THE PHILIPPINES, THE GREATEST enemy Admiral William F. "Bull" Halsey's Third Fleet encountered was not the Japanese but a monstrous typhoon—the largest storm the U.S. Navy had ever faced.

It was not that the maelstrom was unexpected; the storm had been predicted and plotted, but Halsey had a timetable to keep. He was positioning his fleet to support General Douglas MacArthur's invasion of the enemy-held Philippine island of Mindoro. To meet his schedule, he needed to refuel his ships at sea and continue pressing forward. The typhoon was a damnable obstacle in his way, but one that could not be ignored.

In *Down to the Sea: An Epic Story of Naval Disaster and Heroism in World War II* (Smithsonian Books/Collins, Washington, D.C., 2007, 368 pp., photographs, map, bibliography, index, hardcover, $26.95), author Bruce Henderson chronicles the battle the Third Fleet waged to survive the onslaught of the elements. Halsey's meteorologists and staff advised that, by turning south, the fleet just might avoid the worst ravages of the storm, but, as Henderson writes, "Continuing to the south, while it might be the safest 'in a weather sense,' would put them farther from Luzon, which his carrier-based planes were supposed to strike. Also, spending time to search for calmer conditions in which to fuel would take up valuable time and delay the planned air strikes. Halsey expressed his determination 'not to be feinted out of position' for the Luzon strikes by bad weather."

But prudence overcame his sense of duty, and Halsey decided to turn away from the storm. With his destroyers dangerously low on fuel, Halsey ordered the refueling process to begin on the morning of December 18—at the very moment the storm changed course and began charging directly for the Third Fleet. Howling winds of 160 miles per hour and great mountains of water 90 feet high slammed into Halsey's ships, tossing carriers, battleships, cruisers, destroyers, oilers, and other supply ships about like plastic toy boats in a bathtub.

Three ships (the destroyers *Hull, Spence,* and *Monaghan*) were sunk, 28 others damaged, 146 aircraft destroyed, and 756 men lost at sea—losses that were more than had been suffered in many naval battles in the Pacific. In all, 92 survivors from the three sunken ships (each carrying a crew of about 300) were rescued, some after spending up to 80 hours in the water. Scores more had made it off their sinking ships only to perish in the pitching seas; some from injuries and exhaustion, others devoured by circling sharks before the eyes of their horrified shipmates.



During the far-flung rescue operations, other sailors valiantly risked their own lives to save shipmates and strangers. The skipper of one badly damaged vessel disobeyed an admiral's order to abandon the search and was credited with saving 55 lives.

The whole heart-wrenching story of the Third Fleet's battle with the forces of nature is masterfully told in this superb new book by Henderson. *Down to the Sea* recounts the heroism of sailors and commanders faced with an

While preparing to invade Mindoro in the Philippines, Halsey's Third Fleet experienced much loss and damage during a violent storm.
(National Archives)

entirely new foe and how they battled the elements to save their ships and their shipmates.

Drawing on extensive interviews with survivors and rescuers, the families of lost sailors, plus memoirs, letters, diaries, official records, and court-of-inquiry transcripts, Henderson, who served as an aircraft carrier weatherman during the Vietnam War, brings to vivid life one of the greatest naval dramas in history. An unqualified "must read."

Ike: An American Hero, by Michael Korda, Harper, New York, 2007, 779 pp., photographs, maps, bibliography, index, hardcover, $34.95.

Of all the American heroes who emerged from the aftermath of World War II, none approached the stature of Dwight David Eisenhower, the Supreme Allied Commander. Perhaps only Roosevelt and Churchill eclipsed him as a genuine "giant of history."

Although he had never commanded so much as a platoon of men in combat, Ike's gifts for leadership and coalition building earned him the respect of his superiors and the undying admiration of his countrymen and led to his being placed in overall command of millions of troops in three major amphibious invasions: Torch (North Africa), Husky (Sicily), and Overlord (northern France), not to mention two terms as president of the United States.

In this brilliant new biography of Eisenhower, Michael Korda paints a fresh, frank, revealing, and admiring full-length portrait of one of America's greatest generals and one of its best presidents. This is not simply the smiling, amiable Ike of legend but the real man, a daring, gifted, intelligent, courageous, superlatively trained, and tough-minded soldier, a perfectionist with a hair trigger temper kept under precarious control.

Ike certainly had his critics and detractors, most notably British General Sir Alan Brooke, Chief of the Imperial General Staff, and Field Marshal Sir Bernard Law Montgomery, both of whom thought Eisenhower knew nothing of strategy or tactics and was hopelessly in over his head as Supreme Allied Commander. But through sheer force of will and an innate diplomatic skill he managed to hold the delicate, fractious multinational coalition together and ensure victory for the Allied side.

As Korda writes, "Ike's own war memoirs are notably fair-minded, even on the subject of people he had every reason to resent, and he

Short Bursts

Sherman Firefly vs. Tiger: Normandy 1944, by Stephen A. Hart; ***P-51 Mustang vs. Fw 190: Europe 1943-45,*** by Martin Bowman; ***Panther vs. T-34: Ukraine 1943,*** by Robert Forczyk, Osprey, Botley, Oxford, U.K., 2007, each book 80 pp., photographs, illustrations, maps, bibliography, index, softcover, $17.95.

A series of three fully illustrated Osprey books provides the aficionado with a wealth of detail and comparisons of the capabilities and characteristics of six of the most legendary weapons of war.

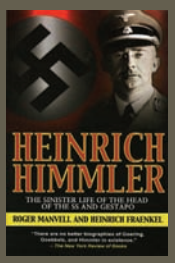
Covered in these informative volumes are the British Firefly tank (an up-gunned Sherman with a 17-pounder main gun that made it a formidable foe); the German Tiger heavy tank, virtually immune to any weapon except the Firefly; the North American P-51 Mustang that enabled Allied bombers to have fighter cover all the way to the deepest targets inside Germany and was more than a match for the much-feared Focke-Wulf Fw-190; the famed Russian T-34 tank that was so devastating that the Panther was hurriedly developed to counter it.

These books describe in detail the design and development of opposing machines, analyze their strengths and weaknesses, assess their tactics, weaponry, and training, and give brief biographies of many of the "aces" who mastered them.

Innovative digital artwork and first-person perspectives place the reader alongside the pilots and tank commanders to give an unparalleled view into what combat on the ground and in the air was like. An exceptional new series from Osprey.

Heinrich Himmler: The Sinister Life of the Head of the SS and Gestapo, by Roger Manvell and Heinrich Fraenkel, Skyhorse Publishing, New York, 2007, 285 pp., photographs, bibliography, index, softcover, $14.95.

From his improbable transformation from a meek, devout Catholic and Bavarian chicken farmer to the dreaded head of two of the world's most evil organizations, Heinrich Himmler is a person who continues to fascinate long after his suicide in 1945.



Roger Manvell and Heinrich Fraenkel's classic study of Himmler traces his rise from an ordinary boy to a superstitious man who ventured into herbalism, astrology, and homeopathic medicine before hitching his wagon to Adolf Hitler's star and becoming obsessed with racial purity and the superiority of the Aryan race.

A master of intrigue, Himmler, with Hitler as his protector, rose to become the second most powerful figure in the Third Reich and one of the chief architects of the "Final Solution" that would cost millions of human beings their lives. Understanding this diabolical leader will help readers further understand a political party and a nation that committed the most horrendous crimes against the world and humanity.

This 2007 reprint has lost none of the chilling nature of the 1965 original.

USS Iowa at War, by Kit and Carolyn Bonner, Zenith Press, Osceola, Wis., 2007, 128 pp., photographs, illustrations, index, softcover, $19.95.

The complete history of the USS *Iowa,* the flagship of the last battleship class and one of the mightiest warships to ever sail into combat, is superbly told in this visually stunning book by Kit and Carolyn Bonner. The authors do an excellent job in tracing the history of battleships in general and discussing how the Iowa-class in particular was the epitome of warship design and technology.

Having fought in three wars (World War II, Korea, Vietnam) and used to enforce the peace in other parts of the world until she was decommissioned in 1990, the *Iowa* has been a symbol of American naval power as well as one of the last remnants of a history that has seen battleships become obsolete.

Full of fascinating facts, figures, and details (such as holding the record for firing a 16-inch shell the longest distance—23.4 miles), *USS Iowa at War* is a fine tribute to a great ship and the men who sailed in her.

did not attempt to refute criticism of himself, or encourage others to do so on his behalf."

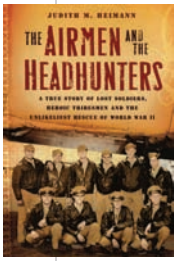
Tracing Ike's life from his rural Kansas upbringing, through his West Point years, his staff jobs during World War I (when his immense organizational and administrative abilities first showed through), and the interwar years of slow promotion, Korda grasps and fully exposes the quiet genius that was Eisenhower.

Korda also discusses in depth Ike's determination to win the war in Europe with his own strategy; his difficulties in reining in and separating the clashing personalities of Patton and Montgomery; his unselfish willingness to take the blame in the event operations did not go well; the reasons for his decision not to take Berlin or Prague before the Soviets; his reluctant rise to the presidency; and the many crises he faced a president from McCarthyism to the very real likelihood of the Cold War going nuclear.

As a war hero, an international statesman, and president of a nation undergoing tremendous social changes, Ike always remained a man who maintained the unshakable values learned in his youth—honesty, courage, loyalty, love of country, and basic human decency.

Korda's superb biography will undoubtedly make many readers ache for a time gone by in America—the "Eisenhower Era." This is a book not to be missed.

The Airmen and the Headhunters: A True Story of Lost Soldiers, Heroic Tribesmen and the Unlikeliest Rescue of World War II, by Judith M. Heimann, Harcourt, New York, 2007, 289 pp., photographs, bibliography, index, hardcover, $26.00.



On November 16, 1944, an air armada of 40 Consolidated B-24 Liberator bombers and 15 Lockheed P-38 Lightning fighter bombers lifted off from their air base on the Dutch East Indies island of Morotai on what was thought to be an easy, routine bombing mission along the Borneo coast. It turned out to be anything but.

The mission of the American force was to hit a small concentration of Japanese ships at anchor. But instead of the expected lone carrier or cruiser, the flight spotted a huge assemblage of enemy ships. Worse, the Japanese fleet also spotted them and began throwing up a curtain of antiaircraft shells.

Ripped by shrapnel, the B-24 piloted by 2nd Lt. Tom Coberly quickly began to sputter and smoke, with several of its crew members hit and badly wounded. There was no other option than to bail out over the dense jungle of northern Borneo and hope for the best.

After the men floated into the trees and managed to cut themselves out of their parachutes, they found that they were scattered across the island's mountainous interior. Then a fierce-looking group of loin-clothed natives—the Dayaks—silently emerged from the thick jungle.

Would the tribesmen kill the airmen or turn them over to the Japanese? Or would the Dayaks risk reprisals to help the airmen get home? The tribal leaders' ultimate decision would lead to a desperate game of hide-and-seek and a return of a long-renounced ritual: the triumphant and bloody taking of heads.

Judith Heimann's book reads like an improbable movie script: a bamboo airstrip built on a rice paddy, a mad British major, and a blowpipe-wielding native army that helped destroy one of the last Japanese strongholds. Yet, it is all true. Her clear prose presents a gripping, you-are-there journey into a remote world and the forgotten heroism of the Dayaks.

PUBLISHER SPOTLIGHT:

CASEMATE

Headquartered near Philadelphia, Casemate has been publishing a wide variety of books on military topics since 2002, and currently puts out about 20 titles a year.

One of their main publishing interests is giving veterans a forum, and through their personal accounts to provide valuable historical understanding to the generations that follow—understanding that only comes from such firsthand experience.

In addition, Casemate is also the distributor for 32 other publishers, mainly from the United Kingdom (but also from France, Spain, and elsewhere), and altogether introduces some 280 books into the U.S. market annually. Some of these other publishers include Brassey's UK, Heimdal, Amber, Helion, Grub Street, etc. Combining their own books with those of their client publishers, Casemate covers the gamut from ancient military history to the present day.

World War II titles, naturally, make up a large portion of both Casemate's own publishing and that of their distribution clients. Some of their most recent World War II books include *Day of the Panzer* by Jeff Danby, *Stalingrad* by Michael K. Jones, *Escape from Auschwitz* by Andrei Pogazhev, and *The Tank Killers* by Harry Yeide. Jonathan Gawne's book, *Finding Your Father's War,* is an invaluable reference for anyone seeking information on those who fought in World War II and has been Casemate's best-selling book for the past year.

These, along with many other Casemate titles, provide as vivid an account of life in World War II as one is likely to find anywhere.

For more information and an online catalog, visit their website: www.casematepublishing.com.

Endgame 1945: The Missing Final Chapter of World War II, by David Stafford, Little, Brown, New York, 2007, 581 pp., photographs, bibliography, index, hardcover, $26.99.

Although the fighting in Europe ended in early May 1945, a series of dramas still needed to be played out. David Stafford's *Endgame* chronicles the experiences of nine individuals—from soldiers to POWs to war correspondents—who witnessed the Allies' struggles to bring the war to an end during the final weeks of the conflict and in the first few months following VE Day.

Through their eyes, Stafford traces the elaborate web of events that brought about the war's real resolution and set in motion the postwar world to follow: the deaths of Hitler and Mussolini, the liberation of Buchenwald and Dachau, and the Allies' competition with the Soviets to see which side would control Europe.

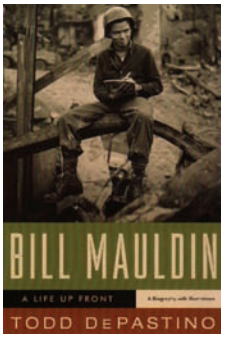
As Stafford writes in the introduction, "Wars do not end when the fighting stops, and military victory in itself is no guarantor of peace. The wounded continue to die. The dispossessed still seek a place to call home. Parents search for lost children among the ruins, and families and friends try desperately to be reunited. The victors do not suddenly turn their swords into plowshares. They hunt down enemy leaders, confront those who wish to continue the fight, and wrestle hard to establish law and order. Only then can peace come. For this requires more than the absence of conflict, and is harder to build than battering cities to rubble."

From his descriptions of Hitler's April decision to never surrender, to the fateful Potsdam Conference when the new American President Harry Truman came face to face with the West's newest and most dangerous arch rival Josef Stalin, Stafford has produced a work that will be hard to put down and even harder to forget.

Bill Mauldin: A Life Up Front, by Todd DePastino, W.W. Norton, New York, 2007, 320 pp., photographs, illustrations, bibliography,

index, hardcover, $27.95.

It is safe to say that nearly every student of World War II is familiar with Willy and Joe, two grizzled cartoon "dog-faces" that brought black humor to the front lines in the pages of the G.I.'s newspaper, the *Stars and Stripes*. Perhaps less familiar is the life of their creator, Bill Mauldin.



In this first-ever biography of the cartoonist and commentator, Todd DePastino shows how Mauldin's cartoons, which often lampooned self-important officers and bungling strategists, first saw the light of day in the 45th Infantry Division's newspaper before his talent was recognized theater-wide and he was promoted to the staff of *Stars and Stripes*.

In partnership with Mauldin's family and estate, DePastino pays loving homage to the complex artist whose craft not only angered generals such as George Patton, but also shocked and educated the American public by giving voice to the dreams, fears, and grievances of the lowly foot soldier.

Infused with Mauldin's sometimes impish, sometimes bitterly funny look at war and the human condition, the book also reveals lesser-known aspects of the artist's life, such as his ventures into memoir-writing and news journalism, his political aspirations, and the challenges he faced in civilian life, including working as a political cartoonist, trying his hand at acting (as a Union soldier in *The Red Badge of Courage*), and his frequent attempts at marriage and fatherhood.

Many of Mauldin's 600 wartime cartoons, over half sketched in combat, are reproduced within and stand as genuine masterpieces and an essential chronicle of citizen-soldiers—from peace, through war, to victory. A thoroughly enjoyable and revealing work about an American genius.

The Secret War: The Inside Story of the Code Makers and Code Breakers of World War II, by Michael Paterson, David & Charles Ltd., 2007, 288 pp. London, photographs, bibliography, index, softcover, $16.95.

Nations at war rely not only on ships, planes, tanks, weapons, and trained combatants but also on people skilled at encoding their most closely guarded secrets—and breaking the secret codes of the enemy.

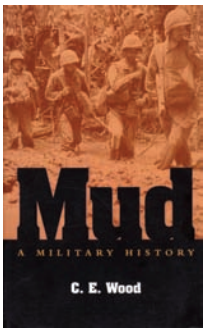
World War II ushered in an era of code makers and code breakers as never before. Back and forth across battlefields, oceans, airwaves, deserts, and highways during the war flowed messages of all kinds—all of it fiendishly coded to prevent prying eyes and ears from knowing what the messages contained, even if the messages seemed of absolutely no value at all.

Not only was it vital to know what the enemy's intentions were, but also to prevent the enemy from knowing that his codes had been broken. Such knowledge was often a two-edged sword; on many occasions, one army or another would know that the enemy was planning an attack but could not alert the units about to be hit for fear that such a move would tell the enemy that his ciphers were no longer secure.

Several books have been published on this topic in the past, but one of the newest and best is Michael Paterson's *The Secret War.* In this work the author, going back to before the Great War, lays out for the reader exactly the lengths each nation went to keep their secret signals from being read by the enemy and how they simultaneously attempted to crack their enemy's codes in a high-stakes game of cat and mouse.

A better, more easily understood overview of the business of code making and breaking than *The Secret War* will be hard to find.

Mud: A Military History, by C.E. Wood, Potomac Books, Dulles, Va., 2007, 190 pp., photographs, bibliography, index, softcover, $15.95.



To give his fellow countrymen safe at home an idea what life at the front was like, World War II soldier and cartoonist Bill Mauldin came up with this recipe: "Dig a hole in your back yard while it is raining. Sit in the hole until the water climbs up around your ankles. Pour cold mud down your shirt collar. Sit there for 48 hours."

Since the very first battle millennia ago, mud has been the curse of the soldier. Author C.E. Wood has written the first book-length treatise on this most common of substances, reflecting upon how for centuries the gooey mess has altered tactics, slowed cavalry charges, stopped cannonballs, gummed up weapons and equipment, halted vehicles, irritated skin, destroyed uniforms, and generally made life miserable for the field soldier.

Although not confining himself strictly to World War II (there are passages dealing with mud from Waterloo to the Great War to Vietnam, among others), Wood manages to convey just how deleterious mud has been and can be to military operations and to the health and welfare of troops that must contend with it.

As a Marine says in the book, "It has always puzzled me that this important factor in our daily lives has received so little attention from otherwise excellent personal memoirs by infantrymen."

After reading Woods's enlightening and entertaining observations, chances are good that readers will never look at mud in quite the same way again.

Last Team Standing: How the Pittsburgh Steelers and Philadelphia Eagles—"The Steagles"—Saved Pro Football During World War II, by Matthew Algeo, DaCapo Press, Cambridge, Mass., 2007, 270 pp., photographs, bibliography, index, softcover, $14.95.

During World War II, the National Football League faced a crisis unimaginable today, a shortage of players. By 1943, so many players were in the armed forces that the eight-team NFL was on the verge of collapse. Some teams did not even have 11 players on their entire roster; faced with this problem, the Cleveland Rams folded.

Seeking a way to salvage the 1943 season and save the league, the team owners were forced to merge two teams, the Pittsburgh Steelers and Philadelphia Eagles. Thus the "Phil-Pitt Steagles" were born.

The Steagles' roster included military draft rejects, an aging superstar lured out of retirement, and even a couple of active-duty servicemen who got leave to take part in games. The star receiver was half blind, the center was deaf in one ear, and the quarterback had ulcers. The team's two coaches could not stand each other.

Yet, somehow this motley bunch posted a winning record (5 wins, 4 losses, one tie)—the first in Eagles history and just the second in Steelers franchise history. More than that, during America's darkest hours, they and the rest of the league captured the hearts of the fans and gave people something to cheer about. Their accomplishments exemplified the never-say-die spirit that won the war. Highly recommended. □

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the ill-fated Stargard counteroffensive in Pomerania. The autobahn from Berlin to Stettin, along which the Walloons traveled to the assembly area, was congested with thousands of people desperately fleeing from the Russians. Powerless to help them, Degrelle impassively surveyed the pitiful columns of gaunt refugees with no illusions about their fate if and when the approaching Red Army caught up with them. Stories of wholesale Russian atrocities against civilians in East Prussia were already spreading like wildfire.

Launched with all the customary élan and ferocity typical of the Waffen SS, the offensive soon stalled and ultimately accomplished little other than to precipitate a powerful Soviet counteroffensive. Degrelle once again led from the front as his Walloniens fought fanatically in the face of overpowering Soviet forces. They were doggedly forced back through central Pomerania toward Berlin. By mid-March 1945, following weeks of unrelenting combat in the hopelessly one-sided fight, Degrelle's division had been burned to a cinder.

As ruinous destruction loomed like some ghastly specter at the gates of the German capital, Degrelle saw ample evidence of the German Army's total collapse. The stiff, lifeless bodies of countless Wehrmacht and Volkssturm soldiers, suspected of desertion, had been left hanging by the roadside from trees, lamp posts, and makeshift gallows as a gruesome warning to others. Placards pinned to their uniforms or hanging around their necks typically read, "I hang here because I left my unit without permission."

In spite of the draconian measures being employed by the SS, Degrelle decided to release those volunteers who no longer wished to fight. They were free to make their way home to Belgium or elsewhere. Others were given foreign worker cards and disguised as conscripted laborers. From the remaining 650 officers and men, he formed one well-equipped battalion to continue the futile struggle. Even though Hitler was dead, the remaining Walloons knew that as foreign volunteers they had no future beyond the life of the Reich. Their fate was sealed. With the sword of Damocles hanging over their heads, many saw death in combat as the only course open to them, and they were determined to fight to the bitter end.

Scenes of panic, death, and cruelty typified the Reich's rapid disintegration, but a surprising number of German officers at this time were convinced that if they could hold on the advancing Western Allies would soon join with them to fight the Soviets. Degrelle saw such hopes as delusional. They were all living on borrowed time, and even his unconfirmed promotion to SS Brigadeführer (Brigadier General) on May 2, 1945, held little real meaning.

With the final surrender of Berlin in May 1945, Degrelle was desperate to avoid Russian captivity and ordered as many of his worn-out veterans as possible to make for the Baltic port of Lubeck to surrender to the British. The man the Belgian authorities really wanted, however, would not be among them. Degrelle, who had little doubt about the fate that awaited him in his native land, had fled north through Denmark and Norway to Oslo, where he commandeered a plane and took off for the sanctuary of Spain. After a daring 1,500-mile flight over portions of Allied-occupied Europe, he crash-landed on the beach at San Sebastian in northern Spain but was gravely wounded and hospitalized for over a year.

The Belgian government was soon demanding his extradition for treason, but Spain's leader, General Francisco Franco, refused to hand him over. Degrelle's family and supporters in Belgium were not so fortunate. Many were arrested and tortured. Most of the Walloon soldiers who had surrendered to the British had been handed over to Belgian authorities and thrown into prison or condemned to death. Degrelle's eight young children (seven girls and a boy) were separated and placed in detention camps in different parts of Europe, where their names were changed to frustrate any chance of reuniting them. Not only did the Belgian authorities order these children never be allowed contact with each other or their father, but they also passed a law, the Lex Degrellana, which made it illegal to transfer, possess or receive any book by or about Degrelle. His subsequent work, *Campaign in Russia,* was banned in Belgium.

In 1947, most of the Rexist leadership was subjected to show trials in Belgium, and 25 were executed. Degrelle was condemned to death in absentia. Knowing that many in the postwar Belgian government had been wholehearted collaborators themselves, Degrelle challenged the establishment on 12 separate occasions during his 50-year exile to put him on trial in a legitimate court of law. His demands were ignored.

Isolated in Spain, branded a Nazis fugitive, and demonized in his homeland, Degrelle rose to mythical status among many neofascist groups and nostalgic admirers. Protected and sheltered by powerful Spanish friends, he eventually forged a new life as founding head of a major construction company in Madrid, which ironically procured contracts with the U.S. govern-

ment to build military airfields in Spain. Meanwhile, friends scoured Europe for his children. In time, all were found and spirited to Spain.

Beyond reach of the Belgian authorities, Degrelle remained unapologetic about his fascist views or associations and became a prodigious writer and speaker. His controversial far- right solutions, Holocaust denial, and self-published revisionist views regarding Hitler and the Nazi genocide led to widespread resentment and anger. Following legal action, the Supreme Court of Spain actually imposed a substantial fine on Degrelle for bringing offense to the memory of the victims of the Holocaust, but he continued undeterred. Conveniently overlooking the deplorable conduct of the SS in the occupied territories, Degrelle still embraced many of the tenets of Nazi ideology and his belief that Hitler was the greatest statesman of his time. He also appeared to have no regrets about his collaboration or his place in history other than to tell Dutch television, "If I had the chance, I would do it all again, but much more forcefully."

After decades living comfortably in Spain, Leon Degrelle died from cardiac arrest in 1994 at the age of 87. Many young Belgians barely knew of him, but the Belgian government had never forgotten or forgiven his collaboration or military service with the Nazis. He was refused burial in Belgium, and the government took steps to prevent Belgian veterans who had fought alongside Degrelle from attending his funeral in Spain.

Today, there is little acknowledgment for the thousands of Belgians who died fighting on the Eastern Front; their sacrifice and distinguished combat reputation remain largely ignored. Leon Degrelle, however, spent his life arguing that they had volunteered for service with the Germans through a fierce desire to save Europe from Bolshevism. The crimes attributed to the Waffen SS, he said, were as often as not in retaliation for even worse atrocities committed by Red Army units. During the postwar years, few were willing to listen or accept comparisons.

Whether his true motivation to fight for Hitler was to bring about the destruction of communism is debatable; many still firmly believe Degrelle had created the Legion purely to further his own political aspirations. Whatever the truth, the charge of treason that stained Degrelle's military career in no way diminished his record as a combat commander who regularly led from the front—a place where true leaders are sometimes hard to find. □

Australian author Richard Rule is a frequent contributor to World War II History. He resides in Melbourne.

Patton

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Hermann Göring, had claimed the castle when the Nazis came to power and stored in it many priceless art objects that had been looted from occupied territories.

It was inevitable that advancing American troops should also begin encountering Nazi concentration camps during their rapid push across Germany in the spring of 1945. Most of the men of the 761st did not know the camps existed until one morning when elements of the battalion drew up before a labor camp surrounded by barbed wire. Stunned tankers climbed out of their vehicles and gazed at sights of unspeakable horror.

On April 28, 1945, Radio Milan announced that Italian Fascist Dictator Benito Mussolini had been executed by communist guerrillas. Two days later, Hitler and his mistress, Eva Braun, committed suicide in their Berlin bunker. The 761st Tank Battalion reached the city of Steyr, Austria, on the banks of the Enns River, on May 5, 1945. Over 100,000 German soldiers, fleeing the advancing Soviet Red Army, surrendered to American troops, who herded them into a large field that had become a makeshift holding facility.

By the end of the war, the 761st Tank Battalion had been in combat for 183 continuous days. During this time, it participated in four major Allied campaigns in six different countries and was attached to three separate American armies and seven different divisions. The Black Panthers had inflicted more than 130,000 casualties on the enemy. Eight black enlisted men received battlefield commissions, while 391 received decorations for heroism, including one Medal of Honor awarded posthumously to Sergeant Ruben Rivers, seven Silver Stars, three of them posthumous, 56 Bronze Stars, and 246 Purple Hearts. Three officers and 31 enlisted men had been killed in action, and 22 officers and 180 enlisted men had been wounded. In 1998, the 761st Tank Battalion received a much delayed Presidential Unit Citation.

On VE Day, tanks of the 761st lined up beside a small bridge along the Enns River. General George S. Patton Jr. stood up in a Jeep, tall and straight. The soldiers of the 761st saluted smartly. The general returned the salute and drove on. The great warrior wore a quiet, satisfied look on his face. He had asked for the best tankers, and he had gotten them. □

Charles W. Sasser is a veteran of the U.S. Navy and the U.S. Army Special Forces. He resides in Chouteau, Oklahoma.

By Eric T. Baker

Shoot your way through World War II in three new games.

If you have children, there is a good chance that you also have a Wii. And if you have a Wii, you've probably played tennis on it, and maybe even gone fishing, but you probably have not played a war game on the console, or if you have, it may have been *Medal of Honor Vanguard,* previously the best war game available on the Wii.

Which is really saying very little. Now, however, Electronic Arts has released a new *MoH* game for the Wii, and this one clearly had more time and care taken with it.

The game is **Medal of Honor Heroes 2** and evidence that the game has been built for the Wiimote is on display right from the start. The player gets his missions by tuning to the proper band on a radio, which is done by twisting the Wiimote in the air like a dial. The sound then comes out of the Wiimote speaker, which gives it the quality of WWII radio. The shotgun is reloaded by jerking the nunchuk up and down in a cocking motion. The mine detector is used by waving the Wiimote back and forth and the rocket launcher is used by putting it face down on the shoulder.

The two other things that *MoHH2* has that are improvements on other Wii WWII games are a shooting gallery arcade mode and a 32-player multiplayer death match mode. The arcade mode isn't as smooth as a dedicated rail shooter like the *Time Crisis* games, but it is fun and immersive to just have to concentrate on aiming and shooting. The multiplayer is remarkably smooth and very fast paced on a full server. The lack of voice chat makes for less cooperation than in a more high-powered system, but it is definitely the best that has ever been done on the Wii.

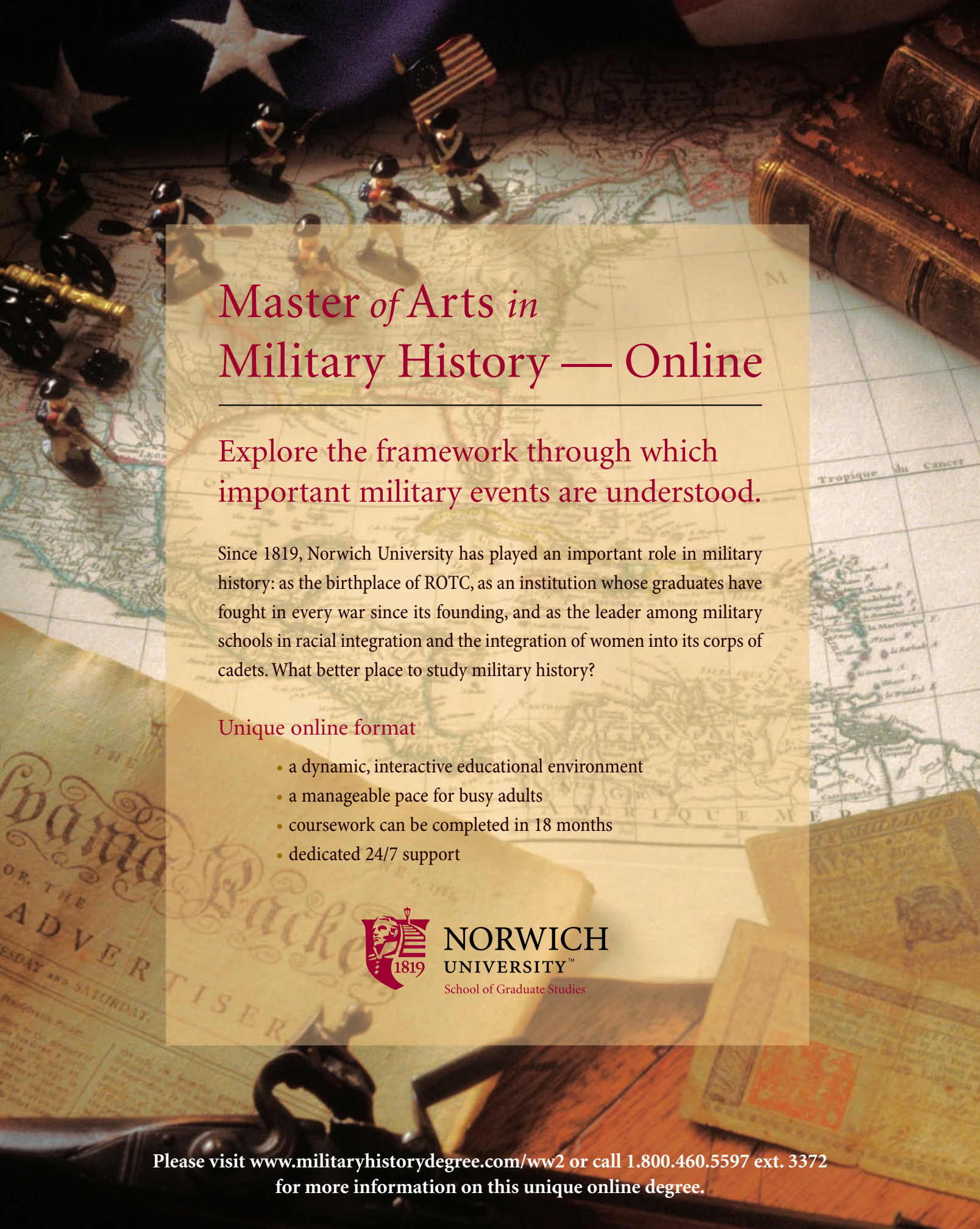
Another option for players to shoot their way through War II from a first-person perspective is **The History Channel the Battle for the Pacific** which can also be played on the Wii ... and every other system on the market including the PC. Given the choice, it is a better PC game than it is on any of the other systems. Certainly it is not optimized to make use of the Wiimote the way that *MoHH2* is. *HCtBftP* presents a more of historical tour of the era, along with a baseline of combat action.

As with the other games that have the History Channel imprint, *HCtBftP* starts at the beginning of the era and takes the player through the time period, WWII in this case, filling in the space between the scenarios with cuts from various History Channel programs that include real combat footage, discussion of the battle, and facts about how it really happened. This concern for the real history carries over into the game itself where everything from the maps to the weapons, uniforms, and vehicles are true to the actual war.

As a first-person shooter, *HCtBftP* has the player supported by computer-controlled squad mates just as in *MoHH2*. There are fewer minigames in *HCtBftP,* however, so the battles are both faster and more streamlined. From Henderson Field to Mount Suribachi the player fights through recreations of real missions from the war. There is also an online multiplayer that lets the players choose to be either Americans or Japanese to fight it out on historical maps.

The third game is on another platform that you probably have if you have kids: Nintendo's DS hand held. **Panzer Tactics DS** from Sproing is a turn-based tactical game set in WWII that contains 150 units: infantry, ships, aircraft, paratroops, commandos, and of course, tanks. Each unit has full stats and the ones that survive a mission carry over to the next battle, leveling up and becoming tougher and having higher morale. All of this is tracked and played on two tiny LCD screens and managed with a stylus.

There is nothing in *PTDS* that hasn't been done better on a desktop computer. But it is hard to bring your desktop to the kids' soccer practice. *PTDS* is like the dancing bear; the point isn't its shortcomings as a war game. The point is how well it includes all the entertaining and challenging elements of a desktop game in such a small package. Weather. Fog of war. Purchasing new units. Supply. Entrenchment. Two-player hot seat games on the same DS. Four-player battles over Wifi. In the single-player version there are three campaigns each with about 12 battles loosely based on historical offensives. In each campaign the player is either Germany, Russia, or the US and Britain and is always the attacking side. □



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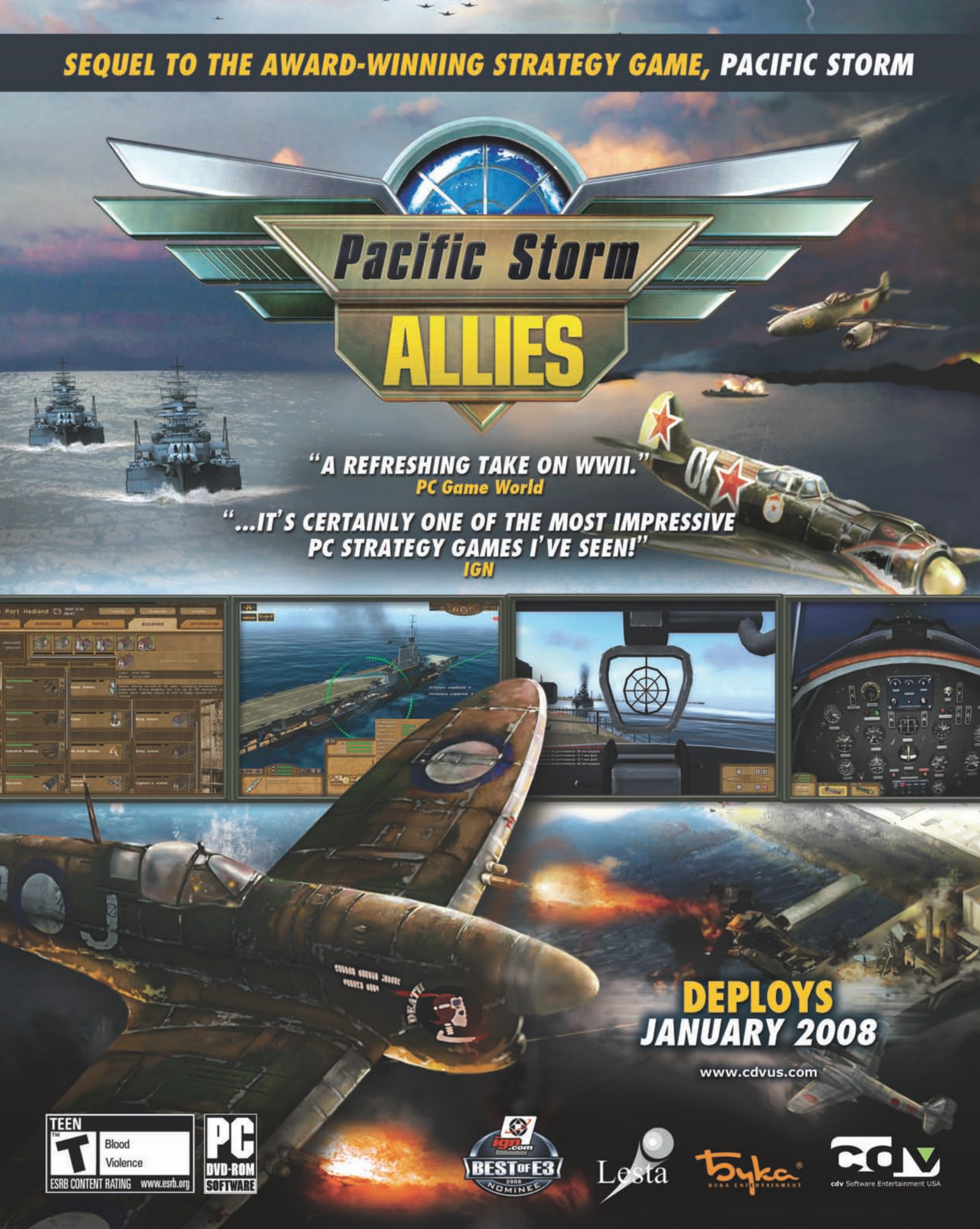
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