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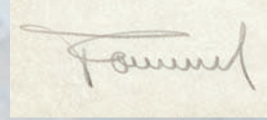

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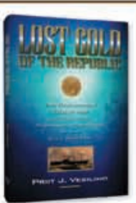

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Cover: General Sir Bernard Law Montgomery commanded the British Eighth Army in North Africa and went head-to-head with Rommel at El Alamein. After fighting with the Eighth Army in Sicily and Italy, he was called home to England to command the 21st Army Group and prepare for the invasion of Normandy. Photo courtesy of the Imperial War Museum.

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Editorial

The Desert Fox was respected by both friend and foe.

BY THE TIME ERWIN ROMMEL ARRIVED IN THE LIBYAN DESERT IN FEBRUARY 1941 he was already a national hero in Germany. A career soldier, he had served as a junior officer, training recruits, prior to the outbreak of World War I. During the Great War, he earned the respect of senior commanders, suffered serious wounds, and accomplished the fantastic feat of capturing a mountain in Italy and the 9,000 Italian soldiers whose job had been to defend the heights.

A colleague described Rommel as "one hundred percent soldier" in tribute to the leader who disdained the rear areas, often nosing around the front lines or flying a reconnaissance aircraft, although he did not have a pilot's license, to see the disposition of his troops for himself or to survey enemy positions while planning an attack. Virtually fearless, he was not unnerved by the presence of the enemy or the bursting of an artillery shell.

Between the world wars, Rommel remained in the military. In 1937, he authored a book on infantry tactics, which brought him to the attention of Adolf Hitler. Shortly thereafter, he was appointed to the Führer's staff. Although he never joined the Nazi Party, the officer's future was inextricably tied to the regime that plunged the world into war in 1939.

Personally appointed by Hitler to command of the 7th Panzer Division, Rommel skillfully led the unit across the Belgian frontier on May 10, 1940, and wreaked havoc on the enemy for five weeks. Nicknamed the Ghost Division, 7th Panzer sometimes covered as many as 150 miles in a single day. Often, the Germans moved so quickly that they caught French troops completely unprepared to defend themselves. Rommel's tanks rolled into the major port city of Cherbourg and reached the English Channel. During one sharp engagement at Arras, he had personally supervised the deployment of 88mm antiaircraft cannon, ordering that they be employed against British armor in an antitank role.

Like the dreaded 88, Rommel became a legend and earned the grudging respect of his enemies. In early 1942, Prime Minister Winston Churchill told Parliament, "We have a very daring and skillful opponent against us, and, may I say across the havoc of war, a great general."

When Churchill made those remarks, Rommel had earned the nickname of the Desert Fox, reversed early British successes in North Africa, and recaptured vast territory previously lost by the Italians. His vaunted Afrika Korps was steadily pushing British and Commonwealth forces hundreds of miles eastward, toward Cairo and the vital seaport of Alexandria. Unchecked, the Germans might have seized the Suez Canal and eventually reached the oil fields of the Middle East. At times, it seemed that this genius of warfare almost knew of British plans before they were executed. Indeed, it was later established that an Allied intelligence leak served him well.

Regardless, Rommel proved himself to be a superb strategist and tactician. However, he could not overcome two great handicaps—a continual lack of adequate supplies and the preoccupation of the high command in Berlin with the war on the Eastern Front. Inevitably, the Desert War became a war of attrition, a war which Germany could never win. By the autumn of 1942, Rommel's forces were growing weaker by the day, while those of his opponent, Field Marshal Bernard Law Montgomery, had grown stronger.

Rommel soldiered on through much of the retreat from El Alamein, but Hitler had other plans, ordering him to France to command German troops that would oppose the coming Allied invasion of Western Europe. During the discharge of his duty, however, it became apparent to Rommel that the entire war would be lost.

In 1944, while recovering from a wound received when his staff car had been strafed, Rommel was implicated in the July 20 plot to assassinate Hitler. He was given the choice of suicide or answering the charges at trial. The verdict of such a proceeding would have already been decided, and his family would have suffered. Although an elaborate state funeral was held in the town of Ulm, it was a sham—an inglorious end for one of the greatest military commanders of World War II. □

Michael E. Haskew

WWII HISTORY

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Debacle at Luban

Dear Editor:

I read the "Debacle at Luban" article in your July 2007 issue with much interest. The study of this unknown campaign gives the reader a clearer insight than he can get from the study of famous battles which are distorted by myth and legend. Luban shows the totalitarian state at its worst. The leader is remote from the battlefield, surrounded by flatterers, distrustful of his officers, ignorant of tactics, and unconcerned with the fate of his unfortunate soldiers. This is a history lesson for all times.

William Saunders
Whately, Massachusetts

Misidentified Tank

Dear Editor:

Sorry, but the disabled tank pictured on page 13 of the July 2007 issue is not an Italian tank. It is one of the U.S.-made M3 "Stuart" types. This should have been obvious to someone. Technical errors of simple facts significantly detract from an author's work.

Francis Blake
Fullerton, California

Sherman Versus Tiger Redux

Dear Editor:

I have enjoyed the debate between Barry Ward and Guy DeYoung on the Dispatches page concerning Shermans versus Tigers in Normandy. Although Mr. DeYoung made strong arguments in the July 2007 issue, I believe Mr. Ward's case is even weaker than Mr. DeYoung suggested.

The first issue concerns the range at which combat took place on the Western Front. The heavy guns of the Tiger and Panther tanks could indeed knock out Allied tanks of any sort, on any front, and at a very long range (approximately 6,560 feet). However, due to the hedgerows in Normandy, the high level of urbanization, and other obstacles, this range was rarely achieved on the Western Front. It was on the Eastern Front, and its wide-open spaces, where the Panthers and Tigers had their greatest success. The average distance over which tank fights took place on the Western Front was about 500 meters, where the Sherman tanks, even with the less powerful 75mm guns, stood a good chance against the thicker armor and bigger guns of the German tanks.

The second issue that hasn't been mentioned is the number of German tanks present in Normandy. While the Tiger and the Panther often get identified as the main German tanks in Western Europe, the reality of the situation was that the vast majority of German tanks on the Western Front were the Mk IV model—a tank with less armor and a weaker gun than the later tank models. The Sherman was on about equal terms with the Mk IV in a fair fight.

Another issue that has important implications is the presence of air power. The Allies by 1944 had complete air superiority and used it to make regular attacks on German tank units. Many German tanks were destroyed outside of battle by the Allied fighter-bombers. To avoid the Allied air attacks, the German tanks could only really move at night, and in battle the Allied ground support aircraft could perform functions that the Sherman's weak guns could not; the planes could take out the heavy German tanks at long range. The effects of air power on the Western Front so concerned the Germans that they waited until the Allied planes would not be able to fly to launch their winter offensive.

The final issue in the debate concerns the adaptability of the Sherman. The Sherman tank was actually very adaptable to other tasks; it could be modified to use rocket artillery, flamethrowers, mine destroyers, and serve many other purposes, while the Tiger and the Panther were nowhere near as adaptable, and thus not as useful. So while the Tiger and Panther were good tanks, it was the "weak" Sherman that ended up winning the battle of Normandy for the Allies.

Kevin Fortuna
Lafayette, California

A Soldier's Message from Iraq

Dear Sir,

First, I love your magazine. I buy one every month. However, I thought I would clear something up that I thought wasn't completely fact in Maura B. Delaney's story about Corporal James G. Delaney (May 2007). It was a very good story, but at the end the writer goes on to say that a U.S. soldier in Iraq today can communicate via cell phones for only four cents a minute and that soldiers with laptops equipped with broadband have free Internet at their bunks, which isn't true. Soldiers are not allowed to have cell phones in Iraq. Maybe civilian contractors can—they are not under all the many rules we are. Also, as far as the Internet goes, some soldiers have Internet at their bunks, but most don't—and it is far from free. Those who don't have to go to our local MWR center to use satellite phones and Internet, which still aren't free. We have to pay to get cards for those phones. Granted it isn't like World War II where soldiers were on the front line for months on end. As a soldier in Iraq myself, I felt it was some thing I should clear up for the folks back home. Otherwise, I have had no complaints about your magazine.

Matthew R Vitek (U.S. Army)
Al Taqaddum, Iraq

FDR and Pearl Harbor

Dear Editor:

In "FDR Prepared the US for Entering the War" by Peter Kross (Top Secret, May 2007) the author lists a plethora of actions taken by the Chief Executive which directly contravened his public pledges to—and the strongly expressed desires of—the American people to steer clear of another European war. Kross's own words, as well as the column's title (Top Secret) invalidate, to a large degree, his conclusion that the debacle at Pearl Harbor on December 7 was merely "misinterpreted and mishandled" intelligence. Where there is smoke one usually finds fire, but one must have the desire to look! See *Day of Deceit: The Truth About FDR & Pearl Harbor* by Robert Stinnett (1999).

The leaked story in the *Washington Times Herald* of December 5, 1941, just two days prior to Japan's "sneak" attack shows just how far the president and the political class of the country had planned ahead for the war. It was also a well-timed psy-ops maneuver that informed a stunned public of their intentions and the immense cost of the coming war a mere 48 hours prior to the horrors of Pearl Harbor, thereby mitigating any serious discussions.

There are two ways one can view history: either as coincidence or conspiracy. I would urge your readers to peruse the work of historian Bernard Baylin, whose *Pamphlets of the American Revolution, 1750-1776* shows the Founding Fathers acceptance of a conspiracy on the part of Britain's ruling elite to deny them their rights was considered the "enlightened" way to view events.

As opposed to those who would label such theories as paranoid/delusional (an ad hominem attack used to stifle debate) historian

Gordon S. Wood found them "rational and scientific." In his essay "Rhetoric and Reality in the American Revolution" (*William and Mary Quarterly,* 1966) he went on to say, "The Whigs *intense search* for the *human purposes behind events* was in fact an example of the beginnings of *modern history*" (emphasis added).

Would that today's crop of chroniclers take such a "modern" view of happenings and also recall FDR's quip that nothing in politics ever happens by accident. Perhaps such tragedies as December 7 and September 11—not to mention *The Maine* (how so few today "Remember"), the *Lusitania,* and the Gulf of Tonkin—and their aftermath could be averted, and the promises of representative democracy in our own land be fulfilled.

Thomas Jefferson was absolutely right when he concluded that "a people who expect to be ignorant and free, never were and never will be."

Wayne Costigan
Loretto, Pennsylvania

Russian Front Special Issue

Gentlemen:

Thanks for the excellence of this issue, which I have just finished reading. There were so many items of personal relevance—from the killing of my cousins in Lithuania in the early days of Barbarossa to the picture on page 23 of my fraternity brother, Bernie Kirschenbaum (in the middle), greeting the Russian forces at the Elbe River to mark the concluding days of the war in the East. The articles on the Russian Air Force and the T-34 tank and the progressive improvements of each as the war went on were instructive. The sacrifices of the civilians of Leningrad brought tears to my eyes. My own U.S. military service was as an Army doctor (pediatrics) on the island of Okinawa from Thanksgiving Day 1956 to July 2, 1958.

Bernard A. Yablin, MD
Rochester, New York

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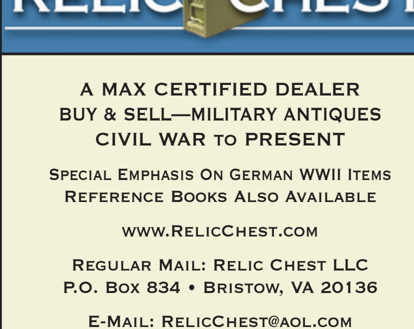

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Free coins are being handed out for the next 7 days to all who cover the $98 vault release fee for never before seen mammoth 'Ballistic Rolls' of new U.S. Gov't dollar coins

By SHAWN OYLER
UNIVERSAL MEDIA SYNDICATE

It's like a run on the banks. The phones just keep ringing off the hook.

For the next 7 days the public is actually getting never-before-seen Ballistic Rolls of the U.S. Mint's® dazzling new Washington Presidential Dollar Coins.

"The mammoth Ballistic Rolls captured in these world exclusive photos are being handed over to everyone who calls the National Order Hotline beginning at 8:30 a.m. this morning and those who beat the order deadline are actually getting a free coin with each roll," confirmed Timothy Milton, Chief of Coin Operations for the World Reserve Monetary Exchange.

The U.S. Mint barely got started minting these new coins and by law were required to stop production forever. There will never be any more.

"First issue coins like these are highly sought after, but we've never seen anything like these sealed Ballistic Rolls being put into the public's hands direct from the private vaults of the World Reserve. Coin values always fluctuate and there are never any guarantees, but ordinary Eisenhower Dollar coins as recent as 1973 have already increased in value by an astonishing 1,200 percent," Milton said.

"So just imagine what these gigantic fifty coin rolls of new Presidential Dollar Coins could bring someday. These are not ordinary commercial bankrolls. You can't get these Ballistic Rolls at the U.S. Mint, at the Federal Reserve or at any local bank. You just can't find these sealed tubes anywhere because they remain sealed in the crystal clear Vault Tubes that show off the coins' edge markings," he said.

Each sealed Vault Tube is then encased in its own gold foil Vault Brick to preserve the coins' radiant, four metal alloy in brilliant never-circulated condition.

And here's the best part. "We are releasing the entire hoard of these sealed Ballistic Rolls from the vault in the Vault Bricks for just the $98 fee for each. They are so heavy they feel like solid bars of .999 pure gold. So be careful, you may need both hands to pick them up," he said.

"Remember, these coins have never been in the hands of the public. Never-circulated coins are among those most likely to increase in value," said Milton.

You would expect that these Vault Bricks of never-circulated Ballistic Rolls would never leave the vault. But now, you can show them off like a diamond ring or a brand new car. You just won't believe the expression on people's faces when

you hand them one of these. It's like you just gave them a Million Dollars.

"We can't stop people from breaking the sealed tubes open and handing the Presidential Coins out individually. But anyone who does would be an absolute fool. So, to keep that from happening we are giving away a free Presidential Dollar Coin with each Ballistic Roll. That way everyone can still examine and show off the individual free coin without breaking the seal on the valuable Ballistic Rolls," Milton said.

"Just think if you had saved the Eisenhower Dollar Coins. Right now you'd be tempted to cash them in for a huge jackpot. Now that this free coin giveaway is being so widely advertised, everyone is practically clawing each other's eyes out to beat the order deadline for the sealed Ballistic Rolls," said Milton.

Beginning today at 8:30 a.m., the National Order Hotline opens to the public for only 7 days. Readers must dial **1-800-239-3675**. If the lines are busy, keep trying.

"We have to put limits on dealers. But everyone else who calls should be able to get what they need," Milton said.

HOW TO GET YOUR FREE COINS

Claim Authorization SR873

Readers have 7 days to call the tollfree National Order Hotline at **1-800-239-3675** beginning at 8:30 a.m. today.

The World Reserve has just announced that it is also giving away the Presidential Dollar Coin to everyone who beats the 7 days order deadline for each Ballistic Roll. The crystal clear sealed Ballistic Rolls are being released from the vault in these impressive vault bricks for the special fee of just $98 plus shipping. That's a whopping 425 grams of coins in all.

Those who miss the deadline will be turned away and required to wait for future announcements authorized by the World Reserve Monetary Exchange in this or other publications.

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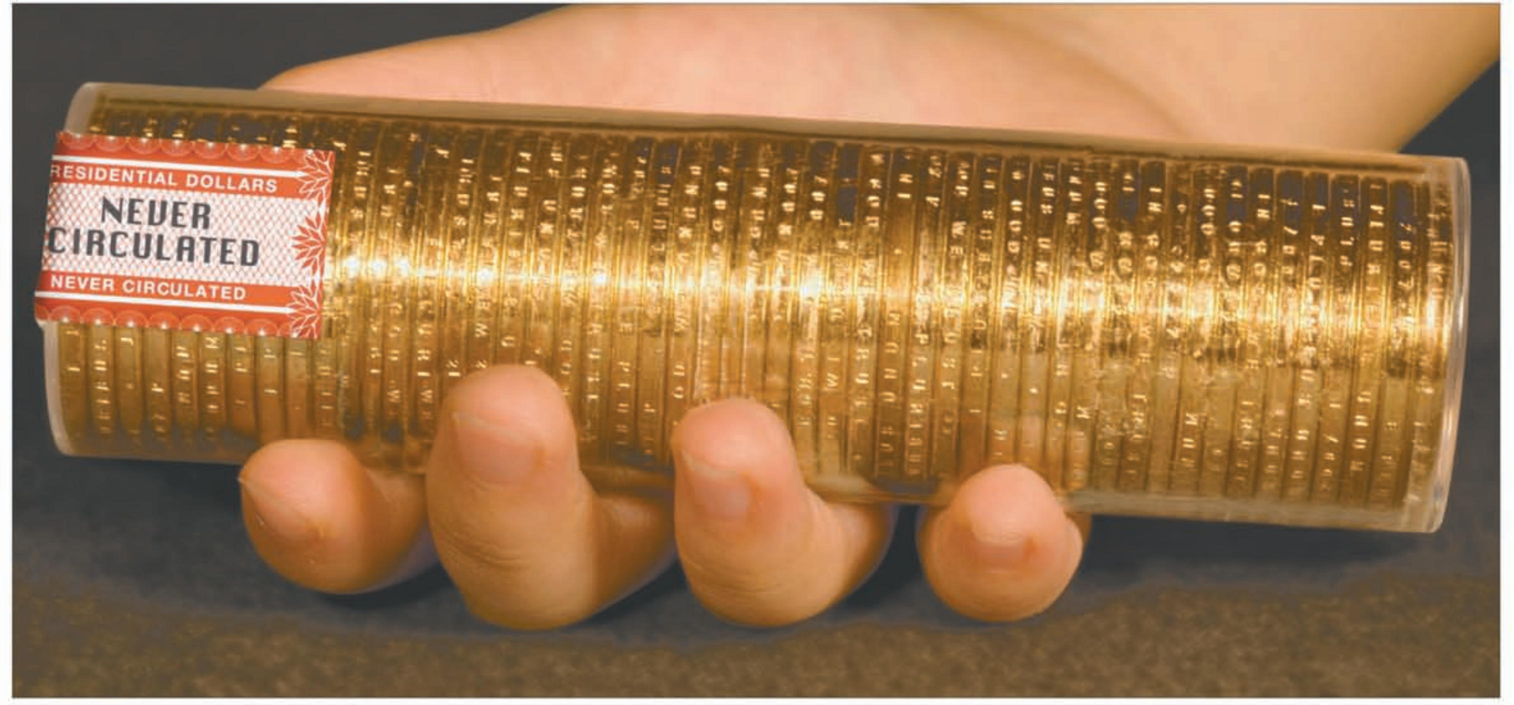

By Christopher Miskimon

Enemy wolves in sheep's clothing

German forces seldom hesitated to put captured Allied armor to use.

THE GERMAN CREWMEN OCCUPIED THE VARIOUS STATIONS IN THEIR TANK AS they approached the American roadblock ahead. It was 2100 hours on Christmas Eve, 1944, just outside the town of Manhay, Luxembourg, which was occupied by elements three different U.S. divisions. The Nazi offensive into the Ardennes, which later came to be known as the Battle of the Bulge, was well under way, and this column of the 2nd SS Panzer Division had been given the objective of seizing the town from its American defenders.

The moon overhead shone brightly in a clear sky, reflecting on the blanket of snow that covered the ground and providing good nighttime visibility. As the lead tank of the column got ever closer to the roadblock, tension no doubt mounted; the American tankers and infantrymen must have strained to see who was approaching their position—friend or foe. With each passing second, the crew of the leading German tank, out front and vulnerable, must have feared the calls of warning and bursts of tank and bazooka fire that would turn their machine into a fiery coffin.

The German crew, which has manned a captured British Matilda tank in the Western Desert in 1941, surrenders to a group of New Zealand troops after the vehicle has been disabled by antitank fire. Note the German markings and flag draping the tank. (Australian War Memorial)

No shouts of "Open Fire!" or "Krauts!" rang out, however. Instead, the lead tank moved up to the roadblock without a shot being fired. The American sentries were not lazy or incompetent; they had been fooled. The German tank crew was driving an American tank, a captured M-4 Sherman, its silhouette easily discernable from that of an enemy tank in the bright moonlight. Behind this Sherman, the rest of the SS detachment sprang to the attack, both infantry and German tankers in their own panzers. Surprise was complete.

Muzzle flashes and screams pierced the darkness; men who should have been singing Christmas carols at home with their loved ones were instead fighting, killing, and dying in what might have been considered an idyllic winter backdrop. Within minutes, the German infantry spread out and used their Panzerschreck and Panzerfaust antitank weapons to destroy four of the defending Shermans and disable two more.

Flush with success, the Germans decided to try their ruse again on the next roadblock, which lay about a thousand yards farther down the road into Manhay. This roadblock was well manned by 10 more American Shermans and an understrength company of infantry. The defenders were dug in with their tanks in hull-down firing positions, leaving only the turrets exposed to an attacker.

Once again the SS troops put their captured Sherman in the lead. The troops at the second roadblock would have heard the gunfire. Presumably, the Germans hoped the Americans would observe one of their own tanks approaching and believe the occupants were retreating comrades. Their luck held, and no fire greeted the SS-crewed Sherman. The rest of the Nazi column quickly went into action, lighting flares to blind the crews of the American tanks and opening fire. All of the American tanks were lost in the ensuing firefight. An hour and a half after the attack began, the Germans were in Manhay, where five more tanks fell to them.

It was an ingenious use for a captured tank, and one that paid off for the German attackers. In addition to using such vehicles in subterfuges, the Wehrmacht made much use of captured armor on all fronts during World War II. A popular image of the German Army is that of an armored juggernaut using its superior tanks, like the giant Tigers and Panthers, to either sweep

all before it or to fight bitter and costly defensive battles against overwhelming odds.

While one can certainly find numerous examples of just such actions, this was not always the case. At times, the German Army suffered equipment shortages like most military forces. For example, after the fall of France in 1940, the Wehrmacht increased the number of its armored divisions. Since there were not enough tanks to fully equip the new units, the existing tanks were spread out among them, reducing the total number of tanks per division.

In the early part of the war, German industry was not yet up to its full wartime production capacity. So, the Army used a number of methods to make up for numerical deficiencies. One prewar innovation was to use the large numbers of Czechoslovakian tanks that had fallen into their possession when that nation came under the Nazi yoke in 1938. As nations fell to the German onslaught, another method was to use tanks from conquered nations and still-active enemies. As the war continued, so did German improvisation in the use of captured Allied tanks.

After the French surrender in June 1940, the Wehrmacht found itself not only in possession of large numbers of French tanks, such as the Somua S35 and Char 1 bis, but also of the French production facilities and ammunition factories needed to sustain these vehicles. These early French designs were equivalent to the German ones then in use; it had been more a matter of their tactical employment than their quality that had hastened French defeat. So, the Germans retained these vehicles, using them for the security of airfields and railroads and for driver training in Western Europe.

Later, when these tanks became obsolete for battlefield use, their turrets were removed and placed in bunkers and pillboxes, while the chassis found use as artillery tractors and carriers for self-propelled guns. Very small numbers of seized French tanks saw combat. Just a few were used in Russia and a few in the Balkans. After their usefulness in direct combat was over, these tanks were employed against partisans, who generally lacked antitank weapons.

British tanks were also captured during the fighting in France. Since Germany was still fighting Britain, some captured armor was put to use outside of combat. Examples of these captured tanks were sent back to Germany to the Army Weapons Office, a practice that would continue with captured armor from all fronts and enemies during the course of the war. There, various testing would be conducted, and

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ABOVE: "War Daddy II," a captured American Sherman (left) is tested against a German Panther and other tanks. After testing by the German Army Weapons Office, some captured tanks were put on display while others were put into service against their original owners. RIGHT: Captured with the fall of Bir Hacheim in North Africa, a Crusader tank is inspected by German troops. Practically intact, this vehicle was also taken with plenty of ammunition to turn against its original owners. (ABOVE: ullstein bild / RIGHT: Imperial War Museum)

tanks would be evaluated for their fighting capability. Once these evaluations were done, the tanks would be tested against various German antitank weapons to see which would be most effective. Firing tables were created showing these results along with each vehicle's vulnerable points.

Since there was no ready source of ammunition or spare parts for British tanks, some were converted to tractors or training vehicles. As vehicles broke down, some were stripped for parts to keep others running. The final destination would often be the target range, where the hulks were used for target practice and to train infantry on close-in tank killing. A very small number of captured British cruiser tanks saw action in Russia, and a handful of Churchill tanks captured at Dieppe were salvaged, tested, and then used until they, too, ended up on the firing range.

For the Afrika Korps fighting in the North African desert, however, captured tanks were put to frontline use as often as possible. German forces often had difficulties receiving adequate resupply. Replacement tanks had to be shipped across the Mediterranean, something the Royal Navy and Air Force tried hard to prevent. Also, the fighting in Russia often took priority over the fighting in the desert, leading to shortages of all kinds for the Afrika Korps, including tanks. Captured British tanks were used to fill the gaps. While British tanks are often viewed as inferior to their German counterparts, it should be noted that in the early period of the war the qualitative differences were usually not so dramatic. One must also consider that when faced with the need, even a "bad" tank is much better than no tank at all.

Both the 15th and 21st Panzer Divisions of the Afrika Korps formed provisional units of captured English armor in 1941. The size of these units varied widely from time to time, since new vehicles were acquired and those in use broke down, were cannibalized for parts, or were lost in combat. By February 1942, a consolidated captured tank unit was created for the Afrika Korps as a whole. It remained in service until the end of the fighting in Africa, since newly captured vehicles were funneled to it as others were lost. A maximum of 18 tanks comprised the unit, though numbers constantly fluctuated. Various models of British tanks served in these units, including Matildas, Valentines, and Crusaders. Only a very few examples of American tanks in British service were taken.

American forces landed in Africa in November 1942, joined the fighting, and before long some of their tanks fell into German hands as well. By this stage of the North African fighting, it was apparent the Wehrmacht's war in the desert was nearing its end. Knowing time was short, every effort was made to capture examples of American tanks for return to Germany and the Army Weapons Office so testing could be carried out.

It was in Tunisia that the first Sherman tanks were captured. Here begins the story of the hapless M-4A1 Sherman named "War Daddy II." Panzerabteilung 501 captured the tank from the First Armored Division on February 22, 1943, near Sbeitla, Tunisia. From there, its captors drove the tank to Tunis, a 350-kilometer journey that took four and a half days. Once there, "War Daddy II" was placed aboard a ship and transported to the Army Weapons Office. There, the tank, which displayed serial number WH 058941, was put through testing. The thickness of the armor in millimeters and its slope in degrees were determined. Photographs exist of this tank, its name still painted on its hull, both on display and being tested

alongside German armor. During the course of the war, more captured Shermans joined various other types of seized tanks at testing centers at Berka and Kummersdorf. After testing, some tanks were placed on display in army museums at the test sites. In the last days of the war, those few tanks that still ran were pressed into battle in ad hoc units.

The Allied landings in Normandy intensified the European fighting, and naturally more Shermans found their way into German hands. Four German divisions are known to have formed captured tank units with numbers of Shermans. The 10th SS Panzer Division, for example, had a separate unit of 10 Shermans at one time. Indeed, due to the widespread use of the Sherman by virtually all the Allied nations, more of them were used by Germany than any other Western tank design.

The reliability of the Sherman was an advantage for its German operators, whose own tanks were often difficult to keep operational. Additionally, since the Germans were usually retreating or on the defensive by this stage of the war, they could not hope to overrun stockpiles of spare parts as they had during the heady days of the invasion of France in 1940.

The 150th Panzer Brigade, formed in November 1944, provides perhaps the greatest example of German ingenuity in the use of captured tanks on the Western Front. This is the unit which, during the Battle of the Bulge, infiltrated American lines in order to misdirect, confuse, and sabotage Allied units. Equipped with

10 Shermans and as many other captured American vehicles as could be gathered, the 150th was rounded out with German vehicles specially disguised to resemble American counterparts. Sheet metal added to a Panther could, for example, change its silhouette to resemble a U.S. tank destroyer. The 150th did achieve some success in sowing confusion, though its contribution to the overall German campaign was minimal.

Germany's war in the East against the Soviet Union also saw wide use of captured tanks. Indeed, after observing how many tanks had been taken during the fall of France and the Low Countries, the German high command issued orders for the gathering of captured Russian tanks in July 1941, only weeks after the beginning of the invasion. The speed of the German advance during the early stages of their offensive resulted in the capture of vast numbers of Soviet troops and large amounts of tanks and equipment. The Germans intended to turn these tanks against their former owners as quickly as possible.

Initial hopes for the fast turnaround of these vehicles proved futile, however. The rapid pace of the advance meant increased wear and tear on German armor, and these increased maintenance requirements taxed German repair assets to the limit. There was little time to spare to refurbish Soviet tanks for duty, and most seized tanks needed repair to some degree. This was because the Soviets, while having built and issued tanks by the thousands, had done a rather poor job distributing spare parts and sufficient ammunition, both vital to the operations of armored vehicles.

In the early days of the war on the Eastern Front, Soviet units were often poorly supplied, so broken-down tanks could not be repaired and often had to be abandoned virtually intact. These tanks were captured by the advancing Germans but still needed repair. Retreating Soviet troops destroyed stocks of parts when they could, and sometimes captured tanks were stripped for parts by the German units that seized them. Even though thousands of Soviet tanks of all types had been destroyed, abandoned, or captured, only about 100 were in German service by October 1941.

This number included light tanks such as the BT-7 and T-26, both armed with a 45mm cannon. They stood in for German tanks for a short time until they too were relegated to serving as artillery tractors and ammunition carriers. The Wehrmacht still used large numbers of horses in these roles, so the addition of mechanized transport would have been welcome. Due to the large numbers of Lend-Lease tanks shipped to the Soviets, there were even examples of American M-3A3 and M-4 medium tanks captured on the Eastern Front and put to use. A single Matilda ended its days as a tractor, towing artillery pieces through the thick mud of the Russian steppes.

Posing aboard a captured Soviet KV-1 tank, German soldiers have placed a Nazi flag atop the vehicle's turret to warn friendly aircraft not to attack. The cables lying across the chassis indicate that the tank may have recently been towed to a marshaling area.

(ullstein bild)

None of these tanks, however, could possibly have been as welcome in German use as the medium T-34 and heavy KV-1. Both tanks shocked the Germans when they first entered combat in late 1941, since they were equal to or better than any German tank then in service. Both were armed with 76mm guns compared to the smaller 37mm and 50mm guns most of the Panzers carried. The T-34's armor was well sloped to deflect incoming shot, while the KV-1 boasted armor up to 75mm thick, later increased to 130mm. Only the larger German guns had a chance to stop them. Thus, it was no surprise that they put as many as they could into their own service. There was even discussion among the German high command of directly copying the T-34 and putting it into production. Eventually, it was decided to design a new tank, which resulted in the development of the Mark V Panther, arguably the best medium tank of the war. The features of the T-34 figured prominently in the design of the Panther.

Such priority was given to the acquisition of the T-34 that factories were set up to refurbish captured vehicles. A facility in Riga, a Daimler-Benz factory in Marienfelde, and a plant in Gorlitz all turned out T-34s. When the Germans retook Kharkov in early 1943, the SS seized a factory site exclusively for rebuilding captured T-34 tanks. The vehicles were to be disassembled and rebuilt. Tanks and their parts were numbered to assure compatibility. T-34s turned out there were used to form captured tanks units in the 2nd SS Panzer Division "Das Reich."

As the war in the East turned against Germany, the Wehrmacht was pushed steadily back. While on the defensive, few opportunities occurred for the capture of Soviet tanks such as the improved T-34/85, so named for its long-barreled 85mm cannon. At least three were captured in 1944, though, and used in the fighting in East Prussia by the 252nd Infantry Division and near Warsaw by the 5th SS Panzer Division "Wiking." These were among the last captured Soviet tanks to see service in the German Army.

It would be a gross exaggeration to say that captured tanks used by German forces had any real or lasting impact on the course of the war. At best, they filled gaps and plugged holes in the order of battle as domestic production was insufficient. Still, the use of captured armor by a regime known for its ideology of racial superiority showed a flexibility and capacity for improvisation on the part of the German soldier. □

Christopher Miskimon served in the U.S. Army in both the infantry and artillery. He writes from Denver, Colorado.

By Sherman Gengler

ABOVE: Standing to the far left, deputy Nazi chief Rudolf Hess casts an admiring glance toward Hitler, who delivers the Nazi salute during a review of parading Brownshirts at the Nuremberg Nazi Party rally in 1938. BELOW: Deputy Führer Rudolf Hess took Hitler's dictation of *Mein Kampf* in a prison cell and became a devoted follower of the Nazi leader. (Both: National Archives)

From Hitler's inner circle

The bizarre career of Deputy Führer Rudolf Hess was punctuated by an extraordinary flight to Scotland and a mysterious death decades after WWII.

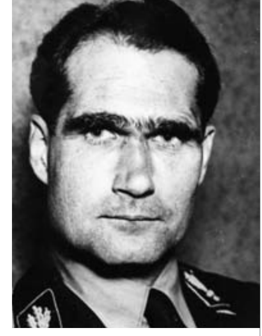
THROUGHOUT THE REIGN OF THE NAZI PARTY IN GERMANY DURING THE 1930s and 1940s, Adolf Hitler's inner circle comprised a diverse group of men from many walks of life. Each had his specific talents and each played his individual role in the success of the party. Hermann Göring, Josef Goebbels, Heinrich Himmler, Reinhard Heydrich, and others fit into Hitler's grand scheme in a particular way.

Among this select group of men, however, Rudolf Hess played, perhaps, the most varied role of all. Rudolf Hess's role in the party engaged him in incredibly diverse activities ranging from participation in the Beer Hall Putsch to taking the dictation of *Mein Kampf* as Adolf Hitler's fellow prisoner, culminating in his secret, unauthorized flight to Scotland on May 10, 1941.

Rudolf Hess was born on April 26, 1894, in Alexandria, Egypt. Relatively little is written about him prior to his union with the Nazi Party in 1920. His father, Fritz, was a wholesale merchant and exporter with whom he reported always having a good relationship. Despite having an admittedly good relationship with his parents, Hess was, in much the same manner as his future idol, Adolf Hitler, an "insecure, moody loner and never stood up to the strict demands of his father." Hess attended a German school in Alexandria and did not move to Germany until he was 12 years old. In addition to this schooling, Hess had a private tutor to supplement his lessons since his father thought the community's German Protestant School was lacking in discipline.

The Hess family lived in a large German community in Alexandria and, being relatively well off, held a respectable position in that community. Later in his life, Hess reminisced that his first memories as a child in Alexandria were of the birth of his brother, Alfred, and of receiving a toy gun carriage drawn by horses.

In 1908, at the age of 12, Hess attended the Evangelisches Paedagogium school in Godesberg am Rhein, Germany. There, he was confirmed in the Protestant church although, as he later admitted, he never attended its services. Five years later, a 17-year-old Hess, traveling once again, enrolled in a Swiss business school, the Ecole Supérieure, at which he attended classes unfailingly even though he was positive that he neither wanted to be a businessman nor to follow in his father's footsteps by inheriting the family business. Regardless of his disdain for business, he spent a year in Switzerland before moving again, this time to Hamburg to serve his apprenticeship in an export house. This would allow for his planned role as the third generation of importer-exporters in the Hess family.



With the outbreak of World War I in 1914, Hess saw an opportunity to escape his future as a businessman. He volunteered and was accepted into the 1st Bavarian Regiment and fought on the Western Front, sustaining the first of what would eventually be three war wounds. During the first year of the war, he was transferred to the Air Corps after being commissioned as a lieutenant. On December 13, 1918, having spent the remainder of his service in the Air Corps, Hess, now 24, was released from duty. He forsook all thoughts of becoming a businessman and entered Munich University. He began a rigorous regime of studying history, eco-

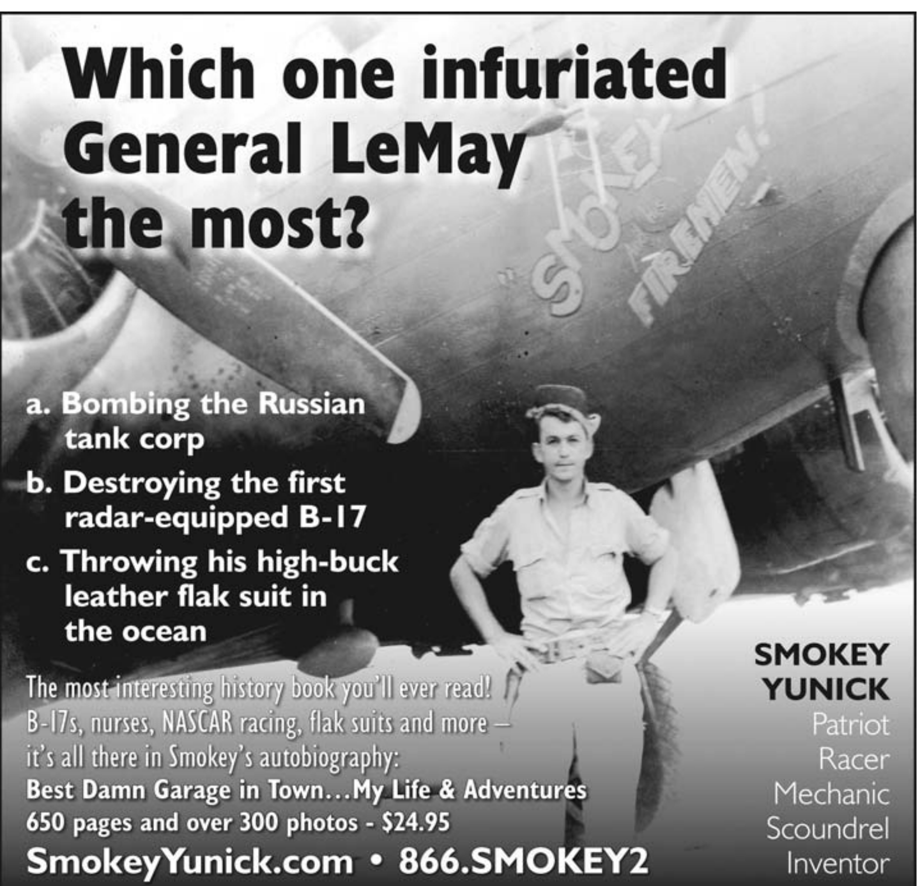
nomics, political science, and geo-politics, subjects that he would later put into heavy use as one of the leaders of the Nazi Party.

It was at Munich University that Hess was sharply influenced by a number of different sources. First was a geo-politics professor named Karl Haushofer. Haushofer ingrained in Hess a somewhat surreal sense of German history, one laced with references to astrology and the supernatural. Hess believed that Germany could be made great once more through the implementation of Haushofer's theories despite national feelings of outrage and injustice following the Treaty of Versailles.

In addition to the political influence of Haushofer, Hess was also greatly affected by the anti-Semitic feelings that were prominent throughout Europe in the early 20th century. Often distributing anti-Semitic pamphlets while attending Munich University, Hess was obviously taken in by commonplace feelings of hatred and distrust for the Jewish population. Hess was also influenced by the Thule Society and its ideas of anti-Semitism and occult mysticism. He had received from his professor ideas of restoring Germany's former glory and political power. Finally, in 1920, Hess found a group with a leader who combined these two ideas into one grandiose message. He joined on the first day of July, becoming the 16th member of the up-and-coming political movement. That group was the Nazi Party, and its leader was Adolf Hitler.

It is really no surprise that an individual such as Rudolf Hess would attach himself to Adolf Hitler and the Nazi Party. Hess, as many accounts state, especially those after 1941, was somewhat neurotic. He found a group that held in common his most treasured ideas and beliefs. Given his mental instability and affinity for the Nazi ideology, he would most likely have become a member even if the group had not been headed by Hitler. Hess was completely captivated by both Hitler's persona and his political and social ambitions. It was not long after Hess had joined the party that this feeling was reciprocated by Hitler. Hess had written a thesis for Munich University answering the question, "How must the man be constituted who will lead Germany back to her old heights?" Hess's answer to this question all but mentioned Adolf Hitler by name. Hitler greatly appreciated the views presented in the essay.

Henceforth, Rudolf Hess would follow Hitler's leadership with unwavering devotion throughout the following two decades. His devotion was such that he brawled with com-



Prior to taking off for a practice flight, Rudolf Hess stands in the cockpit of the Me-110 twin engine fighter he later flew to England during an abortive peace mission. Hess was jailed for the duration of the war, tried and convicted at Nuremberg, and spent the rest of his life behind bars.

(Imperial War Museum)

munists and other political activists who attempted to disrupt party rallies and speeches by Hitler.

Had Hess not been so enthralled by the Nazi Party in 1920, he most likely would have further pursued his education. Continuing on in the tutelage of Haushofer, Hess would have advanced in his schooling and earned his doctorate. Of course, it is impossible to say for sure what would have happened if he had not been taken in by the Nazi Party. It was, after all, Haushofer's teachings that helped him acquire beliefs similar to those of Hitler and his followers.

Despite his active participation in the Nazi Party after 1920, Hess does not really appear in any history books until three years later.

Although near the end of 1922, Hess, a senior at Munich University and a veteran of the army, formed an SA (Brown Shirts) student battalion for the local Munich regiment, it is not until November 8, 1923, that he becomes a notable figure in the story of the Hitler and the Nazis. On that date Hitler and his companions staged the Munich Beer Hall Putsch. Hess was present at this event and participated along with many of the early members of the party. Hess and some storm troopers prevented a number of Bavarian cabinet members from escaping the beer hall along with the crowds of people. That night Hess also participated in the rounding up of hostages to use for negotiating with the police commander the next day.

Following the putsch, all of the Nazi leaders were arrested, with the exception of Hermann Göring and Rudolf Hess, both of whom had fled to Austria. For leading the uprising, Hitler was sentenced to five years in Landsberg

Prison. During the summer of 1924, Hess returned from Austria. He did so voluntarily in order to be sentenced and imprisoned along with his leader. While Hess was serving his 18-month sentence, he made his contribution to what would be one of the most influential works of the era.

In Landsberg Prison, Hitler began to write his book, *Mein Kampf*. Initially, Hitler began dictating his book to Emil Maurice, but upon his arrival at Landsberg, Hess took over the duty of putting the Nazi leader's words to paper. After their release from Landsberg Prison, Hess continued dictation near Berchtesgaden at Haus Wachenfeld and did his best to transform Hitler's ramblings into a manuscript. It seems fitting that someone as steadfastly dedicated to Adolf Hitler and the Nazi Party as Hess would receive the "honor" of assembling such a monumental book as *Mein Kampf*.

When they were released from prison after serving only a few months of their sentences, Hitler and Hess were free to return to their work with the Nazis. By this time, Hess had become Hitler's unofficial personal secretary, transcribing not only *Mein Kampf* but also various pieces of propaganda. On July 20, 1929, Hess was finally given an official position within the party. On that day he was officially named Hitler's personal adjutant, by Heinrich Himmler, leader of the SS. Hess continued in this position until April 21, 1932. He was then given an even higher position. Hitler decreed, "I hereby name to be my deputy, the leader of the central political commission, Party member Rudolf Hess, and give him all the powers of attorney in all questions of decision of the Party leadership to be decided in my name."

As deputy leader of the party, Hess was now one of the most important figures in the Nazi leadership. He essentially had command over all legal issues and was trusted enough by Hitler to use this command at his own discretion. Hess was still, in effect, Hitler's personal secretary, opening and often answering the Führer's mail and acting as a general liaison between Hitler and various other factions of the party. A number of important decisions were left to Hess as well. He was also responsible for much of the routine business concerning party organization and functions.

From April 21, 1932, to May 10, 1941, while Hess held the position of deputy führer, he was heavily involved in a variety of different activities. One such activity was issuing directives on the proper functioning of the party. For instance, it was his duty to warn the party at a 1938 rally to be wary of discussing sensitive party issues with their families because of security concerns. Along with other party members such as Dr. Robert Ley and Martin Bormann, he established a nationwide network of administrative groups to help deal with the vast task of running a nation. These groups had their own interior structures with the leader, or Reichsleiter, of each group reporting directly to Hitler. Hess and Bormann, although formally of higher rank in the party, often acted more as couriers or liaisons between the Reichsleiters and Hitler than as superior officers.

LEFT: A gaunt Rudolf Hess sits in the courtroom at Nuremberg in 1946, surrounded by former Nazis on trial for war crimes. BELOW: While incarcerated in Landsberg Prison, Hitler poses with Hess, his trusted secretary, and three other Nazis. Hitler's time in prison was something less than oppressive. The guards were Nazi sympathizers and allowed him to have numerous visitors and flowers in his cell. (Both: National Archives)

Hess's position as deputy führer also required him to keep tabs on the enrollment of new recruits into the party. To Hess, "the 'basis of spontaneity as one of the most valuable and important symbols of the movement' was to 'be preserved completely.'" This meant that Hess did not want anyone to be pressured into joining the party. He felt that the inner meaning of a person's recruitment was somewhat lessened if that person joined against his will. Hess also reinforced the party's beliefs on racial purity in its recruitment. He repeatedly stressed that those applicants who had a spouse who "was not free of Jewish or colored racial mixture" or those with "half-breed" children were to immediately be refused admission into the party. These decrees show just how important the institutions of Nazism were to Hess.

Hess's job description allowed him to make decisions without Hitler's direct counsel. A prime example of this is the command sent out directly following the events of Kristallnacht, or the Night of Broken Glass, on November 9, 1938. This command from Hess's office forbade the burning of Jewish businesses, and the order disclaimed any responsibility by the party for the riots. Once the rest of the world realized what was happening in Germany, Hess took the initiative and made an attempt to cover up the truth. By denying responsibility for the pogrom and appearing as though they were attempting to alleviate the problem, Nazi officials, including Hess, averted a great deal of scrutiny from other nations such as Britain and the United States.

All of Hess's achievements and responsibilities aside, though, he was really not known on a worldwide level until 1941. On the night of

Continued on page 75

By Robert F. Dorr

What happened to fighter pilot Grant Stout?

The P-47 Thunderbolt pilot was shot down over Germany. His parachute opened. They captured him. His remains were returned after the war. But ...

IT WAS LOUD. IT WAS VIOLENT. GUNFIRE RIPPED INTO 1ST LT. GRANT G. STOUT'S Republic P-47D Thunderbolt fighter high over Dortmund, Germany, near midday on March 19, 1945, and the aircraft trembled and shook. Other pilots saw Stout's P-47 begin shedding pieces.

Stout's mission leader, Major Arlo C. Henry, Jr., later said the Thunderbolt was hit in the engine. According to Henry, Stout had been on his way home from a dive-bombing mission when he spotted a German train, rolled over, and went down to strafe it. A squadron report differed slightly from Henry's recollection, saying that Stout was strafing a truck. Many decades later, a researcher would claim that Stout's target was neither a train nor a truck but something far more macabre. Said Henry, "Stout's parachute was seen to open and land safely."

Because Stout was a big, husky guy who seemed cramped even in the famously roomy cockpit of a P-47, his buddy, 1st Lt. Allen V. Mundt, had pleaded with him to exchange his standard 24-foot parachute for a larger, 28-foot model that was available only upon special request by the supply sergeant. Stout had apparently requested the larger chute but had not yet gotten it.

Also in the air with Stout, Henry, and Mundt was 1st Lt. Donald E. Kark, who saw Stout's Thunderbolt get hit, but unlike Henry and Mundt, did not observe the bailout. Kark did see the chute on the ground a few minutes later. He remembers thinking that Stout was now a prisoner of war. In fact, Stout was in the final minutes of his life, a situation he almost appeared to have foreseen.

ABOVE: Not yet a second lieutenant or a pilot, student flier Grant Stout poses with the Stearman PT-17 Kaydet primary trainer that was the initial aerial classroom for so many. OPPOSITE: Now overseas, Stout is a first lieutenant wearing his wings.
(Both photos courtesy of Lyla K. Stout)

Before the mission during which he hit the silk over Germany, Stout allowed a buddy to take a snapshot of him standing in front of a P-47, "map in hand, poop in pocket, and raring to go," as he wrote to his sister Lyla. "The boys gave me that old 'song' about having your picture taken before a mission," wrote Stout, hinting that posing for a photo was tantamount to inviting a jinx. "I needed to go out and explode that superstition."

Almost two years after the war ended, the U.S. War Department informed Stout's family that the P-47 pilot's remains had been recovered from an isolated grave near Dortmund. Stout had been reburied, the Pentagon told his family, at the U.S. military cemetery in Nouville-sur-Condroge, near Liege, Belgium. In 1949, his remains were disinterred and moved to his home in Pike, New York. His mother was not convinced it was her son's body. Someone told members of the family that Stout had been mortally injured in the bailout. The family did not believe that could happen. And if a pilot bailed out successfully, he was supposed to be accorded humane treatment as a prisoner of war.

Grant's mother, his sister, and others in the family all wondered: What happened to Grant Stout?

"We learned the truth only in 1997," said Stout's sister, Lyla K. Stout, 78, of Rochester, New York, referring to the shocking revelation that Germans on the ground had murdered Stout. She was wrong. Half a century after the war, she had learned only part of the truth.

Stout's story is the saga of a citizen-soldier—in his sister's words, "a young farm boy who wanted to fly and who ended up doing exactly what he wanted to do." It is also the story of a big, burly warplane that was built in greater numbers than any other fighter in the United States and was as tough as a tank.

Grant Stout was born in 1922 in Pike. His parents owned a 181-acre farm that harvested potatoes and grain and had a milk dairy. Following high school graduation in 1941, he worked in a munitions plant where he earned money for private flying lessons. "Our mother was not aware of this until he flew over the farm and waved to her," Stout's sister recalled. "It was a thrill for both of them, although of some concern to our mother."

Stout was a strapping, athletic figure. A member of Army Air Forces' flying class 43-J (along with 1st Lt. Donald E. Kark, who would later be in the air with Stout over Dortmund in the final minutes of Stout's life), Stout was one of thousands of AAF aviation cadets who underwent primary training in the Stearman PT-17, basic training in the Vultee BT-13 Valiant (or "Vibrator," the men called it), and advanced training in the North American AT-6 Texan. After seven hours of instruction, he made his first solo flight in the PT-17 at Avon Park, Florida, on May 15, 1943. "I was the second in our group of 200 men to solo," he wrote home. In one of several pessimistic comments that seem prescient when viewed later, he wrote of how eagerly he wanted to succeed as a pilot, but, "There will be a lot of hard work and ... the 'law of averages' is against me."

While in basic flight training at Gunter Field, Florida, Stout wrote home with unconcealed enthusiasm about a new fighter he had seen. "Last Saturday afternoon we had a P-47 Thunderbolt show," he wrote. "They brought four of them over from a nearby field and they showed off to us, doing loops and other acrobatics in a very tight formation. Our instructors were all sore because the big shots made us take time off to watch them."

Stout's biggest thrill, simply, was becoming a pilot of a P-47 Thunderbolt, an aircraft that evoked fierce loyalty from pilots. It did not happen immediately.

From Spence Field, Moultrie, Georgia, still in training, Stout wrote home on October 22, 1943, that he had now accumulated six hours in the P-40F Warhawk. On November 3, he sent a telegram to his parents with the happy news that he'd pinned on pilot wings and second lieutenant's bars. Soon afterward, at Richmond, Virginia—finally—he was introduced to the P-47 Thunderbolt. He wrote home, "Imagine landing at 130 miles per hour!" A few days later, he wrote, "This Thunderbolt is more like a rocket ship than an airplane. You have no idea how powerful those 18 cylinders are until you get hold of the throttle and then she really goes places."

Not for nothing, the Farmingdale, New York, manufacturer of the Thunderbolt was called the "Republic Iron Works" and had a reputation for building fighters that were big, roomy, and robust.

The typical P-47D flown on the European continent by Stout and other pilots had a 2,535-horsepower Pratt & Whitney R-2800-59W Double Wasp 18-cylinder, twin-row air-cooled radial engine; a 17,500-pound takeoff weight; and eight .50-caliber (12.7mm) Browning M3 machine guns packing 250 rounds each.

P-47s rolled out of American factories in greater numbers than any other U.S. fighter, ever. The total of 15,683 P-47s compares to 15,486 P-51s, 13,143 P-40 Warhawks, and 10,037 P-38 Lightnings. But while the Thunderbolt was plentiful, P-47 pilots became accustomed to being slighted. In an appalling gaffe, the U.S. National Air and Space Museum did not have a P-47 on permanent display until 2003 when the museum opened its Udvar-Hazy Annex at Dulles Airport near Washington, D.C.

On a museum floor, clean and silvery and surrounded by other aircraft, the "Jug"—as the Thunderbolt was nicknamed for its portly shape—might look like a high flyer. But Grant Stout and his buddies fought their war down in the treetops, where they came face to face with the German foe. It was a dirty war, fought eyeball to eyeball, and it saw its share of grit, gristle, and blood. Consider, for example, the following citation awarded to P-47 pilots for destroying a column of German vehicles attempting to escape advancing Allied forces near Chateauroux, France:

"Thirty-six P-47's ... raced south of the Loire River to find the road from Chateauroux to Issoudon clogged with military transport, horse-drawn vehicles, horse-drawn artillery, armored vehicles and personnel. Attacking this [German] concentration, at minimum altitude, in spite of accurate ground fire, the ... pilots ... made pass after pass until their bombs, rockets, and ammunition were expended. The road was blocked for 15 miles with personnel casualties, wrecked and burning military transport. More than 300 enemy military vehicles were destroyed in this attack alone."

The citation continues: "The group returned to home base, and after being refueled and rearmed in minimum time, returned to the scene of the action. Before the enemy could reorganize and extract the remnants of his column, a further 187 vehicles, including 25 ammunition carriers, were attacked and

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destroyed. In spite of intermittent rain and the hazard of landing at night on a slick tar paper runway....”

Left out of the citation is the fact that Thunderbolts frequently strafed horse-drawn supply columns, leaving behind tangled, bloody carcasses. One of Grant Stout's fellow P-47 pilots remembered, “The horses were not our enemy,

First Lieutenant Grant G. Stout poses at a 365th Fighter Group base in Europe in late 1944 or early 1945. “Map in hand, poop in pocket, and raring to go,” he wrote on the back of the original snapshot.

(Courtesy of Lyla K. Stout)

but our assignment was to prevent those columns from harming our troops.” The gruesome sight sometimes made pilots physically ill.

P-51 Mustang pilots on high-altitude escort missions may have found moments to savor the joy of flying that had prompted most to join the air force. But for Grant Stout and other pilots in the 365th Fighter Group, the “Hell Hawks,” the job meant living in infantry-like conditions at snow-covered, mud airstrips on the Continent and flying low-level strafing and bombing runs—“not clean, not comfortable, and certainly not glamorous,” said another 365th pilot, “but necessary....” In Stout's outfit, the 365th Group's 387th Fighter Squadron, Fighter Group “Hell Hawks,” one P-47 returned to its European base with body parts from a German soldier embedded in its engine cowling. Another landed safely riddled with 138 holes from bullets and shrapnel.

Stout almost didn't survive long enough for his 1945 rendezvous with destiny in Germany. When his fighter group came ashore after the Normandy invasion, Stout was observed to retain his usual sense of humor—he had a pet duck named Zeke—but he also spoke, occasionally, as if something bad lay ahead.

Shortly after D-Day, Stout and his buddies began carrying out strafing runs that brought them low enough to see the upturned faces of Wehrmacht soldiers. Major Arlo C. Henry, a flight commander, wrote to Stout's parents of their son's D-Day exploits: Grant “shot up so many enemy supply vehicles that he had only one [.50-caliber] gun firing when he spotted four German soldiers firing at him … He got three of them and the last one was running along a wall, trying to make the corner. [Stout's gun camera] film showed the bullets clipping the wall about two feet above the German's head as he ran.”

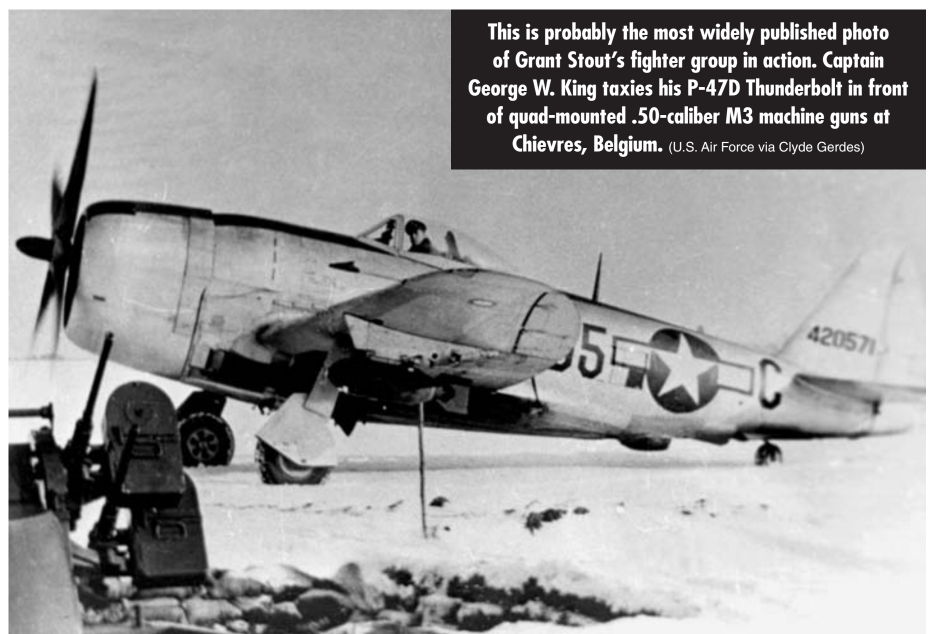
On an August 8, 1944, mission led by Lt. Col. Don Hillman, the “Hell Hawks” were attacking their assigned targets of ammunition bunkers at Pre en Pait, France, where all bombs were dropped, but no secondary explosions were seen, making it doubtful that the ammunition bunkers were destroyed. The pilots then went on a strafing attack in the area and destroyed four trucks in two attacks near Putganges. During the attack on the trucks, Stout's Thunderbolt was hit by flak, and he personally was hit. He was able to fly his plane back to Fontenay-sur-Mer where he landed. He had to bring the P-47 to a halt without working brakes, and stepped out of the fighter with a serious laceration on his foot. Because of the wound, Stout was briefly assigned a half-track and a driver to enable him to act as a forward ground observer; eventually he went back to flying.

He wrote home about seeing a German Messerschmitt Me- 262 jet fighter and admiring it:

“The day Grant was shot down was bright and sunny,” 1st Lt. Allen V. Mundt later wrote. “It was a morning mission for the purpose of attacking ground transport of all sorts. There were a lot of trains out that day. They proved very vulnerable up to the time Grant and I saw this last one just before we regrouped to go home. He didn't know until it was too late that the train was heavily armed with flak guns. I was far enough behind on the initial run to be able to pull up but Grant's plane flew right through a cloud of flak. He pulled up then too and seemed to have good control for a minute, but then the ship rolled over and went down. I saw his chute open a split second after the ship crashed.” Mundt learned nothing more about Stout's fate until decades after the war.

After the war, Stout's remains were repatriated, but family members were told nothing of his cause of death.

Even while reeling under bombing and strafing attacks, most Germans treated downed



This is probably the most widely published photo of Grant Stout's fighter group in action. Captain George W. King taxies his P-47D Thunderbolt in front of quad-mounted .50-caliber M3 machine guns at Chievres, Belgium. (U.S. Air Force via Clyde Gerdes)

Allied pilots with respect and humanity. Most simply became prisoners of war and lived in reasonable comfort until the end of hostilities. On the very rare occasions when Germans violated the law of war by killing a downed pilot, the perpetrators were usually civilians rather than uniformed members of the Wehrmacht or Luftwaffe.

In Stout's case, it was different. In the 1990s, a Canadian doctor, Robert Reid of London, Ontario, was researching a related topic when he learned about one of hundreds of low-level war crimes trials held by U.S. authorities after the war. Reid uncovered documents from a U.S. tribunal held in Dachau in July 1947. Four Germans were convicted and sentenced, one to life imprisonment.

An official summary of the U.S. war crimes trial says that the commander of the German antiaircraft battery at Brackel, on the outskirts of Dortmund, placed the downed P-47 pilot in front of townspeople and "incited the crowd to beat and kill the flyer." According to the summary, four Germans, led by 1st Sgt. Georg Mayer, used clubs, stones, and a shovel to brutally attack the P-47 pilot. The summary says Mayer shot Stout with a pistol. Mayer was sentenced to life imprisonment for the killing and is thought to have died while imprisoned by U.S. occupation forces.

It was unusual for a German military member to perform such an act, but this was the "truth" Stout's sister learned in 1997. Later, she said, "We just want to be sure that Grant's service to his country is remembered."

If the story ended there, it would be a tragedy. Stout, after all, deserved to be captured, treated as a prisoner, and released at war's end. But the tragic tale of the strapping P-47 pilot does not end there.

Canadian researcher Reid, who visited Dortmund and has worked in collaboration with a German researcher, believes the war crimes trial convicted the wrong culprits. Reid and the German researcher concluded that civilians, not Luftwaffe antiaircraft artillerymen, killed Stout and that the murder weapon was a shovel, not a pistol. Finally, while all Americans who participated in the mission say Stout was strafing a train, the two researchers say American fighter planes strafed civilians that day, including a funeral procession for a small child. There is no way to be certain after all this time, and the proposition is questionable at best, but it suggests that there may never be a wholly satisfactory answer to the question: What happened to Grant Stout?

No matter what the Thunderbolts were firing at, and no matter how much people on the ground suffered, international law requires captors to protect a downed airman who is unarmed and has surrendered. On that day, the law and the system failed Grant Stout.

Along with Army soldier Theodore Hunt, Stout is one of only two residents of Pike, New York, to lose his life in World War II. Today, the Hunt-Stout Post of the American Legion in Castile, New York, near Pike, is named for the two men. □

Robert F. Dorr is an Air Force veteran, a retired U.S. diplomat, and author of the book Air Force One, *a look at presidential aircraft and air travel. Don Hillman, Donald E. Kark, Allen V. Mundt, Lyla Stout, and Robert Reid were interviewed for this article.*

Sacrificed for a secret?

The British Prosper spy network was destroyed by the Germans in France. The British themselves may have facilitated the tragedy to conceal plans for the D-Day invasion.

ON JUNE 6, 1944, HUNDREDS OF THOUSANDS OF ALLIED TROOPS, PLANES, AND ships departed from their bases in England bound for the shores of France in what was to be the greatest invasion of all time. Plans for the massive operation had begun months before in both London and Washington, D.C. A major part of the planning rested on an elaborate, multifaceted deception operation to be launched to fool the Germans as to where the actual invasion was to take place.

Allied intelligence officials convinced the Germans that the invasion was to take place at the Pas de Calais, about 150 miles northeast of Normandy, the actual invasion location. In 1943, one year prior to D-Day, the British intelligence services initiated a complex deception operation centered in France designed to fool the Germans into believing the invasion would take place in the spring and summer, centered in the northwest of France. The code name for the men and women who would play their deceptive game was "Prosper." By the time the war ended, however, the entire Prosper network had been killed or captured, either by design or happenstance.

The originator of the Prosper mission was the super-secret British intelligence unit called the Special Operations Executive, or SOE. The SOE's primary mission was to aid the resistance fighters in occupied Europe by any means possible, including assassination, guerrilla operations, and attacks on German military and industrial targets. The SOE was given its mandate by Winston Churchill, who issued marching orders to "set Europe ablaze." This they surely did. A special division of British intelligence, called F-Section, or

French Resistance fighters discuss plans after receiving a drop of weapons from the British. F-Section of the British SOE was mandated to aid resistance groups across France in an effort to mislead the Germans. (National Archives)

French Section, strictly devoted to aiding the resistance groups, was set up. As the war progressed, over 80 independent resistance groups were established in France, from the hills of the Pyrenees to the streets of Paris and to Hitler's Atlantic Wall. Prosper, led by Francis Suttill, was one of these.

Francis Suttill was of Anglo-French origin, born in Lille, France, in 1910. A lawyer before the war, he had served in the East Surrey Regiment of the British Army. When the war started, he was posted to F-Section and was soon put in charge of the nascent Prosper network, which had wide tentacles across France.

Suttill was given only seven months of training in the ways of secret warfare and sent into the field. His main task was to set up a clandestine resistance organization in northern, southern, and eastern France, including the capital, Paris, which was in German hands. His cover was that of a man named Francois Despree, who was in the agricultural produce business. His new cover identified him as born in Lille in 1910 of French and Belgian parents. Along with his new personality, F-Section gave him its own secret code, Prosper, named after a 15th-century author.

F-Section's main training base for these new agents was at Gibraltar Farm, Tempsford, in Buckinghamshire, approximately 40 miles outside London. On October 1, 1942, Suttill arrived at the Manston air base for his covert flight to France. Accompanying him was Maurice Buckmaster, the commander of F-Section. Buckmaster was there to see off his principal agent. Buckmaster had worked hard to set up F-Section's logistics and method of operation, which included various airfields in England where skilled pilots and ground controllers would see to it that agents were secretly flown into and out of France. These secret RAF flights also carried mail to their agents in France.

One of the most talented of these ground controllers was a French military officer named Henri Dericourt. Dericourt's main job in the Prosper scheme was as the controller of all secret air traffic into Paris and the surrounding areas. As time went on, Dericourt would play a controversial role in the history of the Prosper network.

On that dark night in October 1942, Suttill was dropped by parachute into German-occupied France, landing near the town of Vendome, about 110 miles from Paris. Over time, he was to recruit a large number of men and women who would make up the nucleus of his network. The code names given to his agents were Physician, Donkeyman, Bricklayer, Chestnut, Priest, Cinema, and Orator. During the next year, Suttill was able to recruit over 10,000 covert agents throughout France. These daring individuals ran secret mail lines, espionage operations, medical clinics, and wireless operations back to England.

The way in which Dericourt came to the attention of Buckmaster's F-Section is fraught with controversy. Most historians say that Dericourt was introduced by Air Commodore Archibald Boyle, who was head of intelligence at the Air Ministry. Boyle had heard of Dericourt from Claude Dansey, a pariah among many people in the British intelligence services for his ruthless way of doing business. Dansey was vice chief of the British SIS (Secret Intelligence Service) during the war. He controlled thousands of spies in Europe and was head of the shadowy "Z" operation, which ran without the knowledge of the SIS.

No matter how Dericourt came to the attention of F-Section, his covert role in the organization was to penetrate the German Sicherheitsdienst (counterespionage) headquarters in Paris. What was not known to many top members of British intelligence was that Dericourt had a clandestine relationship with Hans Boemelburg, the chief of German counterespionage.

On the night of January 22-23, 1943, Dericourt parachuted into France. He arrived in Marseille where he picked up his wife. From there, they traveled to Paris and took a room in the Hotel Bristol, which was the home away from home for many SD agents. Curiously, Dericourt's presence in the hotbed of SD activity went undetected, and he was not apprehended while the couple stayed at the hotel. The lack of German action against a well-known leader of British covert operations poses an obvious question. Why did the Germans allow a known British agent to remain safely ensconced in the middle of their own operation? Agent reports after the war said that Dericourt did indeed meet with Hans Boemelburg while the latter was in Paris and that he divulged his real mission to him. Dericourt also gave up the locations of 14 clandestine airfields from which airdrops into occupied France originated.

While Dericourt made his secret arrangements for the landings of SOE F-Section agents, preparations for the insertion of other members of the Prosper network began. One of the first agents to be parachuted into France was Jack Agazarian, who worked for the SOE. He arrived in Paris in December 1942, and his wife, Francine, soon joined him. He began

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working with Henri Dericourt on organizing secret airfields on which RAF pilots were to land on their clandestine missions. Over time, Agazarian began to question Dericourt's loyalty, and he reluctantly made London aware of his misgivings.

Suttill worked closely with Agazarian, and through information gleaned from his other agents in Paris, he began to believe that his friend's identity was being compromised. On June 16, 1943, Agazarian returned to London for a progress report on Prosper's operations on Paris. He met with Maurice Buckmaster and Nicholas Bodington, a former Reuters newsman who was assigned to Buckmaster's staff during the war. In their meetings, both Bodington and Buckmaster refused to take Agazarian's warnings seriously, despite the fact that Bodington would write after the war concerning Dericourt's possible ties to the Germans, "We know he is in contact with the Germans and also how & why."

A key member of the Prosper network, Henri Dericourt's role was to penetrate German Sicherheitdienst headquarters in France. The Germans were aware of his presence, but did nothing, leading the British to suspect Dericourt as a traitor.
(National Archives)

On July 22, 1943, both Bodington and Agazarian returned to France to meet with Suttill and his agents. A meeting was arranged with another member of the Prosper network, Flight Lieutenant Gilbert Norman, code named Archambault, a wireless operator, at his address near the Rue de Rome. However, only Agazarian met with Norman. As the meeting was progressing, German police broke down the door and arrested both Norman and Agazarian. Agazarian was sent to the Fresnes prison, where he was tortured over a period of six months. He was later sent to the Flossenburg concentration camp, where he was executed on March 29, 1945.

Another casualty in Suttill's group was a woman named Andree Borrel. Borrel was of French decent and worked for the SOE. In her early 20s, Borrel was in France working in a hospital. She later aided downed Allied airmen in crossing the Spanish border and reaching safety in England. She joined F-Section in May 1942. She was transported to France for the first time aboard a Whitley bomber on the night of September 24, 1942. Joining her on the mission was Lise' de Baissac, code named Odile, who worked in the Poiters section of France. Both Lise' and her brother Claude, also an agent, were safely returned to London in August 1943.

Unknown to Borrel, the Germans were watching her every move. She, too, was arrested. In May 1944, Borrel, along with other women members of the resistance—Odette Sansom, Veral Leigh, Diana Rowden, Yolande Marie Beekman, Zoe Damerment, and Eliane Brown-Bartoli Plewman—were taken to the women's prison at Karlsruhe. Borrel was later executed in a prison in France. Of the captured women, only Odette Sansom survived the war.

Another casualty of the Prosper deception was Noor Inayat Khan. She was of Indain heritage, a noted children's writer, and came from a heralded Muslim background. She fled France when the Germans took over that country and arrived in England with her family in May 1940. She subsequently joined the SOE and was given the code name Madeleine. On June 16, 1943, she was flown with two other female SOE agents to France to join the Prosper organization. She was a wireless operator whose job was to send and receive secret messages to and from London. She aided in the release of 30 downed airmen and helped them return to safety. However, the Gestapo soon learned of Khan's work, and she was arrested in October 1943. The Germans were able to break her codes and sent bogus information back to London. She, along with the other female agents, was sent to the feared Dachau

concentration camp. All of them, including Noor Inayat Khan, were executed in September 1944. The deaths of Khan and the other SOE women were only a part of the destruction and betrayal of the Prosper network.

Noor Inayat Khan joined the Prosper network in 1943 as a wireless operator. She was arrested by the Gestapo, sent to Dachau, and later executed. (National Archives)

During a botched operation in France that may have been caused by an informer in their ranks, a number of Prosper's agents were rounded up. Among them were Yvonne Rudelatt, Frank Pickersgill, and John Mcalister. All three were captured by the SS. Rudelatt died at the Belsen concentration camp.

Prior to the downfall of his resistance movement, Suttill himself returned to London for debriefings. In his memoirs, Maurice Buckmaster said that Suttill met with Winston Churchill, who told him that the Allies were planning an invasion of Europe in 1943. Others in the Prosper network said that Suttill had in turn told them that the invasion was planned for 1943.

On June 23, 1944, Suttill was arrested by German authorities outside his Paris hideout. He was severely tortured by the Gestapo and was executed on March 21, 1945.

Who betrayed Suttill and the Prosper network? M.R.D. Foot, the official historian of the SOE in France, charges that Claude Dansey was responsible for the betrayal of Suttill. He said, "It was widely believed in France that Suttill's circuit was deliberately betrayed by the British to the Germans even directly by wireless to the Avenue Foch [German military headquarters in Paris]."

Conflicting beliefs as to who compromised the group were fueled after the war. Upon his capture, Suttill was interrogated by H.J. Kieffer, the chief of the SD's counterespionage service in Paris. His harsh questioning lasted almost three days without rest or food. Kieffer questioned Suttill about when and where the invasion of Europe would take place, but Suttill did not break.

Kieffer, however, had better luck with Gilbert Norman. Under intense questioning, Norman gave up several of Prosper's most important secrets, including the locations of the F-Section airfields in France used by Prosper's organization and possibly the names of his fellow agents.

Kieffer then arranged a pact with both Suttill and Norman in which he would, in return for their cooperation, spare the lives of any of their fellow Prosper members who would be captured in the future. In the final analysis, the Germans, as far as both Norman and Suttill were concerned, broke their promises, and both men were executed.

As far as Dericourt was concerned, no punitive action was taken against him. In fact, Bodington traveled secretly to France to meet with Dericourt, despite the 10,000 pounds sterling price placed on his head by the Germans. To his credit, Dericourt did not reveal Bodington's whereabouts to Kieffer, and Bodington eventually returned to Britain.

So, who betrayed Prosper and why? Did the British deliberately and needlessly sacrifice dozens of their prime agents in such a manner in order to obscure from the Germans the real time and place of the D-Day invasion? To take the mystery one step further, could both Dericourt and Bodington have been double agents, working for the British and the Germans?

Dericourt was ordered back to London in February 1944 and faced hostile interrogation concerning his knowledge of the Prosper affair. That same month, a court of investigation was convened to look into all the facts concerning Dericourt and his relationship with Suttill. The investigation was run by Air Commander Archibald Boyle of the SOE and H.N. Sporborg, the SOE vice chief of staff. Dericourt admitted to his association with the SD and said he pretended to join them out of necessity. Despite his obvious Nazi ties, no punitive action was taken against him.

In 1946, Dericourt was place into custody at a British airport for carrying platinum, gold, and about 1,400 pounds sterling on his person. He was arraigned in a British court, found guilty, fined, and set free. At his hearing, the defense said he was carrying the money on behalf of the "British intelligence service." In the end, the treachery in the death of Major Francis Suttill and the end of his Prosper network remains among the unsolved mysteries of World War II. □

Peter Kross is the author of Spies, Traitors and Moles: An Espionage and Intelligence Quiz Book *and* The Encyclopedia of World War II Spies.

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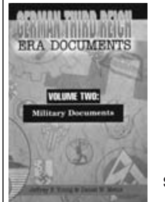
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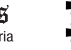
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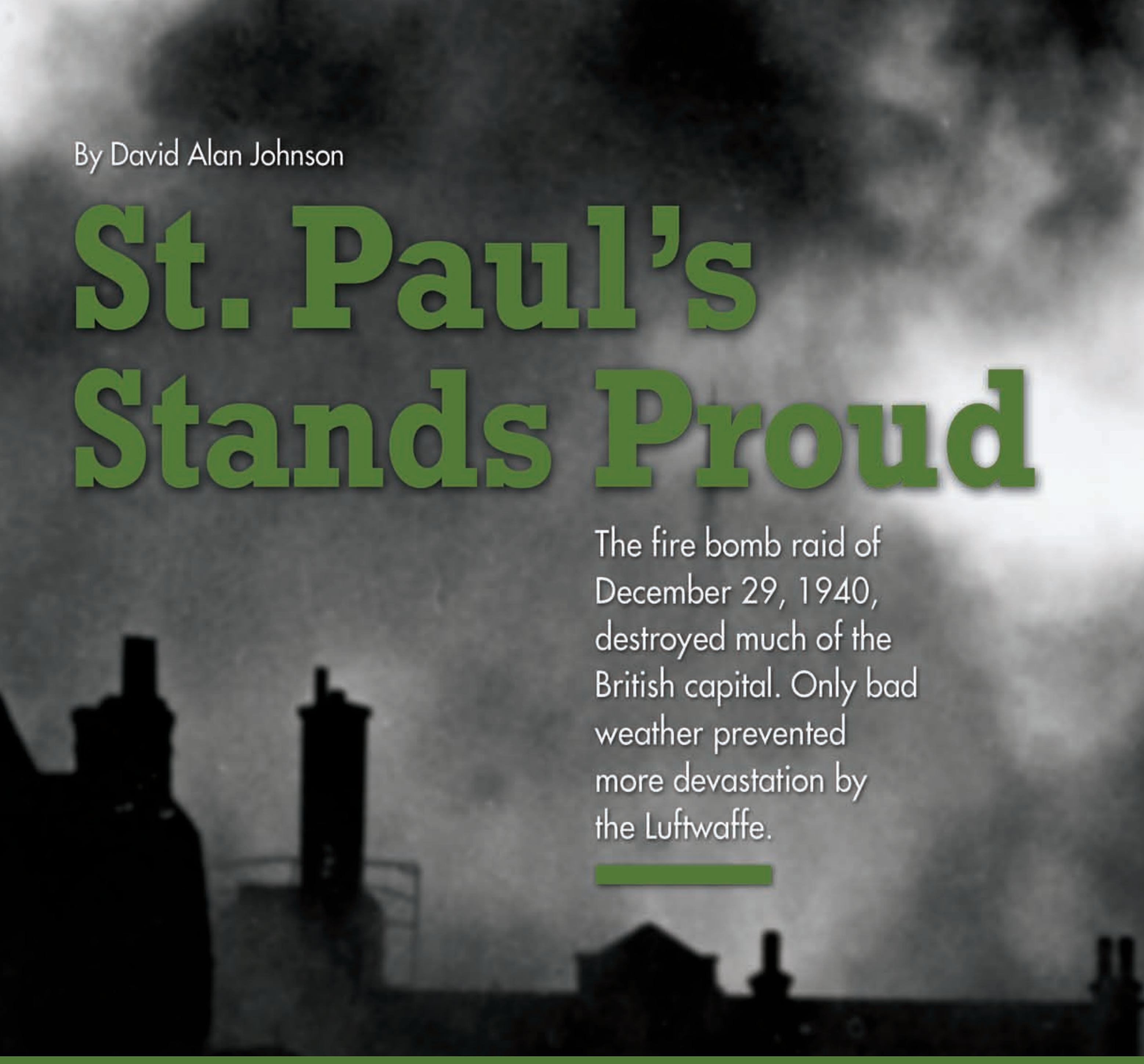


By David Alan Johnson

St. Paul's Stands Proud

The fire bomb raid of December 29, 1940, destroyed much of the British capital. Only bad weather prevented more devastation by the Luftwaffe.

At St. Paul's Cathedral, the rooftop lookout telephoned the cathedral control center at 6 PM to report that air raid sirens were sounding off to the southwest. George Garwood, a member of St. Paul's watch, received the call and told the patrol he would be right with him. Before Garwood could put on his axe belt and helmet, the lookout phoned again to say that he could see incendiary bombs bursting in Southwark, on the other side of the River Thames. By the time Garwood reached the roof, the local sirens were sounding and fire bombs were falling on the cathedral itself. The German bombers had arrived overhead with much less warning than during any previous raid.

This was the third air raid in a week, which was actually much lighter than the bombing had been in September and October. After the Blitz had begun on the night of September 7, 1940, the Luftwaffe bombed London every night for 57 nights. But because of the weather, the German bombers had not been as aggressive in recent weeks. The raid of the previous Sunday, December 22, 1940, was only a light "nuisance" raid, and had not even made the front page of most daily newspapers.

Residents of London tried their best to be blasé about the raids; after three and a half months, they were more resigned to the nighttime bombings than bored by them. Had they known what Adolf Hitler had in store for them on this particular night, Sunday, December 29, they would have been a great deal more anxious.

The dome of St. Paul's Cathedral in London looms against the surreal glow of fires ignited during a Luftwaffe bombing raid. The cathedral itself was in great peril during the Germans' Blitz against the British capital city in 1940.

(The Art Archive/Culver Pictures)

Tonight's raid had been ordered by Hitler himself, in retaliation for an RAF bombing attack on Berlin on December 20. Since then, fog and rain had shut down the Luftwaffe's bases in northern France, which prevented a maximum effort against London. Now, it looked as though the weather would clear long enough to give the Germans their opportunity.

The commander of Air Fleet Three, Field Marshal Hugo Sperrle, was not very enthusiastic about this attack, in spite of Hitler's directive. The rain and overcast appeared to be breaking up, but the weather reports were predicting that a storm front would close in on the French airfields before morning, which would interfere with Sperrle's planned attack. The clouds that covered France would also put London under heavy cloud cover, making accurate bombing a problem.

Weather problems or not, Sperrle had his orders. The planning session at his suite in the Hotel Luxembourg, his headquarters in Paris, did not last any longer than usual. As it was outlined, the Sunday night attack would be launched in two waves. The first wave would be carried out by about 140 bombers, which would carry mainly fire bombs. The small incendiaries would set hundred of fires within the target area, creating a brightly lit aiming point for the second attack. The second wave would be carried out by about the same number of planes, but these would drop loads of 550-pound high explosive bombs. The object was to destroy

anything that had not already been burned down by the first wave. Close to 300 sorties would be flown, making this the heaviest attack against London in well over a month.

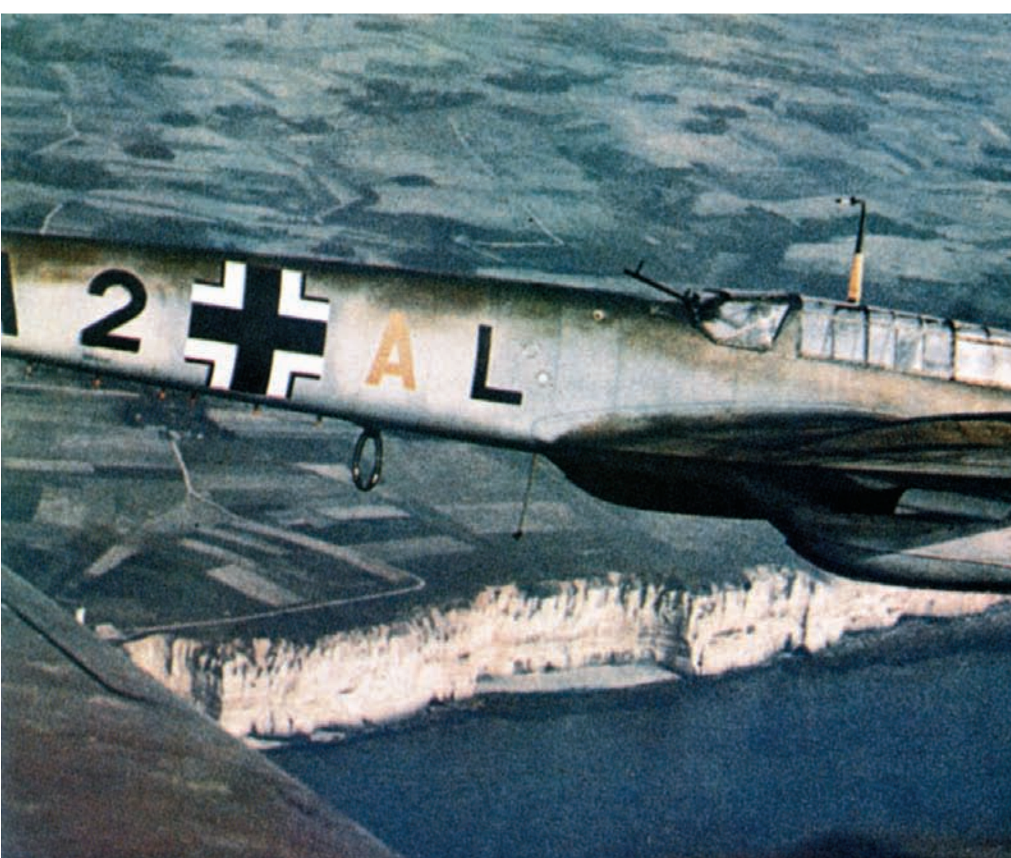
The fire blitz was not a new tactic. The foot-long incendiary bombs had been used many times, but always mixed with loads of high explosives. The first time they had been used exclusively was on December 22, exactly one week before, against Manchester. Thousands of the small but effective incendiaries had burned out entire sections of the city in only a few hours. On Monday morning, people on their way to work watched firemen as they tried to bring hundreds of fires under control.

Because the fire bombs had worked so well against Manchester, Sperrle decided to use the same tactic against London. The target he chose for the attack was the City of London, the ancient "square mile" that surrounds St. Paul's Cathedral. The City district was probably best known for its banks and the Royal Exchange, along with picturesque churches and St. Paul's itself, built by the famed architect Sir Christopher Wren. The City also had its share of military targets, all rated top priority by the Luftwaffe. The Wood Street Telephone Exchange and the London Telephone Service, with its overseas lines, and the General Post Office telephone and telegraph services were important enough to rate pinpoint attacks as separate targets. The district's six railway stations had also been marked by the Luftwaffe, along with its bridges across the Thames. All of these were within walking distance of each other.

Another factor that made the City such an inviting target was that it was so vulnerable to fire—the London Fire Brigade had labeled it a fire zone years before. The district was filled with old, flat-roofed buildings that were packed with books, textiles, and other flammable items. Paternoster Square, just to the north of St. Paul's, was the heart of the bookselling and publishing industry; over five million volumes were stored within that confined area. One London fireman called these old places "torches looking for a light." A few well-placed fires could spread beyond control before the fire brigade could do anything about them.

Also, the 29th was a Sunday, which meant that few people would be on hand to deal with the fires while they were still small and easy to extinguish. If the weather held, this raid might be the most destructive attack on London since the Blitz began.

In spite of the cloud cover over London, Field Marshal Sperrle could be certain that one of his units would find and bomb the target. The attack would be led by Kampf Gruppe (Bomb Wing) 100, an elite pathfinder unit staffed entirely by handpicked pilots and crews. Nicknamed the "Fire Raisers," KG 100 was famous throughout the Luftwaffe for having the very best pilots and crews and was commanded by the veteran pilot Hauptmann (Captain) Friedrich Aschenbrenner. Its job was to drop clusters of incendiary bombs on targets at the beginning of a raid, creating a brilliant bull's eye for the rest of Air Fleet Three. The City of London, with its jumble of old buildings, was tailor made for them.



Even the unit's aircraft were unique. The Heinkel He-111 bombers flown by KG 100 were equipped with the so-called "X-apparatus," an electronic device that led the bombers to their assigned target even on the darkest or cloudiest of nights. The apparatus picked up a high-frequency radio beam, which was transmitted by the Luftwaffe Signal Corps from a station on the Normandy coast. The beam was aimed to pass directly over the assigned target. The bombers of KG 100 simply followed the beam to the target.

This primary beam was intersected by a second radio beam, which was broadcast from a station farther down the coast, crossing the "X." When the aircraft crossed the second beam, the bomb aimer received a signal that he was directly over the target and toggled his load, usually with remarkable accuracy.

The first time that KG 100 used the X-apparatus had been on the night of November 14, 1940, against Coventry. The fires started on that night set the stage for one of the most intensive bombing raids against Britain. Following the Coventry attack, the German Propaganda Ministry coined the word "coventrised," meaning "burned to the ground."

Aschenbrenner and the other 19 He-111s of KG 100 left their base at Vannes, on the south coast of the Brittany peninsula, at 5:40 PM. At 6:05, the bombers arrived over the City of London and, prompted by the X-apparatus, dropped their canisters of incendiaries. Because they flew at a height of only 6,000 feet to avoid early detection by British radar, the Heinkels arrived with much less warning than usual. The fire bombs did their job with alarming efficiency, starting hundreds of small but scattered fires within the space of a few minutes.

When a fire bomb landed on a roof or struck the pavement with a metallic crack, its magnesium core burst into life. A shower of glittering white, molten splinters spewed out in a radius of about 10 feet. The few air raid wardens and roof spotters on duty on this Sunday night stared as dozens of dazzling white sparklers suddenly jumped out of the darkness. For every

bomb that burst harmlessly in the street or on a rooftop, at least one pierced a slate roof and began doing its work inside the City's old buildings. Magnesium reaches a temperature of 4,000 degrees Fahrenheit. At St. Paul's Cathedral, roofspotters watched as the textile and publishing firms of Paternoster Square were pelted with a rain of the foot-long bombs. Within 15 minutes, the book depositories and textile warehouses were already blazing ruins.

Several thousand feet above the clouds that covered London, Aschenbrenner could see a translucent glow through the dense overcast.

ABOVE: Seventy-nine of London's tube stations served as air raid shelters during the Nazi Blitz of 1940. Although they provided a great deal of protection against the lethal bombs of the Luftwaffe, the stations could not survive a direct hit by a heavy explosive. LEFT: Flying above the famed white cliffs of Dover and the English Channel, a twin-engine Messerschmitt Me-110 of the Luftwaffe provides escort duty to German bombers. In preparation for a proposed invasion of Great Britain, the Nazis attempted to gain control of the skies above the Channel. (ABOVE: Imperial War Museum/ LEFT: akg-images)

The rest of Air Fleet Three also saw the reddish patch in the cloud and dropped their own bomb loads on this aiming point. With each fresh load of incendiaries, punctuated by an occasional 550-pound high-explosive bomb, the fires raging within the City spread and intensified.

By 7:00, only 55 minutes after KG 100 began the attack, three separate fire zones had broken out. The largest, about three-quarters of a mile long and a quarter of a mile wide, surrounded St. Paul's Cathedral. From the cathedral roof, George Garwood could see the central telephone exchange burning out of control "without a bucket of water to put on it." As Garwood and the other members of the firespotting team were only too well aware, the cathedral was also in danger. The staff at *The Daily Telegraph* building on Fleet Street watched as a hail of the two-pound bombs glanced off the cathedral's dome.

St. Paul's was far from doomed, although it was in great peril. The cathedral watch stayed out on the roof to take care of burning debris from nearby buildings and put out the sparks with wet sacks. At 6:39, the control center received a telephone call from Cannon Street Fire Station. The firehouse switchboard reported that the dome was on fire.

At the cathedral, a team was sent to investigate. They discovered that an incendiary had punched halfway through the dome's outer lead covering, sputtering and smoking, with its tailfins jutting out. The bomb was going to be a bit awkward to get at, but it did not pose any serious threat. Even if it burned its way through and fell inside the dome, it could easily be smothered before it could do any damage.

From outside the cathedral, however, the brilliant light of the smoldering bomb made it look as though the dome was burning and that St. Paul's would soon be in ruins along with its neighbors. One reporter was already at work writing the obituary. "Tonight, the bomber planes of the German Third Reich hit London where it hurts the most—in the heart." In a nearby City street, Edward R. Murrow of the Columbia Broadcasting System was preparing his nightly report to New York. "And the church that meant most to Londoners is gone. St. Paul's Cathedral, its great dome towering over the capital of the Empire, is burning to the ground as I talk to you now."

Up in the dome, the bomb's intense heat melted the lead skin that held it in place. Before the fire watchers could get close to it, the bomb fell outward of its own weight and landed harmlessly in the Stone Gallery at the bottom of the dome. Whether this was a miracle, as would be claimed, or only gravity is a matter of opinion.

A short time after the fire crew at St. Paul's disposed of the dome bomb, firemen from all over London began arriving in the City to deal with the spreading fires. Senior officers in the London Fire Brigade had ordered units from fire brigade posts to concentrate on containing the conflagration. More than 100 fire calls had been received by 7:00; fighting individual fires would be a waste of time, effort, and resources.

Antiaircraft batteries kept up an intensive fire against the raiders, but bursting shells did more damage to roofing tiles and skylights than to the Luftwaffe. The flak was a great morale booster; the bang-banging away at the raiders gave everyone the feeling that they were hitting

back. Also, two night fighter units—85 Squadron's Hawker Hurricanes and 219 Squadron's Bristol Beaufighters—were on patrol over the capital. Most pilots had trouble finding an enemy bomber, much less shooting one down. The Beaufighter's AI airborne radar was new and having more than its share of teething pains. It was very sensitive to vibration and completely unreliable. Sometimes the set would work perfectly on the ground, but the vibrations from the fighter's twin engines would render it inoperable by the time the aircraft reached its assigned altitude. The Hurricane pilots had no radar at all.

Thousands of feet above the brightly burning City, the bombers of Field Marshal Sperrle's Air Fleet Three continued to unload their clusters of two-pound bombs. Every two and a half minutes, on average, another bomber crossed the English coast and headed on a northerly course toward London. Once over London, the target would have been difficult to miss. The inferno was visible from as far away as the English Channel. Waves of hot air from the hundreds of fires welled right up through the ten-tenths cloud cover, boring a hole in the fleecy white and causing mild turbulence. The heat waves lifted the bombers suddenly higher as they flew over the fires, but not enough to make the bomb aimers miss their mark.

On the ground, the London Fire Brigade did its best, but the fires spread faster than anyone thought possible. A major problem was the lack of water. Abnormally low tides made the River Thames all but useless as a water source—one of the reasons why this particular Sunday was chosen for a major attack on London. Through sheer luck, one of the few 550-pound high-explosive bombs had hit the City's primary water main, cutting off fire hydrants throughout the district. Sperrle's strategy—dropping massive numbers of incendiary bombs on the weekend before New Year's when the tides were at their lowest point—was working beautifully. The second wave, carrying loads of high explosives, would finish off anything left by the fires.

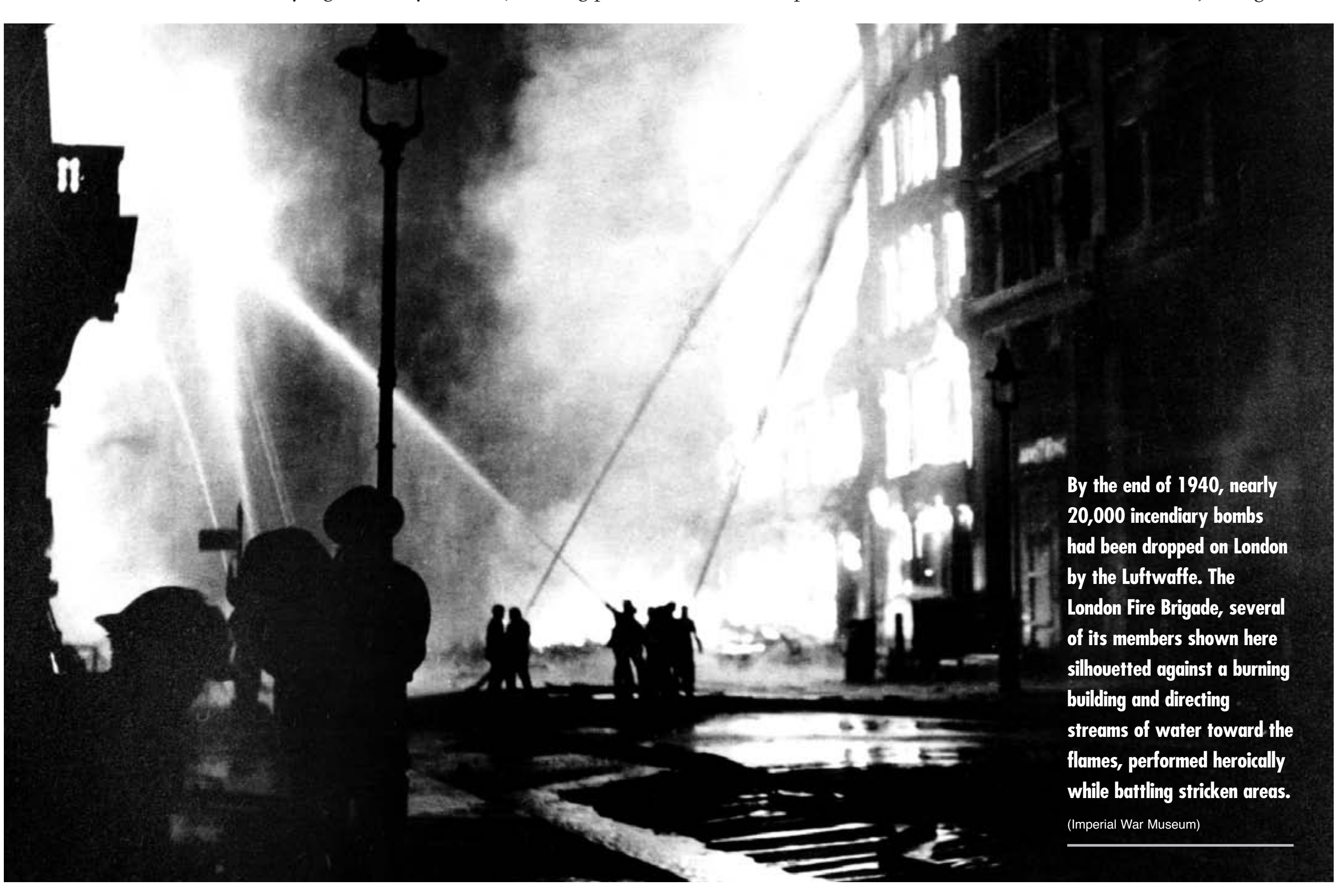
The heat was extraordinary at the heart of the inferno. The flames and superheated air crumbled stone walls, made the asphalt roadways burst into flame, and twisted steel girders like so much putty. Inside Moorgate Underground Station, all the aluminum and glass from the light fixtures melted and ran down the walls, forming pools on the concrete platform.

"The Hun is giving us a priceless opportunity to re-conceive the city on a more rational and liveable plan."

The favorite and most repeated phrase by eyewitnesses of the fire was, "You could read a newspaper by it." Reporter Hilde Marchant of the *Daily Express,* astonished by the sight of her shadow on the pavement, opened a newspaper to see if it really was bright enough to read by. She felt certain that someone would say that it was. By the flames on Ludgate Hill, not far from St. Paul's, she was able to make out every word on the printed page.

The last time this district burned was in 1666, during the Great Fire of London. That fire had begun on September 2 and, fanned by strong winds, raged across the City for four days and nights. What had taken days to destroy in 1666 was now being brought down in a matter of hours.

At about 10 PM, the tide finally started coming in. Water was relayed from the Thames via 3.5-inch fire hoses into 5,000-gallon static water dams that were stationed throughout the district. It was still only a trickle, but a very critical trickle. A few hours earlier, it might have



By the end of 1940, nearly 20,000 incendiary bombs had been dropped on London by the Luftwaffe. The London Fire Brigade, several of its members shown here silhouetted against a burning building and directing streams of water toward the flames, performed heroically while battling stricken areas.

(Imperial War Museum)

made all the difference.

Firefighting units were still arriving in the City from all over the greater London region as well as the counties surrounding London. They were too late to do anything about the damage that had already been inflicted, but at least they now had water to keep the flames from spreading. The new supply of water was no help to anyone on Fore Street, north of St. Paul's, where the fire brigade was fighting a losing battle. Buildings along both sides of the street had been burning since about 6:30. There was nothing the firemen could do to save any of them. The air was hot and alive with flying bits of glowing debris as the buildings disintegrated and sent hot embers shooting into the air.

More than 1,400 fires burned within the "square mile." Everything from textile warehouses to medieval churches was being destroyed. One landmark succumbing to the advancing flames was the Guildhall, the City's town hall, which dated from the 15th century. Besides being a City landmark, Guildhall was also the control center that connected the many fire stations in and around the City with each other. Telephone operators inside the Guildhall stayed on the job even though they knew that the building was on fire. Their log book entries for the night of December 29, 1940, give a terse account of the City's ordeal, noting the time and nature of each incident. "IB-F" indicates "incendiary bomb—fire."

No. 1 6.20 Knightrider Street—Queen Victoria Street IB-F

No. 59 6.45 Eastcheap by Mark Lane—"Explosive IBs are bursting all over the place."

No. 62 6.59 Queen Street by Mark Lane—"Well alight." IB-F

No. 74b 8.10 YMCA Bldg., 186 Aldersgate St. IB-F "Fire spreading rapidly—nobody in building."

No. 137 9.10 26/27 Bush Lane – "LFB wanted urgently!" IB-F

No. 171 10.0 12/16 Red Lion Court—"LFB in attendance, IB-F but no water."

Telephone operators kept the lines open for as long as possible, but by 10:30, it was clear that the building would have to be evacuated. The fire brigade officer in charge ordered the girls to leave Guildhall, telling them there was nothing more for them to do. They left the building and began walking south, past the church of St. Lawrence Jewry, in Guildhall Yard, which was also crackling and flaming.

At about the same time that Guildhall was being evacuated, Sperrle decided that the second strike would have to be postponed for a few hours. Every one of Air Fleet Three's bases had been reporting bad weather for the past several hours. Sperrle's pilots reported that his plan of using a torrent of 2.2-pound incendiaries against the City had been totally successful—roughly one and a half miles of London was burning brightly. He still hoped that the planned second wave would be able to attack the target with high explosives.

Richard Southern and R.H. Betts, auxiliary firemen in London, train their hose on a flaming house while another burns just behind them. A number of firefighters died during the Blitz. (Imperial War Museum)

The weather continued to worsen. By midnight, heavy rain had shut down every bomber base in northern France and there was no letup in sight. Sperrle was thoroughly disappointed, but the weather left him with no choice but to call off the next strike. From his suite in the Hotel Luxembourg, he reluctantly gave the word to his commanders to stand down. The second attack had been cancelled.

No one in London had any idea that the raid had ended. The antiaircraft guns had stopped firing, but there had been lulls in the shooting throughout the attack. Firemen were surrounded by their own world of noise and flame. The fires themselves made their own continuous roar, and over 2,000 fire pumps added to the din. When the all clear sounded at 11:50 PM, the high pitched howl of the sirens was met by a sigh of relief from most Londoners.

There were some who could not bring themselves to believe that it was all over. An auxiliary fireman at work in Southwark was taken completely by surprise when the sirens sounded. He thought that the authorities were sounding an alert to warn of "some new menace—we already had rattles for [poison] gas and bells for invasion." When the sirens held the high note for the all clear, the fireman was "utterly incredulous." It was unbelievable that the Germans would miss "the juiciest target in history." The thought even occurred to him that some fifth columnist might have sent a false all clear to confuse the defenses.

Everyone who was not asleep came out of their air raid shelters to have a look at the fires they had been hearing about for the past five hours. A combination of nerves and curiosity brought most people out. A woman living on the very edge of the fire zone was struck by the brightness of the fires. She does not remember any smoke at all, just flames and more flames with the image of a fireman on a ladder stamped upon the red backdrop.

The focus of attention was St. Paul's Cathedral, the tallest and most brightly lit landmark in the district. "The dome of St. Paul's seemed to ride the sea of fire like a great ship," noted a reporter with *The Times,* "lifting above the smoke and flames ..." Onlookers might have been inspired by the sight, but it made little difference to the firemen on duty. Their long night was still far from over.

For most of the fire crews there was no relief, only hour upon hour of holding a pressurized fire hose in sweltering heat and stinging smoke. The relays from the Thames were finally beginning to take effect. By the time Monday morning commuters began making their way into the city, the fires were no longer spreading.

The morning after an air raid always meant chaotic traffic. Even an early start was not much help on this morning. Every road and all the Thames bridges into the ravaged City were closed to automobile traffic. Most people who worked in or near the City rode their usual trains or buses as far as they would go and walked the rest of the way. Many walked for a mile or more, climbing over piles of bricks and rubble and leaking fire hoses, and arrived at their jobs filthy and soaking wet. Clerks and shorthand typists often arrived hours late and were congratulated for having shown up at all.

Thousands arrived at work only to find that their offices or factories had disappeared during the night. St. Paul's was still unscathed, but hundreds of nearby firms had been destroyed. Many of the displaced workers simply wandered aimlessly about, not knowing what else to do. A

crowd gathered outside St. Paul's, as though hoping some of the cathedral's charm would rub off on them.

Although wartime censorship would try to keep the damage done to war-related industries a secret—newspaper accounts would emphasize the destruction of ancient churches and historic buildings, including Guildhall—employees of firms within the fire zone could see the damage for themselves.

Probably the most disrupted of the essential war services was the communications network. Telephone and telegraph services were knocked out, including transatlantic lines to the United States. The post office telephones on King Edward Street were a total loss—the building had been burned out by incendiaries and the basement, with all of its transformers, was flooded. Also destroyed was the Central Exchange on Wood Street, along with every other building on both sides of the road. Engineers tried to rig emergency telephones, but this was no help at all. The telephone lines had also been destroyed.

After the Great Fire of 1666 burned itself out, almost all of the old walled City of London was a blackened ruin. On Monday morning, December 30, 1940, the fire damage was not quite as widespread, but entire sections of the City had been destroyed; row upon row of blackened shells and freestanding walls swayed and creaked in the wind. This would remain the largest area of destruction in London throughout the Blitz, and perhaps the worst in Britain.

Luftwaffe Lieutenant Karl-Heinz Thurz pilots a Heinkel He-111 bomber during an air raid on Great Britain. Originally developed under the guise of a passenger airliner, the He-111 was a workhorse of the German bomber force. (Imperial War Museum)

Sperrle had no idea what his bombers had done. Reports from the crews mentioned *sehr starke Brände,* "fierce fires," in the target area, but these descriptions were too vague to be of any real value to Luftwaffe intelligence. Because all of southern England was still covered by dense clouds, it was not possible for reconnaissance planes to photograph the target. As far as Sperrle was concerned, the previous night had been a total failure.

An official report filed a few days after the raid illustrates the Luftwaffe's lack of information. "Toward the end of the attack," the document declared, "there were over one hundred widely spread fires with dense black clouds of smoke, mainly in the City and to the north." Actually, the incendiaries alone started more then 1,500 fires, with additional outbreaks spread by wind. Because of the limited visibility over the target, the pilots could not see what was happening in the target area.

Sperrle's opinion was shared by the rest of the Luftwaffe's high command, as well as by the Ministry of Propaganda. If Dr. Josef Goebbels, head of the Propaganda Ministry, had known about the chaos created by the raid, he would have broadcast a highly descriptive and voluble account of it over German radio. Goebbels was never given to understatement. On December 30, only this routine communiqué was issued: "Strong bomber formations attacked London again last night."

Intelligence would learn the full effects of the

Incendiary bombs were not sophisticated but still lethal.

The incendiary bombs used by the Luftwaffe against London were not very impressive looking objects. An "IB" measured about one foot in length, about three inches in diameter, and weighed one kilogram (2.2 pounds). A Station Officer in the London Fire Brigade described the IB as "not a very clever bomb." Although it was not the most sophisticated of weapons, its small size was its great advantage. The bombs were packed in cylindrical containers called "Molotov Breadbaskets," with 36 of the bombs in each container. One bomber could carry five of these containers, equaling 180 incendiary bombs per bomber. After being released, the breadbasket burst open at a pre-set altitude, spilling its contents over a confined area. The small, toy-like incendiaries were deceptively innocent looking. Even one could cause serious damage in an alarmingly short time if left unattended.

The magnesium core of a fire bomb burned at about 4,000 degrees Fahrenheit for about 10 minutes. After that, it finally burned itself out. A sandbag or shovel full of earth would quickly snuff out a glowing incendiary. The only way not to deal with an IB was to douse it with water. A 1939 Public Information leaflet warned, "If you throw a bucket of water on a burning incendiary it will explode and throw burning fragments in all directions."

Besides being small, the bombs were also cheap to manufacture and turned out in great quantities. After a raid, the streets were usually filled with hundreds of unexploded IBs. Firemen would often take one home. After the magnesium core was removed, the bombs could be used as paperweights or very prominent conversation pieces. One London fireman said that they could also be made into very nice lamps.

A sub-officer attached to Red Cross Street Fire Station, just northwest of St. Paul's Cathedral, walked into the firehouse carrying one of the many unexploded IBs after the December 29, 1940, raid. One of the firemen spotted it and announced that it was "one of our bombs." To prove his point, the man put the bomb in a vise, unscrewed the end, and removed the combustible filler. He then located the stamp mark inside and showed it to the sub-officer. The stamp showed that the bomb had been manufactured in 1938 by a firm in Islington, north London. It had been sold to the German government shortly before the war broke out. □

A Luftwaffe 1kg incendiary bomb (Brandbombe) presumed to be of the B1 type.

bombing of December 29 when the weather cleared. After seeing the reconnaissance photos, the propagandists would jump into high gear, gloating over the damage and boasting that over 100,000 incendiaries had been dropped. Actually, about 24,000 had been used. But on Monday, they did not even bother with the usual practice of interviewing the bomber crews. Because half the raid had been cancelled, it was not considered important enough to warrant it.

The rain and clouds saved the City. Had the second attack been carried out as Sperrle planned, Air Fleet Three's bomb aimers would have dropped hundreds of tons of high explosives on the brightly lit target. Everything that had not already been burned—military targets and historic sites alike, including St. Paul's—would have been blasted into rubble. The City of London would have ceased to exist.

In the wake of the fire blitz and the incredible damage that had been done by the small, easily extinguished two-pound incendiary bombs, an outcry of anger and frustration erupted throughout greater London. The outrage was not directed so much at the Luftwaffe as at the landlords and company managers who failed to post roof spotters at their buildings. Outraged letters to newspapers and entries in wartime diaries called for charges of criminal negligence against building owners and managers. Harsher critics simply railed and called names, declaring that the fires were every bit as much the fault of City landlords as the enemy bombers.

A very small minority took a completely different point of view. Architects and forward-looking urban planners almost rejoiced over the loss of the City's old firetrap office blocks. One commentator wrote that some of the "dreariest and meanest stretches of Victorian office buildings in the whole of the City of London" had been demolished literally overnight, something that would have taken 25 years in peacetime. "The Hun is giving us a priceless opportunity to re-conceive the city on a more rational and liveable plan."

This might not have been the most widely held opinion, but it certainly was prescient. The face of the City would be changed by glass and steel office blocks that replaced the old Victorian and Edwardian buildings. Entire streets would be paved over to make room for new construction, and only eight of the 17 ruined Wren churches would be rebuilt. For better or worse, the City of London would never be the same after December 29, 1940.

In contrast to the damage to property, loss of life was disproportionately small. Only 163 persons were killed in the bombing and fire, and another 509 were wounded—almost miraculous considering the scale of the attack. The London Fire Brigade's killed and wounded was also relatively small—12 dead and 250 wounded. Had Sperrle been able to launch his second wave, the toll of dead and wounded would have been many times that number.

London had escaped the full measure of Adolf Hitler's wrath this time. But there would be other opportunities, and Hitler would see that each one was exploited to the fullest. The clouds would have to lift sometime, and when they did the Luftwaffe would be ready. London was too large a target and too filled with tempting landmarks and objectives to be missed.

The Blitz against London would continue for another five months, until May 1941, when Hitler turned his attention to Russia. On Monday, December 30, however, the bombing stopped for the time being. A semblance of life returned until the next time the sirens sounded. With the approach of darkness came the threat of another air raid. By 5 PM, it was evident that the bombers would not be back again this night. The sky was still overcast and threatening rain. A City worker made this entry in his diary: "The night turned out to be windy with rain and I was thankful that no warnings were sounded." □

A vista of smoldering destruction bears witness to the ferocity of Luftwaffe bombing during the Blitz. Hitler originally ordered an air attack against London as retaliation for a British raid on Berlin. (Imperial War Museum)

David Alan Johnson is the author of The City Ablaze, *which is an hour-by-hour eyewitness account of the December 29, 1940, fire blitz. He resides in Union, New Jersey.*

Pearl Harbor

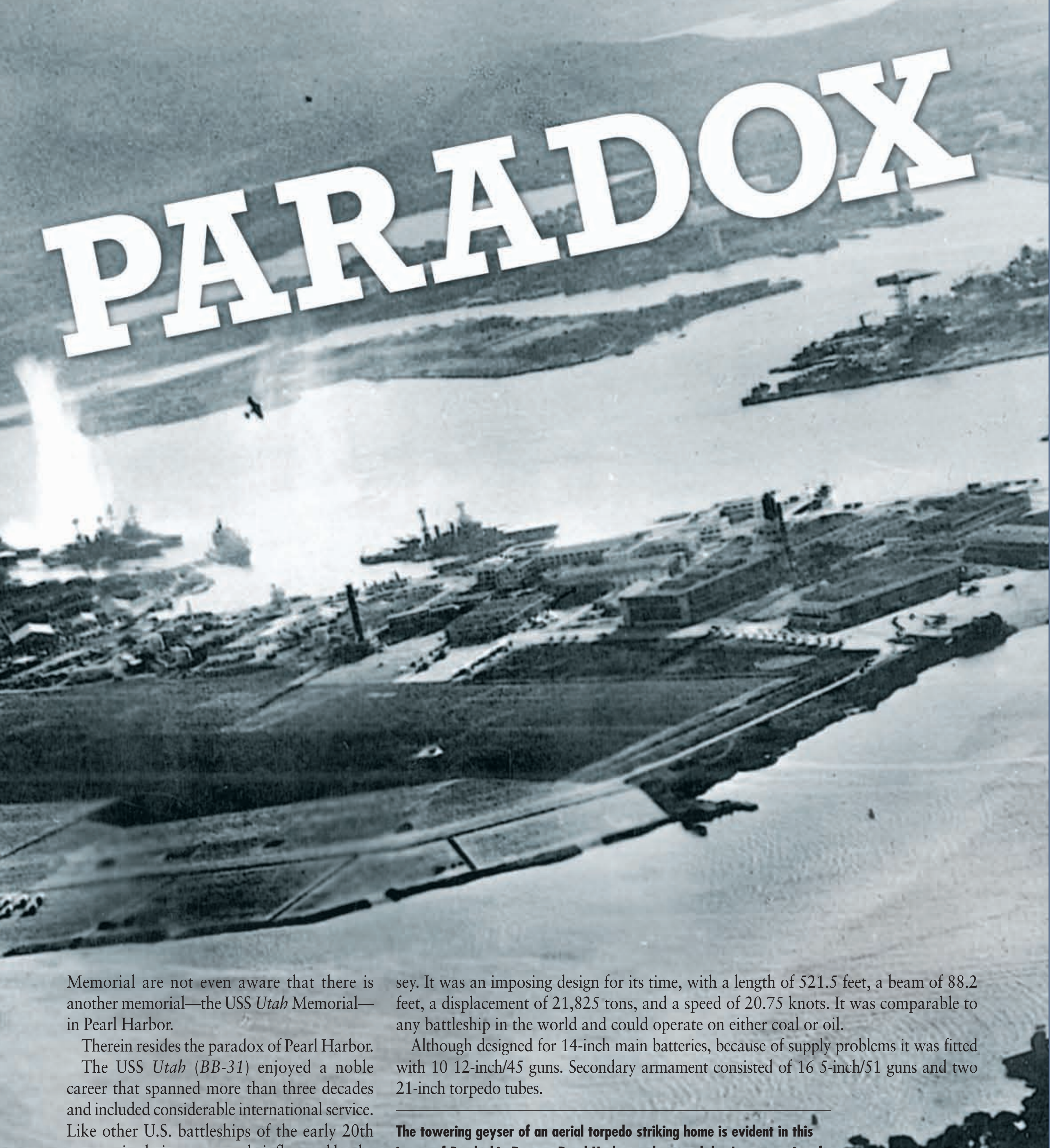
The target ship USS *Utah*, a memorial to the dead of December 7, 1941, exists in relative obscurity.

BY RICHARD KLOBUCHAR

Very few among the throngs of visitors to Pearl Harbor on the island of Oahu are aware of an anomaly, but it definitely exists. On the east side of Ford Island in the middle of the harbor lies one of the world's most visited tourist attractions. A gleaming white, architecturally unique memorial straddles the submerged hulk of the U.S. battleship *Arizona*. The memorial was constructed in 1962 to honor the *Arizona*'s 1,177 sailors who died when the ship exploded during the surprise attack by Japanese aircraft on December 7, 1941. Visitors to the *Arizona* Memorial from around the world number over a million annually.

On the western shore of Ford Island, a scant mile away, is a second memorial. This, too, honors the dead members from the crew of a U.S. battleship, sunk during the same attack, and almost to the minute of the USS *Arizona*. Both ships rest on the harbor bottom with part of their superstructure exposed, and both still entomb many of their deceased crew within their hulls.

However, the contrast between the elegance of the *Arizona* Memorial and the starkness of the open concrete platform and walkway of the other memorial could not be more profound. Although U.S. Navy launches carry hordes of visitors to the *Arizona* Memorial daily, the general public does not enjoy similar access to the second memorial. Most visitors to the *Arizona*



Memorial are not even aware that there is another memorial—the USS *Utah* Memorial—in Pearl Harbor.

Therein resides the paradox of Pearl Harbor.

The USS *Utah* (*BB-31*) enjoyed a noble career that spanned more than three decades and included considerable international service. Like other U.S. battleships of the early 20th century, its design was greatly influenced by the first all-big-gun British battleship, HMS *Dreadnought,* which revolutionized naval warfare.

The *Utah,* one of the two-ship Florida-class, was laid down on March 9, 1909, at the New York Shipbuilding Yard in Camden, New Jersey. It was an imposing design for its time, with a length of 521.5 feet, a beam of 88.2 feet, a displacement of 21,825 tons, and a speed of 20.75 knots. It was comparable to any battleship in the world and could operate on either coal or oil.

Although designed for 14-inch main batteries, because of supply problems it was fitted with 10 12-inch/45 guns. Secondary armament consisted of 16 5-inch/51 guns and two 21-inch torpedo tubes.

The towering geyser of an aerial torpedo striking home is evident in this image of Battleship Row at Pearl Harbor under attack by Japanese aircraft on the morning of December 7, 1941. A Japanese plane is also visible as it banks away from the unfolding holocaust. The former battleship USS *Utah* was moored on the other side of Ford Island that fateful morning.

(National Archives))

Utah was launched on December 23, 1909, with Mary Alice Spry, 18-year-old daughter of Utah Governor William Spry, christening the ship. The *Utah* was completed in 1911, and after sea trials off the coast of Maine, was commissioned on August 31, 1911. *Utah* then took her place in the battle line of the U.S Navy.

After several years of maneuvers, exercises, and midshipman cruises, *Utah* participated in her first major action in 1914. With a revolution sweeping Mexico, President Woodrow Wilson embargoed arms and military supplies to the country's dictator, General Victoriano Huerta. When Germany agreed to furnish arms to Huerta, a task force including *Utah* was ordered to Vera Cruz to intercept the shipment.

With *Utah*'s contribution of 384 officers and men, a task force brigade landed at Vera Cruz on April 21. In spirited fighting, this force captured vital warehouses and forced the rebels to surrender. Eventually, General Huerta fled to Germany and the revolution ended.

Chief Water Tender Peter Tomich is seen in the only photograph of him known to exist. Tomich sacrificed his life while securing the boilers aboard the USS *Utah* as the ship began to heel over. (United States Navy)

Utah continued to operate in Atlantic and Caribbean waters until the United States entered World War I in 1917. Fearing German attacks on Atlantic troop convoys, a squadron of U.S. battleships was dispatched to Bantry Bay, Ireland, in August 1918. With *Utah* as flagship and leading *Nevada* (*BB-36*) and *Oklahoma* (*BB-37*), this force provided protection for convoys approaching the British Isles until war's end.

Utah continued in the Atlantic Fleet until 1931, taking part in a number of important diplomatic missions to Europe and South America by carrying top government officials. Her days as a battleship ended on July 1, 1931, when, under the terms of the 1930 London Naval Treaty, she was designated to be converted to a noncombatant ship. Her 12-inch guns and other armament were removed, but her huge, empty turrets remained. She was also fitted with modern electronics and other equipment for her new role as a fleet target ship. She was recommissioned in that configuration as *AG-16* on April 1, 1932.

For the following nine years, *Utah* operated with the Pacific Fleet, usually based at Long Beach, California. Her new equipment allowed her engines and steering gear to be operated either manually or by remote control from another ship. In this role, *Utah* provided realistic training for the fleet's pilots in dive-, torpedo-, and high-level bombing.

All bombs and torpedoes used were inert, water-filled projectiles. However, even small inert bombs dropped from high altitudes could cause damage to the *Utah*'s deck and other features. Large 6-inch by 12-inch timbers were laid on the deck, giving it a foot of added protection. Crewmen who remained on the ship during target practice found refuge below deck or in the armored conning tower near the bridge. *Utah* also provided practice for the fleet's big guns. She towed target sleds, which allowed battleship and cruiser batteries to hone their skills at long range using live ammunition.

"When the torpedoes hit and the ship began to list, I scrambled up to the main deck, climbed down the starboard side, and swam to shore."

In 1935, *Utah* became even more versatile. In recognition of the new threat posed by modern aircraft, the Navy established a fleet antiaircraft school on the ship. The fleet's most experienced machine gunners were assigned to the *Utah* as instructors for the course. *Utah* provided .50-caliber training for the first year and added quadruple 1.1-inch mounts the following year. By 1941, the mainstay of the fleet antiaircraft weaponry had become the 5-inch gun, and during an overhaul in Bremerton, Washington, four 5/38 and four 5/25 guns were added in single mounts.

Utah was now not only a mobile target ship, but the primary fleet antiaircraft training ship as well. When the ship was in target mode, its cranes placed steel housings over the 5-inch guns to protect them from damage during bombing practice. Smaller guns were moved below deck.

Utah was ordered to Hawaii in September 1941 to help train the Pacific Fleet's antiaircraft gunners and carrier bomber pilots. On December 4, the target completed a three-week assignment and returned to Pearl Harbor for routine maintenance and replenishment. Docked at berth Fox 11 on the west side of Ford Island, the ship occupied a berth usually reserved for an aircraft carrier. Her crews worked on December 5 and 6 to unfasten the huge timbers so they could be off loaded in the Navy yard the following week. She would never reach the Navy yard.

Utah was still berthed at F-11 on the morning of Sunday, December 7, her crew anticipating a leisurely day. She had company along the west side of Ford Island, including the seaplane tender *Tangier* immediately astern and cruisers *Raleigh* and *Detroit* directly ahead. Like most men of the Pacific Fleet, few of *Utah*'s crew thought that war would come to Hawaii. It was too isolated for attack from the air, and Pearl Harbor's destroyers and battleships were capable of dealing with any submarines or surface ships foolish enough to approach the islands. The harbor thus appeared safe from any threat.

Just before 0800, men on deck noticed aircraft circling over the south end of Ford Island. Although Sunday morning exercises were not common, they did occur. Even when explosions were heard, *Utah*'s observers assumed that the exercises were simply a bit more realistic that morning. That assumption evaporated at 0755, when a roar out of the southwest shattered the stillness of the new day.

Sixteen aircraft flying extremely low in squadrons of eight approached the *Utah*. The planes were Kate torpedo bombers from the Japanese aircraft carriers *Hiryu* and *Soryu*. Their pilots had been alerted before takeoff that they were to attack only battleships and aircraft carriers and that none were expected to be moored on Ford Island's west side.

Nevertheless, six of the *Soryu* pilots misunderstood the orders and attacked. Two launched their torpedoes at *Utah*, two at *Detroit*, and two at *Raleigh*. Both torpedoes aimed at *Detroit* missed and buried themselves in the mud of Ford Island's shore. *Raleigh* was hit by a single torpedo and began to list immediately. Both missiles directed at *Utah* hit amid-

ships, only seconds apart at 0801, and ripped open her hull. Without watertight integrity, *Utah* began to list within minutes. At 0805 the list reached 40 degrees, and it was apparent that the ship would soon capsize.

The attacking aircraft were part of a force of 350 planes from six Japanese aircraft carriers, striking Oahu's military installations in two waves an hour apart. Many of the first-wave bombers congregated on the east side of Ford Island where the fleet's eight battleships, their principal targets, were moored. Within minutes, most of these had taken multiple torpedo or bomb hits and were settling on the harbor bottom or blazing from fires fed by the fuel and ammunition stored within them.

Plowing through the Pacific on December 10, 1936, the USS *Utah* is employed as a target ship by the Navy. Her 12-inch main guns and other weaponry have been removed. (National Archives)

ABOVE: While serving as a target ship off Long Beach, California, on April 18, 1935, the USS *Utah* lies at anchor. The aging warship's armament had been previously removed to comply with the terms of the London Naval Treaty. LEFT: Converted to a target ship in 1930, the battleship USS *Utah* is shown during World War I in a camouflage scheme intended to confuse enemy range finders.

(ABOVE: United States Navy / LEFT: Naval Historical Center)

On the west side of Ford Island, the torpedo hits triggered a variety of reactions from *Utah*'s crew. Those on deck knew quickly that the ship would turn over, and their decision to leave was hastened by machine-gun bullets slamming into the ship's deck. Many, like Radioman 3rd Class William Hughes, dove off the ship and swam to nearby concrete mooring quays where they found refuge. Others, like Pharmacist's Mate 2nd Class Lee Soucy and Electrician's Mate 3rd Class Warren Upton, slid down the barnacle-encrusted hull, swam to shore, and dove into a newly excavated utility trench. Even though he had left his first-aid kit on the ship, Soucy spent most of the day treating wounded men.

Below deck, Electrician's Mate 3rd Class Dave Smith, one of the ship's crane operators, heard the roar of aircraft engines and glanced out of a porthole in time to see the red circles on the aircraft that had just dropped torpedoes at *Utah*. "I suddenly realized that we were being attacked by Japanese planes," he explained. "When the torpedoes hit and the ship began to list, I scrambled up to the main deck, climbed down the starboard side, and swam to shore."

Seaman John Vaessen also felt the torpedo hits below deck and the ship beginning to list. He stopped to secure fans and other electrical equipment and turn on emergency lighting. As the ship capsized, Vaessen was forced to evade a rain of dislodged equipment that now became deadly missiles. As the ship settled in the mud, Vaessen was still alive, but trapped in a dark, frightening, upside-down world.

He knew that his only chance of survival was to reach the bilges, since they would be above water in the shallow harbor. He headed for the nearest bilge hatch using the light from a flashlight that he had been working on when the torpedoes hit. As he reached the hatch, he was blessed with another miracle when he discovered that the huge wrench needed to loosen the cover was still hanging in its place.

Crawling through the hatch, Vaessen could see water rising behind him. Upon reaching the hull, he began rapping with the hatch wrench he kept for that purpose. He continued rapping even after painful blisters formed on his hand. The water was now only eight feet behind him and still rising when he heard rapping and voices outside the hull.

Crewmen on shore had heard Vaessen's rapping and returned to the hull to locate the noise. Taking a launch to the *Raleigh*, they returned with a cutting torch and operators. The water was only three feet from Vaessen when he noticed the red spot forming on the hull from the acetylene torch. He knew it would be a close race to see which reached him first—the water or the rescuers. Minutes later, the men outside completed the cut and knocked the circular remnant through the hole. As they pulled Vaessen out, battered and burned but still alive, water was licking at his heels. He was the only crewman rescued through the hull.

Not every crewman caught below deck when the torpedoes struck chose to seek safety topside. Chief Water Tender Peter Tomich recognized that if cold water reached the hot boilers, they would explode, endangering everyone still aboard the ship. Someone had to stay behind to secure the boilers. As the *Utah* began to roll over, Tomich knew what he had to do. He ordered all boiler

ABOVE: A unique system of cables and pulleys was fashioned for the effort to right the capsized battleship USS *Oklahoma* after the Pearl Harbor attack. The USS *Utah* was partially righted in 1944, but further salvage operations on the venerable ship were abandoned. RIGHT: Moored across Ford Island from Battleship Row, the USS *Utah* was struck by Japanese torpedoes during the opening moments of the attack on Pearl Harbor. Today, her final resting place remains relatively obscure. (Above: National Archives / Map © 2007 Philip Schwartzberg, Meridian Mapping, Minneapolis, MN)

room personnel to leave at once.

"Get out, now. Leave immediately!" he yelled.

He then ignored his own order and began to work. As his men turned one last time to watch him, he was already turning valves and setting gauges. The ship continued to roll as he worked, and he knew that by the time he completed his task, escape would be impossible. That thought did not deter him, and he continued with his life-saving efforts even though he realized that his own death was now only minutes away.

Tomich was an extraordinary man. Born Peter Tonic in 1893 in Prolog, a small village in what is now Herzegovina, he emigrated to the United States at age 20. He served in the U.S. Army for 18 months, and while in the service became a United States citizen. Ten days after discharge in 1919, he enlisted in the U.S. Navy and served continuously for the next 22 years. He became one of the most proficient men at his position in the entire Pacific Fleet. Except for a cousin in New York, his only family was the sailors he served with, and the Navy his only home.

For his actions in knowingly sacrificing his life to save others, in 1942 Tomich was awarded a posthumous Medal of Honor. A letter sent to his cousin, John Tonic, announcing the award was returned stamped "address unknown." Tonic had returned to Europe 20 years earlier.

For the next 64 years, Tomich's medal was displayed in a number of locations, including the USS *Tomich,* a new destroyer-escort named after him in 1943; the Utah State House; a Navy museum in Washington, D.C.; and Tomich Hall, a new academic building at the Senior Enlisted Academy in Newport, Rhode Island. There it served as an inspiration to the hundreds of chief petty officers who attended the school annually.

A lengthy search through the years for a Tomich relative bore fruit in 1997, when representatives of the New York Naval Militia visited Croatia. There they located Srecko Herceg-Tonic, a retired lieutenant colonel in the Croatian Army. Tonic was the grandson of Tomich's cousin, John Tonic. A nine-year bureaucratic and legal battle ensued over the proposal of the New York Naval Militia to have the Tomich medal presented to Herceg-Tonic.

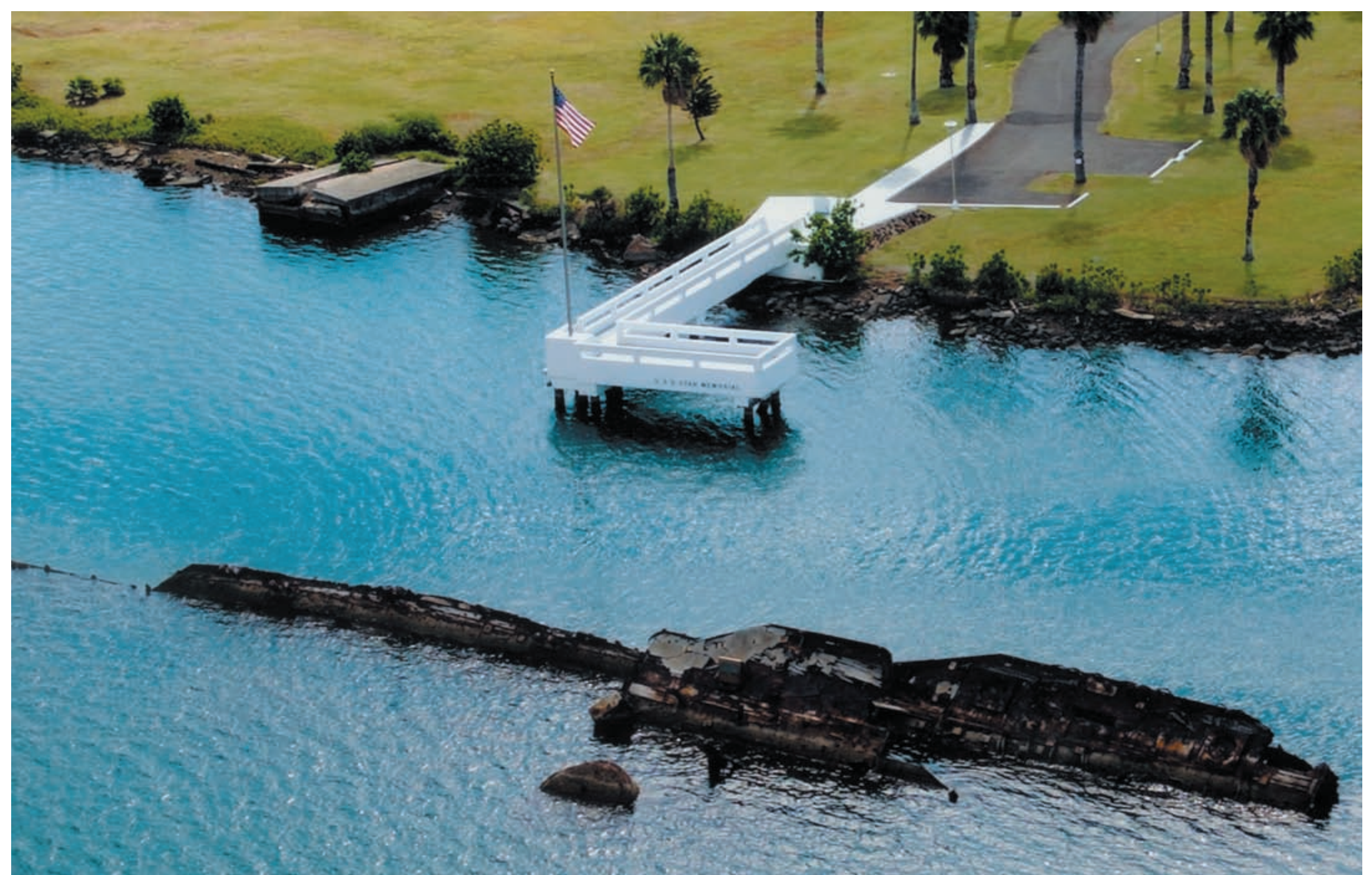
In 2006, the knotty issue was finally resolved when the U.S. Navy agreed to relinquish the medal. In an hour-long ceremony aboard the carrier USS *Enterprise* (*CVN-65*) in Split, Croatia, on May 18, *Enterprise* sailors and a contingent of its chief petty officers witnessed Admiral Henry Ulrich, Commander, U.S. Naval Forces in Europe, presenting Peter Tomich's Medal of Honor to a beaming Srecko Herceg-Tonic.

"Peter Tomich is one of only 39 chief petty officers in all naval history to receive the Medal of Honor," explained *Enterprise*'s Command Master Chief, Paul Declerq. "He's one of us." Like Tomich himself, the medal finally found a permanent home.

Although 54 *Utah* crewmen are still interred in the hull, in 2000 the amazing discovery was made that there are actually 55 sets of remains on the ship. Mary Wagner Kreigh, daughter of former crewman Albert Wagner, revealed an incredible story she had kept hidden for almost 60 years. She told the world that the ashes of her twin sister, Nancy Lynne Wagner, had been buried within the *Utah* since the ship sank in 1941.

Nancy had died at birth in 1937 at Makati in the Philippines; Mary, although hospitalized for several months, survived. Wagner had Nancy cremated and later brought the urn aboard the *Utah*. He intended to have her ashes scattered at sea when a chaplain was assigned to the ship. That day never came. Burials at sea were a tradition in the Wagner family. In 1936, while serving aboard the battleship USS *Pennsylvania* (*BB-38*), he had such a burial for another daughter, Helen, who had also died at birth.

Divers inspecting the *Utah* several weeks after it sank tried to enter the quarters of Chief Yeoman Wagner to retrieve Nancy's urn. They were unable to penetrate the wreckage. It



Overshadowed by the stately memorial to the USS *Arizona* less than a mile away, the simple memorial constructed at the grave of the USS *Utah* in 1972 commemorates the 54 sailors who lost their lives aboard the vessel on December 7, 1941. (Mark Else)

would remain there for eternity and serve as the burial at sea that Chief Wagner had intended for his daughter. Although Mary kept the secret of Nancy's ashes for decades, she made many trips to the *Utah* to visit her sister's grave. Since 1990, she has visited it annually.

Finally, on December 6, 2003, 66 years after she died, Nancy received a formal burial. Mary, her daughter Nina, friends, and reserve and active duty Navy personnel attended a service at the *Utah* Memorial overlooking the ship.

Mary felt relieved that a huge burden had been lifted from her shoulders. As she put it, "For 62 years the courageous crew of the *Utah* has watched over a tiny copper urn in my father's locker. Nina and I are so grateful that my twin sister has finally received God's blessing in the presence of men and women of the United States Navy. Our tears are tears of joy, not sadness. One day I hope to join her aboard our beloved ship."

Mary has remained active in the USS *Utah* Association, has hosted its recent reunions, and is currently its public relations director.

Utah's crew numbered just over 500 at the time of the attack. When it was over, 58 crewmen had been killed by strafing, flying timbers, or drowning within the hull. Only the battleships *Arizona, California, West Virginia,* and *Oklahoma* (which also capsized) suffered a greater number of fatalities. Four of the dead were recovered and buried ashore, leaving 54 to serve their eternal watch within the *Utah*.

Efforts to salvage the sunken ships began within days of the attack. Most of the effort centered on the east side of Ford Island where four battleships and several other ships had sunk. Little was done on the *Utah* until 1943 because of the low potential for returning the ship to useful service. The *Oklahoma* was righted that same year, floated, and moved to a drydock to make her seaworthy.

The complicated derrick system used to right the *Oklahoma* was then installed on the *Utah* after her guns, fuel oil, and other upper works were removed to lighten the ship. A righting operation began in February 1944 and was only partially successful. It did pull the hulk closer to shore and away from the shipping channel, but instead of righting, the hull merely slid along the bottom and settled deeper in the mud. Righting operations then ceased. When another attempt to free the anchorage location was rejected in 1956, the Navy declared *Utah* to be a permanent grave site.

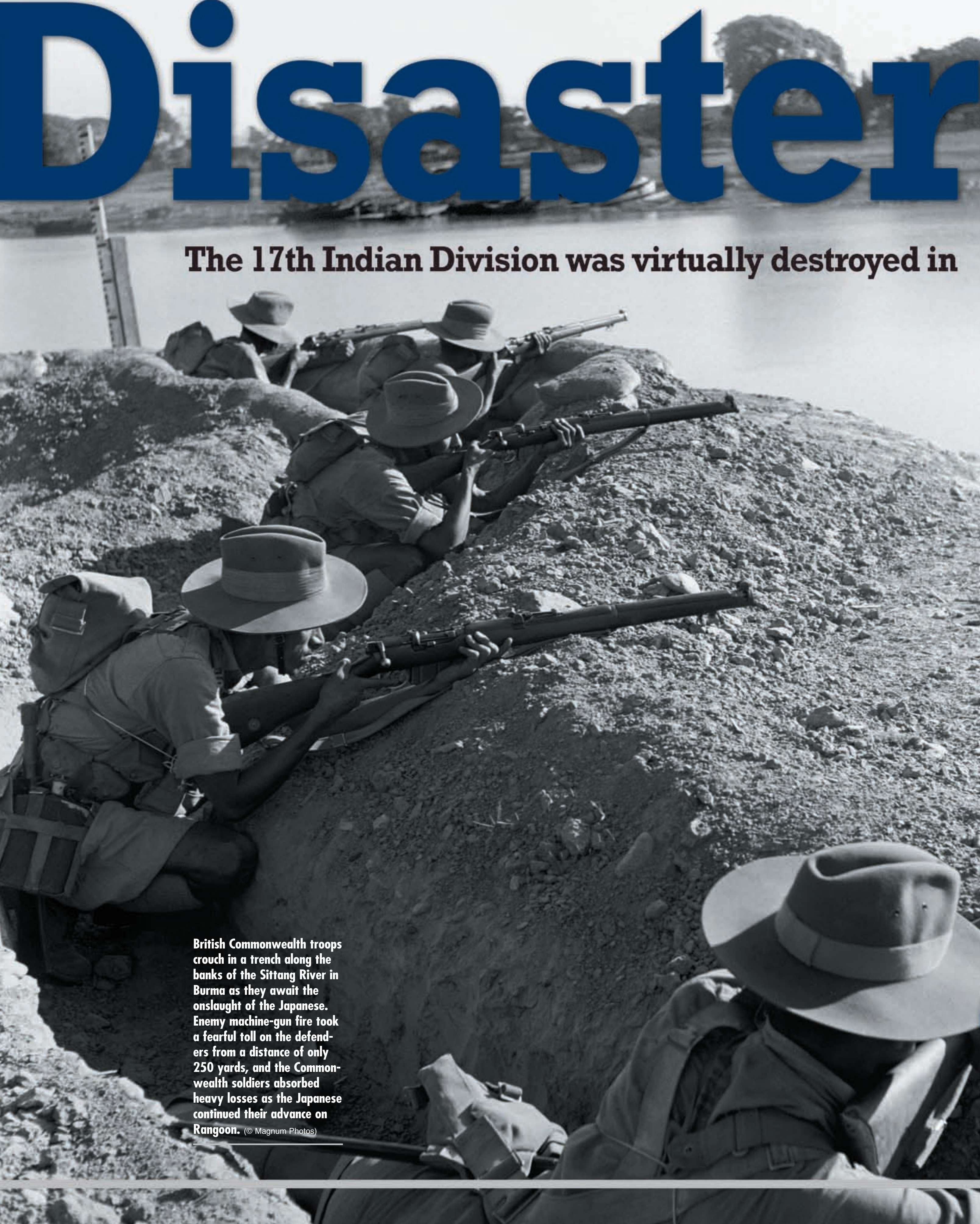
For over a decade, nothing further occurred at the *Utah* site. At the *Arizona* site, however, the Navy erected a wooden platform in 1950 to allow a daily flag raising to honor her 1,177 dead. A commemorative plaque at the base of the flagpole served as a memorial. On May 30, 1962, after years of planning and fund raising, a permanent memorial constructed over the *Arizona*'s hull was dedicated.

This gleaming white structure draws thousands of visitors daily and has become the focus of activities honoring all who died at Pearl Harbor. On October 10, 1980, a $4.5 million Visitor Center complex was opened on Pearl Harbor's shore to service the crowds of *Arizona* Memorial visitors. On that day, operations of the *Arizona* Memorial and Visitor Center were turned over to the U.S. National Park Service.

Continued on page 78

Disaster

The 17th Indian Division was virtually destroyed in



British Commonwealth troops crouch in a trench along the banks of the Sittang River in Burma as they await the onslaught of the Japanese. Enemy machine-gun fire took a fearful toll on the defenders from a distance of only 250 yards, and the Commonwealth soldiers absorbed heavy losses as the Japanese continued their advance on Rangoon. (© Magnum Photos)

combat against the Japanese in the Burmese jungle in 1942.

The Japanese looked unstoppable. Two divisions of the 15th Army had crossed from Thailand into Burma in mid-January 1942, bent on capturing Rangoon before the British could land reinforcements and block the seizing of the Burma Road.

Burma was critical to the entire Allied defense of the Far East. By taking Rangoon and then the Burma Road, the Japanese would cut the vital land link to China, where half of the Imperial Army was already tied down fighting Chiang Kai-shek's Nationalist forces. Burma was also the gateway to India, and Rangoon was the key to everything. In addition to being Burma's administrative capital, it was a crucial communications and industrial center and had the only port capable of handling troop ships. The loss of Rangoon would mean the loss of Burma.

Opposing the two Japanese divisions fighting their way northward through the Tenasserim District of lower Burma was only the recently arrived 17th Indian Division, commanded by Maj. Gen. Sir John G. "Jackie" Smyth, who had won a Victoria Cross in World War I. Smyth was a courageous and dedicated soldier, but he was a sick man. In September 1941, he had undergone an operation for an anal fissure and piles, which had gone badly. Although pronounced fit for duty, by January 1942 he was still in constant pain, and in the light of subsequent events, it has been speculated that his military judgment was affected.

Smyth's immediate superior was Lt. Gen. Thomas J. Hutton, general officer commanding, Burma Army. Hutton had been a very competent chief of staff to General Sir Archibald Wavell when the latter had been commander-in-chief, India. Wavell had named Hutton to command Burma Army shortly after the outbreak of war with Japan in December 1941. But Hutton was untested as a field commander, and his responsibilities in Burma were extensive and went beyond simply issuing orders to troops. He had requested a corps commander, but it would be March 1942 before one arrived. In the meantime, Hutton exercised direct control over just two divisions, the 1st Burma Division and the 17th Indian Division. These would be augmented in February with the arrival of the 7th Armoured Brigade at Rangoon. The 1st Burma Division was tied down in the Shan States of eastern Burma near the Thai border, awaiting a Japanese attack along that axis of advance.

BY MARC D. BERNSTEIN

on the Sittang

Preparing for an invasion by the Japanese, Indian troops, which comprised a large number of the British Commonwealth forces in Burma, march past a pagoda toward defensive positions. (Imperial War Museum)

Hutton still reported to Wavell, but Wavell's position had changed with the advent of 1942. He had been named Supreme Commander of ABDACOM, the American-British-Dutch-Australian Command now responsible for defending the huge swath of territory lying between India and Australia. Wavell established his new headquarters in Java, some 2,000 miles east of Rangoon. Further complicating matters was the fact that though Hutton was subordinate to Wavell operationally, for administrative purposes he still reported to the C-in-C, India, the newly appointed General Sir Alan Hartley. Wavell's geographical remoteness was to prove very cumbersome during the five critical weeks that ABDACOM directed the defense of Burma.

The 17th Indian Division's components were hastily assembled in Burma during January and February 1942. Essentially, the division consisted of the 16th, 46th, and 48th Indian Infantry Brigades, plus troops, such as engineers and artillery, that answered directly to division headquarters. Smyth also exercised control over the 2nd Burma Brigade during the early fighting, notably in defending the important city of Moulmein. But the division was not a crack unit. As one writer has noted, "It had been in existence only a few months, training for the Middle East," and was "pronounced unfit to face a first class opponent by India's Director of Military Training."

Ironically, that same director of military training, Brigadier D.T. "Punch" Cowan, was requested by Smyth to serve as the 17th Division's second in command. He arrived at the front in early February.

As the Japanese 33rd and 55th Divisions pushed through Tenasserim, Hutton insisted that Smyth follow a forward defense strategy. This meant that the 17th Indian Division would seek to delay the enemy advance at every key river barrier in an effort to buy time for reinforcements to land at Rangoon. The strategy was dictated by Wavell himself. But Smyth considered it folly to try to hold such positions as Moulmein and Martaban against determined assault by a superior number of battle-experienced (in China) enemy troops. He favored early withdrawal to better defensive positions closer to Rangoon, most notably behind the Sittang River, just 55 miles east of the capital.

Despite the argument, Smyth was forced to comply with the strategy of delay. The Japanese succeeded in taking their early objectives and by February 15 had reached the Bilin River, 35 miles below the Sittang. There, Smyth's men fought a furious four-day battle that temporarily checked the enemy advance. Hutton authorized a withdrawal across the Sittang on February 19, but one of Smyth's units broadcast the withdrawal order in the clear, and the Japanese intercepted the message. On the night of February 19-20, as Smyth began his pullout from the Bilin River line, Lt. Gen. Seizo Sakurai, commanding the Japanese 33rd Division, sent his 215th Infantry Regiment on an end-run around Smyth's left flank in an attempt to seize the railway bridge across the Sittang intact.

Curiously, although Smyth had for weeks advocated a more rapid withdrawal, he now hesitated at a crucial time. There were two clear routes to the Sittang. One followed a railroad track, and the other, further inland, followed the trace of a road. The latter was not paved, but Smyth decided to send virtually the entire division along the trace to the Sittang Bridge—and the 17th Indian Division was totally dependent on its road-bound motor transport. The Japanese, on the other hand, had few vehicles and could move rapidly overland through the jungle.

With the withdrawal from the Bilin already under way, Smyth outlined his plan for crossing the Sittang at a conference on the morning of February 21. A small bridgehead on the east side of the river was being held by the much-depleted 3rd Battalion, Burma Rifles. Smyth proposed to strengthen the bridgehead by sending the 4th Battalion, 12th Frontier Force Regiment there in trucks ahead of the rest of the division, to be followed by Advanced Division Headquarters, engineers, and a few other units. Then the 48th Brigade would move to within 7-10 miles of the bridge, while the 16th Brigade stayed put at the Boyagi rubber estate four miles west of Kyaikto (a town about halfway between the Bilin and Sittang Rivers), and the 46th Brigade would form the division's rearguard. Smyth envisioned no units crossing the Sittang on February 21, and the entire division crossing the bridge on the next day.

Major General Ian Lyall Grant, as a young man a participant in the first Burma campaign, has written, "This was an astonishing plan in view of the danger, indeed likelihood, of a Japanese outflanking movement both north and south. It showed a complete lack of any sense of urgency in getting across the Sittang. It was apparently influenced by the desire to rest the troops, who were certainly very exhausted by their four days of fighting at the Bilin River. But the result was that, on this vital day, the leading troops would only march 11 miles, and half the division would scarcely move at all. Brigadier [R.G.] Ekin [46th Brigade] was horrified. He saw clearly that a terrible risk was being taken."

Lyall Grant went on to observe that Smyth was making a serious mistake, and that "the answer must surely be that his illness had affected his judgement." But, "There can be no doubt that if he was really ill, as he seems to have been, it was also his duty to hand over command. He had an able deputy at hand and many thousands of men were relying on his judgement for their lives."

In fact, on February 8, Smyth had taken the extraordinary step of writing a confidential letter to Hutton requesting leave in India. He had also remarked to Cowan upon the latter's arrival in Burma that he thought it might be necessary to relinquish command. Cowan had

replied that doing so in the midst of a tough campaign would have a disastrous effect on troop morale, and Smyth remained in charge of 17th Indian Division.

Louis Allen, who also fought in Burma, has noted that Smyth "would not uncover the Kyaikto area until he had more definite information about the strength and direction of the Japanese advance. There was no traffic control formation at the bridge either, so he thought it inadvisable to send so much transport back at once."

Whatever the true reasons might have been for it, Smyth's decision to engage in a carefully staged retreat to the Sittang would prove very costly. Brigadier Ekin "was very suspicious of the apparent lack of Japanese follow-up along the road. This indicated to him not that the Japanese were being sluggish, but that they were out-flanking" Smyth's division, but as Lyall Grant added, "Smyth did not agree. He thought that the tentative Japanese follow-up was the result of the casualties inflicted in the successful fighting on the Bilin."

Because the Sittang Bridge itself was a railway bridge, the 1st Burma Auxiliary Force Artisan Works Company had been at work for a week bolting down planking on each side of the railway line to make it suitable for vehicle traffic. In addition, on Hutton's orders, the bridge had been wired with explosives. But the charges were removed and stacked about 100 yards from the west end of the bridge when the planking work was undertaken. By February 21, the only engineers left east of the Sittang were a company of the Malerkotla Sappers and Miners, under the command of Major Richard Orgill. On the evening of the 21st, before the first vehicles of the division were scheduled to cross, Orgill received orders to prepare the bridge once again for demolition. He was instructed to have it ready to blow by 1800 hours, February 22.

The 17th Indian Division's withdrawal to the Sittang during February 21-22 was an agonizing experience. One historian commented, "The heat was intense under a cloudless sky and the dust thrown up by their boots and the wheels of the transport grinding along at two miles an hour completely obscured the track ahead and clogged the ears and throats of the soldiers. The men marched like automatons, seldom speaking as their throats were so parched.... Enemy aircraft flew low above the track, bombing and machine-gunning with deadly precision."

On the afternoon of the 21st, as the division plodded along the road from Kyaikto toward Mokpalin, a town just two miles southeast of the bridge, a disastrous friendly-fire incident occurred. Royal Air Force and American Volunteer Group planes appeared over the column and attacked it. A reconnaissance aircraft had mistakenly reported that a large number of vehicles spotted on a road heading toward the Sittang were Japanese, and both bombers and fighters were scrambled from fields at Magwe and Rangoon for an immediate strike.

The pilots did not realize that they were attacking targets west of their prescribed bomb line and that the Japanese were almost entirely lacking in motorized transport. The bombing and strafing went on for several hours, and by the end of it the 17th Division had suffered considerable casualties in personnel, plus the loss of numerous vehicles, pack animals, and vital radio communications equipment. The troops on the ground, thinking that the planes had somehow been captured and were being flown by Japanese pilots, had fired back and shot down two aircraft. It was a first-class fiasco.

Captain Bruce Kinloch of the 1/3 Gurkhas recorded, "I remember lying on the ground with a .303 rifle and firing at Blenheim bombers which were flying low and dropping bombs on the column. Tired men were kneeling, scorched and blackened by the flames and smoke and crouching in the flimsy shelter of smouldering trees at the side of the track while streams of tracer bullets from the multi-gunned fighters scythed through the branches with a high-pitched tearing snarl that merged into a continuous ear-splitting crescendo of sound as the planes screamed over again and again just skimming the tree tops, strafing and bombing without a moment's respite. The earth heaved and shuddered under the muffled thud and roar of fragmentation bombs."

The Japanese, for their part, were also exhausted after weeks of campaigning, but they pressed on toward the Sittang, moving through the jungle both north and south of the retreating 17th Indian Division. A 15th Army operations order dated February 17 specified that the 33rd and 55th Divisions were to advance to the river and then wait for instructions.

In a rare photo that includes Japanese armored vehicles, victorious infantrymen cross a makeshift bridge during the advance through Burma. The Japanese capture of Rangoon marked a low point for the Allies in the China-Burma-India Theater. (National Archives)

Lieutenant General Shojiro Iida, commanding the 15th Army, stated, "I was then extremely worried ... because of the increasing shortage of supplies. In order to pass through the rugged jungle of the Thai-Burma border, the quantity of equipment and supplies was reduced to a minimum.... Under these circumstances, it was quite impossible to attempt to

ABOVE: Japanese troops leap from the safety of a trench line and advance against British positions as a machine-gun crew prepares to fire in support of the charge. Such attacks, while heroic, were often repulsed with severe losses. RIGHT: An aerial view of the railroad bridge across the Sittang River conveys a sense of the stream's breadth, which challenged the Commonwealth forces during their withdrawal.

(Above: National Archives / Left: Imperial War Museum)

march further forward beyond the Sittang."

This was, of course, unknown to Smyth, Hutton, or Wavell. And it did not prevent the Japanese from moving with comparative lightning speed in trying to reach the east end of the bridge before what was left of the 17th Division's vehicles and most of its fighting men could. Units of the Japanese 33rd Division would succeed in covering the distance from the Bilin to a hill overlooking the bridge in just 56 hours. Moreover, the presence of Japanese airborne troops had been observed in Thailand, and both Smyth and Hutton became concerned about a possible parachute drop west of the bridge.

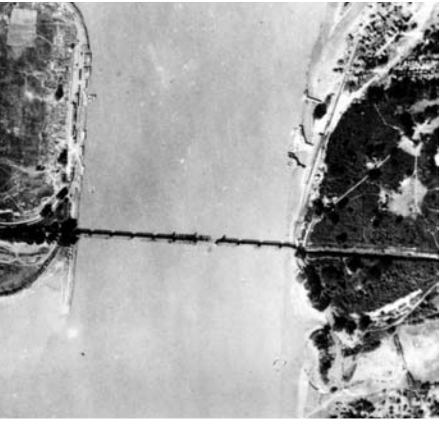
A flotilla of some 300 small boats had been assembled on the west bank of the Sittang to assist in moving the 17th Indian Division across the river. Three ferries also were moored on the east bank. Worried that the boats might fall into enemy hands, Smyth ordered his chief of engineers to destroy them, and the ferries were destroyed by Japanese Army Air Force bombing. The only way left for the whole 17th Division to cross the river was by the 550-yard-long bridge.

After the very trying day of the 21st, leading vehicles of the division began to cross the bridge at about 0200 hours on February 22. All went well for two hours, and then an accident occurred. An Indian driver of a three-ton truck mistakenly put his foot down on the accelerator instead of the brake, narrowly avoided plowing into an ambulance in front of him, and ran partially off the bridge's planking. It took over two hours to clear the accident, during which time traffic on the bridge was at a standstill. Given the course of events, the time lost would prove critical.

By dawn on the 22nd, the 17th Division was strung out over 14 miles between the Boyagi rubber estate near Kyaikto and the west bank of the Sittang. Smyth, in fact, did not know where his units were, as division headquarters was unable to establish radio contact with them. This was most unfortunate, as the division would engage in three separate actions on the 22nd. One of these was in the bridgehead east of the bridge, while the others were near Mokpalin, two miles from the bridge, and farther east on the Kyaikto-Mokpalin road.

The Japanese 1st Battalion, 215th Regiment emerged from the jungle at 0800 and attacked Sittang village. Meeting unexpected resistance there, the commander of the lead company decided to occupy Hill 135, also called Buddha Hill, which dominated both the village and the approaches to the bridge. Another terrain feature, Pagoda Hill, stood between the Japanese and the bridge, and an unsuccessful attempt was made to move past it and seize the bridge. The 4/12 Frontier Force Regiment and a company of the 2nd Battalion, Duke of Wellington's Regiment counterattacked, driving the enemy off Pagoda Hill and rushing up Buddha Hill before being driven back by Japanese fire. The Japanese reinforced their positions on Buddha Hill and could not be dislodged, but their first attempt to gain the bridge had failed.

About noon, Smyth put Brigadier Noel Hugh-Jones of 48th Brigade in command of all bridgehead troops. Hugh-Jones had been on the west bank of the river, but moved his tactical headquarters to the east end of the bridge. After suffering some casualties from heavy shellfire, Hugh-Jones decided to withdraw the bridgehead troops and his headquarters back to the west side of the river. Subsequently, the



Japanese made another attempt to seize the bridge but were pinned down by fire from two platoons of the 1/3 Gurkhas attacking from the south. At 1530 hours, Smyth ordered Hugh-Jones to reestablish the bridgehead on the east side of the river. An assortment of units formed the new bridgehead force and set up a perimeter around the east end of the bridge.

Smyth had moved division headquarters considerably west of the bridge to Laya, about five miles from the river. This meant that he was almost completely out of touch with what was happening. Adding to his concerns, Hutton specified that he was to attend a meeting at Milestone 53 on the Pegu road, about 25 miles from the bridge, the next morning. Smyth gave Hugh-Jones full responsibility for defending the bridge, and his orders were that under no circumstances could the bridge be allowed to fall intact into enemy hands.

Meanwhile, Ekin's 46th Brigade had been ambushed by the Japanese 3rd Battalion, 214th Regiment on the Kyaikto-Mokpalin road. It had been bringing up the division's rear, but a

one-mile gap had developed between the 46th and 16th Brigades along the road. At 0930 hours on the 22nd, the Japanese sprang their ambush. Two companies of the 3/7 Gurkhas tried to move around the block on the road, but their attack failed. After an hour-long firefight, Ekin decided to send some of his men overland through the jungle to Mokpalin, while part of the column tried to continue moving along the road.

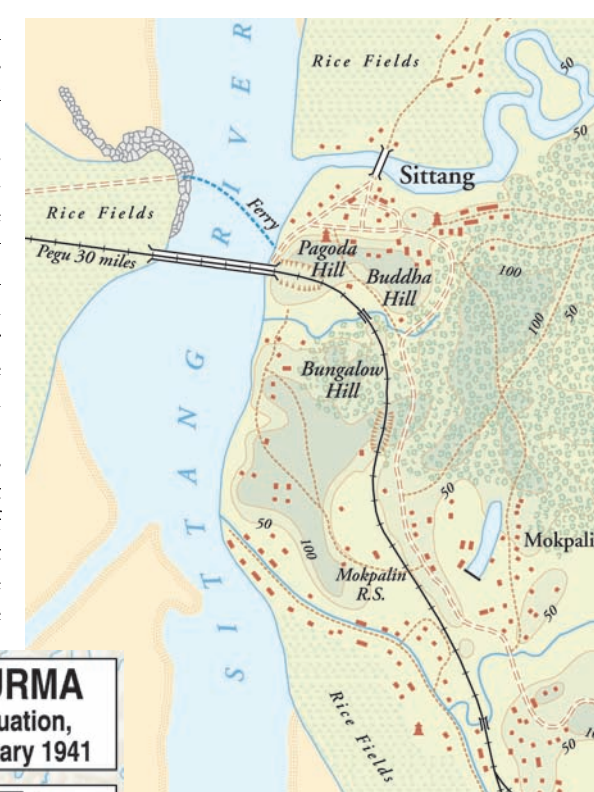
The Japanese absorbed substantial casualties in the fighting and eventually withdrew, so part of 46th Brigade was able to reach Mokpalin with vehicles. The troops, including Ekin himself, who moved toward Mokpalin through the jungle, found the going difficult and split into small parties. Some eventually made it to Mokpalin railway station the next day, while others crossed the river independently. Casualties sustained by the 46th Brigade in the ambush and aftermath were heavy.

Brigadier J.K. "Jonah" Jones, commanding 16th Brigade, had led his own unit safely into the vicinity of Mokpalin, but in the town the 2/5 Gurkhas had come under fire from the north. The Gurkhas attacked and captured a small hill, then two companies continued on and launched an attack on Buddha Hill farther north. That attack failed. Then the 1/3 Gurkhas arrived and launched their own attack toward both Buddha and Pagoda Hills. It was at this point that the Gurkha attack blocked the second Japanese attempt to capture the bridge, but the Gurkhas failed to dislodge the enemy from Buddha Hill and were ordered by Jones to pull back.

This proved very difficult to do, and two companies of the 1/3 Gurkhas were isolated near Buddha Hill. These Gurkha units actually were part of Hugh-Jones's 48th Brigade, but because they were in the vicinity of Mokpalin, Jonah Jones had taken control of them when he and his 16th Brigade arrived at that location. On the evening of the 22nd, Jonah Jones set up a defensive perimeter around Mokpalin and then planned for yet another attack to the north to commence after first light on February 23. It was to be supported by nearly all the divisional artillery, which was near Mokpalin, but the attack never came off.

Jonah Jones at Mokpalin was not in communication with Hugh-Jones at the bridge, though the distance separating them was only about two miles. Hugh-Jones, in fact, had been led to believe from the reports of a Gurkha officer and some stragglers that both the 16th and 46th Brigades had been overrun. The bridgehead force, under Hugh-Jones's control, was considered weak and would get weaker when two companies of the 1/4 Gurkhas were sent west across the bridge at dawn on the 23rd as protection against the feared enemy airborne drop. So Hugh-Jones felt severe pressure to blow the bridge. A renewed Japanese attack was thought probable.

At 0200 hours on the 23rd, Hugh-Jones summoned Major Orgill of the Malerkotlas and asked him if he could guarantee a successful daylight demolition of the bridge. Orgill replied that he could not guarantee it, but that he would do his best. The Malerkotlas had worked throughout the 22nd, under sporadic fire from Buddha Hill, getting the bridge ready to be demolished. Although the bridge consisted of 11 spans, only numbers 4, 5, and 6, counting from the east bank, could be prepared due to a shortage of explosives, wire, and fuses.



The difficult terrain of the Sittang River valley contributed to the obstacles in transportation and communication experienced by Commonwealth troops as they attempted to cross the stream. The 17th Indian Division paid dearly for command and logistic failures.

(Maps © 2007 Philip Schwartzberg, Meridian Mapping, Minneapolis, MN)

Orgill could not guarantee a successful daylight demolition because only span number 5 could be prepared with electric detonators and an instantaneous fuse. The other two spans were set with long safety fuses and wired for a sympathetic detonation. If Orgill's men came under heavy fire and were casualties, the fuses to numbers 4 and 6 might not get lit, and only span number 5 would detonate. Dropping just one span would be inadequate.

Brigadier Cowan, as Smyth's number two, received a frantic telephone call from one of Hugh-Jones's staff officers not long after Hugh-Jones's conversation with Orgill. Authorization was requested to blow the bridge before daylight. Cowan woke Smyth, and the latter considered the issue for five minutes before ordering Hugh-Jones to destroy the bridge. Smyth

Continued on page 77

The German Great Escape

An informant paid with his life after revealing plans for a major POW escape in England.

BY CHARLES WHITING

Devizes in southern England had had a quiet war. It had not suffered any bombing as most English cities had. Nor had it been overrun by evacuees from London or Birmingham.

Naturally, there had been soldiers coming and going. First it had been the members of the Wiltshire Regiment, the local battalion that left its creeper-covered depot near the Marchant barracks. It had been followed by the battered survivors of Dunkirk, who in their time were also replaced.

In 1942, the first Yanks started to arrive. These were the "Blue & Grays" of the 29th Infantry Division. They were to stay so long, they quipped, that they were to remain in the United Kingdom and scoop the bluebird dung off the White Cliffs of Dover (referencing a popular song of the day sung by Vera Lynn).

That was not to be. By the summer of 1944, the 29th had gone, only to be replaced by men wearing the uniform of the enemy, a stream of Wehrma-

A long line of German prisoners captured on D-Day, June 6, 1944, marches into captivity along a street in England. A number of German prisoners, primarily members of the SS, plotted a mass escape from POW camps in December 1944. OPPOSITE: Paratroopers of the British 6th Airborne Division pose for the camera with several captured members of the SS who escaped from prison in Great Britain. (National Archives)

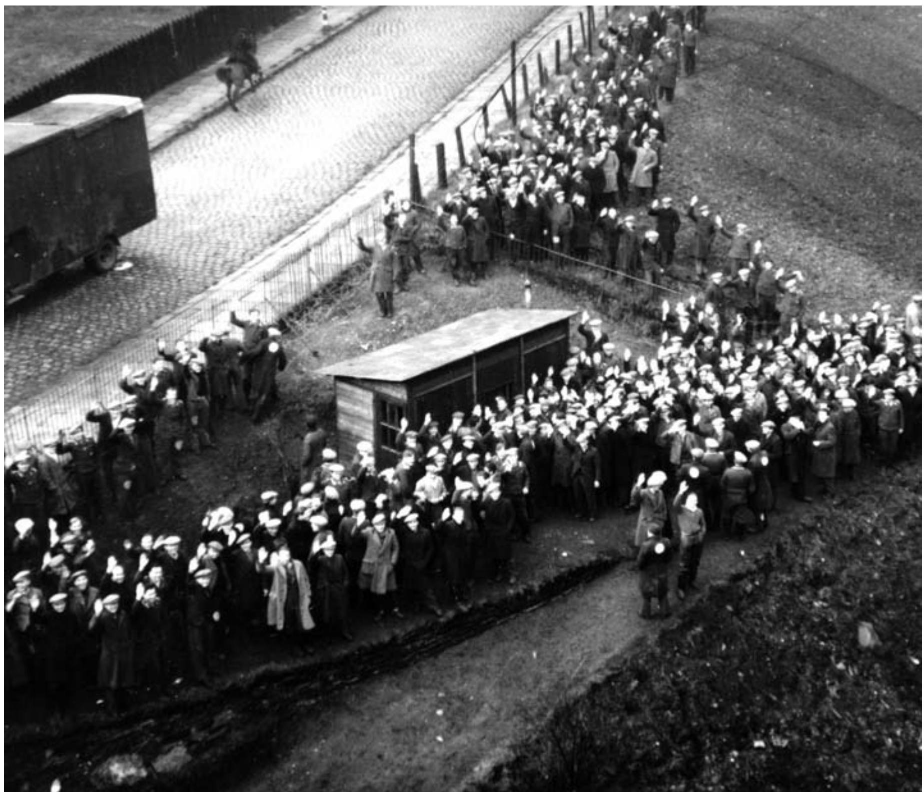
cht prisoners of war brought from the nearby port of Southampton. At a rate of 2,000 a day, they were filling up the Devizes camp and hundreds like it throughout the United Kingdom.

By December 1944, there were well over 250,000 young Germans in Britain, guarded by a handful of middle-aged or unfit British soldiers.

Now, strange things started to happen around these camps. Lurking figures were reported everywhere. Weapons and even trucks from the nearby U.S. military hospital were stolen, and discipline had fallen apart.

While the German authorities demanded the locations of these camps, the British refused in case the Germans attempted a parachute drop to free the POWs. The Germans secretly organized escape committees. In the case of Devizes, it included Sergeant Joachim Palme-Goltz of the SS Leibstandarte and Private Kurt Zuchlsdorff of the 17th SS Panzergrenadier, a hardened killer who boasted of the many Americans he had killed before he had been captured.

But these fanatics were being observed by Wolfgang Rosterg, once a fanatical Nazi him-



Gathered in a prison camp at Glen Mill on Christmas Eve, 1940, a group of German prisoners awaits instructions from their British captors. These POWs were destined to spend five years in captivity. (Imperial War Museum)

self from a rich family, who acted as the camp's interpreter. His task of keeping his fellow prisoners docile was made more difficult by two things: the first German victories in the Battle of the Bulge and the arrival of a new kind of tough paratroopers who encouraged the camp's fanatical Nazis.

One of these newcomers, 19-year-old Officer Cadet Erich Koenig, was particularly fanatical. He snarled at the first guard he met at the Devizes camp. "Our day will come soon. I'll be back with a whip, and the first person I'll use it on is you!"

Apparently there was more to Koenig than simply being a blowhard. It appeared as if he had been briefed before he had been captured regarding what he was supposed to do in case he fell into enemy hands (the British also routinely trained their troops in such cases) and now he brought the possibility of a breakout into the open. He encouraged his fellow "blacks," the name for the prisoners who were Nazis, with statements such as, "We are still German soldiers. It is our duty to escape. We must, however, do more than escape. We must spread terror. We must march on London."

But Rosterg was listening. He told himself these men were dangerous. Somehow, he must inform the British authorities. By doing so, he signed his own death warrant.

The plot continued. For a new POW, Koenig seemed to know a lot. He said he knew of six camps in southern England where there were similar plots afoot. They would form a kind of Trojan horse in the middle of the enemy citadel because "our espionage system in England is excellent."

Now things were going well for the Germans. In the Ardennes the Americans were retreating, a whole German parachute brigade had landed behind the U.S. lines, and Churchill had been forced to use his last military reserves to help fight the German attack in the Bulge.

Already, there were Germans in other camps prepared to follow Koenig's plan. Sergeant Gerald Hanel, a 17-year-old paratrooper who was far away in the north at the Command Screening Camp in the industrial town of Doncaster, was such an example. Now, the British attempted to break the spirited young Saxon. They failed, and with 50 other young paratroopers he was sent to the Glen Mill camp, which had lapsed into virtual anarchy. The place was being run by German bully boys armed with homemade clubs and caps with razorblades sewn in the peaks. One slash with a cap of that type, and a man was scarred for life.

"I'll be back with a whip, and the first person I'll use it on is you!"

At the Glen Mill camp, the prisoners even demanded that the barbed wire fence be moved. Their spokesman received a right hook from the camp's sergeant major for his cheek.

The Germans grew ever bolder as their troops in Belgium drove for the River Meuse, and hopefully from there to the English Channel. At night, they cut the wire and advanced ever farther afield looking for the weapons they needed for the great escape. But by now their hosts were becoming ever more aware that something dangerous was afoot. Not only did the British have their stool pigeons and listening devices inside the camp, but they were also picking up the secret messages between Germany and the various camps, which had been sent through such means as microdots and seemingly harmless private letters.

Colonel Upton, the Devizes camp commandant, called a secret conference. What were he and his officers to do if the Germans attempted a breakout? They knew most of the POWs' intentions in Devizes and other camps by now. They came to no firm conclusion except that they had to be prepared for anything.

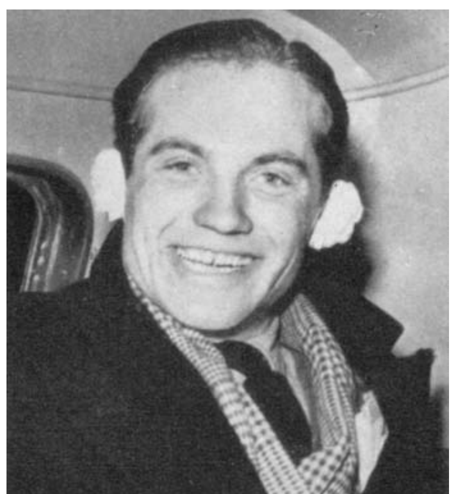
Now the problem went up through channels until it reached Churchill himself. He interrupted a top-level cabinet meeting to discuss the matter, and with his usual growl he ordered that all Christmas leave for Army, Police, and Home Guard be stopped because he suspected that the Germans would revolt during the traditional season of goodwill to all men.

At the same time, he asked for help from the U.S. forces in England. The 66th Infantry Division was scheduled to sail for Cherbourg, France, on Christmas Eve, leaving only the 11th Armored Division in the immediate area where the great escape attempt was expected.

It was then that the Germans launched their last parachute drop of World War II. An entire brigade of the German 6th Parachute Regiment dropped behind the lines of the U.S. 1st Infantry Division in Belgium. The drop seemed to be a signal for open revolt. But the guards were now forewarned and supported by the tough veterans of the British 6th Airborne Division, soon to fight in the Battle of the Bulge themselves. They went into action supported by tanks and armored cars. Mostly, however,

they fought it out with stones, fists, and bats. Everywhere the Germans, along with a few radical Italians, broke out of their camps across the length of Britain.

The problem was accelerating by the day, and odd little bands of escaped Germans were on the run everywhere. They were even



ABOVE: Prisoner Franz von Werra is shown shortly after his recapture in New York. Exposure to the elements resulted in a case of frostbite on both ears. TOP RIGHT: Following the end of hostilities, German POWs, now wearing civilian clothes, walk toward transportation in Britain. The repatriation of thousands of former prisoners was a major undertaking after the surrender of Germany. RIGHT: German prisoners of war labor to repair a damaged barbed wire fence at the Glen Mill camp following the abortive escape attempt of December 1944.

(ABOVE & TOP RIGHT: National Archives / RIGHT: Imperial War Museum)

killing their own who were longing to stop, including a German officer who had once been a protestant cleric.

Churchill called in his German specialist, Colonel A.P. Scotland, who had once actually served in the German Army. On December 19, he wrote, "No escape story of the Second World War is more fantastic than that of the prisoners of Devizes. It began with a bold master plan for a mass breakout of German POWs …"

It also included an extraordinary project for an armed sweep by the escaping men through hundreds of miles of England, but the tough old German expert was not going to let that happen; he worked his stooges and informers at all levels, urgently seeking information. Then, he had a stroke of luck. One of the key plotters became a turncoat. He explained that the plotters in Devizes kept in touch with similar people 100 miles away. It was the breakthrough Colonel Scotland needed.

If he could not stop the individual breakouts—there were too many POWs and too few guards—he could break up the secret links between the camps by imprisoning the plotters in one spot. This should prevent a major breakout.

Scotland had the key plotters transferred to Comrie in northern Scotland. This was the main top-security camp housing Nazi fanatics and the like, and with those sent from Devizes went the interpreter stool pigeon. It was a fatal move for all concerned.

One late afternoon, Rosterg was seized in his bunk, and with a mob howling for his blood, he was taken away for his "trial." He was charged with betraying the Devizes plot. Clad only in his shorts and vest despite the freezing cold, he fought back, but as brave and bold as he was, he did not stand a chance. The mob wanted blood.

The angry POWs broke Rosterg's nose, then his ribs, broke his eardrums, and beat him until he lapsed into unconsciousness. Then they left to confer with all the Devizes men. They wanted joint action. Scar-faced Palme-Goltz, one of the real toughies, snarled, "We need a rope to hang the bastard traitor." The rope was found in a hurry. Palme-Goltz started to beat the victim once more. Blood began to pour from Rosterg's mouth. The killers showed no mercy. After yet more torture, gasping like a pack of wild dogs on the rampage, they left Rosterg, hanging by the rope and dying slowly, in the latrines. It was all over, with the plotters turned killers promising each other they would stick together and never reveal what happened.

Of course, they did not stick together. Someone broke down, and five of the main plotters were sentenced to death. The official hangman was called in. That winter, the quiet Yorkshire man whose main job was running a pub had executed 29 German war criminals. Now he made short work of Koenig, Palme-Goltz, and the rest. In two hours, it was all over.

Today, some 60 years later, the victims and the murderers lie under the English earth at the German cemetery of Cannock Chase. No one visits their well-tended graves. For they are forgotten men who came to England as prisoners, hating the nation as an enemy and determined to escape from it at any cost. They paid the price. It was in blood, and in the end they were fated to remain on English soil forever. □

Well-known author Charles Whiting has written regularly for WWII History. *He has written a number of well-received books, which have sold millions of copies worldwide.*

The Beginning of the End In North Africa

By John Brown

Tobruk, the vital Libyan seaport on the coast of Cyrenaica, fell to General Erwin Rommel and his victorious Afrika Korps in less than 24 hours after an unexpected and devastating air, armor, and infantry attack on June 21, 1942.

Into captivity went Tobruk's garrison commander, South African Maj. Gen. Bernard Klopper, 13,400 South African soldiers, 2,500 Indians and Gurkhas, and 19,000 British soldiers and sailors. Only a thousand or so of the garrison managed to escape to rejoin the British Eighth Army, falling back on Mersa Matruh 220 miles to the east and well inside Egypt. Popski's Private Army, led by Lt. Col. Vladimir Peniakoff (nicknamed "Popski") and the smallest of the British special forces detachments operating in the desert, assisted some of the escapees in getting out of Tobruk. Many months later, while operating behind the German lines in Italy, Popski and his Private Army rescued General Klopper who had escaped from a POW camp and was, in Popski's words, "wandering around."

Rommel's victory was given huge publicity in Germany and Italy. Rommel, the headlines blared, had opened the way to Egypt, to Alexandria, Cairo, the Suez Canal, and beyond. Hitler promoted him to field marshal, and Mussolini flew to Tripoli with his white horse and dress uniforms to lead the Italian troops in a victory parade in Cairo.

Three days later, June 24, using trucks, gasoline, oil, ammunition, and food captured at Tobruk and the Beau Geste-style Fort Capuzzo, Rommel advanced on Mersa Matruh where the severely mauled Eighth Army had halted its retreat and was preparing to make a stand. At this point, the British Commander in Chief Middle East, General Sir Claude Auchinleck, assumed personal command in the field. He decided not to fight for Mersa Matruh and ordered the Eighth Army to begin an immediate withdrawal to El Alamein. That evening, Rommel launched his attack on Mersa Matruh.

On October 27, 1942, the British 2nd Battalion Rifle Brigade fought along Kidney Ridge during the pivotal Battle of El Alamein. Artist Terence Cuneo captured the ferocity of the combat in this 1951 painting. (The Art Archive)

The defeat of the Afrika Korps at El Alamein initiated a long retreat and eventual surrender for Axis forces.

The New Zealand Division, encircled by panzergrenadiers on an escarpment south of Mersa Matruh and without armored support, broke out in a wild night attack with fixed bayonets, yelling Maori war cries and killing grenadiers as they tried to surrender. Almost 10,000 New Zealanders broke through and got away, but when the battle for Mersa Matruh was over the Germans held another 6,000 unwounded Eighth Army prisoners.

Rommel drove relentlessly after the tired, scattered Eighth Army in what became a race for El Alamein, 109 miles eastward along the coast. El Alamein for Rommel was "the last obstacle to our advance on Alexandria. Once through, our road to the Nile is clear." For Auchinleck, El Alamein was "the defensive position of last resort." The German and Italian tank crews and infantry, exhausted and running short of the supplies captured at Tobruk, lost the race.

At El Alamein, Auchinleck regrouped his forces, including the recently arrived 9th Australian Division, in a line stretching from El Alamein, an isolated railway station one mile from the sea, 40 miles south to the northern cliffs of the Qattara Depression, a 7,000-square-mile basin of sand-encrusted salt marsh almost impassible for any kind of vehicle. Anchored on the sea to the north and the Qattara Depression to the south, the Alamein line could not be outflanked. Any attack on the line would have to be frontal, denying Rommel's panzers the advantage of mobility.

Between El Alamein and the Qattara Depression were three low, narrow ridges running roughly parallel with the coast and named from west to east Miteiriya, Ruweisat, and by far the largest, Alam el Halfa. Auchinleck deployed some infantry and artillery on these ridges and set up his forward tactical headquarters on the eastern part of Ruweisat. As there were not enough troops to hold the line continuously, a number of strongpoints, or "boxes," were set up along the line with most of the armor deployed behind them. German Maj. Gen. Fritz Bayerlein described the whole area as "stony, waterless desert where bleak outcrops of dry rock alternated with stretches of sand sparsely clotted with camel scrub beneath the pitiless African sun."

On July 1, 1942, the Afrika Korps came up against the British minefields and murderous artillery fire of the Alamein line. In Rommel's words, "Under such overwhelming weight of firepower our attack ground to a halt."

The following day, after some reorganization, Rommel attacked again with the 15th and 21st Panzer Divisions pushing to the north of the line. Eighth Army armor ducked and weaved, feigned a retreat, and then hit the panzers on their unprotected southern flank. They were soon on the defensive and outnumbered by Eighth Army tanks, and with a sandstorm blowing in, the panzers pulled back.

During the sandstorm, Rommel's 90th Light Division, which had more armored vehicles and mechanized infantry than tanks, unexpectedly stumbled into the 3rd South African Brigade. In an uncharacteristic display by the veteran division, it panicked and bolted. At the same time, the Italian Ariete Armored Division crumbled under an attack by the New Zealanders, who captured 30 guns and took 400 prisoners.

When the sandstorm died down, Rommel tried for several more days to break the Eighth Army line, but his attacks were broken up and repelled by artillery and air bombardment. Auchinleck retaliated with several widespread counterattacks. His targets were Italian in an

LEFT: British Field Marshal Bernard Law Montgomery addresses a group of officers. Montgomery took command of the Eighth Army in Egypt at a critical moment in the battle for North Africa. BELOW: Its carriage towed by a half-track, a heavy German artillery weapon is moved into position during the first phase of the fighting at El Alamein. The supply problems that dogged the Afrika Korps contributed greatly to its final defeat. (LEFT: National Archives / BELOW: Imperial War Museum)

effort to force Rommel to use up his armor's fuel to assist his allies. On the fifth day, Rommel ordered a pause to rest his exhausted troops and to absorb German infantry reinforcements being flown in from Crete. He intended to return to the attack, but Auchinleck beat him to it.

During the first six months of 1942, the U.S. military attaché in Cairo had been sending regular, comprehensive reports on the British order of battle and British intentions to Washington in a code that German intelligence had broken. It had been a valuable source of information for Rommel until the leak was discovered by ULTRA intercepts and was plugged. Without advance notice of British intentions, Rommel was now obliged to fight his enemy on a more equal footing.

At 5 AM on July 10, Auchinleck's guns opened up in a heavy bombardment of the northern end of the front. This was followed by an attack astride the coastal road by the 9th Australian Division. The Australians put the Italian Sabratha Division to flight, taking 1,550 prisoners, and on Tel el Eisa, the Hill of Jesus, they captured Rommel's 100-strong Wireless Reconnaissance Unit 621. This mobile radio interception station had been picking up reports from German spies in Cairo and eavesdropping on British military radio communications. The tactical intelligence collected was of vital importance to Rommel and its loss was another serious blow for him. For the British it was a bonus; they put the radios and other equipment to good use.

Field Marshal Erwin Rommel, commander of the Afrika Korps, earned the nickname of the "Desert Fox" during a virtually uninterrupted string of victories that made him a legend. (Mary Evans/Explorer)

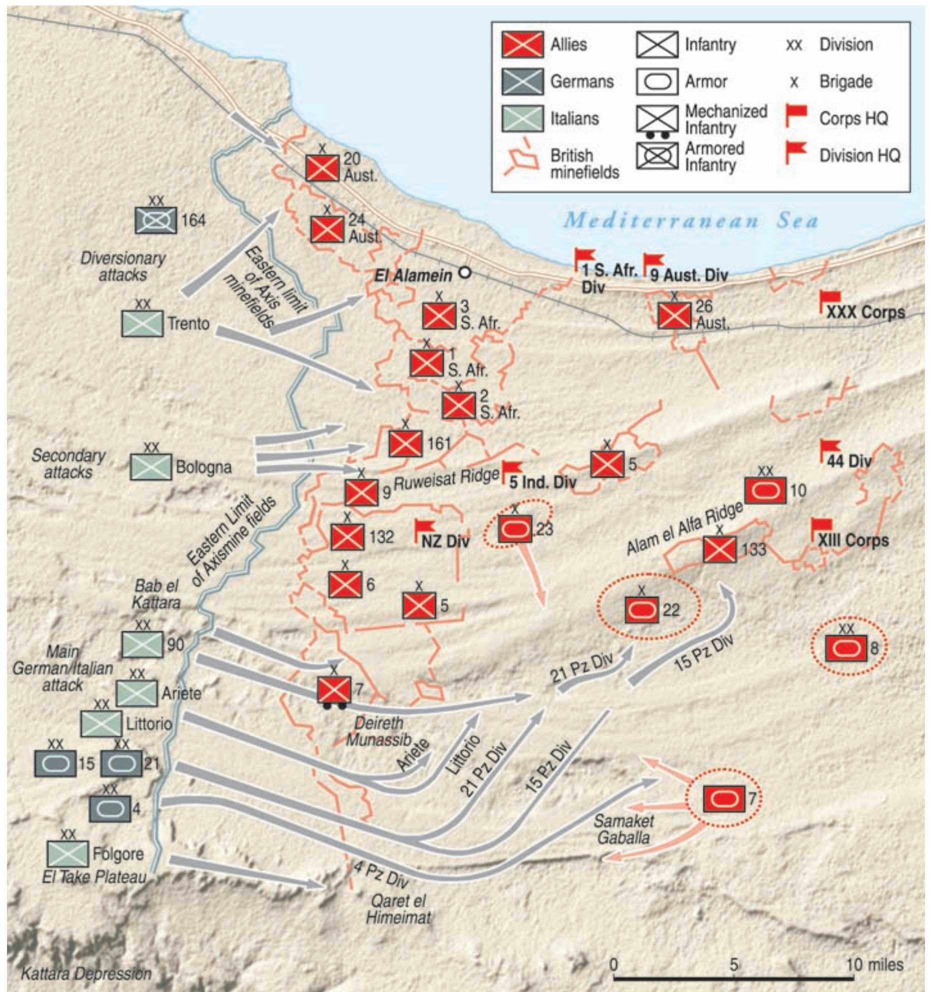
Rommel was at the southern end of the line when he heard of the Australian attack. He rushed north with part of the 15th Panzer Division to close the gap, and for several days a vicious battle was fought for Tel el Eisa. During one panzer attack, Corporal James Hinson got close enough to a leading tank to take it out with a "sticky" bomb he attached to it. Hinson was awarded a Distinguished Conduct Medal. During an infantry assault, Corporal Victor Knight and his four Vickers machine guns held off an attack for three hours, the infantrymen urinating on the gun barrels to cool them and pouring oil into the working parts, keeping the guns firing continuously. The Germans, the 104th Infantry Regiment recently arrived from Crete, sustained 600 casualties, more than 50 percent of their number, from the machine guns and some shellfire during the attack. Knight, too, was awarded a Distinguished Conduct Medal.

On July 14, savage fighting erupted around Ruweisat Ridge, held by the New Zealanders, when it came under attack by the 15th Panzer Division and the Italian Brescia Infantry Division. Fighting continued into the next day. In one action, Captain Charles Upham was awarded his second Victoria Cross. He was wounded twice while leading a night attack against mechanized infantry and got close enough to a truck filled with panzergrenadiers to kill most of them with grenades. He was wounded again but took part in another attack at dawn.

Four machine-gun posts, supported by tanks, held up the attack, and Upham charged. Wounded yet another time, he was captured. He made several attempts to escape and ended the war in Colditz Castle, the Germans' highest security prison. He was only the third man in the history of the Victoria Cross to receive it twice, and the only one to survive. When the battle for Ruweisat Ridge ended the New Zealanders remained in possession of it.

Around this time the British mounted several strong attacks, severely mauling the Italian Brescia, Trieste, and Pavia Infantry Divisions and forcing German armored units to use scarce fuel in coming to their assistance. On July 17, Rommel wrote to his wife, "It is going pretty badly for me. The enemy's superior infantry is taking out one Italian unit after another. German units much too weak to halt them alone. It makes me cry!" And on the following day he wrote, "The past, crucial day was particularly bad for us. Once again we got away. It cannot go on much longer or the front is lost. Militarily these are the worst days I have lived through."

By now, Rommel had committed his last reserves, including elements of the new 164th Infantry Division, which was still being formed. To keep the pressure up, Auchinleck threw in the 23rd Armored Brigade, only recently arrived from England. It had done little desert training,



The stout British defenses at El Alamein were anchored in the north by the Mediterranean Sea and in the south by the escarpment of the Qattara Depression. Rommel planned to attack along the front, but it was Montgomery who struck first. (Map © 2007 Philip Schwartzberg, meridian Mapping, Minneapolis, MN)

and its Valentine tanks, although heavily armored, were armed with only the old, inadequate two-pounder gun. In Balaclava style, the brigade charged the veteran 21st Panzer Division, screened by antitank guns, and in an hour 86 of its 97 Valentines were destroyed.

Auchinleck was now faced with another problem—a high-level mutiny. Both Australian commander Maj. Gen. Leslie Morshead and New Zealand commander Maj. Gen. Bernard Freyberg had long been dissatisfied with the performance of the British armor. More often than not, they said, "the tanks had difficulty coordinating with the infantry—they turned up at the wrong place or the wrong time, or didn't turn up at all. They disappeared from the battlefield long before midnight saying they couldn't see in the dark, leaving the infantry without tank cover. When they did attack they often attacked 'unscientifically,' for example, as had the 23rd Armored Brigade." So now Morshead was declining to attack on the grounds that he had no confidence in the armor and if ordered to do so he would have to consult the Australian government.

Auchinleck managed to placate the Australian by offering him British troops for the most dangerous part of the next offensive, and Morshead finally agreed. Freyberg, too, decided to let the matter rest. The British troops given to Morshead were one of 50th Division's tired brigades that had been in action continuously for over three months.

On the first night of the offensive the British brigade lost 600 men killed or captured, and one Australian battalion was surrounded by panzers after its tank support was driven off with heavy losses. As the panzers closed in, an Australian soldier ran forward, spraying a tank with bullets from his .303 Bren gun. The bullets were useless against the tank, and the soldier was shot down. His action convinced the battalion commander of the futility of resistance, and he signaled the battalion to end the hopeless fight.

The next day, Auchinleck called off the offensive, ending the battle in a stalemate. Both sides were exhausted. But for Auchinleck, it was, in a sense, a victory. The Afrika Korps had been stopped cold, and 7,000 prisoners, mostly Italian, had been taken.

During July and August, Rommel received some 24,000 troops and 11,000 Luftwaffe personnel airlifted in by Junkers Ju-52 transports. However, these reinforcements had no artillery or other heavy weapons, no troop carriers, tanks, or ammunition. They, in fact, imposed a greater strain on his overstretched transport and supplies. Among the reinforcements was a brigade of paratroops commanded by Maj. Gen. Bernhard Hermann Ramcke. It comprised four battalions of paratroopers and support units, 4,000 men in all, a tough, hard-hitting force that was soon in the thick of the heaviest fighting.

British Prime Minister Winston Churchill flew into Cairo on August 3, and, intent on a shakeup of his top military commanders, visited them in the field. He replaced Auchinleck with Lt. Gen. Sir Harold Alexander as commander of a new Near East Command, and placed Lt. Gen. Bernard Law Montgomery in command of the Eighth Army.

Montgomery arrived at Eighth Army headquarters on Ruweisat Ridge on August 13, where his chief of staff, Brigadier Francis de Guingand, had assembled all his staff officers. Sitting in the sand, they listened to this small, wiry man who "looked more like an ops room clerk than an army commander." His message was short, simple, and electrifying: There would be no more surrender.

"There will be no further withdrawal," stated Montgomery. "I have ordered that all plans and instructions dealing with further withdrawal are to be burnt, and at once.… The Eighth Army will not yield a yard of ground to the enemy.… Troops will fight and die where they stand.… We will start to plan a great offensive; it will be the beginning of a campaign which will hit Rommel for six right out of Africa." He was doing what all effective leaders do—defining and focusing on the task of finishing Rommel. He was also building a team by creating mutual confidence.

Montgomery knew that "generations of taking war seriously had given the Germans a superiority in standard operating procedures, command and control and staff work, and an instinct for battle so great that the only way they could be defeated was by ruthless attrition." He planned accordingly.

Anticipating that Rommel's next attack would be at the southern end of the Alamein

line and aimed at Alam el Halfa Ridge, Montgomery brought in a newly arrived infantry division, the 44th, with its antitank guns and artillery, to reinforce his units already on the ridge. Most of his tanks, including 170 American-made Grants with their 75mm guns, were dug in around the ridge, hulls down so that only their turrets were exposed. The tanks were under strict orders to stay put, to stand and fight. There would be no more heroic cavalry-style charges as had happened so often in the past with devastating results. From now on the Eighth Army would play it Monty's way, not Rommel's.

It was a reversal of Rommel's tried and tested tactic of show and kill, which had so often in the past lured British tanks to their destruction.

Montgomery knew from ULTRA that Rommel was desperately short of supplies, especially fuel. The main ports along the North African coast, through which Rommel could obtain supplies from Italy and Greece, were Tripoli, 1,300 miles from El Alamein; Benghazi, 800 miles away, and the still-distant locations of Tobruk at 300 miles and Mersa Matruh at 109 miles. The British Desert Air Force mauled German convoys, bombed and strafed targets in Tobruk and Mersa Matruh, and attacked supply ships. British submarines also took their toll on Axis shipping. Only a small percentage of the supplies sent were reaching Rommel.

In stark contrast, for the Eighth Army, El Alamein was only 60 miles from the port of Alexandria and 150 miles from the Suez Canal where 100,000 tons of fuel alone were being unloaded each month. As a veteran desert warrior remarked, "War in the desert is ultimately about who has the better lines of supply."

For his next attack on the Alamein line and a breakthrough to Alexandria and Cairo, Rommel planned a feint attack in the center of the line while his armor would outflank British positions in the south, then wheel north and head for the sea, encircling British forces in their positions. They would then head east, for Alexandria. Rommel believed that Egyptians would welcome him and turn against the British. An integral part of the operation involved the Ramcke Parachute Brigade which, with the Italian Folgore Parachute Division, would parachute near the Nile and capture the bridges at Alexandria and Cairo. The plan did not fully materialize.

When he spoke to his officers on August 13, Montgomery had said, "I understand that Rommel is expected to attack at any moment. Excellent. Let him attack. I would sooner it didn't come for a week; it will just give me time to sort things out. If we have two weeks to prepare we will be sitting pretty. Rommel can attack as soon as he likes after that and I hope he does…."

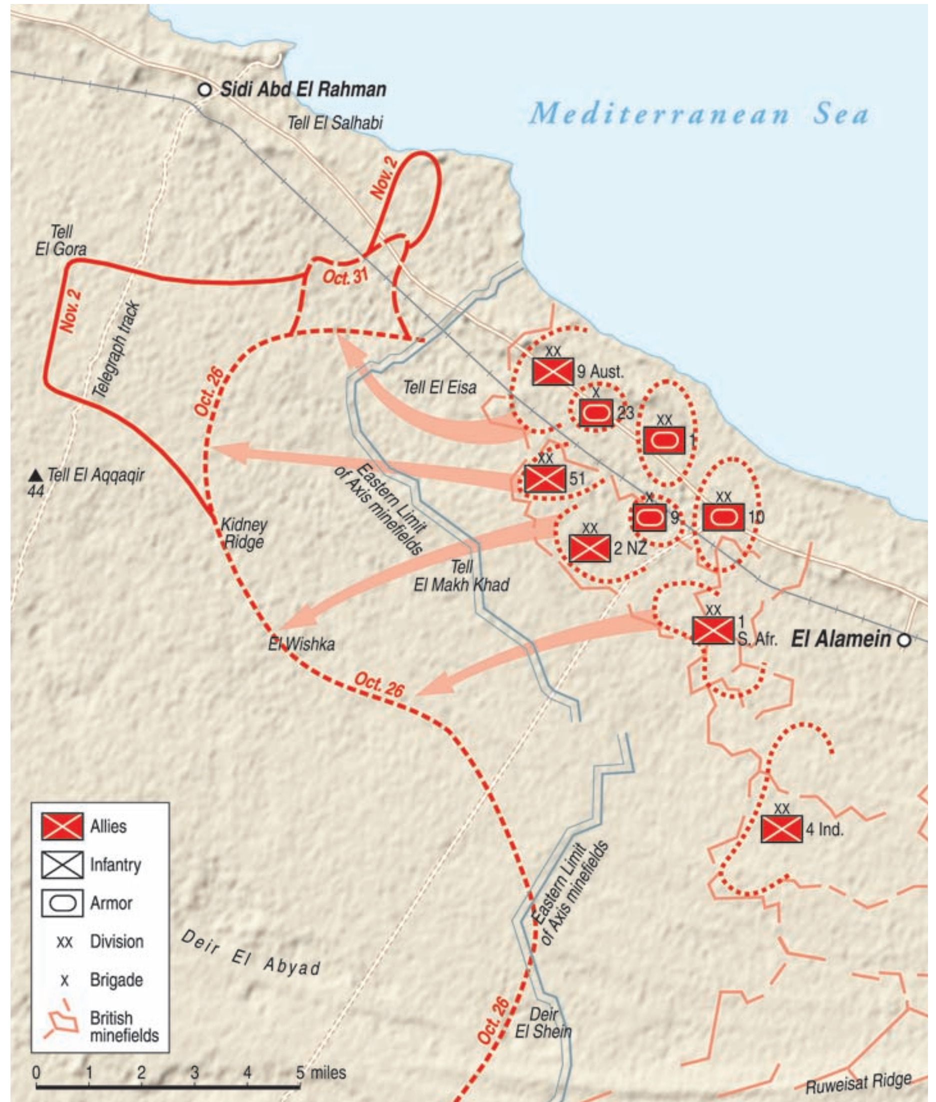
Rommel launched his attack on the night of August 30. With the larger part of the Axis force, including four armored divisions, he raced in a sweeping arc just north of the Qattara Depression to break through the British line and wheel toward the sea. But the British had heavily mined the area, and while German and Italian troops tried to clear passages through the minefields the Desert Air Force lit up the sky with parachute flares and bombed and shot up tanks and the supply trucks coming up behind them. British guns accounted for more.

Patrolling in their Bren gun carrier, a group of British soldiers comes under fire from German artillery positioned beyond the desert horizon. (National Archives)

The following day, the panzers were out of the minefields but still under air attack and faced with the guns and tanks on and around Alam el Halfa. Rommel wanted to call off the attack, but Bayerlein persuaded him to go on, turning east earlier than planned so as to make the drive on Alexandria much shorter and save on fuel. As it was, the armor would soon have to refuel anyway.

It took until 10 AM to get the armor moving, but by then a sandstorm was beginning to blow in. By midday visibility was almost nil. The Desert Air Force was grounded, and refueling for the Germans and Italians was an exhausting and nerve-wracking business, but better than being bombed. By 1 PM the tanks had refueled and, with the storm at its height, they began moving slowly northward, toward the western edge of Alam el Halfa where the 22nd Armored Brigade with its Grant tanks and supported by the 23rd Armored Brigade was dug in and waiting.

Progress for the German and Italian armor was painfully slow in soft sand and the blinding sandstorm. Then, at about 5:30 PM, the storm began to abate. As the air cleared, observers on Alam el Halfa saw 120 German tanks emerge from the subsiding clouds about 1,000 yards in front of the 22nd Armored. The tanks then wheeled east, across the British positions, and General Roberts ordered a flank attack. The leading German tanks were new, with long-range guns, and they opened up while they were out of range of the British guns, causing casualties among the Grants. However, they closed in, and the British hit back. Probing for a way through, the Germans edged west, toward presighted antitank guns, which they could not see. The gunners held the fire of



Following a heavy artillery barrage, troops of the British Eighth Army succeeded in breaking through the German defenses at El Alamein in October 1942. The decisive defeat in Egypt was the beginning of the end for Axis arms in North Africa. (Map © 2007 Philip Schwartzberg, Meridian Mapping, Minneapolis, MN)

their 6-pounders until the range closed to 300 yards, then opened up. There was nothing the German tanks could do but charge. They overran a few of the guns but took losses and could not break through. It was a reversal of Rommel's tried and tested tactic of show and kill, which had so often in the past lured British tanks to their destruction. When dusk came, Rommel withdrew a few miles. Both sides had lost more than 20 tanks in the action, and both sides worked at reclaiming and repairing the many that were damaged.

That night, Montgomery ordered the bombing of German and Italian supply transports, hitting Rommel where it hurt. The next morning, September 1, Rommel was further frustrated when the British tanks did not try to attack him. He attempted another push on the ridge, hoping to lure the British tanks out, but they did not move. He then withdrew into the desert where he was bombed all day. He subsequently decided to retreat but had to wait until nightfall to do so. He then fell back in good order, and by the evening of September 6 had returned his forces to the safety of their own fortified line.

From now on, Rommel was doomed to a battle of attrition, a battle he knew he could not win. His only gain in territory was the Himeimat Ridge in the far south, and at 1,300 feet it was a wonderful observation post for the Folgore. Montgomery was happy to leave the Germans there; he said it suited his purposes "that Rommel should be able to have a good look" at the dummy installations he was preparing to set up in the south to confuse the Germans as to the direction of the next British attack.

Casualties in the battle of Alam el Halfa were about 1,750 for the Eighth Army and about 2,800 for the Germans. The Afrika Korps had lost 47 tanks and recovered 76 that had been damaged. It had lost some 400 other vehicles, mostly by bombing, a serious blow to the movement of troops and supplies.

Some high-ranking German officers blamed Rommel for the defeat at Alam el Halfa, saying that once the panzers had gotten through the minefields and outflanked the British the old Rommel would have pressed on. Others accused him of allowing himself to become demoralized by his fears of fuel shortages after the sinking of several Italian oil tankers in the Mediterranean. On the other hand, if he had pressed on at Alam el Halfa he might have lost all his armor in useless frontal attacks.

Rommel was also a sick man, suffering from stomach and liver complaints complicated by high blood pressure, sinusitis, and a sore throat. On September 23, he handed over command of the Afrika Korps to General Georg Stumme, a veteran Panzer commander of the French and Russian campaigns, and left for Germany on sick leave. He was greeted as a national hero.

Rommel was also a heroic figure to many in the Eighth Army, and Montgomery looked for a way to improve his own image. He had begun wearing an Australian issue Digger's hat studded with the badges of various regiments, but it tended to fly off when he stood up in the turret of the tank he had adapted for use as his mobile tactical headquarters. He changed it for a black Royal Tank Corps beret adorned with the Tank Corps badge and a general's insignia. He also had the name "Monty" painted in large letters on the side of his tank, a rather dangerous thing to do.

Montgomery was determined not to launch an offensive against the Afrika Korps without the intensive training and retraining of both newcomers to and veterans of his Eighth Army. So, though Prime Minister Churchill (who wanted an offensive mounted in September before the planned Allied landings in Morocco and Algeria) fumed at the delay, Montgomery refused to move until he was sure his army was ready and he was confident of a victory.

While working on his plans, Montgomery rotated brigades out of the line and put them through various training courses based on what he expected to happen in reality. Vigorous physical training, mine clearing, tanks and troops working together, the use of creeping barrages, communications, night attacks, and cooperation with the Desert Air Force were part of the regimen. He also worked on camouflaging the buildup for his offensive to achieve maximum

surprise on the date he had set, a date he was keeping secret.

At the southern end of the Alamein line, dummy headquarters buildings, barrack tents, and supply dumps with empty fuel cans were set up. Fires were lit at night to suggest a major troop concentration, trenches and gun emplacements were dug, and imitation minefields laid, while the Desert Air Force deliberately allowed German reconnaissance aircraft to photograph the activity. Mock tanks were set out, a dummy water pipeline made from empty oil drums was constructed, and signalers kept up a steady flow of coded radio traffic between bogus divisions.

In the north, similar dummy positions were laid out while the fighting divisions were kept well to the rear. As the deadline for the attack approached, the fighting divisions were filtered into their positions and dummy vehicles and supply dumps were replaced with the real thing.

As the date Montgomery had selected to begin his attack approached, he issued an order to his officers telling them to promote a bloodlust among their men, saying, "They must be worked up to that state which will make them want to go into battle and kill Germans, even the padres who could kill Germans one on weekdays and two on Sundays." Montgomery was the son of a bishop.

Before leaving for Germany, Rommel had laid the foundations for a formidable defense. It was based on a half million mines, a mix of antitank and antipersonnel mines in two enormous fields a mile apart. The minefields were covered by artillery and machine guns, and behind them the deadly 88mm cannon and other antitank guns.

The front was manned by infantry: the 164th Light and Trento Divisions in the north; Bologna, Ramcke's Parachute Brigade, and Brescia in the center; Pavia and Folgore Airborne in the south. Behind them were the armored divisions divided into six groups, three formed by 15th Panzer and Littorio in the north and three by 21st Panzer and Ariete in the south. At the far south of the Axis line was the German Kiel Group, equipped with captured Stuart light tanks. The reserves, the veteran motorized 90th Light and Trieste Divisions, were three miles behind the front and close to the coast in case Montgomery tried an amphibious landing to the rear. In all, the Axis force consisted of about 50,000 Germans and 54,000 Italians. They had about 500 tanks, 280 of them inferior Italian models; some 1,200 artillery pieces, half German and half Italian; and about 350 aircraft, not counting those available from Crete, Greece, and Sicily.

The reinforced Eighth Army had 195,000 men, just over 1,000 tanks, 2,300 artillery pieces, and some 530 aircraft of the Desert Air Force. It consisted of 19 Royal Air Force, nine South African, seven American, and two Australian squadrons. Some RAF squadrons had the latest Supermarine Spitfire fighters, while the U.S. squadrons flew primarily the North American B-25 Mitchell medium bomber and the Curtiss P-40 Tomahawk fighter. The Desert Air Force was now in almost total control of the air, and it worked extremely well with the Eighth Army. Montgomery worked feverishly to make his Eighth Army "think on its tracks and wheels and react quickly, and to weld infantry, antitank guns, artillery, armor and air power into one controlled and seamless killing machine."

Monty divided the Eighth Army into three corps, numbered 30, 13, and 10. The first two were mainly of infantry, while 10th Corps, commanded by Lt. Gen. Herbert Lumsden, was made up of tanks, armored cars, and the truckborne infantry of two armored divisions.

This image taken in July 1942, shortly after the German advance across the North African desert had been checked during the first battle of El Alamein, shows British soldiers advancing during a training exercise intended to improve coordination between infantry and armor. (Imperial War Museum)

Montgomery divided the front into northern and southern sectors at the Ruweisat Ridge. In the northern sector was Lt. Gen. Oliver Leese's 30th Corps with Morshead's Australians nearest the coast; then, moving south, Maj. Gen. Douglas Wimberly's 51st Highland Division, Freyberg's New Zealand 2nd Division, Maj. Gen. Dan Pienaar's South African 1st Division, and Maj. Gen. Francis Tuker's Indian 4th Division. All these Commonwealth divisions had a certain amount of British armor attached to them, the New Zealanders an entire brigade. The 4th Indian Division included three battalions of British infantry. The artillery and support arms were almost entirely British, and in reserve was the 23rd Armored Brigade, which included a battalion of motorized infantry. Behind these in the northern sector were the 1st and 10th Armored Divisions of Lumsden's 10th Corps.

In the southern sector, Lt. Gen. Brian Horrocks's 13th Corps included Maj. Gen. Nicholl's 50th Division reinforced with a brigade of Free Greeks and Maj. Gen. Hector Hughes's 44th Division. Farthest south in the line was Brig. Gen. Marie-Pierre Koenig's Free French Brigade, the heroes of Bir Hacheim. Behind them was the 7th Armored Division, the original Desert Rats, commanded by Maj. Gen. John Harding.

Confined as he was to a 40-mile front, Montgomery's plan for his assault on the enemy was quite simple. He would attack simultaneously in the north and the south, making it hard for Rommel to ascertain the direction of the main effort, which would be in the north where 30th Corps would break the Axis line between the Miteiriya Ridge and the sea and clear a bridgehead. The 10th Corps would then pass through them and engage the armor of the Afrika Korps on the plains beyond. In the south, 13th Corps would capture Himeimat and thereby threaten Rommel's flank, forcing him to commit his armored reserves to plug the gap. At the same time, part of the 7th Armored Division would

attack his supply dumps.

Montgomery's date for the beginning of his offensive was October 23, and for all of that day the frontline troops in the northern sector lay hidden in their trenches and foxholes under the desert sun. After dusk, in the early chill of a cold desert night, the troops were allowed out of their holes to eat and smoke and, if lucky, to sip a little rum from large stone bottles that were passed around. Since the days of Admiral Horatio Nelson a regulation tot of 90 proof navy rum had been issued daily to sailors on His or Her Majesty's ships, but only on very special occasions was it issued to soldiers. A tot, a serving spoonful, was estimated to be enough to maintain morale without losing coherence. At 9 PM, in full moonlight, the infantry divisions moved to their start lines and waited in complete silence.

At 9:25, in the southern sector, 230 British guns opened up in a bombardment of the German defenses. At 9:35, all along the line there was the sound of approaching bomber squadrons of the Desert Air Force, and at 9:40 the ground shook and the air vibrated as a 460-gun artillery barrage opened up in the northern sector, mixing with the crash of bombs from the planes passing overhead.

The artillery barrage and the bombs were aimed at enemy artillery batteries, and an intense rate of fire was kept up for 15 minutes. Then there was a pause for five minutes. At exactly 10 PM, the guns opened up again with a rolling barrage on all of the enemy's forward positions at the rate of 900 rounds per minute. Acres of mines were blown up, blockhouses and dugouts caved in. German and Italian soldiers were deafened for hours, their ears bled, and some dropped dead from the concussion of the exploding shells.

As the barrage rolled forward, the infantry divisions in the northern sector of the line fixed bayonets and began their advance, the 51st Highland Division with bagpipes skirling. Piper Duncan McIntyre, age 19, his Royal Stuart kilt swinging, led the 5th Black Watch to the first ridge. Twice he was wounded, but he continued skirling out "Highland Laddie" until a burst of machine-gun fire silenced him forever. The job for the Highlanders that night was to open up two corridors through the enemy minefields and defenses. Bofors antiaircraft guns fired tracers above their heads to mark the lines of advance cleared by sappers and flail tanks through the minefields.

The Australians and Highlanders, with the assistance of three regiments of tanks, were to clear a path through the positions held by the 164th Light and Trento Divisions so that the 1st Armored Division could pass through. The Australians struck into the area west of Tel el Eisa. The northern brigade of the division took its first objectives by midnight and, after some hard fighting, took its final objectives by 2:45 AM. The southern brigade was still 1,000 yards short of its final objectives when dawn broke, so the troops dug in. Casualties were only about 350.

The Highland Division's task was to extend the northern corridor down from the Afrika Korps strongpoint at Kidney Ridge to the northwest corner of Miteiriya Ridge, the strongest part of the defenses. After crossing the first minefield the troops came upon barbed wire entanglements and, as they cut the wire, machine guns opened up on them. Men began falling, and platoons and companies mingled and bunched up and lost direction. The supporting tanks ran into minefields. In spite of the chaos that ensued, the northern brigade captured some of its objectives though the southern brigade was short of all its objectives. The infantry now became pinned down by fire from some of the enemy strongpoints. The 51st had taken 1,000 casualties.

The Trento and 164th Divisions held the Miteiriya Ridge. The New Zealand Division, supported by the 9th Armored Brigade, attacked the northern half of the ridge, and the South Africans, supported by a regiment of Valentine tanks, attacked the southern half. The New Zealand northern brigade, after some heavy fighting, had reached all its objectives by 2:45 AM and linked up with the Highlanders. They then found more minefields and had only just cleared them by sunrise. The southern brigade also got across the ridge by dawn, but its supporting tanks were held up by mines and gunfire and stayed on the eastern slope of the ridge, with the infantry out in front of them

LEFT: During a lull in the desert fighting, a bagpiper entertains British soldiers with an impromptu concert. BELOW: As a German shell bursts dangerously close by, steady veterans of the 4th Indian Division continue to move forward across a stark desert landscape. The British Army was augmented by large numbers of Commonwealth troops. (Both: Imperial War Museum)

without heavy weapons. They had bunched toward the north, leaving a gap to the south between them and the South Africans. The New Zealanders had lost about 800 men.

Although held up by heavy resistance at the beginning of their attack, the three South African brigades got onto the ridge and captured their objectives by dawn—except for the

ABOVE: German soldiers confer as they await orders during the El Alamein fighting. Afrika Korps tank losses were heavy and virtually impossible to replace due to Allied successes against Axis shipping in the Mediterranean. LEFT: Its commander riding in an open hatch, a German tank moves toward the front. Following defeat at El Alamein, the Afrika Korps was chased across hundreds of miles of desert. (Both: National Archives)

brigade to the north; it was 500 yards short. South African losses were 350.

The Indian Division, at the southern end of the northern sector, carried out a number of diversionary attacks on the Italian infantry and German paratroopers on Ruweisat Ridge, helping to keep the enemy unclear as to the intentions of the Eighth Army.

The problem on the northern sector of the line was that the engineers and sappers, taking casualties in the moonlight from artillery and machine-gun fire, had been unable to keep to the timetable of mine removal. Mine detectors and flail tanks were in their infancy and unreliable, and the task of detecting and lifting mines was mainly left to probing with bayonets. Most of the mines were teller antitank, and mixed in with them were antipersonnel mines, which, when exploded, threw out a ring of ball bearings at waist height. The minefields were covered by artillery and machine guns, many of the machine guns fixed to fire at knee height.

Once a lane had been cleared through the mines, it became congested with tanks and vehicles waiting for lanes ahead to be cleared, and the tanks and vehicles were sitting targets in the moonlight under German parachute flares. In the swirling sand and dust, tanks ran over the tapes marking the lanes, and some veered off into the minefields while others stopped, not knowing where to go. Soon it became a vast traffic jam, and the ammunition and fuel trucks, artillery, ambulances, and other vehicles stretched back for miles. The sun came up to fully reveal this huge mass of vehicles in choking sand and dust clouds.

In the southern sector of the line, the role of 13th Corps was to look threatening enough to persuade Rommel to keep his 21st Panzer Division and other units in the south. To do this, Horrocks sent his 7th Armored Division into the attack, with the infantry following, at the same time as the northern sector infantry began their advance. The infantry attack comprised the 44th and 50th Divisions, the Free French Brigade, and the 1st Greek Infantry Brigade.

After some delays, mainly because of the breakdowns occurring with several of the flail tanks, a path was cleared to attack the positions of the Folgore Parachute Division, and the Free French moved through to take the two peaks of the Himeimat. But the German Kiel Gruppe counterattacked and pushed them off. The French, mostly Foreign Legion men, were demoralized by the death of one of their most flamboyant officers, the Russian prince Colonel Dimitris Amilakvari. The Kiel Gruppe, on the Himeimat, played havoc with the advancing 13th Corps armor and infantry. When dawn came, the infantry dug in and the Folgore Airborne and some of Ramcke's paratroopers closed in.

The Eighth Army's opening artillery barrage and bombing had destroyed many of the Axis guns and disrupted communication links between army, corps and divisional headquarters. Runners were used to carry some messages, but no one knew very much about what was going on. The German commander, General Stumme, set off in the early morning for the front line in a car with a driver and staff officer to assess the situation. Under fire from Australian machine guns, the staff officer was killed and Stumme was stricken by a fatal heart attack. The driver, though wounded, managed to get Stumme's body back to his headquarters. Lt. Gen. Wilhelm Ritter von Thoma, commander of the Afrika Korps, took over as commander of the entire panzer army until Rommel returned.

By dawn on October 24, the Australian, British, New Zealand, and South African infantry of 30th Corps had achieved some of their objectives along the line codenamed "Oxalic," but by 8 AM only about half of them were where Montgomery had wanted them to be. Nevertheless, they had hammered a huge wedge in the enemy's defenses. Casualties had been relatively few, mainly wounds from mines and booby traps.

Behind the infantry, 10th Corps armor had performed badly, failing to exploit the infantry's successes. Nowhere had they broken through the enemy defenses to establish a tank screen to protect the infantry from the panzer divisions massed to counterattack. Much of 10th Corps' armor was stuck in the minefields or in the

ABOVE: Dead Germans and their personal effects lie strewn across a scarred landscape following the capture of their position by British troops during the early stages of the Battle of El Alamein. British artillery support was devastating against the German entrenchments. RIGHT: A burning German tank marks the line of retreat from El Alamein. During his preparations for the decisive battle, British Field Marshal Bernard Montgomery made certain that he had numerical superiority.
(ABOVE: Imperial War Museum / RIGHT: National Archives)

clogged lanes through them. They had not carried out Montgomery's order that if the infantry was held up they should drive through them and attack. The British commander was furious. He saw it as a lack of determined leadership and offensive spirit in his armor, and he threatened that if the armored division commanders hung back any more he would replace them with better men.

During next day, on both fronts, one soldier said, "It was dangerous to lift your head, suicide to stand up," and casualties were heavy. That night, in the northern sector the tanks tried to get through the minefields to the infantry, but German 88s and mines took out so many of them the attempt was called off. In the southern sector, Maj. Gen. John Harding withdrew his tanks and infantry—he had been ordered to conserve his tanks for a future action—leaving Ramcke's paratroopers and the Folgore Airborne on Himeimat. This was intentional; Montgomery wanted the Germans to think he might still make his major attack in the south.

Getting the wounded back from areas under shell and machine-gun fire was a hazardous business for the Eighth Army medics and many others who helped. They were assisted by a band of American Red Cross volunteers who drove four-wheel-drive Dodge trucks back and forth under fire, leaving British medical officers and soldiers with, as one medical officer said, "fond memories of a gallant and eccentric breed."

Rommel returned and took up command of the Axis forces at midnight on the 25th, more than 48 hours after the battle had begun. With his return, morale rose in all the ranks of the army. He inherited a front on which the Eighth Army had severely dented the northern part of his line, but nowhere had the British succeeded in driving a hole through it. Most of the Eighth Army's armor was still stuck behind the infantry, and the Germans and Italians were putting up a stiff resistance.

Rommel quickly realized that Montgomery was feinting in the south and that his main attack was nearer the coast. He ordered the 21st Panzer to move north toward Kidney Ridge. It was a risk; it left him with only the Ariete Division in the south, and if Montgomery decided to move his armor in that direction Rommel would not have enough fuel to send his panzers back to help the Ariete.

But Montgomery was sending his infantry and armor from the south to the north, around Kidney Ridge, where an all-out battle was developing with the Highlanders and Australians fighting for the position. Early in the battle the 15th Panzer and the Littorio Armored Division with its "wretched M13 tanks" began an all-day attack on the ridge. One regiment of the Littorio had its 41 tanks quickly reduced to two. An Italian officer described what happened: "Some of the tanks continued to advance even after they had been hit and set on fire, with only dead and dying men inside them, like huge self-propelled funeral pyres, a dead man's foot still pressing down on the accelerator.... A procession of blazing monsters, shaken by explosions and emitting colored flashes as the shells inside went off.... The souls of the dead men must have been trapped in their vehicles; how else could a smashed and blazing tank continue to advance towards the enemy?"

The battle continued with heavy losses on both sides in men and tanks, six days of non-stop attack and counterattack. Then Montgomery withdrew his tanks, and with both sides exhausted the battle petered out in stalemate. More than 2,000 of the Highlanders were dead or wounded, and well over 1,000 Australians, but the Australians had gotten "a thumb" across the railway line. If they reached the sea, they would trap Rommel's 90th Light and 164th Divisions in a pocket.

Montgomery had already planned his next attack, codenamed Supercharge. New Zealand commander Bernard Freyberg would lead five battalions—three from the Durham Light Infantry and two from the Highland Division—together with one battalion of his Maoris and, supported by the tanks of the 9th Armored Brigade, and punch a corridor through the minefield to just north of Kidney Ridge in the vulnerable junction where the German and Italian defenses met.

At 1 AM on November 2, the six battalions of infantrymen fixed bayonets and began walking forward behind a creeping barrage that advanced 100 yards every three minutes and fell on and exploded hundreds of mines. Bofors anti-aircraft guns with barrels lowered fired tracers above the heads of the infantry to help the battalions stay on course. Shortly before dawn, the infantry had seized most of its objectives. The 9th Armored Brigade, for various reasons, started late, at 6:15 AM. Close to the front, the tanks had to feel their way under artillery fire along narrow channels cleared through the

minefields. When the sun came up behind the tanks, they were easy targets, and soon plumes of smoke rose up from the burning wrecks.

Still, the armor pushed on in a frenzy, in a charge often compared with that of the Light Brigade at Balaclava, reaching the enemy's antitank and field guns, driving over guns, gun pits and gunners. Some of the armored cars of the Royal Dragoons charged through the enemy lines and began shooting up fuel dumps, transports, and other soft targets. In this charge, the brigade lost 270 men killed or wounded and 71 of its 90 tanks.

The 2nd Armored Brigade failed to take advantage of the hole punched through the enemy antitank gun line, and then it was too late. Rommel, realizing what was happening, reacted quickly, moving the 21st and 15th Panzer Divisions to block Montgomery's move, and the largest tank action of the battle began to build up on the Rahman track around Aqqaqir.

The 2nd Armored Brigade and the remnants of the 9th bore the brunt of the initial fighting, but soon more and more British armor was drawn into the battle. By the end of the day, Rommel had less than 50 tanks able to move while Montgomery had some 500. Rommel was also short of antitank guns; he had only 24 88mm guns left to face the British tanks in the salient Freyberg had created. That evening, Rommel sent a message to the Commando Supremo in Rome, saying that his only hope was to "extricate the remnants" of his army. He warned that his Italian formations, without transport, would have to be abandoned. The British picked up the message via ULTRA, as well as one that followed the next day. This was a communication from Hitler ordering Rommel to stand and fight, victory or death. It was a death sentence for the army, and Rommel understood it as such.

Still, the armor pressed on in a frenzy, in a charge often compared with that of the Light Brigade at Balaclava.

Field Marshal Albert Kesselring, Commander in Chief South (although he did not have direct authority over Rommel), intervened on Rommel's behalf and got Hitler's order rescinded on November 4. That day, the Afrika Korps (the two panzer divisions plus the 90th Light) commander, von Thoma, was taken prisoner when his command tank was hit and disabled. He formally surrendered to Montgomery.

The panzer army front collapsed as Germans and Italians began to fall back, pursued by the Eighth Army. In the southern sector the Folgore Airborne Division, having fought well and now out of ammunition, surrendered. Only 306 paratroopers were left of an original complement of 5,000. The infantrymen of the Pavia and Brescia Divisions quickly joined them. Others began the long walk back, and many died from their wounds, hunger, or thirst or were picked off by Senussi tribesmen for their weapons and anything else of value.

Ramcke's parachute brigade, which had been involved in heavy fighting during the battle, was abandoned as it had no transport and was unable to join the retreat. Ramcke, rather than surrender, decided to break out to the west. The breakout cost him 450 men, but by a stroke of luck he captured a British convoy of 50 trucks carrying supplies. Using them, the brigade made a hazardous drive across the desert to rejoin the retreating panzer army at Mersa

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LEFT: Afrika Korps commander Ritter von Thoma meets Field Marshal Bernard Montgomery following the capture of the German general during the fighting at El Alamein and the long German withdrawal to Tunisia and surrender. BELOW: British Crusader tanks, which exploited the breakthrough at El Alamein, take up positions at dusk to defend against a counterattack by the Afrika Korps. Air superiority also took its toll on the retreating Germans. (Both: Imperial War Museum)

RED Air Force Heroines

BY GEORGE TIPTON WILSON

Ignoring a nonaggression pact between Hitler and Stalin, Nazi Germany launched Operation Barbarossa, an invasion of the Soviet Union, on June 22, 1941. The Soviet Air Force was caught on the ground and nearly annihilated.

By November the German Army had fought its way to within 19 miles of Moscow. Leningrad was under siege. Three million Russians had been taken prisoner. A large part of the Red Army had been wiped out.

Immediately after the devastating attack began, the Soviet Union formed three regiments of female combatants at the behest of Marina Raskova, the Amelia Earhart of the Soviet Union. Raskova, already a heroine in aviation circles, had the ear of Soviet Premier Josef Stalin and convinced the wily dictator that women needed to be involved in the desperate fight.

Pilot Marina Raskova of the 125th Guards Bomber Regiment is suited up for a mission. Female pilots earned the grudging respect of their German enemy.

It was a decision that many historians are convinced helped turn the tide of the war. By the close of World War II, nearly 1,000 Russian women had flown combat in every type of Soviet aircraft. Their participation has been called the best kept Russian secret of World War II. Even before the war, the Soviet government had encouraged women to participate in activities that earlier had only been the province of men. Women were to be the equal of their male counterparts in everything from being deck hands to flying airplanes.

As a result, women in the Soviet Union who wanted to learn to fly or work with airplanes were not discouraged or frozen out the way they were in America and to a lesser extent in Europe. The United States had its Jacqueline Cochran, its Nancy Harkness Love, its Amelia Earhart, and its Phoebe Omlie, but their fame was mainly relegated to "powderpuff derbies." In the Soviet Union, it was not "healthy" to discriminate openly. Thus, by 1940, fully one-third of the trained pilots

Russian women pilots originally flew the antiquated Polykarpov PO-2, which was made of wood covered with fabric.

Gaining a reputation as formidable foes, the Night Witches earned grudging respect from their German adversaries.

in the Soviet Union were women, and the Russian women pilots had set more flight records than the women of any other country.

One of the records was set on a nonstop flight from Moscow to the Manchurian border made in September 1938 by three women—Valentina Grizoduboya, Captain Polina Osipenko, and Lieutenant Marina Raskova—who were destined to take a leadership role in bringing women into aerial combat in the war against the Nazis. Raskova was the publicly acclaimed heroine among heroines because she selflessly parachuted from the plane during the last stages of the flight in a blinding snowstorm to lighten the plane's load and assure a record-setting, nonstop distance. The aircraft subsequently crash-landed in a swamp near the border, and Raskova had to wander several days without food before she was able to rejoin her colleagues.

The three record-setting women were lionized throughout Russia, but Raskova's fame far outlasted that of the other two. At the time of the flight, she was the navigator, but she went on to train and achieve excellent marks as a pilot. Her fame enabled her to grow close to Stalin, a position that could be tenuous at times, but one that augured well for the author of any project receiving his blessing.

Eleven months after the flight, in August 1939, an unthinkable diplomatic event occurred. Hitler and Stalin signed the non-aggression pact and became co-conspirators in the partition of Poland. Hitler subsequently stabbed Stalin in the back and launched the brutal, surprise attack on Russia in June 1941.

It was then that Martina Raskova joined the throng of would-be bureaucrats imploring the government to implement their plan to save the nation. With her connection to Stalin and the nation's desperate need for military air personnel of all skills, it was a simple matter to get approval for women to join the Air Force and actively fight the German invaders. In fact, a few women pilots already were flying in the service, but they were highly dispersed and hardly visible to the general public. When Raskova called for volunteers to serve in all-women flying units in the summer of 1941, literally thousands responded. Distaff pilots, navigators, even mechanics rushed to lend their skills to help repel the invaders.

By October, Raskova had personally interviewed them all and winnowed out the "Summer Patriots." As the successful applicants were approved, they were billeted around Moscow. Finally, on October 15, the women of the 122nd Composite Air Group left for the training camp at Engles, a small town on the Volga River just a few hundred miles northeast of Stalingrad. There they received the same instruction and training given to all Soviet air units.

Shortly after the women arrived, they were reformed into three regiments, the 586th, the 587th, and the 588th Air Regiments. Nothing in the Russian records indicates these units were treated differently in any way, and the Soviet Army Air Force History of World War II accords them the same treatment as any Soviet Air Regiment. Training days were long and intense, lasting 14 to 16 hours. Much of the time was spent flying—on-the-job training for pilots and navigators. Ground mechanics worked equally hard to keep the training planes flying. Instant recognition of all types of German planes was a primary classroom subject. But the body of knowledge that was so important to each recruit was so huge and the time to master it so short that the women were constantly pressed. Yet they persevered.

She was a shy, retiring, curvaceous blonde beauty out of the cockpit; in it she was a roaring exhibitionist.

The determined glare of fighter pilot Raisa Surnachevskaya is testament to the commitment of the Night Witches to the ultimate victory over the Nazis. Surnachevskaya flew with the 586th Regiment.

The 856th Fighter Regiment was the first to end training and move into combat. Its commander was Major Tamara Kazarinova. Unfortunately, her health failed soon after the regiment moved into its operational headquarters at Saratove. She was replaced by a man, Lt. Col. A.V. Gridnev, who commanded the regiment until the end of the war. The regiment flew the Yak-l, a Soviet fighter designed by the Yakovlev Bureau and comparable the German Messerschmitt and British Spitfire. The unit was used primarily to guard specific targets, fending off German bombing and strafing sorties. Since its mission was defense, it did not rack up huge numbers of kills, but was equal to every assigned task.

Eight of the regiment's exceptionally skilled pilots transferred to a previously all-male regiment in September 1941. Instead of defense, this regiment was employed in seeking and destroying German planes anywhere in its operational area. As a result, two of the women, Lilya Litvyak and Katya Budanova, earned the right to the coveted title of "ace" while flying as "Lone Wolf" fighters. Litvyak had 12 kills and three partials, while Budanova was reputed to have more, although no reliable record seems to exist.

Litvyak's life as a Soviet pilot was the stuff of which movies are made. Apparently, she possessed the necessary physical and mental skills a successful pilot has always required, whether in the early days of aviation or in today's supersonic jets—exceptional hand-eye coordination, marvelously quick reflexes, keen intellect, lightning-fast decision-making capacity, and indomitable courage. She was a shy, retiring, curvaceous blonde beauty out of the cockpit; in it she was a roaring exhibitionist.

Lilya's daredevil moves were the envy of every pilot with whom she came into contact. If the pilot was a man, he promptly fell in love with her. As word of her feats spread through the Red Air Force, her ability to execute others more numerous and daring seemed to grow also. She survived two serious wounds in combat and each time returned to her relentless pursuit of the German invaders much too soon for her own good health. But Lilya was eternally sanguine about her capacity as a fighter pilot. Many of her peers had already included her in the international ranks of legendary pilots.

The mechanic who serviced Lilya's aircraft, Sergeant Inna Pasportnikova, decribed Lilya's insouciant ways to Anne Noggle, whose book *A Dance with Death* is the definitive work on women's contribution to the Soviet Air Force in World War II. "When Lilya approached the airdrome after a victory, it was impossible to watch her; she would fly at a very low altitude and start doing acrobatics over the field. Her regimental commander would say, 'I will destroy her for what she is doing. I will teach her a lesson!' After she landed and taxied over to our position, she would ask me, 'Did our father shout at me?' And he had shouted at her, and then he admired what she had done.

"She flew so low over the field covers of the aircraft would flap and fly around, she created such a wind! When she was shot down the first time, she received a new Yak-1. Men tried to stop her from flying because they wanted to save her, but it was impossible."

Lilya's vibrant personality went well with her blonde hair and fair features. The whole package was a young man's dream, and plenty of Soviet airmen of that day dreamed of wooing and winning her. However, she fell for only one. He was Alexei Salamon, her squadron commander. Their romance lit up the sky almost as brightly as their aerobatics between September 1942 and May 1943. Then, on a beautiful, late spring day, Alexei was in the sky flying a routine training session, showing a recruit how to perform aerobatics. His plane malfunctioned, and he was killed in the ensuing crash.

The accident was almost more than Lilya could bear. Not only was her lover Alexei dead, but the crack pilot died in a mundane accident that had nothing to do with his ability as a pilot. The irony seemed to goad Lilya into more furious aerial activities. She flew relentlessly, spending almost every waking moment in the air.

About three months after Alexei's tragic accident, Lilya and her wingman ran afoul of German fighters while escorting bombers on a mission. The date was August 1, 1943, and it marked the end of Lilya's aerial panegyrics. She crash-landed her plane near a village and was apparently killed by the impact. However, her body was not found in the wreckage. Her commander pressed hard to have her awarded the title Hero of the Soviet Union, but the authorities refused because no trace of her body could be found. They speculated that she might have been captured by the Germans. The mystery was added to the Litvyak legacy of skill and daring, and the puzzle remained unsolved for many years.

Inna Pasportnikova told how she, her husband, and grandchildren searched for the remains of Lilya's body for more than three years. They used metal detectors over an extensive area in the vicinity of the crash site but found no trace of it. For decades, rumors of Lilya sightings popped up across the Soviet Union. There were even comments about the gross exaggeration of her death, but Lilya never showed up in the flesh.

Finally, in the late 1980s, two boys playing in a field in Belorussia started enlarging a hole that they had seen a snake enter. They did not find the snake, but they did uncover some human bones. After extensive investigation and evaluation by forensic experts, the mystery of Lilya Litvak's demise was solved. Apparently, the inhabitants of the nearby village had buried her immediately after her crash to deny the Germans any opportunity of desecrating her remains.

ABOVE: Soviet PE-2 bombers in flight. LEFT: Working on the engine of a U-2 biplane, a trio of female mechanics prepares this Red Air Force relic for a nightly harassment mission against the invading Germans.

The year 1990 saw the end of the long, winding Lilya Litvyka trail. President Mikhail Gorbachev proclaimed her posthumously a Hero of the Soviet Union. Although official recognition of her skill and daring was 47 years in coming, the inspiration Lilya provided her peers in the Red Air Force was a palpable factor in molding the airwomen into effective defenders of their country.

The origin of the sobriquet "Night Witches" (the Nazi term was *Nachthexen*) lay with the 588th Air Regiment. It was the only one of the three to remain under the control of a woman, Major Yedokia Bershanskaya, throughout the war. Its objective was twofold. First, of course, was the destruction of German military installations, but it also extracted a growing psychological toll on German soldiers as the struggle continued. The "pop, pop, pop" of the engines in the Polikarpov PO-2 aircraft they flew was so distinctive that when German troops heard them, they automatically began to dive for cover from bombs, conditioned to jump at the sound.

Since the regiment's pilots flew virtually all night long every night, it is easy to imagine the emotional trauma they wreaked on the tiring German soldiers. MacBeth's witches chanted, "Hover through the fog and filthy air." Perhaps the ranks of the Wehrmacht that surrounded Stalingrad contained a Shakespearean scholar or two who remembered that line, and thus thought it appropriate to dub their tormenting Russian women Night Witches. In any event, the nickname stuck, and soon spread to all Russian airwomen.

The PO-2 was virtually a flying anachronism. It was designed in 1927, but new production had almost ceased by 194l. It was made of wood and covered with fabric, hardly cutting-edge technology even for 1941. Presumably, even the lethargic Soviet production facilities could be counted on to make them quickly and in sufficient quantity to be hustled into the breach against Germany.

The cockpit of the plane was open, and its cruising speed was an agonizingly slow 60 miles per hour. The slightest brush with anti-aircraft fire or tracer bullets set the aircraft ablaze. The crews were not even provided with parachutes until 1944. So, for three years every mission was fraught with great peril.

Primeval living conditions, primitive equipment, long hours on duty without sleep, and abject danger were bad enough, but the women often were subject to the political stresses

placed on Soviet citizens during those times. Lieutenant Mariya Tepikina-Popova told of her experience in joining the regiment: "While I was being interviewed at headquarters a personnel officer saw my last name and asked if I was related to the political officer of the same name, who was assigned to the same training school where I had been a pilot.

"I knew this officer with the same name had been arrested and imprisoned as an enemy of the republic in 1937. I thought quickly how I would best answer, because I was not related to him. In these times you had to deny any knowledge of him, or the consequences could be quite unpredictable and include prison. So I answered that I kept my distance from the command and staff of the school and didn't know him. The personnel officer understood my evasion and replied, 'Oh, since he was my best friend and you are a Tepikina too, I'll let you join the 46th Regiment.'"

During the war, the regiment flew 1,100 nights of combat, just about every single night from the time it entered combat in 1941 to the end of the war in 1945. It flew 24,000 combat missions. Twenty-three of its women were recognized as Heroes of the Soviet Union, five posthumously. The unit was designated an elite or "Guards Regiment" in 1943 and thereafter was known as the 46th Tamar Guards Bomber Regiment. It fought in the Caucasus, Crimea, and Belorussia.

The 587th Bomber Regiment was the third unit to be formed from of Marina Raskova's 122nd Composite Air Group. Instead of the antiquated PO-2, it flew the Petlyakov PE-2.

After a pre-mission briefing, members of the 586th Regiment head for their aircraft and another confrontation with the Luftwaffe in the skies above the Eastern Front. Women pilots of the Red Air Force proved themselves adept in combat.

This was a modern twin-engine dive-bomber with a maximum speed of more than 330 miles per hour. With its twin fuselage configuration, it was one of the Red Air Force's most difficult planes to fly and was just coming into production in the spring of 1942.

Thus, while the other two regiments were training in the planes they would fly in combat, the 587th could only work in classroom training, using service manuals and other instructive material. Finally, the PE-2s began to arrive at Engles in late August and early September 1942. Training consumed the rest of the year, and in January Raskova led her unit to an airfield on the Volga River near Stalingrad.

Then fate struck Marina Raskova a cruel blow. She, whose aerial career had been fawned on by fortune for years, suddenly saw her good luck spin out of control. On a routine flight to the regiment's new base, bad weather struck. As she flew closer to the base, the weather grew worse. When she tried to land, her plane crashed into an embankment on the other side of the river. She and her crew were killed instantly. Marina Raskova had never flown a combat mission.

However, her regiment certainly did. The first combat mission of the 587th was in February 1943, and the regiment was under the command of a man, Major Valentin Markov. He maintained command of the unit throughout the remainder of the war, despite his initial skepticism about female pilots flying combat missions. As he expressed it in a 1992 interview, "I couldn't visualize how I could command women during war, flying bombers. I knew the aircraft and knew how difficult it was even for men to fly. I didn't know how women could manage it."

The skepticism was mutual. A navigator, Captain Valentina Kravcheno, spoke for the entire regiment when she said, "We wouldn't even hear of a man coming to command our regiment."

Discipline and devotion to duty won out, and the regiment served with distinction. In the fall of 1943, it was honored with the designation of a Guards Regiment and was renamed the 125th Guards Bomber Regiment.

Markov ended his career as a lieutenant general in the Soviet Air Force. During the 1992 interview, he went on to elaborate on the complete metamorphosis of his views on women pilots flying in combat. "It's hard to fancy how difficult the conditions were for these women," he reflected. "Almost all of them were shot down and, after hospitalization, they came back and flew bravely.

"The women in my regiment were self-disci-

The record-setting flight of the *Rodina* captured the attention of the Soviet people.

During the last weekend of September 1938, the attention of the world's capitals was transfixed by the diplomatic pas de deux Adolf Hitler and Neville Chamberlain were enacting to determine the fate of Czechoslovakia and ultimately the world. All, that is, but one—Moscow. Muskovites were preoccupied with plans for a record-breaking, nonstop "aeroplane" flight by three intrepid Russian aviatrixes. It was to begin Sunday, September 25, and according to *The New York Times,* it pushed the Munich story to the back pages of every Moscow newspaper.

The papers of Monday, October 3, proclaimed that two of the women had been spotted as they sat by their plane, a twin-engine ANT-37 named *Rodina* in a Siberian swamp on the Manchurian border. They were seen from planes searching for them after their 26-hour, 29-minute flight ended in a crash-landing in the area. Shortly after they were located, a "parachute landing party" descended on the record-setting women, bringing to their aid "a physician, food, medicine, boots and hot drinks."

The *New York Times* story identified the three heroines as Valentina Grizodubova, Captain Polina Osipenko, and Lieutenant Marina Raskova. It also indicated that the rescuers had been dispatched by truck to return the flyers to civilization. While they awaited discovery by their rescuers, they had munched on chocolate bars.

By Sunday, October 9, Soviet Premier Josef Stalin had added his congratulations to those of the world. He noted that the 4,036-mile, nonstop flight was longer than Charles Lindbergh's transatlantic flight and far exceeded any nonstop aerial journey made by women to that point.

By then also, the special role played in the flight by Marina Raskova was known throughout Russia. She was the crew's navigator, not licensed as a pilot at the time. As the *Rodina* was nearing the end of her fuel supply, the women began to jettison the plane's furnishings to coax extra miles from the engine and make certain they were setting a new distance record.

Then they flew into a blinding snowstorm. Since they had

plined, careful and obedient to orders; they respected the truth and fair treatment to them. They never complained and were very courageous. If I compare my experience of commanding the male and female regiments to some extent at the end of the war, it was easier to command this female regiment. They had the strong spirit of a collective unit."

Between 1943 and the war's end, the 125th Guards Bomber Regiment moved its operations as the front moved westward through Belorussia, the Baltic area and eastern Prussia; it was based in German territory when the Third Reich surrendered. Its members flew up to three sorties a day, dropping 980,000 kilograms of bombs, attacking enemy positions, and harassing troop concentrations. Five of its pilots were named Hero of the Soviet Union. In contrast, 23 of the 46th Regiment's flyers received that award.

Of that disparity Markov commented, "From the present viewpoint I can see that very few of my girls were awarded the highest title. If I could turn time back, I would have promoted more of them for that award. Now I have a grave sentiment about that, because many of them deserved it."

Pilots of PE-2 bombers with the 125th Guards Day Bomber Regiment relax between missions as they await orders to take to the air once again. Several Night Witches received prestigious Soviet military decorations for their service.

By the end of World War II as many as 18 percent of the personnel in the Red Air Force were women. Even before Marina Raskova's legendary call for female volunteers in 1941, women were serving in various parts of the Red Air Force. Her organization of the three women's regiments and their outstanding performance lured even more women to serve. They came asking only to serve the country they loved. Month after month they faced tremendous danger. They endured the harsh demands of combat service, survived disasters and life-threatening sorties, and suffered sickness and wounds. Yet they always remained to perform their duties in service to their country.

Socrates explained to Crito about his obligation to obey the call of the state: "This is the voice I hear in my ears, like the sound of the flute in the ears of the mystic. Its humming prevents me from hearing any other." That same voice must have hummed in the ears of those heroic women whom the Nazis disdainfully called Night Witches, but in the end contributed so much to toppling the Nazi dictator who had envisioned conquering the Soviet Union. □

George Tipton Wilson is a resident of Memphis, Tennessee. A veteran of World War II, he received the highest possible intelligence clearance while working as a cryptographer at the Pentagon and on the staff of General Douglas MacArthur in Australia.

The *Rodina* is checked out by mechanics some time before its celebrated flight.

thrown every movable thing overboard, Raskova, deeming herself the most expendable, donned a parachute and exited the plane in a brave and selfless move to ensure the record. She wandered around the wilderness several days before finding the plane and her comrades, which accounted for the original report of "two women."

In Moscow later that month, Lazar M. Kaganovich, the commissar of Heavy Industry, feted the trio at a glittering reception. Apparently inspired by the war clouds gathering over Europe, Commissar Kaganovic remarked that if the Soviet Union is attacked, "We have flyers who can chase the enemy back to his own territory." One wonders if the commissar realized just how prophetic his words would turn out to be.

The next day at another reception for the three, Stalin appeared to put an end to the quests, at least in the Soviet Union, for records that so bemused flyers of that day. Although elated by the feat of the women but saddened by the death of a male aviator the week before, the Soviet leader said, "The government will be extremely severe henceforth toward permitting record-setting flights. The lives of the pilots are more precious to us than any records, no matter how great or renowned they may be."

Thus enjoined, the ladies never strove for another record. But Marina, whose bravery above and beyond the call of duty earned the lasting acclaim of the Soviet people, was to occupy a far greater place in history. Under her leadership, women officially joined the fight for their country for the first time when Russia was turned on so viciously by Hitler. □

By Mason B. Webb

Recalling the devastation of Dresden

Controversial Allied bombing caused a horrific firestorm that reduced much of the historic city to ashes.

German soldiers and policemen attempt to identify the dead in the aftermath of the Allied fire-bombing of Dresden. (National Archives)

IT IS HIGHLY UNUSUAL IN THE PUBLISHING WORLD FOR TWO BOOKS TO come out in the same year on the same topic with the same title (and even the same photo on their covers). Yet just such an anomaly has occurred with the publication of ***Firestorm: The Bombing of Dresden, 1945*** (Paul Addison and Jeremy A. Crang, editors, Ivan R. Dee Publishers, 2006, 260 pp., maps, index, $16.95, softcover) and ***Firestorm: Allied Airpower and the Destruction of Dresden*** (Marshall De Bruhl, Random House, 2006, 346 pp., photographs, bibliography, index, $27.95, hardcover)..

Despite these surface similarities, these are very different books.

Until the night of February 13, 1945, the German city of Dresden had seen very little in the way of bombing. That charmed existence came to a sudden and tragic end when 768 British planes, in two waves, dropped their explosives on Dresden and ignited a devastating firestorm that obliterated the historic and beautiful Baroque city center and killed thousands of civilians. But the worst was not yet over.

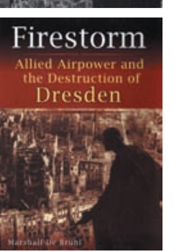
The next day 316 American bombers unleashed another attack on the still-burning city. A conservative estimate said that 25,000 people died in Dresden, which had a prewar population of 640,000. In all, more than a thousand bombers dropped almost 3,500 tons of high explosives, incendiaries, and flares on the city, known as the "Florence of Germany," which many felt had no military significance.

More than 60 years later, these raids remain one of the most controversial episodes in the history of World War II. On one hand, the bombing of Dresden has been condemned as a hideous and unnecessary war crime. On the other hand, the raids have been defended as a justifiable, if ruthless, application of military force against a target that was a major transportation hub serving the German military machine.

Following closely on the heels of Frederick Taylor's acclaimed 2004 bestseller *Dresden: Tuesday, February 13, 1945,* we now have two new books that approach the topic from different viewpoints.

In 2003, editors Paul Addison and Jeremy Crang gathered a host of distinguished historians—such as Hew Strachan and Richard Overy—at a colloquium in Edinburgh, Scotland, to discuss the causes, conduct, and consequences of the bombing. Their new book is a compilation of the papers given at that conference, which explores various aspects of the pitiless aerial assaults with the benefit of six decades of hindsight.

Strachen writes, "When Arthur Harris had taken over Bomber Command in February 1942, he had to hit the medieval and inflammable cities of Germany because his aeroplanes could hit nothing else.... He was not picking on civilians and their will specifically, but engaging in what he called a campaign of unrestricted air warfare.... Much of the criticism of Harris which the Dresden raid unleashed focused on the cultural loss: what was at issue was that Harris was a philistine, not that he had wantonly killed German civilians."



On the other side of the coin, in his chapter titled "Why Dresden Matters," Alan Russell quotes Yehudi Menuhin, the great Anglo-American Jewish violinist, who had been one of the first to play for a German audi-

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ence after the war. He wrote scathingly, "Dresden was a gem of a city, whose pointless destruction was a tragedy and a crime."

Addision and Crang's *Firestorm* carefully and soberly assesses the reasons why Dresden, like Hiroshima and Nagasaki, has come to symbolize the military and ethical questions involved in the waging of total war. Many of the contributors bring up the matter of the Holocaust and compare the systematic slaughter of millions of Jews and other "undesirables" to the "wanton" destruction of historic German cities full of civilians and refugees.

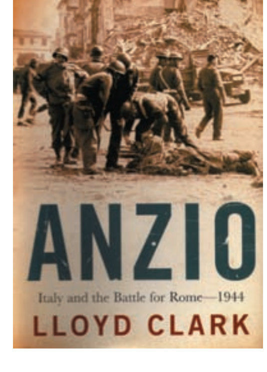
Perhaps Donald Bloxham, who wrote a chapter entitled "Dresden as a War Crime," said it best: "Whatever 'Dresden' was, it was not Auschwitz."

De Bruhl's book is less an academic study and philosophical discussion than it is a straight history of the city, the Allied bombing campaign over Europe, and a detailed examination of the raid itself—as seen through the eyes of those who took part in it and those who survived it.

De Bruhl's prose is riveting as he provides deep background and describes the buildup to the raid, the lives of the unsuspecting burghers of the city, the dropping of the bombs, and the terror that swept through the streets along with the whirling flames. His description of the aftermath is heartbreaking, and his closing chapter ,which talks of the rebuilding and rebirth of the city 40 years after the war, is hopeful.

As De Bruhl observes in his final pages, "The firestorm that destroyed the dense urban mix that was prewar Dresden ... was not unlike the purifying fire that brings to a close Wagner's epic *Ring of the Nibelung*. Just as that great conflagration consumes Valhalla and its corrupt gods and heralds redemption for mankind, so the fires of World War II were necessary in order to destroy an evil society and portend a new beginning for Germany."

Both *Firestorms* are among the very best books that have been written on the subject, and both are very highly recommended.



Anzio: Italy and the Battle for Rome—1944 by Lloyd Clark, Atlantic Monthly Press, 2006, 392 pp., photographs, maps, bibliography, index, $25.00, hardcover.

For a comprehensive history of the Battle of Anzio, it will be hard to top Lloyd Clark's stunning effort. In his gripping account of this often-overlooked battle—one of the deadliest battles of the European Theater—Clark looks at combat from the point of view of all the combatants, German, British, and American, and the high-level decisions made by commanders on both sides that resulted in the five-month slugfest.

The battle, which began in January 1944 as a way for the Allies, pinned down at Monte Cassino and along the Germans' Gothic Line 100 miles south of Rome, to make an end run around the enemy defenses and, it was hoped, cause the Germans to retreat, became another stalemate. The brutal fighting at Anzio and surrounding sites cost the Allies and Germans 7,000 dead.

The surprise amphibious assault, just 30 miles from Rome, initially caught Field Marshal Albert Kesselring's Germans napping, but they quickly recovered and threw an iron ring around the beachhead. While many critics of the operation, known as Shingle, blamed U.S. General John Lucas, head of the Fifth Army's VI Corps, for being overly cautious and not driving directly for Rome, he was actually following Mark Clark's directive "not to stick his neck out" and instead build up his supplies and forces on the beachhead.

The author's exhaustive research and elegant prose do justice to the courage, heroism, and frustrations of the men who were caught for months in the mud of Anzio, enduring a constant rain of artillery shells and massed attacks by tanks and infantry.

The personal stories are poignant. During the height of the battle for the Overpass, a key terrain feature, Captain Felix Sparks, commanding a company of the 45th Infantry Division, recalled, "Following the tank attack, there was a lull of three or four minutes. Then the German infantry came pouring in, several hundred of them. As one group approached my command post, a sergeant in one of the tank destroyers strapped himself to a .50 caliber machine gun on the side of his TD. At a range of about forty feet, he scattered Germans around the landscape. Then I saw dust coming in spurts from the back of his field jacket as a burst from a machine pistol hit him squarely in the chest. His heroic action, however, saved the company post from being overrun." Sparks, however, and one sergeant, would be all from his company to survive the battle.

A British soldier, Sergeant Ben Wallis, remembered the fear he felt: "We were all frightened; don't believe anybody that says he wasn't. We'd heard the fighting earlier in the day, seen the dead and dying—now it was our turn. I turned to my mate before the off and we shook hands. The order was given to advance, and we walked into bullets, mortar bombs and shells. They were waiting for us, we didn't stand a chance." Wallis was lucky; he was wounded in the shoulder, but his mate, a chap named Billy, was killed.

Clark also quotes from German participants in the battle. Joachim Liebschner, an 18-year-old runner for his company, had been issued a bicycle in order to maintain liaison with battalion headquarters. He said, "It was a really big joke because when we moved forward, the harder the artillery fire became and we were then attacked by aeroplanes. When everybody jumped into ditches ... I was left with the bicycle." Later, Liebschner left the bicycle leaning

Osprey Leads the Way with World War II Titles

It is safe to say that no other publisher has produced as many military themed books as Osprey, a company based in Oxford, England. Established in 1968, the publisher has produced hundreds of titles on virtually every possible military subject, from the Roman legions to the Iraq War.

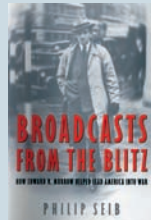
Its original series, *Men-at-Arms,* which depicts in photos and illustrations the uniforms, weapons, and equipment of various units around the world, has grown to over 400 titles, which are in constant reprint. Other series include *Warrior, Elite, New Vanguard,* and *Campaign,* along with several series on aviation.

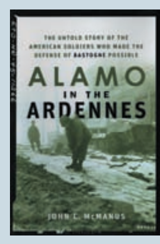
Today Osprey can count over 1,500 titles on various aspects of military history that it makes accessible to a wide audience. These are superb, accurate, and richly illustrated sources for the serious historian, researcher, modeler, and military history enthusiast.

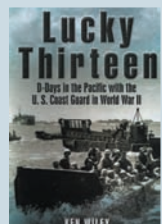
As Osprey says on its website, "The central mission is unchanged. Osprey will continue to bring together expert authors and illustrators and military-history enthusiasts by delivering the information readers need to increase their knowledge and to enrich their leisure or professional pursuits. Osprey's enthusiasm for military history is balanced by an equal enthusiasm for excellent publishing."

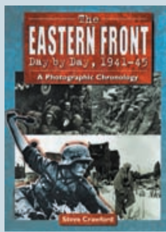
The Osprey online catalog is available at *www.ospreypublishing.com.* □

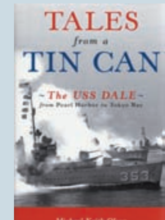
Short Bursts

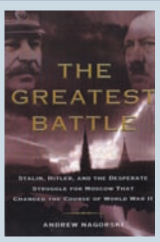












Broadcasts from the Blitz: How Edward R. Murrow Helped Lead America into War by Philip Seib, Potomac Books, 2006, 210 pp., photographs, bibliography, index, $24.95, hardcover.

Philip Seib, a journalism professor at Marquette University, has put together a fine book about radio pioneer Edward R. Murrow's life and career in bomb-ravaged London during the late 1930s and early 1940s. With the words, "This is London," Murrow would begin his groundbreaking broadcasts, often with the real sounds of bombs falling and air raid sirens wailing in the background.

Countering the tide of U.S. isolationism, Murrow made it clear that America could not, and should not, long avoid the war. Although often cited as a paragon of objective journalism, Murrow had a clear agenda and slanted his reporting accordingly. Behind the scenes he helped the British win over American public opinion, and even secured U.S. funds for a British intelligence operation.

As interesting as any story of wartime intrigue, this brief volume illuminates how the convictions and contributions of one man convinced nearly an entire nation to side with the British in the tense days before Pearl Harbor.

Alamo in the Ardennes: The Untold Story of the American Soldiers Who Made the Defense of Bastogne Possible by John C. McManus, Wiley, 2007, 296 pp., photographs, bibliography, index, $24.95, hardcover.

The 101st Airborne's heroic defense of Bastogne, Belgium, during the Battle of the Bulge would not have been possible without the self-sacrificing delaying action efforts of a battered, ragtag collection of soldiers from the 28th Infantry Division, elements of the 9th and 10th Armored Divisions, and other, smaller units. Until now, their devotion to duty has been largely overshadowed by the 101st's stand at Bastogne; with *Alamo in the Ardennes,* John McManus has shone a much-belated spotlight on their contributions to the eventual American victory in the Ardennes.

Outgunned and outnumbered by Hitler's hard-charging panzer units during the harsh December of 1944, these Americans took the full fury of the Nazi onslaught for five days, making the Germans pay in blood for every inch of ground and buying time for the U.S. units behind them to bring in reinforcements and stiffen their defenses. *Alamo in the Ardennes* is a compelling, day-by-day account of this pivotal moment in one of history's greatest battles.

Lucky Thirteen: D-Days in the Pacific with the U.S. Coast Guard in World War II by Ken Wiley, Casemate, 2007, 334 pp., photographs, illustrations, index, $32.95, hardcover.

If you think it took guts for soldiers and Marines to hit an enemy-held beachhead under fire, imagine what life was like for the U.S. Coast Guardsmen charged with delivering troops to the hot beachheads in flimsy, unstable landing craft, and doing it over and over again.

Ken Wiley, who enlisted in the Coast Guard when he was just 17, has written a tremendous memoir of his time in service as commander of the LCVP "Lucky Thirteen," a landing craft assigned to the attack transport *Arthur Middleton.* Wiley's assignments included the Marshall Islands, the Marianas, the Philippines, and Okinawa. He conveys well the terror and horror of war, the kamikazes, suicide boats, fortified beaches, snipers, and dangerous jungle river missions, as well as the softer side—wartime romances, friendships, and enjoyable, peaceful moments aboard the *Middleton.*

For unknown reasons, there are virtually no first-person books by or about U.S. Coast Guard coxswains in World War II. Ken Wiley corrects that oversight with *Lucky Thirteen,* a book to be treasured.

The Eastern Front Day by Day: A Photographic Chronology by Steve Crawford, Potomac Books, 2006, 296 pp., photographs, maps, bibliography, index, $24.95, hardcover.

For anyone with the least bit of curiosity about the Eastern Front to those with a burning interest to learn the details, this outstanding chronology, which highlights the political and military activities taking place from April 28, 1939, until May 19, 1945, is an invaluable resource.

In addition to the daily overview of the evolution of the war between the Germans and Soviets (and their satellites), the erudite text also contains sidebars that delve into the key personalities of the conflict as well as the forces, weapons, and decisive moments of the campaign.

Profusely illustrated with hundreds of never-before-published photos, and easily understood maps, Crawford's book will leave the reader staggered by the scale and scope of the war on the Eastern Front.

Tales from a Tin Can: The USS Dale from Pearl Harbor to Tokyo Bay by Michael Keith Olson, Zenith Press, 2007, 336 pp., photographs, maps, bibliography, index, $24.95, hardcover.

What was life like on a destroyer during World War II? Find out by reading Michael Keith Olson's superb telling of tales of the war in the Pacific as seen from the deck of a very lucky "tin can." The *Dale* was one of the few ships to emerge unscathed from the Japanese raid on Pearl Harbor; she managed to make it through the entire war without losing a single crewman to enemy fire, in spite of her being in the thick of numerous campaigns.

The son of a former *Dale* crewman, Olson interviewed 44 veterans and delved deeply into official documents to give this book the air of authenticity that puts the reader in the heart of the action.

Tales from a Tin Can is the first oral history of one combat ship's adventures, sometimes comic, sometimes mundane, sometimes heart wrenching, over the entire course of America's involvement in the Pacific. An impressive accomplishment and highly recommended.

The Greatest Battle: Stalin, Hitler, and the Desperate Struggle for Moscow that Changed the Course of World War II by Andrew Nagorski, Simon & Schuster, 2007, 370 pp., photographs, maps, bibliography, index, $27.00, hardcover.

As the introduction of this book says, "The battle for Moscow was arguably the most important battle of World War II and inarguably the largest battle between two armies of all time." The sheer number of troops involved is so huge that it becomes almost unimaginable. A combined total of approximately 7 million troops took part in the fight; 2.5 million were killed, wounded, or taken prisoner, nearly a million of whom were Soviet soldiers.

Nagorksi has done a fine job in detailing the strategy, politics, maneuvers, and consequences of this epic struggle. Swinging back and forth between the leaders and the common soldiers caught up in this gigantic maelstrom, Nagorsky provides the reader with both an important overview and a detailed, personal glimpse into what has been called the war's earliest turning point. One terrific book. □

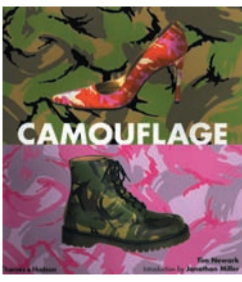
up against a tree. "I thought I could find the tree again when we got to the front line. Not only had the bicycle gone but the tree had gone as well."

The bloodbath at Anzio—and the battles for Aprilia, Cisterna, the Overpass, the Pontine Marshes, the Wadis, the Dung Farm, and all the other sites of intense combat will never be forgotten by those who fought there. *Anzio* is a big, important book about one of World War II's biggest, most important battles—a book that will help the rest of us remember. Not to be missed.

Camouflage by Tim Newark, Thames & Hudson, 2007, 192 pp., photographs, bibliography, index, $45.00, hardcover.

Although not strictly a book about World War II, or even a book entirely about the military (the last two chapters are about the influence of camouflage on fashion and architecture), this coffee table book is still a delight. Filled with 280 photos and illustrations (248 of them in color), *Camouflage* tells of the interplay between military developments and the worlds of art, design, and popular culture.

Inspired by the principles of camouflage in nature (think chameleon), the military art of disguise was spurred in World War I by threats of aerial reconnaissance and long-range enemy



fire. In World War II, teams of artists, designers, and scientists worked together to create highly sophisticated modes of hiding soldiers, gun emplacements, tanks, aircraft, ships, and even entire factory complexes from enemy observation.

Newark begins with some dazzling photos and insightful text about how animals, fish, reptiles, and insects use natural camouflage to blend in with their surroundings, thus avoiding detection and the likelihood of becoming a predator's meal.

He then takes the reader into the field and explains how early hunters disguised themselves to get close to their prey, following that with information on how armies of the 18th and 19th centuries, in contrast with their brightly colored tunics, plumed headgear, and brilliant banners, equipped snipers and sharpshooters with uniforms that helped them disappear into the landscape, not stand out.

The widespread use of khaki- colored uniforms began to make an appearance on battlefields near the end of the 19th century, as did the practice of disguising gun positions and fortifications with netting, tarps, foliage, and special paint jobs.

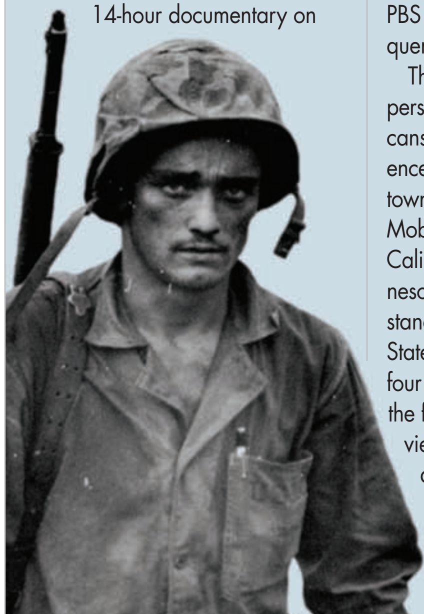
With the advent of aerial reconnaissance during the Great War, a greater emphasis was placed on hiding military equipment and installations in plain sight. Experiments were done with all sorts of fanciful paint schemes using bright oranges, greens, and even pinks to find the right combinations.

The chapters devoted to World War II show the highest examples of the camofleurs' art: dummy tanks, landing craft, and other decoy equipment used to deceive the Germans into thinking that a phantom army under General George Patton was being built up in southeast England in preparation for a cross-Channel invasion aimed at the Pas de Calais. So successful was the illusion that the Germans, days after the real invasion hit the beaches of Normandy, still expected Patton to cross at Calais, and kept their troops on high alert there.

The pages devoted to camouflage and optical illusion as employed in art, architecture, and fashion are also interesting, making this fascinating and detailed book a must-have for the avid enthusiast as well as the average reader.

The War, Ken Burns's Epic Documentary on WWII, to Air in September

Ken Burns, creator of the documentary series *The Civil War, Baseball,* and *Jazz,* spent the past six years making *The War,* a seven-part 14-hour documentary on World War II. It will air on PBS beginning Sunday, September 23. Check your local listings for the specific times of each segment as PBS will be repeating them frequently.


National Archives

The documentary focuses on the personal stories of ordinary Americans who had extraordinary experiences. Burns chose four American towns—Waterbury, Connecticut; Mobile, Alabama; Sacramento, California; and tiny Luverne, Minnesota—that could represent, or stand in for, any town in the United States that went through the war's four devastating years. Citizens of the four communities take the viewer through their personal and quite often harrowing journeys into war, reminiscing about the war's effects on their lives and those of their families and community, as well as the country they helped save for generations to come.

Burns says, "There have been countless books and films about World War II. In *The War,* we try to allow a small group of individuals to tell their bottom-up story. This film is as much about storytelling, about sharing unique experiences, as it is about World War II, and as such, we hope that it touches on the universal human experience of battle."

To coincide with the airing of *The War,* Ken Burns, PBS, and The Library of Congress have launched an educational outreach program designed to gather the firsthand recollections of the diverse men and women who served our nation during wartime. Paula Kerger, PBS president and CEO, says, "We hope the personal stories portrayed in *The War* will inspire others to share their memories with their friends, families, and, ultimately, The Library of Congress, as part of a national discussion about this pivotal point in history."

Burns reiterates, "We hope by providing the tools to people around the country, especially young people, we can work together to capture many more of these stories before the generation that fought in World War II has passed."

A companion book will be published by Alfred A. Knopf, and PBS Home Video will issue the series in a boxed set of DVDs that includes a "making of" feature and interviews with Ken Burns and others involved in the project. As with all of Burns's films, there will be an extensive educational outreach component and an interactive Web page (*www.pbs.org/thewar*) that provides more information on the film, the battles, and related issues. □

Krueger's Men: The Secret Nazi Counterfeit Plot and the Prisoners of Block 19 by Lawrence Malkin, Little Brown, 2006, 287 pp., photographs, index, $32.95, hardcover.

It is safe to say that very few Americans have ever heard of Operation Bernhard, but the story behind the codename is one of the most fascinating of the war.

Operation Bernhard was the Germans' attempt to destabilize the economies of Great Britain and the United States by counterfeiting their currency. Selected by an SS major named Bernhard Krueger who headed the operation, hundreds of Jews and non-Jews with the proper skills—printers, engravers, artists, paper experts, and more—were pulled out of Auschwitz and other camps and put to work carefully copying real currency and then printing millions of bogus copies.

Setting up his secret printing plant inside special barracks within the Sachsenhausen concentration camp near Berlin, Krueger and his multinational crew of 140 specialists went to work turning out bank notes perfect enough to fool even the experts.

Lawrence Malkin's clear and compelling writing style whisks the reader along from one intrigue to another while providing information about how the smallest details in every bank note—even the flaws—were painstakingly reproduced, and how even the handmade paper on which the bills were printed was faithfully crafted, right down to the watermarks.

Besides the technical intricacies, Malkin brings to life the real human interest side of this story. By rescuing the Jews, befriending them, and treating them like human beings instead of slaves to be brutalized, Krueger saved them from certain death and became a hero, much along the lines of Oskar Schindler. The prisoners slept on cots instead of being crammed together in lice-ridden racks. They had proper toilet and shower facilities, wore civilian clothes, and were allowed to grow their hair longer than the regular inmates.

Despite the better life they enjoyed, many of the prisoners were conflicted about their no-win situation; if they did their job too well, the Nazis might win the war and they would be exterminated. If they performed poorly and the bogus notes were discovered, they would also be exterminated.

What happened to this top-secret operation is part *Schindler's List,* part *The Great Escape*—a gripping account of subterfuge and courage. Best of all, it is all true. You won't find a better page-turner than Malkin's wonderful tale of deception and moral awakening. □

Profile

Continued on page 19

May 10, he boarded a Messerschmitt Me-110 fighter aircraft and piloted the plane over 900 miles to England. The exact reasoning behind this self-appointed mission remains something of a mystery to historians. Hess did indeed explain his objectives, but one can only speculate as to whether he actually thought he could succeed in those objectives.

Hess explained that he had undertaken the mission to attempt to negotiate a peaceful end to Germany's war with Britain. Hess, being close to Hitler and at times his only friend and confidant, recognized Hitler's desire for peace with Great Britain and an eventual alliance between the two countries against the threat of Soviet communism. Hitler respected the British peoples as a fellow "Nordic" race. Hess also knew of the impending war with Russia and saw the disadvantage of Germany fighting on two fronts. The way to solve all of these problems, in Hess's mind, was to fly to Britain and engage in peace negotiations himself.

Hess said, "It was my hope to be able to convince the British government how senseless it was to continue this war until both sides were exhausted and brought to the verge of breakdown." Hess intended to give the British government the chance to declare the following, which he described in his own words: "As a result of discussions with Rudolf Hess, the Government now feel [sic] that the Führer's offers are sincerely meant. In these circumstances it would be irresponsible to continue the bloodshed without ourselves trying to reach an understanding. We therefore declare our readiness to negotiate."

Given the circumstances in which Hess undertook this mission, it is not surprising that he managed to catch the entire world off guard. His sudden flight to England shocked Hitler and the world, while at the same instant, it struck a decisive blow to the internal functioning of the party. Hitler, who had not been informed of Hess's intentions, later declared him to be insane. Hess was, as a result of his flight and subsequent capture by the British, essentially disowned by the Nazis. This was undoubtedly easier for the party to deal with than trying to explain why a sane, high-ranking official would attempt to negotiate with the enemy. Hitler and the Nazi party slandered Hess not only in an effort to disavow any connection with his actions, but also because they were completely confused by the event.

For his trouble, Hess became a prisoner of war and was, for the most part, treated as such. Following his capture, he was continually transferred from place to place to dissuade any attempt by the Germans to rescue or assassinate him. One location where Hess was reportedly held was Porth Mawr, a mansion in Crickhowell, Powys, where the British housed troops. The word "Hess" was found scratched into a window pane, evidence of the presence of one of Britain's most infamous prisoners of war.

Hess was kept under close supervision through the remainder of the war and was put on trial, along with many of his former comrades, at Nuremberg in 1946. His verdict and sentence came on October 1. On that day, Hess was found "Not Guilty of War Crimes and Crimes Against Humanity, but … Guilty of Conspiracy and Crimes Against Peace." He was sentenced to life imprisonment in Spandau Prison in Berlin. Initially with him at Spandau were six other men. Two of them, Grand Admiral Erich Raeder and Walter Funk, former president of the Reichsbank, would be there for life as well.

By 1966, Hess was the only remaining prisoner in Spandau. The other six men had been either transferred or released upon completion of their sentences. Hess lived out the remainder of his life, another 21 years, alone, as the sole occupant of Spandau. He died on August 17, 1987, at the age of 93. He had apparently hanged himself, although some mystery continues to shroud the circumstances of his death.

Throughout his career as a member of the Nazi Party, until his final days in Spandau, Rudolf Hess remained a loyal follower of Adolf Hitler. Even after the war had ended, Hess stressed his love for the Führer and for Nazi ideals. At the Nuremberg trials, he addressed the court: "I was permitted to work for many years under the greatest son whom my country has brought forth in its thousand-year history. Even if I could, I would not want to erase this period of time from my existence … No matter what human beings do, I shall some day stand before the judgement seat of the Eternal. I shall answer to Him, and I know He will judge me innocent."

Rudolf Hess made a reputation for himself as both a party leader and a fervent Nazi. Over the course of more than 60 years, he remained loyal to a lost cause and an inherently evil doctrine. □

First-time contributor Sherman Gengler is a graduate of the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee. A resident of West Bend, Wisconsin, he is also an avid collector of antique military equipment and memorabilia.

By Eric T. Baker

Three new games feature arcade-style warfare.

Much more of an arcade feel this issue as we don't have any hard-core sims on hand. The action is fast paced and with more emphasis on game play than on strict modeling of the era and the equipment involved. For example, first is a dogfight game: **Attack on Pearl Harbor** for the PC from CDV. The name is misleading because although Pearl Harbor is one of the 50 scenarios in the game, and although it can be played from the Japanese or American side, the game covers the entire Pacific Theater in WWII.

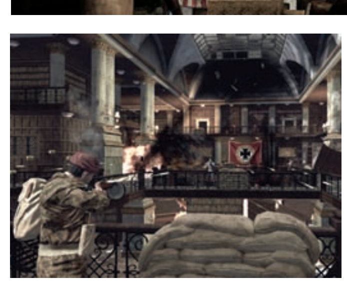
Despite the size of the area covered, the focus of the game is on display in that there are only eight planes modeled in it. Each side has two fighters, plus a dive-bomber and a torpedo bomber. After the initial, get-used-to-the-system missions, players can start choosing which plane they want to fly, even replaying the missions to try them with different fighters or to attempt to do them better to score more reputation points or (more importantly) earn a replacement plane for one shot down in a previous mission.

The controls for the planes are a mixed blessing. On the one hand they are very simple—easy to learn and easy to use. On the other hand, they are very simple. Players of hard- core flight sims who are used to having separate flap and rudder control and doing the sorts of flying tricks that such control allows will be disappointed by *AoPH.* Players who like being able to just push their mouse around and gun enemies from the sky will be much more at home.

Among the many modern dogfight game features that *AoPH* includes are an instant-action mode, if the player wants to just jump on and fight a straight-up battle against another plane. There is also a multiplayer mode for up to 12 players. It has a branching scenario structure.

About the only thing it lacks is a chase camera view. In *AoPH,* the default views are always out the front of the player's plane. The arrow keys can be use to look in other directions, but many dogfight games now have a view where the camera follows whichever target the plane is locked onto. In the twists and turns of aerial combat, this turns out to be a very handy view. *AoPH* is still a very good game, but that is a strange omission.

Airplanes also play a role in **Medal of Honor: Airborne** for the PC and Xbox 360 and from Electronic Arts, but there is no dog fighting. Instead the player starts each mission in a perfectly good airplane, but then jumps out to do the actual fighting on the ground. This is a similar setup to *Metal of Honor: Vanguard* for the PS2, which came out a few months ago, but the execution of *Airborne* is much better. The major difference is that players really can land their characters anywhere on the map and the AI of the enemies has been ramped up to handle that the players are not going to be coming down the same path every time.



Again, *MoH:A* is not a hardcore simulation, although the game does trace most of the Allied air operations in Europe: Overlord, Market Garden, and Varsity. The designers collected accurate maps and details for the scenarios and looked into the actual men and materials that made up those operations. That said, the player is still only in charge of one soldier, so that soldier is going to take amounts of damage that would kill real men many times over. There are other, computer-controlled allies on the map, and parachuting into the areas marked by flares will get the player more of them, but *MoH:A* is a game conducted at the personal level.

While *MoH:A* is a first-person shooter that varies the experience by letting you start each mission literally anywhere, **Hour of Victory** from Midway for the Xbox 360, is a FPS that varies the experience by letting the player choose one of three characters to take on each mission. There is a British commando for run and gun, an American OSS agent for sneaking and booby trapping, and an American Ranger for climbing and sniping. Most of the levels tend to favor one of these character's styles over that of the others, but any of them can compete any level.

The missions in *HoV* are less historical than those of *MoH:A* because the player is going it alone in each of them. The missions relate to real WWII events and battles, but the player is doing more by himself than any real man did in the war. That is one of the reasons it is a game and not a simulation. Another big difference between the two games is that *HoV* lets the players drive vehicles, including tanks, on some missions. □

Disaster

Continued from page 47

later claimed he was well aware that a substantial part of his division was still on the far side of the river. Eight infantry battalions plus most of the motor transport and divisional artillery were east of the bridge.

The bridgehead force was ordered to withdraw to the west bank, and at about 0400 hours on February 23, according to his own recollection, Lieutenant Bashir Ahmed Khan of the Malerkotlas pressed down on a plunger and fired the charges. Spans 5 and 6 dropped into the river, and two-thirds of the 17th Indian Division was cut off.

On hearing the demolition, all firing on the battlefield momentarily ceased. Both sides knew what destruction of the bridge meant. The Japanese had no immediate plans to attack toward the bridge and did not do so on February 23. If any of the 17th Division's Indian, Burmese, Gurkha, and British troops east of the river were to cross it, they would now have to swim or float on hastily constructed rafts. That meant abandoning almost all equipment, including small arms.

Many Gurkhas, in particular, could not swim and drowned in the river, but some did manage to cross the destroyed bridge with the assistance of ropes. Brigadier Jonah Jones had at first hoped to delay an organized crossing until the evening, but the pressure of events forced him to schedule an afternoon evacuation. He was especially concerned that the wounded be accommodated on rafts, if possible. The Sittang is a tidal river, but February is the dry season and the river tide is low in the afternoon. However, a strong current in the vicinity of the bridge made swimming difficult as thousands of men took to the water throughout the day. Even strong swimmers averaged about two hours in the water to complete the crossing. Those who could not or would not attempt it were captured or fought to the death.

When it was over, the 17th Indian Division was thoroughly wrecked. About 5,000 troops were dead, missing, or captured. Of the original division, there remained only 80 British officers, 69 Indian and Gurkha officers, and 3,335 other ranks. They possessed just 1,420 rifles, 56 light machine guns, and 62 Thompson submachine guns. As late as March 19, the partially reconstituted division had just 6,700 effectives.

The Japanese, who were exhausted, waited a week for logistical reasons, then sent a regiment 18 miles north of the bridge to ford the river at Kunzeik, while three regiments crossed at the actual bridge site, where engineers had built a wooden footbridge across the dropped spans. They then drove on Rangoon, entering the city on March 8. So, for a variety of reasons, Smyth's decision to blow the Sittang River Bridge proved both premature and ultimately unnecessary.

Smyth later described the Sittang battle as "a dog-fight in the jungle. Nobody above the rank of company commander could exercise any control." Shortly after the bridge incident, Wavell removed him from command and forced him out of the army, depriving him of his general's rank. Smyth's military career was ruined, though after the war he became a Member of Parliament and was given the honorary rank of brigadier for his earlier accomplishments. Hugh-Jones, who took counsel of his fears and requested permission to blow the bridge in the early morning darkness of February 23, never recovered from the shock of the division's destruction and committed suicide after the war. Hutton, who learned during the fighting that he was to be replaced as Burma Army commander by Lt. Gen. Sir Harold Alexander, said, "There is no doubt that the battle of the River Sittang was nothing less than a disaster."

Wavell was in the process of resuming command in India after the dissolution of ABDACOM. He summed up events succinctly: "The battle of the Sittang bridgehead on February 22nd and 23rd really sealed the fate of Rangoon and lower Burma. From reports of this operation which I have studied I have no doubt that the withdrawal from the Bilin River to west of the Sittang was badly mismanaged by the headquarters of the 17th Indian Division, and that the disaster which resulted in the loss of almost two complete brigades ought never to have occurred."

Long after the war, Smyth persisted in antagonizing many participants and observers by claiming that his division had not been destroyed at the Sittang. His actions and beliefs remain highly questionable. But his dilemma about the bridge in late February 1942 was a real one. As Field Marshal Viscount William J. Slim was to write, "It is easy to criticize the decision; it is not easy to make such a decision. Only those who have been faced with the immediate choice of similar grim alternatives can understand the weight of decision that presses on a commander." □

Marc D. Bernstein is the author of Hurricane at Biak: MacArthur Against the Japanese, May-August 1944, *and has written extensively on modern military and naval history. He lives in California.*

North Africa

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Matruh. Only 600 of the brigade survived.

In the northern sector, the British 22nd Armored Brigade cut off the remnants of the Ariete Armored Division. Twenty-nine tanks and numerous other vehicles were destroyed and 450 prisoners were taken. The 8th Armored Brigade reached the coast and destroyed 40 Italian tanks and six panzers. By then, the Axis forces were in full flight.

The Eighth Army's total casualties were 13,500 killed, wounded, or missing, about eight percent of the force engaged. Most were in the northern sector. The Australians, who at the opening of the battle were tying down the bulk of the panzer army, suffered 2,827 casualties; the 51st Highland Division 2,495; the New Zealanders 2,388; and the South Africans 922. Among the Germans and Italians, 30,000 out of a total of just over 100,000 were taken prisoner, 10,000 of them Germans. Perhaps another 20,000 were killed or wounded. There are no accurate figures.

On Sunday, November 15, 1942, church bells rang out all over Britain, ringing for the first time in the three years since war began, to celebrate the first victory over a German-led army—the victory at El Alamein. Prime Minister Churchill said of the victory, "Now is not the end. It is not even the beginning of the end. But perhaps it is the end of the beginning."

While Churchill was speaking, the Eighth Army was entering the devastated seaport of Tobruk. Ahead of it, Rommel and his panzer army continued their retreat westward, 1,400 miles across Libya, until, in January 1943, they crossed the border into the hills of Tunisia to meet their end in the final battles in Africa. Before the Axis surrender in North Africa in the spring of 1943, Rommel was recalled and given command of Army Group B in France, tasked with preparing to meet the expected Allied invasion of Fortress Europe.

Montgomery commanded the Eighth Army in Sicily and Italy until late 1943, when he was recalled to England and given command of the 21st Army Group preparing for the invasion at Normandy. He was promoted to the rank of field marshal and remains one of the most renowned heroes in British military history. Fittingly, he was invested with the title Montgomery of Alamein. □

John Brown last contributed to WWII History *with a story on the ordeal of the Mediterranean island of Malta. He hails from Minyama, Queensland, Australia.*

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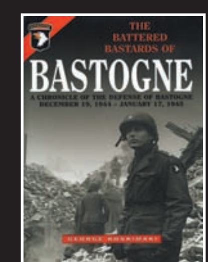

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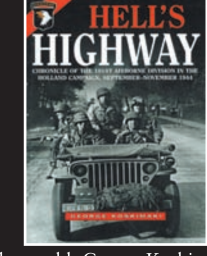

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Pearl Harbor

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Commemorative activities at the *Utah* were much more austere. A bronze plaque was attached to *Utah*'s deck in 1950. Its simple message was, "In Memory—Officers and Men—USS *Utah*—Lost in Action—7 December 1941." Since visitors did not have access to the ship, no one could actually read this plaque. A readable second plaque was then placed on a wharf just to the north of the ship.

The plaques served as the principal memorials until 1972, when a permanent memorial was finally constructed. It consisted of a 15- by 40-foot concrete platform connected to shore by a 70-foot walkway. Neither the platform nor the walkway touches the *Utah*. A flagpole in a corner of the platform allows a daily flag raising. The memorial was formally dedicated on May 27, 1972.

The *Utah* Memorial remained basically unchanged until 2005, when a $900,000 Navy construction project provided needed structural repairs to the memorial's foundation, as well as other improvements.

Both *Utah* and *Arizona* were destroyed in the same action and sank within two minutes of each other. Both still have crewmen entombed within them and are the only ships in the harbor remaining from the attack on December 7. On May 5, 1989, both were designated as national historic landmarks, which provides them with special consideration for preservation. Like the *Arizona,* survivors of the *Utah* are now permitted to have their ashes interred within their ship when they die. Five have chosen to do so.

In spite of these similarities, comparisons between the two ships are usually one sided. *Utah* was not sunk by a spectacular explosion as was *Arizona*; it capsized over a period of 11 minutes. While *Arizona* was a principal target of the attack, *Utah* was attacked by mistake. *Arizona* lost 1,177 men, about 85 percent of the crew on board during the attack. *Utah*'s death toll of 58 was 12 percent of her on-board crew. Approximately 1,002 of *Arizona*'s crew are still on board, while 54 of *Utah*'s crew still remain.

These statistics should not belittle the lives or achievements of the *Utah* or her crew. They fought as gallantly as men on any ship in the harbor on that morning. The sight of the incredible explosion as *Arizona*'s forward magazine blew up, and the huge and instantaneous death toll rightfully focused the world's attention on that ship. It properly became the symbol of the "day of infamy."

That symbolism was eventually responsible for creating the magnificent structure and shore facilities at the *Arizona* site. The greatest frustration of *Utah* survivors and their families is that the public has no similar direct access to the *Utah* Memorial.

No Navy launches stop there, and access may be gained solely from Ford Island, which is still an active military installation. Civilians are allowed on the island only with a formal permit. Although this is possible, the visitors to the *Utah* Memorial in recent years have numbered only in the dozens annually, a far cry from the million and a half who visit the *Arizona* Memorial. Most visitors to the *Arizona* Memorial are not even aware of the existence of the *Utah* Memorial less than a mile away.

Ironically, if the Navy had been successful in removing the *Arizona*'s hull in 1942, *Utah* would have been the sole attack victim remaining in Pearl Harbor. It, then, would have been the recipient of the public attention and the focus of efforts to establish a permanent memorial there.

It is not envy that prompts *Utah* survivors to seek increased public awareness of their ship's existence. They fully understand the relationship between the two ships and are supportive of the attention given to the *Arizona*. They are, however, interested in seeking changes to current operations within the harbor to permit visitors to at least view *Utah*'s remains. This would be a logical first step in increasing public knowledge of the ship's fate on that terrible Sunday in December 1941.

A modest expansion of the *Utah* Memorial's platform and allowing direct visitor access to it appear to be feasible and fundable solutions. Access could be provided either by water or by land using shuttle buses like those carrying visitors to the battleship USS *Missouri* (*BB-63*), moored near the *Arizona* Memorial. Visitors would then be able to view both national historic landmarks and both burial sites in Pearl Harbor.

An additional step to improve access to the *Utah* would be to transfer the *Utah* Memorial to the National Park Service, thus placing both memorials under the umbrella of the same federal jurisdiction. The income generated by the visitor center could then be used to support both memorials. Then, the *Utah* might no longer be known as "the other memorial," and the paradox of Pearl Harbor could finally cease to exist.□

Richard Klobuchar is the author of the books Pearl Harbor: Awakening a Sleeping Giant, *which is sold at the Pearl Harbor Visitor Center, and* USS Ward: Operational History of the Ship That Fired the First American Shot of World War II, *published in March 2007.*

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