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The design concept was amazing and its impact could still be amazing in this day & age! Imagine a platoon of infantry Riflemen also each carrying 15 mortar shells and working as a fire and maneuver machine. Stalinist purges and a failure to develop better ammunition put this idea to sleep before its time!

37mm Spade Mortar Assembly.....**$175.00** MISC458
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(non-firing)

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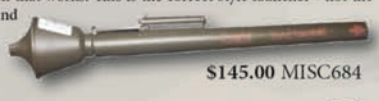

$145.00 MISC684

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Newly manufactured full size, non-firing German WW2 Panzerscrheck now available with an inert rocket!

(Inert)

Almost impossible to find actual inert rockets of this type, we have the next best thing which will be perfect to display or re-enactments.

Our steel launcher comes with wood furniture and leather sling and detachable shield. Our inert rockets are cast synthetic from the old Kamabee Keep iron rockets, long gone from the market. We can offer the ensemble or individual items as follows:

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Panzerschreck Launcher with Inert Rocket $355.00 RL017
Panzerschreck Inert Rocket..... $55.00 each or 3 for..... $145.00 MISC724
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FOR THE M1, M1A1 & M9 BAZOOKAS

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$39.95 MISC447

M39-B German WW2 Smoke Grenade

M39B Stick Grenades were used by the Wehrmacht & SS, all over their theater of operations. We have the tapered finger version rarely encountered today. Full size and can break down into components. Made from wood and metal.

$29.95 MISC678

(Inert)

Rarely offered with tapered finger handle, used for identifying it in the dark by touch.

Breaks down into separate components for display.

M11A3 WWII DUMMY RIFLE GRENADE (Inert)

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Standard Potato Masher grenade as used by German troops in WW2. Wood and metal construcion with individual components.

$24.95 MISC464 (Inert)

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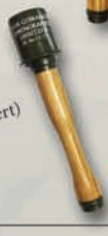
Sleeve with Grenade (inert) **$34.90** MISC791



U.S. WWII Paratrooper Signal Cricket

Brass w/metal clapper. Puts out a distinctive clicking sound so that allied troops could communicate to "friendlies". U.S. embossed. **$7.50** MISC284

German WW2 M39 Egg Grenade

Accurate inert steel reproduction with detachable Fuse assy. Full Size. (Inert)

$22.95 MISC680

U.S. Pineapple Grenade (inert)

Inert cast iron body with inert US GI fuse lends authenticity to this iconic staple of the American serviceman in the last century. Introduced in WW1, the original designed grenade progressed through evolutions to serve in WW2, Korea, and beyond to retirement @1969. A very deadly grenade due to its girth and castellated body which reminded GIs of a Pineapple. Comes with WW2 era, (1943) 'overpaint Yellow' band and O.D. green body.

$16.50 ea, 3 for $45.00 AM026

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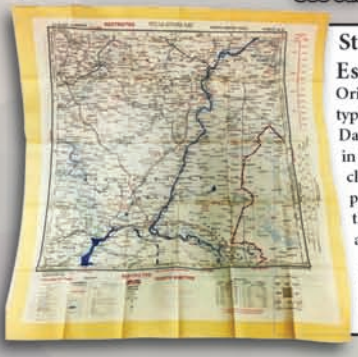

Stalingrad Regional Aircrew Escape Map

Original Rayon fabric escape & evasion type map issued to aircrews and 'Cloak & Dagger' operators behind the iron curtain in the 1950s. One side covers the region including Stalingrad from the 48th to 52nd parallels and the other directly south of that to 'Stepnoy' region between the 44th and 48th parallels . Easily foldable and resistant to water damage. Very scarce today and very limited. Size@22"x23.5"

Original. **$45.00** MISC952

AVG, Volunteers China Blood Chit, U.S. WW2 , Leather

American Volunteer Group chit worn during the early part of the Second World War. Usually sewn inside or outside the leather flight jacket. Provided a message in Chinese, to assist the pilot to safety and protect the person from the Japanese. Real Leather blood chits as they were originally made and full size like the orginal, 10" x 8"

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Flying Tiger Shield Emblem Patch

At time when the odds were stacked against the free Chinese by the Japanese juggernaut, and Americans came forward to fight for the 'underdog' and win! Replicated emblem from an original with a slightly faded 'off ' White, Royal blue, and Maroon leather compilation of sewn pieces like the original. Perfect for decoration or applying to leather flight jackets. 8" high by 7" across like the original.

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#1 MK3 Enfield Rifle

British SMLE service rifle of WW1 & WW2 use, and still used by police in commonwealth countries. Bolt functions back and forth with trigger that clicks. Full size with wood stock, metal hardware Enfield sling.

(non-firing)

~~$210.00~~ *Sale!* $189.00 REP41

1928 Thompson SMG

Well-made wood and metal replica and has a cocking mechanism that moves back and forth and trigger that allows the bolt forward. Magazine catch also works. Comes with steel 50rd. display drum.

(non-firing)

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Non firing, all steel, full size replica of the venerable WWII British sub machine gun. Bolt cocks and goes forward when the trigger is pulled, magazine catch functions and releases and locks the non functional magazine. Very realistic and certainly the best Sten replica on the market. Comes with sling!

(non-firing)

~~$145.00~~ *Sale!* $130.50 REP22

German MP40 SMG

(non-firing)

Famous full size display gun with operating bolt, recoil assembly, folding stock, mag catch and trigger. Saw combat throughout Europe, Africa, and even Vietnam! Bound to spark interest and conversations from all who see it. Realistic metal and plastic construction and it comes with steel magazine and leather sling.

~~$210.00~~ *Sale!* $189.00 REP02

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M1 Garand Rifle

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~~$213.00~~

Sale! $193.50 REP08

German FG42 1st Model

(non-firing)

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Full Size metal & wood replica of the venerable German Paratroop assault rifle. Comes with magazine & bayonet. This is the 1st model (Type 1), highly coveted and very difficult to find on the market today. This is a non-firing replica that we had purchased many years ago during the first production run by Shoei in Japan. Last Chance!!! Note: Guns lock & function just like the original. Exact size - over 85 machined parts in the FG42. These guns are dinosaurs in the making.

Not sold to NY, CT, WI, MN, KS, MA, CA, PR & Canada

$1595.00 MISC117

Japanese Rising Sun Flag

Cotton 3 x 5 feet with loop on top and cord on bottom like the original WW2 flags. Originally adopted by the Army, but later dominated for use by the Japanese Navy. **$18.00** FLAG12

German Balkenkreuz 'Vehicle Cross' Flag

All cotton, size 3 x 5 feet with loop and bottom draw cord. **$18.95** FLAG21

German Imperial WWI Flag

Classic German Imperial Flag that adorned Battleships, Army, and Headquarters installations from the late 1800s through 1918. Befitting that we can offer this classic war flag in 3 x 5 feet cotton 100 years after it flew during the War to End all Wars! **$18.95** FLAG27

British Grenadier Guards Regimental Flag

Whether storming fortress Tangiers, repelling Napoleons Imperial Guard at Waterloo, Crimea, or the Gothic Line, this Regiment has famously made great 'in roads' in the history of warfare. 3 x 5 feet flag with fringe is a beauty for wall display and perfect for any 'Anglophile'! **$25.00** FLAG30

BETSY ROSS FLAG

Size 3 x 5 feet

Manufactured with heavy duty cotton layered with 13 embroidered Stars applied in a manner Betsy Ross would be proud of. Perfect for flying every day on your flag pole. A beautiful touch of traditional colonial Americana. (High quality, heavy duty cotton…. Not cheap nylon or poly!)

HEAVY DUTY COTTON & Embroidered Stars $34.95 FLAG56

German Officer Visor Cap - SS, Black, Wool

Iconic German Officer Visor caps from WWII adorned with regalia representing organizations from the SS to the Luftwaffe. Well made with braided chin cords, buttons, metal emblems, and in the case of the Luftwaffe hat, embroidered badges. **$45.00** MISC379

Vietnam Advisor's Bush Hat, US Military

Manufactured in the traditional labor intensive circular weave pattern for strength as used with the French Foreign Legion Bush Hat. Highly coveted during the war and almost impossible to find large sizes today! Perfect for the ranch, camping, or any rugged adventure where utility is important. Comes with a Saigon facsimile label of the period. Comes in O.D. green. U.S. Sizes: 7-1/4", 7-1/2", 7-5/8", 7-3/4", 7-7/8"

$34.95 HAT06

French Foreign Legion "Sahara" Kepi

Our Kepi is the NCO type with blue wool cover with red top and blue piping. An embroidered green bursting bomb is sewn into thefront. Finished with brass chinstrap buttons and leather visor and chinstrap. We have included the DESERT COVER, which fits over the top, and the "Saharan" neck protector. Well-made. U.S. Sizes: 7-1/4", 7-3/8", 7-1/2", 7-5/8", 7-3/4"

$35.00 MISC285

German M35 Helmet WWII, Afrika Korps Tan

Model 1935 German helmet with rolled edge, metal banded liner with 8 tongue leather liner and leather chinstrap assembly mounted by 3 rivets on the 1.7-1.9mm thick steel shell in German 'Feldgrau' Afrika Korps Tan color. Helmet fits 7-1/4" to 7-5/8" head size (large). New, well made and great for static displays or reenactments. M35 helmet with decal - Sorry, no choice on decals as they are quite limited. **$34.95** HLM058

Steel Type 99 Protective Shield

As used by Japanese forces during WW2. Complete with handle and monopod. New.

$80.00 MISC443

WW2 Japanese Army Helmet w/Net

Steel helmet complete with suspension, chin strap. New made. **$54.95** HLM038

British WWII TOMMY Helmet

Accurate reproduction of the venerable British helmet having served through out Europe, Africa and Asia by all Commonwealth forces. Authentic details include weight of the steel pot, color, leather liner with rubber accents and 1st model spring loaded khaki chinstrap. Size liner-LG 7½" (U.S.) Great quality and bargain priced!

$29.95 HLM022

German Helmet 1889 Prussian Kurassier, Pickelhaube

$84.95 HLM012

Beautiful Pre-WWI model military helmet made from steel with leather liner, brass scalloped chinstrap, cockades, steel spike and brass emblem. Inscription embossed on brass emblem translates from German as, 'With God for King and Country'. (Mit Gott Fur Koenig und Vaterland).

Japanese WW2 Paratrooper Bandolier

Very sturdy, this 17 pocket bandolier holds 85 rds of ammo as originally designed and used throughout the Pacific and China campaigns by Imperialist Japan. Used with 6.5mm & 7.7mm Japanese ammo on 5 rd. stripper clips, this bandolier can hold an assortment of different similar sized ammo on clips like 8mm, .303, etc. New mfr. *Japanese Khaki bandolier (only)*

$27.95 MISC676

1888 British / Boer War .303 Bandolier

Soft Pliable Cow Leather like the Originals! Fits 50 rounds of .303 officially, but all sorts of other similar sized ammo like .30 and 7.62 Nato too. Fits well for people of Medium to 2XL build! New. Limited quantity. **$59.95** MISC786

Reich WW2 Metal German Wall Plaques

Small 15 inches **$22.95** MISC371

Large 27 inches **$50.00** MISC372

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Cover: An unidentified U.S. Marine Navajo code talker photographed during the battle for Tarawa. Marines carried out most of the amphibious assault landings during the war in the Pacific. See story page 28. Photo: Alamy

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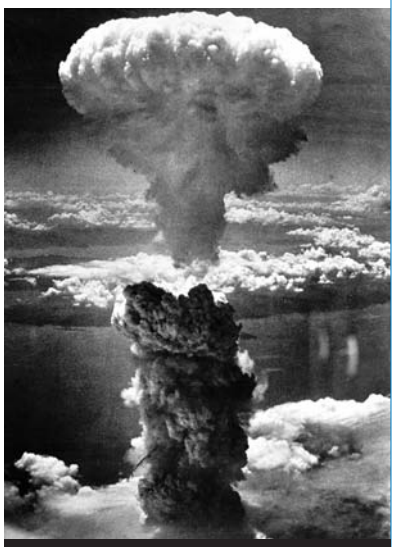
When Peace Came in a Flash—75 Years Ago

A few short months ago, the world paused to reflect on the 75th anniversary of the end of the greatest human-caused cataclysm mankind has ever known: World War II.

By May 1945, American, British, French, and Soviet forces had left Nazi Germany lying prostrate in the dust and debris of Europe—the detritus of a war that German leader Adolf Hitler had started.



The atomic bomb above Nagasaki billows skyward, August 9, 1945.

Then, on August 6, 1945, an atomic bomb, possessing a destructive force that few had ever imagined possible, obliterated the Japanese city of Hiroshima and instantly killed some 80,000 people, mostly civilians.

Reeling from what had happened and unable to quite grasp the enormity of it (as well as perhaps thinking that the explosion was a one-off event), the Japanese government failed to get the message and was punished with another bomb, this one dropped on Nagasaki three days later. Another 40,000 died in a flash.

Tens of thousands more Japanese would die agonizing deaths from burns and radiation poisoning over the next several decades.

President Harry S. Truman had inherited the bomb from his predecessor, Franklin D. Roosevelt, but the decision to employ it (or them) was Truman's alone. What an agonizing decision that must have been.

On the one hand, the bomb was almost certain to instantly snuff out human lives the way a bucket of water snuffs out a campfire. Military leaders urged Truman to use the bomb as a way of stopping the prolongation of the war and preventing another million or so casualties—American and Japanese—being added to the ghastly toll.

Had Truman not used the bomb, the howls of outrage from American families whose sons and husbands died invading Japan would have been deafening.

There was another consideration: with relations with the Soviet Union growing frosty even before the German surrender, Truman felt that it was important to let Stalin know that the U.S.—and only the U.S.—had a weapon of unimaginable power, so the Soviets had best not to get too aggressive. (Little did we know then that spies and traitors would give the secrets of the bomb to the Soviets.)

In later years, critics of Truman's decision said that Japan was nearly defeated anyway, and that an embargo without an invasion or the use of atomic weapons would have finished her off, saving incalculable lives on both sides in the process. We'll never know, will we?

Even some of those who helped develop the bomb had second thoughts after they saw the deaths and destruction it caused.

I remember my father, who was serving with the 10th Mountain Division in Italy when the war in Europe ended and whose unit was scheduled to take part in the invasion of Japan, telling me long after the war, "Thank God for Harry Truman and the atomic bomb." It is a sentiment that I heard from many veterans whom I interviewed over the years.

The genie was out of the bottle, never to be stuffed back in. We live with the decision to this day.

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Without Operations Bodyguard and Fortitude, and the Ghost Army, victory over the Nazis might not have been possible.

For Operation Neptune/Overlord, the Allies had 6,939 naval vessels, 11,590 aircraft, and 156,000 infantrymen and airborne soldiers (both parachute and glider) ready to participate in the D-Day invasion of northern France on June 6, 1944. But, arguably, no unit made a greater contribution to the Allied success at Normandy than an army that didn't exist.

The First U.S. Army Group, or FUSAG, was the brainchild of the Supreme Headquarters Allied Expeditionary Force, or SHAEF, which was certain that if the Germans could be fooled into thinking that the invading force would come across the 20-mile width of the English Channel between Dover and Calais instead of at Normandy, 100 miles from the English south coast, they would station the bulk of their forces where they would be of absolutely no use.

To make this elaborate hoax even more believable, one of the U.S. Army's best-known generals—George S. Patton, Jr.—was put in command of it. But, since FUSAG didn't really exist, Patton himself was merely a decoy.

There were several reasons for the Allied success in convincing the Germans that the real invasion would come at the Pas de Calais. It was all part of Operation Bodyguard, with sub-operations known as Fortitude and Quicksilver.

To pull off this scheme, German spies in Britain had been arrested, neutralized, and "turned"—threatened with death if they didn't cooperate with the Allies.

By loading these double agents with false information that they then sent on to Germany, by June 1, 1944, the German high command was convinced that the Allies had 89 divisions in Britain, just waiting to invade, when the real number was half that.

Secondly, because German aerial reconnaissance planes were still flying over Britain, there had to be a simulated build-up of an army on the ground: tents, trucks, tanks, troops, aircraft, and even landing craft in the Dover area.

Operation Fortitude

With Overlord slated to take place along a 50-mile stretch of shoreline in Nor-

British soldiers hoist a lightweight, inflatable dummy Sherman tank. Soldiers in the U.S. Army's top-secret "23rd Headquarters Special Troops" unit, also known as the "Ghost Army," were detailed to deceive the Germans about Allied troop build-ups and positioning and draw the enemy away from the actual Allied intentions.

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ABOVE: The U.S. Army used recordings to fool the enemy into thinking that vehicle movements or skirmishes were taking place. Here a giant loudspeaker on a halftrack at Fort Knox, Kentucky, tests the fidelity of the sound effects. BELOW: The bogus decoy tanks and airplanes could be inflated in mere minutes with entire bases and airfields set up and dismantled in just a few hours, effectively summoning a battalion of 30,000 men out of thin air.

mandy, 100 miles from the south coast of England, the Allies wanted to convince the Germans that Normandy was only a feint or diversion to mask the "real" invasion force coming across the English Channel between Dover and Calais.

Operation Fortitude provided the deceptions and decoys to misdirect the Germans' attention. And, through intercepts of German communications, it was discovered that the Germans were indeed putting the bulk of their heaviest defenses and troops in the Calais region.

Everything possible was done to enhance the Germans' belief that Calais was the real invasion site. Farm fields in East Anglia were converted into realistic-looking (at least from the air) military encampments with roads, tents, supply dumps, and vehicles emplaced. Fake communications were instituted, with just a handful of skilled operators generating enough radio and telegraph messages to duplicate what a real army would produce.

Small numbers of GIs were detailed to drive jeeps and trucks around the camps, light smoke-generating fires to simulate cooking fires and tent stoves, and generally give the dummy installations the look of real camp activity.

These GIs were encouraged (without needing much prompting) to let slip, while drinking with locals in the pubs, that they were assigned to such-and-such division, training in the area and getting ready for the invasion. To further the illusion, they wore fake divisional sleeve insignia, and the bumpers of their jeeps bore the unit numbers of non-existent units.

The *piece de resistance* was added in early 1944, when Lt. Gen. George S. Patton, Jr., who had been relieved of command of the Seventh U.S. Army in Sicily when he slapped two convalescing soldiers, was appointed to command the fictitious FUSAG—First U.S. Army Group. The Germans considered Patton their most formidable foe and were certain that his "firing" was merely a ploy and that he would be picked to lead the invasion—not be "wasted" as a decoy. (This part of Bodyguard was labeled Operation Quicksilver.)

Fortitude became, as one British historian noted, "the most complex and successful deception operation in the history of warfare."

The Ghost Army

In late 1943, the U.S. Army had started its own deception unit, called the 23rd Headquarters Special Troops (later known as the "Ghost Army"). Commanded by Colonel Harry L. Reeder, the 23rd boasted an interesting collection of men with varying backgrounds and skills.

One of the 23rd's four components units, the 603rd Engineer Camouflage Battalion Special, was made up of visual artists, painters, movie and stage set designers, former stagehands, store-window-display artists, fashion designers (such as Bill Blass) and others, who handled the inflatable rubber jeeps, tanks, trucks, and artillery pieces. (Goodyear and U.S. Rubber, which had created the barrage balloons, were two of sev-

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eral companies that provided the inflatable dummy vehicles.)

The Signal Company Special was in charge of developing realistic but totally spurious radio traffic that could simulate the radio transmissions of units of any size from a platoon to a division.

Flooding battlefields with realistic sound effects was the forte of the 3132nd Signal Service Company Special. By the use of pre-recorded sounds blasted from huge speakers mounted on halftracks, this unit could fool the enemy into believing that a fierce firefight was taking place over a hill, in a woods, or in a village, or that large numbers of vehicles were traveling from one place to another, or that men were constructing a Bailey bridge. The unit recorded their sound effects at Fort Knox, Kentucky.

The last unit was the 406th Engineer Combat Company Special, whose job was to provide security for the Ghost Army and to perform construction and demolition that would make the work of the other three units even more believable.

There was also a headquarters company to take care of administrative matters, bringing the total number of men in the 23rd to 1,100.

Formed at Camp Forrest, Tennessee, in 1943 (later joined by the sonic-deception unit that had been stationed at Pine Camp—today Fort Drum, New York), the 23rd began creating test dummies and having them photographed from the air and from different angles on the ground to see if they were realistic enough to fool sharp-eyed German photo interpreters.

On May 2, 1944, with the Normandy invasion just a few weeks away, the 23rd packed up and sailed to England, where British deception artists had long been at work under the aegis of Operation Fortitude.

Launching Neptune/Overlord

Operation Neptune/Overlord was launched on the night of June 5-6, 1944, and, except for a few touch-and-go moments, was a rousing success. Much of the credit must go to everyone involved in Operation Fortitude, for they kept many enemy divisions that could have wreaked havoc with the

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An inflated rubber L-5 reconnaissance plane used by the Ghost Army at one of the last operations on the western border of Germany.

landings far from Normandy.

So convincing was the Fortitude ruse that, as late as August, major German formations were still being held in the Calais area because Hitler and many in the high command were convinced that Normandy was just a large-scale feint and that Calais was where the real invasion would come. By the time reality sank in, it was too late to stop the Allies from piling onto the continent in huge numbers.

The 23rd continued to play a major role even after the Overlord landings had succeeded. The unit arrived piecemeal in France in late June and early July and was bivouacked near Sainte-Mère-Église, the town captured by the 82nd Airborne Division on D-Day morning. They immediately set to work putting up a battery of dummy artillery pieces and a group of inflatable Sherman tanks.

According to Rick Beyer and Elizabeth Sayles, authors of *The Ghost Army of World War II*, a couple of Frenchmen stumbled on the scene and saw four GIs picking up one of the dummy tanks. To confuse the flabbergasted Frenchmen, another soldier told them, "The Americans are very strong."

The 23rd was beginning to adapt to its role on the battlefront, but the unit commander, Colonel Reeder, had to send a memo to his subordinate units: "The attitude of the 23rd HQs towards their mission is lopsided. There is too much MILITARY and not enough SHOWMANSHIP.

"Like it or not, the 23rd HQ must con-

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An aerial photo of inflatable dummies deployed near the Rhine River, March 1945. Their last performance, Operation Viersen, successfully fooled German forces into converging to defend a point on the Rhine miles away from the actual attack.

sider itself a traveling road show ready at a moment's notice to present [itself as] the 2nd Armored Division, the 9th Infantry Division, and the Seventh Corps.

"The presentation must be done with the greatest accuracy and attention to detail. They will include the proper scenery, props, costumes, principals, extras, dialogue, and sound effects. We must remember that we are playing to a very critical radio, ground, and aerial audience. They must all be convinced."

The 23rd was attached to Patton's Third Army and accompanied it on the drive to Brittany, where the "traveling road show" continued to confound the enemy. When coming into a town or village, members of the 23rd always played the role of some other unit. Some of the men even dressed up—and acted like—colonels and generals to fool potential spies and collaborators.

After the successful operations in Brittany, the 23rd headed east with Third Army and enjoyed the celebrations following the liberation of Paris in August 1944. Many of the artists within the unit, when they weren't partying, took the opportunity to draw street scenes and portraits of the people they met.

Near Metz, having been halted due to a lack of fuel, Patton was in a difficult position and worried that the Germans might counterattack his thin lines. To give the impression of greater strength, the 23rd came to the rescue, setting out two dozen inflatable tanks over the border in Luxembourg. Tank noises blared from the loudspeakers for four nights, adding to the deception. The Germans, deceived, avoided attacking through the area. Eventually, the 83rd Infantry Division arrived to plug up the line.

In mid-December 1944, the 23rd was masquerading as the 75th Infantry Division and "holding" Bastogne, a quiet area in Belgium, when suddenly the Germans crashed right through their sector. The 23rd quickly withdrew to avoid being annihilated.

Beyer and Sayles wrote, "Soldiers in nearby American units overwhelmed by the German attack were angry that the 75th Infantry Division was right next to them in line [but] was suddenly nowhere to be found." Patton was directed by Lt. Gen. Omar Bradley to rush to the area.

Although most of the 23rd had withdrawn to the rear, the communications boys were detailed for a new assignment: fool the Germans into thinking that Patton's 4th and 80th Infantry Divisions were going into reserve when the exact opposite was true. When the Germans attacking Bastogne were hit by the 4th and 80th, they got the surprise of their lives.

Major Ralph Ingersoll of the 23rd commented, "This bit of trickery I know did work—exactly as conceived."

After surviving Hitler's Ardennes Offen-

sive—what the Americans called "the Battle of the Bulge"—the Allies went back on the offensive, pushing the Germans back into Germany. The 23rd's services were still required to keep the enemy off balance and guessing about where the next blow would strike.

Final Mission

The 23rd's final mission came on March 24, when they were detailed to make the Germans believe that two Ninth Army divisions—30,000 men—were about to cross the Rhine River at Krefeld, a point 10 miles south of where the actual crossing would take place. The deception was code-named Operation Viersen.

In addition to fake radio traffic, hundreds of rubber vehicles were inflated and placed in strategic locations, as well as dummy antiaircraft guns, a dummy airfield, and dummy spotter planes. The sounds of large numbers of trucks on the move and pontoon bridges being built were broadcast toward German lines across the river. Feints made by real units at the fake crossing site added to the deception.

When the real attack occurred on March 24, the attackers found only light and confused resistance. Ninth Army Commanding General William Simpson commended the 23rd in a letter to Colonel Reeder: "The [23rd] was engaged in a special project, which was an important part of the operation. The careful planning, minute attention to detail, and diligent execution of the tasks to be accomplished by the personnel of the organization reflect great credit on this unit….

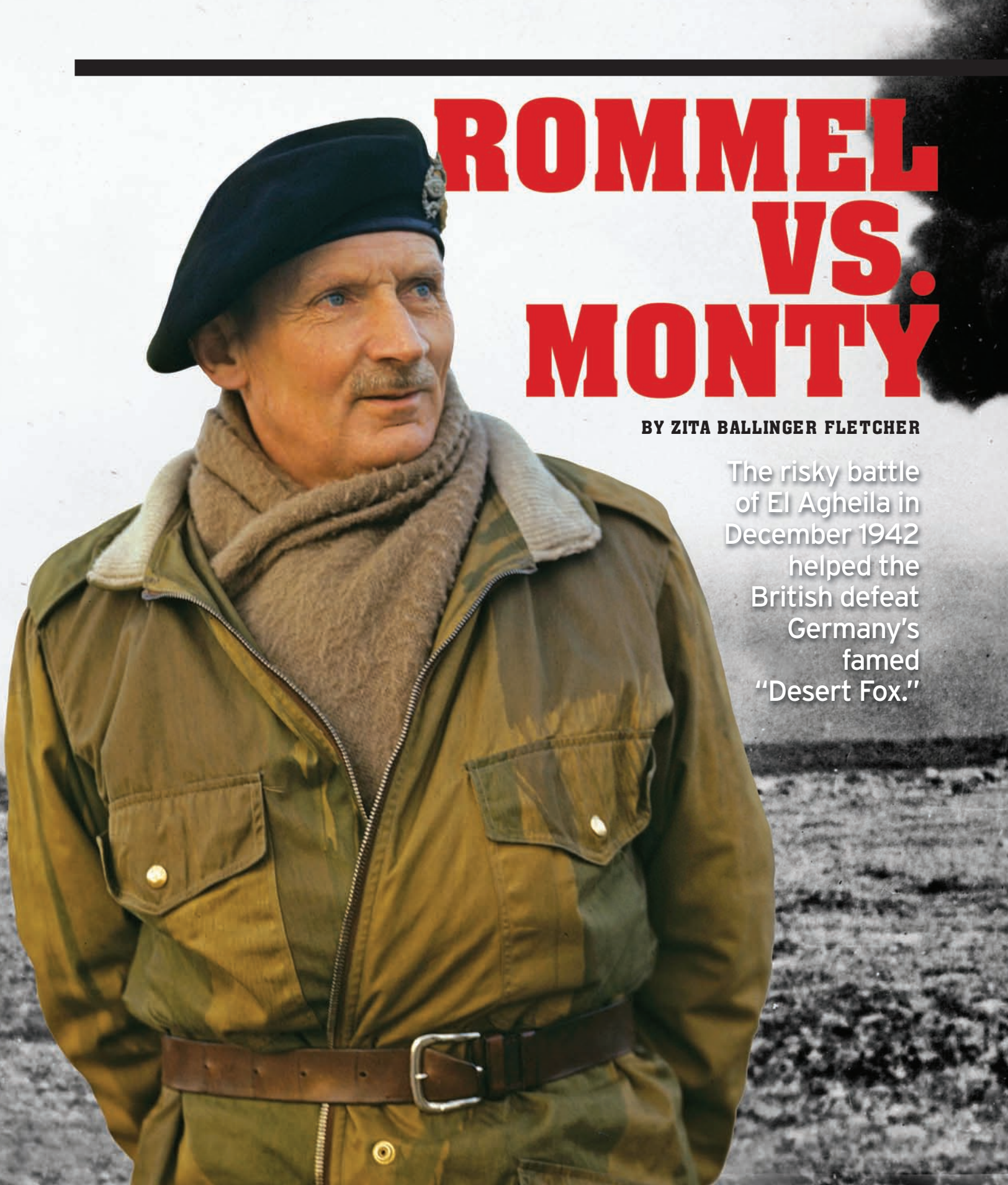
"I desire to commend the officers and men of the 23rd … for their fine work and to express my appreciation for a job well done."

While the combat forces deserve the lion's share of credit for victory in Europe, the wide panoply of other, less well-known personnel and organizations, such as the 23rd, along with the technicians at Shepperton Studios (the manufacturers of inflatable vehicles), the double agents, and the code breakers at Bletchley Park all deserve a large share of the credit. Without a well-executed deception plan, the war might not have been won. □

ROMMEL VS. MONTY

BY ZITA BALLINGER FLETCHER

The risky battle of El Agheila in December 1942 helped the British defeat Germany's famed "Desert Fox."



The relatively unknown Bernard Law Montgomery (left), commander of the British Eighth Army, and the near-mythical Erwin Rommel, head of the German Afrika Korps, engaged in several pitched battles across the sands of Libya, Tunisia, and Egypt in a titanic struggle for supremacy in North Africa.

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ABOVE: A German tank commander scans the flat, barren desert landscape for any sign of British positions. Fighting in this type of terrain was a challenge for both sides. OPPOSITE: British troops, clad in short pants, take cover behind a knocked-out panzer as they advance toward German lines near El Alamein, where they would win a surprising victory in the autumn of 1942.

The famous retreat of the "Desert Fox" Erwin Rommel across North Africa following his defeat at the Second Battle of El Alamein in 1942 was less a retreat than a series of stubborn battles to hold ground. His opponent, British General Bernard Law Montgomery, was determined to expel the Germans from conquered territories in a momentous advance across the African continent.

Each commander lashed out at the other in a series of tense duels. Rommel, once renowned by British troops as a "magician" for his tactical skills, had not lost his legendary ability to opportunistically exploit the terrain and manipulate enemy weaknesses. Montgomery, a seasoned fighter with a passion for studying strategy, was eager to test his strength against a formidable opponent.

At the Battle of El Agheila, however, both generals were handicapped. Strapped with administrative weaknesses and political obligations, they faced each other across the battlefield with uncertainty. Both commanders urgently needed time to solve their armies' troubles, but both were under pressure to act quickly. The battle would determine who held the gateway to Egypt.

The Build-Up: A Fighting Retreat

Rommel's swift and seemingly unstoppable string of conquests across North Africa since 1941 was brought to a crashing end by Montgomery's Eighth Army at El Alamein. The path straight to Cairo was now firmly closed to German troops, who had been plotting to seize control of the city for some time. Before his defeat at El Alamein, Rommel had already made a plan for seizing Cairo; his designs involved mobilizing Axis-friendly Egyptian "sleeper cells" within the city and detonating all Nile bridges to trap British troops inside the metropolis.

As Rommel's war-weary troops encamped 60 miles west of Alexandria, citizens began evacuating Cairo in anticipation of a German takeover. The unforeseen British victory at El Alamein had reversed the fate of Egypt and British troops in North Africa.

Even prior to El Alamein, Rommel's personal morale had started to fray at the edges. His health was worn down by life on the grueling desert frontlines without reprieve. He had developed nasal diphtheria and low blood pressure, which forced him to receive frequent medical attention. Constant strategic arguments with German counterparts and squabbles with allied Italian commanders hampered his battlefield progress. His army's supply line, stretched and targeted by British bombers, was failing—and, despite his constant demands for assistance, German and Italian bureaucrats were in no hurry to deliver aid. His writings during and after that time reflected disillusionment.

"It is sometimes a misfortune to enjoy a certain military reputation," Rommel wrote. "One knows one's own limits, but other people expect miracles."

Despite all this, Rommel was confident enough to underestimate Montgomery before their first all-out battle at El Alamein. After all, he had played cat-and-mouse with the best of Britain's commanders over the course of nearly two years, and he had won.

When Montgomery assumed command of the British Eighth Army in 1942, Rommel found himself faced with a shadowy opponent. Montgomery was a previously unknown entity in the British Army. Although respected by military peers for his prowess at tactics and physical training, Montgomery, dubbed "Monty" by comrades, was far from famous. He was a stranger to the desert war, and limited public information was available on him.

Rommel scrutinized his new opponent, tested him with a tank skirmish at Alam Halfa in summer 1942, and wrongly labeled him as overcautious. This misjudgment resulted in Rommel's defeat at El Alamein and subsequent retreat to El Agheila.

While it was true that Montgomery was slow to react to Rommel's maneuvers, this apparent inaction was not due to caution. In reality, Montgomery was an extremely meticulous and controlling personality. His writings reveal that maintaining complete control of situations was his ideal. He refused to smoke or drink alcohol because it represented a loss of mental and physical control.

Control was also one of his strongest battle principles; he refused to concede that any aspect of battle should be "dictated" to him by the enemy. After assuming command of the Eighth Army, Montgomery reorganized all forces under his authority until things suited him, ignoring Rommel until the right moment came to strike.

Montgomery also had the benefit of more experience. He was older than Rommel and had fought more battles than his German opponent. Rommel had previously won Germany's highest decoration for valor as an infantryman during World War I. Montgomery had, in addition to fighting in World War I, served on the volatile frontier of present-day Afghanistan, fought in the Irish War of Independence, and seen action in a civil war in Palestine. Although new to the Eighth Army, he was battle-hardened and ready for action by the time of his first sparring match with Rommel in North Africa.

"It was true that I had never fought in the desert and I would have under me some very experienced generals who had been out there a long time. However, Rommel seemed to have defeated them all, and I would like to have a crack at him myself," Montgomery recalled in his memoirs.

To complicate matters, Germany's High Command had begun aggressively interfering in Rommel's decisions. Third Reich propagandists had seized upon Rommel, spinning colorful fictions about him to suit their political agendas. Rommel's human weaknesses and struggles were not acknowledged by German political leaders—his complaints and misfortunes no longer suited the Nazi narrative. As Nazi rulers worried about their world political image, they urged Rommel to behave according to their propaganda, however out of touch with reality it might be.

During Rommel's crushing defeat at El Alamein, Hitler ordered him to "stand fast, yield not a yard of ground, and throw every gun and every man into the battle…. It would not be the first time in history that a strong will has triumphed over bigger battalions. As to your troops, you can show them no other road than that to victory or death."

Rommel, plunged into confusion, realized later that Hitler's order was only the first in a series of "propaganda commands" that would affect his decision-making authority for the duration of the war in North Africa. It shook him deeply.

"This order demanded the impossible. Even the most devoted soldier can be killed by a bomb…. We were completely stunned, and for the first time during the African campaign I did not know what to do," he wrote. "This first instance of interference by higher authority in the tactical conduct of the African war came as a considerable shock."

Rommel wrote that from then onward, he had to "continually circumvent orders from the Führer or the Duce to save the army from destruction." Meanwhile, Rommel remained in control of vast territories across the North African continent he had captured in his previous conquests. He was reluctant to relinquish them.

Under Montgomery's command, the Eighth Army had decisively defeated Germany's most famous field marshal at El Alamein. However, Rommel's defeat was not final. As the aggressive Afrika Korps desert troopers fled across the badlands in search of a new stronghold, they headed to a very familiar place—El Agheila, called Mersa el Brega by the Germans. This uncanny stretch of wasteland was known far and wide as the prime hunting ground of the Desert Fox.

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The Phantom of the Wilderness

The ghost of Rommel's past successes lingered at El Agheila, an eerie region of the Libyan wilderness filled with soft sand dunes and shimmering salt fields. Twice the British army had come to within an inch of victory at this spot, only to be forced to turn back by the Desert Fox.

The Agheila wasteland was like the threshold to a supernatural playing field where Rommel held dominion. He had made cunning use of natural elements, including sandstorms and the treachery of the open landscape, to wreak havoc on troops who pursued him here in the past.

"The Agheila position was naturally very strong. It covered the area of desert between the sea … which formed a difficult obstacle running east and west," wrote Montgomery, who had been formulating plans to seize the region for a long time previously. "There were only a few tracks through this sand sea," he wrote, "and so long as Rommel held the area, he could hold up our advance, or alternatively could debouch at will against us."

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Montgomery prepared an outflanking maneuver to encircle Rommel's army. The left flank of the Afrika Korps was shielded by the Mediterranean coastline, while other areas of approach were hampered by natural obstacles. The Germans' right flank, however, remained open across nearly 120 miles of desert. Montgomery planned to lead an assault on the front of Rommel's army while also closing in to cut him off from behind.

It would be no easy task, Montgomery realized. "I did not think we would have any serious fighting till we reached Agheila," he wrote. "Rommel would undoubtedly withdraw to that position and would endeavor to stop us there; his supply route would then be shortened while ours would be long, thus reversing the supply situation which had existed at Alamein." He described Agheila as "a difficult position to attack."

Despite his recent defeat, Rommel's near-mythical reputation cast a growing shadow over the minds of his pursuers. Montgomery's predecessor, British commander Claude Auchinleck, had written of Rommel in February 1942 that the German field marshal was "becoming a kind of magician or bogey-man to our troops … it would be highly undesirable that our men should credit him with supernatural powers."

Although the command situation had changed, Rommel's fearsome reputation persisted. The atmosphere around El Agheila was shrouded with gloom behind British lines. The men felt haunted and ill at ease.

The energetic Monty was unable to dispel his troops' sense of foreboding regarding this area. "As we approached the Agheila position I sensed a feeling of anxiety in the ranks…. Many had been there twice already, and twice Rommel had … driven them back," he wrote. Despite noticing "a feeling of depression" among his officers, Montgomery remained eager to fight. "I did not feel depressed at the prospect myself," he noted dryly.

Yet this was a difficult situation for Montgomery to master. He liked to personally motivate and inspire his troops, delivering rousing speeches among the ranks to inflame their warrior spirit. "The troops must be brought to a state of wild enthusiasm before the operation begins…. They must enter the fight with the light of battle in their eyes and definitely wanting to kill the enemy," he wrote of his approach.

Despite Montgomery' efforts, the proud men of the Eighth Army grew more nervous with each step closer to the treacherous dune sea where their enemies lurked. The soldiers ironically made jokes about traveling to Libya for Christmas and returning to Egypt for New Year.

Montgomery realized the phantom presence of the Desert Fox was undermining his troops' esprit de corps. "I therefore decided that I must get possession of the Agheila position quickly; morale might decline if we hung about looking at it too long," he wrote.

Waiting long to start the attack was not an option in any case. Rommel was already moving—digging in defenses around El Agheila in what was known as the Agedabia region. The elusive wizard of the wilderness had reached his former stronghold and was mustering for battle. "The enemy was preparing to turn and face us," wrote Montgomery.

The duel was soon to begin, but each general entered the battle suffering from strategic handicaps.

Off Balance

As Montgomery had predicted, Rommel's supply difficulties were alleviated somewhat as he drew closer to Axis-held territories. However, the Afrika Korps' need for materiel

Imperial War Museum

ABOVE: "Monty" studies a map. A master tactician, he seldom made a move unless he was certain he could control the outcome. OPPOSITE: Rommel (left) and Italian officers pore over a map. Not only did the "Desert Fox" hold a dim view of his jittery Italian allies, but he was frustrated by Hitler's continual interference in the conduct of the North Africa campaign.

remained dire. During his retreat to El Agheila, Rommel's Italian allies destroyed much-needed ammunition in a fit of sheer panic. "On top of all else, some overzealous people had blown up the ammunition dump at Barce along with the ammunition we were most short of," Rommel wrote.

"The Italian Supply HQ had been overcome by a perfect frenzy of destruction. Ammunition dumps were blown up and water-points destroyed, all of which were urgently needed for the maintenance of the fighting troops. It was only at the last moment that we managed to stop them demolishing the water and electricity works in Benghazi."

Additionally, the German High Command and their Italian counterpart, the Comando Supremo, were slow to respond to the reality that the impending battle at El Agheila would impact the fate of Axis control across the entirety of North Africa. While Rommel insisted that further damage to the Afrika Korps would result in the loss of Libya and tried to develop backup plans, higher authorities struggled to comprehend the situation and ordered him to hold his position indefinitely.

"We had still received no strategic decision from the supreme German and Italian authorities on the future of the African theatre of war," wrote Rommel. "They did not look at things realistically—indeed they refused to do so." Rommel was forced to wait for orders before making any major strategic decisions. The aggressive general hated being forced to hold back. "It was an ugly situation to have to stand immobilized for any length of time in the desert," he wrote angrily.

Temporarily abandoned, Rommel had to devise his own plans for how to deal with the looming presence of Montgomery stalking him from a relatively short distance. Rommel brimmed with resentment at the British approach and ordered his men to sow a deadly trail of mines. These were no ordinary mines; many of the explosives were improvised "creations" devised by German sappers at the last minute. Some improvised mines known to have been created by the Afrika Korps included Luftwaffe bombs weighing more than 1,000 lbs., buried in shallow pits and rigged with tripwires. Rommel referred to the explosive devices as "neat little surprises" for the British.

Like Rommel, Montgomery's own line of supply was stretched very thin, resulting in what he admitted was a perilous situation. "The pace of the pursuit was fast and the strain on administration became increasingly severe," confessed Montgomery. "The advance was becoming sticky, and I was experiencing the first real anxiety I had suffered since assuming the command of the Eighth Army."

He had chased Rommel relentlessly across vast distances of bleak wilderness. Now, not unlike his enemy, Montgomery was facing a supply crisis. Montgomery's ability to properly replenish his troops and supply his army had become "a matter of urgent priority."

"From Cairo to Tripoli is 1,600 miles by road…. It was as if GHQ were in London and the leading troops were in Moscow, with only one road joining them," described Montgomery. Preceding the battle of El Agheila, a severe, unexpected rainstorm knocked advancing supply columns off balance, requiring supplies to be brought "a distance of 700 miles: equivalent to being disposed at Vienna and drawing stores in London with only one road available…. My whole force was stretched administratively, relying largely on Tobruk, some 450 miles by road in the rear."

The situation was potentially disastrous for the British, and Rommel was a clever tactical opportunist. He preferred to exploit situations as they arose; most of his decisions on the frontlines relied on his opponent's behavior. He was proactive in goading enemies to strike and constantly probed for weaknesses.

The aggressive Desert Fox eyed Monty's position and zeroed in on its vulnerability. The British were isolated—the bulk of their

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ABOVE: Colonel General Rommel meets with Maj. Gen. Jürgen Georg von Bismarck, commander of the 21st Panzer Division, photographed in June 1942. Bismarck would die in battle two months later. OPPOSITE: Monty addresses a group of British officers shortly after taking command of the Eighth Army in Egypt. He would become famous for his rousing speeches that instilled a fighting spirit in his men.

fighting troops were concentrated forward, and a gap had formed between these troops and their lines of supply and reinforcement in the rear. This put Montgomery and his men in prime position for a stealthy, shark-like attack by Rommel's panzers.

Rommel's prior experience and killer instincts strongly inclined him to take the chance. "In January 1942, we had succeeded … in falling upon and smashing the British vanguard with locally superior forces before effective help could reach them," wrote Rommel. He noted that the current scenario was "very similar" to past times when he had trapped his enemies.

Montgomery sensed his enemy's intentions with some anxiety; he admitted that his position was "off balance." Despite Rommel's disadvantages, he did not doubt that the daring panzer general had the audacity to sneak around him and attempt to cut off his forces.

"My outflanking movement was necessarily weak owing to maintenance restrictions and it was launched into difficult country," Montgomery noted, while Rommel's position was "was immensely strong and very heavily mined."

Rommel and fellow commanding officers discussed the idea of ambushing Montgomery. After a detailed discussion, Rommel—with uncharacteristic caution—ultimately decided the undertaking was too risky. "What made this so galling was that the British dispositions were excellently suited for such an operation," he wrote, chagrined by his own decision.

As the pall of uncertainty thickened, political and strategic necessity demanded that both commanders take immediate action.

Rommel, pressuring Italian supervisors for crisis instructions and getting nowhere, flew to Germany for an emergency meeting with Hitler prior to the battle. He attempted to stress his dismal supply situation and suggest new approaches to strategy regarding Africa.

"Unfortunately, I then came too abruptly to the point and said that … the abandonment of the African theatre of war should now be accepted as a long-term policy," he wrote. "If the army remained in North Africa, it would be destroyed. I had expected a rational discussion of my arguments," he wrote, yet his remarks affected Hitler like a "spark in a powder barrel."

Rommel, dumbfounded, witnessed Hitler's temper explode for the first time. "The Führer flew into a fury and directed a stream of completely unfounded attacks upon us," he wrote, unleashing "a violent outburst in which we were accused, among other things, of having thrown our arms away." Although Rommel attempted to defend the Afrika Korps and urged measures to relieve them, Hitler refused to listen.

"There was no attempt at discussion. The Führer said that his decision to hold the eastern front in the winter of 1941-42 had saved Russia and that there, too, he had upheld his orders ruthlessly," recalled Rommel. "I began to realize that Adolf Hitler simply did not want to see the situation as it was, and that he reacted emotionally to what his intelligence must have told him was right."

The famed Desert Fox, once a beloved and respected hero of the German-Italian alliance, was now regarded with contempt by his superiors—a reverse in fortunes that filled him with cynicism as the hour for battle grew near. "Most of the Führer H.Q. staff officers present, the majority of whom never heard a shot fired in anger, appeared to agree with every word the Führer said," Rommel recalled.

Describing higher staff at German and Italian headquarters, he wrote: "They believed the fault lay with us and thought they could improve our fighting spirit with bombastic and magniloquent phrases…. Me, they regarded as a pessimist of the first order, and they were probably the source of the legend which later went the rounds back in the rear—and was swallowed whole by certain office-chair soldiers only too anxious to delude themselves—that I was cocky in victory, but a prey to despair in defeat."

Rommel was commanded not to yield his position. There would be no long-term withdrawal. Meanwhile, new interference in his authority came from the Luftwaffe. "Goering stated that I must at all costs hold on indefinitely … if possible, I should already begin attacking the enemy from Mersa el Brega [El Agheila]," he wrote. "Flying back to Africa

I realized that we were now completely thrown back on our resources and that to keep the army from being destroyed as the result of some crazy order or other would need all our skill."

Attacking with unfavorable odds was an equally high-stakes gamble for Montgomery. Failure to wrest the Agheila wilderness from the enemy's grip meant the possibility of a lengthy and bloody siege for North Africa, and possibly a reversal in British fortunes.

"The problem," he wrote, "was now to turn the enemy out of the El Agheila position as quickly as possible before he had time to perfect the organization of his defenses. I wanted to occupy the Agheila bottleneck myself … and thus ensure that the Axis forces would not hold the gateway to Cyrenaica a third time."

Montgomery realized he needed to carefully protect his front-line troops from severe damage, as it was impossible to bring any fresh forces forward quickly. "My next anxiety was the reinforcement situation. I could not at this stage risk a battle involving heavy casualties," he recalled. Like Rommel, Montgomery used the lull as a chance for reprieve, flying back to Cairo for a weekend to discuss his plans at British army headquarters. "I also wanted to get some more clothes, and generally get cleaned up after nearly four months in the desert."

National Archives

After a comfortable stay in the British embassy, he returned refreshed for the fight. "When I got back to my headquarters just east of Benghazi … it seemed the enemy was becoming nervous about our preparations."

As a cold winter night fell, scattered movements became apparent within the eerie sea of sand dunes. The Desert Fox was shifting his strength under cover of darkness. He started moving Italian infantry troops away from the forward area, withdrawing them to another defensible area called Buerat. Rommel hoped to keep his maneuvers secret. However, the element of surprise he needed was inadvertently foiled by his Italian allies.

"In spite of the need for secrecy … the Italians made an atrocious din and some of their vehicles even drove back through the moonlit night with blazing headlights," Rommel wrote.

The movements caught Montgomery's attention. Eager to thwart Rommel and bolster the fragile morale of British troops, he took action earlier than he had planned. He launched a full-scale attack.

The Roar of Battle

British troops commenced the attack with a barrage of heavy artillery fire on the night of December 11. The earth shook and white flashes pierced the black skies like lightning. Montgomery's troops had already brought artillery forward, established supply dumps, and reconnoitered the battlefield. Raiding parties soon swept across the desert in vehicles and opened fire on German positions.

In keeping with his philosophy of total control, Montgomery refused to let Rommel dictate events on the battlefield. Rather than allow Rommel to retreat quietly, he decided to throw him off balance with what he described as "bluff and maneuver," intended "to bustle Rommel to such an extent that he might think he would lose his whole force if he stood to fight."

Rommel indeed believed that the British were attempting an all-out bid to overrun them. "The British made attack after attack against our strongpoints in the north and south, and soon there was no more doubt—the enemy offensive had opened," wrote Rommel.

In fact, Montgomery's forward assaults were a subterfuge. He hoped to herd Rommel's panzers into an open area where they would be more prone to damage. "In view of the awkward country to the south and the difficulty of a frontal attack, it would obviously be preferable to maneuver Rommel out of the Agheila position and then attack him in the easier country to the west," he wrote.

Meanwhile, British troops came unexpectedly face-to-face with old Afrika Korps enemies in the dusty wilderness—especially the formidable German 90th Light Division, which was nearly destroyed at El Alamein. The number of Rommel's tanks had increased somewhat as supplies had been forced through to him from Europe, and British soldiers found it a somewhat

Imperial War Museum

Men of the 2nd New Zealand Division on the march. The "Kiwis" nearly encircled the retreating Germans, only to have Rommel's forces slip out of the noose in December 1942.

spooky experience to witness the "resurrection" of the 90th Light Division—some elements of the Panzer Army seemed like ghost ships that would never die.

"We continued to meet old opponents right through to the bitter end of the campaign, and it used to be said that Eighth Army would be pursuing '90 Light' till the end of the time," according to Montgomery, noting the uncanny scenario.

Rommel decided that to remain in the area would be "suicide." He sounded the retreat as his staff sent incessant SOS messages to Europe. Even as Rommel pulled back, the New Zealand Division maneuvered behind the retreating Afrika Korps.

The Desert Fox was nearly encircled several times as the long arms of Montgomery's army reached forward and choked his troops. At one point, the whole of Rommel's Panzer Army was caught between the New Zealand Division and the rapidly advancing British 7th Armored Division. The British struggled to press onward across the rugged terrain of the dune sea.

"The Germans broke into small groups and burst their way through gaps in the strung-out New Zealand divisions," according to Montgomery. He described fighting as "intense and confused," and said the Afrika Korps was "severely mauled" during its escape. Over the course of the battle, Rommel's forces sustained an estimated 20 percent casualties.

Rommel was livid with anger. He entertained thoughts of slicing advancing British tank columns to ribbons with guerilla-type assaults as he had done in the past. "It was infuriating for me to have to stand idly by and watch the wonderful opportunities which the enemy offered us for countermoves," he wrote, adding he could have charged into the battlefield to cut off the enemy's flank from its main force.

Montgomery had taken action knowing that Rommel had already committed his troops in a different direction. The British logistical weakness was exposed, but there was no longer any chance of Rommel being able to exploit it; things were moving too quickly.

The 90th Light Division and the Italian Combat Group Ariete fended off an assault from 80 British tanks that lasted nearly 10 hours. "The Italians put up a magnificent fight," Rommel wrote. Eventually the British pulled back, leaving 22 tanks and two armored cars on the battlefield.

During the onslaught, the British also commenced a series of air strikes. Montgomery called the Royal Air Force his "long-range hitting weapon." The bombardment was intended to unsettle the fleeing Germans during their withdrawal and protect British light infantry from Luftwaffe strafing. A bomber targeted Rommel's forward headquarters, destroying the truck of his intelligence staff and other vehicles. The RAF also sank an Axis tanker and two fast ships laden with a total of 3,500 tons of petrol intended for Rommel's troops.

Montgomery was adamant about keeping the attack constant and ferocious. "The enemy must be given no respite and no opportunity to organize defenses to delay us," he wrote.

As fighting raged on December 16, the battlefield became confused as the British attempted repeatedly to surround the fleeing Afrika Korps. Prisoners on both sides were

captured, freed, and recaptured again as sparring opponents tried to force their way back and forth through the difficult desert terrain.

On the morning of December 17, German tank crews faced a harrowing situation as they literally ran out of gasoline. They were immobilized as they fought swarming British tanks in what Rommel described as "a violent action." The Germans were only able to launch a counterattack when some long-awaited fuel canisters arrived. Disabling 20 British tanks, they fled as quickly as possible.

The Desert Fox and his remaining troops escaped by a very narrow margin. "We had to use our last drop of petrol to get out of the sack," he wrote, embittered. He promptly evacuated his troops to Buerat, located farther behind his frontline, where he had orders from superiors in Germany and Italy to make another desperate stand.

In doing so, Rommel effectively relinquished his stronghold of El Agheila, abandoning it completely for the first time since the early stages of the desert war. The "magician" of the dune sea had been expelled from his hideout.

"The Agheila bogey had been laid and we were leaguering as an Army beyond that once-dreaded position," wrote Montgomery. "We had made the grade, and morale was high."

The victory had a profoundly positive effect on the British troops in the Eighth Army. Private Geoffrey Glaister wrote to Montgomery on December 23, 1942: "For the first time in my Army life I felt I belonged to something…. For myself, thank you, Sir, for this new feeling. You have made us proud to belong to the 8th Army … I again on behalf of thousands of us here in Libya—on behalf of this great brotherhood, thank you sincerely."

Montgomery ordered the New Zealand Division to halt and reorganize, and followed up Rommel's army with light forces, renewing contact with them in the Buerat position. More battles lay ahead—Montgomery was already hell-bent on hacking a path forward to Tripoli, Libya's wild and luxurious capital city on the Mediterranean coast. "The enemy will try to stop us," he vaunted to his troops. "Nothing has stopped us since the Battle of Alamein began on 23rd October 1942. Nothing will stop us now…. On to Tripoli!"

Monty moved his tactical HQ to a locale known as Marble Arch—a site where Mussolini's fascist artisans had erected a triumphant white arch in the middle of nowhere. Called the Arco de Fileni by Italians, the portal was crowned with a pair of gruesome bronze statues showing the legendary Philaeni brothers of ancient Carthage being buried alive for the glory of empire. (The arch was destroyed by Libyan leader Muammar Gaddafi in 1973.)

Montgomery situated himself near airfields in an ideal position to direct the reconnaissance of enemy troops lurking in Buerat and plot his steamrolling advance. "We were now well into Tripolitania, and over 1,200 miles from Alamein where we had started," he noted. "Rommel and his Axis forces had been decisively defeated. Egypt was safe for the duration of the war."

After being driven back to his stronghold at El Agheila, Rommel was forced to abandon it in order to save Panzer Army Africa, thereby boosting British morale.

Aftermath: A Desert Christmas

As Christmas approached the dusty troops in the cold barrenness of the desert, Monty opted to give his men a break. "I decided that the Eighth Army needed a halt … officers and men deserved a rest and I was determined they should have it," he wrote.

Montgomery was touched by a feisty Christmas greeting he received from an anonymous "Yorkshire lass." "Keep 'em on the run, Monty," she wrote. He shared the letter with his men and recalled the occasion later with fondness. "It was very cold. Turkeys, plum puddings, beer, were all ordered up from Egypt."

Cracking open a bottle of port, Monty and a large group of his administrative officers gathered together for a very lively evening. Despite his self-styled health regime forbidding alcohol or tobacco, Monty had a boisterous personality and encouraged camaraderie among his staff.

Partaking in the gathering were two of Monty's best friends: Charles Sweeny, a sarcastic Irish orphan who viewed Monty as a father figure, and John Poston, a rakish young cavalry officer known for his love of smoke, drink, and ribald humor.

With his sober self-discipline and Spartan obsession with warfare, the much-older Monty had little in common with these young rascals, yet he became close to them. Isolated and burdened by high-command responsibilities, Monty found relief from his stressful job duties in witnessing the clowning of the rowdy young men.

Both Poston and Sweeny were killed in

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Axis troops march across a bleak North African landscape. Searing heat, freezing cold, biting flies, and a lack of cover and concealment made fighting in the forbidding terrain a hell for both armies.

the last days of the war after having loyally served Monty for years on the front lines. Yet they and other faces from the Eighth Army would forever live on in Montgomery's memory, celebrating that Christmas Eve party with him amid much toasting, drinking, joking, and singing.

"I enjoyed that Christmas in the desert. I think we all did," Montgomery wrote later. "We had a feeling that we had achieved something."

The atmosphere at Rommel's headquarters was less festive. Nevertheless, the Germans, for all their difficulties, were also eager to celebrate Christmas. Rommel wrote to his wife that his men were "in top spirits, thank God, and it takes great strength not to let them see how heavily the situation is pressing on us."

His thoughts turned towards home; it was his son Manfred's 15th birthday. He penned a greeting to his family and went for a drive across flowery green meadows—a vastly different environment from the wastes of El Agheila. A herd of gazelles trotted towards the vehicles. Rommel recognized "Christmas dinner" and promptly went on a hunting spree; he was accustomed to shooting North African game from command vehicles using a pistol. "Armbruster (an interpreter) and I each succeeded in bringing down one of these speedy animals from the moving cars," Rommel wrote.

Attending his headquarters Christmas party later in the day, the Desert Fox received a cynical gift from his men. "I received a present of a miniature petrol drum containing, instead of petrol, a pound or two of captured coffee," he noted, not missing the irony. "Thus, proper homage was paid to our most serious problem even on that day…. At 2000 hours I invited several people from my immediate staff to share a meal off the gazelles we had brought in that morning."

Despite the brief respite of Christmas, the war in North Africa was far from over. The two opposing generals were destined to grapple again in a further sequence of brutal clashes. One thing was certain: Rommel's loss of the El Agheila position effectively closed the Third Reich's access to Egypt forever.

Reflections on the Battle

Describing his North African endeavors in his memoirs, Montgomery later reflected: "In battle, the art of command lies in understanding that no two situations are ever the same; each must be tackled as a wholly new problem to which there will be a wholly new answer."

The situation at El Agheila was certainly very different from any that either side previously experienced. As both commanders struggled to guard their weaknesses, they were forced to come to blows for the first time since their hard clash at El Alamein. Neither of them had any idea what to expect.

Even with his limited fuel supply, Rommel could have held El Agheila, exploiting natural defenses and the overextended British supply line to wear down his enemy. Yet the Desert Fox chose to withdraw from the area before the battle had been decided. Was this bitterness or pragmatism?

"I was angry and resentful at the lack of understanding displayed by our highest command and their readiness to blame the troops at the front for their own mistakes," wrote Rommel, preoccupied with increasing feelings of disillusionment towards his country's

National Archives

ABOVE: Dead Germans and their personal effects lie strewn across a scarred landscape following the capture of their position by British troops. BELOW: Rommel (lower right) and his despondent staff in the desert during his long retreat from El Agheila, late 1942. The defeat tarnished Rommel's reputation, but Hitler still selected him to bolster German defenses in Normandy less than two years later.

Author's Collection

leadership. Furious that Hitler and army chiefs had ignored his requests for supplies, he expressed little hope for success before the battle began. "We were up to our necks in the mud and no longer had the strength to pull ourselves out," he wrote grimly.

The point of view was very different on the other side of the battlefield. To win against Rommel at Agheila "might have been very difficult for me," according to Montgomery. "It was the first defensive position at which he had the opportunity to face our advance with any chance of success, yet we turned him out of it with comparative ease."

For his part, Monty continued to wonder afterwards why Rommel had chosen to withdraw from El Agheila without attempting to make a tougher stand. "I can think of no sound military reason for Rommel's decision to stop at Buerat," he wrote, citing Rommel's hasty removal to a more distant location in the wake of action at El Agheila. "I believe that Mussolini ordered it and that Rommel could not disobey until our advance gave him the excuse. By then it was too late."

Although it was true that Axis commanders had ordered Rommel's relocation to Buerat, they did not order him to make a hasty withdrawal—German and Italian commanders had clearly urged Rommel to stay at El Agheila and fight. Why Rommel, despite natural advantages in the terrain and an obvious weakness in Montgomery's army formations, ultimately declined to put up a more determined struggle for the territory remains a mystery.

The Battle's Effect on Rommel & Monty

The war in North Africa has been largely viewed as a "gentlemen's war"—both British and German opponents engaged in combat in what is seen as a chivalrous manner, humanely and without atrocities. In the postwar era, many men from the British Eighth Army befriended former enemies from the Afrika Korps. Their shared experience of desert warfare created a strange bond between them. The outcome of battles such as El Agheila left many of these men without feelings of hatred for one another. However, the North African struggles seem to have had a different effect on Rommel and Montgomery.

Judging from his writings, Rommel appears to have developed some resentment against Montgomery. While he enjoyed analyzing enemy generals, including former British opponents Auchinleck, Wavell, and Ritchie, Rommel gave no such literary treatment to Montgomery—in fact, he rarely mentioned Montgomery's name in writing. In many instances, he dubbed him only "the British commander."

Few appraisals of Montgomery's ability exist in Rommel's written work, aside from a few acrimonious criticisms—instances where Rommel claimed "the British commander" should have known better, or could have done better. The closest Rommel ever came to complimenting Monty was a brief sentence stating that Montgomery "never made a serious strategic

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U.S. Marines from the 3rd Marine Amphibious Corps consolidate their positions along the shoreline during the Second Battle of Guam, July 21 to August 10, 1944. Whenever there was an enemy-held island in the Pacific that needed to be taken it was usually the U.S. Marine Corps that was called upon to take it.

Naval History and Heritage Command

The strategy of "island hopping" was no walk in the park, but the U.S. Marine Corps proved equal to the task.

LEGACY *of* VALOR

BY DICK CAMP (Colonel, USMC, Retired)

The war in the Pacific was a bloody, protracted struggle between the Empire of Japan and the United States and her allies. The first shot that propelled the U.S. into World War II was fired in the East. Even before Japan's attack on Pearl Harbor in December 1941, the U.S. had taken casualties in 1937 when the Japanese sank the Yangtze River gunboat USS *Panay*. Two U.S. sailors were killed, and a civilian passenger and 11 men were seriously wounded.

There was some concern that the incident would trigger a war. President Roosevelt sent a formal protest to Tokyo. Japan was not quite ready for war and took responsibility for the attack. They agreed to pay an indemnity of $2,214,007.36 for property loss and death/personal injury indemnification.

Once America got into a full-scale shooting war, taking back territory that Japan had conquered became a national priority nearly a full year before U.S. troops met German soldiers in ground combat. For the most part, it was the United States Marine Corps that carried out the bulk of the amphibious combat assault landings on far-flung tropical islands and engaged in a duel to the death with the Japanese occupants who did not know the meaning of the word "quit."

By the summer of 1942, the Japanese juggernaut appeared to be unstoppable. Guam, Bataan, Corregidor, and Wake all fell to the Japanese, sending thousands of Marines into captivity. But America's battlefield fortunes were soon to change.

GUADALCANAL

Operation Watchtower, August 1942

Operation Watchtower was launched to occupy and defend Guadalcanal, code-named "Cactus," and adjacent positions (Tulagi, the Florida Islands, Gavutu, Tanambogo, and the Santa Cruz Islands) "in order to deny these areas to the enemy and to provide United States bases in preparation for further offensive action." It was America's first major offensive of World War II.

ABOVE: After hitting the invasion beaches and moving inland, U.S. Marines take a brief rest on Guadalcanal in the Solomons. The Guadalcanal campaign would be the Marines' first and longest major battle of the war — lasting six months, from August 7, 1942 until February 9, 1943. This unit has yet to be issued the distinctive splotched camouflage helmet covers. OPPOSITE: The invasion of Tulagi Island was part of Operation Watchtower, the Guadalcanal/Solomons campaign. Here men of the 1st Marine Raider Battalion wade ashore after the initial fierce Japanese resistance has died down.

A 1st Marine Division colonel issued a mimeographed memo to his men. "The coming offensive in the Guadalcanal area," he wrote, "marks the first offensive of the war against the enemy, involving ground forces of the United States. The Marines have been selected to initiate this action which will prove to be the forerunner of successive offensive actions that will end in ultimate victory for our cause. Our country expects nothing but victory from us and it shall have just that. The word 'failure' shall not even be considered as being in our vocabulary."

With that, the Marines in their distinctive splotched camouflage helmet covers began climbing down cargo nets slung from the gunwales of the transport shIps and loading into landing craft that would take them to beaches that were being pounded by ships' guns and warplanes.

On shore, Special Lieutenant (j.g.) Kakichi Yoshimoto, 3rd Kure Special Naval Landing Force (Rikusentai), was sound asleep when he was awakened abruptly by the excited voice of his batman. "Strange ships have been seen near Savo Island," the man blurted out.

Yoshimoto hurriedly dressed and made his way in the predawn darkness to the communications station. Just as he reached the facility, bright flashes in the harbor caught his attention, followed seconds later by explosions throwing him to the ground.

"Guadalcanal was a mammoth anticlimax, devoid of combat," wrote a U.S. war correspondent. The enemy had pulled back into the jungle after the first salvo of shells hit the beach.

"We landed pretty much unopposed," Major Ray Davis, commanding a special-weapons battalion, recalled. "[The Japanese] had work forces there building an airfield but very few armed forces. When we landed, my weapons [Swedish-designed 20mm and 40mm Bofors automatic cannons] were still in factory crates."

"We seized the airfield [named Henderson Field in memory of Lofton Henderson, killed at Wake Island] without opposition," Davis explained. But the situation didn't remain quiet for long.

"After that, the Japanese started bringing forces down to drive us off. For the next six months we were bombarded from the sea, and we were bombed from the air and attacked from the ground, but we held them off."

"Initially, my primary mission was to provide low-altitude antiaircraft defense of Henderson Field," Davis said. "We had a mechanical fire-control computer for the 40s. However, for anything above 4,000 feet, we had no accuracy."

"The Japs came in at 10,000 feet the first few days and blasted us, but they learned pretty quickly when the 90mm guns started to fire. They went up to 23,000 feet ... and stayed there the rest of the time."

The Marines' health deteriorated quickly in Guadalcanal's tropical paradise. Hundreds of men came down with malaria and dysentery. Davis was no exception.

"We were overrun with malaria. With inadequate protection and an unbelievable mosquito population, the situation simply got out of hand. I had both types, plus a severe hepatitis jaundice attack.... Fortunately, I had a friendly surgeon who kept me out of the hospital and on my feet."

The division's medical log showed that in the three-month period just prior to leaving the island, 6,000 Marines were admitted to the hospital, most for malaria.

The enemy was tough, too. War correspondent Hanson W. Baldwin expressed grudging admiration for them: "Hard, ruthless, brave, well-equipped, they are the best jungle fighters in the world—judging from their operations in the Solomons and elsewhere in the Pacific.... The Japanese are never content with defense; they always try to attack.... He will keep coming until he is dead."

The Guadalcanal campaign lasted for six months before the surviving Japanese

were forced to withdraw. American losses were approximately 7,100 men, 29 ships, and 615 aircraft. The Japanese lost 31,000 men, 38 ships, and 683 aircraft. As Baldwin wrote, "Our Japanese enemies are a ruthless and very dangerous foe." It was an assessment that would prove true everywhere.

TULAGI

Operation Ringbolt, August 1942

Operation Ringbolt, the code name given for the seizure of Tulagi Island, was part of Operation Watchtower.

In the early morning darkness of August 7, the men of the 1st Marine Raider Battalion began climbing down the cargo nets into the Higgins boats that would take them ashore. The first wave landed exactly on schedule at 8 AM (H-Hour), and they landed unscathed. The landing caught the defenders by surprise.

Captain Justice M. "Jumping Joe" Chambers said, "The best beach on Tulagi was at the other end of the island, and the Japanese had clearly expected that any hostile landing would be made there."

By late morning the Raiders had reached the main Japanese defensive positions. A green flare signalled the Japanese response. "We came under fire almost immediately," Chambers said. Two of his men were hit by machine-gun bullets as they moved down the face of the ridge. By this time the Japanese had shaken off the effects of the air and naval gunfire and were manning fighting positions dug in on the hill.

"We thought that coconut trees would not have enough branches to conceal snipers, but we found that the Japs were small enough to hide in them easily," Chambers recounted. "I was looking around a big coconut tree when a Jap laid a round right alongside my head."

The Raiders continued to advance under heavy fire. "That afternoon—I'd say about 1400—we had taken the golf club house, which had been occupied by the Japs," the battalion executive officer recalled. "We found a lot of uniforms hanging, binoculars, rice left in bowls, raw fish, and stuff like that."

By this time it was close to dark, so the Raiders dug in for the night. All along the line, the men laid out grenades and stacked ammunition close at hand so it would be easy to reach in the dark. Machine gunners carefully sited their guns in an attempt to get overlapping bands of fire. Chambers recalled, "The password for the night contained words with the letter 'L' because the Japanese had difficulty pronouncing it."

Around 11 PM a large force of Rikusentai (the Japanese Navy's Special Landing Force, similar to U.S. Marines) struck the seam between two Raider companies, splitting them and leaving their flanks dangling in the air. One officer remembered "a series of attacks, but the real force of the counterattack hit the center of the position; this gave us the first indication of how dumb the Japs were, because the center of the position was just naturally the strongest."

The Japanese launched two major attacks, which were beaten off. "Normally, if you make a couple of attacks and get your ass kicked and burned badly, as they did, you'd think they'd stop," an officer reported.

By first light, the surviving Japanese had melted back into their caves and bunkers. The Raiders pounded them with mortar fire and by late afternoon declared that organized resistance on the island had ended; Tulagi was "secure." The victory had not been without cost. Thirty-eight Raiders were killed in action and an additional 55 wounded. All but three of the estimated 350 Japanese defenders were killed.

For the rest of 1942 and well into 1943, Japanese and American forces continued to wrestle with each other in the jungles, on the seas, and in the skies for control of the Solomons. It was a bloody business, but eventually the Americans would prevail.

TARAWA

Operation Galvanic, November 1943

Two coral atolls—Tarawa and Betio—made up Operation Galvanic's objective. Maj. Gen. Julian C. Smith, commanding the 2nd Marine Division, wrote at the start of the operation, "We are the first Ameri-

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can troops to attack a defended atoll. What we do here will set a standard for all future operations in the Central Pacific area.... Our people back home are eagerly awaiting news of our victories."

The amphibious tractors carrying the first wave of 2nd Marine Division's assault troops started taking long-range machine-gun fire at 2,000 yards—and the dying began. At 800 yards, the amphibious tractors ran into the coral reef and Japanese anti-boat guns.

A coxswain lost his nerve and stopped his Higgins boat short of the reef. "This is as far as I go!" he shouted and dropped the ramp. A boatload of Marines, laden with heavy packs, stepped out into 15 feet of water; many drowned.

Shells screamed in. Tractors exploded and burned. Bodies floated in the water. Survivors stumbled out of the surf to find cover behind the five-foot coconut sea wall. The landing plan fell apart. A radioman sent a message from the beach: "Have landed. Unusually heavy opposition. Casualties 70 percent. Can't hold!"

Two thousand badly disorganized Marines were on the beach, but in this chaos, junior officers and enlisted men took charge and led the men forward through the curtain of fire. A civilian correspondent wrote: "In those hellish hours, the heroism of the Marines, officers and enlisted men alike, was beyond belief. Time after time, they unflinchingly charged Japanese positions, ignoring the deadly fire and refusing to halt until wounded beyond human ability to carry on."

Correspondent Richard W. Johnston detailed tank action on Red Beach and Green Beach. After crawling through deep surf, the Marine Shermans came ashore and dueled with Japanese armor. "The tanks played an all-important role. Their 75s and machine guns were a partial substitute for the Marines' lack of artillery. [A Sherman named] China Gal outdueled a Jap tank in the course of the advance, and together two Sherman smashed in numerous pillboxes and emplacements. One of them finally was hit, caught fire, and burned."

Operation Galvanic lasted until 1:30 PM on D+3, when the island was declared secure. Some 3,300 Marines had been killed and wounded, while the Japanese lost over 4,600. General Smith's troops did indeed set a standard.

ROI

Operation Flintlock, Gilbert and Marshall Islands, November 1943

This combined Marine-Army operation was designed to take Kwajalein (the world's largest atoll), the Roi-Namur Islands, and Eniwetok. Kwajalein was assigned to the 7th Infantry Division, while Roi-Namur would be the responsibility of the new 4th Marine Division.

The Japanese had installed 3,000 well-equipped defenders on Roi-Namur, but there were no underground tunnels, no underwater obstacles or mines, and the beach defenses were weak. After two days of continuous air and naval bombardment, the 23rd Marines assaulted Roi while the 24th Marines hit Namur.

The assault on Roi was making good progress, but there were still enemy strongpoints to be eliminated. One large, reinforced-concrete blockhouse with walls three feet thick stood in the path of the 2nd Battalion, 23rd Marines. It had been partially

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ABOVE: A huge explosion shakes the beach at Kwajalein during the combined Marine-Army November 1943 invasion of the Gilbert and Marshall Islands. Kwajalein, Roi-Namur, and Eniwetok were especially well fortified by the Japanese. BELOW: One Marine crawls toward the action on Saipan while another crawls toward his LVT landing craft to retrieve more supplies, June 1943. OPPOSITE: Behind a wall of sandbags on Tarawa, a Marine prepares to throw a grenade. Operation Galvanic, the 2nd Marine Division's invasion of the Tarawa and Betio Atolls, turned into a brutal, bloody affair, even though it lasted only three days.

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damaged by naval gunfire, but the battalion commander, Lt. Col. Edward J. Dillon, ordered Company G to make sure it was completely demolished.

A 75mm half-track fired five rounds against the steel door. Under covering fire, a demolition squad came up and placed satchel charges at the gun ports and shoved Bangalore torpedoes through a shell hole in the roof. The squad pulled the igniters and ran like hell for cover. There was a terrific explosion; twenty Marines were killed and dozens wounded. Falling debris killed several men who were caught in the open, and even men in small boats a considerable distance from the beach were killed and wounded. An observation pilot radioed, "The whole damn island has blown up!"

Large chunks of concrete, torpedo warheads, and bombs were blasted high into the air. An eyewitness described an ink-black darkness spreading over a large part of the island. Where the large blockhouse had been, now all that remained was a large, water-filled crater. The demolition squad had not realized the blockhouse had been a torpedo-warhead magazine.

As the Marines were trying to recover from the explosion, two more concrete bunkers exploded, apparently set off by the Japanese. The cumulative effect of the three explosions caused 50 percent of one landing team's total casualties for the operation.

Despite the disaster, the Marines managed to secure Roi within 48 hours at a cost of 195 killed and 545 wounded; the enemy had 3,472 killed and 91 men captured.

SAIPAN

Operation Forager, June 1944

Forager was a three-island campaign—Saipan, Guam, and Tinian. Saipan's importance lay in its planned use as the first B-29 base in the Pacific. Three days of intense naval and air bombardments softened up the island for the 2nd and 4th Marine Division's invasion.

The 4th MarDiv's landing beaches, color-coded Blue 1, Blue 2 (23rd Marines Regimental Combat Team), Yellow 1 and Yellow 2 (25th Marines Regimental Combat Team), were located on the lower-west coast of Saipan, adjacent to the 2nd MarDiv's landing beaches: Green 1 and 2 (8th Marines Regimental Combat Team) and Red 1 and 2 (6th Marines Regimental Combat Team).

The first wave consisted of 68 armored amphibians, armed with 37mm and 75mm guns, formed in line abreast. Behind them surged 196 troop-carrying amphibious tractors in four successive waves spaced from two to six minutes apart. The first wave approached the fringing reef in good order.

Robert E. Wollin recounted, "We got

MORE ISLAND CARNAGE

NEW GEORGIA

Operation Toenails, July 1943. The 1st and 4th Marine Raider Battalions landed on Bairoko Harbor on the night of July 10, suffering heavy casualties. The attack bogged down; the Marines' light weapons were no match for the Japanese heavy machine guns and mortars. The Marines withdrew on July 21 after having suffered 46 men killed and 190 wounded.

BOUGAINVILLE

Operation Cherry Blossom, Papua New Guinea, November 1943. The battle for the island of Bougainville, whose air and naval bases protected Rabaul, lasted nine months—from November 1, 1943 until August 21, 1945. 174,000 U.S. and Australian troops overwhelmed 45,000-65,000 Japanese.

CAPE GLOUCESTER

Operation Dexterity, New Britain, December 1943. The battle of Cape Gloucester was the main American attack during the invasion of western New Britain. The Marines lost 310 dead and over a thousand wounded; the Japanese lost 3,868 killed. Fighting basically ended in summer 1944, but isolated pockets of Japanese held out until the end of the war.

TINIAN

Operation Forager, July 1944. With the capture of Saipan and Guam assured, Lt. Gen. Holland M. Smith turned his attention to the island of Tinian, just three miles off Saipan's southwest coast and invaded with the 2nd and 4th Marine Divisions. The end result was "the most perfect amphibious operation of the Pacific War," and gave the U.S. B-29 bases within striking distance of Tokyo.

no Japanese fire outside the reef. Moving over the reef I saw small colored flags sticking out of the water. The Japs drove in aiming stakes overnight for their artillery waiting for us to come into range. Then all hell broke loose." Mortars, small arms, and artillery fire increased in intensity.

Jerry D. Brooks recalled, "In the lagoon, hitting coral heads, bouncing us up, down, and sideways, it was impossible to shoot our 75mm howitzer with accuracy. A couple of our 75mm shells exploded directly in front of us. Two or three went nearly vertical ... but our noise and the sight of us alone apparently made a big impression on the enemy. Naval operators monitoring Jap radio traffic picked up their messages telling Tokyo that 'monster guns' mounted on 'monster floating tanks' were coming at them in the leading assault waves. Our 75mm's muzzle with blast shield looked like an 8-inch gun."

"Nearing the beach I saw a watery explosion, then another and another," Winton W. Carter recalled. "Ahead, slightly to my left, two men got up and started running inland. I stared. Paralyzed. I tried to grasp what this meant. They wore steel helmets, short sleeve shirts. 'They're Japanese, you Lummox, the enemy, shoot!' It seemed ages. But probably two or three seconds actually passed until my brain and hands got to working together. Then I opened up with my machine gun, firing away."

Wollin recalled, "Jap artillery was still bracketing us, trying to get our range, and drenching us with near-misses, splashing water into open turret hatches. Still, they were misses. We were lucky. As the Japs sharpened their range, the assault wave coming in behind us looked to be having the harder time."

Lt. Gen. Holland "Howlin' Mad" Smith remarked, "Saipan instantly became a savage battle of annihilation ... spearheaded by armored amphibian tractors…The Marines hit the beach at 0843 ... the best we could do was get a toehold and hang on. And this is what we did, just hang on for the first critical day."

M. Neil Mumford described coming ashore: "I saw out the side hatch an amtank afire next to us, its hatch going up and down. I thought someone was trying to get out, but the heat was moving the hatch, making it flutter; then the tank's ammo began to blow. A shell hit the base of our turret. We abandoned our tank, only to discover it was safer inside."

The leading waves of troops landed and debarked short of the O-1 line, the first day's objective. "Someone shouted, 'The American army's coming!" a Japanese soldier wrote. "I lifted my head a little. They advanced like a swarm of grasshoppers. The American soldiers were all soaked…they were so tiny wading ashore. I saw flames shooting up from American tanks, hit by Japanese fire."

Long-range grazing fire from enemy machine guns pelted the beaches, pinning the Marines to a shallow beachhead. 1st Lt. John C. Chapin recalled, "All around us was the chaotic debris of bitter combat. Jap and Marine bodies lying in mangled and grotesque positions; blasted and burnt-out pillboxes, the burning wrecks of LVTs that had been knocked out by Jap high-velocity fire; the acrid smell of high explosives; the shattered trees; and the churned-up sand littered with discarded equipment ... suddenly, WHAM! A shell hit right on top of us!

"I was too surprised to think, but instinctively all of us hit the deck and began to spread out. Then the shells really began to pour down on us: ahead, behind, on both sides, and right in our midst. They would come rocketing down with a freight-train roar and then explode with a deafening cataclysm that is beyond description."

One officer recalled, "It's hard to dig a hole when you're lying on your stomach digging with your chin, your elbows, your knees, and your toes [but] it is possible to dig a hole that way, I found."

The assault companies found themselves fighting for every inch. "Our attention

Men of the 3rd Marine Division, part of Operation Forager, scramble over the side of their LVT Water Buffalo landing craft onto the Guam beachhead under heavy fire.

[was] concentrated on our yard-by-yard advance inland—our beachhead was only a dozen yards deep at one point," Holland Smith said.

Time-Life journalist Robert Sherrod wrote, "An artillery or mortar shell…landed every three seconds for the first 20 minutes. Most of them were in the water, 100 yards and more offshore, but some of them hit the beach itself. None of them hit inside the seven-foot deep [tank] trap which the Japs had built for their protection and which we were now using for our protection. Inside the trap the battalion aid station for 2/8 (Lt. Col. H. P. Crowe) had been set up. There were a half dozen men lying on the sand; they were already bloodily bandaged and awaiting evacuation by amtracs.... In the 300 yards separating two [wrecked] vehicles I counted 17 dead Marines..."

Captain John A. MacGruder spotted "a young, fair-haired private who had only recently arrived as a replacement, full of exuberance at finally being a full-fledged Marine on the battle front. As I looked down at [his body], I saw something I shall never forget. Sticking from his back trouser pocket was a yellow pocket edition of a book he had evidently been reading in his spare moments. Only the title was visible—*Our Hearts Were Young and Gay*."

Casualties sustained during the landing far exceeded 2,000; in the 2nd Division alone, 553 men were killed and 1,022 wounded. Out of the 68 armored amphibians, 31 were sunk or disabled. Five of the original infantry battalion commanders in the two divisions were wounded on D-day. Howlin' Mad said, "Not for another three days could it be said that we had 'secured' our beachhead. We were under terrific pressure all the time."

GUAM

Operation Forager, June 1944

Colonel E.A. Craig said, "As I was walking along the road which cut through Asan Point ridge with Captain George Percy and a runner, I was surprised to look to my left and saw two Japanese soldiers who had just come out of a cave. One of them raised a square package in his hand and threw it at me. It landed some distance away and exploded with a terrific roar, knocking me off the road and into a ditch filled with sharp stones. It was a so-called satchel charge.

"Several Marines in the area came running up, firing at the Japs as they went back into the cave. A jeep with an antitank gun arrived at this time and it was trained into the cave and blasted away for some time. Many dead Japanese were later found in this cave, which ran some distance back in the hill to other positions. I was severely bruised from the concussion. It really made my teeth chatter for a while."

Craig was closely following the advance of his men when they "heard the sound of motors starting. Before we could locate the position of the noise, two enemy tanks rolled out of cleverly camouflaged positions on the side of the hill off to our right and headed toward us firing machine guns and small-caliber cannons. They were not over 100 feet away, and I had visions of losing all my men who were in the immediate vicinity.

"A bazooka man and his assistant went into action immediately. With a calmness that was uncanny, they proceeded to knock out the tanks in quick succession!"

A couple of gutsy Marines jumped on the tanks, forced open the hatches, and dropped hand grenades inside, finishing the crews. "We later found two well-camouflaged, unmanned tanks dug into the side of the hill, just a short distance away," Craig said.

The battle for Guam cost 3,000 American lives.

PELELIU

Operation Stalemate, September 1944

The Battle of Peleliu occurred between September and November 1944 on the island of Peleliu (today Palau) and involved over 18,000 men of the 1st Marine Division and the Army's 81st Infantry Division against 11,000 Japanese.

Oily black smoke rose into the sky, marking a funeral pyre of more than 20 burning amphibious tractors off Peleliu's White Beach 1 and 2. Major Raymond

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Davis' 1st Battalion, 1st Marines, plowed through the shell bursts.

"Mortar shells began falling all around the LVTs; the Japs had apparently sited their heavy weapons to cover the area between the reef and the shore," Davis said. "Three tractors of our wave were hit going in, with great loss of life, and the fires we had seen raging on the beach turned out to be numerous LVTs and DUKWs.

"When I got off the amphibian tractor on the beach, my run for cover was not quick enough; a mortar round splashed nearby and ran a long sliver into my knee. It bled a lot, but they got it out, doctored me up, and I went back to work.

"The lead elements were bogged down on the beach," Davis recalled, "and the men had to fight their way off the beach."

The battalion after-action report stated, "Company A moved into positions trying to take advantage of a Jap anti-tank ditch. It was apparent that the Japs had sited anti-tank weapons from the left flank and mortars from the ridges to the front to cover this ditch well, and his riflemen and mortars made the ground untenable. It is only natural that our Marines, lying in all the attitudes of death, should have sought shelter in this defiladed trench."

The company was stopped cold; casualties were severe. Davis recalled, "The enemy had tunneled back under the coral ridge lines, sometimes 100 to 200 feet, and they would lay a machine gun to shoot out of a distant hole, with deadly crossfire from well dug-in and fight-to-the-death defensive positions."

The Japanese counterattacked and cut off a squad. "Sergeant [Robert W.] Riley noticed two amphibious tractors and a Sherman tank that had been knocked out on his left," the after-action report noted. "He ordered his men to form a skirmish line to the right of the tank ... took its machine gun and brought fire to bear, inflicting heavy casualties on the enemy and pinning them down.

"The squad was rescued when the company executive officer sent out another tank. Upon Riley's return, he was elevated to platoon commander after all its leaders had either been killed or wounded. Riley led the 2nd Platoon through some of the fiercest fighting of the campaign until wounded by grenade fragments. The platoon was turned over to the ranking Marine, Pfc. G.E. Hogan.

"While Sgt. Riley and his men were occupied with the Japs in their sector, Sgt. Aubertin with the 2nd Squad of the 1st Platoon under command of Cpl. McQuade succeeded in storming the coral ridge to their front and moved down the other side. They contacted Company I on their right and refused the left flank, bending it back to the ridge behind them. Since there was a distance of 200 yards to cover, Sgt. Aubertin organized four separate fire groups, with visual contact, and successfully held the ground he had taken until noon the following day. During the night they repulsed all efforts of the Japs to dislodge them."

With Company A pinned down, Company B was committed to the attack but suffered the same fate. Corporal Herbert B. Goff "boldly faced the withering barrage in a determined effort to outflank the Japanese opposing troops and, skillfully disposing his men for maximum effectiveness, fearlessly led them in a determined attack," as recounted in his Navy Cross citation.

"Aware that the fire of his squad was insufficient to neutralize the heavily fortified emplacement, he pressed forward alone and, armed only with grenades and a sub-machine gun, succeeded in silencing the hostile weapon and annihilating the

crew before he was fatally struck down by enemy fire." His effort was not enough, and Company B was forced to go to ground.

A historian wrote, "The battle remains one of the war's most controversial, due to its high death toll, but questionable strategic value. Considering the number of men involved, Peleliu had the highest casualty rate of any battle in the Pacific War." Eight Medals of Honor were awarded. Over 2,330 Americans died and 8,450 were wounded. Only 202 Japanese survived.

Afterwards, many analysts said that the isolated island should have been bypassed and allowed to "wither on the vine," rather than be the scene of such carnage.

IWO JIMA

Operation Detachment, February 1945

Author S.E. Smith wrote, "If Peleliu was formidable, then certainly Iwo was beyond belief. It was, in point of fact, the greatest fortress encountered by the Marine Corps in World War II." Lt. Gen. Holland Smith called Iwo "the most savage and costly battle in the history of the Marine Corps."

What importance did this "ugly, smelly glob of cold lava squatting in a surly sea," as William Manchester put it, have in the overall conduct of the war in the Pacific? And why did three Marine divisions (3rd, 4th, and 5th) need to assault it?

Korean slave laborers had spent years constructing miles of tunnels, gun emplacements, pillboxes, bunkers, underground supply depots, command posts, hospitals, and living quarters. There were also three airfields (one under construction) that would be perfect as bases for bombing Japan.

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ABOVE: The first, smaller flag (foreground) raised on Iwo Jima's Mount Suribachi has been replaced by a larger one visible to all the troops on the island. But the battle would go on for nearly three months and cost almost 7,000 Marines their lives. OPPOSITE: On Peleliu, a member of the 1st Marine Division fires at the enemy over the turret of an LVT while other Marines take cover before advancing. Some historians believe the bloody battle was unnecessary to the American's Pacific Theater strategy.

Trying to dismantle all that hard work were six battleships and five cruisers, smothering the island with 14,000 rounds of 14-inch and 8-inch shells—the heaviest naval bombardment up to that point of the war.

Seven Higgins boats (LCPR, or Landing Craft Personnel, Ramped) carrying Marines of the Provisional Reconnaissance Unit and sailors from Underwater Demolitions Teams (UDT 12, 13, 14 and 15) bobbed up and down in the slight ocean swell. Their big diesel engines idled as the coxswains waited for the signal to make their run. The signal came and the coxswains hit the throttles, and with a roar of engines, the boats surged forward.

Corporal Charles A. "Art" Linder, a scout/sniper in the 5th Reconnaissance Company, Headquarters Battalion, Fifth Marine Division, studied the shoreline. "It was difficult to see because we were so low in the water, but I could make out the silhouette of the beach and the terraces that led upward from the water's edge," he said.

The forbidding profile of the 550-foot Mount Suribachi (code-named "Hot Rocks) loomed over the landing beaches. "As we got closer," Linder recalled, "I saw one big explosion on the side of the mountain where a large-caliber naval shell hit. I also saw several caves, which I assumed contained Japanese guns."

Linder's boat passed between two camouflage-painted LCI(G)s, converted infantry landing craft, as the craft prepared to support the swimmers with rockets, 20mm, and 40mm gunfire.

Thirty thousand Marines were coming ashore. At first there was no hostile greeting, and then the defenders opened up with heavy mortar and large-caliber artillery fire, turning the black lava sand blood-red. Within minutes, the lightly armored LCI (G)s were in trouble; nine of 12 were put out of action, and three were damaged.

The Marines and UDT swimmers

were in serious trouble. Their support had been shot to pieces, and they were all alone, within spitting distance of the Japanese guns. Linder saw "bullet splashes in the water, particularly when we went in as close as 150 meters. We started evasive action to avoid fire."

War correspondent Richard Newcomb wrote that a sergeant "and a corporal ran to the first pillbox. They threw in three or four grenades, and the corporal ran inside. He came out with his bayonet dripping blood, trotted to a second pillbox, and jumped on top of it. Fire from another pillbox killed him."

At 8 AM on the 23rd, a combat patrol from Company E, 2nd Battalion, 28th Marines, seized the crest of Suribachi and raised a small American flag. Another larger flag was sent to replace it.

Joe Rosenthal, an Associated Press stringer, related his account of the second flag raising to the author: Joe said that he heard that a patrol was going to the top of Suribachi, so he tagged along. When he got to the top, he saw several Marines tying a flag onto an iron water pipe. Being only five-feet-five inches tall, he stacked up several stones to stand on. He held his camera about waist high when he heard someone shout, "There she goes."

Joe quickly swung the camera up and snapped the photo. "Out of the corner of my eye, I had seen the men start the flag up. I swung my camera and shot the scene. That is how the picture was taken, and when you take a picture like that, you don't come away saying you got a great shot. You don't know." Later, he shipped the film to the military press center in Guam to have it developed. The photograph of the flag raising immediately became a sensation.

When Rosenthal reached Guam some days later, he was asked if the shot had been posed. He thought they were referring to a group photo of the men after the second flag raising and said "yes." Once he saw the famous photo, he corrected his acknowledgement, but the rumor persisted that the photo was posed. "I don't think it is in me to do much more of this sort of thing.... I don't know how to get across to anybody what 50 years of constant repetition means."

The flag raising, unfortunately, did not symbolize the end of the battle. Beating Iwo Jima into submission took nearly three months and cost the lives of 6,821 Marines; over 19,000 others were wounded. Few Japanese survived.

OKINAWA

Operation Iceberg, April 1945

Sheets of flame lit the pre-dawn darkness as the naval guns of battleships, cruisers, and destroyers of Task Force 58 pounded the Hagushi Beaches in preparation for the landing of thousands of Marines and soldiers of the Tenth Army.

At 7:45 AM on April 1, waves of carrier planes swept over the island, bombing and strafing known or suspected targets. With the thunderous cacophony of light and sound as a backdrop, Vice Adm. Richard K. Turner, Commander Joint Expeditionary Force (TF-51), gave the traditional order: "Land the landing force."

GUNNERY SGT. JOHN BASILONE, who had received the Medal of Honor on Guadalcanal in 1942, was in the thick of the fighting on Iwo Jima. At 10:30 on the morning of February 19, a Japanese mortar round dropped on his position, killing him and four other Marines. On his forearm was tattooed "Death before Dishonor."

The transport areas were alive with activity as the Marines and soldiers of the assault force began to debark. Hundreds of landing craft stood alongside the transports, waiting for the troops to climb down cargo nets. LSTs (Landing Ship Tank) disgorged fully loaded amphibious tractors. Tank-carrying LCMs (Landing Craft, Mechanized) floated from the well decks of LSDs (Landing Ship, Dock).

An eyewitness described the scene: "The water was a turmoil of movement: dispatch and control boats running about, LCMs and LSTs moving slowly forward to their unloading areas, motor torpedo boats dashing around as guides..."

The 1,400 landing craft formed into waves behind the line of departure, marked by control boats lying off each landing beach. Major Charles S. Nicholas, Jr., USMC, and Henry I. Shaw, Jr., described the assault in *Okinawa, Victory in the Pacific*: "At 0800 the pennants fluttering from the masts of the control craft were hauled down, signaling the first wave of LVT (A)'s [armored amphibian tractors] forward behind a line of support craft.

"In its wake, hundreds of troop-carrying LVTs [amphibian tractors] disposed in five to seven waves crossed the line of departure at regular intervals and swept toward shore. One Japanese soldier observing the huge armada bearing down on him wrote in his diary, 'It's like a frog meeting a snake and waiting for the snake to eat him.'"

Colonel Hiromichi Yahara, Senior Staff Officer, 32nd Army, wrote in *The Battle of Okinawa*, "At this time the commanders of Japan's 32nd Army are standing on the crest of Mount Shuri near the southern end of Okinawa's main island, quietly observing the movements of the American 10th Army.... The group simply gazes out over the enemy's frantic deployment, some of the officer's joking, a few casually

National Archives

Marines follow a flame-throwing Sherman tank into the blazing jungle on Okinawa as part as the 82-day battle. Both sides sufered horrendous casualties.

lighting cigarettes.... For months now the Japanese army has been building its strongest fortification on the heights of Mount Shuri—and its adjacent hills." [Lt. Gen. Mitsuri] Ushijima [commanding general of the 32nd Army] marveled at the "earthshaking bombardment, vast and oddly magnificent in its effect."

Gunboats led the assault waves in, firing rockets, mortars, and 40mm guns into prearranged target squares on such a scale that all the landing area for 1,000 yards inland was blanketed with enough explosives to average 25 rounds per 100-yard square. The pre-H-Hour bombardment was the heaviest concentration of naval gunfire ever to support a landing: 44,825 rounds of 5-inch or larger, 33,000 rockets, and 22,500 mortar shells.

After approaching the reef, the gunboats turned aside and the amphibious tanks and tractors passed through them and proceeded toward the beach. *First Marine Division Special Action Report, Okinawa*, noted, "First waves were on all beaches at 0839, with air observation reporting no damage to landing craft in the initial waves. First reports from assault elements of the division reported very light resistance with all units moving rapidly inland."

The first waves went ashore "standing up," a cakewalk. The landing was virtually unopposed. Journalist Robert Sherrod wrote after reaching the beach, "I've already lived longer than I thought I would."

At noon on L-Day, Admiral Turner reported, "Preceded by intense naval and air bombardment, troops of Tenth Army began landing Hagushi beaches at 0830. Troops landed on all beaches against light opposition. Practically no fire against boats, none against ships..." The troops were amazed and overjoyed; intelligence had predicted casualty rates could reach 80-85 percent. Within the first hour, the Tenth Army put 16,000 combat troops ashore.

Yahara wrote, "Contrary to their expectations, the enemy meets no resistance from Japanese troops. They will complete their landing unchallenged … they are not suspicious that the Japanese army has withdrawn and concealed itself in the heights surrounding Kadena [Mount Shuri], with plans to draw the Americans into a trap."

But it was the Japanese who were trapped—as many as 100,000 died. When the 82-day battle had ended, total American dead on Okinawa ranged between 14,000 and 20,000. But the war had been brought to Japan's doorstep and was nearly over.

America's "Island Hopping" strategy to seize key bases in the Central Pacific was made possible by the Marine Corps' and Navy's development of amphibious tactics two decades before the outbreak of World War II. During that time, the Marine Corps established itself as specialists in amphibious warfare, which was the key to success in the Central Pacific and resulted in the final defeat of Japan. □

The Cold Shoul

BY ALLYN VANNOY

National Archives

Army commanders understand that the key to dealing with an enemy breakthrough is to slow the enemy's advance and prevent the breach from widening—that is, "holding the shoulders." During defensive operations by Lt. Gen. Courtney Hodges's U.S. First Army in the Ardennes, a series of actions took place on the southern shoulder that was important to the final outcome of the battle.

On December 16, 1944, General der Panzertruppe Erich Brandenberger's German Seventh Army, the southernmost of the four German armies spread across the Ardennes, launched its divisions across the Our and Sauer Rivers.

Americans units in position to meet the attack included elements of the U.S. VIII Corps—the 4th Infantry Division's 12th Infantry Regiment, the 109th Infantry Regiment of the 28th Division, and the 60th Armored Infantry Battalion of Combat Command A (CCA), 9th Armored Division.

The 109th Infantry was struck by elements of the German LXXXV Corps' 5th Fallshirmjäger (Parachute) Division and 352th Volksgrenadier Division (VGD); the 12th Infantry was assaulted by the 320th and 423rd Regiments of the 212th Volksgrenadier Division, commanded by Generalleutant Franz Sensfuss; and the 60th Armored Infantry was attacked by the 276th Volksgrenadier Division, under Generalmajor Kurt Möhring.

The latter two volksgrenadier divisions constituted the LXXX Corps under General Franz Beyer. Beyer's grenadiers were reinforced by the attachment of the 4 08th Volksartillery Corps, 1095th Artillery Battery, and the 657th Heavy Antitank Battalion.

The Sauer River drains southeastward to the German frontier, where it absorbs the Our River and forms the Luxembourg-German border until it joins the Moselle northeast of Luxembourg City.

The LXXX Korps was to cross the Sauer south of the confluence with the Our at the town of Wallendorf, the river winding and steep-banked, fast-moving as it was swollen by rain and snow—a challenge for assault forces as well as bridging engineers.

They faced American artillery batteries on the heights southwest of Beaufort and Echternach. Field Marshal Walther Model, commander of Army Group B, stressed to General Brandenberger the need to destroy or displace the American artillery.

Complicating the situation was the deep Schwarz Ernst gorge (referred to by some sources as the gorge of the Ernz Noire), extending south from the Sauer, splitting LXXX Corps' frontage. General Beyer feared that it would provide an avenue for an American counterattack, but failed to recognize that his own troops might make use of it.

Prior to being transferred to the Ardennes, the U.S. 4th and 28th Infantry Divisions had been mauled during fighting in the Hürtgen Forest. The 4th was commanded by Major General Raymond O. ("Tubby)" Barton, a West Point graduate and World War I veteran.

The 4th's regiments were under-strength by an average of 500–600 men; many rifle companies were no better than half-strength. Equipment was in short supply, worn out, or in poor condition.

Each of the division's 105mm howitzer battalions was placed in direct support of a regiment. General support was provided by the 155mm howitzers of the division's 20th Field Artillery Battalion along with

From their position inside a ruined house, two solders from the 4th Infantry Division's 22nd Infantry Regiment fire on a German tank with a 3.5-inch rocket launcher, commonly called a "bazooka," during the Battle of the Bulge, December 1944.

der

A desperate fight on the Sauer River at the height of the Battle of the Bulge prevented Germany from scoring an important victory.

Bundesarchiv Bild 183-1985-0104-501; Photo: Langl

two battalions attached from the 422nd Field Artillery Group—the 81st and the 174th Field Artillery Battalions. On December 16, the 70th Tank Battalion, attached to the 4th Division, had only 11 operational Sherman tanks.

The 12th Infantry, spread along the Sauer River—veterans of the D-Day landings on Utah Beach and commanded by Colonel Robert H. Chance—found itself with limited radio communications due to the rugged terrain. A static linear defense here was out of the question because of the length of the front and the meandering course of the waterways that cut through the hills.

General Barton instructed his regimental commanders to maintain only small forces at river outposts, holding their main strength in separate companies at nearby villages. This also allowed troops a respite from the harsh winter weather. One regiment had only five companies on the line, situated in villages along main and secondary roads leading from the Sauer.

The problems of control and coordination were made more difficult by the wide dispersion of units and their isolation in wooded areas separated by gorges and crevasses. Critical points in the 12th Regiment's defense included Berdorf (held by F Company), Echternach (E Company), Lauterborn (G Company), Osweiler (L Company), and Dickweiler (I Company)—units of the 2nd Battalion, under Major John W. Gorn, and 3rd Battalion, commanded by Major Herman R. Rice.

The 60th Armored Infantry Battalion, 9th Armored Division, under Lt. Col. Kenneth W. Collins, held positions on a high plateau between the Sauer in the north and the Schwarz Ernst gorge to the south—the gorge lying 300–500 feet below the surrounding tableland, in some places with sheer cliff walls.

The gorge did not strengthen the armored-infantrymen's positions, as three roads cut across it. One led to the rear of American positions at Beaufort, where Colonel Collins had his headquarters in a 12th-century castle. Further up the gorge, the other two roads led west toward positions of the 3rd Armored Field Artillery Battalion.

The 12th Infantry covered the northern entrance to the gorge, but the regiment was overextended and had only a small outpost to block movement up the gorge.

Collins was also concerned about his northern flank, as more than a mile separated his positions from those of L Company, 109th Infantry. To cover the gap, he had only a squad at the village of Hogenberg, looking down on the town of Wallendorf and the juncture of the Our and the Sauer. Collin's main positions were located atop steep bluffs with good fields of fire into the valley of the Sauer.

The Seventh Army was the weakest of the German armies of the winter offensive. Its 276th VGD was a short-lived unit—destroyed in the Falaise Pocket in August and then re-organized in Poland as a volksgrenadier division (VGD).

Brandenberger believed the 212th VGD was the Seventh Army's best unit, but he withheld its 316th Regiment as part of his army's reserve. A veteran of three years of fighting on the Eastern Front, the 212th Infantry Division had been shattered during the retreat from Lithuania in 1944, then sent to Poland in September 1944 for overhauling before becoming the 212th VGD.

Its replacements were better than average, although there were many 17-year-olds among them. Unit commanders and non-coms were experienced, and morale was high. Although at full strength, it was short of communication equipment and had only four

assault guns as armor support.

The LXXX Corps initially had no armored support except for four or five *sturmgeschütze* (assault guns) in General Sensfuss' division. Möhring's division also had four, but they were not available until December 19. The supporting 408 Volksartillery Corps lacked its sixth battalion with its 17cm guns and 21cm mortars.

The 212th VGD was ordered to attack over the Sauer on either side of the town of Echternach; contain American troops by a thrust towards Junglinster; eliminate American artillery in the Alttrier-Herborn-Mompach area; and reach and hold along the Schlammbach, about seven miles northeast of Luxembourg City. Once this was accomplished, the division was to assume a defensive posture to protect the southern flank of the German offensive.

On the night of December 13/14, in preparation for the offensive, the 212th's 423rd Regiment made a forced march from Trier, and by the next day it had reached the right wing of the division. The following night all three of the division's regiments assembled behind a single battalion acting as a screening force along the Sauer between Bollendorf and Ralingen.

The 423rd was north of Echternach, the 320th Regiment was on the left—where the Sauer turned east of Echternach—and the 316th was the Seventh Army reserve. The leading assault companies began crossing the Sauer at dawn on the 16th, but they were hindered by the swift current and their shortage of rubber boats.

The attack began inauspiciously as German engineers were forced to abandon their efforts to place a bridge at Wallendorf by American artillery fire and had to restart operations later at Bollendorf. Heavy fog also hampered progress of the assault companies, although it concealed their movements and allowed them to cut off several American pickets and then make a quick occupation of Bigelbach.

Bundesarchiv Bild 183-J28477; Photo: Göttert

ABOVE: German soldiers consult a map as they push their way into Luxembourg, December 1944. Their objective was the port of Antwerp, Belgium, but Hitler's counteroffensive never got close. OPPOSITE: A line of soldiers from a Volksgrenadier division moves cautiously through the silent, snowy woods on their way to attack American positions along the Luxembourg-Germany border, December 1944.

The immediate objectives of the 423rd Regiment were to seize the plateau in the area of Berdorf, cut the road running west from Lauterborn and Echternach, and then link up with the 320th Regiment.

It was originally intended that the 320th should cross the Sauer at Echternach, which lay in the center of the 212th VGD's lines, its first objective being a series of hills north of the villages of Dickweiler and Osweiler. Once in possession of these hills, the 320th was to seize the two villages, then advance to join the 423rd. But this plan had to be adjusted because the river was swollen by rain and snow and too fast-flowing for the rubber assault boats.

The 1st Battalion, 423rd Volksgrenadier, on the regiment's right flank, headed towards Berdorf, while the 2nd Battalion, on the left, moved towards Lauterborn. Beyond these villages lay Consdorf and Scheidgen, headquarters of 12th Infantry's 2nd Battalion, under Major Dorn, and artillery positions at Alttrier.

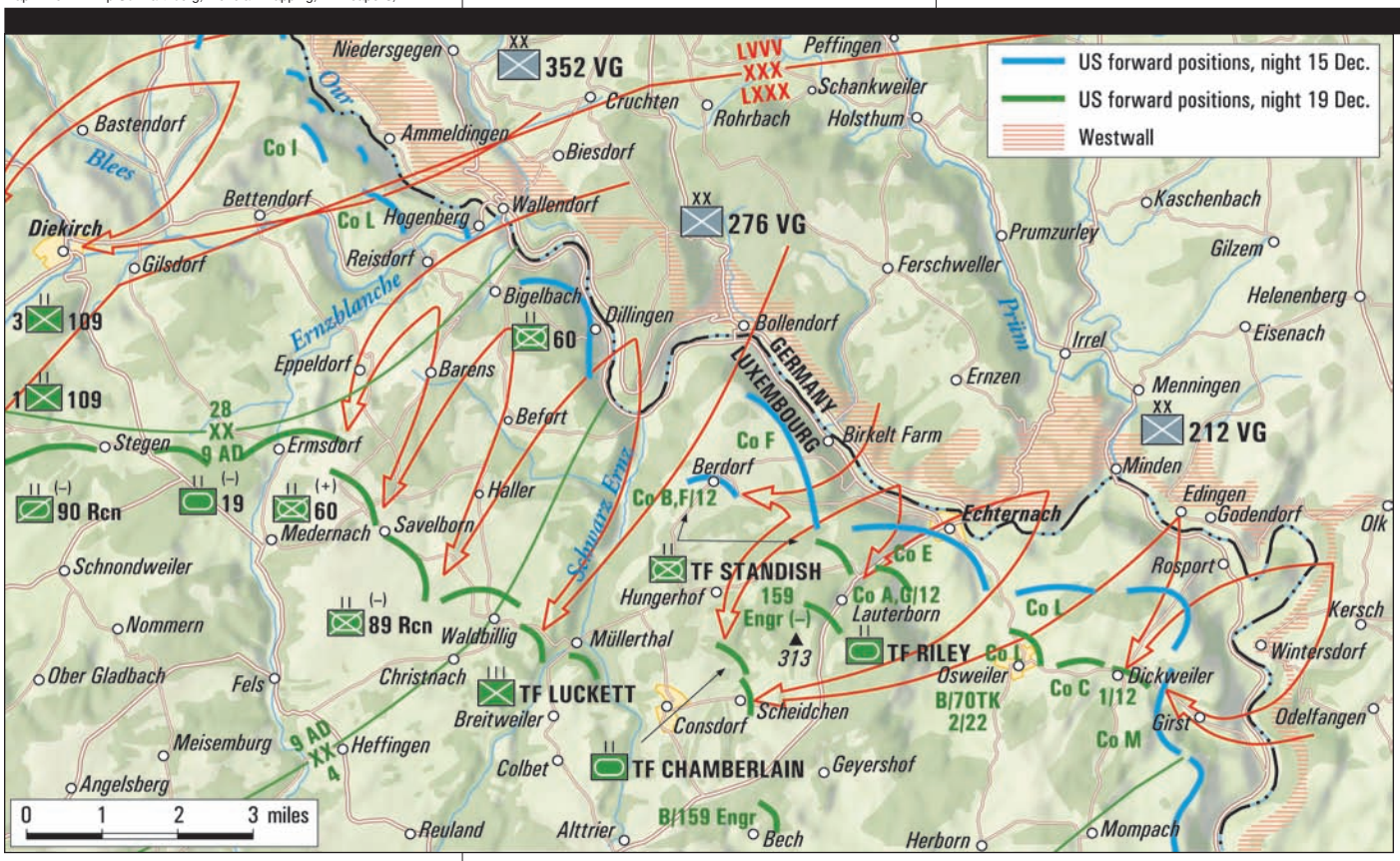
One company of the 1st Battalion, 423rd Regiment, overran three outposts, capturing mortars, machine guns, and antitank guns while cutting the Echternach-Luxembourg road. A German assault struck E Company in Echternach at about 11 AM. Though surprised, many of the outpost's troops worked their way back to a hat factory on the southwestern edge of the town, where they organized a strongpoint.

By 11:30, elements of G Company, near Echternach, were surrounded by the 1st Battalion, but continued fighting at a mill near the village, while a platoon of I Company held on in buildings at the west edge of Lauterborn.

The LXXX Corps' assault began to falter as orders to bypass pockets of resistance were partially ignored and troops became involved in costly and time-consuming fighting for insignificant villages, keeping the volksgrenadiers from reaching their main objectives.

The German infiltration did considerable

Map © 2021 Philip Schwartzberg, Meridian Mapping, Minneapolis, MN



damage to the 12th Infantry's F Company outposts. Three were located northwest of Echternach near the village of Berdorf, on high ground above the Sauer, and in farm buildings, all held in platoon strength.

A fourth OP, manned by an understrength squad, was in the Schwarz Ernst gorge near the point where a road led across the gorge west to Beaufort. All four outposts were captured, their personnel either killed or taken prisoner, except for two men at the Schwarz Ernst OP and 13 who had been on patrol.

By late morning, the volksgrenadiers had driven a platoon of F Company to the shelter of a stone farmhouse at Birkelt Farm, close to the river a mile and a half east of Berdorf. The outpost was able to avoid being overrun, and the platoon of 21 infantrymen and two artillery observers held out there for the next four days.

By noon the Germans had reached the streets of Berdorf and surrounded some 60 members of F Company under 1st Lt. John L. Leake, in the Parc Hotel, 100 yards east of the village. It was a three-story, fortress-like structure of reinforced concrete and sur-rounded by open ground—perfect for defense.

German grenadiers bypassed American strongpoints and captured a hill south of Echterbach. Some managed to reach the village of Lauterborn but were later forced to withdraw.

The swift current of the Sauer had caused the 320th Regiment to end up at Edingen, more than three miles downstream from where they'd entered the river. The delay brought the 320th onto the hills above Osweiler and Dickweiler well after daylight so that all of the American outposts in the area were able to pull back largely intact. At Osweiler, the German assault cost 50 men, and those who'd managed to gain the houses pulled back after dark.

Late in the morning, as two German companies began their attack on Dickweiler—defended by I Company—they came under mortar, small-arms, and machine-gun fire. The Germans made a half-hearted effort against the village until late afternoon, by which time the 3rd Battalion commander, Major Rice, had sent 15 men to the village from his reserve company riding on three Sherman tanks.

The Americans called in artillery, but it had limited effect as the supporting artillery battalions were widely dispersed behind the 4th Division front. Only 15 pieces from the 42nd Field Artillery Battalion and 12th Regimental Cannon Company were in range to support the 12th Infantry.

At noon, General Barton authorized 12th Infantry to commit its 1st Battalion, under Lt. Col. Oma R. Bates, out of regimental reserve. At the same time he gave Colonel Chance eight medium tanks and 10 light tanks, leaving the 70th Tank Battalion with only three mediums and a platoon of light tanks for other commitments.

Chance sent B Company, along with some tanks, toward Berdorf to relieve F Company in its hotel bastion and A Company, with the rest of the tanks, toward Lauterborn to reinforce G Company, whereupon the two companies were to drive to the relief of E Company inside Echternach. Because the Germans held the high ground on either side of the highway into Lauterborn, it took A Company the better part of the day to get into the

village, and by that time it was too late to continue on. The men of E Company remained isolated in Echternach.

Barton asked Major General Troy Middleton, VIII Corps commander, for reinforcements, but Middleton only had the 159th Engineer (Combat) Battalion available. Nevertheless, elements of A Company, 159th Engineers, mounted on a platoon of light tanks, were ordered to open the road to Lauterborn and Echternach, the main supply route for the 2nd Battalion, 12th Infantry, under Major Gorn.

Early in the afternoon, B Company, 159th Engineers, mounted on five light and five medium tanks, set out to reach F Company, 12th Infantry. But when it reached the southern edge of Berdorf, it ran into grenadiers of the 1st Battalion, 423rd Regiment.

The troops of the 60th Armored Infantry faced seven battalions of the 276th VGD in their positions between the Sauer and the Schwarz Ernst gorge. The volksgrenadier division was deployed from Wallendorf to Bollendorf, with the 986th Regiment on the right, the 988th on the left, and the 987th in reserve. The division's objective was to cross the Sauer, destroy the Americans, and gain the high ground to the southwest—about eight miles from Luxembourg City, from where they were to create a blocking position.

Since the bulk of the Seventh Army's artillery was supporting its north wing, the preparation in the area of the 60th Armored Infantry was about 1,000 rounds, most of which fell on the battalion headquarters at Beaufort and on artillery positions farther to the rear, near Haller. This was sufficient to knock out phone lines within the battalion.

There was confusion among the German engineers manning the assault craft at Wallendorf as the morning mist made navigation difficult. The first assault companies crossed the river about 6:30 AM. Once across, the 2nd Battalion, on the right flank of the 986th, headed west between Reisdorf and Bigelbach, making for the high ground in front of the village of Berens.

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ABOVE: Despite the frigid cold and frozen ground, men of the 28th Infantry Division's 110th Infantry Division hurriedly dig fighting positions in a ditch along a road in anticipation of an enemy attack. OPPOSITE: On the night of December 15, 1944, the Germans unleashed their broad-front counteroffensive through their Westwall defenses and into unsuspecting American positions along the north shoulder in Luxembourg.

When the morning fog lifted, the armored infantrymen could see Germans swarming across the river near Wallendorf and near the village of Dillengen, just below the positions of A Company. The American artillery took both sites under heavy fire, but the Germans continued to cross. The small outpost at Hogenberg was quickly overwhelmed.

At daylight, the German assault force came under heavy fire from troops of the 3rd Battalion, 109th Infantry, on high ground north of the Sauer, delaying their advance. Meanwhile, the 1st Battalion had taken Bigelbach without opposition, but then came under fire from C Company, 60th Armored Infantry.

On the 986th Volksgrenadier's left, the 988th Volksgrenadier crossed the Sauer around Dillingen, heading towards Beaufort and American artillery positions behind Haller. Dealing with the American guns was a priority, as their field of fire fell on the 276th VGD's bridge sites at Dillingen and Wallendorf, and until they were removed none of the 276th's artillery, or its four assault guns, could cross the river.

The men of the two forward companies, A and C, were soon aware that the wooded draws leading to their positions were thick with Germans. By mid-day, large numbers of volksgrenadiers had infiltrated through the gaps in A Company, as well as on both flanks, and forced back one of the company's platoons.

The 60th's commander, Colonel Collins, had little choice but to send his reserve, B Company, to fill the gap between A and C. Although B Company had several skirmishes with groups of volksgrenadiers, it managed to reach positions abreast of their fellow companies.

Meanwhile, the 3rd Armored Field Artillery Battalion at Haller continued to shell the German bridge sites. During the

afternoon the 9th Armored Division commander, Maj. Gen. John Leonard, sent armored cars from A Troop, 89th Cavalry Reconnaissance Squadron, to guard the approaches to Beaufort.

By dusk, the 988th Volksgrenadiers had made no more significant progress than had the 986th on the right, other than encircling the three American companies on the Sauer heights. Divisional artillery on the east bank of the Sauer provided supporting fire but was limited due to a shortage of ammunition.

As night fell, except for the outpost at Hogenberg, the 60th Armored Infantry's positions remained intact. But Collins was increasingly concerned with the possibility of the Germans moving up the roads from the Schwarz Ernst gorge and isolating his companies and supporting artillery.

By early evening on December 16, the 12th Infantry continued to hold all its positions except those outposts overrun in the initial German assault, but it was clear that the Germans were continuing to build their strength.

So intense was the pressure against I and L Companies at Osweiler and Dickweiler that Colonel Chance sent the last of his reserve, C Company, to the 3rd Battalion's CP to be ready to move to the two villages early the next day. The troops had no choice but to hold their positions as Barton ordered that there was to be "no retrograde movement" in the 12th Infantry's sector.

Though hard-pressed, Barton was hesitant to call on his other two regiments, the 8th and 22nd Infantry, for assistance. But he did order the 22nd to release its reserve battalion, the 2nd, under Lt. Col. Thomas A. Kenan, to move north early the next morning to Junglinster, where it was to be joined by two tank platoons.

At the same time, three battalions of 155mm and two batteries of 105mm howitzers were ordered to move north to new positions. The 4th Engineer (Combat) Battalion and the 4th Cavalry Reconnaissance Troop were alerted to be ready for commitment.

In response to the developing crisis in the 60th Armored Infantry's sector, General Leonard, 9th Armored Division, ordered forward a company of medium tanks of the 19th Tank Battalion of CCA, for the next morning.

About midnight, General Middleton, VIII Corps, informed Barton that the next morning, CCA of the 10th Armored Division was to leave an assembly area in the Third Army's sector, 35 miles from the 12th Infantry, and be available to Barton.

On the second day of the offensive, both sides committed more troops. The 212th VGD had started to place a bridge over the Sauer the previous day, but American artillery had shot out the structure before it could be used.

During the night the German engineers brought searchlights to the river opposite Echternach. They planned to build a bridge using the stone piers of what had been an ancient bridge site, but American shelling halted their efforts. Falling back, the engineers had to wait for daylight before beginning work at another site further downstream.

The division's Füsilier Battalion, which had managed to cross the river, was committed against the 12th Infantry's center in an attempt to drive a wedge through the American lines at Scheidgen.

The superior numbers of the 212th VGD—five battalions versus three of the 12th Infantry—were in the process of disappearing. With the 22nd Infantry's 2nd Battalion on the move toward the threatened sector, as well as the possible use of Barton's organic engineer battalion, the odds were growing even.

Barton also had an advantage in artillery, tanks, and tank destroyers, while German General Sensfuss was yet to get his assault guns or artillery over the Sauer.

American commanders' intentions on the second day included using local reserves to

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ABOVE: An American soldier, the whitewash camouflage on his helmet faded, inspects a captured German MG 42 in the ruins of a Luxembourg village. BELOW: Two GIs man their weapon—a formidable .50-caliber machine gun—on a snowy ridge in Luxembourg. OPPOSITE: 9th Armored Division troops prepare to recover tanks disabled during fighting in the Bulge.

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rescue cut-off units, strengthening threatened units, and blocking exits from the Schwarz Ernst gorge leading to the rear of the American positions. Chance's 12th Infantry was to rescue the men of F Company in the Parc Hotel outside of Berdorf and E Company in Echternach, as well as to reinforce the hard-pressed members of the 3rd Battalion in Osweiler and Dickweiler.

Three hours before dawn, Barton dispatched the 4th Engineer Battalion and 4th Reconnaissance Troop to Breitweiler, occupying the high ground above the gorge, not far from Müllerthal, behind the 12th Infantry.

The situation was reaching crisis proportions. Along the 4th Division front, the line was only secure at Lauterborn. Other units were isolated or cut off. At Berdorf, while elements of one company held out in the Parc Hotel, others defended the hat factory in Echterbach.

On the extreme end of the German left flank, the XIII/999 Fortress Infantry Battalion crossed the Sauer and advanced from the east on the village of Girst before being stopped by the American defenders.

Between the Sauer and the Schwarz Ernst gorge, the 60th Armored Infantry command was concerned about German movement up the gorge and egress along one of the three roads leading into the rear of the American positions—with the possibility of envelopment from the north—where, on the first day of the offensive, the Germans had eliminated an OP. During the night of December 16/17, Colonel Thomas Harrold, commander of CCA, 9th Armored Division, sent the 19th Tank Battalion's light tanks, D Company, to screen the northern flank; attached a troop of the 89th Cavalry Reconnaissance Squadron to Colonel Collins' 60th to patrol the road from the gorge to Collin's headquarters at Beaufort; and sent another troop, plus self-propelled guns of B Company, 811th Tank Destroyer Battalion, to block the other two roads leading from the gorge.

During the same night, grenadiers of the 276th VGD worked south into the rear of Collins' companies and occupied a ridgeline between Beaufort and the Sauer, cutting off the three companies of the 60th Armored Infantry.

On December 17, concerned over the 276th VGD's lack of progress, Brandenberger authorized the release of the 987th Volksgrenadiers from reserve to attack on the division's left flank using the rocky defile of the Schwarz Ernst gorge to penetrate the American lines. The volksgrenadiers moved unopposed up the gorge to Müllerthal, a distance of about three miles beyond the Sauer.

From there they threatened the village of Waldbillig, not far behind the 3rd Armored Field Artillery Battalion. This forced Colonel Harrold to divert resources

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ABOVE: Men of the 9th Armored Division conduct a fire mission with their self-propelled 105mm gun, December 21, 1944. OPPOSITE: The bodies of 28th Infantry Division soldiers line the edge of a farm field in Luxembourg. Each had been shot in the head, likely POWs executed by the Germans.

to meet the new threat, easing the 988th Regiment's task. A half dozen Greyhound armored cars from Beaufort, sent to break through to the armored infantrymen, ran into a hail of fire.

As night fell, the volksgrenadiers of 1st Battalion, 988th, moved on Beaufort from the gorge. Colonel Collins ordered his headquarters troops to withdraw to Savelborn while cavalrymen of A Troop, 89th Cavalry Reconnaissance Squadron, under Captain Victor C. Leiker, fought a rearguard action.

Leiker's troops managed to hold for about two hours—long enough for the self-propelled howitzers of the 3rd Armored Field Artillery to displace from Haller to Savelborn, in the center of a new line that Colonel Harrold was forming between Ermsdorf and Waldbillig. Leiker's force suffered the loss of 43 men and seven armored cars.

At the end of the day, a new defensive line was beginning to take shape along the 12th Infantry's front. Osweiler and Dickweiler, on the right, were firmly in hand. On the left, a new task force from the 9th Armored Division, Task Force Luckett, under Colonel James S. Luckett, had established an anchor along the upper reaches of the gorge.

If there was a weakness, it was a gap between Osweiler and Consdorf, along the main highway from Luxembourg City to Echternach. In front of the line were several key positions still holding out—B Company and Lieutenant Leake's small band at Berdorf, A and G Companies in Lauterborn, and E Company in Echternach.

With the 60th Armored Infantry effectively cut off, Colonel Harrold ordered a rescue operation with the only units he had available—B Company, 19th Tank Battalion; a company of the 9th Armored Engineer Battalion, mounted on halftracks; his Intelligence and Reconnaissance (I&R) Platoon; and one platoon each of light tanks and tank destroyers. They formed task forces under Captain John W. Hall and Major Tommie M. Philbeck, which set out towards Berens before dawn on the 18th.

The 1st Battalion, 986th, along with the regiment's antitank (*panzerjäger*) company, armed with 54 Panzerfausts, was ordered to attack across the Ermsdorf-Savelborn road towards Medernach. The next morning, December 18, this force assembled near Savelborn.

As the 9th's I&R Platoon was reconnoitering the planned route of attack for its task force, it was ambushed, the platoon leader killed, and the platoon virtually wiped out.

As a result, TF Hall was not aware of the trap they were headed into. Hall's lead M-5 light tank was knocked out, blocking the road. During the subsequent fight, six or seven Shermans or assault guns were hit by panzerfausts and put out of action. The commander of the company of Shermans, Captain Arthur J. Banford, Jr., ordered a withdrawal to Savelborn.

Late in the afternoon, Harrold ordered the men of the 60th Armored Infantry Battalion to break out from their encirclement. Over the next two days, 400 men succeeded in making their way to American lines. In the three-day fight, the battalion lost close to 350 men, most of them during the withdrawal.

The new line of the 9th Armored Division's CCA extended over seven miles—from Waldbillig north along the Schwarz Ernst gorge through Savelborn and Ermsdorf. But a four-mile gap still existed between CCA and the 109th Infantry on its left.

A new commander of the 276th VGD, Colonel Hugo Dempwolff, replaced General Möhring, who had been killed, and set about reorganizing the division. Lacking a bridge over the Sauer, on the night of December 18/19, he was able to bring forward three assault guns via a bridge in another sector. With their arrival, Colonel Dempwolff prepared for his division to return to the offensive, but higher command had other ideas.

The 276th VGD had taken the village of Beaufort and advanced to the outskirts of Breitweiler and Müllerthal. At 9:36 AM, December 17, a German force of some five companies was reported moving along the Schwarz Ernst gorge near Breitweiler on the boundary between the 12th Infantry and 60th Armored Infantry. These were troops of the 987th Regiment, taken from the division reserve. C Company, 70th Tank Battalion, with eight tanks, was hurried to Breitweiler to reinforce the cavalry and engineers there.

Two platoons of A Company, 19th Tank Battalion, along with the assault gun and mortar platoons of 70th Tank, a battery of 105mm howitzers, the reconnaissance company of the 803rd Tank Destroyer Battalion, and the 2nd Battalion, 8th Infantry, under Lt. Col. George Mabry, were hastily assembled at Colbet, one-and-a-half miles south of Müllerthal—organized as Task Force Luckett. (Colonel Luckett had been carried as an excess officer with the 9th Armored Division headquarters.) The task force was intended to prevent any further German advance beyond Müllerthal.

Early in the day, B Company, 12th Infantry, with five M-4 and five M-5 tanks from the 70th Tank, renewed the attack at Berdorf in an attempt to breakthrough to F Company, still encircled in the village.

In the center of the line, A and G Companies, 12th Infantry, with a platoon of five light tanks, started from Lauterborn along the road to Echternach. But German shellfire met the Americans. At the end of the day the relief force had only managed to consolidate positions in Lauterborn.

In Echternach, E Company, 12th Infantry, had occupied two strongpoints from which they harassed Germans attempting to move through the town. Troops from the 320th Regiment and the division füsilier battalion bypassed Echternach and Lauterborn in an attempt to cut the main road to Scheidgen. A platoon of A Company, 12th Infantry, posted the day before on Hill 313, southwest of Lauterborn, fell back to Scheidgen, but were eventually overwhelmed there.

At daybreak, C Company, 12th Infantry, in reserve, had moved out of Herborn en route to join the two companies beleaguered in Osweiler. As the company worked its way through the woods south of Osweiler, it ran into troops of the 2nd Battalion, 320th Regiment. One C Company platoon was lost in the action.

Meanwhile, in mid-morning, the 2nd Battalion, 22nd Infantry, under Colonel Kenan, arrived in the area of the 12th Infantry, de-trucked behind Osweiler and Dickweiler. F Company, mounted on tanks from the 19th Tank Battalion, and set out for Osweiler. Along the way they encountered a company of the German 320th Regiment, which they routed. In the process, they freed 16 members of C Company, 12th Infantry, and then pushed on into Osweiler. With these reinforcements, a new defensive line was organized on the hills east of the village.

During mid-afternoon, the remaining companies of 2nd Battalion, 22nd Infantry, started for Osweiler, advancing through woods atop a ridgeline southwest of the village. As the column moved, it encountered a German force in battalion strength and exchanged fire. The 2nd Battalion companies became separated, but the darkness ended skirmishing.

At the end of the day both Osweiler and Dickweiler remained in American hands as C Company, 12th Infantry, took positions on high ground between and slightly south of the two villages, extending the American line to the right. Despite achieving some initial surprise, the 212th VGD was unable to effect a deep penetration or disorganize the 12th Infantry.

Meanwhile, General Middleton directed General William H.H. Morris, Jr., 10th Armored Division, to send one combat command to Bastogne and the remainder of the division to the 4th Division to help drive the Germans back over the Sauer.

CCA, 10th Armored Division, under Brigadier General Edwin W. Piburn, moved north immediately in the area between the Schwarz Erntz gorge and the Echternach-Luxembourg road. CCA made good progress on its 75-mile drive from its assembly area at Thionville, France, but leading elements did not arrive in the 12th Infantry area until late in the afternoon of the 17th. Because of approaching darkness, an attack was postponed until the next day.

Piburn was to attack during the morning using three task forces—TF Chamberlain was to clear the Schwarz Ernst gorge; TF Standish, with the 61st Armored Infantry Battalion and a company of light tanks, was to push through Berdorf and then to

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ABOVE: An assault boat full of medical equipment is manhandled by medics across an icy stream in Luxembourg to reach wounded 4th Infantry Division troops. OPPOSITE: Four M-4 Sherman tanks with high-velocity 76mm guns prepare to roll toward the enemy along a Luxembourg road.

Echternach; and TF Riley was to retake Scheidgen, link up with infantry in Lauterborn, and continue into Echternach. Given the concern for the Germans in the gorge, the first of Piburn's task forces was to be committed there.

The counterattack began in a thick fog on the morning of December 18. On the left, TF Chamberlain, commanded by Lt. Col. Thomas C. Chamberlain, dispatched a small tank-infantry team, using elements from the 11th Tank Battalion, from Breitweiler into the gorge upstream from German-held Müllerthal.

The gorge was a formidable obstacle—a difficult transverse either by foot or vehicle, capable of being defended by only a few men and guns placed at key locations. The entrance to the gorge was so narrow that the tanks had to advance in single file. The task force came under a hail of antitank rockets and small arms fire, and the lead Sherman was knocked out.

The 2nd Battalion, 8th Infantry, already in place, attempted to assist, driving back a few volksgrenadiers from the high ground. The fighting ended at dusk as Chamberlain's men were forced to pull back.

TF Luckett, 9th Armored Division, advancing during the afternoon, was to bypass Müllerthal to the west and seize the wooded bluff above the gorge road north of Müllerthal. Before doing so, tank fire softened up the woods.

The task force under Lt. Col. Miles L. Standish, which had been assigned to assist the 2nd Battalion, 12th Infantry, moved towards Berdorf to link up with the 12th Infantry's B Company to clear the village. Although elements of TF Standish were strafed by a pair of German planes, before noon they'd entered the village and contact with the infantry and six tanks already there.

The Germans responded by laying down smoke and a three-hour artillery barrage, disabling some tanks and halftracks and driving the Americans to cover. When the fire lifted the attack was resumed, but the Germans resisted stubbornly in house-to-house fighting as darkness brought the assault to a halt.

Meanwhile, members of F Company remained holed up in the Parc Hotel.

While part of TF Standish was engaged in Berdorf, more Yanks attacked through heavy underbrush toward Hill 329, east of Berdorf, which overlooked the road to Echternach. But the American infantry was checked halfway to their objective by machine-gun and artillery fire.

The task force under Lt. Col. John R. Riley—a company each of medium tanks and armored infantry—made good progress in its attack from Scheidgen to Lauterborn. Scheidgen was retaken early in the afternoon, virtually without a fight, since the German battalion that had previously seized the village had departed to the south.

Once inside Scheidgen, TF Riley delayed advancing to Echternach, as Riley thought that it was too late in the day to continue. The task force held up for the night along the road to Echternach at a mill where G Company had its CP. Riley did send two tanks with two squads of infantry into Echternach to contact E Company, 12th Infantry.

The E Company commander, 1st Lt. Morton A. Macdiarmid, had established his headquarters near the edge of the town in the hat factory along the road to Lauterborn. Although his headquarters was not under pressure, Macdiarmid had withdrawn some of the riflemen capable of making it back to the CP, but some outposts, including one platoon, were still cut off.

Macdiarmid didn't want relief from defending Echternach, since he had orders to stay put, but rather wanted tanks to help extricate the cutoff 1st Platoon. But the commanders of the two tanks from TF Riley were unwilling to risk their vehicles in the town's narrow streets, though they promised to return the next morning.

Meanwhile, five tanks and two companies of the 159th Engineer Battalion launched a surprise attack against Hill 313, overlooking the road to Lauterborn; thick fog prevented the Americans from taking the hill.

General Barton attempted to strengthen 12th Infantry's right flank in the Osweiler-Dickweiler area. The 2nd Battalion, 22nd Infantry, which had met the German column in the woods west of Osweiler the day before, headed for the village early on December

18. Upon its arrival, the American garrison then consisted of a tank company and four under-strength rifle companies.

As the American reinforcements stiffened the right flank and the armored forces grappled to wrest the initiative from the Germans on the left, the Germans attempted to widen and deepen the penetration into the 12th Infantry's center, shouldering their way south between Scheidgen and Osweiler.

The burden of the advance was carried by the 320th Regiment and the advance guard of the 316th Regiment, which General Sensfuss had "pried" from the Seventh Army's reserve—but it would be another 24 hours before that regiment crossed the Sauer.

The first appearance of German forces deep in the center of the 12th Infantry occurred near Maisons Lelligen, northwest of the village of Herborn, where the 12th's Regimental Cannon Company came under fire while on the move. The cannon crews responded by unlimbering their guns and fighting a three-hour engagement at ranges as short as 60 yards before withdrawing.

Further west, German elements that had come up from Scheidgen surrounded the headquarters of the 2nd Battalion, 22nd Infantry, along with a platoon of 57mm towed antitank guns, in Geyershof. But tanks en route to Osweiler intervened, allowing the battalion headquarters personnel to withdraw to Herborn.

German General Sensfuss apparently didn't realize that his men had achieved a breakthrough. But the German battalions, already under-strength, had taken heavy losses during the day and were in no condition to exploit their gains.

By the end of the 18th, the two American companies in Berdorf had been reduced to just 79 men, while the companies of 2nd Battalion, 22nd Infantry, counted an average of only 60 men. Meanwhile, the remainder of the German 316th Regiment began to cross the Sauer, moving up behind the center of the 212th VGD.

The two left-flank divisions of the German Seventh Army were nearly stalled, their engineers having had great difficulty placing bridges across the Sauer due to American artillery fire. The 276th VGD managed to wrest the village of Savelborn from CCA, 9th Armored Division, after which they turned back counterattacks by TFs Hall and Philbeck.

During the night of December 18/19, elements of the 9th Armored Division withdrew to a new line on the left of the 4th Division; however, the division did not abandon its right flank anchor at Waldbillig. Dealing with the German 987th Regiment and eliminating or containing the German forces in the Schwarz Erntz gorge was left to the 4th Division and CCA, 10th Armored Division.

On December 19, Patton turned his Third Army north toward the southern shoulder of the German penetration—the "Bulge." Command of VIII Corps passed to Patton, who created a provisional corps headquarters to control the Corps' troops still in Luxembourg and others moving to the area.

Under the command of the 10th Armored Division's General Morris, the provisional headquarters controlled Morris' division, except for CCB at Bastogne; CCA of the 9th Armored Division; the 109th Infantry; and the 4th Infantry Division.

Retaking the territory seized by the Germans during the first four days of the counteroffensive was no longer a priority for the Americans. Their mission now was to hold a line in order to allow time for troops from Third Army to arrive. General Barton was to form a main line of resistance extending from Osweiler and Dickweiler through Scheidgen and Consdorf to positions held by TF Luckett overlooking the Schwarz Ernst gorge at

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Müllerthal, while the 10th Armored Division's CCA was pulled back into reserve. This meant withdrawing from Berdorf, Lauterborn, and Echternach.

Also on December 19, the commander of the LXXX Corps, General Beyer, ordered his forces into a defensive posture. Although the 212th and 276th VGDs had failed to push the shoulder of the penetration as far south as originally planned, Beyer believed they had gone as far as they could. He also calculated that the Americans were preparing a counterattack and that he needed his men to dig in.

But two tasks remained. Beyer wanted the 276th VGD to take Waldbillig in order to afford the troops in the gorge at Müllerthal a route of egress if needed. The other task was to eliminate the Americans holding out in Echternach.

Early on the 19th, TF Luckett made another attempt to advance into the gorge. The maneuver involved a flanking movement intended to seize the high ground overlooking Müllerthal.

Troops of Colonel Mabry's 2nd Battalion, 8th Infantry, with tanks and artillery support, attacked east from Waldbillig to take the wooded nose around which looped the Waldbillig-Müllerthal road. The advance, over open fields, was eventually checked by heavy shellfire.

Mabry then shifted his attack to the right to bring the infantry through the draw that circled the nose. E Company, which had only about 70 men left, was still the strongest in the battalion and led the assault. Despite losses, E Company drove forward, clearing the Germans from the lower slopes before being recalled.

Barton then called off the attack and assigned TF Luckett the mission of denying the Germans the use of the road net through Müllerthal. Luckett responded by deploying his troops along the ridge southwest of the Müllerthal-Waldbillig road. Log abatises (entanglements), mined and covered by machine guns, were erected to block the valley road south of Müllerthal.

Meanwhile, the village of Christnach, a few miles south of the Sauer, fell to elements of the 276th VGD, while TF Chamberlain was so battered that the unit retired to Consdorf.

A tank-infantry counterattack by TFs Standish and Riley in the Berdorf and Echternach areas resumed while heavy fog covered German operations. This included the assembly of the 316th Regiment behind the 212th VGD center during the day. Also, by the middle of the afternoon, a bridge had finally been erected at Edingen.

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ABOVE: With revolver in hand, an 8th Regiment, 4th Infantry Division, soldier in a snow-camouflage suit takes charge of a group of captured German soldiers near the Sauer River. BELOW: A Wehrmacht truck lies on its side—one of many German vehicles destroyed during the heavy fighting in Luxembourg. The Bulge was Nazi Germany's last chance to stave off defeat in the West. OPPOSITE: After the German counteroffensive had been halted, soldiers of the 8th Infantry Regiment, 4th Infantry Division, move through the snow-covered Luxembourg town of Moesdorf, January 21, 1945. Much hard fighting took place in small villages such as this one.

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At Berdorf, a team from TF Standish and a platoon of armored engineers set to work mopping up German troops of 1st Battalion, 423rd Regiment, who had holed up in houses on the north side of the village. The work required pole charges and tanks to blast through the walls of houses. The infantry then went to work with grenades and small arms. As the Germans were slowly driven back, they were assisted by the fire of *nebelwerfers* (rocket artillery) of the 8th Volkswerfer Brigade.

TF Standish returned to the attack in the direction of Hill 329, along the Berdorf-Echternach road, where they had been checked by flanking fire the previous day. They destroyed a German machine-gun position as the attack reached the ridge before Hill 329, but the advance halted short of its objective in order to free the tanks and halftracks to evacuate the wounded. The tanks of the task force were then involved in a night-long firefight with the 2nd Battalion, 423rd Regiment, which had been concentrated in preparation for the capture of Consdorf.

Colonel Riley sent tanks carrying infantry to the edge of Echternach on the morning of the 19th, established contact with E Company, and covered the withdrawal of outlying detachments to the hat factory. The 12th Infantry's Colonel Chance gave permission for E Company to evacuate Echternach.

Meanwhile, the Germans began an assault on the hat factory. Two volunteers were sent to Lauterborn with a request for help, but instead of receiving relief, E Company was ordered to fight its way out during the night.

Lieutenant Leake and his 60 men continued to hold the Parc Hotel in Berdorf as German artillery landed around the building and panzerfausts tore holes in its east side. On the night of December 19/20, a dense fog descended, the volksgrenadiers using it to approach the hotel. Before daylight the next morning, an explosion blew a large opening in the hotel and the Germans launched an assault. For half an hour the fight was desperate; then it stopped as quickly as it had started.

The Germans made no move to push deeper into the center of the 12th's lines during the day. In the meantime, combat engineers in Scheidgen returned and occupied Hill 313 without a fight. By nightfall, the situation seemed much improved as both flanks of the 4th Division held steady while the German attack lost momentum.

On December 20, the 4th Infantry and 10th Armored Divisions sought to disengage their advance elements and regroup along a stronger line.

At the same time, elements of the 276th VGD, having received several assault guns as well as rocket and artillery support, struck through Müllerthal to Waldbillig—the boundary between the 4th Division and the 9th Armored Division—in an attempt to push the right wing of the LXXX Army Corps forward to where the road net leading east to the Sauer might be denied the Americans.

In savage fighting, troops of the 212th VGD finally drove the Americans from Berdorf. In Echternach, the division's füsilier battalion prepared to conduct an attack, supported by four assault guns. At 2 PM, the German assault guns opened a devastating fire on the buildings held by the E Company riflemen and the machine gunners and mortarmen of H Company. Compelled to surrender, prisoners included 111 officers and men of E Company, plus 21 men of H Company.

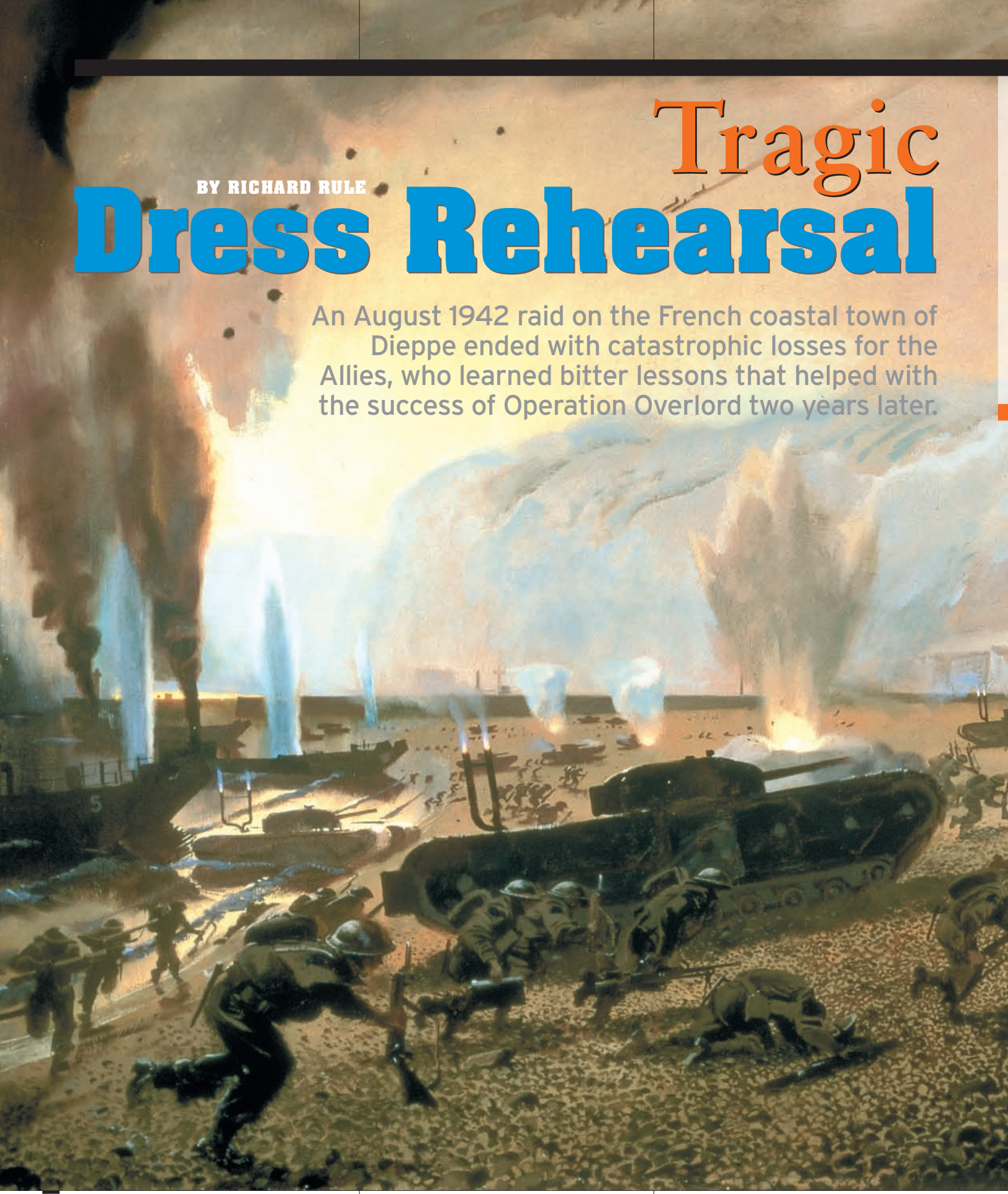
At the same time, F Company, 12th Infantry, continued to hold its position in the Parc Hotel, while G Company, with only 40 men, managed to withdraw from the town. With the coming of daylight, the Americans found the Germans dug in to the west of the hotel. Leake and his men soon abandoned their position and joined B Company and armored elements in

Continued on page 98

Tragic Dress Rehearsal

BY RICHARD RULE

An August 1942 raid on the French coastal town of Dieppe ended with catastrophic losses for the Allies, who learned bitter lessons that helped with the success of Operation Overlord two years later.



By early 1942, British Prime Minister Winston Churchill was still unable to boast a single victory in the field against Germany. Under enormous pressure both at home and abroad, he hoped a large-scale cross-channel raid, code-named Operation Jubilee, would send a clear message to the world that England was still very much in the fight.

The combined operation, deemed a reconnaissance in force by Churchill, would determine what resistance was likely to be encountered in an attempt to seize an all-weather port by frontal assault. It was a view that fell into line with that of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, who had wanted to launch a sizable amphibious landing under fire as a prelude to a much larger operation (Operation Overlord) planned in the years ahead. With the ports of the Pas de Calais considered too heavily defended, the gaze of the interservice planning committee came to rest upon the small French resort town of Dieppe.

The thousand-year-old seaport derived its name from Norman adventurers who found its *Diep*, or natural inlet, to be an ideal anchorage. The harbor is located in a mile-wide gap at the mouth of the Arques River approximately two miles west of center of an 11-mile strip of coast. Backed by two wide boulevards, villas, and a casino, the open beaches were flanked by two commanding headlands at Berneval to the east and Varengeville in the west, each of which boasted formidable German gun batteries.

It would be a difficult nut to crack because the port, being so close to the English coast, was a vital link in the enemy chain of coastal defenses. The beachfront and cliffs had been fortified

Men of the Royal Hamilton Light Infantry cross White Beach at Dieppe under heavy German fire in August 1942; at right is the Casino. Although the Canadians, British Commandos, and U.S. Rangers fought with undeniable courage, the battle plan was seriously flawed and casualties were horrendous. Painting by Dr. Charles Fraser Comfort.

Charles Fraser Comfort, Canadian War Museum

with reams of barbed wire and strategically placed strongholds supported in depth by countless machine-gun nests and mortar emplacements bolstered by medium and heavy artillery batteries sighted to cover the beaches and sea approaches.

Combined Operations, under newly appointed chief Lord Louis Mountbatten, finalized the details for Jubilee, which, in reality, had been on the drawing board for some months in one form or another. With available landing craft able to transport approximately 6,000 troops and tanks across the Channel, the bold objective of the raid was to occupy the port of Dieppe, establish a defensive perimeter around the town, inflict as much damage as possible to docks and enemy facilities during the course of a single tide, and then withdraw to England.

The planning, however, was based on the mistaken belief that fewer than 2,000 Germans manned the shore defenses. In fact, close to 6,500 experienced troops of the 302nd Infantry Division were on station with strong mobile reinforcements close by. Instead of outnumbering the defenders three to one, the invaders would be facing the enemy on even terms.

For air cover, the Royal Air Force committed over 70 squadrons to Operation Jubilee, 48 of which were fighters, to form a protective umbrella over the beaches. Opting to forego a softening-up bombardment for fear of alerting the Germans, the RAF would instead provide fighter-bomber support to naval shore parties and ground troops fighting their way off the beaches.

Outnumbering the Germans in the air three to one, the RAF viewed the raid as an opportunity to force the Luftwaffe to do battle on its terms. With all in readiness, it was now a matter of selecting the troops to carry out the operation.

The 2nd Canadian Division had been training in England for nearly three years, but had yet to see combat. The divisional officers were chafing at the bit for operational experience while the restless troops, bored with home duty and frustrated by countless exercises, wanted action. With the men having undertaken extensive training in amphibious assaults, the Canadian High Command insisted that its troops take the lead role in the raid. With the die cast, the eager young men from the Rockies, prairies, and Maritime Provinces of Canada appeared destined to finally get their baptism of fire.

The moonless night of August 18 was the last date in 1942 that offered the conditions of time and tide suitable for the operation. With the new Churchill tanks already embarked onto their landing craft, the assault force of 6,086 officers and men began boarding their ships. Loaded down with full kit and believing they were embarking on another tedious exercise, the grumbling troops filed through the companionways below deck to their assigned areas.

The banter of the men, however, quickly fell silent as unit leaders began distributing maps and aerial photographs in preparation for detailed briefings. As the troops listened intently to their officers, naval crews in numerous harbors along the British coast busied themselves in preparation for putting to sea. Shuffling, shadowy figures moved to and fro along the quays as Aldis lamps flashed signals directing smaller craft to their flotilla positions. In an atmosphere of excitement and high expectation the 252 vessels, under the command of Maj. Gen. J.H. Roberts, slipped away from their English coastal ports to negotiate the 70 miles of seaway to Dieppe.

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The various units had been organized into specific groups, each with a clearly defined task that had been studied and rehearsed. Prior to the main assaults, two flanking

BELOW: A large fire burns and the smoke of battle engulfs the area in this shot taken by an RAF film unit flying over the target area. LEFT: A U.S. Army Ranger offers a light to an English commando during training for the upcoming raid on Dieppe.

Imperial War Museum

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As British naval units lay a smokescreen far below, RAF bombers release their payload over Dieppe.

attacks would see the British No. 4 Commando put the battery near Varengeville out of action, while No. 3 Commando would deal with the batteries at Berneval, thus clearing the way for the five landings.

The Royal Regiment of Canada, along with elements of the Canadian Black Watch, would land on Blue Beach at the small resort village of Puys to secure the east headland at Berneval and capture a gun battery east of Puys. It was imperative that these eastern defenses be silenced ahead of the main landings.

In a simultaneous landing farther west at Pourville, the Scottish Saskatchewan Regiment would disembark on Green Beach. Theirs was a difficult assignment with a number of key objectives. First, they were to offer direct flank support to the landings on the main beaches by clearing the ridge to the east and capturing the radar station sited nearby, then they were to push on ahead and overwhelm the stronghold at Les Quatres Vents Farm, and finally take the battery on the west headland in the rear.

Thirty minutes later, with the beachhead at Pourville secured, the Queen's Own Cameron Highlanders would land in a second wave to pass through the Saskatchewans and link up with the main attacking force and its tanks to capture St. Aubin airfield and the headquarters of the German division at Arques la Battaille.

While the Camerons were coming ashore at Pourville, the main effort would see the Essex-Scottish Regiment land in eastern Dieppe at Red Beach and the Royal Hamilton Light Infantry land in western Dieppe on White Beach.

To support the main landings, Churchill tanks of the 14th Canadian Army Tank Battalion would simultaneously undertake the first amphibious tank assault in history. Having been rushed into service despite limited trials and an unreliable reputation, the new Churchills were deemed ideally suited to infantry support and had been waterproofed and fitted with a unique exhaust attachment that would allow them to come ashore from a depth of up to seven feet.

A colorful unit called Les Fusiliers Mont-Royal, made up of French Canadians, would be held in floating reserve. When Dieppe was secured, they would be landed to occupy and maintain an inner perimeter before forming the rear guard covering the final withdrawal through the town to the beaches. To add salt to the German wound, a Royal Marine cutting-out party, acting in the finest traditions of the Navy, would dash into the harbor to remove 40 German invasion barges and take them back to England.

Steaming through the inky blackness of the English Channel, the convoy cleared the German minefields and arrived undetected eight miles off the French coast shortly before 0300 hours on the morning of August 19. Holding outside the range of German radar, the escorting destroyers immediately took up their stations east and west of the headquarters ship, HMS *Calpe*, to act as the eyes and ears of the expedition. Naval personnel aboard the landing ships began to lower the landing craft into the water. It was a noisy, tedious process leaving many convinced the sound must surely have carried to the German shore defenses—but it had not.

The Commandos had already departed toward the two headlands as the troops destined for Puys and Pourville were loaded onto their landing craft. As officers moved reassuringly among the soldiers, the men began to blacken their faces and arms; some rechecked equipment, many steadied their nerves with the repetition of orders, while others remained silent, lost in their own thoughts, wondering if they would survive the dawn.

As the LCPs took up station behind the gunboats leading them in, the most hazardous seaborne operation conceived or attempted up that point of the war was underway. There was no turning back.

The run in across the calm, misted waters was unfolding smoothly until some of the landing craft carrying the Royal Regiment of Canada mistakenly formed up behind the wrong gunboat; 20 vital minutes were lost sorting out the confusion. Would they now be able to make it to the beach on time—or even in time to carry out their tasks?

This setback was followed at 3:50 AM by the first disaster of the raid, when the gunboat and 23 landing craft carrying No. 3 Commando to Berneval were suddenly

Bundesarchiv Bild 101I-291-1213-34; Photo: Karl Müller

illuminated by star shells. Through pure chance, the small Allied force had blundered into a convoy of formidably armed German trawlers and E-boats making for Dieppe harbor. In the brief firefight that ensued, the lead gunboat lost her wireless station and was left a wreck, her guns knocked out and most of her crew wounded.

Many of the small wooden landing craft were sunk or scattered, making it highly unlikely that the Commandos' mission could succeed. Without communications, the gunboat was unable to report what had happened. The flashes of gunfire, however, had been observed from the command ship, leaving General Roberts gravely concerned. He knew that many lives hinged on the commandos successfully silencing the three 8-inch and four 4.2-inch guns of the Berneval battery.

Fortuitously, one of the landing craft, having avoided the engagement, held its course to land three officers and 17 men undetected on the narrow beach of Bellevile-sur-Mer. Armed with only their personal weapons and one 2-inch mortar, the commandos scaled the cliff face to engage the Germans. Their harassing fire was so effective that the Berneval guns failed to fire an effective shot during the main landings.

The No. 4 Commando contingent landed without incident on the extreme right flank. In a textbook action, the men blew up the six 6-inch guns of the Varangeville battery and by 0730 hours were on their way back to England. The mission, carried out with daring and skill, would be the only complete success of the entire operation.

By closely coordinating the timing of the flank assaults at Puys and Pourville, the invaders hoped to minimize the chance of alerting the Germans' main defenses, but the Royal Regiment of Canada was already in trouble. Having not made up the time during the confusion on the run in, the Canadian force had broken into two waves instead of one and would hit the narrow Blue Beach at Puys nearly 20 minutes late and in full daylight. Their protective smoke screen, dispersed prematurely by the breeze, failed to conceal their approach as German gunfire confirmed that the element of surprise had been lost.

With bullets already striking the metal ramps, the tension was almost unbearable as the men steeled their nerves and moved to the forward section of their landing craft ready to disembark. When the LCPs struck the beach, the troops surged forward into a hell few could have ever imagined. Sheltered in trenches and pillboxes, the waiting Germans opened up with a heavy and murderously accurate deluge of fire. The effect was devastating.

The 300 yards from the shoreline to the head of the beach were soon littered with the bodies of the dead and wounded as most of the first wave was annihilated. The few who had cleared the shingle unscathed huddled for dear life against a 12-foot stone sea wall as German shells tore up every square inch of the beach behind them.

While teams tried to blow breaches in the wire, the men beneath the wall found themselves exposed to enfilade fire from a blockhouse overlooking the beach.

The concrete fortification claimed scores of troops as its guns swept the outer face of the wall until an officer, leading from the front, worked his way forward to throw a grenade through the embrasure, killing the occupants, then falling dead himself.

With fire raining down upon them from all angles, the men pinned on the beach frantically signaled the incoming troops to turn back, but it was too late. The Germans, now utilizing mortars, let loose a frenzied inferno of explosives and flying shrapnel that cut

the next wave to pieces. An officer recalled that within five minutes, "an assaulting battalion on the offensive [had been reduced] to something less than two companies on the defensive, hammered by fire they could not locate."

With German guns commanding the only access point off the beach, the surviving Royals were trapped. As casualties mounted by the second, and with virtually no radio contact with the headquarters ship, the situation seemed utterly hopeless. Salvation arrived in the form of strafing runs by RAF fighters, supported by naval bombardment that had the German gun crews ducking for cover.

During the lull, the commanding officer, Colonel Douglas E. Catto, desperate to get his men off the beach and onto the high ground, sent Bren gunners to the western edge of the beach to subdue German fortifications on the opposite slope. Showing exemplary leadership, Catto and an NCO then scaled the western edge of the sea wall and began cutting through the wire by hand. Exposed to enemy fire, Catto toiled for over half an hour to clear a path, then rallied his men to follow him through. Only 20 made it before heavy machine-gun fire sealed off the opening.

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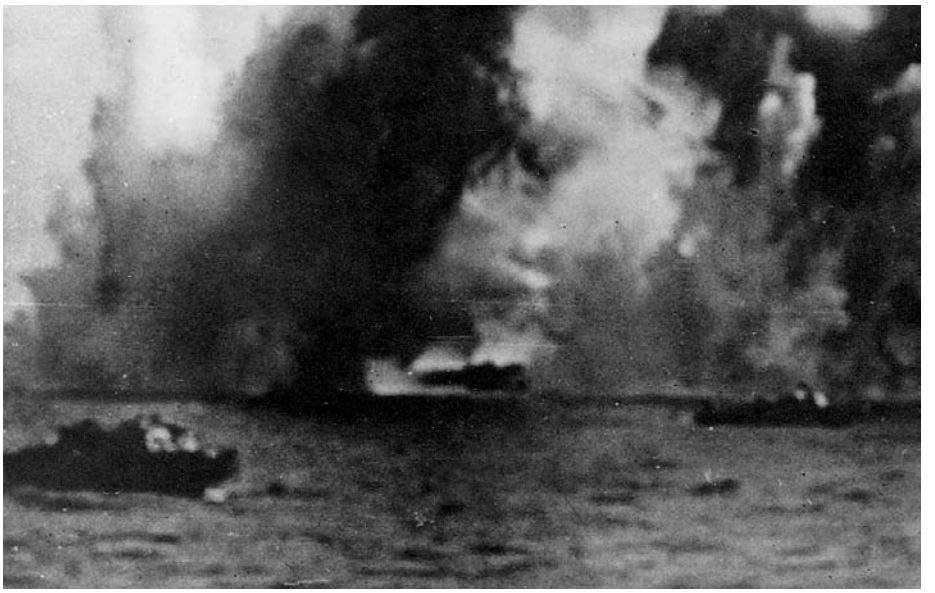


ABOVE: From their superior positions above the beach, German coastal guns tear into approaching Canadian landing craft. BELOW: With smoke rising from naval and aerial bombardment ahead of them, men in a landing craft head anxiously for the Dieppe invasion beaches. OPPOSITE: The crew of an MG 34 waits in their reinforced-concrete bunker along the coast at Dieppe for the invasion code-named Operation Jubilee. Instead of 2,000 defenders, there were actually over 6,000 Germans, with more reinforcements available.

Imperial War Museum

Finding himself cut off from the battalion, Catto pressed on to the top of the gully, clearing the Germans from a number of houses, but soon found the roads beyond heavily patrolled by enemy troops. The small band, now isolated from the battle, was forced to find cover in the nearby woods where it remained until long after the operation had ended, at which time it surrendered.

A third wave, carrying a detachment of the Canadian Black Watch, landed on the western edge of the beach alongside survivors from preceding waves who lay trapped at the foot of an unscalable cliff. A small group managed to fight its way off the beach to inflict heavy casualties on the Germans, but eventually was forced to surrender when it ran out of ammunition.

With smoke obscuring Dieppe and wireless communications on the beach disrupting signal traffic to the headquarters ship, General Roberts was left unaware of the unfolding tragedy. It was not until much later that the first chilling message from Puys got through, "From Blue Beach: Is there any possible chance of getting us off?"

With over 200 men lying dead along the beach, it was clear that the landing had failed. While a shaken General Roberts belatedly gave the order for evacuation, the prospect of a systematic withdrawal was impossible due to the intense German fire raking the beaches and sea approaches. Barely any of the naval craft that ran the gauntlet made it in and back unscathed. Most were sunk.

In any case, the rescue effort had come too late. Of the more than 700 men who

landed, 600 were casualties, including 240 dead. Incredibly, German records examined after the war indicated that the defense of Puys was conducted by only two platoons manning machine-gun nests that incorporated the new rapid fire MG-42s, mortars, and supporting howitzers. This small garrison, which was not reinforced during the entire action, had in less than two hours torn the Royal Canadian Regiment to shreds.

In stark contrast to the disaster at Puys, the simultaneous landing by the South Saskatchewan Regiment on the other side of Dieppe on Green Beach had proceeded unobserved, on schedule but in the wrong place. Instead of disembarking astride the River Scie, the Saskatchewans had landed on the western bank, forcing those units with objectives to the east to detour inland to the only bridge that would get them back over to the right side. With the fully alerted Germans now firing on them from emplacements along the west headland, this costly navigational error had essentially nullified the advantage of an unobserved landing.

One company made solid progress on the west bank, taking all of its objectives on the hills overlooking the village of Pourville, paving the way for the Camerons to land. The other two companies, pushing inland to the radar site, were soon stalled at the bridge, whose approaches were swept by mortars and withering machine-gun fire. Repeated attempts to force a way over to the opposite bank were ruthlessly beaten back with heavy losses.

The battalion's commanding officer, Colonel C.C.I. Merritt, seeing the roadway to the bridge strewn with bodies, rallied his troops in similar fashion to Napoleon at Arcole. The Canadian officer, however, seized not a flag but his helmet and held it aloft as he walked out onto the western entrance of the bridge, shouting, "You see there's no danger at all." His courage injected new momentum into the attack, and the men, following their leader's example, dashed over the bridge to silence the guns that had cost so many lives.

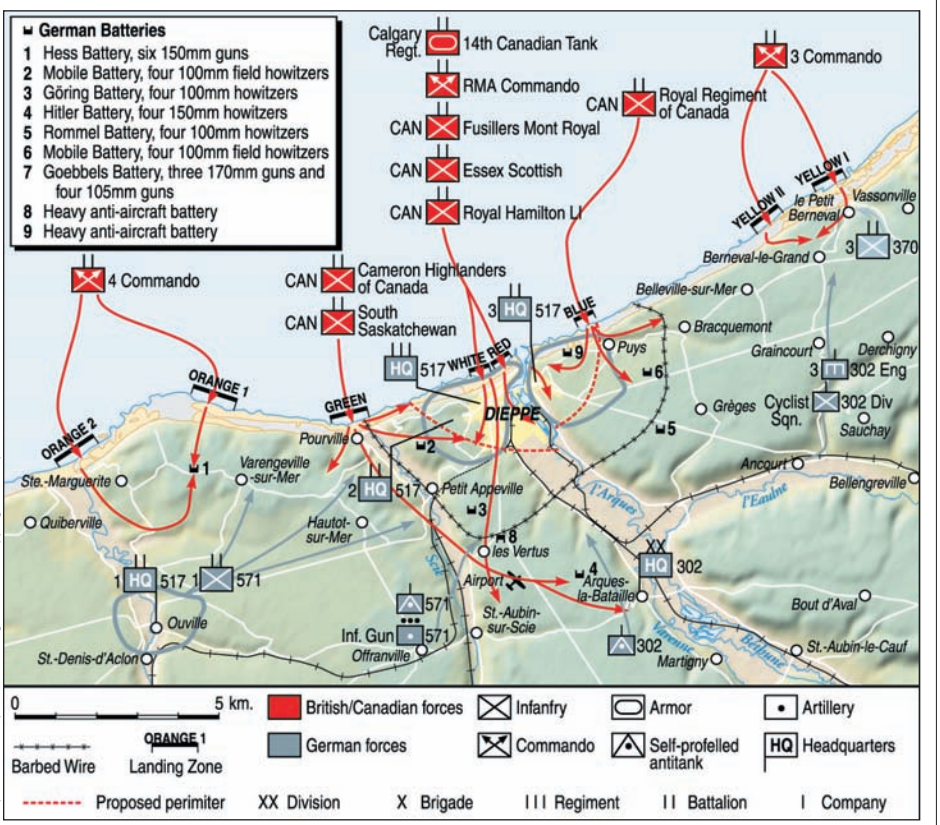
The troops continued inland, fighting close- quarter engagements all the way, only to

In the face of such brutal firepower, the organization of the first assault waves completely collapsed as the men vainly struggled to break through the wire entanglements that ranged along the beaches.

Bundesarchiv Bild 101I-611-2122-16; Photo: Antonowitz

Canadian War Memorial

ABOVE: Dozens of men of the Royal Regiment of Canada lie dead at the base of the beach wall at Blue Beach. The regiment lost 225 men killed and 264 taken prisoner. BELOW: The Canadian landings at Dieppe took place at several points along the French coastline. German units were initially unable to respond quickly enough, giving the Canadians an upper hand. OPPOSITE: Preparing for invasion forces to reach the town of Dieppe, German troops erect a concrete-and-steel tank barrier across the Rue de Sygogne.



find the radar site's outer defenses too strong to overcome without artillery. The strategic position at Quatre Vents Farm, south of the radar site, was also found to be too heavily defended, and the Canadians were forced to withdraw. It became clear that they could not take either of these objectives; their arduous inland penetrations had been in vain.

Meanwhile, on Green Beach the Queen's Own Cameron Highlanders landed at 0530 hours to the skirl of their bagpipes. Their commanding officer was killed as the men dashed across the beach, leaving the unit's second in command, Major A.T. Law, to take over. Most of the force had landed at the river mouth, and Law, quickly moving the men through Pourville, realized his comrades had not captured the heights of the right bank. Leaving a company to assist the Saskatchewans, he pushed the rest of his command swiftly along the left.

About a mile inland from the coast the Camerons reached the hamlet of Petit Appeville where they crossed over the Scie toward the aerodrome at St. Aubin, but the leading troops came up against exceptionally strong resistance. The tanks and Hamiltons with which Law was to attack the airfield were nowhere in sight; he was not to know that most of them were already dead or wounded.

In any case, the Camerons could not launch the attack alone, so Law decided to strike out toward the fortifications at Quatre Vents Farm. Not long after pushing on, the Camerons found themselves fending off repeated attacks by German units in the area with further reinforcements observed pouring in from all directions. With little knowledge of the enemy dispositions in front of him and no idea how the main landings had fared behind him, Law was in a difficult situation. By mid-morning a message came through for Law to get his men back to Green Beach. At this point, it was clear that the success of the raid was in serious doubt.

The landings by the Saskatchewans and Royals had been made primarily to silence much of the opposition beyond the town and on the flanks prior to the main landings. Despite their valiant attempts, the under-gunned Canadians could not make headway against a well-entrenched and well-prepared enemy. With the German guns still largely intact, the stage was set for tragedy on the main beaches.

Hawker Hurricane fighter-bombers and naval gunfire supported the main effort by the Essex Scottish and Royal Hamiltons coming in to land under cover of smoke. However, the moment the bombardment finished German fire quickly resumed with even greater intensity. Ominously, bullets began sweeping out across the water, slamming into the plywood hulls and metal ramps of the boats. Scarcely reassuring to the nervous troops, this situation was compounded by a navigational error that would delay the tank landings.

The armor had been an important element of the attack, but without its firepower the men would be left completely

Canadian War Memorial

As their German captors look on, Canadian POWs are marched down a street shortly after the Dieppe landings of August 19, 1942.

unsupported during those first crucial minutes. It was a recipe for disaster. The moment the landing craft dropped their ramps, the troops struggling ashore were greeted by an impenetrable wall of fire.

In the face of such brutal firepower, the organization of the first assault waves completely collapsed as the men vainly struggled to break through the wire entanglements that ranged along the beaches.

The Essex-Scottish landing at Red Beach had no natural cover, and the featureless promenade between the town and the beach was 150 yards wide. They made three attempts to cross this area, but each time they were driven back, sustaining heavy casualties. Along the fireswept beach, all vestige of command and coordination had been blown away, and enemy snipers coolly picked off anyone showing leadership; few company commanders or senior NCOs survived the morning.

The Essex-Scottish Regiment had been nearly destroyed by the weight of fire brought to bear from both the east and west headlands and positions within the fortified villas and houses fronting the promenade. Their attack was maintained only by the initiative of small isolated groups, acting on their own and now fighting for survival. With such grievous losses, any hope of launching a coordinated assault on the town was gone.

On the right, the Royal Hamiltons assaulted White Beach, but once ashore they were raked with impunity from dozens of hidden machine-gun and mortar emplacements. The German gunners could not miss as they capitalized on the skillful use of barbed wire that channeled the Canadians into predetermined killing zones where they were mercilessly mowed down.

With one company completely wiped out, the Hamiltons were reduced to a few desperate bands of men trying, like a punch drunk boxer, to fend off blows they could not see coming. White Beach had become a deathtrap.

The Canadian soldier's reputation for fearless gallantry had been forged during the nightmare battles of World War I. But like their grandfathers on the Western Front, the men at Dieppe would discover that flesh and blood sustained by raw courage are rarely enough in the face of overwhelming machine- gun, mortar, and artillery fire.

Despite the lack of tank support, some of the Hamiltons breached the wire in several places and made for the shelter of the casino. Forcing their way inside, they overwhelmed the Germans and broke into buildings beyond to establish a defensive foothold. Nearby, a small number of Essex-Scottish troops had also fought their way into Dieppe and set the tobacco factory alight, while others made it as far as the harbor. Their numbers were small and their impact was minimal, but they were at least hitting back in a fight that had been tragically one-sided.

Finally, the tank landing craft made their run into the beaches. As they emerged from the protective curtain of smoke with their ramps down and doors open, German shells began slamming into the metal plating of the landing craft when they were still 200 meters offshore. Of the four troops of tanks landed in the first wave, only 17 made it ashore, with most of these quickly disabled or bellied out and immobilized in the loose gravel. The steep grade of the shingle beaches intermingled with large pebbles and sand made it difficult for the tanks to maneuver, leaving many trapped and floundering under heavy fire.

Major Allen Glenn of the Calgary Tank Regiment recalled, "You couldn't pick worse terrain for a tracked vehicle. You turn the vehicle a little bit, the stones are rolled into the track, and if you get too many going in at once you break the track."

The men of the Royal Canadian Engineers, lacking the specialized equipment needed to deal with the beach obstacles, toiled with incredible bravery and suffered horrendous losses as they tried desperately to clear a path for the armor. Of the 314 engineers landed, 186 were killed or wounded.

At the eastern end of the beach, the seawall was found to be only a few feet high, allowing five Churchills to claw their way onto the promenade, immediately drawing substantial fire away from the men on the beaches.

The tanks provided much needed fire support to the small bands of Canadians fighting in Dieppe, but they found themselves hemmed in by concrete roadblocks at the entrances to the town. Left to prowl the beachfront like caged lions, the tanks, all armaments blazing, were a potent force that broke down numerous strongpoints until German reinforcements with antitank guns reclaimed the initiative. The Germans launched

coordinated attacks that would eventually bottle up or overwhelm those Canadian forces still fighting within the town, while pushing the rest back to the beach.

While Supermarine Spitfire fighters circled tirelessly above the beaches, Hurricanes continuously came in across the wave tops to strafe and bomb the German positions with unbridled fury.

As the morning wore on, however, it was clear that the main landings at Dieppe had disintegrated. While nothing seemed to be going right for the Allies, very little seemed to be going wrong for the Germans. They appeared to have the situation well in hand. The forlorn body of men on the beachfront, unable to mount a serious challenge to the surrounding German defenses, could do little more than maintain static gunfire exchanges, tend to the wounded, and await death, capture, or evacuation.

Due to faulty communications and heavy casualties among signal groups, General Roberts was still ignorant of the true situation or the magnitude of the losses. Hampered by smoke that completely obscured the beach from view, he tried to coordinate his forces based on fragmented and sometimes misleading radio intercepts.

Believing that the Essex-Scottish and Hamiltons had successfully fought their way into the town and that the Canadians held the western section of the front, he committed his floating reserve, Les Fusiliers Mont-Royal, to reinforce the Essex-Scottish and allow them, with tank support, to push inland.

At 0700 hours, the famous Les Fusiliers Mont-Royals made their way onto Red Beach only to meet appalling fire as soon as they came within range. Further problems arose from tidal influences that spread the landing craft and scattered the men along the beach instead of concentrating them behind the Essex Scottish as planned. The reinforcement was ineffectual, with most of the men quickly seeking refuge beneath the seawall alongside the various units of the Essex-Scottish and Hamiltons. The landing of the Fusiliers ultimately meant that instead of two battalions being trapped on the beach, there were now three.

General Roberts, still oblivious to the real course of events and under the mistaken belief that large raiding parties were moving into Dieppe, decided that the harbor was still a viable objective. Earlier attempts to capture the landing barges had been driven off by German shore defenses, which freed up the Royal Marine A Commando for a new assignment. Landing on White Beach, they were to work their way through Dieppe to launch a flanking attack against German emplacements situated along the east cliffs.

National Archives

At 0830 hours, the marines began to move toward the beach but were set upon by the most murderous concentration of fire yet seen that dreadful morning. From his landing craft, the Royal Marines' commanding officer, Lt. Col. J.P. Phillips, could quickly see that the Dieppe beaches were completely blanketed with fire and that attempting to land would be suicide. Standing up in the small forward deck of his craft, exposed to the enemy, he signaled the landing craft following him to turn back. Moments later he was cut down, but not before six vessels veered off, saving 200 men from certain disaster.

With ruthless efficiency, German machine guns, mortars, captured French 75s, and German 88s firing over open sights were tearing the life out of the attack, but it was not until 0900 hours that General Roberts became aware of the full extent of the calamity. With barely any of its objectives having been achieved, Operation Jubilee had collapsed. It was now of the highest priority to save as many troops as possible.

Planning for the original withdrawal had anticipated victory and was to be phased in over a three-hour period. In the shambles of the Dieppe beaches, these elaborate plans had been rendered useless. At approximately 1100 hours, with the dis-

ABOVE: A wounded Canadian soldier is disembarked from a Polish destroyer after taking part in the landing actions. LEFT: There were some successes. Here, a bespectacled German soldier, taken prisoner by the Canadians, is escorted to a landing craft to be taken back to England.

Both: National Archives

tant shoreline a cauldron of smoke and flame, the crews of the landing craft steeled themselves for the run into the beaches. Every craft possessing guns and ammunition joined in close support as destroyers formed a line to follow the rescue.

With the last tragic chapter of that terrible morning about to commence, formations of German bombers supported by fighters broke through from the south to add to the misery and chaos. This was the first time the Luftwaffe appeared in force over Dieppe, and Spitfires wasted no time trying to break up the German bomber formations. The sky above the beaches was soon filled with hundreds of aircraft engaged in furious combat.

Along the shallows, meanwhile, landing craft and other rescue vessels were desperately loading as many men as they could while destroyers, guns blazing furiously, continuously streamed up and down the length of the beaches trying to suppress the German fire.

The unspeakable carnage, terror, and turmoil at Dieppe defied description. German guns continued to methodically pound the men without respite. Focke Wulf Fw-190 fighters strafed the crammed open decks of the landing craft, and Luftwaffe bombers from airfields as far away as Belgium and the Netherlands plastered the beaches.

The noise of gunfire, bombs, and shelling was deafening; a man could barely be heard over the frightful din.

Despite the unimaginable horror being played out during those last desperate hours, ordinary soldiers committed deeds of extraordinary heroism and self-sacrifice. Many repeatedly went back and forth through a hail of fire to retrieve wounded comrades; naval personnel held their vessels in close, absorbing incredible punishment as bullets raked many from stem to stern; and Air Rescue launches weaved among the water spouts to pick up downed airmen. On shore, gallant rear guards fought against overwhelming odds, buying time for those on the beaches, while the RAF crew, some on their fourth sortie of the morning, continuously attacked the enemy positions.

With the Germans maneuvering to seal off and secure the entire sector, the tanks on the promenade fell back to form the core of the beach defense. Taking the role of self-propelled guns, they valiantly provided fire support on Red and White Beaches until the bitter end, with barely a handful of crewman making it back to England.

Finally, with the likelihood of more casualties than survivors coming off the beaches, further evacuation attempts were abandoned. In the mayhem, many troops, desperate not to be left behind, tried to swim out to the departing craft, but it was too late. Those who remained at Dieppe had no alternative but to surrender.

By early afternoon on August 19, the battered ships were finally homeward bound, leaving behind beaches strewn with burning tanks, destroyed landing craft, and the corpses of nearly 1,000 comrades. A shattered General Roberts dispatched a message to the Headquarters of the 1st Canadian Corps which read, “Very heavy casualties in men and ships. Did everything possible to get men off but in order to get any home had

to come to sad decision to abandon remainder. This was joint decision by Force Commanders. Obviously operation completely lacked surprise."

As a raid, Operation Jubilee had been a dismal failure. The attempt to seize Dieppe had failed on the beaches and surrounding shallows and died. The enemy defenses had been tested, but overall the Germans had not been seriously alarmed. They did, however, undertake a major review of their western coastline defenses and withdraw a number of divisions from the Eastern Front.

While apparently no one foresaw the tragic consequences of Dieppe at the time, the long-term Allied view was that many valuable lessons had been learned and it was certainly realized that capturing a German-held port by direct assault was nearly impossible. For the D-day landings in 1944, the Allies developed and transported their own artificial harbors, code-named Mulberry.

As vital as this information may have been for the future, there was no escaping the horrendous cost borne by the Canadians and the handful of American Rangers who accompanied them. It was six days before the causalities could be assessed, and in the final count the total military losses amounted to well over 4,000 officers and men killed, wounded, or missing.

Of the seven major Canadian units involved, only one, Les Fusiliers Mont-Royal, returned to England with its commanding officer. Seventy percent of the Canadian raiders did not return at all. The Royal Navy suffered over 550 casualties and lost 34 ships, while the RAF, which had flown nearly 3,000 operational sorties over Dieppe, lost more than 150 aircrew and 106 aircraft, of which 88 were Spitfires.

Three Victoria Crosses were awarded for actions during the Dieppe raid. Captain Pat Porteous of No. 4 Commando, Royal Marines, received the medal for saving an NCO during the raid on Varengeville, and Lt. Col. Merritt received it for his leadership at the bridge over the Scie. The third went to a padre, Captain J.W. Foote, chaplain of the Royal Hamilton Light Infantry, who worked tirelessly and courageously carrying men from the beach to the cover of the landing craft during the evacuation.

ABOVE: Knocked-out tanks, dead bodies, and burning landing craft litter the shoreline. Dieppe provided a costly "lesson learned" on how not to invade an enemy-held coast. OPPOSITE: Scene of carnage: Dead Canadians lie sprawled around their destroyed equipment on the rocky beach at Dieppe. Over 4,000 of the attackers were either killed, wounded, missing, or taken prisoner, making it one of the Allies' worst debacles.

What went wrong at Dieppe is a matter of much conjecture, even today. Postwar postmortems have generally accepted that the military plan was too ambitious, too inflexible, and expected too much of the troops. The reliance on tactical surprise over such a wide area was deemed overly optimistic, and the dependence on timing for the various operations left no room for error.

In general, communications were found to be completely inadequate and intelligence was poor, particularly information on the German defenses at the assault points, which was hopelessly inaccurate. In command circles it was believed that the Germans had been warned of the raid by French traitors and were therefore alert and ready.

It should be noted, however, that German reconnaissance aircraft had observed the steady build-up of ships and materiels prior to the operation and that the Wehrmacht was alert to the tidal periods suitable for an amphibious assault just as the British had been. To this end, they routinely maintained a state of readiness during these times and regularly brought up reinforcements. August 19, 1942, fell within one of these periods of heightened alert.

The implication that the nefarious work of French traitors rather than inept planning by the British had led to the disaster at Dieppe has been the topic of debate for decades. However, many believe that the Combined Operations Staff, who had planned and briefed the front-line officers on the raid, should have shouldered much of the responsibility for the failure at Dieppe.

In the end, it was Maj. Gen. Roberts who became the scapegoat. Shifted sideways, he was placed in charge of Canadian reinforcements and would never again command troops in the field.

Cruelly, on August 19 for years afterward, Roberts would receive an anonymous package in the mail containing a small piece of stale cake—a bitter reminder of his comment at the preraid briefing that the Dieppe operation would be a "piece of cake." □

BY CHRISTOPHER MISKIMON

TEN DAYS AT Aschaffenburg

Determined German resistance led to the virtual destruction of this Bavarian city in 1945.

Following six days of fighting to drive German forces from the town of Aschaffenberg, American soldiers march through its ruins. RIGHT: Conferring with Lieutenant Colonel Everett Duval, Major General Robert Frederick (right) commanded the 45th Infantry Division.

As the winter of 1944-1945 slowly gave way to spring, the combined Allied armies ground their way into Germany. Years of fighting in Europe, North Africa, Eastern Europe, and the Mediterranean had culminated in these final months of bitter loss, surrender, and annihilation for the Nazi Reich.

In the East, Soviet armies approached Berlin itself while Hitler stood over a map in his bunker, issuing orders to armies that

no longer existed. In the West, the Allies had crossed the Rhine and were moving into the German heartland. Large numbers of German troops, once the masters of Europe, now bowed to the inevitable and surrendered en masse, while many civilians adorned their towns with white flags, bedsheets, tablecloths, anything that would spare their towns the destruction the advancing Allied troops could mete out. The pace of this advance was often so fast that reconnaissance units and advance forces captured entire towns and villages with hardly a shot fired. At times it resembled the lightning movement across France in the days after the breakout from Normandy.

This was not always the case, however. The Nazis could still put up a spirited, dogged, and determined resistance, making Allied troops pay for every foot of the Fatherland they seized. One such place was Aschaffenburg, a city of about 38,000 nestled on the east bank of a large bend in the Main River some 40 miles from Frankfurt. Here, a German major named Lamberth, using a motley collec-

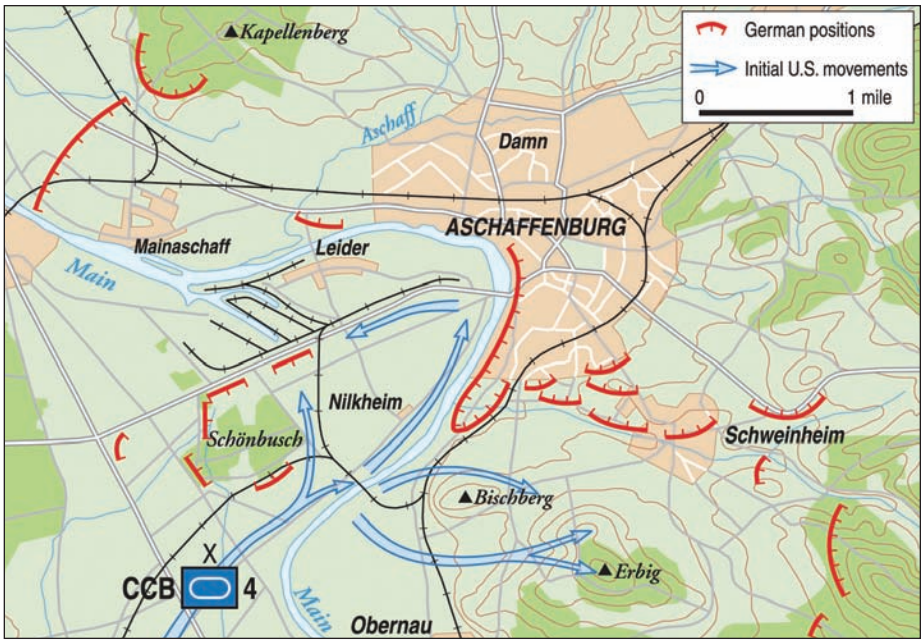
tion of SS troops, replacements, convalescing wounded, officer candidates, and civilians, would turn the city into a fortress of resistance. Unexpectedly, for over a week, they held off American efforts to take it. In the end the city would be all but destroyed, with thousands of dead and wounded, pounded by the combined arms of the U.S. 45th Infantry Division.

The history of Aschaffenburg dates to Roman times. By the time of the Third Reich, it was a major hub for water and rail transport, and the city also boasted extensive industry. In addition, there was a substantial military presence, as Aschaffenburg was home to the 106th Infantry Regiment. Engineer and artillery units were also stationed there, along with a reserve officer's training school. Finally, a large number of wounded soldiers were recovering in local hospitals from either battle wounds or illnesses, awaiting return to their units.

The terrain in and around the town favored the defender. To the north, south, and east are the wooded foothills of the Spessart Mountains, dotted with smaller towns and villages. The Main River, while not particularly large, would be a fearsome obstacle to cross if the attackers were under fire. The city itself had rail lines and two roads converging into it.

Two large buildings dominated the city, the Stiftskirche, a 10th-century church that sat on the city's highest point, and the Schloss Johannesburg, a stout 17th-century palace that sat nearly in the city center close to the riverfront. The military barracks were clustered mostly in the southeast portion of Aschaffenburg, with training areas farther south. These barracks, along with a military warehouse nearby, were stoutly constructed, and several would become strongpoints during the fight. With the river to one side and mostly high ground surrounding it, Aschaffenburg sat in a depression with a number of small towns and villages in the immediate vicinity.

The German forces available for the defense were a disparate collection representing the qualitative mix of troops avail-



ABOVE: American armored and then infantry units encountered stiff resistance at Aschaffenburg, where soldiers of the German Army and the Volkssturm home-defense forces opposed the capture of the city for nearly a week. OPPOSITE: Cautiously working their way through the debris of the shattered town, American soldiers slowly take control of Aschaffenberg.

able to the Third Reich this late in the war. Since Aschaffenburg was home to the 106th Infantry Regiment, its small replacement and training unit was in the city. Added to this was a group of officer candidates undergoing training in the area. Unlike the U.S. system wherein men with a certain educational level were admitted to officer training regardless of experience, many of the German candidates were men with up to three years of military experience.

The soldiers in the convalescent hospitals, while perhaps not up to full fighting condition, were also combat experienced. The 9th Engineer Battalion and 15th Artillery Regiment with a few guns were present to support the defenders. These, along with a small SS contingent, represented the better troops available. There were no tanks, and only a handful of artillery, mortars, and Nebelwerfer rocket launchers were on hand.

Reinforcing these men were seven companies of Volkssturm, essentially militia troops with limited training and equipment. Nevertheless they would fight. Last, the civilian populace played its part in the battle as well. Shortly after contact with the advancing Americans, the city leadership ordered the elderly, women, and children out of the city, stating that anyone who remained would be expected to take up arms or assist in the fight. Those who stayed had no choice but to participate to some degree. While very few actually fought, many more tended casualties, carried supplies, and worked as runners during the coming fight. The Americans would later report fighting with numbers of civilians.

About 5,000 men formed KampfKommando Aschaffenburg, a battle group designation pulling all the city's units under one command. This label came directly from Hitler, establishing the city as a fortress requiring a supreme effort in its defense. Reinforcements received during the fighting would bring the total strength of the garrison to some 8,500.

The man selected to lead this battle group was Major Emil Lamberth, a World War I veteran. He had arrived in the city to take over the 9th Engineers in June 1944. On January 30, 1945, he was appointed senior garrison commander. He had assisted in planning the defenses of the city, tying them in with the larger defense line along the Main River. On March 5, he was appointed combat group commander and swore an oath to

defend the city, placing himself under Hitler's direct command. A small SS delegation came to Aschaffenburg to oversee the diligence of the battle group's effort. Despite Nazi Party interference, Lamberth was able to pass muster with his defensive scheme.

The overall plan was designed to be a link in the chain of defenses along the Main. A number of positions were created along the river's east bank, using the Main itself as a natural obstacle. A line of bunkers had been created for this defensive belt, and the Aschaffenburg garrison would make use of some of them. Additional strongpoints were set up both to establish a perimeter around the city and to create a defense in depth.

Several of the outlying towns, such as Schweinheim and Mainaschaff, would be heavily defended. In Aschaffenburg itself, the waterfront and the central section around the Schloss Johannesburg were fortified. In truth, most of the town was composed of stone or masonry buildings packed closely together with the relatively narrow streets common to older European cities. On their own these buildings provided good cover that was resistant to small arms and, to a limited extent, tank and artillery fire. The bridges on the Main would naturally be blown.

The main German unit outside the city was the 36th Volksgrenadier Division, with a strength of perhaps 6,500, only a third of them trained. It had three half-strength battalions of artillery and two assault guns.

The Aschaffenburg command would have been tied more firmly into the overall defense of the region, but time ran out when the Americans arrived. On Palm Sunday, March 25, at 9 AM, Lamberth received word that the Americans were only nine miles west of the city at Babenhausen. By noon sentries on duty in the towers of the Schloss Johannesburg sighted the lead U.S. elements. Combat Command B (CCB) of the 4th Armored Division was leading the way for General George S. Patton's Third Army to cross the Main River while the bridges still stood.

Commanded by the now-famous Colonel Creighton Abrams, CCB plunged straight down the road from Babenhausen to Aschaffenburg toward the primary road bridge over the river. This bridge crossed the Main directly into the city from an area on the west bank known as the Nilkheim salient, which was named for the town at its southern end.

CCB reached the bridge and immediately tried to cross. Intense German small-arms fire poured into the Americans, but they pressed on. The lead U.S. tank nosed onto the span and started across. Instantly it took numerous hits; antitank rounds, hand-held *panzerfausts*, and mortar fire all pummeled the hapless Sherman, and it exploded. Seconds later, the Germans demolished the bridge, sending the span and the Sherman into the river below.

CCB pulled back from the bridge toward Nilkheim. As this was happening, the commander of the 10th Armored Infantry Battalion, Lt. Col. Harold Cohen, received word from his reconnaissance platoon that a railroad bridge south of Nilkheim was still standing as well. Though prepared for demolition, the Germans had failed to defend it as heavily as the road bridge. Cohen ordered his scouts to seize the bridge, grabbing any armored vehicles nearby for fire support.

Despite taking heavy fire, the scouts rushed across and quickly started disabling the aerial bombs mounted on the bridge, pushing them into the river and cutting any wires they found. Cohen then sent three of his infantry companies across to form a bridgehead. The infantry's half-tracks and a few tanks from Abrams's 37th Tank Battalion quickly followed. Within a mere half hour of the German sentries spotting them, CCB had crossed the river and was fighting its way up two hills known as the Erbig and the Bischberg south of Schweinheim. It had all happened so fast that the Germans had not had time to destroy the bridge as planned. The German officer in charge of the bridge later

claimed there were no detonators for the explosives on the span.

Trying to keep its momentum going, CCB tried to push into Schweinheim in mid-afternoon. Defending it were several units composed of replacement troops and officer candidates, well dug-in and with an engineer platoon attached. American tanks and infantry moved across open fields toward the town and stiff resistance. In places the combat became hand to hand. Several tanks were lost before the Americans pulled back to the hills. Some U.S. troops had moved north along the river to the outskirts of Aschaffenburg, while others mopped up isolated German pockets in the area.

As the first day of the battle ended, the Americans had seized a valuable bridgehead but had failed to get enough forces across to exploit it before the Germans began reinforcing. At midnight a boundary change was to take place with the lines delineating the responsibility of the local American units changing. That boundary line shifted north, and Aschaffenburg would then be in the zone of the 45th Infantry Division, a unit of the XV Corps of the U.S. Seventh Army. Lacking sufficient infantry for an urban operation, 4th Armored prepared to hand over the battle. German reinforcements continued to arrive, and Lamberth strengthened the defenses in Schweinheim and to the east of the American bridgehead.

Then began a strange episode, known generally as the Hammelburg Raid. Although it was separate from the battle of Aschaffenburg, it certainly influenced it. General Patton dispatched a task force of tanks, armored infantry, and artillery past Aschaffenburg toward the town of Hammelburg, the location of a prison camp holding Allied officers, including Patton's son-in-law, Lt. Col. John Waters, who had been captured in Tunisia some two years earlier.

Much of March 26 was spent preparing a force of 294 men, commanded by Captain Abraham Baum, to break through enemy lines, advance to Hammelburg, liberate the camp, and bring back the POWs.

ABOVE: Walking past armored vehicles that have momentarily paused, American soldiers march down the road toward their next objective. The fight for Aschaffenberg was bitter and, in the end, futile for the Germans. OPPOSITE: An American Sherman tank fires on a building near Aschaffenberg where German snipers are suspected of hiding.

A 30-minute artillery barrage preceded the attack, which had to move through the southern end of heavily defended Schweinheim to reach the road to Hammelburg. Baum and his men did not get through the town until midnight, but they pushed on. Once through the main defensive line, they advanced rapidly toward the POW camp, shooting up several trains carrying reinforcements and supplies along the way. Baum's force reached the camp, where there were far too many POWs to evacuate, tried to fight its way back with a portion of them, and was essentially hunted down and all its men killed or captured.

The initial reports of an American column penetrating so deeply caused confusion among German commanders, who feared a U.S. breakthrough. Additional reinforcements were sent to the area. Much effort was spent over the next several days containing and capturing Baum's force, diverting some attention away from Aschaffenburg itself. Still, several company- and battalion-sized training units began to arrive around Aschaffenburg to reinforce the defenders.

With a portion of its strength now detached for the raid, CCB withdrew to the high ground south of the city. Even the hard-won foothold in Schweinheim was abandoned. Early the next morning, March 27, CCB started withdrawing across the Main, being replaced in the bridgehead by the 1st Battalion, 104th Infantry Regiment of the 26th Division, which had been attached to the 4th Armored.

With the area now in the zone of the XV Corps, the 45th Infantry Division was ordered to Aschaffenburg. The 45th, commanded by the former head of the First Special Service Force, Maj. Gen. Robert Frederick, was a veteran force that had been in combat since the invasion of Sicily in 1943.

Frederick ordered the 157th Regiment, commanded by Colonel Walter P. O'Brien, to take the city. The regiment's third battalion, commanded by Lt. Col. Felix Sparks, was ordered to lead the way and occupy the hills in the bridgehead. The men of the third battalion, indeed the entire regiment, were told the town had been cleared by the Third Army, which of course it had not. Sparks received a cryptic warning about not firing on any American tanks he saw to his front but otherwise was not informed about Captain Baum's task force or its mission. Sparks would not even know of the raid until years later.

The battalion reached the railroad bridge by 2 PM on March 27 and began to cross. Mortar and rifle fire immediately began to fall upon them. Sparks found a company

of reconnaissance troops equipped with jeeps and armored cars guarding the bridge. The lieutenant commanding the recon troops told Sparks that his orders had been to hold the bridge until relieved. Sparks relieved him and sent his battalion across the river into defensive positions.

Two attacks from Schweinheim were beaten back. From the high ground, Sparks looked through his binoculars at Schweinheim and Aschaffenburg; the streets were devoid of movement, and no white flags or bedsheets hung from the windows.

Lieutenant Colonel Sparks recalled, "I got information from a civilian that there were several thousand Germans in the town. I radioed that information back to the division, and I don't think anybody believed me." The area was not secured, and the 157th would have to fight for it.

Two rifle companies supported by an attached tank destroyer platoon and an artillery battery from the 158th Field Artillery Battalion were sent into Schweinheim. This attack succeeded in taking a few prisoners and regaining the lost foothold vacated by CCB of the 4th Armored. On the German side, efforts continued at organizing an assortment of units into a cohesive force. The commander of the German 36th Volksgrenadier Division began planning a counterattack to throw the Americans back across the Main using what infantry and artillery were available.

On the morning of the fourth day of the battle, the rest of the 157th Regiment arrived and began crossing the river. The only enemy activity was a series of Me-109 sorties against the bridge area. A plan was devised to take Aschaffenburg using the three battalions of the regiment with its attached supporting units: the 158th Field Artillery Battalion equipped with 105mm howitzers, Company A of the 191st Tank Battalion, Company B of the 645th Tank Destroyer Battalion, and Company C of the 2nd Chemical Mortar Battalion.

Sparks's 3/157th began assembling east of Erbig Hill, preparing for an attack on Schweinheim. The 2/157th, under Major Gus Heilman, would attack to the north along the river into Aschaffenburg itself. Company F would move north along the riverbank with its right flank protected by Company E, while the battalion's Company G trailed in reserve. This unit would receive some additional support from Company D of the 191st Tank Battalion equipped with the M-5 Stuart light tank. Lt. Col. Ralph Krieger's 1/157th would take up position between the two other battalions; it was to essentially sit in reserve until Schweinheim was secure and then take the ground northwest of it.

The attack began with an artillery preparation. Sparks's troops attacked into the eastern end of Schweinheim, I Company on the left, K Company on the right, L Company in reserve. German resistance was immediate and fierce. Despite the heavy artillery fire and air support the Americans threw at the town, only the outskirts of Schweinheim were in U.S. hands when the attack was halted at nightfall.

The 2/157th started north toward

Aschaffenburg and likewise met heavy German resistance from the outset. Despite punishing machine-gun and *panzerfaust* fire, Company F pushed forward some two kilometers before it too stopped for the night. Company C of the 1/157th moved into the gap between the 2nd and 3rd Battalions to fill the vulnerable separation between them. The day's advance had been bitterly contested by the German defenders, and overall there had been minimal progress. German mortar fire fell on the Americans, prompting them to reply with counterbattery fire throughout the night of March 28.

During the day, soldiers of the 1/157th found a warehouse full of liquor. Apparently vintages confiscated from all over Europe had been brought to Aschaffenburg for storage. This bounty was quickly distributed around the regiment, and the unit's unofficial history includes a recipe for a drink the troops concocted using their spoils of war. Called the "157th Zombie," it consisted of "¼ Cognac, ¼ Benedictine, ¼ Contreau and ¼ of any other bottle handy, followed by a champagne chaser." The history went on to note, "… many days passed before some canteens carried anything so tasteless as water."

After combat engineers laid planking to improve the railroad bridge, the other regiments of the 45th, the 179th and 180th, crossed the Main and headed south to link up with the 3rd Infantry Division. The 179th tied in with the 157th's flank, while the 180th continued southward to make contact with the 3rd Division.

As the battle entered its fifth day, the struggle for Aschaffenburg focused around the southern end of the city, including Schweinheim. The fight centered on the advance of the 157th Regiment. The high ground between Schweinheim and Aschaffenburg had to be kept out of American hands as long as possible. The airstrikes and artillery bombardment had already reduced portions of both areas to rubble.

The German officer candidates positioned themselves in various strongpoints throughout Schweinheim. Many of these

ABOVE: The body of a German lieutenant, convicted of desertion and hanged by his own troops, was found in Aschaffenberg by the Americans. OPPOSITE: Crouching behind a stone wall for protection, an American infantryman advances along a dirt path at Aschaffenberg. The rear of the tank this soldier is accompanying may be seen on the road to the right.

fortified houses had been connected by a series of underground tunnels through which the Germans would reoccupy positions already cleared by the Americans. This would come as a nasty surprise to GIs trying to clear the next house, only to be fired on from the last one taken. Snipers used their knowledge of the town to constantly infiltrate into the American rear areas.

While these clever tactics did greatly hamper the U.S. advance, they also contributed to the massive destruction Aschaffenburg eventually suffered. The veteran troops of the U.S. 45th Division, not having expected to fight here in the first place and fully aware of the risks of urban combat, did not hesitate to use every bit of firepower at their disposal to blast the Germans out of their positions. The infantrymen of the 157th knew how to coordinate with tanks, artillery, and air support after almost two years of fighting; now every bit of that knowledge would come into play at Aschaffenburg.

At 7:30 AM on March 29, both attacking American battalions resumed their assaults. The 2/157th once again ran into immediate and heavy resistance and had to call up Sherman tanks to pour direct fire into the fortified houses. In Schweinheim, Sparks attacked with two companies advancing side by side, the third in reserve. Company C, on the left flank, took an hour to reach the first street of the town as bitter house-to-house fighting slowed the advance to a crawl.

Determined resistance caused the Americans to pull back and dig in while artillery and mortar fire softened the German positions. To try and break the enemy line, O'Brien sent his reserve battalion against the center of the German line. The resistance there proved just as stiff as the rest of the line, and the attack gained little.

In Schweinheim, Sparks's battalion continued to push forward block by block. To assist this effort, all available artillery was concentrated on the town. Tanks and tank destroyers fired directly into enemy strongpoints. Buildings had to be cleared one at a time. The tanks and tank destroyers directed their fire on a targeted building, giving the infantry a chance to storm it while the Germans inside were pinned. In the confines of the German town, vicious combat was the rule. At short range, two Shermans of Company A, 191st Tank Battalion were lost to antitank fire.

Approximately 3,000 civilians were still in the town, many of them casualties whom

the German medical staff was hard-pressed to care for. Major Lamberth ordered an officer from among the convalescent soldiers to be hanged when he was accused of desertion. The officer, a Leutnant Heymann, had been told on March 26 to register with the local command so he could be assigned to the defense. Later that day he was arrested for not having registered and for allegedly making an English sign found hidden in a basement. He was court-martialed, convicted, and on the 29th, taken into the street in front of a café, and hanged from a lamppost. A sign calling him a coward was placed on the body, and the corpse was left hanging.

Just after midnight on March 29, the counterattack by the 36th Volksgrenadier was set in motion. Aimed at the high ground around Erbig Hill, the 165th Grenadier Regiment broke through the American perimeter on the south and east sides of the bridgehead. Four hours later they had reached the area between the Erbig and Bischberg Hills while the 87th Grenadier Regiment had penetrated on the southern end of the perimeter. Along with a battalion of the 179th Regiment, heavy counterattacks by the 157th, again using coordinated tank and artillery support, drove back the Germans to their starting points by noon.

The German position was becoming untenable as the divisions around Aschaffenburg were steadily pushed back, leaving the city further isolated. By the afternoon, the German LXXXII Corps conceded and issued orders for its units to withdraw, leaving Aschaffenburg cut off.

To complete this isolation, General Frederick ordered his 179th and 180th Regiments to push to the east and position themselves to flank Aschaffenburg. While they did so, the 157th continued to slowly gain ground into Schweinheim and the southern outskirts of the city. The defenders launched a series of five counterattacks, each company sized. Although the Americans took some casualties, they repulsed each of them while inflicting serious and unrecoverable losses on the enemy.

In Schweinheim, 3/157th was able to cut the town in two, with small pockets of defenders remaining in the northeast and northwest corners. In an attempt to flank the German line, two companies (A and B) went around Schweinheim to attack the

The lead U.S. tank nosed onto the [bridge] and started across. Instantly it took numerous hits; antitank rounds, hand-held *panzerfausts*, and mortar fire all pummeled the hapless Sherman, and it exploded. Seconds later, the Germans demolished the bridge, sending the span and the Sherman into the river below.

high ground to the southeast. Though under fire, they were able to advance 1,000 yards. The American commanders were now seeing that a direct assault would not work and that enveloping their enemy was the better option. All the German counterattacks had failed, and now they could do little but grimly hold on and inflict the maximum possible loss on the attackers.

Again the 45th Division maximized the firepower of its support assets. More armor from the 191st Tank Battalion was brought into play. The Americans also brought in additional artillery. The four artillery battalions of the neighboring 44th Division were attached to the 45th. Five corps-level battalions, some with massive 8-inch howitzers, were likewise given to the 45th. So much artillery now pounded the city that some Germans likened it to machine-gun fire. Overhead, P-47 Thunderbolts of the 64th Fighter Wing began pelting Aschaffenburg with napalm, rockets, and .50-caliber bullets.

The defenders, now on their own, lacked the troops or artillery to either retake or destroy the bridge, and a sortie by a pair of Messerschmitt Me-262 jets failed to down it. After dark on March 30, four German Navy frogmen tried to place an explosive charge on the bridge by floating down the Main from Aschaffenburg. Mortar fire was called down upon them, killing all four frogmen.

On the last day of March, the envelopment of the city continued. While 2/157th continued to press into the southern end of Aschaffenburg and 3/157th mopped up in Schweinheim, 1/157th struck north along the city's eastern side. The 179th Regiment, to the right flank of the 157th, pressed north as well to help complete the envelopment. In the air the P-47s reappeared and continued to rain destruction on the garrison. If the planes were not overhead, massed artillery, often firing time-on-target missions, pounded the remaining buildings into rubble. The enemy headquarters in the Schloss Johannesburg was hit repeatedly. White phosphorous rounds from the 4.2-inch mortars started fires here and there, while self-propelled guns were brought up to support the GIs directly.

The Germans responded with intense mortar fire—one barrage dropped 200 rounds in 15 minutes—and continued sniping and infiltrating back into lost ground. Near Schweinheim, two tanks—one identified as a German Mark VI Tiger and the other a captured Sherman hastily painted with German crosses and the word *beutepanzer* (captured tank)—fired on the Americans, halting their advance. An M36 tank destroyer of the 645th destroyed the Sherman with its 90mm gun. The body of a German crewman hung out of one of the hull hatches, burned and blackened. The Mark VI was quickly destroyed as well.

At noon the 157th's adjutant, Captain Anse Speairs, flew over Schloss Johannesburg and dropped a message. This ultimatum demanded the garrison's surrender, guaranteed observance of the Geneva Conventions, and threatened to level the town if the Germans continued the fight. The note ended ominously, "The fate of Aschaffenburg is in your hands." Additional surrender flyers were dropped around the city.

In the afternoon American attention focused on the barracks just north of Schweinheim. By nightfall Company K of 3/157th had won a small foothold in the Artillerie Kaserne nearest Schweinheim, but otherwise let fire support begin the process of wearing down the entrenched enemy.

Easter Sunday, April 1, 1945, was not a day of peace in Aschaffenburg. The 1/157th and 3/179th continued their envelopment by seizing the surrounding towns of Gailbach, Halbach, Goldbach, and Hoesbach. The first two towns fell quickly; the last two held out until the next afternoon. This move completed the encirclement.

To exploit this flank, the barracks area had to be taken. Sparks's Company K, 3/157th attacked again at 1 PM following six hours of artillery preparation. Small-arms fire from some 100 convalescents drove the attack back. Now tanks moved up and fired white phosphorous shells into the enemy positions. The GIs stormed the building and took it in hard room-to-room combat. The next enemy position, the Bois-Brule Kaserne across the street, was taken the same way. Within four hours both were in American hands. The fighting was so intense that every defender of the second building was wounded.

The last barracks to be taken was the Pionier Kaserne, northwest of the previous two and much larger. This mission fell to the 2/157th, which planned ahead and took note of the fight for the previous two strongpoints. Besides the usual artillery barrage, two M12 self-propelled 155mm howitzers were brought up to a hill overlooking the target. They fired more than 100 rounds directly into the Kaserne while the American troops struggled to take it. By day's end, half of it had fallen.

The incessant pounding of the artillery, air support, mortars, and armor were now taking their toll on the Germans. While many of their positions were so well fortified that they were relatively safe from the physical effects of the fire, it was now affecting them mentally, depriving them of rest and making movement of supplies hazardous.

The last full day of fighting came on April 2. Resistance continued, but it was no longer organized. The 157th's sister regiments finished seizing the surrounding towns and established additional roadblocks. After mopping-up operations, 1/157th moved north and linked up with the 324th Infantry Regiment of the 44th Division, which had moved into position north of Aschaffenburg. Late in the morning most of the German defenders of the Pionier Kaserne pulled out, leaving only a few strongpoints that fell by mid-afternoon.

As night fell, 2/157th had fought its way into the city's heart while 3/157th broke into the eastern suburbs, occupying a wooded park that extended into Aschaffenburg's center. The artillery and air strikes continued as more and more Germans surrendered. Over 1,100 were captured on April 2. The remaining defenders clustered around the Schloss.

Fortunately, Major Lamberth had decided to end what was now a hopeless battle. At 7 AM he sent a Volkssturm officer with a captured American to seek terms. Colonel O'Brien refused to negotiate and demanded Lamberth surrender by 8 AM or the fighting would continue.

ABOVE: Two wounded soldiers, one American and one German, are evacuated from Aschaffenberg in a jeep speeding toward a field hospital. OPPOSITE: Sherman tanks train their guns on sniper positions at Aschaffenberg. German snipers were capable of holding up large formations of American troops unable to leave cover.

On the American side, unaware of the possible surrender, GIs readied artillery, tanks, and planes. O'Brien sent two German-speaking lieutenants with the surrender party to make the message clear. Lamberth agreed to capitulate but would not personally surrender to an inferior-ranking officer. Lt. Col. Sparks was the nearest ranking officer, so O'Brien sent him to the Schloss.

As Sparks recalled, "So I got word and I was a few blocks away. So I drove up there in my jeep and got out, went up to the building, and told this major, 'I'm a Colonel and now I want you to surrender.' So this major gave an order, and all of his officers came out of the building single file. They took off their pistol belts and dropped them at my feet. I knew there were still some strongpoints the Germans had left, so I told the major that he had to tell them to give up too. He said, 'all right.' So I put him in a jeep with me and we drove around and he pointed out where the strongpoints were and I'd make him go up and yell to them in German to surrender. There were three or four of them [strongpoints]. And that was the end of Aschaffenburg." Sparks recalled seeing the body of the German lieutenant still hanging from its lamppost. The surrender took place at 9 AM. With the city declared cleared by 1 PM, the weary troops of the 157th Regiment moved to the towns of Goldbach and Hoesbach to reorganize.

The fate of Aschaffenburg was the destruction of 70 percent of the city, lost in a determined but wasted struggle. Of the 8,500 defenders, 1,600 were wounded or killed and 3,500 more became prisoners of war. The Americans suffered around 300 wounded and 20 killed. As the unofficial history of the 157th stated, "…the city itself now lay shattered as an example of the futility of resistance. It had been pounded to rubble, its occupants had been slaughtered, and those who survived were punch drunk from the day and night hammering by air, artillery and infantry." □

BY BLAINE TAYLOR

Was There Justice at Nuremberg?

"The moral is, *'Don't lose a war!'*"
–German Reich Marshal Hermann Göring

After Imperial Germany lost the Great War (1914-1918), the Treaty of Versailles punished her severely in terms of ruinous restitution payments to the victors, economic sanctions, the loss of territory and colonies, the forced abdication of Kaiser Wilhelm II, and the heavy restrictions imposed on her armed forces. Virtually all historians agree that it was these onerous conditions that led to the rise of Adolf Hitler and the start of a second world war within a generation.

The victorious World War II Allies also severely punished Germany and her surviving wartime leaders for starting the conflict that ravaged Europe and killed millions. In a move unprecedented in legal history, a series of war-crimes tribunals was established a few months after the end of the war to fix blame on certain individuals who were held responsible for the heinous acts of their government.

The following is a recounting of those tribunals and their outcomes.

After the world's most destructive war, a handful of Nazis who conducted it went on trial for their lives in a series of war-crimes tribunals.

National Archives

Twenty-two members of the Nazi regime on trial at Nuremberg for their part in war crimes. This, the first of 13 tribunals, lasted 11 months—from November 1945 until October 1946. Ten men were hanged; three committed suicide in prison.

Navy History and Heritage Command

Hermann Göring (left), former head of the German air force and high Nazi government official, is questioned by a lawyer as judges from four victorious Allied nations listen to the testimony.

Even at the height of World War II, the group of wartime Allies—France, England, Russia, and the United States—had decided that, if the Allies were to emerge victorious again, individual Germans would be held accountable.

At one time or another, both British Prime Minister Winston Churchill and Soviet Premier Josef Stalin bandied about the notion of simply shooting 50,000 German officers without trial to prevent yet a third Teutonic war in Europe. U.S. President Franklin Roosevelt demurred, however.

Joking or not, they all agreed that *something* more had to be done about a captured German leadership corps postwar, from the top to the bottom. By war's end in May 1945, the International Military Tribunal (IMT) had been established via the London Agreement—a convenient way of bypassing civilian legal niceties.

Selected as the actual site of the IMT events was the largely undamaged Palace of Justice at Nuremberg, Germany—scene of the giant Nazi Party rallies in the 1930s, as well as all of the Third Reich's prewar-enacted anti-Jewish laws.

Thus, the stage was set for the first—and today the most remembered—of what over the next four years became 13 separate trials, of all levels of miscreant Germans.

The First Trial

The first important proceeding of the IMT was the trial of the 22 major war criminals at Nuremberg, from November 1945 to October 1946. Most of the rest followed in the same Palace of Justice in the courtroom that still exists today.

The IMT set the standards and practices for the trials that followed, first by refusing to accept the accused's common defense that they were "just following orders from above" as valid.

The four indictments specified: participation in a common plan or conspiracy for crimes against peace; planning, initiating, and waging wars of aggression; war crimes; and crimes against humanity—the latter covering the Holocaust against Jews, gypsies, and others. These fell under a new, invented term—*genocide*—that still survives.

The first trial ran from November 20, 1945, through the hanging of 10 condemned men on October 16, 1946 (three were acquitted, later dying natural deaths). All pleaded not guilty. Of the accused defendants, three ultimately committed suicide: Labor Leader Dr. Robert Ley before the trial, Reich Marshal Hermann Göring hours before his scheduled execution in 1946; and—amazingly—Deputy Führer Rudolf Hess 41 years later, in 1987, at Berlin's Spandau Prison.

The indicted Nazi Party Secretary Martin Bormann was tried *in absentia* and also condemned to death. (His body was found at a construction site in 1972 in Berlin, where he had died in 1945, being "missing" for decades.)

The hanged convicts were: Foreign Minister Joachim von Ribbentrop; Army Field Marshal Wilhelm Keitel; Col. Gen. Alfred Jodl; SS General Ernst Kaltenbrunner (standing in for the late Heinrich Himmler); Reich Minister of the Interior Dr. Wilhelm Frick; Nazi Governor-General of Occupied Poland, Dr. Hans Frank; Governor-General of Occupied Holland, Dr. Artur Seyss-Inquart; Minister of the Conquered Eastern Territories, Alfred Rosenberg; slave-labor czar Fritz Sauckel; and race-propagandist Julius Streicher.

It is now generally agreed that the official U.S. Army hangman—Sergeant John C.

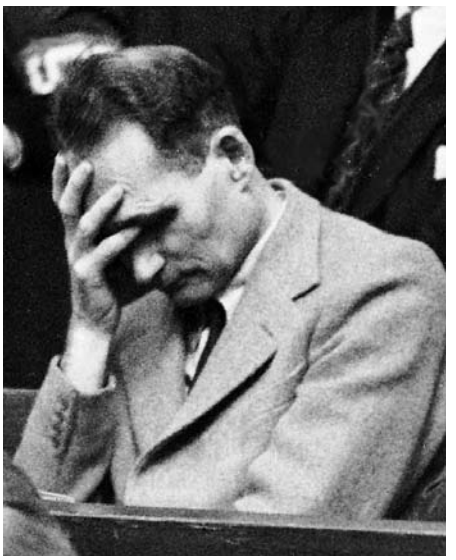
Woods—bungled the hangings, either via incompetence (doubtful) or deliberately, to make the convicted men suffer for their crimes via slow strangulation, as opposed to quickly having their necks broken.

Photographs of the dead show some with bloodied faces from having struck the edge of the open trap door on their plunge downward. The cocky hangman Woods boasted afterwards, "*I* hanged those 10 Nazis!" Sauckel and Ribbentrop choked to death over 14 minutes each, and Keitel double that, at 28—the most painful of them all.

Of the other six men imprisoned at Spandau, Foreign Minister Baron Konstantin von Neurath was released in 1954 after a heart attack, dying in 1956; Grand Admiral Dr. Erich Raeder was released due to ill health in 1955, dying five years later; and Economics Minister Walther Funk went home ill in 1957, dying that same year.

Sentenced to 10 years was Grand Admiral and Reich President Karl Dönitz, who served his full term, was released in 1956, and died in 1980. Dying in 1981 was Minister of Armaments Dr. Albert Speer, having served his full 20-year term, as had Hitler Youth leader Baldur von Schirach; both were let out in 1966, with the latter dying in 1974. The seventh man—Hess—served from 1947-87, plus an earlier four years as a British POW, 1941-45.

National Archives



TOP: Post-mortem photo of Field Marshal Wilhelm Keitel. His bloodied face reportedly came from striking the edge of the opening in the gallows platform. ABOVE LEFT: Deputy Führer Rudolf Hess, who had flown to Scotland in 1941 to try and broker a peace deal, was sentenced to life in prison. ABOVE RIGHT: The hangman: U.S. Army John C. Woods. Some say he deliberately bungled the hangings to increase the suffering of the condemned men.

The November 1937 Hossbach Conference Memo was introduced as evidence showing that Hitler and his top warlords, plus Neurath, began plotting World War II from that period and originally slated it to start in 1943, moving it up to September 1939 with the invasion of Poland.

Several secondary and middle-level Germans testified for the prosecution against the defendants, the most notable being then-Russian POW German Army Field Marshal Friedrich Paulus of the Stalingrad debacle; he had drafted the invasion plans to conquer the U.S.S.R. Paulus became an inspector for the East German Police, strangely, in 1957.

Essentially, the main courtroom fight was a set-up "battle" between Göring's "Hitler-was-right" testimony on the one hand, and the testimony of so-called "Good Nazi" Speer, with his pro-Allied mantra of "Hitler-was-the-mad-war-criminal," on the other. Between those two poles stood everything else. Göring knew he would hang (but didn't) so stood his ground, while Speer cut a tacit deal with the Americans in advance, thus knowing he wouldn't.

Two others who recanted their Nazi past were von Schirach—who wasn't hanged—and Seyss-Inquart, who was. Recanter Hans Frank was also hanged.

Of the military defendants, both soldiers were hanged, while neither admiral was, mainly due to the written testimonials of American admirals and others who admitted they would have done the same things as the accused naval officers during wartime.

Of the diplomats, the arrogant Ribbentrop was the first on the gallows, while gentleman von Neurath was spared. As Fritzsche was only present as the stand-in for the late Dr. Goebbels, he was freed, as were the pre-Nazi Chancellor Franz von

Papen and the cranky ex-Reichsbank president Dr. Hjalmar Schacht—the latter partially because he was himself a Nazi concentration camp inmate (at Flossenbürg) at war's end.

The greatest prosecution deception attempted during the 13 trials occurred when the Soviets tried unsuccessfully to pass off their own 1940 Katyn Massacre of Polish Army officer-corps POWs (admitted as such 50 years later) as a Nazi crime, when all present knew the reverse to be true; hence, the matter was thus quickly dropped.

Another controversy concerned the

National Archives

The Doctors' Trial—one of 12 additional tribunals—involved Nazi doctors and officials accused of performing heinous medical experiments on concentration camp inmates. SS General Dr. Karl Brandt, one of Hitler's physicians, is at lower left.

overall debate time before the sentencing of all the accused; the Allied judges took a mere two days, while most ordinary American murder trials today take far longer than that.

Chief prosecutor for the U.S., Supreme Court Associate Justice Robet H. Jackson wrote "shamefacedly" that the Allies themselves "have done—or *are* doing—some of the very things we are prosecuting the Germans for! The French are so violating the Geneva Convention in the treatment of POWs that our command is taking back prisoners sent to them! We are prosecuting plunder, and our Allies are *practicing* it!

"We say aggressive war is a crime, and one of our Allies [the U.S.S.R.] asserts sovereignty over the Baltic States, based on no title *except* conquest!" He was right.

Liberal Supreme Court Justice William O. Douglas added, "I thought at the time—and still think—that the Nuremberg trials were unprincipled. Law was created *ex post facto* [after the fact of the crimes] to suit the passion and clamor of the time."

IMT Chief Russian Prosecutor Red Army Lt. Gen. Roman A. Rudenko became the postwar commandant of the Sachsenhausen concentration camp, where ex-Nazis were held by the Soviets and where—after the fall of communist East Germany—12,500 bodies of elderly German men and women, and also children, were discovered.

Finally, Soviet Judge Red Army Maj. Gen. Iona Nikitchenko had earlier taken part in Stalin's notorious political Great Purges of 1936-38. Indeed, in 1936 alone, over 900 were executed *daily*, while during the last two years an estimated 681,692 were shot.

Many Germans complained about "victors' justice"—that both sides bombed cities, killed civilians, and also relocated millions of people all across Europe during the war—the Allies more so and well into 1949—but only the losing side was held to account. America's dropping of two atomic bombs is still considered a "war crime" by some.

Overall, the 13 trials covered an estimated 3,889 charges, of which fully 3,400 were dropped. Still, 489 cases went to trial, with 1,672 defendants. Of these, 1,416 were found guilty; fewer than 200 were actually executed, with a further 279 sentenced to life imprisonment. Of the latter, by the mid-1950s almost all of them had been released.

One reason for these low numbers was, as the Soviet Communists charged of their former wartime Western Allies, the 1955 establishment of the new West German Federal Army—the *Bundeswehr*—as a new, Cold War element of NATO. Indeed, one of the late Marshal Erwin Rommel's top wartime aides—General Hans Speidel—served later as a NATO commander, while many high-ranking Luftwaffe aces of World War II commanded the new West German Air Force.

"Subsidiary and related trials" after the 13 major proceedings were held by other courts against concentration- and extermination-camp personnel who ran or served at Auschwitz, Bergen-Belsen, Belzec, Buchenwald (where the infamous Ilse Koch was tried), Chelmno, Dachau, Majdanek, Mauthausen-Gusen, Ravensbrück, Sobibor, and Treblinka.

In addition, in May 1960, former Austrian Nazi SS Colonel Adolf Eichmann—who had escaped to Dictator/General Juan Peron's Argentina, where he lived under an assumed name with his wartime family—was kidnapped outside of Buenos Aires by Israeli Mossad agents. Flown to Israel, Eichmann was tried, convicted, and hanged in 1962 for facilitating the Holocaust in Hungary and elsewhere.

After the main IMT trial of the 22 top Nazi leaders, the following 12 trials fell into the separate legal category of "United States versus...."

The Doctors' Trial

The first such—The Doctors' Trial—was held before a U.S. Army military court, as were all the succeeding trials. Its indictment was filed on October 25, 1946, against 23

ALL: National Archives

ABOVE: A defiant Hermann Göring, who understood he was likely to hang, glares at the court. He escaped the noose by taking poison in his cell just hours before his scheduled execution. RIGHT: U.S. prosecutors Justice Robert Jackson (left) and Brig. Gen. Telford Taylor. The latter became the main U.S. prosecutor after Jackson resigned.

defendants—20 of them being professionally trained and graduated medical doctors from prestigious medical schools, while three were non-M.D. high Nazi officials.

As with Martin Bormann, Dr. Josef Mengele (the "Angel of Death") escaped justice altogether, drowning in Brazil during a self-imposed exile in South America. His family supported him financially from its farm-machinery company in Bavaria until his death.

Of the 23 indicted, seven were acquitted and seven were condemned to death by hanging, the rest being imprisoned for from 10 years to life. Another M.D. who escaped justice was Dr. Leonardo Conti, who hanged himself in his Nuremberg cell in October 1945 before his trial.

The major figure in the dock of the accused was SS General Dr. Karl Brandt, Hitler's personal travel physician, Reich Commissioner of Sanitation and Health, and co-administrator of the 1939-41 Final Solution's predecessor program, *Aktion T4*.

Under the aborted *Aktion T4*, Karl Brandt had caused the aged, insane, incurably ill, and deformed to be medically murdered via gas, lethal injections, etc., in their nursing homes, hospitals, and asylums, in what was officially but quietly called "The Euthanasia Program." Hitler shut it down due to public pressure from the Third Reich's vocal Catholic pulpits. As Hitler told religion-hating Bormann, "The problem of the churches will have to wait until *after* the war," as he needed Catholic soldiers to first *win* it.

Brig. Gen. Telford Taylor's main medical charges were for illegal and inhuman experiments on unwilling victims—both POWs and occupied-country civilian nationals—in the course of which they were tortured and often died terribly.

The Doctors' Trial lasted 140 days, with 85 witnesses testifying, and nearly 1,500 documents introduced as evidence. The heinous medical "experiments" on live subjects encompassed many tests: high-altitude/oxygen deprivation; freezing in ice water; prolonged exposure to sea water; malaria; typhus; mustard gas; sulfanilamide; bone, muscle, and nerve regeneration and bone transplantation; epidemic jaundice; sterilization; spotted fever; tuberculosis; unspeakable experiments on pregnant women and young twins; and incendiary-bomb experiments.

The Judges' Trial

The third—the Judges' Trial—included 16 high German jurists and attorneys, nine of whom had been top officials of the Reich Ministry of Justice, with others serving as judges and prosecutors of Nazi Special and People's Courts.

Among other charges presented on January 4, 1947, the Nazi judges were accused of both implementing and advancing the Party's racial purity program via eugenic and racial laws. Their crimes included running a judicial/penal process that resulted in mass murder, torture, private property plunder, and slave labor, as well as membership in two organizations officially declared criminal by the IMT: the Nazi Party itself and its SS/Security Service Leadership Corps (but not the SA Stormtroopers).

Of the 16 defendants, 10 were found guilty, four sentenced to life, and six to lesser prison terms; four were acquitted of all charges. Four top Nazi jurists had already died before the trial started.

The Pohl Trial

The fourth, the Pohl Trial, brought to justice main defendant SS General Oswald Pohl and 17 others of the SS Main Economic & Administrative Office, or SS-WVHA. Their main crime was the actual administration of the murder apparatus used to accomplish what the Nazis called "The Final Solution of the Jewish Question"—their physical extermination—in a chain of death camps across German-occupied Europe during 1942-1945, mainly in Poland.

In addition, the 18 high SS officers ran

National Archives

ABOVE: SS General Oswald Pohl (left), a key figure in the "final solution," and Auschwitz commandant Richard Baer. Pohl was hanged in 1951; Baer evaded arrest but was captured in 1960 and died in prison. RIGHT: Executives of the I.G. Farben chemical company stand trial for producing Zyklon B, the poison gas used in the Nazi death camps, as well as committing other crimes.

the concentration labor camps from 1933 on and recruited the Waffen/Armed SS combat divisions, as well as the Death's Head units that staffed all the camps.

Convicted, Pohl and three others were hanged, three were acquitted, and the remaining convicted war criminals sentenced to terms of 10 years to life; two had their death sentences changed to life. Another who had earlier commanded all the camps committed suicide two days before the German surrender of May 8, 1945. Pohl was hanged on June 7, 1951.

The Flick Trial

The fifth tribunal, the Flick Trial, charged its defendants with both using slave labor *and* plundering, with German industrialist Friedrich Flick and Senior Director Otto Steinbrinck also accused of being members of the "Circle of Friends" of SS Reichsführer Heinrich Himmler, who killed himself while in British custody on May 28, 1945.

The "Circle" encompassed prominent German bankers and heavy industrialists who supported Nazi crimes financially, donating one million marks to Himmler's "Special Account S." The indictment on March 18, 1947, said there was participation in the deportation and enslavement of civilians in lands occupied by the Third Reich for usage in both Flick mines and factories, plunder and despoilation of those lands, and also plant seizures.

All pleaded not guilty, but Flick was sentenced to seven years; two received lesser terms, and another trio was acquitted.

The Trial of I.G. Farben

The sixth trial, I.G. Farben, began on May 3, 1947, against the manufacturer of the pesticide Zyklon B that was used in the death camp gas chambers to kill Jews and others deemed racially unfit by Nazi Germany.

All of the accused had served as wartime Farben directors of the IGF overall conglomerate of German chemical firms. Farben also produced synthetic gasoline and rubber from coal, thus lengthening the time Germany could wage war after losing its foreign oil fields to the Red Army, as well as utilizing slave labor and also plundering on a massive scale.

Of the 24 men indicted, 13 were found guilty and sentenced to prison terms up to eight years, and 10 were acquitted; Flick's chief attorney had his case dropped for medical reasons. Two were released after judgment for time already served.

The Hostages Trial

The seventh trial, Hostages, centered on top German Army commanders in Greece and Yugoslavia, and, to a lesser extent, Albania. The indictment was filed on May 10, 1947—two years after the war's end.

It charged the accused with mass murder of hundreds of thousands of anti-fascist combat partisans and civilians, hostage taking, and reprisal executions; wanton plundering and destruction of villages, including in Occupied Norway; murder and ill treatment of POWs; naming combatants as partisans to disguise their murder; plus torture and deportation via rail shipment to concentration camps.

All the accused were indicted on all counts, and all pleaded not guilty. Of the 10 actually tried—one committed suicide pretrial, and Army Field Marshal Maximilian von Weichs was not tried due to poor health—two were acquitted, with the remaining eight being sentenced to prison terms of from seven years to life.

The Race and Settlement Trial

The eighth trial, RuSHA, charged 14 SS organizational defendants who had adminis-

tered the infamous Nazi Race and Settlement Main Office, including leaders of the Commission for the Consolidation of German Nationhood, the Repatriation Office for Ethnic Germans, and the Lebensborn Society. The indictment, presented on July 7, 1947, charged the kidnapping of children as possible Aryans; forcing abortions on women pregnant with non-Aryan or "defective" children; the plundering and deportation of populations from occupied countries to Germany; the subsequent re-population of ethnic Germans to those lands; imprisoning those having interracial sex; and the overall persecution of Jews.

The four Lebensborn defendants were found not guilty on two counts of the indictment, and the Society as a whole was deemed not responsible for kidnappings carried out by others.

Defendant Ulrich Greifelt, condemned to 20 years at Landsberg Prison in Bavaria—where Hitler himself had been jailed by a German court during 1923-24—died there on February 6, 1949, while RuSHA head Richard Hildebrandt was sent to trial in Poland, and was hanged on March 10, 1952.

A trio of defendants was released in 1951, while two sentences that same year were reduced to 15 years, and one to 10. Another convict was released in 1954.

The Death-Squad Trial

Perhaps the most horrific of all the trials was the ninth—the trial of SS Einsatzgruppen mobile death-squad unit commanders. Operating behind the German front lines in the Occupied East—both in the Baltic Republics and the Soviet Union—these mobile killing units slaughtered more than a million Jews during 1941-1943 alone, as well as "tens of thousands" of alleged "partisans"—a term often used as a cover for Jews—Romani gypsies, disabled people, Red Army Communist Party political commissars, Slavs, homosexuals, and others considered deviant.

The amended indictment was presented on July 29, 1947, with all defendants charged on all counts, and all pleading not guilty. Except for two defendants out of 24, all were found guilty on all counts, with the pair only guilty on count three.

The Einsatzgruppen Trial had as its main defendant suave lawyer and SS General Otto Ohlendorf, who was convicted and hanged at Landsberg on June 7, 1951, as were three other condemned SS war criminals on the same date.

Eight other SS murder-unit commanding officers condemned to hang had their sentences commuted to life imprisonment (and another to 10 years); six were released by 1958, all dying natural deaths as free men. One died after transfer to Belgium, another committed suicide, and one was released for time served; two more received sentences of from 10-20 years but were later released.

When this operation was deemed too costly and not numerically efficient enough, the Final Solution was at last reached in late 1941 into 1942. This consisted of the death camps with gas chambers disguised as water showers that achieved massive daily fatalities.

Ironically, the Einsatzgruppen crimes might have been entirely overlooked but for another significant hire by General Taylor—that of U.S. Army Sergeant Benjamin Ferencz, a Hungarian Jew who was also a graduate of the Harvard Law School.

Ferencz was assigned to head a team of 50 Allied researchers in fallen Berlin to scan 10 million captured Nazi Party official files.

National Archives

United States Holocaust Memorial Museum

ABOVE: More than two million people were murdered by SS Einsatzgruppen mobile death squads on the Eastern Front. Twenty-four unit commanders went on trial; 14 were executed. LEFT: A group of boys, believed to be products of the Lebensborn program, give the Nazi salute while on an outing. Richard Hildebrandt, head of the prgram was executed in 1952.

National Archives

One of Ferencz's researchers, working at former Gestapo/Secret Police headquarters, "stumbled upon a nearly complete set of ... the SS Einsatzgruppen records.... These extermination squads—some 3,000 men—over a two-year period...systematically slaughtered over a million helpless men, women, and children...." (See *WWII Quarterly*, Fall 2019.)

"I showed the discovery to General Taylor," Ferencz said, "and urged him to prepare a new trial.... At age 27, I'd yet to try a case.... I offered to handle the prosecutions myself. Taylor smiled—but agreed. I was promoted to chief prosecutor ... in the trial against the Einsatzgruppen," and thus was legal history made.

The Krupp Trial

The tenth trial, Krupp, had as its main defendant the son (Alfried) of the man (Gustav) whom the Americans had really wanted to try in the first trial. It was a rather ironic reversal of the ancient adage of not visiting the sins of the father upon the children.

Ironically, there were no trials at all of aircraft builders like Heinkel, Messerschmitt, Dornier, etc.; of surface and submarine naval warship yard titans like Hamburg's Blohm+Voss; nor of bombsight optical firms like Siemens; nor of formerly civilian automakers-morphed-into tank, artillery, and field motorized-vehicle builders such as Daimler-Benz, Volkswagen, and BMW. This was because the Allies recognized that all of the above firms would be needed to launch their new Central European ally, West Germany.

Krupp and his directors were convicted of building the arms that allowed the Nazis to wage their aggressive wars of conquest. The Krupp indictment was issued on November 17, 1947. Of the dozen defendants, one was acquitted, the others received prison terms of from three to 12 years, and Alfried was ordered "to sell all his possessions." The Krupp firm was *en toto* convicted of using 100,000 slave laborers, of whom an estimated 23,000 were Allied and Red Army POWs.

The firm was convicted, too, of "plunder, devastation, and exploitation of occupied countries; of murder, extermination, enslavement, deportation, imprisonment, and torture..." Ten of the Krupp directors were charged on all counts, while a pair faced fewer.

All were convicted on a variety of counts, one was acquitted and, by January 31, 1951, all except one had been already released, their sentences ranging from two years to 12 thus being overturned.

In 1953, Alfried Krupp simply resumed his family firm's ownership after no buyer for it had been found. The company, which still exists, is now known as ThyssenKrupp. (Ironically, Thyssen company president Fritz Thyssen was an early Hitler supported but ended up in concentration camps for changing his mind about the Nazi leader. He was also tried by a tribunal and let off with a $1,500,000 fine.)

The Ministries Trial

The eleventh trial, Ministries (*Wilhelmstrasse*), had as its main defendants 21 men, including Ribbentrop's former Foreign Office permanent State Secretary Ernst von Weizaäcker. (His son Richard was the elected President of the West German Federal Republic for 10 years and of united Germany for four more.)

Some of the defendants were career diplomats who ran all the German regime's foreign relations, while the rest were bureaucratic civil servants.

Of the overall 21 defendants, a pair was acquitted, while the remaining 19 were found guilty on at least a single count of the indictment, receiving sentences from three to 25 years. None were hanged.

Of the 21, the most prominent were Weizaäcker (five years reduced, and released in 1950); Hitler's personal economics adviser Wilhelm Keppler (10 years, released in 1951); Ernst Wilhelm Bohle (head of the Nazi Party's own non-State foreign office, served five years); Edmund Vessenmayer (ruled German-occupied Hungary, 1944-45, 20 reduced to 10, and released in 1951); Reich Chancellery chief Dr. Hans Heinrich Lammers (also with a 1951 release); and a pair of Reich Food and Agriculture czars, Richard Walther Darré (sentenced to seven, freed in 1950) and Herbert Backe, who evaded trial via suicide on April 6, 1947.

Trial of the High Command

The indictment for the twelfth and final proceeding, High Command, was filed by Taylor on November 28, 1947. It focused mainly on the top warriors of Nazi Germany's armed forces, including just a single naval admiral—Otto Schniewind (acquitted, died 1964)—and a sole Luftwaffe field marshal, Hugo Sperrle, acquitted and dying in 1953 of natural causes.

Sperrle had been the first Condor Legion commander in 1936-1937 in Spain's Germany-assisted Civil War, being thus responsible for the first mass bombing in aerial warfare of the Basque village of Guernica.

Sperrle also helped conquer France in 1940, and in 1944 commanded the remnants of the Luftwaffe during the Allied Normandy campaign until Hitler fired him.

Of the Army warlords, only two were field marshals, surprisingly: Wilhelm von Leeb (released after trial and died in 1956) and Georg von Küchler; both held top commands in Russia. Küchler was released in 1952 and lived 16 more years.

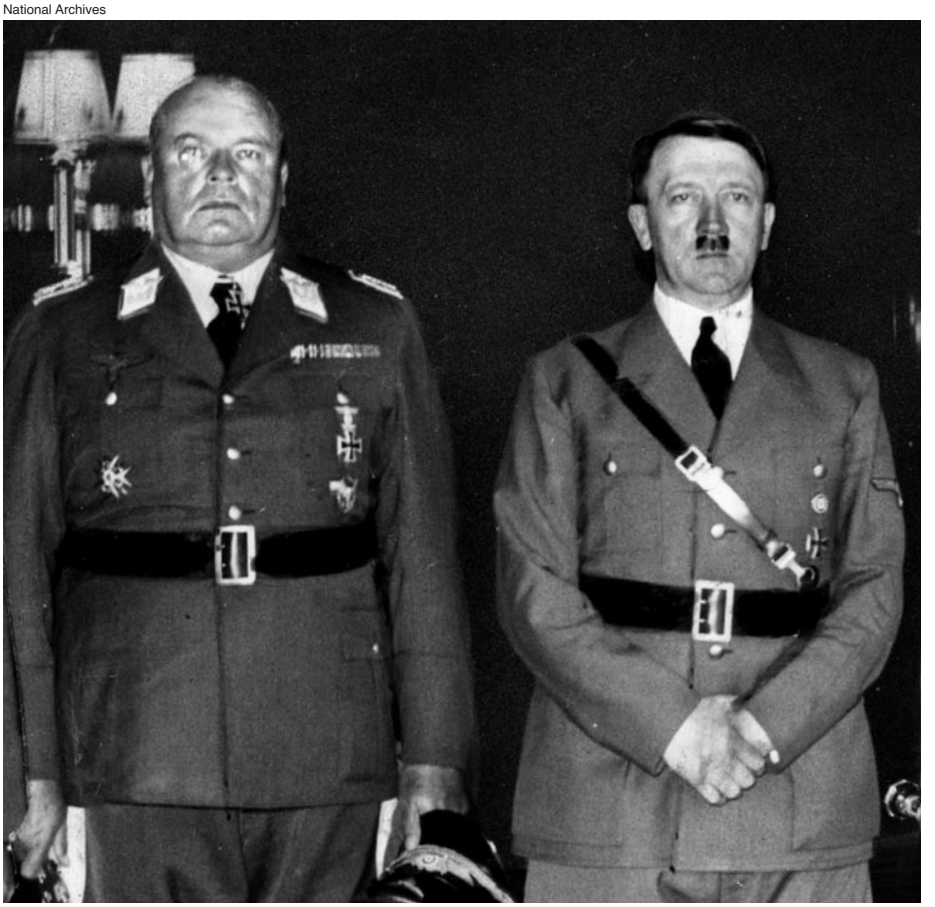
Of the colonel generals, Johannes Blaskowitz either committed suicide during the trial or was murdered inside the prison on February 5, 1948.

Hermann Hoth was paroled in 1954 and died in 1971. Georg Hans Reinhardt was released in 1952, dying in 1963. Hans von Salmuth was released in 1953, dying in 1962.

General of Infantry Karl von Roques was sentenced to 20 years but died on December 24, 1949. General Hermann Reinecke received life imprisonment for the deaths of 3.3 million Red Army POWs as chief of the High Command's General Office of the Armed Forces but was released in 1954, dying in 1973.

General Rudolf Lehmann was the High Command/OKW Judge-Advocate General who issued the order that allowed the murder of Soviet civilians as partisans. He also drafted the December 1941 "Night & Fog" decree that seized civilians in the occupied lands without any legal due process.

National Archives



ABOVE: Hugo Sperrle stands stiffly beside his Führer. The ruthless Luftwaffe field marshal, who once held a variety of senior commands, was tried in 1947 but acquitted. He died a free man in 1953. OPPOSITE: Adolf Hitler greets Gustav Krupp, head of the industrial conglomerate that provided the Third Reich with much of its armament. A dozen Krupp directors were convicted of aiding the regime in waging aggressive war; none served long sentences.

General Otto Wöhler was convicted for enforcing the Russian invasion's Operation Barbarossa Jurisdiction Order, deporting civilians for slave labor, and working with the SS Einsatzgruppen murderers. Receiving only eight years, Wöhler was released in 1951 and lived until 1987.

Of the 14 defendants—all of whom plead not guilty—two were acquitted, one died, and the rest received prison terms from three years to life to time served. The guilty had been convicted of violating international treaties and waging aggressive war.

There were no Allied war crimes trials of any kind for the Italian Fascist leaders, except for the simple Communist expedient of shooting them all in April 1945, starting with Benito Mussolini. Most of the Italian marshals, generals, and admirals escaped the Red Partisan firing squads.

There were, of course, the Tokyo Trials (and many others) of the captured Japanese warlords, but that's another saga altogether.

In truth, there were so many Germans who had committed heinous crimes or profited from the war that 90 percent of the nation's population would have been brought to justice had the Allies had the time, resources, and will to try everyone. Many millions of perpetrators received little punishment or escaped justice completely—their only sentence being the private guilt they had to carry for their rest of their lives.

Was true justice served? Were the 13 Nuremberg Trials an effective deterrent to wars since? Not at all. On the downside of the ledger, as Göring himself correctly asserted, "The moral is, *Don't lose a war!*"

Blaine Taylor's latest of 23 books is the forthcoming Teutonic Titans: Hindenburg, Ludendorff, and the Kaiser's Marshals and Generals. *He is a former managing editor of the* Bulletin of Psychiatry & the Law, *1979-81, as well as of* The Maryland State Medical Journal, *1974-81. He has also published the first of a series of four books entitled,* The Personal Photograph Albums of Hermann Göring.

The Partisan Scourge

Russian partisans took a heavy toll in German lives and tied down troops needed to fight the advancing Red Army during World War II.

BY PAT McTAGGART

The concept of partisan warfare in Russia was nothing new in 1941. During Napoleon's invasion of the country in 1812, small bands of civilians harassed the French and their allies both before and after the retreat from Moscow. When the Kaiser's army struck in World War I, the Germans were forced to pull units from the front line to deal with partisan activity in the occupied areas.

Numerous bands of partisans were formed during the Russian Civil War. Red partisan detachments were particularly successful in Siberia, harassing the rear areas of the Whites and making a vital contribution to the communist fight in the Far East. The commander of the Urals Partisan Army, Vasilli Bliukher, was awarded the Order of the Red Banner for his leadership against the Whites. He was later

Mary Evans / Meledin Collection

After the German invasion of the Soviet Union in June 1944 sent Red Army formations reeling, members of partisan units, such as these men preparing to blow up a section of railroad track to hinder the movement of German men and materiel, became vital to preventing a complete rout.

beaten to death during the purges brought on by Soviet Premier Josef Stalin's paranoia.

After the Civil War ended, Soviet leaders continued to publish works on the organization and effectiveness of partisans. Lenin addressed the subject in some of his works, and Marshal of the Soviet Union Mikhail Tukhachevsky published several documents dealing with partisan tactics. He also addressed the subject of antipartisan operations, dealing with both how to conduct them and how to counter them. Tukhachevsky was murdered on Stalin's orders in June 1937.

By the summer of 1941, a semidoctrinal mind-set concerning the spirit and usefulness of partisan warfare had become part of the psyche of many Soviet citizens. For Party fanatics, there was no question about civilian resistance to any enemy threat. A sense of duty to the communist system made the choice to fight automatic. For many others, it would take time to make the decision to fight.

National Archives

ABOVE: Heavily armed Soviet partisans listen to a radio communique with instruction concerning their next foray against the Nazi invaders. OPPOSITE: Waffen-SS troops, slogging through the Pripyat Marshes near the city of Mazyr in Belarussia, hunt for partisan groups, active in the area.

Operation Barbarossa, the German invasion of the Soviet Union, began on June 22, 1941. During the first six months of Barbarossa more than three million Soviet soldiers were captured or killed. Around Kiev, the figure was more than 600,000, while the defense of Smolensk cost the Red Army about 486,000 men. Another 300,000 prisoners were taken at Uman. The staggering figure of killed and captured astounded the Germans, who were not equipped to deal with the massive influx of enemy soldiers.

Successful as the German encirclements appeared to be, the lines around the trapped Soviet armies were often porous. Remnants of many divisions escaped eastward through gaps in the German positions. Other small groups and individuals disappeared into the marshes and forests that make up much of western Russia. Even if they were trapped behind enemy lines, those men continued the fight, forming the nucleus of early partisan units.

Although Moscow expected local Party leaders to form partisan units in the event of an invasion, actual preparations, such as stockpiling food and weapons, were woefully inadequate. The swift advance of the Wehrmacht through Western Russia also impeded any initial partisan formation because German forces were literally at the doorstep before many officials knew what was happening.

Another factor was the hostility directed against Moscow from many inhabitants of western Russia, especially in the Ukraine and former Polish territory. During the initial stage of the war, the Germans were treated as liberators in many areas, with the local populace only too ready to point out communist officials.

Despite these difficulties, from the beginning attempts were made to form a truly civilian partisan movement in some areas. More than a thousand Party members were left behind in Belorussia, and more were ordered to stay in various other areas that would soon fall into German hands. For the most part, these men were used to organize communications networks and find safe houses and other hiding places in which build up weapons caches for future use.

At the end of June, Moscow finally sent out an official directive to the nation. In a June 29 proclamation, the Central Committee of the Communist Party and the Council of People's Commissars directed local Party organizations to form partisan detachments and bring the war to the enemy. A mid-July order gave specific instructions on how the partisan groups should organize and what targets were priorities for destruction.

Detachments were to be composed of 75 to 150 men who were divided into two or three companies, and each company was subdivided into platoons. Large forested or swampy areas were deemed vital for cover and use for a base of operations, and care was given in explaining how to develop and distribute weapons caches. Instructions were given to make night raids on petroleum and ammunition dumps, railroad lines, airfields, and communication centers. Units were also told the best places to lay explosive charges and how to deal with attack, defense, and pursuit operations.

Once the Communist Party became engaged in the partisan movement, the vast Soviet bureaucracy kicked into gear. Committees were formed from the top levels of government down to local levels to regulate guerrilla activities. Powerful figures in the Party, the NKVD (secret police), and the Red Army vied for control of the partisan organization.

The tactical and operational orders concerning partisan warfare finally ended up being controlled by the notorious political chief and head of the Main Administration of Political Propaganda of the Army and NKVD, Lev Mekhlis.

Mekhlis had a bloody reputation earned during the purges of the 1930s. A favorite of Stalin, Mekhlis ruthlessly ordered the executions of officers and men whom he thought did not show proper aggressiveness during the Russo-Finnish War of 1939-1940. Later in World War II, his meddling in military matters would cost the Red Army dearly in the Crimea and elsewhere, but his friendship with Stalin prevented him from ever receiving more than a slap on the wrist.

LEFT: SS Lt. Gen. Erich von dem Bach-Zelewski battled the partisans. RIGHT: Soviet General V.I. Kusnetzov. 600 of his soldiers were rescued by partisans.

While Moscow struggled with organizational details, partisan units remained fairly passive throughout the summer and fall of 1941. Most of the active aggression came from detachments that had benefited from the influx of Red Army stragglers who found their way into the partisan camps. Experienced in weapons and tactics, the soldiers passed their knowledge on to the civilians in their group. It was these detachments that caused the first pinpricks to disrupt the lengthy German supply and communication lines.

Geography played a major role in early partisan actions. The vast forests and swamps in eastern Belorussia and the western Russian Soviet Federated Socialist Republic offered natural protection for units that would strike quickly before disappearing into the primitive countryside. German security units were reluctant to follow the partisans, preferring instead to stay close to the installations they were guarding. Those that did pursue were often on the receiving end of an ambush by unseen enemies.

One of the few partisan units that were able to organize effectively in those early days was a Belorussian detachment led by Mihay Filipovich Shmyrev. It was ironic that this man led one of the first successful groups since his combat experience consisted mainly of fighting anti-Soviet partisans during and after the Russian Civil War.

Shmyrev formed his detachment on July 9 with 23 men who worked in a small factory that he managed. Their first weapons came from Soviet soldiers who were fleeing from the advancing Germans. More recruits were gleaned from Red Army stragglers and local civilians who were drawn to the cause.

Their first offensive action came on July 25 when Shmyrev and a squad of his men ambushed some Germans who were bathing in a river, causing the enemy 25 to 35 casualties and suffering no losses to themselves. Subsequent ambushes in August were directed against light-skinned vehicle convoys and other soft targets.

The unit was soon acknowledged by Soviet officials, who sent 12 Red Army soldiers to reinforce Shmyrev in early September. Supplies followed in the form of four heavy machine guns with 15,000 rounds of ammunition and a light and a heavy mortar. Although some of his men deserted in the waning months of 1941, new recruits sought out the elusive Shmyrev, who now had the means to cause the Germans more than a little trouble throughout the rest of the year.

Both: National Archives

ABOVE: The invading Germans were especially brutal toward captured partisans, even women. Here, one of them, 18-year-old Zoya Kosmodemyanskaya, is publicly executed. The sign around her neck says she was an arsonist. OPPOSITE: Destroying German transportation links was a favorite partisan activity. Here, partisans melt into the woods after setting fire to a German supply train.

As the Wehrmacht moved deeper into the Soviet Union, partisan units were ordered to step up attacks on rail lines in the occupied territories. The road system in western Russia was in pitiful shape before the war started. German tanks and armored vehicles made a bad situation worse as they moved farther east, churning up the few good roads and making the rest all but impassible for the supply trucks that came after them.

The gauge for the Soviet rail system was different from that of Germany, and construction battalions followed the German advance, changing the rails so that Wehrmacht supplies could be moved quickly to the front on German-gauge rolling stock. It was slow going, however, even with conscripted labor from the conquered areas. Early partisan attempts to disrupt rail supply lines were not very successful, and damage was usually repaired in a day or two. Nevertheless, the farther east the Germans went, the more tenuous this vital network would become.

Another major function of partisan units in the first months of the war was to find straggling formations that had been bypassed by the Germans and were now behind the front. Many of these refugee soldiers were brought back to the Soviet lines. In October, some 800 soldiers were rescued from encirclement in the Poltava area, while another partisan group was able to rescue the 3rd Army's General V.I. Kuznetsov along with 600 of his men.

Early partisan activity, scattered as it was, provided Soviet propagandists with many stories designed to incite hatred for the Germans while promoting sacrifice for the Russian Motherland. Nothing tugs at the heart of a Russian more than a tragic or sentimental story, and communist propagandists knew how to appeal to the soul of the people, be they fervent Party members or secret anti-Stalinists. One such story centered on a young girl named Zoya Kosmodemyanskaya.

Born in 1923, Zoya joined a partisan unit in the autumn of 1941. She quickly adapted to the rigors of partisan warfare, helping lay mines and performing reconnaissance work. In November she volunteered to enter the village of Petrischevo, which had a German garrison, to reconnoiter and to cause any damage she could.

Zoya was captured a few days later and subjected to an interrogation that included severe beatings. According to a German sergeant who was present, the teenager remained silent during the entire process. Making no headway, the Germans marched her through the village half naked and hanged her. Zoya's mutilated body was left on the gallows for more than a month until the village was recaptured by the Red Army.

Word of the young girl's ordeal spread through occupied and unoccupied areas of the Soviet Union with lightning speed. Her story inspired patriotism that translated into a surge of volunteers for the partisan movement.

While the partisan movement struggled in its infancy, Mekhlis intervened with an order making political indoctrination of partisan volunteers a major priority. In some cases, potential partisan candidates were interviewed by NKVD teams that often turned away any volunteer that did not show proper communist zeal. Even as the Germans were approaching the gates of Moscow, Soviet political paranoia saw polit-

ical reliability as more important than the necessity of defending the Russian Motherland with any means possible.

One of the most important moments in Soviet partisan history came with the Red Army offensive in December 1941. Before then, much of the Soviet population in German-occupied Russia had either embraced the Germans as liberators (as it did in the Ukraine) or had just continued to struggle to survive, having traded one despot for another.

The Wehrmacht had seemed invincible in the summer and fall of 1941, and cries from Moscow to rise up against the invaders went largely unheeded. Calls to fight for the Motherland, with little mention of the Communist Party, drew some recruits, but the physical presence of German soldiers and the vast panzer and motorized columns heading east were a great deterrent for any overt action.

When the Red Army struck during one of the coldest winters in a century, the population of the occupied territories suddenly saw a different German soldier. Cold, frightened, and hungry, the once victorious troops were now heading west as Soviet forces smashed their lines. Even German reinforcements moving toward the front had a look of uncertainty about them. This did not go unnoticed by the local population.

Another important aspect of the Winter Offensive was fear. In the early days of the war, Soviet propaganda warned of dire consequences for anyone collaborating with the enemy. This seemed unlikely as the Germans advanced on every front. News of the great encirclements of July and August spread from town to town, making it all the more difficult for Moscow to mask the seemingly devastating defeats that plagued the Red Army in those early months.

In December, word of Germany's retreat began spreading. The propagandist's cry of "The Red Army Is on the Way" now seemed to be a real possibility, causing many to rethink their earlier positions. Straddling the fence was no longer an option as word spread of the early Soviet victories in December. For many it was time to act because everyone knew that Stalin's revenge would be terrible and swift. Reports from German rear-area commanders revealed a growing concern over increasing partisan activity.

On December 14, Heeresgruppe Mitte (Army Group Center) received a communiqué from one of its Korücks (Kommandant Rückwârtiges Armeegebeit—Commandant of an army rear area) stating: "As the Russians have become more active on the front, partisan activity has increased. The troops left to this command are just sufficient to protect the most important installations and, to a certain extent, the railroads and highways. For anti-partisan operations there are no longer any troops on hand. Therefore, it is expected that soon the partisans will join together into larger bands and carry out attacks on our guard posts. Their increased freedom of movement will also lead to partisans spreading terror among the people, who will be forced to stop supporting us and will then no longer carry out the orders of the military government authority."

Small partisan actions during the offensive sometimes led to huge results. As the Germans retreated in the face of the Soviet onslaught, a partisan demolition group led by A. Andrianov destroyed one of the few remaining bridges across the Sestra River, creating a massive bottleneck on the east side of the river. The Red Air Force was notified, and in a large-scale attack Soviet aircraft destroyed approximately a hundred vehicles before the Germans could find alternate routes to the west.

In 1942, Moscow stepped up its control

of partisan organizations, placing local units under regional commanders. Ten detachments in the Smolensk sector, for example, were centralized into a larger unit code-named "Batia." Overall, Batia had more than 5,000 members, which made it able to fight regular battles with German security forces.

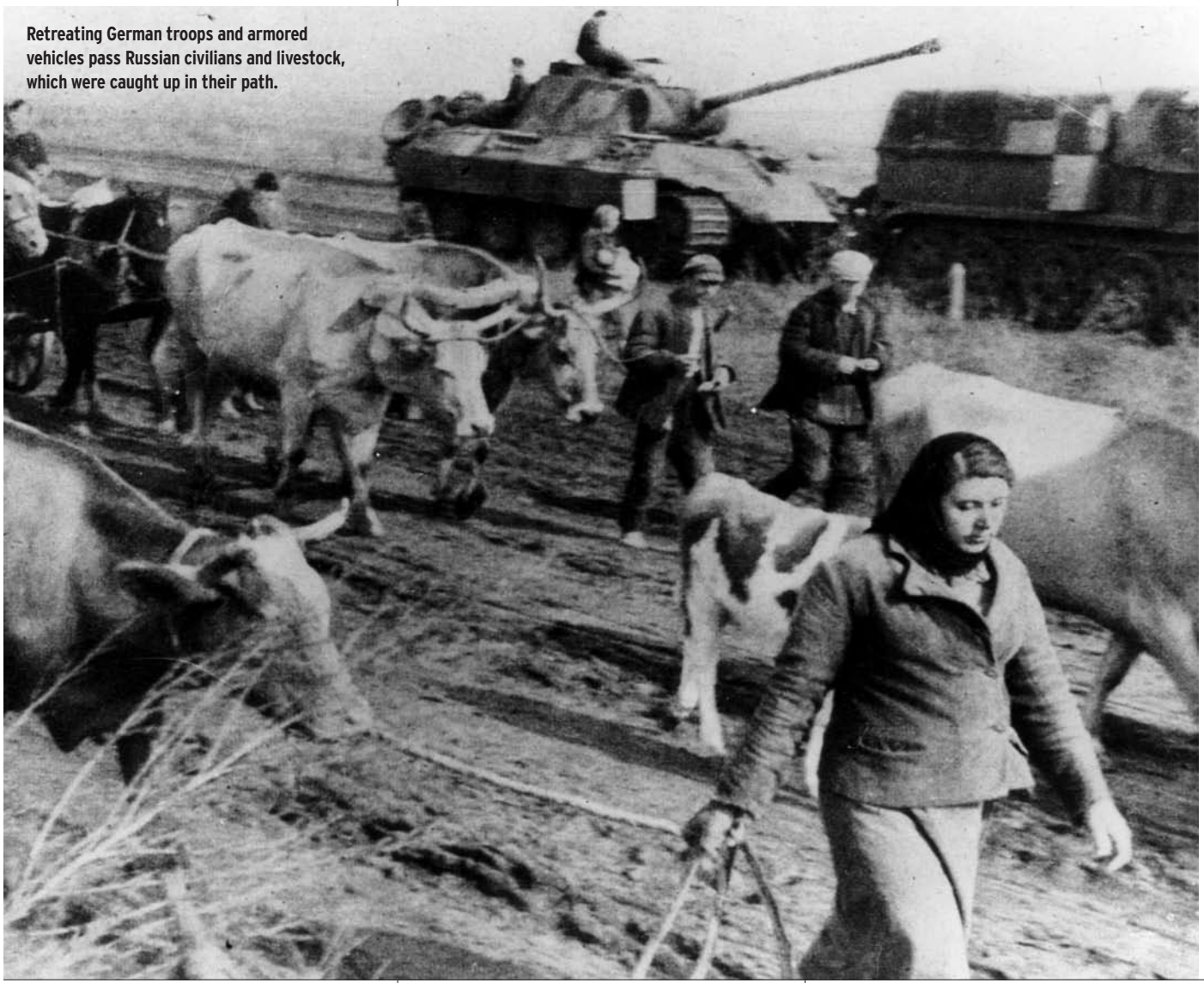
As the partisan movement gained impetus, more resources were relegated to the organization. Units were supplied with military communications equipment, and special radio channels were set aside specifically for partisan radio traffic. The Red Air Force at first dropped weapons and supplies by parachute, but by 1942 the larger partisan detachments had built airstrips in the forbidding forests and marshes that they called home.

Perfectly camouflaged, the airstrips were nearly invisible from the air, and the Red Air Force performed most of its supply operations at night with the partisans clearing away camouflage and lighting the airstrips with small fires set along the runway. Hand-picked partisans were also flown out of the occupied areas and were sent to a special school where they were given advanced training before flying back to their units.

The Soviet supply system became hopelessly overloaded in January 1942 as the result of the rapid advance. As the Winter Offensive stalled against determined German resistance, partisan units helped overextended Russian forces make their way back to their own lines.

Psychologically, the partisan movement far exceeded its actual accomplishments during the first winter of the war. Field Marshal Günter von Kluge, the commander of Heeresgruppe Mitte, reported, "The steady increase in numbers of enemy troops behind our front and the concomitant growth of the partisan movement in the entire rear area are taking such a threatening turn that I am compelled to point out this danger in all seriousness."

Von Kluge was correct in one important area. From June 22, 1941, to November 6, the German Army had sustained more than 650,000 casualties. By the beginning of April 1942, another 900,000 casualties from all causes were incurred. Even with



Retreating German troops and armored vehicles pass Russian civilians and livestock, which were caught up in their path.

National Archives

replacements and returning wounded, the Army was about 600,000 men short. This led to a realignment of security forces that left many of the smaller bridges and crossings behind the front completely unguarded.

The partisans were quick to react to the situation, demolishing numerous bridges and causing more supply headaches for the Germans. Frustrated, the German High Command called for security formations from its Axis partners to help with the problem. More pro-German local forces were also employed in antipartisan operations.

One of the most vicious antipartisan units was commanded by Bronislav Kaminski, an engineer of Polish extraction and a radical anti-communist. Kaminski had a force of about 1,500 men when the Germans encountered him during the Winter Offensive in a heavily partisan-infested area in the Bryansk sector.

Fighting under the emblem of the Tsarist St. George's Cross, Kaminski carved out his own kingdom in the area, and by 1942 he had more than 9,000 men serving under him. The Germans had been unable to make any headway against partisans in the area, so they granted him a semiautonomous status in return for keeping up the pressure on the partisans.

Kaminski and his men were known for their extreme cruelty and ruthlessness. Partisan and nonpartisan villages alike were destroyed in the region, their citizens massacred

Most of these ethnic groups had been tyrannized by Stalin and the communist system, and they fought ruthlessly against Soviet partisan units being formed in the newly occupied areas.

under his reign of terror. Rape and plunder were the orders of the day as his men moved through the countryside, and even the German SS units operating in the area were appalled by the actions of the Kaminski Brigade. Kaminski was finally executed in 1944 on the orders of SS Lt. Gen. Erich von dem Bach-Zelewski.

Despite antipartisan activities like Kaminski's, the movement kept growing. Working in cooperation with the Red Army and on their own, partisan forces continued to destroy German vehicles and communications lines. Some units even liberated towns held by enemy garrisons, which usually meant immediate execution for any surviving German soldiers.

Although the Germans had basically stabilized the main front by May, there were still formations of Soviet troops left behind the lines, cut off since the Winter Offensive. One of the largest was in the Bryansk-Smolensk-Vyazma triangle. Major General P.A. Belov and the remnants of his 1st Guards Cavalry Corps formed the nucleus of a group that also contained parachute troops and the survivors of the 33rd Army.

Working closely with partisan detachments, Belov's forces struck weak points behind the German lines. The partisans provided vital information concerning German troop movements and strength, allowing Belov to hit the enemy at his most vulnerable positions before melting back into the countryside.

By mid-May, the Germans had taken enough. A two-pronged attack, code-named "Hannover," was planned to eliminate the threat from Belov once and for all. A force of three panzer divisions, three infantry divisions, and one security division began the operation on May 24. Bridges destroyed by partisans hampered the attack as the Germans were forced to wait for engineers to replace the structures before they could cross the swollen streams and rivers in the area. Other partisan units shadowed the attackers, keeping Belov informed of the advance and allowing him to pull his forces out of harm's way.

When the German prongs met on May 27, Berlin claimed about 2,000 prisoners taken and another 1,500 Russians killed. It was not the result that had been expected. Belov still had about 17,000 men in his command, but he knew that his time was running out. He decided to break through to the Russian lines using partisan guides to travel from one partisan-controlled area to another.

The Luftwaffe finally spotted the columns of Soviet troops, but by the time ground forces closed in Belov and his men were already making their way through a densely forested area controlled by the Lazo Partisan Regiment. The Germans refused to follow for fear of well-laid partisan ambushes.

Finally reaching the front, Belov organized his men and ordered an attack. A fierce fight developed, but Belov claimed that he brought at least 10,000 men to safety, even though he was flown out before the attack commenced. Thanks to partisan efforts, a large body of well-trained Soviet troops had been saved to fight another day while several German divisions needed at the front had been forced to deploy behind the lines in an effort to capture them.

The late spring muddy season gave the partisan units a chance to regroup. It had been a bloody winter for all involved in the savage fighting. Strength reports reaching Moscow showed a loss of about 20,000 partisans due to all causes. Official Soviet estimates give a total of about 70,000 effective partisan fighters operating in the spring of 1942. By the end of summer, that number had risen to about 125,000.

An important change in the partisan organization came in May 1942. Incompetence had its limits, even within the rigid

Soviet bureaucracy. Although Stalin had ordered that a central staff be set up to control partisan activities in July 1941, Mekhlis and his boss, NKVD Chief Lavrenti Beria, continued to control the movement. That control was finally wrested from the NKVD when P.K. Ponomarenko became Chief of the Central Staff of the Partisan Movement on May 30.

The change effectively removed control of the partisans from the Party and moved it toward closer cooperation with the military. Attached to the Headquarters of the Supreme Commander (Stalin), Ponomarenko soon had staff personnel at several front and theater headquarters, working closely with the Army commanders to control partisan activities in their respective sectors.

Hitler's thrust toward Stalingrad began about the same time that Ponomarenko assumed his new position. The German advance brought new areas under occupation and also provided the Wehrmacht with new antipartisan forces. The German Army showed remarkable tolerance toward most of the tribes they encountered while advancing across the steppes and into the Caucasus and was rewarded with a flood of volunteers from various ethnic groups in the area.

Don, Kuban, Terek, and Siberian Cossacks were formed into legions to fight the Soviets and to protect the precarious German supply routes. Thousands of Armenians, Azerbaidjanis, Georgians, and North Caucasians also joined German forces, as did the Kalmucks, a Mongolian nomadic people living west of the Volga River and northwest of the Caspian Sea. It is interesting to note that many of these tribes were Muslim or, in the case of the Kalmucks, Buddhist, and that the Wehrmacht took great care in providing each group with its own religious leaders or chaplains.

Most of these ethnic groups had been tyrannized by Stalin and the communist system, and they fought ruthlessly against Soviet partisan units being formed in the newly occupied areas. In the final years of World War II, they followed the retreating Germans westward. Most were handed over to the Soviets by American and British forces to be executed outright or to be sent to the Gulags to die.

As 1942 waned, word of the impending disaster at Stalingrad spread across the occupied regions to Germans and Russians alike. German morale, especially in the supposedly secure areas, began to suffer. The news, coupled with the increased partisan activities along the supply routes, had a depressing psychological effect on troops in the town and village garrisons tasked with guarding bridges and railway lines.

Another important effect of partisan activity in the last months of 1942 was a decrease in food supplies received by the Germans from the occupied areas. As partisan detachments became bolder, villages that had once furnished meat and grain for the Wehrmacht supply organization showed a dramatic drop in production, making it more difficult for the Germans to live off the land.

Partisan units began entering the populated areas, taking what they needed and destroying the rest. Entire village populations were coerced into leaving their homes to seek sanctuary in the forests so that the fruits of their labor would not feed the hated Germans. Some left for patriotic reasons, while others left at the point of a gun. Assassins, targeting villagers who had become too friendly with the enemy, were also used by the partisans to increase tensions between occupation forces and the local population.

With the deteriorating military situation and the increase in partisan strength, the German High Command appointed SS Lt. Gen. Erich von dem Bach-Zelewski to the position of Chief of Anti-Partisan Forces in December. The 43-year-old von dem Bach had served in World War I, where he earned both classes of the Iron Cross. He had served as the senior SS and Police Leader in the rear area of Heeresgruppe Mitte since June 1941.

When the Germans entered the Soviet Union, von dem Bach oversaw the Einsatzgruppen murder squads that followed in the wake of Heeresgruppe Mitte. As a result of those activities, he suffered a nervous breakdown, liver congestion, nightmares, and hallucinations that had to be treated by specialists at an SS hospital in Germany. After being declared fit to return to service, he resumed his duties until assuming his new post.

An SS officer directs civilians to destroy weapons captured during an anti-partisan sweep, summer 1941. The Germans were forced to expend considerable resources in countering partisan activities—which enabled Stalin to rebuild his shattered forces.

National Archives

Hard-riding Cossacks gallop across a steppe strewn with the wreckage of war as they head toward the German lines. The threat of partisan activity forced the Germans to enlist Russian ethnic groups tyrannized by Stalin, including Cossacks, in the fight against Soviet partisans.

With von dem Bach's appointment, the partisan war entered a new era of savagery. Partisan leaders already knew of his reputation, and the various formations steeled themselves to face their new enemy. This was especially true of the Jewish partisan units that often had to fight a two-front war against both the Germans and the animosity of the Russian people.

Most Jewish partisan units received little help from the peasant population, which often hated Jews more that they hated the Germans. Nevertheless, they won grudging admiration from other partisan units for their daring raids against German targets. In Belorussia, a unit commanded by the Bielski brothers grew to include about 1,200 fighters, while another unit, led by Shalom Zurnin, had about 800 Jews.

In an effort to counteract the increasing danger posed by the partisans, von dem Bach ordered the creation of the Jagdkommando (Hunter Commando) in early 1943. These were independent units, usually of company strength, designed to attack the partisans in their own element. The Jagdkommando units infiltrated into the forests and swamps that contained partisan bases and stayed for extended periods of time.

They moved mostly by night, looking for any well-traveled path or trail that might be used by partisan forces. Living off the land, they were able to set up ambushes along those trails. The ambushes sometimes caused severe casualties to small partisan formations, but it was not enough to stop the recruitment of more Soviet locals, who easily replaced the Russian losses.

In the spring of 1943, Adolf Hitler was planning a battle designed to annihilate Soviet armies deployed in a huge salient in the Kursk sector. Massive amounts of men and equipment were sent to the area in preparation for the battle.

The Soviets were well aware of Hitler's plans. Their own espionage system was privy to many details of the operation, and partisan sources kept the Red Army up to date on enemy troop movements and dispositions. Hitler kept postponing the offensive, code-named "Citadel," so that even more divisions could be moved in for the attack.

German commanders grew more worried about the delays and the effects that partisan units in their rear might have on the operation once it finally got going. With postponement following postponement, the Army decided to use some of its field divisions scheduled for the offensive to secure, if only temporarily, the rail lines bringing vital supplies to the attack forces. Their mission was to eliminate as many partisan groups as possible in the weeks before the offensive, which was finally rescheduled for July 5.

Battle-hardened infantry and panzer units swept the Bryansk sector in several operations throughout May and June. The partisans took some fairly heavy casualties in German operations such as Osterei, Freis-

chutz, Tannhauser, and Ziegeunerbaron, but the units still managed to keep their cohesion. For the most part, surviving partisans melted into the marshes and forests to reform and integrate new recruits for the upcoming battle.

Citadel began with some initial success, but on July 13, Hitler, nervous about the Allied invasion of Sicily, decided to call off the offensive. He ordered key SS panzer divisions to disengage and head to the Mediterranean Front. Both sides had suffered massive losses during the nine-day battle, but the Soviets had a powerful reserve behind the front line ready to strike when the time was right.

The Russian counteroffensive began on July 17 with the Southwest and South Fronts attacking the flank of Heeresgruppe Süd. Heavy rains gave the German divisions of Heeresgruppe Mitte a break from the Russian offensive—the Soviets unable to attack or advance due to mud. The Heeresgruppe commander, Col. Gen. Walter Model, told Hitler in no uncertain terms that his armies would have to withdraw to shorten the line. For once, Hitler agreed and the divisions of the Heeresgruppe began moving westward on August 1.

ABOVE: Advancing toward the smoldering ruins of a Russian village, German soldiers prepare to search the remains of buildings for evidence of partisan activity. The German troops were encouraged to act brutally against the civilian population. OPPOSITE: Pouncing on unsuspecting German infantry, Soviet partisans unleash a hail of gunfire and hand grenades as they emerge from a treeline.

The partisan operation was code-named "Rail War." Preliminary attacks took place in late July with the Soviet counteroffensive now in full swing. Partisan units succeeded in blocking a main rail artery south of Bryansk for two days, and by the end of the month the Germans reported more than 1,100 separate attacks on railways in the central sector.

As the divisions of Heeresgruppe Mitte began their August 1 withdrawal, all partisan units scheduled to participate in Rail War were placed on alert. During the nights of August 3 and 4, Heeresgruppe Mitte reported more than 4,100 railway demolitions. It was the same in other sectors of the front. In all, Heeresgruppen Nord, Mitte, and Süd had a combined total of 262 kilometers of tracks destroyed. Supply trains heading toward the front were derailed by the attacks, backing up rail traffic and turning German logistics at the front into a nightmare.

The attacks continued up and down the front. In the Odessa sector in southern Russia, the 2nd Partisan Brigade, commanded by S. Kaplun, severed the Sarany-Luminets rail line, preventing its use from August 15 until October 19. The 3rd Partisan Brigade, operating behind the lines of Heeresgruppe Nord, claimed that it blew up 10,000 sections of track in August alone.

The partisan operation also had the effect of attracting thousands of new recruits. Soviet figures, which should often be taken somewhat skeptically, estimate a 250 percent increase in partisan fighters compared to the end of 1942. Even if the figure is inflated, there is no doubt that partisan units saw a significant increase in volunteers during the last half of 1943.

In the early days of 1944, the Soviets launched two offensives—one against Heeresgruppe Süd and the other against Heeresgruppe Nord. The southern operation tore into the German line from Kirovograd to Korosten, forcing the Wehrmacht back

more than 150 kilometers in some places. In the southern region of the Pripyat Marsh, partisan bands demolished the few rail lines in the area, totally disrupting the German supply network.

As the Soviets advanced, the partisans moved farther westward to set up new camps from which they could strike the enemy rear. More volunteers flocked to the cause, and German reports estimated that four partisan units with a combined total of nearly 9,000 men were operating in the rear of the Fourth Panzer Army, which was defending the sector directly south of the marsh.

In the north, the Russians launched an offensive aimed at breaking the siege of Leningrad and destroying the thinly stretched divisions of Heeresgruppe Nord. The offensive began on January 14 with thousands of shells slamming into the German positions. Tank and infantry units followed closely on the heels of the initial bombardment, breaking through the German front in several sectors.

Partisan units in the north were ordered to wait until the assault was in full swing before making their own attacks. The hard-pressed Germans, seeing no partisan activity in the rear area, released some security divisions and sent them to the front to try and stem the Russian tide.

As the offensive developed, the partisans were put into action, striking key communications and supply networks. The security units heading to the front were also attacked as their columns moved through the open countryside.

The Russian offensives had pushed Heeresgruppe Nord and Süd back hundreds of kilometers, leaving Heeresgruppe Mitte occupying a massive bulge in the center of the Eastern Front. In Moscow, staff officers worked night and day in planning a new offensive that was hoped to crack the Germans once and for all. The planned offensive was code-named "Bagration."

On the night of June 19, partisan forces in Belorussia set off more than 9,500 demolitions on German rail lines, and the main lines from Mogilev to Vitebsk and from Minsk to Orsha were knocked out of action for several critical days. When the Soviet offensive began on the 22nd, the movement of desperately needed supplies and reinforcements was impossible, leaving units on the front line in a hopeless position.

National Archives

As the Red Army rolled forward, partisans prepared river and stream crossing points that helped Russian tank and infantry units continue to drive west. Partisan units also assisted the Army by seizing and holding bridgeheads ahead of the advance and by cutting off German lines of retreat.

When Bagration was finally over in late August, the Germans had been pushed back almost 600 kilometers in several areas. Most of the Soviet Union had been liberated and Central Europe cowed at the approach of the Red juggernaut. Many of the partisan groups in the Soviet Union were subsequently disbanded, ending the Soviet partisan phase of the war in Russia. Some disbanded units were incorporated into the Army, but other units were sent into German occupied Poland and Czechoslovakia to continue the struggle.

The transplanted partisans had a twofold mission: They were to continue to disrupt German supplies and communications, but they were also ordered to contact communist partisans in the still occupied territories. The Soviet partisans helped form the nuclei of organizations that would eventually bring all of Eastern Europe into the Soviet camp once the war was over. When the Germans were finally defeated, these well-armed, battle-hardened groups represented a popular front that stamped out any democratic movements that dared to stand up against them.

Western historians have debated the effectiveness of the Soviet partisan movement for decades. It is clear, however, that Soviet partisans played an important part in several key battles during 1943 and 1944. Their positive effect on the morale of Soviet citizens was also important, as was their negative effect on the morale of the German soldier. It should also be remembered that just by their existence, the partisans forced the Germans to divert much needed units to secure their own rear areas at times when every man was needed at the front. □

ROMMEL VS. MONTY

Continued from page 27

mistake." This seems to evidence feelings of bitterness or antagonism. If true, it would be hardly surprising; Montgomery was, after all, the architect of Rommel's military downfall—the first enemy who had ever soundly beaten him in combat, and more than once.

Rommel mentioned once cynically listening to a Cairo radio broadcast that vaunted Montgomery's success. Monty's star rose as Rommel's fell; he skyrocketed to fame while Rommel was disgraced and stripped of military powers. This seems to have had a chilling effect on the German commander.

A similarly unusual silence occurred on Montgomery's part. He rarely mentioned Rommel after the war except to explain how he defeated him. Montgomery later said to his family that he wished he could have met Rommel in person. Monty appears, though, to have made no statements of soldierly admiration for Rommel either during or after the war—either in public or in published writings. Former opponents of the Desert Fox praised him as a "good man"; even Winston Churchill referred to Rommel in a speech as "a great general."

Montgomery was a very deliberate man; it is unknown whether his silence about Rommel was due to some unspoken principle or lingering wartime antagonism. Interestingly, unlike many Eighth Army veterans, Montgomery also gave no praise to the German troops he'd fought against. Perhaps his battles against Rommel had left Monty with experiences that he found difficult to express or forgive.

In contrast to the troops who fought under their command, it would seem the two generals became personal enemies during the war. El Agheila marked only the beginning of what would become a long series of hostile engagements between the two men, who were destined to constantly face off against each other in North Africa before their ultimate showdown on D-Day in 1944. □

SAUER RIVER

Continued from page 53

Berdorf just after nightfall, then withdrew to Consdorf.

At daylight the 1st Battalion, 423rd Regiment, which had been brought in from the Lauterborn area, initiated a counterattack against TF Standish at the edge of Berdorf and recovered all the ground lost during the previous two days, until American artillery fire drove the German troops to cover.

Although the evacuation of Berdorf was part of the 4th Division plan for redressing its line, the actual withdrawal was not easy. The Germans had cut the road to Consdorf as elements of TF Standish were withdrawn from an attack on Hill 329 and spent most of the afternoon clearing an exit for troops in Berdorf.

Shortly after dark, B and F Companies, 12th Infantry, along with 10 engineers and four squads of armored infantry, loaded onto 11 tanks and six halftracks and made their way to the 4th Division line northeast of Consdorf.

The Germans had gained control of most of the road network just beyond the Sauer, but too late. The new American line, running from Dickweiler through Osweiler, Hill 313, and Consdorf, to south of Müllerthal—though weak in the center—was well anchored on the flanks; German artillery was unable to drive the Americans out of Dickweiler.

At Bech, between Junglinster and Echternach and behind the American center, General Barton had placed the 3rd Battalion, 22nd Infantry, in reserve, having further stripped the 4th Division's right. In and around Eisenborn, CCA, 10th Armored, was also assembling to counter possible German threats.

The German Seventh Army's assault reached its high-water mark on December 21 and was halted due to the growing threat from Third Army. In its furthest penetration, the 276th VGD had nearly reached the village of Savelborn, but was stopped by dug-in American tanks. A bid by the 10th Armored and 9th Armored Division's CCA to take Waldbillig was stopped with great difficulty, the American armor taking over 100 prisoners.

At the southernmost point of the German advance, the 212th VGD moved in mass along the Echternach-Luxembourg highway. The German assault carried through Lauterborn and then continued south; however, the U.S. 4th Division and CCA, 10th Armored, rallied to repulse German advances toward Consdorf and Osweiler, parrying the German attacks with counterblows of their own. Elements of the U.S. 5th Infantry Division, XII Corps, began arriving to reinforce the overtaxed 4th Division.

The LXXX Army Corps had fought itself out. Some infantry companies reported strength of only 30 to 40 men.

The Germans had failed in their initial objective of overrunning American artillery or at least forcing its withdrawal to positions from which it could no longer interdict the German bridge sites. The failure to open the bridges over the Sauer within the first 24 hours had then forced the German infantry to fight without heavy weapons or armor support.

But American success along the Sauer came at a cost. In six days of fighting, the units on the southern shoulder lost over 2,000 killed, wounded, or missing. German casualties were believed to be somewhat higher, although exact numbers were unknown; about 800 German prisoners were taken.

The stubborn defense of the towns and villages close to the Sauer blocked the roads that were essential to the Germans' moving through the rugged terrain and barred a quick sweep into the American rear.

If the Seventh Army had succeeded in achieving its objectives, Patton's Third Army would have been hard-pressed to firm up the southern shoulder while also attempting to break through to the 101st Airborne Division at Bastogne.

For its actions in holding the southern shoulder of the Bulge, the 12th Infantry Regiment received a Presidential Unit Citation. Many more certainly deserved it. □

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