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FAILURE at Monte Cassino

U-BOAT RAID AT SCAPA FLOW

Axis Spy In America

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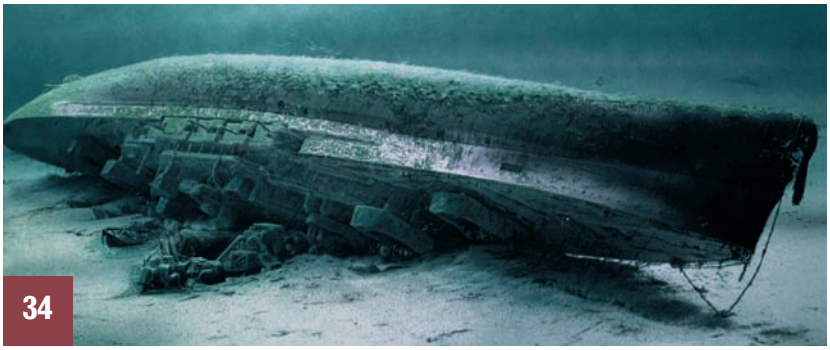
Cover: Corporal M. Smith of the Duke of Cornwall's Light Infantry poses with a tommy gun at the main headquarters of the Eighth Army in the Sant' Angelo area. Smith was involved in the fighting north of Cassino and on the Garigliano River. Photo courtesy of the Imperial War Museum.

WWII HISTORY

MAY 2007

FEATURES

COLUMNS



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On the fourth Allied attempt to capture Monte Cassino, the Polish II Corps succeeded.

In the spring of 1944, the Italian Campaign was one of frustration and stalemate for the Allies. General Mark Clark's Fifth Army had been stymied at Cassino, and strong German defenses barred the gateway to the valley of the Liri River and Rome, the Eternal City and capital of fascist Italy. Three previous attempts to capture Cassino and force entry into the Liri Valley had foundered, and the Allied landings at Anzio had secured a beachhead but had failed to open the way to Rome. Actually, the Anzio effort had just about become a liability. Desperate to link up with the beachhead for a joint push on Rome, General Sir Harold Alexander, commander of Allied ground forces in the Mediterranean, devised an offensive code-named Operation Diadem.

On May 11, 1944, more than 1,600 guns of the Fifth and Eighth Armies commenced a thunderous artillery barrage as the Allies attacked at four different points in the Cassino area. The Polish II Corps, commanded by General Wladyslaw Anders, was given the task of capturing Monte Cassino, the mountain that towered above the town of Cassino, resting on its slope. Atop the 1,700-foot mountain sat the ruins of the ancient Benedictine abbey, which had been reduced to rubble by Allied bombs and subsequently fortified by the Germans.

American and Commonwealth forces had come within yards of the ruined abbey but failed to take the position. Now, two Polish divisions, the 3rd Carpathian and the 5th Kresowa, stepped off. The Poles took the Phantom Ridge, 1,800 yards northwest of the abbey, and Hill 593, about 1,000 yards from the Corps objective.

Although they absorbed heavy casualties, the Poles fought on. Theirs was a special brand of determination. Many of them had been taken prisoner by the Soviet Red Army during the early days of the war as the Germans and Soviets partitioned their country. When the Nazis turned on the Soviets and it became necessary for the Soviet Union and the Western powers to fight together, the Poles were released and permitted to form an army. They went to Palestine and then Italy, where they were equipped and continued training with the assistance of the British.

General Anders was himself a veteran of World War I who had fought for his country in the Polish-Soviet War of 1919 and against the Nazis and the Soviets in the early days of World War II. He had been held for months in Moscow's Lubianka Prison. Anders and the Polish II Corps were fighting for their nation and for their individual honor. They had lost their country and their families. So, they fought like lions against the Nazis.

At dawn on May 12, the Poles found themselves exposed to heavy enemy fire. Half the attacking force had been killed or wounded, and Anders ordered a withdrawal. The Polish Corps mounted its second attack on Monte Cassino on the morning of May 17. The British succeeded in cutting Highway 6, and the Poles took Sant' Angelo Ridge north of the abbey. Allied aircraft pounded Monte Cassino, and the Germans feared being cut off. That night, under cover of a fierce counterattack, the 1st Parachute Division evacuated Monte Cassino.

The 12th Podolski Lancers reached the abbey on the 18th and found 30 wounded German soldiers and a few medical personnel. The Lancers raised a makeshift regimental standard, and four months of bitter fighting for control of Monte Cassino had ended. Many of the heroic Poles who were killed in the battle for Monte Cassino are buried in a cemetery near where they fell. General Anders, who died in 1970, is buried with them. A simple marker reads:

We Polish soldiers
For our freedom and yours
Have given our souls to God
Our bodies to the soil of Italy
And our hearts to Poland.

It is a fitting epitaph.

Michael E. Haskew

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Sherman versus Tiger

Dear Sir,

Isn't it time you told it like it really was about the breakout from the Normandy beach-head? That the Sherman tanks the Allies had were absolutely no match for the German tanks, and that the Americans had refused to countenance attempts by the British to upgrade the Sherman's peashooter gun with the Firefly because they couldn't accept a non-American gun on an American tank? There was only the possibility of a breakout where the Shermans were unopposed, because, compared to Tigers, they were basically rubbish. It is all very well to say that the Allies had more tanks and that the Shermans would in the end prevail due to their numerical superiority, but what about the tank crews who were sacrificed in the "Ronsons" or "Tommy cookers," as the Germans dubbed the Shermans? No problem, as long as they were British or Canadians at the eastern end of the bridgehead; this could always be blamed on Montgomery's "caution" or "obsessive tidiness" or some other supposed failing which could soothe American egos. The truth you are avoiding is that Montgomery, like Rommel, had served in the First War, and had, also like Rommel, suffered from the "chateau generalship" of staff officers safely ensconced behind the lines. There was no way he was going to send his troops into suicidal attacks led by the "tommy cooker" Shermans just to please U.S. commanders. If the Americans, by 1944 senior partners in the Western Alliance, had had any bloody sense at all (something they still don't seem to have acquired viz. the Nam, Somalia, Lebanon 1983, Iraq) they would have copied the best tank of the war, the Russian T-34, but no! Too wounding to the All-American ego!!

Barry Ward
Hyogo, Japan

While all the things Mr. Ward said about the Shermans are true, it was their number rather than their heft or firepower that mattered in the end. The Americans actually did develop a much larger tank, supposedly the answer to the Tiger, but the war ended before it could be introduced. Also, the fact that Operation Cobra succeeded, in spite of the failings of the Shermans and the carping of British and American officers, should be given foremost consideration.

On the subject of German tanks, the King Tiger was notoriously inefficient in its gasoline consumption, which turned out to be a major shortcoming during the Battle of the Bulge. The British Centurion tank did not match up to German tanks, either, nor did any other British tank. Which is why the British Army used the Shermans—they were very reliable and were available in mass-produced numbers.

The British and Americans have always found fault with each other, during World War I, World War II, and after. I just read a report titled: "British Officer Slams US Military Tactics, Attitudes in Iraq," which was written by the UK's 21st-century equivalent of Field Marshal Montgomery. The more things change ...

David Alan Johnson, author of "Operation Cobra," January 2007

Military Police in WWII

Dear Editor:

In reference to Ken Wright's article concerning Military Police in Australia (March 2007 issue), I was glad that the MPs received some attention. Unfortunately, the article wasn't as positive as I had hoped, but I think it was a fair assessment of the incident. Although seen by many as rear-echelon troops, MP duties run the gamut.

Consider some of the Military Police tasks and achievements during World War II: MPs provided security and law enforcement functions from the U.S. to the front lines. There were Aviation MPs as well as MPs onboard troop ships. Accompanying forward echelons, MPs maintained circulation control and unraveled traffic on the Red Ball and ABC Highways after the "Breakout" from northern France. They served as bodyguards for VIPs, and ran confinement operations for EPWs, civilian criminals in conquered territory, and GIs.

Their criminal investigation section solved crimes ranging from pilferage to massacres (Malmedy, Doolittle's raider executions). Divisional MPs accompanied their respective divisions on all fronts, in all landings (or jumps/glider rides) and in all campaigns. MPs were at Bastogne, the Normandy beaches, Iwo Jima, Okinawa, etc. After the war they provided war trial security and administration of sentencing.

The Corps of Military Police became an official branch of the Army on September 26, 1941, and would peak at over 209,000 soldiers during the war.

Andy Watson
St. Robert, Missouri

Tigers in North Africa

Dear Sir,

I would like to point out an error in the "Profiles" article about Sgt. Maj. Stan Hollis (March 2007). The article describes Hollis's attack on a German Tiger tank during the El Alamein campaign. According to excerpts from *Tigers in Combat* by Wolfgang Schneider, the first Tigers to arrive in North Africa were from sPz-Abt. 501, which arrived in Bizerta, Tunisia, on November 23, 1942. The other Tiger unit to serve in North Africa, sPzAbt. 504, did not have its first tanks arrive until March 12, 1943. The point being, there were no Tigers involved in the El Alamein campaign. Although the overall article details Sgt. Hollis's unquestionably heroic exploits, this simply cannot be a true accounting. The tank Hollis most likely attacked was a Panzer Mk. IV, armed at best with a 75mm KwK40L/43 gun, and not the dreaded 80mm KwK36L/56.

Steve Roersma
Ada, Michigan

Running the Gauntlet

Dear Sirs:

As a new subscriber to *WWII History,* I read it cover to cover when my new edition arrives. While all the articles are fascinating, one in particular really had me in tears as I finished. In the January 2007 issue was the article "Running the Gauntlet" by Flint Whitlock! Not only does he have a fascinating name, but his article on the Liberty Ships and the men who manned them really struck home with me. I have seen TV shows about the Liberty Ships and the role they had in WWII, but the sheer volume of them, the tonnage of goods they carried, and the unbelievable courage shown by the men who operated these vessels never came home to me until I read Mr. Whitlock's article. I wish to thank him for bringing to my (and I hope others') attention how vital was the role they played in the Allied victory.

I trust I will see many more articles by Mr. Whitlock in forthcoming issues! Because of his article, I plan now to visit one of the two remaining Liberty Ships to pay my respect to the sheer courage and patriotism of the crews who manned them.

John R. Wieder, MD
Spartanburg, South Carolina

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Lockheed's versatile Electra and Lodestar aircraft were overshadowed by more famous transport and combat types.

BY SAM McGOWAN

During its history, the Lockheed Aircraft Corporation has earned a reputation for building versatile airplanes. Its 1950s era C-130 Hercules is no doubt the most famous, but it was not the first.

Although, like the Hercules, they were originally designed as transports, the Electra/Lodestar series of twin-engine airplanes were adapted for a number of roles after the outbreak of World War II. Some were transports, but the type was also modified as a bomber, becoming the Hudson, Ventura, and Harpoon. Although none were particularly successful as military aircraft, they nevertheless were there when the need arose for specific missions, whether serving as a VIP transport with the Air Transport Command, flying reconnaissance or harassment missions out of the Aleutians, or operating over the vast reaches of the Atlantic in search of U-boats.

The original Electra was the Lockheed Model 10, an all-metal twin-engine transport that first flew in 1934. The Model 10 could accommodate 10 passengers and was the first multiengine design produced by the company that would later become famous for its twin-engine fighter, the P-38 Lightning. For wind tunnel testing, the company turned to the University of Michigan, where a young aeronautical engineering student assistant by the name of Clarence "Kelly" Johnson was placed in charge of the project. The young engineer suggested a radical change to the original design—instead of a single tail, Johnson recommended a dual-tail design that would reduce drag and increase speed.

Johnson also suggested the elimination of oversize wing fillets that were designed primarily for appearance, but contributed to drag. The result was a faster airplane with significant range. Another result was that Lockheed offered the young engineer a permanent position with the company. As the head of Lockheed's special projects division, more commonly known as "the Skunk Works," Kelly Johnson

A Lockheed Hudson bomber of the Royal Australian Air Force scores a hit against a Japanese freighter near Port Moresby, New Guinea. Variants of the Lockheed Electra and Lodestar designs saw service around the globe during World War II.

Australian War Memorial (ART 25914)

went on to design some of the most famous airplanes in aviation history, including the P-38 and the first successful U.S. jet fighter, the P-80.

The Electra's long range made it popular with a number of record seekers, including the famed—but not so skilled—aviatrix Amelia Earhart, who in 1937 disappeared in the Pacific in one while trying to become the first woman to circle the globe. A few months later Dick Merrill, who would become famous as an airline pilot and later as a B-24 squadron commander in the 93rd Bombardment Group, flew a Model 10 on a round trip across the Atlantic and back, a feat that is recognized as the first commercial oceanic crossing. Merrill and his copilot, J.S. Lambie, were awarded the Harmon Trophy for their feat.

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ABOVE: Beaming with delight at the prospect of a deserved rest, a group of RAAF men take their seats in a Lockheed Lodestar of the 37th Squadron on a flight from Noemfoor to Australia. BELOW: The Lockheed Electra was utilized as a passenger aircraft during the 1930s. This subject is a British Airways plane that served along Scandinavian routes.

Amber Books

Electras were purchased by many airlines around the world. A British Airways Electra carried British Prime Minister Neville Chamberlain to Munich for the infamous meeting with Adolf Hitler in 1938. The U.S. Army purchased a number of Electras, which were designated as C-36s. A single pressurized version of the Model 10 designated as the XC-35 was used by the Army in tests of pressurized fuselages. Lieutenant Ben Kelsey was the pilot for these tests.

Lockheed saw an opportunity for a new market with small airlines and corporations, so the company produced a scaled-down eight-passenger version of the Electra that was designated as the Model 12 Junior Electra. The Model 12 was almost 50 miles an hour faster than its predecessor, with a top speed of 250 miles per hour. A number of Model 12s were purchased for military use as liaison aircraft and given L designations. Australian inventor Sidney Cotton modified two Model 12s that had been purchased by British Airways to track potential enemy aircraft immediately before the outbreak of war.

Lockheed also went in the other direction with an upscale version of the Electra that was designated as the Model 14 Super Electra. Howard Hughes purchased a Super Electra and took it on a four-day flight around the globe in July 1938. Ironically, more Super Electras were built under license in Japan than were constructed by Lockheed.

The Model 14 suffered from a number of design deficiencies, which led to a further improvement that became the Lockheed 18 Lodestar. The first Lodestars were actually modified Super Electras that had been sent back to the factory by Northwest Airlines after a series of crashes plagued the Model 14. The fuselage was lengthened to accommodate more passengers while more powerful 1,020 horsepower Pratt & Whitney Hornet engines replaced the 760 hp Wright engines of the Super Electra, increasing cruise speed by 15 mph to 265 mph. The change in power plants constituted a new model, so Lockheed designated them as Model 18s.

With the outbreak of World War II, the U.S. Army began purchasing Super Electras and Lodestars from Lockheed and confiscating civilian aircraft for military service. Although they were given various designations depending on power plant and configuration, the most common transport designation was the C-60, which was given to the Lodestar. Used primarily as logistical transports and paratrooper trainers in the United States and Europe, C-60s did not see combat—with one exception. When war broke out in the Pacific, three Lodestars were on a ship bound for Manila for delivery to Philippine Airlines, a new company owned by Filipino businessman Andres Soriano that had only been in business for a short time.

The Lodestars were planned to supplement the airline's trio of Beechcraft Model 18s on operations throughout the islands. Immediately after the outbreak of war, the airline's chief pilot, retired U.S. Navy Chief Petty Officer Paul I. Gunn, and the airline's other personnel were inducted into the Army Air Corps, along with the company's airplanes, and assigned to an air transport squadron based out of Manila. The ship carrying the Lodestars was diverted to Australia, where the planes sat on a dock for several weeks along with other airplanes and tons of supplies that had been destined for the Philippines and were at sea when war broke out.

In early February 1942, Gunn, who had been ordered out of the Philippines just before Christmas, was put in charge of air transportation in Australia. The three Lockheeds, which had been painted olive drab and designated as C-60s, joined his ad hoc air transport unit, which also included some Electras that originally belonged to KLM Airways' Netherlands East Indies division.

The Dutch transports were commandeered after the Allied defeat in Java and assigned to transport duty along with a number of Australian military and civilian transports and U.S. Army transports that arrived in Australia in early 1942. The C-60s and C-111s operated

first with the 21st Transport Squadron, then with other troop carrier squadrons of the 374th Troop Carrier Group and the 54th Troop Carrier Wing on missions in New Guinea and the Southwest Pacific. They dropped supplies to Australian troops fighting on the rugged Kokoda Track, transported troops and cargo into forward airfields from Wanigela Mission to Tsili-Tsili, and often transported casualties to rear-area hospitals on the return flights. Although the primary transports in the 54th Wing were the Douglas C-47 and the C-53 paratrooper variant of the DC-3, C-60s continued in active service in wing squadrons until mid-1944.

Although the Electra and Lodestar saw only limited use as combat transports, both types were converted into bombers, mainly by the addition of defensive armament and bomb shackles in the cargo compartment. The original bomber was a Super Electra derivative that was sold to Britain where it became the Hudson, with deliveries beginning in early 1939. Britain saw the Super Electra as an off-the-shelf airplane that could easily be converted into a light bomber and placed a $25 million order with Lockheed, the largest contract the company had received up to that time.

The first Hudsons were assigned to RAF 224 Squadron in Scotland, and by the outbreak of the war 78 airplanes were in operational service. Assigned primarily to RAF Coastal Command in the antisubmarine and coastal patrol role, Hudsons served with RAF units until 1944. A Hudson achieved the distinction of being the first RAF airplane to shoot down a German aircraft, a Dornier D-18D flying boat, over Jutland on October 8, 1939. During the evacuation of Dunkirk, RAF Hudsons operated as fighters.

As the United States began arming for war, the U.S. Army began purchasing its own Hudsons, which were designated as either A-28s or A-29s, depending on which power plant was used. The U.S. Navy also operated Hudsons, which were initially designated as PBO-1s, with the O standing for Lockheed. The designation was later changed to V for Lockheed's Vega division, which manufactured the Electra and Lodestar and their military variants. On March 1, 1942, a PBO-1 became the first U.S. aircraft to sink a German U-boat off Newfoundland. An hour before the attack on Pearl Harbor, an RAF Hudson sank a Japanese ship off Malaysia; this was the first Allied victory of the war in the Pacific. A trainer version was produced for the Army with the AT-18 designation.

The need for military aircraft led to the development of a larger and more powerful bomber based on the Lodestar. The RAF was interested

in the airplane to supplement its fleet of Hudsons and for use as a low-altitude attack bomber, which they gave the designation "Ventura." Initially, the RAF planned to use its Venturas on low-altitude daylight missions over occupied Europe, but their vulnerability led to their transfer to Coastal Command. The U.S. Army Air Corps had evaluated the design for a medium bomber contract that went to North American for its B-25 Mitchell, but the Lockheed proposal was later accepted as the B-34 "Lexington" after war broke out and the need for military aircraft suddenly increased. A number of Venturas were diverted from the British production for U.S. Army use and were assigned to coastal patrol squadrons operating out of bases along the East Coast on antisubmarine patrol missions.

Australian War Memorial

ABOVE: A Lockheed Ventura of the U.S. Navy flies antisubmarine patrol above the Atlantic Ocean. Squadrons of the Royal Australian Air Force flew the Ventura in both the European and Pacific Theaters. TOP RIGHT: Turning into their bomb runs, a pair of Lockheed Hudsons bore in on an Axis target in the Western Desert in August 1942. Allied air power played a significant role in the victory in North Africa.

A new version of the Ventura was equipped with Wright 1,700 hp engines, which were actually less powerful than those on the B-34, and designated as B-37s. The Army ordered 550 of the type but took delivery of only 18 after the War Department and the Navy came to an agreement regarding antisubmarine warfare and coastal patrol that gave the mission to the Navy. The remainder of the production went to the Navy, which gave them the designation of PV-1. Performance deficiencies in the PV-1 led to the development of an improved version that was designated as the PV-2 Harpoon.

One of the most important features of the Ventura in U.S. naval service was the installation of ADS-1 search radar, which enabled the crew to detect ships and submarine conning towers from many miles away before enemy sailors knew the airplane was there. Radar also made blind bombing possible using radar navigation, a feature that proved invaluable in the fog-shrouded waters of the Aleutians and Kuriles, where Venturas saw the most action. The Navy's Venturas and Harpoons came about largely due to a major compromise with the Army Air Corps. The Army objected to the Navy's use of land-based bombers, an objection that forced the Navy to depend on amphibious patrol bombers and float planes for patrol use during the early months of the war. But when the Army needed a Navy manufacturing plant at Renton, Washington, for the manufacture of Boeing B-29s, it agreed to give up its objections and to allow all Army production of B-34s and B-37s to go to the Navy in return for use of the facility. The Navy also received other bomber types, particularly B-24s and B-25s, from the Army production as part of the compromise.

Venturas made their appearance in the war at the top of the world in April 1943, when bombing squadrons VB-135 and VB-136 deployed to the Aleutians. The two squadrons replaced a pair of patrol squadrons equipped with PBY Catalinas that were decommissioned, with their personnel transferring into the two Ventura squadrons to provide a cadre of experience. The Venturas entered combat at the height of the Aleutian campaign, just as the Allies were preparing for the invasions of Attu and Kiska Islands, which had been occupied by Japanese troops a year before in concert with the failed attack on Midway. The two squadrons were split between Adak and Amchitka, islands off of Alaska.

VB-135 arrived on Amchitka, the farther westward of the two, on May 5, 1943, and settled into tents on the Army airfield. Immediately upon arrival, the squadron commenced patrol operations. The Venturas supplemented Army B-24s and B-25s in the Aleutians, and it was common for the three types to operate together on missions against Japanese positions. Their radar allowed them to drop their bombs without seeing the ground, and the Navy bombers often led Army B-24s on missions against fog-obscured targets on Kiska. The Army Liberators would fly formation on a Navy Ventura, which would drop its bombs using radar, and the B-24 bombardiers would drop as soon as they saw the bombs fall out of the Navy plane.

Shortly after the Venturas began operations in the Aleutians, the Allies invaded Attu. Fighting on Attu was brief, although Japanese soldiers continued holding out through August. As soon as possible after the invasion, the Air Corps began moving in Army Air Forces officers who decided that the existing Japanese airfield was too hazardous, so construction was begun on a new one to serve as a base for bombers and fighters. It was the Arctic summer, and the men lived in tents heated by small potbellied stoves.


Australian War Memorial

On July 6, a Seabee battalion began construction of an airfield at Casco Bay, which would serve as a base for Navy bombers and patrol planes. Butler buildings, more commonly known in the Navy as Quonset huts because the first ones had been set up at Quonset Point, Rhode Island, were erected as semipermanent living quarters and office and supply facilities. Hangars were constructed so maintenance could be performed inside, and the airplanes and mechanics would be sheltered from the hostile elements. Wood-planked walkways con-

"The knowledge of higher leadership can only be acquired by the study of military history and actual experience."

Napoleon Bonaparte

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nected the buildings. Supplies were abundant, and merchant ships filled the harbor waiting to unload their cargoes.

The dense fog that made Allied operations difficult afforded the Japanese on Kiska cover for an evacuation. Allied plans were to invade the island on August 15, but by the time the first American foot touched the soil of the island, the Japanese had slipped away. Although 21 American and Canadian troops died on Kiska, they were all killed by friendly fire. Not a single Japanese soldier was encountered on the island. There was one friendly encounter. A small dog named Explosion had fallen captive to the Japanese when the U.S. Navy weather station crew was captured in 1942. The little dog, a Dutch Harbor native, was repatriated.

Five days before the landing on Kiska, VB-135 moved onto the new airfield at Alexai Point. The field was called Casco Field, after a seaplane tender that had serviced the PBYs that preceded the Venturas in the Aleutians earlier in the war. The mountainous terrain of the island dictated that approaches be made from over the water. Flight crews developed a procedure of descending below the clouds over the water, then homing on the radio beacon on the field until they picked up terrain features on the island and could locate the field visually.

As soon as they arrived on the island, VB-135 crews commenced patrols in six sectors west of Attu, with the furthermost points 500 miles away. They also operated over Kiska, which had already been abandoned. The intent of the usually fruitless patrols was to detect Japanese ships or bomber formations far out at sea.

Prior to the invasion of Attu, Army bombers had been conducting raids against Japanese targets in the Kurile Islands, the easternmost of the Japanese home islands. The raids were carried out by B-24s and B-25s and, as the Japanese built up their defenses, were often accompanied by comparatively heavy losses. The problem was compounded by the neutrality of the Soviet Union in the war with Japan. Even if a bomber crew survived a fighter attack, if they were forced to land in Soviet territory they and their airplane would be interned and lost to the Allies. On September 11, 1943, a 20-plane force made up of eight B-24s and 12 B-25s departed Attu for a raid on the Kuriles. Three B-24s and nine B-25s failed to return from the mission, and Army Air Forces leadership in Washington began questioning the wisdom of continuing daylight raids in the region, at least at that point in the war.

Headquarters, U.S. Army Air Forces, elected to withdraw all but two bomber squadrons from the Eleventh Air Force and transfer them to the South Pacific where reinforcements were sorely needed. With Army bomber strength in the Aleutians reduced, the importance of the Venturas to continuing operations against the Kuriles increased. In fact, for several months the Navy bombers would be the only Allied aircraft attacking targets in the Japanese home islands.

Up to this point, the Ventura crews of VB-135 were involved primarily in routine patrols in search of Japanese shipping and aircraft. The missions were long, boring, and essentially unfruitful. The sister squadron, VB-136, arrived on Attu on October 1 and immediately began patrols. Shortly afterward, a Ventura crew encountered a Japanese Mitsubishi Betty bomber and gave chase, but when the pilot realized the Japanese cannon had greater range than his .50-caliber machine guns, he gave up the contest. That was the only eventful operation of the Ventura patrols to this point. A little over a month later, VB-135 was relieved and departed for the squadron's home base at Whidbey Island, Washington, leaving VB-136 to assume the full schedule of patrol missions.

A requirement for photographic intelligence of Japanese military strength in the Kuriles gave the Venturas a new mission. In November 1943, Lieutenant H.K. Mantius was assigned the task of computing the maximum operating range of the PV-1. Mantius compiled a log of fuel consumption rates for all of the squadron airplanes and conducted experiments with power settings in an attempt to increase range. In mid-November he and his crew flew a nine- and-a-half-hour mission that put them within 30 miles of Paramushiro Island before they turned back. They reached Attu with almost an hour and a half of fuel remaining in the tanks.

It would not be crews from VB-136, however, that began the long-range missions that were the most important of the war for Ventura and Harpoon crews. Poor weather prevented missions until it was time for the squadron to rotate back to Whidbey. The squadron was replaced by VB-139, which operated modified Venturas that included dual cockpit instrumentation, a feature not a part of previous aircraft configurations. This feature

TANK RECOVERY AT NARVA

The German defense of Estonia in 1944 was a fierce fight. Anchoring the entire Russian Front line at the Estonian city of Narva, the Germans and their Estonian allies blunted attack after attack by the Red Army. The Germans, low on every item of war, used whatever they could to beat back their enemy—even stealing.

That was the case for a Russian T34/76A tank. The Germans captured the medium tank intact and turned it on its owners. They painted it with distinct German crosses to mark the new ownership, but it could still fool Russian gunners from a distance who could not make out its markings but recognized it silhouette. Despite its usefulness in battle, when the Germans retreated from Narva in September of 1944, they most likely drove the undamaged tank into Lake Kurtna Matasjarv to keep it out of Russian hands.

There it stayed until 1999, when a local boy, who found tank tracks leading into the lake and noticed a constant flow of bubbles from a particular spot, explained his find to some war enthusiasts. A diving party was put together and the tank was discovered in 23 feet of water beneath 10 feet of peat. Using a bulldozer attached to three heavy pulling cables, the war relic emerged from the lake after six hours of hauling.

After everything the tank had been through, it showed no signs of wear or rust. Everything worked except the engine. The tank is being restored and will be put on display at the Narva World War II Museum. □

Kevin M. Hymel

National Archives

Gleaming in the sun as it sits on a runway, this Lockheed Electra Model 12 is similar to the aircraft made famous by aviatrix Amelia Earhart during her attempt to circumnavigate the globe.

allowed the copilot to fly the airplane on instruments from the right seat, a factor that reduced pilot fatigue and allowed longer missions.

Three squadron crews went to Adak where a pair of Venturas was being modified for long-range missions with the addition of a bomb bay fuel tank and with K-19 cameras for photographic reconnaissance. In early January a nine-hour test mission was flown over the Aleutians. Three days later the modified airplanes and the test crews joined the rest of the squadron on Attu.

On January 19, 1944, strikes against the Kuriles were authorized under a program called Empire Express. That evening three crews were briefed for a mission against the troop staging area at Kashiwabara. Each PV-1 carried three 500-pound bombs and several boxes of 20-pound fragmentation bombs as it took off into the frigid Arctic night. Two airplanes carried cameras. Although the Venturas were equipped with cabin heaters, they had little effect in the sub-zero temperatures of the Arctic skies. The Navy flight crews had bummed electrical flying suits from the Air Corps, but the PV-1 electrical system allowed only one suit to be plugged in at a time. The men took turns plugging in, suffering in the cold when their suit was unplugged. Using a Soviet marine radio beacon to navigate, the three crews made landfall.

Starlight illuminated the snow-covered landscape and allowed the crews to identify features without difficulty. As soon as the first bomb burst, the Venturas were greeted by antiaircraft fire. All three airplanes dropped their bombs and returned to Attu unscathed. A second mission two nights later was similarly successful. For the next few weeks, missions were spasmodic, owing primarily to weather conditions over Attu, but during the first few days of February, raids were carried out on four consecutive nights.

Although it was difficult to assess the strike results, there was little doubt that the attacks were having a psychological effect on the Japanese because the Kuriles had been considered part of the home islands since Russia had relinquished its claim to them in the previous century. Japan was being bombed, although little public attention was paid to the actions since the targets were so far from Tokyo. The attacks were often coordinated with naval action by U.S. Navy surface vessels operating just offshore.

The Empire Express missions against the Kuriles were flown without fighter escort, but the PV-1 had an advantage in speed. One of the fastest twin-engine aircraft of the day at 265 mph, the Lodestars were so fast that even the Zero was unable to overtake them in some instances. The Japanese fighter pilots preferred to make head-on attacks if at all possible and knock out an engine, but the speed of the Venturas made them difficult to intercept.

Still, the fighters were sometimes successful, and with an engine gone, the Venturas would lose much of their speed and become sitting ducks. If an airplane suffered damage, the crew usually had no choice but to set a course for Soviet territory. Even if they made it, their safety was hardly guaranteed because of the rugged mountainous terrain of the region, especially in the winter when it was covered in snow and ice. If they survived, they would be interned for having violated neutral Soviet airspace.

By mid-1944, Army B-24s and B-25s had resumed missions against the Kuriles, and the Navy Ventura crews were no longer alone in the skies at the top of the world. The three squadrons rotated back and forth between their home base at Whidbey Island and the Aleutians.

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Young Franklin Sousley was an ordinary Marine caught up in an extraordinary moment on Iwo Jima.

BY RANDALL B. INGRAM

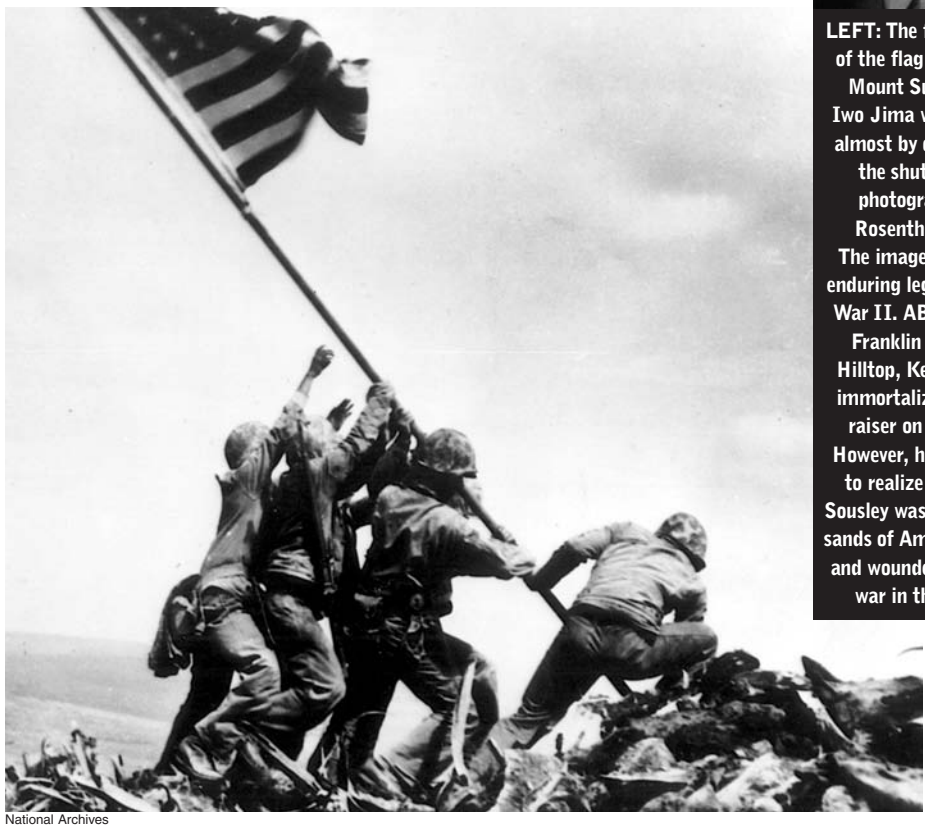
EVERYONE HAS SEEN THE NOW FAMOUS PHOTOGRAPH OF THE THREE FIREFIGHTERS HOISTING Old Glory over the ruins of the World Trade Center. Much has been said about its resemblance to one of the most famous photographs ever taken, the flag raising atop Mount Suribachi on Iwo Jima during World War II. That picture captured the imagination of the American people, and indeed the entire free world in 1945. It was the embodiment of the American fighting spirit, its image the very essence of heroism and determination. It has

in combat. Today, he rests in a quiet cemetery, virtually forgotten outside his rural Kentucky hometown.

There were six flag raisers, although only four are visible. On the far right planting the flagpole is Harlon Block of Texas, a star football player who enlisted in the Marines along with all the seniors on his high school team. Between Harlon and Franklin is John Bradley, a Navy medic from Wisconsin who received the Navy Cross for bravery, then stuffed the medal in a closet, never telling his family of its existence. On the far left of the photo, reaching but never quite able to clutch the pole, is Ira Hayes of Arizona, a Pima Indian. His whole life would be like that, always reaching and never quite grasping. The two men on the other side are barely discernible in the photo. Rene Gagnon of New Hampshire would forever try to capitalize on his newfound fame, only to see each lucky break somehow slip through his fingers.

Finally stands Sergeant Mike Strank, whose only visible feature is his right hand helping Franklin's to steady the pole. A Marine's Marine, his birthday shared the same date as the Marine Corps founding. His men absolutely idolized him. Mike taught them how to kill the enemy, but would also say, "Listen to me, and I'll get you home to your mothers."

US Marine Corps History Division



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LEFT: The famous photo of the flag raising atop Mount Suribachi on Iwo Jima was captured almost by chance when the shutter of AP photographer Joe Rosenthal clicked. The image remains an enduring legacy of World War II. ABOVE: Young Franklin Sousley of Hilltop, Kentucky, was immortalized as a flag raiser on Iwo Jima. However, he did not live to realize that fame. Sousley was among thousands of Americans killed and wounded during the war in the Pacific.

Then there is Franklin Runyon Sousley from Hilltop, Kentucky, second from the left. He was the second of three sons, born September 19, 1925. The name goes all the way back to 1809, when the first Franklin Sousley was born. The Sousleys were not wealthy, nor were most people living through the Great Depression. There was electricity, but indoor plumbing was only the stuff of dreams. Mostly, life was about work; and it was hard work, usually tobacco, but also putting up hay and milking the cows that provided milk for the family. His older brother died in his mother's arms from appendicitis when Franklin was just three. Franklin and his mother Goldie drew particularly close as she sought to find solace in him. The bond would only grow with time

In 1931, Franklin began his education in a two-room schoolhouse in nearby Tea Run, and continued at a larger schoolhouse in Elizaville. Three years later, his father died of diabetes. At age nine, Franklin became the man of the house, and his mother became even more emotionally dependent upon him. In school, Franklin was academically perfect—all Cs. With chores before school and work around the farm until dark, there was little time for studying or after-school athletics. It was not an

easy life, but those who remember him best recall a boy with a quick and ready smile who loved to hunt and fish in the nearby Licking River. Moreover, he loved that farm, saying it was his dream to someday return there and live out his years.

Upon graduation, Franklin came north. Dayton, Ohio, was by then a bustling wartime town with plenty of opportunities for someone willing to put in a hard day's work. He found his way to Frigidaire Plant 2 on Springboro Pike, working as a staker and assembler on the propeller line. During the week, he stayed in an apartment at 107 Park Drive in East Dayton. Weekends often found Franklin making the long trek back home to see his mother and his longtime sweetheart, Marian Hamm. Things might have stayed that way, but in December 1943 a telegram from a certain Uncle Sam changed all that—Franklin had been drafted. Instead of going into the Army, Franklin opted, like many young men his age, to join the Marines.

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ABOVE: This photograph of the historic February 23, 1945, flag raising atop Mount Suribachi was taken as Marines took up positions and sought to anchor the pole in the debris and rock atop the extinct 550-foot volcano. LEFT: This view of the Stars and Stripes waving in the breeze atop Mount Suribachi was taken moments after the historic Rosenthal photograph. A Marine sentinel stands guard near the base of the flag.

December 7, 1941, came as a shock to America. When Japanese bombs rained down on Pearl Harbor, Hawaii, on that Sunday morning, the United States was an isolationist nation wanting no part in another European war. Franklin and his mother were down at the barn milking the family cows that evening before church when word came. He knew it meant nothing less than war. Three days later, Nazi Germany declared war on the United States. Now there was no turning back. America would have to fight two major wars at the same time.

Franklin set about proving himself during the seemingly endless weeks of boot camp at Camp Pendleton, California. While laughing off a lot of good-natured ribbing about his thick Kentucky drawl, he did admit to some feelings of loneliness in letters written to his mother. "I believe I am homesick for once in my life. If you had treated me mean before I left, it wouldn't be so hard to forget. But you were so good that when they [the Drill Instructors] start raving around here, I think of home."

It was a big day in the normally placid, quiet country town of Hilltop, Kentucky, when the lanky, freckle-faced Marine returned home after boot camp for a much needed rest. "He stepped off that train in his Marine dress blues looking straight as a string," remarked a childhood friend. He seemed bigger now too. On his last night home, Franklin summoned up the courage to ask his longtime sweetheart, Marian, to wait for him. It was a risky proposition. What if she said no? He was going off to war; she had to be aware of the danger. When he finally popped the question, she thought for a moment and then gave her answer: Yes, she would wait! Franklin was overjoyed and much too excited to go home. He spent a good part of his last night home on the front porch of the Hilltop General Store reminiscing with friends about the good old days and talking about how great it was to be a Marine. But foremost in his thoughts was that girl down the road.

Sad farewells were exchanged at the train station the next morning as Franklin prepared to leave. Goldie just didn't want to let her boy go. Following a long, tearful hug, he looked directly into his mother's weary eyes and promised her, "Momma, I'm gonna do something to make you proud of me." And saying goodbye to Marian before boarding the train to Maysville, his parting words were, "When I come back, I'll be a hero."

Franklin was assigned to the newly created 5th Marine Division, some 21,000 strong, whose purpose was to offset the staggering losses incurred in the war so far. Eventually, the 5th would become the most highly trained division in the history of the Marine Corps. Yet it would fight in only one battle. On September 19, 1944, the Marines set sail for Hawaii. It was Franklin's 19th birthday and would be his last.

Advanced Infantry Training, or AIT as they like to call it, is basically boot camp after boot camp—except the bullets are real and the training more intense. Franklin found himself at Camp Tarawa, a 40,000-acre cattle ranch nestled in the rugged foothills of the island of Hawaii. Thick volcanic ash from two nearby volcanoes covered everything. The Red Cross deemed the site unsuitable for prisoners of war, but perfect for the Marine Corps. Easy Company would spend the next four months there, honing its skills at beach landings, climbing down the sides of ships into landing craft, and maneuvering under fire.

The huge armada that finally made its way from Hawaii was 70 miles long and contained 500 ships. Some 100,000 Marine and Navy personnel sailed 4,000 miles over the next three weeks before reaching their target, a tiny, desolate island 650 miles south of Tokyo Bay called Iwo Jima. Barely five miles in length and shaped somewhat like a large pork chop, Iwo Jima is dominated on its southern tip by a huge inactive volcano called Mount Suribachi. The island's surface is quite similar to what one might find on the moon. Barren, rocky, and virtually void of vegetation, a thick sulphur ash coats everything and is several feet deep in some places along the beach.

For the Americans, Iwo Jima was a staging point for the inevitable invasion of Japan. For the Japanese, it was home soil, sacred ground that had been a part of Japan's empire for over 4,000 years. To the Japanese, an invasion of

Iwo Jima was an attack on Japan itself. They began fortifying Iwo in May 1944, when the emperor himself handpicked General Tadamichi Kuribayashi to lead the island's defense. The general knew he could not possibly win the battle. Instead, his effort would be to kill as many Marines as possible and shock the war-weary American public into not supporting an invasion of Japan. His strategy was to let the Marines land unopposed, and once the beaches were clogged with men and equipment, destroy them.

The defense of the entire island was designed toward this goal. Over 750 blockhouses and pillboxes manned by 22,000 Japanese were neatly camouflaged into the landscape, each one strategically located to have interlocking fields of fire and support. Months were spent setting up and sighting the myriad machine gun, mortar, and artillery pieces. General Kuribayashi brought in the best fortifications specialists in the Japanese Army. Quarry experts, mining engineers, and labor battalions worked around the clock to devise a complex system of underground tunnels and caves 16 miles in length and five stories deep. There were 1,500 underground rooms, electricity and ventilation, even a hospital. He could shuttle entire units of men from one end of the island to the other in minutes.

Over 70,000 Marines were massed in their landing craft on February 19, 1945, hurtling toward their destiny in wave after wave along a two-mile beachhead. Seventy-two straight days of naval and aerial bombardment, the longest of the war, had just concluded; 5,800 tons of bombs had been dropped on Iwo's surface. Enormous 2,600-pound shells from the 16-inch guns of U.S. Navy battleships sailed overhead. At 9:05, the first landing craft hit the beach, taking only light small arms fire. Men and machines were instantly bogged down in the soft, sucking, volcanic sand. The Japanese held their fire. More men and equipment were hitting the beach now; units were starting to form up. Still, they waited.

Easy Company landed with the 12th wave near the base of Mount Suribachi at 9:55. There were now 6,200 Marines strung out along a 3,000-yard beachhead. Suddenly, the entire island exploded. Bullets, mortars, and artillery shells fell in torrents from hundreds of concealed positions, shredding the ranks of the stunned Marines. The landing zone was instantly transformed into a maelstrom of death. There was simply nowhere to hide. Digging a foxhole was almost impossible. As soon as each shovelful was scooped out, the hole filled up again. Still the assault waves kept com-

ing. One Amtrac took a direct hit, instantly disintegrating everyone onboard. The noise from all those guns and the constant explosions rose to a point where the din became one loud, deafening roar. Franklin and the men of Easy Company were caught on the terraces just beyond their landing zone.

Franklin and the other survivors of Easy Company worked their way up over the terraces and were moving inland, albeit at a snail's pace. They were a part of the 28th Regiment, whose task was to cut across the island at the base of Mount Suribachi, isolating it from the rest of the island. Suribachi and its 2,000 Japanese defenders had to be taken if the Marines were to have any hope of winning. They crept, crawled, and staggered forward, sometimes sprinting forth like athletes at a track meet. Now all the months of training began to pay off. Many were cut down in the process, but usually Marines were able to destroy the defensive positions with grenades or satchel charges. Then they would move on to the next one, yard after bloody yard throughout the entire day.

The rains, which had been mercifully absent on day one, pounded Iwo Jima with a fury as the curtain lifted on the second day. Easy Company had it pretty good for a while, being held in reserve in case of counterattack. There were now 33,000 Marines on the island, and the 28th Regiment, some 3,000 strong, was attacking Mount Suribachi. Ordered up to the front lines around 4 PM, Easy quickly came under heavy enemy fire. At one point, Franklin, Mike, Harlon, and Ira helped rescue five gravely wounded friends by dragging them into a trench. A tank was then directed over the ditch and the crew loaded the wounded up through its bottom hatch. By the end of the day, with all their suffering and loss of life, the Marines had gained 200 yards.

By February 23, the rainy weather finally let up. The day loomed large for the 28th Regiment. At 9:30 AM, a couple of four-man patrols were ordered to the top of Mount Suribachi. Surprisingly, both returned about an hour later unscathed, one having made it all the way up to the top of the volcano. Still, everyone was suspicious; it had to be a trap. The decision was made to risk sending a platoon to the top. The 2nd Platoon, with Ira, Harlon, Mike, and Franklin, was off on a patrol around the mountain's base and unavailable. As luck would have it, what was left of 3rd Platoon was closest, so these men got the honor of being the first to scale Mount Suribachi. Given a small flag, they were told, "If you get to the top, put it up."

Sergeant Lou Lowery, a photographer for Leatherneck magazine, volunteered to go along, and up they went, walking and sometimes climbing over boulders, rocks, and debris, cautiously scaling Suribachi's charred and blackened slopes. After making sure the area was secure and free of booby traps, the 3rd Platoon quickly set about getting the flag up. Everyone was still tense. One leatherneck did take the opportunity to relieve himself over the edge of the crater, declaring, "I proclaim this volcano property of the United States of America."

A length of drainage pipe was soon located among the rubble, and the flag was attached to it. As three of the Marines planted the pole and Old Glory fluttered over Japanese soil for the first time, the island erupted—not in gunfire but in a deafening chorus of cheers. For a few brief moments, Iwo Jima was transformed into Times Square on New Years Eve. Every Marine on the island was cheering, ships at anchor blasted their horns, and some new guys even thought the battle was over.

It wasn't. The Japanese holed up inside Suribachi reacted with characteristic fanaticism. They swarmed out of their tunnels and caves, screaming and shooting; one brandished a broken sword over his head. Grenades were going back and forth like a snowball fight. But the flag stayed up, and in a few minutes it was over.

All the attacking Japanese were killed, with no loss of American life. A few days later, over 150 dead were found inside the caves. Most had died of self-inflicted wounds.

The secretary of the Navy, James Forrestal, aboard a ship as an observer, had just come ashore and witnessed the event on top of the volcano. He commented, "The raising of that flag on Suribachi means a Marine Corps for the next 500 years." Forrestal was so impressed that he decided to keep the flag for himself as a souvenir.

The 28th Regiment, however, was going to have no part of that. They had fought too hard to get that flag up there. The regimental commander, Colonel Chandler Johnson, ordered a replacement put up and the first flag brought back down for safekeeping. He then barked at his departing aide, "And make it a bigger one."

The colonel also decided it would be a good idea to have a wired field telephone on top of the mountain. Having just returned from their uneventful probe around Suribachi's base, Franklin's 2nd Platoon was given the job. Although worn out from their mission, nobody complained. While gathering their equipment,

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On March 1, 1945, several days after the historic raising of the flag on Iwo Jima, weeks of difficult fighting remained. Here, a squad of U.S. Marines advances past a tank, which has become trapped in the rubble of a demolished Japanese pillbox.

they were joined by a runner, Rene Gagnon, who had the new, larger flag. This flag, twice as big as the other one, had been salvaged from a sinking ship at Pearl Harbor.

While all this was going on, an Associated Press photographer named Joe Rosenthal was having a bad day. He had taken a spill in the ocean while climbing into a landing ship and was too late to the mountain to get any pictures of the flag raising. He ran into Bill Genaust, a Marine combat photographer with a color movie camera, and Bob Campbell, another combat photographer. The three decided to climb to the summit of Suribachi anyway; maybe they could shoot a few good pictures.

Arriving on top of the mountain with their wires, telephone, and flag, Strank ordered Hayes and Sousley to locate another usable length of pipe while he and Block cleared a spot to plant the new flag. "Colonel Johnson wants this big flag run up high, so every son of a bitch on this whole cruddy island can see it," he explained to a nearby officer. As fate would have it, Rosenthal, Genaust, and Campbell arrived on the scene at just this precise moment. It was a few minutes after noon, February 23, 1945.

The journalists noticed two Marines lugging a heavy pipe toward a third Marine holding a neatly folded flag. The plan was to simultaneously lower the first flag while the second flag went up. Campbell placed himself a little down-

hill to capture this moment, while Rosenthal and Genaust stood about 90 feet away. Block positioned his feet over the spot he had cleared amid the rubble, ready to plant the pipe. Genaust started his movie camera. Strank, the 100-pound pole on his right shoulder, moved toward Block as Hayes joined in. The flag was wrapped around the pipe to keep it from touching the ground. There was nothing ceremonial about the event; they did not even know they were being filmed.

Strank called to Bradley, who dropped his armload of bandages and stepped up to the pole. Sousley then moved into position in front of Hayes. Block leaned over to plant the pole. They gingerly moved the pipe into position, high stepping over the debris as Gagnon entered the picture from the right and joined the cluster of men as they wrestled the new flagpole into position.

Genaust, his camera rolling now, positioned himself a few feet to the right of Rosenthal. "I'm not in your way am I, Joe?" he asked. "Oh no," Rosenthal replied as he glanced over his shoulder just to be sure. And then, out of the corner of his eye, Rosenthal glimpsed the flag going up. It may be too late! He had to hurry. With no time to frame his shot, Rosenthal reflexively swung his camera up in an arc, pointed, and snapped the photograph.

It was 1/400th of a second, frozen in time—perhaps the most celebrated image of men at war in history. A moment sooner or a split second later, and it might have been just another photo. A good one to be sure, but the flag would not have been at that perfect 45 degree angle. It is the symmetry between the flag and the men that makes this photo such a classic. It looks like the flag is going up, but we cannot be sure it is going to make it. The men are struggling to see that it does go up—and stay there. The image compels casual and interested observer alike to leap into the scene and lend them a hand or cheer them on.

And then it was over. The Marines drove the pipe into the ground and piled rocks around its base while the flag flapped smartly in the breeze. Campbell and Genaust were satisfied; they got the shots they came after. Joe Rosenthal, however, was less enthusiastic. As an experienced photographer, he was well aware of the odds against his photo coming out. It could be all sky, all rocks, possibly out of focus and certainly not centered. As a consolation, he gathered the remaining Marines and took a posed "gung ho" shot. Then everybody went back to work. Rosenthal went out looking for more photos and that night packed up his film and sent it back to the States.

The 28th Regiment spent the next four days resting and licking its wounds, having lost 510 men in the four-day battle to take Suribachi. Since hitting the beach on D-Day, a third of the regiment had fallen in battle. Some men spent their time exploring caves in search of souvenirs; others wrote letters home, and everyone slept.

On February 27, Franklin wrote to his mother Goldie: "As you probably already know we hit Iwo Jima February 19th just a week ago today. My regiment took the hill with our company on the front line. The hill was hard and I sure never expected war to be like it was those first four days. I got some [bullet holes] through my clothing and I sure am happy that I am still OK.

"This island is practically secured. There is some heavy fighting on one end and we are bothered some at night. Mother, you can never imagine how a battlefield looks. It sure looks horrible. I do know of at least four Nips that won't be going back to Tokyo. Look for my picture because I helped put the flag up. Please don't worry and write."

The AP photo editor told his boss, "Here's one for all time." He was holding in his hand a picture just back from Iwo Jima of the flag being raised after the Marines conquered Mount Suribachi. However, this picture was different; it wasn't your everyday news photo. Only one face was visible, the others were all obscured or looking away. Yet it was a masterpiece of composition and lighting. Looking very nearly as if they were carved out of stone, the heroic figures seemed larger than life. They promptly passed it on. On Sunday, February 25, 1945, millions of Americans awoke to find the flag- raising picture on the front page of their newspapers.

Exactly who these men were was anybody's guess. But Joe Rosenthal became an overnight celebrity. No one back in America yet knew that this was not the original flag raised on Suribachi, but a replacement.

Since Rosenthal was a civilian, his pictures had traveled back to the states much faster than did Lowery's, which had to pass through military channels. When the truth finally came out it caused a minor scandal, some critics going so far as to accuse Rosenthal of staging the entire scene. He did not, of course, and Genaust's color motion picture vindicated Rosenthal and silenced his critics.

The public also expected that with the taking of Suribachi the battle was all but won. In reality, the opposite was true. The killing would not conclude for another 32 days. On February 28, the 28th Regiment received orders to move directly to the front lines on the western side of the island for a sweep

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The letters of Corporal James G. Delaney provide a glimpse of military life in World War II and concern for family at home.

BY MAURA B. DELANEY

Letters were a valuable commodity to the World War II soldier. They were the link to home and to all things familiar in a most unfamiliar place and time. The war produced mountains of mail. In 1943, GI's received an average of 14 pieces of mail per week. On the island of New Guinea in the Pacific, three-quarters of the soldiers wrote one or more letters every day. While acknowledging the value mail held as a stabilizing factor in a soldier's psychological well-being, the U.S. government was also grappling with two major concerns regarding the mail system, volume and content. Volume was directly linked to critical shipping space needed by the armed services.

In response to the volume issue, the U.S. government created "Victory Mail" or "V-Mail." These letters were microfilmed versions of full-size sheets. The condensed letters were an effort to speed the delivery time and allow for more room in overseas shipping. Every 150,000 letters scanned would result in one ton of shipping space saved. This concept began in England as "airgraphs" and was picked up in the United States on June 15, 1942. The U.S. Army began operating a large V-Mail facility at Casablanca in North Africa in April 1943. Over a billion letters were sent via V-Mail between 1942 and 1945. Miniaturized V-Mail reduced 2,575 pounds of regular mail to a single sack weighing 45 pounds.

One 16mm roll of the microfilmed V-Mail letters weighed in at seven ounces and could hold more than 1,500 letters. A large reel could contain upward of 18,000 letters. Numerous advertisements were produced promoting the use of V-Mail. These included such slogans as "The Next Best Thing to a Leave Is a Letter." Others said, "Write that boy in service today!" and "Let a 300-mile-an-hour mailman speed your letter overseas."

The second concern regarding mail was censorship of content. President Franklin D. Roosevelt, recognizing the potential breach in military classified information that existed within all aspects of communication, established the Office of Censorship in 1941. The office employed 14,462 civilians to monitor communications between the United States and other nations.

The letters and a journal of this author's uncle, Corporal James G. Delaney, a military transport flier, provide a glimpse into daily life in the armed forces during World War II while also offering some understanding of the censorship that occurred. The comparison of the journal entries and corresponding letters written the same week also reveals a level of self-imposed censorship.

Growing up, I knew little about my Uncle Jimmie, who died before I was born. When I was a child, my father told me that Jimmie was killed by "friendly fire" while serving in World War II. I learned only recently that he was one of 319 casualties, shot down on July 11, 1943, during Operation Husky, the invasion of Sicily. This incident has become known as one of the most tragic incidents of friendly fire during the entire war. I knew little else, except that his death, as told to me by my mother, altered my grandmother's life forever.

Rose Delaney, who had battled rheumatoid arthritis for a number of years, would rarely walk again after hearing the news of Jimmie's death. That was it. There were never any more stories forthcoming from my father about his older brother. So, Jimmie's story, shrouded, I imagine, in too much pain, went untold until it resurfaced some 15 years ago, when my sister Roseann and I came across a simple brown envelope upon which was written "Jimmie's Letters. Do Not Destroy."

In full gear, paratroopers of the U.S. 82nd Airborne Division wait calmly in the skies above Sicily for the order to stand up and hook up aboard their Douglas C-47 Dakota transport aircraft.

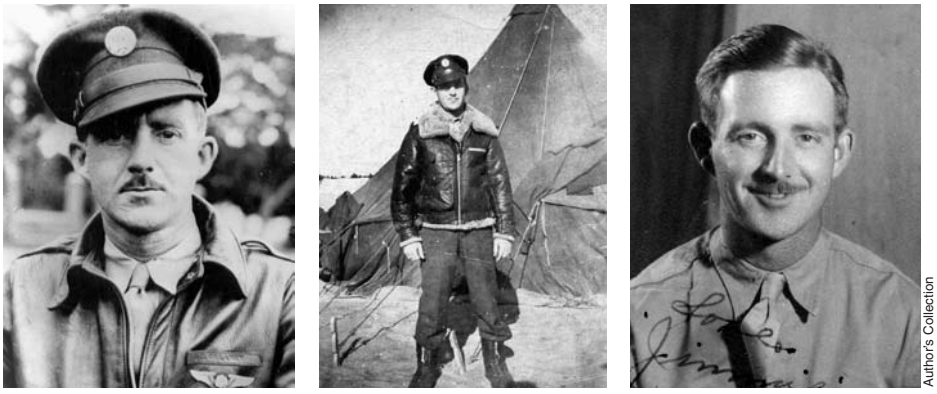
Opening the envelope, we found 25 letters and a 1943 daily journal, all in Jimmie's hand, all written from North Africa. The letters spanned several months from November 13, 1942, to July 4, 1943, and the journal from January 1 to July 8, 1943. The letters were given to my nephew, Patrick Connell McNulty, and I was given the journal. In August of 2005, I finally took the time to read the letters, and I was fully introduced to Jimmie, one letter at a time.

These letters and journal entries are so conversational in style that I actually felt like he was talking to me through the pages. These newfound words penned by my uncle gave shape to a life and piqued my curiosity, inspiring me to research not only the Delaney family genealogy, but also the archives of the city of Wilkes-Barre, Pennsylvania, where he lived, his military records, and countless declassified documents of Operation Husky.

Born November 13, 1912, Jimmie seemed to live an ordinary childhood, certainly no different from those of his siblings in Wilkes-Barre in the Wyoming Valley of Pennsylvania. Unfortunately, the only thing that sets this otherwise ordinary life apart from the others is World War II and a fateful mission over the shores of Sicily in July 1943.

There are no records of Jimmie's elementary school years. His high school years, however, were filled with diverse activities. He attended Coughlin High School, where he would later teach. He was president of the glee club for two years, lettered in track his senior year, and performed in the Coughlin Collegiate Minstrels. He entered St. Thomas College, now Scranton University, in Scranton, Pennsylvania, where he managed the Science Class intramural basketball team, and continued his acting in local theater and the St. John's Dramatic Club. He graduated in 1935 with his bachelor of science degree. He eventually became a high school chemistry and general science teacher, but not before trying his hand at aeronautics as an employee of the Brewster Aircraft Plant, Long Island City, New York.

On December 8, 1941, the *Wilkes-Barre Record* ran the following headline: "It was a transformation of but seconds to turn a quiet home-loving and Sabbath-observing Valley into one of intense patriotic action." This was, of course, in response to the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor the day before. Although it is said that the paper used its share of hyperbole in this headline, it is fair also to say that the Wyoming Valley World War II experience became that of the nation. Pamphlets explaining what to do in an air raid and open discussions of potential bomb shelter sites dominated local news reports. At this time, Jimmie was living with his parents and two of his seven siblings.



Author's Collection

Three views of Corporal James G. Delaney during his brief career in the armed forces present an optimistic and smiling young man, who nevertheless comments on the hazards of his duty. The left photo was taken in the United States in 1941. The center photo was taken at Enfidaville in North Africa, prior to Operation Husky. On the back of this photo, he wrote, "Just in Case," and his family believes this photo is the last taken of him. On the right is an image mailed with a letter to his sister Mildred from Ismailia on January 16, 1943. On the back, he wrote, "Slip it in your wallet Sis and remember me in your prayers."

As a high school teacher, it seems likely that Jimmie would have had ample opportunity to engage his students in discussions about the attack on Pearl Harbor, patriotism, and the impact the war was having in their homes. He and his students read reports about people in the city making purchases of sugar and flour at staggering rates. This rush on purchases was likened to hoarding and solicited a response from local grocery store owners to limit sales while restaurants and hotels dealt with this growing anxiety by removing all sugar bowls from the tables.

The anxiety was matched only by the valley's growing patriotism. By January 1942, men in the Wyoming Valley were breaking all the recruitment records set during World War I. One such enlistment story is that 60 Hanover Township High School seniors, including the entire football team, volunteered for service. As most were under the age of 18, they were not allowed to enroll, but the act itself was not lost on the people of the valley. This was a time to serve. So, on March 19, 1942, Jimmie and three of his brothers—Frank, Joe, and my father, Tommy—enlisted. Because of prior debilitating injuries or marital status, three of the brothers were denied enrollment. Jimmie was the only family member who would be allowed to serve.

Jimmie was assigned to the 316th Troop Carrier Group, 45th Squadron. He was accepted into the Air Corps Radio School and graduated as a radio technician on September 7, 1942. While stateside, he was assigned to a number of bases, including Keesler Field, Mississippi; Scott Field, Illinois; Larson Field, Fort Benning, Georgia; and finally Del Valle Air Base, Austin, Texas. On November 11, 1942, while stationed at Del Valle, Jimmie received orders that his squadron was shipping out. Before departing he called home and followed up with a letter to his parents on November 13, 1942. It read in part, "Dear Mother and Dad: We should be leaving here sometime today [sic] we make—one more stop in Florida and then we will probably only be in Florida for a few days and most likely will be well on our way by the time you receive this letter. What our destination is I can't say because we haven't been told. It will probably be South America, Brazil or one of those places."

He continued later in the letter to encourage his mother not to worry by saying, "This letter merely indicates a change of address —nothing more" and to "Keep your chin up darling and I will write you as often as possible." He concludes by writing, "I am in the best of health—we have a fine crew and the ship is in A-1 condition so we shouldn't have any difficulty to speak of. My love to each and every one of you. Love Jimmie"

His orders sent him not to South America or Brazil, but to North Africa.

The World War II soldier relied on mail to stay psychologically connected to home. Communication with family was a critical factor in the morale of the soldier. Mail call traditionally has been a highlight (and occasionally a low point) of a soldier's time in combat. This is evident in a January letter from Jimmie. "I had 25 letters and cards waiting for me," he concluded. "It's the best time in the world right now."

Two weeks into his journey, Jimmie wrote home, assuring the family that he was fine. He began this letter much like he ended the previous one with the disclaimer, "I can't tell you just where I am at this writing, except that I'm

in the air over foreign soil."

Recognizing this recurring reference to censorship is important in considering a soldier's ability to communicate with home. Silence was considered a strategic defense in the fight for freedom. Men and women in the armed forces, whose job it was to review and censor mail for classified or militarily sensitive information, would excise text from a letter with a sharp knife, leaving holes in the stationary. Not only military personnel but also workers in factories producing war goods were cautioned not to talk about what was being made.

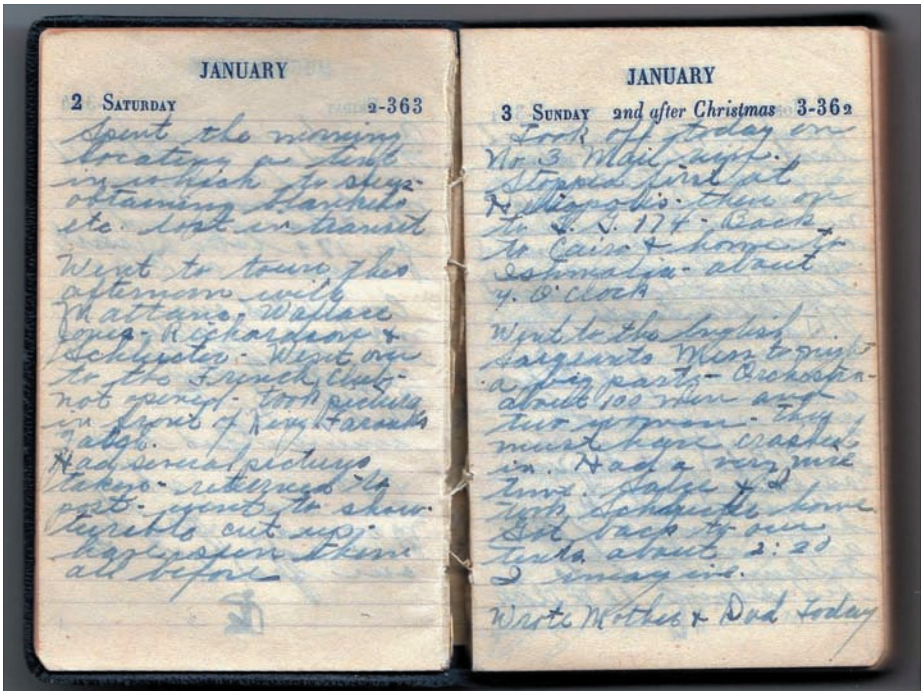
One way of reinforcing this silence was a poster campaign. A group of 26 art organizations representing 43 states combined to create "Artists for Victory." In 1942, posters were designed as reminders of all aspects of the war, but many spoke directly to the value of silence and censorship. They carried phrases such as "Loose Talk Sinks Ships," "Someone Talked," and "Zip Your Lip America. Loose Talk Is Dangerous." This censorship, although understood and accepted by soldiers and factory workers alike, was difficult to master.

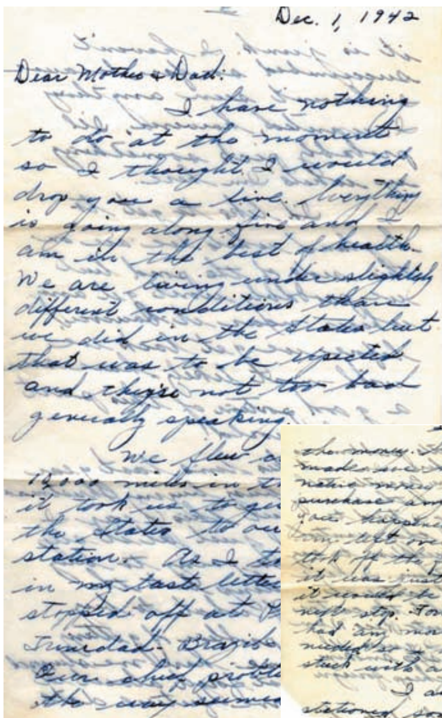
Jimmie, eager to assure his family of his safety and give them enough information to feel connected, had to overcome censorship hurdles. In his early letters he wrote on both sides of the stationery, rendering his letters indecipherable, as the reader wasn't even sure, in looking at the letter, which side had been redacted. It also took him several letters before he became accustomed to words and phrases that were not acceptable to the censors.

On November 24, 1942, he wrote, "If the above isn't censored it will give you a faint idea of where I am." But it had been heavily censored, leaving literally large holes in the paper and no clues for the family as to where he was. He was cognizant of the censorship and wrote that writing was getting to be a tough assignment. "Never having been fond of it when I could set [sic] down and write just anything that came to my mind, but if I were to do that now you either wouldn't get the letter or else it would look like a crossword puzzle by the time the censors were through with it."

On March 30, he wrote home saying, "I'm sorry my letter of Feb. 3 was so badly censored. It must have been spot censored because our own censor usually tells us if anything is wrong. Save the letter and maybe I can fill in the spaces when I get home."

He became more adept in his writing, and in a short time his letters were no longer like crossword puzzles. He began to communicate covertly, as in his letter written on March 11, 1943, when he simply told the family they

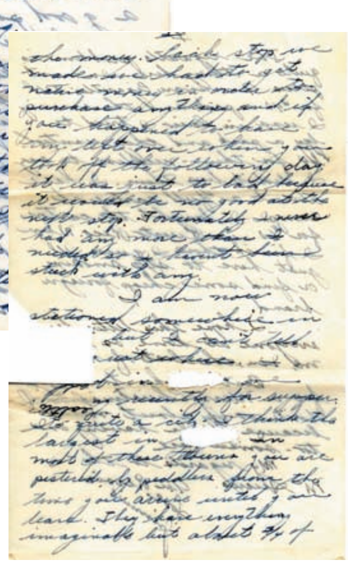




Dec. 1, 1942

Dear Mother & Dad:

I have nothing to do at the moment so I thought I would drop you a line. Everything is going along fine and I am in the best of health. We are living under slightly different conditions than we did in the States but that was to be expected and they're not too bad generally speaking.



Both: Author's Collection

ABOVE: The yellowed pages of Corporal James G. Delaney's journal entries for January 2-3, 1943, remain legible and provide a glimpse into the life of an airman during World War II. **BELOW:** Corporal Delaney's letter to his parents dated December 11, 1942, bears the classic signs of heavy censorship. The young flier captured both the exhilaration and frustration of life in the armed forces in his letters and journal.

might enjoy the December 21, 1942, issue of *Life* magazine. Two articles appear in that issue, "African Airfields Are a Headache to Pilots" and "The Battle for Tunisia: The Victory Runs into Trouble." These articles would have informed the family of his approximate whereabouts.

Jimmie continued in this way on March 30, writing, "My APO is 681 and that is all I can tell you. Orders from headquarters." His next letter read, "Did you get the gist of what I told your father in my last letter? The AP dispatch which I enclosed probably gave you a better idea of what we've been doing than what I've been able to tell you in my letters."

Government censors were concerned with locations and actions about troop activities. Self-imposed censorship, however, is also evident in the letters. This censorship protected Jimmie's family from the realities of war. Jimmie's letters and the journal entries of the corresponding days reveal contrasting perspectives. His January 14, 1943, journal entry reads: "Getting ready to make some coffee this afternoon when I was interrupted by Ack-Ack breaking loose. It was just an observation plane, however. Maybe we will have a visit from Jerry tonight. An anti personnel bomb just blew up and put a block of holes in the Majors [sic] tent and one piece traveled about fifty feet and hit Pt. Hausel. No damage, flying suit stopped it."

On January 15, he recorded the following in his journal: "Went to the front with a load of tires. Flight and drop successful. Landed and were taxiing to parking space when our right wheel hit a mine. It blew off the landing gear—propeller—engine buckled the wing and filled the forward fuselage full of holes. The biggest of which were right through the radio compartment. Fortunately I received only a bruised elbow. It was a close call—too close for comfort. Plane can not be fixed."

In a letter home dated January 16, Jimmie wrote, "Dear Mother and Dad, As usual I don't know what to write about. Things are rather quiet in a way. Suffice it to say that, at the moment I am in good health and in no immediate danger." His continues, "I was just wondering the other day if you ever received the dollar bill I send to you from Trinidad? You never mentioned it. Also, you never said that you received my Christmas card." He finished with, "I suppose that at this time you are in the midst of snow and cold weather. I hope someone is making use of my overcoat. Au Revoir, Love, Jimmie"

Over time, Jimmie's journal entries divulge all kinds of information. "While I was on guard duty the mess tent and fifteen days rations burned to the ground," he advised. On another occasion, he said, "While getting ready for take off the crew chief on 61 walked into a spinning propeller. Doesn't look good." He references countless attacks by the Germans on his base, for example: "Jerry was over again, last night. The show lasted almost an hour. They got four planes." This last attack would deplete, even further, an already disabled air fleet.

These serious episodes are juxtaposed with more mundane concerns. In keeping with his love of entertainment, he wrote in his journal the title of each movie he saw, such as Bette Davis and Errol Flynn in *The Sisters* and Rudy Valle in *Too Many Blondes*. His journal also recorded all of his wins and losses in poker games. On April 5, 1943, he wrote, "Played poker this evening and won a little over $34. I'm recouping my loses [sic] a bit." He even detailed having been grounded for being, in his words, falsely accused of stealing canned peaches from the mess tent.

In his corresponding letters home, Jimmie wrote of day passes granted and recent travel to Cairo. He sent pictures of himself with "the fellows" in front of the Gaza pyramids.

He shared his enthusiasm for good entertainment in a

June letter referencing a band he said was "the best we have seen since we left the states." He went on to say, "They [the band] were accompanied by Josephine Baker, a Blues singer who was the rage in Paris for quite some time."

His letters also reflect his desire to return home, with such statements as this one about his nephew and niece: "Billy III and Alice should be pretty well grown by the time I get home. I'm looking forward to seeing them." He painstakingly explained his financial plan to the family so that they could be the caretakers of his finances in his absence, which consisted of sending home $50 monthly in bonds, $20 each month for his mother, saying "this is hers to do with as she wishes," and investing $200 in the Army bank at 4 percent interest.

In the midst of it all, the value Jimmie put on his relationships at home is edifying. He never once referenced information in his letters that he believed would upset his family, though many of his journal stories are sobering. One final example of his need to protect the family came in what was an obvious response to a letter he received from Mildred, his sister. "I think you read something between the lines Sis that wasn't there. I'm not homesick. I'd like to be home, naturally, but so would everyone else. As it is we are probably living as well if not better then [sic] you are at home with all the rationing you have to contend with."

His job, it seemed, was to literally protect himself from harm while figuratively doing the same for his family. This phenomenon is obvious even in this final journal entry and corresponding letter. The journal entry for July 8, 1943, reads, "Didn't do much of anything this morning. Had a lecture on escape. Has a meeting this afternoon at headquarters, of all the [radio] operators in our mission in Sicily tomorrow night. It will be the first time we've dropped paratroopers on enemy soil."

The letter of July 4, 1943, reads, "Dear Mother and Dad, If we could believe rumor. It would say it won't be too long before we would be heading for home. However, we must take them for what they are and hope for the best. Things are quiet here at the present time yet the situation is quite tense. We are not doing much flying right now and as a result we are getting guard duty quite often. I got paid today and I put another forty dollars in the bank. I will need it when I get out. That will be all for now Mother. I am in the best of health and hope to see you soon. Love Jimmie."

The next letter my grandmother received began, "We regret to inform you ..."

The modern U.S. soldier, although aware of governmental classified information, may never know the same level of censorship as the World War II soldier. There is no need for soldiers to code letters in order to communicate their location to an anxious family. Posters reminding citizens of the importance of secrecy have been replaced by reporters embedded in troop action and onsite media coverage of the war as it occurs. However, the value the soldier puts on family communication remains strong. A recent government report addresses, among other things, advances in modern communication technology and its effects on the competing demands of family and mission. The once innovative V- Mail system has been replaced with cell phones and Internet instant messaging in the forward operating bases (FOB).

An FOB is a place where the discomforts of combat commonly experienced by the World War II soldier become a thing of the past. Jimmie wrote of scorching heat in the North African desert, tents that would regularly blow over in sandstorms, and Spam and white bread sandwiches three times a day. The FOB comes equipped with air-conditioning, hot showers, abundant food, and much more. It is a refuge from the mental stress of war and, because of modern technology, a means of staying connected with family and friends.

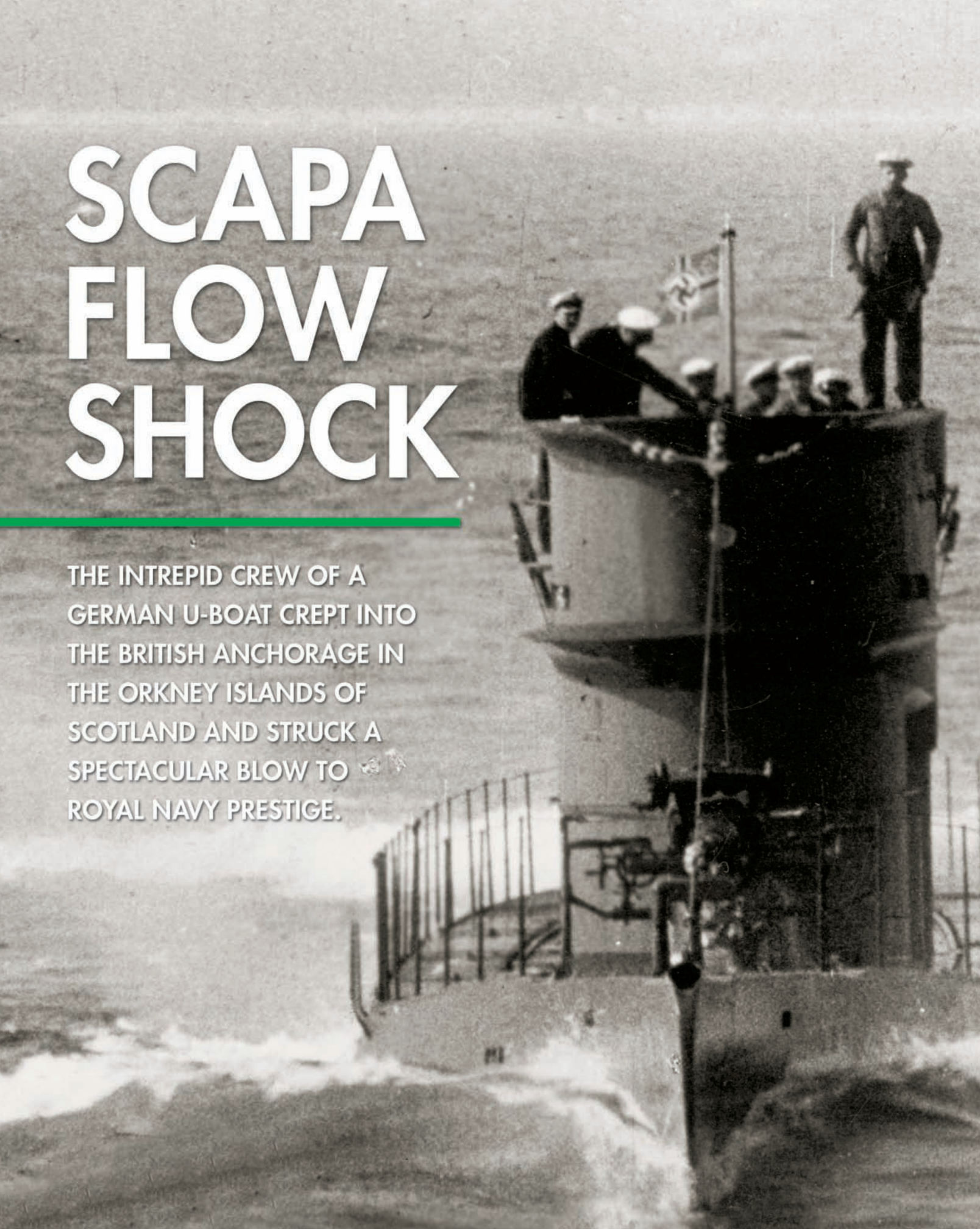
A U.S. soldier in Iraq using a cell phone can call home any time for only four cents a minute; laptops equipped with broadband give soldiers free Internet capability at their bunks. Unlike Jimmie's experience of waiting weeks if not months for mail and packages, much of the contact with family and friends today is immediate. Self-imposed censorship is unnecessary, if not impossible. Soldiers remain an integral part of the family while simultaneously functioning as part of a military community. What soldiers sought in World War II letters from home was unmistakable. They wanted to remain connected to the daily lives of family and friends.

Technology may have caused a shift in the wartime paradigm, but the psychological stress of soldiers living in two worlds remains the same. The life of a combat soldier in World War II or the present Iraq war was and is a constant tug between duty to the military and duty to one's family. □

Maura B. Delaney is the youngest daughter of the late Florence and Thomas Delaney. She is the assistant dean for administration in the Graduate School of Arts and Social Sciences at Lesley University in Cambridge, Massachusetts. She is currently working on a book based on the letters of her uncle, Corporal James G. Delaney.

SCAPA FLOW SHOCK

THE INTREPID CREW OF A GERMAN U-BOAT CREPT INTO THE BRITISH ANCHORAGE IN THE ORKNEY ISLANDS OF SCOTLAND AND STRUCK A SPECTACULAR BLOW TO ROYAL NAVY PRESTIGE.



Crewmen line the conning tower of the German submarine *U-47,* commanded by Captain Günther Prien. *U-47* executed the daring raid on the British anchorage at Scapa Flow in October 1939, but was later lost in action.

The Granger Collection, New York

BY JON LATIMER

WORLD WAR II HAD BEEN IN PROGRESS FOR SIX weeks when on the evening of October 12, 1939, the German submarine *U-47* surfaced off the Orkney Islands at the northern tip of Scotland. While the officers standing in the conning tower observed the twinkling lights ashore to the west, only the captain, Kapitänleutnant Günther Prien, knew the purpose of their mission. Security surrounding it had been so tight that only now, with the climax approaching, would it be possible to tell his men the reason for so daring a foray into enemy waters.

Following a night of observation, *U-47* submerged and withdrew eastward. As it settled on the bottom, the motors were cut and Prien ordered the crew to assemble in the forward mess. The time had come to reveal to these young men—average age of 20—that the following day, they would be entering Scapa Flow.

Scapa Flow had a special significance to the officers and men of Germany's Kriegsmarine. It was at Scapa Flow that the pride of Germany during World War I, the High Seas Fleet, with which it had sought to challenge the Royal Navy for control of the seas, had been scuttled, laid to rest in a final defiant act following the defeat of its armies in northern France and Flanders. There, its ships lay as they still do, in 15 fathoms of water. The superb natural harbor provided ample protection for large numbers of British warships and a perfect position from which to intercept German vessels attempting to escape into the North Atlantic. Prien was proposing an extraordinary act.

The German Navy was very much the least favored of the three services at the outbreak of the war. The glory went to the Army and in its support, the Luftwaffe, as they sliced through Poland in a few short weeks. The mind-set of Hitler's high command was geared to fighting battles on the continental landmass, and little imagination was applied to the problems faced by naval forces. Nor were the consequences, either tactical or strategic, considered of an enemy whose principal strength was naval.

The importance of the U-boat arm was overlooked in favor of large surface units such as the battleships *Bismarck* and *Tirpitz*. Kommodore Karl Dönitz, the head of the U-boat arm, desperately wanted a major success to impress upon Hitler the importance of developing the U-boat program. While serving as a U-boat commander in World War I, Dönitz had himself slipped his boat into a defended harbor in Sicily and gotten out again without detection. If such a feat could be repeated, it could prove a calamitous blow for the Royal Navy in both materiel and prestige, and equally glorious proof of the value of his submarines.

Imperial War Museum

The elderly battleship HMS *Royal Oak* is shown at flank speed with heavy armament raised to firing position in this World War I photograph. On the night of October 14, 1939, the warship was sunk by the German submarine *U-47* at its anchorage in Scapa Flow.

Dönitz had been appointed commander of the new Nazi submarine fleet in September 1935, during the years of appeasement when the British unilaterally gave the Germans the go-ahead to start building submarines once again via a naval treaty. The Germans had been prevented from doing this as part of the settlement of World War I, but they had maintained their skills through antisubmarine warfare training. A thoughtful and far-sighted commander who knew that Britain could not be defeated by a few isolated successes by powerful submarines, Dönitz was desperately keen to ensure he had the wherewithal to conduct a protracted campaign with a substantial fleet that could wear down the British through sustained and heavy attrition. He wanted the ability to sweep an area of sea and then concentrate for night attacks, and for this he needed quantities of relatively simple boats. The Type VII boats, such as *U-47,* were perfectly suited to his requirements.

To have even the most remote chance of success in Scapa Flow, Dönitz needed intelligence. *U-16* was sent to reconnoiter the waters, tides, and currents while all available charts were collected together with aerial photographs. Close examination of these suggested that Scapa Flow was not as well defended as they had expected. The antisubmarine booms and sunken blockships had been sufficient during World War I when two German submarines were lost attempting similar operations, but gaps were now apparent and the traditional defenses no longer offered complete protection to the anchorage. The best route was through Holm Sound, which divided into a number of smaller channels, one of which, Kirk Sound, was incompletely defended by blockships. If the timing was right, at slack water on a dark night, a surfaced boat could slip through the gap. It was a dangerous undertaking, but not an impossible one.

The commander of such a raid would need to be a first-class seaman with no lack of raw courage. Dönitz chose the 31-year-old Prien, a fervent Nazi and a relative newcomer to the service. Born in 1908 in Leipzig and brought up in great poverty, he was inspired as a boy by the Portuguese explorer Vasco de Gama. Prien first went to sea at age 16 and moved up from cabin boy to merchant captain before the Depression threw him out of work. The expansion of the Navy as Germany began its rearmament program enabled him to return to sea, and there he immediately shone as a natural U-boat commander.

Prien possessed the "sixth-sense" needed for such work, together with a common touch that made him both liked and respected by his men. To Dönitz, "Prienchen" was the ideal skipper for this special task: he had scored the U-boats' first official victory (not counting the liner *Athenia,* sunk on the first day of the war—even the Nazis denied that publicly). He had sunk three ships totaling over 66,000 tons on his first war patrol and won the Iron Cross, Second Class.

Standing before Dönitz in the Weichsel, Prien glanced at the charts on the table and saw the map of Scapa Flow on top. He could barely contain himself as Dönitz outlined his "Special Operation P." Finally, Dönitz asked, "Do you think a determined commander could get his boat inside Scapa Flow and attack the enemy's forces lying there?" He gave Prien 48 hours to look over the accumulated charts, photos, and intelligence and deliver a carefully thought-out assessment.

AFTER SUPPER AT HOME, PRIEN SENT his wife and young child out for the evening and spread the documents on his writing table. Dönitz had been planning the venture for some time, and there was a wealth of intelligence. Aerial photos taken as early as September 6 showed the entire Home Fleet at anchor and antisubmarine booms and sunken ships blocking the bay's seven entrances. A U-boat scouting the inlets had found scant defenses but 10-knot rip tides. Navigation, even in daylight, would be tricky at best. But in Kirk Sound, the northernmost of the Flow's three eastern inlets, the blockships *Thames, Soriano,* and *Minich* lay just far enough apart that a U-boat might zigzag through in the slack water just after high tide.

The tide on the night of October 13 would be one of the highest that year, and there would be no moon. "I worked through the whole thing like a mathematical problem," Prien related in his autobiography, *Mein Weg Nach Scapa Flow* (*My Way to Scapa Flow*—most recently published by Tempus as *U-Boat Commander*). The next day he reported ahead of deadline. Dönitz was at his desk. "He did not acknowledge my salute; it seemed as if he hadn't noticed it. He was looking at me fixedly and asked, 'Yes or no?'"

Prien answered, "Yes, sir."

"Very well," said Dönitz as he came around to shake Prien's hand. "Get your boat ready."

The crew selected for this mission were all hand-picked volunteers, already proven in their ability to handle the extreme pressure of submarine warfare. Oberleutnant zur See Englebert "Bertl" Endrass, the first officer, would later become a U-boat ace in his own right in *U-46* and *U-567.*

"LIKE HUGE BIRDS, BLACK SHADOWS SOARED THROUGH THE FLAMES, FELL HISSING AND SPLASHING INTO THE WATER …"

Oberleutnant zur See Amelung von Varendorff, the second officer, would captain *U-213*, and the other 42 men of crew were all volunteers, products of the grueling U-boat school that required 66 simulated attacks on the surface and 66 more submerged before the firing of a single torpedo. On October 8, *U-47* was ready to set sail from Kiel.

Passing through the Kiel Canal and entering the North Sea, the Germans headed for Heligoland for final trim trials. The Type VIIB U-boat was the most advanced model in the German Navy at the time, although it was not strictly a submarine in the modern sense and was capable of only short distances under water at low speed. U-boats normally traveled on the surface unless attacked by aircraft or surface vessels. Attacks would be delivered on the surface if possible, unless against well-defended convoys. These boats were armed with 15 torpedoes with four bow-firing tubes and one at the stern. *U-47* was also armed with an 88mm deck gun and a 20mm antiaircraft gun.

Security was essential to Prien's mission, so *U-47* remained submerged during daylight and traveled on the surface at night. The daily routine was reversed, and breakfast was taken in the evening. Crossing the shallow waters of the North Sea occurred without incident, and the sighting of the Orkneys on the 12th meant the end of their ocean journey. Now Prien could inform his crew of the daring plan. Afterward, he dismissed them to their bunks for a few hours of sleep prior to the rigors to be faced. The lights were extinguished. The only noise was the whisper of the control room watch, the drip of condensation off the pipes, and the occasional gurgle of the water, just a few feet away, pressing in on all sides.

Prien could not sleep and finally got up and went to the wardroom, where he found navigator Wilhelm Spahr poring over the illuminated map table on which was spread the chart of Scapa Flow. For what no doubt seemed a long time, they stood there together, contemplating the chart. Finally, Spahr said, "Do you believe, sir, that we can get in?"

"Do you think that I am a prophet, Spahr?" Prien retorted.

"And suppose it goes wrong?"

"Well, then, we will have had very bad luck."

About this time, Endrass peered out from his bunk. "I can't sleep anymore, sir, and you can court martial me if you like."

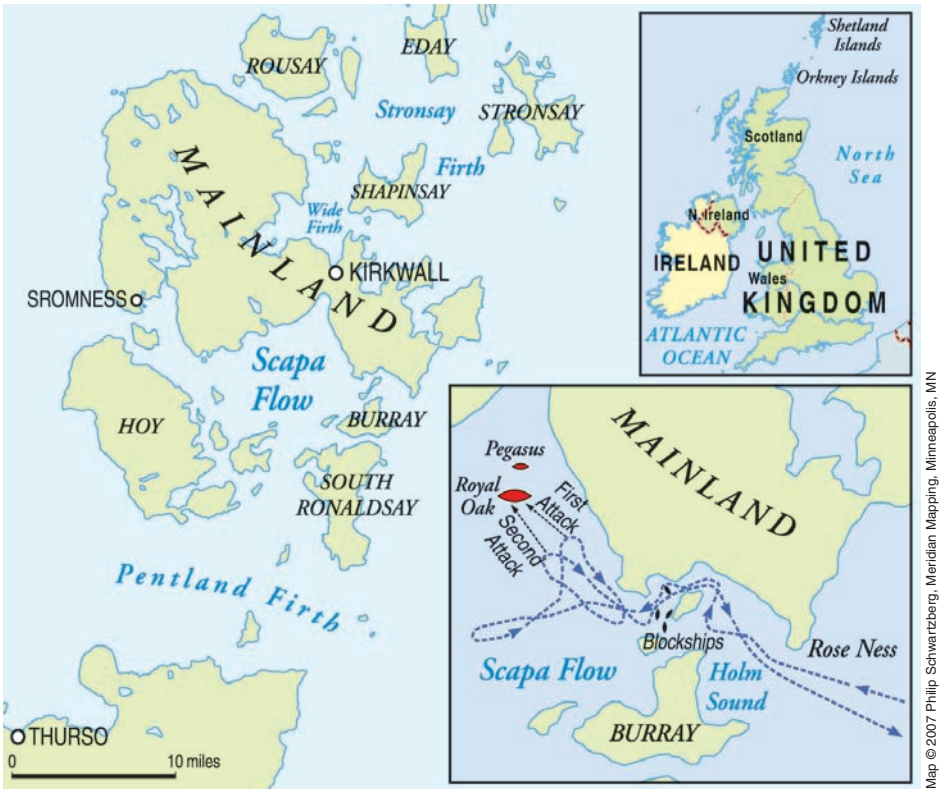
"Shut up and save the air."

Prien went back to his bunk. Presently somebody stumbled past. The radio operator across the passageway snarled, "Quiet! The old man's sleeping."

"The Old Man never sleeps," answered Prien from the shadows. "He just rests his eyes."

At 4 PM, the thick stench of diesel fuel and unwashed bodies was thinned by the smell of the finest feast the Kriegsmarine could provide. Walz, the ship's cook, had outdone himself—soup, veal cutlets, pork ribs and gravy, potatoes and green cabbage, and strong coffee to wash it down; a "hangman's dinner" the men called it. Then the table was cleared, and Prien recalled, "Once more I went through the boat and gave my instructions. During the whole of the action, no one was to smoke, and even mission, but his men's morale was high and a postponement would achieve nothing, so he decided to press on.

A merchant ship was spotted off Rose Ness, forcing a crash dive for 30 minutes until, at 11:31 PM, *U-47* resurfaced and entered Holm Sound. With the shapes of the low coastal hills outlined in the pale orange and blue glow of the flickering sky lights, disaster was close at hand. The missed sighting of a blockship almost led to entering the impassable Skerny Sound, but the navigator corrected the error. Passing through Kirk Sound, the boat grated



Map © 2007 Philip Schwartzberg, Meridian Mapping, Minneapolis, MN

The Royal Navy anchorage at Scapa Flow in Scotland's Orkney Islands was thought to be well protected against attack by enemy submarines. However, Captain Günther Prien and *U-47* proved the assumption tragically wrong.

more important, no one was to speak unnecessarily. Everyone inspected his lifejacket. I cast a glance at the escape hatch; the navigator fixed his chart." The torpedoes were armed and prepared for firing and charges placed should it be deemed necessary to scuttle the boat.

AT 7 PM, THE ELECTRIC MOTORS WERE started up and *U-47* surfaced slowly before the diesel engines were switched on. Prien, two watch officers, and the boatswain emerged onto the conning tower to find that the night was not especially dark and the northern lights cast a glow across Scapa Flow and its approaches, making the U-boat considerably more visible than he would like. He considered aborting the against the cable of another blockship and was momentarily grounded. Quickly, Prien ordered the opening of the air pressure valves and the flooded dive tanks to be blown. Trembling in the water, *U-47* shook herself free and into Scapa Flow.

Carefully edging past the village of St. Mary's, the boat was illuminated in the headlights of a car, to the horror of the little group on the conning tower. But no alarm was raised, and the crew sailed on to look for targets. Having entered Scapa Flow shortly before midnight, *U-47* had traveled over three nautical miles westward and seen nothing. Fearing that to travel any further westward would leave them vulnerable to patrols in Hoxa Sound and with

increasing desperation, Prien first ordered a 180-degree turn followed by a turn to port to head northward. However, nothing could be seen. The expected mass of battleships, cruisers, and destroyers of the British Home Fleet was no longer in the position given in aerial photographs of a week before.

The main body were now anchored at Loch Ewe on the northwest coast of Scotland, following a vain pursuit of a German sortie into the North Sea led by the battlecruiser *Gneisenau*. The aging battleship HMS *Royal Oak* had returned to Scapa Flow, unable to maintain contact with the fleet in the force 9 gales they had been fighting. Now her bulk loomed up before Prien, who correctly identified her class.

COMMISSIONED IN 1916, *ROYAL OAK* was a Royal Sovereign-class battleship armed with eight 15-inch and 12 6-inch guns. With her displacement of 31,250 tons, she made an impressive sight, although strictly speaking she was now a second-line battleship. Behind her, Prien thought he saw the battlecruiser HMS *Repulse,* but in this he was mistaken; it was the 6,900 ton seaplane tender *Pegasus*. Torpedoes were loaded into the tubes, and Prien ordered a salvo to be fired, but one of the four forward tubes jammed. The remainder were away—two at *Royal Oak* and one at *Repulse* (*Pegasus*).

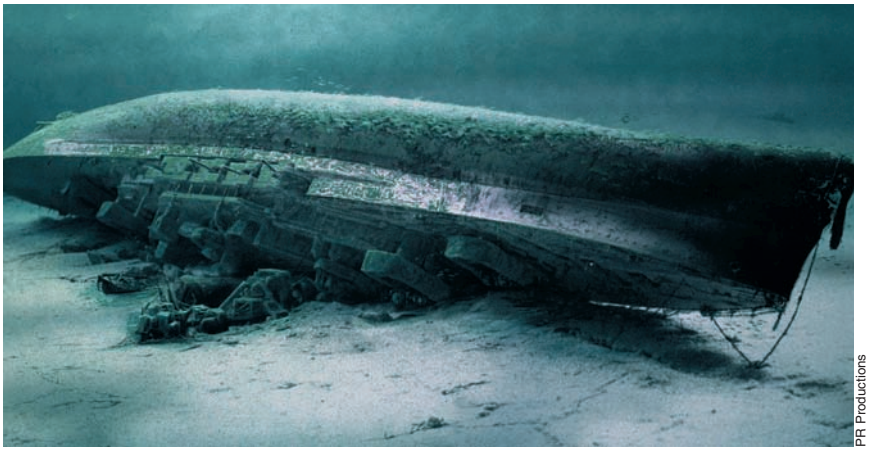
The electrically powered weapons took fully three and a half minutes to cover the 3,000-meter range until at 1:04 AM, a hit was made on the bow of the *Royal Oak*. Although the explosion was felt throughout the large ship, it caused amazingly little reaction. Nearly the entire crew was asleep, including visiting Admiral H.E.C. Blagrove, commander of the Second Battle Squadron. Few of the men were much disturbed by the first dull bang. Captain W.G. Benn believed it was an internal explosion in the paint store, or perhaps an aerial bomb. Nobody could imagine they might be under attack from a submarine. Most of the 1,200-man crew, getting no duty call, went back to bed. Several, however, reported air venting under high pressure. *Royal Oak* was taking on water.

The hit was acknowledged on *U-47,* although Prien thought he had hit *Repulse*. Afraid of detection, the U-boat turned around to reload her torpedo tubes and fired from the stern as it did so. This shot went wide. A second salvo of three was released about 12 minutes after the first. The first torpedo hit the starboard side under B gun turret and sent up a huge cloud of spray. Shortly afterward, the other two also struck the starboard side and the battleship lifted before settling and beginning to list to starboard. Tons of water leaped the height of *Royal Oak*'s mast; black smoke gushed from the colossal hole amidships. Her lights went out, and she immediately began to heel over.

"Flames shot skyward, blue ... yellow ... red," recalled Prien. "Like huge birds, black shadows soared through the flames, fell hissing and splashing into the water ... huge fragments of the mast and funnels."


Imperial War Museum

RIGHT: Prien and the crew of *U-47* returned to a hero's welcome in Germany. Here, the submariner is greeted by Admiral Karl Dönitz, commander of Germany's U-boat force.


PR Productions

ABOVE: This computer rendering, based on underwater photographs, shows the sunken hulk of the battleship HMS *Royal Oak* lying on its starboard side 60 feet beneath the surface of Scapa Flow. A war grave for 833 sailors of the Royal Navy, the resting place of the vessel is the site of an annual ceremony in memory of those who died. RIGHT: Upon entry into the harbor at Kiel following their successful mission, sailors of *U-47* exchange greetings with crewmen aboard a German warship. Every member of the submarine's crew was decorated for participation in the sinking of the battleship HMS *Royal Oak*.

On board there was total chaos. *Royal Oak* had taken a hit in an aft magazine, and with the power out the only light came from blazing cordite searing through her vents. "Like looking into the muzzle of a blow lamp," was how one Royal Marine put it. The eerie light illuminated a hellish scene of screaming, horribly burned men stumbling about like lost souls in the flickering maze. The crew staggered blindly in the dark, many trapped by the fires that had started and others by the power-operated hatches now jammed shut.

The starboard list steadily increased until some 10 minutes after the second salvo hit; another set of explosions turned the ship over and *Royal Oak* went down. Captain Benn was one of the lucky ones and was blown overboard. At the board of inquiry 10 days later, it was found that "he remained in the ship until the last possible moment, until in fact the ship left him." The time was 1:33 AM, and 833 of the 1,200 men aboard the battleship had perished with it.

Meanwhile, *U-47* was turning away to make good her escape. She was forced to claw her way back to Kirk Sound against the current, and Prien decided not to leave the way he had come in, but to use the deeper though tighter channel to the south. This the helmsman managed with great skill, negotiating the blockship and guiding *U-47* out into Holm Sound.

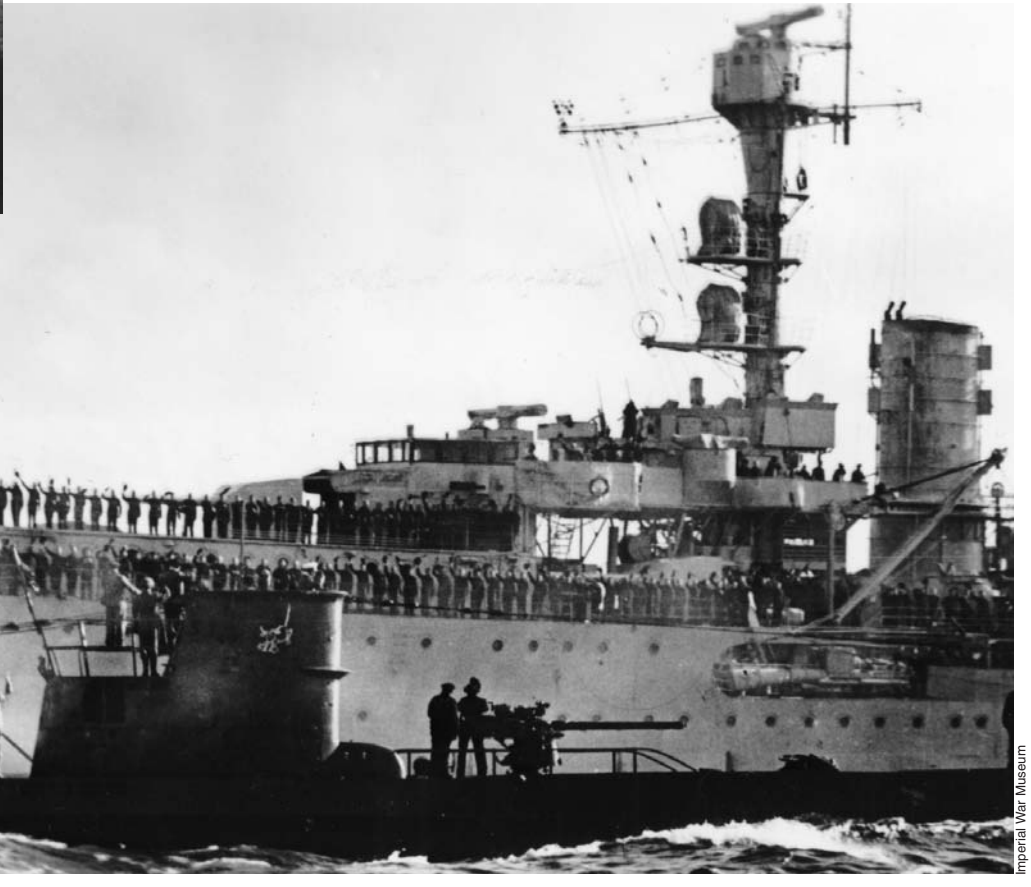
The *U-47* cleared Rose Ness Point at 2:15

AM and headed into the North Sea. A crate of beer was produced, and the crew began to celebrate a most daring feat of arms. They had sailed right into the heart of the enemy's lair and sunk a major warship. On their return journey, the Germans had a run-in with some British minesweepers, which forced *U-47* to crash dive. The minesweepers dropped depth charges on *U-47*. The U-boat evaded them and escaped unscathed to reach Wilhelmshaven two days later. On October 15, an old steamer arrived in the wreckage-strewn Flow in order to be sunk as a blockship in Kirk Sound—as a result of a decision by the Admiralty on July 10, 1939, to close the gap.

When *U-47* arrived back at its home base at 11 AM, the German naval authorities were already aware of the sinking, and the crew was granted a hero's welcome. Grand Admiral Erich Räder, chief of the Kriegsmarine, was there with Dönitz to award the entire crew the Iron Cross, Second Class. William L. Shirer, the CBS correspondent in Berlin, later met Prien, who "came tripping into our afternoon press conference at the Propaganda Ministry this afternoon, followed by his crew—boys of eighteen, nineteen, twenty. Prien is thirty, clean-cut, cocky, a fanatical Nazi, and obviously capable. Introduced by Hitler's press chief, Dr. Dietrich, who kept cursing the English and calling Churchill a liar, Prien told us little of how he did it. He said he had no trouble getting past the boom protecting the bay. I got the impression, though he said nothing to justify it, that he must have followed a British craft, perhaps a minesweeper, into the base. British negligence must have been something terrific."

Dönitz was promoted to rear admiral, and Prien was to receive the Knight's Cross from the Führer himself.

For the British, the Scapa Flow scandal ended several naval careers. In the entire war, only one other British battleship—HMS *Barham*—was sunk by a U-boat. After *U-331* torpedoed the *Barham,* it and the liner *Empress of Britain* were the only U-boat victims larger than *Royal Oak*. Churchill, as First Lord of the Admiralty, escaped only because he was new on the job. The Royal Navy was forced to resort to other anchorages, which the Germans quickly mined. The battleship HMS *Nelson* and the cruiser HMS *Belfast* were damaged and four other vessels sunk, all due in no small part, at least indirectly, to *U-47*.



Imperial War Museum

Dönitz now had the proof he needed of the war-winning potential of his submarines and the need for an expansion of the U-boat building program. However, the strategic shortcomings of Hitler's war machine meant that it was already too late, and despite considerable success to come the Germans simply would not be able to produce boats quickly enough nor, in the end, match Allied technological superiority.

Over 600 of the Type VII boats such as *U-47* were eventually produced, and most were eventually sunk. Prien himself would have little time to savor his triumph. He continued for a another 18 months and proved that he was one of the best German commanders. On his sixth patrol in June 1940, he sank eight ships for a total of 51,483 tons. In convoy battles Prien often was the first who found the convoys and vectored in other boats. He enjoyed considerable success, sinking 28 ships with a combined tonnage of 160,939.

The Royal Navy, however, would have its revenge when *U-47* was lost in March 1941. This victory has always been attributed to the British destroyer HMS *Wolverine*, but new data suggest that the destroyer was actually attacking Hans Eckermann's *U-A,* which had to withdraw from the battle with heavy damage. It is now speculated that *U-47* may have been hit by one of her own circling torpedoes.

CERTAINLY THE U-BOAT WENT DOWN with all hands, including Prien and seven other members of the original Scapa Flow crew. Indeed, only 15 of the 44 submariners involved in the sinking of the *Royal Oak* were to survive the war, a testament to the appalling losses the U-boats suffered as a whole. The youngest member of the crew, torpedo mechanic Herbert Herrmann, eventually married a Scottish woman and settled in Dumfriesshire.

In Britain itself, rumors persisted throughout the war that the German boat had been guided into Scapa Flow by a traitor, and that the car headlights that had so scared the submariners were in fact a secret signal. Only when the war ended did it become apparent that the Germans' main source of information had been aerial photographs.

Today, the *Royal Oak* lies on her starboard side in about 60 feet of water and is a registered war grave. Recently there have been difficulties with the fuel oil in her tanks beginning to seep out, threatening to cause a major environmental problem as the hull begins to deteriorate. The German High Seas Fleet, however, remains a major attraction for scuba divers. □

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National Archives

STILL A SPLENDID SIGHT

BY AL HEMINGWAY

PRIVATE FIRST CLASS FRANK RINALDI CAUTIOUSLY MADE HIS WAY THROUGH THE dense foliage. He and other soldiers were on patrol when they heard the unmistakable sound of Japanese voices, and they inched their way forward to investigate. To their surprise, they had stumbled upon a group of enemy combatants performing close-order drill. Rinaldi and the others had been in the jungles of Burma for months and had become experts in jungle fighting, and soon learned how to sneak up on the enemy without being detected. They were members of an elite unit referred to as Merrill's Marauders.

As the patrol moved closer, the machine gunner, a Chicago native named Farino, held up his hand and whispered, "They're mine." Suddenly, the air erupted with the crack of .30-caliber rounds ripping into the Japanese. "After it was over," Rinaldi later said, "we counted 80 bodies."

Since the outbreak of World War II, the Japanese had moved rapidly and seized most of Burma. Lt. Gen. Joseph W. Stilwell, CBI (China-Burma-India) commander, remarked, "I claim we got a hell-of-a-beating. We got run out of Burma, and it was humiliating as hell. I think we ought to find out what caused it, go back, and retake it."

The eccentric British Major General Orde C. Wingate had organized and trained a group of jungle fighters in 1942 to take the war to the Japanese deep within the Burmese jungles. The unit was officially named the 77th Indian Infantry Brigade, but everyone knew it by its nickname, the Chindits, a mythical beast, half-eagle and half-lion, that guarded the Buddhist temples throughout the country.

Wingate's Chindits participated in a raid, dubbed Operation Longcloth, in February 1943 that really did not accomplish anything militarily. It did, however, excite the public back in Britain, which was starving for any positive news from the CBI Theater. Because of this, the Chindits' popularity rose, and they took part in Operation Thursday in early 1944.

MERRILL'S MARAUDERS, RANKS DEPLETED BY COMBAT AND DISEASE, GAINED FAME WHILE FIGHTING BEHIND ENEMY LINES IN BURMA AND ATTACKING THE IMPORTANT TOWN OF MYITKYINA.

National Archives

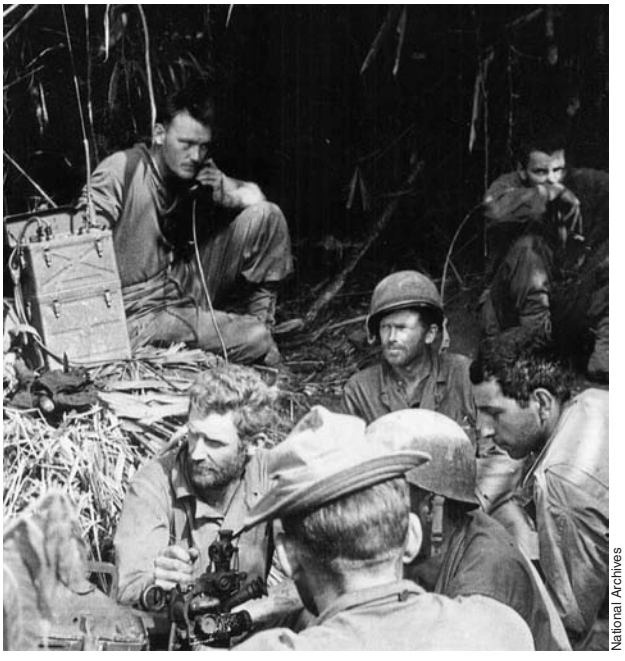
With pack mules in tow, soldiers of the 5307th Composite Unit, dubbed Merrill's Marauders by the press, cross the Chindwin River in Burma on a foot bridge, March 17, 1944. The Marauders became a legend but paid a terrible price in the process. OPPOSITE: General Joseph Stilwell (left), commander of Allied forces in the China-Burma-India Theater, confers with General Frank Merrill during a moment of relaxation

Captivated by the aura that surrounded the Chindits, President Franklin Delano Roosevelt ordered that an American unit, similar to Wingate's Chindits, be formed to fight in the CBI Theater. It would be the first and only U.S. ground force in World War II to fight on the Asian mainland.

VOLUNTEERS CAME FROM VARIOUS Army units for a "dangerous and hazardous mission." Approximately 3,000 soldiers answered FDR's call, and they created the 5307th Composite Unit (Provisional), codenamed Galahad. The men were split up into six combat teams: Red, White, Blue, Green, Orange, and Khaki; two teams were in a battalion with the remainder of the soldiers forming headquarters company and air transport units.

This was an odd name for a combat unit, but soon *Life* magazine reporter James Shepley dubbed the group "Merrill's Marauders," after the outfit's leader, Brig. Gen. Frank D. Merrill.


National Archives


National Archives

ABOVE: Passing through a Burmese village in March 1944, a group of Merrill's Marauders emerge from the thick jungle. Along with the Japanese, disease and harsh climactic conditions often proved to be destructive foes.
LEFT: Going over final instructions, a squad of Marauders prepares to move out on a mission to silence a Japanese machine gun position that has been impeding their progress.
OPPOSITE: The U.S. 5307th Composite Group, commanded by General Frank Merrill, and its British and Chinese allies fought a series of sharp clashes with the Japanese in Burma.

Merrill, sporting his wire-rimmed glasses and clenching a pipe between his teeth, resembled a college professor rather than a combat leader. Merrill, however, had garnered an impressive record since graduating from the United States Military Academy in 1929. He received an engineering degree from MIT and was assistant military attaché in Tokyo in 1938, where he studied Japanese and Chinese. Since the start of the war, Merrill had been enjoying a meteoric rise from major to major general in a short span of time and he was assigned to lead the newly organized unit that would bear his name.

After a long and arduous ocean voyage, the unit disembarked in Bombay, India, and began jungle warfare training under the auspices of Brig. Gen. Francis G. Brink, who had experience training Chinese troops in long-range patrolling and operating behind enemy lines. After a 10-day exercise with the Chindits, Galahad was sent to northern Burma in January 1944 to link up with Stilwell's force comprising Chinese, Kachins (Burmese natives), Indian, and British forces.

From February 1944 until April of that same year, the Marauders had fought bitter battles at Walawbum, Shaduzup, Inkangahtawng and Nhpum Ga. In addition, they had over 30 minor engagements and inflicted numerous casualties upon the elite 18th Japanese Division. The unit had compiled a remarkable record in a short period of time. After the Walawbum campaign, where the infantrymen pushed the enemy from their positions and killed and wounded over 800, Merrill commented, "Between us and the Chinese, we forced the Japanese to withdraw farther in the last three days than they have in the last three months of fighting."

Unfortunately, the rigors of jungle warfare had taken their toll on the Marauders. Since beginning the campaign, the riflemen had marched an astonishing 750 miles in some of the worst terrain in any theater of operations. Disease and battle casualties had drastically reduced the unit's combat effectiveness. Out of the nearly 3,000 men, only 1,400 remained—and some of these soldiers needed to be evacuated. Men could barely walk and suffered from such severe dysentery that they slit the seats of their trousers so they could keep moving. Because there were no reinforcements for them, Stilwell augmented the force with Kachins and Chinese troops for a total strength of 7,000. Stilwell pressed the Galahad force even harder and gave them a new assignment: take the airstrip at Myitkyina, code-named Operation End Run.

A complete reorganization took place for the Myitkyina operation. The 2nd Battalion was the most depleted of the lot after sustaining numerous casualties at Nhpum Ga. With just enough men to form two rifle companies, 300 Kachin guerrillas boosted their numbers. This was designated M Force under Lt. Col. George A. McGee, Jr.

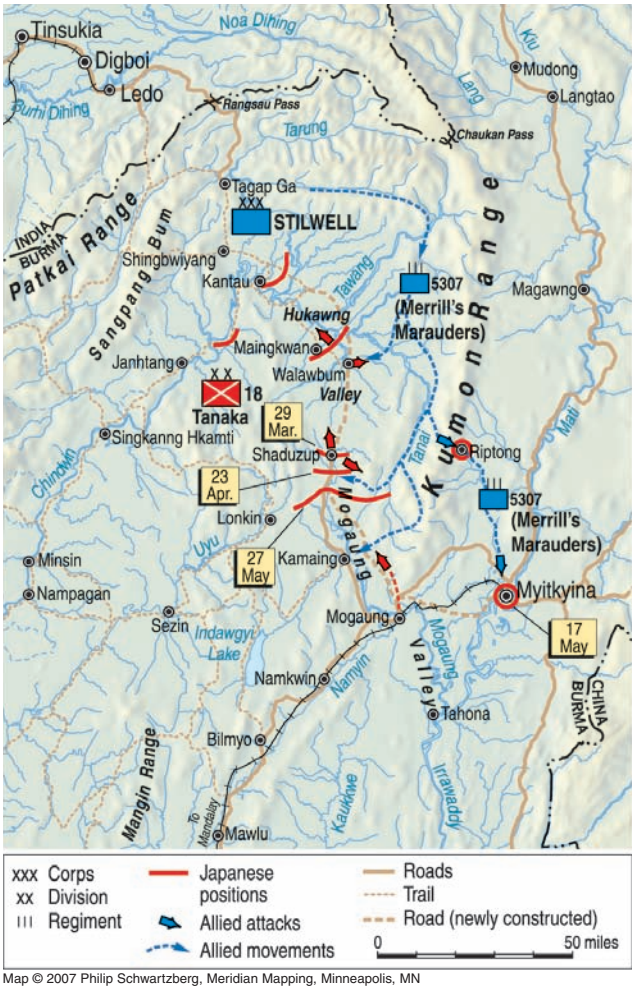
Colonel Charles N. Hunter was given the 1st Battalion with the Chinese 150th Regiment from their 50th Division. Several 75mm pack

howitzers were added to Hunter's command, which was named H Force.

Lastly, the 3rd Battalion and the Chinese 88th Regiment, 30th Division was consolidated into K Force and commanded by Colonel Henry L. Kinnison, Jr. They were given the artillery from the Marauders for additional firepower for the upcoming campaign. Merrill, who had a heart attack after Galahad's second operation, had recovered sufficiently and rejoined the Marauders.

In late April, Stilwell arrived at Merrill's headquarters at Naubum to confer with him on the upcoming operation. The plan had H and K Forces traveling north to Taikri, then turning sharply east, traversing the Kumon Mountains, and arriving at Riptong. From there, both groups would make their way south all the way to Myitkyina. M Force would move parallel to the others, acting as flankers to stop any enemy troops from advancing northward to strike at H and K Forces.

On April 28, K Force began its arduous trek into the Tanai Valley and over the Kumon Range. Several days later, H Force jumped off. The march was approximately 65 miles, but one-fifth of it was over the toughest ground ever encountered by the Marauders. To make matters worse, the trail the men were to use had not been traveled in 10 years. A group of Kachins and 30 laborers, under the leadership of Captain William A. Laffin and 2nd Lt. Paul Dunlap, took the point to clear the unforgiving underbrush for the rest of the party.



Map © 2007 Philip Schwartzberg, Meridian Mapping, Minneapolis, MN

TO ADD TO THEIR MISERY, TORRENTIAL monsoon rains began. Rain fell every day, and the humid tropical air was unbearable. The loads had to be taken off the pack mules and carried by the soldiers up the steeper cliffs for fear that the animals would slip and fall. In spite of this, Khaki Team alone had 15 mules lose their footing and, in some cases, fall hundreds of feet to their deaths.

The other Marauders experienced the same harsh elements as they slowly snaked their way toward their objective. In his book, *The Marauders,* former member Charlton Ogburn, Jr., relates the misery of the trek: "We were scarcely ever dry. When the rain stopped and the sun came out, evaporation would begin. The land steamed. The combination of heat and moisture was smothering. You had to fight through it. For those most weakened by disease, it was too much. For the first time you began to pass men fallen out beside the trail, men who were not just complying with the demands of dysentery—we were used to that—but were sitting bent over their weapons, waiting for enough strength to return to take them another mile."

On May 6, the advance elements of K Force arrived at Riptong, where they knew a sizable Japanese garrison was stationed. Colonel Kinnison opted to envelop the enemy. He sent 1st Lt. Logan Weston and his platoon to hack at the dense jungle on the south side of the village. While Logan's men were establishing their blocking position, the Khaki and Orange Teams proceeded in a wide arc to the south to further cut off any escape attempt by the Japanese. Orange Team arrived on the heels of Khaki and set up its 60mm and 81mm mortars to support the Chinese infantry ordered to seize the village.

Enemy snipers soon began harassing the Marauder's positions with rifle fire. Private Charles A. Page was seriously wounded and died four days later. Private Anthony Colombo later said, "We knew that he was going to die. I was 19 years old and he was 18, and from what I understand it was his birthday. I just sat and held his hand as he lay there."

On May 7, the sounds of the Chinese bugles of the 88th Regiment permeated the air as two companies prepared to attack Riptong. Moving on the village, the Chinese took extensive casualties as the enemy opened up with mortars and automatic weapons fire. The Marauders supported the Chinese with machine guns and mortars but had to be careful not to drop shells on the advancing Chinese infantry. Japanese defenders assaulted the Marauders' roadblock in an attempt to breach the perimeter and make their escape but were driven back.

By May 9, the Chinese had successfully taken Riptong. One Marauder medical officer estimated that "about one-third of the two companies of Chinese became casualties." However, it became evident that they had inflicted heavier casualties on the Japanese when one prisoner said under interrogation that 90 of his comrades were killed and only 40 managed to escape. Later, Marauder patrols would kill 36 of these enemy soldiers.

The battle at Riptong had undoubtedly alerted the Japanese to a sizable enemy force in the area. Colonel Hunter's H Force attempted to make a dash for Myitkyina, a mere 35 miles away. To protect Hunter's flank, K Force was ordered to the village of Tingkrukawng, to assist a group of Kachins and Gurkhas embroiled in a battle there.

By the morning of May 12, lead elements of K Force had reached the outskirts of Tingkrukawng. One of the scouts erroneously thought he saw a group of Chinese on the trail and he greeted them, only to find out they were Japanese when they quickly scattered. Soon Khaki and Orange Teams, together with the Chinese 89th Infantry Regiment, prepared for the attack.

As the infantrymen pressed forward, enemy machine-gun bullets wounded several men, nearly killing the cameraman accompanying them. Orange Team's K and L Companies attempted to reach the village but met stiff resistance. Colonel Kinnison soon estimated that well-entrenched battalions of Japanese were in the village.

As American and Chinese mortars tried to soften the enemy's defenses, riflemen scurried to envelop the Japanese but met with no success. By late afternoon, the Marauders located the Japanese fortifications. In his book, *Spearhead: A Complete History of Merrill's Marauder Rangers,* author and former Orange Combat Team surgeon James E.T. Hopkins wrote, "The entire battle area was covered by dense jungle with massive hardwood trees and dense low vegetation, including much thick and heavy bamboo. The Japanese defenses dominated all approaches."

Even medical personnel were susceptible to Japanese fire as Hopkins would soon find out when the battle resumed the next morning. As the team of doctors was operating, a Japanese machine gun let loose devastating fire on the makeshift operating room. Hopkins describes the courage of several muleskinners trying to silence the weapon: "Pfc. H.T. Pausch's heroic action cost him his life, and that of Pvt. Clayton A. Vantol resulted in his being wounded. These two and several other muleskinners worked their way toward the gun and, at about fifty yards' range, a burst from the gun caught Pausch in the chest, causing his instant death." The deadly machine gun nest was eventually wiped out by the Marauders.

Realizing he could not dislodge the enemy with the troops he had, Kinnison was satisfied that he had held up the enemy long enough, and Hunter's group was well on its way to Myitkyina. Under the protective umbrella of an artillery barrage, K Force slipped away and set out to link up with H Force.

On May 13, Merrill fired off a message to Stilwell that read: "Can stop this show up till noon tomorrow, when die will be cast, if you think it too much of a gamble. Personal opinion is that we have a fair chance and that we should try." Stilwell concurred and penned in his diary: "Hunter expected to give us the 48-hour signal tonight. I told Merrill to roll in and swing on 'em."

National Archives

General Frank Merrill and Colonel Charles Hunter, commander of the Marauders' 1st Battalion, observe their troops as they traverse Pangsan Pass on the Ledo Road near the border between India and Burma. Their pack mules are loaded with ammunition and provisions.

HUNTER'S WEARY H FORCE, CONSISTING of the 1st Battalion of Merrill's Marauders, the 150th Chinese Regiment, the 3rd Company Animal Transport Regiment, and a detachment from the 22nd Division artillery, trudged into the village of Lazu where Hunter immediately formulated plans for the capture of Myitkyina airfield. H Force would conduct the main assault, with Colonel Kinnison's K Force on the eastern side. Colonel McGee's M Force, which had just arrived after an arduous trek through the jungle, was to shield Hunter's western flank.

The Kachin lead scout, trained by OSS (Office of Strategic Services) Detachment 101, led the column on a torturous trail so they could arrive at their destination unseen by the Japanese. Misfortune struck when the knowledgeable guide received a bite from a venomous snake. When the Kachin's foot became infected, several Marauders sucked poison from the wound to save his life. This rudimentary medical practice was successful, and they placed him on Colonel Hunter's horse so they could continue on to Myitkyina. The account from the official history states, "Without his guidance, the Marauders would have had difficulty finding their way in the dark through the intricate maze of paths."

As the group proceeded, Hunter took every precaution to hide his movements from the enemy as they neared their objective. He had his men confine the inhabitants of the village of Namkwi, just four miles from the airfield, within his own perimeter. Many of the natives were known to be loyal to the Japanese.

Prior to the attack, Hunter wanted intelligence on the condition of the airstrip and the disposition and number of its troops. Sergeant Clarence E. Branscomb, from White Combat Team, a savvy veteran of the Solomon Islands campaigns, led a six-man patrol to reconnoiter the area. Taking a radio, Branscomb's patrol headed out. On the way, the men "killed a [bottle of] Canadian Club" given to them by Colonel Hunter. Upon reaching the field, the Marauders witnessed the enemy repair crews leaving. Apparently, the Japanese customarily worked on the field until midnight and then withdrew to their bunkers to afford them better safety from the constant air attacks.

In 1989, in a letter to *The Burman News,* Branscomb relates what happened next: "I picked up the radio and started walking down the middle of the runway, thinking if those emplacements were occupied we'd soon find out …"

After keying the microphone, because the radio could only receive but not send voice traffic, Branscomb notified headquarters that the coast was clear to send in gliders carrying Chinese troops for the impending assault.

On May 17, Colonel William L. Osborne was to jump off at 10 AM with the 1st Battalion of the Marauders and the Chinese in trace. Arriving at the southwest end of the airstrip, he was to leave the 150th Regiment there to seize the field at a predetermined signal while he and the battalion made their way to Pamati to capture a ferry launch that traversed the Irrawaddy River.

Within the hour, the Marauders had secured Pamati and the nearby ferry. Red Combat

Team remained at the ferry while White Combat Team returned to the airfield to capture Zigyun, the main ferry terminal for Myitkyina. The Chinese, after seeing the red flare signal, moved on the airstrip and quickly overran the enemy positions. With bugles sounding the charge, the Chinese took the Japanese completely by surprise, and the airdrome soon belonged to the Allies.

AFTER THE BRIDGE AT NAMKWI WAS blown by the Kachins, the Chinese established defensive positions on the southeast end of the field. The code words, "In The Ring," were sent, informing Merrill that the strip was ready to be used.

Communicating between the various units soon became a problem. Seven C-47s, towing gliders with engineering supplies and soldiers from the 879th Engineer Aviation Battalion, began their approach to the airfield with no advance warning to the working parties on the ground. Gliders landed and skidded in all directions as men ran to escape injury. Luckily, no one was hurt.

Soon, Chinese units began arriving as well. The 2nd Battalion, 89th Regiment, and a battery of antiaircraft guns landed before the rains struck. Again, Hunter could not reach this unit to disperse the troops around the airfield. However, the items most desired by the Marauders—food and ammunition—did not arrive.

On May 18, two battalions of the 150th Chinese Regiment attacked Myitkyina itself from the north while White Combat Team seized Rampur. The Chinese assault was moving well as they took a railroad station, but they soon bogged down when they became involved in confused fighting and had to retire. The Chinese withdrew and set up a perimeter 800 yards west of Myitkyina.

K Force was moving toward Myitkyina from the north and was ordered to attack the village of Charpate, located about five miles from the airfield. After a brief firefight with a lone Japanese machine-gun emplacement, the hamlet was secured. K Force's ranks were rapidly thinning because of disease. As Dr. Hopkins states in his book *Spearhead*, "A new combination of complaints was now surfacing. Numerous men were complaining of severe headaches that persisted in spite of aspirin. The men also had skin rashes and swollen glands in their groins. We suspected that we were now seeing early cases of scrub typhus, the frequently fatal disease about which we had been warned when we were halfway across the mountain range."

Despite the health crisis in the 3rd Battalion,

Continued on page 82

"WILL THIS BURN UP THE LIMEYS!"

Why, with the Marauders riddled with disease and fatigue, were they given the mission to attack Myitkyina? Stilwell and Merrill had to be aware that the unit was decimated. Galahad was originally designed to be a hit-and-run unit and to harass the enemy in his own backyard. Instead, the Marauders had fought pitched battles with the enemy, many times without air or artillery support.

The reason Stilwell kept Galahad in the field was simple: the Marauders were the only U.S. ground combat unit in the CBI Theater. In *Merrill's Marauders: Combined Operations in Northern Burma in 1944,* historian Gary Bjorge writes, "Stilwell had no choice but to use the 5307th to execute End Run because the nature of the forces he commanded made it necessary for Americans to lead the Myitkyina task force. The Chinese were not trained for long-distance cross-country maneuver through the jungle. They also lacked the aggressiveness for such an undertaking. Moreover, any attempt by Stilwell to send a Chinese force alone against Myitkyina would certainly have been opposed by Chiang K'ai-shek as being too risky. To ensure full, effective participation by the Chinese and the Kachins, the force moving on Myitkyina had to be a combined force under American command."

This logic may be true. However, to the emaciated foot soldier of Merrill's Marauders it meant little. Being the lone ground combat force in the entire CBI area had its downside. They felt they had been lied to and misled. They were promised rest and recuperation, and now they were ordered into another major battle. Despite the anger and bitterness, there was never any doubt in their minds that they could handle the mission, even in their horrible condition.

As Dr. Hopkins relates in *Spearhead,* "Above all, the Marauders were disgusted by the failure of Generals Merrill and Stilwell to meet them in small groups or as a unit to express some gratitude to them and their dead and seriously wounded or sick comrades. The Stilwell way was to forget that the Marauders had ever existed as a unit. This great volunteer outfit, with its gallant men and officers and its fantastic esprit de corps, was to disappear without written history, colors, insignia, or future."

The Marauders were not the only ones to dislike Stilwell. Because of his acid tongue, he made few friends in the high command as well. "Vinegar Joe," as Stilwell was called, could speak fluent Chinese but seriously lacked any tact or diplomacy when dealing with his peers. He frequently circumvented the chain of command and went directly to the JCS (Joint Chiefs of Staff). This angered Admiral Lord Louis Mountbatten, who was in charge of all operational matters in the CBI Theater.

Stilwell also did not like Orde Wingate, and he penned in his diary, "What's the matter with our people? After a long struggle, we get a handful of U.S. troops, and by God, they tell us they are to operate under Wingate! We don't know enough to handle them, but that exhibitionist does! And what has he done? Made an abortive jaunt to Katha, got caught E. of the Irrawaddy (River) and come out with a loss of 40 percent—net result, cut the RR that our people had already cut (by air attacks). Now he's an expert. This is enough to discourage Christ."

While planning End Run, Stilwell did not tell Lord Mountbatten about the operation. He did confide in General William Slim but asked him to keep silent about the operation. Stilwell felt that British security was shabby. When word reached Mountbatten and Prime Minister Winston Churchill that the airstrip had been taken, they were furious that they had not been informed. Stilwell was elated and put in his diary in capital letters: "WILL THIS BURN UP THE LIMEYS!"

The assault on Myitkynia, which had begun so auspiciously, would turn into a quagmire. Even the determination and fighting spirit of the Marauders were not enough to seize the town. Even Stilwell saw this and wrote, "Galahad is just shot."

Despite the terrible hardships the Marauders had to face, they never complained. They had overcome tremendous obstacles to perform their duty. As Hopkins wrote, "Their ability to ignore disease, constant fatigue, poor food, obvious lack of appreciation, death, and wounds—while forging ahead again and again into hostile territory and more battles—will continue to deserve the honor of future generations." □

FIRST DEADLY ROUND AT CASSINO

BY DAVID H. LIPPMAN

The town of Cassino is left a shambles in the aftermath of heavy Allied bombardment. Anchoring the western end of the formidable Gustav Line, Cassino and the Benedictine abbey that crowned the adjacent mountaintop proved costly for the Allies to capture. The wreckage of a Sherman tank and a prefabricated Bailey bridge lie in the foreground.

Imperial War Museum

BY DECEMBER 1943, the phrase "sunny Italy" had evolved from being a travel agent's selling point to becoming an ugly joke for the British and American troops of the Allied Fifth Army, advancing north from Naples to Rome. Rain and snow turned ground to mud and made roads impassable. Valleys were seas of black mud. Troops on the mountains created shelters behind rocks and in caves.

American reporter Ernie Pyle described GIs returning from two weeks in the front line as looking "ten years older than they were ... Soldiers became exhausted in mind and in soul as well as physically. The infantry reach a stage of exhaustion that is incomprehensible to the folks back home ... to sum it up: A man just gets damned sick of it all."

And the greatest battle of the Italian campaign had not even started yet.

The Allied invasion of Italy had been launched as the logical follow-up to the conquest of North Africa and Sicily. Under the publicity-hungry Lt. Gen. Mark W. Clark, the Fifth Army stormed ashore at Salerno, south of Naples, in September 1943, and began a slow, plodding drive toward Rome across mountains and rivers—every one of them seemingly named Volturno to exhausted American soldiers. Finally, the arduous trek was halted along the Garigliano and Rapido Rivers at the base of the Liri Valley—the gateway to Rome—by exhaustion, winter weather, and fierce German resistance.

DURING THE FIRST OF FOUR BLOODY ATTEMPTS TO TAKE THE BASTION OF MONTE CASSINO AND THE TOWN THAT OCCUPIED ITS SLOPE, THE ALLIED FIFTH ARMY WAS REPULSED.

Stalemate followed along what the Germans called the Gustav Line—a triumph for the Todt Organization's engineers—with its strongpoint the town that barred the entrance to the Liri Valley, Cassino, and the great mountain that stood above it, Monte Cassino.

The market town was typical of central Italy—four churches, prison, railway station, high school, orchards, vineyards, oak woods, a working Roman thermal bath, and 22,000 inhabitants. But looming just above it stood one of civilization's great works, the Benedictine monastery of Monte Cassino, brooding 1,600 feet over the town, an all-seeing eye that gazed in every direction.

The monastery dated back to AD 529, when St. Benedict sought to headquarter the brotherhood that bore his name in a place where his monks could worship in security during the violence of the Dark Ages. The monastery that resulted became the worldwide headquarters of the Benedictine order. Working by candlelight, Benedictine monks laboriously copied the works of ancient authors, creating miniatures and frescoes that became the basis for art across Europe, and sang Gregorian chants. When the new monastery was built in 1349 after a devastating earthquake, it was a huge building with five courtyards and 15-foot-high walls that were 20 feet thick at their base, and it was accessible only via a five-mile long hairpin track. The monastery, the repository of ancient manuscripts of legendary authors Tacitus, Cicero, Horace, and Virgil, was the blueprint for similar ones throughout Europe and for centuries was host to pilgrims, students, and tourists.

By the time German General Heinrich von Vietinghoff's Tenth Army began digging trenches and bunkers around the mountain's base in 1943, the Monte Cassino abbey was one of the sacred sites of Christianity. But it was also one of the finest defensive positions in Europe, and the German soldiers (Landsers) digging foxholes around it were among the finest defensive infantrymen in Europe, lean, hardened men who had been indoctrinated in martial values as Hitler Youth and their bodies toned by physical work in the prewar Arbeitsdienst (Labor Service).

The Landsers were supported by the strongest defenses German engineers could create. Adolf Hitler took a personal interest in the Gustav Line and that ensured plenty of supplies. Engineers laid out interlocked systems of antipersonnel mines and barbed-wire entanglements behind the Rapido and Garigliano Rivers and removed buildings and trees to create fields of fire. They were replaced by bunkers reinforced by railway girders and concrete and built in multilayered lines.

The Germans built 100 steel shelters and 76 armored pillboxes around Cassino. The latter weighed three tons each and could shelter a two-man machine-gun crew. The Germans called them "armored crabs."

Other pillboxes could accommodate 20 to 30 men, with their light machine guns and a charcoal brazier on which to cook rations. Subterranean passages and trenches connected them to infantry trenches. In some cases, the Germans did not knock down homes and buildings but instead incorporated them into the Gustav Line with heavy layers of crushed stone.

Imperial War Museum

Goumiers, fierce fighters of the 2nd French Moroccan Division, receive a final briefing on German troop dispositions prior to relieving the U.S. 34th Infantry Division on the front line near Cassino in December 1943. The rugged Goumiers were already renowned for their combat skills in mountainous terrain prior to their arrival in Italy.

EVERY ONE OF THESE BARRIERS WAS LACED WITH mines and booby traps, a German specialty. The Germans sowed more than 24,000 mines, most of them the S-42 "Schu-mine," which exploded under only 10 pounds of pressure, blasting off a man's foot. The S-mines were more frightening, going off at groin height. The Americans called this weapon the "Bouncing Betty." Both mines came in wooden casings, making magnetic detection very difficult.

To cap this, the Germans blasted open a dam on the Rapido River, which flooded the flat plain before the monastery, turning already soggy terrain around Cassino into a quagmire that swallowed men and vehicles.

Nor did the Germans rely solely on passive defenses. Infantry squads were expected to regularly probe and harass attackers and launch immediate counterattacks.

Yet the Allies were going to have to muster men and attack through this vile terrain and into the viler defenses. More than the conquest of Rome was on the line. British Prime Minister Winston Churchill had put his prestige behind the Italian campaign and now it was sinking. At Tehran in 1943, Soviet Premier Josef Stalin had once again fumed about the lack of an Allied invasion of Western Europe and demanded more action from the British and Americans.

Churchill's idea to breathe new life into the Italian campaign was to propose an amphibious left hook around the German lines, aiming at Rome. An Anglo-American corps would land at Anzio, while the Fifth Army and its American, British, and French troops would break across the Garigliano and Rapido Rivers, work their way through the Liri Valley, and head for Rome. With the German forces tied down on the Garigliano, they would not be able to stop the assault on Rome. All roads led to Rome in 1944 as they did in Julius Caesar's day, and Allied control of the Eternal City would cut off all supplies to the German front, trap the Germans in the mountains, and break open the campaign.

The assault would be launched in January, despite awful weather, to take advantage of a period when sufficient landing craft for the invasion would be in the Mediterranean. After the assault, the craft would be pulled out for the invasion of Normandy. It was January 22, 1944, or never—17 days to plan and launch an

amphibious assault and its supporting attacks.

President Franklin D. Roosevelt was sold on the idea, and he approved the retention of enough landing craft in the Mediterranean to make the Anzio assault, code-named Operation Shingle.

But to tie down the German defenders, Fifth Army would have to attack on the Garigliano line first, with its three corps: the British X, U.S. II, and the French Expeditionary Corps. The French were to advance through the mountains north of Cassino, while the other two corps broke across the Garigliano and Rapido Rivers south of the town and monastery. They began with trouble. Amphibious craft were in very short supply: a Bay of Naples storm had sunk 40 of 50 DUKWs assigned to Shingle, and their replacements came from the two corps assigned to the Garigliano and Rapido crossings.

The Battle of Cassino was launched by a force from which little was expected, the French Expeditionary Corps, under General Alphonse Juin, on the Fifth Army's right flank, north of Cassino.

The French Corps consisted of the 2nd Moroccan and 3rd Algerian Divisions, 50 percent of them French and colonial French, the other half African natives. The former were eager to fight and avenge the humiliation of 1940. The latter were professional soldiers who had spent most of the war square-bashing (drilling) in North Africa, eager to prove their value. What the corps lacked in tanks and vehicles it more than made up in ferocity and mules. The French corps included four regiments of ferocious Moroccan *goumiers,* bearded mountaineers in striped uniforms who enjoyed close combat with knives, followed by rape and pillage.

Both divisions were fresh arrivals in Italy, refitted with American ammunition and equipment. The first to arrive, the 2nd Moroccan in December, had a unique feature—female ambulance drivers. The Americans wanted them sent to the rear, but the 2nd Moroccan commander, General Andre Dody, exploded at the idea. "The women of France, like the men, are proud to die for their country," he said.

General Joseph de Monsabert's 3rd Algerian Division followed, enabling Juin to set up his corps headquarters and work out the best way to send the divisions across the Abruzzi mountain range north of Cassino. With his mountain troops and mules, Juin did not see the mountainous terrain as a barrier. The French North African Army stressed small-unit autonomy, foot mobility, and infiltration.

On the night of January 11, the French Corps opened the battle for Cassino with a two-division, broad-front assault. The 7th Algerian

Imperial War Museum

ABOVE: Pictured left to right at Eighth Army tactical headquarters in March 1944, General Sir Harold Alexander, commander of Allied forces in Italy; General Sir Oliver Leese, commander of the British Eighth Army; and General Alphonse Juin, commander of the French Expeditionary Corps, discuss plans for a coming attack.

BELOW: Lieutenant General Sir Richard McCreery (center), commander of the British X Corps, gestures during conversation with General Dwight D. Eisenhower (left), supreme Allied commander in the Mediterranean Theater, and General Mark Clark (right), commander of the Allied Fifth Army, during a meeting at San Martino on December 23, 1943.

Imperial War Museum

Regiment led off the attack—its first battle—on a pinnacle called Monna Casale. After a 15-minute bombardment, the French moved out to attack the German 5th Mountain Division, a proven outfit of Austrian veterans.

Tragedy struck immediately. A German shell hit a rockpile where all the officers of the 7th Algerian Regiment's 3rd Battalion were getting their orders, wiping out the battalion leadership with a single shot. The 3rd Battalion had to pull out of the attack. The other two regiments went in anyway. The 1st/7th Algerian took a beating, too. Captain Boutin was hit by a shell and refused to be evacuated. Instead, walking stick in hand, he led his men to take the summit of their objective. A bullet cut Boutin when he neared the top. Sous-lieutenant Vetillard took over and hobbled around, despite a bullet in the hip, encouraging his men to keep attacking. Then an exploding mortar round killed Vetillard. The French finally reached the top of Monna Casale, but it changed hands all day.

The Algerians used up their ammunition, and battalion commanders went up front to distribute bullets. The commander of one company told his 40 surviving men, "You have no officers left. But the 10th Company doesn't need them. Go, take this peak for me." The 10th Company did. Finally, the German 85th Mountain Regiment retreated to the Gustav Line.

The Moroccans had an easier time. Equipped with their ancestral dagger, the *baroud,* the 4th Moroccans gained surprise in their night attack. Jamming *barouds* into German backs, the 4th Moroccans "pushed on into the night. They were now no longer men, they were there to kill. Grenades exploded in the dugouts and screams came from within; elsewhere the Germans rushed out into the snow, some still in stocking feet. Half-dressed, they rushed toward their weapons pits through bursts of machine gun fire which forced them to throw themselves flat. Some put up a half-hearted resistance but this was soon broken by the relentless tide of hellish giants that surged all around them," their history recorded.

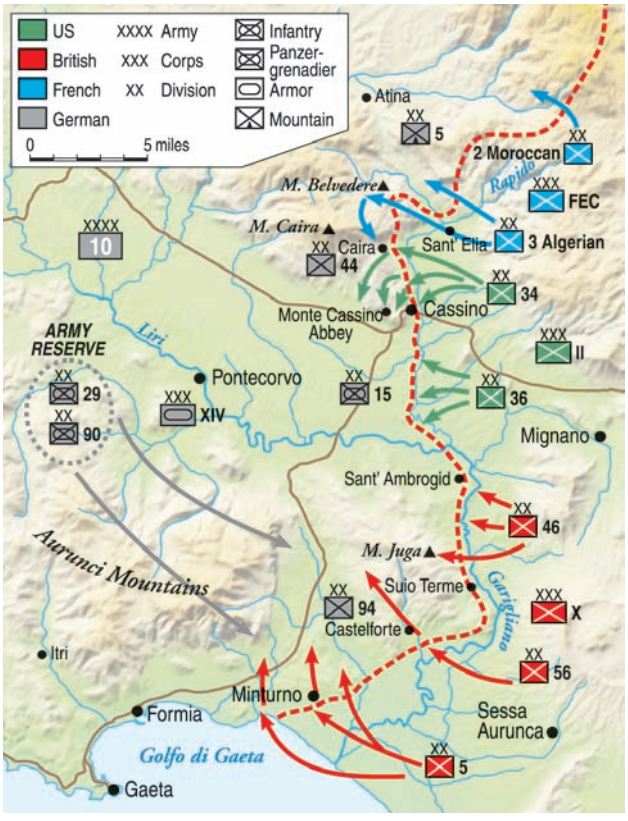
For four days, the French chased the Germans across the hills and mountains. They bounced across the Rapido and kept pressuring the Germans. But the French took serious casualties and, by January 21, were running short of food and ammunition and were weary from frostbite and exposure. Juin judged that with another division he could break through the crumbling German lines, hook around Cassino, and enter the Liri Valley. But he didn't have another division. He kept trying with what he had, but the Germans were well dug in on the Gustav Line, and the French were exhausted. Juin called off further attacks on the Cassino massif and consolidated his gains. Patrolling Moroccan *goumiers* found Italian civilians hiding in caves and they raped the women they caught.

THE BRITISH X CORPS, UNDER GENERAL SIR Richard McCreery, went in next on the left coastal flank. Two of the corps divisions, the 46th "Oak Tree" and 56th London "Black Cats" Divisions, had seen their first battle at Salerno and had been in action ever since. Fusilier Len Bradshaw of the 9th Royal Fusiliers, at age 19, was a battalion veteran. After three months of fighting, he did not think he would reach age 21. McCreery put the 5th Infantry Division on the coast, the 56th in the middle, and the 46th on his right. The 5th and 56th would cross the Garigliano and turn right, dri-

ving through the Ausente River valley into the narrow Ausonia mountain gorge and into the Liri Valley. The 46th would cross opposite Sant' Ambrogio and protect the U.S. 36th Infantry Division on its right. The British made a close reconnaissance of the Garigliano riverbank, cleared German mines, and sited their bridging equipment.

The German defense consisted of the 94th Infantry Division, standing on high ground 1,000 yards west of the river. They had plenty of machine-gun positions and 24,000 mines, under General Bernard Steinmetz. The division bore the number of an outfit that had been eliminated at Stalingrad.

X Corps guns opened fire on the evening of January 17, 1944, supporting a British attack into mountainous terrain with few roads and fewer tracks. Mules were the crucial arm of logistics, but X Corps had only 1,000 of them, barely enough to supply the infantrymen up front, let alone carry mortars and artillery. Under the intense pressure, the mules repeatedly broke down, and McCreery had to send in human porters—Cypriots and Palestinian Jews of the Royal Pioneer Corps—to haul bully beef and .303-caliber bullets to the front-line positions.



Map © 2007 Philip Schwartzberg, Meridian Mapping, Minneapolis, MN

The Allied Fifth Army struggled mightily to breach the German Gustav Line at Cassino. Beyond the mountains lay the valley of the Liri River, open country in which tanks and armored vehicles could maneuver freely. Still farther northwest lay Rome, the Eternal City and capital of Italy.

The 5th Division's amphibious move against Minturno did not work, and neither did its overland attacks. The division's 17th Brigade crossed the Garigliano but took appalling casualties in the German minefields. One company of the 6th Seaforths found itself surrounded by tanks, and only a pinpoint artillery barrage saved them. The Germans regrouped and blasted the Scots. The company commander ordered all men to make a break for it. He was killed minutes later, and only one survivor of the company escaped the trap.

By the morning of the 18th, the 5th Division had taken Minturno, but made very little progress; its reserve brigade, the 15th, was sent in, following narrow tracks marked by Royal Engineer tapes, through dikes and ditches. One company got lost and went straight into a minefield, losing a platoon. It took the rest of the night to extract the wounded men.

Meanwhile, the 5th Division's third brigade, the 13th, took heavy casualties in its drive on Hill 156. They took it and lost it to a counterattack. The 2nd Cameronians warned their men in an operations order: "It is fatal to halt when mortared. Once you are in among [enemy] troops he will stop mortaring. Dig or die."

The 5th Division had gained a shallow bridgehead and time to breathe. They took advantage of the superb German dugouts, one of which had a fully cooked breakfast ready to eat. The Germans launched counterattacks, which were fended off by artillery and naval gunfire.

The 56th London Division sent in the tough 169th "Queens" Brigade, which consisted of the 2/5th, 2/6th, and 2/7th Queen's Regiments. By nightfall on the 18th, they were across the river and up on their ridge. The 167th Brigade was assigned a group of hills and ran into heavy machine-gun fire. The 9th Royal Fusiliers headquarters party walked along the wrong railway embankment and into enemy gunfire. The commanding officer survived, but most of his men were killed. The other two battalions were able to take their objectives, but the assault was running behind schedule. German resilience had been underestimated, as was the strength of their firepower and minefields.

At least the 5th and 56th got across their river. The 46th "Oak Tree" Division, supposed to support the American drive into the Liri Valley, was not even able to do that. Just before attacking, the division's 128th "Hampshire" Brigade saw the Garigliano River turning into a torrent. The Germans had released the sluices of the San Giovanni Dam, and the river was six feet deeper than usual. The 2nd Hampshires and 1st/4th Hampshires had to offload their boats and manhandle them into position for the assault. When the 2nd Hampshires finally crossed, they rigged a cable ferry, but it broke, scattering boats downstream. Others got lost in the torrent and the mist. The 1st/4th Hampshires made 14 attempts to push a cable across the river; all failed. By January 20, the 128th Brigade had to call off its attack, the Hampshiremen badly shaken by the destruction.

The Germans held the high ground and used it to their advantage, with artillery and mortar spotters calling in fire on British ferries, rafts, and floating bridges. Mines and shells wrecked British vehicles and blocked routes. The engineers tried to shield the bridgeheads with smoke, but the wind blew the wrong way, and the Bailey bridges had to be abandoned.

The 46th Division's attempt to cross the Garigliano and take pressure off the central V Army attack had failed. Maj. Gen. Fred Walker's 36th Infantry Division would have no cover.

The 46th Division's commander, Maj. Gen. J.L.T. "Ginger" Hawkesworth, went to Walker to apologize for the failure, offering to provide one of his battalions to support the 36th attack, but the American was unimpressed. "The British are the world's greatest diplomats," Walker wrote in his diary. "But you can't count on them for anything but words."

The 36th Infantry Division was a proud outfit of Texas National Guardsmen, with traditions that dated back to the American Civil War. Walker was a quiet, rangy, and rugged veteran of the Mexican Expedition of 1916 and World War I. In person he was shy and sensitive, and ill at ease with West Pointers. Still, he had turned the division—a peacetime social club for well-connected Texans—into a tough fighting division.

The 36th fought its first battle at Salerno, a harsh trial for any division. Two battalions of 1,000 men had been wiped out: one surrounded and captured, the other ambushed by artillery. The assistant division commander collapsed under the strain and was replaced by

Brig. Gen. William Wilbur, a flamboyant and blunt officer.

The 36th had slogged up the Italian peninsula since then, its men feeling they were in a hard-luck outfit that always got the dirty deal. That was common in a lot of front-line units, but 2nd Corps deputy chief of staff, Colonel Robert Porter, wrote that the division had never really found itself.

NOR DID GENERAL WALKER GET ALONG WITH HIS two bosses, Maj. Gen. Geoffrey Keyes, who commanded the II Corps, or Lt. Gen. Mark W. Clark, who commanded the Fifth Army. Where Walker was shy and retiring, Clark was an outspoken, brash self-promoter. Keyes was a cavalryman, daring and impulsive in planning and action, but restless and flighty. Walker was older than both of his superiors and increasingly at odds with them.

Where Keyes and Clark relied on naval gunfire and heavy artillery to flatten towns and German morale, Walker believed they had little impact on well-defended German positions and too much impact on defenseless civilians.

Now, as the 36th moved up to the Rapido River, Walker was even more worried—the troops entered the line in mid-November amid pouring rain. Temperatures fell to freezing. Everyone froze in soaked clothing. Jeeps bogged down in the mud. Walker requisitioned 12,000 winter jackets, 6,000 pairs of leather gloves, and 2,000 gasoline heaters for his men, but it was not enough. Even so, he kept going to the front, ignoring visitors, to check on his men.

The big question was whether the 36th could cross the Rapido with the Germans in possession of the Cassino Monastery Hill, which dominated the whole waterlogged plain. Walker believed a frontal assault would be a disaster. The river and the German defenses reminded him of World War I battles where he had held the Marne River line with a small force against vast but doomed German attacks. But Walker kept his protests mild, and Keyes and Clark ordered him to get on with the assault.

Now, with the failure of the 46th Division to cross the river, Walker realized his division's going would be harder. McCreery recommended the attack be canceled. He did not think it would succeed even if the 46th had taken its objectives, calling the whole Rapido attack "a tactical monstrosity."

Ironically, Clark's purpose had already been achieved. The British attack had brought in Kesselring's reserves on the Garigliano. But that was immaterial to the men of the 36th Infantry who faced the Rapido River. Its banks were steep and vertical, between three and six feet high, between 25 and 60 feet apart. The river was nine to 12 feet deep.

The center point of the German defenses was the village of Sant' Angelo, whose pulverized buildings had been turned into blockhouses, dugouts, bunkers, and trenches, all festooned with barbed wire, booby traps, and mines. The men defending the positions came from Maj. Gen. Eberhard Rodt's tough 15th Panzergrenadier Division, which was considered one of the finest German outfits in Italy.

Walker's engineer, Lt. Col. Oran C. Stovall, flew over the river, making a personal reconnaissance of the area, and he reported to Walker: "First, it would be impossible for us to get across the river. Second, we couldn't cross, and third, if we got across the river there was no place to go." The Liri just seemed a muddy bottleneck.

There was another problem. While engineers could remove mines and mark out safe routes, the Germans had an irritating habit of sending patrols across the river to move the tapes or plant new mines.

With Monte Cassino looking down on the valley, the only way Walker could neutralize the German height advantage was a night attack. He proposed a thunderous 30-minute barrage on the evening of January 20, followed by two regiments moving to the river at 8 PM. The 142nd Infantry Regiment would cross north of Sant' Angelo and the 143rd to the south, grabbing the village in a vise. The 141st Infantry Regiment would be Walker's reserve for exploitation.

It was up to Stovall and his men to get the 36th across the river. He spent three days studying the terrain, interrogating local civilians, and locating equipment. There was not enough, not even a standard M-1938 footbridge. Stovall would have to make do with sections of catwalk laid across pneumatic floats, 24-man rubber dinghies, and 12-man plywood scows. The 111th Engineer Battalion and two companies of the 16th Armored Engineers were assigned to clear mines and maintain routes leading to the bridges and exits on the far side. Once the riverbanks were free of enemy fire, they would build Bailey and treadway bridges across the Rapido. The 19th Engineer Regiment would provide a battalion to each assault regiment, each equipped with 30 rubber reconnaissance boats, 20 wood assault boats, and four improvised footbridges. The engineers had more than 100 boats. Crossing the Rapido would be an exercise in paddling and assembling cable ferries and bridges.

To make matters worse, no roads to the crossing sites were capable of carrying the trucks that would haul the boats to the water. The assault troops would have to manhandle the boats across the flooded ground to the river. Because of the loss of 40 DUKWs before Anzio, there were none to spare for the 36th crossing.

Walker swapped out the assignments of the 142nd and 141st Regiments in his battle plan to equalize the amount of combat the regiments were seeing. Then he changed the crossing sites for Colonel William H. Martin's 143rd Infantry Regiment, which astonished Major Jack Berry, commander of the 1st Battalion, 19th Engineers. There just seemed to be no teamwork in the planning. The two engineer battalions had never worked with the 36th before.

Lieutenant Colonel Aaron A. Wyatt Jr.'s 141st planned to cross the river with its 1st Battalion at one site, seize a bridgehead, and then send over the 2nd and 3rd Battalions. The 143rd planned to send over its 1st and 3rd Battalions at two points. With the plans in hand, the officers briefed their men. They had no illusions the attack would be easy. Both regiments were short 500 men, and many of the GIs who shouldered their M-1 rifles and grabbed an extra bandolier of ammunition were fresh from replacement depots and new to combat. Staff Sergeant W. Kirby of the 3rd/143rd believed the Germans had an "ideal position." Technical Sergeant C.R. Rummel, of the same outfit, said, "We thought it was a losing proposition, but there ain't no way you could back out."

On the night of the 19th, the assault battalions moved off Monte Trocchio and through clumps of trees to their starting points. Meanwhile, the engineers, unable to move their bridges up to the river by vehicle because of the sodden ground, deployed the bridges in two dumps, one for each assaulting regiment. Infantrymen would carry the bridges to the water and place them in the river. Engineers would supervise the assembly.

"WE THOUGHT IT WAS A LOSING PROPOSITION, BUT THERE AIN'T NO WAY YOU COULD BACK OUT."

Amid darkness and fog, the 1st Battalion of the 141st Regiment moved to attack. The boats had been laid out for them by the engineers, but when the infantry found them, several had already been smashed by German shellfire. The troops headed off to attack at 7 PM, plodding the 200 to 300 yards from the boat depots to

As the Italian Campaign wore on, the Luftwaffe appeared in force on fewer and fewer occasions. Here, however, debris still smolders in the streets of a town bombed and strafed by German aircraft moments before.

National Archives

the river. Half an hour later, 16 battalions of American artillery and mortars opened up in a barrage. German guns roared back, and the darkness was lit by exploding shells, which illuminated attackers. One German shell cut down 30 men.

Among the men advancing with 1st/141st was a young lieutenant from Grand Rapids, Michigan, named Carl Strom. A high school ROTC and college man, he was assigned to B Company of the 1st/141st on New Year's Day. Seven of B Company's officers were, like him, brand-new replacements. After a week of fighting, he was given command of 3rd Platoon. Half of the men were also fresh from training. Aware of his own inexperience, Strom told his platoon sergeant and squad leaders to be honest with him. "You guys know more about this than I do even with all my training. I can't match what you've learned in three or four days of combat."

Another leader, Lieutenant Bill Everett of Baltimore, commanding C Company's mortar section, tried to inspire his men. He told them that night they "were going to pay their dues for being an American."

Now Strom and his other platoon leaders drew cards to see who would lead the attack. Strom drew the high card, so his platoon set off at 6 PM, bayonets fixed, behind an engineer guide who took the wrong path, which led Strom and his platoon to the battalion's forward command post. They tried again, but the noisy turnaround attracted German fire.

Despite the flash of shells, it was hard for the Americans to see the marker tapes in the dark. German shelling destroyed the tapes or buried them in the mud. To avoid shellfire, Strom's men dived into mud and set off more mines. By 8 PM, when the Americans were scheduled to cross the river, they were still struggling to reach it, and one-fourth of their 400-pound boats and bridges had been destroyed, damaged, or abandoned, hurled down by wounded men who found them too heavy to carry. It took six to eight men to carry one boat.

By the time the 1st/141st reached the crossing sites, half the bridges were useless or abandoned. Lt. Col. D.S. Nero, who commanded the engineers, already saw the mistakes: the troops had to carry the boats more than 200 yards from depot to river (the assault troops should not have had to carry their own boats, as it exhausted them), there were too few crossing points, too many troops were bunched too tightly, men got lost in the fog, and abandoned boats and bridges lay where they fell, blocking approach routes.

Strom's platoon was in the thick of the shelling and the men shuffled down a sunken road to their crossing point. "The Germans had these places all zeroed in for their artillery so they could fire blind," he said later. "We were about halfway down the sunken road … I was up front with my runner and an engineer guide and I was probably 300 feet ahead of the company. As I turned around to look back, two German shells came in and they hit right in my platoon. They killed or wounded every man." B Company's commander was dead, too, along with his exec. Three officers were left, none of whom had been in combat, and the senior man (over Strom by two weeks) took command.

Under heavy fire, about 100 Americans managed to paddle their boats across the river and stake out a small claim. When the engineers started assembling their footbridges, they found one had been wrecked by mines and a second was defective; German shells blasted the remaining two apart while they were being assembled. The engineers scrambled around,

put together the parts, and managed to build a single structure that opened for business at 4 AM. Infantrymen of the 3rd/141st struggled across the soaked and shaky bridge. The shelling was too heavy for the engineers to build the bridge for vehicles.

STROM FINALLY GOT OVER THE RIVER ON A FOOTbridge around 4 AM, and he and his men found mines, booby traps, barbed wire, and machine-gun fire from a position 250 yards away. They tried to dig in, but first had to probe for mines with their bayonets. Then they found that in the damp earth their foxholes filled up with water to their waists or just collapsed.

The bridges were in terrible shape, but so were communications. By dawn, German shells knocked out the phone wires to the far bank. All the radios were lost or damaged, so the only way the Americans on the near bank could tell U.S. positions from German was by the roar of machine guns. The German MG-42 had that distinctive buzzsaw sound from its high rate of fire.

With dawn breaking, Wilbur, the assistant division commander, was on the scene to assess the situation. There seemed little point in continuing the attack, with one footbridge and only a few boats, so he ordered the men on the near bank to retire to their assembly areas before daylight brought down precise German shellfire and tanks. The men on the far shore were told by a messenger to dig in and hold until relieved.

Meanwhile, Major David Frazior's 1st Battalion of the 143rd Regiment launched its attack south of Sant' Angelo. They had an easier time at first. At 8 PM, a 40-man platoon launched assault boats and crossed the river. After unloading, the engineers paddled the boats back—and then the Germans opened fire, blasting open all the boats and sinking them. The engineers tried to build a bridge across the river. By 8:20 it was done, but minutes later, German guns destroyed it.

By 11 PM, Colonel W.H. Martin, commander of the 143rd, came to the scene and found Frazior trying to push more boats to the river. Personally pulling an engineer lieutenant and 18 of his men out of foxholes, Martin urged the attack forward. Through leadership and determination, the Americans pushed a battalion and two bridges across the Rapido by 5 AM. Shortly after that, German shells destroyed one bridge and gravely damaged the other—the Americans could cross it only one at a time.

On the far shore, the 1st/143rd came under fierce counterattacks from the 15th Panzergrenadiers. By 7 AM, the Americans were being forced into a pocket against the river. Frazior asked Martin for permission to withdraw, and Martin passed the request up to Walker. The division commander ordered Frazior to hold his ground and await reinforcement.

The message came too late. Frazior's men were facing German tanks and broad daylight. On his own initiative, he began withdrawing his troops. By 10 AM, the survivors of his battalion were back across the Rapido.

At the 143rd's other crossing site, the 3rd Battalion and its engineer guides got lost in darkness and fog and wandered into a minefield, which shattered men and boats alike. Disorganization reigned after that, and by 11 PM, when order had been restored, all the rubber boats assigned to the battalion had been destroyed by German shelling and mines. Infantrymen waited for the engineers to arrive with wooden boats to replace the rubber ones, while engineers waited for the firing to die down before building bridges. Both groups waited until after midnight, when Martin phoned to ask what was going on.

Major Louis H. Ressijac, who commanded the 3rd Battalion, said, "We have a few boats and one footbridge, but we don't know the way through the mine field. Am looking for an engineer guide." Ressijac promised to attack in an hour. But at 1 AM, there was still no progress, nor at 3 AM and at 5 AM, Martin relieved Ressijac of command and sent Lt. Col. Paul D. Carter to fire up the attack. By the time Carter reached the crossing sites, dawn was breaking. Not one man of the 3rd Battalion crossed the Rapido. Gloomy, Carter had the men withdraw to their assembly areas before sunrise.

Meanwhile, Strom and his men of the 1st/141st were still clinging to their position on the far bank north of Sant' Angelo. After sunrise, Strom peered up from his flooded foxhole to see what was going on. A bullet bounced off the side of his helmet. His foxhole mate was not so lucky—the German bullet hit him right between the eyes. After that, Strom could only take cover from intermittent German shelling.

Walker was upset. He wrote in his diary, "I told Col. Martin that he would have to put more of the will to fight in his troops. He said that he would do so. Maybe he will—I doubt it."

Now came time for analysis and recrimination. The British 46th Division had let down the Texans. Had their crossing been successful, they would have held the high ground that enabled German artillery spotters to call down accurate fire on the 36th. The Americans lacked experience and confidence for night fighting. The engineers and infantry were not well coordinated. Leadership was weak, mostly because so many young officers were replacements, as were the sergeants.

Meanwhile, Walker and his staff, having finished their postmortems, discussed what to do next. U.S. troops were still on the far side of the Rapido. A rescue or reinforcement operation had to be launched. But when? Wyatt and Martin believed a daylight attack was out of the question.

At a 9:45 AM staff meeting with his subordinates, Martin blamed the engineers for not providing enough boats or guides to lead his infantrymen to the river. Martin asked the exhausted Berry how many boats and bridges he had left. Berry reported 17 bridges left and 72 pneumatic boats his men would pump up, promising they would be organized "some way."

Another problem was that a large number of men had gotten lost in the darkness and fog, leading to an inordinate number of stragglers. Some were genuinely lost, others were genuinely scared. Martin told his bedraggled officers, "You gentlemen must realize this operation is a vital operation and I trust you have been in the army long enough [to know] that you can accomplish any mission assigned to you. It should have been proven last night." The river, he was implying, was supposed to have been crossed.

But at the Fifth Army's tactical headquarters, Clark was getting a different picture of events. Reports to him suggested that the British X Corps and U.S. II Corps were advancing. Ready to embark for Anzio, Clark phoned Keyes and urged him to "bend every effort to get tanks and tank destroyers across the Rapido promptly."

KEYES DROVE TO THE 36TH DIVISION'S FORWARD command post and got there at 10 AM, to pass on Clark's desires. Lecturing the divisional commander, Keyes said that if tanks had been rushed over the previous night, the assault would have been a success. A noon attack would have put the sun in the Germans' eyes.

Walker said he could not attack again by day. He would try again at 9 PM. For Keyes, that was too long to wait. He wanted it to go in at once, but certainly before 9 PM.

Walker pointed out that his infantrymen needed to reorganize and his engineers needed to get new equipment. Keyes was unimpressed. Commanders were supposed to overcome obstacles, not be overcome by them.

Walker phoned his senior officers and reported back to Keyes that the earliest he could attack would be 2 PM. The engineers promised 50 plywood assault boats and 50 rubber craft in the division area by 12:30, which would give the assault troops an hour and a half to pick them up and move out. Not good enough for

Keyes, but he would have to accept it. Keyes drove off, and Walker wrote in his diary, "I expect this attack to be a fizzle just as was the one last night."

But communications were still snarled. Martin did not know he was going in until 1:10 PM, 50 minutes before jump-off. He asked for more time and was allowed to postpone the attack until 3 PM. Wyatt's boats weren't delivered in time either, so he got the same one-hour delay. But at 3 PM, the battalion commanders were objecting, the men were exhausted, and the boats still had not arrived. A 4 PM attack seemed more reasonable. Walker agreed.

AT 3:30, MARTIN PHONED WALKER TO SAY SOME of the boats had arrived, but not all. Berry saw one truck being driven by a brigadier general. Martin asked for another delay. This time, Walker said no. Martin was to go with what he had. At 3:45, with 15 minutes to go, Wyatt learned his boats had been on hand for an hour. But it was too late to meet the 4 PM deadline, so Wyatt asked to hold off until 9 PM. Wyatt got his wish. Martin still had to go in even though the only real reason to attack was to save the men on the far bank, and there were none in his sector.

At 4 PM, Martin tried again. The assault troops filed in at the same crossing points. Martin figured that, while the Germans would have the sites mapped and referenced, his men would not lose their way finding them a second time. And he also laid down a heavy smoke barrage that created an artificial fog on the river and nearly suffocated his own men—a small price to pay to avoid being shelled.

The companies pushed off in rubber boats, and for two hours paddled back and forth, putting all three companies of the 3rd/143rd on the far shore by 6:30 PM. Then the heavy weapons companies came over with their machine guns, while the engineers built footbridges. With those up, the rest of the battalion, including its headquarters, shuffled across the river.

Martin then sent a second battalion across, while the third battalion guarded the crossing site and kept the bridge open. By 2 AM on the 22nd, the morning of the Anzio landing, Martin had a bridgehead. His men moved 500 yards inland, came under heavy fire, and dug in to consolidate their gains.

Now the engineers had to replace the footbridges with treadway and Bailey bridges capable of supporting M-4 Sherman tanks. Normally, engineers could lap up a pontoon bridge in 45 minutes, but with the steep Rapido banks, they had to cut approaches.

Bailey bridges, a British invention still used around the world today, looked then as now like giant Erector sets, made of prefabricated sections in standard lengths, put together with rivets. They took six to eight hours to build, and were generally built out of range of enemy fire. This night they would be built under heavy fire.

But the pontoon bridges and Bailey equipment had not been brought forward yet. Time before the Shingle landings and dawn was running out. Keyes himself ordered that a span-type Bailey be flung across the river from one bank to the other, obviating the need for approach ditches. The engineers were astonished at the idea: the whole area was under fire. The engineers were brave enough, but this looked like suicide.

Suicide or not, the engineers tried. By midnight, they had cleared the mines on the approach routes, and trucks struggled forward through the quagmire to deliver the bridges. The trucks got stuck. The engineers hauled the steel sections to the site by hand and tried to start work, but German fire was too heavy. The engineers spent most of their time trying to take cover. By 9 AM, it was clear that the bridges would not get built.

Meanwhile, Martin's second attack, by the 2nd Battalion, went in on schedule. By 6:30, two companies were over the river, but the German shelling became fierce. Until 10:30, nothing could move across the river. Frazior personally crossed the footbridge to get his men moving, but it was impossible. German resistance was too strong. At 1:30 AM, he nonchalantly radioed Martin, "I had a couple of fingers shot off," and said he would stay there until a replacement, Lt. Col. Michael A. Meath, arrived. It took Martin three and a half hours to send forward a replacement for his wounded subordinate.

THE MEN OF THE 36TH WERE FURIOUS OVER THEIR SACRIFICE, AS WAS THE AMERICAN PRESS. AMERICAN NEWSPAPERS CALLED THE RAPIDO THE WORST DISASTER SINCE PEARL HARBOR.

Three officers and 140 enlisted men made up F Company. By day's end, all the officers were wounded, and only 15 of the enlisted men, many also wounded, made it back across the Rapido. Engineers began building a Bailey bridge at 3 AM, but after four hours of work, it was only 4 percent completed. By 5 AM, all three rifle company commanders were wounded, the footbridge was destroyed, and the boats were all wrecked. The engineers spent an hour and a half laying down two new footbridges, but all they were doing was helping litter bearers haul wounded men to the rear—or stragglers to flee, claiming illness or that they were carrying a message. By dawn, Meath reported he had only 250 effectives. And trucks bringing new bridges were stuck in the mud. Berry reported his Bailey bridge would be ready—if there was no enemy fire or interference—at 3 PM.

Martin told Berry to build the bridge, regardless of enemy fire. Martin would get more smoke pots to cover the construction efforts. But by mid-morning, the Bailey program was stalled. Engineers were trapped in foxholes, scared and shelled, a mile from the bridge site. Officers moved the engineers to the bridge site, but everyone was reluctant to go—the situation was getting hopeless. At noon, Martin saw that his bridgehead was untenable, and he ordered his men to withdraw.

Meanwhile, Wyatt's 141st Regiment launched its attack at 9 PM on January 21, at the previous crossing site. The new boats the engineers brought forward were found to be defective, thanks to German shellfire, so only 60 men could brave the river and reach the far shore. In five hours of maneuver and attack, the 141st eliminated the German riflemen and machine guns. That gave the engineers time to build bridges. By 2 AM, the engineers had two improvised footbridges finished, and two battalions headed across the river by dawn, along with their heavy weapons teams. The Americans moved 1,000 yards inland, despite heavy casualties, then dug in. But they found no sign of the men who had been trapped on the far bank.

While the infantrymen consolidated their gains, the engineers turned to building a Bailey bridge, hauling the girders and frames by muscle power across the swampy ground and shell holes. They started at 1 AM and eight hours later had made no progress.

Everybody in the 36th was getting hammered. Around 4 AM, the Germans hurled 300 shells at the division's command post, causing casualties and disrupting the division's staff work. Rumors spread that the Germans were counterattacking and making their own river crossing to trap the Americans. They were not,

but heavy river currents washed away two footbridges weakened by German shells. The men of the 36th were tired, wounded, lost, and hungry. By 4 PM, every commander in both battalions on the far shore was dead or wounded, and a German shell hit the last footbridge, obliterating it.

Between 6 PM and 7 PM, 40 men paddled their way to the near bank, clinging to logs and debris to propel themselves through the bitterly cold current. Everyone else on the other side was left to be killed or captured. After about 8 PM, the sounds of gunfire died down on the far side. The 1st/141st was annihilated. The 36th Division suffered more than 430 killed, 600 wounded, and 875 missing. Most of the missing were presumed killed or captured. One company commander reported that out of 184 men in his outfit, only 17 were left. "My fine division is wrecked," Walker wrote. The 15th Panzergrenadiers lost 64 killed and 179 wounded.

Walker further wrote, "The great losses of fine young men during the attempts to cross the Rapido River to no purpose and in violation of good infantry tactics are very depressing. All chargeable to the stupidity of the higher command."

The postmortems continued. The attack was badly prepared—four battalions carrying heavy assault boats across boggy terrain to attack an entrenched and alerted enemy. The top generals had relied on maps, not personal inspection of terrain, to plan the attack. There was not even a plan for tactical air support.

The men of the 36th were furious over their sacrifice, as was the American press. American newspapers called the Rapido the worst disaster since Pearl Harbor. Soon field grade officers started pointing fingers. Clark blamed Walker and the division's will to fight. Clark fired Martin, Wilbur, Walker's aide, and the division's chief of operations. Clark also fired two of Walker's other aides, which hurt the division commander deeply—they were his sons.

MEANWHILE, WITH TWO DIVISIONS OVER THE Garigliano, X Corps kept moving against the German 94th Infantry Division. Lt. Gen. Fridolin von Senger und Etterlin, corps commander, visited the 94th and saw that the division was in trouble. He requested reinforcements from Field Marshal Albert Kesselring, the supreme German commander in Italy, and Kesselring scraped up three battalions of the 15th Panzergrenadier Division, the 134th Infantry Regiment of the 44th Austrian "Hoch und Deutschmeister" Division, the 2nd Hermann Göring Panzergrenadier Regiment, and three reconnaissance battalions.

Most important, Kesselring assigned his army group reserve, the 29th and 90th Panzergrenadier Divisions, which were well-equipped with assault and antitank guns. Unfortunately, the 29th would have to attack alone. The 90th was out of gas and under air attack.

National Archives

Near the banks of the Rapido River, American soldiers seek cover behind a thicket of brush and barbed wire on February 7, 1944. The ill-fated attempt by elements of the 36th Infantry Division to cross the Rapido was one of the war's most regrettable tactical reverses.

The 29th hit the British 56th and 5th Divisions on January 21, just as the British attack was wrapping up. The Germans stopped the British cold. The British were weary and short of men. Private S.C. Brooks of the 6th Cheshires saw that his platoon was made up of replacements with nine months of service. Engineer Matthew Salmon, working on a ferry, saw that his passengers were edgy, saying, "How much longer are we going to be here? It's about time we were bloody relieved."

The next morning, the 22nd, the Anzio assault went in. The Anglo-American VI Corps enjoyed complete surprise, but the Germans reacted with their usual speed, rounding up a variety of units to contain the assault. None of them came from the Garigliano and Rapido battles. The Fifth Army's river assaults had failed in their primary purpose—to draw off the German defenders.

The next six days saw hard fighting along the Garigliano River. The British launched attacks with ample determination against equally determined counterattacks. The 5th Division's 15th Brigade pushed through an attack to find the Germans charging back, shouting, "Give up, Tommy, you are surrounded."

With the 5th Division's attack running out of steam, the British sent in the crack 201st Guards Brigade against the 90th Panzergrenadiers, and guardsmen and grenadiers traded verbal insults amid the vicious fighting.

The fighting raged on for the hills and mountains, with the Green Howards reaching Minturno, and Hill 201 changing hands four times before the British took it for good. The 2nd Royal Scots Fusiliers tried to take Monte Natale but were not successful until January 29, when two battalions of the 17th Brigade took the crest. By then, the 5th Division was completely shot out.

The 56th Division was not doing any better. By the 20th, all of its brigades were committed, and two were tired and low in strength. Troops could only move by night. On the 24th, McCreery had to admit "the enemy remains firm … 56 Division troops have now been fighting for seven days and are tired. No further advance can be expected on the Corps front for some days unless the enemy withdraws." Two companies were down to three officers and 37 men between them.

McCreery sent in the 43rd Royal Marine Commando and 9th Army Commando Battalions to make progress up Monte Ornito, and the tough men in the green berets gained ground. But there were not enough reserves to exploit the success. The overall picture was slow going. The supply situation was a mess—the 10th Royal Berkshires went in without blankets or greatcoats, and the trails were impassible to mules. Porters had to bring everything up. Private George Pringle of the 175th Pioneer Regiment took supplies from pioneer mule transport companies and carried packs weighing up to 50 pounds on his back.

On January 23, the 1st London Scottish and 10th Royal Berkshires made a failed attack on Monte Damiano. The British sent up medics under Red Cross flags to recover the wounded. To the Britons' surprise, a German officer appeared atop the ridge and said in English, "Gentlemen, will you please stop firing while we bring in our wounded." A cease-fire lasted long enough to bring the wounded men down on both sides.

ON JANUARY 29, THE X CORPS MADE ONE MORE attempt to take Monte Damiano, with the 2nd and 1st/4th Hampshires leading off, having recovered from their failed Garigliano crossing. The 2nd Hampshires' diary said it all: "Attack unsuccessful owing to unexpected nature of ground and excessive use of grenades by the enemy." The follow-up attack was called off. Everywhere the British tried to attack, they found ferocious German resistance.

McCreery decided to hit the Germans across the mountains by infiltrating from behind, and that worked. The German defenders of Castelforte were extremely surprised, but the British troops struggled atop windswept mountains, some 2,000 feet high, under heavy shelling.

On February 10, McCreery faced facts. His men had taken Minturno and gained a few bridgeheads across the Garigliano, but had not driven the Germans off the pinnacles. The corps went over to "active defense" and counted the dead and wounded. Nobody was sure about German losses, but the British had taken a beating. The 2nd/6th Queens had lost 138 men, 28.6 percent of its strength. The 7th Oxfordshire and Buckinghamshire Infantry lost 188 men, 37.8 percent of its strength.

Despite fatigue, wintry weather, flooded terrain, high mountains, and higher casualties, Clark had to continue the offensive. About 70,000 British and American troops and 356 tanks were trapped at Anzio. Churchill, who had pushed for the operation, was enraged. He had hoped "we were hurling a wildcat on the shore, but all we got was a beached whale."

With the Germans hammering at the Anzio beachhead, Fifth Army now had to charge to its rescue as soon as possible. Clark could not wait for spring and dry weather. But he was running out of fresh troops. All that was left was the 34th Infantry "Red Bull" Division, holding the ground between the battered 36th at Sant' Angelo and the equally worn-down French Corps on the Cassino Massif. The 34th was facing the town of Cassino and the monastery brooding above it. The division's time had come.

Clark's plan was to send the 36th Division's 168th Regiment along the far side of the Rapido River north of the town in one thrust and send a second dagger directly across the Cassino Massif, three miles behind the river, and into the Liri Valley. The French Corps, despite fatigue, would attack again, this time on the far right, toward Colle Belvedere, to protect the American right flank.

The Red Bulls' 133rd Infantry Regiment would be the inner wheel. It would have to take an old wrecked Italian Army barracks two miles north of Cassino, while the 168th drove on a hillock called Hill 213, a stepping-stone to the higher peaks that led to the monastery.

Under Maj. Gen. Charles W. "Doc" Ryder, the Red Bulls would have to attack across a river less formidable than the 36th faced at Sant' Angelo, but they would still face soggy ground. More important, the Germans created a 300-yard-deep mine belt on the far shore, in front of a flat plain, cut clean of all vegetation, which provided German machine-gun nests, strongpoints, and pillboxes with perfect fields of fire. Barbed wire obstacles stood six feet in depth. All the surviving buildings had been turned into pillboxes, with self-propelled guns and antitank guns poking out from them, and the hill that led to Hill 213 was surrounded by 150 yards of barbed wire.

Senger, the literate Rhodes Scholar and lay Benedictine, trained his men on how to dig into rocky positions with crowbars and explosives instead of spades. His troops learned how a single man could lower a wounded soldier with ropes and haul him on an improvised sled. It was a remarkable adaptation to difficult con-

Imperial War Museum

A pall of smoke hangs over the ancient Benedictine abbey of Monte Cassino as Allied medium and heavy bombers pulverize the structure on February 14, 1944. Allied commanders had opted to bomb the monastery prior to an assault by New Zealand troops, fearing that the Germans were using it as an observation post. The destruction of the abbey was one of the most controversial decisions of the war.

ditions, and it was a hallmark of the German army throughout the war.

The slopes of Colle Maiola, Monte Castellone, and Monte Cairo rose 450 meters in a distance of 1,000 meters and were crisscrossed with wire, mines, felled trees, bunkers, and machine-gun emplacements. Atop the pinnacles of Colle Sant Angelo, Hill 444, and Hills 593/569, the Germans had built sniper posts and mortar emplacements, all covered with thick logs. The mortars were neatly concealed in gullies.

Nor were the defenders any slouches. This part of the Gustav Line was held by elements of the 71st Infantry, 5th Mountain, and the 44th "Hoch und Deutschmeister" Infantry Divisions, under Lt. Gen. Dr. Franz Bayer. The original 44th was based on the historic Austrian 4th Infantry Regiment and been destroyed at Stalingrad. A new 44th was created to replace the old one, and the Austrians were determined to uphold their long traditions. Even so, the Austrians were understrength.

On the evening of January 24, backed by tanks, the 1st and 3rd Battalions of the 133rd Regiment attacked the German defenses. With the regiment's 2nd Battalion still back in North Africa, the 100th Infantry Battalion, composed of Japanese-Americans from Hawaii, was committed to this, its first battle.

The 133rd immediately ran into the minefield. The tanks hurled more than 1,000 75mm shells into the high far bank of the river to break it down, but with no success. By midnight the following day, the 3rd/133rd was the only battalion across the river, holding a shallow bridgehead. The 1st/133rd found its stream unfordable. All day the 133rd struggled to cross the river, and by midnight all three battalions were across.

National Archives

In an effort to slow Allied progress, the Germans often opened dams and flooded low-lying areas. Here, an Allied tank has become bogged down in the soggy ground near the Rapido River on February 8, 1944.

On the 26th, Ryder sent in troops and tanks to reinforce the bridgehead, but the lead tanks became bogged down in the flooded quagmire, blocking the advance for the remaining vehicles. The 100th Battalion's attacks were repulsed. The 1st/133rd was forced back across its start line. More than 300 casualties were suffered, and the regiment's morale was sinking fast. But the attack had to go on. Ryder committed the 168th Regiment, which had been his exploitation reserve.

Early on January 27, the 168th launched its attack, slightly upriver, with a platoon of tanks from the 756th Tank Battalion leading the 1st and 3rd battalions. Most of the tanks slid into the bogs, but four of them were able to make it to the far shore, followed by infantry. All four were out of action from antitank fire, mines, and artillery by 1 PM, but they did their job, as the 168th reached the base of Hill 213 early on the 28th.

Unbelievably, the commander of the lead company decided his position was untenable by daylight and ordered a withdrawal to the river. "As he did so," Martin Blumenson wrote in the U.S. Army's official history, "the withdrawal turned into an uncontrollable rout. The troops fled across the river."

The panic spread, and other companies began fleeing. Once the withdrawals were checked, the 3rd/168th regrouped and headed 500 yards north to another crossing point, where they went over again, this time advancing a mile toward the village of Caira. This crossing point proved workable. While the infantry dug in for the night, engineers built "corduroy" roads of logs and tree trunks to enable the tanks of the 756th and 760th Battalions to cross the swampy ground for a new three-battalion attack on the 29th.

Meanwhile, the French prepared their second attack. Juin briefed Monsabert on the plan, but the 3rd Algerian Division's commander objected. Juin did not like the plan, either. He was expected to hit one of the least accessible parts of the Gustav Line. The defenses included the 1,669-meter-high Monte Cairo, higher than the monastery, and the 800-meter high Colle Belvedere, all under German artillery observation from Monte Cifalco, a 947-foot pinnacle. Juin wanted to take Monte Cifalco and sweep across the mountains, taking the Gustav Line and the Cassino Massif from behind. Instead, he was ordered into a frontal assault on the massif. Nevertheless, Juin was determined to succeed. He had to demonstrate the French Expeditionary Corps' loyalty to the Allied cause. "It is a matter of honor," he told Monsabert. That was all Monsabert needed.

The 3rd Algerian's Tunisian regiments were tapped to lead the attack. Lacking mules, the Tirailleurs hiked for eight hours through the mountains carrying their supplies to the forward positions. Each man stolidly followed a white patch tied to the pack of the man in front of him. Sergeant Rene Martin of the 4th Tunisian Regiment's 3rd Battalion led his mortar section across the Secco River, and everybody was soaked through before they could attack. Men also had to wade across the ice-cold Rapido, through water up to their armpits.

The 3rd Battalion's commanding officer, Commandant Gandoët, wrote, "The battalion is physically and mentally ready. Ready to lead a bayonet charge, to be killed on the mountainside, to deal the enemy all sorts of blows." The 3rd/4th Tunisian was assigned to capture Hill 470 and then push on to take the high ground, Hill 862, on the northern end of the Belvedere/Abate escarpment. The axis of attack would be "Gandoët Ravine," which would give the Tunisians cover from shellfire and the advantage of surprise.

The 2nd/4th Tunisian, under Commandant Berne, was to grab the southern end of Colle Belvedere and hit Colle Abate. The 1st/4th Tunisian was the regimental reserve for exploitation.

The French attacked at 7 AM on January 25. They found the defending Germans as fero-

cious as ever. The French stormed their way through to the summit of Hill 470 against massive counterattacks. Captain Denee, commanding the 3rd/4th Tunisian's 9th Company, was wounded in the chest. He crawled to his radio operator and whispered into the mike and to Gandoët: "Denee here … I'm wounded … about to take the objective … I'm handing over command to Lt. El Hadi. Terribly difficult. Don't worry, the 9th will make it … they'll make it … to the bitter end." El Hadi, a Tunisian, leaped to his feet and led his men up the crest.

The 9th Company reached the top, was thrown back by a counterattack, and attacked again. El Hadi had his forearm sliced off by a shell, but he fought on, dragging his arm behind him, the men following, until he was hit by a machine-gun bullet atop Hill 470 and died.

With 470 taken, Gandoët pressed the attack. The 3rd/4th Tunisians found "Ravine Gandoët" to be a steeply sloped gorge, blocked by rocky slabs, 2,500 feet high—three times the height of the Eiffel Tower. The Tunisians climbed the mountain walls with their hands, feet, and teeth. They came under German machine-gun fire, so the Tunisians knocked out the German positions with hand grenades. German shellfire commenced at 4 PM, but still the Tunisians climbed the gorge, freezing, exhausted, thirsty, drenched in sweat. Men nearly blacked out from exhaustion.

After the eight-hour climb, the Tunisians reached their objective, Hill 681, atop Colle Belvedere. It turned out to be lightly defended—the Germans did not think anybody could climb the gorge—and the Tunisians made short work of their attack, sweeping forward and killing most of the defenders, setting the rest to flight. At dusk, exhausted, hungry, thirsty, and out of communication with their regiment, the Tunisians dug in atop their objective.

The 2nd/4th Tunisians drove south of Colle Belvedere to Hill 700, and more Tunisians reinforced the weary men atop Belvedere, then pressed on to Hill 862. Without rest, under heavy fire, the Tunisians climbed the mountains all night, finally securing "Le Piton sans Nom" at 2 AM.

The French had taken their objectives but were exhausted from the ordeal. Captain Carre, who commanded the 1st Company of the 1st/4th Tunisians, wrote, "Night black, visibility zero, we trample over corpses; they're ours, one with no head, his guts spilling out." Colonel Roux, commanding the regiment, asked Monsabert for a 24-hour delay on resuming the attack but was told it was "out of the question." The Germans were reinforcing. If the French delayed, the Germans would strengthen their defenses. "Prepare to attack 862 and 915 without delay," Monsabert said. Monsabert later added to the transcript of the radio message, "Cruel necessity."

NOW THE GERMANS WERE TRULY WORRIED FOR the first time by the repeated Allied offensives. If the Allies were having supply problems with the mountains, the German situation was worse, exacerbated by Anglo-American air interdiction of roads and railways. But the standard German riposte to an enemy attack was a counterattack, and Senger hurled his Austrian troops against the Frenchmen, driving them back to the Secco River.

Sergeant Rene Martin was just finishing setting up a position for his mortars when a warrant officer suddenly shouted, "Get out, get out, get out." An entire German regiment was advancing. Martin and his mortarmen retreated, and Gandoët's troops atop Belvedere found themselves being shot at from all sides. For five days, Martin and one of his sergeants lay in a German foxhole, without water or food, under shellfire. Martin held a tin of peas against his lips to ease the chapping.

On Colle Belvedere, the 11th Company of the 3rd/4th Tunisians hung on all day, out of radio contact for most of it. The only orders they got: hold at all costs. The Germans hurled mortar rounds at the Frenchmen. "We are organizing the position," the company's war diary read. "Nobody sleeps. No water. Little to eat. The ration boxes were thrown away during the climb because they were too heavy. We must hang on ... we stay where we are."

"NOBODY SLEEPS. NO WATER. LITTLE TO EAT. THE RATION BOXES WERE THROWN AWAY DURING THE CLIMB BECAUSE THEY WERE TOO HEAVY. WE MUST HANG ON … WE STAY WHERE WE ARE."

That evening, the French reinforced the 1st/3rd Algerians to plug the Secco Valley, while the 3rd/7th Algerians were sent to take over Hill 700. Roux decided to hold off on the attack until the reserves had arrived. At dawn on the 27th, Gandoët's battalion started out of its ravine, across the Secco, and up the escarpments, under heavy German shelling. The men hauled up machine guns, mortars, shells, radios on their backs, under heavy fire, to reinforce the exhausted 11th Company up on the high ground.

The 2nd and 3rd/4th Tunisians were ordered to attack at 4:30, with Gandoët's men to hit Hill 862, while the 2nd Battalion attacked Hill 915. Both battalions set off on time and into a hurricane of fire. The commander of the 2nd Battalion was knocked unconscious by a German shell, and his battalion struggled. Roux was determined, and the 5th and 6th Companies attacked again at 9 PM. With only a handful of men left, they took Colle Abate at 2:30 AM. Gandoët's men also took a beating.

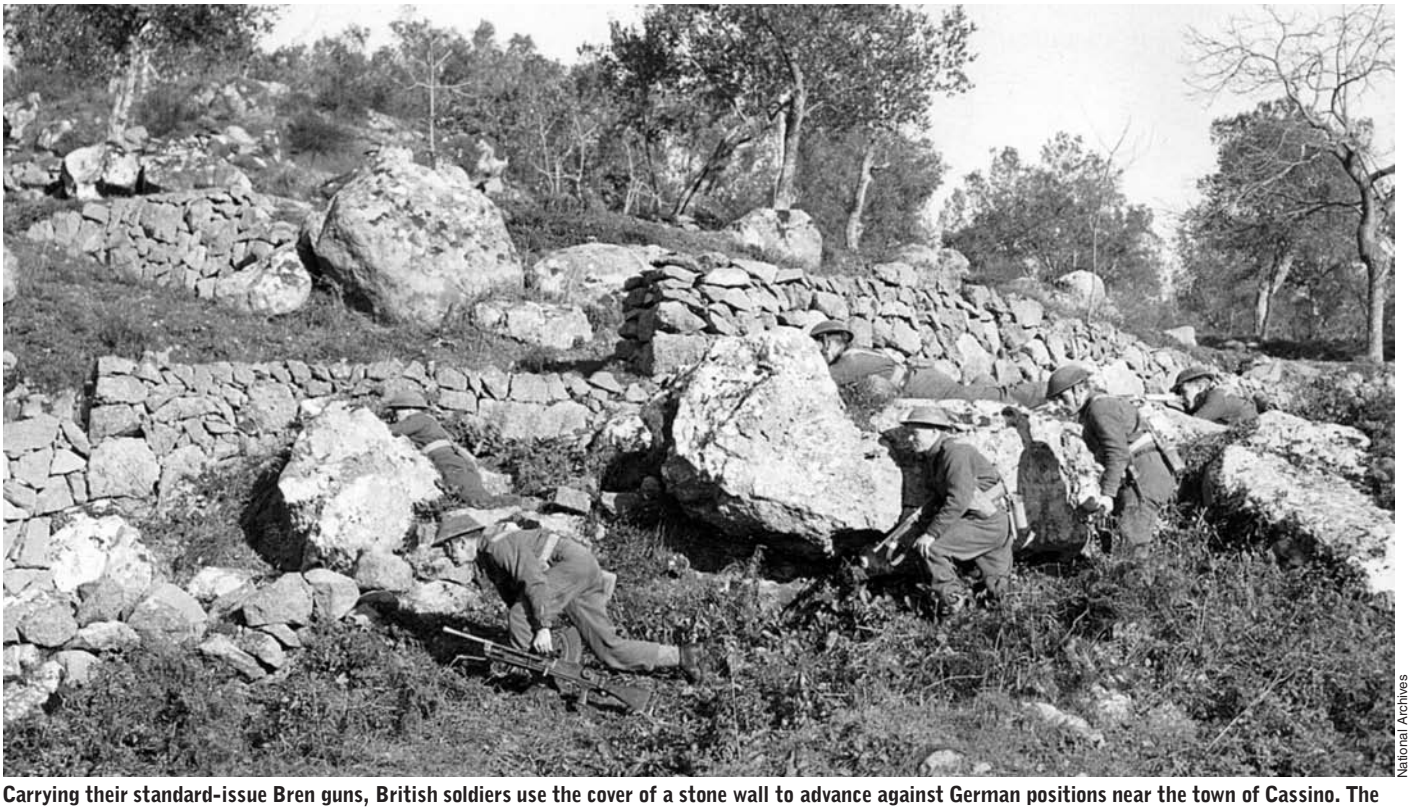
After five days of bombardment, the French gunners had the range on the ravines and clefts of Belvedere, and the Germans were short of ammunition and men. The French pulverized Point 862 with artillery, and the infantry attacked in the evening. At 7 PM, Gandoët ordered his men to fix bayonets and storm the crest. The Tunisians charged with gusto and took the pinnacle, holding it against determined counterattacks.

On the 26th, Colle Abate finally fell, but the French were running out of men and steam. The French had gone in against two battalions of the 44th Division's 131st Regiment and another battalion from the 71st Division's 191st Regiment.

Senger had brought in the third battalion of the 131st, a second from the 191st, and the entire 134th Infantry Regiment as well. He also rounded up some pioneers, two reconnaissance squadrons, and even a Luftwaffe airfield security company to hold the slopes. Senger was told bluntly that despite heavy casualties, there could be no withdrawal from Cassino.

On the 27th, Senger counterattacked, hurling his 2nd/191st at Colle Abate and the 1st and 3rd/134th at Hill 700 and the Secco Valley. By 11 AM, the 2nd/4th Tunisians were almost surrounded on Hill 915 and forced to fall back. Berne's battalion had been almost completely destroyed, and Captain Leoni was killed while directing machine-gun fire with his swagger stick.

Gandoët's men held on a little longer but were dwindling fast. A runner's message read, "Noon. Situation very serious. Massive counterattacks everywhere. Enemy infiltration. We need an extra battalion. There is no 2nd Battalion." Half an hour later, Gandoët pulled his 3rd/4th Tunisians off Colle Abate. The Germans charged after them, seeking to regain Colle Belvedere. The French situation got



National Archives

Carrying their standard-issue Bren guns, British soldiers use the cover of a stone wall to advance against German positions near the town of Cassino. The Allies eventually attempted four times to take the ruins of the Benedictine abbey above the town.

worse. At Hill 861, Captain Belsuze of 11th Company reported, "The men are collapsing with fatigue. The human mechanism has its limits."

All afternoon, German shells rained down on the French positions, and the thin lines. The 1st/4th Tunisians moved in to support the defense, and they took a beating. Captain Jean took over the remains of the 10th and 11th Companies and shouted into the radio to battalion, "Above all, do not worry! I will hang on!" Then he ordered a bayonet charge to drive the Germans back. It worked. But Jean took 11 hits from mortar shells and died as he was brought to the aid station.

Gandoët's men lacked food, ammunition, and water. A convoy of 16 mules sent with all three was blasted by the Germans. But the battalion hung on, with the supporting French guns firing until barrels glowed hot, the shells falling nearly on top of French positions, breaking up attacks.

On the morning of the 29th, incredibly, Roux ordered the 1st and 3rd/4th Tunisians to recapture Colle Abate. It seemed an impossible order, but the Algerian forces backing up Roux had secured the Tunisians' rear, and the 7th Algerians were to attack Hill 700 and take over from battalion commander Colonel Bacque's battalion. With reinforcements and supplies in hand, Roux went over to the offensive.

At 7 AM on the 29th, the French attacked. The 3rd/7th Algerians grabbed Hill 700 in half an hour, but the Germans drove them off at 11 AM. Bacque's battalion could not reach **Hill 771** and was driven back to its start line. Gandoët's men, incredibly, made great progress against the depleted German defenders and once again took Hill 862. The Germans counterattacked anyway, despite their own parlous numbers.

But now Gandoët's ammunition shortages were to put his battalion at a crisis point. At 7 PM, 26 mules finally reached Colle Belvedere's lower slopes, along with a fresh company from the 3rd/3rd Algerians.

ON THE 30TH, BACQUE'S BATTALION ATTACKED Hill 771 again and grabbed it momentarily. But the Germans drove the Frenchmen off the pile. Bacque was among the last to retreat. Before he did, according to French historian R. Chambe, he "planted his walking stick in the ground, like a range-marker, at the side of the abandoned mortars, and said to his adjutant, 'Come. We'll be back to look for that tomorrow.'" The 3rd/7th Algerians took over for Bacque's battalion, attacked on the 31st, and regained Hill 771, the abandoned mortars, and Bacque's walking stick. The 3rd/7th pushed on to take Hill 915 by noon on the 31st.

Gandoët's men were still clinging to Hill 862, long past the end of most men's endurance. The 11th Company "had reached the limit of human capabilities. Yet still, on all fours, they dragged the ammunition up to Hill 862."

By now the Germans simply lacked the troops for another counterattack. On February 13, the 4th Tunisian was relieved by the 3rd Algerian, and Gandoët's survivors were pulled out, with only 30 percent of the assault company's men left. On the way down, Gandoët himself was wounded by a flurry of chance shells. Of Martin's outfit of 38 men, only seven shuffled down the hills, to a warm greeting from Juin.

Juin was proud, but angry. The French troops had taken the high ground, and with reinforcement, he believed, could sweep the defending Germans off the Cassino heights and drive into the Liri Valley. If there were no Allied reserves, why hadn't the 34th Division gone in at the same time, to draw off German reserves? Unless the 34th got moving, Juin would have to pull his exhausted and exposed men off the Belvedere massif, giving up the hard-won ground.

On the 29th, the 168th Regiment attacked in force across the Rapido, trying to take the high ground in front of Caira, Hills 56 and 213, which were connected by a ridge. It took all morning to get the tanks across the Rapido to support the infantry, pinned down by minefields, machine guns, and barbed wire. By afternoon, a dozen of the 50 promised tanks arrived. The rest

were destroyed or bogged down in mud.

The surviving tanks clanked through the minefields, blasting through the antipersonnel mines with no damage to themselves, creating lanes through which the infantrymen could move. The German machine gunners abandoned their positions in the face of the American tanks and retreated.

With the tank support, the 168th grabbed its objectives by dusk and began consolidating. The 168th's men found that the German concrete bunkers were huge—accommodating up to 30 men in bunks, with plenty of food, ammunition, and even heating. Bolstered by German concrete and ration packs, the 168th held off counterattacks and captured the village of Caira. The German and American troops were so close they could hear each other talking.

The battle was going well, but it was a tremendous strain on the Red Bulls. More than 1,100 mules and 700 litter bearers were needed. "Fighting was the bitterest met to date; casualties for all causes were high; replacements were slow in arriving and inadequate in number," Ryder wrote. He intended to continue the attack on the 30th, using his 135th Regiment, since the 133rd was shot out. Keyes was worried, too. Asked to give an estimate of when Cassino would fall, Keyes could not do so.

While the 168th dug in, Senger continued to reinforce his lines. He moved the 211th Regiment of the 71st Infantry Division, another division bearing the number of one annihilated at Stalingrad, to the town of Cassino. The 1st and 3rd Battalions of the 90th Panzergrenadier Division's 361st Panzergrenadier Regiment, and the division's colorful commander, Maj. Gen. Ernst Gunther Baade, arrived to take over the defenses on the massif. They were followed by the 3rd Battalion of the 3rd Parachute Regiment from the 1st Parachute Division.

THE 90TH DIVISION WAS ANOTHER OUTFIT THAT had been rebuilt from a disaster, in this case, North Africa, formed in June 1943 from miscellaneous units in Sardinia. Baade himself had survived the North African campaign. Eccentric in dress, an Anglophile, and prewar international equestrian star, he sometimes wore a kilt over his uniform and carried a bone-handled dagger instead of a pistol.

Against stronger opposition, the 133rd Infantry Regiment attacked the old cavalry barracks, trying to break open the road into the northern end of Cassino. Backed by tanks, the 133rd cleared the barracks on February 1, then fought its way along a mountain shelf between the Cassino Massif and the Rapido River, heading for Hill 175, which overlooked the northern end of Cassino town. Then the 133rd finally stormed into the town itself.

For a week, the 133rd battered at the edge of Cassino, trying to take Castle Hill, a nearly vertical hill that rose 193 meters over the town and was topped by a ruined fort. The 133rd kept trying but made no progress in the ravine between **Hill 175** and the castle. While the 133rd struggled in Cassino, the 135th fought its way up the massif from **Hill 213**. Its job was to drive on the French left and seize the monastery and the mountains beyond. The 135th's first objectives were Colle Maiola and Monte Castellone.

When the 135th attacked on February 1, its troops moved up in single file in a dense fog, completely concealed from German gunners. As the 135th moved through the mist, its soldiers could hear Germans talking. "We were way up above them and got past in the fog. We could never have done it otherwise," remembered Don Hoagland of the 3rd/135th. By 10 AM, Colle Maiola and Monte Castellone were in American hands, and Hoagland and his buddies were digging foxholes.

The next day, the Germans counterattacked Castellone, but the rest of the 3rd/135th pushed on toward the monastery along a ridge that would gain the name "Snakeshead Ridge" for its shape. At the end of Snakeshead Ridge stood Monte Calvary, Hill 593 on the Chinagraph maps, a steep-sided hill 2,000 yards from the rear entrance to the monastery. Hill 593 was topped by a ruined fort, which had a perfect view of the massif area.

With the 135th advancing, General Mark Clark was optimistic. "Present indications are that the Cassino heights will be captured very soon," he wrote to his boss, Field Marshal Sir Harold Alexander on February 2. The next day, the 135th, backed by a battalion from the 168th, advanced from Monte Castellone along Phantom Ridge, parallel to Snakeshead, aiming at Hill 706 and Colle Sant' Angelo (or **Hill 601**) beyond that, to complete the effort to cut off the monastery.

The move on Hill 706 went fine, but Baade's men counterattacked at Colle Maiola against Hoagland and his men, and they tried to dig in. They couldn't. Beneath the soil was solid rock. The men created small hollows and piled stones around them to create "sangars," a word that comes from the Hindustani word "sunga," which describes a rock parapet made by moving loose stones into a wall. The British and Indian Armies had picked up the concept and the term from the Northwest Frontier Province and passed them on to the Americans.

Now the Americans built their sangars and found they worked. The German attack was beaten off. On the following day, the Americans kept moving up Snakeshead to within 200 yards of Hill 593. On the left, the rest of the 135th and 168th Regiments advanced toward Hill 445, directly before the monastery. The 34th was advancing on three axes and was nearly at the Liri Valley. One more push, and the monastery and the Gustav Line would be outflanked. The problem was that the 34th was running out of steam.

Casualties were appalling, with companies down to 30 men. To make up shortages, truck drivers and antitank gunners were turned into infantrymen. But even these desperate measures could not help. The 1st/141st was down to 56 men. The 3rd/141st was down to 75. Two of its companies had 25 men between them. Hauling the wounded men down from the heights was another ordeal. The Red Bulls' 1,000 doctors and medics were overwhelmed.

Most wounds were caused by shrapnel from mortars, more feared than artillery. Because they could be fired over reverse slopes and from narrow positions, mortars could dispense death and destruction from nearly anywhere, with great accuracy. But the biggest manpower drain was trench foot. Up on the massif, men could not change socks and shoes, were always cold, and soon their toes were looking like sausages in the cold and damp.

The senior American leadership could not see what was going on. Brigadier Howard Kippenberger of the 2nd New Zealand Division, checking on the situation personally, had a better view of it. He reported to his boss, Maj. Gen. Bernard Freyberg, that the 34th Division was worn out, and Freyberg questioned the American commanders about the condition of their troops. With the 34th closing in on the monastery and the Liri Valley, General Clark believed that one more push would drive the Germans off the pinnacles. On February 4, a company from the 1st/135th captured Hill 445, near the top of Monte Cassino's ridge. South of 445, across a deep ravine full of rocks and thorny bushes, was Monastery Hill.

The next morning, two patrols of that company were sent out to capture the monastery if possible. A platoon of 15 men led by a sergeant worked its way through melted snow and mist toward the huge gray blur ahead of them. They moved down through a gully toward a small stream and found three Germans from an observation post fetching water from the stream. The Americans took the Germans prisoner and sent them back with three guards. The rest of the platoon crossed the stream and started up the slope, finally hitting the black-

topped winding road that led to the monastery. They gazed up at the huge building's east face.

So far, the monastery, its abbot, monks, and the refugees hiding in it had endured isolation, loss of electrical power, and occasional errant German and Allied shells. The Americans would not let their artillerymen fire on the monastery because of its religious significance and because the Vatican had assured the Allies that they had barred German troops from its precincts with a 300-meter perimeter around it.

NOW THE AMERICANS FOUND, BENEATH THE immense, brooding monastery, that the Germans had taken advantage of two natural caves within the 300-meter perimeter. One held ammunition and the other was a two-room quarters for troops. The monastery's abbot, Gregorio Diamare, had repeatedly complained about the troops' presence, but to no avail.

The Americans surrounded the cave and cut the phone line leading in, and the sergeant ordered the Germans to surrender. One German came out to see what the fuss was, and the Americans captured him. The Americans told him in halting German to order the other Germans to come out. If they did not, the American sergeant would toss his grenades at them.

Out came 17 Germans, led by a captain, with their hands up, followed by three conscripted Italian laborers. The Americans poked around the caves, finding the Germans had bunks, tables, and food as well as their phone. With the POWs outnumbering their captors, the Americans moved them into four groups and headed back down a mule path, under fire from German snipers. One sniper hit an American corporal in the leg, but two other Americans captured him. The sergeant had three Germans and an Italian carry the wounded corporal back. The trek down was no easier. The Americans spotted a German machine-gun crew setting up its Spandau and shot them all before they could get in position. Finally, the Americans, shielded by a smokescreen, returned to their sangars with the POWs, the only casualty being the wounded corporal and a man who had been nicked in the ear. This was as close as any Allied troops would come to the monastery for months.

While the incident did not make the 14th Panzer Corps' report that day, Senger saw that his defenses were being worn down. He recommended withdrawal from Cassino and pulling back behind the Anzio beachhead.

Instead, Kesselring chose to hold Cassino. He sent in the 361st and 200th Panzergrenadier Regiments along with the 1st Parachute Regiment, a battalion from 3rd Parachute Regiment, and the Parachute Machine Gun Battalion. In their mottled camouflage uniforms, the huge, tough paratroopers took up defensive positions on February 7 against Clark's next attack. To hold Cassino, the Germans pulled in reserves from France, Germany, and Yugoslavia. Thus, the Allies could claim that the Italian campaign was tying down enemy reserves. The problem was that it was also tying down Allied forces.

The last bullet left in Clark's gun came from the battered 36th Infantry Division. The division's 142nd Regiment had not been involved in the Rapido fiasco, and now it was ordered to reinforce the Red Bulls on Monte Castellone. On February 5, the 142nd began climbing the mountain. Private Clare Cunningham, from Iona County, Michigan, the son of an Irish immigrant, was among those who slogged up the mountain, taking over a two-man German foxhole with his pal, Stanley Katula. The foxhole was a big one—six feet wide and seven feet long.

While the 142nd moved up, the 34th Division kept trying. Hill 593, with its fortifications and superb view of the whole area, was the focus of the attacks. Between February 4 and 8, the 135th and its German opponents battled back and forth, swapping control of the pinnacle repeatedly. The 135th attacked on the 7th, faced an immediate counterattack, and its 1st and 3rd Battalions found themselves under heavy enfilading fire. On the 135th's left, the 168th kept pressing on the monastery.

The 168th kept trying, but the Germans managed to counterattack just as the Americans were about to launch their own attack. It was all the 168th could do to hold the ground it had already gained. By February 7, Senger had started moving in more reinforcements from the tough 1st Parachute Division, in their distinctive crash helmets and camouflage smocks, and they all headed for Hill 593.

By February 10, the Germans had regained the summit. The 34th's men were worn down from a lack of sleep and hot food. Men were either incapable or utterly unwilling to leave foxholes and sangars in order to attack. Casualties were high. Some companies of the135th were down to 30 men. The 168th and 133rd were in little better shape. Clark sent the regrouped 141st Regiment up to Snakeshead Ridge with orders to clear the gorge between Snakeshead and Phantom on its right, then break out into the valley below. Captain C.N. "Red" Morgan commanded the regiment's 3rd Battalion, and he was told to hook up with the 34th Division's advanced units, supposedly possessing Hill 593.

When Morgan reached the front, he found that the 34th did not hold the summit, but was 100 yards short. Morgan could not attack to the right of Hill 593 if the Germans held it. The 34th was supposed to take the pile on the night of February 10-11, but the attack was called off. So the 1st and 3rd Battalions of the 141st relieved the exhausted Red Bulls, hiking up trails amid blinding rain and snow.

National Archives

Haggard and fatigued from weeks of heavy combat, German prisoners collected during operations around Cassino wait to be taken to a rear area and ultimately a POW camp in January 1944.

The 141st was not happy about being sent into action so quickly after the Rapido debacle. Lieutenant Harold L. Bond, commanding a mortar platoon in the 3rd/141st, was told to make sure his men had full K rations and water canteens. The men of his platoon were mostly green replacements or worn-out veterans of the Rapido. The rookies were scared, but the veterans took the news quietly, except for one man who repeated over and over, "Who do they think we are?" Bond wrote that he was one of the first men to crack up in the battle. The men were driven by truck toward Highway 6 by night, past ambulances going back, full of wounded men. The nervous men, not allowed to smoke, watched the flashes of American artillery. Finally, the men were dispersed in the dark, the trucks left, and jeeps arrived to break down and issue heavy weapons and ammunition.

IN THE DARK, THE 141ST, LOADED DOWN WITH gear, followed a temporary road of metal matting built to accommodate tanks; they traveled over swampy ground, past burned-out tanks. Once near the village of Caira, the men were allowed to sleep while they waited for dawn.

By the morning of February 11, the two battalions of the 141st were in position to attack Hill 593 at 11 AM. Bond and his men waited for their orders to move, chomping on K rations amid wind, snow, and the bloated bodies of three long-dead German horses caught by American artillery.

The attack went off into freezing rain, snow, and 50-mile-an-hour gusts of wind. Lieutenant Carl Strom and his company's 40 survivors from the 141st's Rapido debacle had been provided replacements, but there were not enough to attack. The Germans attacked instead, charging up a hill against the Americans.

Bond and his men hiked up the narrow paths past the bodies of six dead Germans whose feet had been stripped of their boots by local peasants. After two hours of climbing, Bond and his team were in position on soaked ground in freezing rain. Bond's position stared straight at the monastery. Like many Americans in the battle, he believed the Germans were using the monastery as an observation post, so he had his mortarmen hurl a few bombs into its yard.

After three rounds, the Germans answered with a larger shell that cut Bond's telephone line. Heavy rain and sunset followed, which prevented Bond from finding the break in the wire. He and his platoon dug in until morning, amid cold rocks, endless rain, heavy shelling, and stragglers and wounded men shuffling back from the fighting. For two hours, the Germans shelled Bond's position with the hardest shelling he endured in the entire Italian campaign. After that, both the shelling and rain stopped, but everything was soaked, and Bond's feet were numb—the first sign of trench foot. He quickly changed into the spare pair of wool socks he had brought up, which saved his feet. The next morning, he rose to sort out the phone line and told his orderly to try and improve the trench. When Bond returned , the orderly was gone. Bond never saw him again.

Ryder kept pushing his attack, in turn pushed by Keyes, who was in turn pushed by Clark. Alexander had given Clark until February 12 to keep the 34th in the Cassino battle. After that, he intended to bring in New Zealander and Indian troops. Clark was fearful of how that would impact American prestige—and his own.

Prodded by Keyes the same day, Ryder hurled the 168th Regiment at the monastery again. With battalions down to one-third strength, drivers, cooks, clerks, and supply men went into battle, struggling to remember how to use their M-1 rifles. They made a spirited charge forward to Hill 593 through driving snow, but the Germans threw them back.

At headquarters, Bond was asked about his mortar bombardment of the monastery. Admitting he did it, believing the Germans were using it for observation, Bond was told, "The army commander says that you can fight around the abbey, but you can't hit it."

CASSINO'S BROODING MOUNTAINTOPS WERE STILL IN GERMAN HANDS, AND GERMAN GUNNERS DOMINATED EVERYTHING IN SIGHT.

Up on Snakeshead Ridge, the 141st and 142nd had time to count casualties. By 5 PM on February 11, the 1st and 3rd Battalions of the 141st were down to 20 officers and 150 men. Normally, both battalions had up to 70 officers and 1,600 enlisted men. Even the walking wounded were pressed into the line.

Bond and his mortarmen were alerted to provide covering fire for an attack. But as February 12 droned on, the attack never came. The 141st and 142nd could only hold their sangars. Any movement drew immediate German small-arms fire or worse. The Americans made one more charge in a snowstorm, failed, and retired to their start lines.

The II Corps advance had stalled. The corps itself was shattered. Walker began pulling his exhausted troops off the pinnacles, replacing them with troops from the 4th Indian and 2nd New Zealand Divisions. By night, amid cold and wind, the men of the 36th crawled out of their foxholes for the first time in days and found themselves too exhausted to walk, in some cases suffering from trench foot. First Sergeant Hoagland was the last one out of his position.

The battle was not over yet. The 143rd Regiment of the 36th Infantry Division still held Monte Castellone, an ugly mass of three ring contours, scrub brushes, and little shelter, which anchored the American positions on Snakeshead Ridge. Baade reasoned that hitting Monte Castellone and taking it would force the Americans to retire from the massif. Colonel Baron Behr and two battalions of his 200th Panzergrenadier Regiment led the attack.

At 4 AM, February 12, Operation Michael kicked off, with German shells hurling a hurricane bombardment of the American positions. Clare Cunningham of the 143rd was one of the casualties, when a shell hurled him and a buddy out of their foxhole just before dawn. Katula was killed. One of Cunningham's legs was broken and the other smashed. Behr's men charged up the mountain's bare slopes in the bitter cold. The Americans reached for their weapons, only to find them frozen. One GI lit matches to thaw out his machine gun, while others urinated on their rifles to heat them up.

The Germans captured the near slopes of the mountains but came under fire from their own guns. The German barrels, having fired so often, were worn out and no longer fired with accuracy. Many of their shells fell short and onto their own men. The Americans took advantage of this error to rally and counterattack, beating off the German assault.

By noon, more than 150 gray-coated Germans lay dead on Monte Castellone's slopes, and Baade called off the attack. The Germans realized that the defenders' advantages on Cassino's mountains worked both ways. At 5 PM, Cunningham was evacuated, but it took him 10 hours to get to an ambulance. Once at the casualty clearing station, his shattered leg was amputated.

The next morning, February 13, the German regimental commander beneath Monte Castellone sent an English-speaking officer up the hill under a white flag to ask for a truce to remove

their dead. The Americans agreed to a two-hour break in the fighting. The 36th stayed up on the peaks for another week.

The commanders of the American, British, and French divisions had a lot to think about. The First Battle of Cassino had been a failure for the Allies. They had taken ground and heavy casualties but had not broken into the Liri Valley. The Anzio beachhead was a grim stalemate. Cassino's brooding mountaintops were still in German hands, and German gunners dominated everything in sight.

The casualty bill was horrendous: The 34th Division lost 318 killed, 1,641 wounded. The 2nd/168th had only seven officers and 78 men left. The 3rd/133rd had 145 men in all ranks. The 1st and 3rd Battalions of 141st were down to 22 officers and 160 men. Battalions of the 36th Division were down to 100 men. The French had the most successful drive but lost 2,500 casualties. The British X Corps had suffered 4,000 casualties, and the 46th and 56th Infantry Divisions were also played out.

The Germans also took a beating: the 2nd/132nd Panzergrenadiers had been "pulverized," and the 2nd/361st had "melted like butter in the sun." Only 32 men of the latter battalion were left by February 2. On February 4, the nine battalions of the 44th, two battalions of the 8th Panzergrenadiers, and an Alpine company together totaled fewer than 1,500 men. The Germans were holding the ground, but at massive cost.

It was also time to wonder what had gone wrong. The American assaults at the Rapido were poorly planned and executed. The French divisions showed ample determination and surprising toughness but lacked the depth to maintain the pace of their offensive. Supplies could not move forward in flooded areas and high mountains. Italy's winter weather made survival in the mountains an ordeal.

Walker had a lot to ponder, too. He believed the Rapido attack had no value. When it failed on February 3, Clark came up to Walker's headquarters. Walker expected to get sacked, but Clark and Keyes asked Walker what happened, and Walker explained. When it was done, Clark said to Keyes, "It was as much my fault as yours." Walker saw in that an admission of error.

Worse, the debacles provoked a harsh reaction at home. The 36th Division's sacrifices seemed like a meaningless waste of lives. Some of the 36th Division's fiery Texan officers held a meeting in a barn on March 2, 1944, to honor Texas Independence Day. There they voted to have the battle investigated after the war. This they did in 1946, when they formed the 36th Division Association. Backed by Texas American Legion posts, newspapers, and the state Senate, they made their case to the U.S. Congress, which investigated the debacle.

National Archives

The ruins of the abbey of Monte Cassino bear mute testimony to the ferocity of the fighting that swirled around the ancient structure. Combat engineers have cleared a path through a possible minefield, marked by tape, in the lower center of the photograph.

WALKER AVOIDED ASSIGNING BLAME, MERELY SAYing that the attacks "were failures because of poor tactical judgment on the part of higher commanders in carrying out the instructions they received from General Alexander, and that the operation, because of poor tactical judgment, resulted in unnecessary loss of life and did not assist to any material degree the landing at Anzio."

Congress decided that Clark's attack on the Rapido with the 36th was justified and an unfortunate consequence of war. Although Clark admitted the Rapido attack was his fault after it happened, he never again took blame; he said merely that if he faced condemnation for a choice of attacking or retreating, he would rather be condemned for attacking.

Amid appalling weather, poor planning and logistical mismanagement, and incredible courage, the British, American, and French attacks of the First Battle of Cassino had failed. No link-up with the Anzio beachhead was achieved. The beachhead itself was sealed off by German reserves. The Germans still held the high ground over the town of Cassino, and above all, the unblinking eye of Monastery Hill. Despite vile weather, terrain, and casualties, the Fifth Army would have to renew the offensive against Cassino and the Liri Valley. It was time to pass the torch to a new bearer.

That new team began to arrive as January gave way to February.

Before the New Zealanders attempted to capture Monte Cassino, their commander, General Bernard Freyberg, insisted that the monastery be bombed. The decision to destroy the venerated structure was one of the most controversial of the war. The Germans, as it turned out, had not been using the monastery itself for observation. However, after it was destroyed, they moved troops into its ruins and exacted a heavy toll on Allied troops. Not until the fourth attempt, in May 1944, were the town of Cassino, the mountain, and the ruined monastery captured by the Allies. □

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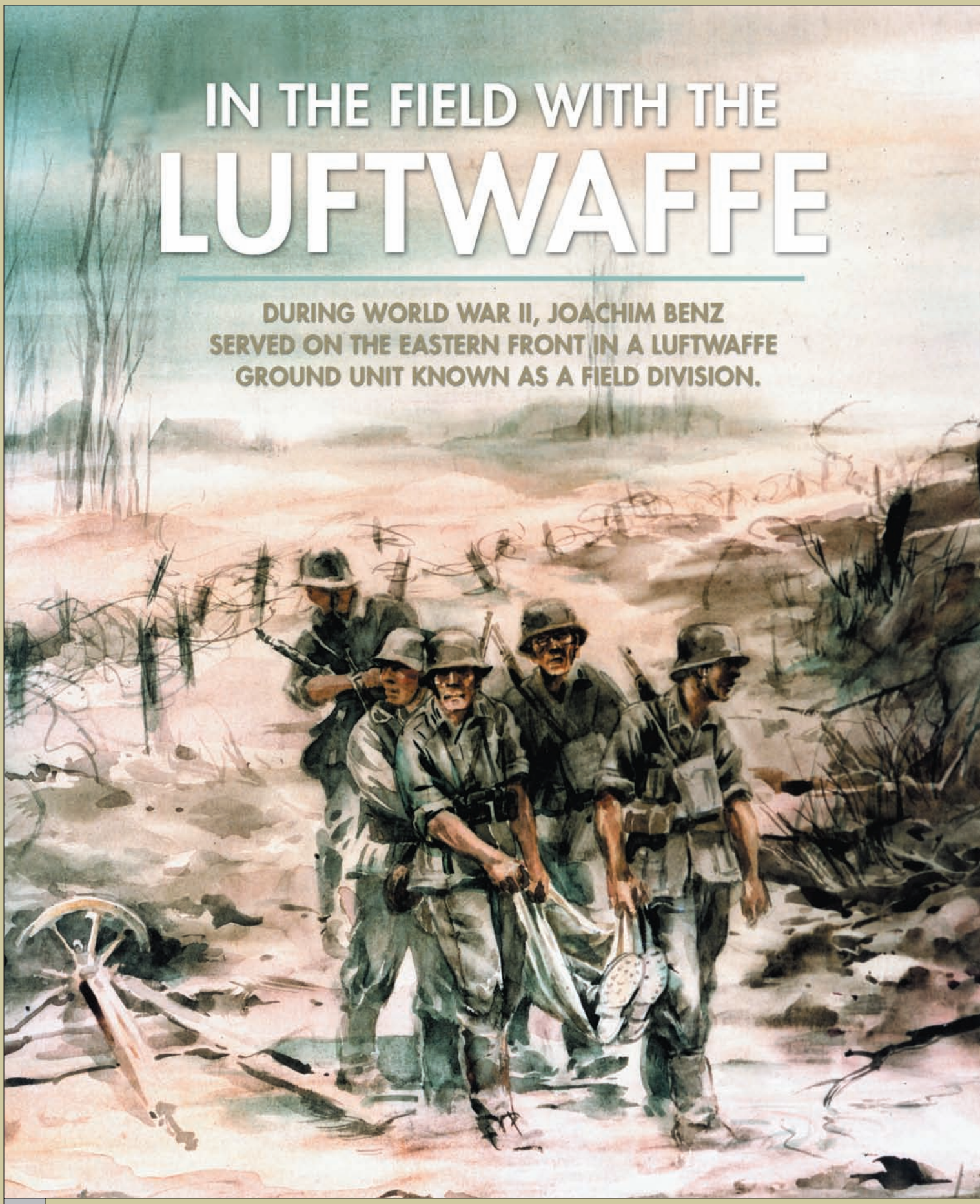
IN THE FIELD WITH THE LUFTWAFFE

DURING WORLD WAR II, JOACHIM BENZ SERVED ON THE EASTERN FRONT IN A LUFTWAFFE GROUND UNIT KNOWN AS A FIELD DIVISION.



Following service as a lieutenant in the U.S. Army Air Defense Artillery during the early 1970s, Ward Carr decided to remain in Germany, residing in Frankfurt. He has worked as a language trainer, freelance journalist, and translator. In 2001, Carr and a German colleague began writing a book featuring the crew of the famous battleship Bismarck. *While searching for survivors and family members of* Bismarck *sailors, Carr often encountered veterans or family members of veterans who had served in the German armed forces during World War II. Although they may not have been associated with the Bismarck, many of their stories were nonetheless fascinating.*

During the course of his research, Carr placed an ad in a national veterans' magazine. Joachim Benz was one of those who responded. Over a period of several years, the two communicated often by telephone and visited one another. Benz has contributed oral passages, comments, and photographs for publications, and a German-language book of his memoirs was published in 2003.

The photographs in this article were all taken by Joachim Benz with a Kodak Junior camera that he got as a confirmation present.

As a student at the Virginia Military Institute in the 1960s, Carr had learned German from Peter Fyfe. The two renewed their acquaintance in the 1990s, and Fyfe contributed his translation skills to numerous projects, including the interview with Benz, which formed the basis for this article.

Benz tells an interesting story of combat with a Luftwaffe field division. After the war, he worked on a farm for two years before opening up a grocery store and delicatessen in Bad Arolsen in the German state of Hesse. He has often met with buddies from his former flak regiment, many of whom were prisoners of war in the United States after their capture with the Afrika Korps. Although he has tried repeatedly, he has never been able to get in touch with anyone from the 3rd of 4th Luftwaffe Field divisions.

BY JOACHIM BENZ, AS TOLD TO PETER D. FYFE AND WARD CARR

I was born November 13, 1922, in Hamburg, Germany. I had a happy childhood with my older brother and two sisters. I wasn't very gung-ho about it [the Hitler Youth]. I preferred playing soccer or going to the movies. Once, a policeman and the Hitler Youth leader came to pick me up because I hadn't reported to drill.

Photo courtesy of Joachim Benz

In November 1940, I was called to the colors in Hamburg. Then I was drafted into the RAD [National Labor Service] on February 2nd, 1941. Our basic training was in Cammin/Tessin, Mecklenburg, and then we were sent to a little village in Poland about 50 kilometers east of Warsaw. It was directly on the demarcation line [between Germany and the Soviet Union]. We constructed a munitions depot for bombs and built roads to the depot. At the beginning of June 1941, we were transferred to Lyck, in East Prussia, where they armed us with old French rifles and trained us. Since these rifles were very long, the 4th Platoon got Dutch carbines, which were very inaccurate because they were so short!

Later, in Russia, we exchanged these useless arms for captured Russian weapons. The Russian carbines resembled our 98Ks but did not have safety catches. In addition, every platoon was issued a Russian machine gun. They were extremely heavy, and we called them "The Gramophone" because the magazine was round, lay flat on the barrel, and rotated.

Right after the war with Russia broke out, we were deployed to guard a forward airfield east of Vilnius [Lithuania]. After Minsk fell, we were redeployed there, where we had beautiful quarters in a large, multistoried building of a former uniform factory. We were detailed to guard captured material and an airfield. Our unit was assigned to the Air Force Central Command. There was material of German origin among the captured booty. The uniform manufacturing plant was furnished with German Singer sewing machines. At the Russian airfield we found, fresh from the factory, BMW rear-propelled airplane motors in the original boxes. In one room of the uniform factory there was a German grand piano. We used this room as a movie theater to show films, a very welcome change for us. I should also mention the magnificent Opera House in Minsk, which was richly decorated with marble. There were many other big, splendid buildings on Lenin Square.

The winter of 1941 came very early; on October 6, we had the first snow, and our equipment was not suited to this climate. In the middle of December, we were transported by rail back to a town in Mecklenburg and were released from the RAD two days before Christmas.

Actually, duty in the RAD was pretty good. We were all the same age and almost all of us already knew one another either from school, the Hitler Youth, or from sports clubs. However, our leaders were not the pick of the litter. Our commander was

LEFT: A forlorn group of German soldiers carries the body of a dead comrade on a makeshift canvas stretcher. After a series of rapid successes on the Eastern Front, the Germans were subjected to the harsh Russian winter, followed by the sledgehammer blows of a rejuvenated Red Army. ABOVE: Private first class Joachim Benz served with a Luftwaffe field division north of the Russian town of Vitebsk in the spring of 1944. He received the Iron Cross for heroism.

U.S. Army Art

All photos by Joachim Benz

ABOVE: Hans-Joachim Buchmüller, a comrade of Joachim Benz, scans the horizon near Vitebsk during the winter of 1943-44. The bitter cold took a fearful toll among the German troops and caused mechanized equipment to fail. RIGHT: Christmas Day passes like any other at the forward observation post occupied by Joachim Benz and other Luftwaffe ground troops.

a gnome, and not just physically. He was an extremely corrupt man and diverted a part of our rations. Whenever he was annoyed with us, he did not salute us at the morning formation and said we were not worthy of being greeted with the name of the Führer!

On January 15, 1942, after a four-week leave, we were absorbed into the headquarters battery of the Reserve Antiaircraft Division 62 in Oldenburg. Here we met almost all of our old friends from the RAD again. We were a bunch of old Russia hands, which could not be said of our trainers. We were all trained as radio operators after a test, which I passed with the help of my pals from the RAD. Actually, I was a bad signalman. Up to a certain speed I was okay. After that, I could not tell the dots from the dashes. You had to have a pretty good musical ear, and I did not.

After basic, we were ordered to the Air Force Communications School 5 in Erfurt. After eight weeks we took our radio operator's exam and went back to the reassignment center. Unfortunately, our old group was broken up. I was sent to Rostock and assigned as a radio operator to the heavy antiaircraft battery, the 88s. We protected the Heinkel airfield where the new jet fighter was tested in August 1942.

In October 1942, our unit, the 9th Antiaircraft Regiment (Motorized) was reassigned to the Afrika Korps. At that time, however, I was in the hospital with a serious pleurisy infection. After my release and recuperation leave, I reported to the Antiaircraft Replacement Section in Rosenheim to rejoin my unit, which was already fighting in Africa. But I only got as far as Caserta/Naples in Italy. It turns out my buddies who made it to North Africa had a great war later as POWs in the USA. They could go to classes there and so on.

Things had gotten so bad because of Stalingrad that the Luftwaffe had to assign its ground divisions to support the army. Therefore, at the end of January 1943, I was transferred to the Air Force Ground Division and went from Italy to the Munsterlager reassignment center in north Germany. [Munsterlager was a reception, troop distribution, and training center. It also served as a reception center for German POWs returning home after the war.] This reassignment was a real shock, for it was back to Russia, again. It had been like spring it Italy—over 60 degrees. In Russia it was zero.

Our division commander was Lieutenant General [Robert] Pistorius. I did not know him personally, but then again I never saw any general on the front lines. He signed the attestation for my Iron Cross, Second Class. Later he took overall command when the 3rd and 4th Field Divisions were merged in 1944. He later fell in the Vitebsk Pocket.

Our regimental commander, Colonel Windesch, whom I knew personally, was an extraordinarily brave and upright superior. A forester by profession, he was an elderly, fatherly figure. He visited frequently on the firing line and the forward observers out front. Once during a visit at the gun emplacement he asked me if the rations were satisfactory. I said no. He was amazed to find out that I, as a soldier under 21, was supposed to get the supplementary rations. I told him that our battery commander, by his own admission, issued these "children's" rations to everyone. The colonel saw to it that supplementary rations were directly distributed to those entitled to them. A short time later, I was rewarded for this by my battery commander by being lent from the gun emplacements to the forward observation posts.

Our battalion commander was Major Meyerkort, who had been a tropical fruit importer in Hamburg before the war. He was a beloved leader among us soldiers, with a lot of courage. He wore a leather uniform without rank insignia so we called him "Leatherstockings." Major Meyerkort visited us frequently at our forward observer posts. He also regularly inquired about our wishes and concerns. Major Meyerkort fell into the hands of the Russians in June 1944, and died in Baku of dysentery. It is interesting that the major is said to have had a Russian mother and to have been born in Baku, and he spoke Russian. His captivity in Baku was certainly not an accident, and so I doubt that he really died of dysentery there!

We had several battery commanders in a short time, and they all seemed to have only one thing on their minds: to be reassigned to Germany or France as quickly as possible. Number one was 1st Lieutenant Sauer. He was our commander for about five months; then he was transferred, I assume, in the direction of the homeland. I was with him at battery head-

quarters for several weeks, and we often played chess together. After I beat him once, he stopped playing me. He was really a very vain man. Number two was a 1st Lieutenant Werner. I believe he came from Hamburg. Twice we played soccer together in Battery 11. He, too, was transferred after a short time, probably back home. Number three was 1st Lieutenant Lohse. He probably was lost with the battery in June 1944. We hardly ever saw these three gentlemen at the forward observer positions.

Our other officers were 2nd Lieutenant Müller, deputy battery commander, and 2nd Lieutenant Streib, a law student from the Saarland. Our platoon leader was Master Sergeant Hermann. There was a private with us, Gerhard Schubert, whose father was a general. Gerhard was later killed in action.

When we got to the reassignment center in Munsterlager at the beginning of February 1943, we went through a three-week orientation course as artillerymen. My new unit now was the 5th Battery, 2nd Battalion, 3rd Artillery Regiment.

I was assigned to the calculating section as a tabulator. The section leader was Corporal Setz, a teacher from Austria. We were supposed to calculate the weather and other influences four times a day using logarithm tables. We received the numbers for the evaluation four times daily from the weather bureau. Our battery was equipped with four 75mm pieces. These guns were captured French war booty from World War I. The date "1916" was engraved on the barrels. Since we were a motorized unit, the gun barrel had been mounted on a 50mm antitank gun carriage. The 50mm antitank gun had been taken out of service in Russia since its projectiles could not penetrate the Russian T-34 tank. We called the 50mm antitank gun "door knocker." The carriage was not much use either.

The 75mm gun had a range of about 12 kilometers. If we shot over nine kilometers, we had to be careful not to break the crossbar, because at this elevation the recoil was directly on the weak crossbar. The alternative was to dig a hole under the back of the carriage. From the outset, we were clearly at a disadvantage with this weapon, and indeed with all our equipment.

In mid-February, our convoy left for Russia. After a seven-day journey through East Prussia and Lithuania, we reached Newel. Then we were off-loaded and drove through bitter cold and a snowstorm eastward to our assigned position. We soon discovered our equipment was unsuitable. The roads were as smooth as glass and the tractors were completely worthless. The iron tracks slipped on the smooth roads. The bolts on the treads came off, and the tractors were left stranded on the road without treads. Our "Lanz" tractor that was supposed to help us out in difficult situations was also useless. It had ironclad wheels and could not keep to the roads. We had to leave these brand-new tractors sitting in the ditches. Thanks only to our Opel all-wheel-drive trucks, which performed excellently in all weather, were we able to reach our destination to the south of Welicke-Luki.

We had just arrived at the front when the guns were immediately positioned and aimed, and we had to start firing. The Russians welcomed our forward observers over a megaphone, saying, "You half-trained Luftwaffe soldiers straight from Munsterlager repo-depot, we'll whip your asses in no time!" This showed how well informed Ivan was!

Our computing section was quartered in a farmhouse only a few meters behind the guns. At the first salvo, the window pane blew out on our card table, and the battery commander

Corporal Paul Gustloff, who had worked as a stevedore on the docks at Hamburg before the war, stands holding an MG-15 machine gun. Gustloff was later killed in action.

was lying on the ground shouting, "Direct hit! Take cover!" Then we found out that the damage had been caused by the reverberation of the recoil of our own guns. After a few days our battery was transferred to the east of Newel, about 10 kilometers from Uswaty. We were located on the firing line close to the village. We stayed there for a half year.

At first, we support troops were quartered in "Finnish huts," big round structures made of plywood. About 20 people could live in these things. Since the Russians quickly spotted us, we soon received nuisance fire from a 172mm battery. The shrapnel from the shells penetrated one of our cabins, but, thank God, there were no casualties.

We called the 172mm guns "black sows" because the shells produced a big black cloud when they exploded. Another Russian artillery piece was the 76mm cannon, which we called the "creaky bang." Because of its high muzzle velocity, you heard the sound of the explosion before the sound of the firing. This extraordinarily effective weapon was developed in Germany by Krupp. The Army artillery experts had rejected this gun because the muzzle velocity was too high, and thus the cannons were sold to Russia.

AT THE END OF MARCH 1943, WE REVAMPED THE artillery position so that we could defend it in all directions. Every gun crew and the battery headquarters got individual bunkers. Building bunkers at this time of year was very difficult since the ground was frozen solid. Frequently, we had to blast, and because of the shortage of proper explosives, we used mines. There was a trench around the entire artillery position with a 15mm antiaircraft machine gun emplacement that was supposed to protect us on all sides. At that time, the front was extremely quiet. Only the partisans were making pests of themselves behind the lines.

Now we had the time to learn more about our guns and equipment. In addition, we fired in our barrage areas. Air activity on both sides was minimal, aside from reconnaissance flights. The Russians tried to recon our lines using a captive balloon until one of our fighters shot it down. Once we saw Russian fighters shoot down a German Focke-Wulf double-bodied reconnaissance plane. On the very next day, a German Army communiqué announced: "Yesterday 'X–number' of Russian planes were shot down without loss to us!"

Up on the front line Ivan used megaphones to make almost daily announcements like "Stalingrad [is a] mass grave site," or he invited us to desert. "German soldiers—desert! The most beautiful women in Leningrad await you. You will have regular sex. Bring two mess kits along, one for pudding." I do not know of a single German deserter, but Russians often deserted to us. These announcements were made by Seydlitzers, members of the National Committee for a Free Germany, Stalingrad prisoners.

[Lieutenant General Walther von Seydlitz-Kurzbach, captured at Stalingrad, joined several other officers in forming the Association of German Officers and the National Committee for a Free Germany. Opposed to Hitler's management of the war, they hoped to gain some leverage with the Soviets for Germany after the defeat they expected. The organizations created and supported propaganda efforts

aimed at convincing German soldiers to surrender to the Soviets.]

I became a forward observer in mid-1943. Our computing unit was broken up, so I lost my cushy position as a calculator. They figured out that the consideration of unusual and climatic factors is redundant for light artillery. I was assigned to the forward observers because our forward observers— despite the general lull on the front—had suffered serious losses from Russian snipers. The artillery position occasionally had to provide a gun to combat the partisans. Here, too, we had losses. Almost every night so-called "sewing machines," old Russian biplanes, flew over us and dropped rations and munitions to the partisans, especially in the Lapel area.

Because of the partisan activity, resupplying was difficult. A lot of supplies were lost—mail, food, and munitions. Only when our supply trucks drove in convoys protected by armored reconnaissance vehicles did the supply situation improve. Since the summer of 1943 was very lovely and the front was calm, we built a soccer field and scheduled games against other batteries. The area around Uswaty was very level. We could see a large white house through our artillery range finder—maybe it was a palace. And there was a lake in front of Uswaty.

During the breaks in the action, movies and theater came up near the lines, so that the guys had a little diversion. There was a barn, which they used for these performances. Every unit could release a certain number of men to attend these performances. Of course, the positions had to be battle ready at all times. The Russians quickly found out about these shows and shelled us during one performance with a 172mm gun. We immediately ran out of the barn and took cover, so there were no casualties. The shells hit right near the barn. A dancer got hysterical, and our medical officer, famous for his rough manner, treated the poor girl with a slap in the face and the words: "Go behind the barn and piss yourself dry!"

IN THE FALL, THE FRONT GOT LIVELIER. TO THE left and right of our sector, the Russians made major breakthroughs, so at the end of October we had to abandon our beautifully built position without direct contact with the enemy. The time of straightening the front began. New fronts had nice names like Panther, Tiger, or Bear Position. But now these positions were just simply strongpoints. There were no longer solid, unbroken front lines. Furthermore, these strongpoints were much too thinly manned. The enemy could attack us from all sides.

Benz snapped this photograph of the Russian limestone factory on the Dvina River from his forward observation post. During the autumn of 1943, the Soviets stepped up offensive operations against German positions.

Shortly before Christmas 1943, we took up a position east of the road from Vitebsk to Nevel. On Christmas Eve the Russians attacked. It was very cold, and an icy snowstorm was raging. Ivan broke through left and right of our position, and our battery was ordered to abandon its position as quickly as possible and get back to our new lines to avoid being cut off.

We had been looking forward to a happy Christmas Eve in a warm bunker! We hurriedly loaded our equipment, range finder, radio gear, and machine gun on our motor sled, which looked like a little boat, and sped off to the west. Toward midnight, we four sat under the open sky and sang the Christmas carol, "O Du Froehliche...!" We reached our lines on Christmas Day, and—what a miracle—we even got a bunker, which we shared with six infantrymen. We artillery forward observers were very welcome guests, for we all had our tommy guns and a 15mm machine gun. We also had hand grenades and armor-piercing antitank grenades. We were supposed to hold this position—I think it was called Position Panther—at all costs because it protected the Nevel-Gorodok-Vitebsk road.

In the beginning of January 1944, the Russians attacked almost daily without any noteworthy success. Our battery and forward observer line were transferred to the northeast of Vitebsk, in the Dvina River bend. Our forward observation post was located on a bald knoll, an ideal place for defense. The knoll was about six meters high and very steep, scarcely negotiable for tanks. The limestone was so hard that our trenches were only a meter and a half deep.

During the day, we could only move around in them bent over, almost crawling. The enemy positions were only 150 meters away, and the Russian snipers were damned good; in a few days we had three men killed. We used mirrors in the trenches to see what was going on. If you put a helmet on a pole and put it into view—pow—within minutes a Russian sniper would put a hole right through it. The duty was rough because a forward observation post like this had only a four-man crew, and since we had double guards at night, we had to go on guard every two hours. It was better during the day since we had only one guard on watch at a time, so you only had to fall out every six hours. Several attempts by the Russians to storm our position failed. We held it with our forward observers with the help of 10 infantrymen. On April 4, 1944, a Russian shock-troop unit managed to penetrate our position. Naturally, it was when I was there all alone!

However, I was able to fight off the Russian attack with hand grenades and a light machine gun. The infantrymen from a Brandenburg unit and my three comrades fought through and got me out. Accurate fire from our battery caused the Russians additional severe losses. There were three men killed just in our position alone. We all got the Iron Cross, Second Class and were credited with a day of close combat on our records. Our battalion commander, Major

Meyerkort, visited us a few days later and treated us to a big bottle of vodka and cigarettes. In general, vodka played a big role in this period. We got a cup of vodka with a quarter liter of schnapps daily. The rations were better this winter, when the supplies reached us. One of the infantrymen was a barber from the same town in Brandenburg as my father and actually knew him. A small world.

I remember seeing the Stuka pilot Rudel at work. [Hans Rudel, a Luftwaffe colonel, was the most highly decorated soldier of the Third Reich. He piloted a Junkers Ju-87 Stuka dive-bomber and flew 2,530 missions during the war and destroyed 532 tanks. In September 1941, he sank a cruiser and the battleship *Marat*.] Whenever things got tight, we called for the Stukas because we could not stop the Russian tanks with our 75s. They were too well armored. We could use a special armor-piercing charge, which was placed on the muzzles, but they were not accurate. So we called for the Stukas.

Rudel approached the tanks from the rear because the armor there is weakest, it being over the motor. Then he blasted them with the cannons. Since Stukas were very slow, he was always protected by two ME-109s [fighter aircraft]. It was always a great relief for us when we saw the plane with long cannon barrels protruding from the wings approaching. The cannons looked like broomsticks.

Another thing I remember is the ensigns—officer candidates—at the front. They had to spend a certain amount of time in a combat zone. We called it "Iron Cross training."

Since the Russians were always shooting at us or sending raiding patrols out, the ensigns would have to come to us for contact with the enemy. When they had gone through an attack, they would be given an Iron Cross and could return to whatever school or course they were attending.

ONE TIME A RAIDING PATROL ATTACKED, AND AN ensign was there with us. He wanted to report the action to the colonel, but he was so excited and nervous that the colonel simply said, "Just give me Private Benz." And I made the report; it was nothing new for us.

At the end of January, I got three weeks of R&R. It was a difficult and dangerous journey through the rear area, and many a soldier lost his life on the trip home. The partisans harassed the rail lines with gunfire and explosives. There were destroyed cars up and down the rails. Our train was protected by a 20mm cannon and several machine guns. We were glad when we reached the border at Wirballen, where we were deloused and given a "Führer's food pack." [This was a special package given to front-line soldiers for their home leave. It contained items such as butter or margarine, sugar, coffee, chocolate, etc., which were almost impossible for the normal citizen to get.]

ABOVE: A camouflaged 75mm field artillery piece, its barrel pointed eastward, sits unattended near Usvaty while its crew takes shelter nearby. Heavy Soviet artillery often outgunned the Germans.

I hoped for a new uniform since mine was all torn up and really filthy, and my underwear had not been washed for four months. But because the Luftwaffe ground division was now under the command of the Army, neither the Luftwaffe nor the Army felt responsible for me. So, they let me go home to Hamburg in this condition. My parents had been bombed out in Hamburg, and I had no clothes back there. It was only thanks to my clever sister that I was able to spend my leave in a clean uniform. She got me the new uniform and underwear at a shop for antiaircraft personnel. I had a wonderful leave in Hamburg. My family was housed in a Hitler Youth dorm. But I was furious over the destruction to my hometown.

Back at the front we were still in our old position on the Dvina, northeast of Vitebsk. Just outside the city, the train was shelled from both sides by Russian artillery. The corridor to Vitebsk was getting narrower and narrower, and it would be just a matter of time until the Russians shut the trap. I did not hear any cheerful news when I arrived. We had suffered substantial losses, particularly in the forward observation posts. Since we could not count on reinforcements from home any longer, we were slowly bleeding to death. The Third and Fourth Air Force Ground Divisions had been merged in the meantime and were now called the Fourth Air Force Ground Division. General Pistorius was in command.

The old routine began again—manning the station at our forward observation post. The Russians were always coming up with new ideas to make life miserable for us.

It was April 1944, and at this time of year the Dvina was still running high. I had just come on duty one day when a rather large, unmanned barge came floating down the river. I began firing at it with the machine gun when it passed our position, but I could not damage it. So, I reported it to our battery commander, and he ordered a gun on the Dvina brought into position. When the barge came level with the cannon, it was shelled. It blew up after a direct hit. It had been loaded with explosives and was supposed to blow up the Dvina Bridge at Vitebsk. One artilleryman was wounded by the tremendous explosion.

In May, Russian reconnaissance activities increased. It was clear that Ivan was planning an attack. Although we could observe the Russian activities, we were not permitted to fire. We had to save our ammunition. Our vulnerable position worried us because the Russians would quickly tie the noose around Vitebsk if they attacked. So, I was overjoyed when I got orders at the end of May to attend the artillery forward observer course in Lepel.

This order did not make sense to me. They wanted to make me a forward observer officially. But I had been directing artillery fire for several months as an assistant observer, and

especially when our forward observer, Corporal Ditmann, had been killed. But it turned out that these absurd orders saved my life. On the way to the course I met another fellow from Hamburg, Corporal Louis Petersen, who had been ordered to the course too. We hit it off right away and have remained friends ever since.

Most of the people in the course were sergeants or corporals; I was one of the few Pfcs. On June 7, 1944, our course leader, a major, informed us that the Allies had invaded France. He made a very daring statement: "If the Allies are not repulsed in a few days, then the war is lost." How right he was!

Shortly before we finished the course, the Russians started their offensive. Vitebsk was quickly surrounded. We were all assigned to fighting units. Petersen and I were attached to the crew of an old 105mm howitzer with ironclad wooden wheels. It had no sights, and we had to aim point blank along the gun barrel! So, off we went, six men plus cannon toward the East, and we were supposed to stop the Russians with it.

We soon lost contact with the other outfits. We neither heard from nor saw anything of our school officers. We scarcely had contact with the enemy when we were pushed aside by troops flooding back, particularly supply units. Near Glebokie we captured a Russian antitank gun with two horses and ammunition. The two-man crew escaped. They had probably lost their way and suddenly landed—to their surprise and ours—right in our location. Now there were six men and two guns. After we had fired all the ammunition for the 105, we blew it up, for there was no resupplying anymore.

Off we went with our captured antitank gun in the direction of Schwentschionen. We handed over our antitank gun to an artillery supply train since Petersen and I were now alone. The other four had disappeared during a tank attack. We two had hidden in a huge wheat field.

Then we joined up with a quad 20mm antiaircraft gun. These guns were mounted on halftracks and were really effective. The Russians had great respect for them. Usually their planes attacked convoys directly along the axis of movement, either from the front or behind. When they thought we had quad 20s, they attacked the convoy from the sides, which limited the damage they could inflict.

From Vilnius we went north. We were under continuous attack from low-level bombers, IL-2s, the Shturmoviks. Even quad 20s had trouble shooting them down. Those planes were really something, not very fast but were they well armored! Once we came across one that had crashed. Just for fun we shot at the canopy. The bullets just ricocheted off of it—did not even scratch it. And they had rear-firing rocket launchers. They would make a pass firing machine guns, then fire rockets going away. We always had to make sure to wait for a while after they passed over before coming out of cover.

The Latvian people were well inclined toward us and continually warned us of the pursuing enemy. The front had completely disintegrated. Supply columns, fragments of troop units—all streamed leaderless to the west. Officers were hardly ever seen. They had probably saved themselves in motorized comfort. Rations were a problem; the food stores had been set ablaze. Once, in Utena, we were able to get provisions before the stores were blown up.

On the way from Vilkomir to Kovno, two MPs on motorcycles suddenly appeared and threatened the retreating guys, saying, "Halt! Whoever retreats will be shot!" When the guys gave no sign of stopping and pointed unmistakably to their weapons, the two MPs turned around and took off.

In Kovno, Petersen and I reported to the local headquarters and were assigned to a task force. This commander obviously had a "sore throat" and wanted the Knight's Cross at all costs. He gave us a stirring speech. His favorite words

ABOVE: Benz says, "The 5th Battery Calculation Section, located in the woods, with our CO 1st Lieutenant Sauer standing second from the right. I am sitting behind him and to his right. Notice the mosquito nets the two fellows in camouflage uniforms are wearing. The mosquitoes were really bad, especially when you were at the FO post and couldn't move around much. The man fourth from the left, wearing dark blue coveralls, is a truck driver. The NCO third from left is holding a raven that he captured, tamed, and taught to speak." ABOVE LEFT: Two German soldiers, Pfc. Tiefengraber (left) and Corporal Dittman, rest outside the forward observation post on a limestone knoll at the Dvina River northeast of Vitebsk in the early spring of 1944. LEFT: Playing a favorite card game called Skat, several soldiers find a moment of relaxation. Louis Petersen, a cigar hanging from his mouth, raises a card to trump one of his opponents.

were, "When the Russians come, don't be cowards. Throw those grenades up their ass."

Just how we were supposed to repulse an enemy that had tanks, low-flying planes, and hundreds of guns, he did not say. After all, we were only armed with carbines. Later on, while in the hospital in Hamburg, I read in *Der Völkische Beobachter* [the official Nazi newspaper] that the colonel had fallen on the Eastern Front. He got the Knight's Cross posthumously. I could not guess how many guys had to bite the dust for it.

While the task force was still being assembled, Petersen applied again to the local commander and actually got orders for us to report to our replacement unit in the Alsace. Armed with these papers, we left Russia with the next train heading west.

On July 13, 1944, we crossed the border after being deloused in Wirballen. After a couple of days' travel, we reached the replacement team in Diedenhofen. My buddy Petersen was already on leave, and I was interrogated by a courts-martial officer. The only thing I could report was that we had been abandoned by our officers from the artillery school. I never heard anything more about the matter.

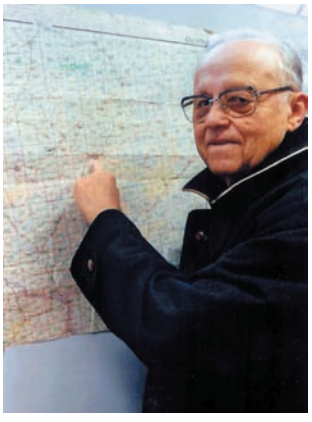
On August 2, 1944, I got a 16-day reassignment leave. Because of the hardships of the retreat and journey, I had come down with a serious lung infection, and so I was taken to the Reserve Hospital in Hamburg where I stayed until September 11, when I was allowed to take my postponed leave.

In the meantime, our replacement unit had been transferred to Regensburg, so I reported there after my leave. On November 1, 1944, I took part in a corporal's training course in Ansbach, near Nuremburg. After passing the exam, I became a reserve corporal candidate. Because of my illness, I was classified "fit for limited duty only" and was reassigned to another base where I was made an instructor for a corporals' class, which consisted of men from 16 to 42 years old. In February 1945, I caught pleurisy again and was sent to the Reserve Hospital in Hamburg until March 3.

In the meantime, the Allies had crossed the Rhine. About 15 limited-duty people were sent back toward Regensburg. After a four-week foot march, we reached our reserve unit in Regensburg. The Amis [slang for Americans] were right behind us the whole way. When we arrived in Regensburg, they were already right at the gates.

Our people told us to take 30 young and almost unbroken horses from there to Landshut. Only two or three of us had ever been on a horse. It was impossible to move during the day because the enemy fighter-bombers had complete control over the roads. So we set off at night toward the end of April. Every guy had two horses, which he took turns riding. Using back roads, we went the 100 kilometers to Landshut, where we arrived one morning completely exhausted. Since we did not have riding britches—and were no horsemen—we had terrible blisters on our cheeks and were completely raw between the legs. So far in the war this had only happened to my feet!

When we arrived at the garrison, we immediately lay down on the cots and slept right through to the next morning, May 1, 1945. When we got up, we realized that the whole garrison personnel—including the officers—had run away. Once more we had been deserted by our officers. The Amis were already in the city and standing right in front of our barracks. Since we had no food, we raided the military stores, put on new uniforms, and en-tered into American captivity.



Decades after the end of the war, Joachim Benz peruses a map of the area where he served in a Luftwaffe field division.

That day, I was wounded by shrapnel from a tank shell. The garrison was shelled by tanks although we had raised the white flag and offered no resistance. The Americans took us to the notorious POW camp, Regensburg-Donauwiesen. On the way there, they put us in a cow pen. When the farmers tried to bring us cooked potatoes—we had not eaten anything for 24 hours—the Americans shot at us. A buddy was hit in the thigh and bled to death. The Americans denied us any help. Thus we became acquainted with our liberators right away.

IT WAS NOT ANY BETTER IN THE REGENSBURG camp, where there were over 100,000 prisoners. We got scarcely anything to eat—three biscuits per day. But not getting any drinking water was really a dirty deal. Several times during the week there was a so-called roll call. We were herded from one camp to the other. The Americans stood to the left and right and beat us with bamboo canes. For weeks we lay under the open sky; they had taken away our tarps. The weather god was gracious; it scarcely rained at all. On the first of May, the day of our capture, it had snowed. Many comrades, especially the older ones, died of lung infections.

At the beginning of June 1945, rumor had it that we were to be handed over to the French to work in the mines. Now, I had to fake something. I went on sick call and told the American doctor that I had TB [tuberculosis]. The Americans were very scared of TB, so they released me quickly.

Since the Americans only released prisoners in their own zone, I gave my grandmother's house in north Hesse as my home address. There was one final dirty trick. Those of us to be released, about 40 men from the Kassel area, had to have our heads shaved.

On Sunday, June 3, 1945, black American soldiers drove us by tractor-trailer truck from Regensburg to Kassel. We went via Würzburg and Giessen. In the villages that we passed through, the people tossed bread to us. In the evening, not far from Giessen, they threw us out of the truck and told us to walk the rest of the way.

It only took a few days to reach my grandmother's house. But a couple of interesting things happened on the way. An American patrol stopped me and asked to see my papers. When they read that I had a lung disease, they gave me the papers back immedi-ately and wiped their fingers on their pants. Then, I was walking past a former SS barracks occupied by American troops. Some GIs heard me approaching. I was still wearing the hobnailed boots, which made a lot of noise on paved roads. And they hung out of the windows razzing me, shouting "hip – hop – hip – hop" in rhythm with my boots plunking on the road.

I looked up and yelled, "Fellows, the war is over for me. You get to stay here and play soldier boy a little longer!" You can imagine the tirade of curses and oaths that came back. Finally, on June 5, 1945, just before the night curfew, I got to my grandmother's house. For me the war was over.

Although I tried for many years to establish contact with my former buddies from the Third/Fourth Air Force Ground Division, I never succeeded. I had no better luck with their relatives. All the comrades who were in the Vitebsk area were reported missing. □

Interviewer and translator Peter D. Fyfe resides in Lexington, Virginia, and worked as a professor of German at Virginia Military Institute. Ward Carr is a veteran of the U.S. Army. He performed preliminary editing of the interview and resides in Frankfurt, Germany.

Spy Walter Koehler double-crossed FBI Chief J. Edgar Hoover.

BY DAVID ALAN JOHNSON

THROUGHOUT HIS LIFETIME, FBI DIRECTOR J. EDGAR HOOVER ALWAYS BOASTED THAT NO enemy agent, either spy or saboteur, ever operated at large in the United States during World War II. The FBI's record against spies and saboteurs was perfect, Hoover insisted. Clandestine enemy activity had been "kept under control" throughout the war, and no "military secrets" had been smuggled out of the country by either German or Japanese agents. Any and all spies who entered the United States had been captured and rendered harmless.

Hoover never found out how wrong he was. For nearly two years, a German agent had sent hundreds of reports from a secret radio transmitter in New York to contacts in Germany. And nobody in the FBI, including Hoover, ever found out.

The agent who managed to send all that information, right under the FBI's nose, was anything but a super spy. He was a 51-year-old Dutch national named Walter Koehler, a fat, bald, near-sighted little man with horn-rimmed glasses and bad teeth. Although he had been trained in espionage, Koehler owed at least part of his success to good luck and the complacency of J. Edgar Hoover.

Koehler had been chosen to go to the United States on an espionage assignment mainly because of his technical and engineering background. German intelligence knew that American scientists had been experimenting with nuclear fission for some time. Articles in U.S. scientific journals, along with stories in the *New York Times* and other newspapers, described atomic energy in general terms and also discussed the power of an atomic bomb as a weapon. A German spy named Alfred Hohlhaus had also sent a number of reports on American nuclear research, along with as much information as he could get regarding the U.S. atomic program. Hohlhaus, incidentally, also operated without the knowledge of J. Edgar Hoover or the FBI. The Luftwaffe was especially interested in knowing if the United States was close to making a bomb.

To find out, German intelligence decided to send Walter Koehler to the United States. Koehler had studied engineering and is usually described as being technically minded. He had also worked for German intelligence during World War I, which gave him several years of practical experience in espionage in addition to training and instruction in "spy school." Just as important as his technical background and his experience, Koehler had also spent several years in the United States. He was a sleeper agent in New York from the late 1930s until 1941.

Koehler was recalled to Germany in 1941 because of some irregularities in his bookkeeping. His superiors wanted to know why he was not able to account for some of the funds that he had been issued for operating expenses. The explanation Koehler gave must have been quite a good one; whatever it was, it kept him out of prison. Or maybe German intelligence needed someone with a devious nature and decided to put it to work for them instead of against them.

After being chosen for his new assignment, Koehler was given a sort of cram course in nuclear physics, a class in the basics of atomic energy and technical terms related to it. In the summer of 1942, he was sent on his way to New York via Madrid. It was decided that his wife would go with him. Mrs. Koehler's presence was part of Koehler's disguise. No one would ever think that a fat, middle-aged man and his plump wife might actually be German spies.

During a conversation with Attorney General Francis Biddle (left), J. Edgar Hoover, director of the Federal Bureau of Investigation, gestures toward a display at a conference with President Franklin D. Roosevelt at the White House on April 7, 1942.

National Archives

Mr. and Mrs. Koehler would need visas before they could to enter the United States. These could be applied for in Madrid, before the Koehlers left for New York. They took a train to Madrid, where Koehler presented himself at the U.S. consulate to apply for permission to enter the country. The entire procedure was normal and routine at first; no one questioned the false identification documents that had been provided by German intelligence. When Koehler sat down to be interviewed by a member of the consulate's staff, however, Koehler shattered the routine and left the young official speechless with astonishment.

Koehler told his interviewer that he was a German espionage agent and that he wanted to turn himself over to the American authorities. This threw the entire process into a cocked hat; it was no longer just an ordinary matter for some junior official, but a request for political asylum. The vice counsel was summoned to hear what else Koehler had to say and was as amazed as his predecessor had been. Koehler's story sounded like something out of a Hollywood film.

The stylized likeness of a German soldier glares menacingly from a poster placed in factories across the U.S. during 1942. Some workers were critical of the poster, wrongly assuming that the soldier was intended to be American.

He was being sent to the United States to set up a secret radio station, Koehler explained, and he went on to say that his job would be to send reports on U.S. troop departures for overseas. But, he went on, he did not want to work for the Nazis. The only reason that he accepted the assignment was to escape. He was Roman Catholic and anti-Nazi in German-occupied Holland, which did not offer a very promising future. He wanted to get away before he said or did something that landed him in a concentration camp. Instead, he wanted to work against the Nazis as a double agent, sending authentic-sounding information to Germany that was actually false.

To prove that he really was a bona fide German agent, Koehler showed the consulate staff the paraphernalia that he had been issued by German intelligence—his code book, the operating manual for his radio, his schedule for transmitting reports to his contact in Germany, and $6,230 for operating expenses.

The consulate staff believed Koehler but did not know what do with him or his wife. Finally, after talking it over for some time, they decided that the best thing would be to contact the U.S. State Department in Washington. As soon as the staff at the State Department heard the phrase "German spies," they immediately telephoned the FBI.

When J. Edgar Hoover heard the story, he recommended that the Koehlers be granted their visas. Hoover did not really care if Walter Koehler was a spy or a refugee. As far as he was concerned, Koehler was an opportunity for publicity, and he would take full credit for any harm Koehler did to the German intelligence network.

With Hoover's full knowledge and blessing, the Koehlers boarded a neutral Portuguese ship in August 1942 and began their trip to New York. But midway across the Atlantic, Koehler developed a severe case of pneumonia, so severe that the captain decided to send for help. The ship did not have the medical staff to treat anyone in Koehler's condition, so the captain hoisted the international distress signal, hoping that a passing ship would see it and come to assist.

Fortunately for Walter Koehler, a U.S. Coast Guard vessel happened to be close by and went to investigate. The Coast Guard removed Koehler from the Portuguese ship and rushed him to a hospital in Florida. No one notified the FBI, however. When the Portuguese ship docked in New York, federal agents were highly annoyed, to put it mildly, when they discovered that Walter Koehler was not on board. It took some frantic searching and a few threatening telephone calls from J. Edgar Hoover before Koehler was located.

As soon as Koehler recovered from his pneumonia, the FBI set him up as their very own German agent. The Bureau gave Koehler his own radio station on Long Island, installed in a large secluded house, and surrounded it with a solid wall of security. No one was allowed anywhere near the station except a handful of carefully screened FBI agents. Guard dogs patrolled the grounds. Three agents ate, slept, and lived in the house; one man was always on duty to keep watch.

Koehler was not allowed to send his own messages to Germany. Hoover did not trust him. An FBI agent who had learned to copy Koehler's "fist," his own unique way of pounding out dots and dashes on the telegraph key, sent the reports and signed Koehler's name. When the first message was sent, on February 7, 1943, Koehler was not even present. Five days later, Koehler's contact in Hamburg sent a reply, conveying his "thoughts and good wishes" and admonishing Koehler to use "caution and discretion" when sending future signals. Koehler never saw it.

A steady stream of reports was sent to Germany by federal agents. A schedule had been arranged. Signals would be sent by the FBI every Saturday or Sunday at 8 AM to Koehler's contact in Hamburg. Replies would then be radioed by Hamburg on the following Friday or Saturday at 7 PM. Among the items sent to Hamburg on a regular basis were weather reports, data on ships under construction and undergoing repairs, and troop departures for the British Isles, along with unit identification and insignia. Most of this would either become common knowledge—U.S. Army insignia would not remain secret very long after American troops came ashore on D-Day—or had been doctored to alter the facts. All information that was sent had been cleared by the armed forces and classified as harmless.

No news on the U.S. atomic bomb project, not even misleading reports, was ever sent. Although Soviet spies and Americans sympathetic to Soviet communism managed to smuggle atomic secrets to Russia, there is no record of any U.S. nuclear technology ever reaching Germany. But German intelligence did not care. They were more than happy with the

information they were receiving.

The FBI was also more than pleased with what was taking place on Long Island. The Germans seemed to be swallowing everything whole; the ruse was working perfectly. Hamburg sent Koehler congratulations for a job well done on several occasions, along with birthday best wishes, and Christmas and New Year's greetings (in both 1944 and 1945). Federal agents responded by sending their own best wishes and fond regards. They could afford to be agreeable. They were doing an incredible job of misleading and generally making total fools of their counterparts in Germany.

The ruse continued throughout the rest of the war. In the spring of 1944, Koehler informed Hamburg that "a number of armored and infantry divisions" that had originally been scheduled to be sent to Britain, for the D-Day build-up, were being diverted to the Mediterranean for a "special operation." There was no such operation. It was another bit of misinformation carefully cooked up to fool the Germans.

During all this time, Walter Koehler seemed perfectly content to sit back and let the FBI send false information in his name. He and his wife lived comfortably in a New York hotel, subsisting on an allowance that was doled out from the operating funds the American authorities had confiscated from them.

Some of the federal agents assigned to keep an eye on Mr. and Mrs. Koehler did not completely trust their charges. The two always seemed to have more money than they were being allotted, although nobody could figure out where they got it. Also, they seemed to be a little shadowy and mysterious for a pair of simple Dutch political refugees. But no one had any proof of anything; there were nothing but vague suspicions.

FBI Director J. Edgar Hoover entertained no such suspicions. He was more than pleased with himself for having used the German spy to suit his own purposes. Hoover was so proud of his work in the Koehler affair that he wrote his own version of it in a magazine article. "The Spy Who Double-Crossed Hitler" appeared in an American magazine in May 1946. In the article, Hoover called Walter Koehler "Albert van Loop" and described how he and his bureau completely tricked and misled German intelligence by sending all manner of falsified information.

According to Hoover, he "succeeded on all scores" with the Koehler hoax. Among other accomplishments, he claimed to have deceived the German High Command regarding the time and place of the D-Day landings. Koehler/van Loop had done exactly what Hoover wanted him to do, although he cooperated "with a pistol at his back."

Hoover's account was the only known version of Walter Koehler's story for over 25 years. In the 1970s, after Hoover's death in 1972, the Hungarian-born American writer Ladislas Farago came across Walter Koehler's dossier in Germany. Farago was researching a book about German intelligence during World War II and discovered Koehler's file in the German war archives. He recognized some of Koehler's signals from quotes in Hoover's magazine article, but he also noticed that there were a lot more messages than the 115 signals sent by FBI agents in Koehler's name. Something was not right.

The German files listed more than twice as many messages received by Hamburg than the FBI claimed to have sent. On March 4, 1944, the FBI noted that signals number 63, 64, and 65 had been transmitted. But the German file detailed that Koehler had sent 137 messages by that time. Some of them had been sent in a code that was completely different from the Long Island station's cypher. It became clear that Walter Koehler had been working independently from the FBI. Federal agents had been sending their signals to Hamburg, while Koehler had been sending his own.

Walter Koehler had not been double-crossing Hitler. He had been triple-crossing J. Edgar Hoover and the Federal Bureau of Investigation. While federal agents were busy sending falsified information to Germany in Koehler's name, Koehler had been sending authentic reports to his contact in Paris. Hamburg knew all along that the messages it had been receiving were phoney.

Farago also interviewed three former members of the German secret intelligence service. All three remembered Walter Koehler, including his eyeglasses and bad teeth, and gave Farago another surprise. Koehler's double agent ploy, as well as his request for political asylum, had been prearranged by his superiors in German intelligence. The story handed to the vice consul's staff in Madrid had been worked out well in advance. Koehler's willingness to work for the FBI had also been rehearsed; the story gave him the perfect cover for his real assignment and also guaranteed his entry into the United States.

Most of Koehler's reports were smuggled out of the country via courier, crossing the Atlantic aboard ships flying a neutral flag. They would arrive at a port in Spain or Portugal and would have Koehler's secret information in German-occupied Paris within a few days.

If some piece of information was too important to be sent via steamer, Koehler had access to a secret radio transmitter in Rochester, New York, which was operated by another of Koehler's contacts. The man from Rochester would come to Manhattan to pick up Koehler's data and would send it off to Paris as soon as he returned to Rochester. To avoid being detected, the Rochester station was used only when speed was of the essence and the information was too vital to be sent by the usual method. When the Germans were driven out of Paris in August 1944, Koehler's messages went to a radio station in Sigmaringen, in southwest Germany.

One of the radio messages concerned the Allied landings in France on D-Day. "According to rumours circulating here, the invasion appears to be a success," Koehler said. "I am convinced that this is a gross exaggeration and that all will end well … Barometer reading at 9 o'clock this morning 30 point 20. Greetings, Koe."

Federal agents observing the Koehlers were right when they thought they had more money than their allotment. They had turned $6,000 over to the U.S. authorities but had been given $16,000 for expenses. Koehler's corpulent wife had smuggled the additional $10,000 into the country in her girdle, right past federal agents and everybody else. It supplemented the FBI's allowance very nicely and allowed Mr. and Mrs. Koehler to live beyond their means. In 1943, $10,000 was a great deal of money, more than most people earned in several years.

Although Koehler never had access to any atomic secrets, his superiors in Germany considered him the best spy they had during the war. When the secret intelligence service was revamped in 1944, a good many active agents were found to be deficient and dismissed. But Koehler remained throughout the war. His last message was sent on April 26, 1945. Hitler killed himself four days later, and Germany surrendered less than two weeks after that. If the war had continued, Koehler would have gone on sending his signals indefinitely.

"The Spy Who Double-Crossed Hitler" had put one over on the FBI, thoroughly and completely. Much of this was carried out during a critical period, when the German High Command was in desperate need of data concerning U.S. troop movements during the build-up for D-Day. And J. Edgar Hoover never had the slightest suspicion. □

David Alan Johnson has written extensively on World War II for more than 20 years. His book The Battle of Britain: The American Factor *was well received in both the United Kingdom and the United States. He is currently working on a book about Anglo-American relations since colonial times.*

Continued from page 17

They were joined by a fourth in mid-October 1944, when VPB-131 arrived to replace VPB-135 (the Navy changed the VB designation to VPB for patrol bombing on October 1). For a time, the PV-1s operated in daylight as well as at night, but the loss of the VB-136 commander and his crew in a daylight raid on September 16 led to a hold on further daytime missions. Night missions were still being flown.

Modifications continued with the Venturas, including the addition of hard points under the wings for the mounting of high-velocity aerial rockets, a Navy invention. The Navy also asked Lockheed to design an improved version of the Lodestar derivative, with a redesigned wing and tail section and additional armament. This version was designated the PV-2 Harpoon. The Harpoon payload was increased by 2,000 pounds, which allowed the installation of five .50-caliber machine guns in the nose and two additional guns in a belly turret. Eight rockets could be carried under the wings. Unfortunately, the increase in weight carried with it a penalty in speed since the Harpoon was equipped with the same engines as the lighter PV-1. PV-2s were introduced to combat with the arrival of VPB-139 at Attu on March 12, 1945.

With the surrender of Germany, pressure on Japan intensified. American B-29 raids were burning out Japanese cities to the south and Eleventh Air Force B-24s and B-25s and Navy PV-1s and PV-2s were striking the Kuriles while Navy task forces carried out operations against Japanese shipping and targets on shore. Navy bombers were often scheduled in concert with Army planes on attacks on targets in the Kuriles as more and more pressure was placed on Japan in preparation for the impending invasion.

A VPB-139 Harpoon crew was on its way to the Kuriles when the message was received that Japan had surrendered and that all combat was to cease. The crewmen at first considered turning back but discussed all the propaganda they had heard about the Japanese and decided to disregard the recall order and continue to drop their bombs. They concocted a story that they would claim they had jettisoned their bombs in the ocean. Instead, they dropped them over land but chose an uninhabited portion of an island for the target. After they thought about what they had done, the crew regretted their action. For Lockheed crews, the dropping of the bombs was the last hostile act of the war.

Other than their long-range missions in the Aleutians and Kuriles, the most successful operations by Lockheed Electra/Lodestar derivatives were in the antisubmarine role. The Hudson was the most successful of the Lockheed bombers in the war against U-boats, no doubt largely due to timing. By the time the Ventura entered service, U-boat operations were on the decline. Hudsons were involved in the sinking of 25 U-boats, while Venturas were involved in the sinking of only six. Their record was not as impressive as that of other types—Liberators were involved in the sinking of 75—but it was still considerable.

RAF Coastal Command crews were involved in other operations. In December 1939, a Hudson participated in an operation to intercept a German prison ship and free its prisoners, most of whom were Royal Navy sailors. Hudsons flew photographic missions over Europe, and a formation of the Lockheed bombers participated in the first 1,000-plane raid in the spring of 1943. Radar-equipped Hudsons sometimes flew missions into German airspace, usually under the cover of bad weather and often at night. Hudsons were also used to insert agents into occupied countries. RAF crews gave the airplane the nickname "Old Boomerang" because the Hudson always came home from its missions. The plane was also flown by the air forces of China, New Zealand, Australia, and Brazil.

The Lockheed Electra was one of a handful of aircraft types that were operated by both sides. Before the war, Lockheed sold 30 Super Electras to the Japanese Tachikawa Aircraft Company and licensed the company to build the airplanes at its factory in Japan. When the war broke out, the Allies identified the Japanese-built Lodestars as "Thelmas" and the ones that were sold to Japan as "Tobys." All told, Japan had some 120 Electras, including Lockheed airplanes purchased before the war and airplanes built under license. The Japanese Electras were used throughout the Pacific as military transports.

Except for their roles against the Kuriles and in the Battle of the Atlantic, the wartime record of the Electra/Lodestar family of airplanes was less than spectacular. As a transport, the Lodestar was overshadowed by the Douglas DC-3, and by the end of the war most C-60s had been replaced in troop carrier and air transport squadrons. The Douglas A-20 and the North American B-25 were favored as attack airplanes. Nevertheless, the Hudson and Ventura live on in the memories of those who flew and supported them in combat. □

Sam McGowan is an expert on aviation in World War II and is the author of The Cave, *a novel of the Vietnam War. He resides in Missouri City, Texas.*

New Tarawa book captures horror and heroism of bloody Pacific battle.

BY MASON B. WEBB

"On all sides, shells detonated in bloody geysers, bullets churned the water, which looked as if it were agitated by a storm, and wounded Marines, some hideously disfigured and dying, shouted, even begged, for help." So begins John Wukovits's latest chronicle of the Pacific campaign, titled ***One Square Mile of Hell: The Battle for Tarawa*** (Caliber, New York, 2006, 320 pp., photographs, maps, bibliography, index, $24.95, hardcover), and he maintains the tension of that bloody opening throughoutthe book.

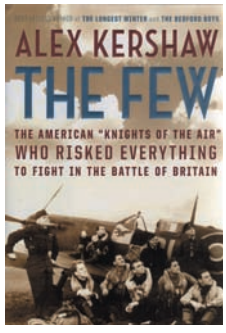
It is probably safe to say that very few of the 35,000 young American Marines who waded ashore on November 20, 1943, had ever heard of the Gilbert Islands or Tarawa Atoll while they were growing up, or had ever pinpointed its main island, Betio, on a map in a high school geography class. But now they were up to their waists in the atoll's seawater, which was being roiled by bullets and shell fragments, and were clawing their way onto its tropical beaches, dying by the score in an effort to wrest it away from determined Japanese soldiers whose mission was to kill Marines or die trying.

And try they did. Of the atoll's nearly 8,000 defenders (which included Korean civilian laborers pressed into service by the Japanese), nearly all of them were wiped out in the four-day battle. U.S. casualties were high, also. Out of an invading force of 35,000 Marines and Navy personnel, some 1,500 were killed. The battles for Tarawa, Makin, and Betio were precursors to the enormous and costly struggles that would take place across the vast expanse of the Pacific in the next 20 months.

Wukovits, whose stunning *Pacific Alamo: The Battle of Wake Island* set a new standard for combat chronicling, is an expert at thrusting the reader into the smoke and stench of battle. From his personal interviews with survivors, Wukovits follows a group of young Marines from enlistment, through boot camp, and then on their long voyage across the Pacific, where they faced death on a massive scale.

USMC Art Collection/Painting by Richard M. Gibney

Over 35,000 American Marines waded ashore on Tarawa on November 20, 1943, dodging bullets and shells. The casualties were high on both sides: 1,500 Americans and 8,000 Japanese.



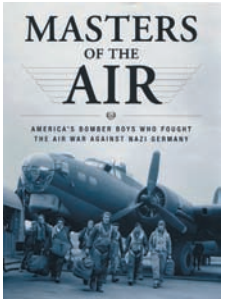
Few other authors can weave personal memoirs with factual historical narrative with Wukovits's skill and achieve the overall effect of placing the reader smack in the middle of the action. Over and above that, Wukovits, who writes frequently for *WWII History,* dramatically demonstrates the amount of courage it took to defeat a tenacious enemy who had nothing to live for.

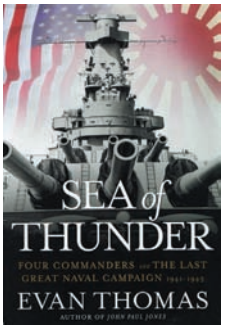
It will be hard to find a better book about Tarawa—or a better book about combat, period—than *One Square Mile of Hell.*

The Few: The American "Knights of the Air" Who Risked Everything to Fight in the Battle of Britain, by Alex Kershaw, Da Capo Press, New York, 2006, 300 pp., photographs, bibliography, index, $29.95, hardcover.

The war in Europe had been raging for nearly a year, but still the United States kept out of it. Upset by their country's officially neutral stance, thousands of Americans were itching to get into combat. Even though they knew that it might cost them their U.S. citizenship—not to mention their lives—a few hundred Yanks went to Britain and signed up to fly and fight for the Royal Air Force in what became known as "The Battle of Britain."

Alex Kershaw, author of *The Bedford Boys* and *The Longest Winter,* tells the riveting, inspiring story of eight Americans who fought side by side with England's finest, bravest pilots. Flying the powerful Supermarine Spitfire, they became the "knights of the air" who, with minimal training but plenty of guts, dueled and downed the skilled aces of Germany's Luftwaffe. Of those eight, all but one died during the war.





Day after day, night after night, the RAF flyers rose from their grassy airstrips in the east of England to battle the foe in the skies above the island nation. And day after day, night after night, the RAF flyers returned to their bases, bloody, battered, fewer in number than when they had left, but unbowed. The RAF and the Eagle Squadrons, as the Yank flyers were known, had inflicted enormous losses on the hitherto undefeated enemy and, by October 1940, had helped out-manned Britain defeat Hermann Göring's much feared Luftwaffe and stave off Hitler's planned invasion.

Winston Churchill once declared, "Never in the field of human conflict was so much owed by so many to so few." The Americans of the Eagle Squadrons were the few among the "few." Kershaw's superb prose makes this a definite must-read.

Masters of the Air: America's Bomber Boys Who Fought the Air War Against Nazi Germany, by Donald L. Miller, Simon & Schuster, New York, 2006, 671 pp., photographs, maps, bibliography, index, $35.00, hardcover.

For readers who enjoyed Stephen Ambrose's *The Wild Blue* and James Bradley's *Flyboys, Masters of the Air* is another blockbuster book about America's intrepid airmen.

Focusing on the Eighth Air Force based in England, author Miller captures in words the type of young man who was called upon to risk his life day after day to drop bombs on the enemy. As Miller notes, "American bomber crews learned to fight the air war by experience and experiment, every mission a learning exercise. It was a special kind of experience, different from that of the ground forces."

Indeed, before joining the Air Force, most bomber crewmen had never even been passengers in airplanes. The crewmen had to learn in a hurry, for there was no margin for error at 30,000 feet and hundreds of miles from friendly territory. And the Eighth's casualties were staggering: more than 26,000 killed (30 percent more than the entire U.S. Marine Corps suffered) and 28,000 taken prisoner.

Miller's deeply personal story, drawn from oral histories, manuscript collections, unpublished memoirs, and hundreds of published accounts, gives the reader an uncannily realistic sense of what the pilots and crews went through from a physical and a psychological sense. He deftly captures the feelings of frostbite, oxygen deprivation, and mental strain that were even greater threats than enemy fighters and flak.

Masters of the Air also captures the story of life on the ground in wartime England—in bomb-torn London as well as the once sleepy hamlets in the countryside that the boisterous Americans completely transformed. Miller also explores the ongoing argument of the morality of the indiscriminate bombing of cities full of noncombatants and the surprising lack of effect the bombing had on German war industries. He concludes that strategic bombing did not win the war in Europe—but the war could not have been won without it.

A complex and sobering aerial view of the war that should not be missed.

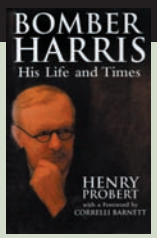
Sea of Thunder: Four Commanders and the Last Great Naval Campaign, by Evan Thomas, Simon & Schuster, New York, 2006, 414 pp., photographs, maps, bibliography, index, $29.95, hardcover.

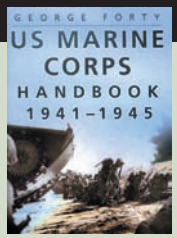
Like a skilled shipfitter, Evan Thomas has seamlessly welded together a powerful book made up primarily of the biographies of four naval combatants: Admiral William F. Halsey, Jr., Commander Ernest Evans (he the commander of an heroic, ill-fated destroyer, the *Johnston*), and Japanese Admirals Takeo Kurita and Matome Ugaki.

Although a superbly told, overall history of the Pacific War, *Sea of Thunder* saves its best punch for last—the October 1944 Battle of Leyte Gulf, the biggest, wildest, and most devastating sea battle of all time. Fought by 200,000 men, hundreds of land- and carrier-based warplanes, and 300 ships over a watery battlefield some 100,000 miles square, the Battle of Leyte Gulf spelled ultimate doom for the Japanese empire and eventual victory for the Americans—in spite of many blunders.

Convinced he was on the verge of a major

SHORT BURSTS





Final Patrol: True Stories of World War II Submarines, by Don Keith, Caliber, New York, 2006, 331 pp., photographs, index, appendix, $15.00, softcover.

In the early months of World War II, American's submarine force stood as the thin gray line between victory and defeat in the Pacific. Although small in number, by war's end the subs had accounted for nearly 60 percent of Japan's shipping losses and had made a major contribution to the Allied victory. The cost of that victory was high, however. Twenty percent of the entire submarine force was lost—the highest casualty rate of any branch of service in the U.S. military.

In addition to chronicling the war patrols of 16 of America's World War II submarines and their crews, Don Keith does something unique in *Final Patrol.* He takes readers on a tour of all 16 of the subs (and the German *U-505*) that are currently in museums open to the public, plus provides a fascinating, behind-the-scenes look at how the submarines on display reached their final resting places.

Final Patrol is a well-written account of the undersea world of the submarines and a worthy salute to the men who served in them.

Bomber Harris: His Life and Times, by Henry Probert, Greenhill Books, London, 2006, 432 pp., photographs, index, bibliography, $15.95, softcover.

The bombing of cities during the war remains controversial to this day, and a figure at the heart of the controversy—the head of the Royal Air Force's Bomber Command, Air Marshal Sir Arthur Harris—remains largely a shadowy, unknown personality. Author Henry Probert has shed light on the complex, multifaceted Sir Arthur in this insightful, penetrating biography.

Harris is credited (or blamed) for the first 1,000-plane raid—Operation Millennium, as it was known—on May 27-28, 1942, against Cologne. The raid resulted in 3,300 homes destroyed, another 9,500 damaged, and 45,000 persons left homeless. Following the success of this one attack, many more raids of a thousand planes or more were mounted.

Harris comes to life on the pages through Probert's judicious use of quotes and correspondence that demonstrate the commander's leadership qualities, professionalism, and decisiveness mixed with kindness, humor, and generosity.

Using for the first time Harris's own extensive papers, Probert paints a complete picture of the man lauded by many and vilified by others—a portrait that both fans and detractors of Sir Arthur will find intriguing.

Four Stars to Valor: The Combat History of the 505th Parachute Infantry Regiment in World War II, by Phil Nordyke, Zenith Press, St. Paul, MN, 2006, 480 pp., photographs, maps, index, bibliography, $27.95, hardcover.

Few authors love the 82nd Airborne Division more than Phil Nordyke. His earlier books, *All American All the Way* and *The All Americans in World War II,* chronicled the division's exploits in the Mediterranean and European theaters; *Four Stars to Valor* is his way of honoring one of the division's stellar regiments—the 505th.

The 505th was the only regiment in World War II to make four combat jumps: Sicily, Salerno, Normandy, and Holland. Virtually all of the jumps met with one level of disaster or another (shot down by trigger-happy fellow Americans over Sicily, badly scattered at Salerno and Normandy, and cut off and nearly annihilated at Nijmegen).

But the 505th did more than simply take part in deadly, dangerous jumps; the unit had to perform as infantry once it hit the ground. And what battles and campaigns the 505th fought in on the ground: Sicily, Naples-Foggia, Normandy, Rhineland, Ardennes, and central Germany.

Basing his book on extensive archival research as well as the memoirs and interviews of over 300 veterans, Nordyke takes the reader from the 505th's prewar days, through basic and airborne training, and into the unfriendly skies above enemy-held territory, conveying with remarkable immediacy and power what it was like to be an American airborne trooper engaged in heavy combat during World War II.

Four Stars to Valor is essential reading for anyone moved by the American fighting man's courage, discipline, and devotion to duty.

Dunkirk: Fight to the Last Man, by Hugh Sebag-Montefiore, Harvard University Press, Cambridge, MA, 2006, 700 pp., photographs, maps, index, bibliography, appendices, $35.00, hardcover.

It is probably safe to say that most Americans know of Dunkirk in only the most general terms. After the British sent an expeditionary force to France in 1940 to bolster the French defenses against the invading German armies, they were pushed back to the shores of the English Channel, where they were subjected to unrelenting aerial and artillery pounding until rescued by the Royal Navy and a flotilla of private craft—and lived to fight another day.

Naturally, there is much, much more to the story than that, and author Hugh Sebag-Montefiore, in his epic volume *Dunkirk,* provides a stunningly detailed examination of the entire tragic yet heroic episode. He places special emphasis on the courage of a group of British and French troops deployed as a rear guard to protect the evacuation, which held off the German divisions and enabled the other battered battalions to escape to the coast and, ultimately, rescue.

Sebag-Montefiore, who had two ancestors rescued at Dunkirk, points out that had it not been for the ferocious bravery of the officers and soldiers on the ground, the German forces would likely have encircled nearly half a million Allied soldiers and emboldened Hitler to proceed with his planned invasion of the British Isles. By saving the men at Dunkirk, the noble defenders may just have prevented Hitler from winning the war.

Dunkirk is a dramatic, deeply moving tale of a battle that, although seen initially as a defeat, deserves to be remembered as one of the early and most important turning points of the war.

U.S. Marine Corps Handbook 1941-45, by George Forty, Sutton Publishing, Phoenix Mill, UK, 2006, 279 pp., photographs, maps, index, bibliography, appendices, $44.95, hardcover.

The word "Handbook" in the title is curious, as this profusely illustrated book by the eminent British military historian George Forty is, in actuality, a general history of all aspects of the U.S. Marine Corps during and just prior to World War II.

Included in this handsome volume are chapters on how the elite Marine Corps was organized; how and where it trained; how it conducted amphibious operations; other shore duty roles (such as guarding U.S. embassies); special units such as raiders and paratroops; Marine aviation; uniforms, insignia, vehicles, weapons, and equipment; the Women's Reserve; a history of each of the six Marine divisions; a chronology of the Pacific and Far East campaigns; and brief biographies of some of the most famous Marines, such as John Basilone, Pappy Boyington, Chesty Puller, and more.

In short, *U.S. Marine Corps Handbook 1941-45* is an enormously informative and entertaining look at one of America's elite fighting units. □

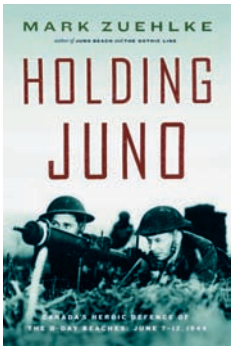
victory, Halsey took the bait offered by a decoy force and sailed away from the crucial main action without permission, leaving his fellow Americans without the vital cover his ships were to provide. For Kurita's part, he withdrew his forces and sailed back to Japan, even though the Japanese were, unknowingly, on the cusp of defeating the ragged, battered American escort carrier force off the Leyte beaches.

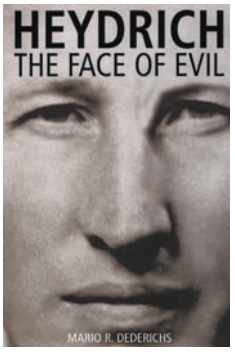
As Thomas writes, "Cultures clash; nations do battle. But in the end wars are fought, and won or lost, by the actions of individuals—heroes and cowards, the prudent and wanton, ordinary men reacting, not always predictably, to extraordinary circumstances."

Working with new documents, a wealth of official and personal reports, and even interviews with the friends and family members of the Japanese commanders, Thomas has written a powerful account of this massive, all-important battle from a unique perspective.

Heydrich: The Face of Evil, by Mario Dederichs, Greenhill Books, St. Paul, MN, 2006, 240 pp., bibliography, index, $29.95, hardcover.

If evil could be personified, it likely would have taken the form of Reinhard Heydrich, a complex and contradictory figure. Tall, blond, athletic, musically gifted, a sensitive, loving father and husband, Heydrich was also as ruthless, scheming, calculating, and cold-blooded as anyone who ever wore the SS runes on his collar, for it was he who was the Third Reich's architect of the Holocaust.





Head of the much feared Reich Security Service (SD), Heydrich was given the post of "Protector of Bohemia and Moravia" in the conquered Czechoslovakia—and a cruel "protector" he was. In fact, so hated was he by those under his heel that he was marked for assassination by a group of Czech partisans. The group trained in England and was dropped by parachute into Czechoslovakia where, in May 1942, it succeeded in its mission, which turned out to be a suicide mission. As part of their retaliation, the Nazis leveled the Czech town of Lidice and murdered all its citizens.

There have been several comprehensive biographies of Heydrich, but Mario Dederichs's fine depiction burnishes new facets of the life and times of the man some have called "The Blond Beast." Dederichs, who passed away shortly after completing this manuscript, had access to Heydrich's widow's memoirs and was able to obtain rare interviews with his son and daughter, thus creating a more complete and personal portrait than ever before.

For those who wish to learn more about the workings of Hitler's inner circle, and the types of individuals who held the reins of power in the Third Reich, Dederichs's book provides a chilling glimpse into this frightening world.

Holding Juno: Canada's Heroic Defence of the D-Day Beaches: June 7-12, 1944, by Mark Zuehlke, Douglas & McIntyre, Vancouver, Canada, 424 pp., photographs, maps, bibliography, index, $29.95, hardcover.

There seem to be very few books devoted to Canada's considerable contributions to the war effort, but Mark Zuelke, the author of *Juno Beach* and *The Gothic Line,* has done much to fill this gap.

Operation Overlord, the invasion of France's Normandy coast (popularly known as D-Day), was a combined U.S.-British-Canadian operation—the most important of the war, from the West's viewpoint. It was the Canadians, landing at Juno Beach at Courseulles, between the British beaches of Gold and Sword, who made the deepest penetration of the day—six miles inland.

Although this drive toward the vital Carpiquet airport seemed spectacularly successful, the men of the 3rd Canadian Infantry Division knew the battle had just begun and that they would soon become the focus of a fearsome German counterattack. They were right.

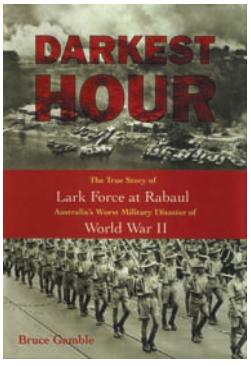
Very quickly the Germans began amassing tank, infantry, and artillery units with which to throw the Canadians back into the sea. If the 3rd Division could be defeated, a huge gap would be torn in the Allied landing force's tenuous hold on the beachhead. For six desperate and bloody days, the enemy smashed at the invaders with everything they had but, in the end, could not dislodge the Canadians. Although battered and bloodied, the Canadians held their ground and made possible the beginning of the advance across France toward Germany and the eventual Allied victory.

Basing *Holding Juno* on official archives, contemporary magazine and newspaper

accounts, and interviews with more than two dozen veterans, Zuehle has created as fine and readable a history of Canadian courage as one is likely to find.

Darkest Hour: The True Story of Lark Force at Rabaul, Australia's Worst Military Disaster of World War II, by Bruce Gamble, Zenith Press, St. Paul, MN, 304 pp., photographs, index, bibliography, $24.95, hardcover.

For whatever reason, far too few books about Australia's participation and heroic sacrifices in World War II make it to these shores. Had it not been for Bruce Gamble's remarkable history of Aussie courage at Rabaul, comparable at least with the American and Filipino doomed defense of Corregidor Island or the brave but futile U.S. stand at Wake Island, few Americans would know what went on there.



On January 23, 1942, an overwhelming force of some 20,000 Imperial Japanese Marines stormed ashore at Rabaul, located on the island of New Britain at the western end of the Solomon Islands, with the intent of seizing the island and turning Rabaul into a powerful naval base. Dug in to hold off the enemy were a mere 1,400 Australians. Hopelessly outmanned and outgunned, and without hope of reinforcement or rescue, the Aussies valiantly hung on and did their best to make every bullet count.

But it was no use. Although 380 men were able to escape the onslaught (but not the jungle-borne diseases that ravaged their numbers), the rest of the defenders were either killed or captured. As a further tragedy, 850 POWs and more than 200 civilian internees from Rabaul drowned when the Japanese ship transporting them to another island was torpedoed and sunk by an unknowing American submarine. It was the worst maritime disaster in Australian history.

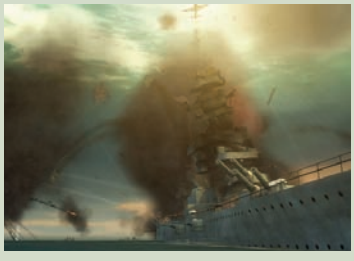
Author Gamble pored over forgotten files and official reports and conducted interviews with the handful of surviving veterans to craft this tragic, heroic story. A terrific tale about a little-known (to Americans) battle. □

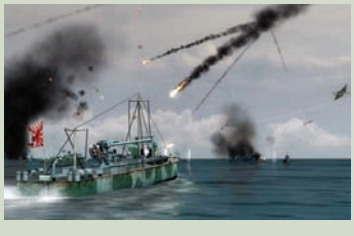
SIMULATION GAMING *By Eric T. Baker*

Refight the major battles of WWII on the Wii.

Early last year, Nintendo released a new game console with the unlikely name of Wii. Anyone reading this column has probably heard of it. In fact, anyone reading this column has probably considered buying one, at least for their kids. The thought that might be holding them back, however, could be, "Well, bowling and golf are all well and good, but can I refight many of the important battles of World War II on it?" Well, with the release of Electronic Arts' ***Metal of Honor: Vanguard***, the answer is an emphatic yes.

Everything that *MoHV* will do on the Wii, it will also do on the Playstation 2. The difference is the controls. *MoHV* is a first-person game where the player takes the role of Frank Keegan, a corporal of the 82nd Airborne. As the player wins battles, Frank rises in rank and responsibility, but the start of each battle (and they are the big ones: Market Garden, Husky, Neptune, Varsity, and so on) is the character parachuting (or glidering) in behind enemy lines and setting about making a ruckus. In fact, the player can start nearly anywhere on the battlefield, although green smoke flares indicate spots of particular advantage.





On either game, the player can direct Frank with the controller buttons in ways that are pretty standard now for run and shoot games of this type. On the Wii, players will also be able to direct Frank using simple, intuitive gestures. Flicks of the pointer control will make Frank jump, crouch, aim, reload, and spin about. It's fun. And while *MoHV* is not a hardcore simulation of WWII combat, it is an involving game with some very well modeled WWII tropes.

For players who don't have a Wii, but who picked up a 360 during the recent price drop or who still prefer their trusty PC for gaming, there is ***Battlestations: Midway*** from Eidos. Despite its name, the game actually models combat in several Pacific sea battles. This is a hybrid game where the players jump back and forth on the fly between controlling their whole fleet on a strategic screen and piloting individual units on a tactical one. For example, the game lets the player set the formation of the carrier group, pick the armament of the planes, and then jump into the cockpit of a fighter and lead the strike on the enemy before bouncing back to pilot a destroyer against a Japanese sub. It is a very fast-paced simulation where victory comes from properly combining arms.

Set in a World War II where Hitler died almost at the start, ***War Front: Turning Point*** from CDV Software is available only for the PC. The two different single-player campaigns use the real war as a frame, but the game's scifi take on the conflict with players harvesting resources and building bases in classic real-time strategy style as they also buy their way up the technology tree to not just super bombers and jet fighters, but power armored infantry and multiturreted tanks. It is a perfectly entertaining game for players who enjoy the RTS experience and who like alternate history. □

Continued from page 27

north. A sense of dread soon swelled through the ranks. The next day Easy Company and the rest of the 28th Regiment were thrown back into the horrific nightmare of combat in front of Nishi Ridge, an area strewn with large boulders and shallow, jagged ravines.

The enemy fought with fanatical stubbornness. Every yard won was paid for in blood. It was always the same scenario as before—rattling machine guns; charging, cursing Marines; flames; and screams of appalling agony. Sousley, Hayes, and Block were among maybe a half dozen men under Strank's command who came under a withering fire from a nest of Japanese snipers. Pinned down behind a formation of large, jagged rocks, which offered protection on three sides, their only opening was to the sea where American destroyers were laying down a heavy covering fire on Japanese positions.

"You know, Holly, that's going to be one hell of an experience," Mike dryly observed to one of his men while gazing upon a fallen comrade a few yards to their front. A moment later, their world exploded. Sousley and Block were knocked down by the blast but unhurt; a few others received serious head and chest wounds. All were stunned by the explosion. When the smoke cleared, everyone's worst nightmares were realized. There on the ground lay Strank, a hole blown right through his chest where his heart had been. As twilight settled on March 1, the 28th had gained a meager 300 yards. Block was killed by a mortar round late in the day.

On the same day, U.S. Congressman Joseph Hendricks of Florida rose from his seat in the House of Representatives and introduced a bill authorizing the construction of a monument. It would be a tribute "to the heroic action of the Marine Corps as typified by the Marines in this photograph. I have provided in the bill that this picture be a model for the monument because I do not believe any product of the mind of the artist could equal this photograph in action. Never have I seen a more striking photograph."

By the time the sun set, Nishi Ridge had finally fallen. Only after the battle was over did the Marines discover that it was as heavily fortified as Mount Suribachi. Just over 200 feet high and stretching nearly to the western shoreline, it featured 100 camouflaged cave entrances and was manned by 1,000 of Kuribayashi's best troops. Inside, the Marines found an elaborate tunnel network.

On March 5, 2nd Battalion was pulled back for a couple of days of rest. Halfway around the world, the latest edition of *Time* magazine hit the newsstands with the photograph on the cover along with the caption, "TO RANK WITH GETTYSBURG, VALLEY FORGE AND TARAWA."

Two days later, as Franklin and the shattered remnants of Easy Company headed back to the killing fields of northern Iwo Jima, Representative Mike Mansfield of Montana proposed on the House floor that the photograph be made the official symbol of the Seventh War Bond Tour.

On March 14, Iwo Jima was declared secure, although the Marines were still fighting pockets of resistance. Disabled American bombers were beginning to make emergency landings on the island, and by war's end 2,400 would find a haven there, saving the lives of 27,000 crewmen.

A total of 24,127 Marines had been lost so far, 4,189 killed in action, and 19,938 wounded. Iwo Jima had now become the deadliest battle in the Marine Corp's 168-year history. Admiral Chester W. Nimitz, commander in chief of the U.S. Navy in the Pacific, stated, "Uncommon valor was a common virtue."

For Sousley and Hayes, it had been a very hard time. In combat for 20 of the last 26 days, they were the two surviving Easy Company flag raisers. They had watched as their comrades, one by one, fell in battle.

On March 21, Sousley was killed in action. The bullet hit him square in the back and shattered his spine. His buddies dove for cover as Franklin swatted absently at his shirt, as if brushing away a fly, while collapsing. "How ya doin?" one shouted. "Not bad," Franklin replied, "I don't feel anything." And then he died.

The Kentucky farmboy turned factory worker, who had survived 30 days of combat and had been transformed from happy-go-lucky teenager into hardened combat veteran, lay dead. He never saw the famous photograph, never even knew of its existence. He was 19 years old.

Easy Company was pulled back from the front line three days later, just two days before the Battle of Iwo Jima reached its conclusion. Of the 310 men of Easy Company that hit the beach some 36 days previously, only 50 were left.

On Monday, April 9, a telegram bearing the awful news arrived in Hilltop, Kentucky. Word of Franklin's death soon raced like a wildfire through the countryside. Marian Hamm solemnly packed up all of Franklin's personal effects and walked them over to Goldie's house. Marian was still young and knew someday she would get over this tragic chapter in her life, but what about poor Goldie, what would she ever do? Her neighbors reported hearing Goldie's screams all through the night and into the next morning. Their home was a quarter-mile away.

The final toll at Iwo Jima staggers the imagination. Out of Chandler Johnson's 2nd Battalion, which numbered 1,688 men at its peak, only 177 walked off the island. In 36 days of battle, 25,851 Marines fell in combat. Of these, 6,821 died and were buried in a makeshift cemetery at the base of Mount Suribachi. Franklin was interred in Grave No. 2189, Mike Strank rested in Grave 694, and Harlon Block was buried in Grave 912. It took 10 years to have all the bodies exhumed and brought home to the United States.

Japanese losses were 21,000 killed; most were entombed underground in the same caves in which they fought and died. Only 1,000 survived to be taken prisoner. The last two defenders did not surrender until 1949.

Iwo Jima was perhaps the most ferocious battle our nation has ever fought. There were larger battles and longer fights, to be sure, but nothing quite like this eight square miles of lunar-like landscape. More medals for valor were awarded here than for any other conflict in U.S. history. One-third of the 84 Medals of Honor awarded the Marine Corps in all of World War II were earned on Iwo Jima.

John Bradley, Rene Gagnon, and Ira Hayes became national heroes and thus were the centerpiece of the Seventh War Bond Tour. Massive, cheering throngs greeted them wherever they went, large city or small. Ironically, they did not consider themselves heroes, and all were very public about it. The real heroes were those men who did not return, all their buddies who were still back there, still on the island. They were just part of an accidental photograph.

Franklin Runyon Sousley was buried in the Elizaville Cemetery on a beautiful, sunny Saturday morning, May 8, 1947. As the Marine escort gently lowered his body into its final resting place, local veterans fired a salute, and a lone bugler played taps. The governor of Kentucky stepped forward to hold Goldie's hand as she said her last goodbye to the son she loved so much. The grave was marked with a simple stone tablet. Forty years later, a group of Marine veterans took it upon themselves to raise funds for a new marker, this one befitting the man and those who served with him. □

First-time contributor Randall B. Ingram is the president of the Franklin R. Sousley-Iwo Jima Memorial Freedom Fund. He works in the General Motors facility in Dayton, Ohio, where Sousley was once employed. Ingram credits James Bradley's bestseller Flags of Our Fathers *with providing information for this story.*

splendid sight

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the Marauders patrolled the area and kept a constant vigil for any Japanese. Merrill and Hunter situated their forces to block the enemy from reinforcing their small garrison at Myitkyina. The 3rd Marauder Battalion blocked the north and northwest, while the 88th and 89th Chinese Regiments held a perimeter that ran from Charpate southwest to the railroad. The 2nd Marauder Battalion formed its lines between the railroad and Namkwi to the south. The 1st Marauder Battalion was protecting the airfield with the 150th Chinese Regiment, which also had the responsibility of defending the western side of the city.

Merrill disbanded H, K, and M Forces and had the Marauders stay in their own battalions under the command of Colonel Hunter, while the Chinese were to operate independently. When he arrived at the airstrip and saw his men, even Merrill remarked sympathetically, "[They] were pitiful but still a splendid sight."

When this was completed, however, Merrill sustained another heart attack and had to be evacuated. Command of the depleted Marauder battalions fell to Colonel John McCammon.

Even though the Allies had established blocking positions around Myitkyina, the Japanese were soon able to bolster their small force near the airfield with an additional 3,000 to 4,000 men from the surrounding villages. By the end of May, the enemy began offensive operations to retake the airdrome.

The reason for the rapid buildup of enemy forces was simple: the Marauders were spent both physically and emotionally. The medical report states, "Many of them were seriously ill and they were so tired, dirty, and hungry that they looked more dead than alive. They suffered from exhaustion, malnutrition, typhus, malaria, amebic dysentery, jungle sores, and many other diseases resulting from months of hardship in the tropical jungle."

Morale was also extremely low. In an article entitled "Burma Campaign Phase I," author C. Peter Chen noted, "The harsh conditions the Marauders fought in were made worse by their constant fighting in the jungles without adequate rest and recuperation. Colonel Hunter made a report of complaint to General Stilwell, noting that his men had been overworked.... Even promises that they would not be used as spearheads for Chinese troops were broken, as shown by the current campaign at Myitkyina. Nevertheless, the Marauders stayed in the campaign, and fought on valiantly."

On May 23, a company-size enemy force breached the 3rd Battalion's lines at Charpate. Visibility was made worse by a driving rain, and before the Marauders realized it, the enemy was within their lines.

Private First Class Stephen "The Russian" Komar was ripping into the attackers with his Thompson submachine gun when he was struck in the arm. He was draped with the intestines of one Japanese soldier as he continued firing. Hand-to-hand combat ensued, with a few Marauders being killed by enemy bayonet wounds. In the end, however, the defenders drove the enemy from their position. Five Marauders were killed and another six wounded while the Japanese sustained 15 dead and 35 wounded.

Soon, the Japanese occupied Namkwi and set out to rebuild their fortifications. Even with some replacements from engineer battalions, the Marauders were finished as an effective fighting force. Additional Chinese units arrived as the 2nd and 3rd Marauder Battalions were evacuated. Only the 1st Battalion, also a mere shell of its former self, remained at Myitkyina until August 3, when the town was finally wrestled from the Japanese.

Of the nearly 3,000 original Marauders, only 1,300 were there at the Myitkyina campaign. Of this, nearly 700 were evacuated during the last two weeks of May. By August 3, when the remnants of the Marauders finally left Myitkyina, only 200 were left. Disease and death had taken their toll. The Chinese lost 972 killed and 3,184 wounded. The Americans had 272 killed, 955 wounded, and 980 medically evacuated for various illnesses. The Japanese fared worse, losing over 3,000 men. The outfit received a Distinguished Unit Citation (renamed Presidential Unit Citation in 1966) for its outstanding service in the CBI Theater.

The Marauders tallied an impressive record in the nearly five months of jungle fighting in Burma. The unit history proudly states, "The attack on Myitkyina was the climax to four months of marching and combat in the Burma jungles. No other American force except the First Marine Division, which took and held Guadalcanal for four months, has had as much uninterrupted jungle fighting service as Merrill's Marauders. But no other American force anywhere had marched as far, fought as continuously or had to display such endurance, as the swift-moving, hard-hitting foot soldiers, of Merrill's Marauders." □

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