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Peashooter: P-39 Airacobra

Panzer Ghost Division

SEPTEMBER 2005

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Cover: A German anti-tank gun crew takes position during street fighting in Russia. (Photo: The Granger Collection, NY)

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FEATURES

COLUMNS

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Intrepid men and advancing technology defeated the U-boat menace.

The peril posed to the British Isles, and indeed the entire Allied cause, by the Nazi U-boat threat can scarcely be overstated. During the early months of World War II, it quickly became apparent that marauding wolfpacks of enemy submarines could potentially choke off the flow of supplies to Great Britain and eventually starve the island nation into submission.

The early days of the Battle of the Atlantic became a harrowing time for Allied merchant ships to attempt the hazardous crossing. With the fall of France in the summer of 1940, U-boat bases were established along the coast of France at such port cities as Lorient and St. Nazaire. Previously, the submarines had operated from German waters. Now, their range was greatly extended, and the number of sinkings increased at an alarming rate. From June to September, the U-boats sank more than 200 merchant ships totaling more than a million tons. The submariners would come to refer to this heady period of success as the Happy Time.

When the United States entered World War II, the nation was ill-prepared to defend against U-boats attacking shipping in American territorial waters. During Operation Drumbeat in the early months of 1942, U-boats sank more than 130 ships totaling over 800,000 tons off the East Coast of the United States. On several occasions, the brazen submarine commanders sank their prey in broad daylight and in full view of bathers along beaches from Florida to New York. The hunters also used the blazing lights of American cities to guide them.

The convoy system, however inadequate, remained the cornerstone of an effective defense strategy. With the introduction of the aircraft carrier, convoys were now provided much-needed air cover, and the sheer numbers of escort vessels also facilitated the formation of hunter-killer groups. Allied naval craft were actually able to take the offensive in antisubmarine warfare, turning the hunters into the hunted.

One significant technological advance was the introduction of a device that could detect the presence of submerged U-boats and pinpoint their positions. Known as "asdic" to the British and "sonar" to the Americans, the system involved a transmitting and receiving echo device enclosed in the underside of a ship's hull. During the war, the system was improved steadily, and eventually groups of ships were able to cover large areas of ocean to provide early warning of a U-boat's approach. Used in tandem with a compass, the system also indicated the location of the enemy vessel.

A high-frequency direction finder system, nicknamed Huff-Duff by British sailors, was deployed both on land and at sea. Huff-Duff exploited a weakness in German U-boat tactics. By detecting short coded messages sent between enemy U-boats and fixing on their positions, Huff-Duff gathered information that could serve to reroute convoys away from concentrating wolfpacks, and send hunter-killer groups or aircraft to attack the unsuspecting enemy.

When a suspicious contact was made, Allied naval vessels not only responded with patterns of depth charges rolled off the stern or fired by a Y-gun affixed to the deck, but also with an ingenious weapons system called Hedgehog. An improvement on the depth charge, Hedgehog involved the firing of 24 bomblets at a distance of up to 250 yards ahead of the ship. The bomblets fell in a wide oval pattern and were equipped with contact fuses. When a hit was scored, it usually meant the end of a U-boat.

In May 1943, losses reached such high levels that Admiral Karl Donitz withdrew his U-boats from the Atlantic temporarily.

By the end of the war, nearly 800 U-boats had been lost, and German submariners had suffered the highest percentage of casualties of any element of Germany's armed forces. In return, the Allies suffered mightily, losing more than 4,500 merchant vessels totaling 20 million tons of shipping. Victory in the Battle of the Atlantic proved to be essential in the ultimate defeat of Nazi Germany. □

Michael E. Haskew

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Dear Editors,

You have a great magazine. I enjoy every issue. You should include a "Recommended Reading" section with articles. For instance, with "A British Legend in Burma" in the March issue, you could have recommended *Burma* by Louis Allen, *The Chindit War* by Shelford Bidwell, and the recent *The Jungle War* by Gerald Astor. These are informative books that would be of value to everyone interested in the CBI.

Stuart Barratt
via email

We include a "Further Reading" sidebar with many of our feature stories.

Dieppe Raid

Dear Editors,

In August 2001, in the village of Momignies, Belgium I had the honor of meeting two veterans from the fighting at Dieppe: Ray Geoffrion and Paul Dumaine. Both men were at the village to dedicate a memorial to the Canadian POWs organized by the Foundation Belgo-Americaine. The train carrying the POWs stopped for eight hours at the Momignies train station where the train commander refused to let the locals give the men water or food. The wounded were given no aid during their slow journey to Germany. The sun was relentless in August and many men were driven to near insanity in their sealed boxcars. The train commander finally allowed the doors to be opened and the men received some water, milk, and bread. The Germans considered the Canadians terrorists and treated them roughly throughout most of their captivity. Geoffrion and Dumaine said they were kept in chains for 13 months. Just wanted to share.

Tom Larscheid
Tervuren, Belgium

Dear Editors,

I am a high school teacher in Ontario, Canada. I teach a 10th Grade Canadian history course, which includes world War II. I am an exceedingly proud and patriotic Canadian and I am once again dismayed to see the story of Dieppe told as a "tragic sacrifice" or a "learning experience." The simple facts are that the attack on Dieppe was, from the outset, planned as a large-scale commando raid and nothing more. It was not a fact-finding mission, and it was not planned as an experiment to see what would work in the event of the invasion of Hitler's Europe.

Unfortunately this has been the line fed to the Canadian (and world) public since the end of WWII. During the war, the raid was never explained as a trial run—only after the war, to calm and soothe those Canadian, American, and British families whose sons had been recklessly sent to their deaths. Canadian high school textbooks explain how so many important lessons were learned as a result of Dieppe—such as using battleships with 14 or 16-inch guns instead of tiny Hunt-class destroyers (with 4.7-inch guns) for shore bombardment. Many, if not all, of the items that were allegedly learned from the failure of Dieppe were clearly seen in the invasions of North Africa, Sicily, and Italy, to say nothing of what the United States was learning in its many Pacific landings. Certainly the massive casualties at Tarawa are not explained away as a learning

experience for Iwo Jima or Okinawa.

It it time to admit that Dieppe was a tragic failure due to poor planning and poor intelligence. Dieppe was a blunder—D-day was a success. The only direct links between the two are that the same nations were involved and both occurred on French beaches. Anything else is a disgraceful coverup or glossing over of the sacrifices and losses of those men who stepped onto the stony beaches of Dieppe.

Andrew Frise
Orangeville, Ontario

Dear Editors,

I enjoy each issue of *WW II History* and read every article. Michael D. Hull's article brought back memories when he told of the 504th and 505th Parachute Infantry Regiments jumping in support of the Salerno, Italy beachhead. I was in the 601st Tank Destroyer Battalion "C" Company and we had fought our way into the mountains off the beachhead. We were out in front without any infantry support. I will never forget the beautiful sight to see those parachutes come down among us. They passed through our position and set up defenses to our front—what a relief that was to us. Our battalion had landed on the Salerno beachhead in support of the 36th Infantry Division. Thanks to Mr. Hull for a great article about the paratroopers. Keep up the fine work publishing the stories that mean so much to so many of us.

Bill R. Harper
Richardson, Texas

Peleliu

Dear Editors,

I am 13-years-old and I just read your article in Volume 4, No. 3. The article "Shocked Beyond Imagination" was very interesting. Seeing how the USMC was planning to lay siege to Peleliu and watching their strategy crumble to dust was hard to stop reading. The thing that was most shocking was the picture of the marine who had his entire left side bloody and skinned from battle. I know many 13-year-olds aren't interested in history, but I like to read *WW II History* because it covers a lot of parts of WW II that aren't mentioned in many books or websites that I've seen.

Ryan Witkowski
Mayfield, Missouri

We're glad you liked our story on the Battle of Peleliu. We agree that the painting by Tom Lea, based on what he saw when he landed with the Marines, is shocking. We felt that this painting, though disturbing, truly captured the horror of the landing. While we try to avoid running unnecessarily grotesque images, we don't want to avoid acknowledging the often grim reality of human conflict.

Dear Editors,

At the edge of the Hurtigen Forest in a small German military cemetery is a rather unusual marker. This monument was placed there on the 50th anniversary of the battle, donated by the 22nd Infantry Society, in honor of a German officer who died trying to help a wounded American soldier.

In January 1945 I was assigned to the 7th Artillery Battalion. My battery headquarters was at that time about two miles from the village of Hurtigen.

George W. Boving
Carroll, Ohio

WWII History welcomes your letters which must be signed and include a telephone number for verification. If your letter is published, only name, city, and state will appear; telephone numbers will not be published. Letters must be brief and of general interest to our readership. Write to *WWII History*, 453 B Carlisle Drive, Herndon, VA 20170; fax to 703-964-0366 or e-mail cdamore@sovhomestead.com.

Nicknamed "Peashooter," the P-39 Airacobra was maligned by many.

BY SAM MCGOWAN

In this painting by Jack Fellows, P-39s flown by Major George Greene, Jr., (foreground) and "Buzz" Wagner take on Japanese Zeros over the Salamaua Peninsula.

IF THERE IS AN AMERICAN COMBAT AIRPLANE THAT HAS ACHIEVED AN ILL-DESERVED REPUTATION, no doubt it would be the much-maligned Bell P-39 Airacobra, a tricycle landing gear single-engine fighter whose reputation was greatly overshadowed by the more famous, and of more recent design, Lockheed P-38 Lightning, Curtiss P-40 Tomahawk, Republic P-47 Thunderbolt, and North American P-51 Mustang.

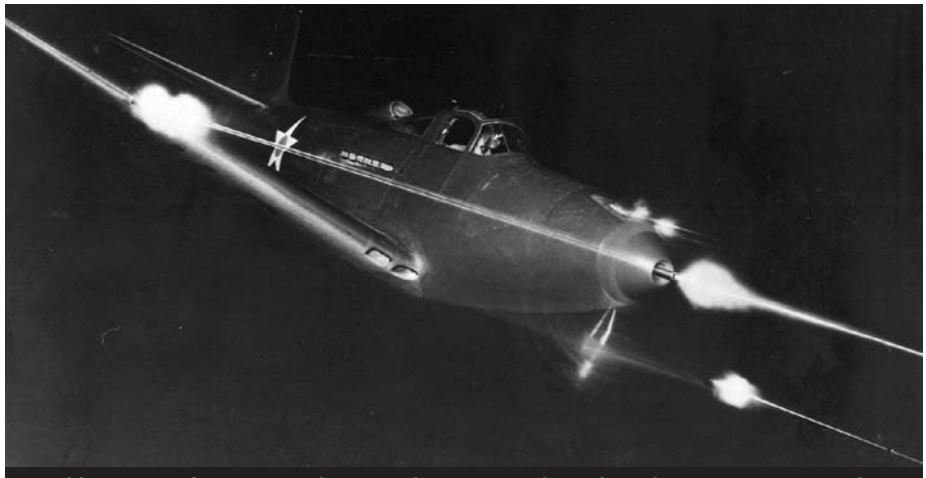
In the minds of some, the P-39 was a practically worthless airplane, with few redeeming features. They consider the nickname used by P-39 pilots—Peashooter—a term of derision that implies the airplane's effectiveness as a fighter. But the P-39's many detractors ignore the reputation of the Airacobra with the Soviet Air Force, and the important role it played in the Southwest Pacific Area of Operations in 1942, when P-39s were the only fighters available, thanks at least in part to the decision not to use them in large numbers in the European Theater. And if considering overall capabilities instead of concentrating solely on certain features, the P-39 comes off as a capable fighter.

While it is true that the P-39 lacked the high altitude performance needed to excel as an interceptor, it had other attributes that made it a successful combat airplane. When Bell Aircraft was designing the single-engine fighter, U.S. defense plans centered around the possibility of repelling naval attacks and possible landings on American shores. Little attention was paid to the high altitude performance needed to intercept formations of enemy bombers, because the Atlantic and Pacific Oceans provided the best possible defense from foreign attack. No country possessed the capabilities of mounting a transoceanic air attack in 1935, and the United States had yet to seriously consider the possibility of combat in Europe or around what would come to be known as the Pacific Rim.

Consequently, the U.S. Army wanted airplanes that were more suitable for attacking invading ground forces and/or naval landing parties than for intercepting enemy formations at high altitude. So, Bell designed its new interceptor around the Allison V-1710 engine without turbochargers—even though the engine in the prototype was turbocharged—and concentrated more on low altitude maneuverability and firepower than high altitude or climb performance.

Thus, the Airacobra featured short wings that allowed it to turn on a dime but greatly reduced its climb performance due to their overall area. Its best speed of 368 miles per hour was reached at 13,800 feet. At higher altitudes, performance began to degrade rapidly and the airplane had reached its maximum ceiling by the mid-20s range. Unfortunately, developing events in Europe were soon dictating air combat at altitudes over 30,000 feet.

The P-39 was also unique. Not only was it the first operational tricycle landing gear single-engine fighter, it was the only U.S. manufactured military airplane with the engine located in the center of the fuselage instead of in the nose. The P-39's pilot actually sat in front of the engine, directly over a drive shaft that was modified so that a 37mm cannon fired through the propeller hub. It was this feature that led to the peashooter nickname, a term that was already in wide use in the Army Air Corps long before P-39s entered combat in the Southwest Pacific. The cannon was an effective weapon that could be deadly against bombers and ground targets, although the 37mm shell was a bit small to do much damage to heavier armored vehicles such as larger tanks.



National Archives

A P-39 bearing U.S. markings lets loose with a barrage of lead from its wing and nose mounted cannons. The P-39 was heavily armed and could be a formidable foe to targets both on the ground and in the air.

Additional armament consisted of a pair each of .30-caliber machine guns mounted on top of the nose, synchronized to fire through the propeller blades. Two .50-caliber machine guns were added in the wings for combat. The Airacobra's armament was eventually increased to six .50-caliber machine guns, two on the nose and two in each wing, and the 37mm cannon, a powerful package that made the P-39 an ideal ground attack airplane. Hard points were added to allow the Airacobra to carry bombs. But it was not in the ground attack role that P-39s initially saw service.

The Airacobra was one of the first American fighters to be exported; an export version designated as the P-400 was produced for delivery to British forces, who called it the Airacobra I. The first P-400s were produced to fill a French order, but none had been delivered before France fell. Britain picked up the French orders for American aircraft, including the P-400. Compared to the P-39, the P-400 was lightly armed, with only a 20mm cannon and two .30-caliber machine guns mounted in the wings instead of on the nose. Beginning in October 1941, Royal Air Force fighter squadrons operated P-400s for a short time, but they were soon withdrawn from combat due to their lack of high altitude performance.

After having become accustomed to high altitude combat during the Battle of Britain, the RAF pilots were not impressed with the Airacobra, and the airplane's disparaging reputation began (or at least that is the point at which some historians have decided it was a worthless airplane. Actually, many of the pilots who flew the P-39 thought it a joy to fly.)

When the Japanese attacked Pearl Harbor, the U.S. took over the British contract. A large number of reclaimed P-400s saw service with U.S. Army Air Corps squadrons that were sent to Australia, where they proved inadequate as interceptors, while others served in North Africa. The Airacobra's problems were due to the combination of the design's short wings and the lack of a supercharged engine, which kept it from attaining more than medium altitudes.

Instead of electing to correct the problems and trying to turn the Airacobra into a high altitude interceptor, the United States Army decided to forego the addition of superchargers since new, high performance fighters such as the P-47 and P-38 were entering production. Those who flew the P-39 and P-400 would have to take them into combat as they were.

Airacobras went into combat without modifications that might have made them more suitable as interceptors for another reason. Along with Curtis P-40s, they were the only American-built fighters available in large numbers in early 1942 that were not obsolete, and they were badly needed in the Pacific.

Immediately after Pearl Harbor, the Army Air Corps began dispatching Airacobra-equipped squadrons to Australia. The 35th Pursuit Group had actually set sail for Manila two days before the attack on Pearl Harbor, and the men of two of its squadrons were already there flying P-40s, but no Airacobras had reached the Philippines before the December 8 attack (the "pursuit" designation was changed to "fighter" when the Army Air Forces reorganized in early 1942).

After the attack the group headquarters returned to the U.S. for a few weeks, but was in place in Australia shortly after the first of the year. Many of the pilots who had gone to the Philippines rejoined the group there. The 35th Group's squadrons began equipping with P-400s that had been delivered from the United States by ship and went into training for combat. The 8th Pursuit Group also moved to Australia and its P-39s were soon operating from forward bases in New Guinea. Those two groups, along with the P-40 equipped 49th Pursuit Group, would constitute the nucleus of the soon-to-be-famous V Fighter Command, which would ultimately gain air superiority in the Southwest Pacific. But with the Airacobras, the pilots of the two groups would be at a distinct disadvantage in their initial role as interceptors.

Early on, the Army planned to send Airacobras to England with the Eighth Air Force, and two P-39 groups were assigned to it in early 1942 when the Eighth was organized. At the time, the planned mission of the Eighth Air Force was to support the Allied landings in North Africa that were scheduled for later in the year.

The Allied defeat in Java, followed by the threat to the United States as the Japanese fleet steamed toward Midway Island, led to a cancellation of the planned invasion, although a revised plan was reinstated after the U.S. victory at Midway. The new Eighth Air Force lost most of its combat groups to the Pacific, then was selected to reorganize and go to England as the British Isles Air Force.

Two groups, the 31st and 52nd, trained with P-39s, but the problem of flying the single-engine fighters across the North Atlantic led to a decision to send the pilots and ground personnel to England by ship and to leave their airplanes behind. When they got to England, the two groups re-equipped with British Supermarine Spitfires. The lightweight Spitfires cost considerably less than the more rugged Airacobras. Another group, the 81st Fighter Group equipped with P-39s and former RAF P-400s in England, then deployed to North Africa, as did the 68th Observation Group. The 99th Fighter Squadron, the original Tuskegee Airmen, trained in the United States with P-39s before going overseas and flew them in combat in North Africa and the Mediterranean.

By mid-March 1942, ninety P-39s and more than 100 of the P-400 derivative had been shipped to Australia. The P-39s went to the 8th Fighter Group while the 35th, which was reorganizing in Australia with pilots who had come out of the Philippines, received the P-400s. Five squadrons of P-39s were also distributed across the South Pacific, with squadrons at Fiji, Christmas Island, Canton, New Caledonia, and Palmyra. Four of the five

squadrons, the 67th, 68th, 70th, and 339th, would be formed into the 347th Fighter Group in October 1942, with the group headquarters on New Caledonia until it moved to Guadalcanal late in 1943. Another squadron of P-39s was part of the 18th Fighter Group. Some South Pacific squadrons would still be flying P-39s in early 1944. A P-39 squadron was also dispatched to Alaska. But it would be in New Guinea that P-39s would enter combat, and it was there and in the nearby Solomons that they would play their greatest role with U.S. forces.

In the spring of 1942, the mission of Allied air forces in the Southwest Pacific was the defense of Australia. Immediately upon his arrival there from the Philippines, General Douglas MacArthur decided that the battle line should be drawn in New Guinea. The original Allied plan had been to withdraw south of a line in Central Australia and organize a defense of the more populated southern half of the country, but the idea of giving up more territory to the Japanese was anathema to MacArthur.

The loss of the Philippines had affected him deeply, and his every effort was devoted to offense, rather than a continuing retreat deep into Australia. He elected to defend Australia by holding the line in New Guinea until he had sufficient strength to go on the offensive and drive the Japanese off the huge island. While the 49th Fighter Group took its P-40s to Darwin, which had come under Japanese air attack from Java, an advanced echelon of the 8th Fighter Group moved its P-39s in April into Port Moresby on the south coast of Papua, New Guinea, and immediately began combat operations.

Although the pilots of the 8th Fighter Group were flying an airplane that lacked the performance to meet the Japanese at high altitude, their P-39s could hold their own at the lower altitudes and they were led by pilots with combat experience in the Philippines—where Army Air Corps pilots and gunners had destroyed as many Japanese aircraft in the air and on the ground as had been lost. Lieutenant Colonel Boyd "Buzz" Wagner was one such commander.

National Archives

ABOVE: Though the P-39 lacked high-altitude capabilities, its short wingspan and tight turning radius made it particularly effective when used in a ground support role. BELOW: Sporting Red Air Force markings, this P-39 Airacobra is typical of the approximately 5,000 such fighters supplied to the Soviets during the Lend-Lease program by way of Alaska.

As a young lieutenant flying P-40s, he had quickly achieved a reputation for aggressive action in daring attacks on Japanese airfields in the first weeks of the war. An aeronautical engineer by training, he knew the capabilities of the Japanese fighters as well as those of his own aircraft, and his skill and knowledge quickly put itself to good use in New Guinea.

On the afternoon of April 30, 1942, Wagner led a formation of 26 Airacobras on their first combat mission, a strafing of the Japanese airfields and fuel dumps at Lae and Salamaua. They encountered Japanese fighters and engaged in an intense dogfight. Four P-39s were lost, but the Americans claimed three Japanese fighters shot down. Unfortunately, the losses were especially severe since eleven P-39s had failed to reach Port Moresby during the flight up from Australia and every airplane was badly needed. But there was a bright spot—all of the P-39 pilots were rescued and only one was seriously injured. In two months of combat in New Guinea, the 39th squadron shot down 12 Japanese aircraft for a loss of nine of their own—but did not lose a single pilot. The only serious injury came when a pilot bailed out at high speed and struck his airplane's surface.

Intercepting incoming Japanese bomber formations was the pressing concern of the force at Port Moresby, but the P-39s and P-400s that constituted the bulk of the air defenses lacked the performance to reach the 22,000-foot altitudes at which the Japanese bombers came over in time to intercept them. It was not that the Airacobras were vulnerable to Japanese fighters. They simply lacked the climb performance to reach the altitudes at which the Japanese were operating!

During the month of July, P-39s only managed to intercept the Japanese formations four times during nine air raids. The P-40s had somewhat better high-altitude performance and attempted to intercept the Japanese formations, but most of their efforts were equally unsuccessful due to a lack of time to gain enough altitude. Furthermore, the P-40s of the 49th Fighter Group were needed to defend Darwin, which was becoming a major Allied base. So, the fighter role in New Guinea remained the responsibility of the P-39s.

If the Japanese dropped to lower altitudes, the P-39s were more than up to the task of knocking them down, but a more effective method was to catch the enemy aircraft on the ground and take advantage of the P-39's cannon and machine guns in strafing attacks. The P-400s were particularly ineffective as interceptors due to their lack of heavy armament, but with racks for bombs they were well suited for ground attack. On August 8, a 32-plane formation struck Japanese supply dumps on the north side of the Owen Stanley Mountains in one of the first ground attack missions in the theater.

On August 22, an advance element from the 67th Fighter Squadron arrived at Henderson Field on Guadalcanal with five P-400s. The remainder of the squadron arrived five days later, and the Army pilots began operations under the control of Marine Aircraft Wing One and became part of the Cactus Air Force. After initially attempting to intercept Japanese aircraft, the squadron only had three airplanes still in commission after only four days of operations.

Amber Books Ltd.

National Archives

A pair of Bell P-39s wing their way to Africa during Operation Torch.

Recognizing that the Army P-400s were attempting a mission beyond the airplane's capabilities, the Marines changed the squadron's mission to ground attack. Soon the P-400s were doing everything but fighting at high altitude, including strafing, dive bombing, and attacking Japanese shipping. The P-400s did possess one advantage over the Navy and Marine fighters at Henderson Field. They were able to take off in mud that kept the other types on the ground.

Unfortunately, this ability did little good in the mission of intercepting Japanese bombers at high altitude, but it did allow the P-400s to provide close air support for the soldiers and Marines fighting the Japanese on the ground when the Marine and Navy aircraft could not. A handful of P-39s were brought onto the island to supplement the P-400s and Marine fighters, but even though they were able to operate at higher altitudes than the P-400s, they were still unable to reach the Japanese bombers, which were operating at 30,000 feet.

By December, there were three squadrons of P-39s and P-400s on the island, and they joined Marine Douglas SBD Dauntless dive bombers in attacks on Japanese ground troops and supply areas. Marine records reported that in one instance "P-39s harassed the enemy all day." In addition to strafing and dropping conventional bombs, the P-39s also began delivering "gasoline bombs," which would come to be known as napalm. P-39s continued to play a large role in the Solomons Campaign throughout 1943 and were still active when AirSolomons assumed responsibility for the destruction of Rabaul from Fifth Air Force in early 1944.

In September 1942, a new weapon appeared just over the treetops of Papua, New Guinea, a weapon that led to a change in tactics by the Fifth Air Force that took advantage of the low-altitude fighting capabilities of its P-39s and P-400s. In July, the first of the Douglas A-20 Havoc light bombers that were to equip the 3rd Bombardment Group (Light) arrived in Australia. Modifications were soon made to the A-20s, including the addition of a package of .50-caliber machine guns in the nose, so that they could be used in the ground attack role rather than as a light bombers.

On September 12, 1942, the A-20s made their combat debut in an attack on the Japanese airfield at Buna. The results of the attack were so impressive that low altitude attack became the stock in trade of the V Bomber Command.

Previously, V Bomber Command light and medium bombers had attacked at comparatively high altitudes, but the new low level tactics called for low altitude fighter escorts, and this was a task for which the Airacobras were well suited. The low altitude attacks on Japanese airfields and other installations forced the Japanese fighters to come down to the lower altitudes where the P-39s could meet them on their own terms. Several of the Fifth Air Force aces, including Captain Tommy Lynch, got their first kills while flying P-39s. The Airacobras added to the carnage of the attack missions by coming in on the heels of the A-20s to strafe with their own guns and powerful cannons.

Another frequent P-39 mission was providing escort for Fifth Air Force troop carrier transports. Immediately upon arriving in Australia, General Kenney began advocating the use of transport aircraft to move troops into battle in forward areas and to keep them supplied. In mid-1942 Japanese troops landed at Buna, beating the Allies to the punch, and Australian troops opposed their southward advance toward Port Moresby along the Kokoda Track. Fifth Air Force transports kept the Australians supplied, and they were protected from Japanese fighters by the P-39s.

In mid-1943, Kenney decided to establish a forward airfield at Tsili-Tsili using troop carrier transports to bring in construction crews and supplies. The C-47 transports which executed the mission were escorted by P-39s. When Japanese fighters attacked a flight of C-47s as they were preparing to land at the new airfield with maintenance personnel from a fighter squadron, P-39s broke up the attack. Throughout 1942 and 1943, the escort of transports operating in forward areas was a major mission of the P-39s.

Late December 1942 saw the appearance of a new fighter in the Southwest Pacific, and a consequential change in tactics by V Fighter Command. Although several Lockheed P-38 Lightnings had been in Australia since late summer, the twin-engine fighters required extensive modification to make them suitable for combat. Then followed several dry weeks as the Japanese refused to engage them. During the U.S. Christmas holiday week, the P-38s had their first combat with the Japanese and very quickly demonstrated that the Allied air forces now had a fighter that could meet the Japanese on their own terms and defeat them.

With the advent of the P-38, the P-39s were relieved of the frustrating duty of attempted intercept and were able to devote their attention to the ground attack and low altitude escort missions for which they were so well suited. They were also able to fight the Japanese fighters and bombers when the P-38s drove them down to lower altitudes. Still, the Airacobra's days with V Fighter Command were numbered. As more P-38s and P-47s became available for duty in the Southwest Pacific, P-39s were replaced. By mid-1944, most of the former P-39 squadrons had converted to P-38s.

The introduction of American-flown Airacobras to combat in Europe lacked the urgency with which the 8th Pursuit Group went to New Guinea in April 1942. Shortly after the attack on Pearl Harbor, President Franklin Roosevelt and Prime Minister Winston Churchill agreed to defeat Germany first, while fighting a holding action in the Pacific. Unlike the Pacific, where Japanese forces continued to advance until the late summer of 1942, the advance of Axis forces in Europe had been halted, and the Allied plan was to begin an offensive designed to push them back into Germany.

There was an abundance of British Hawker Hurricanes and Spitfires with the capability to intercept German and Italian bomber

formations while the U.S. Army Air Forces built up its strength in England in advance of the invasion of North Africa. Airacobras saw action in North Africa, mostly in the ground attack role. The 81st Fighter Group, equipped with a mixture of P-39s and P-400s in England in the summer of 1942, then flew to North Africa in December.

Although the British had not been impressed with the P-400 export version of the Airacobra, the P-39 had capabilities that the Soviet Air Force leaders were looking for. Having been in constant ground combat since June 1941 when Hitler elected to stab Stalin in the back and launch his invasion of the Soviet Union, the principal role of the Soviet Air Force had become ground attack, the role for which the Airacobra had been designed. Deliveries to the Soviets began in the late summer of 1942, when fifty P-39s were part of a consignment of Lend-Lease aircraft that were delivered to Soviet ferry pilots at Fairbanks, Alaska.

The United States Army Ferrying Command had been established before the U.S. entered the war to ferry American-built airplanes from the factories to delivery points where they were picked up by pilots from the receiving countries or loaded aboard ships for overseas delivery. Deliveries to the Soviet Union had been difficult due to enemy action and the harsh desert conditions around the Persian Gulf, where ships with Soviet supplies were routed. It was possible to fly the Airacobras overland from the United States to Alaska, then across the Bering Sea to Siberia and on into the Soviet interior.

However, there were international issues that had to be worked out. The Soviets were not anxious to have American aircrews operating in the areas of their country that were in close proximity to territory held by the Japanese, with whom the Soviets remained neutral. After months of frustrating negotiations, the U.S. Army and the Soviets worked out an arrangement under which Soviet pilots, some of whom were women, would pick up U.S.-built airplanes in Alaska, then deliver them to combat units in the Soviet interior.

The Ferrying Division of the Air Transport Command, which replaced the Ferrying Command in mid-1942, developed a route from St. Louis to airfields in Alaska. Other departure points were developed as the war continued. More than 5,000 P-39s were ultimately delivered to the Soviets, with the majority of them delivered via the Alaska route.

With the increasing role of the P-38s and P-47s in combat in the Southwest Pacific, the need for the P-39s in the theater gradually diminished as more of the newer and more capable fighters came into operation. The War Production Board elected to discontinue P-39 production in favor of other types. The last P-39s rolled off the assembly lines at the Bell plants in western New York in August 1944, and the last of the type was delivered to the Soviet Air Force in September. By this time the former P-39 squadrons in the South and Southwest Pacific were making the transition to P-38s or P-47s.

The poor high-altitude performance of the P-39 led Bell to seek improvements in the type. In December 1942, the prototype P-63 Kingcobra made its maiden flight. With a slightly larger tail, a four-bladed propeller, and a more powerful engine than the P-39, the P-63 had significantly better performance than its predecessor. But by the time the P-63 entered production, the U.S. Army Air Forces were concentrating on P-38s, P-47s and P-51s and were not interested in the Kingcobra as a combat airplane. Consequently, the Soviet Air Force was its primary user. The first P-63s were delivered to the Soviets in June 1944, but the Soviets were not happy with the airplane and requested several design changes, including the installation of a ventral fin to improve lateral stability.

Many modern writers lament the "poor performance" of the P-39, but without placing their observations in the proper context. Compared to the later models and to other aircraft such as the British Spitfire that had been designed for high altitude operations, the P-39 was severely lacking if only considered in the context of the interceptor role. However, as a ground attack aircraft it was a very effective airplane, and it could more than hold its own in air-to-air combat at low altitude. The Airacobra's reputation as an extremely rugged little airplane whose pilots usually survived when one was shot down is often overlooked.

Although its lack of high-altitude performance hampered the P-39's effectiveness as an interceptor, it is important to remember that the Airacobras literally held the line in New Guinea against the Japanese in the summer and fall of 1942. By the end of that year, the slightly more capable Curtiss P-40s could be moved up from Darwin and the Lockheed P-38 finally entered combat and began turning the tide of war. And the Russians loved the rugged little fighter. □

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Frederic John Walker turned the tables on the German U-boat menace.

BY ROBERT BARR SMITH

On this writer's desk sits a small, pewter mug, dented and somewhat battered. It is neatly engraved, and the lettering reads: "Wardroom H.M.S. *Harrier*, presented by Q.N. 20 Course June 1956. 'Tally Ho Pounce.'"

The little mug is a souvenir of one of the endless series of tactical exercises the Royal Navy runs year in, year out. This endless and exacting practice is one of the reasons nobody knows more about, among other operations, anti-submarine warfare than the men who serve under the White Ensign. Such expertise comes of hard practice and long tradition, and it owes much to a single storied British captain, the man, many say, who had more to do with destroying Hitler's U-boat menace than any other single officer. His name was Frederic John Walker.

Walker, inevitably called Johnny, was a professional naval officer who began his maritime education at the Royal Naval College, Dartmouth, when he had just turned 14. He served at sea during the First World War, and afterward became deeply interested in a new area of naval warfare, the battle against submarines. In spite of repeated assignments to the big ships of the navy between the wars, he kept his interest in anti-submarine tactics and in 1937, as a commander, he was assigned as experimental commander at the Anti-Submarine School at Portland, where he worked on anti-submarine tactics and weaponry.

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A plume of water shoots skyward as a German U-boat is struck by a barrage of depth charges and "Hedgehog" bombs.

There is some indication that Walker's uninspiring assignments between the wars produced some less-than-glowing reports by his seniors, and even that he was due for early retirement as the clouds of World War II loomed on the horizon. In view of his astonishing achievements at sea during the war, it may well be that what his seniors saw before the war was an outspoken officer bored and frustrated in a series of, to him, meaningless assignments. For once Walker came into his own at sea during the war, his record was nothing short of spectacular. He was not only promoted to captain but also awarded extra time-in-grade to make up for whatever delay in promotion his earlier reports may have cost him.

With the outbreak of World War II and the German U-boat offensive, the Royal Navy, committed all over the world, had far too few escort vessels both to protect the vital Atlantic convoys and to screen the heavy ships of the fleet. In the first three months of war, the German submarine service sank more than 400,000 tons of merchant shipping, losing only nine boats of its own. In June 1940, alone, as the Royal Navy lost more escort vessels lifting the British Expeditionary Force from the beaches of Dunkirk, the U-boats sank almost 600,000 tons more. At that rate, or anything close to it, the merchant fleet would be destroyed in time, and Britain would be starved out of the war.

Walker got his chance at last in the fall of 1941, when he was appointed to the command of the 1,200-ton *Bittern*-class sloop HMS *Stork*, and to the leadership of 36th Escort Group. Walker was a driver, as most good commanders are, and his crews and captains trained exhaustively ashore at first. His commanders learned his system of command

during an attack, based on pre-arranged codes designed to catch a U-boat in the ship's asdic (sonar) and hold it there. "Buttercup astern," for example, told the ships of the group precisely what maneuver to execute and the direction in which to do it. With experience, Walker's captains could almost read his mind, and operations were carried out with a minimum of terse messages between ships.

Again and again, Walker rehearsed his ships in various patterns of attack. The group would have particular success with what they called the "creeping attack," a technique for dealing with a U-boat which had dived deep to escape the hunters. One ship, usually the senior commander on the scene, would trail the submarine by 1,500–2,000 yards, keeping contact by asdic. (The British term for sonar, asdic, is somewhat ponderously derived from Anti-Submarine Detection Investigation Committee). A second warship would then move very slowly over the submarine without using her own asdic, directed by the first ship. On order, she would drop a preordained depth charge pattern, then go to high speed and clear the area. The directing ship would close in right behind her, dropping her own preset pattern.

The creeping attack insured that the first assault would come without warning because the enemy would not pick up the asdic of the first ship right above her. The U-boat skipper would know he was under attack only when the first depth charges exploded around him and would have no time to take evasive action.

When there were enough escorts present, the senior officer might order a variation called the "plaster attack." In this similar technique, three escorts cruised slowly over the submarine in line abreast, directed by a fourth vessel behind them. The three then attacked together on order, the middle ship centered over the quarry. A sudden sharp turn by the submarine, either right or left, would bring the boat directly under more depth charges.

Officers and asdic operators trained on the attack trainer, a simulator that would duplicate the conditions they would encounter at sea. The all-important depth charge crews drilled with their awkward 500-pound charges ashore until they could meet Walker's exacting standard. They had 10 seconds to reload after dropping the last round of charges, a colossal task on dry land, let alone on a pitching deck in a heavy sea. Gun crews were expected to get off six rounds within 30 seconds of acquiring the target.

Before December was out, Walker and his little ships were at sea, covering homeward-bound convoy HG76, consisting of 31

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The HMS *Starling* steams its way through the waters of the Atlantic.

freighters and a fleet auxiliary bound for England out of Gibraltar. Besides his own *Stork*, Walker's escort group included the older sloop *Deptford* and seven *Flower*-class corvettes: *Marigold*, *Rhododendron*, *Convolulus*, *Penstemon*, *Gardenia*, *Vetch*, and *Samphire*. In addition, for part of the way the escorts would be reinforced by three destroyers, including the ex-U.S. Navy four-stacker *Stanley*—and out ahead of the convoy were four more destroyers temporarily detached from Force H, based at Gibraltar.

The Royal Navy corvette deserves a mention here, for these little warships were the backbone of the convoy escorts, particularly early in the war. They carried depth charges, a single four-inch gun, a two-pounder antiaircraft cannon, when one was available, and an assortment of machine guns, some of them World War I-vintage Lewis guns. Later versions got a couple of 20mm Oerlikon antiaircraft guns as well.

Like other escort vessels, many were later fitted with the hedgehog spigot mortar, an ingenious device developed in 1941 by the British office aptly named the Department of Miscellaneous Weapons Development. The hedgehog was a simple device: a divided box filled with 24 missiles that looked like oversized rifle grenades. As the warship charged down on an asdic contact ahead, the hedgehog threw salvos of bombs filled with Torpex high explosive some 250 yards forward of the ship. They had no preset pistols to fire them as depth charges did; they would explode on contact at any depth.

Originally designed as coastal escort vessels, the corvettes could manage no more than 16 knots flat out. They were tiny vessels of shallow draft and short length, and therefore given to rolling and pitching horribly in any kind of sea. They were "wet" as well, sailor's language for any ship that took heavy seas on board when the going got rough. As with other escorts, privacy was almost nonexistent, sleep sparse and interrupted, and other comforts rare. Seizing an apparently quiet moment for a wash, Walker's executive officer, Lieutenant J. Filleul, ran to action stations, as a newspaper told the tale, "with his shirt in one hand and his trousers in the other."

Life aboard a corvette was especially spartan and rough. That exacting, draining duty was superbly described in Nicholas Montsarrat's *The Cruel Sea*, a tale of life on the corvette *Compass Rose*. The little ships were quick to construct, however, and helped fill the desperate need for escort vessels. Altogether, more than 200 *Flower*-class corvettes were built.

In retrospect, the battle that developed around convoy HG76 would prove to be, in Winston Churchill's words, the "end of the beginning" of the U-boats' domination of the Atlantic trade routes. It would mark the advent of new tactics for the defenders of the convoys. The passage north past Spain and Portugal, skirting the deadly Bay of Biscay, was bound to be contested. Axis agents could watch the convoy forming up at Gibraltar, and long-range Luftwaffe reconnaissance aircraft out of France could shadow the convoy all the way, calling in packs of submarines as the convoy worked its way north.

The Focke-Wulf 200C Kondor was the Luftwaffe's primary maritime reconnaissance and bombing aircraft, with a substantial range of about 2,300 miles. The Kondor carried a cannon in one top turret, a machine gun in a second, and more guns in her waist and in a peculiar cylindrical bomb bay set a little off center to starboard in her belly. During the long trip north, Walker and his captains could count on the regular presence of relays of these four-engined shadows.

Thus far, the concept of convoy protection had been, of necessity, essentially what it was in the latter days of World War I: defensive in nature, a perimeter of escorts shielding the precious merchantmen, trying to keep attacking submarines away from the relatively slow and vulnerable cargo ships and tankers. On this voyage, however, Captain Walker was to employ his own revolutionary notions of offensive protection, sending his warships ranging far out from the convoy to strike shadowing U-boats before they could engage.

And on this trip he had the invaluable support of the little escort carrier *Audacity* and her tiny complement of four Martlet (Grumman Wildcat) fighters. *Audacity* was a no-frills conversion from the captured German cargo ship *Hannover*, primitive by later standards, without either hanger or elevator or any substantial antiaircraft armament. The first of many Royal Navy escort carriers, she would make only three voyages before she was lost; but while she lasted she was an enormous help to the hard-pressed surface escorts. At last, a convoy in mid-ocean could have its own eyes and talons in the sky. On this trip little *Audacity* would conclusively prove the great value of escort carriers.

Many more would follow her, in both the Royal and the United States navies. Most of the British escort carriers were built in American shipyards and were far more sophisticated than *Audacity*. She was a pioneer in the antisubmarine warfare business nevertheless. Even though her fighters could not carry depth charges, they were still invaluable in spotting lurking U-boats long before they could reach attack positions; they at last gave the convoy the means to drive off or shoot down shadowing German planes. On a single voyage, *Audacity's* fighters would destroy six of the Luftwaffe's big aircraft. And even if a U-boat were not sunk after being spotted by carrier aircraft, once they or the warships of the escort drove the submarine under, she reverted to her glacial underwater speed and lost the surface speed required to quickly close with the convoy.

On December 14, the day of sailing from Gibraltar, the surface vessels drew first blood. Working some 30 miles off Cape St. Vincent at the southwest tip of Portugal, the destroyer *HMAS Nestor* of the Force H contingent

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Captain Frederic John Walker made a name for himself by putting an end to the havoc being wreaked on British shipping at the hands of German U-boats.

depth-charged and sank *U-127* with all hands. Walker concluded, correctly, that the Germans knew the convoy was at sea and that other U-boats would sail to intercept. There was no hurrying the progress of the convoy, a massive block of merchantmen sailing in parallel columns. The convoy could move no faster than the speed of its slowest ship while the U-boats closed in, sailing on the surface in darkness.

On the following night, a Swordfish biplane flying out of Gibraltar located still another submarine and drove it under. So far, so good, but by this time another 10 U-boats were moving to intercept HG76, and the convoy had seen a shadowing Focke-Wolf 200 Kondor. Walker and his commanders knew they were in for a fight. It began in earnest on the morning of the 17th, when his escorts charged after a submarine spotted from the air more than 20 miles from the convoy. In the ensuing action, corvette HMS *Penstemon* damaged *U-131* and drove her under and away from the convoy.

And as *U-131* crept back toward the convoy, she was spotted on the surface by *Stork* and three other escorts. This time the British ships were helped by a fighter from *Audacity*, which dove to strafe the U-boat. Hit by machine-gun fire from the submarine, the Martlet crashed, but the guns of Walker's escorts, shooting at the extreme range of seven miles, hit *U-131* eight times. The U-boat's captain called it quits, opened his boat's seacocks, and got most of his crew off. The British ships picked up the body of the Martlet's pilot and 55 survivors from the U-boat.

The following night, the 18th, would be the ultimate test of Walker's theories: a close-in protective escort group stayed close to the merchantmen, while Walker's hunters ranged far out from the convoy. Again the hunter-killer group detected a shadowing U-boat, and *Exmoor*, *Stanley*, *Blankney,* and *Deptford* blasted *U-434* to the surface. The British collected her captain, Korvetten-Kapitaen Heyda, and his entire crew but two before *U-434* went down for the last time.

Later in the next afternoon, however, Walker's ships suffered their first loss. *U-574* torpedoed HMS *Stanley*, which blew up, a monstrous flash of flame ripping through the gloom hundreds of feet high. There were few survivors. *Stork* and her consorts went after the killer and got their revenge less than an hour later, closing in to hammer the submarine with precise depth-charge attacks. As damage mounted in the submarine, the captain and his engineering officer, responsible for the trim of the boat, argued bitterly over whether to surrender. Finally the engineer settled the matter. "Either you leave the boat or I do. I take no further responsibilty."

Leaking, her electric motors out of action, an electric fire flickering in her control room, the submarine blew her tanks and surfaced. Walker in *Stork* charged down on *U-574*, chasing his quarry in a series of concentric circles, each vessel trying to turn inside the other. When *Stork* got too close to the U-boat for the sloop's main guns to bear, Walker at last rammed the U-boat, shoving *U-574* onto her side. As *Stork* ground on across the submarine's hull, Walker dropped a 10-round salvo of depth charges on shallow setting and the submarine was finished. Walker's ships fished 28 British and 18 German survivors from the water; they did not include either the U-boat's captain or his engineering officer. Walker commented later: "I was surprised to find later by the plot that *Stork* had turned three complete circles … I kept the U-boat illuminated with 'Snowflakes' which were quite invaluable in this unusual action … some rounds of four-inch were fired from the forward mountings until the guns could not be sufficiently depressed, after which the guns' crews were reduced to shaking fists and roaring curses at an enemy who several times seemed to be a matter of a few feet away rather than yards…."

Meanwhile, a merchantman, SS *Annavore*, had been torpedoed, and more Focke-Wulfs had appeared. *Audacity's* Martlets would shoot down four of the Kondors in spite of the big planes' four defensive turrets. One fighter

pilot, Sub-Lieutenant J.W. Sleigh, pressed his head-on attack so closely that he grazed the falling Kondor and returned to *Audacity* with part of the German's radio antenna wire wrapped around the tail of his Martlet.

But more U-boats of the gathering pack still remained around the convoy, and Walker was left with only four ships after some of his escorts ran low on fuel and had to turn for home. One of *Audacity's* fighters jumped two U-boats stopped side by side, one with a hole visible in its hull. A plank had been laid down as a gangway between the two, and crewmen were crossing it. The Martlet pilot attacked with machine guns, his only weapon, raking both boats and shooting men off the plank.

Both U-boats dived and disappeared, but four more submarines were sighted, and Walker correctly concluded, "The net of U-boats round us seemed at this stage to be growing uncomfortably close in spite of *Audacity's* heroic efforts to keep them at arm's length.

Stork herself was now limited to only about 10 knots, for the ramming of *U-574* had damaged her bow and torn away the dome that shielded her asdic. At about 10 o'clock on the night of the 21st, a Norwegian merchantman was torpedoed. Worse was to come, for just then the other merchantmen, following standing orders, fired "snowflake" flares, designed to expose a U-boat working close to the convoy or within its columns. In this case, however, exposed by the glare of the snowflakes, *Audacity* was hit a few minutes later by three torpedoes from *U-751*. She sank quickly, and her survivors were picked up by the escorts, which continued to harry the shadowing U-boats.

And on the 21st, the group scored again: depth charges from HMS *Deptford* caught *U-567* and sank her without a trace. Her skipper, who died with her and her whole crew, was the famous Kapitaenleutenant Engelbert Endrass, one of the Kriegsmarine's few remaining ace skippers. A second boat, *U-67*, also took a terrible pounding from 41 depth charges from *Rhododendron* and *Deptford*.

The next night, Walker ordered three changes of course by the convoy and staged a mock battle to lure the shadowing enemy away from the convoy's new courses. The deception worked and, on the 23rd, now covered by Coastal Command aircraft and a couple of fresh destroyers, the convoy made port. Walker was awarded the Distinguished Service Order for his victory and had the deep satisfaction of knowing that his tactics had worked. The Merchant Navy knew it too, and the commodore of the convoy signaled Walker: "On behalf of the convoy deepest congratulations and many thanks."

During the last of the fighting on this run, Walker showed his understanding of the terrible pressures under which his men, especially his captains, worked constantly. During the night *Deptford*, hot on the trail of a suspected submarine, went in to ram and found her target was not a U-boat, but *Stork*. Adroit ship handling minimized the collision, but the damage was still considerable. Walker did not reprimand his captain and showed his own sense of humor when another ship signaled him at daylight. "What have they done to your nose?" It was an allusion to the bow damaged in ramming *U-574*, and Walker replied, "That's nothing. You should see what they have done to my arse."

Not only were his escorts sinking U-boats, but his wide-ranging hunters made it much harder for a U-boat to run on the surface, even at night. Since sailing submerged vastly reduced the speed at which a submarine could close the convoy, Walker's boldness kept many U-boats out beyond torpedo range. On at least two occasions during the war, his ships sank enemy boats as far as 40 miles from the convoy Walker was covering. Although anything approaching total victory over the Kriegsmarine was still many dreary months away, this battle was at least a draw for the convoy escorts and maybe something of a victory.

Johnny Walker was a deeply religious, genial man with a quiet sense of humor, but he was also a demanding leader who left no doubt as to who was in command. Nor did his operating instructions leave any question about the purpose of his tactics: "Our object is to kill, and all officers must fully develop the spirit of vicious offensive. No matter how many convoys we may shepherd through in safety, we shall have failed unless we slaughter U-boats. All energies must be bent to this end."

Walker was the embodiment of the Royal Navy's aggressive philosophy: attack always; never let the enemy pause to take a breath; whatever the odds, attack. One of his officers summed up Walker's character: "[H]e showed me the type of person it takes to win wars, he was absolutely dedicated to seeking and destroying U-boats. He spent most of the time on the bridge walking up and down, he had a special coir mat provided to deaden any sound he made so that he could hear the asdic … He slept very little, sometimes only two hours a night…."

Walker took only a few days leave and hurried back to duty. Throughout his meteoric career in World War II, this dedicated, driven officer pushed himself far beyond any reasonable physical boundaries. Returning quickly to 36th Group, he sailed temporarily in the sloop HMS *Pelican*, later shifting back to *Stork* after dockyard repair of the damage caused when she rammed *U-574*. The 36th Group got another three, and maybe four, more submarines before an unwise Admiralty assigned Walker to a shore job in Liverpool.

Walker was not at all happy sailing a desk and steadily bombarded his seniors with repeated requests to return to sea. Walker knew where he belonged, out along the far-flung convoy routes hunting the German enemy. The Battle of the Atlantic was fast approaching crisis proportions. The Allies were losing merchant ships faster than they could be replaced, and the Royal Navy had fewer than half the escort vessels it estimated it needed to keep the supply lines to Britain open and functioning.

The magnitude of the commerce war is mind-boggling. The U-boats sent some 15 million tons of Allied shipping to the bottom during the war. The cost to the Kriegsmarine was 781 boats. In the course of the war, almost 30,000 U-boat personnel went down with their boats, a loss of about 75 percent of all of Germany's submariners.

At last, in February 1943, the Admiralty relented, and Walker became captain of HMS *Starling*, a modern Glasgow-built sloop. Walker asked for as many as possible of his old crew from *Stork*, and he got almost half of them. He then took command of a new organization called 2nd Support Group, at first two sloops and seven little *Flower*-class corvettes, and took his new pack of hunters to sea.

Walker's greatest success came after he persuaded Sir Max Horton, commander-in-chief of the Western Approaches, that the most efficient sub-killing machine would be a special hunting group of six first-line sloops. They would carry the most modern equipment and weaponry and operate with a roving commission, without responsibility for close-in protection of any convoy. Impressed by Walker's record thus far, Admiral Horton agreed, and Walker got his wish. By the end of the third week in May 1943, he was at sea with his own sloop, HMS *Starling*, and her sister ships *Wild Goose*, *Wren*, *Woodpecker*, *Cygnet,* and *Kite*. Under his command, 2nd Support Group would become the most successful U-boat hunters of either world war, the model for every anti-submarine operation to follow.

All of Walker's little ships were modified *Black Swan*-class sloops. They were 283 feet long, displacing either 1,300 or 1,350 tons

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Walker and several of his key men arrive at *HMS Wild Goose* shortly after ramming *U-119* aboard the *HMS Starling*.

(*Woodpecker*, *Wren,* and *Wild Goose* were a little smaller than their sisters). They could do between 19 and 20 knots, a bit faster than the original *Black Swans*, their sisters in the convoy escort business. While the sloops could not muster the speed of a fleet destroyer, their engines were much more efficient, giving them tremendous endurance at sea. If their top speed was only about half that of a destroyer, they could hold that speed on about a tenth of the destroyer's horsepower, at an enormous saving in fuel. They mounted three turrets, each with a pair of four-inch guns, plus six double-mounts of 20mm antiaircraft guns. Equipped with asdic and radar, they carried a large load of depth charges and hedgehogs.

As he had with his previous group, Walker made certain his captains knew precisely what the group's mission was. As one officer put it later, Walker told them, "Our sole job was to sink U-boats … and there followed a short list of evolutions that we had got to be able to do very quickly and accurately at any time of the day or night, in any weather, and in which no sort of excuse for failure would be accepted…."

Walker also lectured "in praise of the ram as a weapon of precision," and laid out a few rules for depth-charge attacks. Walker's whole emphasis was on simplicity and precision of technique and brevity of orders.

In June 1943, veteran submarine captain Gunter Poser made the mistake of sending a long radio message back to Germany within range of Walker's radio direction-finding equipment. Poser's boat, *U-202*, was returning from her ninth operational mission, coming back from dropping five German spies on Long Island. The 2nd Group homed in on the German's signal, and Poser dived when he saw the sloops charging down on him. By that time, however, *Starling's* asdic had picked up *U-202* and the hunt was on, Walker directing it from a specially built platform on his bridge, wearing white shorts and a cricket shirt.

The first depth-charge attack, 86 charges, drove *U-202* far under, and Poser kept on going, getting his groaning boat down as far as 800 feet. British asdic operators on the surface could hear the rush of high-pressure air on the U-boat as she corrected her trim after British attacks. At that depth her hull was close to rupturing, but at least he was safe from the British depth charges, which could not be rigged to fire as deep as Poser had gone. Walker drew the right conclusions. "No doubt about it. She's gone deeper than I thought possible...." He smiled: "Well, long wait ahead. Let's have some sandwiches sent up. We will sit it out. I estimate this chap will surface at midnight. Either his air or batteries will give out by then."

And so it was. At just about midnight Poser's air was nearly exhausted and he ordered his boat to the surface. As she broke water, her gun crews ran to man their weapons, and Poser went to full speed, hoping to run from the waiting sloops in the darkness. Walker was ready, however, and gave the order to fire star shell, tearing the cloak of blackness from his quarry. All six sloops pounded *U-202* with shellfire, and a crimson gleam behind the conning tower announced a hit from one of the four-inch guns. *Starling* charged down on the damaged U-boat, intending to ram. As she got closer, however, Walker could see that the submarine was too battered to submerge, and so he swung his sloop and ran down the side of Poser's boat, sluiced its decks with machine-gun fire, and dropped a pattern of shallow set depth charges.

It was over for *U-202* and Kapitaen-Leutnant Poser. Poser shouted to his men to abandon ship, but he did not join them. He turned his own pistol on himself and stayed with his boat on her trip to the bottom. The hunt had taken 16 hours, and for another 14 hours *Starling's* doctor, Surgeon-Lieutenant Fraser, operated on badly wounded German U-boat crewmen.

On the same trip, Walker's group got two more U-boats, *U-449* and tanker-boat *U-119*. A depth-charge pattern forced *U-119* to surface in the midst of a ring of British escorts, all the ships banging away and shells whistling in all directions as the submarine began to dive again. *Starling* was on her before she could clear the surface and smashed into *U-119*, rolling her over and grinding across her hull. As *Starling* cleared the submarine, she fired a shallow pattern of depth charges and *U-119* was gone, leaving only debris, including body parts.

Walker now transferred to *Wild Goose*, leaving Commander Wemyss of *Wild Goose* to take crippled *Starling* home. In July, the group was back at sea, hunting the 150 submarines Admiral Karl Dönitz had sent against the Atlantic convoys. Increasingly, long-range RAF and USAAF aircraft and Royal Navy surface vessels hunted together on the routes from German Biscay bases to the Atlantic. The Kreigsmarine was heavily arming its boats with antiaircraft weapons and sending them across the bay on the surface in groups. When Allied aircraft could not penetrate the antiaircraft and attack, they called for surface vessels and circled, waiting for help. If the U-boats dived, the aircraft could close in once the antiaircraft weapons were no longer manned. If the U-boats successfully submerged, the aircraft marked the spot for the surface vessels.

On the 29th, a British aircraft reported three U-boats on the surface, and the group steamed hard down the bearing the aircraft had given. Soon they had visual contact, and, according to legend, Walker could not resist hoisting the signal for "General Chase." The story goes that this signal had been flown only twice before in the long history of the Royal Navy, by Sir Francis Drake when he pursued the Spanish Armada down the English Channel in 1688, and by Lord Horatio Nelson when he smashed the French Navy at Trafalgar in 1805.

One U-boat was depth-charged and sunk by

a Royal Australian Air Force Sunderland flying boat. Other aircraft, including an American B-24 Liberator, joined the attack, and an RAF Halifax bomber mortally wounded a second submarine. Standing on his bridge as the surface ships closed in, Walker waved his hat, cheering on his *Starling*. She and her sisters opened fire at four miles, and their gunnery was superb. The U-boat dived, but Walker's group closed in with depth charges and sank her. The success was part of a spectacular run of victories over the U-boats in the Bay of Biscay, nine boats sighted and seven of them sunk in just a few days.

Walker and his group returned to Liverpool in high spirits. In port, however, bad news waited for Walker. His son, Sub-Lieutenant John Timothy Ryder Walker, had been lost with his submarine in the Mediterranean. Walker's wife Eileen was waiting to see him in this moment of agony, and the story goes that Walker's officers formed a defensive line, for a time keeping the couple sequestered from all sorts of people who had urgent business with Walker. Always concerned with those he commanded, however, Captain and Mrs. Walker insisted on attending, the very next night, a wardroom dinner with Walker's officers and their wives.

From this time on, Walker became even more than the professional naval officer fighting his country's enemies; now he had a personal score to settle as well. Back at sea, he and his group hammered the U-boats stalking the merchantmen of the vital convoys. One of them, *U-264*, fired a "Gnat" homing torpedo at *Starling*, but a sharp-eyed British lookout saw the track of the Gnat as it raced toward the sound of the sloop's screws. Walker ordered a hard turn to port, and then, as the Gnat closed in, *Starling* dropped a shallow set pattern of depth charges. The roar of the exploding charges was immediately followed by a second roar as the shock of the charges detonated the torpedo before it reach *Starling*. Walker immediately ordered a plaster attack on *U-264*, and within five minutes the group was rewarded by a gigantic air bubble and a litter of floating debris, including human body parts.

This voyage ended in another triumphal entry into Liverpool harbor, for *U-264* was only the first of a record six submarines sunk by the group in just two weeks. The group entered harbor in line-ahead, *Starling* leading, her PA system playing the group's theme song, *A-hunting We Will Go*, Admiral Horton and the First Lord of the Admiralty, standing on a destroyer's bridge, met the group as they entered harbor, and the docks were lined with cheering civilians, sailors and WRENs.

An officer serving under Walker in the sloop HMS *Wren* wrote much later of his admiration for Walker's leadership. On one occasion, chasing down a U-boat sighted by an aircraft, Walker's ships had 60 miles to go to reach the scene. "In the three hours we took to get there the U-Boat, submerged, could have gone up to 18 miles in any direction, he worked out where the U-Boat captain would go and headed for it … and his calculations were spot on … [h]e dropped a pattern of depth charges and the U-Boat surfaced in his wake … all of us opened fire … Walker then decided to ram, which he did, turning the U-Boat over and dropping a shallow pattern as he went over it."

By the autumn of 1943, it had become apparent to Dönitz and his staff that the U-boat offensive had misfired. Out of 2,468 merchantmen crossing the Atlantic, the Germans had sunk only nine, and Allied surface ships and aircraft had destroyed 25 U-boats in the same period. The Germans were losing the convoy war, but their most implacable opponent, Johnny Walker, was wearing out.

In March 1944, the group sailed to cover a large convoy traveling the terrible northern route to Russia. Among the ships in convoy was USS *Milwaukee*, sent as a gift to the Russian navy. The Group sank two more U-boats during the voyage, and *Milwaukee* made Murmansk safely. On May 5, on the way back and carrying the American crew of *Milwaukee*, the convoy heard that the American destroyer *Donnell* had been torpedoed and sunk some 200 miles away. Walker turned his group toward the site of the sinking, and two days later made contact. For 15 and a half hours, Walker stalked *U-473* over 20 miles of rough sea, his ships dodging Gnats fired by their quarry. And then as *U-473* ran out of air and was forced to surface, his sloops tore her apart with gunfire and sent her down. Walker briefly signaled his ships, "Cease firing. Gosh, what a lovely battle," and turned his command for Liverpool.

It had been another highly successful voyage, but on top of all the other months of exhaustion, lack of sleep, and the crushing cares of command, the war at sea was destroying Johnny Walker. His wife was horrified by his haggard appearance. By rights her husband should have been sent ashore for a real rest, perhaps even hospitalized. But duty is a jealous goddess, and Walker knew that he had never been more needed than he was as the summer of 1944 approached. In May 1944, just five merchantmen had been sunk by U-boats. The Germans had lost 22 boats, and Dönitz had pulled most of his remaining vessels out of the north Atlantic. The Allies were plainly winning the convoy war, but there was a huge and urgent job waiting closer to home.

For the long-awaited invasion of Festung Europa was imminent, and the Navy knew its success hinged on keeping open the sea lanes across the Channel. If the U-boat fleet could interdict that steady stream of reinforcements and supplies, a lot of good men would die for nothing, and the liberation of Europe would be long delayed. And the Navy knew the Germans would come; Dönitz would throw every boat he had into the effort to cut the invasion forces off from their base in England. The supreme commander, General Dwight Eisenhower, said flatly that he had to have two weeks of absolute control of cross-Channel traffic if the invasion was to have any real chance of success. In the event, on June 6, the Germans would send 76 U-boats from Biscay ports against the Normandy landings.

Walker knew where his duty lay, and tired as he was, he saw the invasion as a double opportunity. "Eisenhower wants two weeks," he said. "He'll not only get it, but this is our chance to smash the U-boats for all time." And so, on June 6, 1944, when the invasion armada loomed out of the predawn darkness off the Normandy beaches, Walker was there. This time he controlled no fewer than 40 ships. In the first three crucial days of the invasion, his flotilla put in at least 36 attacks on U-boat contacts. His ships sank eight submarines and damaged a number of others. Allied aircraft got another six, and the Germans pulled their surviving boats back to regroup.

But they came again, as the Navy knew they would, into a weeklong non-stop melee between Allied surface vessels and aircraft above, and the enemy below. Walker and his captains and the rest of the antisubmarine forces won that brawl, but it was the last straw for Walker's health. When *Starling* put into a British port to rearm and refuel, exhausted crew members caught at least a few hours of sleep, but Walker could not. He used the time to plan and reorganize and attend meetings ashore. Then it was back into the fray again, and again without rest.

In the end, the U-boats of the Kriegsmarine took such a battering that they were never again the formidable threat they had once been. But this last effort also killed their most dangerous and unforgiving enemy. For Walker was plainly ill and getting worse. His face and body were skeletal, and his officers noticed that he hesitated trying to find words

for a signal or an order. Now, however, he could at last spend a little time at home and perhaps give his wasted, exhausted body a chance to mend.

There was much to rejoice at for the Walkers. Not only had Walker won his long battle, but he was to be made a Knight Commander of the Bath by King George VI, he had won a total of four DSOs, and he was slated for promotion to admiral rank. The afternoon after Walker at last came home, he and his wife went to see the film *Madame Curie*. Afterward, Walker told his wife that he did not feel well. He was dizzy, he said, and had a sort of humming sound in his head. He grew quickly worse and worse, and at last was hospitalized. At first the doctors were confident. It was, they told his wife, only a matter of his terrible exhaustion. Rest should do the trick.

But it wouldn't. About midnight on July 9, 1944, Johnny Walker died. The medics called the cause cerebral thrombosis, but it was generally believed that Walker had given his country and his Navy all he had for far too long. He had simply died of exhaustion, or, some might say, of dedication.

The 2nd Escort Support Group would continue to serve, now under the capable leadership of Commander D.E.G. Wemyss, who had been Walker's executive and right arm. Before the war was finally history, the Group sank at least 23 U-boats, perhaps more, and certainly damaged many others. *Starling* herself was in on the kill of 14 German submarines, a record unmatched by any other single ship of any nation in any war.

Library of Congress

Shortly after his memorial service, a team of bluejackets escorts Walker's body through the streets of Liverpool.

Today a statue of Johnny Walker stands on the Pier Head, Liverpool. He is looking out across the River Mersey, and displayed on the far bank is one of his old enemies, *U-534*. After his funeral in Liverpool Cathedral, the remains of the man himself were placed on board HMS *Hesperus* and buried at sea, the sea he loved and defended. What he did abides, however, a permanent monument to courage and devotion.

Speaking at Walker's funeral, Sir Max Horton, his old boss, perfectly described Walker's legacy to the Royal Navy, to the Merchant Navy, and to the people of Britain: "In the days when the waters had well nigh overwhelmed us, our brother, apprehending the creative power in man, set himself to conquer the malice of the enemy. In our hour of need he was a doughty protector of them that sailed the seas in our behalf. His heart and mind extended and expanded to the utmost tiring of his body, even unto death; that he might discover and operate the means for saving our ships from the treacherous foes."

But the tribute Walker would have liked best came from one of his ship's company. When *Loch Killin* blew a U-boat to the surface and captured her entire crew, a watching *Starling* sailor exclaimed, "I bet the Old Man's rubbing his hands up there."

He probably was. □

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OSS Operation Ginny met with a tragic end during the Italian Campaign.

BY DON SMART

THE THREE RUBBER DINGHIES STRUGGLED THROUGH THE ROUGH SURF IN THE PITCH black night toward an inhospitable stretch of rocky beach. The cliff rose almost straight up from ocean's edge. The mission commander realized his team had landed in the wrong place, but there was no time to hunt for the correct landing area. The mission would have to start from here. This mistake was just one of many as Operation Ginny unfolded to its final tragedy.

In the early days of the North Africa and Italian campaigns, Office of Strategic Services (OSS) personnel initially lacked experience, resources, and the respect of skeptical staff officers in the theater. The agency soon began to prove its value. Prior to Operation Torch, the Allied landings in North Africa, OSS agents established contact with Allied sympathizers and gathered intelligence vital to the invasion.

During the North Africa campaign, OSS operatives organized warrior tribesmen into a guerrilla force to guard against a possible Axis thrust through Spanish Morocco into the Allied rear. During landings on the Italian mainland at Salerno, an OSS detachment provided Colonel William O. Darby's Rangers with critical tactical intelligence during their defense of the Sorrentino Peninsula. The activities of OSS agents soon came to the attention of General Mark Clark, commander of the Allied Fifth Army, who gave them vehicles, rations, and a free hand to operate.

In February 1943, General Dwight D. Eisenhower, supreme commander of Allied forces in Europe, agreed to allow the OSS's Special Operations staff to employ four to eight commando cells to organize and assist guerrilla forces in Italy and southern France. During the fall of 1943, these newly arrived operational groups began to look for offshore islands on which to establish bases for raids against the German-held northern coastline. After the Italian surrender, an OSS unit joined a French expeditionary force to take the island of Corsica. The German garrison was already withdrawing to the mainland, so the OSS groups established advance bases on Corsica as well as the nearby islands of Gorgona and Caprais. At Corsica, they were only 35 miles from the Italian coast.

From their new bases, the OSS operational groups conducted raids against German communications lines along the Italian coast in an attempt to divert enemy troops from the main front. The narrow, rocky coastal plains of the Italian peninsula were crossed by numerous roads and railways, which the Germans used as lines of supply. Night after night, small groups of OSS soldiers crawled ashore to attack the most vulnerable points and recon-

National Archives

Donning camouflage, a team of OSS operatives lands ashore. Despite initial skepticism, the OSS more than proved its worth during numerous operations in Italy and North Africa.

noiter enemy installations.

The 2677th Headquarters Company, Detachment C, (Unit A, First Contingent) was one of the special OSS units activated in April 1943. Commanded by Colonel Edward J. Glavin, they were stationed at Ile Rosse on Corsica. The Italian front stretched across the peninsula at Cassino with a further front initiated at Anzio in January 1944. The Allied forces recognized that one of the main German supply routes was the railway line running along the western coast of Italy. The Allied air forces had been conducting Operation Strangle to cut all German lines of communication; however, bombing in the mountainous terrain along the coast had not succeeded in cutting the Genoa Livorno line.

The Allied G-3 Special Operations branch suggested that the best way to cut the line was to demolish one of its tunnels by means of a sabotage party landed from the sea. At about 15 miles northwest of La Spezia, a tunnel between a small station named Stazione di Framura and the small fishing village of Bonassola was deemed the best target. Passed down to the 2677th, Operation Ginny was born.

The task of developing the tactics needed was assigned to the unit's operations officer, 1st Lt. Albert R. Materazzi. The aim was to destroy the northern tunnel entrance, located some 500 yards southeast of Stazione di Framura. Materazzi's plan was for a team of 15 men—nine demolition experts and six security riflemen—to land under cover of darkness from two PT boats.

Reconnaissance indicated that there was a natural ravine the team could move through to reach the tunnel entrance. The team consisted of Americans with Italian backgrounds and some who could speak the Italian language fluently. All were to be dressed in U.S. Army field uniforms and would not carry civilian clothes. After neutralizing the signal house, they would blow the tunnel entrance then retrace their steps to the three rubber boats, and reboard the waiting PT boats.

The operation was carefully timed. The team would launch at 11 PM, reach the target by no later than 12:30 AM, and be picked up at 3:30 AM. There were contingency plans. If the commanding officer decided the operation could not be accomplished that night, he would notify the PT boats no later that 2 AM, the men would hide, and the operation would be rescheduled for the following night with pickup at the same time. If contact could not be made with the PT boats after blowing the tunnel, then the party would proceed inland to a safe house about 40 miles away. On the sur-

face, it looked like the plan was risky but that it had a reasonable chance of success.

In 1944, the German forces in Italy were commanded by Field Marshal Albert Kesselring. All of northern Italy was under the command of Army Group von Zangen, led by his subordinate, General Gustav von Zangen. The targeted area of the Italian coastline was defended by the 75th Army Corps under General Anton Dostler, with his headquarters at San Andrea near Parma. The 135th Fortress Brigade, commanded by Major Kurt Almers, was guarding the area around La Spezia.

After the go-ahead for the operation was received, the first attempt was made on February 27-28. It was called off when the correct landing area could not be found in the dark. When the party got to shore, it could not find one landmark and returned to the PT boats. The unit then did a more complete target study based on profiles of the railway and intelligence gathered from engineers of the Italian Railways Maintenance Section. The 52nd Fighter Group flew a photographic reconnaissance mission of the area on March 10. The 15-man group made a complete dry run of the mission during the night of March 20-21 near Ile Rosse. The timing and emergency plans were left in place, and the group pronounced itself ready for insertion on March 22-23.

The U.S. Navy's PT-214, commanded by Lieutenant R.T. Boehel, and PT-219, commanded by Lieutenant Harold Nugent, left Bastia at 5:55 PM and made landfall west of Stazione di Framura at 10:45 PM The overall mission and demolition team were commanded by 1st Lt. Vincent Russo. The security party was under 1st Lt. Paul J. Traficante. Radio contact was sporadic, but the PT boats did hear Russo report that they had reached shore and were looking for a place to land.

At 11:45 PM, things began to go wrong. A convoy of German torpedo boats was sighted returning from a mine-laying mission. PT-219 took diversionary action and got into a firefight, while PT-214 idled along the coast on one engine and tried to keep in contact with the shore party. The radiomen on the boats kept trying to reach the shore party, but all was silent. At 2 AM, the two PT boats rendezvoused five miles out to sea. Their radar indicated numerous targets along the shore, and they had to lie quietly until 3 AM At that time, they moved in close to the rocky cliffs in an attempt to raise the mission party on the radio. PT-214 reported its main steering mechanism had malfunctioned, and it was 4:15 a.m. before it was repaired. No transmissions were heard from the mission party, and the two boats returned to base.

National Archives

***PT 211*, one of the PT boats that saw action in Operation Ginny, lies docked at the port of Bastia in February 1944.**

Russo realized the team was in the wrong spot. He left 12 men to guard the rubber dinghies while he and two others headed off to reconnoiter the area. Climbing up the steep, rocky embankment, the three discovered they had landed near the village of Carpineggio, about halfway between Bonassola and Stazione di Framura. The group had landed two miles from its intended initial point and about one mile from the target. By the time the reconnaissance party returned, several hours has passed and daylight was at hand. The radioman reported that contact with the PT boats had been lost and that they had probably returned to base.

Russo decided on a contingency plan requiring the men to hide during the day, establish contact with the PT boats the following night, and then accomplish the mission. He would not blow the tunnel until contact had been made. Like the dark clouds of an oncoming storm, the problems of Operation Ginny continued to mount.

The dinghies loaded with the explosives and demolition equipment were dragged up on the beach, hidden under trees, and camouflaged. The party moved inland over the steep hills until they found an empty barn to occupy. By midmorning, Russo decided to attempt to find food for the group.

Franco Lagaxo, a local farmer living on the crest of a hill overlooking the sea, saw two soldiers approaching his cottage. They identified themselves and asked if he would help them procure some food. They also asked if he would guide them to the "little house at the railway." He did not understand and took them to nearby Paggio.

Realizing the mistake, Russo and his partner released Lagaxo and told him they would return for the food at noon. At noon, three of the Americans returned to Lagaxo's house and got the food. They also asked if he would come to the barn where they were hiding and try to guide them to the railroad signal house. At mid afternoon the farmer took a small party to the correct spot and the team determined the exact target location. The Ginny men spent the rest of the day in the barn waiting for nightfall.

On March 23-24, the second night, two PT boats launched to accomplish the pickup per the contingency plan. They were carrying oarsmen, a dinghy, and two canvas boats in case the original rubber boats were damaged. About an hour after their departure, one PT developed engine trouble and turned back. The remaining boat continued on and arrived at the pickup point about midnight. Radar showed several objects patrolling the area, and the decision was made to abandon the attempt. The Ginny team had to spend another day in hiding.

The morning of Friday, March 24, was the beginning of the end for the demolition team. A fishing boat returning to Bonassola reported seeing several small rubber boats hidden along the shore. Vittorio Bertoni and Giobatta Bianchi, two Facist militiamen, went with the fisherman to investigate and found the boats and explosive material. They alerted the local German command and formed a search party. Five Facist militiamen and a German patrol started to comb the area.

The farmer, Franco Lagaxo, had seen the Italians discover the boats and rushed to warn the Americans. When he got to the barn, he discovered just how many were in the group. His warnings came too late. Two of the team were captured without a struggle near Franco's house. They tried to maintain that they were the only two, but the Italians knew that there were more because of the three boats. When Bertoni blew his whistle to summon the patrol, the Americans opened up with rifle fire. The German patrol surrounded the area, and after a brief, vicious firefight the outnumbered Americans surrendered.

The Americans were disarmed and taken to Bonassola where they were locked in an office. The two officers were questioned by Commissar Guglielmini, who managed to find out details about the mission. Russo and Traficante were tired, hungry, and very disillusioned about the outcome of the mission. They indicated they had come from Corsica on a PT boat with plans to blow up the railroad tunnel between Framura and Bonassola. The commissar was also surprised to learn that all the men were from Italian-American backgrounds and could speak and understand the language.

At 2:30 PM a German Army truck arrived and the prisoners were transported to 135th Fortress Brigade headquarters in a castle at the village of Carrozzo for further interrogation. The enlisted men were confined to three rooms in the cellar, while the two officers were placed together in one room. Word of the capture of the 15 was moving up the chain of command of the German Army. First Lt. Wolfgang Koerbitz, the brigade intelligence officer, was given the assignment of interrogating the men. He had little experience in this sort of thing, so a naval intelligence officer, Corvette Captain Friedrich Klaps, was brought in to help. Klaps agreed to help; however, since he spoke very bad English, he asked his assistant, Lieutenant George Sessler, to translate.

Klaps and Sessler started with Lieutenant Traficante, who would give only his name, rank, serial number, and home address. The enlisted men disclosed the same information. When Lieutenant Russo was brought in, Sessler tricked him by telling him that Traficante had given them the whole story. Russo then proceeded to disclose the details of the mission. Late on the afternoon of March 25, Sessler closed the interrogation and wrote a report to be sent up the chain of command.

Back on Corsica, the 2677th staff officers were wondering what had happened to their men. A photo reconnaissance plane from the 52nd Fighter Group made a run over the Framura area. The photos showed no damage to the tunnel, nor any signs of the dinghies or men. The Ginny men had simply disappeared.

Word came back to 75th Army Corps headquarters that the brigade had captured "Italian-speaking American commando troops." This headquarters then cabled the brigade asking if this was a reconnaissance on the part of the Allied forces in Corsica aimed at conducting a larger landing operation. The answer was, "No, their mission was to blow up the railroad tunnel at Framura." General Dostler now realized he was in a very difficult situation. The word "commando" suddenly tied the Americans into the definition given in the Führerbefehl (Führer's order).

After the raid at Dieppe on October 18, 1942, Hitler issued a decree stating that all enemy troops encountered during so-called commando operations, or acting as agents or saboteurs, were to be exterminated to the last man. It made no difference if they were in uniform or not, armed or unarmed. If they were captured alive, then they were to be immediately handed over to the intelligence service. Under no circumstances were commandos to be sent to a POW camp. Any German officer failing to carry out this order would be summoned before a war tribunal.

Dostler gathered his staff officers together to discuss whether the 15 Americans fell under this order. After much discussion and rereading of the document, he sent a cable to brigade on the morning of Saturday, March 25, stating, "The captured Americans are to be shot immediately. Signed Dostler."

The order caused an uproar at brigade headquarters. Almers, Klaps, and Koerbitz realized they were going to be caught in the middle of an execution of American prisoners of war.

Almers told Klaps to try and get the order rescinded or at least put off. Since he could not disobey a direct order, Almers phoned 1st Lt. Rudolph Bolze, commander of 1st Company of Fortress Battalion 905, with instructions about the place of execution, firing squad, and grave for burial of the 15 men. Sessler reacted even more strongly. He stated that in his opinion these 15 prisoners did not fall under the Führer's order. At midday, Almers got on the phone with Dostler about the order. He was told to hold up on the execution until higher headquarters could rule on the edict.

Dostler put the matter to the next higher headquarters, Army Group von Zangen, with a copy of Almers' report. This headquarters in turn asked Army Group Southwest for a decision. Late that afternoon the answer came down that the American saboteurs were to be shot. For General Dostler, that settled the matter. His chief of staff phoned Almers and told him to have the Americans executed by 7:00 the next morning. Almers had no choice, and he told Captain Rehfeld, commander of Fortress Battalion 906, and Lieutenant Seidenstucker, commander of the 1st Company of the 906 Fortress Brigade, to transport the prisoners to the place of execution.

Klaps and Koerbitz continued their desperate efforts to save the Americans. Klaps managed to get Dostler on the phone with a request to postpone the execution. He used the excuse that he needed more time to get information from the captives about the facilities on Corsica. Dostler told him he could have until 7:00 the next morning. Klaps told Dostler he could not disclose information over the phone, so Dostler requested he send a telegram explaining he reasoning is continuing the interrogation.

Sessler was still talking to the Americans, with very little success. The captured Ginny men now were giving only name, rank, and serial number. Then an unusual thing happened. One of the enlisted men suddenly said, "I know you, you were on a German Merchant Marine vessel that I provided ice to in the New York harbor."

It was true, Sessler had served on a merchant ship in the 1930s. For him, suddenly the whole thing was personal. He met with Klaps and Koerbitz, and the three were convinced not only that the execution order was premature, but that the men did not fall under this order. At midnight, Klaps retired to his quarters, convinced that the execution order would be withdrawn. Unable to quell his fears, Klaps began to telephone headquarters to talk to Dostler again to find out if he had read the telegram. Finally, around 4:30 AM. Dostler came on the phone. Dostler asked his staff to show him the telegram. He then told Klaps the case was decided, the order had been given, and that it must be executed. Nothing could save the Ginny men. Their fate was sealed.

Sessler went back to talk to the Americans. Now they were aware of their fate. Sessler told them that everything possible had been done but there was no chance for a change. In one last desperate attempt to help the Americans, Sessler left his pistol hanging on the door so one of the prisoners could steal it. He hoped it might be of use in an escape attempt.

On Sunday morning, March 26, 1944, only three days after the men of Operation Ginny landed on the Italian shore, two trucks arrived to take them to the place of their execution.

National Archives

ABOVE: Two U.S. soldiers fire on an enemy position during action in Italy. Far from being a strike at the "soft underbelly" of Europe as British Prime Minister Winston Churchill had believed, the advance up the Italian boot was slow and costly. BELOW: Colonel Edward J. Glavin received the Distinguished Service Medal in August of 1945.

Lieutenant Rehfiel arrived with an escort guard of 25 men to collect the American prisoners. It was still dark as the men were loaded in two trucks with guards in each. Lieutenant Traficante had the gun stolen from Sessler and planned one last attempt at escape. The bad luck of the Americans continued. As Traficante started to pull the gun out of his sheepskin jacket, it hung on the edge. The guard opposite him simply lowered his rifle to cover the lieutenant. The convoy stopped as the guards disarmed Traficante and searched the other 14 men.

At 6:30 AM, the trucks arrived at the grave site where Bolze was waiting. Rehfeld informed him that the prisoners in the trucks were not dead yet. Bolze directed him down the road another five kilometers to where the execution was to take place. Bolze realized that they had not summoned a doctor to pronounce the men dead and called the battalion doctor, Heinz Kellner. At 7:15 AM with the doctor present, the men were taken off the trucks and marched to the execution site. To add more horror to the event, the Germans could not decide whether to place them against a rock wall or at a cliff with the sea to their backs. It was decided that in order to avoid a possible ricochet they would stand with the sea to their backs.

In a scene of almost indescribable terror, a group of eight was marched up to face the German firing squad. As the second group looked on, they were shot down with their hands tied behind their backs. The Germans covered their bodies with planks and then marched the second group to face the firing squad. At 7:20 AM, the second volley rang out and the final curtain fell on the tragedy of the Operation Ginny soldiers. The German lieutenant in charge then administered a pistol shot to the back of the neck of each body to ensure death.

Bolze had walked as far down the road as he could to get away from the execution site. After the second volley, he returned as the bodies were being loaded into the trucks. The convoy then drove back to the site where the grave had been dug. The bodies were placed in the pit and covered with dirt. Then clumps of grass were placed on top. The grave was left unmarked.

National Archives

Later in the day, in an ironic twist of fate Kesselring rushed a cable to Dostler's headquarters with orders to hold up on the execution. Both the German and Italian Fascist headquarters realized that this execution was a mistake and if the war did not go their way someone would have to pay. German radios began to broadcast stories about a group of American commandos that had been wiped out in a skirmish with German troops. They enlarged on the lie by adding a statement that the Americans had shot some of the German troops during the fight. Kesselring, feeling very ill at ease with this execution, ordered all headquarters concerned to destroy documents on the incident.

Immediately after war's end, two men from the 2677th showed up in Bonassola searching for information on the missing Ginny men. Captains Albert G. Lanier and Nevio J. Manzani searched the files at the local Facist archives. They found a copy of the prefect's report of the capture of the Ginny team and the names of Vittorio Bertoni and Giobatta Bianchi. The two were arrested and detained as POWs. They next found the farmer, Franco Lagaxo, and from his statement learned that a German patrol was also involved.

The first real lead came when they found Lieutenant Bolz in a POW camp. Questioned on May 10, he described his part in the execution and burial. Bolze also named Major Almers and 1st Lt. Koerbitz as the officers that gave him the orders. Sessler, the interrogator, was also found in a POW camp and confessed his part in the war crime. He wrongly named General Rudolf Toussaint as the person who gave the execution order. This information sent the American team searching in the wrong direction for some time.

When Koerbitz and Klaps were found and interrogated, they identified General Dostler as the man who issued the order. The investigation now began to pick up speed. Dostler was located in the U.S. 85th Division POW camp and had been formally charged with committing a war crime. He was charged with violating the "Law of War under the Hague convention of 1907" by having unarmed prisoners of war shot.

Armed with the information given by Bolze, a team of medical personnel went to the area to look for the mass grave. On May 23, 1945, excavation began and the bodies were discovered. All 15 still had their hands tied behind their backs. None had any boots or shoes, and two wore no outer clothing. Identification was made with dogtags or marks in the uniforms except for the two with no clothes. The remains of Tech/5 Joseph M. Farrell and Tech/5 Liberty J. Tremonte could not be identified with certainty.

The mysterious disappearance of the OSS men of Operation Ginny was solved. Since they were never brought before a court or given a hearing, it was clear to the Americans that this summary execution constituted a war crime.

General Anton Dostler was transported to Rome for his war crime trial. A military commission of nine officers was set up by Headquarters Mediterranean Theater of Operations to conduct the trial. This trial was widely covered by the press for two reasons. First, Dostler was the first German general to stand before a United States military commission and, second, the outcome would set a precedent for a wide-ranging set of upcoming war crime trials, including Nuremberg.

All of the German and Italian prisoners of war were also in attendance except Almers.

He had been captured but escaped before a statement could be taken. Lt. Gen. Joseph M. McNarney, U.S. commander in Italy, appointed the following officers to the commission: Maj. Gen. L.C. Jaynes, Brig. Gen. T.K. Brown, Colonel H. Shaler, Colonel James Notestein, and Colonel F.T. Hammond. Major F.W. Roche (Judge Advocate) served as prosecutor. The defense was headed by Colonel C.O. Wolfe and Major C.K Emery. General Fridolin von Senger und Etterlin was appointed as special German counsel and interpreter.

The defense immediately presented a plea that a military commission did not have jurisdiction to try the accused but that he should be tried by a court-martial. The commission ruled that the defendant did not commit the war crime as a prisoner of war but before hostilities ceased.

The defense then tried to put forth two more arguments. First, the commission had been set up by an American general, when in fact the theater was commanded by a British commanding general during hostilities. Second, no order had been given by the president of the United States appointing or authorizing the appointment of such a commission. In both cases, the commission overruled the pleas of the defense.

The prosecution then presented its case to the commission. It was very straightforward. The series of events, starting with the night of March 22 and ending with the execution on March 26, was examined. The prosecution stated that the 15 members of the U.S. Army were on a bona fide military mission to demolish the railroad tunnel on the main line between La Spezia and Genoa. All of the available witnesses were put on the stand and testified. The prosecution proved the OSS men were neither tried nor given a hearing of any kind.

The defense presented its case, claiming that for any person to be accorded the rights of a prisoner, he must have a fixed distinctive emblem recognizable at a distance on his uniform. Since the mission was for the purpose of sabotage to be accomplished by stealth, the Ginny men were not entitled to the privileges of lawful belligerents. The defense admitted they were entitled to a lawful trial even if treated as spies.

The main point that the defense relied on was obedience to superior orders. These orders were laid down in Hitler's decree of October 18, 1942. Dostler also stated that he had orders from both General von Zangen and Field Marshal Kesselring's headquarters to proceed with the executions. General von Zangen testified on the stand that he had not personally issued the order.

The prosecution countered that even if the *Führerbefehl* was binding on Dostler he should have acted in accordance with paragraph 4 and handed the prisoners to the security service or Gestapo. The Commission found General Dostler guilty, and he was sentenced to death by firing squad.

After the guilty verdict, Dostler was transferred to the Peninsular Base Section Garrison Stockade No. 1 near Aversa. This military prison was run by the 803rd Military Police Battalion and had a firing range suitable for executions. Saturday, December 1, 1945, was a foggy, misty morning. Dostler was escorted to the firing range by a three-man squad. As he was roped to the post, two Catholic chaplains, one of the U.S. Army and one a German POW, gave comfort in his last minutes. Just before the black hood was put over his head, Dostler said, "*Es lebe Deutschland* (Long live Germany)." He concluded, "I give my life to my country and my soul to God."

With a taut face and tight-set lips, Dostler heard the order for his execution containing the names of the 15 Americans. The black hood was dropped over his head, and Dostler stood alone facing the firing squad of the 803rd MPs. Shortly before 8 AM, 12 rifles cracked and Anton Dostler became the first German general to be executed for a war crime.

Dostler lies buried at the Deutscher Soldatenfriedhof Pomezia south of Rome. This cemetery contains the graves of 27,000 German dead of World War II. The verdict and execution were somewhat controversial, since many felt that Kesselring and von Zangen should have shared the blame with Dostler. A British court in Venice tried ex-Field Marshal Kesselring for the massacre of 335 Italians in the Ardeatine Caves and other war crimes. He was sentenced to death on May 7, 1947, however the sentence was commuted to life imprisonment two months later.

Seven of the OSS Ginny soldiers are interred at the U.S. military cemetery near Florence. The bodies of the other eight were repatriated to the United States to be buried in family plots.

The Office of Strategic Services staged many successful operations during World War II, but Operation Ginny was the ultimate tragedy for these 15 soldiers. □

Don Smart is a retired aerospace engineer whose passions are military history and the history of his home state of Texas.

Seizing the Solomons

Using a machine gun and carbine rifles, infantrymen sight up enemy positions during an attack on Cape Gloucester.

National Archives

and Beyond

BY DOUGLAS STERLING

ON THE ISLAND OF NEW BRITAIN, at the north end of the Solomon chain, lay a major base that provided Japanese forces with the naval power, supplies, and reinforcements to control the sea lanes of the Southwest Pacific. It was also a nearly impregnable airbase and a haven for a large Japanese fleet of fighters and bombers.

This base, known as Rabaul, threatened any attempt by the Allies to return to the Philippines. In the summer of 1943, following the capture of Guadalcanal and the Allied naval victories in the southern Solomon Islands, a plan was hatched to capture this dangerous Japanese stronghold.

Designed by the Combined Chiefs of Staff and placed under the overall command of General Douglas MacArthur, the operation, designated Cartwheel, envisioned Allied forces advancing in two great wings. A western force would proceed up the coast of New Guinea, while another to the east climbed northwest along the Solomon chain and almost parallel to New Guinea. Together, these advancing wings were designed to trap Rabaul in a great pincer action.

Both marches were to be deliberate, capturing bases and islands from which to build airstrips and naval bases for resupply and air support. Cartwheel was a miniature version of the grand Allied offensive strategy. Calculated to culminate in the seizure of the Admiralty Islands, it was meant to be an integral part of the two larger prongs intended to at length threaten the Japanese occupation of the Philippines. It was the Philippines upon which MacArthur was ultimately focused, vowing to fulfill his promise, "I shall return."

Cartwheel gained approval at the Casablanca Conference between British Prime Minister Winston Churchill and President Franklin D. Roosevelt and their military staffs. Both MacArthur's Southwest Pacific and Admiral William F. "Bull" Halsey's Southern Pacific forces were to be under the overall direction of MacArthur. While Halsey oversaw the advance up the Solomons chain to Bouganville, MacArthur would lead the attack up the New Guinea coast to eventually land on New Britain and converge with Halsey's group on Rabaul. With Rabaul isolated, the original intention was to capture the base.

Operation Cartwheel isolated the Japanese bastion at Rabaul and paved the way for General Douglas MacArthur's return to the Philippines.

Soon after, however, the Combined Chiefs determined that it would be more effective to bypass Rabaul, than to assault it. If it could be isolated and neutralized by air action from bases captured or built by the advancing Allied forces, then the strong and well-equipped garrison did not need to be taken and needless casualties would be avoided. MacArthur was originally against the decision, claiming that Rabaul was too strong to be left in the rear of his force and was in any case an excellent harbor ideal, in both a naval and air sense, to support his westward advance. MacArthur's arguments failed to convince the Combined Chiefs, however, and no attempt was ever made

MacArthur was to suffer a further disappointment when many of his and Halsey's forces were earmarked instead to support Admiral Chester W. Nimitz's advance through the Central Pacific. The Combined Chiefs' decision effectively relegated MacArthur's Southwest Pacific command to a supporting role. There developed a push and pull not only between the European Theater and the Pacific Theater for men, materil, warships, and transports, but between the plans for a Central Pacific drive and for the Southwest Pacific drive toward the Philippines and eventually Japan.

Nimitz preferred the Central Pacific because there was more room to maneuver, making his aircraft carrier task groups more effective. He felt that "the waters around New Guinea [were] too crowded for America's growing fleet of aircraft carriers, that they would be exposed to attacks from land-based Japanese bombers." Many believed his motive was to keep the carriers out of MacArthur's hands. In the end, a compromise was reached. Both drives were authorized and actually became mutually supporting, each protecting the other's flank and keeping the Japanese from concentrating sufficiently against either force. Halsey kept enough of his transports to move one reinforced division, and some of his warships. MacArthur kept the 1st Marine Division, while the 2nd Marine Division went to the Central Pacific Drive.

The two commanders employed different strategies. In the words of historian William Manchester, MacArthur's intention "was to move land-based bombers forward in successive bounds to achieve local air superiority, while Nimitz's was predicated on carrier air power protecting amphibious landings on key islands, which then became stepping-stones through the enemy's defensive perimeters—but that was because they were dealing with different landscapes and seascapes."

MacArthur's key objective in taking land, whether on small islands or moving up the New Guinea coast, was to capture airfields or tracts where airfields could be constructed. "Victory depends on the advancement of the bomber line," he is reported to have said. He counted on airpower as a sort of super-mobile artillery, considering bomber and short-range fighter attacks as forerunners of the land offensive. This was also true when the objective of Cartwheel was to the taking of Rabaul and not simply its neutralization. For, he knew that his forces would need to gain control of the air over New Britain if they were to have any success against Rabaul. Indeed, airpower would play a huge role in the Cartwheel advance, especially in the leapfrogging progress up New Guinea.

The initiation of Operation Cartwheel came after the capture of Buna and Gona on the Australians'drive from Port Moresby, and the lessons learned in this campaign were important in the management of Cartwheel. Buna's capture was more difficult than had been expected due to faulty intelligence reports and ignorance—of the terrain, weather conditions, and the health of the Allied forces. The Fifth Air Force did not yet control the air, and the 32nd Infantry Division, earmarked to conduct the assault, had no experience in jungle warfare and little artillery support. The offensive against Buna, a two-pronged assault, quickly ground to a halt.

The battle essentially became a slugging match between ground forces. The Navy was loath to risk its ships in the uncharted waters off Buna. Air forces could not identify targets in the dense jungle and dropped bombs on their own troops, causing some casualties and seriously affecting morale, which was already depressed by the swampy insect-infested terrain and hot, humid air. A November 19 attack in the rain against Bun failed; an all-out attack along the entire front on November 22 was equally fruitless.

On the same day, the Australians, reinforced by two American battalions, launched a general attack against Gona and the Soputa-Sanananda road. No headway was made, but the Americans were working their way around the enemy position on the road, and by November 30 they had established a roadblock behind the Japanese, thereby cutting the supply line to Sanananda. The next three weeks were spent in maintaining this roadblock against desperate enemy attacks from all sides.

The infantry was worn out by the hot, humid conditions and by the onslaught of tropical disease. In addition, the officers of the 32nd were unaware of the extent of the Japanese defenses and manpower. In Brisbane, MacArthur, away from the fighting and ignorant of the conditions, instead concluded that the problem must be poor leadership. He sent the I Corps commander, General Robert Eichelberger, to investigate and to make changes if necessary. Eichelberger reluctantly did so, replacing the commander, Maj. Gen. Edwin Harding, but the problem was not in the leadership on the ground.

According to historian Geoffrey Perret, "MacArthur seemed to be thinking of the Western front, rather than the jungles and swamps of Papua. There was no elbow room for troops fighting their way into Buna. It was like crossing a bridge or advancing into a cave. It was not rifles that mattered; it was artillery and tanks." What was needed were reinforcements, and Buna was not taken until they arrived, with a better logistical situation and long-awaited air support. When fresh firepower and fresh

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ABOVE: In order to better assess fighting conditions being endured by U.S. and British forces, General Douglas MacArthur and Lt. Gen. Robert Eichelberger take part in an island inspection. OPPOSITE TOP: U.S. Marines descend cargo nets before being ferried ashore by landing craft in this painting by artist William Draper. OPPOSITE BOTTOM: The nine-month island-hopping campaign of Operations Cartwheel and Chronicle would see Admiral William F. Halsey moving against New Georgia and the Solomons while General Douglas MacArthur would focus on capturing the islands of Kiriwina and Woodlark off New Guinea.

troops were supplied, the Japanese defensive system collapsed quickly.

The arrival of the veteran Australian 18th Infantry, along with seven light tanks allowed for an attack along the coast. With their tanks forming a wedge, the Australians charged between the Japanese defenses and the sea. A supporting attack from the west by two American and one Australian brigade cleared that section. Further attacks, even with weak firepower, finally drove the Japanese from the Buna region. But in Buna, the Allies came up against what would be typical of the Japanese: strong defenses based on interlocking entrenchments and bunkers with overlapping fields of fire.

The fall of Buna led to further attacks up the coast with the use of tanks and fresh reinforcements, tactics and capabilities the Japanese could not imitate. By the end of December, reinforcements had been flown in and blocked the Japanese, while the 127th Infantry Regiment moved north along the coast and an Australian brigade placed tanks before the southern Japanese roadblock. By January 9, attacks against those positions opened up routes to the west and up the coast. The 127th then was able to get behind the Japanese, return to the coast, and cut them off. By January 16, Papua New Guinea was in Allied hands; all that was left was to destroy the remaining strongpoints and defeat the Japanese holdouts.

MacArthur released a typically grandiose statement claiming that it was a well-designed and inexpensive victory. This was misleading at best. The campaign was not without its errors, missteps, and recklessness, and it was very costly. Over 4,000 Allied soldiers were killed, most of them Australian. However, the operation was a strategic success. Among other positive results, MacArthur had garnered airfields from which to strike at Rabaul with Air Force bombers and fighters of the air force, and from which he could cover the future assaults on Japanese strongpoints on New Guinea. MacArthur had also learned that, unless forced, he should abjure frontal attacks without adequate artillery or air preparation.

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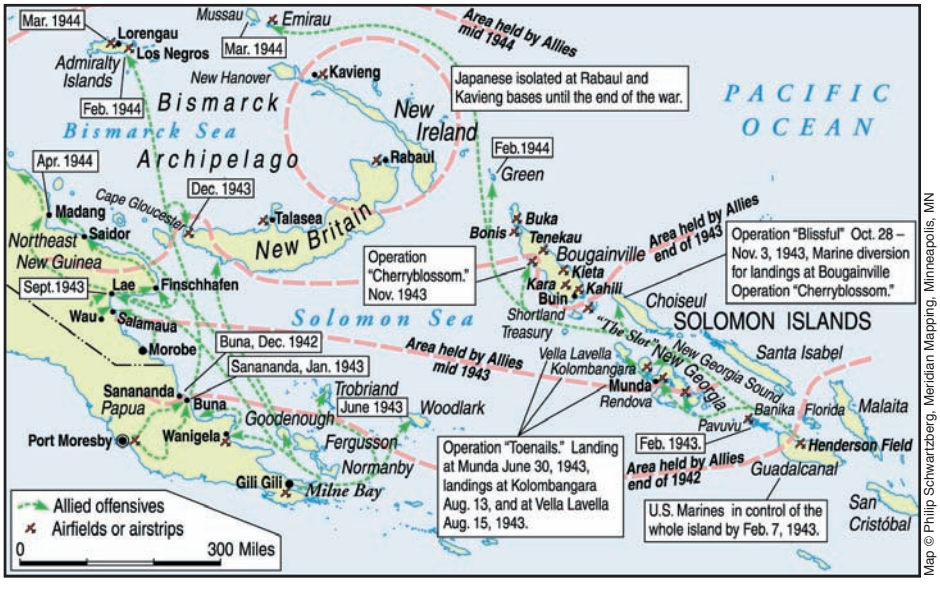

Map © Philip Schwartzberg, Meridian Mapping, Minneapolis, MN

After the Papuan campaign, MacArthur's supply and manpower situation greatly improved. By the start of the Cartwheel operation, he had four U.S. and six New Zealand and Australian divisions, with a number of specialized corps, including paratroop regiments. The Navy had sent a number of ships to his theater to augment his slight forces, adding some cruisers and destroyers as well as improved charts of the New Guinea waters.

Most important was the addition of landing craft. Also aiding MacArthur's operations were new bombers and fighters arriving to serve with the Fifth Air Force. The added elements, which continued to grow, would be used to keep the pressure on Rabaul and other Japanese air and naval bases, as well as directly support MacArthur's further operations on New Guinea.

One of the first uses of this augmented airpower capability was in the Battle of the Bismarck Sea, March 2-5, 1943. A large convoy of Japanese ships was seen at Rabaul, betraying the Japanese plan to reinforce one of their garrisons. It was believed the target was Lae, as the Japanese had previously landed a regi-

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ABOVE: A U.S. SBD Dauntless dive-bomber cruises over the Solomons. The Dauntless wreaked havoc on Japanese shipping and contributed heavily to turning the tide in the Pacific. OPPOSITE: Australian troops slosh through knee-deep water in the jungles of Buna. The stifling heat and swampy, insect-infested terrain took a harsh toll on the morale of many.

as the Japanese had previously landed a regiment there and launched a series of attacks.

On the last day of February, the convoy sailed from Rabaul. Spotted off Cape Gloucester at the western tip of New Britain, it was attacked by heavy bombers from the Fifth Air Force. The weak Japanese fighter support was intercepted, and the bombers, flying low and using skip-bombing techniques, devastated the convoy in three days of attacks. This battle was of tremendous importance to the success of Cartwheel as it so alarmed the Japanese high command that they never again sent large ships to reinforce their garrisons on New Guinea. As a result, those garrisons became more isolated and suffered great shortages of supplies.

In further attacks on New Guinea, the Allies executed a series of amphibious landings east of Lae on the coast south of the Huon Peninsula and in conjunction with an airlift of troops in the Japanese rear. After seizing the airstrip, the airlifted troops met up with the Australian 9th Division, which had landed on the beaches east of Lae. An amphibious landing to the west completed the three-pronged convergence on Lae. Air superiority was maintained not only by the capture of the airstrips, but by a well-timed assault on Japanese airfields which caught numerous enemy planes on the ground at Wewak. Combined with the Japanese commitment to the defense of Rabaul and the central Solomons, this spelled inadequate air protection for the Japanese in the region.

The Army relied on reconnaissance parties and coastwatchers, but Rear Admiral Daniel Barbey, commander of the 7th Amphibious Force which was responsible for the landing, preferred overlapping aerial photographs. He felt that interpretations of these photographic images were more reliable than the observations of local landowners who had not seen how the shore looked from the sea. Occasionally, he had some of his men make on-the-spot reconnaissance forays from rubber boats to obtain information.

In the attack at Lae, Barbey was forced to work without information on the beach approaches. The landing craft were lightly loaded to facilitate transport and to return from the beaches quickly for use in resupply. The Navy obliged with four destroyers to sweep Huon Gulf and bombard the shore. Planes were sent to support the landing at daylight, and Barbey also had the destroyer *USS Reid* with a fighter director team stationed offshore.

The 9th Division was sent ashore near Lae on September 4, with the 7th landing by air to the north of the town the next day. Salamaua was captured on September 11 and Lae on the 16th.

Sir Thomas Blamey had taken command of the Australian forces on August 20, 1943. Before the operations against Lae, he decided, against Air Force and other objections, to bypass Salamaua and proceed directly to Lae. This would neutralize the Japanese at Salamaua, who would have no way of extricating themselves and thus would offer less of a threat. He also discussed with MacArthur an advance up the Markham Valley with airborne forces. In this way, the Allies could secure airfields to provide cover for operations against Cape Gloucester.

Winston Churchill described the importance of the Markham Valley which, "running northwest from Lae, had many potential air fields, and the 7th Australian Division, swift to exploit success, occupied its length in a series of airborne assaults. All the operations were well conceived and skilfully [sic] executed, and the co-operation of all three fighting Services was brought to a high pitch." This is according to Churchill, though it may be accurate in a broader sense, to say that there were, nevertheless, disputes and interservice rivalries within the theater.

The next step was a seaborne attack on Finschafen along the New Guinea coast to the east of Lae. MacArthur and Blamey sharply disagreed on the expected enemy strength there, with MacArthur downplaying the size of the Japanese defensive force. The result of this dispute was dissension over the proper size of the assaulting force required to take Finschafen. Blamey wanted a landing with two brigades, while MacArthur thought one would be sufficient. In the end, Blamey ordered the second to be sent in, which caused a bitter dispute when Barbey hesitated to deploy it and, as it turned out, the Japanese were in greater strength than Australian intelligence had assumed.

D-day was September 22, 1943, and Barbey had only three days to plan, assemble ships, and load cargo and only six days to pick up troops. Barbey planned for his landing craft to hit the beach one hour before daylight and land troops along with 15 days of supplies. This was considered enough time in which to construct temporary landing areas for air support. The Japanese resistance was so stiff, however, that it took the full two weeks to get Finschafen declared secure. MacArthur accepted Blamey's plan, despite objections from the U.S. Navy, which had wanted an advance along the New Guinea coast before the landing at Cape Gloucester. However, this was the last time Blamey exercised any influence as commander of the Allied land force.

MacArthur understood the significance of control of the seas, and he coupled that with the importance of control of the air in leading his advance to the Philippines. With control of the seas north of New Guinea, he would not need to advance through the 1,500 miles of jungle that lay between him and the staging areas necessary for a successful return to the Philippines. MacArthur, therefore, planned to use air-

A major component of this airpower in the New Guinea campaign was the implementation of tactical air doctrines developed by Major General Ennis Whitehead, deputy commander of the Fifth Air Force. According to historian Donald Goldstein, Whitehead's tactics were simple. This included using his air reconnaissance and concentrating his airpower on individual targets rather than spreading his forces thinly over many targets. He would first gain air superiority in a given area, then isolate the enemy in this area on both land and sea by bombing and cutting him off from supplies and reinforcements, and finally blasting his ground position with heavy and medium bombers.

To facilitate this plan, Whitehead assigned the First Task Force of the Fifth Air Force to a hamlet called Dobodura on the other side of the Owen Stanley Range from Port Moresby. There, his forces constructed 70 airfields to facilitate attacks against Rabaul and other Japanese bases. As protection for the base at Dobodura, Whitehead had surprise landings made on a pair of islands off the New Guinea coast where airstrips were built.

The attacks on these islands, Kiriwina and Woodlark, fell under the codename Operation Chronicle and began on June 30, 1943. For Chronicle, Halsey loaned MacArthur ships, troops, and Seabees (Navy construction battalions) and provided Barbey with distant and close support. Barbey decided to approach the islands at night.

Observed by many high-ranking American officers, the mission "was fouled up from the beginning." The landing craft, approaching the beach at 8 PM, had difficulty clearing a sandbar at the entrance to the channel and had problems maneuvering along the sloping beach. The Japanese offered no resistance. Yet, in spite of such drawbacks and a 50 percent seasick rate, Barbey moved 16,000 men and their supplies 185 miles through poorly charted waters without the loss of a single ship.

According to Goldstein and others, attacks from Dobodura on Rabaul were so effective that they made the Japanese sea and air bases at Rabaul untenable and ended their threat to the Allied advance along the New Guinea coast. It was this that made the Allied Supreme Command decide to bypass Rabaul rather than attempt to capture it.

Yet, before Rabaul could be effectively bypassed, it was necessary to neutralize the Japanese air base at Wewak, which was farther up the New Guinea coast and was a threat to any further Allied advance. Attacks there, however, were met with fierce antiaircraft and fighter defenses, resulting in heavy losses. Therefore, at NadzabWhitehead established the 309th Bomber Wing, which was composed of Australian and American airborne infantry that had been airdropped by troop carrier forces. From there that same force captured Marilinan, 40 miles southwest of Lae and Salamaua. This air base allowed Allied aircraft to refuel when returning to Dobodura and made possible fighter support for bombing raids over Wewak.

In a raid on August 17 1943, more than 200 Japanese aircraft were destroyed and Wewak was effectively neutralized. Like Rabaul, Wewak could be bypassed.

The campaign on Guadalcanal had exposed weaknesses in both Army and Navy jungle and island tactics and forced a reassessment that would lead to some of the innovations that came out of Cartwheel. Much of the criticism stemmed from a perceived absence of command unity and the differences between Army and Navy views of how to conduct operations.

Operational logistics were a significant problem in the Southwest Pacific due to numerous factors, including the scarcity of available shipping, a lack of unloading facilities and skilled dock labor, too few storage facilities, and an inadequate distribution system, to name only a few. The divided command and separate requisition systems maintained by the Army and Navy were also factors. Of course, the Allied situation was far better than that of the Japanese, and Japan's would only grow worse with the increase in Allied air and naval power.

This concern about lack of shipping is evidence, however, of a significant advance in the Allies' thinking. Planners were gaining an increasing appreciation, which grew exponentially after Guadalcanal, of the importance of the role of logistics and supply techniques in island warfare.

The importance of logistics functions is well described by retired Marine officer and historian Joseph Alexander: "The impact of logistics on the vital element of acceleration, or momentum, in an opposed amphibious assault cannot be overstated. Assault troops have to dash ashore virtually naked, a storming party of riflemen and light machine gunners who cannot be slowed with logistical burdens. As developed in amphibious doctrine, tactical sustainability gets ashore by increments, first in follow-on scheduled waves, then in designated on-call waves, or 'floating dumps,' finally by general unloading once the beachhead has been secured to enable unrestricted, administrative flow of boats in and out."

There developed a difference of opinion between the Navy and the landing forces over how long unloading should take. The Marines believed that offloading procedures should be the responsibility of the commander in charge on the beachhead. He would determine what supplies were needed and in what order.

Australian War Memorial

The Navy considered the safety of the vulnerable transports to be paramount and insisted on control of offloading procedures to make sure the process was as quick and orderly as possible to free up the shipping for release from the dangerous shore. In the Solomons, the Navy generally got its wish, as the Japanese response to Allied landings was to effect strong air and surface counterattacks against the assaulting forces and their shipping.

The effectiveness of the Navy method was then gauged by how much around-the-clock

unloading was required before the boats could get back to sea. Although the Finschafen landing on September 22, 1943, experienced some glitches and suffered from attacks by Japanese planes, the landing and unloading went at a faster rate than ever before. By sunrise on the 23rd, the landing ships were headed back to Lae to embark the follow-up forces.

Far to the southeast, Admiral William Halsey was conducting the right wing of the Cartwheel campaign. Among the forces under his general control, his Army commander had four divisions in addition to the 1st and 3rd Marine Divisions, which amounted to 250,000 troops, counting service personnel. The air forces available in the Solomons theater, known as AirSols, included 200 bombers and 250 fighters of all types from Marine Corps, Navy, and New Zealand air forces. Halsey did not have a large, permanent naval force, but was normally provided with what he needed for a specific mission by Nimitz. At the start of Cartwheel he had an amphibious force and two cruiser-destroyer forces that totaled eight cruisers and 16 destroyers. He also had at his service two aircraft carriers, the *Saratoga* and the *Enterprise*, and their attendant task forces.

After the fall of Guadalcanal, Halsey's main objectives lay in MacArthur's theater, and MacArthur was determined to utilize all the forces under his command to march toward Rabaul. According to Manchester, Halsey was proud to serve under MacArthur and he and his men had become "MacArthur's right wing." His capture of the Russell Islands, a part of the Solomon chain, was "intended to be a prelude to the admiral's advance up the long ladder of the Solomons toward Rabaul, which would then be trapped between Halsey on the east and MacArthur on the west."

The first assault in Halsey's Solomon component of the Cartwheel plan was the capture of the airfields at Munda on New Georgia Island. Halsey developed a practically simple plan to land a division east of the airfield, break through the Japanese defenses, and seize the field. Simultaneously, another amphibious landing would be made on the north coast of the island to drive southwest and seize the harbor to prevent the Japanese from evacuating. The landing parties were to be supported by artillery from the nearby island of Rendova, which had been seized earlier.

The first part of the plan went well, though it was decided to land at Segei early. The shipping was not available for full-scale assaults, so relatively small forces went ashore at Segei and the three other landing sites where there were few Japanese. If the Japanese were able to occupy Segei before the arrival of the Americans, more troops might be required to take it, upsetting the complicated Cartwheel timetable.

With landings made, a harbor was secured for resupply and an airstrip begun at Segei point. Concern that Japanese forces were too strong at the original site prompted the decision to divert the main landings east of Munda airfield. When the Allied regiments proceeded toward Munda, stiff Japanese resistance stopped them. The Japanese had set up an extremely strong defense consisting of roadblocks east of Munda and fortified lines strung with automatic weapons. They were able to sever communication between the infantry on the Munda trail and the regiments along the beach. Supply was intermittent and morale sank. Frontal attacks along this sector made little headway. MacArthur had already learned that lesson in New Guinea.

The assault in the north sector of the island fared little better due to the toughness of the terrain and the stubbornness of the Japanese. Reinforcements were required there as well, but the naval support task groups had their own problems. Alhough outnumbering the Japanese naval forces in the area, the Allies had not yet overcome the superiority of the Japanese long lance torpedo. A Japanese task force delivering reinforcements clashed with an American task group, sinking a cruiser. Later, in spite of air attacks, another Japanese force made it through, although it did not reach the garrisons on New Georgia.

The Allies, however, continued to remain bogged down against Japanese resistance. Halsey sent Maj. Gen. Oscar Griswold to investigate, and he determined that the troops were "dispirited, exhausted, and suffering from low morale" he was critical of the dual command arrangement and felt the 43rd Division on the island would fold up under the pressure if they

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island would fold up under the pressure if they were not reinforced soon.

Consequently, the size of the invasion force was doubled with the commitment of additional regiments. This brought the size of the force up to what it should have been in the first place. There was a tendency among American commanders to initially underestimate Japanese resistance, leading to an inadequate force commitment. It was a hard-learned lesson.

A new offensive was ordered, which began on July 25th after the extensive employment of artillery and air and naval gunfire to knock out the Japanese fixed defenses. The Japanese fell back to rear defensive lines after suffering heavy losses. Some fell back even farther to a narrow perimeter around Munda Point, which conceded the airfield to the Americans. However, it took another three weeks before the Americans could capture the port, allowing the Japanese to evacuate most of their remaining troops to the islands of Kolombangara and Baanga.

Baanga was quickly captured by the Americans. Japanese troops on Kolombangara, while expecting to fight for possession of that island (if not attempt to retake New Georgia), were effectively isolated by the loss of a Japanese transport convoy in Vella Gulf off the coast. The Allied attack on the convoy sent some 1,500 Japanese soldiers to the bottom of the sea.

Halsey's decision to take Vella LaVella, an ungarrisoned island to the north, effectively isolated the Japanese troops and, in a series of operations, they were evacuated to southern Bouganville. The Navy, like MacArthur's forces on New Guinea, was getting the hang of leapfrogging past strong garrisons to cut them off and isolate them. Yet, the Japanese still had a large enough naval force to evacuate their men and save them for another fight, in spite of their now persistent state of defensive retreat.

At Bougainville, the next great test of Halsey's climb up the Solomons ladder, the tactics were considerably altered, though the strategic concept remained the same. The objective was to seize and secure airbases from which fighters could support long-range bombers from Munda and Papua New Guinea in their attacks on Rabaul. The Japanese had built several airstrips and had a large garrison of almost 60,000 troops on Bougainville and the nearby islands. A reconnaissance assessment of the Japanese force determined that they were strongest at the southern tip of Bougainville, on the southern offshore Shortland islands, and at sites in the north and surrounding the airport on the eastern shore.

The original assault plan was scrapped due to the length of time devoted to Munda and the

ABOVE: British soldiers exit landing craft and head into the thicket on a mission to relieve their American allies. OPPOSITE: With armor leading the way, U.S. Marines advance on a Japanese pillbox. Often, such enemy strongpoints had to be reduced by individual soldiers with satchel charges or point-blank fire from armored vehicles.

strength of the Japanese in the south. Therefore, Empress Augusta Bay on the western shore of the island was chosen as the landing site. Due to the dense jungle, the great distances, and the wide distribution of Japanese troops, the enemy would require a significant time to redeploy in support of any threatened points away from Japanese garrisons.

Halsey simply did not have enough troops to take on the 35,000 Japanese defending the airstrips. The Allied forces did not need to seize the entire island since control of a relatively small perimeter would be sufficient for the construction of an airstrip. The Japanese were counting on the Americans attacking them through the jungle terrain, where they expected to inflict heavy casualties. However, by March 1944, it was clear to the Japanese that the Americans were committed to a defensive strategy there and, if they wanted to prevail and to take out the vital airfield, the Japanese would themselves have to frontally attack.

Earlier landings were made in the Treasury Islands, both as support for Bougainville and as diversions, and another landing was carried out on the island of Choiseul, south of Bougainville, and used primarily as a feint. The Japanese would be expecting an attack there as the next logical step in the island hopping campaign, and therefore would be thoroughly fooled by the feint, even though the island itself was in relatively unimportant to the Americans. The bypassing technique, later so important, was still in a trial stage at this time, but the attack on Choiseul augured well for the strategy as the capture proved relatively easy and the Japanese were deceived.

The Parachute Battalion stormed ashore on Choiseul in an amphibious assault and captured the accessible enemy installations, while setting up a defensive position. The Japanese, believing they faced a stronger force than had actually landed, attacked from the north and south and were repulsed with great loss. With the landings on Empress Augusta Bay, the true nature of the American plan became obvious, and the battalion withdrew to join the forces on Bougainville. As a result of the operation, Choiseul was neutralized; with the Americans on Bouganville, Choiseul was useless.

The bombardment proved ineffective at Bougainsville as well. Preliminary attacks included airstrikes that had been performed for weeks before the landing. Marine aircraft had been hitting the enemy airfields on the island and at nearby locations which could threaten the landing effort. They were aided by Army and Navy planes operating from other islands in the Solomons, including Guadalcanal. Even carrier borne aircraft got into the act, hitting bases on New Britain and New Ireland. The intention was to neutralize Japanese airstrips that were within attacking distance of Empress Augusta Bay. These attacks were largely successful, though some fighters and dive-bombers did delay unloading at the beaches.

On D-day, November 1, the covering fire

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ABOVE: In the sweltering midday heat, soldiers of the 37th Infantry Division return fire at attacking Japanese in Bougainville. OPPOSITE: Wounded in action during Operation Cartwheel, a soldier of the 43rd Infantry Division is moved on a stretcher to the operating room at the division's field hospital. The advent of the field hospital in World War II saved the lives of many wounded American soldiers.

lasted only 11 minutes, because the Japanese were thought to have few, if any, forces in the immediate vicinity. The first wave of amphibious assault troops landed following a bombing and strafing attack on the landing area. The 3rd and 9th Marines and the Raider Regiment (minus one battalion) carried out the assault, with the 21st Marines and the 37th Infantry Division in reserve. These, about 34,000 men, constituted the I Marine Amphibious Corps.

The transports carrying troops and supplies formed lines off the beach as the barrage progressed. Destroyers bombarded Cape Torokina where intelligence had determined there were enemy emplacements. Ships passed by the cape and let loose with their main batteries. As the transports waited to go ashore, Marine fighters and bombers directed a last-minute attack on the landing area, but in reality they had little effect. Naval historian John A. Lorelli wrote, "The first wave was approaching the beach when the failure of both bombardments was revealed. One bunker behind the southern beaches sheltered a 75mm gun that was put into lethal play by the defenders. The leading boat crew commander became one of the first casualties when his LCVP was blown to bits. The enemy gunners hit thirteen other boats, sinking three. The fire of this gun caused the first wave to become scrambled but did not stop the landing."

As they moved in, boats carrying the assault troops came under fire from a pair of islands close offshore. A landing party quickly silenced them, but when the assault units approached the beach they were met with heavy fire from small arms, mortars, and artillery. As it turned out, the Japanese had moved in 300 men since the last amphibious scouting mission. These men were well dug in and prepared to offer stiff resistance.

In spite of this opposing fire, the landings were made, though the unexpected resistance and the loss of the boat containing the boat group commander made the assault confused and offline. Many of the units landed far from their assigned positions. Due to these factors, and the landing of the 9th Marines on a severely sloping beach with high surf, the beachhead was very narrow. The extreme density of the jungle also limited the beachhead. The jungle was filled with swampy areas that were very difficult for the assault troops to negotiate. However, by the end of the first day, the Third Amphibious Force had put 14,000 troops and 6,000 tons of supplies ashore. The transports pulled out and minelayers began to lay a minefield off the beach.

Although the landing went relatively smoothly in the center and southern sectors, it was a different story to the north. There was no resistance from Japanese troops, but poor surf and beach conditions disrupted the flow of the landing. Landing craft could not come ashore easily on the steep beaches, and soon the surf was littered with wrecked LCMs and LCVPs. The landing plan was altered accordingly, shifting the northern transports to the south. In spite of Japanese aerial counterstrikes, the transports were offloaded and back at sea by nightfall.

In large part, the operation at Bougainville resembled Guadalcanal. The assault had a limited objective: to capture and defend a strategic airfield site. At the outset, conquest of the entire island was not required. Other points of similarity included the general nature of the terrain and certain of the enemy's reactions. But there were differences as well. In contrast to Guadalcanal, the Japanese were the ones lacking supplies. Consequently, at Bougainville the result was never in doubt.

Another contrast, and one that determined tactical objectives, was that at Bougainville the Americans would be required to build their own airstrip. This was not because there were none in existence on the island (as a matter of fact, the Japanese had three functioning airstrips). The Japanese fully expected the airstrips to be targets, and they were strongly held. Therefore, strategic surprise was impossible, so it made sense to achieve tactical surprise by attacking where least expected.

In this campaign, though not on Bougainville itself, parachutists played an important part. Four days before the assault on Bougainville began, the Eighth New Zealand Brigade Group launched a parachute assault on the Treasury Islands, southeast of Empress Augusta Bay. This operation was to serve as a feint to distract the enemy from the main effort and to neutralize a potential threat to the Allied line of communications. Although the Allied troops encountered stiff resistance, within two weeks the area was secured.

Halsey felt he had enough planes with Kenney's Papuan bombers, but he worried about the inadequacy of his naval force. Many warships had been lost or damaged in earlier actions in the Central Solomons, and new construction was being earmarked almost entirely for the Mediterranean. What was not was assigned by Nimitz to the Central Pacific thrust. For the assault on Bougainville, Halsey had to rely on Admiral T.S. Wilkinson's Third Amphibious Force and 12 transports with 11 destroyer escorts.

The expected Japanese cruiser attack on the beachhead came quickly. The Americans were ready and showed how much they had learned since Guadalcanal. U.S. Army reconnaissance planes spotted the force of enemy cruisers and destroyers, and Allied naval forces repulsed them with a flanking attack in the Battle of Empress Augusta Bay.

two destroyer divisions were detached, "which raced along the enemy's flanks attacking with torpedoes. At the same time … cruisers, firing their guns, executed a series of 180 degree simultaneous turns, repeatedly crossing the enemy's T, each time a little closer, and thereby forcing the Japanese into confused retreat." At dawn the Americans broke off the pursuit and braced for the inevitable air assault that duly came. The Japanese lost 17 planes for two inconsequential hits.

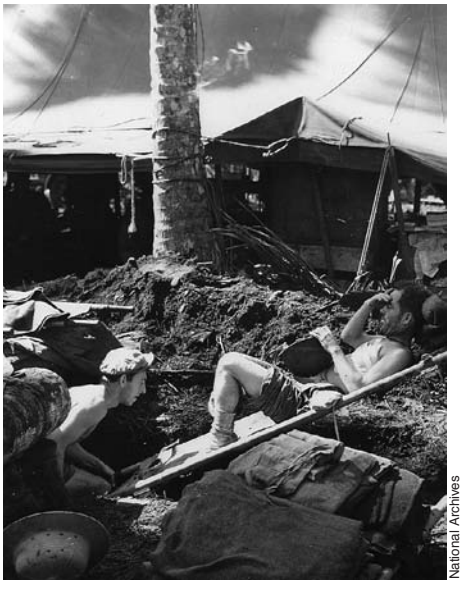
Two days later, on November 4, planes from the Solomons spotted another Japanese force of four destroyers and eight cruisers headed for Rabaul from Truk. The carrier group of *Saratoga*, reinforced with the light carrier *Princeton*, could attack the force while it was fueling in Rabaul. This went against the common wisdom that carrier forces should not attack a strong, heavily defended base, but it was necessary to protect the Marines on Bougainville. Along with the land-based aircraft on the island of Vella LaVella, recently captured, the carrier force had air cover and was free to send 100 fighters, dive-bombers, and torpedo planes against the Japanese force that had anchored at Rabaul just two hours before.

The attack was a huge success, damaging six cruisers and two destroyers with a loss of 10 planes. As Halsey remarked upon hearing the report, the results opened "the stops for a funeral dirge for Tojo's Rabaul." After three days the beachhead was hardly any deeper, though the troops had encountered no serious resistance since the first day.

The Marines on Bougainville were aided by a number of important factors, not the least of which was the harsh terrain. For one thing, although the swamp they confronted, inhibited expansion of the beachhead, it also was a fine defensive barrier against enemy attempts at dislodgment. Also, the terrain seemed a poor choice for an airstrip, which may go some way to explaining the confused response of the Japanese, who could not fathom Allied intentions on the island and consequently offered only confused and uncertain combat. It was not until the Marines had left and the Seabees and engineers had created a usable base there that the Japanese attempted to dislodge the Allies in any determined way.

The Japanese counterattack in force came in March and was directed at a spot on the American perimeter known as Hill 700. The perimeter was composed of a number of hills and valleys, and Hill 700 was right in the center, towering above the area with a clear view of the airfield. The Americans, aware of an impending Japanese attack, planned accordingly, allowing for a strong reserve force to repulse the Japanese wherever they might make a breakthrough. The massive attack began on March 8, and at one point the Japanese assault partially overran the hill. The attackers were eventually repulsed by 37th Division forces, which inflicted horrendous casualties in recapturing the hill. The Japanese abandoned their effort on March 13.

The seizure of New Britain, the island on which Rabaul lay, began on December 15, 1943. The Sixth Army, under General Walter Krueger, was assigned the task of taking Arawe Peninsula, southeast of Cape Gloucester. Its capture would isolate the western tip of New Britain from Rabaul. It had a small harbor from which control could be extended over the Vitiaz and Dampier Straits, separated New Guinea from New Britain.



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Kreuger selected the 112th Cavalry Regiment, along with artillery, engineer, and other supporting units, to conduct the amphibious operation. The 112th had negligible training in the amphibious assault landings, the harbor was infested with coral, and amphibious tractors and tanks had to be used instead of landing craft. Kenney promised air cover, and the Pacific Fleet's carriers contributed aircraft.

Intelligence reports claimed that Arawe would be only lightly defended, but the 112th Cavalry soon ran into heavy machine-gun fire as they approached the landing sites. Nevertheless, American superiority in firepower quickly forced the Japanese to retreat. By the middle of the afternoon, the 112th had established a foothold. The Japanese began a series of furious air attacks that were to last for several days, concentrating on the American ships supporting the landings. They also brought up reinforcements of infantry to dig in just outside the bridgehead positions. Krueger reinforced the 112th with a Marine tank company and additional infantry. Utilizing armored firepower from Marine tanks, American soldiers forced the Japanese from their trenches.

In the midst of the struggle, a number of firsts had been achieved, according to Barbey's biographer, "including the first use of tractors, rockets, an LSD, and Australian LSI, LCTs as medical centers, a specially trained naval beach party, landing craft control officers (Barbey's brainchild), and the employment of carrier aircraft in close support." In earlier tests, LST's took three hours to unload; at Arawe they unloaded in less than an hour.

As it was, the fighting took a month. The trenches were not overrun until January 16, at a total cost of 118 Americans killed and 352 wounded.

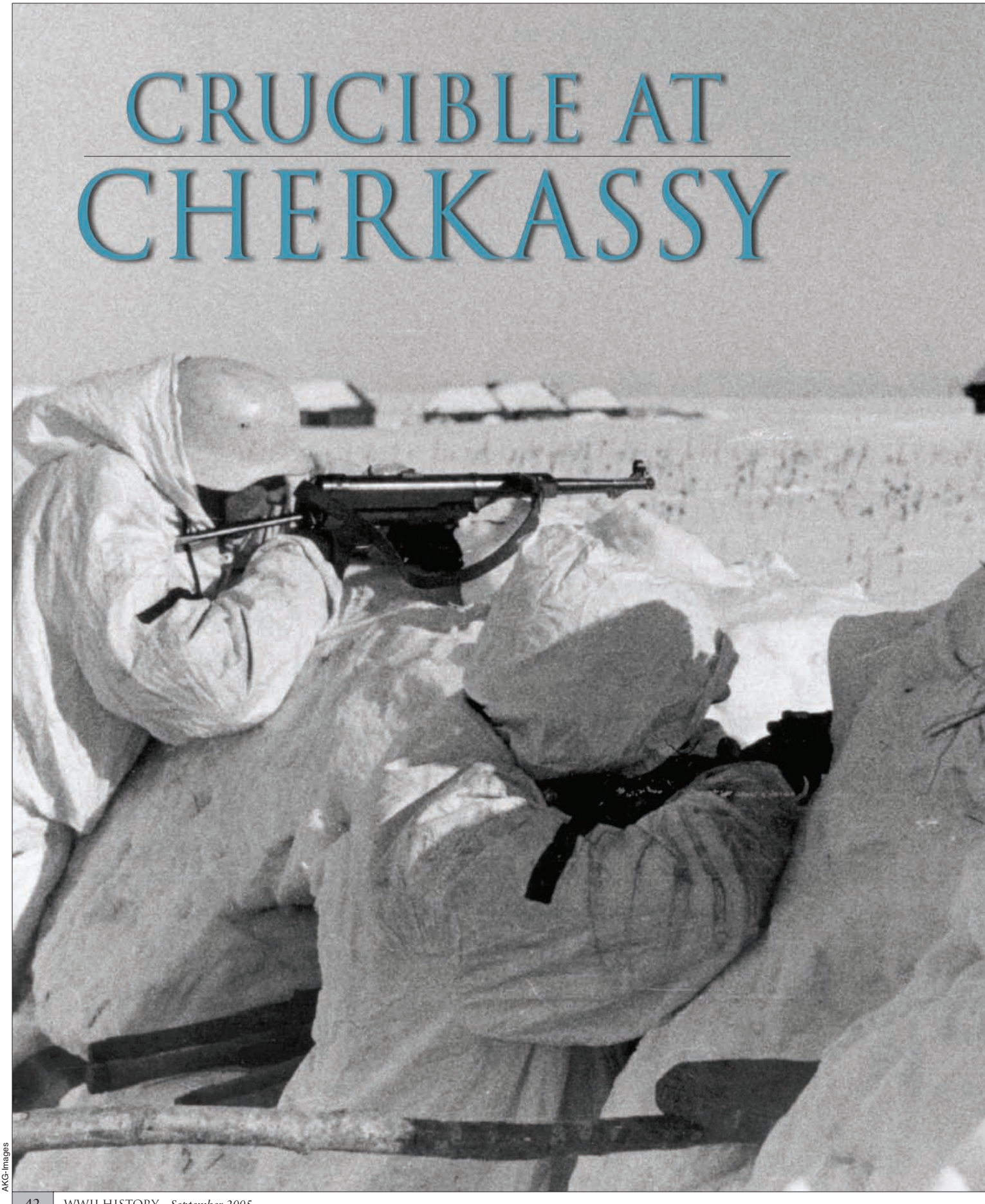
To complete the security of the right flank of New Guinea, two new bases were needed. At the same time as the fighting raged at Arawe, Krueger launched an operation to seize the airfield at Cape Gloucester on the extreme western tip of New Britain. With airstrips there and in the eastern Solomons, Rabaul could be threatened from the east, west, and south at the same time, effectively neutralizing it. Named Operation Backhander, the assault was a mirror image of Arawe, but prosecuted on a larger scale. The attack on Cape Gloucester required coordination between Whitehead's air plan and the naval forces of the Southern Pacific Area under the command of Admiral Barbey. The coordinated attack and the concept of preparations used in the invasion were applied to other amphibious operations.

For a week before the invasion, the target was hit with intensive night and day aerial bombardment. Shorter reconnaissance was also carried out on a daily basis to assess the damage and to uncover new targets. With careful planning from naval and coordinated sea patrols, Cape Gloucester was sealed off from Japanese reinforcement and resupply. Naval gunfire and air support during the assault were coordinated and included timely responses to requests by heavy B-17 Flying Fortress bombers. By the time Allied troops landed, the Japanese were worn out.

Yet, according to Barbey, naval bombardment was of only limited usefulness, and must not be considered a panacea. "Naval bombardment," he wrote, "is very effective against fixed targets, but of little use when firing into a matted rain forest that extends almost to the

Continued on page 82

CRUCIBLE AT CHERKASSY



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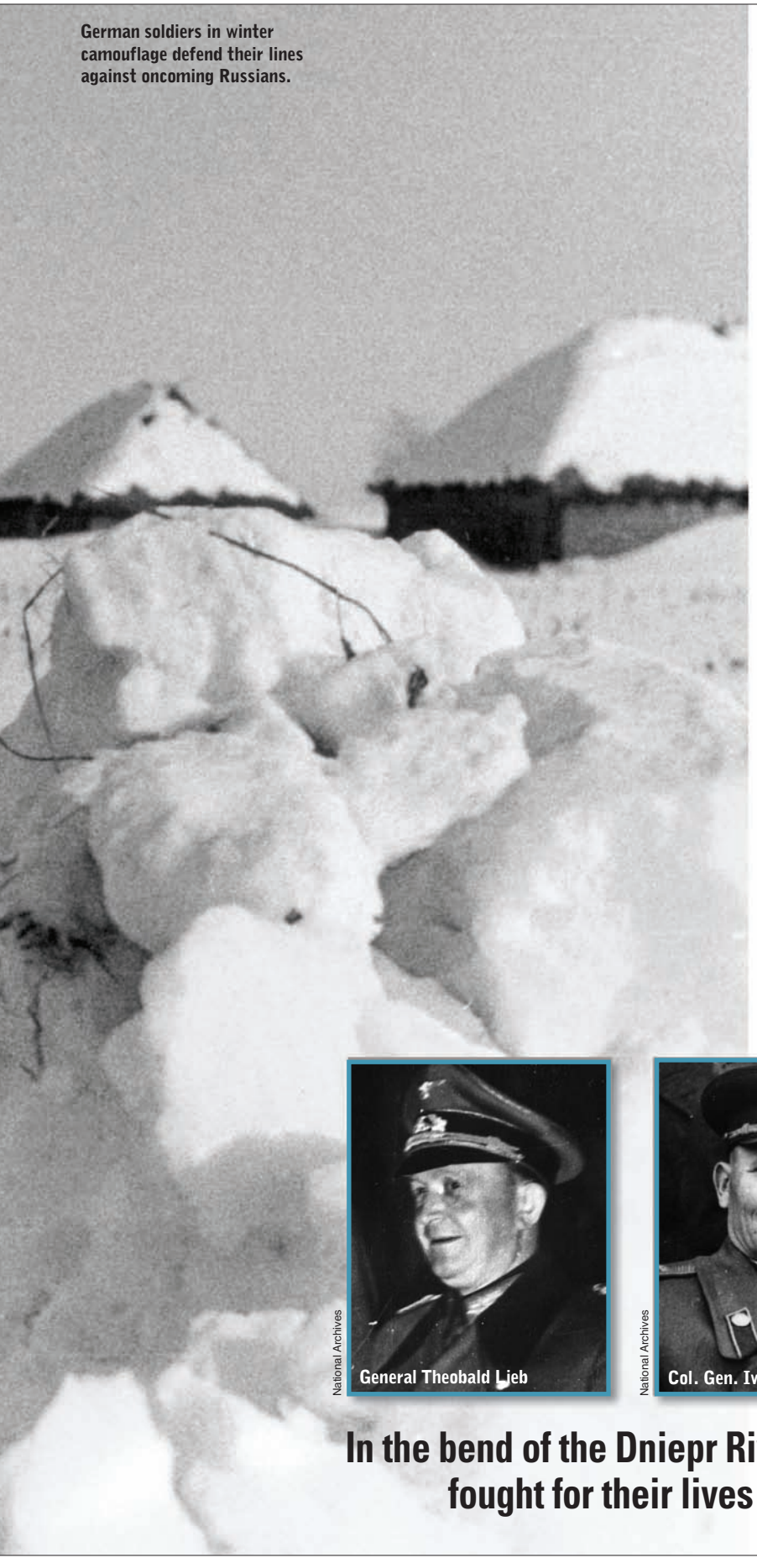

German soldiers in winter camouflage defend their lines against oncoming Russians.

BY PAT MCTAGGART

IT WAS THE THIRD WINTER IN RUSSIA FOR THE MEN of Field Marshal Erich von Manstein's Army Group South, and things were going from bad to worse. Since the gigantic battle at Kursk in July 1943, von Manstein's battered divisions had been steadily pushed to the west. In a massive counter offensive after the battle, Soviet forces drove the Germans to the Dniepr River in the Ukraine with a series of shattering blows.

Pausing to regroup after reaching the eastern bank of the river, the commanders of four Red Army fronts waited anxiously to continue the offensive while streams of supplies and replacements filled their depleted ranks. In Moscow, Stalin and his high command (STAVKA) were planning a drive that would not only liberate the Ukraine, but reclaim the Crimea as well.

Even von Manstein would have approved the audacity of the operation. Spearheaded by armored divisions and motorized infantry, the Soviets planned a staggered attack by the four fronts, which would keep the Germans guessing as to where the main attack was taking place. After the German line was breached, regular infantry would surge through the gaps and hit any enemy units left in the main line from the rear. Taking a page from German armored doctrine, the Red Army tank units would keep going without worrying about their flanks until the Crimea was isolated. The following infantry and motorized units were to consolidate their gains, possibly encircling the three armies of Army Group South (1st and 4th Panzer and the 8th Army) in the process.

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General Theobald Lieb

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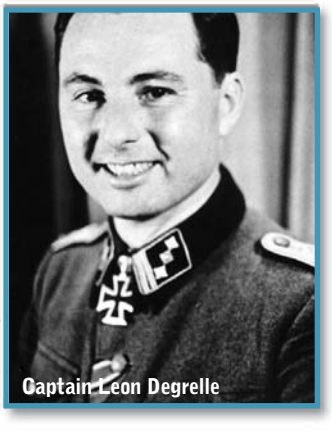
Col. Gen. Ivan Konev



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Captain Leon Degrelle

In the bend of the Dniepr River, surrounded German troops fought for their lives during the winter of 1943-1944.

On paper, von Manstein had a powerful force with which to defend the Dniepr Line. In fact, many of his infantry divisions had an average combat strength of a thousand men. His panzer divisions were not in much better shape.

Von Manstein's southern flank was protected by Col. Gen. Karl Hollidt's 6th Army, consisting of 13 understrength divisions. The meandering Dniepr made it necessary for Hollidt's divisions to defend the eastern side of the river in positions that had been hastily constructed and that were practically worthless in the face of overpowering Soviet superiority.

On October 1, the 3rd Ukrainian Front under Rodion Malinovsky began attacking German forces near Zaporozhye. While the Germans scrambled to send reinforcements to help, the 4th Ukrainian Front (Fyodor Tolbukhin) struck Hollidt on October 9. Supported by 400 batteries of artillery, Tolbukhin's 45 infantry divisions, two guards mechanized corps, three tank corps, and two guards cavalry corps smashed through the almost useless defense works of the 6th Army.

The final blow came when the 1st and 2nd Ukrainian Fronts of Col. Gens. Nikolai Vatutin and Ivan Konev hit Army Group South on October 15. The Germans were slowly pushed back across the entire front of attack and were saved only by the rainy season, which began in mid-November. Casualties on both sides had been horrendous, and the Germans had little means of replacing their losses.

It was different for the Soviets. On their way westward, they immediately drafted any male of fighting age into their ranks. Few said no to the NKVD squads that roamed liberated areas on the prowl for new recruits. Taking advantage of the lull, Soviet commanders fleshed out their ranks, teaching the new soldiers the rudimentary basics of combat. At the same time, supplies poured into the battle area, bringing food and ammunition to continue the advance once the ground had sufficiently frozen.

Meanwhile, STAVKA revised its original plan, since annihilation of German forces on the entire southern front was no longer feasible. The bulge created in the October offensive, defended by General Erhard Raus's 4th Panzer Army and the 8th Army under General Otto Wöhler, was tailor made for encirclement. Destruction of the two armies was assigned to Konev and Vatutin.

The Russians struck with with the onset of winter in early December. While Konev headed out toward the important communications hub of Kirovograd, Vatutin struck the 4th Panzer Army's left flank and then headed for the Bug River. Both fronts were to link up on the Bug River at Pervoinaysk.

Blowing snow whipped by gale-force winds prevented either side from using air support, and the battle soon became hopelessly confused as marauding groups of Soviet tanks and mechanized infantry clashed with columns of German troops attempting to form a new line. Many of the German units soon found that they had been cut off and surrounded.

One of these units was commanded by 22-year-old Sergeant Franz Hofbauer. In a letter to the author, Hofbauer described those first harrowing days of the Soviet attack:

"I had barely taken over command of the 3/Fusilier Battalion 72 when the Russians attacked. Our company commander had been killed a few days earlier. By December 3, I realized that Ivan had us surrounded, so I formed the company into a Hedgehog [all around] defensive position. This was near the town of Cherkassy. We were attacked again and again by the Russians, but our position held long enough for the battalion to occupy a new defensive line.

"Our ammunition was almost nil, and I realized that the only thing that we could do is [sic] attack. We formed a wedge and struck Ivan in an area closest to our own main line. Luckily, the Russians were caught by surprise, and we were able to break through, taking our wounded and our weapons with us. I received the *Ritterkreuz* [Knight's Cross] for this action, but it was the courage of my men that really saved us."

SEEING THE WRITING ON THE WALL, VON MANSTEIN DECIDED TO TAKE MATTERS INTO HIS OWN HANDS...

The Soviet attack continued, with Vatutin creating more havoc with the 4th Panzer Army. Von Manstein tried to convey the seriousness of the situation to Hitler, but the German dictator would not listen, calling the field marshal a defeatist and threatening to relieve him. Seeing the writing on the wall, von Manstein decided to take matters into his own hands by reshuffling his forces. He handed over the 1st Panzer Army's sector to Hollidt's 6th Army and ordered it to Uman. There, the 1st Panzer Army would add to its ranks the XXIV Panzer Corps and the VII Army Corps of the 4th Panzer Army.

The commander of the 1st Panzer Army, the one-armed General Hans Hube, was also ordered to created a reserve armored force around the headquarters of the III Panzer Corps, which would soon be commanded by General Hermann Breith. The force included the 6th and 17th Panzer Divisions, the 16th Panzergrenadier Division, and the 101st Jâger Division.

The move was justified when on January 3, 1944, Soviet advance units were caught and mauled a mere 30 miles from Uman. As that engagement was taking place, Konev's 2nd Ukrainian Front made a thrust toward Kirovograd. Led by Col. Gen. Pavel Rotmistrov's 5th Guards Tank Army, the Soviets fought through the German defenses and encircled the four divisions now trapped inside the city.

Against Hitler's orders, General Fritz Bayerlein led the four divisions in a successful breakout, giving von Manstein a new force to use against the Russians. They succeeded in stemming the Soviet advance, but the Red Army offensive had gained important ground and had created a dangerous bulge in the German line on the Dniepr bend. Von Manstein repeatedly called for the withdrawal of the units inside the bulge, but Hitler steadfastly refused.

Throughout January, the Soviets tried to keep their momentum going, but German counterattacks seemed to thwart them at every turn. In Moscow, STAVKA decided to shift the focus of the offensive and ordered Vatutin and Konev to concentrate on eliminating the Dniepr Bulge. With those orders, the two Soviet generals devised a plan similar to the double encirclement used so effectively at Stalingrad. The inner ring would be formed by infantry units supported by some tanks, while an outer ring, with the purpose of meeting enemy counterattacks, would be composed of mechanized and armored corps with infantry support. For the operation, the Soviets would enjoy an overall superiority of 7:1 in artillery, 5:1 in tanks and 2:1 in men.

Pressed into the bulge were General Theobald Lieb's XLII Army Corps (5th SS Panzer Division "Wiking," SS Brigade "Wallonien," and the remnants of the 112th, 255th, and 332nd Infantry Divisions known as Corps Abteilung B) and General Wilhelm Stemmermann's XI Army Corps (57th, 72nd, and remnants of the 389th Infantry Division). Joining them were the 88th Infantry Division and elements of the 167th, 168th, and 323rd Infantry Divisions, the 213th Sicherungs (Security) Division, and the 14th Panzer Division.

"We had no second or third line of defense, as was usual in the preceding years," General Heinz Gaedke, who as a colonel had been

Stemmermann's chief-of-staff, wrote to the author." But our corps was so depleted that our divisional commanders were happy that we even had a single line to occupy."

The battle for the Cherkassy bulge began on January 24 with an attack by Konev's 2nd Ukrainian Front against a 12-mile front that had no more than one German infantryman for every 15 yards. Penetrations in the German line were soon made, although it was not the knockout blow that the Soviets had expected.

STAVKA had hoped for a penetration of at least 30 kilometers on the first day, but steadfast German resistance upset the timetable. Interior communications and accurate artillery fire allowed German units to slowly retreat. Konev threw Maj. Gen. A.I. Ryzhov's 4th Guards Army and Co.l Gen. Pavel Rotmistrov's 5th Guards Tank Army into the fray, but only four kilometers were gained for a heavy price.

On January 26, the 1st Ukrainian Front attacked the border of the 88th and 198th Infantry Divisions. Supported by tanks, three and a half Red Army divisions smashed into the 198th, forcing it to retreat to the west. The 6th Tank Army under Col. Gen. A.G. Kravchenko exploited the gap, pushing the 88th to the northwest and breaking communications between the XLII Army Corps and the remainder of the 1st Panzer Army.

In the 2nd Ukrainian Front sector, Konev succeeded in expanding his previous gains, but an attack by the 14th and 11th Panzer Divisions almost succeeded in driving the Russians back. While the fighting continued, Rotmistrov, in a Guderian-style thrust, sent two tank corps (20th and 29th) on an end run. Disregarding his flanks, Rotmistrov pushed his armor westward to meet the 6th Tank Army. The outer ring of what would be called the Cherkassy Kessel (Cauldron) was almost complete.

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ABOVE: A snowsuit-clad German machine gun squad holds the line. BELOW: Russian tanks piled with soldiers thunder across the frozen landscape. It was not uncommon for Soviet commanders to flesh out their ranks with new recruits from liberated areas.

The Germans in the Cherkassy bulge were in dire straits. The commander of the XLVI Panzer Corps, General Nikolaus von Vormann, recorded that Soviet tank and mechanized units sped past his panzers without stopping to give battle. Regardless of losses, the Russians were determined to bypass attacking German armor in order to close the ring around the Germans inside the bulge.

With Rotmistrov's 5th Guards Tank Army moving from the south and Kravchenko's 6th Tank Army advancing from the north, it was only a matter of time before the two met. Supported by infantry, Kravchenko's 233rd Tank Brigade reached Lysyanka on the bank of the Gniloy Tikich River on January 27. The 233rd was followed by other units that crossed the river to form a bridgehead of 12 to 15 kilometers on the eastern side.

On January 28, the 233rd met with 5th Guards Tank Army units at Zvenigorodka, effectively sealing off the Dniepr bend. Both Konev and Vatutin continued to pour in more forces to strengthen the outer ring. German commanders inside the bulge pleaded for freedom of action, but no orders came. Bypassing regular channels, General Herbert Otto Gille, commander of the 5th SS Panzer Division "Wiking," sent Reichsführer SS Heinrich Himmler a message reading, "In three hours, the encirclement of my division will be accomplished."

Gille's division was the strongest unit inside the Kessel. Its 15,000 troops were drawn from nations all over Europe and included Norwegians, Danes, Dutch, Flemish, Swiss, and Swedish volunteers. There were also Finns, Estonians, and *Volksdeutsch* (ethnic Germans) from most of the Eastern European countries. Gille had a total of 90 panzers and *Sturmgeschütze* (assault guns) at his disposal to fend off the Soviets. The armor would play a vital role in the coming days, as is evidenced by a letter to the author from 1st Lieutenant Willi Hein, a company commander in the 5th Panzer Regiment "Wiking":

"On January 28 we attacked Olschana with

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ABOVE: Two Russian artillerymen take position in the snow. With lack of air support due to foul weather, infantry and armor would play a major role in breaking German resistance on the southern front. BELOW: On the edge of a Russian village, German soldiers wait for the inevitable enemy approach.

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four assault guns. The enemy had fortified the town, so we were attacking the high ground around it. We destroyed five enemy vehicles and lost one of our own.

"At 0600 on January 29 we attacked the village of Kirillovka with two assault guns, but strong enemy attacks north and east of Olschana forced us to retreat. Close combat took place after an enemy breakthrough.

"The following day Ivan took the high ground near our position with armor and supporting infantry. We had two assault guns left for a counterattack with an infantry company. Three enemy tanks were destroyed and 200 prisoners were taken before we were forced to retreat to our old positions."

Other units were just as hard pressed. Captain Harry Schlingmann, commander of the 112th *Pionier* (engineer) Bn./Korps Abteilung B, wrote to the author, "(T)he constant action of the previous months had diminished our strength to that of a regular company. Once the Russians broke through our front line, we had to make due with little or no shelter in the freezing weather. Nevertheless, our orders were to attack the enemy whenever possible. We had no anti-tank guns so we used bundles of grenades and 'sticky mines' to destroy the Russian tanks.

"Our method was simple. We would huddle in our foxholes until the T-34s passed over us. Then, one group would fire at the following infantry while 'killer teams' would tackle the enemy tanks. We inflicted heavy losses on Ivan, but we lost many men ourselves. The enemy could replace his casualties, but we could not, so in the end, we were forced to retreat time and again."

The Russian commanders in the field worked hard at consolidating their gains and in reinforcing the outer and inner rings of the encirclement. German forces inside the Kessel were fighting for their very existence as Soviet tank and infantry units pounded them. Elements of the 14th Panzer Division that were trapped inside the pocket battled the 18th Tank Corps, while the 389th and 57th Infantry Divisions began to fall back under the weight of savage Russian attacks.

Stemmermann, who had been given overall command of the Kessel, ordered his troops to fall back to shorten the main line of resistance. The retreat was covered by men like Sergeant Gerhard Fischer, an 18-year-old commander of a Sturmgeschütz (assault gun) in the "Wiking" Division, and Captain Fritz Steinbacher, a 30-year-old artillery commander in the 72nd Infantry Division.

Vatutin and Konev continued to push reinforcements into the battle. The outer line, which ran from Vinograd to Zvenigorodka, received the 53rd Army's 49th Rifle Corps to help the 5th Tank Army keep the Germans from counterattacking. Other units arrived to help the 6th Tank Army hold the Germans at bay.

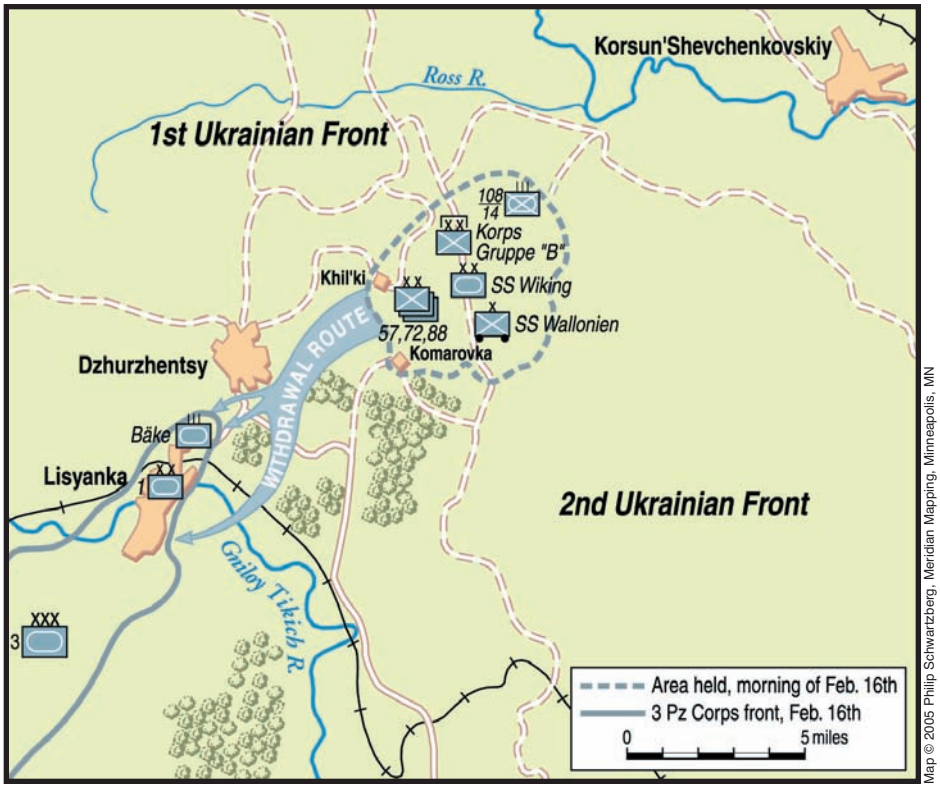
Supplying the Kessel fell to Luftwaffe transports that operated out of a forward airfield at Korsun. Although Soviet antiaircraft fire was heavy over the Russian line, the transports continued to fly ammunition and food to the surrounded Germans and pick up wounded for a harrowing flight to a field hospital outside the pocket. Oskar Hummel, a 22-year-old member of the "Wiking" Division, described his personal ordeal: "My right leg was shattered in a counterattack, and they [his comrades] saw to it that I was brought back. The whole platoon covered me so that I could make it to a field hospital. Ten men would rather have risked their lives than to leave one lying wounded. We knew that all Waffen SS soldiers were automatically shot by the Russians."

Hummel's ordeal was only just beginning. The field hospital came under attack and had

to be abandoned, but Hummel was once again rescued by his unit. They loaded him on a horse-drawn cart and made for an airstrip, fighting their way through roving enemy patrols. Hummel sustained another wound during the journey and was finally put aboard an aircraft for the flight out. He survived the war, but lost his leg due to his wounds.

The Russians increased their efforts to wipe out key German defenses on January 31, when they launched combined arms attacks against the 88th Infantry Division near Boguslav and the Estonian "Narwa" Battalion of the "Wiking" Division. Neither unit gave much ground to the pummeling attacks.

One unit that had escaped most of the initial Soviet fury was the 2,000-man "Wallonien" Brigade, composed of Belgian volunteers under the command of Lt. Col. Lucien Lippert. In its ranks was the leader of Belgium's pro-German Rexist Party, Captain Leon Degrelle. Rabidly anti-Communist, Degrelle had joined the German Army as a private. He rose through the ranks before transferring to the Waffen SS and had made a name for himself in several combat actions. In the coming days, the Belgians would be put to the test again and again as the battle for the Kessel intensified.



Surrounded by spearheads of the Red Army's 1st and 2nd Ukrainian Fronts, elements of the III Panzer Corps moved to free their encircled comrades near Cherkassy.

While the Germans fought to hold their perimeter, von Manstein moved to build a relief force with the III (General Hermann Breith) and XLVII Panzer Corps (General Nikolaus von Vormann). He planned a two-pronged attack, with the III Panzer Corps striking near Lysyanka and the XLVII Panzer Corps hitting the Russians south of Svenigorodka.

Schwere Panzer Regiment (heavy tank regiment) Bäke (Lt. Col. Franz Bäke) formed the nucleus of the III Panzer Corps. It consisted of 45 Tiger tanks and 45 to 50 Panthers augmented by two artillery battalions and a Panzergrenadier regiment. Additional tanks from elements of the 1st, 6th, 16th, and 17th Panzer Divisions brought its total armored strength to between 175 and 250. The Leibstandarte Adolf Hitler (LAH) SS Panzer Division was also ordered to move with all possible haste to reinforce the III Panzer Corps.

Von Vormann's Panzer Corps was reforming, and most of its planned armored components were fighting in other areas of the front. Five panzer divisions (3rd, 11th, 13th, 14th, and 24th) were ordered to place themselves under von Vormann's command, but von Manstein planned to use whatever forces that were on hand when the attack began since time was the critical factor.

The attack was planned to begin on February 3, and Stemmermann proceeded to shorten his line on his eastern flank in preparation for a possible breakout. His men had been fighting in blizzard conditions, with the average temperature hovering around zero degrees. On February 1, all that changed as a sudden thaw set in.

"The frost was 10-15 centimeters thick, but the thaw caused our heavy vehicles, such as tanks and artillery, to break through into the mire," Sergeant Fischer wrote. "Thus, we were only able to pull back slowly, meter by agonizing meter."

It was even tougher on the German infantry. Some tied their boots around their necks during the pullback to prevent them from being sucked off their feet by the clinging mud.

The fickle weather changed once again as it grew dark. Sub-zero temperatures returned, freezing vehicles and heavy equipment up to their axles in the Russian earth. German infantry and engineers used every means at their disposal, including pick axes, torches and even small amounts of explosives, to free the stricken vehicles in order to continue the withdrawal.

The pullback did not go unnoticed by the Soviets. Col. Gen. K.A. Koroteev, commander of the 52nd Army, ordered his infantry to attack, and a breach in the German line was made at Losovsk. A company under Captain Degrelle was ordered to retake the village, which it did after savage house to house fighting. As Degrelle reported his success, he received orders to pull out and report to brigade headquarters in Moshny.

Upon his arrival, Degrelle found himself in the midst of a new battle with Russian forces pressing hard to take the town. The Walloons were ordered to hold the sector while the rest of the "Wiking" Division pulled back farther to the west to form a new defensive line. After 10 hours of heavy fighting, they were told to abandon the town and make it back to the new line.

Meanwhile, von Manstein's relief forces began arriving at their assembly areas. They were sent piecemeal to jump-off points, clawing their way through the mud. Von Manstein had to make changes in his plans on the spot because many of the units were having problems disengaging from their former positions. Also, his spearhead division, the 24th Panzer, was forced to turn around and head to the Nikopol sector because of Soviet attacks there.

Nevertheless, von Manstein ordered the relief attempt to start on schedule. Elements of the 16th and 17th Panzer Divisions smashed into the 104th Rifle Corps, breaching the Soviet line. Shielded by units from the 134th and 198th Infantry Divisions and the LAH, the panzer divisions drove toward Veselyi Kut, a key crossing point on the Gniloy Tikich River.

Farther south, units from the 11th and 13th

National Archives

ABOVE: Russian vehicles and wagons move forward past the shells of blasted buildings as the push westward continues. OPPOSITE: German Panzer units in and around the Kessel were not only isolated in many cases, but were also severely outnumbered by the advancing Soviets. By conflict's end, most would be lost.

Panzer Divisions became bogged down in the mud after making initial progress against the Soviets in the Zvenigorodka sector. The 3rd Panzer Division was also forced to halt in the face of savage Russian counterattacks after taking the village of Kamunovka.

With the relief attempt underway, Stemmermann ordered his own forces into action. The 88th Infantry Division "Wiking" and Corps Abteilung B assaulted Soviet forces in Boguslav, but were thrown back with heavy losses. "We had heavy casualties," a doctor in the "Wiking" Division wrote. "My dressing station was overflowing to the point that we had to use all available transport to get the unattended wounded to the main hospital."

Russian countermoves made the relief attempt slow going as Vatutin ordered General S. I. Bogdanov's 2nd Tank Army into the fray against the III Panzer Corps. Konev also shuffled his forces, sending the 5th Guards Mechanized Corps forward to stem the drive of the XLVII Panzer Corps.

The Russians also attempted to use propaganda to weaken the Germans. General Walter von Seydlitz, who had been captured at Stalingrad and was now working for the Soviets, wrote a letter to General Gille promising good treatment for his soldiers and an early release from captivity after the war.

Captain Schlingmann recalled, "the Seydlitz men (German POWs from the National Free Germany Committee, an anti-Hitler group) spoke to us through loudspeakers. They promised us everything a soldier dreams of if only we would surrender.

"We had been in constant combat and were freezing in our open trenches, so my men and I talked the situation over. We were very democratic about it. In the end, we decided that continuing the fight was the only solution—much preferable to dying in a Soviet labor camp—so there was no more thought of surrender."

A short time later, Schlingmann was wounded in the thigh, his fifth wound of the war. His men took him to a hospital, where he was operated on in a room thoroughly riddled by artillery fire. Later, he was flown out of the Kessel for further treatment. He received the Ritterkreuz (Knights Cross) on February 14 for valor shown during the Cherkassy operation.

Things got worse inside the Kessel when mud forced both airfields used to land supplies to close down on February 5. Engineers immediately started building a new one on drier ground, but it would take four days to complete. The closures gave transport pilots a much needed rest. More than 40 of the aircraft had been shot down or lost through accidents from January 29 to February 4.

The relief effort was also in trouble because of the mud. The LAH was still struggling to get most of its elements into the combat zone to reinforce the struggling III Panzer Corps, its Panther unit bogged down in the morass. Roads and bridges were inadequate to handle the heavy tanks, and going overland was next to impossible. The same held true for most of von Vormann's XLVII Panzer Corps.

Stemmermann requested freedom of action as the Soviets closed in from three sides, noting that the relief force was inadequate to the task assigned it. Hitler refused to give up the Dniepr bend at first, but as the Russian pressure mounted he finally gave his approval for a breakout on February 6, with the attempt to begin on the 10th.

Once again, the weather took a hand in events as a new thaw during the day made moving men and equipment to assembly areas inside the Kessel virtually impossible. Looking at the overall situation, Stemmermann was forced to radio a request for more time before a breakout could be attempted.

Outside the Kessel, Bäke's panzers finally reached Veselyi Kut on February 8. There they were halted by extremely fierce Soviet resistance from the fortified east bank of the Gniloy Tikich, which made any thought of crossing the river obsolete. Bäke was ordered to pull back and assemble farther to the south, along with the bulk of the III Panzer Corps. So far, the relief attempt had caused thousands of casualties on both sides, and the toll on equipment was just as fearful. On February 9, the 17th Panzer reported that it had only four operational tanks, while the 16th Panzer reported 19. German maintenance units worked furiously to get damaged machines back in service for the ongoing battle.

Breith's Panzer Corps was now reinforced with the bulk of the LAH and the 1st Panzer Division, which had finally arrived near Risino, bringing with it 75 to 80 tanks. The weather had turned cold again, freezing the ground and making it easier for the tanks to move across the battered landscape.

Frozen ground also helped Stemmermann in his attempt to shorten his line for the upcoming breakout. His heavy equipment once again was able to move, and he was able to take Colonel Hermann Hohn's 72nd Infantry Division out of the line and put it in reserve. The 72nd was the second strongest division inside the Kessel, next to the "Wiking." It would be the spearhead division when the breakout took place.

Among the men of the 72nd were 1st Lt. Matthias Roth and Captain Fritz Steinbacher. Roth had recently taken over command of the 105th Infantry Regiment's II Battalion after its commander became a casualty, while Steinbacher was a battalion commander in the division's artillery regiment. Roth's battalion would

be on the cutting edge of the breakout, supported by Steinbacher's artillery.

Time now became critical. German infantry units had suffered heavy casualties as they fought off Soviet attacks on the flanks of the advancing panzers, and there was no way to replace those losses. The Russians were funneling more men and armor in to try and cut off the relief forces. If von Manstein waited to order Stemmermann to begin the breakout, the Russians would have time to attack and force the Germans out of striking range of the Kessel. The field marshal made his decision and ordered his corps commanders to attack on February 11. They were told that this was a "do or die" operation and that if it failed their trapped comrades inside the Kessel were doomed.

At 6:30 AM on the 11th, German artillery blasted the Soviet lines and the Regiment Bäke and the 16th and 17th Panzer Divisions rolled forward, annihilating Russian forward defenses. On their right flank, Colonel Richard Koll's 1st Panzer Division widened the gap, while the left flank was covered by the LAH and the 198th Infantry Division.

Koll ordered a *kampfgruppe* (combat group) of his division to head straight for the Gniloy Tikich. The unit took the river town of Bushanka and sped across a bridge spanning the river, establishing a bridgehead on the eastern bank. Soviet counterattacks soon followed, and Russian control of the hills surrounding the bridgehead made further progress impossible.

Koll then ordered his men to drive south for a surprise attack on Lysyanka, which was taken late on the 11th. It was a Pyrrhic victory, however, as Soviet engineers blew up the bridge spanning the Gniloy Tikich just as Koll's panzers reached it.

Vatutin and Konev were quick to react to the German threat. The 21st Rifle Corps (4th Guards Army) was ordered into the Lysyanka sector, while the 5th Guards Cavalry Corps and elements of the 1st Guards, 5th Guards and 2nd Tank Armies were also moved to the area. Marshal Georgi Zhukov now assumed command of the Soviets' outer ring, while Konev was placed in charge of the inner ring.

On the 12th, Soviet forces pushed the LAH out of Repki and then headed toward Votylevka, where they were stopped by other elements of the division. The LAH was also involved in a battle near Vinograd, where the Russians had broken through the lines of the 198th. A fierce battle ensued in which the Soviets were finally encircled and destroyed.

Sunday, February 13, gave the Germans a present. An enterprising Panther commander of the 1st Panzer Division, Sergeant Hans Strippel, discovered a ford that crossed the 30-meter-wide Gniloy Tikich. He ordered his driver to cross and was soon followed by other tanks from his platoon. Tanks from the 5th Guards Tank Corps opened fire on Strippel and his men, but the Panthers soon reduced them to smoking hulks. Two more Panther companies followed, accompanied by elements from the 113th Panzergrenadier Regiment.

Moving along the riverbank, Strippel found an intact bridge guarded by two T-34s. After making his 59th and 60th tank kills, he informed his headquarters that the bridge was in friendly hands and that it was strong enough to support armor. Reinforcements were immediately rushed to the area, giving the 1st Panzer a link between the two riverbanks.

The bridgehead on the east bank of the Gniloy Tikich was tenuous at best. Only a few elements of Regiment Bäke and the 16th and 17th Panzer Divisions could be spared as reinforcements because those units were themselves engaged in heavy fighting around the villages of Chishinzy, Dzhurshenzy, and Daschukovka.

The final obstacle between the relief forces and the Kessel was Hill 239, midway between Dzhurshenzy and Potschapinzy. Although the 1st Panzer had only 10 operational tanks and two battalions of infantry in the bridgehead, an attack was ordered to take the hill on February 14. The assault took the village of Oktybar but was stopped dead in its tracks before Hill 239 could be reached.

Elements of the 5th Guards Tank Corps counterattacked during the next two days as tanks from the LAH, 16th Panzer, and Regiment Bäke joined the fray. The fighting was fierce as both armies fought at near point-blank range. Strippel and his platoon of seven Panthers accounted for another 27 Soviet tanks, but it soon became clear that the III Panzer Corps could go no further. The fate of the men inside the Kessel was now in their own hands.

Fighting was also raging inside the Kessel itself as the relief forces struggled forward. Stemmermann had been ordered to shorten his lines and move toward Schenderovka to assemble for the breakout. He had the "Wiking" and "Wallonien" abandon their positions at Gorodishche, while the 88th pulled out of Yankova.

"The plan for the breakout was designed by the 8th Army," Gaedke wrote. "We naturally had to carry them out. Radio contact between the Kesseltruppe and the relief forces were constant, so we knew approximately where they were located."

National Archives

Under intense artillery fire, the Germans trudged through the mud and snow protected by the few remaining tanks and assault guns left inside the pocket. Units formed into assault groups around the Korsun area and final orders were given for the breakout. The first order of business was securing the villages of Schenderovka, Novo Buda, Kamarovka, and Khilki.

First Lieutenant Roth moved his men into position to attack the Russians on the night of February 11. A Soviet sentry noticed the gray

shapes moving forward and raised the alarm as Roth's men reached the Soviet lines. Roused from their sleep, the Russian troops valiantly tried to defend themselves, but Roth's troops were already in the enemy trenches, slashing out with bayonets and entrenching tools as the Soviets poured from their night quarters. The savage fight lasted for an hour and a half, but the Germans took the line and went ahead to secure Novo Buda.

At Schenderovka, the "Germania" Regiment of the "Wiking" took the village by storm. Soviet forces immediately formed for a counterattack, and the SS troopers dug in, fighting off several enemy assaults. The fighting for the village continued on the 12th with the Germans holding firm.

On the 12th, Lippert's "Wallonien" relieved Roth at Novo Buda, leaving his battalion free to continue the attack. Roth led his men against Komarovka, supported by Captain Steinbacher's artillery. His men closed on the well-defended village, and fierce fighting erupted. On the 13th, the village was finally secured.

"Ivan fought like the devil," Roth wrote to the author. "We used every trick that we knew to take the village. When it was over, we had killed about 90 enemy soldiers and had captured 50 more. We also destroyed eight tanks, seven mortars, and three antiaircraft guns."

Stemmermann followed the action closely. He abandoned Korsun on the 13th, but was forced to leave his severely wounded cases behind in the main hospital. "The wounded, there were more than 2,000 of them, were left behind in the hospital with a volunteer doctor," Gaedke wrote. "We hoped that the Russians would treat them properly. However, no one ever found out what happened to them once they fell into enemy hands."

Throughout the 14th, the "Wallonien" was hit by several Russian attacks. Red Army artillery blasted away at the defenders of Novo Buda, and combined armor-infantry attacks pushed their way inside the village. The Walloons fought like tigers, destroying several Soviet tanks and finally pushing the Russians out of the village.

Lippert fell, mortally wounded in the head. Captain Degrelle took command of the brigade, which had already lost more than 200 men. For the next two days, the Walloons continued to hold the village against overwhelming odds.

Meanwhile, the 72nd Infantry Division was fighting two actions—one defensive and one offensive. In Komarovka, the 124th Infantry Regiment was engaged in a heavy defensive struggle against Soviet armor and infantry. Lieutenant Roth, commanding the lead battalion of Major Robert Kaestner's 105th Infantry Regiment, assaulted Khilki supported by Steinbacher's artillery. After a fierce struggle, the village was finally taken.

Outside the Kessel, the battle for Hill 239 was still in full swing. The III Panzer Corps attacked the position again and again, but Rotmistrov's men held. Late on the 15th, a message was sent to Stemmermann stating "Capacity for action of III Panzer Corps limited. Group Stemmermann must perform breakthrough as far as Dzhurshenzy/Hill 239 by its own effort. There, link up with III Panzer Corps."

No mention was made of the German failure to take the heavily defended hill. Therefore, Stemmermann and his men were set to unknowingly clash with a heavy concentration of Soviet troops in their desperate bid to escape. Thousands of German soldiers would die because of this miscommunication.

The breakout was set to begin at midnight on February 16. By now, the Kessel had shrunk to a five-by-seven-kilometer area, with Soviet artillery pounding all German positions. Stemmermann ordered an attack on three separate approaches. The 72nd would form the center of the attack, while Corps Abteilung B attacked on its left and "Wiking" on its right. When the main attack forces penetrated the Soviet line, the wounded and remnants of other decimated divisions would follow. The 57th and 88th Infantry Divisions formed the rear guard to hold off Russian forces attacking from the east.

Advance forces moved out in the bitterly cold night, unaware of what lay in front of them. The III Panzer Corps had finally realized its communication error, but attempts to inform Stemmermann failed because he had already ordered the destruction of his long-range radio equipment.

"There was no communication with the relief forces once the breakout began," Gaedke wrote. "We did, however, know that the Oktybar area had been heavily fortified, so we went south of the village, where the Russian lines were supposedly weaker."

Once again, Lieutenant Roth's unit formed the spearhead for the 72nd. He was ordered by Kaestner to take Soviet outposts by bayonet in order to maintain secrecy. After silencing Soviet forward positions, it took Roth's men more than four hours to reach Hill 239, which was assumed to be in friendly hands. Approaching the hill, Roth could see the silhouettes of enemy T-34s on the hilltop. He immediately informed Kaestner of his find.

Roth then moved his battalion around the northern edge of the hill and made contact with a Soviet trench line. With sharpened entrenching tools, bayonets, knives, and rifle butts, the Germans overwhelmed the enemy and burst through the Soviet line, followed by the rest of Kaestner's regiment.

Other units tried to follow, but the Russians had been alerted and moved heavy reinforcements to close the gap. Heavy fire ripped through the German columns as commanders looked for alternate escape routes through the now heavily defended Soviet line.

Kaestner's regiment continued forward and eventually ran into advance units from the III Panzer Corps. The regiment had finally made it, but the price of freedom was staggering. Three weeks earlier, the 105th had a strength of 27 officers and 1,082 men. When a muster was taken on the 17th, only three officers and 216 men reported.

The Russians were now fully alerted, and pure chance dictated which German units would make it through relatively unscathed, and which would be decimated trying to escape. Most of the 72nd Infantry Division took a southerly route around Hill 239. It sustained heavy casualties, not only from fire from that hill, but from Hill 222, which lay south of the escape route.

Corps Abteilung B made some initial penetrations, and several regiment-sized groups made it through before the Russians could fully mobilize. Those that followed were forced to run a gauntlet of fire to make it to safety.

"Wiking" ran headlong into the heavily entrenched Soviets. Its badly understrength Panzer Abteilung was engaged in heavy combat around Novo Buda and Schenderovka, supporting the 57th and 88th Divisions in an effort to stem advancing Russian forces coming from the east. Degrelle's Walloons were also fighting for their lives against the advancing Soviets.

When dawn broke, the temperature stood at

THE WALOONS FOUGHT LIKE TIGERS, DESTROYING SEVERAL SOVIET TANKS AND FINALLY PUSHING THE RUSSIANS OUT OF THE VILLAGE.

National Archives

Picks and shovels are used to clear snow from the tracks of a buried German tank. Conditions around Cherkassy shifted from near blizzard-like to a muddy mess—all serving to delay troop movements.

about 20 degrees fahrenheit, with blizzard conditions hampering both sides. In some areas, it was impossible to tell friend from foe in the blinding snow, and running gun battles sometimes erupted between friendly forces as the breakout attempt continued.

General Lieb had been placed in charge of the assault forces, with Stemmermann commanding the overall operation. With more Soviet reinforcements arriving, the follow-up German forces were pushed steadily southward toward the Gniloy Tikich. Lieb drove his men forward unaware that Stemmermann had already fallen victim to Russian fire.

His chief of staff, Gaedke, described the general's death to the author: "Stemmermann, leading the rear guard, wanted to fight his way out on foot. However, his strength soon gave out. We halted a horse-drawn cart, and the general climbed aboard. A short time later, an antitank shell hit the cart, blowing it to pieces and killing everyone on it."

Lieb and his staff finally reached the Gniloy Tikich around midday on the 17th. Lieb was greeted by a sight of pure chaos. Literally thousands of German troops were stranded on the bank of the river while Soviet artillery blasted the area. The screams of the wounded filled the air, and the dead lay everywhere.

The river was more than two meters deep and was several meters wide with a very strong current. Ice flows sailed by on the water as the men desperately looked for an avenue of escape. Pure bad luck had led the Germans to this section of the river. About two kilometers upstream, the 1st Panzer Division had built two temporary bridges, but Soviet blocking forces were now between the trapped Germans and the way to safety. The bridges might as well have been on the moon.

When the "Wiking" arrived on the scene, General Gille ordered his remaining vehicles to be driven into the river, hoping to form a makeshift bridge. Most of them were swept away in the strong current, as were the human chains of swimmers and nonswimmers attempting to cross. Some men used everything from tree limbs to vehicle doors to try and make it across.

At that point, Russian tanks were spotted coming from the east. The last panzers left in the Kessel rushed to engage them as panicked German solders stripped off their uniforms and ran into the freezing river. Some of the better swimmers took non-swimmers with them, returning again and again to bring other comrades across.

The German tanks were soon destroyed, and all hell broke loose as the Russian T-34s advanced on the eastern bank. Firing at point blank range, the Soviet tanks roamed at will, crushing those that could not escape their treads and blasting huge gaps in the vast crowd of Germans. The river was soon filled with thousands of naked or half-naked men, all trying to make it to the western bank.

At Lysyanka, the initial trickle of survivors alerted the 1st Panzer Division about the inferno taking place just a few kilometers away. Engineers were rushed to the scene, where they began building temporary bridges under heavy Russian tank and artillery fire. More men struggled across, and by nightfall only German corpses remained on the eastern shore. Up to 35,000 German troops had escaped the Kessel, but nearly all heavy weapons and equipment had been lost, and two German Corps had been more or less destroyed.

Only 4,000 men remained alive in the "Wiking," and the "Wallonien" Brigade, whose men had brought the body of their dead commander with them, was down to 632. Several of the other divisions engaged in the Kessel were disbanded soon after.

Sergeant Fischer, the 18-year-old Strumgeschütz commander, received the Knights Cross for his actions at Cherkassy, as did Lieutenant Roth and Captain Steinbacher. In a 1989 letter to the author, Fischer summed up his feelings about the battle: "The military commanders saw it as an excellent operation—35,000 men escaped! However, the soldiers who were there regarded it as a sad, bestial massacre." □

Pat McTaggart is an expert on World War II on the Eastern Front and the author of the forthcoming book Siege! *about six epic sieges during the war in that theater. He resides in Elkader, Iowa.*

DISCHARGED:

One GI's Odyssey from Soldier to Civilian

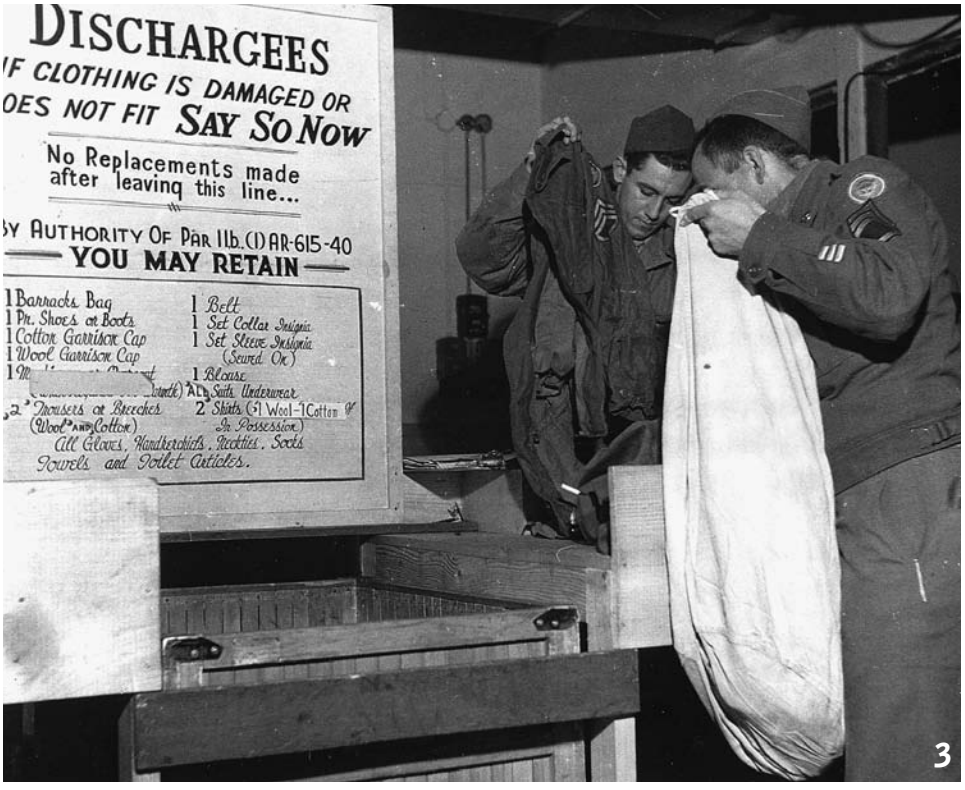
BY KEVIN M. HYMEL

EVERY MAN IN UNIFORM dreamed of taking that big boat home, but stepping foot on American soil was just part of the journey. For every soldier, sailor, airman, and marine who arrived back in the United States to be honorably discharged, the system was the same. Fortunately, the government established a process to prepare veterans, as best it could, to return to civilian life.

To earn a ticket home, a soldier needed 85 points in the Army's adjusted service rating system. Soldiers received one point for each month on active duty, five points for each medal they earned, and 12 points for each of their children under the age of 18. Naturally, the most experienced veterans returned home first, leaving those with fewer points to wait their turn. The point system became the hot topic among GIs overseas as they used C-ration boxes, or anything else they could write on, to tally their points.

Staff Sergeant George Faulkner of Company B, 422nd Infantry Regiment, 106th Infantry Division, with 86 points, was picked randomly to represent the average GI going through the discharge process, and Army cameras followed him through the entire experience.

Upon his arrival in New York City, Faulkner's troopship was met by a welcoming ship, complete with a Women's Auxiliary band on board, playing patriotic songs. He and other veterans then disembarked from their ship and went to a staging area at Camp Shanks. There, Faulkner turned in his uniform for a new one and gave back any items due Uncle Sam. With that accomplished, Faulkner and his fellow vets attended an



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1. Staff Sergeant George Faulkner steps ashore at Camp Shanks, the staging center where he will make his first steps toward separation from the Army.
2. Members of the 106th Infantry Division crowd the rails of their troopship for their first glimpse of New York City and the United States.
3. Turning in excess clothing is the next step. The place card tells him what he can keep. (Marines were allowed to keep their blankets.) A new uniform is issued to replace worn garments.
4. After an orientation lecture, Faulkner receives help and information on employment after his discharge.
5. Arriving at Fort Devens, Massachusetts, the separation center nearest his hometown of Attleboro, Massachusetts, Faulkner turns in his dog tags, which are used to stamp all his papers for identification purposes.
6. A Ruptured Duck—a gold discharge emblem—is sewn onto Faulkner's blouse as he supervises the job.
7. It's official. With his discharge in hand, ex-Staff Sergeant George H. Faulkner, 3106617, of Company B, 422nd Infantry Regiment, 106th Infantry Division, leaves the separation center as a "Mister."
8. Home! Faulkner finds his mother and father waiting for him as he steps onto the front porch.


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orientation lecture to explain the process they were about to go through. After that, they were given a steak meal. Veterans spent an average of three days at the staging area while their papers were processed. They were then sent off individually to separation centers near their hometowns.

Faulkner was sent to Fort Devens, close to his home in Attleboro, Massachusetts. There, he signed his discharge papers, officially returning to civilian life. He was also given a good conduct medal for being a "good soldier" for a period of 12 months and a "Ruptured Duck," a medal or patch issued to all honorably discharged veterans. Veterans wore the new insignias, which bore the image of an eagle, on their lapel or had them sewn on their right chest pockets.

Faulkner was also issued his final Army pay, plus a mustering out pay. With that he was free to leave. New civilian George Faulkner's first order of business was to call home and tell his parents he was coming. Upon his arrival in Attleboro, they greeted him at the door, in more a family reunion atmosphere than a hero's welcome. His first realization that he was actually home and that he had been away so long occurred when he stripped off his uniform and tried to put on his old clothes.

He commented, "Who would have thought that I had put on that much weight in the Army?" Mr. Faulkner, who helped free the world from tyranny, was now himself free of reveille, cold showers, and combat. As far as the army was concerned, he was ready to get on with his life. □

National Archives

BY BILL VAN ORMAN

General Paul Tibbets has lived for decades with the memory of dropping the atomic bomb.

A Man *and* a Mission

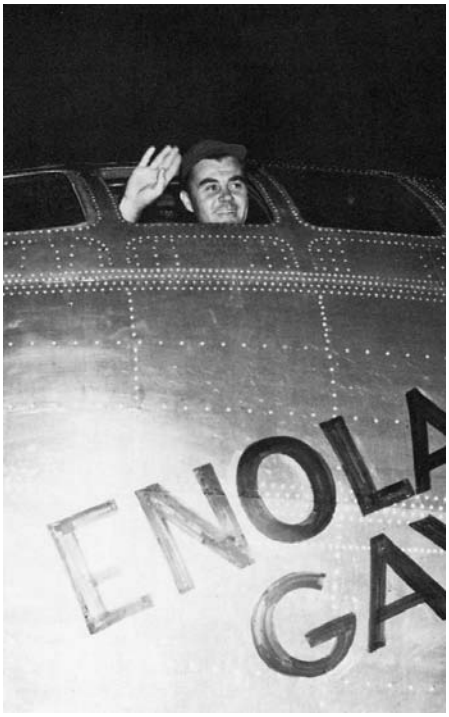
William S. Phillips, courtesy of The Greenwich Workshop

TODAY, IN HIS NINETIES, he is still a handsome man. He has a full head of silver hair. His gaze, even with the heavied lids of age, is intense. He does look like an old man, but not a 90-year-old man. His walk has slowed, but he remains erect and dignified. Only his hearing betrays him: He is as close to stone deaf as one can get and still hear.

He has the countenance and bearing of a man who has spent time on fields of high adventure and great achievement. Perhaps even flirted with greatness.

ABOVE: The Boeing B-29 Superfortress *Enola Gay* streaks through the clouds on August 6, 1945 in artist William S. Phillips's *The Beginning of the End*. TOP LEFT: The first atomic bomb is detonated on July 16, 1945 in New Mexico.

National Archives



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ABOVE: The crew of the *Enola Gay* (top row left to right): Lt. Col. John Porter, Captain Theodore J. Van Kirk, Major Thomas W. Ferebee, Colonel Paul Tibbets, Captain Robert A. Lewis, Lieutenant Jacob Beser. Bottom row: Sergeant Josh S. Stilborik, S.Sgt. George R. Caron, Pfc. Richard H. Nelson, Sergeant Robert H. Shumard, S.Sgt. Wyatt E. Duzenbury. RIGHT: Paul W. Tibbets prepares to take off from the island of Tinian en route to Hiroshima and a date with history.

And so he has.

His full name is Paul Warfield Tibbets, Jr., and although not one American in 10,000 can place it, a good case can be made that, absent the name, he is one of the most famous men of the 20th century. He is the man who is credited with dropping the atomic bomb on Hiroshima. Technically, that is a mistake. Bomber pilots do not drop bombs, bombardiers do. Within that hairsplitting context, the late Tom Ferebee actually dropped the weapon. But it was the irascible and often abrasive General Tibbets who piloted the plane, and it is he who is credited with, or blamed for, history's single most notable act of warfare.

HE IS, AND FOR ALL OF HIS ADULT LIFE has been, a most remarkable man. From his earliest days he exuded a self-confidence that could be, and frequently was, insufferable. He has never been able to abide adequacy, much less foolishness. Paul Tibbets is an absolutist. His is the right way and no other. Certitude with attitude can be a bit much, and Paul Tibbets, by any measure, can be a bit much by half.

From the day he graduated from Western Military Academy in North Alton, Illinois, to the present, there has never been an assignment at which he did not excel. His father wanted him to become a doctor, but he wanted to fly. During the Depression era, there was only one avenue open for people of modest means to become pilots—enlist in the Aviation Cadet program. With his mother's blessing and his father's condemnation, that is what Paul did. He graduated at the top of his class. Unlike all the other men who had a choice of career paths, he did not opt for fighter training. On the advice of his tactical officer, he chose observation. It would prove to be a momentous decision.

There are two kinds of pilots: those who learn to fly by dint of hard work and determination and those few for whom the sky seems to be their natural element. There are two phrases for these exceptional aviators: "He was born to fly" and "He's a real stick and rudder man." Both applied to Paul Tibbets. Not only was he a gifted pilot, but was one of a handful who can do things with an airplane that even its designers never envisioned.

Then there is the military aspect. For one who has never "pulled a hitch in the regulars," it is difficult to relate to the phrase "command presence." It refers to a man with innate qualities who, without seeming effort, compels other men to follow into harm's way. Civilians constantly try to equate this military phrase with some sort of unique managerial skill. It is a task awanting. Managerial skill can be taught; command presence is genetic. Paul Tibbets had this unquantifiable quality in spades. It is one thing to be supremely competent, but is an entirely different order of magnitude to have it realized and accepted by others whose very lives are in your hands. General Tibbets, as fate would have it, ultimately held a changing world in his hands. He was the perfect man for the mission.

In the summer of 1944, the United States was two and a half years into World War II. What had been wrought in those 30 months? In a phrase, the creation of an air force, quite literally from nothing.

On the day that Pearl Harbor was bombed, Paul Tibbets was a newly promoted captain, and although his rank may have been modest, he had an asset that was in high demand: well over 1,000 hours of multiengine flying time. In December 1941, that was rare, whatever the rank. After a few months of bouncing around due to bureaucratic indecision, Captain Tibbets landed as original cadre with the 97th Bomb Group in Tampa, Fla.

The 97th was destined to become the first heavy bomb group in what would become the "Mighty Eighth" Air Force in England. But that would be much later. In the early months of 1942, there were so few qualified pilots for the Boeing B-17 Flying Fortress bombers that Tibbets spent all of the late winter and spring

just teaching newly minted multiengine pilots to fly the plane. Not how to fly it in combat, just how not to kill themselves on a daily basis. The newly created Army Air Force was that small. By the time the 97th was ordered to the United Kingdom, a newly promoted Major Tibbets was a squadron commander. Keep in mind that this is a man who just six months earlier was a first lieutenant who had never commanded anything.

Upon arrival in England, the group was posted to a base named Polebrook. Almost immediately, several of the command-level officers in the group were relieved of command and the group commander was replaced by Colonel Frank Armstrong. Armstrong was a superlative leader but he had just one drawback: He had never flown a B-17.

National Archives

ABOVE: The four engine B-29 Superfortress *Enola Gay* sits on an airfield tarmac. The bomber's tricycle landing gear is plainly visible in this photo. The B-29 featured numerous innovations, including a pressurized cabin. BELOW: Colonel Paul Tibbets tackled numerous assignments during a long Air Force career.

FOR THE SAKE OF HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE, IT is important to note that the Army Air Corps had become the Army Air Force only a year earlier. The name change was more than incidental; it was historic. The Army Air Force was in the throes of growing from an adjunct into a force to be reckoned with. Air power was coming of age, and it was not at all certain just how to take advantage of it. One thing, however, was becoming abundantly clear. There was an absolute dearth of command-level officers to lead this growth. In his autobiography *Global Mission*, General Henry "Hap" Arnold put the situation in the starkest possible terms: "When we lost one [senior or command level officer] he was almost irreplaceable."

In the 1949 film *Twelve O'Clock High*, there is a scene in which Brig. Gen. Frank Savage selects and promotes an acerbic Major Cobb to group air executive officer. The motion picture is a compilation of events from mid-1942 to February 1943, based loosely on General Frank Armstrong's relationship with the 97th and 306th Bomb Groups. The Major Cobb incident is based on fact, and the real Major Cobb was in truth Paul Tibbets.

In July 1942, when Colonel Armstrong took over the 97th, he had to be taught how to fly the B-17. Paul Tibbets was his mentor.

When, on August 17 of that year, the 97th flew the first B-17 bombing mission over German-occupied France, it was Armstrong who was credited with leading it. In fact, Colonel Armstrong sat in the co-pilot's seat of the lead aircraft; he was not yet left-seat qualified. The man in command of the raid was Paul Tibbets.

When the 97th Bomb Group was transferred to North Africa as part of Operation Torch, it was Tibbets who was chosen to fly General Mark Clark to Gibraltar for a secret meeting with Vichy French officials. A few weeks later, he was tasked to fly General Dwight D. Eisenhower to the Rock to command the invasion. When the group was transferred to Biskra, Tunisia, in November 1942, it again got a new commander, Colonel Hamp Atkinson. Colonel Atkinson became ill from some malady picked up in the desert, and Lt. Col. Tibbets was, for all practical purposes, the acting commander of the 97th Bomb Group. Only one year earlier, Tibbets had been a first lieutenant.


National Archives

Both Frank Armstrong and 'Hamp' Atkinson were brigadier generals by early 1943. Both stated publicly that they owed their stars in no small measure to Paul Tibbets.

As is usually the case, personalities impact individual careers. The career of Paul Tibbets was no different. Lauris Norstad was a man of impeccable credentials, but he had no combat or field command experience. He had a superb reputation as a staff officer and early in his career, he had hitched his wagon to the star of Hoyt Vandenberg. Both men were reflective of, and complimentary to, the highest ideals of what was at that time a still developing service. Vandenberg was the nephew of the single most powerful Republican senator on the Senate Armed Services Committee. Norstad was his supremely able aide-de-camp.

During the war, the Air Corps and Air Force were commanded by General Arnold. He was a man on a mission to create a service that could and would stand on its own. In part, he did it by weeding out, often in brutal fashion, weak commanders. Sometimes it would seem this was done on a whim and that very junior men were promoted on the basis of rather insubstantial or short-term accomplishments. However, Arnold's judgment was uncanny.

In January 1944, his replacing General Ira Eaker, a life-long friend, with General Jimmy Doolittle seemed at first blush to be rash. In retrospect, it was a stroke of genius. Doolittle had gotten better results with less in the Mediterranean Theater, and Eisenhower had confidence in him. Friendship be damned. This same weighting of results led to Paul Tibbets' command of the 509. The pure and simple facts dictated that no other officer of similar rank had achieved what he had in so short a time. If Norstad did not like him—too bad. His record spoke for itself.

In early 1943, Tibbets was assigned to General Doolittle's headquarters. While there, he ran afoul of Colonel Norstad and this confrontation would follow Tibbets to the end of his Air Force career. Tibbets was reassigned to stateside duty to remove him from harm's way by the politically connected and vindictive Norstad.

By this time, late winter and early spring 1943, there was no other officer in the Air Force who possessed Tibbets' experience in combat at a leadership level. In less than six months, he had flown 37 combat missions, most of them as a mission or group comman-

der, if not in name, then in fact.

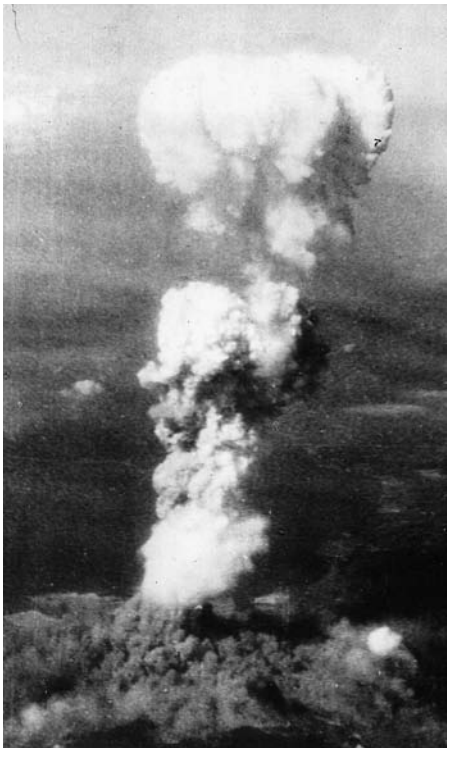
When Tibbets was assigned to the Boeing B-29 Superfortress bomber program, General K.B. Wolfe was in command of what would come to be known as the Battle of Kansas. Wolfe was a logistics expert. Tibbets became head of the service flight test program and de facto operations officer. It was he who had to fly and sign off on what was at best a troublesome bird and at worst an underpowered death trap. Throughout the entire program, there was hardly a day when he did not lay his life on the line in the effort to get the B-29 into combat.

TIBBETS BECAME ARGUABLY THE SINGLE most competent and experienced combat bomber pilot in the U.S. Air Force. By the summer of 1944, he was the most experienced and knowledgeable B-29 pilot alive. Thus, when it came time to select a commander for the 509th Composite Group, Tibbets was at the top of the list to head a nascent atomic bombing unit.

The then 28-year-old old Lt. Col. Tibbets had two minuses on an otherwise sterling résumé. He had had what would, over time, prove to be a career-ending run-in with a powerful, politically connected superior, and he had a personality that was a godsend in wartime and anything but in peacetime. In July 1944, neither of these two factors mattered. He was first and foremost an achiever of tasks. In 10 months, he formed and trained his unit and executed his mission flawlessly.

Never before and never since has an officer of even remotely similar rank been given either the authority or the responsibility that went with Operation Silverplate. For the time that General Tibbets commanded the 509th, he held a singular, and to this day unique place, in the history of American arms.

In the ensuing years, Tibbets took on other daunting, if less historic, missions. He headed the B-47 service test program. He commanded SAC wings and air divisions. After retirement, he was president of a corporate jet taxi service.



National Archives

In each of these instances he took over troubled programs and in short order set them right.

Once the war was over, the inevitable questions began to be asked. "Was the dropping of the atomic bomb on Hiroshima really necessary?" There arose what amounted to a cottage industry of victors' guilt that to this day is hard to put into rational pigeonholes. They range from the seemingly reasonable to the absolutely absurd.

Over the past few years, Tibbets has tried to put his reputation in an historical context. The forces arrayed against him are many, powerful, and unrelenting. He is confronted by those with differing perspectives, some revisionist historians, and others who have drawn conclusions based at least in part on political agendas. People with not a clue as to what Tibbets was asked to do or why, at times seem to be passing judgment on him as though they understand. He is cast on the horns of a dilemma that only he uniquely comprehends. In the twilight of his life, he wishes to be understood for who he is, and more precisely, for his proper place in history.

While an issue is being settled in the most violent and amoral fashion imaginable—war—those who do the settling are glorified. The moment the matter is resolved some of those not involved in the combat begin to recast the event in moralistic and humanistic terms. The two are historically irreconcilable. War and removed dispassion have a disconnect that is unbridgeable. Paul Tibbets is the ultimate victim of this abyss.

He is a man born of an era of rectitude. For reasons probably even he does not fully understand, he has carried this "old-time religion" to something of an extreme. But that is exactly what it took to accomplish the task set before him. He is the almost perfect example of the "right man ... in the right place ... at the right time."

His guard is always up. When he can spend a day as an unrecognized elder citizen, he is as mellow as a man of his demeanor can be. This is most of the time. When he is "on display," as it were, he is defensive and not without reason.

Consider these facts: He is the man who led our first heavy bomber mission over occupied Europe yet he is bereft of honors. He is the man who led the operational portion of the B-29 service test program, which was quite literally a no-win situation. He is the man who created, trained, and led the 509th Composite Group in the atomic bombing mission. For this, he is reviled by some. He is the man who led the Air Force B-47 service test program in Project WIBAC in the late 1940s and brought the airplane into operation a year and a half ahead of plan.

He is the man who in 1956 took over a failing SAC wing, the 308th, and turned it around from the worst in the second Air Force to the best. Two and a half years later, he repeated the performance with the 6th Air Division at McDill Air Force Base. Upon retirement, he took over a failing jet taxi company, Executive

TIBBETS SEEMED SOMETHING OF AN OUTCAST, EVEN IN HIS ELEMENT.

GENERAL TIBBETS' dress uniform has what to the untrained eye would seem to be a pretty fair array of "fruit salad." He was, in fact, a highly decorated combat veteran. What jumps out to those who are knowledgeable about such things is that he was never honored above the bare minimum that could be awarded. For reasons that defy explanation, even the Army Air Force and later the Air Force seemed to have it in for him. In a service and at a time when bomber pilots were particularly likely to be selected for honors, Tibbets got short shrift.

Even in promotion he became the eternal bridesmaid, staying a colonel for almost 12 years. He did not get a star until given a job that mandated one. From then on he got only deadend assignments until he retired. Even then, he was awarded only the obligatory Legion of Merit. Nothing more.

Paul's love affair with the Air Force appears to have been strictly a one-way street. □

Jet, and created the world's largest and most successful executive charter service.

Historically, one is left to ponder what more one man could do in the service of his country. Paul Tibbets is about as good as a great nation can ask. Would that there were more like him. At a time and a place when great resolve and ability were most needed, he stood in the breech. It is not too hyperbolic to say that for a brief moment in time the fate of the world was placed in his hands. Paul Tibbets did not flinch, and he was not found wanting. The historical status he merits is not the one he now holds.

EAA Aviation Center

In the case of the two atomic attacks, the salient points are these:

President Roosevelt was informed in 1939 that there were extreme possibilities in the form of a super weapon within the application of nuclear power as it related to the fission of certain materials. It was known that Germany was working on such a project.

In 1942 work was sufficiently advanced to go beyond concept to begin the creation of a practical weapons system and build and deliver an atomic bomb.

By the time of the Trinity test, the United States had spent two and a half years and over two billion dollars on a supposedly war-ending weapon.

In April 1945, President Franklin D. Roosevelt was succeeded in office by Vice President Harry S. Truman. Upon accession to the presidency, Truman knew nothing of the Manhattan Project.

Given his short time in office, he availed himself of what he perceived to be the best advice extant as to the use of the bomb.

When Mr. Truman took office these were the global war facts as known at that time:

1. Germany had been a beaten nation for at least a year. Yet, it had fought on until the entire country was overrun, at a cost of at least another six million lives in that last year of the war in Europe.

2. It was the general consensus by the powers in Washington and in the field that Japan was a more adamant foe than was Germany.

3. Although Japan was losing the island war in the Pacific theater, it had an army of 1.5 million men that was still all-conquering on the Asian mainland in China.

4. The conquest of the Marianas, Iwo Jima, and Okinawa gave every indication that the defense of the home islands would be a bloodbath beyond description.

When one considers that President Truman had inherited what was perceived to be a possibly war-ending program (The Manhattan Project) that had been started by a predecessor who was widely held to be a national treasure (and today is considered by many to be the greatest president of the 20th century), it is inconceivable that this unknown man from Missouri would cast aside the resulting weapon and let the killing continue for an indefinite period.

Had Truman demurred and let the war go on for whatever time it would have taken and then word leaked out, as surely it would have, that we had possessed and did not use a possibly war-ending weapon, he would have been impeached in short order. And rightfully so.

Smithsonian Air and Space Museum

TOP: An aged Tibbets takes in the sights at EAA AirVenture in 2004. ABOVE: The gleaming Boeing B-29 bomber *Enola Gay* occupies a prominent space in the hangar at the Smithsonian Air & Space Museum in Chantilly, Va. OPPOSITE: Superheated air from the detonation of the atomic bomb pushes upward in a characteristic "mushroom" cloud over the Japanese city of Hiroshima.

ANYONE WHO TAKES A STANCE CONTRARY to this action simply does not understand the government of the United States, the attitude of the nation in 1945, or how democracies work.

Given the times, the decision to drop the bomb was, in today's parlance, a no-brainer. Truman had no choice and neither did Paul Tibbets. They both did their duty and by so doing the killing stopped at 54 million.

I got to meet General Tibbets in 1997. He was making a tour of the country to promote a painting of the famed B-29 named *Enola Gay* on its historic mission.

The venue was a hangar at the airport in Salem, Oregon. When I arrived at the facility, I was struck by the fact that most of the people who came had no notion of what he looked like. They knew him by reputation alone. I knew exactly who I was looking for and spotted him across the hangar walking slowly, looking at the artwork on display.

If one can be 80 plus years old and still be described as fiery, Paul Tibbets is that man. Any stranger who approaches him is presumed to be hostile until proven otherwise.

When I presented myself I was not just cordial, I was deferential. I had what I thought was the ideal icebreaker. One of his officers in the 509th had been my squadron commander in SAC. Moreover, he had been the Air Force technical advisor in the making of the film *Above and Beyond*. Still, I was treated with what amounted to hostility. Fortunately, I was prepared for it. Any good historian knows his subject. I knew where he was coming from.

I cannot say that we parted on a plain of 'bon ami,' but when I left, having accomplished my goals, he was at least not in the en garde position. The parting handshake was more than a pro forma gesture. □

Bill Van Orman is a retired optician, U.S. Air Force veteran, and founding member of the Oregon Air & Space Museum in Eugene.

Eleventh-Hour PERIL

The escape of U.S. gunboats from China in 1941 proved to be a heroic chapter in the history of the navy.

By Eric Niderost

The Art Archive / Dagli Orti (A)

ON NOVEMBER 11, 1941, the U.S. Navy gunboats USS *Luzon* and *Oahu* were ordered to "make quietly all preparations within the ship for a cruise at sea." The message, while long expected, was anything but routine. The two gunboats were moored at Shanghai, just off the International Settlement, which made secrecy paramount yet paradoxically impossible to achieve. Spies and informants were everywhere, and the Whangpoo (today Huangpu) River was filled with Japanese warships.

Mary Evans Picture Library

ABOVE: U.S. Navy sailors march down the streets of Shanghai. Such a show of force was occasionally necessary in order to discourage those who might interfere with the interests of U.S. and European nationals. LEFT: In 1937 Japanese forces captured Shanghai during their conquest of China.

Japan and the United States were on the verge of war, and the Japanese military would welcome the chance to destroy or capture the gunboats if given the opportunity. Yet the odds of any successful escape from Shanghai seemed long. The Japanese controlled the middle and lower Yangtze River Valley and the great river's outlet to the sea. Even if the gunboats did manage to slip the Japanese net and make it into the East China Sea, they would face a whole new set of challenges.

In the summer and fall of 1941 the East China Sea—indeed, much of the Chinese coastline—was firmly under Japanese naval control. The gunboats would have to literally run a gauntlet of warships and patrolling aircraft. The best course of action was to make a dash to the Philippines, then United States territory. If war suddenly broke out en route, or conditions would not permit passage to Manila, then the gunboats would try and make it to the relative safety of British Hong Kong. At the moment, the American gunboats were sitting ducks, so it was far better to attempt a breakout than to passively wait for the inevitable end.

The gunboats were part of the Yangtze River Patrol (YangPat), then commanded by Rear Admiral William A. Glassford (ComYangPat). Glassford, the youngest flag officer in the U.S. Navy, was a handsome and dashing man, and such an Anglophile that he habitually wore knee-length white hose with his uniform shorts. Glassford was convinced the Navy should withdraw from China, an opinion luckily shared by his immediate superior, Admiral Thomas C. Hart. Bureaucracies tend to lead to inertia, so it took a lot of effort and a flurry of memos throughout the summer of 1941 to convince the U.S. State Department that withdrawal was the proper course of action.

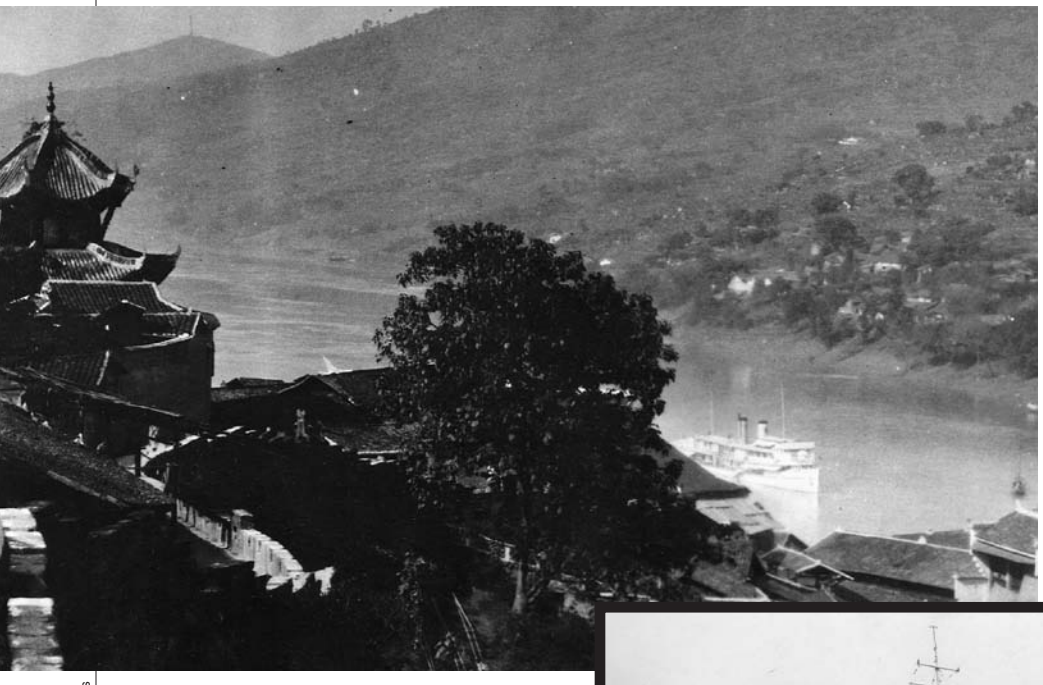
Formally created in 1919, though there had been an American naval presence in China since the mid-19th century, YangPat's main mission was to safeguard American lives and property. It performed this duty with distinction throughout the 1920s and 1930s. China was in turmoil, struggling to emerge from centuries-long hibernation into the modern world. The transformation into modern statehood would be neither easy nor bloodless. Generalissimo Chiang Kai-shek's Nationalist (Kuomintang) Party, nominally in control of the central government, battled both Communists and petty warlords for supreme power.

Technically, the Yangtze River Patrol was part of the U.S. Asiatic Fleet, an amorphous, scattered body whose main base was in Cavite, the Philippines. The YangPat sailors were a breed apart, self-styled "River Rats" or "Old China Hands" who took pride in themselves and their sturdy, flat-bottomed river craft.

In the 1920s and early 1930s, Shanghai was the most colorful, cosmopolitan city on earth, a blend of east and west whose legend resonates to this day. The International Settlement was Shanghai's commercial heart and

center of foreign influence in the region. It had been created in the 19th century when Western powers had forced China to open its doors to foreign trade. The International Settlement and the neighboring French Concession were literally another universe, part of China yet not subject to Chinese law.

Shanghai's heart was the Bund, a mile-long waterfront that hugged the broad sweep of the Whangpoo. Sleek black sedans carried British businessmen to work or to the exclusive Shanghai Club, and character-festooned double-decked buses bludgeoned their way through traffic, narrowly missing sweating coolies pulling rickshaws filled with gawking tourists or off-duty foreign servicemen.



National Archives

ABOVE: Navigating an inland waterway, the USS *Mindanao* is seen passing a majestic pagoda in Foochow, China. RIGHT: U.S. Navy gunboats such as the USS *Panay* provided protection and a place of refuge for American missionaries and businessmen in China.

Duty in China was considered a plum assignment in the mid-1930s. Prices were cheap, and even a common sailor or marine's meager pay would go a long way. Many bars and cabarets where drinks and the companionship of beautiful Chinese and White Russian ladies were readily available to servicemen.

American bluejackets and Marines usually found themselves elbow to elbow with servicemen from other countries, with predicable results. It was said that many, though not all, Marines in the early 1930s were "perennial privates with disciplinary records a yard long." They "fought … French, English, Italian and American soldiers and sailors in every bar in Shanghai."

Most of these altercations were a means of letting off steam, momentary quarrels that were considered good-natured recreation by all concerned. Shanghai's famed Sikh policemen, dubbed "red heads" by local Shanghaiese because of their red turbans, sometimes were called in to restore order. British marines, always loving a "bloody good scrap," would invite their leatherneck opponents for another round of drinks once "peace" was declared.

Not everyone engaged in drunken revels while off duty. Nanking (now Nanjing) Road was a shopper's paradise where Marines and sailors freely bought silks, kimonos, teakwood chests, and ivory, all earmarked for Stateside after tours of duty ended. In April 1938, enlisted men of the 4th Marines were presented with a club that was second to none. This 4th Marines Club included a Noncommissioned Officer's Bar, Private's Bar, a three-lane bowling alley, billiards, gymnasium, library, restaurant, movie theater, ballroom, and dining and private rooms.

Chinese servants did most of the menial work, which was one of the reasons why Shanghai was considered such a "cushy" assignment. Servants cleaned rooms, did the laundry, and even shined shoes. Chinese cooks, mess boys, and firemen in engine rooms were a common sight aboard American gunboats. Officers were served by mess boys, who made sure that there was a freshly ironed uniform at hand, together with hot water, a razor, and a steaming cup of coffee. No early morning detail was overlooked—even toothpaste would be squeezed on toothbrushes.

Yet, China could be hazardous, and occasionally a sailor would be killed or wounded while on duty. The country was tearing itself apart with internecine strife, and the gunboats provided a refuge for American missionaries and other U.S. citizens. Lt. Cmdr. R.A. Dyer of the *USS Panay* remarked in 1931, "Firing on gunboats and merchant ships have [sic] become so routine that any vessel traversing the Yangtze River, sails with the expectation of being fired upon."

These occasional hazards notwithstanding, Shanghai was still the place to be in the early 1930s. The great metropolis on the Whangpoo was booming, its economy scarcely touched by the worldwide Great Depression. In a very real sense Shanghai's Golden Age, the period that remains a legend to this day began to fade in 1937, when the Japanese launched their full-scale invasion of China. True, there had been some brief but bloody fighting in 1932 between the Japanese and Chinese in Shanghai's Chapei district, but the Japanese withdrew and the city quickly rebounded.

This time, the Japanese were playing for higher stakes, nothing less than the conquest of the entire country. Rabid ultranationalists in the military, tough and utterly ruthless, gained the upper hand over Japan's civilian politicians. They saw the Japanese as racially and culturally superior to all other Asians, and they resented what they saw as Japan's "second-class" position in the Pacific vis-à-vis Britain, France, the Netherlands, and the United States.

The Chinese fought a heroic if ultimately futile holding action at Shanghai for some three months but eventually were forced to retreat up the Yangtze River. Nanking (now Nanjing) fell to the Japanese in December 1937. Enraged by continuing Chinese resistance in the face of overwhelming superiority,

the Imperial Japanese Army killed an estimated 300,000 people in what was later called the "Rape of Nanking." Troops went berserk, fiendishly inventing new and terrible tortures to inflict on their victims. Perhaps 20,000 Chinese women were raped in this holocaust.

The Americans gunboats on the Yangtze performed many vital tasks during this period. On September 19, 1937, U.S. Ambassador Nelson Johnson received a message from Vice Admiral Kiyoshi Hasegawa, commander of Japan's Third Fleet, that Nanjing was going to be bombed on September 21. The warning, which was dispatched to all foreign diplomatic missions, advised an immediate evacuation of all diplomatic staff. Johnson and the American mission to China boarded the gunboat USS *Luzon*, then moored in the Yangtze River, on September 20.

The ambassador remained aboard *Luzon* throughout the 21st, waiting for "hell to descend." When the entire day passed without incident, Johnson resolved to return to shore the next day, since conditions on the gunboat "were not conductive to the proper functioning of an embassy." Japanese bombers appeared on the morning of September 22, turning parts of the Chinese capital into a raging inferno. Johnson and his staff watched the horrific spectacle from the relative safety of the *Luzon*. Once the "all clear" was sounded, the ambassador returned to the American embassy.

As the Japanese advanced up the Yangtze, Johnson followed Chiang Kai-shek's retreating Chinese government. In November 1937, the ambassador boarded *Luzon* for Hangkow (Hangkou), some 400 miles upriver. But it seemed nothing could stop the Japanese juggernaut. The Chinese abandoned Hangkow on October 25, 1938, but the Japanese Imperial Army did not actually take the city until four days later. In the interval, all was chaos, so USS *Guam* landed two officers and 22 men to go ashore and guard the American oil installations of Texaco, Asiatic Petroleum, and Standard-Vacuum against looters.

A few months earlier, on August 3, 1938, Johnson was aboard USS *Luzon* for the 750-mile, seven-day journey to Chungking (today Chongqing), the newest Chinese capital. The *Luzon* was accompanied by sister gunboat USS *Tutulia*, inevitably nicknamed "*Tutu*" by her crew. The "*Tutu*" carried embassy cargo that was considered vitally important, including 40 cases of beer. After all, Chungking was a very remote location, and the embassy was going to be "marooned" there for the foreseeable future!

In retrospect, the years 1937 to 1941 have an almost surreal quality to them. By 1940, it was clear to most on-scene China observers that Japan and the United States were on a collision course, but for the most part the diplomatic niceties were observed. There were, however, some serious incidents along the way. On December 12, 1937, Japanese planes attacked the American gunboat USS *Panay* in the Yangtze River. Two sailors were killed and many more wounded, but hasty Japanese apologies and a large indemnity defused the situation and averted war.

Shanghai's International Settlement was neutral ground and as such it was the perfect stage for "showing the flag" and impressing rivals with benign displays of military might. There was an atmosphere of surface cordiality, and this was especially true of the officer caste. Whatever the nationality, officers were by definition gentlemen who shared many of the same responsibilities and privileges of rank. When an American naval officer arrived in Shanghai, he was expected to make courtesy calls to his foreign opposites, and they were expected to return the compliment.

After 1937, these courtesies continued, but the dramatically altered political climate began to strain relations. Shanghai's International Settlement was by late 1937 a neutral island in a Japanese sea. The International Settlement was small, about 8.73 square miles, or 5,583 acres. The adjoining French Concession was even smaller, just under 4 square miles in circumference. In a sense, the International Settlement was even smaller that it was on paper because its Hankow District, just across Soochow (Suzhou) Creek, was so heavily Japanese it was nicknamed "Little Tokyo."

With the middle and lower Yangtze Valley under direct Japanese control, the U.S. Yangtze River Patrol's mission became harder and harder to fulfill. Individual Japanese officers, particularly naval officers, remained friendly, but increasingly an iron fist was replacing the velvet glove.

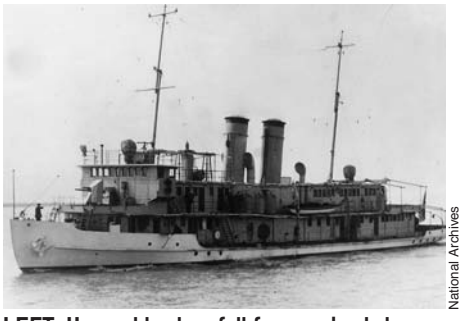
With Ambassador Johnson ensconced some 1,400 miles up the Yangtze in Chungking, senior American naval officers found themselves diplomats by default. Admiral Harry E. Yarnell, commander of the U.S. Asiatic Fleet, was the first to lock horns with an increasingly arrogant Japanese high command.

On December 21, 1937, Admiral Hasegawa sent a letter to Yarnell explaining, "It is the desire of the Japanese Navy that foreign vessels including warships will refrain from navigating the Yangtze except when an understanding is reached with us." The missive had an undertone of command, something Yarnell would not tolerate. Besides, the Japanese could not abrogate American treaty rights, however they might bluster or bully.

Admiral Yarnell, tongue firmly in cheek, called Hasegawa's demand a "suggestion," a "suggestion" the American C-in-C was not about to follow. Yarnell wrote to Hasegawa in a polite but firm manner, saying, "We cannot … accept the restriction … that foreign men-of-war cannot move freely on the river without prior arrangement with the Japanese and we reserve the right to move these ships whenever necessary without notification." Yarnell's letter was cosigned by senior officers of the British, French, and Italian navies.

By 1939, the handwriting was on the wall, at least to senior American officers stationed in China. Admiral Thomas C. Hart succeeded Yarnell as commander, U.S. Asiatic Fleet, on July 25, 1939. Yarnell had been respected by his peers and by the international community at large, and many were aghast at his removal. Hart and Yarnell had been midshipmen at the U.S. Naval Academy at Annapolis, and the outgoing chief knew the command was in good hands. When asked about his replacement, Yarnell would simply reply, "Tommy Hart is a stout fellow."

Hart was indeed a stout fellow, more than capable of crossing swords, diplomatic or oth-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LEFT: Her coal bunkers full for an extended voyage, the USS *Guam* rides low in the water of a Chinese river. CENTER: Vice Admiral William A. Glassford. RIGHT: Admiral Thomas C. Hart

erwise, with the rampaging Japanese. The admiral knew he was playing a high-stakes game with very few cards. The U.S. Asiatic Fleet was scattered and relatively weak, certainly no match for the might of the Japanese Imperial Navy. Besides the gunboats, in 1939 Hart had one heavy cruiser (USS *Augusta*, CA 31), one light cruiser (USS *Marblehead*), a dozen or so destroyers, some submarines, and the usual auxiliary craft.

Of course, it was never intended that Admiral Hart fight it out toe-to-toe with the entire Japanese fleet. He would be expected to fight a holding action, defending the Philippines until the main U.S. Pacific Fleet could sail and engage the enemy. Hart also felt it was prudent to keep the lines of communication open with the British, who possessed a large Far Eastern colonial empire.

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As a group of Japanese soldiers watches from ashore, a detonated mine sends plumes of water from the Yangtze River.

Under the circumstances, it was deemed necessary to regroup and consolidate. Late in 1939, all seagoing units, including the destroyer divisions then operating in Chinese coastal waters, were withdrawn to the United States or the Philippines. That left the four gunboats of the Yangtze River Patrol and the South China Patrol (one gunboat, the USS *Mindanao*) as the sole remaining American naval presence in China.

In May 1940, France was defeated by Nazi Germany, the Third Republic replaced by a weak and vacillating Vichy regime. Vichy was a broken reed, and the Japanese took full advantage of the situation. In August of that same year, the Japanese bullied Vichy into letting them occupy the northern half of French Indochina, and in September Japan signed the Tripartite Pact with Germany and Italy, a loose alliance plainly aimed at British and American interests.

Admiral Hart looked at the situation around Shanghai and did not like what he saw. Foreign nationals were leaving the city in droves; once there had been around 50,000 foreigners in Shanghai, but by the end of 1941 scarcely 8,000 or so remained. River commerce was Shanghai's life blood, the very reason for its existence. When Japanese interference brought river traffic along the Yangtze to a virtual standstill, Shanghai suffered greatly. The great metropolis, deprived of its sustenance, slipped into an economic coma.

In December 1940, all dependents of Asiatic Fleet servicemen—some 2,000 women and children—were sent home. The American consulate in Shanghai strongly advised all American citizens to go home immediately. Many took heed and joined the exodus, and the trickle of expatriates going home reached flood proportions. Some elected to stay, including long-term resident businessmen and missionaries. But it was clear the American population in China was being substantially reduced. If this was so, why maintain an American military presence there?

By the summer of 1941, it was not a matter of whether the United States and Japan would go to war, but when. When the Japanese occupied the southern portions of French Indochina, President Franklin Roosevelt, with the agreement of the British and Dutch, major colonial powers in Southeast Asia, imposed an embargo on Japanese trade with the United States. This action, taken on July 26, 1941, cut three-fourths of Japanese trade, but most importantly, nine-tenths of its oil supply. Japan had only about a year's worth of oil stockpiled, and when that was gone, its war machine would of necessity grind to a halt.

In essence the U.S. government was pressuring Japan to cease its aggressive policies—in particular, abandon its ongoing conquest of China. This was unacceptable to the hard liners in the Japanese government. General Hideki Tojo, a prominent figure in the anti-Western military expansionist faction, became prime minister on October 17, 1941.

These last few months of peace produced some bizarre episodes, at least in retrospect. It is one thing to size up a potential enemy, but quite another to actively socialize with him. Captain Teizaburo Fukuda, a Japanese naval officer stationed at Hankow, was an amiable sort who generally liked Americans. The gunboat USS *Wake* was also at Hankow. In April 1941, she had to relinquish her former title, *Guam*, to a new cruiser that was coming down the way Stateside.

The newly dubbed *Wake* was well supplied by the U.S. Navy godown (warehouse) was located in Hangkow. Japanese control of the Yangtze was now so tight that *Wake*'s movements were strictly limited, so the gunboat was pretty much "confined to quarters" in the port city. There were a few shortages, notably fuel oil. Luckily, the U.S. Navy had a friend in Captain Fukuda. Any supplies that were urgently needed would be flown or shipped in courtesy of the Imperial Japanese Navy.

"What!" Fukuda once exclaimed when he heard the *Wake* was low on fuel oil, "Who say trubber (trouble) on oiru?" This was a calamity to *Wake*'s self-appointed Japanese host. "You want oiru?" the captain asked in his heavily accented English. It was shipped in the very next day.

In October 1941, when the Japanese government's attitudes were hardening, Captain Fukuda was promoted to rear admiral. Officers of the USS *Wake* gave him a little party in celebration. The tables were festooned with

little crossed Japanese and American flags, and there were toasts with good wine. The Japanese officers with Fukuda returned the compliment and invited the Americans to a Japanese-style teahouse in Hankow.

Professional courtesies aside, relations between the Japanese and American military in China were deteriorating badly. Both American officers and enlisted men knew their fate if war broke out, and they accepted the situation with a shrug of the shoulders and gallows humor. Admiral Hart and his immediate subordinate, Rear Admiral William Glassford, commander of the Yangtze River Patrol (ComYangPat), could not afford to be so fatalistic. They recognized that the position of the American sailors and Marines in China was increasingly untenable.

Colonel Samuel Howard of the Fourth U.S. Marines also concurred. On August 10, 1940, the British announced they would be withdrawing all their military forces from Shanghai and Northern China. The removal was accomplished by August 26, leaving around 1,000 marines in a sea of potential enemies. It was obvious the Japanese were just waiting to seize the remains of the International Settlement that were not already under their control.

Once war started, they would make their move, and what could a handful of Marines do against the estimated 300,000 Japanese troops in the area? Outgunned and outnumbered, the few American gunboats still operating would be no match for the swarms of Japanese destroyers and cruisers now infesting Chinese waterways.

After much wrangling between the Diplomatic Service, the State Department, and the military, President Roosevelt gave the withdrawal recommendations his approval. On November 7, 1941, "on advice from the Navy and State," Roosevelt declared that the Yangtze and South China River Patrols would be removed, and a short time later further approved the "withdrawal of all Marines—except those necessary to perform communications for State.... "

On December 12, 1937, Japanese planes attacked the American gunboat USS *Panay* in the Yangtze River. Two sailors were killed and many more wounded...

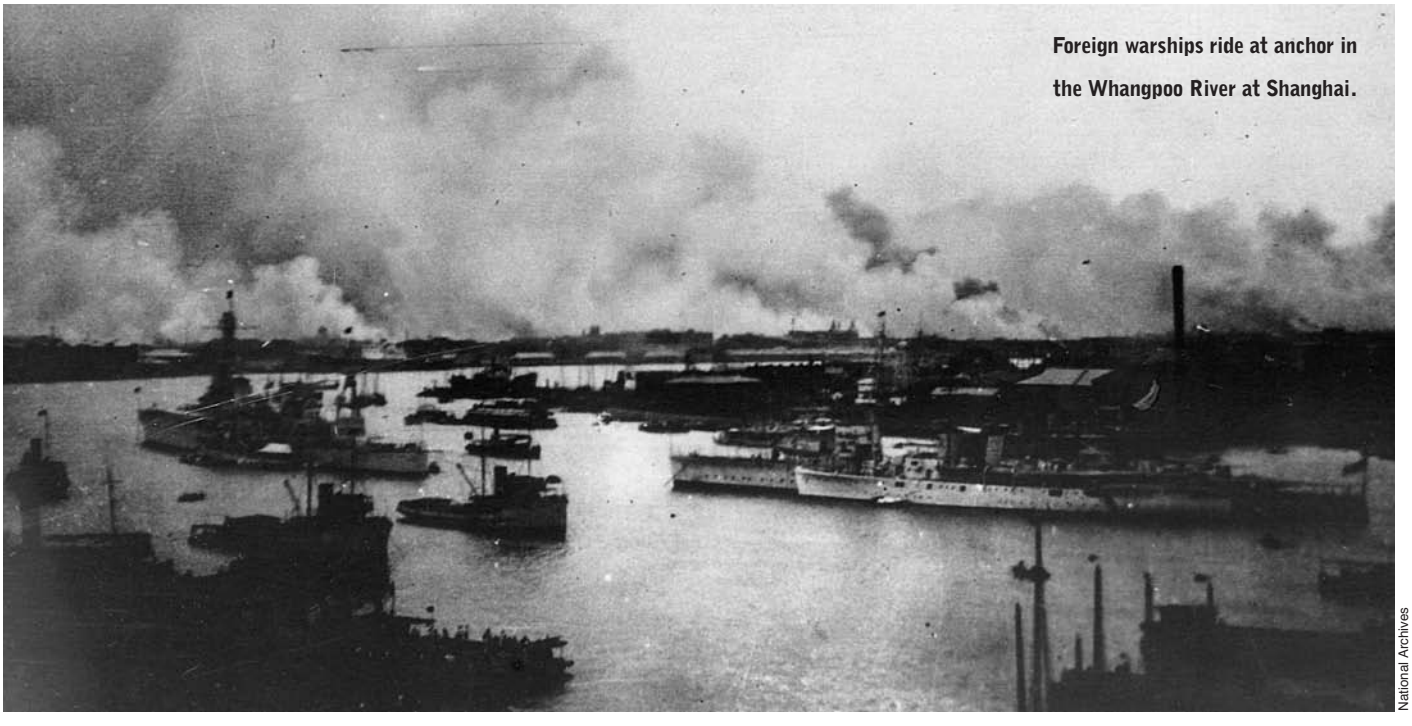
The formal orders for gunboat withdrawal were issued on November 18, but by that time preparations to leave China were well underway. The USS *Wake*, then anchored at Hankow, was the deepest in Japanese-held territory and was in the greatest danger. As a first step, the U.S. Navy godown's huge inventory of supplies was liquidated, mainly by selling it to local Americans who were determined against all advice to stay on. The USS *Tutulia*, still at the temporary Free Chinese capital at Chungking, would of necessity remain where it was.

The *Wake*'s fevered preparations were given added urgency by the realization that *Wake* had to reach Shanghai before her large sisters *Oahu* and *Luzon* left port. The gunboat's officers had a few drinks the evening of the 22nd, simultaneously saying goodbye to Hankow and also to a colorful chapter in U.S. Naval history.

The USS *Wake* began its desperate run downriver around 2:30 on the afternoon of November 23. The crew was in the process of singling up lines, thus freeing the vessel from its mooring pontoon, when an agitated Japanese officer ran up the catwalk moments before it was going to be pulled in. "Stoppu! Stoppu!" the khaki-clad figure shouted, vicious-looking samurai sword raising a raucous clatter as he rapidly raced ahead.

"You cannot sair! [sail]!" the officer insisted, cap slightly askew. "You must have escort! It can arrange [sic] in one week!" *Wake*'s skipper, Lt. Cmdr. A.E. Harris, was done with superficial courtesies. Poking his head out of the pilot house door, Harris replied, "Unless you want a free ride to Shanghai, I advise you to leave now."

The Japanese officer complied but still



Foreign warships ride at anchor in the Whangpoo River at Shanghai.

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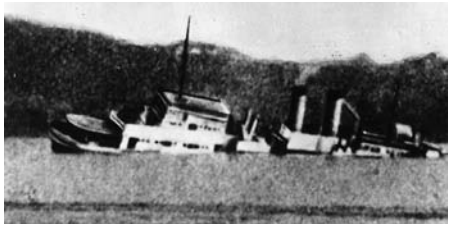
insisted that *Wake* must have an escort. A Japanese gunboat about *Wake*'s size soon appeared alongside together with a well-armed sloop. All three ships went underway, the *Wake* literally sandwiched between the menacing Japanese vessels. Both sides were at battle stations, the *Wake*'s crew in its Model 1917 steel helmets alongside the ship's two 3-inch guns and eight Lewis machine guns.

The next five days were, in the words of Executive Officer Kemp Tolley, "tense." Nerves were stretched taut, the anxiety heightened when the Japanese gun crews decided to go through a practice gun drill using the *Wake* as a target. When the gunboat reached Shanghai on November 28, preparations to make *Luzon* and *Oahu* oceanworthy were well underway. That same day, the last contingent of the 4th Marines boarded the liner *President Harrison* for the Philippines.

The Marines were given a spectacular send-off, with dignitaries from the Shanghai Municipal Council, foreign diplomatic corps, and military from various countries, including Japan, on hand to see them off. Thousands of Chinese waved American and Chinese flags, and the 4th Marine Band at the head of the marching column played the "Marine's Hymn" and "Semper Fidelis." The hardworking bluejackets aboard the three U.S. gunboats probably did not give the hoopla a second glance—time was pressing, and they were engaged in their own



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In frames taken from a series of photographs, the USS *Panay* is sunk–supposedly in error–by Japanese planes in the Yangtze River.

race with the clock.

There was much work to be done, but the River Rats were making good progress. The gunboats were river craft, built without keels and flat-bottomed. That was bad enough, but the main deck on each vessel was only a few feet above the waterline. All main deck shutters and windows were covered with watertight steel, and the fire room blower intakes on the main decks were covered by cofferdams.

Rear Admiral William A. Glassford was going to accompany his gunboats on the long and perilous journey, the first time a Yangtze River Patrol commander was going to take to the open sea in its entire history. It was estimated that the 1,170-mile journey from Shanghai to Manila would take five or six days—with luck. "Luck" was the operative word here because there were indications that a typhoon was brewing and might strike at any moment. Weather-wise Chinese fishermen were already crowding into Shanghai, seeking safety for their fragile junks and sampans. The gunboats had no option; they could not wait for better weather.

It was decided that *Wake* would remain behind at Shanghai, moored on the Whangpoo as a station ship to provide radio communications for Consul General Lockhart. The ship's normal complement of 55 men would be reduced to about 14. The bulk of these would be radiomen, there to man equipment both on the *Wake* and at the American consulate on shore. The skeleton crew would be commanded by Lt. Cmdr. Columbus D. Smith, a reservist recalled to duty early in 1941. Smith was the perfect choice for such an assignment. A merchant skipper in civilian life, Smith knew Chinese waters well and could get by in Japanese and Mandarin Chinese.

Luzon and *Oahu* left Shanghai just past midnight on November 29, 1941. The night was pitch black, save for the bobbing lights of moored Chinese sampans. There were no official pilots aboard to guide the boats, so they had to proceed with extreme caution. After painfully groping their way down the meander-

The Men of the Yangtze River Patrol were a Different Breed

For many years the Yangtze River Patrol was the U.S. Navy's orphan child, neglected and half forgotten. China was half a world away, and the United States did not have compelling reasons to strengthen its military commitment there. In some respects, the size and quality of a foreign river patrol was a reflection of its political and economic interest in China. In 1934, when the United States had seven gunboats operating on the Yangtze, two of them were rapidly aging relics. In contrast, the British, with a strong presence in Hong Kong and elsewhere in China, had no less than 12.

Often the Yangtze patrol had to make do with ships well past their prime. In the early years of the 20th century, the Patrol was largely composed of antiquated Spanish ships acquired as spoils of war after the Spanish-American War. As late as the 1920s, these antiques were still commonplace sights.

Elcano (translated from Spanish as "the canal") was typical of these relics. Built in 1885, its guns were complicated museum pieces so old that their American crews scarcely knew what to make of them, much less how to operate them. There was not even any dummy ammunition for practice drills, so the guns were left largely undisturbed! In 1913, the *Palos* and *Monocacy* were built at the Mare Island Naval Shipyard, the first vessels specifically earmarked for China service. But even they were getting long in the tooth by 1930.

This situation changed when Congress finally appropriated money to build six modern gunboats in the mid-1920s. Built in Shanghai from Chinese designs, their basic configuration was pretty much the same, though differing in details and size. The USS *Mindanao* and USS *Luzon* were the largest, followed by the *Panay* and the *Oahu*. The last two, *Guam* (later *Wake*) and *Tutulia*, were the smallest and could navigate the treacherous Yangtze during times of the year when the other gunboats could not.

Each of the "new six" featured eight machine-gun batteries amidships on both the port and starboard sides. These were vintage .30-caliber Lewis guns

Illustration by Gary Joseph Cieradkowski

Wearing a white undress uniform with canvas leggings, this sailor is armed with a .30-caliber Lewis light machine gun.

ing river, the two gunboats finally reached the confluence of the Whangpoo and the Yangtze, about 15 miles downriver from Shanghai. From there, it was a short distance to the open sea.

The passage down the Whangpoo was far from trouble free; in fact, there were a few anxious moments when *Oahu* ran aground, a victim of shallow waters. The ship managed to break free, and the tiny flotilla reached the China Sea without further problems. The first day or so the skies were clear and the seas manageable, but the Japanese were a constant menace. Scouting seaplanes buzzed overhead, circling like vultures anticipating an animal's early demise. Japanese destroyers also appeared, arrogantly sending message after arrogant message to Admiral Glassford aboard *Luzon*.

The two gunboats had been joined by the minesweepers *Pigeon* and *Finch*, dispatched from Manila to provide escort should the *Luzon* or *Oahu* founder. But the minesweepers were not fighting ships, and the Americans were very vulnerable. The two gunboats could easily have been blown out of the water, and with war imminent the Japanese must have wished the date was December 8, not December 2. It was obvious they were practically salivating at the thought of destroying the gunboats, not to mention killing or capturing an American rear admiral.

Nevertheless, the Japanese could not attack prematurely, so they let the Americans go. There were a few more attempts at intimidation, such as when the gunboats were "ordered" to sail to Japanese-occupied Formosa (Taiwan), followed by repeated "requests" for the Americans to identify themselves and state their mission. The high-handed directives were bluffs, easily ignored or rejected.

Map © 2005 Philip Schwartzberg, Meridian Mapping, Minneapolis, MN

Home to a diverse population, ships of many nations paid regular visits to the cosmopolitan Chinese port city of Shanghai.

After eight hours of harassment, the Japanese finally departed. One enemy had been disposed of, but a far more formidable foe was waiting in the wings. The seas grew rougher and rougher, until the Americans found themselves sailing into the very teeth of a full-blown typhoon. The seas grew mountainous, tossing the gunboats about like corks in a bathtub. The *Oahu's* inclinometer recorded a roll of 56 degrees to starboard and 50 degrees to port, yet somehow the gunboat refused to capsize.

Both ships were in trouble; the bows and sterns were not merely awash, but underwater for periods of time. Admiral Glassford, hanging on aboard his flagship *Luzon*, later recalled, "We were tossed about as by a juggler, now up like a shot to a crest from which we would fall like a stone. The ships were rolling 28 to 30 degrees on a side, within a three-second period.… There was no sleep, no hot food; one could scarcely even sit down without being tossed about."

On December 5, the skies cleared and the raging ocean was transformed into a turquoise sea as flat as a mill pond. Soon, the battered gunboats were entering Manila Bay and the apparent safety of the Philippines. That same day, December 5, 1941, the blue-fielded two-star flag of Rear Admiral Glassford was lowered aboard *Luzon* for the last time. This was not merely a change of ship, but the close of an entire chapter of U.S. Naval history. The word officially went out, "YangPat Dissolved." The

Continued on page 81

mounted on armored swivel shields. By the late 1930s, if not earlier, these World War I-era weapons were becoming outdated but could still pack a punch. Each gunboat also was armed with two 3-inch guns mounted at the bow and on the stern.

Those guns were often needed. In the late 1920s and early 1930s, the Yangtze hardly knew a moment's peace. The countryside was infested with armed soldiers who took delight in sniping at the gunboats as they sailed up and down the river. China was in such turmoil that gunboat sailors and others often did not know who was firing at them. In the end, it did not matter if it was a bandit bullet, a Communist mortar shell, or a Nationalist machine-gun round; all were equally deadly, and the gunboats would respond in kind.

The experience of the USS *Guam* provides a concrete example of such an action. On July 4, 1930, the *Guam* was passing near Chungsha when it came under heavy sniper fire from shore. The gunboat returned fire, opening up with its Lewis guns on the port side, then reversing course and repeating the process with its starboard machine guns. Seaman Samuel Elkin was hit by an enemy bullet square in the chest and died five minutes later. Enough was enough. It was time to take off the gloves. The *Guam*'s two 3-inch guns opened up, lobbing a total of 34 shells at the opposite shore. The opposition was soon silenced.

Gunboats escorted American and foreign flag merchant ships though trouble spots along the great river. They also provided refuge for American citizens and protected property. Gunboat crews were often called upon to form shore parties. If it was a summer foray, both officers and men wore the standard white undress uniform, ideal for China's sweltering temperatures. An officer's uniform was the same as he wore aboard ship, save for the addition of a Model 1917 steel helmet, such as those so familiar in photos of World War I, and a .45-caliber pistol holstered in a Model 1910 pistol belt. Canvas leggings strapped around his lower legs completed the costume.

Enlisted seamen dressed in similar fashion but carried a variety of armament. The basic weapon was the Model 1903 Springfield rifle, which was also used by the Army and Marines. As part of a machine-gun squad, some sailors might carry a .30-caliber Lewis machine gun. A Lewis gun team usually consisted of one gunner and two ammunition carriers, who also knew how to handle the weapon if the gunner was killed or wounded in action.

During other times of the year, a sailor wore a dark blue undress uniform and the distinctive white Navy hat that is so familiar even today. When he went out on liberty in Shanghai, he most likely wore the dress version, which had cuffs and the back flap-style collar. In the summer, the dress uniform was white with a blue collar and cuffs. Rank was worn on the upper arm, service stripes, each stripe representing four years, on the lower arm. Personnel responsible for the running of the ship would wear their ratings on the right arm, all others on the left. □

Giving Up THE GHOST

IT WAS AN IMPRESSIVE SIGHT. UPON THE REVIEWING STAND as honored guest was General Dwight D. Eisenhower, supreme commander of Allied forces in Europe. It was an autumn day in October 1946, in Munich, Germany, and he was taking the pass in review of the 2nd Constabulary Regiment. At the head of the formation the regimental commander, Colonel Charles Reed, a seasoned cavalryman, rode on a handsome charger. He was followed by a platoon of mounted soldiers which trotted in front of a khaki-clad band. Behind the musicians came the

By Brig. Gen. Raymond E. Bell Jr., U.S. Army (Ret.)

regiment's motorized and mechanized vehicles, all fully manned. As the last element passed down the Munich street, all observers agreed the parade was a huge success, and the regiment was praised for its performance.

The Americans in postwar Germany staged many such parades, but this one was unique. Unbeknownst to Eisenhower, and surely to everybody else outside the 2nd Constabulary Regiment, not every participant in uniform was an American soldier. Half the troopers mounted on horseback, most of the musicians, and a portion of the crews in vehicles were veterans of the demobilized German 11th Panzer Division, the *Gespensterdivision* (Ghost Division). The fact that this situation arose is a most intriguing story of the surrender of a crack German Army fighting division and its eventual role in this impressive show of American armed might. It all had to do with a unique relationship between the division and the constabulary regiment and the terribly undermanned condition of the 2nd Constabulary Regiment on the day of the parade.

The 11th Panzer Division had originally been organized in August 1940, in the then German province of Silesia, now part of Poland. Elements of the division, the 15th Panzer Regiment and the 11th Rifle Brigade, had previously participated in the Polish campaign of 1939 and the 1940 invasion of France and the Low Countries. The infantry brigade allegedly received the *nom de guerre* of "ghost brigade" from a British officer when the unit appeared unexpectedly behind Allied lines in Holland during the Germans' May 1940 invasion. In the fall of 1940, as the 11th Panzer was being organized, the new division adopted as a mark of honor the title of "*Gespensterdivision*" or "Ghost Division." The 11th incorporated an image of a ghost in its symbol used as part of its combat identification markings.

From France the 11th Panzer Division deployed to the Balkans for the 1941 campaign. It then fought in Russia and was heavily engaged in the battles around Stalingrad in 1942. It was cited for distinguished service three times in 1943 for action on the Eastern Front. In the summer of 1944, the 11th Panzer Division was stationed in southern France as part of the German Nineteenth Army, charged with resisting any invasion of France from the Mediterranean Sea. When the Americans and French landed on the southern coast of France in August, the 11th Panzer Division fought a rearguard action up the Rhone Valley. As the Western Front stabilized along the German-French border, the 11th did battle well into the autumn of 1944.

The 11th Panzer Division first came into contact with elements of the 2nd Constabulary Regiment's predecessor, the 2nd Cavalry Group, in the French province of Lorraine. Then, as the Americans drove into central Germany, the 11th Panzer Division was badly mauled but still managed to duel effectively with U.S. units such as the 94th Infantry Division. The German division won the reputation of being a tough but honorable opponent. Finally, unable to stem the overwhelming tide facing it, the 11th Panzer Division withdrew eastward at the beginning of May. Still intact as a fighting orga-

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Shortly after a surrender to U.S. forces, German officers hand out rations of bread to hungry soldiers.

In the closing days of World War II, the German 11th Panzer Division took an unconventional road to surrender.

nization, the division was located just inside the western border of Czechoslovakia. It is here that the saga of the 11th Panzer Division's surrender began.

The commanding general of the 11th Panzer Division was *Generalleutnant* (Major General) Wendt von Wietersheim, a tall handsome man, 45 years of age, an able and experienced commander. He was also a pragmatist. When the division surrendered, however, he was not officially recognized as being in command. On April 15, 1945, a full two weeks before the bulk of the 11th Panzer Division surrendered, von Wietersheim was relieved of division command and ordered to Berlin. His new assignment was to command the LI Panzer Corps, a "paper" organization which was to participate in a last ditch defense of the German capital. But von Wietersheim never got to Berlin.

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Ever the realist, the German general had recognized that the end of the war was near, and he had no desire to be in the beleaguered capital at the end, no matter how much duty called. He therefore reported himself sick and unable to assume his new position. At the same time, he remained close to division headquarters where he was available for consultations with the new commander, *Generalmajor* (Brigadier General) Freiherr Edgar von Buttlar, and the 11th Panzer Division staff. There seems to have been no problem with having the popular former commanding general in such close proximity to the division's nerve center.

Apparently it was also part of von Wietersheim's hidden agenda to seek an appropriate opportunity to achieve an honorable end for the 11th Panzer Division by surrendering it to the Americans. Evidently he had been contemplating doing so for the whole month before May 2, but events intervened and did not allow him the opportunity.

When von Wietersheim relinquished command, the division was in the process of withdrawing into the border area of western Czechoslovakia, the Sudetenland. Here the 11th Panzer Division was trying unsuccessfully to slow the swift advance of General George S. Patton, Jr.'s Third Army. As columns of the American 11th Armored Division, backed up by infantry units, raced southeast along the southern German-Czech border, the 11th Panzer Division tried to beat back probes into its positions by supporting U.S. infantry divisions such as the 26th and 90th and the 2nd Cavalry Group.

The fast progress of the Americans in the direction of Linz, Austria, led to conflicting orders to the 11th Panzer Division by the German high command. On April 25, a *Kampfgruppe* (battle group) consisting of the 111th Panzergrenadier Regiment and a tank company with combat support and service support elements was ordered to the Czech town of Domazlice. The remainder of the 11th Panzer Division was to join the battle group when the division obtained the motor fuel required to move the organization. Meanwhile, the 11th Panzer Division's mission was to block an American advance on Pilsen, home in Czechoslovakia to the world famous Pilsen beer. On April 28, the division arrived at its assigned operational area close to the Czech-German border.

No sooner had the bulk of the division assembled in its new location than orders were received for the 11th Panzer Division to move over mountainous terrain a further 60 miles to the southeast to the Czech town of Volary. The new mission was to block the U.S. 11th Armored Division from entering Linz.

Once again, this was a piecemeal operation caused by the shortage of fuel which by now was critical. As it was, there was only enough fuel to move the previously formed *Kampfgruppe*, which was led southeast by the "official" division commander, von Buttlar. Von Wietersheim remained "indisposed" with the main body of the division around Domazlice. On May 2, von Buttlar and his battle group arrived in the vicinity of Volary, where they were soon to come into contact with the U.S. 26th Infantry Division. Not only were his units low on fuel, but he was out of effective signal communication range with the main body of the 11th Panzer Division.

Wise heads, both German and American, were to prevail at this juncture. At the end of April, elements of the U.S. 2nd Cavalry Group (commanded throughout the war by Colonel Reed) had entered the Czech town of Hostoun to rescue some 500 Lipizzaner horses. Reed's men also had to contend with fanatical Nazis and soldiers studying at non-commissioned officer schools, which had been moved to Czechoslovakia from Germany. For the 11th Panzer Division, however, Reed was to do a big favor. Operating as it was on the left flank of the advancing U.S. units along the Czech-German border, the 2nd Cavalry, skirmishing with 11th Panzer Division units, soon came into contact with the forward elements of the Soviet Red Army advancing from the east. When the Soviets realized that the 11th Panzer Division was in the vicinity, they began to seek the German division's surrender.

The 2nd Cavalry had little interest in turning German soldiers over to the Soviets. This was due partially because of suspicions as to what might happen to the German troops, but it also had much to do with the fact that the 2nd Cavalry and the 11th Panzer had faced each other in combat and "knew" one another. During fighting in the French province of Lorraine in 1944, the two adversaries had exchanged seriously wounded soldiers. The 11th Panzer Division was also known to General Patton, who like Colonel Reed, was an old horse cavalryman. Perhaps Reed, who was no stranger to Patton, shared some of Patton's adverse feeling for the Soviets. In any event, Colonel Reed played an important role in thwarting Soviet attempts to draw the Ghost Division into their clutches.

Colonel Reed could not have acted without the influence of General Patton, who receives much credit for allowing the 11th Panzer Division to surrender to the United States Army. Patton was taking a big chance when he allowed the division's capitulation to take place as it did. He had received strict orders not to interfere with the political decisions, which gave the Soviets authority to claim all German forces in Czechoslovakia as their prisoners of war. Nevertheless, he authorized the surrender of the 11th Panzer Division because it was, "… the fairest and bravest of all the German divisions against which he had fought

in this war." His decision, however, was also approved by General Omar Bradley, who emphasized that the 11th Panzer Division enter captivity in an orderly manner.

So, while Colonel Reed was delaying the Soviets, the German soldiers of the 11th Panzer Division were preparing to surrender to the Americans. That is, most of the German units were getting ready to march into the arms of their adversaries. There was, however, a complication. While much of the 11th was around the town of Domazlice, there was still that element 60 miles away at Volary. And the official division commander was not in Domazlice, but with his Volary battle group, which was in communication with units near Domazlice only by means of motor messenger.

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ABOVE: A crowd of 90th and 2nd Infantry Division troops gather as the German 11th Panzer Division makes its formal surrender in May 1945. LEFT: Troops of the 90th Infantry Division move through the woodlands of Czechoslovakia while probing German positions near the southern German-Czech border. OPPOSITE: Rolling through a Czech city, U.S. infantrymen quickly take cover as their halftrack comes under the attack of Wehrmacht snipers.

Although there was, strictly speaking, no division commander with the bulk of the 11th Panzer Division, General von Wietersheim was present, even if he was officially supposed to be hospitalized. Having already disobeyed the order to report to Berlin, it would be easy for him to ignore other illogical commands and even to undertake unconventional actions. So on May 2, von Wietersheim called together all the division's senior officers present in the Domazlice area. He then told them of his intention to open negotiations with the Americans for the surrender of the division. When the the majority of the officers agreed to his plans (the Nazi Party members in the command strongly objected), von Wietersheim resumed command of the division.

Von Buttlar, on the other hand, while acquiescing to von Wietersheim's resumption of command and opening negotiations, did not take his own command responsibilities lightly. He felt it necessary to prepare to execute an order to move to Brno. However, von Buttlar, whose troops now faced the U.S. 26th Infantry Division, was also a pragmatist. He, therefore, was prepared to canvass his men as to their desires once it was known that von Wietersheim and other key officers had prevailed upon the majority of the division personnel to open talks.

The result of von Buttlar's attempt to ascertain the preference of his troops was not unexpected. They definitely wanted to follow their comrades into the protective arms of the Americans. They also had little interest in continuing combat operations. They wanted honorable terms and not to have to surrender to the Soviets. To accomplish these two objectives, the leaders of the division had to make the right contacts.

The 2nd Cavalry Group had already been in contact with elements of the 11th Panzer Division At the same time, fanatical non-commissioned officers in German army schools were engaging in desperate actions. In one instance, a patrol of the 2nd Cavalry was ambushed by a group of these NCOs, and the captured vehicles were used in a ruse to attack a company of the U.S. 90th Infantry Division's 357th Infantry Regiment advancing into Czechoslovakia. There was no telling what the mood of certain American troops would be when they were approached by Germans seeking to surrender, especially since the word was out concerning the rights which the Soviets had asserted.

Indeed, when a German emissary first tried to make contact with the 90th Infantry Division, he was rudely rebuffed. Major John H. Cochran, Jr., operations officer of the 3rd Battalion, 359th Infantry Regiment, recalls that when a German soldier with a white flag of truce approached his unit's position he was brought to the battalion's command post. The German insisted on being taken to the chief of staff of the 90th, which did not sit well with Cochran. Cochran's sensibilities being offended, he asserted, "No German soldier was going to tell me what to do, so I returned him to our perimeter. He was told to return to whence he came."

This was the first message, addressed to no one particular person or entity, carried into the lines of the 359th's 3rd Battalion. It is probable that the previous contact with Colonel Reed's 2nd Cavalry had given hope to von

Wietersheim that such a message would automatically get into the correct hands. It was, nonetheless, a risky business, and the rejection of the first formal contact to surrender must have been unsettling to the staff of the 11th Panzer Division. Nevertheless, the first steps having been taken, there was now no turning back, especially since the Soviets were pressuring Colonel Reed to be allowed to take the surrender of the Germans.

A second attempt to make contact with the Americans, however, was successful. At 7:15 the next morning, May 4, Technical Sergeant Fifth Class Walter Huskey of the same U.S. infantry battalion's G Company was manning a forward outpost when he spotted three German vehicles approaching. These Volkswagens were flying white flags. A tall young major dressed in the black uniform of the German armored troops approached Huskey and asked to speak with the U.S. division commander. It was the 11th Panzer Division logistics officer, a Major Voightmann, who entered G Company's lines and was taken to the 90th Infantry Division's command post in the German town of Cham where he delivered the surrender proposal.

The persistence of von Wietersheim and staff paid off. For the 90th Infantry Division, however, this episode was really only a blip in its overall tactical operations. The XII Corps, the 90th's immediate higher headquarters, had on May 4 ordered the entire division to pull back into a large goose egg around the German town of Viechtach, several miles from the Czech border. The division was to become the corps reserve. The German surrender offer, along with an order for the 357th Infantry Regiment to seize and clear the avenue of approach into Czechoslovakia through the German town of Regen early on May 5, caused the corps' reserve plans to be changed. A combat command of the U.S. 4th Armored Division spearheading an eastward drive to capture Prague, the Czech capital, was then to pass through the 357th.

It was also at this time that the 2nd Cavalry was having considerable trouble moving through the thick woods on the German-Czech border. Screening the left flank of the 90th, the cavalry encountered resistance which proved to be of great interest to the division it was protecting. On May 5, German officer candidate school students (the previously mentioned noncommissioned officers) put up stiff resistance, cutting off and wiping out a cavalry platoon, an event which was to result in severe repercussions for the 90th and could have adversely impacted surrender negotiations with the 11th Panzer Division.


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The need for a hasty surrender by the 11th Panzer Division became increasingly apparent to the Germans. The delayed negotiations could have run into more trouble on May 5 as a result of the ambush of the 2nd Cavalry's platoon.

The 357th Infantry Regiment had jumped off on the 5th in its attack to clear the pass into Czechoslovakia. Then, as a platoon of the regiment's I Company was about to enter the small Czech village of Zhuri, the unit encountered two American scout cars which they took to be manned by 2nd Cavalry troopers. Instead, the two M8 scout cars opened fire on the unsuspecting Americans. Other Germans blazed away at the surprised American soldiers, killing 10 and wounding a further 10. The outraged Americans, embittered by this heavy loss so late in the war, closed on Zhuri and without artillery support proceeded to wipe out the German resistance in hand-to-hand combat. The German subterfuge cost the enemy 24 dead and 76 taken prisoner. The 2nd Cavalry recovered the two M8s and four quarter-ton trucks.

Luckily for the 11th Panzer Division, the timing of the surrender negotiations was not affected by the unfortunate incidents of May 5. General von Wietersheim got his wish. The 11th Panzer Division, still a cohesive if battered organization, was to march into captivity with its flags flying (albeit white ones) and its head held high. The Americans would stand off and allow their former adversaries to control their own people. When necessary, the 359th Infantry, designated by 90th Infantry Division headquarters to oversee the actual surrender, would lend administrative and logistics support. It soon would be required. But first, General von Wietersheim would have to meet the 90th Infantry Division commander, Brigadier General Herbert L, Earnest, and formalize the German troops' surrender. The meeting was scheduled to take place at 4 PM on May 4.

At the appointed time, negotiations between General von Wietersheim got underway. As the talks progressed, General Earnest asked if the Germans had enough fuel to get their vehicles to the appointed assembly areas. Von Wietersheim replied that some of the vehicles would soon run out of gasoline. Earnest then said that in that case the men would have to walk. "No," stated the German general with a sad smile, "They're used to hauling each other's vehicles."

Then occurred one of those moments in history when levity helped to assuage an awkward discussion. Generals Earnest and von Wietersheim went on to discuss further details of controlling the movement of the German troops into captivity. It was suggested to the German general that since more than a thousand vehicles would be entering the assembly area at dusk and during the night that the vehicles

should use their headlights. One wag who was present was moved to voice a caveat on the use of lights at night by saying to the Germans, "If they [the Germans] are not afraid of the Luftwaffe [German Air Force]." This brought laughter from all those present and it was agreed that lights-on it would be. The talks were then soon ended.

Colonel Raymond E. Bell, commander of the 90th Infantry Division's 359th Infantry Regiment who was present at the negotiations, remembered the ending of these surrender conversations. Von Wietersheim took his pistol out of its holster and handed it across the table to General Earnest as if he were turning his sword over to his vanquisher. Earnest, however, knew a gallant gesture when he saw one and reciprocated by removing his pistol from his holster and passing the weapon over to von Wietersheim. On this note of respect the formalities of capitulation ended. It was now time for implementation.

At 1:30 PM on May 4, the 90th Infantry Division headquarters, in anticipation of the formal surrender, had sent out orders that the 11th Panzer Division assemble in two areas. Each one of them was to have a water point established in it, a task to be accomplished by the 204th Engineer Battalion. It was estimated that the 11th Panzer Division would be logistically self-sustaining for four days. The division's elements would take two routes out of Czechoslovakia, one through the border town of Rittsteig, the other through Vseruby where the negotiations had taken place. The routes would terminate in two assembly areas, designated "A" and "B," one on either side of the German town of Koetzting. The 2nd Battalion of the 359th had responsibility for Area "A" to the west of Koetzting, while the 3rd Battalion was charged with Area "B."

At 5:25 that afternoon, an enemy column approached Lieutenant Colonel Orwin C. Talbott's 3rd Battalion checkpoint. All seemed to be going well, but problems soon arose. There was the fuel challenge, which was anticipated, but then reports arrived at division headquarters that American soldiers of another infantry division were shaking down 11th Panzer Division soldiers passing through their lines. Lieutenant Colonel James O. Boswell, the division intelligence officer, proceeded to "straighten up the hold up." By 11:30 that night, mechanized units of the 11th Panzer Division had closed in on the assembly areas while at 2:30 next morning dismounted German soldiers had begun to come through the checkpoints.

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ABOVE: German POWs mill about awaiting transport after surrendering to the U.S. 1st Infantry Division in Czechoslovakia. OPPOSITE TOP: The lead Tiger of the 11th Panzer Division makes its surrender to U.S. forces in Area "B." OPPOSITE BOTTOM: Members of the 11th Panzer abandon tanks and other motorized vehicles at one of the two designated assembly areas.

In all, some 9,050 German military personnel were counted as surrendering. Of these, 225 were officers, 1,713 non-commissioned officers, and 4,834 soldiers of the 11th Panzer Division. The rest were stragglers who came from a variety of different units. In terms of vehicles, some 155 motorcycles, 300 sedans, and 700 trucks were turned over to the Americans, but only seven tanks, 15 self-propelled guns, and five tank destroyers. The weapons count was also relatively low, with only six 150mm infantry howitzers and five 105mm howitzers being turned in. By 3:30 PM on May 5, the 90th Infantry Division command post had moved some 45 kilometers to the southeast along the Czech-German border at Zwiesel. At 10:30 that night, the division notified its 359th Infantry Regiment to be prepared to move into Czechoslovakia in the vicinity of Nyrsko some time on May 6.

The division's encounter with the 11th Panzer Division was hardly going to last even two full days. At the same time, the memory of the 90th's taking General von Wietersheim's surrender was rapidly fading. General Von Buttlar's element surrendered a few days later to the U.S. 26th Infantry Division, and his soldiers proceeded to join the rest of the division around the town of Koetzting.

It now became the task of the 2nd Cavalry Group to pick up where the 90th and the 26th left off. It took another four weeks to finish disbanding the 11th Panzer Division under the supervision of the cavalry troopers.

Within a few days of the capitulation, Captain Ferdinand Sperrl, who spoke fluent German, had established a military government cell in the town of Koetzting, the site where the 11th Panzer Division was demobilized. German soldiers were soon permitted to journey home, some taking vehicles with them. Those who could not return to homes in Silesia, then under Soviet occupation, found new abodes, some around Koetzting. Sperrl established an outstanding relationship with not only the German units but the town as well, allowing a traditional folk festival to take place soon after the

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The Spanish Blue Division fought alongside the Germans on the Eastern Front.

BY JOHN W. OSBORN, JR.

To their Russian enemies they were the "Spanish mercenaries of Hitler's Fascist lackey, Franco." To Hitler himself, "One can't imagine more fearless fellows. They scarcely take cover. They flout death."

Officially the 250th Infantry Division of the Wehrmacht, it was commonly called the *Division Azul*, Blue Division, after the color of Spain's Falangist (Fascist) Party. As Spain was neither combatant nor conquered, the volunteers who fought in it were probably World War II's most purely ideologically motivated soldiers.

The announcement on June 28, 1941, by the regime of Caudillo Francisco Franco that a division of volunteers would be recruited to join Hitler's six-day-old invasion of Russia set off a wave of virtual hysteria across Spain. While some mobs stoned the British embassy, others stampeded recruiting offices in such numbers that many met their quota in a day and within in the week they had signed up enough to form several divisions.

The entire cadet corps of Spain's equivalent of West Point volunteered, as did 3,000 students from the University of Madrid. While the senior command was unenthusiastic, many officers offered to be demoted or even enlist as privates. Of the first 18,694 who entrained for Germany on July 17, 1941, 70 percent, including every officer from captain on up, were from the regular army, and most of the rest were Spanish Civil War veterans.

As Gerald R. Kleinfeld and Lewis A. Tambs wrote in *Hitler's Spanish Legion*, "for many of the young Spaniards who volunteered, the Russo-German War was a continuation of their own Civil War of 1936-1939—a crusade against Communism." Those who sent them had their own more subversive and politically (as opposed to ideologically) motivated reasons.

The most pro-Nazi members of the Fascist regime, led by foreign minister and brother-in-law of Franco, Ramon Serrano Suner, pressed for an outright declaration of war against Russia, seeing it as a stepping stone for joining Hitler against Britain and seizing Gibraltar. However, the ever-cautious Franco, whose vehement hatred of Communism always took a back seat to his own political survival, had his own personal agenda. For nine hours the previous October he had patiently listened to, then rebutted, Hitler's blandishments to enter the war. Hitler would later groan that he would rather have teeth pulled than try again. For Franco, the Blue Division was a way to keep his hand in should Hitler win the war, while holding off the Nazi dictator at least temporarily and satisfying his most extreme elements at home.

While training in Bavaria, the Spaniards drew harsh criticism from Germans for their sloppy dress and failure to salute. In Russia, they continued to draw the ire of the Germans for their disdaining to properly maintain weapons or dig effective fortifications. Hitler even complained: "They regarded a rifle as an instrument that should not be cleaned under any pretext."

The Spanish for their part showed their contempt for an order against fraternization with women by parading before German officers with inflated condoms on their rifle barrels, and some Russians who observed this spectacle reported it as possible use of poison gas balloons. Since they received all their supplies from the Germans, the Spanish would soon have more substantial and serious causes for complaint. A German diet that spread gastritis

Both images: National Museum of the U.S. Army, Army Art Collection

In this painting by German war artist R. Hanzl, a Spanish mortar crew, equipped and uniformed by the Germans, fires on a Russian town. RIGHT: General August Munos Grandes commanded the Spanish Blue Division.

and a last-in-line priority for winter clothing forced the Spaniards to share one overcoat among a number of men. By Christmas, over 700 men had been disabled by frostbite, more than had been killed in action.

To reach the front, the Blue Division made the longest sustained marching effort of World War II—45 days. From August 29 to October 9, 1941, they trudged from Sulvaki, Poland, to Vitebsk, Russia, almost 625 miles, in a column stretching 20 miles, each man lugging 70 pounds of equipment. The division saw its first action just 24 hours after being moved into the line and would soon be engulfed in a military maelstrom.

On November 8, one battalion occupied the villages of Posselok, Possad, and Otenski in a line stretching 25 miles along the east bank of the Volkhov River. Four days later, before dawn, the first furious Russian assaults along the line began. Within hours, Posselok was in flames and the 40 Spanish survivors of the company there had fled to Possad.

Kleinfeld and Tambs wrote that they found the village "a living hell!…Bodies with the young faces of university students were stacked like cordwood at the CP (command post)."

By early December, the division commander, General August Munos Grandes, who had so bombastically ordered his men to "defend Possad as if it were Spain … share the glory and the danger," was now despairing, "All the men in Possad and Otenski are dead, sacrificed to bombs, shells tanks, and crushing enemy infantry attacks."

On December 7, a withdrawal was ordered prior to securing German authorization. The Spanish crossed over the frozen Volkhov under cover of darkness so stealthily that the Russians bombed and shelled the vacated positions for hours. A spotter who didn't get the word and an infantryman who slept through it had to walk out on their own. The stand along the Volkhov had cost the division 120 killed and 440 wounded.

The Division served along the Leningrad sector, enduring the hardships and experiencing the horrors that made the Eastern Front the most dreaded of World War II. In winter, food had to be sliced with axes and temperatures of 12 degrees below zero were considered mild weather. In springtime, the men were tormented by hoards of mosquitoes from the surrounding swamps and by the stench of thousands of bodies frozen stiff during the winter and now thawing and decomposing.

The Spaniards were shocked by the horrors of war in the East. One soldier of the Blue Division saw a comrade impaled to the

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ABOVE: Advancing eastward, horse-drawn wagons of the Spanish Blue Division cross a checkpoint on the border between Poland and Germany. BELOW: Experiencing the harshness of their first Russian winter, and short of proper attire, the Blue Division utilize white sheets as a means of camouflage.

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ground by an incoming Russian shell. Spaniards who retook positions previously abandoned to the Germans found wounded they had left behind with their chests torn open with picks. In turn, volunteers from Spain's vicious version of the French Foreign Legion sliced off the ears, noses and fingers of Russian prisoners, then sent them stumbling back to their lines.

Of its 21 major battles and hundreds of smaller engagements, three actions of the Spanish Blue Division would epitomize the savagery of the Russian Front in World War II and become legendary. These include the endurance trek of its ski company from January 10-21, 1942, the stand of the El Segunda Battalion at Poselok, January 22-28, 1943, and the desperate battle at Krasny Bor on February 10, 1943.

Ordered to relieve 543 Germans cut off south of Lake Ilmen, the ski company started out in temperatures of minus 40 degrees. The temperature plunged even further to minus 56 degrees as the company struggled through winds, knee- and sometimes waist deep snow and icy water, and zigzagged around crevasses. After crossing the frozen lake, the company still had to fight its way past Russian ski troops and tanks. By the times the Spanish contingent reached its destination and brought out the Germans, only 12 of its original 206 men had not been killed, wounded, or disabled. The ski company had suffered an incredible 95 percent loss!

The El Segunda Battalion was equally and brutally decimated defending Poselok. It had needed 20 trucks to be transported to the front. When it was relieved after almost a week under incessant Russian shellfire, only Lieutenant Francisco Soriano, seven sergeants, and 20 men had survived.

One soldier who did not come back was Captain Salvador Massip. Hit in the left eye, ooze freezing as it ran down his cheek, then hit in the right leg, he rejected pleas by his men to be carried to safety as he dragged himself along the line directing machine-gun fire at the oncoming Russians. In the end, he pulled himself to his feet to face the enemy and was cut down as he was throwing his last grenade. He was awarded the Laureate Cross of St. Ferdinand, Spain's version of the Medal of Honor or Victoria Cross.

Warned by the Germans of the impending Russian assault at Krasny Bor, 20 miles east of Leningrad, a Spanish officer told his men, "Tomorrow the bulls will run." At 6:45 AM, the Spaniards were, in the words of the Russians' official Leningrad war diary, "stunned by a squall of explosions," as artillery shells, mortar rounds and katyusha rockets fired from 800 Russian.

Bunkers were demolished and trenches caved in. "Where snow had lain, the fierce heat had laid bare the scarred grass and a moment later grass and topsoil as well disappeared. A landscape like the mountains of the moon was created," recalled one survivor. To another, it was an "absolute inferno."

The next storm broke as almost 100 Russian tanks and thousands of soldiers charged. Twelve hours of pure chaos and carnage followed. The Spaniards called artillery fire down on themselves as they were being overrun. Members of the headquarters staff armed themselves, charged singing the Falangist anthem *Face to the Sun*, and were wiped out. Russian tanks fired point-blank

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Patton and Rommel were masters of battlefield mobility and the operational art of war.

BY LT. COL. HAROLD E. RAUGH, JR., PH.D., U.S. ARMY (RET.)

American General George S. Patton, Jr., and German Field Marshal Erwin Rommel both demonstrated the masterful employment of armored forces in many World War II military campaigns. Both combat commanders, as described and assessed in Dennis Showalter's highly readable ***Patton and Rommel: Men of War of the Twentieth Century*** (Berkley Caliber, New York, 2005, 441 pp., index, $22.95, hardcover) were unorthodox military leaders with colorful personalities. Their military accomplishments generally earned them the loyalty of their soldiers and the respect of their adversaries.

Prominent military historian Showalter has written an interesting and somewhat provocative dual biography of these iconic field commanders. His goal is to concentrate on three major areas in this parallel biography: "the men, their wars, and the system they served."

The first chapter covers the background, education, and professional development of these future adversaries from birth until the advent of World War I. Patton, born in 1885, came from a family with a rich military heritage. He had unbridled ambition and seemingly equated discipline and rigidity with leadership. Upon graduation from West Point in 1909, he was commissioned into the already anachronistic cavalry. Marriage to a millionaire's daughter allowed him to have the near-aristocratic lifestyle he aspired to.

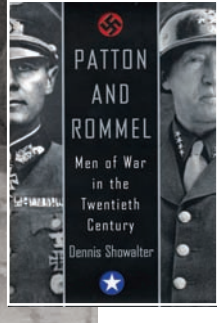
Rommel, the son of a schoolmaster, was born in 1891 in Württemberg. While he had a number of technical interests, Rommel passed the officer qualification examinations and was commissioned "as a last resort" in the infantry. He was a diligent young officer, although he reportedly had a lapse in judgement and fathered a child out of wedlock. In March 1914, Rommel was attached to an artillery unit.

Both Patton and Rommel had their baptisms of fire in the crucible of World War I. Rommel spent the first years of the war on the Western Front where he was wounded and decorated twice for his courage in action. He was then assigned to a mountain battalion in the Tyrol, excelling as a fearless and indefatigable leader. Rommel's outstanding performance was recognized by the award of the coveted "Pour le Merite"—the "Blue Max."

Patton's combat service, largely due to the United States' late entry into World War I, was much shorter. In November 1917, he was assigned to establish the First Army Tank School. During the following summer, Patton assumed command of the 1st Brigade, Tank Corps. In action for only a few weeks, Patton was severely wounded and awarded the Distinguished Service Cross for his gallant leadership.

During the interwar years, Patton and Rommel both received professional education and held increasingly significant leadership positions. World War II gave them their opportunities to put their theories of armored and mobile warfare into practice on the battlefield.

Rommel made his mark commanding the 7th Panzer Division in the blitzkrieg into France in 1940. Thereafter, his rise was meteoric, as he was appointed to command the Afrika Korps and, later, the Panzerarmee Afrika, in North Africa. Rommel employed audacious tactics and led daring operations. Dubbed the "Desert Fox," he later commanded Army Group B before being wounded in action in 1944. Later that year, implicated in the plot to assassinate Hitler, Rommel was ordered to commit suicide.



Positioned just outside Tobruk, Field Marshal Erwin Rommel confers with a fellow officer as the 15th Panzer Division prepares to move.

Patton commanded the II Corps in North Africa and the Seventh Army in the invasion of Sicily in 1943. In Northwest Europe, through the Battle of the Bulge and to the war's end, Patton aggressively commanded the Third Army. Nicknamed "Old Blood and Guts," he was killed in an automobile accident in December 1945.

In the prologue, Showalter states he wants this book to be "reader-friendly, by eschewing the academic apparatus that so often gets in the way of the story." Perhaps he is referring to notes and a bibliography, which permit readers to corroborate controversial information and guide the way for additional research. Surprisingly, there are no notes, a major shortcoming, and there are no maps or illustrations. There are, however, more than a few spelling and minor factual errors.

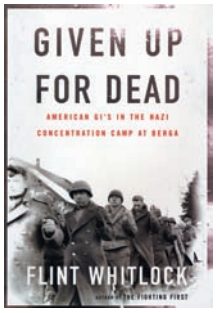
Showalter is generally balanced in his assessments of these two famous generals, whose reputations have grown to mythical proportions. Ironically, each commander has been studied and revered most by their former adversaries. Each general recognized the technological innovations that created an environment suitable for mobile, armored warfare and boldly pursued battlefield victory.

Recent and Recommended

Sledgehammers: Strengths and Flaws of Tiger Tank Battalions in World War II, by Christopher W. Wilbeck, Aberjona Press, Bedford, PA, 2004, 262 pp., illustrations, maps, tables, appendix, notes, bibliography, index, $19.95, softcover.

The legendary German Tiger and King Tiger tanks were arguably the most formidable and the most feared armored vehicles of World War II. These sophisticated and powerful tanks, of which slightly over a thousand were manufactured, were in continual service from September 1942 until the end of the war. In action initially against the Soviets near Leningrad, the German heavy Tiger tank battalions fought against Soviet, American, and British forces on numerous European battlefields.

Author Christopher Wilbeck, an active-duty U.S. Army armor officer, examines in this deeply researched and finely crafted volume, the combat effectiveness of German heavy tank battalions. After a perceptive introduction, Wilbeck chronicles the development of the German heavy tank battalions, their organization, composition, tactics, and doctrine. Chapters 3 through 6 provide historical case studies and analyses of the heavy tank battalions. Chapter 3 covers armored battles from May 1942 until the July 1943 Battle of Kursk,



and Chapter 4 describes engagements from the summer of 1943 to the summer of 1944. Heavy tank warfare during the final year of the war is covered in Chapter 5, with the exception of tank battles in Hungary, the Ardennes, and the Eastern Front in 1945, which are described in Chapter 6.

Although intended as a breakthrough force—a "sledgehammer"—the German heavy tanks were most effective in the defense and as tank killers. This detailed yet readable study, enhanced by fascinating photographs and superb maps, deserves to be on every tank warfare devotee's bookshelf.

In Brief

The Polish Underground Army, the Western Allies, and the Failure of Strategic Unity in World War II, by Michael Alfred Peszke, McFarland, Jefferson, NC, 2005, 244 pp., chronology, illustrations, maps, appendices, notes, bibliography, index, $45.00, hardcover.

Poland was the first victim of the German blitzkrieg in September 1939 that began the second worldwide conflagration in a quarter-century. The conventional Polish Army, consisting of the Grenadier and Fusilier divisions, the Highland Brigade, and a small armored unit, was reconstituted in France. These and other Polish troops, notably paratrooper and air force elements, fought in many of the war's campaigns and theaters.

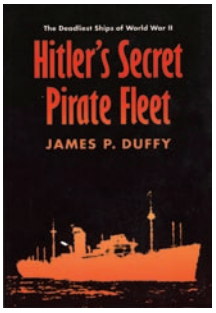
To the Polish government-in-exile in London, however, the most important area of operations was its occupied homeland, Poland. It supported the Polish underground—the Home Army (*Armia Krajowa*). Polish Prime Minister and Commander-in-Chief from 1939 to 1943, General Wladyslaw Sikorski and his successor, General Kazimierz Sosnkowski, worked ceaselessly to integrate the Polish Home Army and its operations into the overall Western (and especially British) military strategy. This detailed book chronicles their activities and machinations to accomplish this goal that ultimately failed. Polish influence waned as the Soviet war contribution increased, as shown by the intentional Allied failure to assist the Poles during the Warsaw Uprising in the fall of 1944. This condemned the Poles to a postwar Soviet occupation.

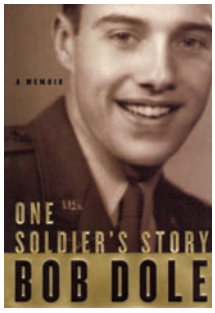
Given Up for Dead: American GI's in the Nazi Concentration Camp at Brega, by Flint Whitlock, Westview Press, New York, 2005, 320 pp., illustrations, maps, notes, selected bibliography, index, $26.00, hardcover.

Germany generally adhered to the Geneva Convention in its treatment of military prisoners of war during World War II, although there were glaring exceptions. The Germans captured thousands of American soldiers in their initial stunning success in the Battle of the Bulge, December 1944. German POW camp Stalag IX-B was soon overflowing, and in January 1945, according to author Flint Whitlock, the Germans announced that all Jewish POWs there would have to identify themselves for relocation to a segregated camp. These Jewish POWs (and many others, some randomly chosen) were soon sent to a labor camp at Brega-an-der-Elster, south of Leipzig. Living in the Brega camp in harsh conditions, these 350 American POWs were forced to assist in digging underground tunnels. In early 1945, as the Allies neared Germany, the famished and fatigued POWs were marched from Brega southward to Bavaria. They were rescued from this "death march" by American forces three weeks later. Based largely on anecdotal accounts of participants and survivors, this interesting book helps expose more German atrocities and the horrors of war.

Hitler's Secret Pirate Fleet: The Deadliest Ships of World War II, by James P. Duffy, University of Nebraska Press, Lincoln, 2005, 240 pp., illustrations, maps, tables, bibliographic essay, index, $15.95, softcover.

During World War II, German submarines and disguised surface raiders wreaked havoc on Allied navies and shipping around the globe. The German surface raiders, officially called "Auxiliary Cruisers," went to sea as camouflaged cargo ships, generally giving the appearance of an unarmed vessel from a neutral nation. The naval chameleons had plywood hull sections and fake structures that altered their appearance and hid numerous guns. Nearing an unsuspecting victim, the commerce raiders at the last minute would raise the swastika-decorated German naval ensign, reveal their guns, and attack to destroy or capture their maritime adversary. The Germans had nine commerce raiders during World War II, and one chapter in this compelling study is devoted to the history, description, and cruises of each vessel. These nine German commerce raiders sank or captured almost 140 ships totaling nearly one million tons during a three-year period. Each ship's operations are stories of guile, courage, and audacious seamanship. Readers of this excellent book will enjoy the brisk writing style and action-packed naval encounters, reminiscent of centuries-old piracy on the high seas.





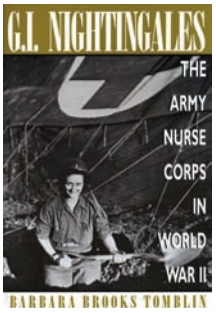
One Soldier's Story: A Memoir, by Bob Dole, HarperCollins, New York, 2005, 287 pp., illustrations, map, $25.95, hardcover.

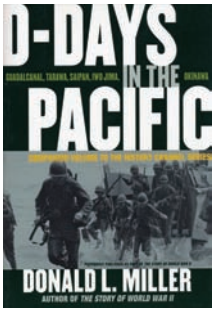
Bob Dole is best known as a long-time U.S. senator from Kansas and recent presidential candidate. The pivotal day of Dole's life, April 14, 1945, occurred years before he entered national politics. On that fateful spring day, 21-year-old 2nd Lt. Robert J. Dole was leading his rifle platoon of the 85th Infantry Regiment, 10th Mountain Division, in combat against the Germans near Castel d'Aiano, Italy. In that fierce attack on Hill 913, the Americans suffered more than 460 casualties, including Dole. A German high explosive shell shattered his right shoulder and damaged his spine. The medical report stated: "The patient had immediate paralysis, complete of all four extremities." It appeared Dole would never walk again. For the next three years, Dole "battled raging fevers and threatening infections, underwent several operations, and endured grueling physical therapy and lengthy hospital stays." Thanks to modern medicine, a good doctor, the support of his mother and others, Dole regained his physical and emotional strength. This heartfelt and inspiring saga chronicles Dole's journey of determination and faith to overcome his war wounds and regain his sense of purpose.

G.I. Nightingales: The Army Nurse Corps in World War II, by Barbara Brooks Tomblin, University Press of Kentucky, Lexington, 2004, 272 pp., illustrations, maps, notes, bibliography, index, $22.00, softcover.

"During World War II," writes historian

Barbara Brooks Tomblin, "Army nurses traveled to every theater of war to help staff army hospitals, dispensaries, and hospital trains, ships, and medical air evacuation squadrons." As a result, their contribution to the war effort was significant. This deeply researched and finely crafted study begins with an overview of the Army Nurse Corps, which originated during the Spanish-American War. The remaining chapters are generally topical and geographical in nature, describing nursing activities and the accomplishments of individual nurses at Pearl Harbor and in the Philippines; during subsequent operations in the Pacific; in the North African, Sicilian, and European campaigns; and in the China-Burma-India Theater of Operations. Overall, Tomblin has written an interesting and informative book. It is a worthy tribute to the more than 60,000 Army Nurse Corps members who served their nation in World War II.





D-Days in the Pacific, by Donald L. Miller, Lou Reda Books/Simon & Schuster Paperbacks, New York, 2005, 426 pp., illustrations, maps, notes, index, $15.00, softcover.

The Allied assault landings at the Normandy beaches on June 6, 1944, did not comprise the only "D-day" of World War II. Originally a World War I U.S. Army term for "the starting day of any offensive," D-day came to signify the start of amphibious operations. There were, as recorded by Donald L. Miller, over a hundred seaborne D-day invasions against enemy-held islands in the Pacific Theater during World War II. Miller begins this book, revised and expanded from his earlier volume *The Story of World War II*, by explaining the origins of the Pacific campaign and placing it superbly within the overall context of the war. While Miller lists all 126 Pacific D-day landings in an appendix, this book focuses on the most significant amphibious operations, including: Guadalcanal, Attu, Tarawa, Saipan, Peleliu, Leyte Gulf, Iwo Jima, and Okinawa. These battles were among the most ferocious and savage of the entire war, with American casualties on Iwo Jima totaling 28,686, and on Okinawa, where there were over 49,000 U.S. casualties. Enthusiasts of the Pacific island-hopping campaigns will enjoy this book, espe-

simulation gaming *By Eric Baker*

The latest video game in Electronic Arts' ***Medal of Honor*** franchise is ***European Assault.*** Available on the Xbox, the PS2, and the Gamecube, the game is set in Europe, 1942. Players take the role of US Army Lieutenant William Holt, field agent of the Office of Strategic Services (the OSS), chosen for the job by "Wild Bill" Donovan himself. The player's mission is to lay the groundwork for the liberation of Europe.

The trademark of the *Medal of Honor* series is trying to get the facts correct, and *EA* is no exception. The designers interviewed several experts aiming for accuracy and realism. The designers also consulted with the Congressional Medal of Honor Society to make sure the game is up to the ideals and integrity that the Medal of Honor represents. By playing, gamers experience the history of the OSS and WWII as a story and a challenge, but without the linear path of a written history. The player chooses what to do when, changing history even has they relive it. In addition, the designers created many of the game's encounters to give the player the feeling of being an ordinary soldier compelled by circumstances to be a hero.

Players command both their character and a squad of other soldiers' movements in combat. Coordinating the player's efforts with the squad's is the key to most of the game's challenges. The missions will bring the player in conflict with historical German leaders at locations all based on actual WWII locations throughout Europe.

Another video game available now from another franchise is ***Commandos Strike Force*** from Eidos. This game is out on the Xbox, the PS2, and for PC computers. Previous installments of *Commandos* have been third person perspective, real-time strategy games. For *Strike Force,* the designers have changed the action to first person. As in *EA*, the focus is on commandos, but in *SF*, the player takes the role of three different characters: a "green beret," a spy, and a sniper. The game has three campaigns, all set in Europe, and each demanding a combination of stealth and shooting to achieve their goals.

The designers of *SF* did not set out to create the sort of virtual reality tour of history that *EA* is. The characters and missions of the game are all invented; the weapons and vehicles, however, are authentic to the period. The player's characters' skills are also less about the real world and more about the needs of the game. The designers divided the characters' skills broadly into action (shooting things), infiltration (disguise), and stealth (not being seen). The characters use weapons not just for straight-ahead fighting, but also for situational advantages like bombs to create diversions or silenced weapons to aid infiltration.

A board game rather than a video game, ***Bomb Alley*** is a new installment in the ***Second World War at Sea*** series from Avalanche Press. Set in the Mediterranean Basin during the years of 1940 to 1942, the game depicts the struggle between the Italian Navy trying to keep the sea lanes open from north to south while the British Navy fought to keep the east-west route open. The battles included air, surface, and submarine forces, which the game depicts on both a large strategic map and a smaller tactical map for fighting the actual battles.

The game uses playing pieces for depicting the battleships, aircraft carriers, cruisers, and destroyers as well as smaller ships, aircraft, and markers.

The rules include 50 scenarios, which covers just about everything that happened in that period from convoy defences to battleship clashes to carrier raids. Even impossible fights are included such as the night battle where the Italian torpedo boat *Lupo* defeated three British cruisers. □

cially the many participant anecdotes interspersed throughout the vivid narrative.

Siege! Six Epic Eastern Front Assaults of World War II, by Patrick McTaggart, J.J. Fedorowicz, Manitoba, Canada, 2005, 251 pp., illustrations, maps, glossary, bibliography endnotes, table, index, $39.00, hardcover.

Whil Eastern Front battles were frequently characterized by mobility and lightning combined arms operations, there were also a number of large-scale sieges, notably at Leningrad and Stalingrad. In this well researched and interesting volume, Patrick McTaggart examines six other significant Eastern Front sieges. He initially provides an overview of the history, mechanics, and methods of siege warfare. The Eastern Front sieges chronicled in this study are Brest-Litovsk, Cholm, Sevastopol, Budapest, Konigsberg, and Breslau. These case studies are well organized, nicely written, perceptive, and interesting. The academic value of this book is enhanced by the inclusion of considerable material from German-language histories and personal accounts, as well as by excellent photographs. This fine book is a superb addition to the literature of Eastern Front operations.

From the Pilot Factory, 1942, by William P. Mitchell, Texas A & M University Press, College Station, 2005, 195 pp., illustrations, notes, sources, index, $32.95, hardcover.

In 1939, on the eve of the outbreak of World War II in Europe, the U.S. Army Air Force trained 1,200 pilots. After the United States entered the conflict in 1941, the demand for pilots increased tremendously and training peaked in 1942-1943 with a goal of 50,000 trained pilots per year. As a result, pilot training "methodology changed from piecework to mass production," in essence becoming a pilot "factory." William P. Mitchell was a 19-year-old aviation cadet when he entered the pilot training program in March 1942. His aviation odyssey took him to a number of Texas airfields and finally to advanced flight school at Brooks Field, where Mitchell received his lieutenant's bars and pilot's wings. As a member of the 434th Troop Carrier Group, Mitchell was assigned to England in 1943. His squadron dropped paratroopers during Operation Market Garden and generally conducted resupply operations for the rest of the war. This compelling story consists largely of Mitchell's detailed and frequent wartime letters to his family. They provide a firsthand glimpse into flight training and the combat experiences of a young pilot. □

Insight

Continued from page 75

into the clearly marked field hospital and at fleeing ambulances until driven back with Molotov cocktails.

Corporal Antonio Ponte blew a Russian tank up along with himself. Captain Manuel Ruiz de Huidrobo had turned down leave to visit his wife and newborn son to remain with his men and went down emptying his pistol into Russians swamping his trench. Both were awarded Laureate Crosses.

The Spaniards were finally ordered south to form a new line, where they held against further attacks for five days. On Black Wednesday, as Krasny Bor came to be called, 75 percent of the Spaniards who fought were killed or wounded, a staggering 3,645 casualties among the total complement of 5,608 soldiers.

In addition to the troops on the ground, five Spanish fighter squadrons were rotated in and out of action. Flying Me-109s and Focke-Wulf FW-190 fighter aircraft, they shot down 156 Russian aircraft while losing 21 pilots killed and one shot down and captured.

In the meantime, ruthless diplomatic and political infighting were raging in Berlin and Madrid. Munoz Grandes told Hitler he wanted to take over the government of Spain, declaring, "I am prepared to stake everything, even myself, for friendship with Germany. My driving force is hatred for Britain, which has oppressed my country for centuries." Hitler, not surprisingly, encouraged him. In Madrid, the German military attaché met with another Spanish general about a possible coup. German Foreign Minister Joachim von Ribbentrop proposed a characteristically harebrained scheme to force Franco from power by bombing Madrid.

Allied diplomats, for their part, were pressuring Franco to stop trading with Germany and to withdraw Spanish forces from Russia with threats of oil and food embargoes and the successful invasion of North Africa to put teeth into them. The U.S. Ambassador went further, reminding Franco, "What would happen if Russia declared war on Spain? Russia is an ally of the United States and Britain." Franco finally sacked Foreign Minister Serrano Suner, purged pro-Nazis from his regime, and recalled Munoz Grandes, giving him a hero's return, decorating him, and then shelving him.

With the war's tide plainly turning against Hitler and the numbers of Spanish men volunteering for service drying up, Franco decided on September 25, 1943, to withdraw the Blue Division. A week later, he publicly affirmed Spanish neutrality. The Blue Division, in contrast to the cheers it went off to, returned in near silence. Cautious as ever, Franco chose not to irritate Hitler any further by drawing much public attention to the pullout.

Of the 47,000 Spanish men who served in the Blue Division, 22,000, or 47 percent, became casualties. A year after their return, Franco was writing them off, making the amazing remark to an American journalist that sending the Blue Division to Russia "implied no idea of conquest or passion against any country." He added, "When the Spanish government realized that the presence of these volunteers could effect its relations with those Allied countries with which it had friendly relations, it took the necessary steps to make those volunteers return home."

National Archives

During the fighting at Volkhov, the German Army's only efficient means of transporting supplies and evacuating casualties, was via horsepower.

A Volunteer Legion, inevitably called the Blue Legion, of 2,133 stay-behind, diehard Spanish Fascists fought on until it was recalled on March 21, 1944. Some 250 Spanish Fascists joined the Waffen SS and went down fighting around the Reich Chancellery in Berlin in 1945. Their leader, SS Colonel and former Blue Division captain Miguel Ezquerra, was taken prisoner but managed to escape and return to Spain.

Ezquerra was more fortunate than 330 other Spaniards, 300 of them captured at Krasny Bor, and held in Soviet prisons and labor camps from Odessa to Siberia. Ninety-four of these died before the remainder were returned to Spain on April 1, 1954. For all their suffering, they were, in their turn, luckier than the almost 5,000 of their Blue Divisions comrades who "flouted death" and lost. □

Author John W. Osborn, Jr., is first time contributor to WWII History *who writes from his home in Laguna Niguel, California.*

experience for Iwo Jima or Okinawa.

It it time to admit that Dieppe was a tragic failure due to poor planning and poor intelligence. Dieppe was a blunder—D-day was a success. The only direct links between the two are that the same nations were involved and both occurred on French beaches. Anything else is a disgraceful coverup or glossing over of the sacrifices and losses of those men who stepped onto the stony beaches of Dieppe.

Andrew Frise
Orangeville, Ontario

Dear Editors,

I enjoy each issue of *WW II History* and read every article. Michael D. Hull's article brought back memories when he told of the 504th and 505th Parachute Infantry Regiments jumping in support of the Salerno, Italy beachhead. I was in the 601st Tank Destroyer Battalion "C" Company and we had fought our way into the mountains off the beachhead. We were out in front without any infantry support. I will never forget the beautiful sight to see those parachutes come down among us. They passed through our position and set up defenses to our front—what a relief that was to us. Our battalion had landed on the Salerno beachhead in support of the 36th Infantry Division. Thanks to Mr. Hull for a great article about the paratroopers. Keep up the fine work publishing the stories that mean so much to so many of us.

Bill R. Harper
Richardson, Texas

Peleliu

Dear Editors,

I am 13-years-old and I just read your article in Volume 4, No. 3. The article "Shocked Beyond Imagination" was very interesting. Seeing how the USMC was planning to lay siege to Peleliu and watching their strategy crumble to dust was hard to stop reading. The thing that was most shocking was the picture of the marine who had his entire left side bloody and skinned from battle. I know many 13-year-olds aren't interested in history, but I like to read *WW II History* because it covers a lot of parts of WW II that aren't mentioned in many books or websites that I've seen.

Ryan Witkowski
Mayfield, Missouri

We're glad you liked our story on the Battle of Peleliu. We agree that the painting by Tom Lea, based on what he saw when he landed with the Marines, is shocking. We felt that this painting, though disturbing, truly captured the horror of the landing. While we try to avoid running unnecessarily grotesque images, we don't want to avoid acknowledging the often grim reality of human conflict.

Dear Editors,

At the edge of the Hurtigen Forest in a small German military cemetery is a rather unusual marker. This monument was placed there on the 50th anniversary of the battle, donated by the 22nd Infantry Society, in honor of a German officer who died trying to help a wounded American soldier.

In January 1945 I was assigned to the 7th Artillery Battalion. My battery headquarters was at that time about two miles from the village of Hurtigen.

George W. Boving
Carroll, Ohio

WWII History welcomes your letters which must be signed and include a telephone number for verification. If your letter is published, only name, city, and state will appear; telephone numbers will not be published. Letters must be brief and of general interest to our readership. Write to *WWII History,* 453 B Carlisle Drive, Herndon, VA 20170; fax to 703-964-0366 or e-mail cdamore@sovhomestead.com.

China Gunboats

Continued from page 67

Yangtze River Patrol was no more.

The USS *Mindanao*, flagship, and indeed the only vessel of the South China Patrol, arrived on December 10 after a perilous voyage from Hong Kong. By the time *Mindanao* reached the Philippines, the United States was at war with Japan. Because the Philippines were across the International Date Line, word of the Japanese attack on the Pacific Fleet at Pearl Harbor was received on December 8. The *Mindanao* had encountered a Japanese fishing trawler and taken its crew prisoner. The gunboat was the first U.S. naval vessel to take Japanese prisoners in World War II.

Two gunboats still remained in China. The *Tutulia* was basically marooned at Chungking, unable to move because the Japanese controlled the lower reaches of the Yangtze. Eventually "*Tutu*" was turned over to the Chiang Kai-shek's Nationalist Chinese government. The *Tutulia's* skipper, Lt. Cmdr. W.A Bowers, was not about to sit idly by when there was a war raging. In early 1942, he wrote orders for himself and his crew, stating in the third person that the "officer and men" were to "report to the nearest ship or station for duty."

Incredibly, the "nearest station" was Trinidad, in the Caribbean! The first leg of the odyssey was a plane trip from Chungking to Calcutta aboard a commercial airliner run by the CNAC (China National Aviation Corporation). Once alighting in Calcutta, Bowers and his men took a train ride across the Indian subcontinent to Bombay, where the American liner *President Madison* lay at anchor jammed with refugees from the Netherlands East Indies.

The *President Madison* sailed for Trinidad via South Africa and the Cape of Good Hope. Bowers and his globe-trekking men finally arrived in Trinidad after a journey of three months and five days.

The *Wake*'s story was much different. *Wake* commander Lt. Cmdr. Smith was ashore at home in bed when a telephone call from his quartermaster informed him that Pearl Harbor had been attacked and the US was at war. He immediately put on his uniform. It was about 4 AM, December 8, and he grabbed a taxi to the Bund. The moment hostilities started, the Japanese lost no time in occupying what remained of the International Settlement. Japanese roadblocks barred traffic, and the streets were swarming with brown-clad Imperial soldiers.

Smith was threatened by bayonet-wielding Japanese a few times, but he managed to bluff his way through to the Bund waterfront. There were no docks at Shanghai at the time; passengers and cargo were transferred by small boats to waiting ships. *Wake* was moored in the middle of the Whangpoo, literally within sight, but the Japanese refused to allow Smith to go out to his gunboat. It must have been one of the oddest episodes in the history of World War II. A lone American naval officer, surrounded by a score or more of rifle-toting enemy soldiers, politely asking in Japanese to be allowed to return to his ship, while they politely refused him and expressed their sincere regrets.

Smith's quandary was interrupted by the loud reports of naval and land artillery fire. Not far away, the British gunboat *Peterel*, which had refused to surrender, was paying the consequences for its defiance. The British ship was soon ablaze and sinking, its 15-man crew dead or wounded. The Japanese made no effort to arrest Smith as a POW, so he took a taxi back to the American consulate. From his office on the fifth floor, he had a clear view of the street below, and he expected the Japanese to come for the staff at any time.

The radiomen on duty were busy destroying codes and other important documents. When the Japanese arrived at the consulate around 11:30 AM, Smith ordered the radio equipment destroyed after a final signing off. A Japanese naval officer took Smith into custody as a POW, but expressed disappointment that the American did not have a sword to give him in token of surrender.

The *Wake* was captured intact after an aborted attempt by her crew to scuttle her. The Japanese took over, renaming the gunboat the HIJMS *Tatara*. It was the only American naval vessel to be captured by the Japanese in World War II. The *Tutulia* met a quite different fate. It was formally given to the Republic of China under the terms of Lend-Lease on March 19, 1942, then renamed the *Mei Yuan*. In some translations, this means "of American origin."

The *Luzon*, *Oahu*, and *Mindanao* were at least spared the ignominy of surrender. All went down fighting during the bitter campaign for Bataan and Corregidor, either sunk in combat or scuttled to avoid capture. The last gunboat, *Oahu*, was sunk on May 6, 1942, the very day when the half-starved, haggard men of Corregidor were finally forced to surrender. □

Eric Niderost resides in Hayward, California. He is a community college professor who has written over 350 articles to date, many of them on topics related to World War II.

Giving up the Ghost

Continued from page 73

war ended for Germany. Fifty years after the end of the war, his appearance at reunions brought cheers from the division veterans and townspeople.

Well after the termination of hostilities in Europe and its official demobilization under the aegis of the 2nd Cavalry Group, the 11th Panzer Division retained vestiges of cohesion. The division band, for example, traded uniforms for civilian clothes and was dispatched to Regensburg, the headquarters of the U.S. XII Corps, which was performing occupation duties. The members became known as "Phillips (XII Corps' Own) Band" and played for American entertainment in the ballroom of a local hotel.

Then there was the large elaborate parade in Munich in October 1946, which was staged for General Eisenhower. How Captain Sperrl, who allegedly orchestrated the coup of having former members of the 11th Panzer Division participate in the pass in review, accomplished the feat is to this day somewhat of a mystery.

Such was the saga of the 11th Panzer Division's surrender. Both the veterans of the 2nd Cavalry Group (whose postwar armored cavalry regiment patrolled the old East-West German border for many years) and the veterans of the 26th Infantry Division claim with gusto that the 11th Panzer Division surrendered to them. It was the 90th Infantry Division's 359th Infantry Regiment, however, which actually took the surrender of the bulk of the 11th Panzer Division and then moved on quickly to other tasks.

Even if the American veterans dispute the final outcomes, there is no question that over the years the members of the German 11th Panzer Division—the Ghost Division or *Gespensterdivision*—and their former U.S. adversaries could proudly assert that "*Feinden wurden Freunde,*" that is, "Enemies became Friends." Today the German Ghost Division, "which was real and deadly," is now truly an apparition, while the division's noble and effective performance has now passed into the annals of World War II armored combat. □

Author Raymond E. Bell, Jr., is a retired U.S. Army brigadier general. He has written on military and historical subjects for more than 40 years and holds a doctorate in Central European history from New York University. He is also a 1957 graduate of the United States Military Academy.

Seizing the Solomons

Continued from page 41

shoreline. Furthermore, the flat trajectory of naval gunfire was not effective in driving the Japanese out of their pillboxes; aerial bombing of specific targets was better but, unfortunately, we could not count on pinpoint accuracy nor precise timing. Nor was strafing of the beaches with aircraft of much help."

The landing was to be carried out by the 1st Marine Division, which had not participated in an amphibious operation since Guadalcanal, and the Marines argued with the Navy commander over the number of transports needed. After a three-week air bombardment of the landing area, the Marines were put on the beach by Barbey's landing craft. A new carrier of offensive firepower, designed by Barbey's assistant repair officer, also aided the assault. Two LCIs were rigged with rocket launchers, which added plunging firepower and close support for the landing troops.

Krueger landed the troops on an undefended beach about six miles from the airfield in order to outflank the Japanese, who had set up defensive positions around the airstrip. There was little resistance, and the landing and offloading efforts went smoothly. The new practice, first tried on Bougainville, of having preloaded trucks drive from the LSTs to a designated supply area, speeded up the process immeasurably.

With the Japanese already outflanked, the Marines encountered light resistance when assaulting the airfield. However, Japanese resistance stiffened when the Marines tried to clear the jungles to the east. The worst fighting came in a manner that was becoming familiar to the Americans, as they tried to assault a well-camouflaged bunker complex along a stream bank later nicknamed Suicide Creek. For two days, the Marines were thrown back with heavy losses. It was not until Army engineers built a log road through the jungle that tanks could be brought up to blast the Japanese bunkers from point-blank range.

This underscores the importance of American tanks in MacArthur's offensive designs, which could, to some extent, neutralize Japanese firepower. Log pillboxes and other Japanese defensive positions were often so well built and well hidden that they were impervious to destruction by either ship-or shore-based artillery and had to be assaulted head on. The tank gave the Americans the ability to provide close ground support with superior maneuverability and firepower.

The next step in the march to the Philippines was the assault on the Admiralty Islands, 200 miles northeast of Rabaul. The capture of the Admiralties had been seen early on as a requirement for the isolation of Rabaul. They also were excellent sites for facilities to aid in the approach to the Philippines. The invasion of the Admiralties began on February 28, 1944, with a landing by 1,000 soldiers on the island of Los Negros. MacArthur accompanied the troops. Resistance was light, and at the end of the day's efforts the invaders had lost two killed and three wounded and had captured an airfield.

By the end of March, after a month of intense fighting and the loss of 326 Americans killed and over a thousand wounded in the Admiralties, the Japanese defenders were no longer a viable fighting force. With the capture of the Admiralties, the Japanese stronghold of Rabaul was surrounded. Bombers pounded Rabaul from dawn to twilight from both Bougainville and Cape Gloucester, cutting supply lines and demolishing installations. The great Japanese base was quickly becoming a liability.

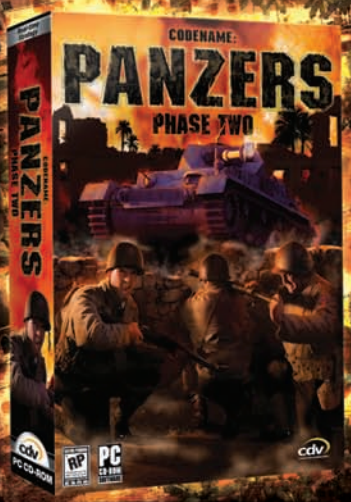
The Japanese were already moving ships and planes out of Rabaul to Truk, their bastion in the Carolines, while digging 100,000 men in to repel the invasion that never came. Cartwheel had been completed, and the Allies carried their offensive toward the Philippines. Perhaps the greatest legacy for the successful campaign was in the experience the commanders and men had gained and in the innovation and honing of triumphant tactics.

In his monograph on the Solomons campaign, Charles Koburger discusses the major turning points in the Pacific War. Naturally, the Battles of Midway and the Coral Sea are at the top of the list. He places the naval Battle of Guadalcanal as even more significant; in fact, it opened the door to the Allied advance in the Solomons and New Guinea.

Koburger also accurately viewed the entire Solomons campaign as vitally important to the war effort, not only in a strategic sense, but in the experience and training that it gave to the Allied armed forces to continue to bring the fight to the Japanese. As he so convincingly puts it, "From a hurried collection of half-trained men and too few ships [the Navy] acquired more and better to work with, but it had learned to use it, the hard way. For the Navy, the whole Solomons was a learning experience. For this, it had paid, in ships, planes, and blood. In the Solomons, the Americans were bloodied, shaking off peacetime attitudes and learning new skills." □

Douglas Sterling is a bookseller who lives in Independence, Kentucky. He has previously written on numerous historical topics.

CODENAME:
PANZERS
PHASE TWO



"A GOOD MIX OF FUN AND FACT THAT CAN TRANSLATE INTO A FIRE FRENZY OF EXCITEMENT ON THE BATTLEFIELD."
- IGN

"...CAPABLE OF ASTONISHING ZOOMED-IN LEVELS OF DETAIL."
- GAMESPOT

3D GRAPHICS ENGINE RENDERS FIERCE RTS BATTLES IN EXQUISITE DETAIL.

LEAD THE AXIS, ALLIES, OR YUGOSLAVIAN RESISTANCE ACROSS NORTHERN AFRICA, SOUTHERN EUROPE OR THE BALKANS.

COMPREHENSIVE MISSION EDITOR ALLOWS PLAYERS TO CREATE THEIR OWN SCENARIOS AND MISSIONS.

FEATURING THE VOICE OF PETER WELLER
(*ROBOCOP™, BUCKAROO BANZAI©*)

ACTUAL IN-GAME SCREENSHOTS

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