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Contents

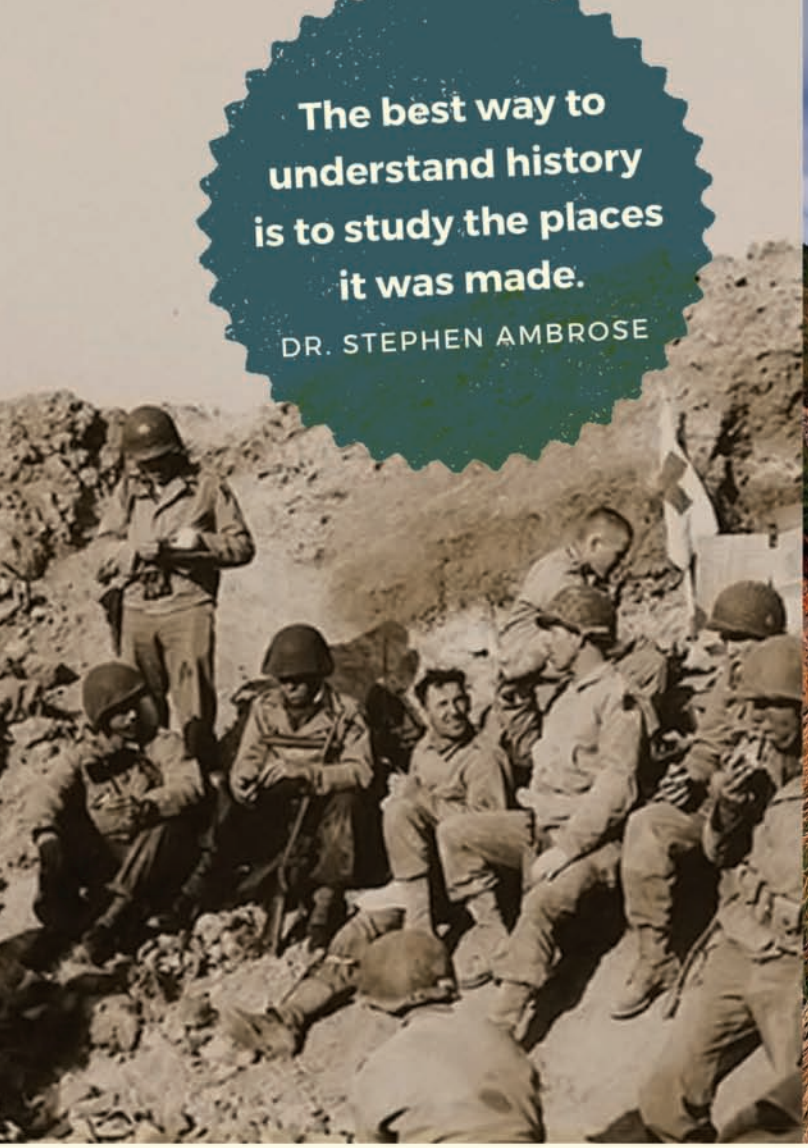
WWII HISTORY

Features

Columns

Cover: Field Marshal Erwin Rommel, photographed with Allied Italian troops in North Africa in 1942. See story page 44. Photo: Alamy

WWII History (ISSN 1539-5456) is published six times yearly in February, April, June, August, October, and December by Sovereign Media, 6731 Whittier Ave., Suite C-100, McLean, VA 22101. (703) 964-0361. Periodical postage paid at McLean, VA, and additional mailing offices. *WWII History*, **Volume 21, Number 4** © 2022 by Sovereign Media Company, Inc., all rights reserved. Copyrights to stories and illustrations are the property of their creators. The contents of this publication may not be reproduced in whole or in part without consent of the copyright owner. ***Subscription services, back issues, and information:*** **(800) 219-1187** *or* write to ***WWII History*** **Circulation, WWII History, P.O. Box 1644, Williamsport, PA 17703.** Single copies: $6.99, plus $3 for postage. Yearly subscription in U.S.A.: $24.95; Canada and Overseas: $38.95 (U.S.). Editorial Office: Email Michael Haskew, Editor, at mhaskew3734@comcast.net. Articles, proposals, and synopses should be sent as Word attachments; please include a brief description of your submission within the body of your email. Authors' guidelines are available upon request. *WWII History* assumes no responsibility for the loss or damage of unsolicited material. **POSTMASTER: Send address changes to WWII History, P.O. Box 1644, Williamsport, PA 17703.**



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Allied defeat at Gazala was followed by victory at El Alamein.

MANY HISTORIANS CONSIDER THE VICTORY AT GAZALA THE GREATEST in the fabled career of Field Marshal Erwin Rommel. However, it was Gazala that also led to the undoing of Panzer Armee Afrika and the ultimate defeat of the Axis forces in the Desert War.

After their initial feint in the north and the wide flanking movement to the south of the Gazala Line stalled, Rommel retired temporarily and fought off the British counterattack led by General Claude Auchinleck, as Eighth Army commander General Neil Ritchie poorly executed the tactical aspect of Operation Aberdeen. The British again suffered heavy losses, and Rommel seized the initiative once more, capturing the vital port city of Tobruk, a prize that had eluded the Desert Fox earlier in the war, in a single day.

Although Rommel chased the British across the Egyptian frontier in an embarrassing retreat the came to be known as the "Gazala Gallop," Auchinleck declined to make a final stand at Mersa Matruh, fighting a delaying action there with two corps. Instead, he chose to stake the beginning of the endgame in the desert at a railroad whistlestop called El Alamein, about 60 miles west of the great port city of Alexandria.

At El Alamein, Auchinleck was secure from flank attack, his right resting against the Mediterranean Sea and his left abutting the impassable Qattara Depression, a vast expanse of impassable terrain through which tracked vehicles could not operate. In June, just weeks after the defeat at Gazala, the British and Commonwealth troops under Auchinleck blunted Rommel's German and Italian spearheads at the First Battle of El Alamein. The Axis offensive stalled.

Now, time was on the side of Auchinleck and the British. Supply convoys meant to replenish Rommel with fresh troops, fuel, food, and more tanks were ravaged in the Mediterranean by Allied aircraft flying from the tiny island of Malta. Allied submarines also took a heavy toll, choking off the lifeline. Rommel watched—virtually helpless—as his combat efficiency eroded.

The British, however, were growing in strength as reinforcements, including American-built tanks, arrived in Egypt and deployed to the front, steadily augmenting their strength as they girded for an offensive that would bring on ultimate victory and the demise of the myth of Rommel's invincibility.

British Prime Minister Winston Churchill, however, believed a change of command was necessary. He relieved Auchinleck, placing Middle East Command in the hands of General Sir Harold Alexander, while Eighth Army was given to General Bernard Law Montgomery after General William "Strafer" Gott was killed en route to take the post when his transport plane was shot down.

In recent years, some historians have reevaluated the contribution of Auchinleck and his deputy chief of staff, the controversial General Eric Dorman-Smith, in achieving the ultimate desert triumph at the Second Battle of El Alamein in October 1942. Auchinleck and his staff had already worked out the plan to drain Rommel's fighting strength. Montgomery, they assert, maintained his predecessors' strategy of attrition, which led to a defeat of Axis forces at the Battle of Alam Halfa, fought from August 30 to September 5, 1942, and set the stage for victory at Second El Alamein, one of the turning points of World War II.

Churchill did express some dismay as he felt compelled to relieve Auchinleck, comparing the event to "killing a magnificent stag." Perhaps even then, the prime minister knew that Auchinleck's perspective was one that would ultimately provide the decisive triumph

—Michael E. Haskew

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By Sam McGowan

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Merian Cooper: A Man of Adventure

Combat pilot and filmmaker Cooper completed a distinguished career in aviation and served capably during World War II.

ON MARCH 2, 1933, ONLY A FEW WEEKS AFTER THE INAUGURATION OF FRANKLIN D. Roosevelt as President of the United States, the most spectacular event in the entertainment world premiered in New York. It was a high-tech production that utilized models and new photographic methods to tell the story of a giant ape from a South Pacific island that went on a rampage after escaping its captors in New York and was shot off of the Empire State Building by U.S. Army aircraft.

Few members of the audience realized that the actor playing the pilot was not only the creator and producer of the film; he was also a former Army bomber pilot who had fought in two wars and been a prisoner in both. Of course, no one had an inkling that within a decade the pilot would be a principal player in an ambitious plan to bomb Tokyo, or that he would become an instrumental figure in the two most desperate theaters of World War II, serving as chief of staff for Generals Claire Chennault and Ennis Whitehead and on the staff of Far East Air Forces Commander General George Kenney.

Although he would become most famous as a Hollywood producer, Merian Caldwell Cooper was a man born to adventure—and to war.

Public Domain

ABOVE: During the Polish war with Russia in 1920-21, Cooper petitioned the Polish government to form a fighter squadron to battle the Russians. He is shown here in the uniform of the Polish Air Force. TOP: Chinese and American ground crewmen service a Curtiss P-40 Warhawk of the U.S. 28th Fighter Group in China. Merian A. Cooper, famed as a Hollywood producer, served as the unit's commander and chief of staff to General Claire Chennault in China.

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Merian Cooper was the producer of the 1933 film hit *King Kong* and also played one of the Army pilots who flew against the giant ape, killing the animal at the climax of the film.

Merian was afforded the best education. After completing his preparatory education at Lawrenceville School in New Jersey, Cooper was appointed to the United States Naval Academy by Senator Duncan Fletcher, a family friend. Although he made it through three years of discipline and intense study, he got into trouble during his senior year and washed out.

After living homeless for a while, Cooper's first employment was as a reporter for a Minneapolis newspaper. He moved from there to Des Moines, then St. Louis, each time accepting positions with local newspapers. In 1916, he joined the Georgia National Guard. His unit was called up and sent to Texas and New Mexico in pursuit of the Mexican revolutionary Pancho Villa.

Cooper's desire to fly had never waned, and he enrolled in the Georgia School of Military Aeronautics in Atlanta. He excelled, graduating first in his class of 150. Cooper was eager for combat, but more training awaited him in France at the flying school at Issoudun after going overseas as adjutant with the 201st Aviation Squadron.

Cooper volunteered for the bomber school at Clermont-Ferrand. Upon completion of his training, he asked for immediate transfer to a combat unit, and his wish was granted. He went to the 20th Aero Squadron as a pilot.

Shortly after he joined the squadron, it became part of the 1st Day Bombardment Group, the premier bombardment unit of the United States Army, when it was formed with the 11th and 96th squadrons in addition to Cooper's 20th.

Like his fellow pilots and observers, Cooper realized that his days were numbered as long as he was flying the DeHavilland DH-4 Liberty bomber, but they all went out each day. And each day a few failed to come back.

On the morning of September 26, 1918, he was shot down and captured along with his observer/gunner. Both men were wounded and became prisoners of the Germans.

The men recovered, and Cooper learned after the Armistice that had been promoted to captain several weeks before he was shot down. He would later learn that he had been recommended for the Distinguished Service Cross, an honor he would decline on the basis that he didn't deserve it any more than anyone else in that formation that day. Cooper would later memorialize the day in the movie *The Lost Squadron*.

Cooper became convinced that communism was an enemy of liberty, and this belief became the focal point of his life. Still in the Army, Cooper volunteered to go to Poland with a humanitarian mission being organized by Herbert Hoover. While his military status forbade combat, he visited the front lines as often as he could. He remained with the food mission until June 1919, when his request for a transfer was approved.

While in Poland, Cooper had been lobbying the Polish head of state for permission to become a pilot. He recruited fellow veterans, and in January 1920 the Kosciuszko Squadron entered combat against the Red Army.

Cooper flew more than seventy combat missions against the Soviets, mostly in Austrian Albatross D-3 airplanes. Cooper and his friend Buck Crawford were shot down in June, but they managed to fight off the Russians and escape. On July 13 Cooper was hit again, but this time his luck failed to hold.

Cooper was famous as the number-two man in the American squadron, but he Russians never learned his true identity during the 10 months he was captive. On April 12, 1921, Cooper and two Polish officers managed to escape.

When he returned to the U.S., Cooper settled in New York City. He worked for the *New York Times*, but his love of adventure had been stimulated by his years in Europe.

Cooper's association with films led him to Hollywood, where his *King Kong* production established him in the motion picture industry. Cooper saw his role in films as an opportunity to promote patriotism as war clouds gathered in Europe.

Both: Public Domain

Cooper, left, photographed shortly after his escape from a Russian prisoner of war camp and during his successful career as a Hollywood film producer.

Although it had been two decades since he had worn the uniform, Cooper still held a commission in the Army Reserve. Several of his friends returned to service, and on June 16, 1941, Cooper also returned as a lieutenant colonel, joining such others as the famous air racer, James H. "Jimmy" Doolittle. Cooper was appointed executive officer for A-2 (Intelligence) on the staff of the United States Army Air Forces directly under General Carl Spaatz, the commander of Army Air Combat Command.

In early 1942, the War Department began making plans for a bombing campaign against the Japanese homeland from airfields in China, most of which at the time was still free of occupation. Cooper was assigned to a special project—codenamed AQUILA—under the command of Colonel Caleb V. Haynes that was to deploy to India, then to China to form the nucleus of X Bomber Command.

Prior to his assignment to Haynes' project, Cooper had made the acquaintance of a young Army colonel at a Hollywood party. Although

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Colonel Robert L. Scott was a pursuit pilot, Cooper had been impressed by him and persuaded Haynes to request that he be assigned to the AQUILA force.

Prior to their departure for India, Cooper met with General Henry H. Arnold, who informed him that the B-25 medium bombers destined for China would be deployed by aircraft carrier, and that if they got underway before Haynes' unit arrived in India, they would attack Japan while enroute. Shortly after their arrival in New Delhi, Cooper got word that the B-25s were at sea.

As the Tenth Air Force intelligence officer, Cooper went to China to debrief Doolittle after his historic raid on Tokyo. Claire Chennault was still in China advising the Chinese military as a civilian, although plans had been made to bring him back into the Army along with his recently established American Volunteer Group.

The Doolittle Mission, as it is popularly known, was a psychological—and political—success, but its fallout led to a scrapping of plans to use China as a base against Japan. The loss of the Chinese bases coupled with a new urgency in Africa led to major changes. Haynes, Scott, and Cooper were told to organize a "ferry" of supplies to China, but a Japanese offensive in Burma led to more urgent matters. The Assam-Burma-China Ferrying Command was put to work hauling ammunition and other supplies into Burma; then, as the situation worsened, they turned to evacuating British troops. Scott reported in his memoir *God is My Copilot* that on one mission with Cooper aboard as a volunteer radioman, they fought off Japanese fighters with submachine guns.

The shakeup in the CBI produced major political problems that would involve Cooper personally, resulting in his eventual transfer out of the theater. General Clayton Bissell was elevated to command of Tenth Air Force under the direct command of General Joseph Stilwell, who arrived in China in February 1942 as head of the military mission and Allied chief of staff to Chiang Kai-shek.

Cooper had gone to the CBI under two sets of orders, one assigning him to Hayne's command and a second that more or less gave him carte blanche to go wherever he wanted in his capacity as an intelligence officer. Cooper decided to use his special orders to throw in his lot with Chennault, and as the Japanese ran the Allies out of Burma, he went to Chunking to join him. Chennault made the maverick colonel his new chief of staff.

War Department plans called for the induction of the American Volunteer Group into the Army to form a new fighter group. Scott was selected to command the new 23rd Fighter

National Archives

Robert L. Scott, a fighter ace in China, served with Cooper in China after the two officers became friends. Note the Japanese flags painted on the fuselage of Scott's Curtiss P-40 Warhawk fighter, signifying aerial victories in combat against the enemy.

Group while Haynes returned to his previous role as commander of the Bomber Command in the new China Air Task Force, an advanced element under Tenth Air Force commanded by Chennault, who was supposed to report to Bissell. Army Chief of Staff General George Marshall was fearful of Chennault's power and brought him into the Army as a brigadier general one day after Bissell attained the same rank, making him the senior officer. The move infuriated Chennault, who detested Bissell from past assignments at the Fighter School at Langley. It was a purely political move, designed to ensure that Chennault was subordinate to both Bissell and Stilwell, and a decision that seriously affected the Allied effort in the CBI.

Chennault and Cooper were an ideal match. Both were Southerners, and both had the same disregard for the authority of senior officers whose careers had been based more on politics than operational experience. Neither Stillwell nor his superior, Marshall, had ever commanded troops in combat. Neither, for that matter, had Chennault while serving in the U.S. Army, but he had been in China for four years and was thoroughly familiar with Japanese tactics and military capabilities. Bissell had attained ace status in World War I but had never comprehended the new tactics offered by improved aircraft performance. Bissell was particularly ignorant of the tactics of interception of bomber formations.

Cooper fell into disfavor with Bissell when he threw his lot in with Chennault while the AVG was still active. Previously, the two men had gotten along well, but Bissell considered Cooper's act as traitorous and began seeking a way to get him out of China. Cooper worked closely with Chennault planning missions against Japanese targets that were later termed as "aerial guerrilla warfare."

Yet, even while Cooper worked to defeat the Japanese, Bissell finally got him out of China when he got word that Cooper had been seriously affected by dysentery. Bissell order Cooper back to India.

Cooper finally left Chunking in late November for New Delhi, where Bissell dismissed him from further service in China. In spite of his insubordination, Chennault had been retained, but he was being punished by the loss of Cooper. When he returned to the U.S., Cooper added to his problems when he met with General Marshall and told the senior officer of the Army that his man in China—Stilwell—had Communist sympathies.

Marshall, who some believed was also pro-Communist, was incensed and told Cooper that if he didn't retract the statement, he would never see another promotion or decoration as long as he was in command of the Army. As a civilian in uniform for the duration, Cooper was not intimidated by Marshall and refused to make the retraction.

But Cooper already had an ally. In 1917 he had become friends with a young officer by the name of George C. Kenney, who in 1942 had gone to Australia to become the chief of staff for air under General Douglas MacArthur. Kenney got word through some of his officers who

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had been in the States that Cooper had been sent home from China. Knowing that Cooper was an energetic worker, he immediately put in a request to have him reassigned to his command. Cooper left for Australia in May and reported to Fifth Air Force commander Kenney, who assigned him to New Guinea as General Ennis Whitehead's chief of staff.

Cooper arrived in New Guinea at an opportune time. Fifth Air Force was gaining air superiority over the Japanese, and Kenney had produced a plan to establish an air base deep in the interior to bring his fighters, attack bombers and transports into closer proximity to the Markham Valley, which he intended to seize in an airborne assault. As Whitehead's chief of staff, Cooper was responsible for the planning, which called for the construction of a base near Marlinan, a facility that would be supported entirely by air. A second airfield was established in another location to serve primarily as a diversion to keep the Japanese from discovering the new base at Marlinan and to serve as an emergency landing strip.

Once the airfield had been established, Fifth Air Force brought up fighters and medium bombers in preparation for the attack on the airfield at Nadzab, which Kenney intended to use as a landing zone for transports bringing in troops to attack the Japanese garrison at Lae from their rear. The attack on Nadzab went off like clockwork while Kenney and his boss, General Douglas MacArthur, watched "the show" unfold from a B-17 bomber circling above.

As Fifth Air Force chief of staff, Cooper was once again serving with a shoestring force in a remote theater, but this time he was under a theater commander who had full confidence in the airmen beneath him. He knew MacArthur personally. He was also part of a command famous for innovation.

Cooper remained as Whitehead's chief of staff for 18 months and proved invaluable in the planning of the operations that allowed the Far East Air Forces to spearhead an offensive northward from Papua, New Guinea, toward MacArthur's beloved Philippines. Kenney was constantly fearful for Cooper's health. Not only was he plagued by dysentery and fatigue, but he was also rumored to have suffered a heart attack before the war. In October 1944, just before the Leyte landing, Kenney told Cooper to go home for a month of recuperation leave and then fly to London to assist with the transfer of Eighth or Ninth Air Force from Europe to the Pacific theater.

It would be 10 months before Cooper would return from Europe. On June 25, 1945, Kenney received a wire from him that he was back in the United States after completing his assignment

National Archives

General George Kenney (left) and Ennis Whitehead confer during air operations in the South Pacific. Merian Cooper served with both men as chief of staff of the U.S. Fifth Air Force in the Pacific theater.

and was looking for work. Kenney wired back for him to report to Manila as soon as possible. By this time, the war had moved north to Okinawa, where Whitehead had established Fifth Air Force headquarters. Kenney made Cooper his deputy chief of staff. Cooper remained with Kenney through the end of the war and stood with him aboard the battleship *Missouri* in Tokyo Bay during the Japanese surrender.

Had it not been for his run-in with Marshall after his return from China, Merian Cooper would have probably been promoted to high command. His name was sent up for promotion to brigadier general numerous times, but each time it was stricken from the list before it went to the U.S. Senate for confirmation. Marshall retired from government in 1950, and as soon as he was gone, Cooper joined other blacklisted officers—including Charles Lindbergh—on the promotion list to brigadier general in the Air Force Reserve.

Although he had spent most of his life as a civilian, Cooper proved indispensable in the two most dramatic areas of operations of World War II. Claire Chennault was especially bitter over having Cooper taken away from him and had continually beseeched Arnold to return him. Had Arnold been so inclined, Kenney would doubtlessly have protested the transfer. After the war, Cooper returned to Hollywood and the motion-picture business, where he produced a number of movies aimed at promoting the officer corps, most with John Wayne in a starring role.

One of the projects he most wanted to complete was a movie about the life of Claire Chennault, but it never came to be. Cooper died on April 21, 1973, at the age of 79.

Author Sam McGowan is a pilot and veteran of the U.S. Air Force. He resides in Missouri City, Texas.

By Peter McQuarrie

Alamy

Two Marines of the 2nd Division operate a radio on the embattled islet of Betio during the assault on Tarawa Atoll in November 1942.

Tarawa Radio Failure

Faulty radio communications compounded the difficulties encountered by U.S. Marines during operations on Tarawa.

AT DAWN ON NOVEMBER 20, 1943, U.S. MARINES UNLEASHED THEIR FIRST amphibious attack in the Central Pacific Theater. This was a daylight landing on the beaches of Betio Islet, Tarawa Atoll, in the Gilbert Islands.

The Japanese fortress at Betio was said to be the most heavily defended, acre for acre, of any that Allied forces would encounter in the Central Pacific and the cost in human lives was high. Many Americans were killed before they could make it ashore; they died in the atoll's lagoon while wading toward the beaches. In total, more than 6,500 men died in the battle. The majority, 4,600, were Japanese; 1,900 Americans died, most of them Marines but the total including U.S. Army and Navy personnel.

The Americans learned bitter lessons in this first amphibious operation, lessons that helped them to develop the art of amphibious assault, which they continued to improve upon during the final two years of the war at other famous Central Pacific battles: in the Marshall Islands, the Marianas, Iwo Jima, and Okinawa. One of the lessons of Tarawa was that reliable radio communications were vital in order that commanders could communicate with the ships, aircraft, tanks, landing craft and infantry taking part.

The story of the Battle of Tarawa has been told many times in books and documentary videos. All of these mention that poor radio communications were a factor that contributed to the difficulties faced by the Americans, prolonged the fighting, and increased the death toll.

Crucial to the communications network was the battleship USS *Maryland*, the command-and-control ship of the operation. *Maryland* was nearly 30 years old. She had been badly damaged in the attack on Pearl Harbor and now returned to service at Tarawa, repaired and refitted. But new radio equipment had been added just before Tarawa, and there had been no time to test it under battle conditions prior to the actual assault. The radios were not shockproof, and it was found that every time *Maryland's* 16-inch guns fired a salvo, the shock completely knocked out her ship-to-shore radio communications. As a result, the ship's radio equipment needed constant repair throughout the battle. The consequent delays in communication made the control of naval gunfire and air support difficult.

For the fighting men on the island, radio communications were even more of a problem. The Marines had two types of portable radios sets, designated the TBX and the TBY.

The TBX was an old, some say "antiquated,"

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By S.A. Nickerson, Health Correspondent

Renowned holistic physician David Brownstein, M.D., knows most men feel embarrassed to talk about their prostate.

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ABOVE: Marines man a field telephone during the fighting on the islet of Betio at Tarawa Atoll, where shortcomings of some of the radio equipment used by U.S. Marines were exposed. BELOW: A pair of U.S. Marine code talkers is shown training with radio gear. During the fight for Betio, it's likely their radios did not work.

National Archives

transceiver, well-proven in some ways but not fully waterproof. The individual modules making up the TBX system were housed in cast-aluminum cases with rubber gaskets around the edges of covers that were screwed down when the radios were transported. These covers made them splash-proof, but they were not designed to withstand complete submersion in water. Many of these radios were made useless when they became soaked in seawater during the landing.

The TBX was described as a "field portable radio," but unlike modern portable radios, which weigh a few ounces, the TBX was comprised of several heavy modules. Four men were required to carry the complete set. The basic radio weighed 30 pounds. Then there were heavy batteries or an alternative hand-crank generator, the large antenna, plus interconnecting cables and accessories. Altogether it weighed over 100 pounds.

The TBX operated in the longer-wavelength part of the shortwave band, and consequently the whip antenna needed to be long—24 feet. This antenna made the radioman a conspicuous target for enemy snipers.

In spite of the difficulties in transporting and operating the TBX sets, a few did make it to shore in working condition. Sergeant Elwin B. Hart, whose rank had risen to colonel by the time he retired from the Marine Corps in 1974, kept his TBX going for the whole three days of the battle. Hart was the head of a TBX team in 2nd Battalion, 8th Marines, who had landed in the second or third wave of landing craft. They landed without damage to the TBX and set up what apparently was the only operating TBX station on the island, and relayed all messages to and from division headquarters for the entire duration of the battle. Later a second TBX station came on the air and provided communications to supporting naval gunfire ships.

The TBY had been designed specially for US Naval/USMC landing operations. It operated in the VHF (Very High Frequency) portion of the radio spectrum and so could work efficiently with a short vertical antenna. Another advantage it had over the TBX was that it had its own internal battery power pack and was a self-contained unit that could be worn as a backpack. It could thus be transported and operated by one man instead of four. And it was less than half the weight of the TBX. In the early 1940s, the decade before the silicon age dramatically miniaturized radio equipment, the TBY was state-of-the-art in small, portable radio equipment.

One important weakness was that it had not been well-tested and proven on the battlefield; the first field use of the TBY radio was at Tarawa. The case of the TBY was made from sheet metal, folded into shape. It had many holes and controls passing through where water could enter its circuits inside. The battery compartment was not sealed off from the radio itself, and if the battery compartment flooded, water could easily flow through to the radio. So, it was not waterproof—not even splash-proof. There were later many comments in the after-action reports about the lack of water-resistance. For example:

"… This landing team suffered one hundred (100) percent failures in the TBY radios due to the fact that these sets are not water-proof," wrote Lieutenant L.C. Hayes Jr., commanding

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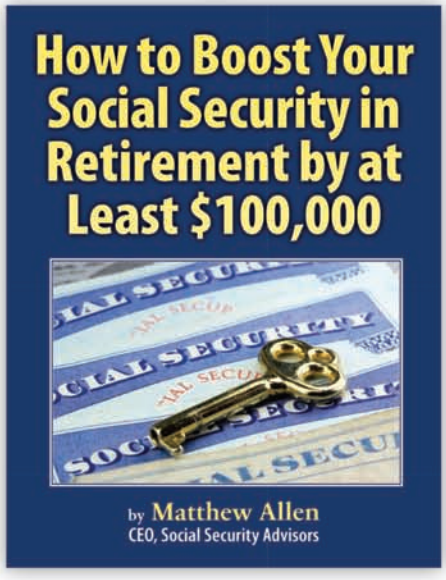

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Matthew Allen is CEO and co-founder of Social Security Advisors. Since 2008, he has helped thousands of seniors maximize their Social Security benefits and avoid costly mistakes when filing.

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officer of 1/8 USMC. A Marine Corps radio operator at Tarawa, 17-year-old William Dodson Smith, commented, "The TBY that each company had was not worth 2 cents."

The Navajo Code Talkers had TBY radios at Tarawa, but there is no indication that they were able to successfully communicate with them.

The high-VHF frequency circuits used in the TBY were inherently unstable, and so the sets were difficult to tune, and they would drift off frequency. A large improvement would have been to use quartz-crystal control of the channels, but because of the urgency brought about by the war, there was no time to have crystals made to the required frequencies. The radios were therefore produced with only manual tuning dials. But even then, the dials were not calibrated directly in frequency. Operators needed to use a calibration chart to relate the numbers on the dials to the desired transmit-and-receive channel frequencies, something not easily done in the heat of battle. After Tarawa, the TBY was never used in battle again.

After the war, surplus TBY radios were sold to amateur radio enthusiasts who used them on the amateur bands. The amateurs would first convert the TBYs to crystal-controlled operation to stabilize the frequencies.

Another area of communications difficulty at Tarawa was interaction between infantrymen and tanks. At Tarawa, there were 14 tanks of Company C, 1st Corps Medium Tank Battalion, led by 1st Lieutenant Edward L. Bale in his tank *China Gal*. The tanks were equipped with an old type of radio set designated RU-GF, with a separate receiver (RU) and transmitter (GF). These radios were very basic and of an ancient design, first produced in 1932. There were several versions of the RU-GF, but for some reason the version installed in the tanks at Tarawa was an aeronautical model not compatible with the infantry's TBY radios, as they operated on different wavelengths.

In fact, one of the three bands that the RU-GF operated on was a navigational-beacon band not used for voice transmissions at all, and previous use of the receivers had primarily been for direction-finding in small naval aircraft. The RU-GF was obsolete equipment, no longer in service anywhere in the Navy.

It was found after landing on Tarawa that the radios were not suitable for communications either between tanks and infantry or tank-to-tank. It has been said that the CO of the company could broadcast to all, but his platoon leaders could not reply, as their tanks had been fitted with only receivers (RU) and had no transmitters (GF). However, this is refuted by

National Archives

A soldier trains with an SCR 300 radio set, including a talking apparatus and a heavy backpack. The SCR 300 had a range of up to three miles, operating on FM (frequency modulation) and becoming the world's first true 'Walkie Talkie.'

Ed Bale, who has confirmed that all tanks were fitted with both transmitters and receivers.

The unreliability of the old equipment was probably the major cause of the failed communications. The vacuum tubes used in the RU-GF radios were large and not robust enough to withstand the shocks and vibrations encountered in a tank during a battle. It was reported that complete lack of communications between tank and infantry was the main cause of tank losses on the first day of the battle.

In reality, the tanks' RU-GF equipment and the TBX radios were capable of communicating with each other, as they had a common band of 3 to 4.5 Megacycles. But there were only one or two serviceable TBX radios on Tarawa, and these were preoccupied with other work. No prearranged frequencies or times had been made for communicating with tanks, and the tanks' radios were difficult to operate when changing between frequency bands. The equipment was supplied with a box of plug-in coils, and coil-changing and re-tuning was required each time.

A recommendation that came out of Tarawa was that tanks needed to be fitted with radios which could communicate directly with infantry and that training with tanks and infantry operating together was needed. A further recommendation was that telephones should be added to the outsides of tanks to make it possible for infantry to talk with the crew inside.

Apparently, none of the LCVP and LCM landing craft were fitted with any type of radio. But some of the Amtrac (LVT) vehicles were. A few of the LVTs at Tarawa were fitted with the same RU-GF radios as the tanks, but there was no intention that the tanks and LVTs would communicate with each other. The radios in the LVTs were for communicating back to their HQ Section, and it was reported that some communication was successful. Radioman Pfc. Bill Haddon was aboard an LCM that had gotten stuck on a reef. He set up his TBX radio and successfully communicated with an Amtrac.

The HQ Section had a radio Jeep fitted with a TCS radio transceiver. The TCS was a more modern design than the RU-GF and far more selective in its tuning, making it easier to operate. But because the exposed reefs and low tides made the landing of vehicles difficult at Tarawa, no attempt was made to land the radio jeep, and it remained on board ship throughout much of the battle. When the jeep finally came ashore, it was on the pier for only a short time before that part of the pier collapsed, taking the jeep into the lagoon.

In addition to radio equipment, the Marines did have landline telephones with them at Tarawa, but many of these were also destroyed by seawater. The Marines deployed EE-8 Portable Field Telephones at Betio. These could be operated by their own internal batteries or they could be connected to a central switchboard at the command post. They had a maximum range of 10 to 15 miles, depending on the type of copper wire used to interconnect them, and they weighed approximately 10 pounds in their portable carry cases.

Dean Woodward was a Pfc. Radioman in 2/18, on Tarawa. His team operated the TBX radio for Colonel David Shoup at the command post near the pier. Dean's specific task during the battle was "… repairing EE-8's that had been messed up by the salt water on the way in. I checked them out and found that if I rinsed them in fresh water and then dried them out they worked fine. I fixed maybe 40–50 during the battle."

Elwin Hart also had a landline telephone over which he received messages to relay via his TBX radio. Hart later explained, "I had an EE-8 connected to our battalion switchboard and talked every day with Captain John

Continued on page 74

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By Allyn Vannoy

National Archives

Rise of the U.S. Army

> Organizing and building a modern ground force were primary tasks of the War Department prior to and during U.S. entry into World War II.

WINSTON CHURCHILL DESCRIBED THE U.S. ARMY DURING THE WAR YEARS AS A "prodigy of organization … an achievement which soldiers of every other country will always study with admiration and envy."

Building the U.S. Army into one of the mightiest in world history was done with American "know-how" and technical prowess, but the challenges were enormous.

On July 1, 1939, the strength of the active Army was approximately 174,000, three quarters of whom were scattered throughout the continental United States in over 120 posts, camps, and bases. The other troops were stationed overseas. The existing corps headquarters functioned in only an administrative role, while army commands did not exist. Of the authorized infantry divisions only the 1st, 2nd, and 3rd had a divisional framework.

The Regular Army was supplemented by the National Guard, which had just 200,000 men. The Guard organization had only come into being in 1933. Its state was worse than the Regular Army—short of equipment and weapons, with little opportunity for training. An Organized Reserve, which existed for the purpose of supporting mobilization, contained a pool of over 100,000 trained officers, mainly graduates of the Reserve Officers Training Corps (ROTC).

On September 8, 1939, President Franklin D. Roosevelt declared a limited national emergency, raising the strength of the Regular Army to 227,000. With the growing war in Europe, the government approved the Selective Service Act in September 1940. This authorized the Army's strength to increase to 1.4 million men—500,000 Regulars, 270,000 Guardsmen, and 630,000 Selectees. Between October 1940 and July 1941, 17 million men registered for the Draft.

By mid-summer 1941, the Army had increased eightfold. Ground forces were organized into four armies with nine corps containing up to 29 divisions, plus overseas garrisons, including those in Alaska and Newfoundland. But the situation regarding equipment and weapons presented challenges due partially to the need to provide arms to Britain.

The U.S. Army eventually mobilized 91 divisions compared to 120 for the Japanese, 313 German, 50 Commonwealth, and 550 Russian divisions. However, unlike some countries, the American divisions would be maintained near full strength throughout the war. This was not a small task. By early 1945, some 57 regiments in 19 divisions had suffered 100-200 percent casualties.

During the war, approximately 11,200,000 men and women served in the Army. From a strength of 1.6 million in December 1941, the Army reached a peak in March 1945, of 8,157,000 personnel—a near fourfold increase in just over three years. However, only 2.7 million were in the ground forces.

The Army was composed of three elements. The Army Ground Forces provided for combat operations. The Services of Supply (Army Service Forces in 1943) was responsible for supplying and servicing units and included engineers, quartermasters, medical personnel,

An M3 tank and mounted cavalrymen of the Third Army participate in training maneuvers in Louisiana in 1942. Training was critical as the American army grew from fewer than 500,000 members in 1939 to more than eight million men and women in 1945.

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ABOVE: Soldiers from an artillery unit navigate an obstacle course while carrying weapons and other equipment during exercises at Camp Edwards, Massachusetts. BELOW: Riding atop a tank carriage at Camp Hood, Texas, soldiers train at the Tank Destroyer Replacement Training Center early in World War II.

National Archives

signal corps, chemical warfare service, ordnance, and military police. The third element was the Army Air Corps, which became the Army Air Forces in 1942. All three commands reported to the Chief of Staff of the U.S. Army, General George Marshall.

Lieutenant General Lesley McNair became commander of Army Ground Forces in March 1941.

The Army Service Forces commanding officer, 1942 to 1945, Lt. Gen. Brehon Somervell, had led the Construction Division, Quartermaster Corps in 1941, building camps to house and train personnel. The most enduring of his many projects was the Pentagon.

The Army Air Forces commanding officer was General Henry (Hap) Arnold. A supporter of strategic bombing, he laid plans for an Air Force of 60,000 aircraft and 2.1 million personnel. The Army's air elements included ground support, strategic bombing, troop transport, interdiction or medium-range bombers, and reconnaissance units.

In September 1939, the Army Air Corps had just 800 frontline aircraft. Growth in aircraft production was dramatic—from 4,477 in December 1941 to 43,248 in May 1945.

In 1941, the Army Air Corps had 152,125 personnel, with the AAF reaching a peak strength of over 2.4 million and approximately 80,000 aircraft in 1944, with 1.25 million men stationed overseas, exceeding Arnold's original plan.

Prior to 1940, basic training was left to individual units. The War Department created special training organizations, Replacement Training Centers, to provide a steady flow of trained personnel. Twelve ground force centers began operations in March 1941—three coastal artillery, one armor, one cavalry, three field artillery, and four infantry. During 1941, they trained over 200,000 men. Later, centers were established for antiaircraft and tank destroyer training. During 1941-43, some 42 centers were in operation.

In addition to RTCs, service schools were set up to train officers, officer candidates, and enlisted specialists. Between July 1940 and August 1945, nearly 570,000 men passed through the schools.

Additional challenges began to appear in mid-1942 due to equipment shortages. Units due for immediate shipment to a combat zone received highest priority. Units sometimes received their allocations so close to embarkation that there was no time to train with their new equipment. Despite these problems, mobilization proceeded at breakneck speed.

In the summer of 1943, the decision was made to build the Army to an effective strength of 7.7 million. By 1945, operating strength reached 8.3 million, including some 600,000 'ineffectives'—half a million in hospitals and 100,000 being discharged. Manpower was distributed with 2,340,000 in the Army Air Forces, 1,751,000 in the Army Service Forces, 3,186,000 in the Army Ground Forces, and 423,000 in Theatre Forces.

Army Ground Forces personnel were grouped into divisional and non-divisional forces. Non-divisional forces included service units and additional combat troops not organic to divisions, such as independent artillery, tank, antitank, antiaircraft, and engineer battalions.

The combat arm was organized around the division, the smallest organization capable of performing independent operations. The 91 divisions formed were of five types with the eventual mix including 68 infantry, 16 armored, five airborne, two cavalry (mechanized), and one mountain. Authorized strength by division was infantry—14,253, armored—10,937; airborne—8,596; cavalry—12,724; mountain—14,965.

Division numbering followed a pattern established in 1917. Numbers 1 to 25 were reserved for the Regular Army; numbers 26 to 45 for the National Guard; and numbers 46 to 106 for the Army of the U.S. There were numerous exceptions. Two airborne divisions, the 82nd

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and 101st, were re-designated Regular Army with conversion from infantry to airborne. The 25th was formed from troops of the Hawaiian Division and classified as an Army of the U.S. division. The 42nd Division was a National Guard division, but mobilized as an Army of the U.S. division.

Eventually, Regular Army divisions included the 1st-9th, 24th, Philippine, 82nd and 101st Airborne, 1st and 2nd Cavalry, and 1st-5th Armored. National Guard divisions included the 26th-41st and 43rd-45th Infantry. Organized Reserve divisions included the 76th-91st and 94th-104th Infantry. All others were Army of the United States divisions, including the 25th, 42nd, 63rd-75th, 92nd and 93rd, 106th, and Americal Infantry, the 10th, 11th, 13th, and 17th Airborne, and the 6th-16th and 20th Armored.

Steps to create a division were extremely tight as the War Department planned to activate three or four per month from March 1942. First there was cadre selection. About 1,300 officers and enlisted men were selected from an existing division to serve as the nucleus of the new division. Then a division commander was selected. The commander was handpicked by General Marshall. Months of cadre training followed prior to activation. Remaining officer slots were filled by officers from schools and replacement centers. The division was then formally activated.

Division expansion came next as draftees and enlistees brought it up to authorized strength. The division trained for a year with 17 weeks of basic and advanced training, 13 weeks of unit training, 14 weeks of combined arms training and large-scale exercises, and eight weeks of final training. Large-scale multi-division exercises followed.

The division then moved to a staging port, loaded on transports, and embarked to an overseas theater. There was sometimes a period of additional training, after the division arrived in theater. The division then moved to the front, where it entered combat.

The Army expanded rapidly from 1939 to 1943, starting with an existing force of just six divisions. Four of these were based in the continental U.S., another in Hawaii, and one in the Philippines. Five were infantry, and one was cavalry. The four continental divisions included the 1st Cavalry and 1st, 2nd, and 3rd Infantry.

All Army divisions were activated in the continental United States except for the Philippine, activated in the Philippines in June 1921, the Hawaiian, activated in February 1921, in Hawaii and later renamed the 24th Division, the 25th Division, also activated in Hawaii from troops of the Hawaiian Division, and the Americal Division, activated in New Caledonia in May 1942.

Wearing World War I-vintage helmets, soldiers of the 34th Infantry Division parade during Louisiana Maneuvers in 1941. The 34th Division went on to see considerable combat in North Africa and Italy during World War II.

Divisions were assigned in three theatres of operations during the war: 60 to Europe, 14 to the Mediterranean (North Africa and Italy), of which seven—the 2nd Armored; 82nd Airborne; 1st, 3rd, 9th, 36th, and 45th Infantry Divisions—were eventually transferred to Western Europe, and 22 divisions in the Pacific.

Two divisions were removed from the rolls during the war. The Philippine Division was destroyed in action and disbanded on Luzon on April 10, 1942. The 2nd Cavalry Division was activated and inactivated twice— April 15, 1941—July 15, 1942, and February 23, 1943 – May 10, 1944. Three divisions never saw combat—the 98th Infantry, activated in September 1942, sent to garrison the Hawaiian Islands in April 1944, the 13th Airborne, activated in July 1943 and deployed to Europe in 1945, and the 2nd Cavalry.

The number of activated Army divisions tripled from eight in early1940, to 24 in January 1941, with another 13 added in the following year— creating 30 infantry, two cavalry, and five armored. After December 7, 1941, 27 infantry, two airborne, and nine armored divisions as the Army's size doubled to 73 divisions by the end of the next year. Another 17 were added in 1943. The 65th Infantry Division was the last activated in August 1943. The 10th Division was activated in July 1943, as a light division and redesignated the 10th Mountain in November 1944.

In 1942, the US Army deployed 10 divisions to the Pacific and North Africa. Another nine followed in 1943 as Mediterranean operations progressed to Sicily and Italy and expanded across the Pacific. In 1944, with the invasions of France and the Philippines, 45 divisions were added to those fielded, including seven armored and two airborne. In 1945, 23 more divisions were deployed.

In 1942-43, a bulwark of garrisons, some nine divisions, were spread across the Pacific from the 7th Infantry in the Aleutians (moved to Kwajalein in 1944), the 24th and 25th in Hawaii (the 25th would later serve on Guadalcanal), the 27th at Makin, the Americal and 43rd at Guadalcanal, joined in early 1943 by the 37th, which moved from Fiji to the Solomons, and the 32nd and 41st at Papua, New Guinea.

As Allied operations moved closer to Japan, more Army units deployed. Pacific forces were split between those supplementing the Marines in the Central Pacific and those under General Douglas MacArthur in the Southwest Pacific. Serving the Central Pacific were the 77th at Guam in mid-1944; the 27th at Saipan June-July 1944; and the 81st at Peleliu that autumn.

Added to MacArthur's forces in New Guinea during January 1943–August 1944 were the 1st Cavalry and seven infantry divisions—the 6th, 11th, 24th, 31st, 33rd, 38th, and 93rd.

Four Army infantry divisions participated in the bloody fighting for Okinawa—the 7th, 27th, 77th, and 96th. Nineteen divisions saw

action in the Philippines, including the veteran 1st Cavalry, 6th, 7th, 24th, 25th, 31st, 32nd, 33rd, 37th, 38th, 40th, 41st, 43rd, 77th, 81st, and Americal, 11th Airborne, and the newly-arrived 96th.

Army forces destined for Western Europe were highly mechanized, a mix of 16 armored and 52 infantry, mountain, and airborne divisions.

While an infantry division could maneuver and fight with its basic organization, it usually had additional assets attached—a tank battalion, an antitank battalion of either towed or self-propelled guns, an engineer battalion, and sometimes additional artillery. Attachments depended on the mission and availability of units.

The last divisions to arrive in the European theater included the 86th and 97th, and the 16th and 20th Armored, during March–May 1945. The 86th appeared in both Europe and the Pacific.

The first three armored divisions, the 1st, 2nd, and 3rd, were all "heavy" divisions, their organization including two tank regiments and an armored infantry regiment—a total of nine battalions. The armored divisions that followed had three tank battalions and three armored-infantry battalions. The armored division also had three tactical command elements, or combat commands, to carry out selected missions.

Attaching and detaching units to divisions presented a constantly changing organization. A company of engineers might be attached to a combat command from corps assets one day, a tank company detached to another division the next. In periods of crisis and highly mobile operations the composition of a combat group could change dramatically. Combat commands were sometimes split into task forces (TFs), identified by the name of the commanding officer.

While armored divisions were organized around combat commands, infantry divisions were generally organized into regimental combat teams (RCTs) with additional mission specific assets attached to a regimental headquarters.

In 1942, Army planners considered the need of doubling the number of divisions to 200—a force considered necessary to defeat the Germans should the Soviet Union succumb to the Nazi onslaught. But as the Red Army endured, American commanders pared back their plans. It is questionable though whether American manpower could have even reached such heights given the crisis in infantry strength that arose in 1944.

The longest duration in a combat zone, 654 days, was accomplished by the 32nd Division in the Pacific, and the shortest, just three days,

Both: National Archives

ABOVE: Soldiers of the 106th Infantry Division trudge through the snow in Belgium during the winter of 1944. The inexperienced 106th suffered at the hands of the marauding Germans during the opening hours of the Battle of the Bulge, sustaining 8,627 casualties. The number was the highest for a U.S. combat division in the shortest period of time during the entire war. BELOW: Soldiers of the 32nd Infantry Division are shown during combat operations on the island of Luzon in the Philippines in April 1945. The 32nd Division recorded the highest number of days in a combat zone of any American division during World War II: 654 days in the Pacific while fighting the Japanese.

the 16th Armored in Europe. Pacific divisions averaged 306 days in combat. Some veteran divisions saw action in North Africa, Italy, and Western Europe, the longest periods including the 1st Infantry (443 days), the 3rd Infantry (531 days), and the 1st Armored (360 days).

Ground division casualties totaled about 664,000, not including the Philippine Division. The vast majority were suffered in Europe and the Mediterranean—approximately 570,000. Divisions in the Pacific averaged about 4,700 casualties. The 3rd Infantry suffered the highest casualties with 25,977 in North Africa, Italy, France, and Germany. The 106th Division suffered the highest casualties during the shortest period in combat—8,627 in 63 days, most during the Battle of the Bulge.

The 66th Division suffered 1,452 casualties, although it never reached the front. In response to the crisis in the Ardennes in late 1944, the division crossed the English Channel to Cherbourg on two transports. One, the *Leopoldville*, was torpedoed by a German U-boat just five miles from Cherbourg with the loss of 14 officers and 748 enlisted men.

The demand for infantrymen in Europe became so critical that some of the late divisions, such as the 70th, 42nd, and 63rd, were so heavily drawn down during the summer of 1944 to provide replacements for combat units that they had to be rebuilt before being shipped to France.

Another major source of manpower in 1944 was the Army Specialized Training Program (ASTP), instituted to meet wartime demands for junior officers and soldiers with technical skills. Most of the men were trained at colleges in engineering, foreign languages, and medicine.

Opponents of the program, such as General McNair, felt that ASTP took young men with leadership potential away from combat positions where they were most needed, producing a shortage of 300,000 men—the equivalent of over 20 divisions. In 1943-44, manpower planners calculated that additional infantrymen would be required for operations in Europe. The ASTP not only provided well-educated men, it also provided a large pool of ready-trained soldiers. In an emergency measure, in the spring of 1944, about 110,000 ASTP students were transferred to combat units. Some 35 Army divisions received an average of 1,500 men each, some considerably more, such as the 395th Infantry Regiment, 99th Division, which received about 3,000 replacements from the program.

Also in 1944, continued shortfalls in replacing casualties resulted in the use of divisional service troops and Army Service Forces troops as infantry replacements. The mix of divisions by theatre at the end of the war included 60 in Western Europe—four airborne, 15 armored, 41 infantry; seven in Italy—one mountain, one armored, five infantry; and 21 in the Pacific—one airborne, one armored cavalry, 19 infantry.

Some 17 divisions remained in service by June 1946, including the 1st, 3rd, and 9th Infantry and 4th Armored in Germany; the 42nd in Austria; the 88th in Italy; the 6th and 7th in Korea; the 86th in the Philippines; the 24th and 25th Infantry, 1st Cavalry, and 11th Airborne in Japan; and the 2nd and 5th Infantry, 2nd Armored, and 82nd Airborne in the U.S.

The United States Army that fought in World War II was created in a relatively short period and built in a time of crisis. It established the foundation for the future of the modern U.S. Army.

Author Allyn Vannoy has written extensively on a variety of topics related to World War II. He resides in Hillsboro, Oregon.

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By Patrick J. Chaisson

National Archives

The Sinking of SS *President Coolidge*

Chaos and controversy surrounded the loss of the troopship SS *President Coolidge*.

ENSIGN DORAN S. WEINSTEIN, A U.S. NAVY COMMUNICATIONS OFFICER, stationed himself outside the bridge of a troop transport named SS *President Coolidge* as it approached the South Pacific island of Espiritu Santo on Monday morning, October 26, 1942. The sight of Espiritu Santo's green palm trees meant Weinstein's vessel was finally nearing the end of its 6,800-mile voyage from San Francisco.

Weinstein, however, had no time to look at trees. His job was to keep alert for friendly signal lamps, as well as for the telltale signs of an enemy submarine periscope. Around 0930 hours, he observed through his binoculars a shore-based light attempting to contact him with an urgent message.

It read: S-T-O-P.

Weinstein dashed inside to warn the ship's captain, who immediately ordered his engines to full reverse. Meanwhile, an assistant signalman decoded the rest of the warning message. "You are standing into mines," it said. Other watch standers reported seeing several of those deadly spheres close aboard—added proof the *President Coolidge* was indeed sailing through an American minefield.

At 0935 hours, tragedy struck when the first of two sea mines detonated under *Coolidge's* hull. She rolled over and sank 78 minutes later, although miraculously, only two of the 5,440 men on board were killed that fateful morning.

Weeks later, a naval court of inquiry convened to investigate the facts behind this maritime disaster. Its members also sought to identify and punish whoever was responsible for allowing the *President Coolidge* to proceed into a channel blocked by friendly mines.

"Someone had blundered," the commission's report concluded. But who? Could the ship's captain, a 63-year-old merchant sailor, be at fault for acting irresponsibly in time of war? Or did U.S. naval officers fail to provide that man with the charts and instructions necessary to safely enter Espiritu Santo's harbor, then try to cover up their own negligence?

The SS *President Coolidge* was one of two nearly identical passenger vessels (the other being SS *President Hoover*) ordered by the Dollar Steamship Line on October 26, 1929. Construction began April 21, 1930, at the Newport News Shipbuilding and Dry Dock Company in Virginia, and she was launched exactly 10 months later on February 21, 1931. Former First Lady Grace Goodhue Coolidge christened the new luxury liner with a bottle of spring water from their family farm, as Prohibition laws prevented the use of champagne.

Built at a cost of $7 million, *President Coolidge* measured 634 feet long with a beam of 81 feet and a 34-foot draft. Displacement was 30,924 tons. Turbine-electric Westinghouse engines propelled the vessel to a cruising speed of 20 knots, while her range exceeded 19,000 nautical miles.

The *President Coolidge* accommodated 990 passengers and a ship's company of 324 crewmen. She could carry 600,000 cubic feet of cargo in her seven holds, one of which was refrigerated. Air conditioning, then considered an engineering marvel, kept travelers comfortable in tropical climes.

Entering service on October 1, 1931, SS *President Coolidge* plied the Trans-Pacific route between San Francisco and ports-of-call in Hawaii, Japan, China, and the Philippines.

During this tumultuous decade, crew members witnessed firsthand the global conflict then

Men scramble down ropes hastily thrown from the foundering troop transport SS *President Coolidge,* which struck a mine in the harbor of Espiritu Santo in October 1942.

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ABOVE: After a pair of sea mines detonated under the hull of the troop transport SS *President Coolidge,* the ship remained afloat for 78 minutes before sliding beneath the surface. BELOW: After leaving the sinking transport *Coolidge,* a group of survivors paddles away from the sinking ship. The ship's captain insisted on frequent lifeboat drills, which contributed to the orderly evacuation as the ship slowly rolled over.

National Archives

spreading across Asia. In June 1941, while transiting the Formosa Strait, *President Coolidge's* lookouts counted 100 Japanese warships out on maneuvers there.

That same month, an agency known as the United States Maritime Commission assumed operational control of the *President Coolidge*. She would now serve as a troop transport, delivering U.S. Army personnel and their equipment to Far East garrisons. The liner, still manned by merchant seamen, made three journeys to Hawaii and the Philippine Islands under Army orders during the autumn of 1941.

When on December 7, 1941 (8 December west of the International Date Line), Japanese forces staged their surprise attacks on Allied forces across the Pacific, *President Coolidge* was en route to Honolulu from Manila carrying a number of American civilians and service dependents who had been ordered out of the Philippines. Stopping at Pearl Harbor, she took on a number of badly wounded servicemen for evacuation back to the mainland. The vessel reached her home port of San Francisco on Christmas Day.

Captain Henry Nelson, age 63, served as *President Coolidge's* skipper. A seasoned mariner with nearly a half-century's experience in the U.S. Merchant Marine to his credit, Nelson accepted this dangerous assignment—as he later wrote—"because of my feeling that my country needed me in its time of crisis." Nelson and his vessel sailed continuously over the next nine months, transporting combat troops to Australia, New Zealand, Fiji, and New Caledonia.

The *President Coolidge's* final trans-Pacific passage began on Tuesday, October 6, 1942. At 1030 hours, she cast off from Pier 44 in San Francisco harbor and headed out to sea. On board were 340 ship's crew, 50 U.S. Navy sailors, and 4,800 passengers—all members of the U.S. Army. Their artillery pieces, jeeps, trucks, camp equipment, and pallets of ammunition filled her cargo spaces. She also carried 519 pounds of quinine, the entire Pacific Theater reserve supply of this anti-malaria treatment.

Most of the soldiers on her passenger manifest belonged to the 172nd Regimental Combat Team (RCT), 43rd Infantry Division. Commanded by Colonel James A. Lewis, this formation included the 172nd Infantry Regiment, 103rd Field Artillery Battalion, a medical company, some combat engineers, and other service-support detachments. The 172nd RCT's final destination was Guadalcanal in the Solomons, where U.S. Marines had been locked in a desperate fight against Japanese attackers for two full months. Lewis' men would reinforce the American defense and ultimately help win victory on this island battleground.

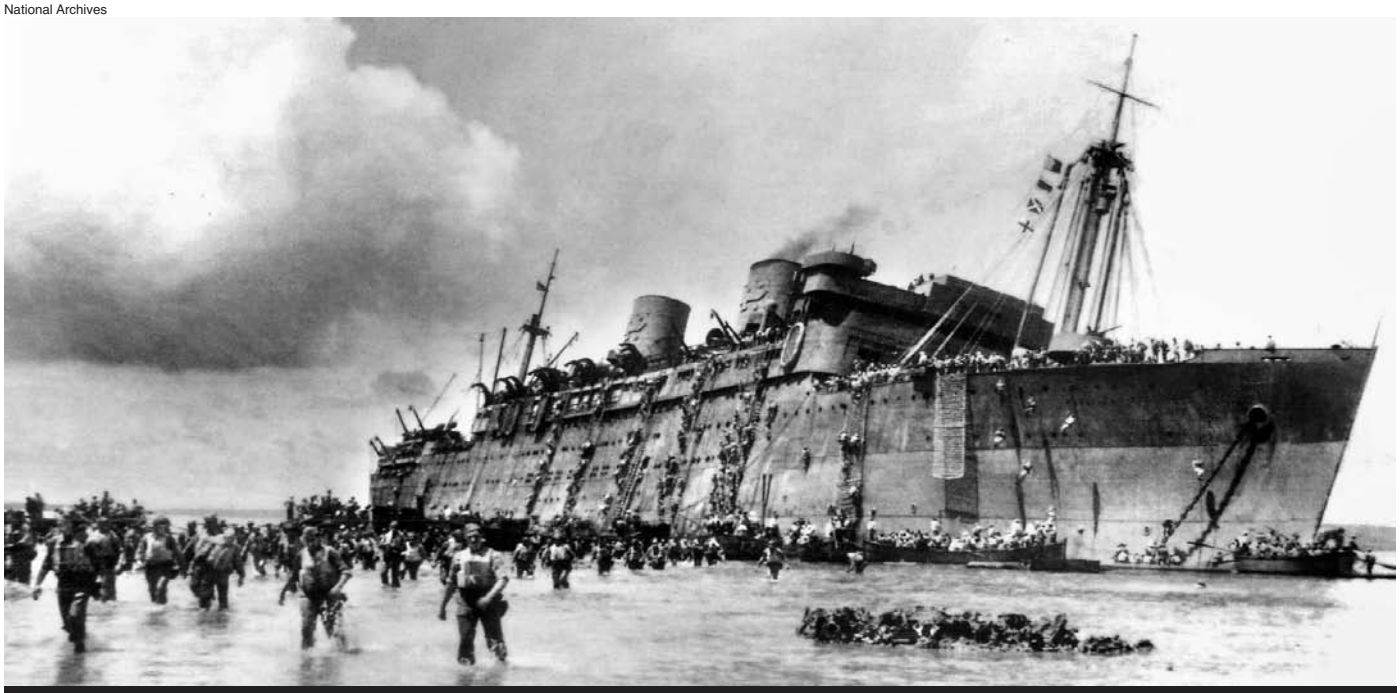
Also present, but kept segregated from the 172nd's troops, were 300 African American cannoneers serving with the 2nd Battalion, 54th Coast Artillery Regiment. A World War I veteran named Colonel Dinsmore Alter led this contingent and, as the highest-ranking Army officer embarked, acted as commander of troops throughout the journey.

Finally, Lieutenant Commander Craig Hosmer of the U.S. Navy headed *President Coolidge's* 45-man armed-guard contingent. These sailors manned the one 5-inch, four 3-inch, and dozen 20mm antiaircraft guns mounted throughout the ship. Hosmer (who later became a U.S. congressman) was aided in his duties by Ensign Doran Weinstein and five Navy signalmen, who performed a variety of communications tasks.

The first leg of her journey, from San Francisco to the port of Nouméa in New Caledonia, lasted 12 days. She sailed without escort, as it was believed the *President Coolidge's* 20-knot cruising speed was sufficient to outrun an enemy submarine. Frequent course changes also served to spoil a sub attack, although Nelson's watch standers always kept a wary eye out for periscope wakes.

A routine of sorts quickly established itself among the GIs crammed into her holds. "Unless you've lived through it," wrote 2nd Lt. James Renton of the 172nd RCT, "life aboard a combat-loaded Army transport is impossible to describe." Renton tried anyway, detailing how

National Archives



Showing a pronounced list to starboard, the *Coolidge* progressively settles underwater in the harbor of Espiritu Santo in October 1942. Troops in the foreground wade to shore in shallow water close to the beach.

his troops slept in canvas bunks stacked four-high: "Your pack was your pillow, your rifle your bunk mate, and duffel bags stowed along the bulkhead." There was, he suggested, "at most, two feet between bunks."

To prepare his ship for possible enemy contact, Captain Nelson insisted all hands participate in frequent fire and lifeboat drills. Lieutenant Hosmer's armed guards also regularly test fired their deck guns. Yet there was time for fun, too. When *President Coolidge* crossed the Equator on October 12, her crew held a traditional "King Neptune's Court" initiation ceremony.

SS *President Coolidge* docked at Nouméa, New Caledonia, on October 20, 1942. While most of her passengers debarked on a brief shore leave, the ship's crew readied their vessel for her next port of call, Luganville Harbor on Espiritu Santo in the New Hebrides.

The U.S. Navy's port director at Nouméa, Lieutenant Commander John D. Andrews, closely managed all maritime traffic moving through his area of responsibility. On October 23, Andrews prepared *President Coolidge's* sailing orders for Espiritu Santo. These documents defined her time of departure and route there, as well as other coordinating details. A set of attached special instructions, classified Top Secret, contained comprehensive directions on how to approach Luganville harbor. No mention of friendly minefields was included in any of Andrews' instructions.

During the early afternoon of October 24, a harried young courier named Ensign John A. DeNovo boarded the *President Coolidge* carrying with him a satchel full of classified information. DeNovo was pressed for time. He had to hand Captain Nelson his sailing orders and depart the troopship so she could cast off as scheduled at 1500 hours. In his rush to complete this chore, the ensign may or may not have passed along all necessary documents. Nelson, for his part, signed DeNovo's checklist indicating receipt of the detailed harbor entry directions, even though he later claimed these papers were never delivered.

Once underway, Captain Nelson and his First Officer, Kilton I. Davis, discussed how best to approach Luganville harbor. Having never docked there before, both men felt it would be safest to wait for a pilot—someone employed by the harbormaster who could help guide them through narrow Segond Channel. But the threat of submarines remained a concern. Standing outside the channel for any length of time, Nelson and Davis agreed, would just invite a torpedo attack.

President Coolidge arrived at Espiritu Santo shortly after sunrise on Monday, October 26, 1942. Halting at a rendezvous point three miles off Tutuba Island, Captain Nelson fretted while Ensign Weinstein's signalmen attempted to contact a small warship seen circling some distance to the south.

This was the subchaser *PC-479*. It had been dispatched to guard the safe channel into Luganville earlier that morning when the destroyer normally assigned to perform this duty came in for fuel. Although *PC-479* carried a harbor pilot, no one aboard knew that the *President Coolidge* was due to arrive or that she required navigational assistance. When the subchaser's patrol track took it behind Tutuba, Weinstein lost his last chance to communicate with anyone who could help him safely reach port.

Ship's time read 0906 hours. SS *President Coolidge* had been sitting exposed to enemy attack for over an hour with no sign of an approaching pilot boat. Nelson decided he had waited long enough and made for Scorff Passage, the normal peacetime route through Segond Channel. Unbeknownst to him, Scorff Passage was seeded with two parallel double rows of anti-submarine mines.

Signalmen on shore desperately flashed warnings to stop, and *PC-479* took off at flank speed in a futile attempt to catch the errant transport before it met with catastrophe. These measures came too late; at 0935 hours a contact-fused sea mine went off under *Coolidge*'s keel. Seconds later, another explosion rocked the already crippled vessel. The blasts ripped two gaping holes in her port side; she began to list badly as seawater flooded in and fuel oil flowed out.

Captain Nelson immediately ordered a hard turn to starboard, attempting to beach his vessel before she sank. At 0938 hours, her bow hit a coral reef some 50 to 100 yards offshore, and the *President Coolidge* shuddered to a halt. Her passengers, prompted by loudspeaker announcements, donned their life jackets and prepared to abandon ship. Meanwhile, crew-

Naval History and Heritage Command

This photo was taken just moments before the *Coolidge* slid beneath the surface of the harbor at Espiritu Santo. In the distance, two men are visible atop the hull of the stricken vessel. These may well be Captain Warren K. Covill and Warrant Officer Robert H. Moshimer, who were assisting Captain Elwood Euart, who lost his life while searching for anyone trapped inside the sinking ship.

men began lowering lifeboats and throwing cargo nets overboard to aid in the evacuation.

Infantryman Richard Schneider was, like many aboard, in his rack that morning. "When the ship hit the mine, I fell from the top bunk onto the floor. An alert was given, and we were told that the ship was not going to sink. We were instructed to stay in our quarters."

Shortly thereafter, another voice informed him the transport was in fact going down. "We were instructed to leave," Schneider recalled. "I made my way to the deck and jumped from the deck to a life boat." He came ashore having "lost all of my equipment and personal belongings, escaping only with the clothes on my back."

Lieutenant Renton remembered October 26 as "a beautiful, calm, and clear Monday morning." After the explosions occurred, he heard the "call for all personnel to proceed to 'Boat Stations'" and noticed the vessel was already "beginning to roll counter-clockwise." Receiving orders to abandon ship, Renton and his platoon went "over the side—no panic, very orderly—all in life jackets, helmet liners, and web belt with canteen—into the warm Pacific."

"Many boats were dispatched from shore to pick up survivors," Staff Sergeant Parisi recollected. "It was organized chaos, but most of the soldiers stayed calm throughout the evacuation."

At 1012 hours, Lieutenant Hosmer recorded that *Coolidge's* list measured 18.5 degrees and was increasing one degree per minute. He then noticed several terrified G.I.s who refused to jump from the cargo nets and swim for shore. "Kick them in the face," Hosmer shouted to other troops descending the nets. "She can't stay up too much longer!"

Officers went from compartment to compartment, looking for anyone left behind. Army captains Elwood J. Euart and Warren K. Covill, together with Warrant Officer Robert H. Moshimer, struggled to locate the last groups of stray soldiers. Tying a rope around his waist, Euart crawled down a steeply sloped passageway while the other two men—bracing themselves against an outside hatch—held onto his safety line. It was now 1052 hours.

"The ship by this time had keeled over on the port side until the decks were vertical," Moshimer wrote of that fateful moment. "At the same instant, the ship's bow slid off the edge of the reef and sank stem first into the channel."

Moshimer's account continued: "Only seconds later the water came rushing up over us and in an instant we were carried down and down as the ship sank." Moshimer could not recall how long he remained underwater, only stating that eventually "both Covill and I rose to the surface … but there was no sign of Euart."

Captain Euart received a posthumous award of the Distinguished Service Cross for his heroic sacrifice that day. Moshimer and Covill each earned the Soldiers Medal.

Although it was later learned that Fireman Robert Reid also perished in the blast, 5,438 passengers and crew did successfully escape the *President Coolidge*. One survivor, Private Henry Schumacher, summed up their feelings thusly: "Every man, though stripped of all belongings, felt thankful to be alive as he stumbled ashore."

Once on dry land, however, these G.I.s faced a fresh set of difficulties. "We didn't have a toothbrush. We didn't have a tent. We didn't have anything," said the 172nd's Sergeant Glen Goodall. "People on the island gave us what tents they could, and we lived that way for several months."

Another castaway, Captain John H. Davin, described the motley appearance his fellow soldiers presented after a few weeks on Espiritu Santo. "Having lost most of their clothes in the sinking, the survivors had to wear whatever they could get from the various outfits ashore," Davin wrote. "Soon, it became practically impossible to determine to which service a man belonged, for he may have had on Army, Navy, and Marine clothes at one time."

The loss of SS *President Coolidge* and its cargo of war materiel demanded a thorough investigation. Within days of the incident, Vice Admiral William F. "Bull" Halsey, Jr., commanding the South Pacific Area, established a preliminary court of inquiry to gather information and recommend possible legal action. Beginning November 12, 1942, this court met on board the destroyer tender USS *Whitney* in Nouméa Harbor. Its members heard testimony for five days.

Yet the Navy needed a scapegoat for this disaster. Shortly after the court rendered its recommendations, Halsey charged Nelson with gross negligence resulting in the loss of his troopship, two members of its company, and all government property aboard. Starting on December 8, 1942, a military commission convened in Nouméa to try him for dereliction of duty in wartime.

The proceedings lasted seven days and ended with Captain Nelson's acquittal. His defense team, which included Lieutenant Hosmer, convinced the commissioners that those naval officers responsible for ensuring *Coolidge's* safe passage from Nouméa to Espiritu Santo were to blame for its unfortunate demise and not the ship's captain. Fully exonerated, Henry Nelson returned to California where in due course he received command of another large merchantman.

For months, the U.S. Navy suppressed all press coverage of SS *President Coolidge's* last journey. When word of its sinking finally reached the public in December 1942, Americans reacted with shock and anger. Many people spoke out about the incompetence that led to this wholly preventable accident, as well as its impact on future military operations.

Indeed, someone had blundered.

Patrick J. Chaisson writes on a variety of historical topics from his home in Scotia, New York. *He wishes to thank Lt. Col. Herman C. Brown, USMC (Retired), curator of the Vermont National Guard Library and Museum, for his assistance in the preparation of this article.*

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Armored Soldiers *at the* Battle of the Bulge

Photo courtesy the author

Colonel Samuel Hogan and his intrepid soldiers spent Christmas 1944 fighting Germans in the Battle of the Bulge.

BY WILLIAM HOGAN

Wary of a possible German counterattack, M4 Sherman medium tanks of the U.S. Third Armored Division idle on a snow-covered road in Belgium while a disabled tank is removed from the roadway ahead of them. The tankers have their 75mm main weapons pointed in the direction of the enemy. INSET: Lieutenant Colonel Sam Hogan, a 28-year-old West Point graduate, led the 3rd Battalion, 33rd Armored Regiment during heavy fighting at the Battle of the Bulge.

By mid-December 1944, the 3rd Battalion, 33rd Armored Regiment, Third Armored Division "Spearhead" had seen plenty of action. Led by 28-year-old West Pointer Lieutenant Colonel Samuel Hogan, the 54 tanks and 400-plus men had participated in most of the major battles—often at the tip of the proverbial "Spearhead." Its soldiers included tankers, infantrymen, mortar men, cooks, mechanics and often additions of engineers, artillerymen and antiaircraft cannoneers.

Theirs was a potent outfit, Task Force Hogan, named for its dashing commander.

After the breakout from Normandy and heavy losses at Mortain, the Task Force swung west and charged through France toward the closing of the Falaise Pocket. Sam Hogan led his columns in a Sherman tank, flying the flag of his home state of Texas from its radio antennae. To curious inquiries from liberated French nationals, Sam would respond: "That is the flag of the free Americans."

"Ah," said one elderly Frenchman who spoke a little English but informed the other onlookers, "That is the flag of the American resistance movement!"

Spearhead was ordered to thrust straight north into Belgium after the Falaise Gap was closed. This three-day running battle in early September 1944 was in fact a giant meeting

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engagement as Third Armored Division and their brothers of the 9th Infantry Division, the "Old Reliables," set up a titanic ambush on a German corps retreating from the French coast back toward Germany.

From there, Task Force Hogan alternated taking the lead with its sister tank battalions within the "always out front" VII Corps. There were picturesque little Belgian villages liberated in a blur of heavy action followed by the joy of victory as grateful Belgians showered the disheveled tankers in kisses, flowers, and Champagne. From there it was into Germany proper. The tankers and infantry knew full well that the going would only get tougher.

The Allies plunged into the first defensive belt of the Siegfried Line only to outrun their supplies. The hard battles since the previous July took their toll on men and machines until the Spearhead division had less than 50 serviceable tanks, a quarter of the normal combat strength of 200.

Taken off the line to rest and refit, Hogan's command settled in for a short period of maintenance. Patrols and probes of the German line portended a quiet winter until a renewed offensive could launch in the New Year, but Hitler's "last gamble" offensive into the Ardennes rudely shattered any expectation of a quiet Christmas. The German objective was the Belgian port of Antwerp, lifeline of the Allies in Western Europe. Capture of the port would cripple supply lines and drive a wedge between Allied armies north and south.

The German attack achieved complete surprise. Among the Allied leadership, there was shock and confusion. First Army commander Lieutenant General Courtney Hodges seemed overwhelmed and practically incapacitated. Still, his deputies at First Army headquarters in Spa immediately alerted and prepared to rush into the fray their two uncommitted units, the 82nd Airborne and Combat Command Reserve of the Third Armored Division. With 2/3 of its valuable armored combat power assigned elsewhere, Spearhead was notified to move out immediately, falling under XVIII Airborne Corps to establish a defensive line from Grandmenil to Melreux. As the only armored force in the northern shoulder of the Bulge, CCR was the only hope to slow down the German advance. The initial German "bulge" into the U.S. line cleaved General Bradley's 12th Army Group from First Army, resulting in Eisenhower's grudging decision to place First Army and thereby Third Armored Division under none other than Field Marshal Bernard Montgomery.

On the evening of the 19th, Task Force Hogan was put on a two-hour alert to move from the Stolberg Corridor to an assembly area in Hotton, Belgium. The understrength battalion was down to its Headquarters; George Company (with eight Sherman tanks, after losing seven in the Roer Offensive); A Company of the 83rd Reconnaissance Battalion, and Field Artillery and Anti-Aircraft sections (A battery from the 54th Field Artillery and a section from the 486th Anti-Aircraft Artillery Battalion) to secure Houffalize, about 20 kilometers north of Bastogne.

Charlie and Service Companies would remain behind in the little resort town of Soy along with the regimental trains, the light tanks providing security for the Combat Command (Reserve) command post. The Task Force mortars were placed at Hotton, where they could support nearby units and help hold the town. The mortar platoon consisted of three M3 half-tracks, each mounting an 81mm mortar in the open bay of the vehicle and led by a Sergeant. The veteran of the group was Sergeant John "Little King" Grimes from tiny Forbes, Missouri. His soft face held narrow, piercing eyes that showed the kind of determination in a person that only adversity can bring. The other sergeants called him "Little King;" at 5'5", he was short in stature but large in boldness and action.

As early as 15 December, rumors that German paratroopers were being prepared to jump into U.S. rear areas reached G2 (intelligence) channels. There were also rumors that German Commandos dressed as American military police were guiding columns into ambushes or in the wrong direction. To complicate matters

even further, fuel resupply was late in arriving, so the U.S. task forces moved out with fuel tanks only half full.

The understrength column left Mausbach, Germany, and swung west in the direction of the little Belgian towns they had liberated the previous fall. Already the temperatures were freezing, and ice covered the roads as drivers squinted hard to see the blackout lights on the vehicle ahead. Drivers posted assistants outside the cab sitting on the fender to help steer. Most soldiers were fighting off chronic colds and coughs they had suffered since early November. The column moved toward the unknown at night, under cold, pewter skies streaked with the ominous glow of German V-1 flying bombs headed for Antwerp.

Sam didn't need to say it, but the feeling was that sending 1/3 of a tank battalion, with half-filled fuel tanks, into what was already rumored to be a division-sized German counterattack was nothing more than laying down a "speed bump" to slow the enemy advance. He also knew that these were the hardest conditions to lead men; zero intelligence on enemy strength with unknown locations or intentions, plus bitter cold and lack of supplies, would test the officers, sergeants and soldiers to the maximum.

Eighteen miles due south, the 101st Airborne Division was rushing in to occupy Bastogne. Task Force Hogan moved in their direction, the River Ourthe covering the right flank and forming the boundary of the XVIII Airborne Corps. After 10 miles of nighttime movement, Hogan's column arrived, bleary-eyed, at the village of La Roche without contacting any enemy. The center of town was littered with abandoned trailers left behind by supply units upon learning that the Germans were headed their way in strength. The 7th Armored Division trains (supply units) were still in town but eager to be relieved, as they were already receiving enemy fire from the outskirts of town.

Sam instructed his tankers and infantrymen to load up on the abandoned rations and cigarettes. He then detached his headquarters assault-gun platoon to assist the 7th Armored supply-and-services personnel in holding the town, which would keep his own supply route to the rear open. The gas tanks of Task Force Hogan's vehicles were now half empty, and there was still no information coming through on the enemy's disposition.

The cold night passed with the task force coiled up and on full alert. The sounds and flashes of artillery indicated the impending arrival of a wave of German armor. As the 20th dawned crisp and cold, Sam set out with his operations officer, Major Travis Brown, and his scout platoon leader, Lieutenant Clark Worrell, in two Jeeps to reconnoiter the forward line of troops. At the edge of town, a U.S. picket advised the passengers of the two Jeeps that the Germans ahead were rolling grenades down the hill. "Push on!" said Sam as he lit another Camel cigarette and cinched down his steel helmet. The Jeep drivers stepped on the gas, roaring down the road and kicking up gravel and icy mud.

Ten kilometers out of the town, they ran into a unit of American soldiers with their half-tracks. These soldiers were eating rations while apparently guarding several fit-looking Germans in long trench coats and steel helmets. Something did not seem right. The Jeeps stopped, and the two groups stared at each other for a tense few seconds.

Suddenly, one of the "Americans" leveled his Tommy gun at Sam's little party. "They're all Germans, Colonel!" came the fearful yell from Jeep driver Private Charles Gast. The Jeeps emptied out in the woods as machine-gun bullets clipped the gravel behind Sam and his staff's mud-encrusted boots. It was a very close call, as the "real" Americans escaped even as the German commandos stopped their pursuit to

BELOW: American soldiers move through La Roche, Belgium, during the Battle of the Bulge. Task Force Hogan reached La Roche on December 19, 1944, and Hogan's men made a stand along with an assault-gun platoon in defense of the town. The remainder of Hogan's command kept moving northward. OPPOSITE: Forging ahead, tanks of the U.S. Third Armored Division pass a disabled German PzKpfw. V Panther medium tank that had been abandoned by retreating Germans. The Panther, with its high-velocity 75mm cannon, is considered by many to be the best tank of World War II.

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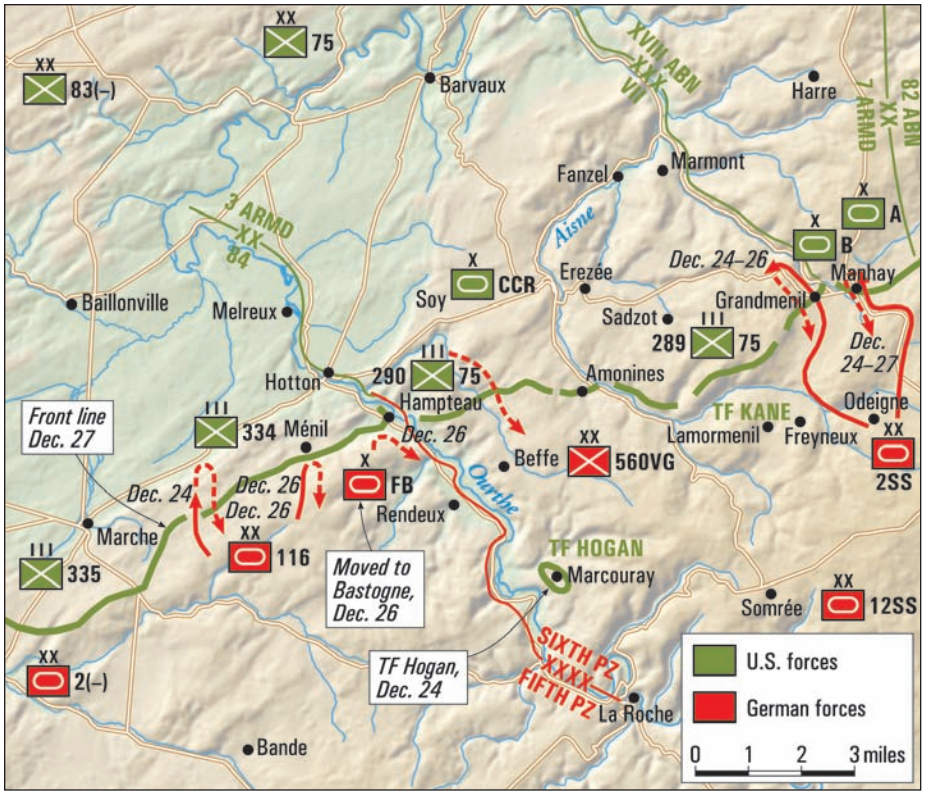

ABOVE: Action swirled across the wintry landscape of Belgium during Hitler's desperate gamble that led to the Battle of the Bulge. Task Force Hogan did its part in turning the Nazi tide. TOP: Fighting back against the German onslaught of the Ardennes Offensive, American soldiers fire a mortar from their halftrack near the town of Amonines, Belgium.

help themselves to the contents of the Spearhead Jeeps, including one of Sam's prized Christmas fruitcakes.

Now separated from his battalion, Sam and his small party spent the next 24 hours fumbling through the woods. Twice they ran into enemy pickets, finally making it back to the friendly lines near a U.S. artillery battery, whose soldiers miraculously did not fire into the group of what they thought were Germans coming out of the woods. The lost patrol made its way back to Task Force Hogan's new perimeter in the village of Marcouray. Sam learned that German infantry were trying to cut off his unit from the rest of the Third Armored Division. At approximately 1300 hours, Colonel Robert Howze of Combat Command Reserve ordered the task force to move to Amonines.

Strong German forces blocked the road ahead. Earlier, their roadblock outside the hamlet of Beffe had taken out a Sherman tank with Panzerfaust antitank rocket fire. The skirmish resulted in one American soldier killed in action—a forward observer from the artillery battalion—and 17 wounded. Flanking the position was impossible, as a cliff protected it on one side and thick woods crawling with Germans were on the other.

Marcouray was an ideal defensive position, with one flank protected by the Ourthe. Sturdy stone houses with fields of fire out to 1,000 yards dotted the village. Sam decided to stay put and block the advancing Germans. He reckoned it would take at least a regiment of Germans to drive his men out. Still, the task force hunkered down for an uneven fight.

Sam, a leader who infected his troops with his calm, confident demeanor, told them: "We're on very defensible terrain, and we have a good deal of firepower and ammunition. This is where we'll make our stand." Little did they know they were to play a crucial part in pinning down an entire German panzer division, disrupting its advance toward Antwerp.

Task Force Hogan pickets improved their defensive positions through the night of the 22nd, engaging Germans on the other side of the Ourthe. Led by air-operations chief Captain Helaman "Ted" Cardon and Sergeant "Shorty" Wright of the recon platoon, observers lit up a dozen German trucks and Kubelwagens with artillery fire as they tried to bypass the American position. Clearing skies and moonlight allowed more fire missions targeting the German tanks attempting to bypass them. The horizon glowed with the light of burning enemy vehicles.

At first light, Sam stepped out of the stone farmhouse to the shocking sight of two German 8-wheeled armored scout cars loaded with troops screeching by his command post. He jumped back inside to radio the tank manning the roadblock in the direction the German scouting party was going. He then radioed the roadblock that the Germans had just passed. The tank crew had been alert and ready, but condensation overnight had frozen the turret ring hard and fast, and they were unable to traverse the turret to fire at the fast German scout

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During the bitter fighting at the town of Hotton, Belgium, both sides suffered severe casualties. Shortly after the battle, Third Armored Division soldiers inspect the burned-out hulks of a German Panther medium tank and a Panzer IV that have fallen victim to accurate fire.

cars. Normally very calm, Sam let out a few ice-melting expletives and returned to the task of dealing with "enemy in the wire." The tank at the roadblock at the far end of the village blasted the second scout car, scattering its occupants into the woods.

Sergeant Wright and Captain Cardon took a patrol out and engaged the Germans, killing several. Another patrol found five enemy soldiers lying prone in a ditch near the road. Before anyone could stop him, a recon lieutenant fired his .45-caliber pistol at the backs of the heads of two. He was stopped and disarmed, and the remainder of the Germans became prisoners. Sam was livid. Besides one of his men acting in the precise way the enemy they were fighting acted—without humanity—now the task force was surrounded, in danger of being overrun, and had two German corpses with gunshot wounds to the backs of their heads. Things looked grim.

The situation was also deteriorating for the "unsurrounded" sections of Task Force Hogan, the headquarters assault-gun and mortar platoon, located 12 kilometers northwest of Sam's position among the ridgetop hamlets of Hotton and Melreux. Staff Sergeant Arnold "Slack" Schlaich and Sergeant Grimes knew they were in trouble from monitoring the battalion radio net and from all the fire missions they had executed in the past 48 hours. After dawn on the 22nd, they fought off repeated probes by the forward enemy units that had already bypassed the Americans in Marcouray.

Looking out the window of a small stone building the mortars were using as their fire-direction center, Sergeant Grimes was shocked to see a Panther tank 300 meters away and moving toward Hotton. The tank was astride railroad tracks leading straight toward the little mortar section. "Kozloski! Svoboda! Get your gear! Enemy tanks coming up!" Unable to do much against an approaching tank with mortars, Grimes raised the alarm over the radio. Several intrepid souls of the 36th Infantry Regiment ambushed the lone Panther, taking it out with Bazooka fire from the rear.

Sergeant Grimes' mortar section, Kozloski, Svoboda, and a third man named Debone, spent the entire night firing flares and alternating with high explosives when the little parachutes illuminated any enemy advance. Still, the Germans were able to slip past Hotton through an enfilade, skirting the town to cut off the assault-gun platoon in Melreux. They met stiff resistance from Schlaich's lightly armored, snub-nosed howitzers shooting in direct-fire mode. The uneven duel went on into the 23rd, and as the Germans got closer Schlaich called in artillery and mortar fire, disrupting their attack. As the frigid evening grew near, the men in Melreux grimly prepared to destroy their assault guns, now close to empty of fuel and ammunition, and move by foot to rejoin their comrades in Hotton under the covering umbrella of their mortar fire.

Back in Marcouray, a German officer under a flag of truce arrived in a Kubelwagen, requesting to see the American commander. Blindfolded, the German lieutenant was led to Sam's command post in the abandoned farmhouse. The battalion surgeon, Captain Louis Spigelman, a nice Jewish doctor from New York who completed medical training at the American University in Beirut, took time from caring for the 17 wounded troopers to help translate. With Doc Spigelman's Yiddish and Sam's broken German, they began the parlay. The German unlimbered a note signed by a colonel general demanding surrender. It boasted that Hogan was surrounded by three German panzer divisions and that "with a desire to avoid unnecessary bloodshed," the Germans would accept the Americans' surrender.

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Sam lit a cigarette—partially to calm his nerves and to deceive the German that the Americans were well supplied. Taking a drag and thoughtfully letting it out, he replied, "We have orders to fight to the death, and as soldiers we will obey those orders." Hogan added menacingly, "We've plenty of firepower and ammunition; if you want this town, you can try and take it." The German officer, ramrod straight and shaking his head with disdain, returned to his lines.

The Americans settled in for a freezing Christmas surrounded on all sides. Cargo planes attempting to drop supplies by parachute met withering walls of antiaircraft fire protecting a German corps headquarters nearby. The despondent American ground troops saw white parachutes drift down into the woods, but from such low altitudes that a safe landing seemed improbable. Prayers were whispered from chapped, wind-burned lips that the flyers survived their falls and any would-be German executioners.

Two American fliers, bruised, battered but alive, walked into Sam's perimeter bearing news that theirs was the last attempted supply drop. They had departed England hours earlier with only a vague idea of where to drop their canisters of fuel and medical supplies. An unfortunate mixup in the 435th Troop Carrier Group operations tent in Surrey had resulted in confusion of the town names of Marcouray and Marcourt, the few supplies landing within enemy lines at Marcourt, a Christmas present for the Germans. A last-ditch attempt to fire 105mm artillery shells loaded with medical supplies accurately delivered small canisters into the task force perimeter; however, the vials of plasma were all crushed.

On Christmas Eve 1944, in the worst winter to batter the Ardennes in over 100 years, with ammunition running low and all fuel exhausted, Task Force Hogan hatched a daring nighttime escape through the enemy encirclement. All day the starving, freezing soldiers prepared: tank engines ran without oil until they seized up, tires were slashed with bayonets or "dad's old hunting knife," and sugar was poured into fuel tanks. Noisy equipment was broken and abandoned.

Soldiers blackened their faces with cork ash or campfire soot, commando style. The freezing darkness creeping upon them was bittersweet to the American soldiers as they assembled in one long column of 400. Doc Spigelman volunteered to stay behind with the 17 soldiers too wounded to walk on their own. Sam and Doc knew what could happen to a Jewish officer captured by the Germans, but Spigelman refused to leave his wounded.

One last radio transmission came in before the radios were smashed to pieces at the end of a rifle butt: "A patrol from the 82nd Airborne will guide you into friendly lines, challenge and password are 'Final'—'Edition'—out." Some Joe at headquarters had a grim sense of humor. Sam hoped the last words would not be prophetic.

It is tough to overstate how difficult it is to move 400 soldiers through wooded, snow-covered terrain at night in peacetime, much less through a gauntlet of German tanks and infantry. The Christmas march took the entire night. There were several close calls. The closest involved point man Sergeant Lee Porter of the battalion scouts, halting his silent slog through the frozen woods as he came upon the dark shadow of a German sentry blurting out a challenge. Before the German could react or call for help, the Missourian pounced on him, covering his mouth with his left hand while plunging his bayonet into the German's jugular vein with his right. Porter lowered him to the ground, motioning the sign "move forward" as the column marched on speechless. They had gotten lucky.

The cold dawn illuminated the long column of tired, bedraggled soldiers as they made it past friendly lines into an old farming compound in the village of Soy. Frowns turned to grins as the

waiting regimental cooks poured hot soup and coffee into ration tins and canteen cups. Big chunks of baked bread passed into hands still stinging with the first signs of frostbite. Combat camera crews were on hand to capture the unbelievable escape of a surrounded battalion from under the Germans' noses.

With his men around him, face still camouflaged, his head bundled against the cold, Sam stood tall in front of Third Armored's revered commander, Major General Maurice Rose. Sam didn't know if he would get dressed down, relieved, or congratulated. Immaculately uniformed in taupe-colored riding breeches, polished knee-high riding boots and gleaming steel helmet in front of his disheveled subordinate, his hands on his hips, General Rose asked Sam in his business-like, commanding voice why he was the last one out. Sam thought of several heroic things to say and finally uttered the truth: "My feet hurt." General Rose cracked a rare smile, patted Sam on the back, and returned to his Jeep. After a short tactical road march, Hogan's 400 camped at Barvaux, where they remained through the New Year to reequip and reorganize.

Back in surrounded Marcouray, Doc Spigelman woke to a clear, quiet dawn surrounded by his two medical sergeants and the 17 wounded troopers. The ruse had worked. The Germans still believed the town occupied. As planned, he assembled his motley crew of wounded soldiers and prisoners and, under a Red Cross flag, began marching out of town trying to reach U.S. lines on their own. They reached the first German roadblock, where astonished sentries attempted to detain them. With his Yiddish and pointing to the Red Cross flag, Spigelman was able to pass that and two more checkpoints until upon reaching the final one, where they were held until "completion of our upcoming attack."

The German attack did not go as planned; by then word had gotten back that the American battalion holding up progress at Marcouray had exfiltrated to its own lines. Doc and his wounded soldiers became prisoners of war. Doc remained a prisoner for four months, escaped, was recaptured, and finally was liberated by US forces at the end of the war.

Overnight, Hogan's 400 and Task Force Hogan became household names, and the story of their intrepid breakout made the *Stars and Stripes* and then state and national news. Sam's wife and her girlfriends giddily awaited the newsreels at the local cinema to try and catch a glimpse of Sam's camouflaged face among his 400 men. The legend of Task Force Hogan was cemented as the unit broke out of its "mini-Bastogne" on Christmas night and rejoined Spearhead to counterattack and pinch off the Bulge. For Sam and his soldiers, there was no time for accolades. They scribbled short letters home telling their loved ones that they had survived Hitler's last gamble in the West, then prepared for some payback.

Sam's boys received new equipment. Marcouray or "Hogan's crossroads," as it was being called by division troops, was retaken by other Spearhead elements on January 7, 1945. The Germans had not been able to use any of the equipment left behind. Task Force Hogan, rearmed with only 12 medium and 10 light tanks, plus supporting Infantry of the 83rd "Thunderbolt" Infantry Division, moved out for some payback across roads choked with German vehicles destroyed by U.S. artillery in the preceding weeks.

Ten miles to the south, the First and Third U.S. Armies linked up. The lost ground regained and the Bulge eliminated, Montgomery sent the following secret cable to General Dwight D. Eisenhower, the supreme Allied commander:

"I have great pleasure in reporting to you that the task you gave me in the Ardennes is now concluded. First and Third Armies have joined hands at Houffalize and are advancing eastwards. It can therefore be said we have now achieved tactical victory within the salient. I am returning First Army to Bradley tomorrow as ordered by you. I would like to say what a great pleasure it has been to have such a splendid Army under my command and how very well it has done."

During the Battle of the Bulge, Spearhead sustained losses of 125 medium tanks, 38 light tanks, and 1,473 casualties including 187 killed in action. For Hogan's 400, the war was far from over. There remained another four and a half months of hard fighting, fatigue, sleepless nights, and the loss of close friends, but the U.S. Army had withstood the largest offensive directed against it in the entire war.

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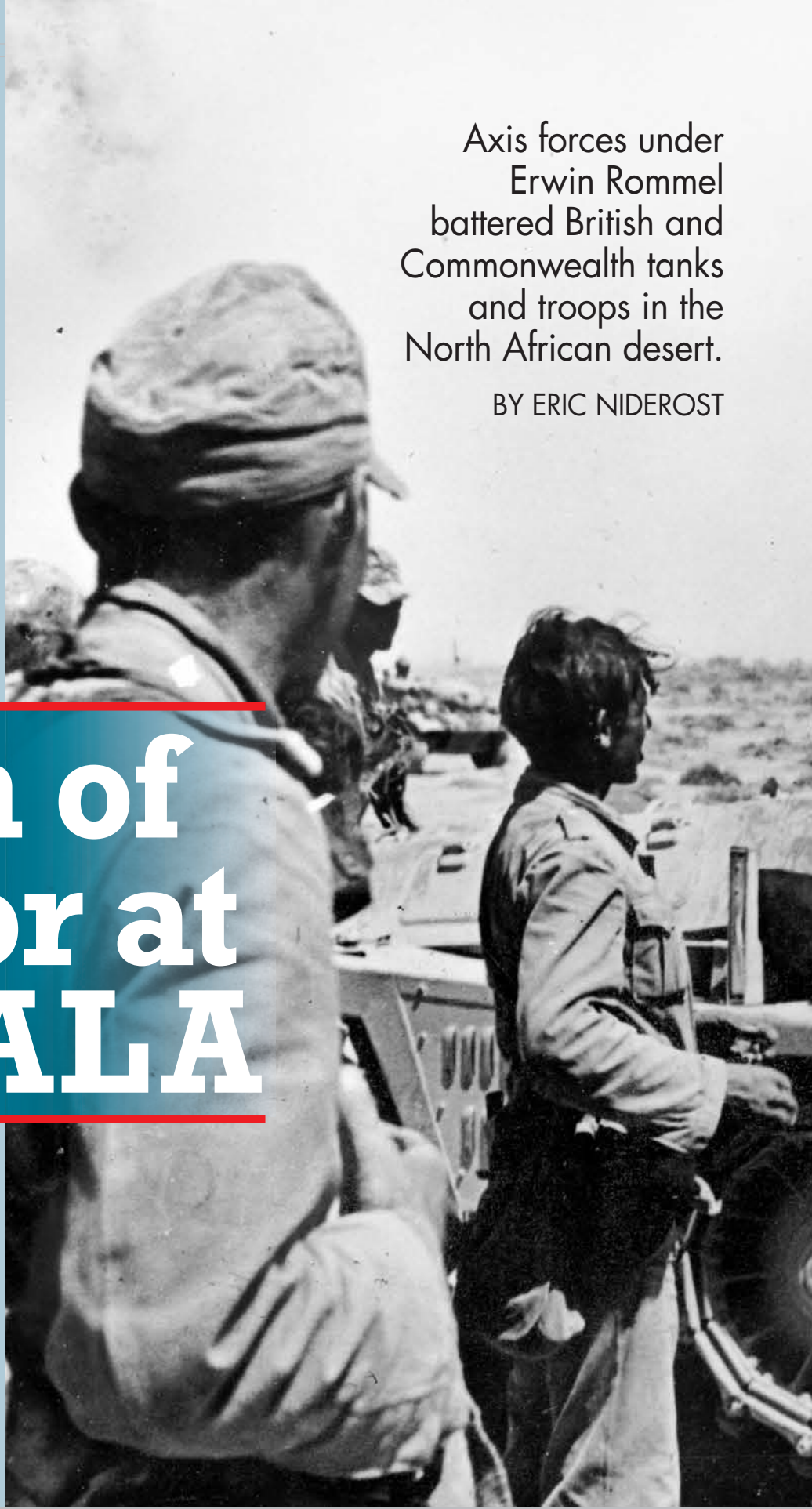
ABOVE: Their faces blackened as camouflage during their night march through German lines, men of 'Hogan's 400' pass out Lucky Strike cigarettes to one another and celebrate their survival from the desperate combat that characterized the Battle of the Bulge. OPPOSITE: The abandoned hulks of two German armored vehicles, probably Sturmgeschutze assault guns, are pictured in this aerial image taken after the battle at Hotton.

William R. Hogan is a fourth-generation U.S. Army officer who has served across the world from Bosnia to Haiti and Afghanistan. He is the youngest son of Colonel (Ret.) Samuel M. Hogan and is completing a book on the exploits of Task Force Hogan from Normandy to the Elbe. He currently resides in Paris, serving as an exchange officer on the French Army Staff.

Clash of Armor at GAZALA

Axis forces under Erwin Rommel battered British and Commonwealth tanks and troops in the North African desert.

BY ERIC NIDEROST



Generaloberst Erwin Rommel, commander of the Panzerarmee Afrika, was in his element, riding in an armored car at top speed through the desiccated plains of the Libyan desert. It was early evening of May 26, 1942, and Rommel was in the lead as usual, advancing with the vanguard of an armored spearhead he hoped would deliver a crushing defeat to the British enemy.

Rommel was already a legend in his own time, honored by friend and foe alike and dubbed the Desert Fox. He was a familiar figure to both his men and to the German public, thanks to the newsreel cameramen that always seemed to be around to record his deeds and embellish his growing legend. Goggles wrapped around his peaked cap, binoculars hung around his neck, the Iron Cross and the Blue Max—the latter a high award from the First World War—clustered at his throat.

He was leading "Gruppe Rommel," which consisted of four major elements, all travelling parallel to one another. From left to right there was the Italian 20th Corps, the 21st Panzer Division, the 15th Panzer Division, and finally the 90th Leiche (Light) Division. Counting tanks, armored cars, and support and supply trucks of every size, around 10,000 tracked and wheeled vehicles were following in Rommel's wake.

The desert at night was usually quiet, but now the engine noises joined with the clattering, grinding, rumbling sounds of tank treads to produce a metallic cacophony that echoed and re-echoed through the night. And that wasn't all: the leading tanks kicked up the fine-grained, powdery desert sand until great plumes ascended skyward to mark the armor's rum-

Field Marshal Erwin Rommel visits with troops of the Africa Korps while inspecting positions in the Tobruk fortress belt. Rommel is aboard his light-infantry command vehicle SdKfz. 250/3 'Greif.' The vehicle is equipped with radio-communications gear; note the antenna apparatus atop the open personnel area.

Bundesarchiv Bild Bild 146-1991-031-25A; Photo: Koch

bling passage.

But these sand clouds also stayed near the ground, a gritty "fog" that was made worse by a dark night. The tank drivers were all but blind in these conditions and had to be guided by tank commanders standing in open hatches, shouting down directions. The commanders themselves relied on compasses, but even so, visibility was so bad there were occasional collisions and near misses. If a vehicle was too badly damaged to continue, it was placed to one side, and the trek wore on. The Germans and Italians advancing with Rommel shared his optimism. He had pulled off near-miracles before—why not again?

The desert war began in 1940, when Italian dictator Benito Mussolini hoped to emulate the successes of Nazi Germany. Sensing a complete Axis victory, eager for his share of the spoils, Mussolini cast covetous eyes on British-occupied Egypt, right next door to the Italian colony of Libya. The British Western Desert Force there numbered only around 63,000, seemingly no match for the 200,000 Italian troops stationed in Libya under Marshal Rodolfo Graziani.

The Italians attacked Egypt in the fall of 1940, but a British counteroffensive quickly turned the tables on Mussolini's legions. The Italians hardly knew what hit them, and they were sent packing in a headlong 400-mile retreat that did not stop until they reached Beda Fomm. But then the British offensive ran out of steam, in part because Prime Minister Winston Churchill was sending troops to Greece to support the tiny Balkan nation against the Nazis.

But it had still been a humiliating defeat for the Italians, and Hitler felt he must intervene to help his ally. In February 1941, the first elements of the Deutsches Afrika Korps (DAK), or German Africa Corps, arrived in Tripoli. They were commanded by Rommel, destined for desert greatness.

For the next year, the British and Germans fought a see-saw battle in the sun-baked plains of North Africa. Rommel's first offensive was successful, and he pushed the British back to Egypt, but they reposted with an attack code-named Operation Crusader. Crusader forced the Germans and Italians to retreat back to Libya. Rommel ended up at his starting point for the 1941 campaign.

There was some fighting in early 1942, but for the most part both sides paused to gather strength for the next round, a clash that might well determine the course of the war in the Middle East. The British Commander in Chief Middle East was General Sir Claude Auchinleck, a man who was widely respected as a good soldier. Unfortunately, he lacked experience in armored warfare, and tanks were the principle means of victory in the desert.

General Auchinleck, affectionately nicknamed "the Auk," was a man who believed in thorough, even meticulous, preparation before attempting any offensive action. Most of his officers were of the same mind. Unfortunately, Auchinleck had to deal with British Prime Minister Winston Churchill, who was always ready to sack generals if they didn't share his pugnacious instincts. Churchill knew the war was going badly for the Allies and felt a victory was needed to assuage morale.

The Prime Minister put enormous pressure on "the Auk," all but demanding an offensive be launched against Rommel at once. When the general demurred, Churchill sent him a curt message that went straight to the point: "Com-

Rommel's attacks at the end of May 1942 inflicted a heavy defeat on the British forces at Gazala as the German armored spearheads attempted to outflank the British and Commonwealth defensive line. For a time, the British believed the main Axis assault was a feint.

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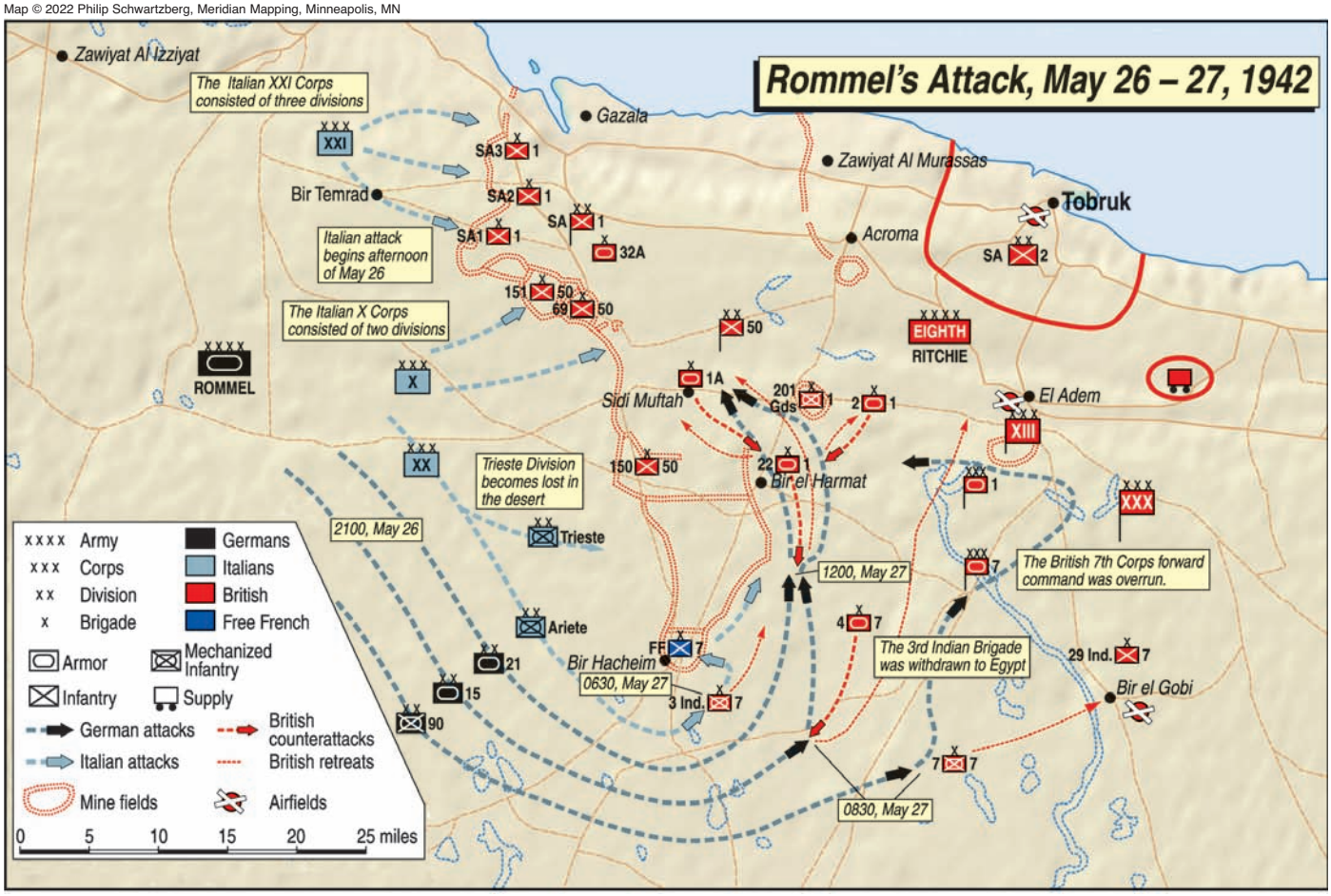


Imperial War Museum

A PzKpfw. III churns up a cloud of desert sand as it advances across the battlefield in June 1942. The German victory at Gazala sent the British reeling back across the Egyptian frontier to El Alamein.

ply or resign." Almost against his better judgement, Auchinleck promised an offensive in June 1942. It was obvious that the Germans also were going to launch an offensive sometime in the future—but when?

To guard against any sudden German attacks,the Gazala Line was established. This arrangement was a far cry from the unbroken lines of trenches, bunkers and forts that characterized warfare on the Western Front during World War I. Instead, a series of self-contained, self-sufficient strongpoints were strung out like a "necklace" from Gazala on the Mediterranean coast to Bir Hacheim, a distance of some 43 miles.

Each strongpoint, called a "box," was manned by a full brigade, and each was further protected by tangles of prickly barbed wire and vast stretches of minefields. It was recognized that the Gazala Line could not go on forever, and whatever "box" anchored the end would be of crucial importance to the overall defense. Bir Hacheim was that anchor and was manned by the First Free French Brigade under General Marie Pierre Koenig.

The boxes, sometimes called "keeps" in memory of medieval castle fortifications, had enough food, water, gasoline, and ammunition to be self-sufficient for a week. Each was about one to two miles in circumference, and the minefields and barbed wire were supplemented by slit trenches and pillboxes. Besides the all-important Bir Hacheim, other boxes included strong points at El Adem, Knightsbridge, and Commonwealth Keep.

The Gazala Line was certainly formidable and made the best use of available British forces, but it had a number of inherent weaknesses. The line was long, but it lacked depth. In fact, a second line was starting construction, but the Germans attacked before it could seriously be put in hand. The boxes were also too far apart to be mutually supportive of one another. For example, the 150th infantry box was 16 miles away from Bir Hacheim.

Though "the Auk" was the supreme commander in the Middle East, the British Eighth Army was led by his subordinate, Lt. Gen. Neil Ritchie. Ritchie was another infantryman with no experience in the tactical use of armor in warfare. There was a difference of opinion between Auchinleck and Ritchie when it came to determining German moves. This differing of opinion was going to impact the course of the battle in its early stages.

Richie was of the opinion that Rommel was going to stage a demonstration along the coast road, then head south to go around Bir Hacheim and outflank the entire Gazala line. Auchinlek disagreed, feeling the main German/Italian thrust would be in the north, along the coast road by the Mediterranean. Subsequent events were to prove Richie right.

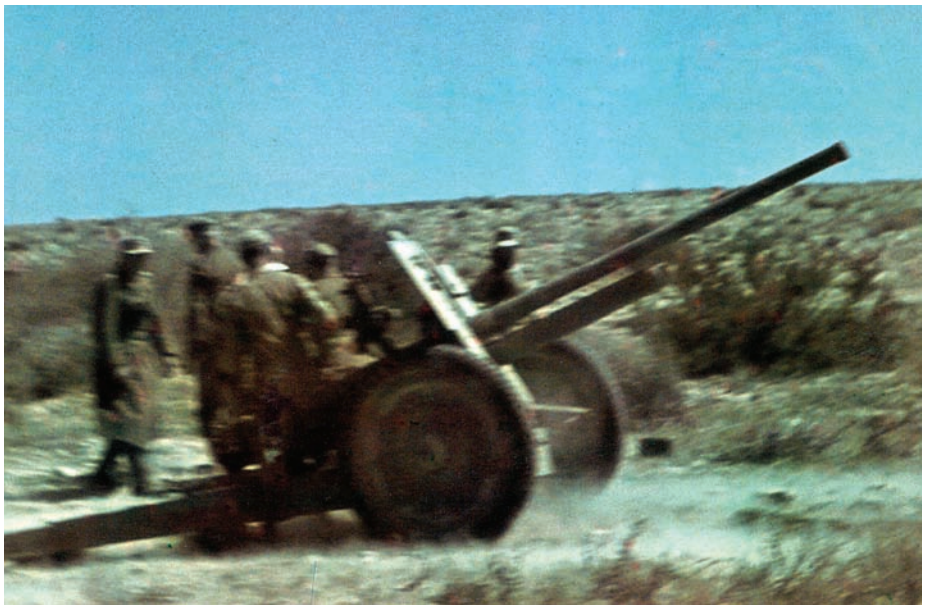
The Eighth Amy had 100,000 men, with the bulk of the infantry in the strongpoint boxes. The British XIII Corps, largely infantry, included the 50th (Northumberland) Division, the 1st South Africa Division, and the Second South Africa Division. The XXX Corps, Lt. Gen. C.W.M. Norrie commanding, contained the 1st and 7th Armored Divisions.

The Eighth Army had more tanks than Rommel, but the quality was uneven. Some British tank models were prone to mechanical failures, and the main gun was the 2-pounder (40mm), an absurdly lightweight weapon with poor penetrating power for the effective ranges of most battles.

However, the British now had the American made M-3 Grant, which had thick armor, mechanical reliability, and a powerful 75mm gun—better than most German tanks had at the time. It was a stopgap tank, quickly designed and put into production to serve emergency needs. At the time, American industry was still gearing up for war and couldn't yet manufacture a full turret. For that reason, the 75mm gun was placed in a side mounting called a sponson.

Rommel decided that his offensive would

Both: National Archives



ABOVE: A German field artillery piece goes into action as its crew prepares to fire the weapon at the British. Artillery was a strong deterrent to advancing tanks and armored vehicles, and the larger German 88mm antiaircraft gun was especially adept at killing British tanks. TOP: An Italian M13/40 tank of the Ariete Division is silhouetted against the horizon during the fighting of June 10, 1942.

involve two major components: Group Cruwell and Group Rommel. Group Cruwell, commanded by General Ludwig Cruwell, would have the task of staging an attack in the north, along the coast road, exactly where most British officers though it would come. In reality, Cruwell's advance would be only a feint, a diversion, to disguise the fact that the real blow was going to come via a flanking movement further south.

While Cruwell occupied British attention in the north, Rommel would take the main strike force and head south toward Bir Hacheim under the cover of darkness. Once he circled around and got behind the boxes, he would defeat any armor the British might have in the area and proceed northward. Those infantry strongpoint boxes, outflanked and outmaneuvered, would be helpless to stop him.

Rommel's immediate objective was Tobruk, the port city on the Mediterranean that had been a thorn in his side in 1941. If it could be captured by the Germans and held, it might then be used as a staging area for the capture of Malta. The possibility that the Eighth Army might be destroyed and a path to Egypt and the Suez Canal be opened were added bonuses.

Rommel's plans reflected the man himself—bold, innovative, often brilliant, and willing to take calculated risks. But his scheme also had flaws, blind spots that nearly became his undoing. He had absolutely no idea that the British had those new hard-hitting Grant tanks. His ideas on supplying his troops were based on faulty assumptions and bad intelligence reports.

The main strike force was allotted only enough gasoline for 300 miles of offensive action and enough supplies for 96 hours. The Germans envisioned a supply corridor between the northern boxes and Bir Hacheim via the desert tracks of Trigh Capuzzo and Trigh el Abid. Rommel did not know of the existence of the 150th Group Box, which covered those paths.

Rommel also assumed that Bir Hacheim would fall fairly quickly, thus shortening his supply "umbilical chord."

Rommel's offensive began with an attack by General Cruwell in the northern section of the Gazala Line, specifically British positions between Gazala and Sidi Mufah. A German artillery barrage started the action, and Luftwaffe Junkers Ju-87 Stuka dive bombers plummeted again and again, screaming like metal birds of prey as they bombed and strafed British positions. Cruwell's force was mainly Italian, consisting of the Sabratha, Trento, Brescia, and Pavia Divisions, supported by a brigade from the German 90th Light.

The tanks kicked up huge clouds of dust, but as the sun sank into the western horizon and the shadows deepened into night, the panzers were replaced by trucks carrying aircraft engines. It was all part of Rommel's plan to make the British think Cruwell's attack was the main German offensive. The aircraft engine propellers stirred up massive amounts of sand and debris, resulting in massive cloud plumes that simulated formations of tanks on the move.

Rommel's push south began seemingly without a hitch. By first light, his panzers had executed a left wheel just south of Bir Hacheim, using that fortress as kind of a pivot. Though Rommel convinced himself that this massive move was undetected, in fact the movement had been spotted much earlier by the 4th South African Armored Car Regiment, which subsequently followed the invaders and relayed every move to headquarters.

Unfortunately, forewarned is not always forearmed, and little was done for hours after reports filtered in. Both General Ritchie and his subordinate General Norrie of XXX Corps were plagued by an indecisiveness that often is

Imperial War Museum

In this image, a German vehicle has come to grief. An American-built M3 Grant tank passes the blasted hulk of an Axis tank as its British crew surveys the wreckage. The Germans were reportedly surprised by the appearance of the Grant on the battlefield at Gazala.

fatal in war. Norrie was the one with the bulk of Eight Army's tanks and armored vehicles and the best chance to stop Rommel's advance. Both Ritchie and Norrie hesitated, unsure if Rommel's drive south was a feint.

German and Italian tanks and troops successfully completed the left wheel without incident and were soon speeding northward on paths that were east of the Gazala Line. But they were not going to be unopposed, at least not for long. Scattered elements of the 7th Armored Division, Major General Frank Messervy commanding, were in the area, ensuring a major confrontation in the south.

In the morning hours just before dawn some British units were in the dark both literally and figuratively. The 4th Armored Brigade had been told to move forward at 2:30 in the morning, the better to support both the 7th Motor Brigade and the 3rd Indian Motor Brigade. The 3rd Indian was surprised when attacked by the 21st Panzer and the Italian Ariete Division.

Around 6:30 on the morning of May 27, the British finally got the idea that this southern push was no feint. Brigadier General Anthony A. E. Filose, commanding the 3rd Indian, radioed his superior General Messervy that he faced "a whole bloody German armored division." They were actually Italian tanks from the Ariete Division, but the comment wasn't too far off the mark.

The Italians hit hard and fast, and within a half hour the 3rd Indian was wiped out. A few managed to escape, but 450 officers and men were now stunned POWs. The 3rd Indian Motor Brigade's war diary laconically notes its "positions were overrun." Happy, and even ebullient, over their victory, the Ariete Division moved on to Bir Hacheim, where they were to find the Free French an entirely different proposition.

The German 90th Light Division made contact with the 7th Motor Brigade about this time, and the results were much the same. Surprised and outnumbered, the 7th Motor tried to regain the initiative by withdrawing into their strongpoint "keep," the Retma Box. It did little good. The Germans steamrolled their way into Retma with relative ease, capturing the post and sending what remained of the 7th Motor in headlong retreat in a northeasterly direction.

This was Auchinleck's worst nightmare. Earlier, he had insisted that British armor should not attack piecemeal, in "penny packets" as the saying went, where small unsupported units could be defeated in succession. But this was exactly what was happening, in part because of the surprise of Rommel's move—it was suspected to be a feint at first—and the size of his southern offensive.

Things were happening so fast General Messervy found it hard to make sense of it all. Confusion reigned; radio reports told of a German advance that was seemingly coming in all directions. The 7th Armored Division's headquarters were not at a fixed location, but consisted of the general and his staff riding in five armored command vehicles. Merservy got word that German armored cars were coming in his direction, and about the same time shells started to explode around his command car, the dirty blossoms of flame and smoke coming perilously close with each hit.

Three of the command vehicles managed to escape, but a fourth was hit and was quickly engulfed in flames. Moments later a German 30mm shell slammed into Merservy's car, killing the driver. There wasn't much more Meservy and his two staff companions could do but surrender. Luckily, they had just enough time to destroy the cypher code books, and the general removed all badges of rank.

Stripped of his insignia and dressed in a shirt and shorts, Merservy pretended to be a simple private, perhaps an orderly to an officer. The ruse worked, though he was almost discovered when a German officer noted his greying hair. "Aren't you a bit old to be a private?" "Yes,"

Imperial War Museum

ABOVE: The crew of a Free French anti-tank gun prepares for action in the desert. The Free French garrison of the defensive position at Bir Hacheim proved a tough nut for the Germans to crack during their June 1942 offensive. RIGHT: Mary Travers, a British socialite turned soldier, served with the Free French at Bir Hacheim. OPPOSITE: A column of German tanks rolls forward during the fighting at Gazala. Field Marshal Rommel seized the initiative and drove the British and Free French from the Gazala Line, but by the end of June the Allied forces had formed a new defensive line at El Alamein.

answered Merservy without a pause, "It's a bloody disgrace they've called me up at my age!" In a scenario that seems more Hollywood than reality, Merservy and his companions actually escaped German captivity the next day.

So far, the German had had things their way. Now, for the first time, they were about to encounter the new M3 Grant tanks in battle. These were tanks of the 4th Armored Brigade, specifically from the 3rd Royal Tank Regiment. The Grants began firing their 75mm guns to good effect, and even when they came within range, the lighter German shells just bounced off the thick metal hides of these lumbering metallic beasts.

Panic started to spread among the men of the 15th Panzer, and Rommel himself later admitted, "The advent of the new American tank tore great holes in our ranks." Panzer after panzer was "brewed up," reduced to twisted metal hulks engulfed in flames. The Grants were neutralized to an extent by a flank attack by the deadly German 88mm artillery, so the 3rd Tank Regiment was forced to withdraw to the north.

The 8th Hussars and 5th Royal Tank Regiments came up in succession, and they, too, gave a good account of themselves before being compelled to withdraw. Even with the Grants, single battalions fighting in piecemeal fashion against entire panzer divisions was not the way to victory. But the Germans had been taught a sharp lesson and had lost many tanks in the process.

The 7th Armored Division was essentially out of the action, with many formations destroyed or scattered and badly in need of regrouping. The 1st Armored was the Eighth Army's last hope, and it did rise to the occasion. After very heavy fighting, it managed to blunt, if not altogether stop, Rommel's drive.

The Desert Fox's plans were starting to unravel just when he seemed to be on the brink of his greatest success. His panzers were running perilously low on fuel and ammunition, and even water—that key ingredient in desert warfare—was in short supply. Bir Hacheim had not fallen, which meant the Germans had to travel extra miles to avoid that dangerous obstacle, and also meant waiting extra time for depleted stores to be replenished.

The next day, May 28, the fighting resumed with new intensity. The Germans ignored their supply problems, if only for the moment, and pushed on. The 21st Panzer reached Commonwealth Keep, a box that was near the Sidra Ridge, but still short of the Mediterranean by about five miles. There was some small good news: the Italian Motorized Division "Trieste" had cleared a path through an undefended minefield just north of Bir Hacheim. It was a narrow trail, but a shorter route for supply trucks to get through to Rommel.

The new path helped, but the trickle was still not enough to fully ease the increasingly critical supply situation. The bulk of Rommel's forces were still east of an undefeated and generally unbroken Gazala Line. Rommel had delivered a series of powerful blows, but even after tank losses the British still outnumbered him in men, materiel, and armor. And the Panzerarmee Afrika had not emerged unscathed; perhaps a third of its panzers were out of action.

Rommel's men were also running out of water, and not enough was getting through to supply basic needs. A British POW, Major Archer Shee, personally complained to Rommel that he and his fellow prisoners were only getting a half a cup of water a day. "It's the same as we get," replied Rommel, "but I agree this can't go on forever. If we can't get a convoy in tonight, I'll have to ask General Ritchie for terms."

Some water and supplies did reach the Panzerarmee, and at one point Rommel personally led a supply convoy through to his troops. But the Desert Fox was at bay, and it was during this period—around May 28 to June 1—that he was at his most vulnerable. But timing is everything in war, and Ritchie launched major counterattacks on June 3, which were repulsed with heavy fighting.

Necessity is supposed to be the mother of invention, and it certainly must have seemed that way to Rommel. He decided to "fort up," going on the defensive with British boxes and minefields all around him. He wanted German engineers to clear a broader supply path to the west, an action that would simultaneously breech the Gazala Line. While the engineers worked feverishly to accomplish this task, a ring of German 88mm artillery would fend off any British armor attacks from the east.

But there was a major problem—the path the engineers were carving out was perilously close to 150 Box. Artillery shells from that box rained down constantly, slowing progress and producing German casualties. While Ritchie dithered, trying to decide the best course of action in light of an ever-changing situation, Rommel threw the whole weight of the Afrika Korps on 150th Brigade box, which fell after heroic resistance on June 1.

British responses were also hampered by the weather. Howling winds kicked up powerful sandstorms on June 1-2, the yellow clouds of sand particles obscuring everything in their path. A major Eighth Army counteroffensive, Operation Aberdeen, was launched on June 5, but it ended up a fiasco of major proportions. Something like 150 tanks were lost, victims of the deadly German 88s, and 4,000 men were taken prisoner.

Rommel now turned his attention to Bir Hacheim, determined to remove that thorn in his side once and for all. There were around 3,600 men at Bir Hacheim, many of them in the celebrated French Foreign Legion, and they were determined to erase the shame of the 1940 defeat at the hands of the Germans.

General Koenig was a tough old soldier, as determined to hold out as his men, but he did have had some further comfort in his chauffeur and lover, Mary Travers. She was English, daughter of a wealthy businessman, and before the war had been a beautiful socialite addicted to parties, champagne, and lovers. But when the war broke out, she turned serious, and became a nurse and later a chauffeur. Though Travers and Koenig became lovers, she refused to be left behind when he was assigned Bir Hacheim.

Day after day, the Germans pounded Bir Hacheim with artillery and Stuka dive bombing attacks, followed up by land assaults. The fighting was often hand-to-hand, and though the defensive perimeter shrank, it did not break. The British somehow managed to get a trickle of supplies and ammunition into the beleaguered garrison, but it was clear the Germans had the upper hand.

On June 10, General Ritchie ordered the Free French to withdraw from Bir Hacheim. Evacuation was done under the cover of darkness, but eventually the Germans discovered the movement and all hell broke loose. The French had to run the gauntlet of German machine-gun fire and artillery shells. General Koenig's car, Mary at the wheel, at one point paused at a large shell hole, and in the darkness the passengers heard German voices all around them.

Travers later recalled, "Tracer fire started coming at us … We had to drive as fast as we jolly well could in the pitch dark … We got through, almost the entire brigade. I had eleven bullet holes in my car, but we made it." The fall of Bir Hacheim was a major psychological blow to British morale. British counterattacks had been badly timed and badly executed, though fought with great courage.

Both sides were exhausted, but Panzerarmee Afrika now had the momentum for victory. The British XXX Corps was down to 70 tanks and seemed to be on the verge of collapse. Panzerarmee Afrika had even fewer, with the Germans fielding just 44 tanks and the Italians around 14. But Rommel had smelled victory, and nothing was going to stop him now. A few days later, Tobruk, that symbol of British resistance, fell to the Germans.

Auchinleck felt the battered Eighth Army needed precious time to rest and reorganize, so he ordered a withdrawal to Egypt, there to secure a line between the Qattara Depression and El Alamein. As the British withdrew to the east, their headlong flight was dubbed the "Gazala gallop." By June 30, 1942, all British units that were capable of escape had done so.

Gazala was Rommel's greatest triumph, but even his tactical genius and audacity could not overcome logistics and geography. Adolf Hitler was preoccupied with the Russian front and looked on North Africa as a sideshow scarcely worthy of his attention.

And in Egypt, the great Qattara Depression meant that the bold flanking moves that the Desert Fox relished would be a thing of the past. That November, Rommel was decisively defeated at El Alamein.

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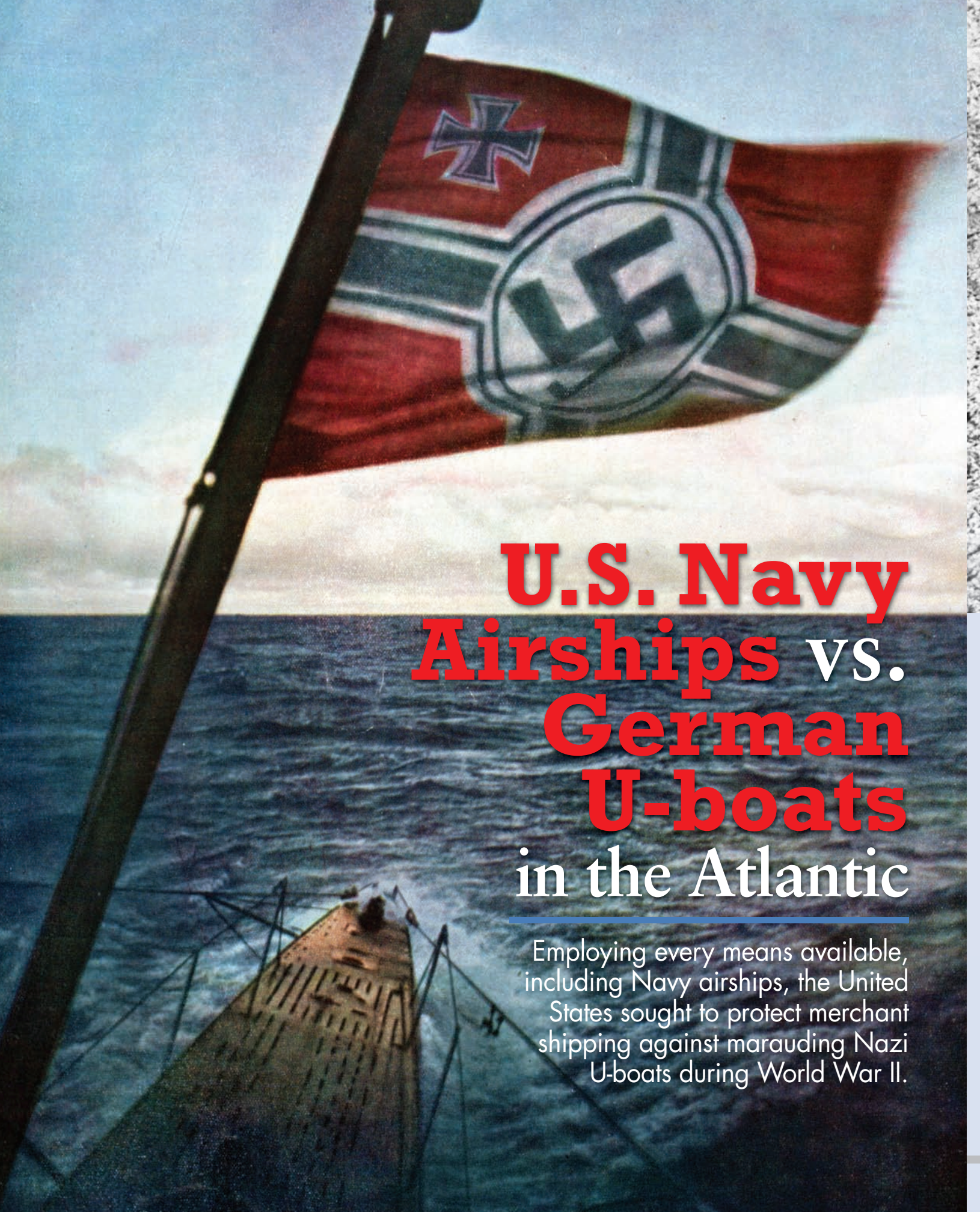
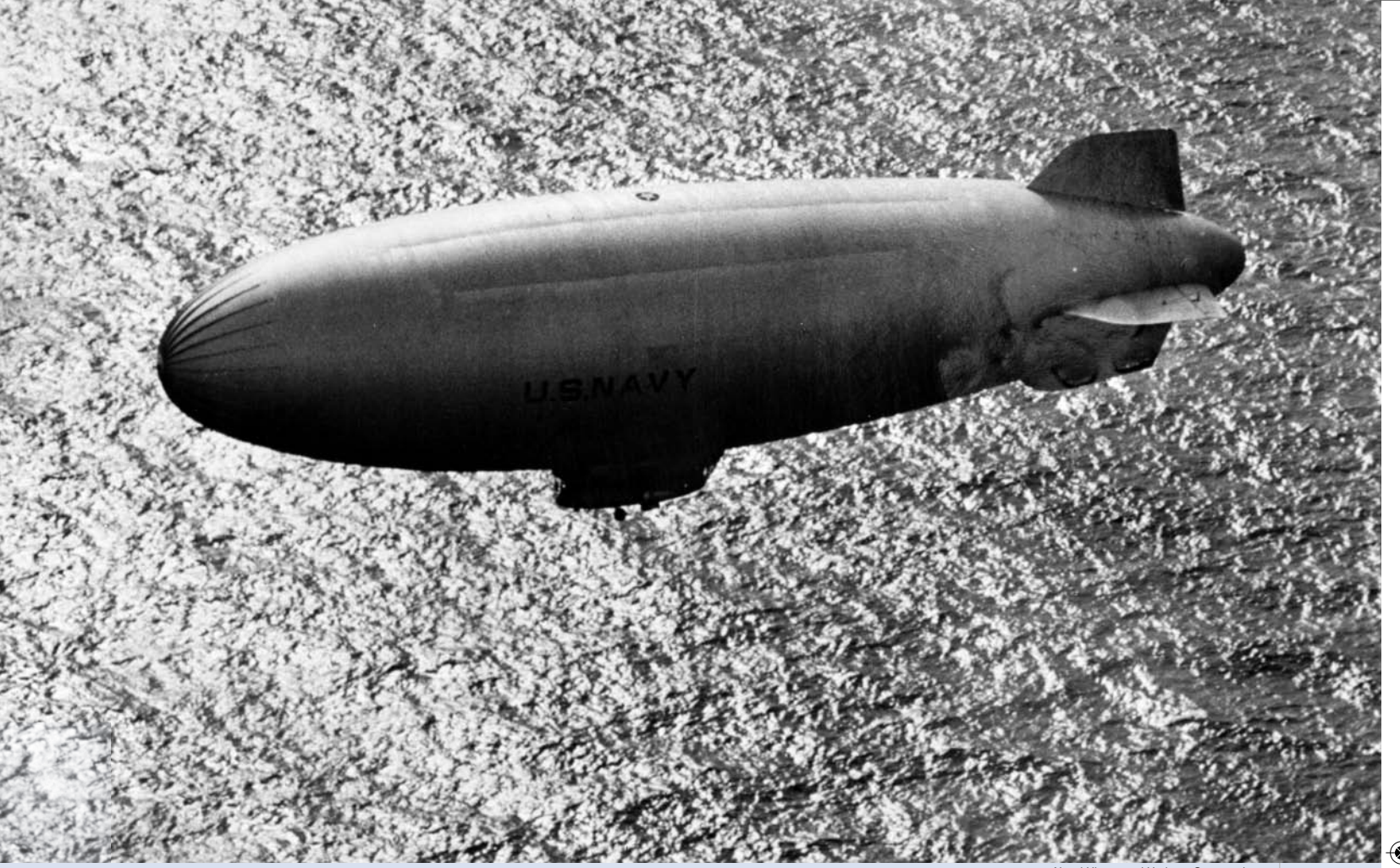


U.S. Navy Airships vs. German U-boats in the Atlantic

Employing every means available, including Navy airships, the United States sought to protect merchant shipping against marauding Nazi U-boats during World War II.



Naval History and Heritage Command

BY ERIC NIDEROST

Kapitanleutnant Volker Simmermacher gazed intently through his attack periscope, sizing up the target that so far seemed oblivious to his presence. Yes, the silhouette was unmistakable—an American "liberty" cargo ship. Simmermacher was skipper of the *U-107*, and the German submarine was just returning from a minelaying expedition off the Georgia coast. Now, about 110 miles from Savannah, here was a chance to score a sinking. The *U-107* was a Type IXB submarine, a boat that normally carried 22 torpedoes, and Simmermacher wasn't about to pass up such an excellent opportunity—or so it seemed.

But there was a complication: the targeted ship, S.S. *Albert Gallatin,* was not alone. A U.S. Navy airship hovered in the skies nearby, a guardian angel to the vulnerable freighter. The Kapitaneutnant had actually spotted the airship before the *Albert Gallatin,* and now he had to decide what to do. These airships—Luftschiffs to the Germans—were becoming a more common sight ever since their first appearance in early 1942. It was now July 1943, and the conflict which later historians called the Battle of the Atlantic was at its height.

Simmermacher decided to throw caution to the wind and attack the *Albert Gallatin* immediately, trusting he could escape before that *Amerikanisches Luftshiff*—American airship—could make an effective response. The Kapitanleutnant decided on a fan shot, two torpedoes fired simultaneously, following up with a third for good measure. After the necessary information was gathered—target range, course, speed—it was time to give the final commands.

"Rohr eins—los!" Simmermacher ordered, followed by a "Rohr zwei—los!" in quick succession. After tubes one and two were fired, a torpedo from tube three was also launched on Simmermacher's express command. Were the calculations correct? And more importantly, what would be the airship's response? Only time would tell.

TOP: An airship of the the U.S. Navy patrols the Atlantic Ocean in search of German U-boats. This photo was taken in 1943, and at the time the Allies were wresting the initiative in the Battle of the Atlantic from the Nazis via improved sub-hunting technology and weapons systems. OPPOSITE: The swastika flag whips in the winds of the Atlantic Ocean from a surfaced Nazi U-boat. The U.S. Navy employed airships to combat the U-boat threat during World War II.

In a sense, this duel between airship and submarine had its roots in the years immediately following World War I. The 1920s and 1930s were the golden age of the airship, an era of triumph that was also marred by occasional tragedy. But in those years, it was the so-called dirigible that took center stage in both military planning and public affection. Sometimes called a "rigid," the dirigible had an internal structure, a "skeleton," that gave it form. This skeleton was made of duralumin, an aluminum alloy that was relatively light yet strong.

Germany's zeppelins were the first, and probably the most famous, of the dirigibles. They were used as bombers in World War I, and after initial successes proved too vulnerable for continued use in that role. However, Germany's wartime experiences gave the country a head start in the use of airships as commercial passenger vessels. The *Graf Zeppelin,* LZ 27, became world famous for such feats as circling the globe in 1929.

But the United States Navy hoped there still might be military applications. Arrangements were made for the Zeppelin company to build

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Both: Library of Congress

ABOVE: This view aboard the airship USS *Macon* was taken in the auxiliary control station in the lower vertical fin sometime between 1933 and 1935. TOP: U.S. Navy sailors work amid the steel superstructure of the airship USS *Macon* (ZRS-5) during the 1930s. *Macon* was constructed at the Goodyear Airdock in Springfield Township, Ohio, by the Goodyear-Zeppelin Corporation.

a zeppelin which upon completion was brought to the United States and dubbed *Los Angeles*. The *Los Angeles* was generally deemed a remarkable success, and many later airship advocates, like future Admiral Charles Rosendahl, gained experience aboard the dirigible in the 1920s.

By the 1930s, a new proposal was being circulated in naval planning circles: why not have dirigibles as airborne aircraft carriers? They could be potentially invaluable as scouts, especially in the far reaches of the broad Pacific. Two large rigid dirigibles were built, the *Akron* and *Macon*, but both met untimely ends in tragic crashes. Those losses, plus the famous destruction of the German airship *Hindenburg* in 1937, seemed to close the door on future airship development.

The rigid dirigibles were evolutionary dead ends, at least for the 1930s. They were things of awesome beauty, silvery leviathans that reached enormous sizes; the *Macon* alone stretched some 785 feet from nose to tail. But while the dirigible was grabbing the headlines, its "cousin" the nonrigid airship was slowly being developed. The nonrigid didn't have an internal structure metal "skeleton." Instead, its size was maintained by the internal pressure of the lifting gas.

The nonrigid airship was nothing new; it had been used in World War I. In fact, its other name, "blimp," comes from a British term. Supposedly the name derives from the sound the outer skin makes if you poke an inflated portion. But the United States had a unique advantage that actually encouraged the development of blimps: helium.

Traditionally the lifting gas universally used for airships was hydrogen. Virtually all countries used it, in part because it had great lifting power and was easy to manufacture. But unfortunately, hydrogen was revealed to be highly flammable and ultimately very dangerous. Helium was a much safer alternative, though its lifting power was somewhat less. But that was a minor consideration, considering how explosive the other gas was.

Helium was found in commercial quantities only after World War I. But the biggest surprise was a fortunate accident of geography. The United States had the largest-known helium reserve in the world. That meant that any future German airship program would have to rely on foreign countries or use more dangerous lifting agents.

After France fell to the Nazis, Congress started to awaken from its isolationist "coma." The 76th Congress passed Public Law 635 that authorized the building of 10,000 airplanes. The vast majority ordered were heavier than air, fixed-wing aircraft, but there was also a provision for 48 non-rigid airships as well. Slowly, almost painfully, the U.S Navy was also coming around to the idea of non-rigid airships/blimps as ideal vehicles for coastal patrol, escort duties, and even search and rescue.

Blimps could hover or travel slowly and methodically at low altitudes, all the while scanning and searching for trouble or for personnel that needed rescue. They had great endurance and could stay airborne much longer than conventional heavier-than-air fixed-wing aircraft. Blimps were not expected to engage subs as a primary mission but could carry a respectable payload that included machine guns and depth charges.

As war clouds gathered in 1941, the ZNP-K airship type was emerging as the future backbone of the service. The letters meant "Lighter than Air, Nonrigid, Patrol, K-class." Yet, in spite of Congressional authorization, construction of the airships was slow. Goodyear Tire and Rubber Company was given the contract to build the airships, a natural choice because years earlier they had partnered with the Zeppelin com-

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The immense airship USS *Macon* is shown docked in its hangar at Naval Air Station Moffet Field, Sunnyvale, California, in October 1933. This photo was taken following a cross-country flight from Lakehurst, New Jersey, and months before the airship was damaged during a storm and lost off the coast of Big Sur, California, in 1935. Most of the crew was rescued, and the wreckage is listed as the USS *Macon* Airship Remains on the U.S. National Register of Historic Places.

pany and gained enough experience to build the ill-fated *Akron* and *Macon*.

Nevertheless, Goodyear and the U.S. Navy were caught flat-footed by the Japanese surprise attack on Pearl Harbor. On December 7, 1941, the U.S. Navy only had 10 operational airships in service, and of those 10, only 4 were K-types. The rest were a ragtag collection of diverse types, including TC-types that were "hand me downs" from the Army, which had abandoned their airship program in 1937.

As if that weren't bad enough, the Germans launched a U-boat offensive all along the eastern seaboard of the United States, an effort Admiral Karl Donitz labeled Operation *Paukenschlag* (Operation Drumbeat). During seven to eight months of 1942, German U-boats had a field day, sinking ships with near impunity. Depending on what source you consult, Allied shipping losses off the American coast numbered over 600. Some ships were torpedoed in broad daylight with observers watching incredulously from the shoreline. It became clear that the Navy had to put its house in order. It wasn't simply a matter of building airships. The plans to expand the airship force looked great on paper, but facilities had to be built and personnel trained if these estimates would come to fruition. The first formal class of aviation cadets did not begin training at Lakehurst, New Jersey, until October 1940.

Building new facilities was another challenge, of course. There were pre-existing bases that could be put to effective use. The naval air station at Lakehurst was the most famous, largely because it was the site of the *Hindenburg* disaster in 1937. But the west coast also had to be seriously considered. Japanese submarines may not have had the fame or notoriety of the U-boats, but they were uncommonly active in the early months of the war.

In the aftermath of the *Macon* crash, the Naval Air Station, Sunnyvale, was handed over to the U.S. Army. The Sunnyvale facility was located in the San Francisco Bay area, a very strategic area for any of the armed forces. The army was reluctant to give it back to the navy, but pressure from President Franklin Roosevelt forced them to yield. In early 1942, the Sunnyvale base was reclaimed and dubbed the Naval Air Station Moffett Field.

New facilities included lighter-than-air stations at South Weymouth, Massachusetts; Weeksville, North Carolina; Glynco, Georgia; Richmond, Florida; Houma, Louisiana; Hitchcock, Texas; Santa Ana, California; and Tillamook, Oregon. The K-type was the mainstay of the Navy's airship fleet, and they were usually deployed six to 12 ships in a squadron.

The ZNP-K type was a nonrigid whose lifting gas, as noted, was helium. The bulbous "bag" so distinctive in all airships contained three compartments. The main compartment stored the helium but was supplemented by two smaller compartments called ballonets.

The ballonets were filled with air, which was used to trim the ship, keeping its aerodynamic equilibrium. If, for example, air was pumped from the forward ballonet to the aft ballonet, it would force helium to the front of the bag, causing the ship's nose to go up. Thus, the air in the ballonets was a kind of ballast. The helium and air movements were controlled by cables on the flight station overhead control panel.

The outer skin or envelope of three-ply rubberized cotton formed an egg-shaped bag that was 253 feet long and contained over 400,000 cubic feet of helium and air. The control car, sometimes called a gondola, was where the crew worked and lived. It was made out of chromium-molybdenum tubing covered with

Library of Congress

sheet aluminum.

Armaments were important, but the use of them was secondary to the K-type's overall mission. Ideally, they were supposed to detect enemy subs, but once found, they were to relay the information to "regular" aircraft or available surface vessels like destroyers. Nevertheless, a "K" came equipped with a .50-cal. machine gun in the forward turret and a .30-cal. machine gun aft. The "K" also carried four depth-charge bombs: two Mark 17s in a floor bomb bay and two Mark 24's in two outboard racks.

Arch H. McCleskey, Jr., was an airship radar man who left a colorful memoir that provides information on what it was like to serve aboard a K-type in the war years. Most of the time, he was assigned to the base ZP-21 at Richmond, Florida, a station not far from Miami. Though U-boat activity in the North Atlantic got the public's attention, the South Atlantic and Caribbean also grew to be hot spots for German submarines.

The most important equipment aboard were the tools used for locating enemy submarines. In the early part of the war, what was kiddingly called the "Mark-1 eyeball" was the primary method of submarine detection. That meant visual scans of the ocean, straining to see the small periscope "pole" jutting out of the water and forming a small wake, or the choppy, white-flecked waters that indicated a sub had just dived. If you were lucky, you might see a conning tower or maybe the whole submarine on the surface.

But gradually, more modern, sophisticated methods were employed. Radar was important, but there were also other tools. MAD (Magnetic Anomaly Detection) was a system that could detect submarines under water. It revealed minute changes in the earth's magnetic field due to the magnetic field of another object, like a submerged submarine. The field-sensing detector was located at the end of the airship helium bag, far away from the metal of the gondola/control car.

An old adage says war is "long periods of boredom punctuated by moments of sheer terror." K-class duty was long and sometimes tedious. A short flight could be 10 hours, and flights of 17 or more hours could be almost routine. With such long stretches of time involved, it's natural to wonder what the living conditions were like aboard a K-type airship.

The short answer is spartan, but tolerable. There was a small galley that had some kind of a hot plate that could heat food, and a place where coffee could be brewed. You might have eggs, or some meat cold cuts. The heating elements were unreliable and sometimes didn't deliver on the warm food the airmen hoped and almost prayed for. Nevertheless, most airship men took it in stride. McCleskey recalled with genuine appreciation a Christmas day patrol that featured turkey on the menu. The turkey was cold, but holiday food is holiday food!

There was also a "can" (toilet) on board, rudimentary but serviceable, and a separate contraption for urination. The device was simple: a hose about three feet long and attached to a funnel When in use, the hose end was pointed over the side of the gondola and into the ocean.

Communications were established with both a high frequency (HF) and a VHF radio. The radio wire was on a reel and was extended and retracted manually. Signals, of course, were in code. Though the K-type featured some of the best and most technologically advanced equipment of the time, many ships also carried homing pigeons. These birds, decidedly low-tech but generally reliable, were used if radio silence was required, or some kind of radio malfunction occurred.

Routine flight came in several categories. Convoy duty had the best chance, at least on paper, of detecting an enemy submarine. The airship blimps, often more than one, would zigzag back and forth in the path just ahead of the cargo-laden freighters, making sure there were no lurking U- boats in the area. Other missions were simply routine patrols, scanning the U.S. coastlines, and sometimes foreign coastlines like Cuba, in search of the ever-elusive quarry.

McCleskey admitted that many of these patrols were boring at times, but the Caribbean and more southern routes had compensations. In those tropic climes, beautiful young women would often sunbathe nude on rooftops or isolated areas. Low flying and slow, the K-types were perfect observation posts for such activities. Soon the blimp's high-powered binoculars were looking at more than sub conning towers!

On paper, a K-type crew consisted of 10 men, but in reality, it usually included two extra men as well: one extra pilot and one extra crewman. Generally, there would be one- or two-hour shifts, with one shift devoted to having an off-duty rest break. There were fairly decent bunks

aboard which a man would stretch out and sleep, such relative spaciousness a luxury in a cramped and utilitarian area like a control car.

Every man had his official duties, but in this service many men were qualified for and performed other tasks. McCleskey, for example, tells of one patrol where he was one hour on radar, one hour on elevator (a pilot's job), one hour on radio (a radioman's job), and so on throughout the flight. And yet the long hours produced a closeness and even camaraderie among officers and men that made the term "band of brothers" not a shopworn cliché but a living reality.

Some K-ships patrolled for months without ever sighting a U-boat. And yet, a routine flight could suddenly be transformed into a life-and-death struggle on the high seas. That's what happened to the *K-34* while on a routine mission escorting the S.S. *Albert Gallatin*. It was the late afternoon of August 28, 1943. The *K-34* picked up a faint MAD reading, but there was enough doubt about it not to raise the alarm, at least not yet. It may well have been a false reading.

But after the *U-107* fired its torpedoes, all doubts were quickly erased from the minds of the *K-34* crew. The aft observer spotted the telltale wakes of the fired torpedoes and sounded the alarm. Pilot Ensign Jack Healy was at the controls, and once he was alerted, he swung *K-34* around to follow the wakes' trails back to the sub. Nothing could be done about the initial torpedo launches, but then fate intervened: apparently, two of the torpedoes missed, and a third hit the ship's rudder but failed to detonate.

BELOW: The German U-Boat *U-107* arrives at its port in Lorient, France, in November 1941. The *U-107* was attacking the merchant ship SS *Albert Gallatin* during a war patrol when the U.S. Navy airship *K-34* arrived and drove the U-boat away. OPPOSITE: A U.S. Navy airship patrols the Atlantic Ocean above a convoy in June 1943. Airships were serving regularly in anti-submarine patrols during the Battle of the Atlantic.


Bundesarchiv Bild 101II-MW-3956-05A; Photo: Rudolf Meisinger

Ensign pilot Healy ordered two of the *K-34*'s depth charges to be dropped. They duly exploded at the 50-foot setting, but the U-boat was far away from its original firing position. But confusion reigned within the submarine's crew. Kapitanleutnant Simmermacher himself had doubts. The detonations were heard, and at first everyone was elated—the ship had been hit! But then, it was realized the timing was off. What was going on here?

In the meantime, the *K-34* was having problems with the befuddled crew of *Albert Gallatin*. The ship captain had ordered a full stop, and once the A*lbert Gallatin* was dead in the water, a boat was launched to pick up the dead fish killed by the depth charge blast! Observing the comedy from above, the *K-34* men could hardly believe their eyes. Somehow, the liberty ship crew didn't get the original message and didn't realize they were in grave danger. But if they were safe, then why would the airship drop depth charges? Did they think the airship was dropping the charges to provide them with a courtesy fish dinner?

Ensign Pilot Healy quickly ordered another signal sent to the ship, and this time they got the message. Once again, comedy overcame possible tragedy as the scared crew rowed back to the ship, hauled the boat in, and got underway in record time. But they were still not out of danger—the sub might follow them to finish the job.

Back aboard the *U-107*, the still-puzzled Simmermacher decided to go back and have a look. This decision was almost his last, because as the sub neared periscope depth it was violently rocked by two more explosions. They were the remaining two depth charges from the *K-34*. The U-boat skipper veered off, apparently undamaged but thankful for the escape from destruction.

But, cheated of his prey, Simmermacher hoped to trail *Albert Gallatin,* catch up with her, and send her to the bottom. The *U-107* waited an hour and a half, hoping that the *K-34* would go back to base or otherwise disappear, but it always hovered into view. Finally, Simmermacher gave up and broke off the pursuit empty-handed.

By far the most celebrated battle between airship and submarine occurred off the Florida Keys on the night of July 18, 1943. The mission was a standard one: airship *K-74* was ordered to protect a tanker and a freighter. The *K-74* was commanded by pilot Lieutenant Nelson Grills, and he and his crew were genuinely sur-

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ABOVE: A German U-boat is shown under attack by Allied air assets in the Atlantic. As anti-submarine measures improved, the Allies gained the upper hand in the Battle of the Atlantic, and airships played a role in the ultimate victory. TOP: A U.S. Navy blimp drops a depth charge into the ocean during exercises in 1943. This target practice sequence occurred off the coast of New Jersey and the base at Lakehurst, which had gained fame as the site of the destruction of the German airship Hindenburg in 1937.

prised, even shocked, at the sudden sight of a surfaced German U-boat. Grills was cautious, and rightly so, because it was almost midnight, and in the darkness, he didn't want to attack an Allied vessel by mistake.

It was the *U-134*, a 220-foot Type VIIC U-boat, and the skipper was Oberleutnant Hans-Gunther Brosin. Brosin had ordered the sub to surface to vent the carbon dioxide that inevitably built up and let in fresh air. Grateful to be released from the confines of their steel "prison," the Kreigsmarine sailors came out on deck to enjoy a warm and delightful tropical night. This little respite was going to be brief—the oberleutnant knew there were two Allied ships in the vicinity that he intended to make short work of.

Satisfied it was a German submarine, Grills decided to attack at once. The darkness, the excitement of battle, and the relative inexperience of the *K-74*'s officers and men were going to have impacts on subsequent reports of the clash. Details don't agree, though the general narrative is clear enough. Heading straight for the sub's starboard quarter, the *K-74* dived lower as the U-boat's machine guns opened fire. The *K-74* opened up with its own .50-cal. machine gun, with Aviation Machinist Mate Third Class Garnet Eckert returning fire as rapidly as the German gunners.

The chattering cacophony deafened the ears even as the tracer bullets, those long streaks of incandescent light, dazzled the eye. According to one later report, the C-74's machine gun cleared the U-boat's deck as German sailors scrambled for cover. The *K-74* sped over the sub, and when the timing seemed right, the order was given to release the depth charges. Here is where the narrative gets murky; some later claimed that the old-design L21A bomb release was tricky and that, in part due to inexperience and lack of practice, Machinist Mate Second Class Isadore Stessel was unable to release the depth charges.

Two distinct and very loud noises were heard seconds later, and the *K-74* crew seems to have felt the reports were from the *U-134's* deck gun. But the official story falls apart when it is noted the *U-134* probably did not have a deck gun. At least there is no solid evidence of one. Sadly, and ironically, Stessel was killed, the crew's one fatality, so his side of the story will never be known.

In the meantime, the *K-74* had other things to worry about. The control car was being peppered with German bullets, and the starboard side had caught fire. An unnamed "mechanic," possibly Machinist Mate Second Class Jonathan Schmidt, extinguished the fire by "leaning out the maintenance door." Though the immediate danger was over, a new crisis had arisen: too many German

A U.S. Navy K-type airship floats above the battleship USS *Missouri* during the latter's shakedown cruise in August 1944. The use of airships was an interesting chapter in the U.S. Navy's campaign against Nazi U-boats.

bullets were puncturing the *K-74*'s helium and air-filled skin. The slow but unmistakable hiss of escaping gas from numerous bullet holes could be heard even amid the noise of battle.

This was serious, and not only because of the loss of altitude. As the *K-74*'s envelope, or bag, collapsed, the ship's elevator and rudder cables would go slack. Any kind of control or navigation would be impossible. Ballast and fuel tanks were dropped, and air shifted into the ballonets in a desperate effort to stay aloft. The battle was now over, as the crippled and deflating *K-74* drifted away from the sub and gained some altitude.

Every effort was made to lighten the ship. Lieutenant Grills hoped they could stay in the air long enough to reach Elbow Cay, the nearest speck of dry land. Alas, it was not to be. The stricken blimp descended and landed in the water stern-first. It was a little after midnight, very dark, but the evacuation of *K-74* was orderly and without panic. Everyone had their "Mae West" life preservers on, but attempts to inflate and board a raft proved unsuccessful.

Pockets of helium still remained, and what was left of the *K-74* did not immediately sink. Grills went back to the half-submerged control car, in large part to dump secret electronic gear and classified documents overboard. Aviation Radioman Third Class John Rice also came back to the control car. Both men showed courage in returning, because it could have sunk or the two remaining depth-charge bombs might have exploded.

Mission accomplished, the two men returned to the water, but Grills became separated from the others in the darkness. The rest of the crew clung to the wreckage and were discovered by a J4F-2 Wigeon seaplane the next day. Grills also was picked up, but tragically one man, Stessel, was killed by sharks.

The *U-134* reported that it had been attacked by an American airship and further noted it has sustained damage that was not related to any machine-gun bullet hits. According to some reports, the damage was great enough for the sub to be unable to dive. If that is so, it was made particularly vulnerable to surface attack, a "sitting duck" to any Allied ship or aircraft that spotted it.

Sure enough, the *U-134* was spotted and sunk by a British patrol plane about a month later. An RAF Wellington bomber from No. 179 Squadron made short work of the sub; the entire complement of 48 men perished. But there seems to be little doubt now that the *K-74* deserves at least partial credit for the "kill."

Initially, the Navy brass did not like Grill's decision to attack, and a court martial was seriously discussed. Unless the circumstances absolutely warranted it, airships were not to directly engage enemy submarines. Their duty was to seek, to locate, and let others do the job of sinking the quarry. Nevertheless, the "brass" relented, no trial was held, and years later Grill was awarded the Navy Cross for his heroic attack. The *K-74* crew also received Commendation medals at the same time.

When the war ended in September 1945, there were at least 15 blimp squadrons in existence, patrolling about three million square miles of water. These LTA squadrons, whose equipment was mainly the K-type airship, performed 35,000 operational flights in the Atlantic and 20,300 flights in the Pacific. These statistics are impressive enough, but it's their contribution to the war effort that underscores their overall importance.

The airships accumulated more than 5.5 million hours in the air, escorting nearly 90,000 ships loaded with cargo, troops, weapons, and supplies to far-flung battlefronts. It was their proud boast that no ship was ever lost under their protection. That's an outstanding record, but the full story of their successes in hunting, spotting, fighting and sometimes even sinking and destroying enemy submarines perhaps has yet to be told. □

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It was a bold prediction. "Rough but fast … We'll be through in three days. It might only take two."

Major General William H. Rupertus, commander of the 1st Marine Division, was confident of a swift victory once his veterans assaulted the island of Peleliu in the Palaus.

Nicknamed "the Old Breed," the 1st Marine Division had earned its reputation as a formidable fighting unit at Guadalcanal and Cape Gloucester earlier in the Pacific War. Pulled back to tiny Pavuvu in the Russell Islands for rest and resupply, the division received replacements and new equipment, although there remained some materiel shortages.

By late summer 1944, the 1st Marine Division had been deployed to the Pacific for nearly two years. The drive toward the Japanese home islands had been costly but successful thus far. As Admiral Chester Nimitz's island-hopping across the Central Pacific and General Douglas MacArthur's advance toward the Philippines converged, however, a difference of strategic opinion emerged between the commanders.

While Nimitz favored the capture of Formosa and then a move against Okinawa, MacArthur, for both strategic and sentimental reasons, wanted to return to the Philippines first

Although the necessity of capturing the island was questionable, Marines and Army troops fought for weeks to wrest it from the Japanese.

MICHAEL E. HASKEW

and then strike at Okinawa. Either way, the eventual control of Okinawa would provide an essential staging area for the invasion of Japan.

The final strategic decision for the continued offensive in the Pacific went all the way to the White House. President Franklin D. Roosevelt flew to Hawaii in July 1944 to confer with both senior commanders. The President chose MacArthur's proposal, and Nimitz pledged to protect his right flank during the coming offensive.

The high-level decision thrust the tiny island of Peleliu, only five square miles in area and shaped like a lobster claw, at the forefront of Allied planning.

A speck of land in the Palaus group about 600 miles east of the Philippines, Peleliu lies near the western end of the Caroline Archipelago, which stretches 1,000 miles across the Central Pacific.

An enemy airstrip on Peleliu, and another on the nearby island of Ngesebus, concerned MacArthur; they presented the threat of aerial attacks against his troop-transport and

Anne S.K. Brown Military Collection

TERRIBLE TRIAL ON PELELIU

In this painting by Marine Corps artist John McDermott, a pair of flamethrowing tanks belch fire into a narrow ravine where Japanese troops have taken cover, while Marines move up warily, crouching behind the steel hulls of the armored vehicles. The Marines invaded Peleliu, in the Palaus Island Group, on September 15, 1944.

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supply lines to the Philippines. Nimitz concurred, and plans were developed for Operation Stalemate II—the capture of Peleliu, Ngesebus, and the island of Angaur, about six miles to the southwest.

But rather than the quick victory on Peleliu predicted by General Rupertus, the 1st Marine Division and the U.S. Army's 81st Infantry Division, commanded by Maj. Gen. Paul Mueller, were to experience some of the most bitter fighting of the Pacific War during Stalemate II, and the bloody campaign remains one of the most controversial of World War II.

Several major elements contributed to the ferocious nature of the combat at Peleliu. Among these was the failure of American reconnaissance flights and photo analysis to accurately assess the rugged terrain—a jumble of deep draws, canyons, and mountains dotted with heavily fortified caves, their entrances concealed by thick jungle.

Another factor, likely the most significant, was a profound change in Japanese strategic and tactical defensive philosophy. Previous Marine and Army amphibious landings had been met with fierce opposition at the water's edge. Spirited banzai attacks followed, with the persistent expectation that the Americans would be driven back into the sea. After the anticipated results had failed to materialize, the Japanese adopted a new concept of defense-in-depth. The beaches would be contested, but the object would now be to draw the Americans inland, engaging them in a protracted battle of attrition and exacting the highest possible toll in American blood, making the conquest of further Japanese-occupied territory so costly that the enemy would tire of war and sue for peace. The battle for Peleliu would mark the debut of the new Japanese defensive plan.

National Archives

ABOVE: American Marines take cover from intense Japanese fire on the beach at Peleliu. These men are crouching behind an amphibious DUKW vehicle, while a landing craft burns furiously in the background after receiving a direct hit from a hidden Japanese gun on shore. TOP: A pall of smoke from naval and air bombardment covers the small island of Peleliu as landing craft carrying the invading U.S. Marines turn for their runs into the contested beaches.

Delays in the capture of the Marianas extended the timetable for the Peleliu opera-

tion and exacerbated a debate as to whether the invasion of the island was necessary at all. Some contemporary observers, among them Admiral William F. "Bull" Halsey, commander of the U.S. Third Fleet, believed it was unnecessary. Modern historians have also continued to debate the judgment of both McArthur and Nimitz; however, considering the information available at the time, it can convincingly be argued that the two senior commanders acted properly.

On the eve of the Peleliu assault, Halsey approached Nimitz with a recommendation to cancel the operation and instead accelerate the invasion of the Philippines, first hitting the beaches on the central island of Leyte in October, two months earlier than the originally planned invasion of the southern island of Mindanao. The Leyte-invasion portion of Halsey's recommendation was adopted, but the Peleliu landing would proceed as planned.

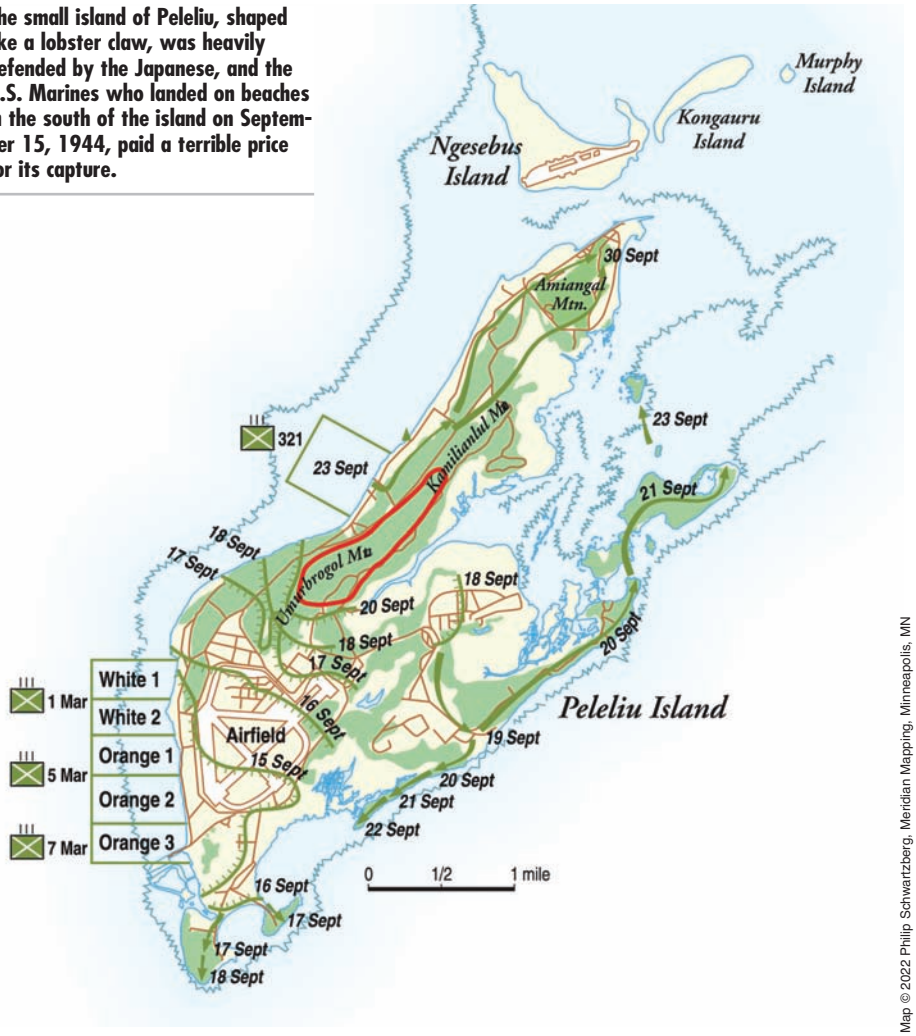
The Peleliu assault would be preceded by an intense naval and air bombardment. The five old battleships *Pennsylvania*, *Tennessee*, *Maryland*, *Idaho*, and *Mississippi* led a contingent of cruisers and destroyers that were to pound Peleliu for three days before the landings. Aircraft from three fleet carriers and eight light and escort carriers were also to attack targets ashore.

When the task of executing Operation Stalemate II was handed to Marine Major General Roy S. Geiger's III Amphibious Corps (consisting of the 1st Marine Division and the 81st Infantry Division), the executive officer of the 1st Marine Division, Brig. Gen. Oliver P. Smith, led the planning effort, while Rupertus was in Washington, D.C., for an extended period. Early on the morning of September 15, 1944, three Marine regiments—the 1st under Colonel Lewis B. "Chesty" Puller, the 5th commanded by Colonel Harry D. "Bucky" Harris, and the 7th led by Colonel Herman H. Hanneken—were to assault a 2,200-yard stretch of sand at the southwest corner of Peleliu Island. From there, the Marines would drive due east toward one of their primary objectives, Peleliu's airfield. The artillery of the 11th Marines and the III Amphibious Corps were to begin landing within an hour of the assault.

From north to south, the invasion beaches were designated White 1 and 2, where the 1st Marines would hit the beach; Orange 1 and 2, the responsibility of the 5th Marines; and Orange 3, where the 7th Marines were to come ashore. Once clear of the beaches, Puller was to advance eastward and then pivot northward to attack the southwestern end of the formidable Umurbrogol Mountains while moving steadily northward along the coast. The 1st Battalion, 5th Marines was to provided flank protection as the 2nd Battalion, 5th Marines crossed the island to the east and took the airfield. The 7th Marines were to drive east and then south, isolating and annihilating enemy resistance.

Meanwhile, the 81st Division's 322nd Regimental Combat Team was to capture Angaur with the support of the 321st Infantry Regiment and then revert to III Amphibious Corps as a reserve. Altogether, more than 40,000 Marines and soldiers were made available for Operation Stalemate II, nominally brining to bear a substantial superiority in manpower.

The small island of Peleliu, shaped like a lobster claw, was heavily defended by the Japanese, and the U.S. Marines who landed on beaches in the south of the island on September 15, 1944, paid a terrible price for its capture.



Despite this apparent advantage, however, Colonel Puller observed that only about 9,000 true riflemen populated the ranks of the 1st Marine Division; the rest were support personnel and other noncombat specialists.

The Japanese defenses on Peleliu were formidable. Colonel Kunio Nakagawa commanded the 2nd Infantry Regiment and two battalions of the 15th Infantry Regiment from the veteran 14th Division. Many of these soldiers had fought with the Kwantung Army in China, and there were at least 10,000 of them. The Japanese had also been preparing their defensive positions for many months—a labyrinth of caves and tunnels had been blasted from the rock of the Umurbrogol, and many of these strongholds were protected with sliding steel doors that made them virtually impossible to detect from the air. Heavy guns, mortars, and machine-gun nests with interlocking fields of fire were placed in concealed positions. Aerial bombs were rigged with tripwires and set as mines across potential invasion beaches. More than 500 caves, some extending several levels below ground, had been fortified by the eve of the American invasion.

The 3rd Battalion, 1st Marines, commanded by Lt. Col. Stephen V. Sabol, came ashore first, at 8:32 a.m. on September 15, 1944, on the far-left flank of White Beach 1. Enemy fire was accurate and intense, particularly against Sabol's command, and the destructive enemy barrage expanded rapidly along the beachhead. Within an hour, scores of landing craft and other vehicles had been disabled or demolished,

including numerous LVTAs—amphibious tractors equipped with 75mm guns designed to blast enemy strongpoints. Twenty-six LVTs were destroyed during the first 10 minutes of close combat. Puller's LVT took a direct hit, and he barely escaped with his life.

While the 2nd Battalion, 1st Marines penetrated 350 yards inland and linked up with the 5th Marines on its right, Sabol's 3rd Battalion struggled from the beginning. Just 100 yards off the beach, it ran into a 30-foot coral ridge topped with strong defenses, particularly a 47mm gun that pounded the Marines continually. Nicknamed "the Point," this troublesome high ground had to be taken, and the task fell to Company K, 3rd Battalion, under Captain George P. Hunt.

After the war, Hunt became a managing editor with *Life* magazine, but on this day, he was preoccupied with staying alive and keeping his Marines focused on the Point. It had not been identified on any maps of Peleliu, and its existence proved to be the first of many nasty surprises the Marines encountered on the island.

Captain Hunt's well-trained men moved forward, attempting to flank the incessantly firing gun embrasure and then silence it with demolition charges and rifle grenades. A Marine corporal named Anderson fired a rifle grenade that ricocheted off the muzzle of a Japanese gun, careened into the bunker, and set off a series tremendous explosions inside the blockhouse, demolishing the 47mm and several other guns positioned inside. Enemy soldiers poured from the blockhouse, their clothes flaming and rounds of ammunition cooking off in their belts. The Marines shot them down as they ran.

By afternoon, Company K held the Point, but it had been reduced to only platoon strength. Still, Hunt's Marines beat back vicious counterattacks over the next 30 hours. When they were finally relieved, the colonel counted only 18 men able to shoulder a rifle. Company K had been torn to pieces; of its original 235 riflemen, only 78 Marines survived the ordeal.

The 5th Marines advanced steadily through coconut groves and jungle, reaching its first objective within an hour of the landings. By that afternoon, it had also reached the airfield.

Both: National Archives

ABOVE: Marines catch the lifeless body of a comrade who has just been shot by a Japanese sniper on Peleliu during the fight for high ground that came to be known as 'Suicide Ridge.' OPPOSITE: During attacks against well-concealed Japanese strongpoints on Peleliu, Marines advance cautiously and with the cover of an M4 Sherman medium tank.

The 7th Marines absorbed heavy enemy fire at Orange Beach 3, and several landing craft were diverted to Orange Beach 2. The 3rd Battalion, 7th Marines advanced 500 yards before meeting a line of pillboxes and concrete blockhouses near an old Japanese barracks. Tank support was misdirected, creating a gap between adjoining elements that required a halt to reestablish coordination. As a result, it took nearly six hours for Lt. Col. John Gormley's 1st Battalion, 7th Marines to reach its objective.

Rupertus, monitoring the progress of the 1st Division, became concerned that its momentum was waning. He committed the last of his reserve, the 2nd Battalion, 7th Marines, in the afternoon. As the 5th Marines consolidated its hold on the airfield, Nakagawa launched a counterattack just before 5 PM, spearheaded by about 15 Type-95 light tanks supported by infantry.

Moving north to south, the Japanese stumbled into a prepared defensive line and soon came under fire from both the 1st and 5th Marines. One Marine destroyed a pair of enemy tanks with a bazooka, while the M4A1 Sherman tanks of the 1st Tank Battalion flanked the Japanese and raked the inferior enemy armor with 75mm fire. Within minutes, most of the Japanese tanks were engulfed in flame. They had also outdistanced their infantry, leaving the Japanese foot soldiers exposed to withering American small-arms and artillery fire. The Japanese counterattack foundered and collapsed.

Although the Marines had secured a foothold on Peleliu, the Americans had not reached all of the objectives planned for the first day of Stalemate II. After dark, the Japanese mounted numerous counterattacks; one of these, against the 7th Marines, was repulsed with the help of a black Marine support unit that volunteered to take up rifles and moved inland from the beach.

Puller's 1st Marines had suffered heavy casualties, and its hold on the Point was tenuous. The colonel's report to Rupertus was overly optimistic, due primarily to his limited comprehension of the tactical situation in the confused battle. During the first day of combat, the 1st Marine Division had lost 1,111 casualties, including 209 killed in action. It was only the beginning of the bloodshed.

The 5th and 7th Marines continued their advance during the following week as temperatures soared above 100 degrees Fahrenheit. Steadily destroying pillboxes, blockhouses, and machine-gun nests, the 7th Marines secured southern Peleliu on September 18.

The 5th Marines captured the area around the airfield on September 16 and encountered heavy enemy fire across a patch of open ground to the north.

The 2nd Battalion became locked in a savage fight with Japanese strongpoints in a swampy area to the east. As they moved north to support the 1st Marines the following day, elements of the 2nd Battalion took flanking fire from enemy strongpoints in front of the 1st Marines' positions. Heavy jungle vegetation impeded progress, but the 5th Marines forged ahead, reaching the eastern shore on of the island on September 20. Enemy resistance in southern Peleliu effectively ended on the 23rd.

On the left flank, meanwhile, the ordeal of Puller's 1st Marines was becoming painfully obvious. On the second day, Puller was obliged to come to the aid of Hunt's Company K, 3rd Battalion, at the Point and then take on the Japanese in a desperate assault northward through the dense jungle toward the ridges, valleys, and rocky crags of the Umurbrogol pocket. It was apparent to those on the ground that the thick canopy of jungle had obscured the nature of the Umurbrogol from aerial reconnaissance, and Puller's command would consequently pay a bloody butcher's bill.

On September 17, the 1st Marines encountered the rough terrain of the Umurbrogol for the first time. They soon found that the capture of one promontory meant subjecting themselves to direct fire from the next high ground to the north. Attacking on a front approximately 1,000 yards wide, the Marines engaged in a frustrating, bloody, time-consuming effort to blast the Japanese from every cave, defile, and peak of the Umurbrogol, which they nicknamed "Bloody Nose Ridge."

During five days of intense fighting from the beaches into the labyrinth of Bloody Nose Ridge, the 1st Marines suffered 1,749 casualties, just six fewer than the entire 1st Marine Division had absorbed during the battle for Guadalcanal a year earlier. All the while, Rupertus continued to urge Puller forward, insisting that the drive maintain critical momentum. Rupertus refused to accept the idea that reinforcements from the 81st Division were needed. He ordered the Army division to proceed with the planned invasion of Angaur on September 17.

The 1st Battalion, 1st Marines moved forward steadily until confronted by a concrete blockhouse that the Navy had reported destroyed during the pre-invasion bombardment. Obviously, this had not happened, even after the Navy reported it had run out of targets and ceased its bombardment ahead of schedule. The blockhouse was taken only after the 14-inch guns of the battleship *Mississippi* were directed against its four-foot-thick walls, finally cracking them.

On September 19, Company B, 1st Battalion, 1st Marines attacked Hill 100 near Horseshoe Canyon at the eastern edge of the Umurbrogol. Captain Everett Pope had led 242 Marines ashore; four days later he commanded only 90 effective riflemen. Pope stepped off with tank support but quickly lost it when two Shermans slipped from a narrow causeway as the elevation increased. The Marines pressed on under Japanese small-arms and mortar fire.

When they reached the summit of Hill 100, which the Japanese called East Mountain, Pope's men came under fire from high ground beyond and from caves that laced a parallel ridge on the western flank that had been dubbed "the Five Brothers." When night fell, the Japanese began a series of counterattacks to dislodge the Marines, whose ammunition, food, water, and medical supplies were dangerously low. Fighting was hand-to-hand; knives flashed and rifle butts rose and fell. The Marines held on by their fingernails.

Lieutenant Francis Burke and Sergeant James McAlarnis survived a harrowing fight with two Japanese soldiers, one of whom thrust a bayonet into Burke's leg. The lieutenant killed the enemy soldier with his bare hands, repeatedly pounding him with his fists. McAlarnis crushed the other foe's skull with his rifle butt. The bodies of the attackers were then unceremoniously tossed down the slope.

As the sun rose, what was left of Company B still held Hill 100, but Pope was down to only eight men. Ordered to withdraw, he evacuated his wounded but had to leave the dead behind. Their bodies were not recovered until two weeks later, when Hill 100 was taken for the last time. Pope received the Medal of Honor for his gallantry.

Aware that the 1st Marines had lost roughly 1,500 killed and wounded by September 19, Maj. Gen. Geiger visited the regiment's command post on the 21st and discussed the situation with Rupertus and members of his staff. Rupertus was adamant that the Marines did not require Army assistance to capture Peleliu. Geiger, however, had seen enough. He overruled Rupertus, directing the 321st Regimental Com-

bat Team to redeploy from Angaur to Peleliu.

As this was accomplished, Rupertus was ordered to withdraw the 1st Marines. The gallant regiment had virtually ceased to exist as a fighting force, and one veteran of the hellish fight at Peleliu remarked, "I resigned from the human race. We were no longer human beings. I fired at anything in front of me, friend or foe. I had no friends. I just wanted to kill."

Life magazine war artist Tom Lea accompanied the Marines on Peleliu and produced haunting images that reflected his experience there. One of these depicts a Marine staring with hollow eyes, a victim of days in horrific combat.

"As we passed sick bay, still in the shell hole, it was crowded with wounded, and somehow hushed in the evening light," Lea captioned the painting, "I noticed a tattered Marine standing quietly by a corpsman, staring stiffly at nothing. His mind had crumbled in battle, his jaw hung, and his eyes were like two black empty holes in his head."

The advance of the 1st Marine Division finally reached the main Japanese line of defense, eliminating several observation posts that the enemy had used to direct artillery fire from the high ground. With the airfield operational, supporting fighter-bombers were now conducting regular missions. Supplies were flowing, but the elimination of Japanese resistance in the Umurbrogol remained an ugly business.

By September 23, the necessity of capturing northern Peleliu was recognized more fully as the Japanese managed to land a battalion of reinforcements from the nearby island of Babelthuap. The arrival of the Army's 321st Regimental Combat Team from Angaur the following day facilitated operations to isolate the Umurbrogol and secure northern Peleliu. The plan involved a northward advance past the Umurbrogol by the Army troops, with the 5th Marines advancing through them into northern Peleliu as the 7th Marines took over the former positions of the 1st Marines.

Only a single road was available for the movement of tanks and other vehicles, and it was constantly under Japanese fire from the surrounding hills. The advancing troops were often on their own, with only light weapons available.

As Marine Air Group 11 began arriving at the airfield, its fighter-bombers assumed primary responsibility for tactical air support. Major Robert F. "Cowboy" Stout and the pilots of Marine Fighter Squadron 114 (VMF-114) were conspicuous in pressing home their attacks against ground targets.

On September 25, the 5th Marines advanced to the shattered village of Garekoru and secured the neighboring high ground. The following day, the 321st initiated a three-pronged attack on the northern edge of the Umurbrogol, hemming the Japanese into a defensive pocket.

The 5th Marines assaulted the successive promontories of Hills 1, 2, 3, and Radar Hill, known to the Americans as "Hill Row." Approximately 1,500 Japanese troops occupied these knobs as well as Amiangal Ridge, which extended northward. The 3rd Battalion, 5th Marines captured Hill 80 and reached the eastern shore of Peleliu. On the 27th, the northern portion of the island was effectively secured, although sporadic resistance continued for some time. After four days of combat, the Marines claimed the peaks of Hill Row.

When the 2nd Battalion, 5th Marines assaulted Amiangal Ridge, they requested artillery support, which came from a single barrel of the 8th 155mm Gun Battalion. Japanese observers spotted the weapon on the morning of September 28 and peppered the artillerymen with machine-gun and rifle fire. The incoming Japanese fire was quickly suppressed, and all morning long, the 155mm gun plastered the visible caves and enemy positions along the ridge.

One troublesome strongpoint escaped the rain of shells—the mouth of a large tunnel at the northwestern base of the ridge that was too close to Marine positions for the artillery to fire on. Bulldozers filled in an antitank ditch that blocked the approach to the tunnel, and a combined tank-infantry assault rushed forward to toss demolition charges and fire point-blank into the tunnel mouth. Bulldozers then rolled up and sealed the entrance with mounds of earth and rubble. The Marines seized the crest of Amiangal Ridge, but they remained heavily engaged for some time with the Japanese burrowed inside the warren of tunnels and caves beneath them.

On September 28, the 3rd Battalion, 5th Marines landed on the island of Ngesebus, just 600 yards north of Peleliu, to stifle further Japanese efforts to run more reinforcements down from Babelthuap and capture the airfield. The close-air support of Marine fighter squadron VMF-114, in the first such all-Marine operation of the war, paved the way in the 36-hour fight that subdued 500 Japanese troops.

The Umurbrogol Pocket remained defiant, and the Japanese on Peleliu made their last stand there. Stretching about 1,000 yards by 500 yards, the pocket was thick with defenders in well-concealed bunkers, pillboxes, and cave complexes. From the hills nicknamed the Five Sisters in the south to Baldy Hill in the north, the enemy had already exacted a terrible toll. The 1st Marines had begun the dirty job by neutralizing the early threat of artillery fire against the invasion beaches and the Marine movement inland.

Now, the 2nd and 3rd Battalions of the 321st Regimental Combat Team pushed from the north, while the 7th Marines stepped in for the 5th Marines and pressed ahead from the south. The 2nd Battalion, 321st Regiment captured Hill B, at the northern edge of the pocket, on September 26, setting the stage for penetration into the Umurbrogol from the north. On the 29th, the 2nd and 3rd Battalions, 7th Marines relieved the Army troops. To accomplish the transition, ad hoc Marine units were pieced together to maintain the static line previously occupied by the two battalions of the 7th Marines.

With their maneuverability restored, the 2nd and 3rd Battalions of the 7th Marines forged ahead, capturing Boyd Ridge. Recalled from Ngesebus, the 3rd Battalion, 5th Marines came up in support of the 7th Marines on October 3. Although days of combat had reduced each battalion nearly to company strength, the Marines then executed a coordinated assault with four battalions against the eastern and southern sectors of the Umurbrogol Pocket, including Baldy Hill and Hill 300. Simultaneous diversionary attacks were mounted against the cluster of the Five Sisters and Horseshoe Canyon.

The attacks achieved their objectives, with the exception of the 3rd Battalion, 5th Marines' assault on the Five Sisters. Marine riflemen reached the tops of four of these hills west of Horseshoe Canyon but were forced to withdraw when the fifth was too hotly contested. On the same day, the highest-ranking Marine to lose his life on Peleliu, Colonel Joseph F. Hankins, was killed by a sniper. Hankins had moved down the West Road to sort out a traffic snarl when he was shot.

A renewed effort against the Five Sisters on October 4 was momentarily successful, but the heights had to be abandoned once again. The 3rd Battalion, 7th Marines rushed to the top of Hill 120, and for a time, it was believed that this position could provide a springboard for the seizure of the next ridgeline. But, as was so typical of the fighting on Peleliu, the 3rd Battalion soon found itself under heavy fire, and the Marines were withdrawn.

During the attack on Hill 120, Captain James Shanley, commanding Company L, 3rd Battalion, was killed in action. Shanley dashed from cover to rescue two wounded Marines, dragging them to safety behind a tank, and then went back to save a third. As he stepped forward, an exploding mortar round wounded him fatally. While Shanley lay dying, his exec-

National Archives

ABOVE: U.S. Marine artillerymen prepare a 75mm pack howitzer after it has been wrestled into firing position across the inhospitable terrain of Peleliu. The heavy but versatile pack howitzer brought successive Japanese positions under heavy fire. BELOW: African American Marines man a defensive position near the beach at Peleliu. When casualties mounted during the advance to the island's interior, a number of African American Marines volunteered to take up weapons—leaving their usual support roles to serve as riflemen.

utive officer, Lieutenant Harold J. Collins, attempted to reach the captain and was killed by an antitank shell. Shanley received a posthumous gold star for the Navy Cross he had earned at Cape Gloucester.

Two weeks of heavy combat in the Umurbrogol had taken their toll on the 7th Marines, and the attacks of October 4 were its last of the campaign. The 7th Marines had suffered 1,486 casualties, roughly 46 percent of its strength. General Rupertus still wanted the reduction of the pocket to be a Marine affair but acknowledged that the 7th Marines had to be withdrawn; he replaced it with the 5th Marines.

Colonel Harris, the 5th Marines' commander, had conducted an aerial reconnaissance of Peleliu's rugged interior during the first week of Operation Stalemate II, prompting him to declare that he intended to be "lavish with ammunition and stingy with…men's lives." When Rupertus handed him this latest assignment, Harris viewed the tactical situation as something of a siege. He determined that the Marines held the greatest advantage in the north. The offensive would continue there, while those Marines in the east and south would generally remain in reserve.

Moving into its new positions on October 5, the 5th Marines sent patrols to probe the Japanese defenses and called up bulldozers to carve roads into the box canyons and jungles to the front. Tanks and LVTs equipped with flamethrowers would then be able to provide support to the riflemen.

For nearly a week, the 2nd Battalion, 5th Marines fought to take Hill 140, knocking out numerous Japanese positions with satchel charges and hand grenades, while the 3rd Battalion launched a tank-infantry assault into Horseshoe Canyon. The 3rd Battalion's objective was to clear the stubborn Japanese from the Five Sisters and the lower, western slope of Hill 100. The 2nd Battalion's capture of Hill 140 signaled the completion of the comprehensive effort.

With Hill 140 in Marine hands, a disassembled 75mm pack howitzer was placed in a sandbag revetment on the West Road, reassembled, and began firing at the mouth of a large cave at the base of the next ridgeline. Repeating this technique with the versatile pack howitzer brought successive Japanese positions under heavy fire, greatly assisting in the capture of hilltops and the clearing of two box canyons that had previously been deathtraps for the Americans. Although the 5th Marines were taking Japanese positions on the western flanks of Boyd Ridge and Walt Ridge under fire, the enemy troops were still protected by a series of guns along the Five Brothers.

In mid-October, the 3rd Battalion, 5th Marines was ordered to relieve the spent 2nd Battalion. The slow but steady collapsing of the Umurbrogol Pocket, which had thus far reduced the enemy perimeter 500 yards to the south, meanwhile continued. The Japanese enclave was now only 800 yards wide by 500 yards long. For all practical purposes, enemy resistance was contained to that area, and Peleliu was secured.

Rupertus, however, remained fixated on the Marines completing the conquest of the Umurbrogol. That is, until a pair of significant events

compelled him to relent to those, including Maj. Gen. Geiger, who urged that the 5th and 7th Marines should be withdrawn from the fighting altogether and that Maj. Gen. Mueller's 81st Infantry Division should complete the assignment. First, the 81st Division's 323rd Regimental Combat Team returned from the capture of the island of Ulithi and brought the division to full strength. Second, a communique from Admiral Nimitz at far-off Pearl Harbor proclaimed that Peleliu was secure and further instructed Geiger to turn over tactical command to Mueller.

On October 15-16, the relief of the remnants of the 1st Marine Division was accomplished. Four days later, Mueller established his command post on southeast Peleliu.

For six more weeks, the troops of the Army's 81st Infantry Division methodically destroyed Japanese strongpoints, particularly in the vicinity of the Five Brothers, Five Sisters, and a formidable rise called the "China Wall." Army engineers used satchel charges and flamethrowers to root the enemy soldiers out, entomb them, or burn them alive.

Nakagawa sent his last message to superior officers on the island of Koror on November 24, advising, "Our sword is broken. We have run out of spears." He further related that he had burned the colors of the 2nd Infantry Regiment and that the handful of troops who remained at his disposal were being grouped into infiltration teams "to attack the enemy everywhere." After dark, 25 Japanese soldiers were killed attempting to slip through the American lines. When daylight came, a prisoner informed his Army captors that Nakagawa had committed suicide.

On the 74th day of Operation Stalemate II, American troops converged from north and south and linked up near the site of Nakagawa's former headquarters. Isolated pockets of Japanese resistance took many more days to clear, but the horrific battle for Peleliu was effectively over.

Along with Captain Pope, seven more Marines received the Medal of Honor for valor on Peleliu. Corporal Louis Bausell, Pfcs. Richard Kraus, Charles Roan, and John D. New, and Private Wesley Phelps smothered hand grenades to save their comrades, while 1st Lt. Carlton Rouh was seriously wounded when he placed himself between his men and the blast of another grenade. Private First Class Arthur Jackson was credited with destroying 12 fortified Japanese positions and killing 50 enemy soldiers singlehandedly on September 18. Rouh, Pope, and Jackson survived the battle to receive their medals.

Library of Congress

Marine artillery saturates the mouths of caves that the Japanese have fortified, while riflemen attack the positions, often resorting to explosive satchel charges to silence the enemy emplacements and then calling on bulldozers to seal the entrances, entombing the occupants.

The fight for Peleliu had shattered the 1st Marine Division, which absorbed 1,300 dead and 5,450 wounded, while 36 Marines were missing in the deep jungle. The 81st Division lost more than 3,000 casualties on Peleliu and Angaur, 468 of them killed. The Japanese garrison on Peleliu and the surrounding islands was annihilated. Only 241 prisoners were taken, and of the 202 captured on Peleliu, just 19 were Japanese. The remainder were Korean and Okinawan laborers.

Was possession of Peleliu worth the cost? The debate continues to this day. Because of assurances that the campaign would conclude swiftly, only six reporters accompanied the Marines to the island, and the brutal battle received scant news coverage. MacArthur's looming return to the Philippines also relegated the operation to the back pages of American newspapers.

In the years after World War II, Nimitz never fully explained his decision, although it can be concluded with certainty that he did not allow the invasion to proceed for personal glory or pride, as other senior commanders might have done. Still, some historians have called Operation Stalemate II the admiral's great mistake of the Pacific War.

The real payoffs for the bloodshed at Peleliu lay in its future use as a base for American bombers to strike the Philippines; as the cork in the bottle that isolated 250,000 Japanese troops on other islands in the Carolines; and in the invaluable lessons learned in tank-infantry coordination and the subduing of fixed, in-depth fortifications. These lessons would be applied in the future at Okinawa, but, sadly, there was no time to impart the hard-won wisdom to the Marines of the V Amphibious Corps, ordered to take the island of Iwo Jima to the north a few weeks after major combat operations on Peleliu ended.

Eclipsing any other conclusions, the battle for Peleliu validated the combat prowess, dedication, and pure heroism of the United States Marines and confirmed the honor and prestige of the 1st Marine Division for all time. For many, though, the American victory at Peleliu has remained a pyrrhic one.

Michael E. Haskew is the editor of WWII History Magazine *and the author of numerous book and articles on varied historical topics. He resides in Chattanooga, Tennessee.*

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German Sd. Kfz. 173 Jagdpanther Tank Destroyer with Side Armor Panels - "113", schwere Panzerabteilung 507, Germany, 1945

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French M10 Tank Destroyer - "Siroco", 3eme Peloton, 4eme Escadron, RBFM (Regiment Blinde de Fusiliers Marins), French 2nd Division, Place de la Concorde, Paris, France, August 1944

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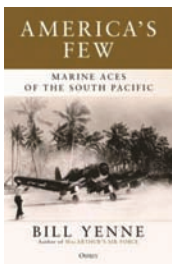
By Christopher Miskimon

America's Few

Marine Corps fighter pilots gained hard won victories in the skies over the South Pacific; many of them became aces along the way.

AS JIM SWETT GUIDED HIS GRUMMAN F4F WILDCAT FIGHTER TO A LANDING AT Henderson Field on Guadalcanal, he looked forward to getting some rest. He had climbed out of his bed at 3:30 a.m. on April 7, 1943, for a dawn patrol with three of his fellow Marine aviators. They returned shortly before noon, their mission uneventful. Sleep eluded them, however. A nearby radar station and some alert coast watchers had spotted a flight of about 100 Japanese planes approaching. They seemed headed toward the navy anchorage at Tulagi, where American destroyers were based.



Swett got orders to lead a four-plane division to intercept the incoming Japanese. He climbed back into the cockpit of a Wildcat, and soon his flight was in the air. They soon intercepted a flight of 20 Aichi "Val" dive bombers at 16,000 feet. As the Marines moved to engage the bombers, Mitsubishi Zero fighters appeared nearby and dove toward the Wildcats. The Wildcat was more powerful than the Zero but slower and less maneuverable, so Swett went into a dive of his own, outpacing the Zeros. When he was 300 yards from the nearest Val, he opened fire. The Japanese plane burst into flames.

The other Vals reached the American ships and started dropping their bombs. Swett lined up on another enemy at 2,000 feet and once again fired. That Val exploded in front of him. Now at only 1,000 feet, he fired on a third plane to no visible effect. The Japanese pilot tried to escape, but Swett chased him over the jungle canopy of the island below. He noticed his wing was damaged but ignored it. When he reached point-blank range, Swett triggered his guns again and watched the Val catch fire.

By now the Japanese had expended their ordnance and were grouping for a return to their base. Swett climbed into a cloud to sneak up on a group of enemy planes. He emerged right behind a group of dive bombers and fired. Pieces flew off his target, and it went down. As Swett lined up on another target, he saw the plane's rear gunner fumbling with his machine gun to shoot at his Wildcat. The American fired first and saw smoke burst from the Val's wing roots. The enemy plane fell into the ocean. It was Swett's fifth victory of his first combat

TOP: Marine ace Jim Swett is shown downing his seventh Japanese plane on April 7, 1943 in a painting by Roy Grinnell. INSET: Jim E. Swett.

New and Noteworthy

Hitler's Fortresses in the East (Alexey Isaev, Pen and Sword Books, 2021, $34.95, hardcover). Hitler declared several Eastern cities fortresses, to be defended to the last. This book covers the sieges of Ternopol, Kovel, Poznan, and Breslau.

Counter Strike Operations: Combat Examples and Leadership Principles of Mobile Defence (F.M. von Senger und Etterlin, translated by Linden Lyons, Casemate Books, 2021, $45.00, hardcover). After World War II, many German officers participated in a series of books presenting their perspectives of the war's campaigns. This volume is part of that classic series.

Leyte Gulf 1944 (1): The Battles of the Sibuyan Sea and Samar (Mark Stille, Osprey Books, 2022, $24.00, softcover). This is the first of two volumes about the Japanese Navy's complex deployment in the autumn of 1944. It is lavishly illustrated, including original artwork.

United States Tanks and Tank Destroyers of the Second World War (Michael Green, Pen and Sword Books, 2021, $34.95, hardcover). This illustrated volume covers American tanks and tank destroyers in great detail. The characteristics and service of each type receives attention.

Panzergrenadier (Thomas Anderson, Osprey Books, 2021, $40.00, hardcover). This is the latest in the publisher's series on German armored forces. The author covers organization, development, and service.

U.S. Army Signal Corps Vehicles 1941-45 (Didier Andres, Casemate Books, 2022, $37.95, hardcover). The Signal Corps produced a variety of specialized vehicles, such as radar and radio trucks. This book provides technical specifications and illustrations.

action; he was now officially an ace, but he was not finished yet.

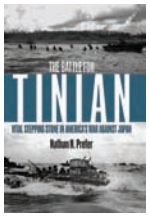
Another Val soon fell in Swett's sights; a well-aimed burst caused it to explode into wreckage. The Marine dodged the flying debris and aimed at another Val, his chattering guns drawing a plume of black smoke from it and sending it into the sea. Lining up on an eighth target, Swett watched his bullets tear into the plane's forward fuselage, but this time the Japanese machine gunner fired back. The Wildcat's oil system failed, and the engine seized. Swett had to perform a water landing, breaking his nose when the plane hit the surface. He managed to get out as the plane sank, inflated his life raft, and climbed in. Soon a Coast Guard vessel rescued him. He returned to Guadalcanal the next day.

Initial skepticism about Swett's eight victories was soon dispelled by an investigation, though he received credit for seven. Swett achieved these victories during his first combat experience. Admiral Marc Mitscher recommended him for the Medal of Honor, which Swett received in October 1943. The citation credited him with eight victories. Swett went on to serve through the rest of the war, attaining more aerial victories and reaching the rank of colonel postwar.

James Swett's actions, while extraordinary, are just a few of the many covered in *America's Few: Marine Aces of the South Pacific* (Bill Yenne, Osprey Books, Oxford, UK, 2022, 352 pp., maps, photographs, appendix, bibliography, index, $35.00, hardcover). This book tells the tales of a handful of young Marine pilots fighting their enemy in a wild area at the end of a long supply chain.

The author is a recognized authority on aviation history, and this latest work does not disappoint. His attention to detail, clear prose, and excellent descriptions of combat actions combine to make the book an engaging and entertaining volume. The book covers the intense and close air battles of 1942-43 through to the final dogfights of 1945, treating the reader to a history of Marine aces throughout the war. There are good illustrations of the pilots and their planes, and a concluding chapter discusses their postwar activities.

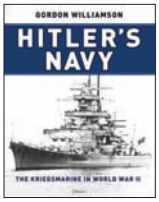
The Battle for Tinian: Vital Stepping Stone in America's War Against Japan (Nathan N. Prefer,



Casemate Books, Havertown, PA, 2022, 238 pp., maps, photographs, appendices, notes, bibliography, index, $22.95, softcover)

The island of Tinian sits a mere three miles southwest of Saipan. Nine thousand Japanese troops garrisoned Tinian, and they had to sit in their bunkers while the Americans defeated the 20,000 troops on Saipan. The Americans bombarded Tinian for a month before they finally landed on the island, using skills acquired at great cost during previous invasions in the Pacific. The Japanese resisted bitterly, inflicting heavy casualties in nine days of heavy combat. Notably, this was the first place the Americans used napalm in battle. Afterward, Tinian became a base for Boeing B-29 heavy bombers in the bombing campaign against the Japanese home islands.

Tinian is a significant location in the history of the war, but the invasion itself gets relatively scant attention compared to other island-hopping operations. This book redresses that imbalance with a detailed account of the planning, preparation, the invasion, and the aftermath. The book is extensively illustrated with good maps and informative appendices.



Hitler's Navy: The Kriegsmarine in World War II (Gordon Williamson, Osprey Books, Oxford, UK, 2022, 256 pp., maps, photographs, appendix, bibliography, index, $40.00, hardcover)

The German Navy started World War II with decisive actions in support of the overall strategy of the Third Reich. German surface ships took part in the attacks on Poland, Denmark, and Norway, bombarding coastal targets and in some case transporting troops to their objectives. U-boats undertook a grand campaign of commerce raiding designed to bring England to its knees. Surface ships such as the *Graf Spee* and *Scharnhorst* undertook commerce raiding, presenting a threat which tied down much of the Royal Navy. Eventually, however, innovative technologies and the expanding British and American navies neutralized the submarine threat while the remaining surface ships were bottled up in ports and fjords or fighting small defensive actions. By late 1943, the German Navy ceased to be a major factor in the war, and many of its sailors were eventually transferred to infantry units.

This new work is a concise yet detailed look at the German Navy and how it operated throughout the war. Most books focus on either submarines or the battleships, but this volume includes detailed looks at the destroyers and smaller vessels, including torpedo boats and coastal ships. The original artwork is visually intriguing; there is a good mix of color and black and white illustrations, supported by the publisher's usual good maps.

Arracourt 1944: Triumph of American Armor (Mike Guardia, Casemate Books, Havertown, PA, 2021, 127 pp., maps, photographs, bibliography, index, $24.95, softcover)

Soon after the Allied armies broke out of the Normandy beachhead and began storming across France toward Germany, Hitler ordered an armored counteroffensive against the Americans at Arracourt. There, the U.S. 4th Armored Division met the German 5th Panzer Army. Instead of the rout Hitler had hoped for, the German Army suffered a serious defeat, losing 200 of its 262 tanks and assault guns. In contrast, the Americans lost a relatively paltry 48 tanks. The fighting around Arracourt in September 1944 was harsh and unrelenting, but

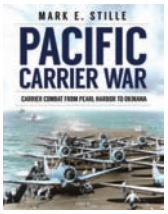
when it was over the Nazis were in retreat, and the path toward the German border lay open to the soldiers of the U.S. Third Army.

The commonly accepted narrative of tank warfare in Europe is that Americans were constantly outmatched by superior German tanks, tactics, and firepower. While the Germans were indeed formidable, the Americans emerged victorious at Arracourt due to a winning combination of leadership, teamwork, initiative, and their own tactical innovations. This well-written book explains how U.S. forces won this critical battle. The book is beautifully illustrated and is part of Casemate's new Illustrated Series. Like Osprey's Campaign Series, these books provide good summaries of their subjects alongside good artwork and dozens of photographs from various archives.

Tanks in the Battle of Germany 1945: Western Front (Steven J. Zaloga, Osprey Books, Oxford, UK, 2022, 48 pp., maps, photographs., bibliography, index, $19.00, softcover)

The fighting in Germany in the last months of World War II in Europe saw some of the Allies' newest and most effective tanks engage what was left of the German Army's depleted panzer forces. Handfuls of German Tigers and Panthers squared off against Allied Pershings, Comets, and Chaffees alongside the latest versions of the venerable Sherman. The Germans suffered shortages of everything from trained replacement crews to fuel and ammunition. The Allies had a long but effective logistics chain and were now masters of combined-arms warfare. While actual tank combat was rare in 1945, when it did occur, it was usually sharp, sudden, and violent.

The author is an acknowledged expert on armored warfare, and this book focuses that expertise on the last days of the war in Europe. It contains extensive information about tank strength and losses on both sides during 1945, including charts dividing tank numbers by unit and vehicle type. The full-color original artwork is visually interesting, and the photographs are well chosen for the topic. A forthcoming companion volume will examine tank combat on the Eastern Front in 1945.



Pacific Carrier War: Carrier Combat from Pearl Harbor to Okinawa (Mark E. Stille, Osprey Books, Oxford, UK, 2021, 304 pp., maps, photographs, bibliography, index, $35.00, hardcover)

When the United States and Japan planned for war in the Pacific, both sides thought the issue would be decided by a titanic clash of battleships firing massive shells at one another. Instead, the relatively new aircraft carriers and their air groups became the arms of decision in naval warfare. The Pacific War began with the carrier strike against Pearl Harbor by the Imperial Japanese Navy and continued until the battle of the Philippine Sea in 1944, when the Japanese carrier fleet met their final defeat and became irrelevant for the remainder of the conflict. American ships, aircraft, and tactics evolved considerably over this period as the Americans recovered and adapted from initial difficulties. The Japanese, lacking the industrial base and resources to make up losses or significantly expand, could not match the pace of their enemies and paid a heavy price for it.

The author, a retired naval intelligence officer, is an acknowledged expert on the U.S. Navy during World War II and has many books to his credit. This one, focusing on carrier warfare, contains astute analyses and clear prose, which brings home the author's insights to the reader. Typical of this publisher, the book is beautifully illustrated, including color imagery, and contains excellent maps. □

Simulation Gaming

BY JOSEPH LUSTER

WARGAMES EXPAND IN DIFFERENT DIRECTIONS OUTSIDE OF WORLD WAR II WITH AN INDOMITABLE SPIRIT OF SURVIVAL

FOXHOLE

PUBLISHER SIEGE CAMP • **GENRE** STRATEGY • **SYSTEM** PC

In most war games, players are either in control of one unit or a very specific assortment of units. In some cases, it may be an army-of-one style scenario, while others might be more strategy-minded, granting players an eye-in-the-sky vantage point from which they can turn the tides of war. That's a major facet of the genre that *Foxhole* aims to change. In this massively multiplayer war game, player-directed warfare is what it's all about. An actual player controls every single soldier, whether they're responsible for building bases, logistics, reconnaissance, direct combat, or another notable part of the battle. Anything can happen when players are in charge of even the most minute details of weapon manufacturing, for instance, and the years since its launch have proven *Foxhole* to be as unpredictable as one would expect.

If you haven't tried *Foxhole* for yourself, Siege Camp's impressive game is ideal for patient players who want to contribute in any way imaginable. Depending on the strategies at play, missions can take days to plan, but the persistent nature of its world means it's always tense in one way or another. The wars in *Foxhole* won't be perfectly familiar to history buffs; it takes place in an alternate timeline in which the great wars never ended, and the world has been in conflict for hundreds of years. While that certainly veers it more toward speculative-fiction territory, the white-knuckle intensity of combat will be familiar no matter the campaign in question.

One of the most interesting aspects of *Foxhole* has been watching the way its various roles play out over the course of its life on PC. While most players will likely opt to function as boots on the ground and take the battle directly to the enemy, there are also those who take on more logistical roles. That means they're tasked with crafting the weapons that are actually used in the fight, which can often be a thankless job others take for granted. Earlier this year, for instance, a group of players on the logistical side of combat went on strike, saying they believe players shouldn't have to stress over such a frustrating gameplay experience.

While everyone else is blasting away on the battlefield, those who fancy logistics must gather resources, craft items, and then work their way to the frontline to deliver them to the combatants. Changes to *Foxhole* made their job even more difficult, which is why a group known as Logistics Organization for General Improvement (LOGI) opted to deliver an open letter and go on strike. Their complaints ranged from lengthy pull times from Public Stockpiles and Refineries to the lack of closed-loop logistics in containers and the frustration of snowstorms occurring on the first day of war.

It may seem like an "if you don't like it, don't play it" situation to some, but even though the LOGI group isn't composed of every logistics player in the game, they still number around 1,800 strong. Those players didn't all take part in the strike, but a vocal portion made their issues known, whether the developers chose to acknowledge them or not. It's all a very interesting microcosm of the real world, showing how a relatively small but essential group can leverage their dependability to, hopefully, create change for the better. With any luck, they'll have resolved their complaints and be back to happily crafting weapons for the greater good by the time this issue is in your hands.□

ordnance

Continued from page 20

Bradshaw at RLT-2 HQ."

Overall, the failure of telecommunications at Tarawa can be summed up by the comments of Captain McWethy, 1/8 Marines, in his after-action report: "We lost all our TBYs in the water. All [EE-8] telephones were ruined. Two TBXs were landed, one of which was used for air liaison. Each assault company had four hand-set radios (MUs), and they were all put out of commission by the saltwater."

Most of the communications problems on Tarawa were eventually solved. As far as portable infantry communications were concerned, the answer came nearly one year after the Battle of Tarawa.

Motorola had been working on the development of a new FM (Frequency Modulated) transceiver since 1940. There are advantages of FM over AM (Amplitude Modulation) in that most unwanted noise in a radio system, both natural and man-made, is produced as amplitude variations. The new FM transceivers were immune to amplitude noise and thus far quieter than their predecessors.

The Motorola SCR-300, the first "Walkie-Talkie," proved to be everything the TBY was not. Not only did it operate on FM, but also the frequency was crystal-controlled, and it had a single switch to change both receiver and transmitter channels. Furthermore, it used automatic-frequency-control circuitry to keep it locked on frequency and a squelch control that silenced the receiver noise unless signals were actually being received. The set was constructed with cast aluminum compartments and rubber seals, making it far more water resistant. The total weight, including batteries, was only 33 pounds.

In combat the SCR-300 proved to be durable, easy to operate, and reliable. After Tarawa, when FM radio equipment was installed in tanks, it became possible for tanks and infantry to talk directly with each other. Tanks were commonly fitted with a modified SCR-300 infantry radio, called an AN/VRC, which was mounted inside the turret. An alternative was the SCR-508 tank radio, which had crystal frequency control and FM modulation.

The British became aware of the qualities of the SCR-300 and began producing it in Britain in 1948 with the name "Wireless Set No 31." They used these radios throughout the 1950s, and NATO also adopted them.

Author Peter McQuarrie has previously written for WWII History *on World War II in the Pacific. He resides in New Zealand.*

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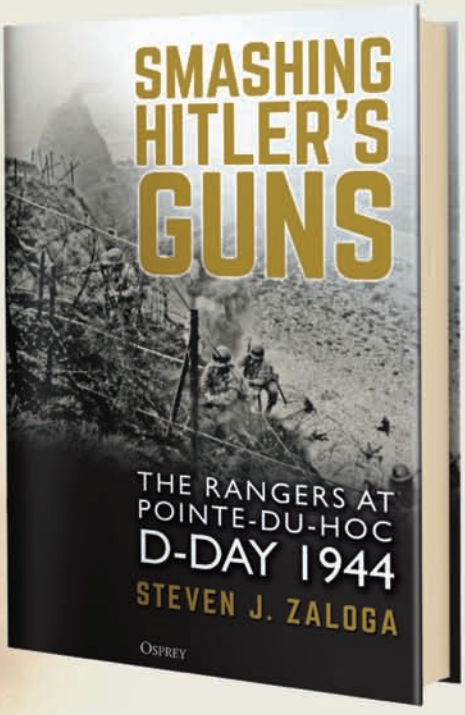

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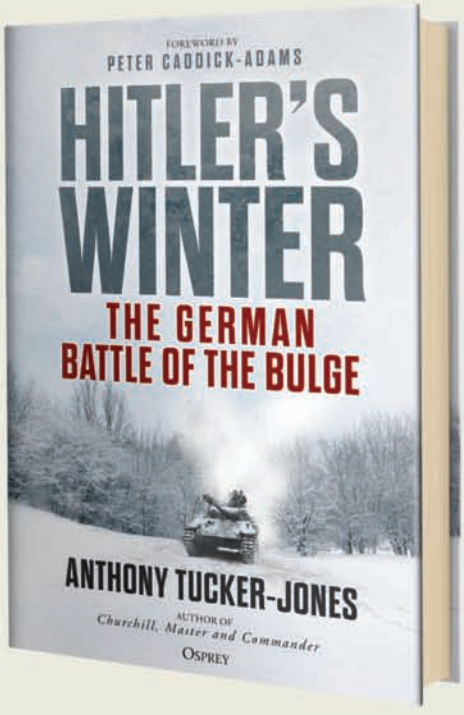

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