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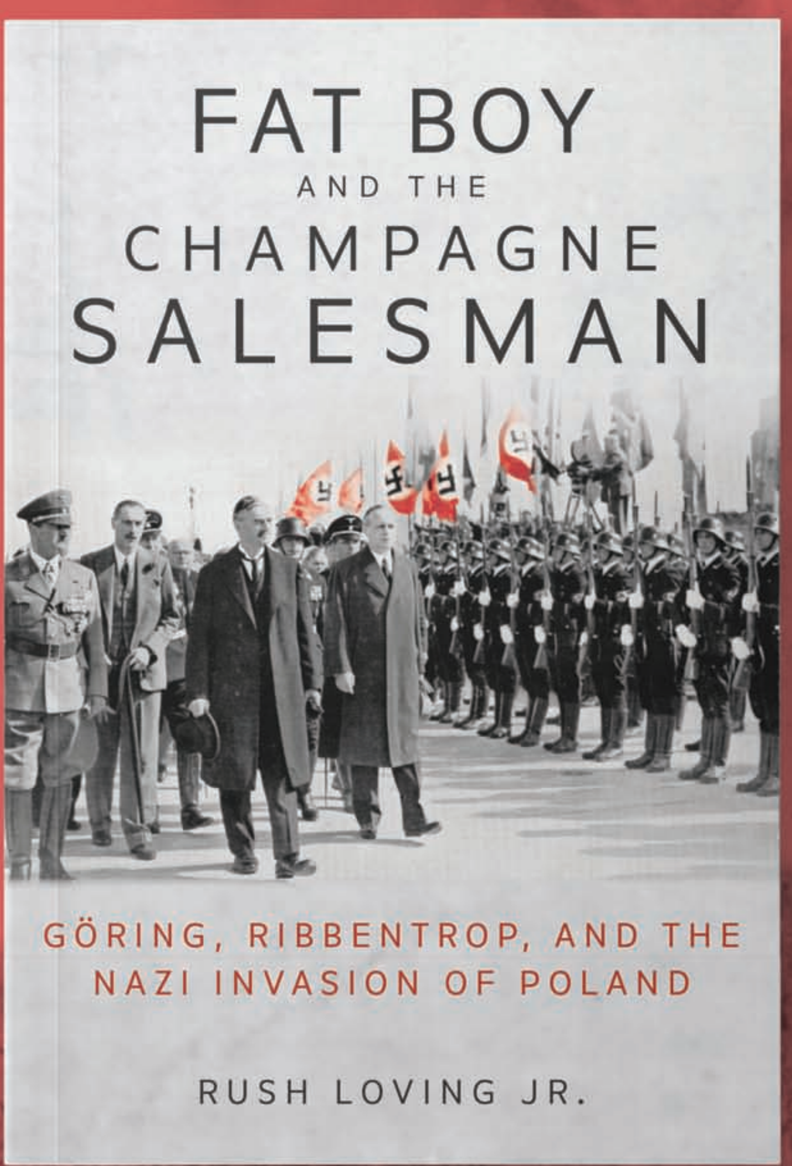

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Cover: Third Army infantryman Private Ralph Terry appears happy that fighting around the Falaise Pocket is over. See story page 48. Photo: National Archives.

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Editorial

The meatgrinder of the Hürtgen Forest bedeviled American forces in the autumn of 1944.

SEVENTY-EIGHT YEARS AGO, THE U.S. FIRST ARMY WAS EMBROILED IN THE longest battle of World War II fought on German soil. The dreary autumn of 1944 was one of only limited progress on the Western Front, while the mere mention of the Hürtgen Forest brought dismal thoughts to mind.

In the dark, thick and twisted confines of the Hürtgen, an area of 54 square miles just east of the German-Belgian frontier, the First Army lost at least 33,000 men killed and wounded between mid-September and mid-December, while German losses amounted to roughly 28,000. The objectives of the American advance into the hell of the Hürtgen were straightforward; however, the German defenders put up a brilliant fight, utilizing the fortifications of the West Wall, or Siegfried Line, as well as supporting entrenchments, machine-gun nests, minefields, and strongpoints with interlocking fields of fire, making every American move forward as costly as possible.

The Battle of the Hürtgen Forest became the longest sustained battle fought in the history of the United States Army. When it began, the idea was to keep the Germans busy south of the First Army offensive effort against the German city of Aachen. The seat of Charlemagne's Holy Roman Empire, Aachen did become the first German city of consequence to fall to the Americans on October 22, 1944, after a particularly bloody fight, that lasted three weeks and cost the victors 2,000 killed in action and 5,000 wounded while the Germans lost nearly 11,000 killed, wounded or captured. But the necessity of keeping the First Army occupied in the Hürtgen, actually played into the hands of the Germans and their crafty commander, Field Marshal Walther Model, who was quite willing to wage a continuing conflict of attrition, bleeding his adversary white.

When the American advance into the Hürtgen began, Model's forces were also engaged in the repulse of Operation Market Garden, the Allied airborne offensive into the Netherlands that ended in a bloody fiasco at Arnhem. Model deftly fought the defensive action in the Hürtgen simultaneously. American attempts to capture the towns of Schmidt and Monschau were fiercely contested, while later forays against the Roer River line and its hydroelectric dams were thwarted. Heavy German artillery took its toll, and tree bursts rained shrapnel and splinters on the Americans, while exceptionally rainy weather made conditions almost unbearable.

After the fighting in the Hürtgen was over, one American soldier vividly recalled its ferocity. "That battle became so unendurable that we didn't care whether we lived or died. We tried digging in but every time we scooped out a shovelful of mud the hole filled with water and more mud. We said the hell with it and just lay down in the mud to sweat out the shells."

Another reason for the ferocious German defense of the Hürtgen was their intent to use it as a staging area for the looming Ardennes Offensive, Hitler's last great offensive in the West aimed at the port of Antwerp, Belgium, with the goal of disrupting the Allied supply chain and driving a wedge between American forces in the south and the British in the north. And coincidentally, the Battle of the Hürtgen Forest is officially considered to have ended on December 16, 1944, the date that the infamous Ardennes action, leading to the Battle of the Bulge, began.

By the time it was over and the action in the Bulge grabbed all newspaper headlines, the overshadowed Battle of the Hürtgen Forest had consumed 140,000 American casualties. At various times, the Americans had committed elements of 11 infantry and two armored divisions, two Ranger battalions, and the 366th Fighter Group of the Army Air Forces, which provided tactical air support, to the bloodbath.

The fight for the Hürtgen is considered a decisive defensive victory for the Germans, but in one sense their losses were irreplaceable while the Allies were able to draw on vast resources in men and materiel. The tactic of attrition prosecuted by Field Marshal Model may have been successful in the near term, but it may also be reasoned that it hastened the defeat of Nazi Germany–particularly when coupled with their spectacular losses suffered in the Ardennes/Bulge defeat.

—Michael E. Haskew

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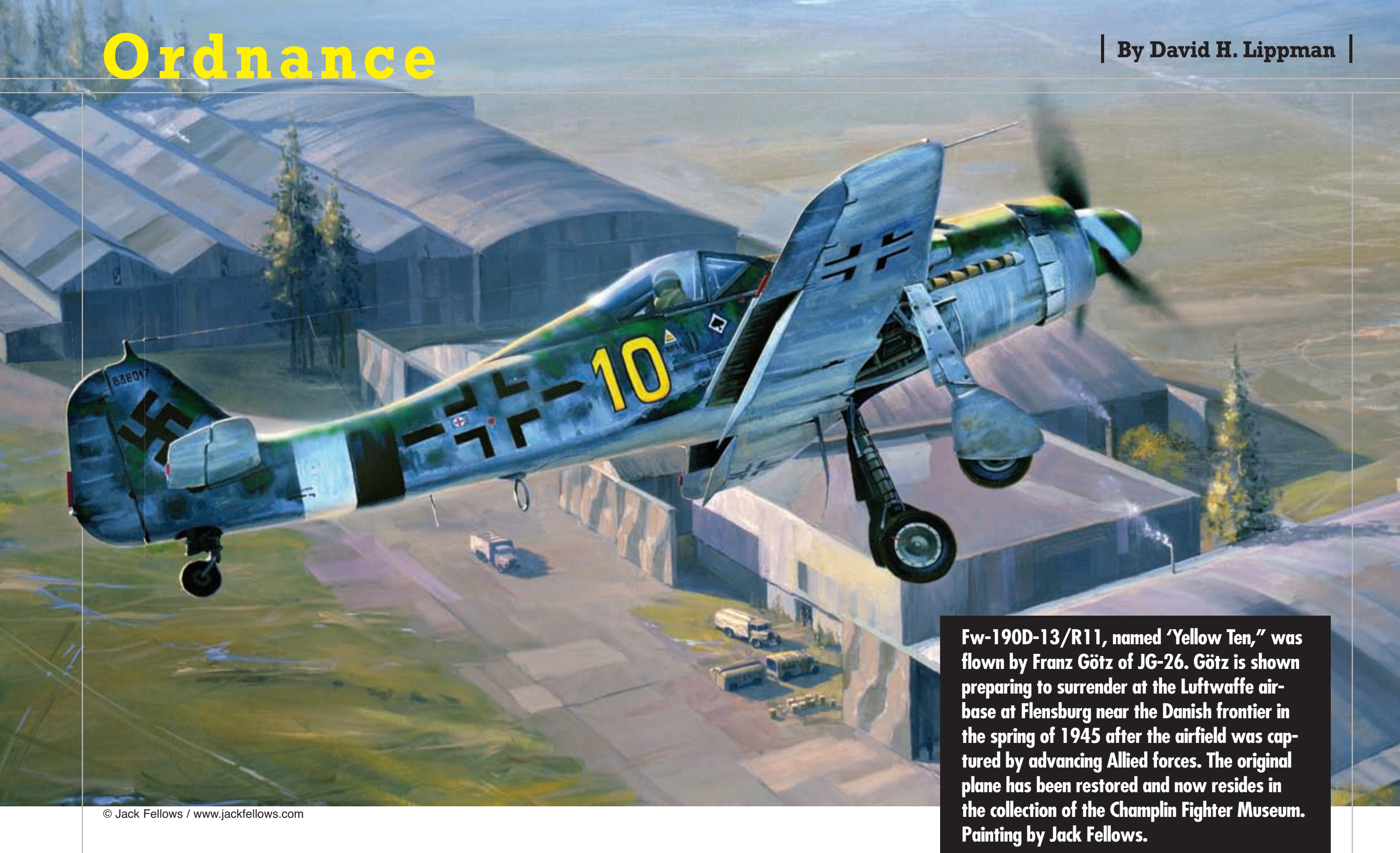

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Fw-190D-13/R11, named 'Yellow Ten," was flown by Franz Götz of JG-26. Götz is shown preparing to surrender at the Luftwaffe airbase at Flensburg near the Danish frontier in the spring of 1945 after the airfield was captured by advancing Allied forces. The original plane has been restored and now resides in the collection of the Champlin Fighter Museum. Painting by Jack Fellows.

The Luftwaffe's Sturmvogel

The Focke-Wulf Fw-190 was a capable dogfighter and interceptor of Allied bomber formations.

AN AMERICAN ADVERTISING POSTER FOR ONE OF THEIR BOMBERS SHOWED A cartoon of a smiling pilot over the captioned question, "Who's afraid of the big Focke-Wulf?"

Bombardier Charles Hudson saw that poster placed in his crew room. Minutes later, a piece of paper was pinned to it with a note saying, "Sign here." Every flier in the group — including the group commander — signed the paper.

They had good reason to fear the new Focke-Wulf 190. It was Germany's last piston-driven fighter of World War II, a powerful machine that gave immense grief to American bombers over the skies of the Reich, as one of the Luftwaffe's most dependable aircraft.

The Fw-190 owed its origins to a pre-war competition run by the German Air Ministry for new fighters to equip the equally new Luftwaffe in 1934. Professor Kurt Tank created the parasol-winged Fw-159. It was inferior to the Arado 89, He-112, and the Me-109. The latter two were slightly similar, but Willy Messerschmitt's plane won because of its lightweight performance.

Focke-Wulf and Tank tried again in 1938 with a radial-engined fighter, equipped with a powerful BMW 801 engine. It flew for the first time in July 1939.

Called the "Sturmvogel" (Storm Bird) or "Würger" (Shrike) by its pilots, the Fw-190 was built unlike other fighters: a large engine on the small airframe. Tank saw the Me-109 and RAF Supermarine Spitfire fighters as racehorses in the air. He wanted a breed of fighter that could operate in harsh conditions and badly prepared frontline airfields, maintained by ground crew with short training. Therefore, the Fw-190 had to absorb battle damage and still return to the fray. It would not be a racehorse, but a "cavalry horse."

Other advantages the design team came up with included measures that reduced the aileron and rudder trim burden on the pilot. Its electrically powered undercarriage was more reliable and rugged than hydraulic systems.

The Fw-190 was soundly constructed and flew well, yet it did not impress at first. The engine suffered repeated overheating problems, and these remained unsolved by 1941, when the first planes were delivered to their major user, Jagdgeschwader (JG) 26, an elite fighter wing defending the English Channel coast.

Called the "Abbeville Boys" by the British for the French town near their base, Lt. Col. Adolf Galland, one of Germany's most capable and colorful fighter aces, commanded the JG 26. The wing was a squadron of aces who built up their bag in daylight battles against British daylight "Rhubarb" offensive fighter sweeps over France and "Circus" bomber strikes.

The Fw-190 A-1, the initial version, had a speed of 404 mph at 20,500 feet, an operational range of 592 miles, and packed two 7.92mm machine guns and four 20mm cannon. The Fw-190 flew at 391 mph (629 kph), weighed 8,700 pounds (3,945 kg) and had a maximum altitude of 34,775 feet (10,800 meters).

JG 26 was assigned the Fw-190 to replace its

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ABOVE: Former German test pilot Karl Borris became a Luftwaffe fighter ace flying the Fw-190. He scored 43 kills and is shown exiting his Fw-190 A-8 at Krefeld Airfield in western Germany. BELOW: This brightly painted Fw-190 A-5 was flown by Luftwaffe Major Hermann Graf, who commanded a fighter training unit in southern France in 1943.

Britain's newest fighter, the Spitfire V.

In February 1942, the German Navy ordered its battlecruisers trapped in Brest, *Scharnhorst* and *Gneisenau*, to return to the Reich by steaming up the English Channel in Operation Cerberus. This required the Kriegsmarine's toughest warships to challenge Britain's channel defenses and the RAF's main forces. In one of the rare occasions that the Kriegsmarine and Luftwaffe cooperated closely, JG 26 and its Fw-190s provided close cover for the warships.

The British sent six biplane Fairey Swordfish torpedo bombers under Lt. Cdr. Eugene Esmonde, escorted by 11 Spitfires, to attack the German warships. JG 26 pounced on the attack, splashing all the British planes in the channel—only five of 18 British airmen survived. Esmonde was not one of them. He earned a posthumous Victoria Cross, and the

Björn Huber / Wikimedia

Me-109Fs, which were under gunned and worn out from heavy use. However, initially, the Fw-190 seemed no improvement because of its breakdowns and lingering mechanical issues.

The Luftwaffe had to move a detachment of their operational test squadron from Berlin to Paris to solve the engine problems. Ground crews—known as "black men" in the Luftwaffe for their uniforms—tore apart engines and found inadequate cooling, ruptured oil and fuel lines, and runaway propellers, which they struggled to address. Leaking fuel lines left pilots dazed from the fumes, unable to emerge from their planes unaided. Test planes flew over Le Bourget in Paris, smoking and stinking.

Other issues, like failing connecting rods, were more fundamental and were the results of Germany's shortages of metals necessary to create true high-strength, high-temperature alloys. Because of this, the BMW 801 engine would be a major nuisance for the Fw-190 as long as it was in service. Even so, making the Fw-190 ready for service required 50 modifications, whose approval had to go through the intricate German bureaucracy. The Luftwaffe wanted to scrap the plane, until their top brass saw its success where it counted—in battle.

The Fw-190 fighter made its combat debut on August 16, 1941, with indifferent results. JG 26 trained on both flight and maintenance of the temperamental plane with no crashes—though German flak downed one. The pilots gained confidence and on September 18 shot down four Spitfires without a loss.

Successes like these impressed the Luftwaffe high command, which ordered the Fw-190 A2, with an improved engine and 20mm wing-root guns timed to new interrupter gear. Most importantly, engineers rerouted the exhaust to deal with the engine overheating.

Back at the Western Front, Fw-190s struck again against a Circus of Bristol Blenheim bombers on November 8, and brought down 14 British pilots for a loss of three of their own. At first, the British thought these new German planes were actually American-made P-36 fighters that the Nazis had captured from their French buyers.

Meanwhile, the Fw-190 made its debut against the Soviets under horrific conditions. The Storm Bird's mechanical issues combined with the vile Russian winter to render the fighter useless. JG 54's black men were happy to send their Fw-190s back to France to face

German squadron made it home to the Reich.

The British were embarrassed by Germany's battlewagons succeeding where the Spanish Armada failed, and Galland called Operation Cerberus the high point of his career.

As spring 1942 rose in the West, the Luftwaffe came up with a fighter-bomber model of the Fw-190 that could carry a 500-kilogram bomb into the air. These were used to make retaliatory attacks on England for their bombing raids and rattle British nerves.

To avoid British radar, the Fw-190s of JG 2 and JG 26 made low-level approaches to attack British coastal cities. Leading the attacks were JG 26 aces Major Josef "Pips" Priller and Lieutenant Paul Galland, the CO's younger brother, who later perished in the war. The offensive saw 775 sorties for a loss of 38 Fw-190s.

On October 31, 1942, 70 Storm Birds carried out the largest Luftwaffe day raid on England since the Battle of Britain, hurling 30 bombs on Canterbury, killing 32 and injuring 116.

The British were forced to resume the wasteful practice of standing patrols over their south coast. They also reacted with more Circus operations. By now, JG 26 was entirely equipped with Fw-190s and doing brilliantly with them. In

An Fw-190 of JG-52 is serviced at an airfield in Immola, Finland, while Junkers Ju-87 Stuka dive bombers fly in the distance.In the summer of 1944, Nazi Germany deployed Fw-190 fighters to Finland to assist their allies in the fighting against the Soviet Union.

April, the RAF lost four times as many planes as the Luftwaffe in Circus battles, their Spitfire V aircraft being downed routinely by Fw-190s.

The British were learning how powerful the Storm Birds were the hard way, but on June 23, JG 26's Lieutenant Armin Faber, got lost. Thinking he was over the English Channel and not the Bristol Channel, he landed his Fw-190 at RAF Pembrey. The RAF quickly moved the plane to the Fighter Development Unit at Farnborough and compared it with the Spitfire V. Britain's top test pilots soon found that the Fw-190 had superior aileron controls and thus had a superior roll rate to any fighter then in the war—Allied or Axis—and was 25-30 mph faster than Spitfires at altitudes up to 25,000 feet.

Air Marshal Sir William Sholto Douglas, commanding British fighters in southern England, reported to his superiors on July 17, "We are now in a position of inferiority…There is no doubt in my mind, nor in the minds of my fighter pilots, that the FW 190 is the best all-around fighter in the world today."

However, the RAF tried to come up with better answers. The Hawker Typhoon had structural problems, but the new Spitfire IX proved superior to the Storm Bird at high altitude.

With the American entry into the war, their fighters proved inferior to the Fw-190, including the Republic P-47 Thunderbolt and the North American P-51A. The former was too heavy in maneuver, and the latter's Allison engine lacked the power to compete with the Fw-190.

The next big test for the Fw-190 came on August 19, 1942, when the British launched the ill-fated raid on Dieppe. A JG 26 Fw-190 pilot spotted the invasion fleet steaming in, and the squadron was promptly scrambled. The RAF hoped they would gain control of the skies over Western Europe in the assault, and what transpired was the single greatest one-day air battle of the entire war.

The RAF flew 2,617 sorties that day, gaining a clear advantage by 1 p.m., although by then pilots on both sides were flying their third and fourth missions of the day. JG 26 and JG 2's Fw-190s flew 945 sorties, having a shorter distance to go from their bases to the battlefield.

Under thickening cloud cover, Spitfires fended off Fw-190 attacks and Luftwaffe bombers attempting to attack the landing beaches. The RAF lost 106 aircraft, including 88 Spitfires. The Luftwaffe lost 48 aircraft in the wild battle, but was unable to bring its bombers to bear on the invading ground troops. However, an Fw-190 fighter bomber sank the destroyer HMS *Berkeley* with a 1,000-kg bomb. Galland and three of his buddies sank another ship with their 20mm guns — a derelict steamer off the Dieppe coast, filling it full of lead until it exploded, to everyone's surprise.

For the British, there was a lot of finger-pointing and blame evasion in the disaster, but Field Marshal Sir Alan Brooke, Chief of the Imperial General Staff, struck an important note in a memo that said, "This bloody affair, though productive of many valuable lessons, ended the summer's attempt to draw off planes from Russia by trailing Fighter Command's coast over northern France—a gesture that cost Britain nearly a thousand pilots and aircraft."

With that, Rhubarbs and Circuses ended and daylight air battles over Europe were turned over to the American "Mighty Eighth" Air Force and its Boeing B-17 Flying Fortress bombers, which flew in tight formation at altitudes of 27,000 feet and bristled with .50-caliber machine guns for defense while 8,000-pound bombs devastated Germany's factories and infrastructure.

Fw-190 "Butcher Bird" pilots found it difficult to make stern, beam, or forward attacks against the formidable B-17 and its machine guns, particularly during the initial short-range Allied raids on Lille, Rennes, Brussels, and the U-boat bases on the Atlantic Coast, within range of their fighter escort. That November, Fw-190s were sent to a newly opened front, Tunisia, where American and British troops were storming toward Tunis and Bizerte. The Americans relied on long-range Lockheed P-38 Lightning fighters, which could not maneuver as well as the Fw-190, while the British used Spitfire Vs and IXs, whose operations were hamstrung by the Tunisian winter, which turned their bases into muddy quagmires. In comparison, the Luftwaffe took over concrete airfields around Tunis and Bizerte.

On the Eastern Front, Fw-190s were still flying in limited numbers with JG 54 near Leningrad. Luftwaffe fighters and fighter bombers were acting as a "fire brigade" to assist German ground forces facing increasingly larger and more powerful Soviet troops.

Germans "experten" pilots flew until they were dead or wounded. On the Eastern Front,

The Mistel composite aircraft consisted of an Fw-190 fighter attached to a Junkers Ju-88 bomber. U.S. soldiers inspect this captured example at an airbase in Bernberg, Germany, in the spring of 1945.

that meant German aces, facing inferior aircraft like LaGG-5s, MiG-3s, and American Lend-Lease P-39s, racked up more than 100 kills. Top Fw-190 Eastern Front ace Otto Kittel shot down 227 Soviet planes before his death. However, the Luftwaffe only assigned a few hundred Storm Birds to the Eastern Front at any time.

The big battle for the Fw-190 and its new variants was the struggle over the Reich against the Mighty Eighth, whose B-17s and Consolidated B-24 Liberator bombers were hammering factories by day and the RAF's Bomber Command's Avro Lancasters and Handley Page Halifaxes, which pounded whole cities by night.

The Luftwaffe converted a number of Fw-190s into night fighters, using the "Wilde Sau" (Tame Boar) tactic, which meant that they would fly over cities during air raids, without ground control, to attack Allied bombers illuminated by ground fires. Two wings of Fw-190s were assigned to this duty under Colonel Hans-Joachim "Hajo" Herrmann. They were tested right away in July 1943, when the RAF attacked Hamburg using "Window"—metal tinfoil jettisoned from bombers—to blind German radar. Only the Tame Boar fighters could locate the bombers. However, the Tame Boars ran into greater difficulties than that—they were shot at by their own flak and had difficulty landing, leading to crashes.

By day, Fw-190s defending Germany also had a tough time, so Kurt Tank developed new variants of his Storm Bird, giving them armored canopies, 30mm guns, and Werfer-Granate-21 unguided air-to-air rockets to attack bombers. The Fw-190 A8 that resulted was dubbed the "Pulk-Zerstörer" (Bomber-Formation Destroyer). With such heavy loading, this variant of the Storm Bird proved less maneuverable than its predecessors, and it required Me-109 fighter escort when it flew to attack American bombers. However, the Fw-190 A8s performed as planned. They pressed stern attacks to within 100 yards.

Luftwaffe ace Richard Franz said this about his Fw-190: "When we made our attack, we approached from slightly above, then dived, opening fire with 13mm and 20mm guns to knock out the rear gunner and then, at about 150 meters, we tried to engage with the MK 108 30mm cannon, which was a formidable weapon. It could cut the wing off a B-17. Actually, it was still easier to kill a B-24, which was somewhat weaker in respect of fuselage strength and armament. I think we generally had the better armament and ammunition, whereas they had the better aircraft."

The Americans responded to the Storm Bird by cutting loose long-range P-51 Mustang fighter escorts, powered by British Merlin engines, which could fly all the way to Berlin. Superior in nearly every way to the Fw-190, they drove German fighters from the skies during 1944's "Big Week."

JG 26 had its hands full as the Allied invasion of Normandy loomed, with British and American tactical bombers, all heavily escorted by the latest model Spitfires and P-51s, pounded German transportation lines and defenses. The Luftwaffe also continued to use Fw-190s in the fighter bomber role against England.

On D-Day, JG 26, like the rest of the German command, was caught by surprise, and only two pilots were able to respond, Lt. Col. Priller and his wingman, Lieutenant Heinz Wlodarczyk, ordered to strafe the British invasion beaches. They did so. They made one strafing run, then headed back to base, undamaged. Priller survived the war with 101 kills, while Wlodarczyk was killed in Operation Bodenplatte (Baseplate) on New Year's Day, 1945.

That attack, part of the Battle of the Bulge, marked the real end of the Luftwaffe in the war. The German fighter force was ordered to support the failing Nazi Ardennes offensive by attacking numerous British and American airbases in France, Belgium and The Netherlands at dawn, shooting up aircraft on the ground. Numerous Fw-190s of many types were involved, and while they destroyed or damaged many Allied aircraft—including Field Marshal Montgomery's personal transport—the Luftwaffe took horrendous losses in planes and pilots. The Germans lost 117 Fw-190s.

The Luftwaffe found yet another role for the versatile Storm Bird with the "Mistel" project in 1945. Fw-190s were attached by struts and control cables to the top of a Junkers Ju-88 bomber, whose cockpit was replaced by explosives. The Fw-190 was to take off, release the Ju-88 near a Soviet bridge over the Oder, and control it in a powered dive on the bridge. The project failed—none were destroyed.

Luftwaffe Captain Hans Linge, who scored 70 kills flying a Storm Bird, said, "I first flew the Fw-190 on 8 November 1942 at Vyaz'ma in the Soviet Union. I was absolutely thrilled. I flew every fighter version of it employed on the Eastern Front. Because of its smaller fuselage, visibility was somewhat better out of the Bf-109. I believe the Fw-190 was more maneuverable than the Messerschmitt—although the latter could make a tighter horizontal turn; if you master the Fw-190 you could pull a lot of Gs (g force) and do just about as well. In terms of control and feel, the 190 was heavier on the stick. Structurally, it was distinctly superior to the Messerschmitt, especially in dives. The radial engine of the Fw-190 was more resistant to enemy fire. Firepower, which varied with the particular series, was fairly even in all German fighters. The central cannon of the Messerschmitt was naturally more accurate, but that was really a meaningful advantage only in fighter-to-fighter combat. The 190's 30 mm cannon frequently jammed, especially in hard turns—I lost at least six kills this way."

Of the thousands of Fw-190s in many variations that were produced, about 28 are estimated to survive today, usually as museum exhibits or airbase displays.

Author David Lippman resides in New Jersey and writes frequently on a variety of topics for WWII History.

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By Jon Diamond

National Maritime Museum

Captain George Tennant, Dunkirk Architect

Royal Navy Captain George Tennant carried out the evacuation of Allied troops from the embattled beaches of Dunkirk during Operation Dynamo and beyond.

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ABOVE: Captain George Tennant was instrumental in the successful evacuation of the British Expeditionary Force. TOP: Smoke billows from distant fires and a German shell explodes on the beach at Dunkirk as Allied soldiers await evacuation from the east mole or directly into the surf in Operation Dynamo, May-June 1940.

AS APTLY STATED BY HISTORIAN MAX HASTINGS IN HIS BOOK WARRIORS, "THE LEADERS most readily admired by fellow-soldiers are those who seem committed to do their duty, and also to bring every possible man home alive."

Captain (later Admiral) William George Tennant, Royal Navy, who had vital command responsibilities and made critical decisions at crucial moments during the British evacuation at Dunkirk in May-June 1940 and at the sinking of the battlecruiser HMS *Repulse* and the battleship HMS *Prince of Wales* in the early days of the Pacific conflict in December 1941, proved himself such a leader. Although less popularly celebrated than many of his contemporaries in post-war history books and journals, his feats during these two operations and in the design and implementation of artificial harbors at Normandy in 1944 attest to his courage, intellect, and leadership.

William George Tennant was born on January 2, 1890, in Upton-on-Severn. He joined the Royal Navy at just age 15, being sent to the Junior Naval College on the Isle of Wight and later to the train-

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British soldiers reach the safety of a port in England during the evacuation from Dunkirk. The operation succeeded beyond the hopes of its organizers, largely due to the organization skills of Captain Tennant.

ing ship HMS *Britannia*. Specializing in navigation, he saw action during World War I in naval operations in Heligoland and Dogger Bank. Portending his service in World War II, he was involved in the evacuation of troops from Gallipoli. He also saw service at the Battle of Jutland and survived the sinking of his ship by German U-boat torpedoes in the North Sea. During the 1920s, he was promoted to lieutenant commander and navigator aboard the cruisers HMS *Renown* and then HMS *Repulse*, taking part in two royal world tours. In recognition of these duties, he was promoted to commander and awarded the MVO (Member of the Victorian Order).

But Tennant's pivotal roles in naval history came during World War II. On May 26, 1940, as the British Expeditionary Force (BEF) was being battered and started its retreat through Flanders and northern France, Captain Tennant, Chief Staff Officer to the First Sea Lord (who had just been appointed captain of HMS *Repulse*), had volunteered to Vice Admiral Bertram Ramsay, commander of Operation Dynamo, to help with the Army's evacuation at Dunkirk. Ramsay ordered him to Dunkirk as Senior Naval Officer (SNO) ashore, and early on the afternoon of May 27, he sailed from Dover with 12 officers and 160 ratings, together with a communications staff aboard the destroyer HMS *Wolfhound*. Every 30 minutes, the *Wolfhound* was attacked by Nazi dive bombers on the passage across. While the British gunners had no great success against the Luftwaffe's planes, the attacks helped Tennant realize just how harrowing the Channel crossing was to be.

As Tennant went ashore at 1800 hours to contact the British army commanders in the town, he said, "The sight of Dunkirk gave one a rather hollow feeling in the pit of the stomach. The Boche had been going for it pretty hard, there was not a pane of glass left anywhere and most of it was still unswept in the center of the streets."

Tennant swiftly assessed the situation of the docks as unusable and stationed his sailors along the beaches east of Dunkirk to act as shore police. Only ashore for two hours, Tennant made the first of his several brilliant decisions, which would favorably impact the evacuation. At 2000 hours, he notified Admiral Ramsay, "Please send every available craft to beaches east of Dunkirk immediately. Evacuation tomorrow night is problematical." Thus, Tennant determined that the town of Dunkirk and its harbors were not going to be points of embarkation and importantly informed Operation Dynamo's control center in Dover of this fact. The beaches east of Dunkirk were to be utilized immediately, at least for the time being.

According to Walter Lord in *The Miracle of Dunkirk*, "Captain Tennant, making his inspection of the beaches as SNO, personally addressed several jittery groups. He urged them to keep calm and stay under cover as much as possible. He assured them that plenty of ships were coming, and that they would all get safely back to England. He was invariably successful, partly because the ordinary Tommy had such blind faith in the Royal Navy, but also because Tennant looked like an officer. In his well-cut navy blues, with his brass buttons and four gold stripes, he had authority written all over him."

Tennant continued to direct a stream of urgent requests to Dover for more rescue vessels. Although privately convinced that he and his naval shore party would either perish or enter into captivity, he exhibited the traditional British military sang-froid by reporting cheerfully to Dover, "I am getting along splendidly here."

Tennant realized the evacuation process from the beaches was impossibly slow. Small groups of men were picked up here and a few more there. Out of desperation, Tennant re-examined Dunkirk's outer harbor and the beaches east of the town. Although the Luftwaffe had set Dunkirk's piers and quays ablaze, the two long breakwaters or "moles" that formed the entrance to Dunkirk's harbor were intact. The clouds of smoke from the German air assault and the Wehrmacht's artillery barrages on the town of Dunkirk hung low over the harbor, impairing visibility to and from the air.

The moles were a mile apart at the land side and angled toward each other into the open water. Made of concrete pilings and covered with an eight-foot-wide boardwalk, it seemed risky to Tennant to try to bring ships alongside the moles to tie up. However, if large numbers of men were to be evacuated by ship, there was no other way. The West Mole was only about 500 feet long, and the water at its near end seemed dangerously shallow. But the East Mole attracted Tennant's attention as it ran some 1,400 yards out to sea. The base of the East Mole ran right into the sandy beach at the town limits of Dunkirk where the holiday resort of Malo-les-Bains begins.

Tennant saw that troops could be mustered on the dunes and beaches of Malo-les-Bains and marched in groups straight onto the mole and along the walkway. Thus, there was no need for the men to enter the fiery inferno of Dunkirk itself. Under their own officers, supervised by Tennant's naval shore party, the beleaguered troops could exit from their makeshift beach trenches right onto the evacuating ships.

During the evening of May 27, Tennant directed the ferry *Queen of the Channel* to enter the harbor and tie up at the East Mole. The vessel eased into place alongside the breakwater, and to Tennant's relief was quickly and safely secured. This experiment demonstrated very quickly to Tennant that although not ideal the East Mole was preferable to the alternatives offered on the open beach. At 0436 hours on May 28, a signal went to Ramsay in Dover requesting an alteration in plans. Now Tennant wanted as many ships as possible, especially the fast modern destroyers, not off the beaches but alongside the East Mole. This modification in

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The French destroyer L'Adroit lies a twisted wreck off the shore of Dunkirk while German soldiers relax on the beach in the foreground following the withdrawal of the British Expeditionary Force.

evacuation tactics, using the East Mole, would prove to be the pathway to safety for almost 200,000 of the total 338,000 British and French troops embarked over the next several days. This was Tennant's second crucial decision.

Unfortunately, British destroyer losses at sea were beginning to mount by the morning hours of May 29. About 1500 hours, weather conditions for the evacuation took a turn for the worse from the Allied perspective. The wind shifted toward the north, clearing the smoke that had covered the port all morning. Conditions were now ideal for the Luftwaffe to deliver one of the most disastrous air onslaughts on the ships conducting Operation Dynamo. Three destroyers, *Wakeful, Grafton,* and *Grenade*, were sunk and six more badly damaged.

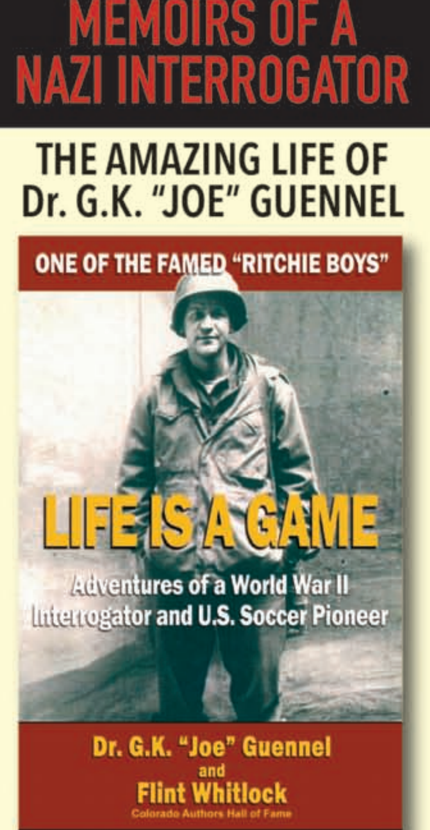
However, on the following day, May 30, the East Mole, despite the bombing, was still usable. Tennant sent Ramsay a cable in which he stated that Dunkirk would be "untenable" by the next morning. Embarkation, Tennant added, "…could continue until then, but its effectiveness would depend upon large ships and destroyers being sent to the East Mole that night." He reminded Ramsay, "…a destroyer going full out, with her boats to the beaches, could only embark 600 men in 12 hours, whereas this could be done in 20 minutes at the mole."

Prompted by the urgent tenor of Tennant's cable, early that afternoon Ramsay phoned First Sea Lord Admiral Sir Dudley Pound in London and insisted that the modern destroyers must be returned to the evacuation operation if it was to prove successful in the time left. After a heated exchange, Admiral Pound finally relented, and at 1530 hours the destroyers were ordered back to Dunkirk. Thus, another tactical decision adjustment by Tennant continued to help augment the number of evacuees from Dunkirk, primarily via the East Mole. The peak of the evacuation occurred on May30.

At Dunkirk during the late afternoon of June 1, Captain Tennant became alarmed by the damage that the German planes were inflicting on the rescue ships. Tennant witnessed the old destroyer HMS *Worcester* being pounded every five minutes without mercy, leaving over 350 dead and 400 wounded. Tennant radioed Ramsay, "Things are getting very hot for ships; over 100 bombs since 0530 hours; many casualties. Have directed that no ships sail during daylight. Evacuation of transports therefore ceases at 0300 hours." Although, maybe less critical than his earlier decisions on the impact of the evacuation, Tennant's recommendation to Ramsay demonstrates his zeal as a commander to continue an operation's peak efficiency while minimizing needless casualties by modifying the conditions of battle.

On June 2 at 2250 hours, Captain Tennant loaded the last of his naval party onto a torpedo boat. He radioed Ramsay at 2330 hours, "Operation Dynamo complete. Returning to Dover," a message that was abbreviated to the more triumphant one, "BEF evacuated."

Regarding his shining moments at Dunkirk, Vice Admiral Ramsay was to declare, "Without Tennant and his men, the troops would have been lost like sheep." Vice Admiral Sir Kenneth Buckley recalled, "Bill Tennant's tall athletic figure in blue strode fearlessly over the beaches giving orders to largely demoralized 'brown jobs' and being obeyed." For his actions at



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Off the coast of Malaya, crewmen of the battleship HMS *Prince of Wales* abandon ship after the Japanese raid that also sank the battlecruiser HMS *Repulse* on December 10, 1941. Captain Tennant, commander of *Repulse,* was credited by Churchill for saving many lives during the action.

Dunkirk, Captain Tennant was awarded the CB (Companion of the Bath) and France's Legion of Honour and Croix de Guerre with Palm. The nickname he was, thereafter, given by ordinary sailors, "Dunkirk Joe," indicates the key role he played in the evacuation of the Allied troops in the dark days of 1940. At a personal level, Tennant was the human embodiment of the term "military leader."

After Operation Dynamo, Tennant returned to the command of HMS *Repulse*. In May 1941, he took part with the Eastern fleet in the action to trap the German battleship *Bismarck*. The sailing of aircraft carrier HMS *Victorious* and *Repulse* had been canceled by the Admiralty, and they were placed at the disposal of the Commander-in-Chief, Home Fleet. The *Victorious* was already at Scapa Flow, and the *Repulse* was ordered to sail from the Clyde to join her. However, it was later in December 1941 in the Pacific Ocean that Tennant was to enter history's limelight again.

The sinking of the *Prince of Wales* and *Repulse* was a seminal naval engagement in World War II, which illustrated the effectiveness of aerial attacks against naval forces that were not protected by air cover and the resulting importance of including an aircraft carrier in any major fleet action. The disaster took place east of Malaya, near Kuantan, Pahang, where Force Z, as the two British warships were designated, was attacked by Imperial Japanese Navy level and torpedo bombers. The original British plan had called for a larger fleet which included the new *Illustrious*-class aircraft carrier HMS *Indomitable* for air cover, although the plan had to be revised when *Indomitable* was damaged en route. Ultimately, it was Prime Minister Winston Churchill's decision to allocate these two capital ships to Singapore's defense; however, it was only a token compromise to demonstrate the British need to protect its various colonial territories in Malaya, Borneo, and the Straits Settlements.

At 1113 hours on December 10, 1941, the *Repulse* and *Prince of Wales* were attacked. High-level bombers scored a hit on the hangar deck of the *Repulse*, which started a small fire. At 1140 hours, six torpedoes hit the *Prince of Wales*. Meanwhile, Captain Tennant had sent an emergency radio signal to Singapore at 1150 that Force Z was being attacked. This was the only signal ever received on shore to indicate that air support was urgently needed by the *Prince of Wales* and *Repulse*.

Six minutes after the solitary signal requesting air cover was sent, Tennant showed incredible skill of maneuver and succeeded in evading all the tracks of nine torpedoes launched by a further group of torpedo bombers, and two minutes later *Repulse* was missed by high-level bombers. Tennant now brought the *Repulse* closer to the *Prince of Wales* to ask if he could assist her; there was no reply.

Soon it was *Repulse*'s turn again to be attacked. A group of nine torpedo bombers was spotted low on the horizon off the starboard bow. One torpedo struck amidships "with a great jarring shudder, as though a giant hand had shaken the ship," recalled one officer. Yet *Repulse* still steamed at 25 knots; still her 4-inch guns and eight-barreled pom-poms attempted to provide antiaircraft artillery cover for the wounded ship. *Repulse* was hit by more torpedoes as the Japanese planes were attacking from all directions.

With *Repulse* now listing heavily, Captain Tennant ordered everyone on deck. Again, he demonstrated decisive leadership. He later reflected, "The decision for a commanding officer to cease all work in the ship below, is an exceedingly difficult one, but knowing the ship's construction I felt very sure that she would not survive four torpedoes, and this was borne out, for she only remained afloat six or seven minutes after I gave the order for everyone to come on deck."

Captain Tennant remembered seeing 200-300 men collecting on the starboard side of the ship prior to its rolling over. He recalled, "I never saw the slightest sign of panic or ill discipline. I told them from the bridge how well they had fought the ship, and wished them good luck."

The destroyers *Electra* and *Vampire* picked up the survivors, who numbered 42 of 66 officers and 754 of 1,240 ratings. As the *Prince of Wales* went down, 11 Royal Air Force (RAF) Brewster Buffalo fighters arrived on the scene, prompting a distant group of Japanese bombers to jettison their bombs and make for home. Tennant's emergency signal had been received at 1219 hours, and the Buffaloes were in the air only seven minutes later. Now the Buffaloes patrolled overhead while the survivors of both ships were being picked out of the water or from floats and lifeboats. It has been reported that while swimming for their lives the survivors of the *Repulse* gave three cheers for their captain and their lost ship.

Curiously enough, the men were far from dispirited, as one pilot reported later: "It was obvious that the three destroyers were going to take hours to pick up those hundreds of men clinging to bits of wreckage and swimming around in filthy, oily water. About all this the threat of another bombing and machine gun attack was imminent. Every one of those men must have realized that. Yet as I flew round every man waved and put up his thumb as I flew over him. It shook me, for here was something above human nature."

According to Churchill's *History of the Second World War*, "Captain Tennant realized

that his ship was doomed. He promptly ordered all hands on deck, and there is no doubt that this timely action saved many lives."

Shifting back to the Atlantic and the feverish preparation for Operation Overlord and the invasion of Normandy, a major problem confronted the Royal Navy. The transport and installation of the artificial harbors (Mulberries) after the invasion had commenced presented a colossal undertaking in itself. To take complete charge of this "devil" of a task, the now Rear Admiral Tennant had been appointed to Ramsay's staff in January 1944.

Tennant immediately doubted whether the Phoenix breakwaters, comprising the Mulberry artificial harbors, could withstand even a moderate gale. Moreover, since it would be nearly three weeks before all had been towed over and put in place, he thought that in any case some other kind of shelter must be immediately provided for small craft off the beaches. He therefore proposed that obsolete ships should be sunk stem to stern as breakwaters.

Prime Minister Churchill approved; 55 old merchant ships and four redundant warships were to be prepared as blockships to be scuttled to form five shelters (one in each of the five assault areas, including the two Mulberries) code named Gooseberries. Rear Admiral Tennant was in charge too, of the laying of the cross-Channel Pluto pipeline supplying vital fuel for the same Normandy invasion. For his part in the success of the D-Day landings, Tennant was awarded the Commander of the Order of the British Empire (CBE) by King George VI and the United States Legion of Merit.

In 1945, Vice Admiral Tennant was awarded a knighthood for "distinguished war service," and from 1946 until 1949, he served as Commander-in-Chief of the American and West Indies Station headquartered in Bermuda. Tennant was promoted to admiral in 1948 and retired the following year at the age of 59. He died in 1958 after a distinguished public service career in Worcestershire.

Few officers are presented a single opportunity to command during the chaos and carnage of battle and demonstrate the leadership qualities which enable them to be labeled true warriors. William Tennant on numerous occasions, by exhibiting tactical and strategic wisdom as well as composure under fire, was such a brilliant leader who was committed to the proper discharge of his duty and bringing as many men home alive as possible.

Jon Diamond lives and practices medicine in Hershey, Pennsylvania. He is a frequent contributor to WWII History.

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By Mark Carlson

Signal

Hitler meets with his generals at his Eastern Front headquarters on February 19, 1943, including Field Marshal Erich von Manstein, far left.

Defeat from the Jaws of Victory?

Adolf Hitler doomed the Third Reich to annihilation with his string of poor strategic decisions.

WITH ALL IT HAD GOING FOR IT, HOW DID GERMANY MANAGE TO LOSE World War II? There are many answers to this deceptively simple question, including the obvious one that the Allies had the technical and industrial advantage. Radar, sonar, convoys, mass production, code-breaking, and a dozen other factors undoubtedly contributed to the Allied victory. But even these did not guarantee victory over the Axis powers. In fact, Germany's defeat came down to one man: Adolf Hitler.

In his book *Inside the Third Reich*, Albert Speer, the Nazi Minister of Armaments, stated "Adolf Hitler had once said, 'The loser of this war will be the side that makes the greatest blunders.'" Hitler, by forcing a worsening succession of wrongheaded decisions, made that prediction come true. While this article is purely opinion, its conclusions are based on more than 20 years of evaluation of history. These may be considered the direct causes of the defeat of Nazi Germany.

The Fuhrer hated the wrong enemy. Hitler was determined to use his total domination over Germany to conquer, control, and cleanse the world of all the elements he so hated. The taproot of his very being was his xenophobic hatred of Jews and Communists. While he believed both groups were subhuman, filthy, godless, and stupid, Hitler blamed them for the loss of the Great War, and more importantly, the racial and ideological poisoning of Europe. His goals of conquering and dominating Europe and Western Asia were not ends in themselves but a means to eradicate the Jews and Communists from the face of the Earth.

In Germany, Jews had a significant and valuable role in the economy, industry, and social structure. Through the First Reich, or empire, under Bismarck and the Second under Kaiser Wilhelm, Jews served in government and the military with as much zeal and patriotism as any pure Aryan. For Hitler, hatred of the Jews was more than a purely religious ideology; it was a maniacal hatred that went beyond mere obsession. It was the dominant factor in his political and personal thinking.

Germany's defeat in 1918 sowed the seeds of national hatred of Jews and Bolsheviks. With the rapidly rising inflation and unemployment in Germany after the signing of the Treaty of Versailles in 1919, the people needed a scapegoat and a leader. Hitler provided both. The former army corporal Hitler found it easy to convince a growing element of the population that the Jews were responsible for losing the war and the subsequent national depression. But by making the persecution of the Jewish race the goal of all his later politi-

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Hitler salutes a formation of Wehrmacht infantry as they march into Poland on September 1, 1939.

cal and military objectives, Hitler lost sight of the national goal of making Germany the dominant European continental power. In fact, if he had not been determined to eradicate the Jews from Germany and Europe, he would have found them a powerful economic and social ally.

It is significant that the original NSDAP, or National Socialist German Workers Party, was not anti-Semitic. The NSDAP was concerned with the reform of the government and giving more control of industry to the people. But with Hitler's growing influence, hatred of Jews became more ingrained until it was the core value of the NSDAP and later Nazi Party.

Hitler went to war too soon. He believed he was the supreme general, bolstered by his Iron Cross for service in the trenches of the Great War. He had revered men like Field Marshal Paul von Hindenburg and General Erich Ludendorff, but he refused to take the advice of any man with field marshal rank. His successes of marching into the Rhineland, annexing Austria, and the bloodless victory over Czechoslovakia were all the proof he needed that he was the superior field commander. But those victories were largely due to his political skill and the wishes of other national leaders to avoid another war. British Prime Minister Neville Chamberlin's appeasement allowed Hitler to double the size of the German Reich without firing a shot, or indeed having much of an army with which to fight. In fact, Germany was far from being able to conquer Europe.

As far back as 1936, Grand Admiral Erich Raeder, commander of the Kriegsmarine, was in the process of building a powerful fleet of surface raiders to destroy enemy naval and merchant ships. He had been assured by Hitler that there would be no war with Great Britain until at least 1944, giving Raeder time to launch more than a dozen battleships and cruisers. But Hitler jumped the gun and planned his invasion of Poland in the summer of 1939, before more than six of the raiders were built. The German navy was not ready to take on the Royal Navy.

Hitler turned potential allies into enemies. After Germany conquered Poland in three weeks, Hitler began unleashing the SS Einsatzgruppen to begin the enslavement of the Poles and Jews. This action did not have any military objective. It was the first major step in his goal of eradicating the Jews from Europe. His non-aggression pact with the Soviet Union and Premier Josef Stalin had never been more than a stalling tactic to divide Poland with the Soviet Union, which was more than happy to accept a huge addition to the Motherland. Stalin was too busy with the Finns and the Baltic States to be worried about his fellow dictator's aims.

The invasion of Poland was the spark that led to total war. The global community might have tolerated or even accepted Hitler's blatant takeover of countries with ethnic German residents if it had not led to the slavery and genocide of whole populations.

Hitler harbored megalomaniacal delusions. Hitler was convinced that he was a better general than his best field commanders. Each time he presented his plans for a campaign, his generals had no choice but to accept. Any senior general that protested or disagreed with the Fuhrer was often fired or dismissed on the spot. Some field marshals were fired and hired a number of times, further evidence of Hitler's erratic behavior. His total control of the military led to his armed forces jockeying for his attention and approval. Field Marshal Hermann Goering's Luftwaffe had Hitler's support at the cost of the Kriegsmarine, and Admiral Raeder found little cooperation from the Air Force. Likewise, the ground forces were sharply divided, particularly between the elite Waffen SS and the regular Wehrmacht. The Waffen SS consistently received the best and newest equipment and highly motivated troops. In Hitler's eyes this served to encourage healthy competition. It had the opposite effect of fostering resentment among the field commanders. This grew worse as Hitler's war plans advanced.

When the Wehrmacht began lumbering westward in the summer of 1940, it was obvious who would come out the victor. The German Blitzkrieg swept across the Low Countries and France in record time. This only served to inflate Hitler's already overblown belief in his ability as a strategist. Convinced by Goering that his Luftwaffe could eliminate the Royal Air Force and gain air supremacy over the English Channel, Hitler planned an invasion of Britain. But Goering failed, and the Germans never launched Operation Sea Lion. Furthermore, the Battle of Britain and the endless terror bombing of the Blitz further drained the Luftwaffe of planes and experienced pilots.

Hitler's alliance with Italy was a liability. Hitler admired Benito Mussolini's political power, but Il Duce's army, navy, and air force constituted a paper tiger. Goering, during his interrogations after the German surrender, said, "If the Italians had been our enemies instead of our allies we might have won the war."

Italy's ill-advised and badly run North African campaign led to Hitler keeping a rare promise to support his ally. The drain of resources on Germany made it impossible for Hitler to provide support to the Eastern Front armies. In the end, Italy's surrender forced Hitler to maintain and defend troops to hold the line against the British and Americans.

Hitler invaded the Soviet Union. In 1941, Hitler told his generals that he was beginning a

National Archives

Hitler admired Italian Fascist dictator Benito Mussolini, shown riding with the Fuhrer in an open car.

"war of ideologies," a clear indication that he was obsessed with the goal of destroying Communism. To invade the largest and second-most populated nation on Earth was insane. His entire campaign against the Soviet Union was intended for the pure Aryan race to conquer the racially subhuman Communists. How he expected Germany, with a population of about 80 million to defeat a nation more twice as populous and more than 20 times in land mass, was a clear indication of his flawed ideology. Hitler had failed to learn from history, particularly from the catastrophic defeat of Napoleon 150 years earlier. He truly believed the enslaved peoples of Russia would overthrow Stalin. But he failed to understand that the people of the Soviet Union had no more choice in the matter of who oppressed them than did the Germanic peoples. Furthermore, he never understood that the Russian people, oppressed or not, would fight ferociously for their motherland.

Operation Barbarossa in 1941 was to have driven into the heart of Russia and taken Moscow. At first the German forces were successful in driving far into the Soviet Union before Stalin's armies were able to form a strong defense. This further convinced Hitler that his strategies were superior. However, he never considered that his troops might be caught in the grip of a severe Russian winter and had not provided winter clothing for the men, nor winter protection for the tanks and machines of war. Josef Goebbels, the Nazi propaganda minister, was forced to beg winter clothes and blankets from the citizens to be sent to the Eastern Front.

Hitler did not reckon on the Western Allies providing vast amounts of war materiel to Stalin via convoys to Archangel and Murmansk, and that Stalin would move most of his arms industry eastward past the barricade of

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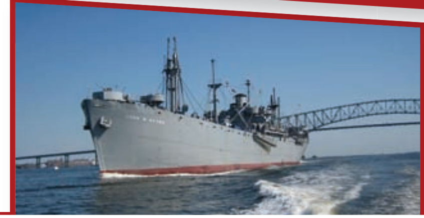

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ABOVE: Shown after their liberation at Buchenwald concentration camp, these prisoners are almost too weak to comprehend that deliverance has come. RIGHT: The Thousand Year Reich lasted only 12 years, and Hitler brought devastation to Germany, as this photo of the damage wrought in Berlin attests.

the Ural Mountains. The Nazi invasion soon became a frozen and deadly quagmire that consumed whole armies. The Red Army could afford to lose thousands of men in stemming the drive on Moscow. But even when his generals were desperately trying to salvage something from the catastrophe, Hitler made the second of his two greatest blunders.

Hitler declared war on the United States four days after the attack on Pearl Harbor. The great majority of Americans believed Japan should be the prime enemy. But Hitler's ill-timed declaration changed all that. President Franklin D. Roosevelt and Prime Minister Winston Churchill chose to move on Germany first, quadrupling the weight of industry and manpower facing Hitler's already stretched forces.

In one stroke Hitler had made the sleeping giant turn its angry eyes on Nazi Germany, and there was no way to stop it. But even so, Hitler had managed to further stack the odds against Germany. Within hours of his declaration of war against the U.S., he learned that the Red Army had counterattacked and driven the German forces back. He immediately fired Field Marshal Walter von Brauchitsch and made another critical mistake by taking full command of all the army's operations in the East.

At that point, with his armies stagnated on the frozen Eastern Front, Hitler might have refocused his military attention to the south and defeating the British in North Africa and the Mediterranean. His efforts to reinforce the armies in the Soviet Union and seize the oil-rich Caucasus resulted in nothing more than the loss of hundreds of thousands of men.

Hitler failed to maximize the use of available resources. Despite having an authoritarian and centrally controlled government, Germany failed to make full use of its armaments industry when it was most critically needed. According to Speer's *Inside the Third Reich*, in contrast to the democratic governments of the United States and Great Britain, Germany's war production was subordinated to consumer products. Having been through the severe privations of the Great War and the depression, Hitler was determined to avoid a repetition that could lead to another revolution. Automobiles and refrigerators were being manufactured alongside fighter planes and tanks.

Compare this to Roosevelt's immediately putting the U.S. on a war footing and urging American industry to make war production its primary goal.

Winston Churchill told the British people that the war would require their "…blood, sweat and toil."

By 1942, America had turned its full industrial might toward total war against both Germany and Japan. Germany could hardly hold its gains, much less fight off what would soon become the two mightiest military forces in the world. Hitler, in his efforts to keep the German populace from being inconvenienced, put their comforts ahead of the needs of the military.

In Britain and the U.S. rationing was quickly established, and the production of major consumer products either stopped or reduced. The U.S. auto industry did not build civilian vehicles between 1942 and mid-1945, instead throwing its manufacturing capacity into building tanks, guns, planes, and the tools of war. The citizens accepted the rationing of vital resources like

rubber, steel, aluminum, oil, and gas.

Ironically, Hitler and the Nazis could not make Germans do what Americans and Britons were willingly doing. In the U.S. and Great Britain women eagerly worked in factories and other important fields, freeing up millions of men for military service. But Adolf Hitler had a deep vein of chauvinism which manifested itself in the role of German women. Instead of utilizing half of the civilian population in the vital war industry, women were expected to stay at home and give birth to the next generation of Nazis.

Hitler's war effort was not sustainable. The year 1942 was the turning point in the war on both fronts. Midway, the fall of El Alamein, the Soviet siege of Stalingrad, and the looming defeat of the U-boats were the next nails to be driven into the Third Reich's coffin.

Yet Hitler did not do the prudent thing and withdraw his forces for the inevitable assault on the Fatherland. Instead, he continued the Nazi policy of eradicating Jews from Europe. With so much of his armed forces involved in the genocide, he began moving phantom armies and weapons that only existed in his mind. Super tanks that proved to be useless and a drain on Germany's weakening war industry were no help except for their diminishing propaganda value.

Hitler continued to order retaliatory air raids and tactical bombing on advancing Sovi-

et forces instead of using the Luftwaffe to deny them fuel and supplies. Speer also tried in vain to dissuade Hitler from useless retaliatory bombing and rocket attacks on Britain. The attacks were pure terror bombing with virtually no effect on the course of the war other than to deprive Germany of much-needed industry and manpower. It took huge numbers of German troops to guard and house the slave labor force for key war industries.

In the end, Hitler was a delusional madman. Between the summer of 1942 and the summer of 1944, the intertwined fates of Hitler and Nazi Germany were sealed. With the D-Day invasion in the West and the Red Army's drive into Germany from the east, the end would be disastrous and inevitable. Even with his armies, navy and air forces being ground to dust on three fronts, Hitler continued to oversee the genocide of the Jews.

The political house of cards he built in 1934 was falling around him. He had staffed his cabinet with ambitious, unintelligent, greedy and power-hungry toadies whose sole aim in life was to be as close to the Fuhrer as possible while stabbing each other in the back. No one could change Hitler's mind, and no one could replace him. He was the sole demigod, the only decision maker in the entire country. He refused to listen to any general who disagreed with his manic pronouncements.

Hitler had buried Germany into a pit that grew deeper and darker with each passing day.

The German people had no voice, no means of removing the Fuhrer from his throne. Even as fleets of U.S. Army Air Forces and RAF bombers were raining steel death on German cities and huge armies were closing in on three sides, no German citizen dared raise his voice in protest against the Nazi government. Germany was totally and irrevocably clutched in the ever-weakening grip of the Nazi tyrant in Berlin.

The underlying reason for the loss of the war was that Hitler was more focused on the eradication of the Jews and Communism than in military victory. If he had stopped before the invasion of Poland, Germany would likely have been left alone by the appeasers. But he unleashed the forces that would ultimately lead to Germany's defeat.

Germany lost the war because its sole leader made the most mistakes.

Author Mark Carlson has written on numerous topics related to World War II and the history of aviation. He is the author of the book Flying on Film—A Century of Aviation in the Movies 1912-2012. *He resides in San Diego, California.*

RARE ORIGINAL PHOTO ALBUM - NAZI BERCHTESGADEN

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DER STAHLHELM STORMTROOPER ARMBAND 1923 ORIGINAL RARE

WW2 GERMAN PARATROOPER M38 JUMP SMOCK EARLY WAR

GERMAN DEUTSCHE WEHRMACHT ARMBAND IN GOTHIC SCRIPT ORIGINAL

GERMAN OFFICER'S VISOR CAP SILVER CHIN STRAP (STURMRIEMEN)

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This artist's rendering depicts the proposed aircraft carrier of the Royal Navy made out of ice, and its relative size compared to the aircraft carrier HMS *Indefatigable*. British Scientist Geoffrey Pyke (inset below) worked on the project championed by Prime Minister Winston Churchill, but the carrier was never built.

Back-room Genius of World War II

Geoffrey Pyke was a scientist and innovator, whose ideas helped the Allies win the war.

WHILE THE BATTLE OF BRITAIN RAGED AND A GERMAN invasion was feared in the sunny, tense summer of 1940, Prime Minister Winston Churchill took time to create an organization that would exemplify his offensive spirit, his love of gadgets and innovations, and his use of cronies. That July, he set up the Combined Operations Command to develop seaborne hit-and-run raids on Nazi installations in occupied Europe and to press forward with research on "all forms of technical equipment and special craft." The first fruit borne of the new headquarters were the all-volunteer British Commando brigades, which soon gave rise to the U.S. Rangers.

Combined Operations also was responsible for the early development of two of the most effective devices of World War II—the prefabricated concrete Mulberry harbors and PLUTO fuel pipelines set up to supply the Allied armies in the June 6, 1944, Normandy invasion. They were ranked along with the foremost British military inventions, such as tanks, aircraft carriers, radar, jet engines, and penicillin. Other more bizarre projects, however, failed to materialize.

Churchill appointed retired Admiral Sir Roger Keyes, a World War I hero, to head Combined Operations. He rapidly organized a number of Commando raids, but most were hampered by poor intelligence and planning.

Admiral Keyes antagonized fellow military leaders and insisted on direct access to Churchill, so he was booted out in October 1941 and replaced by the handsome, dashing Lord Louis Mountbatten, a Royal Navy captain, radio specialist, and cousin of King George VI.

A destroyer veteran who had been waiting to take command of the carrier HMS *Illustrious*, Lord Louis shared the prime minister's zeal for "dash, the unexpected, the use of novel gadgets," and matched Churchill "in his relish for new and improbable devices." Mountbatten marshaled a disparate cadre of "back-room boffins" (scientific advisers) and theoreticians that included South Africa-born Baron Solly Zuckerman, a strategist and authority on the biological effects of bomb blasts; Sir Malcolm Campbell, the engineer and record-breaking car and motorboat racer; Irish-born, charismatic Professor John D. Bernal, a crystallographer and lifelong Communist, and his friend, Geof-

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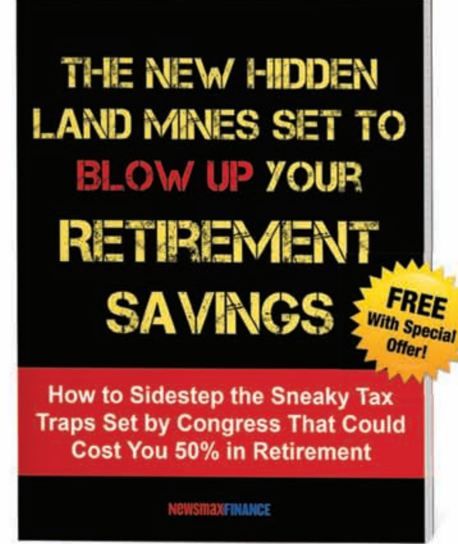

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Soldiers of the 1st Special Service Force patrol the countryside from positions in Italy., The military unit was proposed by Geoffrey Pyke, and included men from both the United States and Canada.

frey N. Pyke, an antisocial, inventive genius and the most eccentric British personality of the 1939-45 war.

Tall, gawky, and wild-eyed, Pyke rarely bathed, shaved, or cut his hair. He wore spats instead of socks, a soiled gray homburg, a rumpled, stained suit, and no necktie. He was jealous and suspicious and widely disliked. Yet he kept as many as 60 books at his bedside at one time and remembered everything he had read. Ideas always crowded his head. *The London Times* described him as "one of the most original, if unrecognized, figures of the present century." Bernal believed that he was "one of the greatest geniuses of his time," and a two-column *Time* magazine obituary called him "everybody's conscience."

Among his accomplishments, Pyke was responsible for the invention of a tracked, amphibious truck, fathered the creation of a highly effective Allied assault force, and helped devise the most ingenious naval weapon of the war, though it never saw action.

Geoffrey Nathaniel Pyke was born in 1894, the son of Lionel E. Pyke, a descendant of Dutch Jews. When his father died at the age of 44, the boy's strong-minded, erratic mother decided that he would be sent to Wellington College in Crowthorne, Berkshire, which sent most of its graduates to the nearby Royal Military College at Sandhurst.

When World War I broke out in August 1914, the young man decided to become a journalist. He haunted the newspaper offices on Fleet Street, announcing that he was one of the world's greatest reporters. His persuasiveness resulted in the *Daily Chronicle* hiring him, but agreeing to pay only his expenses.

After shrewdly buying a forged American passport to get him through Sweden, Pyke traveled to Germany. Six days after reaching Berlin, he was arrested by the police, who did not know what to make of him. He spent four months in solitary confinement, where he persisted in lecturing his warders on military tactics. Denied writing materials, he spent his days mentally solving mathematical problems and sharpening his powers of deductive reasoning. In 1915, he was sent to the big Ruhleben civilian prison camp, where he shared a smelly stable with 300 other men.

During the winter of 1915-16, Pyke recruited a fellow German-speaking prisoner, Edward Falk, and they came up with a plan after studying the camp schedule. Of 72 escape attempts from Ruhleben during the war, theirs was one of only three that were successful.

Life was unsettled for the restless Pyke after the war. He tried his hand as a stockbroker, became a successful metal trader, although he had received no technical training, and founded a school with such radical principles that it drew international attention.

Ideas poured from Pyke during the interwar years, and he captured the imagination of a few intimates who spread his concepts throughout the country. Alarmed by the rise of Nazism, he created a worldwide propaganda group in defense of freedom.

As war threatened in Europe in the late 1930s, Pyke came up with another plan which aroused wide interest. Pointing out the devastation that bombing would inflict on cities, he proposed that the big chalk hills in southern England be excavated to shelter large numbers of people. Some experts said later that if his plan had been accepted, thousands of lives could have been saved during the World War II air raids.

War came, as Pyke had long feared, and in 1940 he started drawing up a set of memoranda designed to clarify its true aims. He prophesied a Europe divided between East and West and predicted that the region would ultimately be dominated by the East. He also sent a memorandum to the War Cabinet advancing the use of a new military strategy. Pyke suggested that a small but tough British force could defeat a superior number of Germans if provided with the type of machinery which would give it versatility and speed.

The plan gained Pyke a valuable ally in Conservative politician Leo Amery, a former First Lord of the Admiralty and colonial secretary and a member of Churchill's War Cabinet. Amery tried vigorously but vainly to sell Pyke's plan to the War Office, so he submitted it in desperation to the new Combined Operations Headquarters headed by Admiral Keyes. Mild interest was shown, but it was rejected.

Things began to look up for Pyke, however, when Mountbatten took the helm of Combined Operations, and Amery put the two men in touch with each other. It was a shock for the immaculate Lord Louis when the unkempt Pyke visited his headquarters, but he tactfully listened to his ideas and was intrigued when Pyke announced, "I've got a plan here whereby a thousand British soldiers can tie down a force of a half a million Germans."

Mountbatten took him on as civilian director of combined operations programs at the big salary of 1,500 pounds. The post eventually secured Pyke the respectful attention of Churchill, President Franklin D. Roosevelt, and General George C. Marshall, U.S. Army Chief of Staff.

The first plan Pyke offered to Mountbatten was keyed to the invention of a vehicle — a fast, armored sled—which would travel rapidly and reliably over snow. He had few practical suggestions for its creation but considered that it presented no more of a challenge than had the development of the tank in World War I. Pyke believed that such a vehicle was needed because almost 70 percent of Europe lay under snow for five months of the year.

The vehicles, Pyke told Lord Louis, could carry small groups of specially trained troops to attack bridges, tunnels, trains, rail tracks, and power plants in snow-clad countries, such as Norway, which had been under the Nazi yoke since April 1940. Mountbatten was impressed

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The M29 Weasel, a tracked vehicle made for operations in winter weather, was suggested by Pyke. This example belongs to the 79th Infantry Division operating in France in January 1945.

with this new concept of warfare, and Churchill lent encouragement.

Mountbatten studied Pyke's highly detailed, 54-page plan, and the result was Operation Plough, which called for hand-picked troops to be air-dropped into Norway, set up a glacier base, and use the sleds for hit-and-run sabotage raids against the hydroelectric stations which were critical to the German war economy. The enemy, Pyke pointed out, would be forced to send troops to retaliate and thus deplete their strength in other areas.

Lord Louis briefed Churchill on the plan at a meeting on April 11, 1942, to discuss the general strategic question of an invasion of continental Europe. It was attended by President Roosevelt's trusted envoy, Harry Hopkins, and General Marshall. The prime minister was as impressed with Pyke's project as Mountbatten. It was agreed that America would manufacture the "armored fighting snow vehicles" and that Pyke should go to Washington to work with Marshall, who categorized him as "a very odd-looking individual" who "talks well and may have an important contribution to make."

Pyke was flown to Washington, where he conferred with Lt. Gen. Joseph T. McNarney, Marshall's able, hard-headed deputy chief of staff, and other officers for several weeks. But Pyke became frustrated at the War Department. His slovenly appearance and abrasiveness shocked many, and McNarney developed an intense dislike for him. The Americans insisted on making a thorough investigation into the physical nature of snow, and, while assuring Pyke that they would bring his plans to fruition, they agreed unanimously in private that the idea was worthless and should be abandoned. The lack of enthusiasm irritated Pyke. He became verbally abusive at times, was barred from some meetings on security grounds, and cabled Mountbatten that he was being "sold short."

After initially supporting Project Plough, the Norwegians decided it would almost totally destroy their country's industry, so Mountbatten decided eventually that it should be sidetracked. Yet Pyke's plan led to two breakthroughs for the Allied war effort.

The first was the Studebaker-built M-29 Weasel, a 2.5-ton tracked amphibious cargo carrier with a two-man crew and a maximum speed of 33 miles an hour. Its cargo capacity was only 1,200 pounds, but it could tow 4,200 pounds. The vehicles were to prove useful in October-November 1944 when British and Canadian forces of Field Marshal Bernard L. Montgomery's 21st Army Group fought a prolonged, bloody campaign to clear the muddy Scheldt Estuary and make use of the strategic port of Antwerp.

The other breakthrough attributed to Pyke was the formation in the summer of 1942 of the U.S.-Canadian 1st Special Service Force, which distinguished itself in the Italian mountains around Monte Cassino, at Anzio, and in the invasion of southern France. Called the "Devil's Brigade" by the Germans, it was one of the war's elite assault units. As Mountbatten told Pyke in October 1943, "You must feel proud to think that the force, the creation of which you originally suggested to me in March 1942, has become such a vital necessity in the coming stage of the war .... One day I feel that you will be able to look with pride on this child of your imagination."

Pyke continued to churn out logistical ideas from his cluttered desk at Combined Operations headquarters, but many of them were unsuccessful, such as his "uphill rivers" project, whereby cargo would be transported by water through pipelines. In 1943, however, his genius was enlisted to bring to reality the strangest secret project of the war.

After the Royal Navy and the U.S. Navy lost several of their precious aircraft carriers to the enemy in the Mediterranean, Atlantic, and Pacific, Churchill and others sought a stopgap solution while new flattops were still under construction. The inventive prime minister, who had helped to pioneer tank and carrier development in the previous war, suggested the possibility of floating airfields. "If we could create a floating airfield," he explained, "we could refuel our fighter aircraft within striking distance of the landing points, and thus multiply our air power on the spot at the decisive moment."

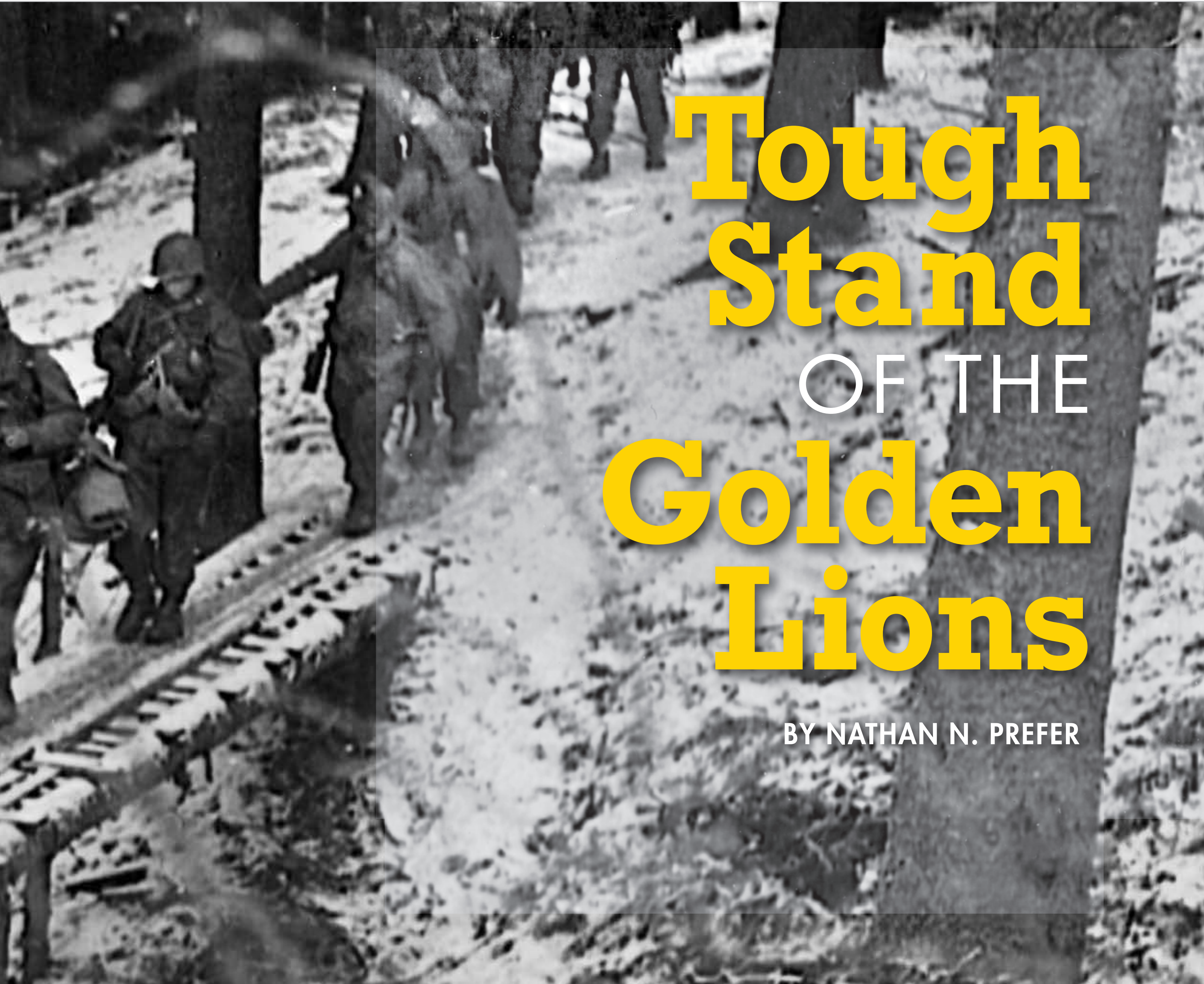
He discussed the idea with Mountbatten, and they came up with a novel notion. Why not use icebergs as carriers? All that was necessary was to cut the top off an iceberg, smooth out a landing deck, and insert engines. Displacing about two million tons, such a vessel should prove unsinkable because, if hit by a bomb or torpedo, the resulting hole would fill with water and quickly refreeze.

Churchill rushed off a memorandum to his War Cabinet. Field Marshal Alanbrooke was not enthusiastic, but the prime minister and Mountbatten were sure they had hit upon something, so they persevered with Project Habakkuk, whimsically named for the Old Testament prophet who had said, "Look over the nations and see, and be utterly amazed. For a work is being done in your days that you would not have believed, were it told."

Called upon to make Habakkuk a practical reality, Pyke got busy inventing a tough, economical material with which to build the unprecedented "ice boats." A mixture of wood pulp and 90-percent sea ice called Pykrete (Pyke's concrete), it was as strong as concrete, could be hewn and hammered like wood, and was amazingly slow to melt in water of any temperature. In order to prove its resiliency, Pyke dropped a chunk into Churchill's bathtub, and it refused to melt.

Continued on page 78

A platoon of the green U.S. 106th Infantry Division trudges through a Belgian woodland. Although they were told that they would occupy a quiet sector of the Western Front in December 1944, the Golden Lions were soon in the teeth of the Battle of the Bulge.



Tough Stand OF THE Golden Lions

BY NATHAN N. PREFER

Elements of the green U.S. 106th Infantry Division made terrible sacrifices to help stem the German tide during the Battle of the Bulge.

When the men of the newly arrived 106th Infantry "Golden Lions" Division arrived on the front lines near St. Vith in Belgium on December 11, 1944, they were happy to learn that they were inheriting a quiet sector. The combat-experienced veterans of the 2nd Infantry Division had told them so. Even when Pfc. Earl Copenhaver pulled the lanyard of his 105mm howitzer of Battery A, 589th Field Artillery Battalion, firing the division's first shot in anger, the lack of any response from the enemy only enhanced the feeling that the new division had "lucked out" by starting its combat career in a quiet sector of the front line.

The division's three infantry regiments and four artillery battalions took over the positions formerly held by the 2nd Infantry Division, noting in passing that most of these had been German positions that the Americans had simply taken over when they drove the enemy out several weeks earlier. The division's organic engineers, the 81st Engineer (Combat) Battalion also took over frontline positions, and the division's flank was guarded by the 14th Mechanized Cavalry Group. The attached 168th Engineer (Combat) Battalion was in the division's rear, maintaining roads, supply depots and other tasks.

The men of the Golden Lions may not have been aware of it, but their division was guarding a 22-mile stretch of the Allied front line in Northwest Europe. The recommended length of front line for an American division in 1944 was at most six miles. Even the attached

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Killed in action during the early German advance at the Battle of the Bulge, the bodies of American soldiers sprawl beside their anti-tank gun. Although inexperienced, the soldiers of the 106th Infantry Division fought a spirited battle against the attacking Germans in the Ardennes Forest.

units, including the 14th Cavalry Group, 168th Engineer (Combat) Battalion, and 275th Armored Artillery Battalion, could not make up the strength to properly cover such an extended front. Although a few senior officers may have been concerned, most were not as this was, once again, a quiet sector where nothing much was expected to happen.

There were other difficulties as well. The division artillery battalions were low on ammunition, having received none since landing in France a week before. Assured that they would receive plenty of ammunition when they arrived at the front, in fact there was none for them. It was only through the generosity of the artillery battalions of the 2nd Infantry Division, that a supply was finally obtained. But, of course, that was not a serious problem in such a quiet sector. Of more concern to the men of the Golden Lions was the fact that their barracks bags, containing all their spare clothing and personal articles, had yet to catch up with them. In the cold, wet climate of the Ardennes Forest, this quickly became a problem when individual cases of frostbite began to appear within days of arrival.

The climate was not welcoming, and the men huddled in huts, pillboxes, and villages when available. Most of these villages were in depressions, "sugar bowls" the men called them, at crossroads within the Ardennes Forest. They were all surrounded by hills which would allow an enemy unobstructed observation of them and easily allow an enemy to bring down fire on each village.

The division commander was worried about the way his division had been ordered to position itself. Major General Alan Walter Jones was born in Washington State in 1894. After attending the University of Washington, he accepted a commission in the Infantry in 1917 and made the Army his career. Although he had never seen combat, his training at the Command and General Staff School and Army War College told him that his division was vulnerable to an enemy attack. His assistant division commander, Brigadier General Herbert Towle Perrin, agreed with his concerns, as did the division's artillery commander, Brigadier General Leo Thomas McMahon. Even more outspoken was Colonel Mark Devine, commanding the 14th Mechanized Cavalry Group, who insisted that a new plan be drawn up to prepare for a counterattack. With all the senior commanders in agreement, the order was issued to develop such a plan.

The division's intelligence officer, Lieutenant Colonel Robert P. Stout, noted that the division faced two known enemy divisions, the 18th Volksgrenadier Division and the 26th Volksgrenadier Division. This information came from the division's senior headquarters, the VIII Corps, First U.S. Army. Both enemy formations were inexperienced and had been destroyed on other fronts before being rebuilt with transfers from the Kriegsmarine and Luftwaffe. There were also supposed to be two panzer divisions some 15 miles behind enemy lines that could counterattack, although that seemed unlikely in the wooded and hilly terrain held by the 106th Infantry Division.

As the planning continued, the Germans remained quiet except for the occasional artillery or mortar shelling and patrol activity. None of this disturbed the Golden Lions as much as the sounds each evening of engines behind enemy lines. No one seemed to be able to account for the motor traffic, what it was or what it meant. When one battalion intelligence officer reported hearing a "motor convoy" to VIII Corps, he was informed that the Germans were playing with the newcomers by playing transcriptions over loudspeakers to make them nervous.

Despite this calming news from VIII Corps, Colonel Stout ordered increased patrols to better identify the enemy opposite the 106th Infantry Division, plot enemy minefields, and capture prisoners. Just as this was to begin, overshoes for the suffering infantrymen arrived to improve their situation. And one patrol nearly found out what the Germans were really doing behind their front lines. A patrol from Troop C, 18th Mechanized Cavalry Squadron, under First Lieutenant Ajax L. Crawford, was prowling behind enemy lines on the night of

December 15-16 when they noticed a lot of activity in the village of Allmuthen. Lieutenant Crawford and his eight men investigated and discovered the village filled with the enemy busy preparing weapons and vehicles for some sort of action. Before they could see more, they bumped into an equally surprised German patrol and had to withdraw.

General Jones and his staff had good reason to be concerned. Across the front line the Germans were gathering 30 divisions, 1,900 artillery pieces, and 970 tanks and armored assault guns. These were being assembled for a massive counterattack whose goal was no less than cutting through the Allied front lines and reaching the critical port of Antwerp, Belgium. Success would divide the British 21st Army Group (2nd British and 1st Canadian Armies), the Ninth U.S. Army and part of the First U.S. Army from the rest of the Allied forces to the south. The hope was that such a success would force a negotiated peace upon the Western allies. The idea came from the highest authority in Germany, Chancellor Adolf Hitler, and every effort was being made to carry the plan to success.

Facing the 106th Infantry Division and 14th Mechanized Cavalry Group was the Fifth Panzer Army under the command of General Hasso Eccard von Manteuffel, a respected and experienced battlefield commander. His plan was for General Walther Lucht's LXVI Corps to use Major General Hoffman-Schönborn's 18th Volksgrenadier Division to encircle the Golden Lions on the high ground known as the Schnee Eifel and isolate them while the rest of the Fifth Panzer Army raced to the west. Only a few men from the 18th Volksgrenadier Replacement Battalion would hold the front lines while the rest of the division attacked around the flanks of the Americans. An assault gun battalion would support the German attack. H-Hour, set for the morning of December 16, was to open with no massive barrage, but surprise was to be used to gain and pass the flanks of the American positions. The attack was to be supported by Major General Frederich Kittel's 62nd Volksgrenadier Division, brought up from reserve.

The attack began as planned at 5:30 a.m. on December 16, 1944. Enemy shells fell on crossroads and towns behind the 106th Infantry Division's front. The frontline infantrymen took cover, the division band put away their instruments and took up positions as the headquarters security guard, and the division braced for an attack. One witness remembered, "At 6:15 the shelling stopped. Vague figures in white snow suits, figures who screamed and

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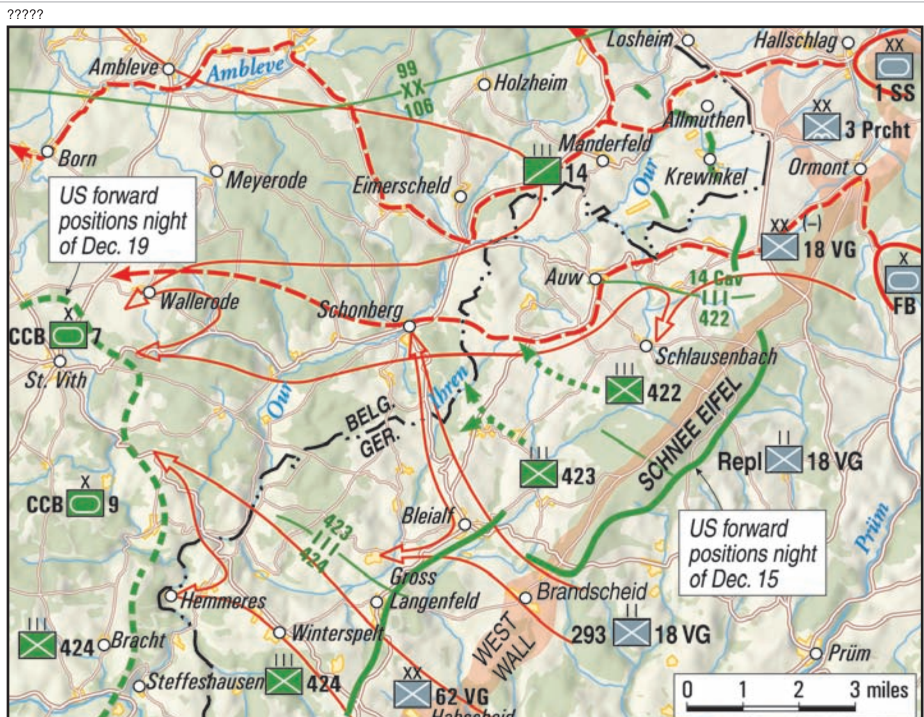

ABOVE: The positions of the 106th Infantry Division were widely dispersed and unable to provide effective mutual support when the Germans struck in the opening hours of the offensive. BELOW: Lieutenant Ivan Long, center, talks with members of his Intelligence and Reconnaissance Platoon, 423rd Infantry Regiment. These soldiers were among the few who escaped the the advancing Germans on the Schnee Eifel, making their way to American lines around St. Vith.

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whooped as they danced through the trees, flittered along the front. The clatter of tank treads reverberated on the roads. At last this was something tangible, American artillery, mortar, machine gun and small-arms fire came down on the enemy spearheads."

The attack on the 14th Mechanized Cavalry Group surprised the Germans as much as the Americans. So dispersed were the cavalry positions, that at first the Germans believed that the Americans had pulled back before they attacked. But they soon learned differently, for

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when they attacked the villages the cavalry held, they were repeatedly repulsed. In the case of the village of Krewinkel, a platoon of Troop C and the reconnaissance platoon of Company A, 820th Tank Destroyer Battalion fought off attacks for hours. These attacks from the 3rd Parachute Division were unsuccessful, and the Americans continued to hold the village. After the last unsuccessful attack, the Germans withdrew, shouting to the Americans, "Take a ten-minute break. We'll be back," to which one GI responded, "We'll still be here."

But the German strength was overwhelming and supported by armor and artillery. They would not be denied for long. Soon individual cavalry troops were cut off and surrounded. Some surrendered, others tried to escape, some successfully, others not. Colonel Devine called up his reserve cavalry squadron, the former Chicago "Black Horse Troop" and now the 32nd Mechanized Calvary Reconnaissance Squadron under Lieutenant Colonel Paul A. Ridge, but it could do little in halting the enemy advance. By December 19, the 14th Mechanized Cavalry Group consisted of small groups of men trying to reach American lines and avoid capture. Colonel Devine, overcome by the destruction of his command, collapsed and was relieved of command. Lieutenant Colonel William F. Damon, Jr., the commander of the 18th Mechanized Cavalry Reconnaissance Squadron, assumed command of the remnants of the 14th Mechanized Cavalry Group.

Unknown until after the battle, the 14th Mechanized Cavalry Group had been caught on the boundary between the attack of the Sixth Panzer Army's 3rd Parachute Division to the north and the Fifth Panzer Army's 18th Volksgrenadier Division on the south. Given the wide dispersal of its units, required to cover such a vast front, it never had a chance of accomplishing its mission to maintain contact between the V and VIII Corps. In attempting to do so, it lost 20 percent of its officers, 33 percent of its enlisted men, and 53 percent of its vehicles.

Meanwhile, the Germans had penetrated deeply behind the Golden Lions' front lines, slipping between the 422nd Infantry and 14th Mechanized Cavalry Group on one side and between the 424th Infantry and 106th Reconnaissance Troop, which was all but wiped out, on the other. Soon the Germans were behind the main line of resistance, cutting off supplies, communications, and withdrawal routes. By the end of December 16, General Jones had committed every resource except the attached 168th Engineer (Combat) Battalion. His 422nd and 423rd Infantry Regiments were surrounded on the Schnee Eifel while his 424th Infantry was fighting for its life nearby. He called for help from VIII Corps. Help from combat commands of the 7th and 9th Armored Divisions was promised.

It was too late. By the end of December 17, perhaps as many as 9,000 American soldiers were trapped on the Schnee Eifel, including the 422nd and 423rd Infantry Regiments, parts of the 589th Field Artillery Battalion, the 590th Field Artillery Battalion, Company B, 81st Engineer (Combat) Battalion, Company C, 820th Tank Destroyer Battalion, and others. Attempts at air resupply had failed. The reinforcements sent by VIII Corps were too weak to break through to them. German tanks were moving closer. They had no choice but to surrender.

But that was not the end of the Golden Lions. Although the bulk of the division had been surrounded and forced to surrender, the rest of the division fought on. The 424th Infantry Regiment would go on to fight the rest of the month with the equally badly hurt 28th Infantry Division on its flank. It would later constitute the core for rebuilding the division, which returned to battle in 1945. Others fought on despite having lost all support and with no orders on what to do next. One such unit was Lieutenant Colonel Thomas Paine Kelly, Jr.'s 589th Field Artillery Battalion, one of three 105mm howitzer battalions that were a part of the 106th Infantry Division. The battalion was in position two miles northwest of Schlausenbach supporting Colonel George L. Descheneaux's 422nd Infantry Regiment when the attack began. Its positions were along Skyline Drive and ran some 300 yards from Bleialf to Auw. The three firing batteries were spread out along the road in woods and road junctions. They were kept busy responding to calls for support because the 422nd Infantry Regiment lacked any mortar ammunition, which would have otherwise been used in most cases. Once the attack began the 589th Field Artillery Battalion sent out local patrols for its own protection. One patrol soon reported enemy infantry approaching from the direction of Auw.

The 589th Field Artillery Battalion was orga-

nized at Fort Jackson, South Carolina, as a truck-drawn 105mm howitzer battalion. Assigned to the 106th Infantry Division, it trained there until it departed the United States in November 1944, for England. Like the rest of the division, it landed in France December 6, 1944, and was soon on the front lines. The September 1943 Table of Organization and Equipment for the battalion included 31 officers, two warrant officers, and 488 enlisted men. Besides two aircraft for observation, the equipment included 12 105mm howitzers, 21 .50-caliber machine guns, 37 trucks, 19 weapons carriers, and 22 jeeps.

The battalion's main weapon was, of course, the 105mm howitzer. With this it provided artillery support for the infantry in attack or defense. Developed in the 1920s and 1930s, the 105mm (3.0-inch) howitzer weighed 4,475 pounds and fired a high explosive shell weighing 33 pounds. It had a maximum range of 12,248 yards, had a split trail, hydro-pneumatic recoil system and was known in the U.S. Army as the M2A1 howitzer.

Both: National Archives

ABOVE: Preparing their 105mm howitzer for action, soldiers of the 591st Field Artillery Battalion, 106th Infantry Division, man their weapon in hopes of stemming the German tide through the Ardennes Forest. BELOW: A 105mm howitzer of the U.S. Army is serviced during training exercises. The field artillery pieces assigned to the 106th Infantry Division during the Battle of the Bulge were difficult to relocate due to the slick roads and wintry conditions. OPPOSITE: Soldiers of the U.S. 106th Infantry Division come under sporadic German fire during fighting in the Ardennes Forest.

The battalion now heard enemy fire coming from the left and rear of its positions. Enemy counterbattery fire and distant small-arms fire began to impact within the battalion's area. First Lieutenant Thomas J. Wright, Jr., executive Officer of Battery C, moved forward to an observation post of the 634th Antiaircraft Artillery Battalion and adjusted fire on approaching enemy assault guns. Meanwhile, Major Elliot Goldstein, the battalion executive officer, took two bazooka teams from the nearby 592nd Field Artillery Battalion and led them to the front to support the 634th AAA Battalion. Soon enemy tanks were reported behind the regiment and the artillery battalions.

The enemy tanks came into view, and Captain George F. Huxel, the battalion assistant operations officer, tried to take them under fire, but they were too close and opened fire on the battalion. One of the outposts opened fire, supported by 40mm fire and bazookas, which damaged the armored vehicle. Finally, Battery A managed to position its guns and fired two devastating rounds which finished off the enemy assault gun.

Another tank opened fire, and Major Goldstein and Captain Arthur C. Brown, the commander of Battery B, directed fire which silenced this vehicle as well. First Lieutenant Eric Fisher Wood, Jr., Battery A's executive officer, ran to a nearby hill and, shouting instructions back, directed Number 4 gun's fire, hitting the vehicle. Lieutenant Wood then ordered his guns to fire short-fuse shells into the woods to clear out any enemy infantry hiding there. These acts broke up the enemy attack on the 589th Field Artillery Battalion. But the Germans had now blocked the withdrawal route of Battery C.

By late afternoon, the Germans held Auw in strength, the cavalry had withdrawn on the flank, and Lieutenant Colonel Roy Udell Clay's 275th Armored Field Artillery Battalion was also pulling back. Soon orders came from General McMahon for the 589th and 592nd Field Artillery Battalions to withdraw as well. Intense activity erupted in the artillery battalions as preparations were made to get the two battalions on the road. The 589th Battalion was to join its service battery three miles south of Schönberg while the 592nd Battalion headed for St. Vith. The roads were difficult, narrow, snow-covered, and winding through woods from which the enemy might strike at any moment. Each gun had to be carefully maneu-

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vered around sharp curves on icy roads while enemy fire buzzed overhead. Most difficult was the situation of Battery C, whose retreat route was cut off by the enemy.

Battery A discovered that the wheels of some of their guns had sunk up to their axles into the muddy ground. But after much effort, both Battery A and B were ready to travel. Lieutenant Wood had by now succeeded to command of Battery A after its commander, Captain Aloysius J. Mencke, had been captured at a forward observation post. As they struggled to the rear, they were unaware that reports were coming into division headquarters from the 32nd Mechanized Cavalry Reconnaissance Squadron that they had been pushed out of Schönberg and were withdrawing. Other reports indicated the enemy was on the Schönberg Road and establishing roadblocks behind the forward American positions. General Jones ordered the 81st Engineer (Combat) Battalion withdrawn to St. Vith and the 806th Ordnance Company evacuated.

The 589th Field Artillery Battalion was struggling to withdraw as ordered. The enemy shelled their wooded area as they hitched the guns to their prime movers. The road was a morass of mud and ice that required the most careful maneuvering. But soon both Batteries A and B were on the road. Lieutenant Colonel Joseph F. Puett's 2nd Battalion, 423rd Infantry, tried to assist Battery C out of the area by attacking the Germans at the roadblock and woods, but General Jones had marked them as a division reserve, and he did not want them tied down yet, so permission was denied.

Colonel Puett would later report that only with the aid of a bulldozer and daylight could they have released the Battery C howitzers from the mud, but neither was available. Colonel Kelly asked for and received permission to destroy the Battery C howitzers. He then led the men to the point where they were to meet the trucks which would carry them to the rear. Along the way most of the men of Battery C were captured by the enemy. Attempting to escape by cutting across the wooded hills, the battery commander, Captain Rockwell, was killed. Colonel Kelly managed to return to Colonel Puett's infantry battalion, where he would share their fate.

The two-battery battalion managed to reach the main road and withdraw, losing another howitzer when it slid off the icy road and had to be abandoned. They were just setting up their guns east of Schönberg when firing began nearby. Lieutenant Wood ordered one gun under Sergeant Barney M. Alford to set up on the road in an antitank defense. Meanwhile, service battery, further up the road, was attacked by the enemy. They fought back from houses and roadside ditches. Pfc. Thomas C. Graham raced across an open, fire-swept space to reach a machine gun, and opened fire. Using bazookas, small arms, machine guns, and grenades, they held back the Germans, capturing an officer and several enemy soldiers. But as before, the enemy soon overwhelmed service battery, and the men scattered for safety. The 589th Field Artillery Battalion, what was left of it, was now surrounded by the enemy. The executive officer, Major Arthur C. Parker, Jr., in command after Colonel Kelly's disappearance, ordered each remaining battery to get out as best it could.

Battery B was overrun before they could get out, but Lieutenant Wood managed to get three of his howitzers on the road. Under small-arms and tank fire, the battery roared down the highway toward St. Vith. The men of Battery B followed behind in trucks. The column suddenly came upon an enemy tank, and Lieutenant Wood ordered the column to halt while he and a small group attacked the tank with a bazooka and carbines. The tank disappeared. They again rolled on the highway until a second tank blocked their way. The tank blew up the lead truck. The artillerymen took to the woods, encountering an officer and seven artillerymen from the 333rd Field Artillery (Colored) Battalion who were similarly stranded in front of the tank. Lieutenant Wood refused to surrender and took off for the nearby woods, from which he would later fight an epic battle alone behind enemy lines. Battery B and the remnants of service battery were overrun and scattered. Many were captured; others managed to rejoin American lines later in the battle.

But the three guns of Battery A that Lieutenant Wood had pushed down the road survived. They had moved through Schönberg under fire, picked up service battery of Lieu-

tenant Colonel Vaden Lackey's 590th Field Artillery Battalion (105mm howitzers) and prepared to move north to find a place to stop and fight again. They would make their stand at a place soon to be known as "Parker's Crossroads."

Its true name was Baraque de Fraiture, a height on the highway between Bastogne and Liége. "It consisted then, as it does today, of a few buildings on one of the highest summits in the Ardennes (over 2,000 feet), and a key intersection of the north-south road from Bastogne to Liége with a good east-west route running between Vielsalm and La Roche," said one observer. It was an important road, since from it one can travel to Basel, in Switzerland, to Amsterdam, in Holland and to Sedan in France. It was "a dreary, snow-sifted patch in the middle of one of the Ardennes marsh areas, surrounded by pine forests, and lying eight miles in air-line west and slightly south of Vielsalm."

When the order came to withdraw from St. Vith, Major Parker took the three remaining guns of the 589th Field Artillery Battalion to Baraque de Fraiture with orders to set up a roadblock to protect the Golden Lions' rear. He arrived on December 19 with about 100 men, all exhausted and numb from the cold. Here he set up his roadblock. One report has him declaring, "We will run no more. Here we will stand and fight and here we will make a difference." His command included the three 105mm howitzers, some machine guns, and several trucks. The following day he added to his troop list four halftracks mounting multiple .50-caliber machine guns from the 203rd Antiaircraft Artillery Battalion of the 7th Armored Division. He also added some stray tanks, a cavalry platoon, and a few towed anti-tank guns.

Major Parker's three 105mm howitzers were commanded by men of the battalion who had managed to escape the Schnee Eifel trap. One gun was commanded by Captain Arthur C. Brown, originally of Battery B. A second gun was commanded by 1st Lieutenant Thomas J. Wright of service battery, and the third gun was under Sergeant Barney M. Alford. Wounded men were treated by battalion medics including T/5 Robert E. Vorpagel and T/4 Melvin R. Pollow, often under fire and utilizing enemy medical supplies to treat both American and German wounded.

Major Parker soon found himself under the command of Colonel Herbert W. Kruger, who commanded the 174th Field Artillery Group. Colonel Kruger was moving his battalions out of the danger zone and wanted Major Parker to protect his rear while he did so. Colonel Kruger also informed Major Parker that enemy tanks

ABOVE: Parker's Crossroads was an otherwise nondescript intersection in the village of Baraque de Fraiture, Belgium. It was military significant because of the two good highways that passed through the village. BELOW: The American positions around Parker's Crossroads were established to impede the progress of German spearheads early in the battle. OPPOSITE: German soldiers of Kampfgruppe Hansen, one of them carrying an assault rifle, advance past burning vehicles of the U.S. 14th Mechanized Cavalry Group. The American column had been overwhelmed minutes before this photo was taken, and the image is from four rolls of film captured from a German soldier during subsequent fighting.

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were believed to be in nearby Chérain.

No enemy tanks appeared, and Major Parker stripped his command of all his men who were not a part of the firing of the howitzers and sent them to the rear at Vielsalm. At Baraque de Fraiture he organized a perimeter defense with his guns and waited. The Germans did not appear. The artillerymen had no food and were reduced to eating emergency rations, so Major Parker sent his trucks to the division supply area for food, gas, and small-arms ammunition. The trucks returned with orders that the battalion should withdraw and refit in the rear.

But before the guns could be limbered up, new intelligence reported Germans approaching. General McMahon ordered Major Parker to hold his roadblock to protect the division supply area from attack. While waiting, men of the battalion service battery who had survived the Schnee Eifel joined the group, which now numbered about 110 officers and men.

The platoon from the 87th Cavalry Reconnaissance Squadron soon reported the enemy and tanks in the village of Samrée. Major Parker took them under fire, and after two volleys the reconnaissance observer reported "mission accomplished." Realizing he might be in place for a while, Major Parker reorganized his roadblock. One howitzer was pointed east, down the road to Regné, the second pointed west, on the road to Samrée, and the third south toward Houffalize. Machine guns were set up around the perimeter. Outposts were put out to give early warning of the enemy's approach.

Unknown to Major Parker and his little band at the crossroads, the 82nd Airborne Division had been rushed from theater reserve and ordered to form a line of defense just beyond Parker's crossroads. They were moving into position, but for the moment the airborne division's right flank was unprotected. If a strong German force came through Parker's crossroads, it could hit that unprotected flank and possibly knock out the new line of defense before it was completed.

It was midnight on December 19-20 when an outpost reported a dozen enemy motorcyclists coming down the road. While the outpost kept quiet, a .50-caliber machine gun opened fire and scattered the Germans. Soon all outposts were reporting enemy approaching. The battle that followed left six dead enemy and 14 prisoners in Major Parker's hands.

Morning brought snipers, who harassed the artillerymen all day long. Several men were killed during the day. At noon came word from the headquarters of the 106th Infantry Division that the remnants of the 589th Field Artillery Battalion were to withdraw for reorganization, leaving only the single platoon of the 87th Cavalry Reconnaissance Squadron to hold the crossroads. Major Parker knew that the lone platoon could not possibly hold the roadblock, so he elected to remain with his men until other reinforcements arrived.

Later that afternoon the 560th Volksgrenadier Regiment attacked again. This time two platoons of tanks from the 3rd Armored Division were available, and the attack was repulsed. But the visiting tanks were only passing through, and Major Parker was again on his own. Then word was received that infantry of the 82nd Airborne Division was coming up to relieve the artillerymen. An advance squad came in and reported that the Germans had built their own roadblock which cut Parker's Crossroads off from all friendly contact except along the Liége Highway to Manhay. In effect, Parker's crossroads was now surrounded by the enemy.

Reports of enemy activity in the early morning hours of December 21 raised fears of an attack. Major Parker ordered his artillery and machine guns to open fire in the hope of making the enemy think he was attacking them. No enemy attack materialized. But constant barrages of mortar, small-arms and machine-gun fire kept the roadblock on edge. German artillery was also active. To maintain his small force, Major Parker was everywhere, encouraging his men, inspecting defenses, and refusing to be evacuated after he was wounded by a

mortar round on December 21. Months later, after recovering from his wounds, he would take command of a reconstituted 589th Field Artillery Battalion.

Despite his intentions, Major Parker soon collapsed from his wounds, and Major Elliott Goldstein assumed command. The enemy fire continued all day and all night. Enemy patrols infiltrated close to the perimeter boundaries and attacked in strength before dawn on December 22. They were driven off, but not before two prisoners were taken. These men reported that they were from the 2nd SS Panzer Division, a strong armored force with considerable battle experience and a deadly reputation.

The Germans soon added American guns to their arsenal. Four captured 3-inch anti-tank guns were turned on the Americans at Parker's Crossroads after a platoon of the 643rd Tank Destroyer Battalion had left the perimeter and been ambushed along the road. But messages from both the 3rd Armored Division and the 82nd Airborne Division to "Hold out as long as you can" left Major Goldstein with no option.

To protect his vulnerable flank, Major General James Gavin, commanding the airborne division, decided to send an infantry company to strengthen Major Goldstein's forces. He sent down Captain Junior R. Woodruff's Company F, 325th Glider Infantry Regiment, to assist Major Goldstein. The combined force, still less than 300 soldiers, waited throughout a quiet December 22. Unknown to the Americans, the 2nd SS Panzer Division was having trouble getting fuel to supply its vehicles, and without tanks and assault guns no attack on Parker's crossroads was going to succeed.

By nightfall, enough fuel had arrived to allow the 4th Panzergrenadier Regiment, some tanks, and an artillery battalion to move. Before dawn on December 23 the 2nd Battalion made a surprise attack on the perimeter but was driven off by the glider infantrymen. Captured radios were used to jam American communications, preventing American artillery observers from directing fire. Whenever the Americans did fire, German mortar crews dropped dozens of shells on the Americans, making observation and determination of direction impossible. The 3rd Armored Division sent some infantry and tanks to help, but so close were the Germans that the infantry had to turn back, and only a few tanks arrived to help in the defense.

One unit that did manage to reach the crossroads was Company C of the 509th Parachute Infantry Battalion. Attached to the 3rd Armored Division, the company had been sent by the division commander to help hold the vital crossroads. Later an armored task force was also sent to the crossroads under the command of Major Olin F. Brewster. With eight tanks, two halftracks and supply and transport troops along with Company A of the 509th Parachute Infantry Battalion, the task force was halted short of the crossroads, and by the time they would have reached it, the crossroads had been overrun. The paratroopers that had earlier reached the crossroads, Company C, 509th Parachute Infantry Battalion, lost 49 men during the fighting.

The Germans were determined to eliminate this thorn in their side, blocking their plans for a rapid advance to the west. In late afternoon enemy artillery began to pound the perimeter for 20 minutes and then two panzer companies and the entire 4th SS Panzergrenadier Regiment attacked. The Americans were outlined by newly fallen snow which made the American tanks easy targets for the panzers. Within an hour Captain Woodruff was asking his regimental commander, Colonel Charles Billingslea, for permission to withdraw. General Gavin's reply was the same, "Hold at all costs."

Major Goldstein went to the 3rd Armored Division for help, but before it could arrive the enemy had attacked. As he tried to return to the perimeter, Major Goldstein found his way blocked and joined the 54th Armored Field Artillery Battalion of the 3rd Armored Division. Up the road, his roadblock was under a major attack by tanks, infantry, artillery, and mortars. Within an hour, and despite a desperate defense, the roadblock was overwhelmed. Only 44 of the 116 glider infantrymen who came with Company F escaped to return to the 82nd Airborne Division.

Major Goldstein later recalled, "The principal emotion I felt was anger, anger at myself for not succeeding in extricating my command from the trap; anger at the Germans; anger at the commander, whoever he might be, for not having sooner sent aid to us. Although I had escaped almost certain capture or death, I felt neither happy nor relieved since the men I commanded were being overrun. I thought all our efforts had come to naught."

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ABOVE: Soldiers of the 424th Infantry Regiment take a moment to clean their weapons during a lull in the fighting near the village of Wanne, Belgium. OPPOSITE: Troopers of the 509th Parachute Infantry Regiment, 82nd Airborne Division, trudge past an M5A Stuart light tank during fighting around the French village of St. With. The 509th suffered 49 casualties at Parker's Crossroads.

But the battle cost the Germans tanks, soldiers, and time. Sergeants Alford and Jordan knocked out two enemy tanks with their howitzer and missed a third tank with their last round of ammunition. The men then withdrew slowly to the command post, firing their carbines as they went. When the artillerymen heard that the glider infantry was withdrawing, they decided to break up into three groups and withdraw as well. Lieutenant Wright led one group down the road toward Manhay and the 3rd Armored Division, but they were pushed back and captured. Captain Brown,

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Roger Sauvage & Normandie Niemen

Roger Sauvage was born in Paris in 1917 to a white Parisian woman and a black soldier from Martinique. His father had come to France with his island regiment to fight for France in World War I. Around the time of his son's birth he was killed at the "Seconde bataille de Chemin des Dames" (Second Battle of the Aisne.)

Roger was raised by his mother in the Ménilmontant District of Paris and grew up every inch a Frenchman. When he was 16 years old, he read a biography of Georges Guynemer, one of France's top flying Aces in the Great War with 53 victories. From that point on Roger wanted to fly. He was then attending high school but soon dropped out and enrolled in a flight school where he studied mathematics and mechanics while flying gliders or small planes whenever he could.

Some of his early expenses were paid by the *Aviation Populaire*, a government organization that selected and sponsored young men to become pilots at a time when the French budget allocated little money for the purpose. Germany, meanwhile, was training thousands of pilots.

In the peacetime of the 1930s, the small French Air Force took only the most qualified pilots. In 1937, Sauvage stood for the entrance exams for the French Air Force, the Armee de l'Air. He passed and was selected as a reconnaissance pilot with the rank of sergeant.

Sauvage was assigned to the 553rd Observation Squadron based in Strasbourg. He flew missions in a Mureaux 115 aircraft and photographed fortifications along the Siegfried Line. But Roger wanted to be a fighter pilot.

In April 1939, he got his wish. He was transferred to Fighter quadron (Groupe de Chasse or GC) 1/5 based at Reims, home to 300 pilots.

French pilot Roger Sauvage was the highest scoring black fighter ace of World War II.

BY GLENN BARNETT AND ANDRÉ BERNOLE

The 1/5 squadron was equipped with a twin-engine fighter called the Potez 631. Originally designed as a light bomber, the Potez, an all-metal monoplane, proved to have excellent handling capabilities and was converted to the fighter role. But when the war began the Potez proved slower than some of the German bombers and less maneuverable than the Messerschmitt Me-109 fighter.

By September the war was on. Roger flew his first wartime mission on September 25, 1939, a patrol along the border. The coming winter of 1939-40 was brutally cold and drastically cut back on flying.

On May 13, 1940, during the confused early days of the Battle of France, a group of four Canadian RAF pilots patrolling in their Hurricane fighters mistook Sauvage's Potez 631 for a twin-engine German Messerschmitt Me-110 and shot him down. He was not hurt and was able to open his canopy and deploy his parachute. Unfortunately, it was a hard landing and he was hospitalized briefly after lapsing into a coma.

He was soon back in the air, and on May 18, he surprised a Heinkel He-111 bomber from

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This reproduction Soviet Yakovlev Yak-3 fighter aircraft is painted in the colors of the Normandie Niemen and is an accurate representation of the type piloted by Roger Sauvage. INSET: Roger Sauvage, the son of a soldier from Martinique and a Parisian woman, became a hero pilot of the Normandie Niemen squadron.

Photo © Harry Measures / www.harrymeasures.co.uk

Both: National Archives

ABOVE: Sauvage and his fellow pilots often endured difficult living conditions like this shelter that has been dug into the ground during a period of cold weather and deep snow. TOP: Roger Sauvage sits at far right in this photograph of Free French pilots belonging to the Normandie Niemen squadron. A Yak fighter plane serves as the backdrop for the image.

above with a quick burst of his 20mm cannon, causing it to make a forced landing. Roger landed next to the downed Germans and took them prisoner. He also "liberated" a Leica camera from them and kept it throughout the war. It was his first aerial victory. On June 16, he downed a Dornier Do-17 light bomber. Soon after, the Battle of France ended with a humiliating surrender. Roger had flown 19 missions with two victories during the brief war.

After the fall of France, Sauvage considered escaping to Gibraltar and then to England, but his squadron was grounded by the new Vichy government who suspected that some of the pilots might have Gaullist beliefs that France should fight on. He was transferred to another squadron and sent first to Morocco and then Algeria where, for over a year, he was assigned to a lonely air base at Aïn Sefra in the desert with little chance to fly except in trainers and gliders.

It wasn't until the Allies had occupied all of North Africa that his fortunes changed. In September 1943, he and two fellow pilots were summoned to Algiers to meet with Free French recruiters including his longtime friend, Ukrainian born and Russian speaking Constantin Feldzer and Jacques Casaneuve, who offered the Gaullist minded pilots the opportunity to resume the fight against Germany.

Sauvage was given the choice of flying for the RAF or going to Russia, where he could join the Normandie squadron (GC3) already famous for its role in the Battle of Kursk in the skies over Orel.

The Normandie squadron was the brainchild of Charles de Gaulle, who wanted French forces represented on every front of the war. The first pilots arrived in the Soviet Union in November 1942, while the Battle of Stalingrad was still being fought.

After training in their new planes, the Russian built Yak-1 and Yak-9, the squadron was attached to the Soviet First Air Army and saw extensive action at Kursk and its aftermath. They acquitted themselves well but only five of the original 12 pilots survived. If it was to continue, the Normandie squadron needed new pilots.

Despite the terrible privations in Russia, Sauvage chose to fly with the Normandie squadron. He and the other volunteers soon found their way to Cairo, where they were met by an unrelenting round of parties and dinners in their honor.

From Cairo the group was flown to Tehran in Iran. There the small French expatriate community feasted them yet again. It was January 6, 1944, before Sauvage arrived at Normandie's airfield in Tula, south of Moscow. Then the parties stopped. Russia was still suffering severe shortages of food that had led to widespread starvation the previous winter.

Sauvage was ready to fight immediately, but first he had to be trained in the unfamiliar Yak fighter. By now the early wood and canvas Yaks were being replaced by updated models with improved brakes and elevators and a larger gun. The Yak-9 was the squadron's plane at the time.

With the arrival of the new pilots the squadron was organized into three escadrilles or wings. Sauvage's first flight proved disorienting. After reaching an altitude of 2,000 meters he looked down on a vast sea of snow with no familiar reference points, only white. Once he located the Moscow-Tula rail lines he felt better, oriented himself, and landed successfully. Individual and group training went on all winter, weather permitting.

Sauvage and Marcel Albert, one of the surviving original pilots of the squadron, had been friends since their earliest days of flying. The popular veteran chose Sauvage to be his wingman and taught Sauvage valuable lessons. For instance, Roger learned to keep his head permanently on a "ball bearing" with his eyes constantly sweeping the skies for signs of the enemy.

In Russia, Roger stood out not only for the color of his skin but also because of his height, over six feet. This was unusual for a fighter pilot, especially since cockpits were always short on space.

The Soviets were planning an offensive in May. Until then there was little to do but prac-

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tice flying and firing skills, play cards, smoke, drink vodka and, if possible, meet local women. During his time at Tula, Sauvage befriended a local female doctor named Irma and frequently stayed with her at night. During his stays in town, Sauvage did experience some prejudice from the locals, but he believed this was not because he was black but because he was a foreigner. One of his nicknames in the squadron was "le Nègre," which in French was not then a derisive term.

Meeting Russian women was important to the Frenchmen even though they knew that some of them were working for the NKVD (forerunner of the KGB). One of the pilots would remember after the war: "We were living like animals, cold, dirty, hungry, and we were all becoming animals. These girls allowed us to be normal humans again; clean, shaved, dressed, with normal food. We owed a lot to them."

By now so many new pilots were joining the squadron that they were able to establish a fourth escadrille, which allowed them to refer to themselves as a regiment rather than a squadron. Each escadrille was given the name of a French city in Normandy: Rouen, Le Havre, Cherbourg, and Caen.

In May, the Russian spring offensive left Tula in the rear, and the flyers, Russian and French, were moved to advance bases to the west. Accommodations were poor. The veterans were used to this, but Sauvage and the 13 new pilots, nicknamed "Rayaks" for their former airfield in Lebanon, who had joined with him found themselves housed in a leaky thatch-roofed hut with one side open to the elements. The logs of the surviving walls were chinked with dirt and straw which housed armies of lice, bed bugs and other insects that made life miserable. In the wake of their retreat, the Germans were destroying almost every structure that had not already been razed three years earlier by the retreating Soviets. So, this type of accommodation was the norm for the pilots and their Russian mechanics.

Normandie pilots fought alongside Soviet airmen of the 18th Guards Fighter Air Regiment under the command of General Géorgui Zakharov, who treated his French guests with great respect, trust, and camaraderie. The flyers settled into an endless round of flying cover for Russian ground attack planes like the Pe-2 and the more famous Ilyushin Il-2 "Sturmovik."

Normandie pilots typically flew in groups of four or six about 1,500 feet above the Soviet ground attack planes to protect them from German fighters. The Soviets had only one standing order for their fighter pilots; do not return with a full magazine. If the pilots were not able to engage enemy fighters, they were to seek out targets of opportunity on the ground for strafing.

In June news came of the Allied landings in Normandy, namesake of the squadron. There was great excitement among the French pilots. On that night General Zakharov and pilots of the 18th Guards Regiment came to the French encampment for a celebration that included singing, dancing, and the consumption of great quantities of wine and Vodka.

In the summer of 1944, there was a curious

ABOVE: Veteran pilot Marcel Albert (left) is shown with his wingman Roger Sauvage. Albert chose Sauvage to serve in the vital role during hazardous fighter sorties. TOP: Pilots of the Normandie Niemen, some of them wearing decorations, pause for the camera in front of one of their fighter planes on the Eastern Front.

absence of the Luftwaffe in the skies over the Eastern Front. Most of the German fighters were trying desperately to stave off the British and American bombers that were ravaging the Fatherland. Only flak and accidents brought down the Soviet and French pilots. It was a frustrating time for the fighter pilots, especially Sauvage who yearned to go up against Germany's best. Still, he had to fly his assigned missions. All were eager for action. Albert called the pilots "les impatients" (The Impatient ones).

At the end of July, the squadron participated

in a campaign to cross the Niemen River, the border between Poland and East Prussia. Stalin was so pleased with the results that he ordered that all participating battle units to add the word 'Niemen' to their regimental names as an honorific. The French pilots proudly took to their new name 'Normandie-Niemen'. In August Sauvage became a patrol leader.

After flying Yak-9s for most of the year, the pilots were issued an improved Yak-3 on August 18, 1944. With and engine-mounted twin Schwak 20mm cannon, the Yak-3 was more maneuverable, allowed the pilot better vision, and had a faster rate of climb. It was a natural dog fighter and the pilots relished that role.

The new plane did not come without problems. In a power dive the early Yak-3s tended to disintegrate, and two Normandie pilots lost their lives in this way. As a result, the pilots were warned not to fly faster than 750 km/hr. Another problem was that after about ¾ of an hour flying time the engine would develop a vapor lock and shut down. This happened to Sauvage several times as he frantically hand pumped the fuel to get his engine going again.

The commanding officer of the Soviet mechanics assigned to the French flyers was Serge Agavelian, who was a graduate of the best engineering school in the Soviet Union. He was able to make adjustments that solved the problem and it was soon fixed at the factory.

On August 24 (actually a day early), Soviet radio announced that the western allies had liberated Paris. That night the French pilots and their Soviet hosts partied like never before. General Zakharov ordered all the guns along his front to fire in celebration (at the German lines of course).

Within a month however morale sagged again. Sauvage was typical of the malaise. So fast had the westward advance occurred that supplies and mail lagged behind. Without ammunition and fuel, the advance stalled. Sauvage noted with sadness that mail, so vital for morale, had not been received for six weeks. Adding to the misery of the flyers was a devastating dysentery affecting everyone. The squadron's French doctor, Igor Eichenbaum, had no medication on hand to fight it. Sauvage sometimes was up six times a night because of the distress. The disease plagued him for five months even in combat. Yet he still flew.

By September 18, the squadron moved to Antonovo in Lithuania. As the French pilots moved into "Catholic" territory they found a population more likely to understand some French and the pilots made the most of it. Sauvage met a woman named Paula, whom he wooed in the presence of her ever vigilant mother.

He had not scored a victory since the Battle of France despite countless hours in the skies over the fierce fighting below. When German planes did appear overhead, primitive Soviet radar failed to detect them until it was too late to intercept them.

In September 1944, it was announced that the veterans, the four surviving pilots who had been in Russia since late 1942 were scheduled to go home in October. But on October 12, General Zakharov told the squadron commander that a new and powerful Soviet offensive would begin soon. In eight days, he promised, they would reach Konigsberg and the Baltic. He asked the favor of the French veterans to stay and see it through. They all did.

This caused a mad scramble among the airmen as the veterans had given away most of their possessions to the remaining flyers. Pants, boots, jackets, and maps were hastily returned. Albert, however, could not get back a bottle of vodka which was already empty.

On October 14, Sauvage finally began to record victories. While flying over a German airfield with three other pilots, a flight of four German Focke Wulf Fw-190 fighters was spotted below. The French dived on them. Sauvage fired a burst at one of them. He saw parts of the wing fly off before the plane exploded in midair. It was his first victory since 1940. He later mused in his diary that sneaking up behind a plane to shoot it down seemed more like murder than fighting, but that was the way to win.

There was no time for celebration. His continually turning head noticed two enemy fighters on his tail. For several minutes he was in a dog fight, turning and sliding, with an experienced Me-109 pilot. Neither could best the other. Sauvage finally used his Yak's superior climbing speed to get away.

On October 20, a powerful Soviet artillery barrage heralded the new offensive. Flying with a wing of six planes, Albert announced that there was a flight of Junkers JU-87 dive bombers below them to the left. Sauvage immediately dived on the Stukas. Unfortunately, his power dive was too fast. He barely pulled out in time to avoid crashing nose first into the ground. When he recovered from the dive, he found a Stuka headed straight for him. He fired several bursts until the Stuka plummeted to earth.

Then Sauvage found another Ju-87 fleeing toward German lines and banked in behind it. The tail gunner hit his Yak several times. But the Yak's firepower was greater. He killed the gunner with two quick bursts. As he lined up for the kill, however, his guns failed to fire. Fortunately, Albert was right behind him. In one burst the Stuka exploded. Now over German lines both their planes were hit by flak. They turned sharply for home.

Back at base Sauvage was irate with his Soviet mechanic, telling him heatedly that his guns failed to fire in combat, denying him a victory. He blamed the Russian made 20mm Schwak cannon which occasionally misfired. But when the mechanic opened the ammunition storage box it was empty. In the heat of combat, Sauvage failed to notice that he had run out of shells.

The problem of misfiring was also solved by the squadron's brilliant Russian head mechanic, Agavelian. He discovered that the tracer shells left a powder residue in the barrel of the gun, which eventually jammed it. He ordered that anti-tank shells replace the tracers. This was opposed to all official rules, but it worked. The guns stopped jamming.

One day, Sauvage flew four sorties by 6 p.m. and was exhausted. His knees were shaking, he had a headache and an intense abdominal pain. It was then that the commander asked him to make a fifth flight. Dutifully he went back in the air. It was the kind of brutal schedule kept by the Russian pilots. The French could do no less.

The next day seven new French pilots arrived as reinforcements. Sauvage remembered well that by the end of the war five of them would be dead.

French and Russian victories soared at this time as the quality and quantity of Russian planes improved and the Germans were forced to field barely trained pilots and suffered from shortages of fuel. The offensive went well at first, but as the weather chilled it stalled as rain and mud grounded planes and impeded infantry and vehicles.

Still, by October 23, the French squadron moved to a forward base at Ckierki in eastern Poland. The French and Russians felt the disappointment of a stalled offensive, but heavy rain turned the primitive airfield to mud, which froze at night and thawed back to mud during the day.

Despite the muddy fields, the squadron continued to fly. On the 24th, Sauvage flew in formation with five other planes on patrol over East Prussia. After an uneventful flight, the French pilots turned and headed for home only to find a wall of fog in front of them. As they ran low on fuel, they desperately searched for an opening in the thick gray that lay below them. At last a clear patch was discovered and the airfield came into view just in time.

Four Yakovlev fighters of the Normandie Niemen fly in close formation in the skies over the Soviet Union.

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For a week fog grounded all planes in the area. Sauvage and others spent the time at cards, reading detective novels, playing phonograph records or making hopeful plans for the future. It was a much needed break as many of the flyers were still weakened by the effects of dysentery.

Around this time the Soviets held a party to commemorate the October Revolution. Appetizers, biscuits, and vodka were plentiful. Sauvage noted that the Russian dignitaries, gratefully, did not engage in their usual Soviet propaganda speeches.

Morale picked up in November when it was learned that General Charles de Gaulle would be coming to Russia in December and would be visiting with the squadron. Sauvage noted how much the men were looking forward to his visit.

The offensive resumed on November 19, and by the 27th, the regiment moved again. This time to Gross-Kalveitchen in East Prussia. The Normandie Niemen pilots were the first unit of the Western Allies to occupy German soil. Whole towns were deserted as the German population fled westward in advance of the vengeful Soviets.

The French and Soviets had reached a different world, one of modern furniture and comfortable beds with real mattresses. There were cattle and poultry in plenty and a nearby hunting preserve belonging to Nazi bigwig Hermann Goering. His forests teemed with tame deer which fell to hungry Soviet riflemen. By now the weather worsened again, and the offensive was halted until spring.

During their mutual fight the Soviets greatly appreciated the contributions of the French regiment and began to pile on the honors. Normandie Niemen was awarded the Order of the Red Banner, while veteran pilots Marcel Albert, Ronald La Poype, and Marcel Lefèvre (posthumously) were honored with Hero of the Soviet Union. By war's end another would be awarded to Jacques André.

The idle squadron occupied itself in preparation for de Gaulle's visit. It was thought that he might visit them in East Prussia, so supplies were collected for a banquet and the common areas were spruced up in anticipation. But de Gaulle would not be coming. Instead, the flyers along with Russian officers would go to Moscow to meet him.

As the weather was bad, the journey to Moscow would begin over land. A convoy of aging Studebaker trucks set off in weather that reached 5 degrees Farenheit. At one stop they were housed in a military hospital where the pilots enjoyed the forgotten delight of a hot shower and fresh sheets that were changed for them. There they remained until the weather cleared enough for the five-hour flight to Moscow.

All along their route they were feted by grateful Soviet generals who wanted to show their appreciation for the Frenchmen who had stuck with them through thick and thin. This camaraderie was in stark contrast to British and American efforts to fight on Soviet soil, which ended in distrust and mutual reserve.

The pilots, their doctor and interpreters would be meeting with De Gaulle. Sauvage and the other pilots reached Moscow in early December. The pilots gathered in their best uniforms inside a great hall. Speeches were made by Soviet dignitaries and the French ambassador. Then the men stood in a line that was four rows deep to meet their hero, de Gaulle himself. Because Sauvage was the tallest of them all, he stood in the back row.

Sauvage would later write that he and his mates were thrilled as de Gaulle made his entrance. For these brave men, he embodied France. He seemed poised and confident as he pinned medals on the chests of the French heroes. After the formal ceremony the pilots gathered around de Gaulle, who, in casual conversation, answered questions and seemed to know every man.

Soon, however, the happiness of the visit with de Gaulle was replaced by the sadness of losing the original veterans of squadron. On December 19, they flew home to a liberated France. Sauvage would especially miss his friend Marcel Albert.

Now there was little to do but await the coming spring and the final push to victory. The men gathered nightly at a cocktail bar on Maxim-Gorki Street. To their surprise it was an American style bar with drinks costing 80 rubles. Sauvage began a winning streak at poker. He also learned the foxtrot and American style 'swing' dancing.

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ABOVE: Upon their return to France in 1945, pilots of the Normandie Niemen are greeted at Bourget aerodrome. The group was hailed as heroes, and Roger Sauvage finished World War II with 16 confirmed aerial victories. INSET: Sauvage wrote a book titled *One of the Normandie Niemen* about his experiences with the unit, published in 1950.

The fame of their uniforms made the pilots a hit with the locals, especially the women — and one in particular. Her name was Tamara. She was the wife of a Russian colonel who was away at the front. She and Sauvage spent the rest of December together, but on the 30th he had to return to base in East Prussia, another sad parting.

Operations resumed on January 12, 1945, as the skies cleared. There were 36 pilots now in the squadron. The Luftwaffe was back in the air trying desperately to stem the Soviet juggernaut.

By this time in the war, the Germans were using raw recruits with little flight time or training due to severe shortages of fuel. But mingled with these novices were experienced pilots, who had been fighting since the Spanish Civil War. Some had over 100 victories. The trick for the French and Soviet pilots was to avoid the pros and engage the less experienced.

Life was a little easier for the pilots now. Sauvage was issued a brand new Yak 3. The problems with the plane had been fixed. Finally, a well-fitting tarpaulin was provided to protect the engine from the -30 degrees Celsius (- 22 degrees F) weather. Before dawn, his mechanic could run glycol through the engine to warm it before startup. Steamrollers replaced the legions of shivering women who used to shovel snow from the run way.

For Sauvage, it was his most productive time. He was at last promoted to sous (second) lieutenant and immediately proved his worth. On the 16th, he led a flight of six planes guarding the Sturmoviks. Ahead of them they spotted a dozen German planes. The less experienced Germans formed a defensive circle, sometimes called a Lufbery circle, that allowed each plane to cover the one in front of it.

But when an inexperienced pilot panicked and broke the circle, Sauvage pounced on him. The German twisted and turned trying to evade him, but the Yak could turn inside him, and each time Sauvage crossed his opponent's turn he sent a short burst of two or three shells, again and again. His shells slammed into the fuselage. All the while they were losing altitude until they were very near the ground. Suddenly the Fw-190 banked and hit the top of some trees and crashed — another victory for the Frenchman.

The Germans fled, and the faster Yaks chased them. Sauvage closed in on a second Fw-190 from about eight o'clock. He fired a burst, hitting the engine, and watched the pilot bail out before the plane crashed. In all, Sauvage's wing claimed six victories for the loss of one of their own.

The next day, Sauvage was flying in a wing of eight planes when he spotted an Fw-190 strafing Soviet ground positions. He dived directly on the enemy despite flying into Soviet ground fire aimed at his opponent. He reached 800 km/h in the dive, and for three seconds he lined up the German plane in his sights and fired before frantically pulling on the stick to level out before hitting the ground.

He and his wingman rejoined the wing just before an overwhelming number of Fw-190s dove on them. Now the French formed a defensive circle to ward off attack. But one of the newer pilots broke away, only to be shot down by an enemy waiting for just such a mistake. His sacrifice allowed the others to escape in the confusion. That day the French lost two pilots, while a third had his elbow shattered by a 20mm shell.

On January 19, the weather was still frigid (-25 degrees C, and -40 degrees C at night). Roger wondered how the poor mechanics worked without gloves to maintain the planes. On that day Sauvage became involved in a huge dog fight with planes of both sides streaking around the sky shooting at each other. To escape from the enemy shells, he used every trick. He turned, nose-dived, climbed up again and always kept moving in another direction. All the while he looked for the "pigeon" who will sooner or later show in his sights. Eventually one did, and Sauvage shot him down.

Low on fuel and out of ammunition, Roger was attacked by an Fw-190. The two enemies contorted in the sky as Sauvage steadily worked his way east to safety. When the two flew over Soviet antiaircraft batteries, the German turned for home. Sauvage made an emergency landing, but by afternoon he was in the air again to score another victory.

In February, Roger added three more victo-

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Yak-3 fighters of the squadron are lined up at an airfield near the Niemen River in eastern Poland. During the Red Army counteroffensive of the summer of 1944, the Normandie Niemen provided valuable support.

ries, including two Me-109s. On the 9th, he avoided being shot down by the most experienced German pilot he faced during the war. His score might have been higher if his mission was to seek out and fight enemy fighters, but the main job of the squadron was to protect the ground attack bombers while engaging in ground strafing and antiaircraft suppression. At this task the squadron excelled.

All the while, the Russians pushed relentlessly forward, and the French and Soviet flyers had to keep up, moving their bases constantly westward in order to support the advance. One temporary base was so close to the front that German artillery destroyed some planes on the ground. There would be at least nine moves forward from January until the war was over in May. Sauvage and his mates supported the First Air Army's final battle at Konigsberg. His last victories came on March 27, when he shot down two Fw-190s.

When hostilities finally ended, Lieutenant Sauvage had 16 victories with at least one probable, and he was awarded seven major Soviet and French decorations. They were dearly earned. The Normandie Niemen Regiment claimed 273 enemy aircraft shot down and 37 probables. They lost 87 aircraft and 52 pilots in the service of France and their allies. Soviet Premier Josef Stalin was so pleased with the work of the squadron that he allowed each of the pilots to keep his aircraft and fly it home.

In June 1945, the entire squadron flying their Yak-3s landed in Paris to a hero's welcome. Sauvage would stay in the Armee de l'Air after the war, serving with French occupation forces in Germany and rising to the rank of captain in 1950. In the same year, he published his memoir titled *Un du Normandie-Niemen* (*One of the Normandie-Niemen*). It was an immediate bestseller in France, enjoying three printings and a paperback edition. The authors are indebted to this work for much of this article.

Sauvage retired in 1969 and died in 1977. He is buried at a military cemetery in Nice.

The authors would like to thank Monsieurs Yves Donjon, the documentarian of the Normandie Niemen Association, and Lionel Sauvage for their support in preparing this article.

As a child in 1944, French historian André Bernole cheered allied forces streaming up the Rhone Valley after the invasion of Southern France. He interviewed the son of Roger Sauvage for this article.

Glenn Barnett has published over 30 articles about World War II. He has worked in aerospace on the Apache Helicopter, B-1B bomber and several space craft programs.

As a late summer sun finally dipped below the horizon, Captain William L. Koob, Jr., came to realize that his unit had been abandoned on the battlefield. The infantrymen assigned to help defend Koob's 57mm antitank guns against German infiltrators were no longer in position, leaving his lightly-armed cannoneers to fend for themselves.

Worse still, all communication links with higher headquarters had been severed. Captain Koob, commanding Antitank Company, 317th Infantry Regiment, 80th Infantry Division, could not request reinforcements or learn what was going on. He and his men were, quite literally, alone in the dark.

Koob dispatched several contact patrols, but these detachments all failed to locate friendly troops. The 24-year-old captain even went out himself in search of help, but after walking 400 yards in this unfamiliar but definitely hostile terrain he "suddenly felt extremely naked" and returned to the relative safety of the Antitank Company's perimeter.

Unbeknownst to Captain Koob, thousands of soldiers were in motion all around his lonely outpost that night. Some men, wearing the U.S. 80th Infantry Division's "Blue Ridge" shoulder patch, advanced warily toward high ground that dominated the surrounding countryside. Other combatants, clothed in German Army, Air Force, or Waffen-SS uniforms,

BY PATRICK J. CHAISSON

set off in a desperate attempt to escape the massive Allied trap that was rapidly closing around them.

These adversaries would collide with one another along a roadway north of Argentan, France, shortly after dawn on August 20, 1944. The chaotic melee that followed led to a decisive win for the 80th Infantry Division, then fighting its first major action of World War II.

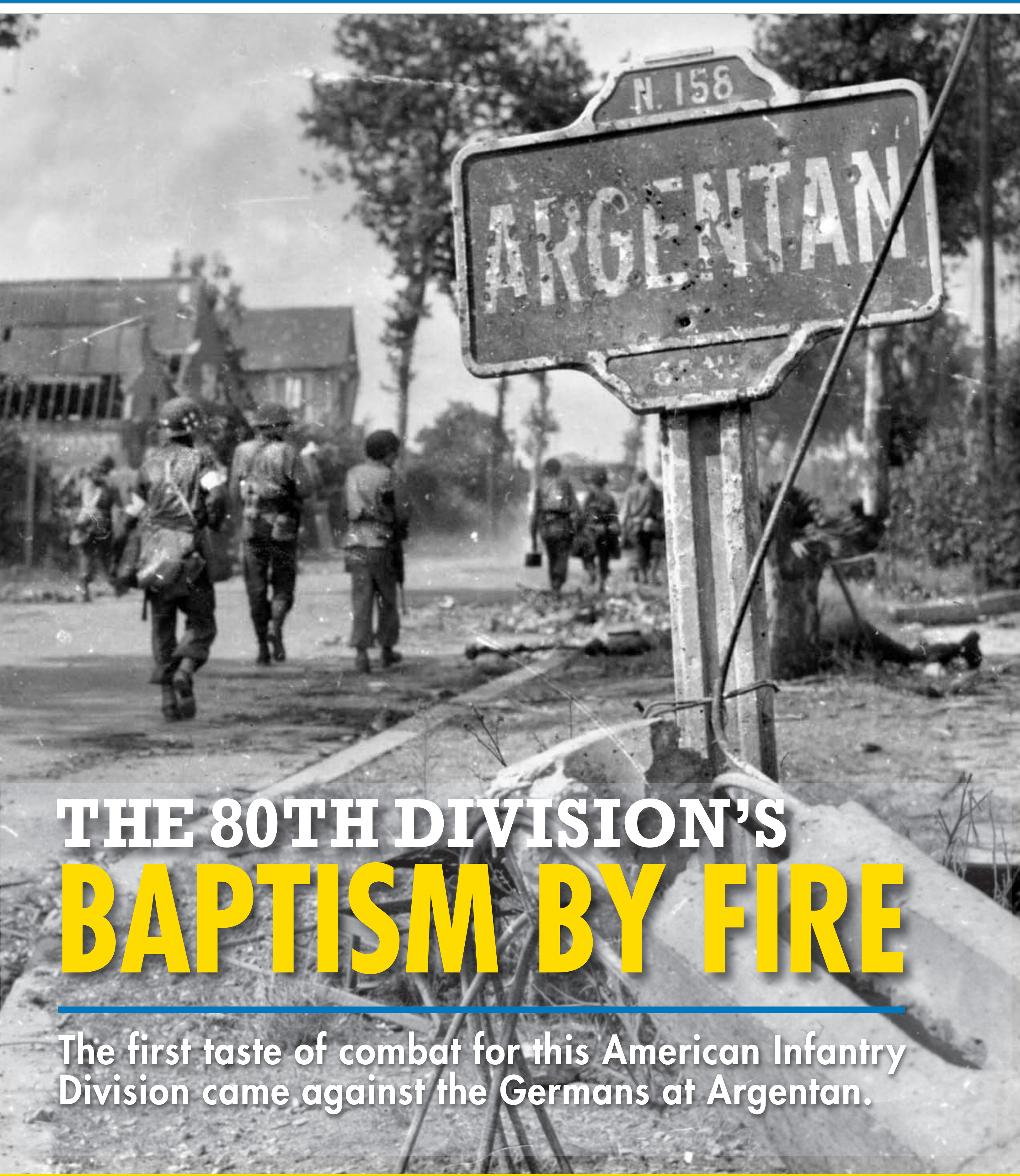
Yet the men of the Blue Ridge Division paid a steep price for their battlefield victory. Enlisted soldiers quickly discovered that no amount of training could fully prepare them for the terrifying realities of combat. Officers learned hard lessons too, as their failure to properly utilize armor, artillery, and engineer bridging assets caused many unnecessary casualties.

Infantry leaders repeatedly ordered riflemen forward in a series of futile assaults, only to have them mowed down by dug-in German tanks and machine guns. Furthermore, these officers stubbornly refused to consider other schemes of maneuver better suited to the terrain and enemy laydown. The situation required a confident, self-assured division commander to take charge; that man, however, was also struggling to learn his job.

Major General Horace L. McBride served as the 80th's commanding general during its bloody baptism by fire at Argentan, and throughout the war in Europe. A 1916 graduate of West Point, McBride first saw action as an artillery-

American infantrymen enter the war-ravaged French town of Argentan during the effort to trap thousands of retreating German troops in the Falaise Pocket during the final stages of the Normandy Campaign in 1944. The fighting around Argentan was the baptism of fire for the U.S. 80th Infantry Division.

National Archives



THE 80TH DIVISION'S BAPTISM BY FIRE

The first taste of combat for this American Infantry Division came against the Germans at Argentan.

National Archives

man in World War I. His interwar career included assignments to Panama and the Philippines, as well as instructor duty at Fort Leavenworth, Kansas. He assumed command of the Blue Ridge in March 1943, taking his outfit overseas the following summer.

McBride's division crossed the English Channel into Normandy during the first week of August 1944. Now under the command of XII Corps, Third U.S. Army, the unit spent several days in a forward assembly area, preparing itself for battle.

The 80th consisted of approximately 14,600 soldiers. Its primary maneuver force, three infantry regiments numbered the 317th, 318th, and 319th, was supported by four field artillery battalions (FABs). The 314th, 315th, and 905th FABs all employed 105mm towed howitzers, while the 313th FAB fielded larger 155mm cannon. The 305th Engineer Combat Battalion and 305th Medical Battalion, along with several smaller signal, cavalry, and service support formations, rounded out the division's wartime organization.

While in bivouac, McBride's outfit was joined by the 702nd Tank Battalion (TB), 633rd Anti-Aircraft Artillery Battalion, and 610th Tank Destroyer (TD) Battalion. These attachments were made to increase the division's lethality, especially against German aircraft and armored fighting vehicles.

The Blue Ridge next reconfigured itself into three combat teams, each centered on an infantry regiment. Combat Team (CT) 317 included the 317th Infantry Regiment and its 3,000 riflemen, the 315th Field Artillery Battalion (FAB), as well as a company each of tanks, engineers, medical aidmen, and TDs. Built around the 318th Infantry Regiment, CT 318 employed the 314th FAB together with armor, TD, and combat support elements. The 905th FAB (105mm towed) provided artillery support for CT 319, while the 313th FAB's powerful 155mm howitzers remained under division control.

On August 7, McBride's command was reassigned to XX Corps along with orders directing it to occupy the city of Le Mans. This change of mission came in response to a surprise German counterattack that struck U.S. formations well to the west at Mortain. The 80th Division was needed immediately to help shore up a suddenly vulnerable segment of the front line.

August 8 saw the Blue Ridge Division conduct a 40-mile motor march to the outskirts of Le Mans. It also received assignment to XV Corps, thus beginning a dizzying series of transfer orders that would shift control of McBride's unit almost daily between the four corps comprising Third Army. It was a necessary but confusing means of coping with the extraordinarily fluid situation that confronted Allied commanders in Normandy during early August 1944.

This was a time of great opportunity for Field Marshal Bernard Law Montgomery, commanding all Allied land forces in France. During the eight weeks following D-Day, his British-led armies in the north captured the city of Caen while simultaneously crushing their foe's most capable combat formations (albeit at great cost to themselves in men and equipment). Meanwhile, G.I.s under Lt. Gen. Omar Bradley finally broke out of Normandy's bocage region and began a wide, sweeping thrust to the south and east.

Leading the charge across France was Lt. Gen. George S. Patton Jr.'s Third U.S. Army. Operational only since August 1, Third Army already had a full list of missions to accomplish. One element (VIII Corps) turned south to capture several port cities along the Brittany peninsula. Patton's other three corps (XII, XV, and XX Corps) moved east, paralleling the British frontline trace to their north. This maneuver was meant to create a "pocket," inside which would be trapped the German Fifth Panzer and Seventh Armies.

Montgomery and his American subordinates disagreed on how best to defeat these crippled but still dangerous adversaries. Bradley and Patton wanted to "go long," advancing well eastward to cut their foes off from all escape routes across the Seine River. Monty preferred a safer option, sending forward British, Canadian, and Polish outfits then at Falaise south toward Argentan in a pincers maneuver designed to encircle most (but not all) of the German combat formations still fighting in

Normandy. Relentless pressure applied by ground and air units within this so-called "Falaise Gap," insisted the field marshal, would result in complete victory with less attendant risk to Allied troops.

Montgomery's plan won out, much to the disgust of Generals Bradley and Patton. Orders issued on August 11 formally assigned the capture of Argentan to General Harry Crerar's First Canadian Army. This obliged Third U.S. Army, its lead elements already marching on the city, to cancel all attack plans.

Frustrated, Patton sought to maintain the initiative by sliding elements of his XV Corps eastward toward the Seine bridges starting on August 13. While Bradley authorized the maneuver, he did express concern about a 25-mile hole in the lines that had developed between Patton's thinly-spread XV Corps near Argentan and other American commands to the west. This breach needed to be sealed, and the force ordered to do so would include Maj. Gen. Horace McBride's Blue Ridge Boys.

At 0400 hours on August 13, CT 317, CT 318, and division troops started off on a tactical road march toward Argentan. Combat Team 319 stayed behind in Le Mans, however, as it had been detached for outpost duty. This command would not rejoin its parent division until after the battle of Argentan concluded.

On August 15, McBride reported that his outfit had closed on its assembly areas as of 0700 hours and stood ready to act as Third Army's reserve. Meanwhile, Patton – under pressure from Bradley to plug that hole in his battle zone – created a Provisional Corps comprised of the 80th and 90th Infantry Divisions, as well as the 2nd French Armored Division, with orders to firm up the Americans' shoulder near Argentan.

It so happened that on August 16, Maj. Gen. Leonard T. Gerow's V Corps headquarters, a First Army organization, had become available for assignment. General Bradley, unaware of Patton's plans, directed Gerow to take charge of those three divisions comprising Third Army's Provisional Corps and continue the advance. That same day, Montgomery called down to Bradley's HQ and suggested a new linkup point be established between Crerar's men and the Americans. This meant Argentan once again fell within the U.S. area of operations.

Gerow, however, needed time to relocate his command post, orient himself to the situation, and issue a proper operations order. Furthermore, the 13 battalions comprising V Corps Artillery had to move into and establish firing positions within their new zone. To allow for these necessary measures to occur, V Corps postponed all coordinated attacks until August 18.

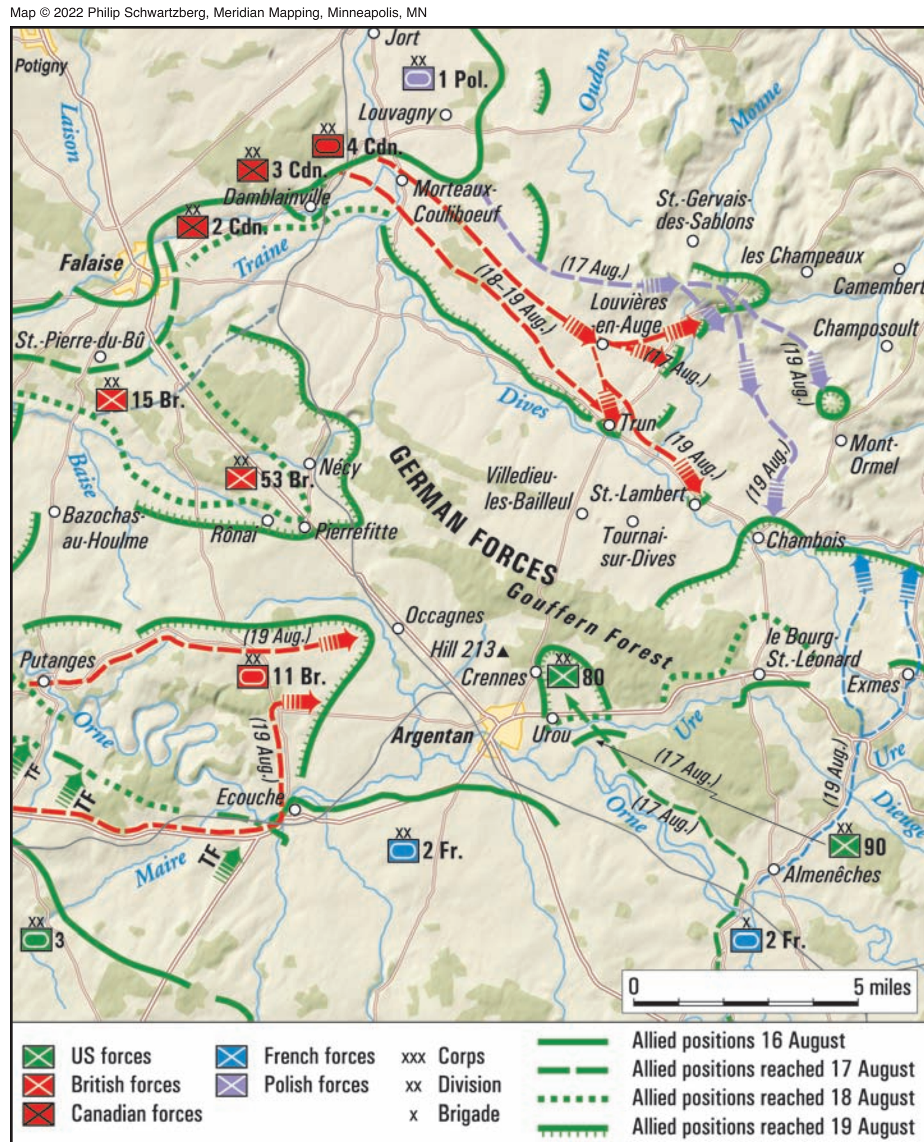
On V Corps' right flank, the 90th Division would take and hold Chambois, newly-designated as the meet-up point between British and American forces. To the left, French tankers of the 2nd Armored Division were to establish a strong position near Ecouche and prevent German troops from breaking out of the Allies' trap in that direction.

In the center, McBride's division would advance in a northerly direction, keeping east of Argentan, to seize high ground overlooking the city. This maneuver was intended to cut off Argentan's garrison and compel it to either evacuate or surrender, permitting the Blue Ridge Boys to dash in without resorting to a costly frontal assault. Three battalions from V Corps Artillery were to serve as general support for the 80th's attack, which was now set to kick off after dawn on August 18.

Defending Argentan and its approaches was a scratch force of foot soldiers, tankers, Luftwaffe anti-aircraft gunners, paratroops, and Waffen SS men. Hastily cobbled together from the remnants of several once-proud formations, this ad-hoc kampfgruppe (task force) served as a rear guard for SS Oberst Gruppenführer (General) Paul Hausser's rapidly retreating Seventh Army.

American commanders believed an estimated 2,000-2,500 German soldiers and 35 PzKpfw. V Panther tanks occupied the Argentan sector.

Map © 2022 Philip Schwartzberg, Meridian Mapping, Minneapolis, MN



ABOVE: The 80th Infantry Division advanced across France in the summer of 1944 with the 90th Division on its right flank and the French 2nd Armored Division on its left. The objective of the grand Allied advance was trapping German troops in the Falaise Pocket. OPPOSITE: An infantry patrol of the 318th Regiment, 80th Division, moves forward against an enemy-occupied farmhouse near Argentan as the supporting mortar section waits to provide heavier fire if needed.

These men mostly belonged to the 9th and 116th Panzer Divisions, fighting alongside a number of Luftwaffe flak crews. Battle-wise and determined to avoid capture, they were, as an 80th Division intelligence analyst described, "…well dug in in the finest defensive positions, protected by tanks, artillery, anti-aircraft guns, automatic weapons, barbed wire entanglements, and well-placed mine fields."

"The terrain was also tough," another Blue Ridge Division officer wrote, "favoring the enemy in defense with its hedgerows and sufficient open spaces to permit good fields of fire for tanks, and mutually supporting automatic weapons. In addition to this, the enemy had cleverly zeroed in every key avenue of approach to his positions for accurate artillery fire."

Weather conditions were typical for Normandy in late August. The daytime high temperature averaged 71 degrees, while nighttime lows dropped into the mid-50s. Intermittent thundershowers gave way to partly cloudy skies after sunrise on August 18; the rain would not return for two days. This left most roads muddy but trafficable by tactical vehicles.

Acknowledging his soldiers' near total lack of combat experience, Maj. Gen. McBride devised as straightforward an assault plan as possible. A narrow axis of advance permitted the passage of only one infantry regiment at a time, which suited McBride since he had only one combat team (CT 318, commanded by Colonel Harry D. McHugh) available for use. Colonel A. Donald Cameron's CT 317 could not be employed, as Maj. Gen. Gerow had previously designated it as V Corps Reserve.

The infantrymen of CT 318 were to jump off from attack positions near the hamlet of Urou, moving in a northerly direction to cross their line of departure (the main road running east-west from Argentan to Le Bourg-St. Leonard) not later than 0800 hours on August 18. The G.I.s' final objective, a prominence known as Hill 213, sat about 3.3 miles from their start point. From this hilltop, situated on the edge of the Gouffern Forest, they could then look down into Argentan and take that city if the opportunity presented itself.

First Battalion, led by Lt. Col. Gustof A. Lindell, would go in first, followed closely by Lt. Col. John C. Golden's 2nd Battalion. Third Battalion (Lt. Col. John B. Snowden II, commanding) remained in reserve. The G.I.s were to maneuver in a tactical formation known as "column of battalions." which allowed for rapid movement and ease of control but made them vulnerable to flanking fires.

First, though, CT 318's riflemen had to reach the battlefield. An unexpected swampy area hindered their approach, while supporting tactical vehicles were held up by a "natural anti-tank ditch" known as the Ure River. Failure to conduct proper reconnaissance prevented U.S. armor from lending its weight to the fight until combat engineers could find a fording site, a process that took most of the morning.

Following a one-hour artillery preparation, the Blue Ridge Boys commenced their assault. Sometime between 0730 and 0800 hours, Lindell's 1st Battalion crossed the main highway north of Urou and turned east, heading for a

Both: National Archives

ABOVE: An American bazooka team intent on destroying an oncoming German halftrack peers from cover during action at the Falaise Pocket. TOP: Covering the withdrawal of German forces through a gap at Falaise, artillerymen of the 12th SS Panzer Division "Hitler Jugend" service their weapon. The Germans held desperately to the shoulders of the Falaise Pocket and thousands managed to avoid capture.

National Archives

American troops fire a 57mm anti-tank gun at a distant target during action at Falaise. Captain Koob's Antitank (AT) Company was in position to fire on the Germans as they retreated east from Argentan.

fortified farmhouse complex. There, in the words of an 80th Division historian, "…very heavy fighting was encountered." By 0905 hours, however, this strongpoint had been reduced and the G.I.s began their movement north toward Hill 213.

Yet after covering a few hundred yards Lindell's men came scurrying back, forced to seek cover by ferocious tank, artillery, and small-arms fire. Well-sited German defenders, firing from strong positions on the outskirts of Argentan, quickly unhinged 1st Battalion's attack. Those gunners then turned their wrath on 2nd Battalion, caught on the flank while still in column formation.

Lieutenant Colonel Daniel J. Minahan, an artillery battalion commander, witnessed this slaughter. "While heading to the front," he wrote, "I came across elements of the 2nd Battalion 318th near the village of Urou. They had tried to cross the road in order to achieve their objective. Losses were heavy, inflicted by enemy machine guns and 40mm mobile antiaircraft cannons whose position nobody had been able to fix."

Second Battalion's plight worried Maj. Gen. McBride, who was observing the day's action from CT 318's command post (CP). Desperate to destroy the hidden German guns then wreaking havoc on his men, McBride ordered a platoon of supporting M4 Sherman tanks to push forward and seize an enemy-occupied hedgerow. Five M4s, led by 2nd Lt. William B. Miller, set off on this assignment at around 1000 hours.

Within minutes, four of Miller's Shermans were destroyed by unseen 75mm antitank guns. Corporal Jack Weaver, a gunner in the fifth vehicle, described what happened: "We started to turn to the road on the left and follow the other tanks. Through my periscope I saw flashes of fire, huge clouds of black billowing smoke, and guys I knew jumping from burning tanks. The 3rd Platoon was wiped out, except for us."

One tanker perished in this brief encounter, while two more were listed as missing in action and 10 men wounded. Weaver later remembered seeing "a hole left by a German armor-piercing shell" in the center of each white recognition star painted on the Shermans' hulls. Miller believed enemy gunners tracked his M4s by watching for the identification pennants attached to their tall radio antennas. It was a sudden and shocking introduction to combat for the men of the 702nd Tank Battalion.

Vicious German automatic weapons and artillery fire had stopped CT 318's assault cold just yards from its jump-off point. Worse, these G.I.s were now under direct enemy observation where even the slightest movement could provoke a violent response. That afternoon, Lt. Col. Lindell and Major Robert B. Norris were issuing orders from behind a haystack when enemy shells struck and killed both men.

At 1700 hours, 3rd Battalion passed through the remnants of 1st Battalion and entered the fray. Its commanding officer, Lt. Col. John Snowden, recalled what happened next: "At the moment when we began the attack, K Company was on the left and L Company on the right. We had crossed a road and ahead of us lay an immense field of clover that sloped down for 500 yards and then rose up again for another 500 yards toward the edge of the forest. When our troops launched their assault toward the edge, the Germans opened fire with everything they had: mortars, artillery, machine guns and rifles. We were totally exposed, with almost no place to hide."

After nightfall, both sides paused to lick their wounds. As litter-bearers carried off the wounded, Maj. Gen. McBride made his way back to the 80th Division CP near Almeneches. There, he and his staff began work to better synchronize all the elements of combat power at their disposal when fighting resumed at sunrise.

This meant employing field artillery, seven battalions of it, against known and suspected German positions around Argentan. From 0400 to 0600 hours on August 19, over 80 105mm and 155mm guns pounded away in an attempt to "soften up" the objective. Then, at 0645 hours, the infantry went forward.

Second Battalion tried once more to take the main highway east of town. Its advance was again met with "a withering fire," according to

the Blue Ridge Division's historian. No gains were made that day despite the valor of soldiers like Company F's Pfc. Thomas E. DiMartino, who received a Bronze Star for directing artillery on a German 20mm position while wounded and in an unprotected position.

Meanwhile, 3rd Battalion's attempt to continue moving forward also encountered fierce opposition. By 1430 hours, the Americans' assault had ground to a halt with little to show aside from a long list of casualties. General McBride reluctantly canceled CT 318's attack orders and had that outfit transition into a defensive posture so it could consolidate and reorganize.

By now, CT 317 was available for duty after having been released from Corps Reserve the night before. A new unit brought fresh perspectives: unit commanders saw a way to slip their troops around the 318th's right flank through a grove of trees that concealed them from enemy observation. The maneuver worked — sometime between 1600 and 1755 hours (accounts differ) the 317th's riflemen started moving northward "despite terrific enemy infantry, artillery, and armored resistance," as one account described it.

Not all the shellfire directed against CT 317 was German, however. After a volley of "short rounds" fell on the infantrymen of Company F, a medic named Pfc. Hoyt T. Rowell dashed across an open field to signal some attached forward observers that they needed to shift their aim. He then returned to treat those men wounded by this errant artillery, an act that earned him the Blue Ridge Division's first Distinguished Service Cross for valor in World War II.

Throughout August 19, U.S. forces struggled to keep up the pressure on their tenacious opponents. Thousands of soldiers and their tactical vehicles had by this time churned all crossing sites along the Ure River into a nearly-impassible quagmire, slowing the arrival of badly needed tanks and guns.

Some of those heavy weapons belonged to Lt. Col. William L. Herold's 610th TD Battalion. At about 2030 hours, Herold and several members of his command group were working to speed traffic over the Ure when a volley of high-explosive projectiles landed among them. Severely wounded, Herold was evacuated to a clearing station where he died at 0130 hours the next morning.

In the meantime, lead elements of CT 317 had moved northward almost two miles to form a battle line along the Argentan-Crennes road. Most of these troops belonged to the 2nd Battalion, 317th Infantry Regiment, commanded by Lt. Col. Russell E. Murray. As darkness began to fall, Murray's men were joined by a number of cannoneers under Captain Koob of the 317th's Antitank (AT) Company.

National Archives

ABOVE: Armed with a Thompson submachine gun, an American soldier of the 80th Division proceeds warily through a rubble strewn street in Argentan searching for remaining Germans. OPPOSITE: The graves of a German tank crew, killed in action in the Falaise Pocket, are marked by their helmets. In the background an overturned halftrack and a destroyed PzKpfw. IV medium tank bear mute testimony to the ferocity of the fighting.

Koob controlled a powerful force. In addition to the dozen 57mm cannons comprising AT Company, he had attached to his command 12 towed 3-inch guns belonging to the 610th TD Battalion as well as eight tracked M-10 tank destroyers from the 893rd TD Battalion. Leaving the towed pieces back to cover key road junctions, he deployed his M-10s and 57mms well forward in an orchard near the hamlet of Crennes.

After sundown, Koob noticed the riflemen detailed to guard his perimeter had all vanished. Only later did he learn that Murray's battalion had been called away (without anyone informing him) so it could conduct a night attack on Hill 213. American tactical doctrine normally discouraged such maneuvers, though, as they were difficult to synchronize and fraught with the risk of friendly fire.

General McBride, the man who ordered this assault, recognized these dangers but gambled on a night fight to help regain the initiative. His chief of staff, Colonel Max S. Johnson, set out around midnight to coordinate details with Colonel Cameron of CT 317. Curiously, Cameron could not be found anywhere, so Johnson then went on to Lt. Col. Murray's CP bearing instructions for an immediate advance.

Beginning at 0100 hours on August 20, Murray and his men cautiously made their way up about 1,000 yards to the Argentan-Trun Road. Company E, on the right, split off to occupy Hill 213. Yet these soldiers were deep in enemy territory, without reinforcement, and still unable to contact Colonel Cameron's HQ.

That night, the Germans defending Argentan started to evacuate. Harried by incessant American artillery barrages, a column of tactical vehicles including Panther tanks, halftracks, command cars, and trucks departed the city around 0430 hours heading up the road to Trun. Their route took them directly past Lt.

Col. Murray's "lost battalion," now bolstered by additional infantrymen, Captain Koob's AT guns, and a company of Sherman tanks.

As rain and fog blanketed the battlefield, weary G.I.s identified the sound of armored vehicles approaching from Argentan. First to pass through the kill zone was a motorcycle escort; Lieutenant Doug Cox of Company H opened the Americans' ambush with one deadly shot from his carbine. Then the roadway erupted in a maelstrom of gunfire.

"Their tanks began pushing their vehicles out of the way so they could get to us," remembered Company G's Private Benjamin Alvarado. "One tank got as close as fifty feet ahead of us before we knocked his track off with a bazooka shell, making it immobile. They used the machine gun from their tanks and fired their [cannon] at us but couldn't lower their barrel enough to hit us."

Alvarado's account continued: "Another German tank was coming. Our radioman called for help. Only one American tank was available. We could see him behind us. As the two tanks saw each other, their guns began to turn toward each other. With our tank still in motion, the German tank got the first shot off…. It ricocheted off our tank. While still on the move, our tank fired twice and made a direct hit!"

Closer into town, a platoon of gunners from Company A, 610th TD Battalion, observed five enemy armored vehicles also attempting to escape the trap. About to engage with their towed 3-inch pieces, these cannoneers were told to stop by Brig. Gen. Edmund W. Searby, 80th Division artillery commander, who stood nearby. Searby, fearing the tanks were British, changed his mind only when he saw black crosses painted on their turrets. Now free to fire, the AT crews quickly dispatched four of the five fleeing panzers.

Heavy fighting continued well into the morning as Lt. Col. Murray's battalion continued its assault. Pfc. Earl G. Goins of Company E earned the Distinguished Service Cross when he sprinted through murderous enemy fire to singlehandedly destroy a machine gun that was pinning down his comrades. As friendly tanks, TDs and crew-served weapons finally reached Hill 213, Murray reported his objective secure at 1030 hours.

While elements of CT 317 finished mopping up to the north, its 3rd Battalion turned south to seize the ruined city of Argentan. That outfit was soon joined in town by Lt. Col. John Golden's 2nd Battalion, 318th Infantry Regiment. At 1405 hours, the Yanks reported they had made contact with Tommies of the 11th Armoured Division advancing from Falaise. Combat Team 318's Colonel McHugh declared Argentan secure at 1500 hours, holding a brief flag-raising ceremony alongside the city's mayor shortly thereafter.

All across the 80th Division zone, disheartened enemy troops began to capitulate en masse. On Hill 213, Private Alvarado observed "a column of Germans, as far as you could see, with their hands on their heads, moving in our direction to surrender." Officially, the division captured 1,009 prisoners during its three-day campaign at Argentan.

In addition, the Blue Ridge was credited with destroying 14 tanks and several dozen soft-skinned vehicles. On August 21, patrolling G.I.s discovered a munitions depot containing 27,000 tons of German war materiel. One warehouse, noted a logistics officer, was filled with 1940-dated maps of the United Kingdom. That same day, Maj. Gen. McBride formally turned over control of Argentan to the British 50th "Northumbrian" Infantry Division and moved his command into an impromptu rest area.

The 80th Infantry Division's victory at Argentan came at great cost. Combat Team 318 suffered 416 casualties: 77 men killed, 303 wounded, and 36 missing in action. The human toll for CT 317 included nine soldiers killed and 45 wounded. The 305th Medical Battalion reported processing 432 casualties during the battle, while that organization's Company B treated in one 24-hour period a total of 195 patients, all but three of whom required evacuation.

The Blue Ridge Boys went into battle at

Continued on page 77

National Archives

Despite their gallant service in the Civil War, on the Western frontier, and in the Spanish-American War, black soldiers were used mostly for labor and given only a limited fighting role when the U.S. Army entered World War I.

Unfortunately, African-American soldiers in the U.S. Army faced the same prospect when their country was thrust into World War II on December 7, 1941. The War Department still viewed black troops as unsuitable for combat, and again relegated them to labor and support battalions.

But, because of the constant need for manpower and spirited lobbying on the part of the black community and Mrs. Eleanor Roosevelt, the first lady, changes eventually came about. Late in the war, African-Americans were given a chance to prove their worth in action, including most notably the Tuskegee Airmen of the Mediterranean Air Force's 99th Pursuit Squadron and 332nd Fighter Group, the 761st (Black Panther) Tank Battalion of Lt. Gen. George S. Patton Jr.'s

The African-American soldiers of the U.S. Army's 92nd Infantry Division experienced combat and racism in Italy during World War II.

BY MICHAEL D. HULL

Third Army, and the hell-bent-for-leather truck drivers of the legendary Red Ball Express.

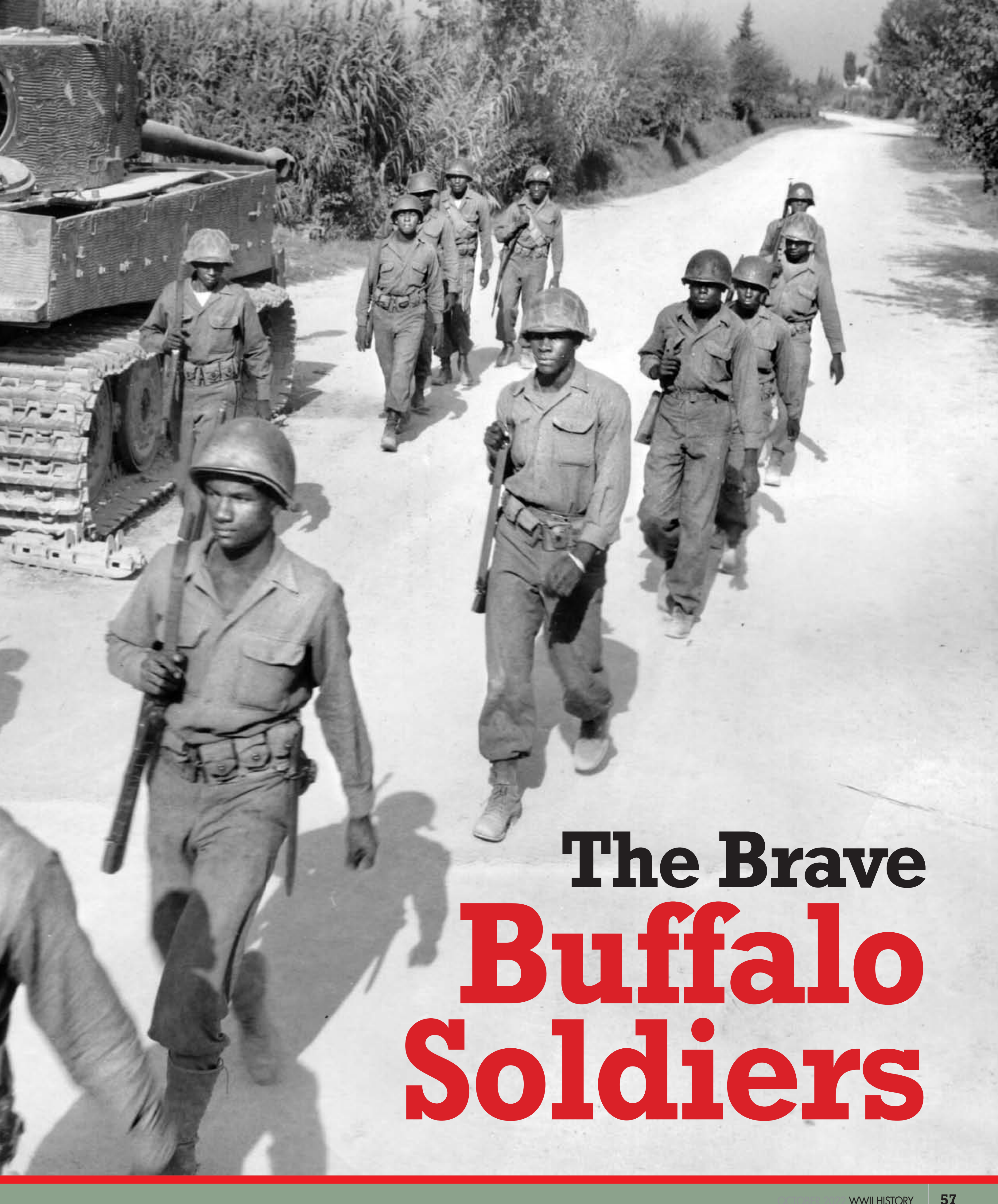
The Army activated three "colored" divisions in 1941 and 1942—the 2nd Cavalry Division at Fort Riley, Kansas, on April 1, 1941; the 93rd Infantry Division at Fort Huachuca, Arizona, on May 15; and the 92nd Infantry Division at Fort McClellan, Alabama, on October 15. Civil-rights leaders were encouraged, but their hopes soon dwindled when the three divisions were kept undergoing endless training while white divisions shipped out for the Pacific and European theaters. It was not until 1944, a campaign year, that President Franklin D. Roosevelt began pushing the back-pedaling War Department to deploy black troops.

The 2nd Cavalry Division, which comprised the 9th and 10th Cavalry Regiments of frontier fame, was shipped to Oran, Algeria, in March 1944, but saw no action. It was inactivated two months later and its personnel sent to labor battalions for the duration. It was an inglorious end for the "Buffalo Soldiers."

The 93rd Infantry Division arrived at Guadalcanal on February 7, 1944, but its elements were parceled out for defensive and labor activities for the rest of the war. Only one unit, the 24th (Separate) Regiment, saw combat. After departing from Guadalcanal on December 8, the unit landed on Saipan and Tinian in the Marianas for garrison duty. It joined black U.S. Marines in mopping up Japanese resistance and was awarded a unit commendation.

Fighting men of the 92nd Infantry Division, the famed Buffalo Soldiers, march past the wreckage of a knocked out PzKpfw. VI Tiger tank in the vicinity of Ponsacco, Italy. The African-American soldiers of the 92nd Division fought racial injustice in their own army, as well as the Germans.

All photos: National Archives



The Brave Buffalo Soldiers

Soldiers of the 92nd Infantry Division engage the Germans on September 7, 1944, three miles north of the town of Lucca, Italy. A soldier rises up to fire a bazooka at a German machine-gun nest just 30 yards from the American position, while an Italian partisan at left covers his ears.

The 92nd Infantry (Buffalo) division was the only black division to see combat in Europe, and this came about because of heightened demands from civil rights leaders and a critical manpower shortage in the Italian theater during the summer of 1944. Lt. Gen. Mark W. Clark's multi-national Fifth Army had been stripped of almost 100,000 men for the Normandy campaign.

After its activation in Alabama, the 92nd Division moved to Fort Huachuca in May 1943. It took part in Fourth Army maneuvers in Louisiana in early 1944, and returned to Arizona that April. At Fort Huachuca, a 19th century cavalry post situated in southeastern Arizona, 15 miles north of the Mexican border, the men of the 92nd were led and trained by white staff officers and company commanders. They were mostly southerners.

The divisional commander was 51-year-old, Virginia-born Maj. Gen. Edward M. "Ned" Almond, a World War I infantry veteran who had taken over the 92nd in October 1942. It was said that he owed his command to his marriage to the sister of General George C. Marshall, the Army chief of staff. Energetic but tactless and dictatorial, Almond believed that he knew how to manage African-American soldiers and lacked sympathy for them.

Addressing one of his regiments, Almond said, "I did not send for you. Your Negro newspapers, Negro politicians, and white friends have insisted on your seeing combat, and I shall see that you get combat and your share of casualties." Another white officer noted later, "He most certainly kept his word."

The first element of the 92nd Division to go overseas was the 370th Infantry Regiment, which was shipped to the Mediterranean theater in the summer of 1944. Wearing the division's distinctive shoulder patch bearing a black buffalo on a green background, the soldiers were raw but eager to get into action. Lt. Vernon J. Baker, a platoon leader from Cheyenne, Wyoming, said, "We were young and dumb and thought we were going to whip the Germans' behinds and drive them back home as soon as we got there." Baker was later awarded the Medal of Honor, upgraded from the Distinguished Service Cross, for leading an attack that wiped out six German machine-gun nests near Viareggio in April 1945.

The men of the 370th Regiment disembarked at Naples on August 1, and black soldiers in the service units on the docks cheered loudly as they filed down gangplanks. Private Edward Winn, a quartermaster, observed, "Most times you would see a black soldier, he was carrying ammunition, cans of fuel, or chow for the front line—anything but a gun. These guys were carrying rifles. A black G.I. carrying a rifle was not a normal sight to see every day in Europe in 1944."

Three weeks later, on August 23, the regiment went into the line with Maj. Gen. Vernon E. Prichard's 1st Armored Division and advanced against negligible German resistance across the muddy Arno River toward the walled city of Lucca and the ultimate Allied objectives in northwestern Italy, the naval base at La Spezia and the port of Genoa. Then, hampered by torrential autumn rains and relentless enemy shellfire, the 370th Regiment tried but failed to break through the main Gothic Line in the northern Apennine Mountains.

One of the major obstacles to the British Eighth and U.S. Fifth Armies, the heavily fortified Gothic Line stretched 190 miles east to west across Italy from the Ligurian Sea to the Adriatic. After the fall of Rome, Field Marshal Albert Kesselring's 10th and 14th Armies had retired behind its 2,376 machine-gun nests, 479 gun and mortar positions, and miles of antitank ditches. The enemy troops had been

ordered to hold the line at all costs.

As the 370th Regiment moved toward the Serchio Valley in northwestern Tuscany, the rest of the 15,000-man 92nd Buffalo Division shipped out to the Mediterranean theater in stages. Elements departed from Hampton Roads, Virginia, on September 22, 1944, and arrived in Italy on October 16. That month and in November, they joined the 370th Regiment in the rugged mountains north of Pisa, facing the western anchor of the Gothic Line. Lieutenant Baker reported, "It was some of the worst country you could fight a war in, but I had grown up in the mountains and knew how to survive in them. From the time I first pulled a trigger at the age of 12, my job was keeping my family going during the Depression by hunting game."

Besides the harsh weather, terrain, and stubborn enemy, the Buffalo Soldiers had to fight the racism which had plagued them since basic training; they groused that General Almond and his "southern crackers" were using them as "cannon fodder." Baker said, "We wanted to defend our country, but we faced the most vicious kind of racism, and that soured a lot of the guys. I tried not to let this get to me; I focused on being a soldier and surviving, but sometimes it was hard to tell who the bigger racists were—the Germans in front of us or the commanders behind us."

Lieutenants Vernon Baker (left) and John Fox were two soldiers of the 92nd Infantry Division who received the Medal of Honor, Fox posthumously, when their medals were finally upgraded during the 1980s. RIGHT: In action on the banks of the Arno River on September 1, 1944, the crew of a 105mm howitzer of Battery B, 598th Field Artillery, services its weapon. The 598th was a component of the 92nd Infantry Division.

In two operations during the harsh winter of 1944-45, the 92nd Division was routed by seasoned German mountain troops. The white commanders blamed the defeats on inexperience and cowardice, an Army report branding the black soldiers as "entirely undependable" and "terrified to fight at night," and General Clark later called the division the worst in Europe.

All this was denounced by the division's Lieutenant Frederick Davison, who said the units performed with distinction and that the high number of casualties was due to Almond and his staff. Their orders, said Davison, "were so flawed, so inept, that there was no way that success could have been achieved."

Rothacker C. Smith, a conscientious objector and medical corpsman who was wounded and captured in one of the battles, agreed that the black soldiers fought bravely. He recalled later, "After the war, I read these reports that the Buffalo men 'melted away' in combat, but the men I watched fought with spirit and guts."

Lieutenant Baker echoed, "There was disharmony in the 92nd, but I had no problems with my platoon when the shooting started…. When I went forward under fire, they followed."

During their offensive in the fall of 1944, the Allied forces managed to breach the Gothic Line in mid-September, but exploitation proved impossible, and both sides suffered heavy casualties in the protracted fighting. During the lull, the exhausted, mud-covered Allied troops regrouped for a third great push.

When the Christmas season arrived, the Buffalo Soldiers and their comrades celebrated as best they could in their foxholes and in friendly Italian communities. On Christmas Eve, a black platoon delivered a truckload of surplus food, cheese, and chocolate to the village of Barga. "We had never seen so much food," reported 17-year-old Irma Biondi. "They were wonderful, so nice to us." The soldiers and villagers shared wine, danced, and sang carols.

But the merriment was short-lived. During the night, the Germans had launched a surprise counterattack—part of an attempt to seize the Tuscany port of Livorno—against the 92nd Division's positions along the Serchio River. Preceded by an artillery barrage at dawn on Christmas Day, German, Austrian, and Italian Fascist troops advanced, overrunning the Buffalo Division outposts and precipitating a general withdrawal. The invaders penetrated Barga and other neighboring villages, including Bottinaccio and Sommocolonia.

The action was bitter and bloody as the Buffalo Soldiers engaged the enemy swarming through the streets. There was much confusion because some of the invaders were dressed in civilian clothes. Almond's troops fought desperately and bravely, and a number of Silver Stars were later awarded for heroism. In the village of Sommocolonia, where the enemy sought to roll up the 370th Infantry Regiment's line, the G.I.s and Germans fought from door to door while the besieged 366th Regiment struggled to drive the invaders away. But the situation deteriorated as black battalions and companies were disorganized and forced to withdraw with heavy casualties.

Sommocolonia was the site of one of the most remarkable and tragic feats of heroism in World War II. The hero was 29-year-old Lieutenant John R. Fox, a forward observer with Cannon Company of the Buffalo Division's

Advancing through the hill country of Cacina, Italy, soldiers of Company I, 3rd Battalion, 370th Infantry Regiment, 92nd Division move toward the front lines during the Italian campaign.

598th Field Artillery Battalion. Born in Cincinnati, Ohio, on May 18, 1915, John Robert Fox studied biology and science at Wilberforce (Ohio) University, where he participated in the ROTC program and met his future wife, Arlene. They had a daughter, Sandra. Fox was commissioned in 1940 and graduated from the Fort Benning, Georgia, Infantry School in August 1941.

On the night of December 25-26, 1944, Lieutenant Fox was directing defensive artillery fire. When the Americans were forced to withdraw, he volunteered to stay behind with a handful of defenders. He positioned himself on the second floor of a house. When the Germans and Austrians attacked in strength at 8 a.m. on December 26, surrounding the house, Fox radioed for closer gunfire.

The 105mm artillery battery questioned the order and said that the next adjustment would bring salvos directly onto Fox's position. "Fire it!" he replied. "There's more of them than there are of us. In three or four minutes they'll be all over us. Fire directly on the house." Fox said that the gunfire was the only way to defeat the attackers. The battery opened up again. The house was blasted, and the heroic soldier perished.

When a later counterattack retook the position, Fox's body was found amid the remains of about 100 enemy troops. A citation said later that Fox "greatly assisted in delaying the enemy advance until other infantry and artillery could reorganize to repel the attack." He was buried at Colebrook Cemetery in Whitman, Massachusetts.

In a postwar assessment, Lt. Gen. Maximilian Fretter-Pico, a Wehrmacht veteran of the Eastern Front, defended the Buffalo Soldiers' performance in the fighting around Sommocolonia. He said it was a situation in which good soldiers were poorly assigned. "Your troops were deployed on a front which was too long for the number of men available," he stated, "and your reserves were too far in the rear, which prevented their being deployed immediately." While the American press generally criticized the black division, a white officer from another division stated in a letter to The New Republic, "The 92nd didn't break nearly so badly as white divisions did under similar conditions at the Kasserine Pass."

A posthumous Distinguished Service Cross was presented to Fox's widow at Fort Devens, Massachusetts, on May 15, 1982, by Maj. Gen. James F. Hamlett, who had been a 1st lieutenant in the hero's company. The decoration was eventually upgraded to the Medal of Honor, citing Fox's "gallant and courageous actions, at the supreme sacrifice of his own life." Mrs. Fox received the medal from President Bill Clinton at a White House ceremony on January 13, 1997, during which the nation's highest honor was awarded to six other black veterans of World War II. Lieutenant Baker was the only living recipient.

After the war, the villagers of Sommocolonia erected a monument to Lieutenant Fox and eight Italian soldiers who were killed in the Christmas 1944 artillery barrage. In 2005, the Hasbro toy company introduced a 12-inch action figure of Fox as part of its G.I. Joe Medal of Honor series. Fox's other decorations were the Combat Infantryman Badge, Purple Heart, and Bronze Star.

He had delayed the enemy advance on December 26, 1944, but only one American officer and 17 enlisted men were able to escape from the village. The Germans pushed back the

92nd Division, which had been holding a 17-mile front across the Serchio Valley. Supported by 4,000 sorties by fighters and bombers, the Allies rushed in reinforcements to plug the hole in their lines and retake the valley. The Buffalo Division was reinforced by two brigades of the British Eighth Army's 8th Indian Division and two regiments of the U.S. 85th Infantry (Custer) Division. By January 1, 1945, the opposing armies were back at their original positions and the stalemate lingered through the winter.

The Buffalo Division fought on from January to April. Despite more heavy losses and bouts of low morale, its general performance was rated exemplary. A tragic setback on February 6-10, however, shook the black troops. Assigned to a sector south of Viareggio, the 366th Regiment was pinned down for four days by intensive fire from German artillery and coastal guns. A total of 47 officers and 659 enlisted men were killed, wounded, or missing in action.

"The Germans mowed us down like clay pigeons," reported Sergeant Willard A Williams. He said that his comrades performed "far above and beyond the call of duty." Yet the 366th was deactivated on March 14 and converted into two general service regiments. Officers and G.I.s wept at the humiliation.

Starting on March 1, 1945, the 92nd Division was thoroughly reorganized, with some regiments withdrawn and others attached. Then, on April 5, it began to attack along the Ligurian coast, spearheaded by its 370th Infantry Regiment and the famed 442nd ("Go for Broke") Regimental Combat Team. The division, which took more than 11,000 prisoners during April and May, overcame disorganized resistance, captured La Spezia, and reached Genoa on April 27. The Buffalo Soldiers were in the vicinity of Alessandria and Pavin when the German forces in Italy surrendered on May 2, 1945. The division returned to New York on November 26, 1945, and was inactivated at Camp Kilmer, New Jersey, two days later.

The Buffalo Division emerged from the European war with a mixed record of reverses and gallant service, and many of its officers and men proudly wore the Distinguished Service Crosses, Silver Stars, Purple Hearts, Combat Infantryman Badges, and Bronze Stars. Its fighting was over, yet it continued to come under fire from committed racists and others.

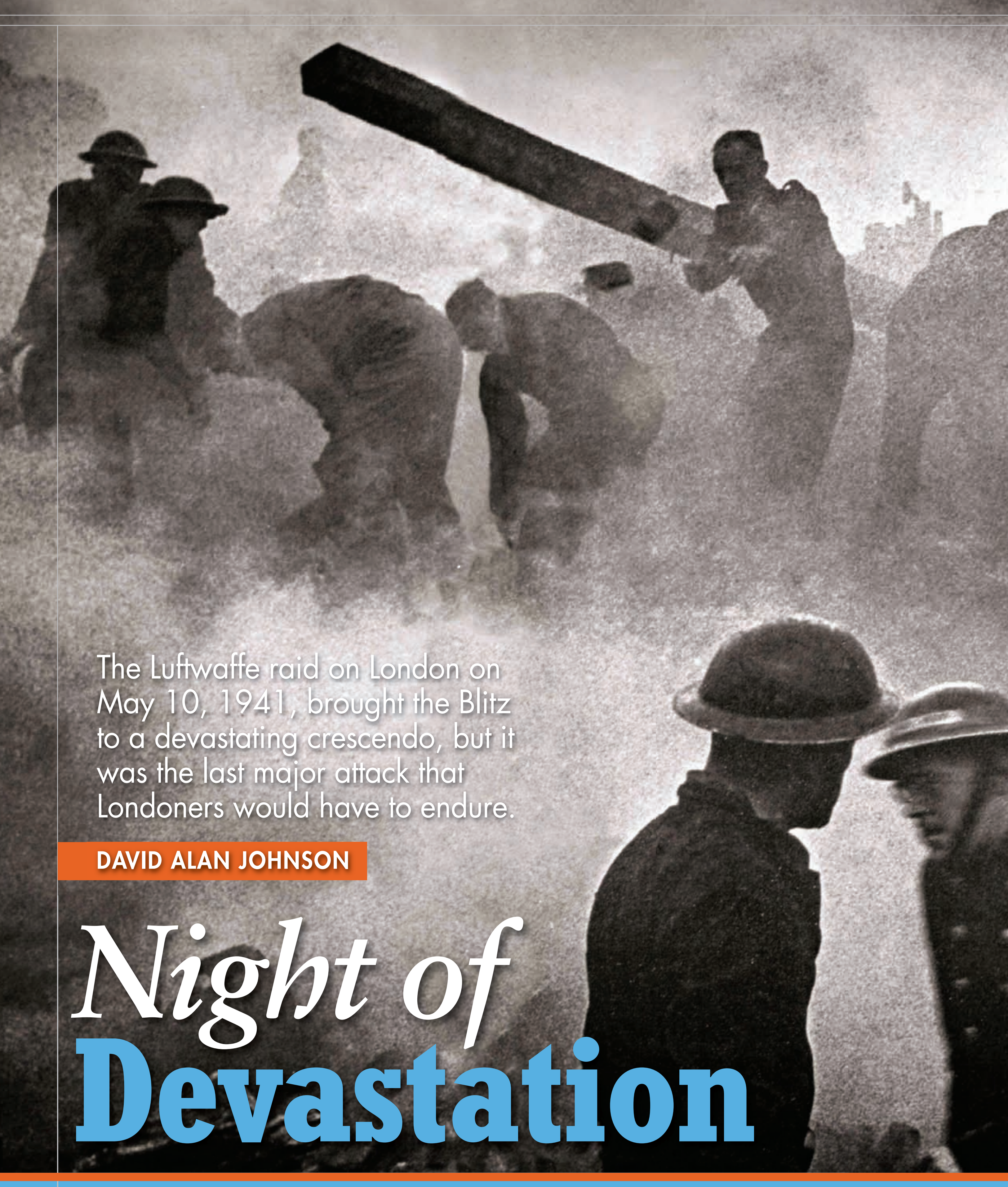
These views were not shared, however, by three decorated veterans of the Italian campaign who became U.S. senators—Robert Dole of Kansas, Daniel K. Inouye of Hawaii, and Edward W. Brooke of Massachusetts.

Senator Dole, a Republican leader for several years, was wounded while fighting with Maj. Gen. George P. Hays's crack 10th Mountain Division during the North Apennines and Po Valley campaigns in January-April 1945, and was proud of his association with the 92nd Division. Inouye, who served in the Senate from 1962 until his death in 2012, won the Medal of Honor and 15 other decorations for heroism while serving in the 442nd Regimental Combat Team and had "a special, personal memory of the 92nd." After his right arm was shattered while leading his platoon against three German machine-gun nests on the Gothic Line in April 1945, he received 17 blood transfusions from African-American soldiers. Brooke was the first black elected to the U.S. Senate since Reconstruction and served from 1967 to 1979. A captain in the 92nd Division's 366th Infantry Regiment who also spied behind the enemy lines in Italy, he lauded his comrades for their fighting spirit and sacrifices.

In the Pacific theater, the 93rd Infantry Division was engaged in defensive missions and port operations in the Treasure islands, New Guinea, and Morotai until the end of the war. After serving in the Philippines, it returned to San Francisco on February 1, 1946, and was inactivated at Camp Stoneman, California, two days later.

Lieutenant General Lucian K. Truscott, commander of the Allied Fifth Army in Italy, pauses to chat with soldiers of the 92nd Infantry Division after the American troops have stood their ground in defense of the hills above the town of Viareggio. Sentries are alert atop the adjacent buildings.

The U.S. armed forces were still segregated when World War II ended, but this changed in 1948 when President Harry Truman's Executive Order 9981 mandated equal treatment and opportunity regardless of race. Beginning in 1951, reverses in the Korean War led to the end of all-black units in the Army and Marine Corps. All of the services integrated the enlisted ranks, though the officer corps remained largely white. The Vietnam War saw the highest proportion of African-Americans ever to serve in an American war. ■



The Luftwaffe raid on London on May 10, 1941, brought the Blitz to a devastating crescendo, but it was the last major attack that Londoners would have to endure.

DAVID ALAN JOHNSON

Night of Devastation

The first word of the incoming Luftwaffe raid arrived at about 10:45 p.m. on the night of Saturday, May 10, 1941. Air Marshal Sholto Douglas was in the Filter Room at Fighter Command Headquarters in Stanmore, Middlesex, when the telephone call came through. The message was short and to the point: "There's something big on tonight, sir."

Radar stations all along the coast—at Pevensey, at Rye, at Ventnor on the Isle of Wight—had been picking up the German bombers for the past half hour, while the planes were still over France. During the next 25 minutes or so, more and more V-shaped blips of light began appearing on radar screens. At Ventnor, the count quickly increased from 20-plus aircraft, to 25-plus, and then to over 30. Every other radar station was also picking up enemy aircraft approaching the south coast in ever-increasing numbers. The message received at Fighter Command Headquarters was absolutely correct; the Luftwaffe was sending something big, and the target was London.

The Blitz against London had begun over eight months earlier, on Sunday September 7, 1940. Between September 7 and November 2, the city had been bombed for 57 consecutive nights. London's City District had been entirely burned out on the night of December 29. During the month of April 1941, the Luftwaffe conducted two heavy raids, which were remembered by Londoners as "the Wednesday"—April 16—and "the Saturday"—April 19. On this night, May 10, the bombers were returning for another maximum effort.

Shortly after Air Marshal Douglas received his telephone message, the air-raid sirens began to sound throughout London. A fire watcher on the roof of a City firm made a quick entry in the logbook: "Air raid alert, 10.48." Even after eight months of bombings, the sirens still made Londoners tense up; there was no such thing as a "routine" alert. A woman from the Paddington area remembered, "Every time I heard the sirens, my nerves went into a knot. We never knew whether an attack was going to be a small nuisance raid or a massive effort. It only took one bomb to kill you. I was always frightened stiff by those sirens."

The first bombs to come down on this Saturday night were dropped at 11:05 p.m. by the pathfinders of Kampfgeschwader (Bomb Wing) 100. KGr 100 had been assigned the job of dropping thousands of two-pound incendiary bombs at the beginning of the raid, creating a luminescent aiming point for the rest of the bomber fleet. KGr 100, the "glamour boy" unit of the Luftwaffe's bomber fleet, was famous for having the best pilots and air crews in the Luftwaffe. Nicknamed "Fire Raisers," the group was staffed entirely by hand-picked officers and crew, most of whom had been in the Luftwaffe since before the war and all of whom had many hours of combat flying.

KGr 100's complement of 20 Heinkel He-111 bombers crossed the English coast at 10:45, just as the night's maximum effort was beginning, and had been registering on British radar screens ever since they had taken off from their base at Vannes, in Brittany. Twenty minutes later, the group's bomb aimers scattered their incendiaries across London, all the way from Waterloo Station to the docks beyond Tower Bridge. Each bomber carried eight canisters of the foot-long incendiaries; each canister, called a "Molotov Breadbasket," held 36 firebombs, for a total of 286 incendiaries per bomber. In total, the group would drop nearly 6,000 of the small but lethal bombs.

The incendiaries did their job with frightening efficiency, punching their way through roofs and igniting hundreds of widespread fires. The individual fires spread out across streets and alleyways and began merging into major conflagrations within a quarter of an hour. Roof spotters throughout London began telephoning their first fire reports before 11:30. Blazes could be seen all across central and eastern London, and they appeared to be growing in intensity. On a factory roof in northwestern London, a fire watcher told an operator in the control center, "I can see a very large fire over to the east." This was one of hundreds of similar reports being submitted across the city.

Following one of many harrowing Luftwaffe raids against London, rescue workers comb through the rubble of a structure looking for survivors. The people of London and other British cities endured many nights of bombing during the Blitz of 1940-1941.

Alamy

By about 11:30, all 20 of KGr 100's Heinkels had dropped their bombs and were turning back toward their home base in Brittany. Captain Friedrich Aschenbrenner could be well-satisfied that his men had done a thorough job of lighting up the target. Several large fires had been set, including a massive blaze east of Tower Bridge, which was clearly visible for many miles. Aschenbrenner ordered his radio operator to send a message to Field Marshal Hugo Sperrle, the commander of Air Fleet Three, at his headquarters in Paris: the target was well alight and well marked for the rest of the incoming bomber force.

At British Fighter Command Headquarters, the plots kept coming in at a steady rate. Ventnor was plotting 20-plus hostiles still over France; Pevensey had another 15-plus just crossing the Channel coast. From the controller's gallery overlooking the huge map of the British Isles, Air Marshal Douglas watched as the WAAFs—members of the Women's Auxiliary Air Force—marked these plots on the map. Red metal arrows, representing the locations of incoming enemy aircraft, were maneuvered into position by long, magnet-tipped plotting rods. As the stream of bombers advanced toward London, the red arrows were also moved northward toward their targets on the map.

National Archives

Citizens of London make do with their safe space in the city's underground. The subway tunnels had few of the comforts of home, but Londoners found a sense of shared suffering and comradeship while the Nazi Luftwaffe rained bombs on their city.

By 11:00, most of Field Marshal Sperrle's bombers had either already left their bases or were preparing for takeoff. They included Kampfgeschwader (Bomb Wing) 27, based at Dinard in Brittany; KG 54 at Evereux; Lehr Geschwader 1 at Orleans; KG 51 at Orly, near Paris; and KG 4 at Eindhoven, Holland.

Residents of London did not need anyone to tell them where the Luftwaffe's bombers were heading. In scattered locations throughout the city, roadways and rooftops were being sprinkled by shrapnel from bursting antiaircraft shells, and searchlight beams darted across the night sky looking for the intruders. American journalist Quentin Reynolds was astonished by the noise made by the incoming airplanes. "Christ," he said to a fellow reporter, "it sounds like there are hundreds of them."

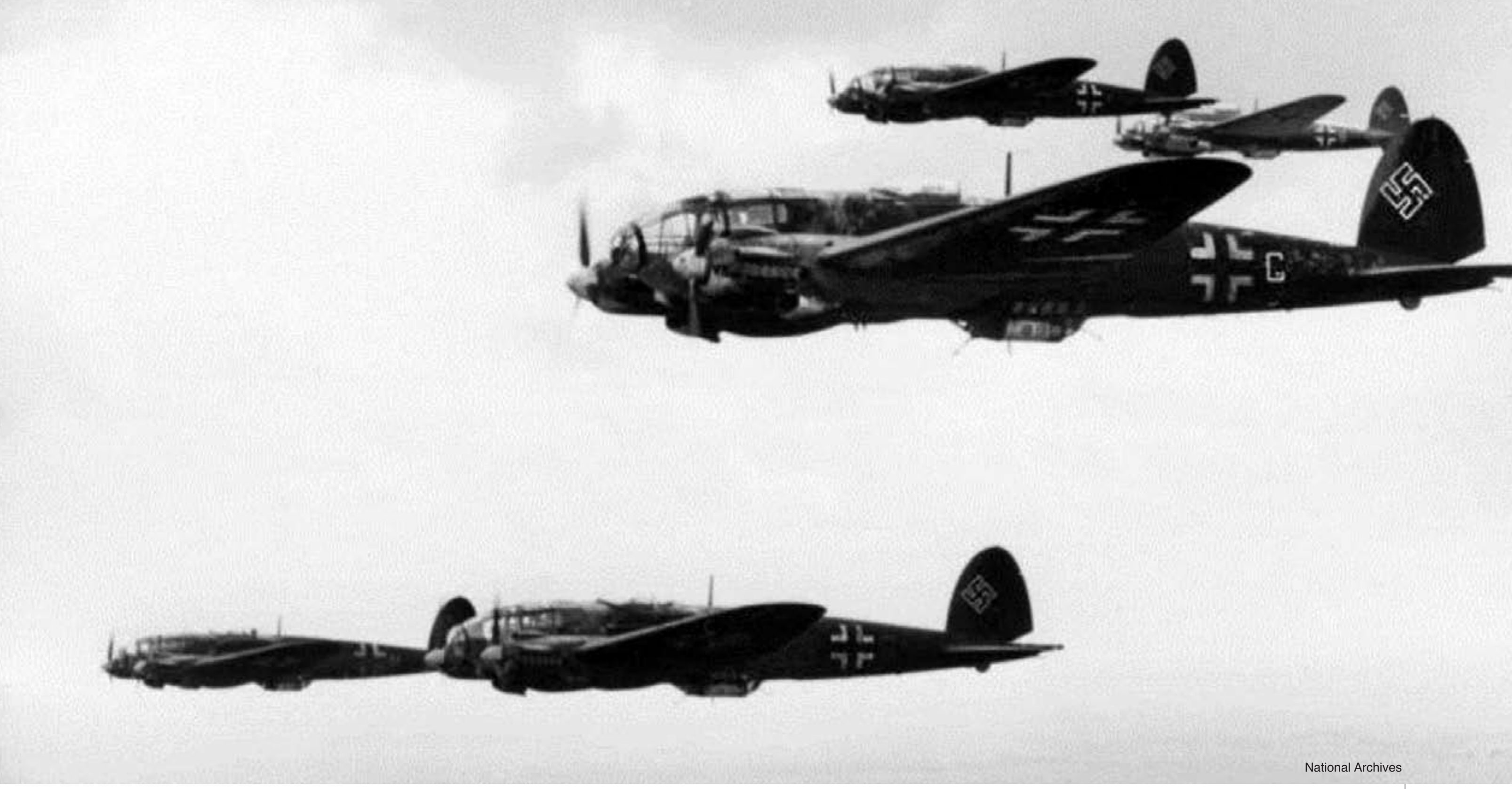
At this stage of the raid, there were not yet hundreds of bombers over London, but there soon would be. So many contacts were being made by the radar stations that the blips on the screens merged into one massive splotch. The WAAFs at Fighter Command Headquarters were no longer receiving detailed reports; the stations could only announce "massive plots." Radar defenses were being overwhelmed by the number of enemy aircraft crossing the Channel.

Even though the raid had just begun, fires were already burning out of control and spreading fast. In the vicinity of Waterloo Station, incendiary bombs had already set several good-sized blazes. At Fields Candle Factory, fire spotters were doing their best to put out the incendiaries that landed on the building's roof, but the bombs kept falling. They were determined to hold on and save their factory, and so far, they had managed to smother each bomb with sand before it could do any damage. But at about 11:40, a London Fire-Brigade officer telephoned to advise that two nearby water mains, one at York Road and the other at Waterloo Road, had been fractured by high-explosive bombs. The entire area would be without water to fight the fires.

Residents living near Finsbury Circus had a different problem: Two parachute mines had landed in the vicinity. A fire watcher had seen them come down, slowly and silently, by parachute, and immediately threw himself flat on the ground. The mines, which were actually anti-shipping weapons, were eight feet long and contained 1,500 pounds of high explosives. When one of them exploded on dry land, the concussion was devastating—the blast could demolish an entire row of houses and still have enough power to smash windows two or three streets away.

When the fire watcher rose to his feet after the explosion, he found himself looking at a scene of absolute devastation. Sixty houses, a brewery, a barrage-balloon site, and several other buildings had been shattered; 60 people had been killed by the blast, and about twice that many had been seriously injured. Several other parachute mines came down in other sections of London and created their own havoc.

By midnight, it had become evident that this raid was not directed at any particular district, but that all of London was the target. The attack still seemed to be gaining momentum, hitting areas that had not been bombed earlier in the attack. Reynolds went up on the roof of the Savoy Hotel to see the fires and thought the


National Archives

A flight of Luftwaffe Heinkel He-111 bombers wings its way toward a target somewhere in England. Though the Royal Air Force won the Battle of Britain, the intense bombing of British cities continued into the spring of 1941, with London taking great punishment during the Blitz.

scene was like something out of an epic Hollywood film. A man watching the attack from Hertfordshire, about 20 miles north of London, was shocked by its intensity. The explosions had been going on for what seemed like hours. "It's that bastard Goering," he said. "He's really lost his temper."

Colonel Paul Weitkus of KG 53 was not losing his temper, but he was concerned about British night fighters. He had taken off from Lille at about 11:30 p.m. and had flown straight to London with no interruptions. But he knew the fighters were out there somewhere; there was a full moon, and German bombers made an inviting target on such a well-lit night. The antiaircraft fire was heavy, but not accurate; it rarely was. His target was the Victoria Docks, east of the Tower of London. He intended to put his bombs— a mix of high explosives and incendiaries—directly on target and get back to base before either the flak or the fighters could get to him.

Weitkus and his crew could see the fires of London before they crossed the English coast. As they neared the city, the fires became more vivid and more widespread. Everything along the Thames, on both sides of the river, seemed to be burning. Even the river itself seemed to be on fire—it was the color of bright, red-hot coals as far downriver as he could see. The Victoria Docks were easy to spot—brilliantly illuminated, as though by hundreds of floodlights. He had been to London on many raids since the Blitz last September, but these were the most intense fires he had ever seen. It looked as though nothing would survive this attack.

The bomb aimer, lying prone on his stomach in the nose of the aircraft, manipulated a series of switches on the bombsight. Occasionally, he would call out instructions to Weitkus: "Come left a few degrees. That's good. Now steady …" But he kept staring into the sight, adjusting the dials. Finally, he pushed a button at the end of a long cable, releasing the bombs. The Heinkel suddenly jumped into the air, over 1,000 pounds lighter, while its load of high explosives plummeted toward the docks. "Bombs gone!" crackled his voice over the crews' headsets.

During the next few minutes, the bomb aimers in the other 19 Heinkels of Oberst Weitkus' group followed the same routine—last-minute adjustments in course, release of the bomb load, and "Bombs gone!" With all bombs released, there was nothing more to do except turn for home. The radio operator notified Paris that the target had been bombarded successfully. The bomb aimer returned to his role as navigator and set a course back to Lille.

Weitkus would make it safely back to base, but at least four German bombers had already been shot down by British fighters. Forty fighters were spread out between London and the south coast. This included everything from twin-engine Bristol Beaufighters, specially equipped with AI airborne radar sets, to Supermarine Spitfires and Hawker Hurricanes—day fighters without any radar. The night fighters did not have much of a chance of intercepting an enemy bomber even with their radar, but the Spitfires and Hurricanes had almost no chance at all.

But Air Marshal Douglas was not discouraged. Any mention of the RAF's fighters engaging enemy bombers made good news headlines and was good for morale. He was also convinced that the fighters were having an effect on the enemy bombers, no matter how many bombers were being shot down or where they were being destroyed. "It does not matter where the enemy is shot down so long as he is shot down in large numbers," he said. Or even in small numbers, especially on a night like this, when the map of the filter room was covered with red arrows.

One red arrow in particular was causing concern. Slightly before 10:30, the filter room received a telephone call that a single aircraft had crossed the coast northeast of Alnwick, Northumberland. Two fighters were sent to intercept the mysterious airplane, but they quickly lost track of it—the aircraft was trav-

eling over 300 miles per hour. No one had any idea what the airplane was doing that far north, or even whether it was British or German. There were no friendly aircraft in the vicinity of Northumberland, but it could not possibly be a German bomber, either—no Luftwaffe bomber could reach speeds anywhere near 300 miles per hour. After staring at the red arrow for several minutes, a decision was reached: "Slap an X on it," marking the contact as "unknown." It might just be a friendly fighter in trouble.

But Sholto Douglas was not satisfied simply to call the mystery plane "unknown" and leave it at that. He issued an order, "Find out what it is—what it's doing." As he spoke, WAAF plotters continued to push the arrow farther to the north, toward Scotland. The first solid clue regarding the airplane's identification came from an Observer Corps post in the north of England. "We've got a visual at one hundred feet;" it was a Messerschmitt 110 twin-engine fighter, flying north toward Edinburgh.

Sholto Douglas did not believe it. "Impossible," he said. "No Messerschmitt would have the fuel to get to Edinburgh and back. Get another fix on it." A few minutes later, a telephone call from the Observer Corps confirmed the earlier report—the airplane was a twin-engine Messerschmitt flying at extremely low altitudes, sometimes as low as 50 feet.

"Get the fighters up after it," the air marshal ordered. But that was the last clear message regarding the mystery aircraft. Shortly after the order was given, the airplane was identified as a Boulton Paul Defiant, a single-engine RAF interceptor. Next, an Observer Corps station near Glasgow reported that the airplane had been shot down. But when fighter control in Scotland was contacted, no one knew anything about any airplane being shot down. That was the last report Douglas heard concerning the mystery plane; at about 11:20 p.m., a WAAF removed the red arrow from the map. But Air Marshal Douglas had the feeling that the incident was not over.

At his headquarters in the Hotel Luxembourg in Paris, Field Marshal Sperrle could be well-satisfied that his bombers seemed to be inflicting maximum damage to London. According to the reports he had been reading, entire areas within the city were burning out of control. The eastern section of London had been especially hard hit; fires were spreading for miles all along the River Thames. And the night was far from over—the attack was scheduled to go on until daybreak. After looking at the reports from the bombers, the field marshal decided that he might as well go to dinner; there was no point in staying at headquarters. He would get a full account of the raid in the morning, after it was over and all the bombers had returned to base.

Alamy

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ABOVE: A ground crewman prepares a Junkers Ju-88 bomber for a nocturnal raid against a British city during the Blitz. Some German bomber crews returned to bomb London a second time on the night of May 10-11, 1941. TOP: This photo was taken from the Press Association building in London on the night of May 10, 1941. It captures the British capital city in flames at the height of the heavy German bombing raid.

Members of the London Fire Brigade did not need any news dispatches to tell them how desperate the state of affairs had become. Those at work in the middle of the fire zone were surrounded by flaming buildings; the situation looked to be getting steadily worse with the passage of time. The red, shadowy streets played tricks on the eyes. In the rose-colored twilight, firemen tripped over the straggling lengths of firehose. Side streets were entered with caution; fallen beams and huge chunks of debris went unseen in the half-light.

Water could be as much of an enemy to the firemen as the fires themselves. Under high pressure, darts of water from a loose coupling could hit a fireman in the face and temporarily blind him. Moisture on the outside of a fire hose acted like glue for ground glass, creating a hazard for a fireman's hands. A brass hose nozzle, which weighed several pounds, could become a lethal weapon if it slipped out of a fireman's grasp, lashing out and breaking an arm or fracturing a skull as neatly as a club.

Once in a while, an unintentionally funny incident would ease the tension. At the height of the attack, a civilian walked into an Air Raid Precaution (ARP) post carrying a bucket of water. "I have a bomp in my bucket," he proudly announced in a heavy Eastern European accent. He proceeded to reach into the bucket and produce a chunk of white metal that had been the core of an incendiary bomb, displaying it for all to see. The wardens were not impressed. They advised the man to take

his bomb to a nearby disposal center, but he paid no attention—it was his bomp and he intended to keep it. Having shown his trophy to the officers, the man walked out of the station. Apparently, he was traveling from ARP post to ARP post to show off his prized possession. The wardens just laughed and shook their heads as they watched him leave. It was the only funny moment they had all night.

At Fighter Command Headquarters, Air Marshal Douglas was also shaking his head. About an hour and a half after the mysterious German aircraft disappeared over Scotland, the operations room received a telephone call from an Observer Corps post near Glasgow. The message was startling to the point of being unbelievable: "We've got the pilot of the Me 110, sir. He admits he's Rudolf Hess and he wants to see the Duke of Hamilton."

It was a fantastic story. Rudolf Hess was Deputy Führer of the Third Reich—in the entire Nazi hierarchy, only Adolf Hitler and Reichsmarschall Hermann Goering outranked him. And he was now being held prisoner in Scotland—he had bailed out of his specially modified Messerschmitt after it had run out of fuel; he had not been shot down. He was asking to speak with the Duke of Hamilton, who lived on an estate nearby. Air Marshal Douglas was absolutely dumbfounded.

After all the facts were in, it turned out that Hess had flown to Scotland with a peace proposal—he wanted Britain and Germany to join forces in an offensive against the Soviet Union and thought that the Duke of Hamilton had the power and influence to persuade the British government to accept his plan. He had met the duke at the Berlin Olympic Games in 1936 and had convinced himself that the duke had the connections within the government to turn his idea of an Anglo-German alliance into reality. Instead, Hess was taken into custody and remained a prisoner for the rest of the war. After the war, he was tried by the Nuremberg War Crimes Tribunal and sentenced to life imprisonment.

After the mystery of the phantom Messerschmitt 110 had been solved, Air Marshal Douglas once again turned his full attention to the Luftwaffe's determined effort against London, which still looked to be increasing. From the balcony overlooking the giant map of England, he watched as the red arrows moved northward toward London like a swarm of insects. There was no letup in the number of incoming enemy aircraft. Even after 3:00 a.m., the arrows continued their journey from the Channel coast toward their targets. It seemed that the attack was never going to end.

One of the metal arrows represented the Heinkel flown by Paul Weitkus of KG 53. Colonel Weitkus had returned to his base at Lille at about 1:45 a.m., after dropping his bombs on London. He'd sent a message to Luftwaffe headquarters in Paris, "Mission accomplished," and headed for home. But when he landed, Weitkus was informed that he would be making a second trip that night; he was told to make certain that his Heinkel was refueled and to prepare for another sortie.

Weitkus was not happy about going back to London for a second time; he knew that British night fighters were in the air south of London and had heard that several bombers had been shot down. But the mechanics and armorers were already preparing his Heinkel for the trip. He decided to have something to eat before takeoff. It occurred to him that if he made it back, he would be landing just in time for breakfast. Like Sholto Douglas, it seemed to him that the attack would never end.

Residents of London had the same feeling—the night would never end, and the bombs would never stop falling. At the fashionable Alexandria Hotel in Knightsbridge, all of the guests had been escorted either to the lounge or to the air-raid shelter in the basement. The hotel was a large, six-story building and seemed secure enough, but it was always prudent to take every precaution. There were those who refused to come downstairs, of course; they were not about to give up their beds and their night's sleep just because some bloody Germans were making a damned nuisance of themselves!

One of the hotel's porters was on his way to the upper floor to rouse another porter out of bed. Going up six flights of stairs was a long climb; he decided to take the lift instead, even though he had been warned never to take the

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ABOVE: Firefighters of the London Fire Brigade bravely battle a conflagration on Queen Victoria Street with water hoses during the devastating Nazi air raid on the capital city on May 10, 1941. The raid lasted for six hours and killed 1,486 people while destroying an estimated 11,000 homes and damaging both houses of Parliament, the British Museum, and St. James Palace. OPPOSITE: The façade of another building on Queen Victoria Street is captured in mid-collapse in this startling image. German incendiary bombs had burned the heart out of the structure, and weakened it so that the exterior toppled in spectacular fashion while firefighters watched from nearby.

lift when an air raid was in progress. He stepped into the small passenger lift and pressed the button for the sixth floor.

Two 550-pound high-explosive bombs struck the hotel almost simultaneously. No one remembered hearing an explosion, although all of the survivors mentioned that the entire building shook violently. All the lights in the hotel went out; guests groped their way through the darkness, which was made even more impenetrable by the thick plaster dust that seemed to be everywhere. Half of the main lounge collapsed into the basement and dumped everything in the room—tables, chairs, lamps, clocks, books, even the stairway to the upper floor —down onto the shelterers below. One of the bombs struck the passenger-lift shaft, killing the hotel porter instantly and collapsing that section of the hotel. After the noise of the blast faded away, other sounds could be heard—the pounding on doors of the guests who were trapped in their rooms, the thudding of beams and other debris cascading down from upper floors, the cries of the wounded as they attempted to escape from the wreckage all around them.

Some of those who were fortunate enough to survive were surprised to find that the hotel had been so seriously damaged. A pair of long-time guests looked up from the ground floor and could see moonlight where there used to be five more floors. And there were those who kept on doing what they always did. A middle-aged couple made a habit of sitting on the same sofa in the main lounge every night; they never said very much. The woman always had a slight half-smile on her face; her husband sat beside her. Tonight, the couple was in their usual spot in what was left of the lounge, sitting on their sofa. The woman was covered with dust but still wore the same half-smile. Her husband sat beside her in his usual place. The only difference tonight was that he was dead, killed outright by the explosion.

A few miles to the east, some of London's most famous landmarks were experiencing their own ordeals. The roof of Westminster Abbey had been set alight by incendiaries, and firemen were discovering that putting out the fires presented a major challenge—the roofing timbers were 130 feet above the floor and difficult to reach from outside the building. But the firemen managed to extinguish the fires, and the abbey was saved, even though the church's lantern fell with a tremendous crash at about 1:00 a.m. Just a short walk away, the Houses of Parliament were not as fortunate. The House of Commons was blazing out of control; the fires spread throughout the chamber via the heating ducts, and there was not much the Fire Brigade could do to save the Commons Chamber. The best they could hope to accomplish was to keep the fire from spreading through the rest of the complex. The House of Lords had been struck by a firebomb, which passed through the roof of the chamber without exploding. An incendiary bomb also struck the bell tower and broke all the glass on its south face, but the well-known clock was not damaged, and the bell, Big Ben, continued to chime every quarter-hour.

Firemen were able to stop flames from destroying nearby Westminster Hall; the fires never were able to gain a foothold there. Putting out the small fires turned out to be relatively easy once the firemen were able get inside the ancient hall. The problem was that the main entrance had been locked, and nobody could find the key. The officer in charge did not want to chop down the door with fire axes—it was several hundred years old—so a Member of Parliament who had dropped by to visit the scene did the job himself. He informed the firemen that as a Privy Councilor, he had the authority to destroy the centuries-old door. Before anyone could say or do anything, the MP grabbed an axe and began chopping.

Once they were inside the hall, firemen trained their hoses on the burning roof beams and soon had them extinguished. The visiting MP was gravely concerned about the fate of the ancient hall, which dated from the year 1097, and encouraged the firemen do everything pos-

sible to save it: "Remember the building is a thousand years old. It must be saved." But the officer in charge was more concerned with the safety of his men and was not impressed with the antiquity of the hall. "Never mind if it's a thousand years old," he said, "don't risk your bloody necks if it gets dangerous."

Word reached the firemen that Big Ben had been destroyed, a piece of news that put everyone in a sullen mood. But Westminster Hall is close enough to Parliament that the firemen could hear the famous clock ring the quarter-hour, which put their minds at ease.

The Luftwaffe attack was not letting up, and the fires showed no signs of dissipating, but the enemy did not have everything his own way. By the early morning hours, about 10 bombers had been brought down by RAF fighters, and Pilot Officer (P/O) Andrew Humphrey of No. 266 Squadron was about to shoot down two more bombers himself. P/O Humphrey took off from Wittering aerodrome at about 2 a.m. He discovered a Heinkel near the coast of Essex and managed to close to less than 100 yards of the bomber before opening fire. Because he was flying a Spitfire and did not have the benefit of radar, P/O Humphrey needed to get to within visual range before he could be absolutely sure of his target. The bomber blew apart, temporarily blinding him; he instinctively threw his fighter into a sharp turn—probably the tightest turn he ever made in his life—and just missed crashing into the burning remains of the Heinkel.

Pilot Officer Humphrey managed to recover his night vision after a few minutes, but he had no real idea where he was. He knew that he was over the North Sea off the coast of Essex but did not know how far off the coast he was. He was probably still dazed from his encounter with the Heinkel and decided to continue on his present course. Eventually, Humphrey spotted the landing lights of an airfield and suddenly realized that he had flown completely across the North Sea. He watched as a Heinkel took off from the runway on its way to London. Immediately, he pushed the Spitfire's stick forward and began diving toward the German bomber. He could see his tracers hitting his target as soon as he began shooting, but he was suddenly shaken by an episode of vertigo just before the Heinkel crashed into the ground. As he tried to regain his equilibrium, Humphrey began to climb. Less than a minute later, he saw another potential target, a Messerschmitt 110, and dove at the unsuspecting fighter. But after firing only a few rounds, Humphrey heard the telltale sound of compressed air coming from the Spitfire's guns—he had run out of ammunition.

The time was about 3 a.m. P/O Humphrey had run out of ammunition, was running out of fuel, and did not know where he was. Not knowing what else to do, he radioed his base at Wittering to ask for a course to take him back home. "I only know I'm heading southwest," he said, "and I think I've shot down two Heinkels." The controller at Wittering was not sure where young Humphrey was, either—it was either Holland or Belgium—but he gave the pilot the vector he needed to fly back to base. For his adventures on the night of May 10, Andrew Humphrey was awarded the Distinguished Flying Cross. According to his DFC citation, "This officer has performed splendid work as a night fighter pilot."

From a distance, the London fires seemed to be a single mass of red flame. But the firemen and roof spotters within the fire zones throughout London could see an entire kaleidoscope of colors. Every building burned with its own unique shade, depending upon what was burning inside. Packing cases, as well as bedding and furniture, burned bright red. Rubber gave off a dull, deep shade of red, along with thick clouds of black smoke. Chemicals went up in a brilliant white flame with hardly any smoke. Whenever another load of incendiaries landed, the area suddenly came to life in a burst of brilliant blue-white.

Although the incendiaries and high explo-

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sives were still coming down, news from the coastal radar stations began to offer some hope. By about 4 a.m., the tall masts at Pevensey, Rye, and Ventnor had not detected any activity from Luftwaffe bases on the Continent for over an hour. Radar screens were showing that more enemy aircraft were returning to their bases than were taking off for London. As they lost altitude and began descending toward their home runways, the bombers disappeared from radar screens as if by magic.

At Fighter Command Headquarters in Stanmore, the WAAF plotters continued to push the red arrows across the huge table map, just as they had been doing all night. But as the hour approached 5 a.m., the arrows retreated steadily southward—across Kent and Sussex and Surrey toward the Continent. From the gallery above the map, Air Marshal Douglas and his staff watched the arrows being pushed southward until they were removed from the board, one by one.

The last bomb to fall landed on the northwest corner of Scotland Yard at 5:37 a.m. It destroyed the Metropolitan Police's filing system—the records of over one million criminals were shredded into so much confetti. No one realized that the air raid had ended; the fires showed no signs of subsiding, and the sounds of thousands of fire pumps had been drowning out the noise of the bombers' engines for the past several hours. When the planes were gone, no one noticed at first.

But members of the Observation Corps knew that the Luftwaffe had gone. From their stations many miles from London, they could hear the bombers as they flew back to their bases. The last enemy aircraft left the English coast at 5:50, as officially noted. In London, the all-clear sounded two minutes later. All over the city, the high-pitched howl of the sirens flooded the blacked-out streets and penetrated the interiors of air-raid shelters. From Hammersmith to East Ham, shelterers came out to see for themselves the fires they had been hearing about all night. They were appalled by what they encountered.

A total of 505 German bombers had attacked London during the seven-hour raid. According to official German records, 358 had bombed London during the first sortie and 147 during the second. German archives also record that 14 bombers were shot down, including the two Heinkels destroyed by P/O Humphrey. The first sortie dropped 498 tons of high explosives, the second sortie another 210 tons. According to the London Fire Brigade, about 2,200 fires were started. Nine were classified as conflagrations, 20 as major fires that required at least 30 fire pumps, and 30 as serious fires requiring up to 20 pumps.

The attack had done serious and long-term damage to Britain's war industry. Factories producing materiel for the forces, including plants that manufactured munitions, parts for tanks, and equipment for the navy, had either been destroyed or were forced to shut down for many months. In the port of London, four docks and 24 wharves had been put out of action, which meant that the port could only operate at 25 percent capacity. All of London's main rail stations had also been put out of action. Nearly 8,000 streets—one-third of the roads in greater London—were blocked or inaccessible. Millions of households were without gas, water, or electricity—155,000 households in one borough alone were without utilities—along with thousands of businesses and factories that had not been hit by German bombs. The most visible—as well as the most publicized—victims of the air raid were London's old and historic buildings. St. Paul's Cathedral was damaged, along with many centuries-old churches. The House of Commons had been completely burned out; there was nothing left of the chamber except a fire-blackened ruin. Over 1,400 people had been killed. Another 1,800 were seriously injured and would die in hospitals. Two thousand fires still burned out of control and would continue to burn for the next several days.

Throughout the day on Sunday, residents went out to assess the damage that had been done. A good many were saddened and distraught; others were angered at the sight of so much destruction, as well as at their inability to do anything about it. A father living in north London took his young son up on the roof of their building and pointed toward the smoke and fire. "I want you to see this, and I want you to remember it," he said. "I want you to remember what the Germans did."

But a woman living in a southern district of London had a completely different point of view. "Just heard the terrible news that Westminster Hall was hit last night, also the Abbey and the Houses of Parliament," she wrote in her diary. "I cannot comment on such disasters. I just feel grievously limp. I feel we must have sinned grievously to have such sacrifices demanded of us … I can see our ancestors looking down at us reproachfully and saying, 'We gave it to you. You have not guarded it and handed it on as you received it. You have failed, even those of you who loved it best.'"

But the most pressing worry on Sunday morning was that the Germans would be back again that night. About 700 acres of the city were still burning; these fires would create a target for the Luftwaffe's bombers. If they returned, the result would be nothing short of a full-scale disaster. An administrator at London Regional Headquarters predicted, "If we get another like this tonight, we shall have to call the troops in." An alderman from the district of Southwark told another official, "In my opinion, sir, two more nights of this and London will be at a standstill."

"We can't take much more of this," a woman said. She had lost her flat and all of her possessions for the second time since September, and she spoke for a good many London residents. The air raid had caused widespread ruin throughout the city and killed 1,400 of its residents, but most damaging of all, it had done irreparable harm to morale. The bombing had all but broken the city's spirit. "I began to really worry for the first time, and to realize to what deep depths of their being the May 10 raid had shocked and shaken the people of London," an American reporter remarked. "It was just one raid too much."

However, the bombers did not come back that night, or the night after that, or for the next several weeks. People began to wonder why the raids had stopped so abruptly. Hitler must have had a reason for the sudden peace and quiet, and it was bound to be a nasty reason. "Something's up," a police constable said. "Jerry's planning something, and you can bet your life it'll be bloody painful."

Hitler certainly was planning something, but what he was planning had nothing to do with London. On June 22, 1941, German forces invaded the Soviet Union. From mid-June onward, Hitler would be devoting his full attention to waging war against Russia. By May 10, about two-thirds of the Luftwaffe had already been transferred to the east. The attack of May 10 had only been a parting shot, a decoy to keep everyone watching England while Germany prepared to attack Russia.

After May 10, the Luftwaffe would not send another large-scale raid against London; the main portion of its bombers and fighters had been sent to Russia. London's *Evening News* told the story in a concise, five-word headline on June 23: "BLITZ OVER. MOSCOW'S TURN NOW."

The residents of London could afford to breathe a sigh of relief.

Author David A. Johnson has written for WWII History *on a variety of topics. He is also the author of numerous books on subjects ranging from the Civil War to World War II. He resides in Union, New Jersey.*

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Sprechen sie Deutsch?

After fleeing the Nazis in 1934, a German immigrant returns to his homeland as an interrogator in the U.S. Army.

GOTTFRIED KURT "JOE" GUENNEL'S FAMILY ESCAPED GERMANY JUST AFTER Hitler and his Nazi Party came into power in 1934. He was just 14 and soon became thoroughly "Americanized," enjoying baseball almost as much as he enjoyed the soccer he had learned in his homeland. When World War II began, he enlisted into the Army Reserve, hoping that volunteering would keep him out of the draft and that he might be able to finish his last year of college. He knew Germany could not win; he had seen both countries. Most families he knew in America had a car and a telephone. America's industrial might made the outcome certain in Guennel's mind.

The army did call him up just before he graduated, though they gave him a weekend pass to attend commencement. Soon afterward, he went to Camp Wolters, Texas, for basic training. He did well during training and was soon considered for Officer Candidate School, but instead gained acceptance into the Army Specialized Training Program (ASTP), which sent thousands of qualified men to colleges around the country to receive useful training before they would enter the army as officers. Joe wound up at the University of Missouri, Columbia, where he was assigned to learn Italian. While there, he and some other students took up soccer, a game Joe still loved.

Soon, however, the ASTP program was cancelled due to the need for troops on the front lines. Joe went back to his infantry designation, but once again fate intervened. Upon learning he was a native German speaker, the army assigned Joe to intelligence school where he learned about communications equipment and prisoner interrogation. Classes were taught on how to put an enemy prisoner at ease before questioning him and make use of the German soldier's Soldbuch, a document every soldier carried and which contained extensive information about the soldier and his service.

Promoted to Technician Grade Five (T-5), equivalent to a sergeant, he soon joined Interrogation, Prisoner of War Team 124 (IPW 124), assigned to the 44th Infantry Division. Joe soon learned how to do his job in a war zone. The team gathered large stores of souvenirs (German weapons, helmets, medals, etc.). They often traded them for things they needed, such as food, gasoline, or even a replacement jeep.

On one occasion, Joe and a fellow interrogator were attached to the 106th Infantry Regiment. When they arrived the regimental intelligence officer, a major, said he did not need them; the 106th did not take prisoners. They talked the major into trying them for a few days. They spoke with prisoners and refugees along with local citizens, who knew the terrain and where the German defenses were located. Joe and his comrades gave the major the locations of the enemy's machine guns and artillery batteries, along with German command posts and barns where enemy tanks sat hidden. The major changed his mind about prisoners and the use of interrogators.

Joe spent the rest of the war and time after questioning prisoners and writing up reports on what he learned. Along the way he organized baseball and soccer teams. On day he received a message from German Field Marshal Albert Kesselring, though he had never met or questioned the man. It turned out to be a compliment on his soccer playing, which Kesselring watched from the window of his cell. Joe also took part in many postwar interrogations of high-ranking Nazis.

Young German POWs march past an American tank crew. Joe Guennel interogated such men during the advance into Germany.

After the war Joe returned to the United States where he eventually obtained advanced degrees in botany and moved to Littleton, Colorado. There he took up soccer again and was instrumental in expanding the game in America. His life is told

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in *Life is a Game: Adventures of a World War II Interrogator and U.S. Soccer Pioneer* (Dr. G.K. "Joe" Guennel and Flint Whitlock, Cable Publishing, Brule, WI, 2022, 187 pp., maps, photographs, notes, appendix, bibliography, index, $9.95, Kindle Edition).

This book is an interesting look at the work of interrogators in Europe during the war. The subject's accomplishments in soccer make the work of interest to fans of the sport as well. The narrative is clear and the writing engaging. There are many photographs accompanying the text, a lot of them from the author's own collection. This is a fascinating look at a veteran's experiences during the war and the life he built afterward, justifying the sacrifices he and so many others made during the conflict.

Bridge to the Sun: The Secret Role of the Japanese Americans Who Fought in the Pacific in World War II (Bruce Henderson, Alfred A. Knopf Publishers, New York, NY, 2022, 454 pp., photographs, appendices, notes, bibliography, index, $35.00, hardcover)

Thousands of Americans of Japanese ancestry served in the United States Army during World War II. Many served as interpreters, interrogators and translators, and they served in all the battles and campaigns in the Pacific theater. Most of them came to the army from internment camps and after they volunteered their families stayed behind in those camps. Eager to prove themselves loyal Americans, they also faced the prejudices of their fellow citizens and soldiers. They set about their task of gathering useful intelligence with determination, their job often made easier by an Imperial Japanese bias that no Westerner could understand the complexities of their language. As a result, much Imperial radio traffic was sent in plain language and the Japanese Americans listening quickly translated it. MacArthur's chief of intelligence, Major General Charles Willoughby, claimed "The Nisei in the Pacific saved countless lives and shortened the war by two years."

This new work by an authority on the Pacific theater effectively tells the story of the Nisei who served there. The narrative is rich with detail on each of the author's subjects, including their pre-war lives, enlistment, training, and service. The book contains many photographs from the subject's personal collections. This volume is a worthy addition to the more well-known histories of the Japanese Americans who fought in Europe.

New and Noteworthy

Syria and Lebanon 1941: The Allied Fight against the Vichy French (David Sutton, Osprey Books, 2022, $24.00, softcover). In June 1941 Commonwealth and Free French forces invaded Syria and Lebanon. Their victory kept German forces out of the region and away from the Suez Canal.

F4U Corsair Vs A6M Zero-Sen: Rabaul and the Solomons 1943-44 (Michael John Claringbould, Osprey Books, 2022, $22.00, softcover). The Vought F4U Corsair fighter encountered difficulties against the Japanese when it first entered combat. Eventually new tactics and combat experience made it a fearsome opponent.

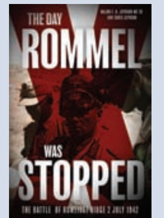
Panzer III (Thomas Anderson, Osprey Books, 2022, $50.00, hardcover). The Panzer III was Germany's workhorse tank during the early years of the war. This well-illustrated volume covers its development, unit organization and combat employment.

Red Star Versus Rising Sun Volume 2: The Nomonhan Incident 1939 (Adrien Fontanellaz, Helion and Company, 2022, $29.95, softcover). Part of the publisher's Asia at War series, this edition covers the major clash between Soviet and Japanese forces on the eve of World War II. The Japanese defeat had serious implications for later Japanese decisions.

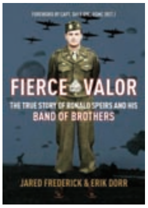
Fallschirm Panzer Division 'Hermann Goring:' A History of the Luftwaffe's Only Armoured Division 1933-1945 (Lawrence Paterson, Greenhill Books, 2022, $39.95, hardcover). The Luftwaffe's leader jealously developed his own personal army, including a small Prussian police unit which grew into a powerful tank division. It fought in North Africa, Sicily, Italy, and the Eastern Front..

Bloody Verrieres: The 1st SS-Panzerkorp's Defence of the Verrieres-Bourguebus Ridges (Arthur W. Gullachson, Casemate Books, 2022, $37.95, hardcover) This is the first volume in a set examining the German defense of these ridges south of Caen. The SS troops put up a stiff defense against the attacking British forces.

On to Stalingrad: Operation Winter Thunderstorm and The Attempt to Relieve Sixth Army, December 1942 (Horst Scheibert, Casemate Books, 2022, $45.00, hardcover). This is a reprint of a 1956 account of the German attempt to break through the Soviet forces surrounding Stalingrad. The author served as a tank commander during the operation.



The Day Rommel was Stopped: The Battle of Ruweisat Ridge, 2 July 1942 (Major F. R. Johnson and Chris Jephson, Casemate Books, 2022, $22.95, softcover). This is the story of a small number of British defenders who held against Rommel's forces during the First Battle of El Alamein.

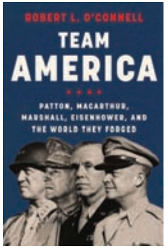


Fierce Valor: The True Story of Ronald Speirs and his Band of Brothers (Jared Frederick and Erik Dorr, Regnery Books, Washington, D.C., 2022, 346 pp., maps, photographs, notes, bibliography, index, $27.99, hardcover)

Ronald Speirs began his combat career as a 2nd lieutenant leading a rifle platoon in D Company, 506th Parachute Infantry Regiment, 101st Airborne Division. A complex figure, he inspired many things in his men, devotion, respect, and admiration, but also fear and at times confusion. Whatever the opinions of his men, Speirs was unquestionably a sterling combat leader, brave and heedless of personal danger. After his service in D Company, he went on to command E Company in the same regiment, the famed "Band of Brothers" popularized by the classic Stephen Ambrose book of

the same name. He commanded the company in combat for longer than any other officer and went on to serve in Korea, Germany, and Southeast Asia after the war, retiring as a lieutenant colonel two decades later.

A biography of one of Easy Company's more enigmatic members is long overdue, and the authors deliver it with clear writing and a detective's eye on the various stories around Speirs. They dive into some of the persistent stories, such as one depicting him killing one of his own sergeants for refusing orders and another executing prisoners during the Normandy Campaign. They try to separate the facts from the rumors and, like real investigators, acknowledge when the truth is unknowable based on the available information. The book is easy to read and follow and provides plenty of detail for the reader interested in America's most famous unit of paratroopers.



Team America: Patton, MacArthur, Marshall, Eisenhower, and the World They Forged (Robert L. O'Connell, Harper Books, New York, NY, 2022, 547 pp., photographs, notes, bibliography, index, $29.99, hardcover)

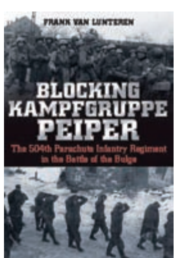
Many things combined to bring the United States success in World War II, and among the foremost was the leadership provided by key generals. George Patton proved a formidable tactical and operational commander, able to hit the Germans hard and keep them off balance. Above him, Dwight D. Eisenhower led the Allied effort in the European theater, balancing competing concerns between the Allies, logistical requirements, and the need to win in a way few others could have managed. In the Pacific theater, Douglas MacArthur, while vain and dramatic, became the face of victory. George C. Marshall oversaw all of them and helped coordinate the national effort during the conflict. None of them were perfect, and they did not always get along or necessarily like each other, but together they worked toward the ultimate goal of ending the war successfully.

The author deftly blends accounts of these four disparate characters to reveal how they served their country during the war. Their careers were often intertwined, and the narrative shows how this worked to the advantage of all. The tale begins with their births, all within a decade of one another, and goes through their upbringing, educations, and entry into military service. The result is an in-depth and fascinating look at the higher ranks of the United States Army in World War II.

Smashing Hitler's Guns: The Rangers at Pointe-Du-Hoc D-Day 1944 (Steven J. Zaloga, Osprey Books, Oxford, UK, 2022, 368 pp., maps, photographs, appendices, glossary, notes, bibliography, index, $35.00, hardcover)

The Allied staff officers planning the Normandy invasion were very worried about the German gun emplacement at Pointe-Du-Hoc, which could range the American invasion beaches and fire on the fleet offshore. They assigned a force of Rangers to scale the sheer cliffs dropping from the Pointe to the sea below and knock out the cannon. This mission is well-known in the lore of D-Day, but the Rangers performed other feats that day. Another Ranger unit attacked a different artillery position at Pointe-et-Raz-de-la-Percee, an action little known today. Meanwhile, on Omaha Beach a third Ranger force fought on the right flank in the Vierville sector. There, they played a vital part in the success of the American landings.

The author gathered new accounts in researching this work, including the original, unedited report from the U.S. Army, long filed away and forgotten in an archive. The book sheds light on the contribution of the Rangers to the success of the D-Day invasion. The appendices give useful, interesting information on the Rangers and the guns they targeted. The book is filled with firsthand accounts by Ranger veterans who participated in the fighting.



Blocking Kampfgruppe Peiper: The 504th Parachute Infantry Regiment in the Battle of the Bulge (Frank van Lunteren, Casemate Books, Havertown, PA, 2022, maps, photographs, appendices, notes, bibliography, index, $24.95, softcover)

When the German army launched an offensive through the Ardennes in December 1944, the Allies were initially caught by surprise. They sent two divisions of paratroopers to bolster the lines against the Nazi onslaught. One of them, the U.S. 82nd Airborne, was rushed to the area of St. Vith. There, American soldiers of the 504th Parachute Infantry Regiment blocked the advance of SS troops including the infamous Kampfgruppe Peiper. Within two days of arriving at St. Vith, the paratroopers shifted to the offensive against the Germans, forcing their withdrawal. Despite their efforts, further fighting forced the Americans to fall back from St. Vith. As the weather worsened, the 504th continued to fight, defending not only against SS panzer units, but also their German airborne counterparts, the 3rd Fallschirmjaeger Division. The men of the 504th were determined to live up to their motto – "Strike and Hold."

The book provides an intriguing, in-the-foxhole view of the 504th's actions during the Battle of the Bulge. The author's sources include unpublished diaries, letters, and battle reports to establish the facts of the battle. Over 100 veteran interviews contributed to this book as well. The work is well-illustrated and contains excellent maps depicting various engagements in detail. A series of detailed appendices flesh out the narrative and provide interesting background information.

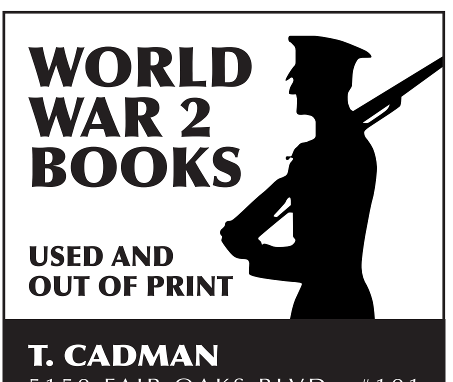
Siege of Budapest, 1944-45: The Brutal Battle for the Pearl of the Danube (Balazs Mihalyi, Osprey Books, Oxford, UK, 2022, maps, photographs, bibliography, index, $24.00, softcover)

Some of the most brutal urban combat of the war took place during the 52-day siege of the city of Budapest, Hungary, from December 1944 to February 1945. Hitler declared it a fortress city, giving it symbolism as a place whose defenders must fight to the last bullet. Almost 100,000 German and Hungarian troops garrisoned the city, fighting against double that number of Soviet soldiers. The Red Army cut off the city on the east bank of the Danube before crossing the river and completing their encirclement on the west side. Afterward came a phased operation to take the city.

Part of Osprey's well-known and successful Campaign series, this work delves into the siege of the city using good maps, original artwork, and extensive illustration. The text is organized to cover the leadership, plans and opposing forces before launching into a narrative of the actual campaign.

Japanese Carriers and Victory in the Pacific: The Yamamoto Option (Martin Stansfeld, Pen and Sword Books, South Yorkshire, UK, 2022, 227 pp., maps, tables, photographs, index, $34.95, hardcover)

In the years leading up to World War II, Japan had to decide what kind of fleet it needed to defeat the United States. The first choice was for a larger force of battleships, mainly the



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Simulation Gaming

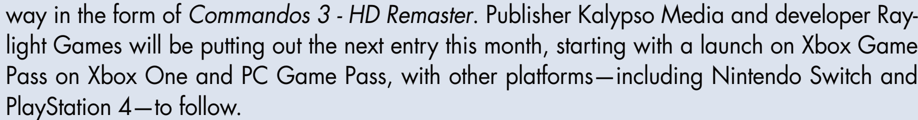
BY JOSEPH LUSTER

ANOTHER COMMANDOS CLASSIC IS BACK IN THE SPOTLIGHT THANKS TO A PROMISING HIGH-DEF REMASTER

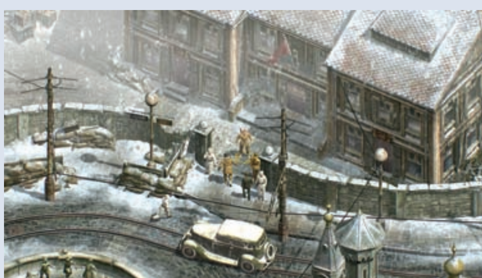
COMMANDOS 3 - HD REMASTER

PUBLISHER KALYPSO MEDIA • **GENRE** STRATEGY • **SYSTEM** PC, Xbox

It's time to return to the world of *Commandos* once again. The vaunted series previously had a pair of respected remasters to its name, and now another is on the way in the form of *Commandos 3 - HD Remaster*. Publisher Kalypso Media and developer Raylight Games will be putting out the next entry this month, starting with a launch on Xbox Game Pass on Xbox One and PC Game Pass, with other platforms—including Nintendo Switch and PlayStation 4—to follow.



Commandos 3 - HD Remaster serves up a full high-definition revamp of the original *Commandos 3: Destination Berlin*, which first launched on PC back in October of 2003. A lot of games jump straight into the remaster a little too early, but we'd say nearly two decades is a solid window of time for a fresh coat of paint and other enhancements. In the case of *Commandos 3*, those enhancements include reworked 3D models and textures that have been built from the ground up just for this installment. There's also a refined user interface, as well as tutorials and hints that aim to provide an optional beginner-friendly experience for those new to the series.



Players will be whisked through some of the most iconic World War II campaigns and frontlines in this entry—from Stalingrad to Central Europe and Normandy—over the course of 12 missions. Among the units available to command through real-time tactics are the Green Beret, Sapper, Sniper, Diver, Spy, and Thief, and putting their expertise to good use will be critical to your mission. Beyond the single player campaign, you can test those skills in Deathmatch and Collect the Flag modes, which are open for two to eight players.

If you haven't played a *Commandos* game before, the user-friendly nature of the third remaster makes it a good place to start. This goes doubly so for those with a Game Pass membership on PC or Xbox, where you'll be able to try out the game free of charge so long as you're signed up to the program. For others keen on waiting for additional platforms, we'll be sure to revisit the full release once it's available to let you know whether or not it passes muster. ■

Yamato-class super battleships, to overmatch the American battle line. Their other option involved constructing enough aircraft carriers to reduce the U.S. Navy's numerical advantage. They chose to develop their carrier fleet, although many of the ships they built were converted from auxiliary vessels and liners while some battleships remained in the construction slips. These took up space which could have been used to lay down more modern aircraft carriers. The *Yamato*-class ships were practically useless during the war while additional carriers and air groups early in the conflict would likely have made a difference. Whether it would have been a war-winning difference is open to conjecture.

This new work examines how the Pacific War might have gone differently had Japan made different decisions in its war preparations. The author backs up his hypotheses with good research and knowledge of the personalities involved. The book is an interesting look at a "what-if" of the war which has not seen attention before. ■

106th Infantry Division

Continued from page 39

despite his wounds, got his group to safety but was himself captured. Captain Huxel remained at the command post with his group until the roof collapsed. Seeing a group of cows dashing about in confusion and terror, they used that as a distraction to make their own escape.

During the rush, T/5 Pollow stopped to give aid to two wounded men. Then the group dragged them along as they made their way to the 325th Glider Infantry Regiment's positions. Several of the artillerymen remained in and around the command post until surrounded by the enemy, who demanded their surrender. As they came out, several were shot, the others captured. Parker's crossroads was no more.

The commander of the 2nd Battalion, 2nd SS Panzer Regiment, 2nd SS Panzer Division, SS Lieutenant Colonel Horst Gresiak would later state that the battles at Parker's Crossroads were "the most violent and the toughest battle that he experienced during the entire war."

For its stand on the Schnee Eifel and at Parker's Crossroads the only recognition the 589th Field Artillery Battalion received was not from its own army, but from the French government, which awarded it the unit Croix de Guerre with Gold Star and Streamer embroidered "St. Vith." Similarly, the 14th Mechanized Cavalry Group's only recognition came from the Belgian government, which cited it in an Order of the Day for action in the Ardennes. The 81st Engineer (Combat) Battalion was awarded a U. S. Army Distinguished Unit Citation, as was the 634th Antiaircraft Artillery Automatic Weapons Battalion.

Units like the 589th Field Artillery Battalion, the 14th Mechanized Cavalry Reconnaissance Group, 81st Engineer (Combat) Battalion and many others had made a difference in thwarting Hitler's plan to split the Allied front and negotiate a peace agreement. These units, and so many others, had slowed the enemy drive, which depended upon speed, and had cost it valuable time, while expending the Germans' strictly limited supplies of ammunition, fuel, and armored vehicles at an unsustainable rate.

The "quiet sector" held by the Golden Lions had proved decisive after all.

Nathan Prefer is the author of numerous books and articles on World War II. He received his Ph.D. in military history from the City University of New York and is a former Marine Corps reservist. Dr. Prefer is now retired and resides in Fort Myers, Florida.

80th Division

Continued from page 55

Argentan as untested novices, emerging three days later much wiser to the horrors of war. Combat, they learned, affected men in unique ways. "Some men were exhilarated (as I was)," said CT 317's Major James H. Hayes. "Other men simply fell apart from fear; a few men became 'shell-shocked' or more euphemistically 'battle fatigued.'"

Hayes also noted that several officers, unable to cope with the stress of battle, had to be relieved of duty. Indeed, the division's senior leaders all struggled with their responsibilities to command effectively at Argentan. After trying and failing to press the attack using textbook tactics, Maj. Gen. McBride and his subordinates kept throwing men and machines forward without serious consideration of the situation or what they could do to change it.

The U.S. Army combined arms team that helped win World War II worked best when infantry, artillery, and armor all cooperated on the battlefield. This was not how the 80th Division fought during the battle of Argentan. McBride controlled a massive amount of field artillery, yet brought those powerful guns to bear almost too late in the fight to make a difference. He showed even less aptitude for mechanized warfare, recklessly sending Lieutenant Miller's tank platoon forward only to be massacred by antitank gunners who were well prepared to defeat an unsupported armor assault.

Yet the Blue Ridge Division learned well from its costly baptism by fire at Argentan. Even as his men finished cleaning out the last pockets of resistance in their zone of operations, Maj. Gen. McBride started making plans to institute a rigorous training schedule for all three combat teams. His new syllabus would emphasize night fighting, tank-infantry operations, coordinated "time-on-target" procedures for artillerymen, and increased reliance on engineer support to speed the advance.

These tactical lessons, hard learned at Argentan, helped transform McBride's unit into one of Patton's most reliable fighting organizations. The 80th Infantry Division helped lead Third Army's dash across France, then performed magnificently in a defensive role during the Battle of the Bulge. Horace McBride served as head of the Blue Ridge until V-E Day, distinguishing him as the only U.S. division commander in Europe who trained and fought with the same outfit throughout World War II.

Patrick J. Chaisson is a retired U.S. Army officer and historian based in Scotia, New York.

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Top Secret

Continued from page 29

The prime minister was sold and encouraged his boffins to proceed. Pyke's subsequent plan called for the Habakkuk prototype to be 2,000 feet long, 190 feet high, and to displace 1.8 million tons of water—26 times the displacement of the great liner *Queen Elizabeth*. The 50-foot-thick walls of the cavernous hull would enclose hangars, living quarters, an immense refrigeration plant, and 20 electric motors to power the monstrous vessel. Of Pyke's building material, Churchill observed, "This substance … seemed to offer great possibilities, not only for our needs in Northwest Europe, but also elsewhere. It was found that as the ice melted, the fibrous content quickly formed a (fuzzy) outer surface which acted as an insulator and greatly retarded the melting process."

It was agreed that Mountbatten and Pyke's colleague, Professor Bernal, would unveil Habakkuk at the first strategy conference—code named Quadrant—of the Allied combined chiefs of staff in Quebec on August 13-24, 1943. Churchill hoped that a demonstration of the project's possibilities would impress Roosevelt and his advisers.

By this time, Pyke was in the doghouse. His stormy time at the War Department, with General McNarney branding him as a "principal handicap," threatened Anglo-American relations in Mountbatten's view. "I am afraid Pyke will have to stand down for the good of his own scheme," he said. Bernal took his place, and Pyke was soon precluded from Combined Operations planning.

At Quebec, the Allied chiefs set May 1, 1944, as the tentative date for Operation Overlord, the invasion of Normandy, with a senior U.S. officer in command, and agreed to step up operations in the Pacific, invade Italy, send more aid to China, and allow British Maj. Gen. Orde C. Wingate to loose his Chindit long-range penetration columns against the Japanese in Burma.

On August 19, two days into the conference, Mountbatten introduced his unusual project. With the grudging consent of the dour Alanbrooke, he launched into a sales pitch on behalf of the ice-cube carrier and Pykrete. Even Admiral Ernest J. King, the acerbic U.S. chief of naval operations, listened attentively. He distrusted most of his British colleagues, but respected Mountbatten for his courage and intelligence.

Mountbatten arranged a demonstration to prove his point. One of his staffers and Bernal wheeled into the conference room a dumbwaiter bearing two three-foot blocks of ice—one regular ice and the other Pykrete. Lord Louis invited the strongest man present to test the resilience of the new material with an axe, and General Henry H. "Hap" Arnold, commander of the U.S. Army Air Forces, was voted. He rolled up his sleeves and splintered the block of ice with one blow. When Arnold swung the axe at the block of Pykrete, it rebounded, jarring his arm, and he cried out in pain. The block was intact.

National Archives

A crew of 15 men spent two months working to build a model aircraft carrier using "pykrete," a mixture of ice and wood pulp, on Lake Patricia, Ontario, Canada in 1943. The construction effort, part of Project Habakkuk, was later abandoned.

To further prove his point, Mountbatten drew his Webley service pistol and splintered the block of ice. When he fired at the Pykrete block, it remained solid and the bullet ricocheted, narrowly missing the leg of Air Marshal Sir Charles Portal, able chief of the British Air Staff. "The damn fool!" he snorted. Confusion erupted in the room and outside, where waiting staff officers had heard blows, a cry of pain, and gunshots. "My God," exclaimed one. "Now they're shooting at each other!" Afterward, the conference minutes recorded simply, "Professor Bernal demonstrated with the aid of samples of Pykrete the various qualities of this material."

Mountbatten's demonstration had succeeded in impressing the joint chiefs, so work went ahead secretly on Operation Habakkuk. Canadian workmen built a prototype at remote Lake Patricia in Ontario. Constructed from blocks of mixed ice and wood pulp by 15 men in two months, the vessel was 60 feet long, 30 feet wide, and weighed 1,100 tons. Completed late in 1943, it was roofed over and camouflaged to make it resemble a boathouse.

Despite positive first impressions, however, further research made Habakkuk seem increasingly challenging and expensive. It was estimated that producing and assembling 280,000 Pykrete blocks for one "bergship" would require 8,000 men working for eight months in arctic temperatures, would also need thousands of tons of steel, and would cost about $70 million. "Much development work was done on this side, particularly in Canada," Churchill eventually reported, "but for various reasons it never had any success."

The Allied shipyards, meanwhile, were speeding up production and meeting the demands of the Royal Navy and U.S. Navy for more conventional flattops, particularly escort carriers. So, the bold dream of Churchill, Mountbatten, and Pyke melted on the Combined Operations back burner without reaching completion. The ice-cube carrier never went to sea.

After the war, Pyke was a troubled man. He busied himself with attempting to rationalize problems dealing with the basic laws of the universe, feeling that it was his mission to establish a set of radical rules governing certain concepts of time and space, which had eluded even Albert Einstein. But he grew increasingly impatient and exasperated.

At the same time, he could not forget his treatment in America and remained convinced that it was an example of the dedicated thickheadedness of most military planners. Eventually, one day in February 1948, he committed suicide with an overdose of sleeping pills. Learning of his death, a Norwegian officer commented, "It's the only sensible thing that Pyke ever did." ■

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