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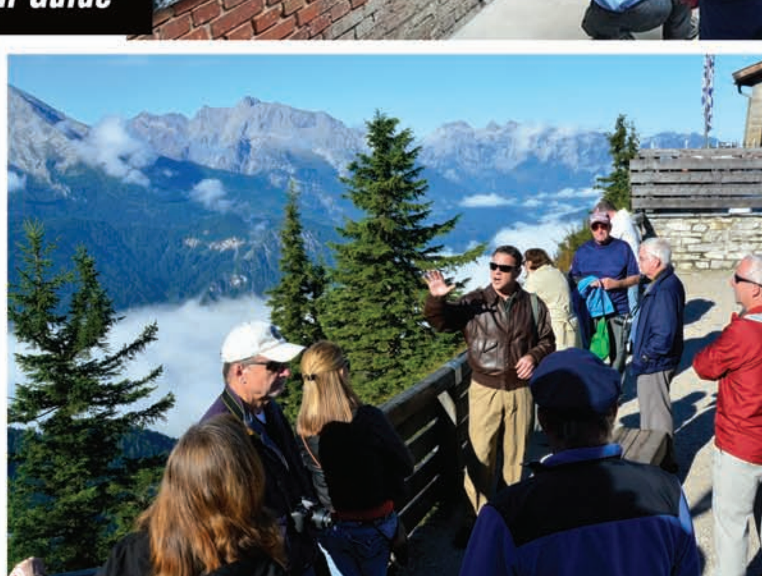

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COVER: A U.S. Marine boards a Coast Guard assault transport after two days and nights of combat on the beach at Eniwetok in the Marshall Islands. See story page 48. Photo: National Archives

WWII Quarterly (ISSN 2151-3678) is published four times yearly by Sovereign Media, 6731 Whittier Avenue, Suite A-100, McLean, VA 22101-4554. (703) 964-0361. *WWII Quarterly,* Volume 8, Number 3 © 2017 by Sovereign Media Company, Inc., all rights reserved. Copyrights to stories and illustrations are the property of their creators. The contents of this publication may not be reproduced in whole or in part without consent of the copyright owner. ***Subscription services, back issues, and information:*** (800) **219-1187** *or* write to *WWII Quarterly* **Circulation, WWII Quarterly, P.O. Box 1644, Williamsport, PA 17703.** Hardbound single copies: $19.99, plus $3 for postage. Yearly subscription in U.S.A.: $39.95; Canada and Overseas: $79.95 (U.S.). Editorial Office: Send editorial mail to *WWII Quarterly,* 6731 Whittier Avenue, Suite A-100, McLean, VA 22101-4554. *WWII Quarterly* welcomes editorial submissions but assumes no responsibility for the loss or damage of unsolicited material. Material to be returned should be accompanied by a self-addressed, stamped envelope. We suggest that you send a self-addressed, stamped envelope for a copy of our author's guidelines. **POSTMASTER: Send address changes to WWII Quarterly, P.O. Box 1644, Williamsport, PA 17703.**

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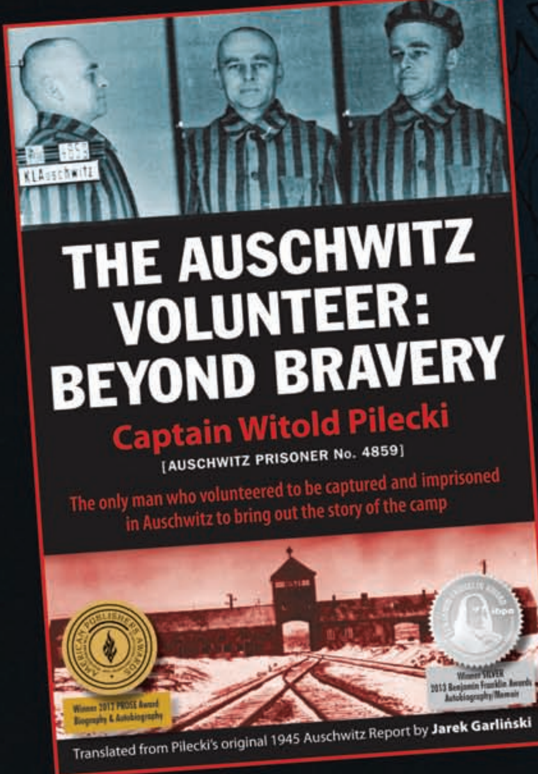

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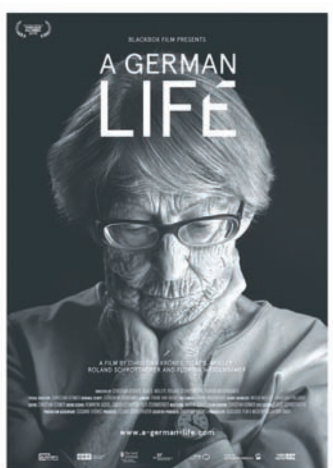
A living link to a horrific past.

OVER THE PAST FEW MONTHS, several stories with a World War II connection have slipped into the news. One of the most compelling was about a German TV documentary called *A German Life*. The subject of the film is 105-year-old Brunhilde Pomsel, probably the last living person with a close, intimate connection to the Nazi center of power.

At the beginning of the film, she asks, "Is it bad, is it egoistical, when people who have been placed in certain positions try to do something that is beneficial for them, even when they know that by doing so they end up harming someone else?"



Frau Pomsel had been a personal secretary to Josef Goebbels, the Nazis' propaganda minister, from 1942 until May 1, 1945—the day he killed his wife Magda and their six children before committing suicide at the besieged Berlin bunker.

Although she had been at the center of power for the Third Reich's final three years, Pomsel called herself a "stupid and disinterested nobody from a simple background" and claimed that she "never knew about the Holocaust." She described herself as "one of the cowards," someone who was too "dumb" and "superficial" to grasp the larger picture.

In 1933, a friend in the Nazi Party got her a job in the news department of the Third Reich's broadcasting station. She joined the Nazi Party in 1942 only to qualify for the prestigious, well-paid job at the Ministry of Propaganda, where she was one of four secretaries working under Goebbels and taking dictation until the end of the war.

"Why shouldn't I?" she asked, with the same bland banality that so many other Germans from that era have exhibited when confronted by Nazi Germany's horrific past. "Everyone was doing it."

Pomsel remembers Goebbels, one of Hitler's loyalists and the mastermind of the Third Reich's viciously anti-Semitic propaganda machine, as being "an outstanding actor" who could go from being "a civilized, serious person into that ranting and raving hooligan."

In 1943, just after Germany's defeat at Stalingrad, Goebbels made what is called his "Total War" speech in which he called for "a war more total and radical than anything that we can even imagine today." Pomsel said that she was there but "didn't even realize what the speech was all about. I just didn't listen," she said in a recent interview, "because it didn't interest me. That was a stupidity within me, I know this now."

She said in the interview that she never had access to information about Nazi war crimes or mass killings, and that she learned of the Holocaust only after her release from a Soviet prison in 1950.

"We knew that Buchenwald existed," she said, but believed it was a correctional facility. "We knew it as a camp. We knew Jews went there. I witnessed the deportation of Jews from Berlin."

She dismisses those who would judge her: "The people who today say they would have done more for those poor, persecuted Jews—I really believe that they sincerely mean it. But they wouldn't have done it, either. By then the whole country was under some kind of a dome. We ourselves were all inside a huge concentration camp."

One of the film's directors, Olaf Müller, warned, "The dangers are still alive. It could happen again."

If you have a chance to see *A German Life,* take that opportunity.

Flint Whitlock, Editor

WWII Quarterly Volume 8 • Number 3

WARFAREHISTORYNETWORK.com

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CURTIS CIRCULATION COMPANY
WORLDWIDE DISTRIBUTION

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6731 Whittier Ave., Suite A-100
McLean, VA 22101-4554

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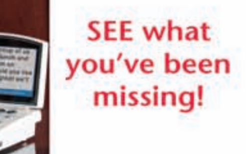

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Against the odds, Detroit defied reality to help win World War II.

They said it couldn't be done. Doubters chided Henry Ford for declaring that his Willow Run Bomber Plant could turn out a B-24 Liberator heavy bomber every hour.

They'd called him crazy in 1896, too, but Ford ignored the naysayers, pushing past obstacles and failures until his gasoline-powered horseless carriage rolled down the streets of Detroit. His creation, which he christened a "Quadricycle," featured an engine with the equivalent pulling power of four horses. It was the machine that would transform a world and help win a war.

With the "War to End All Wars" in America's rearview mirror, the country was focused on the positive. Having lost any appetite it had for war, most of America was confident there would never be a future need for war machines. Or the military.

After World War I, Congress decreased the military's overall numbers. It also passed laws denying tax breaks to companies that owned equipment that could make weapons of war.

"Bethlehem Steel, the largest arms producer in the world, destroyed all their arms-making capability in 90 days to avoid the taxes," Randy Hotton, a pilot and former director of the Yankee Air Museum in Ypsilanti, Michigan, said during a presentation in June 2015. "DuPont Corporation, which had been contracted to build seven [gun] powder factories for World War I, had spent $25 million of its own money. The government, when the war was over, cancelled the contract and basically said, 'Because there's no more war, we don't need your powder.'"

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One of the B-24 assembly lines at Ford's Willow Run (Michigan) plant, where one bomber was produced every hour.

Meanwhile, the powers on the losing side of World War I were rearming and, without admitting it out loud, the United States was worried it might get dragged into another war. Just in case that happened, in November 1929, then-Major Dwight D. Eisenhower was called upon to create a plan to make sure the country could mobilize its military if it needed to. There was just one problem. The Great Depression was in full swing and Congress wouldn't fund the plan.

Four years later, the situation in Europe started heating up. Adolf Hitler rose to power and brought Nazi law to Germany. By 1938, Germany had annexed Austria and the Sudetenland—the German-speaking part of Czechoslovakia along the German border.

Through all of this, the United States maintained its isolationist ideals. November 9, 1938, changed that thinking. On what is referred to as Kristallnacht—the Night of Broken Glass—the Nazis terrorized German Jews, breaking windows of homes, businesses, and burning synagogues.

Soon after, President Franklin D. Roosevelt asked Congress for 10,000 airplanes. Seven months later, while still claiming America wasn't interested in getting involved in Europe's war, Congress granted a compromise—5,500 planes over five years, according to Hotton.

By May 1940, Germany had invaded Poland, Belgium, France, the Netherlands and Luxembourg. "This is the blitzkrieg," Hotton said. "This is the mechanized infantry with airpower. Air power is now decisive. If you do not control the air over the battlefield, you will not win the battle."

With the 12th largest Army in the world—behind Brazil—America's military was not the powerhouse it is today. "We had 32 tanks in the U.S. inventory," Hotton said, comparing that figure to the nearly 6,000 tanks—German and Allied—that were involved in the May 1940 Battle of France. "We had the 18th largest air force in the world—326 'modern' air-

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Willow Run plant under construction, 1940. With nearly 5 million square feet, the factory was touted as the largest single-story building in the world at the time.

planes that were obsolete by world standards. We had 54 heavy bombers."

It was becoming much clearer that the U.S. needed to ramp up production —and fast.

While foreign demand for war equipment—especially airplanes—skyrocketed and helped prop up America's fragile Depression-ravaged economy, Roosevelt remembered the problems encountered in World War I, when it had taken America too long to mobilize its forces. He went back to Congress and asked for a whopping 50,000 planes a year.

"When Hermann Göring, head of the German Luftwaffe heard this, he laughed," Hotton said. "He said, 'No one can build 50,000 planes a year. That's pure propaganda.'"

The U.S. would have the last laugh. In 1944, the U.S. would build nearly 100,000 airplanes.

Roosevelt didn't have faith in the government to get America to a place where it could mobilize effectively, so he turned to the automotive industry with its efficiencies and understanding of mechanization.

Bill Knudson, the then-president of General Motors, was a Danish immigrant who had worked his way up the auto industry ladder. "He knew everybody and he knew how factories worked," according to Hotton.

But Knudson faced multiple problems, including the fact that nobody knew what they wanted. The Army was still ordering horse saddles for the cavalry at Fort Leavenworth, Kansas.

But the auto executive also knew the mechanisms to mobilize America—the tools to make weapons of war—had been destroyed. He knew, too, it would take 18 months to get them in place and another 18 months to produce at peak levels.

"He said, 'Aircraft and aircraft engines are the biggest problem we're going to face, and only the auto companies have the capability of building these airplanes and engines,'" Hotton noted.

While that was true, it wasn't that simple. Knudson faced a political hurdle—the Army and the airplane companies didn't want the automakers involved in building airplanes. But the Battle of Britain—Germany's sustained bombing raids on the island and Britain's efforts to oppose them—opened eyes to the serious threat of the German air force.

"Bombers are now the offensive weapon," Hotton said. "The U.S. identifies the four-engine bomber as what we need to fight the war. The distances in the Pacific to fight the Japanese are long. We need the long range of the bombers. We need airplanes that can carry tremendous loads tremendous distances."

After the Battle of Britain ended in the autumn of 1940, the United Kingdom asked for more bombers. Roosevelt turned to Army Chief of Staff General George C. Marshall and asked him to fulfill the request. Marshall's answer was a serious wake-up call: He only had 32 bombers left in the U.S. and if he gave them up, he wouldn't be able to train his crews.

Bomber production suddenly became a top priority.

In October 1940, Knudson, who had resigned his position with GM to become the government's chairman of the Office of Production Management earlier that year—rounded up the heads of Studebaker, Nash Motors, GM, and Hudson Motor Car Company in New York and boiled down the dire situation: America needed bombers—more than it could hope for and sooner than it dared to ask for them.

The auto industry leaders were in Detroit two weeks later, matching items they were already making for cars with similar items needed to make airplanes. The automakers said they could make all the pieces required to build the much-needed bombers.

Factories to assemble the planes were also under construction. Tulsa, Oklahoma, would build B-24s; Kansas City, Kansas, B-25s; and Omaha, Nebraska, got the B-26. But in December 1940 the focus shifted to the B-24s.

"The B-24 is the most problematic airplane that the Army has on its list," Hotton said. "It's faster, carries more, goes further than the B-17, and they want the B-24."

Consolidated Aircraft had a contract to build the planes, but it had only completed seven and delivered just three. The Army decided the way to build the B-24 was through a collective effort and World War I pilot, aviation pioneer, and racer Jimmy Doolittle would facilitate that effort.

On December 7, 1941, Japan attacked American military facilities in Hawaii and the Pacific, and the U.S. was now in the new world war. Although too old to vol-

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unteer for World War II, Doolittle was called by Congress back to active duty for his expertise. Doolittle, who would gain fame for his air raid on Tokyo on April 18, 1942, held the first Ph.D. in aeronautical engineering issued in the United States.

The military assigned him to Detroit to enable a "shotgun marriage between the auto companies and the aircraft companies," Hotton said. To make that happen, Dolittle turned to Henry Ford and his precision assembly line to build parts. Ford agreed, until Charlie Sorenson—his right hand at Ford Motor Company—visited Consolidated's San Diego operation in January 1941. He was floored by the haphazard way the planes were being assembled.

"They were building aluminum airplanes outdoors on steel fixtures," Hotton said. "They've got a surveyor's transit on pallets in the back of a pickup truck with a guy looking at the center line of the prop shaft to line it up. [It took] four hours to hang an engine."

Reuben Fleet was the head of Consolidated and the company was proud of its

National Archives

Women in the factory use a spot-welding machine, 1942.

product. So, Fleet, offended when Sorenson expressed his dismay, asked him how he would do it better.

"Sorenson loved a challenge and he said, 'You know what? I don't know, but I'll have an answer for you in the morning,'" Hotton said. With 35 years of manufacturing experience, Sorenson broke the B-24 down into assemblies, subassemblies, and parts for subassemblies—all diagramed in pencil on hotel stationary.

The next morning, he showed Fleet his plan—and was told it couldn't be done. Fleet asked if Ford would build parts for Consolidated and was met with Sorenson's definitive answer: Ford wasn't interested in building subassemblies. It would build complete airplanes or nothing.

"[The Army Air Force] been looking for somebody who could answer their bomber production problem and Ford stepped up and gave them the answer they wanted to hear," Hotton said.

Based on pencil sketches, the Army, desperate for B-24s, awarded Ford a multimillion dollar contract to build the bomber plant and the airplanes. The contracts were signed in February and the logistical debates started almost immediately.

By April 1941, the construction had already begun on four flat acres of Michigan farmland outside the village of Ypsilanti, 25 miles west of Detroit. In May, the project was scaled up based on government assurances Ford would be building complete B-24s.

Initially, it had been thought that the Willow Run plant would handle the final assembly of the B-24s from the parts man-

ufactured at Ford's Rouge Complex in Dearborn, 28 miles away. Marshall kyboshed that idea, pointing out the potential for damage to the parts in transit.

The decision that Willow Run would build complete bombers—parts to plane—called for a bigger plant. Had it just been tacked on to the end of the existing building, it would have landed in the middle of the planned airport.

Explained Hotton, "So the guy in charge of the factory design said, 'We've got to make a 90-degree turn. And since we're making a 90-degree turn, we might as well keep the factory inside Washtenaw County [Ypsilanti],'" noting that keeping the factory in one county would also provide a postwar tax benefit.

By November 1941, all the airplane factories had been built—with Willow Run's final square footage of 4,734,617 million—and the airplanes we would fight WWII with were in production, according to Hotton.

"FDR had given the U.S. an 18-month head start on WWII," he said. "Time magazine said this in February of '42: 'The miracle of American productivity was something Hitler didn't understand.' He fully understood it. He was deathly afraid of it. But, based on German experience, he thought it would take the U.S. four years to mobilize, and he would have won by that time."

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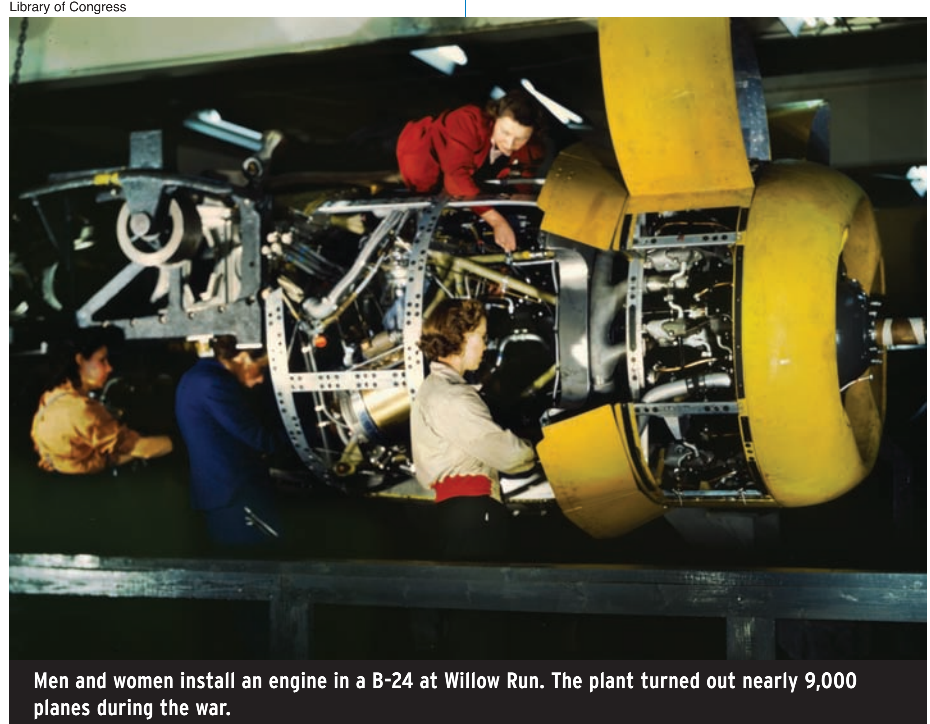

Men and women install an engine in a B-24 at Willow Run. The plant turned out nearly 9,000 planes during the war.

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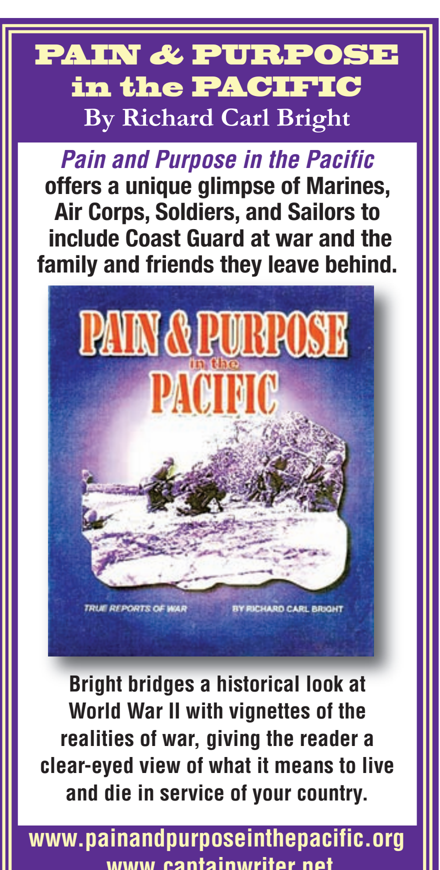

If Hitler had walked through Willow Run in 1942, his assessment might have appeared accurate.

Ford was building the B-24s at Willow Run, but Consolidated was still in charge and it had no blueprints for Ford to work from—just sketches, drawings and templates. The materials were nothing Ford could use in his efficient assembly line, so he had 200 engineers work in shifts around the clock, seven days a week. They produced five miles of drawings a day based on Consolidated's materials. Ten thousand of the 30,000 drawings the engineers made were obsolete by the time they got them back to Detroit from San Diego.

"All the tooling they designed now doesn't work because [Consolidated] changed the airplane every day," Hotton said. "This gives Ford a six-month delay in their production schedule because they thought they'd have all this equipment."

The media was watching all of this closely and the Detroit Free Press ran a story boasting that Willow Run would be able to build a bomber a minute by summer. "And, of course, it was written in the paper, so it must be true," Hotton said jokingly.

Not only was a bomber a minute a pie-in-the-sky dream, but Willow Run was supposed to deliver its first model in May 1942. It didn't fly until September. The media started referring to Willow Run as "Will It Run?"

The delays, as the Truman Committee discovered, were not Ford's fault. Headed by then-Senator Harry S. Truman, the group was charged with rooting out graft and corruption in the defense industry. "He's sent to look at Willow Run," Hotton said. "The government is looking at nationalizing Ford Motor Company to take over Willow Run."

What Truman found was that the delays were a result of Consolidated being allowed to call Willow Run and make changes whenever they wanted. And they did. Every day.

Truman's Committee gave Willow Run a clean bill of health, noting all the "meddling from Consolidated was keeping things from moving forward," Hotton said. It called for a single plant manager with the authority to make decisions affecting the day-to-day operations of the plant. From that point on, the plant manager made the calls and production picked up.

Meanwhile, able-bodied men were drafted or volunteered for military service and Ford started hiring women. By May 1942, 15 percent of the Willow Run workforce was women and they were earning the same wages as men did for the same jobs. Thirteen months later, employment peaked at 42,000, and by summer 1944, the factory was humming along. Production had peaked at a bomber an hour, just as Henry Ford had promised, and employment was reduced to 17,000, thanks to the efficiencies the auto industry had applied to making the B-24.

The center wing assembly was key to meeting that bomber-an-hour quota, Hotton said. "All the prefabricated structures had all been pre-manufactured. They didn't have to be fit. They would snap into place."

Workers put the parts in the wing. Riveters knocked the wing parts together. Then the center wing assembly was sent to a multiple-function machine that completed 42 precision machining operations to .0002-inch in 17 minutes.

"Six-and-a-half man-hours were invested in those center wings," Hotton said. "Consolidated had about 1,500 hours involved in their center wing." From there, all of the remaining pieces—all pre-made and waiting—were fit to the piece as it moved down the assembly line. Plumbing, wiring, landing gear, cockpit shields, instrumentation—all were added quickly and efficiently. The wings, however, could have been problematic.

"Henry Ford hired eight [dwarfs]," Hotton said. "And if you read the stories … they were very proud of what they were doing. For the first time in their lives, they weren't … sideshows. They had a real job. They'd [climb] inside the wing and they'd hold the backing plates that hold the outer wing onto the center wing."

Despite how smoothly the plant ran, putting out a bomber an hour still wasn't an easy feat. Willow Run ran two nine-hour shifts. The remaining four hours were used to restock parts and change tooling. That was the schedule six days a week.

By the end of the war, Ford had pushed 8,865 B-24 heavy bombers out the Willow Run doors for the Army Air Force. The plant went from building just one plane a month in October 1942 to nearly 500 a month by June 1944, with the capability of creating 650 B-24s a month by fall. The Army, however, slowed production to 200 bombers a month.

"The Army literally said, 'Slow down. We have no place to park them. The losses in combat haven't been what we expected,'" Hotton said. By the time the last B-24 rolled off the Willow Run assembly line on June 28, 1945, the plant had produced more than 92 million pounds of airplanes. In 1944 alone, Willow Run produced nearly as many aircraft as the entire nation of Japan, according to The Ann Arbor Observer.

"Given the limited capacity of the aircraft industry, and the enormous pressure for airplanes, it was fair to conclude the Army Air Force was justified in underwriting this Ford experiment," Hotton said.

A General Motors holding when GM declared Chapter 11 bankruptcy in 2009, Willow Run was destined for demolition until a small Michigan organization known as the Yankee Air Museum stepped up. Backed by the Michigan Aerospace Foundation, the museum has been working for over four years to save a portion of the bomber plant. Once a sprawling military defense colossus, just 144,000 square feet were spared the wrecking ball.

Once restored, it will house the Yankee Air Museum, which will be renamed the National Museum of Aviation and Technology at Historic Willow Run.

"At a dark time in American history," Hotton said, "the U.S. turned to Detroit to save the world—literally. While we might not think of Willow Run as a large battleground … 100 years from now, people will come here to hear this story, and that's what we have to preserve at Willow Run."□

Samantha L. Quigley is the editor-in-chief of the USO's ON PATROL *magazine. This article is adapted from one she wrote for the Fall 2013 issue of that magazine.*

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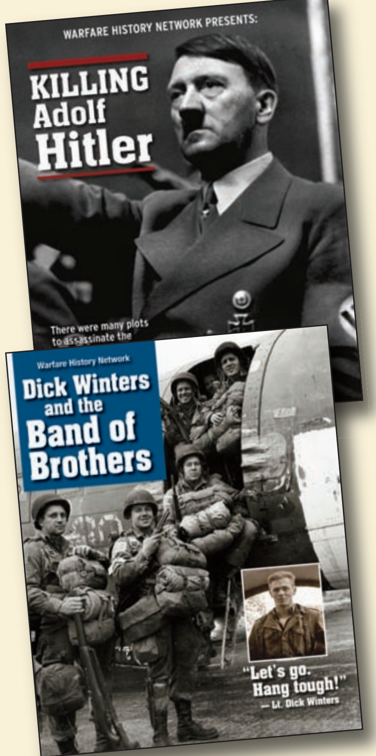

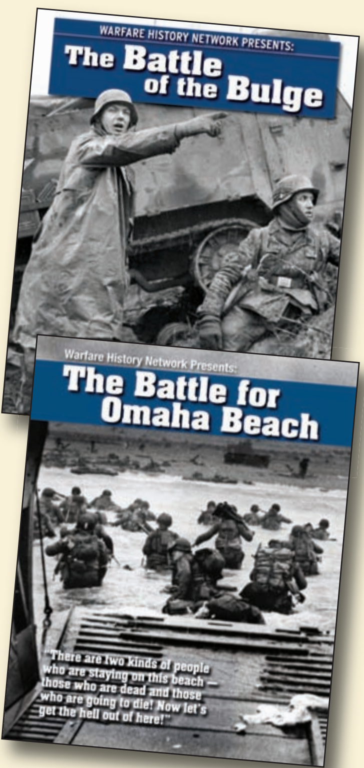

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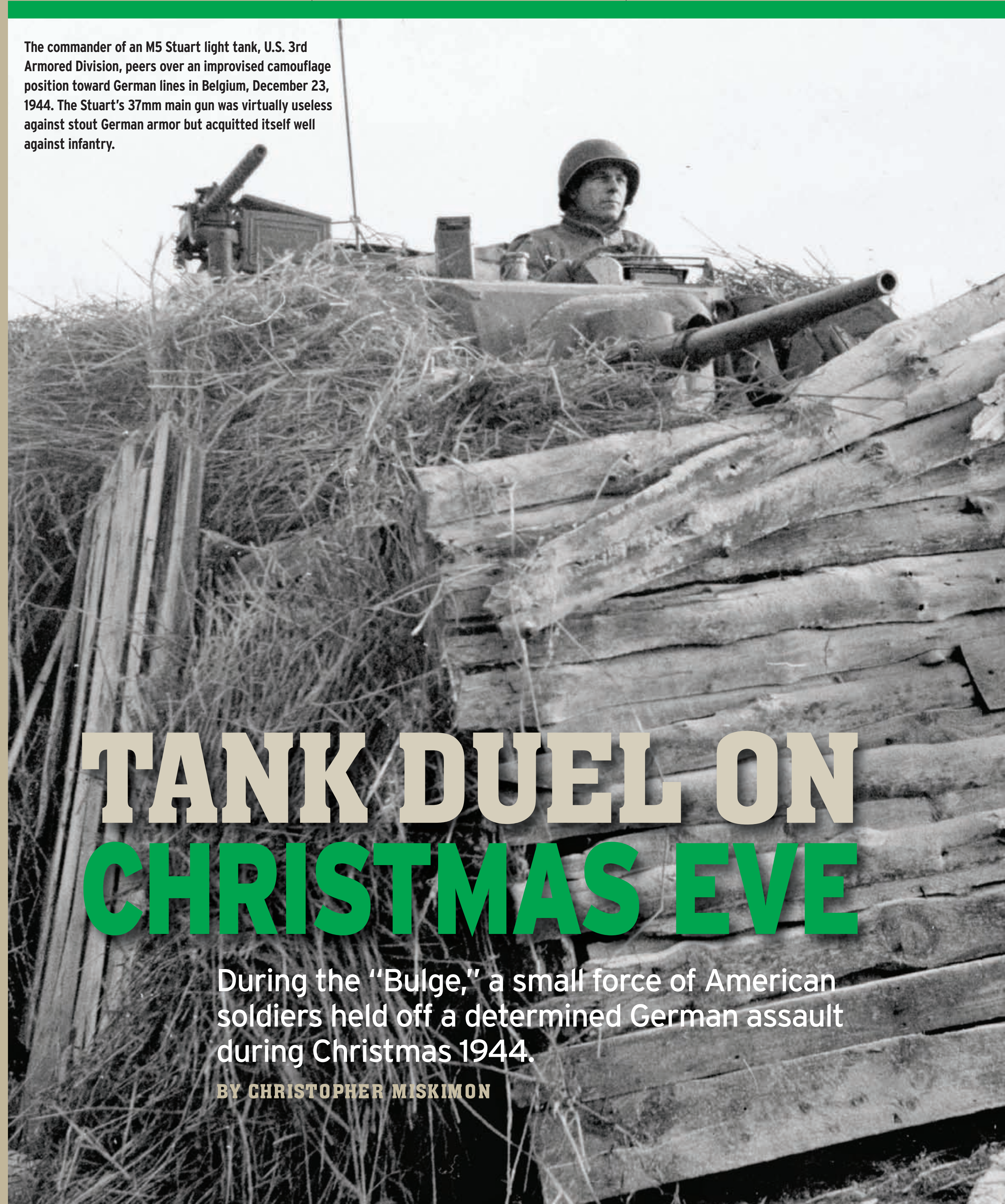

The commander of an M5 Stuart light tank, U.S. 3rd Armored Division, peers over an improvised camouflage position toward German lines in Belgium, December 23, 1944. The Stuart's 37mm main gun was virtually useless against stout German armor but acquitted itself well against infantry.

TANK DUEL ON CHRISTMAS EVE

During the "Bulge," a small force of American soldiers held off a determined German assault during Christmas 1944.

BY CHRISTOPHER MISKIMON

THE Battle of the Bulge is famously known as the largest battle fought by the U.S. Army in World War II. Some 610,000 U.S. troops were involved, and around 81,000 of them became casualties.

Like any action of such size and scope, however, the Bulge was really hundreds of smaller actions linked by common purpose. In the Ardennes, many of them were desperate fights, pitting small units against each other as they vied for control of critical towns, villages, bridges, and crossroads.

Many of these small engagements were between armored forces; the Ardennes fighting was the final large-scale tank battle in Western Europe. The last large reserves of armor the Germans possessed were thrown against the Americans in an environment where it was hoped Allied air power would be grounded by weather.

In the chaos of the Ardennes, the various units maneuvered; German formations attacked and sought advantage while American ones defended, biding time while the Allies prepared a response. Two such units, the U.S. 3rd Armored Division and the German 2nd SS Panzer Division Das Reich, fought repeatedly around the small town of Manhay in Belgium, an area of rolling fields and thick forests dotted with tiny villages centuries old.

Across this otherwise picturesque landscape men struggled and died in foxholes and tanks. Amid the thunder of gunfire and the cries of the wounded, American soldiers proved they were a match for the best Nazi Germany could throw at them.

The grand scale of the Bulge notwithstanding, American doggedness and bravery made the difference in dozens of small skirmishes—none more so than one in the tiny hamlet of Freyneux, Belgium, on a cold and snowy Christmas Eve.

The area around Freyneux was the responsibility of the U.S. 3rd Armored Division's Task Force Kane. This small, combined-arms group was initially assigned the mission of seizing the village of Dochamps southwest of Manhay. Like most American task forces, it was named for its commander, in this case Lt. Col. Matthew Kane.

The unit was composed of a dozen M-4 Sherman medium tanks and five M-5A1 Stuart light tanks from the 32nd Armored Regiment, another four Stuarts from the division's reconnaissance battalion, and a squad of engineers. For fire support, six M-7 "Priest" self-propelled 105mm guns were attached from the 54th Armored Field Artillery Battalion. Infantry from other units were to be attached to the task force at various times.

The attack on Dochamps began around 9 PM on December 22. A badly understrength C Company, 1st Battalion, 517th Parachute Infantry Regiment (PIR) was sent to attack the village despite the knowledge it was stoutly defended by German troops from Volksgrenadier Regiment 1129. The lieutenant in command of C Company was told to follow railroad tracks running from Freyneux to Dochamps that would guide him to their objective. Several tanks would follow in support.

At first the paratroopers met with success; their scouts seized an enemy machine-gun nest and several patrols cleared some woods near the village. But a heavy German counterattack forced the Americans to take cover in a few buildings outside the settlement. They waited there until daybreak on December 23 only to face a concerted attack by another German unit, Volksgrenadier Regiment 1130. A flurry of hand grenades flew through the air from both sides as intense close-quarters combat ensued.

After a short time this assault overwhelmed the exhausted paratroopers, who fell back to another cluster of structures closer to another village named Lamormenil, northeast of Dochamps. There the tanks were able to join them, along with a few towed 3-inch antitank guns from a tank destroyer battalion. The added firepower allowed them to hold off further attacks by the enemy grenadiers.

In nearby Freyneux, Lt. Col. Kane learned of the paratroopers' failed attack and issued orders for another effort to be made at 2 PM. Third Armored Division headquarters had instructed Kane to make

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ABOVE: American tankers clean the bore of their M-4 Sherman's 76mm gun during a pause in the battle. The frigid, snowy weather added to the difficulties both sides faced. BELOW: SS tanker and platoon leader Fritz Langanke had a long history of success in battle.

this second attack despite reports of the heavy German defenses in the area; fortunately, the attack was cancelled shortly before it was to jump off. Kane subsequently left to obtain further orders, leaving Major Robert Coughlin in charge of the defenses at Freyneux while the paratroop commander took over at Lamormenil. Task Force Kane had failed to achieve its primary objective, but it was now ensconced in this pair of nearby villages, close to the Germans, who were preparing to resume their counterattacks.

In 1944 Freyneux was a tiny hamlet of some 130 people, a farming community containing about 42 buildings, mostly homes. There were also four general stores, a shoemaker, and a cattle seller—businesses that received most of their income from the farmers who lived in the area. The Catholic Church of St. Isidore sat at the village's eastern end; there was a small cemetery at the rear of the church inside high stone walls that surrounded the church itself on three sides. Roads from several directions converged at Freyneux, including one that led west to Lamormenil.

The buildings were almost all stout structures made of stone; they sat clustered along the muddy roadways, covered in a layer of glistening snow. A thin screen of trees lay dotted around the village, providing a little concealment. In the distance, thicker forestland sat to the north, northeast, and east.

Bundesarchiv Bild 146-1997-007-31; Photo: Unknown

Northeast of Freyneux the narrow River Aisne, really more of a creek, curved gently through the meadowland. A stone bridge crossed it, connecting the road from Freyneux to another road leading north-south. This road joined the villages of Odeigne and Oster.

Major Robert Coughlin laid out the defenses of Freyneux with a focus on guarding the eastern approaches since the Americans in Lamormenil provided cover to the west; the paratroopers there could provide warning of any threat from that direction. To cover the road leading southwest back toward Dochamps, he placed two Shermans (commanded by 1st Lt. Elmer Hovland of Luverne, Minnesota) of the 2nd Platoon, D Company, 32nd Armored Regiment. A pair of Stuart tanks from 3rd Platoon, C Company, 83rd Reconnaissance Battalion, was placed alongside the Shermans. Together the four tanks were also to cover another road that led generally off to the southeast.

At the northeast end of Freyneux, Coughlin placed a trio of Shermans from the 3rd Platoon, D Company, 32nd Armored Regiment. One tank belonged to the platoon leader, 1st Lt. Charles Myers. His tank, D-31, an M-4A3 with a long-barreled 76mm gun, was positioned at the very edge of the village just beyond the church. Near the lieutenant's tanks and just north of the road leading to the stone bridge was the second Sherman, commanded by Sergeant Alvin Beckmann. He placed his tank near a barn and behind a large pile of wood, providing at least some concealment. This tank, D-34, was an older model M-4A1 with the shorter, low-velocity 75mm cannon.

The third Sherman, D-32, was also an M-4A3 (76mm), commanded by Sergeant Reece Graham of West End, North Carolina. His tank was positioned near the road junction and west of the church. Graham was able to place his tank behind a large stone wall that he could just barely shoot over, giving his Sherman cover. Graham had only recently been promoted to tank commander and was short one man from his crew. Even though he commanded the M-4, he took turns driving it as well.

Another pair of Stuarts set up in support behind these Shermans. While their diminutive 37mm cannons were almost useless against heavy German armor, the Stuarts could be effective against enemy infantry by using both canister shot from the cannons and their .30-caliber machine guns. These tanks were from the same platoon as their counterparts on the south end of the village. One of these Stuarts was commanded by Sergeant Adolfo Villaneuba of San Antonio, Texas. The young, wiry Villanueba was highly respected among the other soldiers of his platoon.

A small number of dismounted reconnaissance troops, perhaps 45 men, were placed around the village as well, rounding out the American defenses. Major Coughlin also had

a few headquarters troops at his command post, but overall the force was long on armor and short on infantry, with few foot soldiers able to protect and screen the tanks.

As dusk settled over Freyneux on December 23, the Americans there prepared for a long, cold night of sentry duty, watching for any sign of enemy troops moving in on them in the darkness. Sitting inside their tanks brought no respite from the frigid night air. Some of the Sherman crews took turns rotating into nearby buildings. Inside they could brew coffee and warm their bodies before braving the chill to stand their watch. A loader in one of the Stuarts, Albert Li Muti, remembered spending an entire night shivering in his tank. "We were half frozen, buttoned up in our tanks," he said. "We couldn't turn on our engines, giving our position away. The inside of our tank was like a refrigerator."

Another tanker, gunner Jerry Nelson, hated nighttime guard duty. In winter the nights were longer. This meant some crewmen would have to take two watches during the night, each two hours long. "It was always very long and lonely in that turret and all we did was think of home," he recalled.

It could be hard to stay alert as mind-numbing hours passed by. The least noise could cause a green soldier to open fire into the darkness, drawing attention to their position. Most of the men in Freyneux were veterans, however, and no panicked bursts of machine-gun fire interrupted the quiet, inky blackness of the night.

The only noises to be heard were the few preparations still being made. Two 3-inch anti-tank guns from the 643rd Tank Destroyer Battalion arrived in the evening. The crews set up their cannons in some bushes near the church, not far from Alvin Beckmann's Sherman, D-34. Lieutenant Myers decided to pull his tank, D-31, back from the edge of the village to a better position near the church. He ordered the driver to place the tank at the southeast corner of the church's wall.

Eventually the dawn began to break, shedding dim light across the fields around Freyneux. Major Coughlin announced an officer's call and Lieutenant Myers left to attend the meeting, leaving his gunner, Corporal Jim Vance, in command of D-31. The increasing light allowed the young soldier to check the tank's field of fire. Vance recalled, "The wall around the cemetery was high enough to hide my tank except for the turret. The gun, a 76mm cannon, was able to clear the top of the wall by a few inches." This placed his tank in a "hull-down" position, making it a more difficult target. Vance and the other

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Artillerymen dig a gun emplacement into the frozen soil of a Belgium farm near the village of Freyneux.

tankers around Freyneux continued their vigil, awaiting the return of their leaders to tell them what was planned for the day. It was Christmas Eve, 1944.

A scant few miles away, the Germans of the Das Reich Division spent an equally cold night, shivering in their tanks, preparing for the next day's assaults, and trying to catch a few hours of much needed sleep. Much of the unit spent December 23 trying to assemble near a vital crossroads well east of Freyneux. Obersturmbannführer (Lt. Col.) Alfred Hargesheimer, commander of the 2nd Company, SS Panzer Regiment 2, arrived with his Panther tanks around 2 PM.

He reported to the regimental command post where his commander, Obersturmbannführer Rudolph Enseling, took him along to observe the assault on the crossroads. The pair of officers watched from their command half-track while elements of two other units seized the intersection. Afterward they returned to the command post, and Hargesheimer was ordered to prepare his unit for a night attack on Freyneux at 11 PM.

His tanks and others moved out for the pending attack, eventually arriving at a narrow road surrounded by forest. Moving down it, the Panthers veered into a swampy area where a number of them broke through the thin ice and became mired. It took until nearly morning to get them free; some engineers found a better route, and the tanks finally arrived at the village of Odeigne, a few miles east of Freyneux. The attack was rescheduled for the morning of December 24.

A new plan was drawn up to take Freyneux, which was in actuality not the primary target. The main objective was the town of Oster, a few miles northeast. Two companies of Panthers, including Hargesheimer's, were attached to the SS Panzergrenadier Regiment 3 "Deutschland." This hastily organized Kampfgruppe, or battle group, would take the road to Oster from Odeigne, which ran past Freyneux to the east. Once they arrived at Freyneux, a small force would break off and clear the village, which they believed to be lightly defended. With this potential threat

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Infantrymen ride into battle atop a foliage-covered Sherman tank near Freyneux in December 1944.

to their flank neutralized, the entire force could then move on to Oster and eventually the larger town of Manhay.

As the panzer crews prepared for their mission, Obersturmbannführer Enseling briefed his officers on what to expect. They pulled out maps of the area and talked about the terrain, which was full of gentle hills, mostly usable roads, and patches of thick forest. It was the best preparation they could do on short notice after the cancellation of the previous night's attack. While the German leaders could look over their maps, it was no substitute for actual reconnaissance.

Untersturmführer (2nd Lt.) Erich Heller, a platoon leader in the Panzergrenadier regiment's 1st Company, was concerned about the lack of firsthand information and said so. Despite being a junior officer, he requested some scouts to precede the column.

This request was denied, though several others expressed apprehension about not only the lack of reliable information but also the lingering threat of American "jabos," a shortened slang version of "jäger-bomber"—the almost ubiquitous ground attack fighters that seemed to German soldiers to be everywhere by this stage of the war. The poor winter weather during the Bulge fighting kept the American aircraft at bay most of the time, but occasionally the weather cleared long enough for the deadly planes to take flight, scouring the landscape in search of German columns. Whatever concerns existed, the attack was nevertheless ordered to proceed.

Around 8 AM the Panther tanks set out on the road leading from Odeigne to Oster. Erich Heller's platoon of infantry rode on the tanks' engine decks, each vehicle carrying six to eight soldiers; a few walked behind the tanks when their movement slowed near Freyneux. The Odeigne-Oster road intersected the road to Freyneux just east of the stone bridge the Americans assumed any attacking force would have to use.

The leading four Panther tanks were from the 1st Platoon of Hargesheimer's 2nd Company, commanded by Untersturmführer Fritz Langanke. This 25-year-old veteran had been in the SS since 1937 and had been personally responsible for the destruction of 19 enemy tanks; he wore a Knight's Cross at his throat, awarded the previous August. Langanke had only been an SS officer for a few months, having been promoted the previous September. His platoon was ordered to proceed to Freyneux and ensure it was clear of American troops.

Now, looking at the bridge leading to the village, Langanke became suspicious. He could see objects on the bridge that looked like landmines. Deciding not to take a chance on the bridge, he instead ordered his platoon to attempt to ford the narrow River Aisne a short distance to the north.

A suitable spot was soon found; the riverbed was firm and seemed able to support the bulk of the 50-ton Panthers. The platoon began fording the river but quickly discovered the far bank was steep, making it difficult for the tanks to climb. One tank nearly overturned, but finally all four were safely on the opposite bank and closer to Freyneux.

A meadow north of the village lay before them, and the platoon could easily cross it to get to Freyneux. Meanwhile, the rest of the company, led by Hargesheimer, crossed the river to the south of the bridge and began taking up position overlooking the village. This meant four Panthers were moving toward Freyneux while seven more waited on the west bank of the Aisne. The river crossing had separated the two groups somewhat but they were still proceeding with their plan.

As Langanke's platoon clanked toward Freyneux his tank was on the far right of his

line. Trailing slightly to his left was Oberscharführer (Sergeant) Kurt Pippert. To his left was the tank of Oberscharführer Kirchner and the last Panther, on the extreme left of the formation, was commanded by Untersturmführer Kurt Seeger, leader of the company's 2nd Platoon. Unwilling to get back on the road, which would have required the platoon to advance in a column rather than a line, Langanke kept his tanks moving across the wide, sloping meadow. A few trees dotted the field, which sat on a slight rise, allowing the Germans to look down onto Freyneux. So far they had not seen any American presence but continued their wary advance.

In Freyneux the Americans quickly became aware of the advancing enemy tanks. The morning quiet was broken by the sound of the Panthers' 700-horsepower Maybach engines, and the American reconnaissance troops dug in around the village soon caught sight of them crossing the meadow to the north. The American tanks were generally laid out to defend against attacks from the south and east. The Germans were unwittingly outflanking the American defenders.

Corporal Jim Vance was standing in the commander's hatch of D-31, still parked behind the church wall. Suddenly he saw a GI on foot running up to his tank. The soldier climbed onto the turret and excitedly told Vance four enemy tanks were moving up the hill to his left front and would be in sight within moments. The corporal shouted to his driver to start the engine while he traversed the Sherman's turret to face the oncoming Germans.

Nearby, Sergeant Reece Graham and several of D-32's crew were sheltering in a house next to their tank when Platoon Sergeant Alvin Beckmann burst through the door and told them enemy tanks were coming. The men quickly forgot the coffee they were brewing and rushed outside and scrambled into their tank.

As the American tankers prepared to fire, the four Panthers continued to close on Freyneux. Corporal Jim Vance looked through the sight of his Sherman's 76mm gun at the line of four tanks. They had just come over the crest of the hill, and luck was with Vance. In a frontal confrontation with a Panther, the Sherman was at a decided disadvantage, even with the more powerful 76mm cannon. The Panther boasted up to 100mm of sloped armor the American tank couldn't reliably pierce and had much more powerful armament.

The side armor of a Panther, however, was only 40 to 45mm thick, well within the ability of the American tank to penetrate. These four Panthers, obviously unaware of D-31's presence, were presenting their vulnerable sides to Vance.

In desperation, with the fire's heat making the tank's interior unbearable, Bliemeister stripped down to his underwear, making him thin enough to squeeze through the narrow opening and escape. He ran through the cold and snow to a nearby home and took cover. Outside, D-34 burned.

The young corporal sat on the right side of the turret next to his cannon. He peered through the telescopic sight, which magnified the view of his foe by a power of five. A periscopic sight sat just above the telescopic sight. The range was less than 500 yards. His left hand rested on a small wheel which controlled the gun's elevation, allowing him to make small corrections. With his right hand he used a joystick tht allowed him to traverse the turret and keep the gun centered on the moving Panthers. There was a trigger on the joystick for firing; alternately Vance could fire his cannon by pressing a button on the floor with his foot.

Normally Lieutenant Myers would call out firing instructions from the commander's hatch, but with the officer away at a meeting Vance would have to act alone. Nevertheless, the corporal from Pittsboro, Mississippi, was prepared to do his job that morning.

Setting his sights on the second tank in line, Vance took careful aim at its side and fired. With a crash the 76mm gun sent an armor-piercing round flying toward the Panther at 2,600 feet per second. The cannon recoiled next to Vance, ejecting the spent round's casing, which clattered into a small basket. The tank filled with smoke and fumes from the burning propellant; two small exhaust fans worked to draw the noxious vapors out of the turret as the loader moved to throw another round of ammunition into the breech of the gun.

In the meadow the Panthers were continuing their slow advance when Vance's shot crashed into the side of Kurt Pippert's Panther. The round went through the thinner side armor and into the tank's ammunition stowage, immediately starting a fire. The crew began to bail out, standard practice on both sides when a tank received a serious hit.

The panzergrenadiers on the engine decks of all four Panthers quickly jumped down, moving to cover in a small ditch nearby. If there was to be an armor battle, the last place the infantrymen wanted to be was on the tanks.

Vance quickly moved on to his next target. He later recalled, "When I saw I had hit one of the attacking tanks, I came up from my sights and fire controls to locate another tank. I picked up the second tank and immediately went back to my sights and fired. Again the round hit and I saw the tank become enveloped in fire and smoke."

Again the 76mm gun thundered, sending another deadly shell into the side of a different Panther, causing it to burst into flames.

Fritz Langanke was standing in the hatch of his tank when the hastily planned ambush was sprung. He watched as Pippert's tank was hit first and the crew bailed out. The vulnerable panzergrenadiers ran for the comparative safety of a nearby ditch, getting as low as they could. Their

leader, Erich Heller, the junior officer who had earlier requested scout troops, was on the back of Langanke's tank but went with his men. Before he could react further, a second Panther burst into flames. It was Kurt Seeger's tank.

As Langanke took in the horrid spectacle, he thought he saw Seeger jump out of the hatch onto the snowy ground. In actuality, Seeger's gunner, Fritz Nolte, had pushed the officer out of the hatch so he could quickly follow him out of the flaming wreck. Nolte realized they had been struck in the front of their tank, a lucky hit. "We received a hit in the underside plating at the front of our panzer. Due to a slope in the terrain we presented our weak spot." Half of Langanke's platoon was now out of action.

Corporal Vance now set his sights on Kirchner's tank, but as he prepared to fire, he saw that another American tank had hit it. Instead of firing at it he began searching for the fourth Panther. Before he could find it, a shot from Langanke's tank slammed into the wall D-31 was sheltering behind. Unable to find the enemy tank to return fire, Vance prudently had his driver back D-31 to a new position behind the church. Meanwhile, Kirchner's Panther survived the hit from the other Sherman and began to withdraw.

This left Langanke and his crew alone, but he ordered the tank forward anyway. His gunner, Rottenführer (Corporal) Paul Pulm, began firing at whatever targets he had. Alvin Beckmann's tank, D-34, soon fell victim to Pulm's accurate fire. Beckmann had returned to his tank after warning Reece Graham of the advancing Germans. D-34 was still sitting behind the woodpile, and Beckmann ordered the driver to start the engine. The cold weather had affected the Sherman's engine, which wouldn't turn over, leaving the tank stuck facing east. Beckmann ordered the gunner to traverse the turret to the tank's rear and engage Langanke's Panther, but it was too late.

Langanke's Panther was now just 100 yards from D-34. Pulm took aim and sent a round into the American tank's turret, starting a fire; the GIs bailed out as the flames spread. Unfortunately, D-34's driver, Corporal Conrad Bliemeister, couldn't get out; his hatch was jammed and wouldn't open far enough to allow him to exit. In desperation, with the fire's heat making the tank's interior unbearable, Bliemeister stripped down to his underwear, making him thin enough to squeeze through the narrow opening and escape. He ran through the cold and snow to a nearby home and took cover. Outside, D-34 burned.

National Archives

ABOVE: A 3-inch (76mm) M5 antitank gun in action during the Bulge, December 23, 1944. Towed A-T guns such as this one helped the Americans hold off the German armored attacks. OPPOSITE: Hergesheimer's panzers tried to hit American positions at Freyneux from the north but accurate fire from the out-gunned, outnumbered Shermans of Task Force Kane turned them back.

After disposing of D-34, Langanke directed Pulm to fire on another Sherman partially concealed nearby. This was D-32, Sergeant Reece Graham's tank. His tank was also hidden behind a stone wall, but this didn't stop the German gunner from trying to destroy it.

"I saw a flash from the panzer, the shell hitting the building near the eaves of the house, sending debris all over us," Graham said. "The panzer then fired another round and missed, hitting the same area." Graham's gunner returned fire, shooting two or three rounds at the Panther without scoring a hit. The Nazi tank was in a small depression, and the GI gunner could only see the tank's turret and gun barrel.

As Graham watched his gunner trying to engage the nearby Panther, he saw a hint of movement farther up the hill, far beyond the meadow. It was the 3rd Company of SS Panzer Regiment 2, the other tank company that had been assigned to this attack. The German plan was for Hargesheimer's company to clear Freyneux while the rest of the Kampfgruppe continued north toward Oster.

Third Company was following the plan, unaware the road they were using was under observation by the Americans in Freyneux. Due to the angle of their movement, these Panthers were also presenting their weaker side and rear armor to the Americans, though at a much longer range of 2,000 yards.

Graham took a chance and ordered his gunner to refocus on the distant, more vulnerable tanks on the road. "I then gave the orders. 'Right front! Right front! Range 2,000! Fire!'" Graham said. "After firing, I saw the AP with tracers direct in line, but short. I then ordered the gunner, 'Up 2! Fire!' The second shell went straight into the panzer and it started burning.

"I was watching it with field glasses and to my surprise saw another panzer move from right to left behind the burning tank. I then gave the gunner orders, 'Left! Up 2! Fire!' The shell went straight into the rear." Three Germans, including the company's senior NCO, died in one of the Panthers. The rest of the 3rd Company tanks scattered eastward into some woods to take cover from D-32's murderous cannon fire.

As Reece Graham was distracted by the Panthers on the Odeigne-Oster road, Fritz Langanke found his tank under attack from a new quarter. Very quickly, several rounds impacted on his frontal armor, though none penetrated. Searching for the source, Langanke saw it was coming from an area covered with bushes to his right from the woodpile where D-34 was burning.

He realized it had to be coming from at least a pair of antitank guns, judging from the rate of fire. The guns were close, no more than 200 yards or so. "Their field of fire was obviously restricted. They were firing only at our hull," Langanke recalled.

Langanke ordered the turret turned toward the antitank guns. The undergrowth was so thick he couldn't spot the American guns, so the gunner began spraying the area with machine-gun and cannon fire to strip away some of the foliage. The weather had cleared enough for the sun to appear, leaving a glare on the snow that also kept Langanke from pinpointing his opponents.

Soon the Panther had suffered 10 hits to its frontal armor, splitting the welds. (This was a problem for German tanks that is little known today; even hits that did not penetrate could crack the welded seams of the thick armor plate. Shortages of molybdenum in the factories in Germany could also make the armor brittle, causing it to crack.)

Another round struck the tank's turret and glanced away. Langanke ducked when the round hit, but a piece of it hit him in the head. It was only a glancing blow, but it rendered him senseless for a few seconds. When he came around, Langanke decided his crew had risked enough and ordered the tank to withdraw. The driver backed slowly away, keeping his frontal armor toward the antitank guns. After a few harrowing minutes the Panther dipped into a depression, giving it cover from the American fire.

Langanke then directed his battered machine away from Freyneux under cover, finally crossing the road just short of the stone bridge and moving into a concealed position in some pine trees; Kirchner's damaged tank had already arrived there. They were just a short distance north of where Obersturmbannführer Hargesheimer sat with the rest of the company.

As Langanke took stock of his situation, Hargesheimer advanced on Freyneux from the east with his remaining tanks, seven Panthers advancing in a line. As they crossed another open meadow, Hargesheimer spotted an American tank at the edge of Freyneux and instructed his gunner to destroy it. The tank, a light M-5 Stuart, was quickly dispatched, although the German officer recalled it did not burn. The Germans continued advancing.

The destroyed Stuart was Sergeant Adolfo Villanueba's. He remembered his tank taking two direct hits. He and his crew bailed out, though his men later retrieved the Stuart's machine guns and set up a defensive position in a nearby house.

As the SS troops pressed their advantage, several Shermans were shifted to deal with them. One of them caught Villanueba's eye, and he led it into a good position where it opened fire on a Panther, disabling it. By luck this was the company commander's tank. Hargesheimer recalled his tank was hit multiple times, the gun disabled, and his loader wounded.

With his tank numbers rapidly dwindling and stiff resistance from the Americans steadily growing, Hargesheimer realized it was time to withdraw and regroup. As his remaining six Panthers drew back with his damaged panzer, one was knocked out and another immobilized. Hargesheimer got his remaining tanks back into cover.

"After our attack foundered, we withdrew into our initial position and each panzer sought cover either in the forest area or in another site that offered potential," he stated. "After I climbed out of my disabled panzer, I made my report to the nearby regimental command post, where I then waited for further operational orders. That did not prevent me from checking at intervals on the position of the panzers of my company."

The attack on Freyneux was over, but there was still fighting to be done that day.

Map © 2017 Philip Schwartzberg, Meridian Mapping, Minneapolis, MN

The weather was clear enough for American air power to make its presence known. Soon fighter bombers began to attack the German positions, particularly the wooded area held by the 3rd Company. Strafing runs with machine guns and cannon were accompanied by bombs dropped all around the SS troops east of the village. Corporal Jim Vance, his tank still hidden behind the church, watched the planes making their runs, calling it "a beautiful sight."

For Fritz Langanke the jabos were anything but beautiful. Each time a flight of fighters appeared overhead he tensely waited for them to attack his position. The only time he could relax was when they finished their runs and disappeared into the distance. Nearby a 37mm flak gun fired at the American planes, though it never brought one down.

Corporal Jim Vance and D-31 stayed near the church during the rest of the engagement. After the fighting started Lieutenant Myers left the hastily ended officer's call and rushed back to his tank with Lieutenant Hovland in tow. The two officers reached the tank after Vance finished his part of the engagement.

With Myers back with his tank, Hovland decided to ascend the church steeple so he could direct artillery fire onto the nearby Germans. After he got to the top Hovland began relaying spotting information down to the tank for the task force's artillery battery to use. Soon they began to adjust their fire onto the now beleaguered SS unit.

Unfortunately for Hovland, his career as a forward observer was brief. The panzer crewmen knew the steeple was a likely observation post and quickly began firing at it.

"I got out of there quick. They just blew off part of the steeple," Hovland said. Even after he reached the ground enemy fire hounded him. A 75mm round struck a wall just behind him as he dove to the ground. He got up to run again, and a second round hit the wall just ahead of him. He stayed down for a few minutes before sprinting back to his platoon.

Earlier in the battle, Untersturmführer Erich Heller and his panzergrenadiers found themselves stuck in a ditch while the tankers of their Kampfgruppe fought and died. Now the young officer watched as American jabos raced overhead to drop their deadly payloads on his comrades along the Odeigne-Oster road. Heller decided to take action and pay the Americans back.

He led his men down the ditch, crawling low to remain out of sight until they reached the nearby road leading into Freyneux. The best option open to him was to send his troops down each side of the road and seize some of the buildings at the northeast end of the village.

Heller sent a runner back to his superiors requesting at least a company of infantry along with armor and artillery support. Instead, he received a platoon of panzergrenadiers and an order to attack with what he had. Despite the odds against the SS men, Heller ordered the attack.

Keeping some machine-gun and panzerfaust teams in the rear of his formation for fire support, he sent the rest down the road. With his heavy weapons laying down effective suppressing fire, the German infantrymen were able to get into the nearest homes. Soon they consolidated their gains and resumed their advance.

As the SS troops again moved forward into Freyneux, however, they were greeted by a hail of American machine-gun fire; a Sherman tank had gotten into position ahead of them and laid down a veritable storm of .30-caliber bullets. The American tankers particularly targeted the panzerfaust carriers, and soon they were all down.

Then the U.S. reconnaissance troops joined in, adding their own rifle fire to the fusillade the Germans were enduring. The German infantry was stopped cold, but they stubbornly held the houses already taken.

Despite the difficulties the Germans were having, Major Coughlin was becoming concerned about his ability to hold Freyneux. He sent a radio message to nearby Lamormenil, where the paratroopers were still holding their ground. The captain in charge of that village sent a platoon of men under Lieutenant Thomas De Coste. They rushed to Freyneux across some 400 yards of open fields and took positions around the village, content for now to bolster the existing defenses.

After holding his position for about an hour, Heller realized he'd shot his bolt. Many of his men were wounded, and several American tanks were seen to his south. The Germans withdrew in relays with the remaining troops laying down covering fire to aid their retreat. Soon only Heller and three soldiers were still occupying the house. They still had one machine gun and a panzerfaust. As they prepared to retreat, a Stuart tank and one of the American 3-inch antitank guns were spotted only 120 yards away.

The Stuart tank belonged to Lieutenant Thomas McKone. He got out of his tank because the firing stopped and was standing near another soldier. Suddenly McKone heard the sound of a panzerfaust firing and dove to the ground just before the round slammed into his tank. The vehicle was knocked out, and the soldier with McKone was killed.

With the tank out of action, Heller and another German opened fire on the crew of the antitank gun with their last machine gun. The hail of gunfire succeeded in pushing the crew to cover, away from their weapon. Satisfied, Heller ordered his men to retreat one at a time.

Before they could get away, though, Major Coughlin arrived in his jeep with a driver, Private Harvey Miller. Seeing the American crew had abandoned their antitank gun, Miller and another soldier manned it and began firing into the German strongpoint. One round blasted the house Heller occupied. He was knocked unconscious by the blast, and when he came to he discovered he was pinned beneath the rubble of what had once been the ceiling. The rest of the structure was in flames.

Heller called for help, but his men had already gone. Trapped and alone, the situation seemed dire for the SS officer. Then a group of three GIs led by Private Miller, the man who had fired the shot that immobilized Heller, came into the blazing structure and res-

National Archives

With its turret and 75mm main gun reversed, a German Panzer V Panther tank, similar to Langanke's, burns after being struck by an Sherman tank round during fighting in Belgium in December 1944. Chunks of stone and masonry on the tank's back deck indicate it may have crashed through a wall or a building.

cued him. The Americans carried Heller back to their lines while Miller conversed with him in German. After a brief interrogation by Major Coughlin, Heller was taken away to spend the rest of the war in a POW camp.

Aside from sporadic long distance German shelling from Hargesheimer's Panthers, the fighting for Freyneux was now drawing to a close. There was one more tragic moment to play out, and it would end in favor of the Germans. Fritz Langanke's tank was still under cover but had a view of a hill north of Freyneux, about 1,000 yards away. All but one of the crew was out repairing links in their tank's tracks, damaged in the earlier fighting.

Inside the tank, gunner Pulm sat looking through his sights. The hill seemed a likely avenue for an enemy counterattack, and Pulm had used his machine gun to range various points on the hill to determine the exact distances. As they worked, another SS officer came by to gauge the condition of the tank and to tell Langanke of the death of a comrade nearby.

Suddenly, Pulm saw an American Sherman appear on the hill. Within seconds three or four more M-4s came into view. They were a platoon from C Company, 14th Tank battalion of the 9th Armored Division. Throughout the day they had manned a roadblock to the north. Now they were trying to return to their unit but were unaware of the fighting around Freyneux.

As the American tankers drove south, they had no idea they were in the sights of the enemy. Langanke shouted a warning to the men outside the tank and gave the order to fire, but the visiting officer didn't hear him. The Panther's gun roared, the muzzle blast blowing off the man's cap and stunning him.

The first German shot struck a Sherman in its gun barrel, sending fragments into the face of the tank commander. Succeeding shots set the Sherman on fire, and the crew bailed out. Within seconds, three more tanks were knocked out as Pulm calmly fired round after round. The fifth Sherman quickly withdrew over the hill, leaving four wrecks smoldering, their crews sheltering in a small ravine. It was a grim revenge for the German defeat and the death of Langanke's friend.

As evening fell, Hargesheimer's tanks were ordered to withdraw to Odeigne. While there would be a few skirmishes and much patrolling over the next few days, the battle for Freyneux was over.

The fighting in the village on Christmas Eve was costly to both sides. Aside from the human toll in casualties, burning tanks littered the battlefield. The Americans lost five Shermans and two Stuarts, while the Germans lost five Panthers with several more damaged. These raw numbers fail to state what is most significant; the outgunned GIs held Freyneux at the end of the day, upsetting German plans for further action elsewhere.

The commonly held view is that German armor always outmatched its American opponents. Here the GIs showed that stereotype to be untrue. Tank battles are more than just a number of vehicles banging away at each other. Tactical ingenuity and courage played their part on each side that day.

Armored engagements are most often won by the side that first spots its foe and opens fire effectively. Once Langanke's platoon was fired upon with good result, the rest of the German attack devolved into an uncoordinated struggle that the experienced Americans were able to repel despite having fewer, less powerful tanks.

It was a grim Christmas for the soldiers of Task Force Kane, but their victory was a hard-earned gift. □

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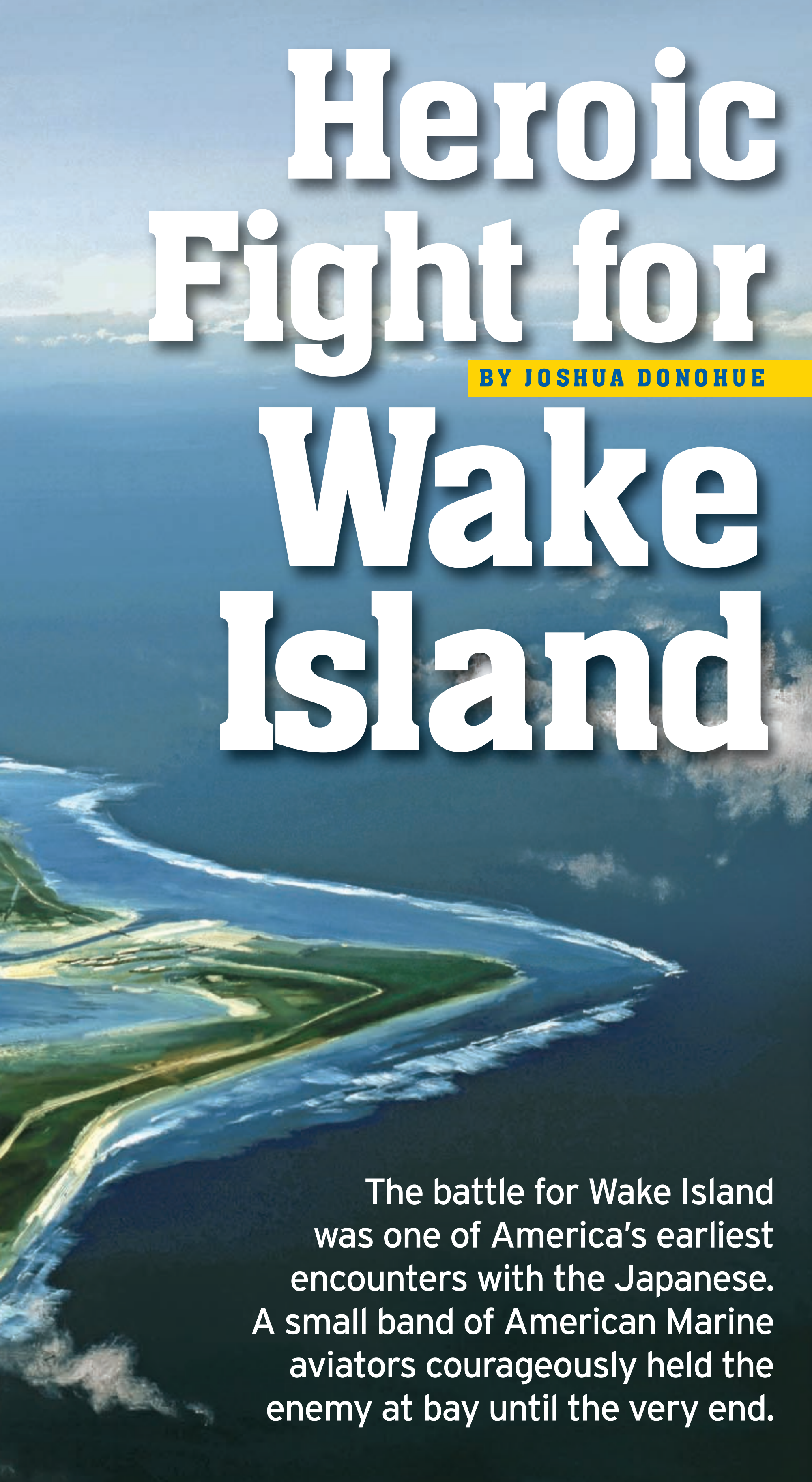

Heroic Fight for Wake Island

BY JOSHUA DONOHUE

The battle for Wake Island was one of America's earliest encounters with the Japanese. A small band of American Marine aviators courageously held the enemy at bay until the very end.

"All hands have behaved splendidly and held up in a manner in which the Marine Corps may well tell."

—Major Paul A. Putnam, Commander VMF-211

On November 28, 1941, U.S. Marine Corps Major Paul A. Putnam sailed for Wake Island aboard the USS *Enterprise* (CV-6). Putnam and 11 other Leatherneck aviators of Marine Fighting Squadron 211 (VMF-211) prepared to fly their Grumman F4F-3 Wildcats to reinforce the small U.S. Pacific outpost located some 2,000 miles west of their base at Ewa Mooring Mast (Territory of Hawaii).

Four days after the 38-year-old major and VMF-211 arrived on Wake, the atoll was attacked by Japanese bombers within hours of the raid on the U.S. Pacific fleet anchored at Pearl Harbor.

Paul Albert Putnam was born in Milan, Michigan, on June 16, 1903, but grew up in the town of Washington, Iowa, where his father moved the family business in 1909. After graduating from high school, Putnam attended Iowa State University at Ames, majoring in civil engineering. During his sophomore year, Putnam decided to leave collegiate life behind; he enlisted in the U.S. Marine Corps on December 1, 1923.

Over the next several years, Putnam served in a variety of interwar assignments, including occupation duty in Nicaragua as the United States attempted to help the elected government overcome a leftist insurgency.

Deciding to make the Marines a career, Putnam applied for officer training and was accepted; he was commissioned a second lieutenant on March 3, 1926. In early

Captain Henry T. Elrod, of Marine Fighter Squadron VMF-211, is pictured by artist Jack Fellows flying high over Wake Island in his Grumman F4F Wildcat. On December 10, 1941, Elrod single-handedly attacked 22 Japanese planes, downing two. He also sank the destroyer *Kisaragi*, the first warship to be destroyed by small bombs dropped from a fighter aircraft. On December 23, Elrod was killed while commanding a squad of men defending the beach against Japan's seaborne invasion, becoming the first U.S. Marine Corps aviator to be awarded the Medal of Honor.

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1927, he returned to Nicaragua as an officer with the 23rd Company, 1st Battalion, 5th Regiment, 2nd Marine Brigade and in January 1928 got his first taste of combat against rebel forces.

In June 1928, he returned to the United States and applied for aviation training, earning his wings on May 7, 1929. It was back to Nicaragua, where he conducted a series of bombing and strafing runs against the rebels. He remained on duty in that Central American country until July 1938. Two years later he was promoted to major and, in January 1941, sailed for Pearl Harbor, Hawaii, with Marine Fighting Squadron 2 (VMF-2). On July 1, 1941, VMF-2 was redesignated VMF-211 while attached to the 2nd Marine Aircraft Group (later MAG-21).

By October 1941, VMF-211 was transitioning from its obsolete F3F-2 biplane, nicknamed the "Flying Barrel" because of its bulbous shape, to the sleek, new Grumman F4F-3 Wildcat fighters. Unfortunately for Putnam and his Leatherneck aviators, they did not have adequate time to familiarize themselves with their new planes by the time they departed for Wake Island the following month.

Major Putnam became commanding officer of VMF-211 on November 17, 1941, as plans were already being set in motion to send his squadron to the Wake atoll. On November 27, Putnam received secret orders from his commanding officer, Lt. Col. Claude A. Larkin of MAG-21, to deliver 12 of VMF-211's Wildcats to Wake Island aboard the USS E*nterprise*.

As relations between the United States and the Japanese Empire continued to deteriorate during the fall of 1941, reinforcing the American Pacific outpost at Wake took on a greater sense of urgency.

Wake Island is a V-shaped atoll consisting of three separate islands: Wake proper, Wilkes located on the southern tip, and Peale on the northern tip. Prior to the arrival of the 1st Marine Defense Battalion in August 1941, Wake had been a regular stop for Pan American Airways (PAA) and its Martin M-130 Clipper flying boats.

PAA also built a hotel complex on Peale Island, making Wake a favorite destination for tourists. In addition to the PAA personnel, 1,200 civilian workers employed by the Contractors Pacific Naval Air Bases (CPNAB) were responsible for the construction of Wake's buildings, base facilities, and road networks.

Major Putnam and 11 other Marine aviators (10 officers and two enlisted) of VMF-211 took off from Ewa on the morning of November 28, making the short flight to Naval Air Station Ford Island in the middle of Pearl Harbor to await further orders. His men were under the assumption that this was a routine overnight training mission to Maui and packed nothing more than an extra set of clothing, razors, and toothbrushes.

Putnam returned with instructions for his aviators to depart Ford Island and rendezvous with the *Enterprise* and Task Force 2 already at sea. Once they formed up over Vice Admiral William F. Halsey's flagship, Putnam and his fliers were signaled to land

All: Naval History and Heritage Command

ABOVE LEFT TO RIGHT: Winfield S. Cunningham commanded U.S. forces on Wake; Marine aviator Henry Elrod; Admiral Sadamichi Kajioka headed Japan's Wake Island invasion force. BELOW: A flight of Grumman F4F Wildcats in tactical formation, mid-1943. Although outperformed by the Zero, the F4F was a tough opponent that could dish out punishment as well as take it.

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Map © 2017 Philip Schwartzberg, Meridian Mapping, Minneapolis, MN

The largest of three islands surrounding a lagoon in the Western Pacific, Wake was strategically located halfway between Guam and Midway. The United States was unable to send reinforcements in time to prevent its capture two weeks after Pearl Harbor.

aboard the carrier, a clear indication to the rest of VMF-211 that this mission was more than routine.

As soon as Putnam and his men landed on the *Enterprise,* Halsey's official Battle Order Number One was relayed to the Marine aviators. The message indicated that the *Enterprise* was operating under wartime conditions and that VMF-211's new destination was Wake Island.

While Putnam was already aware of his mission, his request to Halsey for further instructions did not assuage any lingering uncertainty. "Putnam," explained Halsey, "your instructions are to do what seems appropriate when you get to Wake."

The men of *Enterprise* quickly went to work on VMF-211's dozen F4F-3s under Putnam's watchful gaze as the carrier began a westerly course toward Wake. Halsey was also quick to replace one of VMF-211s Wildcats that was left on Ford Island with starter trouble.

In a letter to Lt. Col. Larkin on December 3, Putnam brilliantly (and sarcastically) summarized the situation he faced: "Immediately I was given a full complement of mech[anic]s and all hands aboard have vied with each other to see who could do the most for me. I feel a bit like the fatted calf being groomed for whatever it is that happens to fatted calves, but it surely is nice while it lasts and the airplanes are pretty sleek and fat too."

Just before 7 AM on December 4, 1941, Major Putnam and VMF-211 took off from the *Enterprise* as she stood 200 miles from Wake. The 12 Wildcats were escorted to the atoll a few hours later by a Consolidated PBY Catalina flying boat sent from Wake.

The Marine aviators touched down on the atoll's 5,000-foot, coral-packed runway and were greeted by the ground elements of VMF-211 who had been sent to Wake aboard theanciliary ship USS *Wright* less than a week before.

Putnam immediately reported to Commander Winfield Scott Cunningham, who had assumed overall command of Wake from USMC Major James P.S. Devereux. Upon his return to the airfield, Putnam had his first opportunity to assess the condition of his squadron's parking area. He quickly determined that there was much work to be done.

Putnam's immediate concern was the lack of protective revetments for his fragile Wildcats, which sat out in an open parking area located along the southern edge of Wake's main runway. The terrain was both rough and uneven with loose pieces of coral surrounding most of the area where VMF-211 was forced to park its planes.

Due to the uneven areas and loose coral that surrounded the hardstand mat, Putnam attempted to keep the fragile Grummans as widely dispersed as he could to avoid certain damage. One author stated, "The only safe spot for parking F4F-3s was a hardstand mat no more than 300 by 800 feet in size."

The cross runway was still under construction while the main runway was too narrow to allow multiple aircraft to take off at the same time.

Sitting adjacent to the parking mat were two elevated 25,000-gallon fuel tanks and more than 600 55-gallon fuel drums. Fueling had to be done by hand pumps, and the ground crews who were tasked with maintaining the F4F-3s were unfamiliar with the newly acquired airframes.

Putnam also needed additional manpower from the civilian workers of the CPNAB to aid in the construction of bunkers, foxholes, and aircraft revetments. The major's frustration with the slow progress of these projects was evident in his initial operations report from Wake: "Backed by a written request from the Commander, Aircraft Battle Force, a request was made through the Island Commander to the Civilian Contractor's superintendent on the morning of 5 December, asking for the immediate construction of bunkers for the protection of aircraft, and outlining various other works to follow. Great emphasis was put on the fact that speed, rather than neatly finished work,

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was required.

"However, an inspection that afternoon revealed a young civil engineer laboriously setting out stakes with a transit and three rodmen. It required an hour of frantic rushing about and some very strong language to replace the young engineer and his rodmen with a couple of Swedes and bulldozers."

Ever since the F4F-3s were assigned to them back in Hawaii, the Marine airmen of VMF-211 attempted to gain as many flight hours in their new Grummans as they possibly could. None of the pilots had fired the Wildcat's four .50-caliber machine guns, nor had they dropped bombs from them.

The planes also did not have armor, and only two of them had self-sealing fuel tanks. The F4F-3s carried a 100-pound bomb under each wing, but the planes lacked the correct suspension racks needed to carry the ordnance available at Wake. Captain Herbert C. Freuler quickly devised a modified mechanism made from the bands taken from practice bombs that worked flawlessly.

Commander Cunningham ordered Major Putnam to fly combat air patrols consisting of four aircraft aloft during dawn, midday, and evening hours. The patrols were of vital importance since the Wake garrison did not have a radar system and the noise produced from the pounding surf made it difficult to detect the sound of incoming aircraft.

The first patrol on December 5 was meant for VMF-211's aviators to gain further experience in the Wildcats while also attempting to establish air-to-ground communications. One of Putnam's pilots, 2nd Lt. John F. Kinney, fashioned a homing beacon for the Grummans that allowed them to pick up signals from VMF-211's ground radio.

Major Devereux gave the Marines of the 1st Marine Defense Battalion and VMF-211 the day off on Sunday, December 7 (Wake time). The morning of December 8 began with the dawn patrol, and the first chance for the Marine pilots to fire the Wildcats' .50-caliber machine guns was scheduled for later that day.

ABOVE: Navy ground crewmen performed yeoman service keeping the handful of Wildcats in flying condition, but it was a losing battle. OPPOSITE: A view of Wake Island taken shortly before the Japanese attack on December 8, 1941.

The protective works were set for completion by the early afternoon as Putnam's frustration with the CPNAB laborers continued to grow.

Just before 7 AM on December 8 (December 7 in Hawaii), Wake's U.S. Army radio truck picked up a frantic message coming from Hickam Field, just across from Pearl Harbor: "Air raid Pearl Harbor. This is no drill." The surprise Japanese attack on military installations across the island of Oahu was on and had thrust the United States into war with Japan.

Major Devereux ordered general quarters for his Marines to man their positions across the atoll, while Major Putnam was already in the air with a four-plane patrol by the time the news was delivered to the squadron. He immediately put VMF-211 on a wartime status when he was informed of hostilities with Japan and went back aloft leading the followup patrol. Upon landing, his executive officer and squadron favorite, Captain Henry Talmage Elrod, relieved Putnam for the midday patrol.

The Japanese Air Attack Force Number 1 of the 24th Air Flotilla (Chitose Air Group) was based on Roi Atoll in the Marshall Islands, located just over 700 miles south of Wake. At dawn, a flight of 27 Mitsubishi G3M2 Type 96 bombers (Allied code name "Nell") departed Roi for Wake with their deadly payloads of fragmentation bombs and incendiary bullets. Not only were the Marines unfamiliar with the G3M2 Nells in terms of their appearance, but they also underestimated the abilities of the aviators who flew them.

Commander Cunningham recalled the Philippine Clipper that had taken off from Wake's lagoon on a course for Guam before word of the attack on Pearl Harbor was received. When the Martin M-130 landed, Putnam scheduled a meeting with the Clipper's captain, John Hamilton, who would go aloft with two of VMF-211's Wildcats for a long-range reconnaissance patrol around the atoll to search for any Japanese threats from the air or sea.

Eight of Putnam's Wildcats were sitting on the ground as widely dispersed as possi-

ble, while the other four were aloft at 12,000 feet above Wake. As noon was approaching, VMF-211 and the Marines of the 1st Defense Battalion were still hard at work reinforcing their respective positions. Putnam and his squadron were gathered in the path of an oncoming rain squall that was about to descend on Wake's airfield.

At 11:58 AM, the officers and enlisted men of VMF-211 were busy with their new assignments as the formation of Nells headed toward the southern edge of Wake proper with the airfield in their sights. Using low-hanging clouds to mask their approach, the 27 G3M2s broke through the clouds at 1,500 feet as Wake's lookouts got their first glimpses of the approaching bombers.

By the time Putnam and his men heard the sound of aircraft engines, they only had seconds to take cover as Japanese bombs and machine-gun bullets rained down on the airfield's crowded parking area. At the moment of attack, Putnam's ground crews were busy loading the Wildcats with fuel, bombs, and .50-caliber bullets.

Putnam's engineering officer, 1st Lt. George A. Graves, and 2nd Lt. Robert A. Conderman were in the flight tent going over the final details of the reconnaissance flight with the Philippine Clipper when the air raid alarm sounded. As Graves made a dash for his Wildcat, he was killed instantly by a direct bomb hit as he was climbing into his cockpit. Conderman also reached his Wildcat only to be struck in the legs and neck by bullets as his plane exploded, pinning his body beneath the burning Grumman. A third pilot, 2nd Lt. Frank J. Holden, was cut down by bullets while attempting to find cover. Second Lt. Henry G. Webb sustained serious wounds, while Captain Frank C. Tharin and Staff Sgt. Robert O. Arthur received minor wounds during the raid. Major Putnam sustained a painful wound from a bullet across his left shoulder while the horrific scene played out before his eyes.

The Chitose Air Group also attacked the Marine barracks at Camp 1 just beyond the end of Wake's runway. The Nells then turned their sights on Peale Island and Camp 2 on Wake's northern end where the civilian contractors were quartered. Bombs landed on the Pan American Hotel complex on Peale, killing nearly a dozen civilian employees. The Philippine Clipper was also subjected to strafing but was not seriously damaged.

After the Nells finished their attack runs and began their flight back to Roi, USMC Major Walter L.J. Bayler and Commander Cunningham were among the first to find Major Putnam bleeding from his wound and staggering near the runway in an almost "trance-like" state from the harrowing, near-death experience.

Putnam quickly regained his composure and began to reorganize his squadron while aiding in the evacuation of VMF-211's dead and wounded. Major Bayler remarked, "As for Putnam himself, I've never seen a man change so completely." Bayler further added that Putnam "emerged from the first smoke of battle as the iron-jawed commander of a hard-fighting outfit, forceful, energetic and resourceful."

VMF-211 sustained over 60 percent casualties (23 killed, 11 wounded) following the Chitose Air Group's opening strike on Wake. Three of Putnam's pilots were killed, including Lieutenant Conderman, who died at the hospital later that same evening. VMF-211 also lost irreplaceable ground personnel and equipment following Japan's daring raid.

Seven of VMF-211's Wildcats in the parking area were completely destroyed, while an eighth was heavily damaged by bullets and shrapnel. Both of the 25,000-gallon aviation fuel tanks beside the parking mat were completely destroyed along with several 55-gallon drums sitting nearby. Putnam's squadron lost spare aircraft parts, tools, radio equipment, oxygen supplies, and numerous documents and reports pertaining to the squadron's operations. To make matters worse, Captain Elrod's Wildcat was damaged when its propeller struck bomb debris near the parking area as he taxied back from his patrol.

Naval History and Heritage Command

Major Putnam immediately assigned 2nd Lt. Kinney as his engineering officer following the death of 1st Lt. Graves. "Kinney," Putnam told him, "you are now the squadron's engineering officer. We have four planes left. If you can keep them flying, I'll see that you get a medal as big as a pie."

Kinney, along with Tech. Sgt. William J. Hamilton, worked tirelessly to keep the remaining Wildcats in flyable condition. They were later assisted by Aviation Machinist Mate First Class James F. Hesson. The men spent much of their time scavenging the wrecks of destroyed Wild-

cats to keep the remaining planes airworthy throughout the course of the siege.

By the evening of December 8, the aviation Marines and the CPNAB contractors had completed the construction of several bunkers, foxholes, and lightproof aircraft revetments that allowed maintenance on the Wildcats to continue during hours of darkness.

The next morning, a formation of 27 Nells of the Chitose Air Group arrived over Wake at approximately 11:45. The twin-engined bombers approached at 13,000 feet, concentrating their attacks on the civilian hospital and barracks at Camp 2, along with the Naval Air Station on Peale. Fifty-five CPNAB workers were killed, while Marine casualties were light.

Major Devereux's 3-inch gunners brought down one of the attackers and sent a number of others home damaged by shrapnel. Two of Putnam's pilots rose to meet the Nells and scored the first victory for the squadron when 2nd Lt. David D. Kliewer and Tech. Sgt. William Hamilton downed one of the Nells. Putnam later wrote in his December 9 action report, "They never, after that first day, got through unopposed."

At 10:45 on the 10th, the Japanese arrived over Wake with a flight of 26 or 27 G3M2s for a third straight air raid. Putnam's executive officer, Captain Henry Elrod, was already aloft and was able to intercept the formation with his .50-caliber machine guns blazing away at the bombers. Elrod shot down two Nells, earning him the nickname "Hammering Hank."

Casualties were light, and VMF-211 had inflicted losses on the Chitose Air Group for the second consecutive day. Putnam's squadron had stood its ground after suffering terrible losses on December 8 and word of VMF-211's exploits quickly spread across the atoll. The news not only lifted the morale of Wake's garrison, but also in the United States shortly after.

In the early morning hours of December 11, Major Devereux's lookouts spotted lights out to sea. The Japanese were sending an amphibious invasion force consisting of three light cruisers (*Yubari, Tenryu, Tatsuta*), six destroyers (*Hayate, Oite, Mutsuki, Kisaragi, Mochizuki, Yayoi*), two transports, (*Konryu Maru* and *Kongo Maru*), and two destroyer transports (Patrol Boats 32 and 33). Rear Admiral Sadamichi Kajioka of Destroyer Squadron 6 was in overall command of the Wake invasion force when it sailed from Kwajalein in the Marshall Islands.

National Archives

ABOVE: A happy Japanese pilot (right) demonstrates to his comrades some of the aerial combat moves he made against the Marine aviators. OPPOSITE: In this 1999 painting, *The Magnificent Fight* by aviation artist John Shaw, Marine Captain Henry Elrod (in cockpit) confers with fellow pilots John Kinney (in white t-shirt) and Frank Tharin before Elrod bombed and sank the destroyer *Kisaragi.*

Devereux alerted his gunners and ordered them to hold their fire until he gave word. When the cruiser *Yubari* (Kajioka's flagship) closed within 4,500 yards of Wake, Devereux ordered his 5-inch gun crews to open fire. The 1st Marine Defense Battalion scored multiple hits on Kajioka's ships, including the destroyer *Hayate,* which was sunk by a direct hit from a 5-inch shell from Battery L on Wilkes Island, claiming the lives of all 167 sailors on board.

Putnam, Elrod, Freuler, and Tharin were already in the air when they confirmed to Major Devereux that no Japanese aircraft carriers were in the vicinity. Putnam and his aviators located Kajioka's ships and began to bomb and strafe the vessels now in full withdrawal from Wake.

The four Wildcats made their bombing runs into a barrage of heavy antiaircraft fire from the cruisers, destroyers, and transports while raking their decks with .50-caliber machine-gun fire. Putnam, Tharin, and Freuler attacked the light cruisers while Elrod dove down on the destroyer *Kisaragi.* He scored a bomb hit on the retreating destroyer, but his Wildcat sustained damage from the ship's gunners, forcing him to crash-land on Wake.

As Putnam and 2nd Lt. Kinney later approached the sinking *Kisaragi,* damage from Elrod's bomb caused the ship to explode, claiming the lives of all sailors on board.

Only two Wildcats remained, but Putnam quickly sent them up for the midday patrol with Lieutenants Kinney and Carl Davidson at the controls. The pilots did not have to wait long until 17 G3M2s arrived over Wake. Davidson downed two of the Nells, while Kinney accounted for one probable.

Although VMF-211 had suffered, so had the Japanese. With two to three bombers shot down and Captain Elrod's sinking of the *Kisaragi,* December 11 had been a historic day

for Major Putnam and his men. But the odds were not in their favor.

Early the next day, a pair of Kawanishi H6K4 "Mavis" flying boats of the Yokohama Air Group based in Majuro attacked the atoll in Wake's fifth air raid. Captain Tharin, who was already aloft on the dawn patrol, intercepted one of the raiders and quickly shot it down. Another victory for VMF-211 was scored on the evening of the 12th by Lieutenant Kliewer when he sighted and sank a Japanese submarine lurking in the waters off the atoll.

Putnam and the rest of VMF-211 were able to resume their duties for the remainder of the 12th and 13th as there was no sign of the Chitose Air Group on either day. The lull also gave Putnam an opportunity to relocate his command post to a more concealed position on the eastern side of VMF-211's charred parking area.

By December 13, many of the civilian workers of the CPNAB were understandably apprehensive about working anywhere near the airfield. As more of the laborers failed to return to their assigned work stations around the airfield, Putnam's frustration with the CPNAB workers and their superintendent, Dan Teeters, had reached a boiling point.

Following his disagreement with a group of CPNAB workers at the airfield after his arrival on December 4, he conferred with Commander Cunningham and requested more assistance from them. Putnam noted in his official report that the pace of construction work for his squadron was "progressing with slowness and confusion" and that Cunningham denied his repeated requests to round up civilian workers and force them to remain with VMF-211.

December 14 began with another early morning raid by the Yokohama Air Group when a group of Kawanishi flying boats bombed the atoll without causing damage. At noon, while Kinney, Hamilton, and Aviation Machinist Mate First Class James Hesson were working to get a third Wildcat back to operational status, 30 Nells arrived over Wake. A bomb scored a direct hit on a Wildcat inside a revetment, but Kinney and his assistants were able to salvage the engine from the burning plane by using a makeshift hoist. Putnam noted that the herculean efforts of the three men were "the most outstanding event of the whole campaign."

Back at Pearl Harbor, a rescue mission was being planned to reinforce Wake's garrison and evacuate the civilian personnel. Admiral Husband E. Kimmel, still reeling from the shock of Japan's attack on his naval base at Pearl Harbor on December 7, organized an operation to reinforce Wake with additional ammunition, supplies, aircraft, and radar, as well as a contingent of Marines from the 4th Defense Battalion.

Kimmel dispatched Task Force 14, under the command of Admiral Frank Jack Fletcher, consisting of the seaplane tender USS *Tangier* (carrying all supplies and men of the 4th Defense Battalion) and aircraft from the carrier USS *Saratoga* (CV-3) to deliver fighters from VMF-221.

The task force departed Pearl Harbor on December 15, covered by Task Force 11, which served as a diversionary tactic to distract any Japanese attention from *Saratoga* and *Tangier.* When Admiral Kimmel was relieved of his command on December 17, his temporary replacement, Vice Admiral William S. Pye, would determine the fate of Wake's ambitious rescue attempt in the coming days.

Putnam conducted the morning patrol on the 15th with the only operational Wildcat, but to his chagrin the Chitose Air Group never arrived. A flight of Mavis fly-

Painting © John D. Shaw, www.libertystudios.us

ing boats attacked Wake that evening, but their raid caused only minor damage. Thirty-two Nells bombed Wake the following afternoon, with the 1st Defense Battalion gunners claiming one shot down while damaging an additional four or five to the point that they could not make the return trip home.

The Japanese struck again on the 17th when 27 Nells attacked the atoll from 18,000 feet, followed by another raid in the late afternoon by the Yokohama Air Group. The Chitose Air Group did not attack Wake on the 18th but resumed its bombing campaign on the 19th when another 27 Nells bombed Peale Island and Camp 1 without causing significant damage.

On the afternoon of December 20, a lone U.S. Navy PBY landed in Wake's lagoon with long-awaited news of the relief force that was en route from Pearl Harbor. The Catalina was set to depart Wake for Midway the following day with Major Bayler, whohad been ordered to set up radio communications there, as the only passenger.

Putnam handed Bayler his operations report, which was to be delivered to Lt. Col. Larkin upon Bayler's return to Hawaii. Putnam also scribbled a two-page letter to his wife Virginia back home in California. "War sure is hell," Putnam wrote. "Not much squadron left, but what there is, is still in there swinging at 'em."

The PBY carrying Bayler lifted off from Wake's lagoon at 7 AM on the 21st. Bayler would famously become known as "the last man off Wake Island," as the twin-engined patrol plane winged on an easterly course toward Midway Atoll. The Japanese attacked Wake just over two hours later, only this time with planes from aircraft carriers.

The Japanese detached the aircraft carriers *Hiryu* and *Soryu* (Carrier Division 2) from the returning Pearl Harbor Task Force and launched a wave of planes, including 18 Mitsubishi A6M "Zero" fighters, to strike Wake.

Putnam was in the vicinity of Camp 2 when he heard the roar of the incoming planes. He jumped into the nearest truck and made his way toward the airfield. As the major sped down the main access road from Camp 2 to the airfield, he was repeatedly forced from the road by strafing aircraft. Barely escaping the ordeal, Putnam jumped into Wildcat number 9 and took off in pursuit of the attackers in the hope that he could locate the carriers.

After losing sight of the Japanese planes, Putnam returned to Wake in frustration. Although he was unsuccessful in his attempt, he would later earn the Navy Cross for this action.

Twenty-seven Nells from Roi bombed Wake a few hours after the naval planes of the *Hiryu* and *Soryu* struck the first blow of the day. With the arrival of the Japanese carrier planes on the 21st, the consensus among many of the Wake Islanders was that another landing attempt was forthcoming.

American machine gunners hold off the invading Japanese force. While inaccurate in some details (the artist invented the barbed wire for dramatic effect; no such obstruction existed on Wake Island), it does capture the desperate nature of the Marines' last stand.

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A Japanese illustration shows Japanese troops, some carrying samurai swords, assaulting American positions on Wake Island. The Marines lost 49 killed and two missing, the Navy had three killed, and 70 American civilians died during the siege. After the 15-day battle, 1,600 American military and civilian personnel were taken prisoner.

On the morning of December 22, Captain Freuler and 2nd Lt. Carl Davidson were on patrol when they spotted a large group of carrier planes headed toward the atoll. Freuler shot down two Nakajima B5N Type 97 "Kate" bombers, but his Wildcat was damaged by debris after one of the B5Ns exploded below him. Freuler then sustained wounds from an attacking Zero and was forced to land back at Wake. Davidson was last seen with a Zero on his tail and never returned to the atoll.

With his final two Grummans out of commission, Putnam gathered the remaining personnel of VMF-211 and reported to Major Devereux as infantry. When Japanese ships were reported out to sea around 1 AM on December 23, Devereux ordered Putnam and his group of around 30 Marines and civilians to protect the 3-inch antiaircraft gun manned by 2nd Lt. Robert M. Hanna, located south of the airstrip; Putnam was armed only with his .45-caliber pistol.

Putnam and his men arrived at the gun position not a moment too soon, for the Japanese had ordered two converted destroyer transports, Patrol Boats 32 and 33, to ground themselves on the reef along Wake's southern shoreline and send their men into the attack. Despite heavy fire from Hanna's "anti-boat" gun that ripped into the craft nearest to his position, Special Naval Landing Force (SNLF) troops frantically roped down or jumped off both transports to assault the defenders.

Major Putnam, along with Captains Elrod and Tharin, formed a defensive line around Hanna's gun, but the Japanese were pouring men onto both Wake and Wilkes Islands where a chaotic, close-quarter battle was rapidly unfolding under the night sky.

Elrod blazed away at the invaders with his Thompson submachine gun but was later killed by an SNLF rifleman as he attempted to throw a grenade. The death of "Hammering Hank," a favorite among his fellow Marines and the CPNAB workers, came as a tremendous loss for the remaining defenders. He was posthumously awarded the Medal of Honor for his heroic actions during the siege.

Major Putnam was also wounded in the face and neck by a Japanese bullet but continued to fight on despite drifting in and out of consciousness from blood loss.

The Wake relief force was at sea approximately 500 miles to the east but was delayed by bad weather. Admiral Pye was less than encouraged to continue with the rescue operation now that he had learned that Japanese carriers were in the vicinity of the island.

When Pye received the message, "Enemy on island, issue in doubt" from Commander Cunningham, he came to the bitter conclusion that Wake could not be relieved. Pye's order to recall the Wake relief force came as a shock to many around him, including Rear Admiral Frank Jack Fletcher, who gave the order from the bridge of the *Saratoga* to return to Pearl Harbor. Putnam and the remaining Wake Islanders were now left to fend for themselves.

After nearly six hours of continuous combat, planes from the *Hiryu* and *Soryu* continued to pound Wake's remaining defensive positions. When the sun finally broke over the atoll, the silhouettes of several Japanese ships now appeared on Wake's horizon; Admiral Kajioka had returned with greater numbers than his first attempted landing on the 11th.

At around 8 AM, more than a thousand Japanese SNLF men were now on Wake, forcing Commander Cunningham to make the agonizing decision to surrender rather than needlessly sacrificing additional American lives. Major Devereux had a white surrender flag made and quickly contacted the Japanese, who then escorted Devereux and his aide, Sergeant Donald R. Malleck, around the atoll to direct Wake's defenders to lay down their arms.

When Devereux and his surrender party reached Hanna's gun—still being guarded by VMF-211—Putnam emerged from his position, bleeding profusely from his facial wound. Devereux remarked in his book, *The Story of Wake Island,* that Putnam "looked like hell itself ... his face was a red smear."

Putnam, Tharin, and Hanna were left under guard as Devereux made his way across the atoll to spread the grim news. By the late morning of the 23rd, all resistance had ceased. As the Japanese began questioning their new captives, Putnam, Tharin, and Lieutenants Kinney and Kliewer were singled out to be executed after SNLF men obtained a roster of VMF-211's aviators. The Japanese were clearly incensed by the

heavy losses that Putnam's squadron had inflicted on them during the siege and were now thirsty for revenge.

On January 9, 1942, Putnam's wife, Virginia, received the first of several letters from USMC Headquarters in Washington, D.C., indicating that her husband had been stationed on Wake when the Japanese attacked and was likely a prisoner of war. It would not be until October 1942 that she would receive a letter from him: "There is no way of saying how your letters buoyed me up," he wrote, "and how much brighter the world looks now that I have heard from you and know that all of you are well."

The Japanese herded Wake's nearly 1,600 surviving military and civilian personnel to the airfield where SNLF guards were posted with machine guns at the ready. After the decision was made to spare the lives of Putnam and the rest of Wake's garrison, the major was questioned by Japanese intelligence officers. Putnam's extensive background in aviation and communications was of vital interest to the Japanese, but he refused to talk.

On January 11, Wake's Marines and civilians were informed that they would be evacuated from the atoll aboard the Japanese liner *Nitta Maru* the following day.

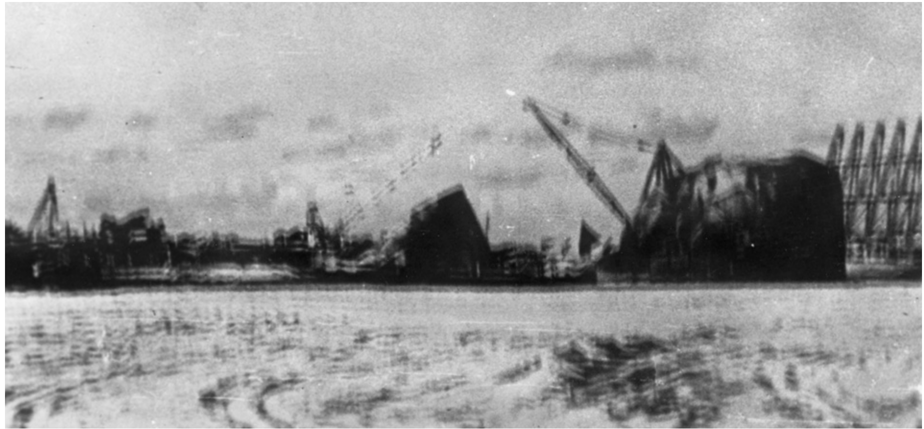
Putnam and around 30 of Wake's officers boarded the ship where they were shoved into a cramped space that once served as the ship's mailroom. The men were not permitted to speak, and all valuables were confiscated. The civilians and enlisted men were then forced into the bowels of the ship where some endured savage beatings at the hands of their captors.

The *Nitta Maru* departed Wake Island on January 12, 1942, leaving behind those who were too sick or wounded to be moved along with a group of civilian contractors needed for future construction projects; 98 of these civilians were later executed on Wake by their Japanese captors on October 7, 1943.

After spending six tense days at sea, the *Nitta Maru* docked at Yokohama on January 18. Putnam was among 20 men who were taken off the ship for further interrogation. After the *Nitta Maru* left Yokohama for Shanghai with the remaining Wake Islanders, Putnam was sent by rail to the Zentsuji prisoner of war camp where he would spend the majority of his time as a prisoner of the Japanese Empire. Five Americans (three Navy men and two men from VMF-211) were later beheaded by the Japanese aboard the *Nitta Maru* as the ship was en route to Shanghai.

National Archives

ABOVE: Civilian contractors are marched off to captivity after Wake fell to the Japanese, December 23, 1941. Some contractors remained to finish construction projects under Japanese occupation. Fearing a fifth-column uprising, the Japanese executed 98 contractors in October 1943—an atrocity for which the atoll commander, Rear Admiral Shigematsu Sakaibara, was hanged after the war. BELOW: Remains of fuel storage tanks near the Marine camp on Wake. OPPOSITE: Seven of the destroyed F4F Wildcats of VMF-211 on Wake after the island fell. The plane in the foreground was flown by Elrod during his December 11 attack that sank the destroyer *Kisaragi.*



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Arriving at Zentsuji on January 29, Putnam spent his first few weeks in captivity getting acclimated to his new surroundings. On March 7, Putnam began recording the daily events at Zentsuji in a series of diaries that were issued to him by his captors.

Over the next 3½ years, he vividly described the day-to-day life of a prisoner of war. Fortunately for Putnam and the other Wake Islanders, they enjoyed one of the highest survival rates among Allied prisoners who were captured by the Japanese during World War II.

The Zentsuji prison camp was located on the island of Shikoku and held American,

British, Australian, and Dutch soldiers captured during the first months of Japan's offensive operations across the South Pacific in late 1941 and early 1942.

Opening only a few weeks prior to Putnam's arrival, Zentsuji was meant to be a "show camp" to demonstrate for the International Red Cross Japan's "humane treatment" of Allied prisoners.

It was not until June 23, 1945, that Putnam was moved out of Zentsuji and transferred to Rokuroshi (Honshu Island) prison camp, where he spent the remaining three months of his captivity. Following the atomic bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki on August 6 and 9, respectively, supplies soon began reaching Rokuroshi from American planes. After nearly four years of captivity, a gaunt Paul Putnam returned home in September 1945.

His love of country and the Marines had not faded during his ordeal. In March 1946, he reported to the Marine Corps School at Quantico for senior course instruction at the Command and Staff School. He then served as deputy chief of staff with the 2nd Marine Aircraft Wing, later becoming the commanding officer of Marine Air Group 14.

In October 1951, toward the end of his career, Putnam was transferred back to the West Coast when he was attached to Fleet Marine Force Pacific (FMFPAC) at the Marine Corps Air Station based at El Toro, California.

After a distinguished military career, Putnam rose to the rank of brigadier general upon his retirement in 1956.

In addition to receiving the Navy Cross for his actions at Wake, Putnam's decorations include the Nicaraguan Cross of Valor, Purple Heart Medal (with star in lieu of a second), Presidential Unit Citation, Navy Unit Commendation, Nicaraguan Medal of Merit with star, Marine Corps Expeditionary Medal with "W" device, Asiatic-Pacific Campaign Medal, Air Medal with gold stars for his second and third awards, World War II Victory Medal, Prisoner-of-War Medal, Navy American Defense Service Medal, and the Second Nicaraguan Campaign Medal.

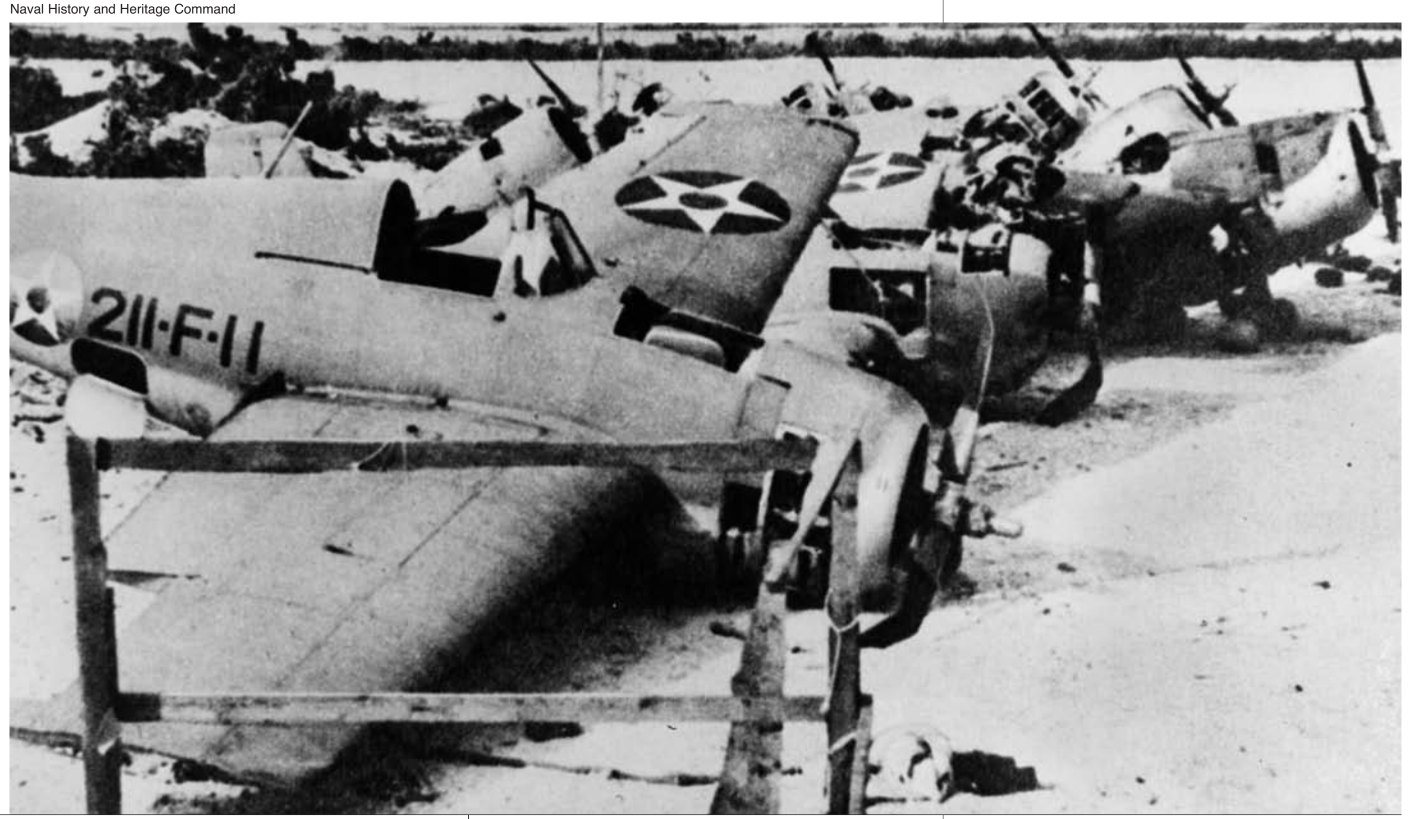
An avid hunter, golfer, and fisherman, Putnam lived out his retirement surrounded by his wife and three daughters. Paul Albert Putnam died on May 21, 1982, in Mesa, Arizona, at the age of 78.

Paul Putnam's legacy is one of humility and sacrifice combined with a strong and steady nerve. In a 1942 interview with the Mason City (Iowa) *Globe-Gazette,* Putnam's wife Virginia described him as "the most placid, sensible human being I've ever seen. He could get along anywhere. He is so modest that other people have always had to tell me of his exploits before he would."

Wake Island is currently under the jurisdiction of the Eleventh Air Force's Pacific Air Force Regional Support Center (PACAF) and is strictly off limits to civilians. Inside Wake's airport terminal building is the Wake Island Museum, which houses several artifacts and relics pertaining to the atoll's storied history.

A prominent framed photograph of Paul Putnam hangs on a wall directly below a large wooden plaque with the famous Wake Island Avengers emblem depicting a lion over a map of the atoll. It is a fitting tribute to a leader of unparalleled courage and integrity. □

Naval History and Heritage Command



Disaster at Villers-Bocage

Audacious panzer ace Michael Wittmann and a force of heavy Tiger tanks destroyed a British armored column at this once peaceful Norman village.

By Major General Michael Reynolds

British General Sir Bernard Montgomery was given command of two Allied armies for the invasion of Normandy: Lt. Gen. Omar Bradley's First U.S. Army and Lt. Gen. Miles Dempsey's Second British Army. His overall plan for the Normandy campaign, and indeed it was his plan, is well known.

Following airborne landings at each end of the proposed beachhead, four Allied corps would land on five beaches; it was intended that they penetrate to an average depth of about 10 kilometers on D-day and capture the towns of Isigny, Bayeux, and Caen. Montgomery then planned to hold Caen and the high ground immediately to its south, while by D+9 an American and a British corps would secure the line of the high ground running from St. Lô through Caumont to Villers-Bocage.

It was also planned that another U.S. corps would capture the major port of Cherbourg in the same time frame. From this firm base, General George Patton's Third U.S. Army, which would by then be operative, would join the First Army and expand south. By D+50, it was hoped that the lodgment area would comprise the Brittany ports and France north of the Loire River and east to the Deauville-Tours line. By D+90 the Allies hoped to reach the Seine River.

This, then, was the plan outlined by Montgomery in front of King George VI, Prime Minister Winston Churchill, Supreme Allied Commander General Dwight D. Eisenhower, and all senior commanders at St. Paul's School, London, on May 15, 1944. All who attended were left with no doubt about Monty's inten-

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In Wittmann's *Tiger I in Villers-Bocage* by Barry Spicer, SS Obersturmführer Michael Wittmann pauses on the outskirts of the French village to confer with his gunner, Bobby Woll. Although there is some conjecture as to Woll's presence in Wittmann's tank on June 13, 1944, the artist has chosen to include him in the scene. Woll eventually commanded his own Tiger I.

tions. General Omar Bradley later wrote:

"The British and Canadian armies were to decoy the enemy reserves and draw them to their front on the extreme eastern edge of the Allied beachhead. Thus while Monty taunted the enemy at Caen, we were to make our break on the long roundabout road to Paris. When reckoned in terms of national pride, this British decoy mission became a sacrificial one, for while we tramped around the outside flank, the British were to sit in place and pin down Germans. Yet, strategically it fitted into a logical division of labours, for it was toward Caen that the enemy reserves would race once the alarm was sounded."

Montgomery's plan for encircling Caen was based on a major thrust to the west of the city, leading to the high ground northeast of Villers-Bocage and then east to Evrecy on the far side of the Odon River. The strategic importance of this high ground near Villers-Bocage cannot be overstated. Point 213 could be seen for miles, and as such it dominated the surrounding countryside.

The threat to the Villers-Bocage area posed a major problem for the German commanders, particularly SS General Sepp Dietrich, because the troops earmarked to fill the widening gap between his I SS Panzer Corps and General Erich Marcks' LXXXIV Corps had yet to arrive. This gap was to be filled with the 3rd Parachute and 2nd Panzer Divisions, though the tanks and wheeled vehicles of 2nd Panzer were not expected to arrive before June 14, or to be ready for action until the 15th at the earliest. In the meantime, the gap would have to be filled by light reconnaissance forces.

Six days after the Allied landings, Dietrich no longer believed a concentrated counterattack against the British and Canadians in the area to the west of Caen was possible. He complained to General Friedrich Dollmann's Seventh Army Headquarters that he had no reserves, forgetting that in fact he had one reserve which was about to arrive in sector and play a dramatic part in forthcoming events: the 101st SS Heavy Panzer Battalion with its superb Tiger I tanks!

Map © 2017 Philip Schwartzberg, Meridian Mapping, Minneapolis, MN

The crisis for the Germans came when the U.S. 1st Infantry Division advanced and captured Caumont on the American left flank. This village stands on a high ridge between Villers-Bocage and St. Lô and was essential to the German defense in that area. General Marcks himself was killed on this day, June 12, in a fighter-bomber attack while leading a group of hastily assembled minor units in a last attempt to defend this vital ground. However, it was too late and by nightfall on June 12, after an advance of eight kilometers, the Americans entered the village.

The news that the Americans had found a gap electrified the British command. The commander of XXX Corps, Lt. Gen. G.C. Bucknall, met his superior, General Dempsey, at the Bayeux railway station at 1145 hours on June 12 and told him that his reconnaissance troops were in contact with the U.S. 1st Infantry Division and all seemed to be going well. Dempsey immediately told Bucknall to switch his 7th Armored Division (the famous "Desert Rats") from its existing front and to push it through behind his armored reconnaissance battalion, which had reached Caumont with the Americans, and endeavor to get to Villers-Bocage that way.

Montgomery told his chief of staff that night that this move could be a "turning point in the battle."

Imperial War Museum

In view of the obvious threat to his left flank, Dietrich decided to use his only reserve as soon as it arrived in sector and before it had time for the urgent maintenance and repairs its Tigers so badly needed. During the move from the other side of the Seine, SS Major Hein von Westernhagen's 101st SS Heavy Panzer Battalion had suffered badly. Damaged in an air attack near Paris, the battalion had been constantly harried from the air and 27 men had been killed or wounded. Many tanks had broken down due to the long move on their own tracks. Even so, while the Headquarters and SS Lieutenant Hanno Raasch's decimated 3rd Company remained in the vicinity of Falaise with only one operational tank, the other two weakened companies were ordered, late on June 12, to move across the Orne and Odon and take up reserve positions behind the Panzer Lehr and *Hitlerjugend* Divisions.

The 1st Company of SS Captain Rolf Möbius, with nine Tigers, was located behind the *Hitlerjugend* in the region of Noyers-Bocage, some nine kilometers northeast of Villers-Bocage. SS Lieutenant Michael Wittmann's 2nd Company, with only five tanks, was to be found behind Panzer Lehr, in a small wood directly south of the tiny hamlet of Montbrocq on the critical Point 213, some two kilometers northeast of Villers-Bocage.

Bundesarchiv

By June 1944, Michael Wittmann was already one of the most famous officers in the Waffen-SS and its greatest panzer ace. He had joined the *Leibstandarte* Division in 1937. As a sergeant he commanded an armored car in Poland and France, and he went on to earn the Iron Cross 2nd Class in Greece. Wittmann was wounded twice and won the Iron Cross 1st Class in Russia in 1941, before being sent to an SS Officers' School and commissioned second lieutenant in December 1942.

After only one year as a tank commander in Russia, Wittmann was credited with 66 tank kills and had been awarded the Knight's Cross. On Hitler's birthday in 1944, Wittmann was promoted to the rank of SS lieutenant, and 10 days later he received Oakleaves to his Knight's Cross. In April 1944, he was given command of the 2nd SS Panzer Company in the 101st SS Heavy Panzer Battalion. He and his gunner, Bobby Woll, had by then been credited with an astonishing 119 enemy armored fighting vehicles destroyed. Woll, who had also been awarded the Knight's Cross, had now been given his own Tiger.

At this time the panzer and panzergrenadier regiments of General Fritz Bayerlein's Panzer Lehr Division were facing north, successfully defending the Tilly-Lingèvres-La Belle-Epine front, and his reconnaissance battalion was covering, as best it could, the left flank.

BELOW: The Tigers of Obersturmführer Michael Wittmann's 2nd Company of the 101st SS Heavy Tank Battalion round a curve on their way to the front. LEFT: A British tank churns up a cloud of dust on the advance near Tilly-sur-Seulles on June 13, 1944. OPPOSITE: Montgomery's plan for taking Caen involved securing the high ground northeast of Villers-Bocage.

When Maj. Gen. Bobby Erskine, commander of the 7th Armored Division, was given his new orders on June 12, he had to reorganize his division for its planned deep probe around the back of Panzer Lehr. Although Erskine would be advancing on a very narrow front with an exposed left

Imperial War Museum

ABOVE: A British armored column pauses in its advance near Tilly-sur-Seulles, while local citizens continue with their daily routine. BELOW: Michael Wittmann, photographed a week after the battle.

Author's Collection

flank, he knew that Dietrich's panzer divisions were fully committed and that there were no immediate German reserves. An Ultra intelligence decrypt on the 12th indicated that 2nd Panzer was on its way to support Panzer Lehr in the neighborhood of Villers-Bocage, but it still had some way to go to reach the battle area. The British generals had every reason to expect success the following day, but then none of them knew about the 14 newly arrived Tigers.

Erskine decided to lead with his 22nd Armored Brigade, which comprised two tank battalions, one motorized infantry battalion, one self-propelled artillery battalion less a battery, and an antitank battery. To provide more infantry for its move through the "bocage" (hedgerow) countryside and, in particular, to help it occupy Villers-Bocage, Erskine reinforced it with an additional battalion from his infantry brigade. The commander of the 22nd Armored Brigade was Brigadier "Looney" Hinde. As his nickname suggests, Hinde was a flamboyant cavalryman, much admired for his personal bravery.

The other half of Erskine's division was Brigadier Michael Ekins' truck-mounted 131st Infantry Brigade, which normally consisted of three battalions and a towed artillery battalion. Ekins, who had been recently appointed to command the brigade, was a much more pedestrian officer than Hinde and was unknown to his officers and men. To balance the division, Erskine took the 22nd Brigade's third tank battalion and gave it to Ekins. In simple terms, the armored brigade had two tank battalions and two infantry battalions, while the infantry brigade had one tank battalion and two infantry battalions, and they were each supported by an artillery battalion.

In addition to these two brigades, Erskine had an armored reconnaissance battalion of which one company was given to 131 Brigade, another told to guard the left rear of the division near Le Pont Mulot, and the remainder given the task of right-flank protection under "Looney" Hinde's command. On top of all this, the XXX Corps' armored car reconnaissance battalion was also given the task of guarding the flanks.

Brigadier Hinde gave his orders at 1500 hours on the 12th. The Stuart reconnaissance tanks were to lead, followed by the Cromwell medium tanks of Lt. Col. Viscount Cranley's armored battalion, with an infantry company and antitank detachment under command. This battle group was to advance, via Livry, to Villers-Bocage and then move on to seize Point 213.

Another tank battalion and infantry company were to take the high ground to the southwest of the town at Maisoncelles-Pelvey and the antitank battery with its splendid self-propelled 17-pounders was to cover the gap between the two groups. The additional infantry battalion allotted to Hinde was to occupy Villers-Bocage itself. As the operation progressed, Erskine planned for 131 Brigade to move forward and occupy the Livry area.

The advance began at 1600 hours on the 12th, but after a short distance a Stuart light tank was lost to a single German antitank gun and a few infantrymen near the hamlet of Livry. It took until 2000 hours to clear this minor opposition, and it was then decided to halt for the night and advance again at first light. Hinde said later, in his official report, that he decided to halt to hide the fact that his objective was Villers-Bocage. This decision was the first in a series of errors, which led, inexorably, to a British disaster.

Most accounts of the battle of Villers-Bocage rely heavily on the memoirs of so-called "eyewitnesses" or participants. Unfortunately, many of these have become embellished with the passage of time, and this has led, in many cases, to an inaccurate or misleading picture of what really happened on June 13. Even the official British his-

tory of World War II, *Victory in the West*, *Vol. I, The Battle of Normandy,* by L.F. Ellis, published by Her Majesty's Stationery Office in 1962, gives a totally distorted account of events on this critical day.

This author has no intention of trying to rehash the minutiae of the battle, but rather to describe the critical events and to then discuss what went wrong and the repercussions. The bottom line in the Battle of Villers-Bocage is that on the morning of June 13, Michael Wittmann in a single Tiger I, supported only marginally by his other four tanks, brought the 7th Armored Division to a complete halt. How did this happen?

Hinde's brigade continued its advance at 0530 hours on June 13. No reconnaissance vehicles led the advance. Those of the leading armored battalion traveled behind the tanks and infantry. This significant mistake can be explained only by Hinde and Cranley's attitude to the forthcoming operation. The brigade chief of staff told this author that the latter had used the expression "a jolly good swan" when discussing the advance to Point 213 and beyond!

Both: Bundesarchiv

ABOVE: This long line of battered British vehicles is mute testimony to the ferocity of Wittmann's attack at Villers-Bocage. The vehicles were blown up while parked on a hill leading to Point 213 along the N175 road running northeast from the town. TOP: A PzKpfw IV "634" of the Panzer Lehr (far left) has an optimal view of the Villers-Bocage street from its vantage point behind a house.

The order of march of Hinde's leading battle group was as follows: a tank company with an artillery observation tank, an infantry company and antitank detachment mounted in half-tracks and light tracked vehicles, half the reconnaissance light tanks and four headquarters tanks of the leading tank battalion, accompanied by two more artillery observation tanks, and then the other half of the reconnaissance troop and the other two tank companies.

Following behind this battle group came Hinde's tactical headquarters, the artillery battalion less a battery, an engineer platoon, and then the additional infantry battalion in trucks. The second battle group of the brigade, a tank battalion with an infantry company, came next, with the antitank battery bringing up the rear.

Moving through Amaye, the leading tanks reached Villers-Bocage at approximately 0800 hours and, finding no enemy, continued their advance up the hill toward Point 213. On reaching the high ground, they halted where they could look down the long, straight road leading toward Caen, less than 20 kilometers away. The infantry company and its antitank detachment halted nose-to-tail behind the tanks, and the men dismounted to stretch their legs and have a cup of tea.

At that moment, Michael Wittmann's Tiger emerged from cover on the south side of the road and, after knocking out the rear tank, drove down the infantry column at a range of about 50 to 80 meters, shooting up the vehicles as he went. Wittmann said later that he had no time to deploy his other Tigers, but ordered them to hold their ground and not to retreat a step. He then drove into Villers-Bocage, knocking out the three light reconnaissance tanks, the four headquarters tanks, which had halted on the eastern outskirts of the town when Viscount Cranley had gone forward in his scout car to see his leading tank company on Point 213; and the two unarmed artillery tanks whose guns had been removed to make room for extra radios. The Brigade War Diary says the headquarters tanks were knocked out by 0830 hours.

Imperial War Museum

The British recaptured what was left of Villers-Bocage on August 5, 1944. This view of a knocked-out Sherman tank and ruined buildings reveals the extent of the damage that two months of fierce combat had wrought.

At 1000 hours, the tank company on Point 213 reported being surrounded and attacked by Tiger tanks. These were, of course, Wittmann's other four Tigers. Half an hour later, Viscount Cranley reported that his position was untenable and withdrawal impossible, and at 1035 hours all contact with the British tanks on Point 213 was lost.

In the meantime, the second tank company of the leading armored battalion had halted at the entrance to Villers-Bocage and the third was in Tracy-Bocage, two kilometers further east, where the second battle group joined it during the morning. Brigadier Hinde's tactical headquarters was less than four kilometers away to the east of Amaye, and he himself was somewhere in the forward area in his scout car.

At 1000 hours Hinde gave orders for his second infantry battalion to enter Villers-Bocage, but he was not heard from or seen again until he reappeared at his headquarters later that afternoon. In summary, therefore, by mid-morning there were five British tank companies sitting uncommitted just to the west of Villers-Bocage.

Shortly after 1000 hours, Lt. Col. Desmond Gordon, commanding the additional infantry battalion and acting on Hinde's orders, told his reconnaissance and antitank platoons to move into the town, while the rest of his battalion debused from its trucks at St. Germain and advanced on foot.

Not surprisingly, Wittmann now found himself in trouble. He was without infantry support and, as with any tank in a built-up area, highly vulnerable to short-range weapons. He said later that he had lost radio contact with his company and was unable to summon help. His citation for this action says, "In the centre of the town his tank was immobilized by an enemy heavy anti-tank gun." Even so, he and his crew managed to bail out and, after a walk of some seven kilometers, Wittmann reached the headquarters of Panzer Lehr at Orbois, to the north of Villers-Bocage.

Again according to Wittmann's citation: "He reported there to the 1a [Operations officer], turned about with fifteen Panzer IVs from the Panzer Lehr Division and once more headed for Villers-Bocage. His amphibious Volkswagen had caught up with him by that time. In it he drove to the 1st Company [Möbius], which was deployed along the main road toward Villers-Bocage. He briefed them on his impressions of the fighting and the situation and deployed them against the town."

The Mk IVs mentioned in Wittmann's citation did not in fact try to enter Villers-Bocage, but took up a screening position 1,500 meters to the north at Villy-Bocage.

Between 1130 hours and noon, Gordon's three infantry companies joined his reconnaissance and antitank platoons in Villers-Bocage.

The 22 Brigade War Diary says that at 1235 hours there were five Tigers and another unspecified tank trying to encircle the leading tank company on Point 213. The history of the Panzer Lehr Division confirms that a few of its Mk IVs, which had been under-

going maintenance at Parfouru four kilometers northeast of Villers-Bocage, took part in this action.

At 1240 hours, Viscount Cranley, the commanding officer of the leading tank battalion— somewhere on Point 213 but out of touch with his companies—radioed for a second time that he was surrounded; and at about 1300 hours the surviving tanks on Point 213 surrendered. Cranley was captured separately and turned up in a German prison camp near Argentan on the 15th.

The leading battle group of the 22nd Armored Brigade had disintegrated. The losses were serious—13 killed, five wounded, 170 missing (nearly all prisoners), 20 Cromwells, four Firefly Shermans, three Stuarts, three artillery tanks, 16 light-tracked vehicles, 14 half-tracks, and two 6-pounder antitank guns. These, however, would pale into insignificance when compared with those that would result from the failure of the 7th Armored Division operation.

Sometime after 1300 hours, Möbius ordered his 1st Company Tigers to advance into Villers-Bocage. They were accompanied by the Panzer Lehr Mk IVs. At least one Tiger and one Mk IV were knocked out by infantry antitank weapons and by sticky bombs dropped from upper-story windows or thrown from ground floors. More were claimed by the infantry antitank platoon and second tank company. In 1979, Möbius told the former chief of staff of the *Hitlerjugend* Division, Hubert Meyer, that his company withdrew after losing three tanks "to close range weapons." Six Tigers and two Mk IVs were found in the town after the battle, and the 1st and 2nd SS Tiger companies suffered a total of 10 killed and 12 wounded during the day.

Following the withdrawal of Möbius's Tigers, the British infantry companies and antitank guns, together with the tanks already in the town, moved to cover the main approaches to Villers-Bocage. Sometime after 1430 hours Brigadier Ekins, commander of 131 Brigade, paid a short visit to Lt. Col. Gordon in the town.

By this time it was raining. Gordon, a highly experienced officer, told Ekins that enemy infantry were beginning to infiltrate his positions. These were in fact from a scratch force hastily put together by Panzer Lehr, possibly reinforced by the leading elements of the 2nd Panzer Division. Ekins said he thought the situation was hopeless and left, not to be seen again by anyone until the following morning. Exactly what he was doing in another brigade commander's sector at all remains a mystery.

At 1525 hours, Gordon drove back to the 22 Brigade Tactical Headquarters near Amaye. Brigadier Hinde had reappeared there during the afternoon, but he refused to discuss the rapidly deteriorating situation with his staff and issued no orders. Gordon explained to the brigade staff officers that unless his battalion was reinforced it was likely to be overwhelmed.

In the meantime, General Erskine had finally recognized the urgent need for more infantry, and at 1500 hours he placed another battalion from 131 Brigade under Hinde's command. It moved forward from the Livry area at 1515 hours.

At 1600 hours enemy infantry were reported in the southeast corner of Villers-Bocage, and at 1650 hours Hinde told Erskine that the position in the town was "unsatisfactory." A withdrawal was sanctioned, with the proviso that the high ground just to the west, around Point 174, should be held at all costs.

At 1700 hours, only 15 minutes before the extra infantry battalion started to arrive in Villers-Bocage, Hinde at last gave some orders—for the mixed tank and infantry force already in the town to withdraw. At this time, four tank companies, an antitank battery with 17-pounders, the greater part of two armored reconnaissance units, and an artillery battalion were sitting impotently only two miles west of Villers-Bocage.

By 2000 hours, the British defenders of Villers-Bocage, together with the rest of 22 Brigade, were in position on the high ground to the west of the town, which they were forced to defend throughout the following day and evening.

At 1200 hours on June 14, Bucknall decided to withdraw the whole 7th Armored Division to positions northeast of Briquesard during the forthcoming night. In his personal diary he claimed to have received the Army commander's agreement to this withdrawal at 1400 hours. The move was covered by the noise of 300 RAF aircraft dropping over 1,700 tons of bombs south and east of Villers-Bocage and on Evrecy, where one Tiger of the 3rd Company of the 101st SS Heavy Panzer Battalion was destroyed and three others put out of action. There were 29 casualties, including the company commander.

In his official report after the battle, "Looney" Hinde complained that the country on both sides of the main road from Villers-Bocage to Caen was much closer than it appeared on the map and that it was easy for enemy tanks to remain hidden close to the road. This is an extraordinary complaint since it is a clear criticism of his own command ability and that of his subordinates.

So ended the battle of Villers-Bocage. The Germans occupied the town and would remain there for another two months. The failure of the British thrust inevitably necessitated a series of extremely costly operations to remove the Germans from the Caen sector.

In retrospect, it has to be said that the 7th Armored Division had been asked to carry out a type of operation for which it was untrained and for which its commanders were not mentally tuned—blitzkrieg. In the event, many of the commanders at every level—company, battalion, brigade, division, and corps—failed Montgomery and, more importantly, failed their men. They displayed none of the panache, drive, imagination, or willingness to take risks that this operation demanded. One can only guess at what might have happened if the roles been reversed and officers in Sepp Dietrich's Corps, men like Kurt Meyer, Jochen Peiper, and Max Wünsche, had been in command, with their tanks operating, like those of the British, under conditions of total air superiority.

Many excuses have been offered in mitigation of this disaster. One is that the "bocage" made it difficult and dangerous for the British tanks and gave an advantage to the Germans. In his official report after the battle, "Looney" Hinde complained that the country on both sides of the main road from Villers-Bocage to Caen was much closer than it appeared on the map and that it was easy for enemy tanks to remain hidden close to the road. This is an extraordinary complaint since it is a clear criticism of his own command ability and that of his subordinates. If it was true that enemy tanks could easily hide close to the line of advance, why did he not insist upon proper air or at least ground reconnaissance?

Another reason given for the failure is that the 7th Armored Division lacked sufficient infantry for its task. This argument ignores the fact that the majority of the infantry in the 7th Armored Division remained uncommitted on the critical day and that a complete infantry brigade was in corps reserve. In fact, two infantry brigades of another division were also unemployed. Any of these three infantry brigades could have been allotted to Erskine before his division set off on its epic task, and the blame for this failure to concentrate sufficient forces at the right place at the right time must be laid at the door of Bucknall, the commander of XXX Corps.

But the major reason given, both at the time and since the war, for the failure of the 7th Armored Division operation was the unexpected arrival of the 2nd Panzer Division on the southern outskirts of Villers-Bocage during the late morning of June 13. This is a curious argument—first because 2nd Panzer's tanks were nowhere near Villers-Bocage at this time, and second because, even if both the division's panzergrenadier regiments had arrived together they would still have had only the same number of infantry companies as the 7th Armored Division: 16. Army panzer divisions had only four panzergrenadier battalions, unlike those of the Waffen-SS, which had six.

The whole business of 2nd Panzer counterattacking in the Villers-Bocage area on the 13th is a myth. Dietrich's chief of staff, Fritz Kraemer, in his postwar interrogation, confirmed that the only combat element of 2nd Panzer to arrive in the Caumont sector on June 13 was part of the reconnaissance battalion. The fact that there was only minor sniping and a few patrols against the British positions west of Villers-Bocage during the night of June 13-14 speaks for itself.

Even Hinde admitted in his official report that during the evening of the 13th enemy infantry confined their activities to patrolling and sniping and that enemy shelling was negligible.

The simple fact is that neither 2nd Panzer Division nor Panzer Lehr was capable of launching a decisive blow against the Desert Rats on the night of June 13 or on the day of the 14th.

In a postwar interview, General Heinrich von Lüttwitz, the commander of 2nd Panzer, said that the trains bringing his tanks were hit so many times by Allied aircraft that they had to finish the journey from Amiens by road, and "it was not until 18th June that 80 of the original 120 tanks finally limped into the line around Caumont." Yet, the mere suggestion that 2nd Panzer had arrived in the Caumont-Villers-Bocage area was enough, apparently, to frighten most of the senior British commanders, including Montgomery himself.

Even on June 14, the German offensive capability was very limited. The first attack on the new British positions to the west of the town did not come until 1100 hours; it was from the east and carried out only by infantry. According to the history of Panzer Lehr, it was mounted by their reinforced divisional reconnaissance group. A second attack developed at around 1930 hours on the southern front, and this was almost certainly launched by personnel of 2nd Panzer. They were supported by four Tigers of Möbius's 1st Company.

Exaggerated reports of the strength of the second attack led to urgent requests for additional artillery support leading, according to the British official history, to 160 guns (84 British and 76 American 155s) going into action to support the defenders. Even so, reports of 11 German tanks being destroyed and several hundred Germans killed, mainly by artillery, are certainly much exaggerated. One Tiger was damaged and later recovered.

Even Hinde, in his official report, said, "in view of the enemy's efforts," it was questionable "whether the expenditure of artillery and small arms ammunition was justified." Unfortunately, the call for support from American guns gave the impression that matters were much more serious than they really were and this led to a totally false picture being painted in later years. David Eisenhower, Ike's grandson, in his book *Eisenhower at War 1943-1945,* wrote in 1986, "U.S. V Corps artillery intervention had prevented a rout, but the British had been forced to retreat."

No, excuses will not do. This was a serious defeat and the real reason for it is very clear: the incompetence of the senior commanders. The whole operation was badly set up and, as already mentioned, some of the officers who led it were unprofessional and mentally

Bundesarchiv

ABOVE: On June 30, 1944, two weeks after Wittmann's astounding feat of gunnery, his Tiger I tank lies disabled and abandoned in Villers-Bocage following an Allied bombing attack. BELOW: The scars of battle all but gone, the same street in Villers-Bocage that was the scene of utter devastation in the above photo is shown today in the now-quiet French town.

Kevin Hymel

incapable of carrying it through when unforeseen complications arose.

Hinde's initial decision to halt at Livry on the evening of the 12th, instead of advancing the mere 10 kilometers to Villers-Bocage, is incomprehensible. Halting was unlikely to confuse anyone. It was inevitable that British troops would turn east and seek the high ground south of Tilly. Hinde's infantry could have done it on their feet before midnight, and Villers-Bocage could have been made a fortress before first light, making it a perfect platform for further advance.

It was when things started to go wrong that the command system really fell apart. Hinde and Cranley appear to have issued no orders at all during the most critical phases of the battle. However, because their staffs and subordinates thought, correctly, that they were still somewhere in the battle area, they were naturally reluctant to take over and give orders with which their commanders might disagree.

Erskine's failure to use 131 Brigade which, with a complete tank battalion, two infantry battalions, and an artillery regiment, was sitting doing nothing of value except "holding a firm base" between Livry and Torteval from 1100 hours, must be placed in Montgomery's category of "criminal." Had the divisional commander personally moved forward and taken a firm grip on the situation, the results could have been dramatic. If he had visited Hinde's headquarters near Amaye he would have seen that only half the brigade had been committed. There were in fact more than enough troops available within his division to hold on to Villers-Bocage and Point 174 and to occupy the high ground at Maisoncelles-Pelvey as required in the original plan.

According to the 22 Brigade War Diary, at 2130 hours on June 13, after the withdrawal from Villers-Bocage, the brigade still had 155 tanks operational, well over 100 of which had not fired a shot all day. This figure does not include the Cromwells of the divisional armored reconnaissance battalion or the 17-pounders of the anti-tank battery, which had taken no part in the battle at all.

At the higher level, Bucknall, commander of XXX Corps, did not seem to comprehend that by withdrawing the 7th Armored Division on the nights of the 13th and 14th, instead of reinforcing or even sacrificing it, he forfeited all chance of Panzer Lehr weakening its front at Tilly, which was clearly its center of gravity. This might have opened the way for his reserves. In other words, it could have stretched the I SS Panzer Corps, and Panzer Lehr in particular, to a point where it would break. His policy was a negation of blitzkrieg.

It is not surprising that after June 13 neither Montgomery nor Dempsey had any real faith in Erskine or Bucknall. Within two months they and Hinde had been sacked.

Michael Wittmann was awarded swords to his Knight's Cross for his amazing performance on June 13 and promoted to SS captain. His citation ended, "With the count of 13th June, Wittmann has achieved a total number of victories of 138 enemy tanks and 132 anti-tank guns with his personal Panzer."

Retired Major General Michael Reynolds is a graduate of the Royal Military Academy at Sandhurst. He served in the British Army around the world and was seriously wounded during the Korean War. He is the former director of NATO's Military Plans and Policy Division and the author of five well-received books.

“BUT HERE ARE MEN WHO FOUGHT IN GALLANT ACTIONS, AS GALLANT AS ever hero’s fought,” wrote the poet Lord Byron (1788-1824). These words apply equally well to many battles fought after the poet’s death, none more so than the conquest of Eniwetok Atoll in the Marshall Islands in 1944.

For Americans of a certain age today, the name Eniwetok may call to mind a palm tree-covered Pacific coral atoll where, on October 31, 1952, the world’s first hydrogen bomb was exploded by the United States in a test called Operation Ivy Mike. But Eniwetok’s place in history began several years earlier.

By January 1944, the Americans in the Pacific had seized the offensive from the Japanese who, barely a year previously, had conquered much of the Western and Central Pacific. Under Fleet Admiral Chester W. Nimitz, the Central Pacific Theater of Operations had, in the space of less than a year, completed the conquest of the Solomons and Gilbert Islands by amphibious assaults from Guadalcanal to Tarawa. By the beginning of 1944, it was time to strike at territory held by the Japanese prior to the outbreak of the war in the Pacific.

It had long been the plan of the Americans that the Central Pacific drive would require the seizure of the Marshall Islands. This island group included at least 32 islands and 867 reefs covering more than 400,000 square miles of ocean directly between the United States and Japan.

Grouped in two sections—a northeastern group and southeastern group—there were several main islands garrisoned by the Japanese that contained both naval bases and air

HELLISH BATTLE IN A Tropical Paradise

BY NATHAN N. PREFER

While not as well known as some of the bigger battles fought for Pacific islands, the 1944 battle for Eniwetok Atoll was every bit as brutal.

Naval History and Heritage Command

bases, both of which threatened any Allied advance to the west. If these islands could be captured, wide lagoons at several places within the Marshalls offered the Americans excellent anchorages for their growing naval forces.

Admiral Nimitz had concerns about seizing the Marshalls. While he had requested permission from the Joint Chiefs of Staff in Washington, D.C., to assault them, he was reluctant to incur unnecessary casualties. The islands had been under Japanese control since 1914, when they had been seized by the Japanese Navy from Germany during World War I. After the war they were handed to Japan as a part of a League of Nations Class C Mandate.

Since then, whatever defenses Japan had established in the islands remained a mystery. Although technically required to prevent “the establishment of fortifications or military and naval bases” in the islands, Japan had left the League in February 1933, and since then no foreigners had been permitted to visit them.

The Joint Chiefs approved Nimitz’s request and authorized the seizure of the Marshalls, after which Nimitz was tasked to continue on to Wake Island, Eniwetok Atoll, and Kusaie, the latter the easternmost island of the Caroline group. Technically, Eniwetok was the westernmost atoll of the Marshall Islands and would be a launching point for future operations to the west against the Caroline and Palau groups.

By October 1944, Nimitz and his staff were concerned about the Marshall Islands.

Marines and Coast Guardsmen display a shrapnel-riddled Japanese flag captured during the fight for Engebi Island, part of the Eniwetok Atoll, February 19, 1944. The atoll became a key stepping stone on America's "island-hopping" advance across the Pacific.

Combined with the results of the recently completed Gilbert Islands operations, where the Japanese had fought from prepared positions at Tarawa, causing many casualties among the assault troops, it was decided to seize only critical islands within the group from which the others could be neutralized by air and naval strikes. Eventually, it was decided that Kwajalein Atoll would be seized, followed by Eniwetok.

Kwajalein was centrally located in the Marshalls, and from there Allied ships and planes could neutralize the other islands occupied by the Japanese. Eniwetok, scheduled for later attack, would provide the Allies with egress to the western island groups.

The target date for the invasion of the Marshalls—codenamed Operation Flintlock—was January 1, 1944. To take the two main objectives, Kwajalein and Eniwetok Atolls, a landing force composed of the Army's 7th Infantry Division, which had fought in the Aleutians, the new 4th Marine Division, the independent 22nd Marine Regiment, and other units, was assigned to Nimitz.

On February 1, 1944, the 4th Marine Division, under Maj. Gen. Harry Schmidt, took the islands of Roi and Namur in the northern Kwajalein Atoll group. Within 48 hours Japanese resistance had been overcome, and the Marines were clearing small outlying islands. To the south, Maj. Gen. C.H. Corlett's 7th Infantry Division, facing stronger opposition, took three days to seize Kwajalein Island itself. They, too, set about clearing the many outlying islands of the atoll.

As a bonus, reconnaissance had revealed that the island of Majuro, with its enormous anchorage and potential for several airfields, was undefended. An ad hoc grouping of the 2nd Battalion, 106th Infantry, the 1st Marine Defense Battalion, and the V Marine Amphibious Corps Reconnaissance Company seized the atoll on January 31, 1944. The Americans had control of Kwajalein Atoll.

The quick and relatively inexpensive capture of Kwajalein prompted Admiral Nimitz to rethink his time table. The capture of Eniwetok Atoll was originally scheduled on or about May 1, 1944. From there the Americans would move to attack the Japanese bastion at Truk or other islands in the Carolines. The 27th Infantry Division, originally drawn from the New York State National Guard, was already preparing for the Eniwetok operation. Intelligence reported that the atoll was lightly defended but that the Japanese were rushing reinforcements to it daily.

Concerned that delay would only increase the difficulty and cost of the Eniwetok operation, Nimitz and his chief tactical officer, Admiral Raymond A. Spruance, recommended

National Archives

ABOVE: Smoke rises from Eniwetok after pre-invasion "softening-up" attacks by U.S. Navy carrier aircraft on February 3, 1944. OPPOSITE: U.S. Marines storm ashore across rough coral at Engebi Island on February 17.

that the Eniwetok assault be initiated immediately instead of waiting until May. Supporting this was the availability of the reserve forces that had not been needed at Kwajalein. The operation to take Eniwetok was codenamed Catchpole.

These forces were the 22nd Marine Regiment and the 106th Infantry Regiment, less its second battalion then on Majuro. The Marine infantry regiment was at this time a separate command, while the 106th Infantry Regiment was an element of the 27th Infantry Division.

Certainly no other operation in the Central Pacific had more of an impromptu character than the Eniwetok invasion. The invasion force was assembled in a week. Planning lasted less than two weeks, from February 3-15, the day the operation's task force sailed from Kwajalein to Eniwetok. Covered by a hastily conceived American carrier strike on Japan's major fleet base in the Pacific at Truk (Operation Hailstone), Catchpole was still believed to be a stepping stone to the invasion of the Caroline Islands.

Eniwetok Atoll is 350 miles northwest of Kwajalein. It is the typical Central Pacific coral atoll. It is 17 miles across from east to west and 21 miles long from north to south. Although there are some 30 islands within the roughly circular atoll, only three had any military value. These were Engebi in the north, Parry to the southeast, and Eniwetok in the south. Two deep-water passages into the lagoon formed by the atoll invited the American naval forces into a haven from enemy submarines.

As was the case with the other islands in the Marshall group, intelligence on the Japanese defenses was limited. Aerial photographs showed defenses but were certainly not conclusive. Initial intelligence reports placed about 700 Japanese troops on the atoll, concentrated on Engebi Island, where the only airfield lay.

By January 1944, however, reports of reinforcements began to come in that identified the 1st Amphibious Brigade as also being on the atoll. An increase in the number of defensive positions identified in new aerial photographs supported this intelligence, and estimates of the Japanese garrison were increased to between 3,000-4,000 troops.

In fact, the Americans would be facing the 1st Amphibious Brigade under Maj. Gen. Yoshimi Nishida and the 61st Guard Force under Colonel Toshio Yano. All together there were some 3,500 Japanese on Eniwetok; several hundred were not trained soldiers but rather civilians, air personnel stranded there, Korean laborers, and naval stragglers. There were actually more Japanese troops on Eniwetok than there had been at Kwajalein, and a weaker American task force was about to attack them.

The Eniwetok attack force was known as the Eniwetok Expeditionary Group, under the command of Vice Admiral Harry W. Hill, an experienced amphibious force commander. Its main components were the Army's 106th Infantry Regiment under Colonel Russell A. Ayers (less the 2nd Battalion) and the 22nd Marine Regiment commanded by Colonel John T. Walker. Both regiments were under the command of the ad hoc Tactical Group One, commanded by Brig. Gen. Thomas E. Watson, USMC.

Several supporting units were detached from the Kwajalein assault forces to assist Tactical Group One. These included the V Amphibious Corps Reconnaissance Company; Company D (Scout), 4th Marine Tank Battalion, 4th Marine Division; Company A, 708th Amphibian Tank Battalion; and a provisional DUKW (amphibious truck) company drawn from the 7th Infantry Division.

The 22nd Marine Regimental Combat Team included its tank company and the 2nd Separate Pack Howitzer Battalion (75mm guns), while the 106th Infantry was reinforced with the 104th Field Artillery Battalion (105mm howitzers) and Company C, 766th Tank Battalion. Several smaller units, including Underwater Demolition Team One and the 2nd Joint Assault Signal Company, rounded

A.P. Images

out the task force.

Operation Catchpole began at 9:15 AM on February 17, 1944. The Japanese watched helplessly as Admiral Hill's task force approached the atoll, firing its guns at the target islands, and then sailed majestically into the lagoon to establish a base of operations.

One of the defenders noted in his diary, "There were one man killed and four wounded in our unit during today's fighting. There were some who were buried by shells from the ships, but we survived by taking care in the light of past experience. How many times must we bury ourselves in the sand?"

First into action were the Marines of V Amphibious Corps Reconnaissance Company, commanded by Captain James Jones (no relation to the novelist). They landed on two of the smaller islands and quickly reported that both were unoccupied except for natives. Other Marine units continued piling onto other small islands, covering five more without encountering Japanese troops.

Behind them, advance parties from the 2nd Separate Pack Howitzer Battalion landed and quickly set up firing positions for their guns, preparing to support the main landings. Under the cover of naval gunfire, Underwater Demolition Team 1 examined the beaches of Engebi, finding no obstacles or mines. Finally, the 4th Marine Division Scout Company seized "Zinnia," or Bogon Island, securing one of the passages into the lagoon.

By establishing troops on these smaller islands, the Americans had prevented the Japanese from moving from island to island, reinforcing or retreating as necessary. They had also been able to establish bases for their supporting artillery that would be needed in the coming main assaults.

General Watson planned for the 1st Battalion (Lt. Col. Walfried H. Fromhold, USMC) and 2nd Battalion (Lt. Col. Donn C. Hart, USMC), 22nd Marines, to seize Engebi with Major Clair W. Shisler's 3rd Battalion, 22nd Marines, in reserve. The 2nd Separate Tank Company and an Army platoon of two self-propelled 105mm guns were kept in reserve. Both the Army and Marine artillery battalions were in support.

The Japanese on Engebi had already been battered by the U.S. Navy as reported in the diary of one of the defenders: "One of our ammunition dumps was hit and went up with a terrifying explosion. At 1300 [1 PM] the ammunition depot of the artillery in the palm forest caught fire and exploded, and a conflagration started in the vicinity of the western positions." Worse was still to come.

Richard Wilcox, a correspondent for *Life* Magazine, came ashore with a group of 22nd Marines in Boat 13 and was immediately immersed in chaos and carnage: "We sprinted low through the milky surf and dropped flat on the hard coral sand…. As the men in Boat 13 lay in the coral they looked around and saw other men lying beside them, their green battle dress soaked black and the gritty sand streaking their bodies. One of these men rose to his feet for an instant, spun and then dropped on his back; the blood welled out of his chest and soaked his jacket."

A Japanese pillbox, thought to have been knocked out, suddenly came back to life and began raking the beach with machine-gun fire. A few moments later the order was given to fall back into the water, where the only protection lay. "Not all of the men of Boat 13 reached the slight safety of the water," Wilcox wrote. "A big, white-faced farm lad stopped crawling as a bullet went through his head."

Eventually the pillbox was knocked out—not by artillery or tank fire, but by angry, determined Marines with nothing more than grenades in their hands.

The American landings continued as planned with the usual delays incurred by waves, wind, and mechanical failures. As Lt. Col. Fromhold's 1st Battalion moved inland it began to encounter stiffening Japanese resistance which, supported by gunfire from the armored amphibian vehicles, slowed but did not halt the advance.

But a delayed landing by a platoon from Company A had left a gap in the Marines' line, and retreating Japanese found it accidently while trying to escape. They soon began attacking the exposed flank of Company A, which had no resources available to stop them. Fromhold halted the battalion's attack until a platoon of tanks could come forward and plug the gap.

Lieutenant Colonel Hart's 2nd Battalion, meanwhile, moved inland quickly after landing despite several amphibious tractors landing in the wrong area. Tanks soon

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Marines from the 22nd Regiment, supported by a .30-caliber machine gun (upper left), find a bit of shelter in the coral sand of Parry Island prior to moving out to assault Japanese positions.

Ullstein Bild / The Granger Collection, NY

With dead Japanese lying outside a concrete bunker, an American serviceman takes a break from battle to grab a bite, February 20, 1944.

moved up behind them and the Marines swept over the airfield supported by their artillery. The Marine tanks soon encountered light Japanese tanks dug in as pillboxes, which they eliminated.

Bypassing knots of resistance, the Marines raced to the opposite shore. When regimental commander Colonel Walker came ashore at 10:30, resistance in the 2nd Battalion's area was limited to two small areas around "Weasel" and "Newt" Points.

Meanwhile, the 1st Battalion was still engaged with the Japanese in the gap at the right of Company A; resistance from the wooded area to the front also stymied the battalion. One platoon had become separated, and casualties had been taken by the Marines. Colonel Walker immediately assigned a company from Major Shisler's 3rd Battalion to the 1st Battalion to give it enough strength to complete its mission, and Company I soon moved through the stalled Company A.

Company I was confronted by ground thickly covered with underbrush and fallen trees that prevented observation of the enemy trenches and spider holes. The Japanese were, as usual, well entrenched in expertly camouflaged, prepared defenses; sniper positions dotted the area.

The Marines soon discovered a way to locate the enemy defenses. They found that a smoke grenade hurled into a bunker at the center of a defensive web would indicate the entire complex when the smoke escaped from the various ventilation and firing holes of the fortifications. Once the outline of the individual web was located, demolitions men and riflemen moved in and eliminated them one by one.

As they reduced the field fortifications, Fromhold's 1st Battalion came up against "Skunk" Point, where the Japanese had built concrete pillboxes. To knock these out, two self-propelled 105mm guns from the 106th Infantry's Cannon Company came forward. They fired an entire day's allowance of ammunition, about 80 rounds, before knocking out the positions and killing some 30 Japanese.

With the fighting slowly subsiding, General Watson came ashore at 2 PM and soon declared the island secured. While there were many individual Japanese still hiding on the island and striking out when they could, organized resistance had ceased. Engebi Island now belonged to the Americans. Shisler's 3rd Battalion, 22nd Marines and the 22nd Regiment Tank Company were immediately reembarked to be available for the next phase of Operation Catchpole.

Meanwhile, the V Amphibious Corps Reconnaissance Company and Company D (Scout), 4th Tank Battalion were not idle. They continued to move to the smaller outlying islands of the atoll, making a total of eight landings, capturing one Japanese soldier, and suffering three wounded from enemy fire.

As night fell, General Watson and his staff reviewed the day's events. Intelligence from natives and captured documents indicated that there were an additional 1,000 Japanese on the islands. There was also supposed to be a 600-man garrison located somewhere. This caused General Watson to alert Colonel Ayers that his 106th Infantry might face increased opposition as they attacked Eniwetok Island the next day. As a precaution, Watson reinforced Ayers

with the 3rd Battalion, 22nd Marines and the group tank company.

Back on Engebi, Lt. Cols. Fromhold and Hart were busy trying to finish off the many Japanese who had hidden underground during the battle. When night fell, the Japanese came out and began attacking the Marines on the island; the attacks were unorganized but deadly. Additionally, snipers, often lashed high up in palm trees, also made any above-ground movement dangerous.

After a formal flag-raising ceremony on Engebi the next day, February 19, the two battalions set about destroying all remaining enemy positions on the island.

Once again, this was easier said than done. As Company E, 2nd Battalion, 22nd Marines was settling in for the night of February 19-20, 1944, Corporal Anthony Peter Damato and two of his men were on the front line. Nearly half of the company had been withdrawn in preparation for the next assault, but several small, fanatical groups of die-hard Japanese still roamed the island at night.

Corporal Damato, a former truck driver from the small mining town of Shenandoah, Pennsylvania, had already seen combat in the North African invasion where he had distinguished himself as a Marine aboard ship at Arzew, Algeria, and received a promotion to corporal. He knew his position was vital to hold the front lines for the night. When an undetected Japanese soldier crept close enough to toss a grenade into his foxhole, Corporal Damato immediately began groping for it in the pitch dark.

Knowing that death awaited all three of the Marines in the hole, he unhesitatingly flung himself on the grenade, thereby saving both the lives of his fellow Marines and their critical position in the front line. For his gallant self-sacrifice, Corporal Anthony Peter Damato received the Medal of Honor posthumously.

The invasion of Eniwetok Island came on February 19. Critical because it flanks one of the two main passages into the lagoon, Eniwetok is a long, thin spit of land. Coming ashore were the two battalions of Colonel Walker's 106th Infantry Regiment and their supporting elements. Landings were made on the Yellow Beaches shortly after 9 AM.

Amphibious vehicles filled with soldiers were supposed to carry them 100 yards inland before discharging them, but this plan soon fell awry because of a nine-foot embankment the vehicles could not cross. Worse still, the soldiers found themselves in an intricate network of spider holes like those the Marines had just encountered on Engebi. Most of Lt. Col. Harold J. Mizony's 3rd Battalion, 106th Infantry found the going a little easier and soon reached the far shore.

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Marine Corporal Anthony Damato smothered a grenade to save buddies, earning the Medal of Honor posthumously.

Less fortunate was Lt. Col. Winslow Cornett's 1st Battalion and a part of the 3rd. A strong enemy defense, under the command of Lt. Col. Masahiro Hashida, had been developed in the southern portion of the island—defenses that had largely been missed in the preinvasion bombardment. Hashida immediately recognized the opportunity provided by the delays in the American attack and withdrew about half his force into the prepared defenses while he sent the other half forward to harass Cornett's 1st Battalion.

In the early afternoon some 400 Japanese troops attacked Cornett's men. Surprise and accurate Japanese supporting fire allowed an initial penetration into the lines, but the Americans recovered quickly and pushed the Japanese survivors back into the brush.

One man, Private George Lorenz of the 102nd Engineer (Combat) Battalion, was using a pole charge to knock out an enemy pillbox when the Japanese attacked and was caught between the two opposing forces. He was forced to lie low during the battle to survive.

One of the key figures in repelling this attack was 1st Lt. Arthur Klein who, when some of the men began to retreat in the face of the Japanese attack, raced forward with his M-1 carbine held over his head and shouted, "I'll shoot the first son of a bitch that takes another step backward! You bastards are supposed to be All-American soldiers. Now let's see you show a little guts!"

After Lieutenant Klein stabilized Company B's line and the machine gunners of Companies B and D who had remained in their positions cut down the remaining Japanese, the enemy resorted to mortars and long-range automatic weapons fire. Company B, now reinforced with Company K, continued pressing the enemy, wearing them down and slowly pushing them back toward their prepared defenses.

The attack continued against strong enemy positions. Colonel Ayers, concerned about the slowness of the advance, called for his reserve, Major Shisler's 3rd Battalion, 22nd Marines to land. It was to relieve the depleted 1st Battalion, 106th Infantry and continue the attack south. Shisler's men landed by 2:42 PM and immediately moved through the 1st Battalion to take up the attack. By 6:30 PM the Marines had reached the end of the island in their zone of action, but there remained a gap between the Marines and the neighboring 1st Battalion, 106th Infantry.

Colonel Ayers, now worried about a night attack, took the unusual step of ordering the American assault to continue during the night. But before this was necessary, Company A reached the south shore and was soon reinforced by Company B.

The following morning, February 20, the remaining Japanese on the island launched a counterattack against the Marine battalion that was soon repulsed. About 30 Japanese, emerging from an underground shelter within the Marines' lines, managed to attack the battalion command post but were beaten off.

The Army and Marines spent the rest of the day clearing Japanese holdouts on the

western side of the island. By the second night, only individual Japanese stragglers remained. The battle for Eniwetok Island was over. There remained only Parry Island to complete the campaign.

Originally the plan was to invade Parry Island at the same time as Eniwetok, but the need to commit the reserve forces to secure Eniwetok delayed the invasion of Parry. This was, in fact, beneficial since it allowed additional days of preinvasion bombardment by the U.S. Navy. It had been learned that the Japanese force on Parry Island was larger than on the other islands. So the longer the bombardment, the less opposition the Americans might have to face.

The bombardment, aided by captured maps showing the island's defenses, was more effective than the usual preliminary bombardment. The Navy placed 944 tons of high explosives on Parry, the aviators dropped another 99 tons, and field artillery contributed 245 tons before the first Americans set foot on the island.

Relieved by the 10th Marine Defense Battalion's arrival on Engebi, the 22nd Marines were reunited for the Parry Island assault. To reinforce the attack in light of the new intelligence concerning the larger than expected enemy strength on Parry, Lt. Col. Mizony's 3rd Battalion, 106th Infantry and the two scout companies were added to the assault force. In addition, an ad hoc battalion of five improvised rifle companies consisting of 100 men each was drawn from the 10th Marine Defense Battalion as an emergency reserve force.

However, due to higher expenditure than expected, the assault troops were low on ammunition and weapons. The Navy ships were scrounged for additional weapons, supplies, and demolition charges. Additional materials were flown in from Kwajalein.

At 9 AM on February 22, the 22nd Marine Regiment, Reinforced, still in their blood- and sweat-stained HBT fatigues from Eniwetok, hit the beaches of Parry Island. Lt. Col. Fromhold's 1st Battalion landed on Green Beach 3 while Lt. Col. Hart's 2nd Battalion hit Green Beach 2. Major Shisler's 3rd Battalion was to land behind Fromhold and join in attacking south toward the island's narrowing tail. From nearby islands the Marines were supported by the 2nd Separate Pack Howitzer Battalion and the 104th Field Artillery Battalion.

For the Japanese on Parry, waiting for the inevitable was hard. One defender wrote, "We thought they would land this morning, but there was only a continuation of their bombardment and no landing. As this was contrary to our expectations, we were rather disappointed."

They would not be disappointed for long. The Marines stormed ashore as planned, although Hart's 2nd Battalion landed slightly out of place. Opposition initially was light, but land mines soon took a toll of the advancing invaders. Inland of Green Beach 2, several Japanese fought to the death from individual foxholes, taking some Marines with them.

In response the Marines called forward

M-4 Sherman tanks (near bottom of photo) are visible moving across bomb-cratered Engebi Island during the last stages of fighting for the island. Japanese planes litter the airfield.

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several bulldozers, which buried the enemy alive in their holes and dugouts. Army light tanks arrived in support and detachments of the V Amphibious Corps Reconnaissance Company added its weight to the attack. By midafternoon Hart's battalion was mopping up in its sector.

Not so in Fromhold's sector, though, where Japanese resistance was stronger. Near a position known as Valentine Pier, enemy machine guns and mortars began to take a toll of the Marines' leaders, who were exposed while organizing their troops. Hand-to-hand fighting raged along the shoreline as the Marines pushed down the island.

Japanese positions in a sand dune just inland from the beach placed interlocking machine-gun fire on any attempt to approach. Located and destroyed by mortars, artillery, and automatic weapons fire, the elimination of the sand dune defenses allowed the Marines to move inland. By 10 AM two groups of Marines had crossed the island to the opposite shore. With Marine medium tanks now ashore, the advance moved forward.

General Nishida, whose headquarters was on Parry, had a surprise for the Marines. Just below the beach he had placed three light tanks. Knowing that they had no chance against the American tanks in an open fight, he had buried them in the sand up to their turrets and camouflaged them in the usual inimitable Japanese style.

However, he did not intend to use them as pillboxes, as many other Japanese commanders did. He provided ramps, so that once the Americans were close enough to prevent their naval and air support from firing, he would launch the tanks against the unprepared Americans.

Unfortunately for General Nishida, he waited just a little too long. By the time he launched his tank counterattack, the medium tanks of the 22nd Regiment Tank Company were ashore in numbers. Nevertheless, the attack did inflict casualties on Fromhold's battalion before the American tanks could get into position to destroy the Japanese armor. By noon the Marines were on the ocean side of the island.

As the Marines were reorganizing in preparation for moving down the length of the island, they observed between 150 and 200 Japanese soldiers calmly marching single file along the shore line. It was surmised that these defenders had taken refuge on the reef off the island to avoid the bombardment and were just now trying to return to their defensive positions, unaware that the Americans had them under observation. The Marines, however, had little time to speculate. The threat was quickly eliminated by the 1st Battalion.

Major Shisler's 3rd Battalion came ashore despite enemy small arms, mortar concentrations, and land mines. Neutralizing previously bypassed Japanese positions as they went, they soon joined Fromhold's battalion at the advanced line. Behind them Colonel Walker and his staff came ashore and set up regimental headquarters near the beach. General Watson sent both the scout companies ashore, attaching Company D (Scout), 4th Tank Battalion to Fromhold and the V Reconnaissance Company to Hart. There was still enemy resistance to be overcome.

That afternoon, the reinforced 1st and 3rd Battalions, 22nd Marines attacked south. Japanese resistance was as fierce as ever, with the enemy fighting from spider holes, trenches, pillboxes, and dugouts. Close cooperation between infantry, armor, artillery, and supporting weapons allowed the attack to proceed steadily.

Gradually, the use of tanks, flamethrowers, mortars, and demolition charges tore apart the Japanese defenses. Armored half-tracks evacuated the wounded. DUKWs provided ammunition and other necessary supplies. By darkness the two assault battalions were within 450 yards of the end of the island. Fearing friendly fire incidents in the dark, the Marines halted for the night. At 7:30 that evening, Colonel Walker announced that Parry Island was secured.

The next day, February 23, the rest of the island was overrun. Japanese resistance was spotty but remained determined. The bypassed Japanese were later mopped up by the 3rd Battalion, 106th Infantry. Operation Catchpole was over.

The seizure of the Marshall Islands not only provided essential bases for the American advance westward, but also accelerated the overall advance of the American forces to Japan. The Navy's assault on Truk, covering the Marshall Islands invasion, revealed that the greatly feared Japanese "Pearl Harbor" was in fact a paper tiger by 1944. The main elements of the Imperial Japanese Navy had been withdrawn, and the Americans were

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ABOVE: Taking cover behind the body of a dead Japanese defender, two Marine riflemen observe an enemy position. This image was taken by a Coast Guard photographer whose camera was later destroyed when he was blown into a foxhole by a Japanese mortar shell explosion. OPPOSITE: Three Marines on the lookout for snipers man a machine-gun position near a Japanese dugout on one of the islands of Eniwetok Atoll, while an SBD bomber makes a pass overhead, February 18, 1944.

now comfortable with leaving it to "wither on the vine."

Likewise, a review of the planning for future operations determined that the seizure of the Caroline Islands was no longer necessary because Kwajalein could fill meet the requirements that had earlier been thought necessary in the Carolines. Instead of adding another campaign before hitting the Marianas, the latter island group would become the next target in the Central Pacific Theater. Months of fighting and planning had been eliminated, as well as a need to incur an untold number of casualties.

Other benefits came from the Marshall Islands campaign. Despite the recent heavy losses at Tarawa, it was now clear that the basic techniques used by the Americans in amphibious warfare were sound and effective. Eniwetok would also be the last well-defended atoll the Americans would face. From this point forward, targets would be larger land masses ranging from mid-size islands like Iwo Jima to large land masses such as Leyte and Luzon.

With the knowledge that the Imperial Japanese Navy had abandoned Truk, the U.S. Navy was emboldened to strike farther and with more power at distant targets that had heretofore been considered too risky. The American fleet was also now prepared to remain offshore in support of amphibious operations as long as it took to resolve the operation, knowing it held the upper hand against any Japanese counterstrike.

Tactical innovations, such as the use of an exclusively dedicated headquarters ship for better command and control of the operation, arming landing craft with 40mm guns and rockets for greater fire support, the use of the DUKW for carrying men and supplies directly onto the beach, and landing artillery on offshore islands in advance of the main assault to better support the assault troops, were among the tactical innovations first used in the Marshall Islands.

American casualties suffered in seizing Eniwetok Atoll were 219 Marines and 94 soldiers killed in action, 568 Marines and 311 soldiers wounded in action, plus 39 Marines and 38 soldiers missing in action and presumed dead. Japanese losses were calculated at 3,380 killed and 105 captured.

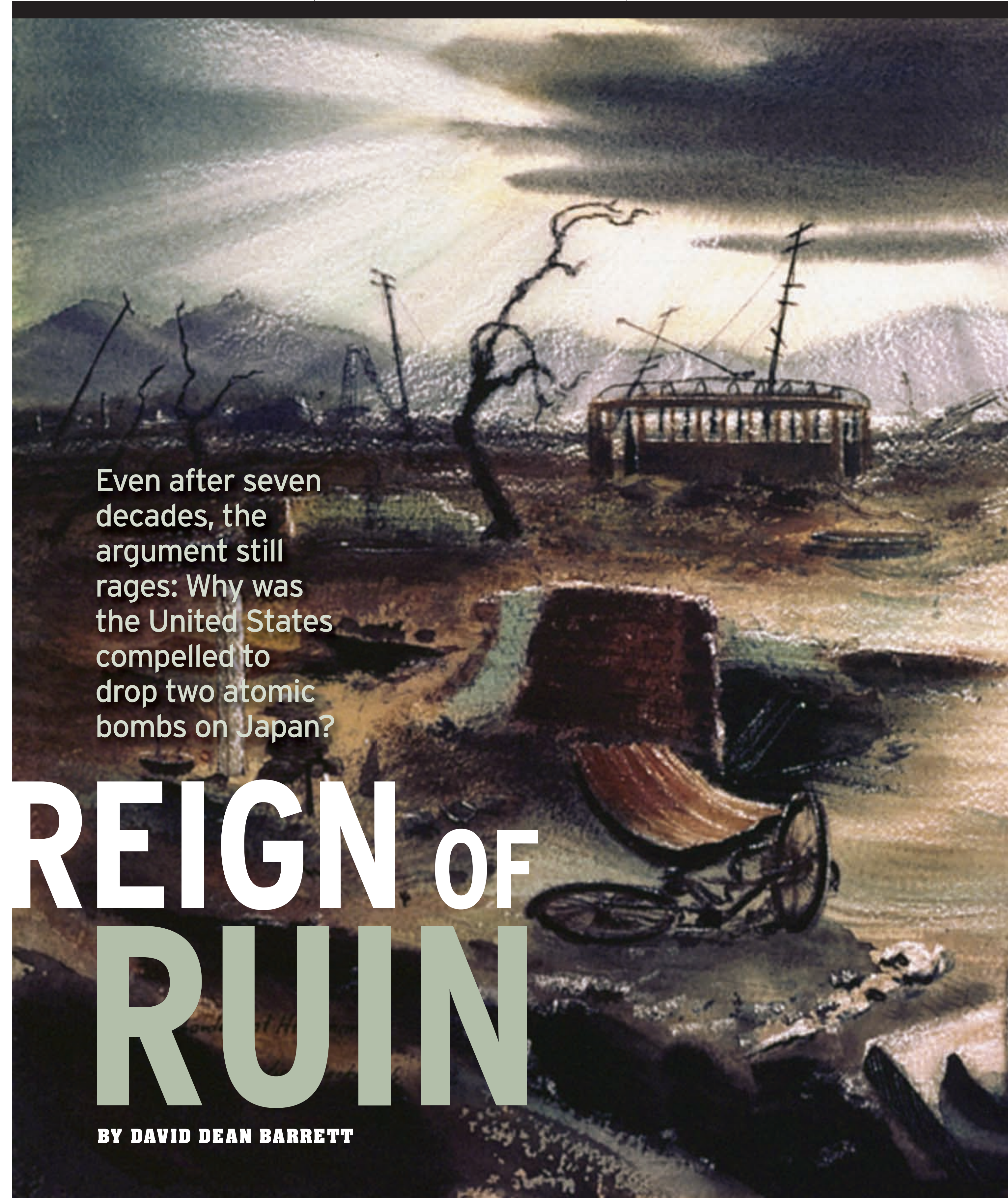
Thus, for a total of 1,269 casualties, Tactical Group One had provided airfields—which were established on Eniwetok and Engebi Islands—for the U.S. Navy to stage replacement aircraft to forward operating forces about to attack the Marianas. A seaplane base was built on Parry for reconnaissance planes.

As expected, the atoll itself became a major fleet anchorage and served as the launching point for several future invasions. These islands also served as bases for the continuing neutralization of the Marshalls and Carolines, tasks largely the responsibility of the 4th Marine Air Base Defense Wing, the Seventh Army Air Force from the Marshalls, and the Thirteenth Army Air Force from the South Pacific.

For the units that took part in Operation Catchpole, the war would continue. The 22nd Marine Regiment soon formed a basis for the new 6th Marine Division and would fight again on Guam and Okinawa. The 106th Infantry Regiment would return to its parent 27th Infantry Division and fight on Saipan and Okinawa.

The V Amphibious Reconnaissance Company would be expanded into a battalion and serve in the Marianas and on Iwo Jima. Company D (Scout), 4th Tank Battalion, returned to its parent 4th Marine Division and would fight again at Saipan, Tinian and Iwo Jima. The other units that had fought for the Marshalls would also fight in other critical battles.

The battle for the small islands of the Kwajalein and Eniwetok Atolls would pay huge dividends as the war in the Pacific Theater continued. □



Even after seven decades, the argument still rages: Why was the United States compelled to drop two atomic bombs on Japan?

REIGN OF RUIN

BY DAVID DEAN BARRETT

National Archives

Seventy years after the fact, the use of atomic bombs by the United States in the final days of World War II remains one of the most controversial events of the 20th century. During his speech announcing the destruction of Hiroshima by an atomic bomb, U.S. President Harry S. Truman used the phrase, "Rain of Ruin." However, by changing, "Rain" to "Reign" the quote can describe Hirohito's time as emperor of Japan and the government that ruled the country during this period, because it was the actions of those leaders that ultimately caused the ruin of Japan.

Hiroshima, Japan, August 6, 1945, 8:15 AM local time: Two glimmering silver Boeing B-29 Superfortress bombers fly high above the city about half a mile apart; a third circles several thousand yards away. The lead aircraft carries the number "82" on its fuselage, a large black R encircled on its tail, the name *Enola Gay* on its nose, and the atomic bomb Little Boy in its belly.

The doors to the forward bomb bay open, and a large gun-metal gray projectile falls out, bottom first, flips over, and hurtles nose down toward the metropolis below. With the abrupt loss of weight the plane lunges upward, then banks violently to the right, noses down, and accelerates away as fast as its four 2,200-horsepower radial engines will drive it.

The city below is serene, an azure blue sky above it. People are engaged in their daily routine: adults going to work, children to school. It is morning rush hour. Residents pay no attention to such a small group of American planes.

The bomb drops for 43 seconds before exploding 2,000 feet above the ground in a pinkish burst that cuts across the sky. A fireball—a football field in diameter—erupts from the flash without a sound. An iridescent bolt of light strikes the ground. The heat from the blast melts

A watercolor painting by war artist Standish Backus depicts the total devastation of Hiroshima after the atomic bomb was dropped on August 6, 1945. The question is still asked: did the atomic bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki prevent an even greater human catastrophe? INSET: The B-29 Superfortress *Enola Gay*, named for the pilot's mother, is shown parked on an unidentified airfield.

U.S. Army Art Collection

the surface of granite within a thousand yards of the hypocenter. Roof tiles soften and change color from black to olive or brown and are ripped off. A huge mushroom cloud, filled with every color in the rainbow, ascends five miles above the ground.

Over the center of the city silhouettes are burned onto walls and the street, as people are instantly vaporized. A mile from the epicenter, thousands of Japanese soldiers doing morning calisthenics on the military base drill grounds are instantly roasted to death.

A supersonic blast of wind tears across Hiroshima in a concentric ring for two miles, demolishing all but a few earthquake-proof buildings. People are picked up, blown through the air, and smashed against anything still upright. Some are transformed into grotesque carbon statues and litter the ground like leaves fallen from a huge tree.

The city becomes pitch black, silent. Gradually the blackness dissipates like fog and gives way to gray. Zombie-like figures slowly slog through the ruined city; their shredded and burned skin hangs from them. A woman carries a baby with no head. Fires burn everywhere. Dead bodies glut the river and litter the ground; many are nothing but skeletal bones. Children cry for their mothers. Black rain begins to fall.

Three days later the same fate befalls Nagasaki. Such grim descriptions call to mind concern mainly for the suffering and hardship of unsuspecting Japanese civilians. While their torment was unquestionable, such a singular view argues that the effects of the atomic bombs render their use indefensible.

However, to completely understand the decision to use such weapons requires a thorough examination of the historical context of both the use and effects of the bombs. The war engendered hardship on both sides of the battlefield, diplomatic intransigence, and Japanese abuses of power.

There were five principal topics in the last year of the war that need to be considered: unconditional surrender; the Japanese strategies of Spirit (at the start of the war) and Defense in Depth (in 1944); the escalation of the war; the Japanese wartime government; and, finally, the key decisions made by the leaders in both Japan and the United States during the final months of the war.

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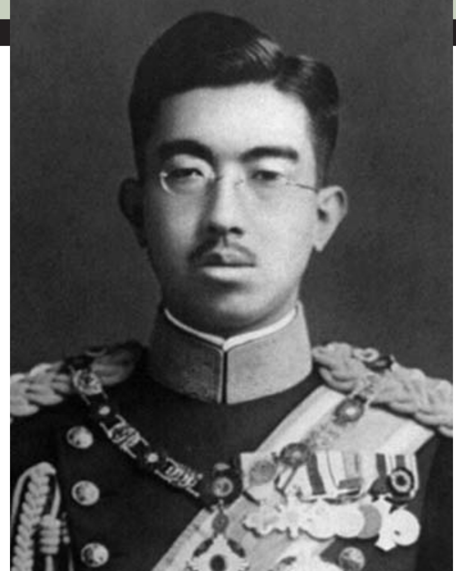
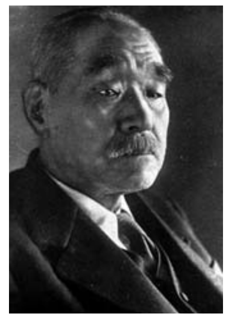


ABOVE: Emperor Hirohito (in prewar photo) broke the Big Six deadlock by agreeing to unconditional surrender.



ABOVE: Prime Minister Suzuki (left) was pressured to keep fighting by hardline Army Minister Anami (right).

ABOVE: Navy Minister Yonai demanded that the emperor be retained; Army Chief of Staff Umezu refused to consider unconditional surrender. BELOW: Navy Chief of Staff Toyoda, another hardliner; Foreign Minister Togo was ready to end the war.

Unconditional surrender means quite simply that the defeated state agrees to whatever the victor decides. It is the equivalent of a revolution for the vanquished nation because its primary objective is the removal of the government in power. Most conflicts have not and do not end in this fashion; instead, they are concluded by negotiation between the belligerents and the establishment of mutually acceptable, if not desirable, terms or conditions. While the Allies' demand for unconditional surrender during World War II was not unprecedented, it was unusual, and it grew out of an American initiative for a specific reason.

President Franklin Delano Roosevelt first considered the idea of forcing the Axis nations to accept unconditional surrender in the spring of 1942. Almost a year later, in January 1943, Roosevelt and Churchill formalized this intention into official policy at their meeting in Casablanca. When he was later asked why the Allies were demanding unconditional surrender, Roosevelt replied, "We are fighting this war, because we did not have an unconditional surrender at the end to the last one." Thus the requirement's genesis went all the way back to the armistice that ended World War I and the Germans' belief that they "weren't defeated"—a belief that angered Germany, spawned Hitler, and led to a second world war.

FDR continued to reinforce the demand for unconditional surrender over the next couple of years. At a press conference in July 1944, Roosevelt stated, "Practically all Germans deny the fact that they surrendered during the last war, but this time they are going to know it, and so are the Japs."

After Roosevelt's death on April 12, 1945, Truman inherited the legacy of unconditional surrender. Just four days later, during his first address to a joint session of Congress, he too called upon all Americans to support him in carrying out the ideals for which Roosevelt lived and

died—and the first of these was unconditional surrender.

The ongoing buttressing of this war aim among the Allied nations caused one historian to state, "If the Americans had made the first move toward peace with the Japanese, Stalin would have denounced it as a treacherous attempt to negate a part of the Yalta Agreement, specifically Stalin's commitment to enter the war against Japan 90 days after Germany's surrender, by striking a deal before Russia entered the war."

This comment is grounded on an enticement made at Yalta by Roosevelt, specifically to allow the Soviets to take possession of southern Sakhalin and the Kuril Islands, internationalize the port of Darien, and restore the Soviet lease on Port Arthur.

As an aside, neither Germany nor Japan took opportunities to negotiate an end to the war. The former had an occasion—with France and Britain in the late winter and early spring of 1940, and again with Russia in 1942-1943—and did nothing. Japan could have considered ending to its war with China in the late 1930s and chose not to.

During World War II, the Japanese government was fundamentally a military oligarchy. It was made up of three components: the emperor, considered divine; the prime minister, appointed essentially by the emperor; and the prime minister's cabinet, partially chosen by him and partially by the incumbents—explicitly the Chiefs of the General Staff of the Army and Navy. The latter augmented the military's power and influence considerably because it allowed them to place the most hawkish members of their respective services into these positions.

Decisions made by the prime minister and his cabinet had to be unanimous. This meant any dissenter had the effect of a veto vote; this created a dysfunctional government. Whenever a unanimous decision could be reached, it was presented to the emperor for his approval, which was largely a rubber stamp.

As such, the emperor knew and agreed to the decisions being made but did not exercise his power in the same fashion as a traditional monarch. However, in extraordinary circumstances he could be asked to make his opinion known to the members of the cabinet, and, because of his divinity, he could provoke a binding decision.

Three prime ministers led Japan during the Pacific War: Hideki Tojo (October 18, 1941-July 22, 1944), Kuniaki Koiso (July 22, 1944-April 7, 1945), and Kantaro Suzuki (April 7, 1945-August 17, 1945).

The last of these, a retired admiral, guided the country primarily with five other men: Army War Minister Korechika Anami, Navy Minister Mitsumasa Yonai, Army Chief of Staff Yoshijiro Umezu, Navy Chief of Staff Soemu Toyoda, and Foreign Minister Shigenori Togo, the only civilian. The group was referred to as "The Big Six" or the "Supreme Council at the Direction of War."

Virtually all Japanese leaders lived in mortal fear. Assassination of political and military leaders had become commonplace in Japan beginning with the Meiji Restoration in 1868. In the 27-year period from 1909 to 1936, eight members of the government and military, including five prime ministers, two generals, and an admiral, were murdered. The message from junior officers, the most frequent perpetrators of these murders, was clear: either support a politically aggressive ideology or you risk your life.

The word *bushido,* used to describe the fighting spirit and behavior of Japanese

Japanese soldiers bayonet bound Chinese POWs. To many Japanese soldiers, anyone who surrendered had dishonored his uniform and did not deserve to live. Such attitudes hardened Japan's leaders against Allied demands for surrender.

National Archives

soldiers, sailors, and airmen during the Pacific War, was a perversion of its historic meaning. *Bushido* refers to the "way of the warrior" and is further defined as "a hybrid code of ethics refined from both the deep honorable tradition of the Japanese warrior class and the spiritual wisdom of Buddhism and Confucianism."

Thus, the application of the Bushido Code had less to do with war, pride, power, and conquest and more to do with a path to human refinement, and for some, enlightenment.

The roots of bushido are firmly planted in a serious and structured approach to living rightly, even if that meant dying for the achievement of living by the code. This is why *seppuku* or *harakiri* (suicide by disembowelment) became an accepted practice in Japanese culture for hundreds of years. It was thought that maintaining the honor of oneself or the family was paramount to all else, including one's own life.

The eight accepted elements of bushido are: rectitude, courage, benevolence, respect, honesty, honor, loyalty, and self-control.

In the 20th century, Japanese militarists hijacked the code and reduced it to little more than courage and loyalty. Combining this version of bushido with an obligation to die for the emperor, military leaders instilled absolute obedience in their subjects.

Japanese servicemen did indeed exhibit courage and loyalty throughout the war, but nothing in their conduct resembled the other six elements of bushido (save a perverted sense of honor), as they behaved in some of the most sadistic and barbaric ways imaginable toward both their battlefield enemies and the people living under Japanese occupation.

From 1931 until the spring of 1944, the Japanese military doggedly held to an idealistic belief that the "spirit" of its soldiers was superior to that of any of its enemies and would result in victory on the field of battle. In combat this meant that, while artillery, mortars, and machine-gun fire would be used tactically to soften up an adversary, bayonet charges and hand-to-hand combat would ultimately defeat them.

This concept of military strategy showed some success in Japan's war with China and the early stages of World War II. However, against the United States beginning in the summer of 1942, it ran into a wall of lead and steel the likes of which the Japanese had never experienced. Banzai charges became little more than a death sentence for the Nippon soldiers facing overwhelming American firepower.

Worse still, the failed charges often led to major breakthroughs that were exploited by the Americans to win the battle. But Japanese military leaders stubbornly clung to the approach for two more years.

Finally, in the spring of 1944, Japan adopted a new stratagem, albeit no less onerous for its troops. Believing American morale to be brittle and that with enough casualties they could still win something better than unconditional surrender, the Japanese embraced the strategy of "Defense in Depth."

Defense in Depth requires the defender to deploy his resources, such as fortifications, field works, and military units, at and well behind the front lines. Although an attacker may find it easier to breach the more weakly defended front line, as he advances he continues to meet increasingly stiff resistance. The deeper he penetrates, the more his flanks become vulnerable, and if the advance stalls the attacker risks being enveloped.

Japanese military planners went even further, adding their own unique spin to this scheme. From the inception of their training, Japanese troops were indoctrinated with the belief that it was dishonorable to surrender and that they had a duty to die for their emperor.

Knowing this axiom, expedient battlefield commanders rationalized the use of tactics that ignored the possibility that their troops might need to retreat. Because battles were often fought on islands, the defenders could literally dig into the volcanic or coral landscape, where it was virtually impossible for an attacker to bypass or flank their fortified positions.

The result was indeed a formidable defense, which imposed ever higher casualties on the Americans. It remained to be seen whether American morale could be broken in this manner.

The last year of the war was far and away the bloodiest for American forces; 64 per-

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On Saipan a Marine uses a bulldozer to dig a burial trench after the Japanese banzai charge on July 7, 1944. The bodies of some of the 4,000 Japanese killed in the charge lay to the left of the trench. The attackers included walking wounded and men armed with only bayonets tied to wood staffs. OPPOSITE: During the Battle of the Philippine Sea, a Japanese heavy cruiser turns in a clockwise circle to evade American dive bombers and torpedo planes. In the distance the plumes of two bomb hits on a Kongo-class battleship are visible, while the stricken vessel narrowly averts a collision with an aircraft carrier also caught in the relentless air attack.

Naval History and Heritage Command

cent of all the casualties and 53 percent of battle deaths occurred during this time. This happened partially because of the strategy of Defense in Depth and partly because of the progressively larger land, sea, and air battles being fought.

The campaign to seize the Marianas Islands in the Central Pacific is a case in point. It began with the invasion of Saipan on June 15, 1944, just nine days after the D-Day landings in Normandy, with an American task force of about two thirds D-Day's size and more than 7,000 miles away. The assault offered dramatic proof of how American might had grown in the 2 1/2 years since Pearl Harbor.

The combined operation encompassed Marine, Army, and some of the largest naval forces of the war. One historian observed, "The fuel needed for the battle would have powered the entire German war machine for a month in 1944."

The battle to seize Saipan took 24 days and ultimately featured the largest banzai attack of the war early in the morning of July 7, when more than 4,000 Japanese soldiers stormed the American lines along the island's northwest coast. When it finally ended at around six in the evening, all the attackers lay dead. But they had killed or wounded more than 1,000 Americans.

In the waters west of the Marianas between June 19 and 20, one of the greatest air-sea engagements of World War II—two to three times larger than the Battle of Midway—took place between the American and Japanese navies in the Battle of the Philippine Sea.

Also called "The Great Marianas Turkey Shoot," this two-day battle saw American aviators decimate their Japanese counterparts, shooting down 426 aircraft of all types or 90 percent of Japan's striking force. The additional destruction of three of Japan's fleet aircraft carriers forever ended her ability to use carriers to conduct offensive operations in the war.

The fall of Guam on August 10, the last of the Marianas Islands to fall, shattered Japan's inner ring of defense. The conquest of the Marianas provided the United States with bases for its long-range, four-engine heavy bomber, the B-29. All three islands served as points of origin for the strategic bombing of the Japanese homeland—an offensive that began November 24, 1944—and would, in due course, include the 509th Composite Group stationed on Tinian, which would deliver nuclear weapons to its targets.

Once the United States had gained control of the Marianas and the seas surrounding them, American air forces quickly moved to cut off Japan's industries from strategically vital oil, iron ore, and bauxite resources in the territories Japan occupied in Southwest Asia.

The victory also led to the termination of an ineffective and expensive China-based B-29 bombing campaign against Japan. Strategically, Japan had been defeated, but Japanese leaders, unwilling to accept unconditional surrender and still believing that they could cause massive American causalities when the home islands were invaded, refused to surrender.

But taking this strategic position in the Pacific came at a high cost. In two months of grueling island and naval campaigns, U.S. forces killed 60,000 Japanese soldiers, sailors, and airmen, while the Japanese inflicted just under 30,000 casualties on the Americans—5,500 of whom were KIAs.

In the months immediately following the attack on Pearl Harbor, the Japanese took nearly 140,000 Allied combatants and more than 300,000 civilians as prisoners of war. By war's end, an appalling 27 to 38 percent of the military prisoners had died in Japanese captivity compared to only two to four percent of those held in German camps. Those who did survive often looked as though they had come out of Nazi extermination camps. As early as 1942, it had become common practice for the Japanese to massacre prisoners, triggered by the

mere threat of invasion by Allied forces.

On August 1, 1944, the Japanese formalized their policy toward Allied POWs. A "kill order" was sent to the commandants of all its POW camps. With the Allies advancing everywhere in the Pacific, the order made it clear the Japanese did not want any of the POWs in their possession to be repatriated. The order stated, "It is the aim not to allow the escape of a single one, to annihilate them all, and not to leave any traces."

In December 1944, the Japanese massacred 139 American POWs held in the Philippine province of Palawan. The murders sparked a series of rescue missions, the most famous of which was "The Great Raid" in January that freed more than 500 Americans. But Allied prisoners remained in grave jeopardy until Japan surrendered.

As the time approached for invading the Philippines in late October 1944, Admiral Chester Nimitz's Central Pacific Command was tasked with securing Peleliu to protect General Douglas MacArthur's flank from an airstrip on the island that potentially threatened his forces.

The Battle of Peleliu, September 15-November 27, 1944, on a tiny coral islet about 600 miles southeast of the Philippine island of Mindanao, became the first to test the potential of Japan's strategy of Defense in Depth.

In preparation, Japanese defenders honeycombed Peleliu with bunkers, blockhouses, and pillboxes. Most of these fortifications tunneled into the island and all bristled with interlocking rings of rifle, machine-gun, mortar, and artillery fire. The Japanese plan forced American Marines and soldiers into squad-level tactics at point-blank range to eliminate positions, all the time subjected to a murderous onslaught that created mountainous losses for the Americans.

Marine Corps commander Maj. Gen. William Rupertus had predicted that the battle would take three days. Instead, the ensuing slaughter to seize Peleliu's six square miles raged for 73. Marines and soldiers suffered nearly 8,000 wounded and 2,000 dead. Japanese losses were

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NO LONGER WOULD LARGE NUMBERS OF JAPANESE EXPOSE THEMSELVES IN BANZAI CHARGES AGAINST AMERICAN FORCES. THEY WOULD MAKE THEIR ENEMY BLAST THEM OUT OF FIXED FORTIFICATIONS—ONE BUNKER, ONE PILLBOX, OR ONE CAVE AT A TIME.

nearly absolute—between 10,500 and 11,000 died.

No longer would large numbers of Japanese expose themselves in banzai charges against American forces. They would make their enemy blast them out of fixed fortifications—one bunker, one pillbox, or one cave at a time. The Defense in Depth strategy had proven its bloody effectiveness, and it would be employed with even greater sophistication during the last land battles of the Pacific War: Iwo Jima and Okinawa.

The Battle of Leyte Gulf, from October 23-26, 1944, was the largest naval battle in history. Three days earlier, on October 20, U.S. troops invaded the island of Leyte as part of an effort aimed at not only fulfilling MacArthur's pledge to retake the Philippines, but to further isolate Japan from the countries it occupied in Southwest Asia.

Despite the desperate commitment of nearly all its remaining capital ships to the fight, the Imperial Japanese Navy suffered its heaviest losses of the war. Thereafter, the IJN posed no significant threat to the Allies. Its few remaining ships limped back to Japan and, deprived of fuel, remained there until the end of the war. Leyte Gulf claimed the lives of 3,000 Americans and more than 10,500 Japanese.

The battle for the Philippines was the largest and most protracted campaign of the Pacific War. The fighting continued until Japan's surrender, generating 62,000 American casualties, of which 14,000 were KIA. Japan suffered a staggering 336,000 dead.

By November 1944, American engineers and Seabees had turned Guam, Saipan, and Tinian into colossal airbases. The initial phase of the bombing campaign against the Japanese home islands, which took advantage of the B-29's speed and high-altitude capabilities, yielded poor results due in large part to the jet stream and the frequently cloudy weather over the country.

But everything changed shortly after General Curtis Lemay assumed control of the XX Bomber Command in January 1945, as he radically altered bombing tactics. Rather than sending his B-29s in high-altitude daylight attacks, he would send them in at night at much lower altitudes.

In a raid that will forever mark this turning point, on the night of March 9-10, 1945, Lemay ordered more than 300 B-29s, using a mix of incendiary cluster bombs and high-explosive bombs, to strike Tokyo. The attack caused an urban conflagration—a

firestorm—and became the single most destructive aerial bombing raid of the entire war in all theaters. Nearly 250,000 homes were destroyed as 16 square miles of the city were incinerated. The death toll was estimated at between 80,000 and 100,000 people—more outright than either of the atomic bomb attacks.

Similar raids continued for the next several months along with the aerial mining of Japanese ports. By August, Lemay had few targets left as much of Japan's war economy and about 60 percent of her major cities lay in ruins.

The February 19-March 26, 1945, battle for Iwo Jima, an eight-square-mile volcanic island situated midway between American B-29 bases in the Marianas and their targets on the Japanese mainland, was one of the most bitterly contested of the Pacific War. Three airfields, an early warning radar station, and a strategic location made taking the island a necessity.

Prior to the land assault, the U.S. Army Air Forces bombed Iwo Jima for more than 70 days. Then naval forces shelled it for a further three days. Once ashore, Marine artillery fired half a million shells at Japanese positions, and throughout the battle Japanese defenders were subjected to continuous close air support from American carrier planes and further naval bombardment.

Nevertheless, the Japanese were so methodically entrenched inside Iwo Jima, in places five stories below ground, that once again as at Peleliu the vast majority of its hardened positions had to be taken at extremely close range by a handful of men at a time.

Over the 36 days of combat, the Marines lost 5,931 men KIA along with another 890 members of the Navy, mostly corpsmen, and more than 19,000 wounded. Only a few hundred of the Japanese garrison of between 21,000 and 22,000 survived. The battle marked the first time in the war that U.S. forces suffered more casualties than the Japanese. Japan's new strategy had emphatically raised the cost in blood for the Americans.

Only 350 miles southeast of the Japanese home islands, Okinawa was the ideal staging point for the upcoming invasion of Japan. As on Peleliu and Iwo Jima, the Japanese employed the Defense in Depth to maximize American casualties. The battle was fought April 1-June 22, 1945, at times in torrential rain and knee-deep mud.

Likely the foremost example of horrific combat was a "pimple of a hill" known as Sugar Loaf, barely 50 yards wide and 300 yards long. The Marines were forced to assault its summit 11 times before they finally held it. In the process, 1,656 Marines died and another 7,429 were wounded over the 12 days it took to take the hill.

With terrible effect, Japan also used kamikazes in the greatest numbers yet during Okinawa's 82 days of fighting. By the battle's end, 2,000 planes, sometimes flying in waves of 200 to 300 at a time, caused more damage and inflicted more casualties upon the Allied armada than in any other battle of the Pacific War. Kamikazes sank 36 ships, damaged 368, killed nearly 5,000 sailors, and wounded a like amount.

When the battle for Okinawa concluded

Burrowed into caves on Iwo Jima, the Japanese defenders had to be blasted out one cave at a time. More than 6,000 Americans and 20,000 Japanese died. BELOW: Marines climb Okinawa's shell-pocked Sugar Loaf Hill after the battle. The 82-day Okinawa operation cost the United States more than 51,000 killed and wounded. OPPOSITE: Dead Americans on Peleliu are wrapped for burial; more than 2,300 were killed, compared to 10,000 Japanese defenders. It was casualties like these that convinced U.S. leaders that without Japan's unconditional surrender, defeating the nation would be terribly costly for both sides.

Both: National Archives

on June 22, more than 12,500 American servicemen were dead along with nearly 39,000 wounded and 33,000 non-combat casualties, mostly from "battle fatigue." On the Japanese side, 95,000 men perished and as many as 10,000 surrendered. The battle also saw a heavy loss of civilian lives; estimates run from a low of 42,000 to as many as 150,000—one third of the island's population.

In early April 1945, as the war with Germany reached its awful conclusion, the Soviet Union denounced its neutrality pact with the Japanese government. Signed four years earlier on April 13, 1941, the Russians told Japan they would not renew it. The Japanese should have taken the Soviet change of position for exactly what it was—an ominous confirmation that the U.S.S.R. would soon become an enemy of Japan.

Immediately following Roosevelt's death in Warm Springs, Georgia, on April 12, Harry S. Truman succeeded him as president. After Truman took his oath of office, Secretary of War Henry Stimson told the new president that he needed to meet with him about a most urgent matter.

On April 24, Stimson and General Leslie Groves, in overall command of the Manhattan Project, briefed Truman for the first time about America's top-secret atomic-bomb program. They told Truman they expected to have a bomb ready to test in a few months.

Three days after Germany's surrender on May 8, Prime Minister Suzuki convened a meeting with The Big Six to discuss how Germany's capitulation affected Japan's wartime strategy. Foreign Minister Togo made his first attempt to move his government in the direction of ending the war after the members also received a dire report on Japan's economy and war production.

Instead, Generals Anami and Umezu, along with Admiral Toyoda and Prime Minister Suzuki, asked Togo to convey Japan's warmest regards to the Soviet Union, looking toward a friendlier relationship where it would be possible to purchase petroleum, aircraft, and other supplies it needed. Some members even suggested that it might still be possible to persuade the Soviets to join Japan in the war.

This perspective completely disregarded the reality that Russia had rescinded its Neutrality Pact with Japan a month earlier, had been an enemy off and on for 30 years before the war, and had been an ally of the British and Americans for over three years. Nevertheless, Togo attempted to carry out the Prime Minister's request.

In Washington, on May 25, the Joint Chiefs of Staff (JCS) met and approved Operation Downfall, a two-phase plan for the invasion of the Japanese mainland. Phase I, code-named Operation Olympic, focused on the lower one third of Kyushu, the southernmost of the Japanese home islands.

The attack, scheduled to begin on November 1, 1945, included the following inventory: 766,700 men, 134,000 vehicles, 1.5 million tons of supplies, 22 fleet and 10 light aircraft carriers, and 2,794 aircraft. By itself, Olympic would have been substantially larger than the D-Day invasion of Normandy. The Chiefs expected 350,000 Japanese troops and no more than 2,500 aircraft to be defending Kyushu.

Phase II, Operation Coronet, targeted the Tokyo Plain. Slated to commence on March 1, 1946, it would have been even larger: 1,026,000 men (many in transit from the European Theater), 190,000 vehicles, 3,328 planes, and 2,640,000 tons of supplies. This amazing commitment of resources was about to be directed at an enemy whose merchant and naval fleets were already at the bottom of the ocean, whose air defenses were meager, and whose entire land area was blockaded by Allied warships.

In Tokyo on June 8, 1945, despite his country's desperate situation, Emperor Hirohito acceded to the military's call for all-out resistance through a heroic last stand by "100 million Japanese," the majority of them civilians. Only two weeks later he decided to follow the recommendation of his closest adviser, Marquis Koichi Kido, and sent peace feelers to Moscow.

Ten days later the JCS briefed Truman on the plans to invade Japan. Prior to the meet-

A Japanese Army officer instructs a group of housewives in the use of bamboo spears. Japan was depending on a huge home defense army to keep invaders out of the home islands.

National Archives

ing, Truman voiced his concern that the United States could end up fighting another Okinawa from one end of Japan to the other and asked the JCS to provide specific casualty estimates; a consistent answer was not forthcoming.

Army Chief of Staff General George C. Marshall sidestepped the question and gave an estimate of only 31,000 casualties, which was tied to only the first 30 days of combat and had come from MacArthur's experience on Luzon in the Philippines.

Admiral William D. Leahy countered that he thought casualties could indeed be similar to Okinawa, where they amounted to 35 percent of the invasion force. Given the size of Olympic, it would mean 250,000 casualties with perhaps as many as one in four killed in action—or 60,000 more dead Americans.

Admiral Ernest J. King responded that the terrain on Kyushu offered more room to maneuver than on Okinawa. Therefore, casualties would be lighter. No one actually gave Truman a figure for the entire battle, although he had already heard former President Herbert Hoover's estimate of 500,000 to a million dead (for both Olympic and Coronet)—an estimate that likely came from the "Smart Colonels" at the Pentagon.

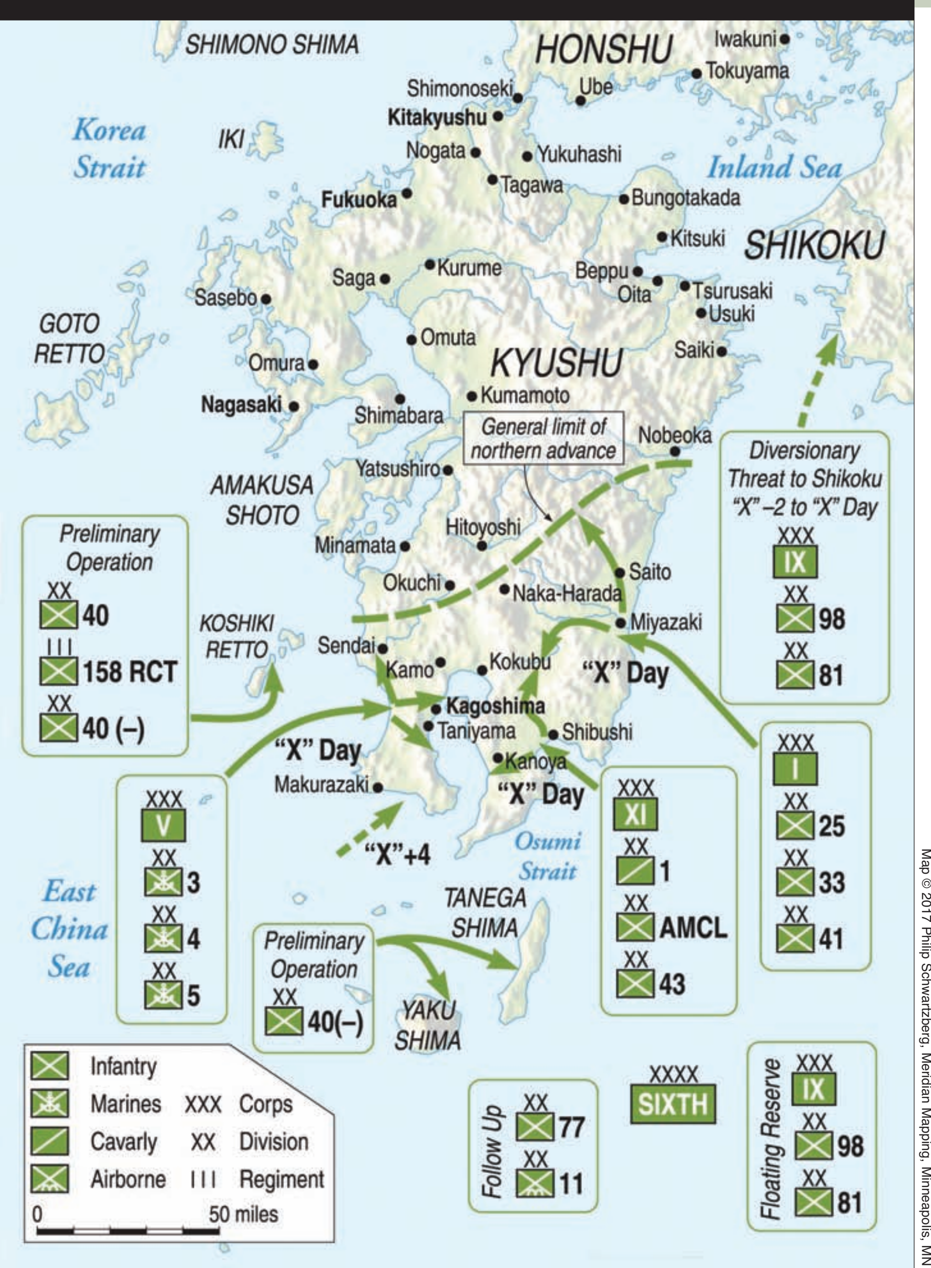
Apart from the casualty discussion, General Marshall once again raised the idea of using gas against the Japanese, seeing it as no less humane than the flamethrowers or phosphorous already in widespread use, but he failed to gain agreement among any of the other attendees. The atomic bomb was not part of the plan, as it has not yet been tested. At the close of the meeting, Truman approved only Operation Olympic after he requested and got unanimous support for it.

In Tokyo in early July, Japanese military leaders finalized their plans for the defense of the home islands. The plan, called Ketsu-Go, involved as many as 28,000,000 civilians fighting with single-shot, muzzle-loading muskets, longbows, sharpened bamboo spears, and pitchforks acting as "cannon fodder" to draw fire away from Japanese soldiers. Women aged 17 to 40 and men from 15 to 60 comprised this civilian militia.

According to the 1944 census, the three prefectures over which the battle for the lower one third of Kyushu would have been fought contained a population of nearly four million people, a large percentage of whom would have been forced to participate in its defense.

The plan also included 2,000 conventional aircraft and more than 10,000 kamikaze planes flying directly off Kyushu to attack Allied troop ships and landing craft. Striking in waves so large that in three hours they would equal the 2,000 sorties the Japanese sent against Okinawa in three months, they expected to completely overwhelm the American invasion force.

In addition, the Japanese planned to employ 1,300 "special attack" (kamikaze) mini-subs and an unknown number of suicide divers with high-explosive charges strapped to their backs who would wait in the shallows along the beaches and swim out and attempt to sink landing craft.



The primary American landings on the Japanese home island of Kyushu were scheduled to take place in the south. The plan called for more than 750,000 Americans to take part in the fight for the island with heavy casualities expected.

Finally, rather than the 350,000 troops expected by the JCS for Operation Olympic, by August there were already 900,000 Japanese soldiers in Kyushu.

In the predawn hours of July 16, 1945, a $2 billion gamble by the United States government culminated in the successful detonation of the first atomic bomb at Trinity Site, Alamogordo, New Mexico. Scientists observed the explosion a mere 10,000 yards away from the blast, or between five and six miles. Truman, meeting with Stalin and Churchill at Potsdam, Germany, received word of the test later the same day.

The next day Stalin, Churchill, and Truman met to discuss Germany's postwar fate and the continuing war with Japan. Truman was particularly interested in reaffirming Stalin's commitment to join the war against Japan 90 days after Germany's surrender, something the Soviet leader did in fact verify. A few days later Truman took Stalin aside during a break and mentioned "the bomb" without specifically calling it "atomic." Stalin acted as though he did not understand but actually did; Russian spies had infiltrated the Manhattan Project, and Stalin knew the bomb was nuclear.

On July 21, American codebreakers intercepted an exchange of communications between the Japanese ambassador to the Soviet Union, Naotake Sato, and Foreign Minister Togo. In the cable Sato expressed the opinion that the best the Japanese could hope for in terms of a peace agreement with the Allies was to keep the emperor. Togo responded that The Big Six would never agree to that sole condition.

Four days later the Anglo-American Allies and China (the Soviet Union had not yet declared war on Japan) released the Potsdam Declaration demanding Japan's acceptance of its terms or face "prompt and utter destruction."

According to Commander George M. Elsey, duty officer of the White House Map Room from 1941 to 1946, the Potsdam Declaration definition of unconditional surrender was modified to: "We call upon the government of Japan to proclaim now the unconditional surrender of all Japanese armed forces."

The change from a blanket all-inclusive unconditional surrender to the unconditional surrender of all Japanese armed forces was made because the United States. knew the Japanese, from decrypted messages, wanted to retain the emperor; the modification in language provided such a path. The same day Truman authorized the use of the atomic bomb any time after August 1, weather permitting, as a visible target was required for its use.

By July 28, 1945, as General Marshall had predicted, even the most moderate of the Japanese leaders (Foreign Minister Togo) viewed the Potsdam Declaration as a weakening of American resolve and a basis for a negotiated peace rather than unconditional surrender.

Unfortunately for the Japanese, before Togo got a chance to begin discussions Prime Minister Suzuki quickly, at the insistence of General Anami, chose to "mokusatsu" the offer. (Roughly translated, it meant to "kill with silence.") The decision sealed Japan's fate.

On August 6, the B-29 *Enola Gay* dropped the Little Boy uranium atomic bomb on Hiroshima. After receiving the news, the Japanese leadership failed to meet for three more days because some members of The Big Six had more pressing matters to attend to.

National Archives

Soviet Premier Josef Stalin and U.S. President Harry S. Truman at the Postdam Conference, July 1945. Although Stalin pretended to be surprised to learn about a U.S. "super weapon," his spies had already tipped him off.

General Marshall, who had been following the immense buildup of Japanese forces on Kyushu, began to seriously question the feasibility of Olympic. According to the latest American decrypts, Japanese troops on Kyushu now numbered 900,000 with nearly three months remaining before the invasion.

As a result, Marshall did two things. First, he cabled General MacArthur and asked if he thought the invasion should be moved to Hokkaido, the northernmost Japanese island. This would have been akin to moving the D-Day invasion from Normandy to Norway three months before its commencement.

Second, he considered the seemingly unthinkable; should the United States use as many as nine atomic bombs as tactical weapons in support of the invasion, over which American troops and Marines would then attack? Marshall had been following the scientific data coming out of Alamogordo after the Trinity test and believed American forces would be better off facing the risks of radiation than the vast numbers of Japanese defenders.

On August 9, the Soviet Union declared war on Japan and attacked its Kwantung Army in Manchuria with well over a million men. With the bulk of its artillery, aircraft, and best troops long since stripped and sent to reinforce many of the islands previously mentioned in the Central Pacific, the Japanese were no match and the Russians rapidly gained the upper hand. The Soviets also struck, in much smaller numbers, the Japanese forces in Korea and in the Kurile Islands north of Hokkaido.

Later the same day, The Big Six finally met to discuss whether the war should be brought to an end or whether Japan should continue to resist. Suzuki, after requesting a vote, found the group deadlocked three to three.

On one side, Suzuki, Togo, and Yonai wanted to end the war with the sole condition of maintaining the emperor "with the understanding that the said declaration [of surrender] does not comprise any demand which prejudices the prerogatives of His Majesty

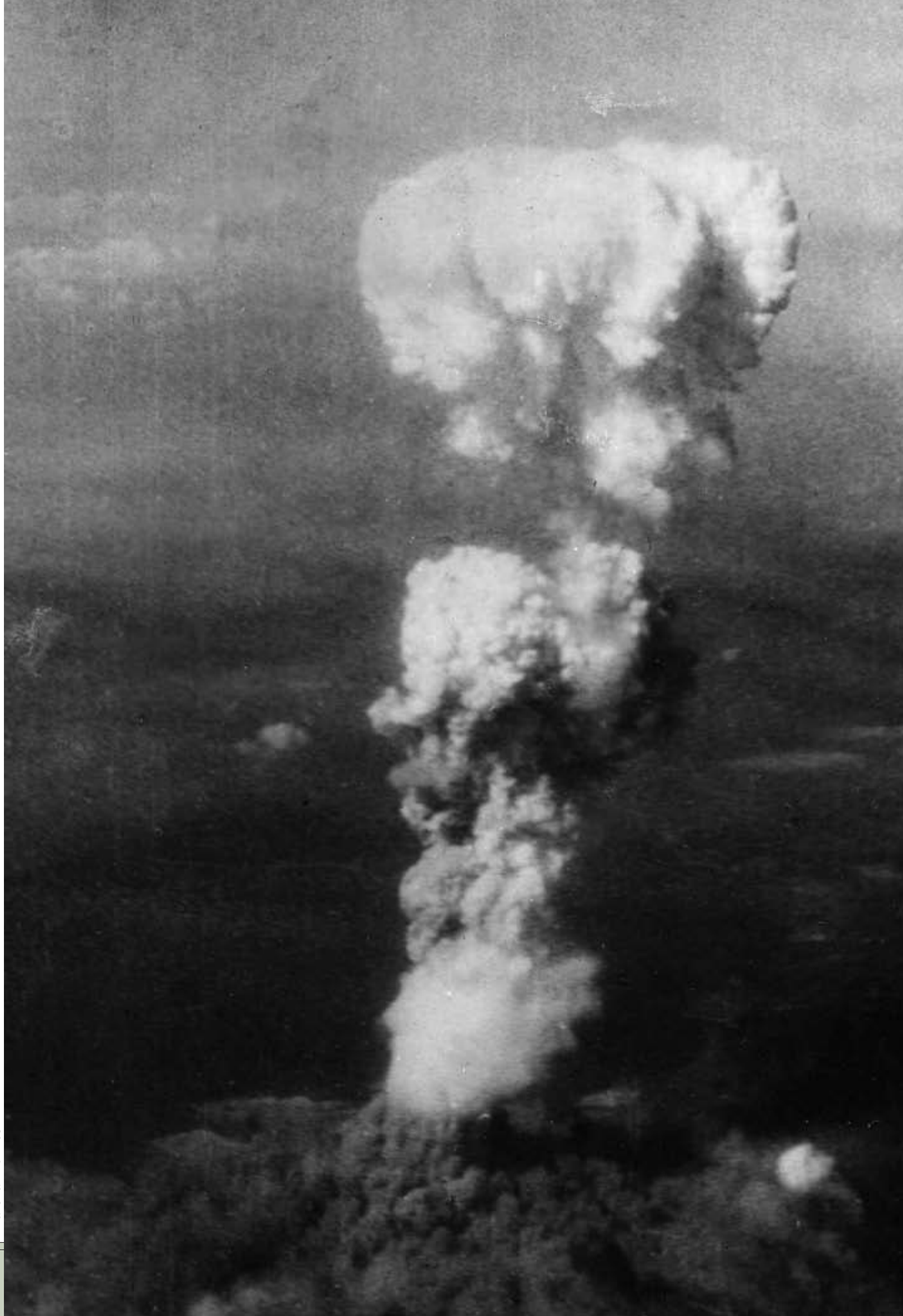
as a sovereign ruler" of Japan.

On the other side, Anami, Umezu, and Toyoda wanted to either fight the "decisive battle" on Japanese soil against the Americans or demand three more conditions in addition to the emperor—specifically Japanese control over war crimes trials, disarmament, and a guarantee of no Allied occupation force in Japan.

The men also discussed the recent atomic attack on Hiroshima. Admiral Toyoda told the group that no country in the world, not even the United States, could build more than one atomic bomb. Implied in his statement was a willingness to dismiss the loss of Hiroshima as a casualty of war since he assumed no further atomic attacks were possible.

About 1 PM, The Big Six, still meeting, got word of the second atomic bomb hitting the city of Nagasaki. The news stunned the men but failed to change any of their opinions. It did, however, elicit a menacing comment from Suzuki: "Maybe the Americans will simply stand off and continue to drop atomic bombs."

A mushroom cloud billows 20,000 feet above Hiroshima and spreads 10,000 feet from ground zero. The crewmen aboard the *Enola Gay* were awestruck by the power of the atomic bomb.



National Archives

[As a sidebar, it should be noted that the Japanese had two atomicbomb programs of their own during the war; both the Army and Navy each had projects. In fact, Prime Minister Tojo took a personal interest in the Japanese bomb project, believing that "the atomic bomb would spell the difference between life and death in this war." Ironically, there was a consensus among Japan's nuclear physicists that no county would be able to develop an atomic bomb during the course of the war.]

In an effort to break the stalemate among The Big Six and reach some decision, Togo and Suzuki, in a nearly unprecedented move, secured Emperor Hirohito's agreement to provide his opinion to the group. The emperor told the cabinet he favored accepting the Potsdam Declaration with the single condition of keeping the Imperial Polity.

Anami, along with Umezu and Toyoda, only agreed to peace as long as the Allies accepted this condition. They also insisted on the conditional wording mentioned previously. If the Allies refused, Japan would continue to fight the war—this in spite of two atomic bombs and Soviet entry into the war against Japan.

The next day, August 10, news of the surrender offer with its single condition reached Washington. Truman immediately called a meeting to discuss whether the offer could be accepted as an unconditional surrender.

In the ensuing discussion, Undersecretaries of State Joseph Grew and Joseph Ballantine took issue with the language associated with the condition to keep the emperor, i.e., that the said declaration did not comprise any demand that prejudices the prerogatives of His Majesty as a sovereign ruler of Japan. They told the group that acceptance of the stipulation would allow the Japanese to continue with the same form of government that took them into aggressive war, and thus could potentially once again become a threat to peace, and that in the end they would have fought for almost four years accomplishing nothing.

Truman agreed and asked Grew and Ballantine to assist Secretary of State James

National Archives

Hiroshima photographed in 1946. Heat and shock waves vaporized people and incinerated wooden structures.

Byrnes in drafting a counterproposal. The offer included two statements in direct response to the condition demanded by the Japanese, specifically, “From the moment of surrender the authority of the Emperor and the Japanese Government to rule the state shall be subject to the Supreme Commander of the Allied Powers,” and “the ultimate form of government of Japan shall, in accordance with the Potsdam Declaration, be established by the freely expressed will of the Japanese people.”

In no way did these declarations by the Allies not comprise a demand which prejudiced the prerogatives of His Majesty as a sovereign ruler of Japan. The statements ended the emperor’s authority.

Two days later, when the Allies’ counteroffer reached Japan, Anami immediately rejected it as it did not preserve the Imperial Polity. He flatly stated that Japan should either go back to fighting the war or demand all four conditions to end it. The Allied proposal sparked two more days of bickering among The Big Six that achieved nothing.

Worse yet, a group of junior Japanese officers plotted a clandestine coup to overthrow the Suzuki government should the peace initiative prove successful. Anami knew of the plot and neither supported nor quashed it.

Finally, on August 14, Togo and Suzuki again asked Hirohito to address the cabinet. The emperor told the group he wanted to accept the Allies’ counterproposal. Reluctantly, Anami, Umezu, and Toyoda all agreed. Additionally, Hirohito offered to record an imperial rescript to be broadcast to the Japanese people the following day telling them the war was over.

On the night of August 14-15, the conspirators launched their coup in an effort to derail the surrender. They seized the imperial grounds, essentially taking the emperor hostage, although they intended him no harm. They then attempted to gain the support of General Takeshi Mori, head of the Imperial Guards. Failing, they killed him and his aide, Colonel Michinori Shiraishi, and used Mori’s official stamp to forge a document that appeared to lend his support to the coup. Other members of the conspiracy went to the homes of Suzuki and Togo intent on assassinating both men; neither was home.

Next, the collaborators proceeded to the Household Ministry, determined to destroy the two copies of the imperial rescript stored there. Coincidentally, at the same time, the last American bombing mission of the war approached Tokyo. Fearing an atomic attack on the capital, officials blacked out the city. The soldiers tore the ministry building apart in the darkness looking for the rescripts but could not locate the hidden recordings.

The leaders of the coup d’état made one last attempt to get Anami’s backing, but he refused. He had given his word to the emperor and could not change it now.

In a final act of desperation, the conspirators attempted to gain control of a radio station with the objective of broadcasting a plea to the Japanese people to not accept the peace but failed to accomplish even this.

Shortly before 6 AM, Anami committed *seppuku* at his home, and one by one the principal members of the coup followed suit. Major Hatanaka used his pistol to put a bullet through the center of his forehead; Lt. Col. Jiro Shiizaki put a sword into his belly and then a bullet into his head, and Major Hidemasa Koga cut open his stomach.

Finally, at noon on August 15, Japanese radio broadcast the imperial rescript proclaiming the end of the war. In his speech to his people on that fateful day, Emperor Hirohito never used the word “surrender.”

Instead, he told his subjects that since the war had “developed not necessarily to Japan’s

advantage," they would have to endure the unendurable for future generations and accept the Allied provisions to end the war. He added that Japan had not fought to aggrandize its territory, but rather to ensure Japan's self-preservation and the stabilization of East Asia.

The emperor did specifically mention the effects of the atomic bomb as a factor in reaching his decision, stating, "The enemy has begun to employ a new and most cruel bomb, the power of which to do damage is indeed incalculable.... Should we continue to fight, it would not only result in an ultimate collapse and obliteration of the Japanese nation, but also it would lead to the total extinction of human civilization."

Essentially, in an act of supreme benevolence, Hirohito said Japan would fall on its sword to save humanity from the Americans. Thus began the myth of Japan as victim in World War II and not an aggressor.

Within a few years of Truman's fateful decision, debate began about whether the bombs were necessary. Were there other alternatives the president had that could have spared the Japanese from atomic annihilation?

What we know is that, in spite of the overwhelming losses in the last year of fighting, the destruction of two cities by atomic bombs, and the Soviet Union's entry in the war against Japan, three members of Big Six—Anami, Umezu, and Toyoda—still wanted to either fight the decisive battle on Japanese soil or require four conditions for ending the war, and they showed absolutely no willingness to end the deadlock eight days after the attack on Hiroshima, until Emperor Hirohito intervened a second time.

Absent that act, their stance would have meant the war would have gone on and likewise at a minimum so would have the American campaign of blockade and bombardment.

As such, for however long it took to finally secure Japan's surrender, the entire Pacific Theater would have remained at war. In Japan this would have resulted in the deaths of hundreds of thousands—or possibly millions—from disease, starvation, exposure, and the ongoing air and sea attacks.

In the territories still occupied by Japanese military forces, Japan's so-called Greater East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere—Manchuria, parts of China, Korea, Burma, Malaya, the Dutch East Indies, Vietnam, Thailand, and New Guinea—people died at a rate of between 100,000 to 200,000 per month throughout the entirety of the war. Allied civilian and military POWs in these areas would most certainly have been at grave risk.

Lastly, the Allied forces necessary to sustain the blockade and bombardment lost, on average, 7,000 men killed per month. Consequently, any delay in bringing a termination to the war would have resulted in the deaths of hundreds of thousands of people.

So what options did Truman have to the bomb in August 1945? There were three: he could have continued to blockade and bombard, resulting in the losses just mentioned; he could have gone ahead with the invasion, likely incurring hundreds of thousands and possibly millions of Allied casualties and killing millions of Japanese soldiers and civilians; or he could have allowed the Soviets to play a much greater role on the assumption he was willing to allow the war to continue significantly beyond its historic end on September 2, 1945.

The last option seems unlikely to have brought a rapid end to the war since, to seriously threaten the Japanese home islands, the Russians would have needed massive naval forces to carry out a large-scale invasion over water, specifically across the Sea of Japan or the Strait of Tartary, the latter 4 1/2 miles wide at its narrowest point. The Red Army had become the most powerful land army of the war, but it had next to no ability to conduct amphibious operations beyond river crossings.

In the end, given Truman's dual objectives of unconditional surrender and a desire to finish the war as quickly as possible while at the same time minimizing the loss of life, the atomic bomb offered the best chance of success and, in fact, accomplished both of those aims. □

Naval History and Heritage Command

The Japanese delegation during the surrender proceedings aboard the battleship USS *Missouri* on September 2, 1945, included Foreign Minister Mamoru Shigemitsu and Army Chief of Staff Yoshijiro Umezu (front, left to right).

The USO Turns

BY JOHN PROVAN

Almost every American veteran has fond memories of a Track-Side Free Canteen, or a USO center at some train station or airport situated at locations around the world, or a "USO Camp Show" that provided entertainment close to the front lines, during every conflict since World War II.

The letters "USO" (United Service Orga-

ABOVE: Bing Crosby and Bob Hope perform for military personnell at an air base in California in February 1944. They were but two of hundreds of big-name and little-known performers who volunteered their services to the USO.
RIGHT: Songstress Martha Tilton, a vocalist with Benny Goodman's band and a member of the Jack Benny Troupe, entertains a rapt audience of soldiers of the 222nd Field Artillery Battalion on New Britain, July 1944. USO performers often risked their lives to bring smiles and a touch of home to troops stationed around the globe.

nizations) often meant a pretty young lady who served a cup of hot coffee, and maybe a doughnut with a smile or a well-known Hollywood actor or musical performer who provided the soldiers with an hour of joy and relief from months of fighting on some far-flung battlefront.

The USO had its earliest roots during the days of the American Civil War, where some 7,000 Ladies Aid Societies provided help as needed to soldiers of both sides.

Another predecessor of the USO, the YMCA, which began in 1856, placed books on ships for sailors to read. During World War I, some 28 organizations, including the YWCA, Young Men's Hebrew Association, the Jewish-Welfare Board, the American Library Association, the Knights of Columbus, the National Catholic War Council, and the Salvation Army all attempted to help our soldiers during the trench fighting in France. More than 125 volunteers were wounded or gassed, three dying later from their injuries, while eight volunteers (including two women) were killed in action while providing services to American soldiers.

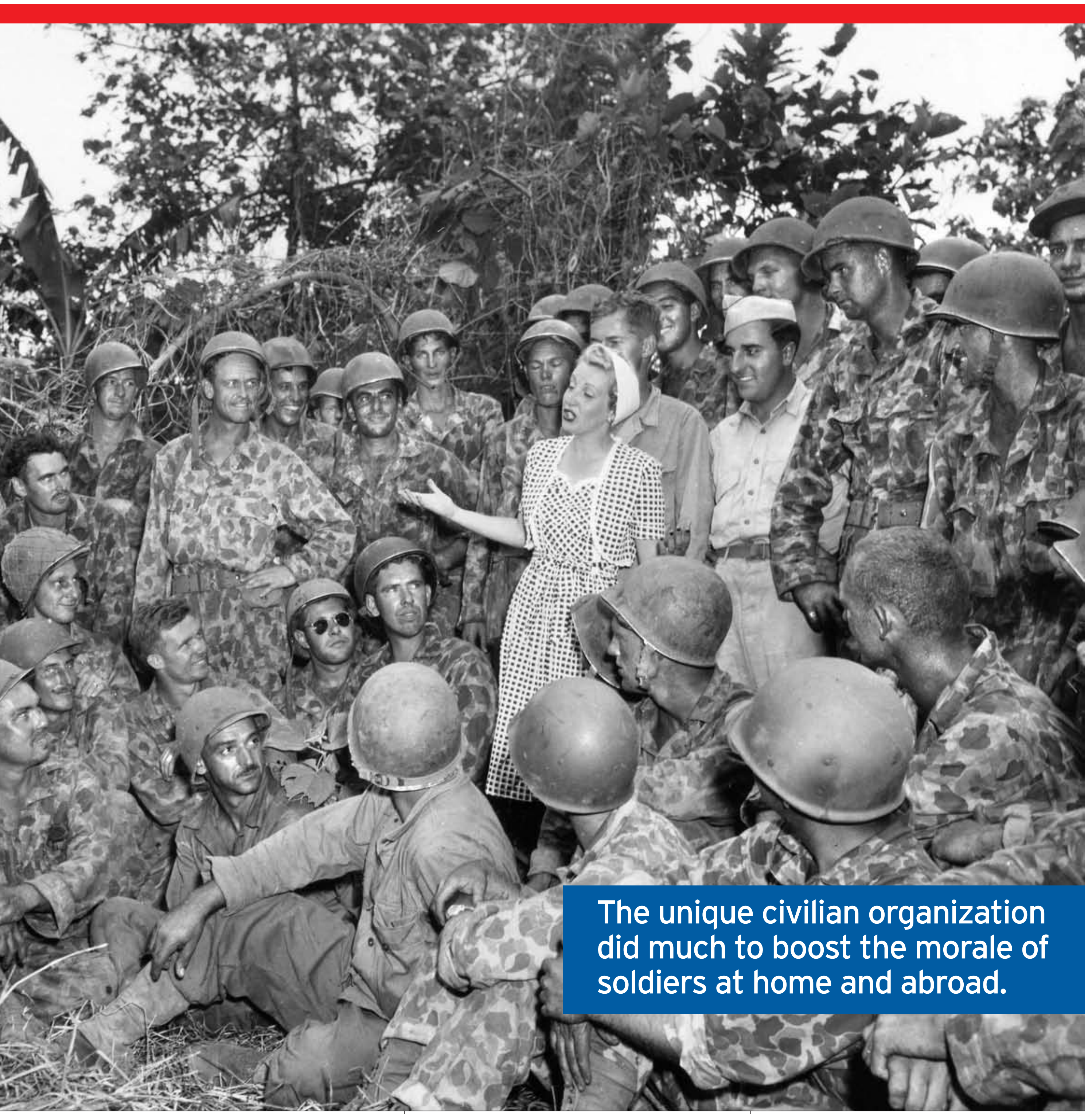
World War I demonstrated that a single organization could function better than multiple smaller groups. Even before the outbreak of World War II, the U.S. military realized the mammoth task that was about to unfold. During the early months of 1938, these various organizations came together to coordinate their funds, manpower, and resources.

The USO was officially created on February 4, 1941, with one of the first centers opening on May 28 at the Charleston Navy Yard. During the war, almost every town in the United States set up a USO center—there were more than 3,000 in all, staffed by 1.5 million volunteers. They provided soldiers a place to eat, write a letter back home, play games, or simply relax.

Approximately 300 prefabricated wooden clubhouses were erected by the U.S. government, with the first being completed by November 28, 1941. These centers were badly needed where local com-

Both: National Archives

s 75 | AMERICAN SOLDIERS' *"Home Away From Home"*



The unique civilian organization did much to boost the morale of soldiers at home and abroad.

National Archives

Bing Crosby performs for Allied troops during the opening performance of the USO Stage Door Canteen in Picadilly, London, August 1944.

munities lacked public facilities to accommodate soldiers, sailors, and airmen stationed nearby.

There were 125 Track-Side Free Canteens that provided a free meal to millions of soldiers crossing the country by train. In three years, the canteen in Danville, Illinois, (population 37,000) alone had served some 489,664 sandwiches. This generosity was all the more remarkable, considering that most food items were rationed and in short supply to civilians during the war.

The USO also established Traveler's Aid—often just a simple desk in a waiting room at a bus depot or railroad station. The volunteers gave soldiers lodging information, local transportation, sightseeing tours, or provided emergency aid when needed.

Because the military was then racially segregated, local state laws forced the establishment of 116 USO centers that were specially run for black soldiers. It is believed that no soldier of any color was ever turned away from a USO center during World War II. It appears that the majority of soldiers realized the situation and normally visited the "appropriate" centers, although this was far more difficult in the southern states.

The USO in New York and Hollywood established "canteens" where servicemen and women could drop in for live entertainment, coffee, soft drinks, and a simple meal. Other canteens were opened in major cities such as Boston, Philadelphia, Cleveland, San Francisco, and even London. It was not usual to see some of the biggest names in entertainment mixing with the troops, serving them snacks, and even cleaning up after the night was over. Two movies, *Stage Door Canteen* and *Hollywood Canteen,* were produced in 1943 and 1944, respectively, that highlighted the importance of these clubs.

Between 1942 and 1947, the YMCA ran many USO Clubs that were visited by 460 million soldiers. The USO underscores the concept of "patriotism," a word that most Americans understand, believe in, and support—especially when American servicemen and women are fighting a war. The act of volunteering is an example of the individual sacrificing for the greater good or the war effort.

The USO Camp Shows featured some of the biggest names in Hollywood entertainment. They conducted some 428,521 performances in 208,000 separate locations around the world. Almost every star volunteered, including Bing Crosby, Judy Garland, Orson Welles, Red Skelton, Martha Raye, the Andrews Sisters, and Tommy Dorsey. Many performed without pay, and they were all heroes in their own way.

Bill Johnson, for example, a well-known jazz musician of the day, had been turned down by the draft because of a medical condition, so he offered his services to the USO Camp Shows. Over the following years he did numerous tours, maintaining a rugged schedule, enduring the same hardships, little sleep, and irregular meals as the soldiers; but he performed his heart out at every concert.

These performers were never told ahead of time where they were going; their move-

The USO wants your memories

The 75th anniversary of the USO, in February 2016, would seem an appropriate time to reflect upon this unique organization and its accomplishments. The author is presently working on a book and a TV documentary covering that story: *The USO—75 Years Helping Our Soldiers.*

As an "overseas brat" whose father served the United States for 33 years and attained the rank of chief master sergeant, Dr. Provan, too, has many fond memories of the USO, which has led him to become involved in this project, despite the fact that he presently lives Germany. To date, no film documentary has ever been produced about the USO, although it is a topic that brings back fond memories to so many generations.

For this reason, he is asking American veterans of any war to come forth and tell their memories and experiences about the USO. Perhaps a veteran still has a photo of some USO Center or Camp Show that they attended. And, naturally, if anyone took 8mm home movies, they might make a great addition to the documentary; these can easily be transferred to a DVD.

From soldiers who once entered Germany or fought on a Pacific island to those serving overseas today, Dr. Provan seeks support in thanking the USO and the countless volunteers for all they have done in the past—and will do in the future. Please feel free to contact him via e-mail at: johnprovan@gmx.net.

ments were kept secret even from the soldiers to provide some security. Entertaining the troops was not without its hazards. During World War II, 37 USO Camp Show members, mainly entertainers, were killed in the line of duty. The loss of a big-name entertainer (such as band leader Major Glenn Miller, who went missing during a flight in December 1944) was just as damaging to morale as a battle lost.

The USO Camp Shows went to great lengths to serve; one tour group of four female entertainers—Jo Andrews, Nancy Healy, Margie Liszt, and Julie Lane—traveled by dog sled to a remote post in Alaska and gave a special performance especially for the four lonely GIs stationed there. The four entertainers then went on to provide these men with a home-cooked meal. This troupe went on to do 830 shows.

Many of these Camp Shows were broadcast over the Armed Forces Network. AFN disk jockey (and movie star) Mickey Rooney often entertained the soldiers as an impromptu addition to a USO Camp Show.

Bob Hope exemplified such commitment to our soldiers, having performed during almost every Christmas season between 1944 and 1991, and becoming one of the most well-respected stars of America.

The current issue of the USO's magazine *On Patrol,* notes that "Hope and his band of entertainers and crew ... had an incredibly close call during a tour stop in Palermo [Sicily], where German bombers destroyed the docks and buildings in the area around their hotel…. The close call didn't deter him. Hope took a USO circuit out to the Pacific Theater the following year."

And who does not remember the legendary German-born singer and actress Marlene Dietrich, who did several tours in 1944 and 1945. At one location, Ms. Dietrich met General George S. Patton, Jr., and said, "I'm not afraid of dying, General, but I am afraid of being taken prisoner…. If they catch me ... they'll shave off my hair, stone me, and have horses drag me through the streets."

Patton smiled and pulled out a revolver. "Here, shoot rather than surrender! It's small but it's effective." Ms. Dietrich would carry that weapon with her for the rest of the war. Years later, while performing in Las Vegas, Ms. Dietrich made a point of inviting veterans to her dressing room after her shows to talk about their experiences in World War II.

The soldiers appreciated any entertainer, especially when they came to the hospitals. One such entertainer, June Andrews, recalled seeing a paralyzed soldier named Richard, who had not spoken in months. From the fatigue of her tour, she just broke down and began crying. Richard simply said, "Didn't they tell you not to do that?" Afterward, the two had a long talk and remained in contact for years to come.

In 1944 alone, some 5,400 performances were given for some 850,000 patients at 79 different hospitals. The following year, this figure had increased to 3.3 million patients at 192 hospitals.

After the war ended, the USO went out of business—temporarily. On New Year's Day 1949, following a directive by President Harry S. Truman, the USO was re-established and continues its work to this day.

Even today, the story of the USO is one of volunteers who give freely of their time to serve our nation's servicemen and women—to entertain them and give them a "home away from home," and to help in any way they can. It is also the story of numerous foreign nationals who provide that same smile, out of gratitude, at USO Centers overseas. It is the story of corporate America, donating the funds and locations, so that the USO can provide this support wherever needed.

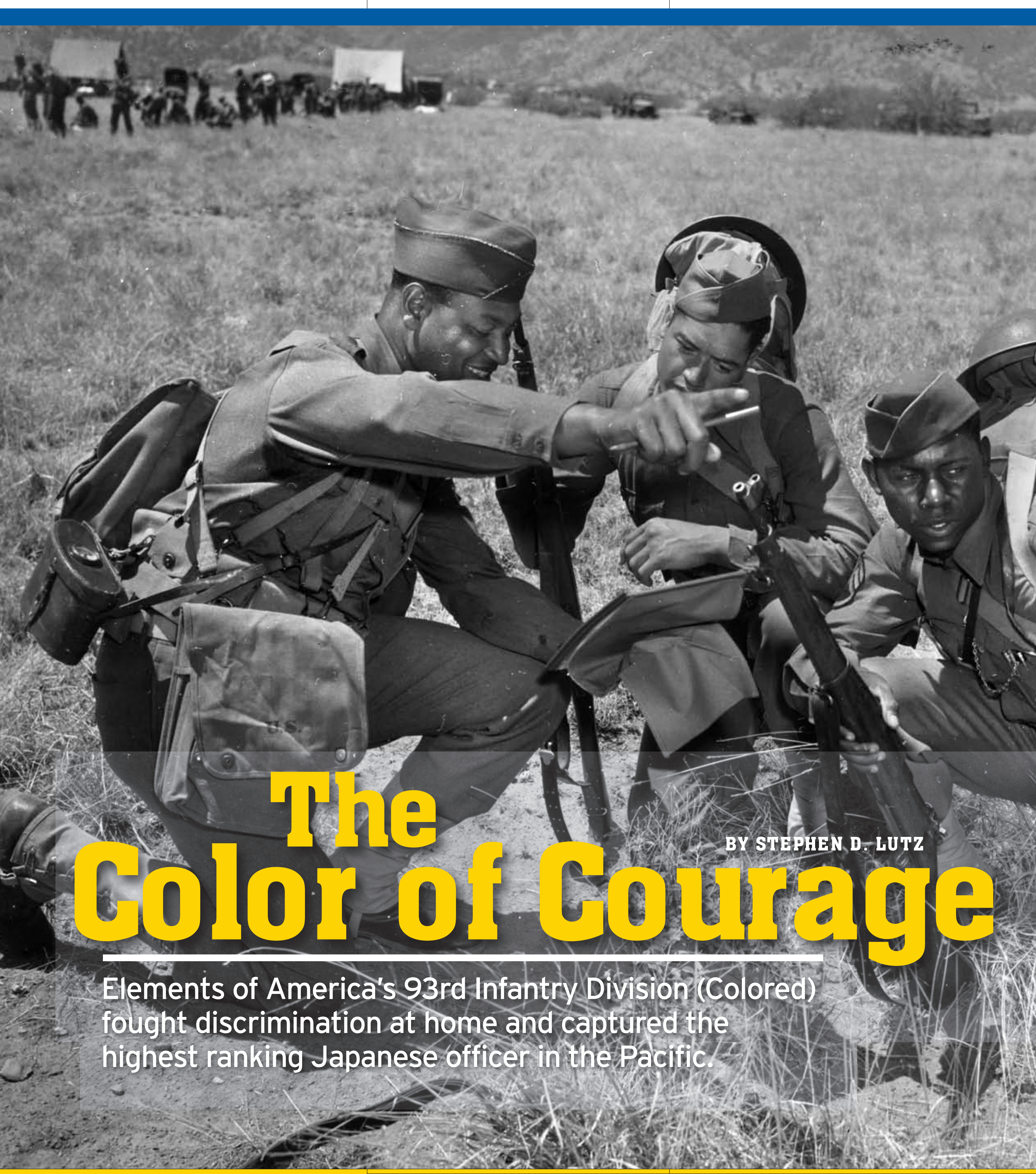
The USO has repeated its support of American soldiers in every war since World War II, including Korea, Vietnam, Desert Storm, and more recently during the War on Terror. The names of the locations, the volunteers, or the actors and singers may have changed, but the attitude is the same: a genuine desire to help those fighting to protect America's freedoms and way of life.

National Archives

ABOVE: Black USO hostesses serve African American soldiers of the 2nd Cavalry Division at Camp Funston, Kansas. Because of segregation, the USO had to provide separate facilities for black and white troops. **BELOW:** Marlene Dietrich is hoisted onto the shoulders of 2nd Infantry Division soldiers on the troopship SS *Monticello* as they return to New York Harbor at war's end. General Patton once gave her a pistol for protection in the event she was ever captured by the Nazis.

Author's Collection

The countless volunteers—be they famous individuals or simple folks wanting to make a difference—each provide a feeling of a caring population. Several current volunteers, stand out: Myrtle Feeney, Sybille Eckhardt, Celesete Warner-Heymann, and Helmut Esser, each withmore than 10,000 hours of service. Baking homemade cookies and cakes for wounded soldiers in military hospitals or providing Kool-Aid powder so that the foul-tasting water in the desert is easier to drink, the USO provides. □



The Color of Courage

BY STEPHEN D. LUTZ

Elements of America's 93rd Infantry Division (Colored) fought discrimination at home and captured the highest ranking Japanese officer in the Pacific.

ON August 2, 1945, two weeks prior to Japan's surrender, the highest ranking Japanese officer captured during the war in the Pacific was taken on the island of Morotai, Dutch New Guinea.

What makes that event remarkable is the fact that those who captured him were members of the 93rd Infantry Division's 25th Infantry Regiment. Of the division's 14,000 members, well over 90 percent were African Americans.

The 93rd's story is one of overcoming obstacles. Most military units only need to battle the enemy; the 93rd had to battle hatred and discrimination at home, a white-dominated military establishment that didn't want them, and officers that didn't want to lead them. Worst of all, the 93rd had to fight the widespread belief that black soldiers were not capable of performing with exemplary courage on the battlefield.

The 93rd Infantry Division got its start as an all-black outfit during World War I and proved its mettle in ferocious battles in France.

Apprehensions existed as to what to expect from 20,000 armed African Americans concentrated in one place. The most overriding questions were how well they would fight—or if they would fight. How well would they follow their white officers in combat?

At first, thousands of 93rd soldiers found themselves doing nothing more than manual labor within the Army. For whatever reason, the segregated, white-dominated U.S. Army thought of the 93rd the way the British and French thought of American soldiers overall. Could any American, regardless of color, fight and succeed in a European war?

Upon arrival in France, the American Expeditionary Force itself was almost parceled out to serve under British and French command structures, but General John J. Pershing said no. (Actually, some units did serve under the British, and black American units were under French command.)

After proving itself, the U.S. Army was still in a quandary about what to do with the 93rd. Black officers were generally regarded as incompetent, and no white officer wanted the command.

The French had no such hesitation. They readily welcomed the 93rd but assigned its four regiments to three French divisions. The 369th Regiment went to the 161st Division, the 370th Regiment went to 26th Division, and the 371st and 372nd Regiments went to the 157th (Colonial) Division.

From that point on the only American thing those four regiments did was wear American uniforms. They ate French rations, used French weapons, fought using French military tactics, and probably learned to speak quite a bit of French.

Although their uniforms were American, their helmets were the French-style, blueish-tinted Adrian helmet. The 93rd's division patch, henceforth, became the silhouetted Adrian helmet patch in a black circle. Because of this, the 93rd was nicknamed the "Blue Helmet" Division.

Throughout World War I, no other American division had as many days in continuous direct combat as those of the four regiments constituting the 93rd. The 369th notched 191 days, beating any similar white unit by a week. The men were decorated with the French Croix de Guerre to show that they had proved their capabilities; 23 years after World War I, the 93rd would have to go through it all over again.

During World War II, the U.S. Army fielded 68 infantry divisions; the normal number of soldiers hovered between 14,000 and 18,000 per division. By early December 1941, the African American press, along with some of their white counterparts, was campaigning to expand the participation of blacks in the war expected to come.

Three members of Company M, 25th Regiment, 93rd Infantry Division—the first all-African American division in World War II—work out a field problem during training at Fort Huachuca, Arizona, May 1942. Although it had proven itself a competent combat force during World War I in France, the 93rd faced segregation and discrimination at home, and the War Department did not know what to do with it or other "all-black" units.

All photos: National Archives

In turn, the U.S. Army clearly stated its position on racial integration. Social integration was a civilian-sociological activity to figure out. It was never meant to be a military issue. In regard to the anticipated war, the Army first envisioned four all-black divisions, but in the end only half came to be. One division—the 92nd—wound up in Italy, while the other—the 93rd—served in the Pacific Theater.

Another division, which would have been designated the 2nd Cavalry Division, got as far as Oran, Algeria, on March 9, 1944. Once there, it was broken up and divvied out in parcels as support units to larger operations and mostly in noncombat roles. It would be up to the 92nd and 93rd to show what the African American infantry soldier was capable of doing.

Although there were black units that fought in the American Revolutionary War and in the Civil War, the modern era of African American soldiers began in 1892. Fort Huachuca, Arizona, lies in the state's south central region of the Sierra Vista mountain range within 20 miles of the Mexican border. Historically, Fort Huachuca was a western frontier fort positioned for intervening with renegade Indians and roaming bandits, whether Mexican or American.

The first Army unit billeted at the desolate post was the 24th Infantry Regiment (Colored) in 1892. Then came the 25th Infantry, followed by the 9th and 10th Cavalry Regiments; all four were African American, or "colored" units. By 1939 the primary residents at Fort Huachuca were the 10th Cavalry and the 25th Infantry. By the time the 93rd was activated there for its military training on May 15, 1942, the educators/drill sergeants were be those from the 24th Infantry Regiment.

As a pre-World War II military installation, Fort Huachuca's populace rarely rose above 800, but that number was about to expand greatly. Fort Huachuca was such a remote, out-of-the-way setting it seemed a perfect place for African American units, for the Army believed there would be less racial friction with any nearby civilian populace. The Army was wrong; fights—often deadly—between black and white soldiers and the civilians were a common occurrence.

Group portrait of bravery. African American soldiers of the 369th Regiment (a New York element attached to the French Army) who were awarded the Croix de Guerre for gallantry in action in France in World War I. (L. to R., front row): Ed Williams, Herbert Taylor, Leon Fraitor, Ralph Hawkins. (Back row): H.D. Prinas, Dan Stroms, Joe Williams, Alfred Hanley, T.W. Taylor.

Like all the Army posts of the day, Fort Huachuca was segregated, even when it came to medical care. Two hospitals existed—one strictly for white patients and the other for black. The latter hospital had nearly 950 patient beds, making it America's largest African American hospital staffed by all African American medical personnel.

Of course, there were also separate barracks, mess halls, and service clubs for officers, noncommissioned officers, and enlisted ranks of both races. Soldiers in the 93rd also brought with them just over 900 dependents: wives, children, and even a few parents.

There were complaints aplenty. One soldier in the 369th told a visiting black general, "I'm basically fighting against slavery down here, sir," while another said, "The Jim-Crowing of our outfit down here must stop."

While the enlisted men were black, most of the officers were white, and it was generally thought that being assigned to command a black unit was the "kiss of death" for a white officer. Appointed division commander was 55-year-old, 1911 West Point graduate and veteran of the 2nd Infantry Division in World War I Maj. Gen. Charles P. Hall.

Hall was the first of four commanders during the 93rd's nearly four-year existence. It was his task to lead the 93rd through its 17 weeks of basic training, then any advanced training required—a task most of his contemporaries did not envy.

One of the reasons Hall was selected was because he had been born and raised in Mississippi. Because he had come from the Deep South, many of his military superiors thought he could relate to African American soldiers better than others considered for the job. Again, the Army was wrong.

The 93rd's Division Artillery commander, Brig. Gen. William Spence, was another Southerner who had a North Carolina upbringing and thus got his assignment under the same circumstances.

Hall's newly formed division consisted mostly of 14,000 enlisted men within the ranks. Among its 883 officers—about half of whom were black—were first and second lieutenants. When one new black lieutenant reported to his white company com-

mander, the captain did not even return the younger officer's salute; "I hate ni--ers," is all the captain said.

Before the outbreak of World War II, the U.S. Army revised its organizational structure to the "triangular" concept, meaning that a division had three regiments as compared to the four during World War I. With this streamlined concept, the 93rd Division now had three regiments: the 25th, 368th, and 369th. While the 25th had previously existed as a Regular Army regiment, the 368th was originally the 8th Infantry Regiment of the Illinois Army National Guard; the newly formed 369th was composed mostly of draftees. Each regiment had three battalions.

Brigadier General Spence's field artillery had four battalions: the 593rd, 594th, 595th, and 596th, each with 12 guns (primarily 105mm howitzers). Additionally there were the 93rd Quartermaster Battalion, 318th Engineer Combat Battalion, 318th Medical Battalion, 793rd Light Maintenance Ordnance Company, 93rd Signal Company, 93rd Cavalry Reconnaissance Troop, a military police platoon, and other support units.

In terms of personnel, the Blue Helmet Division resembled just about any other infantry division on paper—60 percent draftees, 26 percent volunteers, and 14 percent transferred veterans.

In keeping with the Army's standardized instruction schedule, the 93rd's first 17 weeks of training included the basics of soldiering—learning how to march, perform the manual of arms and close-order drill, adjust to barracks life and military discipline, etc. Then came 13 weeks of training in infantry, artillery, or other specialties.

Once proficiency was achieved, the division was graded and moved up to the level of a "maneuver" division. That meant a 14-week encounter with other divisions in staged war games. Following that came the final eight weeks of specialized training that focused on where the selected division might be headed.

From the beginning the 93rd was burdened with the trials and tribulations of discrimination. The Army's inductee test for military capabilities was heavily skewed against black soldiers in general and the 93rd in particular. The Army General Classification Test (AGCT) set the standard for what direction any recruit would go during his Army career.

The 93rd Infantry Division in training at Fort Huachuca, May 1942. Note the soldiers are still equipped with the World War I British-style "Brodie" helmets, and manning a World War I-style trench.

The basics of that test measured one's level of reading and comprehension. Thus Class 1 represented the highest scores; Class 5 was the lowest.

It seemed that the 93rd was doomed before even progressing beyond its basic training, for most of its members had received a substandard education. Of the 14,000 men within the 93rd, only 0.1 percent reached Class 1, while 45 percent of the division was rated Class 5. Within white divisions of the same experience, 6.6 percent were rated Class 1 and 8.5 percent were at Class 5.

These prejudices even affected the division's 585 black lieutenants. To be a commissioned officer, one either had to have a college degree (which few blacks had at the time) or had graduated from Officers Candidate School (OCS). The higher ranking black officers—captains and majors—were mostly found among the medical or chaplain corps. Once such officers showed an exceptional degree of leadership and education and were skilled enough for advancement, many were transferred out.

As for their white counterparts assigned to the 93rd, some being West Point graduates, those lieutenants resented their assignment; many could not get transferred away from Fort Huachuca quickly enough. Thus, keeping qualified, competent junior officer leadership in the 93rd became a challenge.

The Army wasn't the only institution with a "race problem." The Marines did not accept African Americans, and the Navy accepted almost none between the world wars; in the late 1930s, blacks could join the Navy but could serve only as mess stewards.

Once war broke out, the American Negro press, along with some progressive white newspapers, began to point out that blacks were not given a fair shake by the military, especially considering deficiencies in Negro education. One argument involved how well educated the typical Russian peasant-soldier holding the Nazi advance at bay in Western Russia was. Nobody really knew how educated the typical Japanese soldier in the Pacific was, but he was fighting extremely well.

In October 1942, Maj. Gen. Hall, the 93rd's commander, was "bumped upstairs" and replaced by Maj. Gen. Fred W. Miller. His direct instruction to his staff was to minimize the duties and responsibilities of the division's black soldiers.

At one point men of the 93rd wanted to change their division patch from the French Adrian helmet silhouette to something more American. One idea kicked around was a rattlesnake since they were plentiful around their Arizona home. Another was an outline of the State of Arizona.

In a division-wide vote, the majority opted for a growling black panther. The division's executive officer, Brig. Gen. Allison J. Barnett, also voted his approval on the black panther symbol but higher headquarters overruled the vote, insisting that the Adrian helmet remain to designate the division's World War I lineage.

The 93rd began its 17-week basic training program in the Arizona heat. Then came the interdivisional 13-week coordinated unit sessions. Then Arizona governor Sidney Osborn had a less-than-brilliant idea. When the division was not training, perhaps it could be used to pick the cotton in Pima and Maricopa Counties since many of the able-bodied field hands were off in military service or war industries.

While President Roosevelt thought the idea had merit, it was eventually quashed. As one sociologist said, "The armed forces should bend over backwards to see that Negro soldiers are not the first soldiers to be used as farmers and that of all things they should not be assigned to pick cotton which epitomizes to many a return to slavery status."

After receiving the minimum basic training, then taking part in interdivisional war games, the 93rd departed on April 3, 1943, for the large-scale 1943 Louisiana Maneuvers. During that time the other black division, the 92nd, moved into the vacated Fort Huachuca.

For three months the "Blue Army" and "Red Army" chased each other across swamps, up and down hills, and through towns. There was much animosity between white units and the 93rd, and fights often erupted. If the military police got involved, it was assumed that the 93rd "started it all" and received punitive actions at some level. A point came when 125 soldiers within the 93rd collected more than 100 rifles and hid them for any unexpected racial shootout. Fortunately, that did not happen.

Now outfitted with the modern M-1 helmet and an M-1 carbine, Private Clarence Jones, 594th Field Artillery Battalion, is photographed during the Third Army Louisiana Maneuvers, April 1943.

Umpires judged every aspect of the maneuvers. According to the 93rd Division's commander, Maj. Gen. Fred W. Miller, the 93rd did rather well—nothing too exceptional, nothing too exceptionally poor. The Third Army commander, Lt. Gen. Walter Krueger, agreed the 93rd was well led and performed adequately. America's then-highest-ranking African American general, Brig. Gen. Benjamin Davis, Sr., also praised the 93rd's performance. The 93rd had one more go-around before proving itself prepared for overseas movement.

The 93rd moved west into the Southern California Mojave Desert Training Center that butted up against western Arizona. This range, covering 18,000 square miles, was used for the final training of divisions prior to being shipped overseas.

Within this desert training area were a number of camps. The 93rd moved into a camp built just for their convenience at Charleston, Arizona, specially established to be a segregated camp.

For months the 93rd was led to believe it was being prepared for desert warfare while what many thought was a high-level conspiracy was in play. America's top officer, Army Chief of Staff General George C. Marshall, was never a supporter of an integrated army.

A step below Marshall was Lt. Gen. Lesley J. McNair, commander of Army Ground Forces. This 61-year-old, 1904 West Point graduate had the next to the last word on whether or not Army units were ready for combat operations. His preference was to see African American divisions broken up and no more than regimental-sized sub-units be parceled out to other units. Almost to a man, American military leaders were dubious of what any sizable African American infantry unit could achieve.

Farther down the chain of command was 59-year-old 1912 West Point graduate Lt. Gen. Millard F. Harmon. In 1916 he was among the first Army Air Corps pilots. By late January 1942, he was chief of staff of the Army Air Forces and ended up managing the Army's ground war operations across the South Pacific while the 93rd was still training

in the Mojave Desert. In early 1944, he told his superiors he needed another infantry division, and its color made no difference to him.

At this time, Douglas MacArthur was coming under fire from his boss, President Franklin D. Roosevelt. As commander in chief, Roosevelt was pressured into answering more and more inquiries from the African American (and white) press: Why weren't more black combat units in the war? By January 1944 it was settled: The 93rd Division would be going off to war.

The 93rd was put on troop trains heading to California. Just east of San Francisco was the city of Pittsburg with its bustling Camp Stoneman Replacement Depot. Once there, the 93rd learned that it was headed not for the desert but to the Pacific Theater. Leading them was their new commander, 48-year-old Maj. Gen. Raymond G. Lehman of Minnesota, a World War I veteran. Under intense pressure back home for the commitment of black troops to combat, the 93rd would soon ship out for Guadalcanal.

In February and March 1944, elements of the 93rd began arriving on Guadalcanal, where major fighting had ended more than a year earlier. But there still were scattered remnants of Japanese resisters who could make life interesting for the Americans.

No sooner had the 93rd arrived on Guadalcanal than it was disassembled and its various parts were shipped to other locations under XIV Corps commander Maj. Gen. Oscar W. Griswold.

Remaining on Guadalcanal were the 25th Infantry Regiment, one field artillery battalion, and a section from the medical battalion. The 368th Infantry Regiment, 594th Field Artillery Battalion and another group of medical personnel ended up at Banika in the Russell Islands. The 369th Infantry Regiment, 595th Field Artillery Battalion, and other selected groups landed in the New Georgia Island group. Other elements of the 93rd were sent to Wake Island where there was little combat.

A separate all-black regiment, the 24th—with whom the 93rd Division had shared space at Fort Huachuca—had been on Guadalcanal since August 1943. Most of the black troops were relegated to service duties such as improving bivouac areas, building roadways, or working as stevedores—dockworkers unloading and reloading ships. If time permitted once their chores were done, the 24th joined with the 25th Infantry Regiment for brief courses in jungle fighting and survival.

Members of the 593rd Field Artillery Battalion, an element of the 93rd Division, unload 105mm ammunition on Bougainville, April 1944. Because of widespread white prejudice against African American soldiers, many black units were assigned to perform menial labor.

As for the 25th, they, too, were given little to do but hard, menial labor and guard duty along the perimeter of their bivouac areas at night with a rare foray into the jungle on combat patrols. Intermittent Japanese air raids provided the only excitement.

The black troops were told the same story by the Army: The manual jobs they were performing were a necessity and would keep them physically fit for actual combat. But the 93rd despaired of ever seeing combat; it remained a scattered, disjointed division for nearly 14 months. Their "baptism of fire" would come on Bougainville, a part of the Solomon Islands.

The fight for Bougainville had been taking place sporadically since November 1, 1943, against Japanese soldiers who hid out in the jungle after first fighting against the U.S. Marine Corps' 3rd Division.

On January 12, 1944, the Army's 23rd Infantry Division, also known as the Americal Division, took over from the Marines. In late March 1944, the 25th Infantry Regiment was sent from Guadalcanal to Empress Augusta Bay on the southern end of Bougainville to join Americal's three regiments—the 164th, 182nd, and 132nd.

Each battalion of the 25th would be attached to an Americal regiment and given more extensive schooling in jungle warfare. The terrain and climate were a far cry from the California desert in which the unit had previously trained.

Also there was the 1st Battalion of the 24th Regiment, attached to the 132nd.

Based out of a bivouac area just off the Torokina Airstrip, the three battalions of the 25th Regiment commenced field operations with their Americal counterparts from squad- to platoon- to company-size patrols. Later, many of the 25th veterans would vividly recall the stench of rotting jungle vegetation and decaying animals and humans.

A 25th Infantry Regiment soldier, supporting the 23rd (Americal) Infantry Division, takes aim at Japanese troops in an enemy bivouac area on Bougainville, April 6, 1944.

Many a wounded or ill Japanese soldier who was not able to keep up with his comrades would climb a banyan tree and tie himself to it. Essentially he became a sniper locked in place and attached to the tree. Even if not shooting an American, many snipers would die in those trees without being discovered.

Eased into combat, the 25th soon found its footing and began to perform like a seasoned unit. On March 31, during attacks on Hills 500 and 501, Private James H. O'Banner became the first enlisted man of the 93rd Division to kill an enemy soldier.

The worst day for the 25th Regiment on Bougainville was April 7, 1944. On that day 180 soldiers of the 3rd Battalion's Company K followed their white captain, James J. Curran, on a special patrol. This particular adventure was the 25th's first company-size operation almost entirely on its own.

It was viewed as such a major step forward for the regiment, if not for the 93rd Division as well, that two Army Signal Corps photographers went along to document the event.

Another "guest" was Captain William A. Crutcher as artillery spotter from the 93rd's 593rd Field Artillery. Of this entire lot of 180 men, only one was an experienced combat veteran—the white Sergeant Ralph Brodin of the Americal's 164th Regiment.

The mission focused on blocking a trail lying 3,000 yards beyond Americal's perimeter. It was a path long recognized as being used by the Japanese. Expecting to encounter some of the enemy, Curran's company went out well prepared. Nine BAR (Browning Automatic Rifle) men were a part of the patrol, along with four .30-caliber machine guns, one 60mm mortar, and two SCR-300 radios.

Setting out on the morning of April 6, Curran advanced his company with the first platoon as point. The second platoon was divided between the two flanks. The third platoon, led by the company's second in command, black Lieutenant Oscar Davenport, brought up the rear.

Reaching a point about 2,000 yards from their line of departure, Company K found an abandoned enemy aid station. After securing the find, Curran had the first platoon split into "finger patrols" and move farther forward. Within minutes enemy fire was received. Then it all dissolved into chaos.

Survivors would claim at least three enemy killed in that initial exchange of gunfire during which the three platoons commenced firing in every direction. The jungle vegetation was so thick and heavily overgrown that the three platoons could not see one another, let alone at whom they were shooting or from where the shooting was coming.

Curran radioed battalion commander Colonel Everett M. Yon for instructions and was told to reel in his company, fall back 300 yards, regroup, and make a more coordinated advance. That, however, would never happen. Some Japanese were yelling out orders in English that some of Company K thought were legitimate "cease-fire" orders.

One Company K soldier, James Graham, said he shot a Japanese soldier up close and

hit him dead center of his chest. The dying Japanese soldier said in coherent English, "You got me."

Lieutenant Davenport went forward in an attempt to regain order at the center of the firing, only to be killed when he paused to help a wounded comrade; nine others were also killed. Survivors of the skirmish would testify that the only strong, standout person throughout the 40-minute firefight was Sergeant Ralph Brodin, who went about rallying soldiers and pointing them in the right direction to either shoot or withdraw. He constantly exposed himself to enemy fire and somehow was physically unscathed by it all.

The men of Company K then realized that Captain Curran, his radioman, and the company's first sergeant were nowhere to be found. By then Captain Crutcher was calling in a spot-on artillery concentration, and the 593rd dropped two dozen rounds on what was believed to be the enemy's concentrated gathering site.

By 5:30 PM survivors brought back 20 wounded, leaving 10 comrades dead where they fell. If not for Sergeant Brodin's cool leadership, those numbers would have ballooned. Also left behind were one radio, one machine gun, one mortar with all its rounds, 18 M-1 rifles, and three carbines, plus a considerable amount of discarded personal equipment. The Signal Corps photographers never took a single picture, or at least none that were ever made public.

Between April 14 and May 2, 1944, the Americal Division conducted what it thought was a thorough, fair, unbiased, nonbigoted investigation into the debacle. Upon testimony of the survivors it was ascertained that Company K came up against no more than two dozen enemy soldiers, and Captain Curran apparently fled the field of battle with the first sergeant hot on his heels.

Many testified they heard shouted commands in English coming from the direction of the enemy. The soldiers had no idea who was giving legitimate orders.

As for the dead left behind on April 7, a patrol by the 25th's Company L led by Lieutenant Reginald Hall went out the next day to retrieve the bodies. Along the way one solder drowned crossing a river. Coming within 75 yards of the killing field, another Company L soldier died in an ambush. The patrol halted there and then returned to base empty handed.

The following day, black Lieutenant Abner E. Jackson took 40 soldiers out on a second attempt. Upon reaching the two-day-old corpses, 30 of Jackson's men refused to touch the dead. Jackson, two medics, and two sergeants bagged the dead in mattress covers. Only then would the 40 carry them back. They also reclaimed all the discarded weapons, ammunition, and equipment they could find.

In the end, throughout the investigation, Curran had his own personal bodyguard. Once the case was settled, he was transferred out, still a captain. Two black lieutenants were judged lacking in leadership qualities and shipped out as well. From the enlisted ranks, Isaiah Adams and Leroy Morgan were charged and found guilty of disobeying orders. Whose orders those may have been—whether from English-speaking Japanese or other Americans—remains unknown. Both Adams and Morgan were returned stateside.

No matter what flawed, limited, biased, or prejudiced evidence came before XIV Corps Commander Oscar Griswold, he agreed with it. He proclaimed the 25th had too little individual and unit jungle training. The junior-grade black officers were poor examples to follow and, lacking initiative, were not motivated to do better.

Overall, Griswold said that the 25th Infantry Regiment, reflective of the 93rd in total, needed improvement. The 93rd's commander, Maj. Gen. Raymond G. Lehman, disagreed with Griswold's assessment; Lt. Col. Yon sided with Lehman. The investigation was stacked against the 25th, and the 93rd as well, from start to end.

Corps and division rated the 25th's performance as only "fair," but none of the negative statements showed the true heart and soul of the 93rd. For example, in mid-April 1944, a 15-man patrol from the 25th came upon a group of Japanese with well over twice their number and outfitted with machine guns.

Opposing those machine guns was Private Isaac Sermon with his BAR. In the opening exchange of gunfire, Sermon was wounded in the neck. That was the first of four wounds he received while never relenting in the use of his weapon. During the unit's withdrawal, he kept firing away for 600 yards. By then he was so weak from loss of blood that he collapsed. His comrades carried him back to recover from his wounds.

In another action on May 17, 1944, the 25th's 2nd Lt. Charles P. Collins led a patrol on Bougainville along with a contingent of men from the 93rd Cavalry Reconnaissance Troop. Overwhelmed by superior enemy firepower and numbers,

Litter bearers of Company K, 25th Regiment, 93rd Division struggle up Hill 290 on Bougainville with a wounded comrade during fighting on April 7, 1944.

three troopers were killed outright. Three others were wounded but remained somewhat ambulatory. Collins became the fourth wounded and was temporarily blinded as well.

The remaining men withdrew, believing those left behind had been killed and their bodies not recoverable. In fact, Staff Sergeant Rothchild Webb collected all those wounded. Under his guidance the group hid out for three days in heavily enemy-infested surroundings until they reached their own lines.

For their heroics, Webb and Sermon would receive Silver Star medals.

By late summer 1944, two events impacted the 93rd Division. Its commander, Maj. Gen. Lehman, became ill and was replaced by 59-year-old Maj. Gen. Harry H. Johnson, a 1916 graduate of Texas A & M and a World War I veteran of the 36th Infantry Division.

For a brief spell Johnson had commanded the 2nd Cavalry Division—the African American division that did not last long upon reaching Algeria. From Italy Johnson was sent to the Pacific with a special set of instructions from his boss, General Douglas MacArthur. MacArthur wanted the 93rd shaped into a real fighting division with no doubts about its capabilities.

The second event was the positive reaction of the American public to articles found in the newspapers—articles such as those written by 51-year-old Walter F. White, executive secretary of the National Association for Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), who took notice of the struggles of the men serving in the 93rd.

White was also a War Department-accredited war correspondent. He could go anywhere the U.S. Army would allow him to report on the war. With growing support of white Americans, the voices of African Americans highlighting the dilemmas facing the 93rd were becoming heard, creating a challenge for the Army to rectify the situation in the Pacific.

With Bougainville secured, in November 1944 the 25th Regiment was assigned to Finschafen, New Guinea, to beef up U.S. defenses there and, in December 1944, the 24th Regiment departed Bougainville and headed to Saipan and Tinian to again perform mopping-up operations and garrison duties.

ABOVE: The hot, humid jungle conditions on Bougainville made combat an exhausting, harrowing experience for all troops. Here a patrol from the 25th Regiment slogs along a muddy, enemy-infested trail to reach their objective. OPPOSITE: Members of the 1st Battalion, 24th Infantry are briefed by a white officer prior to heading out on a patrol in the Bougainville jungle, April 16, 1944.

But what was in store for the 93rd Division? The answer lay in the Halmahera Island Group of eastern Indonesia's Maluku Islands.

Between Indonesia (formerly the Dutch East Indies) and West Papua lies the "K"-shaped island of Halmahera. By the summer of 1944, this 6,860-square-mile island was known to be the home of 30,000 to 40,000 Japanese soldiers along with some advanced airfields.

Douglas MacArthur's ultimate goal in the Pacific was a grandiose return to the Philippines. A big stepping stone in that direction was Morotai Island, 70 miles north of Halmahera in eastern Indonesia's Maluku Islands. Morotai was 700 square miles of beautiful tropical paradise with lush jungles, rugged mountains, and white sand beaches. But, on the whole, the Japanese did not think much of Morotai—50 miles long by 26 miles wide.

Although the landscape was beautiful, when the Japanese invaded it in 1942 they found a population of 9,000 living on the fringes of mountainous jungles with a wide variety of vegetation. Malaria was rampant, and the flattest piece of real estate was in the southwest corner called the Doroeba Plains. Thinking it could make a useful landing strip for Japanese planes, it became a fool's concept. The Plains flooded excessively during the rainy season, and it took too much time, energy, resources, expenditures, and manpower to keep the airfield operational.

The larger, neighboring Halmahera Island proved a far better setting for over half a dozen airfields and was easier to defend, so the Imperial Japanese Army fortified it and left only a token presence of 600 to 800 soldiers on Morotai, whose entire existence was dependent upon the sea lifeline to Halmahera. A constant stream of small boats, most

often described as barges, kept going back and forth, providing whatever Major Takenobu Kawashima needed to sustain his 2nd Provisional Raider Unit. If that lifeline were ever cut, those on Morotai would be abandoned.

The thick vegetation and craggy peaks were conducive for bands of Japanese resisters who could hide and live off the land indefinitely if they were cut off from supplies from Halmahera.

MacArthur's scheme was to completely bypass Halmahera and capture Morotai, which lay 850 miles south and a bit east of the southern tip of Mindanao in the Philippine Islands. Knowing how weak and poorly defended Morotai was, he felt an invasion would be relatively easy and, more importantly, would bring him closer to the Philippines. By mid-July 1944, proposals were being discussed on how to seize the island.

MacArthur foresaw filling the island with 60,000 Allied military personnel, vastly improving what harbors there were, installing fuel-oil storage tanks, then creating an airstrip called Wama Drome at Pitu Airfield. A hospital system that could accommodate 1,900 patients would also be built.

On August 15, 1944, MacArthur gave the order to commence what was code-named Operation Tradewind with XI Corps commander Lt. Gen. Charles P. Hall, the former commander of the 93rd, in charge of it.

More than 40,000 U.S. Army soldiers, supported by U.S. and Australian naval and air forces, prepared to hit the island. Operation Tradewind, supported by carrier planes of the Navy's 3rd and 7th Fleets as well as fighter-bombers of the Fifth Army Air Force and the RAAF's 80th Fighter Wing, was scheduled for September 15, 1944.

The U.S. Army's 31st "Dixie" Infantry Division, which consisted of the 124th, 155th, and 167th Infantry Regiments—all part of the Alabama, Florida, Louisiana, and Mississippi National Guard—would be the main invasion force.

At the time the 31st Infantry Division stormed ashore, Major Kawashima was in charge of the Japanese garrison. He was specifically instructed by his superiors on Halmahera to withdraw into the island's interior and not challenge the Americans on the landing beaches. He was then to dissolve his force into smaller groups ranging from a dozen to two dozen but nothing larger than 50 in any single locale.

After the Americans came ashore and began hunting for the defenders, life became more and more intolerable for the Japanese; the U. S. Navy's 40 PT-boat Task Force 701.2, which included Patrol Boat Squadrons 9, 10, 18 and 33, kept intercepting barges. The Americans also used loudspeakers to urge, in Japanese, Nippon's soldiers to surrender. It met with a bit of success, and several of the enemy, ragged and hungry, gave themselves up.

The haughty Colonel Kisou Ouchi, commander of the 211th Infantry Regiment, took over Morotai's defenses on October 12, 1944. In addition to his men, there was a mixture of a few other units, including a group of Japanese Army military police known as the Kempei-tai. The Kempei-tai were as bad or worse than Nazi Germany's SS and Gestapo—more secretive, vicious, and lacking in humanity and morals. (See *WWII Quarterly,* Spring 2011).

Little is known of Kisou Ouchi, who was, according to tales told by those who surrendered, despised by those under his command. He may have grown up heavily steeped in the samurai warlord traditions of an older Japanese era, and claimed the privileges of the upper class even while his men suffered. He always demanded better living arrangements and more and better food whenever it became available.

From the outset it seems that the 93rd Infantry Division may never had been considered for any part of the action. Finally, on April 4, 1945—nearly eight months after Operation Tradewind was launched—the decision was made to bring the 93rd ashore at Morotai. The men of the Blue Helmet Division had almost given up hope that they would ever see action and have the opportunity to prove that they were just as good as any all-white division.

They almost didn't get the chance. Nelson Peery, a black platoon leader in Company C of the 93rd, recalled that the tension between his unit and the 31st "Dixie" Division nearly erupted into a race war. While the 93rd was sailing to Morotai, a black sailor on the transport ship men-

tioned that the 31st, which the 93rd was coming in to relieve, was "the Goddamndest set of Ku Kluxers ever seen…. The 31st said they gonna lynch any nigger look cross-eyed at the women [Army nurses]."

The landing craft approached the beach. Peery said that he could see a group of people on the shore—a group of white MPs from the Dixie Division, some holding rifles, a group of nurses from the hospital that had been established nearby, and "the most forlorn group of Negro soldiers [from a water-filtration unit] I had ever seen."

Once on the beach, Peery was approached by one of the "forlorn" black soldiers who seemed overjoyed to see him.

"Jesus Christ! I'm glad to see a black man with a rifle."

"What's the matter, man?" a surprised Peery replied.

"We been catchin' hell here. These white *** got all the guns—they're the military police and they been beating us up."

Peery realized that the rumor he had heard on the boat was true. "So they want to lynch somebody," he said. "I turned to the men filing out of the landing craft. 'Looks like the Dixie boys been giving these men a hard time.'"

Peery's platoon was having none of it. The men loaded their rifles and clicked off the safeties, ready for whatever might come. The superheated atmosphere was about to burst into flames. The nurses looked worried, and the white MPs appeared agitated and ready for a brawl.

A nervous Peery said, "This was worse than combat. We greatly outnumbered them, but we were bunched together for a slaughter. The officers on deck talked together nervously. Behind them, the sailors glanced around for cover. The white soldiers shifted their weapons. We were more than they had bargained for. I turned my back on them and called to the section, 'OK, men, fall in here.'"

His men did as ordered, but a drunken white MP started toward the group, getting ready to unholster his .45. But he stopped when he saw the black solders' weapons brought up to firing position and aimed at him.

"The nurses screamed and ran for the hospital tents," said Peery. "The white soldiers scattered for cover. Men from Company C ran from the landing craft…. Captain Williams, the Negro commander of Company C, ran between the groups. Pulling his .45 from its holster, he shouted for attention. Our men lowered their rifles and snapped to. The terrified white soldier did not move."

Captain Williams ordered the drunken white soldier to get back to his company; the soldier obeyed. The 368th's 1st Battalion commander arrived on the scene, and he and Williams held a brief conference. Soon the situation was defused, and the white soldiers, grumbling, departed the scene.

"We marched to the edge of the swamp that the commander of the 31st had designated our bivouac area, said Peery, but all was not sweetness and light. "Tension rose immediately between the white MPs and our soldiers," he noted. "Arrests and fights between them occurred almost daily. Just as the tension reached the flash point, our division headquarters moved to the island.

"General Johnson, our new commanding officer and the senior officer on the island, took command. Our military police replaced those of the Dixie Division and the bottom rail went to the top. A few cracked heads and the Dixie boys accepted the black MPs. Before any serious trouble developed, the 31st left for the invasion of the Philippines."

The 93rd's arrival did not mean an immediate combat role; the men found the usual tasks awaiting them: guard duty, unloading ships, and stacking piles of supplies. Only this time, their Australian counterparts worked alongside them, virtually shoulder to shoulder.

At last it came time for combat. From the island's southwest corner the 93rd's three regiments would conduct patrols lasting from two to three weeks at a time seeking straggling Japanese holdouts. Their areas of concentration were Wajaboeia, Libano, and Sopi.

One area of particular interest was where the River Tijoe emptied into the Pacific. It was the chosen landing site for supply barges coming from Halmahera Island.

During an April 15, 1945, patrol, men of the 369th Regiment eliminated four Japanese in a shootout. Six days later the 369th brought in the 93rd's first prisoner of war. All the while the Imperial Japanese Navy kept up an intermittent run of barges full of supplies and reinforcements to Morotai. It seemed Ouchi's numbers may have been on the increase.

On May 13, U.S. Navy PT boats chased four Japanese barges that had left Halmahera and were heading for Morotai. Two were destroyed en route, a third was hit just short of Morotai, and the fourth landed, was unloaded, and was hidden in the cove of the Tijoe River outlet. A 25th Regiment patrol eventually found and destroyed it.

On that same day a patrol from the 25th's 3rd Battalion was just north of Libano when it came upon eight well-equipped Japanese who may have been connected to the recently found barge. It was a successful hunt for those of the 3rd Battalion, but in June the 25th would be moved to the Green Islands, where once again they would be used primarily in a service and security role.

On May 24, Company F of the 368th Regiment sent out a patrol led by Lieutenant Richard L. Crawford. Their starting point was the well-known streambed of the Tijoe River. Moving inland, Crawford's 12-man patrol quickly found and began tracking a set of footprints that followed the stream. Two miles later the footprints turned away from the water and went up a rocky ridge onto a jungle-covered hill.

Carrying on stealthily, Crawford's patrol spotted seven unsuspecting Japanese soldiers resting; all wore newly issued, immaculate uniforms. Only one carried a rifle while the others had just pistols. From their hiding place, Crawford and his men watched as one soldier spent a considerable amount of time looking into a hand-held mirror while grooming his beard. The Japanese seemed more like they were preparing for a parade than worried about the possibility of being ambushed.

Troops of the 24th Infantry, attached to the 23rd (Americal) Division, gather behind a Sherman tank before assaulting enemy positions near Empress Augusta Bay, Bougainville, 1944. By war's end, the 93rd reached Mindanao and Leyte in the Philippines and proved that black soldiers were every bit as brave as their white counterparts.

Crawford's patrol opened fire, killing six; the seventh got away, but a blood trail leading into the jungle showed that he had been wounded. Through documents on the bodies, it was determined that these soldiers were, indeed, Kempei-tai.

On July 11, another Crawford-led patrol was again in the Tijoe River area. This 12-man patrol was to spend two weeks in the vicinity scouting for Japanese—especially Colonel Ouchi. On their last day they found a wounded Japanese soldier and took him prisoner. For the aid, comfort, and rations given him, he was happy to give up the location of a nearby camp where Ouchi had his headquarters.

The patrol found a three-hut camp in a clearing occupied by 10 or 12 Japanese. A brief firefight netted one enemy dead, at least six wounded, and the rest running for their lives. They left behind ample piles of rice, blankets, ammunition, and grenades.

Another two days of patrolling netted nothing. On August 2, Crawford's men heard wood being chopped. Homing in on the sound, they found a four-hut camp with a number of Japanese napping. Another half dozen had just deposited boxes of supplies they had carried in and were heading downhill to swim in the river.

Positioning his patrol to cover both camp and swimmers, Crawford tried talking the bathers into surrendering. They refused and ran off into the jungle. At the camp the rest of Crawford's men opened up on the Japanese, killing seven on the spot. Two others ran off into the jungle, and one man was captured.

As luck would have it, Colonel Ouchi was the man captured. While Ouchi was being led away by Sergeant Jack McKenzie, a Japanese soldier playing dead rose up to take out the sergeant. Firing his carbine from the hip without letting go of his prisoner, McKenzie shot his attacker in the head. Colonel Ouchi became the highest ranking Japanese officer captured under combat conditions prior to Japan's surrender.

For their contributions to Ouchi's capture, Sergeant Alfonzia Dillon received the Silver Star while Sergeant Albert Morrison and Privates First Class Robert A. Evans and Elmer Sloan received Bronze Stars.

With their commander in captivity, more than 600 other Japanese finally came out of hiding to surrender.

The 93rd Division saw very little additional combat, but the men did make a contribution to victory in the Pacific. From April 10 to July 10, 1945, the division discharged and offloaded 311,552 tons of supplies and equipment, moved thousands of Allied troops from transports to staging areas and back to embarkation points, and improved harbor facilities, roads, and camp sites. But there were still battles to be fought.

While on Jolo Island in the Philippines' Sulu Archipelago, between Borneo and Mindanao, on July 17, 1945, a patrol from Company I, 368th Regiment was ambushed by a Japanese force three times its size. With bullets flying everywhere, Staff Sergeant Leonard E. Dowden from New Orleans, Louisiana, moved his squad to within 30 yards of the Japanese but was then cut down by enemy fire.

Despite being gravely wounded, Dowden crawled forward alone to assault a machine-gun position with grenades. Just as he was about to throw a grenade, a burst of fire killed him. The patrol was able to fight off the enemy attack with only 18

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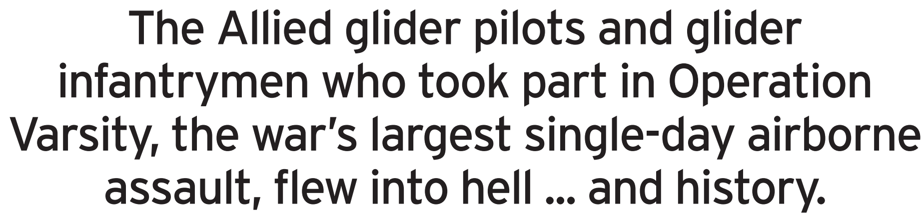
National Archives

Glider troops of the 194th Glider Infantry Regiment, 17th Airborne Division, having just survived the crash landings of their CG-4A Waco gliders onto German soil, begin to move out toward their assembly areas near Wesel, March 24, 1945. INSET: Tom Warner's glider qualification wings. So hazardous was the job that troops said the "G" stood for "Guts."

THE BIRDMEN OF VARSITY



The Allied glider pilots and glider infantrymen who took part in Operation Varsity, the war's largest single-day airborne assault, flew into hell ... and history.

BY CHRISTOPHER WARNER

Author's Collection

MARCH 24, 1945. THE GREEN LIGHT FLASHED FROM THE C-47 TUG PLANE, prompting the glider pilot being pulled behind it to release his tow rope over Landing Zone N, just east of the Rhine River. A steady barrage of German antiaircraft flak blackened the sky as tracer bullets ripped through his rickety Waco CG-4A's fabric-covered fuselage. Making matters worse, thick smoke and haze blanketed the congested LZ, concealing the bevy of wrecked gliders and scrambling troops below.

More bad news: enemy snipers and flamethrowers waited below in a field laced with rows of ditches and barbed wire. Nonetheless, the pilot had to land quickly and at least give himself a fighting a chance on the ground. In all previous combat missions, American glider pilots suffered some of the highest casualty rates of the war. Surviving this corner of hell would be no different.

Operation Varsity, the airborne element to British Field Marshal Bernard L. Montgomery's ground assault across the Rhine River, Operation Plunder, involved more than 4,000 Allied aircraft, including 906 American CG-4A combat gliders, and became the largest, single lift airborne operation in history. It would also be the last major airborne offensive of World War II.

Allied glider pilots faced an especially daunting challenge: deliver heavy equipment, troops, and medical supplies behind well-fortified enemy lines in nonpowered, slow-moving aircraft made of canvas, plywood, and metal tubing. Once again, high casualties were expected.

The men flying these "Silent Wings" were a unique breed of soldier, serving as both pilot and grunt soldier—an unenviable position that ostensibly doubled their odds of being killed. Additionally, the glider pilots' primary duty was returning to their air bases as soon as possible to be available to fly another mission.

Like the aircraft itself, glider pilots were considered expendable. In fact, the men weren't even given parachutes because their "flying coffins" flew either too low to jump or too high for the pilot to survive the fall.

Also setting them apart, glider pilots wore a hard-earned, silver-winged pin stamped with a capital "G"—a letter that would also become synonymous for "guts."

One of those pins belonged to my great uncle, Flight Officer Tom Warner who, on that fateful March afternoon, unhitched from his tow plane and began punching out the plexiglass side window panel prior to touching down. It was a deft maneuver that allowed him to rapidly exit the glider—providing that he survived the controlled crash

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Two CG-4A Waco gliders, being towed by a single C-47, approach the release point near Wesel. Each Waco could carry 13 soldiers, a 75mm howitzer, a jeep, or a 1/4-ton trailer; 906 American gliders took part in Varsity.

landing or wasn't killed by ground fire.

After the war, General William C. Westmoreland had this to say about the dangers experienced by glider pilots: "Every landing was a genuine do-or-die situation often in total darkness. They were the only aviators during World War II who had no motors, no parachutes, and no second chances."

Like many young men living in the Depression era, Tom Warner struggled to find gainful employment while yearning for something more out of life—anything to replace the daily humdrum and frustration of deadend jobs. The attack on Pearl Harbor changed everything. Warner soon enlisted in the newly formed Glider Pilot Program under the command of General Henry "Hap" Arnold.

Germany had been the first to utilize gliders in combat, benefiting indirectly from sanctions of the Treaty of Versailles that prohibited the Germans from having an air force. However, since the treaty didn't prohibit the production and use of unpowered aircraft, glider-flying clubs flourished throughout the country, producing the core of future Luftwaffe pilots.

In the spring of 1940, the combat glider made its debut at the Battle of Fort Eben-Emael in Belgium. The enormous, heavily armed garrison, encircled by a moat and thought to be impregnable, stood tall as an imposing roadblock to Germany's Blitzkrieg across Europe. As the brainchild of Hitler himself, the audacious plan intended to showcase the combat glider's landing precision and hauling capacity with only limited manpower.

The assault exceeded all expectations. At dawn on May 20, nine DFS-230 gliders carrying a scant total of 70 assault troops landed on top of Eben-Emael's earthen roof, catching the unsuspecting Belgians completely off guard. Twenty minutes later the fort surrendered—and just as quickly established the glider's stealth reputation. The rest of the world took notice.

A year later, however, the Germans ironically deemed glider-led assaults too dangerous after suffering heavy casualties in a hard fought victory at the Battle of Crete. Nonetheless, the Allies charged ahead to develop their own glider fleets.

General Arnold's plan initially called for using only officers from the newly formed U.S. Army Air Forces or enlisted men who met specific criteria with flying experience. However, with America ramping up for war, power pilots couldn't be spared, and there simply weren't enough qualified men available to fulfill the quota of 6,000 glider pilots.

A hastily arranged public relations campaign was launched to find recruits—and fast. From state fairs to college campuses and across all military bases, the USAAF distributed flashy pamphlets, touting a patriotic call to adventure: "It's a He-Man's job for men that want to serve their country in the air!"

Other nicknames for the would-be pilots either crazy or brave enough to volunteer included "suicide jockeys," "tow targets," and "flak bait."

But with the promise of hazardous duty pay and the rank of staff sergeant that would go to pilots, Tom Warner and other eager recruits signed up, their sights on flying combat gliders. There was just one problem: no gliders had yet been built.

Most aircraft manufacturers at the time were already producing as many powered air-

craft as they could under restrictive government contracts. Eventually, the Waco Aircraft Company (pronounced "wocko") of Troy, Indiana, won the bid to design and help build America's first combat glider, the CG-4A.

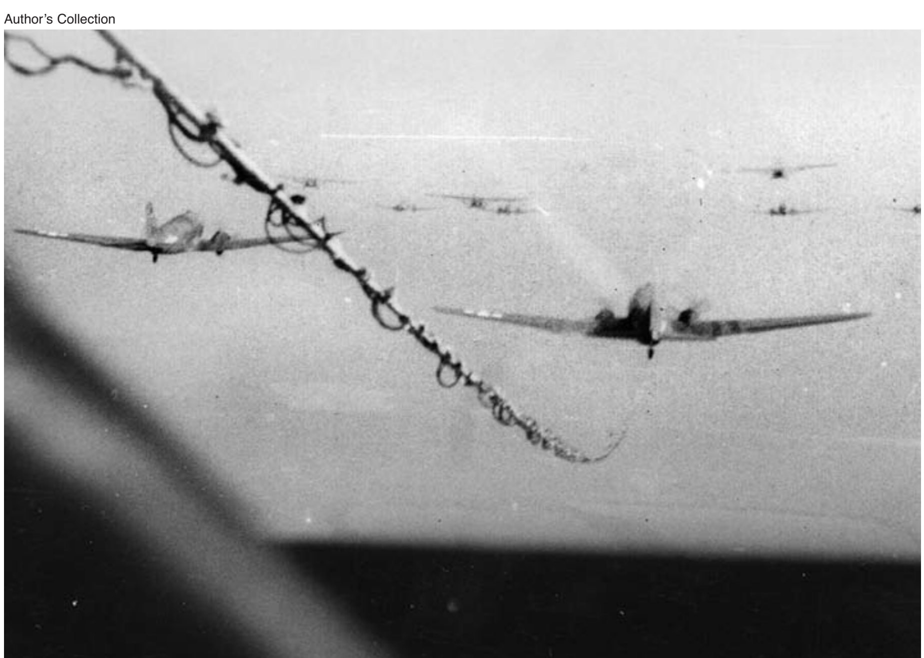
Waco joined 15 other companies (including the Ford Motor Company) and subcontractors to fill the urgent demand. With a wingspan of 84 feet and a fuselage 48 feet long, the CG-4A was constructed primarily of honeycombed plywood, steel tubing, and canvas fabric. Cargo typically consisted of two pilots and up to 13 troops or a combination of heavy equipment such as a Jeep or 75mm howitzer.

Two pilots sat in the plexiglass nose, which opened upward on a hinge to facilitate loading and unloading. Frequently, however, landings were so rough that cargo had to be cut out of the damaged aircraft with an axe.

Additionally, the locking device holding the nose in the upright position sometimes failed before the pilots could climb back out of the nose, keeping them strapped to their seats and staring straight up into the sky.

Another unpleasant feature of the CG-4A was deafening noise. CBS war correspondent Walter Cronkite experienced this firsthand as a young reporter covering the Battle of the Ardennes: "Riding in those Waco gliders was like attending a rock concert while locked in the bass drum ... with enough decibels to promise permanent deafness. I'll tell you straight out: If you've got to go into combat, don't go by glider. Walk, crawl, parachute, swim, float—anything. But don't go by glider! This comes from someone who did it—once."

Author's Collection



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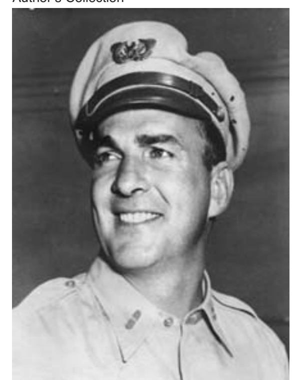

ABOVE: Tom Warner snapped this photo from his glider cockpit showing his tow rope connected to a C-47. RIGHT: Flight Officer Tom Warner, the author's uncle, flew a Waco during Varsity and survived.

Early use of the CG-4A in combat during the 1943 invasion of Sicily (Operation Husky) had produced alarmingly high casualties with several gliders crashing into the Mediterranean Sea or into other gliders. Adding the element of enemy gunfire only increased the steep learning curve for the newly arrived pilots. One such lesson was using an extra slab of metal or flak jacket as a seat cushion to avoid becoming a eunuch.

Tom W. Mayer, retired professor, writer, and aviation expert, had this to say about the piloting hazards they endured: "With minimal training, a glider pilot had to be pretty good or he'd screw up the tow plane, too. If the glider climbed too much before the gooney bird was up and flying, the gooney bird could get tipped onto its nose at 80-plus mph and both engines at full power.

"If the glider pilot stayed too low, he was in beaucoup turbulence from prop wash, which made the glider even less controllable than usual and imposed all sorts of unhappy extra stresses on the rope and fuselage."

Perhaps more aware of their tenuous mortality, glider pilots were regarded as some of the most rebellious soldiers in the Army with little regard for rules and regulations. They were seen as misfits or washouts from other flight programs; many of them were too old or had less than perfect eyesight—or perhaps were just "adrenaline junkies" looking to push the envelope.

In an effort to boost morale, General Arnold announced in late 1943 that all glider pilots completing the program would be upgraded to the rank of flight officer and addressed by the elevated title of "Mister." The promotion affected little change. With a devil may care reputation, glider pilots refused to assimilate with other flight officers—or even look like them.

Favoring a knit wool cap, old leather flight jacket, and overall casual appearance, they were often mistaken for ground crews and other servicemen. The cavalier group also held the distinction of not being bound to any unit once their mission was completed.

Power pilots regarded them with contempt. Airborne infantry resented riding with them, which they voiced in their very own anthem (sung to the tune of "The Daring Young Man in the Flying Trapeze"):

Once I was Infantry,
but now I'm a dope.
Riding in gliders,
attached to a rope,
Safety in landing is only a hope.
And the pay is exactly the same!

As the Allies prepared for the Normandy

invasion (Operation Overlord), Tom Warner earned his coveted silver "G" wings at South Plains Army Air Field in Lubbock, Texas (see *WWII Quarterly,* Fall 2015) and cleared for duty. More advanced training followed at Laurinburg–Maxton Army Air Base, North Carolina, causing him to miss out on Operation Overlord —a battle that saw extensive use of the CG-4A and continued high glider pilot casualties.

On September 6, 1944, Warner finally shipped out aboard the USS *West Point* as part of a large influx of replacement pilots. After disembarking in Liverpool, he was assigned to the 441st Troop Carrier Group/99th Squadron and reported to its home base at RAF Langar near the town of Nottingham.

The excitement of stepping on foreign soil for the first time—and in the land of Robin Hood no less—was quickly diminished by the stark reality of war. Only four days after arriving in the European Theater, Warner experienced his first taste of combat in Operation Market Garden over northern Holland.

With the Germans on the run, Montgomery's ambitious plan hinged on capturing a series of bridges and outflanking the defenses of the Siegfried Line, providing a clear path into the vital industrial Ruhr Valley. The Nazis, however, weren't done yet.

Additionally, several logistical blunders by the Allies—largely at the expense of paratroopers and glider-borne forces—led to catastrophic results. The operation was supposed to have ended the war in Europe by Christmas but instead resulted in bitter disappointment and was later immortalized in print and film with the aptly named *A Bridge Too Far.* The Allies now counted on Operation Varsity to finish the job.

Plans for the Rhine crossing began shortly before the Battle of Bulge in November 1944. The formidable river, with its swift currents and high banks, served as the last major natural obstacle to an advance into Germany. Supreme Commander Dwight D. Eisenhower was determined to avoid the same problems that had plagued Market Garden but reluctantly agreed to another complex joint ground and airborne assault near the town of Wesel.

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Not all landings were happy ones. Here a CG-4A lies crumpled in a field near Wesel. Many glider troopers were killed or seriously wounded in these crash landings or when enemy antiaircraft fire brought them down.

Spearheaded by Montgomery's 21st Army Group, Operation Plunder/Varsity would ultimately involve over a million soldiers, consisting of 30 divisions from the British Second Army under Lt. Gen. Miles C. Dempsey, the Canadian First Army under General Harry Crerer, and the American Ninth Army under Lt. Gen. William Simpson. Air support would be provided by the newly created First Allied Airborne Army (FAAA), commanded by Lt. Gen. Lewis H. Brereton.

Before facing the enemy, however, rampant infighting at high command threatened to derail the entire offensive. Brereton had assigned his deputy, British Maj. Gen. Richard N. Gale, as the chief planner and commander of the airborne operation—a move Montgomery vehemently rejected. Gale was then replaced by the more experienced Maj. Gen. Matthew B. Ridgway, commander of the U.S. XVIII Airborne Corps.

Ridgway, however, had loftier ambitions; privately, he had expressed desire to take command of an army and wanted no part of an unconventional mission to tarnish his reputation. He also despised Dempsey, blaming him for the disaster of Market Garden.

Eisenhower, who had played football at West Point, now found himself in the unfamiliar role of referee. Eventually, Ridgway acquiesced and begrudgingly accepted the command.

Eisenhower had also grown increasingly frustrated with Montgomery, who resented the American's authority as his superior officer. Whether deserved or not, Monty's overly meticulous reputation didn't help matters—nor did his typical refusal to engage the enemy unless ensured a vast superiority in troops. (After the war, a dry Martini using a 15:1 gin to vermouth borrowed the namesake "Montgomery," which, according to his critics, replicated the same ratio Monty preferred to outnumber his enemy in battle.)

The men of the 441st TCG/99th Squadron bivouacked over the winter of 1944/45 at an airbase in Dreux, France, while awaiting their next mission. They faced the usual trappings associated with military life—lousy food, cramped quarters, drills, boredom, etc., and passed the time playing cards or listening to the popular "Axis Sally" (aka "The Berlin Bitch") propaganda radio program.

At 31, Tom Warner was older than most of the other glider pilots. Growing up in Arkansas, he had been a champion athlete, breaking the state record in the hurdles. Like all the Warner boys, he was a skilled outdoorsman and crack shot—traits that served him well later in life.

His easygoing demeanor and Southern charm provided a welcomed balance to the odd assortment of personalities and backgrounds in his squadron; battle-tested Louis Canaiy had seen the most combat among the group, including the debacle in Sicily where only

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Dozens of Waco gliders fill several fields in the vicinity of Wesel. Soon after combat ended, many of these gliders were retrieved and readied for possible future operations—operations that never took place.

12 of the 147 gliders landed on target and 69 crashed into the drink; Don Manke, soft-spoken and educated, studied geology and paleontology at the University of Wisconsin before enlisting in the Army Air Corps.

Another, Leonard Hulet, hailed from a small mining town in rural Utah and had barely survived D-Day when his glider crashed in a field littered with Rommel's asparagus—long wooden poles dug into the ground and attached to explosives.

And then there was "Goldie."

At the ripe age of 21, Curtis J. Goldman landed in the war possessed with unbridled energy and an equal appetite for hijinks. The brash, cocky Texan had been nearly court-martialed on multiple occasions for infractions ranging from willful disobedience to irresponsible flying of a military aircraft. Once, while flying in a training exercise near London for top brass, Goldman grew restless and decided to step outside the glider for a better view of the parade grounds below.

Suddenly, a gust of air knocked him off balance, and Goldman found himself clinging to a wing strut upside down. Miraculously, he was pulled to safety by paratroopers on board only moments before landing. Afterward, Goldie merely shrugged off the incident and continued about in search of his next bit of mischief.

The 99th Squadron periodically volunteered to assist C-47 crews by flying co-pilot on resupply and evacuation assignments. Close proximity to Paris also provided a highly welcomed diversion from the war—especially for glider pilots whose perilous fate remained uncertain. After Lt. Gen. George S. Patton's Third Army liberated Paris in late August 1944, the City of Light shone once again, offering a vast array of entertainment and vice for the conquering heroes.

While the Champs Elysees and Eiffel Tower made for great snapshots, those looking for more risqué entertainment found it in the raunchier districts of Montmartre and its notorious Pigalle area (dubbed "Pig Alley" by GIs). The inflation-ravaged French capital saw champagne flow day and night in makeshift casinos and popular nightclubs such as Club Mayol and the infamous Moulin Rouge.

Horizontal refreshment was also easily procured at the plentiful Maisons de Rendezvous, where the four Cs of wartime rations—cigarettes, chocolate, coca-cola, and chewing gum—were often preferred over hard currency. Not surprisingly, a pack of Lucky Strikes provided more than just "toasted" tobacco pleasure for a soldier on a three-day furlough inside these Gaullic dens of sin.

By March 1945, details for Varsity began to solidify despite a number of last-minute changes directly affecting glider-borne troops. Montgomery's insistence on a daytime vertical envelopment would once again put gliders and paratroopers in an exceedingly vulnerable position from ground fire without the cover of darkness.

D-day for Varsity was set for March 24 on the heels of Operation Plunder and called for three airborne divisions: Maj. Gen. Eric Bol's British 6th "Red Devils" and two American divisions, Maj. Gen. Elbridge G. Chapman's 13th Airborne and

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ABOVE: A jeep exits a CG-4A through the hinged nose fitted with Corey skids. Warner's glider carried a jeep that had to be abandoned on the landing zone due to intense German fire. BELOW: Tom Warner's good friend, Curtis J. "Goldie" Goldman—brash, cocky, and fearless—stands with a Thompson submachine gun slung over his shoulder on a Varsity LZ.

Author's Collection

Maj. Gen. William (Bud) Miley's 17th Airborne ("Thunder from Heaven").

The Americans were assigned the southern portion of the drop and landing zones with the British taking the northern sector in an area six miles east of the Rhine. Varsity would also become the first operation in which gliders landed prior to paratroopers securing the area; the plan called for the use of double-towed gliders—a first in the ETO (earlier results in Burma had been mixed).

Not surprisingly, Ridgway remained leery and became further enraged upon learning Allied resources could only accommodate two airborne divisions: the 6th British and the American 17th. Both divisions would drop east of Wesel and were tasked with disrupting enemy defenses to aid the advance of Dempsey's Second Army. Objectives included seizing the well-fortified Diersfordter Forest, the town of Hamminkeln, and several bridges over the smaller but strategically vital Issel River.

Meanwhile, Montgomery's ego suffered another blow when elements of General Courtney Hodge's First Army captured the lightly defended Ludendorff Bridge at Remagen, becoming the first invading force to cross the Rhine since Napoleon. A few weeks later, Patton, Monty's arch-rival, achieved the same feat near Oppenheim with only one division.

Expectedly, "Old Blood and Guts" couldn't resist gloating: "I want the world to know that Third Army made it before Monty starts across." The fiery British field marshal was livid—and now more determined than ever to strike a death blow into the heart of the Ruhr and arrive first in Berlin.

Unlike the invasion of Normandy, minimal effort was being made by the Allies to create a subterfuge. The Germans were undoubtedly aware of increased activity west of the Rhine and began digging in. Even Axis Sally joined the fight, taunting the invaders on her radio broadcast in the days leading up to the battle. "We know you are coming, 17th Airborne Division, you will not need parachutes—you can walk down on the flak."

Under the command of General Günther Blumentritt, the battle-hardened Wehrmacht positioned 10 divisions along the Rhine. The 1st Parachute Army anchored the defense, placing the 2nd Parachute Corps to the north, 86th Corps in the center, and 63rd Corps in the south. Blumentritt's line was further bolstered by the late arrival of the XLVII Panzer Corps that included the menacing 15th Panzergrenadier Division and the 116th Windhund (Greyhound) Division.

Prior to the operation, British engineers began laying a 60-mile-long smokescreen outside the town of Emmerich, which not only alerted the Germans of an imminent attack but later caused significant visibility problems for Allied troops.

At 9 PM, Operation Plunder was initiated by the 51st (Highland) Infantry Division led by the vaunted 7th Battalion Black Watch (Royal Highland Regiment) near Rees.

Heeding their Latin motto, *Nemo me impune lacessit* ("No one provokes me with impunity"), the pugnacious Scots charged over the Rhine in the shadow of night. The bulk of the amphibious forces commenced shortly after, signaling the coded message, "Two if by sea," to Airborne HQ. Operation Varsity had begun.

The glider pilots awakened that morning to a hearty meal of steak and eggs; many wondered if it would be their last. At 6 AM religious services were held and well attended. The pilots then loaded into a convoy of trucks and assembled in the back of a long flight line.

Warner, along with his co-pilot Louis Canaiy, boarded their chalk-marked #11 glider in one of the last serials and waited for a tug plane to take them to Germany. Their cargo included a jeep along with personnel of the 224th Airborne Medical Company, transporting critically needed medical equipment and supplies.

At RAF bases across the English Channel, the British Glider Regiment, equipped with their trademark maroon berets, prepared to join their American counterparts. Like the CG-4A, the British Horsa and Hamilcar gliders would be easy targets for German antiaircraft crews used to targeting high-speed, well-armed fighters and bombers.

In comparison, the lumbering gliders resembled a carnival shooting gallery—and the mammoth Hamilcar looking more like the *Hindenburg*. Named for the famed Carthaginian general, the Hamilcar was considerably larger than all other Allied gliders, featuring a wingspan of 110 feet, a length of 68 feet, and a capacity to transport a load of 17,600

pounds, including an M22 Light Locust tank.

Learning from the glider-borne landings at Normandy and Arnhem in 1944, the Germans had also discovered tracer bullets could effectively set aflame the bulky gliders long before they reached the ground. The well-entrenched gunners eagerly awaited them.

The first planes carrying the 17th Airborne departed at 7:17 AM, with the last serials getting aloft two hours later. The lift included 9,387 American paratroopers and glider-borne soldiers carried aboard 72 C-46s, 836 C-47s, and 906 CG-4As. Combined with a British force of 1,228 tow aircraft and gliders carrying more than 8,000 soldiers, the massive armada stretched over 200 miles and took 37 minutes to pass at any given point, creating a thundering display of Allied might.

The two divisions converged 100 miles from the target at a designated rendezvous point over Brussels; escort fighters from the RAF and U.S. Ninth Air Force providing additional muscle with squadrons of Spitfires, Hawker Typhoons, P-51s, and P-47s.

The enormous formation also presented unforeseen problems; the buildup of air traffic created a stairstep effect, forcing several gliders to a precariously high release altitude of 2,500 feet, thus giving German ground crews ample time to shoot at the plodding targets.

Just before 10 AM, and slightly ahead of schedule, the 507th Parachute Infantry Regiment (PIR) led the Americans' drop across the Rhine. Despite the calm weather, the drop zones remained blanketed with dense haze caused by the smoke screen covering the river crossings. Although the Americans were forced to land nearly two miles away from their drop zone, they encountered relatively light antiaircraft fire.

Author's Collection

While soldiers behind them guard a road junction near Wesel, Goldie Goldman (left) and Don Manke pose with their tommy guns for Warner's camera. Both survived the war.

The British 6th Airlanding Brigade wasn't as fortunate. Under Brigadier Hugh Bellamy, the 6th AB carried the first gliders into battle and was immediately blasted by flak, tanks, and mortars from the thickly forested Diersfordter.

In nearby farmhouses, snipers picked off paratroopers seemingly at will. In the confusion, several pilots became lost and landed in the wrong zones or crashed into trees and other gliders, creating a salvage yard of tails, rudders, and wings strewn about the LZ.

The 194th Glider Infantry Regiment under Colonel James Pierce followed in doubled tows over DZ S amid continued poor visibility and concentrated ground fire. They also encountered the alarming sight of Allied tugs riddled with bullets (and several on fire) returning home base.

More carnage ensued. A German 88mm shell tore apart a Hamilcar loaded with a M22 tank over the Rhine, scattering its equipment and killing all on board.

On LZ P, Staff Sgt. Desmond Page transported troopers of the 2nd Oxfordshire and Buckinghamshire Battalion (2nd Ox & Bucks) and later recalled the chaos: "The flak was murderous and almost immediately the leading glider was literally blown to pieces. The flight cabin, men and bits of fuselage fell away in front of us and most of the undercarriage hit our tail plane. No one was going to survive that."

Meanwhile, on the ground lifeless paratroopers dangled from tall oak trees in the Diersfordter, where burial squads with pruning saws and ladders would later need two days to cut down all the dead. Adding to the surreal nightmare, a cacophony of hunting horns blared loudly from British commanders, using different calls to muster their troops—all contributing to a proper "buggers muddle."

Eventually, the British recovered and secured most of their hard-fought objectives including the town of Hamminkeln. They also benefited from the American 513th PIR, which had been dropped by mistake in their sector. The Yank paratroopers included legendary war photographer Robert Capa, who bolstered his

National Archives

With a British Horsa glider lying in the background, 17th Airborne Division troops stay low while enemy machine-gun fire sweeps the ground near Wesel.

already daring reputation by snapping the most iconic photos of the battle while on assignment for *Life* magazine.

"The 40 seconds to earth were like hours on my grandfather clock," Capa recalled, "and I had plenty of time to unstrap my cameras. On the ground I kept clicking my shutter. We lay flat on the earth and no one wanted to get up. The first fear was over and we were all reluctant to begin the second."

With arms aching after spending 3 1/2 hours tethered to a 350-foot nylon umbilical cord, Tom Warner finally cut his glider loose at around 12:30. Bursts of flak continued darkening the sky around the airhead while chaos reigned underneath them. Warner nodded to his co-pilot Canaiy and began descending toward the smoke-covered landing zone below.

LZ N was the most northerly of the two American landing zones and bordered the northwest side of the still hot Diersfordter. A checkerboard pattern of fields and meadows filled the rectangular-shaped area along with several other obstacles, including farmhouses, railroad tracks, and the main power line strung on 100-foot pylons. The zone served as a buffer between the American and British sectors, providing a clearing medical station site for the expected flood of casualties.

By this stage, most paratroopers and gliders were on the ground fighting for survival. Bodies rapidly piled up, and the doctors and medics did what they could. As precious seconds ticked away, Warner could now see the ground at 300 feet; unfortunately, the enemy could now see him. Pilots continued smashing into other gliders, trees, and poles as Warner desperately searched for a small clearing in the crowded LZ.

An Army issue .45-caliber M3 submachine gun, known as the "grease gun," rested under his seat ready to join the fray. He also carried a .45-caliber pistol for his aviator to infantry transition once on the ground.

With time running out, executing a standard 360-degree flight path was out of the question. After releasing from its tow, a pilot had only a few minutes at best to put the glider down or risk stalling out. Enemy guns, dense smoke, and vomit-inducing turbulence didn't help. Out of options, Warner plunged into a dive to hasten the glide path and elude ground fire.

The result produced a fast, rough landing intact on a field littered with mangled wreckage, destroyed livestock, and dead soldiers. Canaiy and medics from the 224th quickly exited through the side door, dodging a barrage of gunfire from all directions. The jeep and supplies would have to wait.

Warner grabbed his M3 and finished busting out the plexiglass panel. He kept his head down and relied on his runner's legs, sprinting like mad with bullets pinging overhead. He eventually found refuge in a small ditch next to a tree-lined road and waited for the bedlam to subside.

At 2:58 PM, roughly five hours after the first airborne troops landed, patrols from the British 1st Commando Brigade reached elements of the 17th Airborne, establishing the fastest linkup of ground and airborne forces in the war. Warner met up with members of his squadron to survey the horrific destruction.

As nightfall approached, scuttlebutt of missing pilots turned into hard, cold facts. Five men from the 441st/99th had been killed, including Flight Officer Hulet. Ironically, Hulet wasn't even supposed to take part in the mission but had volunteered at the last minute when a married replacement pilot requested not to fly. Goldman and Manke had flown together and managed to survive, despite taking heavy ground fire.

Upon landing, however, they suffered the misfortune of running over a dead paratrooper. The experience would haunt the young Texan for the rest of his life. "It was a sickening sound when one of the wheels of our glider ran over his body," he said. "As we got the glider stopped, we were already aware that intense fighting was happening all over the area. Grenades and mortars were exploding. Germans and paratroopers

were mixed up like mush."

The British witnessed similar heartbreak in their sector. Major Jack Watson of the 13th Parachute Battalion recalled a particularly ghastly incident. "The saddest thing I saw was when we were moving toward our objective. There were these glider pilots, sitting in their cockpits, having been roasted alive after their gliders had caught fire ... a lot of people were lost like that."

A trickle of German prisoners soon turned into a deluge. Eventually, airborne forces captured more than 3,500 men, with thousands more lying dead or wounded in surrounding fields. Astounding bravery resulted in a Victoria Cross, two Medals of Honor, and the only Conspicuous Gallantry Medal issued in the war. Varsity also produced an extraordinary feat of heroism by gliders pilots in what became known as "the Battle of Burp-Gun Corner."

Three weeks prior to the operation, the 194th Glider Infantry Regiment had been one company short and needed volunteers. A new unit would consist of only glider pilots to assemble after landing in their designated zones. The CO of the 435th Troop Carrier Group, Major Charles O. Gordon, accepted the assignment and transformed his four squadrons into the 435th Provisional Glider Pilot Company.

After landing in LZ S with the troops and equipment from the 194th Glider Infantry Regiment and the 681st Glider Field Artillery Battalion, the company came under heavy ground fire before assembling at its assigned area just north of Wesel at the crossroads of Holzweg and Hessenweg. In nearby farmhouses, enemy soldiers relentlessly fired their MP-40 submachine guns—nicknamed "burp guns" for their rapid rate of fire. The glider pilots fended off the attack, holding their own in a series of firefights, but the worst was yet to come.

Around midnight, a force of approximately 200 German infantry, retreating ahead of British forces, arrived supported by a tank, self-propelled artillery, and two 20mm flak guns. They attempted to overrun the 435th's line, but Flight Officers Chester Deshurley and Albert Hurley stood their ground, firing their machine guns along with Flight Officer Robert Campbell, armed with only a tommy gun, until the tank came within 15 yards of them. What followed is the stuff of pure legend.

Flight Officer Elbert Jella picked up a bazooka—the first and only time he fired one in combat—and struck a bulls-eye, crippling the tank and causing it to reverse and destroy one of its flak guns. By morning, a large number of enemy troops had been killed and several hundred prisoners were captured.

The fight was dubbed "the Battle of Burp-Gun Corner" by a journalist from the *Stars and Stripes*. Major Gordon requested that all the men of the 435th Provisional Glider Pilot Company be given due recognition. But the war soon ended and the order was lost and eventually forgotten. In 1996, however, after exhaustive work, all the men of the 435th (most posthumously) received the Bronze Star, and Campbell, Hurley, Deshurley, and Jella were awarded the Silver Star.

Fortunately for the Allies, valuable lessons had been learned from Market Garden, the earlier botched invasion of Holland. Montgomery's swift crossing of the Rhine had been an overwhelming success, capturing more than 30,000 soldiers and sending the enemy into full retreat. By March 27, 12 Allied bridges spanned the Rhine, opening the northern route into the industrial heart of Germany.

Varsity was also seen as a spectacular triumph. Dropping both airborne divisions simultaneously had overwhelmed enemy defenses. Two months later Germany surrendered. Eisenhower called Operation Varsity "the most successful airborne oper-

Author's Collection

The spoils of war. Flight Officer Tom Warner (third from left) and some buddies pose with a captured Nazi flag "somewhere in Germany."

ation carried out to date."

While tactically successful, the cost was dreadfully high. A total of 1,111 men had been killed during the single worst day of the war for Allied airborne troops. American gilder pilots were hit the hardest, with 79 killed, 240 wounded, and 31 missing. British losses were equally devastating. According to the British Ministry of Information, nearly a quarter of British glider pilots were casualties, and a staggering 79 percent of its gliders had been damaged by enemy fire.

Over the years, many historians have questioned the necessity of Varsity and accused Montgomery of typical grandstanding and overkill. Given the relatively weak resistance encountered during the river crossing, it is a fair assumption that the Germans' defense centered on defeating the much smaller and manageable airborne forces.

For those keeping score, Operation Plunder's 30 divisions to Varsity's two presents a fairly lopsided tilt. It is also worth noting that Allied bombers destroyed 97 percent of Wesel a week prior to the operation during the "softening" of the area, including the use of 10 22,000-pound earthquake bombs ("two-ton tessies").

In his wartime memoir *A Soldier's Story,* General Omar Bradley asserted that if Montgomery had crossed the Rhine on the run as Hodges and Patton did (sans air support) or allowed Simpson's Ninth Army to proceed in a similar manner, there would have been no need for Varsity. Curiously, however, Ridgway would later claim that Varsity was the decisive factor in Montgomery's Rhine crossing. And so goes the debate.

By the time the next war rolled around, combat gliders had become obsolete, replaced by the helicopter. Like Civil War-era balloons or Hannibal's battle elephants, the CG-4A joined other relegated weapons of war with colorful anecdotes and historical footnotes. Glider pilots who survived the war returned home and went about their lives.

Louis Canaiy moved to Colorado and went into the hospitality business, building and operating the Lake Estes Motor Inn and serving on the state tourism board. Don Manke returned to college in Wisconsin and was employed as an engineer with Texaco for many years. After raising hell throughout the war, Curtis Goldman fittingly enrolled in seminary school and began a long career as a Baptist minister.

As for Tom Warner, the Arkansas country boy pointed his compass west in search of a new adventure. For his war efforts, he had received a Distinguished Unit Citation, Silver Air Medal with Oak Leaf Cluster, four Bronze Service Stars and a Bronze Service arrowhead, and the Order of William Orange Lanyard.

But, like most men of his generation, Warner rarely discussed the war. He didn't consider himself a hero but rather just another soldier who did his job and was lucky to be alive. He also never set foot in another aircraft. Ever.

Long before the term PTSD was introduced, returning soldiers simply coped the best they could. To ease his pain, Warner drank heavily. Random images from his scrapbook reveal a labyrinth of bittersweet memories: flying over the Rhine; mangled gliders; dead soldiers lying in a field; war buddies huddled around a captured Nazi flag.

Eventually, he settled in Albuquerque, New Mexico, where he married a young gal he had met while stationed at a glider training facility. He successfully transitioned into civilian life and became an executive at First Bank of New Mexico. In 1971 his nerves would be tested again during an attempted bank heist in which a gun was pointed at his head. He remained calm throughout the ordeal and was later promoted to vice president. The bad guys went to jail.

Warner spent his retirement playing golf and enjoying quiet evenings with my great-aunt before passing away in 1999. According to the National World War Glider Pilots Association, fewer than 200 of the original 6,000 glider pilots are still alive today, but their spirit remains strong—reminding us all that the "G" on their wings did indeed stand for "guts." □

Courage

Continued from page 87

casualties. For the extraordinary heroism that cost him his life, Staff Sergeant Dowden posthumously received the Distinguished Service Cross—the nation's second-highest award for valor. He was the only member of the 93rd Infantry Division to earn the DSC during the war.

By war's end the 93rd would get as far as Mindanao and Leyte in the Philippines while under the command of Brig. Gen. Leonard R. Boyd. When official word of Japan's surrender came, since there was a shortage of fireworks, the rifles blazed away in celebration. Sergeant James Yancy, 369th Infantry Regiment, said the 93rd joined in the celebration. Then a white officer came over to Yancy's elated group and ordered them to cease firing; all of their weapons were confiscated. The white troops kept firing away with their celebrations.

During their two years in the Southwest Pacific, the men of the 93rd accumulated 825 military awards for valor and meritorious service: one Distinguished Service Cross, one Distinguished Service Medal, five Silver Stars, five Legions of Merit, 686 Bronze Stars, and 27 Air Medals.

The 93rd Infantry Division sailed home and was deactivated at their former port of departure—Camp Stoneman, California, on February 3, 1946. The American military was desegregated two years later by order of President Harry. S. Truman.

Once back on U.S. soil, many African American soldiers had mixed feelings about their wartime service. For some their brief time in combat proved that they were just as capable as white soldiers. For others returning to civilian status meant a return to racism, Jim Crow laws, institutionalized discrimination, and restrictions on their personal freedoms.

As one 93rd Infantry Division veteran said, "I got through fighting in the P.T.O. [Pacific Theater of Operations] and now I've got to fight in the S.T.O., U.S.A. [Southern Theater of Operations in the United States]." □

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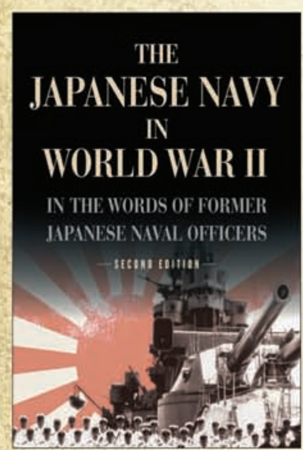

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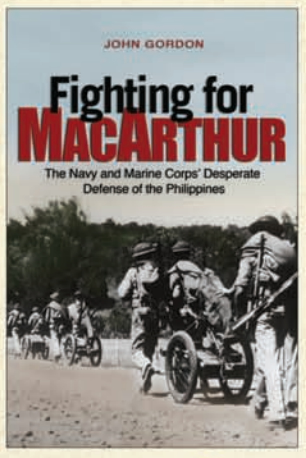

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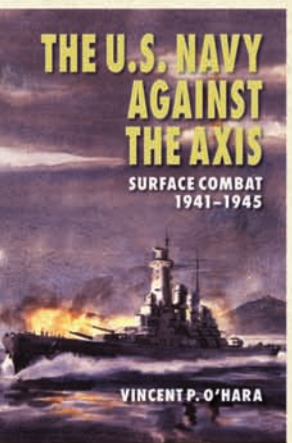

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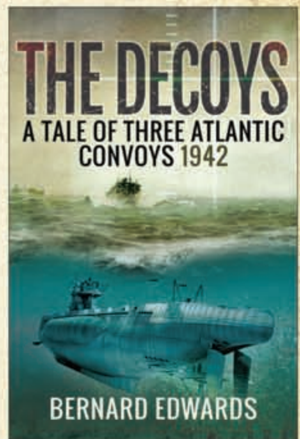

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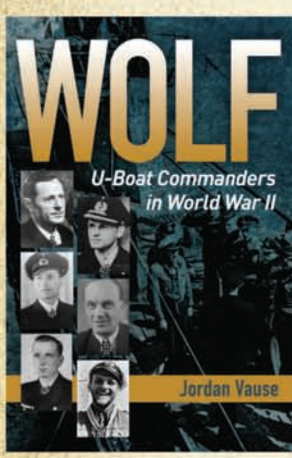

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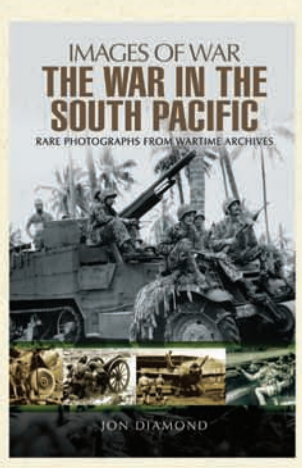

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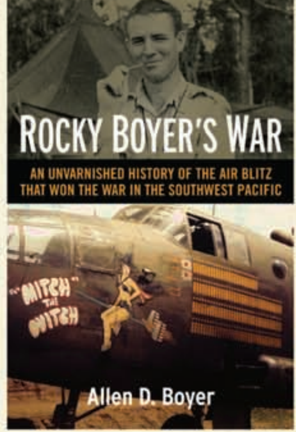

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