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A mainstay of modern warfare, the helicopter was first flown in a combat zone during a rescue mission in Burma.

BY ROBERT F. DORR

Whirlybird and eggbeater were everyday lingo in 1943 when a few young men went to the Sikorsky factory in Stratford, Conn., to learn to maintain and fly the U.S. Army's first helicopter.

The YR-4B looked like a canvas covered box with rotors. In 1944, those young men loaded it aboard a C-46 Commando transport aircraft and hauled it halfway around the world—to Burma. There, in April 1944, 2nd Lt. Carter Harman flew history's first helicopter combat mission.

Harman was an unremarkable man with just a little culture who was thrown in abruptly among roughnecks. "I grew up in New Jersey," Harman said during interviews in 2002 and 2003. "When the war started, a lot of us were thinking, 'Hey, maybe I don't want to be drafted because I'll be in the infantry without rank.' I was a journalist, reporting on music for the *New York Times*. More importantly, I had done some flying, in a Piper Cub and a Waco biplane."

Instead of waiting to be drafted, Harman signed up for the Army Air Corps and went to Texas. He was in flying class 43-C. After earning his pilot's wings, he became an instructor in biplane trainers. When he was asked to volunteer as one of the first line pilots to be trained in helicopter flying, Harman seized a chance to get closer to home.

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A helicopter hovers over the captured German submarine U-*858* shortly after delivering U.S. Naval personnel to her conning tower.

"Our group consisted of five pilots and half a dozen others, including my crew chief Jim Phelan," said Harman. "Sikorsky acted as a training school and graduated the first class of Army helicopter pilots in October or November 1943." The pilots were Harman, 1st Lt. John Beeson, 1st Lt. Burt C. Powell, 1st Lt. Frank M. Turney, and Captain Jack Beighle.

They were the first Army line helicopter pilots, preceded only by a handful of military and civilian test pilots. Sikorsky's great test pilot Jimmy Viner was their mentor. In October 1943, instructed by Viner, Harman became the seventh Army pilot ever to solo a helicopter.

Beighle later assisted Viner with the first helicopter hoist rescue on November 29, 1945, when they pulled survivors from a grounded oil barge in Long Island Sound. That rescue, often called a "first," happened 17 months after Harman flew the first helicopter combat rescue mission, and after the war. While rotary wing aviation was being introduced in Connecticut, the 1st Air Commando Group was running the air war in Burma.

Author Michael Haas wrote in *Apollo's Warriors*, a history of special operations, that the arrival of the 1st Air Commando Group in Burma had the impact of "a brick thrown through a stain-glass window. They were a maverick band of independent thinkers who weren't much for military discipline." The Air Commandos answered to nobody but their boss, Lt. Col. Philip "Flip" Cochran, the real-life model for the cartoon strip Terry and the Pirates. Cochran, in turn, operated on personal orders from President Franklin D. Roosevelt.

Independent, unruly, and at times arrogant, the Air Commandos became the personal air force of Brigadier Orde C. Wingate, the unorthodox British commander in the China-Burma-India theater (CBI). They flew a mixed arsenal of warplanes—the P-51A Mustang fighter, B-25

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A group of mechanics assemble YR-4B helicopters in the China-Burma-India Theater. An L-5 Sentinel previously used for rescue missions sits in the background.

Mitchell bombers packing a 75mm cannon in the nose, the L-5 Sentinel liaison aircraft, the Waco CG-4A glider, and the trusty C-47 Skytrain. In February 1944, they sent out a request for helicopters. A high-level decision was made to send three YR-4Bs from the Sikorsky factory.

Crew chief Jim Phelan remembered the long journey from Connecticut to commando country. "On February 4, 1944, we departed the Sikorsky plant at Bridgeport-Stratford, Conn., with the first YR-4B dismantled and packed aboard a C-46," said Phelan. "We got as far as Baltimore and cracked up."

At Friendship Airport, the site of present-day Baltimore-Washington International Airport, the C-46 went off the runway, through a field, and into a ditch. Phelan and his buddies repaired the helicopter and then repaired the C-46. The C-46 was taken to another airfield for a test hop, and the helicopter was loaded on board once again.

"We had a couple more emergency stops, one in Charlotte, N. C., and one someplace else," said Phelan. "We paused at Homestead, Fla. and then flew on to South America. After that we flew from Brazil over to Ascension Island, and then over to South Africa. We went across Africa and found ourselves in Egypt, where we flew across the Suez Canal. We stopped at Karachi, India (now Pakistan), and I reached the Air Commando base at Lalaghat, India, on April 18, 1943."

Harman, Phelan, and others who brought two more YRB-4Bs inside two more C-46s now became part of the Air Commandos, an unkempt bunch not much like the gentlemanly Harman. When a commando watched the ungainly YRB-4B being put back together at Lalaghat, it struck a chord. "We can do a lot with this," he said to Harman.

"Our mechanics assembled the helicopter out-of-doors in the heat and grit at Lalaghat, with few tools and no equipment," said Harman. "Tragically, on the first flight of a helicopter in India on March 21, 1944, the YR-4B crashed, killing Powell—the first man to die in a U.S. helicopter in a combat zone."

Soon afterward, new helicopter pilot John Beeson went out to fly a conventional support mission in a C-46 transport and was wounded in the hip by ground fire. From the beginning of April 1944, Harman was the only qualified helicopter pilot in the CBI. And his helicopter was being reassembled just in time.

On April 21, 1944, an L-1 Vigilant rescue plane piloted by TSgt. Ed Hladovcak crashed behind Japanese lines while transporting three wounded British soldiers whose names no one ever wrote down.

One of many intrepid sergeant-pilots who served with the Air Commandos, Hladovcak was nicknamed Murphy ("Do you see anybody around here who knows how to pronounce Hladovcak?"). He and his trio of His Majesty's soldiers went down 100 miles from the nearest friendly troops, in a Burmese rice paddy surrounded by clawing jungle.

Another liaison plane, an L-5 Sentinel, pinpointed Hladovcak and the others. The small, fabric-covered L-1 and L-5 liaison planes were ideal for landing in short spaces in unprepared terrain, but they could not set down in a rice paddy that was crisscrossed by ditches. As far as Hladovcak knew, they would have to walk out—or walk, at least, to a place where a plane could land, which might be tens of miles.

At the time Hladovcak went down, Harman was 500 miles away at Lalaghat admiring the reassembled YR-4B. A telex message from the Air Commando base known as Aberdeen, in Burma, ordered: "Send the eggbeater in."

"It was a tough call," Harman said. The YR-4B would have to carry extra gas and would be able to lift only one survivor at a time. "On April 21, 1944, Air Commando boss Cochran sent radio instructions for me to proceed with a helicopter to Taro in northern Burma. I was about to learn about the big trouble that L-1 liaison pilot 'Murphy,' alias Ed Hladovcak, had gotten into. But, first, I had to fill a tall order to get to my destination. Taro was 600 miles from Lalaghat, way beyond the YR-4B's usual range of 100 miles."

While Harman was contemplating this challenge, Murphy and the three Brits were crawling, thrashing, and climbing until they were deep inside jungle foliage about half a mile from their wrecked L-1. As April 21 wore on and the heat became insufferable, the Japanese seemed to draw closer. Their voices were audible, their uniform leggings visible through the undergrowth.

The Japanese were on one side of his position. On the other, Murphy saw an L-5 Sentinel liaison plane fly overhead and drop a note. The message referred to the sharp rise in the terrain behind the men. It read: "MOVE UP MOUNTAIN. JAPANESE NEARBY."

National Archives

Captain Carter Harman pulled off history's first helicopter combat rescue in Burma in 1944.

Meanwhile, to prepare his helicopter for a marathon journey, Harman threw four jerry cans of extra fuel in the unused co-pilot's seat (there was no one in India or Burma who could serve as a co-pilot). Harman positioned a litter stretcher behind the seats. "I took off to cover the first leg of the flight to Taro," he said. "That meant climbing above mountain peaks that loomed to 5,000 feet, in theory, the ceiling of the YR-4B, and visually navigating to Dimapur. I landed safely at Dimapur and filled the gas tanks from my own jerry cans before beginning the second leg of the trip, aiming for Jorhat. That was a bomber base where our boys were flying B-24 Liberators.

"This trip was solo," continued Harman. "I didn't know much about the population of the region, though, except that there were plenty of Japanese troops, so I felt some apprehension

about who might be shooting at whom."

Harman stayed overnight at Jorhat and the next day flew on to Taro with a brief refueling stop at Ledo. When Harman arrived at Taro, he did not yet know why he had been summoned. Harman took a break, went for a dip in a mountain stream, and tried to wash his clothes as best he could. He was wearing the summer khakis he had brought from halfway around the world.

A radio message told Harman to continue on to Aberdeen. That took until April 25. "It was a difficult flight," said Harman. "At Taro, mechanics installed an extra fuel tank borrowed from an L-5 inside the fuselage of my helicopter, but I still would have to set down whenever I needed to transfer fuel, so this last leg might be an overnight trek."

While Harman was embarking on that trek, Murphy was struggling to survive. In the predawn hours of April 25, a series of sounds cracked in the air. Hladovcak was sure it was gunfire. But the sounds came and went. If there were Japanese troops behind a nocturnal wall of foliage, they did not appear.

At daybreak, the three British soldiers were worse. Their wounds were becoming infected. The heat refused to subside. There were insects everywhere, especially mosquitoes, known to carry a virulent strain of malaria.

Harman landed at Aberdeen in early morning, April 25. He was told that the four downed men led by Hladovcak had not been found by Japanese troops, but it was unclear how long they could hold out. L-5 Sentinels were dropping supplies and messages to Hladovcak, aiming at a white parachute he had draped across the rice paddy, but that brilliant white cloak might also make him highly visible to the Japanese.

They dropped a message to Murphy telling the sergeant-pilot about a spot where a liaison plane could pick up Hladovcak and the three British soldiers. It was a sandbar on a river nearby. British commandos had secured a small sector of the bank, enough space for an L-1 or L-5 to land. At Aberdeen, they knew now, that none of the four men could reach the riverbank on his own power. They believed, however, that Harman could get in to the spot where the men were hiding out, and that his YR-4B could lift them to the riverbank. Since Harman could only carry one man at a time, he would have to make four round trips, his YR-4B exceedingly vulnerable to any kind of gunfire throughout the attempt.

It was little comfort to Harman that the YR-4B's 200-horsepower Warner piston engine had previously been used only in washing machines, not in airplanes. He was going to have to push engine and helicopter to the limit to make the pick-ups.

Harman flew from Aberdeen to the sandbar riverbank, where he made the rendezvous with an L-5 Sentinel. They took off together, and the L-5 led Harman to Hladovcak and the three British soldiers.

"Hladovcak went crazy when he saw my 'eggbeater' arriving," said Harman. "He had, of course, never seen a helicopter before. I was pushing the YR-4B to the limit when I set down in the clearing in a swirl of flying dust and pieces of greenery. Murphy loaded the most seriously injured British soldier aboard. The YR-4B strained, vibrated, and took off. I was able to make it to the sand bar where a liaison plane flew that soldier to safety."

Harman hauled out a second British soldier, still searching the jungle canopy for Japanese troops. They reached the riverbank and that was when everything went wrong.

"The Warner engine seized on me," he remembered. "There was a clunking sound and a lot of vapor around the engine. It had overheated and it wasn't going to start. I was going to have to spend the night on the sand bar. I wondered if that was the night the Japanese would overrun Hladovcak and the remaining British soldier.

"It was a long, lonely night and the liaison-pilot guys warned me we might have weather problems on top of everything else next day. When morning came, there was some low cover but nothing to prevent flying if the engine would only start. It did. I was able to pick up the third British soldier and get him to safety."

Edward "Murphy" Hladovcak was now alone and, he said later, very lonely in the clearing in the jungle.

Harman's recollection and the official record on the anticlimactic final phase of the rescue are both vague. Harman remembers that Murphy held out alone near his crash site. "I was able to go in again, in the YR-4B. As I approached him, soldiers broke out of the treeline about 1,000 feet from him, some with their rifles held in the air. 'It's too late,' I thought. 'After all this work, it's too late...' Later, Hladovcak told me he was shouting out loud about Japanese troops bearing down on him."

The YR-4B got there first. Hladovcak climbed on board. Harman put the aircraft into a hover. Now, the troops swarmed directly beneath them, and for a moment the YR-4B's unreliable engine threatened to seize again. The helicopter sank back toward the jungle. Then, Harman was able to get the YR-4B to full power. "We climbed away from those men with rifles," he said.

Harman took Hladovcak all the way back to Aberdeen. "When we got there, we were told that the troops who'd swarmed beneath my helicopter were, in fact, friendly Chindit troops who had been intent on rescuing Murphy. There were Japanese nearby, but I never actually saw them. When I bounded off the ground with Murphy aboard my helicopter, we were escaping from the good guys."

Harman spent several more weeks with the 1st Air Commando Group "retrieving several people who needed rescuing." Then, the last R-4 helicopter was damaged beyond repair. But in early 1945, another helicopter became available.

On January 26, 1945, Captain Frank Peterson flew an R-4 to evacuate a wounded weather observer, Private Howard Ross, from a 4,700 foot mountain ridge in the Naga hills of Burma. Peterson flew with a co-pilot, 1st Lt. (later Lt. Col.) Irvin Steiner. That was a very early helicopter success, but it came eight months after Carter Harman flew the first such mission. □

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An R-4 helicopter hovers low over an airfield in Burma during January of 1945. During future wars the helicopter was to become a mainstay of military operations.

Robert F. Dorr is an Air Force veteran, a retired U.S. diplomat, and author of the book Air Force One, *a look at presidential aircraft and air travel.*

Kurt "Panzer" Meyer was known as the fighting general of the Waffen SS.

BY RICHARD RULE

KURT MEYER WAS WITHOUT DOUBT ONE OF THE MOST OUTSTANDING AND HIGHLY decorated Waffen SS officers of World War II.

Brave, tough and charismatic, he was an inspirational field commander who typically led from the front, expecting no more of his men than he would of himself. Unfortunately, like so many of his Waffen SS comrades, Meyer's legendary fighting exploits during six years of war would be stained by his controversial conviction for war crimes.

Born December 23, 1910, to a humble family in Jerxheim, Germany, Meyer enlisted in the SS in 1931; and in May 1934 transferred to Hitler's personal bodyguard, the elite Leibstandarte SS "Adolf Hitler." Standing approximately five feet, 10 inches, with broad shoulders and an athletic build, Meyer served in the Leibstandarte's anti-tank company (*Panzerjagerkompanie*) as a platoon leader and later as the company commander. Possessing the élan common among Waffen SS officers, the aggressive Meyer received his baptism of fire during the Polish campaign of September 1939, where, for his skill and bravery, he received the Iron Cross second class and a Polish bullet in the shoulder. He recovered from his wounds to lead the Leibstandarte's 15th *Kradschutz Kompanie* (motorcycle) with distinction during the campaigns of 1940 through France and the Low Countries and was decorated with the Iron Cross First class.

Both: National Archives

ABOVE: Members of the 12th SS Panzer Division Hitlerjugend move among the rubble of the battle-scarred town of Caen in June of 1944. ABOVE RIGHT: SS Brigadeführer Kurt Meyer earned the nickname "Panzer."

During these early days of the war, Meyer had shown himself to be not only the archetypal Waffen SS officer, but also a first class leader of fighting men. His innate cool recklessness in battle tempered by keen tactical sense and military skill had not gone unnoticed in the command circles of the Waffen SS. Earmarked for greater things, the 30-year-old officer was promoted to *Sturmbannfuhrer* (Major) in September 1940.

In 1941, the Leibstandarte was committed to Operation Marita, Hitler's conquest of Yugoslavia and Greece. It was in Greece, commanding his battle-hardened reconnaissance detachment, that Meyer's legendary fighting reputation was forged. The German invasion of the Balkans was proving a stunning success, and in order to disrupt the Greek III Army Corps retreat from Albania, Meyer's men advanced rapidly to storm the Klissura Pass, then sped to Lake Castoria to cut off the Greek forces in the town of Castoria.

Meyer spearheaded the perilous journey across the Klissura Peninsula, but his SS troopers, who had outrun their artillery support, found themselves locked in a desperate engagement against a resolute enemy who refused to give ground. The fighting descended into stalemate as Meyer and his men became

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Riding atop a camouflaged self-propelled gun, members of the 12th SS Panzer Division head toward the beaches on June 6, 1944.

pinned down by heavy machine-gun fire. Despite his orders to advance, the men refused to move. So, Meyer threw a grenade at the feet of the last man to get them into the open. The controversial action typified his command style and, although highly unorthodox, it had the desired effect. The machine gun nest was captured and the momentum of the advance restored—but not for long.

The attack once again bogged down in the face of stiff Greek opposition on the approaches to the town of Werjes, situated on the Klissura Pass. The Greeks were well entrenched in the town, and additional troops where deployed on the heights overlooking the pass. In order to breach the defenses, Meyer divided his force into three assault groups, leading one of them personally. The attack, launched at dawn, was brilliantly conceived and executed. By 11 AM, his men had stormed the outer perimeter defenses, and by late afternoon the town was in German hands along with 600 prisoners.

Meyer then pushed on to Lake Castoria and assaulted the town of Castoria from the south. By early evening, the defenders capitulated and 1,100 prisoners were marched into German prison camps. By late April 1941, the one-sided campaign in Greece was over. For his bold and inspiring leadership throughout the Balkan fighting and in particular his victory on the Klissura Pass, Meyer received not only the Knight's Cross but also the nickname "Panzer" Meyer from his troops. The monicker stuck with him for the rest of his life.

Later that same year, the Leibstandarte was at the forefront of Operation Barbarossa, the invasion of the Soviet Union. Meyer and his reconnaissance battalion were once again immersed in fierce fighting as they regularly ventured deep behind Russian lines and then blasted their way out.

Despite initial and quite incredible success in the East, campaigning in Russia was soon to become a relentless, bitter war of attrition. As the months passed, the men of the Leibstandarte fought themselves to exhaustion. No matter how many villages and towns were captured, no matter how many prisoners were taken, and no matter how many miles were traveled, Russia never seemed to end. It was a hellish theater of operations, but Meyer's fighting spirit never wavered as he continually led his troops by example—and they idolized him for it. Often, his mere presence in the front line at a critical moment was enough to restore impetus to an attack or rally wavering morale among his troops. No one who served under him was surprised when he was awarded the German Cross in Gold.

Despite their defeat at the gates of Moscow, the Germans revived offensive operations on the Eastern Front in the spring of 1942, and the Leibstandarte was soon immersed in battles of unspeakable ferocity at Ulman, Cherson, and Rostov. At Kharkov in February 1943, Meyer, now an *Obersturmbannfuhrer* (Lieutenant Colonel), played a significant role in holding back Russian tanks until the rest of his division could deploy to recapture the town. In recognition of his role in the action, he received the oak leaves to his Knight's Cross. To the chagrin of some Wehrmacht commanders in Russia, Meyer had become one of the best known, admired, and highly decorated officers in the German Armed Forces.

As the tide of war began to turn against Germany, a delusional Hitler believed that men of superior will could overcome reversals on the battlefield. In the face of a looming catastrophe, he looked to men like Meyer to steal victory from the jaws of defeat.

The hard reality was that after more than four years of war Germany's reserve of military age fighting men was almost exhausted. The Waffen SS, like the army, was unable to replace its grievous losses and, in desperation, tapped into the vast pool of recruits within the Hitler Youth to form the 12th SS Panzer Division Hitlerjugend. By mid-summer 1943, the new division, comprised mostly of 17- and 18-year-olds, assembled at the Belgian SS military facility at Beverloo to undergo rigorous training with veteran officers and NCOs drawn principally from the Leibstandarte Division.

No one doubted the recruits' dedication to the Nazi cause. With the Allied invasion of Europe imminent, these young soldiers, many of whom were fanatical in their ideological beliefs, would need to be quickly provided with adequate combat and tactical skills if they were to have any chance of success. There was little time for barrack square drill or military formalities as the recruits underwent intense combat training with special emphasis on live firearms exercises under combat conditions.

Meyer, promoted to *Standartenfuhrer* (Colonel), was chosen to train the division's 25th Panzergrenadier Regiment. Drawing on his extensive battle experience and natural leadership skill, Meyer did not allow the boys to

smoke or drink but ensured that each of them understood that the outcome of the war would turn on the looming battle. Nurturing the belief in each of his troopers that they were utterly invincible, he demanded and received their total loyalty. Meyer trained his charges long and hard, galvanizing the soldiers of the 25th Panzergrenadier Regiment into a firstclass fighting unit eager for battle and quite prepared to give their lives for their beloved Führer.

They would not have to wait long.

Deemed ready for offensive operations, the 20,540 men and boys of the 12th SS Panzer Division Hitlerjugend were being held in a reserve area when the invasion of Normandy began on June 6, 1944. Following hours of confusion, Panzer Group West belatedly moved the 12th SS forward to operate on the left flank of the 21st Panzer and Panzer Lehr divisions close to the Juno and Sword invasion beaches used by British and Canadian forces. With orders to "throw the enemy west of the Orne into the sea and destroy him," the untested unit was the first SS force committed against the Allied troops pushing toward the vital communication center of Caen.

The soldiers of Meyer's reinforced 25th SS Panzergrenadier Regiment spearheaded the division's deployment to Normandy and arrived on the outskirts of Caen just after midnight on June 7. Meyer quickly established his command post three miles outside the city in the Abbey Ardenne, whose large towers offered an excellent view of the battlefield. He intended to strike swiftly with a bold counterattack through to the coast commencing at 4 PM, but in the early afternoon of June 7, he could see the 3rd Canadian Infantry Division preparing to launch an attack toward the vital airfield at Carpiquet.

As always, Meyer reacted quickly to the changing situation and scrapped his original plan. Instead, he deployed his forces for a massive ambush. As the Canadian armor and infantry advanced unsuspectingly toward Carpiquet, Meyer waited until they were well inside his predetermined killing zone and then launched his counterattack. The execution was flawless as the young SS grenadiers tore into the shocked Canadians like wraiths, annihilating a company of the North Nova Scotia Highlanders, mauling the rest of the battalion, and destroying 28 tanks.

Buoyed by the success of the ambush, Meyer seized on the momentum to launch a full-scale counterattack, but in the face of withering naval gunfire broke off the engagement and ordered his regiment to dig in and consolidate its gains. The young grenadiers were disappointed they had not driven the Allies into the sea as ordered, but they had stopped the Allied advance on Caen dead in its tracks.

For the next few days, the tenacious Meyer led his men brilliantly in a bloody, bitter struggle against the spirited 3rd Canadian Infantry Division in the villages, hedgerows, and fields around Caen. There is little doubt that Meyer's inspirational leadership on June 7 played a significant role in preventing the British Second Army from taking the city on D-Day. The Allies had quickly come to realize that their overwhelming air and manpower superiority did not guarantee a quick victory. Meyer's troops had fought with incredible tenacity, but many had paid the ultimate price for their reckless bravery.

Allied troops, when initially confronted by the SS teenagers, had sarcastically suggested the division should adopt a baby's feeding bottle as its emblem. However, after days of relentless close quarter combat against these highly motivated boy soldiers, the jokes dried up. The young grenadiers, who had proven themselves a force to be reckoned with, earned the begrudging respect of Allied troops. However, their ruthless fanaticism in battle also aroused in them a deep hatred, especially from the Canadians.

After five years of bloody war, any notion of chivalry on the battlefield seemed to be cast aside at Caen as the relentless combat often mirrored the barbaric intensity of the Eastern Front. In the white-hot cauldron of battle, quarter was rarely given or expected as both German and Canadian troops commonly shot prisoners out of hand in cold blood. It was an unfortunate chapter in the Normandy campaign but one that would have dire consequences for Meyer after the war.

The main body of the 12th SS Panzer Division had finally arrived to take up positions along the defensive line gained during Meyer's first counterattacks of June 7 and 8. In spite of repeated Allied attacks and the violent artillery barrages which constantly swept their lines, the Germans stubbornly maintained their tight grip on Caen.

On June 14, the unit's divisional commander, General Fritz Witt, was killed by naval gunfire at his headquarters in Venoix. Meyer, as the senior ranking officer, took his place. At 33 years of age, he became the youngest divisional commander in the German armed forces. The ability to seamlessly coordinate the use of his tanks and mechanized infantry in the most trying battle conditions not only bolstered his legendary fighting reputation but stretched the boundaries of the impossible as his troops continued to hand out stinging defeats to British and Canadian forces converging on Caen. For his extraordinary efforts in thwarting the Allied drive, Meyer was awarded Swords to his Knight's Cross and promoted to *Brigadefuerher* (Major General).

Day and night for four weeks, the 12th SS had been the rock of the German defenses at Caen, but with each passing day casualties mounted as few replacements arrived to fill the gaps in the line. By the first week of July, the massive buildup of Allied men and equipment threatened the 12th SS with encirclement. In spite of Hitler's orders to hold at all costs, Meyer withdraw from Caen to new positions south of the city. After 33 days of spiteful combat, much of it hand to hand, Caen had at last fallen to the Allies.

The loss of the city in no way diminished Meyer's fierce will to resist the enemy. By July 19, his 12th SS was once again in the thick of the fighting as the British and Canadians launched Operation Goodwood in an effort to break out of the French hedgerow country. In a remarkable feat of arms, the young SS troopers met the attack head on and succeeded in blunting the Allied drive near Vimont.

National Archives

Kurt Meyer sets off on a reconnaissance mission in Normandy with his commander Fritz Witt.

The SS men would remain there, fighting and dying in droves, for the next two weeks until finally pulled out to form the reserve for 1st SS Panzer Corps. With little respite and few reinforcements, Meyer found his exhausted division used as a fire brigade hurled in to fill breaches in the main battle line as one crisis followed another.

Despite the overwhelming odds, and infused by Meyer's dynamic personality, the division continued to fight with suicidal fanaticism; many of his grenadiers grimly fought to the death rather than surrender, while others, carrying explosives, climbed onto enemy tanks, destroying the vehicles and themselves.

During the first weeks of August, the 12th SS played a vital role in halting two separate Canadian offensives, Totalize and Tractible, but by now even Meyer was beginning to wonder how much more his troops could take. In two months of fighting, his division had been bled white and was, by now, a mere shadow of the unit that had arrived in Caen on June 7. Nearly 30 percent of its troops had perished in the inferno of Normandy, while another 40 percent were casualties or missing in action.

When the entire German Army in the West became encircled in the Falaise pocket, nearly 400,000 troops faced annihilation. Meyer withdrew his battered formation to the west with orders to hold the northern side of the Faliase-Agentan gap open to allow as many German troops as possible to escape the trap. The battle was clearly lost, but once again Meyer and his men fought with incredible ferocity to hold open the

upper jaw of the narrow corridor. Afterward, they helped cover the withdrawal of the German Army from France. The 12th SS Panzer Division was virtually destroyed in the process. On August 20, the survivors melted away in small groups across the Seine River, ending their remarkable campaign in Normandy.

The remnants of the 12th SS joined the retreat into Belgium, leaving behind over 9,000 comrades and practically all their tanks, artillery and heavy equipment. Meyer, now wounded, had survived years of heavy combat. However, his war would come to an inglorious end on September 6, 1944, when he was captured by a Belgian farmer and his son and handed over to the British before local partisans could shoot him.

Following his captivity in England, Meyer and a number of his officers were returned to Germany in December 1945, to face five war crimes charges filed by the Canadians. He was tried in the small north German town of Aurich and found guilty on two counts, inciting men under his command to deny quarter, and the merciless killing of Canadian prisoners of war at his headquarters in the Ardenne Abbey during June 7-8, 1944.

Meyer was the first German war criminal to face the death penalty, but the sentence was later controversially commuted to life imprisonment. His reprieve caused outrage in Canada, where Meyer was regarded as a war criminal of the highest order. It was widely believed that during the bitter fighting his troops had actually murdered at least 156 captured soldiers of the 3rd Canadian Infantry Division.

Due to a lack of firm evidence connecting Meyer with the crime, no charges were ever brought. Many within Germany, however, viewed Meyer's conviction as another example of victor's justice. Both sides, they stated, had shot prisoners in cold blood during the early days of the invasion, yet no Allied soldier was ever put on trial.

The accusations and counter accusations continued while Meyer served the first five years of his sentence in Dorchester Prison, New Brunswick, Canada. He was later transferred to the British military prison in Werl, West Germany, from where he was eventually released in poor health in 1954.

Meyer, as an active member of the Waffen SS Old Comrades Association, fought a protracted campaign against the West German Government on behalf of former members to obtain for them the same rights and entitlements received by veterans of the Wehrmacht, Luftwaffe, and Kriegsmarine. He was unmoved by either the damning evidence against the Nazi regime or the countless atrocities committed by the Waffen SS.

As such, Meyer never renounced his National Socialist beliefs and remained proud of everything the Waffen SS stood for and had achieved in battle. He eventually wrote his memoirs entitled *Grenadier*, which was published in 1957 and enjoyed several reprints. His health detoriated rapidly toward the end of the 1950s, due largely as a result of the more than 30 wounds he had received during the war. On the day of his 51st birthday, December 23, 1961, Kurt Meyer died of a heart attack, leaving behind a wife and five children.

Over 4,000 mourners attended the funeral of the unrepentant Nazi at the Hagen-Delstern cemetery in Westphalia, bidding a final farewell to a man widely considered one of Germany's finest warriors. □

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Allen Dulles established a prototype covert listening post in Switzerland while working for the OSS.

BY PETER KROSS

DURING WORLD WAR II, SWITZERLAND WAS ONE OF THE FEW NEUTRAL COUNTRIES TO survive unscathed amid the death and destruction that was being heaped upon the rest of Europe. Strategically located on the borders of France, Germany, Austria, Italy, and Czechoslovakia, Switzerland was an outpost where spies and covert agents of all the warring parties kept a close eye on each other and used Swiss territory to smuggle both people and material into and out of its wartime neighbors.

Into this highly charged political atmosphere the newly created Office of Strategic Services (OSS), headed by William Donovan, sent one of its most trusted officers to Bern to establish an intelligence listening post. That man was a well-connected, socially prominent diplomat and lawyer named Allen Dulles. From his base in Bern, Dulles would fashion a well-organized intelligence gathering operation whose agents were sent into occupied France, Italy, and Austria, as well as making covert contact with the small band of anti-Hitler military officers who were planning to assassinate the Nazi leader. In doing so, Dulles created the model for how a well-organized covert agency was to operate.

Allen Dulles came from a distinguished and politically well connected New York family. His maternal grandfather, John W. Foster, was Secretary of State under President Benjamin Harrison. His great uncle, John Welsh, was the U.S. Ambassador to London in the 1870s. Dulles graduated from Princeton University in 1914 and taught school in India. He began his diplomatic career in May 1916, when he was appointed the third secretary in the American Embassy in Vienna, Austria.

One day at the embassy, Dulles received a call from a young revolutionary Russian figure named Vladimir Lenin. Lenin wanted to meet with someone in the U.S. Embassy. Dulles refused the meeting, saying that he had a date and could not cancel it. In later years, Dulles would never forget that nearly fateful encounter with one of the most important figures of the 20th century.

In 1920, shortly after he married his long time sweetheart, Clover, Dulles was posted to Constantinople in Turkey where he assumed the post of first secretary to Admiral Mark Bristol, the U.S. Commissioner of the Allied tripartite pact which included both France and England. Their job was to oversee Allied interests in Turkey in the aftermath of World War I. He was tasked with the assignment of securing a peace treaty with the Turks, as well as keeping a close eye on the vital Rockefeller family oil interests (Standard Oil) in that country.

After the United States entered the war in December 1941, Dulles began a career in intelligence that would last his entire life. In 1941, he joined the newly created Office of the Coordinator of Information, the predecessor of the OSS, and ran its New York office. Dulles's agents specialized in the collection of information from German emigres to America.

Dulles was a proponent of increased American aid to Britain and was vocally interventionist in his foreign policy pronouncements. In 1936 he co-authored a book called *Can We Stay Neutral* (with Hamilton Fish Armstrong), in which he called for firm American military ties to Britain.

Dulles took up shop in room 3603 in Rockefeller Center in New York, the same quarters as that of William Stephenson's British Security Coordination. Stephenson shared his most important strategic intelligence with Dulles and his COI. As far as William Donovan was concerned, the United States needed its own intelligence agents inside Europe, not just second hand scraps of information at home. After Pearl Harbor, Donovan convinced President Franklin

National Archives

Following the failed assassination attempt of July 20, 1944, a shaken Adolf Hitler and newly arrived Benito Mussolini survey the damage to the Führer's East Prussian headquarters at Wolf's Lair.

D. Roosevelt that if America was to become a prime player in the international intelligence gathering business, it needed a secure place of operation. That location, according to Donovan, was Switzerland.

Donovan's notes to the President read in part, "Switzerland is now, as it was in the last war, the one most advantageous place for the obtaining of information concerning the European Axis powers. Analysis of the telegrams reaching the State Department from various posts in Europe in which we still have representatives shows that the information from Switzerland is far more important than from any other post."

Dulles lobbied Donovan for an overseas posting, and when the OSS chief inquired if he would be interested in London, Dulles begged off. Instead, they all agreed that Dulles would be offered the job in Bern, Switzerland, right in the heart of Europe, a scant few miles from the fighting.

Switzerland was the Mecca for spies and counter-spies from all the warring nations, a place where the lights burned brightly, the stores were well-stocked, and everybody knew one another's business. Swiss intelligence kept a close watch on all these foreign agents, eager not to offend Hitler, Mussolini, or Roosevelt. It was into this hotbed of intrigue that Dulles would enter and play his clandestine role. First though, he had to get there.

While Dulles waited for his official papers to be approved by the State Department, a few accounting considerations had to be worked out. Dulles decided not to accept any regular salary, but insisted that the OSS repay him for his expenses. Donovan assigned Dulles the code designation of "110" along with the title of "Special Representative of the President of the United States." In effect, he was the OSS station chief in Bern, the number one spy for America in Switzerland.

Dulles finally left the United States on November 2, 1942, bound for Lisbon, Portugal, via the Pan Am flying boat. His original plan was to travel by train into Spain, across Vichy France, and finally ending at his destination of Geneva, Switzerland. Unfortunately, his travel plans turned out quite differently. En route, Dulles's plane to Lisbon was delayed a few days in the Azores. He finally arrived in Lisbon and then departed for Barcelona, Spain, where he planned to travel by train to Vichy-controlled France.

While in Barcelona, Dulles learned that the Allies had launched Operation Torch, the invasion of North Africa. Dulles feared that the Germans would stop his train and detain him for the duration of the war. He decided to stay on the train and take his chances. With help from the local French *gendarme*, Dulles waited until the local Gestapo officer went on his break and took advantage of the opportunity to slip unnoticed into Switzerland. It was only by sheer chance that Dulles's espionage mission to Switzerland did not end before it began.

National Archives

OSS spymaster Allen Dulles established a base of operations in wartime Switzerland.

Dulles arrived in Switzerland with $10,000 in cash and a mandate to perform a "special duty" mission. He later said of his first day in Bern, "It (his arrival) had the result of bringing to my door purveyors of information, volunteers and adventurers of every sort, professional and amateur spies, good and bad." The first man he contacted in Bern was an Austrian lawyer named Kurt Grimm who had a business relationship with Dulles's old law firm of Sullivan and Cromwell. Grimm saw to it that Dulles was outfitted with new clothes and, more importantly, found him a posh home. The address was 23 Herrengasse, a ground floor apartment in a 14th century townhouse at the end of a cul-de-sac, a perfect place in which to watch the street for any unwelcome visitors. In a bit of bravado on his part, Dulles had the local authorities turn off the street light adjacent to his apartment throughout the war. This allowed the identities of his clandestine visitors to be kept a closely guarded secret.

Dulles began his clandestine work with a grand total of two secretaries, who typed his correspondence and ran the office. By the time the war ended in 1945, he had a total of a dozen OSS staff members performing all kinds of intelligence related tasks. In time, the all important X-2 (OSS Counter-intelligence) made its headquarters in the same building, only feet from the boss's inquiring eyes.

The British had their own, large intelligence base in Bern, and Dulles was aided in his initial weeks in the city by Henry Baldwin, a former butler and intelligence operative in Egypt. Baldwin performed the less glamorous, yet vital jobs of getting cars for OSS use in Bern, arranging for trains and bus stations to be watched, the tapping of telephones, and even the opening of mail addressed to other people.

Dulles's British counterpart in Bern was MI-6 officer Count Frederich "Fanny" Vanden Heuvel. Dulles and Vanden Heuvel got on well together and made an arrangement whereby their respective agents would not try to recruit each other's sources. The one exception to the rule was the use by both the British and the Americans of the services of a politically well connected Polish widow named Madame Halina Szymanski, who happened to be a mistress to Admiral Wilhelm Canaris, chief of the German Intelligence Service, the Abwehr. Through pillow talk, Madame Szymanski relayed word to the Allies of German military moves into Russia, and the news of anti-Hitler plotting among his generals.

Working covertly in Swiss territory was not an easy task for Dulles. He tried hard not to interfere with the daily workings of the Swiss intelligence service, the Buro H, and did all in his power to lessen the profiles of his own agents. To that effect, he met on a regular basis with three of the most important men in Swiss Intelligence: Brigadier General Roger Mason, the bureau's director, and his assistants, Captain Hans Haussamann and Major Max Waibel. The Swiss provided Dulles with such vital information as naming the anti-Hitler plotters among the Führer's top staff, and discussed with him the actions of the Red Orchestra, the successful anti-German spy network run by the Soviet Union during the war.

Another of Dulles's espionage coups during his first days in Bern was the close relationship he began with the French Resistance inside Switzerland. Dulles made a deal with the head of French Intelligence in Switzerland, Major Gaston Pourchot, who made available over 250 of his most experienced agents who had previously been active in both France and Germany. Newly de-classified OSS records tell that the United States provided up to 45,000 francs per month to support Pourchot's agents.

As time went on, Dulles's secret organization in Switzerland began to take root. His covert associations with both the French Resistance and the Swiss authorities opened many avenues that had previously been off limits. However, his most difficult task was getting agents into Germany. To that end, he recruited a German Standard Oil executive named Gero von Schulze Gaevernitz. Dulles was friendly with the younger

Gaevernitz's father, who had once served as a cabinet member in the old Weimar government. Gero Gaevernitz, 44 years old when the war began, was anti-Nazi in his politics and had offered his services to the British who declined.

Gaevernitz worked closely with another anti-Hitler activist named Elizabeth Wiskemann who was a member of a radical, anti-German group called the Kreisau Circle. The Kreisau Circle was made up of intellectuals, diplomats, and members of the old German nobility opposed to Hitler's rule. Their goal was to remove Hitler from power by any means necessary (assassination was considered an option). Both Gaevernitz and Wiskemann were then living in Zurich, and Dulles made repeated trips to meet with them in late 1942. In time, Dulles was able to recruit Gaevernitz into the OSS, and he stayed on the American payroll until the war's end.

Gero Gaevernitz was not high in the OSS pecking order, but he had access to other, more important people who the OSS might be interested in. In 1943, Gaevernitz introduced Dulles to a man who would play a huge role in penetrating the German Intelligence apparatus, Hans Bernd Gisevius.

Gisevius was the Abwehr voice in Zurich and a covert member of the Black Orchestra or Schwarze Kapelle, an anti-Hitler organization

National Archives

A Swiss guide points out one of many historic sites in the city of Bern to two servicemen.

which included prominent members of the German diplomatic corps. Gisevius first entered the German intelligence service in the dreaded Gestapo under Heinrich Himmler but soon transferred to the Abwehr. Gisevius soon soured on Hitler's regime and was sent by his boss, Admiral Wilhelm Canaris, the head of the Abwehr, who was also part of the Black Orchestra, to act as the liaison officer to the various resistance groups.

Dulles first met Gisevius in 1943 at the World Council of Churches building in Bern. Before approaching the OSS, Gisevius made contact with the British who thought he was a plant, out to sew disinformation among them. They refused his entreaties, and the wily German soon found a home with Dulles and the OSS. Gisevius proved to be a gold mine for the Allies as he gave them the locations of the powerful German V-1 and V-2 terror weapon launch sites. He was also an active member in the abortive plot led by Count Klaus von Stauffenberg to assassinate Hitler on July 20, 1944.

Dulles used his aide and lover, Mary Bancroft, as his official contact with Gisevius. After the war ended, Bancroft helped Gisevius write his memoirs. In a bit of gossip, he told Bancroft that there might have been a "relationship" between Himmler and Reinhard Heydrich, head of the powerful SD or Sicherheitsdeinst, the intelligence gathering component of the SS.

On April 6, 1944, Dulles reported to Washington about a conversation he had with Gisevius, who had just returned from Germany. He reported that German General Ludwig Beck and his associates were contemplating a coup against Hitler and were seeking Western help. However,

Washington refused to participate in the coup, still seeking unconditional surrender from Germany, which had been stated Allied policy.

Another player in the Bern network was a young Austrian, an ex-soldier in the German Army, named Fritz Molden. Molden told Dulles that both his parents were part of the Austrian Underground that fought the Nazis. After being arrested by the Gestapo, Molden made a daring escape and wound up in Switzerland. He too had offered his services to the British but was turned away. Instead, he volunteered to spy for the United States in whatever capacity was needed. Molden worked tirelessly in building up a solid relationship between the Austrian Resistance and the OSS in Switzerland. After the war ended, Molden married Joan Dulles, his old spymaster's daughter.

As can be seen in his recruitment of Hans Gisevius, Gero Gaevernitz, and Fritz Molden, Dulles was steadily broadening his anti-Hitler intelligence base in Bern. Each man added a little to the overall picture of events then unfolding inside Germany. Dulles's next recruit was a man who would become an intelligence bonanza to the OSS and provide a window into Hitler's headquarters previously unavailable. That man was a German diplomat named Fritz Kolbe.

At 42, Kolbe worked for German Ambassador Karl Ritter. Ritter was one of the most important agents receiving intelligence from Berlin. It was Kolbe's job to read Ritter's missives and write reports for the ambassador. Kolbe saw all the intelligence reports that came across Ritter's desk, and he was a walking encyclopedia of information about the Nazis' military plans.

Kolbe offered to work for British Intelligence in Bern but was rebuffed as a possible German plant. Kolbe was introduced to Gerald Mayer at the U.S. Office of War Information, and Mayer passed along Kolbe's offer to Dulles. A secret meeting between Dulles and Kolbe was arranged at Dulles's 23 Herrengasse home.

Without solicitation from Dulles, Kolbe offered up the diplomatic information that crossed his desk. He once carried to Dulles a briefcase with 186 documents smuggled from Ambassador Ritter, known in OSS parlance as the Bern Report. The information concerned a plan to rescue a captured German agent in Dublin, and, most important, the report that the Germans had cracked the U.S. cipher system.

The British checked Kolbe's information for authenticity using the Ultra system. Claude Dansey, the second in command of MI-6, and Kim Philby, head of the Iberian Section of MI-6 (and a secret Russian agent), told Dulles that Kolbe's material was fake. It was not, and

Dansey had to reconcile himself to the fact that the British had passed on the services of one of the most important double agents of the war. Dulles, meanwhile, accepted Koble's offer to commit treason against Germany. Dulles gave Kolbe the code name George Wood.

In a cable to OSS headquarters, Dulles wrote about Kolbe, "I now firmly believe in the good faith of Wood and I am ready to stake my reputation on the fact that these documents are genuine." In subsequent visits to Dulles, Kolbe exposed the Abwehr's secrets. Dulles sent the information dubbed Kappa to both London and Washington for their review.

In March 1945, one month before the war in Europe ended, Kolbe was allowed to stay permanently in Switzerland. By the time his double agent work concluded, Kolbe had given Dulles about 1,600 articles concerning Germany's top diplomatic and military secrets. After the war, he disappeared among the countless men and women determined to begin a new life.

After the war in Europe ended, Dulles returned to the United States and resumed his old job as a powerful attorney with Sullivan and Cromwell. But as the Cold War against the Soviet Union began to heat up, he lobbied hard for a national intelligence agency for the new era. In April 1947, he testified before a Senate committee looking into the possibilities of forming a new intelligence agency and said that the West had to face the new Soviet threat by all means, technological and strategic. He hoped that he would be the leader of the newly created CIA, which was established in 1947 via the National Security Act inaugurated by President Harry S. Truman.

Dulles got his chance in 1953, when the newly elected President Dwight D. Eisenhower appointed him as the director of the Central Intelligence Agency. Dulles would stay in that post until 1961, when he was fired by President John F. Kennedy following the disastrous Bay of Pigs invasion of Cuba. During his tenure as CIA director, Dulles used the CIA to oust the regimes of Arbenz in Guatemala and Mossadegh in Iran, plan the attempted overthrow of Cuba's Fidel Castro, and expand the top secret U-2 surveillance flights over the Soviet Union.

During his retirement in Washington, Dulles wrote books on intelligence, including *Great True Spy Stories, Great Spy Stories From Fiction*, and *The Craft of Intelligence*. He died in 1969. □

Peter Kross, of New Brunswick, N. J., is the author of the books Spies, Traitors and Moles: An Espionage and Intelligence Quiz Book *and* The Encyclopedia of World War II Spies.

U.S. Navy Captain Forrest Biard remembers the cryptanalytic triumphs behind the Allies' Pacific victories.

BY HERVIE HAUFLER

"For several months after the outbreak of the war with Japan the very fate of our nation rested in the hands of a small group of very dedicated and highly devoted men working in the basement under the Administration Building in Pearl Harbor."

That is how Admiral Chester Nimitz addressed the cryptographers who worked in what they called "The Dungeon" at the Oahu naval base. The admiral's words expressed his gratitude to the group for breaking the Japanese naval code and, through their decrypts supplying him with detailed information concerning the Imperial Japanese Navy's plans and intentions. Nimitz had used this information in creating his battle-winning strategies, particularly the great U.S. victory at Midway atoll.

Captain Forrest R. "Tex" Biard was one of that small group on the receiving end of the admiral's tribute. He believes he is the last survivor.

Now, seated in his Dallas home in his 92nd year, Biard still does not have to fumble for a word in recollecting the varied roles he played in achieving Allied successes in the secret war of military intelligence—successes that gave Allied leaders the advantage they used in winning the larger conflict.

Biard recalls his father urging him to "make history" and, as the best way to do this, encouraging him to compete for an appointment to the U.S. Naval Academy. He took the tests, won out, and graduated in 1934, 24th in a class of 450.

While doing sea duty, he began to hear about a Navy program that sent officers to Japan for three years to familiarize themselves with the Japanese language and the mind-sets of the people, preparatory for serving in naval intelligence. He applied and was accepted. He was, however, a latecomer, arriving in Tokyo in July 1939. The result was that he and his group of nine other officer-linguists were able to complete only two years of their training before the pre-Pearl Harbor environment became too hostile to endure. In late August 1941, they received orders to leave immediately.

The Japanese, though, recognized the value of the officers' experience to U.S. military intelligence and put roadblocks in the way of their departure. Biard is given credit for finally engineering their escape from Tokyo by making a deal that got them at last to Shanghai, China. From there they reached Honolulu. Biard and three of his associates reported to the Dungeon, where they became members of the Combat Intelligence Unit, more familiarly known as Station Hypo—the alphabetic equivalent of "H" in the international signal code.

The newcomers were greeted by Hypo's commander, Joseph Rochefort. "Gentlemen," he told them, "here are your desks. Start breaking Japanese codes." Biard felt himself very fortunate when he was given the desk next to Rochefort's. He pitched in to learn from Rochefort, do what he could to help crack Japanese codes, and make up for lost time in improving his command of the Japanese language.

Here in the Dungeon, it was apparent that the work ethic was much more rigorously honored than elsewhere on Oahu. Even with the clouds of war thickening ominously, the prevailing attitude in Honolulu was one of slackness and indulgence. In the Dungeon, Rochefort set the example by never seeming to stop. He padded around in felt slippers and a red bathrobe, his way of surviving the chill of the Dungeon's cold floors and bad air conditioning. The bathrobe's pockets were always jammed with the message forms he had singled out for special attention. He frequently worked 20 hours out of 24.

Hypo was one of three Navy codebreaking centers carrying on the secret war against

U.S. Navy

U.S. fighters in the Pacific Theater attack the Japanese cruisers *Mogami* and *Mikuma* in this painting by Griffith Bailey Coale.

Japan. The others were "Cast" on Corregidor in the Philippines and the headquarters unit, OP-20-G, in Washington, D.C. To the officers of OP-20-G, control was important. They assigned the Japanese codes each unit worked on and decided what information to forward to their outlying posts.

Biard still rankles when he speaks of two critical mistakes he believes OP-20-G made in its relationship with Hypo.


National Archives
Captain Forrest Biard pictured during his years as a WWII code breaker.

The first was not forwarding information on the new breakthrough against Japanese codes achieved by the U.S. Army Signal Corps' Signal Intelligence Service (SIS). This was the success that SIS, under the leadership of super-cryptanalyst William Friedman, had scored in breaking the code machine, codenamed "Purple," used by Japanese diplomats and military attachés. The breadth of Purple's use around the world would have produced information of great value both to Hypo and to Pearl Harbor's commanders. The leaders at OP-20-G knew of the break but kept the information close to their vests. The Purple clone that was supposed to be assigned to the Hawaiian command was never sent.

The second and more important failure was OP-20-G's decision not to have the Hawaiian station tackle the top code used by the Japanese Navy. Instead, Hypo was assigned three lesser codes, one of which was never broken because it was used so infrequently it never supplied analysts with enough material to get their teeth into.

In the days leading up to the Pearl Harbor attack, Biard and three others were sent to a nearby intercept station to conduct an around-the-clock listening effort. The purpose was to detect one of the "winds messages" which the Japanese were, it was thought, to insert in regular broadcasts of weather information as a warning to their embassies that relations with one or another foreign power were being broken off as a prelude to attack. The message that would designate the United States was "East wind rain." Biard was on duty the December morning when he began hearing explosions. His first thought was that these were the sounds of routine blasting in the harbor. A look outside, though, revealed planes with red balls on their wings. The winds message had proved to be a vain hope. The attack was on.

Three days later, Hypo was turned loose on JN-25, the code most relied on by the Imperial Japanese Navy. It was a codebook code with a second super-encipherment. Biard watched admiringly as Joe Rochefort, with his deep knowledge of the Japanese language and ways of thinking, combined with an incredible memory, quickly began to make inroads into JN-25.

On February 14, 1942, Rochefort called Biard and Lieutenant Gilven Slonim to his desk. Hypo, he explained, was to supply officers to head up codework on each of two aircraft carriers that, with supporting ships, were to carry out sorties against the Japanese. One task force, grouped around the carrier *Enterprise*, would be under the command of Admiral William F. "Bull" Halsey. The second, with *Yorktown* at its center, would have Admiral Frank Jack Fletcher in charge. These two bold thrusts were U.S. attempts to counter the British loss of Singapore and stem the Japanese drive into Southeast Asia.

Rochefort handed Biard a coin. "All right, Tex, " he said, "if it comes up heads you will go to *Enterprise* with Admiral Halsey. If it comes up tails, you go to *Yorktown* with Admiral Fletcher."

Biard's toss came up tails. It was his introduction to the Battle of the Coral Sea and to 101 days of difficulty and frustration under Fletcher.

Fletcher was one of those commanders, Biard recalls, who surround themselves with a staff of people they like, regardless of their competence. Since Biard had been chosen for him, not by him, Fletcher was antagonistic from the start. Their relationship quickly deteriorated. There came a day when the admiral, instead of lunching as usual with a few close cronies, invited his entire staff to his cabin. At the end of the meal, he looked toward Biard and said, "Biard, I want you to tell me and my staff all about your communications intelligence organization and the codebreaking it does."

Biard was dumbfounded. Any well-informed commander would have known that military intelligence must be closely guarded, revealed only to those with a recognized need to know. Certainly this right did not extend to a large cabin full of uninitiated officers, not to mention the Guamanian and Filipino mess attendants present. Biard said he was sorry, but he was under orders not to disclose the nature of his work.

Fletcher erupted with rage. "You will tell me all I ask you and you will tell me now in front of my staff and anyone else present." Biard held his ground.

The result was that Fletcher, miffed, there-

after continued to ignore much of the increasingly valuable information that Biard and his two young radio intercept operators received and that Biard translated from the Japanese.

All of this internecine warfare came to a critical juncture in early May. Biard's readings of Japanese messages told him that two strong Imperial Navy groups were bearing down from the east on Fletcher's task force. *Yorktown's* own protecting fleet had been weakened when Fletcher had ordered two Australian cruisers and their British admiral into positions well away from his own location. The reason for this move, Fletcher's chief of staff whispered to Biard, was because, in the victorious aftermath of the coming battle, "he doesn't want to hand out any medals to Britishers and Australians," only to Americans.

Then came the morning of May 7. Biard knew from intercepts that the Japanese carriers were close enough that their planes could reach the Allied ships. Conversely, he was aware that if he could persuade Fletcher to launch his own planes, the U.S. task force would win "the coming battle hands down." For half an hour, Biard says, he tried to convince Fletcher of the opportunity to surprise the Japanese fleet. More urgently, he warned of the danger of an oncoming assault.

"Young man, you don't understand," he quotes Fletcher as telling him. "I am going to attack them tomorrow."

"But admiral," Biard replied, "they are going to attack you today."

The consequent mayhem has been described by Samuel Eliot Morison in his multivolume history of U.S. naval operations in the war, not as the Battle of the Coral Sea, but as "The Battle of Naval Errors."

The carrier *Lexington* and other U.S. ships of Fletcher's task force were sunk or damaged. *Yorktown* was crippled yet saved from complete destruction only by the violent evasive maneuvers managed by Captain Elliott Buckmaster. The Japanese also lost a light carrier, had a second badly damaged, and had to give up their immediate plans to establish a base in New Guinea for attacks on Australia.

Biard had the satisfaction, subsequently, of knowing that the Navy's chief of staff, Admiral Ernest J. King, shared his low opinion of Fletcher. King insisted that Nimitz relieve Fletcher of his duties.

Meanwhile, back in the Coral Sea, Biard felt immense relief when Fletcher received orders from Nimitz to return under full steam to Pearl Harbor. Nimitz's reason, Biard found out when he was welcomed back into the Dungeon, was that he needed every possible ship, including

the battered *Yorktown*, to meet Admiral Isoroku Yamamoto's massive foray against Midway, which included a diversionary attack on American bases in the Aleutian Islands.

Yamamoto had organized his huge fleet for a surprise attack like his earlier one on Pearl. This time, though, it was Yamamoto who would be surprised. Rochefort and his team had broken JN-25 sufficiently to learn precisely where and when the attack would come. To side with his own codebreakers, Nimitz had had to go against the beliefs held by his higher command in Washington that the threat against Midway was only a ruse and that the real objective of the Japanese was either the U.S. West Coast or the Panama Canal. Deciding in favor of Rochefort and his team, Nimitz had sent only a ragtag fleet to counter the Japanese Navy's subsidiary Aleutian offensive. He had positioned his main forces, including the hastily patched up *Yorktown,* but still only a David of a fleet, north of Midway so that it could fall on the flank of Yamamoto's Goliath.

Biard found great tension in the Dungeon. The Japanese had planned twice to overhaul JN-25 but had been forced to delay the change because of difficulties in distributing the new codebooks. These delays had given Rochefort's team the time with the old code to complete their revelation of Yamamoto's plans. Now, on May 28, the Japanese did succeed in introducing a new code, and the Dungeon was shut out until Rochefort's crew could begin breaking it.

There was nothing to do but wait, blinded, for a horrible seven days while the Midway drama played out. The Hypo crew knew it was altogether possible that in that time the Japanese could change their plans or even cancel them altogether. "In either case," Biard recalls, "they would have made monkeys of us in the Dungeon and a martyr of Admiral Nimitz."

The great moment came. On the morning of June 3, right on the predicted schedule, a patrol plane flying from Midway found the Japanese fleet just where it was supposed to be. Rochefort and his mates could relax and smile again, but they also prayed for the U.S. forces now in deadly battle.

"Our prayers there, too, were answered," Biard remembers. All four Japanese aircraft carriers were sunk, and Yamamoto had to order a retreat back to home waters. The heretofore unrelenting Japanese offensive was broken; after Midway there was nothing but withdrawal and eventual defeat. As Winston Churchill wrote of the battle, "At one stroke the dominant position of Japan in the Pacific was reversed."

Biard had one more codework adventure in the Pacific's secret war. This came at the beginning of 1944 as the result of an incredible U.S. Army find in northern New Guinea. General Douglas MacArthur's forces had been relentlessly driving back the Japanese armies there. A Japanese division had to withdraw too quickly to take all its codebooks with it. The remainder were dumped into a metal chest, which was sunk in a water-filled pit. U.S. Army engineers searching the area with metal detectors found the chest. When the codebooks were dried out back in Brisbane's Central Bureau, they revealed all of the mainline Japanese Army code systems.

A serious bottleneck developed. There were not enough translators to handle the flood of decrypts. MacArthur appealed to Washington for help. By then the U.S. Army and Navy were working closely enough together that the Army answered MacArthur's pleas by having two Navy linguists, Biard and Lt. Cmdr. Thomas Mackie, rushed to Brisbane to help.

On their first morning there, Biard recollects, they joined several Nisei translators working on the backlog. The Nisei, they found, were working their way up from the bottom of the high stack of decrypted messages. Instinctively, Mackie and Biard reversed the process, reaching for the freshest communiqué, the one on top of the heap. It was a momentous discovery. Translated, the 13-part message did nothing less than detail a conference of top-ranking Japanese Army and Navy officers at which the major decisions about the New Guinea front had been reached.

The reading of this message and of subsequent ones resulting from the captured codebooks supplied MacArthur with the information on which to base the deceptions that gave him victory at Hollandia in New Guinea and advanced the timetable of his return to the Philippines by months.

After the war, the Navy sent Tex Biard to Ohio State to acquire a master's degree in nuclear physics. He was the operations officer during the first test of the hydrogen bomb. Retired from the Navy in 1955, he became a college physics professor for the next 23 years. Somewhere in Washington lies a recommendation that he receive the Distinguished Service Medal. An interviewer comes away from talks with him feeling that it would be hard to find anyone who deserves it more. □

Hervie Haufler is the author of Codebreakers' Victory, *a review of Allied cryptanalytic successes in World War II published by Penguin's New American Library. For research on this article, he wishes to acknowledge the special help of Captain Biard's close friend, retired Navy Commander Jonathan M. Houp.*

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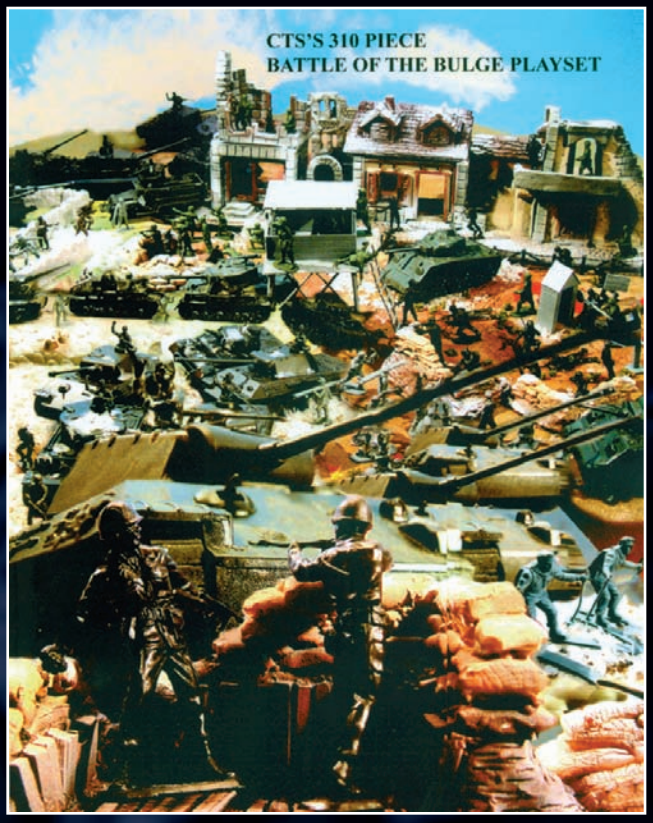

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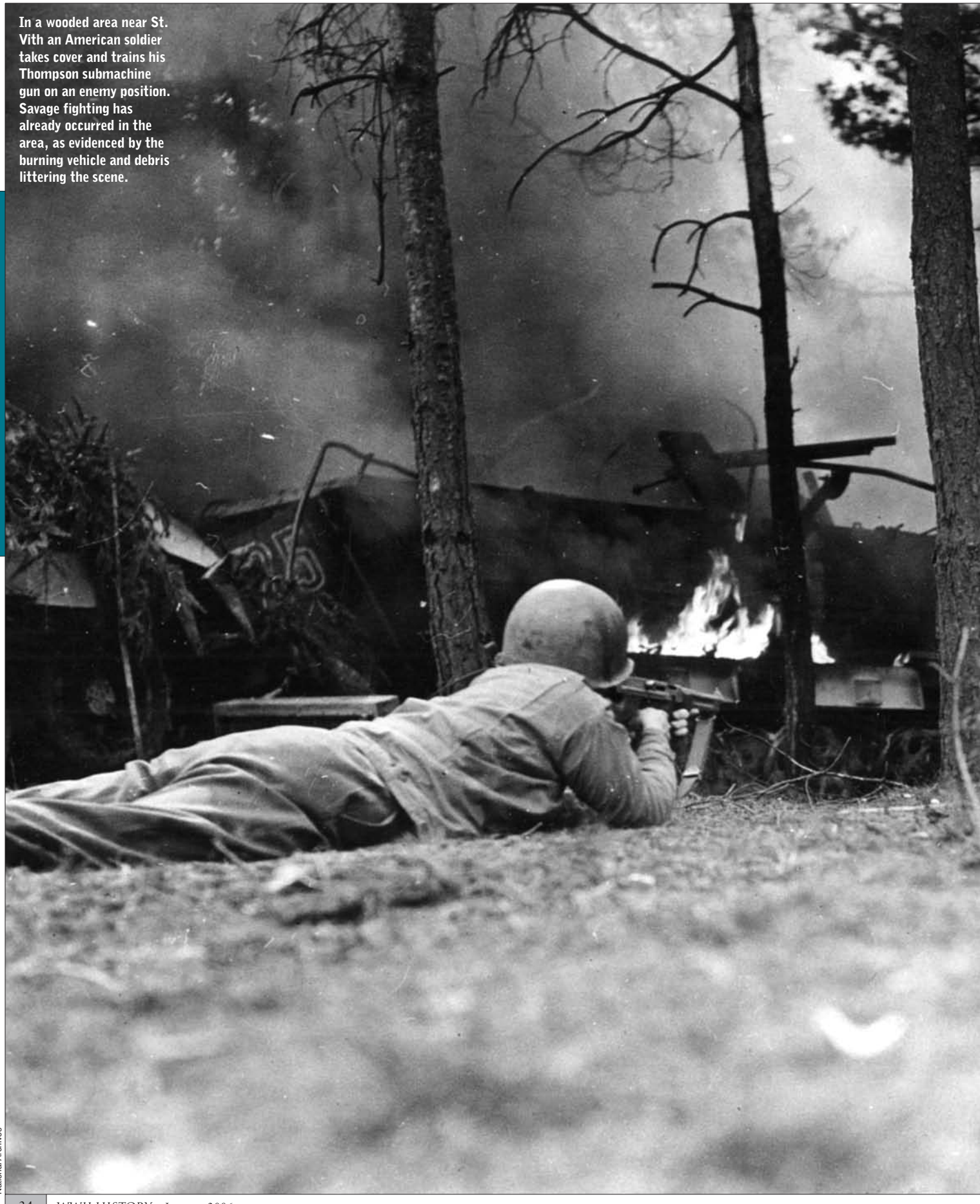


In a wooded area near St. Vith an American soldier takes cover and trains his Thompson submachine gun on an enemy position. Savage fighting has already occurred in the area, as evidenced by the burning vehicle and debris littering the scene.

National Archives

AN OBSCURE BRIGADIER GENERAL, BRUCE CLARKE, AND A CONTINGENT OF AMERICAN TROOPS SLOWED THE GERMAN ADVANCE DURING THE BATTLE OF THE BULGE. BY CHARLES WHITING

STAND AT ST. VITH

In the early hours of Sunday morning, December 17, 1944, an American brigadier general suffering from piles was heading into the unknown. That gray dawn, with the guns rumbling to the east, the newly promoted general was being driven in a looted Mercedes to a Belgian town located a couple of miles from the border with Nazi Germany.

Behind the general in his Mercedes, which required the combined efforts of driver and himself to change gear, there came a lone jeep. In it the frightened GI driver constituted his sole bodyguard in this tense, rugged countryside between Bastogne and the other major Belgian road-and-rail center of St. Vith, the general's destination.

General Bruce Clark, a big, rugged man in his mid-30s who tended to run to fat if he were not careful, had been trained at West Point to become an engineer. Due to wartime circumstances, however, he had first gone into action four months before as a combat commander in General George S. Patton's favorite armored division, the 4th Armored. There he had proved that he knew how to manage tanks just as well as he knew how to construct bridges.

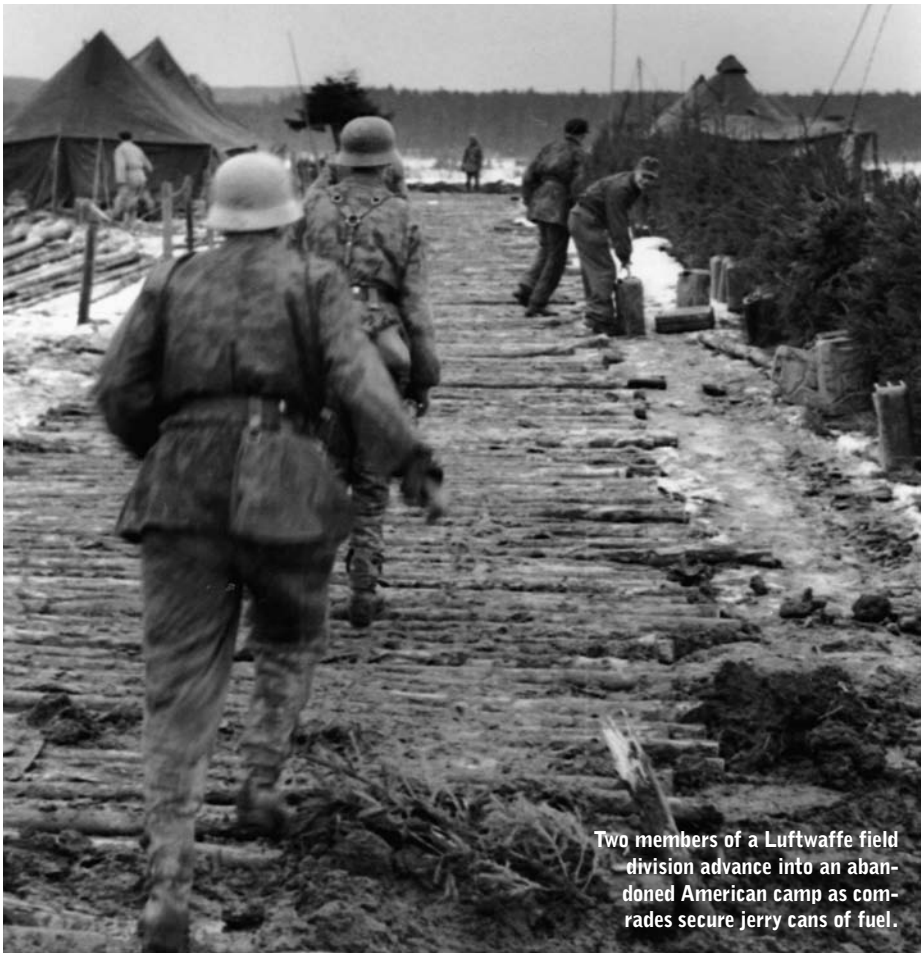
Unfortunately, that did not bring him the kind of promotion he eagerly sought. Once, during a visit, Patton told him why. "You're a damned nobody, Clarke," he had exploded. Clarke, who had been born to a large and poor family in a tight apartment above a grocer's shop, had asked why. Patton explained that General George Marshall, the U.S. Army's chief of staff, had never even heard of Clarke. "Hell, Clarke," Patton had said in that curiously high-pitched voice of his, "if you had been in the infantry instead of an engineer and had served in Fort Benning you would have been a major general by now."

In prewar days when General Marshall had been in command at Fort Benning, he had always noted the names of officers who could be promoted rapidly in the case of war.

Now, Clarke, newly promoted and transferred to the 7th Armored Division as a combat commander, was on his way, without Marshall's aid, to his own personal date with destiny. Ambitious, and not a little ruthless, Clarke would start a reputation at this little border town of St. Vith, where so many other senior U.S. officers would have theirs destroyed, that would carry him to the highest echelons of the U.S. Army and make him a trusted military adviser to a series of U.S. presidents.

For Clarke was heading for a military SNAFU that would have frightened off many more senior officers this dawn. The day before, a whole German Army, the 5th Panzer, commanded by dynamic little gentleman jockey General Hasso von Manteuffel, had struck the 60,000-strong U.S. VIII Corps with disastrous results. The U.S. 106th Infantry Division, the newest U.S. division in Europe, had been trapped and was now virtually surrounded in the Eifel Mountains just across the border in Germany. Its neighbor, the 28th Infantry Division, had been split in half with one of its decimated regiments, the 110th, pulling back in great disorder. In essence, VIII Corps, a mixture of unblooded infantry divisions and those that had suffered appalling casualties in the previous November, was on the verge of collapse. Once von Manteuffel's armor made a complete breakthrough, the fate of the corps might well be sealed.

That Sunday, Clarke did not know that. All he knew was that there was a flap at the front and that he was to lend a hand with his combat command of two columns strung out somewhere far behind, heading down from Holland to Belgium along roads already being ambushed by the advancing Germans. Perhaps it was good that Clarke did not know just how bad the situation was, for as he explained much later, "I was being thrown into a situation the like of which I had never known up to then and fortunately never have since."



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Two members of a Luftwaffe field division advance into an abandoned American camp as comrades secure jerry cans of fuel.

Arriving with his three-man team in St. Vith, Clarke's driver fought his way through the clogged streets, where panic reigned in all its naked ugliness, and Clarke painfully got out of the Mercedes to report to Maj. Gen. Alan W. Jones, the commander of the Golden Lions, as the men of the 106th Infantry Division called themselves after their divisional patch. He climbed the stairs of the Klosterschule, Jones's headquarters, where Jones was located on the upper floor, trying to spot the first Germans the staff expected to appear from the wooded valley below.

Jones, heavy set with sleek, black hair and a pencil-slim moustache in the fashion of the matinee idol of the day, Don Ameche, had been in the Army since 1917, but had never heard a shot fired in anger. Now, within five days of arriving at the front, it appeared he had lost two regiments in a German trap while his third was fighting its way back across the German frontier to avoid a similar fate.

At first, Clarke did not quite know what to make of the older major general, who seemed to waver between an unreal pugnaciousness and a certain careless indecisiveness. "They'll never take me alive," he told Clarke, saying that he always kept a grenade in his jeep in case he was ever trapped by the "Krauts." At the same time, he seemed to think that since Clarke had arrived with his three men he was saved. He could leave everything to the 7th Armored. As General Clarke noted to this author, "General Jones was surprised and not alert to the danger presented by the Germans." To his cronies and fellow veterans of the battle, Clarke expressed his opinion of Jones, his temporary superior, in a much more drastic and outspoken manner. But that utterance is better not appearing in print.

Still, that morning Clarke listened attentively as Jones explained what he knew of the situation. So far Jones had asked for an air strike. It would never come due to bad weather. He had also organized a stop line to the east of St. Vith under the command of former football player and now engineer Lt. Col. Thomas J. Riggs, Jr. His 500-man-strong engineer battalion was Jones's only reserve. Otherwise, Jones seemed to have lost control of his three infantry regiments. Indeed, he was being forced to communicate with them, when he did, through corps headquarters in Bastogne. Now, as Jones expressed it to Clarke, "everything depends on your CCB."

Clarke promised that as soon as his men arrived he would send them to the aid of the two trapped Golden Lion regiments in the Eifel. Then, unable to do much else but wait, he thought he would help to clean up the clogged streets of the German-speaking border town before his command arrived. He did not have a clue when that might be.

To Major Don Boyer of Clarke's command, it seemed that day that CCB, 7th Armored Division, might never arrive—not because of direct enemy pressure, but because of the cowardice and panic of their own people. Just after his advance party had passed the hamlet of Poteau, for example, the already slow-moving convoy was forced to grind to a halt. The road ahead was clogged with U.S. traffic going the wrong way—to the rear. Angry already, Boyer pushed his way forward until he came to a group of Staghound armored cars commanded by an officer wearing the golden lion patch of the 106th.

"Who are you?" Boyer rasped. The officer told him. Boyer asked, "What's the score then?" He should have known better. It was obvious the Golden Lion was panicked, as his next words revealed. "The Krauts—at least six panzer divisions—hit us yesterday," the man quavered, his bottom lip trembling. Boyer, a veteran of the fighting in France, asked cynically, "What are you going to do about it then?" "Me, I'm leaving." Without another word the frightened Golden Lion got back into his vehicle and vanished, leaving a fuming Boyer standing.

Ten miles or so away, Clarke was faced by a similar situation. He had left his aid, Captain Junior Woodruff, at the junction of St. Vith's Hauptstrasse and the Malmedy Strasse, the direction from which the 7th's relief column would come. But the key road was packed with fleeing vehicles, anything and everything from 8-inch howitzers to jeeps. Clarke, who had a short fuse cried, "What happened, Woody?

BOTTOM LEFT: Brig. Gen. Bruce Clark led the spirited American defense of St. Vith.
BOTTOM RIGHT: Major Don Boyer witnessed the breakup of the 106th Infantry along the Schnee Eifel.

National Archives

Author's Collection

How come you're letting them through?" He was referring to the fleeing vehicles. An unhappy Woodruff replied and pointed to an officer, "General, that lieutenant colonel—he was going to use the road. He said he'd shoot me if I got in the way."

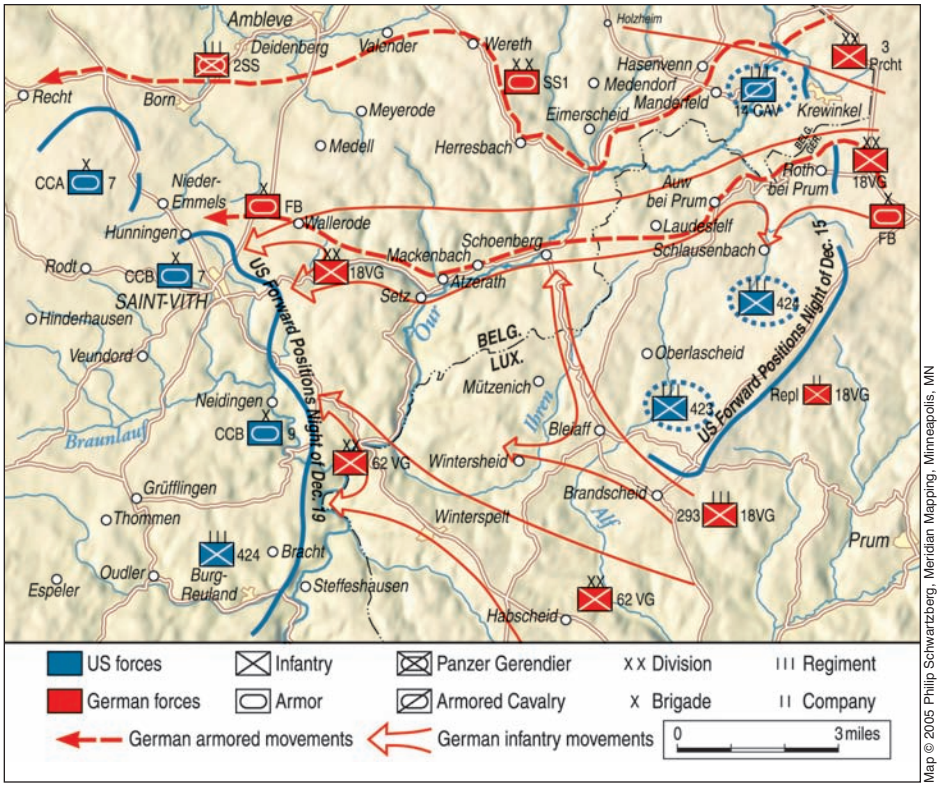
That did it. Clarke strode over to the artillery colonel and yelled above the racket, "Get the tractors off the road so my tanks can get through. If there's any shooting to be done around here, I'll do it!" He tapped his pistol holster. The artillery colonel backed off. The road from Malmedy was cleared, but there was still no sign of Clarke's tanks. So, as Clarke phrased it later, "I became the highest ranking traffic cop in the U.S. Army for a while." He started directing the traffic himself.

By late afternoon that terrible day, the first of Clarke's combat command arrived. They came in dribs and drabs. Some had horrific tales to tell about what had happened on the trip from Holland. Clarke had no time to listen. Standing there doing his traffic cop bit, he assigned them personally to their positions as they arrived. Already, he knew he did not have sufficient strength to help Jones's trapped regiments. By

National Archives

ABOVE: With St. Vith taken, a mortar team prepares to fire on the retreating Germans. Digging holes in the frozen terrain proved a difficult task, and some men resorted to blasting holes with dynamite to loosen the soil.
ABOVE RIGHT: The initial rapid successes of the German drive through the Ardennes in 1944 could not be exploited quickly enough. Eventually, Allied resistance stiffened, dooming the offensive to little more than a setback for the Allies.

now two of them were cut off in an area of 10 square miles of rugged, wooded country some miles away from St. Vith. There, six battalions of green infantry, supported by three artillery battalions, were crowded together in some confusion with their supplies running low, under senior officers who could not seem to make up



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

their minds on what to do next: stand and fight or retreat into Belgium. Like predatory gray wolves, the Germans were heading for their unsuspecting prey in St. Vith.

By Monday, December 18, Jones gave in. He had lost control of his division, and it seemed Clarke was not prepared or in any position to rescue his Golden Lions. Late that afternoon he ordered his command post to move back to Vielsalm some 20 miles to the rear, where Clarke's boss, Brig. Gen. Robert W. Hasbrouck, was in charge. Now it was up to Clarke.

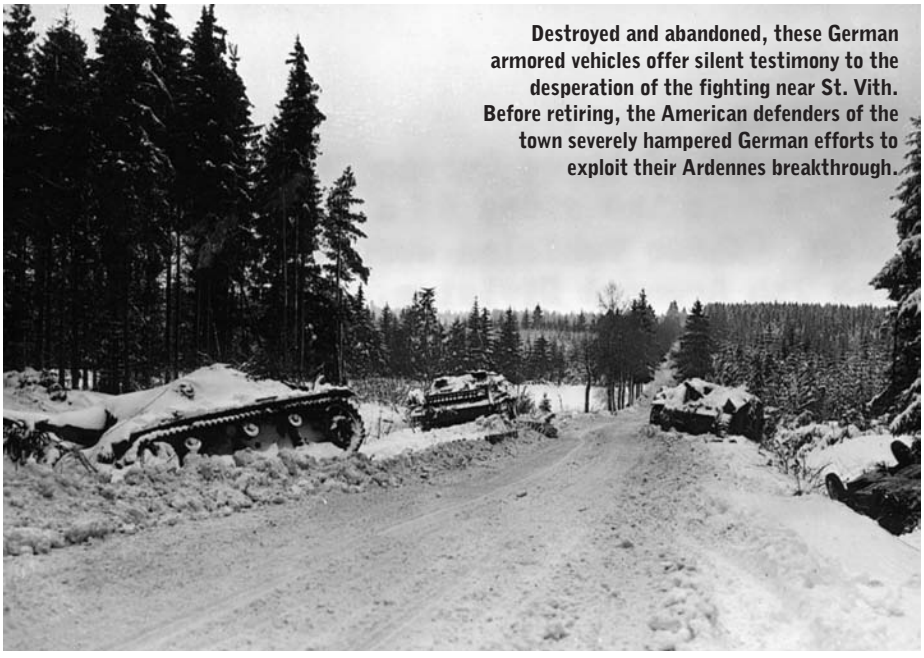
That fact did not particularly please Clarke. By now he knew the Germans were bypassing him on both flanks, and from the reports of officers coming up from corps headquarters in the Bastogne, the rear was devoid of U.S. troops save those fleeing toward the River Meuse. And the Krauts were increasing their pressure all the time.

It was understandable. Manteuffel had wanted St. Vith and its communication network the first day. Now he was two days behind schedule, and everyone from Hitler downward was pressuring him to capture the border town so that the tanks could roll for their first major objective, the Meuse.

Clarke was determined to do his duty. He had formed a kind of rough and ready horseshoe of defense around St. Vith, using what infantry he had and his armor. The task was difficult. The U.S. training manuals had little to say about using tanks in defense. In street-to-street fighting they were particularly vulnerable to some brave enemy infantryman equipped with a rocket launcher—and the Germans had plenty of those. Still, using his Shermans was the only way Clarke knew to thicken his line, and he used them, praying that the weather would not change.

As long as the biting wind that seemed to come straight from Siberia froze the ground, his 30-ton steel monsters would be alright. But once the countryside thawed around the embattled town, the Shermans would be bogged down. Then it would be anybody's guess what might happen. His tanks would be sitting ducks. Naturally, he thought of retreating. He had some 22,000 men under command, and he knew very few of their officers. Still they were American soldiers and his responsibility. Could he simply sacrifice them in what was becoming increasingly a one-sided battle?

The powers-that-be seemed to have forgotten Clarke. His Army commander, General Courtney Hodges of 1st Army, had seemingly vanished from the face of the earth. As for General Troy Middleton, commanding VIII Corps, he had lost two of his four divisions and the other two were either split up and, in the case of the veteran 4th Infantry Division, now under heavy attack. In essence, Middleton was losing control rapidly, and although Clarke did not know it that day, the portly, bespectacled general, who had been called from retirement to take up his command, was now preparing to move his headquarters from Bastogne. It was clear, even to Clarke with his lim-



National Archives

Destroyed and abandoned, these German armored vehicles offer silent testimony to the desperation of the fighting near St. Vith. Before retiring, the American defenders of the town severely hampered German efforts to exploit their Ardennes breakthrough.

ited information, that Middleton expected Bastogne soon to be under attack. What would happen to St. Vith then? Where could he retreat to?

Of course, the decision to fight or withdraw placed Clarke, a relatively junior general as we have seen, in a great quandary. He knew the U.S. Army's doctrine as once expressed by General Omar Bradley, who was also confined to his headquarters in Luxembourg City, cut off from most of his Army group and fearing for his life at the hands of German murder squads.

"The US Army does not give up ground," Bradley had maintained, "bought with American blood." Now, if he, Clarke, did so, he guessed that his career in the U.S. Army might come to an abrupt end. Bradley was well known for his habit of abruptly sacking generals whom he thought had failed him. That third week of December, with Christmas just around the corner, Clarke must have clearly wished for some senior officer to appear at St. Vith and solve his problem. But that particular Christmas present wasn't going to be his—yet.

That day, Clarke received a message from 7th Armored's G-4, a Colonel Hoggeson. He signaled, "I have no contact with Corps … but Corps has ordered us to hold ... Hope you don't think I'm crazy. CG was well pleased with everything you have done. Congrats. Don't move 'till you hear from me." That message made up Clarke's mind for him. The "Corps" in question was the XVIII Airborne, commanded by General Matthew Ridgway, a veteran of Sicily, Italy, and the battles in Holland and Normandy. Ridgway was a parachutist. He would expect Clarke to stand, even if he were surrounded by the enemy. Paratroopers were taught to do so. But he knew nothing of the situation in the St. Vith area. Yet, Hasbrouck would have to concede to Ridgway's wishes if he did not wish to be relieved himself.

Things were already changing drastically on the northern shoulder of the Bulge. Secretly and unofficially at first, Montgomery had taken over command of all troops in the area, including Ridgway's corps and with it Clarke's command. Montgomery was a commander who was not particularly interested in ground as such; men were more important to him. Now, Montgomery took a hand in the fate of Clarke of St. Vith.

On the morning of Wednesday, December 20, Montgomery strode into Hodges's new headquarters in Chateaufontaine, where the lst Army commander had moved in haste, leaving all his top secret documents to be examined by anyone who cared to wander into his abandoned headquarters at Spa. Before he had left his own headquarters, Montgomery had told his staff he could not believe that two U.S. divisions (the 106th and 28th) could have been overwhelmed in such a short time. He was going to send out his scouts to find them and, if successful, to explain the situation and to request the commanders concerned to withdraw westward to positions where they could link up with other U.S. divisions.

Now, Montgomery told a broken Hodges, who had lost control of his army and had still to make an appearance at the front to find out personally what had happened to his VIII Corps, "We must sort out the battlefield, tidy up the lines,.… The primary job is to pull everyone out of the great St. Vith pocket." Montgomery, the man who had been wounded and left for dead on the battlefield, was not going to waste good men's lives that easily.

Hodges did not like that, and for a time Montgomery humored him. But not for much longer. That day, unknown to Clarke, Montgomery was making decisions that would save him and his 22,000 GIs at St. Vith. As Clarke's son, Bruce Clarke, Jr., once told this author, "Dad once drew a list of people involved in the period 16–24 December 1944 and gave them yes or no ratings, depending, in his view, how effectively they had dealt with the situations that had confronted them at that time. Yes rating went to Montgomery, Hasbrouck and Hoge (General Brigadier General William M. Hoge of the 9th Armored Division). No rating went to Ridgeway, Middleton and Jones."

A Sherman tank from the 7th Armored Division lies at the outskirts of Vielsalm—marking the exit road out of the "fortified goose egg."

Author's Collection

Clarke was not out of the woods yet. There were still the Germans and the weather to be reckoned with. All along the perimeter of Clarke's defensive position, which became known as the fortified goose egg, his weary men could hear the rumble of German armor and the creak and jingle of horse-drawn transport heading west for the Meuse. Signal flares shot into the dawn air constantly. Close by their positions in the woods, they could clearly make out the cries of German NCOs. The American defenders were not allowed to fire back. They were running out of ammunition fast; every bullet and shell had to count. The Germans had plenty of ammunition. Shortly after first light, German infantry attacked in small groups. Clad in white camouflage overalls, they advanced under a mortar bombardment behind their tanks. They were obviously looking for a weak spot in the goose egg.

As the intrepid Major Boyer recalled long afterward, "The Krauts kept boring in as fast as we decimated their assault squads. Again and again, the Krauts got close enough to heave a

National Archives

Camouflaged to blend into the winter landscape, two soldiers of the 7th Armored Division defend a roadblock near St. Vith on January 24, 1945.

grenade at a machine gun crew. One .50-caliber squad, which had been dishing out a deadly hail of fire, was hit by a panzerfaust. The gunner fell forward with his face torn off, the loader had his arm torn off at the shoulder and was practically decapitated, while the gun commander was tossed about 15 feet away from the gun to lie there quite still." That night, things got even worse, and Boyer watched in horror as German tanks knocked out five Shermans one after the other, while he took cover in a snow-filled ditch, hoping not to be discovered too.

By this time, an exhausted Clarke, who had been without sleep for days now, had only about 100 infantrymen left in the St. Vith area. All his tank destroyers had been knocked out, and in his own immediate command post area he had exactly four tanks left under Lieutenant Will Rogers, Jr., the son of the famed homespun American humorist. The younger Will Rogers, a bit of a joker himself, had nothing to laugh about this day.

Clarke decided to shorten his line, so his men stole back in fours and fives. The unlucky Boyer was captured doing so. His captor smiled at him. "Just the fortunes of war," the German officer told his bespectacled captive. "Maybe I'll be a prisoner tomorrow". Boyer was too exhausted and miserable to reply. That night, Clarke commented to Hoge, "It looks like Custer's last stand to me." However, help was on its way at last.

That Friday, Montgomery finally made his decision. Earlier that day, Ridgway had told Hasbrouck he might still be able to hold. Pointing to the fortified goose egg on his big situation map, he snapped, "What do you think of making a stand inside this area? You'd hold out until a counterattack catches up with you. You'll soon be surrounded of course, but we'll supply you by air."

Hasbrouck did not like it and he said so. "The area is heavily wooded with only a few poor roads. Besides, the troops have had over five days of continuous fighting.... My people are only 50 percent effective.... I'm sure that goes for the infantry too."

Jones, the failure, who was present, suddenly chimed in to say, "I think it can be done." That made Hasbrouck even angrier. Even as Ridgway was being told by Clarke's individual commanders that their troops were only 50 percent effective (Clarke told him bluntly that his were only 40 percent), Montgomery overruled Ridgway on the decision to stand and made a lifelong enemy. He passed on a message to Clarke through Hasbrouck, which read, "You have accomplished a mission, a mission well done. It is time to withdraw."

However, that was easier said than done. A thaw had set in, and Clarke's vehicles were bogged down in the new mud. That day, Hoge told him, "Bruce, let's just stay and fight. Our vehicles are up to the hubs. We haven't got a chance of getting out."

Clarke frowned and got on the radio to Hasbrouck in Vielsalm, his initial joy over the prospect of a withdrawal vanished. With a note of finality in his voice, he told his divisional commander, "We have to stay." It looked as if there was no hope for him and his trapped men.

At five that Saturday morning, a very worried Hasbrouck called back to Clarke to inform him, "The situation is such on the west of the river (Salm), south of the 82nd, that if we don't join them soon the opportunity will be over." Clarke realized that that buck had been well and truly passed to him. The fate of all those thousands of young men lay in his hands. He ventured outside his headquarters. Dawn was not far off. Suddenly, he felt a thrill of recognition and a surge of new hope. The ground beneath his feet crackled and snapped. The many ruts made by his heavy vehicles had frozen!

Just then, an impatient Hasbrouck called him again from Vielsalm. "Bruce," he demanded, "do you think you can get out?" For once the big general let his pent-up emotions ride loose. "A miracle's happened!" he exploded. "The road's frozen. We're chopping the vehicles out of the ice—at zero six hundred we're going to start rolling."

It was not easy, and it took all day. Several times the Germans infiltrated the long lines of vehicles heading along a single road for Vielsalm. Impatient, Hasbrouck waited for them to arrive. Once he was nearly killed himself by a German tank that started to shell his position. Meanwhile, he reflected, he had once been faced with this same problem, a withdrawal under enemy pressure, at Fort Leavenworth's staff college. His examiners had given him a bad mark on the paper because he had suggested troops should withdraw when under great pressure even by daylight.

Clarke had no such problems. Now it was up to the gods. He collapsed in the front seat of his jeep to snore his way out of the trap. Late that afternoon, Clarke staggered out of his jeep, swaying from side to side like a drunk. A doctor noticed his condition. "General," he said, "you'd better get some sleep, or you could be in serious trouble."

Clarke answered wearily that he did not think he could sleep. Too much was going on in his mind. "I can fix it," the medic replied. He gave the big general a shot, which, as Clarke's biographer put it, sent Clarke out "like a sack of sand."

Twice, Ridgway's aides tried to awaken the exhausted Clarke with, "General Ridgway wants you immediately." Once, Clarke murmured in a highly drugged sleep, "The hell with it." Later, when he had overcome his exhaustion, he was told once again he must report to the corps commander at once. He did so in the same dirty uniform he had been wearing ever since he had left Holland back on December 16. To his surprise, a granite-faced Ridgway did not offer Clarke a cigarette or a coffee. Instead he said, "I'm not used to brigadiers telling me that they won't report."

Clarke looked down at the airborne commander, "Well, general," he said, "the fact is I hadn't been to sleep for a week." He explained what had happened and how the doctor had given him a knockout shot. Ridgway was not impressed. He started to lecture Clarke on Army discipline. Obviously, Ridgway was smarting at the way Montgomery had overruled him and ordered Clarke and his men out. Suddenly, Clarke had had enough. "General, I came to this command against my wishes. I got nine decorations for bravery in two days in my old outfit, I've got a good record in the Third Army and I can go back there tomorrow morning and General Patton will be glad to see me."

Ridgway's face remained stony. He did not react. Clarke tried again. "I've done my job up here. History will give our unit credit for the job we did at St. Vith. I'd like to leave." Finally, Ridgeway responded. With a wave of his hand, he said, "Well, don't let it happen again."

In a way, that episode exemplified the fact that Clarke had reached the nadir of his career that wintry Saturday with the snow falling steadily outside. Within days of receiving his first general's star, Clarke had fought a battle that had ended in a retreat and a kind of defeat as Ridgway saw

Continued on page 81

Cover: U.S. soldiers pause for a well-deserved break in Malmedy on December 29, 1944. (Photo: National Archives)

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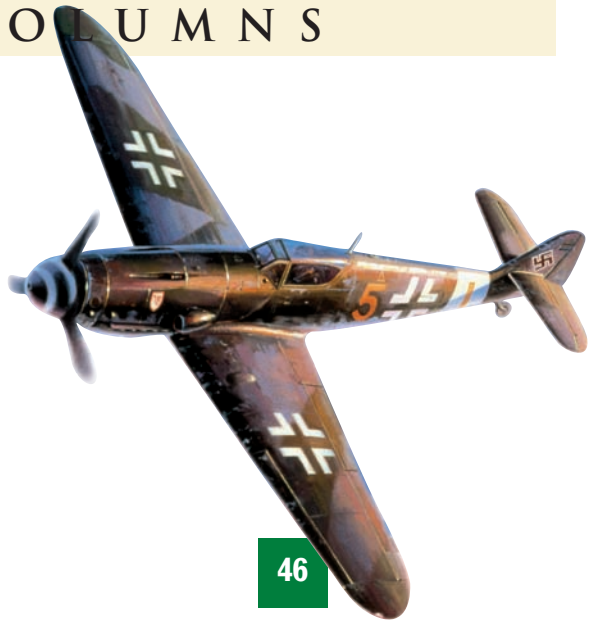

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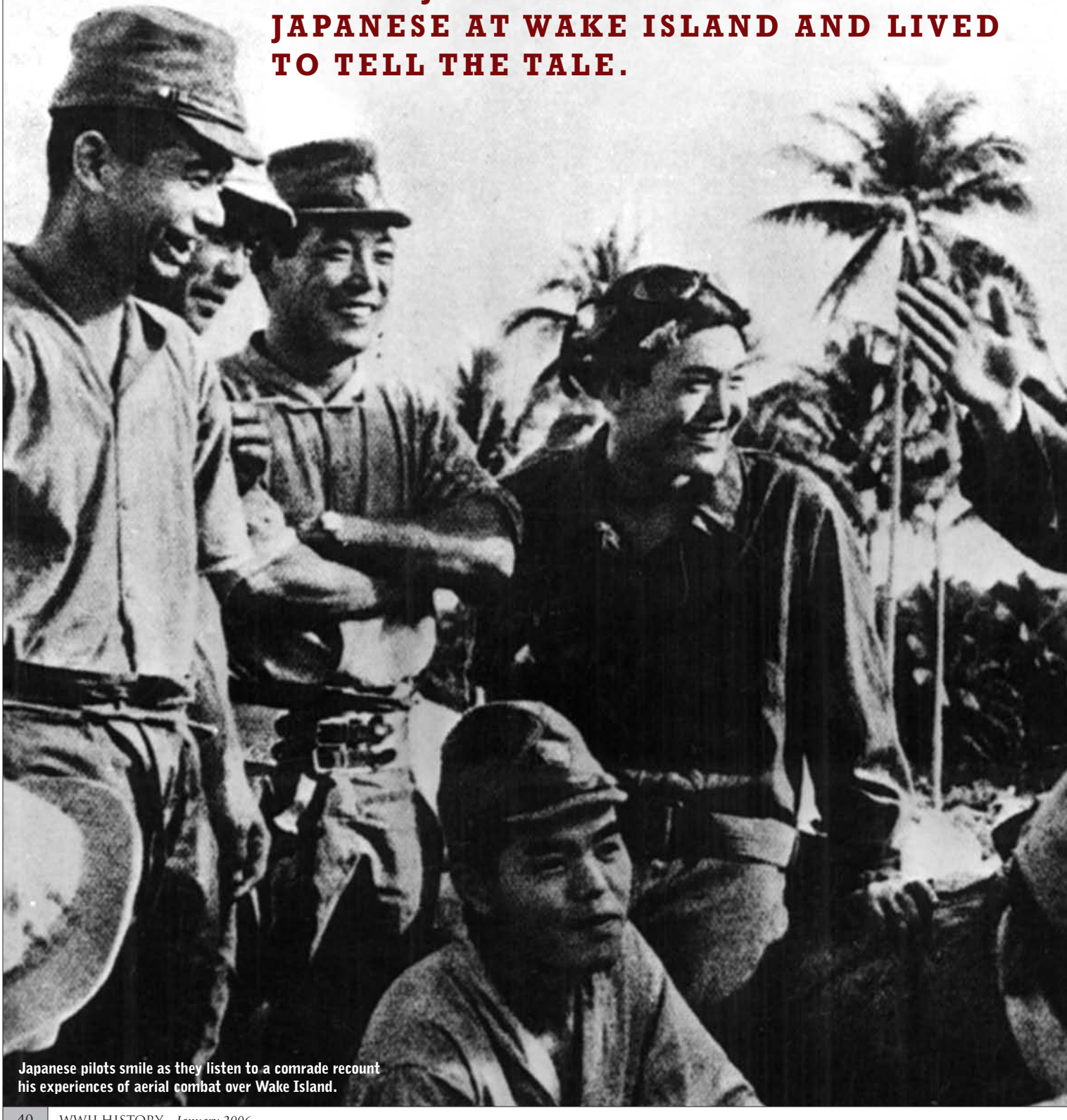
WAKE ISLAND

RALPH J. HOLEWINSKI FOUGHT THE JAPANESE AT WAKE ISLAND AND LIVED TO TELL THE TALE.



Japanese pilots smile as they listen to a comrade recount his experiences of aerial combat over Wake Island.

National Archives

SURVIVOR

BY ERIC NIDEROST

THE SIEGE OF WAKE ISLAND LASTED A relatively short time, from December 8 to December 23, 1941, yet it looms large in the annals of the Second World War. The determined stand of a handful of marines and civilian workers against a massive Japanese onslaught caught the imagination of the American public and provided some good news during a very dark period of U.S. history. The United States Pacific Fleet had been crippled at Pearl Harbor, Hong Kong had fallen to the Japanese, and Hitler's Wehrmacht was hammering at the gates of Moscow, but the heroism displayed at Wake was a bright spot in an otherwise litany of gloom.

Wake Island is a Pacific atoll, an insignificant patch of sand and coral that barely rises above the sea. Wake Island proper is V-shaped. Some have called it a "turkey wishbone" with two smaller islets, Peale and Wilkes, lying off its northern tips to complete the atoll.

Wake assumed increasing importance during the 1930s due to its strategic location in the central Pacific. It was near the Japanese mandate islands, including the Marshalls and the Marianas. In the event of war the Japanese would do everything in their power to seize the atoll. An 11th-hour attempt was made by the U.S. to fortify Wake and convert it into a naval air station. By the fall of 1941, it was clear war was coming—but could Wake be readied in time?

On December 7, 1941, Wake Island's population consisted of some 1,742 people, among them 1,218 civilians. Most of the civilians were construction workers, but some were employees of Pan American Airways. Wake Island was a stop on Pan American's island-hopping route to Asia. Huge Pan American flying boats were regular visitors to the atoll.

Some sailors were stationed on Wake along with a few army communications people, but the bulk of the military personnel were U.S. Marines. Altogether, 449 marines and navy medics comprised Wake's first line of defense. The figure includes the pilots and ground crews of marine fighter squadron VMF-211.

The Japanese siege of Wake Island began with a massive air raid that destroyed seven of VMF-211's complement of a dozen Grumman F4F Wildcats. Air raids became an almost daily occurrence, but the Japanese were repulsed with heavy losses when they attempted a landing on December 11.

Ralph J. Holewinski

Marine Corporal Ralph J. Holewinski was wounded during the defense of Wake and survived Japanese captivity

Marine Corporal Ralph J. Holewinkski, Battery I, Wake Island Detachment, First Defense Battalion was one of the handful of American defenders at Wake. When the Japanese returned in force on December 23, Holewinski found himself manning a 3-inch gun, preparing to resist one of the enemy's main landings. His opposition included troops of the Maizuru Second Special Naval Landing Force, (SNLF) approximately 800 men aboard two converted destroyer-transports. These converted destroyer-transports, named patrol boats 32 and 33, held the 1st and 3rd companies of the SNLF, designated the Uchida and Itaya units respectively. They were named after their commanders; the Uchida unit, for example, was named after Lieutenant Kinischi Uchida.

Corporal Holewinski was part of a crew that manned a 3-inch gun along Wake Island's southern shore. When Patrol Boat 32 landed less than 500 yards away, Holewinkski's 3-inch gun lobbed shell after shell into the transport until it was a blazing wreck. Japanese casualties were heavy, but many SNLF troops still managed to reach shore. As the enemy pressed forward, Holewinski dispatched three Japanese marines with his 1903 model Springfield rifle.

Later, Japanese planes strafed the area, and Holewinski sustained bullet wounds in the legs.

The first attempt by the Japanese to take Wake Island ended in an embarrassing and costly repulse of the invaders. The Japanese would, however, return only days later to capture Wake and take many U.S. civilian and military prisoners.

When a mortar round or grenade exploded near his position, a piece of shrapnel gouged a hole in his back, wounding him severely. The corporal survived these injuries but endured three and a half years as a prisoner of the Japanese.

Holewinski's story is the story of the entire Wake garrison in microcosm, of ordinary men displaying extraordinary courage in the face of overwhelming odds. The Japanese finally took Wake, but nothing could erase the record of those heroic three weeks in December.

✷ **WWII:** First, could you describe your background?

✷ **HOLEWINSKI:** I was born April 2, 1921, on a farm in northern Michigan. My parents had a dairy farm, and I was one of 12 children: five girls and seven boys. Besides the dairy cows, the family also raised potatoes. We lived three miles from the city of Gaylord, Michigan. When I went to St. Mary's High School, I often had to walk the three miles, though sometimes I would get a ride.

✷ **WWII:** Why did you join the Marines?

✷ **HOLEWINSKI:** I graduated from High School when I was 16, but once I was out I found I could not get a job. The army was a possibility, but I talked with a fellow who was in the army, and he said he had stayed in the same place for two years. The slogan "Join the Marines and See the World" caught my eye, so I enlisted with them.

✷ **WWII:** When were you assigned to the First Defense Battalion?

✷ **HOLEWINSKI:** I was assigned to the 15th Marines right after boot camp. The 15th was dissolved soon after, becoming the First Defense Battalion and the Second Defense Battalion respectively. I went into the First Defense Battalion. I became a machine gunner and eventually was promoted to corporal. I guess I was in the right place at the right time. In my Catholic high school I often had to take classes like math that I did not really like but helped me later. I was glad I took those classes. Who would ever have thought that a math class would help on a machine gun range? But of course, it did—calculating how high a bullet went, and such.

✷ **WWII:** You were stationed on a number of Pacific islands before you finally ended up at Wake, correct?

✷ **HOLEWINSKI:** In February 1941, during a Saturday inspection, we were told the battalion would be leaving for Hawaii. A week later we went aboard the USS *Enterprise* (CV-6). It was the first time that troops and their guns and equipment were transported on an aircraft carrier. On board, we had some army training planes (P-39s and P-40s) and their pilots. The Army Air Force pilots wondered how it would be taking off from a carrier, and the navy pilots gave them a rough time about it. I'm not sure, but I think they did fly off the *Enterprise*, the first time army planes flew off a carrier.

✷ **WWII:** You arrived in Hawaii, but didn't stay long?

✷ **HOLEWINSKI:** I spent a couple of weeks in Hawaii, then it was off again, bound for Johnston Island, an atoll some 700 miles southwest of Honolulu, that was being built up as a navy base. I was going to be with a complement of 20 marines, part of 3- and 5-inch gun crews. The sergeant and myself were the only machine gunners, and I could not figure out why we were attached to this unit. Later, I found out. The gun crews of those 3- and 5-inch guns did not have the most ambitious natures. I guess someone thought we could get more work out of them. It turned out they were good workers for us.

✷ **WWII:** It was during this journey to Johnston Island that you had an encounter with marine Major James P.S. Devereux, later famed as one of the commanders at Wake. He had the reputation of being a martinet, and some marines disliked him. What were the circumstances of your meeting with the major?

✷ **HOLEWINSKI:** We left Pearl Harbor in a supply ship, the *Antares*. I was given a work detail one Sunday during the voyage, chipping paint from the deck with three other marines. I caught on quickly why I was with the group. While I was working, the 5-inch gun NCOs were busy watching the waves and porpoises. I told my crew of three what to do, then crawled under a lifeboat to be out of the sun. I was not there long before I heard a voice hollering from the bridge. "Who is in charge down there?" I stood up and said, "I am." It turned out the speaker was Major Devereux. He asked me where I got the orders to form a working party. I told him it was from the office clerk. The major told me to secure the detail, saying "No one under me works on Sunday!"

Johnston Island was a paradise, with hundreds of palm trees of all sizes. Coconuts littered the ground, and at first we ate our fill of them. The surrounding water was full of all kinds of fish. When the tide was low, I walked out to a smaller nearby island, but when I wanted to come back the tide had come in. I had to swim about 20 feet, but while I was crossing a shark went by me. The sharks in that area were not small, ranging from four to six feet long. That was the last time I went for a walk without watching the tide!

✷ **WWII:** Describe your experience at Palmyra Atoll, which is a cluster of small islets about 960 miles southwest of Honolulu.

✷ **HOLEWINSKI:** Yes, we went on to Palmyra, having first left six men on Johnston. There were about 200 [construction] workers on Palmyra. We were put in tents on the

largest island to sleep. I spent the summer on Palmyra, then came back to Pearl Harbor. I spent the next two months in Hawaii, roaming Honolulu, before the first sergeant caught up with me! It was November 1941, when I was told to pack, because I was going to be shipped to Wake island.

✷ **WWII:** What were your first impressions of Wake?

✷ **HOLEWINSKI:** Wake was not as pretty as Palmyra. The trip to the island was uneventful, though we did have two destroyers escort us. Once we landed, most of the marines were assigned to work details, like filling 50-gallon drums with gasoline and taking them to the airport.

✷ **WWII:** Speaking of the airport, Wake was also a commercial air base for Pan American Airways. Pan Am's great flying boats like the Boeing 314s and the Martin 130 "China Clipper" stopped at Wake enroute to Asia, didn't they?

✷ **HOLEWINSKI:** Yes, I saw the Clipper come in once and also take off. It was quite a sight. There was also a Pan Am Hotel on Wake, but I never saw it. One day, 10 PBYs (Consolidated PBY Catalina flying boats) flew in, I think on the way to Java or Sumatra. I understood the pilots were French, and the whole arrangement was under Lend-Lease.

✷ **WWII:** In November 1941, the China Clipper flying boat landed on Wake en route to the United States. On board was Saburo Kurusu, Japan's special envoy to Washington. By this time war was almost certain, because Japan refused to give up its Asian conquests, but Kurusu was supposed to make a last-ditch attempt at a diplomacy. Were you aware that he was on the island?

✷ **HOLEWINSKI:** I never saw him, though we heard that envoys were coming into Wake. The word around was that if you want to make the headline news, here's your chance … you can knock off a Jap—a big one! I don't know if they saw much of the island or not. I think they stayed for one night.

✷ **WWII:** How was daily life on Wake before the war?

✷ **HOLEWINSKI:** I was not assigned to a work detail when I first arrived on Wake. The second week or so I was told to take a crew of eight men and put in two machine gun pits on the south shore of the [main] island. The food on Wake was really poor. When the Marines unloaded supplies they would take field rations. The Sunday before the war started our mess sergeant made the remark that we should be satisfied with what we had, because we'd be eating fish heads and rice soon. How true!

✷ **WWII:** On November 28, 1941, Commander Windfield Scott Cunningham, U.S. Navy, took over from Major Devereaux as overall commander of the island. What are your memories of him?

✷ **HOLEWINSKI:** The first time I saw Commander Cunningham was two days before the war started. It was Saturday, December 6, 1941, and group of officers and Dan Teeters were making an inspection of the island's defenses. [Nathan "Dan" Teeters was the head of the civilian contractors fortifying Wake. Technically he was a representative of the CPNAB, or the Contractors' Pacific Naval Air Bases.]

They came up to where our machine guns were, then asked who was in charge and who put the guns in. I was hesitant to step forward, because just the day before a lieutenant had also inspected our area. We were camouflaging the area, and since I had just shorts on he couldn't see who was in charge. I stepped forward, and he said, "This is terrible! A terrible job! I'm going to send you back to Pearl Harbor—no, you should go back to the States, because we don't need people like you here!"

✷ **WWII:** After you got a dressing down by the lieutenant, did you expect another visit from the "brass" that Saturday?

✷ **HOLEWINSKI:** Yes, I thought we were going to get bawled out again. But when I stepped forward, Commander Cunningham looked at me and said "Corporal, you and your men have done a great job here." As he spoke, he glanced at Major Devereux, who nodded in agreement. Years later, my wife and I met Cunningham in Florida. We had dinner and a very nice evening with Cunningham and his wife. I found out he was a very nice person.

On Wake he was very much like Devereux, a man who was strict and went by the rules. But the marines who got to know him liked him.

✷ **WWII:** Could you describe the first moments when you heard about the Pearl Harbor attack, and knew the war had come to Wake?

✷ **HOLEWINSKI:** On Monday, December 8, we were walking out of the mess hall, and someone shouted, "Pearl Harbor has been attacked!" A bugler sounded "Call to Arms," and an officer hollered, "get your rifles and break out the ammunition!" Each one of our tents had a case of ammo in it, and the senior man in each tent saw to it that it wasn't opened.

A truck hauled us down to our gun positions. We were very close to the communications tent, so I walked into it and was going to ask the soldiers. One of them told me before I could even ask, saying that Pearl Harbor had been bombed, and that it wasn't a drill.

✷ **WWII:** Describe the first Japanese air raid

Ralph J. Holewinski

National Archives

Charles A. Holmes

FAR LEFT: Corporal Ralph J. Holewinski converses with fellow gunners at San Diego in 1940. ABOVE: Major James P. Devereux led the spirited but doomed defense of Wake Island. LEFT: An antiaircraft gun faces skyward. Wake Island's marine garrison received twelve guns prior to the Japanese siege there.

National Archives

Disabled U.S. Grumman F4F Wildcat fighter planes of Squadron VMF-211 sit idle on Wake Island shortly after its fall to the Japanese on December 23, 1941.

on Wake, which took place around noon, Monday, December 8, 1941. That first raid was carried out by 27 Mitsubishi G3M2 Type 96 attack bombers.

✷ **HOLEWINSKI:** I guess our group was among the first to see the first wave of bombers to hit the island. I said, "Gee, there's a new type of army plane." I wasn't alone in my mistake. I heard later that different gun crews on the island didn't believe the planes were Japanese. Most of the marines thought our planes would intercept any bombers before they got to the island.

I saw the bombs starting to come and hollered, "They are Japs!" As we knew our .30-cal. machine guns couldn't reach them, we all went to the coral reefs for shelter. I hid behind a big rock. I could hear the bombs going off, but when things quieted down I walked over to the airfield. There were big fires all around, and a lot of smoke. I saw a pilot by a plane who looked dead [sic]. Major Bayler stopped me, and said, "Go back to the beach." He didn't want me to see all the destruction, fearing how that might effect me. [Major Walter L.J. Bayler was there to establish a base radio station for ground-to-air communications. He was one of the last men to be evacuated from Wake before the island fell to the Japanese.]

I also saw a sailor in Navy whites bleeding. Later, this same sailor would be my legs and help me when I was in the hospital [as a POW].

✷ **WWII:** What were your feelings as you surveyed the damage?

✷ **HOLEWINSKI:** What I saw didn't bother me mentally. I think all the marines on the island were there to fight and wanted to get into action, whatever the outcome would be, like getting killed or wounded.

✷ **WWII:** Your position was along the southern shore of the main [Wake] island. You were actually in charge of your sector for a time?

✷ **HOLEWINSKI:** Yes, for the first few days I was in charge of something like two miles of beach. But then I got a phone call in our position, and I answered it. I think the caller was Devereux, who asked who was in charge, and I said I was. The next day [Second] Lieutenant Robert Hanna came to our position and took over. He was not an officer in 30-cal. machine guns, but we welcomed him. We all got to like him very quickly and enjoyed him.

✷ **WWII:** The first major Japanese invasion attempt took place on December 11. The Wake garrison successfully beat off all attacks, becoming the only force in the entire war to defeat an amphibious assault. It was a major humiliation for the Japanese Imperial Navy, with two destroyers sunk, and several other vessels damaged. What do you remember about that day?

✷ **HOLEWINSKI:** On the 11th of December, I wasn't so sure if I was glad that the lieutenant [Hanna] had joined us. We heard that Japanese ships were around and that a landing was possible. Before long shells from those ships were whistling overhead. Hanna said to me, "Take three men and go to Peacock Point and help the 5-inch gun crew there, because the civilian workers who were supposed to help have deserted them." [This was Battery A, commanded by Lieutenant Clarence Barninger. Battery A engaged and subsequently damaged Rear Admiral Sadamichi Kajioka's flagship, the cruiser *Yubari*.]

I called the men, and we started down the beach, and every so often, a shell would go over and we hit the deck. About halfway down the beach, I saw a Japanese ship firing in the distance, and just at that moment, one of our shells hit and it blew up! It went down in less than a minute. [This was the Japanese destroyer *Hiyate*, sunk by 2nd Lieutenant John A. McAlister's Battery L on Wilkes Island.] It was a very great sight, and I checked my story with others to see if I really saw it go down so quickly. [Holewinski was right. An American shell had detonated the ship's magazines.]

By the time I got to Peacock Point, the battle was over. While at the gun position a chow truck came and unloaded hot food. We hadn't had any hot food since we left camp the day the war started. I asked the driver why we didn't get any hot food, and he said he didn't know we were on the beach. We were eating canned food that we found in the bushes. Some of the storerooms had been emptied, and food scattered in the bushes along the road. So, we got food after that.

✷ **WWII:** The defeat of the Japanese invasion force made front-page headlines back in the States and made Wake Island and its defenders famous. Were you aware of the impact Wake was having at home?

✷ **HOLEWINSKI:** No, as we had no radio on the beach and the army had moved their radio. We got no news from the outside world until after the war was over. We had hoped that we would be helped, but we knew the fleet had been bombed at Pearl Harbor, so it would be a while. I did hope we would be rescued, and while I lay wounded I kept feeling the marines would land at any time.

✷ **WWII:** How was living on the beach defensive positions?

✷ **HOLEWINSKI:** Our dugout was nice; it was big enough so that we could stand up in it and walk around. We could sleep 10 people in it. Actually, it had been a Japanese bomb crater. Some time after the first attack, two contractors came to join us, Paul Gay and Bob Bryan. They had some pull and so brought in a big crane with a shovel on the end that could move tons of earth very quickly.

The bomb crater was over 10 feet deep and 20 feet across, so it squared off, roofed with wooden beams, then covered it with two weeks of dirt. Other than the ammo dumps it was no doubt the best on the island. We felt safe in it.

✷ **WWII:** What are your recollections of December 23rd, when the Japanese returned and finally took the island?

✷ **HOLEWINSKI:** I don't know for sure how we found out a Japanese ship [Patrol Boat 32, filled with Japanese marines of the SNLF] was coming into shore where our dugout was. Earlier, I had lost my rifle in camp, so I grabbed a

weapon that happened to be there. I was the first one out of the dugout.

✷ **WWII:** The Japanese patrol boats 32 and 33 were beyond the range of Battery A at Peacock Point. The only available artillery piece was a 3-inch gun whose elevation mechanism had been damaged during an earlier air raid. Lieutenant Hanna rushed down the beach toward the 3-incher, with you and civilians Gay and Bryan. What was happening?

✷ **HOLEWINSKI:** Yes, but first I ran up to a 50-cal. machine gun on a road near the dugout. I found out why it was left there. It would fire only one round at a time, then you had to reload it. I fired one or two rounds at the ship [Patrol boat 32], then said to Lieutenat Hanna, "This gun isn't working, and we don't have any tools to make it work." In reply Hanna told me to come with him to the 3-inch gun.

It was a 3-inch antiaircraft gun and was controlled by a range finder and other electrical gadgets. A bomb had hit the controls and put it out of commission, so it was no good as an antiaircraft piece. It had been put into our position two days earlier. It just sat there in the brush, no sandbags or anything else around it. It was on a steel platform about a foot off the ground.

Gay and Bryan came along, so Hanna told them to get the shells and hand them to him. I knew a little [about manning the gun] from when I was on Palmyra, so I started to traverse the controls, seeing how the barrel could go up and down. Hanna bore the sighting while I was at the controls. Gay and Bryan started arguing about who was going to pull the lanyard to fire the gun. I told them to take turns [The first shot was fired by Gay]. The first shot missed, but the next shot hit the ship.

One hit on the ship caused explosions that lit up the sky. Another ship came into view [Patrol Boat 33], and we kept firing. With all the light I had a good sighting of the second ship. When we hit the second ship, things were happening fast. I know we fired 14 shells at the two ships, but how many more I don't know.

✷ **WWII:** But by now survivors of Patrol Boat 32, Japanese SNLF marines under Lieutenant Kinichi Uchida, were ashore and infiltrating your position.

✷ **HOLEWINSKI:** Yes, small arms fire was hitting the barrel of our gun. Hanna told us to get off the gun platform. Gay, Bryan, and I got on the east side of the gun and went under the platform as far as we could, so that only our bodies from the waist up were exposed. We had a case of hand grenades, and Bryan hung onto it. He said, "You have a rifle, corporal,

Japanese troops pay their last respects to a fallen comrade killed in action on Wake Island. In retribution for their fallen colleagues the Japanese would behead 5 American POWs.

National Archives

and Gay has a pistol." Whenever he'd hear a noise in the bush in front of us he would throw a grenade, and he was good at it. Now and then I'd fire a shot when I heard something moving in the brush. This kept on until daylight, when we could see better.

✷ **WWII:** The danger must have increased once daylight came.

✷ **HOLEWINSKI:** There was a lot more rifle fire, and a lot more grenades landing around us, but a lot of them, luckily for us, didn't go off. The Japanese got brave, or stupid. One got within 20 yards of me, got up on his knees, and pointed his rifle at me. I was ready, aimed, and fired. I could see the blood shoot out from his forehead. As I reloaded, another Japanese got alongside of him, and I fired and he went down. I saw some movement in the bush, so I fired again and heard a scream. The movement ceased. There was, off and on, fire from them and from us from about 6 AM to 9 AM Bryan kept throwing grenades, and some were thrown at us.

✷ **WWII:** Pressed on all sides by enemy infantry, you were then attacked by a Japanese "Val" dive bomber?

✷ **HOLEWINSKI:** About 9 AM, a Japanese plane flew over our position, very low. It was so low, I could see the rear gunner very clearly, even that he was wearing goggles. I guess he could see us, and as the plane passed, the rear gunner sprayed our position really good. I got hit in the left leg, and Gay and Bryan took a number of bullets. Gay was right next to me, and he was riddled with bullets, the impacts causing his chest to heave up and down. The plane came around again, so I moved a bit under the 3-inch gun, playing possum. On a second pass, both legs were wounded. Gay and Bryan were dead, and I was left alone on the east side of the gun.

✷ **WWII:** Your position along the south shore of Wake saw some very intensive fighting, right?

✷ **HOLEWINSKI:** I had at least 50 shells to start that night. When we surrendered, I was down to three shells. And there had been 26 men in and around the 3-inch gun position. When we surrendered, there was only one man who had not been killed or wounded.

✷ **WWII:** How bad were your wounds?

✷ **HOLEWINSKI:** The bullets went the length of my calves on both legs. I also was hit in the back from a hand grenade; it took out a piece of flesh the size of a scoop of ice cream. I had it as an open wound for over three years. When I was hit, it felt like a hot knife going through my flesh. I didn't know I was hit in the back until we surrendered. I did wonder why I could feel blood running down my buttocks.

✷ **WWII:** What was going though your mind as you lay there by the gun, gravely wounded?

✷ **HOLEWINSKI:** At first, I thought I was going to die. I wasn't afraid of dying, but my thoughts were filled with home. I wished I had more life insurance, so that my parents wouldn't have to work anymore. Then, suddenly, my attitude changed. I felt I was going to live and thought a marine landing party would save us.

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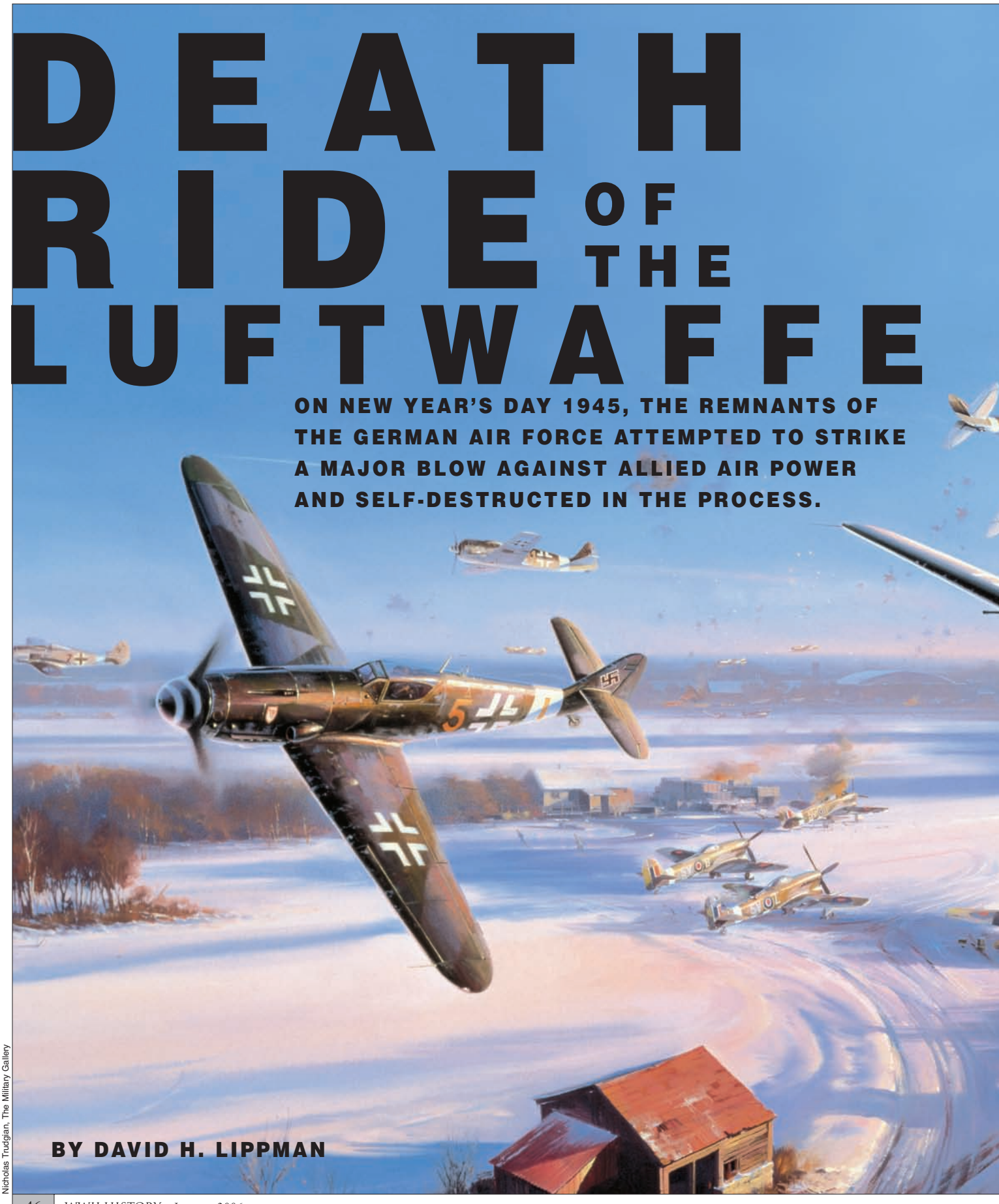
DEATH RIDE OF THE LUFTWAFFE

ON NEW YEAR'S DAY 1945, THE REMNANTS OF THE GERMAN AIR FORCE ATTEMPTED TO STRIKE A MAJOR BLOW AGAINST ALLIED AIR POWER AND SELF-DESTRUCTED IN THE PROCESS.



Nicholas Trudgian, The Military Gallery

BY DAVID H. LIPPMAN

In this painting by artist Nicholas Trudgian, on New Year's Day 1945, a pair of FW-190s swoop low over an Allied airfield in France as part of a late-war assault plan to cripple Allied air power and help turn the tide of the war in Germany's favor.

THEY WERE ALL ANNOYED. THE DIRECTIVE from Jagdkorps (JK) 2 made no sense, but it was clear: all New Year's Eve parties were cancelled. But to the Luftwaffe fighter pilots affected by the ban, it was ridiculous.

Fighter pilots, whether they were veterans of D-day like Lt. Col. Josef "Pips" Priller, or the newest rookie, were expected to party as hard as they fought. And nobody fought harder than Germany's fighter aces. Oberstleutnant (Lt. Col.) Herbert Ihlefeld counted his victories back to the Condor Legion in the Spanish Civil War. Oberstleutnant Helmutt Benneman of Jagdgeschwader (JG, Fighter Wing) 53 at Malmsheim had 92 kills, dating back to 1939. JG 54's Major Erich Leie had 118. And JG 11's aviators had more than 300 kills, 220 of them split between three aces alone.

Unlike the British and American air services, the Luftwaffe did not rotate its pilots out of combat duty after a certain number of missions or hours in the air, or even transfer them much. There were pilots flying in elite outfits like JG 26 who had been with them since Poland and the Battle of Britain. Now, as 1944 was counting down its last days, combat was harder than ever for veteran and rookie alike. On paper, a Jagdgeschwader like JG 26 consisted of three Groups ("*Gruppen*" in German), rendered I/JG 26, II/JG 26, and III/JG 26, and could deploy more than a hundred fighters all told. Now the JGs were down to 70, or even 50.

Every day, German fighter pilots battled overwhelming numbers of Allied planes. Many of the Reich's best pilots were dead or crippled, and the youngsters replacing them were frightened rookies, flung into vicious dogfights with only the sketchiest of training. All bomber production had been cancelled.

Yet, Adolf Hitler was determined to fight on, and the Reich was doing its best to support his twisted determination. V-2 rockets were pounding London, V-1s hammering the port of Antwerp. New Me-262 jet fighters that could fly rings around American and British planes were starting to go into action. But the overall picture was bleak. Unless Germany could turn the tide quickly and dramatically, defeat was certain. If there was any night that German pilots could use a drink, December 31, 1944, was it.

So when Maj. Gen. Dietrich Peltz, commanding Jagdkorps (Fighter Corps) 2, forbade the usual New Year's Eve hell-raising parties for his fighter pilots across western Germany, the pilots were angry. Lieutenant Oscar Boesch, a pilot in JG 3 at Gutersloh, had to cancel a hot date. JG 2 at Mehrhauzen closed the bar promptly at dusk. At Babenhausen airfield, everyone was too busy to care. They were repairing JG 4's airstrip. American bombers had turned it into a moonscape on Christmas Eve. By noon on New Year's Eve, it was ready again for Captain Georg Schroder's Focke-Wulf FW-190 fighters.

Still, nobody would tell them why the parties were shut down. They were just told to stand by to open the sealed,

hand-delivered orders that Peltz's messengers had delivered. These cancelled passes, closed bars, and ordered everybody to attend mission briefings instead.

Actually, Peltz and his JK 2 staff were not issuing these tough memos just to crush parties and enforce the rules of decorum. New Year's Eve was simply the date coincident to the weather Luftwaffe forecasters were promising and Peltz's aviators needed: clear skies and unlimited visibility the following morning. The Luftwaffe needed just such conditions to launch a long-planned counterstroke against the Allies that, if successful, would turn the tide of the air war over Western Europe.

At dawn on New Year's Day, the Luftwaffe intended to hurl more than a thousand fighters in an all-out surprise assault on Allied airfields in Belgium and The Netherlands, destroying the Royal Air Force and U.S. Army Air Forces on the ground in one swift hammer blow codenamed Operation Bodenplatte (Baseplate).

The plan was in turn linked to Operation Wacht Am Rhein (Watch on the Rhine), Hitler's massive December counteroffensive in the Ardennes. Wacht Am Rhein was designed to blast through the quiet and thinly held sector, cleave the American and British forces in two, and trap the British against the sea. It would force a second Dunkirk and perhaps even drive Britain out of the war. This desire to crush the Allies in a grandiose manner led to the idea of a simultaneous grandiose air attack.

Bodenplatte was also a reaction to American and British domination of the air over the battlefields and the Reich homeland. Neither Hitler nor his Luftwaffe chief, Reichsmarshal Hermann Göring, liked defensive warfare of any kind. They preferred lightning attacks.

Under Göring's leadership, or perhaps in spite of it, the Luftwaffe had spearheaded the Nazi blitzkrieg across Europe. But his approach to air warfare was crude in the extreme, tailored more to the days of wooden biplanes and open cockpits than the age of higher technology and fuel-injected engines. When the Luftwaffe began to fail in the skies of Britain, Russia, and Germany, Göring's star, along with his abilities, dimmed.

On October 26, 1944, Göring summoned his top fighter commanders to Berlin, where he accused them of cowardice. Lt. Gen. Adolf Galland, head of all Luftwaffe fighters, answered his chief with the aggressiveness of one of Germany's battle legends, a plan called Der Grosse Schlag, or The Big Punch.

Galland's plan called for 3,700 German fighters, most of them straight off the production lines, to attack the invading fleets of American bombers in one day and two waves of all-out assault. Nothing would be held back. Even generals like Galland would fly the missions.

Göring was not impressed. He tore Galland's medals from his chest and flung them onto a table in front of him. "I'll put them back on when your damned fighter pilots start shooting planes down again. Unless you bring down 500 Flying Fortresses with your Grosse Schlag, you'll find yourself in the trenches," Göring bellowed.

Galland could not assemble 3,700 fighters. On November 2, he sent 500 fighters against 975 American bombers attacking oil plants in the Reich, escorted by 800 fighters, 600 of them the deadly North American P-51 Mustangs, and the Americans shot down 98 Germans, killing 78 pilots. The Americans lost only 50 planes, 30 of them to antiaircraft guns. It was a loss rate Germany could no longer afford. Hitler and Göring were furious.

With the Ardennes plans moving ahead and Hitler having no faith in the Luftwaffe to defend the Reich, the Führer ordered Galland to prepare his fighter reserves to support Wacht Am Rhein. Elite fighter wings like JG 54 Grünherz and JG 26 Albert Leo Schlageter, whose FW-190s and Messerschmitt Me-109s had fought for years, would now move to the Rhineland to back up the big attack. Galland figured his Grosse Schlag was finished. Actually, he was wrong. Göring still liked the idea of a big aerial punch against somebody, and so did Hitler.

Days later, Göring nominated Peltz, a former bomber pilot, to take over JKs 2, which controlled all the fighters on the Western Front, including the planes Galland had been ordered to redeploy. The outspoken and blunt fighter ace was out of the picture, replaced by a pliable and obedient bomber pilot. With most of the Luftwaffe's bombers mothballed by fuel shortages, Peltz was out of a job. Still, Peltz was neither coward nor fool. He had flown and led Junkers Ju-87 Stuka dive-bombers and other bomber formations since Poland, earning the Knight's Cross with Oak Leaves and Swords and a general's rank by age 30.

He put his senior staff in on Göring's new picture. The Grosse Schlag would consist of a massive low-level air raid on the Allied tactical air bases in Belgium, France, and Holland, more than 30 of them. Junkers Ju-88 and 188 night fighters, flying as navigators and pathfinders, would guide the fleets of fighters to the airbases. This was a concession to the Luftwaffe's incredible casualty rate. The pathfinders and wing commanders would shepherd rookie pilots to their targets and mark them with flares.

Pilots would fly in on the deck, up-sun, to avoid both Allied radar and ground observers. The fighters would strafe and shoot up the Allied airfields, catching the wings of Supermarine Spitfires and P-51s on the ground. Secrecy was to be absolute.

With the Allied fighters all destroyed, German fighters would dominate the battlefield. Meanwhile, German bombers, including the new Arado 234 jets, would attack Allied columns and airbases, destroying ground forces and tactical bombers.The attack would go in at dawn on a clear and cloudless day. All was dependent on the weather and the Luftwaffe's ability to husband its resources. The plan was code-named Operation Bodenplatte to remind pilots to fly on the deck, the baseplate.

In reality, neither the weather nor the Allies proved cooperative. As German tanks massed in the Schnee Eifel for the Bulge offensive, American and British bombers continued to pound the Reich. By now, Flying Fortresses and Mustangs were hammering Berlin by day. On December 5, the Luftwaffe attacked an American raid on Berlin. The Germans lost 75 pilots, 53 of them killed, including a group and two squadron leaders. The Americans only lost five planes.

Then heavy clouds and fog socked in the Ardennes and the German border. Neither side's aircraft could operate in the gloom. But that was good news for Hitler, as he needed an

LEFT: Canadian Flight Lt. Dick Audet downed five enemy aircraft on his first combat mission. ABOVE: Luftwaffe ace Josef "Pips" Priller scored 101 aerial victories during the war.

Both: National Archives

initial spell of vile weather to launch the Ardennes offensive while Allied air operations were suspended. On December 10, he moved to his West Front headquarters at the Eagle's Aerie, the Felsennest, at Bad Nauheim, 10 miles north of Frankfurt. Two days later, the top generals assigned to carry out Wacht Am Rhein arrived at Felsennest to finally learn about the plan.

A stooped, puffy, and pale Führer shuffled into the briefing room at 6 PM. Hitler's weak appearance shocked the generals, but he soon regained his usual fire. Claiming the Ardennes offensive would split apart the Anglo-American-Soviet alliance like a thunderclap, Hitler ordered the drive to commence on December 16, the start of a week of poor weather.

Hitler added that Luftwaffe fighter strength now stood at 3,600 aircraft and, without revealing Bodenplatte, said the Allied air forces were in for a massive surprise when the weather did clear.

Actually, Peltz had only 1,500 serviceable planes. Still, they were good machines. The reliable Me-109 had defeated enemies since the Spanish Civil War. Despite its fragile undercarriage (which led to a lot of collapses on the ground) and weak tail, the Me-109G, or Gustav, the current edition, was a highly maneuverable fighter plane.

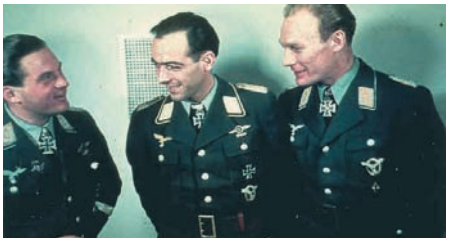
JK 2's other top fighter was the Focke Wulf FW-190, which had first appeared in 1942. It was the Luftwaffe's first radial engine fighter, and it did not gain the fame of the Me-109 because it deployed too late to fight in the Battle of Britain. Despite its heavy-nosed appearance, the FW-190's BMW 801 air-cooled engine made it a fine interceptor and ground-attack plane.

Least in numbers but not last in performance came 30 to 50 new jet-powered Messerschmitt Me-262s, which were being used for tactical reconnaissance and occasional fighter missions. Fast and maneuverable, the Me-262 could crack through the air at 534 mph. However, problems with the plane's metallurgy meant that it could break up easily under stress.

On December 15, Peltz summoned the commanders of his 12 JGs to a secret meeting at JK 2 headquarters at Altenkirchen. There, Peltz briefed them on the plan. More than 1,300 pilots in 33 groups at 37 airbases would hit the Allied targets on a day to be named later. The pilots would only be briefed the night before the attack. Complete radio silence would be maintained in flight until the moment of attack. The attacks would all go in simultaneously.

The targets were all 21 of the Allied tactical airfields in Northwest Europe: 13 in Belgium, six in Holland, and one in France. Most of these airfields were being used by the Royal Air Force or the Royal Canadian Air Force as bases for Spitfires, Hawker Tempests, and Hawker Typhoons. The squadrons based there included Norwegian, Polish, Australian, New Zealander, French, and American outfits.

Peltz handed out aerial photographs of the individual targets to his commanders. These were not to be widely distributed until the attack briefings. If anybody had problems understanding the plan, the orders were simple: Follow the navigation leader and go in with your buddies to attack.



Both: National Archives

LEFT: Dietrich Peltz (center) had the honor of becoming the youngest general in Luftwaffe history. RIGHT: An FW-190 A8 sits on an airfield at St. Trond, Belgium, after making an emergency landing due to Allied flak damage sustained during Operation Bodenplatte.

The next morning, 24 German divisions attacked on what the Americans called the "Ghost Front" in the Ardennes. Fog and rain kept the Luftwaffe grounded, but the German offensive crashed through thin American defenses. The Americans were stunned, but reacted quickly, hurling in reserves.

The following day, the drizzle eased and the temperature jumped to 45 degrees. Peltz sortied his planes to support the panzers. He lost 79 of them and 55 pilots to weather and flak, which meant he had to keep the remaining planes back for Grosse Schlag.

Within days, Wacht Am Rhein ran into trouble. The American 82nd Airborne and 7th Armored Divisions blocked the roads at St. Vith in the north, while the 101st Airborne held Bastogne and its seven-road junction in the south. German horse-drawn supply wagons could not keep up with the panzers, and Nazi columns ran out of gas.

When weather cleared over the Ardennes on the 23rd, American and British tactical fighters and light bombers swooped in on the battlefields, savaging armored columns. Flying Fortress and Liberator heavy bombers pounded rail junctions west of the Rhine to cut off the supply flow. Peltz had to send in his fighters to defend the junctions and lost 98 planes and 63 pilots. His planners chafed at the lack of "unlimited visibility" in the forecasts, which were necessary for Bodenplatte's launching.

ON CHRISTMAS EVE, THE U.S. EIGHTH

Air Force sent the largest mission in its history against the Luftwaffe's Western Front bases, hurling 2,034 bombers escorted by 700 fighters into action. They were followed by more than 1,200 British Spitfires, Tempests, and Typhoons attacking ground targets on the battlefield. Peltz lost 106 aircraft and 85 more pilots. On Christmas Day, the Allies struck again, and Peltz lost 62 more planes and 49 more pilots. On Boxing Day, the Canadian holiday on the day after Christmas, the Germans lost 60 more planes and 49 pilots. Peltz, trying to juggle reserves for Bodenplatte, could only sortie 400 fighters against the Allies' 3,500 fighters and fighter-bombers.

Things were worse on the ground. American and British tanks counterattacked at the tip of the Bulge at Celles, cutting up the 2nd Panzer Division within sight of the Meuse River. Lt. Gen. George S. Patton's hard-charging U.S. Third Army hooked up with Bastogne on Boxing Day, breaking the siege.

Circumstances seemed to dictate that the desperate air operation might not even get started. On December 27, weather socked in most of the Mighty Eighth in England, but the RAF's Typhoons and Spitfires still pounded German troop concentrations in the Ardennes. Peltz lost 50 more planes and 36 pilots. Looking at his maps that afternoon, Hitler ordered a second offensive in Alsace on New Year's Day to take pressure off the Ardennes—and Göring to guarantee air support.

Göring was elated. As soon as the weather broke, Bodenplatte would be launched.

On December 28, Peltz started holding back his fighters. If he held the line on losses, he estimated he would at least have 800 planes for Der Grosse Schlag, backed by 30 Me-262 jet fighters. But December 29 turned out to be *Der Schwartz Tag*, the Black Day, for JK 2, when 2,300 Allied planes swooped in on the Ardennes battlefields. Peltz sent in only 130 fighters but still lost more than 40 of them. Five of them fell in one battle to a single Canadian pilot, Flight Lt. Dick Audet of RCAF 411

"Grizzly Bear" Squadron, flying his first combat mission.

Behind the front, 1,315 American bombers, with 572 Mustangs flying escort, pounded rail marshaling yards and bridges.

On December 31, the skies cleared somewhat, and the Mighty Eigth slammed oil refineries at Hamburg and Milsburg. Peltz's planes stayed out of the battle. Some 137 of his machines flew over the Ardennes. That afternoon, Peltz studied fresh weather reports and fired off the first of three coded signals, designed to fool Allied radio-interception teams, to launch Bodenplatte.

Shortly after the parties were cancelled, commanders summoned their pilots for the big briefings. Each JG had three or four Jagdgruppes occupying one airfield each. At airfields and airstrips across northwest Germany, pilots in leather jackets and flight suits got the word. Lt. Col. Johann Kogler used a table-top sand model to brief his pilots on their target, the RAF base at Volkel, Holland. Major Helmut Kuhle, examining the detailed plan and model, said, "There's really nothing that can go wrong. It's foolproof!"

However, Pips Piller and the veterans of JG 26 were less impressed when Priller brief his top men at the JG's headquarters, Furstenau Middle School. They had to split their JG's groups in half and hit two airfields at Brussels, Grimbergen and Evere. Priller remembered the old military dictum: never divide your forces, and was worried. JG 11, under the one-eyed Lt. Col. Guenther Specht, however, was looking forward to the morning's attack. The pilots of JG 1 relished having 20 of KG (j) 51's Me-262 fighters at their airfield at Twenthe for the morning.

Lieutenant Colonel Herbert Ihlefeld and his JG 1 pilots also studied tabletop models. While JG 1 had veteran pilots and jets to help, they had little experience or practice in low-level attacks.

JG 27 had different problems. Heavy fighting had worn it down. The I/JG 27 was down to 16 Me-109s, most of them overdue for engine overhaul. The II/JG 27 had only 12 fighters. Despite the support of JG 54's Gruppe IV and its FW-190s, JG 27 was in parlous shape. Major Ludwig Franzisket amalgamated his two battered groups into one and held off on briefing his tired pilots until dawn.

JG 4's main problem was its moonscape airfield at Babenhausen. Hard work repaired the airfield, and most of II/JG 4's FW-190 fighters and all of the pilots were ready to go. On the other hand, I/JG 4 had only 10 serviceable Me-109s, while IV/JG 4 had only 20 of its 40 Me-109s ready to fly.

JG 4's Commander, Major Gerhard Michalski—an ace with 70 kills, many of them over Malta—gave his men a simple briefing: "Mission: low-level attack on Le Culot Airfield. The wing is to form up over Bingen." Pilot Horst Thanaan noted that the rookie pilots were the most excited about the planned attack.

JG 77 was just as ready but had the same problems of young pilots and few machines. Some had less than 30 hours in Me-109s and had never done anything but formation flying. Many of its planes were badly damaged. The new boss, Major Erich Leie, tried appealing to his men's pride in being the elite "Red Heart" Squadron. The appeal worked. While the pilots slept, the ground crews worked all night, and by dawn, 100 Me-109s were ready to fly.

JG 53 lacked current photos of its target, Metz-Frascaty, the only one in France, but it had good radio intelligence from chatty American pilots and ground control. The III/JG 53 would take out the base's flak guns, while II/JG 54 and IV/JG 54 would chop up the USAAF's 365th Fighter Group's three squadrons of P-47 Thunderbolts. Lt. Col. Helmut Bennemann told his pilots to come in on the deck, strafe the field, then pull up in stall turns, whip around, and do so again from the opposite direction.

On the other side of the line, Hitler's words went unheard by the men of the British 2nd Tactical Air Force and the U.S. Ninth Air Force, under Lt. Gen. Hoyt Vandenberg. Most pilots had spent the day flying tactical missions to bomb rail lines, troop concentrations, and supply convoys. After a hard day of air battle, nearly all were ready for a break and celebrating the New Year looked like a good way to relieve stress.

The Allied tactical air forces that were spearheading the drive on Germany were a tough, experienced, and powerful force. The 2nd Tactical Air Force (TAF) was commanded by Air Vice Marshal Sir Arthur "Maori" Coningham, a veteran aviator and tactical air commander. He had pioneered air-ground cooperation and showed great energy and leadership. Thanks to him, 2nd Tactical Air Force's wings and squadrons of British, Canadian, Australian, New Zealander, French, Polish, Norwegian, Belgian, and Dutch fliers were a harmonious and effective group.

The 2nd TAF was a large but highly mobile force with 2,000 planes scattered across 27 airfields. These planes were organized in three groups, the 2nd Tactical Bomber Group under Air Vice Marshal Sir Basil Embry, 83rd RAF Fighter Group under Air Vice Marshal Harry Broadhurst, and 84th RCAF Fighter Group under Air Vice Marshal L.O. Brown.

The 2nd TAF's ground elements were very capable of quickly following the advancing armor to establish new temporary airbases. But with the Allied offensive stalled for the winter, 2nd TAF had built up more permanent facilities around existing airfields at Brussels, Antwerp, Eindhoven, and Volkel. When the Ardennes offensive broke out, the U.S. Ninth Air Force planes on the north side of the German offensive were placed, like American ground forces, under Field Marshal Sir Bernard Law Montgomery's command, which in turn put Coningham's 2nd TAF in charge of these American squadrons. The paper shuffling caused no changes in the American operation.

The long drive east had caused problems—airfields were overcrowded and antiaircraft guns had been shifted to the V-1 attack routes. With air supremacy pretty nearly complete, camouflage netting had been among the items left behind in favor of fuel and ammunition.

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In any case, morale was high in the 2nd TAF and Ninth Air Force as 1944 trickled down to its final few days. The German counteroffensive in the Bulge had given the Allied pilots new targets and plenty of work. On a daily basis, American and British fighters and fighter-bombers were pounding German columns and supply lines. Pilots, ground crews, and supply teams were functioning well. So were the aircraft. The primary attack

planes were the British Hawker Typhoon and American P-47 Thunderbolt.

With its huge air scoop, the Typhoon proved a perfect ground-attack machine, armed with two 1,000-pound bombs or eight 25-pound armor-piercing or 60-pound high explosive rockets, which could slice through German tanks. A single Typhoon rocket could put a tough German Panther tank out of action. The rugged P-47, known to its pilots as the "Jug," packed eight .50-caliber machine guns and could also haul two 1,000-pound bombs into the air.

The main Allied fighters—the Supermarine Spitfire and the North American P-51 Mustang—were legends of the sky. Most Spitfires were Mark 14 machines with new Rolls-Royce Griffon engines, fast enough to keep up with German V-1s. A Mark 14 Spitfire was the first to shoot down a German jet, doing so on October 8, 1944. The Mark 16 Spitfire, which still used the Merlin engine of Battle of Britain fame, was primarily a ground attack fighter, and an effective one.

The other top Allied fighter, the Mustang, was a happy combination of American aeronautical design and the British Rolls-Royce Merlin engine. The culmination of propeller-driven fighter design, the P-51 had it all—range, punch, maneuverability, and stunning looks. The British also had a less well known but equally potent fighter in the Hawker Tempest, a derivative of the Typhoon.

Other planes familiar to aviation enthusiasts populated the 2nd TAF, such as the De Havilland Mosquito, the twin-engined "Wooden Wonder" that could serve as tactical bomber, reconnaissance plane, and night fighter. The 2nd TAF also operated the Consolidated B-25 Mitchell medium bomber of Doolittle Raid fame, older Vickers Wellington bombers for reconnaissance, and the usual motley collection of transports, trainers, and utility aircraft. Among them were Field Marshal Montgomery's personal Douglas C-47 Dakota transport and Prince Bernhard of The Netherlands' private Beechcraft.

The knights who flew these aircraft were the equal of their superb steeds. British squadron leaders like Wing Commander Johnnie Johnson, the British commander of 127 RCAF Wing at Brussels-Evere (B-56), were experienced veterans of the Battle of Britain and after Johnson finished the war with 38 kills.

Their American colleagues were just as skilled. On New Year's Eve, Lt. Col. John "J.C." Meyer, commanding 352nd Fighter Group based at Asch Airfield (Y-29) in Belgium, shot down a German Arado 234 twin-engine jet reconnaissance bomber, the first p-51 pilot to do so. With 22 kills, he was already one of America's top P-51 aces.

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

ABOVE: Numerous Allied airfields on the continent of Europe were targeted by Luftwaffe planners for Operation Bodenplatte. The bold but ill-fated strike cost the Germans experienced pilots and planes that could not be replaced. BELOW: A state-of-the-art German Me-262 takes to the sky.


National Archives

On his way back to Asch, Meyer thought about the increasing number of such German reconnaissance missions and decided that the enemy was planning an attack. Asch, which was also home to the P-47s of the 366th Fighter Group, was a possible target. Meyer knew that the two groups were set for a mission on New Year's Day, which would leave the base unprotected. Concerned, he wanted to sortie a dawn defensive patrol of P-51s on New Year's Day, just in case.

It was a busy New Year's Eve for the entire 2nd TAF. Flying Officer (FO) Ed Flanagan and his buddies in RCAF 440 Squadron at Eindhoven (B-78) were preparing for a 7 AM low-level rocket sweep in the Ardennes the next day. Flanagan was also preparing to head to England in the second week of January for his wedding to Renee Taylor at her family's church in Yorkshire. Flanagan and his pals, who had lost eight buddies on Christmas Eve to flak, reviewed their mission profiles and hoisted a couple of belts of schnapps at the small bar in the convent in which his unit was billeted. Then he hit the

Hoping to avoid the eyes of Allied fighter-bombers, German fighters sit under the cover of trees and camouflage netting.

National Archives

sack early. So did the pilots of 3 Squadron and 486 New Zealand Squadron at Volkel (B-80), who were set for an 8:55 AM armed reconnaissance over Paderborn.

Another Eindhoven outfit, the 39th Reconnaissance Wing, which flew clip-winged Spitfire Mark 14s, was eagerly looking to try out its new machines on armed reconnaissance over the Rhine. Unlike other wings that had to live in tents, 39 Wing was based at the prewar Eindhoven passenger air terminal—heated billets and hot food. The wings based at Eindhoven also got to use the German-built dispersal areas hidden by pine trees and the vast 4,000-yard runway, one of Europe's longest.

That long runway proved useful on New Year's Eve when FO Gordon Hill of 416 Squadron landed his shot-up Spitfire Mark 14 on the strip. The mechanics assured Hill the flak-damaged Spitfire would be ready by morning. Meanwhile, Flight Lt. George Bromfield, an official RCAF war artist, flopped down near 143 Wing's dispersal and began a charcoal sketch of the parked Typhoons.

Group Captain Alexander Gabszewicz and his adjutant took their jeep to Brussels-Grimbergen Airfield (B-60) to oversee 131 Polish Wing's arrival there. The Spitfire wing's three squadrons were to fly to their new digs on New Year's Day. Gabszewicz spent the day inspecting new barracks and galleys. At the old base, St. Denis-Westram (B-61), the Polish pilots and airmen prepared for the next day's move.

At Gilze-Reijen Airfield (B-77), Flight Lt. Bill Baggs and 164 Squadron, part of 35 Reconnaissance Wing, just back from the two-week rocket-firing course in Wales, were ready to return to action. The pilots were alert: There were rumors of imminent German paratroop landings, so everyone was told to sleep on their camp cots in the mess, in uniform, wearing sidearms.

St. Trond-Brustem Airfield (A-92) in Belgium was also ready. This former Luftwaffe night-fighter base still had its Luftwaffe camouflage, hangars, and buildings. Home to the U.S. 48th Fighter Group (P-47s) and the 404th and its Lockheed P-38 Lightning fighters, it was to become headquarters for 29th Tactical Air Command, which meant more flak guns.

Despite the tension of war, there was still an air of festivity in 2nd TAF. Wing Cmdr. Mike Shaw, boss of RAF 69 Squadron, a night reconnaissance outfit, celebrated his being awarded the Distinguished Service Order in the mess with his fellow Wellington pilots. Shaw was scheduled to test fly a repaired four-engine Short Stirling transport in the morning, but was not worried.

Wing Commander Paul Davoud was relaxed, too. The boss of 143 RCAF Wing at Eindhoven was handing over command to his pal, Wing Cmdr. Ernie Moncrief. After signing off the morning's orders for a tactical sweep of the Cologne area, he partied hard with his fellow pilots.

The atmosphere was just as casual at Brussels-Evere (B-56), where the all-Canadian 127 Wing, under Wing Cmdr. Johnnie Johnson, had two of its squadrons, 403 and 416 RCAF, based. Flight Lt. Dick Reeves of 403 "Wolf" Squadron returned from his last mission of the day and parked his Spitfire in a neat line next to the other 16 in his squadron, "as if they were getting ready for a Wing Parade." On the opposite side, Prince Bernhard's Beechcraft was parked alongside a B-17, an Auster, and some Ansons.

Led by Johnson, 127 Wing was living fairly high by wartime standards, occupying ritzy Brussels mansions where the parties were in full swing. FO Ken Langmuir of 421 Squadron hit the bar. FO Bill Roddie was partying, too. His Spitfire "Fearless Fosdick" had been shot full of holes by German flak. Taken off the flying roster while the mechanics—"erks" in RAF parlance—repaired it, Roddie donned his dress uniform and drove into downtown Brussels to hit the bistros. Soon enough, he was dancing with a local girl. Dick Reeves, on the other hand, was on the flight list for New Year's Day, so he hit the sack early.

Conditions at Asch (Y-29) were more primitive for the Americans of the 352nd and the 366th. The 366th pilots hopped in their jeeps

and staff cars for the bistros in Brussels, but Meyer warned his 352nd that they might have early takeoffs tomorrow. However, his request for a dawn patrol had been denied.

Just north of Asch, at Ophoven (Y-32), 125 Spitfire Wing was also partying hard. Wing Cmdr. Frank Scott-Malden, a Battle of Britain veteran, commanded the wing's 120 reconnaissance Spitfires, which comprised four squadrons. One of them, the 350th, was Belgian. They had drawn the short straw for the first mission in the morning.

The 2nd TAF's most northerly airfield was Heesch (B-88), in The Netherlands, where 126 RCAF Spitfire Wing was based in an old Hitler Youth camp. It was better than tents, but still a mass of mud covered with wire mesh. FO Al Bathurst lent his Spitfire to his pal, Flight Lt. Donald "Chunky" Gordon for the morning, as Gordon's was unserviceable.

At Woensdrecht (B-79) in The Netherlands, the five squadrons of 132 Wing also partied. The Dutch 322nd Squadron's planes and pilots had not arrived, but the two Norwegian squadrons, 331 and 332, joined the British 66th and 127th to celebrate the New Year. They were set for a 9 AM escort mission to Dasburg. At Antwerp-Duerne (B-70), 146 Wing was set for an early morning Army support mission. Wing Cmdr. Denys Gillam, another Battle of Britain veteran, told his men to be ready.

The only base outside Belgium scheduled for attack was also the only tactical airfield in France, Metz-Frasctacy, home to Colonel Ray Steckers' U.S. 365th Fighter Group (Y-34) and its P-47s. The "Hell Hawks" had just moved there from Mons in Belgium and were celebrating the move in typical fighter jock fashion.

While the Allied pilots celebrated or slept, Bodenplatte began. Just before midnight, four Arado 234 jet bombers of KG (j) 51 flew across the Dutch-German border. Their job was to do a final check of weather conditions, but the jets carried a few bombs anyway. Three planes dropped their bombs on Brussels and its train station, the fourth on Liege. Little damage was done, but it was the first night jet bomber attack in history.

Meanwhile, the Germans prepared their planes and briefed their crews. JG 77's Major Erich Leie commanded a fighter wing with a great history, but now full of inexperienced pilots, barely able to fly in formation. He told his men that the morning's raid on Antwerp-Deurne (Y-70) would enable the young pilots to add to the wing's glorious traditions.

JG 54's 3rd Gruppe hit the sack early. Their co-tenants at Furstenau, JG 26, did not, holding their New Year's Eve party anyway. Lieutenant Gunther Bloemertz and his buddies drank and danced with local girls while an orchestra played approved jazz. But shortly before dawn, the Commander broke up the party, telling them, "Take-off in 50 minutes!" The pilots dumped the girls with speed and took their cars to the flight line, where their 60 FW-190s stood lined up.

JG 54's 3rd Gruppe commander, Major Karl Borris, told his pilots this mission was a major effort. They were to follow the Ju-88 nightfighter on the tarmac and watch for its Goldregen ("Golden Rain") flares to mark the front lines. On return, they were just fly due east.

Oberleutenant Willi Heilmann of JG 54, also at Furstenau, got his wake-up call at 3 AM and joined JG 26 in the big briefing, held in a converted convent and girls school. Their target was Brussels-Grimbergen (B-60). After that, the pilots headed for breakfast in their mess halls. Heilmann ate cutlets, and roast beef and drank a glass of wine. At all JG 2 airfields, pilots got magnificent breakfasts.

Gefreiter (Corporal) Werner Molge of JG 26 rode the squadron bus to the airfield. On the bus, the "weather frog" briefed the airmen. Molge and his pals only got their target briefing at the airfield—"Low level attack on the airfield at Evere"—but were serenaded by his Gruppe's three-piece band. On the flight lines, ground crews—"black men" in the Luftwaffe—loaded 65-gallon drop tanks on the bottoms of the FW-190s.

SHORTLY BEFORE TAKEOFF, OTHER German commanders got the word. Chiefs of bases not involved in the strike were told to be ready to receive large numbers of returning planes. The 16th Flak Division, whose guns protected western Germany, was finally given the attack plan and routes at 3 AM. However, the division's headquarters did not have time to alert all 50 batteries under its control that a huge number of German planes would be flying west at dawn. When Bodenplatte's planes came over their heads, the gun crews assumed they were British planes returning late from a raid on the Fatherland.

Early morning fog delayed the takeoffs until just after sunrise. Black men strapped pilots into their fighters. When the rising sun illuminated the snow and airfields across western Germany, engines sputtered to life, pilots closed their cockpit canopies, and 1,035 German aircraft from 11 JGs with 34 groups between them roared down runways and into the air, headed west.

Meanwhile, 2nd TAF was also waking up ready for another day and a new year of combat missions. Squadron Leader K.F. "Jimmy" Thiele led eight Tempests of 122 Wing into the air at Volkel (B-80). At St. Denis-Westram (B-61), Group Captain Alexander Gabsewicz's 131 Polish Wing was flying at dawn. After its morning strikes, it was to move to its new base.

The same cycle of early morning missions was going on at Eindhoven, Volkel, Heesch, and the other bases. Flight Lt. A.D. Mercer of 268 Squadron at Gilze-Reijen (B-77), flying reconnaissance P-51 Mustangs, drank tea in the old German officers' mess before flying the first mission of the day. Squadron Leader L.H. Lambert of 168 Squadron got a 4 AM-wake up call for a Typhoon-armed reconnaissance strike. He and his pilots lived in a convent outside of Eindhoven shared with its nuns. At Antwerp-Deurne (B-70), Flight Lt. S.J. Eaton of 257 Squadron, another Typhoon outfit, stood around waiting with his pals while the ground crew broke up ice on the runway.

The Melsbroek-based 139 Medium Bomber Wing of B-25 Mitchells roared into the air to hit the road net around Dasburg. Wing Cmdr. Mike Shaw put on his flying suit to test the repaired Short Stirling bomber.

Another early riser was Broadhurst himself, at his headquarters in the Philips Building in Eindhoven, right by the airfield and his personal Fieseler Storch, which had been captured from the Germans. The Storch was kept on the first fairway of the golf course near his office. Normally, Broadhurst was in the air in his Storch at dawn, checking on one squadron or another. This morning, however, he was sipping tea in his office and going over the weather and the day's operations.

All across northwest Germany, gaggles of Me-109s and FW-190s were lifting off runways, streaking into the sky, maneuvering into formation. Not without troubles, however. The III/JG 6 lost one Me-109 just after takeoff when it suddenly lost speed and smashed into the trees. Oberfeldwebel (Sergeant) Walter Jung's Me-109's engine caught fire soon after takeoff. Led by Oberstleutnant (Lt. Col.) Johann Kogler, JG 6 assembled its 70 Me-109s over Quackenbruck and flew behind Hauptmann (Captain) Karl Bibsiem's lead Ju-88. Their target was Volkel, but Bibsiem got his directions wrong. Instead, he led them to Heesch. Only nine of JG 6's Me-109s found Volkel.

JG 3, under Oberstleutnant Heinz Bar, a 200-victory ace, was assigned the prize, Eindhoven Airfield, with its two Typhoon wings and Spitfire wing. JG 3 formed up over Lippstadt and flew across the Rhine behind its Ju-88. As the planes roared over the snow-covered plain of Brahast, some of the German aircraft got lost

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Long-range German FW-190Gs, first introduced in the North African campaign, wing their way to their destination.

and found themselves heading for Gilze-Rijen.

At Eindhoven, 429 RCAF Squadron was taking off to do weather checks over the Ardennes followed by 168 Squadron and its Typhoons, ready to provide rocket support for the 101st Airborne Division. Following that, 430 Squadron's Spitfire 14s and 438 and 440 Squadrons' Typhoons began taxiing out for takeoff, struggling past frozen ridges and bomb craters.

Watching the deployment was FO Gordon Hill of 416 Squadron from Brussels-Evere, whose shot-up Spitfire was fully repaired. All he needed was a starter cart. A combination of frost and rain had left the Evere runway frozen and dangerous for takeoffs and landings. Crewmen were spreading grit on the slippery tarmac.

JG 4, under Major Gerhard Michalski, was also airborne, 55 Me-109s and FW-190s streaking for Brussels behind Feldwebel Gunther Kotschote's Ju-88 leader. Half an hour from the target, the sun cut through the morning mist, revealing the FW-190s to British and American antiaircraft gunners. They opened fire immediately, bagging Kotschote's Ju-88 right away. Michalski took over and lost his bearings. He flew in circles 10 miles north of Brussels, and his three *gruppen* got separated. With flak cutting down JG 4's fighters, the survivors latched onto passing formations. Most of Gruppe II/JG 4 headed for St. Trond-Brustem, which they thought was their target, Le Culot. Actually, St. Trond-Brustem was 10 miles from Le Culot, but it was full of P-47s. As II/JG 4 swooped in, they saw JG 2 attacking as well.

At 8:05 AM, the Allies got their first word of the attack when an Auster pilot, flying an artillery-spotting mission, shouted into his radio, "Have just passed formation of at least 200 Messerschmitts flying low on course 320."

The Richthofen Geschwader, led by Oberstleutnant Kurt Buhlingen, had the new FW-190 Ds in the I and III Gruppen. The II Gruppe still flew Me-109s. Told to unite over Coblenz, JG 2 was to fly south over the Schnee Eifel and then head northwest for St. Trond. They had trouble, too. Unteroffizier (Sergeant) Fritz Altpeter's FW-190 crashed near Diersdorf, killing him. Heavy American flak shot down four planes over Aachen, including Gruppe III/JG 4's skipper, Oberstleutnant Alfred Druschel. As JG 2 flew over the Schnee Eifel, American guns blasted 13 more planes out of the sky.

At 8:14, JG 26's planes took off, their spirits raised by a three-piece band at Nordhorn. Pips Priller took off in the lead accompanied by his longtime wingman, Unteroffizier Heinz Wodarczyk. The two had been the only Luftwaffe pilots to attack the D-day beaches and had miraculously survived their strafing run. JG 26 was to attack in two forces, I/JG 26 and III/JG 54 in one punch under Pips Priller, aimed at Brussels-Grimbergen, while Gruppen II and III of JG 26 hit Evere.

But as the I/JG 26 and III/JG 54 German planes flew over the German-occupied Netherlands, they came under fire from trigger-happy Luftwaffe flak emplacements protecting V-2 launching sites around Rotterdam. They shot down four of their own planes. However, Canadian antiaircraft gunners proved more accurate than their Luftwaffe counterparts. The Canadians shot down four planes, sending two of them spiraling into the North Sea.

Meanwhile, JG 26 flew on. As they crossed the Belgian border, they were hit by 308 Polish Squadron based at St. Denis-Westram. The Poles shot down five Germans without losses. Flight Lt. Zbigniew Zimgrodski shot up 1/JG 26's Obergefreiter Dieter Kraegerloh's FW-190. Kraegerloh was too low to bail out, and his flaps were shot up. Unable to cut speed, he was flung into the dashboard when the plane crashed, breaking his back. Unable to move, he waited until British troops cut him out of the wreckage.

At 9:20, I/JG 26 and III/JG 54 finally hit Grimbergen only to find the airfield was empty except for four B-17s and a P-51. Priller was furious. Intelligence assured him Grimbergen was a major base. Disgusted, he ordered Major Karl Borris, head of I/JG 26, to strafe the base while he headed back to Furstenau to yell at the intelligence officers.

Down below, Group Captain Alexander Gabsewicz and his adjutant were about to drive from their billets to breakfast and start flying in 131 Polish Squadron.

Meanwhile, II/JG 26 and III/JG 26 swooped in on Evere at 9:20 AM and were amazed to see Spitfires lined up on one side of the flight line, multi-engine planes on the other side, with more fighters ready to attack. The III/JG 26's boss, Hauptmann Walter "Count" Krupinski, couldn't lead his own attack—his engine was sputtering from a flak hit. Irritated, he turned over the attack to Major Anton Hackl, who led II/JG 26.

Down on the deck, FO Ken Langmuir and some other pilots not on for missions, worked off their massive hangovers by tossing a baseball around and shooting the breeze. The 416 Squadron's 12 Spitfire 16s were readying for takeoff. Wing Cmdr. Johnnie Johnson paid little attention to the sound of incoming aircraft—he thought it was just another American formation.

JG 11, under Oberstleutnant Gunther

Specht, had clearly marked maps, orders to maintain strict radio silence, and ceilings of 150 feet to avoid Allied radar. Following Ju-88 pathfinders, they were delayed half an hour by mist. The delay resulted in their getting a dose of German flak before hitting Allied lines. The German guns did no damage, but British flak hit Oberstleutnant (1st Lt.) Adolf Fielder in the head. Amazingly, he was able to make a forced landing in a field where he was captured. The rest of the planes spotted their target, Asch, by 9:35 AM, and 70 FW-190s and Me-109s raced in at treetop level.

On the ground, Colonel John C. Meyer of the 352nd Fighter Group, denied permission to fly a dawn patrol, attacked his powdered eggs and coffee. While he ate, he got word from the Ninth Air Force that the group could put up a 12-plane preventive patrol as long as it would not wreck the day's planned escort mission for the Mighty Eighth Air Force. Delighted, Meyer prepared his patrol. With his wingman, Lieutenant Alex Sears, he took off heading east at 9:40 AM

Hauptmann Karl Hrdlicka gave simple orders to the men of his 1/JG 2 at 6 AM—take off at 8 AM, hook up with II/JG 2 and III/JG 2 over Koblenz, and then hit St. Trond-Brustem, where American fighters were reportedly parked wingtip to wingtip. I/2 and III/2 flew FW-190s so fresh from the factories that there had been no time to paint squadron markings on them. II/JG 2 flew Me-109s. III/JG 4, under Oberstleutnant Alfred Druschel, who had just taken over the *gruppe* that morning, would join them in the attack.

Trouble began over the Westerwald. Unteroffizier Fritz Altpeter's FW-190 started spewing black smoke. Altpeter crashed and died. Feldwebel Karl Tschelesnig was luckier. When his undercarriage would not retract, he turned for home and got his plane repaired. But when he flew off to catch up with his buddies, flak tore up his plane as it zoomed in at treetop height. Tschelesnig pulled his plane up to 600 feet and bailed out.

American flak nailed Druschel, too, killing the 800-mission veteran. Major Gunther Dornbrack took over in midflight. But more American guns opened up, shooting down Unteroffizier Otto Dost, Unteroffizier Friederich Opteenhostert, Oberfeldwebel Fritz Schuler, and 13 pilots in all. Luck determined who survived. Unteroffizier Helmut Breitweg crash-landed and was captured, but Unteroffizier Ernst Klein crashed and was killed nearby.

At 8:45, JG 2 approached its St. Trond-Brustem (A-92) target, home of the U.S. 48th and 404th Fighter Groups. The 48th's war diary noted, "At 8:45, when some of the Group had taken their hangovers to work and most had kept them in bed, an amazing thing happened. An unfamiliar drone of engines was heard …"

When Hauptmann Hans-Georg Hackbath briefed his I/JG 1 pilots at Twenthe, they were relieved to hear that most of their approach would be over German-held areas, and they would be joined by Haputmann Harald Moldenhauer's II/JG 1 and his 55 Me-109s. Their target was Maldegem Airfield (B-65), which intelligence said was home to 485 Royal New Zealand Air Force Squadron and heaps of Spitfires. The target would require five passes. II/JG 1, leaving its base at Drope, was to hurl its 30 FW0-190s at St. Denis-Westram (B-61) near Ghent, home of 131 Polish Wing.

As I/JG 1 flew over Rotterdam and the Dutch coast, German Navy antiaircraft gunners mistook them for the RAF Spitfires that harassed them every day and opened fire. German guns shot down and killed Unteroffizier Heinz Jurgan, an 80-mission veteran of North Africa and Italy and an artist by trade. Unteroffizier Heinz Bohmer failed to keep his plane aloft, crashing helplessly and fatally into the ground near Dordrecht. Also falling to German guns was the Geschwader commander, Herbert Ihlefeld, hit by flak near The Hague. He managed to land without injury in a farm field.

Meanwhile, at 9 AM, I/JG 1's 4th Staffel (Squadron), under Oberleutenant Hans-Gottfried Meinhof, swooped down on its secondary target, Ursel Airfield (B-67), listed by intelligence as a base for 12 Spitfires.

The intelligence was wrong. The Ursel Spitfires had been flown to England. All that the 424th RAF Rearmament and Refeuling Unit had on hand was a Mosquito, two B-17s, and two Avro Lancaster heavy bombers, all under repair. The Mosquito was badly damaged, the rest all heavily damaged by German flak. Leading Aircraftsman Edward Green was on his way to pick up a working party in a van when he remembered he also had to check another truck for fuel and mileage. While he read the numbers off, he heard incoming aircraft. He figured it was a squadron of Spitfires due in from England.

At St. Denis-Westram (B-61), 131 Polish Wing took off in its Spitfire 9 fighters to attack enemy targets and fly armed reconnaissance. After the Spitfires flew off on their missions, 30 Spitfires and a B-17 were still left on the ground. The Flying Fortress was another shot-up plane being repaired by an American maintenance crew. It was a massive task. While the Americans struggled with technology, the Poles jammed their base church for Sunday Mass.

The JG 77 "Red Hearts" had fought a tough war—Denmark, Norway, Normandy. Major Erich Leie had just taken over the JG when Major Johannes Wiese was shot down and wounded on December 29. Fortunately, Leie was no slouch with more than 100 kills.

Now JG 77 was to hit Antwerp-Deurne (B-70), home to 115 and 146 RAF Fighter Wings, a 100-mile trip. Leie chose to swoop around Rotterdam and hit the base from the north, doubling the distance but also the chance of surprise. More than a hundred Me-109s roared across clear skies and took German Naval antiaircraft fire. German guns shot down Lieutenant Heinz Abendroth, and he landed safely behind Allied lines. Unteroffizier Johann Twietmeyer, also hit by German flak, fell to earth and was captured. British guns were effective, too. The commander of II/JG 77, Lieutenant Heinrich Hackler, tried to evade British guns and slammed into barrage balloon cables, which tore off his Me-109's right wing and killed him.

A few minutes later, I/JG 77 spotted Woensdrecht Airfield (B-79), mistaking it for Antwerp-Deurne (B-70). I/JG 77 swooped down on the wrong target, while the other *gruppen* pressed on and found the right one.

Woensdrecht was home to five Spitfire squadrons, but only two were there at the time, 331 and 332 Norwegian. Antwerp-Deurne housed two wings—145 and its four Spitfire squadrons, and 149 and its five Typhoon squadrons. The whole base had been shut down by an overnight snowfall, and all hands were digging snow and ice off the runways.

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I/JG 27 and IV/JG 54 drew Brussels-Melbroek (B-58), and Major Ludwig Franzisket's FW-190s followed their Ju-88 guides over Utrecht, where German flak shot down three planes. When the JG closed in, III/JG 27 peeled off to hit Gilze-Reijen (B-77).

Brussels-Melbroek (B-58) was having a busy morning. The 139 Bomber Wing's 35 B-25 Mitchell bombers were on their way to attack the Dusburg road center, while the pilots of 16 Photographic Reconnaissance Unit were waiting for the ground crews to finish de-icing their runway so they could take off. While everyone waited, Flight Lt. Hugh Tudor and FO Ian Ewing of 140 Mosquito Squadron were sitting in a jeep, getting ready to fly a Mosquito to England, enjoying the clear skies. Squadron Leader Mike Shaw was recovering from his hangover and preparing to test fly that Stirling.

Oberstleutnant Helmut Bennemann had 100 victories and command of JG-53, which had excellent photographs of its target, Metz-Frescaty (Y-34). Bennemann's 70 Me-109s in three *gruppen* were to hit the base in three low-level passes. The plan began to disintegrate when III/JG 53 flew into a patrol of American P-47s. The Germans had to jettison their drop tanks when the Americans attacked, forcing them to return to Kirrlach. Short of 20 planes, Bennemann's pilots flew on anyway.

At Metz-Frescaty (Y-34), 11 P-47s of the 387th Fighter Squadron took off at 8:28 AM, on an armed reconnaissance. They pounded a German train, blasting five freight cars, then headed home, landing by 9:13. When they were done, the 388th took off, while the 386th prepared for its morning strike. Only one pilot stood guard in his "alert" P-47, Captain Tom Stanton of the 386th. His wingman, Lieutenant Samuel Lutz, was warming himself over a gasoline fire before climbing into his P-47.

Flight Lieutenants Jim Young and Ed Packwood of 2 Squadron took off from Gilze-Reijen (B-77) at 8:29 on a tactical reconnaissance mission, and 15 minutes later spotted the incoming German strike—two Ju-88s and more than 30 FW-190s and Me-109s headed west on the deck. Young and Packwood pulled up into the sun in their Spitfires and dived down into the rear of the German formation. Packwood opened fire and tore apart an Me-109. Young flipped open his radio microphone and told his controllers back at Gilze-Reijen that bandits were incoming.

His was not the only tocsin sounded. Radar operator Ron Staughton was manning a station at Boortmeerbeek in Belgium when he reported "150 plus bogies headed south west." He corrected that to "250 plus—range eight miles."

His controller was not impressed. "You've probably got a spurious echo."

"I've been doing this job for a long time," Staughton answered, and summoned his commanding officer, Flight Lt. Owen Halfhid. He confirmed the sighting and reported it to the controller. Again came the answer, "Spurious echo."

By now Halfhid could hear the German planes heading over him. "If you don't believe me, go outside and see for yourself!"

It was too late. All across Belgium and the Netherlands, Bodenplatte was going in with thunderclap surprise.

As the lost *gruppen* of JG 6 swung in on Heesch, Flight Lt. John Edison, in the control tower, thought the incoming planes were American P-51s. Gunner Garry Whitmore thought they were American P-47s. When the base's defending 40mm Bofors antiaircraft guns opened fire, everybody leaped out of their bunks and beds.

At all the airfields, it was the same thing. Wing Cmdr. Kit North-Lewis of 124 Wing was glancing out the window when he saw the string of 12 incoming Me-109s and wondered "what the hell they were doing in Eindhoven." FO Ken Langmuir at Brussels-Evere thought it was a disorganized group of American P-51s.

At Eindhoven, 25 German fighters swooped down into neat strafing runs led by an Me-262. Desmond Shepherd, a 137 Squadron armorer, saw two FW-190s collide with each other head-on. Flight Lt. Ed MacKay, in his pajamas, heard the noise from the convent where he was billeted and ran to the window, seeing Me-109s and FW-190s zooming over the rooftops.

On the strip, Flight Lt. "Gibby" Gibbons was taking off in his 168 Squadron Typhoon when JG 3's Me-109s and FW-190s charged in. Feldwebel Gerhard Leipholz had a perfect tail shot of Gibbons as he took off, but Gibbons went into a steep turn that put him behind Leipholz. A single burst of fire, and Leipholz was dead. Another FW-190 shot up Gibbons' Typhoon, killing him.

Flying Officer Len Wilson of 442 "Caribou" Squadron was flying an armed reconnaissance when the Heesch controller ordered his section home. At 10,000 feet, Wilson swung Spitfire Y2-F back home and saw enemy aircraft on the deck at right angles. He gave a "Tally-ho" call, and with his wingman, Flight Lt. D.M. "Tex" Pieri, Wilson swooped down to attack. Wilson was amazed to find more than 20 enemy planes. At nearly point-blank range, he got off a burst and found himself facing an entire squadron of FW-190s. Wilson had the advantage of speed and maneuverability and broke around to port. An FW-190 followed Wilson, and Pieri followed the German plane, shooting it down. Wilson's plane was damaged, and it took everything he had to keep the rudder under control and break away from the battle. He did manage to land his damaged plane.

Major Anton Hackl's JG 26 planes caught four Spitfires taking off at Brussels-Evere and blasted three of them. Warrant Officer (WO) Lou Jean and FO Len Commerford jumped out of their planes and hid behind metal drums, where Jean discovered he had taken a splinter in a leg. Only section leader Flight Lt. Dave Harling got airborne. Hackl's planes split their targets—half hitting the Spitfires on the ground, the other half attacking the antiaircraft guns.

By now Halfhid could hear the German planes heading over him. "If you don't believe me, go outside and see for yourself!" It was too late. All across Belgium and the Netherlands, Bodenplatte was going in with thunderclap surprise.

Johnnie Johnson was stunned to see Me-109s swooping down from the west, blazing away at a section ready for takeoff, led by 416's Squadron Leader Dave Harling. Eleven Spitfires trailed Harling on the runway. The German gunfire tore up three planes behind Harling, but he took off, throttle wide open. He soon had a German in his sights. But Unteroffizier Heinz Gehrke of III/JG 26 had a bead on Harling and sneaked in behind the Spitfire, shredding it with cannon fire. Harling's plane crashed into a house, killing him, but not the occupants.

Oberleutenant Wilhelm Hofmann's squadron hit the airfield with discipline. Gefreiter Werner Molge chewed up the Canadian flak, making four passes over the base through increasingly thick smoke before heading home alone. Unteroffizier Norbert Risky was less

P-47 Thunderbolts of the 365th Fighter Bomber Group take off from a forward airbase on a mission to strafe German motorized transports. Tactical air support provided by the Ninth Air Force proved invaluable during the offensive in Western Europe.

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lucky. He took a flak hit and crash-landed behind his own lines.

At Brussels-Grimbergen, Gabsewicz and his adjutant watched the incoming planes, assuming they were an early morning patrol. But Gabsewicz's adjutant shouted, "They're bloody Focke-Wulfs." Gabsewicz leaped away from his coffee and marshaled the base's airmen to man the antiaircraft guns.

Major Karl Borris's I/JG 26 swooped down on the base, quickly wrecking the four B-17s, a P-51, and a Mosquito. But Gabsewicz's men shot down JG 54 Feldwebel Gunther Egli, making him crash right on the field. Egli survived, as did pilot Hans-Joachim Werner, who bailed out.

The Brussels-Grimbergen raid was a pointless flop. The Luftwaffe wrecked one B-17 and one P-51, two hangars, 12 trucks, and two fuel tankers and killed one man. I/JG 26 lost 12 planes. III/JG 54 did even worse, losing 10 of 17 FW-190s. Leutnant Theo Nibel had to make a belly landing when his FW-190's engine quit, but the cause was not Canadian gunfire. A partridge had slammed into his radiator.

While Nibel survived to tell his tale, other Luftwaffe pilots died. Among the German pilots killed was Heinz Wodarczyk, Pips Priller's faithful wingman.

Lieutenant Colonel Meyer was just taking off from Asch when he saw flak bursts all around him and Gefreiter Gerhardt Bohm's FW-190 from JG 11 flying right at him. Bohm was intent on shooting up five parked C-47 transports, but Meyer hit the firing button first. His 23rd kill was his first while taking off.

When JG 2 hit the American base at St. Trond-Brustem, the pilots got a warm reception from the antiaircraft gunner protecting the 48th and 404th Fighter Groups' P-47s. Fuming muzzles brought down 10 German aircraft. Unteroffizieren (Sergeants) Adolf Redlich and Helmet Bollwerk were both killed. Leutnant Werner Edelhoff bailed out and landed in a field facing angry American airmen brandishing m-1 carbines.

Less than a dozen P-47s fell to German strafing at St. Trond-Brustem, but the Luftwaffe lost 15 JG 2 aircraft flying to the base. In the battle, JG 2 lost 21 more pilots, killed, missing, or captured. JG 4, which had gotten lost and stumbled across the field, made one pass and lost only Wegner's plane in the action, but four pilots overall.

The attack on Woensdrecht was also a failure. The pilots of I/JG 77 thought the airfield was Antwerp-Deurne, swooped in, and found the airfield fogged in. They headed back to Dortmund without firing a shot.

The real Antwerp-Deurne got a visit from 12 Me-109s of III/JG 77. They stormed in at 150 feet over the Scheldt Canal, greeted only by ground flak. With the airfield still iced over, the planes could not take off. Flight Lt. Stan Eaton of 257 Typhoon Squadron watched the disorganized groups of Me-109s swoop down in gaggles.

The Antwerp-Deurne gunners fired off 1,270 rounds of ammunition at 30 Me-109s. The Germans lost six pilots killed, four missing, and four captured. Damage to the British was slight—three Typhoons destroyed, several damaged, along with a B-17 and C-47 damaged.

At the RAF maintenance depot at Maldegem, I/JG and III/JG 1 had better luck. Seventeen freshly repaired Spitfires were lined up in a row, guarded only by two stationary 20mm guns and two Vickers machine guns. Ihlefeld's fighters swooped down and set 11 of the Spitfires on fire in a matter of minutes and damaged two more. Three Me-109s were shot down.

At nearby Bruges, Flight Lt. Bob Fowler and his pals woke up in the Cornet D'Or Hotel and saw "the best close-up view of a German fighter flown by a German pilot" he had in the whole war. Fowler and FO Norm Powell hopped in a truck to head for Maldegem and their Ansons.

Another maintenance shop, at Ursel, faced three FW-190s of I/JG 1. The Germans thought the 424 RAF Rearming and Refueling Unit was a brand-new squadron of Spitfires. When they swooped in, a corporal asked Sergeant Peter Crowest for permission to fire his sten gun at the Germans. "Stay under cover, you stupid bastard!" Crowest retorted.

The swooping Germans were stunned to find

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ABOVE: Second Lieutenant Melvin B. Paisley (left) and Second Lieutenant John J. Kennedy examine pieces of a Luftwaffe plane knocked out over Belgium in Operation Bodenplatte.
OPPOSITE: Caught by the gun camera of an attacking Allied fighter, the pilot of a stricken German plane tumbles from his cockpit before the machine goes into a death spiral.

no Spitfires parked on the strip, but they blasted open the damaged Mosquito that Ed Green was supposed to check on. Had Green not stopped to check his truck's mileage before working on the battered plane, he would have gone up in the fireball.

Next, the fighters stitched up the American B-17 being repaired along with two Lancaster bombers. The Americans busy repairing the B-17 were actually relieved. Their job was finally over. Of the four German planes sent to attack Ursel, two survived.

At St. Denis-Westram, 302 Polish Squadron was just landing, tanks nearly dry, from its morning strike when II/JG 1 swooped in. Flak gunners opened fire and brought down a Spitfire. The FW-190s of II/JG 1 stitched up nine more planes parked on the ground, but missed the rest of the landing planes.

The 308 Squadron was in the circuit when II/JG 1 arrived. Flight Lt. Walclaw Chojnacki's first thought was to jettison his hung-up bomb, but the tower ordered him to return to base. Chojnacki flew back and lowered his wheels just as three FW-190s appeared in front of him. Chojnacki hit the retract button on his landing gear and the firing button on his control stick, blasting off the tail of the rear FW-190 from 800 yards away. Meanwhile, three more FW-190s jumped Chojnacki and ripped his plane apart. Chojnacki's plane plunged into the ground and exploded, killing him.

Other Poles tore into the Germans with their usual tenacity. Even though he was short on fuel, Flight Sergeant Josef Stanowski confronted the planes attacking St. Denis Westram and shot down an FW-190 right away. He saw another one and attacked. Amazingly, the German pilot, probably poorly trained and hitting the wrong button, lowered his wheels. Stanowski took advantage of his enemy's slower speed and confusion to fire another burst. The FW-190 hurtled into the town center and exploded.

THE 317 POLISH SQUADRON ARRIVED

at St. Denis-Westram to find its base blazing and the 308 Squadron engaged. The 317 Squadron Leader, Marian Chelmecki, led his men into attack and saw an FW-190 get on Lieutenant Czeslaw Mroczyk's tail. Chelmecki pulled between the FW-190 and Mroczyk, forcing the German off. Chelmecki climbed into the sun, saw another FW-190, and fired on it at 400 yards. The FW-190 smashed into a small building in flames, right in front of 302 Squadron's intelligence officer, Flight Lt. Jan Bendix.

All across The Netherlands and Belgium the air battle continued to rage. Nine FW-190s, one Me-109, and a lone Me-262 managed to find their target at Volkel, making half-hearted passes at 122 Wing's Tempests lining up for takeoff. FO Bob Adcock and Bill Bailey watched bullets hit the ground around them but miss their aircraft. The Germans perforated a few Tempests but lost six pilots killed or missing, and one prisoner, in the Volkel raid.

By comparison, JG 27's attack on Brussels-Melsbroek went off beautifully despite heavy flak. On the first pass, Hauptmann Hans-Heinz Dudeck's IV/JG 27 pilots blasted the Stirling bomber Wing Commander Mike Shaw was scheduled to flight test, much to Shaw's relief. Also blasted were a 140 Squadron Mosquito and Coningham's personal transport.

Down below, Flight Lt. Hugh Tudor heard a buddy yell, "Christ! Look at those Hurricanes!" Tudor glanced at the incoming machines and retorted, "Hurricanes be buggered—they're 109s!"

Tudor and Flight Lt. Ian Ewing ran back into the mess and the officers' quarters to get everyone out and into the air raid shelters. Six of 10 antiaircraft guns were out of action, but the rest, joined by bren guns, opened up. They had some success. Hauptmann Heinz Dudeck led IV/JG 27 in to attack, and when he pulled out his engine died. From 500 meters up, he bailed out. The parachute caught on the plane's tail and tore. He landed in a tree and was taken prisoner.

The III/JG 27 and III/JG 3 were just as tough at Gilze-Reijen, catching 35 Reconnaissance Wing's Typhoons just as the pilots had arrived at the airfield in trucks. RCAF Flight Lt. Bill Baggs jumped straight from his truck and wrecked his new, clean uniform in a puddle of muddy water.

By now, some of the British were beginning to recover from the shock and impact. At Heesch, FO Doug Cameron of 401 Squadron led his pals to attack the oncoming Me-109s. He blasted open the oxygen tank of the tail Me-109 of one gaggle, sending it crashing into a field with a large explosion. Then he gunned down the group's leader. After checking his "six," he saw an Me-109 orbiting 1,000 yards away, lost. Cameron swooped in and put bullets into its engine. The Me-109 turned toward home. The German plane lost height and smacked into a field on its belly.

The Heesch defenders did well. Flight Lt. Johnny MacKay shot down one Me-109, then headed for Nijmegen where he saw a Tempest chase an FW-190. The German swung round on the Tempest's tail, so MacKay jumped behind the FW-190, closing to 30 yards behind the German. The FW-190 pilot panicked, did some flick rolls, and struck his port wing on a frozen lake. MacKay pulled out and headed

home. An Me-109 was in his path. MacKay slammed down on the deck, playing a game of chicken with the German, and the German did not blink. He hit some trees and the Me-109 broke apart.

Another Heesch defender, Flight Lt. D.C. "Chunky" Gordon of 442 Squadron, took several shrapnel wounds in his back from friendly fire after shooting down two German planes. He crash-landed outside the airfield and carefully emerged from the plane. Flight Lt. R.C. "Jack" Smith found himself amid 10 enemy planes. He expended his ammo, then flew back to Heesch, running out of gas as he approached and making a perfect dead-stick landing. In all, 126 Wing shot down 24 planes—a new record for one day of air combat.

Other pilots were less lucky. Squadron Leader Pete Wilson, the new boss of 438 Squadron, and his wingman, FO Ron Keller, started taking off in their Typhoons from Eindhoven (B-78) as JG 3's FW-190s and Me-109s swooped in, guns blazing. A bullet hit Wilson in the stomach. He managed to throttle back, pull his plane off the runway, and climb out of the cockpit before collapsing. Keller, however, was caught by an FW-190 while taking off, and the German's bullets exploded Keller's Typhoon.

The rest of 438 Squadron did not even get airborne. PO Don Campbell was in his Typhoon cockpit when German bullets ripped open his plane, rendering it immobile. While Campbell took cover in his cockpit, FO Bill Beatty, in the Typhoon right behind, maneuvered his plane off the runway, jumped out of his cockpit, and into a foxhole, landing on an airman. Two more airmen landed on Beatty.

At 138 Squadron's dispersal, FO Bob Spooner sent everyone underground, but he and Flight Sgt. Ron Large set up a bren gun and fired at the attackers. An FW-190 came in close. Spooner could see the pilot looking down at them. The bren gun's bullets started knocking pieces off the plane, and it crashed on the runway.

For 440 Squadron, it was the same thing. Pilots abandoned their planes and hit the dirt. FO Ed Flanagan's goggles saved his eyes from being cut up by broken glass when a bullet hit his instrument panel's gauges. He took more bullets in his thighs as he climbed out and managed to walk to safety at the control tower despite the additional burden of his parachute.

Flight Lieutenant Ernie Savard, on the runway when the Germans arrived, spun his Typhoon around so that his armor plating was between him and the German bullets. Meanwhile, he struggled to disconnect his radio and oxygen mask but did not have enough time. In came German planes straight ahead on a strafing run. Savard fired on them, ducking low. The Germans shot past, and Savard finally got out of his plane, running across frozen ground to find protection in an old shell hole, where he also found an airman, hit by a bullet, dying.

Destruction continued to rain down on Eindhoven. Flight Lt. Jim Prendergast of 430 Squadron was in line for takeoff. He glanced back to see if any planes were in the circuit and saw more than 15 yellow-nosed Me-109s zooming in, guns belching fire. Prendergast's Spitfire was hit. His plane was trapped, so he turned it around and shot back with his cannon. Then, he saw the ground crew that had been guiding him to the takeoff point still sitting on the wings. He waved them off, and all three ran into piles of snow to hide.

Flying Officer Gordon Hill, ready to flight

National Archives

test his newly repaired Spitfire, found his plane had been shot up. FO Phil Macklem, ready to fly back to England after his tour, took an Me-262's shrapnel in his shoulder, which delayed his return for two days. Squadron Leader Hart Massey, son of future Canadian Governor-General Vincent Massey and nephew of famed actor Raymond Massey, walked out of his trailer to see the action. The 439 Squadron intelligence officer, Massey was understandably amazed. He hit the dirt but still took wounds in his head, chest, and rump.

Airman Ron Norris was hit by cannon fire and died the next day. Flight Sgt. Reginald Bazley took a bullet in the hand. Another NCO ran off to get a first aid box. By the time he got back, Bazley was dead. Airman Desmond Shepherd did not move as bullets whizzed through the grass. Then, an empty German 20mm shell landed on his forage cap.

Overhead, pilot Friedrich Hameister, on his first mission, shot up a fuel tanker and twin-engine plane on the ground and shot down a Spitfire in the air that had just shot down an Me-109. Moments later, another Spitfire shot up Hameister's Me-109. He miraculously landed the burning plane in a field. After aimlessly wandering around The Netherlands for the rest of the day, he was caught sleeping in a haystack.

At the height of the battle, the phone rang in 127 Wing's operations trailer at the end of the Brussels-Evere runway. Lieutenant Frank Minton heard a voice shouting, "Large gaggles of Huns near your airfield! Get your Spits off!"

Minton replied, "You're too late. If I stick this phone outside, you'll hear their bloody cannons!" Still, the trailer crew stayed at their posts and ordered their airborne sections to return to base at top speed.

At Asch, Lt. Col. Meyer of the U.S. 352nd Group had one kill this day so far. Now he chased an FW-190 to Liege and sent it crashing. Out of ammunition, he streaked for home.

Home was under attack, but the other American pilots were fighting back. Lieutenant Melvin Paisley fired three of his antitank rockets at an Me-109, nailing his target with the third.

At St. Denis-Westram, the 308th Polish Squadron, a highly trained outfit that, like other Polish squadrons, liked the point-blank attack, charged into battle. Flight Sgt. Zygmunt Socyzinski shot down a German plane at 100 yards. Flight Lt. Bronislaw Mach did the same to an FW-190, sending it into the Scheldt River. Short on fuel, Flight Sgt. Josef Stanowski headed back for base, saw Untertoffizier Karl Hahn's FW-190, and shot it down. Then, again at 100 yards, he shot up II/JG 1's commander, Hauptmann Hans-Georg Hackbarth. The German plane slammed into the back of a Ghent flower shop, hurling the flier's dead body into the street. PO Andrezj Dromlewicz topped them all. He shot up an FW-190 at 30 yards, blasting off the plane's starboard wing.

Unteroffizier Fritz Hoffmann also bailed out at the hands of Flight Lt. Czeslaw Mroczyk, the second time Hoffmann had to hit the silk. This time Hoffmann landed amid Dutch civilians and police, who beat him severely.

All across the Western Front, Allied planes returning from morning strikes were vectored in to attack the German planes. Flight Sgt. Maurice Rose of 3 Squadron was flying a Tempest when he picked up a JG 6 Me-109 at 200 yards ahead. He closed to 100 yards before he ran out of ammunition, but the Me-109 would not crash. Rose shouted into his radio for anyone with ammo to come in and pick up the kill. Then, the Me-109 pulled up vertically to 1,500 feet, rolled over on its back, and the pilot,

The Marshall Plan fueled the economic recovery of post-war Europe.

IT WAS INDEED AN UNPRECEDENTED EFFORT TO RAISE A CONTINENT FROM THE DEVASTATION OF a horrific world war, and ironically, the idea belonged to a career soldier.

George C. Marshall, Secretary of State in the administration of President Harry S. Truman, had already been acknowledged as an outstanding administrator. It had been General Marshall who expanded the U.S. Army from a feeble 175,000 in 1939 to 1.4 million in 1941 and eventually a staggering strength of eight million to face the Axis onslaught. As a member of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, he had been the principal military advisor to President Franklin D. Roosevelt and attended every major conference between Allied leaders during World War II.

During World War II, Marshall, a Pennsylvanian who had graduated from the Virginia Military Institute and served in the Army during the Philippine Insurrection and World War I, performed something of a dual role. He participated in major military decisions while also contributing to the stability of a sometimes tenuous relationship between the United States, Great Britain, and the Soviet Union. Undoubtedly, his organizational and diplomatic skills hastened the defeats of both Nazi Germany and Imperial Japan.

Many had speculated that Marshall himself would lead the Allied invasion of Normandy, but Roosevelt deemed his presence in Washington, D.C., to be too important to the war effort and General Dwight D. Eisenhower was chosen for the job. In December 1944, Marshall was promoted to the rank of General of the Army, becoming on of only a select few military men to achieve five star rank. During his illustrious career, Marshall also served as Secretary of Defense and was twice named *Time* magazine's Man of the Year.

In the wake of the war, the European economy lay devastated. Starvation and despair stalked the continent, and the inevitable clash of political ideologies loomed. When Marshall, now a civilian, stood before the graduating class of Harvard University on June 5, 1947, he chose to outline a bold initiative which would be offered "not against any country or doctrine, but against hunger, poverty, desperation and chaos."

Marshall went on to describe what he called the European Recovery Program. However, it would forever be known as the Marshall Plan. A total of $13 billion in aid to European countries would stimulate the recovery of industry, feed the hungry, and foster political stability. Over the course of the next five years, at any given time as many as 150 ships were en route from the United States or unloading at ports of entry along the coastline of Europe. The ships carried machinery, raw materials, and foodstuffs. All the countries of Europe were invited to participate in the plan, including the Soviet Union — which declined.

Aside from the humanitarian nature of the Marshall Plan, its pragmatic architect also realized that the coming of the ideological standoff between East and West clearly defined the necessity of solidifying spheres of influence around the globe. In gaining the support of the American people, spearheading the necessary legislation through Congress, and championing the eradication of human suffering, Marshall effectively stemmed the tide of communism in Europe. He also facilitated the rebuilding of markets to consume American goods and laid the foundation for the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) and collective defense.

In 1953, largely due to the formulation and delivery of his European relief program, Marshall became the first soldier ever awarded the Nobel Peace Prize. He died on October 16, 1959.

Few men in history have proven themselves so capable in both war and peace as George C. Marshall. As time marches beyond the observance of the 60th anniversary of the end of World War II, we would do well to mark the coming anniversary of the Marshall Plan, the blueprint for peace, freedom, and eventual victory in the Cold War. □

Michael E. Haskew

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Colonel Ray J. Stecker, commander of the 365th Fighter Bomber Group (second from right), examines a map with pilots on the battlefield.

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Unteroffizier Rudolf Schlosshorn, bailed out while his plane crashed in a ball of fire.

The 56 Squadron's Tempests were coming back from their strike on Paderborn and found their home at Volkel under attack. PO Dave Ness and Harold "Artie" Shaw poured bullets into an Me-109's engine until it belched black smoke. Too low to bail out, the Me-109 pilot tried to force land but instead the plane hit the ground wheels up, tore through a row of trees, and flipped on its back before breaking apart.

Squadron Leader Gordie Wonnacott was bringing his 414 Typhoon Squadron back to Eindhoven from a reconnaissance sweep when he found the airfield under attack. He missed his first Me-109 but closed to 10 yards on another one and saw the pilot jettison his cockpit canopy and bail out. Wonnacott streaked over to an FW-190, which pulled up in a loop near the ground. Wonnacott kept on his enemy and opened fire from 250 yards. As the FW-190 flamed, three more pounced on Wonnacott. He kept his cool, whirled back, and shot down one of the three. The other two peeled off. Ammunition and one cannon gone, Wonnacott landed his plane, gaining credit for three kills and an immediate bar to his Distinguished Flying Cross.

Flying Officer Hugh Fraser of 439 Squadron, returning to Eindhoven, shot down an FW-190 from 50 yards away. It crashed next to a windmill. Flight Lt. George Clubley and PO Don Martyn of 137 Squadron teamed up to shoot down a lumbering Heinkel He-111 bomber. Pilot Doug Lindsay of 403 Squadron, at Brussels-Evere, shot up Unteroffizier Wilhelm Schultz's FW-190, sending it smashing into trees. Ground crewmen found the German pilot's decapitated body by the wreckage.

Flight Lieutenants Dave Mercer and John Lyke of 268 Squadron saw a German attack force heading for their base at Gilze-Reijen (B-77), and swooped in to attack the three Ju-88 guides. Mercer warned "Longbow" of the incoming Germans, then sent a Ju-88 crashing into a clump of trees in a ball of fire. Both pilots streaked off before the FW-190s behind it could pounce on them.

At Gilze-Reijen, six Arado 234 jet bombers from Staffel 9/KG 76 and 12 piston-driven Me-109s and FW-190s from JGD 3 hit "Longbow," perhaps the first joint jet and propeller air attack in history. The British defenders were not impressed. Flight Lt. Bill Baggs said, "There didn't seem to be any teamwork. Each fighter seemed to go in individually. It was as if they'd got lost and didn't quite know what to do next."

He was right. The Germans attacked with ample determination and firepower, but their tactics were a far cry from the ruthlessly efficient teams of 1940. At Eindhoven, Flight Lt. Ed MacKay of 438 Squadron reported, "Some of the attackers were skilled, but others were obviously not. The latter pulled up after shooting instead of escaping at high speed on the deck to avoid flak. They circled almost leisurely to select a target, and one Me-109's pilot at about 1,500 feet, midfield, seemed to be sightseeing. A Spit seemed to casually close in behind him and opened fire; he just drifted into the ground and exploded."

The 127 Wing Cmdr. Johnnie Johnson, Britain's top ace, was unimpressed with the German attack on Brussels-Evere. The Germans tore up Prince Bernhard's Beechcraft, but their shooting was "atrocious and the circuit at Evere reminded us more of a bunch of beginners on their first solos than pilots of frontline squadrons. Not one Spitfire should have remained undamaged at Evere."

Still, the battle raged on. Rules were jettisoned under the bombardment. At Heesch (B-88), 500-pound bombs were removed from Spitfires, even though they were armed and fused, so they would not add to the chaos. While machine guns and cannon sprayed the field, Armorer Cecil "Smokey" Mann calmly went from plane to plane, hitting the electronic bomb-release buttons, while crews below had carts ready to roll the bombs out of the way of the Spitfires.

Up above Heesch, Flight Lt. Dick Audet, who had become an ace in one day on New Year's Eve, added to his bag with another FW-190. Down below, the pilots of 412 Squadron, free of their bombs, roared down the runway and into action, finding themselves amid 30 FW-190s. Lieutenant Bruce MacPherson saw Volkel Tempests fighting German FW-190s and zoomed in to help. He sent an FW-190 scurrying into the clouds for cover but kept up a stream of fire. Before heading back, MacPherson saw the German bail out.

Some people were still being caught by surprise. FO Bill Roddie, walking back to Brussels-Evere from a night with the girl he met in the Brussels dance hall the previous evening, saw an aircraft skimming the rooftops. Roddie's reaction was personal, thinking that if his bosses caught that pilot, Roddie would be "off the hook as orderly officer." Then, Roddie saw another identical plane, with its black crosses, and heard gunfire from the base.

The Americans were fighting with typical national gusto at Asch, but having their surprises, too. Captain William "Whiz" Whisner wondered why his guns did not fire on the Me-109 in his P-51's sights. Then he realized he had not turned on his gun switch. Finally, Whisner saw his guns send the Me-109 blasting into the ground. A passing Me-109 tore holes in Whisner's P-51, damaging the oil tank and left aileron, but Whisner saw no reason to head home. He swooped into a dogfight and shredded an FW-190, sending it into the ground before the pilot could bail out. Next, he spotted several Me-109s and got behind one. After a five-minute dogfight, the Me-109 pilot bailed out, but Whisner shot holes in the parachute.

Still not done, Whisner headed back to Asch and found another Me-109 turning into him. The two fighters made head-on passes at each other, and Whisner sent the German crashing into a field. That was it for Whisner. Leaking oil was covering his vision.

His was not the only hat trick over Asch that busy morning. Lieutenant Alden Riby nailed three FW-190s and shared in an Me-109. Lieutenant Henry Stewart nailed three Me-109s. In a fine show of Allied cooperation, Australian Flight Lt. Tony Gaze of 510 Squadron brought in his four-man patrol to help out. Gaze shot down an FW-190, but two American P-51s jumped on him, mistaking his Spitfire for an Me-109. Luckily, the Americans saw Gaze's RAF roundels and did no harm.

One attack remained, Metz-Frescaty (Y-34), the lone French target. The "Ace of Spades" JG 53 Me-109s zoomed in at treetop height, and the Americans initially thought they were British Spitfires or American P-51s. Sergeant George Wasson of the 386th Fighter Squadron was smoking a cigarette with Sergeant John Lehnert when they saw the Germans come in. Wasson thought they were American P-51s showing off. Lehnert yelled, "They're Germans! Watch out!" Both dived into a shellhole, as did several others who were exposed.

All sought cover except Sergeant Dave Hutchins, who was seated on the outdoor latrine reading the *Stars and Stripes* when he heard machine guns. Without hesitation, he dived into the latrine. From the muck, he watched 16 Me-109s coming straight for him. Major George Brookhart, the 386th's commander, was sitting in the officers' latrine. He alertly dived into a snowbank, pants hanging around his ankles.

Corporal Irving Wassermann of the 387th Fighter Squadron was towing a pair of trailers, each loaded with a dozen 500-pound bombs. He could not hear the oncoming planes but saw bullets stitch up the ground. He leaped into a foxhole and watched a passing Me-109. As he took cover, he remembered that it was his 21st birthday.

JG 53 "Ace of Hearts" hurled only two-thirds of its Me-109s at Metz-Frescaty, but those that made it got a warm welcome. An antiaircraft gun smashed a German cockpit, and the Me-109 smacked into the runway, rolling along the tarmac and hurling the pilot's body away from the plane. Two ground gunners ran out and grabbed the pilot's boots as souvenirs. Another Me-109 provided gruesome souvenirs. The plane crashed and decapitated the pilot, but a ground crewman coolly unfastened the pilot's wristwatch.

On the other hand, Oberfeldwebel Stefan Kohl, on his first mission since being hospitalized in August, was luckier. The ground fire of .50-caliber machine guns riddled his Me-109, so he bailed out over the French hamlet of Marly. American troops hauled him to Metz-Frescaty for interrogation and found Kohl "cocky and insolent." A fluent English speaker, Kohl refused to be photographed until he had combed his hair and shined his boots.

Nobody was killed at Metz-Frescaty, but Corporal Emanuel Catanuto gained a Soldier's Medal by rescuing Corporal Lee Weldon from a blazing P-47 and dragging him away from it 30 seconds before it exploded. Catanuto had already won a Bronze Star and Silver Star serving with the 45th Infantry Division two weeks earlier, before his transfer to the Army Air Forces came through.

Other defenders at Metz-Frescaty were equally brave. Staff Sgt. John Lawless and Sergeant Olin Holcomb ignored enemy strafing, grabbed fire extinguishers, and doused a burning bombed-up P-47 before it exploded. Staff Sgt. Gordon Hurt and two pals powered up a P-47 next to a burning fuel truck and drove the plane away from the inferno. All received Soldier's Medals.

Abruptly, the attacks subsided. All across Belgium and The Netherlands, German FW-190s and Me-109s pulled up from their targets, struggled back into formations where possible, and headed east to the Fatherland. The trip home was not easy. Feldwebel Werner Hohenberg of JG 2, a 200-mission veteran returning from St. Trond, was shot down by antiaircraft guns and pancaked in a field. JG 2 counted 33 pilots lost, 23 of them killed or missing, 10 prisoners, and four wounded. That was nearly 40 percent of JG 2's strength. Their attack on St. Trond-Brustem, by comparison, had destroyed only two P-47s and damaged 14—with no human casualties. All the damaged P-47s were ready to fly in two days.

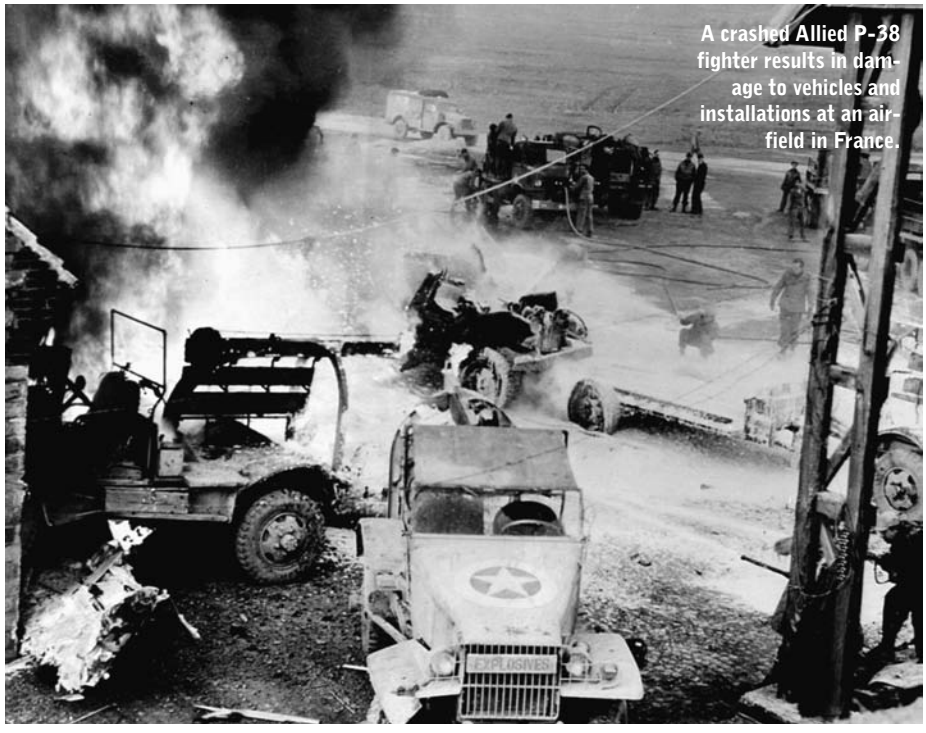
JG 6 had suffered an equal disaster at Heesch, 24 planes lost—a record for the opposing 126 Wing in a single day's combat. The Germans had shot down three Spitfires and put a single bomb hole in the roof of 411 Squadron's dispersal. JG 26 and JG 54 had done badly at Brussels-Grimbergen, too. JG 26 lost 12 planes, and III/JG 54 lost 10 of its 17 pilots. On the way home, III/JG 54 ran into British Spitfires, which shot down five FW-190s, including Hauptmann Willi Bottlander, the squadron leader. The airfield, by comparison, had lost one B-17 and one P-51. The Luftwaffe also blasted two hangars, 12 motor transports, and two fuel tankers, while killing one airman.

JG 11 counted 23 planes and 42 pilots, 40 percent of its strength, lost to Asch's American defenders, including its commander, Oberstleutnant Gunther Specht, and Hauptmann Horst von Fassong, who commanded III/JG 11. In return, the Germans had slightly damaged four P-51s. Not one American plane fell in combat, and the Americans did not suffer a single casualty. For the feat, the 478th Fighter Squadron received a unit citation.

JG 1 headed home having lost 24 pilots, 12

A P-47 Thunderbolt burns on a Belgian runway. Although Operation Bodenplatte did catch the Allies by surprise, the operation would ultimately be disastrous for Hitler.

National Archives



A crashed Allied P-38 fighter results in damage to vehicles and installations at an airfield in France.

National Archives

killed, six captured, one wounded, and five missing—one-third of its strength. These pilots did destroy 25 Spitfires at St. Denis-Westram, the American B-17, and the Stirling awaiting Mike Shaw's test flight, but JG 1 commander Herbert Ihlefeld was enraged. He considered the operation a total waste.

The attack on Volkel had been a disaster, too. JG 6 lost 32 fighters, including its commander, Oberstleutnant Johann Kogler. Hauptmann Ewald Trost, the commander of I/JG 6, was shot down and taken prisoner, while Major Helmut Kuhle, commander of III/JG 6, was killed.

Things went little better for the Luftwaffe at St. Denis-Westram, where five of JG 1's most experienced fighter pilots were killed. JG 1 lost 19 pilots. The defending Poles suffered only two deaths, Flight Lts. Walclaw Chojnacki and Taduez Powierza, both from 308 Squadron. Some 25 Spitfires, one Stirling, and a B-17 were destroyed.

Gilze-Reijen was another Luftwaffe failure. One Typhoon was destroyed, another damaged, one Anson and a P-51 shot up, and seven airmen wounded. The Luftwaffe lost five pilots and five planes, including an Arado 234 jet.

Heesch was a botched attack, too. JG 6 shot down three Spitfires, but two of the 126 RCAF Wing pilots walked away and the third suffered minor injuries. In return, the Canadians shot down 24 German aircraft, which included 10 officers, three squadron leaders, and the JG commander, Oberstleutnant Johann Kogler. Both Kogler and squadron leader Hauptmann Ewald Trost were taken prisoner. The only damage to the base was a hole in the roof of the 411 Squadron dispersal hut.

Le Culot (A-89), home to the 36th U.S. Fighter Group, had the easiest time of all. The airfield was the target for JG 4, and the squadron's Ju-88 pathfinder was shot down right away. The 60 fighter pilots got lost, scattering around the Western Front. Half of their planes did not return.

Some attacks had been highly successful. At Eindhoven, a number of Allied aircraft were lost. An entire squadron of Typhoons was written off. In all, Eindhoven lost 50 Typhoons, 20 Spitfires, 11 Wellingtons, two Ansons, two Austers, and a B-17. Five pilots and 40 members of the ground crew were killed. More than 145 men were wounded. JG 3, which hit the base, lost 22 pilots out of 70 attacking. While engineers got the runways clear by midafternoon, it was not until mid-January that things were back to normal at Eindhoven.

JG 26's attack on Brussels-Evere was also fairly successful, destroying 11 Spitfires, Prince Bernhard's Beechcraft, Field Marshal Montgomery's C-47, and 11 motor transports for a loss of 20 pilots. Brussels-Grimbergen was less impressive, one B-17 and one P-51 destroyed for a loss of 13 pilots.

Gefreiter Werner Molge, streaking home, got separated from his buddies and overshot his base at Nordhorn. On his last fuel, he landed at III/JG 6's airfield. A half-track towed the FW-190 off the runway. The base had no fuel for his plane. They flew Me-109s, which used B4, not C3 gasoline.

Brussels-Melbroek was also a success. Thirty minutes of German strafing left 14 Wellington bombers, seven Harrow transports, six B-25s, six Mosquitos, and three Spitfires destroyed. The attackers, from JG 27 and JG 54, lost 30 planes out of 60 sent in.

Metz-Frescaty faced JG 53's attack and lost 22 P-47s and 11 more damaged. But the defending American gunners shot down 14 enemy fighters. The III/JG 53 lost all nine Me-109s in the air to American P-47 fighters. All nine pilots, including Unteroffizier Karl Goller, who rammed a P-47, were able to bail out.

Wrecked German planes and dead pilots lay all around Metz-Frescaty. Unteroffizier Herbert Maxis's remains were found a month after the raid. Feldwebel Johannes Muller succumbed to his burns in a U.S. hospital the day after the raid. Unteroffizier Hots Pechchardscheck was luckier. He got his crippled Me-109 home. After the raid, only 30 of JG 53's fighters were left serviceable, while not one American pilot suffered even a scratch.

JG 4 and JG 11 hit Ophoven (Y-32) purely by mistake, damaging seven Spitfires and wounding three men. The attackers lost seven fighters. JG 2 and JG 4 did even worse at St. Trond-Brustem (A-92), losing 15 JG 2 pilots before even reaching the target. In the battle, JG 2 lost 21 more pilots. JG 4 lost four pilots. Among the German dead was II/JG 2's boss, Hauptmann Georg Schroder, who had 108 missions under his belt, and III/JG 4's commander, Oberstleutnant Albert Druschel, who had 800 missions and a huge reputation from Russia as a ground attack ace. Germans destroyed less than a dozen P-47s and did not inflict a single casualty.

At Ursel (B-67), the final tally was JG 1's destruction of one Mosquito, one B-17, and two Lancasters, all under repair, for two FW-190s destroyed. There were no casualties.

The carefully planned attack on Volkel (B-80) by JG 6 was also a disaster for the Luftwaffe. Only a handful of German planes hit the base, damaging a few Tempests. The defending flak and 486 New Zealand Squadron took out six German pilots, including fighter wing commander Johann Kogler, and the commanders of I/JG 6 and III/JG 6, Hauptmann Ewald Trost and Major Helmut Kuhle.

Woensdrecht (B-79) was also a failure, but for both sides. JG 77 buzzed the base to no result, but the defenders did no damage. Maldegem took a beating, 11 Spitfires destroyed for a loss of three Me-109s.

At Eindhoven, the bombing was over by

10 AM, but not the explosions, as rockets and jerry cans of fuel continued to explode. RAF ground crewmen doused fires and hauled in captured Luftwaffe pilots. FO Andy Lord of 438 RCAF Squadron found a wrecked Me-109, dead pilot lying in it.

While ground crews hosed down fires, medics tended the wounded, and pilots debriefed their battles, phones were ringing at 83 Group Headquarters. Air Vice Marshal Harry Broadhurst was not going to let the German attack intimidate him. The best answer to the Germans and boost for morale would be an immediate counterpunch, and 2nd TAF's boss, Air Marshal Sir Arthur Coningham, agreed. Broadhurst ordered his senior commanders to get everyone airborne. He told the pilots to ignore radio silence and talk as much as possible.

So did General Elwood "Pete" Quesada, the boyish airman who commanded the Ninth U.S. Air Force's 9th Tactical Command. An exponent of close air support, he was angered by the German daring and reports of Nazi atrocities in the Ardennes. He quickly hurled his planes against German tanks to let the Nazis know who had air superiority. Allied fighters engaged the retreating Germans and inflicted more casualties, which the Luftwaffe could ill afford.

At the Luftwaffe's airfields, the black men waited for their pilots to return. Gradually, the surviving Me-109s and FW-190s flopped down on their bases. At Plantlunne, Hauptmann Walter "Count" Krupinski and his III/JG 26 returned, very pleased with themselves. The *gruppe* had lost only four pilots out of 29. Krupinski took his pilots to the officers' mess for a gala lunch, beginning with several rounds of schnapps.

They were the only German squadrons in a celebratory mood, despite the Berliner Morgenpost's headline the next day, which read, "A Major Success for Our Fighters." While Goebbels' controlled press spouted absurd victory claims, admin officers began ticking off the casualty bills. More than 151 Luftwaffe pilots were dead, including some of the most experienced veterans.

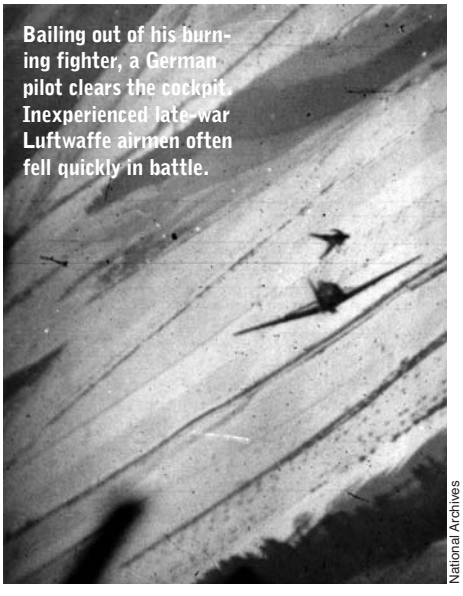
Whole Geschwaders were out of the game. JG 77 took off with more than a hundred planes. Only 30 found the target at Antwerp-Deurne. There they knocked out two planes, losing 11 pilots.

JG 26's pilots claimed they destroyed 120 planes at Brussels-Evere and Brussels-Grimbergen. In actuality, JG 26 and JG 54 destroyed 13 planes at Brussels-Evere and two more at Brussels-Grimbergen, losing 33 pilots. Only seven of the 17 JG 54 planes that attacked Brussels-Grimbergen returned to base.

JG 4 lost 17 pilots out of 60. Major Gerhard Michalski had told his pilots before the raid that if they did not carry out the mission with determination he would send them back to finish the job. Now, studying the casualty lists, he realized he could not do so. The Luftwaffe had suffered one of the most catastrophic defeats in its history.

THE ALLIED AIRMEN HAD A SIMPLE name for Bodenplatte. They called "The Hangover Raid," connecting it to New Year's Day and the effects of too much celebration. In a short time, they had more to celebrate. Lt. Gen. Carl "Tooey" Spaatz, Maj. Gen. Hoyt Vandenberg, and Brig. Gen. Pete Quesada descended upon Asch and passed out medals and handshakes to airmen and ground crews.

Also celebrating was Reichsmarshal Hermann Göring, who presented the Bodenplatte strike to Hitler as a complete success, showing the Luftwaffe's determination in the face of catastrophe. The fraudulent claims were soon obvious. The retreat from the Bulge was continuing, and so were Allied air attacks on the front lines.



Bailing out of his burning fighter, a German pilot clears the cockpit. Inexperienced late-war Luftwaffe airmen often fell quickly in battle.

National Archives

On January 14, Allied fighters shot down 184 more German aircraft. Black Sunday put the Luftwaffe out of business. The next day, Hitler left Adlerhorst to return to Berlin with the Bulge offensive, a total disaster, and Soviet tanks advancing on the Oder River.

Peltz was fired as boss of what was left of Jagdkorps 2; it was academic now, anyway. There were plenty of planes left for the Luftwaffe to fly, but few pilots and even less aviation gas. The Luftwaffe had to yank 221 pilots from the overtaxed Eastern Front to replace their Western losses.

Bodenplatte's bottom line was harsh—300 planes destroyed, 85 of them shot down by German flak; 151 pilots killed or missing; 63 taken prisoner. Among those killed or missing, two JG commanders, 14 Gruppe commanders, and 64 squadron commanders, the heart and soul of the Luftwaffe's fighter command.

By comparison, the Allies lost about 300 aircraft on the airfields, and 70 more in dogfights overhead. While the material losses were great, very few pilots and ground crewmen died in the attacks, with only 40 killed and 145 wounded, 11 of the dead being pilots. The efficient Allied supply system replaced the lost aircraft, ground crews repaired the battered buildings and shoveled wreckage off the runways, and victorious pilots got back to work or got new mounts.

Flying Officer Ed Flanagan of RCAF Squadron 440 recovered from his wounds in a month and got his wedding leave 30 days later. On February 10, he married his fiancée, Renee Taylor, at Colgar Parish Church in Yorkshire. They remained together until his death 50 years later.

At Metz-Frescaty in France, Major George Brooking, the U.S. 386th Fighter Squadron's commanding officer, who had been rudely bounced off the latrine by Bodenplatte, kept checking on his captive: the arrogant Oberfeldwebel Stefan Kohl. The Luftwaffe pilot had spent the afternoon of January 1 and all of January 2 sneering at the wrecked P-47 Thunderbolts on the tarmac.

"What do you think of that?" Kohl would sneer at his captor each time, pointing at the wrecked planes and twisted aluminum. Brooking resisted the urge to punch Kohl in the nose.

Now, on January 4, Brooking brought Kohl to his office and told Kohl to look out the window. The wrecked planes were gone. Out on the flight line stood 10 new Thunderbolts, fresh from American factories and, gleaming in the winter sunshine.

"What do you think about that?" Brooking asked, pointing.

Kohl stared at the planes, then at the floor, and then turned to Brooking, his voice quieter and thoughtful. "That is why you are beating us," Kohl said.□

Author David H. Lippman writes a day-by-day history of World War II for a Web page from his Newark, N.J., home. He is a veteran of the U.S. Navy.

WHEN THE SS *PRESIDENT COOLIDGE* STRUCK TWO MINES OFF ESPIRITO SANTO, OVER 5,000 MEN HAD TO ESCAPE OR GO DOWN WITH THE SHIP. BY KEVIN HYMEL

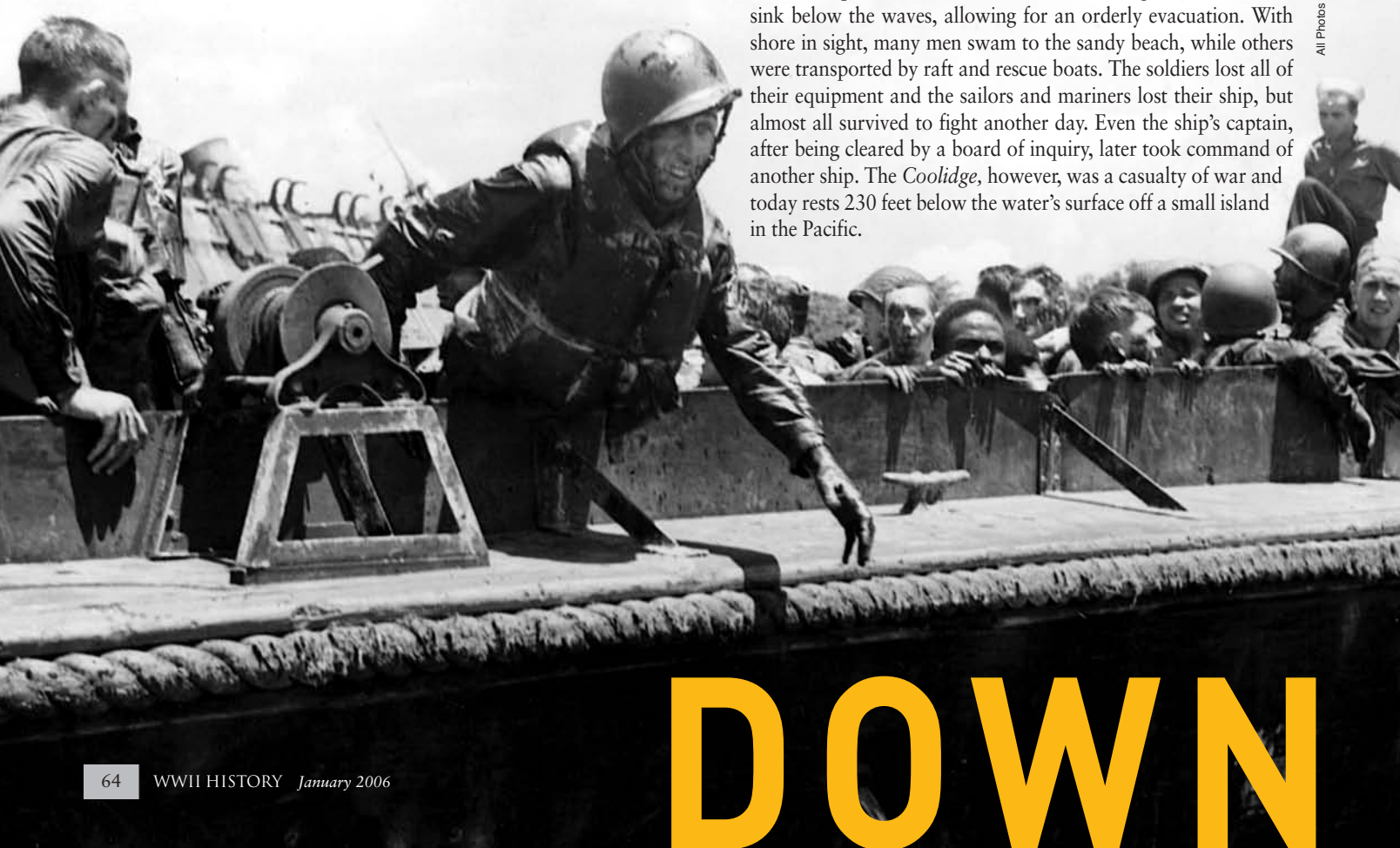
THE COOLIDGE GOES DOWN

IT WAS SUPPOSED TO BE A ROUTINE DELIVERY OF soldiers to the battlefields of Guadalcanal—but nothing in war is ever routine. On October 23, 1942, the SS *President Coolidge,* a luxury liner pressed into service as a troop transport, was heading into the Second Channel of Epirito Santo Island when a signal station on shore flashed a morse code warning: STOP.

The ship's captain did not know it, but he had sailed right into a mine field. Ironically, the mines had been sown by American ships just a few months earlier. The signals officer immediately shouted the message to the captain who stopped all engines. Unfortunately, the *Coolidge* was cruising at full speed and its momentum continued to carry it forward. Suddenly the ship was rocked by an explosion, which was followed thirty seconds later by another. The ship began to list to port as the captain pointed her for shore. The *Coolidge* didn't make it. She hit a coral reef 100 yards from shore and began to list more as she began to sink.

In the ship's bowls, 5,050 soldiers of the 43rd Infantry Division's 172nd Infantry Regiment and the 103rd Field Artillery scrambled up ladders to the ships deck as the list increased. Ropes were tossed over the sides and lifeboats were lowered into the water as the crew of 340, with 50 Navy guards, aided the evacuation. Men who could not find boats to climb into jumped into the water. Some were reluctant to get wet, encouraging one naval officer to tell his men: "Kick men in the face to get them off!"

AMAZINGLY, ONLY TWO MEN DIED OUT OF AN entire compliment of 5,440. It took the *Coolidge* over an hour to sink below the waves, allowing for an orderly evacuation. With shore in sight, many men swam to the sandy beach, while others were transported by raft and rescue boats. The soldiers lost all of their equipment and the sailors and mariners lost their ship, but almost all survived to fight another day. Even the ship's captain, after being cleared by a board of inquiry, later took command of another ship. The *Coolidge,* however, was a casualty of war and today rests 230 feet below the water's surface off a small island in the Pacific.



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1.


2.


3.

OPPOSITE: Covered with oil and soaking wet, these men head for shore. The ***Coolidge*** can be seen in the background (left).

1. Soldiers scramble down the side of the SS ***President Coolidge*** as the ship lists heavily. Life boats await those who cannot swim.

2. Old Glory still flies as the ***Coolidge*** surrenders to the waters off Espirito Santo.

3. Soldiers and sailors make their way ashore as the ***Coolidge*** slides off a coral reef into the waves.

4. Some of the soldiers remained dry throughout the evacuation; these soldiers were left to paddle with their hands.

5. Land ho! The ships crew make it ashore. Bubbles from the sinking ***Coolidge*** can be seen in the upper left corner.


4.


5.

DURING MONTHS OF HORRIFIC COMBAT, THE RED ARMY STRUGGLED TO CAPTURE A GERMAN BRIDGEHEAD AND SUPPORT THE LIFTING OF THE SIEGE OF LENINGRAD.

NARVA: THE BATTLE OF NATIONS

BY PAT MCTAGGART

National Archives

LEFT: Working quickly, a duo of sniper-wary German combat engineers lay communications wire at the front.
ABOVE: Defending their position on a battle-scarred Russian steppe, German infantrymen hurl potatomasher grenades through a pall of smoke toward the attacking Red Army.

National Museum of the US Army, Army Art Collection

IN THE LATTER HALF OF 1943, THE GERMAN WEHRMACHT HAD SEEN DISASTER FOLLOW DISASTER ON THE EASTERN FRONT. AFTER THE BATTLE OF KURSK IN JULY, THE RED ARMY HAD GAINED THE INITIATIVE, ITS TROOPS AND COMMANDERS HARDENED BY TWO YEARS OF BITTER STRUGGLE.

GONE WERE THE DAYS OF MASS SURRENDER BY SOVIET TROOPS, POORLY ARMED AND POORLY LED. THE RED ARMY WAS NOW UP TO THE TASK OF TAKING ON THE GERMANS HEAD TO HEAD, FOR IT HAD FINALLY LEARNED THE LESSONS THAT HAD ONCE MADE THE GERMAN ARMY A NEARLY INVINCIBLE FOE IN THE STRUGGLE FOR EASTERN EUROPE.

In the central sector, Soviet forces gained more than 400 miles as they pushed the battered units of Heeresgruppe Mitte (Army Group Center) west from Voronezh to Kiev. In the south, Heeresgruppe Süd (Army Group South) had lost another 400 miles of some of the richest land in the Soviet Union, located between the Don and Dnieper Rivers. One bright spot, at least in the German point of view, was that the siege of Leningrad was still in progress. The Russian summer and fall offensives of 1943 had left the divisions of Heeres-

gruppe Nord (Army Group North) virtually unscathed. As the new year approached, all that was about to change.

The Leningrad sector had remained static for several months, each side launching intermittent probing attacks instead of major assaults. For 28 months, the Germans had held a stranglehold on the city, bombing and shelling block after block and causing thousands of casualties.

In Moscow, Premier Josef Stalin and his Red Army High Command (STAVKA) were planning a January surprise for the men of Field Marshal Georg von Küchler's Heeresgruppe Nord. Two Soviet Army fronts were assembling a massive number of men and materiel to break the siege of Leningrad once and for all, hopefully destroying Col. Gen. Georg Lindemann's 18th Army in the process.

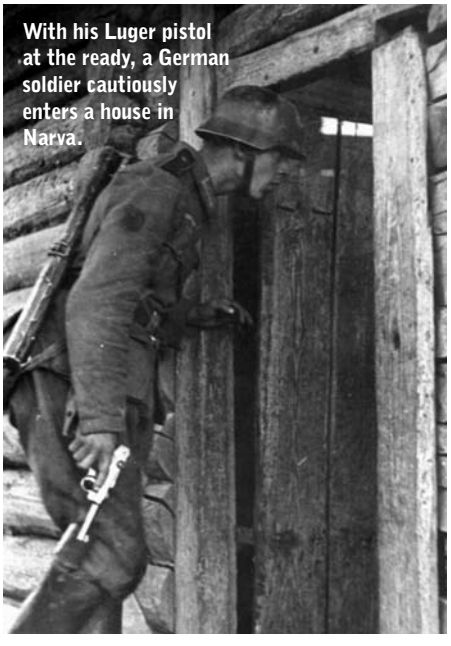
From the city itself, General L.A. Govorov's Leningrad Front would attack with the 42nd (General I.I. Masslennikov) and 67th (General V.P. Sviridov) Armies, while the 2nd Shock Army (General I.I. Fedyiniskiy) would strike out from the Oranienbaum Pocket, a Soviet-held bulge along the Gulf of Finland. Farther south, General Kiril A. Meretskov's Volkhov Front planned a three-pronged assault, with the 8th Army (General Sukhomlin, replaced by General F. N. Starikov on March 1) hitting the Germans near Mga, the 54th Army (General S.V. Roginsky) attacking the Volkhov River line, and the 59th Army (General I.T. Korovnikov) smashing the Novgorod sector.

STAVKA planned a Stalingrad-type operation, with the two fronts forming a gigantic pincer to envelop the 18th Army with fast-moving armored and mechanized forces. The following infantry divisions would then finish the job. Lindemann's divisions, about 20 in all, would face Red Army forces that outnumbered the Germans 3 to 1 in infantry (55 rifle divisions, nine infantry brigades, and eight tank brigades), 3 to 1 in artillery, and 6 to 1 in tanks, self-propelled artillery, and aircraft.

German intelligence was surprisingly inept in discovering this massive Soviet buildup. During the fall of 1943, Heeresgruppe Nord was being used as a reserve for the rest of the Eastern Front, with several top-rate divisions being sent elsewhere to try and stem the Russian offensives in other areas. Von Küchler grew increasingly uneasy as he saw many of his best divisions being replaced with second-class infantry and Luftwaffe field divisions, made up of inadequately trained Luftwaffe personnel that were no longer needed to maintain the dwindling German Air Force.

The Germans were constructing a secondary line, known as the Panther Line, in case the Russians forced Heeresgruppe Nord to retreat. Beginning at the Gulf of Finland, the position ran along the Narva River and Lake Peipus southward through Pskov and beyond Vitebsk. As the new year approached, the Panther Line was still incomplete in several areas, and the constant "borrowing" of divisions from the Heeresgruppe would make occupation and defense of the position an uncertain gamble at best.

The Soviet hammer fell on the night of January 13-14 as more than 100,000 shells from the Oranienbaum Pocket struck the divisions of Obergruppenführer (Lt. Gen.) Felix Steiner's III SS Panzer Corps. Minutes after the barrage lifted, hundreds of tanks and thousands of Red Army infantry surged out of the pocket. Brig. Gen. Hermann von Wedel's 10th Luftwaffe Field Division was the first German unit to get hit by the Soviets. Within hours, the division had disintegrated into a mass of fleeing troops.



With his Luger pistol at the ready, a German soldier cautiously enters a house in Narva.

National Archives

Colonel Ernst Michael's 9th Luftwaffe Field Division suffered the same fate. The German front before Oranienbaum had been torn asunder, leaving a gaping hole in Lindemann's left flank through which additional Soviet divisions poured. Lindemann called for his only reserve, Maj. Gen. Günther Krappe's 61st Infantry Division, to move forward, but it would take two agonizing days before the division could become engaged.

On the Leningrad Front, Govorov launched his attack the following day with a massive bombardment on the L and LVI Army Corps, hitting the Germans with more than 220,000 shells. Masslennikov's 42nd Army attacked, managing to overrun the German forward positions before getting hit hard from the German corps artillery. By day's end, the Soviet advance in front of the city measured 2.6 kilometers.

The staggered assault continued as Meretskov's Volkhov Front hit the Germans. In the 59th Army sector, General Korovnikov ordered his 6th and 14th Rifle Corps (five infantry divisions and one infantry brigade) to take the German positions north of Novgorod, which was manned by General Kurt Herzog's XXXVIII Army Corps (1st Luftwaffe Field Division and 28th Jäger Division). The Germans resisted fiercely, but as more Soviet reserves were pushed through gaps in the lines, their position became hopeless. It was the same story in other sectors attacked by the Volkhov Front.

Bad weather following the opening of the offensive masked the true nature of the Soviet offensive. Aircraft on both sides were temporarily grounded, and German intelligence incorrectly perceived that the Russians had shot their bolt. It was a costly error. When the skies cleared on the afternoon of the 16th, the Red Air Force began a campaign to pulverize every enemy position that could be seen. The Luftwaffe was in such a weakened state throughout the northern sector that it could do little to stop the slaughter.

On the Oranienbaum Front, Steiner's III SS Panzer Corps was fighting for its life. Regardless of losses, the Red Army pushed forward. The 90th Infantry Division's Sergeant Morozov was badly wounded but held his ground against a German counterattack. Other men sacrificed themselves by throwing their bodies against the slits of enemy bunkers so that the Germans could not fire on their advancing comrades. They included Private I.N. Kulikov, 2nd Lt. Volkov (131st Guards Regiment), A.F. Tipanov (64th Guards Infantry Division), and Sergeant Skudrin of the 98th Infantry Division. Each won the title "Hero of the Soviet Union" for his sacrifice.

The Russians kept up their attacks, funneling reserves to the front to make up for the high casualties they were taking. By January 18, it was clear to von Küchler that his entire northern flank was collapsing and that several divisions were in danger of being surrounded and annihilated. In Berlin, Hitler ordered the line to be held with little regard to the sheer numbers facing his troops.

Counterattacks were ordered, especially in Steiner's sector. Limited successes were made by Sturmbannführer (Major) Fritz Bunse's 11th SS Pionier (Engineer) Battalion and Obersturmbannführer (Lt. Col.) Hanns-Heinrich Lohmann's III/ Rgt. "Norge" of the 11th SS

Panzergrenadier Division "Nordland." Both men were awarded the Knight's Cross for their actions, as was 23-year-old Untersturmführer (2nd Lt.) Georg Langendorf, commander of the 11th SS Aufklärungs Abteilung's (Reconnaisance Unit) 5th Company.

In a letter to the author, Langendorf recalled his unit's actions: "We had a total of six antitank guns at our disposal, and the men had done an excellent job of camouflaging their positions. In the distance, a Soviet column of 54 tanks was advancing towards (us). I ordered the men to hold their fire until each had several clear shots. When we commenced firing, there were exploding tanks everywhere, and when Ivan finally retreated, we had destroyed all but four of the vehicles."

Brigadeführer (Maj. Gen.) Fritz von Scholze's 11th SS Freiwillige (Volunteer) Panzergrenadier Division Nordland was clearly the backbone of Steiner's III SS Panzer Corps. Formed in mid-1943, the division was truly international in character. Danes and Norwegians formed the largest contingents with a combined total of about 2,000 officers and men. Other countries represented within Nordland's ranks included Estonia, Belgium, Holland, Sweden, and Switzerland. There were also Volksdeutsch (ethnic Germans) from Romania, Latvia, Lithuania, Croatia, and the Ukraine to augment the German core of the division.

Another important element of Steiner's corps was the 4th SS Freiwillige Panzergrenadier Brigade Nederland, which was mostly made up of Dutch volunteers under the command of the German SS Oberführer (Senior Colonel) Jürgen Wagner. The unit had been on the Volkov and Leningrad Fronts since January 1942, and its combat-hardened veterans would, along with Nordland, form the backbone of the German forces at Narva.

With things going from bad to worse, von Küchler saw the imminent threat posed by a link up of the 2nd Shock and 42nd Armies, which would cut off several German units pinned against the coast of the Gulf of Finland. He ordered the XXVI Army Corps to make a withdrawal of about 30 kilometers to avert that situation, infuriating Hitler in the process. By the time Berlin heard about the order, the withdrawal had begun, lifting the siege of Leningrad after almost 900 days.

Buildings are silhouetted by flame and wreathed in smoke. The Red Army would fight for months in an effort to lift the German siege of Leningrad.

National Archives

Some units along the coastal sector managed to escape, but others were caught by the Russian juggernaut and simply disappeared. Meanwhile, von Küchler was summoned to Hitler's headquarters to explain his actions. While the Führer and the general argued over withdrawals and the effectiveness of the Panther Line, the Soviets continued to drive forward.

During the final week of January, the Russians took Pushkin and Slutsk. The vital supply center of Krasnogvardeysk met the same fate as the 18th Army continued to disintegrate. With all of Heeresgruppe Nord threatened with annihilation, Hitler replaced von Küchler with one of his favorite commanders, Col. Gen. Walter Model.

Model was a good defensive general who had been a loyal follower of Hitler for many years. Because of their relationship, Model knew that he would have at least a few days of freedom before Hitler started to interfere with his plans. He persuaded the Führer that a general withdrawal to the Panther Line was the only way to save the Heeresgruppe, something that von Küchler would probably have never been able to do. Once the order was given, it became a race against time to occupy the line before the Soviets were able to overrun the severely undermanned defenses.

As German forces started pulling back along the entire Leningrad front, the weak units working on the Panther Line worked frantically to strengthen its defenses. In Steiner's sector, the retreat was methodical, with elements of other shattered German units joining the withdrawal. Soviet forces were kept at arm's length by sharp counterattacks against Russian advance elements. By the end of January, the retreating Germans had won the race. The battle for the Narva bridgehead was about to begin.

During the more than 150-mile retreat, some advance units were sent to strengthen Narva's defenses. One such unit was led by Sturmbannführer (Major) Wilhelm Schlütter, commander of the Nederland's artillery regiment. In a letter to the author some 40 years later, Schlütter described his preparations for his unit: "I and my staff worked side by side with the enlisted men. That was how it was. Our hands got just as bloodied and calloused as the low-

DURING THE FINAL WEEK OF JANUARY, THE RUSSIANS TOOK PUSHKIN AND SLUTSK. THE VITAL SUPPLY CENTER OF KRASNOGVARDEYSK MET THE SAME FATE AS THE 18TH ARMY CONTINUED TO DISINTEGRATE.

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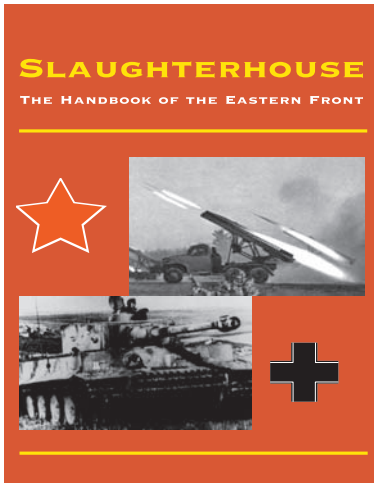

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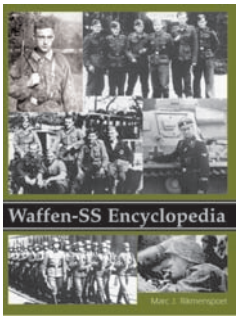

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As Wehrmacht soldiers take cover, a German self-propelled gun opens fire on the advancing Soviets. Urban combat was both difficult and costly.

National Archives

est private, because we all knew that time was of the essence. We had little time to do things by the book. The important thing was the safety of our guns, so we dug our trenches and built bunkers with great care, using every available material to camouflage them."

The Narva line was important to the Germans both militarily and politically. If it fell, the entire Panther Line would be exposed to attack. It was also one of the last bastions in what was once Old Russia. If Narva fell, the Ukraine, Belorussia, and the Baltic States would be in danger of falling into Stalin's hands.

Politically speaking, if Narva and the Baltic States fell, Germany would probably lose its Finnish ally. With German forces fighting on the Murmansk front, a Finnish defection could prove disastrous and might possibly open the way for Soviet domination of northern Norway and its vital nickel mines.

Consistent with German military doctrine, a reinforced bridgehead was established on the eastern bank of the Narva River, across from the city itself. During the first days of February, elements of the Nordland and Nederland fortified the bridgehead, as well as the Narva River Line itself. SS Pioniere (Engineer) units worked alongside the infantry to make certain that their defenses were as strong as possible. When finished, the Narva bridgehead had a seven-mile frontage running from north of Lillienbach, south to the village of Dolgaja Niva.

As the mangled remnants of other units found their way to the city, they were positioned to the north and south to set up their own defensive networks. These units would play a vital role in the upcoming battle, but it was the SS that had the responsibility of defending Narva itself.

Narva was an ancient city, scarred by war almost from its founding. The Danes controlled it in the 13th century, followed by a period of occupation by the Teutonic Knights, who built a huge castle, Hermannsburg, on the western bank of the river. During the Great Northern War, the area around the city became a battleground as the forces of Charles XII of Sweden and Peter the Great clashed. In later years, Ivan III built a castle named Ivangorod directly across the river from Hermannsburg to house Russian troops.

Soviet advance elements had almost beaten the Germans to the Narva, and more troops were on the way. While the Germans worked feverishly on their defenses, they came under artillery fire. Obersturmbannführer (Lt. Col.) von Westphalen, commander of Nordland's 24th Regiment Danmark, reported that his unit was under almost constant fire on the southern sector of the bridgehead and a large enemy buildup was observed by units of Nederland, which held the northern sector.

The Russians moved to establish their own bridgeheads on the western bank of the river on February 3. North of Narva, Soviet forces crossed the river, initially meeting light resistance. Von Scholze reacted quickly, sending Oberstumbannführer Paul-Albert Kausch's SS Panzer Abteilung 11 Hermann von Salza (HvS) to the scene. With the help of a platoon of Tiger tanks commanded by Leutnant Otto Carius, the bridgehead was destroyed.

A bigger concern was an incursion by the 8th Army south of the city. Sukhomlin sent a large force across the river near Krivasao, routing outposts of Maj. Gen. Walter Krause's 170th and Maj. Gen. Wilhelm Berlin's 227th Infantry Divisions. Both units were sorely under strength, and the Soviets were able to make good headway, advancing to within reach of a railroad supply line near Vaivara.

Steiner rushed fragments of Maj. Gen. Günther Krappe's 61st Infantry Division and Maj. Gen. Otto Kohlermann's Panzergrenadier Division Feldherrnhalle to the scene in an effort to stop the Russians. Supporting the ragtag units was Tiger Abteilung 502 under the command of Major Willy Jähde.

Recognizing the threat posed by the Soviet incursion, Heeresgruppe Nord diverted other depleted units to the area, including Brig. Gen. Curt Siewert's 58th, Oberst (Colonel) Hero Breusing's 122nd, and Maj. Gen. Karl Burdach's 11th Infantry Divisions. Maj. Gen. Max Horn's 214th Infantry Division was also ordered to rush to the scene from Norway.

North of Narva, the Russians were able to establish another strong bridgehead at Ssiversti with elements from the 2nd Shock and 47th Armies. To counter this major threat, Brigadeführer (Brig. Gen.) Franz Augsburger's 20th Waffen-Grenadier-Division, made up of Estonian volunteers, was committed from its training centers directly into the battle. The division arrived in the sector on February 20. Supported by a company of Jähde's Tigers, which had been diverted from the battle in the south, the Estonians managed to eliminate the bridgehead after nine days of heavy fighting.

While fighting raged in the north, the 8th Army had reinforced its bridgehead south of the city. The added troops were proving too much for the German units facing them, and by February 24 the Russians were on the verge of cutting the railway that was vital to the defense of Narva.

The Germans counterattacked again and again in an effort to stop the Russian drive. Supported by Jähde's Tigers, the 61st and Feldherrnhalle Divisions finally got the upper hand. Once again, Leutnant Carius was in the thick of things, eliminating several Soviet tanks and helping the infantry clean out Russian defensive positions. The Russians finally pulled back, but Narva's defenses were weakened as the Nordland's Regiment Norge was pulled from the city and sent to reinforce the German lines in the south.

With his attacks north and south of the city proving unsuccessful, Govorov decided to focus his attacks on the eastern bank bridgehead. His first assault was aimed at Nederland's 49th SS Regiment De Ruyter (DR), dug in around Lillienbach. Commanded by Obersturmbannführer (Major) Hans Collani, the regiment was subject to an intense artillery barrage, which was lifted only when the first Soviet troops were within grenade distance of the defenders' trenches.

Collani's Dutch volunteers rose from their foxholes and sent a deadly hail of fire into the advancing Russians, but the Soviets pressed on regardless of losses. Frenzied hand-to-hand combat took place in the trenches, while Collani called for covering fire from Schlütter's artillery, which devastated the second and third waves of the attack. It took hours of vicious combat before the Dutch were able to clear their trenches.

Licking their wounds, the Soviets spent the next few weeks pummeling Collani's lines with artillery. It was dangerous for the Dutch to even raise their heads above the trench line, but work continued on strengthening the line, with Nederland's engineers taking several casualties from shellfire as they laid heavy strands of barbed wire in front of their positions.

Reinforcements flowed forward to Govorov's divisions during the first days of March. The Red Air Force also became extremely active, strafing German positions at will while the Landser (common German soldier) looked in vain for Luftwaffe support. A large wave of Soviet bombers hit Narva on the night of March 6-7, followed by a huge artillery bombardment that all but obliterated any buildings left standing by the bombing. Narva's civilians fled the city, which resembled a ghost town after the Russian attack.

Govorov then switched the axis of his attack by hitting von Westphalen's Danmark Regiment, guarding the southern flank of the bridgehead, and Nederland's SS Panzergrenadier Regiment 48 General Seyffardt (GS), commanded by Standartenführer (Colonel) Wolfgang Jörchel. Von Westphalen's men held the line, but Jörchel's troops were forced out of their positions by the Soviets. Gathering staff personnel, cooks, drivers, and other rear area troops, Jörchel led a counterattack that drove back the Russians. Suffering heavy losses, the Dutch troops finally reoccupied their trenches.

Stymied by his failure in the center, Govorov switched back to Collani's sector around Lillienbach. Following an intense artillery barrage, the Soviets hit hard with infantry and tanks. Assault troops stormed the Dutch positions, breaking through in several areas. With the help of Jähde's Tigers and artillery fire from the west bank, the Russians were stopped in some sectors, but Govorov funneled more infantry and tanks into the breaches, forcing Collani's men back.

The situation became even more critical for the Germans when a column of Soviet tanks broke off from the main engagement and headed south to take the Narva River bridges. Steiner realized that enemy seizure of the bridges would doom the bridgehead and sent for Kausch's HvS to stop the Soviet drive. The panzers arrived ahead of the Russians and met them head on, destroying several T-34s and forcing the rest to retreat.

Kausch followed the enemy north but was stopped in his tracks when he ran into several more Russian tanks that had been dug in to meet his attack. After losing several of his own vehicles, Kausch withdrew and formed his own defensive line. For the time being, the Narva bridges were saved.

THE GERMANS COUNTERATTACKED AGAIN AND AGAIN IN AN EFFORT TO STOP THE RUSSIAN DRIVE. SUPPORTED BY JÄHDE'S TIGERS, THE 61ST AND FELDHERRN DIVISIONS FINALLY GOT THE UPPER HAND.

Meanwhile, the situation around Lillienbach had grown even more critical. DR had suffered heavy casualties, with some companies at 50 percent strength or less. Collani knew that if the Russians hit him again with an all-out assault, there would be no stopping them. He made preparations to shorten the line by withdrawing to secondary positions to his south, but the Soviets beat him to the punch.

In the early hours of March 14, the Russians attacked after a short preliminary barrage. As the surprised SS crouched in their trenches, the Soviet infantry moved forward and reached the Dutch lines just as the barrage lifted. With cries of "*Urra,*" the Red Army soldiers stormed the trenches, catching Collani's men off guard. The German commander ordered a general retreat toward the lines to the south, but the damage had already been done. In the cold, black night, Soviet troops rushed forward, hoping to cut off

and destroy the retreating SS before they could take up new positions.

While some of Collani's units retreated in panic, others continued to fight an orderly withdrawal. Untersturmführer (2nd Lt.) Helmut Scholz, commander of the 7th Company, described his actions in a letter to the author; "As soon as Ivan started shelling us, I knew something was up. Although we had suffered several casualties, I formed up the survivors and launched a counterattack against the Russians that were infiltrating around us. It was pure necessity. As SS, we knew that there was very little likelihood that we would be taken prisoner by the Soviets."

Scholze and his men met the enemy in the trenches, fighting desperately with any weapon available. Combatants stabbed at each other, shot at close range, and even used their bare hands to kill. It was a brutal fight, but the Russians were finally forced back, leaving behind many dead and wounded.

Russian units still managed to penetrate the area around Lillienbach, surrounding Shcholz's battalion, commanded by Hauptsturmführer (Captain) Karl-Heinz Ertel. Ordered to execute a fighting withdrawal, Ertel's men hastily formed up and headed off into the darkness. The Russians struck the battalion again and again, coming out of nowhere and disappearing into the night after inflicting more casualties on the beleaguered unit as it made its way through the forest.

Ertel ordered Scholz to take his company and open a corridor through the surrounding Soviets. His men formed a wedge and advanced, firing at anything that moved. The Russians were overcome by the ferocity of Scholz's attack, and a corridor was opened for the rest of the battalion to pass through. Calling in artillery fire to keep the Soviets at bay, Ertel and his men finally reached their new positions. Scholz and Ertel were both awarded the Knight's Cross for their actions.

As bad as it was for the Germans, Govorov's men had suffered more in casualties and equipment. He called a one-week halt to operations to beef up his divisions, but the Soviet general knew that time was running out. The spring thaw was approaching, which meant almost impassible terrain would soon become the norm. The mud would make the movement of armor and heavy vehicles all but impossible, so Govorov made one last attempt to break the German line before the thaw set in.

On March 22, tons of Russian explosives rained down upon the DR positions. A wave of Soviet infantry hit the 5th Company with

National Archives

Exposing themselves to direct fire from German machine guns, Red Army soldiers step up to attack.

a vengeance, threatening a breakthrough that would split the II Battalion. Hauptsturmführer (Captain) Carl-Heinz Frühauf, who had just replaced Ertel as the unit commander, rushed to the scene with a hastily formed assault unit made up of headquarters and supply personnel.

Frühauf and his men ran headlong into a Soviet assault force of about 150 men. It was man-to-man combat as the two sides clashed. For more than half an hour, men slashed at each other with bayonets, struck savage blows with sharpened entrenching tools, and tried to choke the life out of their opponents.

The Russian force was wiped out, and Frühauf pushed his men forward once again. Gathering stragglers from the 5th Company, the SS managed to retake their lost positions and fire a final volley at the retreating Soviets before slumping in exhaustion to the bottom of their trenches.

Southwest of Narva, the Soviets kept up the pressure on the remnants of several German divisions. The Germans held a stretch of land pointed like a dagger in the Russian lines. On either side of the salient, Soviet troops battled tirelessly to break through the German defenses and sever the main supply highway and rail line that ran from Wesenberg to Narva. The Germans nicknamed the two Russian-held sectors the Ostsack and the Westsack.

It was a game of attack and counterattack, followed by heavy artillery bombardment, low level bombing, and strafing from both air forces. Men fought and died for a small stretch of land that had a moonlike quality about it because of the constant shelling. The Germans held—barely, thanks to the support of Jähde's Tigers, which roamed the battlefield in search of enemy armor.

"Ivan didn't grant us any rest," Leutnant Carius wrote. "He wanted to roll up or encircle the bridgehead at all costs….[In one action] we knocked out six T-34s and a T-60 and destroyed a 76.2 mm AT [anti-tank] gun."

The Russians made one final attempt to break the German line in the Ostsack on March 22. Once again the Tigers rolled into action, blasting enemy armor in support of the German infantry. The Soviets finally gave up, and the sector went into a relative state of quiet. During the period March 17–22, the Tigers had knocked out a total of 38 Soviet tanks, four assault guns, and 17 artillery pieces at the cost of one wounded panzer crewman.

It was the Landser that suffered the most during those battles. An after-action strength report in late March put the I/399th Regiment of the 170th Infantry Division at 69 combat effectives, which was just about the strength of half a company.

While the Russians were held in the southwest, another problem was taken care of around Sergala. Russian forces occupied the vital communications area, located several kilometers to the rear of Narva, and the weak German opposition could barely hold them in check. In late March, Regiment Norge began an attack to reclaim the area. After heavy fighting, the Soviet forces were destroyed, and German units reoccupied their old positions. The regiment was then ordered back to the Narva line to act as support for the bridgehead.

In early April, the spring thaw hit with a vengeance, ending most offensive operations. Throughout the month, both sides strove to regain their strength. More Soviet reinforcements and replacements arrived to fill in the gaps left by the previous month's attacks. Red Air Force bombers and ground attack aircraft lashed out again and again on anything that moved on the German side, while Red Army artillery zeroed in the Narva line and the eastern bridgehead.

Casualties inside the bridgehead were common, as engineers braved Russian fire to work in the open, laying mines and strengthening waterlogged positions. A prime Soviet target was the bridge supplying the bridgehead. It was damaged several times by artillery fire and bombs, but the engineers worked unflinchingly to keep it standing. The infantry worked side by side with the engineers and suffered many casualties, among them, the commander of Regiment Danmark, Obersturmbannführer (Lt. Col.) von Westphalen.

"We worked like madmen to strengthen our positions," Unterstrumführer (2nd Lt.) Scholz wrote to the author. "At higher headquarters, they call this period a lull, but we took casualties on a regular basis from artillery and snipers.

After successfully tearing holes in the German lines through well-coordinated armor, infantry, and air assaults, reinforcements rush forward to widen the gaps.

National Archives

Still, we knew that this work had to be done—the strengthening of bunkers and the reinforcement of outposts."

On the western bank of the river, Sturmbannführer (Major) Schlütter had the same opinion about the so-called lull in the fighting. "We knew that we [the artillery] were the backbone of the bridgehead's defense," he wrote. "Our Nederland artillery and the Nordland's artillery were called upon to break up many a Russian attack. At the same time, we had to constantly move our positions because of Russian counterfire and air attacks. This was exceedingly difficult when the thaw began. We often had to drag our guns through knee-deep mud, at the same time watching out for snipers, Russian aircraft, and dodging artillery fire."

Frustrated in his attempts to smash the enemy bridgehead, Govorov tried an end run with an amphibious landing behind the German lines on the Gulf of Finland coastline. The landing caused a momentary panic, but a swift response by local coastal and SS alarm units smashed the Soviet landing units before much harm was done.

Moscow was getting impatient at the lack of progress on the Narva Front, and Govorov was feeling the heat. As the ground began to dry out, he ordered several heavy attacks to be launched against the Lillienbach area. Machine guns mowed down wave after wave of the attacking Russians, but more followed, closing to fight a savage hand-to-hand battle with the men of Nederland.

The Dutch were able to hold, so Govorov switched his focus to the Danmark sector in the south. Under cover of heavy artillery and air support, the Soviets surged toward the German lines. They attacked fearlessly, disregarding their frightful losses, but it was all in vain. Once again, Govorov was forced to order a cessation of the attack so that his men could rest and receive replacements for the terrible casualties they had incurred.

While the Red Army rested, the Red Air Force went into action over the front. To the SS men below, the sky seemed filled with Soviet aircraft. Narva was pummeled into ruins, with hardly a building left standing. The bridgehead was also heavily hit, making the already lunar-like landscape even more grotesque.

The air attacks went on for days while Govorov marshaled his men for a new attack. Once again, he picked Lillienbach as the focus for his new assault. This time, the German and Dutch defenders were forced to give way, having had their ranks severely depleted by the intense bombing and the fighting of the previous weeks.

Von Scholze ordered the men in the Lillienbach sector to make a fighting withdrawal, and they slowly retreated to new positions closer to the river. The Russians followed, only to be stopped in their tracks by the guns of Schlütter's artillery. Although the Soviets had gained ground, they still could not make the decisive breakthrough that Govorov hoped for.

In Moscow, Stalin and his STAVKA had turned their attention away from Narva and were devising a plan, Bagration, that they hoped would drive the Germans out of the Motherland and bring the war to the gates of Berlin. With a remarkable display of stealth and deception, 19 Soviet armies were moved into position to strike at Heeresgruppe Mitte, the army group just south of Heeresgruppe Nord. The attack was set to begin on June 22, just three years to the day that the Wehrmacht had invaded the Soviet Union.

To keep the Germans off guard, Moscow ordered Govorov to continue his assault against the Narva line. The muddy season had come and gone, and Govorov's divisions had been replenished with men and materiel. Ammunition was replenished, and Red Army mechanics had seen to it that the Soviet armor would be in good running order.

In the attempt to focus German attention away from Heeresgruppe Mitte, STAVKA ordered Govorov to begin his attack on the Narva line on June 7. The southern sector of the bridgehead was the first to feel the ferocity of the Soviet assault when Red Air Force fighters and bombers from the 9th Air Army blasted the German line. Men were buried alive in their trenches or gunned down while trying to escape the brutal attack. Red Army

Soviet troops with horse-drawn caissons and wagons advance along a dusty road in the imposing shadow of the *Alte Burg am Ufer* at Narva.

National Archives

artillery joined the crescendo of death, causing more casualties among the Germans and Danes defending the line.

Dolgaya Niva was particularly hard hit. As the artillery fire lifted, the dazed survivors struggled to rescue wounded comrades or clear weapons that had been clogged by the dirt and debris left by the bombardment. There was precious little time to do either. Looking over the tops of their trenches, the Danes saw masses of Russian infantry approaching on the run.

As the alarm spread up and down the line, the lightly wounded troops picked up weapons to join their unscathed comrades on the line, while those with more severe wounds tried to find a safe haven in which to wait for the medics. At first, the attacking Soviets were met by a smattering of gunfire, but before they had reached the trenches, the entire line had come alive.

Luckily, some of the communication lines were still working. A request for artillery support was answered almost immediately, and the guns of Nordland's artillery regiment began to wreak havoc on the attackers. Artillery observers called in fire directly in front of the trenches, and the first wave of Soviets was obliterated. A second wave, and then a third, met the same fate.

The Russians attacked again and again during the next few days but achieved little for their efforts until June 12, when a breach of the main German defense line was made. Soviet forces surged through the gap, widening it as new units were rushed to the scene. The order was given for the Danes to pull back to new lines closer to the river, where both Nordland's and Nederland's artillery could support them.

The withdrawal took the Soviets by surprise, and they paused to reform their units before making an all out effort to take the main Narva bridge. Seeing the Russians hesitate, 26-year-old Unterscharführer (Sergeant) Egon Christopherson, a squad leader in Danmark's 7th Company, formed an assault group from his own men and surrounding units. "We have to hit them hard and fast," he told his men. "When we charge, yell like the devil himself."

Christopherson's men struck the Russian flank, spraying the surprised Soviets with gunfire and hurling grenades into their midst. Some of the Russians returned fire only to be gunned down by the seemingly berserk SS men. Panic seized the Soviets, many of whom were new replacements. Some threw down their weapons to surrender, while most began a hasty withdrawal. The sight of their comrades retreating threw other units into disarray, and Christopherson's men surged forward to retake their lost trenches.

Other units followed, until the entire line was once again in German hands. For his actions, Christopherson became the first Dane to be awarded the Knight's Cross. His actions had saved the day, but the losses suffered by Danmark had been frightfully high. At Corps headquarters, Steiner reviewed the day's events and looked over casualty reports. He realized that the days of the bridgehead were numbered, and he ordered engineers to begin the construction of a new defensive line.

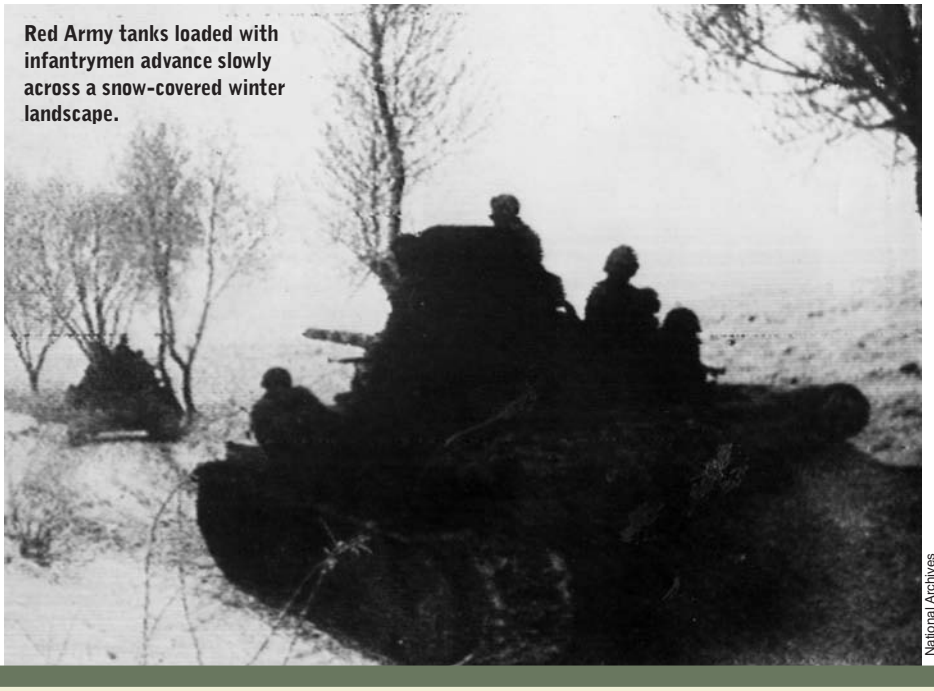
Codenamed Tannenberg, the line would be the fall-back point once the Russians had crossed the Narva. The new defenses would be located a few miles west of the city and would incorporate existing natural obstacles in its overall construction. Although he had instructed his engineer commander to work day and night to complete the position, Steiner knew that the men inside the bridgehead would have to suffer even greater casualties before the new line was finished.

Throughout June, Govorov kept hammering the bridgehead with artillery and air attacks, followed by combined tank and infantry assaults looking for the key to crack-

ing the German defenses. The landscape had been churned up so much in the past few months' fighting that it was virtually impossible to distinguish any reference points on maps made less than a year ago. Grisly reminders of past battles were everywhere, with body parts, half buried in the plowed up ground, strewn in front of the trench line.

The units inside the bridgehead had received little in the way of replacements, and alarm platoons had to be set up behind the main positions, ready to move at a moment's notice to counter any enemy threat on the thinly held line. Inside Narva itself, Sturmbannführer (Major) Schlütter had taken up residence in the partially damaged city courthouse and had set up an observation post in one of the building's turrets.

"We had a fairly clear view of the battlefield," he wrote to the author. "Besides having observers on the front line, we could see possible trouble spots from the tower. This allowed us to sometimes direct artillery fire on enemy assault units without going through the observers in the field. Where seconds could mean lives, this was a great help to the men defending the bridgehead."



Red Army tanks loaded with infantrymen advance slowly across a snow-covered winter landscape.

National Archives

ON JUNE 22, THE RED STORM BROKE AGAINST THE DIVISIONS OF THE HEERESGRUPPE MITTE. SOVIET ARTILLERY REGIMENTS SENT THOUSANDS OF SHELLS CRASHING INTO THE GERMAN DEFENSES ...

Govorov had enough troops to keep the Germans off guard, moving his attacks from one sector of the bridgehead to another. Although the terrain was mainly unfit for armored movement, the Russians continued to push tanks into the area. Jähde and Kausch had been ordered north of the city to help German and Estonian units battle yet another Soviet attempt to establish a strong bridgehead on the west bank of the Narva.

The absence of German armor meant Nederland and Danmark had to rely on their own tank-killer squads. Engineer units could engage the armored monsters with flamethrowers, but the infantry was forced to improvise with "sticky" mines or bundles of grenades. It was deadly work, running alongside a T-34, trying to lodge a bundle of grenades in the drive wheels of the tracks or actually mounting the tank to attach a mine to the turret ring. Those who succeeded then had to jump away and hope that the ensuing blast did not kill them when the tank blew up. Those that failed usually died screaming under the treads of their intended victim.

On June 22, the Red storm broke against the divisions of Heeresgruppe Mitte. Soviet artillery regiments sent thousands of shells crashing into the German defenses, while the Red Air Force unleashed an all-out campaign from the sky. A well-coordinated armor and infantry assault tore gaping holes in the German lines and reinforcements were rushed forward to expand them.

Frantic calls for help came from divisional headquarters, but there were no reserves to be found. At Vitebsk, five German divisions were surrounded and destroyed during the onslaught, which continued for several days. Some divisions merely melted away as the Soviets advanced. Others found themselves surrounded deep behind enemy lines with little hope of rescue, and the dark specter of defeat loomed over higher headquarters as the lines buckled and then collapsed.

Steiner read the grim reports of the looming disaster to his south while his men fought off repeated assaults at the bridgehead. The Soviets at Narva were also aware of the tremendous gains made by their comrades, and their morale soared as reports of new victories were read to them by their commissars.

Govorov decided that the time was ripe for a new all-out assault on the bridgehead, and by mid-July the Soviet general had assembled about 20 divisions to destroy Steiner's corps and the depleted German units on his southern flank. Several new bridgeheads were thrown across the Narva River, and German reconnaissance reported that a massive buildup was in progress.

Berlin would still not let loose of the idea of holding the bridgehead, but Steiner knew that once Govorov's attack began his men would have no chance of survival. Taking matters into his own hands, Steiner ordered the units inside the bridgehead to prepare for evacuation. In small groups, the men of Danmark and Nederland began to filter back to the river. Dummy gun positions were constructed, and night fires were lit in trenches to give the illusion that the lines were still decently manned.

On the western shore, Sturmbannführer (Major) Schlütter received orders to cover his retreating comrades with artillery fire, if necessary. "We knew that the big move was underway," he later wrote. "I laid out coordinates for every possible move that Ivan might make. At the same time, I drew up

Continued on page 81

The slaughterhouse of the Eastern Front was the titanic struggle of the Second World War.

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

THE MAGNITUDE AND GEOGRAPHICAL SCALE OF THE BATTLES AND CAMPAIGNS ON THE EASTern Front during World War II and the number of soldiers involved in these operations are almost beyond the understanding of Americans.

When the *Wehrmacht* (German Army) deployed to invade the Soviet Union in June 1941, it arrayed its forces on a 1,720-mile (2,768-kilometer) front that stretched from the Barents Sea in the north to the Black Sea in the south. This is the enormously large and lethal, and relatively obscure and imperfectly understood Eastern Front, the topic of editor Keith E. Bonn's ***Slaughterhouse: The Handbook of the Eastern Front*** (Aberjona Press, Bedford, PA, 2005, 512 pp., illustrations, maps, figures, bibliography, $29.95, softcover).

The front was, as pointed out in this outstanding volume, "equivalent to the distance along [the United State's] eastern coast from the northern border of Maine to the southern tip of Florida." Moreover, in approximate numbers, "World War II cost the Soviet Union about 14.7 million military dead, half again as many men as the United States fielded in the entire war effort and more than 30 times the 375,000 dead the United States suffered in the war."

Once opened, this book is difficult to put down. It is a massive compendium containing facts, figures, chronologies, and descriptions of myriad topics related to the German and Soviet military operations on the Eastern Front during World War II. This book begins with a perceptive introduction by retired U.S. Army Colonel David M. Glantz, the United States' foremost authority on the Soviet Army during World War II. The first chapter is, "An Annotated Chronology of the War on the Eastern Front," derived and abridged from one of Glantz's earlier publications. In addition to key dates and events, this chapter contains highly descriptive summaries of the various operations conducted, supplemented by detailed maps.

Fifty-seven total illustrated biographical sketches (generally one to two pages each) of significant German military leaders are next, complemented by a section with biographies of "Important Soviets."

The largest section in this volume is "Germany and Their Allies' Units on the Eastern Front." This includes German Army and *Luftwaffe* (Air Force) units, with Axis Finnish, Hungarian, Italian, and Romanian units. Each of the 487 German Army groups, armies, corps, and divisions that saw combat on the Eastern Front is included, with a spectacular amount of relevant and detailed information. This includes the dates of unit establishment, reorganizations and redesignations, combat and other operations, and commanders. "Soviet Forces on the Eastern Front," totaling 881 separate elements, receive the same detailed identification and dissection as their German counterparts.

Organizational charts with tactical unit symbols are covered in "Organization of Military Units on the Eastern Front." This section covers 55 types of German/Axis and Soviet division-sized units. The weapons used by the opposing forces on the Eastern Front are also described in detail. They begin with small arms, rifles, machine guns, and antitank rifles, and continue with illustrations, rocket launchers, artillery and mortars, tank destroyers, assault guns, tanks, and fighter aircraft. Numerous tables are included that provide detailed weapon characteristics and capabilities.

The concluding chapter is "Forgotten Battles" by Glantz. This section highlights the fact that until recently most of the historical information on Eastern Front military operations came from German sources. They were, either intentionally or unintentionally, not always accurate. As a result of the fall of the Soviet Union and the end

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Wehrmacht armored vehicles and troops advance through a war-torn village on the Eastern Front in 1941.

Combat Mission: Afrika Korps is new game for PCs from Battlefront. As the name implies, the setting is the Mediterranean Theater of World War II including North Africa, Italy, Sicily and Crete. The years covered are 1940 to 1945. Players can compete against the computer or against one other player. The action is a hybrid of turn-based and real-time simulation with 3D graphics.

Afrika Korps is its own stand-alone game, but it is also part of the Combat Mission game series. AK has the same engine as the previous games but with improvements and changes to better portray the battles in its theater. For example, now the game takes into account multi-turreted tanks and the huge dust clouds created by military vehicles on the move in the desert. The game lets players refight the Deutsches Afrika Korps storming the fortress of Tobruk, Fallschirmjäger battles in Crete, or Patton's drive through Sicily.

An optional addition to the two-player mode is the Historical Rarity of Units toggle. This keeps players from cherry picking the best of their army's units for battles. Of course, players who enjoy such elite-on-elite fracases can turn this off. When the battles do start, the graphics and interface provide a 3D line-of-sight system, the possibility of misidentification of targets, and enemies being detected by sound, all of which were needed because the game now models spreading fires, billowing smoke, sand, wind, and night.

A different PC game with the same setting as AK that is also part of a series is ***Codename: Panzers–Phase II*** from CDV. C:PPII is also a real-time game, with style that is more war game-like rather than a simulation. The key to the single-player game in C:PII is the characters, most of whom return from Phase I, although the story of C:PII stands alone without having played the first. As players progress through the scenarios, they learn the story of the characters in journals and cut-scenes. This story and the experience system that lets units get better and better as they survive battles

gives the player a reason to think of their units as more than just cannon fodder.

None of which is to say that C:PPII doesn't have its simulation elements and its historical accuracy. There are three campaigns: North Africa, Italy and Sicily, and the Yugoslavian partisan campaign. Only in the last of these do players really need to worry about any of their units besides the tank ones. As befits its name, C:PPII is mostly about the care and feeding and deployment of armored units, a fact that doesn't make it any the less fun to play.

A smaller scale, smaller focus simulation of World War II combat is Merscom's ***Squad Assault: Second Wave***, also for PCs. This is a company-level simulation of squad-based tactical combat in France during 1944 displayed in a 3D real-time game. The goal is to model command difficulties and the real reactions of men under fire. The game is both single-player and multi-player over a LAN. There are 57 total single-player missions, some historical and others hypothetical.

While SA:SW is a fair traditional real-time game (meaning that the play keeps going even as the player is issuing orders), it does include a user defined auto-pause feature. This differs from a turn-based game in that the action only stops when certain things of the player's choosing happen—such as a unit reaching its position on the map or coming under fire. Players can then issue orders and resume the game. Whether this is more or less realistic is a matter of taste, but it is certainly less frantic than straight real-time play. □

of the Cold War, the Russians have permitted Western historians to conduct research in their formerly inaccessible military archives. This has permitted reevaluations and new insight on the unprecedented battles of the Eastern Front.

Slaughterhouse: The Handbook of the Eastern Front is a jewel of a book. It contains the synthesized results of the latest research on Eastern Front topics and a tremendous amount of detailed information and data on German and Soviet military units and operations that cannot be found in any other single volume. This comprehensive and current volume on the decisive theater of the world's largest military conflagration is an authoritative and indispensable reference that will be welcomed by every World War II historian and enthusiast.

Recent and Recommended

Biggest Brother: The Life of Major Dick Winters, the Man who Led the Band of Brothers, by Larry Alexander, New American Library Caliber, New York, 2005, 304 pp., illustrations, appendix, glossary, bibliography, index, $24.95, hardcover.

In 1993, historian Stephen Ambrose wrote *Band of Brothers: E Company, 506th Regiment, 101st Airborne Division from Normandy to Hitler's Eagle Nest*. In doing so, the role of this single airborne company—Easy Company—was highlighted and praised arguably at the expense of other rifle companies. The actions of its officers and men, already generally heroic and exemplary, gained legendary proportions, especially after the showing of the HBO series *Band of Brothers*.

The leader of this "band of brothers" was Lieutenant (later Major) Richard D. Winters. He assumed command of Easy Company on D-Day after the company commander was killed during the invasion of Normandy. On D-Day, Winters courageously led his men in destroying a German artillery battery that overlooked Utah Beach. For this important contribution to the success of the Normandy operation, Winters was recommended for the Medal of Honor but received the Distinguished Service Cross instead. He commanded Easy Company in fighting in Normandy, and Operation Market Garden in Holland before being reassigned to the 2nd Battalion in October 1944. This detailed, page-turning biography recounts Winters' life before, during, and after World War II, focusing on his combat service as the "Biggest Brother" of Easy Company.

In Brief

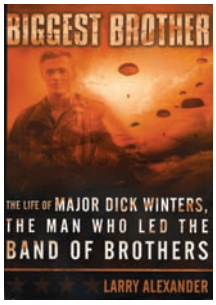
SS—Hitler's Foreign Divisions: Foreign Volunteers in the Waffen-SS, 1940-1945, by Chris Bishop, Amber Books, London, 2005, 192 pp., illustrations, map, appendices, glossary, bibliography, index, $34.95, hardcover.

The German Waffen SS (Armed SS) expanded from a small force of four ethnically pure German regiments to a huge, polyglot force of 900,000 soldiers in 39 divisions during the course of World War II. Fierce fighting, especially on the Eastern Front, caused high casualties. To seek new soldiers and circumvent Wehrmacht restrictions on Waffen SS recruiting, the latter began to enlist troops from "Aryan" Nordic states that shared the Nazis' "romantic vision of a pan-Germanic Europe." By the end of the war, perhaps as many as 350,000 foreign volunteers, from the Soviet Union, Baltic nations, France, Croatia, Serbia, Italy, Hungary, and other countries, served in the Waffen SS. There were also contingents from neutral Spain, Sweden, and Switzerland, and the British Freikorps, consisting of former British and Commonwealth prisoners of war.

This excellent book is divided into five chapters. After an initial overview of the evolution of the Waffen SS, two chapters cover the nations of Western Europe and Eastern Europe that provided troops to the Waffen SS. The last two chapters detail orders of battle and other significant information on, the "Foreign SS Divisions" and the "Foreign SS Brigades." The wealth of information and excellent photographs in this book make it a welcome addition to the library of any World War II enthusiast.

Out of the Depths of Hell: A Soldier's Story of Life and Death in Japanese Hands, by John McEwan, Pen & Sword Military, Barnsley, UK, 2005, 140 pp., illustrations, maps, $19.95, softcover.

It was fortunate that when British Army gunner John McEwan landed with his artillery regiment on Malaya in late 1941, he was "blissfully unaware" of what the future held for him and his comrades. Within weeks, the Japanese attacked Pearl Harbor, Malaya, and elsewhere, and McEwan was one of thousands of soldiers captured by the Japanese when Singapore surrendered on February 15, 1942. His descent into unimaginable depths of hell then began.



On Singapore, humiliating captivity was accompanied by constant hunger, crowded conditions, rampant disease, and bestial brutality. McEwan and some 20,000 POWs were later jammed into a barracks complex that had a pre-war capacity of about 800 soldiers. In October 1942, McEwan and another thousand POWs were crammed into a dank, rat-infested "hell ship" and transported to Formosa (now Taiwan). On Formosa, the POWs were forced to labor in the dreadful Kinkasaki copper mine, beaten and tortured by tyrannical Japanese and Taiwanese. This compelling and candid memoir is a powerful tribute to the triumph of the human spirit over unspeakable adversity and Japanese savagery.

Japanese Paratroop Forces of World War II, by Gordon Rottman and Akira Takizawa, Elite 127, Osprey Publishing, Oxford, UK, 2005, 64 pp., illustrations, maps, glossary, select bibliography, index, $16.95, softcover.

Unlike their stalwart German counterparts during World War II, relatively little seems to be known about Japanese military paratroopers. Using wartime intelligence reports and many Japanese-language books and documents, the authors begin by tracing the origins of the Imperial Japanese Army (IJA) and Navy (IJN) parachute units. The organizational structures and orders of battle of IJA raiding units and glider infantry and IJN special landing forces, and individual and unit equipment are described. The highlight of the volume—in addition to the many excellent and interesting photographs and artwork—is the chronicle of the four Japanese airborne assaults conducted during the war. The first was executed by the IJN in January 1942 into today's Indonesia. In February 1942, IJN units jumped into West Timor, and IJA paratroopers made an assault on Sumatra. The final IJA parachute jump was into Leyte, the Philippines, in December 1944, and a glider-borne assault was made on Okinawa in April 1945. Authors Gordon L. Rottman and Akira Takizawa collaborated on this study and successfully filled an information void on Japanese parachute units and operations during World War II.

Dear Editors,

WAAC, WAC, ANC, ARC, WASP, WAFS, WAVES, WAMS, SPARS—why don't we ever see any articles about the brave women who served?

Sandy Faulkner
Racine, Wisconsin

Enola Gay

Dear Editors,

I wish to express my deepest thanks for publishing such a superb magazine. What better way to learn about World War II than to read your expert and diverse articles about the most significant war in modern history. I especially enjoyed reading the article about Paul Tibbets and the Enola Gay. My dad, Lt. Col. William T. Rourke, a B-17 pilot with 30 combat missions over Europe during WWII, was actually the last pilot to fly the Enola Gay. He flew it to the Smithsonian Institution where it resides today at the National Air and Space Museum. He told me "it was one beat-up old airplane" by the time he flew it. I can only imagine the incredible amount of time and effort that went into restoring the Enola Gay. I have mixed emotions about the Enola Gay being on display, but one thing I don't have mixed emotions about is for those thousands and thousands of Allies who risked their own lives for the freedom of others. You are all heroes in my eyes, including you, Dad.

Mark Rourke
Boulder, Colorado

Dear Editors,

I read your article on the number of generals killed in World War II. While it was a comprehensive list, I wonder if you missed one general. General Ken Walker was not included on the list. I wonder if that omission was an oversight?

Brett Arvidson

Thank you. Brig. Gen Kenneth Walker should have been included on the list. He was killed over Rabaul, New Britain, on January 5, 1943.

Dear Editors,

The Russian unit Stephen J. Parshall was referring to in the July 05 Dispatches was the Women's Death Battalion raised in May 1917 by Maria Bochkareva, which took part in Kerensky's 1917 summer offensive. On July 9, 1917, His 270-woman unit went into action against the Germans and during the two months they were at the front line, they sustained 80% casualties. Bochkareva herself was a victim of the Russian Revolution and was executed by the Omsk Cheka in May 1920.

James M. Scannell
Ireland

USS *West Virginia*

Dear Editors,

I have a question about a photograph appearing on page 16 in the November 2005 issue of WWII History. The picture is of the *USS West Virginia* during the attack on Pearl Harbor and it is reproduced in color. It is one of the most familiar images of the attack and has appeared in countless publications, but always in black and white until recently. My question is, was this photograph originally shot in color or is it an artificially colorized black and white image?

Claybourne C. Snead
Arlington, Virginia

We obtained the photo in question in color (shown above), but it appears to have been colorized, perhaps during the war.

"Pappy" Gunn

Dear Editors,

Two paragraphs in Douglas Sterling's informative article "Seizing the Solomons and Beyond," in WWII History's September 2005 issue need further explanation.

Mr. Sterling wrote regarding the Battle of the Bismarck Sea that "This battle was of tremendous importance to the success of Cartwheel as it so alarmed the Japanese high command that they never again sent large ships to reinforce their garrisons on New Guinea."

How was this important American victory possible? Primarily because of one driven man, Paul I. Gunn. Paul Gunn was a retired U.S. Navy carrier pilot who was living in Manila with his family. He was called back into military service by the U.S. Army Air Force at the beginning of World War II.

Part of Paul I. "Pappy" Gunn's legendary WWII service was his many creative military innovations. One innovation called for adding eight 50-caliber machine guns to the front of U.S. Air Force bombers. Those medium bombers flying low and strafing chewed up Japanese Army defenses.

Pappy's most important innovation was medium bomber skip bombing techniques. Where large, high-flying bombers were unsuccessful, low-flying medium bombers were successful using skip bombing techniques in the Battle of the Bismarck Sea, March 3, 1943. Skip bombing by medium bombers prevented the Japanese convoy from bringing reinforcements to desperate Japanese troops on New Guinea. This battle was the turning point of the war in the southwest Pacific theater.

All of Paul "Pappy" Gunn's colorful life, legendary military service, and why he was so driven is detailed in the book, *Pappy Gunn* by Nathaniel Gunn.

Johnny R. Higgins
Fruitvale, Texas

Dear Editors,

I enjoyed your four articles in the May 2005 issue, "Cauldron of Death," "Shocked Beyond Imagination," "Victory At Last," "Russo-Japanese Clash at Nomonhan," and the profile of Hanna Reitsch (the greatest woman flier ever).

On page 37, I am very sure that the tank shown is a T-26 instead of a T-34 (the T-34 has a sloped front and a Christie suspension).

Regarding the letter from Steve Roersma, the easy way to tell the difference between the Mark III and the Mark IV is that the Mark III has six road wheels (bogies) and the Mark IV has eight.

F.W. Huempfner
Green Bay, Wisconsin

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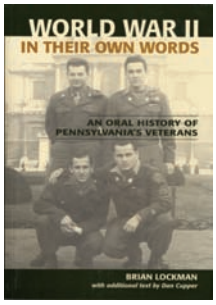


Hitler's Raid to Save Mussolini: The Most Infamous Commando Operation of World War II, by Greg Annussek, Da Capo Press, Cambridge, MA, 2005, 325 pp., illustrations, maps, notes, bibliography, index, $26.00, hardcover.

"I knew my friend Adolf Hitler would not abandon me," proclaimed a grinning Benito Mussolini after German commandos rescued the deposed Italian leader from his mountaintop prison in September 1943. The Allied invasion of Sicily in June 1943 had weakened Mussolini's hold over war-weary Italy and contributed to his overthrow the following month. Mussolini seemingly disappeared, and the Germans began planning a daring military mission, Operation Oak, to rescue the confined Duce. The leader of a recently organized commando unit, Waffen SS Captain Otto Skorzeny, helped plan and then led this risky rescue mission. On September 12, 1943, as assaulting German gliders crash landed on the Gran Sasso peak in central Italy, German commandos and paratroopers overpowered the Italian guards and freed Mussolini. Author Greg Annussek has used many primary source documents and reconciled their discrepancies and controversial details to produce a lively and action packed account of one of the boldest and most notorious commando missions of the Second World War.

World War II in Their Own Words: An Oral History of Pennsylvania's Veterans, edited by Brian Lockman with Dan Cupper, Stackpole Books, Mechanicsburg, PA, 2005, 272 pp., illustrations, maps, appendices, bibliography, index, $19.95, softcover.

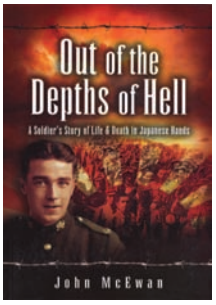
This is a book of war stories. Volume editors Brian Lockman and Dan Cupper have compiled the accounts of over 30 Pennsylvania World War II veterans who were interviewed by the Pennsylvania Cable Network for their lauded television series *World War II: In Their Own Words*. The veterans represent a cross-section of those who served in World War II. Contributing veterans included former officers, enlisted men, and one female nurse. They served in the Army, Army Air Corps, Navy, and Marines, and in the European, Pacific, and China-Burma-India theaters. Henry Heim, for example, flew more than 75 B-17 Flying Fortress missions over North Africa, Germany, and the Balkans. He recalled that he "wouldn't trade the experience for all the money in the world, but [he] would never want to go through it again." A B-29 tail gunner whose plane was shot down, Nick Gazibara was captured by the Japanese and recalls his horrific experiences. John Wiest served as a cook aboard the cruiser USS *Vincennes* and was seriously wounded when his ship was sunk at the Battle of Savo Island. These accounts are interesting and generally of a high quality, but oral interviews from 50 or more years after events need to be taken with a grain of salt, as memories fail, change, or embellish events, or become selective. In spite of inaccuracies in the World War II timeline, these veterans' accounts provide a glimpse of military service during the global conflict.

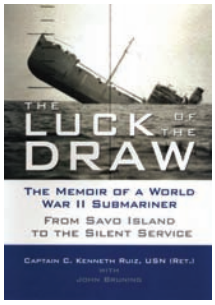
The Luck of the Draw: The Memoir of a World War II Submariner – From Savo Island to the Silent Service, by C. Kenneth Ruiz, Zenith Press, St. Paul, MN, 2005, 304 pp., illustrations, maps, $24.95. hardcover.

Recently commissioned from the U.S. Naval Academy, Ensign C. Kenneth Ruiz was assigned to the cruiser USS *Vincennes* in 1942. During the "nightmare battle" of Savo Island, August 9, 1942, *Vincennes* was one of four Allied heavy cruisers sunk. Ruiz survived this catastrophe and volunteered for submarine duty. He was assigned to the rivet-hulled, all-electric drive Perch-class submarine USS *Pollack* (SS-180). Ruiz made five war patrols on *Pollack* between October 1942 and September 1943. He describes in mesmerizing detail the operations of *Pollack* on these patrols (during which she sank four enemy vessels) and actions taken to avoid detection by surface patrol boats and destruction by depth charges and aerial bombs. After *Pollack* was refitted, Ruiz participated in more war patrols, including one that attacked a phosphate factory on a Japanese-held island. In late 1944, he was transferred to the U.S. This fast-paced memoir of life in the Silent Service is interesting and informative, and it merits a large audience.

Across the Dark Islands: The War in the Pacific, by Floyd W. Radike, Presidio Press, New York, 2005, 261 pp., maps, illustrations, $24.95, hardcover.

This riveting and educational book is Floyd W. Radike's story of his combat service in the Pacific theater during World War II. Radike was initially a lieutenant and rifle platoon leader in the 161st Infantry Regiment, a National Guard unit in the Regular Army 25th





Infantry Division (ID). The ill-prepared and inadequately trained 25th ID was diverted with two days' notice to combat in the dank and disease ridden jungles of Guadalcanal. During this campaign, the strength of Radike's company was reduced from five officers and 195 men to two officers and 11 men. The fighting at Guadalcanal, and later at New Georgia and in the Philippines, was "deadly, debilitating, and offering constant tension and fear, as well as mixing in mud, blood, and despair." While Radike bemoans the incompetence of senior leaders and the relative comfort of rear echelon units, he knew from experience that "the U.S. soldier had courage as well as sense."

M3 Lee/Grant Medium Tank, 1941-45, by Steven J. Zaloga, New Vanguard Series, Osprey Publishing, Oxford, UK, 2005, 48 pp., illustrations, bibliography, index, $14.95, softcover.

"The M3 medium tank was rushed into production in 1941," writes armored vehicle authority Steven J. Zaloga, "as a stop-gap to satisfy the desperate need for a medium tank in the US and British tank forces." The British, who fought in France in 1940 and had been fighting in the Middle East and elsewhere since mid-1940, were in serious need of armored vehicles. The interesting monograph chronicles the evolution of the M3 tank, including its design, development, and shipment as part of the Lend-Lease program. There were two main designs of the M3, each with a different turret (although there were nine variants of each). The U.S. version of this 75mm main gun tank was called the "Lee" and the British version the "Grant." The M3 was most effective in the North African desert battles in 1942-1943, where it was able to penetrate German panzer armor. After 1943, the M3 was no longer employed in the European Theater of Operations, although it was later used effectively in Burma and by the Russians on the Eastern Front. The excellent illustrations—photographs, drawings, and especially cutaway artwork that reveals the tank's interior compartments and equipment—make this a valuable reference for tank enthusiasts and military modelers. alternatives were much worse." □

Narva

Continued from page 75

plans for our own withdrawal. We were ordered to hold our positions until the last troops had come out of the bridgehead. Then, we were to cover the engineers charged with blowing the bridges."

Several groups had already made their way out of the bridgehead by July 23, when Govorov's reconnaissance finally recognized what was happening. Hoping to catch the Germans flat-footed, he ordered a general attack throughout the sector. Soviet forces in the bridgeheads established on the west bank lashed out, driving the Estonian SS troops westward. South of the city, reinforced armored and infantry units broke the German line and headed toward the Tallinin Highway with little more than token enemy forces in front of them.

The evacuation of the bridgehead continued, with Schlütter's guns blasting away at the advancing Soviets. Overhead, more than 800 Red Air Force aircraft fought with the remnants of Luftflotte I, which had only 137 planes to oppose them. Surprisingly, the bridgehead forces retreated in good order, making their way across the bridges as Schlütter watched from the burned-out courthouse.

"As the final troops crossed the bridges, we could see the Soviets following quickly on their heels," he wrote. "Suddenly, my own position came under artillery fire, starting what was left of the courthouse on fire. I gave the order to my radioman to tell the engineers to blow the bridges without delay. We were coming down the steps, with burning timbers falling all around us, when we heard the massive explosions. The engineers had blown the bridges with only minutes to spare."

With his mission completed, Schlütter saw to his own men's safety. His preplanned evacuation route lay open to the west, and the guns were already being prepared for movement. "We hitched the horses to the artillery and made our way out of the city," he wrote. "No one knew what lay ahead of us, but the hell of Narva was behind us. Little did we know that we had almost another year of war to fight. Little did we know how many more of our comrades would fall before the last bullet was fired." □

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

Clarke at St. Vith

Continued from page 39

it. Now all talk was of Bastogne and Patton's brilliant counterattack. Few people considered the fact that General Anthony McAuliffe, in command of the 101st Airborne Division in the absence of General Maxwell Taylor, denied he had been surrounded and that he had needed Patton. America needed a victory. No one wanted to talk of the "defeat" at St. Vith, especially as the withdrawal from the Belgian town had been forced on the U.S. Army by Montgomery.

Just after Clarke had seen St. Vith retaken in January 1945 and celebrated the victory with toasted cheese sandwiches, he was sent back to England to recuperate and for another operation. He did not return to Europe until after the war was over to command the 7th Armored and later his old division, the 4th Armored. There is little information available on why it took so long. The Freedom of Information Act does not make it that easy to obtain the details, and there were many senior officers who had fought in that first week of the Bulge who were under investigation about their conduct.

When he did return, Clarke started to ascend the ladder of promotion steadily, becoming a corps commander, an acting Army commander, the commander of the U.S. 7th Army in Europe, and finally adviser to Presidents John F. Kennedy and Lyndon B. Johnson. He never forgot St. Vith, where it all started. In 1964, when there was a typhus epidemic in that part of Belgium and Americans were forbidden to go there, Clarke ignored the order and attended the reunion of the men who had fought there, many of whose lives he had saved.

There, too, he met an old enemy, General von Manteuffel. There, just outside Bruce Clarke's old command post, the former gentleman jockey told the American who towered above him, "On Christmas Eve, I recommended that the German Army give up their attack and return to the West Wall. I gave as a reason the time my Fifth Army had lost at St. Vith. Hitler did not accept my recommendation."

It was a bald, unadorned statement without flattery. But it told a pleased Clarke one thing. Despite critics such as Ridgway and other U.S. commanders in the Bulge, as a raw, young brigadier general unknown to the outside world, he had helped to change the face of World War II. □

Well-known author Charles Whiting has written numerous books on topics related to World War II. He resides in England.

Wake Island Survivor

Continued from page 45

✷ **WWII:** When did you know the island was taken and the garrison had surrendered?

✷ **HOLEWINSKI:** Major Devereux came, waving a white flag. Some of the marines north of my position hollered, "Watch out, major, there are Japs all around you!" I laughed and asked if he could see the Japanese right by the major!

✷ **WWII:** What happened during the first hours of your captivity when the 1,593 American prisoners were assembled at the airfield?

✷ **HOLEWINSKI:** The Japanese pulled me and my dead buddies out from under the gun platform. A marine bandaged my legs, and it was then that I realized I had a hole in my back. I was very thirsty. I pointed to a Japanese soldier's canteen and motioned I wanted a drink. The Japanese officer told the soldier to give me a drink. I learned the word for water quickly. I was taken to the airfield, which was not far away. Because of my condition, I couldn't see a lot of what was going on. I was on the edge of the group, and I did manage to get a can of evaporated milk. I drank it all at once.

✷ **WWII:** The Japanese had taken heavy casualties during the Wake campaign, around 900 to 1,000 men, including some 500 from the SNLF. Some Japanese officers wanted revenge for their humiliating reverses. Later, five American POW's were beheaded in punishment. As a member of that 3-inch gun crew, were you in danger?

✷ **HOLEWINSKI:** The civilian doctor (Dr. Lawton E. Shank) walked around our area and said in a loud voice, "Remember you were not by the 3-inch gun." He said this a number of times. I caught on right away. A Japanese had told him they were looking for those men who were on the gun, as they were going to execute them for killing so many of their friends. We were lucky because it was hard to tell on the airfield who had been on the gun.

A cot was brought in, and the Navy doctor [Lieutenant G. Mason Kahn] and the civilian doctor [Shank] had to decide who was going to get it. It was a choice between me and a native from Guam who had worked for Pan Am. The bottom of his butt was shot off. I got the cot, and it felt so good. It was the best Christmas present I ever got. Two days later, I was loaded on a flatbed truck and moved to a Japanese hospital [established on Wake].

✷ **WWII:** What was the hospital routine like?

✷ **HOLEWINSKI:** There were seven of us there in the Japanese hospital. Dr. Shank, the civilian M.D., came to see us about every day, and he'd change my bandages, which were usually blood-soaked. A Japanese pilot was one of the patients, and each day his boy attendant would give each of us a cigar. Those of us who didn't smoke would give the cigars to Dr. Shank.

One time a Japanese doctor came in to change my bandages. His assistant dropped the bandages onto the floor. As he reached down to pick it up, the doctor told him, "No." Instead, they got a pair of tweezers, picked the bandages up, and then placed them on my open wound. The next day, when Dr Shank came in, I told him what had happened. When he took those bandages off, he found that maggots were eating my flesh. As it was, I was bandaged right to my knees. It took five months for my legs to heal, as there was no way to graft skin on them.

✷ **WWII:** On January 12, 1942, the bulk of the Wake Island POWs were taken aboard the freighter *Nitta Maru* and transported to the Shanghai War Prisoner's Camp that the Japanese were running in China. Where were you at that time?

✷ **HOLEWINSKI:** Twenty of us who were wounded were left on the island when the others left in January. We left Wake on May 15, the anniversary of when I joined the marines. The ship was the *Asuma Maru*. It had been in Los Angeles Harbor on December 5, unloading its cargo of raw silk. The ship's purser and the male steward took care of us. We had the whole swimming pool area.

✷ **WWII:** Instead of going to Shanghai, your ship went to Japan?

✷ **HOLEWINSKI:** The steward told us the ship had gone down to South America [after visiting the U.S.], and they were told we [Americans] had started the war! We were fed well on the ship and got our first rice diet. There were also women and children aboard. We landed in Yokohama, then were put on a train. After about an hour's journey, six of us were taken off the train and sent to Ofuna, an interrogation prison. We were put in two-man cells. I had been to Palmyra, and they were trying to get information on where the airfield was going to be built. There were also navy officers from ships sunk in Java, British prisoners, and others. I was there a month—long enough.

✷ **WWII:** Where were you transferred next?

✷ **HOLEWINSKI:** The six of us were taken to Zentsuji, on the Japanese home island of Shikoku. I was there for six months. It was the best-fed camp in Japan, at least while I was there, because it was the camp that the Red Cross was shown. We got a small loaf of bread a day, though I heard this ration was cut later.

✷ **WWII:** You didn't seem to stay for very long in any camp.

✷ **HOLEWINSKI:** I was sent to five camps while in Japan, as I wasn't able to work. One camp I went to was Tangawa [near Osaka]. When I arrived, the prisoners—many of them men from the Philippines—were dying at a rate of two to six a day. We were given one Red Cross box per two prisoners, so when we got there we shared our food with them. Some thought we were nuts to do that, but after seeing what we were doing the Japanese increased the ration.

✷ **WWII:** You had a problem with a Japanese colonel that might have proved fatal?

✷ **HOLEWINSKI:** Yes, one day a Japanese colonel was giving a speech about how great they were doing, and during the middle of his talk I passed out. My back wound was still there. After the talk, the guards took me to the colonel's office. He said something in Japanese, and the three guards raised their loaded rifles. A Navy corpsman talked to the colonel and pulled down my shirt to show my wound. The soldiers were ordered to lower their rifles and take me back into the barracks. I heard later that the Japanese colonel thought I purposely passed out to insult him!

✷ **WWII:** You were also sent to Umeda Bunsho, a converted warehouse a mile from the Osaka waterfront and also near the Umeda train station. Later in the war it was destroyed in an incendiary raid.

✷ **HOLEWINSKI:** Yes, and it was a lot better camp. Many of the POWs worked in the railroad yards. They mostly handled food, and so we could eat. They were good providers, and we didn't think of it as stealing, merely borrowing! This was one good reason so many survived.

✷ **WWII:** The war finally ended in August 1945, when Japan surrendered. What did you do after your release and return home to the States?

✷ **HOLEWINSKI:** I was formally discharged from the Marines in March 1946. I got married on the second anniversary of my release from prison camp. My wife also served and was an Army nurse in the China-Burma-India theater during the war. I ran for county sheriff and was elected—the youngest sheriff in the state of Michigan. I was sheriff for 34 years, until I retired at the age of 59. I've traveled a lot and have been in 48 of the 50 states, as well as Europe.

Eric Niderost is a community college professor in Hayward, Califoria. He has written several books and numerous articles on World War II.

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On June 4, 1944, 150 miles off the coast of West Africa, the men of the USS *Guadalcanal* Task Group 22.3 attacked one of Nazi Germany's deadly weapons, the U-*505* submarine. Their mission wasn't to sink it. They wanted to capture it–a feat the U.S. Navy had not achieved since the War of 1812. * After an intense fire fight from both sky and sea, the severely damaged sub began to sink and her German crew scrambled to abandon ship. Just as quickly, a whaleboat of 12 brave U.S. sailors set course towards it. * As the Germans poured out of the quickly sinking vessel, the U.S. headed in to gather critical intelligence and technology. They knew the sub could be booby-trapped and sailors could be hiding, ready to attack. They realized the Germans, intending to sink the U-boat, removed a scuttling valve. Water was quickly rising. The time to act was now and that's exactly what they did, saving the boat, key resources and themselves. * The secret capture of the U-*505* provided invaluable intelligence. Contents aboard the sub helped break Nazi codes, which, along with the blood and sweat of countless other heroes, led to the Allies winning the war.

U.S. sailors aboard the captured U-505

* Decades later, the fearsome U-*505* submarine resides in America for everyone to see. Meticulously restored, the U-*505* has resurfaced in a subterranean exhibit that will draw you in to the world at war. This new experience features never-before-seen artifacts, dramatic re-enactments of the famed capture and interactive challenges where you can test your skills at diving a sub, at seeking out enemy ships with an attack periscope and at decoding secret Enigma messages.

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