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WWII HISTORY

WWII HISTORY • SUMMER 2025 Volume 24, No. 2

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Cover: A GI poses with his trusty M-1 Garand in January 1943. See story page 68. Photo: National Archives.

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Heinrich Himmler, Nazi architect of the Holocaust, was discovered and captured due to papers forged by his own SS.

During the last days of the Third Reich and the immediate aftermath of World War II in Europe, the Allied hunt for the high-ranking Nazis closest to the Führer was vigorous. Some war criminals slipped through the cordon of checkpoints and the interrogations of prisoners, while others took to their heels and were shot down in the rubble of the Nazi capital of Berlin. Such was the case with Martin Bormann, Hitler's private secretary and head of the Nazi Party Chancellery.

Still others—including Luftwaffe chief Hermann Göring; Kriegsmarine commander Admiral Karl Dönitz, who succeeded Hitler as leader of the doomed Reich; Field Marshal Wilhelm Keitel, head of the high command of the German armed forces (OKW); and Gen. Alfred Jodl, the OKW chief of staff—were apprehended. Another of those taken into custody was Reichsfuhrer SS Heinrich Himmler, who tried mightily to avoid arrest.

According to a BBC story in 2020, two men in long green overcoats were with the Reichsfuhrer, who wore a dirty sergeant's uniform and an eye patch. At the British checkpoint on May 22, 1945, they were immediately under suspicion. The two well dressed Germans kept looking back at the third as if worried whether he was keeping up. When asked for their papers, they produced the standard document issued by the Allies to German soldiers after hostilities ceased.

Warnings had been posted that some counterfeit documents were circulating, particularly for the benefit of SS members attempting to elude capture. The British troops at the checkpoint were alert to the bogus forms, and when the third German, allegedly Sergeant Heinrich Hizinger, handed over his identification the trio was detained. The same stamp that had been seen earlier on false documents was evident on Hizinger's.

Taken to a camp for interrogation, the fidgety Himmler removed the eye patch and asked to speak with a senior officer. One of the most wanted Nazis believed still at large, Himmler proclaimed his identity and hoped to bargain for his life. Soon afterward, he was sent for a physical examination. While examing Himmler's mouth the doctor, Captain C.J. "Jimmy" Wells, noticed a small blue object. As he tried to remove it, Himmler pulled away and bit down on the hidden cyanide capsule, dying in minutes. Like Göring a few months later, he had cheated the hangman.

The BBC story announced that Himmler's incriminating identity paper had been found after 75 years. It had been donated to the Military Intelligence Museum in Shefford, Bedfordshire, England, by Lt. Col. Sidney Noakes, an attorney who joined British Military Intelligence in 1943 and was transferred to MI5, Britain's domestic counterintelligence and security agency. Apparently, Noakes had been a member of the interrogation team that questioned Himmler and was allowed to retain the document that bore the telltale stamp that the checkpoint soldiers had been warned to watch for. In an ironic twist, the Germans' own forgery had led to Himmler's capture.

"Without this damning stamp on the document it is possible that Himmler may have been able to pass through the system unnoticed and escape as many other wanted Nazis," Bill Steadman, curator of the Military Intelligence Museum, told the BBC when the identity document was being placed on display. "What appeals to me most about this story is that the Germans themselves made the unmasking an absolute certainty."

Although Himmler, the mastermind of the Holocaust and head of the odious organization that perpetrated unspeakable war crimes, did manage to avoid the Allied military tribunal at Nuremberg, his escape plan had been foiled and his fate sealed—by his own accomplices.

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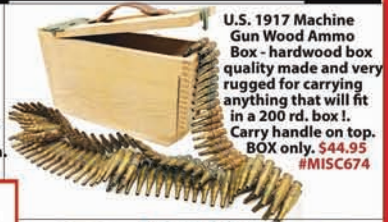

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The Consolidated B-32 Dominator bomber was a lesser-known competitor of the Boeing B-29 Superfortress.

Sergeant Anthony Marchione, an aerial photographer, felt vulnerable as the Japanese fired on the aircraft he was aboard for this August 18, 1945 sortie. Ironically this was a photo-reconnaissance mission to ensure the Japanese air units in the Tokyo area were observing the cease-fire by remaining grounded.

Some of the Japanese pilots attacking the two American bombers may have noticed they differed from the usual Boeing B-29 Superfortress four-engine heavy bomber that had devastated their cities. These veterans would have been correct as the aircraft they were attempting to shoot down was America's lesser-known heavy bomber, the Consolidated B-32 Dominator. One of nine Dominators assigned to the U.S. 386th Bombardment Squadron, it was numbered 42-108578. Two specialists had been assigned to the aircraft. In addition to Marchione, Staff Sergeant Joseph Lachrite knew the possibility of a Japanese attack. The day before, two days after the cease-fire agreement, another 386th photo-reconnaissance sortie had been assailed.

Defending 578, five gunners fired on the attackers with their dual-mounted .50-caliber machine guns. Their aircraft was singled out as a frozen camera forced it to fly lower. The accompanying B-32, which had been flying 10,000–12,000 feet higher, dove to assist. Mitsubishi A6M Reisens (Zero) and Kawanishi N1K Shindens (George), swarmed the Dominator. In a rear compartment, Lachrite began packing his equipment when several 20mm rounds came through the fuselage, hitting him in both legs. Marchione rushed to help and was also hit. The two men were moved to another compartment for first-aid treatment and Marchione was hit again. Despite attempts to save him, he died 30 minutes later—the last mem-

USAAF

ABOVE: Sergeant Anthony Marchione, a photographer aboard a B-32 bomber on a reconnaissance flight over Japan, was the last American air casualty of World War II. TOP: Consolidated B-32 bombers line the floor at an assembly line in Fort Worth, Texas. This photo was taken in 1944 as the Dominator was beginning to hit stride in production.

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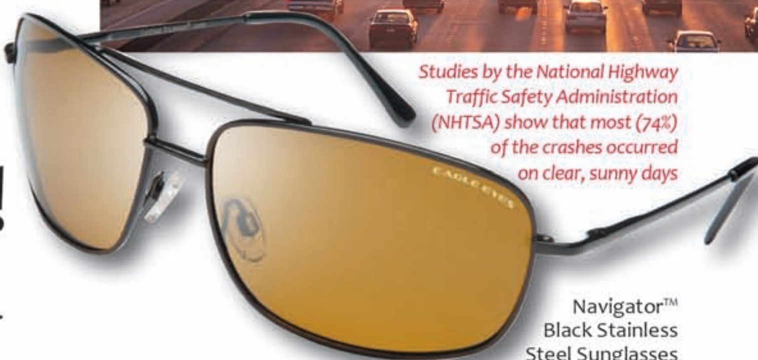

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ber of the Army Air Forces killed in aerial combat during World War II.

The Consolidated B-32 Dominator was developed as an alternative to the Boeing XB-29, in case that program did not work. It was common policy for the United States Army Air Forces (USAAF) to run "parallel aircraft development programs" as seen with the Vought F4U Corsair and the Grumman F6F Hellcat fighters. Plagued by issues throughout its development and testing, the B-32 only arrived in the Pacific theater in May 1945. After some combat test missions, it performed the photo-reconnaissance sorties. Only 118 aircraft were completed, including three prototype models. The B-32 Dominator had the potential to be a satisfactory and complementary long-range bomber to the Boeing B-29 Superfortress before production was officially cancelled in October 1945.

Five years before its cancellation, Consolidated responded to a request for a very long-range bomber. Emphasizing range and speed over bomb load, the desired design would be capable of both high and medium altitude missions. In April 1940, four companies submitted designs—Boeing, Lockheed, Douglas, and Consolidated. After Lockheed and Douglas withdrew, the contracts went to Boeing (XB-29) and Consolidated (XB-32).

Consolidated's "Model 33," as it was known internally, would be pressurized and feature five remotely-operated gun turrets. Like the XB-29, it would be powered by four Wright R-3350 Cyclone, 18-cylinder radial engines. While both programs suffered unique issues and setbacks, one problem they shared was the Wright R-3350's propensity for engine fires. Model 33 looked like an enlarged version of the company's successful B-24 Liberator in some ways, but differed in others. Unlike the Liberator's box-shape, the new design was an 83-foot cylindrical fuselage. With a 135-foot wingspan, the design used the same shoulder-mounted Davis Wing. The B-24's dual "roll-up" bomb bay doors and twin tail were also designed into the XB-32. Mounting enormous three-bladed propellers, two versions of the 2,200-horsepower Wright Cyclone engine, each with two exhaust-driven turbochargers, powered the bomber. The two outboard engines were the R-3350-21, while R-3350-13 were inboard. The two inboard R-3350s had unique reversible-pitch Curtiss propellers, a feature praised by Dominator pilots as it provided for excellent ground-handling.

Ladelle A. Hamilton, USAAF

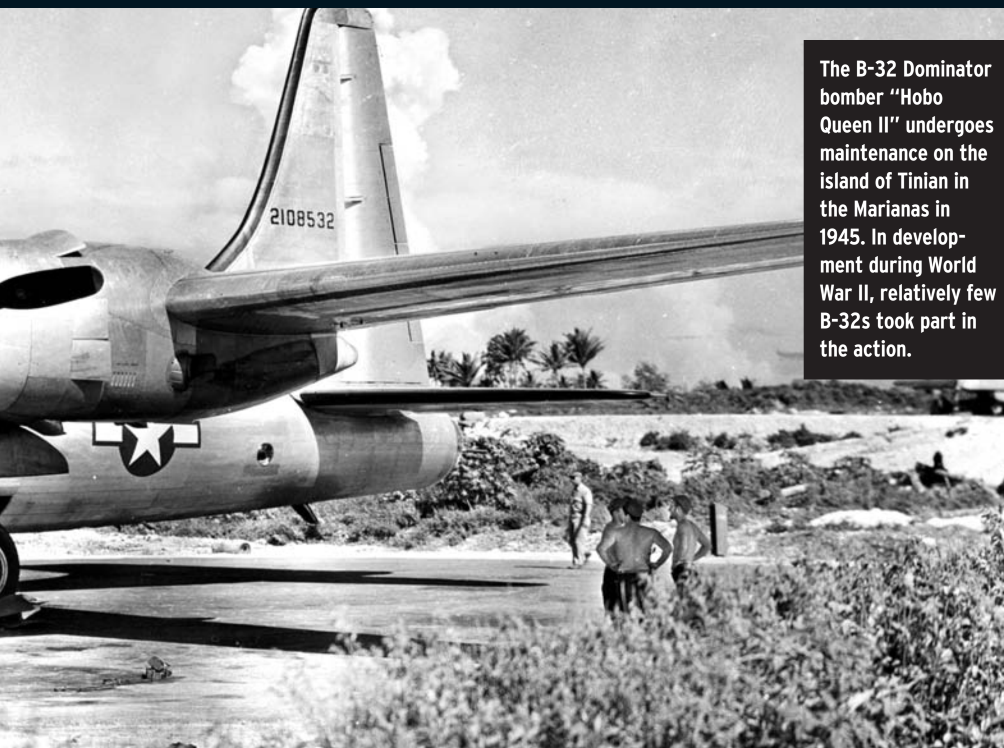
U.S. Air Force

Sporting a twin tail assembly similar to that of the famous B-24 Liberator bomber, a Consolidated XB-32 Dominator prototype is shown with engines running in preparation for a flight in February 1944.

Design and manufacturing issues delayed the XB-32 program, especially the pressurized compartment and remotely-operated weapons systems. Six months behind schedule, the first XB-32 prototype finally flew on September 7, 1942. The success in getting the Model 33 into the air was overshadowed by a fractured rudder trim tab that forced the pilot to make an emergency landing.

Subsequent test flights uncovered more issues leading to a string of modifications of the XB-32, known in 1943 as the Terminator. The most serious of these was the discovery that exhaust gasses from the superchargers were burning away the landing gear's outer skin near the wing fuel tanks. On its 31st test flight, the prototype crashed into temporary buildings on a U.S. Marine Corps base killing 4 and injuring 63. Two more prototypes were constructed with the final XB-32 having a single 16.5-foot tall "B-29"-style tail. The idea of a pressurized cabin was scrapped and the remotely-operated turrets were replaced by manned versions. There was also a complete redesign of the engine nacelles and a switch to four-bladed propellers. Before the B-32 went into production, the tail was increased to a 19.5-foot fin.

Now called Consolidated-Vultee after the



The B-32 Dominator bomber "Hobo Queen II" undergoes maintenance on the island of Tinian in the Marianas in 1945. In development during World War II, relatively few B-32s took part in the action.

two firms merged, a contract was signed for 300 aircraft to be built. An updated contract called for 40 of them as training versions, the TB-32. Flight crew training went quickly as many were from veteran B-24 Liberator crews. A series of modifications to the B-32 exacerbated the program's slow progress. Despite this, the USAAF seemed intent on having 4,000 B-32s in its arsenal.

While building the first B-32 production model in August 1944, it was renamed the Dominator. To ensure the aircraft could meet the desired specifications, the first 10 production models were allocated to complete testing. Slow production prevented compliance with supplying all of the test subjects. The trials not only looked at the mechanical and engine systems, but also its defensive measures, which were now five manned turrets featuring a pair of Browning M2 .50-caliber machine guns at the nose, tail, lower ball, and two dorsal. The B-32 could carry a variety of bomb loads. Mission dependent, bomb types ranged from general purpose to fragmentation to incendiary. Maximum bomb load for the Dominator was designed and combat proven to be 20,000 pounds.

Although the B-32 had a gross weight of 100,800 pounds, the Wright R-3350 power plants allowed for a top speed of 357 miles per hour and a cruising speed of 290 miles per hour.

After more delays, the first B-32 production model finally rolled out on September 19, 1944—and its nose landing gear collapsed. By New Years' Eve 1944, only five Dominators had been completed. The target for December alone had been 30 aircraft. To make matters worse, Boeing's B-29 had already seen action before the first production Dominator was completed.

With all of the ongoing production problems and delays as well the positive performances of the B-29 on its combat missions, the Dominator faced the possibility of cancellation. The USAAF decreed the bomber had to undergo combat suitability testing before being officially allowed to enter service. The lack of a sufficient number of aircraft hindered this. Lt. Gen. George Kenney, Commander of the Far East Air Force (FEAF), handed the Dominator a lifeline. In March 1945, Kenney visited Washington, D.C., to promote his belief that the employment of very long-range bombers was the key to defeating Japan. Repeatedly denied the B-29, he requested the B-32 for testing. Unexpectedly, Consolidated-Vultee received another production contract in the spring of 1945, planning for a total of 1,700 Dominators to be constructed.

The three Dominators chosen for combat were scheduled to start their long trans-Pacific flight on May 16. The selected were all B-32-

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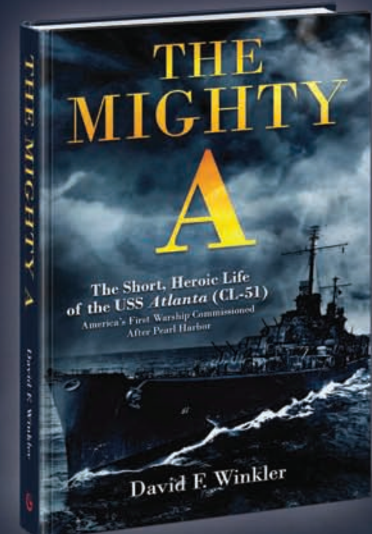

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National Archives

A Consolidated B-32 Dominator bomber with a later tail design flies near Wright Field, Dayton, Ohio, on April 18, 1945. The first production B-32 rolled of the Consolidated assembly line in September 1944, but its nose landing gear promptly collapsed.

20-CF versions with the numbers 42-108529 ("Lady is Fresh"), 42-108528, and 42-108532 ("Hobo Queen II"). After several stops for refueling, the trio arrived at Clark Field in the Philippines on May 24 and May 25. All spare parts for the planes had been errantly sent to New Guinea. Piloting 528, Major Henry S. Britt noted no less than 32 mechanical issues with the bomber and in referring to the B-32, said, "This airplane was the poorest combat airplane [he] had ever flown."

As part of Kenney's Fifth Bomber Command, the three B-32s were assigned to the 312th Bombardment Group (Light) commanded by Lt. Col. Selmon Wells. Based at Floridablanca on Luzon, its four squadrons also flew the Douglas A-20 Havoc light bomber. The three Dominators were assigned to the 386th Bombardment Squadron. If combat testing proved successful, it would switch over to Consolidated-Vultee's bomber, followed by the other squadrons. Optimistically, a total of three Dominator groups were planned by the AAF.

To determine if the B-32 should be authorized for service, 11 combat test missions were devised. From single plane sorties to raids utilizing all three, these varying missions used payloads differing in size and bomb types to assess its capabilities and weaknesses. Operating primarily from Floridablanca, target locations ranged from the Philippines to the island of Formosa (Taiwan).

Taking off from Clark Field, the Consolidated-Vultee B-32 heavy bomber flew its first combat mission on May 29, 1945. The target was Japanese positions in the northern Luzon town of Antatet. Three observers supplemented each aircraft's standard 10-man flight crew to document the mission. For its first offensive raid, each Dominator carried nine 1,000-pound demolition bombs to be dropped from 10,000 feet. Symbolic of the aircraft's career, Britt's 528 developed an issue with its turbo superchargers, forcing him to abort. Several photographs were taken of "Hobo Queen II" and "Lady is Fresh" departing Clark Field. Arriving around noon over Antatet, no enemy interceptors or antiaircraft fire greeted the Americans. "Lady is Fresh" became the first B-32 Dominator to drop bombs in battle.

Two weeks later, the same two aircraft dropped 40 500-pound demolition bombs each on the Basco Runway on Batan Island. More than half of the payload struck the runway, rendering it unusable. Other test missions included dropping demolition and fragmentation bombs on the Heito Butanol plant on Formosa. Only twice did all three Dominators fly a mission together. On June 16, Mission Number 5, each plane carried 40 500-pound incendiary bombs for what could be recorded as the B-32's most successful raid. Targeting the town of Taito on Formosa's southwest coast, the trio arrived over target mid-morning at an altitude of 19,000 feet, greeted by brief ineffective flak. The 40 incendiary bombs per plane dropped at 100-foot intervals obliterated the town's center. This "Tokyo Treatment" turned Taito into an inferno.

After their mission schedule had been completed, the critical review process began. In these 11 missions, 20 sorties had been successfully completed without loss and 134 tons of bombs dropped on enemy targets. No Japanese fighters rose up to counter them and only during the "Tokyo Treatment" of Taito did the 386th encounter antiaircraft fire. The generally favorable report cited that flight crews found the B-32 a "stable and rugged bombing platform." A "clean-up" list of more than 40 items focusing on layout and mechanical issues accompanied the report.

Between late July and early August, while the three Dominator crews continued non-combat training, six aircraft were assigned to the 386th Bombardment Squadron and moved to Yontan, Okinawa, for the final push against Imperial Japan. During this transfer, an American B-29 Superfortresses dropped the first atomic weapons on Hiroshima and Nagasaki. In mid-August, the AAF officially renamed the aircraft the Terminator, a change its crews largely ignored.

Starting August 16, the Dominators of the 386th, under FEAF orders, participated in daytime photo-reconnaissance missions to ensure the Japanese complied with the ceasefire terms. No payloads were carried on these recon sorties, but additional observers accom-

panied the flights. "Hobo Queen II" and 42-108543 ("Harriett's Chariot") flew over the Tokyo area for this purpose as well as to scout for potential airfields for U.S. paratroopers to land ahead of the occupation force. Accounts differ about this mission. Some state the two flew unopposed, while another source mentions the two ran into 10 belligerent fighters and American gunners claimed two probable kills.

The next day, under the direction of Lieutenant Colonel Wells, "Hobo Queen II", "Harriett's Chariot," and two more aircraft, numbers 42-108539 and 42-108578, headed back to Tokyo. Split into pairs, they had different areas to photograph. Starting at 10:30 a.m. and continuing for the duration of their time over Japan, the B-32s dealt with the first officially confirmed fighter opposition. A number of Japanese Navy and Army pilots, offended that American aircraft boldly flew over their ruined homeland, disobeyed orders and intercepted the Americans. In addition to this aerial opposition, heavy antiaircraft fire was directed at the bombers. Numerous Shindens (reported as Nakajima Ki-44 "Tojo" fighters) and one "Tony," the Kawasaki Ki-61 Hien, attacked the four bombers at various times. During this engagement, Dominator gunners scored their first aerial kill—the "Tony." With more than 4,000 .50-caliber rounds fired, another enemy aircraft was listed as a probable kill and at least one more was damaged. The B-32s did not return unscathed, both 543 and 539 had been hit. Though 543 was quickly repaired, 539 was not as fortunate. In addition to having its Number 4 engine hit, the port wing, a flap, and an aileron tab suffered damage. The lack of spare parts prevented its repair. Now 539 became the source of much-needed parts. This aerial battle would be noted as ace Saburo Sakai's last mission for Japan.

On the fateful August 18 mission, "Hobo Queen II," flown by Capt. James Klein, headed back to the Tokyo area with 578, a repaired "Harriet's Chariot," and 42-108544. The latter two developed engine oil leaks, forcing them to return to Yontan. Klein and 578, piloted by First Lt. John Anderson, flew two miles apart at an altitude of 22,000 feet. The mission called for a number of passes over several Tokyo area airfields. For this purpose, photographers Marchione and

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Lacharite were on loan from the 20th Long-Range Photo-Reconnaissance Squadron.

On their second pass, Japanese interceptors were observed taking off. At some point, one of the cameras on 578 became frozen, forcing Anderson to reduce altitude some 10,000 to 12,000 feet. On the squadron's last pass, the crew watched grimly as the Japanese climbed to greet them. Klein radioed the 578, requesting an increase in altitude to rejoin him. When Anderson failed to respond, Klein pushed his Dominator to its limits with a shallow dive to assist. Reaching speeds of 430 miles per hour, "Hobo Queen II" exceeded the "never exceed" speed of 357 miles per hour. Protecting each other, the gunners of the two Dominators engaged the 14 or so Mitsubishi A6Ms and Kawanashi N1Ks, again mistaken by the Americans as the "Tojo."

Targeted first, "Hobo Queen II" weathered the onslaught, the enemy respecting the 10 .50-caliber Brownings' firepower. The five gunners defending Anderson's 578 kept up a constant fire. After one fighter miraculously threaded the barrier, his 20mm rounds seriously damaging the Number 3 engine, the other Japanese fighters swarmed Anderson's bomber with renewed intensity.

Shortly after that the nose gunner scored another probable kill. A Mitsubishi A6M tried to strike from the rear. Sgt. John Houston, the tail gunner who had notched the Dominator's first confirmed kill the previous day, saw the incoming fighter and obliterated it with his dual .50s for a second confirmed kill. While the gunners fought to keep the enemy at bay, photographers Marchione and Lacharite stowed their equipment.

A Japanese interceptor broke through from below sending 20mm rounds into the rear compartments. Both photographers were hit in the legs. Marchione was hit again after having moved Lacharite. Two of 578's crew spent the next 30 minutes attempting to save Marchione from his fatal wounds. Despite their efforts, 19-year-old Sgt. Anthony Marchione became World War II's final air combat casualty. Rear dorsal gunner Sgt. James Smart earned the second confirmed kill of the mission. After losing four planes, the Japanese fighters withdrew. Although "Hobo Queen II" arrived at Yontan undamaged, Anderson's 578 landed safely with a dead Number 3 engine and 20mm damage, with one crewman dead and one severely injured.

National Archives

Air crewmen stroll around the Consolidated B-32 Dominator bomber "Hobo Queen II," the first to arrive in any theater of war. The B-32 project experienced significant delays which, along with the success of the Boeing B-29 Superfortress, nearly spelled the type's demise before it entered production.

The 22nd and final B-32 Dominator combat mission took place on August 28. Five aircraft were scheduled to fly over Tokyo, each loaded with almost 8,000 gallons of fuel in wings and special tanks installed in the rear bomb bay. "Hobo Queen II" and a repaired 578 were joined on the mission by 528 "Lady is Fresh" and 544. After the first four bombers took off, 544 lumbered down the runway. Almost airborne, its Number 3 engine lost power. The pilot aborted, but there wasn't enough runway and the 115,000-pound plane fell 80 feet into a coral pit. The explosion killed all 10 crew members as well as three specialists. "Lady is Fresh" was forced to return after takeoff. The remaining three aircraft carried out their mission. On the return, 528 lost two engines and ditched at sea. All on board were rescued.

Dominator 42-108530, given the name "Direct from Tokyo," flew the last official B-32 sortie on August 31, a goodwill mission flying early surrender photographs to New York City. The 386th Bombardment Squadron officially stood down on August 30. After the 20 sorties of their 11 combat test missions schedule, most of the squadron's nine Dominators took to the air for 11 more missions—three cancelled after departure for differing reasons. In addition to the destruction of Taito, two vessels were sunk plus a possible. Aerial combat totaled three confirmed kills, five probable, and one damaged enemy aircraft. Although no B-32s were lost in battle, accidents and mechanical failures caused the loss of three bombers with 14 crewmen killed and two more wounded.

In the first two weeks of October, the B-32s began their return journeys to the United States. Unfortunately, "Hobo Queen II" was not one of them. The veteran aircraft suffered damage after the collapse of its nose wheel, remaining on Okinawa until scrapped in 1946. The 386th was deactivated in December 1945. The Japanese surrender caused the future of many American weapons programs to become cloudy. The Dominator program was terminated on October 12, 1945. Only 115 of the bombers had been completed.

Like so many USAAF aircraft, Consolidated-Vultee's heavy bomber was ordered to the nearest disposal center. Milton J. Reynolds, a pen manufacturer, unsuccessfully attempted to purchase a surplus Dominator. Today there is not a single complete B-32 in existence. A B-32 was to be displayed at the Air Force Museum at Wright-Patterson Air Force Base, but it was scrapped in 1949. The only known piece from a B-32—an Alcad wing panel—serves as a monument to aviation pioneer John J. Mongomery on Otay Mesa, near San Diego, site of his alleged first heavier-than-air flight in 1883. □

Author John E. Spindler has contributed numerous articles, mainly for Military Heritage. *He resides in Gurnee, Illinois.*

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The first Marine hero of World War II was awarded a MOH for gallantry at Midway Atoll on December 7, 1941.

Marine Lieutenant George Cannon flinched instinctively as a barrage of shells erupted short of the sandy beach with a violent roar, sending columns of water and sand soaring into the air. Before Cannon could settle himself, the next volley landed inland a few hundred yards, falling amid a stand of coconut palms. The third struck closer to the wide-eyed Marines hunkered down in their command post on Sand Island, Midway Atoll, at the far western edge of the Hawaiian Islands chain.

Cannon searched their faces in the dim light. Though none of them had ever been under enemy fire before, they showed no fear. The young lieutenant was proud of his men. They all felt safe behind the thick walls of the concrete building and hoped the next salvo would land beyond them. They gripped the deck as they heard another roar from the heavy guns.

News of the Japanese sneak attack at Pearl Harbor had reached the Marine Corps' 6th Defense Battalion at 0630 local time (0900 Honolulu time) on December 7, 1941. A short while later an official dispatch from the Hawaii-based Fourteenth Naval District confirmed the disastrous attack. The dispatch also ordered the garrison to go to general quarters and activate their war plans. Within minutes the Marines scrambled to their gun positions around the island. Among them was Cannon, a platoon leader in Battery H (.50-caliber antiaircraft machine gun), who set up his command post in a small room in the power plant building. Three enlisted men, Platoon Sergeant William A. Barbour, communications chief Corporal Harold R. Hazelwood, and a runner, assisted him.

Naval History and Heritage Command

ABOVE: For exhibiting extreme courage by remaining at his post on Sand Island while wounded, Marine Lt. George Cannon received a posthumous Medal of Honor. TOP: A 2015 photo of the power plant bombarded by two Japanese destroyers at Midway Atoll on December 7, 1941. Lt. George Cannon, who was fatally wounded, and two others were inside.

He was born in Webster Groves, Missouri, on November 5, 1915, living there until his father died in 1931 and the family relocated to Detroit. He graduated high school in 1932, then attended Culver Military Academy in Indiana, before entering the University of Michigan. He graduated in June 1938 with a

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He joined the Marine Corps, then attended officer candidate training at the Philadelphia Navy Yard. He was commissioned as a 2nd lieutenant in May 1939 and joined the Marine detachment aboard the light cruiser USS *Boise*. In December 1940, he took command of a platoon in the 2nd Defense Battalion, which was then in training at the Marine base in San Diego, California. Three months later, orders sent him to the 6th Defense Battalion (DB) at Pearl Harbor.

Cannon and the 6th DB arrived on Sand Island on September 11, 1941, after months of training in San Diego and Hawaii. It was one of eight such units formed in the late 1930s in response to Japan's aggressive invasion of China, when it became obvious that Wake Island, Midway, and Johnston Island, as well as the navy's main anchorage at Pearl Harbor, needed increased security. While the army provided troops to guard the distant Philippines, these mid-Pacific Ocean locations also required protection, leading to a mission that was unusual for the Marine Corps.

As early as 1937, the Marine Corps was discussing the activation of battalion-sized detachments just for that purpose. Marine Corps commandant Maj. Gen. Thomas Holcomb recognized that Congress, given the isolationist fervor gripping the country, would not approve funding for offensive purposes. However, money might be available to fund defensive battalions to protect American interests abroad and allow an expansion of the Marine Corps beyond its 1939 strength of just over 19,000 officers and men. Each of the new 900-man defense battalions would have three antiaircraft gun batteries, three seacoast batteries, ground and antiaircraft machine gun batteries, as well as administrative and weapons maintenance specialists.

Midway's strategic position 1,137 miles northwest of Oahu had been recognized as early as 1867 when Navy Secretary Gideon Wells authorized funds to survey the area. In 1903, a communications cable company established a station on Sand Island. By June 1935, Pan American Airways had a commercial seaplane base on Sand Island.

The first Marines to land on Sand Island, on May 31, 1940, were a small survey party from the 3rd DB. In September, a work party of nine officers and 168 enlisted men landed to begin the construction of defensive positions.

ABOVE: The vital airstrip on Midway's Eastern Island, with Sand Island and its numerous facilities in the distance, is shown in this aerial view of Midway Atoll from November 1941. BELOW: The laundry building on Sand Island was damaged in the Japanese bombardment of Midway on December 7, 1941. It was hit again in June 1942, during the epic Battle of Midway, the turning point in World War II in the Pacific.

Both: Naval History and Heritage Command

A naval air station was authorized for Midway in early 1941 and construction of support facilities on both islands as well as a landing strip on Eastern to complement the existing runways on Sand.

In the meantime, the balance of the 3rd DB was ordered to Midway. On February 14, 1941, the remaining 28 officers and 565 enlisted men of that battalion came ashore on Midway. At the same time, Cannon and the rest of the 6th DB, then in training in San Diego, received orders to move to Hawaii. There, the unit would continue its training and serve as a rotational pool of replacements for the Marine garrison on Midway and those soon to come to Wake and Johnston islands.

The need for manpower to build and fortify the base on Midway continued unabated during the spring and summer of 1941. The backbreaking work of the young Marines and the contractors paid off when Naval Air Station, Midway, was commissioned on August 1, 1941. The new air station would soon be home to a squadron of Consolidated PBY Catalina flying boat patrol aircraft and a Marine scout bombing squadron.

A few weeks after the commissioning cere-

mony the advance elements of the 6th DB, 10 officers and 130 enlisted men arrived from Oahu on August 11.

With the completion of the airstrip on Eastern in early November 1941, the Marine Air Group 21 at Ewa Field on Oahu received notification of its pending move to Midway. Its Vought SB2U-3 Vindicator dive bombers of Squadron VMSB 231 received orders to land on the aircraft carrier USS *Lexington* on December 5, for a departure from Pearl Harbor and arrival off Midway on Sunday morning, December 7.

Army Air Force Boeing B-17 Flying Fortress bombers en route to the Philippines had been landing on Sand Island for refueling for several months and Navy Squadron VP-21, flying Catalinas and destined for Wake Island, had arrived on December 1 to spend a week at Midway patrolling the nearby waters until the *Lexington* arrived with VMSB 231.

While the Marines toiled, two Imperial Japanese Navy task forces set course for the Hawaiian Islands. The main force under Vice Admiral Chūichi Nagumo sailed from Hitokappu Bay (now Kasatka Bay, under Russian control) in the Kuril Islands on November 26, 1941. Nagumo's force consisted of six aircraft carriers, two battleships, two heavy cruisers, one light cruiser, and eight destroyers. Its target was Pearl Harbor.

The wreckage of a Consolidated PBY Catalina flying boat lies ashore on Midway Atoll. The destructive shelling of the atoll by two Japanese destroyers occurred just hours after the attack on Pearl Harbor that plunged the United States into World War II.

Naval History and Heritage Command

Two days later the Japanese destroyers *Ushio* and *Sazanami*, accompanied by a tanker, left Tateyama Naval Base along the eastern edge of Tokyo Bay. Called the Midway Neutralization Unit, the mission of these vessels was the destruction of the new seaplane base on Sand Island, preventing those

Both: Naval History and Heritage Command

ABOVE: The Japanese destroyer *Ushio*, one of two Imperial Navy warships that bombarded Midway Atoll on December 7, 1941, is shown at center, while a smaller destroyer of another class appears at right. This photo was taken in September 1945, just as World War II in the Pacific came to an end. INSET: Corporal Harold Hazelwood was seriously wounded during the Japanese bombardment of Midway Atoll while serving alongside Lt. George Cannon. Despite suffering a fractured leg and severe shock, Hazelwood remained at his damaged switchboard and reestablished communications across Midway. He received the Navy Cross for heroism.

aircraft from attacking Nagumo's ships as they retired toward Japan after attacking Pearl Harbor. The existence of these two task forces was completely unknown to U.S. naval intelligence. Though the United States had been successful in cracking Japanese codes, those were codes primarily used in diplomatic communications and not naval codes.

Navy PBY Squadron VP-21 launched five Catalinas early on Sunday morning, December 7. They flew prescribed patrol routes searching for anything out of the ordinary. They found nothing. On the seaplane ramp on Sand Island, two PBYs prepared to take off to rendezvous and guide in the aircraft of VMSB-231. It had been a routine morning on the isolated atoll until that first message from Oahu arrived at 0630. Cannon and his Marines could not understand why Japan would attack the much stronger United States. But they were confident they would make the Japanese pay for that sneak attack.

The Midway Marines spent the rest of December 7 preparing the atoll for war. There had been no further messages regarding any Japanese activity around the Hawaiian Islands. None of the PBY search planes had seen any sign of Japanese vessels.

At 1842 hours, a sentry saw a brief flash of light on the horizon southwest of Sand Island. About three hours later the lone operational radar facility at Midway picked up two surface targets about 15 miles to the southwest. Soon, observers in two searchlight positions, equipped with powerful night-vision binoculars, reported that they saw "shapes."

At 2135, the first salvo of shells came, falling short. Then the Japanese gunners walked their fire up the beach. A salvo bracketed Battery A, a 5-inch seacoast unit at the southern tip of Sand Island. The blasts severed many of the recently laid telephone lines. A salvo struck the new seaplane hangar. Another hit the powerplant where Cannon had set up his command post.

In the horrific blast, Corporal Hazelwood suffered a broken leg and Platoon Sergeant Barbour had his ankle smashed. Cannon suffered grievous injuries. Red hot, jagged shell fragments nearly severed his left leg with the force of the explosion crushing his pelvis.

Cannon refused aid and helped Hazelwood reestablish communications. Only after the radio was working and Barbour and Hazelwood had been evacuated—about 40 minutes—did Cannon agree to medical aid. But by then it was too late.

The Japanese destroyers circled for another run at Midway and shells rained down on Marine gun positions, knocking out several of them. Marines firing a 3-inch antiaircraft gun may have hit the enemy ships. A Marine-manned 5-inch gun then opened fire and hits were reported.

At 2158, the destroyers turned for home and the second Japanese sneak attack on December 7, 1941 was over. In the 23-minutes, Cannon and another Marine were killed, and 10 were wounded; two sailors were also killed.

At dawn December 8, Midway prepared for the worst, expecting another Japanese attack with land forces. The Marines of the 6th DB believed that with the damage sustained at Pearl Harbor they were on their own.

In anticipation of further attack, reinforcements arrived at Midway. But it was a slow trickle—17 SB2U-3s from VMSB-231, which were supposed to have landed at Midway on December 7, finally arrived on the 17th. Ground reinforcements in the form of 100 officers and men from Batteries A and C, 4th DB, arrived on Christmas Eve. On Christmas

U.S. Government

A 2015 photo of the ruins of the seaplane hangar on Midway Atoll. The building was heavily damaged during the bombardment of the atoll on December 7, 1941, when two Japanese destroyers unleashed a torrent of 5-inch shells.

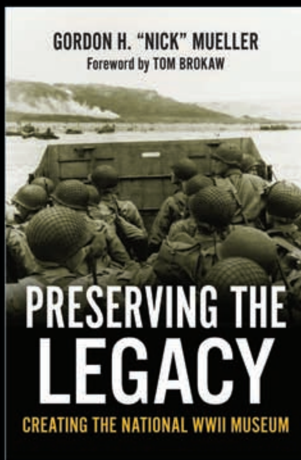
Day, 14 nearly obsolete Brewster F2A-3 Buffalo Marine fighter planes from VMF-221 landed. The next day, Battery B, 4th DB arrived by sea, with antiaircraft guns and their crews.

During the early months of 1942, the U.S. Navy continued to reinforce Midway. At the same time, the Japanese made plans to invade and capture the atoll. In June 1942, the two forces would meet in one of the most decisive naval battles of World War II.

The Navy announced a posthumous Medal of Honor for 1st Lieutenant George H. Cannon for his selfless disregard of his injuries, the first Marine to receive the prestigious medal in World War II. He was the last Marine cited for heroism "in the line of his profession." More restrictive criterion was later adopted: "conspicuous gallantry above and beyond the call of duty involving actual conflict with the enemy" standard. The medal was mailed to his mother in Detroit. A destroyer escort, DE 99, was named in his honor in May 1943. He is interred at the National Memorial Cemetery of the Pacific, Honolulu, Hawaii.

Cannon's mother loaned her son's medal to Culver Military Academy in 1943 for a display honoring his heroism. The school returned it after the war. In 2000 Cannon's sister, Margaret, donated the medal to Culver Military Academy, where it remains. □

Edward F. Murphy has written many books and articles on military history. He lives in Mesa, Arizona. To Lieutenant Cannon's nephews, Bart and Scott Cannon, the author extends a special thanks for their assistance.



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British singing star Vera Lynn wanted to raise the morale of the troops fighting at the front—so she went to Burma.

Another concert in a hospital ward for more British soldiers–this time for wounded from the front line near Kohima, brought down to Dimapur for treatment. Vera Lynn saw two severely wounded men and, wanting to do whatever she could to ease their suffering, she walked over to their beds. She took one in her arms and sang to them both, delivering their own personal concert with the "Forces' Sweetheart."

Nearing total exhaustion after almost two months in Burma, Lynn would return to England soon after this concert. But she didn't want to leave without completing her mission to raise morale with songs that would comfort and energize the men of Gen. William Slim's "Forgotten Army" who were fighting one of the most brutal campaigns of World War II.

In her 2017 autobiography, Lynn explained that she went to Burma "to get as close as I could to the actual fighting. For me this meant going to meet the troops in person; it meant doing everything I could possibly do to support them and let them know that back in England we were all thinking about them and willing them on."

Born on March 20, 1917, in London's East End, Lynn's singing talents were apparent early on. At seven, she was singing in working men's clubs. By 11, she wanted to be a professional singer. She left school at 14, performing with big-name bands like Billy Cotton, Charlie Kunz, Joe Loss and Ambrose, the "Glen Millers" of Britain in the pre-war era.

In 1939 she recorded her first signature song, "We'll Meet Again," an instant hit for the wives and girlfriends of men overseas— "Don't know where, don't know when/But I know we'll meet again some sunny day."

ABOVE: "The Forces' Sweetheart," Dame Vera Lynn, DBE, in uniform in 1941. Lynn sang and sent out messages to British troops on her popular radio program, "Sincerely Yours." In 1944 she toured Egypt, India and Burma, giving concerts for the troops. TOP: Vera Lynn serves tea to servicemen in London's Trafalgar Square in 1942.

Lynn followed with "Goodnight Children Everywhere," which resonated with the families whose children were sent to the countryside to escape the Blitz. "When the Lights of London Shine Again," was a longing for the

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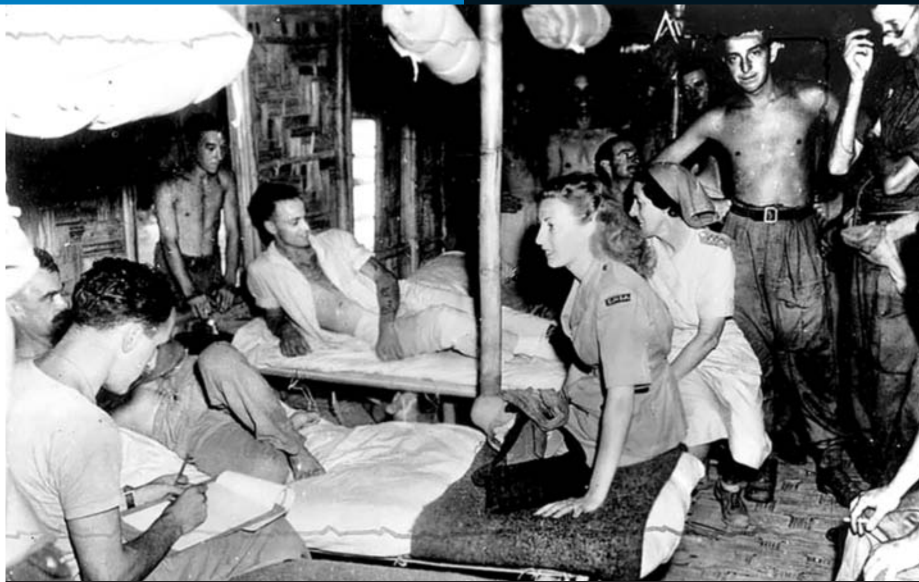

World War II British singing sensation Vera Lynn traveled 5,000 miles in 1944 to sing in person for Allied troops in Burma.

Blitz and its nightly blackouts to end.

Her second signature song was 1941's "White Cliffs of Dover," imagining the homecoming of British airmen who had been "braving those angry skies" to take the war to the enemy.

Before Hitler could begin his planned invasion of England (Operation Sealion), he had to dispose of the one thing standing in his way—the Royal Air Force. Through the summer and autumn of 1940 the skies of southern England were filled with Spitfire and Hurricane fighters beating back the Luftwaffe. The losses persuaded the Führer to bomb England into submission instead.

London was the main target, bombed continuously for more than three months. Londoners held firm into 1941 and Hitler realized that the British people were not so soft. By that summer, his attention had turned to the Eastern Front and the invasion of Russia.

The RAF had supported the country through its darkest hours, but the people had proved they could withstand Germany's worst. They realized that to give in meant being overrun by Germany and the end of life as they knew it.

Fortunately, support networks had started to appear, and Lynn was the epicenter. In April 1940, the BEF voted her top vocalist, ahead of Judy Garland and Bing Crosby. Soon "The Forces' Sweetheart" was a daily presence on BBC radio, the lifeline between those at home and their loved ones overseas. In 1941 Lynn began her weekly request program "Sincerely Yours," aimed at overseas troops.

Most evenings Lynn was also performing in London. Her popular "Applesauce" review with Max Miller was interrupted when the Holborn Empire was bombed, so they moved it to the London Palladium. Impromptu concerts at munitions factories and hospitals—anywhere she found people—filled her days.

She could have kept on this way, and since she had married in August 1941 she had every reason to remain settled in a role that kept her out of harm's way. But Lynn wanted to do more and joined the Entertainment National Services Association (ENSA), which sent performers to battle zones. Given the risks, there was a shortage of top entertainers and the droll British Tommies rebranded ENSA as "Every Night Something Awful."

Vera met with ENSA co-founder Basil Dean for advice on where to go, given that troops in Italy and the Middle East were already well supplied with entertainers. She wanted a destination where she could do the most good and which was in the greatest need of a morale-boosting performer.

Without hesitation, the answer was "Burma." It was a word often whispered in Britain, for in the mind of the populace, serving in Burma was a death sentence with extreme heat and disease and a foe that paid little heed to the Geneva Convention.

Japan had announced its ambitions for Southeast Asia and the Pacific at Pearl Harbor on December 7, 1941. In the following months the Imperial Army left a trail of gratuitous slaughter as it took over strategic locations. In January 1942, the Imperial Guards Division massacred 150 British and Indian troops who had surrendered at Parit Sulong in Malaya. Some were beheaded; the rest were bound with wire, machine-gunned, set on fire and run over by trucks. After the fall of Singapore, Japan planned to kill 50,000 Singaporean Chinese and other "anti-Japanese" elements. Estimates put them halfway to their goal within a month.

In early 1942, Japan wanted Burma and its seaport capital of Rangoon as a starting point for the overland supply line to its old adversary China. Like India to its west, Burma was part of the British Empire and had a small defense force as most British troops were occupied in North Africa and the Middle East. To secure its position, Japan set up a puppet regime and established an alliance with neighboring Thailand.

In the next few months, the Burma Corps were forced northwest to the Indian border, eventually establishing a strong position in the coastal area of Arakan. A newly formed Chindit force under Brigadier Orde Wingate launched daring raids into the interior to cut Japanese supply lines.

In 1943 Lord Louis Mountbatten took over as the supreme commander of the war in Southeast Asia, with a newly promoted Lt. Gen. William Slim in charge of the 14th Army, which was to become the driving force in the Burma Campaign. Slim trained all of his men in jungle warfare—noting the enemy would treat clerks, cooks, drivers, and medics the same as combat troops.

Slim's strategy was to consolidate his forces near the border, fighting defensively to weaken the enemy. When the 14th Army had developed the necessary skills and knowledge of the terrain, they would push forward and liberate the whole of Burma.

In March 1944, Japan sent its troops across the border at Imphal in an attempt to take India and the 14th Army was engaged in ferocious face-to-face battles along the Kohima Ridge. It was into this inferno that Britain's songbird planned to fly.

On March 23, 1944, a Short Sunderland flying boat left England's south coast for Gibraltar–the first of nine stops over two weeks–carving a wide arc across the Atlantic to avoid German-occupied France. She had

no make-up artist, choreographer, or film crew. Her wardrobe was limited to her favorite pink dress and her ENSA uniform.

After a day's break, Lynn and her regular pianist Len Edwards flew to Tripoli, Libya, then to Cairo, where Lynn performed for 3,500 Royal Artillery troops fresh from combat in southern Italy. A sandstorm forced them to hold three separate indoor concerts.

On March 29, Lynn and Edwards took off for Iraq but were forced to land in the Dead Sea. They flew out of Basra two days later, but had to turn back due to bad weather. Lynn held an impromptu singalong at a supply base. Then it was on to Karachi via the island of Bahrain, then Bombay, followed by Nagpur in central India, where they boarded a U.S. Lockheed Hudson light bomber to Calcutta. It was April 7, Good Friday, and Lynn found time for two concerts there before losing her voice. The sandstorm in Egypt had damaged her throat. To make matters worse, Edwards was hospitalized after an asthma attack, and the first concert was canceled.

Though unable to sing, Lynn visited men who had been fighting in Burma and transferred to the Calcutta hospitals. She later recalled: "I toured every ward and sat on every bed and chatted with everyone I met." Along with the thrill of seeing her, the men heard news from home from Lynn, who had toured much of the UK and was able to establish a point of contact with most of them. Lynn's daughter received a letter from a member of the Royal Armoured Corps years later who wrote, "There were 36 beds in the ward and she stopped and shook hands with every man, gave him a Red Cross gift, soap or handkerchiefs. When she came to my bed she gave me a lovely smile and asked where I lived. I told her I was from London, not far from her. I was bombed out and ran away to

Vera Lynn with her piano player Len Edwards, touring Burma with the Entertainments National Service Association (ENSA) from March through June 1944, performing for soldiers who were fighting to stop the Japanese advance on India.

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On April 10, an ENSA concert was held north of Calcutta, and the next day British soldiers queued up at a record shop for signed copies of the latest Vera Lynn singles. A day later, Lynn performed in a live show to raise money for the Indian Red Cross and took part in a newsreel and radio broadcast.

Lynn was paid £10 per week while she was overseas (approximately £550 or $670 today) but she passed her wages to Edwards, who was suffering the same hardships with no glory and without whose piano skills the concerts would not have been possible.

On April 22, Lynn and Edwards took a postal delivery plane to Chittagong, close to the border with Burma. Because of the dangers involved from here on in, ENSA's responsibility was transferred to the British Army to escort Lynn to the front line and keep her safe.

She had arrived at a critical time in the Burma campaign. The previous month, Slim's troops had scored their first victory against the Japanese and he could see that it was his tactics and training that had given the 14th Army the edge. It was known as the Battle of the Admin Box because of its rectangular site in a former administrative area that was turned into a defensive position besieged in the hilly jungle area of the Arakan region. It involved medics, clerks, drivers, and tank crews as well as the regular soldiers in ferocious hand-to-hand combat and got worse when Japanese troops ran through the medical tent killing 35 staff and patients.

Allied air drops of food and supplies ensured that Slim's troops would not be starved into submission. Instead, they wore down the Japanese troops, driving them back into the jungle. It was a huge boost to the confidence of the 14th Army and a blow to the confidence of an enemy used to having its own way since arriving in Burma and had lined up India as its next conquest.

Confident in his tactics, Slim then withdrew to the Imphal Plain at the start of March. The enemy followed him, as expected, but also sent a division to the Kohima ridge, 100 miles to the north, hoping to eliminate the British units guarding it and cut off communications with Imphal. The fate of the Burma Campaign would hang in the balance over the next two months, as did the safety of everyone in this frontline zone, which from early April included Lynn.

At the time of the Calcutta concerts, the siege of Kohima in the central part of the ridge was already underway. Surrounded on most sides and with their main water supply cut off, British troops inflicted heavy losses on the enemy. The Japanese were forced off the central part of the ridge, largely due to the bravery of the 4th Battalion, Queen's Own Royal West Kent Regiment, who held out under siege for 13 days. They were relieved on April 19 as the Japanese withdrew to the lower slopes. Like the British, they were dependent on their supply lines. Good coordination with the RAF meant that the 14th Army was better supplied, a key factor over time.

On Sunday April 23, Lynn visited a hospital and sang in its canteen. The response from men who had been living on the edge for

months required police restraint. With paper in short supply, many soldiers got Lynn's autograph on one rupee banknotes.

The next day, Lynn performed at the YMCA for 1,000 troops, signing hundreds more banknotes. This was followed by a rare show just for officers. On the 25th, there were two concerts for the RAF, then on April 26 it was off south into the hottest and most humid part of Burma on treacherous roads to "far away places with strange sounding names" like Cox's Bazar, Maungdaw, and Ramu Airfield. Lynn and Edwards, who carried a .45-caliber Smith and Wesson on his hip, traveled in two vehicles—one held the piano, microphones, and a primitive PA system for when they stopped to sing.

As Lynn headed south along the Arakan Road, the Kohima Ridge battle was entering its second phase with Slim's army attempting to eradicate the enemy from the lower slopes. After the Arakan leg of her trip, she would be heading toward Kohima.

Lynn threw herself into concert mode on April 26, stopping at a hospital for men of the 81st (West African) Division. These men from Nigeria, Gold Coast (now Ghana), Sierra Leone, and Gambia were also big fans. Lynn entertained troops from many cultures, including Gurkhas, Indians, and local tribesmen on her trip. She then sang for 3,000 troops at Dohazari rest camp.

ABOVE: A 1943 publicity still for singer Vera Lynn, whose most popular song was "We'll Meet Again." OPPOSITE: British Brigadier Orde Wingate's raiding force, known at the "Chindits," crosses a river in Burma. Though they suffered high casualty rates, their raids behind Japanese lines provided a morale boost to Allied troops.

Their 8.5-hour journey south along a bumpy track toward a section of the front line at Bawli Bazar included two concert stops en route, with one at a dressing station only five miles from the front. Despite the anxieties and privations of the combat zone the troops set up a hut for her with a dressing table and jungle flowers. The fighters had not lost their humanity.

On April 29th the show was back on the road, visiting first a coastal hospital and then a makeshift concert stage for an audience of 5,000 at the Ramu airbase on the Baghkali River, just inland from Cox's Bazar, technically in India. In the extreme heat, Lynn slept little on a stretcher balanced between two kitchen chairs—a small price to pay for the privilege of being close to her boys.

The two-truck convoy arrived at 14th Army HQ in Comilla on May 3 for a week's stay. Comilla boasted a town hall, which provided a better equipped venue for two more concerts, and the next day Lynn had her first meeting with a group of Chindits (a corruption of the Burmese word for "lion.") The brainchild of Brigadier Wingate, this special

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force had been living practically native in the jungle behind enemy lines creating mayhem for the Japanese. She met the men after they were deloused and although she did not sing for them, she talked to them about life back home and signed autographs, mostly on jungle slouch hats.

Lynn sang for the top brass that evening, including Slim, Major General Snelling and Air Commodore Baldwin, commander of the new 3rd Tactical Air Force, which was made up of the U.S. 5320th Defense Wing and the RAF No. 221 and 224 Groups. For this event Lynn wore her famous pink dress that cost her a year's supply of ration coupons in England.

Lynn gave two more concerts in Comilla on May 5, and had lunch with the junior ranks in their mess. The next day, Lynn visited a hospital and sang to a crowd of over 3,000. Two days later she toured two hospitals, dined in the sergeants' mess, and performed in an open air concert for 3,000 men. The following day, May 9, she toured hospitals and held two evening concerts.

On May 10, Lynn flew to the RAF base at Agartala, where she performed an evening concert at the local cinema and had dinner with the men of No. 191 Reconnaissance Squadron, who flew Catalinas over the Burmese jungle.

Returning from Agartala to Comilla, Lynn flew to Sylhet on May 12 and went straight to the hospital to sing for the wounded, even by their beds if they couldn't be moved.

The next stop for the exhausted singer was Shillong, where they stayed until May 19. Lynn recovered some of her energy in the cooler mountain air and performed at a convalescent center, a garrison theater, an RAF camp, and more hospitals. She also met Slim's wife, Aileen, who helped her relax a little more before the next leg of her journey, a drive of 250 miles to Jorhat where she arrived at 8 p.m. Still within Slim's army, this area included American and Chinese troops under U.S. Gen. Joseph "Vinegar Joe" Stilwell.

The stay at Jorhat kicked off with a concert for 2,000 at the Plantation Club, followed by a dinner and another hospital visit at Dibrugarh before driving up the Manipur Road to the important supply station at Dimapur, just behind the front line, which would be Lynn's final stop in Burma.

The next day, May 22, began with three hospital visits, followed by an afternoon and

evening show. Two more hospitals were visited the next day as, close by, some of the worst fighting of the campaign was taking place–patients arrived with horrifying shrapnel and gunshot wounds, some already infected and the air was heavy with the stench of gangrene.

On May 24, after two morning shows and wanting to do more despite her body telling her otherwise, Lynn set off on the road to Jorhat which would ultimately lead her home. At Jorhat, Edwards and Lynn waited all day for a pilot willing to brave the monsoon weather to fly them to Calcutta. Against all advice, an American with a small plane agreed to take them. As the exhausted performers slept, the pilot went off course in the dark, and a 2.5-hour flight took six hours. They arrived at Calcutta with 20 minutes of fuel left.

Lynn sang one last concert in Karachi before landing in England on June 6, greeted with the news that Allied troops were piling into Normandy. That summer she recorded "Somewhere in France with you" for the Allied troops fighting toward Germany.

Perhaps the best insight into what Lynn did for the troops in Burma comes from the men themselves who flooded her with letters of gratitude, a process that was reignited when she and her daughter, Virginia Lewis-Jones, asked for firsthand accounts for her autobiography *Keep Smiling Through* to celebrate her 100th year. Some replies came from the veterans, but most were from families recalling fathers who never talked about Burma except the time Lynn sang for them.

Lynn continued her singing career and charity work, but never forgot her boys. In June 2019, at the age of 102, she recorded a voice message for the 75th anniversary of D-Day. The 250 men onboard a Royal British Legion cruise to the Normandy beaches heard: "Hello boys, Vera Lynn here. I wish you and your carers a memorable trip to Normandy. It will be nostalgic and sure to bring back lots of memories. Rest assured we will never forget all you did for us. I'm sending you all my best wishes for the trip."

Dame Vera Lynn was 103 when she died on June 18, 2020. □

A frequent contributor, Alan Davidge lives in Normandy, France.

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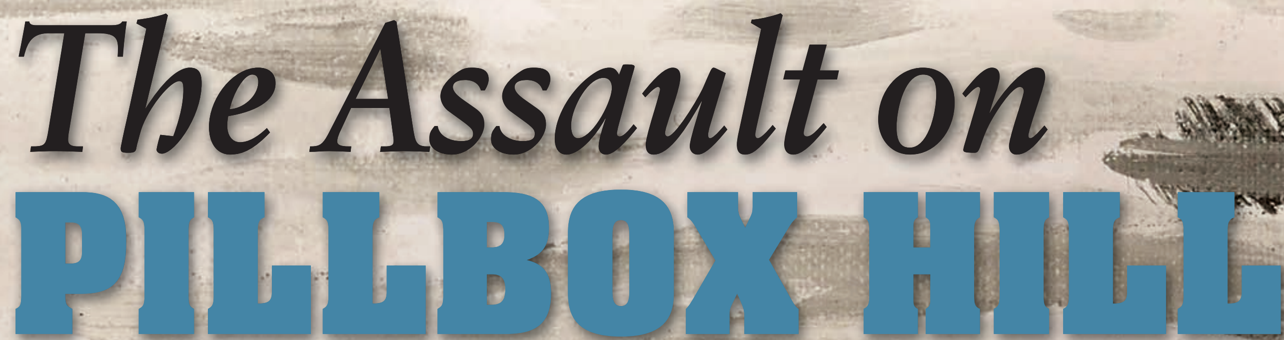
To the Attack by U.S. Coast Guard Chief Boatswain's Mate and combat artist Tore Asplund depicts American soldiers hitting the beach as part of Operation Dragoon in southern France on August 15, 1944. Asplund also painted images of the D-Day invasion at Normandy. INSET: First Lieutenant Audie Murphy, the most highly decorated U.S. Army soldier of World War II, after receiving the Medal of Honor for gallantry in southern France from Seventh Army commander Lt. Gen. Alexander M. Patch at an airfield near Werfen, Austria, on June 2, 1945. The other medal Murphy wears in the photo is the Legion of Merit.



The Assault on PILLBOX HILL

American hero Audie Murphy received the Distinguished Service Cross but lost a friend during heavy fighting in southern France, August 1944. | BY DANIEL R. CHAMPAGNE

National Archives

Staff Sergeant Audie Murphy advanced inland from the beaches of southern France with his rifle platoon until, near the small town of Ramatuelle, intense machine-gun and small-arms fire from a boulder covered hill forced them to hit the dirt.

Murphy jumped back up and sprinted 40 yards under blistering fire to a draw. Alone and outgunned, Murphy climbed back down the depression to take a light machine gun from a GI reluctant to move forward. Up the rocky hill, he placed the machine gun 150 yards from the enemy and began firing, killing and wounding several enemy soldiers to silence the German machine gun. As Murphy advanced further up the draw—bullets whizzing around him—he destroyed the last two enemy machine-gun emplacements in the area. Murphy's extraordinary heroism on the morning of August 15, 1944, resulted in the capture of the hill and the annihilation or capture of the entire enemy garrison by soldiers from the 15th Regiment, 3rd U.S. Infantry Division.

U.S. Army

As early as August 1943, the Allied Combined Chiefs of Staff had considered a diversionary landing in southern France (Operation Dragoon) to support the major Allied invasion in Normandy (Operation Overlord). Generals George Marshall and Dwight Eisenhower, with the support of President Franklin D. Roosevelt, maintained that a landing in southern France would "protect the southern flank of the Normandy invasion forces and provide another critically needed supply port at Marseille."

The Allied forces assigned to assault the coast of southern France consisted of the U.S VI Corps and the French II Corps. These two corps comprised the Seventh Army under the command of Gen. Alexander Patch. The primary landing force consisted of the 3rd, 36th, and 45th U.S. Infantry Divisions of the VI Corps commanded by Gen. Lucian Truscott. The XII Tactical Air Command, Fifteenth Air Force was responsible for air support, and the Western Task Force provided naval support. Opposing the Allied force was the German Nineteenth Army commanded by Gen. Walter Wiess. Coastal defenses, while formidable, were not as strong as those on the coast of Normandy and in northern France.

The 3rd Division's mission in southern France was to land on beaches in the vicinity of St. Tropez and Cavalaire, approximately 30 miles east of Toulon. The mission called

Both: National Archives

On August 15, 1944, U.S. landing craft loaded with troops, vehicles, and equipment approach a landing beach in southern France as part of Operation Dragoon, the "other D-Day." Withing a week American and French troops had captured more than 14,000 German prisoners—including three German generals—and liberated about 5,000 square kilometers of French territory.

for two battalions of the 15th Regiment to land on Yellow Beach, which was positioned between Cap (cape) de St. Tropez and Cap Camarat, and two battalions of the 7th Regiment to land on Red Beach (Gulf of Cavalaire). Once ashore, they were to clear the enemy from the beaches and the adjacent high ground, advancing rapidly inland to assist in the Seventh Army's attack to the west against the ports of Toulon and Marseille. By the early morning hours of August 15, all units of the 3rd Division flotilla were in place off the coast of Cavalaire and St, Tropez. H-Hour was set for 0800.

On the evening of August 14, 1944, allied naval guns pounded the flanks of the landing area near Ramatuelle. The Germans knew an attack was going to take place, but they were not prepared for the magnitude of the operation. The next morning, an intensive barrage consisting of aerial and naval bombardments preceded the landings. Leading 3rd Platoon, B Company, Murphy witnessed the spectacular scene aboard one of the many landing craft advancing toward the beach. After the "battleships gave the beach a thorough pounding, the rocket boat guns took over," he recalled. "[They] fired in batches their missiles sailed hissing through the air like schools of weird fish. They hit the earth, detonating mines, blasting barb-wire entanglements, and unnerving the waiting enemy." He went on: "The old fear that always preceded action grappled with my guts. Seeking to distract my mind, I glanced at the men huddled in the boat. They looked as miserable as wet cats. Although the water was smooth enough, several were seasick, and others had the lost, abstract expression of men who were relieving their bowels."

Major Keith Ware's 1st Battalion, 15th Regiment was in the first wave with Murphy's B Company when it hit the beach at 0800 on August 15. The 1st and 3rd Battalions of the 15th Regiment landed just east of Ramatuelle and south of St. Tropez, while the two battalions of the 7th Regiment landed ashore on Beach Red. As soon as the men jumped off the landing craft, they waded ashore through the swirling water.

Sergeant Richard Robinson remembered the frustration: "I was carrying my machine gun when we jumped off. The moment we hit the beach, I fell into a shell hole full of water and lost my weapon. To this day, there's probably a perfectly good machine gun at the bottom of the Mediterranean Sea."

From the hills beyond the beachhead, the German guns rained fire on B Company as they advanced nervously along the mine-infested beach. Suddenly, an "…explosion sounded on my left," Murphy recalled, "and when the smoke lifted, I saw the torn body of a man who stepped on a mine. Directly ahead of us was a strip of thick scrub and matted grass. We moved quickly toward it for cover, stepping gingerly as if walking on eggs. We discovered that the beach was loaded from end to end with mines, which a few pounds of pressure will detonate." Pfc. Coker Price, who had joined B Company in Naples added: "We had to be careful of the mines. Thank God it was daylight. When we jumped off, I stepped into somebody else's footprints so I wouldn't set off a mine."

Then the Germans began pounding the beach with heavy artillery and mortar fire, forcing

Staff Sergeant Audie Murphy's 1st Battalion, 15th Infantry Regiment, were among the first wave to hit the beach during Operation Dragoon, landing in the Bay of Pampelonne near St. Tropez at 0800.

the Americans out of the thick scrub. They raced across the meadows toward scattered farmhouses and vineyards a few hundred yards inland, each building a potential enemy stronghold. From the windows of the house nearest B Company came a volley of rifle fire. One hundred guns answered and six Germans ran from the building with their hands up. The enemy's defenses on Beach Yellow were reduced within 40 minutes, however, the 1st Battalion suffered 10 percent casualties. Once the resistance was shattered, B Company —along with other members of the 15th Regiment—reassembled to begin the assault on Ramatuelle and St. Tropez."

Reflecting on the landing years later, several members of B Company recalled the success of the operation. "Technically it was called the perfect landing," wrote Murphy. "The vast operation designed to crack the enemy coastal defenses in southern France had been calculated and prepared to the smallest detail and it moved with the smooth precision of a machine."

Staff Sergeant Albert Pyle credited air and naval support for much of the operation's success, noting that "after battleships, cruisers and heavy bombers pummeled the area first, rockets detonated many of the mines planted in the sand as well as destroying other beach defenses."

"The French Patriots did a wonderful job helping make the invasion a success," Pfc. Vert Enis wrote in his diary. "When we hit the beach, they had signs telling us where the minefields were located. And, in some cases, they had removed some of the mines."

Once the 15th Regiment reorganized, the troops advanced inland toward their objectives on the high ground. About a mile in from the beach, they encountered a sheer cliff topped by a wooded hill strewn with boulders. Crowning the hill was a large concrete reinforced pillbox with a coastal gun protruding toward the beachhead. According to the French Underground, the Germans had converted the hill into a strongpoint. The rocky promontory stood smack in the face of the 15th Regiment's advance, hence it had to be destroyed at all costs. That unenviable assignment fell upon the 1st Battalion and B Company was selected to lead the assault.

The engagement to capture "Pillbox Hill" commenced at 1000. The route to the objective was a steep incline shrouded with thickly covered brush, scrub oaks, boulders, and pine trees, which reduced visibility and offered excellent concealment for enemy snipers and machine guns. The 1st Battalion struck the enemy's right flank from the coastal side.

"We were spread out through the vineyard as we approached the hill. When we were about 250 yards from the hill, enemy among the boulders started firing at us with a machine gun and small arms; we all hit the dirt," recalled Staff Sgt. Norman Hollen, a member of Murphy's 3rd Platoon. "So long as we remained quiet the enemy didn't fire, but as soon as we tried to move forward, they would fire on us."

Without warning, Murphy advanced alone to clear the way, ordering his 3rd Platoon—the lead element of the advance—to take cover. Once Murphy's platoon took shelter, the rest of B Company followed suit and covered him as he moved forward. Carrying an M-1 carbine and loaded down with grenades, Murphy advanced up the hill.

"I was alone now, and the Germans had discovered me," he wrote later. "They laid a blistering crossfire directly over my head. I rolled into a ditch that ran parallel to a thick canebrake leading up the hill."

A German machine gun crew had waited in ambush until the Americans reached open ground. The gun was located beneath a cork tree 15 yards up the slope, with a swath cut to allow the weapon to cover the vineyard. Two Germans with their heads barely visible were operating the gun. Three other enemy soldiers sprawled flat on the ground were feeding the ammunition to the gunners and firing their rifles at the Americans. It was a formidable obstacle for the 15th Regiment. With the complete picture in mind, Murphy decided that the enemy machine gun had to be eliminated. He knew that it was impossible to knock the enemy position out of action

without more firepower, so he proceeded back down the ditch to get it.

As he rounded a slight bend, Murphy ran head-on into two Germans. Before the enemy realized what hit them, Murphy dropped them with his carbine. "For an instant they recoiled in surprise," recalled Murphy, "and that was their mistake. My combat experience had taught me the value of split seconds." Near the edge of the forest, he encountered a group of Germans in a series of foxholes and "outdueled them until his ammunition was exhausted."

Murphy continued his withdrawal down the ditch in search of an automatic weapon to knock out the enemy machine gun. He finally located a light machine gun and commandeered it from a crew that was pinned down by enemy fire.

"No amount of arguing or cursing on my part could get them to stir from the spot," said Murphy. "It was perhaps best that way. I reasoned that if one man could do the job, why risk more." He dragged the gun into the open field and placed it downhill approximately 150 yards from the enemy's position. A seasoned veteran, Murphy realized he had the advantage: "I was firing uphill and could lie flat upon the earth. But the Germans, in order to shoot down the slope at me, had to expose head and shoulders over the embankments fronting their foxholes."

Raking the top of the enemy stronghold with machine-gun fire, Murphy silenced the German positions, killing one or two in each of the several foxholes. As he continued to advance up the hill, another enemy machine gun opened on him. "I hit the dirt," Murphy said, "but couldn't locate the gunner. The fire, however, was coming from my left. I set up my gun and raked the area with lead until my last cartridge was spent." With machine-gun fire converging on him, Murphy again raced back to the ditch for cover and retreated down the slope to retrieve his carbine.

On his way down, Murphy met up with his foxhole buddy Pfc. Lattie Tipton from Ervin, Tennessee, who was carrying several clips of carbine ammunition. Tipton and Murphy had been in combat together since landing in Sicily more than a year earlier. The two men were like brothers. "He was as solid as the earth," Murphy wrote. In Italy, Tipton turned down a promotion so that he could stay with Murphy as a runner. "Foxhole buddies were closer than friends, closer than brothers. Their trust in and knowledge of each other was total. They got to know each other's life stories, what they did before the Army, and what their parents, brothers, and sisters were like… Without thinking about it, they would share their last bite or last drink of water or a blanket—and they would die for one another."

Tipton was cool, brave, and reckless under fire—attributes that made him an exceptional combat soldier. The two men confided in each other, expressing their deepest feelings. Whenever they talked about women, "Murphy complained that he didn't have time to fall in love and besides he'd been too damned proud to let a girl see the patches on his pants."

Murphy was moved whenever Tipton talked about his nine-year-old daughter Claudean, whose letters he would often read aloud: "Dear daddy i am in school but the teacher is not looking… when are you coming home i miss you." Murphy said that every time he went into battle with Tipton, he couldn't help but visualize the little girl, "I can see the eyes, eager with life, her pert freckled nose, her pigtails with bows of ribbons at the ends."

Murphy immediately noticed that Tipton had a portion of his ear cut off and was bleeding profusely. Sergeant Tom Godfrey, who was pinned down with the rest of B Company, recalled that "Lattie was shot in the ear and bleeding like a stuck pig. We all tried to get him back to the rear to get it patched up but he refused saying 'I'll be alright.' Then he advanced to a for-

Map © 2025 Philip Schwartzberg, Meridian Mapping, Minneapolis, MN

Operation Dragoon, the invasion of southern France, had originally been planned to coincide with Operation Overlord in June 1944, but was cancelled due to lack of resources. A month later, as clogged Normandy ports proved inadequate for Allied supply needs, the operation was revived. On August 15, 1944, American and French forces hit beaches at several locations in southern France and made substantial progress against the German defenders.

Alamy

ABOVE: This photo from the 1955 film *To Hell and Back*—based on his autobiography of the same name—shows Audie Murphy, portraying himself, preparing to throw a hand grenade at a German position on "Pillbox Hill," the sharp battle for which he received the Distinguished Service Cross for heroism. BELOW: From left, Private Vert Enis kept a diary of his experiences fighting in southern France; Audie Murphy's close friend, Priv. Lattie Tipton, was killed in the fight for Pillbox Hill; Maj. Keith Ware led the 1st Battalion, 15th Infantry Regiment, 3rd Division, during the landings and subsequent battles of Operation Dragoon.

Wikimedia Commons

ward position where he met up with Murph."

Murphy wanted help but not from Tipton. He had made a secret vow a long time ago that his best friend was going home in one piece to his daughter.

"Go back, Lattie," shouted Murphy. "Get back and have that ear fixed."

"I'm going too," said Tipton.

"I'm going up, Lattie," said Murphy. "Now I'm telling you again, fall back and get that ear fixed."

Murphy set off and noticed that Tipton was following him. "You shouldn't have come up," Murphy remarked in a scolding manner.

Reluctantly, Murphy nodded his approval and crouching low they made their way back to the ditch. Two Germans popped out of the canebrake and opened fire. Turning quickly in the direction of the blasts, Tipton fired two rapid shots from his carbine, killing both of them. As the two men quickly moved up the ditch, hand grenades and automatic-weapons fire converged on them. Miraculously, they were able to escape the explosions and bullets without any harm. Finally, they located the enemy machine gun near the large cork tree on a knoll to their left. Charging the gun emplacement, the two men blasted away with their carbines, killing the enemy gunners.

"They never knew what hit them," Murphy wrote. "We shot them carefully in the head and dived in on top of the bodies just as a second machine gun opened up."

Peering cautiously above the enemy foxhole, Murphy and Tipton drew fire from the other machine gun. "The bullets popped at least two feet above us," recalled Murphy. "At ground level, we decided that our heads were relatively safe." After tossing two hand grenades, they rose up in the foxhole and emptied their carbines into the machine-gun emplacement, forcing the Germans to surrender.

Tipton noticed that one of the enemy gunners was waving a white handkerchief—a token surrender in any language on any battlefield—and decided to step out of the foxhole to assess the situation.

"Lattie, keep down," yelled Murphy.

"They want to surrender," said Tipton. "I'm going to get them."

"Keep down," Murphy shouted again. "Don't trust them."

But the warning was too late. A sniper's bullet hit Tipton in the chest. Toppling back into the foxhole, he choked out, "Murph," as his body fell across his grief-stricken friend. "I never saw one drop of blood on Lattie," Murphy recalled years later. "But I knew he was dead. The sniper bullet must have gotten him in the heart. He died so fast."

For the moment, Murphy had no time to mourn the loss of his friend. He was in a tight predicament; the Germans knew exactly where he was. Instinctively, he tossed a hand grenade at the machine gun, finishing off its crew. Upon inspection of the damage, Murphy found one of the Germans with his chest torn open; the other soldier was killed by a fragment that pierced his eye. Fortunately, the blast didn't damage the enemy gun.

Seizing the machine gun, Murphy quickly checked it, then held it against his hip like a Browning Automatic Rifle. Disregarding his

Continued on page 96

The Road to War

Smiling Japanese troops, 1937, during the second Sino-Japanese War (July 7, 1937–September 9, 1945).

Tensions between the United States and Japan had been escalating for years and eventually erupted into war with the attack on Pearl Harbor.

BY JOHN WUKOVITS

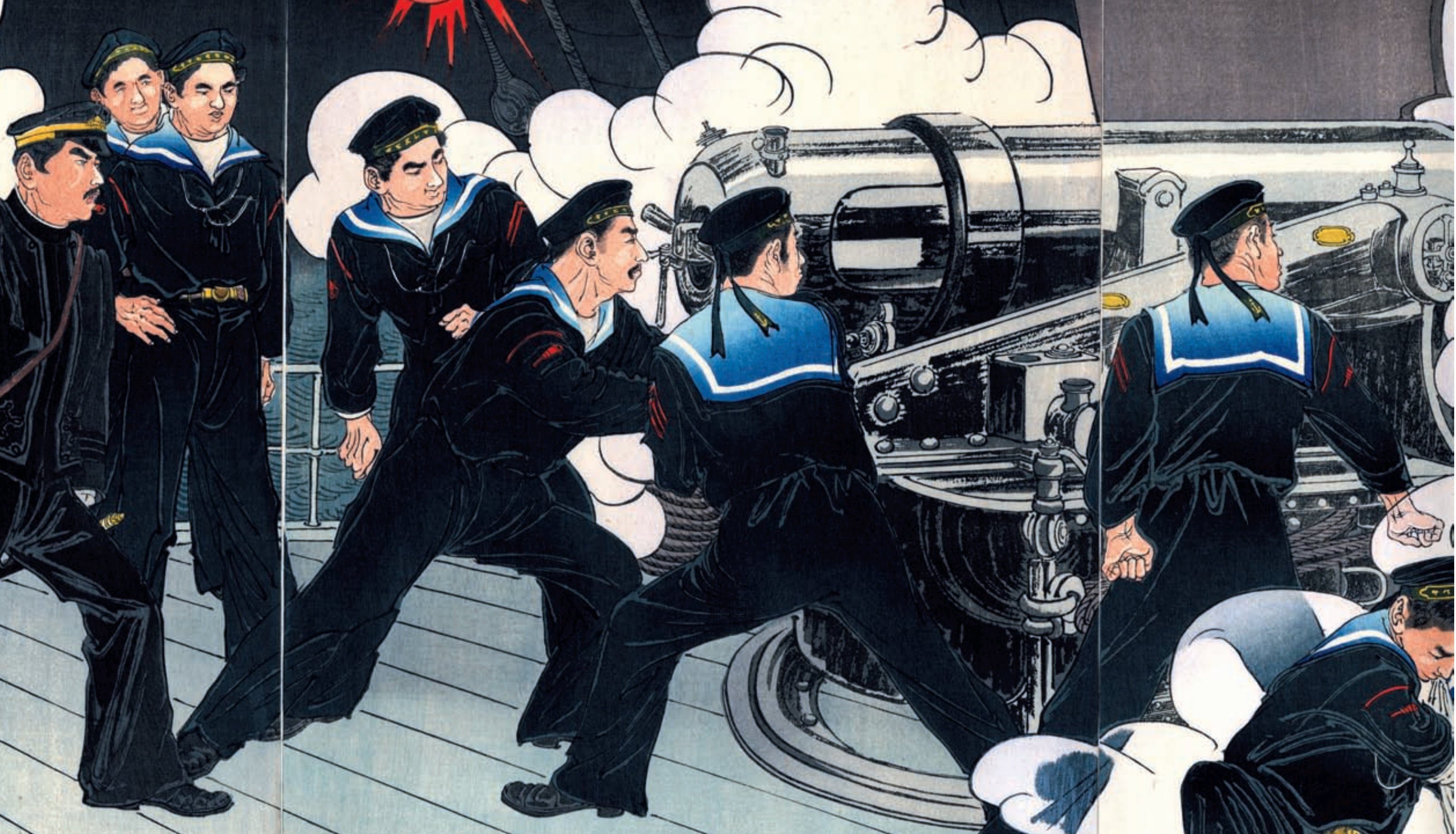
Admiral William F. Halsey had never seen such destruction. Making matters worse, the harm had been inflicted on his beloved Navy inside one of its strongholds—the Pacific bastion of Pearl Harbor. Steaming into the harbor aboard the carrier *Enterprise* on December 8, 1941, taking in what the Japanese had done with a clenched jaw, Halsey saw the battleship *Utah* lying on the bottom—in the same berth he would have occupied with his carrier had he been in port a day earlier.

The sight of mangled ships and floating bodies chagrined the old warrior. As a nearby officer watched, Halsey scanned the harbor in silence, then muttered heatedly, "Before we're through with 'em, the Japanese language will be spoken only in hell!"

Although what Halsey witnessed was a stunning surprise, the burning vessels and shattered aircraft—to say nothing of the charred bodies littering the harbor—were the culmination of a string of events that had begun many years earlier.

As early as the late 1800s, American politicians proclaimed that it was the nation's "manifest destiny" to expand beyond its continental borders into the Pacific. They enviously viewed the lucrative natural resources of the Orient and intended to establish and maintain an economic presence in the region. American manufacturers also wanted to have a ready market for the huge volume of goods their factories churned out.

Pictures from History/Bridgeman


Anne S.K. Brown Military Collection

Following the successful conclusion of the war with Spain in 1898, the U.S. gained possession of the Philippine Islands, some 1,400 miles southwest of Japan. Rich in resources, such as oil and rubber, the Philippines also offered superb sites for military bases. Dispatching a garrison army to occupy the subjected nation the U.S., without openly declaring so, conveyed to Japan that it was not they who would achieve mastery in the Pacific.

In December 1907, President Theodore Roosevelt increased the American presence in the Pacific by ordering the Navy to steam through the region as part of its circumnavigation of the globe. In doing so, he intended to send a message to Japan that the United States would defend its Pacific interests, especially the Philippines. Unfortunately for Roosevelt, once the Navy left Pacific waters, he had no military tool with which to stop any aggressive Japanese moves. Congress was reluctant to start an expensive arms race and until it approved the money needed to add ships to be stationed in the area, U.S. policy in the Pacific would exist without the means to enforce it.

In the eyes of many Japanese, taking a lead position in the Pacific guaranteed the nation's survival, while to accept an inferior status would relegate her to the backwaters of world rankings.

Unlike the expansive United States, the island nation of Japan faced geographical limits on the space available for its growing population. About 80 million people lived in Japan in the 1920s, in an area comparable to the size of the state of Montana—which had a population of less than one million. The most crowded nation on earth, Japan had to seek land beyond her borders in order to grow. When expansionists studied the nearby areas, most eyes turned west toward the Asian mainland and China.

Japan already had to import much of its raw materials and food products. Its people could cultivate only a certain percentage of the national need, and to fill the rest the nation's leaders had to look elsewhere. Japan imported nearly 70 percent of its zinc and tin, 90 percent of its lead, and all of its cotton, wool, aluminum, and rubber.

When they sought raw materials from Asia, Japanese leaders clashed with European interests. Japan needed rubber, tin, and bauxite from Burma and Malaya, but those nations were controlled by Great Britain. Indochina's vast rubber plantations contained valuable material, but France held sway in that country. The most eagerly sought product, oil, existed in bountiful amounts in the East Indies, but the Dutch maintained a stranglehold on the region. Everywhere Japan turned, a European nation appeared to block the path to its future.

Yearning for dominance in the Pacific, the Japanese felt that they, not Great Britain or any other European country, deserved preeminence in the area. Japan had already built a potent military and asserted its interests in the region, even fighting a war with China over supremacy in Korea in 1894. Even though its well-trained soldiers easily defeated the Chinese, Japan's interest in gaining more living space on the mainland was thwarted by Russia, which brokered a peace agreement that gave Japan the tiny island of Formosa, off China's coast.

Ten years later Japan exacted revenge on Russia. The Czarist-led country tried to expand its influence into Manchuria, a region north of Korea, by building a railroad through the country. Japan countered this threat to its interests in Korea and Manchuria by unleashing a surprise naval attack on the Russian Far East Squadron as it lay at anchor in Port Arthur,

Manchuria, on February 8, 1904. Japanese troops then landed and swept north to seize the city of Mukden.

The rest of the world took notice in May of that year when the Japanese Navy soundly defeated the Russian Baltic Fleet at the Battle of Tsushima. For the first time an Asian nation had bested a European power, and both Great Britain and the United States realized that Japan could pose a threat to their own interests.

The successes reinforced the idea that Japan's destiny lay in the Pacific and on the Asian mainland. Japanese leaders masked their intentions by proclaiming that, as the only Asian nation to rise to the status of world power, it, not the European nations or the United States, had an inherent right to rule in the region. This attitude placed Japan in direct opposition to similar interests expressed by the U.S.

The decade of the 1920s saw both a reduction in military weaponry and an escalation of harsh feelings between America and Japan. The isolationist attitudes that swept the U.S. caused government leaders to support arms limitations even though they remained uneasy about Japan's aggressive stance in the Pacific.

Money drove the world's major naval nations to Washington in 1921 to discuss restraints on building ships. Most countries could not afford an escalating naval arms race, and over a three-month period they formulated an agreement to halt naval construction. The document's final version stipulated that Great Britain would retain 22 capital ships (battleships and cruisers) and the United States 18— keeping them virtually equal in power—while Japan reduced its battle fleet to 10. A 10-year hiatus in naval construction meant that the superiority given the United States and Great Britain would remain in force for an entire decade, but Japanese leaders, facing world support for the conference, acceded to its demands.

The Washington Naval Conference slowed the arms race, but it embittered the Japanese, who believed that the U.S. and Great Britain only wanted to keep Japan in an inferior position in the Pacific and excluded from status as a world power. They departed Washington determined to address the wrongs inflicted on them.

Other events in the U.S. contributed to Japan's growing resentment. Although built on the principles of equality and fair play, the United States government had a deplorable history of bigotry toward the Japanese and Japanese-Americans. In 1907 the school board in San Francisco, California, refused to allow Japanese children to attend school. Six years later the California state legislature passed a law prohibiting Japanese from owning land, and in 1924 Congress passed a biased immigration law. Japan was so enraged by this 1924 law that on the day it took effect in the U.S., the Japanese government declared a national day of humiliation.

Japanese rumblings in the Pacific unnerved people in the United States, who had frequently referred to Asians as the "yellow

Library of Congress

ABOVE: Japanese soldiers rapidly advance through a rubble-strewn street in the city of Toh-an, China. Locked in close combat with Chinese troops, the Japanese pushed toward Kiukang, the terminus of the Nan-Hsun Railway. OPPOSITE: In this Japanese artist's conception of the Battle of Tsushima, sailors of the Imperial Navy fire their weapon at vessels of Czarist Russia's Baltic Fleet. The Japanese victory at Tsushima stunned the world and emboldened the island nation to continue asserting its preeminence in Asia.

National Archives

Crossing the Central Mountain Belt in China's interior, elements of a Japanese tank corps roll forward accompanied by well equipped infantrymen. The Japanese Army did not typically employ armored units in large numbers.

peril." At first the Chinese, and then the Japanese, were seen as threats to the white-dominated rule that had existed in the Pacific and throughout the world. The Japanese were not to be trusted, and their desire to expand beyond their borders was to be viewed with alarm.

Other actions in the 1920s were seen as an affront to the Japanese. The Kellogg-Briand Pact of 1928 condemned war as a course of action, which to the Japanese meant that those in control—Great Britain and the United States—would remain in control. The London Naval Treaty of 1930 forbade the construction of any new battleships before 1937, which the Japanese viewed as another step by Western powers to retain superiority. People in Japan, especially younger, more radical Army officers, considered the different peace agreements as a betrayal of Japan's interests by moderate politicians. They looked to their military to correct the situation.

The military commanded enormous respect from the population in Japan in the 1920s and 1930s. When a young man reached the age of 17, he entered his two years of service with a party hosted by the residents of his hometown. School children collected coins in a drive to finance the construction of a battleship, and it was deemed an honor to serve the emperor.

Rigorous training instilled discipline and an aversion to surrendering. Instructors taught trainees that loyalty to one's unit, faith in commanding officers, and spirit would defeat any foe, no matter how well-armed it might be. Attacking, even in circumstances that produced ghastly casualties, was preferred to surrendering or pulling back. Men trained 14 hours a day, six days a week, under the watch of dictatorial officers who answered complaints with punishment. Soldiers would embark on marches of 25 miles wearing gear that weighed two-thirds of their own body weight, then run the final mile to prove they still had reserves of strength.

A soldier's life belonged to the emperor, and to suffer defeat or surrender was considered an insult to the emperor and brought shame to the soldier's family. His behavior was governed by the ancient samurai tradition known as *Bushido*, which meant "Way of the Warrior." The samurai were honored fighters in Japan's history, and soldiers of the Imperial Army were expected to emulate them. "Duty is weightier than a mountain, while death is lighter than a feather," reminded one dictate. A soldier could attain no higher glory than to die in battle.

Japanese militants who urged immediate expansion onto the Asian mainland were held in check by more moderate forces and by the fact that the Japanese economy depended heavily on the United States for products. The stock market crash of 1929, which ushered in the Great Depression, altered the situation. Military extremists castigated moderates for giving away too much military might in the 1920s peace accords and for refusing to exploit China. They clamored for a new policy that would emphasize conquest and expansion.

The Japanese military held such immense power because it controlled the fates of those factions in power. The army and navy each had one minister in the Japanese cabinet, and if they did not agree with current policy they could hamstring a government by recalling the ministers and bringing the regime to a standstill.

From early 1936 on, militarists gained more influence. Politicians justifiably feared for their lives if they supported a position unpopular with the Army or Navy. In the 1930s, four government officials were assassinated by the military and two coups were attempted.

An alarmed American ambassador to Japan, Joseph Grew, warned Washington that the

Japanese militarists were gaining strength every day and that they intended to expand into China and other areas of the Pacific. He told his superiors, "Whatever way it falls out, one thing is certain and that is that the military are distinctly running the government and that no step can be taken without their approval."

The army and navy supported diverse plans for Japanese expansion. The army wanted to focus on Russia and northern China—land targets—while the navy claimed a water advance into Indochina, the Dutch East Indies, and Pacific islands would be better because of the rich natural resources available. In 1936, faced with two radically different plans from groups that could easily dissolve the government, Japan's cabinet refused to take a stand and gave permission for both plans. This decision set in motion a chain of events that could only result in conflict with either Great Britain or the United States, or with both.

The initial aggressive moves that culminated in World War II in the Pacific occurred on September 18, 1931, when a bomb exploded along the Japanese-controlled South Manchuria Railway near Mukden, Manchuria. Units of the Japanese Army had been stationed in Korea since the Russo-Japanese War to protect Japanese interests. Officers of the Kwantung Army, as it was called, immediately launched an invasion to overrun all of Manchuria, which they quickly gobbled up and renamed Manchukuo. The Army command ignored orders from the Tokyo government to halt the invasion, partly because they believed the civilian officials had meekly given away so much military might in the 1920s peace accords with European nations.

Once the government officials realized the Kwantung Army was easily overrunning Manchuria, many of them adopted a different stance. They praised the military for its performance and encouraged Japanese citizens, plagued by crowded conditions in the home islands, to emigrate to the area.

Other nations, including the U.S., condemned the invasion. When the League of Nations refused to recognize the puppet state of Manchukuo, Japan withdrew from the organization in 1933 and continued to exploit her new possession. Since many nations were in the midst of battling economic problems stemming from the 1929 Wall Street crash, they did not consider using military force to halt the aggressive moves. Japan, as well as German dictator Adolf Hitler and Italian leader Benito Mussolini in Europe, noticed this refusal to take action and embarked on bolder courses of action as the decade unfolded.

A more serious incident occurred on the Asian mainland on July 7, 1937, when Japanese soldiers opened fire on Chinese troops at the Marco Polo Bridge near Peking, China. Who fired first is unclear, but the Japanese Army used the incident as justification to unleash a huge offensive against Generalissimo Chiang Kai-shek's Chinese Army. Within weeks the Japanese Army had pushed Chiang's poorly trained and under-equipped forces toward the interior of China, leaving many key coastal cities open to the Japanese.

The Chinese leader steadfastly refused to negotiate with the Japanese, even though his troops were faring poorly. In October 1938, he withdrew farther into China's vast interior, moved the country's capital from Peking to Chungking, and created an alliance with his Communist opponent, Mao Tse-tung. The two bitter enemies, battling for control of their homeland, united in the common cause of repelling the Japanese.

The Japanese reacted swiftly and brutally.

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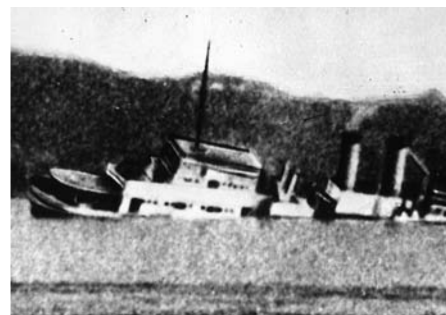

LEFT: Chinese soldiers, ill equipped and poorly led, were squandered during the early fighting in Burma against well-disciplined units of the Japanese Army. BELOW: The gunboat USS *Panay* sinks on the Yangtze River after being hit by Japanese bombers. The Japanese government claimed the incident was a case of mistaken identity even though the vessel was clearly marked as American.

Although their forces stalled at Shanghai, where Chinese forces fought for three months and inflicted 40,000 casualties, the Japanese Army quickly overran other major cities. Peking, Tientsin, Hankow, Chenchow, and Canton fell one after another, with angry Japanese troops exacting brutal vengeance at each site, where raping and killing civilians by the thousands.

The worst carnage had unfolded in December 1937, at Nanking, where Japanese troops embarked on an orgy of killing and rape. Soldiers used thousands of civilians for live bayonet practice and set fire to whole groups of men, women, and children. A war crimes tribunal later determined that 20,000 women between the ages of 11 and 76 had been raped, and more than 200,000 Chinese murdered.

One American who was present wrote on Christmas Eve that Nanking "is a city laid waste, ravaged, completely looted, much of it burned. The victorious army must have its rewards—and those rewards are to plunder, murder, rape, at will, to commit acts of unbelievable brutality and savagery. In all modern history surely there is no page that will stand so black as that of the rape of Nanking. It has been hell on earth."

The United States protested these criminal acts against a nation with which they shared sentimental bonds, developed by American missionaries who had long worked in China. Since no nation was willing or able to mount military action to deter the Japanese, the critical words achieved nothing. The Japanese continued to plunder China at will.

In Japan, Ambassador Grew cautioned Roosevelt that the nation rode a risky path by attacking Japan verbally without appropriate military force to back up the words. Like Winston Churchill warning the democracies in Europe about the rise of Hitler, Grew urged his nation to build a military machine capable of maintaining order in the Pacific. Otherwise, Grew added, "one side or the other would eventually have to eat crow." Roosevelt agreed with his ambassador, but embroiled in rescuing the devastated American economy from the Depression, he unfortunately could do little to stop the Japanese.

The events in China pushed the U.S. and Japan further apart. The Japanese believed that the United States had no right to interfere in Asian matters, and the U.S. was stunned at the brutality with which the Japanese treated fellow Asians. More and more, the two viewed each other as bitter foes.

Relations worsened in December 1937 when Japanese aircraft attacked the U.S. gunboat *Panay* as it was removing the last of the American embassy staff from the besieged town of Nanking. The American commander ordered everyone into the lifeboats and they took shelter in the high reeds along the Yangtze River. Although the sinking *Panay* was clearly marked by American flags, the Japanese pilots continued their assault. Two American sailors and one Italian journalist were killed in the attack, which was filmed by a news reporter.

America reacted angrily to the news, and for a moment the two nations appeared on the

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ABOVE: Preparing to assault Chinese defensive positions guarding the city of Changsha, Japanese soldiers await the order to advance. The Chinese Nationalists, led by Chiang Kai-shek, and their Communist adversaries, under Mao Tse-tung, formed an uneasy alliance against their common enemy. OPPOSITE: Japanese Marines roll a field gun forward to deal with a pocket of stubborn Chinese resistance that has held up their advance through Shanghai. The Japanese captured a number of major Chinese cities and effectively controlled much of the vast nation's coastline.

verge of warfare. Roosevelt knew that he could do little to assert American power in China, and thus did not want to start hostilities. The Japanese government, embroiled in China and fearful that the U.S. would cut off shipments of valuable scrap iron and oil to Japan, hoped to avoid direct conflict with the United States at any cost. With neither side eager to fight, a peaceful solution emerged. Roosevelt demanded that Japan offer a public apology and pay more than $2 million in damages. Tokyo agreed, and Roosevelt accepted the explanation that the Japanese pilots had incorrectly identified the *Panay* as a Chinese boat. Although hostilities were deflected, the affair soured relations between the U.S. and Japan.

Even before the *Panay* incident, Roosevelt was convinced that, sooner or later, there would be war with Germany or Japan. Beset with economic problems and leading a nation that wanted to avoid overseas entanglements, Roosevelt had to adopt a cautious approach in awakening his countrymen to the existing dangers and in which he could slowly build America's military might.

With the *Panay* as justification, Roosevelt asked for and received from Congress a 20-percent increase in funds for the Navy to build fleets in both the Atlantic and Pacific. In addition to asking that American munitions and aircraft manufacturers stop bargaining with Japan, he reduced the amount of important exports—scrap iron, oil, cotton, etc.—the U.S. was sending them.

In October 1939, Roosevelt changed the Pacific Fleet's home base from San Diego, California, to Pearl Harbor, Hawaii. Roosevelt intended for these moves to send a message to the Japanese that the United States opposed their actions in Asia and would react even more strongly in the future.

When Hitler overran Western Europe in the spring of 1940 and threatened to knock Great Britain out of the war, Congress appropriated more money for the military. Shipbuilders increased their output, and aircraft manufacturers strove to produce 50,000 aircraft. In September 1940, Congress passed the first peacetime draft in the nation's history in an attempt to expand the armed forces.

The United States also reexamined its military strategy in light of recent events. For years the nation had been guided in the Pacific by War Plan Orange, which assumed the Japanese would strike the U.S. in the Philippines. The plan called for U.S. troops stationed in the Philippines to hold out until the American fleet could arrive. Since the military did not yet possess enough men or ships to maintain simultaneous operations in both the Atlantic and Pacific, Roosevelt's top military advisers concluded Hitler was the greater threat to American security and that the military focus should be in the Atlantic. In the event of war, American forces in the Pacific would try to hold U.S. possessions until Hitler had been defeated. Then the focus would switch to Japan. Even if they lost the Philippines, U.S. leaders believed they had to first meet the challenge posed by Hitler.

Roosevelt had one more reason to implement this "Germany first" strategy. He feared that German scientists were close to perfecting an atomic bomb, a concern that worsened when German forces defeated France and gained possession of a famed French nuclear physics lab. Should Hitler attain an atomic bomb before the United States, he could act almost at will.

One officer who argued against abandoning the Philippines, was General Douglas MacArthur. A distinguished soldier from an eminent military family, MacArthur claimed that given sufficient time, he could build American and Filipino forces to the point where they could successfully repel a Japanese attack. The former Army chief of staff contended that by spring 1942 he could field 200,000 trained Filipino troops bolstered by one American division. His optimistic opinion swayed his superiors, who named him commander of forces in the Philippines in July 1941. From then on, MacArthur engaged in a race to construct a potent military presence before the Japanese struck.

Most military strategists dismissed the notion that the Japanese would launch an attack against the American fleet at Pearl Harbor. Although they developed a plan to cover the eventuality, few believed it would occur. Army Chief of Staff General George

National Archives

C. Marshall told Roosevelt in May 1941 that Pearl Harbor was "the strongest fortress in the world. Enemy carriers, naval escorts and transports will begin to come under air attack at a distance of approximately 750 miles. This attack will increase in intensity until within 200 miles of the objective, the enemy forces will be subject to all types of bombardment closely supported by our most modern pursuit. An invader would face more than 35,000 troops backed by coast defense guns and antiaircraft artillery." This optimistic evaluation would shortly be tested and found wanting.

Although small numbers of American troops filtered to various U.S. possessions in the Pacific, the country did not possess enough forces to pose a deterrent to the Japanese. Only 400 Marines and Navy personnel defended Wake Island; the same number guarded Guam. Most of the Navy's 347 warships steamed in Atlantic waters. Should Japan attack, it was not likely that American troops could do anything but fight as long as they could, and then surrender. A glimmer of hope emanated from the Philippines, but MacArthur needed until at least early 1942 to be adequately prepared.

Top American military planners held one ace—Army and Navy codebreakers had cracked Japan's diplomatic code. From 1935 to 1939 they intercepted and read most of the messages that passed from Tokyo to overseas embassies. The Japanese switched codes in March 1939, but American codebreakers, aided by the theft of secret material from the Japanese embassy in Washington, D.C., cracked the new code and learned of Japanese intentions before they acted. Called "Magic," this cryptographic operation provided valuable information throughout the war and helped influence the outcome of some of the most crucial battles.

Intercepts informed the U.S. of Japan's advance into French Indochina. Since Hitler had defeated France and the Netherlands and Great Britain appearing to be on the brink, Japan saw an opportunity to seize European possessions in the Pacific and gain control of their valuable resources. In September 1940, the Japanese signed the Tripartite Pact with Germany and Italy. The agreement bound each party to declare war on any nation that joined the war against one of the three. The three hoped this alliance would deter the United States from entering the conflict.

Japan then applied pressure on a weakened France to allow them to place troops in Indochina. While the Japanese claimed that the forces were necessary to protect their southern flank in China, Japan was actually interested in obtaining Indochina's vast natural resources and possessing a base from which to push southward against British-held Burma and Malaya.

When Japanese troops moved into Indochina in July 1941, Roosevelt cut off all trade with Japan, including oil. He promised to maintain the embargo until Japan withdrew from both China and Indochina and renounced the Tripartite Pact. Japanese Prime Minister Hideki Tojo replied, "We sent a large force of one million men, and it has cost us well over 100,000 dead and wounded, their bereaved families, hardship for four years." He answered that they could not now repudiate such sacrifices.

In light of Roosevelt's order to stop the flow of oil, Japanese leaders could follow one of two paths. They could reach a settlement with the United States and reopen the supply line, or they could continue their present policy of overseas expansion and risk war. Since they held only enough oil and supplies to last for 18 to 36 months, the leaders had to determine

which course to adopt and how best to implement it.

The Japanese military then had to settle a dispute between the Army and Navy over the direction of a possible attack. The Army wanted to mount an invasion to the north against long-time enemy Russia. The Navy, needing a continuous supply of oil to fuel the fleet, hoped to swing southward toward the oil-rich Dutch East Indies. When the German Army pushed deep into the Soviet Union and tied up millions of Stalin's forces, the Japanese government decided that they had enough time to hit south, consolidate their new possessions, and still be ready for a spring 1942 offensive against the Soviet Union. The plan was to sweep down the Malay Peninsula and attack Hong Kong, Malaya, Burma, Singapore, and the Dutch East Indies, while other segments invaded American forces in the Philippines.

Japan assumed that the only military force of significance in the Pacific, the American Pacific Fleet stationed at Pearl Harbor, would steam toward the relief of the soldiers fighting in the Philippines. The Japanese Navy planned to station submarines along the route to attack as the U.S. Navy passed by, then destroy the remnants in the Philippines area in a great naval slugfest between opposing battleships.

Japanese military leaders never intended to completely subdue the American foe. Instead, they hoped to set up such a potent defensive perimeter around their new acquisitions that, rather than engage in a protracted Pacific struggle at a time when Hitler posed a serious threat, the U.S. would negotiate for peace. As Tojo said, "America may be enraged for a while, but later she will come to understand."

Japan believed she had the necessary military might to pull off such a complex operation spread out over long distances. About 350,000 British, American, and Australian troops, many poorly trained, manned outposts in the Pacific. Some 90 warships and 1,000 aircraft supported them. Japan could count on 2.4 million well-trained troops, many of whom had been battle tested, supported by 7,500 aircraft and 230 warships.

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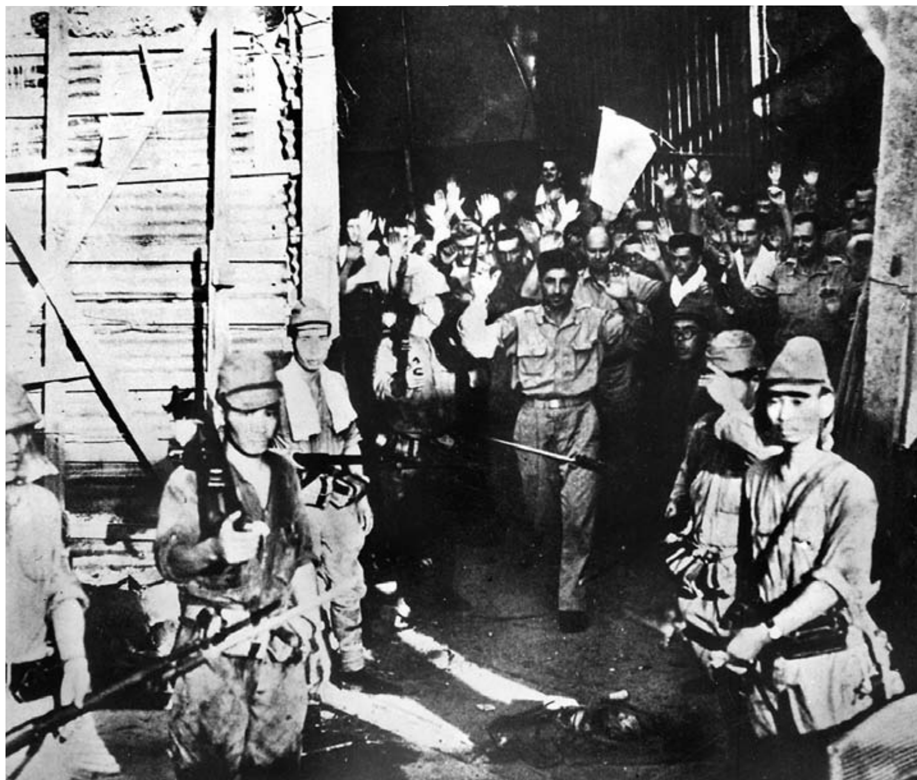

ABOVE: As their wary captors look on, American and Filipino soldiers display the white flag of surrender. In the spring of 1942, the last organized resistance to the Japanese in the Philippines came to an end on Corregidor. OPPOSITE: Japanese machine gunners pause during their pursuit of a retreating Chinese infantry unit. Moving with incredible speed, the Japanese conquered large amounts of Chinese territory in a relatively short period of time.

Admiral Isoroku Yamamoto, however, insisted that the only hope of victory against an industrial giant such as the United States lay in a successful preemptive strike at the U.S. Pacific Fleet anchored at Pearl Harbor in Hawaii. Yamamoto prevailed, and on Sunday, December 7, 1941, Japanese aircraft fell upon the unsuspecting fleet at Pearl Harbor and hit other Navy and Army Air Corps installations on the island of Oahu, inflicting tremendous damage and loss of life. The fighting capability of the U.S. armed forces in the Pacific was crippled.

On December 8, in Washington, D.C., in words that have resonated through the years, Roosevelt asked Congress to declare war on Japan. "Yesterday, December 7, 1941, a date which will live in infamy, the United States of America was suddenly and deliberately attacked by naval and air forces of the Empire of Japan." When Congress overwhelmingly passed the resolution, the United States was at war. For the first time in many months, Churchill thought that victory lay within the Allies' grasp and went to bed and slept "the sleep of the saved and the thankful."

The American military tried to rebound from catastrophe. Eight congressional and military boards concluded that the Pacific Fleet Commander, Admiral Kimmel, and Army Commandant Lt. Gen. Walter C. Short, had been negligent in their duties and they were relieved of their posts. In an effort to raise morale, a Navy message to troops at Pearl Harbor said, "You will have your revenge. Recruiting stations are jammed with men eager to join you."

At the same time Japanese aircraft blitzed Pearl Harbor, other Japanese units advanced toward Southeast Asia, the Philippines, and other Pacific islands. In the first of three huge military operations, the Japanese Army planned to move through Malaya, then split into two groups and swing west into Burma and east toward the Dutch East Indies. From Formosa, other units would strike American forces in the Philippines, while the Japanese

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Snow and biting cold covered American foxholes in the Vosges and the Alsace plain as GI wristwatches ticked down the last hours of December 31, 1944, awaiting the German attack. In their positions, American soldiers peered northward toward German West Wall fortified positions, into heavy woods, or tried to catch some sleep. Nobody felt like celebrating the opening of 1945 on the thin American lines.

There was no reason to—hundreds of miles to the north, two German panzer armies were slugging it out in the Ardennes with American and British forces in the Battle of the Bulge. Now Lt. Gen. Jacob Devers' U.S. 6th Army Group had been forced to stretch its lines west to cover those of the U.S. Third Army, which had been pulled off its offensive into the Saar to drive north to relieve the siege of Bastogne.

OPERATION NORDWIND: *The Last Offensive*

IN THE WINTER OF 1944-45, THE GERMANS LAUNCHED OPERATION NORDWIND EVEN AS THE BATTLE OF THE BULGE RAGED TO THE NORTH. | BY DAVID H. LIPPMAN

The 6th Army Group, consisting of two armies, had to take over. The French 1st Army dug in around the Colmar Pocket in Lorraine and the U.S. 7th Army, under Lt. Gen. Alexander "Sandy" Patch, was tasked with holding the Rhine River from Strasbourg to the German border and westward. That length was 64 kilometers along the Rhine and nearly 140 facing the Saar. Worse, Patch's army was thin, overstretched, short of 9,000 replacements, lacking reserves, and at the bottom of supply priorities because of demands from the Bulge. Some of Patch's men were wearing castoff British, Canadian, and even captured German winter coats.

Still worse, few of its troops were veterans—the 100th "Century" Infantry Division, a new outfit, was all draftees. The 70th Infantry Division had completed training only two months ago. Three American divisions had been sent into the line without their artillery and supporting vehicles, simply to hold the ground on the near side of the Rhine.

Patch's best infantry divisions were the 36th Texas Division and the 45th Thunderbirds, which had fought through Sicily and Italy before invading Southern France in August and through the Rhone Valley, up to Alsace.

It was not all bleak for Patch, who had advantages in air supremacy, good intelligence, and the fact that his troops occupied some of the abandoned earthworks and fortifications of the legendary Maginot Line. The Germans had stripped much of its equipment, even cookstoves, after their 1940 victory, but they couldn't remove the tunnels, tank traps and other defenses—or the heavy guns, which all faced Germany and were soon put to good use.

As 1944 came to a close, the big question was what would the Germans do? Adolf Hitler's answer came on December 22, when he told his top commando, SS Col. Otto Skorzeny, "We are going to launch a new attack in the Alsace!"

The German assault would involve two forces, Army Group Oberrhein, commanded by SS Reichsführer Heinrich Himmler, wearing one of his many hats. He was an unsuccessful general, believing that this task purely consisted of reviewing troops and presenting medals. His army group was deployed from the Swiss border to Scheibenhard, where the French border diverged from the Rhine and the West Wall's fortifications turned west and included the 19th Army in the Colmar Pocket. From there, Germany's defenses were manned by Army Group

In January 1945, a U.S. M10 tank destroyer attached to the 36th Infantry Division rumbles past a blasted out church in Rohrwiller, France. Germany's last offensive, Operation Nordwind, ended in failure as Allied resistance stiffened.

National Archives

G, under Gen. Hermann Balck, who would be replaced by Gen. Johannes Blaskowitz just before the offensive.

Hitler's plan, codenamed "North Wind" (*Nordwind*), called for a three-pincer assault on the exposed bulge of the 7th Army. The German 1st Army, under Gen. Hans von Obstfelder, would attack on the German right. This army was organized into three corps—the 13th SS, the 82nd, and the 90th, comprising nine divisions. The 13th SS Corps included two of the supposedly toughest divisions in the German inventory: the 17th SS Panzergrenadier Division Gotz von Berlichingen and the 6th SS Mountain Division, transferred from Finland when that nation left the war. The 6th Division's men were young and fit, unlike the Wehrmacht units alongside them, but it had long been led by ill-trained party activists, with commanding officers reporting drunk. Even so, Keith Bonn, an American historian of the Vosges campaign, wrote that it was "undoubtedly the best German infantry formation on the entire western front in early January 1945." Col. Felix Sparks, an officer in the 45th, said the 6th SS were "the best men we ever ran into, extremely aggressive, and impossible to capture. There was no driving them out, for they fought until they were killed."

Named for a German robber baron from the Middle Ages, the 17th SS Panzergrenadier Division was also a mess. It was formed in France and consisted of Germans, Romanians, and renegade Belgians. Most of them were killed at St. Lo, and replacements were marginal. The division's chief abilities were torturing and murdering both French civilians and captured American military medical personnel. Flung into battle at Metz, it was mauled again. The division's elitism and equipment were gone. The 29-year-old division commander, SS Col. Hans Lingner, was considered incompetent by his superiors.

But behind this questionable force were three tough divisions that had endured years of war: the 11th and 21st Panzer, and the 25th Panzergrenadier. The 21st had faced the British on D-Day, stopping them from reaching Caen. However, like every German division in the war by this point, they were short of ammunition, guns, fuel, and replacements.

The Germans considered three approach routes for Nordwind—through open country to the west of the Vosges Mountains; through the American salient at the Lauter River; and straight down through the lower Vosges. Obstfelder recommended that his troops attack straight down the lower Vosges Mountains, from Bitche to Saverne. Very few American forces held that area, and some of those Maginot positions were in German hands, reducing risks. It was a southern version of the Bulge offensive.

But Hitler wasn't sold. For all his faults as a military leader, he had been an infantryman, and he did not believe his mechanized troops could drive down the backbone of a range of mountains and forests. He ordered a major effort west of the Vosges by the 13th SS Corps and the main attack east of the Vosges by the panzer forces.

Deployed against this were two American corps: Maj. Gen. Wade Haislip's 15th west of the Vosges, with the 44th, 100th Infantry, Task Force Harris, and 12th Armored Divisions, the latter in reserve, as well as a combat command—the equivalent of a brigade group—of the French 2nd Armored Division, the strongest outfit in the Free French Army. Well-equipped, motivated, and trained, the 2nd Armored enjoyed the dynamic leadership of Gen. Philippe Leclerc, one of the earliest officers to join Gen. Charles de Gaulle's Free French forces in 1940. He and his men preferred operating with the Americans rather than their countrymen, as the French 1st Army was largely made up of French forces that had supported Vichy from 1940 to 1942 and then the Allies. In French army barracks and officers' messes, there was a great deal of tension between Gaullists and former Pétainists.

Though the 44th and 100th lacked combat experience—75 and 47 days, respectively—they were far better trained and equipped than their German opposition.

ABOVE: Engineers of the U.S. 100th Infantry Division string barbed wire to secure positions against enemy attack. They appear either undisturbed by the presence of a dead German's body lying nearby in the snow or oblivious to it. OPPOSITE: American soldiers of the 275th Infantry Regiment, 70th Division, stand by their 57mm antitank gun in Philippsburg, France, on January 4, 1945, as an M4 Sherman tank moves cautiously forward while searching for an advancing German tank column.

Both: National Archives

On the right, Maj. Gen. Albert Brooks' 6th Corps covered the vast tract of land from the high Vosges to the Rhine River. The 36th and 45th Infantry Divisions were dug in on the Franco-German border, with a motley group of tanks and armored cars called Task Force Hudelson, after its CO, Colonel D.H. Hudelson, assigned to cover the high Vosges forests, hills, and mountains.

The German plan was solid, but their troops were short on supplies, worn out, and could not train for or rehearse the attack—or even reconnoiter the American positions, for fear that Allied air supremacy would spot their deployments.

It didn't matter. The Americans knew the Germans were coming. After the crushing intelligence failure that opened the Battle of the Bulge, American reconnaissance planes, British radio-intercept teams, and Bletchley Park codebreakers were reading German Enigma messages to determine Hitler's intentions. It was clear that the Germans were going to attack in the first hours of the New Year. Patch summoned his commanders on New Year's Eve to inform them and forbid any celebrations for the 7th Army. He did not want the Germans attacking hung-over troops.

On December 26, Allied supreme commander Gen. Dwight D. Eisenhower summoned Devers to his Paris headquarters to discuss how the 6th Army Group would face the impending attack. Eisenhower was more concerned about losing casualties and wasting valuable supplies than holding ground. The Alsace salient was a burden on his overstretched lines. He told Devers to be prepared to withdraw. Back at his headquarters, Devers ordered Patch to be ready to fall back as far as the Moder River, and, if necessary, yield Strasbourg.

Devers was not happy with the decisions, particularly the last one—he had strong faith in his men. Furthermore, holding Strasbourg was a major humanitarian and political issue. The city was sacred to France for being taken by Prussia in 1870. The lost Alsace-Lorraine had dominated French military and political thinking since then and through the Great War. One of France's great children's stories, taught in every classroom, was "The Last Lesson," in which a teacher in Strasbourg delivers his final class in French before having to yield his post and the school to the Prussians in the morning.

Now 150,000 Frenchmen—many Alsatians of wavering views—lived in Strasbourg. Ceding the city could lead to bloodshed on a massive scale as Nazis and their sympathizers attacked de Gaulle followers.

He was a major problem, too. As head of the new French state, de Gaulle was concerned about the fate of his citizens. In addition, if Strasbourg were yielded to the Nazis without a fight, it would be a major loss of prestige for his government. He might lose power to his communist rivals, who made up the backbone of the French resistance, despite his efforts to rein it in.

Both Devers and de Gaulle appealed to Eisenhower to keep troops in Alsace and Strasbourg ahead of New Year's Eve, but got no answer before 11 p.m. on December 31—when German artillery in the West Wall opened fire on American positions as Nordwind began under a bright moon. German *Nebelwerfer* ("Fog Throwers")—"Screaming Meemies" to the Americans—rocket launchers lit up the sky with their short-range missiles. German infantry stormed American positions, yelling "Heil Hitler! Down with Roosevelt!" A GI on the receiving end of this verbal assault said, "It sounded like a Republican Convention."

First hit was Task Force Hudelson, the

“seam” between the 15th and 6th Corps. The Americans often had difficulty assembling ad hoc task forces during the war, and this was just such an example—it consisted mostly of armored cars and light tanks from 12th Armored Division and was unable to maneuver off-road. Still, they were dug in with machine guns, trip-flares, and minefields.

Four German Volksgrenadier divisions started the action by probing and finding holes in the thin American line. In their white snowsuits, the German attackers poured through the holes, yelling “Hold your fire!” in English. The Americans did, thinking the snowsuit-covered apparitions were fellow dogfaces or surrendering Germans, until the Volksgrenadiers opened fire. The Americans fought back—even cooks and clerks grabbed rifles and went into the line—but couldn’t hold. The Americans started running out of ammunition and fled in small groups, leaving their vehicles behind in varying states of effectiveness. By dawn, Task Force Hudelson had ceased to exist as a fighting force.

As they retreated, they also discovered that numbers of the Alsatian population, being German, were hostile. A French woman who had been friendly to the Americans up to this point opened fire on the fleeing GIs with a rifle. The Americans cut her to pieces with a .50-caliber machine gun.

On the extreme American left, the 36th Volksgrenadiers and the 17th SS Division attacked the New York and New Jersey National Guardsmen of the 44th Infantry. SS troops—some of them drunk or high on Benzedrine—yelled “Die Yankee bastards!” and “Come and fight, Yankee gangsters!” as they attacked. The 44th held its ground as night turned to day. The American 749th Tank Battalion joined in counter attacks, scything through the Volksgrenadiers. The Germans hit back with some troops from the 17th SS Panzergrenadiers, but they proved as incompetent as ever. German dead piled up below American positions on the high ground. GIs called the area beneath them “Morgue Valley.”

Amid the night fighting, Sergeant Charles A. MacGillivary, a Canadian-born guardsman who lived in Boston, led a squad of infantry of the 71st Regiment of the 44th to meet the German attack and displayed extraordinary courage against the enemy. He received the Medal of Honor from President Harry Truman on August 23, 1945, at the White House, returned to Massachusetts, died in 2000, and is buried in Arlington National Cemetery.

ABOVE: U.S. Sherman medium tanks move through the French village of Wingen on January 7, 1945, following a night counterattack to retake it from the Germans. OPPOSITE: In response to Operation Nordwind, the U.S. Army’s 75th Infantry Division was moved hurriedly into the Ardennes Forest to slow the German offensive. They later relieved the 82nd Airborne Division along the Salm River and when the tide turned against the Germans, they joined Seventh Army in counterattacks in Alsace.

Other defenders proved equally ferocious. Private Leon Outlaw cut down more than 100 attackers with his .30-caliber water-cooled machine gun.

On the right flank, the 6th Corps faced a German advance over the Alsace plain with fewer troops, holding a long line. Brooks reacted to the Nazi attacks swiftly. He had two task forces, Linden and Herren, keeping watch on the Rhine. These two task forces were the infantry components of the 42nd and 70th Infantry Divisions, respectively, which meant they lacked their divisions’ supporting artillery, armor, and engineers. Their infantry had not seen battle, either. But they were trained, equipped, and available. Brooks appreciated from intelligence and weather conditions that the Germans on the east side of the Rhine were in no shape to mount any kind of major crossing, so he pulled the two task forces out of their mission and sent them north to reinforce the battered divisions 45th and 79th.

In the 45th Division, Brooks had one of the best in the Army; the “Thunderbirds” of Texas and New Mexico had fought with valor in Sicily and Italy. The 45th Division’s CO, Maj. Gen. Robert T. Frederick, one of the Army’s youngest, had previously commanded the legendary “Black Devils,” the U.S.-Canadian 1st Special Service Force, leading it from the front. Maneuvering his men dexterously, Frederick and the understrength 45th held off German attacks. The Germans facing them were poorly briefed and not well trained—a

bad combination for an offensive.

Frederick moved with his usual alacrity as he shifted the 179th Infantry Regiment from his far right to his left flank and put the 36th Combat Engineers in on the right, along with two battalions from the 79th. German troops from the 90th Corps' 257th Volksgrenadier Division attacked into the many villages and towns on the Alsace plain, and house-to-house fighting raged all day along a 12-mile curving line. German pressure was heavy—Frederick ordered two regiments to pull back to a new line of resistance in the Maginot fortifications.

Word of this fresh German attack landed on Eisenhower's desk in Paris along with a great deal of other bad news that morning. The Battle of the Bulge was continuing, supplies were short, and the Luftwaffe had launched a massive dawn aerial assault on Allied air bases in Belgium and Holland, destroying 134 Allied aircraft for a loss of 220. Eisenhower's offer of a pardon to GIs convicted of murder and rape if they emerged from stockades to fill manpower gaps in rifle companies had gone mostly ignored.

Now Devers' troops were ignoring his plan to withdraw. Eisenhower sent Devers a hard message, insisting that Patch pull back as far as possible. Sixth Corps was not to be caught on the Alsatian plain and destroyed—if necessary, they were to pull back as far as the Moder River. But Eisenhower did release the 12th and 14th Armored and the 36th Infantry divisions from his reserves.

To make matters worse, de Gaulle demanded that Eisenhower personally guarantee the defense of Strasbourg. De Gaulle sent Marshal Alphonse Juin, head of the Forces Francaise Interieur, which commanded the Resistance, to meet with Eisenhower 's chief of staff, Gen. Walter Bedell Smith. They met on January 2 and the discussion did not go well. As tempers rose, Juin threatened to take the French 1st Army out of the Allied command and order it to hold Strasbourg on its own.

Smith roared back at this insubordination, shouting, "The French 1st Army will not get a single further round of ammunition or a gallon of gasoline!"

"In that case, General de Gaulle will forbid American forces the use of French railways and communications," Juin retorted.

Smith backed down, but the battle between allies was not over.

Nor was the battle on the Alsatian front. The gap created by the collapse of Task Force Hudelson allowed German troops to pour through it on January 1 and 2, threatening to cut off the 100th Infantry on their right and the 45th Division on their left. The 44th rallied, counterattacked, and then retreated again.

Determined to hold his ground, Haislip sent in his reserve, the French 2nd Armored Combat Command L, whose Sherman tanks and mechanized infantry stemmed the German attack. The Nazis tried to split the seam between the 44th and 100th Divisions, using captured Sherman tanks to fool the Americans. But as weather improved west of the Vosges, American air power made its presence felt, blasting open German positions, troop concentrations, and supply columns.

Both: National Archives

The German 1st Army's assistant chief operations officer, Colonel Albert Emmerich, reported on the 13th SS Corps' attack harshly, saying that it had "under incompetent leadership, in the meantime been completely dispersed … Probably because of the insufficient training of the volks artillery corps, the coordination between the attacking infantry and the supporting artillery was only rarely achieved, so that the artillery support, which was actually strong, did not show its effectiveness either."

The assault west of the Vosges was called off on January 4, but harsh fighting continued there. On the night of January 8, Tech. Sgt. Charles Carey, an Oklahoma native in the 397th Infantry Regiment, 100th Infantry Division, gave his life defending against 200 German infantrymen and a dozen tanks. He received a posthumous Medal of Honor and is buried in the American cemetery in Neuville-en-Condroz, Belgium.

But in the 6th Corps sector, a bitter struggle and retreat was the order of the day. Patch and Brooks struggled to disentangle the 45th, 79th, and 70th Infantry Divisions (Task Force Herren) on narrow Alsatian roads jammed with fleeing refugees. Brooks moved Herren to plug up the eastern exits from the Vosges, with Frederick in overall command. In the center, two regiments of the 45th and one of the 79th dug in to face the German second wave.

Patch made another important move—he pulled the 103rd Infantry Division out from his left flank and to the right flank of Haislip's command to relieve Task Force Herren, which was running out of men. The 103rd was a fairly new division, but it had superb leadership in Brig. Gen. Anthony McCauliffe, who had led the 101st Airborne Division in its stand at Bastogne. Command of the 103rd was the quiet paratrooper's reward. The 103rd dug in and held the line.

Fierce fighting raged at Phillipsbourg, where the 12th "Hellcats" Armored Division had been released from SHAEF's reserve to face the German onslaught. Among them was a Los Angelino Pfc. named George B. Turner of the 499th Armored Field Artillery, who survived a harrowing overnight ordeal after covering the retreat of several soldiers forced to abandon damaged armored vehicles and suffering a serious wound. Turner received the Medal of Honor on August 23, 1945. He died in 1963, and is buried in Arlington National Cemetery.

On January 3, General de Vigier, the French military governor of Strasbourg, sent an impassioned plea to Patch's headquarters at Lunéville imploring 7th Army not to abandon the city. While Patch digested this message, Devers turned up and ordered Strasbourg evacuated regardless of any political pressure to hold the city.

Meanwhile, de Gaulle himself took his protests to Eisenhower, admitting that the military plan made sense, but the loss of Strasbourg would be a political disaster for France. With Winston Churchill present as both witness and potential mediator, de Gaulle presented Eisenhower with a letter threatening to use the French Army to independently defend the city if necessary.

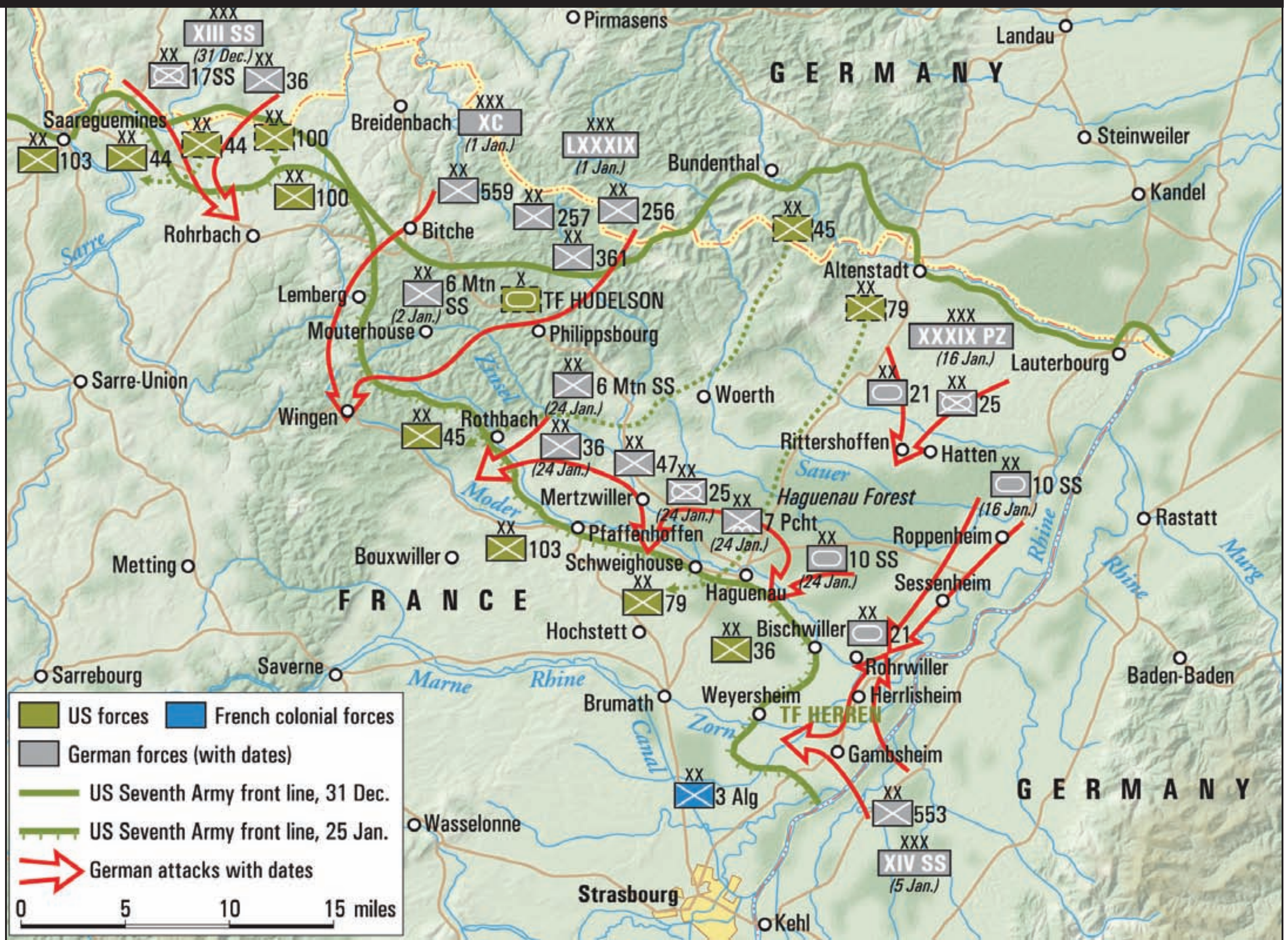
A great military politician, Eisenhower told de Gaulle that he would modify his orders to ensure that Strasbourg would be defended. But he would not tolerate French insubordination to the Allied command. If de Gaulle removed his troops from Eisenhower 's command, the French would not get a single bullet or gallon of gas from his depots. De Gaulle agreed. Studying his maps, de Gaulle ordered the French 1st Army to send the 3rd Algerian Division, a veteran but understrength outfit—like most of the units fighting in Alsace-Lorraine—to Strasbourg with orders to hold the city. Meanwhile, Eisenhower ordered Devers to limit Brooks' withdrawal to a point north of Strasbourg. Then Churchill and the two generals had dinner.

Meanwhile, Frederick fought grim battles in small towns with names that his Thunderbirds would never forget, as they and their buddies would take heavy casualties struggling to knock

Ullstein Bild

ABOVE: Wearing heavy greatcoats, German soldiers move forward in the historically contested Alsace-Lorraine region along the French-German border during the opening hours of Hitler's desperate offensive, Operation Nordwind, in January 1945. OPPOSITE: The last major German ground offensive of World War II in the West, Operation Nordwind was launched in support of the Ardennes Offensive to the north, which became known as the Battle of the Bulge.

Map © 2025 Philip Schwartzberg, Meridian Mapping, Minneapolis, MN



out German assault guns and defeat Volksgrenadier and 6th SS attacks. Frederick moved more troops to his left to face both the SS men and the 361st Volksgrenadier Division, whose 951st Volksgrenadier Regiment was facing his troops. The two forces collided head-on, and the Germans were repulsed at every point, leaving the 12th SS Mountain Regiment at Wingen-sur-Moder surrounded. With a fanaticism born of both desperation and being SS, a number of the trapped German troops were able to fight their way out.

On January 4, the 275th Regiment's 1st Battalion (70th Infantry Division) attacked Phillipsbourg, backed by heavy artillery fire. The regiment's executive officer, Lt. Col. John T. Malloy found 75 men and some tanks clinging to the edge of town, ready to withdraw, but rallied them.

The struggle for Philipsburg continued on the 5th, with American artillery and armor making its presence felt. The SS defenders were forced to withdraw.

Yet German hopes remained high. With reports from Himmler that American defenders were thinning out at Strasbourg, the Nazi high command committed the 21st Panzer and 25th Panzergrenadier on the night of the January 5 to cross the Rhine and be ready to attack across the Alsatian plain, under the command of the 39th Panzer Corps. Eisenhower considered this the most dangerous move the Germans could make in Alsace.

The same day, Himmler hurled his Army Group Oberrhein into the attack from the Colmar Pocket, with SS Gen. Otto von dem Bach-Zelewski's 14th SS Corps leading the way in by crossing the Rhine River against light American opposition. Bach-Zelewski was Hitler's "model anti-partisan fighter," having crushed the Warsaw Uprising in August. Two days later, Operation *Sonnenwende* ("Winter Solstice") got underway with the German 64th Corps attacking north to Strasbourg. The attacks meant that Patch could not gain any relief from his French troops in the south.

Devers now faced attacks on his right and left, with only his stretched-out 7th Army. Fortunately, he had Ultra intelligence reports providing him with up-to-date information on German strength and movements, enabling him to spot his forces. To the 79th Infantry Division, under Maj.-Gen. Ira Wyche, he assigned Task Force Linden and moved them to the road from Weyersheim to Gambsheim. The 79th was named the "Cross of Lorraine" Division from its previous incarnation in World War I, having won battles there.

Brooks told Wyche, "Get in there and get it cleaned up, it's got to be cleaned up pronto! We can't let them get in there!" Wyche attacked at 3:45 p.m. straight into the Germans and became bogged down in darkness and machine-gun fire. Soon Wyche's attack was completely stalled.

Frederick assigned Colonel Malloy to set matters straight. He found tank commanders

refusing to advance. Malloy whipped out his .45 and ordered them to do so at gunpoint. Then Malloy personally took charge of the attack, with one of his lieutenants firing a light machine gun from the hip, like a pistol. "Who is that crazy guy?" Malloy yelled. "Let's get him a medal!"

Malloy's ferocity worked, although he took a wound in the shoulder, then in the leg. Medics took Malloy out of the battle, but he had won the point and the day.

Meanwhile, the Germans had cut holes in the snowy American lines and brought their armored units into play. First up was the 21st Panzer Division, one of Germany's most unusual such outfits. The original 21st Panzer Division had fought in North Africa and been destroyed there. Its number was given to a new panzer division formed in France to face the Allied invasion in 1944. Many of its vehicles were war booty. On D-Day the division's CO, Lt. Gen. Edgar Feuchtinger, was in Paris with his mistress, a French actress. Lacking leadership, the division responded sluggishly and was unable to break through to the British beaches. Feuchtinger's superiors demanded to know why the top panzer commander had failed his most important job. Feuchtinger admitted to being an opportunist Nazi who had planned major Party rallies before the war, not generalship. He claimed his only maps of France were from the 1870 Franco-Prussian War.

Feuchtinger's superiors didn't believe that one, and on January 5, 1945, they arrested the general for deserting his post on D-Day, which—along with misappropriation of Wehrmacht funds and giving secrets to his new South American mistress—resulted in 21st Panzer being unable to attack. Feuchtinger was sentenced to death at court-martial and stripped of all his medals, but Hitler intervened, busting the general to artillery private and sending him to the 20th Panzergrenadier Division on the Eastern Front. Feuchtinger deserted instead and survived the war.

The effect of this high-level court-martial was also to delay 21st Panzer's assault until January 7, when it attacked Task Force Linden, which was reinforced by the 12th Armored Division. The Americans also held Maginot Line strongpoints. Facing fixed defenses, mobile Sherman tanks, well-placed mines, as well as a heavy mist, the German attack stalled.

By January 8, the 553rd Volksgrenadier Division, the cutting edge of the otherwise weak 14th SS Corps, had fought its way across the Rhine to the town of Herrlisheim, cutting the north-south road. It was now reinforced by one of the tougher SS outfits, the 10th SS "Hohenstaufen" Panzer Division, which had fought in Normandy and Holland, but not the Bulge. The Americans mustered two task forces from the 12th and 14th Armored Divisions to tear apart the bridgehead. In what became known as "Purple Heart Lane," a wild battle ensued, as the Americans did not expect to find SS men. The Americans fought their way into Herrlisheim, and on the following day the 12th Armored's Combat Command B (CCB) stormed in, using tanks to provide fire support for infantry. They didn't find SS troops, but the 553rd Volksgrenadiers proved tough enough.

American radio communications then broke down and several of the Sherman tanks milling about outside the town were eviscerated by German 88mm guns. When dusk fell, the GIs withdrew, though harsh fighting continued in the town for four days.

The German assault in the Alsace Plain continued on January 7, with 21st Panzer and 25th Panzergrenadier trying again. Blaskowitz was unhappy with two elite panzer divisions failing to break through slapped-together American task forces and made his displeasure known by personally visiting the 21st Panzer's tactical HQ, where he warned the 39th Panzer Corps' CO, Gen. Karl Decker, and the 21st's acting CO, Lt. Col. Hans von Luck, that Feuchtinger's cell at Torgau prison had two empty cots.

The two German senior officers in turn pointed out that the American opponents, a portion of the famed 42nd "Rainbow" Infantry Division (still Task Force Linden), were holding a portion of the Maginot Line with heavy artillery and tank support. Just to make things worse, von Luck had no up-to-date maps of the battle area. Neither Blaskowitz nor Decker could help von Luck—they didn't have good maps, either.

But Decker and von Luck attacked with ample determination on the 9th, driving on the 242nd Infantry Regiment's 1st Battalion at Hatten. The 25th Panzergrenadier led the way with its tough infantrymen infiltrating around pillboxes. The Americans stabilized the situation with mortar fire, but the Germans hit back with flamethrower tanks. That forced one American bunker to surrender, and most of Company B was overrun. The 1st Battalion's CO told his company commanders to let the tanks pass but kill the German infantrymen.

Three German tanks approached 1st Battalion's command post, but the leading Panther was stopped by mines. The other two, unable to advance, hurled shells at the CP.

Captain Herr of the 21st led an assault group of engineers and 12 Panther tanks against an American bunker and forced its surrender, blasting three Sherman tanks and taking many prisoners. The Americans treated the Germans to a heavy artillery barrage that forced them to withdraw.

With the support of 20 fresh assault guns from Germany, Herr tried again, on a cold snowy night. Neither he nor his men could see the GIs in the moonless dark. German soldiers aged 16 and 17 struggled toward a silent bunker. There was no incoming fire, so a German NCO simply banged on the door. It opened slowly, enabling the Germans to take the GIs prisoner. But the noise alerted the other bunker crews, who opened fire on the attackers, joined by heavy artillery, stalling further German advance. The Nazis kept trying, with the 25th Panzergrenadiers joining in, to little avail.

Another German attack, led by more than 25 tanks, enveloped the town and reached the area south of Rittershoffen. The Americans sent in the 14th Armored Division's 48th Tank Battalion to stop the German assault.

The American fire was effective—in five minutes all the panzers were smoking hulks.

Inside Hatten, German "Landsers" and GIs shot it out in bitter house-to-house fighting. Master Sergeant Vito Bertoldo, of A Company of the 242nd Infantry Regiment, and Macon, Illinois, proved exceptionally courageous.

"He fought with extreme gallantry while guarding two command posts against the assault

Ullstein Bild

ABOVE: As the Nordwind offensive lost its momentum, German soldiers tenaciously defended the last piece of German-held territory on French soil—the 850 square-mile "Colmar Pocket" on the west side of the Rhine River. Many of the defending German units were significantly understrength and inexperienced. Whenever possible, veteran soldiers were allocated to bolster the fighting capability amid the thinning ranks. BELOW: Part of Task Force Linden, a U.S. machine-gun crew prepares to defend a bunker reinforced with logs and mounds of dirt in the windswept Vosges Mountains of eastern France as American forces sought to stem the tide of Germany's Operation Nordwind.

National Archives

of powerful infantry and armored forces which had overrun the battalion's main line of resistance," his Medal of Honor citation read. He received his Medal of Honor on December 18, 1945, died in California in 1966, and is buried in Golden Gate Cemetery in San Bruno, California.

The 242nd Infantry and the 48th Tank Battalions broke the German momentum, and the Americans counterattacked in the dark—not a standard GI practice—using the burning wreckage of German vehicles to light their way. The American assault was joined by a new outfit, the 827th Tank Destroyer Battalion, consisting of speedy M18 Hellcats. The 827th was an all-black outfit with white officers and African American enlisted men. Unlike the sharper 761st Tank Battalion, this unit performed with overall mixed results due to poor communication, training, and leadership. But at Rittershoffen, they had good moments. Attacked by 16 German tanks, the 827th destroyed 11 of the enemy, with the remainder withdrawing. Lt. Robert Jones personally spotted for his gunners under heavy fire, which helped another one, Sgt. Harry Johnson, get the first draw on an approaching Tiger tank, forcing the Germans to withdraw.

Back at Herrlisheim, the 56th Armored Infantry Battalion and the 714th Tank Battalion attacked the village, suffering 50 percent casualties to German mortars and concealed tanks. The battle turned into another house-to-house action, with German troops in white capes marking their targets with tracer fire and then blasting the building with antitank guns or hand-held Panzerfaust rocket launchers. In some buildings, the Germans would hold the first and second floors while attacking Americans would slip into the cellar and charge the Germans from behind, wielding flamethrowers.

As January 9 closed, Blaskowitz messaged Hitler that his shortage of infantry, American air superiority, and their ability to withstand the attack was grinding Nordwind to a halt. All that was left was continuing the attack in the Alsace Plain purely to tie up American troops. Hitler dismissed the reports as "pessimistic."

On January 10, the Hatten battle intensified, when the 2nd/315th moved into town,

and soon came under crossfire from both friendly and enemy tanks. The American infantry faced a dozen German panzers and had to man a crippled M-10 tank destroyer, using it as a "scarecrow" to fend off German attacks. The 827th Tank Destroyers moved in to reinforce the 2nd/315th.

The Germans maintained their determination. Major Spreu led a team of combat engineers to attack American bunkers, snapping barbed wire and hurling hand grenades into the ports. The assault succeeded as five officers and 117 enlisted men emerged under a white flag. Spreu made that bunker his HQ, but was wounded the next day and sent back to Germany. He was awarded a Knight's Cross.

The American counter attacks continued on the 10th. At Herrlisheim, GI engineers built a Bailey Bridge over the Zorn River, enabling the 714th Tank Battalion to drive into the town in the predawn darkness. Captain Leehman didn't know where he was, so he drove through empty streets, closed in on a panzer, and blasted it open at point-blank range. After that, he met a GI who pointed out where the main American command post was. Leehman reported that his men couldn't hold. His superiors disagreed, but the Germans forced them back.

January 11 saw German artillery blasting into Hatten and panzergrenadiers attacking into Rittershoffen through snow and mist in a pincer attack. Fifteen panzers headed to the southwest corner of town. The seemingly ubiquitous 827th Tank Destroyer Battalion sent four M-18s to address this menace, and Sergeant Spencer Irving saw some GIs dug in, awaiting the armored assault.

"How do you want them," Irving yelled, "one-two-three, or three-two-one? I think I'll take them one-two-three!" Irving's gunner did so, and the infantrymen shot down the escaping German crews.

The 14th Armored's Combat Command A (CCA) attacked to relieve the defenders of Hatten and was stopped 400 yards from their objective. Their mechanized infantry got into town, enabling the survivors of 1st/242nd to withdraw. The battalion had gone into battle with 781 officers and men. Some 264 GIs emerged. One 14th Armored man, a veteran of Italy captured by the Germans, told his interrogators, "This is the bloodiest battle we've ever fought, worse than the legendary battle of Anzio."

M4 Sherman medium tanks from the 714th Tank Battalion, 12th Armored Division pause near the French village of Bischwiller in January 1945 during the swirling winter fighting spawned by Operation Nordwind, the last German ground offensive of World War II in the West.

National Archives

CCA tried again on January 12 and reached northern Rittershoffen to find the Germans defending a cemetery in the southeast corner of town. CCA organized teams of eight infantry and one tank to operate in the town, with GIs hurling hand grenades and tanks blasting open buildings. "The tanks inched ponderously a few yards down the street, heavy cannon searching out machine-gun nests (and) enemy strong-points," a divisional history read. "The infantrymen moved along with them, running, dodging from building to building, throwing grenades in the cellar windows, going through each small (house) room by room, rifles at the ready, hand grenades ready; the artillery and mortar fire screamed into the street and exploded the roofs, and the German machine-gun fire swept the street in quick, nasty blasts."

Combat Command B moved in at 11:15 a.m and lost two tanks immediately. Unable to advance further, CCB remained in place for a week.

The Germans reinforced Rittershoffen with mobile antiaircraft guns, flamethrowers, and more panzers. The 14th Armored sent in its third and last outfit, Combat Command R, which finally regained the wrecked town by the 15th. More than 100 civilians were killed in the fighting.

Now 14th Armored faced the full weight of 39th Panzer Corps' two tracked divisions and new reinforcements, the 7th Parachute Division. While not jump-trained, the German paratroopers were still a formidable force, highly skilled on offense as well as defense. They were among the first combat units equipped with assault rifles, giving them extra punch. They wore dark uniforms that made them look like demonic shadows.

CCB's 19th Armored Infantry Battalion counterattacked along with two tanks from 47th Tank Battalion. The GIs moved through the main street's rubble amid supporting fire, which added noise and smoke to the mist. A German tank appeared, and the Americans slammed two 75mm rounds into its engine compartment and turret, knocking it out of action. Unfortunately, the second American tank saw the first one silhouetted against a burning building, and its crew drew the wrong conclusion, blasting it in a case of "friendly fire."

The Americans committed four more tanks to the attack and treated the Germans to 75mm and machine-gun fire. The Germans fired back with Panzerfausts. After five hours, the Americans held half of Rittershoffen.

The Germans got the point. They pulled out the panzers and replaced them with the 47th Volksgrenadiers on January 16, trying to find another area where their tanks could punch through. Two months after the Alsace battle was over, American battlefield surveyors found the hulks of 31 M-4 Sherman tanks and nine M-5 light tanks strewn across the ground along with 16 panzers and 8 self-propelled guns.

On the salient's eastern shoulder, the 45th Division had fought the Germans to a standstill, and Frederick attacked on the 11th, seeking to clear a valley between Baerenthal and Monterhouse. The 3rd/157th drove a salient into the German lines, but the 6th SS Mountain Division, used to snow and difficult terrain, enveloped the battalion, trapping it and destroying it piecemeal. Only two GIs were able to escape the pocket.

It was increasingly clear to Devers, Patch, and Brooks that with shortages of everything from replacements to ammunition, combined with troops becoming exhausted from fighting and snow, 7th Army had to give some ground. The best thing to do was pull back to the Moder River, as originally planned, which would shorten up the American lines but not yield Strasbourg.

But the Americans still had to clean up the west bank of the Rhine, and the 12th Armored attacked on January 16 across the Zorn River amid snow and bitter cold. CCB was ordered to head southeastward to link up with CCA in Herrlisheim, defended by the 553rd Volksgrenadiers. German anti-tank guns cut down a dozen tanks of CCA's 43rd Tank Battalion, slowing the American assault.

Meanwhile, the German 39th Panzer Corps continued its big drive down the west bank of the Rhine, pursuing the Americans and seeking to hook up with the 553rd before it was annihilated.

Before the attack, a junior officer from Blaskowitz's HQ briefed von Luck on the latest big plan, finishing with, "It will interest you to know that Himmler has been entrusted with the high command of Rhine-sector south. Hitler himself, moreover, has ordered the new attack south of the Haguenau forest. Nothing more can now go wrong, Lieutenant Colonel."

Von Luck responded to the lieutenant's fatuous statement in the only manner that seemed appropriate to him and his unshaven, weary, freezing staff—even though what he said was a death-penalty offense: "Very well, then, let us rely on Himmler and his 'war experience.'"

The panzer troops slammed into Task Force Linden's 232nd Infantry Regiment, defending a line from Sessenheim to the river, on the 17th. The SS 10th Panzer Division captured three towns, and Brooks attached two battalions and some light tanks to the defense.

Back at Herrlisheim, the Americans beefed up the 43rd Tank Battalion with the 17th Armored Infantry Battalion, battling past anti-tank guns. Lt. Col. Nicholas Novosel led his tanks over a railroad track near the town's station and found a 10th SS Panzer assault gun, several anti-tank guns, and a number of infantrymen defending the area. The Germans counterattacked immediately, and a wild battle ensued. German infantrymen with

Panzerfausts stalked American Shermans through the town's railyard. "Things are very hot," Novosel reported in his last message. He was hit shortly afterward and recalled nothing until he woke up in a German military hospital.

Under heavy fire, the 43rd withdrew. American air reconnaissance found 14 wrecked tanks lying on the battlefield. A March survey counted 27 blasted tanks from the 43rd scattered in the area. Meanwhile, another prong drove on Herrlisheim. At dusk, American tanks pulled back to the south edge of town. The SS attacked the 17th Armored Infantry Battalion and crushed it, even capturing 15 intact Sherman tanks.

Early on the 18th, the Germans finally connected their main advance with the Gambsheim pocket. SS troops seized the bridge over the Landgraben Canal on the Weyersheim-Gambsheim road and crossed the Zorn River. The Americans hit back with their favorite weapon—massive artillery fire—and knocked out eight advancing tanks to stop the drive.

The 12th Armored had lost 1,200 men and 70 vehicles and needed a break. Patch sent in the 36th Infantry Division to relieve them. The 12th Armored ultimately moved south to recuperate and assist the French 1st Army. Devers saw that Task Forces Linden and Herren also needed a break. He moved the 103rd Infantry Division to the Herrlisheim area to face the three Nazi armored divisions.

Sixth Corps withdrew on the night of January 20-21. On the morning of the 21st, von Luck arose to find the Americans gone, his casualties heavy, his men filthy and exhausted, and the battlefield filled with the ugly detritus of war. Rittershoffen villagers emerged from hiding, seeking permission to bury their dead. "We are so very sorry about your lovely village," von Luck replied. "This damn war! For you it is now at an end."

With that, von Luck led his men to the portion of the village church that was still undamaged, finding a ruined altar and an intact organ. Von Luck asked one of his men to man the bellows, and the colonel started playing an old German hymn, "Now Thank We All Our God." The sound of the organ echoed through the quiet village, and German troops and villagers entered the battered church, faced the organ, sang the hymn, and prayed.

RIGHT: During Operation Nordwind, the German effort in support of the Ardennes Offensive of December 1944 to January 1945, soldiers of a Volksgrenadier regiment move forward through a blanket of fog. Their attempt to break through the lines of the U.S. Seventh Army eventually failed. BELOW: German POWs from the 6th SS Mountain Division captured by the 45th Division. U.S. censor marks indicate a prisoner to be cropped from the photo.

National Archives

Ullstein Bild

The 14th Armored Division screened the 79th Infantry Division's move while smaller infantry units blew bridges behind them. The new line, going east to west, ran north along the Zorn from just west of Gambsheim to its confluence with the Moder at Rohrwiller, west along the Moder to Pfaffenhoffen, then northwest, along the Rothbach River.

The French 3rd Algerian Division took over the defense of the Rhine and the Zorn south of Gambsheim. Everything else was held by the 6th Corps.

The Germans attacked the 6th Corps on the night of January 24-25 with six divisions, driving on the open ground southwest of the Haguenau Forest. Nazi tanks and infantry aggressively probed 103rd Infantry defenses and established a small bridgehead at Rothbach. That enabled the 6th SS Mountain Division to attack there and break through positions of the 410th Infantry Regiment. The Americans counterattacked on the 26th and cut the SS force's supply line. Lacking bullets, gasoline, and hot chow, the SS couldn't put up much of a fight. The 103rd cleared them out by January 27.

Between Neuborg and Schweighausen, the 47th Volksgrenadier, the 25th Panzergrenadier, and the 7th Parachute Division hit Task Force Linden's 222nd Infantry Regiment, driving the GI outpost line south of the river on January 23, plastering the main American line with heavy artillery the next day.

At 8 p.m. on the 24th, German infantry attacked out of the gathering darkness from the woods west of Schweighausen, a town on the Moder's south bank. The Germans surrounded 2nd/222nd's Company F, which fought until they ran out of ammunition. Two officers and 30 GIs escaped the slaughter.

Early on the 25th, 1st/222nd's B Company counterattacked the Germans in the woods. They failed to eject the Germans, but they contained the German bridgehead.

Wyche reestablished Task Force Linden and brought in 14th Armored's CCB to hit the Germans at 7:30 a.m. on January 26. The GIs advanced to find that the Germans had withdrawn across the Moder River during the night.

The Nazis created another bridgehead over the Moder on the 25th, rowing across in small rubber rafts at 1 a.m. They moved forward 500 yards in the dark before meeting determined American resistance from the 242nd Infantry Regiment. The attack stalled, and two battalions of the 242nd counterattacked early in the afternoon and eliminated the bridgehead by 5 p.m.

The German attack across the Moder River had completely failed, and even Hitler had to recognize that Nordwind had become a disaster, doing so on the 25th, ordering the offensive halted after the last attacks. The offensive had failed to gain Strasbourg, failed to cut off the 6th Army Group, and failed to draw in American reserves from the equally failing Ardennes offensive. All that could be shown for it were 25,000 German casualties; the Americans had suffered about 15,000.

Just to make the offensive even more pointless, while four German armored divisions, a mountain division, and a parachute division were expending themselves fruitlessly in Alsace, and as the Anglo-Americans were grinding down the Germans in the Ardennes, the Soviet Union unleashed a massive offensive on January 12, its greatest of the war. In a week, the Red Army was within 100 miles of Berlin.

Hitler had no choice. He began withdrawing his panzer troops to face the Eastern hegira, leaving behind Volksgrenadiers and their Panzerfausts to prevent an American 7th Army drive into the recaptured area. Having dismissed Blaskowitz's earlier messages as "pessimistic," he dismissed Blaskowitz on January 27, in a shuffle of generals that sent him to command the defense of the Netherlands.

The 7th Army needed to shorten its line and recover. As the Bulge was erased, Patton's 3rd Army resumed its old positions and prepared its long-planned drive into the Saar. Patch received the 10th Armored Division to strengthen his line. Task Force Linden became the 42nd Infantry Division, Task Force Harris became the 63rd, and Task Force Herren the 70th, as their proper backing arrived.

Finally, the American 101st Airborne Division, fresh from its epic stand at Bastogne, was brought down to defend the Moder River, relieving the 42nd and the 79th Infantry Divisions. The American paratroopers outclassed the German Volksgrenadiers they faced in every way.

The battle was a great triumph for the 7th Army. It was the first time they had faced real engagements with attacking German forces equal or superior to their own, as the U.S. Army's official history Riviera to the Rhine noted. American leadership from Devers down to regimental commanders had been deft and kept pace with the German moves. The average GI fought well.

The Nordwind offensive was poorly planned, badly fought, and completely failed. It only proved two things: that American soldiers from generals to privates were courageous, adaptable, and skillful; and that, as 13th Corps commander SS Gen. Max Simon tartly observed when his attack was stopped, German troops knew how to fight and how to die and little else.

The American theory won wars. The German theory did not. □

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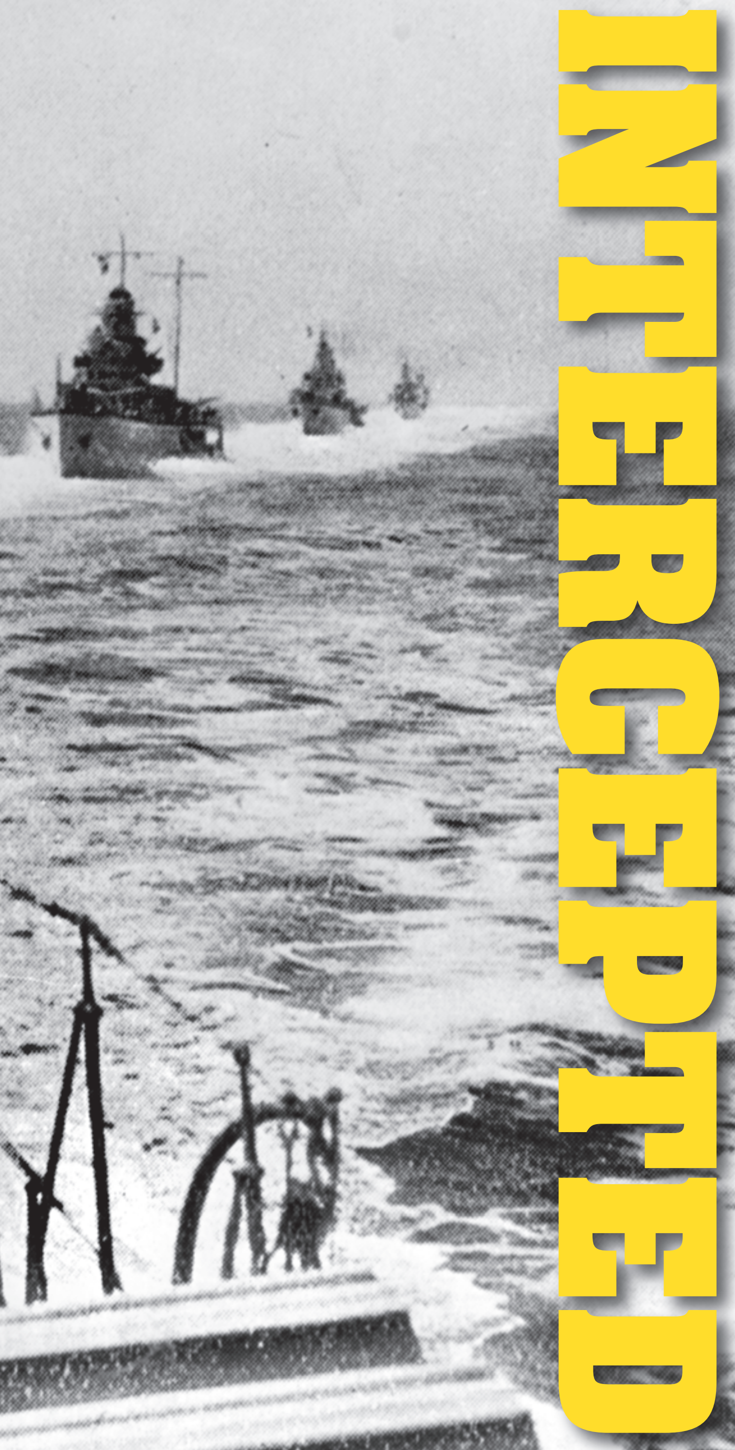
Italian destroyers of the Navigatori-class sailing in line during a deployment to the Mediterranean Sea before the outbreak of World War II. These destroyers were heavily armed and swift, but one of their class, ***Luca Tarigo***, was sunk by Royal Navy destroyers while escorting a convoy from Naples to Tripoli, Libya. The Navigatori-class destroyers were armed with 4.7-inch main guns, visible in the photo, secondary 40mm weapons, and torpedo tubes.

ITALIAN CONVOY INTERCEPTED



Naval History and Heritage Command

By April 1941, Great Britain had been at war for 19 months. Although nurtured and nourished by her empire, she took all the body blows from an increasingly vicious enemy. The Soviet Union, lulled by alliance, had not yet absorbed and repulsed the Nazi tide in full. The United States slept fitfully, seemingly secure behind her ocean moats until the day of cruel awakening.

Things looked bleak for Britain. In February of 1941, General Erwin Rommel had landed in Libya with his newly minted Afrika Korps. He did so because Britain had pushed the Italians out of Egypt, which Mussolini had foolishly invaded, and the Britons now threatened to evict the outclassed Italians from the entire continent of Africa.

Rommel took the offensive, and by April 11 had reversed the British advance and driven them all the way to Tobruk. Elsewhere in April, a pro-German coup took place in Iraq, which threatened the entire Middle East and the all-important Allied link to India. The Germans also invaded Greece and Yugoslavia—again coming to Mussolini's assistance—while the Luftwaffe continued bombing London, damaging St. Paul's Cathedral that month.

The only bright spots for Britain were the victory in the naval Battle of Cape Matapan in late March and the fall of Addis Ababa on April 6, in faraway Ethiopia. The British public desperately needed some

The British Royal Navy decimated an Axis supply effort during the Battle of the Tarigo Convoy.

BY GLENN BARNETT

good news. Fortunately, the Royal Navy was about to capitalize on its victory off the Matapan peninsula in the southern Peloponnese.

The entire Mediterranean Sea was a combat zone. Before the war, Britain and France dominated the sea with the two largest fleets in Europe. Only Italy and her colony in Libya were controlled by the Axis. But after the French capitulated, only Egypt, Palestine, and two specks on the sea, Malta and Gibraltar (and briefly Greece), welcomed the Union Jack.

The center of the fighting in the Mediterranean theater, and the key to victory in the region, was Malta. In British hands, Malta interrupted commerce between Italy and Libya. In Italian or German hands, it would close the entire Mediterranean Sea to the Royal Navy. The two Axis powers continually bombed the island and sank the ships that tried to supply it. All the while, the Royal Navy and Air Force used Malta to strike at Italian convoys heading to Libya. From early 1940 to late 1944, the Mediterranean Sea remained a critical battleground.

As successful as Rommel was in Africa, he needed men, fuel, and ammunition to recoup his losses and keep his tanks rolling and planes flying. Relief could only come from the ports of Italy. On the evening of April 13, 1941, the 20th convoy of ships carrying troops and equipment for Rommel's Afrika Korps embarked from Naples bound for

Tripoli in Libya. Previous convoys had sustained few losses from British attacks.

This convoy consisted of four German transport ships: *Adana* (4,200 tons displacement), carrying 339 German troops; *Iserlohn* (3,700 tons), 282 troops; *Aegina* (2,400), 217 troops; and *Arta* (2,400), 194 troops. Between them they also carried 392 vehicles and 1,510 tons of supplies.

An Italian freighter, *Sabaudia*, carried 1,371 tons of German munitions. These ships could not make more than 8-11 knots. In comparison, the soon-to-be-built American Liberty ships would displace 14,000 tons, though their speed wouldn't be much better.

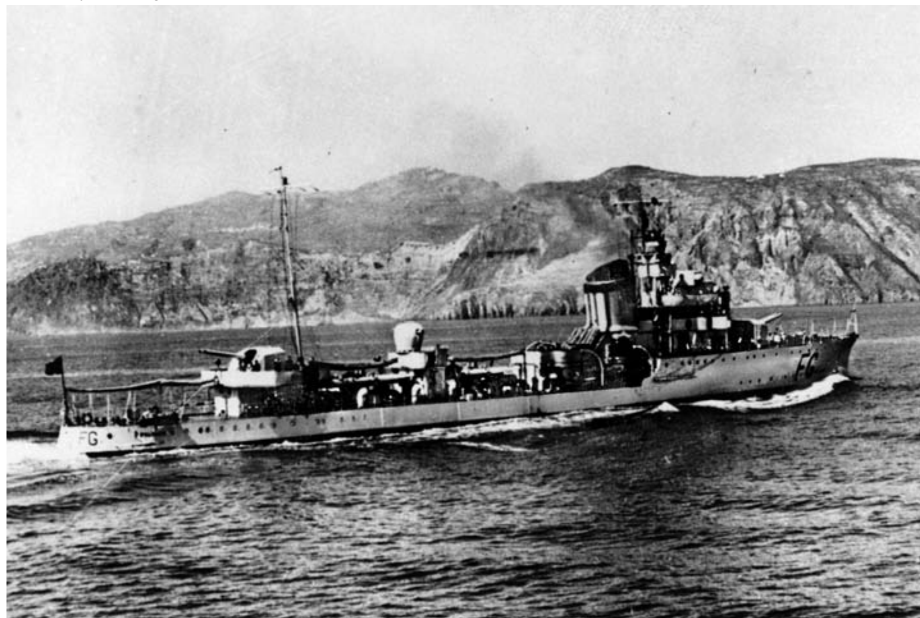
The slow transports were escorted by three Italian destroyers, which could make 32 knots. The lead ship was the Navigatori-class R.N. *Luca Tarigo*, of 1,900 tons (the British would name the coming battle after her). The other two were older Folgore-class destroyers, R.N. *Lampo* and R.N. *Baleno*, at 1,220 tons. All three were armed with 120mm main guns, 40mm antiaircraft guns, torpedo tubes, depth charges, and mines. The convoy sailed under the command of 40-year-old Commander Pietro de Cristofaro aboard *Luca Tarigo*. He had served in the Regia Marina since he was 14, rising steadily through the ranks.

Unfortunately, his convoy's departure from Naples was no secret. The British intercepted and deciphered radio messages revealing the convoy's departure from Italian shores and its destination. These coded Italian messages were easily read because of the code-breaking expertise of British Intelligence. In this case, it was the work of an agency outside the famed Bletchley Park.

Fresh from victory at Matapan, a squadron of four British destroyers had just arrived at Malta on April 10 with orders to attack Italian shipping. Learning of the convoy en route to Libya and knowing its location, they weighed anchor and set out in pursuit of the enemy ships about 160 miles to the west.

The British destroyers were flagship HMS *Jervis*, HMS *Janus*, HMS *Nubian*, and HMS *Mohawk* of the 14th Destroyer Flotilla under the command of Capt. Philip Mack. The son of a cavalry officer, Mack, like De Cristofaro, had joined the navy at a young age (13).

Naval History and Heritage Command



Two of the Italian Navy destroyers that were sunk in the action that came to be known as the Battle of the Tarigo Convoy, were of the Folgore-class, an example of which is shown underway in this photo. The Folgore-class destroyers were older than the Navigatori-class, but had similar armament and comparable speed. The two Folgore-class destroyers lost while escorting the convoy to North Africa were *Lampo* and *Baleno*. OPPOSITE: Royal Navy destroyers such as these performed outstanding service during the fight for control of the Mediterranean Sea, striking a heavy blow against the Axis in North Africa during the Battle of the Tarigo Convoy. While the Axis contingent was virtually wiped out, the British lost only one ship, the HMS *Mohawk* (F31), a Tribal-class destroyer.

He, too, rose through the ranks and was awarded the Distinguished Service Order (DSO) on July 11, 1940, for a previous action. He would win a bar (the symbol for a second DSO) in the coming fight.

Captain Mack led the flotilla aboard *Jervis*, which was a J-Class destroyer of 1,690 tons. Like her Italian counterparts, she was armed with 120mm guns, 40mm antiaircraft guns, torpedo tubes, and depth charges. Because *Jervis* was the flagship, she was probably also equipped with radar. *Janus* was also a J-class destroyer, of similar displacement and armament. Later, while supporting the landings at Anzio, *Janus* would be sunk by a German guided glide bomb. *Nubian* was a larger, Tribal-Class ship at 1,891 tons, sporting 120mm guns, "pom-pom" antiaircraft guns, torpedo tubes, and depth charges. She had been fitted with the Type 285 gunnery radar. *Mohawk* was another Tribal-Class ship. Although three of the four British destroyers had radar, no Italian ship did at the time. There was also a significant disparity in weaponry—the four British destroyers mounted 28 of the 120mm guns, while the three Italian destroyers had only 14 in total.

Having left Naples, the Axis convoy was scattered by foul weather on its first night out and fell four hours behind schedule. At about 1300 hours an American-made Martin Model 167, which the British called a "Maryland," of No. 69 Squadron RAF, spotted the Axis ships and tailed them while sending a message to Malta. The message was intercepted by Supermarina, the Italian Navy Headquarters, which immediately requested assistance from the Italian Air Force (Superaereo). Two Savoia-Marchetti SM-79 torpedo bombers were dispatched to provide air cover for the convoy.

The SM-79s had a good record early in the war, sinking two merchant ships, heavily damaging the light cruiser HMS *Manchester*, and sinking the F-class destroyer HMS *Fearless*. On this mission, though, only one SM-79 was able to take off in the heavily gusting winds, and it was soon forced to return to base. The convoy was then told to alter course to throw off any pursuers. In all likelihood, Captain De Cristofaro did not know he was being followed.

Imperial War Museum

Having cleared port in Malta, the four British ships made 26 knots in line astern to reach a point about 20 miles in front of the convoy and block its path. The speed of the target convoy was only eight knots. When the British arrived at the intercept point, the convoy was nowhere to be found. Captain Mack pondered his next move.

After tracking back to the north, he reversed course to the south and hugged the Tunisian coast, searching for his prey. At 0158 hours the convoy was sighted at a distance of six miles. The Italians were located close to shore, passing the low-lying Kerkennah Islands near Tunisian city of Sfax (the battle is sometimes called “the Action off Sfax”).

Mack maneuvered quickly but silently to a position astern of the convoy, where the moon backlit his target; he could see the Italians, but they could not see him. The British remained unseen until they were within 2,000 yards. Then Mack ordered, “Train tubes to port!” as torpedo men and gunners brought their weapons to bear on the nearest targets.

At 0220 hours, *Jervis*, *Janus*, and *Mohawk* opened fire with their main guns, the 40mm pom poms, and light machine guns—essentially everything they had. Only then did the sailors aboard the slow convoy ships become aware that they were in mortal danger. Immediately, *Baleno* was hit on the bridge, killing her commander and most of her officers. Caught by surprise, *Baleno* returned fire but was hit again in the engine room and was soon a burning wreck, sinking shortly afterward.

Lampo was simultaneously attacked. Her captain ordered full speed ahead, and her gunners began firing back into the deadly darkness but only managed three salvos before *Jervis* destroyed both of her twin 120mm mounts. *Lampo* then fired torpedoes at the attackers but again missed. She began to sink but ran aground on a shoal. The Italians would later salvage *Lampo*, and a year later put her back in service—only to have her sunk in 1943.

At 0250, the ammunition ship *Sabaudia* was hit by *Mohawk* and erupted like a volcano, lighting the night sky with flames said to have reached an altitude of 2,000 feet. At about the same time *Tarigo*, which was leading the convoy, spun hard to starboard to place herself between the British and the merchant ships. But she came under the guns of *Jervis* and *Janus*, which hammered her with rapid fire. The first hit on *Tarigo* seriously wounded de Cristofaro, who lost a leg. He had the presence of mind to use his belt as a tourniquet and continued in command, but he was mortally wounded. The captain lay dying on the bridge of his shattered ship as the situation became desperate.

In the heat of battle, *Mohawk* came into view of the sinking *Tarigo*, illuminated by the roaring fires on *Sabaudia*. She was observed by Lt. Ettore Bisagno, a junior officer. Heedless of the danger, Bisagno and his torpedo crew trained the launcher on the enemy and fired three torpedoes in sequence.

Two Italian torpedoes hit *Mohawk* and sank her. Crewman Frederick Baker remembered, “*Mohawk* was hit by a torpedo which immobilized us causing considerable damage in the engine room and causing us to stop. We then became a sitting target, and in a few moments we were hit again. This time we started to sink rapidly, so we had to abandon ship.”

Six rafts were launched, and other men flung themselves into the sea. *Mohawk* rolled on her side, her forecastle bobbing in the water until after the battle, when she was sunk by gunfire from *Janus*. Forty-three of her crew were killed. The sinking of *Mohawk* made *Tarigo* a special target for British

Continued on page 96

THE GARAND 'PING'

An iconic infantry weapon of World War II, the M-1 Garand rifle developed a reputation for placing substantial firepower in the hands of a single soldier. Its eight-round magazine meant a robust capability for sustained operation in combat and provided a rate of fire that enhanced survivability while giving the American infantryman a decided edge in most situations.

However, in addition to the praise this worthy weapon received in wartime, one issue seems to have emerged during the combat experience. When the M-1 emptied, the spent clip ejected with a characteristically audible "ping." It was a telltale signature of the rifle's operation—but was it also a tipoff to the enemy that the weapon was empty for a few seconds? The debate continues as to whether the opponent was actually able to capitalize on the M-1 ping and kill or wound the G.I. as he tried to reload. An examination of the phenomenon provides some context and evaluation of what is otherwise arguably the finest standard-issue infantry firearm of the great conflict.

Designed by Canadian-American engineer Jean "John" C. Garand, an employee at the Springfield Armory, the M-1 Garand was the first practical and successful semiautomatic service rifle to be adopted by a major armed force. Introduced in 1936, some 5.5 million were produced between 1934 and 1957, with the rifle remaining standard issue in the U.S. military until 1958. Even then, it was found in reserve stocks well into the 1970s and remains in use in a ceremonial role today, famously with the U.S. Marine Corps' Silent Drill Platoon.

Moreover, the Garand was adopted by more than 30 nation states, including Canada, Denmark, France, Iran, Israel, Italy, the Netherlands, Norway, and West Germany. Through Lend-Lease, some 38,000 saw service with the

The best-known U.S. service rifle was described by General George S. Patton as the 'greatest battle implement ever devised'—but did it have a fatal flaw? | BY JOHN BRYLOR

United Kingdom, where the rifle was used by Commando units. The rifle also saw incredible longevity extending well beyond its service issue with the U.S. military, and it is noteworthy that photographic evidence exists showing Soviet troops capturing a Garand in Afghanistan in 1986, as well as Afghan police recovering one during a 2013 operation.

Chambered in .30-06-calibre rounds and weighing approximately 9.5 pounds, the Garand was a reliable, accurate and hard-hitting rifle that furnished its operator with greater firepower than many of his contemporaries, especially during World War II when most Allied and Axis soldiers were still issued bolt-action rifles. It was far from the only semiautomatic rifle used in that conflict, but the Garand's production more than doubled the combined numbers of its two main wartime rivals, the German Gewehr 43 and the Soviet SVT-40.

John Garand, who had already been involved in semiautomatic rifle projects, began design work on his new rifle in 1928. Progress was slow and there was substantial competition, but after some initial production and design difficulties the rifle went into mass production in September 1937. It was a powerful, simple, affordable and easy to produce and maintain repeating firearm adored by the end user, which gave U.S. Army and Marine Corps platoons far greater firepower than their Allied, German, and Japanese counterparts.

The secret to the Garand's success was its action and feed, pairing a gas-operated, closed

An American infantryman aims an M-1 Garand rifle from the window of a halftrack during exercises at Fort Knox, Kentucky, in June 1942. In addition to its firepower and semiautomatic capabilities, the rifle was famous for the idiosyncratic sound it made in ejecting a spent clip.

Library of Congress

rotating bolt system with a top-loading en-bloc clip, inserted through the retracted bolt into a magazine well. Eight rounds were double-stacked in simple metal clips, whereas other rifles —such as the G43—featured detachable box magazines that, although holding more rounds, were generally reloaded using five-round stripper clips as few magazines were issued to each user. The en-bloc clip, therefore, gave the U.S. rifleman an advantage in that he had no magazine to damage or lose and could reload his rifle to capacity in one action.

However, so the myth states, the primary disadvantage was that after firing the last round this clip self-ejected, sprung through the open bolt and out the top of the firearm producing an audible "ping." That distinctive noise is indeed genuine, but it has long been believed that it betrayed to a potential adversary the fact that a rifleman was out of ammunition and needed to reload.

Perhaps, if a Garand user was operating alone in the quiet of a night shattered by the firing of eight .30-06 rounds, the ping could have presented a problem, but the myth ignores multiple realities of modern battle.

First, and most practically, the Garand was very quick to reload thanks to the very en-bloc clips that ostensibly caused the trouble. While the rifle's "ping" is somewhat characteristic and identifiable, it is not so loud that it would drown out the noisy din of a wider engagement. Moreover, the fact that the clip is automatically jettisoned itself facilitates quicker reloading—Garand users simply do not have to worry about removing and stowing, or disposing of, an empty magazine. If the ping was indeed a problem, the design of the action resolved the issue itself.

Further, rarely would soldiers be operating alone. It is unlikely their entire squad or platoon would need to reload at the same time, not to mention the squad automatics, submachine guns and light machine guns that all added to the sustainable firepower of the infantry unit—in many cases issued specifically to cover and support the rifleman in an action by suppressing an enemy and hopefully facilitating movement and maneuver.

However, while it seems unlikely that in most combat scenarios the Garand's noisy automatic ejection would have endangered its operator—indeed, in 1953 it was ascertained that some soldiers instead found the "ping" to be a useful and clear indicator of their need to reload. Still, some veterans were nevertheless convinced the sound would alert their opponents.

Even so, it seems soldiers were more concerned by the rather loud sound caused by releasing the Garand's safety, as highlighted in the 1952 technical memorandum ORO-T-18 (FEC) Use of Infantry Weapons and Equipment in Korea, which states: "Half the men had a nagging fear that some day the noise made in releasing the safety would reveal their positions to the

National Archives

National Archives

LEFT: Firearms inventor John C. Garand poses with his most famous creation, the M-1 Garand infantry rifle. This photo was taken at the Springfield Armory as Garand was involved with production. BELOW: The eight-round .30-06 clip that fed ammunition to the M-1 Garand rifle gave it exceptional firepower. However, when the clip was emptied, its ejection created an audible "ping" that some said might alert enemy troops. OPPOSITE: After killing two German soldiers at Houffalize, Belgium, during the epic Battle of the Bulge, Pfc. Frank Vukasin of the U.S. 331st Infantry Regiment lands a clip into his trusty M-1 Garand rifle.

Wikimedia

enemy, yet only one-fourth objected to the distinctive noise the empty clip made when ejected. They were quite willing to retain the noise of the clip even though the enemy might be able to use it to advantage, because they found it a very useful signal to reload." Of 315 respondents, twice as many favored retaining the "ping" than believed it helpful to the enemy.

It is also frequently said that some even developed a ruse where they would jettison an empty clip or bang one against their helmet to deliberately create the noise in the hope that the enemy would expose themselves. Whether this was a well exploited tactic or indeed successful will probably never be fully ascertained, but given the general acoustic characteristics of a firefight, such a tactic was unlikely to have been effective or common.

Admittedly, it is conjecture and perhaps something that would be worth testing, but the sound of spent cartridges landing onto a hard surface would likely yield a similarly audible note to a falling en-bloc clip—and no soldier appears to have claimed that falling casings have ever gotten either them or their opponent into trouble.

The origins of several Garand myths appear to be found in the 1948 book, *Ordnance Went Up Front*, by Roy Dunlap, who was a civilian gunsmith who during World War II served as an armorer and marine. A noted expert, some of his views on the Garand are nevertheless suspect.

His comments on the "ping" itself are anecdotal and derived from secondhand information, where it is claimed the sound of a jettisoned en-bloc clip on Guadalcanal informed the Japanese that a Garand was momentarily empty, and they rushed forward and killed the rifleman. Dunlap also wrote of the rifle: "The Garand has two faults, to my mind. It is too heavy and it must be loaded with the eight-round charger clip. The latter means you either load it with a full eight-round clip or you have one of the clumsiest single shot arms since muzzle-loading days…If, say five cartridges in a clip are fired, three remain in the gun, and the five expended ones are well-nigh impossible to replace in the rifle. Perhaps only one cartridge remains to fire; the rifle is a single shot until the cartridge is fired and a full clip loaded to replace it. In action, soldiers simply released and ejected partially-emptied clips and reloaded with full ones in an attempt to keep full effectiveness as long as they could.

"In some outfits it was customary to empty the rifle, blazing away the remaining cartridges. It is of course easier and faster to empty the rifle by firing than by stopping to use two hands to hold the bolt back and press the clip release."

He is right in that the Garand was heavy, but references to completely expending a clip before reloading when in a combat situation might simply be more about laying down fire instead of wasting a number of viable rounds by reloading. Nevertheless, it is commonly believed that the rifle must be fired until empty before it may be reloaded, yet the clips may be ejected and replaced regardless of how many rounds remain, and it is possible with practice to top up a clip. Moreover, it was possible, quicker and simpler to eject and replace the existing clip.

This myth likely originates from a misinterpretation of the manual of arms, which called for the rifle to be fired until empty. Instead, the reality was that so long as a soldier watched the placement of his thumb, thus avoiding a nasty pinch, he could reload his rifle at leisure and without constraint.

In a December 1940 article in *Popular Science*, "He Invented the World's Deadliest Rifle," by Edwin Teale, the author wrote of the U.S. government's "$15,000,000 bet that the new Garand semi-automatic rifle is the deadliest firearm ever invented." To what extent that view is correct is speculative, but, unburdened by its supposed fatal flaw, the M-1 Garand did rise as a long-serving icon—one still popular with civilian shooters today—and became one of World War II's most effective infantry weapons. □

Author John Brylor is also a firearms expert who has had extensive experience with the M-1 Garand rifle. A first-time contributor, he resides in the United Kingdom.

Daylight Mission

A U.S. airman recounts his experience during a mission to bomb a German city heavily defended by the Luftwaffe.

BY JOSEPH M. HORODYSKI

The average American airman in World War II faced some tough challenges. Products of the Great Depression, roughly 50 percent of those who fought the war came from rural America. Their average age was between 18 and 21. Individuals older than this stood a good chance of being labeled "the old man." With the system then in place in the U.S. Army Air Force, airmen could be rotated back to the States once a full tour of 25 missions was completed. In the early days of the war, however, flight personnel had about a 1-in-30 chance of surviving long enough to complete a tour of duty.

They faced a tough, battle-hardened foe, something for which a young airman's peacetime background provided little in the way of preparation. Allied airmen stood an excellent chance of serious injury, being shot down, falling into enemy hands, or simply going missing. Those who volunteered for flight duty were by necessity a breed apart, idealistic, and imbued with the optimism of young men. All were heroes in one sense or another, but seldom saw themselves in that light.

One of those men was a member of my own family who, after I lost my dad at a young age, became a substitute father figure that was always present in one way or another in our lives. I heard many whispered stories about some experiences he had endured during the war, but as a child I was too young to ask him about his story, let alone really understand or appreciate the answers. He was one on whom the war had left a deep emotional scar. He seldom talked about his time in the service, answering questions with only one or two words. When I saw him watch an old TV special or look at a book about the war, I came to know this distant look in his eyes that told me he still often visited these far off places in his thoughts, and that they were never far away. Something of a recluse, he never was blessed with a family of his own to share his experiences with and, in a very real sense, ours became a substitute family for him.

Searching for answers about my uncle's career, I was fortunate enough to discover two gen-

to Bremen

uine heroes, one still living at the time and the other long deceased. Both were connected by their experiences when they were very young.

Frank Chairet was born on June 27, 1923, on the family farm in Banksville, New York. He was one of four children. The youngest and only girl in the family was my mother, Florence. Family stories told of his interest in aviation from an early age. The 1930s were considered the golden age of aviation. I often heard tales of his working in the fields and stopping to stare into the sky, mouth agape, whenever an airplane flew past. To my grandmother, of old stock from an extremely rural part of Poland, airplanes were terrifying things. One local crop duster would often buzz the house while she was out hanging the wash, sending her running screaming inside, much to the amusement of my grandfather.

Frank turned 18 in the summer of 1941. After Pearl Harbor, even though he was of age, he often begged his parents to be allowed to join the service, and though my grandfather agreed, it was my grandmother who opposed the idea. With one brother having already enlisted in the Army, his help was badly needed at home, but it was rumored that it was my grandmother's sense of foreboding that something was sure to happen to him that was the true reason.

Nearly a year went by before she finally relented. Frank joined the Army Air Force on

Les Amundson Family

Pilot Les Amundson and crewman Frank Chairet were aboard a Boeing B-17 Flying Fortress bomber similar to this one when they were hit over Bremen, Germany, and crash-landed in Holland in 1943. The restored B-17 "Texas Raider," shown here at the Thunder Over Michigan Air Show in 2018, was lost in a midair collision with a Bell P-63 Kingcobra fighter in 2022 at an air show in Dallas, Texas. All aboard both planes were killed. INSET: Second Lieutenant Les Amundson piloted a B-17 Flying Fortress on a daylight mission to bomb Nazi U-boat pens on November 26, 1943.

Alamy

November 5, 1942, qualifying as an aerial engineer at the camp in Walla Walla, Washington, after doing his basic training at Fort Devens, Massachusetts. He was eventually assigned as a sergeant to the 384th Heavy Bombardment Group and made his way to England as the left waist gunner of a Boeing B-17F Flying Fortress crew, known only by its serial number 42-219987 SQ, in October 1943. He had finally gotten his wish to fly.

In November 1943, he flew five missions over Europe. On the fifth mission, his plane was shot down by the Luftwaffe. He was imprisoned and nearly died as a result of a botched operation days before the war's end.

My quest to learn more about my uncle's life led me to another extraordinary man.

I knew of the raid on which Frank's plane was shot down from an official Army Air Forces report. The flight was a mission to bomb the submarine pens at Bremen, Germany, on November 26, 1943. Twenty-two aircraft from the 384th took part, and four were lost that day. It was the 384th's 37th mission over Europe, and the Eighth Air Force's 138th mission overall.

Having only the serial number of Frank's aircraft, I began an online search to locate any images or photographs of that particular aircraft. I failed to find any, but my search brought up a link to a local PBS station in Pullman, Washington. As I wondered about the connection, I was brought to a page featuring video clips from a series of specials done three years before called *World War II: Our Neighbor's Stories*, profiling various veterans from the state of Washington and recording their experiences as part of an ongoing project.

I searched until I came to a section relating to Les Amundson of Sunnyside, Washington. It listed him as a B-17 pilot and POW from the 384th Bomb Group. As I watched the clips I heard him describe getting shot down while on a mission to Bremen on November 26, 1943. It was the same mission, but with four aircraft lost that day, what were the chances it was the same crew? Though he did not mention anyone else by name, the segment included a photograph of his crew under the wing of its aircraft in the fall of 1943—the same photo hanging on my wall. I saw my uncle's face on the computer screen.

After contacting the PBS show's producers, I found out that not only was Mr. Amundson still alive, but he was more than happy to speak with me. I soon realized that I could not fully tell my uncle's story without also telling Amundson's.

Mr. Amundson, was spry at 92, with sharp and excellent recall when I interviewed him in 2012. He clearly regarded his time of service as one of the most meaningful periods of his life. It was my privilege to speak to him for a full hour.

Horodyski: Was flying something you always wanted to do before the war? How did you become a pilot?

Amundson: I was drafted about five minutes after Pearl Harbor, so I came out of the enlisted ranks, but I had already applied for the Aviation Cadet Training Program probably around October 1941. It was a great opportunity for me, as they would teach anyone who wanted to fly if they volunteered for it. I knew I was listed 1A, but I was drafted as an enlisted man, a buck private. [Shortly afterward] my paperwork finally caught up with me, my application had been approved, so I went into the aviation cadet's program. I went to flying school in Texas, Randolph Field for basic instruction, and Lubbock, Texas, for advanced training, and then I went into B-17s, which was here in the state of Washington, Walla Walla primarily, and that's where I picked up my crew.

Did you know Frank before the mission to Bremen? How long before had he become part of your crew?

I think he became part of the crew when we were in Walla Walla. He was rather soft spoken as I remember, performed very well, but didn't have much to say.

He was like that most of his life. Rather quiet and thoughtful most of the time. What happened next?

They sent me to Grafton-Underwood in England, near Northampton, with my crew. We got there on the last day of the second big mission to Schweinfurt. The first one was in September, I think [actually August 17, 1943], where they lost around 60 B-17s, and the second one, when we got to Grafton, we had to sit outside our barracks while they removed all the personal belongings of those men who had been lost over Schweinfurt. Not many had come back, they lost 60 four-engine bombers on that mission, some 600 men in all. I think just

Author's Collection

ABOVE: Pilot Les Amundson, standing at left, and his crew pose for a photograph in front of their Boeing B-17 Flying Fortress. The author's uncle, Frank Chairet, is kneeling second from right. OPPOSITE: A B-17 Flying Fortress returns from a raid on ball bearing factories at Schweinfurt, Germany, in October 1943. It was a costly attack on a heavily defended target, and Les Amundson's crew joined the 384th Heavy Bombardment Group, which sustained serious losses over Schweinfurt, on the same day as the fateful raid.

National Archives

three aircraft out of 21 in my squadron returned, but they were very badly shot up and they junked some of them for parts and scrap. But a month later we got enough new planes from the States to replenish the group, and on November 26 we went up again with around 200 bombers, all told, to bomb the German submarine pens.

In the report your aircraft was referred to by serial number only. Did it have a name?

I did not want to give the plane a flashy name like so many of the crews did. That just wasn't my style.

Do you remember how many missions you had flown when you were shot down?

We were on our third one. Nobody in our group had gotten to 25 missions yet. The day we went down there were 32 four-engine bombers lost by the Eighth Air Force overall—that's 320 men. We lost, our bomb group [the 384th], which usually flew 21 planes on a mission, a total of 1,600 men during the war, so we turned over eight times and lost 159 B-17s from just our bomb group. So we had losses.

Frank's flight record says he was on his fifth mission when he was shot down.

That's easily possible because sometimes a member of someone else's crew would get sick or something and some people would be taken out of a crew that was standing down and put in another plane, so he got a couple of missions with somebody else probably.

You said you were on a mission to Bremen. Do you remember what your target was?

Supposedly the sub pens, but you know, you're at 22,000 feet, that's five miles up, and Bremen is on the river, these sub pens are all in a row on that river, and we were flying through clouds half the time so we couldn't always be sure what we were hitting. We were dropping our bombs on the leader. When he dropped his bombs we all dropped ours. It was a visual thing, from seeing his bombs drop, we dropped ours. Sometimes I don't wonder that we had a hard time hitting Germany (laughs) let alone anything else. We couldn't see it half the time."

Can you describe that fateful last mission?

November 26, 1943, was mission 37, to Bremen. I'll tell you what happened. We got hit right over Bremen. Just as we approached the bombing point, a Messerschmitt came up from behind, and I saw his tracers going right over my head. He banked slightly and his fire went right through my two right engines. We were on the bomb run at that time at around 22,000 feet, and just as we dropped the bombs we were hit in the right wing root and it blew a hole out of the radio shack, wounding the radio operator very badly, and severed the control cables on the plane. Well, I had the autopilot set in at the time, which controlled the electric motors for the control surfaces such as the elevators, ailerons, and all that. I could control the plane with those buttons, but when I was looking at those buttons at the bottom of the console. I couldn't see where I was going.

Just as we dropped our bombs a flak gun hit my rudder and right wing and blew a big hole through it. The radio operator was badly wounded with shrapnel and I didn't think he could swim, and November 26 is no time to be swimming in the North Sea anyway. I didn't think we would be able to cross the North Sea in our condition. So I said we can't make it back to England in the shape we're in, and I gave everybody the right to bail out who wanted to. Nobody wanted to do that. I said we'll go down and take the wounded man with us because he can't swim or bail out.

After we got hit over the target we lost our speed and couldn't keep up with the bomb group and started losing altitude. So I bellied it in Holland near a little town called Donkerbroek. It was up in the north part of Holland, not too far from the German border. I circled a little house; I could only turn one way with

ABOVE: B-17 bombers over German submarine pens at Bremen on November 26, 1943. An escorting American fighter is visible apparently while executing a turn to head home to its base in England. The addition of external fuel tanks extended the range of Allied fighters, allowing them to accompany bombers for longer periods. OPPOSITE: An aerial view of the November, 1943, attack on Bremen shows heavy smoke covering the area where the B-17 bombers have dropped their payloads. Visible far below are the contrails of a pair of German Focke Wulf Fw-190 fighters seeking out the American bombers.

two engines out on one side, so I chose to belly land it and almost went through a little brick house in the process. I had just enough flight speed to lift over the house, and I skidded on the pasture behind it, landed, and we all got out. That plane—Boeing made a good one—there wasn't a wrinkle in it anywhere except the propellers were all bent back. So we sat down on the grass there, got our wind, and Dutchmen starting coming from everywhere. I tried to burn the plane with a thermite flare. I put it on the gas tank, near the gas cap. I finally got it lighted where it fizzed, and I told everybody to scatter.

Did it work? Did it burn the plane?

Well, no. A Dutchman came along and threw the flare off the plane. They wanted all the machine guns out of it. And we also went down with a bomb, which if it had broken out of the shackles, would have killed the lot of us, but I made a pretty good belly landing in that pasture.

Can you tell me about the bomb that wouldn't release?

After we dropped our bombs and got hit, my engineer, Fred Lord, who was also the top turret gunner, came and told us [in the cockpit] that there was a bomb stuck, still in the bomb bay. I said to go back and see if you can put the pins back in the fuses. There's one in front and one in back of the bomb that keeps a little propeller from spinning. When you drop the bomb with the pins out, those little propellers on each end will pop off [at a set altitude] and fuse the bomb. As long as the pins are in there to keep the little propellers from spinning, it's safe.

Well, he couldn't reach it, and when you're at 22,000 feet the temperature must have been more than 40 degrees below zero because that's where our needles stopped. You're wearing thick, bulky gloves, and if you touched anything metal your skin would freeze off. And you're wearing an oxygen mask. And he had to do all this without wearing a parachute, hanging over an open bomb bay five miles over the ground with that breeze blowing through there. He was being held onto by the assistant engineer the whole time, so he wouldn't fall out of the plane.

Frank's flight record listed him as the assistant engineer for that aircraft, as well as the left waist gunner. Would he have been the one in the bomb bay with Fred Lord?

That sounds about right. He would have been the one to take over if something happened to Lord. Fred Lord was a pretty brave man himself, but he just couldn't get that pin in there, so we had no choice but to take it down with us, and we bellied it in. The bomb stayed in the shackles, which was lucky for us.

What do you remember about the crash?

Holland is not a very big place, and there aren't any big places to land, but I remember I stopped just short of a drain ditch and skidded across the pasture. We all got out. I can remember an old lady standing in the doorway of the house we almost hit, holding her apron, and

Both: National Archives

her mouth was bigger than the door because I was heading right for her [laughs]. I couldn't see where I was going. My copilot said look up, and I looked up and here suddenly was this house, and I had just enough flying speed to drop the plane on the other side of it and just skidded along. That B-17 was well built. If you've ever been in one they look like a flying beer can, but there's nothing frivolous about them.

Did you see Frank after the crash?

Yes, we were in a group. We all got out of the plane.

When you scattered, did he go off in his own direction, or was he in your group?

We all went in different directions. I told them not to go in a big bunch because we had been warned in England at the briefings, don't go as a group if you're trying to escape, go as ones or twos, no more than twos, because [the civilians] can't hide that many people. So we scattered, all except the wounded radio man and one gunner. He walked straight down the road like he was going into town to get a beer, and he got picked up right away. He must have been in some kind of shock.

What happened once you made contact with the Dutch Resistance?

Well, the Dutch people hid me, and they treated me very well, but I was eventually captured. The navigator, Frank Faragasse, and I stayed with a Dutch family, and you have to admire those people. They could not speak English. The husband, I think, worked for the railroad, and the woman was a housewife, and we stayed up in the garret of their barn, in the town of Leeuwarden [about 15 miles from the crash site]. This is in northern Friesland, right up in the north part of Holland. The gentleman who hid me was 20 years old at the time. I was 23, and he hid the four officers of my crew because that's the way the military wanted it. They wanted to get the officers out first because they were the ones who had the most training. But we all got captured eventually. Anyway, he visited me several times after the war. He became a doctor of economics and the head of a department at the University of Leiden. He later took me and my nephew to visit the place where I went down, and we saw many of the same places and that little house I almost went through.

Anyway, we weren't in a group at this time. They put the four officers together out in a pasture under some plywood for about four or five days. The hole in the ground was made for two people, but there were four of us hiding there. The Dutchmen did that by orders from London. They were apparently in touch with London by shortwave. We just had to stay under that plywood.

I don't know how long we were there in that field, but they finally came and got us in the middle of the night. We had to ride bicycles down a little trail by a ditch bank. They had a little generator on the wheel, which ran a little red tail light on the lead bicycle. There was no headlight on it. We were following this Dutchman, and that was an experience when you're going down a dark path at night where there's water on both sides. You have to keep from falling down, and I hadn't ridden a bicycle since I was a kid. But we got up on the main road, and they hid the bicycles for the moment and we lay down in the grass in an open field near a canal.

Our contact saw a dim light coming toward

us—the curfew was at 9 p.m. No one except military or the German police were allowed to be crossing the roads, and very little of that. In fact, I don't recall any car even passing us when we were lying down on that grass. The Dutch were all very brave and self-sacrificing because they could have been shot for helping us. We were then taken to a few safe houses. I don't remember how many, but we were trying to make our way to Belgium. We were moving back and forth across parts of northern Holland by train because they just couldn't make the connections.

The way the underground worked, we were to get on a train, the four of us, sit in different parts of the car, and then pretend to go to sleep. The military police were patrolling the cars, and they looked for identity cards. Well, we had Dutch identity cards provided by the resistance, but none of us could speak Dutch, so we were at a disadvantage. So, when we got off the train, the Dutch underground man went ahead of us and bought the tickets, and we then got on a different train and had to sit in different parts of the car but always within eyesight of this agent. He would get out and say that we would meet another man and he would point out the person we were to follow after that. He then disappeared.

Well, we got to Amsterdam and got off the train. We went through security checks. The military police constantly patrolled the trains. We always had Dutch identity cards, and we wore civilian clothes.

Could you describe how you were captured?

Well, when we got to Amsterdam the agent met us there and said there would be a car to pick us up, which was unusual because there weren't any cars running to speak of. They sent a 1928 Studebaker, and the car stopped and the guy inside said get in. The four officers got in and they drove us around the city a bit then took us to a nice building. We were told it was an undertaker's parlor. We went into an upstairs room with nice Davenports and chairs where we were told to wait. We hadn't been there very long when all the doors suddenly opened and an agent from the Gestapo came in along with some police guards with drawn pistols. They shouted, "Police militaire!" We were placed under arrest, handcuffed with our hands behind our backs, and taken across the street to a Gestapo prison. And this was probably the day before Christmas 1943.

Do you think you were turned in by someone?

The Gestapo had worked their way into the underground, and we were turned over to a person who was supposed to be with the underground but wasn't. They had agents everywhere.

Can you describe what your interrogation was like?

Yes. I have the room imprinted in my mind. The Gestapo agent in charge would sit at the desk across from you asking questions, and there was a fat gal there taking dictation. Across the room stood an SS trooper with a death's head skull on his cap, with a drawn pistol in his hand. Here was this young SS officer, a typical example of a young Aryan man, probably about

LEFT: Airmen inspect the wreck site of a B-17 Flying Fortress that has made an emergency belly landing in a field somewhere in England after sustaining heavy damage in a raid on a German target. Pilot Les Amundson and crewman Frank Chairet experienced a similar crash landing and were taken prisoner when their Flying Fortress came down in the Netherlands, narrowly missing a house. BELOW: An unidentified member of the Dutch Underground with an automatic weapon in 1944. Though he was ultimately betrayed and captured by the Nazis, pilot Les Amundson was impressed with the dedication of the Dutch freedom fighters.

Both: National Archives

21 or 22, beautiful uniform, shiny jackboots. The SS guy came over and twisted my arm behind me. I'm sure this happened to all four of us. We were wearing civilian coats, and you know certain coat sleeves have a place on the cuff where the buttons are. The SS officer would put his finger through the hole in the sleeve, in the cuff, and twist your arm up in back of you. He would then hammer your head with his pistol butt to get you to answer the questions being asked by the Gestapo interrogator. The only answer I was supposed to give was name, rank, and serial number. That went on for quite a while, and I was getting several lumps on my head.

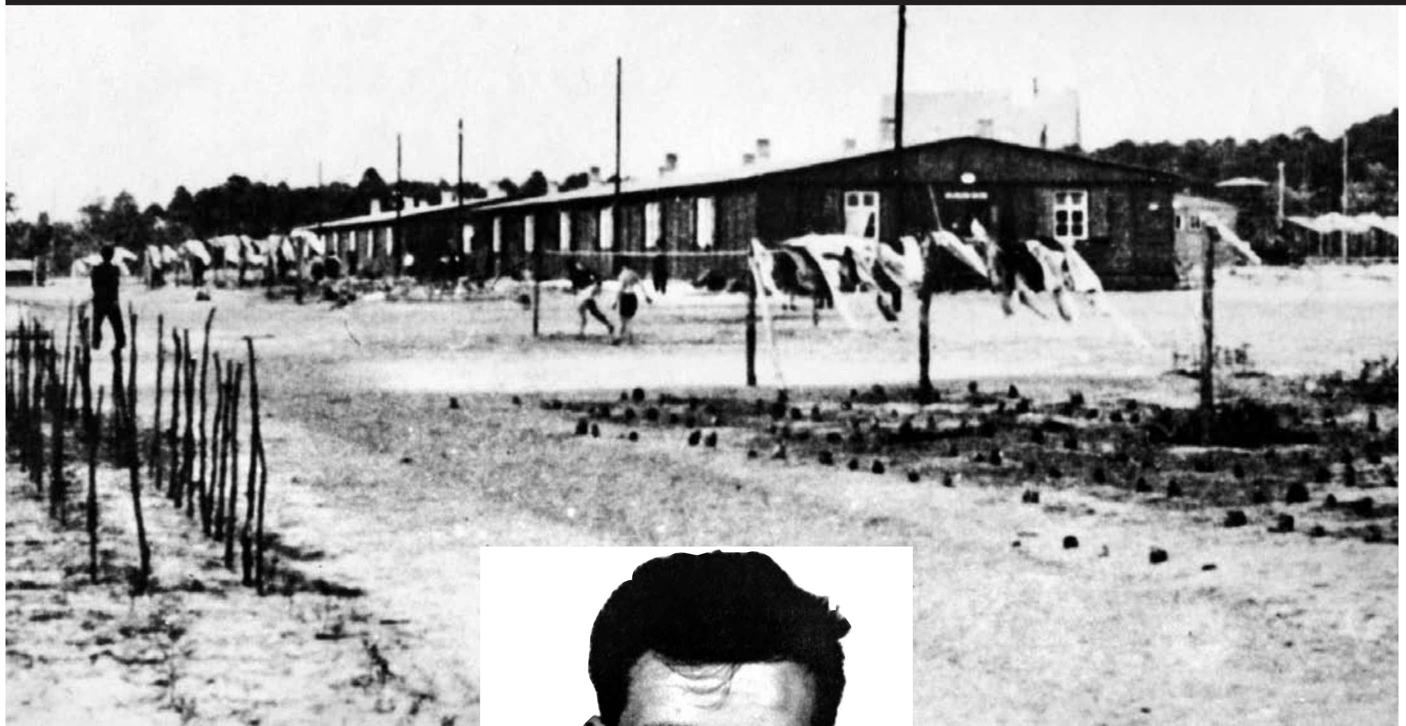
When they got through with me they took me back to my cell in this big old warehouse, I guess it was. They took Bill Marcollo, my copilot, down there and did the same thing to him. I later got to ask him what happened, and Bill said that this weaselly SS guy let go of his arm when they were about done with the questioning and said we were all going to be shot because we were spies, and we couldn't prove that we weren't. Well, there was a little truth to that because we had Dutch identity cards and none of us could speak Dutch.

So, when the interrogator rose from his seat Bill Marcollo lunged and grabbed the pistol that was lying on the desk, but it wasn't loaded. And a good thing it wasn't, because he would have shot everybody in there. Either the pistol was empty or he didn't understand how to work the safety on it. That SS trooper lunged over and picked up a wooden office chair and smashed it over Bill's head and knocked him stone cold out. Then he went over and pushed Bill's face in with the heel of his jackboot. Broke his nose, broke all the front teeth out of him, and came close to breaking his jaw. His face had been pulverized. His nose was totally broken, it was off to the side, his eyes were black, and the whole face had turned purple from the bleeding under his skin.

Then very late, around two in the morning I would guess, they took the four of us out and lined us up in the hall. I looked at my copilot, who wore a white shirt, with dried blood covering him from his head to his feet. They said we were going to be shot as spies. Well, they had us convinced of that, and I'm telling you we believed them. They took us outside, then two riflemen put down their rifles and got on each side of us. They'd get you by the scruff of your neck, by your collar, and by your crotch and throw you in the back of a truck. They'd throw you up onto that steel plate deck of the truck with your hands tied behind you and they'd bang your head down pretty good. There was nothing gentle about it. So we rode around Amsterdam in the back of that lorry with those riflemen for a while. We soon pulled up in a big warehouse area and stopped near a door. The driver honked the horn, and a Luftwaffe guard opened that door and came out to take charge of us. I felt like kissing that guy because I felt that once we got out of Gestapo hands and into the Luftwaffe's there might be some sanity somewhere after all.

Did you see Frank after you were captured or

All photos: National Archives



ABOVE: USAAF Second Lieutenant Les Amundson's POW identification photo from Stalag Luft I at Barth, Germany in 1943. TOP: After his capture, Les Amundson was sent to Stalag Luft I near Barth, Germany, where he remained for 17 months before his liberation by Allied forces.

was he sent somewhere else?

No, I never saw him again. You see, the enlisted people were sent to different camps. I was sent to Stalag Luft 1, which is up on the Baltic, near a little town called Barth, and when I got there, there were 600 British fliers. Some had been shot down as much as three years before that. When I left, there were just short of 10,000 American flying officers there.

Can you describe your trip to the POW camp?

We made it as far Cologne, and we almost got lynched by a mob in the railroad station there. The guards had to keep pushing the crowd back, but they were losing ground, and the crowd was all set to lynch us. So the railroad people opened the door and let us down into the basement on a landing, which was sometimes used by railroad employees as a bomb shelter during raids. Then some German Red Cross ladies came and gave us each a bowl of soup. That was the first meal we had eaten for three or four days. After we got to Frankfurt and the Luftwaffe's interrogation, we were placed in solitary cells. I was there for three days, which was a small amount of time, but you soon count up all the nail heads in the place. They would come and give you a little bowl of barley through the door once a day or so.

Anyway, we eventually got to a Dulag, which was a German transit camp. By this time they were getting so many shot-down American planes they were running out of room. They put us on a train, and after that we went to Stalag Luft 1 at Barth. I was there for 17 months which, together with my time with the underground, made it a year and a half I was a prisoner.

When we got liberated out of the Stalag, the Eighth Air Force came in and flew us out of this airdrome right near the prison. They gave us POWs a cook's tour and flew us all over the area. By this time Germany was pulverized. You can't imagine the devastation, and I mean everywhere."

Did you keep in touch with any of the other crew members after the war? Did you hear from any of them again?

I kept track of my copilot, Bill Marcollo, because he lived in California, and I visited him a couple of times, but I became a very good friend of that underground man who hid me in Holland.

Are there any other members of the crew still alive?

One of them, the engineer, Frederick Lord, stayed in the service after the war and was sent to South America to train Chileans how to fly airplanes and, since he was an engineer, how to take care of them. He retired, as I did, but I retired out of the reserves, and he stayed in and retired out of active duty. But I lost track of the others. Bob Coughlin, who was the bombardier, is dead. I used to talk to him. He lived at Beacon, New York. But most of them are dead. My copilot is dead, I know that. So we're all pretty old—I'm 95 myself.

Did everyone in your crew survive the war?

Yes. We all came back home. We met at Camp Lucky Strike in France after we were liber-

In this photo that was probably taken after the end of World War II, empty guard towers and barracks are seen on the grounds of Stalag Luft I, where hundreds of captured Allied airmen were held by the Germans.

ated, which was a transit camp for returning POW airmen after the war.

Did you do any flying after the war?

Not professionally. I had a private license, but I didn't fly but very little because it cost too much. At that time, during my training, I enjoyed flying and I had no problem with it, but when I got out of the service, after I got liberated from the prison camp and came home, I had to go to work. We had a family hardware store there. It was kind of a one-horse town.

But anyway, I retired out of the reserves. I would take my two-week duty every year in January because I ran the hardware store and it was least busy then, and it worked out very well for me. I had a very good military pension. I got 27 very good years of active reserve time, and I had a lot of fun doing it.

So you stayed in Sunnyside for most of your life?

Yeah, I never got far. I was born in Sunnyside, and after the war I came back here to work in the family store, and I retired out of that business. I got a little one-horse farm out here just south of Sunnyside, and I married, had four children, had a good life, and I have no complaints about anything.

You went back to visit Holland after the war?

Oh yeah, I've been back there two or three, maybe four times.

Does it feel strange being back in that same place after so many years?

Well, I enjoyed it because the Dutch kid that originally hid us showed up in Sunnyside after the war. Well, it turned out he was an expert in finances, his field of work, and he was teaching college on the East Coast. He came to see me, and I didn't know him from Adam. He just showed up one day, and I had no idea who he was because he had changed a lot in that period of time. He identified himself, and then I recalled him. He stayed for a couple of weeks. Anyway, he went to college and became the head of the Dutch savings bank after the war and taught at Harvard for a couple of years before he came out to see me. After the war the Dutch underground had so much money they sent many of their former agents to universities and colleges all over Holland, and he became a financier after the war. Anyway, I met some interesting people.

When you went back to Holland did any of the other civilians come to meet you? Did anyone else remember your crash?

Yeah. The Dutch underground in that area had a well-organized thing after the war, and they made a big hullabaloo out of it. They had a lot of American military equipment like Jeeps and Army trucks that must have been left there in Europe after the war, and they fixed them all up fancy and they had an underground organization that treated us just like we were royalty. They are very appreciative of what we Americans did. They took us back to places where I had been, and every little town in the Netherlands has a resistance museum of some kind where it shows the number of young people who were shot by the Germans during the war. They have their photos there. They just about decimated all the young people that were left around there, the Germans did. They were shooting people right and left.

Do you often hear from other veterans or their families?

I have had several calls from crew members and relatives who want some information because, well, what we did was a big deal at the time, and I guess it still is to many. I don't hold anything against any people. I think that the way I was treated by the Germans was just war. That's the way war is. I have no ill feelings toward the German people at all. I'm not the kind to hold grudges. That's just the way I am, I guess.

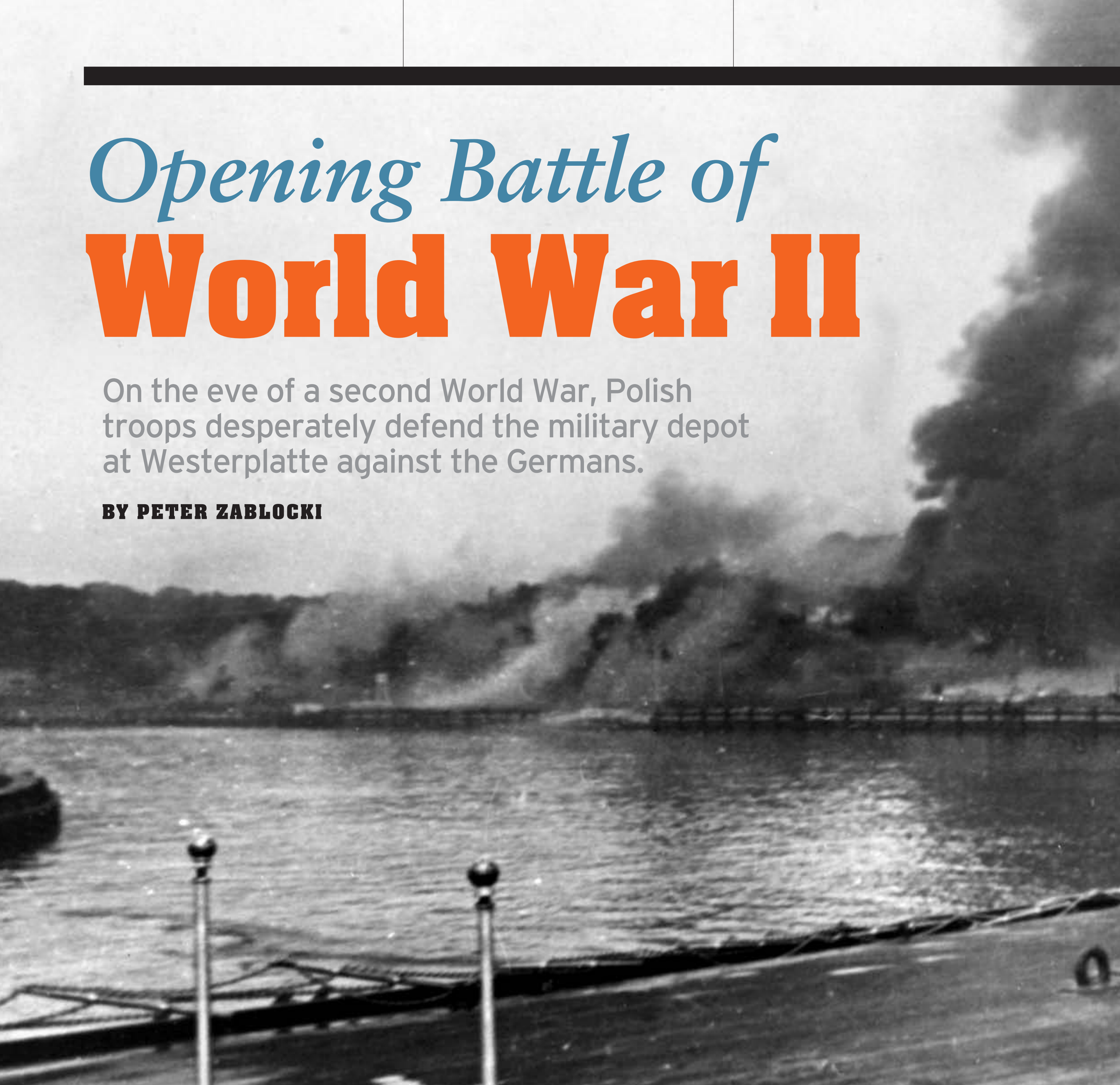
Les Amundson, who passed away in 2017 at age 97, was an honorable man whose thoughts were often with those he served with nearly 70 years ago. In a sense, he straddled both worlds, the modern and the past. As for Frank Chairet, he returned home to a quiet life and to work the land. However, his sense of duty remained strong. He joined the Banksville, New York, volunteer fire department, rising to the rank of assistant fire chief before he retired in the 1980s. He finally married late in life but became a widower in three short years. He died on January 11, 1997, at the age of 74. His funeral reflected his sense of duty. While a military honor guard performed taps at the gravesite and gave the traditional 21-gun salute, his casket was borne

Continued on page 96

Opening Battle of World War II

On the eve of a second World War, Polish troops desperately defend the military depot at Westerplatte against the Germans.

BY PETER ZABLOCKI



The fog that descended over the Westerplatte peninsula in the Bay of the Free City of Danzig, Poland, on August 31, 1939, refused to lift as if trying to stop the night from making way for a new day. At the small officers' quarters building, Capt. Franciszek Dabrowski woke up from a nightmare, his body in a cold sweat; it was now September 1, 3:57 a.m. The 35-year-old officer had spent the past two years as the deputy commander of the Polish Military Depot at Westerplatte. Never had he felt as uneasy as he did that early morning. Dabrowski looked over at Maj. Henryk Sucharski; the commanding officer slept soundly. Perhaps he had accepted that they had done all they could to prepare for the worst.

The German pre-dreadnought battleship SMS *Schleswig-Holstein* had moored in Danzig harbor just six days earlier under the pretense of a friendly visit. It now stood motionless fewer than 200 yards away on the other side of the Vistula River channel's shallow waters. The Polish officers could not see the large ship through the thick fog, even if they tried. But they knew it was there.

The clock on the ship's bridge soon showed 4:43 a.m. German Capt. Gustav Kleikamp, a veteran of the Great War and the Battle of Jutland, looked at the man by the controls and nodded—it was time. The 250 highly-trained SS Marines hiding in *Schleswig-Holstein*'s hull could hear the creaking of metal as the relic of another time turned its 11-inch guns toward the six-and-a-half-foot wall surrounding a handful of Westerplatte's small structures. The booming guns spoke in unison—the second World War had begun.

Adolf Hitler had never hid his disdain for the post-World War I reestablishment of the Polish nation that was previously erased from the map by various 18th-century partitions. Apart from giving up land to Poland, the 1919 creation of the Polish Corridor was

While a German naval officer stands on deck, the guns of the old battleship *Schleswig-Holstein* fire on the Polish ammunition depot on the Westerplatte near the free city of Danzig during the opening hours of World War II, September 1, 1939.

particularly troublesome for Germany.

The new territorial agreement between the Allied powers and Germany's leaders called for providing the newly reconstructed Poland

Alamy ID:WDAH0W

BELOW: The free city of Danzig was established by the Treaty of Versailles to provide Poland with access to the Baltic Sea. The establishment of the Polish Corridor separated East Prussia from the rest of Germany. RIGHT: The Polish defenders of the Westerplatte established several defensible strongpoints to resist the Germans, who mounted several costly attacks against the ammunition depot. in the opening hours of World War II. The gallant Poles were eventually forced to surrender.

Map © 2025 Philip Schwartzberg, Meridian Mapping, Minneapolis, MN

access to the Baltic Sea. The result was a thin strip of land that was 140 miles long and an average of 10 miles wide running from Danzig west to the border of East Prussia, the latter now separated from mainland Germany. The League of Nations granted Danzig, located at the mouth of the Vistula River on the Baltic coast and in the middle of the corridor, "Free City" status. Designated as such to address the city's complex geopolitical and mixed German and Polish population, it became a semi-autonomous city-state serving as a neutral entity under the protection of the League.

The Führer initiated his *Heim ins Reich*, "Return to the Homeland," policy in early 1938. With a claim of bringing ethnic Germans living in other countries back to the Greater German Reich, the Nazi Party, under the guidance of its Führer, first annexed Austria in 1938, then the Sudetenland and the rest of Czechoslovakia the year after. It was only a matter of time before Hitler would come for Poland.

When reports from March 1939 pointed out that an excess of 70 German divisions could at any point be deployed against Poland, which at best could only muster 37, the central European nation undertook a secret mobilization without the permission of its French and British allies. By late August, even they could not deny the intelligence reports of the Nazi war machine amassing 36 divisions within striking distance near the Polish and Czechoslovakian border.

Part of the Free City of Danzig but separated from it by a Vistula River, the usually lightly guarded Westerplatte peninsula was the gateway and protector of Danzig's harbor. Prohibited by the Treaty of Versailles from arming itself past the existing 88 soldiers so as not to instigate nor alarm Germany, the commanding officer of the nation's military ammo depot, Major Sucharski, had spent the past five months building up its forces to 200 men; this included one doctor and a handful of officers, who, like the other reinforcements, were all smuggled in wearing civilian clothing.

Armed with one 75mm field gun, two 37mm antitank guns, various rifles, grenades, and 18 heavy machine guns, Sucharski and Dabrowski established three lines of defense. Covered by cut brush and the tall trees overhead was a line of machine-gun outposts near the narrow entrance to the peninsula designed to hold the line long enough for the troops to mobilize near the second line of defense, the five guardhouses deeper past the depot's walls that protected the barracks, storerooms, and officer quarters. The orders from the Army HQ were clear: do nothing, provoke no one, wait.

Dabrowski now raised his hands and shielded his eyes as shattered glass from the nearby window hit him with a powerful force. The Polish captain had slept in his full uniform, a

Narodowe Archiwum Cyfrowe, NAC (Polish National Digital Archives)

The big guns aboard the battleship *Schleswig-Holstein* fire away at the Poles ensconced at the Westerplatte. Feigning a goodwill visit, the Germans sent the old battleship, with combat troops secretly aboard below decks, to an advantageous position before the outbreak of World War II.

precaution he and his men had taken since the arrival of the German battleship. Across the room, Major Sucharski was giving orders, although the men already knew what to do; they had been secretly preparing for this moment for months.

Within 10 minutes, the German ship would rain five metric tons of shells on the Polish depot's eastern perimeter near their machine-gun nests in an attempt to breach its outer wall. Apart from *Schleswig-Holstein*'s eight salvos from its main guns, 59 shells would come from its medium batteries and more than 600 rounds from its 20 mm flak guns.

Schleswig-Holstein's projectiles continued falling as a young rifleman, Konstanty Jezierski, shielded himself in one of the peninsula's five guardhouses as something crashed through the window. The first soldier to die in World War II never saw the explosion that claimed his life.

The second phase of the German invasion of Westerplatte began at 4:55 a.m. The marines from *Schleswig-Holstein* emerged from the smoke at the base of the peninsula and through the protective wall at a spot damaged by the battleship's barrage.

Supplied with old maps, the SS marines were unaware of the secret changes to Westerplatte's defenses instituted by Sucharski and Dabrowski in the months leading up to the inevitable attack. The men of the foremost gun emplacement codenamed Prom (Ferry) could easily pick out the enemy through the smoke, their off-white rucksacks draped over their shoulders making a stark contrast against the dark German uniforms. The SS unit, led by Lt. Wilhelm Henningsen, crept forward unaware of the hidden machine gun emplacements.

"We didn't have to strain our eyes," a Polish soldier later recalled, "because we let them come as close as [one hundred feet] before we opened fire." The machine guns from Prom came to life simultaneously, with the other nearby outposts instantly meeting their ferocity. German soldiers, unable to see Polish positions through the thick trees, fired their rifles and submachine guns in all directions but the right one.

The invaders finally retreated after the third attempt, convinced that the Poles had built an elaborate system of trenches, tunnels, and defensive positions when, in reality, they faced but four hastily built bunkers. As the smoke settled, a Polish soldier at Prom looked up from his hot machine gun at the slaughter before him. Dead bodies lay seemingly everywhere, some twitching with the last involuntary movements before going still. The initial attack had cost the Germans 13 lives and led to 58 men being injured in less than an hour.

The second and more intense bombardment of Westerplatte began at 7:30 a.m. When it was over, 50 tons of munitions had fallen on the military depot's westernmost outposts. "A hail of shrapnel, splinters, tree branches, and entire treetops rained down from the skies," a Polish lieutenant would write years later.

The barrage had hardly ended when Henningsen's German SS marines resumed their attack around 9 a.m. Anticipating the move, the outposts' commanders set up mortars to repel the advance. The Poles were now facing a larger attack force, reinforced by 60 SS-Heimwehr Danzig troops. Referring to them-

Narodowe Archiwum Cyfrowe, NAC (Polish National Digital Archives)

Heavy German artillery fire, including that of the big guns of the battleship *Schleswig-Holstein*, set workshops and other installations at the Westerplatte ablaze. Though much of the area had been flattened after several days, the Polish defenders held out for seven days before being forced to capitulate.

selves as a home defense army and made up of Danzig's fanatical Germans, the SS-Heimwehr existed as an independent unit responsible for conducting police actions in and around Danzig in the name of protecting the German-speaking peoples from Polish retribution.

Major Sucharski, having also been made aware of renewed German sniper fire from machine-gun nests set up on the roofs of warehouses in the Danzig port across the channel, alleviated some of the pressure on Pajak's position by shifting Westerplatte's main artillery to fire across the Vistula. The Polish barrage successfully quelled the German positions, then turned its attention to the *Schleswig-Holstein* and nearly knocked out the battleship's command post. However, Captain Kleikamp's swift retaliation ensured Sucharski no longer had much artillery to speak of.

By noon, the Marines frantically radioed the battleship, "*Verluste zu Groß, gehen zuruck!*" ("Heavy losses, we're leaving!"). SS commander Henningsen was mortally wounded, and there was no hope of piercing the Polish defenses. Unknown to the Germans, the combination of the ongoing *Schleswig-Holstein* barrage and three hours of continued SS assaults on the Polish position had destroyed the majority of the defending outposts, taken the lives of five garrison members, and wounded numerous others.

With their power supply knocked out by the German attack, Major Sucharski and Captain Dabrowski now agreed to move the soldiers back past the wooded area and to the guardhouses of the second line of defense about halfway up the peninsula. The new positions, while allowing the enemy to gain a foothold on Westerplatte, were laid out in a way that established interlocking lines of machine-gun fire and would make any advance up the strip of land nearly impossible.

As the long day turned into night, the men waited. Meanwhile, the military depot's lone doctor, Mieczyslaw Slaby, worked tirelessly to help those in need with the little he had. For the overwhelmed surgeon, things would only get worse. Back at the entrance and the site of the morning battle, one could still hear cries—*Wasser*! "water" and *Hilfe* "help"—at first audible, but eventually low and then gone altogether.

As the men fought off attacks at Westerplatte, the rest of Poland put up a brave yet futile fight against one of the most powerful nations of the world. While a promised French and British offensive against Germany in the West would have alleviated some of the pressure, it never materialized; the Poles were alone.

The Greeks had Thermopylae, the Americans had a small mission in Texas, and the forces of Franco held the Alcazar in Toledo. It was now the Poles' turn to have their isolated act of heroism. Western newspapers would call it the Polish "Battle of the Alamo." It would be the start of the greatest conflict the world had ever seen.

With the Nazi forces pushing the Polish armies further inland and toward the Soviet border, where the Red Army prepared for its own invasion of September 17, updates on Sucharski and Dabrowski's men dominated radio broadcasts. "Westerplatte fights on!" the announcers

Narodowe Archiwum Cyfrowe, NAC (Polish National Digital Archives)

German soldiers pick their way through a heavily wooded area of the Westerplatte. When they initially attacked the Polish ammunition depot, the Germans had expected to capture the installation in about 15 minutes. Instead, they were rapidly repulsed with significant losses.

worldwide would proclaim, all unable to fathom how an outpost equipped and expected to hold on for 12 hours continued its heroic stand, eventually for days. The German high command, expecting the action to last only one hour, was just as shocked by Westerplatte's resolve.

The 100 bombs dropped on Westerplatte by Junkers Ju-87 Stuka dive bombers on the second day of the fighting turned the peninsula into hell on earth. Naval petty officer Franciszek Bartoszak put his head between his knees and hid in the corner of one of the guardhouses. "We were deafened, blinded, shattered. They could have taken us that day," he would later remember. But the Germans, sure that the bombardment had destroyed most, if not all, of Westerplatte's defenders, instead chose to wait until the third day. By then, the peninsula had been turned into a moonscape, full of craters, knocked down trees, and incendiary bombs still aflame.

At one point, the men hiding from the descending death heard a terrible explosion followed by screams. A dive bomber had scored a direct hit on Guardhouse Five, killing the eight men inside. By the time the two consecutive air raids ended, the Poles at Westerplatte had also lost their kitchen, food supplies, radio station, and water pumps. On board the *Schleswig-Holstein*, a sailor would write in his diary, "This must be the end for Westerplatte."

While the rest of the nation looked for updates on Westerplatte's resolve, the morale of the troops of the entrenched garrison was coming apart. The latest bombardment led Major Sucharski to succumb to a nervous breakdown, which saw his second in command, Captain Dabrowski, effectively taking temporary control of the garrison on September 3. The military depot's new commander quickly countermanded orders to capitulate that had been made under duress by Sucharski, and instead, after speaking with other officers and soldiers, concluded that the majority of the men wanted to continue the fight.

The SS units attacked the peninsula's base on the evening of September 3. The guardhouse defenders could only hear shells buzzing around like bees. Bullets ripped the sandbags covering the windows, spilling their contents onto the ground. Yet the Poles' machine-gun fire did enough to hold the second line. By now, the Germans had taken a foothold on the island and settled into Westerplatte's outposts abandoned by its defenders the previous day. For Hitler, enough was enough. The symbol of Polish resistance had to fall. The declassified diary of the German Naval Staff Operations Division noted, "Order on personal instructions from the Führer: Order for an immediate assault on the Westerplatte together with Army reinforcements is given to Commanding Admiral, Baltic. During the general attack, destroyers are also to participate in the shelling of the Westerplatte."

More German warships arrived on September 4, opening fire from the Baltic Sea, shelling the northern side of the peninsula as the *Schleswig-Holstein* renewed its attack from the south. By now, water and food were nearly gone, and Westerplatte's ammunition stockpiles and medical supplies were dangerously low. Just that morning, the garrison's only doctor used his nail scissors to clamp a stomach wound. But now, even such an act of desperation was no longer feasible as he was forced to leave them inside the patient to prevent further bleeding.

A Polish soldier inside one of the guard-

Narodowe Archiwum Cyfrowe, NAC (Polish National Digital Archives)

houses looked through the darkness and the thick trees ahead of him, unable or unwilling to believe what he saw. The moon was high in the sky when, at 3 a.m. on September 6, the Germans renewed their attack. In their newest attempt at taking Westerplatte and hoping to cause an explosion and expose its defenses by burning down the trees around them, the Germans sent a burning train down the lone tracks that cut through the peninsula.

At the same time that the young Pole realized what he was looking at, his commanding officers had discovered the ploy and ordered all concentrated fire on the approaching train. With thousands of bullets ricocheting off this bomb on wheels, the panicked driver decoupled long before the train reached its destination and the train exploded closer to the German positions than the Polish. As the sky illuminated, Polish gunfire rained down on the SS unit, which had advanced past its defensive positions and was now out in the open with its troops nowhere to go but to their deaths. As darkness gave way to another day, the Germans tried sending another train with much the same results. Casualties aside, Westerplatte bought itself another day.

The failed assaults at Westerplatte were followed by countless hours of on-and-off mortar and artillery fire. Corp. Bronislaw Grudzinski, in Guardhouse Two, waited and hoped another ground attack was not forthcoming, for he knew there would not be much he could do about it. "Our machine guns are bent and twisted; it is quiet outside," he said of the ordeal.

Over at the barracks building, the lone doctor could no longer supply his wounded men with anything but small sips of water. By the evening of September 6, even that would have to stop, for whatever was left had to be rationed to those still fighting. "The wounded needed calm, but here, as if in mockery, booms, quakes, and explosions [came] from every angle," Corporal Edmund Szamlewski, a veteran of Westerplatte, would later write. "Instead, they lay idly, listening to the moaning of their wounded comrades." To make matters worse, the surgeon had another evil to contend with; gangrene began to spread among his patients.

The 4:30 a.m. German attack of September 7 began much in the same manner as the one that started the war the week before. By now, the German armies had overtaken most of Poland, yet the radio stations continued reporting that Westerplatte fought on. This time, the major barrage from the *Schleswig-Holstein* was more successful than the two on September 1. Before sunrise, the projectiles from the battleship obliterated Guardhouses One, Two, and Four beyond repair. The German ground attack resumed with a renewed ferocity, led by advancing flamethrower units. And while the Poles held their own until the enemy stopped to regroup, the men knew the next fight would have to end in hand-to-hand combat, for there was no more ammo or energy left to give.

With 17 dead and 79 wounded, no water, little food and ammunition left, and the painful realization that help was not forthcoming, Major Sucharski, this time with Captain Dabrowski's blessing, ordered a white flag hung on one of the barracks' windows. The men had met and exceeded their assignment to hold for 12 hours—seven days earlier. They could not hold any longer.

With Westerplatte silent, Sucharski and Dabrowski led the men, with the few wounded that

Narodowe Archiwum Cyfrowe, NAC (Polish National Digital Archives)

could still walk in tow, out of the entrenched positions and toward the enemy lines at 11 a.m. The ragged, dirty, and wounded men marched proudly behind their leaders. Awaiting the Poles were the German ground detachment and officers from the *Schleswig-Holstein*. Sucharski handed his ceremonial sword to the recently arrived German commander, Maj.-Gen. Friedrich Eberhardt.

The SS man looked down at the saber. "Where are the rest of your men?" he demanded. The unflinching Polish major took his time to answer. "This is all that is left." Eberhardt stood motionless for a moment, then handed Sucharski back his sword. The battle for Westerplatte was over.

As the Polish officers and troops marched off to prison camps where most would spend the rest of the war, their countrymen persisted in the futile struggle against the German *blitzkrieg*, which they continued long after the official capitulation to the Nazis and the Soviets on October 6, 1939. When the conflict ended, Poland's death toll would exceed six million, the highest proportionately of any combatant nation—with three million of these being Jews.

Hitler walked in silence. It was exactly two weeks to the day when Major Sucharski surrendered Westerplatte. The evidence of battle was still apparent in the rubble and destruction surrounding the Führer. He walked around the shell holes and stepped over fallen trees. The Nazi leader remained quiet as the captain of the *Schleswig-Holstein* gave him a tour of the peninsula.

There was not much left to say. Captain Kleikamp knew better than to boast about persevering. It was clear Hitler was not pleased. In the context of Germany's successful September 1939 campaign, Westerplatte was better left forgotten. □

Peter Zablocki is an award-winning, New Jersey-based author, historian, and host of the History Shorts *Podcast. For more information, visit www.peterzablocki.com.*

Narodowe Archiwum Cyfrowe, NAC (Polish National Digital Archives)

ABOVE: During the formal surrender of the Westerplatte, Polish Major Henryk Sucharski (right) meets German General Friedrich Eberhardt, and the German officer salutes with military courtesy. General Eberhardt was impressed with the tenacity of the Poles and in recognition of his foe's determination allowed Major Sucharski to retain his sword. RIGHT: Their hands on their heads, the former defenders of the Westerplatte are marched off to captivity by the conquering Germans. The Polish garrison in the area near the free city of Danzig made a gallant stand against the invaders in early September 1939. OPPOSITE: After surrendering to the Germans, Polish defenders of the Westerplatte sit under guard awaiting disposition to prison camps. Only after a fierce fight and sustained bombardment were the Germans able to wrest control of the Westerplatte, near Danzig, from the Poles in the opening days of World War II.

Two escort carriers of carrier division 25 under shell attack by the Japanese fleet off Samar during the Battle of Leyte Gulf on October 25, 1944.

Naval History and Heritage Command

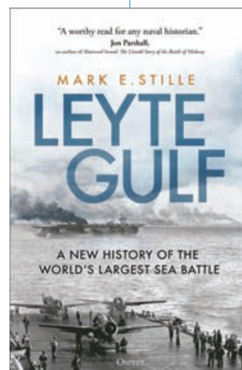
The Battle of Leyte Gulf off the Philippines in 1944 was the largest naval battle in history.

History often remarks on the attack on the Japanese battleship Yamato, but her sister ship, the *Musashi*, suffered a similar fate at the Battle of Leyte Gulf. A massive American air attack struck the ship and its task force on October 24, 1944, two hours after being spotted by reconnaissance planes from the carrier USS *Intrepid*. The task force was transiting the Sibuyan Sea on its way to Leyte Gulf to attack the American landing forces.

Whatever targets the American pilots were assigned, *Musashi* drew most of their attention. The ship's size made it a magnet for attack, the first one from Helldiver dive bombers from *Intrepid*. One bomb struck the No.1 turret, doing little damage due to its armor. Other near misses put holes in the hull and caused flooding, particularly in the bow. Next, Avenger torpedo bombers began their runs as Hellcat fighters strafed the decks to suppress the antiaircraft gun crews.

After the torpedo attack, more dive bombers went in. *Musashi* appeared like a wounded animal, obviously damaged and vulnerable as she was down at the bow. One bomb caused extensive damage to one of the engine rooms, slowing the ship further. The dive bombers scored more near misses, but most importantly they were well coordinated with the torpedo bombers this time. Three of eight torpedoes struck *Musashi*, causing a list which was mostly corrected by counterflooding. At this point the ship was in no danger of sinking despite the damage.

The following attack did more harm. More bomb hits did only moderate damage, with one bomb hitting the bow and causing more flooding. The four additional torpedo hits proved far more serious, putting *Musashi* in real danger. Such damage would have sunk other ships, but *Musashi* was tough, and its crew performed excellent damage control. However, the previous efforts had used up its reserve buoyancy.



Most of the American planes made their next attack on other ships, but a group from Enterprise selected *Musashi* and her escorts, now separate from the rest of the Japanese force. By now the battleship was

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Simulation Gaming
BY JOSEPH LUSTER

THE MIGHTY EIGHTH TAKES TO THE VIRTUAL REALITY SKIES AND KAISERPUNK OFFERS ALT-HISTORY GRAND STRATEGY

THE MIGHTY EIGHTH VR

PUBLISHER MICROPROSE SOFTWARE • **GENRE** AIR COMBAT • **SYSTEM** PC • **AVAILABLE** TBD

It may be harrowing to experience for many, especially in such an intimate way, but it remains surprising that there aren't more World War II-based virtual reality games out there. *Sniper Elite* has a VR version, and *Medal of Honor: Above and Beyond* offered an immersive, if light, experience when it launched in 2020. Many VR wargamers swear by *IL-2 Sturmovik*'s VR experience, but there's room for plenty more where that came from. Enter: *The Mighty Eighth VR*, a new effort from MicroProse Software that's currently in the works for an as-yet-undetermined release date.

The hook of *The Mighty Eighth* is the ability to hop into the cockpit of a B-17 Flying Fortress and coast over enemy-held Europe as you make your way to Germany. MicroProse is going for something really atmospheric here, providing situations that will have you attempting to put out literal fires while Messerschmitt Bf-109s and Fw-190s zip around you and riddle your wings and fuselage with bullets.

Thankfully, you won't be alone in your high-flying mission. You can take to the skies with nine other friends—or tack on some AI players if any gaps need filling—to make up a full crew aboard the bomber. Tasks include determining the right locations to drop bombs, monitoring radio and communications with headquarters, and defending your B-17 against enemy attacks. Remember, dropping out of formation is not an option, so keep your head on a swivel!

Considering how much of your survival depends on working in tandem with others, *The Mighty Eighth VR* is going to live and die based on how well its multiplayer functions. At the time of this writing there's no date in sight, but hopefully those with suitable virtual reality hardware will at least be able to try out a demo at some point before taking the full plunge in the future.

KAISERPUNK

PUBLISHER OVERSEER GAMES, ELDA ENTERTAINMENT • **GENRE** STRATEGY • **SYSTEM** PC • **AVAILABLE** NOW

Veering off of our current timeline, developer Overseer Games' *Kaiserpunk* takes aim at an alternate history that noticeably split from our reality after the end of World War I. This notion paves the way for a strategic city-builder that reimagines the world from 1918 to 1945 during a time known as the Interbellum Era.

Following the events of WWI, city-states rose from the ashes, pitting themselves against one another in an attempt to rule supreme. *Kaiserpunk* envisions war on a global scale as you attempt to rule your city through thoughtful management,

industrial growth, and a focus on military expansion across land, air, and sea.

Every aspect of city building is at your disposal, giving you a chance to dig into the nitty gritty of everything from housing to public services, employment rates that impact the overall economy and the general well-being of public morale that will ensure your metropolis stays at the top. As you encounter other similarly ambitious city-states, it will be up to you whether or not you go for diplomacy and trade, or use them as a means to an end in your quest for total dominance.

All in all, *Kaiserpunk* offers 100 different regions to add to your list of potential conquests. Each aspect of civil and military management within is robust, including an impressive number of interconnected production chains that can scale to meet your burgeoning empire's demands. All of the decisions made throughout have sizable heft to them, and will ultimately impact the way the rest of the world sees you and how successful you end up being on a global stage.

Kaiserpunk will be fully in your hands by the time this issue is on stands, but as of this writing we're still a couple weeks away from final delivery. With inspiration taken from classics like Hearts of Iron and Civilization, the team at Overseer has a lot to live up to, but early looks into the grand strategy that awaits remain promising. ■

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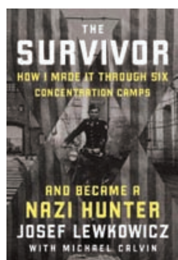
down to twelve knots, only a quarter of her antiaircraft guns were still operational and the ship could barely maneuver. A few planes from other carriers joined the attack. Japanese sources record ten more bomb hits and more torpedo hits. By late afternoon the ship was circling slowly, not answering her helm. Two hours later, soon after the executive officer gave the order to abandon ship, *Musashi* began a slow roll to port. At 7:35 p.m., the ship sank beneath the waves, taking over 1,000 crew with her. The Japanese picked up 1,376 survivors. They went to the Philippines, where they later took part in the Battle of Manila.

The sinking of *Musashi* was just one part of the Battle of Leyte Gulf, the largest naval battle in history. This battle spelled the end of the Japanese Navy as an effective fighting force. ***Leyte Gulf: A New History of the World's Largest Sea Battle*** (Mark Stille, Osprey Books, Oxford UK, 2025, 320 pp., maps, photographs, Bibliography, index, $23, SC) tells the story of this battle in great detail.

The author is an established expert on naval warfare in World War, and particularly the War in the Pacific. This latest volume continues his series of excellent studies with a look at the last critical naval battle of the war. It is well-written and results from the usual attention to detail and thorough research. His evaluations of the various phases of the battle make sense and he deftly puts to rest misconceptions about the battle and the performance

of Halsey and Kurita. The book's conclusions are logically derived and backed by reasonable evidence.

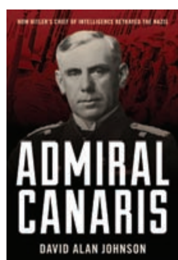
The Survivor: How I Made it Through Six Concentration Camps and Became a Nazi Hunter (Josef Lewkowicz with Michael Calvin, Harper Horizon, New York NY, 2025, 272 pp., photographs, $29.99, HC)



The author was a starving teenage boy, enslaved by the Nazis and imprisoned in a concentration camp. Over the years of his captivity, he spent time in six different camps. At Plaszow, a camp in Poland, he met Amon Goeth, the tall SS officer who killed randomly and inspired fear in the inmates whenever he appeared. After the war, the author joined U.S. Army intelligence to help hunt down Goeth and other Nazis, because he had seen their faces and could identify them. He did in time help find Goeth and others. With 150 members of his family dead, he did what he could to avenge them, spending his life after the war to help bring Nazi criminals to justice. He also helped Jewish orphans rebuild their lives.

This is a firsthand account of a man who not only survived the Holocaust but dedicated his life to avenging the dead but also to aiding the survivors. The author's experiences are sometimes difficult to read, as it chronicles not just the horror of the Holocaust but also the history of anti-Semitism in Europe. The book is thoroughly readable, however, and even when difficult, should be read, particularly as time makes more doubt the events.

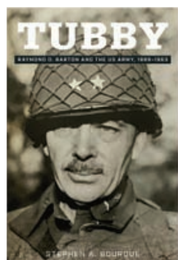
Admiral Canaris: How Hitler's Chief of Intelligence Betrayed the Nazis (David Alan Johnson, Prometheus Books, Essex CT, 2024, 264pp., photographs, notes, bibliography, index, $32.95, HC)



Admiral Wilhelm Canaris served as Hitler's chief of military intelligence, leading the Abwehr. Many found him dull and uninteresting, not even a particularly good naval officer. This persona was a creation, however, and concealed a sharp intelligence. Canaris began as an ardent Nazi, believing in what they could do to rebuild Germany and make it great again. When the Third Reich began terrorizing and murdering Jews and others, he turned against them. Canaris used his position to produce false reports and mislead German leaders, harming their cause. He also helped smuggle Jews out of German-occupied territory at significant risk to himself. Canaris even used Jews as agents. Though he should have fled after his dismissal in February 1944, he stayed, was implicated in the plot to assassinate Hitler in July 1944 and was arrested. He died by hanging less than a month before Hitler committed suicide.

This biography of Wilhelm Canaris and his wartime activities reveals how the man used his remarkable intelligence and wits to undermine a criminal regime and help its victims escape when he could. The book is an interesting read; Canaris is usually mentioned only briefly in most histories. The author does creditable work bringing the man's work to the forefront for modern readers.

Tubby: Raymond O. Barton and the U.S. Army, 1889-1963 (Stephen A. Bourque, University of North Texas Press, Denton TX, 2024, 512pp., maps, photographs, notes, bibliography, index, $34.95, HC)



Raymond O. Barton earned the nickname "Tubby" at West Point due to his athletic ability in football and wrestling. He subsequently spent 37 years in the U.S. Army. His greatest service was as commander of the 4th Infantry Division during World War II. He led that unit through 204 days of combat, starting at Cherbourg and then through Operation Cobra and the Battle of Mortain. He was the first American general to enter Germany, next leading his division in the Hurtgen Forest and during the Battle of the Bulge. While the division earned a reputation as an effective combat force, Barton exhausted himself leading it to success. He returned to the United States afterward and lived the rest of his life in Augusta, Georgia.

A retired army officer and retired professor from the U.S. Army Command and Staff College wrote this biography. This work uses Barton's newly found war diary to provide details on his command decisions and experience leading a division in the maelstrom of World War II combat. This well-written volume provides a good insight into Barton's leadership and how it translated into his division's battlefield success.

Remember Us: American Sacrifice, Dutch Freedom, and a Forever Promise Forged in World War II (Robert M. Edsel, Harper Horizon, New York NY, 2025, 512 pp., maps, photographs, notes, bibliography, index, $31.99, HC)

When Nazi Germany invaded the Netherlands in May 1940, it began four and a half years of brutal occupation. That occupation only ended through the sacrifice of thousands of Allied soldiers and airmen. Today, 8,200 of the American servicemen killed in that cause lie buried at the Netherlands American Cemetery in Margraten. The names of 1,700 more are carved in the Walls of the Missing. Their stories are intertwined with other soldiers and civilians. This includes Frieda van Schäik, a Dutch teenager who fell in love with an American soldier; Lieutenant Colonel Robert Cole, the first member of the 101st Airborne to receive the Medal of Honor; and Sergeant Jeff Wiggins of the 960th Quartermaster Company, who left behind the poverty and prejudice of Alabama to be assigned to dig graves.

This new book tells the stories of 12 people who fought or lived through the carnage of the war. The author's research pulled together various historical records, diaries, and unpublished letters to weave together a fascinating narrative of the sacrifices made to free Europe and the gratitude the Dutch have for those who sacrificed on their behalf.

Mediterranean Sweep: The USAAF in the Italian Campaign (Thomas McKelvey Cleaver, Osprey Books, Oxford UK, 2025, 320 pp., maps, photographs, bibliography, index, $32, HC)

The Italian Campaign had to be fought, though no one on the Allied side wished to fight it. Everyone knew Italy would not be the critical point in the war for Europe, but Germany could not

be given respite to rebuild its forces until the Invasion of Europe. So, the Allies invaded Italy, diverting Axis forces and draining their resources. To this end, the US Army Air Forces flew the length of Italy, adding their firepower to the weight of Allied forces fighting their way up the Italian Peninsula. The Luftwaffe replied in kind, attacking Allied forces wherever they could, such as at Anzio. The mass the Allies could bring eventually told, however, and the Allies attained superiority in the air, launching bomber raids and fighter strikes that punished Axis forces over time.

The author is an established authority on U.S. air power of World War II and the Cold War. He has numerous books to his credit and this one continues his record of good research, readable narratives, and detailed coverage of wide-sweeping campaigns. This book provides excellent coverage of the air war in the Mediterranean.

Hiroshima: The Last Witnesses (M.G. Sheftall, Dutton Books, New York NY, 2024, 545pp., notes, bibliography, index, $36, HC)

At 0812 hours on August 6, 1945, the B29 bomber carrying the atomic bomb began its final bomb run. One minute later, the pilot, Colonel Paul Tibbets, gave control of the plane to his bombardier, Major Thomas Ferebee. Below them, Corporal Tsuchiya Keiji balanced his platoon leader's breakfast tray as he carried it to him. Tominaga Chieko laid on a futon in her home, nursing a stomach ache while her father prepared to go to work. Here and there, people heard or saw the aircraft approaching, seeing the sun glint off its silver fuselage. No alert went out from the air defense headquarters. Even if it had, people in the city turned off their radios at this time of day as an electricity saving measure. Hiroshima's warning sirens stayed silent.

This work gathers the experiences of the last surviving witnesses of the atomic bombing of Hiroshima. The author has spent years interviewing them and researching the events in deep detail. The result is a book which gives a minute-by-minute description of what the bombing was like for those on the ground and the aftermath they faced.

New and Noteworthy

The Story of the Spitfire: An Operational and Combat History (Ken Delve, Air World Books, 2024, $39.95, HC) An in-depth look at the Spitfire's combat legacy, tactical employment and legacy. The book also has extensive technical data.

East Africa Campaign 1940-41: The Battle for the Horn of Africa (Pier Paolo Battistelli, Osprey Books, 2024, $25, SC) The fighting between Great Britain and Italy for East Africa proved hard but necessary. England needed to protect its supply lines from Italian interference.

Japanese Combined Fleet 1942-43: Guadalcanal to the Solomons Campaign (Mark Stille, Osprey Books, 2024, $23, SC) The Japanese Fleet was still strong even after the looses at Midway. It fought a hard and ultimately costly campaign for the Solomon Islands chain.

Borneo 1945: The Last Major Allied Campaign in the Southwest Pacific (Angus Konstam, Osprey Books, 2024, $25, SC) Australian troops with American and Dutch support retook the island from Japanese forces. Its strategic position and resources made it vital for both sides.

The East Pomeranian Offensive, 1945: Destruction of German Forces in Pomerania and West Prussia (Ian Baxter, Casemate Books, 2024, $28.95, SC) Pomerania and West Prussia had to be taken so the Soviet advance into Poland and Germany could occur. This book highlights the Soviet success over the weakened German forces.

The Price of Victory: Memoir of the Commander of 1st Polish Armoured Division (Gen. Stanislau Maczek, Pen and Sword Books, 2024, $44.95, HC) The author fought the Germans in 1939 before escaping into Hungary. He later commanded the division in Western Europe.

Blind Bombing: How Microwave Radar Brought the Allies to D-Day and Victory in World War II (Norman Fine, Potomac Books, Lincoln NE, 2024, 230pp., photographs, notes, bibliography, index, $29.95, HC)

As France fell in May 1940, scientist Vannevar Bush delivered a note to US President Franklin D. Roosevelt. About fifteen minutes later Bush got the page back with "okay" written on it. He immediately set up the Office of Scientific Research and Development, which set about developing the tools to enable Allied victory in the war. One of these inventions, microwave radar, allowed the Allies to prepare for and conduct the D-Day landings, though few have heard of it or its story. A small device, the size of a hockey puck, enabled Allied forces both to better predict the weather and combat the Nazi U-Boats prowling the Atlantic.

The author presents this scientific history of a groundbreaking, war-winning device quite effectively. Despite the technical nature of the subject, the work stays at the layman's level, allowing a broad understanding of how this radar improvement allowed aircraft to get to their targets and prevented marauding submarines from escaping detection. The book reveals how microwave radar proved as important a weapon as any bomb, ship, tank or aircraft.

The Soviet Battle for Berlin, 1945 (Ian Baxter, Casemate Books, Havertown PA, 2024, 128pp., maps, photographs, bibliography, index, 28.95, SC)

The Battle for Berlin was the climax of the War in Europe. This massive operation involved 2.3 million Soviet troops on two fronts, from the east and south. To the north, a third front overran German forces,

isolating the city further. A million Soviet troops attacked the city, arrayed against about 45,000 German troops, their units understrength and weakened. They were reinforced by police, Hitler Youth and Volkssturm militia, but it could never be enough. The city burned in a near-apocalyptic battle, one which finally ended the Third Reich.

The battle that ended the war in Europe is well covered in this concise but detailed volume. It is well written and illustrated, with good illustrations of the weapons and troops who fought in Berlin at the end. The book is a good source for understanding the battle and its participants.

Forged in Hell: The Gripping True Story of the Special Forces Heroes Who Broke the Nazi Stronghold (Damien Lewis, Citadel Press, New York NY, 2024, 400pp., bibliography, index, $28, HC)

At 3:30 in the morning, the first mortar round exploded on the Capo Murro di Porco gun battery on the island of Sicily. An SAS crew fired that round and it was a good shot. The mortar bomb landed some of the emplacement's ammunition. Secondary explosions flashed in the dark, adding more flame and smoke to the conflagration. More SAS men charged the Italian position, bayonets glinting on the ends of their rifles. They dropped to the ground whenever the mortar round landed, to avoid being spotted. Somewhere behind them, a burst from a Bren gun added its chatter to the roar of battle.

The author is widely published on the exploits of the British Special Air Service in World War II. This book covers Blair "Paddy" Mayne, famed SAS leader and the missions he and his men performed during the war.

The Battle of St. Vith and the Potteau Ambush: December 1944 (Hugues Wenkin, Pen and Sword Books, South Yorkshire UK, 2024, 269pp., maps, photographs, notes, bibliography, index, $34.95, HC)

The first days of the Ardennes Offensive were hard on the American forces defending the region. St Vith was hit especially hard. The American 106th Infantry Division and 14th Cavalry Group were destroyed in front of the town. At the nearby village of Potteau, an American column was ambushed and destroyed. German photographers from a propaganda unit took a series of images of this fight, which have since become famous after later falling into American hands.

These images have been seen frequently in books about the battle. After seeing them so often, the author became curious about the story behind the photographs. His investigation led to this book, which effectively explains the action where they were recorded. The book itself is well-researched and equally-well illustrated.

Spitfires: The American Women Who Flew in the Face of Danger during World War II (Becky Aikman, Bloomsbury Publishing, New York, NY, 2025, 368pp., notes, photographs, $31.99, HC)

Spitfires is the story of 26 American women who shared a love for the air and a desire to do what their own country wouldn't let them—contribute to the war effort as pilots. The first of them sailed to England in March 1942 to join Britain's civilian Air Transport Authority. The ATA ferried 309,000 RAF and RN aircraft—147 different types—between factories, maintenance depots and airfields in Britain and later to continental Europe and the Mediterranean.

Delivering new planes to be outfitted for combat and shot-up planes in for repairs—all in England's infamous weather and with the threat of German attacks—one out of every seven ferry pilots was killed.

The ATA would employ some 1,300 pilots from 28 nations—including men who were disabled or unfit for active duty and 168 women. Rare for the time, men and women of equal rank received equal pay.

This entertaining and well-researched work, includes diary entries and material from interviews with surviving pilots. It Also includes photos of many of the women and the planes they flew.

Nothing but Courage: The 82nd Airborne's Daring D-Day Mission—and Their Heroic Charge Across the La Fière Bridge (James Donovan, Dutton Caliber, New York, NY, 2025, 448pp., $35, HC)

A small stone bridge over the Merderet River was a linchpin in the Allied invasion of Normandy, part of a causeway through marshy land that would allow troops from Utah Beach to get to Cherbourgh—the only deep-water port that could support such a massive military offensive.

This meticulously researched and comprehensive telling of the actions of the 82 Airborne Division during this pivotal moment in history is bolstered by the personal stories and information gleaned from interviews with a dozen veterans of the 82nd who were there on D-Day and more than 100 relatives of others who were also there. In addition to archives, records and accounts both official and unofficial, Donovan visited France to see firsthand where the action occurred.

Allies at War: How the Struggles Between the Allied Powers Shaped the War and the World (Tim Bouverie, Crown, New York, NY, 2025, 672pp., $38, HC)

It took an ideologically and politically divided coalition to defeat the global threat of Nazi Germany and Imperial Japan. Winston Churchill, Franklin D. Roosevelt, and Joseph Stalin disagreed on strategy, imperialism, and the future of a free Europe.

With a population of about 830 million in 1940, the combined financial, industrial, and material resources of the Allies dwarfed those of the Axis countries, whose total population was less than 260 million. Bouverie points out that the Allies produced 2,891 naval vessels, 60,720 tanks, and 147,161 aircraft in 1943 alone. The Axis managed 540 naval vessels, 12,825 tanks, and 43,524 aircraft.

But numbers don't tell the whole story of the most chronicled war in history. This well-researched narrative uses firsthand accounts and unpublished diaries to explore the politics and diplomacy, the human drama behind the military events. □

PILLBOX HILL

Continued from page 39

personal safety, he advanced up the hill, shooting from the hip at anything that moved. With bullets flying all around him, Murphy assaulted the last two enemy machine-gun emplacements in the area. "I think the Germans were shocked to see just one man attacking them," Godfrey said. "Murph just lost his head. When you lose a buddy like that it's really tough."

Once "Pillbox Hill" was neutralized, Murphy went back and dragged Tipton out of the foxhole, laid his body under a cork tree, and put a pillow beneath his head. As he checked Tipton's personal effects he looked at the photograph of Claudean and cried. Godfrey recalled, "That was the first time and only time I ever saw Murphy cry."

For his actions on "Pillbox Hill," near the small town of Ramatuelle, France, Murphy was awarded the Distinguished Service Cross—the second-highest U.S. military combat award for valor. "He would've traded it for Lattie Tipton's life in a heartbeat."

This was the last resistance facing the 1st Battalion, 15th Regiment on "Pillbox Hill." Murphy's actions saved many lives, enabling 1st Battalion to quickly capture its objective.

Ironically, both the concrete pillbox and protruding coastal gun proved to be dummies. That afternoon, B Company and other elements of the 1st Battalion advanced on the village of Ramatuelle and bivouacked in the woods. The 3rd Battalion, 15th Regiment captured the town of St. Tropez on the night of August 15, and the 1st Battalion entered the town of Ramatuelle the following morning.

Murphy reorganized his 3rd Platoon and moved on. "Once again I saw the war as it was," he remembered. "It was an endless series of lethal problems, some big, some small, that involved blood and guts of men. Lattie was dead, and I was alive. It was simple as that. The dead would lie where they had fallen; the living would move on and keep fighting. There was nothing else to do." □

Retired history teacher Daniel R. Champagne is the author of Dogface Soldiers: The Story of B Company, 15th Regiment, 3rd Infantry Division. *He lives in Salem, New Hampshire.*

TARIGO CONVOY

Continued from page 67

revenge, and she was pounded into wreckage before going down at 0320.

Then it was the turn of the four German steamers, no match for the British "greyhounds of the sea," which were sunk in quick succession. In the darkness, however, the British did not notice that *Arta* had settled in the shallows and that much of her superstructure and hull remained above water until the high tide slid her into deeper water, where she sank.

Dawn was approaching, and Mack did not want to become the target of Luftwaffe planes that would soon be prowling the skies. Survivors from *Mohawk* were pulled from the water, but there was no time to rescue enemy survivors for future interrogation.

The Battle of the Tarigo Convoy was a one-sided affair. The Italians and Germans lost three destroyers, the ammunition ship, and the four steamers, eight ships in all. The numbers of killed and wounded, both Italian and German, is estimated at about 700. The British lost only one destroyer and 43 men. It was the kind of good news that Britain needed. Rommel had lost an entire convoy of weapons, ammunition, fuel, guns, and vehicles—not to mention men. The survivors made it to Libya, but they brought nothing to fight with.

After the battle, Italian divers searched through *Mohawk* and claimed to have found some signal books and, more importantly, maps of the minefields at Alexandria, which served them in a later raid on that port.

The overwhelming British victory marked the end of the easy passage of Axis transports to Libya, which they had enjoyed since June 1940. Malta had withstood—and would continue to withstand—enemy bombing and the sinking of Allied ships on their way to sustain the island. It remained an important, unsinkable Allied bastion in the strategic Mediterranean. □

Glenn Barnett is a retired college instructor and aerospace engineer. He worked on the Apache helicopter, B-1B bomber, and Space Shuttle. He is a frequent contributor to WWII History.

AMUNDSON

Continued from page 81

to his final resting place on the back of a firetruck while members of the department marched alongside in their dress uniforms. For his service in World War II, he had earned a purple heart and two bronze stars.

While going through his papers after his death, I came across a letter of commendation for Frank signed by the commanding officer of the 384th, Colonel Dale Smith. It reads in part, "Although you failed to return from our mission over Germany on 26 November, 1943, I take great pleasure in being able to commend you for your meritorious achievement on that date. Your performance of duty on that important mission was superior. In spite of heavy fighter and flak opposition you coolly accomplished your duties as Waist Gunner. By your skillful airmanship and courage you enabled our Group to deal a vital blow to the enemy. It is through such acts that we are able to continually press home our blows to the enemy and assure us of ultimate victory. The courage, coolness and skill displayed by you reflect great credit upon yourself, the 384th Bombardment Group, the Army Air Forces and the Armed Forces of the United States. As commanding officer of the 384th Bombardment Group, I speak for its entirety in saying we are proud of you for your gallant action; we sincerely hope that you are safe and we shall again be able to fly with you wing to wing."

Chairet's luck had run out about the same time as Amundson's. He wandered from farm to farm for the next three weeks, often sleeping in open fields, barns, or haylofts. The ground was by now frozen hard, and he occasionally found a potato or some other food that he had to eat raw, sometimes supplemented by what a Dutch farmer's family could spare. He was passed from house to house, never staying for more than a night or two.

The Germans often posted bounties for Allied airmen turned in to them. Some families sympathized with the Nazis, while others just needed money to survive. While this was the exception to the rule, it did account for the capture of a significant number of Allied airmen. In Frank's case, he was turned in by the family that owned the barn he slept in.

The Germans came one morning a few days before Christmas, surrounded the barn, and captured him at gunpoint. None of the crew managed to make it back to England.

At the notorious Stalag 17B near Vienna, Frank almost did not make it home alive. A week before the guards fled the camp as the Allies closed in, Frank's appendix ruptured. Whether the camp doctor botched the operation or not, a serious blood infection set in. The Germans barely had medication for their own men, much less their Allied prisoners. The infection was left untreated.

On April 8, 1945, the Germans forced 4,000 POWs at Stalag 17B to begin an extremely difficult 18-day march of some 280 miles to Braunau, Austria. The remaining 900 men were too ill to make the march and were left behind in the hospitals. Chairet was one of these. Allied medics arrived on May 3. He was probably within a day or two of dying if help had not arrived when it did. He convalesced for six long months back in the States before he could finally return home.

The mission to Bremen occurred on the day after Thanksgiving, 1943. It was said in my family that my grandmother received the telegram that Frank was missing two days afterward. It was at least mid-January before word of the crew's capture was passed through the Red Cross, so the families endured an agonizing two-month holiday season without knowing if their loved one was dead, a prisoner, or missing. My grandmother scanned the local papers, which published casualty lists every day, looking for word of Frank or the chance of perhaps seeing him in some picture. Even after it was known he was in German hands, it was nearly May before the first letter from Frank arrived via Victory Mail. Over 50 letters from Frank arrived over the next year and a half, and my grandmother was said to have read them until they were committed to memory.

Chairet and Amundson crossed paths in 1943 and spent a few short months of their lives together. It was purely by chance I crossed paths with Amundson some 68 years later. A total of 54,700 fellow airmen failed to return home. □

Author and researcher Joseph M. Horodyski resides in Brook Park, Ohio.

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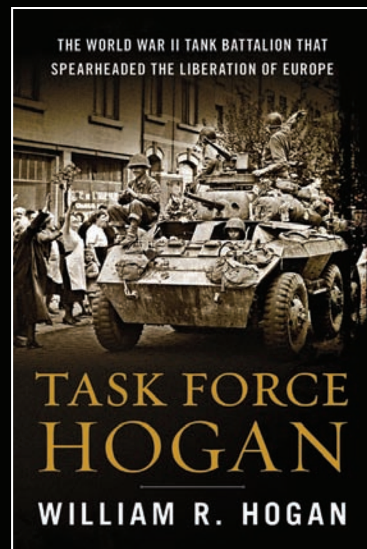

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ROAD TO WAR

Continued from page 49

Navy steamed in the Pacific to seize control of Guam, Wake Island, and the Gilberts. Once they accomplished these moves, the Japanese intended to construct a defensive barrier behind which they could exploit the resources of Asia and the Pacific. By the time the United States recovered sufficiently from Pearl Harbor to mount a counteroffensive, which the Japanese predicted would take at least 18 months, their forces would be so firmly ensconced behind the defensive barrier that they could not be dislodged.

On December 9, Japan quickly took Tarawa in the Gilbert Islands against minor opposition. The next day, 5,400 Japanese attacked the 427 Marine and Navy personnel stationed at Guam, 1,500 miles east of Manila. Although the men battled heroically, they were forced to surrender within one day.

Five hours after Pearl Harbor, more than 200 Japanese aircraft approached American military installations in the Philippines. Since news of the Pearl Harbor attack had already flashed around the world, the Japanese aviators expected stiff resistance from American fighters and antiaircraft guns.

In a surprise more astonishing than Pearl Harbor, there was very little. Japanese planes destroyed American bombers and fighters neatly arranged in rows on the ground. With this second major blow to American forces stationed in the Pacific, MacArthur, the commander of Allied forces in the Philippines, lost much of his air capability.

MacArthur now scrambled to assemble a defensive stance to confront the inevitable Japanese land assault. He commanded more than 100,000 soldiers, but less than a third were experienced veterans. The remainder were newcomers to the Philippines or Filipino soldiers who had received little training.

MacArthur predicted that the Japanese would land at Lingayen Gulf 120 miles north of Manila. He intended to place most of his men along the southern shore of Lingayen Gulf, fight as long as possible, then withdraw to the south into the Bataan Peninsula and wait for reinforcements from the United States.

On December 22, a force of 43,000 Japanese soldiers under Lt. Gen. Masaharu Homma landed at Lingayen Gulf, but farther north than MacArthur expected. Meeting little opposition, the Japanese Army raced behind MacArthur's surprised soldiers and began closing in from the rear. At the same time, a second invasion force landed 70 miles south of Manila at Lamon Bay and headed toward the capital. MacArthur had no choice but to order a hasty retreat into the Bataan Peninsula to avoid being trapped by the two forces.

Barely 20,000 soldiers were healthy enough on Bataan to oppose the Japanese. When Homma renewed his offensive, the Americans and Filipinos could not hold out. After a five-hour bombardment on April 3, fresh Japanese reinforcements, backed by artillery and armor, punched holes in the thin American defensive line. The Americans and Filipinos maintained the line long enough to evacuate 2,000 men and 104 nurses to the island of Corregidor in Manila Bay, but continued resistance was futile. On April 9, roughly 12,000 American and 63,000 Filipino soldiers on Bataan laid down their arms on orders from Maj. Gen. Edward P. King, Jr.

The Western powers, who only six months ago had ruled much of the Far East and the Pacific, were now reduced to the trapped garrison on Corregidor. Japan had triumphed everywhere else, and would soon add one more conquest.

For one month Japanese artillery bombarded Corregidor around the clock to weaken the defenders for the final attack. During the night of May 5-6, Japanese forces crossed over from Bataan, fought through the minor resistance existing at the beaches, and spread throughout the island. Realizing that the end had come, Maj. Gen. Jonathan M. Wainwright surrendered his forces. When the Japanese threatened to continue the killing unless Wainwright ordered the surrender of all American troops in the Philippines, not just those on Corregidor, Wainwright issued the directive. He feared that unless he agreed the Japanese would exact their anger on the wounded and the nurses in Malinta Tunnel's hospital. Some Americans stationed elsewhere in the Philippines complied with Wainwright's order, but many fled into the jungle to continue resisting.

Just before the surrender, Army Signal Corps Private Irving Strobing radioed Pearl Harbor, a recording of which was aired three weeks later on a radio program. "The jig is up. Everyone is bawling like a baby. They are piling dead and wounded in our tunnel. I know now how a mouse feels. Caught in a trap waiting for guys to come along and finish it up. My name is Irving Strobing. Get this to my mother, Mrs. Minnie Strobing, 605 Barbey Street, Brooklyn, N.Y. My love to Pa, Joe [brother], Sue [sister], Mac, Garry, Joy and Paul. Tell Joe, wherever he is, go give 'em hell for us. God bless you and keep you."

On May 6, Wainwright cabled Roosevelt: "With broken heart, and head bowed in sadness but not in shame, I report to Your Excellency that today I must arrange terms for the surrender of the fortified islands of Manila Bay. With profound regret and with continued pride in my gallant men, I go to meet the Japanese commander. Good-bye, Mr. President."

With the collapse of resistance in the Philippines, the Japanese controlled the Pacific from Hawaii to the Far East. Only in Australia did the Allies maintain a slim hold.

The U.S. Navy had been manhandled at Pearl Harbor, the U.S. Army had been forced out of the Philippines, and the U.S. Marines had surrendered at Wake Island and Guam. The British lost much of their fleet as well as their two major possessions in the Far East, Singapore and Hong Kong. After 300 years, the Dutch lost the Indies. The only news that energized the American public, the electrifying defenses at Wake Island and Bataan, resulted in additional defeats.

Just when things seemed their worst, events in the first week of May 1942 cast a glimmer of hope. The U.S. Navy, aided by radio intelligence, started to turn the tide. At the Battle of the Coral Sea, a Japanese invasion force was turned back from Port Moresby on the island of New Guinea. Weeks later, the epic Battle of Midway would change the balance of power in the Pacific permanently. □

John Wukovits is a military expert specializing in the Pacific theater of World War II. He is the author of many books and numerous articles. He lives in Michigan.

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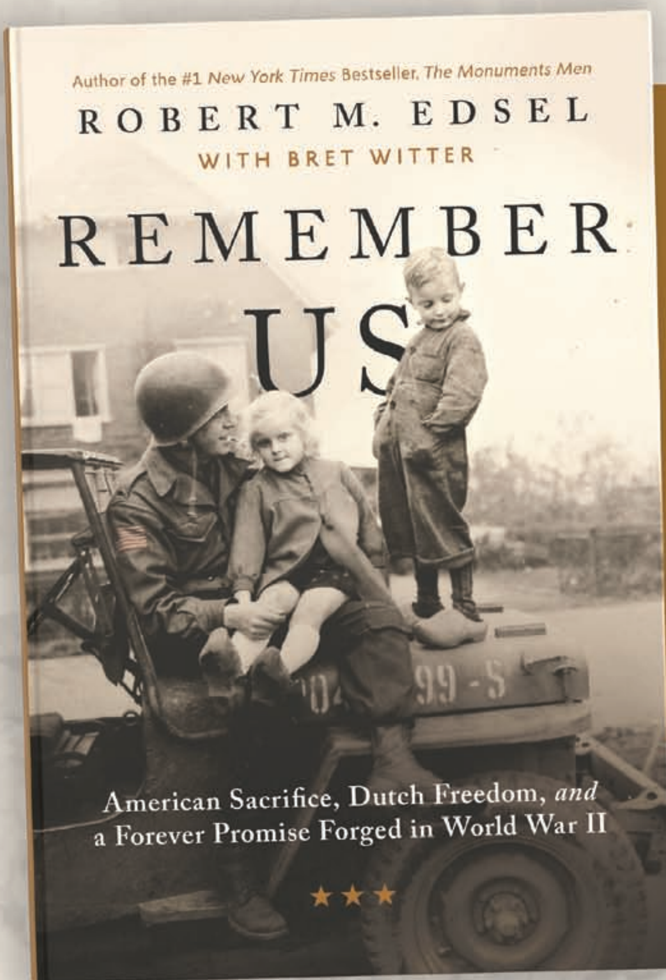

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