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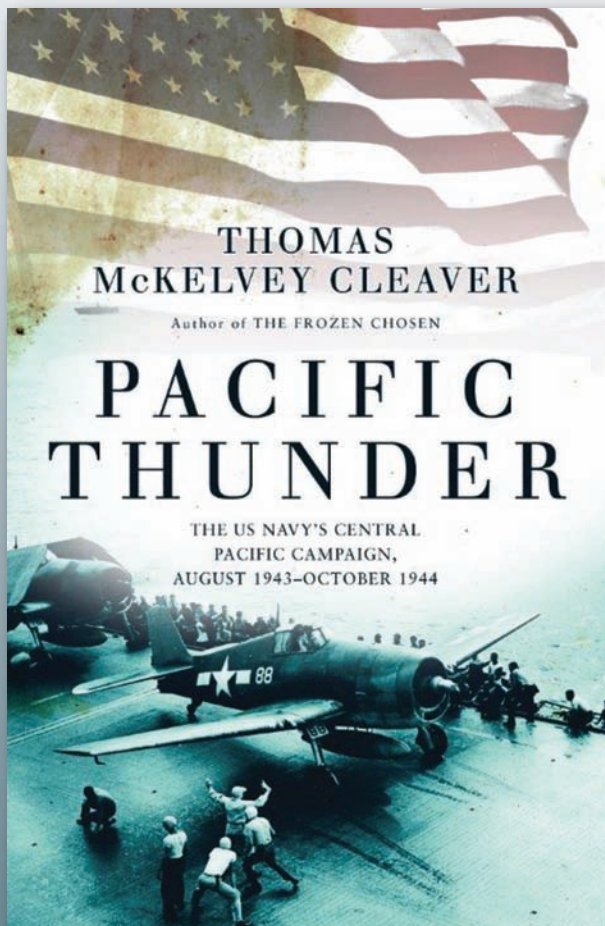


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Cover: A German Panzer III advances toward the battlefield somewhere in Russia in 1942. See story page 54.

Photo: Bundesarchiv Bild 1011-610-1979-23

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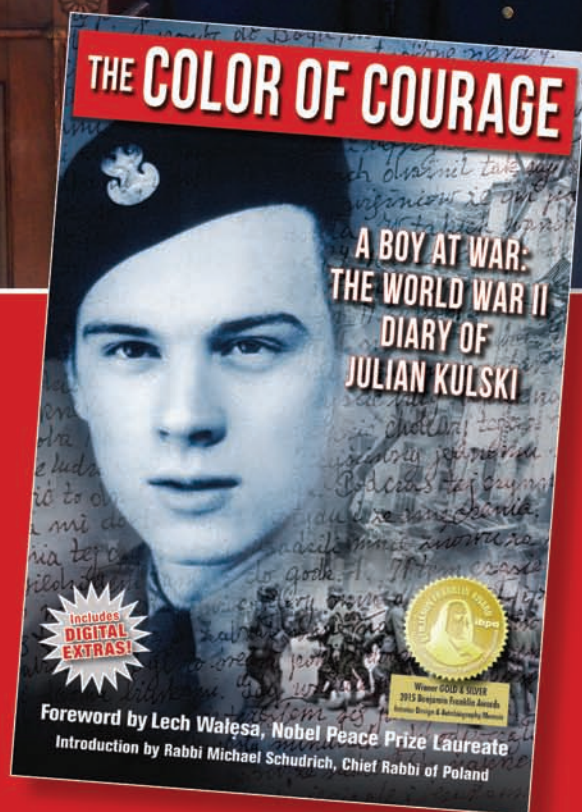
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Editorial

The tide of war turned against the Axis after their defeat at El Alamein in 1943.

IN OCTOBER 1942, AT AN OBSCURE RAILROAD WHISTLESTOP IN THE WASTES OF the Egyptian desert, the tide of World War II turned. True enough, Nazi spearheads had failed to take Moscow, capital of the Soviet Union, before the grueling winter of 1941 set in. However, the Germans had penetrated deep into the vastness of Russia and planned to renew their offensive with the spring thaw in 1942.

The first real strategic defeat of the German war machine on land during World War II occurred at El Alamein, 75 years ago this month. A desert war of attrition had built to a crescendo as the British Eighth Army defended the approach to the Egyptian capital of Cairo, only 60 miles to the east, against the vaunted Afrika Korps, under General Erwin Rommel. General Claude Auchinleck should receive credit for choosing El Alamein to make the desperate British and Commonwealth stand. His flanks were anchored on either side by the Mediterranean Sea and the impassable salt marshes of the extensive Qattara Depression.

By October 1942, however, British Prime Minister Winston Churchill and Field Marshal Sir Alan Brooke, chief of the Imperial General Staff, had lost confidence in Auchinleck. He was replaced at the head of the Eighth Army by the dynamic, self-confident, and hard-driving General Bernard Law Montgomery. The British had stopped Rommel's progress toward Cairo at the First Battle of El Alamein in July. Then, after receiving reinforcements that included 300 new American-built M4 Sherman medium tanks acquired through Lend-Lease, Montgomery launched the offensive at El Alamein on October 23. It was a tremendous risk.

Fate may have actually played a role in the ensuing Allied victory. When the Eighth Army artillery barked to signal the start of the battle, Rommel was ill in Germany. Within hours, his second in command, General Georg Stumme, was dead of a heart attack. Command of the Afrika Korps fell to General Ritter von Thoma, and the coordination of the German response to the offensive suffered. German tank strength was whittled away during a dozen subsequent days of fighting. An initial strength of 500 tanks dwindled to only 30 serviceable vehicles as the Germans also had to contend with shortages of men and equipment due to supply lines that stretched across the Mediterranean through trackless miles of desert and were constantly harassed by Allied planes and submarines. Eventually, they were compelled to abandon key defensive positions.

By early November, the Afrika Korps was in full retreat across 1,000 miles of previously conquered territory. The British had captured 9,000 prisoners, including von Thoma. On November 4, British Army headquarters in Cairo issued a communiqué announcing that the Germans were on the run and reporting that they were being "relentlessly attacked by our land forces, and by the Allied air force, by day and night." In response, King George VI sent a congratulatory message that read in part, "The Eighth Army ... has dealt the Axis a blow of which the importance cannot be exaggerated."

Four days later, Allied forces landed in the west at Oran, Algiers, and Casablanca. Operation Torch opened a second front in North Africa, and Axis forces were inexorably pressed in the vise. Total victory was achieved on May 13, 1943, when the remaining Axis troops in North Africa surrendered in Tunisia. Field Marshal Harold Alexander, commander of the 18th Army Group, reported to London, "We are masters of the Mediterranean shores." Montgomery became a national hero and went on to command Allied ground forces in Western Europe.

Coupled with the great Soviet victory at Stalingrad in early 1943, the defeat in North Africa doomed the Axis—and the turning point had come at El Alamein.

Michael E. Haskew

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Outnumbered and Outgunned

USS *Houston* fought to the very last in the murky waters off Java's Sunda Strait.

THE HEAVY CRUISER USS HOUSTON VENTURED INTO THE SUNDA STRAIT OFF the coast of Java on the dark night of February 28, 1942, and was never heard from again. It was not until 3½ years later that the story of her fate was revealed by the surviving members of her crew after their release from Japanese prison camps.

Houston's career began in 1933, when newly elected President Franklin Roosevelt was piped aboard for a 12,000-mile cruise. Roosevelt enjoyed the cruise so much that he took another one a few years later. Reviewing the fleet from the bridge of the cruiser, the president enthused, "I feel this ship is home." In honor of her history with the president, *Houston* became known as the "Little Flagship of the Fleet."

In November 1940, *Houston* relieved *Augusta* as flagship of the American Asiatic Fleet. She operated in the Manila Bay area, carrying out target practice and tactical maneuvers with *Marblehead* and other ships of the fleet. All the American ships were constantly engaged in preparing for war. In October 1941, *Houston* entered Cavite Navy Yard for installation of new anti-aircraft guns and searchlights. She had been slated to leave the yard by the middle of December. Toward the end of November, however, warnings were received advising the cruiser to be ready to sail "at any time—anywhere." Work on the ship was speeded up to 24 hours a day. On the afternoon of November 28, *Houston* prepared to leave Cavite and clear Manila Bay as soon as possible.

Two days later, *Houston* sailed from Manila to Iloilo in the central Philippines. Upon arrival, a daytime air patrol was established from dawn to dusk. *Houston's*

commanding officer, Captain Albert H. Rooks, also ordered an antisubmarine patrol every night. The cruiser's anti-aircraft batteries were manned day and night. The extra caution was justified when, on the morning of December 8, Rooks was informed that hostilities had begun with Japan. *Houston* hoisted anchor and barely cleared the harbor entrance before gunfire was heard. A ship was observed burning in the distance.

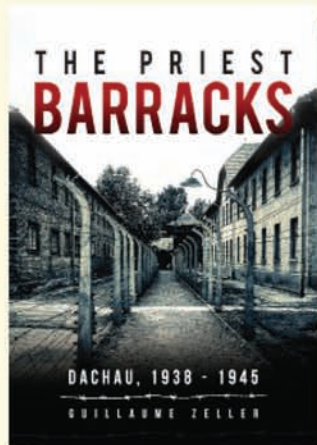
Rooks proceeded to Manila Bay to help convoy Allied supply ships in the southern waters. During the following month, *Houston* was constantly busy escorting convoys between Port Darwin, Australia, and Surabaya, Java. There was no time for liberty, and a constant watch was maintained. The cruiser's scout planes were in the air all day, and the ship was at general quarters most of the time.

On February 3, 1942, *Houston* joined a combined Allied strike force of American, British, Dutch, and Australian ships assembled at Surabaya. Rear Admiral Karel Doorman of the Royal Netherlands

Navy commanded the force, which consisted of four cruisers and seven destroyers. That same night, the force sailed for Macassar Strait on a mission to intercept a Japanese convoy reported to be near Balikpapan, Borneo.

Artist John Hamilton captures the chaos of the night action at the Battle of Sunda Strait in this painting as searchlights stab into the darkness, muzzles flash, and explosions rip through warships and transports.

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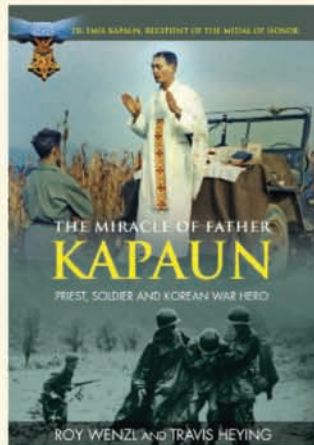
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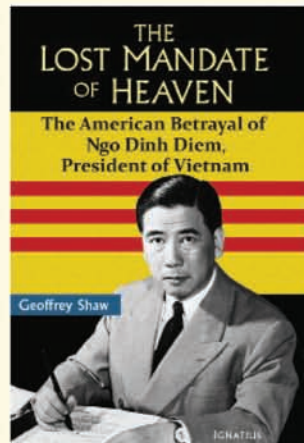


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ABOVE: The U.S. Navy cruiser *Houston* and the Australian cruiser *Perth* ride peacefully at anchor in the harbor at Darwin, Australia. This photo was taken two weeks before both warships were lost in action against the Japanese at the Battle of Sunda Strait. **RIGHT:** In this photo taken in the early 1930s off the coast of Chefoo, China, antiaircraft gunners aboard the cruiser USS *Houston* man their weapons during a training exercise.



The next morning, several groups of enemy planes were spotted off the port beam. *Houston* increased speed and the crew manned their air-defense stations. Japanese bombers commenced attacking from an altitude of 9,000 feet, singling out *Houston* and *Marblehead* as their chief targets. *Houston* opened fire with her 5-inch guns. During the final enemy attack, a bomb exploded near *Houston's* aft turret, setting off ammunition and starting a serious fire. Forty-eight men were killed and another 20 injured. *Marblehead* was also hit by two bombs and badly damaged.

The two ships limped into Tjilatjap, Java, for repairs. The dead were buried in the local cemetery and attempts were made to fix the structural damage to both cruisers. Unfortunately, facilities at the port were very poor, and *Houston's* crew was unable to make the damaged turret operational again. Nevertheless, the cruiser was ordered back to Port Darwin for more escort duty.

On February 15, *Houston* joined the USS *Peary* and two Australian corvettes to transport American and Australian troops to Koepang, Timor. The convoy had only been underway a short time when a Japanese flying boat appeared. It was quickly driven off by gunfire, but the convoy's position had been discovered. The next morning the Japanese dispatched 36 land-based bombers and 10 sea planes to intercept the Allied ships.

Rooks maneuvered *Houston* in and out of the transport column, repelling wave after wave of enemy planes and firing more than 900 rounds in less than 45 minutes. The Japanese planes eventually gave up attacking *Houston* and went after the transports instead. By then the enemy planes had already dropped most of their bombs, and the attack failed. The Japanese nicknamed *Houston* the "Gray Ghost." She seemed to be living a charmed life, but her luck would not last much longer.

On February 18, *Houston* left Port Darwin for Surabaya. She arrived five days later and joined another combined Allied fleet. The next morning, nine Japanese bombers approached the naval base from the southwest. *Houston* opened fire when the enemy aircraft were within range. For the next three days, the ship was under constant air attack.

On the afternoon of February 26, the weary Allied ships put to sea in search of enemy convoys. The next evening, British destroyers signaled that they had spotted enemy ships. To the left, almost dead ahead, were two columns of Japanese cruisers and destroyers. The masts of numerous transports could be seen in the distance. The Allies immediately set a course parallel to the enemy fleet.

As *Houston* rounded into column, the Japanese opened fire. The American cruiser returned fire with her 98-inch batteries, hitting the farthest enemy cruiser and setting it on fire. The action became general. The British cruiser *Exeter* suffered a hit to her boiler room and dropped out of the fight; the Dutch destroyer *Kortenaer* was struck by a torpedo, jackknifed, and sank in less than a minute. Moments later, the British destroyer *Electra* was blasted out of the water and sank within seconds.

The Allies broke off the engagement and headed back to Surabaya. While steaming on a westerly course paralleling the Java coast, the British destroyer *Jupiter* struck a mine and erupted into flames. Rooks steered *Houston* out of the dangerously shallow water and away from the coast. That night, the ship passed a large group of men bobbing in the water—they were the survivors of the *Kortenaer*. *Encounter* was ordered to rescue the sailors and proceed to Surabaya. The other Allied cruisers were now without any destroyer protection.

Later that same night, *Houston* sighted two enemy cruisers off her port. The Japanese ships were on an opposite course and were clearly

distinguishable in the moonlight. *Houston* opened fire with star shells, but the salvos fell short. The Japanese responded with three salvos of their own before the ships passed out of range. Minutes later, enemy destroyers launched a torpedo attack, and the Allied ships *Java* and *De Ruyter* were blasted out of the water. Before losing contact, Admiral Dorman, aboard *De Ruyter*, ordered *Houston* and the Australian cruiser *Perth* to head for Batavia, Java, and not to stand by for survivors. The two ships tore through the water at 28 knots, arriving at the Batavian port of Tandjung Priok about noon the next day.

Rooks met with the British liaison officer and received orders to proceed to Tjilatjap by way of the Sunda Strait, which supposedly was free of enemy forces. *Houston* hurriedly refueled while the crew shifted ammunition from the disabled aft turret to the forward magazines. It was nearly dark when *Houston* and *Perth* set sail for the strait. Rooks placed the ship on condition two instead of general quarters—he wanted the men to get as much rest as possible.

At 2300 hours, *Houston* was about to round the north end of St. Nicholas Point and enter Sunda Strait when *Perth* sighted the Japanese destroyer *Fubuki* and opened fire. *Fubuki* unleashed nine torpedoes at the Allied cruisers. The torpedoes missed the Allied ships but struck four Japanese transports unloading troops and supplies in Bantam Bay. The explosions illuminated the landing area, and *Houston* and *Perth* opened fire on the blazing ships. Three of the transports had to be beached, while a fourth was sunk outright.

The two Allied cruisers were suddenly surrounded by Japanese warships. Rooks realized that there was no way he could maneuver his ship in the narrow waters. *Houston* and *Perth* swung north toward the open sea.

The Japanese fleet consisted of the cruisers *Natori*, *Mogami*, and *Mikuma*, along with 10

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This Japanese painting of the Battle of Sunda Strait depicts an Imperial Navy destroyer in action as sailors man a torpedo tube and take aim at the distant cruiser USS *Houston*. The Japanese Type 97 Long Lance torpedo was deadly accurate during the naval war in the Pacific.

destroyers. The Allied cruisers were hopelessly outnumbered but determined to go down fighting. The night sky lit up with the flash of a hundred guns as both sides began a fight to the death. *Perth* was struck by four torpedoes and sank within seconds. *Houston* fought on alone, her guns heavily engaged in all directions, trapped in the middle in the Japanese fleet.

Houston was soon struck by a torpedo on her port side, killing all hands in the main engine room. The remaining engine room was able to keep *Houston* afloat, plowing through the water at 24 knots. The enemy approached as near as they dared—at times within 1,000 yards. The Japanese destroyers, shining their searchlights on the American ship, inadvertently illuminated their own transports near the beach. *Houston* immediately shifted fire to the new targets, scoring hits on a large combat ship.

Enemy salvos soon found *Houston's* range, blasting the Number Two turret. A Japanese projectile pierced the turret's face plate and set its powder ablaze. The turret officer, Ensign C.D. Smith, pulled the sprinkler lever in his booth and tumbled onto the deck. Smith grabbed a fire hose and turned it onto the gun chamber, putting out the fire, but by then most of the gun crew had died.

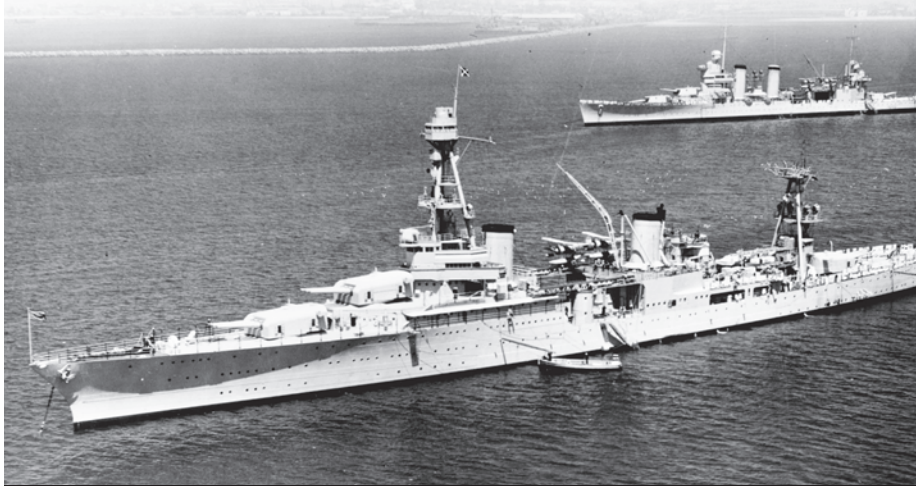
Rooks ordered all ammunition magazines flooded as it appeared that the fire was spreading forward. Turret One had no remaining ammunition except for what was already in the hoists. The turret's rangefinder was also knocked out, but Lieutenant Harold Hamlin

used his periscope and a searchlight to locate enemy targets. The turret was soon out of ammunition and had to be abandoned.

Moments later, *Houston* was blasted by two torpedoes. One exploded forward on the starboard side, while the other struck amidships. Two more torpedoes passed within 10 feet on either side. Due to the intense flames, Rooks was forced to abandon the conning tower. As he left the station he shook hands with several men and wished them luck. The captain then clambered down the ladder from the signal bridge to the communication deck. At that moment a shell exploded, scattering shrapnel in all directions. Rooks was hit and staggered around the port side of the deck, falling about 20 feet from Ensigns Smith and Herb Levitt. The two officers attempted to help the captain, but he had been fatally wounded in the chest and head.

The Japanese ships began to close in for the kill. Planes dove overhead and destroyers weaved in and out in all directions. *Houston* was forced into shallow water, where maneuvering was extremely difficult. All her communication systems were hopelessly overloaded with reports of damage and changes of targets engaged. Even though her 8-inch batteries were completely out of action, *Houston's* 5-inch and .50-caliber guns continued blasting away at the enemy. The shifting targets prevented the Americans from directing sustained fire at any particular Japanese ship.

Shortly after midnight, *Houston* developed a noticeable list to starboard, and the order was



The gleaming cruiser USS *Houston* rides at anchor off San Pedro, California, in 1935. The cruiser gained the nickname of the “Gray Ghost” during the early days of World War II in the Pacific because she seemed to elude destruction on so many occasions.

passed to abandon ship. The crew began putting on their life jackets while rafts were lowered into the water. Because of the dangerous list, several rafts were lost. Commander David Roberts cancelled the abandon ship order. The word reached some, but not all, of the men. Many sailors returned to their battle stations, while others moved to less exposed positions on the ship. The gun crews again opened fire on the enemy, which was closing in for the kill.

Houston was suddenly struck by another torpedo and a salvo of shells that blasted her superstructure, killing and wounding many of the men topside. The stricken cruiser was soon dead in the water. Again, the abandon ship order was sounded by the crew’s bugler, who was silhouetted for a moment against the sky before disappearing into the flames. Commander Arthur Maher fought his way through the fire and smoke to the forecandle. He wanted to make sure that all survivors had been provided with life jackets. Meanwhile, Roberts proceeded aft to check on conditions in that part of the ship. He was never seen or heard from again.

Houston’s list was now considerable, and it was feared she might go under at any moment. Hamlin remained on the forecandle until there were only three men left in his vicinity. He was about to abandon ship when an exploding shell knocked him down. The lieutenant managed to climb over the port side and slide down the bow, where he discovered that he could stand on the ship’s bottom. He walked toward the keel, dropped into the water, and swam as hard as he could to escape the suction of the sinking cruiser.

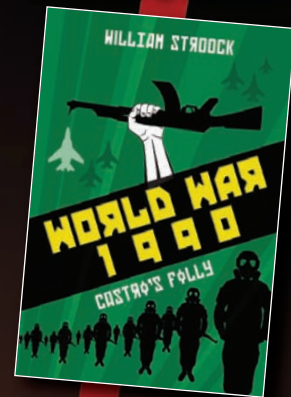
After swimming a few hundred feet, Hamlin turned around for one last look at the

Houston. The ship was full of holes. Close-range destroyer shells had plowed through one side of the cruiser and out the other. *Houston*’s big guns were askew, her turrets pointing in different directions. Hamlin vividly remembered the ship’s last moments. “I could not help thinking what the *Houston* looked like when I first joined her,” he said. “She was the president’s yacht and shined from end to end. I think I will always remember that last look. As I watched her lay down and die, she rolled over on either side and the fires went out with a loud hiss. I watched her for a few seconds, then thought about the suction and swam for all I was worth.”

Japanese searchlights were on the dying cruiser until the end. When she finally slid beneath the waves, her flag was still flying defiantly. The Japanese captured many of the men in the water and others who made it to land, where the bodies of dozens of dead enemy soldiers and tons of supplies had washed ashore—*Houston*’s last battle prize. In all, *Houston* sank seven warships, including cruisers, destroyers, and a seaplane tender, exacting such a heavy toll on the enemy that the Japanese officers were accused of lying when they stated that only two Allied cruisers had been involved in the battle.

A total of 368 *Houston* survivors were captured by the Japanese. Of this number, 76 died as prisoners of war. The balance of the ship’s 1,000-man crew went down with her in the Sunda Strait. For his role in the action, Captain Rooks was posthumously awarded the Medal of Honor, and the cruiser also received the Presidential Unit Citation and two battle stars for her service in the Philippines and Netherlands East Indies engagements. □

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Innovative Soviet Fighter Ace

Alexander Pokryshkin was second only to Ivan Kozedub in Soviet aerial victories during World War II.

ACCORDING TO CONTEMPORARY SOVIET NEWS SOURCES, FIGHTER

Ace Alexander Pokryshkin was the most famous pilot in the Red Air Force during World War II. He was the first member of the Soviet armed forces to be awarded the title Hero of The Soviet Union three times.

This hero criticized the aerial combat tactics of the Red Air Force as outmoded and dangerous. He proposed a new approach and was rewarded by being grounded, reassigned, having his Communist Party membership card taken away, and a court martial scheduled. Contradicting air combat doctrine in the totalitarian world of the Soviet Union entailed huge risks, including arrest, torture, imprisonment, and execution, but Pokryshkin had supporters in the right places. His new tactics were analyzed and approved; he was then not only reinstated, but rewarded with a promotion.

The future three-time Hero of the Soviet Union was born in Novonikolayevsk, now Novosibirsk, in Siberia on March 6, 1913. The son of a bricklayer, he attended an air show when he was 12 and began dreaming of becoming an aviator. The dream never left.

At age 15 he enrolled in a preparatory course at a factory school, and upon completing it in the fall of 1928, he and his fellow students learned the basics of instrument making and began work in a factory tool department. He became an apprentice

roof builder and demonstrated the tool-handling abilities and skills he had inherited from his father. His future appeared to be set.

While working at his trade, he longed to become a pilot, continually fascinated by the sounds of airplane engines. He began to think about learning to fly, and while working at his job and attending evening classes at the factory school, he also began attending classes on becoming a glider pilot. The school was operated by the Society for the Promotion of Air and Chemical Defense (Osoaviakhim). He finished this school in 1932 and soon set out with a Young Communist League ticket in his pocket to join the Combined Flying-Technical School in Perm.

However, he was not admitted to the pilot school, but was instead placed in a class for flight mechanics to learn to perform maintenance on aircraft engines. Although disappointed, he kept his dream of flying and wondered what kind of pilot he would be if he did not know about his plane's engines.

While in flight mechanic school, Pokryshkin joined a gliding group and learned how to fly gliders on Sundays. The group flew ancient US-4 gliders and climbed to a maximum altitude of 600 feet. Gaining experience in aerodynamics and handling the controls of a motorless plane in the air, the glider group provided him with training that was not available at the factory school. Soaring above the ground fostered the qualities of daring, resourcefulness, and self-confidence that are essential to being a pilot.

A good flight mechanic, Pokryshkin was sent to a refresher course in Leningrad. While there, he continued gliding with the Duderhof Gliding Club. After completing the refresher course, he was assigned to an air force unit near Krasnodar as a flight mechanic.

He made many requests to attend flying school but was denied each time. His desire to become a pilot went unabated, and in his spare time he learned all the rules of flying a training aircraft. No matter where he was, he occupied his time studying aviation. At the same time, others who had joined the service were admitted to flying school which increased his frustration, but also his desire to fly. His determination drove him to build a small trainer plane so that he



TOP: Alexander Pokryshkin adjusts his parachute harness as he stands near his fighter plane at a Red Air Force base. **ABOVE:** Pokryshkin was second only to Ivan Kozedub as the leading Soviet fighter ace of World War II and developed innovative tactics in the fight against the Luftwaffe.

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Several Red Air Force pilots stand with a Bell P-39 Airacobra fighter plane. The P-39 was supplied by the United States through Lend-Lease, and though it was a disappointment in most dogfighting scenarios it proved a robust ground attack aircraft.

could sit at the controls and go through the motions of taking off and landing.

Pokryshkin graduated from the factory school in 1933 and started his service as a flight mechanic. He did his job well and by December 1934 was promoted to be the senior aviation mechanic of the 74th Rifle Division. He held that rank until December 1938. Even though he yearned to be a pilot, he applied his skills and invented improvements to the Soviet ShKAS machine gun and the R-5 reconnaissance aircraft.

While on vacation during the winter of 1938, he found a way to circumvent the system for pilot selection. He enrolled in the Krasnodar Flying Club on October 3, 1938, and three days later made his first solo flight. He passed the required test after only 17 days, and doing so automatically made him eligible for flight school. His success at the club impressed his commander so much that he arranged for a transfer to the Kachinskaya School of Aviation in the Crimea. Pokryshkin was so anxious to begin the training that he boarded a train without packing a suitcase. He graduated with top honors in 1939, was given the rank of senior lieutenant, and was assigned to the 55th Fighter Regiment. His superiors wanted him to take the position of instructor, but he refused.

On June 22, 1941, German forces attacked the Soviet Union in Operation Barbarossa. Pokryshkin was stationed in Moldavia close to the border with Germany. His first day of combat was a disaster. While in the air, he spotted a plane that he had never seen, attacked it, and

shot it down, belatedly noticing it had the Soviet red stars on the wings. It was a Soviet Sukhoi Su-2 light bomber. Horrified and frantic, he flew in front of all the other Soviet pilots who were lining up on other bombs, thwarting any other deadly mistakes.

Back in the air the next day, he and his wingman faced five German Messerschmitt Me-109 fighters. Outnumbered and with little time to think, he decided to make a frontal attack, knowing that his wingman was there for support. As he rapidly approached a German at tremendous speed, a head-on collision appeared imminent, but the enemy pilot went into a climb to the right. Flying a MiG-3 fighter, Pokryshkin made a climbing turn and approached his foe from the rear. However, German fighters were on his tail, firing at him.

To avoid being shot down, he yanked on the stick, slowing his plane so much that the Germans flew past and underneath him. He gained enough time to see his wingman withdrawing from the fight with engine trouble. He saw a German fighter above him about to open fire, but he avoided it and then dived and opened fire at close range, hitting the Me-109 and causing it to burst into flames and plummet to the earth. This was his first kill.

Thrilled with his victory, he relaxed briefly only to see several German cannon shells ripping through his wings and fuel tank. His plane turned over and dropped quickly. After a struggle, he managed to straighten it out. He then put his plane into a dive and started hedgehopping, limping back to his base, and

ending his first fight with German pilots in dramatic fashion. By July 3, he had scored several victories and had been shot down behind German lines but managed to make it safely back to base.

During the first few weeks of the war, Pokryshkin saw firsthand that Soviet combat doctrine was outdated, and he proposed a new approach for fighter tactics. He faced court-martial. Fortunately, a top secret directive was issued, ordering dramatic changes in tactics. After pointing out certain deficiencies and poor organization in combat operations, the directive endorsed the deployment of fighters in groups of two and four aircraft; echeloned formations; techniques for mutual support, coordination, proper escort, and coverage of ground attack aircraft and bombers; vertical maneuver; and full exploitation of altitude. The directive acknowledged the superiority of the enemy's air tactics and called for Soviet pilots to study and emulate them. These new ideas were similar to those Pokryshkin had advocated, and once they were approved he was promoted to squadron commander in the 4th Air Army.

Pokryshkin welcomed this new challenge. During the early days of the war, thousands of Soviet planes were destroyed on the ground. The results devastated Soviet capabilities to combat the Germans in the air. Luftwaffe pilots outclassed their Soviet counterparts with superior tactics. Pokryshkin, while training in various air academies and flight training schools, found lots of materials that advocated outdated concepts about air combat. To help improve Soviet tactics, he created his own maxims: "Altitude, Speed, Maneuver, Fire."

For Pokryshkin, altitude was the primary element because it provided Soviet pilots an advantage: freedom to search for the enemy and to choose the best option for attack. From altitude, the Soviet pilot had the initiative. After a dive on the enemy, the speed acquired in the vertical axis gave the pilot the crucial factor of time—often just a few seconds—to make his attack. Altitude and speed provided a set of flexible options of maneuver in either the vertical or horizontal axis. Pokryshkin also emphasized the importance of close-in fire on enemy aircraft. The flying skill and patience required for this discipline brought obvious rewards and greater accuracy and concentration of firepower.

The new tactics entailed a pendulum effect. Flying above the enemy at a great height, the Soviet fighters would dive to the attack at high speed. Afterward, they climbed and repeated their attacks. From the ground, the fighters appeared to be moving like a pendulum,

swooping down on the enemy and then climbing to an altitude that enabled them to continue the attacks using Pokryshkin's tactics. This formula allowed Soviet fighter pilots to exhibit a more competent and aggressive posture, attacking from altitude and providing cover for one another. Because of the new tactics, victories increased and losses diminished.

From the beginning of the war to the summer of 1942, Pokryshkin and his comrades flew Mikoyan MiG-3 and Yakovlev YAK-1 fighters. The determination, skill, and courage of the Soviet pilots in these planes translated into aerial combat victories, but they were outclassed by German planes. The devastation from the initial German attacks of Operation Barbarossa left the Soviet Air Force short of planes, parts, ammunition, and everything needed to take on the Germans. Things changed when the first American Bell P-39 Airacobra fighters began arriving.

As part of the Lend-Lease program, the U.S. shipped the P-39 to the British Royal Air Force, which rejected it. The RAF determined that the plane's performance was deficient. However, the new fighter was a welcome addition to Soviet air capabilities. Soviet pilots liked the cannon-armed P-39. They developed aerial fighting tactics and scored victories over Ger-



His P-39 emblazoned with victory starts stands in the background as Soviet fighter ace Alexander Pokryshkin talks with ground personnel after returning from a mission against the Germans on the Eastern Front during World War II.

man planes.

Flying the American-built plane for the first time in the Kuban region, Pokryshkin showed

his fighter pilot skills, recording 10 victories over German Me-109s from April 9-24, a twin-engine Junkers Ju-88 bomber on April 29, and



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another Me-109 on April 30, for a total of 12 in a month.

During the intense fighting in the Kuban, Pokryshkin employed a formation that became known as the “bookshelf.” Planes were arranged like a set of shelves with each maintaining a definite height above the one below, each having a broad front, and each with a definite task. This formation had its advantages. If an enemy tried to escape the first shelf, it would be attacked by the second shelf and then the third. This new formation also became known as the “Kuban Stepladder.”

Not only did Pokryshkin change Soviet fighter tactics, he also studied his planes, reviewed his engagements by drawing them on paper, analyzed what happened, and determined how he could improve. He lectured and taught new pilots and seasoned veterans about the technical aspects of aerial combat. He borrowed ideas from others such as Major V.V. Sokolov, who violently and instantaneously attacked the enemy on sight. Pokryshkin studied Sokolov’s style, trying to learn how to attack with violence and abruptness. According to Sokolov, enemy pilots, when faced with such an attack, lost their will to fight.

The Soviet high command issued a directive ordering its best pilots to take on “free hunt” missions against important German lines of communication. In fighter units these missions were flown as a rule by a pair of fighters, and in ground attack and bomber units by single crews. The free hunt mission was difficult and presented enormous risks for the pilots. There was a slogan for these actions: “Without risk, there will be no victory.”

Pokryshkin took part in free hunts, which he called “roving missions.” He described the missions and the piloting skills needed: “Flying in couples or pairs of couples, they cross the front line and penetrate the enemy’s territory to a great depth. There they lurk in ambush, attacking the enemy’s aircraft by surprise and nipping his plans in the bud. They fall on transport planes and staff planes and terrorize the enemy over a wide area. The roving pilot is [engaged in] the sport of chance; all sorts of contingencies may arise. He must therefore have the utmost confidence in himself, in his aircraft, and in his partner. He must feel, if one may say so, sole master of the air, or something like it.”

“When on a roving mission, the fighter pilot is thrown upon his own resources, and can count only on himself,” Pokryshkin continued. “He chooses his targets, which must be worthy of the effort he makes and the risk he incurs. Sober judgment, daring cunning, and a perfect

knowledge of the aircraft are essential requisites for roving tactics. These tactics can be mastered and perfected only by a flyer who constantly studies the tactics of the enemy, systematically and critically analyzes his own actions, and who in addition possesses considerable fighting experience.”

Free hunt missions extended 60 to 90 miles behind the German front line. There was no radio communication with ground monitoring stations and no one to alert pilots of the situation in target areas. They could not anticipate any support in an emergency.

According to his own recollection, Pokryshkin took part in many free hunting missions and scored his 50th victory against a German Fieseler-Storch liaison plane. He wrote: “These machines, which resemble dragonflies, maintained service between German staffs, carrying urgent operational documents and officers. I spied out the route some of these liaison planes were taking and got my prey.”

Motivation for his pilots occupied his thoughts from the beginning to the end of the war. He wrote: “The morale of a fighter pilot is one of his principal weapons. It is one of the decisive factors of success, as all of us realized on the first day of the war. That a good pilot must have a thorough knowledge of technique goes without saying. But besides the military factor there are factors of a moral order. This moral force cannot be weighed in the scales of war, but its influence is immense.”

Scoring combat victories, teaching new and experienced pilots improved tactics, and motivating them gained Pokryshkin a solid reputation with his students, peers, and superior officers. On one occasion, new pilots assigned to his unit awaited their instruction to begin and asked who their instructor would be. General Ibragim Dzusov told the group, “You will train by the Pokryshkin system.”

Pokryshkin began his training regimen by familiarizing the students with their fighters. He explained the formula: altitude, speed, maneuver, and fire. Holding a model of the fighter in their hands, the students went through various maneuvers in shooting down the enemy. His charges also took a course in shooting at moveable dummy planes. “The battle training of a fighter pilot, as I see it, is complex process,” he offered. “The chief thing is to instill in him confidence in victory.”

Alexander Pokryshkin claimed 59 victories, 47 of them in the cockpit of a P-39. His first victory in a P-39 took place on April 9, 1943, when he shot down an Me-109. Three days later, he shot down four Me-109s. His successes were well known by the Luftwaffe—to

the point that its pilots refused to engage Soviet fighters if they knew he was possibly in the air. When his unit was transferred to Ukraine, he used the radio signal Sotka (hundred) because he knew the Luftwaffe had ordered its pilots to stay on the ground if they knew he was aloft. His unit’s success brought the honor of designation as the 16th Guards Fighter Regiment.

Pokryshkin claimed only six victories during the last two years of the war. Many of his kills had come at a time when the Soviet Air Force was fighting at a great disadvantage during the first two years of the war. In addition to the honor of being named a Hero of the Soviet Union, he earned many other Soviet decorations and several from other countries, including the Distinguished Service Medal from the U.S. Army Air Forces.

In the postwar years, Pokryshkin’s career practically ended because of his preference for non-Soviet aircraft. He persisted and in 1948 graduated from the Frunze Military Academy. From 1949-1955, he was deputy commander of the 33rd Fighter Air Defense Regiment and commander of the 88th Fighter Aviation Corps in Rzhev. Despite his stellar war record and reputation, he was repeatedly passed over for promotion. Only after the death of Premier Josef Stalin did he regain favor in the military and promotion to air marshal. In 1957, he graduated from the General Staff Academy.

Pokryshkin’s highest position was that of president of the DOSAAF (1972-1981), a mostly civilian organization that was tasked with training young civilians and preparing them for service with the air force. However, he was again shunned because of his honesty. He had refused to write about or support the glorification of Premier Leonid Brezhnev’s role in the Battle of the Kuban. He died on November 13, 1985, at the age of 72.

Although ostracized and shunned by the Communist hierarchy after World War II, Pokryshkin had contributed mightily the victory on the Eastern Front. He may have been shunned by officials in Moscow, but his popularity among his colleagues and throughout the Soviet Union was undeniable. In his hometown, a street, a square, and a subway station are named in his honor. In 1978, he even had a minor planet named for him, 3348 Pokryshkin. □

Christopher J. Chlon is a retired purchasing professional whose work has appeared in numerous historical and trade magazines. He is a graduate of Loyola University in New Orleans and resides in Fort Wayne, Indiana.

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Disaster at Beda Littoria

A British Special Operations raid intended to kill or capture Erwin Rommel went terribly wrong.

ONE NIGHT IN MID-OCTOBER 1941, A BRITISH ARMY INTELLIGENCE OFFICER disguised as a Senussi Arab was dropped by parachute behind the German lines in the Italian colony of Libya.

He was Captain John E. “Jock” Haselden of the famed Long-Range Desert Group (LRDG), a specialized British force led by Lt. Col. David Stirling that conducted reconnaissance patrols and hit-and-run raids against enemy installations in North Africa. Bearded and weather beaten, Haselden wore tattered Arab robes and carried a staff while venturing out alone on his intelligence-gathering forays. Born and raised in Egypt and a former Cairo cotton broker, he was fluent in Arabic.

His mission on this particular night was a hazardous one—to locate the headquarters of the commander of the German forces in North Africa, the legendary General Erwin Rommel. Haselden was to lay the groundwork for a bold attempt—tied to a major offensive by the British Eighth Army—to either capture or kill Rommel and his cantankerous Italian field commander, General Ettore Bastico. For several months, Rommel had proved to be a skillful and formidable foe by outwitting and outmaneuvering the British during the seesawing Western Desert campaigns.

Based on radio intercepts of German message traffic, “Sigint” (Signals Intelligence) at the British Middle Eastern Command headquarters in Cairo had come to the conclusion that a remote village named Beda Littoria in the northern Libyan hump was the probable site of Rommel’s headquarters.

After burying his parachute in the sand, Captain Haselden trudged to the outskirts of the dusty village a dozen miles south of the Mediterranean coast, west of Derna and not far from the site of the ancient city of Cyrene, the birthplace of Hannibal, to verify the Sigint information. Stealthily, he trained his field glasses on stuccoed Italian colonial buildings clustered in olive and cypress

groves and groups of German troops.

Off to one side, Haselden could see a villa and an official building that the Italians called the Prefettura. Parked around it were about 20 Afrika Korps communications trucks, while a steady stream of vehicles disgorged and retrieved officers and dispatch riders. The British officer gasped when he spotted General Rommel striding out of the Prefettura and driving off in a command car. Haselden had hit the jackpot; apparently Beda Littoria was indeed the headquarters of the “Desert Fox.”

Haselden hastily stole away into the desert and linked up with a LRDG patrol two days later. He was whisked back to Cairo with his information, and plans and preparations were drawn up. By mounting a raid on Rommel’s headquarters, the British hoped to wreak chaos in the command system of the Afrika Korps and its Italian allies. The operation was likely to prove one of the most daring special force missions of World War II.

The British Commandos assigned to carry out the mission had come to the Mediterranean theater as part of the “Layforce” contingent led by Lt. Col. Robert E. “Lucky” Laycock, commander of Commando operations and the elite Special Boat Section there. One of his units was the



ABOVE: Lieutenant Colonel Geoffrey Keyes (upper left) lost his life in the ill-fated raid on Beda Littoria. Captain John Haselden (upper right) conducted much of the undercover work that located Rommel’s headquarters.

BELOW: The submarine HMS *Torbay* transported the British commandos to the coast of Libya. **TOP LEFT:** Commander of the German Afrika Korps, General Erwin Rommel, confers with staff officers in the desert. Unknown to the British agents who plotted to kill him, Rommel rarely visited his headquarters at Beda Littoria.



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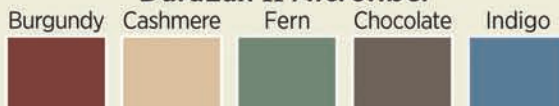
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11th (Scottish) Commando, which had practiced night landings from submarines using rubber dinghies and lightweight canvas canoes called folbots.

The idea for the raid on Rommel's headquarters 250 miles behind enemy lines had been formulated in the autumn of 1941 by temporary Lt. Col. Geoffrey Charles Tasker Keyes of the 11th Commando, the 24-year-old son of Admiral of the Fleet Sir Roger Keyes. A decorated hero of the Boxer Rebellion and the Zeebrugge and Dover naval actions in World War I, Sir Roger had been chosen by Prime Minister Winston Churchill to direct all Commando operations from Lord Louis Mountbatten's Combined Operations headquarters.

A brave, competent officer and the youngest lieutenant colonel in the British Army, Keyes led the planning for the upcoming raid—code named Operation Flipper—and insisted on leading it personally. Simultaneous actions to support the November 16-17 British offensive codenamed Operation Crusader were to be undertaken by the LRDG and the Special Air Service. The initial objectives of the Laycock-Keyes force were to attack the Italian forces' headquarters at Cyrene and destroy telephone and telegraph services; hit the Italian intelligence center at Appollonia; cut communication lines around El Faida, and assault the Afrika Korps headquarters at Beda Littoria and Rommel's villa west of the village.

Colonel Laycock, himself a gallant veteran of special operations in Libya, Rhodes, and Crete who would later win the Distinguished Service Order and lead Commandos and U.S. Rangers in the invasion of Salerno, voiced reservations about the planned mission. A London-born former subaltern in the Royal Horse Guards, he reported, "I gave it my considered opinion that the chances of being evacuated after the operation were very slender, and that the attack on General Rommel's house in particular appeared to be desperate in the extreme. This attack, even if initially successful, meant almost certain death for those who took part in it. I made these comments in the presence of Colonel Keyes, who begged me not to repeat them lest the operation be canceled."

Laycock tried several times to persuade Keyes to detail a more junior officer to lead the raid, but he refused. "On each occasion," said Laycock, "he flatly declined to consider these suggestions, saying that, as commander of his detachment, it was his privilege to lead his men into any danger that might be encountered—an answer which I consider [was] inspired by the highest traditions of the British Army.... Colonel Keyes's outstanding bravery was not



This modern illustration depicts British Commandos on the grounds of Rommel's headquarters at Beda Littoria in Libya just as their doomed mission is getting underway.

that of the unimaginative bravado who may be capable of spectacular action in moments of excitement, but that far more admirable calculated daring of one who knew only too well the odds against him." Despite his misgivings, Laycock agreed to accompany the raiding force as an observer.

On the night of Thursday-Friday, November 13-14, 1941, after a three-day voyage from Alexandria, two 1,575-ton Royal Navy submarines, HMS *Torbay* and HMS *Talisman*, carrying 60 Commandos, stood off the coast of Djebel Akhdar, 20 miles west of Appollonia, Libya. Periscope observations were made of the planned landing area. From a small cove on the shore, Captain Haselden, who had been designated to guide the raiders to Rommel's headquarters, sent a prearranged signal out to the submarines. As soon as his blinking lights were spotted, the vessels flashed back a recognition signal.

But things began to go wrong from the start. The Commandos had been trained to disembark from submarines in calm waters, but a gale was howling on the Libyan coast that night. Rough seas hampered the operation. Instead of the estimated 90 minutes, it took seven hours to get 28 men and Colonel Keyes, the operational com-

mander, ashore from the slippery deck of the first submarine, the *Torbay*.

When the *Talisman* neared the shore to disembark her Commandos, she touched bottom. In the resulting turmoil, seven landing boats with 11 men were swept overboard. Several were never seen again. A few men managed to scramble ashore, but the *Talisman* withdrew with many members of the raiding force still aboard.

Early in the morning of November 14, Keyes assembled his men in Haselden's cove, a dozen miles from Beda Littoria. All were wet, chilled to the bone, and critically short of vital weapons and equipment. The little force was considerably understrength for its mission. Keyes was furnished with directions and an Arab shepherd as his guide, while Haselden slipped away to get ready for the second part of his assignment—to blow up a German communications outpost on the same night that Keyes's team hit Rommel's headquarters.

Colonel Laycock, meanwhile, decreed that under the circumstances the Commandos' objectives must be curtailed. It was agreed that only two of the four planned attacks would be undertaken—on the communications systems at Cyrene and the German headquarters

at Beda Littoria. The plan to hit Rommel's villa was dropped.

Laycock stayed at the landing site to coordinate operations while Keyes, Captain Robin Campbell, his second in command, and the 28 Commandos set off at nightfall on November 15 for a grueling trek to their objectives. Rain poured for 48 hours, and the raiders were soaked as they splashed through ankle-deep mud, slipped on greasy rocks, and picked their way over rock-strewn sheep tracks and a 1,800-foot ridge in the darkness. Their Arab guide refused to go farther as the weather deteriorated, and morale began to flag. But Keyes's stolid resolve kept his men moving forward. By the night of November 16, the column had reached a small cave about five miles from Beda Littoria.

The Commandos spent the rest of the night and most of the following day there. Keyes stayed on the beach through the night to meet any men who might have managed to get ashore from the second submarine. The hideout was odorous and uncomfortable, but the raiders found shelter from the torrential rain and cold that had plagued them almost continually since coming ashore. They lit a fire to warm themselves and dry their clothing, cleaned their Sten submachine guns and .38-caliber pistols, and groused about the absence of the blazing sunshine that reputedly bathed the southern Mediterranean shore.

On the afternoon of November 17, Colonel Keyes made a short reconnaissance foray then briefed his men at 6 PM. He divided his small force in two, sending one half off to detonate a communications pylon near Cyrene while the rest listened to his detailed plan for the assault on Rommel's headquarters. Then, with blackened faces and wearing plimsolls (sneakers), they set off on the final stage of their mission.

The raiders bided their time during the waning daylight hours and moved forward in darkness to a ridge just above Beda Littoria. Pushing on, they reached the outskirts of the village around midnight and crept forward stealthily toward the German headquarters in the Prefettura, an austere, two-story building standing away from the main village. Keyes and Sergeant Terry were in the lead, about 50 yards ahead.

Suddenly, one of the Commandos tripped over a tin can, setting off frenzied barking from neighborhood dogs and a scream from an Arab villager. When two Italian soldiers emerged from a hut to investigate, the quick-thinking Captain Campbell shouted to them in fluent German that they were an Afrika Korps patrol. The disgruntled Italians went back into their hut.

By this time, Colonel Keyes had cut through

the wire surrounding the headquarters building. The rain that had hampered his men now yielded a dividend, confining the enemy sentries to their tents, except one. Keyes dispatched him quietly with his fighting knife, and the rest of the force joined him, carrying enough explosives to wreck both the Prefettura and a nearby power plant.

With a covering party blocking the approaches to the building and guarding the exits from neighboring structures, Keyes, Campbell, Sergeant Terry, and three other ranks crept forward through the security fence. But the mission was about to turn into a fiasco. Keyes, Campbell, and Terry planned to sneak into the Nazi headquarters. Keyes hoped to climb through a window or find a back door but a quick investigation revealed no easy access. So the raiders took the bull by the horns.

Captain Campbell pounded on the front door and demanded entry in his fluent German. When a sentry eventually opened the door, Keyes jammed his revolver in the startled soldier's ribs. But the brave, well-trained German grabbed the muzzle and backed Keyes against a wall. The colonel struggled to draw his knife while the enemy soldier shouted an alarm. The element of surprise was lost. Campbell shot the struggling German over Keyes's shoulder, and the colonel flung the door open.

The six British raiders dashed inside, and the next few minutes brought a chaos of Sten-gun and pistol fire, shouts of anguish and alarm, slamming doors, and running feet on stone steps. A duty officer had aroused sleeping Germans. A man came clattering down the stairs, but Sergeant Terry chased him off with a burst from his Sten gun.

The raiders checked one of many rooms off the main hall and found it empty. Then a door on the left side of the hall started to open. A light shone inside, and the Commandos could hear the occupants moving about. Keyes kicked the door open wide to see about 10 Germans in helmets frozen in shock. After the colonel emptied his Colt .45 automatic pistol into the room, Campbell appeared at his elbow and said he would toss a hand grenade in. Keyes shut the door while Campbell pulled the pin, reopened it, and the grenade and a burst of Sten-gun fire went in.

The grenade exploded with a loud crash, but some of the surviving Germans fired back at the raiders. A single shot hit Keyes just above the heart. Campbell and Terry quickly carried him outside, and he died within a few minutes. An eerie silence then fell upon the Prefettura and every light went out.

Captain Campbell stole back into the house

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to check for further signs of enemy activity and then ran around to the rear of the building where the covering party had been left. The Commandos were there, crouching in the darkness, but they heard no password and thought that Campbell was a German. A Sten gun round smashed his shin bone. He ordered his men to withdraw and leave him behind. The raiding party was left without an officer.

Sergeant Terry took over. He brought up enough explosives to demolish the Prefettura but discovered that the fuses were rain-soaked and unusable. The only damage that the raiders could inflict now was by dropping a grenade down the breather pipe and blowing up the main generator and by destroying some Afrika Korps vehicles. Terry and the other survivors then withdrew, hoping that the enemy would tend their wounded. Several Commandos had been captured by Germans alerted to their assault.

By the following evening of November 18, the 22 survivors reached Colonel Laycock at the shore. Then followed several frustrating hours while their signals to HMS *Torbay*—surfaced 400 yards out—were unacknowledged. Belated return signals to the exhausted Commandos were incomprehensible, and no boats came in to fetch them. So, just before dawn the following morning, Laycock and the survivors filed

into a wadi to lay low for the day and plan how to get to the British lines. But hostile Arabs and then Italian troops attacked them. Laycock ordered the men to split into small groups and disperse before an inevitable and more serious assault came from the Germans.

All of the Commandos except two were eventually seized by the Germans or shot by Arabs. Colonel Campbell was carried off to a German prison camp, where he was well treated but had to have his shattered leg amputated.

Colonel Laycock and Sergeant Terry managed to get clear of the wadi and spent 41 wearying days trekking across the desert toward the Eighth Army lines. They were given food by friendly Senussi tribesmen, and water was not a problem because it rained almost every day. They reached the British lines on Christmas Day. Captain Haselden also managed to get away from the wadi and linked up with an LRDG patrol. After a rest, Laycock was flown back to England to take command of the Special Service Brigade. The intrepid Haselden, who had been promoted to lieutenant colonel, was killed in a raid on Tobruk in September 1942.

Operation Crusader, the big offensive by Lt. Gen. Sir Alan Cunningham's Eighth Army for which the Keyes raid was a diversion, had meanwhile got underway. One hundred thou-

sand men, more than 700 Cruiser and Matilda tanks, and 5,000 artillery units, armored cars, trucks, and personnel carriers rolled forward during the weekend of November 16-17.

A masterpiece of deception, Crusader was a wide-scale armored sweep toward besieged Tobruk from the south while British Commonwealth infantry forces pinned down Axis positions on the Libya-Egypt frontier. The Afrika Korps and its Italian allies were driven back to Benghazi with severe losses, and the British kept up the pressure through December.

Rommel was forced to abandon Cyrenaica, the eastern province of Libya, and fall back to defensive positions at El Agheila. But the Desert Fox quickly recovered. The gallant General Cunningham, who had defeated the Italians in Ethiopia but who lacked a grasp of armored warfare, suffered a nervous breakdown. He was soon replaced by the vigorous, self-confident Lt. Gen. Sir Neil Ritchie. From Operation Crusader until the climactic Battle of El Alamein in October 1942, the desert war continued to rage back and forth.

While it was a daring operation carried out with heroism, the raid on Rommel's headquarters had turned into a costly and unnecessary disaster. British intelligence was correct that the Prefettura in Beda Littoria had been used by the



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general, but only briefly. It was only by chance that Captain Haselden had spotted him there; Rommel was making a routine visit to the Afrika Korps quartermaster general's staff, which had taken over the building.

The Desert Fox had long since shifted his lair to a location much closer to the front lines. In fact, and unknown at the British intelligence offices in Cairo, Rommel was not even in North Africa at the time of the raid. He had been flown to Rome two weeks before to rest and celebrate his 50th birthday.

Toward the British raiders who had sought to capture or kill him, Rommel reacted with characteristic chivalry. He defied Nazi dictator Adolf Hitler's newly issued directive ordering the immediate execution of captured Commandos and arranged for Colonel Keyes to be buried with full honors. The German general's chaplain conducted the ceremony as Keyes was laid to rest beside four Afrika Korps soldiers killed in the raid. Rommel gave a funeral oration and, in an unprecedented soldierly gesture, pinned his own Iron Cross on the Briton's body.

The young colonel was subsequently gazetted on June 19, 1942, and awarded a posthumous Victoria Cross, Britain's highest decoration for valor. A memorial service in London's Westminster Abbey was attended by some of the Com-

Australian War Memorial



The grim surroundings of a German prison camp in North Africa are shown here. All but two of the 22 raiders who survived the Commandos' attempt to assassinate General Erwin Rommel were captured by the Germans.

mandos who had survived the doomed raid. Colonel Keyes's remains were later reburied at the Eighth Army cemetery in Benghazi.

The raid served to point up flaws in the training and tactics of British Special Forces units. Eighteen months after the raising of the Commandos, and despite the fighting spirit displayed in Beda Littoria, there was still much to be learned. Inadequate planning and faulty intelligence were stressed as the Combined Opera-

tions chiefs critiqued the mission.

The Commandos learned their bitter lessons and went on to serve in many World War II campaigns as a peerless special force—mentoring the U.S. Rangers and setting an example for other elite assault units in the years to come. □

Frequent contributor Michael D. Hull has written on numerous topics for WWII History. He resides in Enfield, Connecticut.

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LEFT: American soldiers queue up for donuts and coffee at a Red Cross clubmobile.

BELOW: Jill Knappenberger's Red Cross clubmobile crosses the Moselle River in March 1945.

BOTTOM: Jill Pitts Knappenberger served with the Red Cross during the war in Europe.



Clubmobile Gal

A young woman's service with the Red Cross in Europe included both harrowing and rewarding experiences.

DURING WORLD WAR II, AMERICAN WOMEN FLOCKED TO BE A PART OF THE war effort. They served as factory workers, government agency clerks, WAVES or WAACS, and artists copying propaganda posters. Many young women found that the American Red Cross offered non-nurses a unique opportunity. Jill Pitts Knappenberger was one of them.

Jill Knappenberger



In the fall of 1944, after two months of serving donuts, coffee, cigarettes, and Lifesavers to Allied combat troops in France's Brest peninsula, 26-year-old American Red Cross (ARC) volunteer Jill Pitts maneuvered her 2.5-ton GMC truck, the clubmobile Cheyenne, through mud and rain to a chateau two miles southwest of Bastogne, Belgium. The journey for Jill and her crewmates, Helen Anderson and Phyllis McLaughlin—assigned to VIII Corps—ended on October 1 after four days and 600 miles traveling with a 135-vehicle military convoy.

After checking in with the 35th Special Services Division, the women started on their usual tasks, cleaning inside the truck, ensuring their supply of kerosene for their primus stove used for

heating water, and making donuts for the next day using the Cheyenne's built-in electric donut-making machine.

Nine hundred GIs awaited the Cheyenne the next day. While the built-in Victrola blasted V-disc records through loudspeakers and GIs surveyed a collection of newspapers, Jill, Helen, and Phyl heated water for the 50-cup coffee urns and served the snacks. The Cheyenne's state register—a large bound book with the states listed in alphabetical order for troops to inscribe their names, hometowns, and divisions—enabled the GIs to locate familiar names. The troops were grateful that General Dwight D. Eisenhower, commander of Allied forces in Europe, directed the ARC to send



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Jill chats with a GI as soldiers line up for coffee and donuts in front of her clubmobile named Cheyenne.

clubmobiles packed with food and pretty young women to the European Theater soon after D-Day.

The wet 1944 autumn posed problems at mealtime. The women ate quickly to avoid rain overflowing their mess kits. On November 20, Jill, Phyl, and Helen moved on to a small town and apartment 15 miles from Bastogne. They ate in a mess hall for the first time since July 31, when Jill piloted the Cheyenne off an LST (Landing Ship, Tank) onto Utah Beach in Normandy in complete darkness. The apartment still had furniture, electricity, a back balcony, and a bathtub, a welcome relief after 15 weeks with only two hot showers. For humor, Jill hung a framed and autographed oil painting of Hitler that a colonel had given her.

On December 5, 1944, James L. Brown, director of the Clubmobile Department, sent the women a memo with General George S. Patton, Jr.'s comments about the ARC's work with the Third Army: "In my opinion the Clubmobile Girls of the American Red Cross have performed and are performing a very major work in maintaining the morale of the frontline troops and in keeping before the eyes of our soldiers the best traditions of American womanhood. The Third Army joins me in a respectful and enthusiastic endorsement of the American Red Cross."

On December 11, Jill learned that her twin brother Jack, Captain John Joseph Pitts III, commander of Battery A, 590th Field Artillery, 106th Infantry Division, was stationed near St. Vith, 30 miles north of Bastogne. The Cheyenne was scheduled to join the 106th in a few days. Although artillery fire periodically punctuated

the winter quiet, the Army considered St. Vith's wooded, hilly terrain unsuitable for large-scale attack, deeming it safe for the women.

Jill arranged a three-day leave to surprise her brother. Born in Evanston, Illinois, only a few minutes after Jack, Margaret Frances was nicknamed "Jill" because of the nursery rhyme, "tumbling after" Jack, as her parents told her.

On December 12, with ARC field director Brad Carroll managing the frigid white-knuckle drive to St. Vith across the Schnee Eifel ridge, Jill reached division headquarters, where she was directed 10 miles east to Jack's battalion headquarters in Schönberg, Germany. Jack's commanding officer, Major Tetsey, called Jack in nearby Radscheid and ordered him to the post, not giving any reason.

While waiting, Jill lunched with Tetsey and battalion commander Lt. Col. Vanden Lackey before rummaging through an abandoned warehouse containing liberated fabric. Thrilled at seeing Jill, Jack drove her to his battery and introduced her to the cooks, the men on the guns, his top sergeant, and the supply sergeant who gave her saddle soap for her shoes.

Jill spied the enemy several hundred yards away on a hill. When she asked where the Allied troops were, Jack pointed out a platoon behind them on the right and another on the left. The Army had not felt the need to space the men across the usual three-mile front, instead stretching the troops across 27 miles.

The twins spent the rest of the evening around a stove fire, talking into the night about what they had both encountered since parting 18 months earlier. Jill was glad to have joined the Red Cross. WAVES and WAACS

weren't guaranteed overseas assignments, but clubmobile volunteers were. In Europe she was part of the action.

In 1942, the ARC Commissioner for Great Britain and Europe, Harvey D. Gibson, devised the clubmobile plan to bring a taste of home to combat troops. The first clubmobiles appeared in England. Englishmen unable to serve otherwise drove the Greenline buses, remodeled with kitchens and a lounge. Some vehicles, outfitted with movie projectors, became "cinemobiles." All were staffed with women between the ages of 25 and 35 with some college education. The clubmobiles, named after United States cities and states, were arranged into 10 groups, each denoted by a letter of the alphabet. The 32 women in each group were expected to serve for the duration plus six months. The Cheyenne belonged to Group F.

A year earlier, around Christmas 1943, Jill was part of the largest convoy of aircraft carriers, battleships, troop ships, and submarine chasers crossing the Atlantic. Soon after docking aboard the transport ship Brazil in Scotland, she arrived in London at 2 AM in the middle of an air raid. The V-1 flying bombs, also known as doodle-bugs or buzz-bombs, made her jittery. Jill would wait for 60 seconds after the motor turned off and wonder where the bomb would explode.

Mobilization for D-Day required clubmobile women picked for Europe to drive 2.5-ton GMC trucks—smaller and easier to manage than Greenline buses. Jill and her crewmates took a 10-day, 500-mile obstacle driving course, learning truck maintenance and how to change the 55-pound tires. Jill taught new volunteers how to drive Jeeps and trucks, including clubmobiles, almost 100 of which were used in the European Theater.

Jill snapped photographs of Jack that night in Radscheid with plans to send the prints to their parents in Illinois. She and Jack agreed to meet up on December 16, in St. Vith to celebrate Helen's birthday, and again on Christmas.

On December 13, Jill headed back to Bastogne. During the next two days, the women cranked out donuts for 1,000 men. Jill tried to cable her parents about seeing Jack, but due to the season's mail rush the Army banned cables from December 6 until after Christmas. Jill took her camera film to Special Services to develop her photographs and forward them to her.

The women left the area they called "Mud Flats" on Saturday, December 16. Before heading to their three-week assignment in St. Vith, Jill and her crewmates lunched in Bastogne at rear corps headquarters with Colonel C.B. Warden and intelligence officer

Lt. Col. Kenny Clark.

Jill's 30-mile trek to Vielsalm took three hours. In shops there, they purchased Christmas decorations and presents for Helen's party, meeting several GIs who warned the women to buy candles. A counterattack had started that morning, and German artillery had knocked out the electrical plant in St. Vith, 11 miles east. Jill finally rolled the Cheyenne into camp on the snowy western edge of St. Vith. GIs clustered around the truck, stunned that the crew made the trip with the enemy only a few miles away.

The women stashed their belongings in quarters inside the dispensary. Jill mentioned several times needing to call Jack. Officers persuaded her to eat first. After dinner, Lt. Col. Veazie, a chaplain, pulled the women aside and broke terrible news. Jack had been killed that afternoon while helping his men at a forward gun position. A German 88mm shell fragment had pierced his helmet and skull, instantly killing him.

The officers and her crewmates accompanied Jill back to her quarters, where a medic ordered sleeping tablets for her. When Jill woke the next day, still absorbing the horrific news of Jack's death, she learned she could not tell her parents about it until 30 days had elapsed. It was the Army's job to relay the sad news. Jill could mention seeing Jack, but nothing more. She fired off a letter immediately to her family and pretended to be cheerful, writing only about visiting with Jack and, as a hint, to remember the 16th.

Jill joined her crewmates serving coffee, gum, and cigarettes—no donuts due to lack of electricity. The women also served hot soup to the shell-shocked and wounded men brought to the dispensary. Jill held the hand of a soldier while a surgeon pulled shrapnel out of his other arm.

The roads jammed with vehicles of all kinds—armored cars, tanks, half-tracks, trucks—all hurrying back and forth to the front. A tank battle raged in town. Snow and freezing fog grounded the air force while fighting escalated in and around St. Vith, a crucial hub of six paved roads. GIs took German parachutists as prisoners, but by the night of the 17th, the Germans had surrounded the area. The Battle of the Bulge was in full swing.

Jill recalled the London air raids. At least there she could escape into the Underground's bomb shelters. In St. Vith, she felt like a sitting target. "We were concerned what would happen if we were captured. Would they respect us as young women or take advantage of us? But you adjust to combat," said Jill. She carried a Certificate of Identity of Non-Combatant noting that, if captured, she should be afforded the same privileges as a captain.

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Jill Knappenberger



Jill, second from right, poses in front of her clubmobile. More than 7,000 young women volunteered for service with the Red Cross during World War II.

St. Vith residents griped about being caught in the middle of the fighting. Food supplies dwindled. Everyone functioned on half rations. The women gave all remaining provisions—coffee, sugar, flour—to add to the Army's supplies. Over the next several days, the women cleaned, mended clothes, nursed, and tried to cheer the GIs. The women prayed for clear weather to enable aircraft to drop food and support.

Word spread of the atrocities committed on December 17 at Malmedy when Germans slaughtered 84 American POWs in a field. Other regiments were cut off without food, water, or ammunition. Surrounded, Jack's battery, along with the 423rd Infantry Regiment, surrendered on December 19. That same day, Jill and her crewmates were told to pack up their musettes—their shoulder bags—with whatever the women wanted most to keep and be ready to move at a moment's notice. The women broke into their Christmas packages, pulling out food and luxuries such as nylons and perfume.

The front lines were now only a mile away. Tanks rumbled by. A soldier gave Jill an incendiary bomb which she hid in the Cheyenne, not planning to leave anything behind for the Germans.

During the afternoon of Friday, December 22, the 82nd Airborne Division cleared a road to the northwest. It might be open for only a few hours, the women were told. GIs placed the Cheyenne in the first group to escape. After removing the bomb from the truck, Jill pulled into line behind an Army Jeep and its quarter-ton trailer. An armed escort followed the Cheyenne. Trying to ignore the incoming

artillery fire and grateful for Allied counter-fire, Jill's convoy moved out at 3 PM into the swirling snowstorm toward VIII Corps forward headquarters.

Jill drove the Cheyenne past the site of the Malmedy massacre, where the GIs' bodies still lay. Some hours later, the tail lights of the leading vehicle disappeared. Unable to hear anything due to artillery fire, Jill pulled the Cheyenne to the side of the road. The women ran ahead. The Jeep had collided head-on with an ammunition truck. Two of the Jeep's men were hurt.

Along with two other Jeep passengers, they pushed the vehicle into the ditch to allow the convoy to pass. The women packed an injured lieutenant colonel into the Cheyenne's cab with Jill and Helen. The other men grabbed luggage and equipment and climbed in back with Phyllis. According to the Geneva Convention, armed guards were not allowed inside the clubmobile, but this was an emergency.

Jill and Helen hitched the Jeep's trailer to the Cheyenne. Jill drove onward searching for the men's VIII Corps unit, finally stopping at a forward compound where a nearby hospital could attend to the lieutenant colonel. Informed that a tank battle was in progress ahead, the women stayed overnight. An officer woke the women at 7 AM and told them to leave immediately. The Germans had breached an important roadblock during the night.

Jill headed northwest toward Namur. Thousands of civilians crowded the roads, fleeing the Germans. The crowds and destruction made driving difficult. At one point, Jill detoured 16 miles because of a knocked-out bridge. Eventu-

ally, the crew obtained directions and a map. At 6 PM on Saturday, December 23, Jill dropped the men at VIII Corps forward headquarters at Florenville, Luxembourg. Army personnel arranged for the women to stay in a house recently vacated by *Collier's* reporter Ernest Hemingway.

Jill drove 30 more miles the next day, Christmas Eve, arriving around lunchtime at Charleville-Mézières, France, where the other Group F crews hunkered in unheated and windowless barracks. After the Cheyenne crew freshened up, Group F gathered for a potluck Christmas celebration of goodies from home, along with liberated alcohol. A bomb dropped nearby, shaking the building and momentarily disrupting the Christmas carols.

Later, Jill was dismayed to learn the photographs of Jack from the film she expected to be developed were accidentally forwarded on to an unknown person. There would be no last photograph of Jack to console the Pitts family.

The Cheyenne was one of the first clubmobiles to move on after the Battle of the Bulge. During the second week of January, Jill drove back to the Bastogne outskirts, where the women established themselves in bullet-riddled French-Belgian barracks. With mud causing almost impossible driving conditions, the Cheyenne crew joined the Miami's crew to run a donut dugout at VIII Corps headquarters.

Once while serving the GIs, Jill accepted a tank driver's offer to drive his Sherman tank. Jill drove it in a circle on a parade ground in the middle of Bastogne. Sometimes the GIs would let the women pull the lanyard on the artillery guns.

In March, while on detached service with the 76th Infantry Division, Jill drove the Cheyenne over a pontoon bridge across the Moselle River, then across the Rhine. An American soldier gave her a camera and film he confiscated from a German soldier. Jill used that camera through the rest of her service in Europe.

The Cheyenne followed VIII Corps to Eisenach, Germany, on April 10, 1945. Two days later, the same day that 12th Army Group commander General Omar Bradley and General Eisenhower visited, the women accompanied the 1107th Engineer Combat Group into Ohrdruf, the first liberated concentration camp. Partially burned bodies still lay in the crematorium. The women visited Buchenwald the day after its liberation. Nothing had prepared Jill for the grisly lampshades made from human skin that had been made for the camp commandant's wife. Tattooed skin was particularly prized.

Later in April, GIs escorted Jill, Helen, and

Phyl for a long distance into the Merkers salt mines. "The soldiers took us into the mine. It was like going into a cave about six miles deep. We saw piles of gold, bags and bags of money, and artwork everywhere."

After reaching Hitler's Bavarian retreat, a friend photographed Jill sitting at Hitler's Berchtesgaden conference table. On May 8, the women celebrated VE-Day in Altenburg, Germany, with the 6th Armored Division. After signing their names on two Nazi flags, they applauded the removal of their truck's headlight covers.

Jill's last assignments after VE-Day were at clearing camps for evacuating troops. She operated a clubmobile group near Châlons-en-Champagne, France, billeting with the Manguère family in their hunting lodge. The only French Jill had known before reaching France was "Chevrolet coupé," so while Jill taught the family English, they reciprocated with French. Jill joined the family dining outside on long tables with 15 or 20 people during the lengthy summer days. The family knew how to relax, drinking wine like Americans drink water. One evening, Monsieur Manguère's nephews put 12 shot glasses out with different liquids in them—wine, liqueur, and cognac. There was no identification on the glasses. Monsieur correctly guessed all of the liquids.

After six weeks with the Manguères, Jill was ordered to Camp Philip Morris, one of the embarkation camps for soldiers awaiting transportation home and discharge. In mid-August, Jill learned her father was sick. She returned home on the passenger ship *John Ericsson* as a VIII Corps captain, 35th Special Services. Jill earned a European Theater of Operations ribbon with five stars, one for each of the battles of Brest, Normandy, the Bulge, Germany, and the crossing of the Rhine.

During World War II, approximately 1,000 young, energetic women volunteered for clubmobile work serving combat troops. Today, only a handful, including Jill, remain. She still sparkles whenever she speaks about her favorite subject, American GIs.

Senator Susan Collins (R-ME) said it best in 2012 when honoring the ARC clubmobile women: "A visit from a clubmobile was one of the most significant events for a young G.I. in combat far from home, and the women of the clubmobiles, young women from every single state, acted as friends and sisters to the troops with whom they interacted." □

Maureen Holtz is a first time contributor to WWII History. She writes from her home in Champaign, Illinois.

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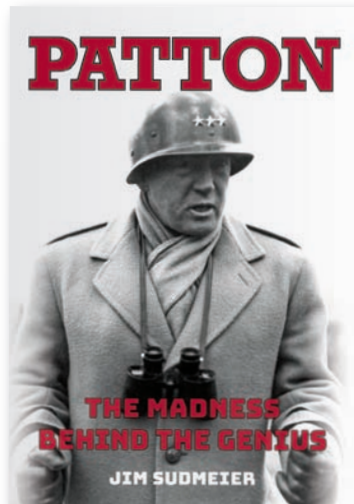
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BY PATRICK J. CHAISSON

“The Enemy Must Be Annihilated”

Japan’s 2nd Tank Division was virtually annihilated during fighting in the Philippines in early 1945.

IT was an amphibious commander’s worst nightmare—swarms of enemy tanks, spitting death with every cannon shell and machine-gun burst, smashing through the American beachhead. Stunned GIs were crushed in their foxholes by the unstoppable leviathans, or bayoneted by accompanying infantry. The few Allied fighting vehicles then on shore stood no chance against this mechanized onslaught. By dawn, after destroying ammunition dumps, supply depots, and motor pools, the Japanese attackers finally halted. Victorious, they had hurled their foe back into the sea.

For Maj. Gen. Innis P. Swift, the threat of just such an armored counterthrust, an imagined nightmare scenario, made for many anxious moments. In January 1945, this U.S. Army officer found himself part of a landing force preparing to invade Luzon, the largest of the Philippine Islands. Swift’s task as commanding general of I Corps was a straightforward one: cover the flank of Lt. Gen. Walter Krueger’s Sixth Army as it liberated the capital city of Manila, thus fulfilling General Douglas MacArthur’s vow to the Filipino people.

Much like MacArthur, “Bull” Swift was also returning to the Philippines. He had been there before, as an aide to General John J. Pershing in 1908. Swift later patrolled the Mexican border alongside George S. Patton, Jr., before heading overseas with the 86th Division during World War I. Entering battle again in 1944 as commander of the First Cavalry Division, he earned rare praise from MacArthur for his efficient work throughout the Admiralty Islands campaign.

In charge of I Corps since August 1944, this ramrod-straight cavalryman had been serving his nation as a soldier for more than 40 years. He was, at age 62, the oldest and most experienced corps commander in the U.S. Army. As such, Innis Swift could be trusted to carry out the toughest assignments in MacArthur’s Southwest Pacific Theater of Operations.

There was nothing glamorous about the job awaiting I Corps on Luzon. Swift’s 60,000 troops were to come ashore near San Fabian and fan out rapidly along a line extending 15 miles north and east of the Lingayen

Both: National Archives



ABOVE: A Japanese medium tank lies knocked out and abandoned after a firefight in the Philippines. The Japanese lagged behind other major world military powers in the development of armor, and much of the terrain where combat occurred in the Pacific was ill-suited for the deployment of tanks. **LEFT:** An M4 Sherman medium tank fires its 75mm main weapon at a Japanese artillery position east of the Filipino capital of Luzon. The enemy guns had already taken a nearby road under fire and disabled another Sherman.

beachheads. The I Corps front controlled access to Luzon's Central Plains, a large, mostly wide-open avenue of approach that led 135 road miles to Manila. This ground had to be secured before the men of Maj. Gen. Oscar W. Griswold's XIV Corps could make their "glory-ride" on the capital of the Philippines. Afterward, I Corps would pivot toward the rugged Sierra Madre mountain range of northern Luzon and mop up any Japanese still holding out there.

But a very dangerous man stood in the way of Bull Swift's plans.

General Tomoyuki Yamashita, age 59, was the Imperial Japanese Army's canniest tactician—a man nicknamed the "Tiger of Malaya" for his stunning conquest of British-held Singapore in 1942. Now, three years later, Yamashita commanded some 262,000 combatants of the 14th Area Army in an assignment most considered utterly impossible. Conventional military

National Archives



American soldiers unload ammunition from an amphibious tracked (Amtrak) vehicle that has come ashore at Yellow Beach, Lingayen Gulf, on the Philippine island of Luzon on January 9, 1945. In a rare move to defeat the Americans, the Japanese committed an entire armored division to defending Luzon.

wisdom dictated that Luzon was too large and the Allied invaders too powerful for any defensive campaign to possibly succeed.

Yet Yamashita reckoned the more Americans he could tie down in the Philippines, the fewer men MacArthur would have available for an assault on Japan proper. By utilizing the forbidding terrain of northern Luzon together with the warrior spirit of his troops, the Tiger of Malaya hoped to upset Allied strategic timetables for months or even years.

After taking command of the Philippine Islands in October 1944, Yamashita made several controversial decisions. First, he chose to leave Manila unguarded, as that city possessed little strategic value. Japanese Navy forces not

under his command would later wreak terrible carnage there. He further forbade ground commanders from entering combat whenever or wherever conditions favored the Allies in naval, air, and mechanized firepower. Henceforth, no effort would be made to defeat amphibious landings on the beaches, nor were the Central Plains to be occupied.

Instead, Yamashita established his main defensive zone along the Caraballo Mountains north and east of Lingayen Bay. For months, Japanese soldiers had been building elaborate bunker systems, stockpiling munitions, and camouflaging artillery positions in this region. Their front line stretched in a 50-mile arc from Rosario in the north down to the vital railroad of San Jose. It was here that supplies from depots in Manila were unloaded and then transported by truck into 14th Area Army's mountain redoubts.

Until those warehouses could be emptied, however, San Jose needed to remain in Japanese hands. This crossroads barrio (village) also protected the entrance to Balete Pass, a major route through the Caraballos that led to Yamashita's headquarters near Baguio. To further complicate matters, in mid-January a division of infantry was slowly marching north through the area to join the 14th Area Army; these riflemen required protection from marauding American armor.

The defense of San Jose would require a thorough yet unconventional plan. The Tiger of Malaya thrived on such problems, though, and on January 11, the 14th Area Army ordered into action its most mobile, battle ready unit. The

2nd Tank Division set out that very night, its destination a triangular sector safeguarding the approaches to San Jose and that town's vital transportation hub. Under cover of darkness, miles-long tactical columns of armored fighting vehicles, tractor-towed field guns, and truck-mounted mobile infantry began making their way along Luzon's dust-clogged roadways.

The selection of the 2nd Tank Division to conduct what was essentially a strongpoint defense violated all conventional tactical doctrine but acknowledged both the realities of combat on Luzon as well as the 14th Area Army commander's unfamiliarity with armor. Said one Japanese officer, "General Yamashita, being an old time infantry soldier, did not believe in mechanized warfare." Rather, he directed the unit to dig in on key terrain—in effect transforming its tanks into pillboxes.

While this scheme forfeited the principles of maneuver and mass used with great success by other combatant nations' armored formations, it did offer some benefits. Well-camouflaged battle positions proved all but undetectable by aerial reconnaissance, while tanks fighting behind earthen fortifications were less vulnerable to Allied antiarmor weapons. Lastly, shortages of spare parts, ammunition, and especially diesel fuel meant a static defense was the only realistic course of action left open to Yamashita's tankers.

Code named Geki ("Attack") Force, the 2nd Tank Division represented an extraordinarily lethal presence on the battlefield. Under the command of Lt. Gen. Yoshiharu Iwanaka, it had available in January 1945 approximately 11,200 men and 1,500 vehicles of various types. Despite suffering losses to American submarine activity during its 1944 deployment from Manchuria to Luzon, Geki Division largely remained intact well into the new year. Some small tank and infantry detachments were sent to reinforce the defenses on Leyte that previous autumn.

The Third Tank Brigade, commanded by Maj. Gen. Isao Shigemi, was Geki Force's primary maneuver echelon. This formation, which contained the 6th, 7th, and 10th Tank Regiments, normally operated with the 2nd Mobile Infantry Regiment. In early January, though, two battalions of those truck-mounted riflemen were detached to defend other positions in the south. Partly to make up for the 2nd Tank Division's shortfalls in foot soldiers, Yamashita forwarded several hundred personnel of the 26th Independent Mixed Regiment and the 356th Independent Infantry Battalion to help hold San Jose.

Fire support was provided by 105mm and

150mm field pieces of the 2nd Mobile Artillery Regiment. Other combat elements included one company each of antitank (AT) guns and combat engineers. Logistical sustainment groups consisted of a maintenance company and transportation section; motorized signal and medical detachments completed the division's organizational structure.

The 2nd Tank Division's primary weapon system on Luzon was the Type 97-kai Shinhoto Chi-Ha medium tank, some 175 of which were assigned. Weighing 17.4 tons combat loaded and powered by a 170-horsepower V-12 diesel engine, the Type 97 could achieve road speeds of 24 miles per hour. Geki Force's tanks came equipped with a high-velocity 47mm cannon and 7.7mm machine gun in the turret, as well as one hull-mounted machine gun. It took five men (gunner, tank commander, loader, driver, and hull gunner) to crew a Shinhoto Chi-Ha.

On hand as well were about 20 light tanks designated the Type 95 Ha-Go. Used primarily as a command vehicle on Luzon, this nimble cruiser tipped the scales at eight tons. Its Mitsubishi V-6 engine, rated at 120-horsepower, drove the Type 95 to a top speed of 28 miles per hour. Armament included a 37mm cannon and two 7.7mm machine guns. Each Ha-Go was crewed by three men: a driver, hull gunner, and tank commander, who also operated the turret weapons.

The 2nd Tank Division also fielded several experimental turretless tank destroyers as well as specialized engineer vehicles and self-propelled howitzers. Mechanics even got into the operation of a few antique tanks—Japanese and American—left over from the 1942 invasion. Anything with tracks, it seemed, was pressed into service by Iwanaka's troopers.

Tank for tank, Geki Force's armored fighting vehicles were no match for the M4 Sherman operated by I Corps. The Shinhoto Chi-Ha's 47mm AT projectile could only penetrate an M4's side or rear at close range, while U.S. 75mm shells punched right through Japanese steel plate at any distance or angle. The Shermans coming ashore on Luzon enjoyed every tactical advantage—mobility, firepower, and armor protection—except one. Against Iwanaka's 220 tanks Swift could muster a mere 59 M4s.

Actually, the U.S. Army possessed more than 500 armored vehicles in the Philippines, but senior commanders held most of them back lest the 2nd Tank Division suddenly appear as the vanguard of a massive counteroffensive. American intelligence officers did not yet know that the Japanese had instead dug in their tanks to protect the transportation network at San Jose. The job of finding and then destroying

National Archives



General Tomoyuki Yamashita ordered many of the 2nd Tank Division's armored vehicles to fight from stationary positions due to fuel shortages. This Japanese tank is shown beside the earthen revetment dug for concealment near the village of San Manuel, Luzon.

Geki Force would have to be performed by the riflemen of Bull Swift's 6th, 25th, and 43rd Infantry Divisions.

While the soldiers of all three divisions were battle tested, their experiences thus far had been in the rainforests of New Guinea or the Solomon Islands. Captain Michael Kane, a rifle company commander in the 20th Infantry Regiment, 6th Infantry Division, remembered his men needed to "unlearn" these jungle fighting skills before "relearning" more conventional, open terrain tactics. Kane added that his troops familiarized themselves with such antiarmor weapons as the "bazooka" rocket launcher and rifle grenade before sailing to Luzon.

Also training hard were gunners of the U.S. infantry's AT platoons, who thus far had rarely used their towed 37mm cannons against Japanese armor. Destined too for tank-killing duty were the six 105mm M7 self-propelled howitzers in each infantry regiment's Cannon Company. Though designed for use as an artillery carriage, these lightly armored vehicles would soon be advancing alongside U.S. riflemen as direct-fire assault guns.

Several attached units augmented I Corps' infantry strength. The veteran 98th Chemical Mortar (CM) Battalion could rapidly drop sheaves of 4.2-inch high-explosive and white phosphorus rounds, suppressing or even eliminating fortified targets. Finally, spread across the corps were 59 M4 Sherman and 17 M5A1 Stuart tanks of the 716th Tank Battalion (TB). Their mission was to provide infantry support, although most tank gunners secretly itched to see a Type 97 in their sights. Many of them

would get this opportunity before long.

The first waves of GIs to come ashore on January 9, 1945 ("S-Day" to Allied planners), quickly overran Lingayen Bay's beachheads. As these assault echelons surged inland, however, Maj. Gen. Swift and his subordinate commanders grew increasingly concerned over the whereabouts of the 2nd Tank Division. The Americans had never faced such a large concentration of Japanese armor, and the threat of this potent force turning up behind U.S. lines continued to worry I Corps' officers. Aerial reconnaissance overflights furnished few clues, and reports from friendly Filipinos often proved unreliable.

Patrols from the 43rd Infantry Division discovered their foe's main defensive belt on January 11 while advancing up the coast near Rosario. There, along a ridgeline eight miles north of the Lingayen beaches, American attackers collided with Yamashita's well-concealed riflemen. All attempts to turn the Japanese lines were met by an avalanche of artillery and small-arms fire. The I Corps' rapid advance had ground to a halt.

In the meantime, Geki Force was completing its move into the San Jose region. Lt. Gen. Iwanaka established his command post, along with the division's logistics trains and a small headquarters guard, two miles north of town. Five miles farther on, the 10th Tank Regiment entrenched at Lupao. In a barrio named Muñoz, nine miles southwest of San Jose, the 6th Tank Regiment began constructing strong earthworks. Small outposts stationed to the west provided early warning of advancing Allied units.

Geki Force anchored its northern flank at San



ABOVE: A Sherman tank accompanies soldiers of the 103rd Infantry Regiment, 43rd Division as they advance along a dirt road in the Philippines. Their mission was to clear the vicinity of Japanese troops who had ambushed an American column earlier in the day. RIGHT: On January 30, 1945, an M4 Sherman medium tank crosses a bridge over the Matain River on Luzon.

Manuel, a village located alongside the Agno River about 40 miles northwest of San Jose. There Maj. Gen. Shigemi determined to make his final stand. “We will hold present positions to the death!” he declared in mid-January, dramatically concluding, “The enemy must be annihilated!”

While the Japanese were committed to a strongpoint defense of San Manuel, Lupao, and Muñoz, Yamashita did authorize several limited counterattacks intended to disrupt the U.S. offensive. One such probe, which took place over the night of January 14 near a settlement named Malasin, marked the first contact between the 2nd Tank Division and I Corps. During this brief fight, three light tanks blundered into a roadblock set up by Company A, 103rd Infantry Regiment, 43rd Infantry Division. One Ha-Go was taken out by bazooka fire, prompting the others to turn around and flee.

The Japanese struck again on January 16-17 when a combined armor/infantry team under the command of 1st Lt. Yoshitaka Takaki set out from its base at Binalonan on a nighttime raid. They got as far as Potpot, a tiny hamlet defended by the same Company A, 103rd Infantry that first encountered Geki Division at Malasin.

Two of Takaki’s lead tanks caught the Americans completely by surprise around midnight. With machine guns blazing, they drove straight through Company A’s perimeter before racing off into the gloom. AT gunners knocked out a

third vehicle but then got caught up in a tenacious attack that lasted for more than two hours. At one point a platoon of Shermans from Company C, 716th TB went forward to help contain this menace.

The fighting ended at dawn when those two rogue vehicles that had earlier sped past U.S. lines clattered back up the road to Potpot, only to be stopped by now-alert gun crews. American casualties were light, two GIs killed and 10 wounded, while Takaki’s losses amounted to 11 tanks destroyed or damaged plus some 50 infantrymen fallen.

Even as the shooting stopped in Potpot, a new player was entering the game. Troops of the 25th “Tropic Lightning” Division stepped in on January 17 to fill a widening gap between I Corps’ 43rd Infantry Division to the north and the 6th Infantry then pressing southward. Backed by Company C, 716th TB, the 25th immediately started moving on San Manuel. Leading off was the 161st Infantry Regiment, veterans of fierce combat on Guadalcanal and the northern Solomon Islands.

Before they could capture San Manuel, however, the 161st’s soldiers needed to neutralize a combat outpost at Binalonan. Later that afternoon, the 3rd Battalion entered the northern part of town where at 1730 hours they dispatched a single prowling Shinhoto Chi-Ha. Five more tanks then charged down the street, spewing machine-gun fire in all directions before

bazooka teams and AT grenadiers could stop them. By nightfall, American riflemen had established a firm foothold in Binalonan.

The next morning 3/161st Infantry, aided by three M4s of Company C, succeeded in capturing this crossroads village. While some personnel and vehicles managed to slip away, the Japanese casualty count at Binalonan added up to nine tanks, two 75mm field guns, five trucks, one artillery tractor, and 250 combatants. U.S. losses included 19 men killed and another 66 wounded.

Not every battle fought against Geki Force ended in such a lopsided victory for the Americans. On the same day that U.S. patrols entered Binalonan, a column of Shermans cautiously approached the community of Urdaneta, 6½ miles to the south. Led by Lt. Robert Courtwright of Company A, 716th TB, this



three-tank section was screening the advance of 6th Infantry Division foot soldiers.

Lying in wait for Courtwright’s M4s was Warrant Officer Kojura Wada. His three Type 97 tanks sat just off the road concealed in a mango grove and were perfectly positioned to ambush the Americans. Wada later recalled this tense moment: “I heard faint track noises.... One, two, three enemy tanks appeared among the palm trees; the white star painted on the front of each tank was clearly visible. They were 100 meters away—70 meters—50 meters—30 meters—but [still] they did not notice our tanks, because we were well-camouflaged.”

At a range of 25 yards, the Japanese opened fire. “Driver Yamashita shouted ‘Hit!’” Wada related. “The leading tank caught fire and turned to the opposite side of the road.... The second enemy tank also caught on fire after several hits.” Wada estimated his gunner put 60 47mm AT rounds into the third Sherman, which although disabled was able to return fire—knocking all three Shinhoto Chi-Has out of action.

In this engagement Courtwright suffered two

tankers dead and two wounded. One of his M4s was declared a total loss, while the other two eventually returned to service. Sixth Infantry Division troops seized Urdaneta later that day, destroying nine Japanese tanks and killing 100 riflemen. The 2nd Tank Division's outpost line had been smashed; could its bastions in San Manuel, Lupao, and Muñoz hold out long enough for those supplies and redeploying infantry to pass through San Jose?

The barrio of San Manuel sat between Highway 3, a major north-south thoroughfare, and the Agno River. While the surrounding countryside was mostly flat, an 850-foot-tall ridge-line one mile to the north provided excellent observation. The Villa Verde Trail, a footpath winding through the Caraballo Mountains, served as the garrison's sole route of escape.

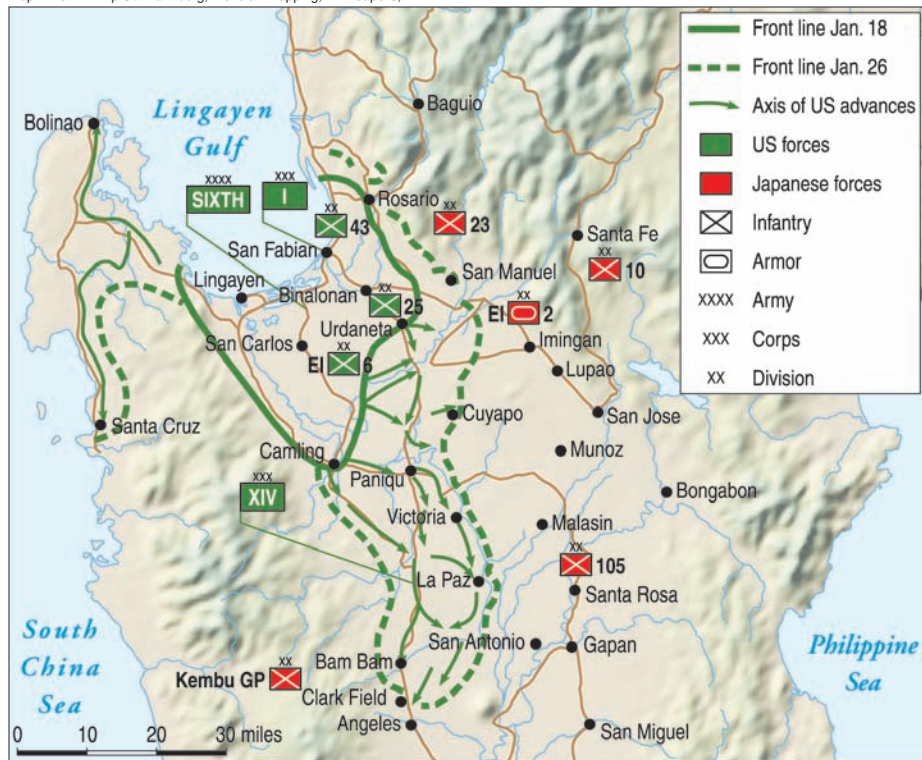
Occupying this village were at least 1,000 soldiers, plus 45 Type 97s and Type 95s of Shigemi's 7th Tank Regiment. To protect their vehicles, Shigemi's crews constructed sturdy adobe revetments that were then carefully concealed. Alternate fighting positions—75 of them—allowed for a semi-mobile operation in which armor could move back and forth as necessary to defend in depth. Street intersections and choke points were covered by indirect fire, while well-concealed riflemen and AT gunners shielded against enemy assaults. The Japanese then burrowed deep and waited, sworn by their commander to hold San Manuel at all costs.

On January 19, a mixed group of Filipino guerrillas, riflemen from the 161st Infantry, and M5A1 Stuart light tanks belonging to Company D, 716th TB set out to scout the area. Shigemi's gunners let them get close before opening up, destroying two M5A1s and killing or wounding everyone on board. The Americans then fell back, electing to "soften" their objective with a five-day bombardment. Several battalions of field artillery, working with naval aviation and light bombers from the U.S. Fifth Air Force, flattened San Manuel while ground troops moved in to completely surround the township.

First, that bare ridge to the north was captured so forward observers could use it to call fire down on Japanese emplacements. Next, at 0725 hours on January 24, the 161st Infantry attacked. Advancing southward was 2nd Battalion with the main effort. A supporting assault conducted by 1/161st Infantry and Company C, 716th TB swept up along the Binalonan Road to strike San Manuel from the west.

Both attempts stalled in a hail of small-arms, mortar, and tank fire. Within minutes Company C lost six Shermans, while the 1st Battalion took more than 60 casualties. An unexpected counterthrust by three of Shigemi's tanks pushed 2nd

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



After landing at Lingayen Gulf on Luzon, American forces established a defensive perimeter and then advanced against the Japanese. Months of furious fighting lay ahead before the enemy abandoned its defense of the island during the liberation of the Philippines.

Battalion out of San Manuel later that morning.

The 161st tried again at 1700 hours. Backed by fast-firing 4.2-inch mortars assigned to Company D, 98th CM Battalion and the M7 howitzers of Cannon Company, 2nd Battalion succeeded in grabbing a toehold on the edge of town. One M7 was wrecked in a suicide attack, but by sundown the GIs had killed five Japanese tanks and were inside San Manuel to stay.

This small victory came at great cost. Technician 4th Grade Laverne Parrish, a medic assigned to 1/161st Infantry, carried to safety five men at San Manuel before he was fatally wounded by mortar fragments on the morning of January 24. For these acts of valor, together with other heroic deeds performed earlier at Binalonan, Parrish received a posthumous Medal of Honor.

For the next two days, U.S. infantry, M7 assault guns, and M4 tanks fought street to street against Shigemi's detachment. No longer able to withstand the Americans' relentless attacks, his last remaining soldiers staged a breakout around 0100 hours on January 28. Leading the way were 13 Type 97s. The 161st Infantry's regimental history tells what happened next:

"The tanks assaulted in waves of three, each tank followed closely by foot troops.... Riflemen in pits opposed them with rifle AT

grenades, bazookas and caliber .50 machine guns. Two 37mm guns had the tanks within range. The first tank was hit but overran the forward position, spraying blindly with machine guns and firing 47mm point-blank.

"Ten of the tanks were halted," concluded the American account, "the leading one just 50 yards inside our front. All had been hit several times. Hits and penetrations were made with AT shells, AT grenades, bazookas and caliber .50 machine guns."

Perhaps 400 survivors somehow made it out, fleeing northward into the mountains. Shigemi was not among this number, though, having committed ritual suicide earlier that morning. U.S. commanders declared San Manuel secure after four days of intense combat; their casualties numbered 60 dead and 200 wounded. More than 775 Japanese died in the struggle.

With San Manuel firmly in American hands, Swift could turn his attention toward San Jose. On January 30, he ordered the 25th and 6th Infantry Divisions to conduct a pincer-like maneuver designed to cut the major roads leading in and out of this key transportation center.

Speed was paramount; Swift wanted to seize the foe's routes of retreat before Geki Force slipped through his grasp. At Pemienta U.S. forces succeeded, ambushing a road column of eight Shinhoto Chi-Ha tanks, another eight

artillery tractors, and 125 men. They were less fortunate at Umingan, where on January 31, an attack by the Tropic Lightning Division's 27th Infantry Regiment bogged down in the face of withering automatic weapons fire.

Its forward progress stymied, the 27th held fast while on February 1 an adjacent unit, the 35th Infantry, bypassed Umingan for the nearby barrio of Lupao. Intelligence reports said a company of Japanese riflemen occupied Lupao; in reality, at least 40 tanks plus AT guns and engineers fighting as infantry were dug in there.

First Battalion went in on the afternoon of February 2. Caught in a murderous crossfire, the assault got nowhere. Next, field artillery and 4.2-inch mortars plastered the town with high-explosive and white phosphorous rounds.

National Archives



An American mortar crew services its weapon on a Luzon hillside. This photograph was taken during an attack on the headquarters of Japanese commanding general Tomoyuki Yamashita. These men withstood three days and nights of enemy counterattacks.

Another attempt made the next day also failed. Taking Lupao was going to be harder than first thought.

Fighting grew more intense on February 3, when the 3rd Battalion joined the battle. Much like its sister regiment at San Manuel, the 35th Infantry here employed M7 self-propelled howitzers as assault guns to good effect. Their 105mm cannons made short work of Japanese emplacements, enabling American infantrymen to take the southern tip of Lupao.

Once inside the village, advancing GIs played a savage game of cat and mouse with Lupao's defenders. Bazooka rockets and AT grenades

took their toll on dug-in tanks, while snipers and machine guns hidden in the rubble dropped attacking riflemen by the score. A series of ferocious Japanese counterstrikes kept the 35th Infantry off balance, preventing it from pushing through the objective.

A fresh battalion, the 2nd, took over starting February 5. Together with Cannon Company's ubiquitous M7 assault guns and a detachment of Shermans, the 35th gradually squeezed shut their enemy's perimeter. On February 7, some riflemen from Company G were moving forward when Japanese gunfire ripped through their ranks. Several soldiers fell while the rest took shelter in a roadside ditch. Though wounded himself, Master Sgt. Charles L. McGaha crawled out on three occasions to

retrieve injured men. For this feat, McGaha would receive the Medal of Honor.

That night the Lupao garrison's last eight tanks tried to bolt. Bazooka fire knocked out three; the rest were later found abandoned. By 1130 hours on February 8, it was all over. In this week-long battle the 35th Infantry Regiment lost 96 killed and 268 wounded, while Japanese casualties exceeded 900 men. Thirty-three demolished tanks were counted in and around the barrio.

While the 35th Infantry was busy clearing Lupao, other I Corps columns maneuvered on San Jose to the south. In the 6th Infantry Divi-

sion's zone, patrols from the 20th Infantry Regiment encountered a robust Japanese force defending Muñoz on January 31. This strongpoint was in fact larger than the one up the road at Lupao and would also require a week of hard fighting before the enemy was defeated.

Joining the 20th Infantry for this battle were several battalions of reinforcing field artillery plus two platoons of 4.2-inch mortars belonging to Company A, 98th CM Battalion. Company C, 44th TB also rolled up from corps reserve once it became clear there would be no armored counterblow on Luzon. These newly arrived tankers surveyed their objective with trepidation, as the battalion history related: "Tank operations were limited by the terrain, boggy ground and deep water-filled irrigation ditches. The town of Muñoz was fortified with antitank guns, 105[mm] artillery pieces and 57 light and medium tanks, all of which were dug in and with a three-foot thick top of logs and sandbags over them. In addition, numerous alternate positions were available so the tanks that were in one place one day would be in an alternate position the next."

The battle for Muñoz began on February 1 when 3/20th Infantry assaulted from the southwest. Little headway was made against heavy resistance, so the next morning 1st Battalion joined the attack. Despite the welcome firepower of M4 tanks and M7 howitzers, the Americans could not advance more than a few yards at a time. The battle settled into a siege on February 4; powerful artillery and mortar barrages kept the Japanese pinned down while American riflemen carefully worked their way forward.

Captain Michael Kane, commanding Company B, 20th Infantry, vividly described one small-unit action that occurred on February 5: "Company B located a tank 75 yards to their front. Immediately they requested one of our supporting tanks to engage the enemy tank. Our tank came up to within ten yards of the Storage Building and, after the crew had been oriented as to the location of the enemy tank, they fired a 75mm round at the Jap[anese] tank, hitting and destroying it. However our tank, before it could withdraw, was hit by a 47mm shell from a mutual[ly] supporting tank.... Our tank burst into flames but the crew escaped safely."

Technical Sergeant Donald E. Rudolph, an acting platoon leader, became a one-man army that same day when he advanced down a line of eight pillboxes, tossing hand grenades through their firing slits to eliminate the gunners inside. Later, he hopped aboard a Japanese tank that was firing on his troops to drop a white phosphorous grenade down its turret hatch.

Rudolph received both the Medal of Honor and a battlefield promotion to second lieutenant for these acts of bravery.

Even though the entire 20th Infantry Regiment was now in action, by February 6 less than half of Muñoz had been brought under U.S. control. It was decided that evening to pull back and let seven battalions of 105mm, 155mm, and 8-inch artillery pulverize the place in an all-night bombardment. Fifth Air Force fighters also prepared to conduct a napalm strike the following morning.

Unknown to the Americans, on February 4 Yamashita ordered Geki Division to pull out of this sector. Due to communications problems, this directive did not reach Iwanaka's headquarters until two days later. Nevertheless, under cover of a diversionary attack the remnants of Muñoz's garrison withdrew toward San Jose before sunup on February 7.

They could not know that the 6th Infantry Division had taken San Jose days earlier. Furthermore, the highway leading there was now barricaded by U.S. infantry, artillery, and tanks. Roadblocks set up by the 63rd Infantry Regiment surprised the Japanese column's lead elements, while nearby a group of tankers from Company C, 44th TB were awakened by the sound of unfamiliar vehicle engines.

"It sounded like an American Caterpillar going full speed," Company C's battle report later detailed. "As the vehicle sped by, they recognized it to be a Japanese medium tank. Immediately the alert was sounded and everyone was up." More enemy armor then approached, shooting wildly into the night.

Another witness chronicled this chaotic encounter: "Japanese tanks pulled into firing position farther up the road, and started shelling the entire Company C area. Although their fire was far from ineffective, one by one they were picked off as the American tankers lined their sights in on the enemy's lurid muzzle blasts. Some gunners searched for targets by spraying machine-gun tracer bullets in a wide arc. When one struck a Jap[anese] tank, it would spark as it ricocheted off. The vehicle would then be destroyed by 75[mm] cannon fire."

Sunrise revealed a gruesome scene. Practically the entire garrison of Muñoz—an estimated 2,000 men—perished in this six-day fight. A physical count of wrecked Japanese equipment totaled 48 medium and four light tanks along with 16 AT guns, four armored cars, and four 105mm howitzers. U.S. casualties amounted to 97 dead and 303 wounded.

The 2nd Tank Division had been annihilated. While it held the approaches to San Jose long enough for badly needed supplies and infantry

Both: National Archives



ABOVE: An M4A3 Sherman medium tank named "Classy Peg" passes the hulk of a destroyed Japanese tank on Luzon on January 17, 1945. **BELOW:** A Japanese Type 95 Ha-Go light tank smolders after soldiers of the 37th Infantry Division have destroyed the threat near the village of Bone, Luzon. At the end of three weeks of fighting the Japanese 2nd Tank Division had lost most of its tanks.



reinforcements to make their way north, the price paid was staggering. In three weeks of fighting, Geki Force lost at least 195 of its 220 tanks. No longer did Maj. Gen. Swift's soldiers need to fear a mechanized counterattack. All that remained of Japan's armored might on Luzon were a few three-vehicle platoons scattered across the island.

The last recorded tank versus tank fight in the Philippines took place during mid-April as American patrols neared Yamashita's headquarters near Baguio. Outside of town, two

Japanese tanks packed with high explosives made a suicide run against some Shermans of the 775th TB. Both vehicles managed to ram their targets, but neither charge detonated. Other M4s quickly knocked out these armored kamikazes. It was a fittingly courageous yet futile conclusion to the story of Japanese tanks on Luzon. □

Patrick J. Chaisson is a retired U.S. Army officer and historian who writes from his home in Scotia, New York.

B-17 RADIOMAN THOMAS FITZPATRICK HELPED DROP BOMBS OVER ENEMY TERRITORY FROM FOGGIA, ITALY.

BY KEVIN M. HYMEL

“BOMBS AWAY!” called out the bombardier of the Boeing B-17 Flying Fortress bomber *Great Speckled Bird*, signaling the release of a full bombload over an enemy target. He was wrong. Two stubborn bombs refused to fall, remaining in their bomb bay racks.

The bomber’s radioman, Technical Sergeant Thomas Fitzpatrick, opened the bulkhead door to the bomb bay and saw the two remaining bombs. He reported it to the crew then took off his headphones and grabbed a screwdriver before entering the open bay as the bomber cruised at 250 miles per hour. Fitzpatrick wore no parachute, and no rope kept him from falling out. The only thing connecting him was the tube attached to his oxygen mask.

Walking gingerly along the eight-inch-wide catwalk down the center of the bomb bay, Fitzpatrick grasped onto handholds to keep his balance. “You could see the farmer with the pitchfork waiting for you,” he later mused. When he reached the bombs, he pushed the screwdriver into the holes in the upright bomb racks until the bombs dropped out. “It was a pretty hairy thing,” he said. With the bomb racks now empty, he worked his way back to his radio station and returned to duty. The task had only taken about a minute.

Fitzpatrick and his crew were part of the Fifteenth Air Force, 2nd Bombardment Group, 96th Bomb Squadron—the “Red Devils”—one of just six B-17 groups flying out of Italy, dropping bombs on German targets across southern Europe and dueling with the depleted Luftwaffe.

As the radioman, Fitzpatrick sat at a desk on the left side of the fuselage between the bomb bay and the ball turret and waist gunners. To his left was a small window and above him large one. He sat facing forward, using the shoeboxed radio on his work desk to send after-action reports in Morse code or receive new targets if the primary target had changed. He was also the bomber’s designated first aid man. His other duties included visually confirming a successful bomb drop and, of course, prying unreleased bombs from the bomb bay.

Fitzpatrick hailed from Wyndmoor, Pennsylvania, where he lived with his parents and older sister. He grew up in a Catholic household and enjoyed canepole fishing with his father in Wissahickon Creek and playing the bugle for his Boy Scout troop and the American Legion Drum and Bugle Corps. He learned about the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor over the radio at the local drugstore, where he served sodas to customers. As a 17-year-old senior at Philadelphia’s Northeast Catholic High School, his first thought was, “I don’t know if I’m old enough [to serve].”

Once he finished school, Fitzpatrick landed a job as a lab assistant at a local U.S. Department of Agriculture lab, where he worked on projects like acrylic



25 Missions Over FORTRESS EUROPE

RIGHT: Technical Sergeant Thomas Fitzpatrick, from Wyndmoor, Pennsylvania, flew 25 missions over enemy territory in the B-17 the *Great Speckled Bird*. BELOW: The crew of the *Great Speckled Bird* poses in front of their damaged Number One engine, which caught fire during a mission over Austria. The pilot, Captain Clifford Foos, earned the Distinguished Flying Cross for returning the crew safely home. Captain Foos stands second to the left in the top row. To his left are Lieutenant Robert Clarke, Lieutenant Malcome Sharpe, and Sergeant Grover Themer (the last man is unidentified). Thomas Fitzpatrick crouches on the far left in the front row, next to him are Staff Sergeant Joe Martin, Staff Sergeant Bill Kontra, Staff Sergeant William Emslie, and Staff Sergeant Bernard Sepolio.



Both: Thomas Fitzpatrick





ABOVE: Six days before Germany surrendered on May 8, 1945, Fitzpatrick, second from left, beat the summer heat by going shirtless at Amendola Airfield in Italy. On the ground, bomber crews dressed informally but donned their uniforms for missions. **BELOW:** Major General Nathan Twining, who would command the Fifteenth Air Force in Italy, talks to a B-17 crew after a mission.



National Archives

rubber, a bulletproof material that would not disintegrate in oil or gasoline. When the Army Air Forces began accepting non-college graduates, he took the aviation cadet examination. After scoring a 99, he went to Keesler Army Airfield in Mississippi for infantry training. He was soon detached to Moorhead State Teachers College in Minnesota to learn to fly Piper J-3 Cub training planes. "It was a breathtaking experience," he said.

Aside from flying, Fitzpatrick worked another job, one that focused on the field's strict military training: he became the base bugler. "Every

morning I played Reveille and [To the] Colors." He played bugle for the next three months, often playing Taps at military funerals.

Next, Fitzpatrick went to Santa Ana Army Airbase, California, for his classification. He did not make pilot or bombardier, so he selected radio operator, an enlisted rank. He then traveled to Scott Field, in Illinois, for radio training. He learned to use the radio's knob to find the correct frequency by listening through his headphones for a whistle that went down and then up again. "You wanted the null between the high and the low pitches," he explained. Once

he had the frequency, he could switch his radio from intercom to inner squadron and back to wing headquarters. Fitzpatrick could tap out 25 words a minute in Morse code, but he would never use the inner squadron option. "The pilot just used his voice," he said.

Fitzpatrick also controlled the antenna wire, which he reeled out beneath the bomber to a length of about 100 feet. A weight at the end of the copper wire kept it steady. "When zeroing in the radio," he explained, "I would reel out the wire until I got that oral null."

The radio contained a small magnesium bomb inside. If his plane were going down, Fitzpatrick had to press a special button on the radio, and it would begin to burn. He would then put all his radio codes into the open back of the radio to ensure their destruction.

Next, Fitzpatrick headed to Yuma, Arizona, for gunnery school and B-17 training. The four-engine B-17 Flying Fortress strategic bomber carried a 10-man crew. While it could not match the wider Consolidated B-24 Liberator's bomb load, it gained a reputation as a rugged bomber that could absorb heavy enemy fire and bring its crew home. The B-17 carried a maximum bomb load of 8,000 pounds in four racks behind the flight deck. Thirteen .50-caliber machine guns defended the bomber from nose to tail, hence the name "Flying Fortress."

Now fully trained, Fitzpatrick went to Plant Park in Tampa, Florida, on August 10, 1944, to join a crew. His bomber crew consisted of himself, pilot Lieutenant Clifford Foes, copilot Lieutenant Robert Clarke, navigator Lieutenant Malcom Sharpe, upper turret/flight engineer Sergeant Grover Themer, ball turret gunner Corporal Joe Martin, waist gunners Corporal Bill Kontra and Corporal Bernard Sepolio, and tail gunner Corporal William Emslie. They had not yet been assigned a bombardier. "We had a great pilot who won a lot of decorations," Fitzpatrick said of Foes, "and a pretty damn good crew."

He was not bragging. When his team made Crew of the Week at McDill Air Force Base, Florida, they were rewarded with flying the famous *Memphis Belle*, the first B-17 to survive 25 missions with her crew intact, to New York City for a War Bond drive. "The plane was fairly rickety," recalled Fitzpatrick. Unfortunately, as the bomber approached New York clouds rolled in over the city. Foes, who had not yet been trained on instruments, had to land in New Jersey, where the men spent a few days before returning to Florida.

The crew took off on November 6, 1944, for Bangor, Maine, the first leg of their journey to war. They flew in a special "Mickey" B-17, which contained a retractable H2X radar device

under the nose to help bomb through heavy clouds and jam German radar. They brought a Mickey operator with them. From there, they flew to Gander Airport in Newfoundland, Canada, for the flight across the Atlantic Ocean. Unfortunately, eight feet of snow fell on November 22, Thanksgiving Eve. All flights were grounded. As plows cleared the tarmac, the American airmen paraded for Thanksgiving Day. "Locals had never heard of Thanksgiving," said Fitzpatrick. "They thought it was great."

While they waited, mechanics installed rubber fuel tanks in the bomb bay to help complete the ocean flight. Fitzpatrick recognized them as acrylic tanks, the same material he had worked on as a civilian. "Here I am a year later and we had bulletproof gas tanks," he recalled. Eventually, the squadron took off for the Azores, more than 850 miles west of Portugal, but Fitzpatrick's bomber stayed behind with mechanical trouble. With reports of German raiding parties being landed by U-boats to plant bombs in the bombers, Fitzpatrick and his crew took turns sitting in the cold plane and clutching Tommy guns.

Finally, on December 2, the weather cleared and a strong tailwind blew in. With the navigator, Malcom Sharpe, hung over from a night of drinking, the men threw him into a shower, fed him coffee, and loaded him into the bomber. They took off. Fitzpatrick contacted the Azores, and the plane flew on across the ocean. Fitzpatrick had to act as both radioman and navigator while Sharpe recovered. The trip proved uneventful. "It's awfully lonely over the Atlantic all by yourself," Fitzpatrick admitted.

Fitzpatrick used his radio compass to navigate the bomber, contacting the Azores and a station in Iceland and giving them his latitude and longitude so they could give him a heading, which he gave to Foos. As they approached the Azores, Sharpe recovered and resumed his navigation duties. "I guess he wanted to put something into his log book," said Fitzpatrick. The bomber headed for Lajes Field, a clifftop base on the edge of Terceira Island. The bomber's altitude went from a couple hundred feet to almost zero in seconds. Not realizing this, Fitzpatrick failed to reel in his antennae, which tore off as the plane touched down. "I got a few words from the major who met us," Fitzpatrick recalled.

Portugal had leased Terceira to Great Britain, giving the pilots a safe haven in the Atlantic. Fitzpatrick was getting closer to the war. He saw battered ships pulling into the harbor with holes in their sides. Across the straits, on the island of Sao Jorge, he could see Swastika flags flapping in the wind. The crew was told to stay put lest they encounter

bubonic plague-infected rats. "They had a rat patrol," said Fitzpatrick, "and a big pit where they burned the rats every morning."

From the Azores, the men flew to Marrakesh in French Morocco. As they taxied down the runway, a regiment of French Foreign Legionnaires (FFL) presented arms on the tarmac while a band played "La Marseillaise." The Frenchmen cheered their American friends with "Vivé le morté! Vivé l'guerré! Vivé l'legion Etrangere!" (Hurray for death! Hurray for war! Hurray for

National Archives



Fitzpatrick operated the B-17's radio during missions, like the radioman shown here. Fitzpatrick, however, always donned an insulated, electrically heated suit and wore an oxygen mask.

the Foreign Legion!) That night Fitzpatrick dined on horse and camel meat.

From Marrakesh, the crew flew across North Africa to Tunis and then to southern Italy, eventually making it to Amendola Airfield between Foggia and Manfredonia on Italy's Adriatic coast on December 9. There they joined the Fifteenth Air Force, 2nd Bombardment Group, 96th Bomb Squadron. The Fifteenth consisted of 15 B-24 Liberator groups of 72 bombers each and six B-17 groups of 96 bombers each. Anywhere from 700 to 1,000 bombers could get aloft for missions over enemy targets.

Although Italy had turned against its Nazi partner more than a year earlier, Fitzpatrick noticed that fliers still wore their sidearms. Earlier in the Italian campaign, American bombers flying out of North Africa had hit the area. Prior to the raid, they had dropped leaflets warning the civilians to take cover. Unaware of the Americans' target, local civilians packed into the railroad yard's underground bomb shelter, not realizing they were in the raid's bull's-eye. Bombs hit the yard, destroying gasoline-filled tank cars. The fuel flowed into the shelter and exploded, killing almost everyone inside. Despite the warn-

ing, the locals blamed the Americans for the heavy toll. "It was a little on the hairy side," said Fitzpatrick of the area and its citizens.

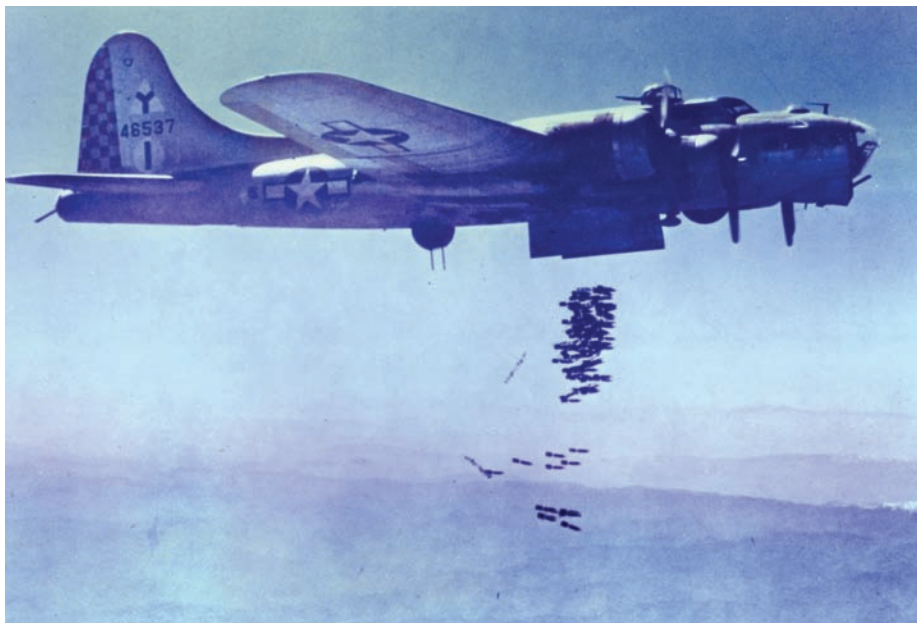
By the time Fitzpatrick's crew arrived at their new home in December 1944, the war had shifted decidedly in the Allies' favor. The Western Allies had liberated most of France and entered Germany, although Adolf Hitler was about to launch his Ardennes Offensive—the Battle of the Bulge. The Soviets had driven the Germans out of their country, as well as Lithuania, Bulgaria, and Albania. The advancing Soviets had also taken huge swaths of Latvia, Estonia, Poland, Yugoslavia, Czechoslovakia, and Hungary. Back in August, King Michael of Romania had staged a coup against the pro-German government and surrendered to the Russians. The oil refineries of Ploesti, which had been the target of so many Allied bombing attacks, were now in Allied hands.

In Italy, Rome had fallen to the Western Allies on June 4, 1944, during an advance some 300 miles up the Italian boot. Despite the diversion of men and materials to the invasion of southern France and operations in Greece, the Allies had penetrated the German Gothic Line. There was, unfortunately, no decisive breakthrough, so they fought an offensive defense to keep the Germans from fortifying other fronts. When Fitzpatrick and his crew touched down in Italy, the Allies were still 100 miles south of the Po River, the last natural barrier into central Europe.

After deplaning, Fitzpatrick's crew had no tent to sleep in, but when a bomber blew up on the runway, killing its crew, Fitzpatrick and his men occupied the dead crew's tent. "That's when we realized that we were at war," he said. Fitzpatrick's crew received a war-weary B-17F, the *Great Speckled Bird*, so named for the bomber's numerous patched flak holes from previous missions.

Before his first sortie, Fitzpatrick got a little absolution, and a laugh. On Christmas Eve, despite a heavy downpour, he and 3,000 other airmen packed the San Lorenzo Maiorano Cathedral in Manfredonia. Airmen gave generously during the collection, creating a huge five-foot-tall pile of money in front of the altar. Then a pyrotechnic wire-guided dove model swooped down the center aisle and exploded over the pile, setting the money on fire. Three airmen quickly doused the fire with their wet coats. The men in the pews cheered.

For their first mission, just before Christmas 1944, Fitzpatrick's crew bombed the small town of Castlefranco Veneto, northwest of Venice. Only a small amount of enemy fire—all flak from antiaircraft guns—greeted them. "It was a milk run," he explained.



A B-17 bomber from the 69th Bomb Squadron drops a load of fragmentary bombs over a target in Italy. Fitzpatrick had to climb into the bomb bay and pry loose any bombs that failed to drop.

Despite the milk run aspect of the mission, Fitzpatrick learned to do his job in combat. “Once we got into enemy territory we kept radio silence,” he said. The Alps, separating Italy from central Europe, stood as the marker for going quiet. After the bombs dropped, he sent his crew’s bomb report in Morse Code.

So began Fitzpatrick’s life as an air warrior. At first, bomber crews had to fly 25 missions to earn the right to rotate home. Because of high casualties, the Army Air Forces leadership increased the number to 30. The crews rotated, and as a result Fitzpatrick flew every third day. “I got 25 missions in before the end of the war,” he said. “I did most of my flying in the winter of ‘45 and the spring.”

Almost every morning, Fitzpatrick and all the other airmen awoke early and ate breakfast at 4 AM, then headed over to their morning briefing. It was usually their last meal before a mission since food froze at 10,000 feet. “We could only then eat crackers,” he recalled about the K-rations they brought onboard, but the men did not mind. The missions were too tense for meals. “I never remember feeling hungry.”

The crew wore Class A uniforms, including neckties. “The Germans were conscious of rank,” explained Fitzpatrick. “We had to impress them if we were captured.” Over their uniforms they wore insulated, electrically heated suits that plugged into sockets in their seats. Heated gloves and boots snapped into plugs on the suits. Early on, the crews wore British heated boots, which were so cold they turned up the heat in their suits to the point of burning just to warm them. Finally, they were issued American-

made heated boots inside their fur-lined covers. For extra protection, Fitzpatrick wore a Saint Christopher Medal—Christopher being the patron saint of travelers—and a Miraculous Medal, which would help believers obtain grace with the help of the Virgin Mary.

Before every mission the men received survival kits containing a compass, maps, \$1,000 in gold notes, and other important items, which they wore in a pocket below one of their knees. The kits were strictly accounted for, and each crewman had to return his after every mission. Crews also received the names of German prison guards who could be bribed, information brought back from those who successfully escaped German prison camps.

Staff officers briefed the pilots and radiomen separately before every mission. Fitzpatrick and the other radiomen received daily codes and weather reports. The pilots, navigators, and bombardiers received targets and secondary targets. Surprisingly, the only other person who knew the wing’s destination was Axis Sally, the American-born woman employed by the Nazis to lower GI morale. Her programs mixed popular American music with propaganda and threats. “You’re coming up to Wiener Neustadt [Austria] and we’re ready for you,” Fitzpatrick remembered hearing her say over the radio. Every briefing ended with the men synchronizing their watches to keep accurate time and to ensure all elements of the mission were coordinated.

Once fully briefed, the crews were trucked out to their bombers, where they greeted the ground crews who were tasked with loading the planes

with ordnance and fuel, as well as caring for their bomber and crew. “They mothered us,” Fitzpatrick said of his ground crew, who constantly patched flak holes and worked on the *Great Speckled Bird’s* faulty turbo supercharger. “They were the unsung heroes of the war.”

Like many planes late in the war, *Great Speckled Bird* was unpainted and showed its silver aluminum body. Camouflage had proved ineffective for disguising the planes on the ground, especially since the Luftwaffe rarely flew over the air base. The parasitic drag of camouflage paint also slowed the bombers. “You could get additional speed without it,” explained Fitzpatrick.

Next to every bomber stood an outhouse, which the men used before climbing into their craft. There were no bathrooms on a B-17, only a tube for urinating, particularly difficult for men wearing insulated clothing. Eventually, *Great Speckled Bird’s* crew learned to drink only one cup of coffee at breakfast. “That way,” recalled Fitzpatrick, “your kidneys did not have to work overtime.”

Before takeoff, Fitzpatrick would turn on his IFF (Identification Friend or Foe) signal. Earlier in the war, the Germans had repaired downed B-17s and bombed England with them. To fight the tactic the Allies developed the IFF signal. If bombers approached Allied territory without it, they would be shot down. Unable to hear the signal, Fitzpatrick would ask the tower, “How does my cockerel crow?” an inquiry as to whether his IFF switch was on or off, and the tower operator would reply, “Your cockerel crow is loud and clear.”

As the bombers lined up and headed down the runway, the squadron chaplain would stand in the back of his jeep and give absolution to the crews as their planes lumbered into the sky. Fitzpatrick liked his chaplain, but it bothered him that there were never services for lost crews.

Once the planes formed up and headed to their target, Fitzpatrick would sometimes receive messages from wing headquarters to change targets, usually because of clouds or because a target of opportunity suddenly became available. He provided the new information to the pilots and navigator, who would make the necessary course corrections. The missions usually lasted about 10 hours, yet there was almost no down time on a flight. “We were constantly on the lookout for enemy planes,” he explained.

When the bomber reached 10,000 feet, the men put on their oxygen masks. B-17s usually flew at 25,000 feet or higher, where antiaircraft gunners had a hard time targeting them. A few times they bombed from 18,000 feet, like the

raid on Munich, Germany, where the bombers hit marshalling yards and rolling stock. "The anti-aircraft could find you quicker," said Fitzpatrick. "That was pretty scary." Another low-level attack targeted an enemy airstrip. "You could see planes on landing strips at that altitude."

The targets themselves could prove surprising. On one run over a small town at 18,000 feet, the group dropped bombs on some storage buildings. "There were huge explosions," said Fitzpatrick. "Green and yellow clouds of smoke came from whatever they were making in the factory." Usually, exploding buildings created white clouds, while oil refineries produced black. The men had hit a hidden chemical complex.

By this point in the war, bombers were escorted by fighter planes all the way to their targets and back. Drop tanks under the fighter planes' wings increased their range. On the way back from one mission, *Great Speckled Bird's* temperamental turbo supercharger failed, and the B-17 fell behind the group. They were flying alone over enemy territory when Fitzpatrick looked out his window and saw two North American P-51 Mustang fighter planes escorting the bomber. He immediately felt relieved. "I don't know where they came from," he said, "but I was very, very, very happy."

The planes' tails were painted red. Fitzpatrick knew that meant they were Tuskegee Airmen, the African American fighter unit, men who had to fight just to get into the war in a segregated military. "We knew they were based not far from us," he said. "We would see them make barrel rolls over the airstrip if they made a kill." The two fighter pilots protected the *Great Speckled Bird* all the way back to Amendola.

Whenever a bomber was hit, Fitzpatrick and his crew counted the parachutes coming out of the stricken plane. "That happened all the time," he said. They would report the stricken bomber's number during their debriefings. On one mission, Fitzpatrick heard a faint radio transmission as a B-17 went down over Yugoslavia. "Going down over Yugo," the radioman on the falling B-17 repeated in the clear, adding his longitude and latitude. Fitzpatrick radioed the information back to wing headquarters so they could steer partisans on the ground to the crash location before German soldiers reached the crew. "I was the only one who picked it up," he said. "I never knew what happened to the crew."

Whenever downed airmen made it back from enemy territory, the crews were debriefed. One group showed up in civilian clothes provided to them by partisans. While traveling out of the occupied area in a train, one of the crewmen

rested his feet, still clad in American boots, on a small heating stove. A passing civilian told him that the letters "US" were branded on the bottom of his boots. The civilian did not report the American, but the word went out to the Fifteenth Air Force to correct it. "Everyone had to get a red-hot poker and eradicate the 'US' from the bottom of their boots," said Fitzpatrick.

With Russian-occupied Hungary now on the Allied side, the town of Sopron provided the Americans an emergency airstrip. Fitzpatrick's crew landed there once when they ran low on fuel. They found the airbase run by women and 12-year-old boys. "Kids jumped on the wing and refueled," he said. "These old ladies would pick up two [50-pound] packs with parachutes and flight suits in them." That night, the crew dined on cabbage and potatoes.

German planes and flak frequently hit the bombers. German Messerschmitt Me-109s would fight through the fighter escorts to shoot down B-17s. As the end of the war neared, Fitzpatrick and his crew started seeing a strange new fighter plane with a bat-shaped wing and

While enemy planes did not show themselves on every mission, anti-aircraft fire did, and there was no defense against it. "Flak was getting more intense all the time," said Fitzpatrick. "You could get out and walk on it."

no propeller. It was the Messerschmitt Me-262, the first operational jet of the war. "We didn't know what the hell they were," said Fitzpatrick. "I could see them traveling much faster than usual planes." On a mission over Munich, rocket-firing 262s had to fly a large circle to get into a firing position behind the bombers. Emsley, the tail gunner, realized their tactic and shot one down.

While enemy planes did not show themselves on every mission, anti-aircraft fire did, and there was no defense against it. "Flak was getting more intense all the time," said Fitzpatrick. "You could get out and walk on it." Once while sitting at his desk an anti-aircraft shell exploded outside his window and a piece of flak tore through the fuselage just behind the window. Fitzpatrick instinctively jerked his head back. Just then, a second piece blasted through the hole made by the first and shot through the bomber, tearing out the other side. "That was a narrow escape," he recalled. Although flak never wounded Fitzpatrick, the plane would sometimes touch down at Amendola with as many as 60 holes in it.

Fitzpatrick's ball turret gunner was not so

lucky. "I'm hit!" Joe Martin called out just after dropping bombs over Austria. Fitzpatrick unhooked his oxygen tube and dashed back to the ball turret. He had just opened its lid and pulled Martin up when he passed out from lack of oxygen. One of the crewmen hooked up Fitzpatrick with a walkaround oxygen bottle, and he came to. They then pulled Martin into the radio room, where a recovered Fitzpatrick tried to help.

They laid Martin on his belly, exposing a large wound in his buttocks. Although the ball turret seat was armored, Fitzpatrick knew Martin always sat high in the turret, exposing his bottom. First, Fitzpatrick cut Martin's heated suit to access the wound, cutting off his heating circuit in the process. The men rotated their gloves and boots to Martin to help keep him warm. Once the plane passed over the Alps, Foos dropped the plane down to a warmer altitude, and Fitzpatrick went to work. He found a piece of flak the size of a fist imbedded into Martin's left buttock and pulled it out. He then sprinkled sulfa powder into the wound. If Martin had

been in pain, Fitzpatrick would have given him a morphine shot, but the gunner remained calm.

When the bomber arrived over the airfield, the flight engineer, Grover Themer, fired a red flare into the sky indicating that they had a wounded man aboard. Wing headquarters rerouted the bomber to an airstrip next to the 61st Station Hospital at Foggia. As the bomber taxied down the runway, an ambulance raced alongside. When it came to a stop, the crew helped load Martin into the ambulance for the trip to the hospital where doctors picked several personal items that he had kept in his back pocket out of his wound.

When the crew returned to their airstrip, one of the ground crewmen pried a piece of flak out of the ball turret and gave it to Fitzpatrick to give to Martin. "He didn't fly anymore," said Fitzpatrick. It had been Martin's 12th mission. The crew received a new ball turret gunner.

The flak did not let up. On another mission over Austria, it hit the Number One engine. Flak cut the propeller's drive shaft, and Foos attempted to feather it, turning the blades into the wind to reduce wind resistance. But the blades did not respond and began wind-milling



With flak bursts exploding in their midst, B-17 bombers of the 69th Bomb Squadron head to their targets over Austria. Fitzpatrick narrowly escaped death when two chunks of flak shot through his bomber's fuselage, almost hitting him.

at high speed, shaking the plane, as Fitzpatrick remembered it, "like a milkshake."

Then the engine caught fire. Copilot Robert Clarke pulled the lever on a CO₂ fire bottle in the wing to extinguish the flame. Fitzpatrick could still see flames and told Clarke it had failed, so Foos rang the bail out bell. Everyone put on their parachutes, knowing if Foos rang it again they would have to jump. Clarke pulled the lever on the second CO₂ fire bottle. This time the flame went out. As the bomber flew over the Alps, another engine failed and had to be feathered. Foos managed to get the plane up to 18,000 feet to cross the Brenner Pass, then landed back at base. They inspected the damage to find the fire had burned through a spar between two gas tanks. Amazingly, the tanks never caught fire. Foos received the Distinguished Flying Cross for his actions.

There were other dangers. Coming back over the Alps after a bomb run, the bomber hit a downdraft and dropped 5,000 feet in just a few seconds. Fitzpatrick, who never wore his seat-belt at his desk, split his head on the ceiling. Blood oozed out of the wound. With great effort, Foos and Clarke leveled the plane and brought the crew home.

Once on the ground, the flight surgeon cleaned and bandaged Fitzpatrick's wound. He then told Fitzpatrick he could thumb a ride to the hospital at Foggia where they would award him a Purple Heart, or he could go to dinner. Fitzpatrick weighed his options. He had been

wounded on a nine-hour mission over enemy territory with a troubled engine that threatened to kill the entire crew. He opted for dinner. The doctor poured him a double shot of good Army whiskey and sent him on his way. "I appreciated that double shot," he said.

With his head wrapped in bandages, Fitzpatrick sat down in the mess hall for dinner. Two new crews who had just arrived from the United States looked at him aghast. "They were probably thinking, 'What were we getting ourselves into?'" mused Fitzpatrick.

While on the ground, Fitzpatrick witnessed a different kind of horror. The day after injuring his head he watched as one of those two new crews flew a practice mission in the rain and slammed their bomber into a hillside. "Troops had to go up there and get the bodies," he recalled. In another incident, he watched a B-24 Liberator's engine explode and the bomber go down. He did see parachutes pop out of the falling plane. "There must have been some kind of malfunction," he said, "and they knew to abandon the plane before it blew up."

British troops, who shared the base with the Americans, brought a different tone to the war. Bagpipers played every morning. One Highlander would sneak Fitzpatrick a rum ration in a silver cup and occasionally invite him to the British mess, where he enjoyed dishes like fish and chips and kidney pie. "We ate pretty good."

The British helped defend the air base from Bed Check Charlie. "A German came over every

night and tried to bomb us," said Fitzpatrick. A British searchlight would pierce the night, followed by anti-aircraft fire. "Sometimes they got him," said Fitzpatrick. "Sometime they didn't." When the alarm went off, Fitzpatrick and his crew jumped out of their tents and dove into trenches, sometimes filled with freezing water. "After a while, we just forgot that," he said.

Surprisingly, the Americans got along well with captured German airmen, whom they called their little brothers. "The common denominator was we were all fliers. If you got shot down they would take better care of you than the SS," said Fitzpatrick. "We treated them the same way." The POWs enjoyed the same food as the Americans and were allowed to watch the same movies. The Americans sometimes chatted through the wire with those Germans who could speak a little English, but for the most part the POWs kept to themselves and played soccer.

One person the American bomber crews did not get along with was their new commanding officer (CO). A West Point graduate who was big on ceremony, he ordered everyone to fall out in their dress uniforms for Reveille. "We hadn't had that for a year," said Fitzpatrick. Although the men wore dress uniforms on missions, they usually wore t-shirts and shorts—and some wore kilts—on the base as the weather warmed. For the new CO's first Reveille only the new crews showed up. Furious, the CO ordered everyone to fall out for the next morning's

Reveille. “We got to those new crews and told them to stay in bed.” No one went out the next day. Again, the CO was furious, but he got the message and gave up on the ceremony.

During down time the men stayed at a beach house in Manfredonia, where they could take a sailboat out into the Adriatic Sea or just relax on the beach. “We would go swimming, and girls would come down there completely stripped and put on their bathing suits,” said Fitzpatrick. Unfortunately, he never had the opportunity to go fishing.

When Fitzpatrick finally earned some rest and relaxation time, he went on a Red Cross-sponsored trip to Rome. He slept at a mausoleum and toured Vatican City with an American-educated guide named Francesco Federici. They toured the Vatican Library, the Sistine Chapel, and met Pope Pius XII. A group of about 12 Americans were brought to an upstairs room in the Vatican where they waited for the pope. When His Holiness entered the room, the men cheered “Viva El Papa!” The pope then looked at each man’s rank and insignia and spoke to them in English. He then gave a prayer for each man’s family, followed by a papal blessing.

As the war wound down, the bombers went on a mission that irritated Fitzpatrick. On March 25, with only six weeks left in the war, the bombers raided a tank factory in Berlin that had already been leveled by the Eighth Air Force flying out of England. Two bombers and their crews were lost at a time when German civilians often killed downed airmen. “They just wanted to get it into the books that we bombed Berlin with 145 bombers,” he explained. Fortunately for Fitzpatrick, he had rotated out of that mission. “Sometimes the flip of a coin can make a difference,” he noted.

In the last month of the war, the bombers attacked a series of roads and bridges over which the Germans were fleeing while the British Fifth Army pursued. One of the 1,000-bomber missions committed a tragic mistake. On every mission the lead bombardier, using the Norden bombsight, would drop his bombs and the other bombardiers followed. The lead bombardier would click his Norden sight forward 45 degrees to lock onto the target, then click it back to the ground below so the plane would drop bombs automatically on target. On this particular mission, the leader clicked his sight up but forgot to click it back. “So instead of bombing at a 45-degree angle,” said Fitzpatrick, “we dropped on Brits south of the Po River.”

The next day the bombers went up on the same mission. This time the British fired their antiaircraft weapons straight up in the air, on either side of the approaching air fleet, creating

a clear corridor. There were also large orange arrows on the ground pointing to the Germans. “They must have had casualties [the day before],” explained Fitzpatrick. “That pained me greatly.”

On April 25, 1945, the 2nd Bomb Group hit Linz, Austria, followed on May 1 with a mission to Salzburg. On May 6, the Fifteenth Air Force ran out of enemy targets. Three days later, Germany surrendered, and the war in Europe ended. “We went wild and drank wine,” said Fitzpatrick. The ground crews took flares out of the planes, planted them on a hill, and set them off. “We lit 1,000 red flares to celebrate,” he said, “and they burned for a long time.” The Americans opened the POW camp gates, but the Germans refused to leave. They knew their world outside had been destroyed and simply

National Archives



Two B-17 bombers fly over the snow-capped Italian Alps. Fitzpatrick’s bomber once had to cross the Alps on only two engines.

finding food would be difficult. As the days passed, the restless Americans began drinking and getting into fights. Soon their superiors confiscated their firearms.

Fitzpatrick and his crew took on a new mission, flying high-ranking officers around Europe. On a trip to Pisa, Italy, he and his flight engineer took a break at a bar. When Fitzpatrick entered, he spotted a friend from Pennsylvania. “Hiya Tom” the friend called out. “Hiya Jim,” Fitzpatrick shot back. It was as if they had not seen each other for just a few days. On a trip to Vienna, Austria, Fitzpatrick went to a hotel where he paid the bar’s piano player a dollar to play “Vienna, the City of My Dreams.” The man played the song. He then played it again, and again, and again. Fitzpatrick eventually had

to pay him another dollar just to stop.

With the war in Europe over but combat still raging in the Pacific, Fitzpatrick and his fellow fliers flew British Gurka and Sikh troops out of Italy on the first leg of their trip back home. “They did everything with a big smile,” recalled Fitzpatrick. One Sikh boarded his B-17 holding a bugle. “Hey sport,” Fitzpatrick said to him, “how about you give me that bugle.” The soldier replied “No sahib, its mine.” Fitzpatrick was undeterred. “Yes, but it’s my airplane.” The soldier coughed it up. “He swapped it for a plane ride to Naples.”

When Japan surrendered on August 14, Fitzpatrick earned the right to go home. “We were happy when they dropped the bomb,” he recalled about the atomic attacks on Hiroshima and Nagasaki. American fliers had the option of

taking a plane or ship home. When Fitzpatrick heard about a plane crash soon after takeoff, he decided to go by ship. He boarded the Victory ship *SS Lake Charles Victory* where, as one of the highest ranking noncommissioned officers, he was responsible for feeding 500 infantrymen three times a day. He spoiled the returning veterans, giving them extra milk and anything else he could find. He treated them better than himself. “I lost about 20 pounds coming back on that ship,” he said.

After 14 days at sea, the *Lake Charles Victory* pulled into port at Newport News, Virginia. After mustering out of the service, Fitzpatrick and some other veterans rented a car and drove to Washington, D.C. Fitzpatrick then

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A few months after the Normandy campaign and with other fronts competing for the American public's attention, Lt. Col. S.L.A. "Slam" Marshall, a hard-living Chicago newspaperman, World War I veteran, and deputy historian in the European Theater, hand carried the first of the War Department campaign publications, *Omaha Beachhead*, to General Omar Bradley. Based in part on Slam's field notes as witness to the Allied invasion and lodgement in Normandy, he was told First Army, which planned and carried out the operation, would have to review the draft. Screwing his courage to the wall, Slam confronted the three-star commanding general: "Then will you instruct that they should question errors in fact but not delete an interpretation simply because it is disagreeable?"

In Slam's view, "Omaha had not been a glittering triumph for our forces. There are few more brutal battles in the annals of America at war. Mistakes had been made and disaster had been narrowly averted." Six weeks later, the report was back at the War Department, accuracy improved but otherwise untouched. It was a model and honest attempt at an objective analysis and paved the way for publication of "a more candid official history than has been written of the armies and generals heretofore."

The 12th Army Group GETS GOING

Activated at Saint-Sauveur-Lendelin, France, on August 1, 1944, the 12th Army Group mounted an offensive across Western Europe.

BY STEVE OSSAD

As tame as official histories sometimes appear now, for the historians writing the first drafts of World War II history this was an exhilarating moment. That feeling would not last, at least for Slam, and he became a critic of Bradley's generalship.

At 0900 on August 1, 1944, Omar Bradley bade farewell to the staff at First Army, and at noon 12th Army Group became operational at Saint-Sauveur-Lendelin, three days after the previous German occupants had vacated the premises in haste. To the relief of General Courtney Hodges and most others at First Army, now working very smoothly in spite of its many idiosyncrasies, Bradley took no staff except for his official family (two aides, driver, cook, pilot, valet) and Red O'Hare, the G-1 (personnel), an aggressive outsider who joined the II Corps after Sicily from Governor's Island and was never popular among the other G's. All of the uncertainty about who would command the American armies was over for the

moment—except in the mind of Field Marshal Bernard Montgomery.

Twelfth Army Group was formed on the Continent after D-Day with a command structure responsible for multiple American armies fighting in France. It was the successor to First Army Group, which had been activated with General Bradley in command in October 1943. The activation of 12th Army Group furthered the transition of American command from British Field Marshal Montgomery. During the early phase of the fighting in Western Europe, Montgomery had commanded all Allied ground forces. However, as the Allies pushed toward the German frontier, 12th Army Group was organized and ordered to report to General

Lieutenant General Omar N. Bradley commanded 12th Army Group from its activation to the end of World War II and led more than a million American soldiers, more than any other U.S. Army field commander in history.

Dwight D. Eisenhower, Supreme Commander Allied Expeditionary Force, who assumed direct overall command of Allied operations on the Continent on September 1, 1944.

Letter of Instruction #1 from 12th Army Group activated the U.S. Third Army with General Troy Middleton's VIII Corps in place and another corps in transit and ordered General George S. Patton to swing southwest through the Avranches gap opened on July 31, 1944. Unleashing his mechanized cavalry and armor, Patton would secure the Brittany ports, especially Brest, and scour the peninsula of enemy forces before turning eastward along the Loire River. First Army, under Bradley's deputy and understudy Hodges, would pivot to the left, driving back the Germans to the city of Vire with his three corps already on the line.

Bradley knew Courtney Hodges well, going back to the days when they served together under Army Chief of Staff General George Marshall at the Infantry School. They were longtime

All photos: National Archives





American soldiers wade ashore in Normandy on June 6, 1944, D-Day. Lieutenant Colonel S.L.A. Marshall, Army historian in the European Theater, was critical of operations at Omaha Beach on D-Day and placed the blame for heavy losses on General Bradley.

hunting and fishing buddies, both crack rifle shots, and knew the terrain and game around Fort Benning, Georgia, as well as anyone. Each played at or under par on most Army golf courses, many of which they played together. A West Point dropout from the class of 1908, Hodges caught up quickly, rising from prewar private to lieutenant colonel in World War I. He was awarded a Distinguished Service Cross as a battalion commander in the 6th Infantry Regiment in the Meuse-Argonne in November 1918. Serious, reserved, and quiet, everyone described him as “courtly” (pun intended), a gentlemen, and at age 57 he looked and spoke like a small town accountant, unimpressive in a cast of fascinating military celebrities.

Everyone knew that Hodges was a conservative believer in the official doctrine. One word and style summed it up: infantry. From instructor at Benning to chief of infantry and commandant of the Infantry School, Hodges was reliable, steady, cautious, a sound tactician, and good planner. Not a man to take dramatic risks, he willingly bore the brunt of battle while Patton hunted glory because he knew that what he was doing was key to winning the war. He was the tackle, and Patton was the end.

Bradley had a real blind spot about Hodges that went far back, based on common interests, experiences, world views, and genuine affection. Junior to Hodges in regular Army rank and personal status, even after Africa, Sicily, and taking over First Army, Bradley deferred

to him in public, addressing him as “Sir” throughout the war.

Evaluated as an Army commander, history has not been kind to Hodges in spite of efforts to redress the disparity in attention paid to Third Army and the dominating image of its commander. Hodges has been described in a broad range from the generous “lacking in presence” to the harsh “clearly in over his head.” The proverbial man behind the scenes, he eschewed publicity and relied on the advice of a few advisers, especially his chief of staff, General Bill Kean, originally added to the team by Bradley when he took over II Corps and to whom Hodges delegated, or surrendered, much day to day control.

Kean, a ruthless, driven, and humorless administrator, was quietly mocked for some strange personal quirks, for example, an annoying addiction to peanut butter, which had to be specially procured. Called “Captain Bligh,” an unflattering reference to a real life movie character, Kean enjoyed his commander’s respect. Hodges also relied heavily on fellow Benning alumnus General Joe Collins, his most valued corps commander and a favorite of Bradley, Supreme Commander General Dwight Eisenhower, and Marshall. Everyone knew the driving force behind First Army’s more aggressive and maneuver-based operations was Collins’s VII Corps, usually spearheaded by General Maurice Rose’s 3rd Armored Division.

By July 27, the main enemy resistance to Oper-

ation Cobra, the Normandy breakout, was vanquished. The Allies had taken Coutances and Avranches and opened the way for the great offensive. Badly wounded in an RAF Hawker Typhoon strafing attack on July 17, Field Marshal Erwin Rommel, commanding German Army Group B, was slowly recuperating. Despite his fearsome reputation, his effect on the battle had been minimal, and after the assassination attempt on Hitler on July 20, he disappeared as the feared adversary haunting the Allies, especially Montgomery and the British.

More important, whatever their reasons, OB West and Army Group B delayed too long in bringing reinforcements to Normandy. It was not until July 27 that Hitler finally released some Fifteenth Army divisions to Normandy. The vast Pas de Calais deception had pinned the Führer’s attention opposite the phony Army Group “stationed” at Dover for more than six weeks, beyond any possible expectation or prediction, and remains the greatest operational battlefield deception in history.

When the American armored columns struck out, the enemy withdrawal was so sudden and disorganized that no defense in depth was possible. Consequently, Patton’s columns of mechanized reconnaissance units probing ahead of the armored divisions met little resistance in the Brittany peninsula until they came to the ports. As expected, the Germans fell back to Brest, St. Malo, Lorient, and St. Nazaire, which they defended as fortresses. The Allied planners were continually searching for answers to growing supply pressure and envisioned the Brittany ports supplying the drive east to the Seine River. That territory would provide ample space for air and supply bases to support the advance to the German border, the Rhine, and beyond.

With corps cavalry groups and squadrons protecting the flanks along with mechanized infantry, Third Army whirled westward with infantry mopping up some opposition around Rennes. Montgomery had finally broken free of Caen and was moving south, which put an end for the moment to the attempts by Air Marshal Sir Arthur Tedder and others to have him replaced by Sir Harold Alexander. Ike and Bradley now pushed hard for General Miles Dempsey’s British Second Army to “be more aggressive” in support of Hodges, but without success.

One piece of good news where little was usually found cheered all: the weather was hot and dry, and inland from the sea there was little fog. Fighter bombers mercilessly attacked all enemy daylight concentrations and movement, further slowing the retreat that was degenerating into a rout. Under the staggering blows of the IX

Tactical Air Command and VII Corps, the enemy left flank crumbled, widening the breakout.

On August 3, 1944, Bradley changed his mind about the ports and issued Letter of Instruction #2, halting Patton's drive into Brittany and shifting Third Army's weight to the drive east, with a single corps (three infantry divisions) left behind to protect the southern flank of the 12th Army Group. Soon after taking command, Bradley had his first battlefield difficulties with Patton. During a visit to newly established Third Army headquarters, Bradley saw a gap in his lines developing with the shift in plans and ordered a division to plug it along with coordinating orders to other divisions.

That was going over Patton's head, an action seldom taken though not unprecedented. Patton was out in the field when the situation developed, so Bradley just left word with Patton's chief of staff and at VIII Corps, most of all savoring the moment: "I got even with Patton." It was a signal of Bradley's continuing frustration with Patton's independence and cavalier approach, although he graciously acknowledged he would have done the same thing and did not complain.

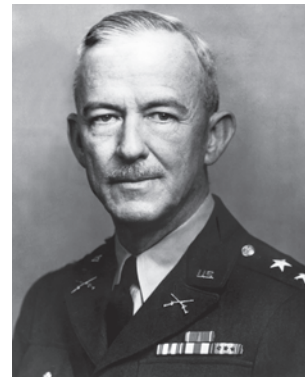
Even as he turned his main strength away from Brittany, there was criticism of the original plan. Bradley's defense was mostly logistical; the Americans needed 750,000 tons of supplies per day, and almost all of it came over the beaches, while the small ports were subject to disruptions, especially by the weather. The storm of June 19, 1944, wrecked the American Mulberry artificial harbor at Omaha Beach, reminding everyone of the frailty of the supply line. Cherbourg was reserved for Montgomery's 21st Army Group, so there was no margin of error. Supply by air was limited to about 1,000 tons a day and only useful for tactical situations, and even that was subject to other requirements for the limited transport fleet of Douglas C-47 transport planes.

The Germans had already demonstrated at Cherbourg that when assaulted they would destroy the port facilities before surrendering them, but critics complained that failure to seize the ports, regardless of the cost and destruction, prevented their use for many weeks longer than if they had been taken in the first rush. SHAEF (Supreme Headquarters Allied Expeditionary Force) always believed that Brest was necessary, and the status of other alternatives, such as Antwerp, remained uncertain.

Grasping the importance of exploiting the German retreat, Bradley calculated that it was more important to unleash Patton to keep them on the run rather than take the ports immedi-



Supreme Allied commander General Dwight D. Eisenhower, left, confers with General Omar Bradley, commander of the U.S. 12th Army Group, center, and General George S. Patton, Jr., commander of the U.S. Third Army. Bradley, subordinate to Patton in North Africa and Italy, was frustrated with Patton's independent streak when the roles were reversed in Western Europe.



Field Marshal Bernard Montgomery, left, hoped to retain command of all Allied ground forces on the European continent. Lt. Gen. J. Lawton Collins, center, gained a reputation as possibly the finest American corps commander while leading the VII Corps of the U.S. First Army. General Courtney Hodges assumed command of First Army after General Omar Bradley took operational control of 12th Army Group.

ately, a decision strengthened by his confidence that the logistics train, especially ammunition, would keep up. When it came, the fight to take the ports, especially Brest, was bloody, a diversion, and well to the rear of where the real war was happening. To some it was an inauspicious beginning and a waste of Third Army's mobile potential at the start of the breakout, but in his first moments as Army group commander Bradley was flexible, adapted quickly to the tactical change opened by the German collapse, and changed the plan on the fly, intervening against doctrine when he thought that necessary.

American history provides few models or even formal guidelines for an Army group commander. During his final campaigns of the Civil

War in Georgia and the Carolinas, Maj. Gen. William T. Sherman commanded three field armies—the Cumberland (General George Thomas), the Tennessee (General James McPherson), and the Ohio (General William Schofield)—and was in many respects the U.S. Army's first Army group commander, though the scale of his operations was small. His army group never numbered more than 100,000 men, smaller than II Corps at Bizerte, and he faced no complicated combined arms, joint planning issues, or Army group boundary problems.

U.S. General of the Armies John Pershing, still the highest ranking ground soldier in American history, except possibly George Washing-

ton, barely deserves the title based on a few weeks during which he commanded two American armies, 500,000 men, at the end of World War I. After the Great War, there had been some study and discussion at the Command and General Staff School about doctrine and organization of large units, that an Army group should direct but not conduct operations ... it should confine itself to broadly stated "mission orders," but these principles were not binding, and Bradley had considerable discretion.

"I was free in a tactical sense to command however I wished. I chose to pattern my administration somewhat on the model set by Sir Harold Alexander, who had commanded the 15th Army Group in Tunisia and the 18th Army Group in Sicily and Italy," he reflected. "I would issue broad 'missions' but at the same

battle, was situated around a small chateau on a large farm. Once his new headquarters was settled, Bradley's routine quickly resumed with small changes from First Army procedures. Operations chief Brig. Gen. Frederick Kibler began the 0830 morning meeting describing operations since the last briefing, and Red O'Hare gave the personnel picture. One week after activation, on August 7, 1944, the Army group had an estimated effective strength of 560,000 soldiers, including 1,400 replacements received in the previous 24 hours.

Bradley had under his command two field armies, six corps, and 21 divisions, including airborne, armored, mechanized, and infantry formations. Since D-Day they had suffered 114,000 cumulative casualties, including 16,000 dead, and taken 77,000 prisoners. Intelligence esti-

given by General Edwin Sibert, was a central feature of the meeting, describing the current enemy order of battle and recent movements, followed by a report on air operations by the Ninth Air Force liaison and the daily weather report and forecast. Important as a means of orienting the officers of 12th Army Group to common purpose, the daily staff briefing was also a source of vital and interesting information, including timely political, geographic, or military data presented by appropriate staff sections or specialists.

General Bradley asked questions directly, which differed from the British system, where the chief of staff took the lead and conducted the dialogue among the general staff (GS) officers about topics of interest. After the formal meeting, the Ultra officer, Major Alexander Standish, briefed the top officers about the most sensitive intelligence. Operating out of his own van and with "shoot to kill" security measures in place, the 44-year-old Boston stock analyst controlled the raw Ultra intelligence messages that arrived each day and could not be taken outside the van, no matter the circumstances.

"The messages were picked up by powerful receivers in England, decoded and translated, put into a British code and re-broadcast to a British unit attached to Eagle TAC which again decoded them and delivered them to me," Standish explained. "It was my duty and that of my staff, consisting of five or six non-commissioned officers, to winnow the wheat from the chaff, maintain a complete 'Situation Map' and brief General Bradley daily utilizing the ordinary intelligence provided by the armies' G-2s observation and prisoner of war interrogations as well as the Ultra intelligence."

Originally, the commanding general's briefing was held twice daily and then reduced to one lasting for half an hour each morning. The head of G-3 Operations Branch, Colonel Gilman C. "Gim" Mudgett, one of Bradley's West Point math students and a protégé of Chief of Staff Lev Allen, was in charge of the liaisons. An expert cavalryman and expert in "advanced equitation," Gim held a liaison officers briefing at 0810 and also briefed General Bradley each evening at 2115 in his quarters. Although Bigland had a major impact at First Army in changing the way American liaisons operated, he credits Gim Mudgett for the adoption of the spirit of the British liaison system and the growing confidence of his American colleagues about their role and importance.

At any time, the liaison officers were authorized to convey appropriate information to Gim, and Bradley could call on them for briefings or special assignments. The rules governing



A tank crewman of the German 9th Panzer Division keeps watch overhead for Allied fighter bombers. Allied tactical air support took a heavy toll in German tanks and troops during the attack on Mortain and the German withdrawal across France.

time I would watch the situation very closely and suggest orders or modification as I thought required, even to the movement of specific divisions. In sum, I would exercise very closest control over Hodges and Patton."

During the turn from Brittany, Bradley harkened to the spirit of the American military tradition and his own tactical desires by selectively violating the former (going over the head of his superiors when necessary) to achieve the latter.

The 12th Army Group, after one week in

mated they had killed or wounded 115,000 German soldiers. After Red, operations officers reviewed the front from left to right, starting with Major Tom Bigland giving the latest plans and appreciations of 21st Army Group. As Montgomery's principal liaison to Bradley's headquarters since just before D-Day, Bigland's report received broad attention. Reports on First and Third Armies followed, presented by liaison officers who by that time had begun to adopt Bigland's methods honed in Normandy.

The G-2 Daily Intelligence Summary, usually

sensitive Ultra information, however, applied to the group commander no less than any GI, and those who knew the secret also knew the consequences of sloppiness.

Attendance at the morning meeting was strictly controlled, and only the general officers and chiefs of general and special staff sections were cleared to attend because of tight space in the trailer van. Frequent high-ranking visitors, generals, and politicians made the space problem worse. Liaison officers had low attendance priority, except for Major Bigland who had a seat in the trailer during the whole war as Monty's representative. When Ike took over the ground war on September 1, Bradley requested that Bigland move up to Eagle TAC (12th Army Group forward headquarters) as well, evidence of the position of trust and respect Bigland held at Eagle TAC. By that time his daily and periodic reports at both Army group headquarters had a wide, if unofficial, circulation, and he constantly met officers complimentary of his work, stressing not only the information about the British, but how much insight he provided into their own command and forces.

As Major Bigland traveled the battlefield and settled into his new job, he gained even more appreciation for the Americans' unmatched ability to adapt and innovate, the practical effects of their often parodied "can do" attitude. The invention of the Rhino was only one example.

"In Normandy and after," he recalled, "I saw many things done which I said at Fort Leavenworth were impossible. It began to dawn on me that the Americans were at the same stage of war in 1944 where we had been in 1941-2, but that, while we were then fighting a superior German, better prepared for war and with superior equipment, we were now superior in men and equipment, above all in the air. We had asked a lot of our troops in North Africa, Sicily, and Italy and those that had survived tended to take more precautions and to move more slowly."

When Bigland returned from his alternate day visit to 21 TAC on August 7, he took some soap "to have a good wash in a muddy, four-foot-deep stream which was somewhat smelly probably owing to dead cows upstream" and went to mark up the map in the operations tent. Since the morning briefing new red lines now pierced General Leland Hobbs's 30th Infantry Division front in several locations. Bradley asked Bigland to join a conference to share the latest British picture as he was already thinking about catching the exposed Germans and wanted to get a good sense of Montgomery's thinking and plans.



ABOVE: American soldiers of the 30th Infantry Division, commanded by Maj. Gen. Leland Hobbs, move warily through the hedgerow country of France toward the village of Mortain. Bradley was confident his forces would stop the German counterattack that could have jeopardized the entire Allied lodgment in Normandy. **BELOW:** The body of a dead German Waffen SS sergeant lies sprawled beside an armored vehicle that has been knocked out during the fighting around Mortain.



Instead of pulling back, as any reasonable commander would do, the enemy had mounted a serious counterattack with five panzer divisions (most of their remaining armor in Normandy), including the crack 116th Panzer and 2nd Panzer, as well three divisions of the I SS Panzer Corps.

In the aftermath of the successful Allied breakout, rather than the withdrawal dictated by military reality and advised by his own general staff, Hitler had ordered a counterattack with the strong mobile forces that he had held back in Normandy.

"The Germans were faced with a serious problem," wrote Bradley. "Should they with-

draw their forces behind the Seine River, a good defensive position, or should they counterattack and try to reestablish the line that had confined us in the beachhead. I am sure the trained German generals would have preferred the former, but Hitler made the big decisions himself." That was a solid insight that Bradley and every other senior commander forgot by mid-December with terrible consequences.

Mortain, a small village perched on a rocky ledge overlooking the Cance River and dominated by a beautiful 13th-century church, was the Germans' first objective. About 20 miles east of the Normandy coast and 15 miles south

Continued on page 78

WEHRMACHT OPERATION **ABORTED**



Soviet T-34 medium tanks lie knocked out and abandoned near Siniavino. These tanks were lost during the Red Army effort that blunted the German offensive to take Leningrad in the autumn of 1942.



IT WAS CALLED NORDLICHT, or Northern Lights. With Hitler's drive toward Stalingrad in full swing, the Oberkommando der Wehrmacht (OKW—German Armed Forces High Command) was also planning to end the almost year-long siege of Leningrad in a two-pronged attack to capture the city.

Failing to take Leningrad in 1941, Army Group North, now commanded by General Georg von Küchler, had settled into a siege reminiscent of World War I. Long lines of trenches covered the landscape, and fierce artillery barrages heralded attacks from one side or the other that yielded little ground gained or lost but were costly in manpower and equipment.

During the Winter Offensive of 1941-1942, the Russian High Command (Stavka) had attempted to lift the siege with a coordinated attack by the Volkhov Front and the Leningrad Front. The offensive around Leningrad began in early January, but despite outnumbering the Germans 1.5-1 in men, 1.6-1 in guns and mortars, and 1.3-1 in aircraft, initial Soviet successes were rare due to poor command and control. Individual army commanders failed to coordinate operations with neighboring forces, and intense German resistance became an increasing concern.

The fighting continued through the first half of 1942, with the Soviets suffering horrific casualties. Lt. Gen. Andrei Andreevich Vlasov's 2nd Shock Army, which had penetrated the German line,

A major German offensive, Operation Nordlicht, was cancelled in the face of Soviet operations that cost the Red Army dearly but upset the German plans.

BY PAT McTAGGART

was surrounded and left to starve to death in a swampy forested area northwest of Myasnoi Bor, and the other Soviet forces were fought to a standstill.

It was in this atmosphere that the operation to remove the thorn that was Leningrad was born. On June 30, 1942, Küchler, who was promoted to field marshal the same day, arrived at the Wolfsschanze (Wolf's Lair), Hitler's headquarters near Rastenburg in East Prussia. General Franz Halder, chief of the Army's General staff, recounted the meeting in his diary.

"[Küchler] submits his plans. He envisages four offensives in his sector, which, as they supposedly could be carried out only one after another, would take all of twenty weeks. The individual projects are put up for discussion."

Küchler's plan consisted of two actions on the right flank of Army Group North and two actions on the Leningrad Front. The two in the south included widening the northern flanks of the corridor to Demiansk and the elimination of a Soviet salient left over from the Russian winter offensive.

In the Leningrad area, the operations consisted of eliminating the

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ABOVE: German crewmen service the mammoth 600mm mortar nicknamed “Karl” in preparation for Operation Nordlicht. The Germans relocated several large siege guns from the Crimea to the Leningrad front in an effort to capture the city. **BELOW:** German soldiers dig trenches in preparation for a Soviet counterattack in the Leningrad area.



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Soviet bridgehead in the vicinity of Oranienbaum southeast of Leningrad and the elimination of the Pogost'e bridgehead on the west bank of the Volkhov River. To assist in the Leningrad operation, especially in the reduction of the mighty island fortress of Kronstadt, which guarded the approaches to the city around the Gulf of Finland, three gigantic siege batteries were to be ordered from the Crimea to the Leningrad front.

Dora was a railway gun that fired an 800mm

(31.5-inch) shell. Karl and Gamma were mortars, the former firing a 600mm (24-inch) shell and the latter firing a 419mm (16.5-inch) projectile. All three batteries had taken part in the successful capture of the Sevastopol fortress.

On July 23, a directive from Hitler ordered that Leningrad be captured by the first half of September. The code name for the operation was *Ferzerzauber* (Fire Magic), but it was renamed *Nordlicht* a week later. To help accomplish the operation, newly promoted Field Marshal Erich

von Manstein was directed to move his 11th Army headquarters, along with five infantry divisions, from the Crimea to Army Group North. That move, virtually crossing the entire Eastern Front from south to north, would not be completed until late August.

Küchler realized that his army group did not have the resources to conduct the four proposed operations discussed on June 30 plus *Nordlicht*. Therefore, he lobbied Hitler and the *Oberkommando des Heeres* (OKH, Army High Command), which was subordinate to the OKW, to postpone the *Oranienbaum* operation until *Nordlicht* was successful. OKH agreed, and because of the weather and changes in the tactical situation, the operation was postponed and eventually cancelled along with the operation against the *Pogost'e* salient. The operation to widen the corridor to *Demiansk* was also postponed.

The Soviets were far from inactive as the Germans prepared for *Nordlicht*. Lt. Gen. Leonid Aleksandrovich Govorov, commanding the Leningrad Front, was receiving reports that the Germans were concentrating forces around *Siniavino* and *Chudov*. Although it was not clear why, it was thought they were gathering for the soon to be cancelled offensive against Red Army units on the west bank of the *Volkhov*.

Born in 1897, Govorov had been commandant of the Military Artillery Academy before the war and was a graduate of the *Frunze* and *General Staff* academies. He had recently replaced Lt. Gen. Mikhail Semenovitch Kozin as the commander of the Leningrad Front after the disastrous spring campaign.

With somewhat foggy intelligence reports pointed toward an enemy offensive in the Leningrad area, Govorov planned to disrupt the enemy with preemptive attacks of his own. As a precursor to these attacks, meanwhile, *Stavka* ordered the devastated 2nd Shock Army to be reformed in mid-July as part of the *Volkhov* Front. Its new commander, Lt. Gen. Nikolai Kuzmich Klykov, was an energetic nonsense general who had previously commanded the 32nd and 52nd Armies.

While the 2nd Shock Army was forming, Govorov ordered Lt. Gen. Ivan Fedorovich Nikolaev to launch attacks to keep the Germans off guard. Divisions of his 42nd Army hit the enemy near *Staro-Panovo* for four days, beginning July 20. Although the Soviets hoped for success, the attacks were beaten off at a heavy price in Russian blood. Halder's diary for that period barely mentioned the fighting, and when it did it described it as “minor and of little importance.”

Despite the failure of Nikolaev's troops to make a dent in the German defenses, Lt. Gen. Vladimir Petrovich Sviridov was ordered to attack enemy positions south of Kolpino with units of his 55th Army. Colonel Semen Ivanovich Donskov's 268th Rifle Division, supported by the 220th Tank Brigade, hit Brig. Gen. Martin Wandel's 121st Infantry Division in the Putrolovo area west of Krasny Bor. After a fierce struggle, the Germans were driven out of their fortified positions.

The 4th SS Police Division, commanded by Maj. Gen. of Police Alfred Wünnenberg, was soon drawn into the battle. The tenacious Donskov held firm, throwing back several German attacks and counterattacking on his own. More of Donskov's troops were then able to cross the Izhora River and establish a bridgehead in the village of Iam Izhora.

Donskov's success forced General Georg Lindemann, commander of the 18th Army, to send more troops to the region. While those divisions were en route, Donskov continued to fend off attacks by Wünnenberg's men.

The fighting as it attacked the bridgehead was described in the history of the 4th SS Division: "Heavy fighting developed along the road [to Iam Izhora] itself. From the elevated west bank of the Izhora, the enemy had good observation of the entire left-handed sector of the division, which was almost devoid of cover. [Enemy] tanks fired on the main line of resistance. Extremely heavy [enemy] artillery and mortar fire covered the road.

"An immediate counterattack made it to the cemetery in the small patch of woods north of Iam Izhora, but it was brought to a halt in heavy enemy defensive fire. The road, however, or more precisely, its roughly 70 centimeter-deep roadside ditches, were the only link to forward elements."

The Soviets continued to enlarge their bridgehead, pushing north along the east bank of the Izhora. Wünnenberg's men continued to suffer casualties as they tried to stem the Soviet advance. All the officers of the 4th SS Reconnaissance Unit were killed or wounded, and artillerymen were used to fill the gaps in the infantry units. The 4th SS even acquired a cynical nickname—the Birkenkreuz (birch cross) Division, symbolizing the crosses used to mark the graves of its dead.

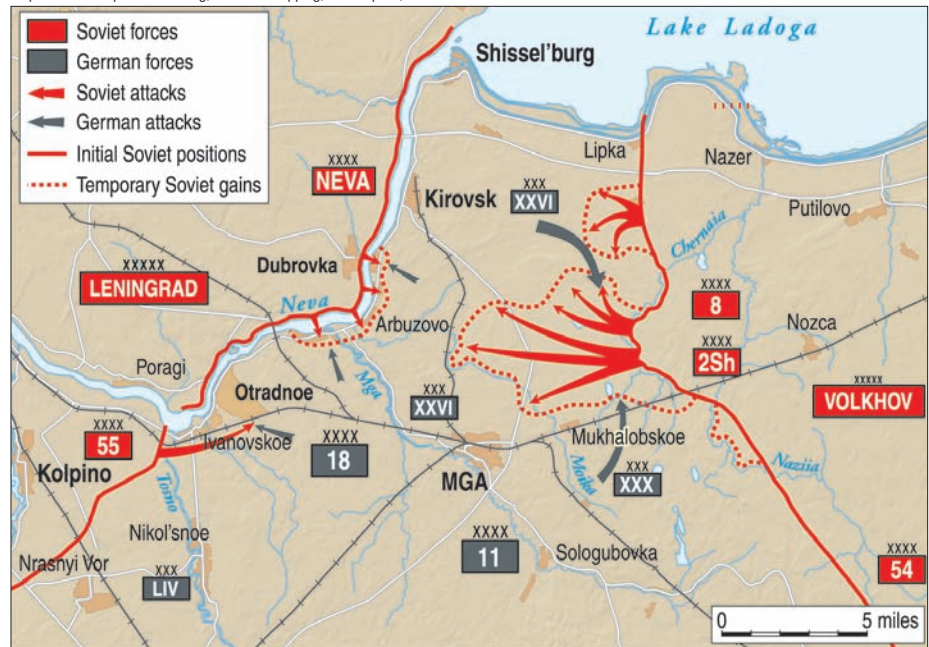
Red Army forces also applied greater pressure to the Demiansk salient and to German units in the Staraya Russa area. The attacks achieved little as far as territory gained, but they did keep the Germans off balance, forcing them to reinforce those areas with units of the 16th Army that could have been used for the

impending assault on Leningrad.

While those actions were taking place, Stavka was planning another surprise. Unaware of the impending arrival of the 11th Army, the Soviets decided to start an even larger operation to disrupt possible enemy attempts to take the offensive and at the same time clear German forces from the Mga salient south of Lake Ladoga with the intention of restoring a land line to Leningrad.

The plan called for Govorov's Leningrad Front to launch an attack across the Neva River about 12 kilometers south of Shissel'burg with his Neva Operational Group. Another attack would be launched by

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



Red Army units suffered grievous losses but succeeded in grinding the German offensive to take Leningrad to a halt in the waning months of 1942. The enemy never captured Leningrad, but the city was surrounded and its population was decimated during a 900-day siege.

Sviridov's 55th Army about 12 kilometers farther south near Ivanovskoe.

Lieutenant General Kiril Anfansevich Meretskov's Volkhov Front would attack from his bridgeheads on the Volkhov River using Lt. Gen. Filipp Nikanorovich Starikov's 8th Army as its spearhead. If all went according to plan, the two fronts would join forces at Siniavino, cutting off German units between there and Lake Ladoga. The attacks would be supported by the Red Air Force, the Baltic Fleet, and the Ladoga Flotilla.

It sounded like a good plan, but the area to be attacked would be an extremely hostile environment. Besides extensive German defensive positions, the Soviets would also have to contend with terrain that was heavily forested, contained few roads, and included many marshes

and wetlands. The forests and wetlands not only hindered the movement of artillery and vehicles, but also prohibited good observation for both attacker and defender.

One of the few good observation sites lay on the Siniavino Heights, about 150 meters higher than the surrounding terrain. The heights not only gave a commanding view of the area, but were one of the few points unaffected by marshy conditions. The Germans had built a strong defensive line that was anchored on those very heights.

As the Soviets assembled forces for the attack, the Germans were also grouping their units for Nordlicht. Brig. Gen. Erwin Sander's 170th

Infantry Division, one of the first divisions arriving from the Crimea, was ordered to move into the Mga salient. Also en route to the salient were four Panzerkampfwagen VI Tiger I tanks, fresh from the assembly line. The tanks, part of Heavy Panzer Unit 502, did not have track mudguards and were still supported by factory teams. They would prove virtually useless in the coming battle due to the inhospitable terrain.

The Soviets had been careful about assembling their forces. Mindful of German air superiority in the vicinity, many of the Soviet units traveled to their jump-off areas under cover of darkness. German patrols and air reconnaissance noticed little change in the enemy's dispositions. On August 6, Halder wrote, "Local fighting flares up at Kirishi and Leningrad." Ten days later he noted, "Attacks against 16th

Army, as in past days, in 18th Army sector, rather quiet.”

The quiet in the 18th Army’s sector was about to come to an end. Although the 4th SS was still facing a stalemate, the division was about to bear the brunt of a new attack. Soviet units crossed the Neva at Ust’-Tosno and Ivanovskoe, at the juncture of the Neva and Tosno Rivers. They managed to establish bridgeheads in both areas but soon encountered increasingly stiff resistance. Strongpoints in the area held up the Soviet advance, which was also hindered by lack of leadership within the bridgeheads and poor artillery support.

One such strongpoint was manned by Sergeant Rudolf Seitz. Armed only with small weapons and a 37mm antitank gun, Seitz and a handful of men held off Soviet attempts to take a key road junction. After holding the Soviets at bay for several hours, the position was threatened with encirclement. Seitz ordered his remaining men to retreat, but he stayed in the position and continued firing, assisted by a Corporal Eggersdorffer. Finally, about to be overrun, the two men destroyed their gun and made it back to their own lines.

Although the Soviets received reinforcements, the SS were also strengthened by elements of the 61st Infantry and 12th Panzer Divisions, as well as by a security battalion. Thwarted in his initial attempt to breach the German defenses, Govorov called off the planned river crossing by the Neva Operational Group until the beginning of Meretskov’s offensive. Even though the crossing was postponed, the Soviet forces still holding on in the bridgeheads continued to harass the Germans.

Reinforcements from elements of three rifle divisions (43rd, 70th, and 136th) helped the bridgehead forces replace losses. It also allowed them to attempt further eastward movement. A cat and mouse game developed as opposing forces sought each other out. In the early hours of August 20, 1st Lt. Mailhammer of the 4th SS Artillery Regiment reported, “The Russians are in the woods in front of us.... We have engaged the enemy over open sights.”

Meanwhile, Manstein, on his way to the Leningrad sector, stopped off at Hitler’s headquarters. Meeting with Halder, he discussed his role in the Leningrad attack. He later wrote, “Halder made it quite clear that he completely disagreed with Hitler’s proposal to take Leningrad in addition to conducting an offensive in the south [Stalingrad], but said that Hitler had insisted on this and refused to relinquish the idea.”

While those talks were taking place, the action along the Tosno River continued with



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Meanwhile, Manstein continued to fine tune his plans for Nordlicht. Although he was determined that his forces would not be bogged down within the city, it is interesting to note that neither he, Lindemann, Halder, or any other higher commanders seemed to have any qualms about the complete destruction of the former Russian capital and the eradication of its population.

more forces being funneled in by both sides. Several Soviet tanks also joined the fight, crossing the river from their laager around Kolpino. Supported by gunboats on the Neva and air and artillery, the Soviets strove to encircle Ivanovskoe from the south. They were met with counterattacks from the SS Police and 12th Panzer Divisions, as well as elements from the arriving 5th Gebirgs (Mountain) Division. In touch and go fighting on the 20th, the Germans were able to maintain their lines against several fierce attacks.

On August 21 (some sources indicate August 23), Hitler formally gave the Nordlicht operation to Manstein. The field marshal would be allotted three army corps to break Soviet positions south of Leningrad. They would be supported by the three siege batteries that had been brought up from the Crimea as well as divisional, corps, and army artillery batteries. The attack was to be two-pronged after the initial penetration was made, with one corps setting up south of the city and two corps attacking east, forcing crossings of the Neva River. Once Soviet forces between the Neva and Lake Ladoga were eliminated, the two corps would swing toward Leningrad, cutting it off from the

east. With the city cordoned off, Hitler was certain he could force its surrender by subjecting it to constant artillery and air attacks.

Hitler even went so far as to subordinate the attacking forces directly to OKH. The subordination jumped the chain of command, as Manstein’s forces would normally be under the control of Kuchler’s Army Group North. Apparently, this was one of the Führer’s mini-management ploys to ensure that his orders would be carried out to the letter.

Manstein was skeptical about the Leningrad assault, having recently witnessed the fierce house-to-house fighting at Sevastopol. “We realized from our reconnaissance that 11th Army must on no account become involved inside the built-up areas of Leningrad, where its strength would be rapidly expended,” he wrote in his memoirs. “As for Hitler’s belief that the city would be compelled to surrender through terror raids by 8th Air Corps, we had no more faith in this than had Col. Gen. von Richtofen, the force’s own experienced commander.”

The field marshal still had to keep an eye on the 18th Army’s battle at the junction of the Tosno and Neva Rivers as he prepared for his

own offensive. The heavy siege batteries from the Crimea were already in place in camouflaged positions that had apparently escaped the eyes of Soviet reconnaissance aircraft. Although some elements of his Crimean divisions had been diverted to the Neva front, a steady stream of units were making their way to assembly points for the main attack.

On August 22, the Soviets renewed their attacks out of the Tosno-Neva bridgeheads. In the early morning fog, Soviet infantry was able to penetrate the lines of Colonel Otto Gieseke's Police Rifle Regiment 1 in the regiment's 1st and 2nd Battalions' sectors. The Soviets were then able to advance south along a road bordering the eastern bank of the river. There, they ran into blocking positions occupied by elements of Captain Wilhelm Dietrich's III/Police Rifle Regiment 1. Supported by a heavy infantry gun platoon, the Germans were able to stop the Soviets at a brickyard, where they held them at bay until support came from the 100th Mountain Regiment's 3rd Company. Counterattacking, the Germans regained their main line by the end of the day.

For the next four days, German and Soviet soldiers continued to slug it out. Attack was met by counterattack, and artillery from both sides caused heavy casualties. Two companies of the 121st Infantry Division and an entire battalion of the 61st Infantry Division had to be

pulled out of the line simply because their fighting strength had fallen to only a few men.

Meanwhile, Manstein continued to fine tune his plans for Nordlicht. Although he was determined that his forces would not be bogged down within the city, it is interesting to note that neither he, Lindemann, Halder, nor any other higher commanders seemed to have any qualms about the complete destruction of the former Russian capital and the eradication of its population. Hitler had said as much in an August 23 conversation with K uchler when he declared, "The attack against Leningrad must be executed with the intention of destroying the city."

The Soviets, however, had different plans. Meretskov was finally ready to strike. Although the Germans knew a buildup was taking place and that an attack was almost certainly imminent, the Soviet general was still able to achieve an element of surprise when the leading echelons of Starikov's 8th Army launched their assault at 2:10 AM on August 27.

Major General Sergei Timofeevich Biiakov's 6th Guards Rifle Corps struck the junction of Maj. Gen. Rudolf L tters's 223rd Infantry Division and Maj. Gen. Friedrich von Scotti's 227th Infantry Division, making good headway and establishing strong bridgeheads on the western bank of the Chernaia River. With Colonel Petr Kirillovich Koshevoi's 24th Guards Rifle Division in the lead, the Soviets

continued to move forward.

The Germans were caught flatfooted by the initial assault, and it was not until noon that Lindemann reported the attack to higher headquarters. Even then, OKH did not appear to be overly concerned. In an August 27 entry in his diary, Halder noted, "The anticipated attack south of Lake Ladoga has started. The attacks on the whole were repelled; only minor local penetrations."

Those "minor penetrations" were achieved by Koshevoi's division, which was supported by Colonel David Markovich Barinov's 19th Guards Rifle Division and Colonel B.N. Ushinskii's 265th Rifle Division. More Soviet troops crossed the river, and with solid bridgeheads behind them the three divisions pushed forward about three kilometers, capturing the village of Tortolovo and surrounding German units in Porech'e.

On the right flank of the assault, an attempt to widen the breach to the north by Maj. Gen. Nikolai Moiseevich Martynchuk's 3rd Guards Rifle Division ran into problems attempting to overrun Colonel Maximilian Wengler's 336th Grenadier Regiment of the 227th Division near the village of Gontovaia Lipta. Although the Soviets succeeded in surrounding the regiment, Wengler's Westphalians held positions on the edge of a small forest, keeping the Soviets at bay and forcing them to use all the 3rd Guards' reserves in an effort to break them instead of continuing to drive north. This action gave other units of Scotti's division time to stabilize their positions.

On the opposite side of the bottleneck, the Neva Operational Group's 86th Rifle Division, under Colonel Pavel Sergeevich Fedorov, had already launched an assault across the Neva. Using swift assault boats, Fedorov's men quickly crossed the river, which was only about 240 meters wide at that point, and established a bridgehead directly across from Dubrovka.

Fedorov ordered his men to expand the bridgehead, but as they moved inland they were met by formidable German defenses within a kilometer of the riverbank. Although brought to a halt in front of the German line, the Soviets had gained another toehold on the Neva's eastern bank that would require more German forces to contain.

On August 28, Barinov and his neighboring divisions continued a slow advance through the marshes and forests east of Siniavino. By nightfall his lead elements were within six kilometers of the southeastern approaches to the commanding position, but they were meeting increased resistance as they continued to advance.

National Archives



ABOVE: Red Army troops aim their rifles in the direction of German positions some distance away as they man a trench near Leningrad during the autumn of 1942. The Soviet soldiers displayed incredible bravery and often fought to the death as Communist Party officers stood behind them with orders to shoot deserters or those who attempted to flee. **OPPOSITE:** German soldiers move supplies through a forest of birch trees that has been devastated by gunfire. This photo was taken near Siniavino during the Russian offensive that thwarted Operation Nordlicht.

Elements of Brig. Gen. Julius Ringel's 5th Mountain Division and Maj. Gen. Johann Sinnhuber's 28th Jäger Division were ordered to advance toward Mga from the Nordlicht staging areas, and part of Brig. Gen. Walter Wessel's 12th Panzer Division was sent to reinforce German positions on the Neva. Although the situation was one of confusion, the German high command was finally realizing that a dangerous situation was developing. Halder noted, "In the north, a very distressing [enemy] penetration south of Lake Ladoga."

In the 4th SS Division sector, most of the Soviet troops that had occupied the bridgehead near Ivanovskoe' had been wiped out, and the SS troops were using the time to reorganize their depleted battalions. Although seeking a few days of rest, the division was once again put on heightened alert when word of Soviet attacks in the eastern part of the bottleneck were received at 6:15 PM on the 28th. A relatively quiet day passed on the 29th, but the division was hit by concentrated artillery fire at 4 AM on the 30th, followed by an attempt to cross the Tosno, which was repulsed.

Meanwhile, heavy fighting was raging south of the Siniavino Heights. The four Tiger tanks at Küchler's disposal were sent to join the action on the 29th after detraining at Mga, but three of them broke down almost immediately due to transmission failures. The fourth found itself practically immobilized by the horrendous road system and lack of bridges heavy enough to support its weight as it tried to struggle forward.

Although the Soviets were tantalizingly close to their first objective, the arrival of more German forces stalled their advance toward Siniavino. Biiakov's 6th Guards Rifle Corps was being bled white as it strove to breach the German defensive positions around the heights, which were considerably stronger than Meretskov's intelligence had suggested. However, the Soviets were still able to hold onto their previous gains.

On August 30 Halder wrote, "In the north, the enemy continued his attack south of Lake Ladoga without making significant gains, but neither did our attack achieve any important objectives. The forces set aside for the Leningrad offensive are increasingly diverted to this sector to repel the enemy drive." In that sense, the Soviets were achieving one of the main objectives of their offensive.

With both sides basically stymied, the opposing commanders had to make some decisions that would further affect Nordlicht. Lindemann and Meretskov used the 31st to devise new plans for the battle, which had changed the situation on the Leningrad Front. What had been

Alamy



German soldiers recoil from the blast of a Soviet artillery shell and seek some shelter adjacent to an armored vehicle in the vicinity of Volkhov.

a basically static line for the past few months was now a battleground on which armies from each side were mounting or preparing to mount an offensive in the same area. By striking first the Soviets had upset the German timetable, but the available German forces near the main thrust of the Soviet assault also forced Meretskov to speed up his careful plans for following up his initial attack.

Major General Nikolai Aleksandrovich Gagin's 4th Guards Rifle Corps (259th Rifle Division, 22nd, 23rd, 32nd, 33rd, 53rd, 137th and 140th Rifle Brigades and 88th and 122nd Tank Brigades) had been scheduled to follow Biiakov's corps in bulk after the initial assault had cleared the Siniavino defenses. That plan was already scrapped, as Meretskov had been forced to send Maj. Gen. Mikhail Filppovich Gavrilov's 259th, along with a tank brigade, to bolster Biiakov's corps on the 29th. Due to the heavy fighting, the other brigades were committed piecemeal, lessening the effect of a massed assault. The result was that the German defenders fought a steady tide of infiltrating Soviet units instead of a massed attack from Gavrilov's corps.

All this added to the confusion among attackers and defenders in the heavily wooded area. Even so, with the help of the men of Gavrilov's corps, Biiakov was able to shift his own units for a more concentrated attack. Sergeev's 128th Rifle Division hit the fortified position at Worker's Settlement No. 8, held by the II/374th Regiment of Maj. Gen. Karl von Tiedemann's 207 Sicherungs (Security) Division.

The heavily outnumbered Germans, lightly

armed and surrounded, defended the settlement vigorously. House-to-house fighting ensued, and after hours of combat the position was taken. The battalion's sacrifice was not in vain, as the time taken to capture the strongpoint allowed German reinforcements to be shifted to the area, stopping Sergeev's advance after it had gained up to three kilometers.

Farther south, Colonel I.V. Gribov's 11th Rifle Division fought elements of Maj. Gen. Hans von Tettau's 24th Infantry Division for control of the strongpoint at Mishino. After another bitter struggle, the Germans were forced to retreat. The attack was in conjunction with Colonel Dmitri Lvovich Abakumov's 286th Rifle Division, which was tasked with capturing Voronovo, about five kilometers to the south. With this accomplished, the Soviets would have secured their southern flank, forming a defensive line to meet German attacks in that area.

Voronovo, however, was a tougher nut to crack. Defended by elements of Lütter's 223rd Infantry Division backed up by a battle group from the 12th Panzer Division, the Germans were at Voronovo in strength. The initial Soviet assault withered away in the face of fierce, effective defensive fire. Abakumov ordered a second assault, which met the same fate. The bodies of Red Army soldiers continued to pile up against the German defenses as fresh troops charged again and again until Abakumov finally called off the attack.

Meretskov had meticulously planned support for the initial attacks of the Volkhov Front, providing massive artillery and air power to pummel the Germans. The heavy woods and marsh-

land, along with poor communication between commands, largely negated the effects of the artillery except when there was a clearcut understanding between forward artillery observers and their units.

In the air, Ivan Petrovich Zhuravlev's 14th Air Army outnumbered its German opponents by about 2-1. However, the German pilots facing Zhuravlev managed to maintain air superiority, even with inferior numbers. Major "Hannes" Trautloft's Jägdeschwader (JG) 54 and Major Gordon Gollob's JG 77 took to the skies, inflicting serious damage to the Red Air Force. On September 1-2 alone, the German fighters knocked 42 Soviet aircraft out of the sky, which had a disparaging effect on Red Air Force pilots. German fighters noticed that Soviet pilots turned as soon as they spotted enemy aircraft. The situation grew so bad that Stalin himself threatened to court martial any pilot refusing to engage the enemy.

While the Luftwaffe and Red Air Force duelled in the sky, the ground war continued unabated, with both sides throwing in more troops. By September 3, the Soviets were almost 10 kilometers inside the German lines in the Siniavino area with only five kilometers to go before they could capture the important junction of the Kirov railroad at Mga.

To the west, the 4th SS once again became the recipient of heavy Soviet attacks, this time supported by truck-borne Stalin's Organ rockets batteries. The rockets were also known as Katyushas (Little Kates). The Soviets were hoping to cut the railway to Mga south of Usti

Tosno. The 1st and 3rd Police Rifle Regiments took the brunt of the attacks, and although some penetrations were made, the Germans were able to seal them off and destroy the enemy troops.

In recounting the September 3 fighting, the 4th SS divisional history states: "The stubbornness of the Russians was admirable. At 1700 hours the attack came, initially in the sector of Polezei-Schützen Regiment 3. It was followed half an hour later by additional attacks on Polezei-Schützen Regiment 1. All of the attacks were halted in the final protective fires of the Polezei Artillery Regiment. The lack of imagination of the Russian command in infantry combat at that time was conspicuous."

Lack of imagination or not, the Soviet offensive had its effect in Berlin. Hitler had become increasingly nervous about the action around Leningrad, and he looked to Manstein to rectify the situation in the bottleneck. In his memoirs, Manstein wrote, "On the afternoon of 4 September, I received a telephone call from Hitler in person. He told me it was essential that I intervene on the Volkhov Front to prevent a disaster there; I was to assume command myself and restore the situation by offensive action."

Manstein, in effect, was relieving the 18th Army of command in its own sector. Although the order had come directly from Hitler, Lindemann's staff was offended by the move. They did, however, do their best to support Manstein for the upcoming battle. As he formulated his next move, Manstein, along with other senior commanders, knew the preemptive Soviet

attack had made implementing Nordlicht impossible. The German forces preparing for the attack on the city would instead be used to wipe out the Soviet gains of the last few days and return to the status quo.

The observation posts on the Siniavino Heights helped Manstein deploy his troops by identifying Soviet positions and troop movements. Artillery observers plotted targets for the coming attack and kept the Luftwaffe updated on targets of opportunity.

As Manstein planned his next move, Meretskov became increasingly frustrated with the advance of his own troops. In an effort to regain the initiative, he ordered the remains of Lt. Gen. Nikolai Kuzmich Klykov's 2nd Shock Army into the battle. These troops ran headlong into Wandel's 121st and Lütters' 223rd Infantry Divisions, which were supported by Sinnhuber's 28th Jäger Division and Ringel's 5th Mountain Division.

While the Soviets were occupied with those forces, Manstein ordered a strike at their right flank. On September 6 the Germans advanced, driving the enemy from Kruglaia Grove, about six kilometers east of the heights. Meretskov was then forced to relocate some of the troops from his vanguard to try to contain the German forces.

Not everything went the Germans' way. In the west, heavy attacks on the 4th SS made some gains along the Kirov railway. The fighting took a heavy toll on both sides, and on September 7, the 4th SS reported an effective fighting strength of only 1,938 men.

Farther east, Manstein ordered the 24th and 170th Infantry Divisions and the 12th Panzer Division to hit the Soviets' southeastern flank. As was true with the initial Soviet attack, the terrain favored the defenders. Soviet engineers had been working at a feverish pace since the beginning of the offensive. Although Meretskov had been thwarted in trying to extend his left flank, the Red Army engineers had sown minefields in the area to guard the flank.

For once, Soviet artillery observers had good communications with the extensive artillery units in the rear and were able to bring down heavy fire on the German infantry from their superbly concealed positions. Deprived of infantry support, the German tanks kept going but soon ran into the recently laid minefields, causing considerable losses among the armored vehicles.

The armor retreated, but the infantrymen gave it another go on the following day, September 11. They were met with Soviet counterattacks that forced Manstein to cancel further major operations in the area for the time being. Ordering reconnaissance units to locate enemy



A German artillery shell explodes as Soviet soldiers advance rapidly across open ground during a counter-attack against enemy thrusts toward Leningrad.

strongpoints, he then sent teams of engineers to destroy them one at a time.

Impressed by the Soviet artillery, Manstein also telephoned Berlin to speak with Field Marshal Wilhelm Keitel, the Chief of Staff of OKW. He informed Keitel that the Soviet artillery would have to be located and destroyed by the Luftwaffe and his own artillery before another setpiece attack from both the north and south could be launched.

While the Luftwaffe and army artillery pounded recognized Red Army positions, German forces nibbled away at the Soviet defenses. Although it was not an all-out offensive, the Soviet salient was slowly being reduced in the area that now extended from Siniavino to Gaitolovo. With the Soviet artillery being suppressed and their ground forces grudgingly retiring, the field marshal decided it was time to strike the final blow.

Manstein set September 18 as the date for a full-fledged attack on the Soviet salient, but weather intervened with rain and fog. For three days the Luftwaffe was hampered by poor visibility. Although it could still strike at known enemy artillery positions, the weather made it impossible for the airmen to provide the close

support that German ground forces were counting on.

While Manstein waited, Meretskov was fuming. Earlier in the month, he had taken the 4th and 6th Guards Rifle Corps from Starikov's 8th Army and placed them under Klykov, hoping that a unified command would make things easier to control. The change did little good, and Meretskov was feeling heat from Moscow. Stavka was demanding results, and it wanted them quickly.

The weather finally broke as Meretskov was making new plans to satisfy the high command. Manstein launched his assault with attacks on both the northern and southern Soviet flanks with the objective of his two spearheads meeting at the village of Gaitolovo, which contained the only decent road to supply the salient. When this was accomplished, Klykov would be cut off from the Volkhov Front, and the pocket around Siniavino could then be eliminated.

Just as the German attack began on September 21, Meretskov submitted a revised plan of operations for Stavka's approval. It varied little from his original plan and called for the capture of the Siniavino Heights before advancing further west to link up with units of

the Leningrad Front. He also called for the 376th Rifle Division to be released from the Front reserve to help settle the situation at the Kruglaia Grove and for the 372nd Rifle Division to be released to help capture the heights. In addition, Meretskov asked for 100 heavy and medium tanks for his ground offensive and three fighter regiments to reinforce his aviation assets and for the transfer of the 314th and 256th Rifle Brigades, as well as the 73rd Tank Brigade, to reinforce his units after the capture of Siniavino. While Stavka weighed Meretskov's requests, the Germans rolled forward.

In the north, Wandel's 121st Infantry Division struck elements of the 4th Guards Rifle Corps. Supported by air and artillery fire, the German infantry managed to make some progress against a desperate Soviet defense, but the going was slow. On the southern flank the 24th, 132nd, and 170th Infantry Divisions formed the battering ram. Sinnhuber's 28th Jäger held the western part of the salient, preventing any Soviet advance toward the heights.

The Germans suffered substantial casualties as they ran up against the Soviet positions. Junkers Ju-87 Stuka dive bombers and other



Bundesarchiv Bild 101111-Mischke-013-10A; Photo: Mischke

aircraft were called in to pound the Soviet defenses. As soon as the Luftwaffe departed, the Germans rushed forward but were still met by a withering fire from the surviving Red Army soldiers. On the first day of the attack, the 131st reported casualties of 16 officers and 494 men.

The following day, four Tigers and several Panzerkampfwagen IIIs were brought up to support Sander's 170th Infantry Division. Once again, the ground was totally unsuitable for their deployment. One of the Panzer IIIs was knocked out after crossing a causeway, and a Tiger was hit by antitank fire, followed by an engine breakdown that immobilized it. The other tanks became bogged down in the marshy terrain. Three of the Tigers were recovered, but the fourth remained stuck dead in the marsh until the Germans finally blew it up later on November 25.

The 132nd had better luck on the 22nd. By sunset, one of its regiments had fought its way to within about a kilometer of Gaitolovo before being stopped by units of the 6th Guards Rifle Corps. The noose was tightening, but the pocket was not yet sealed.

Early on the 24th, with his only supply road

being threatened, Meretskov received approval to initiate his submitted plan. However, Moscow refused his request for additional aircraft. Meanwhile, heavy fighting took place on both flanks of the 2nd Shock Army, further reducing the tenuous Soviet hold in the north and the south.

In an attempt to help Meretskov's planned advance to the Neva, Govorov announced that his Neva Operational Group could commence another cross-river attack as soon as he was given permission. Around midnight on the 24th, he received that permission to go ahead with his assault at dawn on the 25th. It was hoped that this attack on the German eastern flank would draw off troops from the Siniavino sector, allowing the 2nd Shock Army to take the heights and then link up with the Neva forces. Whether there was a breakdown in communication or some other glitch, Govorov would take another full day before he began his attack. By then it was too late.

During the morning of the 25th, Captain Friedrich Schmidt, commander of the 3/II/437th Infantry Regiment of the 132nd, pushed his company forward once again. The Russian defenders around Gaitolovo resisted stubbornly, but the 28-year-old Schmidt kept his men moving, destroying antitank and machine-gun positions and calling in artillery for extra support. By noon his exhausted men had fought their way into the center of the burning village, cutting Klykov's supply line and digging in to resist the Soviet counterattacks that were sure to come.

Later in the day, advance elements of the 121st entered the village from the north. With the added manpower, Soviet attacks to regain Gaitolovo were smashed. More German units arrived to consolidate the position, and by the end of the day the pocket had been sealed. Thanks to the young captain from Munich, most of the 2nd Shock Army was surrounded for the second time in less than half a year.

Govorov finally began his belated attack across the Neva on the 26th. Elements of the Neva Operational Group streamed across the river in assault boats during the predawn darkness, hitting part of the 12th Panzer Division, which had established strongpoints along the river. The assault units of Colonel A.A. Krasnov's 70th Rifle Division, Colonel Pavel Sergeevich Fedorov's 86th Rifle Division, and the 11th Separate Rifle Brigade established bridgeheads at Arbuzovo, Moskovkaia, Annenskoe, and Dubrovka. Guns, mortars, and a dozen tanks were ferried across to reinforce the bridgeheads, but the Soviets failed to expand them in the face of heavy German resistance.

Wessel's panzers launched a counterattack joined by elements of the 28th Jäger, and within another eight days the Soviets were ordered to abandon their bridgeheads and make their way back to the western bank. Their casualties had been heavy, and the action had done nothing more than delay the extinction of the Soviet forces inside the pocket for a few more days.

With supplies running low, the Soviets trapped inside the pocket could only sit and wait for the Germans to come. Although bravely manning their positions, the outcome was in little doubt. Advance elements of Maj. Gen. Hans Kreysing's 3rd Mountain Division, which had been shipped from Finland, helped isolate the 6th Guards Rifle Corps.

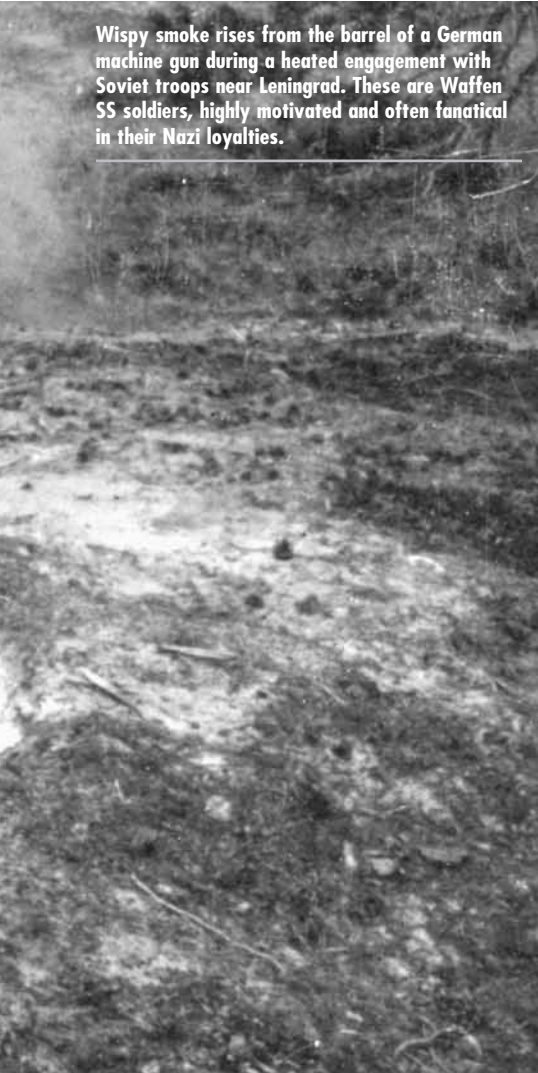
Hard fighting between September 30 and October 15 saw division after division trapped inside the pocket disappear. Although some Soviet troops were able to slip through the German lines, the butcher's bill for the Volkhov and Leningrad Fronts was horrendous. Divisions involved in the operation suffered 113,674 casualties out of a total of 190,000 men that were committed.

For the Germans, the cost was 26,000 casualties. However, the Soviets had succeeded in preventing the Nordlicht operation. Those German divisions earmarked for the operation were worn out, and events on other areas of the Eastern Front would prevent the order for the operation ever being issued.

The Soviet assault on Siniavino was plagued by several issues. Some of the divisions committed had a totally inadequate supply of ammunition, and tank support was either nonexistent or doled out in dollops rather than consolidated in a strong centralized force. Command, control, and communications between headquarters and subordinate units were abysmal in many cases, and adequate reserve forces were not readily available to exploit any potential breakthroughs.

Although the siege of Leningrad would go on until January 1944, the city had received a respite. As the German divisions rested and refitted after more than a month of heavy combat, Manstein flew to Hitler's command post to officially receive his field marshal's baton. He was then informed that he would take his 11th Army headquarters to Army Group Venter near Vitebsk, where intelligence sources indicated the Soviets were planning a large offensive. His departure put the final nail in Nordlicht's coffin. □

Pat McTaggart, a longtime contributor to WWII History, is an expert on the war on the Eastern Front. He resides in Elkader, Iowa.



Wispy smoke rises from the barrel of a German machine gun during a heated engagement with Soviet troops near Leningrad. These are Waffen SS soldiers, highly motivated and often fanatical in their Nazi loyalties.

The Last Days of the USS DeHaven

BY JOHN J. DOMAGALSKI

A LANDING OPERATION TO SECURE GUADALCANAL RESULTED IN THE LOSS OF A NEW U.S. NAVY DESTROYER.

Ceneral Alexander Patch had been thinking about moving some troops to the southwestern part of Guadalcanal since taking command of all American ground forces on the embattled island on December 9, 1942. Little more than a month later his soldiers were cautiously pushing the remaining Japanese troops on the crucial island in the Solomons chain toward its western tip. The general was certain Japanese resistance would soon be near collapse—unless the enemy somehow received reinforcements.

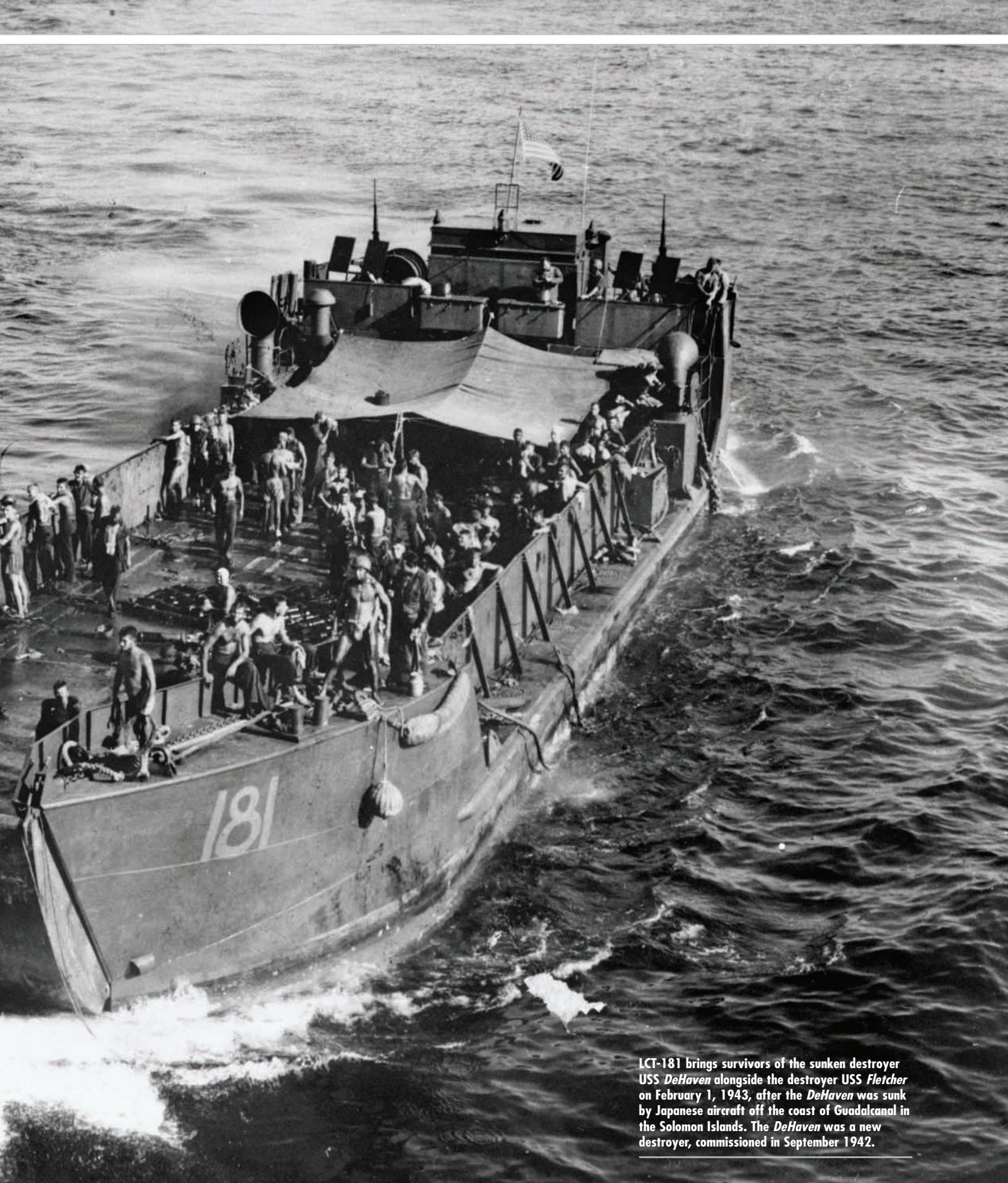
It was a culmination of months of vicious fighting. American Marines had first landed on the island the previous August, touching off a bitter struggle for control of Guadalcanal and the surrounding waters. American forces had only recently gained the upper hand after a series of land, sea, and air battles that engulfed the Solomon chain in the South Pacific. Opposing naval and air units clashed regularly in Iron Bottom Sound, a body of water between Guadalcanal and the nearby islands of Tulagi and Savo, as the Imperial Japanese Navy attempted to resupply its island garrison through speedy voyages under the cover of darkness from bases farther north. The Americans commonly labeled the night supply runs the Tokyo Express.

The last days of January 1943 found Patch's troops advancing west along a coastal plain on the northern side of the island. The remaining Japanese troops were falling back toward Cape Esperance at its northwestern tip. The area was known to be a key dropoff point for the Tokyo Express.

To help prevent the possibility of the Japanese prolonging the battle with reinforcements, Patch wanted to land troops on the southwest portion of the island, directly south of Cape Esperance. It would be a classic flanking move to force the Japanese to face advancing Americans on two fronts. This particular area of Guadalcanal was not thought to be heavily occupied owing to the thick jungle and mountainous terrain.

The operation, however, required help from the Navy. A similar plan had been on the table months earlier but was cancelled due to the lack of avail-





LCT-181 brings survivors of the sunken destroyer USS *DeHaven* alongside the destroyer USS *Fletcher* on February 1, 1943, after the *DeHaven* was sunk by Japanese aircraft off the coast of Guadalcanal in the Solomon Islands. The *DeHaven* was a new destroyer, commissioned in September 1942.



ABOVE: A pair of destroyers from U.S. Navy Task Group 67.5 steam near Savo Island off Guadalcanal. The destroyers were en route to deliver combat troops to Guadalcanal near the village of Verahue. **BELOW:** The *DeHaven*, part of Task Group 67.5, photographed on January 30 as part of General Alexander Patch's operation to flank Japanese forces on Guadalcanal



Naval History and Heritage Command

able seaborne transport. The needed naval forces were now available. The mission would put a brand new American destroyer in harm's way.

When the Fletcher-class destroyer USS *DeHaven* was launched before a small crowd at the Bath Iron Works in Maine on June 28, 1942, few onlookers expected that her service life would be short. The warship was the newest of many vessels being turned out monthly by American shipyards that were now fully mobilized to support the war effort. She bore hull number DD-469. Her namesake was Edwin Jess DeHaven, a Pennsylvania sailor who served with distinction during a long naval career in the mid-1800s.

She was commissioned into service September 21, 1942, under the leadership of Commander Charles E. Tolman. A period of intense training for the crew followed. The new destroyer measured almost 377 feet in length and displaced 2,800 tons. Armament consisted of five 5-inch guns in single turrets, 10 torpedo

tubes, an assortment of smaller antiaircraft guns, and depth charges.

The new warship traveled south to Norfolk, Virginia, after completing some initial training and voyages in local waters. The bustling seaport had long been the bastion of American naval power on the Atlantic. *DeHaven* was soon earmarked for duty in the Pacific. She met up with a trio of new warships—battleship *Indiana*, cruiser *Columbia*, and destroyer *Saufley*—for the long journey.

Ensign Clem C. Williams, Jr., was aboard *DeHaven* from the start. "We spent one night there and started south," he later said of the voyage out of Norfolk. "The next port we hit was Panama. We went through the canal and the next day set off for the broad Pacific."

The trip across the Pacific was largely uneventful, except when the new destroyer made a botched attempt to refuel from the battleship. "It was the first time we had fueled at sea and we took a little too sharp an approach

angle and rammed the *Indiana* and cleared off a couple of her stanchions on deck and punched a hole in the port side of the forecabin on our ship, which we patched up with mattresses, and sent to the *Indiana* for help in the way of a welding machine and some people who might be able to repair it," Williams later recalled. "We were a long way from land at the time."

The small convoy reached Tongatabu, Tonga Islands, on November 28, 1942, and proceeded to Noumea, New Caledonia, after only a short stay. "We all went ashore and ate a lot of coconuts, and we tried to find some beer but there wasn't any," Williams added. "We set off the next day." Noumea was one of several forward operating bases used by the Navy during the ongoing battle farther north in the Solomon Islands.

The new destroyer was quickly pressed into service to escort a convoy of troopships to Guadalcanal. The precious cargo was Army soldiers set to relieve the Marines who had been there since the initial landings in August. "We were, of course, very excited about it and sort of scared, but the trip was fairly uneventful," Williams explained. *DeHaven* screened the transports off the northern coast of Guadalcanal for about a week before returning south on December 14.

The warship supported the effort to secure Guadalcanal over the next month, operating from Noumea, Espiritu Santo in the New Hebrides, and Tulagi. The duty included regular night patrols in Iron Bottom Sound in search of the Tokyo Express, participating in two bombardments of Japanese-held Kolombangara Island in the central Solomons, and antisubmarine sweeps through "Torpedo Junction." The latter region, an area of open water south of Guadalcanal, was known to be regularly patrolled by Japanese submarines.

"During all this period in the Solomons region, our personnel worked their radars and the sound was becoming more and more thoroughly indoctrinated, and we felt that our shake-down was finishing up in a way, but we never felt absolutely certain that we were a seasoned ship by any means," Williams later said. The visit to the front lines was a type of on-the-job training since *DeHaven* was operating with some warships that had been in the area for months.

The men quickly became used to the regular Japanese air attacks on Guadalcanal. The strikes were often preceded by a "condition red" alert, an emergency radio broadcast from Guadalcanal indicating an attack was imminent. "We made a practice of keeping track of all the planes in the area as closely as possible. Our fire control party [had] orders to train the batteries on

all unidentified planes until they were identified,” said Williams. The latter proved to be a difficult task as friendly planes of all types were flying in and out of Henderson Field, the main air base on Guadalcanal.

The holidays marked the waning days of 1942. “Christmas Day, unfortunately, was like any other day,” Williams later said. “We were in Torpedo Junction, and we all had to be on the lookout. We had our turkey dinner as usual, the same as the Navy has all over the world on that day, but outside of that, the day was pretty much a day of business.” There was no sign of the enemy as the destroyer sailed through clear weather conditions and hot tropical air.

Early January found *DeHaven* departing the front lines to escort a tanker from Noumea up to Espiritu Santo. A short stay in the New Hebrides port followed. “This time we sent a couple of swimming parties ashore and people went over to the [destroyer tender] *Dixie*, which had moved up to her base there, to have their teeth fixed and attend to a few routine matters,” Williams explained. He recalled that the ship had to be ready to depart within two hours around the clock as the situation around Guadalcanal could flare up at any time. “Most of the ships there are on very short notice and consequently you can’t plan on any protracted dental appointments, or you can’t plan on what you are doing tomorrow. We had no real liberty there.”

DeHaven received a new assignment during the middle of January when she joined the destroyers *Nicholas*, *Radford*, and *O’ Bannon* to form Task Group 67.5. The group, under the command of Captain Robert P. Briscoe, was later expanded to five with the addition of *Fletcher*. It was to be stationed at Tulagi to provide close support in the Guadalcanal area. The small island, positioned directly across Iron Bottom Sound from Guadalcanal, was home to a good anchorage. Williams remembered Briscoe’s flag moving among various ships, including *Fletcher*, *Nicholas*, and *O’ Bannon*.

Larger warships had not previously been permanently based at Tulagi owing to the continuous threat of air attacks. Cruisers and destroyers moved north from Espiritu Santo only as needed, often resulting in timing problems when trying to intercept the Tokyo Express. Briscoe’s vessels became known as the “Cactus Striking Force” after the American code name for Guadalcanal. The ships arrived on station on January 17, 1943.

The destroyers patrolled in the immediate area for the next two weeks conducting a variety of operations. The duty included shore bombardment in support of the advancing American troops on Guadalcanal, antisubmarine

sweeps, and evening voyages to guard against the Tokyo Express. While operating with the Cactus Striking Force, *DeHaven*, *Radford*, *Nicholas*, and *Fletcher* were tapped to assist in General Patch’s plan to move troops to the other side of Guadalcanal.

The landing would be undertaken by the 2nd Battalion, 132nd Infantry Regiment under the command of Army Colonel Alexander George. The battalion was reinforced with various attached units, including four 75mm pack howitzers from the Marines. The force was large enough to accomplish the mission, but Patch wanted to avoid having the troops land at a defended beach. Little was known about the southwestern coastal area of Guadalcanal because the fighting had primarily taken place on the northern side of the island.

A small group of scouts was dispatched on a

National Archives



U.S. Navy destroyers, including *Nicholas* and *O’ Bannon*, heading to Tulagi and Guadalcanal.

reconnaissance mission to gather intelligence. They ventured across the island on a jungle trail before boarding the small schooner *Kocorana* for a look at the coastal area in question. The men were able to identify several potential landing sites and establish a small observation post.

The last day of January found the area around Kukum full of activity. The coastal village, close to the site of the initial American landing on Guadalcanal, was serving as the debarkation point for the small amphibious operation. The soldiers along with trucks, equipment, ammunition, and supplies loaded aboard six small LCTs (Landing Craft, Tank) and the destroyer transport *Stringham*. The latter was an old World War I-era destroyer that had been converted to a fast troop transport. The vessels departed after the loading was completed at 6 PM.

Captain Briscoe’s four destroyers provided an

escort as the small flotilla began its voyage around the western end of Guadalcanal. Daylight slowly turned into night as the month of January faded away. The destroyers *Anderson* and *Wilson* were set to bombard Japanese positions on the northern coast near the Bonegi River the next morning to create a small diversion.

Unknown to General Patch—even as his small amphibious operation was underway—the enemy was preparing to give up the fight for Guadalcanal. Japanese leaders in Tokyo had already approved an evacuation of the embattled island garrison. Local commanders were about to undertake a series of daring night operations to pick up soldiers near Cape Esperance. The first evacuation mission was slated to run on the night of February 1.

The voyage around Guadalcanal was uneventful for Briscoe’s flotilla. The forces

arrived off Nugo Point at dawn on February 1. After an advance party went ashore in a small boat to confer with the scouts who had reconnoitered the area, it was decided the main landing should take place farther north near the village of Verahue. The landing began a short time later as friendly fighters appeared overhead to provide air cover.

A flight of Japanese bombers passed over the beach at about noon en route to bomb Henderson Field but did not attack. The destroyers opened fire, downing at least one plane. The coastal activity, however, warranted some additional Japanese attention. The destroyers were later reported as cruisers by a reconnaissance pilot—a potentially grave threat to the planned Japanese evacuation mission.

The unloading process near Verahue was nearly completed by early afternoon. “No

opposition was encountered,” Williams later recalled of the landing. “We were prepared to give them fire support if they wanted it but they didn’t need any; they just didn’t run into anybody.” Three empty LCTs began the journey back around Guadalcanal at about 1 PM, escorted by *Nicholas* and *DeHaven*. The remaining ships, including *Fletcher* with Captain Briscoe aboard, stayed behind to wrap up the landing operation. The soldiers indeed encountered no enemy ashore and moved out from the beach area the next morning.

The retiring vessels became separated as the ships rounded Cape Esperance. “The *DeHaven* had gone ahead with the two leading LCTs and left behind the *Nicholas*,” Williams reported. The *DeHaven* group was about two miles southeast of Savo Island, with the remaining ships about five miles behind, when the enemy attacked from the air.

A condition red warning was issued by Guadalcanal at 2:43 PM for Henderson Field. Seven minutes later a second broadcast reported enemy planes over Florida Island, directly across Iron Bottom Sound from Guadalcanal. *DeHaven* was circling the small LCTs at about 15 knots at the time. “The ship went to general quarters immediately and steered a course approximately northeast,” Williams reported. “Two more boilers were lighted off, but were not cut in.” The ship’s speed briefly increased to 20 knots before falling back to 15.

Lookouts sighted nine unidentified planes at 2:57 PM. The aircraft were about 25,000 yards off the destroyer’s starboard beam, heading in a westerly direction. Williams was at his battle

station—a twin 40mm antiaircraft gun at the fantail. “I operated the director and directed the fire of the gun,” he said.

The planes were dispatched to deal with the American “cruisers” reported to be off Guadalcanal. The attack force had sortied with 15 Aichi “Val” single-engine dive bombers, but two later turned back, reducing the number to 13. A strong force of Mitsubishi Zero fighters flew escort. An egregious error kept available American fighters over the *Fletcher* and *Radford*, leaving *DeHaven* unprotected.

The approaching planes were identified as enemy dive bombers about one minute after the initial sighting. All guns that could be brought to bear were training on them. The order to fire, however, was not immediately given.

The delay, presumably due to the commanding officers wanting to be sure the planes were indeed enemy, proved fatal. “When the planes reached a position about on the starboard quarter, six of them changed course sharply and came directly at the *DeHaven*,” Williams explained. He watched as the aircraft dove at about a 45-degree angle. The ship’s guns quickly opened fire after the belated order arrived but could not prevent the enemy planes from unleashing their bombs. One near miss damaged the hull, but three bombs squarely hit the destroyer in rapid succession.

Reporter Foster Hailey watched the attack unfold from his position aboard *Nicholas*. He momentarily focused on a single plane in a steep dive. “There was the flash of an explosion between *DeHaven*’s stacks, followed by a billowing cloud of black and brown smoke,” he wrote before his attention quickly switched to

a plane approaching his ship.

The attack on *DeHaven* was over in a matter of minutes. The first bomb landed amidships on the port side. The second hit the forward stack, knocking it over. The final bomb struck the front part of the superstructure, causing a tremendous explosion that ripped apart the middle of the ship.

Clem Williams saw the third hit from his position on the fantail and recalled, “Immediately the ship was covered with a heavy yellow smoke and I’m led to believe that this bomb reached the forward magazines and caused them to explode. The bridge superstructure was demolished by this bomb, the director was thrown off its base, back into the area between the forward stack and the main deck, apparently right by the mast which was snapped off at this time.” Commander Tolman was among those instantly killed.

The damage was catastrophic. All power was immediately lost as *DeHaven* settled by the bow and was sinking within two minutes. No abandon ship order was given as most senior officers were either dead or dying, but the surviving sailors knew they had to leave the doomed vessel quickly.

Williams moved away from his gun as the smoke started to clear. It did not take long for him to understand how bad the situation was forward. “I looked up and saw the superstructure was mangled, and I saw very few people on deck,” he later recalled. The area near the stern appeared to be undamaged, but he too knew it was time to get off. “I took the liberty on the fantail to pass the word to abandon ship to that group of men in the absence



Naval History and Heritage Command

of further authority.”

A rush of frantic activity followed. Chief Boatswain's Mates Stephen Kowalski and John Laine led the effort to get two life nets over the side. Sailors immediately began to jump off the ship, with several wounded men assisted in getting over the side. Williams checked to make sure the torpedomen had set the depth charges on safe so as not to explode after the ship went down. “We didn't want to repeat some of the previous disasters resulting from failure to do that,” he later said. He deemed it too risky to try to locate any confidential documents, which were probably already destroyed on the bridge.

Williams knew it was time to get off when he saw the vessel was “down by the bow by about 30 degrees. It was very difficult to get a footing on deck then and she was going down fast.” He took one last look around the immediate area for survivors on deck before jumping into the sea.

The sailors were in an ocean covered with thick fuel oil. Williams remembered, “Everybody that jumped in got a good mouthfull of that, and everybody was pretty badly scared.” It took only a short time for *DeHaven* to completely disappear beneath the waves. An underwater explosion was heard shortly afterward, but it was attributed to one of the ship's boilers rather than a depth charge. The survivors, only some of whom had life vests, gathered as many men together as possible while staying afloat by whatever means possible. “They even used the ship's life ring, which I understand is practically never used as a life preserver.”

The LCTs that had been firing at the attacking planes just minutes earlier immediately switched to rescue mode, combing the area for survivors. One of the small boats rescued Williams and a group of survivors in his immediate area. Its commanding officer stood out at the end of the lowered ramp pulling aboard as many survivors as could be found.

The boat crew used their limited medical supplies as best as they could to help the wounded. Williams remembered, “There was just enough morphine to go around to the people who really needed it.”

Nicholas soon arrived on the scene to take aboard all of the wounded survivors. The destroyer had been attacked by eight planes. Near misses caused minor damage, killing two crewmen and injuring seven others. The Japanese lost a total of eight planes in the attack, some victims of American fighters that arrived late on the scene.

Other ships arrived a short time later to help transport survivors back to Guadalcanal. “I reported to Captain Briscoe on the bridge of

National Archives



ABOVE: LSTs pick up survivors from the sunken destroyer *DeHaven* off Guadalcanal. The Japanese air attack on *DeHaven* was over in a matter of minutes and the ship sank soon after. **BELOW:** The wreckage of Japanese landing barges rusts in the sun on the beach near Cape Esperance at Guadalcanal. Japanese vessels were ravaged by American aircraft during the withdrawal of enemy troops from the island, which was declared secure by the Americans in February 1943. **OPPOSITE:** U.S. Army troops advance on January 30 as part of the operation to outflank the Japanese on Guadalcanal.



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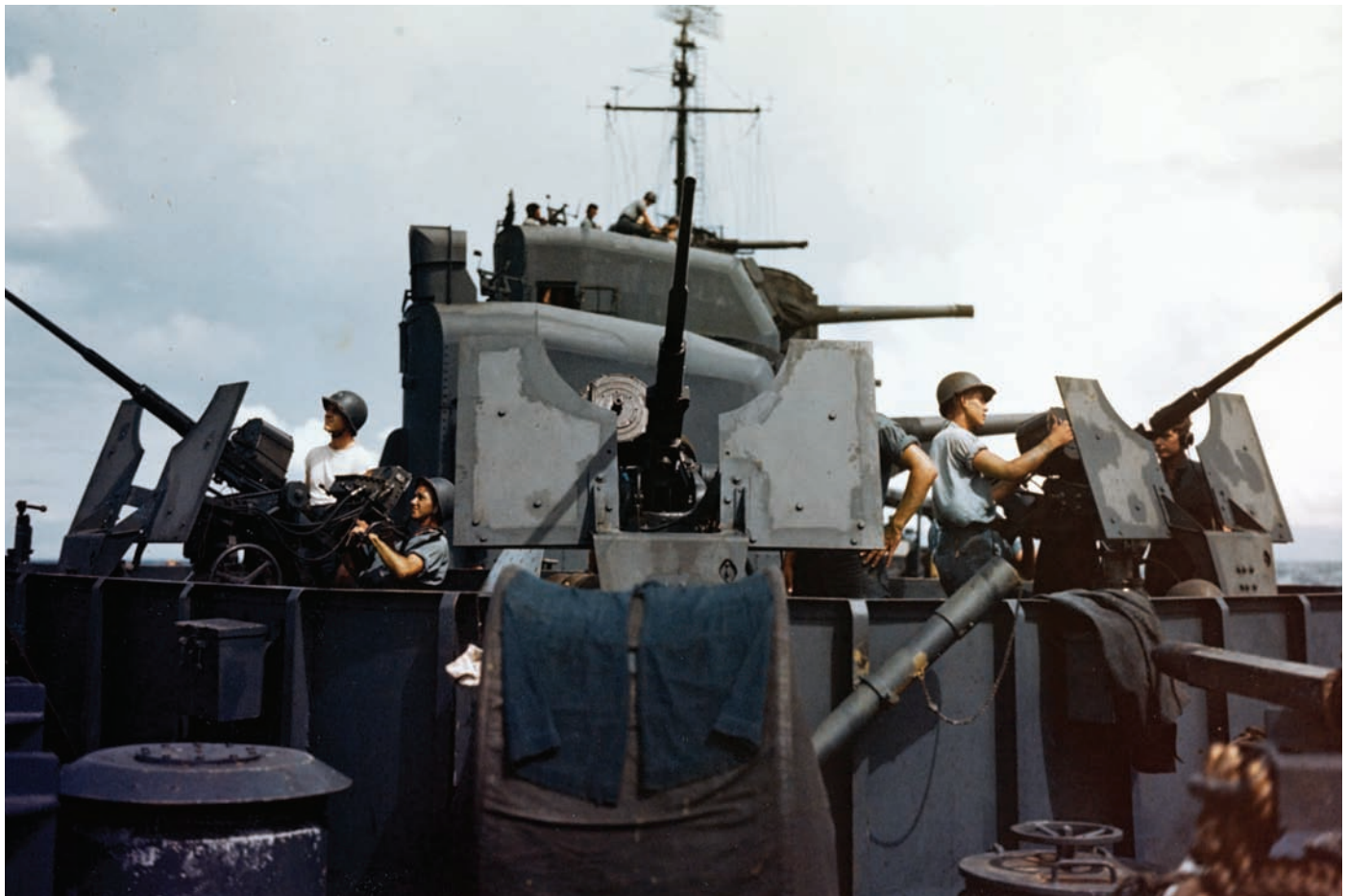
the *Fletcher* and gave him as much as I could say right off about what happened,” Williams later said. The sailors were soon back on dry land. “That was the first time we had any idea of the terrific loss which the ship had suffered.”

The *DeHaven* lost 167 sailors. Thirty-eight of the 146 survivors were wounded. Of the 14 officers aboard, 10 were listed as missing in the aftermath of the sinking and three were wounded. Clem Williams was the only unscathed officer to survive. He authored a report of the sinking in keeping with Navy regulations.

The Japanese evacuation of Guadalcanal

was successful. The fighting was over about a week later. The destroyer *DeHaven* was one of the last warships sunk in the bitter battle for the island. □

John J. Domagalski is the author of three books on World War II. Into the Dark Water: The Story of Three Officers and PT-109 (Casemate, 2014), Sunk in Kula Gulf (Potomac Books, 2012), and Lost at Guadalcanal (McFarland, 2010). His articles have appeared in WWII History, Naval History, and WWII Quarterly magazines. He is a graduate of Northern Illinois University and lives near Chicago.



Hard-Won Combat Laurels

Desron 21 was the most decorated U.S. Navy destroyer squadron of World War II but paid a heavy price for the distinction.

IRON BOTTOM SOUND WAS FULL OF TRANSPORT SHIPS UNLOADING SUPPLIES

IN the early afternoon sun on November 12, 1942. The area was named Iron Bottom for the large number of ships that lay under the waves offshore from Guadalcanal, the site of the first large-scale Japanese-American fighting since the Philippines a half year earlier. The enemy was nearby, so sleek destroyers plied the waters as well, hovering around the transports like sheepdogs protecting their herd. Among them were the USS *O'Bannon* and USS *Fletcher*, a pair of new ships only recently commissioned; both had been in the Pacific for only a month. They each sported 10 torpedo tubes and five 5-inch cannons along with a larger number of 20mm and 40mm antiaircraft guns. They would need them soon.

Three separate flights of Japanese torpedo bombers appeared overhead, each fly-

ing in from a different direction. *O'Bannon* and *Fletcher* formed up with the other destroyers, creating a tight screen around the transports. Some zigzagged to present a more difficult target. Soon the air was filled with projectiles, all of them seeking an enemy plane to smash. Gun crews fed ammunition to their hungry weapons while gunners aimed and fired. Meanwhile, the Japanese aircraft soared past, desperate to reach the vulnerable and valuable transports with their vital supplies.

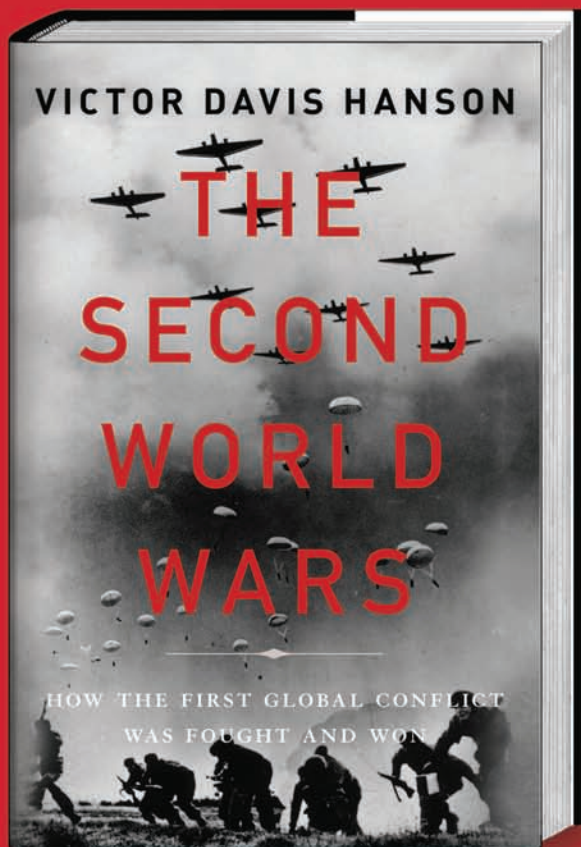
O'Bannon's gunners soon found the range, sending a torpedo bomber tumbling into the ocean, quickly followed by another. The ship fired over 800 rounds in 43 minutes, and her

commander reported damaging two more planes as well. *Fletcher* had even better results. Seaman First Class D.H. Dahlke, manning a 20mm gun, sent numerous rounds crashing into the cockpit and nose of an aircraft. Another 20mm gunner, E.G. Walker, hit a plane and walked his fire down with it



Sailors man the 20mm gun mount on the fantail of the destroyer USS *O'Bannon*.

The *O'Bannon* was assigned to Destroyer Squadron 21, which earned its battle stars during engagements with the Japanese Navy off Guadalcanal in 1942.



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until it hit the water and then gave it a few more rounds for good effect. Several more torpedo bombers passed *Fletcher* on both sides and to the stern, drawing even more fire from the ship. When the attack ended, the crew claimed five planes shot down. Neither destroyer suffered casualties or damage.

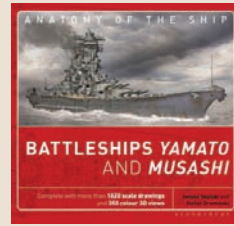
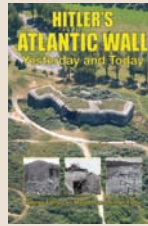
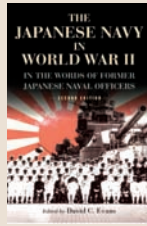
This was the first combat action for either ship, and the crews acquitted themselves well. That evening they escorted the now empty transports away to the east toward what they hoped was a well-deserved rest at Espiritu Santo. It was not to be, however, as the ships were ordered back to Guadalcanal to join a task force preparing to fight an incoming Japanese surface group. They were about to become part of history as the U.S. Navy struggled against the Imperial Japanese Navy in a life-or-death battle to determine who would have the initiative in the months and years to come. Destroyers were a major part of that effort, and Destroyer Squadron 21 (Desron 21) was destined to be there for all of it. This is a story of valor, sacrifice, and endurance and one that is well told in *Tin Can Titans: The Heroic Men and Ships of World War II's Most Decorated Navy Destroyer Squadron* (John Wukovits, Da Capo Press, Boston, 2017, 320 pp., maps, photographs, appendices, notes, bibliography, index, \$28.00, hardcover).

Desron 21 distinguished itself in combat from Guadalcanal to Okinawa. The crews of the 12 destroyers that were part of it sank or helped to sink 10 submarines along with a number of surface ships, downed several dozen planes, and pulled more than 1,800 sailors and shot-down aircrew from the waters of the Pacific. The cost was high; the squadron lost 372 sailors over the course of the war, and only three ships were left in action by the end of the war. The rest were damaged or lost to bombs, torpedoes, and kamikazes. These three survivors, *O'Bannon*, *Nicholas*, and *Taylor*, were given the honor of leading the fleet into Tokyo Bay on August 29, 1945, for the impending Japanese surrender.

The author is a well-known military historian with vast expertise on the Pacific War, and this expertise shines through in his latest book. It is a battle story told from the point of view of the officers and men who manned these destroyers, the sleek workhorses of the war. It is a formula the author is skilled at writing, and it works well here. The clear writing and thorough research combine to make a readable and enjoyable volume.

War Over the Steppes: The Air Campaigns on the Eastern Front 1941-45 (E.R. Hooten,

New and Noteworthy



The Japanese Navy in World War II: In the Words of Former Japanese Naval Officers (Edited by David C. Evans, Naval Institute Press, 2017, \$34.95, softcover) This is a reprint of a classic book collecting the essays of various Japanese officers about their war perspectives. Most were written in the 1950s when their memories were still fresh.

Hitler's Atlantic Wall: From Southern France to Northern Norway, Yesterday and Today (George Fort, Leo Marriott, and Simon Fort, Casemate Publishers, 2016, \$29.95, hardcover) This photo book compares "then and now" images of Germany's coastal defenses. It also contains many maps, diagrams, and charts showing how these defenses were organized.

Battleships Yamato and Musashi: Anatomy of the Ship (Janusz Skulski and Stefan Draminski, Conway Books, 2017, \$60.00, hardcover) A complete history of the world's largest battleships. It is full of rare photos, technical drawings, and operational history.

My War in Italy: On the Ground and in Flight with the 15th Air Force (Keith W. Mason, University of Missouri Press, 2016, \$32.95, hardcover) An autobiography of a squadron operations officer in Southern Europe. It is full of the small details of military life and many interesting anecdotes.

The Rise of Germany 1939-1941: The War in the West (James Holland, Grove Press, 2016, \$20.00, softcover) This book closely examines Germany in the first years of the war. Battlefield actions and economic and social factors are all given attention.

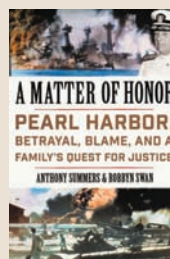
The Mosquito Pocket Manual: All Marks in Service 1941-1945 (Martin Robson, Bloomsbury, 2016, \$15.00, hardcover) This compact volume covers the service history and technical details of the famous British multi-role combat plane, which operated as a fighter, bomber, and reconnaissance aircraft.

1924: The Year that Made Hitler (Peter Ross Range, Back Bay Books, 2016, \$17.99, softcover) Hitler spent 1924 in prison. This book explores in detail how the experience affected the man in his later life.

A Matter of Honor Pearl Harbor: Betrayal, Blame and a Family's Quest for Justice (Anthony Summers and Robbyn Swan, Harper Books, 2016, \$35.00, hardcover) Admiral Husband Kimmel was disgraced after the Pearl Harbor attack. This book outlines the effort of Kimmel and his descendants to clear his name.

The Lost Airman: A True Story of Escape from Nazi-Occupied France (Seth Meyerowitz, Berkeley Caliber, 2016, \$27.00, hardcover) The author's grandfather was a B-17 turret gunner shot down in Europe. His book chronicles his amazing journey of escape.

Accidental Agent: Behind Enemy Lines with the French Resistance (John Goldsmith, Pen and Sword Books, 2016, \$39.95, hardcover) The subject of this book began his service as a driving instructor but soon entered the Special Operations Executive, conducting operations with the French Maquis organization.



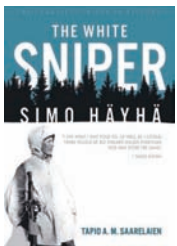


Osprey Publishing, Oxford, UK, 2017, 288 pp., photographs, notes, bibliography, index, \$30.00, hardcover)

Air combat in World War II usually stirs images of Spitfires and Messerschmitts over England,

Hellcats and Zeros over the Pacific, and massive Anglo-American bomber raids over Germany. The Eastern Front is rarely thought of, but it boasted some of the largest air battles and campaigns of the war. Enormous numbers of aircraft vied for control of the skies over the Soviet Union, including domestic German and Soviet designs along with thousands of Lend-Lease planes from the United States and Great Britain. Conditions were brutal, with the weather taking a huge toll upon both men and machines. Combat was unforgiving, a target-rich environment in the air and on the ground with high casualty figures, numbers that nevertheless represented human lives lost and broken. Some pilots achieved hundreds of kills over the steppes, many in the early days before the Red Air Force rebounded and became a flying juggernaut.

The story of the Eastern Front's air war is told here primarily from the perspective of the strategists who ran it and the commanders who ordered and led pilots into combat. Space is also given to the pilots and aircrew, whose experiences are both thrilling and horrifying. The author is an expert in military aviation history, and this expertise shows through in the solid prose. He deftly shows how the fighting on the ground was influenced by the struggle in the skies overhead.



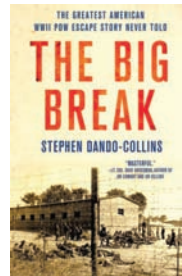
The White Sniper Simo Hayha: The Deadliest Sniper in History (Tapio A.M. Saarelainen, Casemate Publishing, Havertown, PA, 2016, 192 pp., maps, photographs, appendices, bibliography,

\$32.95, hardcover)

When he was 17 years old, Simo Hayha joined the Civil Guard, Finland's reserve military force. There he refined his skill with a rifle to a high level, winning numerous competitions not only with his M-1891 rifle, but also with the Suomi submachine gun and the light machine gun. When the Russo-Finnish War began at the end of 1939, his shooting skills quickly brought him assignment as a sniper. On one occasion he was sent out to

find a Soviet sniper who had killed three platoon leaders and an NCO. Simo found a hide position and waited. At dusk, he spotted a faint flicker; the setting sun was reflecting off the enemy marksman's scope. Suddenly, the Russian stood up as though his work day was over. It was a careless move, and it cost him. Simo took careful aim and fired, sending a 7.62mm bullet through the man's cheek. By the end of the war, he had killed 542 enemy soldiers using only iron sights. He was promoted from corporal to lieutenant, becoming a national hero.

The author spent two decades training snipers in the Finnish Army and helping create their sniper training manual. He conducted extensive research on Simo, including his character and training techniques. The famed sniper's rifle is also given attention. A quartet of appendices provides extensive background information that nicely rounds out the story.

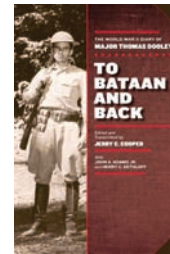


The Big Break: The Greatest American WWII POW Escape Story Ever Told (Stephen Dando-Collins, St. Martin's Press, New York, 2017, 252 pp., maps, photographs, notes, bibliography, index, \$27.99, hardcover)

In 1943, a Canadian and an American prisoner of war dug an escape tunnel through the latrine of the German prisoner camp at Schubin, Poland, enabling 36 men to escape. Afterward the camp was remade into Oflag 64, designed to hold only American officers; more than 1,500 Yanks would eventually be held there. Then, in 1945, the Red Army neared the camp so the Nazi commander ordered the prisoners marched west, away from liberation. Even so, 250 Americans got away to find the approaching Soviets. The rest of the prisoners went west into more captivity. Some wound up in another Oflag in Hammelburg, east of Aschaffenburg on the Main River at the edge of Bavaria. There, they were held with George Patton's son-in-law, Lt. Col. John Waters, captured in Tunisia. When Patton's Third Army neared the area at the end of March 1945, he launched a rescue mission that went deep behind the German lines and managed to arrive at the camp. The mission ultimately failed, too small and too far from support. The remaining Schubin men would wait for their salvation a little longer.

The stories of Schubin and Hammelburg are told together in this new and well-written narrative. The tale of the failed rescue mission has

been written before, but the author reveals the account of the POWs before the ill-fated raid, adding a new level of detail to the saga. It has been compared to *The Great Escape* for its drama and ability to enthrall readers.



To Bataan and Back: The World War II Diary of Major Thomas Dooley (Edited and transcribed by Jerry C. Cooper, Texas A&M University Press, College Station, 2017, 238 pp., photographs, appendices, bibliography, index, \$30.00, hardcover)

The end of the Filipino-American army on Bataan and Corregidor was a desperate time of depravation, combat, and hardship. Major Tom Dooley bore witness to it all, both as a participant and a recorder. He saw artillery barrages, air attacks, and tanks destroyed by land mines. Dooley also had to watch hungry men struggle to continue and walked through fields strewn with the dead. He was an aide to General Jonathan Wainwright, commander of the American and Filipino troops after General Douglas MacArthur left for Australia. Dooley was a graduate of Texas A&M University, which has a ceremony of remembrance of the fallen, called the Muster. In April 1942, as the American surrender neared, he held a "roll call" with the other 26 A&M graduates on Corregidor. A journalist learned of this and wrote an article that was widely published at the time. Dooley had a unique view of the fighting, one he wrote down in a series of journals he kept even in captivity after the surrender.

These journals have been compiled into this new work published by Dooley's alma mater. It sheds new light on a dark time for the United States, showing the resilience of its soldiers under adversity. Well illustrated, the book also includes a number of informative appendices that round out the subject's story.



Operation Lusty: The Race for Hitler's Secret Technology (Graham M. Simons, Pen and Sword Books, South Yorkshire, UK, 2016, 272 pp., maps, photographs, bibliography, index, \$39.95, hardcover)

In the dying days of the Third Reich, the Allies were eager to capture as much Nazi technology as they could. German scientists had labored extensively during the war, and their

efforts had borne fruit. Jet aircraft, rockets, and guided missiles were among the wonder weapons devised to save the Reich, though in the end they were thankfully not enough. Operation Lusty (Luftwaffe Secret Technology) was part of the Anglo-American collection mission, and it resulted in thousands of pages of technical reports, evaluations of captured items, and transcripts of interviews with captured and surrendered Germans. Volumes of photographs accompanied these papers, and the data proved vitally useful in the early years of the Cold War.

The author has painstakingly reviewed and compiled the declassified documentation related to Operation Lusty and presented it neatly within this book. It is thoroughly detailed and full of original photographs. Also included is a section on the same efforts in Japan.



The U.S. Navy Against the Axis: Surface Combat 1941-45 (Vincent P. O'Hara, Naval Institute Press, Annapolis, MD, 2017, 364 pp., maps, photographs, appendices, notes, bibliography, index, \$36.95, softcover)

On August 15, 1944, the U.S. destroyer *Somers* was patrolling on the left flank of the Allied invasion force scheduled to begin landing that morning on the coast of southern France, known as Operation Anvil. At 0347, two small blips appeared on the ship's radar screen, and soon it appeared their course would bring them within range of the fleet's transports. *Somers* hailed the ships, but they did not answer. At 0440, the destroyer's captain, W.C. Hughes, gave the order to open fire. From 4,750 yards, the two contacts were pelted by 270 rounds of cannon fire. The decision was soon justified; the ships were both German gun or torpedo boats, one a former Italian corvette and the other a captured French vessel. The French-built ship was left ablaze after the American ship's first accurate salvos. The Italian corvette was quickly chased down and left dead in the water by 0520. It sank two hours later. The *Somers'* crew had acted quickly and decisively, eliminating a threat to the fleet.

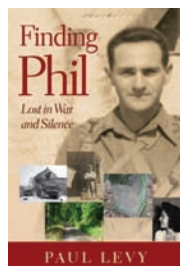
The naval aspect of World War II is often seen as a carrier war, but there is more to the story. In this book a prominent naval historian makes the case that battleships and other surface vessels played just as important a role in defeating the Axis powers. While the bat-

tle-ship was no longer primary among warships, it still played a part no other ships could have, battling surface ships and lending the weight of its firepower to shore bombardment. The book also pays attention to the roles of cruisers, destroyers, and even smaller craft.

Churchill's Ministry of Ungentlemanly Warfare: The Mavericks Who Plotted Hitler's Defeat (Giles Milton, Picador Books, New York, 2016, 356 pp., photographs, notes, bibliography index, \$28.00, hardcover)

In the spring of 1939, as war loomed ever closer in Europe, Joan Bright stood at the St. James' Park Underground Station in London. She came to the city seeking work as a secretary. She had experience and was known for her discretion and efficiency. A trusted friend cryptically told her he could get her a job; she had only to go to the station on a certain day wearing a pink carnation. She thought it might be a prank, but after arriving a woman introduced herself and bade Joan come with her to a brick building in the distance. The route there was roundabout, diverting down alleys and backstreets as though the woman did not want to be followed. Once there, she was brought before a colonel named Chidson, who merely gave her a piece of paper to sign. As she did so, Joan realized she was signing the Official Secrets Act. She had no idea at the time, but she had just joined what would become the Ministry of Ungentlemanly Warfare.

This was Winston Churchill's pet name for the organization charged with combating the Third Reich through acts of sabotage, assassination, and guerrilla warfare. Men such as engineer Cecil Clarke, who built bombs, paired with others like Eric Sykes and William Fairbairn, experts on killing techniques, from across the globe. This fascinating book lays out the ways in which these men and others took the fight to the Nazis in unconventional ways.

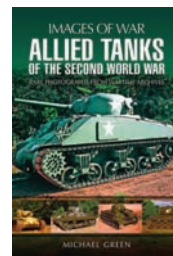


Finding Phil: Lost in War and Silence (Paul Levy, Bauhan Publishing, Peterborough, NH, 2016, maps, photographs, notes, bibliography, index, \$22.95, softcover)

Lieutenant Phil Levy led a platoon of tanks in the 191st Tank Battalion in 1944-1945. That unit spent much of its service attached to the 45th Infantry Division, the famed "Thunderbirds." In January 1945, the unit was fighting in the Vosges Mountains,

struggling against Nazi SS mountain troops and other units trying desperately to stop the American advance. German counterattacks were frequent and aggressive, and the combat took its toll on both sides in the frigid winter landscape. It was here, on January 7, 1945, that Levy died in action.

Most of the World War II veterans who survived such actions are gone now through the passing of time. In some cases their descendants carry on the effort to document and understand what they endured. The author of this work is Lieutenant Levy's nephew, who was only a year old when his uncle died. The family had no real idea of what happened; details were lost in both distance and time. The author's deep research sheds light on the events, telling a tale that not only informs his family but holds true for any student of the war.



Allied Tanks of the Second World War: Rare Photographs from Wartime Archives (Michael Green, Pen and Sword, South Yorkshire, UK, 2017, 208 pp., photographs, \$24.95, softcover)

A trio of Soviet T-34/85 tanks rumbles down a rubble-strewn street in an Eastern European city. A USMC M-4A3 Sherman sits nearly vertical in the wreckage of a bridge that collapsed beneath it. A destroyed French H-35 sits among the bodies of French soldiers in the summer of 1940. A squad of reenactors crowd around the turret of a fully restored M-24 Chaffee owned by a private collector. A rusting M-26 Pershing, rescued from a U.S. Air Force target range, sits in a field awaiting its turn at restoration. A freshly painted Matilda Mark II sits outside the British Army Tank Museum at Bovington, ready to be displayed at the museum's annual "Tankfest" celebration, where still-operational classic tanks are paraded in front of crowds of enthusiasts.

This photo book blends images of World War II tanks from the span of the war. Some photos are from the war, showing the vehicles in service in a number of situations. Other pictures show still existing examples. Some are in museums, lovingly cared for and on display, while others sit rusting in fields and lots awaiting either restoration or the eventual ravages of time. A few are in the hands of private collectors, who fix them up to appear as they did when they rolled off the factory floor. Overall, the volume is an interesting combination of old and new imagery detailing both common and rare tank designs. □

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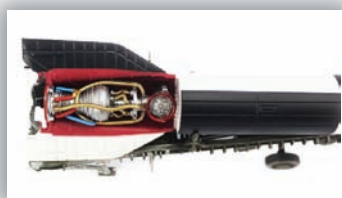


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Historical Information: Originally, plans called for the V-2 (German: Vergeltungswaffe 2, "Retribution Weapon 2") to be launched from massive blockhouses located at Eperlecques and La Coupole near the English Channel. This static approach was soon scrapped in favor of mobile launchers. Traveling in convoys of thirty trucks, the V-2 team would arrive at a staging area where the warhead was installed before towing it to the launch site on a Meillerwagen. There, the missile was placed on the launch platform, armed, fueled, and the gyros set. This set up took approximately 90 minutes and the launch team could clear an area in 30 minutes after launch.

This mobile system proved highly successful and up to 100 missiles a day could be launched by German V-2 forces. Also, due to their ability to stay on the move, V-2 convoys were rarely caught by Allied aircraft. The first V-2 attacks were launched against Paris and London on September 8th, 1944. Over the next eight months, a total of 3,172 V-2 were launched at Allied cities including London, Paris, Antwerp, Lille, Norwich, and Liege. Due to the missile's ballistic trajectory and extreme speed which exceeded three times the speed of sound during descent, there was no existing and effective method for intercepting them. To combat the threat, several experiments were conducted involving radio jamming (the British erroneously thought the rockets were radio-controlled) and massing anti-aircraft guns. These ultimately proved fruitless.

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Simulation Gaming

BY JOSEPH LUSTER

WAR WINGS TAKES ITS MOBILE CONFLICT TO EUROPE, WHILE A PAIR OF UNIQUE STRATEGY TITLES LOOMS ON THE HORIZON.

WAR WINGS

PUBLISHER ACTIVISION • **GENRE** SHOOTER • **SYSTEM** iOS, ANDROID • **AVAILABLE NOW** (UK)

Following up on releases in other European territories, *War Wings* recently made its debut in the UK, bringing it one step closer to its eventual North American release. The wait has been kind of tough, especially with all the hands-on previews and full reviews from outside regions floating around, but it's worth taking a look at the dogfighting action game now ahead of its expanded worldwide availability.

War Wings comes from Miniclip and Tencent, and at the time of this writing its debut in the UK and Australia has built it up to over a million downloads. That's not too shabby for a World War II-based shooter aiming for a close adherence to historical accuracy. That dedication isn't something we get to see too often in the mobile space, especially when it comes to the technical details involved with high-intensity dogfights. That means you can also look forward to realistic plane damage, represented with fully 3D visuals that are on the higher end of what you typically see on iOS and Android.

Beyond the WWII-era plane upgrading and customizing system, the real hook of *War Wings* is its player-versus-player action, which sounds like it's going to be especially heated once it launches in the United States. Since multiplayer is a real-time global affair, there should be plenty of competition by the time it's available in more regions. We'll definitely be back with full impressions when it hits the Google Play shop and Apple Store on our side of the ocean.

SUDDEN STRIKE 4

PUBLISHER KALYPSO MEDIA • **GENRE** STRATEGY • **SYSTEM** PC, PS4 • **AVAILABLE NOW**

The *Sudden Strike* series has a history that dates back to 2000, which doesn't sound like that long ago ... until you realize it's getting dangerously close to 20 years! Now we're officially up to *Sudden Strike 4*, which finally made its full debut on PlayStation 4 and PC this August. The results are both an adherence to and expansion of the gameplay features that make the *Sudden Strike* franchise what it is, including the focus on tactical exploits and unit preservation that sets it apart from other mainstays of the strategy genre.

From our first impressions, *Sudden Strike 4* seems to maintain a solid balance between holding onto long-time fans and luring in new players who haven't experienced a *Sudden Strike* game before. This one



features three campaigns consisting of more than 20 missions, giving players the opportunity to choose from one of nine commanders and take part in some of the most significant battles of WWII. There are over 100 units to throw into the mix, and PC players can dig into an extensive modding system that's integrated with Steam Workshop.

For non-PC players, the fact that *Sudden Strike 4* made its way to PlayStation 4 in the first place fills a major gap on Sony's system. It's pretty rare that we get pure strategy games on any console, much less authentic World War II entries, so it's nice to see the series expanding beyond PC, Mac, SteamOS, and Linux. As for how it plays on consoles, we'll present you with a full report once we've made our way through all the demanding battles.

A TOTAL WAR SAGA

PUBLISHER SEGA • **GENRE** STRATEGY • **SYSTEM** PC • **AVAILABLE TBA**

Your average war game, particularly those that fall within the *Total War* series, is fairly broad in scope. From World War II-focused outings to more specific examples like *Rome: Total War* and *Empire: Total War*, there are plenty of games that cover entire eras. Narrowing the focus a bit, we have spinoffs such as the *Napoleon* or *Attila* games, but what if you zoomed in even further? That's what developer Creative Assembly has in mind for the next leg of the *Total War* franchise, which is currently known as *A Total War Saga*.

The general aim of the *A Total War Saga* sub-series involves whittling things down to a distinct



moment in history. Not necessarily a particular battle, and not necessarily one that centers on a sole historical figure, but something that acted as a powder keg of sorts. That gives the team plenty of wiggle room to continue making new entries and dubbing them *A Total War Saga*, but that doesn't mean these are simple add-ons or pieces of DLC fluff. On the contrary, these will be standalone titles full of the same amount of content fans of the *Total War* games have come to expect, and they won't require ownership of any other entries in the series.

As far as gameplay is concerned, players shouldn't be too worried about a major overhaul. *A Total War Saga* will feature a recognizable mix of real-time tactics and turn-based strategy, only with what team member Michael Whelan describes as a focus on "table-flip moments in history, where events are in the balance and could go any number of interesting and unique ways." Those hoping for an existing point of comparison needn't look any further than *Fall of the Samurai*, a spinoff of *Total War: Shogun 2* that covered the pivotal Boshin War. With all the large-scale war games on the shelves and on digital storefronts at the moment, we're definitely interested in checking out something with a tighter focal point. □



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12th Army Group

Continued from page 53

of Vire, it was the key to Avranches, a bottleneck along the main coastal supply route for Patton's men fanning out to the south, southwest, and southeast, and highly exposed to isolation. Taking Avranches would split the American First and Third Armies, effectively cutting the latter off from its supply and dealing it a crippling blow before it even got into the fight.

Only weeks before, on July 20, 1944, Hitler had barely escaped assassination by a bomb at his Wolf's Lair headquarters in East Prussia, and in a rare expression of personal political opinion, Bradley said what that would mean. "By this time the Germans generals realized that they had no chance of winning the war and ending it would save a lot of grief and many lives. But Hitler had no reason to quit as it would mean his end, so I think the Allies made a mistake in announcing that they would accept nothing short of unconditional surrender as it made it more difficult for the Germans to give up. We could have agreed among ourselves on such conditions without announcing them."

That may not have been solely a political judgment, as every experienced hunter knows that a cornered animal is more dangerous than one maneuvered by careful prodding to its destruction.

Observing Bradley during his first big battle commanding an Army group, Bigland's respect for the man grew. "I was most impressed by Bradley's decision to essentially ignore the German attack and to rely on air to block it, if necessary, which was against the advice of his staff." It was one of two times during the war when Bigland, drawing on his encyclopedic knowledge of units, deployments, supply situation, and plans, felt he was truly able to predict the outcome of American battles when asked by friends at 21 TAC. He knew that VII Corps, its veteran infantry divisions dug in with armor support close by and backed by air support, was in a good position to halt the counterattack quickly.

Bradley calculated that good weather would allow tactical air support to provide the margin of strength to halt the counterattack. Well-sited artillery batteries with good forward observers in position proved decisive. On the morning of the German attack, a combat command of the 3rd Armored and 30th Infantry Divisions lay directly in the path of the German juggernaut. The battle was costly, especially among the armored infantry. Losses in the 36th Armored Infantry Regiment leadership were ghastly. On a single day the regimental commander, two bat-

talion commanders, two acting battalion commanders, five company commanders, six platoon leaders, two first sergeants, and at least four platoon sergeants were killed or wounded. The regimental surgeon earned a Silver Star dragging a wounded man from a burning halftrack.

Terrain also favored the defenders. Hill 317 was held by a battalion of the 30th Infantry and had a commanding view for miles in every direction. Hodges assured Bradley that Leland Hobbs would hold. Bradley knew Hobbs well, ever since their days as friends and teammates on the famed West Point baseball teams of 1914 and 1915. Every man on those teams became a general officer, including several, like Hobbs, who served under Bradley in World War II. Opinions differ about the value of Ultra in tracking the German panzers, but the defenders were ready, and so was Bradley.

"I saw a great opportunity forming," Bradley remembered. "If we could contain the counterattack, and if the enemy did not withdraw soon, there was a chance to get enough force behind him to surround and destroy his army."

When the Germans struck, intending to restore a stable front and cut off U.S. forces moving toward Brittany, they offered the Allies an opportunity for encirclement, every commander's dream. As soon as weathermen reported clear skies, the IX Tactical Air went to work, inflicting terrific losses on the Germans in men and equipment. Within a few days, in spite of the initial penetration of about five miles, the Germans were halted and badly cut up. The surrounded 2nd Battalion, 120th Infantry Regiment on Hill 317 broke up the enemy attack and at terrible cost fought one of the great small unit actions of World War II.

Bradley was confident the Germans had blundered in "a historic mistake" that would decide the second battle of France. On the next day, August 8, during a visit by Secretary of the Treasury Henry Morgenthau, Bradley showed the secretary the situation map, confiding, "This is an opportunity that comes to a commander not more than once in a century. We are about to destroy an entire hostile army." Morgenthau looked even more surprised when Bradley said he only hoped "the other fellow" would continue his attack for another 48 hours to give his men enough time to get in position to start the encirclement.

The stage was set for the next great challenge, the Second Battle of France. □

Author Steve Ossad has recently written a biography of General Omar Bradley, and publication through the University of Missouri Press is forthcoming. He resides in New York City.

Fitzpatrick

Continued from page 47

took a train to Philadelphia and a local train home. As he walked up his street, his sister and cousin ran to him and hugged him. When he got home his mother inspected him head to toe. "I passed muster," he said.

Since it was too late in the year to go back to school, Fitzpatrick temporarily returned to his job at the USDA lab, receiving his replacement's promotions. He eventually earned a degree in chemistry from Penn State University in 1950 and went on to earn a master's degree from the University of Maryland and a Ph.D. from the University of Massachusetts in 1963. He spent the rest of his career at the USDA laboratory. He bought a house in Flourtown, north of Philadelphia, and decorated his den with the bugle from India (where it hangs today). To him, it represents the end of the British Empire. He moved his parents in to take care of them. "They needed me," said Fitzpatrick. He got engaged once but never married. "I still have girlfriends," he muses today.

In 1990, Fitzpatrick watched the movie *Memphis Belle*, starring Matthew Modine. While he enjoyed it, he did not like the scene where a panicked crewman refused to go on a second bomb run. "We would have shot him," he said. "Sometimes we had to go around the third time, and by then the enemy had our range." But he liked the movie enough to see it twice, and said the portrayal of the radioman was accurate "even though there wasn't much of it."

As a biochemist, Fitzpatrick helped invent prenatal vitamins and many other things in use today. After fighting for his country and working at the USDA lab for a combined 40 years of service, he retired at age 55. "Since then," he said, "I've caught a lot of fish." At age 92 in 2017, he continued to ride horses and hunt big game.

Fitzpatrick is proud of his service and the might of America's military strength. One day, when his crew led a 1,000-bomber mission, he looked out his side window and counted at least 100 planes. The sight inspired him. "That was the U.S.A.," he recalled. "That was Uncle Sam." He looks back on the experience with an appreciation of America's modern air force. "Of course," he said, "two bombers could do the same job today." □

Frequent contributor Kevin M. Hymel is a historian for the U.S. Air Force Chaplain Corps and author of Patton's Photographs: War as He Saw It. He is also a tour guide for Stephen Ambrose Historical Tours and leads a tour of General George S. Patton's battlefields.

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