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Contents

Features

32 "You Learn Fast"
A replacement with the 94th Infantry Division recalls the final months of the war in Europe.
By Kevin M. Hymel

38 Heroic Warsaw Airlift
Allied airmen braved horrific German flak over the Polish capital in an effort to drop supplies to resistance fighters during the Warsaw Uprising.
By Patrick J. Chaisson

44 The Liberation of Nordhausen
The U.S. 3rd Armored Division made a startling discovery and its commander was killed on March 30,1945, near Paderborn, Germany.
By Steve Ossad

50 Desperate Delaying Action
Allied warships were roughly handled during the Battle of the Java Sea as they defended the East Indies.
By David H. Lippman

62 Death on the Oder
The Red army's capture of Küstrin, the German fortress town, provided Marshal Georgi Zhukov with a springboard to launch the Battle of Berlin.
By Pat McTaggart

Columns

06 Editorial
Rangers ravaged at Cisterna 75 years ago.

08 Ordnance
The Junkers Ju-87 Stuka terrorized civilian populations in the early days of the Nazi blitzkrieg in World War II.

14 Profiles
How George S. Patton, a spoiled rich kid with problems became what he always wanted to be: a famous general.

22 Insight
WAC Corporal Lena Derriecott served in the only all-black, all-female unit to serve overseas during World War II.

28 Top Secret
The Brandenburgers, employing stealth and disguise, were Germany's clandestine force during World Wat II.

72 Books
The Battle of Anzio was a bitter struggle of endurance between two unrelenting combatants that ultimately ended in Allied triumph.

76 Simulation Gaming
EA leaps from one world war to the next with the latest entry in the long-running *Battlefield* series.

Cover: German soldiers believed to be members of the notorious Waffen SS Dirlewanger Brigade engage Polish resistance fighters during the Warsaw Uprising.

See story page 38.
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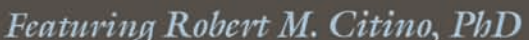

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Photo: Three German Dornier Do 17 bombers flying over the Acropolis. Athens, Greece, circa 1941.

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Editorial

Rangers ravaged at Cisterna 75 years ago.

TO THIS DAY, CONTROVERSY CONTINUES TO SWIRL AROUND OPERATION Shingle and its agonizing aftermath. The Allied landings at Anzio, intended to outflank the German Gustav Line in Italy, occurred in January 1944. Instead of resulting in a lightning thrust toward Rome, the Eternal City and capital of fascist Italy, the Anzio beachhead became a crucible of death and destruction as Allied forces were essentially bottled up for more than four agonizing months.

While the U.S. VI Corps, commanded by General John P. Lucas, fought desperately to prevent the Germans from throwing them into the Tyrrhenian Sea, the Americans mounted several efforts to expand the beachhead and break the German grip. Each one was repulsed, and at the same time German counterattacks were blunted and driven back. Losses were heavy on both sides, and not until Operation Diadem was launched in mid-May did the Allies break out of their lodgment at Anzio.

During those dark, harrowing days at the beachhead, acts of heroism were commonplace, and so were command failure, ineptitude, and tragedy. For the American forces, no setback was more devastating than the defeat of the U.S. Ranger foray against the town of Cisterna. At the end of January, General Lucas set in motion an attempt to break out of the beachhead and designated the 1st and 3rd Ranger Battalions along with a platoon of the 3rd Reconnaissance Troop to seize and hold the town in advance of the main thrust that would come to their relief.

The Battle of Cisterna occurred January 30-February 2, 1944, and resulted in the deaths of 311 Rangers while 450 were taken prisoner. Bear in mind that these losses represented just over 99 percent of an original force numbering 767 men. Only six Ranger survivors and one member of the 3rd Recon Troop were able to extricate themselves from the debacle and return to American lines.

The Rangers, under the command of Colonel William O. Darby, moved out under cover of darkness at 1:30 AM on the night of January 30-31. Moving in column along a drainage ditch, they approached the German positions, bypassing several, until they reached open ground. Coming under heavy fire, they were assaulted by elements of the enemy Hermann Göring Panzer Division and the 715th Infantry Division supported by at least 17 tanks. Apparently, they had run into a well-planned ambush.

For the next seven hours, the Rangers fought for their lives. Major Jack Dobson, commanding the 1st Battalion, personally shot the commander of one tank and dropped a white phosphorous grenade down its hatch. Two other tanks were captured but later destroyed by Ranger bazooka teams that did not realize the German armored vehicles had been taken. When the Rangers were caught in the open, the overwhelming numbers of German attackers spelled their doom.

When the main American attack jumped off hours later, initial gains were made; however, efforts to relieve the trapped Rangers at Cisterna ended in failure. The town remained in German hands until the breakout at the end of May.

In the aftermath of the terrible defeat, the Ranger units in Italy were disbanded, and as many as 400 men were parceled out to other units, including the 1st Special Service Force. Darby went on to serve as assistant commander of the 10th Mountain Division and was killed in action on May 30, 1945, the only American officer posthumously promoted to general rank during World War II.

Later analysis of the abortive Cisterna action concluded that the Rangers had disrupted German plans for a counterattack against the beachhead. Still, among other criticisms of Lucas's performance at Anzio (he was subsequently relieved), the general's decision to spearhead his offensive with the lightly armed Rangers has been seriously questioned.

Lives were needlessly sacrificed at Cisterna, symptomatic of the larger fiasco that was Anzio, 75 years ago but fresh in the minds of the few remaining veterans who served there.

Michael E. Haskew

WWII HISTORY

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By Michael D. Hull

Fearsome Luftwaffe Vulture

The Junkers Ju-87 Stuka terrorized civilian populations in the early days of the Nazi blitzkrieg in World War II.

ONE OF THE DEADLIEST AND MOST EFFECTIVE AIRPLANES OF THE AXIS POWERS owed its origin to a fearless World War I ace and, ironically, to innovative American aviation visionaries in the peaceful early 1930s.

After shooting down 62 planes, ranking second only to the famous "Red Baron," Manfred von Richthofen, and surviving the 1914-1918 war, Frankfurt-born Ernst Udet became a stunt pilot and barnstormed over Africa, Greenland, the Swiss Alps, and South America. While visiting the United States in 1931, he observed dive-bombing techniques being developed by the U.S. Navy.

An ebullient, humorous man with a weakness for women and alcohol, and who made many friends in America and England, Udet returned to Germany around the time that Adolf Hitler and his National Socialists came to power. Encouraged by Hermann Göring, aviation minister of the new regime, Udet demonstrated dive bombing. While the U.S. Navy embraced the dive-bombing concept and the Royal Air Force ignored it, certain German leaders showed interest.

Udet received overtures to help recast the German air service. Though not in a hurry to join the Luftwaffe, he offered some far-sighted technical suggestions. One was that Germany should develop a dive bomber. Hitler wanted a "long-range artillery" plane that would complement the German Army for his planned blitzkrieg strategy, so design work went ahead promptly. In April 1935, the Junkers aircraft company produced and flight-tested a single-engine prototype, and thus was born the Ju-87 Stuka. The name was derived from the German word for dive bomber, sturzkampfflugzeug.

Followed by its rivals, the Arado 81, the Heinkel 118, and the Bloehm & Voss Ha-137, the Stuka had inverted gull-shaped wings, an in-line water-cooled, 1,100-horsepower engine, and a large, fixed undercarriage with wheel spats. Manned by a pilot and a radioman-gunner, its wingspan was 45.2 feet, it had a top speed of 232 miles an hour, it mounted three 7.9mm machine guns, and it could carry 1,100 pounds of bombs under its wings and fuselage.

It was a sinister looking aircraft, resembling a flying vulture. Aviation historian William Green called it "an evil-looking machine, with something of the predatory bird in its ugly contours—its radiator bath and fixed, spatted undercarriage resembling gaping jaws and extended talons." Ironically, early versions of the Stuka were fitted with Pratt & Whitney Hornet and Rolls-Royce Kestrel engines.

Udet, who joined the Luftwaffe in January 1936 with the rank of brigadier, was appointed inspector of fighter and dive-bomber pilots and became director of Reichsmarshal Göring's technical department. Playing a leading role in the Stuka's development, the former ace even added air-driven sirens to the undercarriage legs, designed to spread fear and panic when the plane dived. These "Trumpets of Jericho" were to prove remarkably effective in combat. The Stuka was clearly ahead of its competitors, and the first of its type reached the flying units by early 1937.

Simple to maintain and operate, Udet's dive bomber was to prove effective in the hands of expert pilots. In 80-degree dives to within 2,300 feet of the ground, they could deliver a bomb with an accuracy of less than 30 yards. Even average pilots could achieve a 25 percent success rate in hitting their targets—a far higher proportion than that attained by conventional, horizontal attack bombers.

One of the most terrifying weapons employed by the Nazis in the early days of World War II, the Junkers Ju-87 Stuka dive bomber served as flying artillery during the Blitzkrieg in the West.

The baptism of fire for the Luftwaffe's Stuka squadrons came swiftly when they were deployed to Spain in late 1937 to support General Francisco

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ABOVE: A flight of Stuka dive bombers wings its way toward a target. The Stuka was sometimes fitted with sirens that emitted a distinctive wail meant to terrorize those on the ground when the aircraft went into a dive. RIGHT: Former World War I ace Ernst Udet was an early advocate of the dive bomber in the Luftwaffe.

Franco's Nationalist forces in the Spanish Civil War. As part of Maj. Gen. Hugo Sperrle's Condor Legion, which wreaked havoc on Spanish cities and towns, the Ju-87s were highly effective, despite some shortcomings, against both ground targets and shipping. They flew on every front where German planes served during the brutal war, which served as a valuable training ground for the Luftwaffe.

Stukas had proved their worth in Spain, and production was stepped up. By mid-1939, up to 60 improved "B" models per month were being turned out. They were soon to see action.

Stukas flew the first combat mission of World War II when 53 German panzer and infantry divisions, supported by 1,600 aircraft, swept into Poland on Friday, September 1, 1939. Three Ju-87B-1s led by Lieutenant Bruno Dilley took off early that day to attack the Dirschau bridge over the Vistula River, about 11 minutes before the Nazis declared war. Accompanying the German ground forces as they surged forward, more of the dive bombers proved deadly as they destroyed Polish tanks and planes on the ground, blasted airfields, bridges, highways, artillery emplacements, supply depots, and troop concentrations, and sank all but two of Poland's warships. The Luftwaffe committed all nine of its Stuka groups, a total of 319 planes, to the offensive.

The loud sirens of the diving Ju-87s spread terror among the hapless Polish troops and citizens. Outnumbered and hampered by outdated weapons, the Poles fought gallantly until their government capitulated on September 27. The Stukas gained glowing endorsements for their first major test while helping to speed the German victory, and Propaganda Minister Josef Goebbels boasted that the Junkers dive bomber was invincible. Like the panzer, the Stuka quickly emerged as a highly visible symbol of Nazi aggression as it spread destruction and terror.

During the 1939-1940 "Phoney War," a relatively calm period followed the fall of Poland. That ended with a bang on Friday, May 10, 1940, when Nazi Germany launched blitzkrieg (lightning war), with panzer, infantry, and airborne forces of Army Groups A and B, led by Generals Gerd von Rundstedt and Fedor von Bock, respectively, smashing their way westward into Holland, Belgium, and Luxembourg. Almost all of the 380 available Stukas were initially concentrated against Holland and Belgium. The planes provided close air support for airborne troops landing at several points. It was not the most effective way to use the Ju-87s, but there was no alternative. The lightly armed paratroopers relied on the dive bombers for their heavy punch.

Some of the planes took part that fateful day in one of the most spectacular operations of World War II. When specially trained German glider-borne infantry landed atop the fortress of Eben Emael, at the confluence of the Albert Canal and the Maas River in Belgium, and seized it, nine Stukas of Lieutenant Otto Schmidt's Geschwader 77 lent support by hitting a Belgian Army position near the canal.

In France, as in Poland, the screaming Stukas had a terrifying effect on both troops and civilians. A French general reported that his men simply froze in place as waves of Ju-87s plummeted toward them. "The gunners stopped firing and went to ground, the infantry cowered in their trenches, dazed by the crash of bombs and the shriek of the dive-bombers," he said. "They had not developed the instinctive reaction of running to their antiaircraft guns and firing back…. Five hours of this nightmare was enough to shatter their nerves."

In the following weeks, as the German forces ground on westward, the Stukas reverted to their more usual targets in rear areas. They were in action constantly when the weather permitted, and the crews sometimes flew as many as four sorties a day.

By the final week of May, the Allied troops in northern France were falling back on the Channel port of Dunkirk, where an evacuation operation was started on May 27. The enemy bombers and Stukas managed to cause severe damage to ships and harbor installations.

When the evacuation ended at dawn on June 4, 1940, almost 340,000 British and French troops had been rescued by Royal Navy destroyers and a motley fleet of civilian launches, motorboats, ferries, and yachts. The Stuka squadrons had again proved their worth, and now they prepared to assist in Operation Sealion, Hitler's planned invasion of England. But their fortunes were about to be dramatically reversed when they faced strong fighter opposition during the Battle of Britain.

History's first great aerial campaign opened in July 1940, with small-scale German attacks on coastal shipping in the English Channel. On the afternoon of July 13, half a dozen Stukas of Geschwader 1 pounced on a convoy off Dover. Eleven RAF Hurricanes broke up the attack and damaged two Ju-87s, and no ships were hit. But escorting Messerschmitt Me-109 fighters intervened and shot down two Hurricanes.

The pace of the air fighting gradually accelerated, and the Luftwaffe mounted its heaviest convoy attack on August 8. That morning, a few Stukas tried to reach the 18 freighters and naval escort of Convoy CW-9 as it headed west toward Weymouth, but they were driven away by patrolling Spitfires and Hurricanes. At midday, however, the Luftwaffe launched a heavier assault, with 57 Stukas diving on the convoy as it passed off the Isle of Wight.

While the Me-109 escorts tangled with RAF

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fighters, the Stukas fell upon the slow-moving ships. Several were damaged and two sunk. During the afternoon, 82 more Ju-87s went in to finish off the surviving vessels. The convoy was almost annihilated, and only four ships reached Weymouth without damage. But the Germans had lost 28 aircraft, including nine Stukas downed. Ten others were damaged. The RAF lost 19 fighters that day.

The largest Ju-87 attack during the Battle of Britain came on August 18, which went down in history as "The Hardest Day." Early that sunny afternoon, 109 Stukas drawn from three groups of Geschwader 77 set out to bomb the radar station at Poling and airfields at Gosport, Ford, and Thorney Island in southeastern England. Fifty Me-109s provided protection. As usual, the raiders hit their targets with precision, but scrambling Hurricanes from the RAF's No. 43 and 601 Squadrons charged into the German formations with their machine guns belching fire.

Lieutenant Frank Carey, who led the Hurricanes of No. 43 Squadron, reported later, "In the dive, they [Stukas] were very difficult to hit, because in a fighter, one's speed built up so rapidly that one went screaming past him. But he couldn't dive for ever." One by one, flaming Stukas went down. As the surviving Ju-87s headed south for their French bases 70 miles distant, the Hurricanes ran out of ammunition and broke off the chase.

It was a black day for the Junkers dive bombers. Sixteen were shot down, and seven limped home with damage. The first real setback suffered by the Stuka groups highlighted the plane's major weakness, which would be demonstrated repeatedly as the war progressed. While it was a deadly attack weapon, it could operate only when escorted, when there was no interference from enemy fighters, and when its targets were not well protected by antiaircraft guns.

At the height of the Battle of Britain on August 13-18, a total of 41 Stukas were shot down by Spitfires and Hurricanes, and the losses were regarded by the Luftwaffe high command as unacceptable. The planes were needed to counter the might of the Royal Navy during the imminent invasion of England, so it was decided to preserve the dive-bomber force. The Ju-87s were withdrawn from the Battle of Britain and played little further part in it. RAF Fighter Command's eventual triumph over the Luftwaffe in September 1940 forced Hitler to shelve Operation Sealion, but the Ju-87's career was far from over. Vital roles awaited it the following spring and summer in the Mediterranean, the Balkans, and Russia.

During the bitter campaign on Crete in April-May 1941, when British and Greek troops were forced to evacuate after failing to dislodge the Germans, Stukas caused heavy losses to Royal Navy ships. Three cruisers and six destroyers were sunk, and 13 other vessels were severely damaged, including the 23,000-ton carrier HMS *Formidable*. In the Western Desert, meanwhile, Ju-87s flew numerous sorties in close support of General Erwin Rommel's Afrika Korps during its long, seesaw struggle with British and Commonwealth forces. The planes destroyed many British strongpoints with incredible accuracy.

These Stuka dive bombers are piloted by Italian fliers in the Mediterranean. The Stuka served in every theater of World War II where the German war machine was deployed.

By 1941, however, the Stuka was virtually obsolete. It had an unfortunate tendency to disintegrate when struck by Hurricane machine guns, and its 120-mph climbing speed was too slow to qualify for escort by fast fighters such as the Me-109. RAF pilots breezily relished "Stuka parties" as a form of risk-free recreation, while the Stuka crews joked wryly that their planes were so sluggish that survival depended on their British opponents overshooting.

Nevertheless, the Ju-87s continued in their role of attacking Allied land and sea targets and as "flying artillery" spearheads wherever German forces launched offensives. When three powerful German army groups smashed their way into the Soviet Union on Sunday, June 22, 1941, eight Stuka groups with a total of 324 planes flew in close support. They bombed Russian installations and towns as the panzer and infantry columns raced forward against sparse opposition.

"At first, things were easy in Russia, and we had few losses to either flak or fighters," reported Hauptmann Schmidt of Geschwader 77. "Gradually, however, the Russian gunners gained experience in dealing with our diving tactics. They learned to stand their ground and fire back at us, instead of running for cover as others had done before.... A further strain was caused by the knowledge that if one was shot down on the enemy side of the lines and captured, the chances of survival were minimal."

As the grinding war of attrition continued across the vast Russian steppes, modified versions of the Stuka were rushed into frontline service. They included the Ju-87 "Dora" and the Ju-87G "Gustav." Filling the desperate need for a tank-busting airplane, the Gustav carried a 550-pound high-explosive bomb and mounted two 37mm high-velocity cannons under the wings. The guns proved highly effective in piercing the relatively thin armor on the rear of Red Army tanks. The Gustavs made a timely appearance in the spring of 1943, shortly before the main German offensive, Operation Citadel, aimed at the central front near Kursk.

All available Stuka units, with a total of about 360 Doras and a dozen Gustavs, were positioned to support the offensive. What developed into the biggest tank battle in history commenced on July 5, 1943. With their crews flying up to six sorties a day, bomb-carrying Doras attacked targets in the Soviet rear areas while the Gustavs went after enemy tanks caught in the open. Despite powerful air support, however, the German armored thrusts became bogged down in the Soviet defenses. With the last reserves fully committed, Hitler ordered his army to move to the defensive on July 23. At Kursk, the German Army failed to produce a decisive victory, and it never regained the strategic initiative.

On the Eastern Front, a Stuka pilot emerged as the leading combat ace of World War II. He was Oberst Hans-Ulrich Rudel, a once timid minister's son who flew an incredible 2,530 sorties, dived lower than anyone, and pioneered a

ground attack technique. Like a one-man air force, he destroyed 519 tanks, more than 2,000 vehicles, many artillery positions, and even a Soviet battleship, the *Marat*, and a cruiser. Rudel was the sole recipient of Germany's highest decoration, the Gold Oak Leaves with Swords and Diamonds to the Knight's Cross. After losing a leg, he disobeyed orders from Hitler and Göring and continued to fly until the last day of the war. Rudel was reported to be Hitler's choice to succeed him as führer.

In the autumn of 1943, the Luftwaffe reshuffled the tactical support units, with ground-attack Focke-Wulf 190Fs beginning to replace the Ju-87 Doras. Arguably the best German fighter of the war, the FW-190 mounted four 20mm cannons and two machine guns, carried up to 1,100 pounds of bombs, and was twice as fast as the Stuka.

Elsewhere, from Athens to Corinth and Malta to Tobruk, Stuka squadrons continued to give sterling service. They escorted convoys, raided Allied bases and shipping in the Mediterranean area, and harassed British Eighth Army troops and installations during the long war in the Western Desert. After Operation Torch, when U.S. forces invaded North Africa to join the British, inexperienced GIs felt the wrath of Ju-87s, particularly during the rout of the U.S. II Corps at Kasserine Pass.

A British soldier clears the wreckage of a Stuka dive bomber shot down over the North African desert. The Stuka was a slow, lumbering aircraft whose weaknesses were eventually laid bare.

The last of more than 5,700 Ju-87s came off the production lines in September 1944, but the type continued in service. Some were modified as night raiders, many were employed as glider tugs, trainers, and transports, and the Ju-87C, equipped with folding wings and a tail hook, was developed to operate from the German aircraft carrier *Graf Zeppelin*. The ship was never commissioned.

But the heyday of the Stuka, which had been supplanted by faster and more powerful planes, was over. By April 1945, the last month of the European war, only 125 Ju-87 Doras and Gustavs remained with frontline units. Besides the Luftwaffe, Stukas flew during the war with the air forces of Italy, Hungary, Romania, Bulgaria, and Croatia.

The plane that had spread so much terror and destruction from Warsaw to Crete to Stalingrad, symbolizing Nazi might and ruthlessness, outlived the man who masterminded it. Ernst Udet, one of the most important planners of the Luftwaffe, along with Göring and the stocky, able Erhard Milch, was appointed chief air inspector-general of the Reich Air Ministry in February 1938. He was in charge of aircraft design, production, and procurement.

But his career in preparing the Luftwaffe for the coming war was stormy. He drove himself to the limit as chief of supply, but he became a shadow of his former self, and his buoyant personality cracked under the strain. Udet overindulged in cognac and turned to drugs. On November 17, 1941, he committed suicide.

Author Michael D. Hull is a frequent contributor to WWII History. *He resides in Enfield, Connecticut.*

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The Making of George S. Patton

How a spoiled rich kid with problems became what he always wanted to be: a famous general.

GEORGE PATTON KNEW WHAT HE WANTED TO BE FROM CHILDHOOD ON. "WHEN I was a little boy at home, I used to wear a wooden sword and say to myself, 'George S. Patton, Jr., Lieutenant General,'" he once remembered.

Although there were missteps and setbacks along the way, mostly of his own making, and times when he was sure his career was over, Patton eventually got his three stars and became a lieutenant general. Then he exceeded his childhood dream and earned a fourth star.

"I must be the happiest boy in the world," he said, while reminiscing about his childhood. He was born in Southern California on November 11, 1885, to wealthy parents whose sole mission in life seemed to be to spoil the boy, rarely to punish or chastise him for his behavior. And they were not the only ones to treat him this way. His mother's sister, Annie, who at one time had been desperately in love with Patton's father, moved in with the family and became "Aunt Nannie," to baby Georgie, whom she always referred to as her boy. She too never allowed anyone to criticize him or tell him he had done wrong. So thanks to her domination of the Patton family, the youngster pretty much got away with everything.

Aunt Nannie and Patton's mother moved with him to West Point for the five years he was a cadet (having failed his first year) in case he needed their help. No wonder he was used to being the center of attention and seemed to need to recreate this role for the rest of his life.

But when that role was threatened, no matter the source—or his age—he grew surly, angry, even depressed. When his wife, Beatrice, gave birth to their first child, Patton was 26 years old but found it difficult to play second fiddle when Bea had to devote time to the baby. He became jealous and resentful of the child who, worse to him, was a girl and not the son he hoped for. Another daughter followed, then a son, but he never got along well with the girls; in addition to not being boys, they diverted the limelight from him. He even told his wife, in front of the children, "How did such a beautiful woman like yourself ever have two such ugly daughters?"

Patton was a strict disciplinarian, even with sports and games. He once tried to teach the children to play tennis, treating them as though they were privates undergoing basic training in the Army. The girls swore to each other that they would never play tennis again. When he tried to teach one daughter how to ride a horse, he yelled at her to get off so he could show her how it was supposed to be done. As he rode off, she was overheard to say, "Dear God, please let that son-of-a-bitch break his neck."

His son, also named George, was accepted at the U.S. Military Academy at West Point. Patton wrote to him, "We are really proud of you for the first time in your life. See to it that we stay that way." Obviously, his children were not treated in the adoring, pampered way he had been.

Patton grew up not only extremely spoiled, but also wealthy and privileged, and his father had no hesitation in giving the boy anything he wanted, including two horses of his own when he was 10 years old. The family enjoyed a life of luxury, which Patton was always able to maintain. In 1910, a year after he graduated from West Point, he married Beatrice Banning Ayer, from a prominent New England family that owned textile mills. The Ayers were also extremely generous in supporting George and Bea.

British military historian Charles Whiting wrote that there was "something arrogant and aristocratic" about George Patton. Whiting went on to describe how no matter how remote and

General George S. Patton, Jr., stands with a firm gaze in this familiar portrait captured in 1943. INSET: A young Patton smiles broadly in this image with his Aunt Nannie, his mother's sister.

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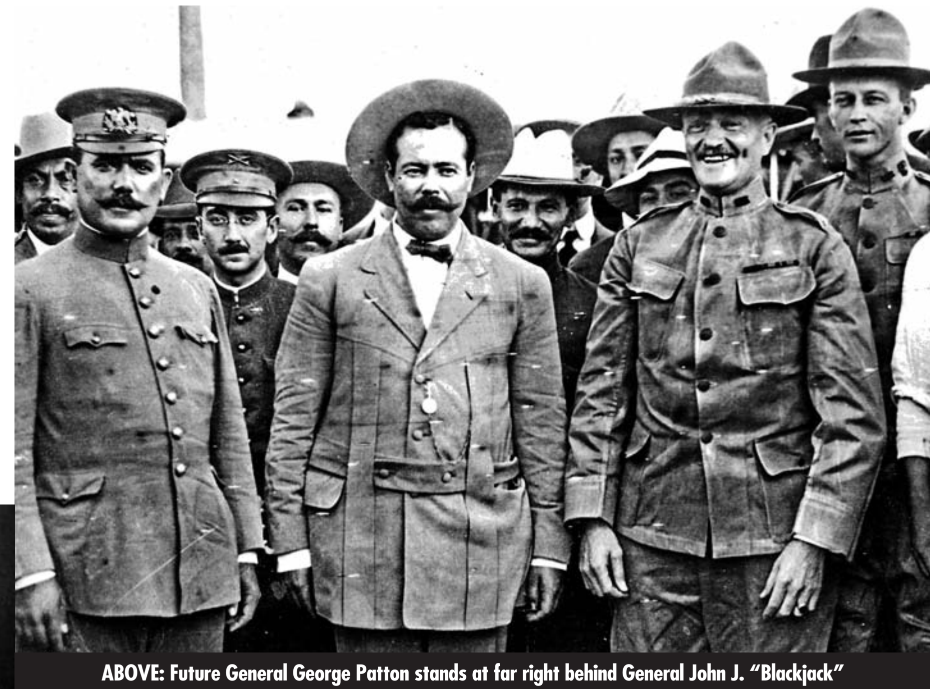
primitive was the Army base to which Patton was assigned, he could "always afford the finest accommodations in the nearest town, motoring back and forth to duty in the latest and most expensive automobile available. [He was partial to Pierce-Arrows, then a status symbol among Hollywood celebrities.] He ran a string of polo ponies at a time during the Depression when the average Army officer of the same rank was lucky to have a single ancient steed at his disposal."

And when a far less privileged commanding officer ordered Patton to take his polo ponies off the base, he boarded them at a private livery stable at his own expense. "In short," Whiting concluded, "The Pattons' private life was aristocratic and upper class; a black-tie affair in the best society." Of course, such a lifestyle aroused considerable jealousy and resentment among his fellow officers, but that apparently never concerned Patton.



ABOVE: Future General George Patton stands at far right behind General John J. "Blackjack" Pershing and Pancho Villa. Within months, Pershing would give chase to Villa and the youthful Patton would begin to make a name for himself in the U.S. Army. LEFT: Patton was a graduate of the West Point class of 1909. He struggled in the classroom, particularly due to dyslexia.

When he was still a poorly paid lieutenant in the Army, Patton bought a 52-foot schooner, had it shipped from New England to California, and spent a month sailing with friends to his new post in Hawaii. He and Bea spent summers in Europe, shipping his automobile along on the same ocean liner on which they sailed; the cost of transporting the car was twice Patton's monthly salary.

During one of the times he was stationed at Fort Myer, a prestigious Army post across the Potomac River from Washington, D.C., the Patton family rented a house so large it required a housekeeper, governess, cook, and six servants to run. Patton arranged to be chauffeured to the base every day, explaining to his father that everyone else had a personal driver and that he and Bea would not be able to maintain their social standing without one.

Fort Myer was an ideal spot to meet high-ranking military officers and influential Congressmen and cabinet members. Patton liked to say that being stationed there was like being closer to God. It was necessary to have the right clothes and the social standing, bearing, and manners to be accepted by that level of society, and George and Bea Patton fit right in with the tennis and polo matches, fox hunts, steeplechases, horse shows, and lavish parties, as well as hosting their own events for Washington's prominent leaders. They won acceptance at two of the most important private clubs, the Metropolitan Club and the Chevy Chase Club. Soon Patton bought a second boat, a two-masted schooner moored at the Capital Yacht Club for sailing in the Chesapeake Bay. Because of his fine horses and social cachet, he was invited to horseback riding many mornings with Henry Stimson, who had been Secretary of War during World War I, Secretary of State from 1929 to 1933, and was soon to be Secretary of War again through World War II.

Patton's lavish spending and upper-class ties led to other influential relationships. He had no hesitation in using his money or his family to expedite those relationships. While a student at West Point in 1905, he wrote to his father in advance of his parents' visit to the Academy, asking him to do whatever he could to cultivate the goodwill of the officers. He told his father that if he could get "on their good side" that would increase his chances of promotion.

In 1939, while in command at Fort Myer, Patton invited the newly promoted Army Chief of Staff, General George C. Marshall, to stay at his own quarters on the post while Marshall's house was being renovated. Marshall accepted and, as Patton wrote to Bea, apparently the two men had a good time "batching it."

Patton bought eight solid silver stars from a prominent New York jeweler and presented them to Marshall as a gift for his promotion to four-star general and frequently took Marshall sailing on his schooner. He knew that Marshall was about to make major changes in the Army officer corps, including forced retirement for most officers of Patton's age.

On July 27, 1939, during Marshall's stay at Patton's quarters, Patton wrote to Bea, who was away with the children, "You had better send me a check for $5000 as I am getting pretty low." That was a little over three times the average annual salary for a worker in the United States; the equivalent today exceeds $71,000.

It is not surprising, then, that George Patton felt a sense of superiority to others, most of whom he considered beneath him socially, mentally, and morally. While still at West Point, he wrote to his father complaining about his fellow cadets, noting, "I am better than they are.... Someday I will show and make them feel how infernally inferior they are."

In another letter he told his father, "I belong to a different class, a class almost extinct or one which may never have existed yet." By his behavior he made it clear to the other cadets that none of them measured up to his own sense of self-worth. Not surprisingly, they left him pretty much alone, considering him arrogant and remote.

While Patton enjoyed many advantages from childhood on, he was also beset by problems which, while not excusing his behavior, may have influenced it. The first was a learning disability now labeled dyslexia, characterized by difficulties with reading, writing, and spelling. "I am stupid," he declared as a child. That issue was reinforced when he attended private school at age 12. He could barely read or write. The other students responded to him with laughter, even derision, a harsh response for a boy who

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had known only praise and flattery. Nevertheless, he had an unusual memory and was able to recite long passages of poetry and prose that his father and Aunt Nannie had read to him. When he finally learned to read, he pored over books for hours on end and could recall every word, particularly those on military history.

Patton biographer Carlo D'Este described additional dyslexic symptoms that affected Patton, including mood swings, obsessiveness, impulsiveness, feelings of inferiority, and a tendency to boast. Dyslexics may feel the need to be as least as good as, but preferably better than, everyone else, which results in a tremendous drive to achieve. In the Army that means becoming not just a general, but a better general than any other.

Patton also suffered a series of accidents, falling off horses and sustaining several concussions. In one incident, two days after a spectacular fall playing polo in Hawaii, he was sailing his yacht off the coast when he turned to his wife in confusion and asked what had happened. He had no idea where he was or what had occurred since the fall; those two days were a blank. He knew bleak moods and intense depression, which worsened with age. He had hoped to be promoted to brigadier general by age 27, but by age 29 he was lamenting the fact that he was not even a first lieutenant. He grew obsessed about showing signs of age.

In 1934, at his daughter's wedding, his second daughter watched him walk the bride down the aisle. She said that he "looked just like a child who is having his favorite toy taken away. All his determination to remain forever young was being undermined by having a daughter getting married. He was 49 years old, and he had still not won a war…. He looked stricken to the heart."

On his 50th birthday Patton refused to get out of bed. His worst fears were coming true. His career had come to a halt, his West Point uniform no longer fit, he wore glasses, his hair was thinning and turning gray, and his stomach had begun to bulge. His depression and anger worsened, and he coped with the change by drinking far too much, sometimes making a spectacle of himself in front of his fellow officers.

The pampered rich boy, used to having his own way and feeling superior to others, had only one goal, to become a mighty warrior who would win major victories and earn a place in history as one of the world's greatest generals. He decided that he had to play the part, to behave the way a successful general would, and so, according to D'Este, he spent "the remainder of his life honing that image by becoming profane, ruthless, and aristocratic. His famous scowl became so successful a part of his persona it seemed as if he had been born with it permanently engraved on his face."

Patton was a pioneer of the employment of tanks in the U.S. Army. He developed a close friendship with Dwight Eisenhower, who shared a similar vision. This photo was taken during tank maneuvers in France in 1918.

The noted Patton scholar Martin Blumenson wrote, "Patton was always interested in glory, adulation, recognition and approval. He believed passionately in the virtue of becoming well and widely known. What he wanted, above all, was applause. And for him that meant winning. Not only wars, races and competitions of every sort, but also winning out over himself, overcoming what he regarded as his disabilities and weaknesses."

Patton once wrote to his father that he was afraid of being a coward. Years later, he took another bad fall from a horse while jumping hurdles and landed on his head. Though clearly shaken, he immediately got back on the horse and led it at a fast pace over the hurdles again. "I did it just to prove to myself that I am not a coward," he explained.

One day on the rifle range at West Point, it was his turn to work in the pits, raising and lowering the targets and recording where the bullets hit. Suddenly, he climbed up and stood out in the open with bullets flying all around him. He was testing his courage, proving to himself that he was not a coward. He passed the test that day, but there were to be many more. In 1943, he wrote to his wife, "I still get scared under fire. I guess I will never get used to it…. I do hope that I will do my full duty and show the necessary guts."

Patton developed his dreams of military glory as a child listening to heroic tales of the Civil War, including those told to him by John Singleton Mosby, the famous Confederate guerrilla leader, a frequent guest at the Patton home. Patton's stepgrandfather recounted his own exploits in the rebel army, and his paternal grandfather was a Confederate hero killed in action.

By the time he was a teenager, Patton was reading everything he could find about military heroes throughout the ages. He decided that a man's greatest glory would be to die on the field of battle, but only, of course, as a famous general. He persuaded himself that would be his destiny, something that had already happened to him in his earlier lives.

A firm believer in reincarnation, he viewed ancient battle sites as familiar ground on which he had once fought, all the way back to the 2nd century BC, when he was a Carthaginian soldier dying on the battlefield in what is now Tunisia. When he visited that site during the North African campaign of World War II, he knew without a doubt that he had been there before. In whatever era he lived, and he had lived in many in his own mind, he had always been a fearless leader in war.

While Patton's financial and social positions certainly helped him advance his career, he also worked hard to become a professional soldier, a model leader of men, and a sterling example of physical prowess. In 1912, at the age of 27 while stationed at Fort Myer, he was selected to compete in the modern pentathlon at the 1912 Summer Olympic Games in Stockholm, Sweden. The competition was designed to test fighting ability and endurance and consisted of five events (shooting, swimming, equestrian, fencing, and cross-country). Patton went on a strict diet for two months and refrained from smoking and even drinking while he pushed himself to excel. He earned a respectable fifth place out of 24 contestants and was mentioned in magazine and newspaper articles and Army publications, all of which enhanced his stature and recognition in the Army.

Patton particularly enjoyed fencing. The following summer he went to France to study for several weeks with Raoul Clery, fencing master at the French Cavalry School at Saumur. When he returned home he wrote an article for the *Cavalry Journal* and an influential report to the Army's ordnance department about the superiority of the technique he had learned. He was named Master of the Sword for the Army and designed a weapon for the cavalry that was named the Patton Saber in his honor. At the time he was still a second lieutenant, four years out of West Point.

In 1915, Patton used his influence to arrange a transfer to the 8th Cavalry Regiment at Fort Bliss, Texas, under the command of Brig. Gen. John J. "Black Jack" Pershing. Patton quickly received a promotion to first lieutenant and

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became an aide to Pershing. He went to Mexico as part of Pershing's expedition to capture Pancho Villa, to keep him and his Mexican bandits from staging more border raids into the United States. In a preview of the armored cavalry warfare to come, Patton led 10 soldiers in three old Dodge touring cars in a blazing gunfight, killing three of Pancho Villa's soldiers. He draped the bodies over the hoods of the cars and roared into camp with his trophies. The reporters jumped on Patton's "big battle" for all it was worth. Exaggerated accounts of his great victory over Pancho Villa filled the newspaper headlines for the two weeks. It was Patton's dream; he was becoming a famous warrior.

In 1917, Patton joined the Tank Corps of the American Expeditionary Forces in France when the United States entered World War I. He saw action in the first American offensive of the war in the Battle of Saint-Mihiel in September 1918, under Pershing's command. As Patton's tanks approached a bridge in a barrage of heavy shelling, they stopped when the men realized that the bridge was loaded with demolition charges ready to be set off. Patton went ahead, walking across the bridge, which remained intact. His men quickly followed and captured a large number of German soldiers on the far side.

Weeks later during the Meuse-Argonne offensive, Patton's tanks and the accompanying infantry forces were stopped by a heavy barrage of machine-gun fire. The men remained pinned down until Patton stood up, waved his walking stick over his head, and shouted, "Let's go!" Only six of his 100 soldiers followed him, and one by one they were shot. Patton was not hit, but he said later, "I felt a great desire to run."

He kept on, however, until he was wounded in the thigh. He staggered about 40 feet farther and fell. His orderly dragged him into a shell hole, where he directed the battle for several hours until he finally allowed his men to carry him to an aid station. When Patton's first major war was over, he had served with glory. By November 11, 1918, he was a full colonel awarded the Distinguished Service Cross and the Distinguished Service Medal.

But then came peace. As after every war, the Army was cut drastically. For more than two decades, until the next war, Patton's career prospects were bleak. Like most officers after World War I, he was demoted in 1920 to his prewar rank, a captain at age 33. Promotions were slow, even with his connections and decorations. His typical reaction to the boredom and to his thwarted plans for glory was anger. Soon he was behaving in outrageous ways, both at home and on the job, and was far too outspoken and belittling of his fellow officers. He even

criticized senior officers in official reports. He had not achieved the destiny he knew should be his, and he was haunted about growing old and losing his mental and physical abilities.

Yet Patton managed to push himself to keep developing professionally, continuing his study of the nature and history of warfare, and he wrote a number of important and well-received articles in Army publications promoting the development of mechanized warfare. He earned high marks and excellent performance reviews at the cavalry's Field Officer Course at Fort Riley, Kansas, and was one of the few to win the award of "Distinguished Graduate" at the demanding Command and General Staff School at Fort Leavenworth. Thus, in those difficult years between the wars while Patton was struggling with his personal and career crises, when many people considered him too overbearing, aggressive, and outspoken, he nonetheless received superior ratings and recommendations from his commanding officers.

One report described him as "an officer of outstanding physical and mental energy who … is absolutely fearless and could be counted upon for great feats of leadership in war." Another evaluation called him "ambitious, progressive, original, professionally studious; conscientious in the performance of his duties…. An officer of very high general value to the service." And one of his last peacetime reviews, given at Fort Myer, called him a "vigorous, forceful and conscientious officer…an outstanding leader."

General Patton was highly competitive and is shown here at the 1934 Tuxedo Horse Show, where he won a trophy cup. Patton competed in the 1912 Olympic Games in Stockholm, Sweden, finishing fifth in the pentathlon.

Patton remained consumed, however, by his unfulfilled dreams of heroism, and he foresaw little hope for any change in the future. But in 1938 his situation suddenly improved when he was ordered once again to Fort Myer. He and Beatrice were able to resume their grand social life and once again mingle with influential people. He received a promotion to the rank of colonel. A year later, George C. Marshall became Army Chief of Staff and began selecting the officers he believed would be the best leaders in the coming war. That was when he accepted Patton's invitation to share his house while Marshall's own quarters were being renovated. "A snappy move," Patton bragged to Bea about the invitation. "Of course it may cramp my style but there are compensations."

In October 1941, Patton was promoted to brigadier general and given command of the 15,000-man 2nd Armored Division. His picture appeared on the cover of *Life* magazine, and he was quoted by his grandson as saying, "All that is needed now is a nice juicy war." Two months later the Japanese attacked Pearl Harbor.

The rest is history, just as Patton had hoped it would be.

Duane Schultz is a psychologist who has written more than two dozen books and articles on military history. He is currently working on a book about Patton's controversial World War II experiences. For more information, go to www.duaneschultz.com.

By Kevin M. Hymel

National Archives

Fighting a Two-Front War

WAC Corporal Lena Derriecott served in the only all-black, all-female unit to serve overseas during World War II.

THE GERMAN V-1 FLYING ROCKET, PACKED WITH 1,870 POUNDS OF EXPLOSIVES, buzzed over Birmingham, England, until its pulsing engine cut out. The rocket dropped out of the sky and exploded in the city, shattering windows, destroying buildings, and killing British citizens.

Corporal Lena Derriecott, an African American soldier, heard the explosion but did not have time to reflect on its destruction. As a member of the U.S. Army's 6888th Central Postal Battalion, the only all-black, all-female Women's Army Corps (WAC) unit to serve overseas during World War II, Derriecott worked with other women to fix a backlog of mail for thousands of American troops serving in continental Europe. "Those were frightening times," she recalled.

Derriecott appreciated her job's importance. She knew that men fighting on the front lines looked forward to a letter from a friend or relative back in the United States. "One thing people in the service looked forward to was mail, knowing somebody was still thinking about them," she explained. "In the military, mail call (when soldiers gathered around a designated mailman as he called out their names for letters or packages) is a very important time."

Three years earlier, Derriecott was a 17-year-old student at Germantown High School, north of Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, when she learned about the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor. She was the only child of divorced parents and lived with her mother and aunt. Her mother worked as a synagogue's caterer while her aunt started her own kosher catering business. Her mother, who had been a farm girl in Georgia before moving to Germantown, also obtained permission from the state to grow vegetables on an abandoned golf course. "She was strong," said Derriecott, "she grew enough food to feed most of the neighborhood."

Despite her young age, Derriecott was quite active in local and national civic causes. She read books and followed the rise of Nazism in Germany in newspapers and on the radio. She also joined a radio show fan club called "Grace Granger and her Nackie Sackies," which broadcasted from the Pearl Theater in Center City, Philadelphia. Nationally, she joined First Lady Eleanor Roosevelt's National Youth Administration and traveled to Washington, D.C., to picket segregated restaurants. "We didn't think they should be segregated," she said. "Many restaurants gave in to the constant action that we took against them."

Lena Derriecott

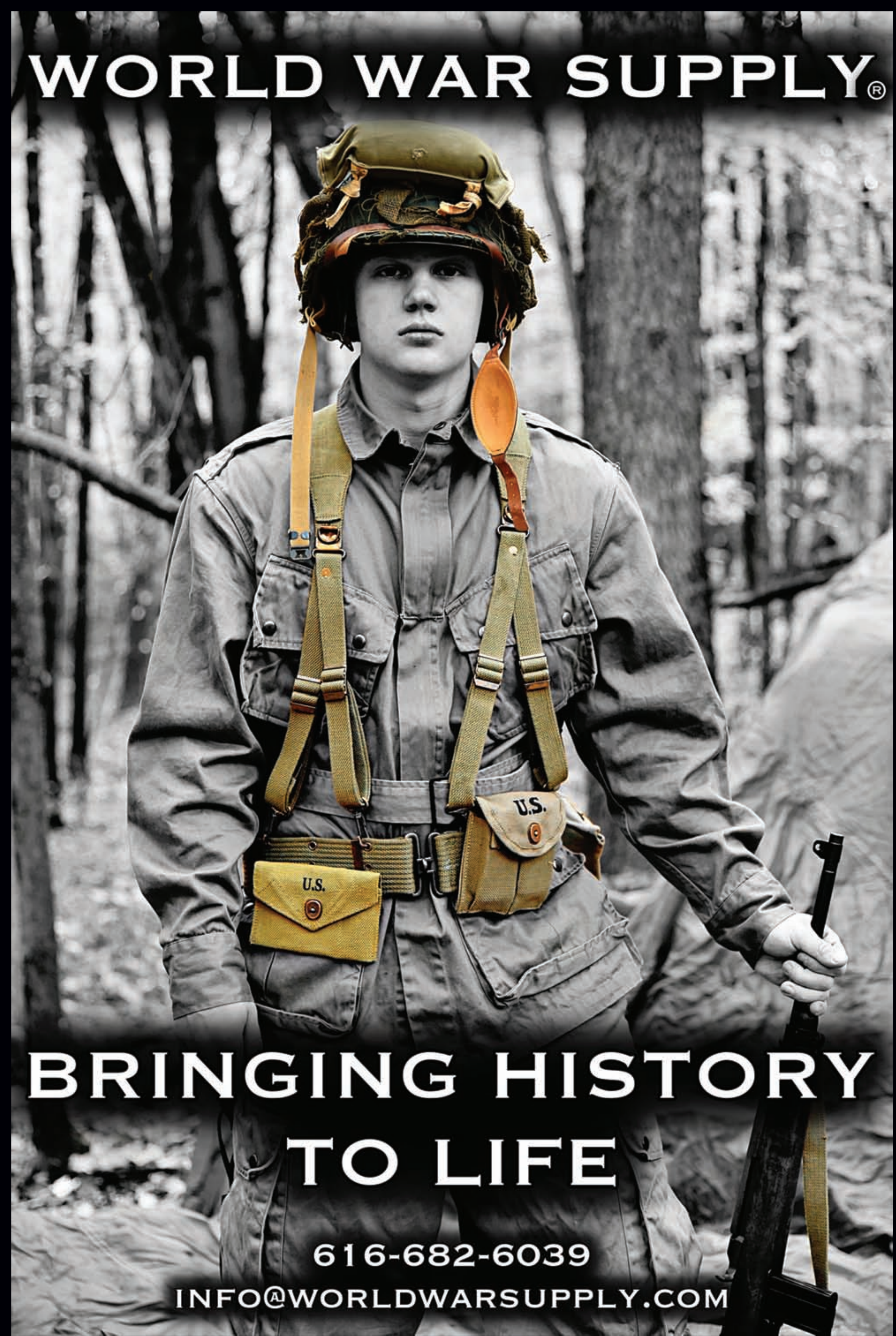
Years before the war, Derriecott befriended a Jewish boy named Abram "Hyman" David, whose parents owned a delicatessen on Earlham Terrace in her neighborhood. Abram joined the Army Air Forces but was killed on his first combat mission. Derriecott was already working in a local hospital when David died, but his death inspired her to join the Army Air Forces.

Since only men were drafted, Derriecott volunteered in the summer of 1943 and applied for nursing. Derriecott was sent to Fort Des Moines, Iowa, for basic training. The fort had originally trained white female officers but opened a segregated section for black female officers. By the time Deriecott arrived, it was training enlisted women as well. Graduates would be part of the WAC. Derriecott learned to dress, march, and eat like a soldier. She bivouacked with other women, lit campfires, and learned military procedures. "We had to keep our shoes shined and our bunkbeds made tight enough to bounce a quarter on," she said.

The women were issued khaki summer and wool winter uniforms called "pink & greens." Since their hair could not touch their collar, the women either cut it or pinned it up. Derriecott, like all the other enlistees, learned to keep their uniforms and barracks clean. "If the cadre came marching through and spotted something wrong, they would penalize you," she said. "It kept you on the ball."

Army life proved strict, but

The 6888th Central Postal Battalion marches through the marketplace in Rouen, France, where Joan of Arc was burned at the stake. INSET: Lena Derriecott, now in her 90s, fondly remembers her days in the service.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Derriecott mostly remembered the cold climate. She took her turn standing guard in the snow and whipping winds. "I was almost frozen during guard duty," she recalled. Once her training ended, she was sent to Douglas Army Air Field in southern Arizona, a training base for Martin B-26 Marauder pilots and crews.

When Derriecott arrived at Douglas in January 1944, she was given an aptitude test. Unfortunately, she had come down with a cold, forcing her to sneeze and cough through most of it, breaking her concentration. "I was never able to take the test again," she said.

She befriended a fellow WAC, Emma Philpot. "That girl could sing!" Derriecott said of the woman who would become her best friend. "Whenever we had a talent show, she would always sing." Derriecott considered herself a pretty good singer, but Philpott had a gift. Besides, admitted Derriecott, "I was too shy to sing."

Derriecott served as a nurse at the base hospital. "They didn't have the ability to give me the courses," she explained, but the hospital needed nurses. She treated airmen, crews, and their families, never seeing combat wounded. Promoted to corporal, she also worked at the motor pool, keeping track of weekly B-25 bomber fuel levels and reporting how much fuel student pilots used. When she was not working her two jobs, she and her fellow WACs marched smartly in the weekly bomber pilot graduations. For entertainment, famous singers like Lena Horne and Arthur Prysock visited the base. "They were talented people," said Derriecott.

One night Derriecott accompanied three black female officers to the base theater to enjoy a movie. One of the officers was a Lieutenant Clark, the chief WAC. They were waiting for the movie to start when a Military Policeman approached and said, "Ladies, you're not supposed to sit there." Lieutenant Clark asked, "What do you mean? These are officers' seats. I am an officer." The MP replied, "What I mean to say is, colored people are supposed to sit on that stand." An enraged Clark shot back, "I want to talk to the colonel in charge. Show me where the phone is and I'd like to speak to him on the phone." When she finally got Colonel Brandel on the line she told him, "Me and my girls have been highly insulted. Three of us here are officers." The colonel responded with silence. "If you're going to treat us like second-hand citizens," Clark continued, "I'll pull my unit out of here. We came here to help and we expect to be respected." Clark hung up the phone, and the women marched out of the theater.

The next day, the colonel announced that the theater would no longer be segregated, nor would the bowling alley and cafeteria. Clark's stand had a ripple effect she could not have foreseen. Within a year, African American pilot candidates arrived from Fort Huachuca, Arizona, to train on B-25s.

National Archives

ABOVE: WACs don gas masks during their basic training. Lena Derriecott learned the rudimentary functions and procedures of being a soldier. BELOW: During basic training at Fort Des Moines, Iowa, WACs prepare for a Saturday morning inspection. Shortly after her unit completed basic training, Lena Derriecott went overseas.

Not long after the theater incident, Derriecott met an African American drill sergeant named Hugh Thadius Bell in the post exchange. Along with his drill sergeant duties, Bell led the base band and served as the base bugler, blowing "Reveille" at sunrise and "Taps" at sunset. "He was the poster boy of the base," recalled Derriecott. He asked her to the movies, and the two started dating. "We became well known on the post," she said. Six months later, he asked her to marry him. "It was quite a wedding," said Derriecott.

After almost a year at Douglas, Derriecott signed up for overseas duty. Mail for the troops in Europe was not getting delivered, and the Army decided its African American women would do the job. The competition was stiff. Women were evaluated for good temperament and character. Once chosen, Derriecott endured eight weeks of training with other candidates, marching, putting on gas masks in a room filled with tear gas, climbing rope ladders, and practicing abandon-ship drills. About a month after training, she got the call. "Of course, I didn't know that we were going be called overseas that soon," she said.

Derriecott said goodbye to her husband, who was very understanding. "He knew that when we got married he or I would go where we were told." Derriecott and the other WACs were shipped directly to New York harbor, where they boarded the French luxury liner SS *Ile de France,* bound for Europe in late January 1945.

The women arrived in Glasgow, Scotland, on February 12 and traveled to the British city of Birmingham, some 100 miles southeast of Liverpool, two days later. The women were officially organized into the 6888th Central Postal Directory Battalion on March 12. Although D-Day had passed some eight months earlier and the Americans had erased the bulge in their lines after Adolf Hitler's Ardennes Offensive, England was still a battleground. German V-1 and V-2 rockets rained down on the island nation. The WACs' barracks had been hit by a V-1 and destroyed the day before they arrived. The women instead took up residence in an old schoolhouse, the former King Edwards Boys School. "It was the only place large enough to house all of us," said Derriecott.

Their job would be to clear out warehouses full of undelivered mail. "We had a cadre of officers in charge," she said. "We had to start from scratch." Soon, Derriecott met Major Charity Adams, the highest ranking black WAC in Europe, who would command the 6888th Central Postal Directory Battalion. "She came through, and we were all introduced," said Derriecott.

Adams impressed Derriecort, who knew, as a black female officer, Adams faced challenges other officers did not. "I do remember people saying she didn't get the respect that she should have gotten," she explained. Adams was the first African American woman to earn an officer's rank in the U.S. Army.

The 6888th contained approximately 850 officers and enlisted personnel. The battalion was divided into four companies—A, B, C, and D—and a headquarters company, which handled all administrative and service support duties. The companies worked in three eight-hour shifts, around the clock and through weekends. Unlike other black units, the 6888th incorporated no white officers, making it unique to the European Theater of Operations. The women were given

only six months to complete their task.

Their job would not be easy. The warehouses were dank, rat infested, and unheated, with blacked-out windows. February skies in England were either overcast or full of rain. Every day was cold. Inside the warehouses, bundled letters reached the ceiling, many of them more than two years old. Many Christmas food packages had either broken open or were gnawed by the rats.

The women worked to break the logjam. They located soldiers who had transferred from one unit to another and readdressed their letters. "That took a lot of work," remembered Derriecott. "It kept you really busy, on your toes."

Then there was the distraction of war. V-1 "buzz bombs" and V-2 rockets had been raining down on England since July 1944. While the British had developed a stingy defense of antiaircraft guns, barrage balloons, and fighter planes to stop most of the V-1 pilotless planes, they had no defense against the V-2 ballistic rockets. "You could hear the German buzz bombs coming over," said Derriecott about the V-1's rocket engines, which pulsed with a buzzing noise that cut off right before exploding on impact. "You could hear in the distance when one had hit."

The women could also see fleets of bombers and fighter aircraft in the sky. Although the Allies had achieved complete air supremacy over Europe, everyone had to be aware, lest an enemy plane penetrate the British antiaircraft defenses. "It was frightening because we didn't know if they were ours or theirs," she said.

In her off hours, Derricott got to know the war-weary citizens of Birmingham, whose city had been bombed heavily by the German Luftwaffe for three years before the V-1s began to fall. They had gotten used to blackout drills and hurrying into air raid shelters. "They opened up their homes to us," she recalled. The locals did not have much to offer for food. War rations had reduced them to mushrooms and toast for breakfast. They also dined on cabbage or a tiny portion of fish on thick white bread. "We would get food from the PX and give it to them."

On April 12, 1945, some hard news reached the 6888th. President Franklin Roosevelt, the man who had led his country out of the Depression and through war, and the only president many of the women had known, died. "I loved Roosevelt," said Derriecott. "I just remember being very sad."

The sadness over Roosevelt's death soon turned to elation almost three weeks later when the German Army surrendered to the Allies in Reims, France, on May 8—VE Day. The WACs and the Birmingham citizens

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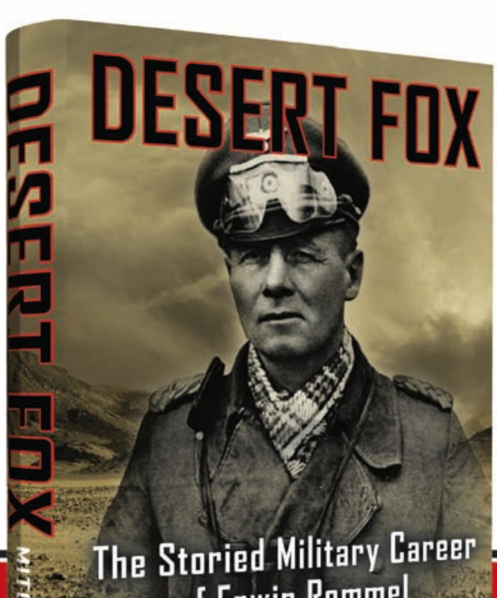

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National Archives

Major Charity Adams and Captain Abbie Campbell inspect the ranks of the 6888th Central Postal Battalion in England. The WACs of the battalion were proud of their service record in Europe.

cheered, danced in the streets, and honked horns. "We had a big celebration," said Derriecott. "Everyone was happy."

About the same time as VE Day, the 6888th finished its job. Despite the hardships and the harsh winter conditions, the stacks of mail shrank, packages were rewrapped and sent forward, and dead letters were returned. The women of the 6888th accomplished their six-month task in only three months. In that time, they sorted, repackaged, and redirected an average of 5.85 million parcels every 30 days, for nearly 18 million parcels over 90 days. Each shift had sorted 65,000 parcels, 195,000 daily, and 5.85 million monthly. Another Army postal unit sorted just 624,000 parcels in one month before the 6888th arrived. The women of the 6888th proved that black women could contribute to the war effort quickly and efficiently if they were only given the opportunity.

Despite the victory, American soldiers were still in Europe and needed their mail. The 6888th was needed again to break a mail logjam in France. On May 20, the women sailed across the English Channel to Le Havre. Their destination: the French city of Rouen. There they would see the true face of modern war. "Everything was just bombed to rubble, and all the beautiful cathedrals were in heaps," she said.

The women set up shop in a French monastery and began organizing and getting the mail out. Derriecott found it a better setup than Birmingham. "It was more permanent," she said. In addition to pitching mail, she worked in the poster unit, which had been set up in one of the monastery's open spaces. "I did a lot of drawings and made decorations," she recalled.

French civilians often visited, many hungry and looking for something to eat. The women helped whenever they could. One woman invited Derriecott to her café, where she was introduced to French bread. "I loved their bread," she admitted. "It was so different." Derriecott also saw French women whose heads had been shaved bald. "They got that from sleeping with Germans," she explained.

On July 8, two U.S. Army two-and-a-half-ton trucks pulled up to the 6888th's camp and picked up three WACs, Sergeant Delores Browne and PFCs Mary J. Barlow and Mary H. Bankston, for a job that needed to be done. They drove along a narrow road through a mountainous area. Then the trucks hit a spot where a mudslide had washed the road away and they rolled down a steep slope into a forest below. "It was a horrible accident." They were the battalion's only casualties, and all three were buried in the American Cemetery in Normandy, where they still lie today.

Derriecott did not stay in France long. With the war over and with so many American soldiers standing around idle, the U.S. military offered college-credit courses to people in uniform. Derriecott had won a number of prizes for her artistic ability in Rouen, so she entered her name in an education lottery

HONORING THE WOMEN OF THE 6888TH

"The 6888th Central Postal Directory Battalion changed the face of the Army forever," explained Carlton Philpot to the crowd at the Fort Leavenworth Frontier Chapel in Kansas. Philpot, a member of the Buffalo Soldier Monument Committee, spearheaded the effort to build a monument to the battalion. On November 30, 2018, Army soldiers, family members, and five veterans of the 6888th gathered in the Fort Leavenworth Chapel to turn the monument from the Buffalo Soldier Monument Committee over to the U.S. Army.

Keith Pope

The day before, five of the surviving members of the 6888th braved the cold, gray Kansas weather to admire their monument. Veterans Lena Derriecott King, Maybell Rutland Tanner Campbell, Elizabeth Baker Johnson, Ann Mae Wilson Robertson, and Delores Ruddock took in the bust of Major Charity Adams, read the quotes, and located their names listed on the back of the monument.

In the chapel, the women, their families, and the families of other 6888th veterans were treated to flowers, a trumpeted serenade, and the National Anthem. Army Colonel Marne L. Sutton and Major General Douglas C. Crissman thanked the veterans for their service. Senator Gerald W. Moran (R-KS) presented the veterans with copies of a recent Senate resolution honoring the 6888th, telling the women, "Every Senator voted in favor of this resolution." He concluded by explaining his efforts to earn the 6888th the Meritorious Unit Citation, adding that he asked Army Chief of Staff Gen. Mark A. Milley about making the idea a reality. "It's no longer a question of 'if,' but 'how soon?'" During World War II, the women of the 6888th faced the dual prejudices of racism and sexism on a constant basis, yet they persevered and completed their mission. When the war ended, their pioneering achievement fell into the dustbin of history for decades before historians, the Monument Committee, and the veterans themselves revived it by telling the unit's story. The 6888th went from a forgotten unit to a celebrated advancement in women and black rights. "I'm glad I lived long enough to see this memorial," said a proud Mrs. Derriecott King.

for design school, was chosen, and headed to Leicester, England.

Although Derriecott loved design and enjoyed her classes, the experience proved uncomfortable. She and her roommate, a fellow 6888th veteran named Clara, were the only blacks in town, and their landlady turned out to be a coarse, petty miser who coveted the Americans' pay and rations, particularly bacon. "That meant the world to her," Derriecott explained. Derriecott was in England when she heard about the two atomic bombs dropped on Hiroshima and Nagasaki, and Japan's subsequent surrender. "

While Derriecott finished her design lessons, the 6888th returned to the United States in March 1948. She later returned to France for her own ship ride home. At Camp Lucky Strike, she was added to a group of white WACs, again making her feel alone, yet the women befriended her.

Soon, they all boarded a converted luxury liner for home. The women were a minority among mostly male passengers. "I think I was the only black person on the whole ship," she said. The journey home went smoothly, with clear skies and calm water.

The ship docked in New York harbor, and the women boarded a train to Fort Dix, New Jersey, to separate from the Army. When the train arrived, Derriecott's mother, aunt, and a handful of friends greeted her. "We just hugged and cried and laughed," she said. Her mother asked her where she wanted to go. "I just want some of your home cooking," Derriecott told her.

Today, Derriecott enjoys retired life in Las Vegas, Nevada. At the age of 95 in 2018, she still goes to church every Sunday with her friend Barbara Lewis and does her own cooking.

Reflecting on World War II, Derricott is proud of her service. "It broadened my life," she says. "I learned a lot about people and the world." Even though it has been almost 75 years since she served overseas in uniform, the war sometimes comes back to her in her dreams. She drifts back to her 6888th friends and the people she met in England and France, but mostly she dreams of her ship ride home, knowing she had served her country with distinction and accomplished her mission.

Frequent contributor Kevin M. Hymel is a historian for the U.S. Air Force Medical Service and the author of Patton's Photographs: War As He Saw It. *He is also a historian/tour guide for Stephen Ambrose Historical Tours where he leads tours of General George S. Patton's European battlefields.*

By John W. Osborn, Jr.

Seeing Without Being Seen

The Brandenburgers, employing stealth and disguise, were Germany's clandestine force during World War II.

IT WAS IN THE EARLY HOURS OF THE GERMAN INVASION OF HOLLAND, MAY 10, 1940, and a Wehrmacht doctor was tending to a soldier wounded during the capture of the key Gennep border bridge. "There's not much of your company left," he remarked to his patient, assuming so because he did not see others about.

"Company? There were nine of us."

"Impossible!"

Not to the soldier. "We are the Brandenburgers!" he declared.

He was not referring to being residents of the city 40 miles northeast of Berlin, but to members of Germany's most secret special force of World War II. For other such units as the British Commandos and Special Air Service and the American OSS, stealth meant sneaking up usually in the dark. For the Brandenburgers it was usually walking up, in broad daylight, straight out in the open—but still being just as secret, and deadly.

The Brandenburgers were the brainchild of Theodor von Hippel, a captain in the Abwehr (military intelligence) concerned with covert combat operations and sabotage. From his own experience with guerrilla fighting in East Africa against the British in World War I and his study of the tactics of Lawrence of Arabia, Hippel conceived the idea of donning the uniforms of enemies and the clothing of civilians to approach positions and infiltrate them to seize and hold vital positions, commit sabotage, gather intelligence, and spread mayhem and confusion. Then he took the idea to his superior, Admiral Wilhelm Canaris.

Canaris rejected the idea as too wild, even for the weird world he operated in, so Hippel received permission from the General Staff to create his special unit in October 1939. After gaining approval, the first disguise was the unit's actual name, that of a mundane construction unit. Its members soon nicknamed themselves for the city they were secretly based near, Brandenburg.

Brandenburgers were recruited on a strictly volunteer basis from the Volksdeutsch, ethnic Germans from outside the Reich. "There was not an area of Europe with which some group of Brandenburgers was not familiar, nor a language they could not speak," author James Lucas wrote. Recruiting did not stop there but spanned the world from expatriates returning from abroad to those who spoke Arabic dialects, even Afghani and Tibetan. Although part of the Abwehr, the Brandenburgers were not professional spies and saboteurs, but still soldier specialists of the Wehrmacht, which decided their missions and ultimately their fate.

"Seeing without being seen" was the credo of the training, combining standard sabotage with "how to spit like a Russian," member Helmut Shwinkler recalled. "The course had a very leveling effect on everyone in it.

"Independence and intelligence counted more than rank. It was typical of the place that the officers and soldiers shook hands rather than saluting each other. Unlike the rest of the army who were told to 'leave the thinking to the horses because their heads are bigger,' we were encouraged to think for ourselves and to develop intuition and resourcefulness.

"In the evening the canteen was amazing. Recruits came from all over the place, so there would be dozens of languages spoken by men of

ABOVE: Abwehr officer Theodor von Hippel was the father of the Brandenburgers. TOP: A group of the German Army's clandestine Brandenburger have donned uniforms of the Soviet Red Army prior to the operation.

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Karen James is a noted journalist who specializes in relationships, romance, and sex

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The Amazing Secret Of A 78 Year-Old Latin Lover!

"I was shocked by his passion and energy. He took me in the bedroom like we were newleyweds - It was incredible!"

Power and Pleasure…

Lately I've received several letters from women about a "little secret" that's made their sex life absolutely explosive! This one from Tina in Texas got a little hot and spicy! (Those Texas women tell it like it is!)

Tina writes: Dear Karen,

Last month my husband came home from a business trip in Europe and shocked me with more energy and passion than he's had in years. Hard as a rock, he tossed me around the bedroom like we were newlyweds, and gave me a night I'll never forget! It was incredible - and our sex life has been like that ever since. His erections are harder than ever and spark the most intense toe-curling 'moments' I've ever had! So here we are, enjoying the best sex of our lives… in our late 50's!

On his trip, my husband stayed next to an Italian nutritionist and his wife, and heard them making loud, passionate love every single night. One afternoon, my husband asked the man his secret. The nutritionist smiled and said in broken English that he's 78 years old and after 42 years together, their sex life was still fantastico! Then he pulled a small pack from his satchel, gave it to my husband, and said "These tablets come from a small village in the north where they're cultivated organically from the most potent sexual extracts on earth. They will give you erections and a climax like you've never had before!" Then he laughed and said "You'll become an Italian Stallion, like me!"

Karen, Italian Stallion is right! But now the pack is almost empty and we both want more. Do you know about these European super-sex tablets and how to get some in the States?

Sincerely,
Tina D., Fort Worth, TX

Tina, you're in luck, I do know about them. Ever wonder why older men from Italy and all over Europe are famous for staying energized and sexually passionate well into their 80's? Well, for years, these men have relied on a unique blossom seed extract to enhance their sexual power and performance.

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The best part from a woman's perspective is the extreme hardness and on-going power is enough to send us over the blissful edge! I found out about Provarin a few years ago when I was dating a cowboy from Wyoming. He took Provarin every morning and believe me, that good ol' boy sure rocked my nights!

All-natural Provarin is still a well-kept secret for those in the know. It's an old-school, family business and they like to keep it that way. They don't do any advertising or seek publicity. They don't need to. Long-time customers and word of mouth ensures their limited stock is sold out every year.

They do have a distributer here in the U.S. and a spokesman told me they are proud to produce the highest quality product for men and couples. He went on to say that if any of my readers call today and mention this article, they'll get a onetime 50% discount plus free shipping!

So there you go, Tina - and the rest of you readers! Just give them a call today and mention this article. The number is 1-800-483-9611.

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very different backgrounds exchanging ideas and opinions. We tended to be very idealistic about our involvement in the unit. It was certainly nothing like being in an ordinary regiment."

Training went from learning to garrote sentries from behind with steel wire to the customs, characteristics, and even cursing from Great Britain to the Russian steppes, literally to drilling and living in local underwear. Exercises included traveling undetected on forged documents, hijacking a truckload of regular soldiers, and trailing the police chief of Brandenburg to lift his fingerprints, getting them finally after a 24-hour-long surveillance off his official car. "If a man had a photograph of his sweetheart in his wallet and there was an incriminating landmark there would be trouble. But it was that kind of attention to detail that saved lives time and time again when we were on operations," recalled Schwinkler.

The training prepared the Brandenburgers for the before-breakfast blitz of Denmark, overpowering hapless border guards and cutting phone lines. A month later 15 Brandenburger combat teams were sent to capture the border bridges with Holland along the Maas River.

Nine Brandenburgers approached the Gennep bridge in the predawn hours of the invasion of Holland. Their arms were raised to indicate that they were deserters, but they pulled their weapons from under their greatcoats to seize the span. At another bridge the Brandenburgers, wearing Dutch uniforms, approached on bicycles at 2 AM.

"With weapons slung we passed through the gap between two pipes which had been filled with concrete and tipped on ends as an obstacle at the entrance to the bridge," their leader remembered. "We walked straight to the Dutch soldiers standing in the bridge. Suddenly they ran away, and I called after them in Dutch, 'Stop, where is the commander of the guard?' The Dutch stopped, and when they were within range I said to them, 'Boys, put down your weapons!' Then I disarmed the soldiers nearest me. Amid the dismayed shouts of 'Don't shoot! Don't shoot!' I cut the ignition wires [to explosives] which had been laid as a double line. We had done it."

Other Brandenburgers captured the Juliana Canal to prevent the Dutch from stopping the invasion by letting loose a wall of water. They committed similar military mayhem in Belgium, wearing Belgian Army uniforms, and as French refugees pushing their weapons in baby carriages. They reached Paris ahead of the Wehrmacht to seize the offices of the French secret services, commandeering trains to ship secret French files to Berlin. They trained in

Few photos of the Brandenburgers are known to exist, and this image is purported to depict several of the troops after an operation in the Soviet Union. The Brandenburgers often used deception to complete missions.

British uniforms to be in the first wave of Operation Sea Lion, the never-to-be invasion of England, then in bedouin garb they roamed the North African coast to observe British shipping passing Gibraltar and traced the 3,000-mile British supply route from West Africa to Cairo.

They went into action once again during the invasion of Yugoslavia. The Iron Gates was a gorge the Danube River ran through, which the Germans feared the Yugoslavs could, if necessary, quickly and easily block. Sergeant Hans-Jurgen Frey was among the Brandenburgers in disguise as local Serbian sailors and stevedores, and what he observed heightened German concerns.

From the coal barge he was going through the motions serving on, he noticed how several Yugoslavian freighters were lying near the gate for no apparent reason. "We thought the freighters would probably be used to block the river in one of two ways," he remembered.

"Either they would be loaded with cement and scuttled in mid-channel, or they would be packed with explosives and blown up close to the riverbank at a point where the rock face would tumble into the water."

On the eve of the invasion, the night of April 5, 1941, Frey and 53 other Brandenburgers rendezvoused in the woods downstream from the gate, discarded their disguises to don their uniforms, then began a precarious descent by rope down the 2,500-foot sheer rock wall of the gorge, in the pitch dark, then pounding rain.

"As we edged down the slippery rock face it seemed we would never get to the bottom,' Frey said. They finally did, found small boats left hidden in the rocks and scrub, then waited until 3 AM, April 6, to start paddling toward the Iron Gate.

"Everyone knew what he had to do," Frey recalled of the predawn assault. "We swept through the docks and then separated into small groups. I was lucky; my group had to take the first freighter in the line, and we were on board before the first shot was fired. Once we got control of the ship, we lifted the hatches to see what she was loaded with."

What Frey found confirmed his suspicions. "It was cement."

It was all over in seven scant minutes as the remaining Brandenburgers took the other freighters, meeting with little resistance. But still everything the Brandenburgers had done was only perilous preparation for their ultimate campaign: Russia.

Advancing on the Dvina River 300 miles south of Leningrad, Field Marshal Erich von Manstein stopped four miles short of the pair of bridges spanning the waterway to send ahead 30 Brandenburgers in Soviet Red Army uniforms and a quartet of captured trucks to prevent the bridges from being blown by the retreating enemy. At first the mission proceeded with the Brandenburgers' standard stealth—they were even waved ahead by Red Army soldiers. Then, for once, deception ended in near disaster.

Sentries discovered a truck at one bridge, and the Brandenburgers had to fight and then ford their way across to cut wires attached to explosive charges. At the other bridge, the driver of the lead truck ran down a challenging sentry and then raced across the bridge followed by the second vehicle while those of the third

jumped out to kill the other sentries.

The explosives placed on the bridge were also defused, but more Russians rushed from both ends, and a firefight erupted. Five Brandenburgers and the lieutenant leading them were killed, and most of the others wounded, but after some 20 minutes German reinforcements roared in to rescue them.

An operation to capture the Dneiper River bridge again almost ended in disaster. For elaborate cover, Junkers Ju-87 Stuka dive bombers made a mock attack on the bridge for a pair of Brandenburger trucks to approach unnoticed in the confusion. The Brandenburger commander had to fend off panicked Russians from clambering aboard his truck, then argued with the Russian engineer in command to distract him as his own men defused the explosive charges. The Brandenburgers then pulled out their uniforms, expecting panzer relief in 15 minutes, but it took it two hours to arrive and they had to desperately hold out under attack until then.

Even more deceptively daring than such swift, surgical strikes were the long-range penetrations that drove hundreds of miles behind Russian lines and sometimes lasted for weeks. Uniforms and papers were in perfect order, even "letters" from "sweethearts" to make the cover more convincing.

But with the Brandenburgers stretched as thinly as the Wehrmacht by the sheer size of Russia, they sometimes had to discard their standard protocol to include those who could speak little, or even no, Russian. The situation put them at even greater risk as they gave impromptu performances, groaning and moaning as they pretended to be wounded Red Army soldiers and sometimes jabbering in gibberish so that the Russian soldiers they encountered might believe they were from some remote area of the Soviet Union where a different language was spoken. Such a trick literally backfired on the Brandenburgers during one encounter.

A group of Brandenburgers were stopped in their truck at a roadblock. The Brandenburger commander, disguised as a Russian soldier, ordered his men off the truck while it was searched. A commissar, possibly suspecting them of being deserters, started to question one of the Germans who could not speak even a word of Russian.

The Branenburger officer, in his own perfect Russian, tried to intervene. "You won't get much out of that fellow. He's an Armenian." So was the commissar, and when he still didn't get answers he went for his pistol. The Brandenburger officer simultaneously went for his and was, fatally for the commissar, the faster. The Brandenburgers then roared away shooting.

Brandenburgers fire at partisans who have harassed German Army formations in Russia. In October 1942, the Brandenburgers were expanded to divisional strength and began to evolve more toward regular operations.

But there would be no mishaps during the Brandenburgers' most brilliant success of the war, the capture of the Maikop oil fields in August 1942.

Baron Adrian von Folkersaum and 62 Russian-speaking Balts and Sudenten Germans crossed the lines in the dark wearing uniforms of the feared NKVD, the Soviet secret police, and they carried cyanide pills to commit suicide if necessary rather than risk being captured alive. The next afternoon they came upon a crowd of Red Army deserters. The baron rallied these Russians with a rousing, hour-long speech, convincing them to turn around and lead the Brandenburgers to Maikop.

Real NKVD personnel, mistaking the Brandenburgers for reinforcements, waved them across a bridge into town and billeted them in a private villa. A Russian general even invited Folkersaum to tour Maikop's defenses. On their fifth night, with the advancing German Army only 12 miles away, the Brandenburgers went into action.

In the dark they blew up the Red Army's telephone exchange. Then, with enemy communications in disarray they rushed around town, storming into offices to bluff or when needed browbeat Red Army officers with bogus evacuation orders. Unable to confirm the fake orders and not daring to challenge the supposed NKVD men, these commanders were eager to comply. They issued orders to retreat.

The Russian garrison quickly fell into chaos, defenses crumbling, as Red Army soldiers fled, abandoning heavy weapons, ammunition depots, and foodstuffs. The Brandenburgers even daringly delivered false orders to delay destruction of the oil fields, saving all the storage tanks and all but one of the derricks. The German Army entered Maikop on the afternoon of August 9, 1942, with virtually no resistance.

The Brandenburgers' most brilliant success proved to be their final one.

With the Germans on the defensive in the East, there was no further use for such secret soldiering, and Admiral Canaris's sinking situation in the Abwehr left him unable to stop the Brandenburgers' appropriation by the Wehrmacht for action in mere frontline fighting. Canaris's old enemy, SS Reichsführer Heinrich Himmler, further undercut him, creating his own covert combat unit led by Major Otto Skorzeny, with no less than Adrian von Folkersaum defecting to join it.

Canaris's last stand pathetically provoked an office altercation. The commander of what remained of the Brandeburgers, Major General Alexander von Pfulstein, had his flight to Vienna ended by an urgent recall from Canaris. Expecting, finally, a new mission, he was instead handed a report by Canaris with an urgent, "Read it! Read it!"

As he dutifully did, the agitated admiral paced. "Haven't you got there yet? Carry on reading!"

The document reported that an officer named Roeder called the Brandenburgers "a shirker's unit."

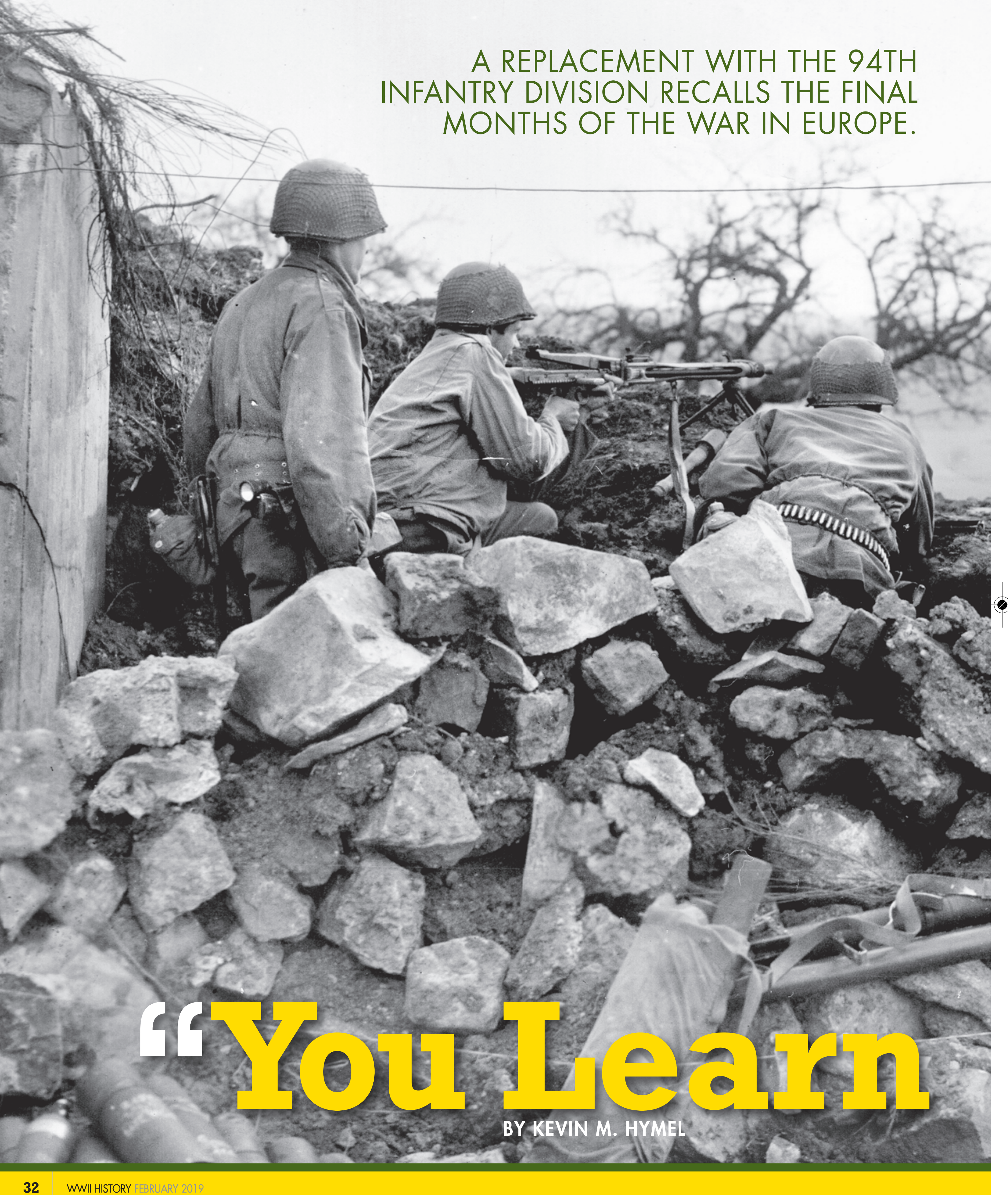
When Canaris demanded to know what Pfulstein was going to do and Pfulstein suggested bringing charges, Canaris exploded, "That won't do!"

"I replied my only alternative was to see Dr. Roeder and 'sock him!'" Pfulstein later said. He proceeded to do just that after confronting the offender with, "You have insulted my men. This is my answer!" Pfulstein got off with a week's confinement, but the bizarre brawl was foolish. A month later, on February 12, 1944, Hitler abolished the Brandenburgers as an independent unit, sending them to the Wehrmacht as a panzergrenadier division.

Canaris did not survive the Brandenburgers for long. The Abwehr itself was abolished four days later.

By the time Canaris was executed in a concentration camp on April 9, 1945, all but a few hundred of his Brandenburgers had uselessly died in action—finally, fatally being seen.

Author John W. Osborn, Jr., has contributed to WWII History *on numerous occasions. He writes from his home in Fort Myers, Florida.*



A REPLACEMENT WITH THE 94TH INFANTRY DIVISION RECALLS THE FINAL MONTHS OF THE WAR IN EUROPE.

"You Learn

BY KEVIN M. HYMEL

Fast"

Private Armand Lorenzi and his fellow soldiers were advancing through a snowy German forest when enemy machine guns opened fire. It was Lorenzi's first time in combat. He started scraping a shallow foxhole until he heard German mortars and artillery exploding and rockets screaming in. Then he started digging desperately. "You learn fast," he recalled. The Germans fired Nebelwerfers, rockets that made a high-pitched scream as they roared to target, earning them the name "Screaming Mimis." One rocket exploded in the trees. "That's what scares the life out of you."

It was during the last months of the war, February 1945, and Lorenzi had just joined Company C of the 302nd Infantry Regiment, part of the 94th Infantry Division in Lt. Gen. George S. Patton, Jr.'s Third Army. Lorenzi and his fellow soldiers were trying to wrestle Germany's Campholz Woods from the stubborn enemy.

In the following weeks, Lorenzi would fight toe to toe with the enemy, battling through forests and towns filled with destroyed German tanks and dead horses. He marched through minefields marked with white tape, constantly worrying about tripping a mine. "Then they send you to that room [in the hospital] where you never go home," he said. Sometimes German shells, likely manufactured by slave labor, impacted near him without exploding.

Armand Lorenzi

ABOVE: Young soldier Armand Lorenzi poses with his Browning Automatic Rifle (BAR), an automatic weapon that gave American troops more firepower at the squad level. LEFT: Soldiers of the 302nd Regiment, 94th Infantry Division fire a captured German machine gun from a pillbox recently knocked out near the city of Ober-Lenken in Germany.

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A native of Charleroi, Pennsylvania, Lorenzi grew up with his parents, an older brother, and four younger sisters. He was only 15 when he read about the attack on Pearl Harbor in the morning paper. Although only a high school student, he worked as a projectionist at the Hilltop Drive-in Theater until he was drafted in July 1944, five months after he turned 18.

Lorenzi reported to Pittsburgh for his physical. A recruiter asked him what branch he wanted, and he picked the Navy, like his brother. The recruiter stamped NAVY on his card and told him, "We'll call you in a couple of weeks." Sure enough, the phone soon rang, and he was invited back to Pittsburgh for another physical. "Bring your clothes with you," the voice on the line instructed, "because you're not going home." After his physical, Lorenzi and all the other recruits were put into the U.S. Army. "Everything broke out in Europe," he said. "They needed soldiers."

From Pittsburgh, Lorenzi went to Fort Dix, New Jersey, for basic training, then to Camp Crowder, Missouri, where he was assigned to the Signal Corps. He spent his days climbing poles, stringing wire, and learning to operate a radio. While he trained in Missouri, across the Atlantic Ocean three German armies attacked the American First Army through Belgium and Luxembourg's Ardennes Forest on December 16, 1944—the Battle of the Bulge. Lorenzi and the other trainees were immediately sent to Louisiana's Camp Livingston for six weeks of infantry training, including fighting

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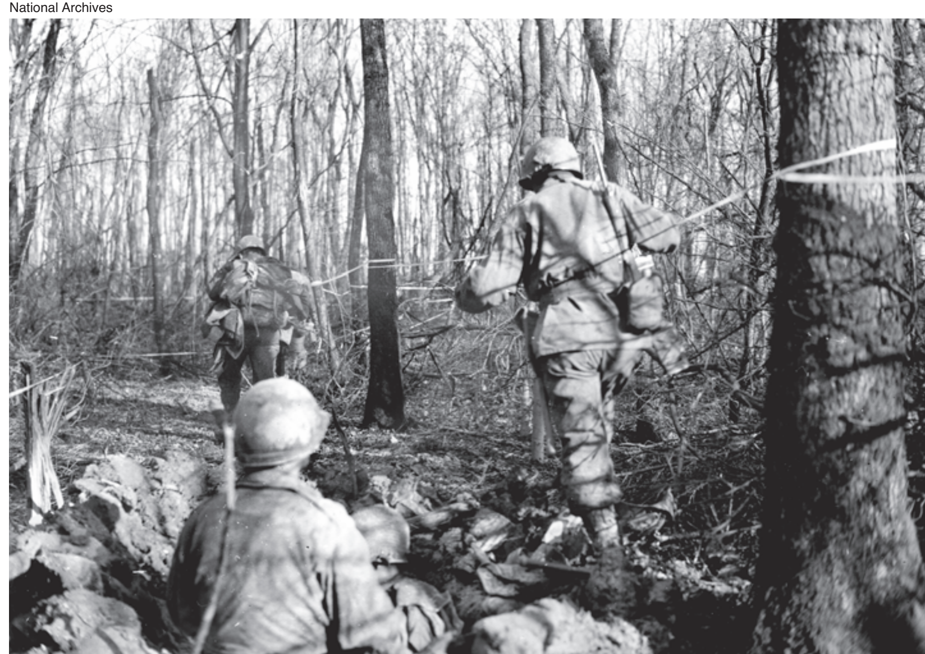

ABOVE: Soldiers with the 94th Infantry Division follow white tape, placed by engineers, to ensure they don't step on mines. Lorenzi often followed such tape when he advanced. RIGHT: Infantrymen from the 94th ride a tank to the front. In the distance, phosphorus-shell explosions hide their advance. Lorenzi rode a tank but dismounted before it rolled into an ambush. OPPOSITE: A bazookaman with the 94th prepares to fire on an enemy target. Most of the German towns Lorenzi advanced through had been reduced to rubble.

insects and surviving the heat.

After training, Lorenzi and the other replacements headed to New York, but he was able to visit home for a few days on the way. Once in the city, he boarded the SS *Louis Pasteur*, a French liner, for a six-day journey across the Atlantic. While he never succumbed to sea sickness, his fellow replacements did. "A guy across from me was throwing up in his mess kit," he recalled.

The *Louis Pasteur* docked in England at night, and Lorenzi and the others climbed aboard a train. They had to keep the blinds down to prevent light from showing. "I didn't see anything of England," he said regretfully. The train deposited the men on a dock, and they boarded another ship bound for Le Harve, France, where they boarded trucks and sped to the front.

Lorenzi's truck arrived at the front lines at night, and the men piled out. It was cold, and snow blanketed the area. Lorenzi was assigned to a squad in C Company, 302th Infantry Regiment, of Maj. Gen. Harry Malony's 94th Infantry Division.

The 94th had arrived on the Continent in September 1944 and spent the next four months containing the Germans along France's Channel ports. During the Battle of the Bulge, it raced across the country and took up positions on the southern flank of Patton's Third Army. While most of Patton's other divisions pivoted north to attack the southern border of the Bulge, the 94th was one of the few that remained in place to prevent more Germans from joining the campaign up north.

By the time Lorenzi joined the 94th in February 1945, the Battle of the Bulge had ended, but the Germans were still in the fight. There would be at least three more months of fighting before the war ended. While the division fought specific actions during those months, Lorenzi does not recall the exact towns, hills, or forests where they occurred, but most of his memories coincide with locations and certain aspects of the regiment's campaigns.

Company C was probably in Pillingerhof, Germany, east of the Moselle River, when Lorenzi joined the unit. On his first patrol, he witnessed the carnage of combat. "The first German I saw had his hand sticking out of the snow." It was a dead enemy soldier. Behind him Lorenzi saw three American bodies covered by blankets with rifles topped with Army helmets stuck in the snow. "That was pretty scary for an 18-year-old just leaving home."

One of the first soldiers Lorenzi befriended was a Texan named Leon Stenson, who was older than any of the replacements. Stenson had been fighting with the division for months. "He never smoked or drank," remembered Lorenzi.

Soon after his introduction to Company C, Lorenzi came under fire for the first time and learned to dig a deeper foxhole. Later, on a predawn patrol with a redheaded sergeant, he crept up to a series of German foxholes, spotted a German, and raised his rifle. "Don't shoot him," the sergeant whispered. The shot would have alerted the enemy to their presence. Instead, they made their way back to friendly lines, where they reported the German location. American artillerymen targeted the foxholes and fired a few volleys. The Germans retreated.

Company C's next task was to take the town of Orscholz on February 19. The men jumped off through a forest at 4 AM. When the Germans fired flares into the air, illuminating the area, the men ducked, trying to reduce their profiles. Then the Germans lobbed mortars. "They were more of a concussion than anything," said Lorenzi.

At night the men climbed aboard some tanks for an attack into Keuchingen. "They smelled of diesel," Lorenzi recalled. The tanks reached the town, and the men jumped off. Then the

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tanks roared forward, driving straight into a German ambush. The infantrymen heard the clash. "They got shot up pretty bad."

The men entered houses, less interested in booze than just finding a place to sleep. They found two old people sleeping in a bed. "We told them to go to the bunker," said Lorenzi. The Americans preferred German homes to any other place to sleep. In one house, Lorenzi found an Italian .34-caliber pistol while rifling through some drawers. He made it his own.

For meals, Lorenzi enjoyed C-rations, canned meals. Special meals, which were supposed to be treats, had the opposite effect. One of the worst was fresh turkey. "They didn't even clean it well," he recalled. "There were some feathers." Fresh eggs were another disappointment.

One day the men were each given two raw eggs. "Cook 'em the best you can," the sergeant told them. Lorenzi tried heating his with hot water in his helmet. The result was two soft boiled eggs. "That was the worst."

Even basic needs resulted in pain. "I drank a lot of bad water," said Lorenzi. The men had been issued iodine pills to drop into their canteens to purify whatever water they could find. But the pills needed an hour to take effect, and the men were usually too thirsty to wait. The result was misery. "I had diarrhea for a long time," he recalled. During night marches, Lorenzi and other soldiers would run out of the line to relieve themselves. "Some had it worse than I did."

One night Lorenzi was standing guard on the line when his stomach started burning. It felt like heartburn. A soldier offered to relieve him from his post, but Lorenzi refused. His guts hurt so much he couldn't sleep, so he figured it was better to stand guard, explaining, "That was 1945 and I still have it today."

At the end of February, the division pushed to the Saar River's west bank near Taben. Lorenzi and five other soldiers clambered aboard a rubber raft, commanded by a lieutenant, to conduct a night reconnaissance. They paddled through the pitch-black night until they could hear German voices and truck motors on the east bank. They were supposed to land, but when the lieutenant heard the noise, he whispered, "That's enough. Let's go back." They turned around.

The next day, February 22, the men received an oral order as they bivouacked in a field: "Patton's coming!" They scrambled to put their camp in order, but the general never arrived. Patton did visit the division's headquarters and told General Malony and his staff, "I don't care if it takes a bushel basket full of dog tags, we're crossing the river right here."

In compliance with the general's orders, the next day before dawn the soldiers of Company C, in groups of six, dragged M-2 assault boats down a twisting road to the river bank near a blown-out bridge south of Taben. Lorenzi remembered the boats not being too heavy. They paddled across the swollen Saar in heavy fog and reached the opposite bank without incident. Then they climbed a 12-foot retaining wall at the water's edge and hiked up the Höckerburg, which the men called Hocker Hill.

On February 24, the division attacked the town of Beurig on the east side of the Saar River. When advancing against the Germans, the men employed marching fire, attacking while firing their rifles from the hip, a tactic Patton promoted to keep the enemy under cover while the Americans closed in. "I remember we did that a lot," said Lorenzi.

Entering the town, the Americans fought house to house. Lorenzi and another soldier occupied the second floor of a building. They stacked wheat sacks around a window and fired at enemy soldiers. When German tanks appeared, the other soldier started shaking uncontrollably. Lorenzi told him to lie down. The man was out of the battle, but Lorenzi kept firing from his perch until the Germans were finally driven from the town. The man later recovered and returned to the unit.

A few days later, on March 1, C Company attacked a hill. The Germans countered with rockets, artillery, mortars, and small arms. Lorenzi manned a foxhole, helping another infantryman fire a Browning Automatic Rifle (BAR). Suddenly, the BAR man started shaking like the soldier had in the building, except this man foamed at the mouth. A lieutenant ran over, pulled the shaking man away, and told Lorenzi he was now a BAR man.

As the new BAR man, Lorenzi often went on patrols with his lieutenant. Lorenzi's new weapon weighed 22 pounds fully loaded and fired .30-06 rounds. He also had to carry extra clips, "and I only weighed 140 pounds soaking

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wet," he said. It was as the BAR man that Lorenzi met Private Nick Laudato, a Pittsburgh native, who helped him with his new weapon. Lorenzi often traded the BAR with Laudato, who gave him the BAR ammunition. "He was a nice fellow," Lorenzi said of the man who became his best friend.

On one patrol the lieutenant sprinted up a steep hill while Lorenzi, lugging his BAR, and the other soldiers tried to keep up. When they finally reached the lieutenant near the top he told them, rather impressed with himself, "I'm a little older than you fellas." But Lorenzi was unimpressed. "He was only carrying a carbine," he recalled, which weighed six pounds fully loaded.

The fight for the hill seesawed back and forth for three days, with the Germans counterattacking every one of the company's attempts to secure the summit. During one counterattack the Germans broke through the line, and Lorenzi and his comrades ran for the rear. As they charged into a wood, a sergeant yelled out, "Get out of there! There's mines in there!" The men froze and walked back out, not tripping any mines as they went.

At one point the Americans captured several Germans. "I've seen a lot of German prisoners," said Lorenzi. The Americans would line up to search the prisoners for souvenirs, especially P-36 pistols and Lugers, but they never found any. "If we had found any guns," admitted Lorenzi, "the lieutenant would take them from you anyway." Officers always had dibs on souvenirs. Although the Americans captured both regular Wehrmacht and SS mountain troops, Lorenzi could not tell the difference. He did notice one thing about the enemy: "They dressed pretty snappy."

The division spent the rest of March fighting for the small town of Schömerich and, more than 100 miles to the east, Ludwigshafen, where tankers of the 12th Armored Division joined them to crush the last remnants of the German Army. Ludwigshafen was the division's last battle.

After two straight months of fighting, the 94th was placed in reserve. The troops were trucked to Baumholder, a German training center. But the break was short-lived. Two days later, the division was reassigned to Lt. Gen. Courtney Hodges' First Army, which was trying to close the Ruhr Pocket. The men reboarded trucks for the 175-mile drive north. When they finally crossed the Rhine River on April 22, enemy shells were still exploding in the water.

Lorenzi crossed the Rhine by walking over a pontoon bridge. "The bridge was not too wide," he remembered. "There was just enough room for trucks to get across." Once across, he and the rest of the 94th took up occupation duties in Düsseldorf. Lorenzi was assigned to the military police to help keep order. Their main task was preventing American soldiers from stealing. "Any time someone was breaking into a building to steal wine from its cellar," he remembered, "we were called."

One day a lieutenant walked up to Lorenzi and told him that the war was over. It was May 8, 1945, and the German high command had officially surrendered to the Allies. What was left of Europe at the end of six years of war was at peace. To celebrate the victory, Staff Sergeant Al Deyer passed a Nazi flag around to everyone in C Company to sign. Lorenzi signed his name and hometown.

The 94th took up occupation duties in Czechoslovakia. While many occupying Americans found the Czechs worse than the Germans, Lorenzi found them accommodating. "They were nice to us," he said.

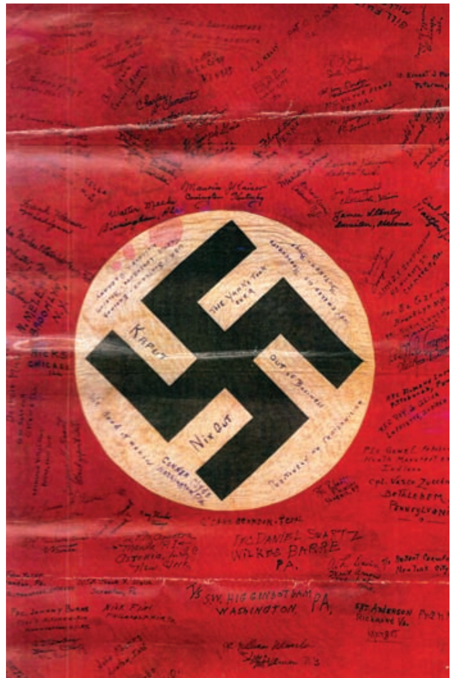
Getting to Czechoslovakia, however, proved difficult. Lorenzi's company took off in a convoy of trucks for the ride across Germany. Along the way his truck broke down in a German forest, but his lieutenant said, "I'll send another truck back for you."

The convoy headed southeast while Lorenzi and his men waited … and waited. Hours turned into days. "We were there for a week," he recalled, "and he never showed up." The men scrounged for food and hunted for deer with

Both: National Archives

ABOVE: An infantryman fires his BAR at the retreating Germans as another fires his M-1 Garand rifle. Lorenzi became one of his company's BAR men when the man firing the weapon broke down in combat. RIGHT: An American soldier tries speaking to a handful of Czechoslovakian children. Lorenzi ended the war there, enjoying the locals, the skiing, and the beer.

Both: Armand Lorenzi



ABOVE: Armand Lorenzi took this photo of fellow soldiers responding to the call of nature during a long train trip somewhere in Germany. LEFT: Lorenzi, as well as all the surviving soldiers of C Company, signed this captured Nazi flag when the war ended in May of 1945. He received a print of the flag in 2006 from a child of the woman whom had taken possession of it.

their M-1 Garand rifles. They finally decided to walk to the next town. When they arrived, an angry lieutenant gave them hell. "Where were you?" he demanded. Lorenzi explained the situation, and the officer calmed down. The men eventually located their company.

Lorenzi and his comrades enjoyed occupation duty. They skied, rode horses, and drank. Living close to a brewery, the men rolled a barrel of dark beer out of the building almost daily. Once they drained it, they rolled the empty barrel out to the road. For other entertainment, the men sneaked into a nearby displaced persons camp to meet the women inside. "They must have been Polish," recalled Lorenzi.

After the easy duty in Czechoslovakia, Lorenzi boarded a 40 & 8 train for a slow ride west across Europe. The simple boxcars, with no seats, contained a bucket filled with sand and a can of gasoline. To keep the car warm, the men had to pour gas into the bucket and light it. The train was so slow the men often jumped off to relieve themselves, then jumped back on.

After the lengthy trip, the train arrived at Camp Lucky Strike in La Havre, France. While Lorenzi waited for transport home, he met a soldier who had been a teacher back in the United States. He was working on a song that mimicked The Merry Macs 1944 number one hit song, "Mairzy Doats":

"Eighty-eights and hand grenades and lots of screaming mimis.

I'd dive for my hole too, wouldn't you?

If the words sound queer and funnier to your ear,

Why don't you come over and try it."

Although the soldier never finished the song, Lorenzi enjoyed it so much he committed it to memory.

Soon, Lorenzi boarded a Victory ship for his trip home. The journey was almost as bad as the combat. Stormy weather stirred up giant swells that violently tossed the ship. One day he was walking to the showers when the ship went up against a wave, tilting it almost vertically. Terrified, he ran back to his bunk. "I grabbed my life preserver and never took it off," he said.

After eight days on the water, the Victory ship pulled into port at New York City. As Lorenzi headed down the gangplank, he saw MPs standing on the dock, checking debarking soldiers for weapons. He quickly dug his Italian pistol out of his duffel bag and stuffed it under his belt. He passed inspection without losing it.

The soldiers were brought to Camp Shanks, where Lorenzi called his parents. He then took a bus to New Jersey, where he met his father and brother, home from the Pacific. They piled into a car and drove home. When he arrived, Lorenzi's mother wasn't there, but when she did arrive she cried. "She was just so happy to see me," he said.

For about a month Lorenzi and his brother spent their nights drinking, getting the war out of their systems. Then their father told them, "It's about time you boys got back to work." And that is just what they did.

Lorenzi returned to his projectionist job at the theater and worked in the profession for the next 20 years. He then took a security guard job at the local steel mill for 35 years until he retired in 2001.

Lorenzi met Patricia McFall through her stepfather at a club the two frequented. He married her, but they divorced after 32 years. He met another woman and married her for seven years, but she passed away. Today, he shares his life with Mary Lou Lachman, whom he calls, "a very good woman." They enjoy dancing together.

In 2006, Lorenzi received a print of the Nazi flag he had signed on the last day of the war. The child of a woman who received it after the war sent it to him in an effort for all C Company veterans to have a copy. As of 2018, Lorenzi still had the Italian pistol he snuck off the ship, though he has never fired it for one simple reason: "I took the firing pin out of it."

Since the war Lorenzi has attended a number of 94th Infantry Division reunions. He has also gone to the annual D-Day reenactments at Conneaut, Ohio. He has visited Normandy, France, and Pearl Harbor, Hawaii, but has never returned to the forests and small towns of Germany where he fought. He still remembers his introduction to combat like it was yesterday. "I can still remember seeing that [dead] German soldier."

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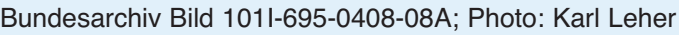
Warsaw was burning. Captain Jack Van Eyssen first saw it as a dull glow on the night horizon, 35 miles distant. Van Eyssen, a pilot with South African Air Force (SAAF) Squadron 31, nosed his Consolidated Liberator bomber into a dive and told the six other crewmen aboard to get ready. They were about to enter an inferno.

"Rows upon rows of buildings were on fire and sent palls of smoke thousands of feet into the air," Van Eyssen recalled years later. "The smoke was in turn illuminated from below by the fires. Obviously, a life or death struggle was taking place before us."

Leveling off at 150 feet, Van Eyssen flew north along the silvery Vistula River while bomb-aimer Sergeant Herbert Hudson counted bridges. After the third one, Hudson uttered a sharp command and Van Eyssen banked his Liberator hard left onto its final approach.


Bundesarchiv Bild 101I-695-0408-08A; Photo: Karl Leher

ABOVE: A German soldier equipped with an MG42 machine gun walks past the corpses of Polish fighters killed during fighting in a small village amid the Uprising. OPPOSITE: Mechanics of the 1586 Polish Special Duties Flight overhaul B-24 Liberator GR-S BZ965 at their base in Brindisi, Italy. The aircraft flew numerous missions, and the long journey to Warsaw with supplies for the fighting Home Army took its toll.

With flaps extended and throttles cut, the massive bomber slowed to 130 miles per hour as it neared Warsaw's Krasinski Square.

Just then, Van Eyssen's warplane became caught in the glare of a dozen German searchlights. Gusts of 20mm antiaircraft shells ripped through its aluminum skin, destroying both engines on the right wing. Seconds later, relentless gunfire set alight a third engine.

Hudson jettisoned the aircraft's payload of 12 cargo canisters while Van Eyssen and his copilot desperately attempted evasive maneuvers. They succeeded—somehow the stricken bomber held together as it sluggishly climbed to an altitude of 1,000 feet. Now over Soviet-controlled territory, Captain Van Eyssen and three other crewmen managed to bail out of the doomed Liberator. Everyone else—including Sergeant Hudson—perished along with their airplane.

The loss of Jack Van Eyssen's Liberator VI (equivalent to a B-24J in American service) during the early morning hours of August 15, 1944, was but one small act in a heroic but ultimately futile drama of World War II. The story of the Warsaw Airlift was one of treachery, raw courage, and defiance in the face of impossible odds. It also highlighted several ugly realities brought on by political interference in tactical matters. At its center was a Royal Air Force (RAF) officer who night after night ordered his men to fly into a maelstrom from which he knew many would not return.

From his headquarters in Caserta, Italy, Air Marshal John Slessor followed with considerable interest the Red Army's inexorable advance across Poland. Soviet forces had by July 1944 reached the outskirts of Warsaw, while Russian radio broadcasts encouraged patriotic Poles to rise up against their Nazi oppressors. The time was ripe for insurrection, but no one then could imagine how quickly events in the prewar Polish capital were to unfold.

As commander in chief of RAF Mediterranean and Middle East (MEDME), the 47-year-old Slessor controlled a number of special operations air squadrons whose task was to supply resistance forces across German-held Greece, the Balkans, and Poland. One of these outfits was Polish Special Duties Flight No. 1586, with a total of seven aircrew on hand as of August 1. Flight 1586 operated a mix of Handley-Page Halifax and Consolidated Liberator bombers, parachuting weapons, matériel, and secret agents into Poland whenever weather conditions permitted.

Special Duties Flight No. 1586 was one of several Polish outfits trained and equipped by the RAF following Poland's fall in 1939. Although subject to the King's Regulations and subordinate to British air commanders, these Poles nevertheless proved themselves to be an aggressive, independent-minded lot. They rapidly earned a reputation for bravery bordering on recklessness.

Complicating matters, Free Polish commanders were never entirely free from the influence of their London-based government in exile. A considerable number of military leaders, diplomats, and elected officials had also escaped to Great Britain, eventually setting up an expatriate administrative apparatus for the war's duration. Secretive, obstinate, and fiercely focused on the liberation of their native soil, the exiled

Imperial War Museum

Heroic Warsaw Airlift

Allied airmen braved horrific German flak over the Polish capital in an effort to drop supplies to resistance fighters during the Warsaw Uprising. BY PATRICK J. CHAISSON

Imperial War Museum

The crew of the 1586 Polish Special Duties Flight poses with its B-24 Liberator GR-S BZ965 at Brindisi. The unit sustained heavy casualties during the Warsaw airlift.

Polish War Ministry frequently issued direct orders to its units in combat with little regard for the proper chain of command.

While relations with their British allies were often strained, these Free Poles harbored outright hatred for the Soviet state and its despotic ruler, Josef Stalin. As the Red Army approached Warsaw in mid-summer 1944, it became abundantly clear to Stanisław Mikołajczyk, Polish prime minister in exile, that the Moscow regime had no intention of sharing power with his London-based government. A more dramatic measure would be necessary to gain Stalin's attention.

There existed in occupied Poland an underground resistance organization known as the Armia Krajowa (AK, or Home Army), led by Lt. Gen. Tadeusz Komorowski. Known by his code name, Bór (forest), this former Polish Army officer commanded an estimated 45,000 irregulars in the Warsaw region. At 1700 hours on August 1, 1944, under orders from the London government in exile, Bór launched Operation Burza (Tempest), the Warsaw Uprising.

Those responsible for initiating this insurrection hoped to stage a fait accompli. By seizing Warsaw, Bór's Home Army intended to present advancing Soviet armies with Poland's former capital city under the control of a force loyal to Prime Minister Mikołajczyk's government. From this position of strength, Free Polish leaders figured, a more equitable postwar future for their people could be assured.

They could not have figured more wrongly. Once the uprising commenced, Red Army reconnaissance troops (who could see Warsaw from their positions across the Vistula) were withdrawn 12 miles south, conveniently just beyond the range of Russian artillery. And though the Soviets enjoyed near-total air superiority, all overflights of AK-held territory abruptly ceased.

Stalin claimed these measures were merely a tactical response to Nazi counterattacks occurring elsewhere. In reality, he was more than happy to sit back and watch the Germans and Free Poles slaughter one another over control of Warsaw. Red Army commanders also prohibited British or American aircraft from entering Soviet-controlled airspace in order to resupply Polish insurgents.

Nevertheless, Bór-Komorowski's ill-equipped Home Army had in one day managed to liberate three-quarters of Warsaw. To keep it, though, the AK needed help. For this assistance Poland's government in exile turned to its oldest ally, the United Kingdom.

The first Polish demands for aid were both considerable and impossible to provide. They first requested that Allied bomber command in Europe immediately shift its focus away from strategic targets in favor of tactical ones that supported the uprising. Additionally, Poland's exiled leadership wanted its airborne brigade dropped on airfields near Warsaw to hold them for use by four squadrons of Polish-flown North American P-51 Mustang fighters. And all this had to happen in a matter of days, despite the fact that Warsaw remained well beyond the combat radius of any Allied aircraft operating from England.

The Poles also asked for significantly increased air delivery of machine guns, ammunition, antitank weapons, and grenades. This was the one appeal that British Prime Minister Winston Churchill felt he could realistically fulfill; accordingly, he directed his military chiefs of staff to investigate its feasibility. The only Allied special operations bombers with the range to reach Warsaw and return fell under Air Marshal Slessor's MEDME Command, so he was in the best position to evaluate such a mission's operational feasibility. On August 3, Slessor received an urgent cable from the Air Staff wanting to know whether it could be done.

He replied the next morning: "Air supply to Warsaw … not a practical proposition." Uncertain weather and a full moon meant exposing flight crews to many hazards en route, while alert antiaircraft defenses were certain to claim more bombers over the target. Few cargo canisters, Slessor predicted, would ever make it into the hands of AK fighters. In summary, he reluctantly concluded, "We should achieve practically nothing and lose a high proportion of our special duty aircraft" in an operation that would do little to affect the ultimate fate of Poland's underground army.

Both: Wikipedia

Air Marshal John Slessor (right) authorized the sacrifice of many air crews and planes to send token relief to the fighters of the Polish Home Army in Warsaw led by Tadeusz Komorowski (left).

While Air Marshal Slessor believed an air bridge to Warsaw would certainly fail, there were others under his command who were more than ready to give it a try. As it turned out, all seven flight crews from Polish Special Duties Flight No. 1586 were scheduled to fly an aerial resupply sortie to other parts of their homeland that very evening. Would the fearless but willful airmen of No. 1586 Flight follow those orders or instead go to the aid of their countrymen then battling the Germans?

At the Poles' mission briefing that afternoon, British staff officers repeated Slessor's instructions to avoid Warsaw. They could not know, however, that General Bór-Komorowski had earlier sent a wire directly to Flight 1586's com-

mander, Major Eugeniusz Arciuszkiewicz, requesting his crews carry out airdrops to the city's defenders. It was a request the loyal Polish aviator could not turn down.

"Who'd like to go to Warsaw?" Arciuszkiewicz asked his men once the RAF briefers departed. The assembled aviators roared with approval; to a man they all volunteered for the flight. It was decided that four experienced crews would fly to Bór's strongholds while the remaining three were to carry out their original assignment "for appearance's sake."

Each bomber making the journey to Warsaw carried up to 12 waterproof metal containers as payload. A typical canister measured 8.2 feet long with a diameter of three feet. It weighed 350 pounds and could be filled with Sten submachine guns, PIAT antitank launchers, 9mm ammunition (used by both British- and German-made small arms), and medical supplies. Dropped from the aircraft's bomb bay, these cylinders employed drogue parachutes to slow their descent but required a low, slow approach to ensure an accurate delivery.

The straight-line distance between Flight 1586's base at Brindisi and Warsaw was 815 miles. However, air mission planners had to plot detours around known enemy flak concentrations and night fighter bases, which made for a nearly 2,000-mile round trip. Other hazards included ice and lightning storms, violent wind shear, and blinding fog. Due to short summer nights, Allied bombers would have to take off and land in broad daylight as part of a typical 11-hour journey.

Special Duties Flight No. 1586's three Liberators and one Halifax destined for Warsaw struggled into the air at 2100 hours on Sunday, August 4, 1944. Dangerously overloaded, the war-weary planes slowly made their way across Yugoslavia and over the forbidding Carpathian Mountains. Flying in loose "bomber stream" formation, each individual aircraft commander had to manage his own navigation and air defense.

Warrant Officer Jan Cholewa vividly described his Liberator's approach to the flashlight-marked Jewish Cemetery. "Below us we can see Warsaw's first buildings and containers going to the ground as well as a Halifax turning right. I slow down, lower the landing gear and the flaps, and open the bomb doors; we're going at the speed of 130 miles [per hour]. The cemetery is now in front of us."

Cholewa's account continued: "'Drop it!' I can hear the navigator shout, and at the same moment the machine bops up. 'The containers are gone,' says the navigator. Emilio [the copilot] retracts the landing gear and the flaps, we speed up. 'A few packages have landed on the street,' yells the tail gunner."

Imperial War Museum

National Archives

ABOVE: Fighters of the Polish Home Army, always short of supplies, take up positions against the Nazis during their historic uprising. Allied efforts to resupply the fighters by air were heroic and costly. TOP: Squadron Leader Stanislaw Krol (left), the commander of the Polish 1586 Special Duties Flight, and Warrant Officer Stanislaw Klosowski peer from inside their B-24 Liberator GR-U BZ860 in Brindisi.

Three of the four Polish special operations bombers reaching Warsaw that night delivered their payloads to Home Army forces near the city center. Though airmen described antiaircraft fire over the target as "light," a Liberator flown by Flight Lieutenant Jan Mioduchowski lost an engine to flak over Krasinski Square. His plane was also shot up by a German night fighter while returning home, crash landing at Brindisi without injury to the crew.

Lost to history is Air Marshal Slessor's reaction upon learning No. 1586 Flight disobeyed his orders to stay away from Warsaw. Likely he suspected the Poles would go there with or without his permission. Besides, Slessor had bigger problems to face. Five of seven RAF special-duty bombers dispatched to objectives elsewhere in Poland that previous evening had failed to return.

In response, Slessor immediately canceled all flights to Polish drop zones. He believed Bór's Home Army, absent Soviet assistance, could only hold out for a few more days no matter what the Western Allies did to aid it. Yet the

AK's resilience surprised him, as did what the air marshal termed a "crescendo of political pressure" brought on by outraged Polish authorities in London.

High-ranking officials within the government in exile fumed over John Slessor's cancellation order. Their vitriol soon reached the ears of senior RAF commanders, prompting Air Chief Marshal Charles Portal on August 5 to cable MEDME Command. Portal did not direct Slessor to resume Poland-bound airdrops, but in his telegram the chief of the Air Staff suggested a "token gesture" might provide psychological support to Warsaw's resistance fighters.

Meanwhile, Major Arciuszkiewicz's aviators impatiently endured day after day of enforced inactivity while their countrymen in Warsaw fought and died. Finally, on August 7, Air Marshal Slessor felt he could no longer stand in their way. He authorized No. 1586 Flight to resume air delivery missions to the beleaguered city commencing the next evening.

On August 8, three Polish crews flew to Warsaw, followed one night later by four more successful drops. All bombers returned safely, leading Slessor to cable Portal that "[a] few aircraft on a show like this will sometimes get away with it." This statement opened the door to a significantly increased Allied presence over Warsaw at the same time a deadly ring of German flak batteries began to close itself around the partisan-controlled city.

Air Marshal Slessor traveled on August 11 to Naples, where Winston Churchill was meeting with senior Allied commanders in the Mediterranean. There he explained to the British prime minister why resupply flights to the Polish city remained tactically unsound. Churchill, however, said the missions "must go on if only to boost the morale of the inhabitants of Warsaw."

"You of course are correct from the military point of view," Churchill added, "but from the political aspect you must carry on."

It was a bitter pill for Slessor to swallow. He knew many of his flight crews, along with their hard-to-replace warplanes, would be lost in an expanded airdrop campaign. Yet to meet Bór-Komorowski's supply requirement of 90 tons per night, more bombers were needed.

Imperial War Museum

Members of a B-24 Liberator crew of No. 31 Squadron, South African Air Force, discuss an upcoming mission. The bomber crews were often required to fly at extremely low levels, under 500 feet, to deliver payloads in Warsaw drop zones accurately. The result was an extremely heavy toll in planes and air crews.

Aside from the Poles, Slessor had available one RAF special operations outfit trained for this type of work. The Halifax-equipped No. 148 Squadron, veterans of many clandestine operations across the Mediterranean, Greece, and Yugoslavia, sent six planes to Poland on the night of August 12 along with five No. 1586 Flight bombers. Seven aircraft successfully delivered cargo canisters to the Home Army, with one RAF Halifax downed by a German interceptor.

Early on August 13, the Foggia-based RAF No. 205 Group received an alert for special duty over Poland. Its newly assigned commander, South African Brigadier J.T. "Jimmy" Durrant, was not pleased with this assignment. His No. 178 (RAF) and No. 31 (SAAF) Squadrons had been busy for weeks bombing targets in support of Operation Dragoon, the invasion of southern France. Aerial resupply was a new game for these aviators, and an unappealing one at that. To many of them, flying a Liberator at rooftop level at near-stall speed into the teeth of enemy flak seemed like an act of sheer insanity. Orders were orders, though, and starting at 1930 hours 24 crews belonging to 148 RAF, 178 RAF, and 31 SAAF took off for drop zones in Warsaw. Two Liberators and two Halifaxes from No. 1586 Flight also went up that evening.

The Germans were ready for them. Sergeant Henry Lloyd-Lyne, an air gunner with No. 178 Squadron, recalled the ferocity of their assault. "At about the second bridge the antiaircraft fire was really intensive … and I could see that the outer port engine was on fire. It wasn't long before the port inner was on fire as well. The whole wing looked to be on fire and the most amazing thing was that at this particular time the antiaircraft shells were coming through the bottom of the aircraft and going out through the top. I likened them then and I still do to cricket balls that were on fire. They looked about the size of a cricket ball and they were glowing. The 20mm stuff, I would have thought, I could virtually have put my hand out and caught them."

After somehow dropping its payload onto Krasinski Square, the Liberator crashed into a wooded area. Of seven men aboard, Lloyd-Lyne emerged as the sole survivor.

Two SAAF flight crews also failed to return from that raid. One plane, commanded by Lieutenant Robert Randolf Klette of No. 31 Squadron, had a rough time just getting to Warsaw. Klette remembers crossing the Carpathians and "plunging into a brute of a cumulonimbus, vicious turbulence rocking, swinging and bumping the Liberator. It was like riding in a rodeo, the compasses spinning in all directions."

Matters worsened for Bob Klette's crew after German flak gunners caught their warplane in a vicious crossfire on its final approach. With three engines aflame, the mortally wounded Liberator staggered along at 100 feet over Warsaw as it headed toward an open area. This was the city's abandoned airport, and miraculously Klette brought his bomber down alongside its main runway.

"Had we crashed? Was I dead and in heaven?" the dazed Klette remembered thinking afterward. He then realized the aircraft had made a perfect belly landing. "My God," Klette exclaimed, "we're alive!" His entire crew survived the crash, but one man was killed while trying to evade capture. The rest surrendered to an enemy patrol.

Those Polish partisans struggling to hold their city against an ever-tightening German stranglehold reacted with joy to the Allies' increased aerial presence. On August 14, Bór-Komorowski radioed, "The gallant effort of your airmen has enabled us to continue our struggle. Fighting Warsaw thanks [these] heroic airmen and sends her highest appreciation. We bow with deepest reverence before fallen crews."

This was small comfort to Jimmy Durrant, whose No. 205 Group had just lost 21 men and three bombers on a mission he deemed utterly useless. That morning the young aviator visited Slessor's headquarters in Caserta to lodge a formal protest but was made to wait for some time while his boss sat in conference behind closed doors. When Air Marshal Slessor emerged, Durrant immediately confronted him with an impassioned plea to halt all supply drops. Slessor listened patiently, then invited the brigadier inside his office. Seated there was Winston Churchill.

After receiving permission to speak, Durrant recounted 205 Group's losses over the previous evening. He then suggested the Allies were throwing away invaluable aircraft and trained flight crews over Poland for no military value. In response, Churchill said he understood the group commander's position but insisted that all possible aid must be given to Warsaw's insurgents. Jimmy Durrant's men would go up again that very evening.

For this sortie, Nos. 178 and 31 Squadrons mustered 15 Liberators, many of them hastily repaired after the previous night's mission. No. 148 Squadron put up another six Halifax bombers, while the Polish No. 1586 Flight contributed two Liberators and three Halifaxes.

With German fighters, searchlight teams, and antiaircraft batteries now on full alert, the operation quickly devolved into a bloodbath. Captain Roman Chmiel of 1586 Flight claimed his aircrew could smell Warsaw burning from the flight deck of their Halifax, "the ground and the sky mingling in one blinding eruption of flame."

Into that vast furnace, remembered Chmiel, "a South African Liberator came skimming over the chimney-stacks, firing with all its guns. It shot out some of the searchlights, but then the pilot, probably dazzled, crashed into a church steeple." Chmiel's own aircraft made several passes over the ruined city before his navigator recognized their drop zone and released 12 canisters over Krasinski Square.

In the raid's aftermath, Slessor cabled London: "Last night's operations to Warsaw, 26 [sic] dispatched, 11 successful. 8 missing including 6 Liberators of 205 Group. One of 148 Squadron and one Pole. Group have lost 25% of their strength in two nights."

Both: National Archives

ABOVE: German troops, diverted from the front lines to put down the revolt of the Polish Home Army, watch as Warsaw, already ravaged in 1939, burns furiously. BELOW: Much of the once beautiful city of Warsaw was leveled during World War II. This photo of a barren landscape was taken shortly after the end of the war in 1945.

John Slessor knew the Allies could not pay this price in men and machines much longer. Morale among his flight crews began to crumble; even the stoic Poles were having difficulty coping with the nightly loss of friends and compatriots over Warsaw. The South Africans of 31 Squadron had been especially hard hit. Slessor took them off the flying schedule for 24 hours to allow for crew rest and badly needed maintenance to be performed on their battle-damaged Liberators.

Now back in London, Winston Churchill sent a series of urgent appeals to his American and Soviet allies. The United States Army Air Forces (USAAF) possessed a barometric parachute release that enabled bombers flying at high altitude to deliver resupply containers with some degree of accuracy. Yet without Soviet landing rights in place, British-based B-17 Flying Fortresses still could not reach Warsaw. And Churchill's repeated pleas to obtain those rights were all met at the Kremlin with stony silence.

On August 15, six bombers (three each from 178 and 148 Squadrons) headed for drop zones in the Kampinos Forest, 12 miles west of Warsaw. Two turned back early with mechanical trouble, leaving four planes to complete their task before returning safely. This marked the beginning of a more cautious phase in the air-

Continued on page 78

The U.S. 3rd Armored Division made a startling discovery and its commander was killed on March 30, 1945, near Paderborn, Germany.

BY STEVE OSSAD

After leading his U.S. 3rd Armored "Spearhead" Division on the longest, one-day, enemy-opposed mechanized advance in American history, Maj. Gen. Maurice Rose was killed in action on March 30, 1945, one of 30 flag officers who fell in World War II, and the only armored division commander ever lost in combat.

However, the march of the 3rd Armored Division did not end with the death of its commander or before its men confronted the full meaning of Nazism. Like other fighting divisions, the various units within 3rd Armored prepared after-action reports for April 1945 that document military operations, including liberations, but the official records, archival sources, personal memoirs, photos, etc., vary considerably concerning discovery of the atrocities and the actual places where the horror was perpetrated.

As one example, the 82nd Airborne Division final after-action report (AAR) contains a single paragraph in the Military Government section about "the discovery of a concentration camp at WOBBELIN" and the medical and humanitarian efforts undertaken, including a forced reburial of victims by the local population, a virtual constant in American AARs. In the case of the 3rd Armored Division, the recollections of individual soldiers, unit AARs, and the semi-official history, *Spearhead in the West*, offer a more detailed description of the liberation of a notorious concentration camp as part of military operations in the last days of the war in Germany—less than two weeks after Maurice Rose, the highest ranking Jewish American officer in the U.S. Army, was cut down in combat in the act of surrendering.

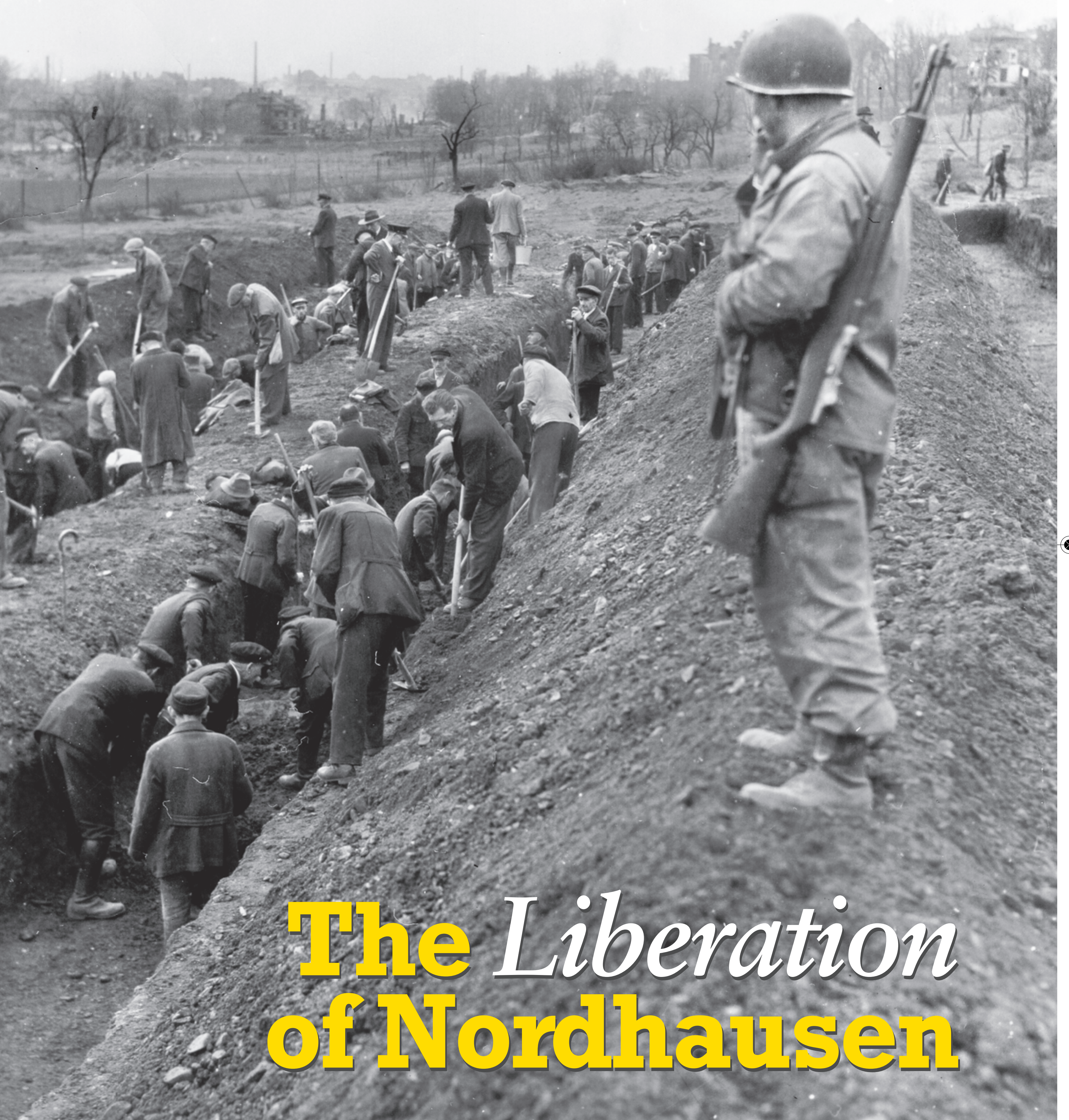
KZ (Konzentrationslager, i.e., Concentration Camp) Dora-Mittelbau was built in central Germany near the town of Nordhausen, by which name the entire camp complex is now commonly, but erroneously, known. The blandly named Mittelbau (translation, "central construction") camp was initially established as a sub-camp of KZ Buchenwald, when the SS sent a detail of 120 slaves to expand a large underground Wehrmacht fuel depot to produce V-2 ballistic missiles after the existing production sites became the target of Allied bombers. When the main V-2 effort shifted from Peenemunde to Mittelbau, the site became an independent concentration camp in late October 1944, eventually encompassing more than 40 subcamps of its own, spread out over the immediate area. The first inmates, who built the facilities, were initially kept underground in the dark, unventilated tunnels, referred to as "Dora" in official documents of "Mittelbau GmbH," the business unit set up by Armaments Minister Albert Speer's vast empire, which oversaw the production site. The main factory area inside the tunnels was often referred to as Mittelwerk ("middle works.") The SS ran all the camps, provided the slave labor at very reasonable negotiated rates, and the supply was constantly "replenished."

Brutalized in miserable conditions, with minimal food, sanitation, heating, or light, the condemned slaves slept on wood racks, four levels high. The daily ration consisted of four ounces of black bread and a liter of potato soup—the former more sawdust than flour, and the latter diluted foul water without nourishment—which only stoked the constant hunger and dysentery. Industrial-level noise from moving and operating heavy manufacturing equipment and blasting though rock never ceased, and the air was befouled by noxious and deadly gases from explosives, fuel, and toxic metal dust. Vermin of all kinds

National Archives

ABOVE: Shortly after their liberation, two emaciated inmates of the Nordhausen concentration camp stare blankly from hollow eyes. RIGHT: Under the watchful eyes of American soldiers, German civilians from a nearby town are pressed into service digging mass graves for the many victims of Nordhausen who were starved or beaten to death.

National Archives



The *Liberation* of Nordhausen

National Archives

On March 28, 1945, two days before General Maurice Rose was killed, an American M4 Sherman medium tank passes the smashed hulk of a German Tiger tank that has been destroyed in combat. This photo was taken near the town of Marienburg, Germany.

and diseases long thought eradicated, such as tuberculosis, typhus, and pneumonia, flourished. The daily death rate during early construction and the last few months of the war soared, and the used-up slaves were "selected," temporarily warehoused near the rail tracks, and shipped to KZ Mauthausen and other places for extermination.

Once full V-2 production began in the autumn of 1944, the Mittelbau complex held about 20,000 slaves, most working on outdoor construction, and about 6,000 in the tunnels. Dora-Mittelwerk produced 600-700 missiles per month on average, short of the monthly goal of 900 but nevertheless a significant achievement, especially after the Luftwaffe commandeered 40 percent of tunnel capacity for Junkers aircraft engine assembly. The enterprise was a model of efficiency, earning official commendations for the top managers, engineers, and SS staff, several of whom, including the last commandant, were prominent Auschwitz veterans.

The first V-2 rockets struck London on September 8, 1944, with the final launches on March 27, 1945. In the nearly seven months of attacks more than 3,000 warheads hit Allied cities, including Antwerp, Liege, and Paris. The ballistic missiles targeting London, most of which were produced in the Dora tunnels, killed about 2,500 civilians, injuring more than 6,000. During its existence as an underground, state-of-the-art, slave-based multi-facility manufacturing site—the final evolution of the SS master-slave economic system—more than 20,000 people from all over Europe were murdered or died from starvation, disease, or random executions at KZ Dora-Mittelbau, a labor cost of seven to eight slaves per V-2 rocket, which would kill or wound three to five civilians.

In early April 1945, as the Allies approached, consistent with Reich policy to leave no evidence of the mass murder behind, the SS began evacuations of the Dora-Mittelbau inmates north to KZ Bergen-Belsen, a mass collection point for the surviving prisoners of the crumbling Nazi empire. Thousands were murdered before and during the death marches, and by the time American forces arrived at Nordhausen few living prisoners remained. The 3rd Armored Division first entered the camp complex at an accidentally bombed and ruined barracks overflowing with corpses, called the Boelcke Kaserne.

Brigadier General Truman E. Boudinot, onetime champion Army free balloon racer and veteran tank commander of Combat Command B (CCB), one of two brigade-sized striking forces of the 3rd Armored "Spearhead" Division, had been driving his men hard for weeks. Starting with the breakout from the Remagen Bridge in early March 1945, the division spearheaded VII Corps, First Army, the southern pincer of 12th Army Group's tightening grip on the industrial Ruhr region where the remnants of several German armies were trapped. When 3rd Armored met the tanks of the northern pincer, the U.S. Ninth Army led by the 2nd Armored "Hell on Wheels" Division, on April 1, 1945, the escape route slammed shut on the greatest encirclement battle in American history, with more than 350,000 prisoners bagged and German Army Group B destroyed. Field Marshal Walter Model, known as "Hitler's Fireman" and the longtime battlefield opponent of Lt. Gen. Omar Bradley, killed himself rather than surrender. Although the bloodletting would continue without pause until 3rd Armored reached the town of Dessau on the Elbe, the original mission of General Dwight D. Eisenhower's

SHAEF was essentially complete. The industrial heart and war-making capability of the Third Reich, and its armed forces in the West, had been destroyed.

A week and a half after closing the Ruhr Pocket, General Boudinot was attacking into the Harz Mountains, where the high command believed strong German forces were gathering. Early on April 11, 1945, he received orders to take the town of Nordhausen. The rest of 3rd Armored, now commanded by Brig. Gen. Doyle O. Hickey, would continue the attack toward the mountains. The two task forces of CCB were built around Colonel John C. Welborn's 33rd Armored Regiment and Lt. Col. William B. Lovelady's 3rd Battalion and were moving abreast on two easterly routes. Lovelady entered the town near the railroad tracks and marked it on his map as a Luftwaffe base. He reported a large prison-type compound and requested more infantry support from Maj. Gen. "Terrible" Terry Allen's 104th "Timberwolf" Infantry Division, which was attached to VII Corps and moving to the north.

National Archives

The main Mittelbau camp was surrounded by an electrified barbed-wire fence and watchtowers. A large roll call area, where prisoners were assembled and counted several times a day, was located just west of the main entrance. The SS guard quarters lay farther east, outside the wire, where resistance was scattered, disorganized, and brief. No elements from the German Eleventh Army were encountered. Northeast of the main camp, from which the slaves were marched to work at 0400 and 1600 hours for 12-hour shifts of hard labor every day, camouflaged entrances led to the underground factory manufacturing Hitler's "weapons of retaliation" (Vergeltungswaffen), the 40-foot-high V-2 ballistic missile packing 1,600 pounds of high explosive and the V-1 early-generation cruise missile (known as the flying bomb or "doodlebug"). The capture of Dora and the V-2 assembly plant at Kleinbodungen were major strategic prizes for Allied air technical intelligence officers looking for missile and aircraft materials and personnel. Even as the war in Europe ended, each of the Western Allies and the Soviets were competing for technological advantages in the next, and colder, struggle to come.

At the deepest level of the underground complex ran two enormous shafts, dug 600 feet into a limestone ridge, each more than a mile long, more than 50 feet high, and housing a full assembly line, one for V-1s, the other for V-2s. Dozens of 500-foot-long cross-tunnels linking the main shafts were filled with machine tools and bomb-making material at various stages of production. German engineers had already begun experiments on a secret V-3 antiaircraft missile system. That program and the V-2 assembly plant and storage facilities claimed the most able-bodied of the slaves, mostly Reich political prisoners under the Nebel und Nacht edict, Polish and Soviet prisoners of war, a small number of specially selected Jews, and forced laborers from the conquered countries who dug the tunnels and were then worked to death on the production lines.

Scattered inventory, and especially German scientists, were immediately secured and put under guard. Tons of documents and as many as 100 intact V-2s were crated and shipped back to the United States. Secrecy under the code name Operation Paperclip descended on Dora-Mittelbau with the birth of the American missile and, eventually, space programs, which would be run by some of the murderous Nazi masters of the tunnels. First among the known war criminals was SS Major Werner von Braun, who was a full and willing partner in all the camp's operations and atrocities. The American intelligence officers and government officials knew who their new partners were. Von Braun's deputy, Helmut Gottrup, was captured by the Soviets and became a hero of their space program.

So terrible was the magnitude of what General Boudinot saw that day that he ordered the headquarters company photographers and MPs, as well as the newsmen, to gather evidence. The dead were left where they lay. A brief film called *The Liberation of Nordhausen* and later film compilations showing the camp and shot by the division and corps cameramen are still powerful testimony. Even for veterans of the most gruesome armored combat, men used to violent death and the human wreckage and casual brutality of the battlefield, the conditions they encountered left them shaking with rage, some openly weeping. As they progressed

LEFT: General Maurice Rose, commander of the U.S. 3rd Armored Division, was killed in an act of treachery, and his troops were enraged by the incident. BELOW: American soldiers stare aghast at a large pyre where German guards had placed the bodies of victims of their cruelty at the Nordhausen concentration camp. Apparently, the cremation of the bodies was incomplete when the German guards fled the camp.

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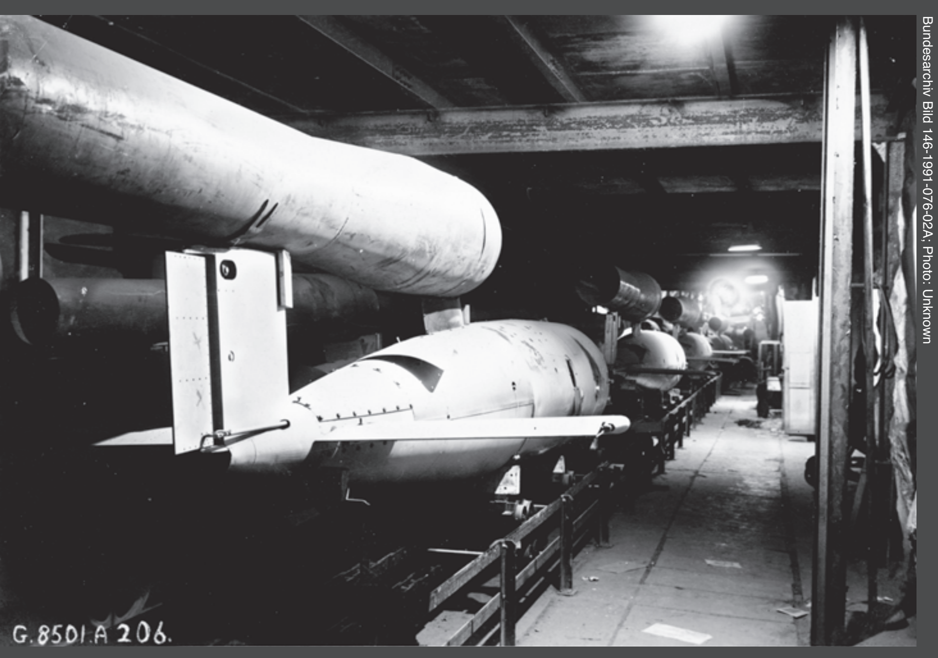
through the place, the troops eventually discovered more than 5,000 bodies in the partially destroyed barracks, lying about or stacked for burning at the crematory located in the north of the main camp. The very few alive lay scattered among the mass of corpses, as described in the division official history: "Emaciated, ragged shapes whose fever-bright eyes waited passively, even in the same beds with their dead and dying comrades, too weak to move. Over all the area clung the terrible odor of decomposition and, like a dirge of forlorn hope, the combined cries of these unfortunates rose and fell in weak undulations. It was a fabric of moans and whimpers, of delirium and outright madness. Here and there a single shape tottered about, walking slowly, like a man dreaming."

To the starving and half-crazed inmates, the arrival of the soldiers and vehicles bearing the white star was a miracle from God. Men barely able to move kissed the filthy boots of the soldiers, murmuring their prayers of thanksgiving in a Babel of languages. One group of hysterically happy liberated souls attempted to hoist Lieutenant Herbert Gontard onto their shoulders. Although he was a slim young man, the weakened laborers could not lift him off the ground. Sergeant Ragene Farris, a medic in the 329th Medical Battalion, saw "rows upon rows of skin-covered skeletons … men lay as they had starved, discolored, and lying in indescribable human filth. Their striped coats and prison numbers hung to their frames as a last token or symbol of those who enslaved and killed them…. I noticed one girl. I would say she was about seventeen years old. She lay where she had fallen, gangrened and naked. I choked up, couldn't quite understand how and why anyone could do these things…. We went downstairs into a filth indescribable, accompanied by a horrible dead-rot stench…. One hunched down French boy was huddled up against a dead comrade, as if to keep warm…. It was like stepping into the Dark Ages to walk into one of these cellar-cells and seek out the living."

Medics removed 250 starvation cases immediately and hastily set up emergency hospitals. Less severe cases of all sorts were treated on site, but for many there was no hope. Major Martin L. Sherman, a doctor in the 3rd Armored's 45th Medical Battalion, estimated that even with immediate assistance no more than half the starvation patients would survive. General Hickey, teeth tightly clenched on his ever-present pipe and accompanied by his corps commander, Maj. Gen. J. Lawton "Lightning Joe" Collins, toured the barracks. Collins was sick to his stomach and ordered Colonel Dell B. Hardin, his G-5 officer (civil affairs and military government) to round up all the male citizens of Nordhausen, the most prominent in the front, and force them into the camp.

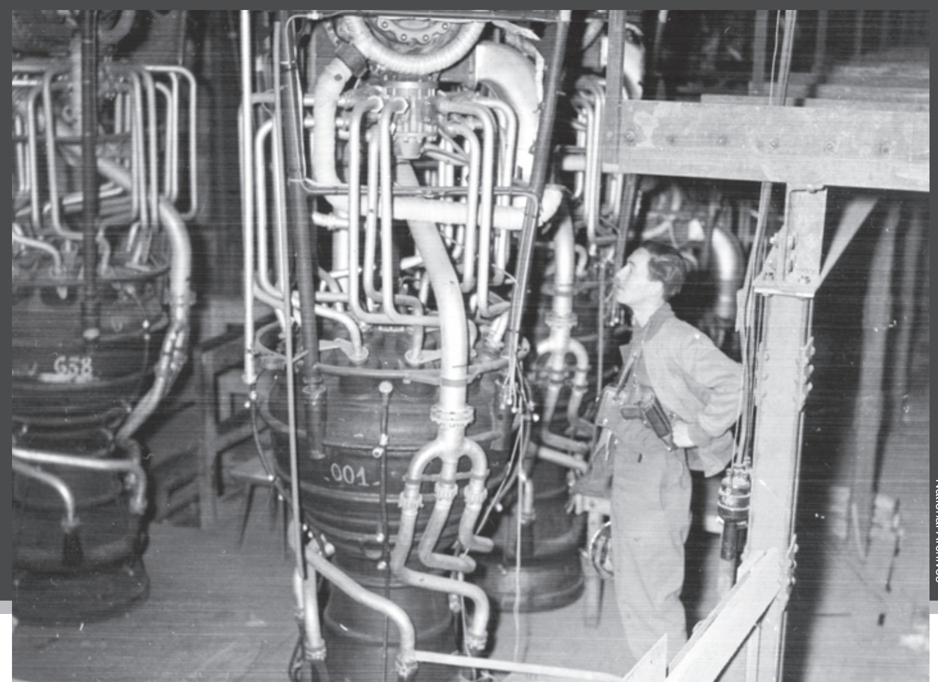
That night Collins wrote to his wife, "We had the Burgomeister [sic] set aside a plot of ground overlooking the town, and these people were required to dig graves and carry every one of the dead up the hill and bury them. The local officials disclaimed any knowledge of the camp, which was, of course, tommyrot. We are going to require them to erect a monument in this cemetery as a memorial to these dead."

Troops who liberated the camp, especially Colonel Lovelady's men who saw the Boelcke Kaserne, were infuriated when the local citizens insisted that they knew nothing of the atrocities. Private Harold Kennedy, one of Terry Allen's foot soldiers, saw the camp a few hours after liberation and could not believe the German civilians. "They always said, 'Well, we didn't know.' And I'd say, 'You could smell it, couldn't you?'" Lou "Louch" Baczewski, a Task Force Lovelady Sherman tank driver, describing decades later what he saw and



Bundesarchiv Bild 146-1991-076-02A; Photo: Unknown

ABOVE: A German V-1 buzz bomb sits on the assembly line near Nordhausen. Many camp inmates worked as slave labor to assemble the flying bombs. BELOW: An American soldier inspects the interior of a German rocket engine after the Nordhausen concentration camp and surrounding area have been liberated and occupied in the last days of World War II. OPPOSITE: A pair of jubilant former prisoners of Nordhausen poses in front of an assembly destined once for the V-2 intercontinental ballistic missile. Many Nordhausen inmates were worked to death by the Nazis.



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smelled at the ruined barracks to his grandson, was overcome several times by the telling, rubbing his forehead, repeating over and over, "It was a bad sight. It was a bad sight. It was something terrible."

Still angry about the murder of General Rose just days before, the 3rd Armored needed no urging to get back into the fight and were in a "savage mood" as they went into the final battles. Several captured German scientists were publicly beaten for benefit of the cameras, and unconfirmed reports circulated that few prisoners were taken in the days immediately following the camp's liberation. After pausing for several hours to refuel, reload, and grab some rest, the VII Corps advance resumed early on April 12, 1945, the 3rd Armored Division Forward HQ entering Sangerhausen, 22 miles to the east, by midday. The Ruhr Pocket battle was eventually renamed the Rose Pocket to honor the fallen 3rd Armored commander. The war—and the killing—went on for another day. But not at KZ Dora-Mittelbau.

At a veterans' reunion to research the biography of Maj. Gen. Maurice Rose, a man came up to the author and introduced himself as Michael Kane, son of Lt. Col. Matthew Kane, commander of Task Force Kane, 32nd Armored Regiment. Hero. Michael's mother had recently told him that his father, a traditional and tough Texas West Pointer who passed away when the boy was 10, had helped liberate the concentration camp at Nordhausen. She was concerned that revisionists were already claiming that the Holocaust had never happened. He was struck by her concern—she had never mentioned it or showed any interest—in truth he thought her conventionally, and passively, anti-Semitic. But now, facing death, she wanted her son to know his father's direct role as a "liberator." Michael was so engaged by the experience that he went to the reunion to prepare for a trip to Germany to commemorate the liberation of Nordhausen and to see the camp for himself. He wanted to tell the story.

On January 27, 1945, the Red Army liberated the death camp of Auschwitz-Birkenau, the last of the six SS extermination camps (Vernichtungslager), all on Polish soil, as well as many other horrible places in Germany. During the final six weeks of the war in Europe, American and British units liberated many of the main concentration camps as well as the network of sub-camps, slave labor, brothels, prison camps, and a dizzying array of other terrible facilities. Popular history has concentrated on a few notorious names, especially the first camps discovered, like Dachau and Buchenwald, but recent scholarship establishes that the Nazi system encompassed more than 40,000 separate installations with a death toll far beyond the latest generally accepted numbers.

Liberation was not limited to places of persecution, and a few days after taking Dora-Mittelbau the 3rd Armored Division freed 450 British POWs at Polleben, some having been captured at such early battles as Dunkirk, Norway, and Crete. The British 11th Armoured "Black Bull" Division liberated KZ Bergen-Belsen, burning that name in the British consciousness along with the image of bulldozers pushing thousands of emaciated corpses into a ditch.

On April 12, 1945, Supreme Allied Commander General Eisenhower and Generals Omar Bradley and George Patton went to KZ Ohrdruf, a sub-camp of Buchenwald and the first to be liberated by Patton's Third Army, to see for themselves. Bradley recalled the moment in his first memoir. "Eisenhower's face whitened into a mask. Patton walked over to a corner and sickened. I was too revolted to speak." They saw the evil they had defeated on the battlefield. As testimony, the surviving work of the U.S. and British cameramen created exactly the images that the generals and newsmen wanted and that mankind still needs to see, especially when Holocaust denial and ignorance is growing in the United States. Even more chilling, in the lands where the crimes happened, some groups celebrate the murderers with parades, statues, and dishonored flags.

The Center of Military History of the United States Army, advised by the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum, has credited 36 U.S. World War II Divisions—24th Infantry, 10th Armored, and 2nd Airborne—as "liberators," and their flags, adorned with campaign streamers, stand in honor at the museum in Washington, D.C.

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

DESPERATE DELAYING ACTION

BY DAVID H. LIPPMAN

THE SHIPS LEFT JUST BEFORE SUNSET on February 26, 1942, passing out of a harbor jammed with wreckage, battered docks, fires, the stench of burning oil, and Dutch women, children, and old men—most of them relatives of the crews heading out—waving their men goodbye and good luck. On the outgoing ships, there were answers back, American sailors cheering, Dutch sailors playing bugles, British and Australian warships hoisting their immense battle White Ensigns fore and aft, the heavy cruiser HMS *Exeter*'s loudspeaker system blaring a familiar song: "A-Hunting We Will Go."

A combined force of American, Australian, British, and Dutch warships was heading out to sea from Surabaya Harbor in the Dutch East Indies to stop a massive Japanese force from invading the capital island of the 300-year-old Dutch possession. On this motley collection of warships stood all hope of stopping the Japanese advance.

Since the outbreak of war in the Pacific, Japan's forces had proved virtually invincible. From Hawaii to Singapore, the emperor's men had crushed all their opponents, conquering Hong Kong, Malaya, Wake Island, Guam, and most of the Philippines. Now, like a giant octopus, their tentacles were spreading to surround Java, the administrative headquarters of the Dutch East Indies, their primary target in the invasion of Southeast Asia. Two prongs of Japanese warships, transports loaded with seasoned soldiers and powerful aircraft, were headed for Java's opposing ends.

As Japan's swords swung down on Java, the Allies had created their first joint command, called ABDA, for the American, British, Dutch, and Australian forces involved. This attempt at a unified command turned out to be a disaster from the start because of its improvised nature, the lack of Allied forces, and the onrushing Japanese. British Field Marshal Sir Archibald Wavell, commanding ABDA from Java, could only helplessly watch Japanese troops storm into Singapore, Sumatra, the Celebes, Borneo, and Timor before admitting that the idea was a failure. He fled to Ceylon, leaving Dutch Admiral C.E.L. Helfrich in charge of a dwindling and poorly equipped band of British, Dutch, American, and Australian troops, airmen, and sailors.

There were good reasons for that. The Dutch troops in the Indies were among their best, the King's Netherlands Indies Legion, a veteran force that had policed the colony for centuries, battling native uprisings. And while the Dutch airmen flew poor aircraft like Brewster F2A Buffalo fighters that were easy meat for Japan's nimble Mitsubishi Zero fighters, their long-service sailors manned modern destroyers, highly effective submarines with torpedoes that worked (unlike their American counterparts), and two tough light cruisers, the East Indies fleet flagship *De Ruyter* and her older sister *Java*.

Equipped with two seaplanes, depth charge launchers, torpedoes, and the sophisticated Hazemeyer fire control system for her seven 5.9-inch guns and her 10 40mm antiaircraft guns, *De Ruyter* was built specifically for East Indies service.

Now *De Ruyter*'s hour had come. She would not be the only defense of Java. The surviving ships of Britain's Far Eastern Fleet, Australian warships, and the U.S. Asiatic Fleet had been

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Allied warships were roughly handled during the Battle of the Java Sea as they defended the East Indies.

Artist John Hamilton depicts the unfolding night debacle during the Battle of the Java Sea. The Dutch light cruiser *De Ruyter* burns furiously while the cruiser HMAS *Perth* turns to avoid a collision amid the confusion as the Imperial Japanese Navy demonstrated its prowess in nocturnal warfare.

ordered under Dutch command into "ABDA Float," which created additional punch. Among the ships was the heavy cruiser USS *Houston,* the Asiatic Fleet's longtime flagship, distinctive by her tall foremast, and HMS *Exeter,* which had run the German pocket battleship *Graf Spee* into Montevideo in 1939. The British provided the light cruisers *Danae, Dragon,* and *Durban,* Australia the more modern light cruisers *Hobart* and *Perth,* and the Americans the old light cruiser *Marblehead* and new *Boise.* The British, Americans, and Dutch also offered a collection of destroyers.

But there were still numerous weaknesses. The British and Dutch destroyers were fairly modern ships. The three elderly British light cruisers were withdrawn. USS *Boise* ran aground on an uncharted reef, tore up her keel, and had to be sent home, taking her radar with her. *Marblehead* endured numerous bomb hits and had to depart as well. When the Japanese attacked *Houston* with medium bombers, the American cruiser's crewmen discovered that most of her antiaircraft shells were duds. Before *Boise* headed for stateside yards, she handed over all her AA ammunition to *Houston.*

The heavy cruiser badly needed it—she had seen endless action in the weeks since Pearl Harbor. Worse, a Japanese bomb had slammed through her quarterdeck and exploded in the base of her aft 8-inch turret. Quick work by a veteran crew prevented a fire that would have sunk the ship, but the three aft 8-inch guns were put out of action, and Java lacked any facilities to repair them.

To make matters worse for the four navies concerned, they had no common ammunition, language, communications, or procedures. While the British and Australians shared the same procedures, and the Americans, Australians, and British the same language, there were still great differences. Rear Admiral Karel Doorman, who commanded the surface naval forces of ABDA, had to use simple flag or radio signals to communicate with his ships' captains. Doorman could signal by blinker light in plain English, but in battle, with smoke and confusion, that was dangerous. He would then relay his orders by high-frequency radio to *Houston*, where a Dutch liaison officer would translate them to *Houston*'s skipper, Captain Albert Rooks. He in turn could relay them by American "Talk-Between Ships" short-range radio to other American vessels, but that did not help the British or Australians, whose flag signals were different from those of the Dutch and the Americans. An American officer called the communications situation "farcical."

Lieutenant Harold Hamlin of *Houston* put it bluntly: "Everyone knows you cannot assemble 11 football players who have never seen each other before and go out and beat Notre Dame. Two hours after it assembled, it was out on patrol."

But that was all the Allies had, and they defied Japanese strength and odds. In January, four ancient American four-stack destroyers swooped in on a collection of Japanese transports anchored off Balikpapan and sank three of them, a morale-boosting victory. American and Dutch submarines knocked off the occasional freighter, and Admiral Doorman himself led a night strike in Badung Strait on Japanese shipping on February 19.

Doorman, 53, a Utrecht native, had been a naval officer since 1910 and a pilot since 1915; he was one of the Dutch Navy's first flying instructors. In 1938, he headed the Dutch Navy's air arm. In 1940, he was promoted to rear admiral and assigned to command the fleet forces in the East Indies. An experienced deck sailor, he had a logical and sound approach to problems and understood the value and impact of airpower in the modern age.

He led his ships to Badung Strait in three packets, relying on darkness to cover his advance, attack, and retreat. Chaos reigned from the start. A Dutch destroyer ran aground. The three packets could not communicate with each other. Allies and Japanese hurled broadsides and torpedoes back and forth, but the only result was the damaging of a Japanese destroyer, the same to the American destroyer *Stewart,* and the sinking of the Dutch destroyer *Piet Hein*. Doorman took his ships home to Java's main naval base, Tjilatjap, and *Stewart*

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ABOVE: The Japanese heavy cruiser *Haguro* steams at high speed. *Haguro* was one of the cruisers engaged at the Battle of the Java Sea guarding transports and firing its heavy guns and torpedoes. BELOW: The Japanese heavy cruiser *Nachi* was heavily engaged at the Battle of the Java Sea as the Imperial Japanese Navy inflicted a stinging defeat on ABDA naval forces. RIGHT: The Australian cruiser HMAS *Perth* was a survivor of the disaster at the Battle of the Java Sea but was lost in action at the Battle of Sunda Strait a month later.

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was placed in a 15,000-ton floating drydock where she promptly rolled over on her port side, taking the destroyer and the drydock out of the game. The Japanese captured *Stewart* after conquering Java and use her for the rest of the war as a patrol ship.

The remaining vessels prepared for the next round, but it was difficult. American destroyers' numbers were being whittled down: *Stewart* was gone, *Whipple* was out of action from a collision, *Pillsbury* and *Parrott* were out of

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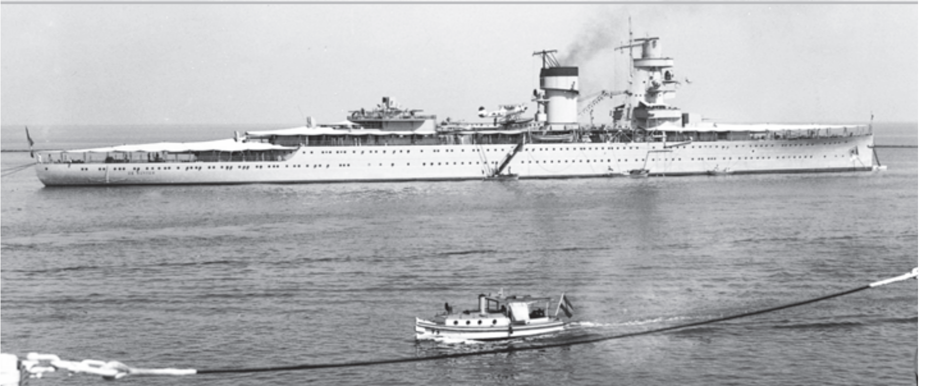
ABOVE: The cruiser USS *Houston* sustained damage at the Battle of the Java Sea but was later sunk at Sunda Strait. BELOW: The Dutch cruiser *De Ruyter* was a casualty of the Battle of the Java Sea, sunk by enemy gunfire and effective Long Lance torpedoes. LEFT: Dutch Admiral Karel Doorman, photographed in 1930, was killed in action while commanding ABDA naval forces at the Battle of the Java Sea.



torpedoes and needed overhaul, and *Pope* had developed feed-water leaks—she was losing more water from her condensers than they could take in. The Americans could only marshal four destroyers, all "flush-deckers" from the 1920s: *Ford, Edwards, Alden,* and *Paul Jones*. They lacked an elevated forecastle, so they could not fire their forward 4-inch gun in rough seas or at top speed. On *Houston,* engineers shoved the wrecked after 8-inch turret into normal position and slapped a steel roof over it, hoping to fool the Japanese into believing it was operational.

Meanwhile, the Japanese forces descended on Java. From the west came 56 transports and freighters guarded by four heavy cruisers, two light cruisers, and a light aircraft carrier. From the east came 41 transports covered by two heavy cruisers, one light cruiser, and seven destroyers, under Rear Admiral Takeo Takagi, a fairly routine officer by Japanese standards.

Behind this power, as deep cover, was even more power: the mighty carriers that had shattered the American battle line at Pearl Harbor, a battleship, and nine more heavy cruisers.

Takagi's force got down to business on February 26, forming a two-column convoy with ships a mile apart, the convoy 20 miles long. The merchant ships were handled poorly by ill-trained civilian crews, and Japanese destroyers struggled to keep order.

Among the tin cans shepherding these vessels was the *Amatsukaze,* under Commander Tameichi Hara, who was annoyed at the merchant vessels' lack of discipline. They emitted huge clouds of black smoke, ignored blackout regulations, and defied rules on radio silence.

"The weather was beautiful; sparkling sun by day, and bright moonlight silvered the sea every night. Even at night, trained eyes could span the length of the entire force. Five Allied submarines had been observed by our reconnaissance planes, but none menaced our ships. To this day, I do not understand why enemy submarines failed to come out," Hara wrote later.

Actually, there was a good reason. The American submarines' torpedoes stubbornly refused to work, so the sub skippers were reduced to reporting on the Japanese movements, which were confirmed by British codebreaking teams operating in Ceylon and London.

With this information in hand, Doorman could prepare. He recalled *Exeter, Perth,* and three destroyers from Tandjong Priok in western Java to Surabaya, and crewmen on *Pope,* watching the Anglo-Australian ships steam in, their White Ensigns flying, let out hearty cheers.

When *Exeter* tied up and shifted colors, her skipper, Captain Oliver Gordon, was summoned with his *Perth* counterpart, Captain Hector "Hec" Waller, to meet with Doorman and the other senior officers at Dutch naval headquarters, the requisitioned Netherlands Indies Electricity company building. All hands showed up in proper uniform, befitting long-service officers.

Doorman shook hands with every ship captain. He gave the briefing in English, but there was not much to say. He intended to leave harbor and attack the enemy convoy southwest of the Celebes. With *Houston*'s after gun turret knocked out, she would not be the last ship in line. With the Dutch destroyer *Kortenaer* suffering leaking boilers, the whole fleet's top speed would be 25 knots.

On the evening of the 26th, Doorman's Combined Striking Force sailed from Surabaya, battle flags streaming. Chaos reigned again as *De Ruyter* collided with a tug and water barge in the harbor, sinking both, but doing no damage to the flagship. They found no enemy forces, and by noon the destroyers were short of fuel. He headed back to Surabaya to refuel, dodging Japanese bomber aircraft on the way home. *Houston*'s new AA gun load helped fend off the Japanese.

When Doorman reached port, there were messages from Helfrich ordering him back to sea as soon as fueling could be completed. The Japanese were definitely on their way.

Doorman signaled back: "This day the personnel reached the limit of endurance. Tomorrow the limit will be exceeded." But at 2:27 PM on February 27, the Combined Striking Force headed for sea once again, following a contact report that put the Japanese convoy just 90 miles to the north. Doorman signaled his ships in a plain English semaphore: "Am proceeding to intercept enemy unit, follow me, details later."

The Striking Force formed up into two columns—one led by Doorman on *De Ruyter,* with *Exeter, Houston, Perth,* and *Java* trailing. The British destroyers steamed ahead of *De Ruyter* as a screening force, while the American and Dutch destroyers were a separate column on the cruisers' rear and port quarter, held back by their older engines and kept back because of their weak armor, which made them susceptible to enemy fire. The American four-pipe destroyers coughed up black smoke.

On the other side, Japanese reconnaissance planes were hard at work searching for Doorman's force. Takagi had issues of his own. His combat group consisted of heavy cruisers *Nachi* and *Haguro,* the light cruiser *Jintsu,* and eight destroyers, including Hara's *Amatsukaze*. The two forces were evenly matched, but Takagi had the burden of escorting 41 transports and freighters.

Takagi followed Doorman's movements closely, mystified by his slow advance (12 knots) and odd courses.

There was reason for that. As the afternoon wore on and the Allies lost touch with the Japanese, Doorman was concerned that his battered ships and exhausted men might simply get ambushed. He decided to head back yet again for Surabaya and refuel and take on more ammunition.

At 3 PM, Doorman stood on his flagship's bridge, heading into Surabaya's outer harbor. At that moment, he received a signal from Helfrich. The Japanese Eastern Force had been sighted north of Surabaya near Bawean Island. Helfrich was ordering Doorman to attack immediately.

Despite his fatigue and that of everyone else in the fleet Doorman followed orders, signaling, "Follow me. The enemy is 90 miles away." The ships turned back into the preset formation and shuffled north without refueling.

As Doorman's ships headed north, the Japanese had their eye on them. One of *Nachi*'s scout planes reported to Takagi: "The enemy fleet has turned around again. The double column formation is now shifting to single column. The enemy is gaining speed and is headed on a course of 20 degrees." A signal 10 minutes later confirmed the Allied speed: 22 knots.

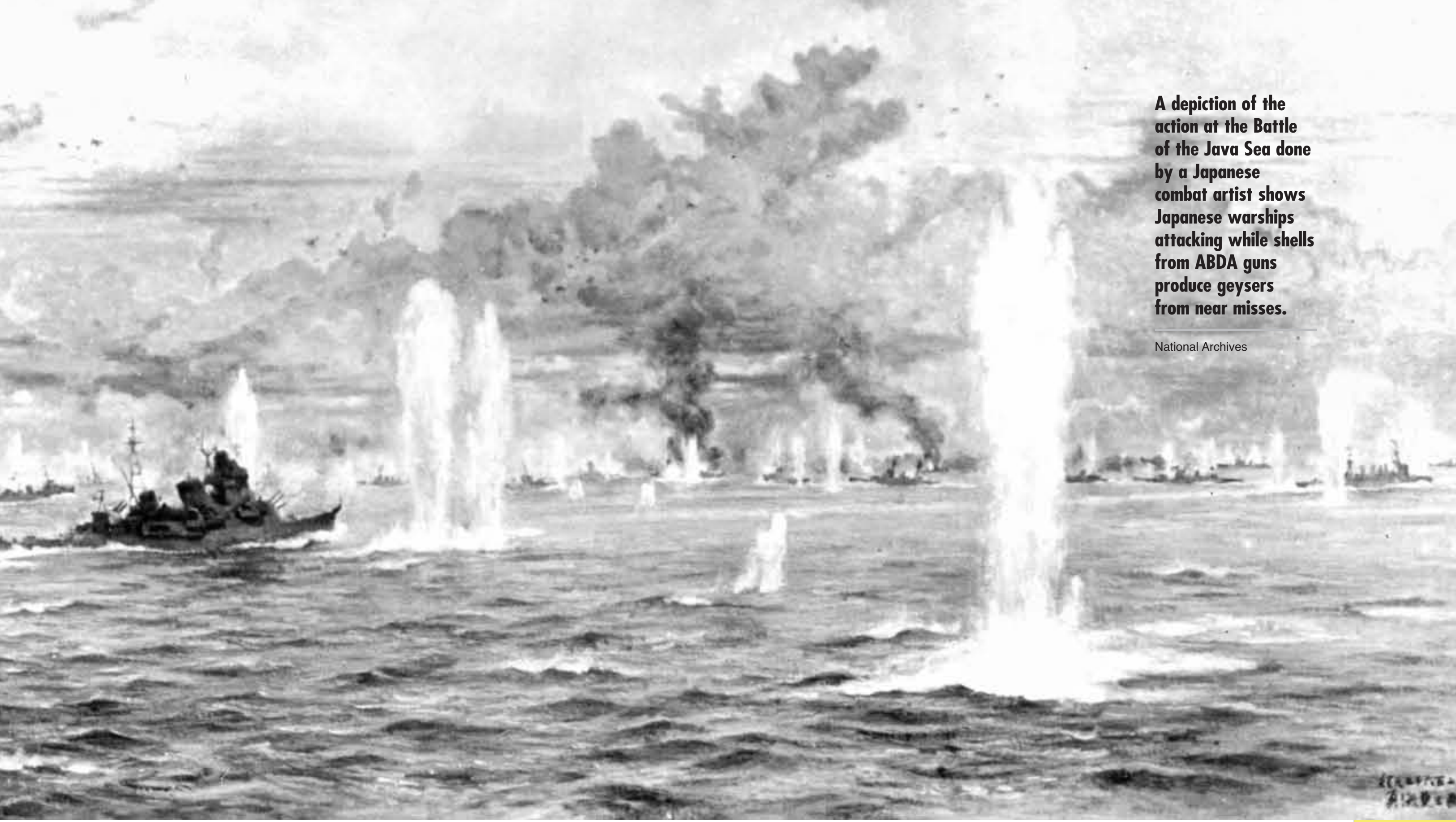
Takagi reacted immediately. He shot off his cruisers' remaining observation planes, ordered his minesweepers and patrol craft to herd the transports into order and away from the Allied fleet, and formed battle line: Rear Admiral Raizo Tanaka's light cruiser *Jintsu* heading the eight destroyers, behind that another flotilla headed by the light cruiser *Naka* with six more destroyers under Rear Admiral Shoji Nishimura, *Nachi* and *Haguro* behind them.

Next, the human preparations: sailors put on working uniforms and helmets, officers white dress uniforms; many men went to their ship's shrines for a quick prayer and to don hachimaki headbands, and finally, immense Rising Sun battle ensigns were broken from every masthead.

At 3:30 PM, the visibility was perfect, the sea was calm, and the two forces pounded toward each other, heading into the biggest surface action since the Battle of Jutland in 1916.

At first the officers on *Exeter* thought they had spotted the invasion convoy and not its screen, but then *Electra* reported at 4:12 PM: "One cruiser, unknown number large destroyers bearing 330 degrees, speed 18, course 220 degrees." *Electra* had spotted *Jintsu* and *Amatsukaze.*

On *Amatsukaze,* Warrant Officer Shigeru Iwata, one of Hara's top lookouts, yelled "Enemy ship!" and everyone trained their binoculars to the south. Hara recognized the lead cruiser from his recognition books as *De*



A depiction of the action at the Battle of the Java Sea done by a Japanese combat artist shows Japanese warships attacking while shells from ABDA guns produce geysers from near misses.

National Archives

CAPTAIN WALLER TOLD AN OFFICER ON THE BRIDGE THAT WAITING FOR HIS MOMENT TO OPEN FIRE IN A SURFACE ENGAGEMENT WAS MORE TERRIFYING THAN ENDURING THE LUFTWAFFE'S BOMBING IN THE MEDITERRANEAN.

Ruyter, and Iwata confirmed it: "*De Ruyter* is 28,000 meters [20 miles]. Closing rapidly."

Hara yelled, "Gunners and torpedomen, get ready. Our target is the lead cruiser in the enemy column!" Hara realized he was heading into his first major sea battle.

At 4:14 *Electra* reported: "Two battleships, one cruiser, six destroyers." Before the various officers had time to react, *Electra* amended the report: "Two heavy cruisers."

Heavy cruisers they were. At that moment, *Nachi* and *Haguro* entered gun range, and at 4:16 PM both cruisers opened a full broadside with a combined 20 8-inch guns at a range of 28,000 yards. The Allied ships answered back, with *Houston*'s after turret silenced by damage and *Exeter*'s simply unable to train on the Japanese, who were trying to cross Doorman's "T," the oldest naval maneuver to gain tactical supremacy since the invention of gunpowder.

Now the problems of communication came in. In the Royal Navy, ships did not open fire until the senior officer gave the word, and Doorman had not done so yet. On *Exeter,* Gordon puzzled over what to do. "Had we been in company with a British Senior Officer, I could and probably would, have hoisted a very brief flag signal—if I had received no order—asking permission to open fire but in this case I knew the limitations of inter-ship communication."

The first Japanese 8-inch shells fell short at 30,000 yards. The Japanese gunners were too excited. This was their first surface action.

Doorman ordered course 20 degrees left to parallel the Japanese ships, putting the three leading British destroyers on the cruisers' starboard bow. The Japanese hurled shells at *Electra,* and Doorman ordered the destroyers to head to the Allied column's port side to await their moment with their torpedoes. He also sent a radio message to Surabaya for air support, but the few bombers the Dutch and Americans had on Java headed straight for the transports.

Now Doorman gave the order, and the two Allied heavy cruisers opened fire. *Houston*'s shells had a crimson dye to assist spotting, and the blood-red geysers of her first short shots frightened some Japanese officers on *Nachi*. The concussion of *Houston*'s guns opening fire hurled Winslow against a bulkhead and ripped his "soup-bowl" steel helmet from his head. Winslow, shaking with excitement, recovered his tin hat and realized that his tension of waiting for battle had ended.

On the Japanese side, *Jintsu* led her column directly toward *Electra*. At 18,000 yards, her group opened fire and straddled the British destroyer. *Electra* and *Jupiter* opened up at 16,000 yards and straddled the Japanese.

The last ship to open fire was *Perth,* at the tail of the Allied line, equipped with 6-inch guns. Captain Waller told an officer on the bridge that waiting for his moment to open fire in a surface engagement was more terrifying than enduring the Luftwaffe's bombing in the Mediterranean.

After eight minutes, Doorman changed course at 4:29 PM to 248 degrees, so that both columns were parallel and the Allied light cruisers could open fire. All of the ships were being straddled. Nobody was scoring any hits yet.

At 4:31, the Japanese scored a hit; an 8-inch shell slammed into *De Ruyter*'s armored deck and down into her auxiliary engine room where it failed to explode. Four minutes later, Door-

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man closed the range on a course of 267 degrees, at which point Nishimura, aboard the light cruiser *Naka,* ordered his seven destroyers forward to unleash 43 "Long Lance" torpedoes at the enemy. The rest of the fleet joined in as well, except *Nachi,* whose crew had left the stop valve on their compressed oxygen system open too long by accident.

Houston had a reputation as one of the U.S. Navy's best gunnery ships, but her rangefinders were outdated by World War II's rapidly advancing standards. She lacked radar and remote-control servo motors to enable crews to train and elevate guns without using sweat and muscle. Ranges were triangulated visually. In the overheated gun houses in the dim red light, 70 gunners cranked wheels to train guns, open breeches, and stuff shells and powder bags.

On the fifth salvo, a fuse box was jarred loose from the Turret One bulkhead, disabling the electro-hydraulic ramming mechanism. The crew now had to load and ram the breech by hand, an almost impossible task in peacetime. But they accomplished it in wartime, almost keeping pace with Turret Two, for 65 salvos until repairs were accomplished.

Up above, Lieutenant Winslow watched the shellfire and saw the dull red glow of exploding shells. Convinced *Houston* had beaten up the enemy, he yelled down a voice-tube into the turrets, "We've just kicked hell out of a 10-gun Jap cruiser." The men cheered back. One of the enemy cruisers seemed to withdraw.

But then, a frayed electrical lead in the forward main gun director, abetted by the whipping back and forth of the towering foremast housing, caused problems with gunnery deflection adjustments. *Houston*'s rangefinders and gunners no longer knew where their shells would land. While this went on, a Japanese shell hit *Houston*'s main deck aft of the anchor windlass, zoomed through the second deck, and out the starboard side above the waterline without exploding. Another hit ruptured an oil tank on *Houston*'s port side after, but it failed to explode. The Americans wondered if the Japanese suffered from dud shells, too.

"Salvo after salvo exploded into the sea around us," Lieutenant Winslow wrote. "I was mesmerized by the savage flashes of enemy guns, and the sigh of their deadly shells flying toward us like giant blackbirds."

Meanwhile, *Exeter* took 12 salvos to get a straddle. Then Gordon saw the orange flash of a shell bursting on a cruiser's superstructure. He yelled, "That's a hit!" It sure looked like one to everyone, but it wasn't … the Japanese cruisers suffered no damage in the action. The destroyer *Asagumo* did—an Allied shell hit her, killing five and wounding 19, disabling her engine.

Exeter, on the other hand, did take hits. At 5:07 PM, a shell passed through the S2 4-inch gun shield and killed the four members of the gun crew. The shell kept going and entered the No. 1 boiler room ventilator and exploded in the boiler room, killing all 10 of its crewmen. Steam vented through the waste pipe, and *Exeter* began losing speed. It felt like "a mighty can-opener being driven into the ship."

Six of *Exeter*'s eight boilers were put out of action. Electrical power failed, and the cruiser's speed fell to 11 knots. Damage control parties moved in, but the great heat from the explosion and superheated steam made it impossible to enter the boiler room until the next day.

Gordon realized his ship could not hold its place in line at 11 knots, and he altered course to port to get out of the battle line and avoid collision. Unfortunately, the shellfire and concussion had knocked out *Houston*'s TBS radio and damaged her signal lights. Heavy smoke obscured her alphabet flags and halyards, as well as the Aldis lamps used for signaling. Commander Henry E. Eccles, skipper of the

ABOVE: In defense of the damaged cruiser HMS *Exeter*, the British destroyers *Encounter, Jupiter,* and *Electra* dash toward the enemy amid a smokescreen at the Battle of the Java Sea. Painting by John Hamilton. BELOW: The Dutch destroyer *Kortenaer* was among the ABDA ships sunk in a hail of Japanese shells and torpedoes during the night Battle of the Java Sea in February 1942.

destroyer *Edwards,* wrote, "From then on, all communication was by flashing lights obscured by gun smoke, smoke screens, and hampered by rapid movements."

Not knowing what was going on, thinking he had missed an order from Doorman, Rooks followed *Exeter* in column, turning to port. As *Houston* turned, the ship had to check fire. On *Perth,* Waller, seeing the two cruisers ahead of him maneuver and *Exeter* blow off steam, headed in a counterclockwise loop to the north to cover the heavy cruisers' retreat with a 30-foot wall of smoke that gave them a reprieve, while *Java* followed *Houston*.

Doorman, sailing off without a column behind him, heeled *De Ruyter* over to port and closed *Exeter,* signaling, "What is your damage?"

Gordon flagged back: "Hit in one boiler room. Maximum speed 15 knots." Doorman ordered *Exeter* to head for Surabaya and reformed the other cruisers on a northeasterly course.

Before anyone had much time to react, smoke, squalls, and fog came down on the action. Doorman retired at 5:20, trying to regroup. Nobody on the Allied side seemed to know what was going on. Eccles wrote later, "The crystal ball was our only method of anticipating the intention of Commander Combined Striking Force."

Tanaka, however, took advantage of the squalls and Allied confusion, ordering eight destroyers to "to close and charge the enemy" behind his cruiser *Jintsu* to hurl torpedoes and shells at the nearest Allied ships, the American destroyers.

The Allied ships opened fire at 7,000 meters, and in seconds everybody was covered in smoke—American smoke screens on their side, missed Allied shells on the Japanese side. The Japanese closed to 6,000 meters, then 5,000 meters, and a tense Hara gripped the rail of his bridge, sweat streaming down his face, his knees trembling.

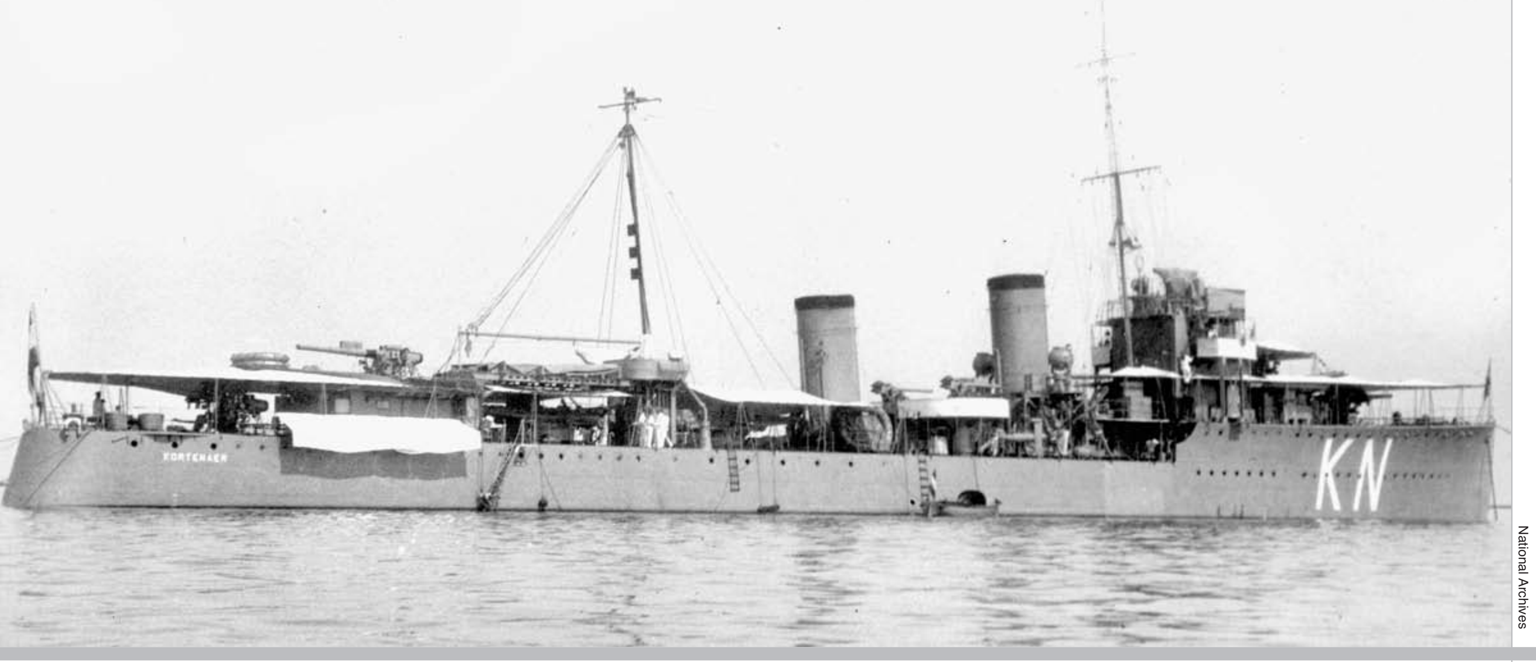
At 5:27, Tanaka ordered his ships to open fire. Hara yelled "Fire torpedoes!" As the Long Lances swished through the water, the Allied ships turned to the west.

The Japanese torpedo salvo finally closed its targets, and at least one smacked home, blasting the Dutch destroyer *Kortenaer.* The 1928-built destroyer jackknifed in two and sank almost immediately, scattering survivors—including her skipper—across the water. It was the first time the Allies had met up with the Japanese Long Lance torpedo in a surface action, and all hands were stunned.

On *Houston,* Ensign Smith watched *Kortenaer*'s two split sections slide into the water, looking like the twin towers of a cathedral. "There was only 15 or 20 feet separating her bow from the stern," he said later. Another seaman next to Winslow yelled, "Jesus Christ, look at that!" Winslow saw a tremendous geyser of water rising 100 feet into the air.

Lieutenant Commander A. Kroese, commanding *Kortenaer,* reported later, "On the stern the doctor was sitting, dressed in a khaki suit, life belt and steel helmet. As a result of the explosion, the smoke apparatus had begun to work and heavy white clouds were rising from the ship. The doctor sat in the midst of it all like some kind of fire-god.

"After a short time the stern turned over on its side, and those who were still clinging to it jumped hastily into the sea. Soon half of the *Kortenaer* sank from sight, but the bows of the ship floated for a long time sticking straight up in the air.



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"After the ship had gone down, a number of rafts, sufficient to support all the survivors, began to float up. The Commander gave orders to tie the rafts together so that we would form a group easily visible to a rescuer…. Our situation was far from comfortable, for much of the surface of the water was covered with a heavy film of black fuel oil from the ship's bunkers."

With *Kortenaer* sunk and *Exeter* severely damaged, Doorman's battle plan and fleet were in serious trouble, even though the Japanese had scored only one hit out of 64 torpedoes launched. Doorman turned his flagship to join his other ships and regroup. Everybody on the Allied ships wondered how they could have been torpedoed at such an incredible distance from the Japanese warships. Not knowing about the Long Lance, the Allied skippers presumed there were Japanese submarines in the neighborhood.

On the other side, Nishimura's 4th Destroyer Flotilla maneuvered to port to link back up with Tanaka's ships for another attack. Doorman responded by ordering his ships to follow him southeast and then northeast, spewing smoke to cover his moves, to put his main force between the enemy and the battered *Exeter,* giving that cruiser a chance to escape. As the Japanese regrouped, Doorman realized he had to strike first, sending in his three British destroyers, *Electra, Encounter,* and *Jupiter,* to make independent attacks. After doing so, they would join the Dutch destroyer *Witte de With* and escort *Exeter* to Surabaya.

On *Electra,* Commander C.W. May told his men on the main loudspeaker at 5:25, "The Japanese are mounting a strong torpedo attack against the *Exeter.* So we are going through the smoke to counterattack." While this went on, *Exeter*'s crew restored power to the guns and steam to 15 knots. With that, her guns opened fire on *Jintsu,* which made smoke and maneuvered away from *Exeter*'s 8-inch shells.

Electra, ahead of her sisters, sprinted forward to the northwest, into the smoke, and emerged through the murk and gloom to find the pagoda-like superstructure and bulbous funnel tops of *Jintsu* leading six destroyers toward her. Gunner Cain felt naked to the enemy.

The Japanese opened up with dozens of shells, most of which were near misses that rocked the destroyer. *Electra* returned the fire, gun crews doing so with veteran experience. But a *Jintsu* shell hit below the bridge, followed by more that broke the after boiler room mains, and *Electra* slowed to a halt. A Japanese destroyer blazed away at the immobile British ship, but *Electra* fired torpedoes back—to no avail. All of them missed.

Jintsu poured more shells into *Electra,* and Gunner Cain fired his turret under local control. Soon the guns were out: A Turret knocked out … B Turret evacuated when a fire started beneath it … the searchlight platforms demolished … a fire started aft that blocked ammunition supply to the X and Y Turrets … the ship's whaler and motor boat smashed. Commander May ordered "Abandon ship."

Electra's self-sacrifice saved *Exeter* and scored a single hit on *Jintsu* that killed one man and injured four, and also bought time for *Encounter* and *Jupiter* to pop through the smoke and hurl torpedoes at the Japanese. *Encounter*'s skipper, Lt. Cmdr. Morgan, saw the hordes of Japanese ships and heeled his destroyer hard over after launching torpedoes, followed by *Jupiter* and *Witte de With*. The three tin cans formed up around *Exeter* to escort the battered cruiser out of harm's way. On the way, *Witte de With* was damaged when one of her depth charges broke loose in the maneuvering, fell overboard, exploded abaft, and shook the ship like a hammer blow.

Up on *De Ruyter*'s flag bridge, Doorman faced more impending disaster. As *Exeter* steamed off, she took six 8-inch guns, half of Doorman's such armament. With *Electra* and *Kortenaer* sunk, Doorman was down to six destroyers.

Doorman reformed his line to find himself on the Japanese side of the smoke screen, parallel to the heavy cruisers *Nachi* and *Haguro*. The Japanese cruisers closed the range and opened fire, aiming at *Houston*.

Now it was the American ship's turn to be in trouble, as she was running short on ammunition. *Houston* had sortied without time to rebunker her magazines, and now had fired off 303 rounds per turret, leaving only 50 rounds per gun. Most importantly, the remaining shells were in the aft magazine for the useless No. 3 Turret. Chief Petty Officer Otto Schwarz and his shipmates hauled greasy shells out of storage racks abaft and hand carried the 260-pound projectiles in slings through the narrow passageways and up ladders, across decks, and into the two forward handling rooms. In addition, the life of an 8-inch gun of the time was about 30 rounds. That level had been exceeded, and the liners of the gun barrels had crept out of the guns an inch or more. The gun casings were so hot it would be hours before they could be touched.

Doorman would not give up. Neither would the Japanese. The Japanese ordered their transports to turn south and head for Java's beaches while the combatant ships polished off the Allied Striking Force.

At 6 PM *De Ruyter*'s after port lookouts spotted *Jintsu*. The Dutch cruiser opened fire, but the gathering dusk and smoke obscured the Japanese. The Japanese closed to 4,400 yards of the Allied ships and launched torpedoes. The Japanese ships heeled over to avoid the shells that their officers knew would be returned. Doorman, realizing the danger, ordered his ships to turn south, and the torpedoes shot harmlessly past his ships.

At 6:21, the sun set on the battle, but the fighting went on through twilight. In the dark,

BELOW: The 5-inch antiaircraft gun crews of the cruiser USS *Houston* dash to their posts during a firing exercise. The *Houston* was reported sunk several times before the ship was actually lost at Sunda Strait. OPPOSITE: Splashes from Japanese shells bracket the Dutch cruiser *Java* during the Battle of the Java Sea. The ship fell victim to enemy torpedoes and sank during the February 1942 fight.

Navy History & Heritage Command

Allied communications worsened—signal lights were broken from shellfire damage, and flags were useless. At 6:06, *De Ruyter* signaled *Edwards* with her signal lamps to "Counterattack." Moments after *Edwards* acknowledged the order, *De Ruyter* flashed "Cancel counterattack," followed by "Make smoke."

Commander Binford of *Edwards* was baffled. As leader of the American destroyers, he had taken them on the requested counterattack course. Then came a last signal: "Cover my retirement." Binford was even more puzzled. Did that mean make smoke? Steam protectively across *Java*'s stern as it turned away? Binford decided that the only way to cover a cruiser column's retirement was with the greatest U.S. Navy tradition: attack, even though his ships were 32 years old.

Binford's tin cans charged toward two ships visible in the dusk to the northwest—the cruisers *Nachi* and *Haguro,* which were guarding the invading transports. On the U.S. destroyer *Alden*'s bridge, a sailor said, "I always knew these old four-pipers would have to go in and save the day."

Up on *Nachi*'s bridge, Takagi saw the American destroyers advance. He could also see Surabaya's lighthouse in the distance, its glass windows reflecting in the sunset.

Binford ordered his destroyers by flag signal to make a torpedo attack. The tin cans raced through the smoke, nearly colliding. They sprinted through and cracked on top speed, set up for broadside torpedo attack on the Japanese cruisers to starboard, and Binford ordered the fusillade of fish. Then Binford's destroyers changed course 180 degrees, maintaining full speed to fire their port tubes at the Japanese.

Incredibly, all the American torpedoes missed. The Japanese changed course to "comb" the American torpedo tracks and avoided damage.

Binford ordered his ships to full speed to clear the area, steaming off at 32 knots into the darkness toward Doorman. As the destroyers closed with Doorman, Binford saw a new signal from the Dutch admiral: "Follow me." Binford was happy to comply but wondered what was going on now.

The American torpedo attack had accomplished little materially but put a little fear into Takagi. The American counterthrust had not damaged any of his ships but showed that they were still fighting and could inflict more damage. They were not routed.

Takagi tried to figure out what Doorman would do next: he might break off and head for Surabaya for fuel and ammunition or head around to the north and attack the transports.

Australian War Memorial

ON HOUSTON, WINSLOW AND HIS SHIPMATES SAW THE FLARES BURST OVER THEIR HEADS WITH AN EERIE, GREENISH LIGHT. "HELPLESS AS PINIONED DUCKS IN A SHOOTING GALLERY, WE STOOD BY, FEARFUL THAT THE ENEMY WAS CLOSING IN FOR THE KILL," HE WROTE LATER.

Worrying about the latter possibility, Takagi broke off the action and turned away to guard his transports.

Doorman saw *Nachi* and *Haguro* turn back and at 6:30 radioed Helfrich at Lembang: "Enemy retreating west. Where is convoy?" Helfrich radioed that he had no current information.

Across the water, the Japanese were confused, too. *Amatsukaze*'s skipper, Tameichi Hara, wrote, "Almost every man in Tanaka's Destroyer Squadron 2 was disgruntled at the order to break off action. Our ships had not expended as much ammunition as the others and I also felt that we had forfeited a chance of giving hot pursuit and finishing off the enemy."

Even so, Takagi took advantage of the break to recover his five seaplanes—a difficult task in peacetime, let alone wartime—which left them nearly immobile when Doorman's force reappeared.

At first, Takagi and his crews thought the approaching ships were the Japanese battleships *Haruna* and *Kirishima* of Battleship Division 3, which had been in the Indian Ocean only two days before. It was unlikely such ships, no matter how powerful their engines, could have reached the Java Sea in such time.

On *Nachi*'s bridge, an officer asked that very question, and Commander Ishikawa screamed in rage, "Damn! Those are enemy ships, and four of them are heading toward us. They are only 12,000 meters away."

Takagi's men were no longer at action stations, and it took him three minutes to realize the situation. Biting his lip, Takagi ordered his men back to action stations. Bugles and loudspeakers gave the order, warship engines cranked up to battle speed, and the heavy cruisers made smoke to hide their movements. It took three minutes for the fleet to haul in the last seaplane and power its engines up. With only two cruisers against four Allied cruisers, Takagi knew he was outnumbered. And the enemy might be headed for his transports.

Doorman had set off to the northeast, then to the northwest, groping in the dark to find the enemy. He had no idea Takagi's ships were sitting there, recovering aircraft. He was down to four cruisers and the British destroyer *Jupiter* in column; *Exeter* and her two escorts were headed for Surabaya. The four American destroyers were in a separate column, trying to keep up, lacking torpedoes and running short of fuel.

The new skirmish broke out when *Jintsu* dropped a flare to illuminate the target. At 7:33 PM, *Perth* and *Houston* opened fire, but their shells fell short.

The Japanese hit back with star shells to further illuminate their target. On *Perth*, Waller saw the flashes in the enemy column and assumed they were torpedoes. He ordered a harsh turn to starboard, and all the Allied ships did the same. Both sides checked fire. On *Houston*, Winslow and his shipmates saw the flares

Both: National Archives

ABOVE: Crewmen of the cruiser USS *Marblehead* view damage from a Japanese bomb hit. *Marblehead* managed to limp into port after sustaining the damage. BELOW: Wounded crewmen of the cruiser USS *Marblehead* are removed from the ship after coming into port in Java. The elderly *Marblehead* was an obsolete design at the beginning of World War II.

burst over their heads with an eerie, greenish light. "Helpless as pinioned ducks in a shooting gallery, we stood by, fearful that the enemy was closing in for the kill," he wrote later.

Doorman, it is thought, was influenced by his lack of information about the location of the Japanese convoy, so he feared that the convoy would head southward and make landfall. He chose to reverse course and head for the Java coast to be in a better position to intercept the convoy.

At 7:55, the Allied force swung south to the coast of Java amid increasing moonlight. At about 9 PM, the force turned to starboard to parallel the coast. Behind Doorman's column of cruisers, Binford's four American destroyers puffed along, gulping fuel. Binford told the officer of the deck on Edwards, "I'm not going in there after Doorman. That Dutchman has more guts than brains." He ordered his ships to head for Surabaya to refuel and reload ammunition. Unable to contact Doorman directly, he radioed the shore bases and asked them to relay the message to Doorman. They didn't. So Doorman steamed along, unaware that four of his destroyers were no longer under his command.

With that going on, the night was rent at 9:25 PM when a gigantic explosion tore into the hull of *Jupiter*, the destroyer at the tail of Doorman's column, sending fire and smoke into the air. *Jupiter*'s skipper signaled: "I am torpedoed." Actually, *Jupiter* wasn't. The destroyer had smacked into a stray Dutch mine, part of a field laid only that day, which had blasted open her forward bulkhead in the engine room and sent water gushing in. Damage control parties kept the destroyer afloat for four hours. That enabled *Jupiter*'s crew to abandon ship properly, using lifeboat davits and Carley floats. Some 78 members of her crew survived the sinking and piloted their boats to the nearby Java coast.

Doorman received this latest piece of bad news and altered course north, entering an area littered with life rafts from the earlier losses at 10:17. On *Houston*, Winslow had been relieved as officer of the deck and had gone to the forward AA director tower in the mainmast to take a few minutes' nap before the next stage of the battle. He had just closed his eyes when he heard shrill whistles and shouting to starboard. He leaped to his feet and saw groups of men in the drink, yelling in Dutch.

Doorman ordered *Encounter* to release itself from escorting *Exeter* and race back to the scene to pick up survivors. *Houston* fired off flares to mark the area, and *Encounter* found 113 survivors of *Kortenaer*, including their commanding officer, Lt. Cmdr. A. Kroese.

Back in Surabaya, *Exeter* and *Witte de With* arrived by 11 PM and began repairs and refueling. Binford and his four ships were about to enter the harbor when he received a message from Doorman through the complex communications chain to head for Tanjong Priok to refuel and rearm. Binford turned about and then realized the futility of such action. He conferred with his other skippers, and they agreed that racing to Batavia in the face of Japanese ships and planes without ammunition and fuel would lead to disaster. He ordered his ships into Surabaya to refuel and rebunker and then head south out of the Java Sea.

Back on *De Ruyter*, Doorman was headed for the last and most dramatic hour of the battle and his life. Lacking destroyer protection, short on ships and ammunition, the Allied force was steaming north on a slight zigzag course. Headed on a slightly converging course but southerly direction was Takagi, still trying to keep between the Allied ships and the transports. Nobody knew where the other side was, as both sides lacked radar and reconnaissance planes.

At 11 PM, both sides sighted each other, with *Nachi* and *Haguro* heading south, *De Ruyter*, *Perth*, *Houston*, and *Java* headed north, in order. Bright moonlight illuminated the battle,

and both sides opened fire at extreme range. After a full afternoon of combat action and steaming, neither side's gun crews were effective. Both sides closed the range to 8,000 yards.

At 11:22 PM, *Nachi* launched eight torpedoes and *Haguro* hurled four at the Allied column. One of them hit *De Ruyter* a few minutes after 11:30 PM and set off an explosion that enveloped the flagship's stern in a sea of flame. The fire hit the pyrotechnics locker and sent flares and rockets flying into the night sky in a garish and ghastly fireworks display. *De Ruyter*'s crew raced to their ship's bow to flee the explosion.

De Ruyter "blew up with an appalling explosion and settled aft, heavily afire," Waller observed. "It happened with the suddenness and completeness that one sees in the functioning of a good cigarette lighter—a snap and a burst of flame." A *Perth* sailor said, "I thought it would fry us. It was so close you could smell burning paint and a horrible stink like burning bodies."

On *Perth*, behind *De Ruyter*, Paymaster Commander Owen watched the fire before him and thought it was the most fearsome thing he had ever seen. On *Perth*'s bridge, Waller threw his cruiser into a tight turn to avoid colliding with *De Ruyter*, which threw Owen off his feet. *Perth* barely missed smacking into the flagship. On *Houston*, Rooks took evasive action as well.

As the two cruisers maneuvered, another Japanese torpedo hit *Java*, setting off a massive fire in the other Dutch cruiser. Crewmen on *Perth* felt the heat. *Java* slid to a halt, and Captain P.B.M. Van Staelen ordered his men to abandon ship. Water flooded Java's compartments, and the cruiser rose up almost vertically. Dutch sailors scrambled and leaped over the sides and into the water as the cruiser went to the bottom.

More than 500 sailors survived Java's sinking and the oil-soaked waters, giving three cheers for their ship and Queen Wilhelmina.

On *De Ruyter* another massive explosion rocked the cruiser, and the ship's distinctive superstructure vanished. The ship's 40mm antiaircraft ammunition started exploding, and a senior officer ordered the crew to abandon ship. As *De Ruyter* sank, Doorman sent off one last signal: all ships were not to stand by but to leave survivors and make for Batavia. Admiral Karel Doorman then joined 344 officers and men of the Royal Netherlands Navy and U.S. Navy Lieutenant Otto F. Kolb of his staff at the bottom of the Java Sea. Another American sailor was luckier. Signalman First Class Marvin E. Sholar slid into the water and was pulled from the drink by the U.S. submarine S-37, which was returning from a patrol.

On *Perth* Waller realized he was now senior officer present afloat and in the best traditions of the Royal and Royal Australian Navies took decisive action. He ordered *Perth* and *Houston* to break off action, feint southeast, and then steam at high speed to Tanjong Priok for fuel, ammunition, and orders.

Winslow wrote, "The *Houston* and *Perth* raced on into the night. Behind us blazed the funeral pyres of our comrades-in-arms, whom we deeply mourned."

The Battle of the Java Sea, the biggest surface naval battle since Jutland, was over. The Japanese had won easily; their invasion of Java had been delayed by exactly one day. And now there was no longer any Allied naval force capable of contesting the Japanese invasion of Java.

Soon there would no longer be any Allied naval force. With ammunition and fuel running short, leadership gone, and two cruisers badly damaged, it was time to flee.

Perth and *Houston* left first, fueling at Tandjong Priok on February 28 and heading out that afternoon, trying to slip through the Sunda Strait by darkness. Instead they met up with a Japanese force invading Java from the west and blazed away in a doomed "Fireaway-Flanagan" for nearly two hours. The Allied cruisers damaged three destroyers while sinking a minesweeper and a transport and forcing three transports to beach themselves. But a broadside of Japanese guns and torpedoes tore apart *Perth* and *Houston*, sinking both. A total of 307 *Perth* men and 368 *Houston* men survived to endure the horror of Japanese POW camps.

At Surabaya, *Exeter* refueled and repaired. Joined by *Encounter* and *Pope*, which still had

Continued on page 78

Navy History & Heritage Command

ABOVE: HMS *Exeter* is fatally struck by the guns of four Japanese cruisers on March 1, 1942. *Exeter* was a veteran of the sinking of the German pocket battleship *Graf Spee*. BELOW: The Japanese heavy cruiser *Myoko* fires on the cruiser HMS *Exeter* at the Second Battle of the Java Sea on March 1, 1942.

Red Army soldiers use a flamethrower to oust German soldiers from their hiding place in the town of Küstrin in late January 1945.

DEATH ON THE ODER

The Red Army's capture of Küstrin, the German fortress town, provided Marshal Georgi Zhukov with a springboard to launch the Battle of Berlin.

BY PAT McTAGGART

Alamy

"WE FELT THAT WE WERE ALREADY DEAD MEN," wrote former Captain Albrecht Wüstenhagen in a May 1988 letter to the author of his time in the fortress garrison of Küstrin. Born in 1920 in Sangerhausen, Saxony, about 190 kilometers southwest of Berlin, Wüstenhagen came from a military family. His father, a Knight's Cross recipient of the same name, was killed on April 20, 1944, in the Vitebsk area while commanding the 256th Infantry Division as a brigadier general.

In 1945, the younger Wüstenhagen found himself in command of an infantry gun company, part of the garrison, estimated at between 9,000 and 16,000 men and boys, in the small town on the eastern bank of the Oder River, some 70 kilometers east of Berlin. On January 25, by order of Adolf Hitler, Küstrin had been made a Fortress Town, meaning that it was to be held to the last man and last bullet. The penalty for retreat was death.

Küstrin was settled by Slavic tribesmen in the 10th century. The Knights Templar claimed the settlement in the 13th century, establishing a market there and receiving a charter as a city, creating a soon to be flourishing community. In the mid-1500s a castle and fortress were constructed, and other fortifications were gradually added. The primary fortifications were located in the Altstadt (Old Town) on a peninsula at the confluence of the Oder and Warthe Rivers.

In 1758 the town was besieged by the Russians. The surrounding wooden buildings were destroyed, but the fortress held firm. Half a century later the French were luckier, and the town was garrisoned by Napoleon's forces from 1806-1814. In 1857 the construction of a railroad line was completed, making Küstrin an important railway hub, and a Neustadt (New Town) grew on the eastern side of the Altstadt.

With the unification of Germany, Küstrin acquired a new artillery barracks, which was finished in 1903 on an island across from the Altstadt railway station. That was followed by the construction of an engineer barracks in 1913. After the defeat in World War I, many of the town's fortifications were ordered destroyed under the provisions of the Versailles Treaty.

Following the rise of Hitler, Küstrin found a new prosperity after the devastating Great Depression. By 1939 its population stood at about 21,500. That figure diminished as the war took more and more young men into the Wehrmacht. However, even by late 1944 the war seemed far away on the eastern side of the Vistula River, and the people led relatively normal lives. That would change in January 1945.

Hitler had been repeatedly warned about an impending Soviet offensive. His intelligence officers for the Eastern Front reported a massive

buildup of men and matériel, which was ridiculed by the Führer. He was convinced that the Russians had bled themselves dry, and he was more focused on the Allied threat in the West. When confronted by General Heinz Guderian, his Army chief of staff, Hitler flew into a rage as he was presented with the intelligence estimates on one sector of the Vistula Front on January 9.

"He declared them to be completely idiotic," Guderian wrote in his memoirs. Hitler also ordered the man who compiled the report locked up in an insane asylum.

Guderian did not back down. "The Eastern Front is like a house of cards," he replied. "If the front is broken through at one point all the rest will collapse, for 12 and a half divisions are far too small for so extended a front."

"The Eastern Font must help itself and make do with what it's got," was Hitler's final word. Three days later, the Soviets attacked.

Guderian's "house of cards" collapsed on January 12, when the Russians unleashed the Vistula-Oder Operation. At 04:35 Soviet artillery, amounting to 230 guns per kilometer, opened a devastating barrage on General Maximilian Reichsfreiherr von Edelsheim's XLVIII Panzer Korps, which was trying to contain Soviet forces inside the Baranov Bridgehead in Poland. It was a Panzer Korps in name only, consisting of only three weak infantry divisions, the 68th, 168th, and 304th.

Following the barrage Red Army tanks and infantry of the 3rd Guards Army and 4th Tank Army from Marshal Ivan S. Konev's 1st Ukrainian Front surged forward. Von Edelsheim's defenses were shattered. In a 1981 letter to the author he wrote: "There was absolutely nothing to be done. The Soviet barrage was astounding and our infantry simply disappeared. By noon my three divisions no longer existed and those that survived were fleeing for their lives. We were simply swept aside or destroyed."

That was only the beginning. The entire German line was torn asunder as more Soviet fronts joined the offensive in the next few days. Warsaw fell to Marshal Georgi Zhukov's 1st Belorussian Front on the 17th, while Konev continued the drive on his left.

The Russian offensive exploded on most sectors of the Eastern Front as Soviet forces hit everything from East Prussia to the Slovak border. German troops were fighting for their lives in Königsburg and Budapest, while Soviet forces pushed their way into the industrial region of Silesia.

In Küstrin, the people went about their daily business. The war had taken most of the men of military age, and those on the streets were mostly children, women, and the elderly. On the radio Nazi propaganda touted the invincible "Eastern Wall," and if anyone doubted that claim they kept it to themselves. Then the refugees started coming. At first it was just a trickle, but it soon turned into a flood.

Bundesarchiv Bild 183-R97892; Photo: Unknown

Author's Collection

ABOVE: SS General of Security Police Heinz Reinefahrth commanded the German defenders of Küstrin in the winter of 1945. BELOW: Captain Albrecht Wustenhagen wrote that the Germans in Küstrin considered themselves "already dead men."

The first ones were from the west, fleeing the devastating Allied air attacks on major German cities. For most of them Küstrin was just a stopover on their way to other destinations. Things started changing as the flow reversed and refugees began coming in from the east. The first wave was composed of Nazi officials and their families. They were followed by civilians using whatever transportation they could get, and they brought troubling stories of Russian advances and Wehrmacht retreats.

People started to get nervous and that feeling grew as the local Volkssturm battalion, composed mostly of teenage boys and those men who were either unfit or too old for military service, was mobilized on January 24. There was now little doubt that something was going very wrong to the east.

Just how wrong became evident on January 25, when the Führer Order declared Küstrin a fortress with Maj. Gen. Adolf Raegener as its commander. The grandiose title "Fortress Küstrin" was almost laughable. There was a scattering of engineers and artillery units in the town, as well as some infantry units consisting of trainees or men convalescing from their wounds. Defensive positions were negligible, as most had been neglected or destroyed in the preceding years, and the frozen ground made digging earthworks difficult. Moreover, the Soviets were reported to be only about 70 kilometers away.

During the final days of January, the garrison of Fortress Küstrin began to grow as a variety of small units, of which Wüstenhagen's was one, started to arrive in the town. The fortress's antitank weapons, of which there were few, were strengthened by the arrival of a few Panther tank turrets. Sporting 75mm guns, the turrets were embedded in strongpoints along likely avenues of attack.

As more units trickled in, the defense force became a little more organized under Raegener's direction. It was also very diverse.

"There were some Luftwaffe personnel from flak units, some of which no longer had their flak pieces," Wüstenhagen recalled. "We also had an Einsatz (action) battalion made up mostly of Turkomans, a Moslem people, as well as one made up mostly of troops from the Caucasus. There were Hitler Youth, Volkssturm, some Hungarians, and even some members of the Waffen SS. Some men were individuals who had been separated from their units and had been stopped by the Kettenhunde (literally chain dogs—soldiers' slang for the German Field Police that referred to the metal gorgets they wore on their chests) and forced into serving with the garrison. It seemed that this mix of units would be able to do little against the Russians, but General Raegener, and later SS General Heinz Reinefarth, worked hard to turn us into a real fighting force."

While the Germans went about trying to strengthen meager defenses, the Soviets kept moving westward. After taking Warsaw, Zhukov's front had advanced another 120-130 kilometers in the period January 20-22. By the 25th, Col. Gen. Vasili I. Chuikov's 8th Guards Army, following in the wake of Col. Gen. Mikhail E. Katukov's 1st Guards Tank Army, had the 60,000 men of Fortress Posen (present day Poznan) surrounded. Leaving parts of both

armies to besiege the city, Zhukov ordered both commands to keep moving westward.

Zhukov's 1st Belorussian Front was a powerful force. Besides Katukov's and Chuikov's armies, he had the 2nd Guards Tank Army (Col. Gen. Semen I. Bogdanov), 3rd Shock Army (Lt. Gen. Tikhon K. Simoniak), 5th Shock Army (Lt. Gen. Nikolai E. Bezarin), 33rd Army (Col. Gen. Viacheslav D. Tsvetrev), 47th Army (Lt. Gen. Frants I. Perkhorovich), 61st Army (Col. Gen. Pavel A. Belov), 69th Army (Lt. Gen. Vladimir I. Kolpakchi), and Lt. Gen. Zygmunt Berling's 1st Polish Army.

Chuikov and Katukov were the tip of this massive spear. Zhukov wanted them to reach the Oder quickly and establish bridgeheads on the western bank. The following forces would eliminate German strongpoints, such as Posen, and then spread out along with Katukov and Chuikov to consolidate positions on the eastern bank to prepare for the final drive on Berlin.

Zhukov was already planning his next actions. In his memoirs he wrote: "Around noon on January 25 I had a telephone call from Stalin. I briefed him on the situation, and he inquired about our next moves. I said that since the enemy was demoralized and unable to put up serious resistance, we would continue to drive toward the Oder and attempt to seize a bridgehead at Küstrin."

However, Stalin was worried about Zhukov's right flank. Marshal Konstantin K. Rokossovski's 2nd Belorussian Front was heavily engaged in East Prussia, and with Zhukov speedily advancing there would be a gap of about 150 kilometers between the two fronts until Rokossovski could clear East Prussia and move up to the Oder. Stalin did not want that gap left open.

Zhukov shifted his forces accordingly. He ordered the 1st and 2nd Guards Tank Armies, most of the 8th Guards Army, and the 33rd and 61st Armies to keep moving toward the Oder and had the 3rd Shock, 47th, 69th, and 1st Polish Armies, supported by Lt. Gen. Vladimir V. Krukov's 2nd Guards Cavalry Corps, swing north and northwest to secure his right flank.

At Küstrin work continued on strengthening the defenses. "We officers worked beside our men," Wüstenhagen wrote. "The materials on hand were limited, but as more and more refugees from the east continued to come through the town, we worked even harder for we knew that Ivan was close."

"Ivan" was indeed close, but Mother Nature now took a hand in events. A blizzard hit central Europe on January 27-28. Mounds of snow piled up in the roadways, slowing Zhukov's mechanized and motorized forces to a crawl.

"The blizzard gave us a few more days," Wüstenhagen wrote.

Zhukov also had other problems, despite his optimism. His rapid advance was becoming a logistics nightmare as supply lines grew longer and longer. Columns had to travel up to 200 miles from depots to furnish the frontline units with gasoline, ammunition, and other materials needed to keep going. There was also the fact that German forces facing his northern flank were putting up much more resistance than expected.

During the last days of January, the weather turned warmer, and the snow that had fallen during the blizzard began to melt, turning the once frozen ground into a slimy mass of mud. Zhukov's forces were once again slowed to a snail's pace, but on the 31st the forward elements of his front reached the Oder north of Küstrin.

The flow of refugees into Küstrin suddenly stopped on the 31st. It was an ominous warning to the garrison. Early in the afternoon a column of Soviet tanks came through the village of Drewitz, just north of Küstrin. They rolled over a group of panzergrenadiers assigned to a defensive position and then spread out, looking for other targets.

A group of about a dozen tanks, many of them American Lend-Lease Shermans, made their way through the outskirts of Küstrin and into the Neustadt. They kept on going toward the Warthe bridges but were stopped by an influx of panicked civilians whose vehicles had created a traffic jam at a major intersection. Finding their way blocked, the tanks turned around and searched for another approach to the river.

The garrison had been caught completely by surprise by the initial penetration, but by the time the Soviets reached the heart of the Neustadt the alarm was finally given, and tank-killer teams started to hunt the Russian armor. Surprisingly, only a few tank-riding infantry accompanied the tanks, and German forces soon began picking off the Soviet raiders with panzerfausts or sticky bombs. In the end, only four tanks made it safely back to their lines.

Backed by T-34 medium tanks, Soviet troops advance along the Oder River in early 1945. Their advance was swift until melting snow turned dirt roads into mud and hampered mechanized vehicles and horses.

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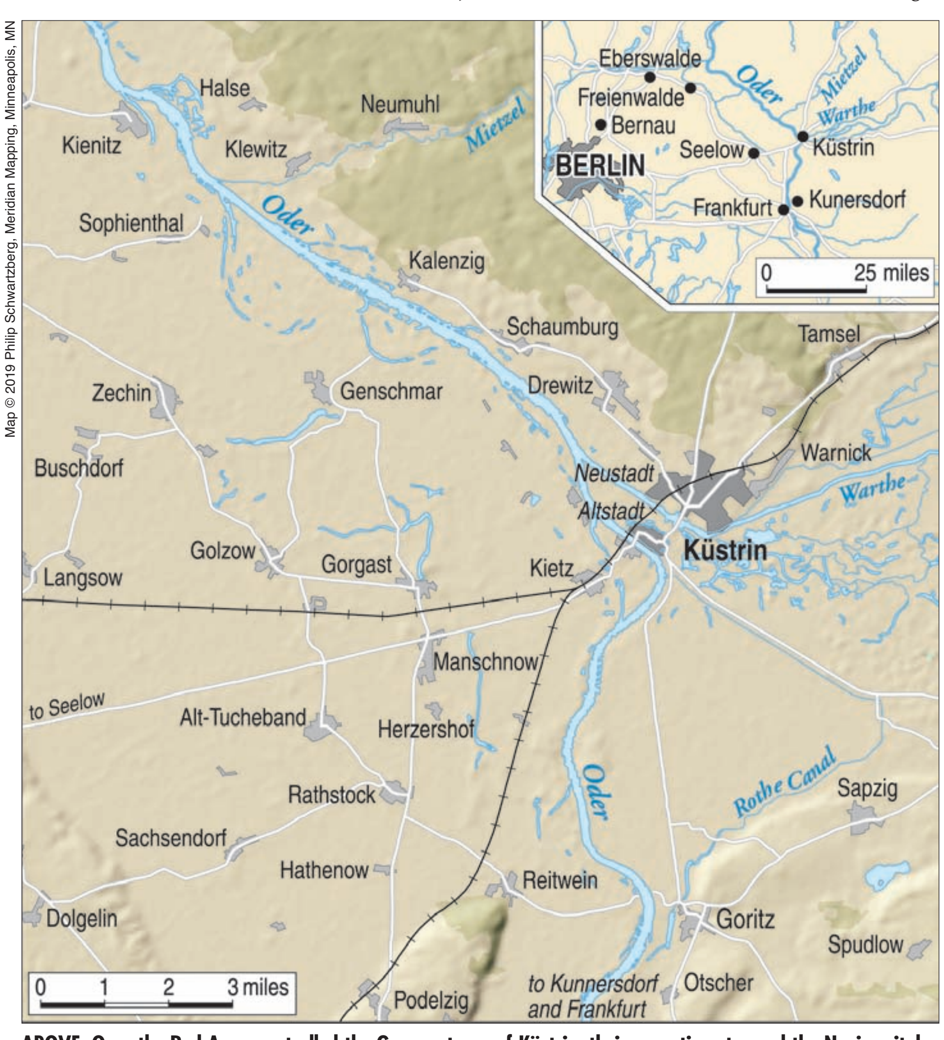
Zhukov had reached the Oder, but the Soviet marshal now had to face several obstacles. His first order of business was to establish his bridgeheads on the western bank of the river. One was established at Kienitz, about 20 kilometers north of Küstrin, and another one was established south of the town at Göritz.

Supplies were also becoming more of a problem. His forces had advanced up to 400 kilometers in a little more than two weeks, and the wear on the vehicles had been enormous. Parts, as well as supplies and ammunition, were needed before any other large-scale operation could commence.

His right flank was also a matter of concern. There was still a strong enemy presence there, and Zhukov's northern blocking force was strung out and repulsing German attacks in that area.

Another matter was reinforcing his armies. During the drive to the Oder, the 1st Belorussian Front lost 17,032 men killed and had another 60,310 sick or wounded—about seven percent of its total manpower. Zhukov knew that for the final assault on Berlin his forces would have to be up to full strength.

Stalin and STAVKA (the Soviet High Command) came to the same conclusions. On February 2, Moscow declared the Vistula-Oder Offensive officially over. Zhukov was now free to consolidate his gains, but there were still two thorns in his side: the German bridgehead on the eastern bank of the Oder at Kunersdorf near Frankfurt and the bridgehead of Fortress Küstrin.



ABOVE: Once the Red Army controlled the German town of Küstrin, their operations toward the Nazi capital city of Berlin gained new impetus. OPPOSITE: German PzKpfw. V Panther medium tanks pause along a road near the bridgehead across the Oder River at Küstrin. This photo was taken in February 1945 as the tanks advanced toward the village of Ortwig.

The appearance of the Soviet spearhead in the center of Küstrin led to an even greater intensity in fortifying the town. Wüstenhagen recalled working 16-18 hours a day shoring up antitank defenses and building machine-gun strongpoints to protect his guns.

Elements of Maj. Gen. Arnold Burmeister's 25th Panzergrenadier Division (PGD) established themselves on the western bank of the Oder across from the town. The 25th had been badly mauled in the Soviet summer offensive and had been rebuilt in October. Those elements that had survived the January winter offensive formed a wedge between the Soviet bridgeheads at Kienitz and Göritz.

They were joined by Maj. Gen. Rudolf Hübner's 303rd "Doberitz" and Brig. Gen. Heinrich Voigtsberger's 309th "Berlin" Infantry Divisions, both of which were newly formed and understrength, and the staff of the still forming "Kurmark" PGD. Also forming around Captain Horst Zabel's Panzer Detachment Kummersdorf was the soon to be Panzer Division "Muncheburg" which would be commanded by Brig. Gen. Werner Mummert.

As some civilians began their exodus from Küstrin westward toward Berlin, other troops were crossing into the town. So far, the Red Air Force had not mounted missions against the garrison, which was lucky for the defenders since they had little antiaircraft protection at first.

"During the beginning of February we finally got some light flak guns into the town," Wüstenhagen wrote. "They were manned by a mixed group of Luftwaffe personnel and Hitler Youth, boys as young as 12 or 13. It was a welcome sight to see the guns but it was disturbing to see the youths that manned some of them. We had no more men to fight, and we were now using children. Surely the war could not go on for much longer."

Although the surprise Soviet tank thrust into the town had failed, the Russians continued to funnel troops into the Küstrin area and were already launching probing attacks. As early as the morning of February 1 a Soviet unit had managed to take a factory on the northwest edge of the town, killing or routing a combined Hungarian-Volkssturm force occupying it. A German counterattack later in the morning finally cleared the building after bitter fighting.

On that same day Raegener was replaced by SS Maj. Gen. Heinz Reinefarth over the objections of the Army. Reinefarth, who had been a member of the SS since 1932, had been awarded the Knight's Cross in 1940 for his actions during the invasion of France while serving as a reserve sergeant in the Army (it was possible for members of the SS to also serve as regular Army personnel). He was promoted to SS brigadier general in 1942 and was made general inspector of the SS in the Protectorate of Bohemia-Moravia.

In September 1943, Reinefarth was transferred to Berlin where he served in the Hauptamt Ordnungspolizei (ministry of the order

Bundesarchiv Bild 183-H28153; Photo: Unknown

police). January 1944 found him serving as SS and police leader in the Reichsgau Wartthelánd, a former Polish province that had been annexed by the Germans after the Polish defeat. In that capacity he took part in the bloody suppression of the Warsaw Uprising in August, for which he was awarded the Oak Leaves to his Knight's Cross. His most recent post was commander of the XVIII SS Korps.

Reinefarth's appointment was political, as he had virtually no command experience except for the past month and a half. Reichsführer SS Heinrich Himmler, who was serving as the inept commander of Army Group Vistula, wanted one of his own to defend the town, and Reinefarth was his choice instead of a combat-savvy Army officer. In his memoirs, Guderian remarked that Reinefarth "was a good policeman, but no general."

Even though the Soviet forces directly involved in the Küstrin sector fighting were still relatively weak, Zhukov ordered Chuikov to keep as much pressure on the garrison as possible. After the failure to hold the factory in the north, Chuikov ordered an attack on the southern sector of the town, which was repulsed with the loss of three tanks. Encouraged by that success, Reinefarth ordered an attack of his own to retake the Warnick area just east of Küstrin. The attack failed miserably in the face of heavy Soviet fire, costing the garrison several casualties.

A Russian attack on February 3 seized a German strongpoint about one kilometer southwest of the town, while another gained about 100 meters of ground in another sector. Despite these successes, the Soviets were confined to mostly reconnaissance attacks since there were still too few troops in the area for an all-out assault

The thaw that followed the January blizzard was still raising havoc with troop movements. Even so, Stalin ordered Zhukov to siphon off more troops of his front to deal with the troublesome Germans that were still offering stiff resistance in the north. His forces did have limited success when they managed to seal the supply route on the west bank of the Oder, isolating the Küstrin area. The success was short lived as the timely arrival of Colonel Helmut Zollenkopf's depleted 21st Panzer Division managed to open a thin corridor that once again gave Küstrin a lifeline to the west.

By the end of the first week of February, both sides had settled into a routine, with the Soviets firing artillery into the town around mid-day and constantly mounting nuisance attacks and the garrison working to shore up its defenses between artillery barrages. After an inspection of the Küstrin sector, Col. Gen. Chuikov described the difficulties faced by the Russian troops.

"The [Küstrin] Citadel itself was set on an island formed by the Oder and Warthe Rivers. The spring [sic] flood had submerged all the approaches to the island. The only links between the Citadel and the surrounding land were dikes and roads fanning out toward Berlin, Frankfurt, Posen, and Stettin. Needless to say, the enemy had taken care to block these roads securely, covering the dikes and embankments with dugouts, pillboxes, trenches, caponieres, barbed wire, minefields, and other defenses. Our small sub-units managed to come so close to the enemy fortifications that hand grenade and panzerfaust exchanges went on around the clock. But we were unable to deploy large forces here since a single tank took up the whole width of a dike."

Despite the Soviet harassment, the garrison had now created somewhat cohesive defenses. In addition to the approximately 6,800 civilians still in the town, there were approximately 9,100 members of the Wehrmacht and Waffen SS and 900 Volkssturm defending the fortress. At times the strength was estimated to be about 16,000 due to the arrival and departure of various units. An estimated 102 artillery pieces, 30 flak guns, 50 mortars, 25 self-propelled guns, and 10 captured Katyusha rocket launchers (Stalin's Organs) were also in the fortress at various times.

Reinefarth divided the town into two defensive areas. The Altstadt sector, which also included Kietz, the island, and the surrounding area, was under the command of Eastern Front veteran Major Otto Wagner, who had received the German Cross in Gold in March 1942 while commanding a battalion of the 32nd Infantry Division in the Demyansk area.

To command the Neustadt defensive sector, Reinefarth chose a Colonel Walther, a field police commander with even less combat experience than Reinefarth himself. It was a poor choice, especially since the Neustadt was more vulnerable than the Altstadt position.

Since the weather precluded any strong ground assault, the Soviets stepped up their artillery fire and also launched mostly platoon-

Bundesarchiv Bild 146-1971-033-41; Photo: Unknown

German sentries guard an area that is apparently in use as a depot for captured military equipment. They are stationed along the road near a bridge across the Warthe River near the city of Neustadt.

and company-sized reconnaissance attacks. In one case, a tank-supported battalion gained some vital ground just south of the fortress. A vigorous counterattack involving close combat finally forced the Russians to retreat after both sides had sustained numerous casualties.

Zhukov ordered more artillery into the Küstrin sector. Between the heavy mortars, rockets, and guns of the Red Army artillery, movement inside the fortress became more and more difficult. Rubble from the shattered buildings clogged the streets, and the town's fire department was hard pressed to douse the flames that seemed to be everywhere.

"We could engage the Russians in counter-battery fire," Wüstenhagen wrote. "But since our supplies were not great, we were limited to the number of shells that we could use. It seemed like for every 20 Russian shells fired, we could only fire one or two. However, we had some good [artillery] observers, and we would not waste our ammunition unless we definitely knew where the target was located."

The Russian shelling was also aimed at the defensive positions at Kietz. In mid-February they stepped up attacks around that town, hoping once again to cut the supply corridor to the fortress, but the forces defending the area managed to prevent any major breakthroughs.

In one such attack, two T-34 tanks that were supporting a Soviet infantry attack fell victim to the terrain as they became mired in the mud. From their defensive positions, German forces fired on the stalled infantry, who were reluctant to advance without tank support, and forced them to retreat.

On February 19, civilians in the Neustadt were notified that they would be evacuated. For the next few days, approximated 2,000-3,000 people made their way across the Oder and headed west through the narrow supply corridor under cover of darkness. Surprisingly, the Soviet artillery was relatively quiet, and the evacuation was carried out with few casualties.

Even as the last of the evacuees were leaving the Neustadt, the remaining residents of the Altstadt were receiving their marching orders. Although ordered to leave, several hundred residents refused to give up their homes and belongings and chose to remain in both sectors.

While the evacuations were taking place, the garrison was kept busy repelling spotty Russian attacks on Küstrin's defenses. The fortress, now under the tactical command of SS Lt. Gen. Matthias Kleinheisterkamp's XI SS Panzerkorps, had received orders from Panzerkorps headquarters stressing the importance of holding the town. Besides preventing the Russians from taking the bridges spanning the Warthe and the Oder, they were to harass other Soviet crossing points within range of the fortress artillery.

"We were suddenly receiving many more shells from the supply convoys that came through at night," Wüstenhagen recalled.

During the final days of February, the Soviet artillery increased dramatically. Choice targets for the Red Army guns were positions around the cellulose factory, located about 300 meters east of the Friedrich-Wilhelm Canal, and positions in Kietz. Reinefarth and his commanders became convinced that these barrages were a prelude to a massive attack, but none materialized.

While the Soviets continued their artillery fire, the boys of Küstrin's Hitler Youth, who were helping the garrison defenders, were ordered to evacuate. Some of them protested the order but grudgingly obeyed.

"We could only hope for the best for those young boys," Wüstenhagen wrote. "They were helping us the best they could and freed up men for the front line, but we were happy to see them get out of danger."

Rain pelted the Küstrin sector during the first days of March, making life miserable for both sides. It also masked Soviet movements on the northern sector of the fortress. Maj. Gen. Dmitrii S. Zherebin's 32nd Rifle Corps of Berzarin's 5th Shock Army was closing in with its 60th Guards Rifle Division (Maj. Gen. Kirill K. Dzhakhua) and the 295th and 416th Rifle Divisions (Maj. Gen. Aleksandr P. Dorofeev and Maj. Gen. Dmitrii M. Syzranov).

Zherebin planned to attack the Neustadt, driving toward the Warthe bridges. Kietz would also be the object of an attack by other units. Four regiments, supported by heavy and medium tanks, would form the main assault, although the tanks would have a difficult time in the muddy terrain.

The assault was preceded by a massive artillery bombardment on March 6. The Neustadt was soon shrouded in smoke from burning buildings throughout the area, which would be helpful in masking Russian movements.

"The explosions of the enemy shells were deafening," Wüstenhagen recalled. "We had not yet experienced anything like this. We were stationed in the Altstadt and it seemed as if all the Neustadt was on fire."

Expecting an imminent attack, the garrison in the Neustadt prepared itself to repel the enemy. However, the Soviets attacked Kietz in a surprise attempt to take the suburb. After initial success, the Russians were stopped by a desperate counterattack that retook some of the ground lost earlier in the day, but leaving much of the southeast section of the town in enemy hands.

The following day Zherebin opened his assault on the Neustadt with troops from Dorofeev's and Syzranov's divisions. Garrison forces gave ground slowly, and by the end of the day the farthest Russian advance amounted to only about a kilometer.

The Neustadt attack continued the next day as Zherebin funneled more troops into the battle. Supported by tanks and the Red Air force, the attackers made steady progress, proceeding along the Friedrich-Wilhelm Canal and taking the cellulose factory by nightfall. Several other key positions were taken, and German engineers were ordered to blow up the Warthe bridges to prevent them from falling into Soviet hands.

The action effectively isolated the approximately 6,000 German troops that were still holding out in the Neustadt. Much of the blame was placed on the incompetence of Colonel Walther, who had totally lost command control of his troops.

Close quarter fighting in the Neustadt went on from March 9 to 12. The trapped German forces occupied strongpoints such as the infantry barracks and had to be blasted out by Soviet artillery and engineers. Because of the closeness of the attacking and defending forces and fears of hitting their own men, German artillery was extremely limited in its effectiveness. At the same time, much of the Red Army artillery shifted its bombardment to the Altstadt and Kietz.

The final battle in the Neustadt centered around the infantry barracks and another strongpoint, the Neues Werke, both of which were on the northeast side of the sector. On March 12 they were both taken, and Lt. Gen. Berzarin declared the area secure. The Russians reported taking 2,774 prisoners and claimed another 3,000 Germans killed.

In Moscow, plans for the final assault on Berlin were being finalized. Zhukov had already met with Stalin in November 1944, when a preliminary plan was discussed. At that time Stalin seemed to agree that the 1st Belorussian Front would be picked to capture the German capital. However, as was his nature, he would later play Zhukov against Konev and his 1st Ukrainian Front for the honor of taking the city.

Zhukov was determined that he would arrive in Berlin first. To do that he needed to head down the highway that led from Küstrin to Berlin. A strong bridgehead would have to be established on the west bank of the Oder along the highway from which he could speed men and machines to the heart of the Reich. To do that, he needed to reduce the rest of Fortress Küstrin quickly.

A day after the Neustadt fell, Zhukov issued orders to take the Altstadt without delay. Zherebin's 32nd Rifle Corps was to attack the Altstadt while Chuikov attacked the Kietz defenders with Lt. Gen. Vasili A. Glazunov's 4th Guards Rifle Corps (35th, 47th, and 57th Guards Rifle Divisions). Both attacks failed to make any headway.

For the next nine days, Kietz and the Altstadt came under constant bombardment. Attacks by the 5th Shock and 8th Guards Armies, looking for weak points in the enemy defenses, also took place against German forces holding the narrow supply corridor.

On March 22, the Soviet infantry and supporting armor struck under the cover of massive artillery fire, with Zerebin attacking from the north with most of his corps, which had been sent to the bridgehead north of Küstrin, and Glazunov attacking from the south. Their goal was to cut the corridor in half, meeting just outside the village of Gorgast.

They would use the Soviet double envelopment tactic, which had been so successful at Stalingrad and in later battles. An inner ring would be formed midway between Kietz and Gorgast to trap enemy forces inside the picket with an outer ring formed east of Gorgast to fend off enemy attacks from the outside.

Manning the defenses in the intended area of the attack were elements of the "Doberitz" and "Muncheburg" Divisions. Under cover of the Red Army artillery, Dzhakhua's 60th Guards Rifle Division hit the German defenses around Genschmar, a town northwest of Kietz. To Dzhakhua's left, Dorofeev's 295th Rifle Division punched through the enemy line and headed toward Golzow, a village west of Gogast. Along the Oder the 1373rd Regiment of Syzranov's 416th Rifle Division worked its way behind elements of the 2nd Regiment "Muncheburg."

On the southern flank of the corridor, Maj. Gen. Vasili M. Shugaev's 47th Guards Rifle Division also pierced the German line and headed to meet Dorofeev's division to create the outer ring. His left flank was protected by Colonel Petr I. Zalizivik's 57th Guards Rifle Division. To his right, the 35th Guards Rifle Division pushed forward to hook up with the 1373rd, which would then form the inner ring of the encirclement.

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During their thrust across the Oder River in March 1945, Red Army soldiers position truck-mounted Katyusha rocket systems to fire on German positions.

After heavy fighting during which the Germans claimed 116 Soviet tanks destroyed, the outer pincers of the encirclement were closed that afternoon. Fighting continued on the 23rd as the Russians consolidated their newly won positions.

German counterattacks were thrown back with considerable loss to both sides during the next few days. In what remained of the Küstrin garrison, casualties mounted as the Red artillery continued to hammer the Altstadt and the Oder Island, which was nestled between the Oder River and the Vorlut Canal, and several German artillery positions were destroyed.

Bundesarchiv Bild 183-R97523; Photo: Unknown

A jumble of the remnants of German units was employed to defend Küstrin. In this photo police troops man a position in the German line and await a renewal of the Soviet offensive against the town.

"The Altstadt was being pulverized," Wüstenhagen recalled. "There were few buildings left standing and my gun company had taken several casualties."

On March 27, the Germans launched a desperate counterattack to reopen the corridor. Unlike the previous efforts, this was to be a coordinated attack. General Theodor Busse, commander of the 9th Army, had been ordered by Berlin to gather a force that could break through to the Küstrin garrison. Under the nominal command of General Karl Decker, the force consisted of Burmeister's 25th PGD and Colonel Georg Schulze's 20th Panzergrenadier Division, Mummert's "Munchenburg" Panzer Division, Brig. Gen. Hellmuth Mader's "Führer-Grenadier-Division," SS Lt. Col. Kurt Hartrampf's Schwere Panzer Abteilung (schw. Pz. Abt.—heavy tank (Tiger) detachment about the size of a battalion), and a combat group under the command of Lt. Col. Gustav-Adolf Blanchbois, consisting of about 500 infantry and almost 50 "Hetzer" self-propelled antitank guns, that was named "1001 Nights."

At 0400 the German forces moved forward. They ran into trouble almost immediately. During the previous three days Russian engineers were busy laying extensive minefields in front of their positions. In the north the "Muncheburg" Panzer, with "1001 Nights" on its right flank, headed toward Genschmar, which was defended by the 60th Guards Rifle Division. Under intense Soviet fire, the spearhead made it to the outskirts of the town before being driven back with heavy losses. The "1001 Nights" lost about two-thirds of its men either killed, wounded, or missing and half its Hetzers.

The center attacking force ("Führer-Grenadier-Division and a panzer and panzergrenadier battalion from the 20th PGD) broke through the lines of the 295th Rifle Division and headed toward the German forces trapped on the west bank of the Oder. They were also forced to turn back after receiving heavy artillery fire and a strong counterattack.

To the south, part of the 90th Panzergrenadier Rgt./20th PGD, Hartrampf's Tigers, and the 25th PGD hit the 47th Guards Rifle Division. Their goal was Gorgast, but minefields and strong Soviet defensive positions at the main line stopped them cold. The experiences of schw. Pz. 502 were documented in Wolfgang Schneider's book *Tigers in Combat II*.

"Shortly after crossing the line of departure, the 1./schw. Pz. Abt. 502 is stopped in a minefield. Three Tigers are immobilized. The same thing occurs in the attack sector of the 3./schw. Pz. Abt. 502, which is advancing on the right side of the main road (from) Manchnow to Kietz. One panzer, Tiger 321, is immobilized after running over a mine. It then knocks out two Soviet tanks before it is knocked out by a captured Panzerfaust."

Accompanying engineers cleared a path through the minefield before sunrise, allowing the 1st and 2nd Companies to continue the attack. The Tigers destroyed four Soviet tanks before they were ordered to halt because they had lost contact with their accompanying infantry protection.

There were also other concerns. The 2nd Company's acting commander, SS 2nd Lt. Schroif, was not up to the task. Schneider's documented account continued: "The new commander of the 2./schw. Pz. Abt. 502 is unfit for the stress of combat and gets on the nerves of tank commanders by constantly issuing nonsensical orders. His tank gets stuck in a large bomb crater during a withdrawal movement. One after another, five Tigers are hit and are immobilized. After darkness falls the battalion moves back to Seelow. The operational panzers of the battalion assemble in Neu Tucheband. Operational panzers; 13."

The failure of the attack had far-reaching consequences. Hitler was furious, and on the afternoon of March 28 he vented his anger on the unfortunate Busse, blaming him personally for the failure. While Hitler was berating Busse, General Guderian jumped to his defense.

"Permit me to interrupt you," he said to Hitler. Barely controlling his own volatile anger he continued, "I explained to you yesterday thoroughly, both verbally and in writing, that General Busse is not to blame for the failure of the Küstrin attack. Ninth Army used the ammunition that had been allotted it. The troops did their duty. The unusually high casualty figures prove that. I therefore ask you not to make any accusations against Gerneral Busse."

After the outburst, Hitler ordered the room to be cleared. Only Field Marshal Wilhelm Keitel and Guderian remained behind. Hitler then ordered Guderian to take a six-week convalescent leave. Guderian would never see Hitler again.

The fate of Küstrin now seemed to be sealed. As the defenders around Kietz, on the island, and in the Altstadt heard the firing fade away to the west, groups of soldiers decided to take matters in their own hands and prepared to break out.

"When I heard about my men wanting to get out, I initially refused to let them go," Wüstenhagen recalled. "We had received no such orders from our superiors, and our current orders were to hold at all costs. In later years I realized how idiotic that sounded. The next day (March 29) I came to my senses. We had no chance of holding the area, and an attempt to break out was preferable to a Soviet prison camp."

Reinefarth apparently came to the same conclusion. On March 29, he asked Berlin for permission to break out. His request was refused, but Reinefarth had no illusions as to what his fate would be if he fell into Soviet hands. He too decided to take his chances and leave Küstrin.

In the final hour of March 29, the breakout began. After breaching the first Soviet line, the garrison forces found themselves in hand-to-hand night fighting as they moved toward the lines of the 9th Army. Having crossed the Oder, they were joined by the Kietz defenders. The situation was confused, and the Germans ran into fire not only from the Soviets, but from their own troops and artillery, which had no idea that a breakout was occurring.

Helped by the element of surprise, the dark-

ness, and intermittent rain showers, the Küstrin survivors started trickling into the 9th Army line as dawn broke. Later that day, 9th Army headquarters reported that 32 officers and 956 NCOs and lower ranks had made it through. Other smaller groups continued to reach the German lines during the next few days. According to a Wehrmacht report, the attempt had cost 627 men killed and 2,359 wounded. Another 6,994 were listed as missing.

In the Altstadt there were still pockets of resistance, held by Germans who could not or would not evacuate their positions. They were systematically destroyed by the Soviets. By March 31, the entire fortress was in Russian hands. Zhukov now had his springboard to Berlin.

The survivors of the breakout were now in a kind of limbo. They were isolated and interrogated, not knowing whether they would be shot or hanged for disobeying a Führer Order or simply let go. However, Germany was collapsing, and they eventually were sent to other ad hoc units that were being formed to stop the coming Soviet attack against Berlin.

Wüstenhagen recalled those final days. "From about 16,000 soldiers at the beginning of the Russian siege only 1,200 men could arrive [on] the German Oder Front after the town was extremely destroyed [sic] and the last ammunition was shot."

"Myself, I did no more than my duty. I received the Knight's Cross after the battle (On April 14—one of the last ones awarded). My comrade, Major (Emil) Hethy got with me the same decoration. I do not know whether he was fallen later on."

Hethy commanded a combat group in the garrison and during the breakout. He did, in fact, survive the war and died in 1983.

"After new activities in the 'Spreewald' not very far from Berlin I was wounded once more and the Russians grabbed me," Wüstenhagen continued. "I was brought into a Russian hospital at Zossen on 30 April. Tolerable [sic] cured, I could escape with civilian clothes brought by German inhabitants [along)] with bread and other things after the capitulation of May 8."

"I crossed the big river, the Elbe, during the night with three other companions by swimming near the town of Dessau and I arrived at my family at Goslar safely after some days. After the war I began my studies at the school of forestry and I became a forest officer in the state forest." Wüstenhagen died on April 8, 2008.

Reinefarth defended his actions in a report on the fall of the fortress and the breakout. In one excerpt he blamed garrison officers for his failure as he recounted a March 29 meeting. "The officers told me unanimously that they no longer had control over their men and the experience of the last few days had shown that neither encouragement no threatening with weapons would avail…. I told the individual officers and SS leaders that due to the lack of ammunition and the soldiers' refusal to do their duty holding on to a few square meters was no longer possible. Thus, the Führer Order to hold the fortress to the last bullet had been fulfilled."

During the last weeks of the war and in the years that followed, Reinefarth seemed to lead a charmed life. Despite being sentenced to death by a military court, he remained unmolested in command of his troops until the war ended.

Reinefarth was used by the Allies during the Nuremberg Trials, at which he testified against some other members of the SS. He was arrested for war crimes after the trials but was released by a Hamburg court because it decided that there was a lack of evidence that he had committed atrocities. Other German courts upheld that decision despite numerous Polish requests for his extradition.

In 1951 he was elected mayor of Westerland, a town on the Island of Sylt. He continued in politics and served as a member of the parliament of Schleswig-Holstein from 1962-1967. After that he pursued his career as a lawyer. He died in May 1979 at his home on Sylt.

German territory east of the Oder, including the Küstrin area, was given to Poland after the war. The Neustadt of Küstrin was rebuilt and is now known as Kostrzyn. Most of the Altstadt was destroyed and has never been rebuilt. The only sound in that area is the eerie whistling of the wind as it blows through the skeletal ruins of shattered homes and buildings. Today, it has the nickname "Pompeii on the Oder."

Author Pat McTaggart is an expert on World War II on the Eastern Front and a frequent contributor to WWII History. *He resides in Elkader, Iowa.*

This forlorn view across the Warthe River depicts the burning town of Neustadt while German forces prepare to attempt a breakout from Soviet encirclement against orders from Adolf Hitler.

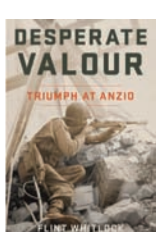
Bundesarchiv Bild 146-1990-060-02; Photo: Unknown

National Archives

At the Costly Anzio Beachhead

The Battle of Anzio was a bitter struggle of endurance between two unrelenting combatants that ultimately ended in Allied triumph.

THE MORNING OF FEBRUARY 16, 1944, DAWNED FOGGY OVER THE VIA Anziate near Anzio, Italy. The 45th Infantry Division's 2nd Battalion, 157th Infantry Regiment had advanced overnight to take positions on the west side of the roadway, assuming its place on the front lines. Company E, commanded by Captain Felix Sparks, was assigned to one end of the battalion's line, where it bordered the division's 179th Regiment. Looking out across the ground in front of his position, Sparks saw overcoat-clad figures moving but could not tell who they were. He called his higher headquarters and asked if the soldiers of the 179th had overcoats. Told they did not, Sparks realized the advancing men were Germans. It wasn't long before enemy artillery began to pound Company E's foxholes. Shells crashed around them for 10 minutes, but the troops were well dug in so casualties were light.



When the barrage lifted, three German tanks, unsupported by infantry, came forward and attacked. "They made a mistake," Sparks said. Company E had an antitank gun and two M-10 tank destroyers supporting it. They opened fire at Sparks' order and quickly destroyed two of the tanks, while the third made a fast retreat. Within a few minutes, however, German infantry attacked again, shouting and screaming as though drunk. Sparks' men shot them down. "We killed every damn one of them," he later recalled. The sound of firing could be heard coming from the 179th's lines; the enemy was attacking there as well.

Only a half hour passed before the third German wave came crashing at E Company. This time, the infantry came with armored support. "That's what killed us," Sparks said, referring to the mutual support of tanks and infantry. The panzers moved up to point-blank range and opened fire. The fighting was intense; soon even more German troops were sent against Sparks' men. As the company fought to hold back the enemy assault, Sparks saw a crewman from one of the tank destroyers climb atop the vehicle and man its .50-caliber machine gun, exposing himself to enemy fire. He stopped part of the German attack but was killed by a burst. Sparks did not even know the soldier's name.

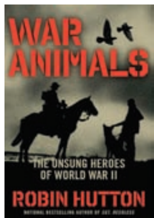
At midday, as the fight raged on, Sparks sent away his sole remaining tank destroyer, its ammunition depleted. It left at full speed with the Germans firing at it the entire way; Sparks watched rounds impact just behind it as it moved. Shortly afterward, yet another wave of Germans attacked. This time, Sparks saw only one way to stop the assault. He called in artillery on his own position, a tactic only used as a last resort to avoid overrun and defeat. E Company's troops were still in their foxholes, while the Germans advanced in the open. The German attack was finally stopped, though only for the moment.

The onslaught was not yet over; the heavy fighting and bloodshed went on for days until the Nazi offensive was finally exhausted. Even then, the campaign ground on in an extended battle of attrition and willpower until the Allies were ready to finally take the offensive, break out of the perimeter, and begin their journey toward Rome. It was a harrowing and dramatic time, a story of courage under pressure for both sides. The story is expertly told in ***Desperate Valour: Triumph at Anzio*** (Flint Whitlock, Da Capo Press, Boston, MA, 2018, 496 pp.,

An American GI moves past the body of a dead German defender in the shattered ruins of Cisterna, during the battle of Anzio.

maps, photographs, bibliography, index, $35.00, hardcover).

The author is an acknowledged master of telling battle stories from the foxhole level, and that skill shows through in his latest book. The story of Anzio is told through the eyes and words of the participants, showing how they perceived the wide-ranging events of the fighting at their level and in their place and time. The author skillfully weaves these various narratives together into a coherent and engaging narrative, giving the reader an explanation of how thousands of Allied soldiers worked together to defeat their opponents and take the offensive, pushing the war along toward its final, dreadful conclusion. This includes accounts by participants such as Audie Murphy and James Arness, in later years the star of *Gunsmoke.* Many books have been written about Anzio; this one stands out through its detailed perspective, thorough research, and clear prose.

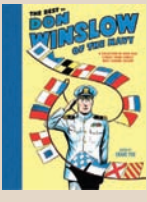


War Animals: The Unsung Heroes of World War II (Robin Hutton, Regnery Press, Washington, D.C., 2018, 466 pp., photographs, appendix, bibliography, notes, index, $29.99, hardcover)

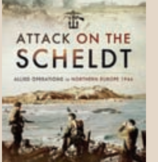
Chips was a mutt, a mix of Collie, German Shepherd, and Husky. He was also the most decorated canine of World War II. He was donated to the Army by a family in Pleasantville, New York, trained, and paired with a handler named John Rowell. Chips went ashore during Operation Torch, the invasion of French North Africa, and faced artillery fire. During the invasion of Sicily in 1943, the dog attacked a machine-gun nest, tearing at the throat of an Italian soldier who quickly surrendered. For this and other brave acts he was awarded the Distinguished Service Cross. Other awards followed, including a Silver Star and a recommendation for the Purple Heart. Later, however, these awards were revoked through the efforts of those who thought animals should not receive awards. Chips survived the war and went home to Pleasantville and his family, where he was recognized as a hero but soon became a beloved pet once more.

The tale of Chips is but one of many in this new work, which tells the stories of various animals who served in a military capacity during the war. They are entertaining and often harrowing, as the animals were exposed to the same dangers as their human handlers. The book is written in a clear, simple narrative, which successfully conveys these simple accounts to the reader.

New and Noteworthy



The Best of Don Winslow of the Navy: A Collection of High-Seas Stories from Comic's Most Daring Sailor! Edited by Craig Yoe, Naval Institute Press, 2018, $$29.95, hardcover) This comic strip was popular during and immediately after World War II. The best stories of the series are compiled here.



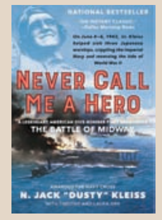
Attack on the Scheldt: The Struggle for Antwerp 1944 (Graham Thomas, Pen and Sword Books, 2018, $39.95, hardcover) The fighting for the region around Antwerp was among the most difficult of the war. This full-length study brings the action into full light.

A French GI at Omaha Beach (Caroline Jolivet, Pen and Sword Books, 2018, $34.95, hardcover) Bernard Dargols was a young student in New York when the war began. He joined the U.S. Army to help liberate his country.

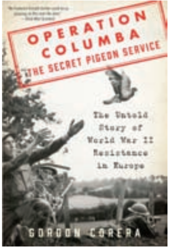
The Spy Toolkit: Extraordinary Inventions from World War II (Stephen Twigge, Osprey Publishing, 2018, $15.00, hardcover) This book reveals the various tools, weapons, and methods used by Allied intelligence to conduct its war of espionage. It is well illustrated.

Sturmgeschutz: Panzer, Panzerjager, Waffen-SS and Luftwaffe Units 1943-45 (Thomas Anderson, Osprey Publishing, 2018, $45.00, hardcover) Sturmgeschutz assault guns were widely used with great success by the German forces. This book recounts their design, production, and use.

Atlas of the European Campaign 1944-45 (Steven Zaloga, Osprey Publishing, 2018, $60.00, hardcover with case) This detailed work contains maps of the major actions of the European Theater along with brief text explain the events of the fighting.



The Death of Hitler: The Final Word (Jean-Christophe Brisard and Lana Parshina, Da Capo Press, 2018, $29.00, hardcover) The authors have compiled new information on the last days and death of Hitler using archival sources and forensic analysis.



Never Call Me A Hero: A Legendary Dive-Bomber Pilot Remembers the Battle of Midway (N. Jack "Dusty" Kleiss, William Morrow Publishers, 2018, $26.99, hardcover) The author was 26 when he piloted a dive-bomber against the Japanese carrier *Kaga* during the Battle of Midway. This is his fascinating story.

Operation Columbia—The Secret Pigeon Service: The Untold Story of World War II Resistance in Europe (Gordon Corera, William Morrow, New York, photographs, index, $28.99, hardcover)

During World War II the British intelligence services dropped more than 16,000 homing pigeons across Nazi-occupied Europe from Denmark to southern France. All of this was carried out under the operational name Columba. Resistance fighters wrote messages on small pieces of rice paper, secured them in tiny canisters tied to the pigeons' legs, and set them aloft to return to Britain. The messages contained reports on troop movements, radar stations, and defenses— when they held anything useful at all. Sometimes the information was so useful British intelligence would para-

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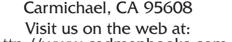

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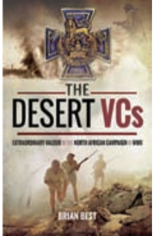
chute agents in to assist the relatively amateur resistance operatives.

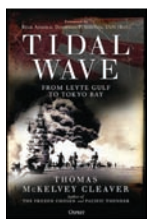
The author carried out extensive research paired with declassified documentation to create this revealing tale of intelligence and resistance at work during the war. It is a dramatic human story of bravery under enemy occupation painstakingly pieced together. The result is an in-depth look at one of the lesser known episodes of the espionage war in Europe.



The Desert VCs: Extraordinary Valour in the North African Campaign in WWII (Brian Best, Frontline Books, Barnsley, UK, 2018, 216 pp., photographs, bibliography, index, $34.95, softcover)

On April 13, 1941, Corporal John Hearst Edmondson of D Company, 2/17 Battalion, Australian Imperial Force was with his comrades in the thin perimeter around Tobruk in eastern Libya. Ahead of his a platoon a group of Germans were infiltrating the Australian line, carrying machine guns and mortars. The platoon commander, Lieutenant Mackell, decided to break up the enemy formation, and the Aussies charged into them, firing and throwing grenades as they went. Edmondson was hit in the stomach and neck but kept going, killing one German and engaging another. Suddenly, the lieutenant called out for help, beset by two enemy soldiers. Edmondson bayoneted both of them and saved his officer. The enemy retreated, leaving a dozen dead behind. The attack was defeated, but Edmondson was mortally wounded, dying the next morning. For his heroism he was posthumously awarded the Victoria Cross. He was the first Australian to receive the award during the war.

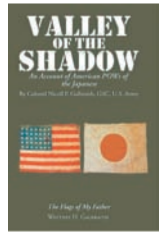
This account is but one of many in this new book relaying the stories of those who earned the Victoria Cross over the course of World War II. Included are chapters on the fighting in East Africa, Greece, and Syria along with a chapter on five submariners who received the Victoria Cross while fighting at sea. The work is full of well-written accounts of heroism in one of the war's earliest theaters.



Tidal Wave: From Leyte Gulf to Tokyo Bay (Thomas McKelvey Cleaver, Osprey Publishing, Oxford, UK, 2018, 320 pp., maps, photographs, bibliography, index, $32.00, hardcover)

The last year of the war in the Pacific was the hardest fought and most difficult. Considering how difficult and brutal this theater of war was, such a statement is significant. Despite the hardships, the U.S. Navy won many overwhelming victories during this period, around the Philippine Islands and elsewhere. Any other enemy would likely have given up after receiving such hammer blows to its fleet and land forces, but Imperial Japan was not a typical enemy. The Japanese were determined and implacable, even in the face of certain defeat. So they desperately fought on despite being gradually ground under by the Allied superiority at sea and in the air. It was a war unlike any that had come before it and has not been seen since.

In this book the author offers his analysis of the strategic and political situations during the last year of the war. He deftly combines this high-level approach with vignettes of aerial combat, severe typhoons, and deadly kamikaze raids, showing how the fighting challenged the sailors of the U.S. Navy just as the Japanese were pushed to fight ever more urgently. Further, he points out how the U.S. Navy had been designed decades before to take on the Japanese and ultimately succeed at its task. This work is a tribute to the sailors who kept pushing forward to final victory despite the high cost in lives.



Valley of the Shadow: An Account of American POWs of the Japanese (Colonel Nicoll F. Galbraith, Xlibris, 2018, 546 pp., photographs, appendices, $23.79, softcover)

Colonel Nicoll "Nick" Galbraith was in the Philippines when World War II began. He was a staff officer serving General Jonathan M. Wainwright. When the American forces surrendered to the invading Japanese in early 1942, Nick became a prisoner of war and would spend the next four years as a captive until he and his comrades were rescued by a six-man OSS team, which parachuted into their POW camp in northern China. It was a harrowing and trying experience fraught with hardship, mistreatment, and hunger. At the same time there was courage, sacrifice, and fellowship.

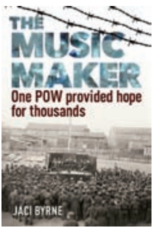
This work was written by Colonel Galbraith in the years after his liberation. While partially fictionalized, it was created using the extensive notes he kept while a prisoner, written on whatever notebooks or paper he could scrounge. He risked punishment or even death if these notes were found. Still, his writings allowed him to put together this fascinating account of life as a prisoner of Imperial Japan.

The narrative flows easily, and the reader is kept enthralled by the day-to-day struggle for both survival and sanity.

Air War Varsity (Martin W. Bowman, Pen and Sword Books, S. Yorkshire, UK, 2018, 256 pp., maps, photographs, appendix, notes, index, $39.95, hardcover)

Operation Varsity took place on March 24, 1945, and was the last large-scale Allied airborne operation of World War II. It was part of a larger operation involving amphibious attacks by British Second Army. More than 1,500 troop-carrier aircraft and 1,350 gliders were involved in the drop with an air attack by some 10,000 combat aircraft against German airfields and transportation networks. The British 6th Airborne and American 17th Airborne Divisions were dropped in a single day north and northwest of the German city of Wesel on the east bank of the Rhine. The Germans, through intelligence analysis, expected an attack in the area, knowing the Allies would not want their paratroopers too far from the advancing ground troops. While Varsity was a success, it was not a walkover and hard fighting ensued.

The author is an acknowledged expert on aviation history, and his expertise shines through in the extensive detail that fills this new book. Attention is given to the operations before Varsity, which influenced how it was conducted. The volume is full of firsthand accounts, which speak to the drama of the operation. Air operations are also given thorough attention alongside the airborne troops. There are also a large number of photographs, some of them never before published, that highlight the actions described in the narrative.



The Music Maker: One POW Provided Hope for Thousands (Jaci Byrne, Big Sky Publishing, Newport, NSW, Australia, 2018, 268 pp., photographs, $34.99, softcover)

Drum Major Henry Barnes Jackson was a musician in the British Army's 5th Battalion, the Border Regiment. He began World War II with them, his unit sent to France to fight the Nazis. He was captured on May 29, 1940, and spent the rest of the war as a German prisoner. During his captivity he used his musical talents to entertain his fellow captives and keep himself occupied and sane. On the last day of the war in Europe, he was liberated by

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Simulation Gaming BY JOSEPH LUSTER

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BATTLEFIELD V

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We're at somewhat of an impasse in the world of shooters and the disparity between single-player and multiplayer offerings. On one hand, smash hit successes such as *Fortnite, Playerunknown's Battlegrounds,* and the more recent *Call of Duty Black Ops 4* have shown that online-only setups can make a ton of money while pleasing hardcore fans and newcomers alike. On the other, there has been plenty of evidence that single-player is far from dead, no matter what your average shareholder-pleasing publisher would like you to believe. Where, then, does that leave *Battlefield V,* which wrestles between the two styles of play with mixed success?

As everyone suspected well before it was announced, *Battlefield V* follows the World War I act of *Battlefield 1* with a welcome return to World War II. It's hard to believe there was ever a time when we were so inundated with WWII shooters that we longed for something more. In recent years, each WWII-themed release has felt more like a breath of fresh air in a sea of modernized shooting action. That doesn't change the fact that many like minded players have had countless experiences with the subgenre, which raises the bar of expectations regarding what the biggest publishers and developers in the industry can do with today's technology.

The issue at the heart of *Battlefield V*'s single-player component doesn't lie within its story; that's actually one of the more deftly handled aspects of the package. The War Stories told here range from a Norwegian resistance fighter attempting to sabotage Germany's nuclear program to the tale of a Senegalese Tirailleur during August 1944's Operation Dragoon and a sortie that puts a convicted bank robber smack dab in the Special Boat Service during Operation Albumen. It's all carried out in a manner similar to the way they handled the campaign in *Battlefield 1,* which was comprised of heartfelt standalone stories full of exciting action set pieces. You'll find similarly well-written missions here, so why does it ring more hollow than its predecessor?

The meat of the complaints fall directly upon the structure of the campaign itself. Gone are the novel settings and goals of *Battlefield 1,* replaced instead with the type of objectives we've experienced time and time again in the context of World War II. You'll take down tanks, attempt to hurriedly dismantle anti-aircraft guns, and generally be moved along at a brisk pace throughout an appropriately hectic environment, mired in familiarity all the while. The snow-steeped Norway section of "Nordlys" offers up some interesting diversions, but you will again find yourself funneled down a relatively restrictive path, with only the occasional open area to break up the action.

There's more on the way for *Battlefield V,* with a fourth story chapter that's supposed to land in December or January (so it will likely be out by the time this issue is in your hands). As it stands at the time of this writing, though, the single-player aspect is mostly uninspired and lacking in content. If *Battlefield V*'s campaign were a little longer and full of more areas that gave players an opportunity to come up with their own unique tactics, it might have felt a little less like an afterthought designed to bolster the multiplayer star of the show.

This is where *Battlefield V* really opens up, which is great news if you're a fan of multiplayer-centric releases. Competitive play is fast, hectic, and fun, but much like the solo chunk it isn't quite fully realized. Some of the most substantial modes, including a highly anticipated Battle Royale mode that aims to capitalize on the aforementioned popularity of Fortnite and similar titles, have yet to arrive. What's here now, though, is pretty enticing for both new players and seasoned veterans alike, with a handful of detailed maps that can be absolutely obliterated over the course of a single 64-player match.

It was during multiplayer, not the solo campaign, that I realized how beautiful *Battlefield V* can be. When the multiplayer works, it does an amazing job of selling the absolute chaos of war. At times this is overwhelming, regardless of how many multiplayer shooters you may have played in the past. Developer DICE wanted to bring the franchise back to its World War II roots, and they've made some major strides in doing so. One of the features that really drives the competition is the Attrition system, which forces players to make an immediate choice between pushing forward with an undersupplied squad or diverting from the get-go to stock up on essential items. For better or worse, this decision will always affect the outcome of battle in some form.

Other systems need some work, especially when it comes to the methods of reviving downed players. It's up to the dying player in question as to whether they want to hold out for help from their team or bleed out to respawn more quickly, but it tends to be a little too buggy to bank on regularly. This brings us to the issue of balance, which is always tricky when designing multiplayer that suits all types of players. You'll run into plenty of balancing gripes of your own if you spend much time in the Grand Operations mode, which takes the structure of single matches and expands it into a series of intense battles that regularly change the level of advantage in favor of the victorious side. As you might guess, these advantages can quickly spiral out of control, especially when dealing with already-overpowered airborne opponents.

Despite some truly rousing battles and a decent amount of room to grow, the full package of *Battlefield V* comes off as more of a compromise than a complete success in both the single- and multiplayer fields. DICE is hoping this one has some legs, naturally, so it's worth sticking around to see where it goes from here. If you're looking for a return to the solo World War II shooters of yesteryear with a slick coat of paint, look elsewhere. If you have patience for a young yet still maturing multiplayer mode, though, *Battlefield V* is certainly worth investigating. □

American troops after enduring a forced march by his captors. The only possession he had left was his diary, meticulously kept during his imprisonment. Henry was 46 years old at the time.

Henry's fascinating diary is now available for the reading public with the release of this book, organized and compiled by his granddaughter. It shows how one man, humble and unassuming, could use his talents to overcome extreme adversity and brutal treatment. The book also contains a number of Henry's personal photographs, adding a visual record to the reader's experience. It also enlightens the reader by showing how the war appeared from within the confines of a prison camp's barbed wire.

Operation Crossbow 1944: Hunting Hitler's V-Weapons (Steven J. Zaloga, Osprey Publishing, Oxford, UK, 2018, maps, photographs, bibliography, index, $20.00, softcover)

By late 1943, the Allies were noticing new construction along the English Channel coast; the Germans were up to something. These massive new creations were launch sites for the Third Reich's newest weapons, the V-1"buzz bomb" and V-2 ballistic missile. Soon these "vengeance" weapons would rain down upon civilian population centers such as London. While the weapons could do little to affect the overall course of the war, they were killing noncombatants. A campaign was begun to destroy these sites, particularly the ski-ramped launching sites for the more numerous V-1s. It included British Avro Lancaster bombers armed with enormous Tallboy bombs using newly developed radar guidance methods. The Americans brought in their own high technology, packing worn-out but still flyable Boeing B-17 bombers with explosives and flying them into targets by radio control. Conventional aircraft were also extensively used. The V-weapons ultimately failed to influence the war, but they were the harbingers of the guided missiles of the nuclear age.

The efforts to hunt down the V-weapons and their launch sites are well covered in this new work, part of Osprey's new Air Campaign series. The detailed text is accompanied by numerous images and original artwork, which bring life to the subject. Maps and charts help explain how the various missions were planned and carried out along with their results. This is an excellent resource on one of the war's lesser known air campaigns. □

WW2 US AERIAL GUNNER WING STERLING BADGE

WW2 GERMAN LUFTWAFFE PILOT GOGGLES

SS TOTENKOPF S.Lb. WALTER 9.11.41 H. HIMMLER HONOR RING LRG HEAD

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Warsaw

Continued from page 41

lift, with flight crews avoiding central Warsaw's flak-infested cauldron in favor of supplying AK strongholds outside the city.

The next raid went badly for Air Marshal Slessor's special duty aircraft. On August 16, six 31 Squadron Liberators, another three from 178 Squadron, and four Halifaxes from 148 Squadron joined five Polish warplanes bound for targets in the Kampinos Forest. German and Hungarian interceptors savaged the bomber stream, downing four planes that night.

Since the start of the Warsaw Airlift on August 4, Polish Special Duties Flight 1586 and No. 178 Squadron had each lost four Liberators, No. 148 Squadron two Halifaxes, and No. 31 Squadron eight Liberators, for a total loss of 18 aircraft. The South African squadron, now down to two flyable bombers, was taken off operational status to rebuild its combat strength.

Air Marshal Slessor had seen enough. Once more canceling all future Warsaw missions, he bluntly informed Prime Minister Churchill that unless supplies could be sent from England or Russia the Home Army was simply "beyond our help." And yet again, political pressure from exiled Polish officials compelled him to allow the battered No. 1586 Flight to resume its dangerous nighttime forays into the heart of burning Warsaw.

Only an extended period of bad weather spared these courageous aviators from certain disaster. Also, by the end of the month replacement bombers and aircrews had arrived in Italy to bolster Flight 1586's thin ranks. From August 20 to 28, the unit went out 38 times to Warsaw and other Polish cities, losing four bombers in the process. Another three aircraft went missing on the stormy night of September 1 while delivering cargo canisters to resistance forces.

In a month of relentless fighting, General Bór-Komorowski's Home Army had improbably held out against eight German combat divisions and SS "police troops." Now those courageous Poles began to believe they had been forsaken by their oldest allies. One communiqué, transmitted on September 1 (the fifth anniversary of World War II's outbreak), read, "The people of Warsaw are left to their own devices, abandoned on the front of the common fight against the Germans." Yet Slessor's flight crews could do nothing to aid them until the weather improved.

Two matters of significance took place on September 10. First, the Soviets finally allowed Allied bombers flying aerial resupply missions over Warsaw access to their landing fields. Second, the arrival of barometric parachute releases in Italy enabled Air Marshal Slessor to schedule an RAF-led airlift sortie that night. Fifteen bombers—including three Liberators from the recently arrived No. 34 (SAAF) Squadron—participated, releasing their payloads from an altitude of 11,500 feet while flying within Soviet-controlled airspace as much as possible. Three Polish, one RAF, and one SAAF aircraft were shot down in this raid.

Another two flights from Italy, flown on September 18 and 20, delivered a smattering of supplies with no loss to Slessor's aircrews. By now the Western Allies were sharing Warsaw's skies with Soviet biplanes, also dropping weapons and ammunition to AK enclaves. Few of these Russian-built munitions, released without parachutes, made it undamaged into the hands of Home Army insurgents.

The final note of this aerial concerto was at once its most majestic and plaintive. At 1200 hours on September 18, a total of 107 B-17s of the USAAF Eighth Air Force escorted by 64 Mustang fighter aircraft appeared high over Warsaw. Bór's partisans watched with amazement as the bombers disgorged 1,284 containers, most of which landed on German-controlled territory. Polish combatants managed to recover a paltry 288 canisters dropped that afternoon.

The end came at 0800 hours on October 2, 1944, when General Komorowski and the remnants of his Armia Krajowa surrendered. They had fought at great cost for 63 days, as demonstrated by the loss of an estimated 15,000 of the AK's 45,000-member force. More than 150,000 Polish civilians also died in the uprising, after which all surviving residents were forcibly expelled from their homes. When Red Army forces finally entered the derelict city in January 1945, they found it almost completely destroyed.

For his part, Air Marshal John Slessor viewed the airlift as "a story of the utmost gallantry and self-sacrifice on the part of our air crews, RAF, South African and above all Polish." A total of 31 Allied warplanes were lost in the campaign, along with some 200 aviators captured, killed, or listed as missing in action. Slessor later calculated that one aircraft was destroyed for every ton of supplies delivered. Perhaps the Warsaw Airlift's greatest tragedy was the loss of so many Allied airmen on a politically motivated mission that in the end had no realistic chance of success.

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

Delaying Action

Continued from page 61

a full torpedo load, having missed the Java Sea battle, *Exeter* sailed late on February 28. She headed northeast and then west, hoping also slip through Sunda Strait. The three ships never got there. Four Japanese cruisers ambushed the ships and overwhelmed all three. Only 800 men survived the two British ships, and 149 men from *Pope* survived.

Binford's four American destroyers had a better fate. They left Surabaya late on February 28, and sailed through the Bali Strait eastward and reached Fremantle in Australia on March 4. All four ships spent the rest of the war on convoy duties in the Pacific and Atlantic.

On the night of February 28, Japanese troops landed on Java and began moving on their objectives. Despite the best efforts of American artillery, British tanks, and Australian and Dutch troops, the defenses collapsed. On March 9, the Dutch East Indies surrendered. The Japanese had expected to conquer the oil- and resource-rich archipelago in six months. They did it in three.

Many things contributed to the failure of the Allies at the Battle of the Java Sea. Foremost was the inferiority of Allied numbers and power to the Japanese force. The Japanese vessels were modern, equipped with powerful torpedoes, and had crews well trained in using them. The Allied sailors were long-service veterans, but they had not trained or worked together for any length of time and were operating elderly ships with inefficient weapons. The American destroyers dated back to 1916, and their torpedoes did not detonate.

Most importantly, the command structure in the Dutch East Indies was the first such attempt by the Allies to create a unified multinational force. It lacked unity, cohesion, common communications procedures, and clear chains of command and authority. Later in the war, when multinational Allied forces invaded Sicily, Italy, France, Burma, and Germany, the command procedures were more authoritative and clear, weaponry and communications unified, tactics simplified. The multinational Allied fleet that returned to Java to bombard and shell Japanese installations and oil fields in 1944 would bear little resemblance to the fleet that went down at the Java Sea beyond the national flags that flew over the attacking warships.

Author David Lippman is a frequent contributor to WWII History. He has written on a number of topics and has maintained a website detailing the daily events of the war.

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