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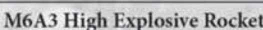

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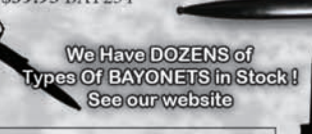

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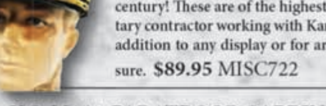

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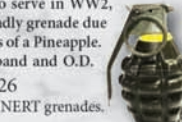

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Cover: A German Panzer IV heads to the front in Normandy during the Summer of 1944. Hitler ordered a panzer attack at Mortain to halt the Allied advance. See story page 46. Bundesarchive Bild 101I-493-3356-07; Photo: Siedel

WWII History (ISSN 1539-5456) is published six times yearly in February, April, June, August, October, and December by Sovereign Media, 6731 Whittier Ave., Suite A-100, McLean, VA 22101. (703) 964-0361. Periodical postage paid at McLean, VA, and additional mailing offices. *WWII History,* Volume 19, Number 3 © 2019 by Sovereign Media Company, Inc., all rights reserved. Copyrights to stories and illustrations are the property of their creators. The contents of this publication may not be reproduced in whole or in part without consent of the copyright owner. ***Subscription services, back issues, and information:*** (800) **219-1187** *or* write to ***WWII History* Circulation, WWII History, P.O. Box 1644, Williamsport, PA 17703.** Single copies: $5.99, plus $3 for postage. Yearly subscription in U.S.A.: $24.95; Canada and Overseas: $38.95 (U.S.). Editorial Office: Send editorial mail to *WWII History,* 6731 Whittier Ave., Suite A-100, McLean, VA 22101. *WWII History* welcomes editorial submissions but assumes no responsibility for the loss or damage of unsolicited material. Material to be returned should be accompanied by a self-addressed, stamped envelope. We suggest that you send a self-addressed, stamped envelope for a copy of our author's guidelines. **POSTMASTER: Send address changes to WWII History, P.O. Box 1644, Williamsport, PA 17703.**

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Editorial

WWII HISTORY

Volume 19 ■ Number 3

Was Justice Served After the Malmedy Massacre?

IT WAS A DISMAL DAY, SUNDAY, DECEMBER 17, 1944, JUST HOURS AFTER THE Germans had broken through the thinly held American lines in the Ardennes Forest along rugged terrain of the Western Front.

The thunderclap of Operation Wacht am Rhein (Watch on the Rhine) had struck with sudden fury, sending the Americans reeling, units scrambling to defend against an onslaught of infantry, armor, and artillery aimed at driving a wedge between the Allied forces north and south, crossing the Meuse River, and capturing the vital port of Antwerp, Belgium. In his delirium, Hitler believed this bold counterstroke in the West, fraught with risk though it was, might bring victory or at least a negotiated peace with Britain and the United States.

In the end, the great Battle of the Bulge resulted in devastating defeat for the Germans, but it was a near-run thing 75 years ago. Amid the death and destruction, one particular event resonates across the decades, an incident so brutal and unwarranted that historians wince today at its very mention. The Malmedy Massacre claimed the lives of at least 86 Americans, men of the 285th Field Artillery Observation Battalion, captured by SS troops under the command of Obersturmbannführer Joachim Peiper and then mercilessly gunned down in a snowy field near the once quiet Belgian town.

Peiper's battlegroup of the 1st SS Panzer Division Leibstandarte Adolf Hitler was the tip of the spear of General Joseph "Sepp" Dietrich's Sixth Panzer Army, racing toward the Meuse. Peiper refused to allow prisoners to slow his pace, and the American prisoners stood in the snow for two hours … waiting. Then, without warning a pistol shot rang out. Another followed, and the chatter of automatic weapons tore into the ranks. Men fell mortally wounded or dead before they hit the ground.

Private Homer D. Ford, one of the few survivors, recalled, "They came along with pistols and rifles and shot some that were still breathing and hit others in the head with rifle butts. I was hit in the arm. The men were all laying [sic] around moaning and crying. When the Germans came over, they would say, 'Is he breathing?' and would either shoot them or hit them with the butt of the gun. After they fired at us, I lay stretched out with my hands out, and I could feel the blood oozing out."

Peiper's column rolled ahead, only to be trapped and nearly annihilated as the Allies rebounded from the initial shock of the German offensive. The bodies of the massacre victims were recovered, and the SS troops were identified as the perpetrators, not only at Malmedy but also other locations along their route of march.

Peiper survived the war to stand trial along with other former officers and soldiers of the Waffen SS during an American military tribunal at Dachau in Bavaria. On July 16, 1946, more than 20 defendants received life in prison, while 43, including Peiper, were sentenced to death by hanging. Eight others received lengthy prison terms. Politics subsequently intervened.

Senator Joseph McCarthy of Wisconsin pushed for a new trial as certain evidence suggested that Peiper had been tortured into a confession of the crime. By March 1948, the U.S. Senate Armed Services Committee had voted to commute 31 death sentences. A month later, General Lucius Clay of the U.S. European Command reduced six more death sentences to prison terms.

In the end, none of the Malmedy defendants went to the gallows. Peiper, Dietrich, and several other former SS men who played roles in the massacre were released from prison after serving 13 years.

Memories of the atrocities committed under Peiper's command remained fresh in the minds of many after World War II ended. On the night of July 14, 1976, Bastille Day, Peiper's home in Traves, a village in central France, was firebombed, and the charred body of the 61-year-old convicted war criminal was found in the burned-out ruins. A shadowy group called The Avengers claimed responsibility, and no one was ever prosecuted.

Peiper's former SS comrades held him in high regard during his lifetime, and even after his death.

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WORLDWIDE DISTRIBUTION

SOVEREIGN MEDIA COMPANY, INC.
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McLean, VA 22101-4554

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By Michael D. Hull

Imperial War Museum

Piping Ashore at Sword Beach

Bill Millin brought Lord Lovat's Commandos some rousing music on the morning of D-Day.

IT WAS THE EVENING OF MONDAY, JUNE 5, 1944, AND AN ARMADA OF ALMOST 5,000 ships stood off the southern coast of England, primed and ready for the greatest amphibious invasion in history.

The long-awaited liberation of Nazi-occupied Europe by the British, American, and Canadian Armies was starting. To observers in the ports and coastal hamlets of Hampshire, Dorset, Sussex, and Devon, the great fleet of battleships, cruisers, destroyers, monitors, minesweepers, landing ships, and assault craft seemed to stretch to the horizon before heading toward its assembly area—dubbed "Piccadilly Circus," south of the Isle of Wight—and then the Normandy coast.

At one of many embarkation docks, Warsash, at the mouth of the River Hamble in Hampshire, Commandos of the crack 2,500-strong British 1st Special Service Brigade clambered aboard 22 landing craft that would take them across the English Channel to Normandy. One of the soldiers was boyish-looking, unassuming William Millin of the Cameron Highlanders, the personal bagpiper of Lord Lovat, the brigade's handsome, charismatic commander.

Standing in the foreground at right, Piper Bill Millin pipes Lord Lovat's Commandos ashore on the Queen Red Beach sector of Sword Beach on D-Day. Lord Lovat is seen wading ashore just to the right of the column of soldiers.

Wearing a battledress tunic and the kilt of the Clan Cameron, Millin stood on the bow, took his pipes out of their box, and started playing the old Scottish air "Road to the Isles" as the landing craft steamed out of the Solent, between Hampshire and the Isle of Wight, and into the Channel. A sailor relayed the music over the ship's loudhailer, and the sound carried across the water. Sailors and troops on other landing ships—tense and fearful of what they would face in a few hours' time—cheered and threw their helmets into the air. Nearby warships joined the impromptu refrain. Two Royal Navy Hunt-class destroyers played "A-Hunting We Will Go" over their loudhailers, and Free French destroyers responded with the "Marseillaise."

The only bagpiper and the only kilted soldier in the powerful Allied armada, 21-year-old Bill Millin was to become a singular figure in D-Day lore.

He was born in Glasgow on July 14, 1922, the son of a policeman. The family moved to Canada and lived there for a few years before returning to Scotland. Young Bill attended schools in Glasgow. Before the outbreak of World War II early in September 1939, the young man enlisted in the Territorial Army (National Guard) and joined the 7th Battalion pipe band of the proud Highland Light Infantry. After being transferred to the Cameron Highlanders, he volunteered in 1941 for the newly formed British Commandos.

Millin met Lord Lovat while undergoing rigorous combat training at Achnacarry, the Commando depot north of Fort William in the rugged northwestern Scottish Highlands. Lovat, the 24th hereditary chief of the Clan Fraser, also had joined the Commandos in 1941. After ranching in South America and attending Magdalen College, Oxford, he had enlisted in the famed Scots Guards and soldiered in Egypt before the war. He would become one of the legendary figures of World War II, distinguishing himself in Commando raids on the German-held Norway coast in December 1941 and during the ill-fated British-Canadian raid on the fortified French port of Dieppe on August 18-19, 1942. British Prime Minister Winston Churchill called Lovat "the handsomest man who ever cut a throat."

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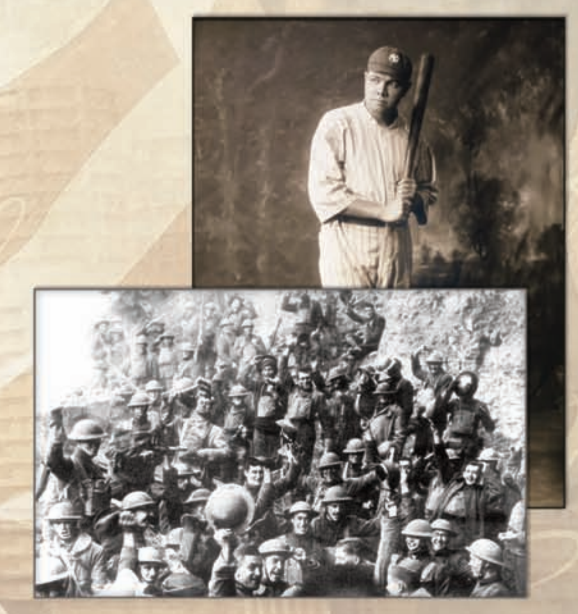

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Imperial War Museum

In this photo taken shortly after D-Day, Bill Millin plays his bagpipes. Soldiers of Lord Lovat's Commandos lounge around and listen during a lull in the fighting in Normandy.

Millin to become his batman. The young soldier turned down the offer, and Lovat agreed instead to take him on as his personal piper. The War Office had banned bagpipers from leading troops into action after the great losses on the Western Front in World War I, but Lovat, descended from a long line of Scottish warriors, had a mind of his own. "Ah, but that's the English War Office," he told Millin with a sly twinkle. "You and I are both Scottish, and that doesn't apply."

Early on the gray, windy morning of Tuesday, June 6, 1944, the Allied armada stood off the Normandy coast after butting through the choppy English Channel. It was a rough, wet crossing for the troops aboard the landing ships and assault boats, and most of them were so seasick that they could not wait to get ashore, no matter what dangers awaited them. Piper Millin was no exception. "I didn't care what was going on ashore," he reported. "I just wanted to get off that bloody landing craft."

The assault force comprising armored and infantry elements of the U.S. First and British Second Armies neared five landing beaches: two American, two British, and one Canadian. At the western end, Utah Beach was the objective of the 12th, 22nd, and 8th Regiments of Maj. Gen. Raymond O. "Tubby" Barton's U.S. 4th Infantry (Ivy) Division, while Omaha Beach was the objective of the 115th and 116th Regiments of the U.S. 1st Infantry (Big Red One) Division led by Maj. Gen. Clarence R. Huebner. Farther east, brigades and Royal Marine Commandos of Maj. Gen. Douglas A.H. Graham's British 50th (Northumbrian) Infantry Division made for Gold Beach, and brigades, Royal Marine Commandos and the 4th Special Service Brigade of the Canadian 3rd Infantry Division, led by Maj. Gen. Rodney F.L. Keller, approached Juno Beach. At the easternmost section of the assault area, Sword Beach was the objective of Maj. Gen. Thomas G. Rennie's British 3rd Infantry Division, comprising the 27th Armored Brigade, several infantry brigades, British Commandos, Captain Philippe Kieffer's Free French Commandos, and Lord Lovat's brigade.

The 1st Special Service Brigade comprised Nos. 3, 4, and 6 Commandos of the British Army, No. 45 Royal Marine Commando, and elements of No. 10 Inter-Allied Commando, most of whom were Free French troops. Although Lovat's men were wet, seasick, and nervous, their morale was high. As their landing craft drew abreast of the cruiser HMS Scylla, the flagship of Rear Admiral Philip Vian, commander of the Eastern Task Force, the Commandos gave thumbs-up salutes. Looking down on them, 18-year-old Able Seaman Ronald Northwood pronounced them "the finest set of chaps I ever came across."

Covering almost 20 miles along Sword, Juno, and Gold Beaches, from Ouistreham near the mouth of the River Orne to the village of Le Hamel on the west, the British and Canadian infantry swarmed ashore starting at 6 AM that Tuesday. The beaches were choked with landing craft disgorging troops, negotiating underwater obstacles, and braving German machine-gun and mortar fire.

Bucking in heavy seas, the landing craft carrying the assault troops of the British 3rd Infantry Division moved into the three-mile-long Sword Beach shortly after 7 AM. The division's main objective was to link up with the men of Maj. Gen. Richard "Windy" Gale's British 6th Airborne (Red Devils) Division, who had dropped just after midnight to secure two strategic bridges at Benouville, six miles inland. The bridges were codenamed Pegasus, over the Caen Canal, and Horsa, on the River Orne. The red-bereted paratroopers, the first Allied troops in action on D-Day, were holding the spans against German counterattacks. The task of reaching the bridges—crucial links between the beachhead and the airborne troops—fell to Lord Lovat's brigade.

Supported by naval gunfire and duplex-drive amphibious Sherman tanks of the 13th and 18th Hussars, infantrymen of the South Lancashire and 2nd East Yorkshire Regiments overwhelmed German shore batteries and machine-gun nests and charged across Sword Beach. Flail tanks from the 22nd Dragoon and the Westminster Dragoon Regiments cleared paths through minefields, and exits from the beach were opened more quickly than in any other landing sector on that fateful morning. During the day, 28,845 men would cross Sword Beach, with about 630 casualties.

Lord Lovat's brigade went ashore under fire near Colleville. His Commandos had discarded helmets at the last moment and donned their distinctive green berets, complete with their regimental cap badges. Lovat led the men off the landing craft, and Piper Millin was glad because the commander, over six feet tall, would show how deep the water was. The man just behind Lovat received a bullet in the face and collapsed. Millin jumped into the water up to his armpits, and the cold shocked him as his kilt spread around him. The man behind him was hit and sank into the sea.

As Millin floundered toward the beach, Lovat shouted, "Give us 'Highland Laddie,' man!" Shivering and waist deep in the water now, Millin put the mouthpiece to his lips and started playing as he struggled through the surf. The bodies of fallen soldiers drifted in the water.

The pipes heartened Lovat, who turned and gave Millin a thumbs-up signal because the tune was a favorite march of his old regiment, the Scots Guards. When he reached the water's edge, Millin could hardly believe his ears when his commander, standing on the sand with the brigade major, asked him if he would mind pip-

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Imperial War Museum

ABOVE: Royal Marine Commandos march through a French town en route to the relief of airborne troops holding Pegasus Bridge on D-Day. When Lord Lovat's command arrived to the skirl of Bill Millin's bagpipes, he apologized for reaching the airborne troops a bit late. RIGHT: Lord Lovat photographed with his walking stick.

ing the rest of the Commandos ashore with "The Road to the Isles." "That sounded rather ridiculous to me to play the bagpipes and entertain people just like on Brighton sands in peacetime," Millin recalled later. "Anyway, I started the pipes up, and marched up and down."

Amid the thump of mortars, shouts, and the whine of machine-gun fire, Millin strode coolly back and forth along the beach, skirling while men streamed past him. Most of the astonished soldiers on the beach cheered and waved when they heard the pipes, a time-honored morale booster in British Army annals. "That's the stuff, Jock!" yelled one Commando. But some soldiers on Sword Beach regarded it as insane behavior. One sergeant shouted, "Get down, you mad bugger! You're attracting attention to us." From then on, Bill Millin was known to many as the "Mad Piper."

One D-Day veteran, Tom Duncan, recalled, "I shall never forget hearing the skirl of Bill Millin's pipes. It is hard to describe the impact it had. It gave us a great lift and increased our determination. As well as the pride we felt, it reminded us of home and why we were there fighting for our lives and those of our loved ones."

On the beach, Lord Lovat handed his short-magazine Lee-Enfield rifle to a young soldier who had lost his in the surf, and from then onward was armed only with a .45-caliber Colt pistol and a long, notched wading stick. After helping to knock out German machine-gun nests and mortar emplacements on fire-swept, smoky Sword Beach, Lovat's Commandos wasted no time in making their way inland. Meanwhile, other British units started heading southward toward the first major D-Day objective: the historic city of Caen, an important communications hub and the capital of Normandy.

For Lord Lovat and his men, there was no time to be lost. They had been ordered to reach the paratroopers at the bridges without delay, avoiding confrontations with the enemy if possible. The brigade had to cover six miles in three and a half hours. Lovat was determined to get there on time, for he had promised General Gale that he would be at the bridges "sharp at noon."

Lovat knew that the men holding the two vital bridges were hanging on by their fingernails. Major John Howard and the 180 gliderborne men of his D Company of the 2nd Battalion, Oxfordshire and Buckinghamshire Light Infantry had been ordered to "hold until relieved, hold until relieved." But their ammunition soon ran low after repulsing German assaults, and an armored counterattack was feared at any minute.

Using some lightweight bicycles and a commandeered horse and wagon to haul some of their gear, Lovat and his men followed a route carefully selected to avoid main roads and major enemy strongpoints—along hedgerows, cutting through barbed wire, crossing antitank ditches, splashing through marshy ground, and picking their way across a minefield to avoid a long detour. They flagged down a passing British tank, whose obliging crew blasted a pillbox that was blocking their way.

With Lovat striding along, casually twirling his wading stick, and Millin playing his pipes, the Commandos trudged on toward Benouville, exposed and always keeping a sharp lookout for snipers. As the column approached the Caen Canal, German fire opened up. Millin stopped playing, and the other Commandos threw themselves flat on the ground—except Lovat, who went down on one knee. Spotting a sniper scrambling down a tree and trying to hide in a cornfield, Lovat killed him with a single rifle shot. He then sent two men to look for him, and they returned with the body, almost as if it were a highland stag.

Lovat then turned to Millin and told him, "Right, Piper, start the pipes again and keep playing as long as you can until we get to Benouville. The Airborne are at the bridges there, and when they hear the pipes, they will know we are coming."

Millin started skirling "Blue Bonnets Over the Border," and the Commandos marched on. After crossing marshy ground under fire and clearing two enemy bunkers, they eventually approached the Caen Canal and River Orne bridges. It had been a grueling forced march, and it was now past midday. Troops on the other side of the canal bridge signaled frantically that it was under sniper fire.

Meanwhile, the soldiers who fought D-Day's first action had been holding onto the vital spans for more than 12 hours. Although Major Howard's company had been joined at dawn by other paratroopers of the 6th Airborne Division, their numbers had steadily dwindled under fierce mortar and small-arms fire. They had stopped several probing German counterattacks, and their ammunition was almost exhausted. The weary, anxious soldiers in the captured enemy positions beside the bridges were in desperate need of reinforcements. Sniper fire rattled overhead.

In his foxhole near the approaches to the Caen Canal Bridge, Private William Gray, a 19-year-old Bren gunner, glanced at his wristwatch. His friend, Private John Wilkes, was lying beside him. Where were the expected rein-

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forcements? Lord Lovat's Commandos were almost an hour and a half overdue. Gray was leery about lifting his head from the foxhole because it seemed that the German snipers were becoming more accurate. Then, during a lull in the firing, Wilkes suddenly said, "You know, I think I hear bagpipes!" Gray answered scornfully, "You're daft." But after a few seconds, Wilkes turned and insisted, "I do hear bagpipes." Now, Gray could hear them, too.

The beleaguered paratroopers' spirits soared as they saw a welcome sight in the distance: Lord Lovat's Commandos marching purposefully along a dusty road toward them. At the head of the column was the imperturbable Piper Millin, still playing "Blue Bonnets Over the Border." On both sides, the firing suddenly ceased as Major Howard's weary men gazed at the Commandos, spruce and jaunty in their green berets.

But the euphoria did not last long. As the Commandos started crossing the canal bridge, German sniper fire opened up again. Lovat ordered Millin to shoulder his pipes and play the column over. Halfway across, Millin turned around to look at Lord Lovat. "He was striding along as if he was out for a walk around his estate," the piper recalled later, "and he gave me the signal to carry on." Millin was "just trusting to luck that I did not get hit, as I could not hear very much for the drone of the pipes." He said, "It seemed like a very long bridge."

Millin's pipes were damaged by shrapnel later that day but remained playable. Exposed and unarmed, he was surprised not to have been shot. When he mentioned it later to some Germans who were taken prisoner, they told him that they had not fired at him because they assumed he had gone off his head with battle fatigue.

Disregarding the enemy fire, the paratroopers raised a cheer and rushed out from cover to greet Lovat's men. It was a stirring moment for Major Howard's exhausted men. Lord Lovat shook hands with Howard, remarked that they had made history that day, and apologized "for being a few minutes late." It was around 1:30 PM. As the soldiers in green and red berets mingled and shared what rations and tea they had left, spirits were lightened. Private Gray felt "years younger."

The Commandos dug in among the crash-landed remains of Major Howard's big Horsa gliders and set up their Bren guns. They kept watch for signs of German counterattacks and waited for the columns of British infantry, Churchill tanks, flail Shermans, and artillery pieces streaming southward. Their objective was Caen, seven miles inland from Sword Beach, and

A statue of D-Day Piper Bill Millin stands near the shoreline at Sword Beach. Millin earned lasting fame with his display of courage.

soon to become the scene of some of the bloodiest fighting in the Normandy campaign.

There was little respite for Lovat's men. On June 7, his Army and Royal Marine Commandos attacked German positions east of the River Orne estuary and the strategic Merville shore batteries, east of Ouistreham and overlooking Sword Beach. Both assaults were repulsed, but the brigade ceded little ground to determined enemy counterattacks. German armor, led by the 21st Panzer Division, made repeated thrusts against the brigade, but some of Lovat's men and a battalion of Gale's paratroopers managed to seize the heavily defended village of Breville on June 12, securing the eastern flank of the Allied landing beaches.

The Commando brigade had suffered heavy casualties by now. While getting ready to hand over his sector to the 51st Highland Division, Lord Lovat was severely wounded by fragments from a German shell exploding nearby. A priest administered the last rites, but a swift blood transfusion, penicillin, and the warrior's hardy constitution pulled him through. As he was being carried off the field, Lovat sent a message to his men: "I can rely on you to not take one step back." They complied.

The gallant Major Howard, meanwhile, was wounded twice during the summer of 1944 and was seriously injured in a vehicle accident that November.

The 1st Special Service Brigade was in action in Normandy for 10 weeks and suffered almost 1,000 casualties before being withdrawn. Piper Millin, unscathed despite his frequent exposure to enemy fire, was with it when it returned to England in September 1944. He then went with No. 4 Commando to Holland and finished the war at Lubeck, Germany, in 1945.

After being demobilized in 1946, Millin accepted an offer from Lord Lovat to work on his sprawling highland estate. But life there proved too quiet for the restless D-Day bagpiper, so he joined up with a touring theatrical troupe and skirled on the stage in London, Stockton-on-Tees, and Belfast. In the late 1950s, Millin trained in Glasgow as a registered mental nurse and worked in three city hospitals. He married Margaret Mary Dowdel in 1954, and they had a son.

Millin moved to Devonshire in 1963 and worked at Langdon Hospital in the coastal town of Dawlish until his retirement in 1988. He played his pipes during several Ten Tors hikes across Dartmoor organized by the Army and also gave some lectures in the United States about his experiences on D-Day.

Piper Millin received mention in Cornelius Ryan's best-selling 1959 book, *The Longest Day,* and his exploits were depicted in Darryl F. Zanuck's epic 1962 film of the same name. Millin was portrayed by Pipe Major Leslie de Laspee, the official piper to the Queen Mother. Major Howard was portrayed by Richard Todd, star of *The Dambusters* and himself a British Airborne D-Day veteran, and Lord Lovat was played by Peter Lawford. The flawed yet definitive film about the Normandy invasion, *The Longest Day* was directed by Ken Annakin, Andrew Marton, and Bernhard Wicki, and also starred Henry Fonda, Richard Burton, Robert Mitchum, John Wayne, Curt Jurgens, Rod Steiger, Robert Ryan, Jeffrey Hunter, and Kenneth More.

Bill Millin played the lament at Lord Lovat's funeral in 1995 and donated his Cameron kilt and bagpipes to the National War Museum in Edinburgh. Predeceased by his wife, the skirling Scottish hero died at the age of 88 on August 17, 2010. He is survived by his son.

Meanwhile, plans were started in 2010 to memorialize Piper Millin in France when the mayor of Colleville-Montgomery, a town on Sword Beach, offered a site for a life-size statue near the spot where he went ashore on June 6, 1944. It stands today as a tribute to Millin.

Author Michael D. Hull passed away recently. He had written for WWII History *for many years and on a variety of war-related topics from his home in Enfield, Connecticut.*

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AFTER ACTION REPORT

Normandy,

The ceremonies related to the 75th anniversary of D-Day are now over This is an opportunity to share with you the unforgettable moments we have had with our guests. We have created a unique program, to discover and live in real immersion the events that took place on June 6, 1944.

Scott came from Pennsylvania with his son, *Doug*. Both former soldiers, they walked in the footsteps of their relative who landed at Omaha Beach in June 1944. *Rony*, a former member of the 101st Airborne and a retired NYPD officer, was coming to Normandy for the first time, passionate about the History of D-DAY. The experience forged unforgettable memories of the jeep rides on the historic trails in the vicinity of Sainte-Mère-Eglise.

Gary and Carol came from Michigan., They found the DDMTUSA experience an extraordinary way to discover places inaccessible to the public. *Jose* is pastor in Nebraska and a former member of the 82nd Airborne. He wanted to celebrate a service in a small church near Sainte-Mère-Eglise. These are all moments that make our program unique.

Tony & Hope, from Colorado, came to Normandy to see the place where his father landed with his glider. Using our jeeps we could follow together the way he had traveled on June 7, 1944.

Josh came from Ohio and brought with him the dog tags of his grandfather. We found his grave in the cemetery of Colleville. Gathering his emotions, he was able to travel the places where his grandfather had fought.

Unfortunately, we cannot list them all here, but on the testimonial page of our website www.ddaymemorytour.com you can read their comments. They are obviously our best ambassadors. Never before has a tour operator conceived such a concept to offer this kind of experience. It is about presenting history from another angle, to give an immersive character to learn, respect and pay homage to those who have made it possible to enjoy the freedoms we have today..

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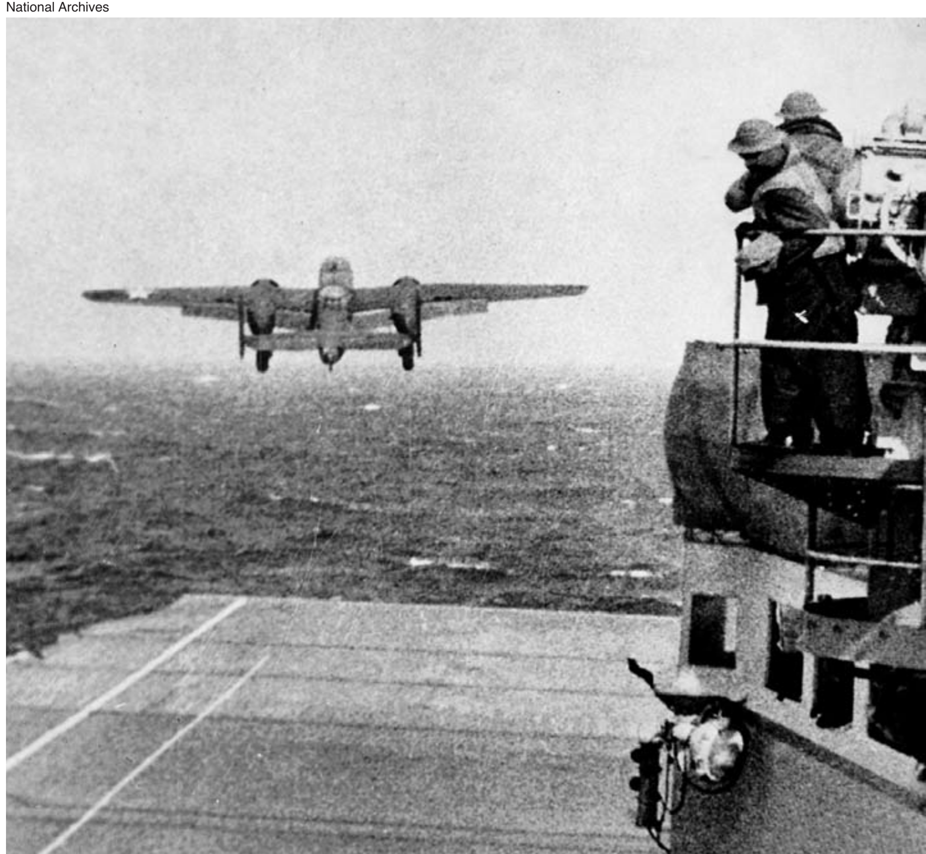

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The North American B-25 Mitchell medium bomber proved a versatile combat platform in all theaters.

LITTLE MORE THAN FOUR MONTHS AFTER THE DISASTROUS ATTACK ON PEARL Harbor, America went on the offensive against Japan with one of the boldest and best remembered bomber raids of World War II.

Led by Lt. Col. James H. Doolittle and laden with extra fuel, 500-pound bombs, and incendiary clusters, 16 North American B-25 Mitchell medium bombers lumbered 500 feet along the wooden flight deck of the 19,900-ton Yorktown-class aircraft carrier USS *Hornet* (CV-8) early on Saturday, April 18, 1942, and took off into a stiff wind. They climbed into a rainy, murky sky and flew 800 miles eastward to hit military targets in the Tokyo, Nagoya, Kobe, and Yokohama areas.

It was the first and only time that bombers had been launched from a carrier, and they achieved complete surprise when they reached their objectives. The material damage they inflicted was slight, but the raid had a major psychological impact. The stunned Japanese were forced to push forward their planned attack on Midway Atoll, preventing further carrier attacks against their country, while the Americans received a much needed morale lift after a series of defeats in the Far East.

One of 16 North American B-25 Mitchell medium bombers led by Lt. Col. Jimmy Doolittle on the raid to bomb Tokyo lifts off from the deck of the aircraft carrier USS *Hornet.*

The gallant Doolittle was awarded the Medal of Honor, and his historic raid—the country's first victory of the war—gained instant fame for the North American B-25 Mitchell, one of the most widely used and effective twin-engine bombers of the war. Meanwhile, the chunky, affable Doolittle, a record-breaking peacetime air racer, became a national hero and went on to command successively the U.S. Twelfth and Fifteenth Air Forces, the Northwest African Strategic Air Force, and the Eighth Air Force.

Named for Brig. Gen. William "Billy" Mitchell, the charismatic airpower prophet who proved in 1921 and 1923 that planes could sink battleships, the B-25 gained an unsurpassed reputation as a ground-attack bomber and ship killer. The rugged, versatile B-25 saw action on almost every Allied front, from the Mediterranean to the Pacific, and from Burma to Normandy, and was regarded by many as the most successful twin-engine combat aircraft of World War II.

The plane was conceived before the outbreak of the 1939-1945 war. In response to an Army Air Corps proposal for a twin-engine attack bomber, North American Aviation, Inc., produced a prototype designated NA-40-1. The moving force behind the design was the company's brilliant president and chief designer, James H. "Dutch" Kindelberger, a West Virginia-born World War I aviator. He was also responsible for the legendary P-51 Mustang fighter, arguably the best fighter plane of the conflict.

Powered by two 1,100-horsepower Pratt & Whitney engines, the forerunner of the B-25 had a shoulder-wing design, a tricycle landing gear, and was capable of carrying a 1,200-pound bomb load. Its armament consisted of .30-caliber machine guns in the nose, dorsal, and ventral positions. Built at the company's Inglewood, California, plant, the prototype was first flown by test pilot Paul Balfour in January 1939. The engines were soon replaced by 1,300-horsepower Wright Cyclones, the plane was redesignated NA-42, and it was delivered to Wright Field in Ohio in March 1939 for USAAC evaluation.

Although the prototype crashed two weeks later because of pilot error, the Air Corps was impressed with the NA-42 design, although some changes were requested, including an increase in the bomb load and armament. North American was engaged to continue development under the basic design,

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ABOVE: Workers assemble B-25 Mitchell medium bombers on the floor of the factory at North American Aviation in Kansas City, Kansas, in October 1942. BELOW: Some B-25s were modified as gunships to strafe enemy shipping or ground targets. In this photo, a ground crewman performs maintenance on one of eight .50-caliber machine guns packed into the plane's nose.

National Archives

NA-62, and this was completed in September 1939, when war broke out in Europe. An immediate contract called for 184 bombers, now designated B-25.

Several improvements were made. The wing was relocated to a mid-position, operating weights and the bomb load were increased, a tail gun position was added, and the engines were upgraded to 1,700-horsepower Wright Cyclone radials. Self-sealing fuel tanks and crew protection armor plating were added later. Stability problems were solved by giving the plane a gull wing.

Building a B-25 was a complex and lengthy matter. Half the size of a Consolidated B-24 Liberator heavy bomber, it contained 165,000 separate items, not counting the 150,000 rivets that held it together. By 1944, the average cost of the Mitchell was $142,194, or $50,000 less than its successor, the Martin B-26 Marauder.

The B-25, which continued to undergo many further improvements, had a crew of four to six men, weighed 35,000 pounds, was 53 feet long, had a wingspan of 68 feet, and carried a 3,000-pound bomb load. Its top speed was 272 miles per hour at 13,000 feet, its service ceiling 24,200 feet, and its range 1,350 miles.

The U.S. Army Air Forces accepted a total of 9,816 B-25s produced at North American's Inglewood and Kansas City, Kansas, plants, but it never had more than 2,700 on hand at any one time during World War II because of the numbers supplied to other American and Allied air units.

The first production model of the B-25 was test flown on August 19, 1940, and 40 further improved B-25As were built. This was the first Mitchell variant to see operational service, with the 17th Medium Bombardment Group based at McChord Field, Washington. The planes flew antisubmarine patrols, and their first kill was notched on Christmas Eve, 1941, when a Japanese submarine was sunk off Puget Sound on the U.S. West Coast.

More Mitchells went into action in 1942 and soon proved their worth with American and Allied air units. B-25V variants were among U.S. reinforcements sent to Australia, where they served with the 13th and 19th Squadrons of the 3rd Bombardment Group, and others were pressed into service with the U.S. Navy, the U.S. Marine Corps, the Dutch, Brazil, the Soviet Air Force, China, and the British Royal Air Force.

The advent of the B-25 enabled the hard-pressed RAF to replace the Bristol Blenheims, Douglas A-20 Bostons, and Lockheed Venturas flown by its No. 2 Group on daylight operations over northwestern Europe. Although Mitchells were not assigned to the U.S. Eighth Air Force in England, 712 of them were earmarked for seven RAF squadrons. The RAF crews loved the sturdy, reliable B-25 as much as their American counterparts.

As the Allies went on the offensive in 1942 and 1943, increasing numbers of Mitchells fought in almost every combat theater, manned by American, British, Australian, Canadian, Dutch, Chinese, Polish, and Soviet crews. They bombed and strafed ground targets, blasted enemy shipping, supported amphibious invasions, and were also used as trainers, transports, and photoreconnaissance planes.

Wherever it was deployed, the maneuverable B-25 was one of the deadliest and most effective weapons in the Allied aerial arsenal. Carrying 3,000 pounds of bombs or eight five-inch rockets and bristling with a dozen .50-caliber machine guns, it proved to be virtually indispensable. Because of its firepower, it did not require fighter escort.

As the war progressed, the B-25 underwent many modifications, chiefly in its armament. Cannons and glide torpedoes were mounted, and some were even equipped with 75mm field

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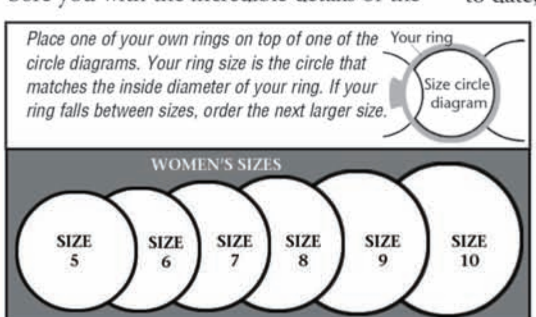

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guns. The gun proved effective in dealing with ground targets and enemy submarines, but was eventually replaced by machine guns. In the end, Mitchells carried almost every combination of guns and bombs that their pilots and crews could imagine.

In the China-Burma-India Theater, the USAAF's 341st Bomb Group found that the B-25s were so rugged that they could operate from makeshift dirt and grass airstrips, range far behind Japanese lines, and strike supply dumps at low level. In the Pacific Theater, Mitchells of the 345th Bomb Group operated at relatively long range, attacked Japanese ships at wave-cap altitude, and survived direct hits from small arms fire.

Clad in yellowish desert camouflage, meanwhile, B-25s were widely used in the Mediterranean Theater. In July 1942, Mitchells of the U.S. 12th Bombardment Group joined Maj. Gen. Lewis H. Brereton's Middle East Air Force (later Ninth Air Force) at Fayid in northern Egypt. B-25s supported British Eighth Army forces at Alam Halfa and in the great Battle of El Alamein on October 23, 1942, the first major Allied victory of the war, and helped to clear the skies for Operation Torch, the three-pronged invasion of North Africa, the following November.

The workhorse medium bombers then bombed and strafed in some of their heaviest fighting of the war. While RAF Vickers Wellington bombers kept up the pressure at night and A-20s mounted their famous "Boston Tea Parties," the British and American Mitchells carried out devastating daylight attacks on German and Italian troop concentrations, convoys, panzer columns, airfields, bridges, marshaling yards, and the port areas of Sfax, Sousse, Tunis, La Goulette, and Bizerte. The Allied air groups in North Africa gained almost absolute supremacy over the Luftwaffe.

Once the Allies had vanquished the German Afrika Korps and its Italian allies in May 1943 and the Mediterranean war shifted to Sicily and Italy, Mitchells joined the action from bases in Sardinia and Corsica. A bombardier in one of the USAAF B-25 groups, Joseph Heller, related his experiences in a satirical novel, *Catch-22*. The best-seller was published in 1955.

Before and after the invasion of mainland Italy by the British Eighth and U.S. Fifth Armies, Allied B-25 squadrons flew numerous sorties to soften up stubborn German opposition. On August 13, 1943, 66 Mitchells joined a force of Boeing B-17 Flying Fortresses, B-26s, and Lockheed P-38 Lightning fighters in an assault on major marshaling yards in Rome. They stopped through traffic to Naples for five days.

A few months later, after many more combat missions, 77 Mitchells were again in action when a large force of Allied bombers blasted the enemy-held monastery at Monte Cassino, site of some of the most intense action on the Italian front, on March 15, 1944. Seventy-seven B-25s, 164 B-24s, 114 B-17s, and 105 B-26s dropped their bombs, followed by an eight-hour artillery barrage. The assault was unprecedented in the Mediterranean campaign. Half the defenders of the German 1st Parachute Division were killed or wounded, but the rest held their ground and sent heavy fire against advancing Allied infantry.

On May 11, 1944, B-25s of the U.S. Twelfth Air Force began Operation Strangle in central Italy, bombing and strafing enemy supply routes along the lengthy, formidable Gustav Line. The aerial offensive culminated in the triumphal liberation of Rome by the Fifth and Eighth Armies on the following July 4.

As on other fronts, the Mitchells were giving sterling service as strafers, bombers, and skip bombers while the Allied naval and ground offensive intensified in the Pacific. In the great Battle of the Bismarck Sea in March 1943, B-25s equipped with 10 forward-firing machine guns and 500-pound bombs played a key role by almost annihilating a Japanese convoy without loss to themselves.

The U.S. Navy purchased 706 Mitchells (PBJs) based on Army models, but, except for a handful used for developmental work, these were transferred to the Marine Corps for deployment in the Pacific Theater. The Marine Corps had 16 B-25 squadrons, nine of which flew in combat, starting at Stirling Island in March 1944. The PBJs were used effectively in subsequent operations, including the invasions of Saipan in June 1944 and Iwo Jima in February 1945. The Marines lost 26 B-25s in action and another 19 in noncombat mishaps.

Nicknamed "Billy's Bomber" and "The Sweetheart of the Services," its pilots and crews loved the Mitchell because of its ability to wreak havoc on enemy targets and still survive. "It is amazing how much punishment the B-25s could take," said Lieutenant David Hayward, a pilot with the 341st Bomb Group based in India and the Pacific. "There were relatively few vulnerable places on the airplane. We had armor plate under our seats. The gasoline tanks were self-sealing. What we sacrificed in speed we gained in security."

The maneuverable and well-armored planes were praised by all crewmen except the occupants of their cramped belly-gun turrets. On his knees, the gunner had to sight through a periscope of lenses and mirrors while using a

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A B-25 Mitchell medium bomber completes a skip bombing run against a Japanese coastal defense warship off the coast of China in April 1945.

dual hand control. The disjointed mechanism made most operators too dizzy to fire. "The bottom turret was very complicated and worked backwards to what was normal," reported one mission commander. "It would have taken more time than we had available to master it. A man could learn to play the violin good enough for Carnegie Hall before he could learn to fire this thing."

Otherwise, and despite its flaws, the Mitchell received high marks from its pilots and crews. "The B-25 was a really superior airplane, right on the cutting edge of technology for medium bombardment," said 24-year-old Lieutenant Travis Hoover of Melrose, New Mexico, commander of the second plane in the Doolittle Raid. "We kind of fell in love with it."

Lieutenant Ted W. Lawson of Fresno, California, also 24 and commander of the Ruptured Duck, the seventh plane in the group, agreed, "You just had to stand there and look at them, and breathe heavily. It's a grand ship—fast, hard-hitting, and full of fight. It is so much more than an inanimate mass of material, intricately geared and wired and riveted into a tight package. It is a good, trustworthy friend."

Lawson, who had to have one of his legs amputated after the famous raid, published the best-selling memoir *Thirty Seconds Over Tokyo*, in 1943.

Inevitably, Lawson's book was viewed by Hollywood as a hot property and national morale booster. Although Colonel Doolittle was unwilling to have a film portraying him produced until the war ended, work got underway at the Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer studios. The book was translated for the screen by writer Dalton Trumbo, working closely with producer Sam Zimbalist and director Mervyn LeRoy, and filming continued through 1943 and 1944. Resources were limited, but the Army Air Forces nevertheless loaned MGM a dozen B-25s and crews. For a wartime production, it was a remarkable job. The *Hornet* flight deck had to be recreated on a Hollywood sound stage, and an oil refinery fire in East Oakland, California, stood in for the bombing of Tokyo, but many scenes were shot on location at Eglin Field, near Pensacola, Florida, where the Doolittle Raiders had trained for a month.

Spencer Tracy portrayed Doolittle, Van Johnson played Lawson in his breakout role, and the supporting cast included Phyllis Thaxter, Robert Walker, and Robert Mitchum. The film premiered in Glendale, California, in September 1944. Taut and realistic, *Thirty Seconds Over Tokyo* won an Academy Award for special effects, a nomination for photography, and became an MGM hit and a long-running favorite with audiences. It was one of the best Hollywood service films to appear during the war years.

When the Allied aerial offensive increased in the European Theater, meanwhile, American medium bomber groups were equipped with the B-26 Marauder and A-20 Havoc because of concern about the Mitchell's ability to stand up to intense German antiaircraft fire. B-25s nevertheless saw plenty of action, starting with a raid on January 22, 1943, when a dozen planes from the RAF's No. 98 and 180 Squadrons attacked an oil refinery at Ghent, Belgium.

Along with Havocs, Marauders, De Haviland Mosquito fighter bombers, and rocket-firing Hawker Typhoons, the Mitchells flew many low-level missions against enemy transports, communications, and radar centers in France, softening up German defenses before and during the momentous Allied invasion on June 6, 1944. Air Vice Marshal Sir Basil E. Embry, commander of the RAF's 2nd Tactical Air Force's No. 2 Group, reported, "On the morning of D-Day itself, our Mitchell squadrons attacked with great accuracy gun positions directly threatening the approach of the great armada to the Normandy beachhead, and our Bostons (A-20s) flying at sea level laid the smoke screen over the invasion craft."

The powerful 2nd Tactical Air Force, which comprised all of the RAF Mitchell squadrons based in England, employed the B-25 in sub-formations of five planes on its daylight operations. In this way, the tremendous firepower of 13 .50-caliber machine guns provided formidable defensive cover. Another practice was to use Mitchells and Mosquitoes together on night raids, with the former acting as target illuminators.

The Mitchells went on to support British and Canadian forces in their costly, month-long struggle to capture the strategic city of Caen in the fiercest action of the Normandy campaign. Besides scourging German troop concentrations, tank formations, supply dumps, rail lines, and bridges, the planes blasted German V-1 and V-2 rocket sites. Almost daily, they served valiantly in their close tactical role as the British, U.S., and Canadian Armies battled eastward toward the River Rhine and into Germany. The last operation of the European War for B-25s was mounted on May 2, 1945, when 47 planes of the RAF's No. 2 Group blasted marshaling yards at Itzhoe in Schleswig-Holstein.

The workhorse medium bombers remained in action almost until the end of the Pacific War in the summer of 1945, while one of them made headlines much closer to home.

Early on the morning of Saturday, July 28, 1945, Lt. Col. William F. Smith of Bedford, Massachusetts, took off in his B-25 and headed south toward Newark, New Jersey. He was accompanied by his copilot and a young sailor hitching a ride home to New Jersey. The control tower at New York's LaGuardia Field warned Smith of extremely poor visibility in the metropolitan region, and he became disoriented in cloud and fog. At 9:40 AM, the bomber slammed into the world's tallest building, the Empire State Building, in midtown Manhattan, gouging an 18-by-20-foot hole between the 78th and 79th floors.

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In July 1945, a B-25 crashed into the Empire State Building in New York, causing extensive damage to the 78th and 79th floors.

scraper's north façade, one engine tore through seven walls, and the other crashed into the elevator shaft. The building "shuddered, realigned itself, and settled," according to historian John Tauranac. There was an explosion, and high-octane fuel spewed from the Mitchell's ruptured tanks and sprayed the building. A wing section fell on Madison Avenue, and other parts of the plane rained on a five-block area.

Despite the severe damage, only 10 people died besides the three men in the plane, and 25 were injured. If it had not occurred early on a Saturday morning, the disaster would have been much worse. On a normal business day, about 15,000 workers and 35,000 visitors might have been in the building. The female operator of the elevator survived miraculously when cables were severed and her car plummeted 80 floors into the building's sub-basement.

Deliveries of Mitchells stopped in August 1945, but after the Allied victory, many of the planes continued in use. The U.S. Air Force converted several hundred into pilot trainers, while others were stripped down to become transports. Besides Canada and Australia and several smaller air forces, postwar users of B-25s included the Soviet Union, Brazil, Argentina, Bolivia, Chile, Colombia, Cuba, Dominica, Mexico, Peru, Uruguay, Venezuela, and Indonesia. Mitchells supplied to the Chinese Air Force remained in service throughout the postwar struggle that led to the communist overthrow of Chiang Kai-shek's government.

Frequent contributor Michael D. Hull passed away earlier this year. He wrote for WWII History *on a variety of topics and resided in Enfield, Connecticut.*

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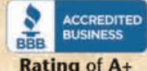

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The Euthanasia Connection

Startling ties of shared perspective fueled Hitler's campaign of euthanasia in Europe before and during World War II.

WORLD WAR II, THE DEADLIEST MILITARY CONFLICT IN HISTORY, CLAIMED THE lives of nearly four percent of the Earth's 1940 census. Hitler's Holocaust against the Jews alone destroyed over six million of the approximately nine million Jews in Europe in 1933. Upon Hitler is assigned the evil that resulted in what scholar Steven T. Katz described as an effort to "annihilate physically every man, woman, and child belonging to a specific people."

Hitler's ambition to develop a "master race" by proper breeding and elimination of the "unfit" did not rise out of a vacuum. The philosophy he embraced around eugenics and euthanasia had proliferated in the Western World for a half century, most notably in the nation that, ironically, would be the most instrumental in defeating him in World War II. Hitler himself attributed his inspiration to breed a super race to the United States and those individuals and groups who strived to eliminate flaws and imperfections in the human race.

Eugenics and euthanasia, the science of properly breeding the human race and the destruction of the defective, claim deep roots in world history. Greek philosophers Plato and Aristotle endorsed eliminating "weak children" and allowing only men and women with superior characteristics to mate and bear offspring. In the 19th century Charles Darwin spread the philosophy into the modern Western World.

To him, natural selection for the betterment of the species was perfectly reasonable. If unfit livestock ought to be eliminated for the health of the herd and not allowed to reproduce, he argued, why should we encourage the breeding of unfit humans?

"With savages," he further elaborated in *On the Origins of the Species and the Descent of Man,* "the weak in body or mind are soon eliminated.… We civilized men, on the other hand, do our utmost to check the process of elimination. We build asylums for the imbeciles, the maimed, and the sick; we institute poor laws; and our medical men exert the utmost skill to save the life of every one to the last moment. [If we] do not prevent the reckless, the vicious, and otherwise inferior members of society from increasing at a quicker rate than the better class of men, the nation will retrograde, as has too often occurred in the history of the world."

In a 1904 edition of *The American Journal of Sociology,* author H.G. Wells offered his recommendation that society "rout out and eliminate urban rookeries and all places where the base can drift to multiply … so that childbearing shall cease to be a hopeful speculation for the unemployed poor.… Thus, euthanasia of the weak and sensual is possible. Once [these] principles … animate the predominate classes of the new time, it will be permissible, and I have little or no doubt that in the future it will be planned and achieved."

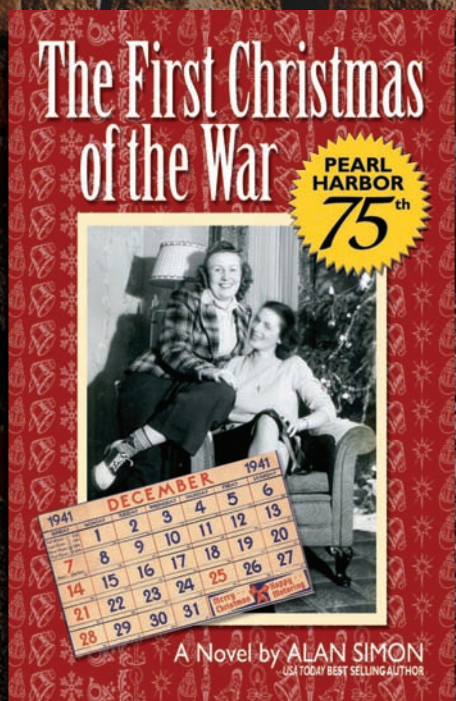
One of those animated in the "new time" was Adolf Hitler.

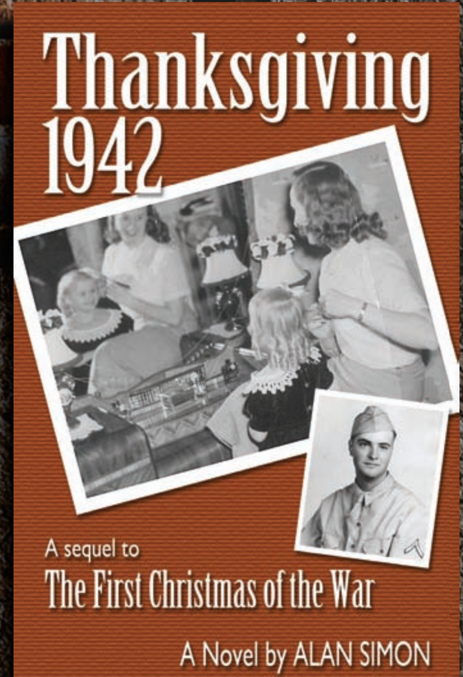
Hitler was born on April 20, 1889, into a world in which anti-Semitism was already a force. His racial prejudice against Jews was not novel. In the West it went back to at least the 16th century when German theologian Martin Luther declared Jews "a plague, a pestilence.… They let us work in the sweat of our nose to earn money for them while they sit behind the oven, lazy, let off gas, bake pears, eat, drink, live softly and well from our wealth."

This Nazi poster depicts Hitler's ideal Aryan family unit. Through the elimination of inferior races and those with physical or mental limitations, Hitler believed he could encourage the propagation of the master race.

FROM *USA TODAY* BESTSELLING AUTHOR

ALAN SIMON:





The First Christmas After the War
THE SEQUEL TO
THE FIRST CHRISTMAS OF THE WAR
AND THANKSGIVING, 1942
A Novel by ALAN SIMON

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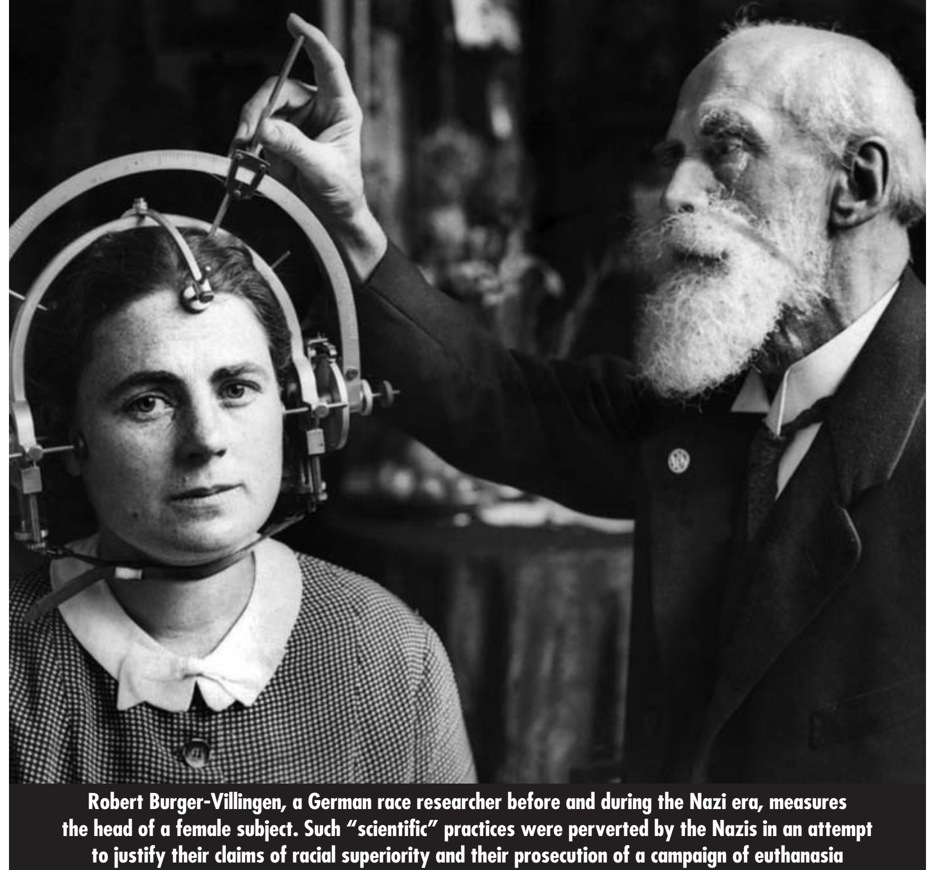

Robert Burger-Villingen, a German race researcher before and during the Nazi era, measures the head of a female subject. Such "scientific" practices were perverted by the Nazis in an attempt to justify their claims of racial superiority and their prosecution of a campaign of euthanasia and genocide. This photo was taken in Berlin in 1930.

Eugenics and Darwinism had caught on as a scientific curiosity by the time of Hitler's birth. Darwin's cousin, Francis J. Galton, helped launch the English crusade to abolish human inferiority by writing in 1863 that the problem "was so clean cut and so dire as to warrant state intervention of a coercive nature in human reproduction." His suggested social planning methods included segregation, deportation, castration, marriage restrictions, and compulsory sterilization.

America's finest universities and most respected scientists were involved in teaching and exploring eugenics by the time World War I erupted in Europe. Hitler, then 20 years old and a corporal in the German Army, spent three months recuperating in a Pomeranian hospital after being severely gassed in the trench warfare of 1918. Appalled at the large numbers of psychological casualties he witnessed among his fellow soldiers, he came to the conclusion that his nation had grown weak and corrupted through dysgenics, the inclusion of degenerate elements into the nation's bloodstream.

In 1924, while serving time in Landsberg Prison for political mob action, he fed his obsession with human breeding by poring through publications and textbooks that extensively quoted American eugenics stalwarts like Leon Whitney, Madison Grant, Henry H. Laughlin, and others.

In 1925, he published *Mein Kampf,* which contains the core of his vision to build an Aryan "super race" through proper breeding and the physical destruction of "inferior" categories such as the Jews. It became one of the most influential books of the 20th century.

"There is today one state," he wrote, "in which … an effort is made to consult reason at least partially. Of course, it is not our model German Republic, but the United States."

The eugenics movement in America received impetus and cash support throughout the early 20th century from a conglomerate of professional, charitable, political, corporate, and government entities such as the Rockefeller Foundation, the Harriman railroad fortune, the Carnegie Institute, the U.S. State Department's Vital Statistics Bureau, and many other advocacy groups drawn from child welfare, prison reform, education, clinical psychology, world peace, and immigration rights. "Superiors," went the argument, should contemplate action against "inferiors" for the greater good of society and mankind.

More than 40 major universities and institutions offered eugenics instruction. A popular high school text by George William Hunter, *A Civic Biology,* railed against unfit families "spreading disease, immorality, and crime…. [T]hey take from society but they give nothing in return. They are true parasites."

The Harriman railroad fortune paid charities in New York and other crowded cities to seek out the "unfit" and subject them to deportation or sterilization.

Author H.G. Wells described "meaningless, aimless lives which cram this world of ours…. Such human weeds clog up the path, drain up the energies and the resources of this little earth. We must clear the way for a better world, we must cultivate our garden."

In 1921, Margaret Sanger went to work "cultivating the garden" by founding the American Birth Control League, which eventually evolved into Planned Parenthood and the International Planned Parenthood Foundation. One of it's purposes was to "improve" the overall population by discouraging the "unfit" from reproducing.

"The feeble-minded, the syphilitic, the irresponsible, and the defective breed unhindered," she explained. "The vicious cycle of mental and physical defect, delinquency and beggary is encouraged by the unseeing and unthinking sentimentality of our age…. I think the greatest sin in the world is bringing children into the world [who] have no chance to be a human being practically."

For many eugenicists, sterilization seemed to be the most appropriate course of action. The Eugenics Record Office (ERO) and its laboratory complex founded with Carnegie Institute funding at Cold Springs Harbor on Long Island estimated that 10 percent of the American population should have its bloodlines terminated.

Sterilization began as a voluntary process but became involuntary in 1907 when Indiana became the first jurisdiction in the world to mandate the procedure against the mentally impaired, poorhouse residents, and prisoners. Three more states ratified similar laws in 1909. In 1911, New Jersey Governor Woodrow Wilson, who would become president the following year, signed into law a bill to join them. In 1913, former President Theodore Roosevelt announced his backing, declaring, "Society has no business to permit degenerates to reproduce their kind."

Laws of forced sterilization, segregation, and marriage restrictions were eventually enacted in 27 states. More than 60,000 Americans were eventually coerced into sterilization, most of which occurred during the 1930s and 1940s. While the blind, deaf, epileptic, mentally retarded, and the "feeble minded" of both sexes were targeted, women suffered most: "bad

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This image from the 1929 Kansas State Fair depicts a crowd gathering for a eugenics and health exhibit and accompanying lecture. Similar disturbing events took place at state fairs across America in the 1920s.

girls," the "passionate," "oversexed," and "sexually wayward." Some women were forcibly sterilized because they had what authorities deemed to be an abnormally large clitoris or labia.

The U.S. Supreme Court upheld the legality of the laws in a 1927 case in which Carrie Buck had been forcibly sterilized. Supreme Court Justice Oliver Wendell Holmes wrote in favor of the decision.

"It is better for all the world," he noted, "if instead of waiting to execute degenerate offspring for crime, or to let them starve for their imbecility, society can prevent those who are manifestly unfit for continuing their kind.... Three generations of imbeciles are enough."

Social Darwinism in America inspired imitating cliques throughout Europe, most notably in Germany where the ethnic cleansing movement was gaining rapidly even before Hitler came to power. German eugenicists formed academic and personal relationships with the U.S. eugenics establishment, relied extensively upon American research and experiments, and together formed a closely knit network that published the racist newsletters and "scientific" journals such as *Eugenic News* that served as propaganda for the emerging Nazis. Soon to be dictator Adolf Hitler was listening.

"I have studied with great interest the laws of several American states concerning prevention of reproduction of people whose progeny would in all probability be of no value or be injurious to the racial stock," he commented to a comrade.

In Madison Grant, author of *The Passing of the Great Race,* Hitler found a kindred spirit when Grant wrote, "The laws of nature require the obliteration of the unfit, and human life is valuable only when it is of use to the community and race."

In *Mein Kampf,* Hitler echoed the sentiment: "It is thus necessary that the individual shall come to realize that his own ego is of no importance in comparison with the existence of his nation.... [T]he unity of a nation's spirit and will is worth far more than freedom of the spirit and will of an individual."

Individuals and institutions in the United States generously funded and supported German race biology prior to World War II. By 1926, for example, the Rockefeller Foundation had donated $410,000 (equivalent to $4 million in today's currency) to hundreds of German eugenics researchers. The Carnegie Institute came in second place with large donations of its own, followed by a number of other corporations and foundations.

Racial theories were rife in German and other European universities where history courses taught that Jews were parasites who sapped the energy of any nation that tolerated them. Nazis preached that Jews controlled international financial networks that kept Germany in desperate poverty, had caused Germany's defeat in World War I, and brought on the Great Depression of 1929 that collapsed Germany's Weimar Republic.

Hitler liked to point out that he gained power in the 1932 elections legally and not at the point of a gun. In supplanting President Paul Von Hindenburg as chancellor, he sealed the National Socialist German Workers Party (NAZI) in power. Nazis began translating eugenics studies into action.

As the United States had done over two decades previously, Hitler started with compulsory sterilization for all people who suffered from allegedly hereditary disabilities such as feeble mindedness, schizophrenia, and epilepsy as well as those with physical and character defects like blindness, homosexuality, or severe drug or alcohol addiction. Included in his sterilization protocol was a "racist hygiene" proposal directed at "inferior racial groups" such as Gypsies, Slavs, and, especially, Jews.

Hitler's sterilization efforts were modeled on laws already introduced in America and upheld by the U.S. Supreme Court. *Eugenics News* in the United States evaluated the Nazi legislation as "clean-cut, direct and 'model.' Its standards are social and genetical. Its application is entrusted to specialized courts and procedure. From a legal point of view nothing more could be desired."

Germany sterilized more than 400,000 Germans during the mid-to-late 1930s. Joseph Dejarnette, superintendent of Virginia Western State Hospital, complained in the *Richmond Times-Dispatch* that "the Germans are beating us at our own game."

When eugenics leader C.M. Goethe returned from a fact-finding mission to Germany in 1934, he sent a letter of congratulations to E.S. Gosney of the Human Betterment Foundation.

"You will be interested to know," he wrote, "that your work has played a powerful part in shaping the opinion of the intellectuals behind Hitler and his epoch-making program. Everywhere I sensed that their opinions have been tremendously stimulated by American thought.... I want you, my dear friend, to carry the thought with you for the rest of your life that you have really jolted into action a great government of 60 million people."

Leon Whitney, president of the American Eugenics Society, and Madison Grant, author of *The Passing of the Great Race,* each received personal fan mail from Hitler congratulating them for their efforts in eugenics. The dictator further noted that Grant's book was his "bible."

In the Nazi Party's official newspaper, Hitler

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also wildly praised President Franklin D. Roosevelt's "New Deal" as an American form of fascism.

Future U.S. President John F. Kennedy toured Nazi Germany in the 1930s and returned with effusive praise for Hitler, recording in his diary, "I have come to the conclusion that fascism is right for Germany and Italy."

Hostility to Hitler, he contended, stemmed largely from jealousy. "The Germans really are too good—that's why people conspire against them."

Even though JFK fought in World War II as a PT-boat commander in the Pacific, he retained his views of Hitler as late as 1945 when he described Hitler as the "stuff of legends…. Hitler will emerge from the hate that now surrounds him and come to be regarded as one of the most significant figures to have lived."

Euthanasia to eliminate "social defectives" logically followed as the next step in the eugenics movement. It too was begun not by Nazis but instead by Americans who topped the field of international eugenics. The ethics of its deployment dominated the debate for at least two decades before Nevada approved lethal gas chambers for criminal executions in 1921.

While American society may not have been ready to apply such drastic measures to the general population, euthanasia was nevertheless already being practiced one patient at a time by some mental institutions and doctors. Medical lethality, willful neglect, and passive euthanasia applied to mental patients and newborn infants accounted for thousands of American deaths. One institution in Lincoln, Illinois, deliberately fed its patients milk from tubercular cows.

In 1918, Dr. Paul Popenoe, World War I Army VD Department, co-wrote the widely used textbook *Applied Eugenics*, which argued for euthanasia. "From a historical point of view," he wrote, "the first method which presents itself is execution."

In 1927, Planned Parenthood's Margaret Sanger was among the first to accept and promote euthanasia as a program to secure a superior population. "The most merciful thing that the large family does to one of its infant members is to kill it," she wrote. "Nature eliminates the weeds, but we turn them into parasites and allow them to reproduce." [Editor's Note: Margaret Sanger, and especially her views regarding eugenics, remains controversial today. However, she is also believed by many people to have been an early champion of women's reproductive rights.]

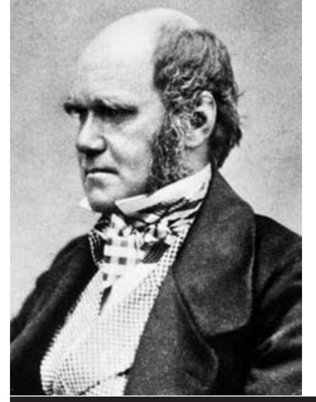
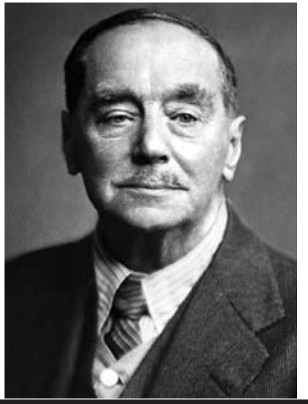
Physician Duncan McKim, author of *Heredity and Human Progress*, concurred that a "gentle, painless death … is the most humane method for preventing reproduction…. In carbonic acid gas we have an agent which would instantaneously fulfill the needs."

In *Eugenics, Marriage and Birth Control*, New York urologist William Robinson decided, "The best thing would be to gently chloroform these children or to give them a dose of potassium cyanide."

"If they are not fit to live," chimed in British playwright George Bernard Shaw, "kill them in a decent humane way."

During Hitler's 12-year Reich that began in 1933, race science and the struggle for a "master race" remained a driving force behind his Nazism. Nazi doctors and scientists became the unseen generals to oversee the eugenics doctrines of identification, segregation, sterilization, euthanasia, and, ultimately, the mass extermination of Jews.

Concentration camps became an integral part of Nazi Germany, the first one built in 1933 almost immediately after Hitler attained power. These prisons soon sprang up throughout Germany and, after World War II erupted, in the nations Germany occupied. In them from 1933-1945 were cast not only Jews and other "inferior" races but also the mentally and physically disabled, homosexuals, and even children.

The Nazis were not the first to contemplate and theorize regarding the supposed virtues of eugenics. Several prominent figures of the late 19th and early 20th centuries were advocates of some form of eugenics, including, left to right, Charles Darwin, H.G. Wells, and Margaret Sanger.

The Reich Committee for Scientific Research of Heredity and Severe Constitutional Disease shared responsibility with the National Coordination Agency for Therapeutic and Medical establishments, code named T-4, to eliminate "worthless eaters … life unworthy of life." Beginning in 1939, "Children's Centers" in 21 hospitals were designated the tasks of euthanizing deformed and retarded children. Hundreds of thousands of "inferior children" were thus executed.

Other patients selected to die were collected from hospitals, nursing homes, old-age homes, mental institutions, and other public custodial facilities and transported to euthanasia centers. Starvation and lethal injections were first used. Eventually, perhaps anticipating the Holocaust, the method of choice became gassing with carbon monoxide or with cyanide gas known as Zyklon B. Approximately 250,000 people were thus done away with by 1945.

Leon Whitney of the American Eugenics Society observed how "while we were pussyfooting around … the Germans were calling a spade a spade."

The "Jewish question" still headed Hitler's itinerary. The Nuremberg Laws on Citizenship and Race enacted in September 1935 accelerated the nation's anti-Semitic campaign by, among other restrictions, revoking Jewish citizenship in the Reich, prohibiting Jews from marrying Aryans, and excluding Jews from schools, libraries, theaters, and public transportation.

"Today, I will prophet again," Hitler announced. "If international finance Jewry should succeed once more in plunging the people into a world war, then the consequence will not be the Bolshevization of the world and a victory of Jewry, but on the contrary, the destruction of the Jewish race in Europe."

In April 1938, Germany annexed Austria. Czechoslovakia fell in March 1939, followed the same year by German troops invading Poland, which prompted Britain to declare war on Germany. Hitler invaded France in 1940, then Norway. In 1941, Hitler double-crossed Stalin and attacked Russia.

Allied and Axis powers continued to line up until the war ultimately stretched around the globe. The United States entered the conflagration after Japan attacked Pearl Harbor on December 7, 1941.

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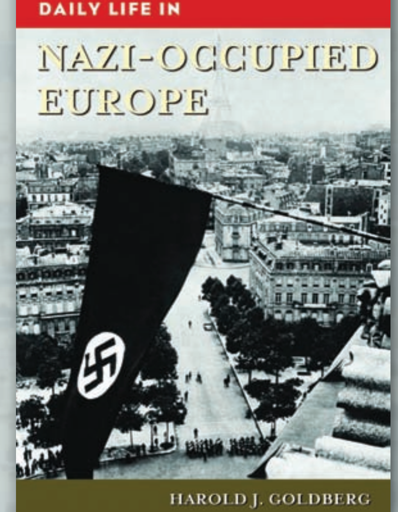
DAILY LIFE IN NAZI-OCCUPIED EUROPE

By Harold J. Goldberg



Daily Life in Nazi-Occupied Europe explores the often surprising story of everyday existence during the war. Discover Polish and Russian poetry, songs, and films with a resistance theme. Consider the choices confronting women desperate to feed their families on meager ration coupons. Recognize the names of famous French actors and writers, some of whom celebrated the collapse of democracy while others remained neutral until the allied invasion. Compare resistance movements across the continent and discover the two largest urban uprisings—in Warsaw. Experience the anguish of children surrounded by disease and death in Leningrad. Every chapter—whether on religious life or intellectual life or recreation—includes surprising information about the millions of unique daily lives conducted by Europeans—in France, the Netherlands, Poland, the Soviet Union, and more—during nearly six years of war.

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Hitler's obsession with eugenics and euthanasia led Nazi Germany to implement its Final Solution with the mass extermination of Jews, as well as many other groups of "undesirables." At extermination camps like Buchenwald (above), millions were gassed, and their bodies incinerated.

Thousands of Jews had already been butchered when Hitler ordered SS Security Chief Reinhard Heydrich and Reich Marshal Hermann Göring to draft "an overall plan of the organizational, functional and materiel measures to be taken in preparing for the implementation of the Final Solution to the Jewish question." On January 20, 1942, a group of 14 of the most powerful Nazi bureaucrats met in the Berlin suburb of Wannsee to implement a solution.

The principal outcome of the Wannsee Conference was a policy by which all Jews would be rounded up and evacuated to occupied territories in the East, primarily in Poland. While the more able bodied would be conscripted for slave labor, all were eventually destined to be liquidated in production-line extermination camps already planned or being constructed in Auschwitz, Chelmo, Balzac, Sobibor, Majdanek, Treblinka, and Lublin. The Holocaust had started.

The first methods of killing were primitive, consisting of mass open-air shootings and disposing of the corpses in ravines or quarries. Mass shootings evolved into gassing with carbon monoxide in the backs of airtight vans, then to gas chambers using Zyklon B and incineration of the bodies in ovens. Groups of musicians sometimes played popular tunes while Jews were being gassed. These death factories continued unabated until the approach of American and Soviet armies in 1945.

Rudolf Hoss, commandant of Auschwitz, took great pride in his full-production extermination rate of 16,000 per day. During the Nuremberg War Crimes Trials following the war, Hoss used the defense that he and the others were merely cogs in a large machine. In memoirs posthumously published, he asserted, "I was completely normal … even when I was carrying out the task of extermination I lived a normal life."

So did thousands of officials, policemen, rail workers, and others throughout Europe who knew what was happening but nonetheless either ignored it or helped keep the assembly line running. The Holocaust represents as much the collective will of Germany as it did Hitler's. Smothered by the collective, no one person feels guilty or responsible for deeds committed by the whole.

Significantly, the *New York Times* noted in a piece about the Nazi era that the most ardent supporters for Hitler's eugenics and euthanasia policies consisted of college and university students, professors, and the general run of so-called intellectuals. "Nazi death camps," the Times summarized, "were conceived, built and often administered by PhDs."

In his foreword to Jerry Bergman's *Hitler and the Nazi Darwinian Worldview,* Doctor David Herbert warned that the world has not endured its last genocide.

"Events happen because they are possible," concluded Holocaust scholar Yehuda Bauer. "If they were possible once, they are possible again. In that sense, the Holocaust is not unique, but a warning for the future."

Charles Sasser is the author of the classic book on sniper warfare titled One Shot-One Kill. *He has written dozens of other books and articles and appeared on numerous television networks including ABC, Fox, the History Channel, and CNN. He is a veteran of the U.S. Navy and the U.S. Army Special Forces. He resides in Chouteau, Oklahoma.*

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By Patrick J. Chaisson

Naval History and Heritage Command

The Wonderful Lady Who Operated the Radio

Australia's only female coastwatcher faced many dangers during World War II.

FOR RUBY BOYE, AN ALLIED AGENT STATIONED ON THE SOUTH PACIFIC ISLAND of Vanikoro, it started much like any other morning. She had just broadcast a routine weather report when her radio receiver suddenly hissed into life.

"Calling Mrs. Boye," spoke a heavily accented voice. "Calling Mrs. Boye on Vanikoro."

Ruby was stunned into silence—no Australian or American sounded like that. Then her caller delivered an ominous warning: "Japanese commander say, you get out ... or else!"

As a coastwatcher, Ruby Boye monitored enemy activity from an extremely remote location far from friendly military forces. Aside from the ever-present threat of death or capture at the hands of Japanese soldiers, she faced a daily struggle just to survive on harsh, unforgiving Vanikoro. Yet this indomitable woman remained at her island post for the entire four-year Pacific War.

Born on July 29, 1891, Ruby Olive Jones grew up in a suburb of Sydney, Australia, where as a youth she enjoyed the piano. In 1919 Ruby married Skov Boye, a laundry proprietor, who gave her two sons. In 1928 the Boyes moved to Tulagi, British Solomon Islands Protectorate, where Skov worked as a plantation manager for Lever Brothers.

Eight years later, he took a job with the Kauri Timber Company on Vanikoro, Santa Cruz Islands. Part of the Solomon Archipelago, Vanikoro comprises five mountainous, volcanic islets ringed by a treacherous coral reef. It sits approximately 500 miles southeast of Tulagi and Guadalcanal, in a region Ruby wryly described as "the hurricane belt."

Conditions on roadless Vanikoro were extremely primitive. Skov and Ruby lived in the village of Paeu along with about 20 European contract employees, including a doctor and radio operator. Another 80 indigenous workers labored high in the mountains, harvesting giant logs destined for Australian markets.

Four times per year, a cargo ship from Melbourne negotiated Vanikoro's hazardous barrier reef to collect this timber. It also delivered supplies and mail. Every two years, the Boyes took a three-month leave of absence to visit their sons Ken and Don who were attending school in Australia.

Aside from these infrequent encounters with the outside world, Skov and Ruby's life on Vanikoro was measured chiefly by the violent tropical storms that lashed their island paradise. As time passed, the Boyes could sense another storm brewing across Pacific skies. This coming tempest, however, was entirely the work of man.

Others also saw war clouds forming. Royal Australian Navy (RAN) Lt. Cmdr. Eric Feldt, a reservist with long experience in New Guinea, began in 1939 to organize and expand a network of observers stationed on the islands to Australia's north. He recruited these coast-

Courtesy Geoff Boye/Royal Australian Navy

ABOVE: A highly successful set of eyes in the Solomon Islands, Ruby Boye was the only female coastwatcher for the Allies in World War II. TOP: American planes attack Japanese warships during the Battle of Santa Cruz. Weather reports from clandestine radio operator Ruby Boye provided vital information to the Americans prior to the major naval engagement.

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Photo: Alan Powell/Royal Australian Navy

Ruby sits at her radio on one of the islets of Vanikoro, tapping out code.

watchers from European planters and missionaries who were familiar with the islands, knew the native peoples living there, and who could survive on their own for long periods of time.

Eventually, more than 600 Australian, American, and British coastwatchers established outposts in Papua New Guinea and the Bismarck Archipelago, as well as all across the Solomon Islands.

After Japan invaded the Southwest Pacific in late 1941, many of these hardy volunteers found themselves deep inside enemy territory. Constantly hunted by Japanese patrols, they lived by their wits and long experience on the islands. Combat was to be avoided. The special call-sign "Ferdinand" (taken from the popular children's book about a bull who preferred to smell flowers instead of fighting matadors) was intended to remind Feldt's coastwatchers of their role as information gatherers, not soldiers.

The coastwatchers' primary mission involved monitoring enemy air and ship movements. Individual spotters sent observations via courier to a central station, where these reports were transmitted via wireless to Commander Feldt's headquarters. Their primary teleradio was the RAN-issue Type 3B, a versatile, portable set that could broadcast in either voice or "continuous wave" (Morse Code) mode over long distances.

Apart from their intelligence-collecting chores, coastwatchers also rescued stranded Allied sailors and airmen. Famously, Australian coastwatcher Lieutenant Alan "Reg" Evans helped save the lives of 11 Americans—including future U.S. President John F. Kennedy—marooned in the waters off Kolombangara after their patrol torpedo boat, PT-109, was cut in two by a Japanese destroyer on the night of August 2, 1943.

A coastwatcher station came to Vanikoro sometime in 1941, complete with a powerful 3B teleradio and an operator trained to make meteorological observations. Allied officers knew that weather patterns generated in the Santa Cruz Islands often influenced conditions throughout the Solomon chain. This data would soon prove indispensable, but first a problem arose—one requiring an unorthodox solution.

The radioman assigned to Vanikoro desperately wanted to leave his post and enlist in the Royal Australian Air Force. No replacement was immediately available, so Ruby Boye volunteered to learn his duties. Before long, she was transmitting weather observations four times a day to the coastwatchers' regional headquarters on Tulagi.

As Japanese forces advanced ever closer to mainland Australia during the first months of 1942, Allied authorities suspended all merchant activity throughout the Solomons. With Vanikoro's logging operation now shut down, the timber company chartered a ship to evacuate its employees.

"What a sad day that was for us," Ruby later remembered of her co-workers' departure. Yet she and Skov did not accompany them off the island. "My husband chose to remain for the company's interest," she explained, "attending to the maintenance of the rolling and floating stock, machinery, houses, etc."

Having joined the coastwatchers, Ruby Boye felt obliged to remain as well. "I decided it was my duty to stay also to continue to operate the radio," she remarked in a 1998 interview. To keep busy, she started teaching herself Morse Code—a wise move, as things turned out.

Skov and Ruby, now the only Europeans on Vanikoro, lived peacefully among several hundred indigenous inhabitants. These people often came to the Boyes seeking help with domestic disputes, dental problems, or other medical emergencies. Skov, Vanikoro's island manager in prewar times, felt responsible for the populace's health and happiness—beliefs Ruby shared. Over the next several years, the Boyes skillfully arbitrated quarrels, pulled teeth, and treated ailments all across the chain of islands.

Those who knew her remembered Mrs. Boye as a dark-haired woman who, at 5 feet, 10 inches in height, towered over her Vanikoran neighbors. Ruby's imposing presence, however, was softened by a gentle laugh and helpful spirit. Utterly self-reliant, she ably balanced her coastwatcher's duties with the countless domestic chores required of an Australian housewife living at the extreme edge of civilization.

In May 1942, a planter named Charles Bignell sailed from the Central Solomons with urgent news. The Japanese, he reported, had invaded Tulagi on May 3 and taken over the British colonial capital there. Its local defense force had been quickly overwhelmed, forcing the island's remaining European inhabitants to either surrender or, like Bignell, make their escape.

The enemy was closing in. Before departing Vanikoro with food and fresh water, Bignell warned of a Japanese cruiser spotted lurking among the Santa Cruz Islands. Long-range reconnaissance planes also began appearing overhead, their Rising Sun insignia unmistakable to Ruby's eye. Her regular weather observations were now accompanied by occasional reports of aircraft sightings.

Japanese intelligence officers knew all about Mrs. Boye and the work she was performing. When radio-delivered threats failed, a flying boat dropped pamphlets over Vanikoro that offered money in return for the death or capture of the island's "European spies."

Ruby also recalled hearing loud motors and seeing bright flashing lights coming from just outside Vanikoro's poorly charted barrier reef late one evening. She believed it was an enemy vessel trying to enter the lagoon. After four or five tense hours, though, the intruders apparently gave up and sailed off.

The Boyes knew what usually happened to coastwatchers who fell into Japanese hands. In March 1942, an elderly Australian copra planter named Percy Good was executed by enemy troops on Bougainville in the western Solomon Islands. As civilians, Skov and Ruby would likely share Good's fate if captured. They agreed that in the event of an actual landing they would flee into the jungle, committing suicide if necessary rather than subject themselves to torture, starvation, and eventual death at the hands

of ruthless Japanese interrogators.

As a further precaution, the Boyes moved their radio transmitter from its location in Paeu to a more remote site across the Lawrence River. This led to a new set of dangers, especially after a cyclone destroyed the bridge connecting Ruby's house with her teleradio. She then had to row across the river in a tiny skiff, an especially perilous journey after dark when Vanikoro's resident crocodiles became most active.

"I kept out of their way and they kept out of mine," Mrs. Boye later remarked about the voracious reptiles. "But they were particularly fond of dogs and cats and would often come and take them from under the house."

Everyday life on Vanikoro meant enduring such hazards as hurricanes, earthquakes, and deadly tropical diseases. Ruby contracted malaria several times, along with an infection known as blackwater fever which, the doughty coastwatcher observed, "usually proves fatal." Somehow, she survived.

Shortly after that threatening radio message came through, some U.S. Navy sailors paid the Boyes a brief visit. They adjusted Ruby's transmitter frequencies and advised her to begin broadcasting in Morse Code (which she had just learned). The Americans also left behind a welcome gift of combat rations to supplement the couple's dwindling stock of native vegetables, tropical fruit, and fish.

Mrs. Boye seemed more amused than alarmed by the fuss that everyone was making over her. "The mere fact that I was annoying them [the enemy] sufficiently to have them warn me off was somewhat gratifying," she said.

With the loss of Tulagi, Vanikoro became a relay station between the American headquarters at Vila in the New Hebrides and coastwatchers operating far behind enemy lines to the west. Ruby's enciphered meteorological observations also gave the Allies a key advantage during the Battle of the Coral Sea (May 4-8, 1942), the invasion of Guadalcanal (August 1942), and the Battle of Santa Cruz (October 25-27, 1942).

This last engagement, while a tactical victory for Japan, marked the sunset of that nation's ambitions in the eastern Solomons. No longer would its fleets of warships and aircraft threaten the ever-expanding Allied presence across this region. Instead, naval vessels flying the U.S. and Australian national ensigns became more and more common in the waters off Vanikoro.

"Our harbor was later used for the American aircraft tenders servicing Catalinas (Consolidated PBY flying boats) on reconnaissance flights," Ruby remembered. "We made many friends and enjoyed the company." The Boyes

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also enjoyed their generous guests' gifts of food and provisions.

The U.S. Navy's presence there did not go completely unchallenged, though. "One day, the enemy attacked one of the tenders in the harbor," she recounted. "Little damage was done but the Japanese lost three of their eight planes in the action."

Sometime in 1943, Ruby Boye received a high-profile visitor when Admiral William F. "Bull" Halsey arrived by seaplane to congratulate the coastwatcher on her wartime achievements. Admitting he was "playing hooky" from his duties as commander in chief, South Pacific Area, Halsey introduced himself by exclaiming, "I want to meet the wonderful lady who operates the radio here."

Admiral Halsey also helped Ruby obtain medical treatment when she contracted the shingles. He arranged for a Catalina to take her from Vanikoro to Australia, leaving behind four sailors to run the radio station during her three-week convalescence. Mrs. Boye said all four men begged to stay on Vanikoro after she returned to duty.

Australian officers were also impressed by this self-taught wireless operator, the sole female coastwatcher to serve during World War II. Commander Eric Feldt arranged for her appointment as Honorary Third Officer in the Women's Royal Australian Navy Service (WRANS), effective July 27, 1943. Ruby was 51 years of age when she accepted this commission.

Shortly thereafter, the Boyes' teleradio—normally reserved for urgent military message traffic—relayed a most unusual request. Headquarters wanted Ruby's dress size, a demand that baffled both the coastwatcher and her husband. All questions were answered in a few days when an Allied transport aircraft appeared overhead, parachuting into the lagoon a waterproof canister that contained her new WRANS uniform.

"It caused some excitement, as you can imagine," Ruby said of this incident.

As battle lines moved westward, life on Vanikoro began returning to its prewar rhythms. Allied warships called less and less frequently—the Boyes once went 10 months without resupply. News also took longer to reach them. In late 1943 His Majesty's Resident Commissioner for the Solomon Islands nominated Ruby for the British Empire Medal, but due to a bureaucratic foul-up it was not until 1946 that she actually received this prestigious decoration.

Third Officer Boye's other awards included the 1939-1942 Star, the Pacific Star, the War Medal, and the Australian Service Medal. As her WRANS commission was strictly honorary, though, Ruby never received pay for the service she performed as a coastwatcher.

Skov and Ruby remained on Vanikoro until 1947, when he sickened with leukemia. The Boyes returned by chartered airplane to Sydney, where Skov Boye died shortly after being admitted to the hospital. Settling in Sydney, Ruby married Frank Jones in 1950. Sadly, she lost Frank after 11 years of wedlock.

For the next three decades she lived by herself in a small flat near Sydney. Surrounded by "a good family and many friends," Ruby often shared her tales of wartime adventure with fellow WRANS, other veterans, and local schoolchildren. Fiercely independent despite mounting health problems, she was finally persuaded to apply for a military pension in her 87th year.

Honorary Third Officer Ruby Boye lived to the age of 99, passing away on September 14, 1990. Her contribution to the Allied victory in World War II has been commemorated by the dedication of an accommodation block—Boye House—at the Australian Defence Force Academy in Canberra.

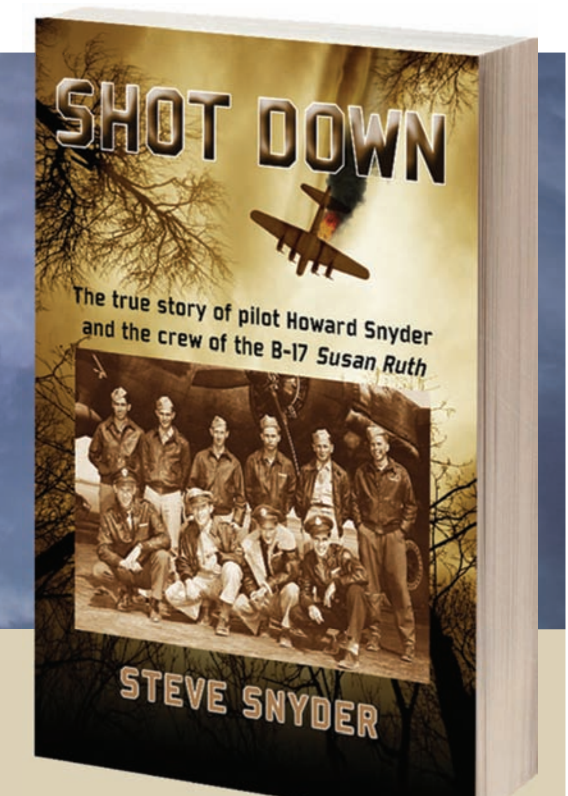
Patrick Chaisson, a retired U.S. Army officer and historian, writes from his home in Scotia, New York.

SHOT DOWN

By Steve Snyder

Set within the framework of the air war over Europe in World War II, Steve Snyder's book, SHOT DOWN, recounts the dramatic experiences of each member of a ten man B-17 bomber crew after their plane, piloted by the author's father, was knocked out of the sky by German fighters over the French/Belgium border on February 8, 1944.

Some men died. Some were captured and became prisoners of war. Some men evaded capture and were missing in action for months before making it back to England. Their individual stories and those of the courageous Belgian people who risked their lives trying to help members of the crew are all different and are all remarkable.



Since being released in August 2014, SHOT DOWN has won 20 book awards in the categories of Military History, War & History, Historical Non-Fiction and U.S. History.

The hardcover book has more than 200 time period photographs of the people who were involved and of the places where the events took place.

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From the Publishers of WWII History Magazine

D-DAY

Through A Soldier's Eyes…

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The storm was violent, the waves were huge and the noise was deafening for the soldiers in the landing craft on D-Day, June 6, 1944. As they neared the beach, the door dropped open… and this photo lets you see exactly what they saw, and feel what they felt: treacherous breakers, withering machine gun fire, a long beach, huge cliffs, and near-certain death.

None hesitated. These brave unselfish men jumped into the cold Atlantic waters. Two thirds of them died soon after, so that we could live in freedom.

This historic photograph shows American soldiers from Company E, 16th Infantry, 1st Infantry Division exiting their LCVP landing craft under heavy German machine gun fire on Omaha Beach. The photo was taken by Coast Guard Chief Photographer's Mate Robert F. Sergeant.

Company E landed on Easy Red Beach at 0645 in the face of murderous fire. Those few who survived kept wading right into everything the enemy had and took their objective, which provided the only exit from the beach that the entire Fifth Corps had for two days. Company "E," perhaps by strength of will and courage alone, helped keep the entire landing force from being thrown back into the sea. For a month afterwards, those who survived remained almost in a daze.

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For once, the ULTRA message came late. Normally, the decoding machines and hard-working British cryptographers at Bletchley Park had an abundance of German Army messages to go through, but in the first days in August 1944, the German panzer divisions had gone to radio silence, which suggested they were going to attack, but not in which direction.

Then the Germans gave away the game. On August 6, the 2nd Panzer Division broke radio silence and asked for night fighter support to back the attack that evening over an area from St. Clement to St. Hilaire and for more fighters later that day. A followup message said that the 2nd SS Panzer Division "Das Reich" would drive west at 8:30 PM toward Mortain and would need Luftwaffe bombers to suppress American artillery before them.

As soon as the message was decoded, Bletchley dispatched the warning to Lt. Gen. Omar N. Bradley, commanding the U.S. 12th Army Group, which would face this offensive in France. The result was twofold. By 4 AM on August 7, Bradley and his senior commanders had a complete picture of the German counterattack, codenamed Operation Lüttich. Second, the full picture did not matter anyway. The defending Americans were already feeling the first impact of Adolf Hitler's latest blitzkrieg, the only one he would launch in Normandy. It was a misguided operation that was doomed to catastrophe.

Operation Lüttich was born in the military chaos of Germany's defeat in the American Operation Cobra, the breakout from the Normandy beachhead, in July and the political chaos of the botched German attempt on Hitler's life that same month. Hitler, suffering

The commander of a PzKpfw. VI Tiger tank peers from the turret of his vehicle somewhere in northern France during the summer of 1944. The Tiger mounted a heavy 88mm main weapon capable of devastating opposing armor at great distances. This Tiger belongs to the 1st SS Panzer Division Leibstandarte Adolf Hitler, one of the Nazi armored divisions that participated in the attack at Mortain.

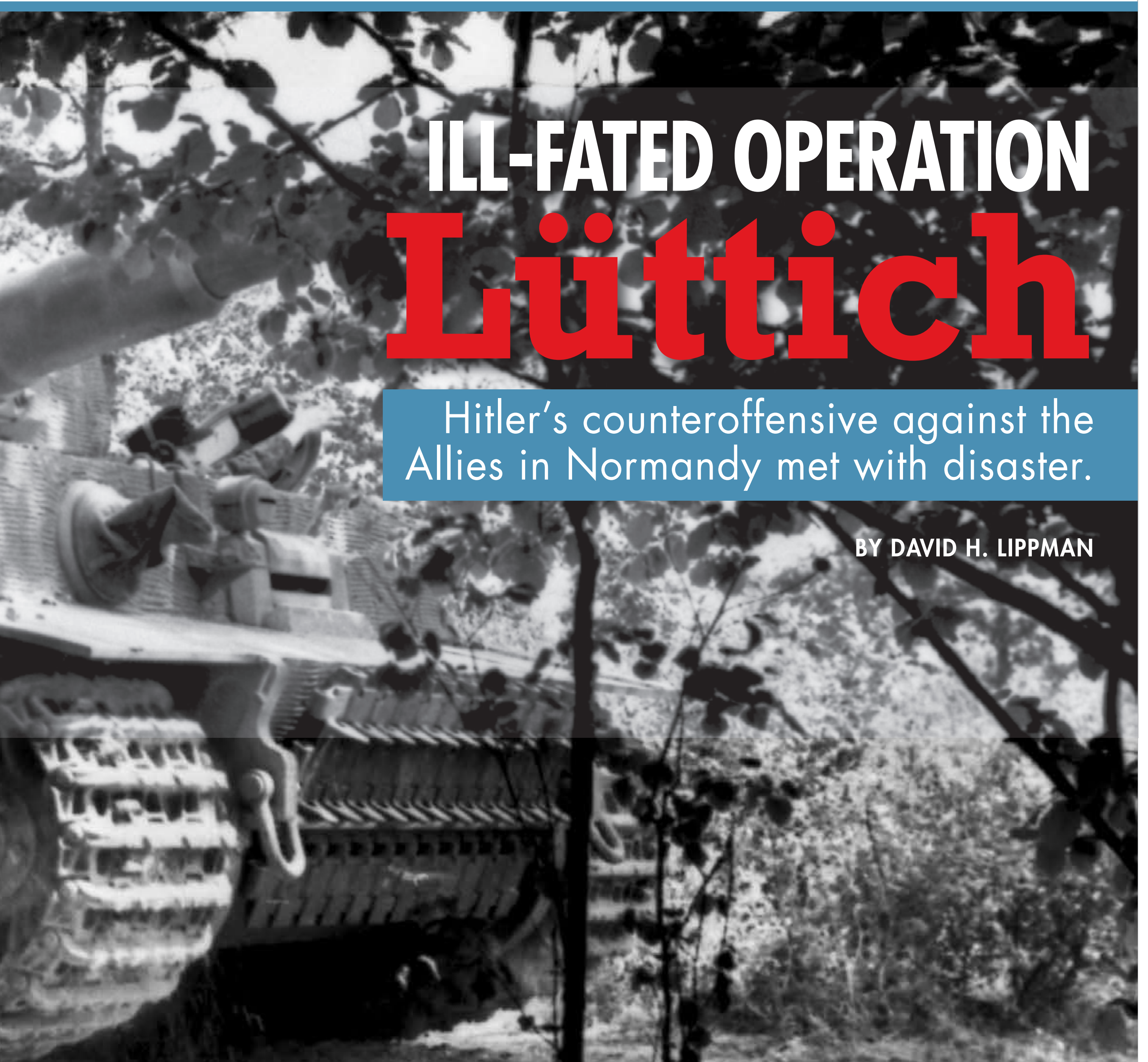
Bundesarchiv Bild 101I-299-1805-21; Photo: Scheck

from serious physical injuries and mental trauma from a bomb going off near his feet, was facing disaster on both the battlefield and the diplomatic front. Soviet troops were driving into Poland and the Balkans. German puppet states were seeking a way out of the war. German domestic morale was sinking under heavy bombing and heavier casualties.

The latest blows had started coming with the Allied invasion of Normandy on June 6. British and Canadian troops defeated German panzers in attritional battles near Caen in the east, while American mechanized forces under the hard-driving Lt. Gen. George S. Patton blasted a hole through German lines at Coutances in the west and stormed down French roads, driving both west into Brittany and east toward Argentan to surround the German Seventh Army. If Patton from the south and the British from the north bagged the Seventh Army, the German defenses in France would collapse, and some of the toughest panzer divisions—nearly impossible to replace at this point—would be lost.

To prevent this, Hitler ordered his favorite response to an enemy offensive: a massive panzer counterattack to halt the American drive by cutting off its supply lines, making Patton vulnerable to isolation and destruction.

Hitler's plan was bold, calling for Seventh Army, under SS Lt. Gen. Paul Hausser, to hurl four panzer divisions, two of them elite SS outfits, and an SS panzergrenadier division at the thin center of the American line and drive on the road junction town of Avranches where Normandy met Brittany, cut all the roads, and strangle American supply lines. The plan was named "Lüttich" in honor of the German name for the Belgian city of Liege, which Kaiser Wilhelm II's men had captured 30 years ago almost



ILL-FATED OPERATION Lüttich

Hitler's counteroffensive against the Allies in Normandy met with disaster.

BY DAVID H. LIPPMAN

to the very day, setting up an offensive that drove the French back to Paris.

The only problem in Hitler's grand theory came from the very generals he was assigning to carry out this mission. The German officers who attempted to assassinate Hitler and end the war had barely missed their target—the Gestapo's vengeance did not. More than 5,000 German officers, some as high as the rank of field marshal, were arrested and subjected to hideous show trials and ghastly torture.

Among those under the Gestapo's eye was the top German commander in the West, Field Marshal Gunther von Kluge, known in the Army as "Clever Hans," a play on his name as "clever" in German is "kluge." He was suspected of promising the plotters to make use of his high rank and position to be the peace emissary to the British and Americans.

Nonetheless, Kluge was the man in charge and on the spot, and he would have to lead the assault. Problem was, Kluge did not have much to work with. The Seventh Army in particular was a disaster. Most German transport consisted of horse, bicycle, and foot. Most German panzer divisions had been ground down by ceaseless attrition from Allied fighter bombers and Allied tanks, losing 750 of the 1,400 committed to battle. The constant bombing had also wrecked German supply lines and morale. Weakened supply lines meant few replacements, and cooks, bakers, and other paper chasers were put in the front as infantry, failing miserably. Luftwaffe pilots taking to the sky found themselves jumped by vast numbers of British Supermarine Spitfire and U.S. North American P-51 Mustang fighters. Tension between the Nazi extremist (and better equipped) Waffen SS and the Wehrmacht was intense, even though both endured the same combat nightmares.

No matter. On July 31, Hitler ordered Deputy Chief of Staff General Walter Warlimont to go personally to Kluge's headquarters at the Duke de la Rouchefoucauld's palace at La Roche-Guyon in France and brief Kluge on the plan.

Acting as Hitler's personal eyes and ears at Kluge's headquarters, Warlimont arrived on August 2 to find that the situation was disintegrating. Kluge had planned a counterattack himself but nixed it because of Patton's advance to the east, south of Mortain. The American 79th Infantry Division was headed for Laval, while the 90th Infantry was driving on Mayenne. East of the planned Mortain attack area, Lt. Gen. Courtney Hodges was advancing with his U.S. 1st Army, and VII Corps commander Lt. Gen. J. Lawton Collins ordered Maj. Gen. Clarence Huebner's 1st Infantry Division to seize the city and a dominant feature above it called Hill 314. The hill was a tourist attraction for hikers, who enjoyed the outcroppings that led to an 18-mile view in all directions, as far as Avranches to the west. Reminded to seize the high ground, the laconic Huebner said, "Joe, I already have it."

With that, Collins decided to replace the 1st Infantry, veterans of North Africa, Sicily, and D-Day, with the 30th Infantry Division, which would hold the area while the "Big Red One" headed for Mayenne.

The 30th "Old Hickory" Infantry Division was a National Guard unit, its men drawn from North Carolina, South Carolina, and Tennessee. Commanded by Maj. Gen. Leland Hobbs, the division's three regiments were descendants of Confederate battalions that had fought at Gettysburg and Cold Harbor. More importantly, the 30th had endured harsh fighting in the Cobra breakout, even being bombed by mistake by the U.S. Eighth Air Force.

Now, after watching a USO show with Edward G. Robinson, the Tennesseeans and Carolinians began replacing the "Big Red One" in its positions east and north of Mortain, an unremarkable town of 1,300 people whose main point of interest was that it sat at the center of a spider's web of roads. The division's 117th Infantry Regiment took over defending the village of St. Barthélémy, a small town north of Mortain. The 120th took over Hill 314 and the other nearby crests, while the 119th was put in reserve. The 120th's commander, Colonel Hammond Birks, said to his aide-de-camp, "This town is 'wide-open.' The hotels are full. It should be an excellent place for a little rest and relaxation."

But an outgoing 1st Infantry officer warned Birks, "Hill 314 is the key to the whole area. In case of emergency this hill has to be held at all costs." Birks assigned that task to his 2nd Battalion under Lt. Col. Eads Hardaway, telling Hardaway, "If any trouble develops, it will be from that direction. Put roadblocks on all approaches to the 2nd Battalion position." The Americans did so but found other problems. The 1st Infantry Division's positions were poorly prepared. Some foxholes were only 18 inches deep. The phone net had to be rewired, and there was no time to deploy minefields.

Meanwhile, German troops and tanks converged on their lines of departure, doing so by night to avoid Allied fighter bombers. Even so, things went wrong. The XLVII Panzer Corps commander General Hans von Funck disliked his SS boss, Hausser, and the two did not work well together. Nor did Funck get along with the 116th Panzer Division's commander, Lt. Gen. Gerhard Graf von Schwerin. The 2nd Panzer and 1st and 2nd SS Panzer Divisions fielded only 75 Mark IV tanks, 70 Mark V Panther tanks, and 32 self-propelled guns, combined.

The 2nd Panzer was assigned to the right, 2nd

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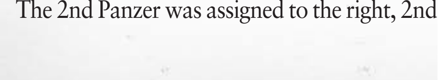


SS Panzer and 17th SS Panzergrenadier to the left, and 1st SS Panzer to the center. The 116th Panzer Division, on the extreme right, would join the attack as soon as it could. The 1st SS Panzer's move-up was delayed when a British Hawker Typhoon fighter bomber crashed into the leading tank in a narrow lane, holding up an entire column. It took the division all morning on the 6th to get sorted out.

Nonetheless, at 2 AM on August 7, Lüttich got down to business in the dark and predawn fog with a German panzer assault in best blitzkrieg style against the 30th Infantry Division. To preserve surprise, the Germans did not precede the attack with an artillery barrage. The Germans planned to surround Mortain and cut it off, trapping the American 120th Infantry from behind. Using infiltration tactics in some places and SS ferocity in others, the attack went in. An SS battle group, Kampfgruppe Fick, attacked Hill 314 head-on, yelling "Heil Hitler" as they charged under supporting machine-gun fire. G Company of the 120th answered back with furious fire, holding them off, but the Germans overran H Company's headquarters. More German troops attacked the 2nd Battalion of the 120th Regiment, forcing Birks to commit his reserve, C Company, to help hold Mortain and Hill 314. The 2nd/120th and one company of the 3rd/120th would ultimately defend the ground.

Meanwhile in Mortain, Hardaway set up his headquarters team to defend the HQ in the Hotel de la Poste. Even the radiomen had to abandon their sets and grab their rifles. Sergeant Robert Bondurant, manning the switchboard, told Birks about the crisis.

"Hold the town at all costs," Birks ordered. 'Stay at your post." Bondurant did so.

As a misty dawn approached, the Germans started shelling Mortain. GIs in foxholes in the cemetery north of town saw blasts explode lids off crypts and topple headstones. C Company moved forward and battled SS men in the dark.

The 2nd SS Panzer's drive was led by two Frenchmen whose sympathies were with Hitler. They headed toward a roadblock held by A/120th, where three GIs challenged the Frenchmen. The traitors explained that they were guiding a "lost" vehicle back to American lines. During the palaver, a German machine-gun crew worked its way into a field behind the fence. Once there, it opened fire, killing the Americans. The rest of the Americans killed the French traitors, but the damage had been done—German machine gunners opened up on the roadblock, and the tanks overran it, surging through A Company and heading for B Company.

The B/120th command team saw the Germans coming, and First Sergeant Reginald

National Archives

ABOVE: During their desperate defense of Hill 314 at Mortain, American soldiers use the cover of a hedgerow to displace. The soldiers of the 30th Division maintained control of the high ground and blunted Hitler's ill-conceived offensive. OPPOSITE: This camouflaged Jagdpanzer IV tank destroyer of the German 116th "Greyhound" Panzer Division has halted momentarily on a dirt road in Normandy. The 116th was criticized for its poor performance during Operation Lüttich.

Maybe handed a bazooka to his company commander, Lieutenant Murray Pulver, who promptly crouched behind a stone wall and fired on a Mark IV from 10 yards away. The round hit the tank's turret, rocking it to a stop. The engine kept turning over, but the blast killed or wounded everyone in the tank. The SS did not give up, though. A dozen SS troopers charged up yelling, "*Amerikaner Kamerad,*" calling upon them to surrender. Pulver fired his carbine at the attackers, and his men did the same, dropping most of the Germans to the ground. The Americans suffered no casualties, but Pulver figured he could not hold much longer and pulled back. He had gained time for B/120th to establish a new defensive line.

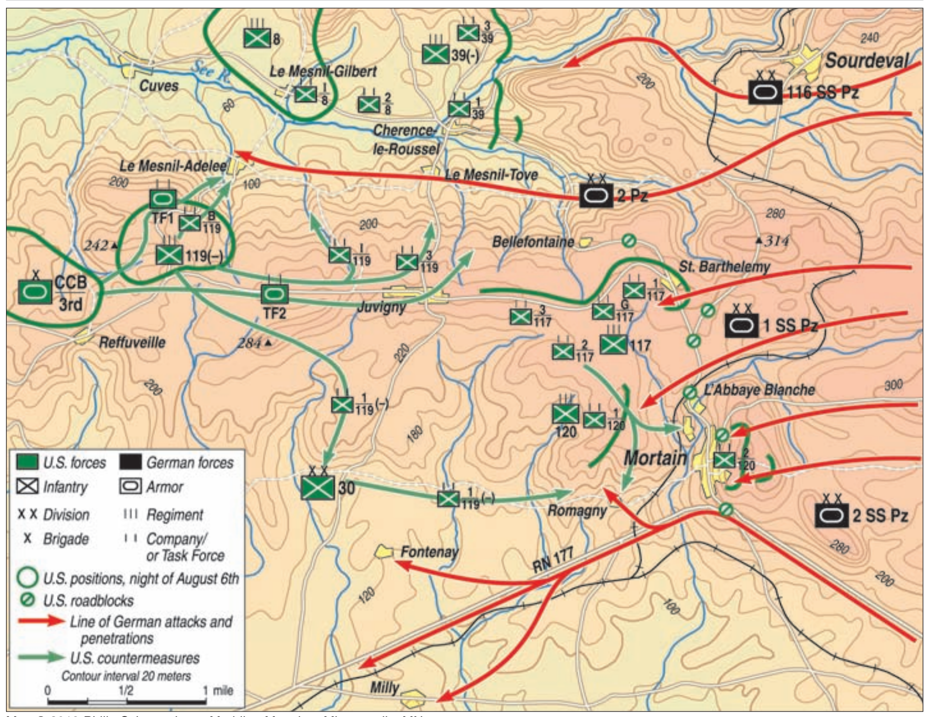
Through the fog, the German advance continued, now backed by artillery, including their Nebelwerfer rockets, known to Americans as "Screaming Meemies" for their terrifying sound. German tanks and infantry drove into Mortain itself. One group of SS men charged into a battery belonging to the 197th Field Artillery and drove off in a jeep with a radio, map, and coding machine. A panzer shot up trucks and cooked off ammunition before retiring, its crew fearful of American bazooka teams taking advantage of the fog to blast rounds into the sides of German tanks.

Gradually, the Germans took control of Mortain in heavy fighting, clearing the buildings of straggling Americans. In his HQ, 2/120th's commander, Colonel Hardaway, warned Birks that he would have to temporarily shut down operations. SS men were inspecting wrecked American vehicles outside his building. SS men yanked wounded American soldiers out of damaged buildings and made the prisoners sit in the middle of a road—the GIs feared the SS men would massacre them as they had done to hundreds of French civilians in Oradour-sur-Glane. Sergeant Robert Bondurant, who manned his telephone switchboard to the last, recalled, "I thought they were going to shoot us. Instead they walked us back to an aid station. Wounded were lying around everywhere, both German and American."

Meanwhile, much of the 2/120th was still holding on to Hill 214, not yet aware that they were being surrounded. They were facing attacks by a determined SS trooper armed with a flamethrower. One American killed the flamethrower man, but the Americans could not silence the enemy artillery. Worse, the Americans were short on supplies and ammunition, and supporting artillery could not find targets in the mist.

National Archives

ABOVE: Although Hitler's Operation Lüttich was a bold stroke to thwart the Allied advance in Normandy, the effort failed due to stubborn American resistance on the ground, accurate U.S. artillery fire, and Allied domination of the air. BELOW: As the battle for Mortain rages on, American soldiers of the 119th Regiment, 30th Infantry Division fire at the advancing Germans near Mortain on August 9, 1944.



Map © 2019 Philip Schwartzberg, Meridian Mapping, Minneapolis, MN

One of the last Americans to reach the hill's summit was Captain Delmont Bym, leading H Company, the heavy weapons outfit. Bym was stunned by the sight of wounded men lying everywhere. "It was my first week of combat," he said later. "I was kind of shocked to see injured men lying there in the open, being hit by shrapnel."

With Hardaway and his command team gone, leadership of the 2nd/120th fell on Captain Reynold Erichson, who headed F Company. He moved quickly, rounding up about 40 stragglers and pulling all the companies into an all-round defensive position on the summit, fully aware that his 600 men were facing one of Germany's top SS panzer divisions, which mustered at least 9,000 men.

Erichson was a 24-year-old peacetime Iowa farmer, and three of his four company commanders had never led companies in battle. However, Erichson had one trump card: two forward artillery observation officers (FOOs), the eyes of 30th Division's heavy guns. From their hilltop observation posts, Lieutenant Robert Weiss and Lieutenant Charles Bartz had a grandstand view of the entire countryside as the fog burned off and a battery-powered radio to call down targets for the 230th Field Artillery Battalion's guns.

Northwest of Mortain, the 1st/117th Infantry Regiment, under Lt. Col. Robert Frankland, faced the 2nd Panzer Division's tanks. The odds were against the 117th. A Company, for example, had a brand new lieutenant commanding it, and its 3rd Platoon had no officers. The company lacked bazookas and artillery support but did have 55 newly arrived replacements.

The 2nd Panzer Division's Panther tanks hit the 117th from three directions at St. Barthélémy, slamming into the 823rd Tank Destroyer's antitank and tank-destroyer guns. Lieutenant George Greene, brand new to the battalion, led the men, blasting open German tanks and firing off an entire clip of machine-gun ammunition to give his men a chance to escape the enemy. After vicious fighting, two German tanks drove within 250 yards of Birks' command post.

The 117th fought hard—their guns and bazookas taking down German infantry and tanks— but German advantages in trained men and heavy tanks soon told. A Company was wiped out in minutes with only one officer and 27 men escaping death or capture.

At midmorning the Germans attacked again, some in captured GI jackets to confuse the defenders, and finally drove the Americans out, but the Germans had lost six hours to the 117th.

All across the Mortain battlefield, it was the same story: harsh German attacks, heavy artillery and tank fire, and a determined American defense that slowed the advance, all under heavy fog, mostly from the River Sée.

But at 11 AM, a new element entered the battle as the fog finally burned off, revealing the entire Normandy front under clear skies. The porcine but capable Lt. Gen. Heinrich von Luttwitz, commanding 2nd Panzer Division, ordered his support columns to take any available cover. On Hill 314, Weiss and Bartz grinned broadly at each other, seeing those "columns of enemy armor and foot troops streaming [toward us] from the east and northeast." The pair began calling down artillery fire on the Germans.

Soon they would get more. Bradley saw the seriousness and weight of the German counter-

attack and put in a request to Lt. Gen. Elwood "Pete" Quesada, the dashing commander of the U.S. Ninth Air Force, which owned the Republic P-47 Thunderbolt attack planes and P-51 fighters that had been carving up German movement for weeks. Quesada saw the opportunity immediately. In a superb example of Allied cooperation, he reached out to Air Vice Marshal Sir Harry Broadhurst, who commanded 10 squadrons of deadly Hawker Typhoon fighter bombers that could dive at 500 miles per hour and cut loose 60-pound rockets that turned even Tiger tanks into shreds of metal.

The two Allies worked out a plan: the RAF would shoot up vehicles in the Mortain area while American planes would fly missions behind German lines to attack Luftwaffe bases and intercept any German aircraft that dared to venture toward the battlefield.

Wing Commander Charles Green briefed the pilots, dressed in their shirt-sleeves, dark glasses, and silk scarves, while mechanics checked the Typhoons and warmed up the engines. "This is the moment we have all been waiting for, gentlemen," he said. "The chance of getting at Panzer tanks out in the open. And, there are lots of the bastards." Green pointed at the Mortain-Saint Barthélémy road on his big map and told his pilots to concentrate on the lead tanks and jam the highway. Flying time to the target was 15 minutes. The Typhoons would take off in pairs, attack individually, then head home and get rearmed and refueled for another strike. There would be a continuous cycle of Typhoons over the battlefield. Pilots were warned to watch for mid-air collisions.

From their cockpits, 245 Squadron pilots looked down on wrecked towns and villages, blasted-open vehicles, and battle smoke from Hill 314. They had no trouble spotting the German columns. They were stretched out along a straight road. The 245 pilots swooped in parallel to the column in line astern at 4,000 feet, winged over, and swept down. German panzer gunners opened up with light flak and tracer, their only defense. Then 245 Squadron raked the tanks with 20mm cannon fire and launched their rockets, following their training procedure of "diving point … release point … scram!" they ripped open tanks and thinner skinned vehicles with explosions, forcing them to a fiery halt and their crews to disperse into ditches, unable to advance.

Within an hour, 245 Squadron was back on the ground for refueling and rearming, then took off again. The pilots had quite a tale to tell. Their rocket attacks were pulverizing the German columns. New Zealander Desmond Scott reported, "As I sped to the head of this mile-long column, hundreds of German troops began spilling out into the road to sprint for the open fields and hedgerows. There was no escape. Typhoons were already attacking in deadly swoops at the other end of the column and within seconds the whole stretch of the road was bursting and blazing under streams of rocket and cannon fire. Ammunition wagons exploded like multicolored volcanoes. A large, long-barreled tank standing in a field just off the road was hit by rockets and overturned into a ditch. It was an awesome sight, plane smoke, burning rockets, and showers of colored tracer."

Both: National Archives

ABOVE: An officer of the American 30th Infantry Division communicates on a field telephone while a walkie talkie lies nearby. Lieutenants Robert Weiss and Charles Bartz were positioned to call in effective artillery fire against German troops assaulting Hill 314, a key element in the successful defense. BELOW: On the night of August 7, 1944, during the German attack on Mortain, American artillery fires in support of the defenders of Hill 314.

The attacks created massive destruction, shocking the German troops under the bombardment. Warner Josupeit, a 1st SS Panzer Division machine gunner, said later, "The fighter bombers circled our tanks several times. Then one broke out of his circle, sought a target and fired. As the first pulled back into the circle of about 20 planes, a second pulled out and fired. So they continued until they had all fired. Then they left the terrible scene.

"A new swarm appeared in their place and fired all their rockets. Black clouds of smoke from burning oil climbed into the sky everywhere we looked. They marked the dead Panzers. Finally the Typhoons couldn't find any more Panzers so they bore down on us and clawed us mercilessly. Their rockets fell with a terrible howl and burst into big pieces of shrapnel."

The fear and destruction infected the higher

German command level. The Seventh Army's chief of staff reported, "The attack has bogged down since 1 PM because of heavy fighter-bomber operations and the failure of our air force. [Our high command] never attached enough importance to the air situation; that made the movements and the supply for the operations doubtful."

The only ground pounders that saw any cheer in the situation were the Americans of the 30th Division, particularly those on Hill 314, who had box seats for the Typhoon attacks, some of them practically on top of their positions. Sergeant Wendell Westall of Illinois watched a Typhoon flash by and said to a pal, "Sure as hell, that one damned nearly parted my hair!"

The RAF's hammering did not stop. German tank machine gunners ran out of ammunition. The U.S. Army Air Forces joined in the destruction as well, once they had finished massacring the Luftwaffe's fighters.

As more Typhoons swooped down to attack, the Germans intensified their attacks, particularly on Hill 314. But if the ground defenses were thin and weak, their defending air and artillery cover—called in by Weiss and Bartz—slammed down on the Germans, keeping them off the hill. Worse, Hobbs and Bradley recognized the serious situation in Mortain and were sending reinforcements to relieve what was now being called "The Lost Battalion."

As dusk settled over the battlefield, the last Typhoons headed west, leaving a scene of horror behind them: blazing tanks torn into grotesque shapes, their 88mm guns bent and twisted … dead men lying in bizarre angles … all under clouds of black smoke from the raging fires.

Of the 70 German tanks that made the attack, 40 were destroyed, and some of those damaged were repaired, a tribute to the skill of German tank recovery teams.

So far, the 116th Panzer Division had not done well under American pressure. XLVII Panzer Corps commander Lt. Gen. von Funck, an SS man, blamed 116th's commander, Lt. Gen. von Schwerin, a Wehrmacht officer, for the "Greyhound" Division's sluggishness, and the two yelled at each other. A furious von Funck demanded that Kluge and Hausser relieve von Schwerin of his command, which was done at 4 PM.

Bundesarchiv Bild 101I-738-0288-39; Photo: Arthur Grimm

Soldiers of the German 2nd Panzer Division service their camouflaged antitank gun during Operation Lüttich.

As dawn rose over La Roche-Guyon, Kluge's headquarters, the German field marshal studied situation maps and read reports that showed the immensity of the disaster facing him. Four of his crack panzer divisions committed to the Mortain offensive had suffered immense casualties and gained virtually no ground, stopped cold by Hill 314 and RAF Typhoons. To the north, the First Canadian Army had launched a massive night attack on Falaise with 600 tanks. To the south, Lt. Gen. George Patton's Third U.S. Army was still driving east toward Argentan, which meant Kluge's assault force at Mortain would be surrounded. But if Kluge cancelled the order, it could cost him his own life. The attack went on, buoyed by German tenacity and Hausser's high hopes.

It was a grim situation for the field marshal, but just as much for the determined defenders of Hill 314, who were enduring friendly and enemy bombing and shelling, as a few Luftwaffe bombers slipped through the American fighters, particularly night-attack planes. German tanks that had not been shot up showed their usual tenacity. At 5:07 PM on August 7, two German tanks came within 250 yards of Erichson's command post on the hill. Private Joe Shipley, a telephone switchboard operator who had never fired a bazooka in his life, grabbed one and knocked out one tank, which frightened off the other. An officer marveled, "He didn't even leave his seat."

On August 8, the Germans tried to storm Pulver's position of A/120th on Hill 285. His radio batteries were dead and his men low on food and water. He took a runner and headed for 1st Battalion's command post, going through a mortar barrage that shattered his teeth and wounded the runner behind the ear. Even so, both men reached the command post. The battalion commander was amazed—he thought Pulver's unit had been entirely wiped out. Pulver briefed his boss, retrieved the supplies, and headed back to his hill despite his shattered teeth.

At Hill 314, the Germans tried to attack, despite continued RAF bombing, while the Americans drove east to relieve the defenders. By now, two American infantry divisions and two armored divisions had joined the 30th in the battle. The defenders were running out of supplies, men, and patience. Lacking morphine, clean bandages, and doctors, all the medics could do was put the wounded in slit trenches. Weiss peered through binoculars, wondered when reinforcements would arrive, and saw "a platoon of those gray-green uniforms, assembled to the front for attack."

The Lost Battalion's survival depended on

Weiss's radio batteries—Bartz's were dead—and Bartz looked to Weiss as "having the pale stamp of death on his face. I could not look him in the eyes or study his face for long."

The Germans attacked, and Weiss called for artillery. "A pall of exploding shells and smoke covered the German infantry, blackening the area around them. Dust and debris shot skyward," Weiss said. The attack was broken up, but the Germans brought in more tanks and infantry. Once again, American artillery stopped the attack.

After an hour and a half, the Germans tried a new tactic, bringing up their dreaded 88mm guns, which opened fire on the hill's crags and promontories. Weiss saw German shells bursting "into hundreds or thousands of jagged, body-severing chunks and slivers … [conveying] a brute power, unstoppable strength and deep malice. Big iron cut through the air, shattered boulders into sharp splinters, then bounced erratically over our heads. We crouched down behind the crags, on the face of the cliff to the rear, uncomfortably sheltered."

Weiss kept calling down counterfire and sent a message from Erichson to Birks at the 120th: "Need radio batteries, medical supplies, food, and ammunition. Men holding their positions. Forward observers Lieutenants Bartz and Weiss doing splendid work. Enemy has been prevented from organizing armor and infantry to attack of overwhelming strength." Weiss added, "Are we getting reinforcements?"

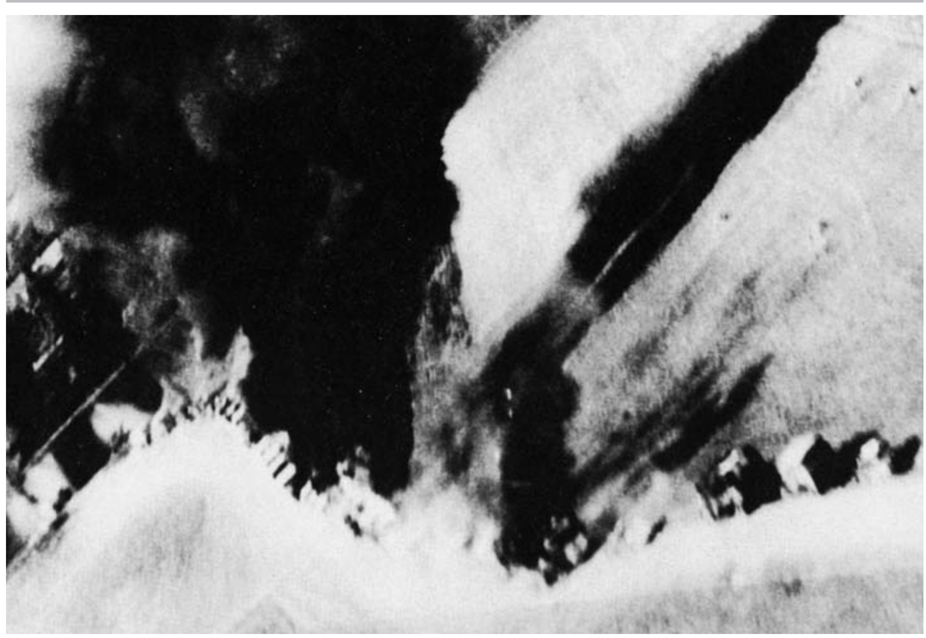
The Germans continued to attack Hill 314 on the night of August 8/9, to little avail, but exhausting the defenders. Weiss nearly lost track of how many fire missions he called in. "As each separate enemy onslaught crumbled, another took its place," he said. "They regrouped and returned, again and again." Weiss wondered why the Germans did not break through.

That was probably because of the determined defense as well as American artillery fire. Sergeant Luther Myers, manning his .30-caliber machine gun, saw German troops charging at him, hurling grenades. One rolled under Myers' machine gun and went off, jamming it. Tracer rounds flew all over the place, hitting members of his squad. Myers repaired his gun and fired several bursts at the enemy, who fled. "I could have got them all," he said later, "but it wasn't worth it, not with my own men crawling across my field of fire."

Weiss's radio was still working as dawn broke on August 9. Weiss set himself up in an observation post with a better view and a telephone line to his radioman, so that he could tell the radioman what was going on, and the radio expert could send a short message to 30th

National Archives

ABOVE: A Hawker Typhoon of the Royal Air Force is armed with three-inch rockets prior to a mission against German armored assets in Normandy. Marauding Allied fighter bombers made German troop and tank movements particularly hazardous during daylight hours. BELOW: Gun camera footage from a strafing American fighter plane reveals the devastation wrought during an attack on a German column caught in the open on a road in Normandy. Allied aircraft dominated the skies during the critical days of Operation Lüttich.



National Archives

Division's artillery. Weiss called down fire on tanks, bicycle troops, infantry, half-tracks, and motorcycles.

But neither he nor anybody on the hill could cope with hunger. "Five of us shared some bits of chocolate and one K ration," Weiss said, "normally a single meal for one person."

The 30th Division artillery commander, Brig. Gen. James Lewis, dispatched two Piper Cub planes loaded with radio batteries and medical supplies, ordering the pilots to drop 71 containers on the hill. One plane was shot down, and the other nearly was. Most of the supplies did not reach the hill. The Army Air Forces tried again with their more reliable C-47 transports, but most of the cargo landed in the German area. American artillerymen loaded their guns with large-caliber shells full of medical supplies and radio batteries and fired them at Hill 314, but the shells broke apart on impact, wrecking the cargo.

The only solution was to relieve the hill. Elements of the 2nd and 3rd Armored Divisions were given the task, with 3rd Armored's Task Force 3, under Lt. Col. Samuel Hogan, attacking behind the force's sole tank dozer, under Sergeant Emmett Tripp. "It seemed as if we initially surprised the Germans," Tripp said later. "We came across some infantry in the

hedgerows and sunken roads, eliminating them fairly quickly. Then we came up against at least one Tiger tank, accompanied by Panthers and several Mark IVs." The men of the 2nd SS Panzer Division attacked the American column from behind and knocked out four tanks, stalling that attack.

Hogan summoned reinforcements, who came under fire. Shaken, they hid under an American M4 Sherman tank. The SS hurled a panzergrenadier battalion at Hogan's force, and the Americans hit them with phosphorous mortar shells. After night fell, the Luftwaffe's night attack planes showed up and bombed their own troops. Hogan found the sight "very enjoyable."

If the Germans could not attack much further due to the RAF bombing, they clearly knew how to hold ground once taken. But they were still determined to seize Hill 314. Atop the height, Weiss saw a convoy of trucks headed toward them, which unloaded more infantry. They formed into a skirmish line.

Weiss called for a fire mission with every battery he could get. In moments, six batteries of 105mm and another of 155mm artillery blasted the attackers. "The powerful impact of all these guns firing together scattered the enemy infantry and bruised them badly," Weiss said. The Germans hit back with their own artillery, which shook the ground beneath the defenders.

As the day wore on, Weiss and the other defenders saw German vehicles head east loaded with wounded. Then at 6 PM, two German soldiers, brandishing a white flag, walked up to the Americans and spoke to Lieutenant Elmer Rohmiller.

One of the Germans turned out to be an SS officer who was offering honorable terms of surrender. The Nazi admired the ferocity of the American stand, but their situation was hopeless. If the Americans listened to reason, the wounded men would be well cared for. If not, at 8 PM the Americans would be "blown to bits."

All: National Archives

ABOVE: General Gerhard Graf von Schwerin (left) commanded the German 116th "Greyhound" Division during Operation Lüttich. General Hans von Funck (center), commander of the German XLVII Panzer Corps, disliked Schwerin and accused him of dereliction of duty. American Lieutenant Robert Weiss (right) risked his life to provide accurate coordinates for artillery fire during Operation Lüttich. TOP: An American soldier scrambles across a road in Normandy during during the German attack on August 8. A Stuart light tank positioned on the road sits ready to open fire on the enemy position.

Rohmiller wanted to tell the Germans to go to hell but also figured he should run the request up his chain of command. He blindfolded the pair and led them to Lieutenant Erichson and Lieutenant Ralph Kerley, who commanded E Company. When the SS officers reached the pair, the parliamentaire saluted and said, "I have come to request your surrender … and to offer you and your men safe escort off this hill. You realize, of course, that your position here is hopeless."

Some of the wounded GIs lying near the command post heard this and yelled, "Don't surrender!"

"As you hear," Erichson said, "my men are prepared to argue that one."

The German had the arrogance of the SS and said, "They are fools; you are not. As their commander, it is your duty…"

"I'm aware of my duty," Erichson cut in. "Do you have anything more to say?"

"Only this. If you do not surrender by 8 PM today, your battalion will be annihilated."

Erichson rejected the surrender demand. The Germans left. The Americans atop the hill awaited the German bombardment as the sun sank behind them. Weiss arranged for a ring of artillery fire against night attack. Eight PM came and went, but the Germans did not attack. Finally, in the middle of the night, the Americans heard the distinctive rumble of a German tank headed for one of their roadblocks, and the tank stopped 50 yards away from the crest of the ridge.

The German tank fired a few rounds over the Americans' heads, then the turret popped open and a helmeted German yelled out, "Surrender or die!"

Weiss stared over the ridge. American rifles were poised. Incredibly, one GI dropped his rifle, ran up the slope, and climbed onto the tank. No shots were fired. Nobody else surrendered. The tank trundled away with its lone captive.

Sunrise on August 10 found the Americans still holding Hill 314 and relief forces steadily driving toward them. The 35th "Black Hawk" Infantry Division, a National Guard outfit from Illinois and Missouri, pushed its way to within a mile of Hill 314 by the close of August 10. To the west, Americans had nearly recaptured St. Barthélémy, and other GIs were inching back into Mortain.

Most importantly, Patton's Third Army and the Canadian II Corps were creating a giant encirclement around the German offensive. If it continued, the Germans would be caught in a giant bag. Bradley himself recognized the situation, saying to his guest, U.S. Treasury Secretary Henry Morgenthau, "This is an opportunity

that comes to a commander not more than once in a century. We're about to destroy an entire hostile army."

Even Hitler and Kluge began to recognize the situation. If Kluge could not prevent the jaws from closing, it would be an irreparable defeat. So far the Germans had lost about 60 percent of their armor in Normandy and could not replace it. A gloomy Hitler reluctantly acceded to Kluge's request to withdraw from Mortain.

None of these high-level decisions impacted the defense of Hill 314. The Americans were still holding, relying on courage, rumors of relief, and the sight of German troops retreating. Even so, the Germans continued to subject the defenders to artillery and mortar fire. "We could see no end. Our radios had grown very weak. When they gave out, our principal means of defense would be lost," Weiss said.

But while the Germans kept shelling Hill 314, the Americans were driving on them from every direction. Three miles to the north, Lieutenant Donald Harrison, an ROTC Ohio State alumnus, told his Corporal Robert Baldridge to call down a fire mission on vehicles moving through an intersection just north of Hill 314. The second bracket of shells exploded the German vehicles and sent troops scattering, starting a slaughter that continued all day.

At his observation post, Weiss heard yet another rumble of tanks driving up the Bel Air Road toward the main American roadblock. Down at the roadblock Private Thomas Street was terrified, but his pal next to him started yelling, 'They're coming to get us! They're coming to get us!" Street held his friend tightly to calm him down, but to Street it sounded like the Germans were heading east in retreat.

Street was right. As the sun rose on August 12, Weiss was awakened by his chief assistant, Sergeant John Corn. A haggard, filthy, bearded Weiss found the energy to climb out of his foxhole, walk 40 yards to the ridge, and start looking for targets. At that moment, a German shell exploded in Weiss's foxhole, killing two men and severely wounding Corn. By 9:45 Corn was dead. "Inside me hate, rage and grief ran together in a stream of violence. I wanted a power that I did not have. I wanted to smash a giant fist for tanks, trucks, troops that I saw now running away."

Down below, Weiss's wishes were being answered. The 35th Infantry was finally climbing up Hill 314 against typical German delaying action resistance: snipers, booby-traps, the occasional machine gun, German artillerymen firing off the last of their shells before retreating. Shortly before noon, Lieutenant Homer Kurtz led a party of scouts from G Company, 320th Infantry to the top and met with Lieutenant Ronal Woody. "A guy came up and asked for our company commander," Woody said later. "Hell, I had my insignia pinned inside my lapel and I looked like a ragamuffin." Woody told Kurtz that he was the company commander.

National Archives

In the wake of an attack by British Hawker Typhoon fighter bombers on August 7, 1944, the bodies of dead German soldiers lie next to a damaged SdKfz 251 half-track that was disabled during the air raid.

Kurtz straightened up and said, "We're relieving you, sir."

Woody smiled and said, "Alll-rrrright!"

Down below, Street and his pals saw troops moving in and prepared to fire until they realized the troops were American. Street shook hands with his rescuers and finally looked around at the devastated hill. They also saw an even more impressive sight: ambulances, trucks full of K rations, and press photographers. Street's outfit, F Company, had suffered nearly 100 percent casualties—only eight men had escaped death, wounds, or captivity.

Weiss was not relieved until early afternoon. He and his two surviving men were too weary to be overjoyed. They packed up their radios and equipment and climbed into their jeep, which had miraculously survived the entire battle. "I flopped into my seat, exhausted, all strength and emotion wrung out. We drove somberly back to B Battery, each of us wrapped in his own thoughts. We had lost something, left it behind on the hill," he said later.

He was right. Of the 700 men who had fought on Hill 314, only 357 were able to walk off. The rest were dead, wounded, and captured. The 30th Division as a whole had suffered 1,800 casualties. But the Germans had suffered thousands more, along with losing larger numbers of irreplaceable vehicles. American wreck recovery teams hauled off more than 100 abandoned German tanks. The great offensive designed to cut off the American advance was now instead a mousetrap, and all the Germans could do was struggle to extricate their trapped men. Looking down at 40 wrecked German vehicles, Birks said, "It was the best sight I had seen in the war."

There were a lot of great achievements in the battle. The Lost Battalion received a Presidential Unit Citation for its stand, all chances of German victory in Normandy were lost, and Anglo-American cooperation was at its absolute best.

There were loose ends, of course. At Rastenberg in East Prussia, Warlimont briefed Hitler on the failure of Operation Lüttich. Hitler listened quietly for an hour then said, "Kluge did it deliberately. He did it to prove that it was impossible to carry out my orders." Kluge would commit suicide four days later.

Another loose end was on Hill 314. Associated Press reporter William Smith White was saying that when the SS officer asked Kerley to surrender, the American had snarled, "I will surrender when every one of our bullets has been fired and every one our bayonets is sticking in a German belly," and duly reported that.

An astonished Birks congratulated Kerley on the stand and asked him if he had really said that.

Kerley cleared his throat and said, "No, sir. I was not quite so dramatic. What I really said was short, to the point, and very unprintable."

"That's telling him," Birks responded.

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.*

In this painting by artist Robert Taylor, *Eagles on the Rampage,* former Eagle Squadron pilots fly North American P-51 Mustang fighters as part of the American 4th Fighter Group. The oldest fighter group in the Eighth Air Force, these pilots were the first to penetrate German air space and the first to engage Luftwaffe fighters over Berlin.

Eagle Squadrons Join the Eighth Air Force

AMERICAN FIGHTER PILOTS WHO FOUGHT FOR THE RAF LATER BECAME MEMBERS OF THE U.S. ARMY AIR FORCES.

BY DAVID ALAN JOHNSON

"Eagles on the Rampage," by Robert Taylor © The Military Gallery, CA

"WE WENT TO LONDON IN ONES AND TWOS during our precious 24-hour passes to transfer and pick up our U.S. uniforms," Pilot Officer James A. Goodson of 133 (Eagle) Squadron recalled, sometime during the late summer of 1942. By "transfer," P/O Goodson was talking about the impending handover of the famous Eagle Squadrons from the Royal Air Force to the U.S. Army Air Forces.

All three Eagle Squadrons knew that it would only be a matter of a few weeks, at best, before they were absorbed into the expanding Eighth Air Force. While the pilots were making their way to London in small groups, someone wrote in longhand across the cover of 71 Squadron's logbook—71 Squadron was the "senior Eagle" squadron—"Now No. 334 Sq. USAAF."

The first of the Eagle Squadrons, Number 71 had been formed in September 1940, over a year before Pearl Harbor. By the middle of 1941, enough Americans had come to England as RAF volunteers to form two more squadrons: 121 Squadron in May and 133 Squadron in August 1941. After flying countless convoy patrols and bomber escort missions and strafing attacks over the enemy-occupied European continent during the past year, the Eagles would be leaving the RAF for the American forces. One of the pilots later said, "We knew that it was only a matter of time until the Eagles would be renamed and most of us would be wearing an American uniform."

Although some of the Eagles decided to remain in the RAF, the vast majority saw the benefits of joining the American forces and looked forward to the transfer with a great deal of enthusiasm. There were two basic reasons for this enthusiasm: American-style food in the officer's mess and, especially, American-style pay.

The change in the daily menu was considered a major incentive. There would be no more things like "bubble and squeak" (cabbage and potatoes) to endure. Instead, the pilots would have steaks, chicken, real fruit and vegetables, American coffee, and other things they had not seen since they left home. The British Isles had a good many admirable things about them, but the British wartime diet was not among them.

The biggest and most impressive change of all was in the rate of pay between the RAF and the U.S. forces. The U.S. government paid its personnel between two and three times the amount earned by their RAF counterparts. A pilot officer in the RAF was paid roughly $67.00 per month (actually, 16 pounds, 14 shillings, and 7 pence). A second lieutenant in the USAAF, the equivalent of a pilot officer, received $162 per month.

During 121 Squadron's farewell party, a departing Eagle pilot informed an RAF Wing Commander, "We can't afford not to go. Do you realize, Wingco, as of now, I'm being paid about twice as much as you if not more—and I'm only a lootenant. Too bad you don't qualify to come with us, your accent would be worth every cent of your pay—what, what, old boy?" The U.S. equivalent rank of wing commander is lieutenant colonel.

Before they could transfer into the U.S. forces, every pilot had to travel to London for an examination by a board of American officers. Among those on the board were two of the

Imperial War Museum

Eighth Air Force's highest ranking officers: Maj. Gen. Carl A. Spaatz, commander of the U.S. Army Air Forces in Britain, and Brig. Gen. Frank O. Hunter, head of U.S. Fighter Command.

After being questioned by the board, the pilots were sworn into the U.S forces. Most entered the Eighth Air Force with the rank that corresponded with their current RAF rank: flight lieutenants became captains; squadron leaders became majors. Sergeant pilots were commissioned into the USAAF as second lieutenants.

Some pilots had their own ideas of what their new rank should be. Squadron Leader Carroll McColpin informed the examining board that he ought to be promoted to brigadier general. The American forces would be getting a seasoned and experienced combat leader, he argued, and paying him a brigadier's salary would represent a sound investment. He allowed himself to be persuaded into settling for the rank of major.

Squadron Leader William Dunn, who was officially credited with being the first American ace of World War II, had an altogether different reaction toward making the transfer. Over a year before, in August 1941, Dunn had been badly injured in combat while he was still a member of 71 Squadron. By the autumn of 1942, he had recovered from his injuries and was serving as acting squadron leader of 130 Squadron, which was stationed in Canada. Dunn was well aware that most American pilots in the Royal Air Force were exchanging their RAF blue uniforms for U.S. khakis, but he did not have much interest in leaving the British forces.

A letter from an organization called The United States Inter-Allied Personnel Board gave Squadron Leader Dunn second thoughts. The letter was not at all friendly. "It was sort of implied that if I didn't agree to a transfer, they'd come and get me," Dunn recalled. Although S/L Dunn was not intimidated by the nasty letter, he was persuaded by the generous U.S. pay and allowances. He agreed to the transfer and was released from the RAF in June 1943.

There was actually no law that could compel William Dunn, or any other American, to transfer to the U.S. forces. Anyone could remain in the RAF if they decided to do so. James C. Nelson of 133 Squadron is one Yank who elected to remain in the RAF and spent the remainder of the war in the British forces. When the war ended, he returned to the United States.

No one can say for certain exactly how many Yanks stayed in the RAF, since nobody knows how many Americans served with the British forces in the first place. Joining the armed forces of a "belligerent nation," including Britain, was a violation of the U.S. Neutrality Acts in 1939 and 1940. Anyone caught trying was subject to a $20,000 fine, 10 years in prison, and loss of U.S citizenship. Some of the volunteers came to Britain by way of forged passports or other illegal documents. It was best for them to keep their mouths shut about their true nationality, and staying in the RAF was the safest bet for such individuals. They were afraid of going to jail if the U.S. or the British authorities ever discovered what they had done.

Throughout the summer, all three Eagle Squadrons continued to escort bombing missions over France as well as to fly convoy patrols. The Luftwaffe rarely came up to challenge these flights. A frequent entry in squadron logbooks is "no enemy aircraft seen."

Once in a while, though, the enemy did decide to come up. Whenever that happened, the result was a short, violent combat. On August 21, 71 Squadron was flying another routine escort mission when the Luftwaffe made an appearance. During the next few minutes, 71's pilots claimed two enemy aircraft destroyed along with one probable and also lost one of their own Spitfires to enemy fighters.

The Eagles kept up a strange existence throughout August and September, half in and half out of the U.S. forces. Many of the pilots had already been commissioned as officers in the USAAF by this time, but they were still on "detached service" with RAF Fighter Command. They still flew Spitfires marked with the RAF roundel insignia and still wore their RAF blue uniforms. Some had not even bought their U.S. uniforms. Even though they were finally members of the American air force, they were still in the British forces.

Everyone was well aware that their leaving the RAF would be only a matter of a couple of weeks, though. On September 5, Pilot Officer Dan Young of 121 Squadron spotted a Junkers Ju-88 bomber near Southend-on-Sea that was being attacked by Spitfires from another squadron. P/O Young chased after the Junkers, which was already burning, and gave it two

bursts of cannon fire. The German bomber crashed into the River Thames estuary "with a huge splash," according to the squadron's logbook. This would be the last enemy claim that 121 Squadron would make. A few shots would be fired at Focke Wulf FW-190 fighters during regular fighter sweeps, but no further claims would be made.

Even though preparations were already underway to absorb the Eagle Squadrons into the U.S. forces, there was one problem that would not go away: The three squadrons had developed an unfriendly rivalry among themselves. The Eagles did not like one another and made no bones about it.

The pilots of 71 Squadron considered themselves to be the best of the all-American fighter units and made no secret of their opinion. Number 121 Squadron did not like hearing about the accomplishments of the "Senior Eagles" and resented being referred to as the "Second Eagles," as though they were somehow second-class citizens. And 133 Squadron had to put up with being called "junior" by the other two units. The situation was not a happy one.

The rivalry did not diminish with time as RAF Fighter Command had hoped. If anything, it had grown "to the point where it was causing concern to various wing commanders," as one historian said. Even though all the pilots were American, the only thing they seemed to have in common was hostility. Keeping the three squadrons based at separate airfields seemed to be the only solution to that particular problem.

The problem was not going to trouble the RAF for much longer, though; the Eighth Air Force was about to inherit the situation. After the Eagles had been absorbed into the American forces, the plan was to base all three squadrons at one station and incorporate them into one group: the U.S. Fourth Fighter Group. But if the three units kept on with their feuding and squabbling, any such arrangement would be impossible. They would spend more time fighting with each other than with the Germans.

This attitude problem developed a new wrinkle in the middle of August 1942, when 133 Squadron was issued the new Spitfire Mark IX. The Mark IX was the latest version of the Spitfire, developed to compete with the FW-190. It was faster, had a better rate of climb, and was more heavily armed than the Mark V, which it was supposed to replace.

The new Mark IX was certainly a status symbol. Only three squadrons throughout the RAF had them—133 and the other two squadrons stationed at Biggin Hill, in Kent—and every fighter unit in the RAF wanted them. Because it had been issued the Mark IX, 133 Squadron claimed this as a "sign of superiority" over both 71 and 121 Squadrons. The other two squadrons resented this attitude.

"We had the best planes," one of 133's pilots said. "We had dawn readiness—71 didn't. We would scramble in the darkness. We considered ourselves the best without question. One-three-three was number one among the Eagles." The pilots of 71 Squadron emphatically did not agree. As far as they were concerned, they were the best of the Eagles. And 121 did not want to hear that the other two Eagle Squadrons thought they were the best.

This sounds juvenile and petty, but the resentment among the three squadrons was deep and bitter. There could be no possibility of basing them at the same airfield as long as feelings were running so high. By September 1942, the problem had become a pressing concern for the Eighth Air Force. The Eagle Squadrons were scheduled to be transferred to the U.S. Army Air Forces later that month.

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ABOVE: King George VI of England inspects Eagle Squadron pilots who have assembled in their RAF uniforms. The British were grateful for the service of the American fliers. BELOW: Marshal of the Royal Air Force Sir Sholto Douglas sometimes found the rowdy conduct of Eagle Squadron personnel troubling. In this photo American pilots enjoy the hospitality of an English pub near their airfield. OPPOSITE: Pilots of an RAF Eagle Squadron fly British Hawker Hurricane fighters during a training mission. The American pilots who joined the RAF risked stiff penalties, including prison time and loss of American citizenship.

National Archives

But senior officers decided to go ahead with their plan just the same. On September 23, both 121 and 133 Squadrons joined 71 Squadron at its base in Debden in Essex. This was the first time all three had been based at the same station. The officers wanted to see if their experiment would work and hoped for the best.

"The nearby village of Saffron Walden would not be losing its boisterous Yanks," according to 71 Squadron's logbook. With all three squadrons now at RAF Debden, there would be three times as many Yanks as before, for better or worse. Saffron Walden was the nearest village, about three miles away from Debden, and was also the closest spot for rest and relaxation for the pilots and their crews.

Three days after arriving at Debden, 133 Squadron was sent off to the RAF airfield at Bolt Head, near the city of Exeter, to prepare for another bomber escort mission. From Bolt Head, the 12 pilots would fly fighter cover for the U.S. 97th Bomb Group, a Boeing B-17 Flying Fortress unit. The 97th would be flying a bombing raid against the city of Morlaix, in Brittany, which was the site of a Focke-Wulf maintenance plant as well as a major rail center for the area.

The pilots thought that Morlaix would be just another routine escort job—take the bombers to their target and escort them back again. Hardly any of the pilots bothered to attend the preflight briefing. They had done the same sort of assignment many times before and knew the coast of Brittany almost as well as they knew the south coast of England—"like the backs of our hands," according to one pilot.

Unfortunately, the "routine" operation went wrong from the beginning. According to plan 133 Squadron was to rendezvous with the 97th Bomb Group over the English Channel, at a point about halfway between Bolt Head and Morlaix, along with the Spitfires of both 401 and 412 Squadrons. But the Fortresses arrived at their rendezvous point about 20 minutes early and continued on to their target without waiting for their escort.

While the Flying Fortresses went on toward Morlaix, the Spitfires kept circling the Bay of Biscay, waiting for orders and burning up fuel. After circling the bay several times, ground control in England finally ordered the fighters to fly after the bombers, catch up with them, and escort them to Morlaix.

The mission should have been aborted—it was normal procedure to cancel an operation if the rendezvous point was missed by as little as half a minute. But this was not a normal operation; it was being carried out for the press and publicity units, to give them both a good story. The most widely reported rumor was that ground control sent the Spitfires after the Fortresses because of pressure from senior officers in the Eighth Air Force.

Both: National Archives

ABOVE: Eagle Squadron pilot William Dunn was the first American ace of World War II. BELOW: Former Eagle Squadron pilot Colonel Don Blakeslee later took command of the U.S. 4th Fighter Group. Blakeslee is pictured in the cockpit of his P-51 Mustang fighter prior to escorting bombers on a daylight raid against Berlin in March 1944.

But there was another problem as well. Besides being kept orbiting the Bay of Biscay, the pilots were also given an incorrect wind speed estimate when they were sent off to find the American bombers.

The Spitfire pilots had been informed that they would be flying into a 35-knot headwind, which would slow their forward speed. But the Spitfires were actually flying into the jet stream, a high-speed wind current that was just about unknown in 1942. Instead of a 35-knot headwind, the jet stream gave the fighters a 100-knot tailwind at 28,000 feet. All this added up to a 135-knot miscalculation.

It should have taken the fighter escort 33 minutes to reach their destination, taking the 35-knot headwind into consideration. But because of the jet stream and the 135-knot error, the Spitfires actually flew more than 100 miles beyond their projected destination during their 33-minute flight. Because of the 8/10 overcast that covered most of northern France that day, none of the pilots could see anything underneath their fighters except a solid layer of gray cloud. Blown many miles to the south and unable to identify anything on the ground, the pilots had no real idea of where they were.

Ground control in England could track the Spitfires on radar but could not give the pilots their position—the Luftwaffe was listening. Eventually, the three Spitfire squadrons did run into the Flying Fortresses they were supposed to be escorting. The bomber pilots had given up trying to find Morlaix through the cloud cover and turned back for England. The fighters joined up with the bombers, hoping that they would lead them home.

Because they had burned up so much fuel over the Bay of Biscay, the pilots began dropping through the cloud layer after only about half an hour with the Fortresses. They were completely disoriented and thought they must be over southern England by that time. They hoped they might be able to spot some nearby airfield where they could land and refuel.

But they were not over southern England. They were still over Brittany. As soon as they dropped below the clouds, the Spitfires came under almost immediate attack, first by anti-aircraft fire, then by FW-190s.

The pilots could not do very much about taking evasive action; they did not have enough fuel left. Each pilot called out his position and his situation and then did whatever he could to save himself. Some bailed out. Others crash landed. One pilot was shot down and killed over Brittany. Only one pilot managed to fly back to England. Richard N. Beaty crash landed his Spitfire a few miles inland from the coast, out of fuel.

Of the 36 Spitfires—three full fighter squadrons—that took part in the Morlaix operation, 22 were lost. Of the three squadrons, 133 fared the worst. Four of its 12 pilots were killed; six either bailed out or crash landed in German-occupied France and were taken prisoner. All 12 Spitfires were lost.

Number 133 (Eagle) Squadron no longer existed, except on paper at the Air Ministry in London. Replacement pilots were quickly sent to Debden along with replacement aircraft. There were no more Spitfire Mark IXs avail-

able, so 133 Squadron was reequipped with the older Mark V.

Pilot Officer James Goodson happened to report for duty on the same day as the Morlaix raid. The only other pilot he met at the nearly deserted fighter base was P/O Don Gentile, who did not go to Morlaix with the rest of the squadron. Gentile told Goodson and another new arrival, "I sure am glad to see you. I'm all alone here."

Dr. Josef Goebbels' Propaganda Ministry in Berlin immediately broadcast the news of the disaster. Twenty-two RAF Spitfires had been brought down by the Luftwaffe, the broadcast said, and several Americans were among the pilots who had been taken prisoner. As soon as reporters in Britain heard the news, they started asking questions about what happened. The Air Ministry and the Eighth Air Force informed the press that the fighters had been lost due to adverse weather conditions and wing icing. Reporters duly wrote that all 22 Spitfires crashed because of heavy icing on the wings; it was the only information they had.

Morlaix was a disaster for 133 Squadron, but one good thing did come out of it; it played a large part in doing away with the unfriendly rivalry between the three Eagle Squadrons. Number 133—"junior," "third Eagles"—had been wiped out. The catastrophe ended all the animosity and name-calling. Bad feeling was instantly replaced by sympathy, and the conflict and all the cutting remarks of the past year were forgotten. Both 71 and 121 Squadrons knew all too well that what had happened to 133 could just as easily have happened to them.

The Eighth Air Force planners took their own steps toward ending the rivalry. All three of the former RAF squadrons were mixed together; not one of the original Eagle Squadrons was left intact. Each individual squadron of the new Fourth Fighter Group incorporated members from all three squadrons; 71 Squadron was now the 334th Squadron, 121 was the 335th Squadron, and 133 had become the 336th Squadron. But all the sympathy offered to 133 Squadron in the wake of the Morlaix raid helped to unite the three units more effectively than any plan the Eighth Air Force might have thought up.

The three Eagle Squadrons officially left the Royal Air Force on September 29, 1942, in a formal ceremony filled with speeches and fanfare. Among the officers present were Maj. Gen. Carl Spaatz, commander of the Eighth Air Force, and Sir Sholto Douglas, chief of RAF Fighter Command.

Sir Sholto Douglas wished the departing Eagles a fond farewell and expressed regret that the Americans were leaving the RAF—gracious words that he could now afford to make. Since 1941, when 71 Squadron was first formed, Douglas had often been furious with the Eagle Squadrons concerning their conduct. In the early part of 1941, he told American General Henry "Hap" Arnold that 71 Squadron's performance was "unsatisfactory" and that there was the possibility of disbanding the squadron and sending all the pilots back to the States.

Besides making the usual polite remarks, the sort of comments that are always made on such occasions—"We at Fighter Command deeply regret this parting"—Sir Sholto also gave a brief history of the Eagles, including their total number of enemy aircraft destroyed. "Eagle pilots have destroyed some 73 enemy aircraft, the equivalent of about six squadrons of the Luftwaffe." A moment later, he amended the score to 73½. The half was a Dornier Do-17 bomber that was shared with a British pilot from another squadron—"a symbol of Anglo-American co-operation," Sir Sholto called it.

For the first few weeks, at least, the pilots of the new Fourth Fighter Group felt foreign and out of place in the U.S. forces. It would take a while to accustom themselves to American ranks and to saying "lieutenant" instead of "leftenant."

Continued on page 93

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ABOVE: Former Eagle Squadron member Captain Don Gentile of the 336th Squadron lands his Mustang at Debden. He is credited with 19.83 aerial victories. BELOW: An American ground crew gives an Eagle Squadron Spitfire a thorough pre-mission check. The top of the American star insignia, painted over the original RAF roundel, is visible at far right.

National Archives

Savagery at San Pietro

BY MICHAEL E. HASKEW

Famed director John Huston crafted a controversial film depicting the capture of an Italian town.

National Archives

The monotonous rattle and snap of the film projector provided a steady accompaniment to the images flickering across the screen in the darkened room. Images of suffering, destruction, and death flashed in stark black and white before the eyes of the audience—difficult for even a hardened combat veteran to watch.

But this audience was a group of stateside staff officers invited to a screening of director John Huston's film *The Battle of San Pietro*. The first film of its kind, purported to depict American soldiers in combat against the Germans at the Italian mountain town of San Pietro Infine, it portrayed with harsh realism the struggle of one of World War II's most difficult campaigns, laying bare the cost of the fighting on the road to Rome and perhaps raising as many questions as answers concerning the butcher's bill in Italy during World War II and in this otherwise typical battle against the Germans.

Huston, already a celebrity who had begun his Hollywood career as a screenwriter in 1938 and won acclaim in his directorial debut with *The Maltese Falcon* in 1941, had joined the U.S. Army Signal Corps in 1942 with the rank of lieutenant. His career in motion pictures spanned nearly 50 years and included two Academy Awards along with 15 nominations. His films include such classics as *The Treasure of the Sierra Madre, The Asphalt Jungle, The African Queen, The Misfits, Fat City, The Man Who Would Be King,* and *The Red Badge of Courage.*

Before his discharge from the Army with the rank of major, Huston made three documentary films for the Signal Corps, and *The Battle of San Pietro* was by far the most famous, though all three were quite controversial. Historians have concluded that the purpose behind the film was possibly threefold: to give recruits and soldiers going through basic training some idea of what modern combat was like, to provide some context and understanding of just what obstacles the Italian Campaign presented and explain its slow progress, and to possibly reassure the

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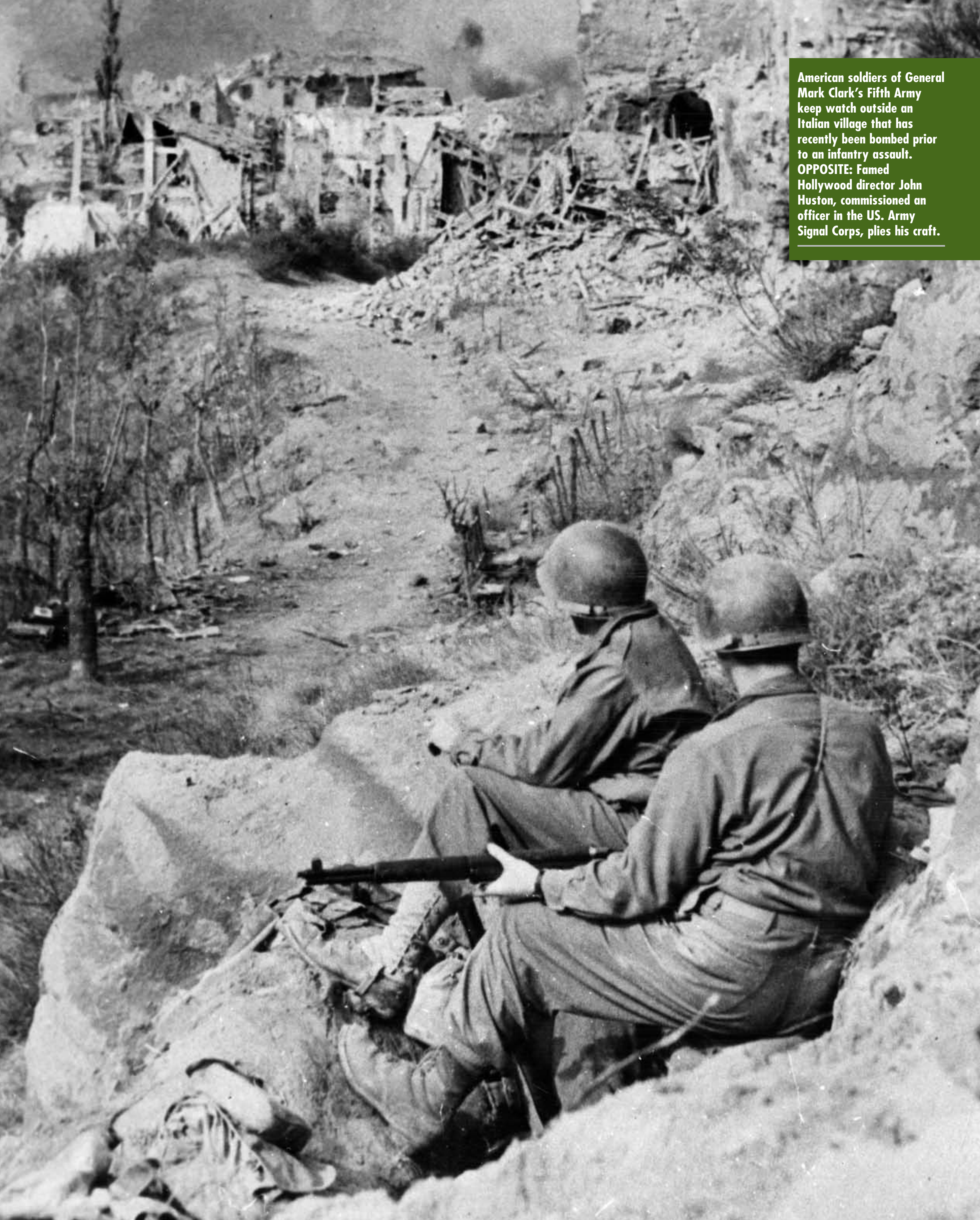

American soldiers of General Mark Clark's Fifth Army keep watch outside an Italian village that has recently been bombed prior to an infantry assault. OPPOSITE: Famed Hollywood director John Huston, commissioned an officer in the US. Army Signal Corps, plies his craft.

American public that competent senior and field commanders were judiciously deploying their sons and doing everything they could to save lives amid the dirty business of war.

In the effort, Huston and his camera crew of six intrepid men created a startling, shocking, and unsettling antiwar film. While that screening for the officers was underway, Huston began to realize that he had stirred up a dust cloud of controversy. He reflected some years later, "A number of high-ranking officers, including a three-star general, were present at the first showing of *The Battle of San Pietro*. About three quarters of the way through the picture the general got up and left the projection room. It was naturally assumed that he was displeased with what he saw, and it was incumbent upon the rest to show their displeasure also. But, of course, they had to do so by rank, according to protocol. It wouldn't do for a lieutenant colonel to go stalking out before a brigadier general. The general was followed about a minute later by the next-ranking officer, and then one by one they filed out, with the low man on the totem pole bringing up the rear. I shook my head and thought, 'What a bunch of assholes! There goes *San Pietro*.'"

The offended sensibilities of a group of stateside Army officers was nothing compared to the real suffering the soldiers of the 36th Infantry Division had actually experienced at San Pietro; many of them had apparently lived and died on camera. The 36th Division, a National Guard outfit comprised mostly of Texans, traced its already storied lineage to the Republic of Texas in the 1830s, and at San Pietro the men of its three regiments, the 141st, 142nd, and 143rd, enhanced the reputation of the division with their heroic performance.

Despite the old saying that all roads lead to Rome, the Allied Fifth Army and its commander, Lt. Gen. Mark Clark, were concerned with only one route to the Eternal City in December 1943, and that was Highway 6, which traversed the mountainous country of southern Italy into the wide valley of the Liri River and on to the Italian capital city, passing San Pietro on the way.

While Rome was 115 miles from San Pietro, the Germans were sure to contest every yard, fortifying mountains, hills, and draws, setting up antitank guns, machine-gun nests, and roadblocks that would stifle traffic wherever they thought practical. Col. Gen. Heinrich-Gottfried von Vietinghoff-Scheel commanded the German Tenth Army, a veteran force still full of fight after weeks in action since the Allies had come ashore in Italy at Salerno in September.

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ABOVE: American troops equipped with mine detectors make their way gingerly down a dirt road leading to the Italian town of San Pietro. OPPOSITE: From a commanding position on an Italian ridgeline, a German soldier mans a machine-gun position and waits for advancing Allied soldiers to approach. At San Pietro the Germans held strong defensive positions.

On December 1, the Fifth Army launched a combined offensive to capture Rome and crack open the German defensive front for good. American forces were to advance through the Mignano Gap, cross the Rapido River, and occupy the town of Frosinone about 50 miles south of Rome. After Frosinone was taken, an amphibious landing, Operation Shingle, was to take place at the resort town of Anzio about 35 miles south of the capital city. In the east, the British were expected to drive toward Rome, and the two forces could link up to take the first Axis capital to fall and cut off the escape route of thousands of German troops in the process.

Beyond the fact that the Italian Campaign needed energy, the window of opportunity for a successful Allied offensive was rapidly closing due to events elsewhere. Operation Overlord, the long-awaited invasion of Nazi-occupied Western Europe, was scheduled for June 6, 1944, and the timetable required that all available landing craft be released for Overlord by the end of January. Without landing craft, the Anzio operation could not go forward. Further complicating the situation were the inhospitable terrain and the simple fact that Field Marshal Albert Kesselring, a Luftwaffe officer turned ground commander and now in charge of all German forces in Italy, was conducting one of the most brilliant defensive campaigns in military history.

Thus far, Kesselring had commanded a skillful fighting withdrawal up the boot of Italy, fortifying several strong defensive lines and taking full advantage of the rugged terrain. For the Americans, the capture of San Pietro and the town of San Vittore just to the west would allow them to press forward to the town of Cassino, which anchored Kesselring's formidable Gustav Line.

Early in the offensive, the combined American-Canadian 1st Special Service Force and the British 56th Division captured Monte Camino and Monte la Difensa, and the 142nd Infantry Regiment took Monte Maggiore, securing the entrance to the Mignano Gap.

The Germans chose the time and place of any pitched battle, and each mountain or hilltop presented a potential obstacle for the advancing Allies. As they moved forward, the troops of the 36th Division drew up around Monte Lungo, a natural sentinel along Highway 6 and the rail line into Rome. To the northeast, Monte Sammucro towered nearly 4,000 feet over the roadway. Just as the grade up the slope of Monte Sammucro began to steepen appreciably, the village of San Pietro was situated to dominate Highway 6 and the valley below for miles in any direction.

After occupying Monte Maggiore and nearby Monte Rotondo, American commanders were optimistic that little German resistance would be encountered at San Pietro. They speculated that the enemy might already have begun to pull out of the town, retiring northward to avoid being cut off and surrounded by the American advance. German commanders had indeed intended to retire, but heavy rains had swollen the Rapido and

Bundesarchiv Bild 101I-303-0554-28; Photo: Funke

Garigliano Rivers beyond floodstage, impeding the movement of troops and vehicles. Then Adolf Hitler intervened. The Führer decreed that San Pietro should be held as long as possible, and the tough panzergrenadiers in the vicinity held their positions, ready for a fight.

The 2nd Battalion, 15th Panzergrenadier Regiment, 29th Panzergrenadier Division held the town of San Pietro, and two additional battalions—the 3rd Battalion, 15th Panzergrenadier Regiment and the 2nd Battalion, 71st Panzergrenadier Regiment—occupied Monte Lungo and Monte Sammucro.

When American intelligence officers discovered that German forces were still in the San Pietro area in force, they failed to comprehend just how bloody the battle for the town would become. The village's stone buildings, steep terrain, and narrow approaches constituted a natural fortress.

Eminent historian Martin Blumenson wrote, "Expecting Monte Lungo to come into Allied possession easily, Allied commanders looked toward San Pietro. What had escaped their intelligence officers was how inaccessible San Pietro really was. There were simply no good approaches to the village, where houses provided stout stone walls for weapons emplacement. Separated from Monte Rotondo and the Cannavinelle Hill by a deep gully and sitting above the Ceppagna road San Pietro could be entered only by way of cart tracks and trails across the ravine-scarred face of Monte Sammucro. Nor was it evident to Allied intelligence how important San Pietro was for the observation it gave of Monte Lungo and the trough that carried Highway 6 to Cassino."

Tactical planning for the effort to take San Pietro was formulated by Maj. Gen. Geoffrey Keyes, commanding the U.S. II Corps, and Maj. Gen. Fred L. Walker, commanding the 36th Division. Keyes reasoned that the newly arrived Italian troops of the 1st Motorized Group might benefit from a morale-boosting victory, particularly since their country's recently installed government had turned against its former Axis partners and joined the Allied cause. Keyes assigned the Italians to capture the summit of Monte Lungo, while two battalions of the 143rd Infantry Regiment were ordered to take Monte Sammucro, drive around the mountain, eject the Germans from San Pietro, and dash on toward San Vittore.

On the morning of December 8, the Italians began their trek up the slope of Monte Lungo. Marching two battalions abreast, they soon stumbled into the prepared positions of the 3rd Battalion, 15th Panzergrenadier Regiment, their guns zeroed in on the approaches. Within hours, the effort had come apart, the Italians suffering 84 killed, 122 wounded, and 170 missing as they withdrew in disorder down the mountainside.

Meanwhile, the 1st Battalion, 143rd Infantry Regiment overran the German positions on Monte Sammucro just as the sun was rising. Reinforcements from the 504th Parachute Infantry Regiment arrived, and the Americans dug in, fending off repeated counterattacks launched by the 2nd Battalion, 71st Panzergrenadier Regiment for several days. American troops occupied adjacent Hill 1205, and the 3rd Ranger Battalion captured Hill 950 briefly before a German counterattack pushed them off. On December 9, the Rangers regrouped, charged the summit, and then held the hill.

Advancing directly on San Pietro, the 2nd and 3rd Battalions, 143rd Infantry advanced only 400 yards before the 2nd Battalion, 15th Panzergrenadier Regiment stopped them cold. By December 10, the 1st Battalion had lost half its strength, reduced to only 340 combat-effective infantrymen.

Taken aback by the ferocity of the German defense, American commanders staged another offensive to take San Pietro on December 15-17. General Walker saw opportunity in the capture of three small hills about a mile west of Hill 1205. If the 36th Division could occupy those hills, the German garrison in San Pietro might be flanked, and the entire 3rd Battalion, 15th Panzergrenadiers would be marooned on Monte Lungo.

Walker assigned the 504th Parachute Infantry Regiment and the 1st Battalion, 143rd Infantry with capturing the three hills before sunup on December 15. The direct thrust at San Pietro would soon follow, with tanks of the 753rd Tank Battalion striking from the east and the 141st Infantry from the north near Monte Rotondo. With these advances underway, he hoped that the German defenders in San Pietro would be too busy defending themselves to provide any fire support for their comrades holding Monte Lungo. Therefore, elements of the 142nd and 143rd Regiments would take

advantage of the opportunity to attack Monte Lungo from the west.

The use of tanks in the mountainous regions of Italy was always problematic. However, General Clark wanted to get the armor into action as quickly as possible around San Pietro and General Keyes agreed. To that end, Clark sent Fifth Army Operations Officer Brig. Gen. Donald W. Brann to Walker's 36th Division headquarters with the strong suggestion that tanks be employed at the first opportunity. Brann questioned Walker about the feasibility of using tanks at San Pietro and was told bluntly that the ground was not favorable. Nevertheless, he understood the directive and agreed to try.

The result was a magnificent disaster. Any vehicle, armored or otherwise, attempting to approach San Pietro was required to utilize a narrow road that was barely wide enough for two-way traffic. A few trails intersected with the road, but these were quite narrow, no more than eight feet across. The road itself was fraught with risk for any tank under fire. Four choke points would undoubtedly be troublesome, and these included culverts of 10 and 15 feet along with a pair of bridges. Tanks passing through the area would be vulnerable to a torrent of defensive fire. To make matters worse for maneuver, the slopes of Monte Sammucro were terraced with retaining walls as high as seven feet between the terraces.

Combat engineers went to work on December 11 to improve the situation as best they could. They demolished walls on some of the terraces and blasted paths for some of the tanks to utilize in descent after they had worked their way into the hills above the town. The lead tank clanked forward after dark and immediately lost traction in the rain-soaked terrain, throwing a track. The commotion attracted the attention of German artillerymen, who began dropping shells into the area. The effort was soon called off.

On December 15, while the 1st Battalion 143rd Infantry and the 504th Parachute Infantry made several unsuccessful attempts to capture the three hills Walker had assigned to them, 16 M4 Sherman medium tanks of Company A, 753rd Tank Battalion, a company of supporting infantry, and a borrowed British Valentine tank equipped with a prefabricated bridge rumbled down the road at midmorning. The original plan to assault the town from two directions quickly fell apart when the lead tank found the road blocked and was redirected across the terraces, where it went on to destroy a German command post and several machine-gun nests.

Late to respond to the threat, German artillery began firing, and the three following tanks found

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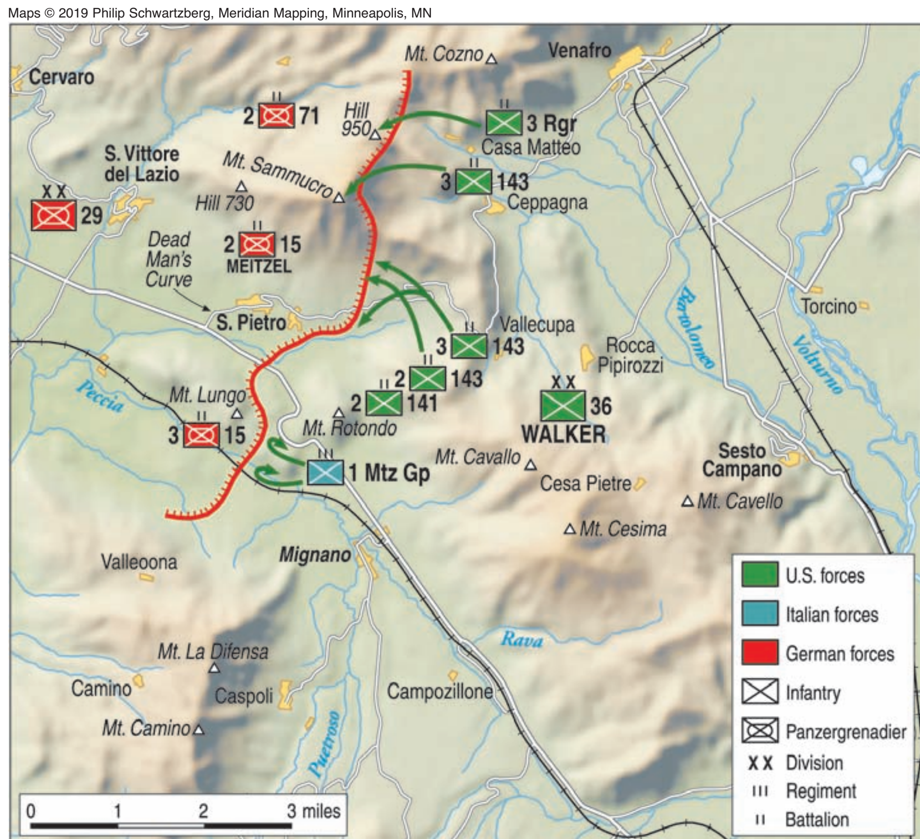
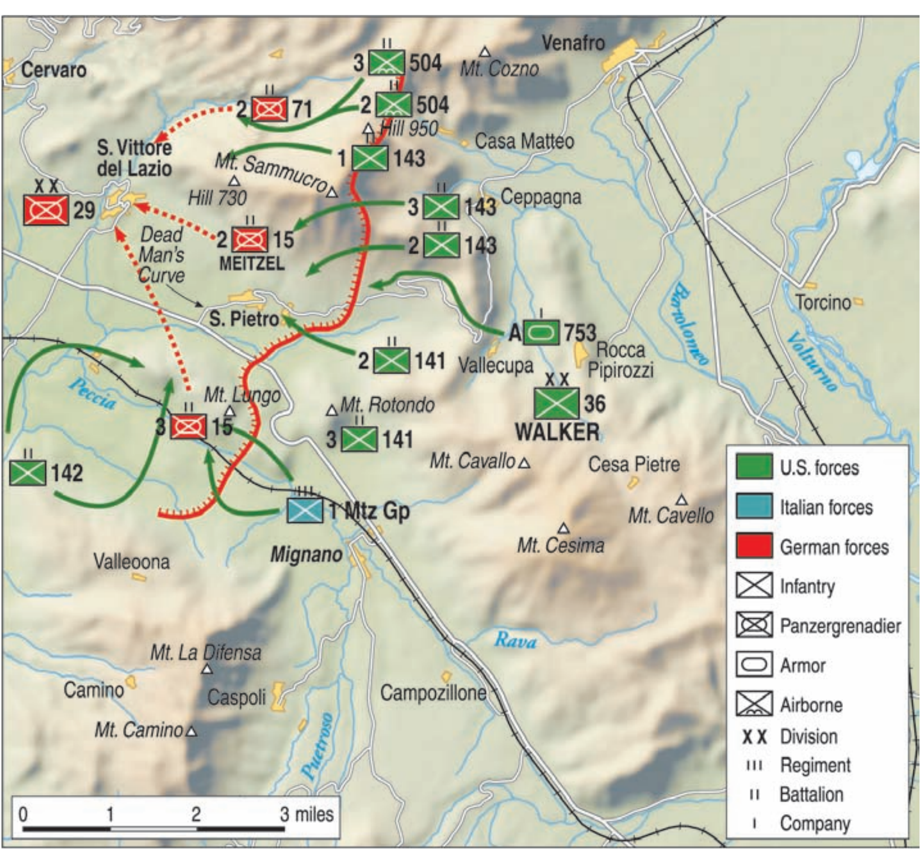


ABOVE: Americans of the 36th Infantry Division attempted to capture San Pietro from the southeast during the first assault on the town. However, fierce enemy resistance and rugged terrain thwarted the effort. BELOW: M4 Sherman medium tanks of Company A, 753rd Tank Battalion led the second assault on San Pietro, but the armored thrust was repulsed with heavy losses.



their trail blocked by the hulk of a knocked out German PzKpfw. IV tank. These tanks could not follow their leader since the terraces in their area were too steep. Instead, they were ordered to retire to the main road and shell the town in support of the upcoming infantry push. About 1,000 yards from San Pietro, the first of the three tanks reached a bridge, crossed, and was immediately set ablaze by a German antitank round. The second Sherman moved across the bridge and was blasted by two shells, erupting in flames. The third tank was destroyed by three shells before it even reached the bridge as the German gunners found the range. The next three Shermans in line were disabled by mines.

One M4 fell off the edge of the road and flipped over, landing five feet below. Three more threw tracks. Another Sherman attempted to follow the lead tank across the terraces but lost traction and turned over on its side. One Sherman crashed into a second that was already disabled. The Valentine remained unscathed, but it was trapped by crippled Shermans and abandoned. Only four of the 16 Shermans that began the attack returned undamaged. Five of the 12 damaged tanks were later recovered and repaired.

Lieutenant John Huston of the Signal Corps watched the unfolding debacle. Although his eyewitness account differed somewhat from the official version, his impression was noteworthy. "This was a most ill-conceived plan undoubtedly conceived by someone back of the lines who didn't know the first damned thing about the terrain around the village. The right side of the road was a mountainside, and the other side was a drop-off down the mountain. Once committed, the tanks couldn't turn around…. We could see the tanks burning and exploding, and men running and trying to hide. After it was over, we crept forward and photographed the disastrous results. It wasn't pretty. There was a boot here—with the foot and part of a leg still in it—a burned torso there…."

Sergeant Ray Wells of the 2nd Battalion, 141st Infantry, the outfit that the tanks were supposed to support, witnessed the armored assault as well. "I was watching them from what seemed to be a mile away," he remembered. "I saw the tanks go up that road. They were moving slowly because of the curves, and they were hitting mines. When they got to where the German 88s could knock them out, the tank behind would just push aside one that was hit and just keep on going. The tankers were a bunch of brave people. That's for sure."

Lieutenant Colonel Milton Landry commanded the 2nd Battalion, 141st during the San Pietro fighting and remembered his unit was ordered that day to interdict any German resupply effort from the west. The 2nd Battalion got going around noon.

"We had companies E, F, G, H, and the battalion headquarters company," Landry commented. "I lost three company commanders in the first 30 minutes. Captain Charles Beacham was shot through the cheek, and Ray Wells pulled him out of the line of fire. Captain [Charles] Hamner was killed, and Captain John Chapin was also wounded. I remember the fact that we had men falling left and right all the way through. We attacked all afternoon and up into the night. We lost so many men that Company L was sent to join us. When we were finally ordered to pull back, there were 42 of us left in the battalion plus the extra rifle company. I would say we had close to 800 men when we started."

Landry led from the front and was wounded three times during the fighting on December 15-17, later receiving the Distinguished Service Cross for his heroism. "The terrain facing San Pietro was terraced almost the complete distance from Monte Rotondo to the town itself, and most of the terraces had a wire fence on top and near the edge," he recalled. "In almost every case the enemy had installed a booby trap of some kind…. We had to figure a way to eliminate this hazard, and we came up with an almost foolproof plan. Two of the larger men would lift me up so I could take hold of the tripwire, and when I gave the signal they would drop me so I could pull the wire down with me, explode the booby trap and at the same time be protected by the rock wall which bordered the terrace."

The German defenders had had plenty of time to dig deep foxholes and entrenchments in the vicinity of San Pietro. Often, the Americans had to advance to point-blank range to root them out of strongpoints. "You couldn't see them," said Landry. "You had to go up and across one terrace, and then there was always another one. You could look in at the wall and see what you thought was a black rock, but it wasn't a rock. It was a hole with a machine gun on the other side where the Germans had dug a big pit and connecting trenches where they could crawl back and forth. They covered the tops of the pits with railroad crossties, dirt and plants. They could sit in there with wine, black bread, and cheese that comes out of a tube like toothpaste and wait for us."

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ABOVE: American artillery observers watch shells fall on enemy positions at San Pietro on December 19, 1943. INSET: Captain John Chapin of Company E, 2nd Battalion, 141st Infantry Regiment was wounded at San Pietro and later killed in action at the Rapido River.

Landry was also at a disadvantage during his attack, relying on highway maps purchased by his battalion surgeon in North Africa. Most of the intelligence had identified the German positions as antiaircraft emplacements, but this proved to be untrue as the soldiers of the 36th Division pushed toward San Pietro. "The highway maps were just as good as our government maps," Landry remarked. "The scale on them was terribly small, though. You could make a line on the map with a pencil, and crossing that line on the ground would take 200 or 300 yards. On the map that distance was only as thick as

the pencil lead. We would get copies of *Life* magazine, and they would show us not having moved at all. We would fight for two or three weeks up and down mountains, and on the maps it looked like we hadn't advanced."

Strangely, when Landry was leaping for cover from an incoming German shell, he discovered a brass plate driven into a rock by surveyors of the U.S. Coast and Geodetic Survey. "I was laying my head on the plate, and it meant that there were good maps of the entire area. We just couldn't get them because nobody knew we had them," he said.

Wells recalled, "Most of the men in my squad were wounded right away. The Germans were looking right down our throats all the time, and the snipers were pretty accurate. A lot of the people I saw were shot right between the eyes. Our medics had helmets with red crosses on them, and I saw some of them shot by bullets that went right through the middle of that cross."

Wells ordered suppressing fire against several buildings where snipers were believed to be holed up. "The enemy was in the houses upstairs, shooting out the windows at us," Landry related. "Raymond [Wells] was leading a heavy machine gun squad, and I think he was the only one that had a machine gun left. Originally the crew had a big water-cooled machine gun. He abandoned that and picked up a one-man light machine gun. Later, after we had done our job, he acted as a rear guard for our withdrawal back to Monte Rotondo."

It is likely that Wells shot at least three German snipers during the brawl, and he probably saved dozens of his comrades in the process. Firing that machine gun in the heat of combat, however, he was never sure of the effect. "You just go on to the next one and do your best, but I never felt like going over and looking." More than half a century after his heroism at San Pietro, Wells received the Silver Star in recognition.

As the 2nd Battalion, 141st was heavily engaged, the 2nd Battalion, 142nd and 3rd Battalion, 143rd worked their way around Monte Lungo, crossing Highway 6. As the frontal assault against San Pietro got underway, they captured the summit of Monte Lungo, fighting off a determined defense by the Reconnaissance Battalion of the 29th Panzergrenadier Division. By the morning of December 16, most of the high ground in the area was under Allied control, the Italians taking the last strongpoints along the ridgeline.

The fall of Monte Lungo sealed the fate of the San Pietro defenders. With American troops also atop Monte Sammucro, the evacuation route along Highway 6 might be cut. German commanders prepared for a withdrawal, believing they had done everything possible to hinder the Americans' progress toward Rome. They launched a sharp but diversionary counterattack to cover the withdrawal of the 29th Panzergrenadier Division from the town on the night of the 16th. The 143rd Infantry Regiment trudged into San Pietro the next day, after absorbing 1,000 killed and wounded. The Americans found the village shattered and 300 civilians dead.

John Huston's camera crew had followed the 143rd Infantry Regiment throughout the San Pietro action. "Previous to our first attack, I had interviewed—on camera—a number of men who were to take part in the battle," Huston later wrote. "Some of the things they said were quite eloquent: they were fighting for what their future might hold for them, their country and the world. Later you saw these same men dead. Before placing the bodies in the coffins for burial, the procedure was to lay them in a row in their bedrolls, make positive identification—where possible—then cover them. At that point, it was necessary to lift the body up, and I had my cameras so placed that the faces of the dead came right to the lens. In the uncut version I had their living voices speaking over their dead faces about their hopes for the future."

Top Army brass demanded that Huston's startling drama *The Battle of San Pietro* be banned from public screening. The film was heavily edited, but even then it was rarely shown until some time after World War II was over.

Army Chief of Staff General George C. Marshall watched the film and took a significantly different view of its impact and value. He stated, "This picture should be seen by every American soldier in training. It will not discourage but rather will prepare them for the initial shock of combat." Huston expected to become persona non grata in Army circles. Ironically, he received a promotion to the rank of major and was decorated for meritorious service.

During the 1980s, roughly 40 years after the events at San Pietro, author Madge Mackenzie interviewed Huston twice, writing in the *New York Times*: "*The Battle of San Pietro* stands alone in the history of documentary filmmaking. Presenting the battle in the Liri Valley as a

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costly continuing campaign rather than in retrospect as a strategic victory, it is the only complete record of an infantry battle. Filmed with … 35mm hand-held Eyemo newsreel cameras in the midst of gunfire, its camera angles are low and from the ground. Shots are grabbed, immediate, unexpected. It is a vivid, complete record.…"

To this day, film historians dispute Huston's assertion that *The Battle of San Pietro* includes actual combat footage and even assert that "dead" soldiers are miraculously seen alive in archival reels after the combat scenes were filmed. Nevertheless, the film makes a strong antiwar statement and stands out in the history of documentary filmmaking.

Landry recalled the activities of other combat cameramen with the 141st. "They were in our battalion area, and when one of them would get hit their camera would keep filming and roll down the hill. I saw film of my mortar crews apparently lying down on the ground and firing their weapons. Actually, it was the angle of the hill, and when they turned their cameras it made it look like the guns were turned flat."

Lieutenant Colonel Landry offered his own unvarnished assessment of the San Pietro attack, which had cost his battalion so dearly in lives. "It was a stupid operation," he said bluntly. "My battalion was used to attacking at night. For us to attack in daylight across a valley and up a hill where the Germans had been fortified for a long time was suicidal. I was fortunate to have a battalion that stuck with me and went all the way. When it was over there weren't many of them left, but the ones that were left were doing their job."

As gut wrenching as the battle at San Pietro had been, agonizing fighting still lay ahead for the 36th Division, particularly during disastrous attempts to cross the rain-swollen Rapido River and attacks on the Gustav Line in January 1944. The planned amphibious landings at Anzio went forward, but Maj. Gen. John P. Lucas, commanding the Allied VI Corps, chose to consolidate his beachhead rather than dash forward on open roads to swiftly capture Rome. Kesselring utilized the time to counterattack and contain the Anzio beachhead until May 23. Rome did not fall until June 4, only two days before the Allied landings in Normandy shifted world attention from the Mediterranean Theater.

After the war, the town of San Pietro was rebuilt some distance away from its original location. The destroyed buildings were left, however, as silent testimony to the terrible fight there in 1943.

Huston's two other landmark documentary films, *Report from the Aleutians* and *Let There Be Light,* stirred controversy of their own. The footage of the Aleutian campaign depicts an air raid on Japanese positions, and the film was nominated for an Academy Award in 1943. *Let There Be Light* depicts the treatment of veterans suffering psychological illnesses at a hospital on Long Island after the war. The film itself was confiscated and remarkably banned from public screening until 1980. *Let There Be Light* and *The Battle of San Pietro* remain the only works of their kind to have ever been banned by the U.S. War Department.

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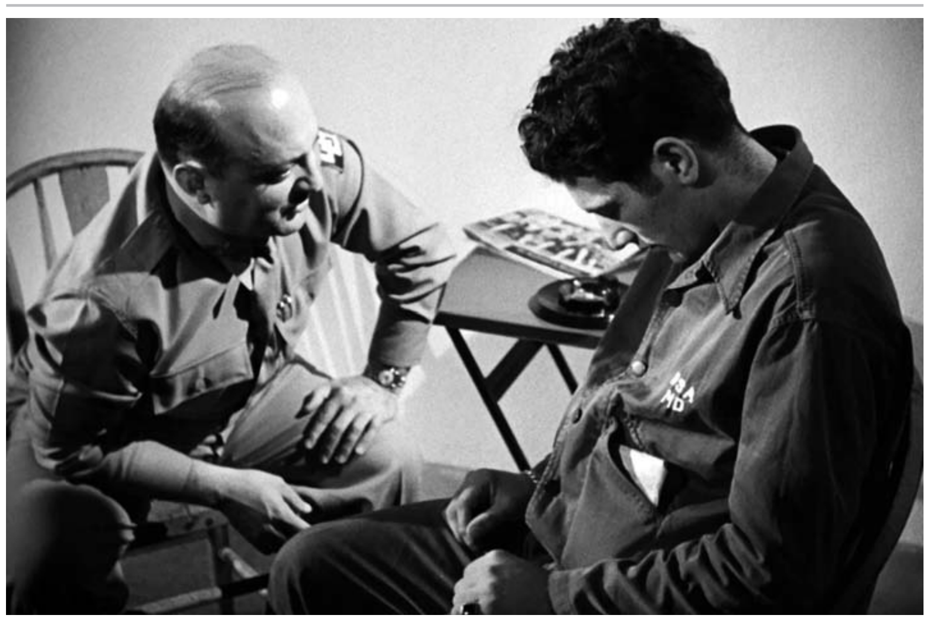
ABOVE: In this still frame from director John Huston's documentary titled *The Battle of San Pietro,* an American soldier struggles up a hillside near the Italian town while coming under enemy fire. Historians now believe some combat scenes were staged for the camera after the battle. BELOW: This still frame from John Huston's documentary *Let There Be Light* depicts one of many soldiers traumatized by combat during World War II. The film chronicled treatment at a facility in New York. OPPOSITE: A day after they were disabled in an attack on San Pietro, several American tanks are recovered. The armored vehicles were then repaired and returned to service.



Author Michael E. Haskew is the editor of WWII History *magazine. He is also the author of numerous books and articles on military history, including* West Point 1915: Eisenhower, Bradley and the Class the Stars Fell On *and* Appomattox: The Last Days of Robert E. Lee's Army of Northern Virginia. *He resides in Chattanooga, Tennessee.*

British soldiers advance through the rubble of a captured town on the road to Mandalay in 1945. Maj. Gen. T.W. Rees's 19th Division captured the old royal capital on March 21 after protracted street fighting and stubborn Japanese resistance from inside the city's ancient citadel known as Fort Dufferin.

Outfoxed IN BURMA

BY MIKE PHIFER

Lieutenant General William Slim sent a fast-moving column across the Irrawaddy River in January 1945 to capture the supply depot at Meiktila. The surprise attack hastened the collapse of the Japanese position in central Burma.

While the soldiers and officers of the Japanese 15th Army fought fiercely to defend Mandalay in central Burma, they were alarmed to discover that British and Indian troops were dangerously close to capturing their supply depot at Meiktila, 90 miles to their rear. If this occurred, they faced certain destruction.

"Isn't there some mistake?" asked a Japanese officer. "How can the enemy be so close in these back areas?" The officer along with three others had been ordered to remain in Meiktila after being told of two reports putting a small enemy force at Taungtha, about 40 miles to the northwest. The second report indicated Allied troops were approaching Mahlaing, not far from the airstrip at Thabutkon and only about 20 miles from Meiktila.

Just two days before, on February 23, 1945, an important meeting was held at Meiktila between the chief of staff of the Japanese Southern Army and chiefs of staff of various armies in Burma about the situation in central Burma, where the British were threatening Mandalay. Plans were made to mount an offensive against them.

The Japanese high command was not overly alarmed at the reports, choosing to believe it was a small-scale raid on Meiktila and that local defenses were substantial enough to deal with the raiders. Another report read that 200 enemy vehicles were spotted, but it should have read 2,000. For some reason the last zero was dropped from the message.

This was no raid, as the Japanese were to learn. The motorized 17th Indian Infantry Division and the 255th Indian Tank Brigade were racing toward Meiktila in a bold move that would jeopardize the Japanese hold on Burma.

During the previous year the Japanese 15th Army had suffered staggering losses in its failed attempt to capture Imphal and Kohima in northeast India. The purpose of the Japanese offensive had been to forestall a British invasion of Burma and cut the movement of supplies between India and China. Elsewhere, the Japanese 28th Army also suffered defeat at the so-called Admin Box in the Arakan region when it tried to overrun the Indian 7th Division's administrative area. With the Japanese limping back to Burma in early July 1944, the British quickly struck before the Japanese Burma Area Army—which comprised the 15th, 28th, and 33rd Armies—could regroup.

Admiral Lord Louis Mountbatten, Supreme Allied Commander in South East Asia, under the operational name of Capital, ordered the British 14th Army under Lt. Gen. Sir William Slim to advance into central Burma to capture Mandalay, the link between the Japanese 15th and 33rd Armies. With this town in Allied hands, any chance the Japanese had of smashing communication between India and China had vanished like dry ground during a Burmese monsoon. While the 14th Army advanced on Mandalay, the Chinese Northern Combat Area Command (NCAC) was to push south and link up with Slim at Maymo, east of Mandalay.

Slim continued his pursuit of the retreating Japanese through the mountainous jungle toward the Chindwin River. Slim predicted that the new commander of the Burma Area Army, Lt. Gen. Kimura Hyotaro, would deploy his forces on the Shwebo Plain, which was located north of Mandalay between the Chindwin and Irrawaddy Rivers, to defend the country's ancient capital. The hard-charging British general meant to destroy the enemy in the open ground with his superiority in tanks and aircraft.

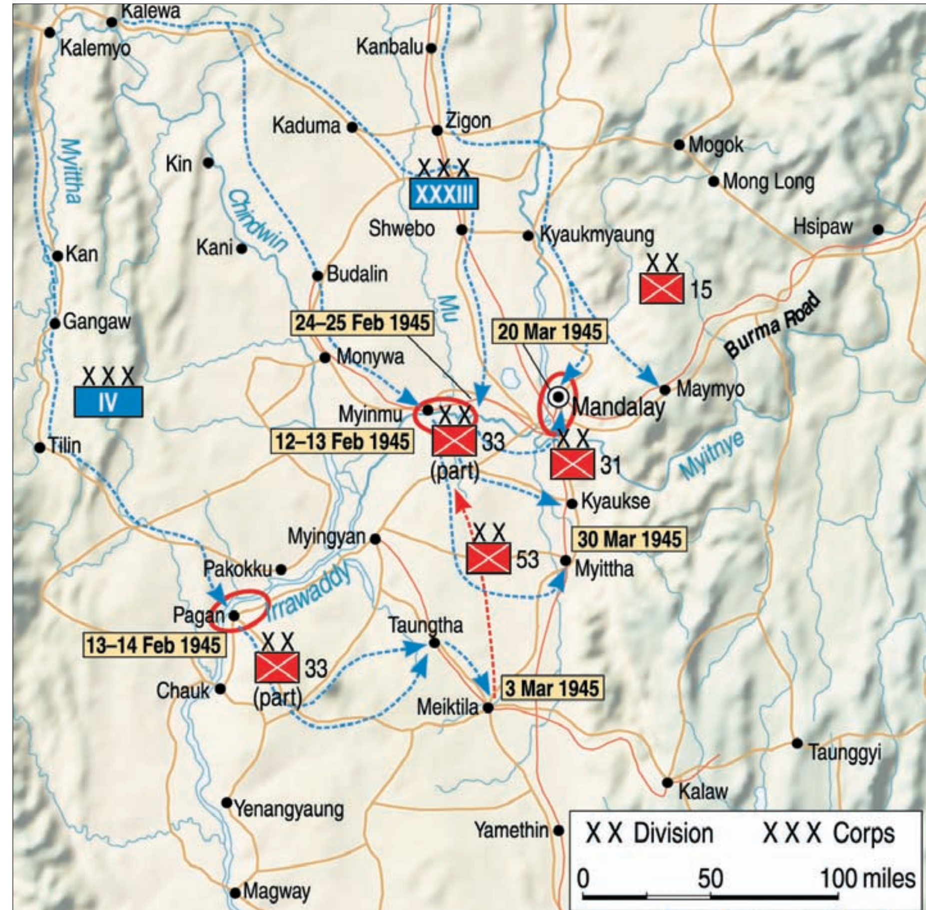
The 14th Army crossed the Chindwin and pushed southward in December. Japanese resistance was light, and it was becoming clear to Slim that Kimura had no intention of deploying his army on Shwebo Plain. Kimura had ordered his men back across the Irrawaddy, which forced Slim to come up with a new plan. Slim unveiled the revised plan on December 17 to his superior, Lt. Gen. Sir Oliver Leese, commander of Allied Land Forces South East Asia.

The success of Slim's bold plan, named Extended Capital, depended on deception, speed, and surprise. Slim intended to deceive Kimura into believing the entire 14th Army was attempting to capture Mandalay, while in reality only one of its corps—the XXXIII Corps—was tasked with the direct assault.

While that attack was under way, the 14th Army's other corps, Lt. Gen. Sir Frank Messervy's IV Corps, would make a rugged journey through the Myittha (or Gangaw) Valley to the Irrawaddy River, where it would cross the wide river at Pakokku. Once across, the IV Corps would advance behind Japanese lines and capture Meiktila. This town, which was located between two lakes, was the enemy's key supply depot through which the majority of supplies moving inland from Rangoon had to pass before being transported north.

Kimura would have no choice but to attempt to recapture Meiktila, while at the same time battling XXXIII Corps at Mandalay. Slim figured the Japanese commander would have to commit all the forces he had in central Burma, allowing the 14th Army to smash them, with IV Corps at Meiktila being the anvil while XXXIII Corps pushing south from Mandalay was the hammer. Slim was confident of victory.

All Photos: Imperial War Museum



ABOVE: Forcing a crossing of the Irrawaddy River in the face of strong enemy resistance was a daunting proposition for the British command. William Slim's skilled deception of the Japanese during the campaign places him in the top rank of British generals. OPPOSITE: Sherman tanks of the 5th Horse, an Indian armored cavalry regiment, rumble toward Meiktila. The tank crews were particularly adept at blasting bunkers that served as enemy strongpoints.

The British and Indian troops that made up the 14th Army had come a long way since the dark days of 1942, when they were driven out of Burma by the Japanese. Low morale, rampant disease, lack of supplies, and a belief that the Japanese could not be beaten in the jungle plagued the troops. British high command began to change all that with better training and tactics in jungle warfare, a major reorganization, and better equipment for the army's divisions. As for shortages of material, they were able to mitigate that weakness by relying more on air supply. Slim worked hard to restore the army's morale and gave it a mission to destroy the Japanese Army, which was preparing to meet them under its new commander on the east side of the Irrawaddy.

The 1,350-mile-long Irrawaddy originates in the Himalayas and flows through the center of the country, cutting a swath through an open plain before fanning out in a delta that empties into the Bay of Bengal and Andaman Sea. Kimura intended to defend southern Burma and the valuable oilfields near Yenangyaung and the much needed rice-growing areas of the Irrawaddy Delta.

To do this, Kimura positioned the 33rd Army, which was composed of the 18th and 56th Divisions and a regiment from the 49th Division from Lashio, west to the mountains to the northeast of Mandalay. Along the Irrawaddy from Mandalay to Pakokku was the 15th Army under Lt. Gen. Shihachi Katamura, which was made up of the 15th, 31st, 33rd, and 53rd Divisions, the latter of which was held in reserve. The 28th Army, consisting of the 54th and 55th Divisions, 72 Independent Mixed Brigade, and a regiment from the 49th, held the area around the Yenangyaung oilfields to the Arakan and the Irrawaddy Delta.

In reserve Kimura placed the 2nd Division, the rest of the 49th Division, and the 24th Independent Mixed Brigade. Kimura also had under his command two divisions of the Indian National Army (INA). To protect the key supply depot at Meiktila with its surrounding airfields, the Japanese had two airfield defense battalions and an antiaircraft battalion.

Kimura believed Slim would attempt to take Mandalay by crossing the Irrawaddy both north and southwest of the key town in an attempt to envelop it. By counterattacking with the 15th Army, Kimura intended to hold the east bank of the Irrawaddy and keep Slim out of Mandalay. Once the monsoons came in early May, Kimura believed the 14th Army's supply lines would be badly stretched, causing its troops to be unable to continue their attack and possibly forcing them to fall back to the Chindwin.

The British commander would have to use deception to make the Japanese think Mandalay was their key objective and commit their forces there, while at the same time keeping the Japanese unaware of IV Corps' drive south from Tamu and down the Myittha River Valley. Their 328-mile journey was made more difficult as there was nothing but a dirt track to travel on, forcing IV Corps to build their own roads. If Slim was to be successful and keep his two corps fighting separate battles supplied with 750 tons a day, which was scheduled to rise to 1,200 tons in March when the fighting for Meiktila would be in full swing, he needed to depend heavily on air transport.

This became increasingly more difficult when Slim learned on December 10 that three U.S. Army Air Forces (USAAF) squadrons, totaling 75 aircraft, roared off to China to help Chinese forces there. "The noise of their engines was the first intimation that anyone in 14th Army had of the administrative crisis now bursting upon us," said Slim.

To make up for the loss, the airlift operation had to be recalculated and replanned. This meant that XV Corps, which was to launch an attack in the Arakan to keep Japanese forces occupied there and capture the key islands of Akyab and Ramree with their valuable airfields, would suffer reduced airlift.

More aircraft became available when two Royal Air Force (RAF) squadrons that had been resting and retraining were quickly brought back into service. Two Royal Canadian Air Force squadrons also arrived in late December. In January and February 1945, two more squadrons arrived, and two of the USAAF squadrons returned.

Although Slim was heavily relying on airlift, some supplies would be moved by road and others by water. In January, Slim ordered his chief engineer, Maj. Gen. W.F. Hasted, to construct vessels and move supplies down the Chindwin to the Irrawaddy. By the end of the campaign, the engineers had built 541 craft.

On December 18, Slim met with his two corps commanders, Lt. Gen. Sir Montague Stopford of the XXXIII Corps and Messervy of the IV

Corps, to explain his plan and stress the need for speed. The corps commanders wasted no time in getting their men moving. The XXXIII Corps, consisting for the campaign of the 2nd British Division, 19th and 20th Indian Divisions, 254th Indian Tank Brigade, and 268th Indian Infantry Brigade, continued its advance toward Mandalay with the 20th Indian Division on the right, the 2nd British in the center, and the 19th Indian Division on their left flank.

Originally, the 19th Division was part of IV Corps, but it was now ordered to serve with the XXXIII Corps, which Slim hoped would deceive the Japanese into believing that IV Corps was advancing on Mandalay as well. To further deceive the enemy, a dummy IV Corps headquarters was set up at Tamu, where all radio communication between XXXIII Corps and 19th Division had to pass.

Meanwhile, IV Corps was to keep radio silence. Elements of this corps, now consisting of the 7th and 17th Indian Divisions, 255th Indian Tank Brigade, 28th East African Brigade, and the Lushai Brigade, headed south from Tamu for Pakokku. Its journey was to be a tough one as Hasted and his engineers had to construct a new road for IV Corps to move on.

Hasted figured he could build a new road in 42 days. To do this he was going to use "bithess," which was Hessian cloth treated with bitumen, making it water resistant. The overlapped bithess strips were used to surface the newly leveled and tightly packed road. Besides building a road, the engineers would have to build rough airstrips along the way for supplies to be delivered to IV Corps.

The Lushai Brigade, made up of Lushai and Chin levies, along with Indian Army battalions, led the way of the stretched-out IV Corps, which had some of its units still in India. The Lushai Brigade was given the task of capturing the town of Gangaw held by a dug-in rear guard of the Japanese 33rd Division. Heavy rains in the first week of the month delayed the assault until January 10. To aid the attack, four squadrons from the USAAF 12th Bombardment Group blasted the Japanese positions, followed by Hawker Hurricane and Republic Thunderbolt fighter bombers conducting strafing and bombing runs. Then the Lushai Brigade attacked. The Japanese troops put up a brief, determined resistance before retreating. Gangaw was cleared the following day.

The 28th East African Brigade now took over the advance. It was impossible to prevent the Japanese from detecting troop movement down the Myittha Valley, but the 28th, operating under the pretext that it was the 11th East African Division, intended to deceive the Japanese that its objective was the Yenangyaung oilfields.

In the meantime, the XXXIII Corps continued its advance on a broad front. The 19th Indian Division advanced on the town of Shwebo, located about 50 miles northwest of Mandalay, from the north and east. Concurrently, the 2nd British Division advanced on Shwebo from the northwest. The town was finally cleared on January 10. From there, Maj. Gen. T.W. Rees ordered his 19th Indian Division to cross the Irrawaddy north of Mandalay at Thabeikkyin and Kyaukmyaung.

By nightfall on January 17, the last brigade of the 19th Division had crossed the Irrawaddy to reinforce the bridgeheads established a week before. While this was under way, the Burma Area Army was planning a counterattack into the Shwebo Plain. But with the troops of Rees's division on the east bank of the Irrawaddy, Katamura meant to wipe them out before they became more established.

Sending part of its force to hold the bridgehead at Thabeikkyin located about 55 miles from Mandalay, the 15th Division, along with the 53rd Division of the 15th Army, concentrated on the bridgehead at Kyaukmyaung, 40 miles from Mandalay. During the last week of January, the Japanese troops bloodied themselves there by launching fierce night attacks against the entrenched British and Indian troops. Even with heavy artillery support, the night attacks could not budge them.

With the 19th Division firmly planted on the east side of the Irrawaddy, Rees consolidated his two bridgeheads and prepared to push south to Mandalay. Meanwhile, the 20th Division was preparing to cross the Irrawaddy near Myinmu and advance on Mandalay from the south and west. Before the 2nd Division crossed, it first had to clear out remaining Japanese troops on the west bank of the Irrawaddy where the mighty river bent at Sagaing. Then when boats became available, the division was to cross the Irrawaddy and join the 20th Division.

The spread out IV Corps continued its push for Pakokku with the 28th East African Brigade leading the way and the 7th Division following it. After leaving Gangaw, IV Corps soon encountered hundreds of downed trees across the track left by the retreating Japanese to slow their advance. The engineers quickly removed them. On January 28, the 89th Indian Brigade of the 7th Division took Pauk about 40 miles west of Pakokku.

As they continued their advance toward the Irrawaddy, Messervy and the 7th Division commander, Maj. Gen. G.C. Evans, had to decide where to cross the river. Shifting sandbars had created a number of channels, making a direct crossing difficult. Patrols were sent out to check possible crossing places, and aerial reconnaissance photos were studied.

Pakokku was closest to Meiktila, but it was also the most obvious crossing point. Evans wanted to cross near the village of Nyaunga where the river was at its narrowest. A crossing at Nyaunga would have to be made diagonally from about two miles upriver instead of directly across to avoid the open sandy beaches on the western bank, which would be visible to the Japanese on the east side of the Irrawaddy.

Facing Messervy on the east bank of the river was the 72nd Independent Mixed Brigade of the 28th Army and the 214th Regiment of the 15th

Army along with some INA troops. As this area was the boundary between the two Japanese armies, coordinating a response from the defending units would be slower because they were under different chains of command.

To deceive the Japanese, Messervy and Evans developed a plan named Operation Cloak in which Pakokku would be captured, giving the impression this was where the main crossing would take place while a diversionary crossing was made farther downriver at Pagan. To add to the enemy's confusion, the 28th East African Brigade was to conduct a feint at Chauk farther to the south.

Once the 7th Division was across the river, the 255th Indian Tank Brigade was to capture Meiktila and the surrounding airfields. Messervy did not believe a tank brigade was enough to hold Meiktila for any length of time and sought Slim's permission to have the 17th Indian Division mechanized. Slim agreed, and the division, which was still in India, was given the vehicles of the 11th East Africa Brigade and the 5th Indian Division. This was enough to allow two brigades of the 17th Division to be mechanized. It was decided the remaining brigade would be flown in once an airfield near Meiktila was captured.

By February 10, the 7th Division had fought its way to the Irrawaddy after the 114th Brigade had dislodged stiff Japanese resistance at the Kanhla crossroads about eight miles from Pakokku. In the meantime, the 89th Brigade had reached the river opposite Pagan and sent across a Sikh patrol after dark. The 33rd Brigade cleared the area around Myitche and prepared to cross at nearby Nyaungu. The 28th East African Brigade secured Seikpyu on February 12 after encountering stiff resistance and prepared to cross the river to Chauk.

Farther to the north on the XXXIII Corps' front, the 20th Division prepared to cross the Irrawaddy near Myinmu on the night of February 12. Before it did, 50 Consolidated B-24 Liberator bombers pounded the concentration of Japanese artillery that afternoon, followed by a squadron of Lockheed P-38 Lightning fighter bombers. With the coming of darkness, the 100th Indian Brigade began crossing near Myinmu, while the 32nd Indian Brigade crossed seven miles downriver at Cheyadaw.

A lieutenant with the 1st Battalion, Northamptonshire Regiment of the 32nd Indian Brigade (often an Indian brigade had one British battalion in it) recalled the crossing: "We set forth like a crocodile of rubber dinghies with an outboard motor on the front one, which kept on conking out. We were met by machine-gun and mortar fire which was not very effective."

Overhead a noisy RAF aircraft patrolled up and down the river attempting to drown out the sound of outboard motors as the boats struggled across the fast-flowing river. Despite some motor problems and boats drifting downstream, the two brigades had established bridgeheads by daylight on the February 13.

That same day, IV Corps' 7th Division was getting into position to cross the Irrawaddy in the early morning of February 14. At the Nyaungu crossing, a detachment from the Special Boat Section and Sea Reconnaissance Unit did a final check of the far side of the river before the lead company of the 2nd Battalion, South Lancashire Regiment, 33rd Brigade rowed out at 3:45 AM on February 14. An hour and a half later the Lancashire men reached the east bank undetected and seized the high ground there.

The rest of the battalion's crossing did not go so well. To maintain silence, the boats' outboard motors had not been warmed up prior to the battalion setting out. This caused problems as the motors began to stall midstream. Some of the assault boats also began to leak.

The crossing fell behind schedule. Because of the strong current and motor trouble, the assault boats drifted downstream past their landing beaches. At daylight INA troops fired on them with machine guns. Within minutes two company commanders were dead, and a few boats were sunk. To aid the troops, air support was called in while the artillery and some tanks provided covering fire to the boats as they made their way back to the west bank.

The 4th Battalion of the 15th Punjab Regiment was now sent in. With no concern now for silence, the outboard motors were allowed to warm up before the boats headed across the river at 9:45 AM. The assault went well, and within two hours the whole battalion was across the river. By nightfall most of the 33rd Brigade had crossed the Irrawaddy.

Farther downriver at Pagan, the 1/11th Sikh Regiment had an easier crossing when, after being initially driven back by machine-gun fire, a small boat with two INA soldiers carrying a white flag appeared, revealing that the Japanese had left Pagan. The Sikhs quickly crossed, and after some light resistance 280 INA troops surrendered while others retreated south.

But at Seikpyu things did not go well. The Japanese 153rd Regiment of the 72nd Mixed Independent Brigade launched a fierce attack on the 28th East African Brigade, driving it back about 12 miles to Letse. Despite falling back, the East Africans had drawn off enemy troops from Nyaunga.

The bridgehead near Nyaunga was made more secure on February 15 when part of the 89th Brigade crossed the Irrawaddy. With not enough troops to counterattack, the Japanese could do little. The following day Nyaunga was

captured, and on February 17 the newly motorized 17th Division began to cross the river. Two days later, the 255th Indian Tank Brigade began crossing as well. The race to Meiktila was on.

Kimura did not take the reports of the crossing at Nyaunga too seriously, believing it was the East African troops. Instead, Kimura believed he faced the entire 14th Army crossing near Mandalay. He intended to attack Slim while half his forces were on either side of the Irrawaddy and defeat each component in turn. The Japanese launched fierce counterattacks against the bridgeheads established by the 20th and 19th Divisions.

Although Kimura was playing into Slim's plan, the British commander had a problem. Slim had requested help from the 36th British Division serving with the NCAC. The request was rejected. Instead, Slim was forced to bring up his reserves, the 5th Indian Division, which caused considerable concern and risk as to whether the overstretched supply line could deal with the extra burden of another division. The matter was resolved "by juggling between formations with the limited transport available and by cruelly overworking the men who drove, flew, sailed, and maintained our transports of all kinds," wrote Slim.

On February 21, the 17th Division and 255th Tank Brigade began their advances by two routes to Meiktila, which lay about 80 miles away. The columns met light resistance the first day. Tougher resistance was met the next day at the village of Oyin. Two companies of Japanese soldiers from the 16th Infantry Regiment of the 2nd Division held 20 bunkers dug underneath houses and screened by snipers along the village approaches. The 6/7th Rajputs supporting the tanks of the 5th Horse quickly came under machine-gun fire, which pinned them down as they advanced into the village.

Allied tanks quickly rumbled into Oyin, blasting at any spotted bunkers. Without warning a Japanese soldier with a bomb strapped to him raced toward the lead tank and threw himself underneath it, detonating the bomb. The explosion knocked out the tank and killed some of its crew. Another enemy soldier climbed aboard a second tank, but the machine gunner in another tank stitched him with bullets before he could pull the string and set off the bomb strapped to his chest. More Japanese tank killers attempted to take out tanks but were unsuccessful. Heavy fighting ensued before Oyin was captured.

On February 23, Slim got terrible news. NCAC had been ordered from northeast Burma to China. With only the 36th British Division left to protect Slim's left flank, this would free up troops for Kimura to face the XXXIII Corps at Mandalay.

However, Slim was far more concerned with the loss of USAAF air transport needed to transfer the NCAC. Failing to change Chinese Generalissimo Chiang Kai-shek's mind, Mountbatten turned to the British Chiefs of Staff, who pressed the importance of continued USAAF air transport to the U.S. Joint Chiefs. In the end, the United States would not remove any air transport from Slim until June 1 or the 14th Army captured Rangoon, whichever came first. Slim had been ordered in January to take Rangoon after Meiktila had been secured.

Japanese resistance proved weak as the two mechanized brigades of 17th Division pushed on with the 255th Tank Brigade, capturing Kaing and Taungtha. On the afternoon of February 26, the vital airfield at Thabutkon 15 miles north of Meittila was captured. The following day the 17th Division's 99th Brigade began arriving by air, which would continue until March 2. Armored cars began to probe toward Meiktila.

With news of the capture of the Thabutkon airfield, it became clear to the Japanese high command that this was no raid on Meiktila. Plans for counterattacking across the Irrawaddy were scrapped, and top priority was given to holding Meiktila. Defending Meiktila were three infantry companies made up from communication troops, four airfield defense units, some administration units, and about 500 walking wounded under the command of Maj. Gen. Tomekichi Kasuya. In total, Kasuya had about 4,500 troops to hold the key town. The men wasted no time in building bunkers and planting mines and booby traps. Kimura ordered the 49th Division, which was being held in reserve, to Meiktila. That division's 1/168th Infantry Regiment arrived in time to help to defend the town, as did an advance party from the rest of the regiment.

ABOVE: Infantry search foxholes on the outskirts of Meiktila for enemy soldiers. Some Japanese infantrymen strapped bombs to their chests and hurled themselves at tanks belonging to the 255th Indian Tank Brigade spearheading the drive on the key Japanese supply depot. OPPOSITE: A British 3-inch mortar crew in action during the fight for Meiktila. The fighting at Meiktila see-sawed back and forth with the two sides vying for control of the airfield, but eventually the Japanese withdrew.

The first goal of Maj. Gen. D.T. Cowan, commander of the 17th Indian Division, was to prevent reinforcements from reaching Meiktila by isolating it. On February 28, while the division's artillery was positioned at Antu to provide supporting fire for the attacking brigades, most of the 63rd Brigade set out on foot for the western edge of Meiktila. By nightfall, the brigade stopped at Kyaukpyugon and set up a roadblock southwest of Meiktila. Meanwhile, the 48th Brigade, which was being led by the 1/7th Gurkha Rifles, reached the Mahlaing/Meiktila

Road and headed south on it. At a partly demolished bridge over a watercourse, the column was held up by machine-gun fire. A patrol set out after dark to probe the heavy defenses on the edge of town.

The 255th Tank Brigade swept wide around Meiktila to be in position to attack the town from the east. Leading the way were two reconnaissance columns consisting of a squadron of tanks from the 9th Horse, a troop of armored cars, two platoons of infantry, and a detachment of Royal Engineers. One column reached its objective, the village of Kyigan a couple miles east of Meiktila, while the other column pushed across the main airfield east of town. The latter came under intense fire when it reached the railway line at Khanda, where the enemy had good cover among the trees, shrubs, and buildings. The Japanese position was made more difficult to reach by a canal that ran parallel to the railway line.

The 5th Horse and 6/7th Rajputs attempted to attack on a two-squadron, two-company front. The infantry on the left flank began to take heavy casualties, and a squadron of supporting tanks soon discovered the Japanese had set fire to surrounding fuel drums. As the squadron commander opened his tank hatch to get a better look, he was killed by a sniper. The tanks of the 9th Horse were ordered to a nearby ridgeline near Point 860 to add supporting fire, but with casualties mounting the attack was called off.

On March 1, Cowan's brigades and the 255th Tank Brigade prepared to fight their way into Meiktila. The terrain did not favor the British tanks. The two lakes north and south of town turned some of the roads into narrow causeways, limiting the Shermans' maneuverability. Irrigation ditches in the surrounding countryside also hindered tanks. Slim and Messervy flew in to observe the attack.

To the west of Meiktila, the 1/10th Gurkha Rifles of the 63rd Brigade along with a troop of the 5th Horse captured the village of Khanna. They then pushed on toward Meiktila, where they met fierce resistance coming from the hospital where the Japanese had built bunkers. Air strikes were called in, destroying the bunkers and setting the hospital on fire.

To the north, the 1/7th Gurkha Rifles of the 48th Brigade, supported by a couple of squadrons of tanks from the 9th Horse, headed south on the Mandalay Road. In the northern suburbs of Meiktila, it met fierce resistance coming from a monastery that was eventually cleared after hard fighting. As the Gurhkas pushed farther into town they encountered aerial bombs dug into the road and dummy minefields, which consisted of bricks with dirt thrown over them.

ABOVE: Infantry search village huts on the outskirts of Meiktila. British and Indian forces worked hard to secure areas because the Japanese frequently infiltrated back into the position from which they had been driven out the day before. OPPOSITE: Neither infantry attacks nor artillery bombardments could budge the Japanese defenders at Fort Dufferin in Mandalay, so the British resorted to using 2,000-pound skipping bombs to open a breach in the thick walls. The Japanese eventually evacuated, thus making an all-out attack unnecessary.

The advancing troops also were met with enemy machine-gun fire blazing from the houses and creating deadly crossfires. The houses had to be cleared one at a time in brutal fighting. The troops managed to fight their way to within 100 yards of the railway line that ran through town before the attack was called off and they withdrew for the night at 6 PM.

To the east, the 255th Tank Brigade took Point 860. At that point, the remaining tanks of the 9th Horse, along with 4/4th Bombay Grenadiers and a detachment of the Royal Engineers, pushed east along the railway line into Meiktila. They got within 200 yards of the railway station before being ordered to retire so as not to have any friendly fire incidents with the 48th Brigade.

During the night, the Japanese infiltrated back into the position from which they had been driven the day before. They had to be rooted out again as the 48th Brigade continued its advance into town from the north on March 2. The 4/12th Frontier Force Regiment led the advance supported by two squadrons of the 9th Horse. Overcoming stiff opposition, the troops and tanks got to within 50 yards of the railway line when a well-concealed 75mm gun knocked out three tanks before it was discovered and its crew killed by the infantry.

To the west, 63rd Brigade, which was supported by ground attack aircraft, pushed into Meiktila. Advancing down a causeway, two tanks from the 5th Horse were hit by a 75mm gun sited at the eastern end of the causeway. The attack was redirected south to clear the area along the southern lake. After an artillery barrage crashed down, the 5th Horse pushed through dense thorn thickets and stone buildings.

As the tanks rolled through a belt of thick scrub, they were soon attacked by enemy teams of tank killers throwing gasoline bombs and placing explosive charges under the tracks. Although one tank was disabled, the tank killers were put out of service, and the tanks continued blasting bunkers. Rumbling out of the scrub, the tanks gunned down many of the enemy soldiers withdrawing in front of them.

In the heavy fighting that raged through the afternoon, Naik Fazal Din of the 7/10th Baluch Regiment knocked out a bunker with grenades and then led his section against others. Despite having a ghastly sword wound, Fazal Din ripped the sword from the hands of the Japanese officer who had stabbed him and killed him with it. Then the sword-wielding, mortally wounded Fazal Din killed two other

Japanese soldiers and urged his men on before collapsing. He was posthumously awarded the Victoria Cross.

Fighting continued the following day as the 1st Battalion, West Yorkshire Regiment, 48th Brigade and two squadrons of tanks from the 9th Horse pushed into the southeast part of town following an artillery and aerial bombardment. The last Japanese defenders fought fanatically as each bunker, building, and machine-gun nest had to be cleared. Three tanks were knocked out by a 75mm gun in the brutal street fighting.

A badly wounded Lieutenant W.B. Weston was posthumously awarded the Victoria Cross for setting off a grenade, killing himself and the enemy soldiers in a bunker, thereby saving his platoon from taking casualties. By the end of the day, the last of the Japanese defenders had been killed and Meiktila was in British and Indian hands. While fighting raged in Meiktila, patrols from the 63rd Brigade and 255th Tank Brigade mopped up pockets of resistance on the outskirts of town. The Allies killed approximately 2,000 Japanese soldiers at Meiktila; the rest slipped out during the night.

With a strong enemy force occupying his supply base and blocking his lines of communication, Kimura shifted the 18th Division from the 15th Army (where it had been sent from the 33rd Army to help in the fight around Mandalay) and ordered it to recapture Meiktila. The 18th Division was further strengthened from the 15th Army with two battalions from the 214th Regiment, 33rd Division under its control.

Also heading south was much of the 15th Army's artillery, consisting of two 150mm howitzers, 21 75mm guns, and 13 antitank guns. The 14th Tank Regiment, which had only nine tanks, was sent along as well. The 119th Regiment of the 53rd Division at Pindale was to cover the 18th Division as it assembled its forces. The 49th Division also was ordered to advance north from Toungoo and assist the 18th Division in retaking Meiktila.

Besides the loss of Meiktila, the situation along the Irrawaddy was deteriorating for Kimura. Rees's 19th Indian Division was pushing south and by March 8 had taken the large town of Madaya and reached Mandalay Hill. This steep hill, covered with concrete temples and pagodas, was on the outskirts of Mandalay. It was heavily fortified with deep bunkers and honeycombed with machine-gun nests. The 4/4th Gurkhas of the 98th Brigade were given the tough job of taking it. They Gurkhas were reinforced the following day by two companies from the 2nd Battalion Royal Berkshire Regiment.

Fighting was fierce as the British and Gurkha soldiers fought their way to the summit of the hill. To get at the Japanese in the deep bunkers, barrels of oil, tar, and gasoline were poured into the access points and ignited with tracer bullets and grenades. On March 11, the hill was taken.

Next lay Fort Dufferin in Mandalay. Surrounded by a wide moat, this impressive fort had brick walls 30 feet wide, tapering to 12 feet at the top and enclosing about 1¼ miles of barracks, offices, and the Royal Palace of Thebaw. Pushing through Mandalay and hammering away at snipers, Rees's force reached Fort Dufferin by March 15. Probing attacks quickly brought a fierce response from the Japanese defenders. Artillery fire hammered the fort for a couple of days but to little effect. A stealth attack conducted by the 1/15th Punjab and 8/12th Frontier Force of the 64th Brigade also ended in failure in the early morning of March 18.

The RAF hammered the fort, even using a 2,000-pound skipping bomb, which blasted a 15-foot hole in the fort's wall. Slim, who observed the bombing, thought a direct attack through the breach would be too costly and wanted the fort bypassed. But Rees wanted to try an attack through the sewers into the fort. Neither approach was tried; a white flag and Union Jack appeared in the early afternoon of March 20. A small group of Anglo-Burmese civilian prisoners appeared with news that the Japanese had evacuated the fort through drains the night before. Mandalay was in Allied hands.

Meanwhile, the 2nd British Division, which had crossed the Irrawaddy on February 24 at Ngazun, had broken out from its bridgehead and advanced from the south to meet the 19th Indian Division. The 20th Indian Division pushed south to the Mandalay-Meiktila Road, captured Wundwin, the headquarters of the

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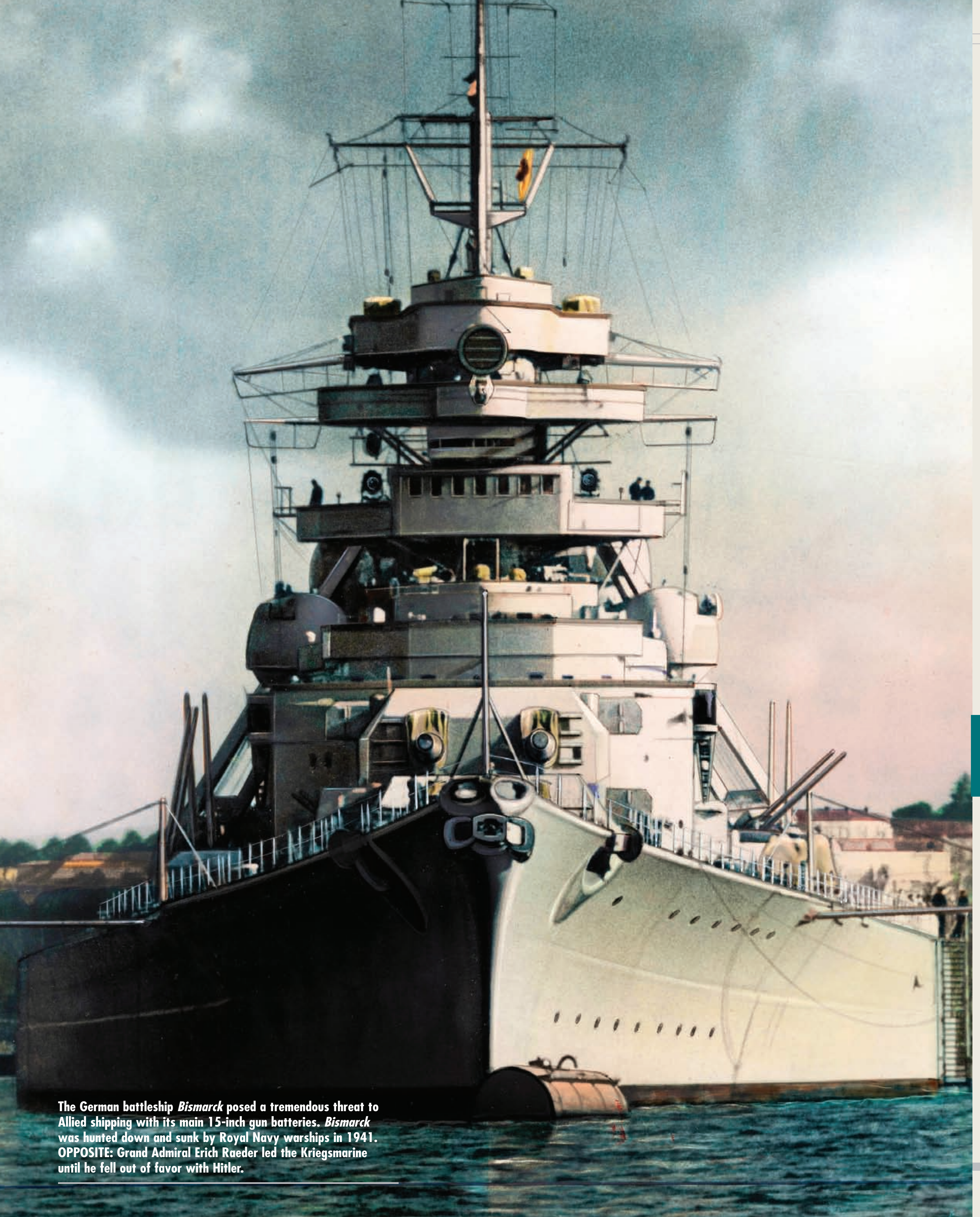

The German battleship *Bismarck* posed a tremendous threat to Allied shipping with its main 15-inch gun batteries. *Bismarck* was hunted down and sunk by Royal Navy warships in 1941. OPPOSITE: Grand Admiral Erich Raeder led the Kriegsmarine until he fell out of favor with Hitler.

Raeder's RAIDERS

BY MARK CARLSON

THE GERMAN NAVY'S SURFACE RAIDERS HARRIED ALLIED SHIPPING THROUGH MUCH OF WORLD WAR II.

On the nights of August 21 and 24, 1939, two dark ships slipped out of the German naval base at Wilhelmshaven and turned west toward the English Channel. Forty-eight hours later they were well out into the broad Atlantic Ocean, safe from prying British eyes. They were two of the Kriegsmarine's most innovative warships, the compact but powerful pocket battleships *Admiral Graf Spee* and *Deutschland*. Each was armed with six 11-inch guns and could range for nearly 10,000 miles, prowling the seas for vulnerable prey.

A week before Hitler's attack on Poland, Germany was already preparing to initiate Grand Admiral Erich Raeder's Plan Z, the daring surface campaign to destroy Britain's military and commercial sea trade.

The two ships were the vanguard of what Raeder hoped would eventually be dozens of fast and potent cruisers and battleships that would disrupt and destroy the Allies' sea lanes and starve England into surrender.

At the war's outset, Britain possessed about 2,000 merchant ships and another 1,000 coastal vessels of less than 2,000 tons each. This added up to around four million tons of cargo capacity. Another three million tons came from countries conquered by Germany, while another million tons were being launched each year. Britain required about 55 million tons of imports—consisting of food, oil, cotton, wool, and other industrial products—to sustain it. Raeder's goal was to sink more tonnage than Britain could endure and force the capitulation. In essence, his raiders had to sink ships faster than Britain could replace them. As events proved, Raeder was doomed to fail before he even began.

Erich Raeder, who had risen to command the Kriegsmarine after a career that went back to being a junior officer aboard Kaiser Wilhelm II's yacht *Hohenzollern* to the post of chief of staff for Admiral Franz von Hipper's battlecruiser force in the Great War, was a strong advocate of fast surface commerce raiders. They had proved successful during World War I, even if their impact on the outcome was negligible. The most successful surface raider was the light cruiser SMS *Emden*. In three months in the Indian Ocean, *Emden* sank two Allied warships and captured or sank 16 merchant vessels totaling 70,000 tons. *Emden* was undoubtedly Raeder's inspiration for his vision of fast raiders running wild through Allied shipping. But he failed to give much credibility to the U-boat campaign of World War I. Although the U-boats were often hampered by the diplomatic need to appease neutral nations who violently opposed unrestricted submarine warfare, in 51 months the 371 U-boats sank 5,282 British, Allied, and neutral merchant ships totaling more than 11 million tons.

Ignoring this persuasive statistic, Raeder had convinced Adolf Hitler that a surface fleet was essential to victory at sea. In January 1939, he proposed his Plan Z, envisioning a huge fleet of battleships, heavy cruisers, and aircraft carriers that would roam and dominate the seas by 1948. Hitler had promised his fleet commander that there would be no war until at least 1944, giving Raeder a healthy margin of time to carry out his grand building program.

But in the summer of 1939, Raeder learned of the planned invasion of Poland. Even though there was little doubt that Britain would quickly become involved, Hitler forged ahead, disrupting Raeder's carefully laid plans to build a huge surface fleet. Faced with a fait accompli, Raeder used what few large surface warships he possessed to support Hitler's grand campaigns.

But Raeder was more of a tactician than a strategist, a remnant of his time with the battlecruisers under Hipper. He never developed a broad strategy, instead using his meager force in hit and run raids and attacks. Additionally, Raeder gave little thought to U-boats as a viable means of cutting the Allied sea lanes. But his greatest blunder was that he failed to recognize the nearly two decades of advances in aviation, marine technology, and radar that made a surface fleet more of a target than a threat.

His shortsighted dogmas condemned the Kriegsmarine to defeat.

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Naval History and Heritage Command

Erich Raeder was not only up against the powerful Royal Navy, but the former First Lord of the Admiralty and later Prime Minister Winston Churchill, whose devotion to the Navy was close to reverence. Churchill gave the Navy all the support it needed to assure Britain's survival.

The last thing Churchill and the Admiralty wanted was for the distinctive shape of a huge German battleship to come out of the misty horizon and open fire with its heavy guns on a helpless convoy of tankers and transports. A salvo of heavy 8-inch or 11-inch high-explosive shells screaming out of the sky like angels of death could be devastating. The thin-skinned merchant ships could be sunk in minutes, leaving their crews to flounder and die in the freezing sea. Germany's powerful ships would be wolves in the fold, unstoppable and deadly.

Raeder lacked the strength and time to make a significant contribution to the Third Reich's war aims, but he doggedly followed a radically shrunken version of his original raiding plan. His only advantage was that the Royal Navy was largely equipped with vessels that had been launched during or shortly after the Great War. They were mostly older, slower battleships and battlecruisers with a leavening of light cruisers and destroyers.

However, Raeder's ships were all new, having been launched since 1931 and fitted with the latest naval technology and engines. They were for the most part fast, heavily armed and armored and were the equal of their larger British counterparts. But there were too few of them.

The numbers leave little doubt as to the inevitable outcome. Even at a fraction of its former glory, the British Home Fleet consisted of seven battleships, two battlecruisers, four aircraft carriers, 21 cruisers, more than 50 destroyers, and 20 submarines. The navies of Canada, New Zealand, and Australia added their own strength to this huge armada. Against this Raeder never had more than 10 powerful warships. Three were the so-called "pocket battleships" *Deutschland, Admiral Graf Spee,* and *Admiral Scheer.* In Germany they were officially called *Panzerschiffen,* or "armored ships." They carried two triple turrets with six 11-inch guns. They were registered as being 10,000 tons each but actually displaced over 12,000 tons. Three 14,500-ton Admiral Hipper-class cruisers, *Hipper, Blucher,* and *Prinz Eugen,* each carried eight 8-inch guns in four turrets. Formidable in themselves, they were soon superseded by two larger vessels, which were called heavy cruisers but were in fact battleships. *Scharnhorst* and *Gneisenau,* launched in 1936, each carried nine 11-inch guns in three turrets. While they were officially registered as displacing 19,000 tons, their registered gross tonnage was closer to 32,000. This made them larger than any German warship ever constructed up to that time, but Raeder was not finished. His planned armada was only partially complete.

The zenith of Raeder's raider fleet were the huge new battleships *Bismarck* and *Tirpitz,* each of more than 50,000 tons and carrying eight 15-inch guns in four turrets. Launched in 1939 and 1940, respectively, the sisters were the largest and most heavily armed and armored warships ever built in Germany. But their very size and power made them the focus of Royal Navy attention even before they completed their sea trials. They were also the last capital ships built in Germany during World War II.

In August 1939, Raeder initiated Plan Z by sending *Graf Spee* and *Deutschland* out to sea. *Graf Spee,* named for Count Maximillian von Spee, commander of the German East Asia squadron in 1914, went to the South Atlantic, while *Deutschland* headed for the North Atlantic.

From the moment *Graf Spee* received word that Great Britain and Germany were at war, her captain, Hans Langsdorff, who was above all a gentleman warrior, began his hunt for British merchant ships. German raiders were under the strict rules of cruiser warfare, where all ships stopped must be searched and their crews allowed to escape in lifeboats before the vessel was sunk. His crew was skilled and loyal to their mission. Langsdorff used his ship's reconnaissance plane to scout for prey. When *Graf Spee* came upon a likely ship, the first thing Langsdorff did was to destroy the merchant ship's radio room with direct fire, preventing a

distress call. Then he ordered the captain to abandon the vessel before he opened fire. *Graf Spee* sank 16 ships in three months of raiding in the Indian Ocean and South Atlantic. Not one person was killed or injured. But time and circumstances were catching up with Langsdorff.

Three British cruisers, HMS *Exeter, Achilles,* and *Ajax,* none of which had the firepower of *Graf Spee,* were under the command of Admiral Henry Harwood, a brilliant tactician. Harwood deduced that *Graf Spee* would head for the port of Montevideo at the mouth of the River Plate in Uruguay where a convoy was expected. On the morning of December 13, 1939, Langsdorff found the three Royal Navy ships converging on him. With few options, he chose to fight. While the three British cruisers had less firepower than their foe, they split up and forced Langsdorff to either concentrate on a single ship or split his own limited firepower. *Graf Spee*'s main armament of six 11-inch guns were in two triple turrets.

After only 20 minutes of battle, Langsdorff had severely damaged *Exeter* but suffered major damage to his own ship's superstructure. The British guns could not penetrate his hull or turret armor. He chose to break off and attempt to make repairs in Montevideo. But the Uruguayan government would not allow him to stay long enough to make repairs, and in the end Langsdorff had to either face a more numerous and powerful foe or scuttle his ship. He stripped *Graf Spee* of all classified equipment and set off charges that sank her in the river.

Langsdorff and his crew then headed for Buenos Aries, where he later committed suicide.

Coincidentally Admiral Maximillian von Spee had died aboard his flagship SMS *Scharnhorst* only 1,000 miles from where his namesake would be scuttled almost exactly 25 years later.

Graf Spee's sister, *Deutschland,* had a longer but far less successful career. Commanded by Captain Paul Veneker, *Deutschland* was operating off southern Greenland and Nova Scotia to interdict British shipping. At first she was moderately successful with two ships taken, but then Venaker made an error that caused great embarrassment to the Third Reich by capturing the American steamer *City of Flint* less than 1,200 miles from New York. The ship was seized and the American crew taken prisoner. Evading prowling British warships, Venaker headed for Norway. This was a further outrage, as both America and Norway were still neutral. The United States sent a flood of protests to the Nazi government.

Veneker then tried to go to Murmansk, but the Soviets, also neutral, refused entry. This meant that *Deutschland* and her crew were, in effect, kidnappers. Returning to Norway, *Deutschland* was boarded by Norwegian officials and the Americans set free. *Deutschland* returned to Germany for refit. To avoid any connection with the highly embarrassing incident, the ship was renamed *Lutzow. Lutzow* was heavily damaged by gunfire and torpedoes during the invasion of Norway the following year and towed back to Germany. Her luck failed to improve when the ship was again torpedoed by a Bristol Beaufort of RAF Coastal Command in June 1941.

Repaired, the ship then went aground off the coast of Norway, thus missing the famous July 1942 attack that scattered convoy PQ-17. By 1944, *Lutzow* nee *Deutschland* was providing support to German troops retreating from the advancing Soviets on the Baltic coast. Then an RAF Avro Lancaster heavy bomber dropped a 12,000-pound Tallboy bomb on the deck, doing great internal damage. Repaired once again, her ignominious career was ended when she was deliberately blown up four days after Hitler committed suicide in 1945.

Yet, as ineffective as *Deutschland*'s raids had been, she had managed to stretch the Royal Navy's assets to the breaking point. Dozens of cruisers and battleships were detailed to protect the convoys from German raids, making things easier for Raeder's plans but also rendering his goals virtually impossible.

Worse was in store for Raeder's reputation. In November 1939, even before *Graf Spee*'s death ride, the battleships *Scharnhorst* and *Gneisenau* found the armed merchant cruiser SS *Rawalpindi* in the region between the Faeroe Islands and the Denmark Strait. A small P&O liner of 16,700 tons, she was fitted with eight 6-inch and two 3-inch guns. Under the command of Royal Navy Captain E.C. Kennedy, the *Rawalpindi* savagely attacked the two big German battleships. Even while the small liner sank from dozens of heavy shell hits, her guns continued to fire. The action forced the two Ger-

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ABOVE: The two forward 11-inch main batteries of the battlecruiser *Scharnhorst* loom as the ship lies at anchor in the port of Kiel in the winter of 1940. *Scharnhorst* sank the British aircraft carrier HMS *Glorious* but was destroyed in the Battle of the North Cape. OPPOSITE: A large crowd gathered in June 1934 to watch the launching of the pocket battleship *Graf Spee. Graf Spee* came to grief in 1939, scuttled after the Battle of the River Plate.

man raiders to leave the area before a heavier Royal Navy force arrived.

Almost exactly a year later, another converted liner, the 14,000-ton SS *Jervis Bay,* under Commander Edward Fegen, was escorting Convoy HX-84 from Bermuda to Britain. *Admiral Scheer* found the convoy off the coast of Iceland. Fegen charged at the German ship with her seven 6-inch and three 3-inch guns. *Jervis Bay* was sunk in 20 minutes. Fegen earned a posthumous Victoria Cross. The convoy escaped without loss.

Despite some victories, one factor Raeder could not ignore was that the German surface raiders needed fuel, ammunition, replacement parts, food, and other supplies as they roamed far and wide in their hunt for Allied ships. Tankers and freighters had to be stationed in neutral or friendly ports. The raiders could patrol no farther than a few thousand miles from a support vessel, further limiting their range and effectiveness. Raeder recognized that it would become increasingly difficult for any of his raiders to evade the Royal Navy and patrol aircraft.

The other factor was geographical. Germany has only one coastline in the Baltic and North Seas. The major ports on the two seas are connected by the Kiel Canal, built in 1895 and expanded in 1913 to allow rapid deployment of ships, avoiding the long and often treacherous route around Denmark. But the fact was Germany could not deploy any ships without passing England either via the North Sea or through the English Channel. Raeder began to urge Hitler to invade Norway. This would provide dozens of fjords and harbors far up the North Sea from which to send his ships out to the Atlantic. Hitler, who had always considered the Norwegians to be a racially kindred nation with Germany, and seeing both strategic and tactical advantages to taking Norway, agreed. Raeder's ships and transports were used extensively in the campaign, which began in April 1940.

The heavy cruiser *Admiral Hipper* and four destroyers were escorting 1,700 troops to Trondheim when they were spotted and attacked by the British destroyer HMS *Glowworm. Hipper*'s captain first fired on the *Glowworm* and then attempted to ram, but the British ship turned the tables by ramming the larger ship, tearing a 100-foot rent in the hull. While *Glowworm* later exploded, *Hipper* needed extensive repairs. Another invasion unit consisting of the newly named *Lutzow* and *Hipper*'s sister *Blucher* was accompanied by the light cruiser *Emden,* namesake of the famous raider of World War I. They headed for Oslo, which was guarded by 40-year-old 11-inch guns purchased by the Norwegians from Krupp to defend the city. When the German ships were almost near enough to "see the whites of their eyes," the heavy guns began firing. *Blucher* was so heavily damaged that she was easily finished off with torpedoes. More than 1,000 German seamen went down with her. *Lutzow* was also damaged but escaped. The big German surface ships had not played a major role in the Norwegian campaign.

The Royal Navy sent the carriers HMS *Ark Royal* and HMS *Glorious,* recently arrived from the Mediterranean, to support the defense of Norway. They were to recover the remaining RAF fighters and bombers that were now stranded in Norway. The captain of *Glorious,* a veteran of World War I, failed to have an air patrol watching for any attack as his ship landed the precious fighters and bombers. Then, vectored in by Luftwaffe reconnaissance planes, the battleships *Scharnhorst* and *Gneisenau* raced in and began firing their 16 8-inch guns at the helpless carrier. Even with a smokescreen laid down by the escorting British destroyers, *Glorious* went to the bottom an hour later. This was the only significant warship, other than the battlecruiser HMS *Hood* the following year, to be sunk by German surface raiders.

With the fall of Norway in June 1940, Raeder had his North Sea sanctuaries for the raider fleet. Germany now controlled 3,000 miles of coastline from northern Norway to the Bay of Biscay, 10 times more coastline than before the war.

By the spring of 1941, Raeder was scrutinizing the total number of ships sunk in the first full year of war. *Graf Spee* had sunk 16 ships, totaling 50,000 tons. *Admiral Sheer* did better in the less heavily patrolled Indian Ocean, sinking 17 ships totaling over 113,000 tons before sneaking back to Germany in March 1941. *Scharnhorst* and *Gneisenau* managed to send 122,000 tons of ships to the bottom before being forced to run for a safe base in France.

The totals were not nearly as high as Raeder had promised Hitler.

And things were only going to get worse.

Naval History and Heritage Command

Using radio direction finding (RDF) and brilliant cryptanalysis, the British Admiralty was tracking the raiders with ever-increasing skill. Long-range patrol aircraft, such as the American-built Consolidated PBY Catalina and its Canadian-built counterpart, the Canso, were scouring the Atlantic Ocean over the convoy routes. Added to this must be the work at Bletchley Park, where the German radio traffic was analyzed and distributed to the fleet. The Royal Navy was able to deduce the location and operational orders for Raeder's ships. Every tanker and supply ship that was found and sunk further limited Raeder's ability to find and attack the convoys.

But Raeder's delusion that his few remaining ships could still do what he had envisioned in 1939 refused to die. He sent word to the newly operational *Bismarck* in April 1941, that she and her escort, the heavy cruiser *Prinz Eugen,* should move out of southern Norway and head to the Atlantic. His ultimate plan was to have the two ships join with the newer *Tirpitz* and the sisters *Scharnhorst* and *Gneisenau* to break into the Atlantic and hit the big convoys. His theory was that the two biggest warships could temporarily control and extend into regions of the North Atlantic with their speed and heavy guns. *Bismarck,* being the most dangerous, was to fight and distract the Royal Navy escort ships while the other German raiders sank the helpless merchant ships. But Raeder's grand plan was never to materialize. *Tirpitz* was not yet fully operational, *Scharnhorst* was having her engines overhauled, and *Gneisenau* had been torpedoed in the harbor at Brest, France. All Raeder had left were *Bismarck* and *Prinz Eugen.* No destroyer escorts could accompany them on their sortie as their range was too limited.

Raeder had little choice. The British convoys were carrying the weapons and troops for the invasion of Crete in the Mediterranean. They had to be destroyed or disrupted. This was pure folly on Raeder's part. The Royal Navy was well aware of *Bismarck*'s location and was keeping a close eye on her. Norwegians, resisting their conquerors, reported any movement of German warships and planes to their British allies. Raeder assumed, with some justification in light of *Rawalpindi* and *Jervis Bay,* that the Royal Navy was defending convoys with as few as one warship or converted liner.

Yet the Royal Navy was more than willing to strip protection from other convoys to provide extra firepower to destroy *Bismarck*. In all, the British force consisted of six battleships, four battlecruisers, two carriers, 13 cruisers, 33 destroyers, and dozens of patrol aircraft. This was the largest force ever tasked with the destruction of a single ship.

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ABOVE: The heavy cruiser *Admiral Hipper* engaged the British destroyer *Glowworm* off the Norwegian coast in April 1940. *Glowworm* rammed *Hipper,* causing extensive damage, but was sunk in the unequal fight. OPPOSITE: The heavy cruiser *Lutzow* lies at anchor in a Norwegian fjord in 1942. The warship was originally christened as the *Deutschland,* but its name was changed after the seizure of the American steamer *City of Flint.*

Even without the additional support of three other large warships, *Bismarck* was to sail in mid-May and wreak havoc on the convoys no matter what.

There is little need to detail the chase and sinking of *Bismarck* as it has been covered many times over the years. But it serves as an excellent example of bad planning, bad leadership, and bad judgment by both Raeder and the fleet commander, Admiral Guenther Leutjens, who commanded *Bismarck* and *Prinz Eugen* on their ill-fated attempt to break out to the Atlantic. Leutjens made some very poor decisions that not only sealed *Bismarck*'s fate but condemned nearly his entire crew to death without any hope of success.

By the summer of 1941, *Scharnhorst, Gneisenau, Admiral Scheer,* and *Admiral Hipper* were all being repaired or under constant air attack. They were unable to find a way to escape their French and Baltic Sea prisons. Then there was the last big raider, *Tirpitz.* She was what Raeder called a "fleet in being," a term for a single powerful ship dominating an entire region. That might have had some validity at the start of the war, but by late 1942 it was pure madness. But *Tirpitz*'s fearsome presence did reap some unexpected benefits for Raeder. When the Soviet Union joined the Allied cause, Churchill promised Josef Stalin that he would begin sending convoys carrying vital war material to the Russian arctic ports of Murmansk and Archangel.

By the end of 1941, the first seven of these, designated PQ and JW, made it through to their destinations unscathed, but soon the Kriegsmarine was able to take action. More surface raiders and U-boats were sent to northern Norway, and long-range Focke-Wulf FW-200 Condor planes were sent out to find the convoys. Then the Royal Navy received word that the huge *Tirpitz,* along with the pocket battleship *Admiral Scheer* and the cruiser *Prinz Eugen,* were being sent to Norway. This was ominous news, as they could only have one objective: the Murmansk convoys.

Prinz Eugen was spotted and torpedoed, forcing her into a port for repairs.

In March 1942, *Tirpitz* was sent out to interdict PQ-12, but bad weather made finding the convoy impossible. The battleship returned to the safety of the Norwegian fjord. The Royal Navy conducted several air raids against the ship, but none were able to get close due to heavy antiaircraft fire.

Convoy PQ-17 was assembled in Iceland. It consisted of 35 merchant ships, 22 of which were American. Their cargoes were composed of hundreds of tanks, aircraft, and trucks, as well as fuel, ammunition, and supplies badly needed by

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ABOVE: The crew of the battleship T*irpitz* busily camouflages the warship, which lies at anchor in Flehke Fjord, Norway, in 1942. BELOW: In April 1944 the battleship *Tirpitz* was attacked by British Fairey Barracuda bombers. *Tirpitz* took multiple hits, and 300 crewmen were killed or wounded. Still, the battleship sustained only minor damage to its superstructure. The ship was finally sunk by British bombers in November 1944. OPPOSITE: An Allied merchant ship of the ill-fated Convoy PQ-17 sinks by the bow after being torpedoed by a German U-boat. A large barrage balloon is seen floating above the sinking ship.

the hard-pressed Red Army in its desperate battle to stop the Germans. The escort was six destroyers and a covering force of four cruisers, two British and two American. Several Royal Navy battleships were sent out in case *Tirpitz* emerged from her Norwegian redoubt.

On June 27, PQ-17 set a course into the Arctic Ocean, well aware of the threat that could come from the many fjords and harbors along the enemy coast. The convoy was spotted by a Condor on July 1, and the U-boats closed in to sink two ships. Then the Admiralty received word via Bletchley Park that *Tirpitz* was refueling in a northern Norway port. This could only mean one thing: she was going to attack PQ-17. There was no way for the heavy battleships of the Royal Navy to get there in time to stop a bloodbath. Near panic ensued, and in a series of badly conceived orders, the covering cruiser force was to head west and the convoy was to scatter, each ship to make a run for Murmansk on its own.

The last transmission from the convoy escort commander was, "Sorry to leave you like this. Good luck. Looks like bloody business." Convoy PQ-17 was now at the mercy of Doenitz's U-boats and the Luftwaffe. Day after day they charged in with a savage fury. By the time the remains of PQ-17 reached Murmansk, only 11 of the original 35 ships were left. It was a costly debacle. It was also the German Navy's greatest single victory against an Allied convoy. The truth was, *Tirpitz* was never sent out to the convoy, but merely fueling and shifting its berth. The scattering of PQ-17 served to show how much the Admiralty feared the power of heavy guns on a convoy. Yet neither *Tirpitz* nor any of the other surface raiders fired a single shot at the unprotected ships.

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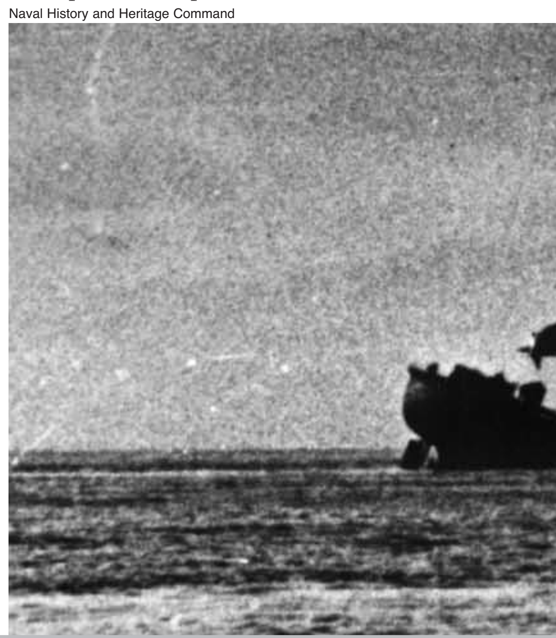


The turning point in the debate over the effectiveness of U-boats versus surface raiders was decided in favor of the former at the end of 1942. Early on, at Hitler's insistence, Raeder had issued standing orders for the raider fleet. It stated that they engage at whatever cost, as long as they did not endanger or lose their ships. Even a casual reading of this order reveals its obvious contradiction. It ultimately led to Raeder's fall from power.

In December 1942, *Hipper, Lutzow,* and six destroyers were sent from Norway to attack convoy JW-51B. The convoy consisted of 15 ships moving through the Arctic Ocean to Kola. The force was heavily escorted by seven destroyers and two light cruisers. Corvettes and air support from Murmansk were at the ready. When the German ships hove into view on December 31, they attacked the outer escort screen, sinking one minesweeper and a destroyer. But it was apparent that many more British warships were coming and further reinforcements had been called in.

The German commander broke off the action. Raeder's order had also made it plain that if the German force was confronted with ships of equal strength they were to disengage. Not one freighter had been sunk. Worse, *Hipper* received three hits from 8-inch shells. The BBC announced the incident, and Adolf Hitler, never one to accept or recognize his culpability, went into a rage and ordered that all the remaining surface raiders be scrapped, their guns turned into coastal fortifications and their crews transferred to the U-boat fleet. In light of how poorly the surface raiders had so far served the Third Reich, this might have been a good tactical move.

Raeder resigned on January 30, 1943. The new grand admiral of the fleet was Karl Dönitz. The U-boats finally had the high command's full support.

As for *Tirpitz,* she remained under heavy air and shore protection in Trondheim throughout much of the war, being subjected to numerous and costly air attacks by Royal Navy torpedo planes and land-based bombers. The only time *Tirpitz,* the last and most powerful battleship in the Kriegsmarine, ever fired her huge guns at the enemy was a shore bombardment of a British weather station on the island of Spitzbergen in September 1943. Fuel shortages prevented her from any further sorties, and the ship spent months sheltered in antiaircraft and antitorpedo defenses.

More Royal Navy torpedo planes and land-based bombers made attacks on *Tirpitz* through the summer and fall of 1944. The end finally came in November 1944, when Lancasters of No. 617 Squadron, the same group that had bombed the Ruhr Valley dams in March 1943, attacked *Tirpitz* with huge 12,000-pound Tallboys. Even though most bombs missed, there were enough hits to assure that the last German battleship would never leave port.

In the end, the mighty *Tirpitz* rolled over and sank in Tromso, Norway. No more surface raiders emerged from the Baltic or North Sea to threaten Allied shipping lanes.

After February 1943, the U-boats were the primary German naval weapon of the war. Altogether U-boats sank 2,779 ships for a total of 14.1 million tons, or 70 percent of all Allied shipping losses in all theaters of the war. The most successful year was 1942, when more than six million tons of shipping were sunk in the Atlantic.

As for the surface raiders, the total tonnage sunk by their guns was just short of 800,000. Considering the expense and the number of men needed to operate them, the results were dismal. The irony is that Raeder, who oversaw all new construction, was undoubtedly aware that for the cost, materials, and manpower of building just one battleship like *Bismarck* the Kriegsmarine could have launched at least 10 U-boats. If he had turned the Navy's efforts to constructing submarines as far back as 1935, there could have been as many as 100 more U-boats manned and in service by 1940.

Churchill had openly stated that the thing that most frightened him during the war was the U-boat menace. Fortunately for the Allies, Raeder followed his own doomed plan. Of all the German surface raiders that put to sea in World War II, only one survived the war. The heavy cruiser *Prinz Eugen,* whose sole claim to fame was accompanying *Bismarck* on part of her death ride, was captured by the Allies and ended up in the Pacific.

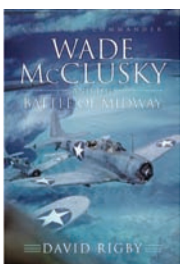
Prinz Eugen was made into a target in the Operation Crossroads atomic bomb tests at Bikini Atoll in July 1946. While *Prinz Eugen* survived the two blasts, the sturdy cruiser was so totally irradiated that she had to be towed to Kwajalein Atoll and left as a derelict. She later turned over and sank. Her stern is still visible today.

This was the final blow to Admiral Erich Raeder's fleet of surface raiders.

Author Mark Carlson has written on numerous topics related to World War II and the history of aviation. His book Flying on Film—A Century of Aviation in the Movies 1912-2012 *was recently released. He resides in San Diego, California.*

Midway Air Hero Remembered

Lieutenant Commander Wade McClusky is the subject of a new biography.



THE CARRIERS WEREN'T THERE. Lieutenant Commander Wade McClusky looked out over the Pacific Ocean from the cockpit of his Douglas SBD Dauntless dive bomber and saw nothing. He was leading two squadrons of dive bombers from the aircraft carrier USS *Enterprise* in search of the Japanese carrier fleet near Midway Atoll, on June 4, 1942. At that point in World War II, the U.S. Navy was hard pressed against Japan's Imperial Navy. The conflict tipped on a knife's edge; the victor in this battle would gain the initiative. That meant McClusky had to find the enemy. With limited fuel, he had to decide where to search next.

Later, many dramatized accounts of the Battle of Midway claimed McClusky guessed when he made the decision to turn north. He stated the decision was a logical one. There were many Consolidated PBY Catalina scout planes in the air west of Midway. McClusky believed if the Japanese fleet were south of his position, he would have gotten word, so the smart move was to search to the north. The American pilots set out to the northwest, beginning a box search for the enemy at 9:35 AM.

Twenty minutes later, the decision paid off. McClusky spotted a Japanese destroyer, *Arashi,* making full steam to the northeast. The ship steamed to rejoin the main Japanese force after remaining behind to depth charge the submarine USS *Nautilus*. Assuming *Arashi* was rejoining its fleet, the Americans followed. At 10:05, McClusky spotted the wakes of the Japanese carriers and their escorts. After confirming they were indeed an enemy force, he made another rational decision. Four carriers sailed below, but the American force lacked enough bombs to guarantee the destruction of all four. Every ship knocked out decreased overall Japanese air power for the fight, so he decided to concentrate on the two nearest carriers, *Kaga* and *Akagi*.

The Japanese lacked radar; as a result, McClusky's force got above them before they were spotted, and by then it was too late. Another force of SBDs from the carrier *Yorktown* also appeared. That enabled the Americans to also successfully attack the carrier *Soryu*. The pilots set up their attacks carefully, and it paid off. Within 10 minutes all three carriers were aflame, secondary explosions erupting from the fuel and bombs on the planes located on both the flight and hangar decks. McClusky's own bombing run—on the Kaga—was a near miss, splashing into the water just alongside. It made no real difference; *Kaga* was already doomed. The first hit on *Kaga* was by Lieutenant Earl Gallaher, who had been present at Pearl Harbor and seen the destruction of the battleship USS *Arizona*. His thought at the time was, "Arizona, I remember you!"

Wade McClusky's attack at Midway was a great success; the fourth carrier, *Hiryu*, was soon attacked and sunk just hours later. Six months of unrelenting Japanese attacks were stopped right there, and their string of successes ended. Imperial Japan was on the defensive for the rest of the war. McClusky would go on to serve throughout that war. An account of his service is here now in this new biography, ***Air Group Commander Wade McClusky and the Battle of Midway*** (David Rigby, Osprey Publishing, Oxford, UK, 2019,

The Japanese carrier *Kaga* is shown under attack at Midway by Navy planes from the USS *Enterprise*, including dive bombers under the command of Lieutenant Commander Wade McClusky (inset).

ADVERTISEMENT

Karen James is a noted journalist and expert in sex and relationships

Ask The Expert | Health, Marriage, and **Love After 50!**

The Amazing Secret Of Older Italian Men And How They Stay So Passionate!

A Secret Any Man Can Use...

This month I got a letter from a reader in Texas about a "little secret" that has renewed her sex life with her husband!

Tina writes: Dear Karen,

For years my husband and I had a wonderful love life, but when he reached his 50s, he lost some of his old spark, especially in the bedroom. He tried every product available, but nothing worked. For the past few years, it's felt like we were roommates, not husband and wife.

Well, last month he came home from a business trip in Europe and shocked me with more energy and passion than he's had in years. He took me in the bedroom like we were newlyweds and gave me a night I'll never forget. It was just incredible, and our love life has been like that ever since. So here we are, closer than ever and enjoying the best sex of our lives… in our 50's!

On his trip, my husband stayed in a hotel room next to an Italian nutritionist and his wife and heard them passionately making love every night. He figured they must be in their twenties, but one morning he encountered them in the hallway and it turns out, they were in their 70s!

Instead of being embarrassed that they'd been found out, they were positively glowing and happy to share their "secret." The man pulled out a small pack from his satchel, gave it to my husband and said ''These tablets come from a small town up north and are made from naturally pure extracts, packed with densely rich sexual nutrients. They will give you back your vigor in the bedroom and you will perform even better than you did as a young man. Then he laughed and said, "You will become an Italian Stallion like me!"

"My husband shocked me with more passion than he's had in years. He took me in the bedroom like we were newlyweds and gave me a night I'll never forget!"

Karen, my husband has been taking one tablet each morning with breakfast, but the pack is almost empty and we both desperately want more. Do you know about these European 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, passionate, and sexually active well into their golden years? For decades, these men have relied on a unique blossom seed extract to enhance their bedroom power and performance.

Milled on the fertile northern plains, and sold under the brand name Provarin, these pure plant extracts have a legendary reputation throughout Europe for naturally fueling extremely hard erections. As Giovanni from Milan put it, "It's like bedroom rocket fuel - especially for us older guys!"

All-natural and safe to take, Provarin is a well-kept secret for those in the know. An old-school, family business, they still harvest product by hand and don't do any advertising. 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 Provarin is surprisingly inexpensive. A spokesman told me they were proud to produce the highest quality product for men and couples. He went on to say that if any of my readers call and mention this article, they'll be offered an additional 50% discount, free priority shipping, and a free bonus pack of 30 tablets!

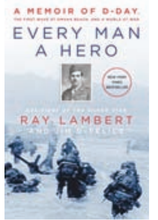
Wow, so there you go, Tina - and the rest of you readers! The offer is only good while supplies last so give them a call today. The number is **1-800-522-1858**.

Aren't you glad you asked?

384 pp., maps, photographs, appendices, bibliography, index, $35.00, hardcover).

McClusky was a humble man, and so he never really exploited his achievement, but his series of decisions that day had far-ranging consequences for the outcome of World War II. Admiral Chester Nimitz later stated that were it not for McClusky's choices the war would have lasted three years longer. He was the right man in the right place at the right time to achieve a decisive result.

For all that, McClusky is still not well known outside of those interested in the war and the Battle of Midway. The author does a creditable job bringing this unassuming flying sailor into the light of public knowledge and well-deserved acclaim. The book covers Midway in great detail, and the author's deep research is evident. There is also a wealth of information on the rest of McClusky's war service as well as his prewar life and naval career. Throughout the book additional facts are used to flesh out the tactics, equipment, and aircraft that made up a naval aviator's world during the war, creating a well-rounded story that gives the reader scope and perspective.



Every Man a Hero: A Memoir of D-Day, the First Wave at Omaha Beach, and a World at War (Ray Lambert and Jim DeFelice, William Morrow Books, New York, 2019, 273 pp., maps, photographs, appendices, notes, bibliography, index, $26.99, hardcover)

Ray Lambert was a medic in the U.S. Army's 16th Infantry Regiment. On June 6, 1944, he was on Omaha Beach in Normandy fighting not only for his own life but those of the many wounded men around him. Ray had been on the beach for a little while when he saw another group of landing craft coming in. He thought it must be the fourth wave by now. Spotting a wounded soldier in the surf, he waded out to help him. The water was about four feet deep; Ray hooked his arm around the man and started to pull him toward the sand. Focused on his task, he didn't see a landing craft that came right up behind him and dropped its ramp on top of the helpless pair of soldiers. Both were pushed under and began to drown. Ray thought, "This is how I'm going to die."

How Ray survived is one of those inexplicable flukes of war, and his answer awaits the reader in this engaging new memoir. The ordeal of Omaha Beach is only one of the harrowing experiences of this combat medic. The book also covers his service in North Africa and Sicily earlier in the war. The narrative is compelling and the prose plain and interesting, making the work enjoyable to read. Ray was helped in creating this book by Jim DeFelice, who also co-authored the best-seller American Sniper. This book is just as extraordinary.

New and Noteworthy

Images of War: The Armour of Rommel's Afrika Korps (Ian Baxter, Pen and Sword Books, 2019, $22.95, softcover) This photobook covers the full range of armored vehicles employed by the Afrika Korps from 1941-1943. Detailed captions and text accompany the photos.

Hellcat vs. Shiden/Shiden-Kai: Pacific Theater 1944-45 (Tony Holmes, Osprey Publishing, 2019, $22.00, softcover) Pilots flying these two fighters, one American and the other Japanese, fought difficult battles in the skies over Formosa, the Philippines, and the Japanese homeland during the war's final months.

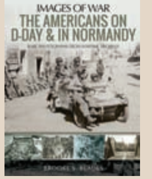
The Solomons 1943-44: The Struggle for New Georgia and Bougainville (Mark Stille, Osprey Publishing, 2019, $24.00, softcover) This detailed book tells of the Allied advance up the Solomon Islands chain aimed at isolating the Japanese fortress of Rabaul. It was a difficult campaign but vital to victory in the Pacific.

The Battle for the Cotentin Peninsula 9-19 June 1944 (Georges Bernage, Pen and Sword Books, 2018, $32.95, hardcover) This battle was a key to the advance off the Normandy beachhead and involved stiff combat. The book also acts as a field guide for tourists.

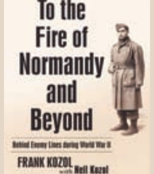
Images of War: M7 Priest (David Doyle, Pen and Sword Books, 2019, $24.95, softcover) The photobook focuses on the M-7 105mm self-propelled howitzer, nicknamed the "Priest." It was one of the most successful Allied artillery vehicles and served into the 1970s.

Hotchkiss H35 and H39: Through a German Lens (Alan Ranger, MMP Books, 2018, $25.00, softcover) This Polish import edition studies captured French tanks as used by the Wehrmacht. It is primarily a photo book but also contains interesting text on its subject.

Appeasement: Chamberlain, Hitler, Churchill and the Road to War (Tim Bouverie, Tim Duggan Books, 2019, $30.00, hardcover) Many believe World War II became inevitable due to appeasement of Hitler by the West. This book chronicles in great detail the case for that belief in England before the war.



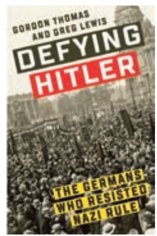
Images of War: The Americans on D-Day & in Normandy (Brooke S. Blades, Pen and Sword Books, 2019, $28.95, softcover) Photographs of D-Day are well known, but this book goes farther by displaying the fascinating imagery of the fighting once it went inland. Detailed text accompanies the illustrations.



To the Fire of Normandy and Beyond: Behind Enemy Lines During World War II (Frank Kozol with Neil Kozol, Archway Publishing, 2018, $33.99, softcover) Frank Kozol was an American soldier attached to the French Resistance during World War II. This interesting memoir highlights his experiences.

Sudden Courage: Youth in France Confront the Germans, 1940-1945 (Ronald C. Rosbottom, HarperCollins, 2019, $27.99, hardcover) When France fell to the Germans in 1940, French youth began resistance movements across many facets of daily life, from the underground to student protests. This book summarizes that unknown war.

Defying Hitler: The Germans Who Resisted Nazi Rule (Gordon Thomas and Greg Lewis, Dutton Caliber Press, New York, 2019, 542 pp., photographs, bibliography, notes, index, $30.00, hardcover)



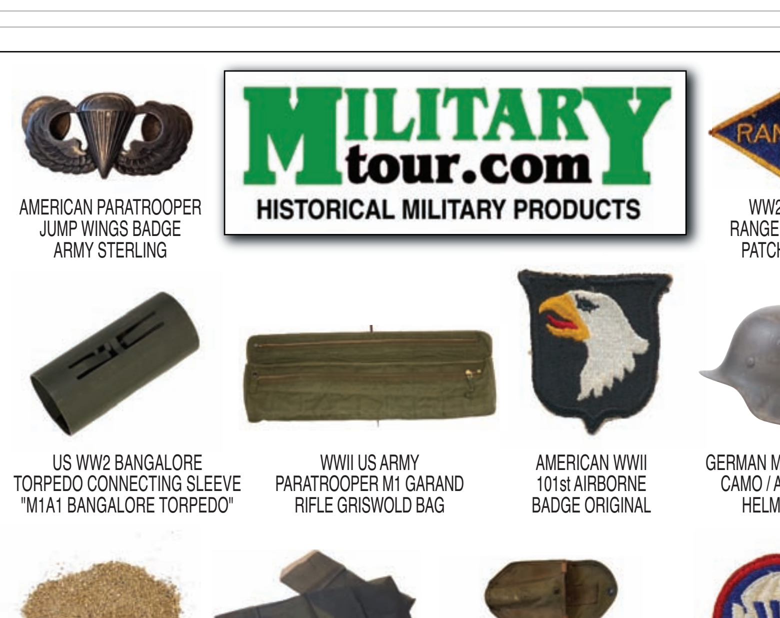
From the time it came to power, the Nazi party embarked on a systematic campaign of repression, brutality, and domination. Anyone who resisted was ruthlessly crushed underfoot, threatened, arrested, imprisoned, or executed. Fighting back carried the most extreme risk, yet a few did, doing what they could to challenge the regime. Would-be assassin Klaus von Stauffenberg is well known, as are Hans and Sophie Stoll, who founded the White Rose resistance group in Munich. Kurt Gerstein joined the SS to document their crimes, but to his horror he became an accomplice to the Holocaust. Hans Oster was a senior member of German counterintelligence who plotted several coups and assassination attempts. Fritz Kolb, a German diplomat, became a spy for the United States, smuggling documents by strapping them to his body.

This is the story of unsung German citizens who risked—and often lost—their lives resisting the Third Reich. It disputes the lie that all Germans were loyal servants of the Reich while simultaneously explaining how the Nazis kept the general population obedient and fighting for them through utter terror and persecution. The author vividly portrays both the heroism of the resistors and the price they paid for doing so. The book is a dramatic tribute to them.

Greece 1941: The Death Throes of Blitzkrieg (Jeffrey Plowman, Pen and Sword Books, South Yorkshire, UK, 2018,225 pp., maps, photographs, appendices, notes, bibliography, index, $34.95, hardcover)

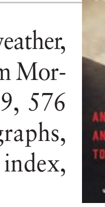
Until the spring of 1941, Nazi Germany had experienced almost complete success in its conquests. Western Europe was under its heel along with Scandinavia, Switzerland and Spain were officially neutral, though Spanish fascists would soon join the German cause in the coming march to the east. Greece was a thorn in the side of the Third Reich, one which had to be removed before the showdown with the Soviet Union. Greece was allied with Great Britain, which sent troops to assist in its defense. In the end, Greece fell, but only after a spirited resistance by Greek, British, and Commonwealth troops left the Germans bloodied and behind schedule for their appointment on the Eastern Front.

The argument in this new work posits that the Germans did not take Greece as easily as is



commonly thought. At no time did the invaders gain a decisive edge over the Allied forces. The author states there were weaknesses in the German blitzkrieg tactics that the British were able to exploit. This is a point of view that will be seen skeptically by many, but the author makes a convincing case for his opinion; this makes the book an enjoyable read with a refreshing viewpoint on the blitzkrieg method of warfare.

The Volunteer: One Man, an Underground Army, and the Secret Mission to Destroy Auschwitz (Jack Fairweather, Custom House/William Morrow, New York, 2019, 576 pp., maps, photographs, notes, bibliography, index, $28.99, hardcover)



Witold Pilecki was a Polish resistance fighter, struggling to survive in a nation under Nazi

Simulation Gaming

BY JOSEPH LUSTER

A CLASSIC RETURNS IN *COMMANDOS 2 HD REMASTER* AND THE DEFINITIVE VERSION OF *SUDDEN STRIKE 4* SWOOPS INTO VIEW.

COMMANDOS 2 HD

PUBLISHER KALYPSO MEDIA
GENRE REAL-TIME STRATEGY
PLATFORM PS4, XBOX ONE, PC, MAC, LINUX, iPAD, ANDROID
AVAILABLE Q4 2019

Fans who have been into real-time strategy games for a while likely recall *Commandos 2: Men of Courage,* which first touched down on PC back in 2001, followed by PlayStation 2 and Xbox in 2002 and Mac OS X in 2005. With a nearly 20-year history behind it, it's safe to say this one is well overdue for a remastered release, and that's precisely what fans are getting in *Commandos 2 HD Remaster.*

Hot on the heels of the original *Commandos,* the Pyro Studios-developed sequel once again had players stepping into the battle-ready boots of an allied officer in World War II. Gameplay was and remains all about directing a group of commandos with a variety of unique skills, knowing when to use which unit and finding new commandos along the way through various circumstances. Some might be scattered about a specific map, for instance, while others need to be rescued from imprisonment before you can add them to your squad.

Commandos 2 introduced some new features to create a more immersive RTS experience, including the ability to take on different types of enemies—from Gestapo soldiers to the wild animals that can be found in each location—and explore underwater and interior environments. New equipment was also introduced, and fresh strategies abound thanks to expanded body hiding possibilities and improved surveillance techniques.

In addition to the beefed-up high-def visuals, *Commandos 2 HD Remaster* will offer up a new tutorial, reworked controls, and an improved user interface while keeping the classic gameplay intact. At the time of this writing, this slick return to RTS form is due out for PlayStation 4, Xbox One, Switch, PC, Mac, Linux, iPad and Android tablets in the fourth quarter of 2019.

SUDDEN STRIKE 4: COMPLETE COLLECTION

PUBLISHER KALYPSO MEDIA
GENRE REAL-TIME STRATEGY
PLATFORM PS4, XBOX
AVAILABLE NOW

It's clear that RTS fans have been good so far this year, because Kalypso Media recently brought another fan

TABLETOP TACTICS

MEMOIR '44

PUBLISHER DAYS OF WINDER • **GENRE** TACTICAL BOARD GAME • **PLATFORM** REAL LIFE • **AVAILABLE** NOW

It's not often that we get to talk about classic World War II board games, but we would be remiss not to recommend diving into *Memoir '44* in the advent of the most recent update. The Richard Borg designed game has been kicking around on tabletops since Days of Wonder published it back in 2004, letting a range of two to eight players (in Overlord scenarios for the latter, at least) get in on the light and breezy tactics at its core.

While it's not exactly the first time for aircraft to be available in any form, the New Flight Plan expansion introduces a bunch of exciting and varied plastic aircraft to create a more tangible focus on aerial combat and strategies. Deploying aircraft and bombing your opponents has never been a more noteworthy feature now that you actually have to execute these actions yourself. It really opens up sessions for more surprises, whether you're a longtime player or this happens to be your first time setting up a scenario.

Each player can deploy one aircraft at a time, and there are a few different types to consider when planning your next moves. Basic Fighters are good at shooting down enemy aircraft and scouting, while Fighter-Bombers provide a solid mix of aerial and air-to-ground action. Rounding out the options are Strategic Bombers, which are all about scorching the earth and dealing heavy

occupation. In the summer of 1940, he was given a strange new mission. Thousands of people were being interned at a new concentration camp named Auschwitz. His task was to discover what the Nazis were doing there and stage an uprising. He managed to get to the camp and soon discovered the full horror of what the Germans were doing. Over the next two and a half

favorite out again in a brand new package. It's been just two years since *Sudden Strike 4* first ventured into the European theater of World War II, and now it's available with all the subsequent add-ons in the form of *Sudden Strike 4: Complete Collection*.

Those who have been following the game since 2017 know that "complete" signifier means this is a pretty loaded package. *Complete Collection* packs in the original *Sudden Strike 4* base game along with five previously released pieces of downloadable content: Battle of Kursk, Road to Dunkirk, Finland—Winter Storm, Africa—Desert War, and the Pacific War. The single player content of the base game alone consists of over 20 missions across three campaigns—German, Allied, and Soviet—and the DLC balloons that to an impressive 45+ missions with over 200 different units to play around with.

Sudden Strike 4: Complete Collection also contains all the free content updates that have arrived since the initial launch, so look forward to the latest gameplay refinements and all the additional maps that made their way into the game over the course of the past two years. If you've been playing *Sudden Strike 4* this whole time you won't find any real surprises here, but it's the perfect package for anyone who's been looking to get into this entry in the most comprehensive way possible.

damage to opponents. Naturally, there are fighters that are unique to each of the five factions, from the Americans' Corsair and Mustang to devastating Lancaster and B-17 models that are almost as impressive on the board as they are in the annals of history.

Included with the expansion are 16 unpainted airplane miniatures, 30 Air Combat cards, 15 Nation Markers for the planes, 12 Bomb Markers, 8 Reference Cards, 18 Machine Gun Markers, a rule booklet and a booklet with 21 new scenarios. The airplane miniatures alone add so much to an already robust board game, so consider this add-on for your next big WWII-themed game night.

NAZI GERMAN COINS & CURRENCY

LAST SILVER COIN OF NAZI GERMANY

The infamous eagle and swastika are featured on this silver 2 Reichsmark coins of Nazi Germany. Paul von Hindenburg, the man who handed Germany over to Hitler is on the front. The coin is about the size of a quarter and contains .1604 troy ounces of silver. It was struck only 4 years, from 1936 to1939

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HITLER YOUTH ON NAZI 5 REICHSMARK BANKNOTE

A Hitler youth and Nazi Eagle and Swastika are featured on the front of this 1942 German 5 Reichsmark banknote. The note was needed because the silver 5 Reichmark coin had disappears from circulation due to the War. The back depicts the Brunswick Cathedral, a female farmer and a male worker.

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FIRST BANKNOTE OF NAZI GERMANY

This 50 Reichsmark was the first note of Nazi Germany. It is dated March 30, 1933, one week after Hitler took over. It continued to be issued until 1945, always with the same date. It features the portrait and watermark of Prussian politician and banker David Hansemann. The back features a portrait of Mercury and two small children.

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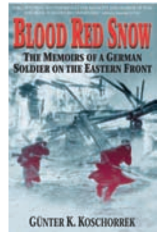
years, Witold created an underground movement that gathered evidence of the Holocaust and smuggled it to the Western Allies. His reports were vital to the Allied response to the slaughter the Nazis were committing.

After the war the newly communist government of Poland essentially removed Witold from their records, erasing him from history. A mixture of newly declassified files, uncovered diaries, and accounts from camp survivors allowed the author to reveal Witold Pilecki's story to the world. It is a dramatic story that reads almost as a novel, thanks to its in-depth research and flowing prose. The depravity of the Nazi regime is juxtaposed with the humanity and courage of Witold and his companions.

Sink the Tirpitz 1942-44: The RAF and Fleet Air Arm Duel with Germany's Mighty Battleship (Angus Konstam, Osprey Publishing, Oxford, UK, 2019, 96 pp., maps, photographs, bibliography, index, $20.00, softcover)

The arctic convoys were considered vital for keeping the Soviet Union in the war. Those supplies helped keep the Red Army engaged in holding down the bulk of the Nazi military. Any threat to these convoys required a response, so when the German battleship *Tirpitz* arrived at her new base in Norway in January 1942, Great Britain made destroying the ship a priority. It was a daunting task; *Tirpitz* was hiding in a steep-sided fjord, protected by antiaircraft guns, torpedo nets, and smoke generators. There were many unsuccessful attacks until finally the great ship was sunk in November 1944 by the raids using Tallboy bombs, finishing *Tirpitz* for good.

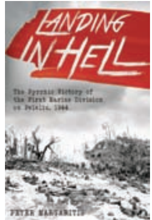
Osprey's Air Campaign series focuses on the greatest air actions of history; this work continues the publisher's tradition of providing a full and detailed yet concise edition complete with maps, original artwork, and a handsome layout of images and photographs. The author shows how the hunt for the *Tirpitz* evolved over several years just as British tactics adapted to those new conditions. It effectively explains how in the end a few bombs at the right place and time changed the course of the war.



Blood Red Snow: The Memoirs of a German Soldier on the Eastern Front (Gunter K. Koschorrek, Frontline Books, Yorkshire, UK, 2018, 318 pp., maps, photographs, softcover)

On November 13, 1942, Gunter Korschorrek had his first taste of the "Stalinorgel" ("Stalin's Organs"). He heard an intense rushing noise, and a medic shouted to jump out of the truck they were in. They took cover under an old tractor. The rockets crashed to the earth like fireworks. Gunter saw a piece of shrapnel the size of his hand hit the ground next to another soldier. It was terrifying, and then it was over. While the wounded screamed for help, Gunter's unit moved on; tracer fire raced through the air, and grenades exploded nearby. They went past a pair of burned-out Soviet T34 tanks and arrived at a factory building. Gunter and his comrades had arrived in Stalingrad. He went on to fight throughout the war on several fronts.

The author wrote this fascinating memoir on any scrap of paper he could find, despite orders that no diaries were to be kept. When he infrequently received leave to go home, Gunter left these fragments with his mother to hide and preserve them. At some point they were lost, but then miraculously rediscovered 40 years later when Gunter was reunited with his daughter in the United States. He published his story as a way to honor those who died during the war.



Landing in Hell: The Pyrrhic Victory of the First Marine Division on Peleliu, 1944 (Peter Margaritis, Casemate Publishing, Havertown, PA, 2019, 225 pp., maps, photographs, bibliography, index, $32.95, hardcover)

American leaders saw the invasion of the island of Peleliu as a necessary step toward the liberation of the Philippines. They expected it to be a fairly easy, quick operation against an unprepared, weak Japanese force. They were completely wrong. The fighting lasted two and a half months against an enemy who bitterly resisted the American attack and held out in the island's rough terrain, inflicting and receiving terrible casualties. The 1st Marine Division's rifle regiments all suffered over 50 percent casualties during the ordeal, and the unit needed six months afterward to rebuild. Later, some argued the island could have been bypassed and isolated, foregoing any landing at all.

This new book looks at the Peleliu fighting with a wide and encompassing perspective, from the presidential meeting to decide whether to mount the operation down to the Marines on the ground. The author also delves into the controversies surrounding the battle and the conditions that contributed to the problems the Americans encountered.

British Destroyer vs. German Destroyer: Narvik 1940 (David Greentree and David Campbell, Osprey Publishing, Oxford, UK, 2019, 80 pp., maps, photographs, bibliography, index, $20.00, softcover)

The German surface fleet began the war actively with commerce raiding and the support of operations in northern Europe. The Reich's destroyer fleet was very active during the invasion of Norway, and the British Royal Navy responded. British flotillas acted with courage and daring, taking the fight to the Germans, who were busily landing troops along the Norwegian coastline and supporting their seizure of vital towns and ports. It was a daunting task; foul weather and the treacherous terrain of the fjords meant attacks could be risky. By month's end the German destroyer fleet had been greatly reduced, and this had effects on its future operations.

This 88th book in the Duel series presents the fight between British and German destroyers with original artwork, excellent maps, and extensive illustrations. The authors cover the prewar developments in both navies along with their tactics, leadership, and the impact of the actions in Norway during April 1940.

The War with Hitler's Navy (Adrian Stewart, Pen and Sword Books, South Yorkshire, UK, 2018, 224 pp., maps, photographs, notes, bibliography, index, $34.95, hardcover)

By his own admission, the only thing that ever truly worried Winston Churchill during World War II was the U-boat threat. Germany's aggressive campaign was combined with daring submariners to produce a true menace to England's ability to continue the war. It took an extensive combined effort from the Allies to thwart the U-boats. Concurrently, Hitler was actually unwilling to risk his expensive and capable capital ships, which the Royal Navy attacked aggressively whenever the Germans dared deploy them. Several were lost or damaged early in the war, and as a result, others spent the rest of the war in port or hiding.

The author takes a wide-ranging view of the fight against the German Navy in World War II. Chapters are devoted to both the surface and submarine forces, giving details of the engagements with clear writing and useful detail. He also provides interesting analysis of the fighting and why it turned out the way it did. □

Eagle Squadrons

Continued from page 61

At least the Eagles would not have to adjust to new fighters. When they transferred to the Eighth Air Force, they would be taking their beloved Spitfires with them. This made the former Eagles a happy group of pilots. As far as they were concerned, there was no American fighter that could hope to compete with the Spitfire, not to mention the Messerschmitt Me-109 or the FW-190. The Fourth Fighter Group would be equipped with Spitfire Mark Vs, courtesy of the Royal Air Force. The British referred to this as "reverse Lend-Lease." Only the national insignia would be changed; the white U.S. star inside a blue disc would be painted over the red, white, and blue RAF roundel.

The fact that American pilots preferred the Spitfire to an American fighter produced no small amount of embarrassment back in the United States. An American pilot was quoted in New York's *Herald Tribune* as declaring that he was "glad they had Spitfires instead of P-40s and Airacobras." The story was repeated in *Time* magazine, where it received national circulation and also caused faces to turn red from coast to coast. No one in the War Department wanted to hear that any foreign airplane was better than anything made in the USA, even if it happened to be true.

The Fourth was reequipped with the Republic P-47 Thunderbolt in the early part of 1943 and would be reequipped again with the North American P-51 Mustang in February 1944. The former Eagles were the first to convert to the Mustang, which is generally regarded as one of the outstanding fighters of the war. With the P-51, the Fourth dramatically increased its total of enemy aircraft destroyed. During March and April 1944, the group destroyed 189 German aircraft in the air and another 134 on the ground. This earned the Fourth a Presidential Unit Citation, the highest award that any American unit could receive.

By the end of the war, the Fourth Fighter Group's final score was 583½ enemy aircraft destroyed in the air and another 469 on the ground, for a total of 1,052½. This made the Fourth the top-scoring American unit in the European Theater of Operations. Hubert Zemke's 56th Fighter Group, the Fourth's main challenger for the highest number of confirmed enemy victories, destroyed fewer enemy planes—985. But its members are quick to point out that the 56th destroyed more planes in the air, in actual combat—a total of 674½—than the Fourth.

At the "handing over" ceremony in September 1942, Sir Sholto Douglas ended his presentation with, "Good-bye and thank you, Eagle Squadrons of the Royal Air Force. And good hunting to you, Eagle Squadrons of the United States Air Force."

In 1940, when 71 Squadron was being formed, the American volunteers who had come to England and joined the RAF had actually violated the U.S. Neutrality Acts. Every one of them had broken the law; some had lost their American citizenship. Just a little over two years later, and eight months after Pearl Harbor, all of this was conveniently overlooked. The Eagles, along with their "operational experience," were officially welcomed into the U.S. Army Air Forces by one of its commanding generals. James Goodson pointed out, "When the U.S. entered the war, they desperately needed experienced Air Crew, so they did everything they could to facilitate our transfer, including restoring U.S. citizenship if it had been lost."

Forty-four years after the Eagles transferred to the American forces, a permanent memorial was dedicated to all those who flew with the all-American squadrons—a granite obelisk inscribed with the names of the pilots of 71, 121, and 133 Squadrons and topped by an American eagle. Appropriately, the memorial is installed in Grosvenor Square, London's most American place, which has been the site of the U.S. Embassy ever since the 13 original colonies won their independence from Great Britain.

After all the speeches had been given and all the fanfares had been played, the Stars and Stripes was raised alongside the RAF's blue battle duster and the band played "The Star-Spangled Banner." The transfer ceremony was finally over; the pilots were dismissed. "The Squadron then marched from the parade ground as No. 335 (USA) Squadron, under the command of Major W.J. Daley, DFC. (Formerly Flight Lieutenant Daley.)" This was the last entry in 121 Squadron's logbook. The other two squadrons marched off the field along with Major Daley and his pilots.

"Swinging their arms straight from the shoulders with their heads held high," wrote the biographer of 71 Squadron, "the Eagles passed smartly in review, and passed out of the Royal Air Force." A British writer summed up the transfer ceremony in a different way: thus ended the "riotous, semi-independent career" of the American Eagle Squadrons.

David A. Johnson has written for WWII History *on a variety of topics. He is also the author of numerous books on subjects ranging from the Civil War to World War II. He resides in Union, New Jersey.*

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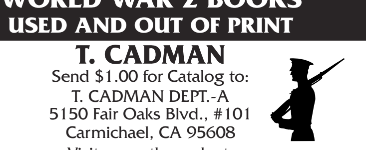

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Meiktila

Continued from page 77

18th Division on March 21, and then pushed on to capture Kyaukse, a supply center for the Burma Area Army. The 15th Army was beginning to crumble.

At Meiktila, Cowan ordered the 99th Brigade to defend the town and its airfield, while he sent out columns of tanks, infantry, and artillery backed by air support to disrupt the Japanese forces massing to attack his troops. For nearly a week, the columns inflicted heavy casualties on the Japanese and destroyed a number of their guns.

Unable to open a route into Meiktila, the 18th Division now concentrated on the main airfield intending to stop the flow of supplies and starve out the defenders. On the night of March 14, Japanese forces began probing the 99th Brigade defense of the airfield and were beaten back. The next day Japanese artillery began shelling the airfield as the 9th Indian Brigade of the 5th Division was being flown in to reinforce Cowan. While enemy shells were slamming into the airstrip, C-47 transport aircraft were landing. One British soldier recalled the American crew telling him, "We're not stopping, we'll land and taxi along, and as we taxi, you lot jump out. As soon as you're out, we'll take off again."

Not long after the arrival of the 9th Brigade, the Japanese shelling of the airfield caused Cowan to order it closed. He then relied on air drops to keep his men partially supplied. In hopes of reversing the situation at Meiktila, Kimura gave the 33rd Army commander, Lt. Gen. Masaki Honda, command of the 18th, 49th, and 53rd Divisions effective March 18. He also ordered the 28th Army to smash the bridgehead at Nyaungu.

Despite suffering personal loss with the death of his son in the fighting at Mandalay, Cowan kept up a steady aggressive defense of Meiktila, sending out columns to clear the nearby villages. With the 9th Brigade taking over the defense of the airfield, the 99th Brigade sent out a column to sweep the villages of Kandaingbauk and Shawbyugan north of Meiktila. The 18th Division was expecting such a move and brought up antitank guns along with three 75mm field artillery pieces and three 75 mm mountain guns to greet the British. The 119th Infantry Regiment was also sent in to reinforce the 55th Infantry Regiment in the area.

The 1st Sikh Light Infantry attacking Kandaingbauk was driven back with heavy casualties, while tanks attempting to attack Shawbyugan had one brewed up and two more knocked out as they moved into the village. A fourth tank became stuck and had to be abandoned. The column withdrew.

While the 18th Division launched heavy attacks against the main airfield, the 49th Division prepared to attack from the southeast against Meiktila. Direct radio contact between the 49th and 18th Divisions was nonexistent, which caused serious problems in coordinating attacks against the British in Meiktila.

Believing the 18th Division controlled the airfield, the 106th Infantry Regiment of the 49th Division launched a heavy attack against the 48th Brigade at Meiktila on the night of March 22. In the bloody fighting, the Japanese pushed up two 75mm guns to the southeast corner of the brigade's perimeter wire, but to no avail. The attack was broken with almost 200 Japanese killed.

Fighting continued to rage at the airfield. On March 24, the Japanese launched a heavy night attack with infantry and tanks against the 9th Brigade. The assault was beaten back with heavy casualties. The Japanese attacks against the airfield and Meiktila ended in failure. Cowan now began to clear the area and surrounding villages of the enemy.

By that time, it was clear to Honda that he could not continue to fight with the 18th Division, which had lost a third of its troops as casualties. The 49th Division had lost two-thirds of its strength. To the west, the 28th Army had failed in its attempt to smash the bridgehead at Nyaungu. By the end of March, the British 7th Division had cleared a route to Meiktila.

With the 15th Army smashed, its divisions down to less than half strength, most of their guns and trucks lost, and their supply line cut, Kimura ordered his broken forces to retreat south to Toungoo, where he hoped to reorganize and hold southern Burma until the monsoons came. On March 28, Honda and his depleted force were ordered to Pywabe, where they could cover the 15th Army retreat.

Slim wasted no time in pursuing the battered enemy. With the capture of central Burma, Slim pushed south toward Rangoon, hoping to beat the monsoons. The Japanese were unable to stop the 14th Army, but the heavy rains did. The monsoons came two weeks early, slowing the 14th Army down near Prome, about 150 miles north of Rangoon.

Rangoon was captured in early May during a combined airborne and amphibious operation. Although the Japanese retreated to eastern Burma where they would continue to resist until mid-August, their hold on the country had been smashed by Slim between the hammer and the anvil at Mandalay and Meiktila. □

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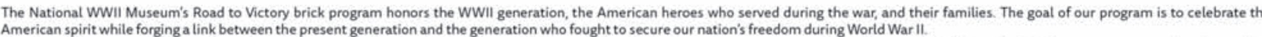
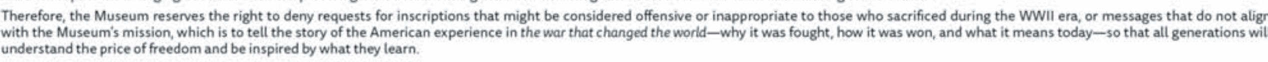


The National WWII Museum's Road to Victory brick program honors the WWII generation, the American heroes who served during the war, and their families. The goal of our program is to celebrate the American spirit while forging a link between the present generation and the generation who fought to secure our nation's freedom during World War II.



Therefore, the Museum reserves the right to deny requests for inscriptions that might be considered offensive or inappropriate to those who sacrificed during the WWII era, or messages that do not align with the Museum's mission, which is to tell the story of the American experience in *the war that changed the world*—why it was fought, how it was won, and what it means today—so that all generations will understand the price of freedom and be inspired by what they learn.

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