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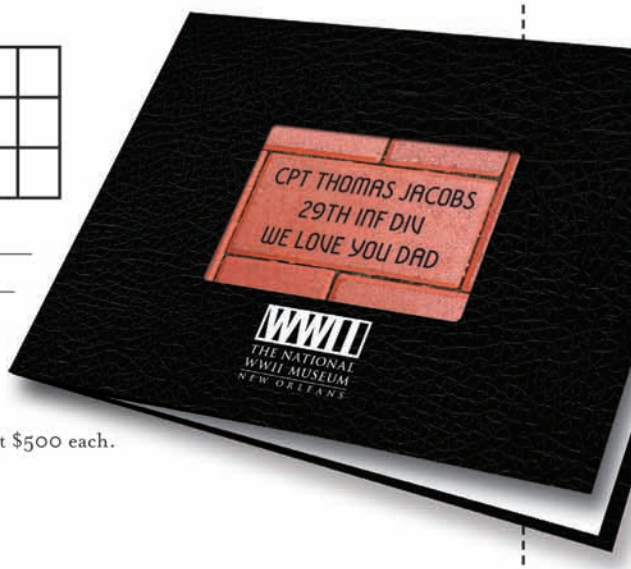

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Cover: Private Jesse K. Fennell of the 101st Airborne Division, and his dog, "Dud," return from two months of fighting in the Netherlands during Operation Market Garden. See story page 54. Photograph: National Archives.

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Editorial

A quiet hero of British Intelligence remained unknown for too long.

MANY TIMES IN WAR OTHERWISE OBSCURE INDIVIDUALS ARE CALLED UPON TO take extreme risks in service to their country, and more often than any casual observer may ever know, the heroic deeds of these individuals remain in the shadows, forgotten footnotes or even totally lost due to the passage of time and the continuing sweep of history.

Once in a while, however, the story of a "quiet" hero comes to light. Such is the case with Eric Arthur Roberts, a British bank clerk whose service during World War II became public only last October with the release of previously classified files by his country's National Archives in London. According to an Associated Press report, Roberts was a good, although not exceptional, employee of Westminster Bank when he was approached by Security Services in 1940. On the surface, there appeared to be no real reason for Roberts to be identified as a potential player in the web of espionage that existed in London during the dark days of the war with Nazi Germany. He was conversant in several languages, but knew only a little German and had been to Germany only twice before the war.

Nevertheless, his boss agreed to assist the government, and Roberts disappeared for a while. When he returned he had taken on the persona of Jack King, a supposed Gestapo agent who was working under deep cover in London. King was asked to make contact with suspected German sympathizers who sought to pass intelligence information to the Nazis and convince these turncoats that he was a Gestapo agent. As King gained their confidence, assuring them that he would pass their information along to Berlin, he would then turn the potentially damaging information over to British authorities.

"He was infiltrating a network, putting himself forward as the middle man in German Intelligence," explained Stephen Twigge, a historian with the National Archives, during an interview with the Associated Press. "He managed to flush them out and put a brake on their activities."

In one instance, a naturalized British citizen named Hans Kohout attempted to pass sensitive information to the Germans that could have compromised the air defenses of major British cities, increasing the devastation and loss of life wrought by the Luftwaffe during its infamous raids. When Roberts, aka King, gained Kohout's trust and took the information from him countless lives were saved.

On another occasion, a woman identified as Nancy Brown, who frequented the vulnerable area around Brighton on the southern coast of Britain, gave sensitive information to King with the belief that it would find its way into German hands. Her effort came to naught because of the unassuming British operative, who remained perplexed at the behavior, writing, "The fact that the items of information volunteered might have resulted in the deaths of many people counted for nothing."

Twigge credits King with a significant contribution to British domestic counterespionage efforts during the war, and the quantity of files released with King's seems to indicate a greater number of Nazi sympathizers in Great Britain willing to pass secret information to the Nazis than first thought. "It was a brave undertaking, mixing with fascists, pretending to be someone you weren't," the archivist concluded. "It was dangerous work that could have gone wrong."

Although the release of Roberts's file after more than 70 years affords the opportunity to acknowledge this unsung hero of World War II, some tantalizing questions remain. How did he do it? The file contains little hard information on his methods and activities. And further, how many others like him served their country and the Allied cause, hardly expecting any acclaim or recognition in their quiet yet daring and audacious enterprise? A tip of the cap to Eric Arthur Roberts.

Michael E. Haskew

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By Matt Broggie

National Archives

Iwo Jima Eyewitness

A 21-year-old naval ensign experienced training and combat in the Pacific.

"THERE'S NO GREATER FEELING IN THE WORLD THAN SEEING OLD GLORY IN A winning position." Twenty-one-year-old U.S. Navy Ensign Joseph Bale watched the American flag raising on Iwo Jima's Mount Suribachi from aboard the attack transport USS *Dickens County Texas*.

As boat group leader of the third wave of U.S. Marines assaulting Iwo' s Green Beach, Bale's role in the invasion was completed within its initial hour. Bale, along with every American sailor and Marine who saw the flag flapping in the wind, assumed the battle would soon be over. The invasion of Iwo Jima had been under way for four days, and the troops felt victory was already overdue. Bale would be surprised to learn the battle would last for 32 more arduous days.

Born and raised in Detroit, Michigan, Joseph Bale enlisted in the Navy at the age of 18. He became part of the V12 program at Central Michigan College and was chosen as one of 10 students for midshipman' s school at Colombia University in New York. The school instilled strict military discipline through marching, drilling, calisthenics, seamanship training, ordnance, and bookwork. "It was the toughest thing I've ever been through," Bale recalls. Fortunately, he was intelligent and athletic and graduated as one of 600 out of an original 1,600 students. He was commissioned a naval ensign.

One of his most memorable moments of midshipman's school was his exit physical. Bale had poor vision in his right eye but managed to pass all prior eye exams by literally memorizing each chart according to a large number printed on it.

Just prior to the eye exam a doctor listened to his heart and said, "You're going a mile a minute! What's going on?" Bale told him, "I'm a little afraid of that eye exam."

The doctor said, "Well I can't clear you now, come back after the eye exam."

"I then proceeded to the eye exam line, forlorn and down-hearted," Bale remembers. As he was nearing the testing area, Bale whispered to the sailor in front of him, "What's the number on that eye chart?"

The sailor turned around and said, "Where do you see the eye chart?"

Bale laughed, "He couldn't even see the eye chart!"

As the moment arrived, Bale strained to make out the letters or even the chart number but was unable to do either. So recalling the list of eye charts he had memorized, he picked one and blurted out, "A,E,L,T,Y,P,H,E,A,L,T." Today Bale still recites it in rapid succession.

Ron Bale

TOP: U.S. Marines keep low aboard their landing craft as they approach the beaches of Iwo Jima. ABOVE: Ensign Joseph Bale was a U.S. Navy officer charged with delivering Marines to Iwo Jima aboard his LCVP.

The doctor grinned and told him, "Okay, go ahead."

As Bale walked passed the eye chart, he looked at the line and realized he was completely wrong. The doctor passed him despite failing the exam. Years later, he proudly proclaimed, "And that, my dear friends, is how I got to be a naval officer."

After graduation, Bale was sent to the amphibious training base in Coronado, California. For the 19-year-old kid from Detroit the oceanside environment was a

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He nicknamed the watch *Ritorno* for homecoming, and the rare heirloom is now valued at $42,000 according to *The Complete Guide to Watches*. But to our family, it is just a reminder that nothing is more beautiful than the smile of a healthy returning GI.

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National Archives

Marine LVTs (Landing Vehicle, Tank) churn the water off Iwo Jima and await orders to head toward the invasion beaches. The LVTs were thinly armored and armed with machine guns to provide fire support for troops fighting their way off an invasion beach.

pleasant change. "It is a gorgeous piece of land," he said.

Bale began to train for beach invasions. "The boats we trained in were landing boats. We would land on the beach and then retract back into the water," he said. The sailors trained with multiple types of landing craft and received training on the gyroscope compass, which is favored in ocean navigation because of its ability to find true north as opposed to magnetic north.

One day while Bale was guarding the base's front gate, he was overwhelmed by the arrival of two visitors in a black limousine. President Franklin D. Roosevelt and First Lady Eleanor Roosevelt had come to witness the amphibious training and visit their son, James, a founder of the Navy's frogman program.

The visit from the president and first lady was kept a complete secret. "They didn't even let the junior officer on the gate know the president of the United States was coming in! I'm just a kid going berserk not knowing what the heck to do," remembered Bale.

From Coronado, Bale went to the Navy port in Portland, Oregon, and was officially assigned to the USS *Dickens County Texas*. The *Dickens* was a 455-foot troop carrier ship called an APA (Auxiliary Personnel Assault). APA ships could carry approximately 26 landing craft or other small boats. Across the dock from the *Dickens* was the escort carrier USS *Bismarck Sea*.

Bale still vividly remembers the fate of the *Bismarck Sea,* sunk by Japanese kamikaze aircraft during the battle for Iwo Jima. While in Oregon, Bale and the rest of the crew participated in sea trials. Bale recalled, "I'm now in charge of the gyroscope compass compensation during the sea trials for my ship."

He was also responsible for training other sailors to use the compass on other ships in his division. The *Dickens* passed the trials, and on October 18, 1944, the ship departed for San Francisco to pick up additional landing craft. While en route large swells caused the *Dickens* to pitch and roll with such force that two landing craft were thrown overboard.

Once in San Francisco, Bale was given an errand: "I had to go ashore at the Captain's request to pick up two [replacement] boats that were waiting for us. I presented them with a requisition from the Navy for $450,000. That's two boats!" After San Francisco, the *Dickens* departed for Leper Island, Hawaii, where the sailors rehearsed landings and practiced firing their cannons. From Hawaii, the *Dickens* went to war.

Filled with 1,300 men of the 5th Marine Division, the *Dickens* set sail across the Pacific. Sometime after leaving Hawaii, while Bale and the rest of the crew were trying to figure out exactly where they were headed, an unexpected source revealed the destination. "Tokyo Rose announced, 'The 5th Marines are now headed for Iwo Jima in the Volcano Islands,'" Bale recalled. "How does she know when we don't even know? [We] had been trying to figure out where we were going and then she tells us. Then we would look on the charts and Iwo Jima was just a dot."

Despite her demoralizing propaganda, Bale enjoyed listening to Tokyo Rose. "We liked her because she played all the great American music. She was on our radio every day and night. That got us young guys who were great dancers [excited]."

The sailors began studying the three-dimensional sand tables of Iwo Jima. Stretching eight square miles. One of the Volcano Islands, it is located 660 miles south of Japan in the Philippine Sea. Shaped like a pork chop, the island reeks of sulfur and is dominated by 550-foot Mount Suribachi on its southwest tip. With its volcanic nature and lack of greenery, the island resembles the surface of the moon. To the north are the highlands of the Motoyama Plateau at 300 feet.

Iwo Jima had two completed airfields and a third under construction. American intelligence reported there were 13,000 Japanese defending the island, when in fact there were 21,000.

For 72 days beginning on December 8, 1944, American bombers hammered the island, followed by a three-day naval bombardment concluding on D-day. The thorough bombardment was a great comfort to Bale. He also rested in the evidence of the reconnaissance photos taken by Navy frogmen that showed "not a weed living on that island, not a living insect from all the months of bombing." Despite the extensive bombing, the Japanese suffered few casualties.

At 7 AM on February 19, 1945, Bale and his crew of four men had their LCVP in the water off the shore of Iwo Jima and were heading for the rendezvous point. An LCVP (Landing Craft Vehicle, Personnel) is a 36-foot flat-bottomed boat that can transport 36 combat-loaded troops or two small vehicles. Once an LCVP ran ashore, a ramp would drop from the bow and allow for easy unloading of its cargo. Another landing craft, the 36-foot LVT (Landing Vehicle Tracked), is fitted with tank tracks for ground transportation once it reaches the shore. At the rendezvous point Bale met up with the 12 LVTs he was to lead to the beach. Each LVT carried a platoon of 36 anxious Marines.

Bale continued with the initial steps of the carefully orchestrated invasion plan for D-day. "The timing was the main element, otherwise it would be catastrophe," he recalled. The Iwo Jima landing was the pinnacle of an evolution of beach landings for the U.S. Navy. "We were going to show the world how beautifully we can do it and also make the American public aware that we don't always make mistakes since we had gone through a great tragedy at Tarawa."

The landings were to be so perfectly executed, a VIP crowd aboard the amphibious command ship USS *Eldorado* came to witness it. Aboard the *Eldorado* was General Holland M. Smith, commander of the Marine V Amphibious Corps, Secretary of the Navy James Forrestal, and their staffs.

The Marines would be attacking at two points on the island. The primary site encompassed two miles of black sandy beach on the south shore stretching westward from the foothills of Suribachi. The second landing site

was to the north of Suribachi on the western shoreline. The first beach was divided into sectors from west to east: Green Beach, Red 1 and 2, Yellow 1 and 2, and Blue 1 and 2.

Bale's boat group was in the third wave that assaulted Green Beach, closest to Suribachi. As Bale arrived at the rendezvous point, the U.S. Navy pounded the island. Bale took notice of a crater the battleship USS *Tennessee* made on the slope of Suribachi with its huge 14-inch guns. He headed in to the line of departure, eight miles from shore. Now just after 8AM, the naval gunfire ceased and 120 carrier-based planes headed for the island.

"Now we're getting heated up," Bale remembered.

Some planes strafed the beach with rockets and gunfire. Others dropped bombs and napalm over the fac e of Suribachi. The Marines cheered and yelled, thinking that no one could survive such an onslaught. Thirty minutes later the planes d ispersed, and the Navy guns recommenced.

The first wave of armored L VTs with mounted 75mm cannons moved toward the beach. Soon after, the second wave followed, and then it was Bale's turn. He led the way to Green Beach. Bale was faced with the words "Too late to worry," which his coxswain had painted on the ramp of his boat. "Going in I kept all 12 of my boats abreast," he said.

As Bale's LCVP moved toward the beach, Japanese artillery opened up. When the Japanese shells came in, he remembered, "the *Eldorado* with its VIPs started backing up real fast, getting the hell out of there."

As the third wave approached the beach, Bale noticed that the crater on Suribachi from the battleship *Tennessee*'s guns had expanded. "The *Tennessee* had been out there for hours just poom, poom, poom, and it looked like the small crater had now split the mountain."

Bale felt the LCVP slide against the sand. His coxswain immediately threw the boat in reverse to prevent it from broaching in the waves. As the tracks of the 12 L VTs churned in the soft sand, they lurched forward from the water and progressed up the beach. "I let them go, I turn around to come back," and then at about 40 feet from the shore Bale recalled, "all hell breaks loose."

An LVT full of Marines coming in to Red 1 Beach was hit by a Japanese shell and exploded. The Marines were flung all over the water, and the LVT instantly sank. Despite the danger of the Japanese shells splashing the water all around him, Bale ordered the coxswain to steer over to the Marines now floating in the water. When they got close enough, Bale and his crew frantically pulled men out of the water.

"It's not easy picking up a guy that's soaking wet with a pack," Bale said. The scene was too much for some of Bale' s crewmembers. "I remember my coxswain, who was such a tough guy aboard ship, started crying."

After they pulled the last Marine they could reach out of the water they headed for a hospital ship. "We got 18 of them out, couldn't get more which is terrible. That's been kept in my memory for a long time."

On the way to the hospital ship Bale gave a shot of morphine to a sergeant with a hole blown through his huge bicep. The sergeant asked for a cigarette, and Bale gave him one. The rest of the Marines had no major injuries, but Bale remembers them being "shell shocked."

Bale's LCVP eventually arrived at the hospital ship. "It was so early in the invasion I had to wait for the [hospital ship] to take its position before I could give them patients. I waited around for about 20 minutes," he added. After unloading the wounded, Bale returned to the *Dickens*, and his main duty for D-day was over.

During the next few days Bale carried out assignments aboard the *Dickens*. At night, the APAs pulled several miles back from the island. The Japanese had been seen swimming

National Archives

ABOVE: Landing craft circle as they wait for word to deliver their human cargoes to the beaches of Iwo Jima. Larger landing ships, LSTs (Landing Ship, Tank), that disgorged the troop-laden craft are also visible in this photograph. OPPOSITE: A catastrophic explosion wracks the escort carrier *Bismarck Sea* off Iwo Jima. On February 21, 1945, a pair of Japanese kamikaze suicide aircraft crashed into the carrier, which later sank with the loss of 318 American naval personnel.

out to the U.S. ships with explosives attached to their bodies.

"We caught a couple of these swimmers near Suribachi," recalled Bale. "One of our boats saw one and got rid of him with a machine gun."

In the morning, the ships would return to their positions near the island. On D+2, February 21, just after sunset, Bale was in his LCVP with hundreds of other landing craft moving in a giant circle. The beaches had become too congested with crippled tanks, landing craft, and supplies for additional boats to come ashore. This circular maneuver was performed to maintain order among the boat groups while they waited to go ashore.

As the daylight faded, Bale heard the sound of plane engines. In the darkness, he made out the shapes of Japanese aircraft. "They flew right over us," he recalled. Soon Bale saw massive explosions from American ships. His LCVP and the other boats in the circle headed to the site. As they neared the area, word spread that two kamikazes had crashed into the *Bismarck Sea*. Bale's crew thought of the *Bismarck Sea* as their "sister ship" since they both had come from Portland and had set out to sea the same day.

"We knew a lot of the guys from the *Bismarck Sea* from going to bars and other things in Oregon," he said.

Now with the fire from the sinking aircraft carrier as the only source of light, Bale began picking men out of the water. The rescue effort lasted 12 hours. In the end, 605 sailors were plucked from the sea, and 318 were either killed by the explosions or drowned. In the same attack, the aircraft carrier USS *Saratoga* was heavily damaged but managed to stay afloat. The *Dickens* was quickly converted into a hospital ship, and the wounded were brought on board. A survivor was even placed in Bale's cabin.

The battle for Iwo Jima raged on. Marine casualties increased as they made slow progress against the Japanese. On February 23, two American flags went up on S uribachi after Marines climbed to the top. The first flag was raised as Bale was on the bridge of the *Dickens*. Amid loud cheering from Marines all over the island and ships blowing their horns and whistles, Bale swelled with pride as he watched the Stars and Stripes flap in the wind on top of the mountain.

A couple of hours later a larger flag was brought up, and Associated Press photographer Joe Rosenthal snapped the shot that would immortalize the moment forever. Two days later, the USS *Dickens*, loaded with 455 survivors from the *Bismarck Sea* and about 500 more wounded men, headed for Saipan.

En route many of the wounded succumbed to their wounds. "We were burying them at sea every night," Bale recalled. Soon after arriving in Saipan, he received bad news. In a letter from

home he learned that his cousin in the Army , also named Joseph Bale, had been killed while fighting in southern France.

Before the war the two Joes had been inseparable. The news was devastating to Bale. "I cried for three days." Bale's cabin mates took his turn on watch and brought him food. "I was just out of it." Cousin Joe was posthumously awarded the Distinguished Service Cross for his actions. Bale received this news as the crew of the *Dickens* prepared for yet another invasion. Eight hundred fifty miles west of Iwo Jima sat the island of Okinawa. The *Dickens* would be part of the landings there.

Recently promoted to lieutenant (j.g.), Bale was made beach master for the landings at Okinawa. "Thanks a lot for the honor," he sarcastically commented. Beach masters in the Pacific Theater had a life expectancy of about 10 minutes. However, the landings at Okinawa were a sharp contrast to those at Iwo Jima.

"I could have had a hammock there and taken a six-hour nap," he remembered. Bale was beach master of Purple Beach, and the Japanese did not contest the landings there. Brutal fighting later went on for 82 days from April 1 to June 21, 1945. American forces took the island in the end, but a huge price was paid with 50,000 Americans wounded and 12,000

National Archives

killed. Over 100,000 Japanese soldiers were killed defending the island.

After Japan surrendered, Bale had the unique responsibility of escorting eight scientists ashore near Hiroshima a month after the dropping of the first atomic bomb. While the scientists walked around with Geiger counters, Bale acted as "a secretary to document and legitimize anything they found."

While walking through the streets Bale came across an old truck. "I went up to it and we were told not to touch anything, so I didn't want to hit it with my arm," he said. "So I pushed it with my foot and the whole thing collapsed into sand. It was pulverized. You wouldn't know two minutes before what was a headlight or a motor or a door."

With the war over, the *Dickens* began transporting troops home to the United States. Bale, too, eventually made it home to Detroit in December 1946. Bale's father was a sales representative for furniture factories across Michigan and northern Ohio, and he joined the family business. For 29 years he worked as a salesman for furniture factories.

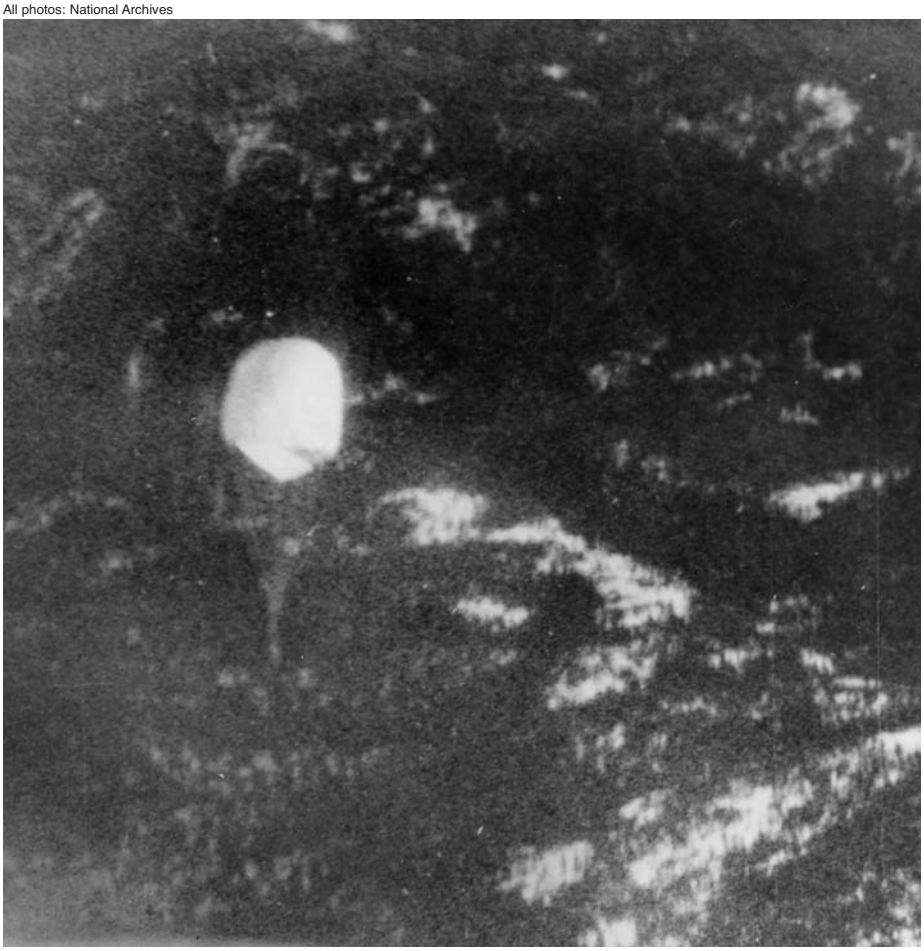
Bale moved to the West Coast in 1981 and led a happy life in the oceanside community of Ventura, California. He became the proud father of four children and grandfather of six.

Joseph Bale passed away July 18, 2012, just shy of his 89th birthday. His obituary spoke of his life in the Navy and the joy he received while spending time with his grandchildren. When asked what he would like people to know about his father, Joe's son, Ron, responded, "He was always an advocate for those less fortunate and the oppressed minority. This is what he taught me through word, and more importantly, example."

Matt Broggie is a Tour Director for Stephen Ambrose Historical Tours. He earned his B.A. in History from California Lutheran University and is completing his M.A. in Military History at Austin Peay State University.

By Darrell W. Coulter

All photos: National Archives



Unlikely Weapon of War

Japanese balloon bombs succeeded only in killing innocent civilians in an Oregon forest.

IT CROSSED SILENTLY ON A CHILLY WINTER EVENING OVER THE SOUTHERN Oregon coast, descending slowly, its ballast spent. The Japanese bomb-laden paper balloon collapsed into the Gearhart Mountain forest near the line separating Lake and Klamath Counties in south-central Oregon. The undercarriage of the 70-foot balloon slammed into the earth, its impact muffled by several inches of snow, which prevented a 33-pound high-explosive antipersonnel bomb from exploding.

This was only one of an estimated 6,000 balloon bombs, codenamed Fugo, launched by the Japanese Army from the main island of Honshu between November 1944 and April 1945. Flowing along the jet stream, their cargo of incendiary and high-explosive bombs reached North America in less than a week.

The origin of the Japanese balloon bombs dated back to the occupation of Manchuria in the early 1930s. The Japanese hoped to harass the Soviets across the Amur River, the border between Japanese-occupied Manchuria and Soviet Siberia, by dropping propaganda leaflets from those balloons. Though the plan was never carried out, Japanese military scientists gained valuable information about the complexity of balloon flights over considerable distances. The idea of eventually using balloons to transport special troops or deliver bombs held promise for the Japanese military.

In 1940, the Japanese purchased daily weather maps from the United States Weather Bureau after discovering the existence of an air current moving west to east from Japan to the North American continent at a high altitude. Traveling at over 30,000 feet, it was possible for a balloon launched from Japan to cross the Pacific Ocean in an optimum timeframe of three days. It was not until late in the war, with the beginning of long-distance American bombing of the Japanese home islands, that the United States and its allies learned about the existence and importance of the jet stream.

During the summer of 1942, some consideration was given to a new use of the balloon project on the island of Guadalcanal. The Japanese proposed to attach grenades to long lengths of piano wire that were held aloft by balloons in hopes of snaring U.S. Marine fighter planes as they took off from captured airfields on the island.

As the fortunes of the Japanese forces on the island turned against them in September 1942, the idea was redirected into a plan for transcontinental balloon bombing. The Japanese saw two distinct possibilities for success. By attacking the richly forested areas of the U.S. Pacific Northwest with incendiary devices, they hoped to tie up military and civilian resources as well as cost the Allies millions of dollars in damage. Of even greater importance, the Japanese believed that the panic created would have a great psychological impact on the citizens of the West Coast.

The technical problems with Project Fugo, which literally translates as "balloon bomb," were enormous but not insurmountable. Two rival military groups were charged with overcoming these challenges to create a reliable bomb delivery system. The first, headed by Maj. Gen. Suiki Kusaba, commander of the First Division of the Ninth Army Technical Research Laboratory, was composed of Japanese Army personnel. Kusaba's group concentrated its efforts on controlling the balloons in flight, arming them, and launching them successfully. Though inter-service rivalry existed, the Army's work complemented the efforts of the Imperial Japanese Navy.

Under the direction of naval ordnance engineer Lt. Cmdr. Kiyoshi Tanaka, the Navy had been developing a reliable radio transmitter that could survive

A Japanese balloon bomb, launched in Japan and carried to the United States by the prevailing winds, floats high above the west coast of North America. Many of these terror weapons were destroyed by American and Canadian fighter aircraft.

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high altitudes over long distances. The goal was to supply atmospheric information and determine the effects of air pressure on the interior and exterior walls of the balloon. T anaka's experiments with radiosondes using balloons 20 feet in diameter were successful. Those balloons could rise to an altitude of 25,000 feet and travel 435 miles. Tanaka hoped to overcome this limited range by using submarines off the American coast as launch platforms.

By this stage of the war, the Imperial naval forces were stretched to their limits. The valuable submarines that were left could not be spared for Tanaka's experiments. However, he was not dissuaded. By early 1944, he had developed a 29.5-foot balloon composed of rubber-covered silk panels. This fabric made the balloon durable, leak proof, and most importantly, flexible enough to withstand expansion and contraction due to changes in air pressure.

The balloon also had to endure extreme temperature fluctuations during flight over a period of several days at maximum altitudes. The panels handled pressure extremely well. However, the glue that held the rubberized panels together did not. This failure resulted in a tendency for the balloons to rupture at the seams or explode under extreme pressure.

The Army's balloon had been developed separately. It was made of more economical paper and was eventually chosen for the continuation of the project. Only 34 of Tanaka's rubber balloons were approved for launch, none of which contained explosives. Tanaka's balloons carried only radiosondes to collect data and sand for ballast.

The Army's paper balloon was lighter and easier to launch, could carry a larger payload, was less expensive, and was slightly larger at 32.8 feet in diameter. This paper balloon was held together by komyyaku-nori, an adhesive gum made from the arum root. It was made waterproof through the use of a lacquer -like substance made from the fermented juice of green persimmons. This unlikely delivery system was chosen to carry the cargo of destruction to America.

The typical paper balloon consisted of a balloon envelope with a flexible belt uniting the upper and lower spheres. The bottom of the bag usually contained a pressure-operated valve for controlling the inflation of the balloon in response to outside temperature and pressure. The ballast and armaments hung from a gondola or ballast ring suspended from a single cable. The cable, comprised of two 50-foot shroud lines, ran through grommets set into the hemisphere-connecting belt.

The ballast ring was set to release ballast sand bags and four small incendiary bombs weighing just over 11 pounds each, through a series of blow-plugs. A platform was placed in the center of the ring. On top of the platform rested a wet-plate battery, a picric acid block for self-destruct, several electrical contact points for the auto-firing system, and four aneroid barometers that would start the firing mechanism once it fell below a preset altitude.

Though the blow-plug mechanism system was designed to keep the balloons at a constant altitude, the extreme temperature fluctuations between night and day made that goal impossible. The balloons that reached the North American coast always crossed at varied altitudes. The last of the blow-plugs designed to go off were attached to long fuses leading back up the balloons' envelopes, triggering self-destruction after the ballasts and bombs were dropped. This mechanism was designed to keep all intact balloons from being discovered.

In addition to the four small incendiary bombs, the Japanese included one 33-pound high-explosive antipersonnel bomb with an instantaneous fuse. This bomb was designed to spread shrapnel up to 300 feet away.

Ideally, once all of the sand ballasts had been exhausted the incendiary bombs would be released one by one as the balloon lost altitude. After the last incendiary bomb dropped, the larger antipersonnel bomb would be released. At that point, the picric acid block would explode, destroying the balloon's undercarriage. This explosion would then light the last fuse, igniting the hydrogen gas used inside the shroud, thus destroying the balloon's envelope and all remnants of its existence.

On November 3, 1944, the first of 6,000 bomb-laden balloons lifted from their moorings and headed toward North America. Though the weather at that time of year was not conducive to starting forest fires, the Japanese hoped that panic would be the measure of their success. Even as the first balloons lifted off, General Kusaba was experimenting with larger balloons for a planned summer offensive strike when the woods would be tinder dry . Though the estimates vary, records indicate that a minimum of 6,000 balloon s were launched

ABOVE: This Japanese balloon bomb was photographed from a pursuing American Bell P-63 Kingcobra fighter. LEFT: American personnel inspect the apparatus of a Japanese balloon bomb that has fallen to earth in the United States. This photo was taken at the naval air station, Moffett Field, California.

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over the six-month period between November 1944 and April 1945.

The first balloon was discovered on November 3, 1944, off the coast of San Pedro, California, by a U.S. Navy patrol craft. It was one of Tanaka's rubberized silk models carrying a radio transmitter. The first recorded bombing from a balloon occurred on December 6, 1944, outside Thermopolis, Wyoming. *The Independent Record,* a weekly newspaper at Thermopolis, reported the incident. It was believed that the bomb was dropped from a plane. Witnesses reported seeing a parachute land with flares. The local authorities abandoned their search for the parachute, believing it to have been only a landing flare.

Less than a week later, a balloon with an unexploded bomb was discovered outside Libby, Montana. This one was reported in the December 14, 1944, issue of the *Western News,* a weekly newspaper in Libby. The story was picked up by both *Time* and *Newsweek* magazines for their New Year's Day editions. The writers for both magazines were as puzzled by the purpose of the balloon as the people of Libby. In a follow-up story two weeks later, *Newsweek,* citing government sources, concluded that the reported balloons had a limited range of 400 miles and were probably launched from submarines.

On the evening of January 2, 1945, Mrs. Evelyn Cyr arrived home and witnessed an explosion in a field next to her house on Peach Street in Medford, Oregon. An investigation by military personnel from nearby Camp White revealed that the explosion was caused by a small incendiary bomb. This was one of the first recorded instances of balloon bombings in Oregon, the state in which the most incidents were recorded. The rest of the balloon and its deadly payload were not recovered in the Medford area.

Authorities were quick to act. A news blackout was issued, requesting the press not to print any news about the balloon attacks. Cooperation among military and civilian authorities was total. The military and several federal agencies, including the FBI, U.S. Forestry authorities, and the Department of Agriculture moved to defend against this new form of attack by the Japanese. It was agreed that any balloons or other materials that were recovered would be sent to either Cal-Tech University in Pasadena, California, or the Naval Research Laboratory.

Of immediate FBI concern was the potential that the Japanese were using balloons for biological warfare. Though a valid concern, there are no known records of any Japanese personnel suggesting the use of the balloons in this fashion.

ABOVE: During testing to evaluate its potential destructive capabilities, this Japanese balloon bomb was photographed following the end of World War II. The balloon was turned over by Japanese authorities. OPPOSITE: A deflated Japanese balloon bomb lies where it fell as American investigators look around the area. A number of balloon bombs were recovered during and after World War II, both in the United States and Canada.

Several defensive strategies were discussed by civilian and military authorities. The Western Defense Command stationed additional planes for coastal defense and about 2,700 troops for fire fighting at critical points to protect against further balloon attacks. Further media attention was squelched to prevent heightened anxiety among the general population of the western United States and Canada.

In February 1945, the Japanese added stories of massive fires and loss of life from balloon attacks to their propaganda broadcasts. Their stories were, of course, false. The Japanese high command had received no reports regarding the results of their unmanned flights. The official silence concerning the attacks was so complete that the Japanese did not know that some balloons had, in fact, successfully made the journey across the Pacific until the war was over.

The balloon attacks continued into April 1945. By the end of that month the launches were terminated. Two possible reasons for ending the Fugo project exist. First, the Japanese high command may have thought that none of the balloons were reaching North America because of the lack of press coverage. Second, the intensive American air raids over Japan may have destroyed factories that supplied needed materials for the balloons, most notably hydrogen gas. Destruction of railroads could have made it virtually impossible to deliver the necessary supplies to launch sites.

The number of reported balloon incidents topped 300 by the time the war ended. Though most of them came down in the Pacific Northwest with 45 in Oregon, 28 in Washington, 57 in British Columbia, and 37 in Alaska, many others were driven greater distances by the jet stream. One balloon fell on a farm in Kansas, and two were discovered as far south and east Texas.

The balloon that settled on the snow-packed ground on Gearhart Mountain in southern Oregon was discovered on Saturday morning, May 5, 1945. Archie Mitchell was the new pastor of the Christian and Missionary Alliance Church in Bly, Oregon, a small lumber and ranching town. Mitchell and his wife Elyse, who was five months pregnant, had moved to Bly only a few weeks earlier. Archie had planned a short fishing trip to get better acquainted with some of his young parishioners.

Taking five local children with them, Archie and Elyse traveled to nearby Gearhart Mountain. As they traveled down a forest service road through Weyerhaeuser Timber Company land, they were stopped by a forest service road grader that had just been pulled from a mud hole by a pickup truck. The stop was a welcomed relief to Elyse, who felt a little car sick. As Archie conversed with the three-man forest service crew about road conditions and fishing possibilities, Elyse and the youngsters got out to take a stretch and look around.

Archie found out that the road was impassible. He decided to take his car back down the road a short distance and park it at Salt Spring. As Archie got into the car, Elyse called out to him, indicating that she and the youths had found something of interest. Archie called back, saying that he would come and look shortly.

Archie moved his car back down the road. Suddenly, an explosion erupted, and flying debris filled the air. After a stunned moment, Archie and the forest service crew rushed the 100 yards to where Elyse and the children had been standing. To their horror, the five children lay dead, their bodies ripped apart. Elyse Mitchell died seconds later. Where Elyse and

the children had stood was a smoldering crater three feet wide and one foot deep.

Elyse W. Mitchell, 26, Jay Gifford, 13, Edward Engen, 13, Sherman Shoemaker, 11, Joan Patzke, 13, and Dick Patzke, 14, were dead. These were the only deaths attributed to enemy action during World War II in the continental United States. An explosion of "unknown origin" was the explanation given to the press by local military authorities. The area was sealed off quickly, and H.P. Scott, a U.S. Navy bomb disposal officer from nearby Lakeview Naval Air Station, recovered the four unexploded incendiary bombs, a self-destruct device, the remains of the balloon, and most of the other debris from the exploded bomb.

Did the Japanese accomplish what they had hoped with their balloon assault? From a military standpoint it was a dismal failure. The Japanese hopes of igniting a major forest fire were ill conceived. Their winter and early spring launches made the remote chance of starting a forest fire practically impossible. No documentation regarding forest fires ignited by balloon bombs exists.

The panic that the Japanese had hoped would grip the West Coast never materialized. The United States government's prompt action to suppress information in cooperation with

Canadian and local authorities was quite effective. If the Japanese had been able to develop their balloon capabilities earlier in the war, they may have found greater success.

A total of 359 incidents of Japanese balloon bombings were documented. These range from finding bomb fragments and pieces of balloon envelopes to completely intact balloons, including their bombing platforms. These recorded incidents, though some may be duplicates, represent less than six percent of the e stimated 6,000 balloons that were launched. Though the majority of the balloons were probably lost over the Pacific, the possibility existsthat there are still unexploded bombs in rural areas in the western United States and western Canada after nearly 70 years.

Darrell W. Coulter is a free lance writer specializing in history and science fiction. He resides in Vancouver, Washington, with his wife Rebecca and three daughters.

By Blaine Taylor

ullstein bild / The Granger Collection, NY

Infamous Tripartite Pact

Imperial Japan joined Nazi Germany and Fascist Italy in World War II to engage Great Britain and the United States.

ON THE EVENING OF SEPTEMBER 26, 1940, AMERICAN RADIO ANNOUNCER AND journalist William L. Shirer noted in his later famous *Berlin Diary* that the next day Italian Foreign Minister Count Galeazzo Ciano would arrive there from Rome, adding that most people thought it was for the announcement that Francisco Franco's Spain was entering the war on the side of the Axis. Indeed, Spanish Foreign Minister Ramon Serrano Suner was already in Berlin for that expected ceremony, Shirer concluded.

Spain did not join the Axis, but something else of even greater importance did take place that day. Hitler and Mussolini pulled off another surprise. At 1PM in the Reich Chancellery, Japan, Germany, and Italy signed a military alliance directed against the United States. Shirer candidly admitted that he had been caught off guard, and Suner was not even present at the theatrical performance the fascists of Europe and Asia staged in his absence.

The formal signing of what became known as the Tripartite Pact, another milestone on the road to global war, was preceded by a top secret meeting in Tokyo on the 19th. The meeting was termed a Conference in the Imperial Presence that had been called by Japanese Emperor Hirohito. It was held in Paulonia Hall of the Outer Ceremonial Palace with everything planned and rehearsed in advance.

Reportedly, Hirohito sat motionless before a golden screen at one end of the audience chamber and said nothing while the other 11 participants at two long tables delivered their set speeches back and forth across the Imperial line of vision.

The real deliberations had already occurred during September 9-10, when Japanese Foreign Minister Yosuke Matsuoka sat down with Germanambassador to Tokyo Heinrich Stahmer to hammer out all the details. The Japanese wanted a free hand in Southeast Asia, and they should have it. The Third Reich desired pressure put upon the British fleet that still maintained naval supremacy in the Straits of Dover. Matsuoka vowed to supply it by having the Japanese Navy attack the British Far Eastern bastion of Singapore.

On Friday, September 13, an unlucky day as it turned out for the emperor, Hirohito allegedly studied their joint document word by word since it undoubtedly would lead in the end to war between the United States and the Imperial Japanese Empire. He approved the text but made one editorial change, striking out the five words "openly or in concealed form" from the type of attack that might launch Japan's participation in World War II. His Imperial Majesty believed that they were too explicit, too close to the truth of the actual event being prepared even then by his naval staff planners.

Thus were secretly sown the future seeds of the sneak attack at Pearl Harbor on December 7, 1941, but as a prudent ruler, the emperor was hedging his bets in case the empire lost the war and had to regroup in a new era of enemy occupation and uneasy peace.

During the meeting of September 19, Prince Fushimi asked on behalf of the Naval General Staff that, since it was likely that such a naval war would be quite long, what the prospects were for Japan's maintenance of her imperial strength? The prime minister, Prince Konoye, answered on behalf of the cabinet that they should be able, in the event of a war with the United States, to supply military needs and thus withstand such a protracted war.

One crucial economic item that affected all deliberations in Tokyo, Berlin, and Washington was oil for the Imperial Japanese Fleet. The Navy was acutely aware that it was dependent on both Britain and the United States for this indispensable commodity.

If the Dutch East Indies could be taken, this problem would be solved, but both the British and the Americans stood in the way . Hence a preemptive war was being considered in earnest to remove them if necessary.

Then, too, there was another consideration. As Matsuoka pointed out, the object of the pact with Germany and Italy was to prevent the United States from encircling Japan. Summing up for the admirals, Prince Fushimi asserted that the Naval Section of Imperial Headquarters agreed with the government's proposal that the Japanese could conclude a military alliance with Germany and Italy, but warned that every conceivable measure should also be taken to avoid it.

Privy Council President Hara

After signing the Tripartite Pact on September 27, 1940, Japanese Ambassador to Germany Saburo Kurusu addresses a gathering in Berlin. Hitler (right) and Italian Foreign Minister Count Galeazzo Ciano look on.

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National Archives

During the infamous meeting at Munich in September 1938, Luftwaffe Chief Hermann Göring, Italian Fascist dictator Benito Mussolini, Adolf Hitler, and Italian Foreign Minister Count Galeazzo Ciano (left to right front row) exit a planning session. Among those in the background are Field Marshal Gerd von Rundstedt (center), Deputy Führer Rudolf Hess (right), and SS Chief Heinrich Himmler (in profile at upper right).

made a prepared statement on behalf of Emperor Hirohito himself. He asserted that, even though a Japanese-American clash might be unavoidable in the end, the emperor hoped that sufficient care would be exercised to ensure that it would not come in the near future. He added that there would be no miscalculations and thus gave his approval on that basis. Through his proxies, Hirohito had spoken.

Meanwhile in Berlin, Shirer witnessed the signing ceremony, noting its showy setting, with German Foreign Minister Joachim von Ribbentrop, Ciano, and Japanese Ambassador Saburo Kurusu looking bewildered as they entered the gala hall of the Reich Chancellery. Kleig lights blazed away as the scene was recorded for posterity. Indeed, the entire staffs of the Italian and Japanese embassies were turned out in force, but no other diplomats attended. The Soviet ambassador was invited but had declined.

The three men sat down at a gilded table. Ribbentrop rose and motioned to the German Foreign Office interpreter, Dr. Paul Schmidt, to read the text of the pact, following which they all signed while the cameras ground away.

Then came the climactic moment, or so the Nazis thought. A trio of loud knocks on the giant door were heard, followed by a tense hush in the great hall. The Japanese held their breath, and as the door swung slowly open Hitler strode in. Ribbentrop bobbed up, and formally notified him that the Tripartite Pact had been duly signed.

"The Great Khan," as Shirer mocked the Führer, nodded approvingly, but did not deign to speak. Instead, Hitler majestically took a seat at the middle of the table while the two foreign ministers and the Japanese ambassador scrambled for chairs. Then they popped up, one after another, and gave prepared speeches that Radio Berlin broadcast around the globe.

In his account, Shirer also noted that German Reich Marshal Hermann Göring, commander

in chief of the Luftwaffe, in the fall of 1939 had ridiculed even the remote possibility of American aid reaching Europe before the issue of the war had been decided. The Germans thought, moreover, that the war would be over bythe fall of 1940 and that American aid could not possibly arrive before the spring of 1941, if at all.

Now, all of that was changing. Shirer opined that Hitler would not have promulgated the Tripartite Pact if he thoughtthat the war was coming to an end before winter , as there would have been no need. It was going to be a long war after all.

Shirer was also on target in noticing the pact's hidden flaws, mainly that the signatories could not lend the slightest economic or military help to one another between Europe and Asia due to great distance and the presence of the Royal Navy, Great Britain's mistress of the world's oceans.

By the time he had researched and published his epic tome *The Rise and Fall of the Third Reich* in 1960, Shirer had discovered a great deal more about what he called "the turn of the United States," asserting that to keep America out of the war Nazi Germany had secretly resorted to actual bribery of American congressmen. Hitler would "deal" with the Americans after he had first defeated both the United Kingdom and the Soviet Union.

Indeed, in Basic Order No. 24 regarding collaboration with Japan issued on March 5, 1941, Hitler stated that the common aim of the conduct of war was to be stressed as forcing England to her knees quickly, and thereby keeping the United States out of the waraltogether. The commander of the German Navy, Grand Admiral Erich Raeder, backed an attack on the British naval base at Singapore by the Imperial Japanese Navy as a sure means of accomplishing this.

The Japanese then stunned everyone on April 13, 1941, by concluding a treaty of their own in Moscow on Russo-Japanese neutrality with Soviet dictator Josef Stalin. Hitler and Ribbentrop were alarmed as were their American counterparts, President Franklin D. Roosevelt and Secretary of State Cordell Hull. All of them believed that this new effort would release Japanese troops earmarked for a possible war with the Soviet Union for a strike south against the British and Americans instead. In the end, they were right.

In effect, the Nazis had been hoodwinked, paid back in like coin for their own August 1939 secret nonaggression pact with Stalin that the Germans had concluded without informing the pro-Axis Japanese ambassador to Berlin, General Hiroshi Oshima.

The Germans invaded the Soviet Union on June 22, 1941, and six days later urged the Japanese to do the same from the Far Eastern frontier, but to no avail. Despite persistent entreaties to do so until the very end of the war, the Japanese never broke their treaty with Stalin. Rather, it turned out to be the other way around in August 1945.

Meanwhile, the admirals of the Imperial Japanese Navy were ready for their strike south and war with America, Britain, China, and the Netherlands, while Hitler hoped to capture Moscow and force the surrender of the Soviet Union in December 1941.

Hitler and Ribbentrop were in for yet another nasty surprise from the Far East. The Nazi chancellor had constantly urged the Japanese to avoid a direct conflict with America and concentrate instead on Britain and the Soviet Union, whose resistance was stopping him from winning his war. It never dawned on the Nazi rulers that Japan might give first priority to a direct challenge to the United States as a determinant of its wartime goals.

On the other hand, ironically, the Nazis had feared in early 1941 that Japan and the United States might in fact settle their differences amicably and that prospects for war between Japan and the United Kingdom in the Far East would

then disappear. This did not come about.In July 1940, the Japanese Army invaded French Indochina, and talks between envoy Admiral Kichisaburo Nomura and Secretary Hull were broken off.

A proposed meeting between Premier Konoye and Roosevelt never materialized, and on October 16, 1941, the prince's government fell and a new cabinet was appointed by his successor , General Hideki Tojo, nicknamed "the Razor." Under Tojo's government, Japan demanded a free hand in Southeast Asia, ensuring that eventual war with the United States was a certainty.

On November 15, Special Envoy Kurusu, who had signed the Tripartite Pact in Berlin, arrived in Washington to aid Admiral Nomura in negotiations with the Americans. Four days later, a secret message came from Tokyo to the Japanese embassy in Washington that war was imminent. On the 23rd, Ribbentrop became aware of this also but did not believe that the United States would be attacked.

On the 28th, Ribbentrop called in Ambasador Oshima and seemed to reverse Hitler's earlier policy of urging Japan to avoid war with the United States. If Japan reached a decision to fight Britain and the United States, Ribbentrop was confident that not only would that be in the interest of Germany and Japan jointly, but it would also bring about favorable results for Japan.

Both: National Archives

Saburo Kurusu, left, Japanese ambassador to Germany, later met with U.S. Secretary of State Cordell in Washington, D.C., on December 7, 1941, the day of the attack on Pearl Harbor. Japanese Foreign Minister Yosuke Matsuoka, right, served as a principal negotiator prior to his country's commitment to sign the Tripartite Pact.

Not sure that he had heard correctly,the tense little Japanese general asked if Ribbentrop was indicating that a state of actual war was to be established between Germany and the United States. Now Ribbentrop hesitated. Perhaps he had gone too far. He answered that Roosevelt was a fanatic, so it was impossible to tell what he would do.

In Washington, the talks between Nomura, Kurusu, and Hull broke down because the Japanese diplomats refused to repudiate the terms of the September 27, 1940, Tripartite Pact. On December 3, the Japanese in Rome asked Italian Fascist leader Benito Mussolini also to declare war on America, and Ciano recorded in his diary on the 4th that Mussolini was enthusiastic about the idea. This was a decision that would doom him in 1943, since it brought the U.S. Army to Tunisia, Sicily, and Italy.

Over the course of December 4-5, Hitler appeared to approve a Japanese attack on the United States that the Germans would then back, but Japan feared that a quid pro quo would be demanded by the Third Reich in the form of a Japanese attack against the Soviet Union through Siberia to help relieve the pressure on the German Army then just outside Moscow.

At 9:30 PM on Saturday, December 6, President Roosevelt was at the White House with top aide Harry Hopkins reading the first 13 parts of a long decoded message from Tokyo to its embassy in Washington when he said flatly, "This means war."

The next morning, December 7, 1941, aircraft and midget submarines of the Imperial Japanese Navy attacked U.S. military installations in the Hawaiian Islands, allegedly catching both the Nazis and Roosevelt off guard. As

Ribbentrop later testified on the witness stand at Nuremberg, the attack came as a complete surprise to the German leadership that had considered the possibility of Japan's attacking Singapore or perhaps even Hong Kong, but never considered an attack on the United States as being to their advantage.

From his unique vantage point as the man who served as interpreter to most of the top Nazis, Dr. Paul Schmidt well remembered the scene at the Wolf's Lair when the Pearl Harbor political bombshell burst. He recalled in his 1951 memoirs that during the night of December 7-8, 1941, the Reich Foreign Ministry's broadcast monitoring service was first to receive the startling tidings of the Japanese sneak attack on America in the Pacific, but it was only when a second report confirmed it that Ribbentrop was duly alerted.

At first, the Reich Foreign Minister refused to believe it, asserting that they were nothing more than unverified reports and a propaganda trick of the British to which his gullible press section had fallen prey. He did, however, order that further inquiries be conducted and furnished to him later on December 8.

Dr. Schmidt recalled that both Hitler and Ribbentrop had been taken by surprise by their Asian allies in the very same way as they had often informed their Italian ally, Mussolini, of new German invasions of various countries. Now the shoe was on the other foot.

Dr. Schmidt commented wryly among his own associates within the Foreign Ministrythat it seemed to be the fashion among dictators and emperors to behave that way.

Hitler returned to Berlin from East Prussia on December 8 and at length decided to honor his pact with Japan, which he did not have to do since he had not been informed of the Japanese intent to attack Pearl Harbor and the U.S. had not overtly attacked the Reich despite the secret naval war then going on in the North Atlantic.

Dr. Schmidt added after the war that he personally knew of no such understanding with the Japanese that would have compelled the Nazi Führer to declare war on the United States. He declared war on the United States on December 11, 1941, in the Reichstag. In a single stroke, he had neatly solved one of Roosevelt's own pressing political problems. Germany had not attacked the United States, so on December 8 in a joint session of Congress Roosevelt had only asked for a declaration of war against Japan, not the Third Reich as well.

Ironically, Hitler had feared that the hated Roosevelt would declare war on him first and had thus made his own decision on the 9th to forestall that possibility. This was duly confirmed in 1951 by Dr. Schmidt, who had gotten the distinct impression that Hitler, with a well-known desire for prestige at the expense of others, had been expecting an American declaration of war and was itching to get his oar in the water first.

The Japanese, naturally, were ecstatic, and so was Admiral Raeder. Hitler asked him if there was any possibility that the United States and Britain would abandon East Asia for a time in order to crush Germany and Italy first. The admiral did not think so, unaware that even then President Roosevelt and British Prime Minister Winston Churchill were meeting at the White House to decide just that wartime policy: defeat Germany and Italy first, then Japan.

In Japan, Eri Hotta reported in 2013 that December 8, 1941, dawned as a cold day when its people awoke to astonishing news after 7AM on the radio that their nation was at war with both the United States and Great Britain, the very nations that had been her allies during the World War I, the latter her Navy's model.

The die had been cast.

Freelance writer Blaine Taylor resides in Towson, Maryland. He is the author of several books on topics related to World War II.

By Wilhelm R. Gehlen & Don A. Gregory

National Archives

The Lost Wehrmacht Pioneer

A German casualty of the war on the Eastern Front was finally located and laid to rest years later.

LETTERS HOME PROVIDE US WITH A GLIMPSE INTO THE DAILY LIVES of soldiers during the best and worst times. German soldiers of World War II wrote them by the hundreds of thousands, and if anything got through the battle lines the mail did. Not even the Gestapo could randomly search military mail trucks, and the soldiers knew it. So they wrote what they experienced. Feldpost letters from the Eastern Front tell the true story, from the virtually unimpeded advances during the first year to the slow and decimating retreats back to Germany that ended the war.

On June 22, 1941, the code words "Wotan" and "Dortmund" launched an 1,800-mile-long wall of German soldiers, numbering some four million, into Soviet-occupied territories. The world held its breath and waited. It is still the largest movement of men and matériel in a single wartime operation—10 times that of D-Day. The invasion would have occurred months earlier if it had not been for Italy's adventures in Greece, which required Germany's immediate attention. Nevertheless, Soviet Russia was to be destroyed in months if not sooner, and Hitler could then turn his attention back to Great Britain.

The British had already been at war with Germany for almost two years, and even with relentless Luftwaffe bombing had not collapsed on Hitler's schedule. Meanwhile, Soviet Premier Josef Stalin was taking full advantage of Hitler's on again off again trade deals, mostly involving Soviet grain and oil for German military technology and equipment. The Germans had already modernized Soviet air capability before the war in an attempt to hide their own research and development from the rest of the world. As a result, the Soviets had an air force, but the Germans knew exactly what they had. They also had three times the number of German tanks, mostly early models though, which were no match for fast, modern German panzers and tank destroyers.

In late August 1942, shortly before noon on a hot day near a destroyed slaughterhouse in the northern Russian city of Demjansk, a long line of German soldiers queued up in front of a field kitchen for a mess tin of thick pea soup. It was not the kind of day for soup with the heat and all, but soldiers do not complain when the food is good and there is plenty of it. Nearby in an unfenced yard two German Sturmgeschütze assault guns were parked. The crews, with mess tins in hand, gathered at the end of the line. The chef in charge of the kitchen didn't mind; there was plenty for the visiting company.

Obergefreiter (Corporal) Lorenz Gehlen, the driver of one of those assault guns, finally got close to the front of the line and asked the young private in front of him, "Say, what outfit is this anyway? We were in Cholm until we got orders last night to move out."

The reply came, "We are the 30th Pionier (Pioneer) Battalion, formed in Lübeck in '37, attached to the 30th Infantry Division, and the best in the Wehrmacht, Corporal."

"Well, I don't doubt that. Without the Pioneers, none of us would get very far in this godforsaken place."

The German Army called its various combat engineer battalions Pioneers. They were trained as both assault troops and construction workers and performed either duty as required. These jacks of all trade were skilled in destroying or traversing anything in the way of advancing forces while at the same time supporting the infantry during battle.

Author's Collection

The German Sturmgeschütz (top) saw widespread action during World War II as a tank destroyer and self-propelled assault gun. Obergefreiter Lorenz Gehlen (above) served with the 184th Sturmgeschütz Battalion.

"When we got a whiff of something good to eat coming from your field kitchen, we thought we'd invite ourselves to lunch. You wouldn't happen to know a Private First Class Mattes Hansen would you? He's in the 30th last I heard."

"No, I don't, but you can ask Unteroffizier (Sergeant) Dalli sitting over there. He knows all the Pioneers from Demjansk to Starija-Russa. We've got 430 men in the 30th alone, and he knows the

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Oberschütze Mattes Hansen, the brother-in-law of Lorenz Gehlen, stands in an entrenchment with his rifle and steel helmet nearby. Mattes served in the German Army's 30th Pioneer Battalion, formed in the city of Lübeck in 1937.

names of every one of them. I don't know how he does it."

After getting a tin of soup and a good sized piece of bread, Corporal Gehlen strolled over to Sergeant Fritz Dalli and saluted smartly, a bit too smartly for being that close to the front line. A well-trained German soldier saluted everyone of higher rank, and the corporal did it without thinking. "What's on your mind, Corporal? And keep the saluting to yourself. Ivan knows a salute when he sees one, and I intend to go home alive."

"Sorry. I'm Corporal Gehlen of the 184th Sturmgeschütz and I've heard that you know about every Pioneer in the area. My brother-in-law joined your battalion in 1938, and I thought you might remember him. He was living near Lübeck then, and the last time the two of us got to spend much time together was at Easter in 1939 when we were both on furlough."

"What's his rank and name, corporal?"

"Oberschütze (Private First Class) Mattes ... I mean, Mathias Hansen."

"Yes, he's with us, 1st Company. He'll probably be here shortly if you want to wait. Who did you say you were? Where are you from?"

"Corporal Lorenz Gehlen from the Krefeld-Viersen, Mönchen-Gladbach area in the Lower Rhine."

The sergeant pointed toward the assault gun. "You drive that thing, Corporal?"

"I sure do, when I'm not in charge of the gun."

"It's an outstanding heavy weapon, and I bet it plays hell with Ivan's tanks. What did you do before the war?"

"I drove an electric streetcar; the No. 9, from Krefeld to Süchteln and back."

"Well, I guess the Wehrmacht thought if you could drive a streetcar, you could drive an assault gun. I never heard of Krefeld or Süchteln. I come from Husum in Holstein, and we don't have streetcars there."

A dark-haired soldier about 30 years old came toward them with his mess tin in his hand. "There's your man corporal. Over here Hansen," he yelled at the man. "There's someone here to see you. It's not your wife, but he claims to know you—and your wife."

Hansen's eyes lit up when he recognized the familiar face of the man talking with his sergeant. "Well, if it isn't Locht, my favorite brother-in-law." Only people who knew Lorenz well called him Locht. "I would've expected the Devil himself before you." The two men shook hands and tried to talk at the same time.

"What brings you here? The fighting's about over." The words hadn't left Hansen's mouth when an unmistakable sound filled the air. Everyone took cover as a Russian Ilyushin IL-2 Sturmovik ground-attack aircraft passed over and dropped its load. The "Sewing Machine" as everyone called it, dropped a few bombs, but they fell on a nearby cemetery, killing those who were already dead and doing no further damage.

"Even at mealtime, Ivan won't leave us alone," a soldier grumbled as he walked past.

"Where are you headed, Locht?"

"We came up from Cholm on our way to Kalinin, but Unterfeldwebel (Staff Sergeant) Kirchner decided we should stay here for the night. He's one hell of a soldier; knocked out 12 T-34s in an hour last February. He knows his business, and Ivan better stay out of his way."

"You talking about Wachtmeister (Sergeant Major) Kurt Kirchner? I've heard of him, but I thought he was with Sturmgeschütz Abteilung (Battalion) 667."

"No, it's a different Kirchner, but our staff sergeant will be just as famous as him someday."

The two men sat on empty panzer mine boxes, ate their supper, and lit up their cigarettes. The last time they had time together was for a beer on White Sunday, a week after Easter in April 1939 when Lorenz's son, Willy, went for his first communion. Because Lorenz and Mathias were Catholic, they were both granted leave. At the time, White Sunday was almost as big a celebration as Easter in the Lower Rhine.

Mathias, or Mattes as everyone called him, had married Lorenz's younger sister, Kaline, in the late 1920s, and a son, appropriately named Hans Hansen, was their firstborn. A girl, Annemarie, was born in 1937. A year later Mattes found work in a construction yard near Lübeck and registered as a temporary resident there. The family was living there when he got his call-up papers from the Wehrmacht. He was given 10 days home leave to pack up and say goodbye before reporting to the Pioneer Kaserne in Lübeck on September 1, 1938, a year to the day before the invasion of Poland. Mattes and Locht did meet briefly once more before their long separation, at Christmas in 1940.

In 1939, Mattes went to Poland and Locht was sent to the Wehrmacht range in Hillersleben near Magdeburg to learn how to drive infantry vehicles, and then to Ohrdruf for more training. Operation Barbarossa swallowed both men, but Russia was a big country and their paths did not cross until Demjansk. Mattes was a skilled Pioneer, and Locht was an assault gun operator in the 184th Sturmgeschütz Abteilung. The 184th fought in many battles with the Russians, especially in the winter of 1941-1942 around the Cholm Pocket.

The 184th was formed at Zinna near Jüterbog in August 1940 and designated as Sturmartillerie-Abteilung 184 with three batteries, and later, in February 1941, as Sturmgeschütz Abteilung 184. It was never given division status but was under the command of various armies or even army groups and sent to divisions when needed as a mobile artillery or antitank unit. In January 1942, it was ordered to the Cholm area and attached to XXXIX Corps under the Sixteenth Army of Army Group North. In July of that year, it was transferred to

the 30th Infantry Division of II Army Corps within the same army group and eventually trapped with II Army Corps in the Demjansk Pocket. It was March 1943 before the surviving members of II Corps were evacuated.

Sometime after midnight that night in Demjansk in August 1942, the two soldiers parted. The 184th was scheduled to advance toward Kalinin, and Mattes's pioneer unit had some bridging operations to attend to across the Pola River, a tributary of the Lovat River, which runs into Lake Ilmen.

After their chance meeting in Demjansk, Mattes and Locht never saw each other again. Kaline received a telegram in late September 1942 saying that her husband had been killed in action in Russia and that his remains had been buried near Starija-Russa. No other details were available.

Locht came home in July 1945, walking most all of the way. He had been captured in Denmark, a world away from Demjansk and another world away from home. He had been in a hospital in Denmark recovering from serious wounds received on August 28, 1943, near Starija-Russa, just south of the Estonian border. Before he was wounded, Locht and the 184th were on the move to Selischarevo in the Waldai Hills when his battery was surprised by an antitank gun, which opened up on their lead vehicle.

Locht was in the following Sturmgeschütz, not driving at the time, but in charge of the gun. He noticed a small church with an onion dome on a hill half a mile away . The Russians had hidden the 37mm gun in the church entrance. He aimed his 50mm cannon at the church and prayed that God would forgive him for firing on His house. One shot, and the position was destroyed. At Welikije Luki, however, Locht's crew was not so lucky. The gun carriage sank into a swamp near the river and was temporarily lost. It was days before Locht' s Sturmgeschütz was extracted.

Kaline, an early war widow, moved away from her hometown with her children and remarried in 1950. Locht' s son, Willy, met Annemarie once in 1966 during a visit to Germany from the United States, where he had come to live after growing up and serving a stint in the French Foreign Legion. Annemarie could not remember ever seeing her father . Kaline was happily married, and Mattes was forgotten. Kaline died in 1974, and Locht' s family lost track of all the relatives. Annemarie and Hans were never heard from again. Locht died of a fall in 1976.

Years later, with the advent of the personal computer and the Internet and the collapse of the Soviet Union, information began to flow more freely from behind the former Iron Curtain. International war grave commissions at work in many countries around the world began seeing to the decent burial and registration of millions of war dead, even in the vast reaches of the former Soviet Union.

Author's Collection

Soldiers of the 30th Pioneer Battalion gather for a hot meal. Mattes Hansen is at far left.

The Volksbund Deutsche Kriegsgräberfürsorge (German War Graves Commission) is responsible for the maintenance and upkeep of German war graves in Europe and North Africa. Its charter is the acquisition, maint enance, and care of German war graves, assisting nearest relatives of the fallen, preserving the memory of the sacrifices made, and promoting educational outreach programs throughout Europe. Today the commission is caretaker for about 2.6 million dead in more than 800 military cemeteries in 45 countries. The co mmission's personnel include about 8,000 volunteers and 571 paid employees.

With the end of the Cold War, the commission gained access to gravesites in Eastern Europe where many German soldiers had lost their lives in World War II. Since 1991, more than 500 cemeteries where the dead of both world wars are interred have been established or restored in eastern, central, and southeastern Europe. More than 750,000 sets of remains have been buried in new graves.

One cemetery was created close to the Pola River, near the village of Korpowo, halfway between Demjansk and Starija-Russa. When commission personnel arrived in the area in 2001, they had an enormous task ahead of them. Most graves dug in Russia during the war were shallow with only birch crosses and steel helmets to mark their locations. The helmets had long since been plundered by souvenir hunters or turned into food bowls for pets and livestock by the poor local people. Commission volunteers in the region between Demjansk and Starija-Russa had to first find evidence of burial sites and then find any surviving witnesses who knew or had seen anything from the summer of 1941 to early 1944. About 33,000 German soldiers have now been buried at the Korpowo site, and it is estimated that eventually 50,000 will be interred there.

And Mattes? Well, a babushka living in a sod hut not far from the Pola had seen quite a bit of the action there during W orld War II. She watched as the 30th Pioneer Battalion attempted to build a bridge on September 6, 1942, and she saw them attacked by Russian infantry. Several Germans were killed, and they were buried by their comrades near the river . The woman tended the graves even during the communist cleansing that went on for years after the war.

When commission personnel arrived asking about burial sites, this 90-year-old woman took them to the graves. The remains of Corporal Mathias Hansen were exhumed and identified. He now rests in the German War Memorial Cemetery of Korpowo on a lonely stretch of road between Demjansk and Starija-Russa. In March 2014, his closest living relative, Locht's son Willy, was notified in a letter from the commission.

He was not forgotten, not by his countrymen and not by his nephew, Willy Gehlen.

Author Don A. Gregory writes frequently on World War II topics and resides in Huntsville, Alabama. Wilhelm Gehlen researched letters and other family memorabilia for this story.

COSTLY VICTORY IN THE Hürtgen Forest

BY KELLY BELL

WEEKS OF HEAVY CASUALTIES MADE THE AMERICAN EFFORT TO CAPTURE THE HÜRTGEN DURING THE DREARY WINTER OF 1944-1945 ONE OF THE MOST COSTLY IN THE NATION'S MILITARY HISTORY.

ON Sunday, September 10, 1944, all bridges over the German-Belgian border rivers, the Our and the Sauer, were dynamited. Word circulated throughout western Germany that the Americans were coming. In some cases the battered remnants of German divisions were not given time to reach the eastern banks before the bridges were blown.

The Americans were closing in so quickly that any hesitation was thought foolish. Remaining occupants of the small towns dotting the rivers' eastern shores were busy hauling in the final harvest before the ground war arrived. These residents were also burying valuables and nonperishable foodstocks while watching the streams of ox cart-drawn refugees flow back into the Fatherland. These once proud and haughty "settlers" had confidently followed the onrushing German Wehrmacht four years earlier as it stampeded to overwhelm Western Europe. Now they deserted their usurped holdings as the liberators from overseas bludgeoned their way ever closer.

The Allied bomber fleets swelled daily as they grumbled endlessly overhead. The big birds' escort fighters habitually plunged from the heights to strafe whatever they caught in their crosshairs—soldiers, civilians, vehicles, trains, even livestock. The Americans were coming, and if the foot soldiers were anywhere near as bloodthirsty as their pilot comrades seemed to be, there was plenty to fear.

The women, children, and elderly in the border towns had no one to protect them. The young men were long gone, consumed mainly by the faraway Eastern Front. A few crippled POWs the Allies had returned told of limitless reservoirs of manpower and matériel, of supply and weapons depots so vast one could get lost in them, and how this was pouring into Europe from cargo fleets that stretched beyond the Atlantic Ocean's western horizon. These reports were not the only ominous signs.

Most residents of the frontier river region heeded Berlin's order to evacuate the immediate vicinity. Hannalore Weiss-Thomas was 12 years old at the time and recalled later, "From up on the heights above our village of Gmund we could see something moving among the trees on the Luxembourg bank and hear the noise of their vehicles on the roads beyond. I remember well how I burst into tears when my mother showed them to me just before we fled. They were the dread Amis, come to do ... I didn't know what.

"I little realized that 10 years later I would be married to one of them and living in Chicago, but then I was frightened. Awfully frightened. Now I know, of course, that on that Monday the world was about to change. Not only my own little world, but the world of everyone in Europe ... for the rest of the 20th century."

On the evening of September 11, a five-man patrol of General Courtney Hodges' U.S. First Army waded across the Our and warily ventured into Germany. Sergeant Warner W. Holzinger, Corporal Ralph Diven, T/5 Coy Locke, Pfc. George McNeal, and a French lieutenant named Lille serving as an interpreter sloshed across the stream and found themselves in the middle of the famed Siegfried Line. They cautiously investigated one pillbox after another. All were empty. The floors were coated in dust, and local farmers had converted some into chicken coops. The defenders had been sucked away by the manpower drain of the Eastern Front.

A deserted Siegfried Line was infinitely more than the invaders had dared hope for , and within the hour Hodges was informed of the apparent windfall. Holzinger was the first armed foreign soldier to set foot in Germany by force of arms since 1814.

There was obvious cause for optimism among the Allies. The Germans had been cleared from France and their other W estern

U.S. Army Art Collection

conquests in a late summer sweep so swift that these first steps in Germany had come a full 233 days ahead of the pre-invasion timetable. Looming in front of Hodges' army, however, was a barrier even more formidable than the Siegfried Line, and this one was manned.

It was a dark and brooding forest, the Hürtgen, straight out of Grimms' fairy tales. While there were no ogres, trolls, or witches creeping through its gloomy confines, these 50 square miles of towering timber harbored a series of bristling, well-camouflaged fortifications. When American troops eased into the woods they found a defense system untouched on the Western Front, one that would dish out the worst defeat Allied ground forces would suffer in Europe.

After breaking out of their Normandy beachhead, the Allies had romped across France with such speed they overextended their supply lines. Supreme Commander General Dwight D. Eisenhower ordered his generals to ration their supplies until the situation could be stabilized. One of Hodges' subordinates, Maj. Gen. Joe Collins, had other ideas.

"Lightning Joe" Collins was 48 years old but looked much younger. He had won his moniker via his brilliant handling of the 25th Infantry Division against the Japanese at Guadalcanal. Now commanding the First Army's VII Corps he believed all that was needed to send the Wehrmacht to the surrender table was for him to lead his men through the remaining defenders to the last natural barrier to victory , the Rhine River.

"Don't stop men when they're moving!" Collins pleaded to Hodges. He proposed that his troops be allowed to bypass the German city of Aachen and its defenses, breach the Siegfried Line immediately so the enemy could not man

The rusting and abandoned hulks of American Sherman tanks lie derelict along a stretch of the Hürtgen Forest that has been devastated during months of combat. The tanks bear mute testimony to the intensity of the struggle in the Hürtgen during the autumn of 1944.

it at the last moment, then pause to await the supply convoys. Hodges eventually relented and allowed his impatient corps commander to go ahead with his "reconnaissance in force," but to halt if he encountered substantial opposition and await supplies and reinforcements.

Collins had no intention of following these orders to the letter. He aimed to develop his probe into a major offensive and saddle Hodges with the responsibility of keeping VII Corps supplied.

Lightning Joe did not take the looming woods lightly. He had read of General John J. Pershing's problems in the Argonne Forest 26 years earlier. These woods lay on very rough terrain whose heights soared to 1,000 feet and were bisected by fast-flowing streams and narrow canyons. Embedded in the craggy slopes were scores of pillboxes and bunkers whose interlocking fields of fire passed over rows of dragon's teeth, concrete tank obstacles. These innocuous looking concrete stumps were everywhere, effectively blocking passage to any kind of tracked vehicle.

There were also thickly strewn fields of plastic Schu mines, invisible to metal detectors, and the feared Bouncing Betty mine. This simple explosive sprayed a canister of metal balls at waist height.

Collins sent part of his command into this hornets' nest to guard his right flank from counterattack. It was a pointless move. The Nazis in the forest were set up exclusively for defense and had no thoughts of attacking. All the Allies needed to do was bypass and encircle the woodlands and starve the Germans into surrender. The Western Front would have been breached and the war possibly won by Christmas.

Not one top-ranking U.S. Army commander in Europe appears to have thought of this logical, humane strategy. Instead, divisions would be fed into the deadly defenses at a rate of about one every other week. As fresh forces arrived they would stare in bewilderment at the few savaged survivors stumbling shell-shocked to the rear, victims of a meaningless offensive whose contribution to final victory was negligible. The folks back in the States expected to read headlines of more smashing battlefield triumphs in Europe. The war correspondents gave them just that and omitted the ugly reality of the Hürtgen Forest.

On September 13, the 9th Infantry Division was the first to enter the treeline. By the 17th, its men were fighting for their lives as the defensive emplacements and artillery to the east mauled them. The invaders were also bedeviled by fast-moving patrols of young German soldiers fighting on familiar ground.

These opening actions were pretty much a draw until the 22nd, when the Nazis opened up with 17 150mm howitzers, nine 105mm howitzers, an undetermined number of 120mm and 80mm mortars, and a few 210mm cannons. For 15 minutes terrified Americans huddled in their muddy foxholes amid the explosions. Plate-sized slabs of glowing shrapnel slashed mature trees in two, and tons of soggy earth blown skyward rained back onto the soldiers, forcing them to dig their way out like moles.

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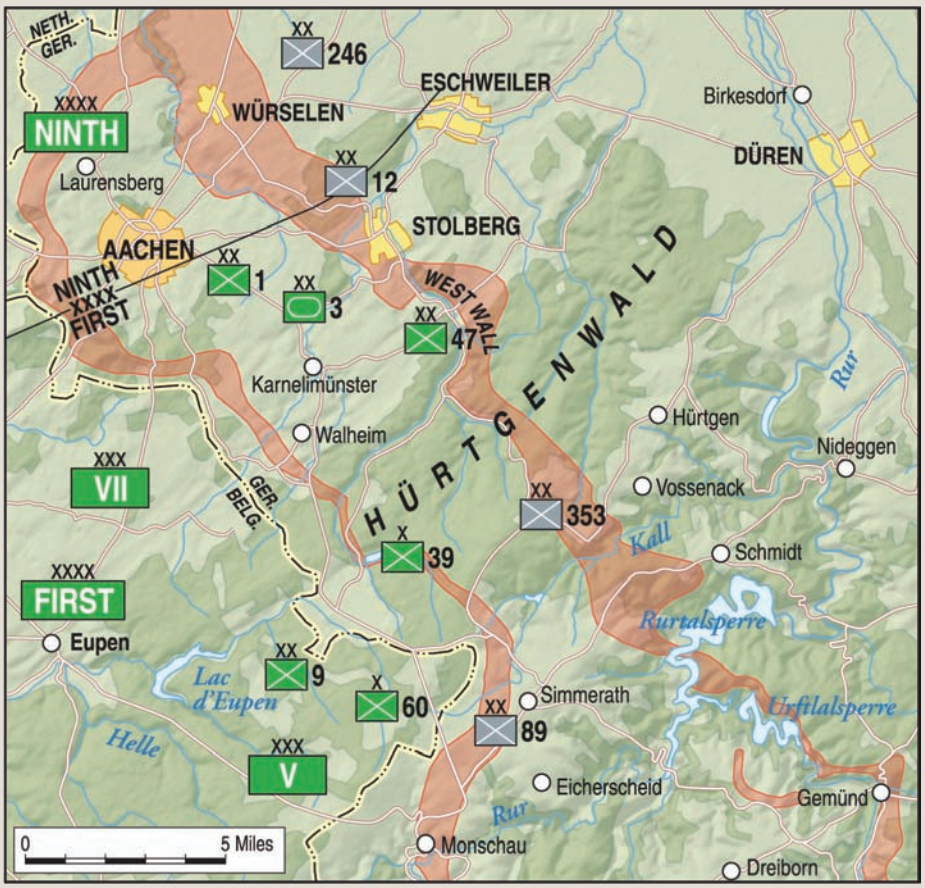
When the barrage abruptly stopped it was supplanted by shrill signals from officers' whistles, shouts in German, and the clatter of tank tracks. The Nazis did well at first, overrunning the U.S. right flank and capturing a cannon company's howitzers. Just in time, divisional commander General Louis Craig sent in his 746th Tank Battalion and 899th Tank Destroyer Battalion. The Germans retreated to their pillboxes, but their artillery again opened fire. The path through the trees was already getting bloody.

Woodland combat was new to the invaders, so the best methods of neutralizing the pillboxes had to be learned in action. The 9th Infantry Division had fought through North Africa, Sicily, and France. By the end of September, it had taken more casualties in the Hürtgen Forest than in all its earlier World War II engagements combined. With the defenses

BELOW: The efforts of the U.S. V and VII Corps to drive the Germans out of the thickly wooded Hürtgen Forest met with difficulty from the outset. The defenders had constructed strong defensive positions and exacted horrific casualties on the Americans. RIGHT: American soldiers service a 105mm howitzer in the Hürtgen Forest. American artillery was often ineffective against the well-entrenched Germans. OPPOSITE: Soldiers of the U.S. 28th Infantry Division, nicknamed the Bucket of Blood due to their red keystone shoulder patch that identified them originally as a Pennsylvania National Guard division, advance warily through the dense Hürtgen Forest near the town of Voosenack.



Map © 2015 Philip Schwartzberg, Meridian Mapping, Minneapolis, MN

seemingly growing stronger by the hour, the 9th was pulled out for a rest.

After this repulse one embittered survivor groused, "If anyone says he knew where he was in the forest, then he's a liar!" The Germans seemed to be everywhere, and their artillery strategy was yet another unfamiliar menace as a foxhole became a death pit unless it had a stout covering. Nazi gunners aimed their artillery not at American positions, but at the trees above them. Striking the trunks, the shells showered hapless GIs with hot, jagged shrapnel. The inclination to drop flat or huddle in a hole were the worst possible reactions because they exposed a man's entire body to the downward-hurtling fragments. The safest response was to snap to attention, but few were aware of this and continued to do as instructors had taught them.

Any kind of movement at night was almost suicidal. With both sides terrified of the dark, it took little sound or imagination to prompt a burst of gunfire. Opposing positions were often separated by only a few yards, and in the blackness men shot first and identified targets at dawn. Soldiers crouched motionless in their foxholes wishing wildly for the murky daybreak, and the nights were getting longer.

For a time the Allies attempted to evacuate their dead and wounded during the lengthy nights, but both sides' trigger happiness made this impractical. Short cease-fires were granted so injured men could be carried to safety, but sometimes this was not enough. Late in the campaign General James Gavin of the 82nd Airborne Division was horrified to stumble across an aid station that had apparently been abandoned in the heat of battle and the wounded left to die. Gavin later described the sight of "dozens of litter cases, the bodies long dead. In the midst of the fighting it had been abandoned, many of the men dying on their stretchers."

Craig was usually scrupulous about his men's welfare. He allowed his soldiers to write to inform him of their problems, the most legitimate of which he passed on to Eisenhower. He had seen what was happening in the forest, how the attackers were being savaged by Germans who were at home among the trees. Yet when Eisenhower informed Craig that the 9th was to attack again on October 2, Craig raised not one word of protest. He obediently sent his dazed survivors and fresh-faced replacements back into the Hürtgen where nothing had changed.

The primary targets were the towns of Germeter and Vossenack via a southward thrust over high ground past the Germeter -Hürtgen road and through the forest with the securing of the Schmidt-Steckenborn ridge the ultimate objective. As outlined on maps, the new assault looked too simple and logical to fail. The 9th Infantry Division's 60th Regiment would advance to the left of the 39th Regiment into the woods and clear a three-mile-wide corridor while the 47th Regiment rolled up the left flank, securing it with 24-hour patrols and providing additional troops to the 60th and 39th if necessary. Nobody considered this latter possibility likely. No emergencies were foreseen.

The high command still had not grasped the realities of forest fighting. Supplying the regimental sectors across the pair of slender, easily blocked trails, which were all that was available for transport, would be impossible. Tanks could not penetrate the trees, which grew in such a dense mass that their branches interlocked. Even if the infantry reached open ground, the enemy would hold the next in the ongoing series of ridges, and the Americans would be unable to advance without tank support.

Worst of all, the brass had not taken into account how spotty control and communications between Allied units and their commanders would become once the attackers entered the forest. The trees were so thick it was virtually impossible for units to remain in mutual contact, so coordination in battle was out of the question. Small squads found themselves isolated and uncertain of their locations.

On October 2, right on schedule, the 9th Division trudged in during a downpour and relieved the 4th Cavalry Group, which had been manning the outer ring of Allied positions. German heavy machine guns firing up to 1,000 rounds per minute were already snarling at the wary Americans.

It took a while, but by daybreak on the 6th, Craig's men were in position. It was never completely light under the thick tree canopy, especially beneath the overcast northern European sky, but on this morning the clouds parted and the sun slowly burned off drifting fog. Republic P-47 Thunderbolt fighter bombers screamed down to assault the Germans, spraying tons of .50-caliber bullets and dropping one 500-pound bomb per plane. Seven squadrons, 84 planes in all, hit the pillboxes, preceding an artillery bombardment with every heavy gun in the 9th Division.

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The shells fell in a three-minute onslaught so violent it dazed even the Americans. After this first pounding there was a five-minute pause, after which the gunners opened up again in hopes of catching the Germans digging their way out of their half-buried positions. For two more minutes the long barrels belched. When they stopped, U.S. officers rose and bellowed

the ancient order, "Follow me!" Six thousand scared young men heaved themselves from their muddy holes at precisely 11:30 AM in the second major attack into the forest.

The lesson the Allies should have learned the previous winter and spring at Monte Cassino was bloodily repeated. Artillery bombardment of strongly fortified, reinforced positions is not particularly effective. The soldiers of the German 942nd Infantry Regiment and 257th Fusilier Battalion opened the slits in their undamaged pillboxes and poked machine-gun muzzles through the openings as the Americans, slowed by the densely packed trees, came into view.

To the northeast, the 39th was stunned by the volume of fire coming from the unseen strongholds, mowing down the vanguard and forcing survivors to drop flat despite their noncoms' and officers' hysterical commands to keep moving. Steadily the shouts of "Forward!" were supplanted by cries of "Medic!"

At first the 60th moved at a steady pace, but when its 2nd Battalion got within 1,000 yards of its objective it came under withering small-arms fire. Then came the sound the footsloggers had come to dread in Normandy the mournful wail of the Nazis' "Moaning Minnie" multiple barreled mortars commenced. As the bombs detonated in the soft, wet earth they sent razor sharp steel and showers of scalding mud in all directions. The 60th's 1st Battalion tried to keep going but blundered into a barbed wire-festooned minefield. Some men got hung up on the wire and were killed by the machine guns, while others had their lower bodies ripped apart by mines.

The 3rd Battalion hurriedly launched itself at the enemy in an attempt to dilute the pressure on the 39th and 60th, but the Germans had plenty of firepower for these newcomers. As the American generals in their faraway chateaus received the first reports from the grisly combat zone they realized their optimism had been false. Another mass movement into the Hürtgen was being crushed. Collins' and Craig's units were cut to pieces without having seen a single German soldier.

The defenders were commanded by Field Marshal Walther Model, a 53-year-old career officer with no interest in politics apart from his ardent devotion to Hitler. After a painful tour of duty in World War I during which he was twice critically wounded, Model had no tolerance for excuses or explanations. During a highly successful stint on the Eastern Front he earned the nickname "the Führer's Fireman" for his skill in stabilizing precarious situations.

With no skills apart from soldiering, Model was lost in peacetime, and this coupled with how the Soviets had branded him a war criminal to be hanged after Germany's surrender incited him to throw himself into his new assignment in the West. Model had already humiliated British Field Marshal Bernard Law Montgomery by using two decimated SS divisions to defeat the British 1st Airborne Division at Arnhem, Holland, during Operation Market-Garden.

Now, Model sent for Kampfgruppe (battle group) Wegelein, named for its commander, Colonel Wolfgang Wegelein. As one of the few reserves left in the reeling Reich this outfit was an invaluable commodity to be used with extreme consideration. These 2,000 men were mostly officer cadets and among the finest soldiers remaining in the German Army. Throwing them against a well-armed, numerically superior enemy force was an undertaking of extreme implications, but Model had little to lose.

By this time high-ranking American commanders were being fired. The 9th Division's assistant divisional commander, the 60th Regiment's commanding colonel, and the divisional chief of staff had all been sacked. A well-seasoned, 30-year-old colonel who had served with distinction in North Africa, Sicily, and Normandy replaced the latter. His name was William Westmoreland, who a quarter century later commanded all U.S. troops in Vietnam.

With so much not going according to plan, U.S. Army Chief of Staff General George C. Marshall flew across the Atlantic and traveled all the way to Craig's headquarters to demand

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Taking up defensive positions in a clearing in the Hürtgen Forest, soldiers of the 28th Infantry Division prepare to engage the Germans. At left, a two-man team has just fired a round from a mortar.

a full account of the unhappy situation. Realizing his and the Army's reputations were at stake, Marshall made it clear there was to be no withdrawal from the Hürtgen and that no mention of what was happening there need be made to the press. The U.S. Army was to take the Hürtgen Forest by force of arms.

Dawn came quietly on Columbus Day, 1944, and briefly the American troops wondered if they might have an easy day, but as full daylight arrived there came the first moanings of the hated multiple mortars as another bloodletting commenced. For a few minutes the same old jarring explosions killed, maimed, and stunned young men in their foxholes. The barrage knocked out communications and several field artillery emplacements, but the real surprise came right after the shelling stopped.

From deep within the forest came muffled shouts and commands in German and the shrill warbling of officers' whistles. Americans raised their heads and widened their bloodshoteyes at the sight of camouflaged cadets swarming toward them as Kampfgruppe Wegelein sallied forth to counterattack.

As the Germans overwhelmed the first depleted battalion of the 39th Regiment, its commander, Lt. Col. Van H. Bond, instantly realized they were trying to cut off and annihilate the 3rd Battalion, so he had his men execute the confusing maneuver of turning 180 degrees and attacking backward. If the 3rd went under, the other U.S. units might panic and break, and with few reserves available in the immediate vicinity this would be a disaster. All day the men of the 3rd did their best to hold the sagging lines, but the Germans were steadily gaining ground. As they reached the Germeter Road it seemed they were on the brink of hurling the 9th Infantry Division completely out of the forest, but incredibly the Nazis halted their advance at this point. It was later revealed that German communications were spotty and they had mistakenly been ordered to stop. They had also lost their bearings and were uncertain if they were advancing in the right direction.

Bond intended to launch a counterthrust of his own the next day, Friday the 13th. Wegelein had been ordered to withdraw to his defensive positions. Preparing to start back at dawn he was shocked when Bond's men came at him and his cadets, who had taken about 500 casualties themselves the previous day. The weakened antagonists tore destructively at each other until Wegelein did something inexplicable.

During a lull in the fighting the elderly German colonel, his adjutant and German Shepherd in tow, strolled in the open right up to the front lines where an American sergeant quickly

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ABOVE: East of the German city of Duren, two soldiers of the U.S. 39th Infantry Regiment fire a .30-caliber machine gun toward German positions in the town of Schlich. BELOW: Just as the Americans suffered, the German defenders of the Hürtgen Forest sustained heavy casualties in the bitter autumn fight on their country's frontier. In this photo, two young German soldiers lie dead following an intense firefight with American troops.

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shot him dead. Perhaps this career officer who had been in the German Army since 1921 succumbed to despondency and decided to end it all by letting his enemy kill him. Whatever his motives, his death disheartened his young charges. They crept back to their concrete strongholds without firing another shot.

With the counterattack over, the stalemate resumed as the Allies continued to probe the German defenses. Staff Sergeant Kin Shogren recalled decades later how after Kampfgruppe Wegelein pulled back the Americans still lost "between one-quarter and one-third of our troops each day, so that there was a constant turnover of company personnel. If a rifleman lasted three days he was a veteran."

By now winter was closing in, and men were coming down with frostbite and the agonizing malady of trench foot, which had tormented their fathers in World War I. After soldiers crouched for days in freezing mire their feet would begin to hurt so severely they could not walk. Removing their warterlogged boots and socks they would find their feet wrinkled, swollen, and a sickly shade of gray. Medics would peel away the dead outer layer of flesh in strips. The feet would then swell until they resembled grotesque red balloons, and they burned as if immersed in battery acid. Some men had to have their feet amputated. Exacerbated by malnutrition, the noncombat casualty situation was becoming serious. The 9th Infantry Division was reaching the end of its tether.

On October 24, the unit was informed it was to be sent to Belgium for rest and reinforcement. Since September the division had gained 3,000 yards through the forest at a cost of 3,836 casualties. A man had been killed or crippled for every two feet advanced, but the high command cleverly included the 47th Infantry Regiment in the casualty lists. The 47th had not been heavily involved in the fighting and suffered few losses. This enabled the brass to report a mere 30 percent killed or wounded.

Now plodding into the meat grinder was the 28th Infantry Division, which had originally been organized as a branch of the Pennsylvania National Guard. It was the first ever National Guard outfit, having fought in every one of its country's conflicts since the Revolutionary War. It was commanded by General Norman "Dutch" Cota, who had won a Silver Star and Distinguished Service Order for his exploits on Normandy's Omaha Beach where, as assistant divisional commander, he had shouted at a battalion of pinned-down Rangers, "You men are Rangers! I know you won't let me down!" Later in the same campaign he earned a Purple Heart and another Silver Star.

Cota's command was assigned to capture the town of Schmidt to secure the right flank of Collins' VII Corps advance on the Rhine. Whoever held Schmidt would also control the road network. The 28th was supposed to take the town by November 5, far too little time to both relieve the 9th and then plan and execute strategy for the attack. Cota pointed out these problems to Hodges along with the anticipated difficulties of advancing over rough, wooded terrain facing enemy-controlled high ground. When Hodges responded to Cota's observations with icy silence, Cota shrugged and went to take on his impossible mission.

The 5th Armored Division would assist the 28th. The foot soldiers were to follow the same route as earlier advances, through Germeter, Vossenack, over the Kall River gorge to Kommerscheidt, and into Schmidt.

Cota's superiors had made nearly all his command decisions in advance, leaving him with little freedom of action. He had to send his men over three lofty, German-occupied ridges and hope the Kall Trail (connecting Germeter and Vossenack) would give tanks access to the fighting. Occasional farm carts had

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ABOVE: During hazardous house-to-house fighting in one of many towns in the Hürtgen Forest, an American tank destroyer creeps forward along a cobblestone street. Two accompanying infantrymen have taken shelter in an adjacent window and doorway. One of these is armed with an antitank bazooka. OPPOSITE: After its capture by American soldiers, a massive German bunker near the town of Germeter, Germany, appears to have been turned into a U.S. command post. Heavily fortified positions such as these exacted a heavy toll on the advancing Americans in the Hürtgen Forest.

worn this slender trace through the trees, and the assumption that it could accommodate Sherman tanks was brazen.

On Halloween, Hodges instructed Cota to attack on November 2, despite miserable weather. For several days a steady, freezing rain had saturated the sector, which was also shrouded in dense fog that ruled out air support and made artillery backup risky because of the danger that Americans would be shelledby their own guns.

At 8 AM, 12,000 artillery rounds shook the rain-drenched, misty landscape as gunners opened up on what they hoped were the enemy's positions. Following the bombardment the Germans manned their gun ports and waited, but the Americans did not come. They were awaiting a P-47 strike which they did not know had been postponed because of the weather. When the planes finally appeared that afternoon they mistakenly strafed a U.S. artillery position, killing or wounding 24 men.

At 9 AM, the 28th began to cautiously filter through the trees, and at first things seemed to be going well as the 112th Infantry Regiment quickly captured Vossenack. Elsewhere, however, the situation was typically bloody . The 110th Infantry Regiment was mauled by the omnipresent German mortars and machine guns. With gaping holes ripped in their ranks, the survivors retreated.

Surprisingly, the next day brought good news as the 28th captured Kommerscheidt. Elsewhere, the 112th Infantry Regiment, shielded by a rain of shells from distant Sherman tanks, splashed across the freezing Kall, poured into Schmidt, and quickly overwhelmed the German garrison. They immediately commenced fortifying their new positions for the anticipated counterattack.

While the 112th was consolidating its hold on Schmidt, a row of Shermans eased along the Kall Trail. The track steadily narrowed until the lead tank was forced to stop to avoid falling off the path's left side, down the steep gradient, and into the gorge. Darkness was gathering as engineers went to work shoring up the crumbling cart track, and as they toiled through the freezing night enemy artillery took repeated potshots at the line of stationary tanks but did not score any hits.

At 5 AM on November 4, the priceless tanks gingerly resumed their advance, but the lead Sherman hit a Teller mine that ripped off a tread. The crew of the next tank attempted to go around the immobilized one but bogged down in the mud. Three Shermans finally made it into Kommerscheidt, their crews unaware that no additional rolling armor was detailed to support them. When the counterattack came, the three tanks would face it alone.

At daybreak on the 5th, the Germans opened up on Schmidt with a cannonade. After a sleepless night the men of the 112th caught glimpses of hostile infantry darting between patches of cover or following behind 15 supporting tanks. The German tanks ignored the antipersonnel mines the Americans had planted during the night and the bazooka rockets that ricocheted harmlessly off their sloping sides. One after another U.S. units succumbed to panic and took flight. The unnerved Allies aba ndoned their wounded and galloped in terror back down the Kall Trail or into the trees, where Nazi infantry captured them.

The situation back at 28th Division headquarters became increasingly confused as reports of the mass flight began to arrive. Cota dispatched one of his colonels to investigate, but the man drove his jeep into a German patrol and was captured. The scene at Kommerscheidt was almost as chaotic.

As fear-crazed men from Schmidt poured into town their state of mind was contagious. Bellowing officers with cocked .45s tried to stem the stamped but managed to corral just 200 of the retreating troops to add to Kommerscheidt's defenses, which included the three Shermans.

The first tank to challenge the oncoming Germans was commanded by Lieutenant Raymond Flieg, who recklessly charged at the enemy The first German tank, a Mark IV, went up like a volcano as Flieg's gunner hit it squarely with a 75mm shell. Next came a Panther. Undaunted, Flieg hurled two high-explosive rounds into its front, causing the tank to shudder but doing little damage. However, the rookie German crew panicked and abandoned the tank. Flieg destroyed three more German tanks to bring the armored thrust to a halt. It was the Americans' sole ray of sunshine that dreary Saturday

The U.S. 2nd Infantry Battalion, dug in on Vossenack Ridge, broke and retreated in disorder after being shelled at daybreak on the 7th. A few of the 2nd's men remained in Vossenack, and Cota frantically cast about for replacements to send there. He came up withan engineer battalion and 70 slightly injured troops from a field hospital at Germeter. Led by a bleeding lieutenant, these walking wounded set out on foot for Vossenack. Most deserted en route.

That afternoon the fight over the town commenced in a drenching downpour, and luckily for the exhausted, undermanned U.S. units their opponents, elements of the 116th Panzer Division were also worn out and depleted. At nightfall the fighting fizzled as both sides ignored their dead and wounded and searched for some kind of shelter.

By now Cota realized his invasion of the Hürtgen Forest was doomed, but he was also aware of how fond General Bradley was of boasting how the U.S. Army never lost ground it "had bought with its own blood." The Army had spilled much more of its blood in losing Kommerscheidt, Schmidt, and Vossenack than it had in momentarily winning them, and with a reduced number of hungry and demoralized soldiers there was no chance of retaking the towns.

Cota decided to go ahead with the retreat that he realized was his sole civilized option, knowing how appalled Eisenhower, Hodges, and Bradley would be when they heard.

Extracting his men and equipment would be difficult under any circumstances, especially with the Kall Trail under enemy control. First came the Herculean task of obtaining authorization.

In a face-to-face confrontation with Hodges, Cota secured permission to execute a limited withdrawal across the Kall River. There would be no retreat from the Vossenack sector, and the 28th was to send troops to aid in planned assaults on the towns of Hürtgen and Monschau. Cota obediently acquiesced, condemning his soldiers to another week of death and agony.

On Wednesday, November 8, beneath another freezing cloudburst, the tattered remnants of the 110th and 112th Infantry Regiments commenced quietly picking their way to the rear, hoping the Germans would not notice the evacuation. As American artillery dropped a covering barrage, 350 remaining GIs disabled what operational equipment they still possessed. Then, each man, holding onto the shoulder of the one in front of him, set out in a long queue for the rear. The file was led by a colonel who immediately lost his way. When the Nazis started lobbing mortar rounds at the pathetic column, the men panicked and bolted. Miraculously, most managed to reach friendly lines.

The units earmarked for the twin offensive against Hürtgen and Monschau were given just 500 fresh replacements. In killing cold, battalions of the 110th were ordered to assist the 12th Infantry Regiment, 4th Division in its drive on Monschau and the wooded high ground overlooking Hürtgen. The temperature dropped so drastically that two signalmen froze to death when they went to repair a phone line the night before the attack.

The 110th was also to help assault a row of pillboxes outside the town of Raffelsbrand, and it was the same old story. For five days the infantry bled while trying to subdue the line of bristling bunkers. The 1st Battalion lost all but 57 of its 870 troops, and other units suffered almost as badly. On the 10th, the 116th's Panzers returned and tore into the 12th Infantry Regiment. The following dawn brought a dense fog that hid surviving Americans as they slipped through enemy lines and escaped. During this last engagement, the 12th lost 1,600 men.

This was the last time the 28th Division would see action in the Hürtgen Forest. Its 112th Infantry Regiment alone had absorbed 167 killed, 719 wounded, 431 missing, 232 captured, and 544 noncombat (nearly all of them weather related) losses, leaving 107 somewhat healthy men out of the 3,000 who had gone into action two weeks earlier.

Even now the Allied high command remained determined to root the enemy from the Hürtgen. The reputation of the U.S. Army meant literally everything. One hundred thousand of America's finest would pour into the dreary forest in an effort to dislodge the Nazis through sheer force of numbers.

Hodges planned to use two complete corps in this fourth incursion. General Leonard T. Gerow's V Corps would go in from the south while Collins' VII Corps was to enter the northern sector. With the 4th and 8th Infantry Divisions and 5th Armored Division slated to attack directly into the forest, the coming invasion would be on a front 30 miles wide. Hopes and prayers were pinned on Allied air support. As usual, it was raining.

Bradley twice postponed the attack, hoping for a break in the weather. He hoped that with the assistance of his massive aerial armada the enemy could finally be overwhelmed and his troops "could push through to the Rhine in a matter of days."

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On the morning of November 16, the overcast parted. At 11:30 AM, 1,191 Boeing B-17 Flying Fortresses of the U.S. Eighth Air Force dumped 4,000 tons of fragmentation bombs on the ruins of Schmidt. Then, 1,188 British Royal Air Force Avro Lancasters savaged the towns of Duren, Heinsberg, and Julich while Allied artillery opened its latest deluge of preparatory shelling. The Ninth Air Force came next with its heavy bombers and 1,000 fighter bombers to splatter the German defenses with yet more fragmentation explosives and millions of .50-caliber rounds.

As the last aircraft droned off to the west, American infantry charged into the damp, smoking landscape. Most expected little resistance after such an opening firestorm, and their generals tended to agree. By then they should have known better. To the rear, war correspondent Ernest Hemingway felt a dark foreboding as he watched the mass of young men head for the trees.

German machine guns began firing as soon as the Americans came into range, ripping gaping holes in the wavering ranks. The Nazis refused quarter to men whose helmets were emblazoned with large red crosses or small white ones. Medics and chaplains were killed as readily as their comrades.

The Germans were steadily losing their senses from the ceaseless Allied shelling and air attacks that were killing more of them than their insane resistance seemed to indicate. The Wehrmacht reserved little compassion for men who lost their wits from constant combat. During World War II the Germans court-martialed and shot more than 10,000 "cowards and deserters," inducing the soldiers manning the Hürtgen defenses to fight like the madmen they were steadily becoming. The only way for them to survive this battle was to win it. To retreat or collapse from shattered nerves were certain routes to execution, and the defense of the Hürtgen was accordingly fanatical. Masses of Allied casualties were again flooding the hospitals at Verviers, Eupen, Liege, and other Belgian cities liberated the previous summer.

From his headquarters in a nearby hunting lodge, Model carefully husbanded his formations as most remaining German reserves were channeled south to the Ardennes Forest for the approaching December counterthrust that the Allies would call the Battle of the Bulge.

On November 17, the U.S. 16th Infantry Battalion secured pivotal Hill 232 only to come under fire from German artillery. The Americans held as the battle at last seemed to be turning in their favor.

After four days of this latest offensive, Gerow

worriedly sent in the 8th Infantry Division, commanded by General Donald Stroh. Unknown to those around him, Stroh had never emotionally recovered from seeing his pilot son shot from the sky and killed during the siege of Brest the previous summer. The heartbroken general had lost the will to fight, and as his men assembled to enter the forest three hours before dawn on November 21, they had no idea their general was a man of broken spirit.

Seemingly infected by their commander's lack of enthusiasm, the men of the 8th made little headway. Stroh did radio for support from the 5th Armored Division, but these reinforcements came to grief as they moved forward.

Advancing along the Germeter-Hürtgen road late on the night of November 24, they had to struggle through not only pitch darkness, but also a peculiar storm mingling rain, snow, and sleet. Antipersonnel mines decimated the Shermans' accompanying infantry, and just before daylight the line of tanks encountered a huge bomb crater in the road. Engineers threw across a pontoon bridge, but the first tank to cross hit a Teller mine and blocked the road.

The Americans called down a P-47 attack as cover to try and sneak a company of riflemen through the trees to the left of the thoroughfare, but these soldiers ran into yet another minefield. As they tried to pick their way out of it they came under machine-gun fire from what they thought were U.S. positions. By dark 150 of these men were dead.

On the afternoon of the 26th, the undermanned 4th and 8th Infantry Divisions tried again to take the towns of Hürtgen, Kleinhau, and Grosshau. They received no artillery support so that senior American officers would have intact buildings in which to set up command posts after the villages were secured. By the 29th, the attackers were finally approaching the objectives they had sought for months. Swarms of Thunderbolts dive bombed the Nazi-occupied structures into smoldering splinters in defiance of rear echelon demands for creature comforts.

THE GERMANS HELD OUT IN CELLARS AND WRECKED HOUSES, AND THAT EVENING GROSSHAU WAS THE SCENE OF GORY HOUSE-TO-HOUSE FIGHTING. COOKS, CLERKS, AND INTERPRETERS WERE THROWN INTO THE MELEE THAT WAS BLEEDING BOTH SIDES WHITE.

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ABOVE: During early fighting in the Hürtgen Forest in November 1944, a frightened German soldier has decided that captivity is preferable to further resistance and quickly surrenders to troops of the U.S. 9th Infantry Division. OPPOSITE: Soldiers of the U.S. 9th Infantry Division pick their way past a Sherman tank that has been knocked out during previous action and apparently take little notice of the body lying a few feet away from the armored vehicle.

The Germans held out in cellars and wrecked houses, and that evening Grosshau was the scene of gory house-to-house fighting. Cooks, clerks, and interpreters were thrown into the melee that was bleeding both sides white. In one instance, 250 GIs died to secure a single street, but by dusk the ruins of the nondescript village were firmly in American hands. Over the past 14 days, the 4th Division had taken 4,053 killed and wounded and lost another 2,000 to trench foot, hypothermia, frost bite, respiratory illness, and combat exhaustion.

Meanwhile, the 8th Division with tank support had managed to drive the Wehrmacht from Hürtgen. Professional wrestler Lieutenant Paul Boesch described the fight for Hürtgen as "a wild, terrible, awe-inspiring thing, this sweep through Hürtgen. Never in my wildest imagination had I conceived that battle could be so incredibly impressive—awful, horrible, deadly yet somehow thrilling, exhilarating." The adrenalin surging through the young soldiers carried them through the obscure little town whose name would haunt their troubled dreams for decades.

General "Wild Bill" Weaver had replaced the ineffective Stroh. Weaver lusted after the glory of being the man to finally clear the forest of its tenacious defenders. The struggle would sober and tame Wild Bill, shoving his ego into a small place.

General Collins was planning another corps-sized assault, this one for December 10. On the northern perimeter his 104th Division was to advance through Eschweiler to Weisweiler. In the center the freshly rebuilt 9th Division would be supported by part of the 3rd Armored Division in a drive through the woodlands to a point south of Merode. To the south the newly arrived 83rd Infantry Division was to advance on the towns of Gey and Hof Hardt bolstered by Shermans from the 5th Armored Division.

The Germans were seriously outnumbered. Their decimated 3rd Parachute and 246th Volksgrenadier Divisions were holding the line alone, but Model made sure his powerful artillery backup was ready. As the defenders noticed the U.S. troops massing in front of them, the gunners opened fire on the milling mob of green GIs.

Shortly after dawn on the 10th, the 2nd Ranger Battalion charged and quickly overcame the Germans atop Hill 400 just outside the town of Bergstein but were immediately cut to pieces by massive shelling that came from three directions. It was a horribly typical scenario.

That morning 30,000 men of the 9th and 83rd Infantry Divisions and the 3rd and 5th Armored Divisions hurled themselves aga inst

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the roughly 6,000 German cadets, paratroopers, and militia still entrenched deep in the forest. These Germans had heard rumors of a great offensive in the making, and it gave them a boost of confidence as they met this latest in the wearying succession of American attacks.

The Hürtgen looked less like a forest every day. The huge shell craters, shattered trees, rusting tank hulks, swirls of shell-twisted barbed wire, and a carpet of mangled corpses further ripped apart by crows, vultures, and wolves created a hellish vista that inspired terror. At 7:30 AM, the Americans struck unexpectedly light opposition. There was little resistance until noon, when the Nazis counterattacked straight into the U.S. spearhead. With field artillery and Sherman tanks, the 9th fended off the attack, but the battle was stalemated for the rest of the day.

The next morning, the 9th Division's 60th Regiment hit the Germans with infantry and armor and took its objective, the town of Echtz. After securing the ruins, the Americans lost several more men who tried to remove booby-trapped German corpses.

While the soldiers of the 60th were walking around lifeless enemies in Echtz, the 39th Infantry Regiment was assaulting medieval Merode Castle. With Collins watching, the 39th, supported by tanks and Thunderbolts that helped thin out the pillboxes encircling the bastion, assailed the stronghold with artillery, bazookas, and small arms. With chunks of the walls splashing into the ice-cluttered moat, troops of the 1st Battalion charged over the drawbridge and cleared out the last of the fanatical young paratroopers inside as the castle saw its first military action since the Napoleonic Wars.

Meanwhile, elements of the 83rd Division were embroiled in grisly house-to-house combat in the towns of Strass and Gey. The division's commander, General Robert C. Macon, was attempting to overwhelm the defenders as he assigned the entire 330th Infantry Regiment to hit Strass while the 331st Infantry Regiment went after Gey. Again, Allied numerical superiority mattered little as the Germans launched a Panzer-supported counterattack. When the 5th Division's 744th Tank Battalion was summoned, it bogged down in a minefield and came under artillery fire. The ground was so thickly carpeted with spent shrapnel that sappers could not use their mine detectors to locate the powerful Teller mines that were disabling the Shermans.

By dusk on the 10th, Strass and Gey were captured, but the roads leading to them were still under German control. The 83rd Division's hold on the villages was tenuous, and just before daybreak the Nazis swarmed from the woods and counterattacked into Strass, igniting a firefight that lasted all day. By nightfall, the outcome was still in question.

It was all very distracting, and while the Allied high command did consider a major enemy offensive along a lengthy stretch of the front a remote possibility, the generals assumed the ongoing violence in the Hürtgen meant that was the area through which the big push would come, if it came at all. While the latest round of frenzied fighting there continued, the Germans were quietly assembling 18 divisions and 600,000 troops behind a 60-mile-wide front just to the south.

On Saturday, December 16, the Germans launched their major offensive in the Ardennes against a thin line of inexperienced American troops. Hodges' first thought was that the Nazi effort was a spoiling attack intended to disrupt his ongoing Hürtgen offensive. Bradley's intelligence chief, General Edwin L. Sibert, called the mushrooming Battle of the Bulge a "diversionary attack."

Ironically, the massive offensive gave Hodges a priceless opportunity to abort his Hürtgen fight and send units there to aid in the Ardennes, where they could have made a priceless contribution. At 1 AM on December 17, Gerow asked permission to withdraw units from the Hürtgen and send them south.

Hodges replied, "No, proceed with the offensive in the north and hold where you are in the south." It was February 23, 1945, before U.S. forces finally cleared the Hürtgen Forest and forded the bordering Roer River.

Model was out of time. The ardent Nazi wandered into a wooded area outside the industrial town of Duisberg and blew his brains out with his service pistol.

Predictably, those Allied commanders responsible for the Hürtgen bloodbath were not anxious to speak of the operation with its heavy casualties. In his thick postwar memoir *Crusade in Europe*, Eisenhower allotted exactly 52 words to the campaign. More than 30,000 Allied soldiers died or were maimed.

Constantly pelted by rain, sleet, and snow the Hürtgen Forest had been unable to burn despite months of blistering combat. Yet, the unmistakable signs of the battle remain. The ground is hillocked and lumpy from shellfire, the trees are scarred, and the soil, enriched by rusting iron and blood, is among the most fertile in the world. Few survivors from either side have ever returned to visit.

Author Kelly Bell writes on a variety of World War II topics from his home in Tyler, Texas.

The FRENCH DESERT FOX

BY ANDRÉ BERNOLE AND GLENN BARNETT

ON NOVEMBER 28, 1947, a converted North American B-25 Mitchell medium bomber crashed in the Algerian desert, killing all aboard. Among the dead was French General Philippe François Marie Leclerc de Hauteclocque. Even as his body was being transported back to France the government decided that he should be given a state funeral.

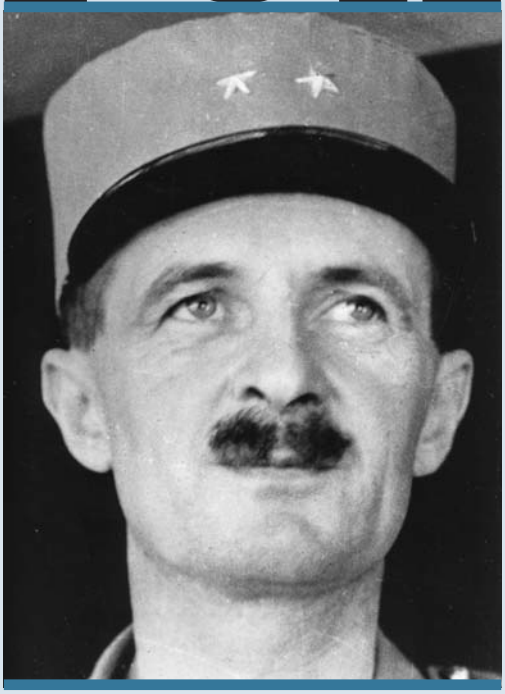
This was unusual. State funerals were reserved for assassinated presidents or great maréchals such as Ferdinand Foch and Joseph Joffre. The convoy bearing the coffins of the crash victims entered Paris by the same route that Leclerc had taken when he liberated the city in 1944. Marching slowly behind the body were some 10,000 veterans of Leclerc's 2nd Armored Division (2e DB), who had spontaneously gathered from throughout France to honor their beloved commander. His wartime boss General Charles de Gaulle wept openly.

Leclerc's body was placed under the Arc de Triomphe next to the tomb of the Unknown Soldier for eight hours for public viewing. December 8, the day of the funeral, was declared a national day of mourning. The Mass for the Dead was held at a packed Notre Dame Cathedral before his body was laid to rest in Les Invalides near Napoleon and beside those of other heroes of France.

Philippe François Marie de Hauteclocque was born on November 22, 1902. The family was one of minor nobility that had served France since the Crusades. It had survived the upheaval of the Revolution to serve in the army of Napoleon and continued to serve in the army in the Great War, during which Philippe's uncle was killed.

Born into this military tradition Philippe went to Saint Cyr, the French military academy, graduating in 1924. He served briefly with French forces in the occupation of the Ruhr, the industrial heart of Germany, and was later sent to Morocco, where he learned to speak Arabic and Berber, skills that would serve him later. From 1931 to 1937 he was an instructor at Saint Cyr, where he suffered a broken leg when he fell from a horse. He limped for the rest of his life and was always seen with his signature cane.

When war began in September 1939, he was assigned as chief of staff of the 4th Infantry Division (4e DI) and posted along the Belgian border. His division was ordered to hold the banks of the Sambre River, a World War I battle site, against the attacking Germans.



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As casualties among the officers mounted, Hauteclocque found himself in command ofthree battalions of infantry. The Germans soon outflanked their position, and the 4th Infantry was forced to retreat. This process was repeated until by May 25 the 4e DI was pushed back to the city of Lille, 25 miles from Dunkirk. There the French troops made a stand that allowed thousands more French and British soldiers to be evacuated from the beaches.

By the morning of May 28, Lille was cut off and surrounded. The commanding general of the 4e DI prepared to surrender. Hauteclocque did not want to be captured and received permission to try to escape. Threading his way through German lines by night on foot and on stolen bicycles, he was captured twice and twice escaped. He made his way to southern France, where his wife and six children had fled. It was there that he heard the radio appeal of Charles de Gaulle from London and decided to join the cause

Philippe Leclerc was among the best of the Allied field commanders of World War II.

AP

Newly armed and outfitted, Free French soldiers march in perfect order after rallying to the anti-Nazi cause championed by General Charles de Gaulle. These soldiers were photographed in Egypt in 1940.

LEFT: General Philippe Leclerc led a remarkable life and became a hero of France before his tragic death in a plane crash.

of the Free French.

Friends were able to obtain a false passport for him. His new identity was as a wine merchant named Leclerc. The pseudonym would become his nom de guerre. It was important for opponents of the collaborationist Vichy French government to use an assumed name as V ichy agents imprisoned and even sent to German concentration camps the families of those who fought them. Hauteclocque would use the name for the rest of his life. He traveled alone through Spain and Portugal, where he was able to take a ship to England.

On July 25, he walked into de Gaulle's office in Carlton Gardens in London and introduced himself. Knowing his family and hearing his story, de Gaulle promoted him on the spot to the rank of *chef d'escadron* (major).

De Gaulle wanted to continue the war from France's colonies and hoped to win them over from Vichy control. On August 6, 1940,he sent a delegation of three men to British Nigeria to represent Free France. Leclerc was one of them. The French colony of Cameroon bordered Nigeria and was targeted first because the French colonists and the natives feared that Vichy would hand Cameroon over to its former colonial master, Germany.

On the night of August 26, Leclerc led a force of 17 men, five officers, and a priest across the swampy border to the town of Douala in Cameroon. Each was armed only with a pistol. To give himself more authority, Leclerc promoted himself to colonel.

Rallying the colonists, Leclerc captured the town without bloodshed and within a week all of Cameroon was in Free French hands. That same week all of French Equatorial Africa, except Gabon, declared for Free France. Leclerc would lead an expedition to capture Gabon in mid-November. In London, de Gaulle gladly confirmed Leclerc's promotion to colonel.

Delighted with the new African converts, de Gaulle overplayed his hand. He hoped his new popularity would extend to West Africa, but a combined British and Free French fleet was rebuffed at Dakar. De Gaulle consoled himself by consolidating his gains in Equatorial Africa. He also had plans for Leclerc. The two men met again on November 17, 1940.

At the end of the meeting, de Gaulle looked at a large map of Africa showing the middle of the Sahara Desert and said, "Then, there is this [the Fezzan] and then that [Kufra]."Leclerc said later that it was the shortest and most precise order he ever received in his life, "and the one that was executed with the greatest faith."

De Gaulle removed Leclerc as the governor of Cameroon and sent him to Chad, where he was to organize attacks against Italian Libya. He arrived in Chad in mid-December to command a force of6,000 native and 460 European troops.

Leclerc inherited a few 75mm cannons and some old underpowered French trucks incapable of traversing hundreds of miles of road, let alone desert terrain. Worse, he would have to haul all of his supplies—food, fuel, guns, and ammunition—from the tiny ports along the Atlantic Ocean through jungle and scrub desert more than 1,000 miles just to reach his starting off points on the Libyan border.

More fuel was consumed in the delivery than was delivered. Still, the British were willing to allocate some of their scant resources and a growing trickle of American goods to support the French in their efforts to discomfort the Italians in Lybia.

About the same time that Leclerc reached Chad, the colony had a surprise visit from a British unit that specialized in hit-and-run tac - tics. This was a patrol of the Long Range Desert Group (LRDG) with Major Pat Clayton in command. The LRDG, operating from bases along the Nile, drove rugged Fords and C hevrolets deep into the desert to strike at remote Italian outposts. The resulting damage caused the Italians to take troops needed for a planned invasion of Egypt to strengthen their desert garrisons.

To be truly effective, the LRDG needed safe areas to refuel and provision. Chad was the perfect choice, and the Free French were willing hosts. On December 21, Leclerc authorized a joint raid on the Italian garrison of Murzuk in the Fezzan Desert of Libya. With 2,000 inhabitants, Murzuk was the most important town in the Libyan desert. Its oasis supported an airfield

Both: National Archives

Then Colonel Philippe Leclerc reviews Senegalese troops in Chad in December 1940. At the time, Leclerc was on a mission to gain support for the Free French cause in Africa. BELOW: A group of Free French soldiers commanded by Philippe Leclerc joins with a contingent of the British Long Range Desert Group in an assault on the Italian garrison at Murzuk in North Africa. Some of the attackers are visible at left as a plume of dust and smoke rises in the distance.

and an imposing Ottoman fortress atop a rocky outcropping manned by 200 Italians.

Dividing into several groups of two or three trucks each, the combined British-French force began firing on the fortress with machine guns, light Bofors guns, and mortars. Other trucks raided the airport, destroying three Ghibli light planes and a Savoia-Marchetti bomber along with a fuel dump. One British soldier and one Frenchman were killed. The patrol returned to northern Chad on January 19.

Leclerc then turned his attention to the other major town in southern Libya, Kufra. Close to the Egyptian border, the airport at Kufra was an important link between Italy and Italian East Africa. Leclerc decided to take it. He wrote to de Gaulle, "Whatever the difficulties, we will go and we will succeed." Unlike the joint raid on Murzuk, Kufra would be an all French expedition.

First, however, Leclerc would conduct a raid in strength as a prelude to conquest. Reconnaissance flights were undertaken to obtain photographs and film of the outposts to determine Italian strength and defenses. Next, a caravan of 55 trucks, two armored cars, and two 75mm mountain guns were assembled along with 400 men, 100 of them European and 300 native Chadians. To support them, another 100 trucks and 150 men were marshaled for supply and logistics.

On February 5, 1941, aging Bristol Blenheim bombers operated by the Free French bombed the airfield at Kufra, doing some damage but losing two planes in the desert due to navigational errors. The Italians were alerted to French activity, but Leclerc determined to keep the initiative and press ahead. He would lead the attack himself.

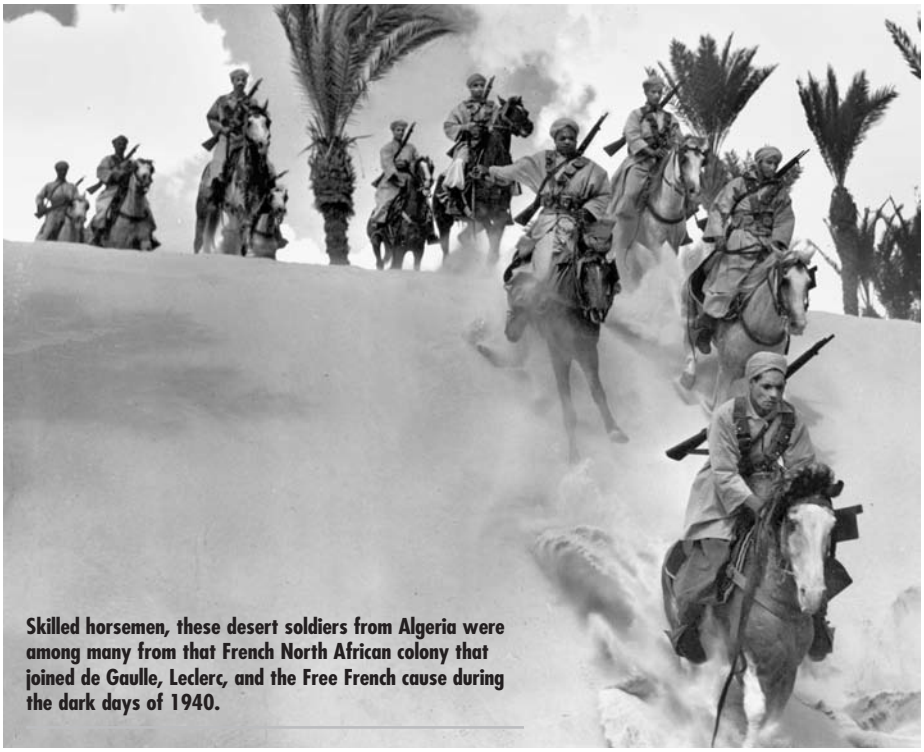
Arriving on the outskirts of Kufra on the night of February 7, 1941, Leclerc used the Arabic he had learned in Morocco to gather intelligence from the local villagers. Then, under the cover of darkness, he led a group of 30 men in six trucks to the airport where he was able to destroy two airplanes in their hangars.

His squad returned to a rendezvous point and moved to the south before dawn to hide in the desert from Italian patrol planes. He returned to Chad with one dead and four wounded.

Meanwhile, the British in Egypt had repelled the Italian attack and were now pushing the Italians back deep into Libya. It was the strategy of de Gaulle and Leclerc to push up from the south to join the British on the coast. It seemed to be the right time to seize Kufra.

On February 17, a Free French truck column led by Leclerc headed north toward the distant town. After the battle, Leclerc would boast to an American correspondent that one of his drivers was a former New York cab driver. "Nothing could stop him," bragged the general.

Rue des Archives / The Granger Collection, NY



Skilled horsemen, these desert soldiers from Algeria were among many from that French North African colony that joined de Gaulle, Leclerc, and the Free French cause during the dark days of 1940.

The next day they arrived and immediately came under machine-gun fire from Sahariana (Libyan natives fighting for Italy). The trucks had raised so much dust that the French could not fire back until they had cleaned their weapons.

Leclerc then ordered half his men to keep firing while the other half flanked the Sahariana defensive position. They were successful in dislodging the enemy and closed on the fort until nightfall and then dispersed and hid to await the dawn. The next morning, the Italians sent seven Savoia-Marchetti bombers against the French, but finding no concentration of forces they did no damage. At least one of the bombers was hit by small-arms fire and left the area trailing smoke. This was followed by an attack by Saharianas in 13 trucks, but they were chased into the desert away from the fighting.

The French then began to bombard the fort with mortars and their two 75mm mountain guns. The shells from these guns made neat holes in the mud walls of the fort and exploded inside. The Italians had little hope of reinforcement because the entire Italian 10th Army was in full flight from the British on the coast. By March 1, the garrison had had enough. The aging Italian commander, Captain Colonna, who had won the Croix de Guerre in World War I, sent out negotiators. Leclerc dismissed them outright and then jumped on the running board of their car and told the driver to return to the fort.

Inside the fort, Leclerc and two of his lieutenants confronted Colonna and demanded his surrender. By that afternoon Kufra was in French hands. Over 300 Italians and Libyans surrendered to 30 Frenchmen. There were so few French to guard the surrendered Italians that even the priest, Père Bronner, took a turn at sentry duty.

Raising the French flag emblazoned with the Cross of Lorraine, the victors celebrated Free France's first victory of the war. On March 1, 1941, Leclerc asked his men to swear an oath not to put down their weapons until the French Tricolor flew again over the Strasbourg cathedral in German-occupied Alsace. The "Oath at Kufra" would become a part of Leclerc's legacy and fighting words for the French.

Garrison duty was not for Leclerc, and with de Gaulle's blessing Kufra was turned over to the LRDG with the caveat that the Free French flag be flown over the fortress at all times. Much of the fort's provisions were carried away, and the French in the forward positions in Chad would feast on macaroni, antipasto, and anchovies for weeks. For his actions at Kufra, the British awarded Leclerc the Distinguished Service Order (DSO).

The Axis was not ready to give up Libya. By March 31, newly arrived German General Erwin Rommel and his Afrika Korps were prepared to strike. In April the British were pushed back to the Egyptian frontier. Only the vital port city of Tobruk held out. Further, Germany invaded Greece, stretching British

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ABOVE: Free French soldiers of the heroic 13th Demi-Brigade of the Foreign Legion drive an armored vehicle across a dusty stretch of the North African desert during the battle at Bir Hakiem. These soldiers bought precious time for the withdrawal of British Commonwealth troops to El Alamein. BELOW: Standing in front of one of their aircraft, members of the Free French Air Force Lorraine Bomb Group exhibit esprit de corps in the North African desert. These airmen joined the British Royal Air Force in 1943 to continue the fight against the Germans.

National Archives

resources to the limit.

Leclerc incessantly asked for new trucks,supplies, and equipment from the British, but they were now in so much trouble that he had to give up his aging Blenheim bombers to support their sagging fortunes. Advancing northward toward the Mediterranean coast was now out of the question. On May 1, de Gaulle himself flew out to review the troops and confer with Leclerc.

The strategic situation changed in June when the Germans invaded Russia. The British began a buildup in Egypt to support an offensive against Rommel. As part of the buildup, Leclerc began to receive a trickle of new equipment including four Bofors antiaircraft guns, six U.S.-made 75mm guns, 10 armored cars, and 400 trucks. Still, trucks and gasoline were in such short supply that fuel was carried to Kufra by camel, sometimes in caravans of over 100 animals.

British supplies began replacing French provisions. These included tins of suspicious looking bully beef and rum. Wine had run out in Free French Africa, and rum took its place.

Around this time de Gaulle promoted Leclerc to *général de brigade* (brigadier general), but the proper insignia would not be available for several months. Leclerc turned his attention back to the oasis at Murzuk. While awaiting reinforcements, he planned his next move.

By November 27, the British had relieved Tobruk and pursued Rommel across the northern Libyan desert. By December, the United States had entered the war. Leclerc pushed his forward base to the southern Libyan oasis of Uigh el-Kebir. He was preparing for continued British success and was ready to join them in Tripoli, but Rommel had other ideas.

Reinforced from Europe with new men and equipment, Rommel lashed out at the British and pushed them back into Egypt. On January 21, 1942, a lone German Heinkel He-111 bomber flying 1,600 miles from an improvised base in southern Libya bombed Leclerc's main airfield at Fort Lamy (N'Djamena) in Chad. Nearly half of his precious fuel was destroyed, and 10 planes were damaged.

After nine months of inactivity following the Kufra operation, Leclerc decided the time had come for action. Instead of trying to capture Italian territory, which Rommel might easily win back, this would be a hit-and-run attack. The targets were to be a dozen Italian outposts in southwestern Libya. There were 150 vehicles, 500 men, and 10 aircraft to carry out raids ina territory as large as France itself. Leclerc divided his forces into several squadrons to accomplish this mission.

The raiders started out from Zouar on February 7. It took six days to reach the forward base at Uigh-el-Kebir. The attacks were timed to begin on February 28. The Fezzan raids lasted for 15 days. In that time, four Italian forts were destroyed, 50 prisoners taken, fuel and ammunition dumps and three aircraft destroyedat the cost of eight French killed and 15 wounded.

Pressed white Italian stars used as insignia were also captured. Leclerc now donned two of these on his kepi to denote his rank of general until proper French stars could be obtained. His new American liaison officer, Colonel Cunningham, wrote, "[Leclerc is] a remarkable soldier, young, energetic and absolutely adored by his officers and men."

The British, meanwhile, were on the receiving end of another German offensive. They were thrown back from the Gazala Line to El Alamein. An orderly retreat was in part due to the stubborn stand of a brigade of French Foreign Legion troops (the 13e DBLE) at Bir Hakeim under the command of General Marie-Pierre Koenig.

Leclerc would have to await events before advancing to the coast. Again, he and his bored men hunkered down to wait out the scorching heat of a second summer in the middle of nowhere. Leclerc arranged rotating holidays for his men in South Africa.

Meanwhile, both sides prepared for the inevitable conflict. Italian and German reconnaissance flights were stepped up, forcing the French to operate at night. The ruined Italian forts were reoccupied with fresh troops. The French continued to receive and stockpile supplies and weapons in advanced areas.

De Gaulle, furious at being left out of plan-

ning for the Allied invasion of North Africa, nevertheless told Leclerc that when he reached the coast at Tripoli he was to place himself under British command. The two menconferred at Fort Lamy and agreed that the French thrust to the Libyan coast would include 3,000 troops. If upon the invasion Vichy sided with Germany, Leclerc would invade and occupy the remaining Vichy colonies in Africa.

On November 8, Leclerc learned of Operation Torch, the Anglo-American landings in North Africa. On the 12th, de Gaulle ordered him to begin his conquest of southern Libya in operation Fezzan 2. By mid-December, Leclerc's small army of three columns had reached its advance bases and moved into Italian territory. He stayed in constant contact with his forces by flying across the vast desert to meet with his commanders wherever they were.

The Germans and Italians sent up fighter planes to strafe the French, who had become masters of camouflage, and French progress was rapid. By mid-January 1943, the German grip on North Africa was slipping. The British victory at El Alamein the previous October had seized the initiative, and all of southern Libya was in French hands. By January 26, French troops entered Tripoli on the Mediterranean coast. It was the first time many of Leclerc's men had seen the sea in over two years.

When Leclerc arrived he was summoned to meet with General Bernard Montgomery, commander of the British Eighth Army . Leclerc showed up in his tattered and thin uniform, covered in Libyan dust and mud. The two men hit it off at once, and the British saw to Leclerc's resupply needs, providing new trucks, uniforms, guns, and, most prized of all, new boots to replace torn and split shoes or rubber tire sandals. Montgomery personally offered Leclerc a battle-dress uniform, some shirts, and a pair of battle shoes.

In the battle for Tunisia, Leclerc was assigned to fight on the left or inland flank of the Eighth Army. His command was reinforced with Greek and British troops. For the battle it was known as Force L.

Rommel had hidden his men behind the Mareth Line, a French-built line of bunkers and trenches meant originally to fend off the Italians in the 1930s. Force L was assigned to guard some mountain passes known as Ksar Rhilane to prevent the Germans from flanking the British positions.

As the battle formed up, Rommel sent tanks into Leclerc's crucible of 600 well-hidden antitank guns and 400 tanks. They were rebuffed with great loss. Rommel then wanted to pivot north, but Hitler would not hear of it and recalled Rommel to Berlin.

The new German commander, General Jurgen von Arnim, also wanted to flank the British position. For that he had to engage Force L again. Montgomery and Leclerc knew of his plans thanks to intelligence and prepared accordingly.

Montgomery, fearing the worst, ordered Leclerc to pull back 50 miles to safety . Leclerc was already dug in and refused to leave his position. He asked only for British air support. Montgomery agreed. The British general did not have faith in Leclerc and lamented to a colleague, "Poor Leclerc! He sure was a nice chap. Now, it's over, we won't see him again."

However, Leclerc knew his business. Three times he lured the Germans into his hidden guns and repulsed them with great loss. When they at last retreated, Leclerc sent a message to Montgomery that he had destroyed 60 enemy vehicles and 10 guns "and they never penetrated our lines." The British general was surprised and thrilled. "Well done!" he replied.

The failed effort was the last German offensive in Africa. The Battle of Tunisia wound down as the Allies approached the last German-occupied city of Tunis. When the Germans evacuated the continent, some 250,000 Axis prisoners were taken, a greater haul than at Stalingrad.

A great victory parade was planned, but in another insult to de Gaulle, the French were to be represented by a former V ichy force, the Armée d'Afrique. Leclerc was furious. On the day of the event, he sent his troops through side streets to join at the rear of the parade, where they formed up and marched in defiance of Anglo-American wishes. He was wildly cheered by the French population and soldiers of the Eighth Army.

Pleased with his favorite general, de Gaulle promoted Leclerc to three-star general. Force L became the nucleus of the 2nd Free French Division (2e DB), which he would lead with distinction across Europe. Its ranks swelled with deserters from the Armée d'Afrique who wanted to join the man of action.

Leclerc would be the Allied commander who liberated Paris and later fulfilled the "Oath of Kufra" by raising the Tricolor over the cathedral of Strasbourg. He also represented France on the deck of the battleship USS *Missouri* in Tokyo Bay as the Allies received thesurrender of Japan. He had earned his place in the pantheon of French heroes.

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Free French colonial troops from Senegal scan the horizon for enemy activity. Following the fall of France in June 1940, the Free French movement gained invaluable support from the prostrate nation's overseas colonies, and Philippe Leclerc was instrumental in securing much of that support.

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American Eagles
AT DIEPPE

American pilots serving in the Royal Air Force flew missions in support of the abortive 1942 raid on the French coastal town.

All the pilots of No. 71 (Eagle) Squadron, Royal Air Force, had been ordered to report to the briefing room on the afternoon of August 18, 1942. As soon as everyone was seated, Group Captain John Peel walked into the room carrying "an armful of maps and a long list of orders." The squadron had just been transferred from its base at Debden, Essex, down to Gravesend, in Kent, which came as a surprise and also created more than the usual amount of rumors and gossip.

Everyone in the room could not help wondering if this was the beginning of a major operation against the Germans on the Continent—there had to be a good reason for the sudden move to Gravesend. Rumor mongers had been predicting some sort of offensive for quite some time, which was nothing new—they always seemed to be predicting something. The only trouble was that their predictions turned out to be wrong nine times out of 10.

But as soon as Group Captain Peel started talking, it became obvious that the gossips were right this time. On a large map of the Channel coast of France, he began pointing to the port city of Dieppe and spoke about a general plan of attack against German installations in the area. It looked like this really was going to be the big offensive that everyone had been hearing about. A few minutes into the briefing, one of the pilots leaned over to the man next to him and whispered, "This is it!"

The other two Eagle Squadrons—121 and 133—had also been transferred to other bases closer to the Channel coast. No. 121 Squadron was moved to Southend-on-Sea, while 133 Squadron was shifted south to Biggin Hill. All three bases, along with every installation in the south of England, were then isolated. All personnel were confined to base, all leaves were cancelled, and all outside telephone calls

BY DAVID ALAN JOHNSON

required the permission of the station commander.

At similar briefings all along the south coast, the men were told the reason behind all the stealth and secrecy. It was in preparation for Operation Jubilee, which Combined Operations described as "a raid on Jubilee [Dieppe] with its military and air objectives." The destruction of the Luftwaffe's airfields and as many enemy aircraft as possible was another of the operation's objectives. The pilot of 71 Squadron was right—this certainly was it. All three Eagle Squadrons would take part in the operation.

The Eagle Squadrons existed as a necessity of war. During the Battle of Britain, the Royal Air Force needed pilots desperately—the Luftwaffe was killing pilots faster than the RAF could train them. Because of the shortage, American volunteers were recruited to join the RAF as pilots for both Fighter Command and Bomber Command. The first of the three American squadrons, 71 (Eagle) Squadron, was formed in September 1940, over a year before Pearl Harbor. So many Americans volunteered that two more squadrons were formed, 121 Squadron in May 1941 and 133 Squadron two months later. After the customary training and breaking-in period, all three units became active and operational RAF squadrons.

The basic aim of Operation Jubilee was to make a landing on the French coast, destroy as many German installations, including "aerodrome installations," as possible, and withdraw. It was a raid, not an invasion. It has also been referred to as a reconnaissance in force.

Even though Operation Jubilee was not a full-scale invasion, it did represent a "second front" of sorts. For several months, the Soviets, along with a few overzealous British and American officers, had been shouting, "Second Front Now!" The Soviets had been demanding any kind of invasion, in France, Italy, or anywhere else, since June 1941, when Hitler invaded the Soviet Union.

It was hoped that Dieppe would placate the Soviets and would also give senior British and American officers some vital information on German defenses. Dr. Josef Goebbels and his Nazi Propaganda Ministry had been bragging about Germany's Atlantic Wall defenses since 1940. The raid would allow Allied planners to find out exactly how solid the German defenses really were. This would be useful in planning future operations, especially the anticipated

Supermarine Spitfire Vbs of the Royal Air Force return to their base at North Weald in England following a mission in this painting by artist Robert Taylor. The fighters belong to No. 71 Squadron, popularly known as one of the Eagle Squadrons, in which American pilots flew for Great Britain early in World War II.

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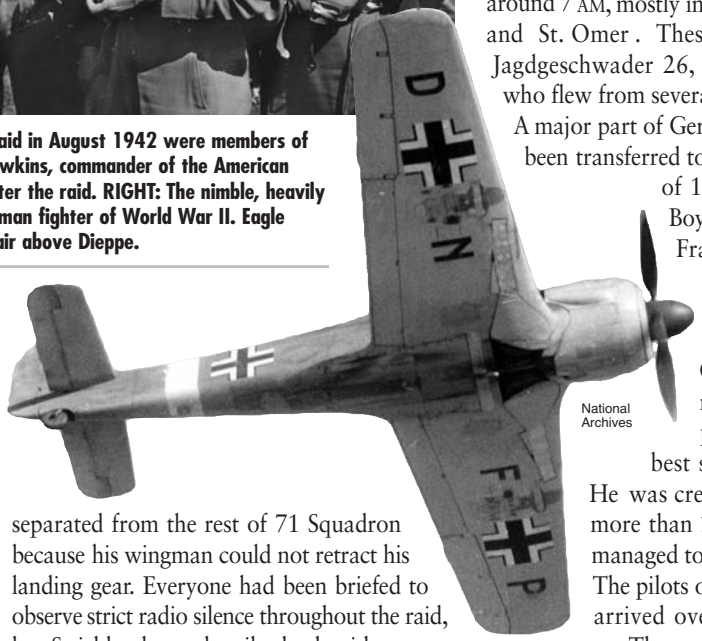

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ABOVE: Not all American pilots in the ill-fated Dieppe Raid in August 1942 were members of the Eagle Squadrons. In this photo, Colonel Jonathan Hawkins, commander of the American 31st Fighter Group, talks with pilots of his command after the raid. RIGHT: The nimble, heavily armed Focke-Wulf FW-190 was arguably the finest German fighter of World War II. Eagle Squadron pilots fought German fliers for control of the air above Dieppe.

D-Day landings that would take place two years later.

A total of 48 Supermarine Spitfire and eight Hawker Hurricane squadrons—including the Eagle Squadrons—would be flying fighter cover for the landing forces, providing an air umbrella over the beaches. The fighters had two jobs: to keep the Luftwaffe away from the landing beaches and to inflict maximum damage to the enemy's fighter and bomber forces. The Boeing B-17 Flying Fortresses of the recently arrived 97th Bomb Group, U.S. Army Air Forces, would also be taking part in the operation. The 97th Bomb Group had been given the vital assignment of knocking out the Luftwaffe fighter base at Abbeville for several critical hours during the raid.

"On the morning of the Dieppe Raid we were all up before dawn and having had breakfast were at dispersal at first light." The commander of a British fighter squadron made this entry in his logbook on the morning of August 19, 1942. For most fighter units, including the three Eagle Squadrons, the operational day on August 19 began at the uncivilized hour of 4:45 AM. After breakfast, the pilots climbed into their Spitfires, started their engines, and began climbing toward the Channel coast at 2,500 feet per minute.

From Gravesend, 71 Squadron joined five other Spitfire squadrons over Beachy Head on the Sussex coast. All six squadrons—a total of 72 Spitfires—headed across the Channel to Dieppe.

Pilot Officer Harold Strickland, who had begun flying in Texas before the war, became separated from the rest of 71 Squadron because his wingman could not retract his landing gear. Everyone had been briefed to observe strict radio silence throughout the raid, but Strickland sent the pilot back with a two-word radio transmission. He did notsay exactly what the transmission might have been, but it was probably something like "Go home!"

With his wingman safely sent back to Gravesend, Strickland pushed the throttle all the way forward and tried to catch up with the rest of his squadron. By that time, 71 Squadron "had turned off their small blue navigation lights and disappeared." He did manage to find four German Focke Wulf FW-190 fighters west of Dieppe in the half-light just before dawn and took a shot at one of them before they disappeared.

Pilots could see the gunfire from the German defenders at Dieppe along with the naval gunfire from the Allied warships just offshore. The attacking forces consisted of about 5,000 Canadian troops, 1,000 British commandos, and 50 U.S. Army Rangers. These were supported by 252 naval vessels—none larger than a destroyer—along with 69 air squadrons.

"I saw the flashes of heavy gunfire to my left, which was towards the sun," Strickland wrote in his diary. He spotted four aircraft in the semi-darkness and flew toward them. As he closed in, Strickland identified them as FW -190s. "I attacked the No. 4 with cannon and m.g. with about 45-degree deflection and saw my explosive shells strike the fuselage." The stricken FW 190 dived; the other three turned on Strickland. He headed for the layer of cloud that covered the French coast that morning and neatly evaded them. "Landed at Gravesend just before dawn," he succinctly ended his report.

The Luftwaffe was coming up to fight in force, even at this early stage of the operation. Radar stations in southern England began detecting large plots of enemy aircraft at around 7 AM, mostly in the vicinity of Abbeville and St. Omer. These were the pilots of Jagdgeschwader 26, the "Abbeville Boys," who flew from several bases in the area.

A major part of Germany's fighter force had been transferred to Russia by the summer of 1942. But the Abbeville Boys were still in northern France and were some of the best pilots in the Luftwaffe. Their commander was Adolf Galland. Galland was not only an outstanding pilot but also one of the best shots in the Luftwaffe. He was credited with destroying more than 100 Allied aircraft and managed to survive the war.

The pilots of 121 (Eagle) Squadron arrived over Dieppe at around 9 AM. The squadron was headed by Squadron Leader Bill Williams, a British officer; the American commander, Hugh Kennard, had been grounded by illness for over two weeks. By the time 121 reached Dieppe, the Luftwaffe was already up and waiting. "Dogfights ensued," noted 121 Squadron's log book, "and the Squadron became split up and returned to base in ones and twos."

The Abbeville Boys were clearly getting the better of the Spitfire pilots. During the course of one particularly violent action, five Spitfires were shot down and a sixth was badly damaged by cannon fire. The Luftwaffe lost two or three FW-190s, depending on which source is consulted. The Focke Wulfs were showing a decided superiority over the Spitfire Mark Vs.

Three of 121's pilots did not return to base after this encounter: one was killed, one was rescued from the Channel, and one was shot down over France and taken prisoner. Another pilot managed to bring his Spitfire back to base literally covered with bullet holes. The fighter had cannon shell holes in its fuselage and wings,

its instrument panel, and even its plexiglass cockpit canopy.

In return, 121 could claim only one enemy fighter destroyed along with two probables and one damaged. This certainly came as a major disappointment. The squadron had been waiting for the Luftwaffe to show itself for the past few months. When the Germans finally did come up to fight, the squadron ended up losing a quarter of its pilots in one encounter.

The Germans were proving to be a lot better than everyone expected. They were not only murderous shots, but also had the knack of being able to dodge and evade the Spitfires whenever an RAF pilot made a firing run. Enemy fighters frequently could not be kept in the gunsight long enough for a pilot to get off a good burst. One entry in 121' s logbook noted, "A number of pilots fired their guns but made no claims."

Enemy fighters were not the only menace to the Spitfires. While 71 Squadron flew toward Dieppe over the landing force, several offshore LCRs (Landing Craft, Rockets) began firing at targets just inland from the invasion beaches. The LCRs carried well over 100 mortar -like rockets. These were usually f ired in salvos—all the rockets on board were shot off in less than a minute.

None of the pilots could tell if the rockets were hitting their targets, but they could not help noticing that about 50 of them passed right through their formation. Although "a few came uncomfortably close," all of the rockets missed the Spitfires. "All the rockets continued to their apogee and duly plunged to earth somewhere off to port," Wing Commander Miles Duke-Woolley, who flew with 71 Squadron at Dieppe, later reported, "and a quick check showed that we remained not merely intact but untouched."

Everyone realized that a direct hit by one of the rockets could have made "a considerable mess of your aircraft"—a classic example of British understatement. To relieve the tension, someone made a crack over the radio, "Who needs enemies when we've friends like that?" Duke-Woolley said that the remark "expressed our collective thoughts."

Throughout the morning, radar stations in England continued to monitor enemy air activity across the Channel. By 9:41, more than 20 enemy aircraft were plotted in the vicinity of Abbeville. Another 20-plus appeared on radar screens about five minutes later. The Luftwaffe was certainly coming up to challenge the RAF and coming up in strength. The bases at Abbeville, St. Omer, and others in the area were only about 30 miles from Dieppe. This meant that the German pilots were only a few minutes' flying time from the landing beaches, which allowed them to use most of their fuel maneuvering against the Spitfires.

The pilots of the three Eagle Squadrons had seen mostly fighters over Dieppe so far, but German bombers began to make their presence known shortly after 9 AM. The first of the Eagles to make contact with enemy bombers was 133 Squadron, led by Flight Lieutenant Don Blakeslee. This took place on 133' s second sortie of the day. The squadron had already claimed two FW-190s destroyed and one probable on its first trip to Dieppe.

On this sortie, 133 had been assigned to fly top cover for the Allied shipping just off the beaches. The Navy was doing its best to get in as close as possible to pick up survivors of the landings. German bombers were just as determined to break through the fighter cover and make their bombing runs at the ships as they moved close to the beaches.

At about 12,000 feet, 133 Squadron, along with several other Spitfire units, ran into a large flight of German aircraft—Junkers Ju-88s, Dornier Do-17s, and a good many escorting fighters. The Spitfires went after the bombers, while the German fighters did their best to intercept the Spitfires. But 133 reached the

After receiving orders to scramble, American pilots of No. 171 Squadron rush to their Hawker Hurricane fighters on March 17, 1941. Within minutes of the alarm, these pilots were airborne and racing from their base at Kirton-on-Lindsey to meet the German Luftwaffe.

Imperial War Museum

bombers first and started shooting as soon as the pilots were within range. A Ju-88 fell out of formation almost immediately, trailing smoke. The pilots of 133 claimed one Ju-88 and two FW-190s destroyed, as well as several other German aircraft damaged.

Number 133 was one of the few RAF squadrons that was having a good day . Most units ran into lethal opposition from the Luftwaffe and, as one squadron leader put it, "Our Spitfire 5s were completely outclassed by the FW-190s." The Abbeville Boys were certainly living up to their reputation as one of the premier units in the Luftwaffe. They could see that they had the upper hand and were going after the Spitfires with single-minded determination.

The situation on the ground offered no improvement over what was happening in the air above Dieppe. Infantry units were also encountering German opposition, usually described as "heavy," and were having a hard time just getting off the beach.

By mid-morning, the Dieppe raid w as already in serious trouble. More than two-thirds of all Canadian troops had either been killed, wounded, or taken prisoner during the first six hours of the assault. A bad situation was made even worse by the fact that there was no heavy naval gunfire to support the troops, only the 5-inch guns of the destroyers. By 11 AM, the decision was made to withdraw all troops from the beachhead.

"The general scene over the beaches was pretty chaotic," an RAF wing commander later reported. "The shipping off shore was wreathed in smoke as it bombarded targets behind the town … Most of the time at least one aircraft could be seen spinning or diving down somewhere in a trail of smoke or flame."

The log book of 71 Squadron recorded, "Two ships were seen on fire in the harbor ." Chesley Peterson, the commander of 71 Squadron, gave a description that was more to the point: "It's like a goddam Fourth of July."

The three Eagle Squadrons were not the only Americans in the air over Dieppe on August 19. The 31st Fighter Group, U.S. Army Air Forces, which had arrived in the British Isles only a few weeks before, flew a total of 123 sorties over the landing beaches that day. Like the Eagles, the 31st also flew Spitfire Vs. The two prevalent American fighters of the time, the Bell P-39 Airacobra and Curtiss P-40 Tomahawk, were no match for either the German Messerschmitt Me-109 or the FW-190. These "American Spitfires" were marked with the white U.S. star, which had been painted over the red, white, and blue RAF roundel.

None of the pilots had been in combat before; the Abbeville Boys gave them a very harsh indoctrination. Eight of the 31st's Spitfires were shot down, with five of its pilots missing. The new pilots did enjoy some success that morning. Second Lieutenant Sam Jankin shot down a FW-190, the USAAF's first enemy aircraft destroyed over Europe. But Lieutenant Jankin was shot down himself a short time later and was rescued from the Channel later in the day.

German intelligence apparently did not realize that the Americans were flying Spitfires. When Oberleutnant Rolf Hermichen of Jagdgeschwader 26 shot down a fighter marked with the U.S. insignia, he claimed a P-39 Airacobra destroyed. No P-39s were in the air over Dieppe.

Twenty-four B-17 Flying Fortresses of the U.S. 97th Bomb Group also had been assigned to fly operations over Dieppe. The 97th had flown its first operation only two days earlier, against the Rouen-Sotteville marshaling yards. That had been an easy trip—a "milk run," in the jargon of the Eighth Air Force. Their current assignment did not look like another milk run. The official name of their operation was "Circus No. 205," a misleadingly innocent name for a potentially deadly job. The objective of Circus No. 205 was nothing less than the Luftwaffe fighter base at Abbeville.

With four squadrons of RAF Spitfires for an escort, the Flying Fortresses set out from their bases in England and headed south toward the Sussex coast. Senior USAAF officers had high hopes for their top secret Norden bombsight, which was supposed to allow a bomb aimer to drop his bombs into a pickle barrel from thousands of feet above the target. With this operation, the generals and senior planners would be able to determine if the Norden lived up to all the hype. If the bombsight allowed the 97th Bomb Group to knock out Abbeville's runways for several critical hours, the generals would be well satisfied that the Norden was as good as its publicity.

The Fortresses crossed the French coast shortly after 10 AM and arrived over Abbeville six minutes later. The bombers had to contend with antiaircraft fire throughout the entire six minutes but met hardly any fighter opposition. A top turret gunner in one of the B-17s fired a burst at an "unidentified fighter." The tail gunner of another Fortress chased an Me-109 by firing in the fighter's direction. But the German

"I knew that I was hit and that I would have to bail out anyway, so I kept firing up to 150 yards, and then I had to quit as there was so much steam and smoke in the cockpit."

–Squadron Leader Chesley Peterson

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ABOVE: Royal Navy warships and transports belch smoke to screen landing operations at Dieppe while a Lockheed A-29 Hudson bomber of the Royal Air Force drops its payload on German positions. BELOW: Smoke billows up from bomb strikes against German positions surrounding the French coastal town of Dieppe. OPPOSITE: During a training flight, American Eagle Squadron pilots maintain a tight formation with their Hawker Hurricane fighters.

Imperial War Museum

fighter pilots were surprisingly hesitant when it came to attacking the American bombers.

This reluctance was partly because the fighters were preoccupied—a flight of RAF Douglas Boston bombers was also in the area—and also because no one knew very much about the Fortresses. Their reputation was formidable—they were said to be very large, very fast, extremely well armed with a dozen or so .50-caliber machine guns, and able to take a lot of punishment. The German pilots could see for themselves that the Forts were big, fast, and intimidating. No one wanted to get too close to all those machine guns.

The Luftwaffe would learn all about the Flying Fortress, especially about its strengths and its weaknesses, in the very near future. When that happened, all diffidence would come to a sudden end. But over northern France on August 19, 1942, the B-17s led a charmed life.

Escorting RAF pilots watched the bombing of Abbeville with approval, if not admiration. A pilot with 401 Squadron observed "many direct hits … on admin area, and also on the southern runway." Another pilot observed that the Forts "successfully bombed from 23,000 feet." The results were certainly successful enough to put two of the fighter base's three runways out of action, which effectively shut it down for two hours, exactly what the brass wanted.

Number 71 Squadron left on its second trip to Dieppe at 10:45 AM. Pilot Officer Stanley M. Anderson wrote this short but to the point entry in his logbook: "Airborne Gravesend 1045—Beachy Head 1100—Convoy 1120. Our job to protect shipping—town on fire—resistance is evident."

A third sortie followed. Pilot Officer Anderson went on to give more details about the morning's air battle. "Plenty of FW -190s, Ju-88s, Do-17s, and Me-109s—took a crack at a Ju-88 damaging it and killing the rear gunner. CO [Squadron Leader Chesley Peterson] and Mike ["Wee Michael" McPharlin] shot down but were picked up by air sea rescue. Plenty of fun and games for all."

In the vicinity of Dieppe, Oscar Coen and "Wee Michael" McPharlin went after a formation of three Ju-88s and set one of them on fire. They did not actually see it crash, though, and could only claim it as a probable.

The squadron leader, Chesley Peterson, singled out a Ju-88. "I fired at one of the 88s, diving at him opening fire at 300 yards astern. I saw cannon strikes, mainly on the starboard wing, and his starboard motor emitted puffs of black and white smoke."

But that was not the end of the confrontation. "As I closed to 200 yards, the rear gunner started shooting and hit my aircraft," Peterson later wrote. "I knew that I was hit and that I would have to bail out anyway, so I kept firing up to 150 yards, and then I had to quit as there was so much steam and smoke in the cockpit."

Peterson received credit for the Ju-88. Wing Commander Miles Duke-Woolley confirmed that the bomber crashed into the sea. But Peterson's Spitfire had also been badly damaged—the Ju-88's rear gunner had set his engine on fire. He jettisoned the cockpit canopy, climbed out of the fighter, and jumped. He remembered, "I saw my Spitfire hit the water with a great splash." He descended toward the cold Channel waters.

On his way down—the descent took about 10 minutes—Peterson remembered that he still had his revolver tucked away in his flying boot. He was about to throw it away when it occurred to him that he had never fired it. Before tossing it into the Channel, he decided to empty the revolver, firing all the rounds into the air. Satisfied, he dropped the gun and watched it fall toward the icy gray water. A few minutes later, Peterson was in the water as well.

Within a fairly short time, Peterson was rescued by a patrol boat. Even though he had been picked up and was on his way back to England, Peterson was still not out of danger. The boat was strafed by a German fighter. Another RAF pilot on board, who had also been rescued from the Channel, was killed. Peterson did make it back to England and eventually back to 71 Squadron.

McPharlin was also shot down by the rear

gunner of a Ju-88. Actually, the gunner knocked out McPharlin's compass. A flight of FW-190s forced him to take cover in theclouds, where he completely lost his bearings. When he came out of the cloud cover, McPharlin discovered that he was almost out of fuel. He bailed out of his fighter when it finally did burn up all of its gasoline and came down in the Channel only about three miles off the coast of France.

McPharlin spent his first few minutes in the Channel trying to clamber into the inflatable single-seat dinghy that all the pilots carried as part of their parachute pack. As he bobbed up and down in the current, the coast of France was clearly visible, which meant that he was much too close to the Germans for his personal comfort. The only way to avoid capture, it seemed, was to start paddling north toward England.

The trip was a lot longer—and would take a lot longer—than it looked. After only a few minutes of paddling, McPharlin could see that he would be needing an energy boost if he was to have any hope of making the trip. So he broke into his escape kit, where he found a supply of Benzedrine, and promptly downed the entire supply.

Benzedrine had a reputation for being an excellent stimulant; the pills certainly stimulated McPharlin. According to his wing commander, Wee Michael was "supercharged with zeal, and feeling that for hours he would become a human dynamo, he thrashed away with the hand paddles. One suspects he resembled a sort of static whirling dervish." Happily for him, an Air Sea Rescue launch spotted him after only about 20 minutes in the water . He was safely back at Debden that night.

Everyone in 71 Squadron was fully aware that Wee Michael was "still full of Benzedrine" by the fact that he was still propped up at the bar at 2 AM. The medical officer advised that McPharlin might go on "at full throttle" for another 48 hours before going out like a light. So the pilots took turns keeping an eye on him. Nobody knew when he might collapse.

As the third night was approaching, Wee Michael finally conked out. "Suddenly, and in mid-pint, he crumpled like a wet flannel" right onto the floor of the bar. His squadron mates carried him out and "poured him into bed." For the next 24 hours, McPharlin was absolutely dead to the world. When he finally did wake up, he showed absolutely no ill effects from the Benzedrine—no headache, no nausea, no hangover, nothing. According to W ing Commander Duke-Woolley, "Our faith in Benzedrine zoomed."

Of the three Eagle Squadrons, both 71 and 133 Squadrons had flown three sorties over

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ABOVE: Squadron Leader Chesley Peterson commanded Eagle Squadron No. 71. Peterson survived being shot down and rescued. BELOW: Lieutenant Colonel Don Blakeslee commanded No. 133 Eagle Squadron and later the 4th Fighter Group in Europe. He finished the war with 15 1/2 aerial victories.

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Dieppe by evening, while 121 had flown two. The raid was over by the time 71 Squadron arrived above the landing area at around 5:45 PM. All the assault boats were away from the beaches and headed back toward England. A formation of FW-190s came into sight as the Eagles flew top cover over the evacuation, and the pilots maneuvered into position to attack. But as soon as 71 Squadron turned into the Focke Wulfs, the Germans retreated inland and the Eagles resumed their patrol over the Allied ships. When they returned to Gravesend after their patrol, it was nearly dark. The Spitfires were rearmed and refueled in preparation for night operations.

"We arrived over Dieppe to find all of our assault boats and transporters away from the beaches and on course for England," Harold Strickland noted in his diary. "We set course for home and landed at Gravesend, re-fuelled, re-armed, and prepared for night fighting."

As it turned out, there would be no night fighting for 71 Squadron. But while the squadron's Spitfires were being readied for the next day's operations, Don Blakeslee was taking 133 Squadron back to Dieppe for its fourth sortie. The planes arrived at about 8PM. By that time, the landing force had been completely evacuated, and most of the Luftwaffe had returned to its bases.

But not every German fighter had gone home, not even at that late hour The pilots who were still in the area of Dieppe were full of fight. "On the fourth show of the day we were attacked by 2 FW-190s who came from above and fired on us," 133' s Richard "Dixie" Alexander wrote in his report. He turned on one of the Focke Wulfs and chased it down to about 3,000 feet, firing all the way. Alexander barely managed to avoid crashing and was reasonably sure that the Focke W ulf did not pull out. Because he knew he had damaged the enemy fighter with his cannon fire, he could see his cannon shells strike the plane, Alexander claimed it as a probable.

This was likely the last action of the long day. The Spitfires of 133 were the last fighters down, landing at L ympne at 8:55 PM. The Eagle Squadrons had flown both the opening and the closing sorties of Operation Jubilee. At dawn, 71 Squadron was the first to see combat, and 133's encounter with the FW -190s came after dark.

The pilots of 133 Squadron enjoyed a profitable day over Dieppe. "Every dog has its day," crowed the squadron's logbook, "and on 19 August, 133 was the dog."

Number 133 entered claims of six enemy aircraft destroyed, two probables, and eight damaged (claims that were later officially changed), with no losses of its own. Don Blakeslee had the best score. He claimed a German aircraft destroyed on each of thes squadron's four trips to Dieppe, which was later changed to one destroyed and two damaged. Blakeslee and 133 were one of the few RAF units to come out ahead on August 19.

The air battle had been visible to hundreds of people in southeastern England. Crowds of spectators gathered along the Channel coast to watch the Luftwaffe and RAF twisting and turning in their deadly maneuvers. This was the first time since the Battle of Britain, two years before, that such fighting had been visible. One of the best vantage points was the high ground at Beachy Head in Sussex. The white contrails could be clearly seen against

the blue summer sky.

"The planes in their hundreds made the sky alive with action, speed, and noise," a reporter from the *Brighton and Hove Herald* noted. "Bombers and fighters were seen, some engaged with enemy planes and many a swift aerial battle was fought within sight of the eager watching crowds."

The Dieppe raid had certainly succeeded in bringing the Luftwaffe out. Nearly 1,000 sorties had been flown by German pilots—145 by twin-engine bombers and the rest by fighters. Because the Luftwaffe airfields were only a few minutes away from Dieppe, most German fighters were concentrated over the landing beaches. This concentration gave the Luftwaffe numerical superiority over the RAF in just about every encounter. A German historian had this to say about the air battle of August 19, 1942: "The Dieppe raid was, from the point of view of the German fighter pilots, one of the happiest days since the Battle of Britain."

Total German claims were 112 aircraft shot down. Official lists of RAF losses differ among themselves, but author Norman Franks, in his book *Greatest Air Battle,* gives them as 97 aircraft lost to enemy action, along with 51 pilots killed in action and 17 captured. The Luftwaffe's top scorer was Josef W urmheller of Jagdgeschwader 2, who was credited with six Spitfires and one Blenheim bomber destroyed.

Combined losses among the three Eagle Squadrons came to six Spitfires destroyed and four damaged. The hardest hit of the three was 121 Squadron, which lost four of its 12 Spitfires, along with two others damaged. Also, one of 121's pilots was killed (James T aylor) and another was taken prisoner (Barry Mahon).

As far as claims that were actuallyconfirmed, the combined score of the three Eagle Squadrons totaled six enemy aircraft destroyed (one by 71 Squadron, one by 121, and four by 133).

The Eagles had never encountered the enemy in such force prior to Dieppe. They had seen Messerschmitts and Focke W ulfs in small groups during fighter sweeps over the Continent, usually in pairs or in small formations. The confrontation over Dieppe came as a sobering experience.

The battle also came as a nasty shock to the pilots of the U.S. 31st Fighter Group, which lost eight Spitfires on August 19. They found out the hard way that they had alot to learn about aerial combat, and also that the Germans, especially the Abbeville Boys, were a lot better than they had been led to believe.

All three Eagle Squadrons were back in the air the next day, August 20, with no time off. Their main activity was escorting bombers on strikes over northern France and keeping a sharp eye for enemy fighters. But the Luftwaffe stayed on the ground. Squadron logbooks complained, "No enemy aircraft seen."

It was as though the Luftwaffe had made its point on August 19—that it was still very much alive, still as full of fight as ever, and still more than capable of challenging either the British or the Americans any time it chose.

The Eagle Squadrons continued to fly operations throughout the summer of 1942, but their days as members of the Royal Air Force were numbered. By mid-September, the first group of Eagle Squadron pilots was commissioned into the U.S. Army Air Forces. The next time the Eagles flew together in the same operation following Dieppe, they would be members of the U.S. Fourth Fighter Group.

The three Eagle Squadrons finally left the RAF on September 29, 1942, in a ceremony at Debden, Essex, that was filled with speeches and fanfare. Number 71 Squadron had become the U.S. 334th Squadron, 121 Squadron was now the U.S. 335th Squadron, and 133 Squadron was the U.S. 336th Squadron. By the end of the war, these three fighter units had become the top scoring American squadrons in the European Theater of Operations, with a score of 583½ enemy aircraft destroyed in combat and another 469 on the ground, for a total of 1,052½.

Over the years, historians have generally considered the Dieppe raid a disaster. Wing Commander Duke-Woolley certainly agreed with that judgment. He admitted that the raid on Dieppe completely baffled him. "It was large enough to invite heavy casualties," he said, "but too small for the Germans to consider it an 'invasion' of any sort."

If he had been given his way, the main effort of the RAF and the USAAF would have been to make repeated attacks on the airfields near Dieppe, "notably that at Abbeville with whose

Continued on page 78

Imperial War Museum

ABOVE: Ground crewmen of Eagle Squadron No. 121 watch as a Supermarine Spitfire Vb, its gear down, comes in for a landing after a mission above northern France in August 1942. The Eagle Squadrons provided valuable service to the Royal Air Force at a time when they were needed most. RIGHT: In the aftermath of the Dieppe Raid on August 19, 1942, dead Canadian soldiers and abandoned Churchill tanks lie on the edge of rocky Blue Beach. One landing craft drifts while smoke pours from another hit by German fire during Operation Jubilee.

It's a Hard Mutt Life

The fox terrier "Salvo" prepares for a drop somewhere over England. His owner, an airman from Cleveland, Ohio, claimed the dog could leap from 1,500 feet and land safely.

Around the globe, American servicemen adopted stray dogs and promoted them to mascots. KEVIN M. HYMEL

AMERICAN MEN left behind a great deal when they left home to fight a world war. They lost their identities, their families, and almost all their worldly goods, but they improvised. Oceans away , they either quickly adopted dogs or simply gave in when canines attached themselves to their units. Dogs provided an immense morale boost, caring for their masters with unconditional love. They reminded servicemen of home, provided them with companionship, and brought them peace. The masters easily returned their new pets' loyalty.

In the Pacific, many sailors brought dogs with them, particularly ships' captains who could keep a pet in their personal cabin. But in the Mediterranean and Europe, servicemen picked up dogs as they went. The dog of choice: mutts. Americans identified with their mixed breed pedigree—something the Nazis would never understand.

Lieutenant Belton Cooper and his driver, Vernon, had a typical experience adopting a mascot in Europe. They were driving through the ruins of Gorron, France, when, according to Cooper , "A small gray object emerged from beneath the charred timbers of a smoking house, ran toward our jeep, jumped into Vernon's lap and started licking his face." It was a wire-haired terrier puppy. Cooper told his driver to put the pup down and they roared off. A quarter mile out of town Cooper spotted the puppy bounding behind them in the rearview mirror . They braked. "The puppy, which had gathered considerable momentum, got a few feet from the jeep," recalled Cooper, "then cleared the back end in a single leap. V ernon reached into the air and

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snagged it like a football pass." The men had their mascot.

Mascots were not the sole property of frontline soldiers. General George S. Patton, Jr., adopted a bull terrier from a British kennel. Originally named "Punch," Patton renamed him "W illie" and took h im across the battlefields of Europe. Willie, in return, kept his master's spirits up. Whether swinging from apple trees, battling General Dwight D. Eisenhower's dog "Telek," or urinating on a bust of Adolf Hitler, Willie kept Patton constantly amused.

The bond between dogs and soldiers was as strong as that between combat soldiers, and it lasted throughout the war. While soldiers, sailors, Marines, and Coast Guardsmen adopted many different animals as mascots while away from home, it was the dog, the mutt, the pup, they considered their best friend.

1. Always ready for a dog fight, "Flaps," the 3rd Depot Unit's mascot, prepares to take off over Italy.

2. "Recall," a German shepherd captured as a pup in St. Malo, France, keeps his paws dry by hitching a ride with two GIs in Shevenhutte, Germany.

3. First Sergeant "Curly" is about to lose his 2nd Infantry Division patch. He is being transferred to the 75th Infantry Division at Camp Atlanta, near Chalons, France. Dangling from his neck are his dog tags, or as he called them, "me tags."

4. "Lulu" beats the line for chow. For easier carrying, her owner made a special handle for her mess kit.

All photos: National Archives

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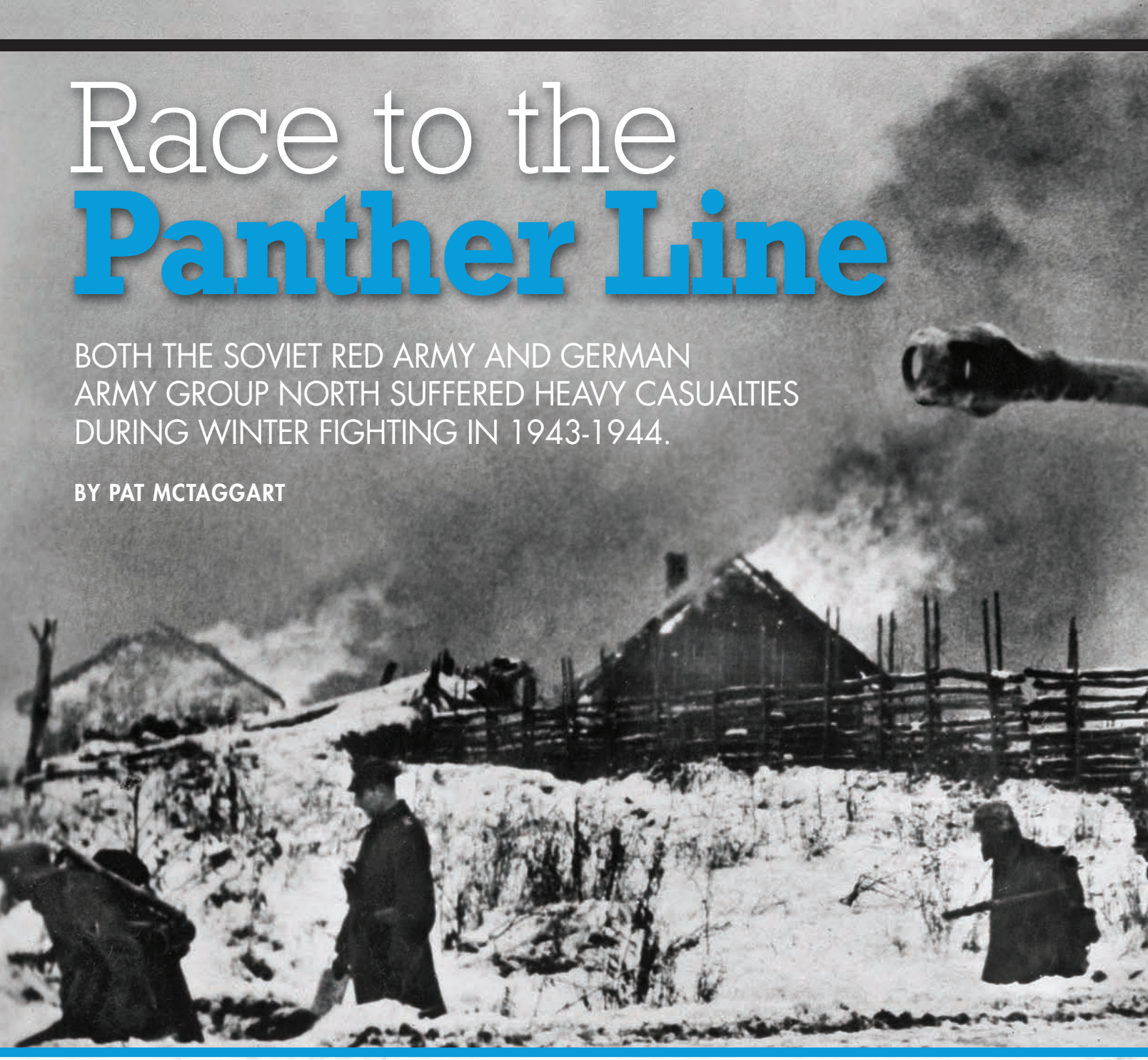
1. With his muzzle at the ready, a GI the 26th Infantry Division stands ready with "Little Joe" on the dangerous streets of Ottweiler, Germany.
2. A Coast Guard crew rescued this puppy from the deck of a sinking ship. She was the only crew member left.
3. At a local British pub, "Sergeant Joe Kodachrome" enjoys his nightly ration of milk and bitters with his comrades, who have to make do with beer.
4. This mascot sniffs out trouble to keep his master safe in Italy.
5. An infantryman leans out of his pup tent to shake hands with a dog in the frozen landscape of Luxembourg during the Battle of the Bulge. The weather was cold enough to make a wet nose dry.
6. Better than pigs in a blanket. Soldiers of a VII Corps artillery unit admire "D-13"s pups in a basket in Friendorf, Germany. The soldiers found D-13 in Normandy.
7. Two medics treat a dog injured in the fighting in and around Carentan, France.
8. War is hard enough without a monkey on your back. Two medics watch as their mascot, "Master Sergeant Chico," waits patiently while "Private Oscar" apes a backward jockey pose in Shadazup, Burma.

See more photos of GIs and their dogs during World War II at **www.WarfareHistoryNetwork.com**

Race to the Panther Line

BOTH THE SOVIET RED ARMY AND GERMAN ARMY GROUP NORTH SUFFERED HEAVY CASUALTIES DURING WINTER FIGHTING IN 1943-1944.

BY PAT MCTAGGART



THE LATTER HALF of 1943 had German forces in the east staggering under a series of hammer blows that saw the Soviet Red Army advance hundreds of kilometers westward on the central and southern sectors of the Eastern Front. After the massive battle in the Kursk salient, the Soviets launched their first great summer offensive late in July.

In a month and a half, Smolensk, Bryansk, and Kirov had been liberated in the central sector, with German forces retreating to the Sozh River and beyond. By September 30, Soviet troops had taken most of the northern shore of the Sea of Azov in the southern sector and had recaptured key cities that included Kharkov , Stalino, and Poltava while pushing the Germans back almost to the Dnieper River.

Luckily for the Germans, the Soviets outran their supply lines and had to call a halt to operations while men and material were brought forward. Both sides had suffered horrendous losses since July 1, and although the Russians could replace theirs with conscripts from newly liberated territory, it would take time to outfit them and give them the basics of command and combat.

While German forces battled the Soviets in a fighting retreat, thousands of forced laborers and German engineers were tasked with building a massive defensive line. On August 11, Hitler signed an order calling for the construction of the so-called "Eastern W all." Although it went against his propensity to fight for every foot of conquered land, Hitler had to face reality for once after the post-Kursk Soviet offensive.

The line was to run from the Black Sea to the Baltic States. In the south, the majority of the defenses would be along the western bank of

A Russian farmhouse blazes in the background as German soldiers accompanied by a massive PzKpfw. VI Tiger tank advance across a snowy landscape in January 1944. Winter fighting on the Eastern Front was particularly bitter as temperatures often plunged below zero.

the Dnieper. North of Kiev it would run along the Desna River to Chernihiv and then continue northward in a line east of Gomel, Orsha, Nevel, and Pskov, ending on the southern tip of Lake Pskov. Continuing north along the western shore of Lake Pskov, it would then follow the Narva River north to the Gulf of Finland.

Toward the end of August, OKH (Oberkommando des Heeres—the German Army High Command) adopted two code names for the northern and southern sectors of the line. The part of the Eastern Wall that would eventually be manned by Army Groups A and South would be the "Wotan Line," while the area occupied by Army Croups Center and North was code named the "Panther Line."

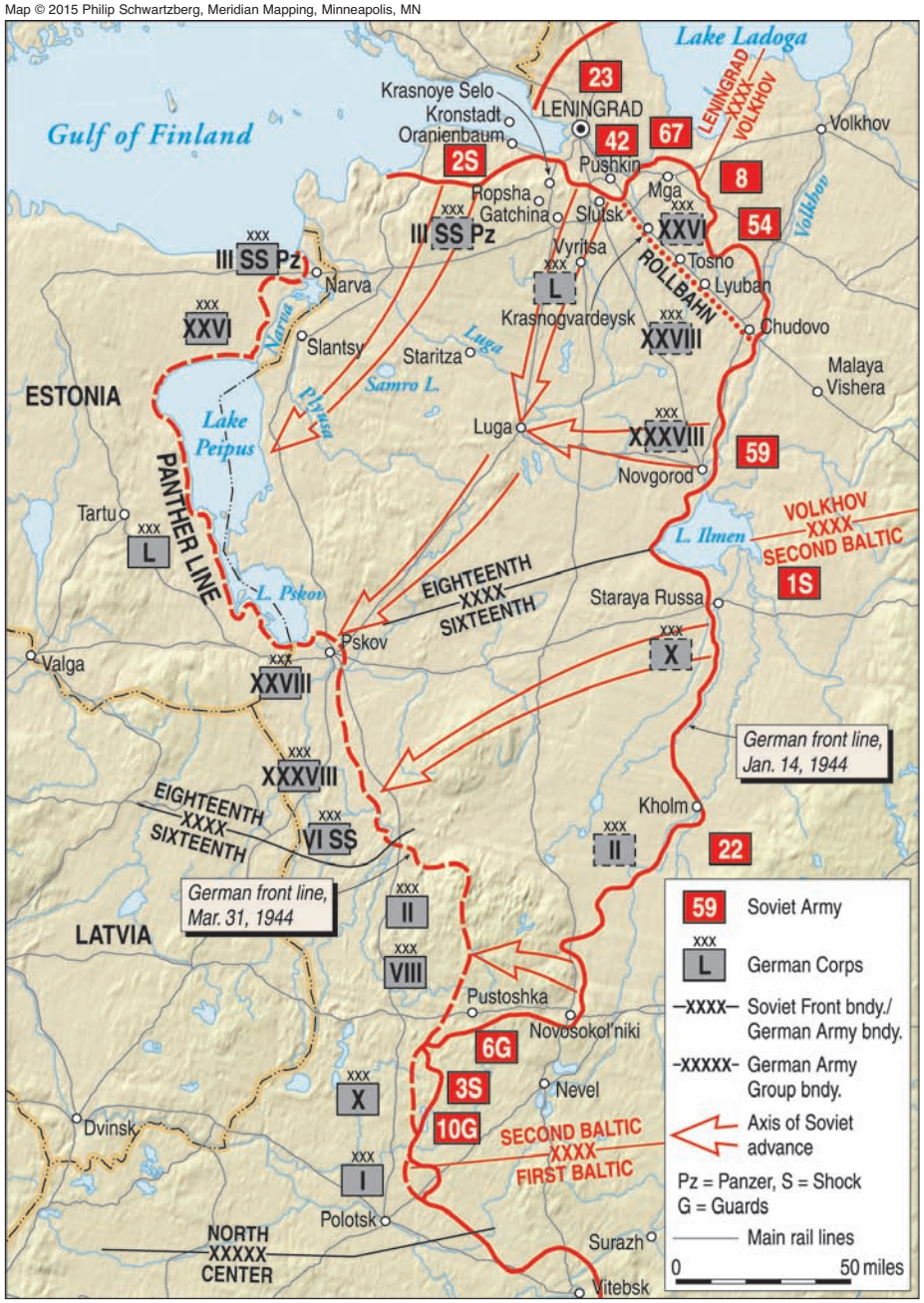
Once it was fully constructed and manned, Hitler hoped his Eastern Wall would be such a formidable barrier that the Red Army would bleed itself dry trying to penetrate it. In essence, it would be a throwback to the trench warfare and the battles of attrition that Hitler himself had experienced in World War I.

There were three basic problems with the line. The first was the time it would take to construct. Soviet advances had already pushed German troops dangerously close to the proposed line, with some already occupying the half-built defenses. The second was manpower. Once the position was finally reached, some German units were so depleted that there was only one soldier to every 50 meters of front.

The third problem concerned the extreme southern sector of the Wall. Since the Dnieper curved west around Zaporizhzya to empty into the Black Sea west of the Crimean Peninsula, the line stretching from Melitopol to Zaporizhzya was constructed on land totally unsuited for its purpose since there was no river barrier

National Archives

Map © 2015 Philip Schwartzberg, Meridian Mapping, Minneapolis, MN



ABOVE: By the winter of 1943-1944, the Soviet Red Army had driven the invading Germans westward across hundreds of miles of territory. In the grip of winter, the two armies endured heavy fighting while German Army Group North attempted to withdraw to a series of fortified defensive positions known as the Panther Line. OPPOSITE: A solitary German soldier occupies a defensive position on the Russian steppe sometime during the winter fighting of 1943-1944.

to use as an additional plus for defensive positions. The Germans were forced to hold that area to protect the 17th Army, which occupied the Crimea.

Once reinforcements and supplies arrived, the Russians continued to batter the Germans. Kiev fell to the Red Army in November, and the 4th Ukrainian Front broke the lines of the German Sixth Army, which was holding the Melitopol area. Farther north, Soviet troops were able to establish bridgeheads across the Dnieper, taking several key positions in the halfcompleted Wotan Line. By the end of the year, most of the vaunted line had been overrun in the central and southern sectors of the Eastern Front.

While the situation was deteriorating in the center and the south during the summer , the sector occupied by Field Marshal Georg von Küchler's Army Group North remained eerily quiet. The army group had been besieging Leningrad since 1941, and the front in that sector had been the object of several heavy Soviet attacks throughout the next two years, but the lines remained relatively stable.

In August, von Küchler received intelligence indicating a Soviet buildup in the Oranienbaum bridgehead—an area on the coast of the Gulf of Finland west of Leningrad that was held by the 2nd Shock Army. Farther south, in the sector held by General Christian Hansen's Sixteenth Army, reports showed that a buildup was also occurring at the boundary of Army Group Center and Army Group North opposite the key rail junction city of Nevel.

Von Küchler responded to the possible threats by pulling five divisions out of the line to form a ready reserve to counter any Soviet attacks. Two of those divisions were lost almost immediately as Hitler, over the objections of the army group commander, sent them south to prop up other sectors of the front.

As Army Group Center withdrew to the Panther Line, Army Group North acquired General Karl von Oven's XLIII Army Corps, which had occupied the northern flank of the retreating army group. This gave von Küchler three more divisions, but it also made him responsible for another 77 kilometers and the towns of Nevel and Novosokol'niki, which were the key communications centers between Army Group Center and Army Group North.

During the first week of October, a heavy overcast prevented further German aerial reconnaissance from taking place. This gave an opportunity for General Andrei Ivanovich Eremenko's Kalinin Front (renamed the 1st Baltic Front on October 12) to move into attack positions without fear of German discovery.

On October 6, Lt. Gen. Kuzma Nikitovich Galitskii hit the 2nd Luftwaffe Field Division, which was occupying the northernmost sector of Army Group Center, with four rifle divisions and two tank brigades from his 3rd Shock Army. The 21st Guards Division and 78th Tank Brigade sliced through the German division, scattering its forces. Following units of the attack force poured through the lines of the disintegrating division and swung northeast toward Nevel. The poor showing of the 2nd Luftwaffe and other Luftwaffe field divisions prompted Hitler to approve the transfer of most of them to the Army , where they were known as feld (L) divisions. The neighboring 4th Shock Army also pushed forward, and by mid-afternoon the town was in Soviet hands.

Trying to restore the situation, von Küchler ordered his three remaining reserve divisions to attack the Russians around the town. Those units arrived piecemeal and had little effect in stopping the superior Soviet force, which had opened a gap of 24 kilometers between Army

Groups North and Center.

Elements of only one reserve division were in the fight. Movement of the other two divisions had been disrupted by partisans, who had blown up the rail lines running directly to the town. With the resulting delay, von Küchler ordered German forces around Nevel to go into a defensive posture.

At the same time, the Soviet commanders called a halt to their offensive. The success of the initial assault had surprised the Russians, who had expected heavier enemy resistance. They now started to fortify their flanks, having learned bitter lessons in the past about the German tendency to let a salient develop before launching counterattacks that could, and in many cases did, trap and destroy the foremost elements of Soviet assault forces.

The impasse continued until November 2. Advancing under the cover of heavy fog, the 3rd and 4th Shock Armies hit Army Group Center's Third Panzer Army, causing a 16 kilometer gap in the line. This allowed the 3rd Shock Army to turn northeast and hit Hansen's Sixteenth Army flank. Von Küchler reacted by sending six battalions from General Georg Lindemann's Eighteenth Army to Hansen, who used them to bolster his right flank. W ith the arrival of those troops the flank bent but did not break.

By now, Hitler was livid. Not only had the Nevel salient remained intact—the new Soviet assault threatened to unhinge the entire front in the northern sector. He demanded that a counterattack eliminate the new bulge with a concentrated action by both Army Groups North and Center beginning on November 8.

Von Küchler objected in the strongest terms. He pointed out that the only way he could attack was to further weaken the Nineteenth Army, which was still in a static mode around Leningrad and Oranienbaum. He also pointed to German intelligence concerning a Soviet buildup in those areas. With the onset of winter, he was worried that a new enemy a ttack would occur in those areas since a Soviet offensive had occurred every winter since the war in the East had begun.

Hitler remained unmoved. He ordered that Army Group Center begin its attack on November 8, with von Küchler joining in on the 9th. An infantry and panzer division opened the attack on the 8th, making surprisingly good progress and advancing eight kilometers. The following day von Küchler postponed his own attack, saying no units could be spared for the assault. Furious, Hitler demanded that Army Group North begin its attack no later than November 10.

On the 10th, von Küchler made a halfhearted attempt to follow Hitler's order by throwing just seven battalions against the Soviet northern flank. Russian artillery fire, followed by a counterattack, threw the Germans back with heavy losses. Once again, the debate over priorities raged between Hitler and his commander.

While the two argued, the Soviets pressed forward. Their new salient was extended to a depth of 80 kilometers. A new threat appeared when the Russians started to turn east at the tip of the salient, threatening the right flank of the Sixteenth Army and br inging Red Army troops dangerously close to Novosokol'niki.

ullstein bild / The Granger Collection, NY

Von Küchler was summoned to Hitler's headquarters, where the two heatedly discussed the new threat. Although obsessed with the Nevel bridgehead, Hitler finally agreed that Soviet forces threatening the flank should be dealt with before continuing to try and stabilize things at Nevel.

Once again it was Lindemann who paid the price with the loss of another division from his Eighteenth Army. Although his front still remained quiet, the gradual transfer of one division after another to the south stretched his defenses dangerously thin. The feld (L) divisions under his command held purely defensive positions and were of questionable combat worthiness, while regular army divisions were rarely up to strength.

Before von Küchler, who was waiting for the transferred division to arrive in the south, could attack, an assault by the 11th Guards Army hit Army Group Center on November 21. The two divisions that had attacked the Soviet bulge on November 8 were withdrawn to meet the new threat, further weakening Army Group North's plan to reduce the salient. A sudden thaw in the last week of November further disrupted the German plan as the ground turned into a quagmire, forcing a postponement of the attack until December 1.

When the attack finally did get under way , the German divisions advanced a mere five kilometers into the Soviet bulge. Mechanized vehicles became stuck in the mud, and each step for the infantry became a struggle with nature. Even Hitler recognized the futility of continuing the attack on the Soviet western flank, so he ordered a halt to the assault and ordered von Küchler to resume plans to pinch off the Nevel salient.

For the rest of December the Soviets in the western bulge took time to refit and regroup. They could be happy with the results of the previous month, as they had managed to make a considerable advance that endangered both Army Group Center and Army Group North. However, they had outrun their supply lines, and reinforcements to replace casualties that had been taken were being held in reserve for the general winter offensive that was being planned in Moscow.

Hitler finally realized that the Nevel salient could not be destroyed on December 16. Enemy pressure on the Third Panzer Army had forced the German line in that sector even farther back, endangering the communi cations hub at Vitebsk. For the next 10 days he kept a close eye on developments in the Vitebsk area while leaving the affairs of Army Group North

to von Küchler.

On December 27, Hitler accepted von Küchler's request to shorten his lines. The withdrawal took troops out of the Nevel bulge and pulled them back to a line running from just south of Novosokol'niki west toward Pusloshka. The pullback gave Hansen more troops to man the line and reinforce positions along the front in the west.

It should be noted that Army Group North was the only army group that had not yet retreated to the Eastern Wall's Panther Line. Since September, a force of some 50,000 civilians and engineers had worked on the line in the north, building about 6,000 bunkers and laying 200 kilometers of barbed wire. Another 40 kilometers of trenches and antitank ditches were also dug. In addition, a series of secondary positions were also constructed, with strongpoints being built at Narva, Chudovo, Kingisepp, Luga, Krasnobvardeisk, and Novgorod.

ABOVE: Soviet artillery fires on secondary positions of the German Panther Line near Narva. Heavy Red Army guns pounded German positions that included 6,000 bunkers, trenches, antitank ditches, and 200 kilometers of barbed wire. OPPOSITE: Cloaked in white camouflage and uniformed against the extremely cold weather, Red Army infantrymen hurry toward one of their own tanks while others climb aboard to hitch a ride rather than trudge through the deep snow.

The plan for retreating to the Panther Line started in September. It was codenamed Operation Blue. One of the main concerns that Army Group North planners had was the 900,000 civilians living in the area that was to be evacuated. It would be impossible to move them all, so security forces in the rear areas singled out adult males that would either be conscripted by the advancing Red Army or be used as workers for the Soviet war effort. In total, some 250,000 men had been forcibly transported to Latvia and Lithuania by the end of the year. Hundreds of thousands of tons of grain and potatoes were also scheduled to be sent to safe areas along with half a million cattle and sheep.

Planning for the retreat envisioned a staggered withdrawal that would start in mid-January and continue for the next couple of months until the spring thaw. However, on December 22 Hitler decided that he would not approve the implementation of Operation Blue unless the Soviets began a general offensive against the army group.

Toward the end of the month, the Eighteenth Army lost one of its best divisions, the 1st Infantry, which was sent south to shore up the front. Two more divisions were also transferred during the first days of January. With each loss, von Küchler protested directly to Hitler with no results. In return for these losses, Hitler sent SS Lt. Gen. Felix Steiner's III SS Panzer Corps to bolster the Oranienbaum sector.

At the beginning of 1944, the units of Lindemann's Eighteenth Army around Leningrad and the Oranienbaum bridgehead were stretched to the limit. The line surrounding Lt. Gen. Ivan Ivanovich Fediuninskii's 2nd Shock Army was manned by Steiner's Corps (SS Police Division, SS Nordland Division and 9th and 10th Feld (L) Divisions). The SS Nederland Brigade was also in transport to the corps.

A half circle ring on the southern sector of Leningrad ran from the Gulf of Finland about 30 kilometers southwest of the city through Pushkin and ended at the Neva River. General Wilhelm Wegner's L Army Corps (126th, 170th, and 215th Infantry Divisions) and General Otto Sponheimer's LIV Army Corps (11th, 24th, and 225th Infantry Divisions) occupied the sector. Facing Soviet units around the Siniavino Heights and the Pogos'te pocket was General Martin Grase's XXVI Army Corps (61st, 121st, 212th, 227th, 254th Infantry and 12th Feld (L) Infantry Divisions and the Spanish Legion, composed of Spanish volunteers who had served in the withdrawn 250th "Blue" Division).

The final sector held by the Eighteenth Army was an area on the Volkhov River running from Kirishi to Novgorod. Along the river line were General Herbert Loch's XXVIII Army Corps (21st, 96th, and 13th Feld (L) Infantry Divisions) and General Kurt Herzog's XXXVIII Army Corps (2nd Latvian SS Brigade, 28th Jäger (Light) Division, and 1st Feld (L) Infantry Division).

South of Lake Ilmen, Hansen's Sixteenth Army still maintained contact with Army Group Center. General Thomas Wickede's X Army Corps (8th Jäger Division and 30th and 21st Feld (L) Infantry Divisions) held a line from Lake Ilmen to Kholm. On Wickede's right flank, General Paul Laux's II Army Corps (218th and 93rd Infantry Divisions) and SS Lt. Gen. Karl von Pfeffer-Wildenbruch's VI SS Army Corps (331st and 205th Infantry Divisions) front ran from Kholm to the Novosokol'niki Heights. Holding the Nevel area were General Karl von Oven's XLIII Army Corps (15th Latvian SS Division and the 83rd and 263 Infantry Divisions) and General Carl Hilpert's I Army Corps (58th, 69th, 23rd, 122nd, and 290th Infantry Divisions). The final sector, running from Putoshka to Lake Nezherda was occupied by General Gustav Hoehne's VIII Army Corps (81st and 329th Infantry Divisions and SS Combat Group Jeckeln).

While the Germans were planning Operation Blue, general planning for a grand offensive against Army Group North began as early as September when Volkhov Front commander General Kirill Anfansevich Meretskov and Leningrad Front commander General Leonid Aleksandrovich Govorov presented almost identical ideas to Stavka (Soviet High Command). The plans called for offensives by both Fronts designed to cut off and destroy the Eighteenth Army before it could withdraw to the Panther Line.

On October 12, Stavka approved the initial plan and set about refining it. Included in the final operational plan was a two-pronged attack with the 2nd Shock Army bursting out

© Sovfoto

of the Oranienbaum bridgehead and Col. Gen. Ivan Ivanovich Maslennikov's 42nd Army attacking to the southwest from Leningrad.

The two armies were to link up at Ropsha about 25 kilometers southwest of Leningrad, trapping the German divisions that occupied the corridor between Leningrad and Oranienbaum. While the pincer attack was under way, Govorov would use Lt. Gen. Vladimir Petrovich Sviridov's 67th Army to tie down German forces south of Leningrad. Once the first phase was accomplished, the three armies were to move westward and southwestward, overcoming other German divisions that were trying to reach the Panther Line.

On the Volkhov Front, Meretskov would use Lt. Gen. Ivan Teretevich Korovnikov's 59th Army as his battering ram. Korovnikov would hit Herzog's XXXVIII Army Corps with a force of nine divisions north of Novgorod while a smaller force would attack across the frozen Lake Ilmen. The two forces would then converge west of Novgorod, surrounding the city and eliminating German units trapped inside that pocket.

Farther south, General Markian Mikhailovich Popov's 2nd Baltic Front would attack the Sixteenth Army, tying down its forces and preventing any reinforcements being sent to the Eighteenth Army. All three Fronts would be assisted by partisan brigades that occupied areas in the German rear. Those brigades were tasked with disrupting supplies and communications throughout the region.

Under cover of darkness, Soviet units moved into their well-camouflaged jump-off points on January 12 and 13. Massive piles of shells lay beside the artillery battalions of all three Fronts as the gunners zeroed in on preplotted enemy positions. Heavy snow began to fall as the clock ticked down to midnight, further concealing Russian assault units' movements.

The snow added a surreal picture to the landscape as German soldiers in outposts strained to see into the area before them. Visibility was almost zero, and it was eerily quiet. Suddenly, the stillness was broken by the hum of motors overhead.

With the help of the partisans and aerial reconnaissance, the Soviets had pinpointed the weakest points in the German line. In the sector of Steiner's Corps those points were in the positions of Colonel Ernst Michaels' 9th Feld (L) and Brig. Gen. Hermann von Wedel's 10th Feld (L) Divisions, which ran from the Gulf of Finland at Peterhof southwest to Zaostrovye. Although these former Luftwaffe divisions had been transferred to the Army, their personnel still lacked the basic ground combat skills of their Army comrades.

The noise grew louder as more than 100 Soviet night bombers approached. Even though the snow prevented visibly identifying targets, the Russians dropped their loads with credible accuracy. The German positions erupted in flames and explosions as the bombers passed overhead. For the rest of the night the troops of the two divisions frantically worked on rebuilding their shattered defenses and gathered their dead and wounded while worrying what would come after the raid.

At 0935 on the 14th, they found out. As the snow abated, the sky in the distance turned yellow and red as the Leningrad Front unleashed hell on the two divisions and other units of Steiner's corps. In a 65-minute bombardment the Soviet artillery, assisted by guns of the Red Navy, fired almost 105,000 shells, obliterating the enemy defenses. The bombardment ended in a screaming crescendo as battery after battery of Katyusha rockets plunged into the German positions.

As the artillery fire ended, Maj. Gen. Anatoli Iosiforovich Andreev's 43rd Rifle Corps (48th, 90th, and 98th Rifle Divisions) and Maj. Gen. Pantelemon Aleksandrovich Zaitsev's 122nd Rifle Corps (11th and 131st Rifle Divisions) hit the two former Luftwaffe divisions. They were supported by the 122nd and 43rd Tank Brigades. As they penetrated the shattered German lines, pockets of resistance desperately tried to stem the Russian advance to no avail.

The assault units were followed by the 43rd, 168th, and 186th Rifle Divisions and the 152nd Tank Brigade, which wiped out or captured any Germans that had survived the initial attack. By nightfall the Russians had overrun most of the primary German defensive positions, and Michaels and von Wedel's divisions had virtually disintegrated.

Survivors of the divisions were rounded up by officers to form hedgehog positions in vil-

lages south and west of the breakthrough points. While Michaels formed combat groups in his sector he ordered a Lt. Col. Lassman to set up an all-around defense at the road junction at Ropsha. Lassmann sent out patrols to pick up stragglers from the front line and slowly formed his defense force.

The Russians continued to advance overnight, with Colonel Nikolai Georgovich Liashenko's 90th Rifle and Colonel Petr Loginovich Romanko's 131st Rifle Divisions, supported by Col. A.Z. Oskotskii's 152nd Tank Brigade and the 2nd and 204th T ank Regiments, gaining an additional four kilometers of ground in the German's secondary defense line. Additional reinforcements and heavy Soviet artillery fire prevented any threat of a counterattack to close the gap.

January 15 saw Maslennikov's 42nd Army join the assault. The preliminary artillery barrage was even more impressive than the one the day before. About 2,300 guns, mortars, and rocket launchers hit a 17-kilometer section of the German line from Uritsk to Pushkin with more than 220,000 shells. At 1100, Maj. Gen. Nikolai Pavlovich Simoniak's 30th Guards Rifle Corps attacked the center of the mangled enemy line west of the Pulkovo Heights with his 45th, 63rd, and 65th Guards Rifle Divisions, which were supported by Lt. Col. I.V . Protsenko's 220th Tank Brigade.

The sector was held by the seasoned troops of Wegner's L Army Corps, who had fared better through the bombardment than their comrades had the previous day. Strong primary and secondary positions had been built, and bitter fighting took place for every meter of ground. Bearing the brunt of Simoniak's attack, Brig. Gen. Walther Krause's 170th Infantry Division was forced to give up about five kilometers of ground to the well-trained and well-disciplined Guards divisions.

The 170th gave ground grudgingly, but not without cost. In Lt. Col. Johannes Arndt's 131st Infantry Regiment, two battalion commanders, Captain Moeller and Captain Meyer, were killed while directing the defense. Their men held their positions and withdrew only when Russian troops threatened Arndt's command post.

On Siamoniak's right flank, Maj. Gen. Ivan Prokofevich Alferov's 109th Rifle Corps had a tougher time as they tried to breach the defenses of Maj. Gen. Gotthard Fischer's 126th Infantry Division. Alferov's three rifle divisions (72nd, 189th, and 125th) only managed to advance about 1.5 kilometers against the determined German resistance.

It was the same on the left flank where Maj. Gen. Stepan Mikhailovich Bun'kov's 56th, Colonel Konstantin Vladmirovich Vvedenskii's 85th, and Colonel Sergei Petrovich Demidov's 86th Rifle Divisions of the 110th Rifle Corps (Maj. Gen. Ivan Vasilevich Khozov) hit Maj. Gen. Bruno Frankewitz's 215th Infantry Division. The costly advance through Frankewitz's primary positions only gained as much ground as Alferov had.

Almost 20 kilometers to the west in the III SS Panzer Corps sector, von W edel and Michaels' divisions were still holding out in some pockets. Meanwhile, Fediuninskii committed more forces into the expanding wedge in the German line. W ith the additional manpower the Russians were able to thrust forward to Sokuli, which fell after heavy fighting. With the capture of the town, the 2nd Shock Army was only a few kilometers from Ropsha.

Watching his lines crumble, Steiner ordered SS Brig. Gen. Fritz von Scholz's Edler von Barancze's 11th SS Panzergrenadier Division "Nordland" to counterattack. The Nordland Division was composed of Scandinavian volunteers (10 percent), native Germans (30 percent), and ethnic Germans from Romania. Among its members was Norwegian John Sandstadt, a member of the 1st Company of Nordland's 23rd Panzergrenadier Regiment, who described the action:

"The counterattack collapsed completely under Soviet crossfire. We immediately lost 13 dead and many wounded. It was the same for the 2nd and 3rd companies. All the same, we were finally able to hold our [old] positions for some 10 days, with our three companies being reduced to the strength of one company."

For the next two days the Soviet juggernaut pushed forward. On the 16th, the V olkhov Front's 54th Army (Lt. Gen. Sergei V asilevich Roginskii) attacked Loch's SS VII Army Corps with the city of L yuban as its objective. The attack faltered almost immediately as it ran into the prepared positions of Brig. Gen. Hellmuth Preiss's 121st, Colonel Gottfried Weber's 12th Feld (L), Brig. Gen. Johann-Albrecht von Blücher's 96th, and Maj. Gen. Gerhard Matzky's 21st Infantry Divisions.

A Soviet report stated: "The direction of the attack is toward Lyuban. However, the enemy's

ullstein bild / The Granger Collection, NY

resistance still has not been overcome. He is continuing to cling fiercely to every clump of ground and launching counterattacks. It is requiring bravery and selflessness to overcome him."

On the 18th, Lindemann demanded that his frontline forces be allowed to withdraw . The 126th and remnants of the 9th Feld (L) were threatened with encirclement. The battle for Krasnoye Selo was beginning, and the pincers of Fediuninskii's and Maslennikov's armies were moving forward south of Ropsha, threatening further encirclements when they met.

At Ropsha itself, Lt. Col. Lassmann received a final radio message from Colonel Michaels, who was still holding out with some of his men at Tuganty, about 15 kilometers south of Lassman's position. His combat group was fighting against the advance elements of Fediuninskii's assault forces, trying to prevent them from linking up with the 42nd Army. After giving Lassmann a report on the situation, he signed off by saying, "In this life, we will never see each other again." Four days later Michaels was killed while defending his position.

While Lindemann, Hitler, and von Küchler were still discussing a pullback, Maslennikov pushed more units to the front to exploit the gains being made by Simoniak. Lindemann had no reserves left, as he had already committed Maj. Gen. Günther Krappe's 61st Infantry Division to the fight. Events overtook the debate as Ropsha fell to Zaitsev's 122nd Rifle Corps. On January 19, lead elements of the 2nd Shock and 42nd Armies met south of the town, while Krasnoye Selo fell to Simoniak's forces.

During the evening of the 19th, Lindemann ordered the 126th and 9th Feld (L) Divisions to break through the tightening Soviet ring and make their way south. Maj. Gen. Fisher regrouped his division and started out at midnight with his 424th Infantry Regiment in the lead. Assault guns guarded the division's flanks as the men moved through the darkness. Since the Soviets still had only forward elements of the 42nd and 2nd Shock Armies occupying the area of the breakout, the 126th and remnants of the 9th Feld (L) managed to break through during the early hours of the 20th.

While the battle for the Oranienbaum corridor was taking place, the Volkhov Front's 59th Army hit Herzog's XXXVIII Army Corps with three rifle corps. The objective was to take Novgorod and dislodge the right flank of the Eighteenth Army. More than 130,000 artillery shells heralded the opening of Korvnikov's offensive on the 14th. At 1050 the Soviets launched their attack from a bridgehead on the western bank of the Volkhov, expecting little resistance from the artillery-riddled German positions.

National Archives

ABOVE: A German mortar crew prepares to fire its weapon from a defensive position on the system of fortifications known as the Panther Line. These soldiers are among the few Germans to don white camouflage gear during the winter fighting. OPPOSITE: A German PzKpfw. IV tank, with side skirt armor attached, advances across a desolate plain in Russia in February 1944. In the distance another tank and a half-track make their way along the route in preparation for an attack on Soviet positions.

As the three divisions of Maj. Gen. Semen Petrovich Mikulskii's 6th Guards Rifle Corps advanced, they were met with devastating fire from the Silesians of Maj. Gen. Hans Speth' s 28th Jäger Division. Mikulskii's divisions were supposed to be supported by Colonel K.O. Urvanov's 167th Tank Brigade, but the swampy terrain and craters created by the initial artillery bombardment prevented the tanks from arriving in time to help. As a result, the Soviets were able to advance little more than a kilometer.

Farther south, an operational group under the command of Maj. Gen. Teodor Andreevich Sviklin, the army's assistant commanding officer, had more luck. Sviklin's men were able to cross frozen Lake Ilmen south of Novgorod, catching the troops of Luftwaffe Brig. Gen. Rudolf Petrauschke's 1st Feld (L) Division flat footed. Overcoming light resistance, Sviklin secured a six-kilometer-deep by four-kilometer-wide bridgehead on the eastern shore of the lake, threatening the communications line between Novgorod and Shimsk.

January 15 saw Mikulskii, now reinforced with a rifle division and a tank brigade, advance seven kilometers. His forces were able to cut the rail line, defended by elements of Maj. Gen. Kurt Versock's 24th Infantry Division, between Chudovo and Novgorod. Supported by the three rifle divisions of Maj. Gen. Pavel Alekseevich Artiushenko's 14th Rifle Corps, Mikulski was able to advance into the main German defensive line and create a 20-kilometer gap in the enemy defenses.

At Novgorod, Colonel Lothar Freutel' s 503rd Infantry Regiment of Maj. Gen. Conrad-Oskar Heinrichs' 290th Infantry Division, which had been rushed forward to bolster Petrauschke's division, formed a defensive barrier in the ruins of the city. The defenders also included elements of Petrauschke's and Speth's divisions and were supported by the 290th Artillery Regiment.

Enveloped from the north and south, Novgorod held out until January 19, when a breakout order was given. A member of the combat group defending the city recalled:

"On the night of January 19, those troops of the 28th Jäger Division in Novgorod received the order to break out. The seriously wounded had to be abandoned in the ruins, the medical staff volunteering to remain behind with them, and all who could carry weapons, including the walking wounded, tried to withdraw under cover of darkness."

The combat group broke down into smaller sections, which were constantly attacked by the Red Air Force and Soviet artillery. In Freutel's regiment, only three officers and 100 men came through alive. It was the same for the other units that participated in the breakout. On the morning of January 20, Maj. Gen. Ivan Nikolayevich Burakovskii's 191st, Colonel Petr Ivanovich Olkhovshii's 225th, and Maj. Gen. Petr Nikolaevich Chernyshev's 382nd Rifle Divisions entered the city, encountering no resistance.

With the fall of Novgorod, von Küchler realized that his army group was being outflanked. He once again requested that Hitler allow him to retreat. Engaging in a back and forth argument about just how far back the troops would withdraw, Hitler grudgingly gave permission to retreat to the so-called Rollbahn Line, which was one of the secondary defensive positions that had been built earlier . The subsequent shortening of the line meant that three divisions could now be used as a reserve. Hitler also agreed to move Brig. Gen. Erpo von Bodenhausen's 12th Panzer Division into Sixteenth Army's area.

Popov's 2nd Baltic Front, operating south of Meretskov, was also causing trouble for the Sixteenth Army, but its early assaults met with little success. By mid-January it had carved out a small bridgehead that had severed the Nevel-Leningrad rail line, but little else was achieved.

Counterattacks from Laux's II Army Corps and Wickede's X Army Corps forced Popov to go onto the defensive on January 20, but the danger of a renewed Russian attack prevented any transfer of German troops in the area to other endangered sectors.

Stavka gave its Front commanders little time to consolidate their gains. With urging from Moscow, Govorov resumed his offensive on the 21st. Masslennikov's 42nd Army was given a number of missions. His troops were ordered to take Slutsk, Pushkin, and Tosno and then drive on to capture the important road junction at Gatchina. The capture of that town would enable him to continue advancing to the Luga River, where the Germans had set up another line of defense.

Meretskov was also ordered to head for the Luga. He charged Korovnikkov's 59th Army with that task. In conjunction with Korovnikkov's attack, Roginskii's 54th Army was to take Lyuban and encircle and destroy Loch's XXVIII Corps.

The attacks were supported by partisan units, which totally disrupted the interior German lines of supply and communication. During the month of January partisans destroyed several stretches of railroad tracks, blew up more than 300 bridges, and derailed 133 trains. The attacks were devastating to German morale. The history of the 11th Infantry Division describes the effect on troops who did not receive much needed food or clothing:

"Often the troops go for days in the icy cold without warm food, with wet clothing that would freeze stiff, with merely crumbs of frozen bread to eat and frozen tea in their canteens to drink. They would catch a few minutes of sleep when they could.…"

On the 21st, Mga fell to Soviet forces after German troops in the city made an orderly retreat. Lt. Gen. Filipp Nikanorovich Starikov was ordered to use his 8th Army to pursue and destroy the garrison, but the pursuing forces were overly cautious and the Germans were able to make good their retreat.

Meanwhile, Wegner's L Army Corps was fighting a desperate battle around Gatchina against the spearhead of the 42nd Army. Once again, von Küchler flew to Hitler's headquarters to demand freedom of action. He wanted to shore up his line as much as possible, and he argued that German forces holding Pushkin and Slutsk would be destroyed if they were not allowed to retreat.

"I am against all withdrawals," Hitler replied. He said that he wanted the Soviets to bleed and incur as many casualties as possible before they descended on the Panther Line. Von Küchler argued, to no avail, that when the army group would finally be allowed to retreat to the line, it might not have the troops to man it.

A frustrated von Küchler returned to his headquarters having received little from Hitler. His lines were tenuous at best, and one decisive Soviet breakthrough could mean disaster for the entire army group.

On January 23, Meretskov launched what he hoped would be a final assault on the German forces at Gatchina. The defenders now consisted of a hodgepodge of units centered around the L Army Corps (170th and part of the 215th Divisions). Other units manning defenses in the area were the remnants of Maj. Gen. Ernst Risse's 225th and Krappe's 61st Infantry Divisions. Arriving in the area were Major Willy Jähde's Tiger Detachment 502 and elements of the 12th Panzer Division.

To help Maslennikov accomplish his mission, Govorov released Maj. Gen. Vasilii Alekseevich Trubachev's 117th Rifle Corps and Maj. Gen. Georgii Ivanovich Anisimov's 123rd Rifle Corps from the Front reserve. Maslennikov ordered his two new corps to make a frontal attack on the German defenses. Farther south, Maj. Gen. Ivan Vasilevich Khazov's 110th Rifle Corps would encircle German forces at Pushkin and Slutsk.

After a short artillery barrage, Trubachev and Anisimov moved forward. The Germans met the attacking Russians with a wall of fire that decimated the first ranks, but more kept coming. Fighting continued throughout the day and into the night, but the German line held. Although two of his corps had failed in their initial mission to take Gatchina, Maslennikov was able to report that the Germans had been pushed out of Pushkin by Khazov on the 24th, and that Khazov was pursuing the retreating enemy.

The next few days saw the Soviet advance move at a steady, if slow, pace. The rail line between Gatchina and Kingisepp was cut on the 27th, and Fediuninskii's 2nd Shock Army was pushing Grase's XXVI Army Corps toward Kingisepp itself. As the German lines continued to deteriorate, Hitler ordered von Küchler to attend a National Socialist leadership conference in Königsberg on the 27th.

At the meeting, von Küchler once again confronted Hitler. He told the Führer that the Eighteenth Army had already lost 40,000 men and that retreat was the only way to save it. Hitler gave him little time to continue. He said that he expected the Eighteenth Army and Army Group North to continue to hold. Nothing was said of reinforcements being sent to help fulfill the order.

Unbeknownst to von Küchler, his chief of staff, Maj. Gen. Eberhard Kinzel, had already started the ball rolling. While von Küchler was gone, Kinzel informed Colonel Friedrich Foertsch, chief of staff of the Eighteenth Army, that the army must retreat no matter what. Knowing that Berlin would never approve, Kinzel issued the order verbally rather that in writing.

The plan was put into action even as von Küchler was arguing with Hitler. Strong rear guards were left behind at critical junctions to slow the Soviets while the main body of troops headed for the Luga River line. Presented with a fait accompli, von Küchler had no choice but to go along with the withdrawal.

Hitler was furious when informed of the withdrawal. Von Küchler was relieved, and General (soon to be Field Marshal) Walther Model was sent to take his place. Model was a favorite of Hitler's and was known as "The Führer's Fireman." He was one of the few German generals who could make decisions contrary to Hitler's orders and get away with it.

Even before taking off for his new assignment, Model issued his first order to Army Group North. "Not a single step backward will be taken without my express permission," he telegraphed to his army group headquarters. "I am flying to Eighteenth Army this afternoon. Tell General Lindemann that I beg his old trust in me. We have worked together before."

Things were going from bad to worse for the Germans, and not even Model could stop the Soviets with his call to stand fast. The Luga River line had already been breached by the Russians, who had established several bridgeheads on the western bank. Only lack of supplies prevented the Soviets from exploiting their gains immediately.

In Steiner's sector, the remnants of his shattered divisions fell back toward Narva and Kinigsepp under heavy Soviet pressure. The men were exhausted from the constant combat. Nordland's John Sandstadt recalled:

"When we had some rest on January 27 our company consisted of one 1st lieutenant, five NCOs, and some 35 men. Our battalion commander, Fritz Vogt, appeared and handed several soldiers, including me, the Iron Cross 2nd Class. [It was] less as recognition for brave deeds than as a 'premium' for having survived the last 12 days."

Although their ranks had been whittled down by the Russians, the men of the Nordland Division made the Soviets pay for their gains. An example can be found in the exploits of 21-year-old SS Corporal Caspar Sporck, a Dutch volunteer in Nordland's 11th Armored Reconnaissance Battalion. Sporck was the com-

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The 900-day German siege of the great city of Leningrad was raised at the end of January 1944. In this photo, Red Army soldiers congregate along the banks of the Neva River near the city and shortly after the German grip was broken.

mander of an armored personnel carrier that mounted a 75mm gun and was attached to the battalion's 5th (Heavy) Company.

When Soviet tanks broke through the German line and entered the village of Gubanizy , Sporck moved his vehicle forward into the village. Playing a deadly game of hide and seek, Sporck drove among the houses catching tank after tank in the sights of his low-velocity cannon. The sharp crack of the 75mm was f ollowed by an explosion that marked another victim. In all, Sporck destroyed 11 enemy tanks and sent the survivors fleeing from the village.

A few days later, Sporck guarded the flank of the division as it disengaged and made its way across the Narva River. He directed stragglers to the crossing point while fending off enemy armored vehicles attempting to overrun the division's rear guard. His vehicle was one of the last to cross over intothe German positions.

Sporck was awarded the Knight's Cross for his actions. He survived the battle for Narva, but his luck ran out a few months later when he was severely wounded at the Stettin bridgehead. He died of his wounds on April 8, 1945, just a month short of the end of the war.

Actions such as Sporcks's might have slowed the Russians down a bit, but nothing could stop the Red Army steamroller. By the end of January the survivors of the German corps on Army Group North's left flank were mostly across the Narva River. Sponheimer's LIV Army Corps was in the process of reforming as Army Abteilung Narva, which would eventually consist of Steiner's corps and the LIV and XXVI Army Corps. Elements of the Panzergrenadier Division "Feldherrnhalle" and the 58th Infantry Division were also on their way to strengthen the Narva front. An Estonian SS Division along with Jähde's Tiger tank detachment would also be available to stop the Russians.

Those German units were the first of Army Group North to occupy its part of the Panther Line. The Narva River position would be the scene of several bloody battles, but the Germans would continue to hold for months to come. Now it was up to the German divisions south of Lake Pskov to beat the Russian advance to their portion of the line.

The forced retreat of the Germans to the Narva was not the only thing Model had to deal with. On January 25 the Red Air Force bombed German defenses at Gatchina. Minutes later, Maj. Gen. Mikhail Fedorovich Tikhonov's 18th Rifle Corps (196th, 224th, and 314th Rifle Divisions), supported by Lt. Col. V.I. Protsenko's 220th Tank Brigade, hit the mixed bag of German forces defending the town. Combat groups of the 11th, 126th, 215th, and 225th Infantry Divisions and the 9th Feld (L) Division fought the Russians at every turn. The battle raged well into the night before Tikhonov called off the attack to regroup.

The next day the attack continued. This time elements of Trubachev's 117th Rifle Corps joined in the assault. By noon, Colonel Aleksei Vasilevich Batluk's 20th Rifle Division and Colonel F.A. Burmitstrov's 224th Rifle Division had reached the center of the town, forcing the Germans to withdraw to prevent encirclement. Tosno fell on the same day.

During the next few days the Eighteenth Army conducted a fighting withdrawal to the Luga, which, as mentioned earlier, had already been crossed by advance elements of the Red Army. Under increasing pressure, the XXVIII and XXXVIII Army Corps were pushed back even more. Their escape route would be cut off if the bulk of the Soviets reached the Luga ahead of them.

To force a wholesale breach of the Luga Line in the retreating Germans' sector , Mikulski's 6th Guards Rifle Corps was given the task of taking the town of Luga. He would be supported by Maj. Gen. Filipp Iakovlevich Solov'ev's 112th Rifle Corps. Meanwhile, Artuishenko's 14th Rifle Corps would strike south

ABOVE: Soviet troops man airsleighs fashioned for swift travel across snow and ice in preparation for an attack on the city of Novgorod, where secondary defenses supported the German Panther Line. OPPOSITE: Taking shelter in a bunker near Narva, these German defenders of the Panther Line appear to be contemplating the arrival of the Soviet enemy. Both sides suffered heavy losses during fighting along the Eastern Front in the winter of 1943-44.

toward Shimsk.

What was thought to be a relatively easy operation became a plodding nightmare for the Russians. Mikulskii's troops, struggling through the uneven terrain, ran into stronger than expected German positions before finally reaching the Luga River. The steadfast German defense gave the XXVIII and XXXVIII Army Corps time to make good their escape, pulling back to new positions that prevented their destruction.

In the Sixteenth Army's sector, Popov was planning another attack with his 2nd Baltic Front that was designed to support Meretskov's efforts in the north. Luckily for the Germans, their intelligence detected signs of the coming assault and Hansen ordered a withdrawal to new positions farther west on January 30. When the attack came it stalled as soon as the new German line was reached. The resulting shortening of the line allowed Hansen to send reinforcements to Lindemann to help him in his struggle.

As he looked at Eighteenth Army's situation, Model knew his "not one step backwards" order was impossible to implement. As a remedy he introduced the "Schild und Schwert" (Shield and Sword) maneuver. Historian Earl Ziemke credits Hitler himself with the idea in which withdrawals were permissible "if one intended later to strike back in the same or different direction in a kind of parry and thrust sequence."

Using Shild und Schwert, Model authorized Lindemann to move west to a shorter line north and east of Luga. He then planned to use von Bodenhausen's 12th Panzer Division, Brig. Gen. Kurt Siewert's 58th Infantry Division, and any other divisions that could be spared to attack along the Luga River and line up with the units on the Narva.

The Russians, however, had their plans too. After a reshuffling of forces, Govorov and Meretskov were ready to continue their assaults. The 2nd Shock Army had been reinforced for its attack on the Narva Line. Although Fediuninskii was able to make some gains south of the city of Narva, his continued assaults would develop into bloody brawls where attack was met with counterattack. Little would be accomplished except the shedding of blood by both sides.

Maslennikov had more success than his neighbor to the north. His 42nd Army was able to cross the frozen Luga River on January 31, pushing Wegner's L Army Corps to the south and southwest. The battered German divisions could do little but retreat while Russian forces remained in hot pursuit and were able to advance as much as 15-20 kilometers a day.

Stavka now set its sights on finally taking Luga. German intelligence reported that two strong Russian forces, one southwest of Novgorod and the other east of Lane Samro, were massing and that an attack on Luga was imminent. To accomplish the mission, part of the 42nd Army was to advance on Luga' s northwestern sector. Roginskii's 54th Army would attack the city's outlying defenses from the east. Sviridov's reinforced 67th Army would support Masslenikov's forces.

Model had no choice but to act quickly. He ordered Lindemann to form a line stretching west of Luga to the southern shore of Lake Peipus. The 11th, 212th, and 215th Infantry Divisions, which had barely escaped encirclement days earlier, were charged with defending Luga with what was left of their forces. Brig. Gen. Hellmuth Reymann's 13th Feld (L) Division was to move up on the left flank and take positions from west of the city to the Plyusa River.

West of the Plyusa, the 58th and 21st Infantry Divisions occupied the line. The two divisions had been ground down to about four understrength battalions. The history of the 21st reports that by the first days of February all the officers of the III/Grenadier Regiment 24 had been killed or wounded and that its companies were now commanded by sergeants.

Farther west the 12th Panzer and 126th Infantry Divisions would prepare for a counterattack from their positions east of Lake Peipus. Moving into their assigned positions proved extremely difficult for the German divisions. The 12th Panzer, fighting poor road conditions, was also hampered by roadblocks constructed by the many partisan units in the area.

To the west, the Schleswig-Holstein troops of Siewert's 58th Division met with disaster on February 9. As the 58th moved toward its positions on the flank of Reymann's division it ran into Demidov's 86th Guards Rifle and Burmistrov's 224th Rifle Divisions, which were also moving up to take new positions. The Russians reacted quickly, engaging the Germans and splitting the division in two. By the next day the 58th had one of its regiments surrounded with the rest of the division trying to fight off the same fate. The 21st and 24th Divisions, which were supposed to occupy Siewert's flanks, had not yet reached their positions, which left the 58th on its own. A German report stated:

"Russian forces filtered past [the 58th] on both sides…. The 24th Infantry Division got nowhere and for most of the day had trouble holding the Luga-Pskov railroad line."

The 12th Panzer finally made it to its jump-off positions on February 10, but its attack stalled almost immediately as it ran into three Soviet rifle divisions (128th, 168th, and 196th). Although the 12th was able to escape encirclement, its attack was stopped dead in its tracks.

Things went from bad to worse for Model on the 11th. The entire 58th Division was now surrounded while the 24th and 21st Infantry Divisions were fighting for their lives as more Soviet units poured through gaps in the German line. Red Army troops also attacked west-

ward, securing the small land a rea between Lake Pskov and Lake Peipus. A Schild und Schwert action was now impossible as the Eighteenth Army tottered on the brink of collapse.

During the evening of the 11th, Lindemann met with Model. He told his commander that the only way his army could survive was to further shorten the line, which would once again provide divisions to fill gaps in his defenses. Although Model initially balked at the suggestion, he reluctantly agreed to it. When he submitted the plan to OKH he was met with a stony silence that indicated Berlin would not even consider it.

At Narva the Soviets made another push that threatened the city, but the Germans held on. Hitler was worried that a Russian incursion into the Baltic States would result in Finland suing for peace. He promised reinforcements for the Narva sector, ordering the recently activated 20th SS Division, composed mostly of Estonians, into the line. To save the Narva sector, Lindemann was forced to send some units to help in Narva's defense, which further weakened his own line. They included the battered 58th, which had managed to fight its way out of the encircling Russians, losing one third of its men in the process.

Even Berlin could not now ignore the calamitous situation that was occurring in Army Group North. Hitler finally understood that the army group could not possibly keep fighting the war of attrition that he had hoped would stop the Russians. Luga had already been abandoned on February 12, and several other important towns and cities were on the verge of falling. With German forces being forced to pull back all along the Eighteenth Army's front, he gave approval for OKH to let Model give the order for a general retreat to the Panther Line on February 17.

Just days before, the Soviet command structure facing Army Group North had undergone a sweeping change when Stalin dissolved the Volkhov Front, giving its armies to Govorov' s Leningrad Front. Meretskov, over his objections to Stalin, was given command of the Karelia Front, which ran from the north shore of Lake Ladoga to the arctic coast west of Murmansk. The front had basically been static for almost two years—mostly due to the fact that the Finns had already regained the land lost after the 1939-1940 Winter War with the Soviets and had no wish to obtain any Russian territory.

It is interesting to note that it was Meretskov who presided over the disastrous 1939 winter campaign against the Finns that cost the Red Army more than 300,000 dead, wounded, and missing. For his failure Stalin downgraded him and put him in command of an army. He was replaced by Semen Konstantinovich T imoshenko, who finally brought the Finns to the peace table.

Putting Govorov in charge of all armies facing most of Army Group North stretched Leningrad Front's command and control to the limit. The vast forces under Govorov were fighting on a front stretching from Lake Ilmen to Narva. There was a great deal of staff work to be done to coordinate attacks by the various armies he commanded, and maintaining tight control on operations would continue to plague the Front.

As the Eighteenth Army was about to begin its withdrawal, the Sixteenth Army had to plan to lengthen its line to protect its left flank. The 2nd Baltic Front had been quiet for the past few days, but German aerial reconnaissance had discovered truck convoys of 2,000-3,000 vehicles each heading to the north and northeast. The 2nd Baltic Front was once more on the move.

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On February 18, Popov's 1st Shock Army, commanded by Lt. Gen. Gennadi Petrovich Korotokov, hit German forces around Staraya Russa and forced the town' s evacuation. A combat group of Maj. Gen. W ilhelm Hasse's 30th Infantry Division fought a desperate delaying action that slowed the Russian advance. Centered around Colonel Georg Kossmala's Grenadier Regiment 6, the combat group exacted a heavy toll on the enemy in its fighting retreat. Kossmala was awarded the oak leaves to the Knight's Cross for his actions in the battle, as well as for previous actions.

Hansen knew his right flank was also in danger due to the intelligence reports concerning the spotted convoys. It was time for him to withdraw the entire Sixteenth Army to the Panther Line, meaning some units, especially those on his left flank, would have to march as much as 300 kilometers to reach the position.

Kholm, which had been an important bulwark on the Lovat River, fell on February 21. On February 23, the city of Dno, the longtime headquarter site of the Sixteenth Army , came under attack by a joint assault from Maj. Gen. Pavel Anfinogenovich Stepanankov' s 14th Guards Rifle Corps (1st Shock Army) and Maj. Gen. Boris Aleksandrovich Rozhdestyenskii's 111th Rifle Corps of the 54th Army. The first attack occurred late in the day and was repulsed by energetic counterattacks from Maj. Gen. Friederich Volcaker von Kirchensittenbach's 8th Jäger Division, two security regiments, and a regiment from the 21st Feld (L) Division.

During the night several supply warehouses were blown up, and the city' s important rail hub was destroyed. The following day Colonel Vasilii Mitrofanovich Shatilov's 182nd, Maj. Gen. Grigorii Semenovich Kolchanov's 288th, and Colonel I. A. V orob'ev's 44th Rifle Divisions took the city with the help of the 137th Rifle and the 16th and 37th Tank Brigades.

As the Germans retreated, Kortokov was joined in the pursuit by Lt. Gen. V asilii Nikitovich Iushkevich's 22nd Army, which put even more pressure on the enemy. The 22nd was met by Laux's II Army Corps, which put up a spirited defense while protecting X Army Corps'

Continued on page 78

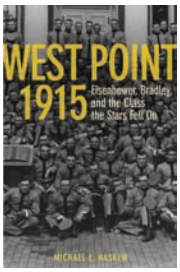
By Christopher Miskimon

Christ Lutheran Church, Gettysburg, PA

The Class the Stars Fell On

The West Point class of 1915 went on to make history and lead the U.S. Army in World War II.

JUNE 12, 1915, WAS A DAY OF ENORMOUS PORTENT FOR THE UNITED STATES OF America, though at the time it passed without great remark. Though none could really have known it at the time, this day gave the United States Army what it needed to win a war no one had even conceived yet. Just before 10 o'clock on this Saturday morning the United States Military Academy at West Point began handing diplomas to the Class of 1915, commissioning 164 new second lieutenants into the service of their country. In the fullness of their varied military careers, 59 of these young men—over a third—would go on to wear the stars of a general, a unique feat in the history of the institution. In the following years this class would be known as the one "Stars Fell On."



Gaining an education and commission at West Point has never been easy. The 164 graduates came from a beginning class size of 287, meaning over 42 percent of the initial group dropped out along the way. The strict discipline, challenging academic regimen, and physical trials all contributed to the weeding out of men not considered up to the task. Indeed, the tasks ahead of them were momentous if yet unperceived and would challenge each of them to the limits of their abilities. These men, the institution that helped forge them, and the roles they would play in war and peace are insightfully covered in Michael Haskew's new book ***West Point 1915: Eisenhower, Bradley and the Class the Stars Fell On*** (Zenith Press, Minneapolis MN, 2014, 224pp, notes, bibliography, index, $30.00, hardcover).

The book begins before these men pinned on the gold bars of a second lieutenant. Each had a background, a life before the academy that helped form the men they became. Some came from wealth; others, like Dwight Eisenhower, a middle-class upbringing which, given the time, was still full of toil. A few came from quite poor circumstances where future prosperity was far from certain. Omar Bradley fit this last category yet both men would rise as high in rank in the Army as it was possible to go. Regardless, all had to pass examinations and receive a senatorial recommendation to get to West Point at all. While they are also the most famous of the Class of 1915, the other members whom stars fell on are also given good attention.

Once accepted into the academy they had to be reborn as soldiers. This was a process as grueling as it was tempering. Each cadet had his problems to overcome. Eisenhower had trouble learning to march and spent time in the "Awkward Squad." Academic standings were also measured closely, and each cadet was ranked periodically and in a final class standing upon graduating. In fact, diplomas were handed out in order of their overall rank. However, their class standing was not necessarily an indicator of future success. Some cadets who were at the bottom of the class went on to great service, giving truth to the old joke, "What do you call the cadet who graduates last in his class? You call him Sir!"

The actual service of these soldiers is given close attention as well. This includes both world wars and the time between them. While they had to wait until World War II to pin their stars on, many served gallantly in World War I, receiving brevet promotions and awards for gallantry. After the war these men helped keep the Army alive through years of lean budgets and hard times. They conducted training, attended professional schools, and served in remote

The cadets of the West Point Class of 1915 pose on the steps of Christ Lutheran Church in Gettysburg, Pennsylvania, on May 3, 1915. Dwight Eisenhower is circled at center, while Omar Bradley is circled at right.

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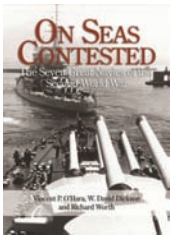
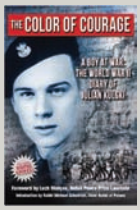
posts. When World War II came, they were among the senior officers of the Army and this was when they really shined. While no others would go as high as Eisenhower and Bradley, many would command divisions, corps, armies, and army groups and lead the nation's soldiers to ultimate victory.

The story of the Class of 1915 is relayed to the reader in smooth prose that really relates what these officers thought and experienced. History often overlooks the fact that these men were human beings who had worries and fears about the future; sometimes their ascent to general rank was less than smooth. A major strength of this book is that it shows them as otherwise normal people who rose through determination and skill. The officers covered in these pages can be related to. The reader can see how such people, of mainly common origin, rise to command armies and determine the fate of nations.



On Seas Contested: The Seven Great Navies of the Second World War (Vincent P. O'Hara, W. David Dickson, and Richard Worth, Naval Institute Press, Annapolis, MD, 2014, 333pp, maps, photographs, appendices, notes, bibliography, index, $24.95, softcover).

New and Noteworthy



Night Flight to Dungavel: Rudolf Hess, Winston Churchill and the Real Turning Point of WWII (Peter Padfield, University Press of New England, 2014, $35.00, hardcover). The author gathers the available evidence surrounding Hess's fateful trip to the United Kingdom. He argues that Hitler sent Hess as part of a scheme to keep America out of the war.

The Color of Courage: A Boy at War, The World War II Diary of Julian Kulski (Julian Kulski, Aquila Polonica Publishing, 2014, $29.95, hardcover). Kulski was 10 when the Germans invaded Poland. By age 12 he was a member of the Underground Army movement.

Once a Hussar: A Memoir of Battle, Capture, and Escape in World War II (Ray Ellis, Skyhorse Publishing, 2014, $24.95, hardcover). This is the story of an artilleryman who fought in North Africa until he was captured. Taken to Italy, he escaped and hid in the mountains for a year.

Unexplained Mysteries of World War II (Jeremy Harwood, Firefly Books, 2014, $24.95, softcover). There are many questions about the war, some still unanswered. This book delves into these obscurities and attempts to answer them.

The Mantle of Command: FDR at War, 1941-1942 (Nigel Hamilton, Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2014, $30.00, hardcover). The author focuses on Roosevelt's leadership during the early part of the war. He maintains that FDR had the genius to keep America involved with achievable goals during 1942.

Mosquito Down! The Extraordinary Memoir of a Second World War Bomber Command Pilot on the Run in Germany and Holland (Frank Dell with Brett Piper, Casemate Publishers, 2014, $34.95, hardcover). Dell was shot down over Germany, landing next to a V-2 rocket launch pad. He made his way to safety in Holland with a resistance group.

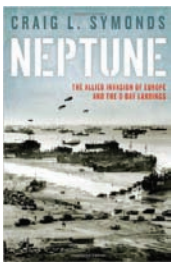
Hiroshima Nagasaki: The Real Story of the Atomic Bombings and their Aftermath (Paul Ham, Thomas Dunne Books, 2014, $35.00, hardcover). This book argues against the use of the atomic bomb, following the premise that the war could have been won in any event.

Fields of War: Battle of Normandy (Robert J. Mueller, French Battlefields, 2014, $29.95, softcover). This is a tour book giving comprehensive instructions for getting around the D-Day battlefields. Directions to surviving landmarks, museums, and monuments are all included.

Guarding Hitler: The Secret World of the Führer (Mark Felton, Pen and Sword, 2014, $34.95, hardcover). Hitler had an extensive array of bodyguards and security personnel. The book includes recently declassified information.

While dozens of nations took part in the war and most had navies, only seven had fleets that were decisive in their effect. The United States, Great Britain, France, Germany, Japan, Italy, and the Soviet Union were the primary arbiters of the war at sea, and each had its own doctrine and goals.

This new reference book looks at these navies in great detail, examining each fleet's history, stated mission, organization, doctrine, ships, weapons, supporting infrastructure, and evolution during the war. It makes the reader's understanding of these forces and how they influenced the outcome of the war much more complete since each essay provides a balanced view Each navy is shown as a whole rather than concentrating on one popular piece, such asGermany's U-boats or American and Japanese aircraft carriers. This book will be a valuable addition to the library of any student of naval history, novice or expert.

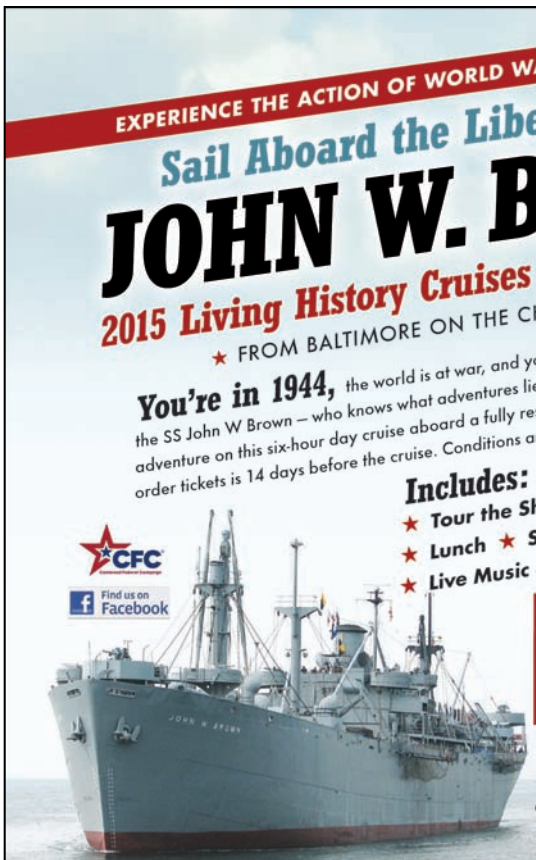


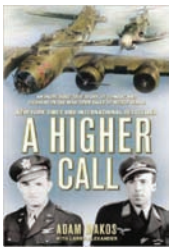
Neptune: The Allied Invasion of Europe and the D-Day Landings (Craig L. Symonds, Oxford University Press, Oxford, UK, 2014, 440pp, maps, photographs, notes, bibliography, index, $29.95, hardcover).

Books on D-Day abound, and for good reason. It is undoubtedly one of the key days of World War II, when an enormous Allied force blasted its way onto mainland Europe, spelling the end for Nazi Germany in the West. The invasion was a truly massive effort, awe inspiring in its complexity and sweeping in its effect. It was also a joint effort with thousands of American, British, Canadian, and French troops in the leading waves.

There are countless books to choose from about D-Day, but this work has much to recommend it. The author begins his account years before the actual invasion, reflecting the extensive preparation required to make it work. Everything from the British-American discussions to the development of specialized landing craft and equipment to the long days and nights of training for the assault troops is covered in good detail. Additionally, the author does not forget that the success of the invasion eventually came down to the actions of brave men under fire on that fateful morning. Even so, this work is easy to read and follow, bringing all these disparate pieces together into a smooth, logical narrative.

A Higher Call: An Incredible T rue Story of Combat and Chivalry in the War-Torn Skies of World War II (Adam Makos with Larry

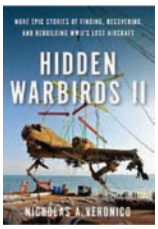




Alexander, Berkley Caliber, New York, 2014, 392pp, maps, photographs, notes, bibliography, $17.00, softcover).

In December 1943, a severely damaged American B-17 Flying Fortress bomber was limping through the sky, its pilot desperately trying to get the crippled plane and its crew home. Soon, however, a German fighter appeared and it seemed the Americans were doomed. Fate intervened, and the German pilot, a veteran ace, instead escorted the bomber out of danger, saving the lives of the crew. It was an amazing occurrence, one neither pilot could talk about since they were supposed to be trying to kill each other.

When the author learned of this episode, he began researching it to find the deeper story. The book includes tales of each pilot's service before and afterward, their civilian lives, and what happened to each after the war. Eventually, the two men would meet in peace, showing that even in modern war there is room for the occasional bout of humanity and mercy. Written in clear prose, it is enjoyable to read and includes a section of photographs with pictures from each pilot's personal collection.



Hidden Warbirds II: More Epic Stories of Finding, Recovering and Rebuilding WWII's Lost Aircraft (Nicholas A. Veronico, Zenith Press, Minneapolis, MN, 2014, 256pp, photographs, bibliography, index, $30.00, hardcover).

Vintage World War II aircraft hold a special fascination for aviation devotees. They were built in the tens of thousands, each with a specific purpose. The most versatile designs found other uses during and after the war, but they were built for war and at times they filled the skies. Now, some 70 years later almost none of them still exist. The world did not need them anymore, and most went to scrap yards or rotted away.

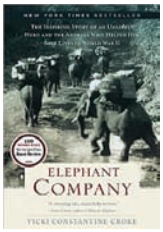
A relative few remain, however. The lucky ones are found in the corners of airfields or warehouses. Some are pulled from the bottoms of lakes or from deep in remote jungles. Those planes are the subject of this book, pulled from wherever they were lost and given a new lease on life through the restoration work of dedicated enthusiasts. Restoring these aircraft is a painstaking labor of love, and this book reflects the efforts taken to get them into museums and sometimes back into the air. Each chapter covers one of 14 different aircraft, giving its history and detailed information about how it was retrieved and refitted. Each tale is a fascinating look at how old warplanes are saved for the enjoyment of future generations.

Islam and Nazi Germany's War (David Motadel, Harvard University Press, Cambridge, MA, 2014, 496pp, map, photographs, notes, bibliography, index, $35.00, hardcover).

The Third Reich was not known for tolerance, religious or otherwise. However, during several parts of World War II, the Nazis were fighting Allied forces across territories populated by Muslims. Both British and Soviet forces ruled over extensive lands full of Arabs, Turks, Chechens, and other adherents to the Islamic faith, all caught between warring ideologies and often hostile toward their nominal rulers. This was something the Nazis could use.

To bring Muslims onto Germany's side the Reich began courting their governments and leaders, painting themselves as allies who welcomed them as partners against their oppressors. For many Muslims this was welcome news, giving them hope that they might gain their independence. The Nazis knew this and took pains to recruit and indoctrinate willing Muslims into their own armed forces, including the dreaded SS. In the end, these efforts failed and many Muslims, particularly those under Soviet control, faced reprisals.

Nazi use of Muslim troops is mentioned often enough but usually not in great detail. This book rectifies that. The author shows the unusual efforts made by the Germans to use their Islamic allies toward the greater goal of victory. The book brings a deeper understanding to a small but significant aspect of the Third Reich's war-making labors.



Elephant Company: The Inspiring Story of an Unlikely Hero and the Animals Who Helped Him Save Lives in World War II (Vicki Constantine Croke, Random House, New York, 2014, 343pp, maps, photographs, notes, index, $28.00, hardcover)

During the war, J.H. "Billy" Williams was a famous man whose story was covered by such widely read publications as the *Times of London* and *Life* magazine. He even wrote an autobiography in the 1950s. Since then he has faded from popular memory, however. His accomplishments were simple yet amazing. Billy could

communicate with elephants.

Before the war he began his association with pachyderms in a commercial venture using them to transport teak logs. Over time he developed a bond with the animals. When the war started he began using the animals to carry supplies forward to soldiers in bogs and swamps where even mules could not go. They also carried heavy materials used in bridge building. Once he even led elephants over a mountain range, causing him to be compared to Hannibal. The elephants he led also carried evacuees to safety.

While this book covers Williams' wartime exploits thoroughly, the book is also largely a biography as well as a look at the elephants themselves and how people were able to utilize their unique strength in a forbidding and dangerous landscape. They helped win the war in India and Burma.

Brazil, the Fortunes of War: World War II and the Making of Modern Brazil (Neill Lochery, Basic Books, New York, 2014, maps, photographs, bibliography, notes, index, $29.99, hardcover).

Few today are aware of Brazil's role in World War II. Far from the battlefields, the South American nation was rich with natural resources, and both the Axis and Allies courted it to obtain those resources. Brazil's leaders used this to their advantage, generating wealth for the country while staying just barely neutral. Eventually, they had to choose a side, however. In August 1942, Brazil declared war on Germany and Italy. This meant its ships would provide escort to merchantmen and attack U-boats at sea. The Brazilian Expeditionary Force (BEF), a force of 25,000 troops, went to serve in Italy. The Italian Theater was known for the diversity of Allied nationalities fighting together, and the Brazilians, trained and equipped by the United States, fought there until war's end.

While not a strictly military history of the BEF, this book shows how a small nation used the circumstances of the world around it to its own advantage. Brazil's actions brought it through the war in a better position than other South American nations. The author does a good job showing the deft political maneuvering and intrigue that made this so.

Explaining Hitler: The Search for the Origins of His Evil (Ron Rosenbaum, Da Capo Press, Boston, MA, 2014, 528pp, notes, index, $18.99, softcover).

Adolf Hitler is such a controversial figure people simply refuse to let him die. He has become a cliché of evil, and perhaps that is fitting. A man who once held vast power and used it horribly is now reduced to little more than a synonym used to give insult. Still, he manages to captivate people's minds decades later. His name is used by those who want to vilify opponents on almost any issue, giving rise to "Godwin's Law," which states the longer an argument continues, eventually someone will compare their adversary to Hitler or the Nazis. Conversely, Holocaust denial has grown into a significant phenomenon despite the body of evidence to the contrary.

These strange issues and more are covered in this book, which investigates the various matters that have sprung up since Hitler's death, giving the dictator and his regime an eerie form of life long after the Third Reich fell. The strength of this work is that it seeks to clarify and explain why so much interest surrounds such a defunct, evil group and its leader. The author explores Hitler's life and legacy in detail, focusing on several episodes little known today. World War II is over, but its effects continue to ripple into the 21st century.

Discourse and Defiance Under Nazi Occupation: Guernsey, Channel Islands, 1940-1945 (Cheryl Jorgensen-Earp, Michigan State University Press, East Lansing, 2013, 300pp, maps, photographs, notes, bibliography, index, $54.95, hardcover).

The British Channel Islands were captured by Germany shortly after the evacuation of Dunkirk in 1940. These small islands remained occupied by the Nazis until the very end of the war in Europe in 1945. The residents had no real ability to form a resistance movement, so they had to defy their occupiers through subtle, nonviolent means. Their covert efforts had to be accomplished via word of mouth, ad hoc symbols, and hasty improvisation.

This new book recounts the experiences of the Guernsey islanders through a number of diaries kept by citizens. Much has been written about possible collaboration by some of the inhabitants, but here the author reveals how they did what they could to resist the occupation. These diaries were kept at great risk to their writers but reveal how British civilians dealt with the Nazi presence in their homes. It makes an interesting counterpoint to stories of resistance efforts on continental Europe, where the conditions were very different. A final chapter deals with the island after liberation and the effects of the war in the following years. □

Simulation Gaming

BY JOSEPH LUSTER

HITLER RETURNS ONCE AGAIN IN A ZOMBIE ARMY TRILOGY COLLECTION THA T OFFERS UP PLENTY OF UNDEAD WORLD WAR II ACTION.

ZOMBIE ARMY TRILOGY

PUBLISHER REBELLION DEVELOPMENTS • **DEVELOPER** REBELLION OXFORD
PLATFORM XBOX ONE, PLAYSTATION 4, PC • **AVAILABLE** MARCH 6

Oxford-based developer Rebellion—whose credits range from 1994's *Alien vs. Predator* to 2012's *NeverDead* and beyond—is giving shooter fans another chance to take in the *Sniper Elite* stand-alone *Nazi Zombie Army* games in the handy *Zombie Army Trilogy* collection. This time the cult shooters will be recut and remastered as they make their way to PlayStation 4, Xbox One, and PC.

The first entry in the series, *Sniper Elite: Nazi Zombie Army,* made its debut in 2013 shor tly after *Sniper Elite V2.* While the game engine remains the same, the premise takes a complete tum, as Adolf Hitler tries one last game-changing maneuver at the brink of the war's end. Occult rituals completely flip the script, causing the dead to rise and overtake Germany. Sounds like the perfect opportunity for a fresh single-player and multiplayer campaign, right? If you're familiar at all with the Left 4 Dead games, you should feel right at home with *Nazi Zombie Army,* which is complete with safe houses and other staples of survival action that make playing with friends so addictive.

A sequel followed in the same year , upping the ante with more zombies, deadlier enemies, and a quest to find fragments of the zombie-controlling Sagamartha Relic. While both of these will arrive in remastered form in *Zombie Army Trilogy,* the real hook is a brand new third entry in the series that has yet to be released in stand-alone form. There's also a Horde Mode included in the package, challenging players with unlimited and increasingly difficult waves of enemies to see how long they can survive. *Zombie Army Trilogy*'s Horde Mode is available for up to four players to dig into cooperatively across five dedicated maps.

The full package ropes in 15 missions throughout World War II Germany, with players able to choose from playing as elite sniper Karl Fairburne and eight other playable heroes and heroines. Since this is a *Sniper Elite* game, you can of course look forward to the always-gruesome X-Ray Kill Cam, the perfect way to showcase a zombie's innards as your long-range bullets brutally rearrange and destroy them. Some of the enemies that will eventually become the Kill Cam' s victims include Undead Super Soldiers, Armored Skeletons, Zombie Snipers, Chainsaw Elites, Fire Demons, and more, building up to an inevitable showdown with Hitler himself.

Twisting the history of World War II has been a proud tradition ever since the dawn of video games as we know them. Whether it's *Bionic Commando* or *Wolfenstein 3D,* devs are always more than happy topit us against the demons of the past in the most literal ways possible. Fans of the *Sniper Elite* series, especially those who have already tried out the *Nazi Zombie Army* games, should find plenty to take aim at when *Zombie Army Trilogy* is available both at retail and as a digital download in March.

IRON BROTHERHOOD INVADES WORLD OF TANKS

PUBLISHER WARGAMING.NET • **DEVELOPER** WARGAMING.NET
PLATFORM XBOX 360• **AVAILABLE** NOW

The latest update for *World of Tanks* recently arrived, deploying a line of Soviet heavy tanks across Xbox 360 consoles. The free-to-play game's *Iron Brotherhood* update adds a new map along with five new Soviet-built heavy tanks, ef fectively throwing a few more battle options in the mix for Xbox Live Gold members.

New vehicles include the T-150 (tier VI), KV-3 (tier VII), KV-4 (tier VIII), ST-I (tier IX), and IS-4 (tier X), each boasting thick ar mor that makes them for midable opponents when it comes to soaking up damage on the battlefield. The newest map offering is South Coast, which looks like a comfor table getaway at first glance, but holds within it plenty of sly strategic opportunities. Tight channels allow for devious convoy ambushes, overlooks provide nice potting locations, and the center and eastern portions are great all-around for vantage points early on in the conflict.

Despite the fact that South Coast comes along with the new batch of Soviet heavies, the varied terrain has some areas that are much better suited for tanks that tread a bit more lightly. Rolling over to the eastern portions of the map will require ample speed, lest you be caught like a sitting duck in the wide open spaces. There are combat options here for most any type of tanker, so longtime players of *World of Tanks: Xbox 360 Edition* now have a nice new playground to dig into whether they decide to roll with the fresh Soviet options or not.

You deserve a factual look at . . .

Should the U.N. Declare a Palestinian State?

Palestinians have asked the U.N. for statehood recognition, but would this really lead to an Israeli-Palestinian peace—or to a viable Palestinian state?

In 1947, the United Nations proposed independent states for Arabs and Jews, but the Arabs rejected this plan. Since then, Israel has made many offers of land for peace and a Palestinian state, all of which the Arabs rejected. In 2013, Arab Palestinians again walked out of peace talks and instead recently approached the U.N. to recognize their state. But can the U.N. dictate an Israeli-Palestinian peace . . . or create a Palestinian state?

What are the facts?

Over the past 66 years, since Israel's formation, the Palestinians have had numerous opportunities to create a sovereign state. Following Israel's repulsion of three invading Arab armies in 1967, the Jewish state offered to negotiate peace with the Arabs and to return land captured during that war. The Arabs rejected this overture with their famous Khartoum Resolution: *"No peace with Israel, no recognition of Israel and no negotiations with it."* Decades later, during U.S.-sponsored peace negotiations with the Palestinians in 2000, 2001 and 2008, Israel offered the Palestinians most of its ancient Jewish lands, Judea and Samaria (the West Bank), plus Gaza, plus a capital in Jerusalem for their state, but the Palestinians rejected each of these offers. At the heart of the Palestinians' refusal to accept a lasting peace is their steadfast rejection of the demand that they accept Israel as a Jewish state.

> A majority of Palestinians still believe their goal should be to conquer all of Israel.

Would it bring peace if the U.N. were to unilaterally recognize a Palestinian state? A peace accord between Israel and the Palestinians must resolve many thorny issues for both sides. What should the borders of a new Palestinian state be, since no borders ever existed? How should the nations share Jerusalem? How can Israel be assured of security in light of existential threats from the Palestinian terror group, Hamas, which insists that Israel must be destroyed, as well as from terrorists such as the Islamic State and al Qaeda, both based in nearby Syria? If Israel relinquishes the territories it controls, what guarantees does it have that the Palestinians will finally accept its existence—and not continue the six-decade Arab effort to obliterate the Jewish state? Unfortunately, a recent poll shows that a 60% majority of Palestinians still believe their goal should be to conquer all of Israel, from the Jordan River to the Mediterranean Sea. Surely a U.N. resolution recognizing a Palestinian state cannot possibly address, let alone resolve these issues. Rather, Israel and the Palestinians must continue the arduous path to peace—and to a Palestinian state—that can be achieved only through negotiations.

Would U.N. recognition lead to a secure and viable Palestinian state? Palestinian institutions are currently so weak that it's doubtful their state could survive on its own. Despite tens of billions of dollars donated primarily by the U.S. and European nations to aid the Palestinians, their economy is in shambles, with few viable industries and a crumbling infrastructure. Indeed, without continued international aid of more than a billion dollars annually, the economy would likely collapse. In addition, the Palestinian political system is dysfunctional, riven by corruption and in-fighting verging on civil war. Because the Palestinians have held no elections since 2005, President Mahmoud Abbas is now in his tenth year of a four-year term. According to a 2013 European Union audit, some $2.7 billion in international aid to the Palestinians is unaccounted for, believed to have been siphoned off to corrupt leaders within Abbas' ruling Fatah party. Billions more aid dollars have been diverted to help Hamas build rockets and tunnels used to attack Israeli civilians. Finally, continued violent disputes between Fatah in the West Bank and Hamas in Gaza make their "unity government" incapable of governance. In fact, most analysts believe that if Israel were to withdraw its security forces from the West Bank, Hamas would quickly seize control there, too, turning the Palestinian territories into another terrorist state. In short, no decree by the United Nations can give the Palestinians the strength and stability necessary to manage the rigorous, high-stakes demands of statehood.

A unilateral U.N. declaration of Palestinian statehood cannot resolve the fundamental disagreements between Israel and its Arab neighbors, especially the requirement that the Palestinians accept the Jewish state. In addition, such a U.N. resolution will not address the disarray and instability within Palestinian society that makes statehood functionally unrealistic at this time. Perhaps most importantly, a U.N. declaration would only encourage Palestinians to believe that negotiations with Israel are unnecessary to reach their goals—that they can achieve statehood without resolving the tough issues that have to date made it elusive. Thus the U.S. and other U.N. Security Council members must continue to vote against and, if necessary, veto attempts by the Palestinians to avoid good-faith peace talks with Israel.

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Facts and Logic About the Middle East
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American Eagles

Continued from page 53

fighters we had tangled on sweeps, and to have made it thoroughly unpleasant by repeated attacks on and around them." Duke-Woolley also talked about Operation Jubilee with what he referred to as his "contemporaries at Fighter Command," and came to the conclusion that "the whole operation was an extraordinary nonsense."

Pilot Officer Harold Strickland took the opposite point of view. Strickland was of the opinion that Dieppe was instrumental to the success of the D-Day landings in June 1944. "Operation Jubilee in 1942 had conditioned the German strategists to believe that the logical site for the main landing of the invading forces would be in the Pas de Calais area, and Normandy was a diversion," he said. This diversion, along with the sacrifices at Dieppe, "saved thousands of Allied lives directly and indirectly during June 1944 in Normandy."

Admiral Lord Louis Mountbatten, who led the planning for Operation Jubilee, agreed with Strickland. In 1973, Mountbatten told a group of Canadian veterans, "The Duke of Wellington ... said that the Battle of Waterloo was won on the playing fields of Eaton. I say the successful landing in Normandy was won on the beaches of Dieppe."

The news media in both Britain and the United States also emphasized the fact that the Allies had staged a successful landing on the enemy coast and hinted that Dieppe had served as a dress rehearsal for a much larger and more ambitious invasion in the future. Newspapers tended to play down the casualties and losses of the operation.

Over the years since 1942, historians have discussed the lessons of Dieppe and have argued at length exactly how much was gained and how much was lost as a result of the operation. To the pilots of the three Eagle Squadrons, Dieppe was the biggest air battle they had ever taken part in. But most of them were too young and too preoccupied to reflect on how that battle might have affected the outcome of the war.

British Prime Minister Winston Churchill probably gave the best summing up of the Dieppe raid. "Honour to the brave who fell," he wrote in his memoirs. "Their sacrifice was not in vain."

Author David A. Johnson has written numerous articles on a variety of World War II topics. He has also completed a forthcoming book, Yanks in the RAF, *to be released on June 2.*

Panther Line

Continued from page 69

southern flank. By using skillful delaying actions at various strongpoints, the Germans were able to prevent the Soviets from splitting Army Group North in two.

Model was further put to the test when Maj. Gen. Fedor Andreevich Zuev's 79th Rifle Corps of Col. Gen. Nikandr Evlampievich Chibisov's 3rd Shock Army appeared on the scene. Zuev was expected to exploit any gains made against Hoehne's VIII Army Corps but was dramatically slowed by the stiff resistance displayed by Maj. Gen. Johannes Mayer's 329th Infantry Division. Nevertheless, by February 26 Popov's Front had pushed the Germans back from positions along the Dno-Novosokol'niki rail line.

Looking at the threats to Pskov and the Sixteenth Army's right flank, Hitler ordered Model to speed up the withdrawal. The German forces still west of the Panther Line retreated skillfully The race that began in January was finished by March 1, when the line was totally occupied. Although fighting along the Narva River continued, the Russians made little progress in that area. Along the rest of the Panther Line, both sides had shot their bolts, and by early March they were both in a defensive mode.

The Red Army had liberated the southern Leningrad region and had finally broken the blockade of the city. It had pushed the Germans back 200 kilometers or more in most places and had badly mauled Army Group North, but it had failed to encircle and destroy the Eighteenth Army. It also lost the race tothe Panther Line. Had it succeeded, the road to the Baltic States would have been open, and German defensive lines farther south would have become worthless.

Assaults were always costly, especially at this stage of the war. The three Soviet Fronts involved from January 14 to March 1 suffered 76,886 killed, captured, or missing, and 237,267 sick or wounded out of the 822,000 troops taking part in the operation. Later attempts to pierce the Panther Line in March and April cost thousands more casualties.

The Germans would hold their positions in the north until the summer, when the Soviets attacked and decimated Army Group Center. The wholesale retreat of Army Group Center finally unhinged the Panther Line in the north, paving the way to a Russian advance through the Baltic States and into East Prussia.

Author Pat McTaggart is an expert on World War II on the Eastern Front. He resides in Elkader, Iowa.

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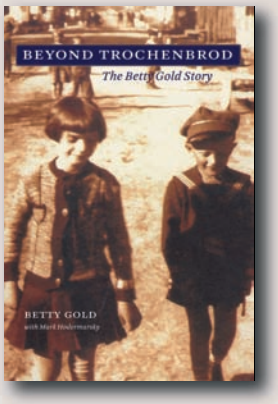

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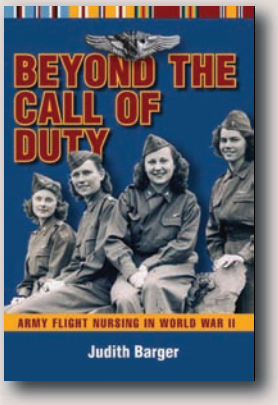

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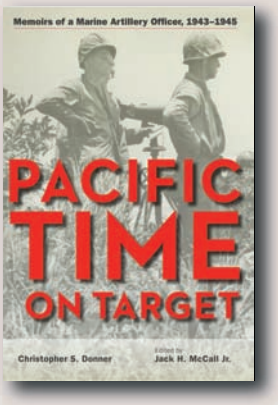

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