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Cover: These paratroopers of the 509th Parachute Infantry Regiment (PIR) executed the first U.S. airborne drop in wartime as a component of Operation Torch. See story page 50. Photo: National Archives.

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Last World War II Recipient of the Medal of Honor Dies.

THE CITATION MADE IT PLAIN. U.S. MARINE CORPS DEMOLITION SERGEANT Hershel W. "Woody" Williams had exhibited extraordinary courage during the bloody, protracted fight for the porkchop-shaped scrap of land in the Volcano Islands known as Iwo Jima.

When the month-long fight for Iwo Jima was over, Fleet Admiral Chester Nimitz remarked that the battle was one in which "uncommon valor was a common virtue."

Williams was born prematurely in the town of Quiet Dell, West Virginia, and at 3.5 pounds wasn't expected to live. Even then he defied the odds, growing up much of the time without his father, who died prematurely of a heart attack. Woody was attracted to the Marine Corps because of the dress blue uniform but was turned down for enlistment in 1942 because at five feet, six inches, he didn't meet the minimum height. A year later, the height requirement had changed, and he was accepted into the Marine Corps Reserve.

By the time the 1st Battalion, 21st Marines landed on Iwo Jima, Williams had already taken part in the action on the island of Guam during the Marianas campaign. On February 21, 1945, he was 21 years old and found himself in the thick of the fighting.

During World War II, 473 U.S. service personnel received the Medal of Honor, and when Woody Williams died on June 29, 2022, he was the last of them. Williams was 98 years old, and after the war he had joined the Department of Veterans Affairs and worked for 33 years, helping others to deal with the effects of post traumatic stress disorder while coping with his own for many years. He once said, "For me, receiving the Medal of Honor was actually a lifesaver because it forced me to talk about the experiences that I had, which was therapy that I didn't even know I was doing."

Woody served 17 years in the Marine Corps Reserve and attained the rank of chief warrant officer 4. He experienced a renewal of his religious convictions in the 1960s and subsequently served as chaplain of the Congressional Medal of Honor Society for 35 years. In recognition of a life of service, the VA medical center in Huntington, West Virginia, was named in his honor in 2018. His story is an example of tremendous good being derived from horrific circumstances.

That day on Iwo Jima defined the course of Woody Williams' life. He responded as tanks accompanying his unit were attempting to clear the way forward through a maze of enemy pillboxes and mines, wielding a flamethrower to destroy Japanese strongpoints on several occasions.

His citation reads in part: "…Williams daringly went forward alone to attempt the reduction of devastating machine-gun fire from the unyielding positions. Covered by only four riflemen, he fought desperately for four hours under terrific enemy small-arms fire and repeatedly returned to his own lines to prepare demolition charges and obtain serviced flame throwers, struggling back, frequently to the rear of hostile emplacements to wipe out one position after another. On one occasion, he daringly mounted a pillbox to insert the nozzle of his flame thrower through the air vent, kill the occupants and silence the gun; on another he grimly charged enemy riflemen who attempted to stop him with bayonets and destroyed them with a burst of flame from his weapon…."

Woody Williams, and the other Medal of Honor recipients from World War II, live on in the stories of their heroic exploits. Their bravery and sacrifice are enshrined, but Williams once told the *Washington Post* about the personal journey which followed that memorable day on Iwo Jima. "It's one of those things you put in the recess of your mind," he reasoned. "You were fulfilling an obligation that you swore to do, to defend your country. Anytime you take a life, there's always some aftermath to that if you've got any heart at all."

He did have a heart and spent the rest of his noble life helping others. Call it atonement if you wish; so be it. Compassion and care, byproducts of the Medal of Honor experience, are his lasting legacy.

—Michael E. Haskew


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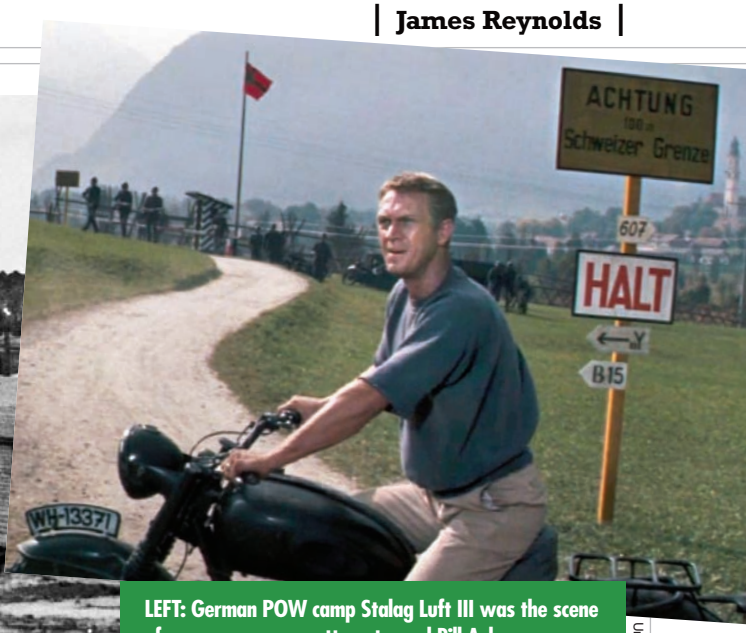

United Artists

LEFT: German POW camp Stalag Luft III was the scene of numerous escape attempts, and Bill Ash was a continuing thorn in the side of his Nazi captors throughout World War II. ABOVE: Actor Steve McQueen portrays the "Cooler King" in the film *The Great Escape,* a character inspired by Bill Ash.

The Cooler King

Bill Ash was the real POW whose exploits served as the basis for the portrayal by actor Steve McQueen in *The Great Escape.*

FOR ALLIED SOLDIERS, SAILORS, AND AIRMEN INTERNED IN ENEMY prison camps during World War II, escaping was regarded as their unwritten duty.

The majority suffered great hardships—denied adequate food, clothing, medical supplies, and proper shelter—but they tried to make the best of it, watching the skies for Allied planes and patiently waiting for eventual liberation. But there were also many others who doggedly refused to accept their fate. They formed escape committees in their squalid wooden barracks, scrounged resources, and devoted their energy and ingenuity to hoodwinking their captors and devising ways to break free. Numerous tunnels were secretly and laboriously dug with whatever primitive tools they could fashion, wire fences were cut, and some prisoners managed to flee, reach neutral territory, and eventually rejoin their own forces.

But many faced the heartbreak of swift recapture after weeks and months of toil. Punishment and the loss of basic privileges usually followed while their captors sought to make the camps even more secure. Brutal treatment and worsening conditions, however, could not quell hope, so the escape attempts continued.

Some prisoners escaped and were recaptured numerous times. Yet they still kept trying and in so doing provided a much-needed lift to their comrades' morale. One of the most remarkable of these heroes was William Ash, a boyish, tousle-haired fighter pilot from Texas who made no less than 13 escape attempts from German prison camps between 1942 and 1945. He was tortured by the Gestapo and went over, under, and through barbed-wire fences, walked out while disguised as a Russian slave-laborer, and even tunneled through a latrine.

Interned variously in France, Poland, Lithuania, and Germany, Ash broke free six times and was recaptured on every occasion. But he never gave up his career as an "escape artist," and finally reached freedom in the spring of 1945 when the European war was waning. He became celebrated as a real-life "cooler king."

American-born Bill Ash flew with the Royal Canadian Air Force and earned the nickname "Cooler King" for his many attempts to escape prison camps.

William Franklin Ash was born on Friday, November 30, 1917, in Dallas, Texas, before the oil boom, and later remembered curious citizens gathering when the city's first traffic light was installed. His father was a struggling salesman of women's hats, and the boy recalled him "forever having his automobile, on which his livelihood depended, carted off by the repo-men, like a cavalryman having his horse shot from under him during a rout."

Life was hard, and young Bill helped support his family by doing odd jobs and selling magazine sub-

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Bantam Press

RCAF pilot Ash was photographed in his Supermarine Spitfire fighter (top), and later, greeted by Canadian Prime Minister William McKenzie King as he exits the cockpit (above).

scriptions from door to door. He worked later as a shelf-stacker and cub reporter for the *Dallas Morning News,* where he remembered staring at the bodies of outlaws Clyde Barrow and Bonnie Parker in their bullet-riddled getaway car after they were ambushed by Texas Rangers and sheriff's deputies in Louisiana in May 1934.

Energetic and ambitious, Bill managed gradually to save enough money to put himself through the University of Texas in Austin. He was an exceptional student, and, despite holding down several jobs, graduated with top marks in liberal arts. But rewarding job opportunities were scarce during the Depression, so he had to be satisfied with operating an elevator in a local bank. One day, he bumped into a former professor who asked if the bank realized that he was an honors graduate. "Yes," young Ash replied with a wry smile, "but they've agreed to overlook it."

Before long, the frustrated young man joined thousands of others hitchhiking on the roads and riding railroad boxcars from town to town in search of work. Rubbing shoulders with hoboes in shanty towns all over the Midwest, Bill Ash shared what little he had, developed sympathy for the needy, and became handy with his fists. At the time of the outbreak of war in September 1939, his travels had taken him to Detroit, Michigan, where he found himself getting involved in street brawls with supporters of the American Nazi Party.

In 1940, with Great Britain standing alone and German forces rampaging through the Low Countries and France, Ash became impatient with his own country's neutrality. So, like a number of other concerned young Americans, he decided to offer his services to the Allied cause. He walked across the bridge from Detroit to Windsor, Ontario, and enlisted in the Royal Canadian Air Force. The move cost him his American citizenship, and he said later, "I tried to explain that I was not so much for King George as against Hitler, but they didn't seem to care much at the time."

After training as a pilot in Canada, Ash rode a troopship to Britain in 1941 and joined No. 411 Squadron of Royal Air Force Fighter Command as a flying officer. Through 1941 and into early 1942, he saw plenty of action as the squadron's Spitfires escorted bombers, defended shipping in the English Channel, and flew low-level "rhubarb" sorties against German airfields, troop concentrations, and communication lines in northern France. Ash also flew escort for RAF bombers during an abortive attack on the 31,800-ton battlecruiser Scharnhorst as she sailed through the English Channel in broad daylight during Operation Cerberus.

Nicknamed "Tex" and popular with his fellow British and Commonwealth pilots, Ash took part in publicity drives during 1941 aimed at encouraging the United States to enter the war and calling for more Americans to follow his example and go to Canada as volunteers. When he touched down at his airfield after a cross-Channel mission one day, Ash was surprised by flashbulbs popping and a portly, jovial man in a suit being helped onto the wing of his Spitfire. It was Canadian Prime Minister William Mackenzie King. The two shook hands and exchanged good wishes.

On a spring day in 1942, Ash was returning from bomber escort duty over the Pas de Calais when he was set upon by half a dozen deadly German Focke-Wulf 190 fighters. They riddled his Spitfire, and his gun button was jammed. The young American flier could do nothing but turn into his attackers to minimize his profile as they casually took turns trying to blow him out of the sky. He continued to press his gun button and defiantly shouted, "Bang, bang!" But his combat flying days were over. Ash was forced to crash land near the village of Vielle-Eglise, where a French war widow sheltered him from the enemy.

Ash was put in contact with members of a local Resistance group, and they helped him make his way to Paris, where he hid for several months. But he grew restless and sauntered out into the streets, visiting art galleries and swimming baths. Before long, however, his luck ran out and he was picked up by the Gestapo. Thrown into the infamous Fresnes Prison, he was beaten, tortured, and singled out for execution as a spy. However, shortly before he was to face a firing squad, Ash was "rescued" by a Luftwaffe officer who feared that his death would lead to reprisals against downed German fliers in Britain.

Ash was sent to Stalag Luft III, a sprawling, remote prison camp near the city of Sagan in Upper Silesia, 100 miles southeast of Berlin and 60 miles from the Polish border. Ten thousand Allied fliers—mostly British, Commonwealth, as well as some Americans, Norwegians, and Dutchmen—were held in five separate compounds behind high barbed-wire fences and machine-gun towers. Life was grim, but the prisoners kept their spirits up with elaborate escape plans.

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In the blockbuster film, when a strapping Australian crocodile hunter and a lovely American journalist were getting robbed at knife point by a couple of young thugs in New York, the tough Aussie pulls out his dagger and says "That's not a knife, THIS is a knife!" Of course, the thugs scattered and he continued on to win the reporter's heart.

Our Aussie friend would approve of our rendition of his "knife." Forged of high grade 420 surgical stainless steel, this knife is an impressive 16" from pommel to point. And, the blade is full tang, meaning it runs the entirety of the knife, even though part of it is under wraps in the natural bone and wood handle.

Secured in a tooled leather sheath, this is one impressive knife, with an equally impressive price.

This fusion of substance and style can garner a high price tag out in the marketplace. In fact, we found full tang, stainless steel blades with bone handles in excess of $2,000. Well, that won't cut it around here. We have mastered the hunt for the best deal, and in turn pass the spoils on to our customers.

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Beneath the watchful eyes of Nazi prison guards, Allied prisoners walk near the perimeter of Stalag Luft III. Ash spent long hours in solitary confinement there.

Scrounging whatever material they could find, they stitched civilian clothes, forged identity papers, drew maps, made compasses, accumulated iron rations from their infrequent Red Cross parcels, and painstakingly dug four 300-foot tunnels whimsically named Tom, Dick, Harry, and George. The efforts were overseen by two decorated RAF officers who consistently and successfully pitted their wits against the enemy—Squadron Leader Roger Bushell and Flight Lt. Ley Kenyon. One of the tunnels was started from the middle of a compound—its entrance hidden under a wooden vaulting horse that was in constant use by a squad of gymnasts while digging went on underground.

Stalag Luft III became famous because of its "escape artists," including Ash, who soon won the admiration of his comrades. Shortly after his arrival, the Texan became firm friends with Paddy Barthropp, an RAF pilot in the Battle of Britain. They made several escape attempts together. During the first of these, they hid in a shower drain under the shower huts in the hope of escaping after lying low for a few days. They fortified themselves with "the mixture," a high-energy concoction of chocolate, oats, and dried fruit donated by other prisoners from their Red Cross parcels. When they were discovered, Ash and Barthropp decided not to let the mixture fall into enemy hands. They were eventually hauled out with chocolate-smeared faces and marched off to solitary confinement in "the cooler."

Solitary confinement, said Ash later, was like "being sent back to 'go' when playing Monopoly, only with more bruises." He made several more escape attempts, only to be recaptured each time. But he refused to be deterred. After being shipped to a camp for recidivist escapees in Poland, he and another Canadian pilot masterminded the digging of a tunnel extending several hundred yards from under a stinking latrine to beyond the perimeter. Leading the way for 30 other prisoners, the pair managed to break out. But all were eventually recaptured and Ash was sent back to Stalag Luft III.

One day, he made a daring climb in broad daylight over two barbed-wire fences flanked by machine-gun towers in order to reach a nearby compound where a group of prisoners was about to be dispatched to a new camp in Lithuania. Ash thought the chances of escape might be better there. After reaching the camp, he helped to dig another long tunnel.

Managing to break free, the determined Texan made his way through Lithuania to the Baltic Sea coast. He found a boat on a beach but was too weak to drag it down to the water's edge. Spotting some men working in a nearby field, he asked them to help him. "We would love to," one replied with a sly grin, "but we are off-duty soldiers of the German Army, and you are standing on our cabbages." The chagrined Ash was swiftly returned to Stalag Luft III.

He was still languishing in the camp's cooler when some of his comrades pulled off the most famous POW escape of World War II on the night of Friday, March 24, 1944, while 811 RAF bombers were pounding Berlin. Seventy-six RAF officers, including Greeks, Frenchmen, Czechs, Poles, Dutchmen, and Norwegians, crawled through a long tunnel and emerged outside the Sagan camp. A Dutch pilot and two Norwegians managed to reach Stettin in Prussia and sail from Sweden to England, but the rest were captured, three of them close to the tunnel exit. Squadron Leader Bushell reached Saarbrucken before being seized.

The mass breakout was described in a book, The Great Escape, by Royal Australian Air Force veteran Paul Brickhill, and then was depicted in a big-budget 1963 film epic of the same name. Directed by John Sturges, it starred James Garner, Richard Attenborough, Donald Pleasence, Charles Bronson, and James Coburn. Steve McQueen portrayed a fictional character, Virgil Hilts, the "Cooler King," based on several sources, including William Ash. The film was handsomely staged, highly entertaining, and a box office hit, but considerable liberties were taken with historical fact. Americans took no part in the real breakout, and one of the film's best remembered scenes—with McQueen vaulting over a fence on a stolen German motorcycle and heading for neutral Switzerland—was Hollywood fantasy.

On the personal orders of Nazi dictator Adolf Hitler, at least 50 of the recaptured Sagan escapees were handed over to the SS and swiftly executed without trial. An official German statement said that the victims were shot "while resisting arrest, or attempting a further escape after being recaptured." Their names were posted at Stalag Luft III as a warning to others, and Hitler fumed to SS chief Heinrich Himmler, "You are not to let the escaped airmen out of your control!"

The murders and threats cast a pall of gloom over Stalag Luft III, but hope flickered on because the prisoners sensed that the Allies were gaining the upper hand over the enemy. The German offensive through the Ardennes had stalled, while the British, American, and Canadian Armies were nearing the River Rhine, and Soviet forces were rapidly pressing in from the east.

When Christmas 1944, came bleakly with bitter cold and six inches of snow dusting the pine forests around the camp, the shivering prisoners strung up decorations fashioned from old tin cans in their wooden huts and listened to an 80-voice choir sing Handel's "Messiah." Supplies of Red Cross parcels had dwindled, but almost miraculously a batch arrived containing canned turkey, plum pudding, cigars, cigarettes, and candles. The American prisoners in the west compound were even treated to a visit from Santa Claus, riding a small wagon pulled by two men dressed as reindeer and tossing out bundles of mail.

In January 1945, word spread that the Germans were going to evacuate Stalag Luft III and march the prisoners out. There was no time to be lost. The Soviet Army had launched a winter offensive on a 300-mile front and was now only 60 miles away. A fresh batch of Red Cross parcels was opened, and the prisoners, who had been on restricted rations since September, were

encouraged to eat what they could to ready them for what lay ahead outside in Germany's worst winter for 50 years.

Flying Officer Ash and the rest of the Allied prisoners were force-marched out in late January, heading westward for POW camps at Luckenwalde, south of Berlin; Marlag Nord, outside Bremen; Nuremberg, and Moosburg, near Munich. They were glad to be out of confinement, but it was a miserable, exhausting ordeal for both the prisoners and their guards as they endured driving snow, sleet, and temperatures that fell to 17 degrees below zero while trudging along frozen roads and through ice-clad forests. Some pulled makeshift sleds carrying their scant belongings. Frostbite, jaundice, scurvy, and dysentery took a heavy toll, and men fell asleep while marching. Subsisting on frozen corned beef, Spam, and whatever else they could save from their Red Cross parcels, they slept in barns, cowsheds, and pigsties at night, and plodded on day after day.

The bedraggled, weary prisoners jostled on the roads with increasing numbers of German soldiers and refugees, often exchanging sympathy, as all fled westward from the Russians. The Allied captives were occasionally surprised and cheered by instances of German hospitality. An old village woman offered cups of acorn coffee, a Wehrmacht field kitchen doled out horsemeat stew, and in one town women had set up tables on a street and were offering soup, bread, sausage, coffee, and God's blessing. "You boys will be going home soon," predicted the headmistress of the local school.

The surviving prisoners eventually reached their new camps by way of trucks and cattle trains, but Flying Officer Ash was not among them. He had abandoned the forced march and walked to freedom across a battlefield to the Allied lines. The war was over for him.

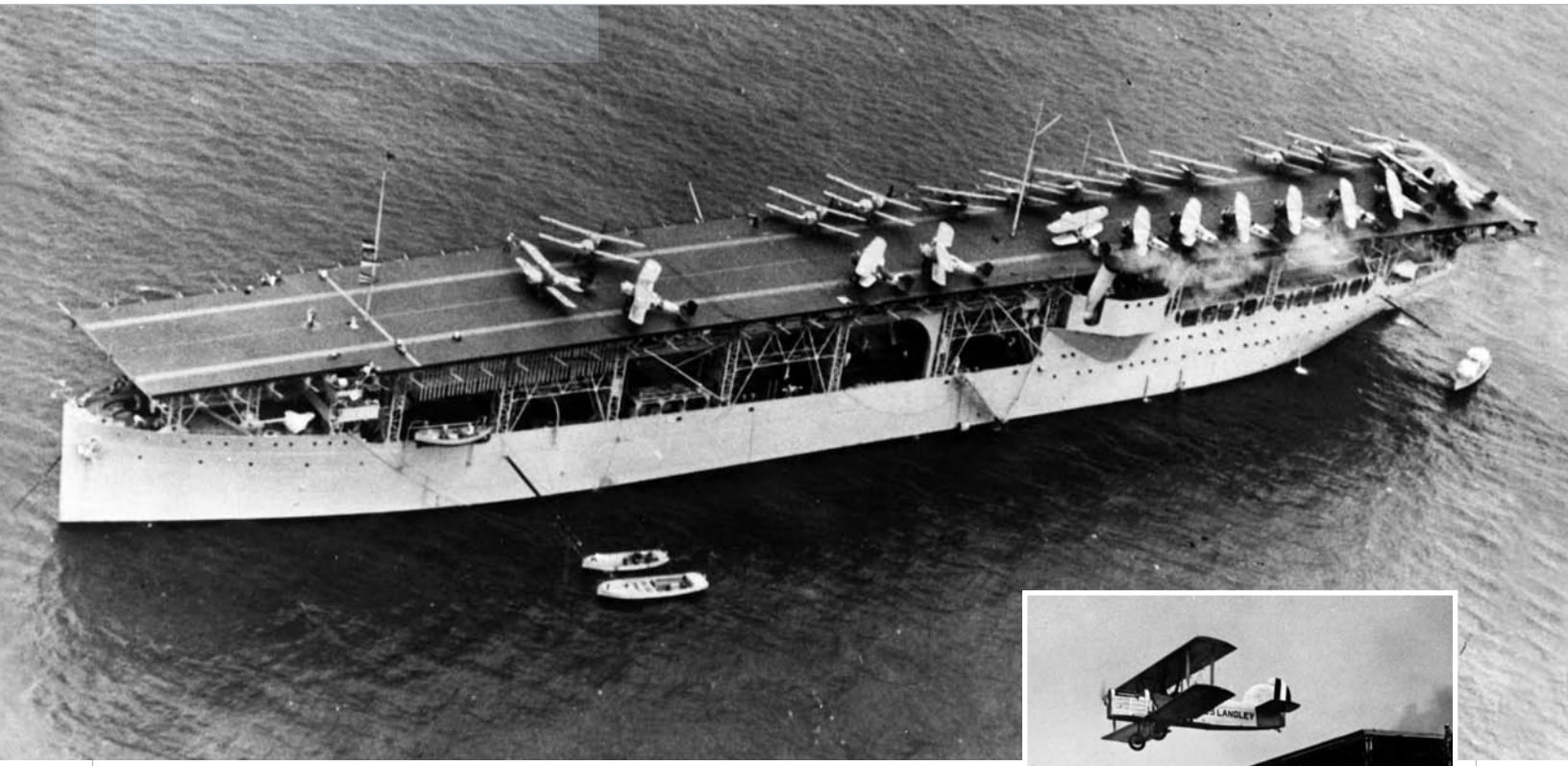
After returning to England, Ash was appointed a Member of the British Empire, awarded British citizenship, and obtained a veteran's scholarship to read philosophy, politics, and economics at Oxford University's Balliol College. He then joined the BBC and worked alongside a young Anthony Wedgwood Benn, who became a lifelong friend and influential Labour Party cabinet minister. Sent to India as the corporation's main representative, Ash married an Indian woman and embraced Prime Minister Pandit Nehru's brand of socialism. When he returned to England in the late 1950s, he was a hard-boiled leftist, active in "street politics" and the anti-fascist movement. But his revolutionary tendencies were too much for the BBC, and he was fired.

He managed to stay in the radio drama department as a script reader. Beginning in the 1960s, Ash wrote several novels, including *Choice of Arms* and *Ride a Paper Tiger*, but politics remained his chief interest. The British Communist Party barred him for being a maverick, so he co-founded an offshoot group and started publishing an academic monthly study, Marxist Morality. While continuing to read scripts for BBC Radio, he chaired the Writers' Guild of Great Britain for several years, helped to encourage young authors, and served as literary manager of a London theater, the Soho Poly. Ash's book, *How to Write Radio Drama*, remained the most authoritative on the subject for more than 20 years.

His remarkable war exploits were mostly unknown until his memoir, *Under the Wire*, was published in 2005. Co-written with Brendan Foley, it was a best-seller and rewarded Bill Ash with belated recognition for his courage and daring. Asked on a BBC program the secret to his late success, he replied, "Easy. All you have to do is dig a hole and wait 60 years."

Ash died at the age of 96 on April 26, 2014. His first marriage to Patricia Rambault was dissolved, and he was survived by his second wife, Ranjana, and the son and daughter of his first marriage." ■

By Frank Johnson



USS *Langley*: The U.S. Navy's Covered Wagon

The first operational aircraft carrier in the U.S. Navy, *Langley* met her end fighting the Japanese in World War II.

FIVE YEARS AFTER GREAT BRITAIN HAD LAUNCHED HMS ARGUS, THE WORLD'S first aircraft carrier, in 1917, and following the signing of the Washington Naval Treaty on February 6, 1922, the U.S. Navy Department ordered the conversion of a fleet collier, the 11,050-ton USS *Jupiter*. Commissioned in 1913, the collier had the Navy's first turbo-electric powerplant, was the first American naval vessel to transit the Panama Canal in October 1914, and ferried a naval aviation unit to France in June 1917. Now, the *Jupiter* was designated to become the carrier USS *Langley* (CV-1), named for Samuel Pierpoint Langley, the famous 19th-century astronomer, physicist, and aviation pioneer.

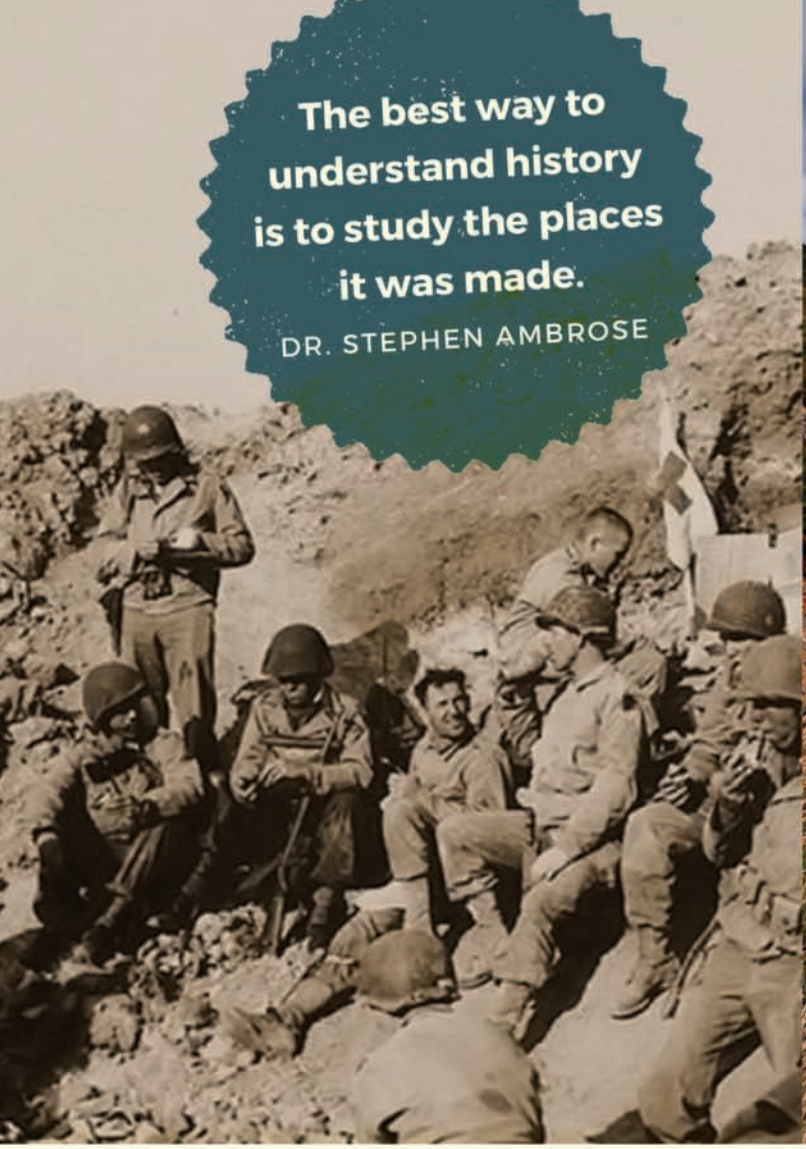
While the collier was being converted at the Norfolk Navy Yard in Virginia through the spring and summer of 1922, Lt. Cmdr. Godfrey de Courcelles "Chevy" Chevalier led 15 pilots in flight training to operate from the *Langley*. They made touch-and-go landings on a 100-foot wooden platform laid on a coal barge. At the same time, Navy pilots trained on an 836-foot wooden flight deck at North Island, San Diego, California.

Commissioned on March 20, 1922, the nation's first carrier was designed to carry up to 34 airplanes—12 single-seater "chasing" planes, a dozen two-seater "spotters," four "torpedo-dropping" aircraft, and six "80-knot torpedo seaplanes." The vessel's first skipper, Commander Kenneth Whiting, was assigned, and the conversion work was completed in September 1922. She left for her shakedown cruise that month.

All photos: Naval History and Heritage Command

ABOVE: A DT-2 biplane takes off from the deck of the *Langley* in 1925. A number of pioneer aviators of the U.S. Navy underwent training aboard the *Langley* and later served during World War II. TOP: The USS *Langley*, the first operational aircraft carrier of the U.S. Navy, was converted from the fleet collier *Jupiter* in 1922. The carrier served as the cradle of U.S. naval aviation and was nicknamed "Covered Wagon" due to its resemblance to the wagons that crossed the American West in the 1800s.

The *Langley* resembled HMS *Argus*—ungainly and with twin funnels that could be swung down during flight operations. Supported by steel box girders, the former collier's 536-foot wooden flight deck covered her yawning holds, which still contained coal-dust particles when she was sunk two decades later.



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The hangar deck of the *Langley* is crowded with aircraft in this image from 1928. The carrier was converted to a seaplane tender and was severely damaged by Japanese aircraft off the coast of Java in February 1942. She was later scuttled by fire from the destroyer USS *Whipple*.

Her arresting gear—cables stretched across the flight deck to grab the tailhooks of planes—later became standard equipment on all flattops. She was also fitted with a forward flush-deck catapult for launching aircraft when there was no wind over her deck. Commander Whiting and Captain (later Rear Admiral) Joseph Mason "Bull" Reeves, who commanded all fleet aircraft, developed other pioneering innovations for the *Langley* and later carriers.

Much naval history was made aboard her, starting on October 17, 1922, while she was anchored in the York River, a Chesapeake Bay estuary. On that day, Lt. Cmdr. Virgil C. Griffin made the first takeoff from her flight deck in a flimsy Vought VE-7SF biplane. Nine days later, on October 26, while the *Langley* steamed off Cape Henry, Virginia, Lt. Cmdr. Chevalier landed his Aeromarine 39B biplane on the deck. The wooden propeller broke, but he touched down safely. Less than a month later, Chevalier died in a plane crash near Norfolk. Another landmark aboard the *Langley* came on November 18, 1922, when Commander Whiting made the first catapult launching.

For two crucial years, the first American flattop operated as an experimental ship: testing aircraft and flight deck equipment, developing takeoff and landing techniques, and training pilots. There were a number of accidents, but no fatalities. The *Langley* was the cradle of U.S. naval aviation, and many of her young fliers went on to flag rank and distinction, such as Lieutenants DeWitt C. Ramsey, John Dale Price, Gerald F. Bogan, Thomas H. Moorer, and Marc A. "Pete" Mitscher, who led the fast carrier task forces in the Pacific theater in 1942-45.

The naval air arm grew in the 1920s as the building of two more carriers – the *Lexington* and *Saratoga* – was authorized. On November 29, 1924, the *Langley* joined the Navy Battle Fleet at San Diego, and Fighting Squadron VF-2 began flying a dozen VE-7S biplanes from her for carrier qualifications in January 1925. This was the first squadron assigned to an American carrier, along with liaison planes and trainers. The *Langley* became the first flattop to participate in fleet exercises that March, and she chalked up a further landmark when Lt. Cmdr. Price made the first night landing on April 1, 1925.

That year, a bright young Naval War College graduate from Texas, Commander Chester W. Nimitz, played a groundbreaking role in successfully integrating the Navy's lone carrier into a circular fleet formation. Admiral Samuel S. Robison, commander of the Battle Fleet, was impressed. Nimitz, who eventually reached fleet admiral rank and skillfully led the Pacific Fleet in World War II, reported, "I regard the tactical exercises that we had at that time as laying the groundwork for the cruising formations that we used in World War II in the carrier air groups and practically every kind of task force that went out."

Captain Reeves, the gaunt, bearded Battle Fleet air commander, went aboard the *Langley* in October 1925, and, seeking to fill every square foot of deck space, increased her complement of planes. Her flight deck was lengthened by 23 feet during an overhaul at the Mare Island Navy Yard in California, and Reeves, now a rear admiral and the first Navy aviation officer to reach flag rank, ordered two full squadrons (36 aircraft) to be placed aboard. Six more planes were stowed below decks.

It was during 1925 maneuvers that the Navy led the way with dive-bombing techniques. Aboard the *Langley*, Reeves and Lt. Cmdr. Frank W. "Spig" Wead developed tactics to support troops in amphibious landings and for attacking enemy ships. The planes would approach targets at 10,000 feet and then dive at angles of up to 70 degrees.

Like Reeves, who eventually became the U.S. Fleet commander, Wead was a prominent pioneer in naval aviation. He led the first seven planes off the *Langley*'s deck in a record-breaking 41 seconds, tested and raced planes for the Navy, and held five world records in naval aviation. Wead was tireless in his efforts to gain public and congressional support for naval aviation.

In October 1926, Lt. Cmdr. Frank D. Wagner led Curtiss F6C-2 planes of Fighting Squadron 2 in a simulated attack on the Battle Fleet off San Pedro, California. Diving from 12,000 feet at an almost vertical angle, the *Langley* squadron "achieved complete surprise and so impressed fleet and ship commanders with the effectiveness of their spectacular approach that there was unanimous agreement that such an attack would succeed over any defense." The Navy's dive-bombing tactics soon received close study by the Imperial Japanese Navy and the German Ministry of Aviation.

Equipped now with Boeing F2B-1 fighters, the *Langley* took part in Army-Navy exercises off Hawaii in April-May 1928. She was able to operate 36 planes and could launch 35 aircraft in only seven minutes. The maneuverable Navy planes easily outfought the Army fighters, and an early morning "attack" with simulated bombing and strafing runs took the Army defenders by surprise. (A similar series of maneuvers proved successful in making Japan's surprise attacks on the island of Oahu 13 years later.) It was because of her station during the 1928 war games that the *Langley* acquired her nickname. Thinking that she resembled the chuck wagon in a western cattle drive, the crew affectionately christened her the "Covered Wagon."

The *Langley* again made U.S. naval history on July 30, 1935, when Lieutenant Frank Akers, piloting an OJ-2 spotter plane and using

only instruments, executed a successful blind landing on her flight deck. But time was running out for the Covered Wagon, as larger and more powerful flattops joined the fleet. Converted from unfinished battlecruisers, the *Saratoga* and *Lexington* had been commissioned in November 1927; the USS *Ranger*, the first built-for-the-purpose carrier, was commissioned in June 1934, and the *Wasp*, *Yorktown*, *Enterprise*, and *Hornet* were also laid down.

Strategic thinking in the Navy Department was undergoing a transformation as the potential of military aviation became evident. Although many battleships were to play key bombardment, escort, and other support roles in the coming world war, their traditional ranking as capital ships was waning. Fleets would be centered instead around aircraft carriers, as with the U.S. Navy in the Pacific and the British Royal Navy in the Mediterranean.

The venerable *Langley*, meanwhile, had played a vital role while serving as midwife during the birth of American naval aviation. But the new flattops coming off the ways rendered her obsolete, so she was relegated to a less glamorous role as an auxiliary vessel. Between October 1936 and February 1937, she was converted to a seaplane tender at the Mare Island Yard. She lost the forward section of her flight deck and was modified to accommodate two squadrons of Consolidated PBY Catalina flying boats. She then operated in the Pacific and Atlantic until sailing westward to service Asiatic Fleet seaplanes. The *Langley* arrived in Manila on September 24, 1939, three weeks after the outbreak of World War II.

At the Cavite Navy Yard in the Philippines the following year, four three-inch antiaircraft guns were mounted on the flight deck of the *Langley*. She also was armed with four .50-caliber, water-cooled machine guns and a few automatic rifles for air defense. Her main battery of four five-inch guns mounted forward and aft, and which had survived the conversion, could not be used against aircraft.

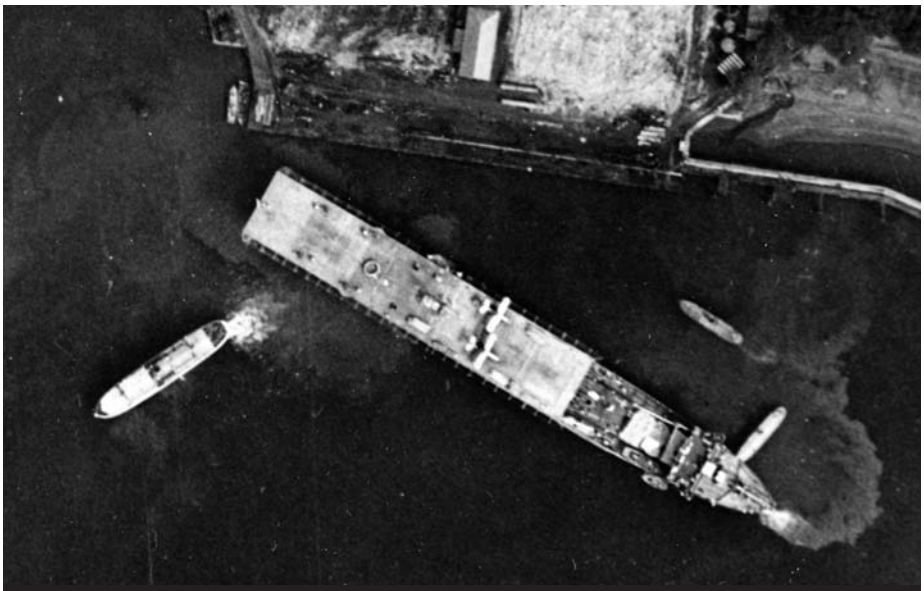
When Japanese carrier planes savaged the U.S. Pacific Fleet at Pearl Harbor on Sunday, December 7, 1941, and thrust America into the war, the tender was anchored off Sangley Point in Manila Bay. Under cover of darkness, she departed on the night of December 8 and fled southward with two fleet oilers, the *Pecos* and *Trinity*. As Japanese invasion fleets closed in on the Philippines, the three vessels headed for safety in Australian waters.

During the voyage, the *Langley* provided support to PBYs while the USS *Pecos* refueled ships of the Asiatic Fleet. In the Sulu Sea, two Japanese torpedoes passed close to the tender, and her crewmen sighted enemy cruisers and destroyers. But she steamed on, undetected, and reached Darwin on the northwestern Australian coast on January 1, 1942.

There was little work for the *Langley* at Darwin in the grim early weeks of 1942, as makeshift American, British, Dutch, and Australian naval units fought a hopeless delaying action against the enemy in the waters around the Philippines and the Dutch East Indies. Boeing B-17 Flying Fortress bombers and Curtiss P-40 Warhawk fighters were sent north from Australia to join the Allied effort, and Japanese landings in the East Indies were imminent.

But the *Langley* was about to be assigned a vital mission. Early in February 1942, it was decided that she should carry much-needed fighters to Java to bolster its sparse defenses. Many planes, mostly flown by inexperienced pilots, had been lost in long, over-water flights, and the island of Timor, used for ferrying, was soon to fall to the enemy.

The *Langley* steamed to the port of Fremantle on the southwestern Australian coast, and 32 Curtiss P-40E Warhawks were loaded on her chopped-off flight deck and aft of the bridge on the main deck. The planes' machine guns were loaded, but they were not fueled. Thirty-



Converted to her seaplane tender configuration and designated AV-3, USS *Langley* is shown off Sangley Point, Philippine Islands, in October 1941, just weeks before the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor and U.S. entry into World War II. Note that the forward section of the flight deck has been removed.

three pilots and a dozen enlisted mechanics went aboard. With one exception, the pilots had little or no experience in P-40s, though they had flown the 2,400 miles across Australia to reach Fremantle.

In addition, 27 crated Warhawks were loaded aboard the American-flagged freighter *Sea Witch*. Escorted by the USS Phoenix, the two ships headed out from Fremantle on February 22. Because of the pressing need for fighters in Java, the *Langley* and *Sea Witch* broke away and steamed—separately and unescorted—for Tjilatjap, the only port where they could deliver their cargoes safely. Conning his vessel at 14 knots, her full speed, Commander McConnell planned to reach landfall early on February 27.

But the *Langley* was delayed on February 26 because of confusion over which ships would escort her on the last leg of the voyage. The Dutch minelayer *Willem van der Zaan* was assigned, but she could make only 10 knots because of a boiler problem. Finally, the U.S. destroyers *Edsall* and *Whipple* went out to meet the *Langley*, but there was another delay while they broke off to run down a suspected submarine contact. It was not until early on Feb. 27 that the tender and the destroyers were able to begin the final 100-mile run to Tjilatjap.

At 9 a.m that morning, an unidentified plane was sighted high above the three ships. Commander McConnell requested fighter cover from Admiral Glassford, but none could be spared by the hard-pressed U.S. Army Air Force squadrons on Java. When more planes were seaplane spotted at 11:40 a.m., the three ships raised their antiaircraft guns. McConnell sounded general quarters and signaled his plight to Java. The *Langley* and her escorts had been sighted by a patrol plane of the shore-based Japanese 11th Air Fleet, which had been keeping a close watch on Allied movements around Java.

At an altitude of 15,000 feet, nine twin-engine enemy bombers soon approached the three American ships. The *Langley* opened fire as soon as the raiders came within range. As the bombers glided in at an 80-degree angle to make their first pass, Commander McConnell ordered hard right rudder, and the bombs splashed harmlessly about 100 feet to port. Expertly maneuvering his tender, the skipper then foiled a second pass by the planes.

But the enemy did not give up, and the *Langley*'s luck ran out as the Japanese pilots anticipated her desperate maneuvering. The bombers came in a third time and badly damaged the 29-year-old ship with five direct hits and two near-misses. She reeled under the blows and started listing 10 degrees to starboard.

One after another, the P-40s lashed on her abbreviated flight deck burst into flames, fanned by a stiff wind. The steering mechanism and gyrocompass on the tender's bridge were destroyed. As the burning *Langley* staggered along, six Zero fighters zoomed in to strafe her, but they soon made off.

Despite the chaos, McConnell tried gallantly to save the stricken vessel. He maneuvered in a bid to reduce the windage and control the fires, but this was unsuccessful. He ordered the burning planes to be pushed over the side and called for counterflooding to lessen the list. Realizing that the *Langley* could no longer negotiate the narrow mouth of the distant Tjilatjap harbor, he laid a direct course to the Java shore. He hoped to ground the vessel and save the few remaining P-40s, but inrushing water flooded both main engines and the electric propulsion system. The tender did not have damage-control equipment, and her pumps could not cope with the flooding. She lost all forward motion.

When the skipper gave an order to "make ready boats and rafts for lowering," some crewmen misinterpreted it and jumped overboard. With the crippled tender dead in the water, McConnell had little choice. At 1:32 p.m., while the two destroyers were nearby and available to take off his crew, he gave the order to abandon ship. In the tender's transmission room, the chief radioman ruefully tapped out a final message to the outside world: "Mama said there would be days like this. She must have known."

All but 16 of the *Langley* crew and aviation personnel were rescued by the *Edsall* and *Whipple*. When Commander McConnell and his aides determined that only the dead were left in the smoldering tender, she was scuttled. The *Whipple* sank her with two torpedoes and nine rounds of four-inch gunfire. The proud old *Langley* went down 74 miles south of Tjilatjap. It was a gallant end to a naval era.

With better luck, the *Langley* might have gotten through. Lt. Cmdr. Hatfield's *Sea Witch* was more fortunate. Dropping her anchor at Tjilatjap on the morning of February 28, she unloaded her crated Warhawks, took on 40 American refugee soldiers, and managed to steam back to Australia undetected by the enemy. The P-40s were assembled, meanwhile, but never saw action. They were destroyed by Army Air Forces personnel as the Japanese overran Java.

Misfortune continued to befall other American vessels around Java. On February 28, the last Allied warship north of Java was destroyed by a dozen Japanese Val and Kate carrier planes. Attempting to escape from the Java Sea, the destroyer USS *Pope* was battered into a drifting hulk and finished off by gunfire from enemy cruisers.

Around 9:45 a.m. on March 1, a plane from the Japanese striking force encountered the oiler USS *Pecos* off Christmas Island, southwest of Java. She had taken on board *Langley* survivors from the destroyers *Edsall* and *Whipple* earlier that morning. Two hours after the sighting, planes from the carrier Soryu swept down and sank the helpless oiler. That night, the *Whipple* located 232 survivors of the *Pecos*, many of them *Langley* sailors. Nearby, enemy battleships, cruisers, and two bombers from the

Soryu ambushed and sank the USS *Edsall*. Her five survivors died while prisoners of war. The *Whipple* managed to escape to Australia.

The American, British, Dutch, and Australian ships of the doomed ABDA Command had fought hard against overwhelming odds, but the enemy closed in on the East Indies. On March 5, four Japanese carriers sent 149 bombers and fighters against Tjilatjap, and they sank 20 ships, mostly merchantmen. With the enemy now in virtual control of Java, Japanese soldiers marched into the port on March 8. The Dutch government had been evacuated, and the island's commander, Gen. Hein Ter Poorten, agreed to surrender 100,000 Dutch, American, British, and Australian troops.

Along with many other Allied ships, the USS *Langley* had gone down fighting in the desperate early months of 1942, but her name was to live on as the Allies regrouped, grew stronger, and eventually took the offensive in the Far East.

Construction started in August 1942 on a second USS *Langley* (CVL-27), one of nine escort carriers of the *Independence* class. She displaced 10,600 tons, was 600 feet long, and was designed to carry a small air group of 32 to 34 aircraft. Her complement was 1,400. She was completed in July 1943, and was commissioned the following month.

The new *Langley* saw plenty of action with the U.S. Navy's powerful task groups in the Pacific theater. After taking part in offensive operations around the Marshall, Palau, and Mariana Islands in October 1943, the *Langley* joined Rear Admiral Samuel P. Ginder's Task Group 58.4, part of grizzled Rear Admiral Mitscher's hard-hitting Task Force 58, in January 1944. From then until April 1945, the ship fought in more actions off the Marshalls, Leyte, the liberation of the Philippines, the invasion of Okinawa, and raids against the Japanese home islands. The *Langley* sailed with Vice Admiral John S. McCain's Task Force 38 in the waning months of the Pacific War, surviving typhoons and damage from kamikaze suicide bombers off Formosa.

After the defeat of Japan and the end of World War II, more service awaited the *Langley* as French forces battled Communists in Indochina. The flattop was loaned to France in June 1951. Renamed the *LaFayette*, she launched sorties by Grumman Hellcat fighters and Curtiss Helldiver dive bombers in support of French Navy units in the South China Sea and the Gulf of Tonkin. The carrier was returned to the United States in 1963 and was scrapped the following year. Like her famous predecessor, she had fought gallantly in the continuing struggle against tyranny. ■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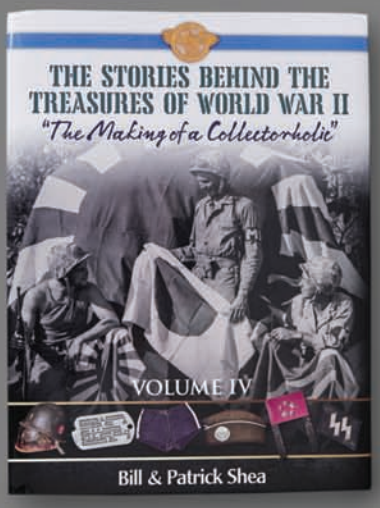

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Adolf Hitler gives a stiff Nazi salute to seven men killed in an assassination attempt in Munich during the 1939 anniversary observances of the failed Munich Beer Hall Putsch of 1923.

A Sting In Venlo

Nazi agents achieved an intelligence coup with the capture of an Allied operative on the Dutch-German border.

SIR ALEXANDER CADOGAN DID NOT BELIEVE IT.

He had been given a report from Admiral Sir Archibald "Quex" Sinclair, head of MI6, on October 6, 1939, that German generals were reaching out to the British Embassy in The Hague in neutral Holland, to orchestrate a coup against Adolf Hitler that would replace the Nazi regime with a military junta, which would then make peace.

During the "Phoney War," when the only combat action consisted of German U-boats and surface raiders on the high seas and propaganda bombast, British Prime Minister Neville Chamberlain was eager to keep the new war from becoming worse and repeating the horrors that had taken family members from 1914 to 1918. An internal German coup to remove Hitler from power would do the trick.

However, while most of the War Cabinet was impressed by the apparent feeler, First Lord of the Admiralty Winston Churchill was not. Neither was British Undersecretary for Foreign Affairs Alexander Cadogan, who wrote in his diary for the day, "(Menzies) has a report on interview with his German General friends. I think they are Hitler agents."

Despite these objections, London ordered two spies in The Hague, nominally assigned to the Passport Control Section, with the sonorous names of Captain Sigismund Payne-Best and Major Richard Henry-Stevens, to meet with a "Major Schaemmel" of the German Army, who was allegedly a link to disaffected Wehrmacht generals.

In actuality, "Schaemmel" was Secret Police Major Walther Schellenberg, a cynical, scar-faced (from university dueling) protégé of SD head Reinhard Heydrich. Born in Saarbrücken, Schellenberg's family was forced out of their home by the Belgian postwar occupation. He studied law at university and entered civil service. When he realized he could gain more power and prestige by becoming a Nazi, he joined the Party and the SS in the wave of Germans who did so after Hitler took power.

Schellenberg wanted to become head of the SD Intelligence arm. Heydrich thought Schellenberg better suited for counterintelligence. He handled security for Benito Mussolini's 1937 visit to Berlin, gaining kudos for protecting the two dictators. His evaluations were outstanding, his anti-Semitic statements, though, pro forma. He also angrily divorced his wife to marry a socially more desirable woman.

Schellenberg proposed luring British spies in The Netherlands to a place where they could be captured in a covert action, brought back to the Reich, and gain the list of British agents in Germany. Schellenberg's idea appealed to Heydrich, who was a big fan of spy-novel feats of derring-do. He ordered Schellenberg to proceed with the plot. Disguised as a German Army transportation corps officer, he met with the two Britons, along with Dr. Franz Fischer, another SD agent masquerading as the leader of an anti-Hitler coalition.

Both sides met in the Backus Café in Venlo, on the Dutch-German border, several times, culminating with a discussion at 2 p.m., on November 7.

SS Major Walther Schellenberg hatched a plan to capture Allied diplomats in the Dutch border town of Venlo.

Schellenberg's story was that, as "Schaemmel," he represented an underground group headed by a German general, who was ready to fly to London for high-level discussions with Chamberlain and his Cabinet. The British should have a plane to fly the fictional general from Schiphol Airport at Amsterdam to London. The British agreed. Schellenberg headed back to Düsseldorf, hoping for orders from Berlin on what to do next.

However, there weren't any.

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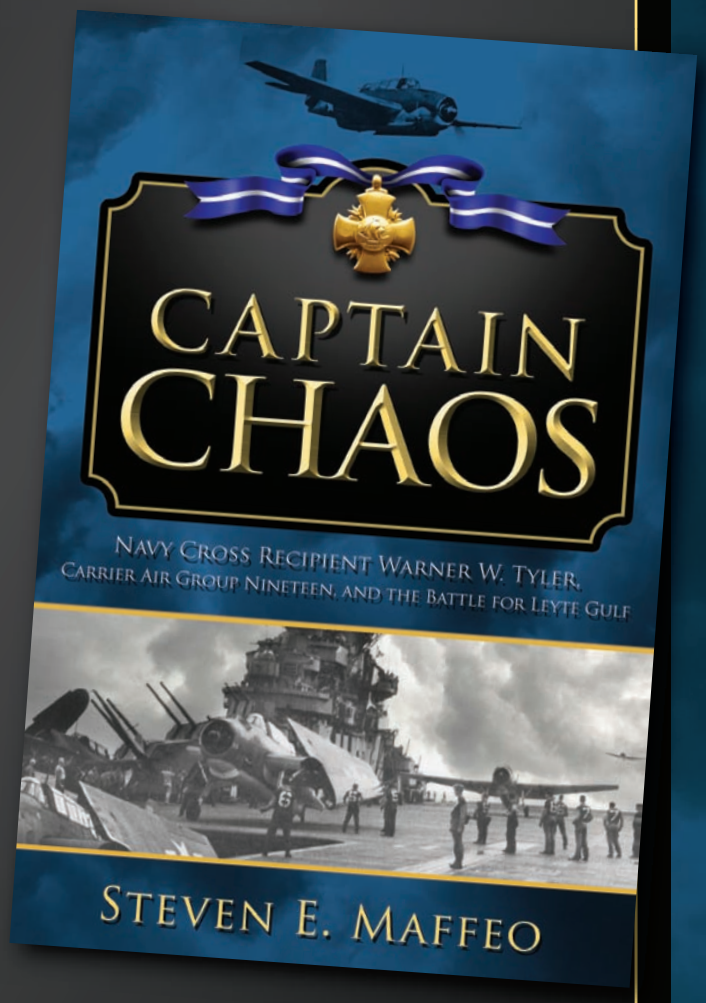

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The wreckage of the Burgerbraukeller in Munich bears witness to the explosive power of the bomb planted by would-be Hitler assassin Georg Elser in 1939. The Fuhrer, who departed the beer hall minutes before the blast, blamed the plot on the British.

Apparently, Hitler was indecisive about what to do next, and nervous about discussing his possible overthrow, even if the "plot" was bogus. Perhaps Der Fuehrer didn't want to give anyone any ideas. Schellenberg decided to go ahead on his own; aware that the big attack on the West was set for November 14. Removing two major British spies from the espionage chessboard would be a great benefit to the offensive.

With that, Schellenberg went to bed, but was unable to sleep.

Next morning, November 8, when Schellenberg woke up in Düsseldorf and read the morning newspapers, he saw an announcement by the Dutch and Belgian monarchs offering mediation to both sides.

For Schellenberg, this solved a problem. The news about the monarchs allowed him to tell the British that the German "resisters" were waiting to see how Hitler reacted to the Dutch-Belgian proposal, and that the "general" was sick anyway, and couldn't come.

With that, Schellenberg drove to the café and sat there, swirling his tea for three-quarters of an hour, noticing, he later wrote, that he was being watched by "several persons pretending to be harmless civilians." He figured that the British were now growing suspicious.

The British spies finally arrived, and they held a short meeting. Schellenberg told his tale, and the British believed it, both sides heading off with warm cordiality.

When Schellenberg returned to Düsseldorf, a senior SS officer, Alfred Naujocks, was there to greet him. Apparently, Berlin backed Schellenberg's play.

Naujocks was in charge of a special detachment to protect Schellenberg. He was a familiar name and reliable SS heavyweight. Naujocks had staged the September 1939 Gleiwitz radio station incident that provided Germany with an excuse to invade Poland. Berlin was worried that the British might be planning their own kidnap trick on Schellenberg. The SS would block off the entire sector of the frontier and cover all Dutch border police in the area to prevent Schellenberg's arrest or capture.

Schellenberg told Naujocks that he may have to drive off with the British agents tomorrow, so if he did so voluntarily, he would give the SS guards a signal. Naujocks promised to bring along an escort of his best men to protect Schellenberg.

With that done, Schellenberg discussed the plan for the kidnap the following day with Fischer, going over all the details. It was midnight before Schellenberg went to bed, taking a sleeping pill to put him out.

Early on November 9, the imperious ringing of a telephone woke up the semi-comatose Schellenberg from his hotel bed. Struggling against the effect of the sleeping pill, Schellenberg grunted into the phone, "Hello."

A deep and excited voice at the other end said, "What did you say?"

ABOVE: Alfred Naujocks, a senior SS officer, delivered to Schellenberg the news that Berlin backed his ambitious plan to snatch British diplomats. BELOW: The hapless British agents caught up in the Venlo Sting were Captain Sigismund Payne-Best (left) and Major Richard Henry-Stevens.

"Nothing so far," responded Schellenberg. "Whom am I speaking to?"

"This is the Reichsfuehrer SS, Heinrich Himmler. Are you there at last?" came a sharp reply.

Now Schellenberg was quite awake. Himmler continued, "Do you know what has happened?"

"No, sir," Schellenberg said. "I know nothing."

"Well this evening, just after the Fuehrer's speech in the Bürgerbraukeller, an attempt was made to assassinate him! A bomb went off. Luckily, he'd left the cellar a few minutes before. Several Party comrades have been killed and the damage is pretty considerable. There's no doubt that the British Secret Service is behind it all. The Fuehrer and I were already on his train to Berlin when we got the news. He now says—and this is an order—when you meet the British agents for your conference tomorrow, you are to arrest them immediately and bring them to Germany. This may mean a violation of the Dutch frontier, but the Fuehrer says that's of no consequence. The SS detachment that's been assigned to protect you—which, by the way, you certainly don't deserve, not after the arbitrary and self-willed way you've been behaving—this detachment is to help you carry out your mission. Do you understand everything?" Himmler roared.

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In 1948, the Dutch staged a reenactment of the Venlo Sting at the Backus Cafe, demonstrating how the two British agents were captured and spirited to Germany.

And indeed, except for the idea that the British were behind the bombing, the Reichsfuhrer's report was quite accurate. A German who opposed Hitler, named Georg Elser, had spent weeks digging a hole in the supports of the legendary Munich Bürgerbraukeller, where Hitler had launched the failed Beer Hall Putsch on November 8, 1923. To mark that date, Hitler and his Alte Kämpfer cronies gathered annually for a night of Nazi oratory, German lager, shouting "Sieg Heil!" and "Jawohl," and oompah music.

The only differences between this event and previous ones were two: first, Hitler and his entourage left early to head back to Berlin and making plans to invade France. Second, shortly after they did so, the bomb went off, killing a considerable number of people, wrecking the beer hall, and setting off Gestapo paranoia. In their eyes, all of Germany was behind Der Fuehrer, so this had to be the work of the British Secret Service, despite all evidence.

The Gestapo arrested Elser shortly after, and he insisted that he was the sole plotter and bomber, but Hitler, Himmler, and Heydrich did not believe that. This bombing made it more important to capture the two British agents at Venlo.

As Schellenberg absorbed all this news, he said, "Yes, Reichsfuehrer, but…."

Himmler cut his subordinate off. "There's no 'but.' There's only the Fuehrer Order—which you will carry out. Do you now understand?"

"Schellenberg merely replied, "Yes, sir," writing later that he knew it would be senseless to argue the situation.

Fully awake now, Schellenberg roused Naujocks and put him in the picture.

Naujocks and his second-in-command were doubtful that the two Britons could be kidnapped without alerting the Dutch border guards, which would in turn set off shooting. That would in turn cause casualties and a potentially embarrassing international incident. The only German advantage was surprise. The best time to attack was when Best's Buick arrived. At that instant, the SS cars would break through the Dutch border barrier, yank the Britons out of their car, hurl them into the German vehicles, and high-tail it for the Reich. The top German driver was highly skilled at driving in reverse, so he wouldn't even have to turn his car around.

The SS men told Schellenberg he should just not take part in the attack, but wait in the Café Backus and walk out into the street to greet them. Then he should jump in his own car and drive off. It all sounded like a good plan to Schellenberg.

Stevens and Payne-Best, joined by Dutch Army Lieutenant Dirk Klop, headed for their conference with the German emissaries at the Café Backus in Venlo, right on the German border, on a dull, cold, day. Klop had joined the British but took no part in the negotiations, only to enable the Britons to go through the Dutch frontier defenses to the borderline café. While the Britons negotiated, Klop stayed to the side. Fearing the worst, the British spies took Browning pistols with them.

The German party headed off, their car's trunk (or boot) loaded with pistols. Naujocks observed that the Dutch border was lined with coils of rusty barbed wire and concrete anti-tank blocks.

The British drove to the rendezvous in a Lincoln-Zephyr, driven by a Dutchman, Jan Lemmens, to await "Major Schaemmel." Payne-Best thought it was odd that the German Customs barriers were open—since the war's outbreak, they were usually closed.

Schellenberg was already waiting for them, sipping his aperitif. While waiting, the German spy noticed a lot of cyclists in the street and men walking police dogs. He suspected the British had arranged for protection.

The British arrived at the café at 3 p.m. and sat in their car, awaiting the meeting: the Britons in front, the Dutch in back. At 3:20, they finally emerged from their car and walked toward the Café Backus, Schellenberg in turn exiting the café to greet them. He waved toward the German cars, signaling them to make their move.

Moments later, Naujocks and his crew roared up from the German side in two Mercedes limousines and opened fire on the Lincoln-Zephyr, mortally wounding Klop. Despite his wounds, Klop fired back at the Germans, a bullet shattering the German car's windshield. Schellenberg thought that Naujocks has been hit. But Naujocks, unhurt, leaped from his car, pistol drawn, and shot at Klop, who kept firing as he fell to his knees, even though Schellenberg was between them.

"Will you get the hell out of this?" Naujocks yelled at Schellenberg. "God knows why you haven't been hit!" Schellenberg ran around the corner toward his car, with alacrity, reaching the vehicle to make his own great escape.

Naujocks yelled at the British spies in English, "Hands up. You have no chance." The stunned Britons raised their hands and the Germans handcuffed the captives.

Stevens said to Best, "Our number is up." These were the last words the two exchanged for the next five years, as they were held in separate captivity in concentration camps.

Naujocks yelled, "Right, march! Hurry up!" The Germans hurled their captives into their limousines and raced back to the Fatherland in best gangster-movie fashion. Dutch civilians watched this spectacle in amazement and fear—a little girl cowered in a nearby garden, clutching a black dog. The Germans drove back for Düsseldorf in silence.

Once there, the SS men searched their prisoners, and one of them told Best that the Britons were seized because the SS believed they were connected to Elser's plot. Klop went to the Protestant Hospital in Dusseldorf, unconscious and dying of a head wound.

The Germans found no evidence that Payne-

Best and Stevens had any connection with Elser. They did find an uncoded list of Britain's SIS agents throughout Europe, which was of greater value. Payne-Best had written it down, expecting to provide it to "Schaemmel," so that the false anti-Nazi organization could connect with MI6. Now the Germans had a list of every British spy in the Reich. They swiftly rounded up the whole lot.

The espionage coup had a huge impact on British intelligence. Best and Stevens confessed fairly freely to the Gestapo. More importantly, for the rest of the war, the British did not trust any feelers put out by any anti-Hitler Germans on the theory that "fool me once, shame on you. Fool me twice, shame on me."

This gap prevented actual German anti-Hitler plotters from gaining support from British intelligence throughout the war. It also exposed the rickety and amateurish state of British intelligence, particularly MI6, in 1939. After that, the British would use more effective measures … the "Double-Cross System"…new leadership … Bletchley Park.

The final insult came from Schellenberg himself, who took to the radio he had been using to send fake messages to Payne-Best and Stevens, to fire off one final signal to London, as follows: "Communication for any length of time with conceited and silly people is dull. You will understand, therefore, that we are giving it up. You are hereby heartily greeted by your affectionate German opposition. The Gestapo."

The British responded with cool understatement: "Thank you."

Next day, Schellenberg and Naujocks returned to Gestapo headquarters on the Prinz Albrecht Strasse in Berlin for the usual post-operation briefing and analysis. Himmler summoned Naujocks to his office for a private and pleasant chat. After that, an SS officer told Naujocks to put on his Class A uniform and be ready to hop into a staff car in 20 minutes, saying, "A very important person wants to see you, Naujocks. Hurry up. He hates people being late!"

The staff car took Naujocks to the Reich Chancellery, where Der Fuehrer himself gave Naujocks a speech, noting that this was the first time the German secret service has been honored this way in its history. The honor was the presentation of the Iron Cross, and Hitler clipped it on Naujocks' dress uniform personally.

After interrogating Stevens and Payne-Best, Schellenberg prepared SS information briefing packs for the expected invasion of England. He tried to convince the Duke and Duchess of Windsor to go to Germany and become figureheads of a Nazi puppet English government.

Continued on page 70

The panzer and panzergrenadier divisions of the Waffen SS fought desperately against the Allies in Normandy in the summer of 1944.

BY MICHAEL E. HASKEW

The ongoing debate between German Field Marshals Erwin Rommel and Gerd von Rundstedt over how best to use the German Army's elite panzer divisions against the coming Allied invasion ultimately reached no clear conclusion.

That inability to agree proved disastrous in the final year of the war as Hitler himself took control of the deployment of the armor.

The panzer and panzergrenadier divisions of the Waffen SS were also caught up in the strategic discussions, slowing their orders to Normandy in response to the D-Day invasion of June 6, 1944. That delay ultimately contributed to their destruction. In the meantime, however, the SS panzer and panzergrenadier divisions that did confront the Allied lodgement in Normandy in the summer of 1944 fought hard and long, impeding the advance of the British and Americans, but paying a terrible price. Once committed these divisions were true to their reputation as fierce, fanatical combat formations dedicated to Nazi ideology and men willing to die for their Führer.

And they did die, thousands of them, under a relentless storm of artillery, air attacks, naval gunfire, and the thrusts of Allied ground troops toward the frontier of the Third Reich. Nevertheless, the Waffen

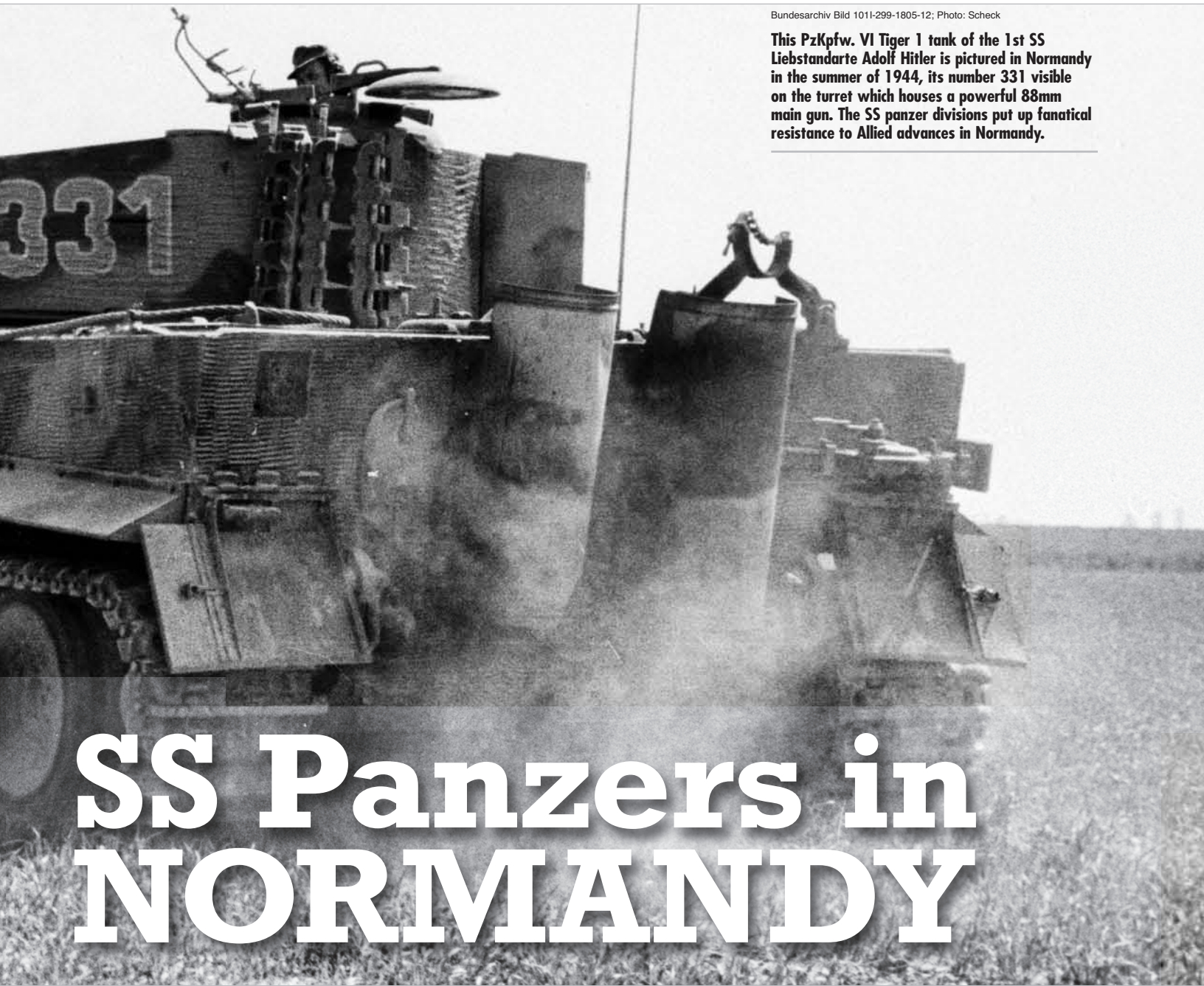
ACHTUNG!

SS exacted a heavy toll in lives and equipment while sacrificing its strength to halt the enemy in Normandy. Highly motivated and led by dedicated veteran officers, the Waffen SS soldier was deployed with the best weaponry available. From early June to late August 1944, no fewer than six Waffen SS divisions—1st SS Panzer Division Leibstandarte Adolf Hitler, 2nd SS Panzer Division Das Reich, 9th SS Panzer Division Hohenstaufen, 10th SS Panzer Division Frundsberg, 12th SS Panzer Division Hitlerjugend, and 17th SS Panzergrenadier Division Götz von Berlichingen—were joined by the 101st and 102nd SS Heavy Panzer Battalions in the death struggle.

The SS panzer divisions were equipped with tanks that had been proven superior to Allied types in tank-versus-tank combat. The 29-ton PzkPfw. IV medium tank, workhorse of the German formations, mounted a 75mm cannon, while the 45-ton PzKpfw. V Panther, perhaps the best all-around tank of World War II, was outfitted with the long-barreled high-velocity 75mm cannon, and the 56-ton PzKpfw. VI Tiger mounted a deadly 88mm high-velocity cannon.

The German guns generally possessed greater range than those of Allied tanks, and the heavier armor protection of the German armored fighting vehicles offered enhanced survivability. The panzergrenadiers, or armored infantrymen, were equipped with the reliable Mauser K98k bolt action rifle, squad level automatic weapons such as the MP-38 and MP-40 submachine guns, the first-generation assault rifle known as the Sturmgewehr 43, and the superb MG-34 and MG-42 machine guns, which possessed cyclical rates of fire well above those of any Allied weapon.

The defending SS troops and German Army troops in Normandy held two additional advantages. The first was the hedgerow country, or *bocage*—centuries-old earthen mounds



Bundesarchiv Bild 101I-299-1805-12; Photo: Scheck

This PzKpfw. VI Tiger 1 tank of the 1st SS Liebstandarte Adolf Hitler is pictured in Normandy in the summer of 1944, its number 331 visible on the turret which houses a powerful 88mm main gun. The SS panzer divisions put up fanatical resistance to Allied advances in Normandy.

SS Panzers in NORMANDY

Bundesarchiv Bild 146-1984-031-14A; Photo: Wilfried Woscidlo

Troops of the 12th SS Hitler Jugend pause on a country road during the pivotal Normandy campaign in the summer of 1944. In the foreground is a VW Kübel vehicle, while a SdKfz. 251 medium infantry fighting vehicle sits on the road and a Panzer IV medium tank with side armor plating is shown in the distance.

that divided fields and pastures in peacetime but in wartime provided excellent concealment and turned every country lane in Normandy into a killing ground. Secondly, the SS soldier was defending his Fatherland—imbued with Nazi ideology, the concept of defeat was unimaginable for him.

However, the SS formations and others throughout France were restricted in their movement during the critical early phase of the battle for Normandy. Tactical commanders were prohibited from engaging the enemy at full strength without permission from Hitler, who slept until 10 a.m. on the morning of June 6 and refused to allow the immediately available armored reserve, the 12th SS Panzer Hitlerjugend and the army's Panzer Lehr Divisions, to move forward until late in the afternoon. Only the tanks of the veteran 21st Panzer Division counterattacked in any strength on D-Day, driving through a gap between two of the British invasion beaches to the English Channel coast before lack of reinforcements to exploit the gains compelled it to retire.

As the early hours ticked away, the opportunity to destroy the Allied beachhead in Normandy faded as well. Rather than mounting a concerted armoured counterattack, the Germans were forced to commit their tanks piecemeal in the face of growing Allied strength. Nevertheless, they blunted the spearheads of British General Bernard Montgomery's attempts to capture the city of Caen, seven miles from the coast and dominating an open plateau that provided favorable terrain for tanks all the way to Paris. Although Caen was a British D-Day objective, their failure to capture the city brought on a brutal fight that lasted a month. The panzers were further stretched to contain the American drive under General Omar Bradley to capture the town of Carentan to the west and then strike across the neck of the Cotentin Peninsula to isolate the major French port of Cherbourg.

The 2nd SS Panzer Division Das Reich was ordered north from Toulouse in southern France, but its movement was seriously hampered by the French Underground, which sabotaged rail lines and harassed the division the entire way. Allied fighter bombers also exacted a heavy toll in men and tanks, delaying the arrival of Das Reich in Normandy until June 12. The 17th SS Panzergrenadier Division Götz von Berlichingen experienced similar delays before reaching Carentan on June 11, and the 1st SS Panzer Division Leibstandarte Adolf Hitler was held north of the Seine River as the Germans still believed the major Allied landing might take place at the Pas de Calais. The Leibstandarte was not ordered to Normandy until late June, its vanguard arriving on the night of the 27th. The heart of the Leibstandarte did not reach Normandy until the first week of July.

At 5 p.m. on June 6, nearly a full day after the Allied landings in Normandy had commenced, the 12th SS was set in motion from Lisieux, its 20,540 troops aboard 229 tanks, 658 halftracks and self-propelled assault guns, and roughly 2,000 trucks. Allied air attacks and streams of refugees slowed its progress during a 65-mile trek. By sundown, only about 30 percent of its strength had reached the marshalling area southwest of Caen. The Hitlerjugend, formed in 1943 and comprised of young men of the Hitler Youth born during the first six months of 1926, had not seen action previously and was spoiling for a fight.

The tip of the Hitlerjugend spear was the 25th Panzergrenadier Regiment under Colonel Kurt "Panzer" Meyer, which came up on the left of 21st Panzer, facing the Canadian 3rd Division. Meyer commanded a battalion of PzKpfw. IV tanks and three infantry battalions. He climbed to the top of a tower at the Abbey of Ardenne on the western outskirts of Caen and peered through his field glasses. Canadian tanks and infantry were moving toward Carpiquet airfield. He smiled, "Little fish! We'll throw them back

into the sea in the morning."

At approximately 10 a.m. on June 7, Meyer was ready to attack. A column of Canadian tanks rumbled past, and he waited until they topped a ridgeline south of Franqueville, barely 200 yards from his hidden tanks, antitank guns, and panzergrenadiers. Then, he gave the order to fire. One German soldier remembered, "The lead enemy tanks began smoking, and I saw how the crews bailed out. Other tanks exploded in pieces in the air. A panzer Mark IV suddenly stopped, burning, tongues of flame shooting out of the turret."

The ferocity of the Hitlerjugend ambush drove the Canadians back two miles before Allied artillery and naval gunfire disrupted the pursuit. The big Allied guns destroyed at least six German tanks, while Canadian antitank guns fought back as the 3rd Division regrouped around the town of Buron. One German tank erupted in flames, and a horrified SS soldier recalled, "The shell tore off the tank commander's leg, SS Scharführer Esser, but I heard he got out of the turret later. Phosphorous shells caused the tank to instantly burst into flames all over. I was helpless. I made my way back with third degree burns, toward our grenadiers following up. They recoiled from me on sight as if they had seen a ghoul."

The fanatical soldiers of the Hitlerjugend had succeeded in stalling the Canadian drive. During their baptism of fire, they had destroyed at least 28 Canadian tanks, and when the division commander was killed by Allied naval bombardment, Meyer was promoted to lead the entire 12th SS Panzer Division.

The following day, Field Marshal Rommel, commander of German Army Group B, organized a major armored thrust to rupture the Allied lodgement, committing the 12th SS and the 21st Panzer and Panzer Lehr Divisions from the army. Devastating Allied naval gunfire and inadequate command and control doomed the attack, while a British armored advance had been scheduled for the same timeframe and added to the general confusion.

Convinced that the opportunity to throw the Allies into the English Channel had passed, Rommel transitioned to a defensive posture, deploying nearly 600 tanks, including those of the 12th SS, on a front from Caen to Caumont in the east, while fewer than 100 were positioned near the western invasion beachhead. The 12th SS anchored positions north and west of Caen, an antiaircraft battery and the 1st Battalion, 26th Panzergrenadier Regiment along with 15 tanks tasked with holding Carpiquet airfield.

Seizing the initiative, Montgomery launched an attack with his veteran 7th Armoured Division, the famed "Desert Rats" of the North African campaign. Intent on driving the Germans out of Caen—and drawing the enemy armor onto his own front to assist the Americans further west in their efforts to break out of the beachhead—Montgomery focused on Hill 112, a commanding position just south of Carpiquet. On June 12-13, the British spearhead raced around the flank of 21st Panzer and into the hamlet of Villers-Bocage, threatening the rear of Panzer Lehr.

However, on the morning of the 13th a stark reversal sent the British reeling. The 101st SS Heavy Tank Battalion, a component of the I SS Panzer Corps later attached to the 1st SS Panzer Division Leibstandarte, had run the gauntlet of Allied fighter bombers from near Lisieux, and at the head of a reconnaissance element Lieutenant Michael Wittmann, commander of its 2nd Company, stood in the turret of his Tiger tank, watching a British armoured column exiting Villers-Bocage and pulling to the side of the national highway near the crest of Hill 213, which dominated the road to Caen.

Wittmann was already a legend in the German armed forces, an armor ace on the Eastern Front with 117 kills against Red Army tanks to his credit and the Knight's Cross at his throat.

Singlehandedly, Wittmann burst from cover on the opposite side of the hill and attacked the armoured vehicles of the 4th County of London Yeomanry and its accompanying 1st Battalion, Rifle Brigade. Wittmann destroyed the leading halftrack, rumbled along a parallel cart path and knocked out the rear tank. He then ravaged the vehicles trapped in between.

Within minutes the British column was a shambles as plumes of smoke twisted skyward. Joined by three more Tigers and a lone PzKpfw. IV, Wittmann rolled into Villers-Bocage, where other targets were blasted. British antitank guns got into action and disabled three German tanks. Wittmann's Tiger lost a track. He dismounted, evaded capture, and later returned to the scene with other tanks. When the fighting at Villers-Bocage ended, 25 British tanks and 28 other armored vehicles had been destroyed. Wittmann was personally credited with 11 tanks and 13 other vehicles.

After the massacre at Villers Bocage led by SS tank ace Michael Wittman, German soldiers aboard a Schwimmwagen inspect the wreckage of armored vehicles and destroyed buildings.

Meanwhile, the Hitlerjugend battered the British 6th Armoured Regiment at Les Mesnil-Patry, destroying 37 tanks in a fight that finally ended on June 14. Elements of Panzer Lehr and Das Reich, finally on the field in strength, stabilized the front around Caen, extinguishing any Allied hope of capturing the city by swift maneuver.

To the west, American paratroopers of the

101st Airborne Division pushed the remnants of the German 6th Parachute Regiment out of Carentan after a bloody street brawl, allowing the U.S. V and VII Corps to consolidate a 60-mile front stabbing 10 miles deep into coastal Normandy. On June 10, a handful of American paratroopers from the 82nd and 101st Airborne Divisions, some of whom had come to earth far from their designated D-Day drop zones, stymied the thrust of the 17th SS Panzergrenadier Division Götz von Berlichingen toward Carentan to support the defenders. The lightly armed Americans lost 32 men killed but held up the panzergrenadiers for two precious days.

The delay had been costly, but the 17th SS and 6th Parachute mounted a fierce counterattack on June 13. SS Panzergrenadier Regiment 37 engaged the 502nd and 506th Parachute Infantry Regiments, 101st Airborne, about a mile southwest of Carentan near Hill 30. The outgunned Americans were about to be overrun when 60 tanks of Combat Command A, 2nd Armored Division supported by infantry from the U.S. 29th Division stopped the Germans, securing Carentan and the linkup of the two American corps. Known as the "Battle of Bloody Gulch," the sharp action cost the Germans four tanks, 43 killed, and 89 wounded. For the rest of the month, the 17th SS battled the Americans around St. Lo and Coutances, losing more than half its strength.

The bitter battle for Caen continued virtually without respite. On June 22, the British 11th Armoured Division thrust southward again toward Hill 112 and collided with the battered Hitlerjugend. Still full of fight, the teenage fanatics sacrificed themselves. Twenty-year-old SS panzergrenadier Emil Dürr unleashed a shoulder-fired Panzerfaust antitank weapon against a British M4 Sherman medium tank. Setting the tank on fire, he rushed forward and threw a "sticky bomb" against its side. When the explosive failed to adhere, Dürr clutched the charge against the side of the tank, killing himself with its detonation.

Bundesarchiv Bild 101II-M2KBK-771-31; Photo: Willi Höppner

Soldiers of the 9th SS Panzer Division Hohenstaufen scout a country lane while a SdKfz. 250 infantry fighting vehicle provides cover. The division suffered under constant air attack while en route to Normandy, and its arrival was delayed until June 26, 1944.

Meanwhile, Hitler ordered the II SS Panzer Corps, including the 9th and 10th SS Panzer Divisions, to disengage from the Red Army in Ukraine and move to Normandy. They prepared a major counterattack and intended to relieve the depleted 12th SS and Panzer Lehr.

However, Montgomery mounted Operation Epsom, a major push to take Caen from the west, on June 26. He deployed three infantry divisions and two armoured brigades with the fire of more than 700 artillery pieces in support. The Hitlerjugend fought with grim determination, but the British captured Hill 112 on June 28.

Colonel Meyer wrote of the intense combat near the town of Fontenoy. "The tank versus tank action starts. Thick, black, oily smoke rolls over the battlefield. Battle weary grenadiers wave to me yelling out jokes, their eyes shining. It mystifies me where these youngsters are getting the strength to live through such a storm of steel. They assure me again and again that they will defend the rubble to the last round and will hold their positions against all comers."

The 9th and 10th SS Panzer Divisions arrived while Operation Epsom was underway. All thought of a German counterattack fell apart in the confusion of battle and under the accurate shelling of Allied warships off the coast. The large-caliber naval shells were capable of obliterating a German tank or tossing a big Tiger end over end like a toy. The SS counterattack, such as it was, caused the British to pause. On June 30, they withdrew from their bridgehead across the Odon River. The Scottish 15th Division had suffered more than 2,300 casualties, while the 12th SS, bled white, had lost 800.

In early July, the American VIII Corps struck south toward Coutances and managed to advance only seven miles in 12 days when two battalions of Das Reich fought beside the 15th Parachute Regiment, inflicting about 10,000 casualties on the attackers. At the same time, the VII Corps advanced southwest from Carentan and ran into a meatgrinder. The U.S. 4th Infantry Division alone lost 2,300 killed and wounded in combat with the 17th SS Panzergrenadier Division and the 6th Parachute Regiment. The performance of the 17th SS was remarkable. It was not fully combat ready when summoned to Normandy from Thouars. Forty percent of its officers and non-commissioned officers had not reached the combat zone. Its tanks and assault guns had also arrived in piecemeal fashion due to lack of transport and Allied air interdiction. By late June, it had lost 900 casualties and one of its panzer regiments fielded only 18 self-propelled assault guns.

Despite the stand of a battle group that included a regiment of the 17th and three infantry battalions, the U.S. XIX Corps made rapid progress toward the town of St. Lo before Das Reich temporarily halted the advance. Panzer Lehr counterattacked but retired under heavy air attack. St. Lo fell to the Americans on June 18, and though Allied

Imperial War Museum

British soldiers sit atop the hulls of refueled and rearmed Cromwell tanks near the French village of Caen. A D-Day objective, Caen was not in British hands for more than a month after numerous thrusts to capture the crossroads and communication center were thwarted.

progress in Normandy was sluggish, the Germans formations were losing combat efficiency swiftly, forced to fight like fire brigades, parrying every Allied thrust.

Stepping up the pressure, the British renewed their effort to take Caen on July 8. During Operation Charnwood, the 3rd Canadian Division fought panzergrenadiers for control of Carpiquet, while the remnants of Hitlerjugend were pounded from the air with 2,600 tons of Allied bombs. Caen was devastated and the British lost 103 tanks while fighting amid the rubble. One 12th SS crew exemplified the ferocity of the German defense, destroying three British tanks, firing its last round, and dying to a man in its gun pit during hand-to-hand fighting.

At long last, Colonel Meyer defied a stand fast order from Hitler and withdrew what was left of the Hitlerjugend because he could not "watch those youngsters being sacrificed to a senseless order." After Charnwood, the 12th SS counted only a few hundred infantrymen and 40 of its original complement of 150 tanks.

A week later, Montgomery launched Operation Goodwood, intended to complete the capture of Caen. After a heavy air bombardment, British tanks rolled southward toward Bourguébus Ridge, where the Germans had assembled a breakwater of more than 500 field guns with a mobile reserve of roughly 80 tanks. By afternoon, a counterattack from the 1st SS Leibstandarte and 21st Panzer stopped the British. The Leibstandarte's 2nd Battalion, 1st SS Panzer Regiment moved 13 Panther tanks forward, engaging 60 British tanks and destroying 20 while occupying the village of Soliers. The 1st Battalion, 1st SS Panzer Regiment fought the British 9th Armoured Brigade to a standstill. The Germans held the ridge for two more days, withdrawing only after destroying 500 tanks, more than 30 percent of the British armored strength in Normandy. Montgomery at last claimed Caen, but the German had prevented a breakout into open country.

By late July, weeks of hard fighting had shredded the panzer divisions of the SS and German Army in Normandy. Nevertheless, Allied formations remained hung up in the bocage and unable to execute a rapid advance across France to the German frontier. On July 25, Operation Cobra changed the dynamic of the campaign. Following saturation bombing, three American divisions plunged through the German lines. Panzer Lehr was virtually annihilated. Das Reich and the 17th SS Panzergrenadier Divisions fought stubbornly, but the floodgates had opened. British progress outside Caen was slow, but the American drive threatened to completely outflank the Germans in Normandy.

On August 7, the Germans commenced a desperate effort to cut off the American advance at its narrowest point near the town of Mortain. Das Reich, the Leibstandarte, and elements of the 17th SS joined the 2nd and 116th Panzer Divisions in a counterattack ordered by Hitler, codenamed Operation Lüttich. Immediately, the timetable of the attack, poised to hit the U.S. 30th Division, was upset as a damaged Allied plane crashed into the lead Leibstandarte tank, temporarily halting the advance. A single American infantry platoon, 66 soldiers, supported by artillery threw back an SS regiment at Abbaye Blanche. Das Reich advanced four miles, capturing Mortain and surrounding the American 2nd Battalion, 120th Infantry Regiment on nearby Hill 314 at a cost of at least 14 precious tanks.

American artillery fire thwarted an attempt by soldiers of the 17th SS to claim the high ground. Resupplied by air, the Americans clung to Hill 314 for four more days. The German attack petered out elsewhere and actually contributed to a catastrophe. With the bulk of the remaining German armor concentrated in the south, the

Continued on page 70

Bitter Bl

The Boeing B-29 Superfortress bomber nicknamed Dinah Might struggled to stay in the air on the afternoon of March 4, 1945. She had been shot up during the course of a perilous bombing mission over the Japanese capital of Tokyo and was critically low on fuel. The pilot, Lieutenant Fred Malo, fought to maintain control of the heavy aircraft.

Making it back to base on the island of Tinian in the distant Marianas was a long shot. But providence was smiling on Malo and his 10 crewmen that day. They probably could get to Iwo Jima, a speck of land in the Volcano Islands, 650 nautical miles south of his target for the day's mission. Malo requested and got permission for an emergency landing on the principal of three airfields located on the pork-chop-shaped landmass that was only eight square miles square.

When Iwo Jima came within sight, Malo dropped from the thick cloud cover and slapped down on the strip. A wing snapped a telephone pole as the big silver bomber came to a shuddering stop just 50 feet from the end of the runway. Within a half hour, temporary repairs had been made, the fuel tanks were topped off, and the plane was airborne, headed once again for Tinian.

Dinah Might was the first of many crippled aircraft engaged in the strategic bombing campaign against Japan that found a temporary haven on Iwo Jima, and its crewmen were among an estimated 25,000 American airmen whose lives were probably saved when they avoided ditching in the Pacific Ocean.

On the day of Dinah Might's salvation, U.S. Marines were still fighting to secure Iwo Jima. For two long weeks they had battled a determined Japanese enemy who was most often burrowed deep in a fortified labyrinth of caves and tunnels and preferred death in combat to surrender. Many of those weary Marines who saw the big bomber descend from the overcast sky and land safely stopped the business of killing for a moment to celebrate life. They cheered loudly and then took up their ugly task anew.

THREE U.S. MARINE DIVISIONS FOUGHT MORE THAN A MONTH TO SECURE MOUNT SURIBACHI AND OTHER JAPANESE STRONGPOINTS ON THE ISLAND.

Although the Marines had been told why they were fighting for the desolate island, such events validated their purpose. But three more weeks of bitter fighting lay ahead before Iwo Jima was secured. When the battle ended, the Marines had suffered 6,821 killed and 17,000 wounded. The defending Japanese force of 25,000 men was nearly annihilated. Only 216 prisoners were captured.

The epic struggle for Iwo Jima was the largest and bloodiest battle in the history of the U.S. Marine Corps. It was a bitter fight with no quarter given and none expected. Iwo Jima would certainly provide an important staging area for the planned invasion of Okinawa scheduled later in the spring of 1945, but there was another immediate reason for its capture.

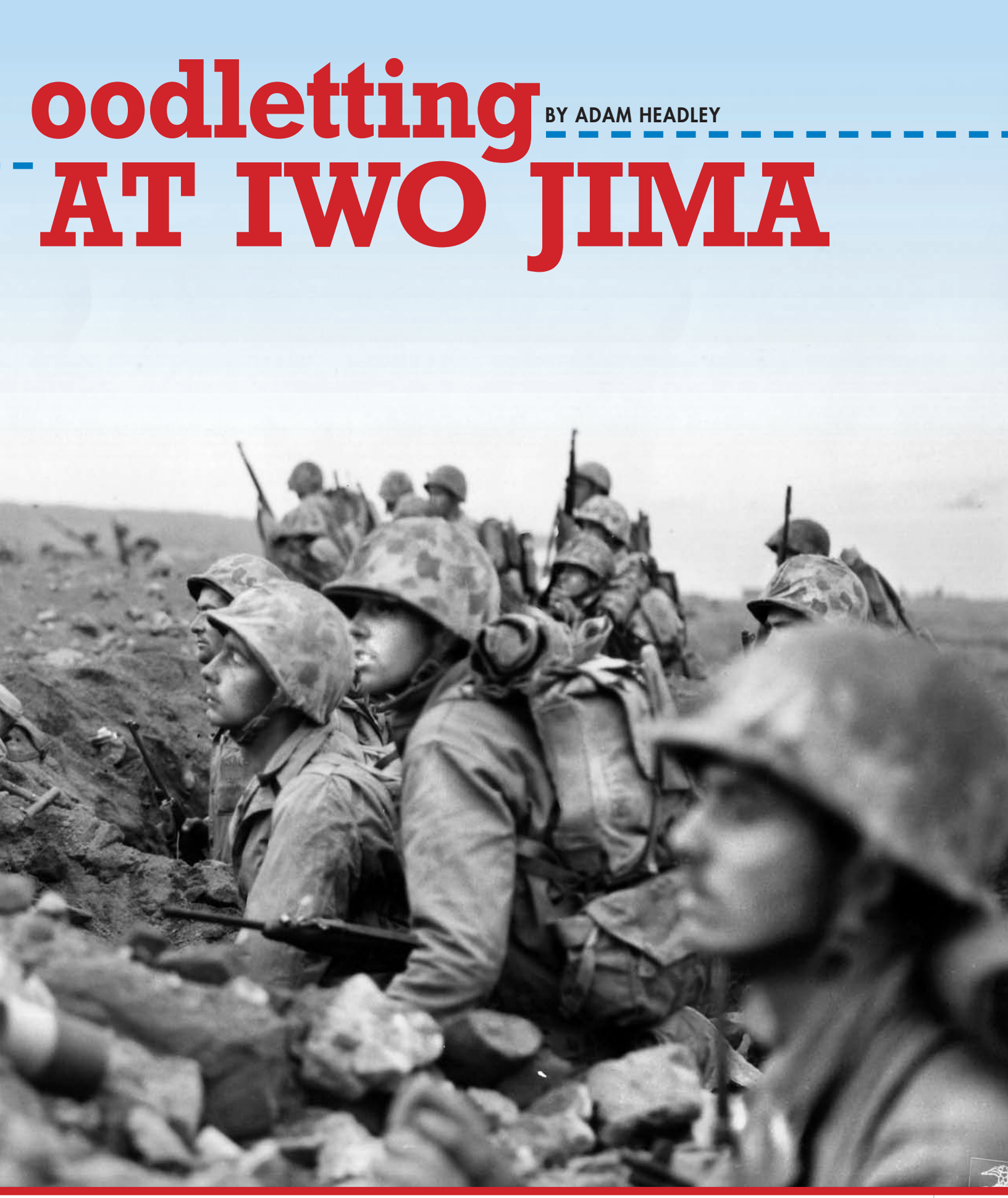
The seizure of the Marianas in the summer of 1944 provided bases on the islands of Guam, Saipan, and Tinian, from which the big bombers of the U.S. Army Air Forces could attack major Japanese cities and military and industrial targets. Although the Marianas brought

Five hundred yards inland from the invasion beaches at Iwo Jima, Marines of General Clifton B. Cates' 4th Division await orders to advance on Motoyama Airfield No. 1, one of three airstrips on the island that would facilitate the return of damaged B-29 heavy bombers en route to bases in the Marianas after attacking Japan.

National Archives

oodletting AT IWO JIMA

BY ADAM HEADLEY



the home islands of Honshu, Kyushu, Shikoku, and Hokkaido within range of the B-29s, the flight was still long and perilous.

One of the most direct air routes to Japan drew the bombers dangerously close to Iwo Jima, close enough for Japanese radar to alert antiaircraft units and fighter squadrons that a raid was coming a full two hours before the American planes arrived. Three airstrips, two finished and the other under construction, allowed Japanese fighters to intercept American bombers en route to their targets and on the return flights, when crippled planes made easy kills. Occasionally, Japanese planes even ventured from Iwo Jima to bomb and strafe the American bases in the Marianas.

Naval History and Heritage Command

During the initial landings on Iwo Jima on February 19, 1945, U.S. Marines of the Fifth Division take heavy Japanese fire as they struggle up a slope off Red Beach 1. The black volcanic sand of Iwo Jima was difficult for Marines to traverse, and tracked and wheeled vehicles often bogged down.

By November 1944, the stepped-up strategic bombing campaign against Japan was in full swing; however, senior American commanders knew well before that time that Iwo Jima had to be taken.

At 6:45 a.m. on February 19, 1945, Admiral Richmond Kelly Turner barked the order, "Land the landing force!" The naval guns thundered, followed by the air attacks. In half an hour, the LVTs carrying the Marines of the first wave were crunching onto the shoreline. If anything, they were punctual, arriving within two minutes of H-hour, the exact time prescribed.

One Japanese observer noted that the Marines hit the beaches like a tidal wave, swarming ashore. However, most of the enemy gunners did not open fire. They had been instructed to wait until the beaches were literally choked with men and materiel. That order had come from Lieutenant General Tadamichi Kuribayashi, the commander of all Japanese forces on Iwo Jima.

The island was honeycombed with tunnels. Cave entrances were fortified. Machine-gun nests and artillery emplacements were positioned with interlocking fields of fire. Spider holes, large enough for only a single soldier, were dug into the volcanic terrain. The Japanese constructed pillboxes and bunkers that were reinforced with steel, concrete, and heaps of sand to absorb the shockwaves of plunging naval fire.

A veteran of the conquest of Hong Kong, Kuribayashi had served as the chief of staff of the 23rd Army and then as commander of the prestigious Imperial Guard Division in Tokyo. He embraced the concept of defense in depth and planned to fortify and defend the interior of the island and Mount Suribachi, a 550-foot extinct volcano at its southwestern tip, exacting a heavy toll. He exhorted his troops to take 10 American lives for every Japanese soldier killed in the desperate fight to come.

More than 5,000 Marines came ashore amid crashing surf and moved inland. In an hour and a half, the 28th Marines had covered the 700 yards to the far shore, taking increasing casualties along the way. The 27th Marines moved steadily to the fringe of Airfield No. 1 by noon. Coming off the Yellow invasion beaches, the 23rd Marines was held up by a pair of pillboxes during its advance toward the eastern edge of the airfield. No armored support was forthcoming, but they slugged away.

Led by Lieutenant Colonel Justice M. Chambers, the 3rd Battalion, 25th Marines was hit hard by enemy fire as it attempted to move up the sloping Blue beaches toward the Rock Quarry. Nearby, the 1st Battalion, 25th Marines had its own trouble with the terrain and increasing Japanese small-arms fire, managing about 300 yards in 30 minutes.

Kuribayashi watched the drama unfold. Just before 10 a.m., he passed the order to unleash a shattering barrage of artillery, mortar, and machine-gun fire on the invasion beaches clogged with Marines and their machines. Veteran Marines remember the ensuing rain of shells as the most intense they ever experienced. Shells burst along the length of the 3,000-yard beachhead.

For an hour, the Marines on the beaches were pummeled. As they were pinpointed however, a number of the Japanese positions were silenced by naval gunfire and planes that strafed and dropped bombs and napalm canisters.

The difficult first day on Iwo Jima left 2,400 Marines killed or wounded. Thirty-five more murderous days were to follow before the island was declared secure. Among those killed early in the action was Gunnery Sergeant John Basilone, a recipient of the Medal of Honor for his heroism on Guadalcanal. While leading a machine-gun platoon of the 1st Battalion, 27th Marines in an attack on the edge of Motoyama Airfield No. 1, Basilone was fatally wounded by an exploding mortar round.

Both Generals Clifton Cates and Keller Rockey, commanders of the 4th and 5th Marine Divisions respectively, had committed their reserves, the 24th and 26th Marines, by evening on the 19th, and the cliffs surrounding the Rock Quarry were in the hands of the 3rd Battalion, 25th Marines, which lost 22 officers and 500 riflemen in the day-long fight. After dark, Kuribayashi dispatched teams of infiltrators to harass the Marines, many of whom expected a banzai charge that never came.

Rain began to fall on February 20, and bad weather disrupted reinforcement attempts. The waterlogged 21st Marines came in on Febru-

ABOVE: Wrecked landing craft litter the shore line at Iwo Jima, with shell craters and foxholes also visible in this aerial photograph. The Japanese held fire until the beach was crowded with American men and machines, while strong tides and surf also played havoc with the landings. INSET: Japanese General Tadamichi Kuribayashi supervised the construction of extensive defensive strongpoints on the island and died during the ensuing battle.

Both: National Archives

ary 21 to relieve the 23rd Marines, who had secured Motoyama Airfield No. 1. The 26th and 27th Marines occupied the west side of the airfield, while the 23rd covered 800 yards from the east under murderous fire.

Fighting raged on the Rock Quarry rim. On the 22nd, Lieutenant Colonel Chambers took a Japanese bullet in the chest while urging his 3rd battalion, 25th Marines forward. When Chambers was shot, all three battalion commanders of the 25th Marines had been wounded before the Rock Quarry was taken. He survived to receive the Medal of Honor.

The 28th Marines, commanded by Colonel Harry B. Liversedge, prepared to renew its mission to take Mount Suribachi and dislodge the 2,000 enemy soldiers who inhabited a maze of interconnected tunnels, caves, and strongpoints along the high ground. Nicknamed "Harry the Horse," Liversedge was well aware that his Marines had lost 400 casualties on the first day of fighting; however, the 1st and 2nd Battalions had reached the base of the mountain. While the 3rd Battalion successfully battered its way to the foot of Suribachi on the 20th, the 1st and 2nd Battalions slipped around the flanks in an attempt to surround it and then entrenched.

Just to reach the positions they occupied, the 28th Marines were obliged to neutralize as many as 70 concrete blockhouses and pillboxes that dotted the base of Suribachi. At least another 50 strongpoints were positioned to open fire at them during the first 100 feet of their ascent. Nevertheless, on the third day of the battle Harry Liversedge's Marines were ready to directly assault Mount Suribachi.

The 28th Marines moved out. Naval gunfire and 105mm artillery assisted the 1st Battalion in its ascent along the west face, but the fighting was savage. Marines placed covering fire on the mouths of caves while intrepid comrades rushed forward and threw satchel charges inside or flipped grenades into gun ports. The Japanese were blasted from concealed positions or sealed inside.

The battle for Suribachi continued throughout the next day as the 28th Marines inched upward. At the end of the day, patrols from the 1st and 2nd Battalions reached the extreme southwestern tip of Iwo Jima at Tobiishi Point.

At 8 a.m. on February 23, the 25 riflemen of the 3rd Platoon, Company E, 2nd Battalion, 28th Marines—along with a few replacements from other Company E outfits that raised their number to 40—moved out with orders to reach the summit of Suribachi. Under the command of 1st Lt. Harold G. Schrier, the Marines picked their way forward. Japanese snipers took shots at them, and individual enemy soldiers jumped up from spider holes. The Marines tossed grenades, fired into the mouths of caves, and cut down those enemy soldiers that lunged toward them.

Schrier's patrol, visible across the island and some distance out to sea as it snaked its way to the top of the mountain, had specific orders to raise the U.S. flag, in this case a small 54-inch by 28-inch example of Old Glory, from the summit. Marine photographer Louis R. Lowery recorded their progress, asking them to stop once and display the flag as he snapped the shutter of his camera.

Once they fought their way to the crater, the Marines looked around for a suitable flagpole and found a length of pipe. Schrier and three

Naval History and Heritage Command

ABOVE: With the heights of Mount Suribachi looming in the distance, Marines of the Fifth Division move inland from the invasion beaches at Iwo Jima after landing on February 19, 1945. RIGHT: The island of Iwo Jima encompasses only about eight square miles. Its distinctive shape is reminiscent of a pork chop with Mount Suribachi at its extreme southwestern end.

Map © 2022 Philip Schwartzberg, Meridian Mapping, Minneapolis, MN

other Marines lashed the flag to the pipe. At approximately 10:30 a.m., the makeshift pole was planted and the small flag snapped in the breeze. The Marines below began to cheer. Whistles blew aboard ships.

General Holland Smith was escorting Secretary of the Navy James V. Forrestal, who had come to observe the operations. When the secretary saw the banner, he exclaimed, "The raising of that flag means a Marine Corps for another 500 years!"

Bursts of rifle fire and a few grenades were heaved from hidden positions. A Japanese officer sprinted into the open wielding a sword. One Marine stepped forward with his .45-caliber pistol, but it misfired and hedove out of the way, and the Japanese officer was riddled by bullets from a dozen Marine rifles.

About three hours after Schrier's patrol successfully completed its mission, Lieutenant Colonel Chandler Johnson, commander of the 2nd Battalion, 28th Marines, decided the original flag was too small. A runner was sent to the beach to find a larger flag. He returned from the LST-779 with a replacement that measured eight feet by four feet, eight inches. A second patrol delivered the flag to the summit of Suribachi, and Associated Press photographer Joe Rosenthal decided to follow along.

When Rosenthal reached the crater, the raising of the second flag was already in progress. He tried not to obstruct the view of Marine William Genaust, filming with a movie camera. "Hey Bill! There it goes!" he yelled.

"Out of the corner of my eye, I had seen the men start the flag up," Rosenthal remembered. "I swung my camera around and shot the scene. That is how the picture was taken, and when you take a picture like that, you don't come away saying you got a great shot. You don't know."

Rosenthal captured on film a moment that defined the courage and fortitude of the U.S. Marine Corps and the will of a nation to see the war through to final victory. The image remains the most iconic symbol of the American fighting man in World War II, and perhaps the most iconic war photograph ever taken.

Since the enduring photograph captured the second flag raising, some observers declared that it had been staged. They were wrong. Rosenthal's film was flown to Guam and developed. Associated Press editor John Bodkin knew it was something special and blurted, "Here's one for all time!" He flashed the photo to the AP office in New York, and within 18 hours of the event it was in distribution.

Although the moment of the flag raising had electrified the Marines on Iwo Jima and those within sight of it at sea, the Japanese were far from finished.

The fall of Suribachi was a serious blow to Kuribayashi's scheme of defense. Still, he took cold comfort in the performance of his command, particularly the skillful handling of his artillery by Colonel Chosaku Kaido, whose prominent blockhouse on the flat Motoyama Plateau, an area the Marines nicknamed the Turkey Knob, seemed impregnable to American fire. Marines came to grudgingly respect the fighting prowess of the Japanese soldier on Iwo Jima, and most agreed that Kuribayashi, who they were unaware was even on the island until intelligence confirmed his presence on February 27, was the best defensive commander they faced in the Pacific.

General Schmidt's northward thrust on Iwo Jima began on February 24, and the enemy's

main defensive line awaited. Motoyama Airfield No. 2 proved a killing ground. Everywhere the coordinated Marine offensive broke down into individual and squad size actions.

On the same day, General Schmidt moved his headquarters to Iwo Jima from a command ship offshore. During the next several days, the 3rd Marine Division's 12th Artillery joined the 13th and 14th Artillery Regiments of the 5th and 4th Marine Divisions on the island. The last major infantry reserve was the 3rd Marines, under the command of Holland Smith at the expeditionary force level, and Schmidt made the first of several requests for the unit's release, but these troops were never committed despite the need for reinforcements. Eventually, in a controversial move, Holland Smith ordered the 3rd Marines to retire to Guam.

For more than a week, the Marines struggled to take control of Motoyama Airfield No. 2 and the series of hills and ridges to the north. Fire support was problematic as the Marine artillery was often too light to deal with the well-entrenched Japanese.

When elements of the 3rd, 4th, and 5th Marine Divisions turned north to assault Motoyama Airfield No. 2, they were also well aware that their next objectives would include the high ground that lay beyond. During 10 days of heavy fighting, the Marines advanced about 4,000 yards and absorbed a staggering 7,000 killed and wounded.

Elements of the 26th, 27th and 28th Marines fought for several days to occupy Nishi Ridge and then secure Hill 362-A, where the 28th took 200 casualties. On February 27, the 1st Battalion, 27th Marines advanced on the high ground and ran into a complex of Japanese pillboxes spewing machine-gun bullets. A half-track mounting a 75mm gun was called up to blast several of the pillboxes.

Individual Marines with flamethrowers and satchel charges were obliged to take care of the rest, and one of these was 1st Lt. Clair Voss, whose 1st Platoon, Company A pushed ahead to a small knoll and was raked by Japanese fire from several directions. Voss gathered hand grenades and demolition charges and managed to work his way to one of the pillboxes. He tossed a grenade into a firing slit, and the machine guns stopped. Then, he climbed atop the concrete fortification and placed a charge that wrecked the structure with the ensuing explosion. Voss was wounded but survived and received the Navy Cross for his effort. Eight Marines of Company A were killed and 50 wounded on the hill. By March 3, the 5th Marine Division had been in combat for 12 days and taken horrific casualties, 1,000 dead, 349 wounded, and 49 missing.

On the same date, the 26th Marines captured Hill 362-B on the left flank as Company F of its 2nd Battalion took the brunt of the casualties with 47 killed or wounded including the last of the platoon commanders who had landed with the 2nd Battalion on February 19. Some units advanced as far as 600 yards to take the hill, and during the night more than 100 Japanese infiltrators were killed approaching the new Marine positions. The 26th Marines suffered 500 casualties from dawn to dusk at Hill 362-B, and five Medals of Honor were earned in a single day on the island.

Across Iwo Jima, the deadly Japanese concentrations of troops and firepower received colorful nicknames. While the 3rd Battalion, 25th Marines fought at the Rock Quarry, the 28th Marines pushed through a contested area at the base of Suribachi that they dubbed the Jungle of Stone. Now, in front of three Marine divisions that were already depleted, rose several prominent terrain features that would live as infamous reminders of the bloody combat. The defenses in the north of the island were formidable, including Hill 382, the Amphitheater, Turkey Knob, and the small village of Minami. Collectively, these Japanese strongpoints were referred to as the "Meat Grinder."

During the first week of March, the Marines had breached Kuribayashi's main line. However, the price had been high. Despite grievous losses, the Marines were making painful gains. Kuribayashi relocated his command post from the compromised center of Iwo Jima to the north, where his troops would continue to resist.

From February 26-28, the 23rd Marines fought to capture Hill 382, a steep warren of machine-gun nests, bunkers, and pillboxes, along with a bombed-out Japanese radar station on its crest that had been repurposed as a strongpoint. Japanese tanks were pulled into crevices that obscured them from vision and played their 47mm guns along the avenues of approach.

On March 1, the 2nd Battalion, 24th Marines relieved the 1st Battalion, 23rd Marines at Hill 382, and by the afternoon of the following day the Americans had finally claimed the summit. However, the 2nd Battalion was in need of rest and replacements as Company E had lost four company commanders in a brief but deadly timeframe. Still, the 4th Marine Division pressed forward through the Amphitheater and against the elevation of Turkey Knob, which rose 600 yards south of Hill 382. The Japanese had fortified it with an observation post and communications center ringed by machine-gun and mortar positions.

Down the slope of Turkey Knob, the ground formed a natural bowl—nicknamed the Amphitheater. The Japanese built three con-

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Just prior to the first flag raising on Mount Suribachi, Marines of the 28th Regiment lash the U.S. flag to a length of pipe they located on the summit. The first flag was raised at 10:20 a.m. on February 23, and was followed by the raising of the larger flag made famous in the iconic photo by Joe Rosenthal.

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A Marine crouches as he carries ammunition to a position in the thick of the fighting at Hill 362 in the northern area of Iwo Jima.

centric defensive rings on the southern slope of Turkey Knob, and their guns swept the open ground.

While fighting raged around Hill 382, the 4th Marine Division continued to batter away at the Amphitheater. By the end of February, the 23rd and 25th Marines had reached the hills north and south and were in position to outflank the deadly bowl and Turkey Knob as well. In a single day flamethrower tanks spewed 1,000 gallons of fuel against enemy strongpoints, and on March 2, the Marine pincers reached to within 65 yards of each other in an attempt to close the ring before a torrent of Japanese artillery shells forced them to withdraw.

Nearly two weeks of heavy fighting were required before the 4th Marine Division subdued the salient formed by the double envelopment around the two centers of resistance. At the same time, the division made progress on both flanks.

To the Japanese, it was clear that with every day their grip on the Amphitheater and Turkey Knob were slipping, and on the evening of March 8 the local commanders abandoned defense in depth. Pulling out of their prepared defenses, the Japanese staged an improvised attack that included an old-style banzai charge. While many of the enemy soldiers screamed and charged, others used the terrain to creep toward the seam between the 23rd and 24th Marines. Some Japanese soldiers even dragged stretchers and yelled, "Corpsman!" in an attempt to infiltrate the Marine line. A mortar and artillery barrage preceded the attack, which was chewed up, leaving 650 dead Japanese soldiers littering the ground. The 4th Marine Division was able to reach the east coast of Iwo Jima within 48 hours.

As evening fell on March 10, the 4th Division's right flank had advanced about 1,000 yards with the 2nd and 3rd Battalions, 25th Marines and the 2nd Battalion, 24th Marines serving as a hinge for the closing of a great door. The remainder of the division, including the 1st and 3rd Battalions, 25th Marines, the 1st and 3rd Battalions, 24th Marines, and the 2nd Battalion, 23rd Marines, had fought their way northeast, east, and then southeast, squeezing the Japanese into a perimeter ever closer to the beach.

In the process, the Marines had fought through and around heavily defended hills and then the formidable defenses at Hill 382, the Amphitheater, Turkey Knob, and Minami village while pushing against the strong defenses northeast of Hill 382 quite nearly to the ocean. After days of hard fighting, General Cates formed a provisional battalion within the 4th Marine Division and charged its commander, Lieutenant Colonel Melvin Krulewitch, with cleaning out Japanese strongpoints that had been bypassed.

The general Marine advance northward on Iwo Jima gained impetus during the first week of March. The 3rd Marine Division battled in the center at Hills Peter and 199-Oboe and then moved on to Motoyama village, Hill 362-C, and a rock-strewn area known as Cushman's Pocket.

On March 2, east of Motoyama Airfield No. 3, Lt. Col. Robert E. Cushman and the 2nd Battalion, 9th Marines got into a brawl with diehard Japanese forces. The Marines encircled the enemy stronghold, and after two weeks of brutal combat, the area was clear of Japanese. Two of Cushman's companies, E and F, were decimated with only 10 survivors between them.

The 2nd Battalion, 21st Marines hit Hill 362-C, located beyond Motoyama Airfield No. 3, on March 6 in a resumption of five frustrating days of combat. It was another day of agonizingly slow progress as naval gunfire and artillery barrages failed to loosen the Japanese hold. Company G reached the top of neighboring Hill 357 but lost contact with the unit on its flank and was compelled to pull back.

Finally, just after 2 p.m. on March 7, Company K, 3rd Battalion, 9th Marines seized Hill 362-C, fulfilling its mission without artillery to

avoid tipping off the enemy defenders.

Before dawn, as Company K Marines were clearing what they initially believed to be Hill 362-C, it was discovered that they were actually occupying Hill 331. Their objective for the day remained 250 yards distant. The direction of the attack, however, was correct. As the sun rose, the Marines advanced at 7:15, following a 10-minute artillery barrage. Now alert, the Japanese poured fire into the Marines from their front and flanks, but the attack succeeded.

For three more days, the 3rd Marine Division fought to reach the northeastern beaches on Iwo Jima. Supported by naval gunfire and advancing across broken terrain, the Marines met resistance that was substantial at first, and then began to ebb. Elements of Company A, 1st Battalion, 21st Marines reached the coast on March 10 and filled a canteen full of seawater, promptly sending it back to V Amphibious Corps headquarters with a note attached

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that read, "For inspection, not consumption."

That evening, General Graves Erskine was able to report that organized resistance had ended in the 3rd Marine Division zone. Scattered Japanese resistance, particularly along the cliffs continued for more than a week. During its two-week drive through the interior of Iwo Jima and then to the coast, the 3rd Marine Division lost 3,563 casualties.

After the capture of Hill 362-B, the 5th Marine Division continued to advance to the north and east, jamming the Japanese into an area around Kitano Point in the extreme north. The division's final push on Iwo Jima began on March 11. Artillery and naval guns barked for nearly an hour, but the going was still rough. On March 14-15, the Marines gained roughly 1,000 yards, and then on the 16th the 21st Marines, fresh out of a job in their previous location, came alongside the 26th Marines to

National Archives

ABOVE: A pair of Marines use a flamethrower to eliminate Japanese troops resisting their advance on Iwo Jima. The Japanese garrison of 25,000 was virtually annihilated during more than a month of fighting, many of the defenders burned out or sealed up in their underground tunnels. LEFT: The body of a dead Japanese soldier lies partially buried in front of the entrance to a fortified pillbox.

grind out another 400 yards.

During the heavy fighting on March 13, the 1st Battalion, 27th Marines drove forward 300 yards but was stopped cold by enemy fire coming from a draw in its immediate front. The battalion settled in for the night, but shortly after dark one of the few heavy guns the Japanese had on Iwo Jima began to pound the Marines in their foxholes. The Japanese had abandoned the 8-inch gun, but crept back to open fire.

Carrying a bazooka, Pfc. Donald Schmille set out to silence the enemy weapon. When the Japanese soldiers saw movement, they opened up with rifles, machine guns, and a fusillade of hand grenades. Schmille was undeterred. When he reached an adequate vantage point, he stood up to acquire his target and blasted the position. Schmille undoubtedly saved many Marine lives. He was later awarded the Navy Cross.

By March 19, the 27th and 28th Marines had reached a reached a treacherous 700-yard box canyon on the northwest coast of Iwo Jima. The Marines referred to it simply as the Gorge or Death Valley. It took more than a week of fighting to subdue the 500 Japanese holed up there. M4 Sherman tanks equipped with bulldozer blades cut roads into the contested area, and tanks and halftracks leveled their 75mm guns at Japanese emplacements from point-blank range. Enemy resistance in the Gorge finally came to a violent end on March 25, the 35th day of battle for Iwo Jima.

As the Marines closed in on the remaining enemy troop concentrations, surrender appeals were broadcast in Japanese. Kuribayashi, though, was prepared to die. Although not known, it is believed that he committed suicide on the night of March 25. Some accounts, however, suggest that he died leading a final, desperate attack near Motoyama Airfield No. 2.

The following day, although scattered pockets of resistance were still active across the island, Iwo Jima was declared secure.

Twenty-seven Medals of Honor were presented for gallantry above and beyond the call of duty at Iwo Jima. Twenty-two of these went to Marines, four to Navy Corpsmen, and one to the commander of a Navy landing craft. Fourteen of the Medals were posthumous, and more than one quarter of the 80 Medals of Honor awarded to Marines during World War II were earned at Iwo Jima.

Summarizing the character of the great battle, Admiral Nimitz at far-off Pearl Harbor, declared, "On Iwo island, uncommon valor was a common virtue."

Perhaps Nimitz came nearest to capturing the essence of Marine bravery and sacrifice at Iwo Jima, but even these stirring words resonate as something of an understatement. ■

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U.S. ARMORED INFANTRY AND COMBAT ENGINEERS TAKE A KEY HILLTOP IN ITALY. **BY PATRICK J. CHAISSON**

'I'm Going Up That Mountain!'

Red-hot grenade fragments sliced through First Lieutenant Bill Munson's left arm and shoulder, causing him to fall backwards onto the lip of a German machine gun nest. He saw several enemy soldiers nearby, their distinctively shaped steel helmets silhouetted against the night sky, but was powerless to react. Munson's Thompson submachine gun, which he held in a death-grip with his one good hand, was completely empty.

His only hope of escape was to play dead. Sprawled halfway across the fighting position, Munson kept absolutely still as bullets fired by friend and foe alike snapped by, inches above his head. Miraculously, he was not injured further in this fusillade.

Sometime later, after things quieted down, Munson heard low voices approaching. To his horror, he realized they were not speaking English. A German kicked him hard in the ribs and wrested the Tommy Gun from his grasp. Then the enemy patrol withdrew under fire from a sudden U.S. mortar barrage, leaving him wounded and weaponless—but alive.

First Lieutenant Orville O. "Bill" Munson, commanding Company A, 48th Engineer Combat Battalion (ECB), endured this harrowing ordeal on the slopes of Mt. Porchia, Italy, during the first week of 1944. Two thousand G.I.s repeatedly assaulted its rocky crest January 4-8, only to be hurled back by ferocious enemy counterthrusts. Artillery, machine guns, and antipersonnel mines took a heavy toll, as did bitter winter

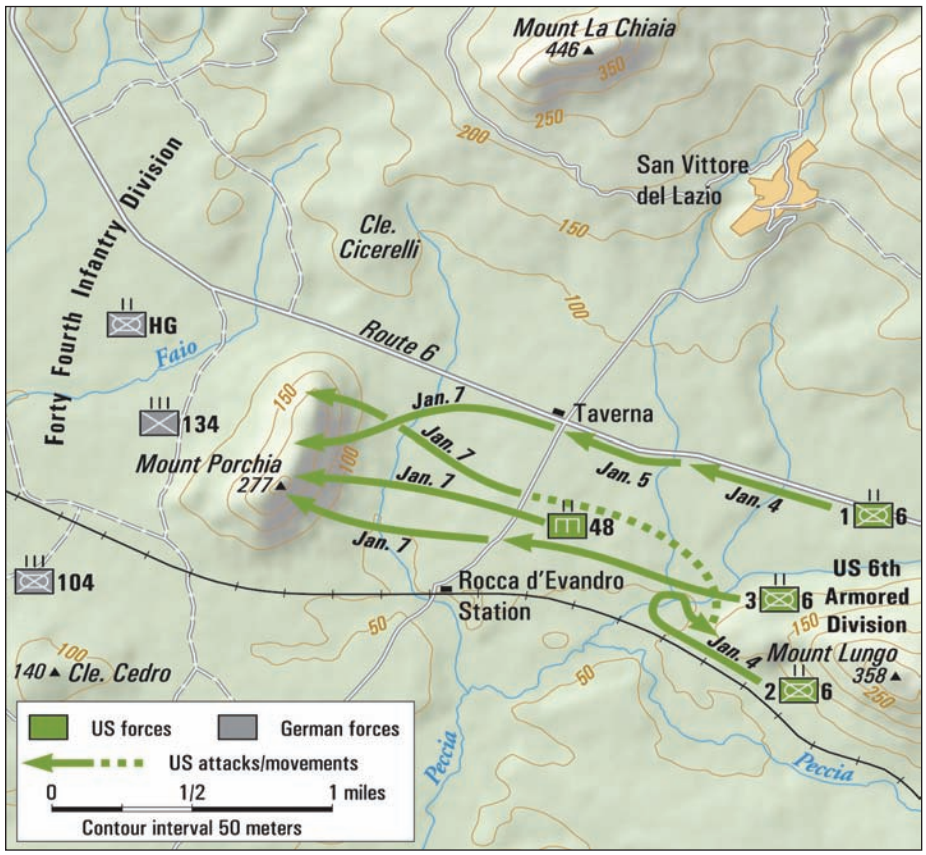
ABOVE: Mount Porchia looms at left in this image, while Mount Chiaia is at right, and the snow-covered peak of Mount Cairo is seen in the distance. American combat engineers fought fiercely to take and hold high ground during the sluggish advance.
LEFT: An American soldier gently removes the detonator from an S-mine, which was capable of severely injuring any man unfortunate enough to step on it. The Germans defending Mount Porchia planted thousands of land mines to impede Allied progress.

All photos: National Archives

weather conditions for which the Americans were wholly unprepared.

In fact, the shortage of fighting men grew so acute that U.S. commanders sent hundreds of highly-specialized combat engineers like Munson into battle fighting as infantry. It was an extreme measure, but one that ultimately succeeded. Allied forces soon put Mt. Porchia to use as a staging area for the next phase of their assault on Rome, 80 miles distant.

For the past six weeks, Lieutenant General Mark W. Clark's Fifth Army had been engaged in a nightmarish campaign to clear Mignano Gap, a seven-mile pass through the mountains of central Italy. Fifth Army's objective was to seize a roadway running through the gap



The American drive to capture Mount Porchia was contested by German troops of the 44th Infantry Division, a formation that was decimated in Russia and reconstituted for defensive fighting in Italy.

known as Route 6. This hard-surfaced thoroughfare, surrounded on all sides by towering, snow-covered peaks, served as a main supply route leading north from Allied beachheads at Salerno.

By New Year's Day 1944, American troops had battered their way through the Mignano Gap to reach Mt. Lungo at its northwestern terminus. Ahead lay a river valley, five miles long and relatively level except for a long, craggy height that rose like a fist 180 feet above the floodplain. This hilltop, which dominated the surrounding terrain in all directions, was labeled Mt. Porchia on U.S. maps.

Mount Porchia and its approaches sat within the II Corps area of responsibility. Commanded by Maj. Gen. Geoffrey Keyes, II Corps had recently been reinforced by the powerful 1st Armored Division (1AD), nicknamed "Old Ironsides." Yet Keyes recognized that mountain warfare required foot soldiers, not tanks, and 1AD's order of battle included just one regiment of riflemen—2,400 troops in all. That outfit, the 6th Armored Infantry Regiment (AIR), was heavily engaged during the North Africa campaign but did not participate in the landings at Sicily or Salerno. Although it hadn't seen combat in eight months, the 6t h AIR was fresh, ready, and battle-tested.

For reasons that remain unclear, Keyes organized his Mt. Porchia assault force in a somewhat unorthodox fashion. Instead of assigning the mission of capturing it directly to the 1st Armored Division, Keyes detached certain units from "Old Ironsides" to form a temporary battle group under II Corps' direct supervision. Designated "Task Force Allen," this formation was commanded by Brig. Gen. Frank A. Allen, normally the head of 1AD's Combat Command B.

General Allen's outfit consisted of the 6th AIR, 1AD's entire Division Artillery (54 guns), the 701st Tank Destroyer (TD) Battalion, and two non-divisional armor outfits, the 753rd and 760th Tank Battalions (TBs). All except the 760th TB were previously tested in action. In addition, the 1108th Engineer Combat Group (a II Corps asset) stood ready to support the attack, as did smaller signal, medical, and service support elements drawn from 1AD and II Corps.

When the "Old Ironsides" commander Maj. Gen. Ernest N. Harmon learned II Corps was taking nearly half his division away for the Mt. Porchia operation, he objected loudly. Harmon felt the assignment could be better handled by his unit, which had trained and fought as a team for years, rather than by an impromptu task force under someone else's control. His anger cooled only slightly when he was told 1AD's tanks were being held ready for an armored breakthrough that Fifth Army was planning to execute in the near future.

Facing TF Allen on Mt. Porchia were grenadiers of the 44th Infantry Division, also known as Hoch- und Deutschmeister (Grand Master of the Teutonic Order). Annihilated at Stalingrad, the 44th was brought back up to strength by an influx of mainly Austrian recruits and moved to Italy during the autumn of 1943. Assigned to the German 10th Army, these soldiers then participated in a masterfully-executed delaying action along the Wehrmacht's Bernhardt Line.

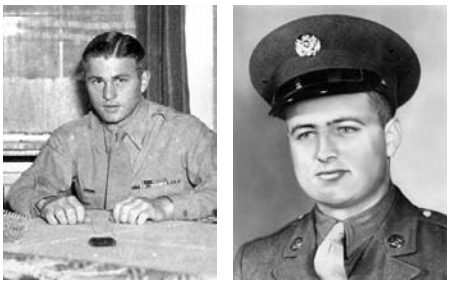
This belt of pillboxes, covered gun emplacements, and heavily-guarded obstacles was meant to slow the Allies' advance in order to buy time for workers to finish constructing the Gustav Line, a more extensive system of defensive fortifications covering the Garigliano and Rapido rivers. Heavy losses were to be avoided, said 10th Army commander General Heinrich von Vietinghoff. "In the event of attacks by far superior enemy forces," he directed, "a step-by-step withdrawal to the Gustav position will be carried out."

The 44th Infantry Division's riflemen had been doing just that for months, utilizing massed field artillery and mortar fire directed by well-positioned forward observers to decimate Allied attackers. When time came to give ground, the Hoch- und Deutschmeister left behind thousands of landmines–including the antipersonnel S-mine (a fearsome projectile that G.I.s called the "Bouncing Betty") and a nearly undetectable explosive device called the Schü mine (capable of shattering foot, ankle, and shin bones).

On January 1, 1944, the 44th Infantry Division defended two isolated but commanding peaks three miles northwest of Mignano Gap. Along the division's left flank stood troops of the 132nd Infantry Regiment, holding key terrain at Mt. Majo. On the right, occupying Mt. Porchia, was an understrength battalion of the 134th Infantry Regiment. The Germans were well-supported by heavy mortar, field artillery, and Nebelwerfer rocket launchers, while a contingent of elite Luftwaffe paratroopers from the Hermann Goering Division could be rushed up in an emergency from reserve positions some distance behind the line.

In addition to their lavish use of landmines, the 44th's grenadiers outposted several stone farmhouses well forward of the Mt. Porchia strongpoint. All road junctions and other identifiable landmarks were registered with artillery, while a sophisticated system of fire control was established using wire communications and signal flares. The Hoch- und Deutschmeister, dug-in and ready, would not surrender this highly defensible ground without a fight.

Cold winds and rain that occasionally turned to sleet or snow prevailed during the first week of January, 1944. While these raw, wintry conditions affected both adversaries, few records have survived that describe their impact on German forces. We do know that U.S. medical officers reported 513 cold-weather injuries during the Mt. Porchia operation, mostly due to exposure and trench foot. Poor hygiene and inadequate footwear contributed greatly to this situation, which may have incapacitated an alarming 11 percent of all personnel belonging to TF Allen.



First Lieutenant Orville "Bill" Munson (left) led Company A, 48th Engineer Combat Battalion. Sergeant Joe Specker (right) received a posthumous Medal of Honor for his valor during the battle for Mount Porchia. TOP: Soldiers of the 48th Engineer Combat Battalion work to repair a bridge and road connection during the Italian campaign. The soldiers of the 48th were later called upon to fight as infantry during the assault on Mount Porchia.

Deep mud, a byproduct of the miserable weather, largely confined vehicle movement to Route 6, which ran east-west along the northern edge of the battlefield. Just east of Mt. Porchia itself was an unimproved dirt road christened "Knox Avenue" by the Americans. This track would serve as a line of departure, or starting point, for their final rush up the mountain. Another thoroughfare, an abandoned railroad bed called Route 48 after the engineer battalion that was transforming it into a roadway, ran roughly parallel to Route 6 but about 1,100 yards south.

Task Force Allen's soldiers occupied positions along the nose of Mt. Lungo, approximately 2,500–3,000 yards from their objective on Mt. Porchia's summit. The terrain between Lungo and Porchia was mostly flat, except for a few low hills flanking Route 6. These hummocks, along with a few derelict farm buildings scattered about the plain, remained under German control.

This meant that, before they could storm the mountaintop, Brig. Gen. Allen's G.I.s needed to clear a zone of approach nearly two miles long from their determined and battle-wise foe—all while under direct observation from artillery spotters calling down fire from the crest of Mt. Porchia. It was not a scenario designed to inspire confidence in those who would make this hazardous frontal assault.

The U.S. attack plan relied on simplicity, as it had to be carried out after sunset on Tuesday, January 4, 1944. Two battalions, 1st and

2nd, would form to the west of Mt. Lungo with 3rd Battalion kept in reserve. On a prearranged signal, the infantrymen were then to advance toward Knox Avenue, reorganize briefly, and rush their objective. The idea was to take Mt. Porchia before sunrise.

To handle enemy strongpoints along the way, 1st Battalion would have the 753rd TB in support while the 760th TB was to follow 2nd Battalion. Tasked with the mission of suppressing enemy positions on Mt. Porchia were well over 100 mortars and howitzers, even some British-crewed long-range artillery pieces firing from the adjacent 10th U.K. Corps zone. Poor visibility caused by low-hanging clouds, however, prevented Allied airpower from lending its weight to the assault.

ABOVE: GIs on a hilltop in Italy train their machine gun on Germans some 200 yards away. On January 6th troops from the 6th Armored Infantry fought their way to the top of Mount Porchia but later that evening an attack from the Hermann Goering Division forced them back down the mountain. OPPOSITE: An M-10 Wolverine tank destroyer of the U.S. 701st Tank Destroyer Battalion proceeds cautiously along a narrow road in Italy. The 701st, and other armored units from the 1st Armored Division, supported the effort to capture Mount Porchia with suppressing fire against German gun emplacements on the high ground.

Late on January 4th, hundreds of foot soldiers began filing off Mt. Lungo while a 30-minute cannonade shook Mt. Porchia 3,000 yards to their front. At 1930 hours, the infantry attack kicked off. First Battalion's advance to the north was quickly stalled by fierce resistance coming from the two knobs guarding Route 6. On the left, 2nd Battalion halted to wait for that fight to cease.

German observers saw these riflemen standing exposed on open ground and called in a volley of heavy mortar fire. This barrage caused so many casualties that Brig. Gen. Allen paused the attack—his medics required time to carry off the wounded. Second Battalion now lacked sufficient manpower to continue its mission; the task force reserve, 3rd Battalion, moved forward to replace it.

It was a costly and disappointing start to the operation. The Americans advanced perhaps 200-300 yards that night, suffering an estimated 35-45 percent of their assault force killed, missing, or injured. Dawn brought with it both a snowstorm and a battalion-sized enemy counterattack that was only broken up by point-blank tank and TD fire.

At 1515 hours on January 5, 3rd Battalion resumed the advance. Guiding on the abandoned railway bed called Route 48, this unit succeeded in reaching Knox Avenue. That night, 3rd Battalion's troops dug in along the line of departure while those of 1st and 2nd Battalions moved up to establish assault positions on their right flank.

Officers and NCOs struggled to get their men ready for the final attack on Mt. Porchia's slender crest, now set to begin at 0700 hours on January 6. Heavy losses reduced some rifle companies to a few dozen effectives, a situation made worse by large numbers of stragglers separated from their commands. Those infantrymen along Knox Avenue needed to be resupplied with ammunition, rations and water, a process that took most of the night. Few of them got any sleep.

A preparatory artillery bombardment commenced around daybreak, mixing high explosives with chemical smoke to conceal advancing U.S. soldiers from enemy observation. At 0700 hours, the attack lurched forward. An American correspondent, Don Whitehead, vividly portrayed the action in 1st Battalion's zone that morning:

"Captain Ralph C. Fisher of Hyattsville, Md., stood up before his detachment and shouted 'I'm going up that mountain!'

"Fisher started straight up the slope of the northeast corner with his men right behind him. They battled their way through enemy machine gun nests straight to the objective…Only half the men who went up the mountain with Fisher reached their goal because of the heavy enemy fire. But those who did dug into positions and quickly prepared to stave off counter-attacks."

Fisher, who commanded Company B of the 6th AIR, earned a Distinguished Service Cross for his heroism on Mt. Porchia but never lived to receive it. Struck by shellfire a few days later, he died of his wounds in an American field hospital on January 13.

Another group of brave G.I.s supporting the attack that day belonged to the 47th Armored Medical Battalion. One of those aidmen, Pfc. Henry J. Guarnere of Philadelphia, lost his life to enemy mortar fire while carrying casualties off the hillside. William, his younger brother and a paratrooper serving with the 101st Airborne Division, learned of Henry's death the night before he jumped into Normandy—a scene poignantly described in the book and mini-series "Band of Brothers."

On this deadly battleground, German shellfire punished fighting men and noncombatants with equal vehemence. First Lt. Arthur C. Lenaghan, the outfit's Catholic chaplain, was struck by artillery fragments on January 6 while volunteering as a litter bearer. Evacuated to an aid station, he died the next day.

By early afternoon, Allen began receiving reports indicating that 6th AIR was now on top of Mt. Porchia. At dusk, however, three companies of paratroopers from the Hermann Goering Division counterattacked and pushed those troops back off the mountain. Worse still, a gap in the lines had developed south of 3rd Battalion—and there were no reserves available to plug it.

Desperate times called for desperate mea-

sures. The 48th ECB, until recently in charge of rehabilitating Route 48, received a warning order from Headquarters, TF Allen, at 1315 hours on January 6, directing them to cease all construction activity and prepare to fight as infantry. The formal directive attaching one company of engineers to each of 6th AIR's three rifle battalions came down at 1750 hours.

This did not sit well with Lieutenant Colonel Andrew J. Goodpaster, the 48th's commanding officer. Goodpaster preferred that his three line companies fight under battalion control rather than being parceled out piecemeal as TF Allen instructed. Yet the order made sense, as combat engineers lacked the mortars and radios found in a rifle company. The men of the 48th ECB would have to rely on their infantry comrades for communications and fire support—along with normal resupply and casualty evacuation—as long as they remained attached to the 6th AIR.

First Lietenant Orville "Bill" Munson of Company A, 48th ECB, had been watching Mt. Porchia "being lit up like a blinking Christmas tree" by Allied artillery ever since the operation kicked off on January 4. That was also the day he took over as company commander after watching the outfit's previous CO being loaded into an ambulance due to combat exhaustion. Fortunately, Munson, a 24-year-old South Dakota native, was by then a seasoned officer who knew and trusted the engineers under his charge. This was their first time fighting as infantry, though, a fact undoubtedly on many of the troops' minds as they jumped off shortly after nightfall on January 6.

With First Sergeant Donald F. Buckley at the rear of the march column keeping an eye out for potential stragglers, Munson's force made its way toward Knox Avenue. Danger lurked everywhere; frequent German illumination flares required everyone to halt in place while occasional mortar barrages further slowed progress. One unlucky sergeant stepped on an S-mine and went down with a mangled leg; the blast also wounded Buckley and several other soldiers. Bleeding heavily himself, the first sergeant immediately organized a detail of engineers to haul their most critically injured casualties back to an aid station.

While attempting to locate the infantry's command post, Munson encountered a single German grenadier coming down the mountainside and killed him with a burst from his Thompson gun. Finally, messengers informed him the attack would renew at 2200 hours. Company A's combat engineers were to dash straight up the hill "screaming to high heaven" as they ran. Riflemen from 1st Battalion, he was told, would advance on their right flank.

The attack came as a complete surprise to Mt. Porchia's defenders. Company A encountered only scattered small-arms fire during its assault but did suffer some casualties due to mines and booby traps. Munson was surprised to learn, however, that only about 50 of the 95 engineers under his command followed him up to the summit. Without 1st Sergeant Buckley to watch them, several soldiers simply disappeared into the darkness, only to reemerge after all shooting stopped.

Fortuitously, Company A possessed a secret weapon on Mt. Porchia. His name was Pfc. Richard F. Stern, a 45-year-old immigrant who won the Iron Cross for frontline service with the German Army during World War I. A Jew from Nuremberg, Stern escaped Hitler's regime in 1939 and joined the U.S. Army shortly thereafter "to get back at the Nazis" as he told one reporter.

Now facing enemy machine-gun teams on Mt. Porchia's shoulder, Pfc. Stern stood up and began calling out to the foe in his native language. Saying the Americans had them surrounded, he convinced six grenadiers to come forward with their hands up. Stern later received a Silver Star and promotion to sergeant for his persuasive "war of words" that night.

In reality, Stern and his fellow G.I.s were the ones in danger of being cut off. Critically short of troops and ammunition, Munson made the difficult decision to withdraw from Mt. Porchia's crest at 0400 hours on January 7th.

While leading Company A off the mountain he was hit by grenade fragments and left for dead. Luckily, the young engineer officer managed to reunite with his command later that morning. Bill recalled, "When the men saw me they all hollered at once." Private Stern, he said, "…was so emotional he threw his arms around me and cried."

Before being sent back for medical treatment, Munson briefed Lt. Col. Goodpaster on his confusing and poorly coordinated night attack. He also told Goodpaster that the Germans kept only a small garrison on Porchia's heights during daylight hours, moving reinforcements up after sunset to sweep the summit clear of any small American units that managed to get that far.

This bit of battlefield intelligence prompted Goodpaster, a 28-year-old career officer from Illinois, to contact TF Allen's headquarters with an idea. Return his line companies to battalion control, he suggested, and the 48th ECB would lead a daylight "march and fire" assault up Mt. Porchia. The plan was quickly approved; at 1600 hours, 340 combat engineers stormed up the hillside. In support were machine gunners from the 6th AIR and some straight-shooting U.S. tankers.

Lead scouts from Company B spotted a German anti-tank gun that was holding up the advance. Guided by their tracer bullets, an M4 Sherman firing from the valley floor made short work of that troublesome cannon. Meanwhile, Lt. Harry Thames of Company C shot and killed an enemy sniper at 300 yards. This feat of marksmanship, together with his other exploits on Mt. Porchia, resulted in award of the Distinguished Service Cross.

That afternoon, Company C's Sergeant Joseph C. Specker of Missouri singlehandedly destroyed an enemy machine-gun position despite being gravely wounded and unable to walk. Unit members later found the sergeant dead at his post. Specker's valor was recognized with a posthumous Medal of Honor—the first such decoration awarded to a combat engineer during World War II.

Reaching the top, Company B's Tech. 5 Ben Santjer encountered a squad of enemy soldiers at extremely close range. He shot four grenadiers and bayoneted a fifth before succumbing to a hail of machine pistol bullets. Santjer's sacrifice enabled the rest of his unit to outflank the German defenders and kick them off Mt. Porchia for good. He earned a posthumous Distinguished Service Cross.

It should be mentioned that the 6th AIR's senior leaders were not sitting idly by while Lt. Col. Goodpaster led the 48th ECB up Mt. Porchia on the afternoon of January 7. Notably, 1st Battalion's Lt. Col. Lyle J. Deffenbaugh and 2nd Battalion's Lt. Col. Elton W. Ringsak distinguished themselves by organizing provisional rifle companies made up of cooks, clerks, and mechanics, then personally guiding those troops up the mountainside. Other officers and senior NCOs roamed the battlefield in search of lightly wounded casualties or soldiers separated from their outfits. Task Force Allen was already starting to reconstitute itself for follow-on missions.

By dusk, U.S. forces firmly controlled their objective. A weak counterattack that came in at 0100 hours was easily beaten back; throughout the night, occasional long-distance shellfire dropped onto the mountaintop but caused relatively few losses among the dug-in riflemen and combat engineers occupying it. Grenadiers and paratroopers, cut off from their parent organizations, began to surrender—the 48th ECB, for example, took 33 prisoners on Mt. Porchia.

Lieutenant Colonel Goodpaster was out inspecting his company positions at 1000 hours on January 8, when he was struck in the right arm by shell fragments. Also injured in that barrage was Lt. Col. Ringsak; shrapnel from an exploding mortar round severely damaged the left temporal region of his brain and left him partially paralyzed. Goodpaster eventually returned to duty (retiring in 1981 as a four-star general) but not Ringsak—he did, however, make a full recovery and go on to serve as a North Dakota State Senator for 17 years.

Bill Munson stayed two nights at the 94th Evacuation Hospital before rejoining Company A on January 9. He received a Distinguished Service Cross for his heroism on Mt. Porchia, ending the war as a major in charge of the 48th ECB's operations section. Munson's Purple

Heart earned during the attack was the first of four such awards this superb combat leader would receive for wounds sustained during an eventful 22-year military career.

More accolades followed. Both the 6th Armored Infantry Regiment and the 48th Engineer Combat Battalion were awarded a Presidential Unit Citation in recognition of their soldiers' extraordinary gallantry during the Mt. Porchia operation. Afterward, letters of commendation also went out to the various tank, TD, artillery, and service support organizations that helped ensure the success of Allen's attack.

The 48th Engineers remained on Mt. Porchia for two full days before they came down to resume their normal duties of road maintenance and mine clearing. It wasn't until January 12, however, that the 6th Armored Infantry's half-frozen and exhausted survivors were relieved by elements of the 141st Infantry Regiment, 36th "Texas" Infantry Division. The 6th AIR would require a significant infusion of replacements and weeks of training before it could again be considered combat-ready.

In 10 days of fighting, TF Allen sustained 66 men killed, 379 wounded, and an unknown number missing in action. The 6th Infantry alone reported upwards of 480 soldiers still unaccounted for at battle's end, although most were found and returned to duty within a few days. Straggling, as Lt. Munson noted, was also a problem in support units such as the 48th ECB.

Nearly a battalion's worth of G.I.s in TF Allen required treatment for non-battle injuries, keeping these troops out of action when they were most needed on the front line. Frozen feet, in particular, plagued the U.S. Army in Italy throughout that brutal winter of 1943-44. Frigid wind and rain, coupled with the logistics system's inability to supply even basic personal items like clean socks, undoubtedly contributed to this high rate of cold-weather casualties.

Yet there was good news coming from newly captured Mt. Porchia during the second week of January, 1944. Reconnaissance patrols sent out to examine Mt. Trocchio, another isolated peak located three miles forward of U.S. lines, found that height completely unoccupied. The Germans appeared to have withdrawn to the Gustav Line, completely abandoning Trocchio and its commanding view of the Italian countryside.

American senior officers quickly made their way to an overlook on Mt. Trocchio's broad crown. What they saw through their binoculars filled these men with renewed hope.

Only a few miles distant, the wide Liri Valley beckoned. This high-speed avenue of approach led directly to Rome, a drive of perhaps 75 miles through terrain ideally suited for the "Old Ironsides" Division's 250 Sherman tanks. Here at last was an opportunity for Fifth Army to finally break out of its agonizing mountain-by-mountain slog up Italy's spine. Plus, it was common knowledge that Mark Clark very much wanted to capture Rome.

There were a few additional terrain features visible to the U.S. commanders gathered on Mt. Trocchio. Along Route 6 at the mouth of the Liri stood a nondescript village known as Cassino, which Clark would have to occupy before his tanks could begin their advance on Rome. Steeply-sloped highlands set back a half-mile beyond Cassino provided excellent observation posts for enemy artillery spotters. Atop one of those ridges, an ancient Benedictine abbey towered over the surrounding landscape.

One mile west of the Americans' outpost, a swift-flowing river labeled the Rapido on Allied maps (it was really the Gari River) presented a more immediate obstacle. This water feature required combat engineers to bridge it so II Corps could seize Cassino and those mountains guarding the Liri Valley. First, though, U.S. infantry needed to cross the Rapido (Gari) in small assault boats to take and hold the far shore.

To the officers looking down from Mt. Trocchio, it seemed like a relatively straightforward operation. To get this far, Clark's men had already crossed plenty of rivers and scaled many a mountain. The Rapido/Cassino region, some confidently predicted, would fall to Allied troops within a week at most.

Crushing these dreams of easy conquest were 90,000 soldiers of Germany's XIV Panzer Corps, who on January 20 hurled back Fifth Army's first assault crossing at the Rapido. These troops, some of whom were veterans of the struggle at Mt. Porchia, waged a tenacious and well-executed defensive action on the Gustav Line at Cassino throughout the spring of 1944, keeping the Liri Valley blocked until mid-May.

By then, Clark had given up all hope of a simple, bloodless, and triumphant advance on Rome. He would not get there until June 4, and only after enduring a series of costly battles in places with names like Cassino, Anzio, and the Rapido River. Thousands more fighting men were destined to die, go missing, or suffer ghastly wounds before Allied forces finally entered the Eternal City. ■

ABOVE: An American officer interrogates young German prisoners from the Hermann Goering Division, recently captured during the fight for Mount Porchia. OPPOSITE: On January 6, 1944, the third day of the assault on Mount Porchia, American artillery pounds German positions in preparation for another attempt to take the promontory.

Patrick J. Chaisson writes from his home in Scotia, New York. *The author wishes to thank Mr. Troy Morgan of the U.S. Army Engineer Museum, Fort Leonard Wood, Missouri, for his invaluable assistance in the preparation of this article.*

The first U.S. airborne combat operations were conducted during the invasion of North Africa in November 1942.

BY MICHAEL E. HASKEW

Paratroopers of the 509th Parachute Infantry Regiment (PIR) check main static lines and parachutes before a practice jump in England in October 1942. A month later, these troops executed the first U.S. airborne drop in wartime as a component of Operation Torch.

AMERICAN AIRBORNE In Operation Torch

Only two years after the U.S. Army officially sanctioned the formation of an airborne arm, American paratroopers were committed to a vast offensive against Axis forces on the coast of French North Africa. Operation Torch, a highly complex endeavor scheduled for November 8, 1942, involved Allied forces landing at Casablanca, Algiers, and Oran.

Plans for airborne troops to participate in operations against Casablanca and Algiers were briefly considered and then dropped.

The Algerian port of Oran, however, had two nearby Vichy French airfields, Tafaraoui and La Senia. Just 230 miles east of the British bastion at Gibraltar, they included the only runways in western Algeria that were adequate for sustained operations, and Tafaraoui was the only one with a hard surface. Vichy fighter planes were within range of the Center Task Force, one of three poised to hit the North African beaches, which included 18,500 troops of the U.S. 1st Infantry and 1st Armored Divisions under Major General Lloyd Fredendall.

Tafaraoui was 15 miles south of Oran, and La Senia just five miles distant. To secure these airfields, remove the Vichy threat, and facilitate the introduction of reinforcements and supplies, it was decided that risking an airborne operation was worthwhile. The 509th Parachute Infantry Regiment (PIR) was placed under Fredendall, and its 2nd Battalion was slated to make the first American combat jump in history.

The 509th had been authorized on March 14, 1941, originally as the 504th Parachute Infantry Battalion, and activated on October 5 of that year at Fort Benning, Georgia. In February 1942, the battalion relocated to Fort Bragg, North Carolina, and joined the 503rd Parachute Infantry Battalion to form the 503rd Parachute Infantry Regiment. In June, the 503rd was detached for service in Scotland and became the first American airborne unit deployed overseas during World War II.

The American paratroopers trained with the British 1st Airborne Division, participating in the lowest large-scale parachute drop in history, from an altitude of just 143 feet. On November 2, 1942, less than a week prior to Operation Torch, the 503rd was redesignated as the 2nd Battalion, 509th Parachute Infantry Regiment.

Two months prior to Torch, General Dwight D. Eisenhower, Supreme Allied Commander in the Mediterranean Theater, gave the go-ahead for an airborne assault on Tafaraoui and La Senia. The 2nd Battalion, 509th PIR, the only American unit of its kind in Europe, was designated for the drop, and its delivery was assigned to the 60th Troop Carrier Group. The two units had been training together for about three weeks when the orders were received in early September.

On September 12, a command group called the Parachute Task Force was established with Colonel William C. Bentley in charge. Bentley had served previously as an Army Air Forces attaché in Morocco and was familiar with area. A cadre of 77 officers and enlisted personnel formed the command structure of the Parachute Task Force, and Bentley was in command during the preliminary phase and while the paratroopers were in the air. Lieutenant Colonel Edson D. Raff commanded the 2nd Battalion, 509th, and went directly to General Mark W. Clark, a member of Eisenhower's staff and a close friend of the supreme commander, to request that the paratroopers remain under his own direct command once they were on the ground.

Raff was a respected officer, who had trained his men relentlessly and earned the nickname "Little Caesar" for his hard-nosed command style and stocky build. Clark granted the request.

Some concerns were raised during the planning of the airborne operation, particularly by British Air Marshal William L. Welsh, the highest-ranking member of the air forces section of Eisenhower's planning staff for Torch. Welsh recommended that the airborne troops should be held back and committed after the Torch landings during the drive to capture the Tunisian capital city of Tunis. His recommendation was discussed briefly, but the preparations went forward.

The first American airborne combat operation remains the longest mission of its kind in the history of warfare. To diminish the possibility of the airborne force being discovered by the Germans, the Douglas C-47 transport planes that were to carry the paratroopers had to be located as far from enemy intelligence agents, radar stations, and fighter bases in occupied France as possible. The fuel capacity of the C-47s, though, required the planes to be based as close as possible to North Africa. Survey crews scoured Land's End at the southwestern tip of England and chose the small airfields at

All photos: National Archives

St. Eval and Predannack. The original force of 36 planes was increased to 39 and divided between the two bases.

Hazardous flight paths across Vichy France in the east or the open Atlantic Ocean in the west were quickly dismissed. The most direct route was through Spanish airspace. Although neutral, the Spanish government was viewed with suspicion. Its fascist head of state, Generalissimo Francisco Franco, was pro-German. Nevertheless, the airborne mission was approved to fly across Spain, a distance of 1,100 straight-line air miles. The flight was to be one-way, and the C-47s would land in the North African desert if airfields were unavailable.

Three days before the mission embarked, six Bristol Beaufighters based at Predannack and a flight of Supermarine Spitfires from Portreach were assigned as escorts. For most of its duration, the eight-hour flight would be conducted under the cover of darkness, which offered some protection from enemy eyes and antiaircraft defenses, although it also obscured landmarks and other visual navigational aids. A possible solution resided with the Royal Navy antiaircraft ship HMS *Alynbank*, equipped with a beacon that would begin sending radio signals from a position about 35 miles off the African coast near Oran at 11:30 on the night of November 7. The signal was to be broadcast at 440 kilocycles, a frequency that would simulate an Italian transmission. To help ensure success, as soon as the transport planes were visible at a distance of 20 miles the *Alynbank* would also begin flashing a V from its signal light.

As the transports crossed the North African coastline, they were also expected to pick up a radar signal planted near Tafaraoui by an agent code named Bantam. Bentley's plane and those of group commanders and squadron leaders were to carry receivers known as "Rebecca," that would enable them to home in on Bantam's signal. Operatives on the ground might also fire flares to illuminate Tafaraoui once surprise was assured.

A complement of 531 paratroopers was to load and lift off into the afternoon sky at 5 p.m. on November 7, and drop near the target airfields at 1 a.m. La Senia was deemed the most difficult objective due to its shorter distance from Oran, and it was also the least valuable of the two airfields. Tafaraoui was an all-weather field and considered easier to capture. The flight path to Tafaraoui, across a large dry lake bed called the Sebka d'Oran, was also less likely to attract attention.

The parachute drop would take place over Tafaraoui, and once that objective was secured a company of the 2nd Battalion would march on La Senia, destroy its facilities and any planes on the ground, and withdraw. Another small force would disrupt Vichy communication lines near an airfield to the northeast at Lourmel. Once these missions were completed, the air-

Colonel Edson Raff (left) and Major Bill Yarborough led the 509th PIR into action during the first combat jump for American airborne forces.

During the same training exercise from October 1942, these 509th PIR troopers sit aboard a Douglas C-47 transport aircraft and await orders to stand up, hook up, and jump. The aircraft is from the 60th Troop Carrier Group, the same unit that would carry the 509th into action in North Africa.

borne force would concentrate at Tafaraoui and hold until relieved.

The mission of the 2nd Battalion, 509th PIR was nearly cancelled in late October after General Clark returned from a clandestine meeting with Vichy officials with promising news that the Torch landings might be unopposed. Eisenhower considered canceling the airdrop and saving the paratroopers as Air Marshal Welsh had suggested. Clark met with Bentley and Raff on October 28, and the three offered contingency plans to Eisenhower. Should negotiations prove fruitless and the Vichy French appeared likely to resist the invasion, the original "Plan A" would go into effect as the signal "Advance Alexis" was broadcast. If the Vichy French agreed to cooperate with the Allies, an alternative "Plan B" would be implemented with the broadcast of the signal "Advance Napoleon." Plan B called for the airborne force to land in daylight on D-day at La Senia and stand ready for a mission against airfields in Tunisia.

Plan A, anticipating a hostile reception in Africa, was in effect until the afternoon of November 7. With planes and paratroopers assembled, the signal for Plan B, "Advance Napoleon," was received. Takeoff was delayed for four hours to allow aircraft to land in daylight at La Senia. Some troopers had already been crammed into their planes with full combat loads for two hours when word reached them.

At 9:05 p.m., the first C-47s rose into the air and formed into four flights, a lead flight of nine planes and three more of 10 each. Final assembly took place above Portreach, and the force flew south on a heading of 225 degrees. Strong winds were encountered over the Bay of Biscay, where a turn was made to 177 degrees. Some planes fell behind the leaders, and as the wind speed increased there were more stragglers.

Cloud cover and rain squalls forced some planes to divert from their intended course, and when the formations neared the coast of Spain they encountered rough weather due to an incoming front that meteorologists had warned the pilots to expect. As the planes climbed to 10,000 feet to clear coastal mountains, some lost airspeed and fell further behind. Others attracted sporadic antiaircraft fire. The weather remained rough, and aircraft became widely scattered.

Cloud cover hampered attempts to navigate by the stars for the few planes that had American instruments for the purpose. In the confusion, several pilots became disoriented. One plane ran out of gas and landed at Gibraltar. Three others landed in Spanish Morocco, some 250 miles west of Oran. Two planes landed in French Morocco, and Vichy fighters either shot down or forced three more to land. Antiaircraft guns barked along the African coast, and those pilots that reached La Senia were surprised when they took more antiaircraft fire.

Their parachutes billowing above them, American paratroopers are shown descending earthward during a parachute jump in North Africa.

Those pilots who had managed to stay on course received little help from *Alynbank*, which was broadcasting on 460 kilocycles, not 440, its beacon unintelligible. On the ground at Tafaraoui, Bantam was unaware that Plan B was in effect. He expected the transports overhead at 1 a.m. and destroyed his radar equipment when none appeared.

Colonel Bentley and five other planes crossed the African coastline about 100 miles west of Oran and, moments later, five more C-47s appeared nearby. When he was unable to locate a landmark, Bentley landed and determined his position from some nearby Arabs. After one of his group's planes had flown on alone, Bentley took off again. Two more C-47s joined up during the next flight.

Just after 8 a.m., Bentley spotted eight transports that had landed at the edge the Sebka d'Oran. He was told that Vichy snipers were shooting at the men on the ground and a column of vehicles was approaching. A radio discussion with Lt. Col. Raff led with the decision to drop paratroopers along a ridge dominating the approaches to the northern edge of the dry lake bed about 35 miles from Tafaraoui. Paratroopers jumped from at least nine C-47s.

While the other planes landed, Bentley continued an air reconnaissance. He saw smoke of battle around Tafaraoui and dodged antiaircraft fire before landing with engine trouble and raising Fredendall's II Corps headquarters on

ABOVE: Although there was some resistance encountered from Vichy French forces during Operation Torch, terms of cease-fire were soon reached. In this photo, French prisoners captured while the situation was still unclear sit under guard. Most of these soldiers were soon released. RIGHT: A trooper of the 509th PIR posed for this photo during Operation Torch. While the operation was criticized for its hasty planning and disappointing execution, American airborne troops gained valuable experience during their combat jump into North Africa. OPPOSITE: The 48-star U.S. flag catching the breeze at the head of their formation, U.S. paratroopers march toward the Maison Blanche airdrome, an installation near the city of Algiers. Maison Blanche served as a base for further airborne operations following the initial American drop during Operation Torch.

the radio. While Bentley worked with the radio, one of the C-47s that had flown to Spanish Morocco landed nearby. The pilot had dropped his troops off to save gasoline and flown on toward Oran until he ran out of fuel. Minutes later, Vichy soldiers rolled up and took Bentley's entire party prisoner.

Flying the third C-47 in the lead flight, Major Clarence Galligan may have been the first American pilot to land troops in enemy territory. He flew through antiaircraft fire along the coast and was attacked by a French fighter plane above the Sebka d'Oran. RAF Spitfires chased the French fighter away. Galligan landed his damaged plane on the dry lake bed about five miles from La Senia and walked with his crew and 14 paratroopers to its rim, where they dug in and waited. French fighters appeared overhead but did not strafe the group.

A company of French troops with a 75mm artillery piece in tow approached menacingly but did not attack, probably awaiting the arrival of Colonel Bentley, who was already a prisoner. Bentley advised Galligan to surrender, and the major complied.

By 9 a.m., 33 planes had reached the vicinity of Oran. Meanwhile, Raff had broken several ribs during the parachute jump and turned over command of his troopers to his executive officer, Major W.P. Yarborough. These men set out to identify the column that was advancing toward approximately 250 more paratroopers and troop carrier personnel who had taken cover from the sniper fire behind a low stone wall. The best news of the day so far was received when the approaching column was identified as American troops driving inland from Les Andalouses.

Once the snipers were driven away, an attempt was made to load the paratroopers who had been pinned down back aboard the planes and ferry them across the Sebka d'Oran to attack Tafaraoui. The effort was aborted when the landing gear of several planes became stuck in thick mud.

With the sun high in the sky, Yarborough ordered his men to rest, and while they ate lunch, he received a message that American ground troops advancing from the beachhead at Arzeu had captured Tafaraoui.

Yarborough sent a message back to the area where the C-47s were located, asking for volunteers to pick up three planeloads of paratroopers to garrison the Tafaraoui airfield. At 4 p.m., these planes reached Yarborough, and a few minutes later they were in the air with their cargoes of 2nd Battalion troopers. Five miles from Tafaraoui, six French fighters jumped the transports and forced them to land.

On the ground once again, Yarborough and his troopers continued on foot toward Tafaraoui and reached the airfield at sunrise the next morning. Trucks picked up wounded men and the crews of the three planes that had been left behind and delivered them to the airfield.

Around noon on November 8, word reached the transport crews and airborne troopers who remained at the edge of the Sebka d'Oran that Tafaraoui might be secure. Lieutenant Colonel Thomas Schofield, commander of the 60th Troop Carrier Group and the ranking officer on the scene, dispatched Major John Oberdorf in a single C-47 to reconnoiter the airfield.

In less than an hour Oberdorf became the first American pilot to land at Tafaraoui. As his wheels touched down, French 75mm artillery peppered the field, and shrapnel clattered against his C-47. A few minutes later two more transports landed. When Schofield confirmed that the shooting had at least temporarily stopped, he allowed the remaining C-47s to load and fly to the airfield. As the afternoon wore on, 25 C-47s and two planeloads of paratroopers arrived Tafaraoui.

Four French Dewoitine fighters started strafing runs against the Americans at Tafaraoui, but Spitfires of the 31st Fighter Group, relocating to their new base from Gibraltar, shot them all down. Some aircraft and paratroopers were still scattered around North Africa by the time Oran fell on the morning of November 10.

As the first combat operation in the history of American airborne forces came to a close, casualties had been light, five dead and 15 wounded. Lieutenant Dave Kunkle, killed

aboard one of the C-47s, was the first U.S. airborne officer to die in battle. Private John T. Mackall of Company E, 2nd Battalion, 509th PIR, was wounded during a French fighter plane's attack on his transport. Mackall died in a Gibraltar hospital on November 12, and Camp Hoffman, North Carolina, was renamed in his honor.

Most of the Americans who had missed their objectives were eventually reunited with the 509th, and the Vichy French released their prisoners. Those aboard the two C-47s that landed in French Morocco were detained until November 13 and performed some transport duty for the Western Task Force of Operation Torch before flying to Tafaraoui on November 20. The planes and paratroopers that landed in Spanish Morocco were interned until February 1943.

The first U.S. Army airborne combat mission had come to an anticlimactic end. Both the airfields at La Senia and Tafaraoui had been captured, and Oran was in American hands, but the airborne troops had played only a minor role in these successes. Several factors contributed to the generally disappointing results.

The entire mission amounted to an effort to take objectives within range of ground forces landing on the beaches near Oran. The 1,100-mile distance was too great for the transports to fly in formation, particularly with much of the journey in darkness. Communications were hampered by the failure of the beacons and the blunder that led the *Alynbank* to broadcast on the wrong frequency. Bad weather contributed to the loss of formation in flight as winds scattered C-47s over hundreds of miles.

Confusion regarding the response of the Vichy French also complicated matters, and the lack of information presented during the preflight briefings, including the totally erroneous information provided in one of them, was inexcusable.

Some observers have concluded that senior Allied commanders, including General Eisenhower, had authorized the deployment of the airborne troops with unnecessary haste. Air Marshal Welsh was probably not alone in his opinion that the goals of the mission did not outweigh the hazards that were encountered.

There were lessons to learn in the aftermath of that first mission, but in mid-November the Allies were racing with the Germans to occupy Tunisia. Airborne forces appeared to offer the best option to accelerate the effort to capture key positions.

On November 10, General Jimmy Doolittle, commanding the American Twelfth Air Force, ordered the 60th Troop Carrier Group to Maison Blanche, an airfield near Algiers, to join the 64th Group, which flew in on the 11th. About 300 paratroopers of the 509th PIR reached Maison Blanche aboard the 60th Group's planes, while the transports of the 64th and the 62nd Groups supported the British 2 and 3 Parachute Battalions.

Lieutenant Colonel Raff and Major Martin E. Wanamaker, the senior officer of the 60th Group at Maison Blanche, were ordered to capture the crossroads town of Tebessa, where several routes into central Tunisia converged. Time was critical, but few good maps existed. Intelligence reports were sketchy, and due to the urgency of the situation planning was minimal.

While the troop carrier men performed maintenance and refueled, straining French gasoline to remove impurities, the paratroopers packed chutes and prepared for another combat jump. The best drop zone near Tebessa was identified as an old French airfield at Youks-les-Bains, 10 miles west of town.

At 7:30 a.m. on November 15, 20 planeloads of 2nd Battalion paratroopers took off from Maison Blanche for the 300-mile flight. Raff, in pain from his broken ribs, flew in the first transport, piloted by Wanamaker. Around 9:30 a.m., the paratroopers jumped from altitudes of 300-400 feet.

Anxious moments occurred as the paratroopers came to earth. Trenches filled with combat troops and heavy weapons of the Vichy 3rd Zouave Regiment were directly below. Luckily, the Vichy soldiers were friendly. No shots were fired. Raff later commented that the

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The Longest Struggle

The Battle of the Atlantic was fought from the beginning to the very end of World War II.

BY MICHAEL D. HULL

A depth charge from the U.S. Coast Guard cutter *Spencer* explodes off the ship's stern during an attack on the German submarine *U-175* in April 1943. The U-boat had attempted to penetrate the screen of a large Allied convoy.

For the duration of World War II, from the evening of Sunday, September 3, 1939, to the evening of Monday, May 7, 1945, the Battle of the Atlantic never ceased.

Waged across a great expanse of unforgiving ocean and touching three continents, the global conflict's longest and most arduous campaign was a war within a war. There were no major battles in the traditional sense—Trafalgar, Jutland, Midway—but rather a long struggle to organize, protect, and manage the movement of war materiel and shipping. It was actually a series of campaigns in which the German Navy's immediate and long-term strategy fluctuated, while that of the Allies remained essentially constant.

It has been the most overlooked campaign of World War II, yet nothing less than the fate of Western freedom depended on its outcome. If the Atlantic lifelines had been severed, Great Britain would have faced starvation and been unable to continue the war. America and Canada could not have rallied in force to the side of the British Empire. Much-needed tanks and airplanes would have been denied to the Soviet Union and the liberation of Europe, which eventually brought victory over the Axis powers, could not have been mounted.

"The Battle of the Atlantic," said British Prime Minister Winston Churchill, "was the dominating factor all through the war. Never for one moment could we

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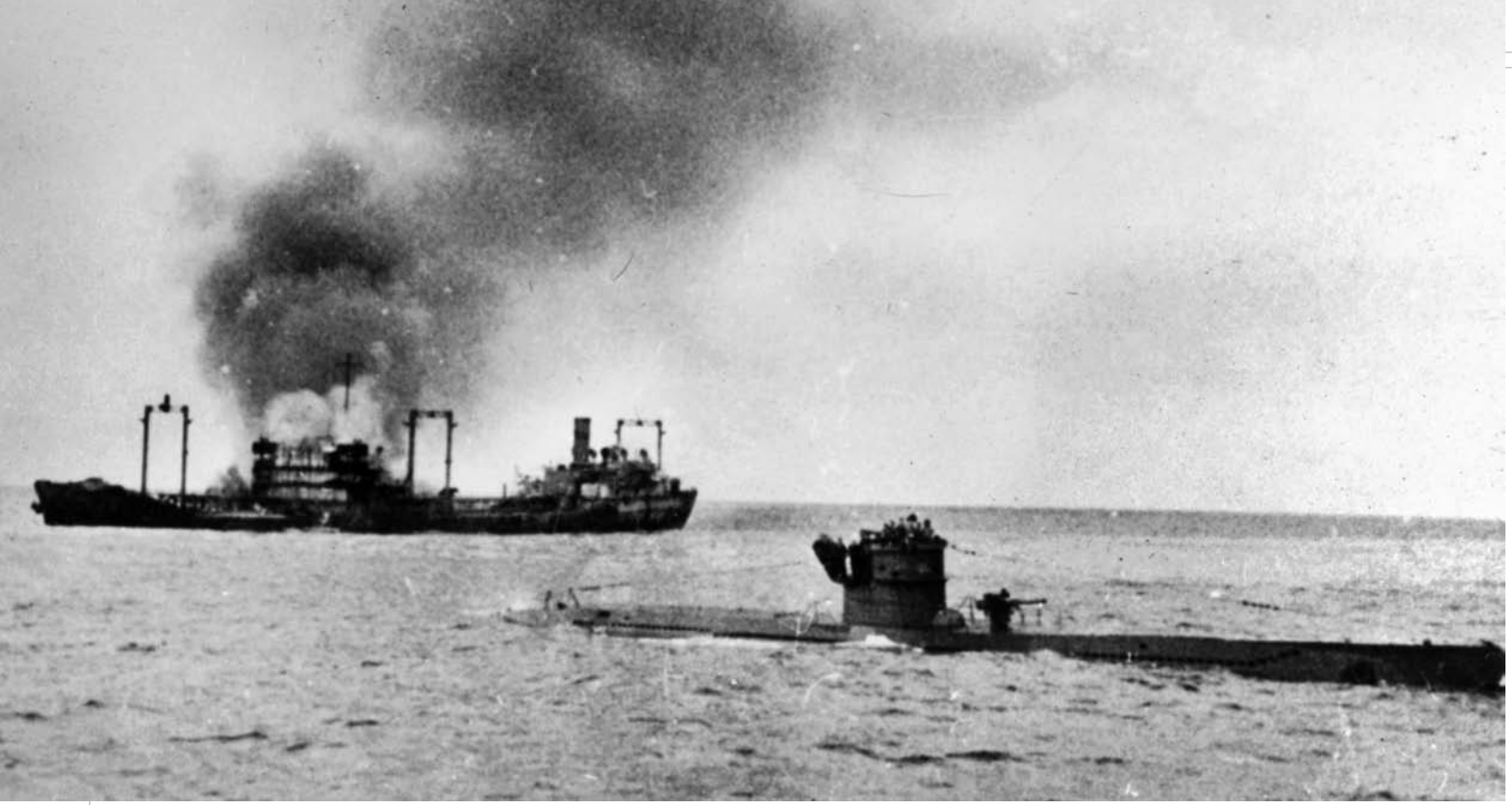

Navy History and Heritage Command

forget that everything happening elsewhere, on land, at sea, or in the air, depended ultimately on its outcome."

For almost the whole of the struggle, the Allied navies were locked into a defensive posture while the German Navy—though unprepared for a major naval war—was on the offensive with a wide range of weapons, such as warships, auxiliary cruisers, submarines, and long-range aircraft. The Kriegsmarine struck hard from the first day of the war. Lt. Fritz Lemp's submarine *U-30* torpedoed without warning the 13,000-ton British liner *Athenia* 250 miles west of Donegal, Ireland, eight hours after Britain and France had declared war on Nazi Germany on September 3, 1939.

The death toll was 128, including 22 Americans heading homeward. Outlawed by the 1936 London naval treaty, the sinking of the defenseless vessel triggered widespread outrage.

In the first two weeks of the war, 27 British merchant ships were sunk in the Atlantic, and between September 3 and the end of the year, 216 merchantmen totaling 748,000 tons went down. During the first year of the war, the toll was 438 merchant ships. For an island nation importing much of its metal, half its food, and all its oil, the mounting losses were alarming.

Meanwhile, the Kriegsmarine targeted warships as well as lone merchantmen. The 22,500-ton aircraft carrier HMS *Courageous* was sunk by *U-29* during an anti-submarine patrol off southwestern Ireland on September 17, three days after the majestic, 22,000-ton carrier HMS *Ark Royal* narrowly avoided torpedoes fired from *U-39*. The navy then withdrew its precious carriers from such routine duties.

Inevitably, the Royal Navy's readiness for war was brought into question. This was dramatized rudely on October 14, 1939, when Lieutenant Gunther Prien boldly steered his *U-47* into the British Home Fleet anchorage at Scapa Flow, in the bleak Scottish Orkneys, and sank the venerable battleship HMS *Royal Oak* with two torpedoes. The death toll was 786.

If the Royal Navy was not fully prepared for war, the Admiralty nevertheless was jolted into action by the *Athenia* sinking. It wasted no time in introducing the convoy system, which had proved effective in the latter part of World War I. The first World War II convoy sailed for Halifax, Nova Scotia, on September 7. Escorts shepherded the merchantmen out for 300 miles and then picked up an inbound convoy and brought it safely to British ports. This pattern was dictated by the Navy's critical shortage of escort vessels.

The operations of German surface raiders early in the war obliged the British Admiralty to provide each convoy with a heavy escort—a battleship, a cruiser, or an armed liner. Royal Navy vessels were kept busy in exhaustive searches for the enemy raiders, which were more of a distraction than a strategic threat. But the surface raiders nevertheless took a toll. The pocket battleship *Deutschland* sank two merchantmen and then caused a major diplomatic blunder by seizing the American freighter *City of Flint*. The incident stirred up much anti-German feeling in the neutral United States.

The most destructive enemy raider was the 11,700-ton pocket battleship *Admiral Graf Spee*, which sank nine merchant ships totaling 50,000 tons between September 30 and December 7, 1939. Pursued relentlessly down the east coast of South America by nine British and French hunting groups, the German ship was cornered in Montevideo harbor. Before the Royal Navy cruisers *Exeter*, *Ajax*, and *Achilles* could finish off the *Graf Spee*, she was scuttled by her skipper, Captain Hans Langsdorff. The Royal Navy had finally scored a front-page victory in the Atlantic.

Britons cheered, but the elation was short-lived. The surface raiders had caused havoc, and long-range Focke-Wulf Condor 200 bombers would sink 580,000 tons of British shipping the following year (1940). But the deadliest ship predators lurked beneath the Atlantic waves, ready to strike again—U-boats. The British remembered only too well that losses inflicted by German submarines had brought their country to within three weeks of starvation during World War I.

Soon to form the bulk of German forces engaged in the Atlantic during World War II, the main ocean-going U-boats were the Types VII and IX, displacing from 700 to 1,100 tons. Their ranges were between 6,500 and 13,450

miles, and their surface top speed was 17 to 19 knots. They were fast enough to catch merchant vessels and outrun many escort ships.

The commander of the U-boat force since 1935 was the frail and gifted Admiral Karl Doenitz, who had joined the Kriegsmarine in 1910, served in cruisers, commanded submarines in the Mediterranean during World War I, and was captured when he surfaced in the middle of a British convoy near Malta in October 1918. He told Chancellor Adolf Hitler that with a fleet of 300 U-boats, Germany could challenge the Royal Navy's hold on the high seas, choke off commerce, and starve the British into submission within six months.

Imperial War Museum

Wikimedia

ABOVE: German submarine *U-570*, pictured here, sank the merchant ship *City of Cairo* and along with it an estimated 100 tons of silver. British naval forces captured *U-570* in 1941, and the silver was recovered from a depth of 17,000 feet in 2013. TOP: Survivors of the British liner *Athenia*, torpedoed by *U-30*, are brought aboard the merchant ship *City of Flint*. A month later, *City of Flint* was captured on the high seas by the German pocket battleship *Deutschland*. OPPOSITE: Riding on the surface off the coast of North Africa, the Nazi submarine *U-442* and her crew remain near a burning tanker, torpedoed in January 1943, its cargo of precious fuel going to the bottom.

But Hitler's priorities were the buildup of the German Army and the Luftwaffe. He doubted Doenitz's claim and had little interest in the sea or the navy. Germany entered the 1939-45 conflict with just four battleships, three pocket battleships, three heavy cruisers, six light cruisers, a few destroyers, and 56 submarines. Nevertheless, with only 22 U-boats operational at any given time, Doenitz's hunters sank 199 merchantmen and a third of the Royal Navy's battleship strength in the first months of the war.

The Royal Navy was also lead by battleship admirals who postponed the building of destroyers and smaller craft suitable for convoy escort. Many of the British escorts early in the war were hastily modified trawlers and other vessels ill suited for harsh duties in the Atlantic.

The Admiralty took control of merchant shipping and ordered vessels with speeds under 15 knots to move in convoy. Faster ships sailed independently. Despite its shortage of small vessels, the Royal Navy had escorted almost 5,800 merchantmen by the end of 1939, with the loss of 12. Four of these were sunk by U-boats. During the same period, 102 independent merchant ships were sunk. Doenitz, meanwhile, lost nine of his boats, almost a sixth of his original strength. But the initial success of the British convoy operations contrasted sharply with the offensive against enemy submarines.

In response to the sinking of the *Athenia*, First Sea Lord Churchill ordered the arming of merchantmen. Both sides began taking retaliatory measures. When the Germans used aircraft, surface vessels, and U-boats to sow minefields in North Sea harbor entrances and estuaries, the British laid undeclared minefields to sink the enemy surface minelayers. Hitler responded by removing restrictions on U-boat operations.

The British made it difficult for Doenitz's submarines to reach and remain in their chief hunting grounds, the Western Approaches (to the British Isles). Barred from the English Channel by a mine barrier across the Strait of Dover, the U-boats had to go far around Scotland in order to reach the Atlantic. They could not stay long because of the fuel needed to reach and return from the operational area. During the harsh winter of 1939-40, there were never more than 10 U-boats in the Western Approaches, and at times only a couple.

But advantages awaited Doenitz and his submariners when the Germans overran Norway, the Low Countries, and France in the fateful spring of 1940. While secondary U-boat havens were set up on the Norwegian coast, Doenitz

supervised the construction of heavily fortified bases on the French Atlantic coast at Brest, Lorient, St.-Nazaire, La Pallice, and Bordeaux. This meant that the U-boats could halve the transit time to their Atlantic hunting grounds. Royal Air Force Bomber Command, concentrating its limited resources on raids over Germany, failed to disrupt the building of the concrete pens in the Bay of Biscay ports. As a result, they were made virtually impregnable to later raids by the RAF and the U.S. Eighth Air Force.

Along with 27 Italian submarines based at Bordeaux, U-boats began venturing from the French bases in July 1940. The reduction in cruising time had the effect of increasing the number of boats available in the operating areas. Assuming tactical command, Doenitz concentrated his strength 260 miles west of Scotland and made effective use for the first time of wolfpack tactics.

In order to meet the increased submarine threat, the British Admiralty ordered additional destroyers and authorized two new ship types—corvettes and frigates. These vessels, assisted by trawlers, luggers, and other small craft, bore the brunt of escort duties in the North Atlantic. Losses were heavy among destroyers and other escort vessels in 1940 during the ill-fated Norwegian campaign and the miraculous evacuation of the British Expeditionary Force from Dunkirk.

When Britain was threatened with invasion, escort ships were stripped from ocean convoys. Some convoys were protected only by a single escort. Deployed in many parts of the world, and depleted by losses, the Royal Navy's resources were severely strained. So, Churchill, the new prime minister, requested from President Franklin D. Roosevelt in May 1940 the loan or gift of 50 mothballed U.S. destroyers for escort work. A deal was concluded that September whereby the World War I-vintage four-stackers were exchanged for 99-year leases on British bases in the West Indies, Bermuda, and Newfoundland. A number of the flimsy "gift horses" served with distinction under the Royal Navy's white ensign.

Sinkings mounted, and the period from June to October 1940 was a "Happy Time" for the U-boats and a distressing one for the British, when 274 merchant ships went down. Doenitz's packs sank 196,000 tons of shipping that July; 268,000 tons in August; 295,000 tons in September; and 352,000 tons in October. One slow east-bound convoy in October lost 21 out of 30 ships, while a west-bound convoy lost 12 out of 49 vessels.

In order to reduce the slaughter, the Admiralty immediately extended the westward escort limits, and during a five-week period late in 1940, the convoys were unmolested. But the U-boat skippers preferred the easy kills of independent merchantmen rather than tangling with convoy escorts, and these losses soared.

In the mid-Atlantic, single ships were most vulnerable, while the U-boats were immune from attack by RAF Coastal Command bombers and torpedo bombers. Despite long-range air patrols from Britain and Canada, there was a broad stretch of the central North Atlantic—the "Black Pit"—which land-based planes could not reach. The U-boats reaped a rich harvest of lone merchantmen there.

As the escorts reached farther westward, Doenitz's submarines began wolfpack forays against convoys. The most heavily hit was a slow-moving, east-bound formation of 34 ships, sighted by the enemy on October 18, 1940, about 250 miles northwest of Ireland. At dusk, Lt. Cmdr. Otto Kretschmer's *U-99* and six other U-boats sneaked through the four-escort screen and sank 18 merchantmen carrying almost 100,000 tons of supplies.

Almost immediately, an east-bound convoy of 49 ships carrying surplus American military materiel to Britain ran afoul of Lieutenant Prien's *U-47* and five other boats. They penetrated the escort screen and torpedoed 13 merchantmen. When the U-boats headed for home, they met another east-bound convoy and sank seven more freighters.

Admiral Doenitz had high hopes for wolfpack operations, but, because of his limited number of boats and their replenishment needs, he could not maintain the attrition rate. Only half a dozen U-boats patrolled off Ireland in late 1940, and heavy weather hindered their efforts to locate the increasingly evasive British convoys. Losses from submarine attacks declined to an average of 180,000 tons of shipping. Doenitz was discouraged to learn at the end of the year that construction had barely covered the loss of 31 U-boats since the war's outbreak. The building of U-boats had declined in late 1940 because Hitler thought that the British, standing alone against the Axis powers, would capitulate.

While Doenitz would have to wait two years to get his 300 submarines, things started looking up for the harried British early in 1941. At dusk on March 7, *U-47* was sunk by the

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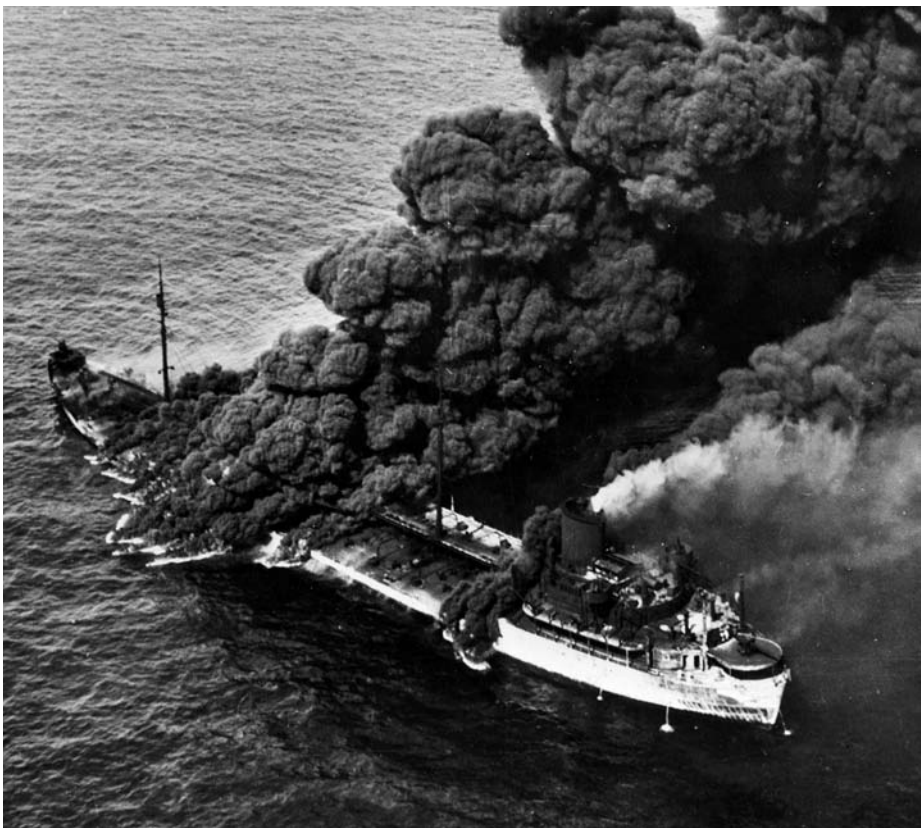

ABOVE: U-boats prowled the U.S. coast early in the war, and on July 15, 1942, the tanker *Pennsylvania Sun* fell victim to *U-571* in the Gulf of Mexico. OPPOSITE: German submarine crewmen load torpedoes aboard the Type-VII submarine at a port in occupied Norway prior to departure for a war patrol. The barrel of the U-boat's 88mm deck gun is visible.

destroyer HMS *Wolverine* in the Northwestern Approaches, and Lieutenant Prien was killed. Two more U-boats were sunk on March 15. With the loss of three much-decorated submarine aces within a week, Doenitz postponed plans for a spring offensive.

May 1941 brought the closing of the escort gap in the mid-Atlantic when an escort force was stationed in Newfoundland. Also that month, the British scored an intelligence coup.

When Lieutenant Fritz Julius Lemp's damaged *U-110* surrendered to a Royal Navy ship, an Enigma coding machine, signal log, and spare rotors were captured. By June, the Admiralty could read many of the messages between Doenitz and his talkative U-boat officers. Information thus gleaned, along with radar, the capture of a German weather ship, and the increased use of underwater sound-location (asdic) equipment, enabled the Admiralty to track the enemy submarines.

The balance of the Atlantic struggle was tilting in Britain's favor, and there was optimism at the Admiralty. Headquartered in Liverpool and established in February 1941, the Western Approaches Command introduced new escort tactics, upgraded anti-submarine firepower such as depth charges, mortars, and rockets, and deployed more long-range aircraft, particularly the B-24 Liberator bomber and the remarkable Short Sunderland flying boat.

New types of escort vessels, such as speedy and powerful sloops, were coming into Atlantic service to aid the workhorse corvettes, and U.S. Navy destroyers began to escort convoys as far as Iceland in September 1941. Meanwhile, the Royal Canadian Navy had been giving support since early in the war, with its escort fleet growing to more than 400 corvettes and destroyers.

While U-boat operations began to mount as more boats came off the ways in Germany, Royal Navy units played deadly cat-and-mouse games with the enemy battleships, pocket battleships, and heavy cruisers. During a fateful week in May 1941, Home Fleet units stalked the new 35,000-ton *Bismarck*, touted as the most powerful battleship in the world. After the sinking of the beloved battlecruiser HMS *Hood*, with the loss of all but three of her crew, the battleships *King George V* and *Rodney* and the cruiser *Dorsetshire* hunted down and sank the *Bismarck*, ending German surface incursions into the Atlantic.

A month after the Pearl Harbor attack and the German declaration of war on the United States, Admiral Doenitz extended the U-boat war westward with his audacious Operation Drumbeat. He dispatched five long-range U-boats, captained by aces, to take advantage of the woefully unprepared U.S. Navy and maraud shipping off the American East Coast. A rich harvest awaited the Germans.

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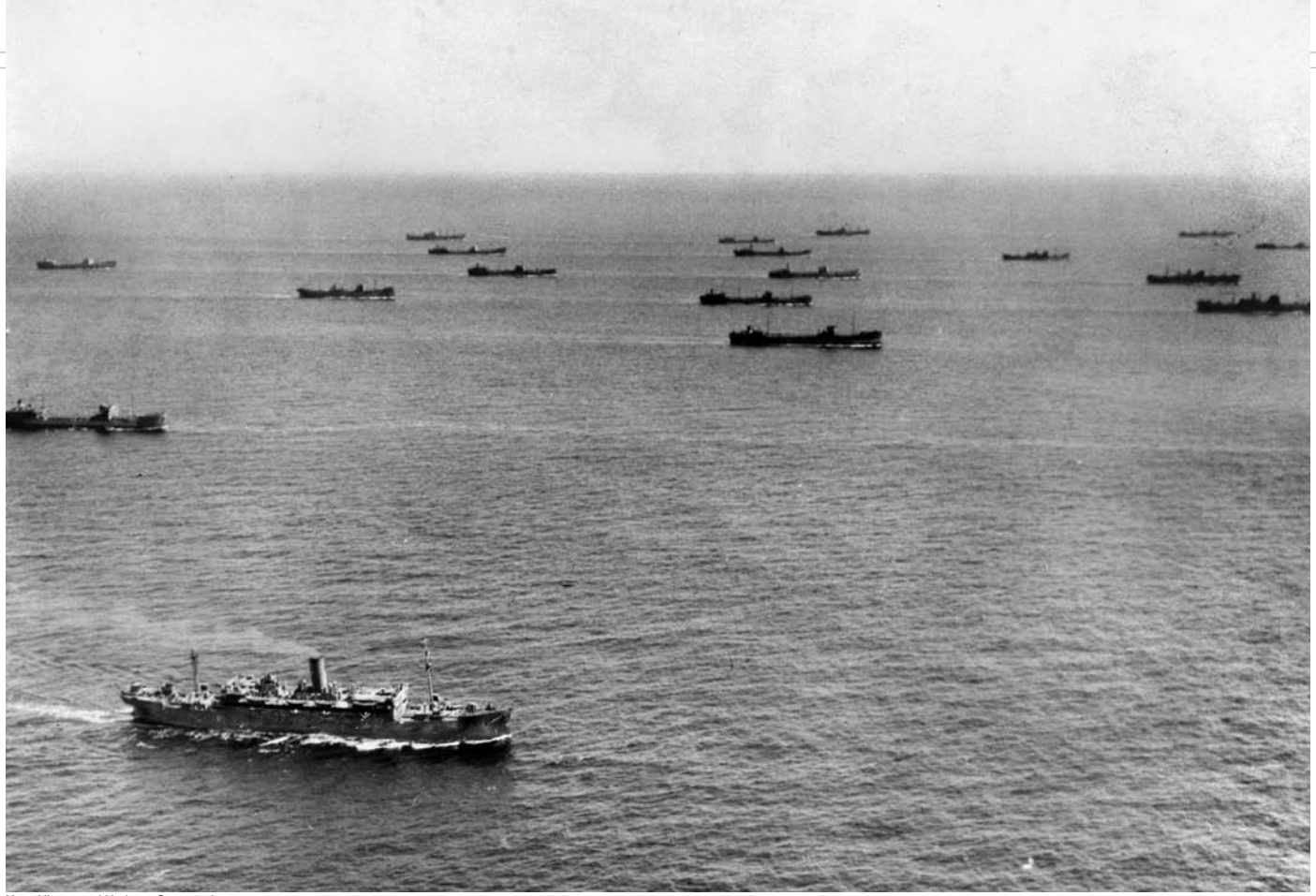
When the submarines reached the East Coast on the night of January 13, 1942, their crews were amazed to see merchant ships proceeding fully lighted and silhouetted by the glow from New York, Atlantic City, Miami, and other brightly illuminated coastal cities. Blackouts had not been imposed because a loss of the tourist trade had been feared, and the ships were easy targets. Remaining submerged by day and surfacing by night to attack with their deck guns and torpedoes, the U-boats roamed freely from Canada to the Caribbean and sank 13 ships by the month's end.

Bathers on East Coast beaches watched many of the freighters and tankers go down, and Admiral Ernest J. King, chief of naval operations, and the Navy Department were slow to respond, even though the British Admiralty had cabled information on the U-boats' movements. For the first half of 1942, Doenitz's submariners enjoyed their second "Happy Time," which a historian later termed "the Atlantic Pearl Harbor." One U-boat skipper, Lt. Cmdr. Reinhard Hardegen of *U-123*, destroyed seven ships in a week.

The Admiralty dispatched 22 armed trawlers to help the U.S. Navy and advised King to form convoys. He refused, but, pressured by General George C. Marshall, Army chief of staff, the



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acerbic admiral finally established a convoy system in May 1942. Meanwhile, without a single loss, the U-boats had sunk 17 ships totaling 103,000 tons in February and 28 vessels of 159,000 tons in March.

Washington finally ordered an East Coast blackout in April. When only six ships were sunk in May, the U-boats moved down the coast to the Caribbean and the Gulf of Mexico, where they destroyed a number of Brazilian freighters and oil tankers sailing out of Venezuela. Doenitz eventually ordered the submarines back into the central Atlantic. During the six months of Operation Drumbeat, 400 ships went down in U.S. Navy-protected waters with the loss of 5,000 Allied lives.

In May and June 1942, the U-boats went on the offensive with a vengeance in the North Atlantic and sank more than a million tons of merchant shipping. Construction had been geared up, and Doenitz now had more than the 300 U-boats he had demanded. Convoys were ambushed in the Black Pit area, and the sinkings mounted. Shipping losses reached a peak of more than 700,000 tons in November 1942. In London, it was feared that Britain might lose the Battle of the Atlantic, and Prime Minister Churchill was depressed.

But it was no new "Happy Time" for Doenitz and his men. Forty U-boats had been sunk since the start of the year, and an estimated 3,700 officers and men had been killed or captured.

Despite continued shipping losses, the tide was gradually turning for the Allies. By August 1942, the British and Canadians had 150 destroyers, almost 200 corvettes, 30 sloops, and new frigates on convoy duty. They were stretched thinly, but more were coming off the ways. The Americans started deploying new escort vessels, and by the end of the year four light "jeep" aircraft carriers were providing air cover. One of them, Captain Daniel V. Gallery's USS *Guadalcanal*, would participate in the capture a U-boat in June 1944, as the centerpiece of a hunter-killer group.

Victory was on the horizon for the Allies through industrial attrition, with their shipyards bustling day and night. By 1943, British Commonwealth yards put out a million tons of shipping a year, while the 95 American yards totaled six million tons. Industrial czar Henry J. Kaiser's assembly lines turned out more than 60 prefabricated, 10,500-ton Liberty ships a month in 1942, and 140 a month in 1943. One was constructed in less than four days. More Allied ships were now being built than the U-boats could sink.

After more than three years, the Allies took the offensive in the Atlantic. Admiral Horton formed support groups of six to eight destroyers, frigates or corvettes, and occasionally an escort carrier. Based in Newfoundland and Iceland, the troubleshooting flotillas were available to rush to the aid of convoys undergoing U-boat attacks. The long-range B-24s and Sunderland flying boats could now reach all parts of the North Atlantic as they scouted enemy submarines from bases in Newfoundland, Iceland, and Northern Ireland.

As more escort ships, better direction-finding gear, improved depth charges, and planes with new homing torpedoes went into service, the Allies finally had the advantage in the Atlantic by late spring of 1943. It was perhaps the most dramatic turnaround of World War II. Forty-one U-boats were destroyed, more than in the first three years of the war, in what the Germans called "Black May." From April through June, 100 U-boats were sunk.

May was also a black month for Doenitz's submarine crews in the Bay of Biscay, which they had to cross leaving or returning to their pens on the French western coast. Operating from southwestern England, RAF Coastal Command bombers sank seven U-boats that month. Nine were sunk in the last week of July, and between May 1 and the end of 1943, 32 U-boats went to the bottom in the Biscay area.

By that July, the total tonnage of Allied mer-

chant ships launched exceeded that lost for the first time in the war. The number of operational U-boats was falling, and the monthly sinkings of Allied vessels diminished, exceeding 100,000 tons only once for the rest of the war.

While deploying many of his submarines to safer waters, Admiral Doenitz admitted privately, "We had lost the Battle of the Atlantic." Hitler stormed, "There can be no letup in submarine warfare. The Atlantic is my first line of defense in the West." During the next several months, 62 merchant convoys crossed the ocean with no losses. The Allies then began using the convoys to lure and destroy U-boats with their hunter-killer groups made up of fast destroyers and escort carriers.

By the autumn of 1943, a U-boat was being sunk for every freighter torpedoed, but Doenitz refused to give up, hoping for science to give him the edge. He thought he had it with an acoustical torpedo code named "zaunkonig" (wren), which homed on the pitch of an escort's propellers. The zaunkonig would blast a hole in the escort screen while merchant ships would be attacked with conventional torpedoes. In September 1943, U-boats equipped with zaunkonigs struck at two convoys in the North Atlantic, sinking three escorts, damaging one, and sending six freighters to the bottom. As a countermeasure, Allied warships were fitted with trailing "Foxer" noisemakers, which drew the acoustic torpedoes harmlessly into them. Doenitz pinned his last hopes on revolutionary 1,600-ton and 300-ton Walter U-boats, but only six became operational because of production delays.

A few U-boats attacked North Atlantic convoys until February 1944, but suffered heavy losses while inflicting only slight damage. With close surface and air support, the Allied convoys were now virtually immune to attack. After the Allies invaded Normandy on June 6, 1944, the U-boats ceased using French ports. The westward drive of the Soviet Red Army expelled them from the Baltic, and they eventually operated only from Norway. But even in early May 1945, when the European war was almost over, there were still 25 U-boats in British waters or in passage.

Admiral Doenitz surrendered unconditionally on May 7, 1945. That evening, Walter XXIII U-boat Kapitanleutnant Emil Klusmeier disobeyed orders, sinking the Canadian steamer *Avondale Park* and the Norwegian tramp steamer *Sneland I*. Twenty-three seamen were killed. The German submarine service ended the war the way it had begun it, with the destruction of defenseless ships.

The casualties on both sides in the Atlantic War were appalling. An estimated 2,800 Allied merchantmen, 148 warships, and 1,700 Coastal Command aircraft were lost, with about 83,000 sailors, seamen, and airmen killed. Out of 863 U-boats committed in the campaign, 754 were destroyed, while out of the almost 41,000 men who served in the "iron coffins," 27,491 died. The U-boat crews' toll was higher per capita than that of any other combat force in World War II.

Despite their hardships and sacrifice, and although the U-boat threat was never completely defeated, the Allies managed to prevail in the Atlantic, with merchant ships successfully completing more than 300,000 voyages. ■

The late Michael D. Hull wrote for WWII History *on a variety of topics. He resided in Enfield, Connecticut.*

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ABOVE: The German submarine *U-515* comes under attack by U.S. Navy destroyers and aircraft from the escort carrier USS *Guadalcanal*. The U-boat was sunk in this action, which occurred in April 1944. OPPOSITE: A large convoy steams south of Newfoundland in July 1942. The convoy system allowed Allied escort ships to provide better protection against marauding U-boats during the perilous Atlantic crossing.

By Christopher Miskimon

Bundesarchive Bild 183-J28646; Photo: Schulz

Hitler's Winter of '44

German troops struggled against fierce American resistance in the Ardennes.

FEW FESTIVITIES OCCURRED ON CHRISTMAS EVE, 1944, IN THE ARDENNES Forest. Thousands of soldiers struggled to attack or defend positions, or to simply survive. On this evening, troops of the German 2nd SS Panzer Division advanced toward the town of Manhay. So far, the Ardennes Campaign had been rough going for the Germans; despite the gains they had made, the Americans were putting up stiff resistance in many places and the operation was badly behind schedule. At 2200 hours, a column of Panther and Panzer IV tanks moved out toward Manhay, led by a captured American M4 Sherman. The Germans hoped any American gunners seeing the Sherman's high, distinctive outline in the dark would mistake the column for a friendly force and hold their fire until it was too late.

"Bright moonlight flooded the Ardennes landscape covered in deep snow," recalled SS Technical Sergeant Ernst Barkmann. "Above us a full moon in a clear starry night unveiled all the contours ahead. Everything was going according to plan." Barkmann commanded a Panther tank, hull number 401. His unit, the 2nd SS Panzer Regiment, had reequipped with the Panther at the beginning of 1944, and he was a decorated veteran of the Eastern Front and Normandy. Panther 401 moved slowly ahead in the darkness, approaching Manhay.

Elements of the U.S. 3rd and 7th Armored Divisions held the line around Manhay, and fears of friendly fire mistakes did cause them to hold their fire. Supporting panzergrenadiers quickly destroyed four Shermans using panzerfausts while damaging two others. Two Panthers were hit in return, but the German column broke through the shattered American line. In the chaos of the fighting, Barkmann got lost, separating from his column and driving down the N15 highway alone. Believing he had simply lagged behind, Barkmann kept going. Soon he spied a tank 50 yards ahead. Thinking it was from his unit, he ordered his driver to pull up next to it and stop the engine. Barkmann removed his headset but saw the other tank commander drop into his tank and shut the hatch. Just then the driver's hatch of the other tank opened and Barkmann had a terrifying realization. The instrument panel light on the other tank was dark red, not green as in a German vehicle. They had stopped right next to an American tank!

Acting quickly, Barkmann ordered his crew to open fire. The gunner traversed the turret to line up his cannon, but the two tanks were so close to each other the barrel of the long 75mm L/70 gun banged into the turret of the American Sherman. They were too close to fire. The driver restarted the engine and quickly backed the tank up several yards, allowing the gun to clear the enemy tank's turret. Now the gunner fired and a 75mm round slammed into the Sherman's rear, setting it ablaze. The Panther advanced past the burning Sherman, but the crew soon spotted two more American tanks coming out of the forest to their right. The German crew opened fire again and soon both tanks were out of action.

Barkmann kept going, increasing speed, and soon the trees thinned out and the Panther arrived at a large open field surrounded by forest. In front of them sat nine Sherman tanks, all partially dug in, the muzzles of their guns pointing directly at Barkmann's Panther. The German sergeant knew that to stop would be fatal; their only chance lay in pushing forward. He ordered his driver to advance—Panther 401's Christmas had only just started.

Barkmann's story is only one of many detailing the German experience of the Battle of the Bulge in this new work, ***Hitler's Winter: The German Battle of the Bulge*** (Anthony Tucker-Jones, Osprey Publishing, Oxford UK, 2022, 320 pp., maps, photographs, appendices, notes, bibliography, index, $28.00, hardcover).

Two Panzer V "Panther" tanks drive through a Belgian village on their way to hit American lines, December 1944.

Men Over 40 Celebrate Breakthrough Pill

Doctor-developed natural formula supports prostate health, normal urinary frequency, and optimal male health

By S.A. Nickerson, Health Correspondent

Renowned holistic physician David Brownstein, M.D., knows most men feel embarrassed to talk about their prostate.

However, if you're a man over 40 or 50, your prostate is probably talking to you — and it's time to listen.

"With aging, your prostate gland can swell," warns Dr. Brownstein. "This pressure begins to affect urinary control, forcing you to look for a bathroom wherever you go. You may have difficulty sleeping because of multiple nightly bathroom trips."

Rogue Testosterone Starts Attacking Around Age 40

Once you hit middle age, your body begins to secrete the enzyme 5-alpha reductase. This causes your normal "manly" testosterone to turn into a rogue testosterone compound called DHT (dihydrotestosterone).

The build-up of DHT is a primary reason why prostate size increases as you age — and is associated with the unpleasant urinary symptoms that result.

What you need, says Dr. Brownstein, is something to block the 5-alpha-reductase enzyme so it can't do its dirty work and encourage higher levels of this rogue testosterone.

Collateral Damage

Inflammation, the second culprit contributing to prostate concerns, represents collateral damage. As your body's response to injury, inflammation leads to the release of chemicals that cause fluid to accumulate in and around your prostate.

So you also need a solution that promotes a healthy inflammatory response in your prostate's tissues.

Based on his two decades of research and treating patients, Dr. Brownstein formulated one of the top-selling prostate support formulas available on the market today. Since 2013, **PROSTATE REVIVE®** has been helping thousands of men across the country.

A Proprietary Blend of 15 Ingredients

PROSTATE REVIVE is truly a male health breakthrough, with 15 powerful, handpicked nutrients working together in a synergistic formula.

Ingredients such as saw palmetto, plant sterols with beta-sitosterol, pumpkin seed powder, and others help reduce the production of DHT.

Additional ingredients, including boswellia extract, pomegranate fruit extract, and pygeum, help promote proper inflammatory response.

Plus, nutrients such as selenium, zinc, and lycopene are essential for the health and function of your prostate.

The Simple Solution

With daily use, **PROSTATE REVIVE** makes it simple to support normal prostate health and function. With better control and fewer trips to the bathroom, you may even sleep better.

PROSTATE REVIVE® Users Speak Out*

Many users write to praise this prostate support formula.

"Had trouble urinating and it took forever. Had to get up 6 times a night. After using **PROSTATE REVIVE** for 2 weeks everything is good. I feel it is perfect. I have used other brands and not one of them worked like yours."
Kenneth F., California

"I'm so happy with **PROSTATE REVIVE**, there aren't enough words to describe it. Fantastic!" ***Manuel L., Tennessee***

"**PROSTATE REVIVE** keeps my bladder under control, so I don't feel the urgency to urinate anymore. I feel more alert and wake up restful, ready to go ahead with my day." ***Luis C., New York***

"I took it for 6 weeks and my PSA level went way down." ***Ramon G., Wisconsin***

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DR. BROWNSTEIN

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You'll also receive Dr. Brownstein's detailed special report "**A Doctor's Guide to a Healthy Prostate**" as a **FREE** bonus gift (a $20 value).

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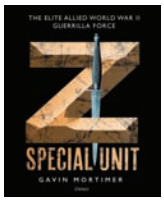
Trial offer requires enrollment in SmartShip program. See website for details. These statements have not been evaluated by the Food and Drug Administration. This product is not intended to diagnose, treat, cure, or prevent any disease. Testimonials are from actual customers who have used our products. *Testimonials reflect their experience but may not be representative of all those who will use our product.

Most works on the Ardennes focus on the American experience and it is good to have a well-written volume on the German point of view. Books like this allow readers to compare the written accounts of both sides and see how the two match and where they differ. Different perspectives of the same event always lead to such variations and this work adds to the existing body of knowledge. The book is also a pleasure to read, with a good, thoughtful narrative and detailed research to ensure the best possible level of historical accuracy.



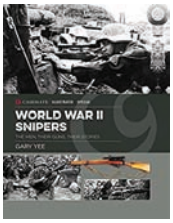
Z Special Unit: The Elite Allied World War II Guerrilla Force (Gavin Mortimer, Osprey Publishing, Oxford, UK, 2022, 240 pp., maps, photographs, notes, glossary, index, $35, hardcover)

The Z Special Unit is one of the least known Allied Special Forces units of World War II, yet it was also one of the most active. For two years they waged an unconventional warfare campaign against the Japanese Empire in the Southwest Pacific. During their 81 missions, Z operatives, consisting of specially trained Australian and British soldiers, carried out a diverse range of attacks. They mined Japanese ships by slipping into harbors using canoes, paddling silently in the darkness. Other groups parachuted into locations such as Borneo, where they joined local tribesmen and fought together against Japanese occupation forces. They faced torture and execution if captured. Their story is a mixed one, full of bravery, determination, and endurance, while simultaneously containing calamity and the brutality of war.

This fully illustrated volume contains photographs never published showing Z Unit members both in training and on operations. It also recounts many of their exploits in vivid detail, making extensive use of the members' own letters and statements. The author has several titles about Special Forces to his credit, and this latest work stands alongside those prior works in their detail, readability, and engagement. The book effectively brings to light one of the war's most effective unconventional warfare organizations and highlights their achievements.

World War II Snipers: The Men, Their Guns, Their Stories (Gary Yee, Casemate Books, Havertown, PA, 2022, 352 pp., maps, photographs, notes, bibliography, index, $49.95, hardcover)

Private Harlan J. Hinkle enlisted in the United States Marine Corps the day after the Pearl Harbor attack. After attending the Scout-Sniper



10 islands across the Pacific Ocean. On one occasion he shot a Japanese sniper who turned out to be a woman, a rare occurrence for the Japanese military, which did not use women in combat roles. Harlan got to her before she died and as she lay dying, she told Harlan she lived in California for 16 years and was a graduate of the University of California. She had returned to Japan before the war to visit relatives. Once the conflict began, she was forced to join the army. This turn of fate eventually led her into the crosshairs of Harlan's sniper rifle.

Each combatant nation had its own methods of selecting and training snipers, arming and equipping them, and then utilizing them in action. This book goes over the details of these snipers, with sections covering them in action and the weapons they used. The book has hundreds of illustrations, including excerpts from wartime manuals and close-in views of various rifles and sighting systems. There are also hundreds of vignettes from the snipers themselves.

Marching From Defeat: Surviving the Collapse of the German Army in the Soviet Union 1944 (Claus Neuber, translated by Tony Le Tissier, Pen and Sword Books, South Yorkshire, UK, 2022, 191 pp., $34.95, hardcover)

Claus Neuber served as an artillery officer in the German Army on the Eastern Front. In June 1944, the Soviets launched Operation Bagration, a massive offensive which crushed German Army Group Center. Nazi forces were thrown back in disarray, with thousands of men killed, wounded, or captured. Neuber took part in desperate defensive fighting and rearguard actions, but the Soviets kept advancing. He was cut off

from his unit, alone behind enemy lines, and spent the next 70 days surviving in hiding with a few comrades, often dependent on the kindness of villagers who had little reason to help them but did so anyway. Eventually, they returned to German lines, reunited with their countrymen through a combination of endurance, bravery, and ingenuity, plus a measure of teamwork and loyalty.

Most German memoirs of the Eastern Front end with retreat and eventual surrender. This extraordinary tale stands out as the story of a group trapped behind enemy lines, hunted and desperate. The author recorded his experiences into a report soon after he returned to German lines, and his notes were later expanded into this account, providing a fresh, clear narrative which lacks the fuzziness which time inflicts on the memory. This is not a typical Eastern Front story.

The 614th Tank Destroyer Battalion: Fighting on Both Fronts (Samuel De Korte, Pen and Sword Books, South Yorkshire, UK, 2022, 227 pp., photographs, appendices, notes, bibliography, index, $29.95, hardcover)

The men of the 614th Tank Destroyer Battalion fought two opponents during World War II. From the moment they began their training in 1942, the African American soldiers assigned to the unit faced the prejudice endemic in American society of the time, and by extension the United States Army. Despite this obstacle, they completed their training and deployed to the European Theater, where they engaged in combat against the Nazis. At Climbach, a French town near the German border, the 3rd Platoon of Company C joined a task force attacking the town. Despite taking heavy casualties, the platoon stayed in action, firing their 3-inch towed antitank guns at German positions and repulsing an enemy infantry attack. The platoon earned a Distinguished Unit Citation, and its members earned 14 awards, including Bronze and Silver Stars and a Distinguished Service Cross. By war's end they also won the respect of the 103rd Infantry Division, whom they were attached to for much of the war.

More than just a unit history, this book relates the struggles of its veterans against both racism and the German Army. The authors effectively balance these two sides of the 614th's war, giving the unit's members their just due while presenting them as men performing a duty and serving their country, just as millions of others did. The work is a fitting tribute to a group of soldiers who served their country honorably and well.

Life and Death on the Eastern Front: Rare Colour Photographs from the Second World War (Anthony Tucker-Jones and Ian Stewart Spring, Greenhill Books, Barnsley, UK, 2022, 288 pp., photographs, bibliography, $34.95, hardcover)

A trio of Soviet T-26 light tanks sit isolated in a field, green grass reaching the tops of their tracks. There are no track marks behind the tanks; they have been sitting there for some time. Their scorched hulls are brown and black, with bits of equipment scattered around their hulls, evidence of past looting. The three armored vehicles sit in a line near a set of farm buildings, hinting they might have been knocked out within seconds of each other. The center tank has a horseshoe shaped antenna around the turret, indicating it belonged to a platoon or company commander; the rest of the tanks would have made do with signal flags. The T-26 was obsolete even in 1941, but the Soviets had so many there was no choice but to throw them at the Nazi invaders. Many of the crews paid with their lives for this desperation, while others marched into captivity.

The photograph described above is one of hundreds of full-color images in this new book. The authors combed through a collection of 32,000 color pictures taken between 1938 and 1946 to find these illustrations of the Eastern Front. It is uncommon in the Western world to see color photographs of the war between Germany and the Soviet Union, and the ones in this book are well-organized and chosen. ■

Simulation Gaming

BY JOSEPH LUSTER

TAKE TO THE SEAS AND STAVE OFF COUNTLESS MARITIME DISASTERS IN *AIRCRAFT CARRIER SURVIVAL*

AIRCRAFT CARRIER SURVIVAL

PUBLISHER CREATIVEFORGE GAMES • **GENRE** STRATEGY • **SYSTEM** PC

We've taken off from and landed atop our fair share of aircraft carriers in the past few decades spent with war-inspired video games, but how many of us have actually had to carefully manage said vessels? That's the task at hand in *Aircraft Carrier Survival*, an indie strategy effort from publisher and developer CreativeForge Games that puts us in a unique position during World War II and, if all goes according to plan, will continue to roll out fresh updates for players around the world.

True to its name, *Aircraft Carrier Survival* has players taking control of all aspects of a WWII aircraft carrier, from the officers and their crew to the planes housed within it and the battles beyond. You'll need to manage fleet resources, decide upon tasks for crew members and officers alike, and handle plenty of damage control as torpedoes strike, fires break out and water breaches the hull. These and other crises may happen all at once in an unpredictable manner, forcing you to make tough decisions and sacrifice individual aspects so you and your crew can live to fight another day.

Outside of balancing threats, *Aircraft Carrier Survival* is primarily a sim based on management and logistics. There is, by the nature of the scenario, a lot going on at any given moment, and not everything about the tutorial is properly in place to prepare you for it all. Some of the scenarios don't quite seem like something that would make you actually break away from your focus on the mission at hand, while others are indeed legitimate emergencies that must be addressed immediately. One additional thing to note here is that combat is handled with a card-based system, so that should tell you all you need to know as far as your own personal tastes are concerned. If cards aren't a deal-breaker, there's plenty of excitement to be had in the battles themselves.

The folks at CreativeForge have rolled out a couple small updates and fixes since the game's initial launch back in April, and while the future is potentially bright for this particular survival outing, it's all going to come down to the level of support they provide. There are still many bugs scattered throughout and the strategic execution might not be the right fit for all tactical fans out there, but *Aircraft Carrier Survival* is worth a look whenever it happens to be on sale, especially if they catch up with the patching by the time this issue is in your hands. ■

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Top Secret

Continued from page 27

He oversaw Nazi espionage in Switzerland and Russia. One of his most bizarre initiatives was "Salon Kitty," a high-class Berlin bordello catering to high-ranking foreign big shots, to learn secrets from their pillow talk. Instead, Schellenberg discovered that top Nazis—including Foreign Minister Joachim von Ribbentrop and his boss, Heydrich—were going there, making the whole operation counter-productive.

Much of Schellenberg's work failed, anyway. He recruited Russians from POW camps to spy in the Soviet Union—most were killed. He entered into useless rivalries with other top SS men, like Ernst Kaltenbrunner and Heinrich Müller, which only tangled up the Byzantine Nazi world. He spent a chunk of the war trying to convince his mistress, fashion designer Coco Chanel, to spy for the Nazis.

As the war ended, Schellenberg tried to convince Himmler to negotiate an end to the war, and Himmler did so, with Swedish Count Folke Bernadotte. The Allies ignored the sadistic Himmler's offer to lead Germany. British troops bagged Schellenberg, and the cynical Nazi made a deal: he would testify against his countrymen in return for a small term. He got the deal. His written statement became his memoir, titled *The Labyrinth*. Historians question its accuracy. He drew six years for his role in shooting Soviet POWs and died in Switzerland from kidney issues in 1952.

The two British spies were treated well in captivity, winding up in 1945 with a collection of "Prominente" prisoners that included repeat British military escapers, Polish generals, relatives of anti-Hitler plotters, and even the former Nazi Economics Minister, Hjalmar Schacht, imprisoned for opposing Hitler. They were held by a group of SS killers as bargaining chips in Austria, but word got out to a nearby German Army unit about the situation, and they disarmed the SS men, enabling one of the "Prominente," RAF Wing Commander Harry "Wings" Day, to escape to American lines, and GIs saved everyone. Payne-Best and Stevens retired when they returned.

But that was in the future. On November 17, 1939, Nazi Propaganda Minister Joseph Goebbels wrote in his diary about the SS feat of scooping up the British spies Payne-Best and Stevens at Venlo. He sneered, "Our boys made themselves out to be the enemies of the state and so lured this piece of garbage to the border. Now we have the fellow, and he can sweat blood." ■

SS Panzers

Continued from page 33

possibility for a rapid encirclement of the entire German Seventh and Fifth Panzer Armies materialized.

In the aftermath of Operation Lüttich, the Germans drew up to defensive positions around the town of Falaise. On August 8, Montgomery launched Operation Totalize toward this concentration, two armored divisions leading the way. Once again, the British and Canadian forces ran into the depleted 12th SS. After two days of bitter fighting, Montgomery was short of his objective, but the northern shoulder of a giant Allied pincer was nearly closed.

Roughly 100,000 German troops were trapped in the Falaise Pocket at the end of August, but 60 men of the 12th SS fought to keep the escape route open north of Argentan. After three days, four of them were captured alive. The battered Hitlerjugend and Leibstandarte fought desperately to keep the gap open, allowing up to 40,000 soldiers to elude capture. The Leibstandarte held the southern shoulder and conducted a fighting withdrawal. On the nights of August 13 and 14, the remnants of Das Reich filtered through the Leibstandarte to a new defensive line at Champosoult. On the 16th, the Leibstandarte began its final retirement as fog cloaked the withdrawal across the River Orne.

The SS divisions in Normandy were shattered, and their losses were tremendous. The Leibstandarte had suffered 5,000 casualties and abandoned nearly all its remaining tanks and artillery during the retreat at Falaise. The 9th SS Panzer Division lost half its strength, about 9,000 men, and the 10th SS Panzer had been reduced to four battalions of infantry and not a single tank. The 17th SS was broken into battlegroups around the city of Metz after escaping the Falaise Pocket. Das Reich could muster only 15 tanks and 450 soldiers. Army Group B reported on August 22 that the 12th SS Panzer Division Hitlerjugend had ceased to exist as a fighting force, utterly destroyed in Normandy with but 300 soldiers and 10 tanks.

Months of bitter fighting lay ahead, but the losses suffered among the SS panzer and panzergrenadier formations in Normandy were irreplaceable. ■

Michael E. Haskew, editor of WWII History, *is the author of numerous books and articles on military history. He resides in Chattanooga, Tennessee.*

Operation Torch

Continued from page 55

"landing pattern over the target was perfect and well timed" and that the jump at Youks-les-Bains was the most successful of his career.

Raff sent a strong force forward to occupy Tebessa and soon determined that the way was open to Gabes on the Mediterranean coast. If the paratroopers were allowed to advance that distance, they might prevent the retreating Germans under Rommel from linking up with other enemy forces already in Tunisia. Raff radioed General Clark for permission to make the advance but was warned to go no further than Gafsa, 75 miles north of Tebessa.

Clark's decision was correct. The paratroopers were lightly armed, and providing adequate support for them would have been problematic. Raff's initiative did secure the right flank of the Allied advance toward Tunis through the critical month of February 1943.

On November 29, the British 2 Parachute Battalion jumped at Depienne to destroy German airfields and supply bases. German troops and tanks attacked them near the village of Oudna, and the British paratroopers fought a running battle across the desert, eventually covering a distance of 60 miles and losing half their number.

The last Allied airborne mission in North Africa took place on December 23, 1942, when 30 American paratroopers carrying 500 pounds of explosives dropped near El Djem to destroy a bridge. The planes flew low to avoid detection, and visibility was good with a full moon. The drop went flawlessly, but the troopers became disoriented and marched away from their objective rather than toward it. Most of them were captured by the Germans.

While the troop carrier groups remained active with logistical support, the Allied airborne units were utilized as infantry for extended periods during the remaining days of the North Africa Campaign. Senior commanders discussed additional parachute operations, but these proved unnecessary as Allied ground troops eventually trapped the Germans against the Mediterranean coast of Tunisia and forced one of the largest mass surrenders of World War II.

As the fighting in North Africa came to an end, the number of airborne troops based on the continent increased in preparation for their anticipated role in the next Allied offensive, the invasion of Sicily. ■

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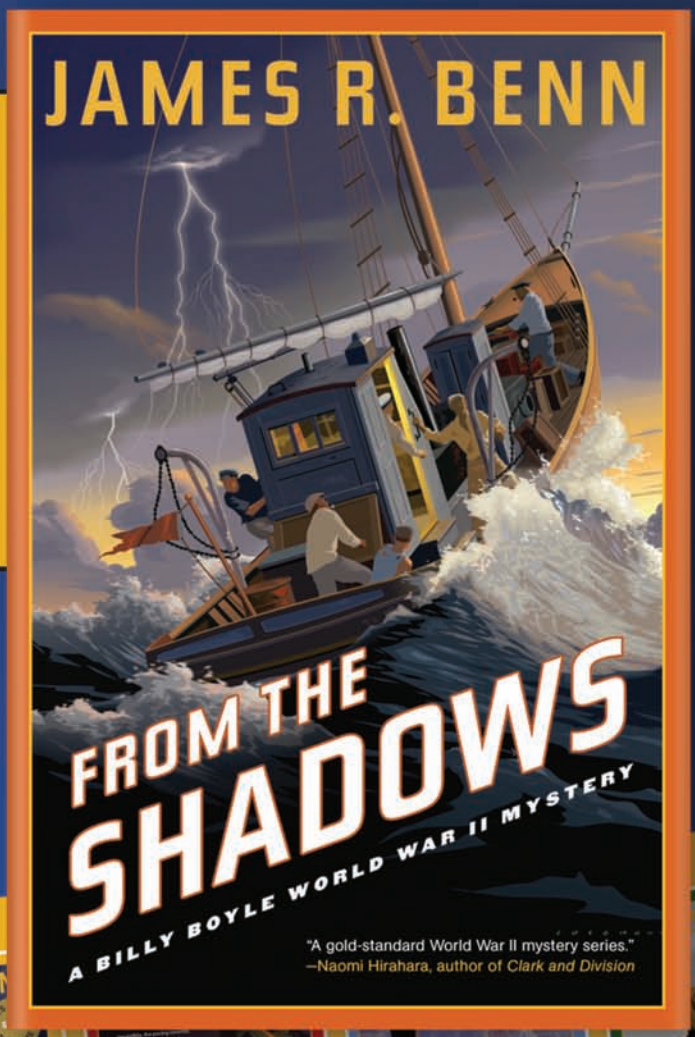

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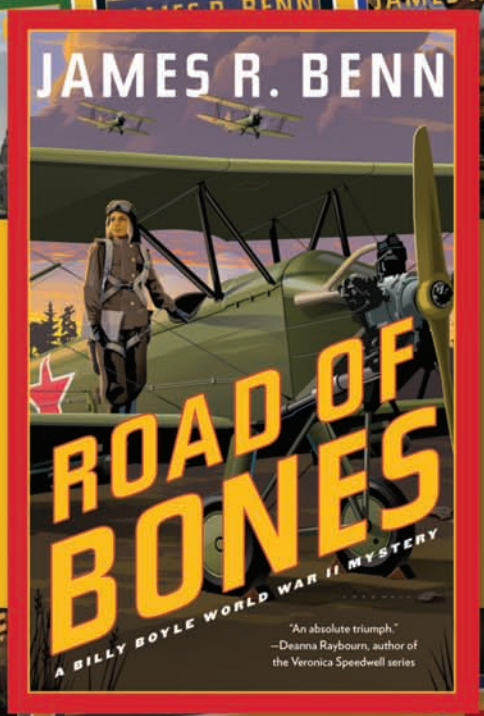

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