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

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Cover: A British Supermarine Spitfire, famed fighter of the Battle of Britain, soars through the skies in the 1940s. See story page 10. Photo © Bettman/CORBIS.

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"AN ANSWER TO THE QUESTION . . ."

NEW FROM THE ABERJONA PRESS

Victory Was Beyond Their Grasp

With the 272nd Volks-Grenadier Division from the Hürtgen Forest to the Heart of the Reich

By Douglas E. Nash

In the English language literature on the December 1944 German offensive in the Ardennes, the so-called "Battle of the Bulge," it is often stated that the American 4th and 28th Infantry Divisions had been "bled white in the Hürtgen Forest fighting" in the autumn of 1944, and were then assigned to the quiet Ardennes sector for rebuilding. I had long wondered at how the scratch, makeshift German defenses on the Western Front, after heavy losses in the Normandy campaign, were able to inflict such casualties on their opponent. An answer to this question is now available in the form of Douglas Nash's new book *Victory Was Beyond Their Grasp: With the 272nd Volksgrenadier Division From the Hürtgen Forest to the Heart of the Reich. . . .*

Victory . . . provides an analysis of the entirety of the late war German Volksgrenadier experiment. The idea behind creating such divisions is examined, as is the manner in which these units were brought into being, including a look at how the reality differed from what was expected by the German high command and Allied intelligence. The focus then narrows to the 272nd Volksgrenadier Division, with it serving as a detailed example of how a typical Volksgrenadier division went through its organization and training. The focus is further narrowed by placing the overall service of the division in the context of the career of one special company within it. That formation, Fusilier Kompanie 272, was intended as an elite mobile reserve for the division, and the survival of a cache of detailed wartime documents from that company was the germ of Nash's research for this book. . . . The picture presented is one of well-intentioned soldiers, who never had quite enough resources or firepower to achieve more than local success, but who gave their best repeatedly, in an already lost cause. Eventually, constant casualties and the hopelessness of Germany's situation wore the division down to the point that the survivors had nothing more to give.

Nash interviewed many surviving veterans of the 272nd, and had access to wartime letters, along with the documents mentioned above. Together, these show the men of the division as fighting for their country, and for each other, far more than for the political leadership of that time. This book is one of the few to provide such a look at the late war German military on the Western Front. . . . The 272nd took an awful toll of their opponents, something Nash verified through extensive use of American sources (veteran interviews, unit histories, and wartime reports).

Victory . . . is well supported with maps, photos (especially of personalities), footnotes, and useful appendices. One need not know much about World War 2 to comprehend the book, but those who are students of that conflict are likely to learn a great deal that is new to them. There are many works currently available that present the history of elite Waffen-SS Panzer Divisions. It is a refreshing contrast to see how a rather ordinary German Army infantry division experienced the last six months of the war. As such, *Victory Was Beyond Their Grasp* is a welcome and much-needed study of a neglected aspect of the World War 2 German Military.

—*Marc Rikmenspoel, author of* Waffen-SS Encyclopedia

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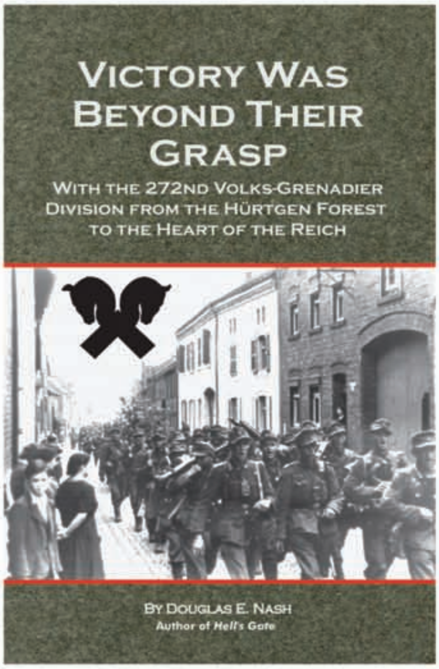

VICTORY WAS BEYOND THEIR GRASP

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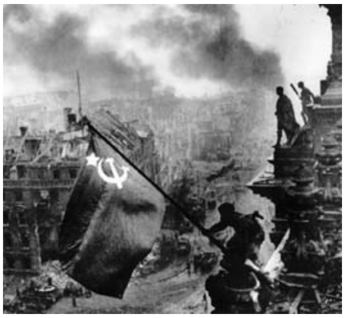
Editorial

Soviet photographer Yevgeni Khaldei staged iconic photos.

THE IMAGE OF RED ARMY SOLDIERS HOISTING THEIR HAMMER AND SICKLE emblazoned banner atop the Reichstag, the seat of the German parliament, is a classic photo of World War II, an image that told the world Nazi Germany was at last finished. Since that photograph has long symbolized the end of the greatest armed conflict ever known, it quite logically has been assumed by many that it captured the very triumphant moment; however, the Associated Press recently reported that the photograph was staged and later versions were enhanced with background smoke, a tank cut from another photo, and even a flight of combat aircraft which were painted into the scene.

Taken on May 2, 1945, by Red Army photographer Yevgeni Khaldei, the image was prominent among a collection of his work that debuted at the Gropius-Bau Museum in Berlin last May in an exhibition titled "Yevgeni Khaldei—The Decisive Moment." Although the Soviets had actually captured the Reichstag three days earlier and the photo was obviously fodder for the Soviet propaganda machine, it nevertheless does survive as a symbol. Behind the image itself is the remarkable career of a photographer.



Relatively unknown in the West, Khaldei was said to have received a commission in the Red Army immediately following the Nazi invasion of his country on June 22, 1941. For nearly 1,500 days he was active in the field, documenting events as they unfolded. Born the son of Russian Jews in 1917, he gained an interest in photography while working in a steel factory. He fashioned his own primitive box camera using a lens from the eyeglasses of his grandmother who had recently passed away.

As a teenager, Khaldei worked as a photojournalist for the Soviet News Agency, Tass, and his work was regularly seen in *Pravda,* the Communist Party newspaper. Venturing far and wide, he recorded photos of death and destruction on the Eastern Front, from Sevastopol to Murmansk and eventually all the way to Berlin. During the final days of the war, Khaldei photographed the Soviet offensive against the Japanese in Manchuria and the Allied leaders during the contentious negotiations at the Potsdam Conference. He also photographed the Nuremberg Trials and later remembered an encounter with Luftwaffe chief Hermann Göring.

"When we received orders to leave Nuremberg, I asked an American colleague to photograph me with Göring," Khaldei said. "Göring remembered that, because of me, he had been hit with a club, and hence he always turned his head aside when I came into the courtroom. When he noticed I wanted to get a picture with him, he put down his hand in front of his face."

Khaldei's Jewish heritage also impacted his career. In 1949, his position with Tass was eliminated. Ten years later, he found work with *Pravda,* remaining there until 1970 when he was again dismissed because he was Jewish. He continued to work privately during his remaining years and lived modestly in Moscow until his death in 1997.

Among Khaldei's other photos in Berlin were those of the raising of the Red banner at Tempelhof Airport and on the Brandenberg Gate. With the Red Army on the outskirts of the Nazi capital, he was said to have realized that no Soviet flags were available for his use. So, he hurried back to Moscow. When he could find nothing suitable, he persuaded a merchant to part with several large, red tablecloths. A stop at his uncle's tailor shop resulted in a sizable flag that was ideal for his purposes.

Perhaps the recent publicity and revelation about his historic photos will cast additional light on the life and times of Yevgeni Khaldei. While his most memorable image may have been staged, a body of work which worthy of note remains.

Michael E. Haskew

WWII HISTORY

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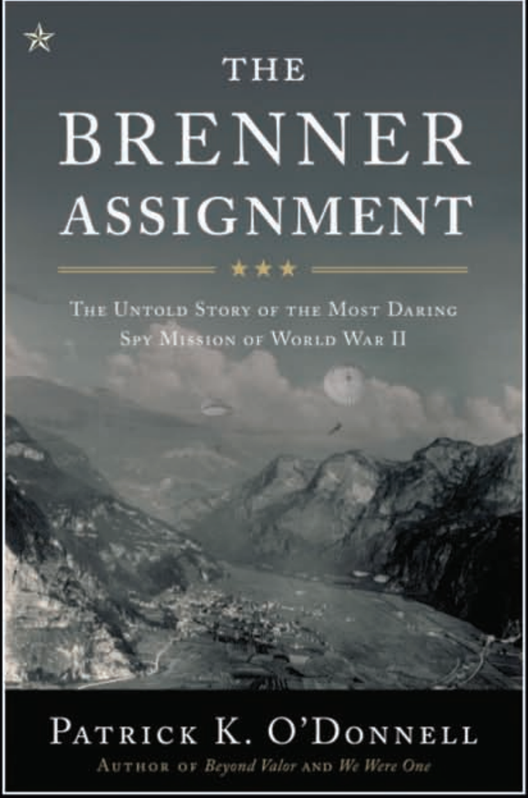
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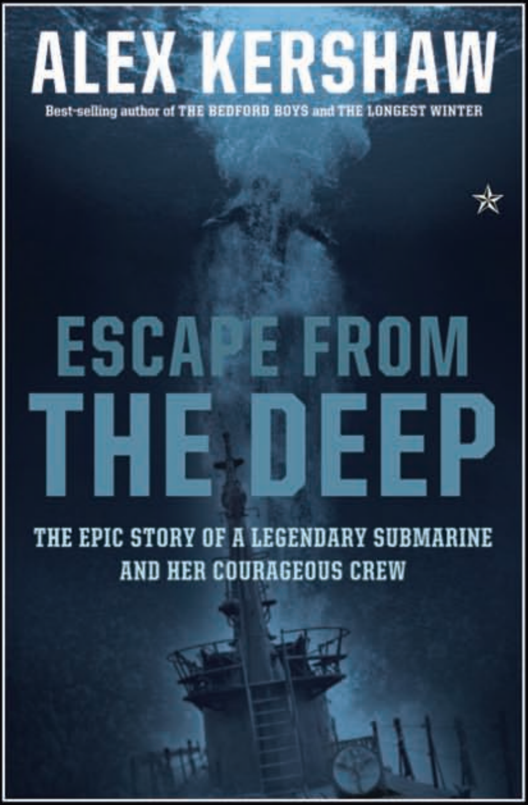
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Dispatches

Dear Editor:

In your October/November 2008 issue, Glenn Barnett's article "Caring for the Casualties" was of particular interest to me. I was wounded on September 10, 1944, flown back to England from the 100th Evacuation Hospital outside of Brest, France, on September 18, arriving at the Army's 121st General Hospital in the evening. I was the first patient moved into a newly opened 24-bed ward, with lights burning, white sheets, and female nurses. Mr. Barnett's sidebar story "'White Sheets and Women': The Army Nurse Corps," reinforced vivid memories of that moment.

But within that story he quoted an entry from Stephen Ambrose's book, *Citizen Soldiers*. This quote can be found on page 325 in the chapter titled"Medics, Nurses, and Doctors": "Funny stories helped keep them going. One concerned a Red Cross worker, Miss Eisenstadt, who picked up a chart expecting to see where and how the patient was wounded. What she saw astonished her. 'How on earth did you ever get shot with two arrows?' she blurted out. The full-blooded American Indian on the cot replied with righteous indignation, 'That's my name, not my injury.'"

Mr. Barnett changed the tale a bit by crediting an Army nurse with that question. My charge is that Ambrose did not clearly convey Miss Eisenstadt's story. The soldier's complete name was Leo Shot-With-Two-Arrows, which lost something in Ambrose's printed narrative.

I spent eight months in that hospital ward and casualties came and left. Leo was a ward mate for perhaps three of four months, during which time we became well acquainted. He was 19, my age, from the Rose Bud Indian Reservation in South Dakota and had been a rodeo bronco rider before entering service. Furthermore, I knew Miss Eisenstadt because she came to the ward periodically to check on new patients or to visit with those who had been there a while. I last heard from Leo in the seventies when his son was serving in the Marine Corps in Vietnam.

Mortimer C. Sheffloe
Georgetown, Texas

Dear Editor:

I really enjoyed the article "Hazardous Duty with the Naval Armed Guard" in the October/November issue of your excellent magazine. It brought back memories of when I was in the Merchant Marine, prior to being inducted into the Army in September 1941. I was a First Sergeant in the 2nd Infantry Division, having seen bloody action in France, Belgium, Germany, and Czechoslovakia and being discharged in October 1945.

In any event, as a Merchant Marine I boarded the SS *Exeter*, which left New York on September 2, 1939, whose itinerary was Marseilles, France; Naples, Livorno, and Genoa in Italy; Pyraeus, Greece; Alexandria, Egypt; Haifa, Jafa, and Palestine; and Beirut, Lebanon, and then back to New York on October 15, 1939.

The same day we left New York, Nazi Germany invaded Poland, and on September 3, 1939, England and France declared war on Germany. We heard the news on the loudspeaker, and on the fourth day while navigating on the Atlantic, we spied a German submarine. The captain of the SS *Essex* immediately gave orders to paint the American flag on the sides of the ship, and then and only then did the submarine leave us alone.

While in the ports of the cities mentioned above we were given a day off to visit the ports while the "black gang" (not for their color, but because they worked while we had our days off) remained aboard, and as war had already been declared we saw uniforms all over the place. Very interesting and scary at the same time, not knowing that in a few years I would be fighting those uniforms.

Subsequently, President Roosevelt signed the Neutrality Act, leaving us merchant seaman out of work ... until I was drafted. The rest is history.

Harold A. Rodriguez
Anaheim, California

Dear Editor:

Perhaps no other battle in the war is more captivating to readers than the Normandy invasion. Author Kevin Hymel does a very nice job in "D-Day Dilemma," (Aug./Sept. 2008 issue), but he is a bit hard on Colonel Edson Raff, in my opinion. Mr. Hymel is critical of Raff for not showing the same boldness and initiative as General Ridgway. Hymel should keep in mind that colonels and generals are truly paid to think and act at different levels. Surely one would expect Ridgway, as a major general, to take bold initiative by searching out the 4th Infantry Division, finding artillery support, and finding Colonel Raff (recall also that Ridgway was surrounded, another incentive for action). Raff, on the other hand, was simply trying to get the job done in his attempt to reach Ste. Mere Eglise. And his peer at the scene, Colonel

James Van Fleet, was also thinking at his pay level, and playing it safe as well. This must have paid off for Van Fleet, who later rose to the rank of full general and commanded the Eighth Army during the Korean conflict.

A point also on author Hymel's critique of Ridgway for using glider troops instead of a better-suited armored division for the task handed to Raff. Keep in mind that, as a commander of an airborne division, Maj. Gen. Ridgway had no access to an armored division or any of one's assets. At that point, Ridgway was probably stymied. To my knowledge no U.S. armored division took part in the D-Day landings, and I do not think one could hold a major general of airborne troops accountable for that.

Finally, it is my opinion that *WWII History* ought to spring for an expense-paid trip to France for Mr. Hymel, and allow him to see for himself the much-venerated church at Ste. Mere Eglise! I was able to see it myself in 1984 and I was struck by how small it truly is. Not a cathedral at all, it is really more of a chapel. But when I saw it, from its steeple hung a white silk parachute and a mannequin, commemorating the airborne trooper who became hung up on it during that fateful night jump of June 6th, 1944.

James Spinelli, MD
Colonel, US Army, ret.
Columbia, South Carolina

Dear Editor:
Recently I had the honor of visiting Ernie Pyle's grave site at the National Memorial Cemetery of the Pacific.

Indeed, Pyle, as a veteran, was entitled to be buried in a military cemetery, but according to our group's tour guide (who was unaffiliated with the National Cemetery), the reason Pyle is interred between two unknown soldiers is because he specifically requested this manner of burial in his last Will and Testament.

William R. Mumbauer
Brandon, Florida

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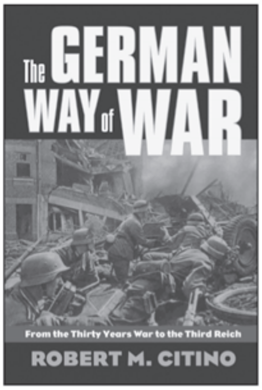

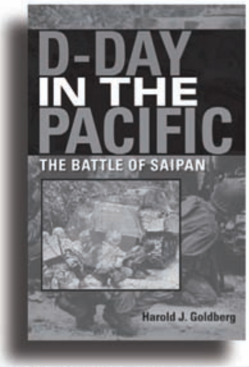

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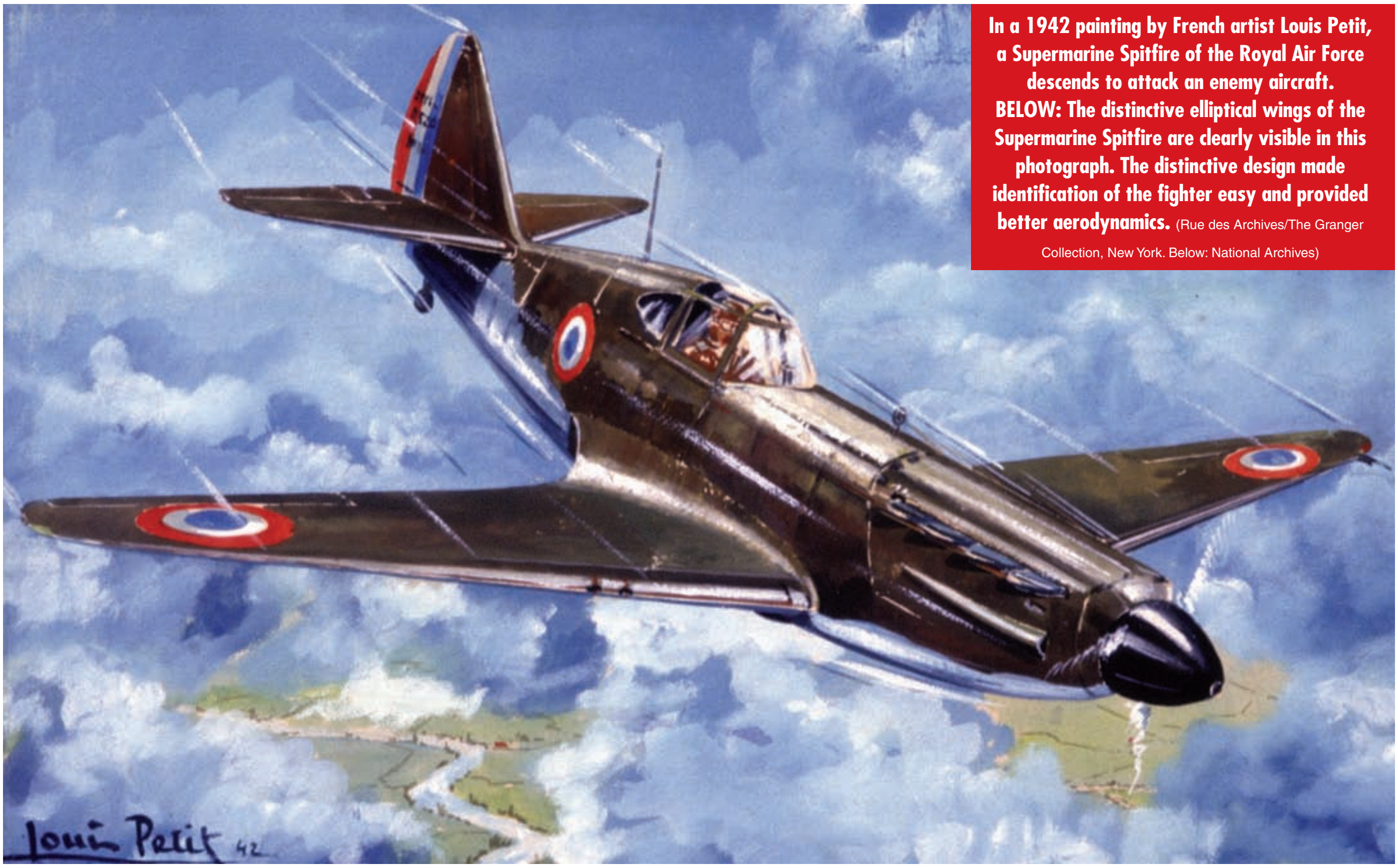
By Sam McGowan



In a 1942 painting by French artist Louis Petit, a Supermarine Spitfire of the Royal Air Force descends to attack an enemy aircraft. BELOW: The distinctive elliptical wings of the Supermarine Spitfire are clearly visible in this photograph. The distinctive design made identification of the fighter easy and provided better aerodynamics. (Rue des Archives/The Granger Collection, New York. Below: National Archives)

The Superb Supermarine Spitfire

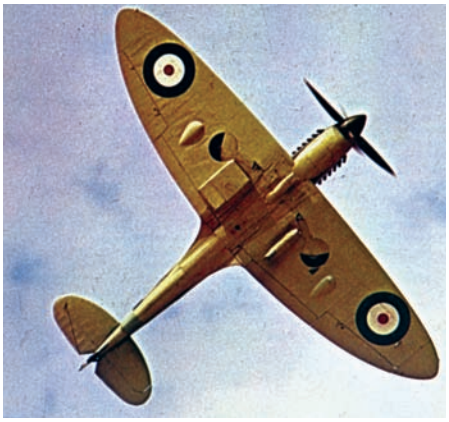
> One of the legendary aircraft of World War II, the Spitfire tipped the balance in favor of the RAF during the Battle of Britain.

IN THE ANNALS OF WORLD WAR II, ONE OF THE MOST famous airplanes is the British-developed Supermarine Spitfire, an agile, elliptical-wing fighter that has become synonymous with the Royal Air Force victory in the Battle of Britain. Thanks in large measure to news reports coming out of that battle, the Spitfire captured the imagination of a generation of English and American schoolboys, some of whom would themselves be flying Spitfires by the war's end half a decade later.

Until the introduction of the North American P-51 Mustang, the Spitfire was considered to be the most maneuverable of the Allied fighters, and it was favored by nearly everyone who flew it.

The Spitfire was a product of the Supermarine Company, a British firm that started out building flying boats before World War I. In 1916, the firm was joined by a young engineer named R.J. Mitchell, who would eventually design the Spitfire. After World War I, Supermarine was heavily involved in designing and building flying boats for competition. Mitchell, however, envisioned smaller, sleeker designs that would be capable of much higher speeds than were possible with the ungainly flying boats.

After the 1923 Schneider Trophy Race, Mitchell decided to design a high-performance seaplane for the 1925 event. Unfortunately, the first Mitchell design crashed during the race, which was won by Lieutenant James H. Doolittle of the U.S. Army. Ironically, 17 years later Doolittle would have command of several Spitfire squadrons operating in North Africa. Supermarine's S.5 finally took the Schneider Trophy in 1927, establishing the company's reputation as a builder of fast airplanes and Mitchell's as their designer. The following year the company was purchased by Vickers. When the worldwide depression of the



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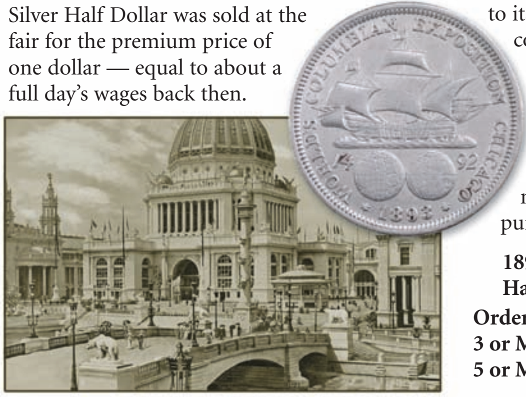
THE COLUMBIAN EXPOSITION HALF-DOLLAR

Designers: Charles Barber (obverse)
and George Morgan (reverse)
Diameter: 30.6 mm
Weight: 12.5 grams
Composition: .900 fine silver
Status: Legal-Tender Commemorative
Date: 1893

Thousands of visitors attended the fair during 1892-93. The official U.S. Mint Columbian Silver Half Dollar was sold at the fair for the premium price of one dollar — equal to about a full day's wages back then.



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A Spitfire pilot dives to avoid machine-gun fire from an attacking German Messerschmitt Me-109. The two aircraft engaged in ferocious dogfights during the Battle of Britain, which put an end to German plans for a cross-Channel invasion. (Signal)

1930s led England to decide not to promote an entrant for the 1931 race, Lady Houston, a wealthy Englishwoman and patriot, funded the entry. Thanks to her generous gift, Britain captured the Schneider Cup and took it home for good.

Until that time, Supermarine's efforts had been aimed at seaplanes, but Mitchell convinced the company to design and build an entry for an Air Ministry specification for a day-night fighter. Although Supermarine had been purchased by Vickers, the original company was given the latitude to design airplanes under its own name. Supermarine named its new fighter "Spitfire," but the gull-wing airplane was not a success.

One of the main reasons for the first Spitfire's failure was the long landing distances required by the high-speed design; the Air Ministry had specified that the new fighter would have to operate from short fields. Meanwhile, Rolls-Royce had developed a new engine it called the Merlin, and Mitchell decided to adopt it for a military fighter for the RAF. In 1934, the Air Ministry put out a specification for an eight-gun fighter, and Mitchell took up the challenge; the company adopted "Spitfire" as the name of its design.

To arm the new fighters, the Air Ministry worked out an arrangement with the American Browning Arms Company to build its .30-caliber machine gun in the UK under license and to convert it to the British standard .303 cartridge. The prototype Spitfire took to the air on March 5, 1936.

In the mid-1930s Britain had begun rearming, prompted at least in part by the rise to power of Adolf Hitler in Germany. When the Air Ministry put out a requirement for an eight-gun production fighter, Mitchell undertook to redesign the Spitfire to meet the new specifications. After he learned that he was terminally ill, Mitchell devoted himself to the project, working night and day and perhaps speeding up his own demise. Unfortunately, the designer succumbed to cancer before the first production airplane had been completed. But the new fighter he had designed would live on to earn Mitchell his place in military aviation history.

The first Spitfires entered operational service in mid-1938; RAF 19 Squadron at Duxford was the first to receive the new fighter, with the first airplanes delivered on August 4. The second Spitfire squadron was also at Duxford; RAF 66 Squadron began replacing its Gloucester Gauntlets with Spitfires on October 13. Other squadrons began receiving the new fighter the following year. By August 1938 the RAF had 400 operational Spitfires, with orders for 2,100 more. Barely a year later, England would be at war, and the Spitfire would be one of the country's most important weapons.

Tragically, the first aircraft shot down by Spitfires were friendly Hawker Hurricanes. Shortly after Britain declared war on Germany during the first week of September 1939, a false alarm led to the scrambling of RAF fighters against a nonexistent enemy. Two Spitfires from 74 Squadron came up behind a pair of Hurricanes from 56 Squadron and shot both airplanes down; both pilots were killed by the friendly fire. A court-martial resulted in an acquittal on the basis that the real fault lay with the fighter controllers who had directed the action. Another Spitfire was lost the same day when the pilot allowed his airplane to stall at low altitude; it spun into the trees before he could recover.

On October 16 a Spitfire pilot was credited with the first official kill of the war for RAF Fighter Command. German reconnaissance aircraft operating over the Firth of Forth led to the scrambling of Spitfires from Scottish bases. A three-plane section from 603 Squadron intercepted a twin-engine aircraft and shot it down. But such engagements were rare during the period known as "The Phoney War," when contact with the enemy was rare. The RAF Auxiliary squadrons took advantage of the temporary lull in the conflict to bring their pilots up to operational readiness in their Hurricanes and Spitfires.

When the Germans invaded France and the Low Countries on May 10, 1940, the Spitfire squadrons were held in reserve while six squadrons of Hurricanes were sent into action over France with the British Expeditionary Force. The decision was logical, in that the difficulties of forward operations could be better endured with only one type of fighter. The Hurricane was better suited for operations from primitive airfields owing to its wide landing gear track—and there were a lot more of them.

As the situation on the Continent worsened, the Spitfire pilots of 19 Squadron were told that they would be deploying to France. Before they could make the move, Prime Minister Winston Churchill decided to suspend further reinforcement of the fighters in spite of French pleas for additional fighter support. His decision to hold the remainder of the RAF in reserve is credited with saving the fighter force and, ultimately, keeping England in the war. As it was, few of the Hurricanes that went to France returned to English soil.

Contrary to the belief among BEF troops who awaited evacuation from Dunkirk that Fighter Command had turned its back on them, RAF fighters—including Spitfires—were heavily engaged against the Luftwaffe during the evacuation. It was just that most of the action took place far away from the beach and out of sight of the frightened British soldiers awaiting evacuation—or capture.

Previously, action by Spitfires had mostly been against German intruders over England. The first dogfight took place on May 23, when

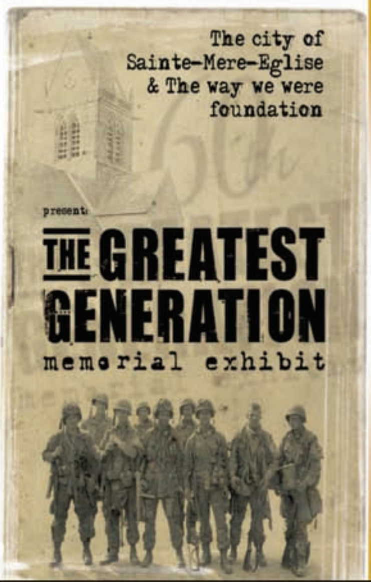
Spitfires from 74 Squadron encountered German fighters over France. The squadron commander had to make a forced landing at Calais. A rescue effort was mounted with a Miles Master escorted by two Spitfires flown by Flight Lieutenant Deere and Pilot Officer Allen. A flight of Me-109s appeared over the field just as the Master took off. The pilot, Flight Lieutenant Leathart, returned and landed. Deere, who would become one of the RAF's most famous pilots, shot down one of the Messerschmitts almost immediately. The Spitfires kept the Me-109s away from the field, and the Master took off and returned to England.

The action over Calais was the first engagement between Spitfires and Me-109s, but air action escalated when the BEF was pushed into an enclave at Dunkirk. Even though the troops on the ground were not aware of it, a great air battle was taking place over France as the British Royal Navy attempted to evacuate the BEF from France. The RAF lost 229 aircraft during the evacuation, of which 70 to 80 were Spitfires.

The summer of 1940 saw what came to be known as the Battle of Britain, and it was during this time that the Spitfire became famous and RAF fighter pilots became heroes. Adolf Hitler was determined to force the British government to capitulate, and Reichsmarschall Hermann Göring, chief of the Luftwaffe, convinced him that his airmen could accomplish the task. Hitler's plans were not to invade and occupy England, but to force the British into an alliance with him against the Soviet Union, a country rich with natural resources, which was his real objective. The Luftwaffe built up a massive force of bombers and fighters in the Low Countries and in the north of France in preparation for the campaign, which commenced in early August.

The only thing standing in the way of Hitler's plan was the RAF Fighter Command, specifically its Hurricane and Spitfire squadrons. Fighter Command apparently recognized that the Spitfire was the better suited of the two to dogfighting and established tactics under which Hurricanes would be vectored against bombers and the Spitfires against fighters. The RAF fighter pilots, those who flew Hurricanes and Spitfires alike, were on constant alert throughout the weeks of the intense German attacks, often standing by in their cockpits where they awaited the call to scramble.

Once a squadron became airborne, it immediately fell under the direction of the RAF ground controllers, many of them young women, who vectored them into position for an attack. There was a controversy over tactics between the two senior fighter commanders, as



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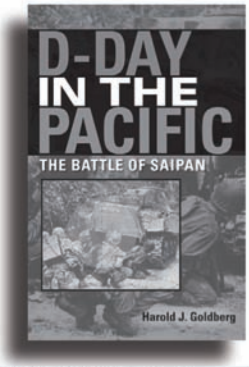

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12 Group Commander Air Vice Marshal Trafford Leigh-Mallory preferred the "big wing" concept of assembling his fighters in strength. The problem was that assembling the formations took time—time during which the German bomber formations penetrated deeper into British airspace and were often able to drop their bombs before they could be intercepted.

Air Vice Marshal Keith Park commanded 11 Group, and it was in his area that most of the attacks were taking place. He was often frustrated because 12 Group was not quick to respond when called on to contribute fighters to the battle. In spite of the command problems, RAF Fighter Command managed to prevail, inflicting heavy losses against the Luftwaffe bombers, until they finally reached the point that Germany could no longer endure them. The German bomber commanders elected to discontinue daylight attacks against English targets and turned to night raids. Credit for the British victory was shared by the Hurricane and Spitfire pilots.

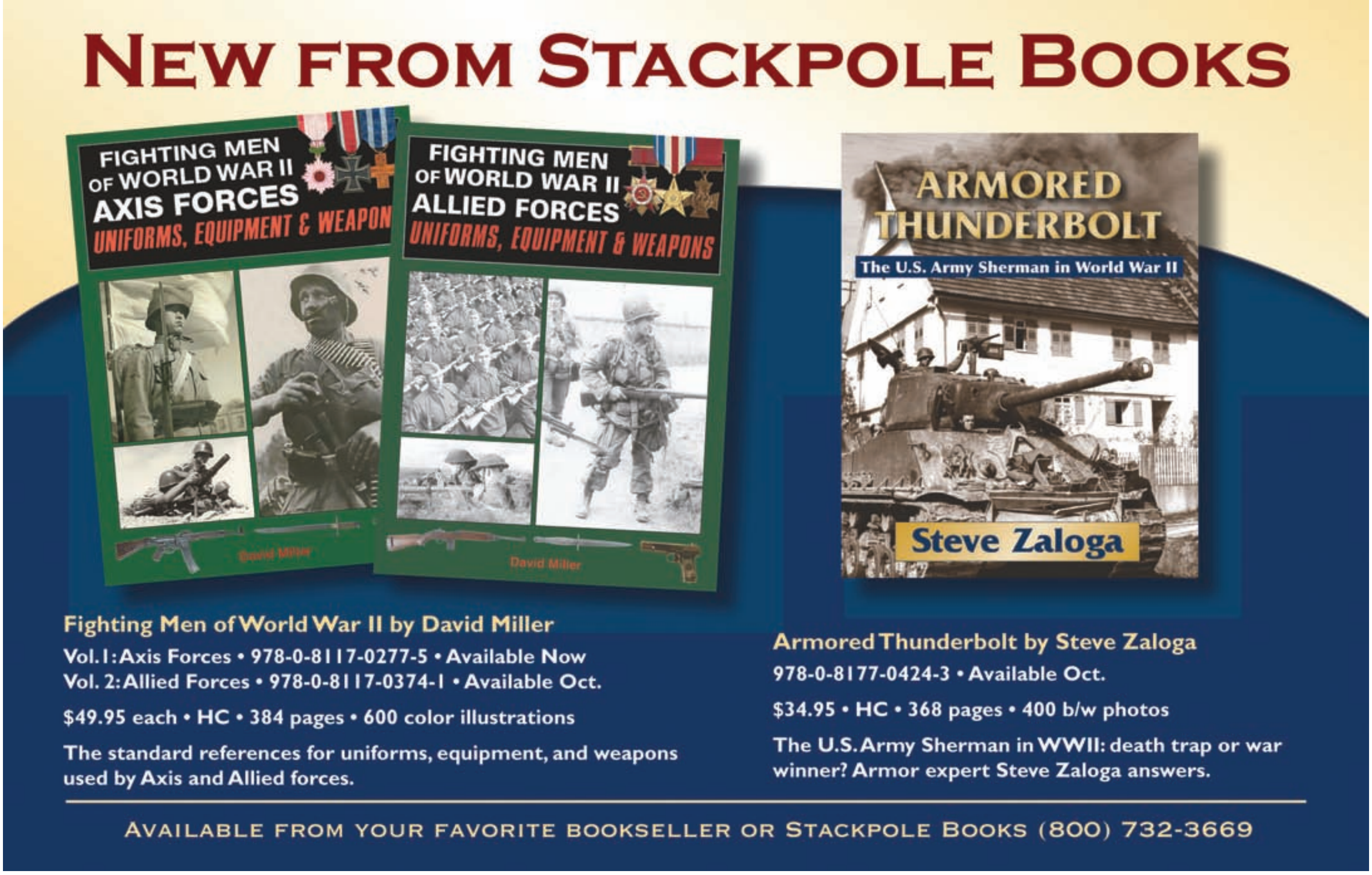
With the turn to night attacks by the Germans, the Spitfire's role as an interceptor had pretty much ceased. Attempts were made to use Spitfires to intercept German bombers at night, but most efforts were futile. The night-fighter role was eventually filled by twin-engine aircraft with two crewmen, one of whom was trained to operate equipment that was designed to detect the ignitions of aircraft engines. The development of radar increased the effectiveness of the specially adapted night fighters, and Spitfires were used primarily in daylight operations.

In late December, barely two months after the Battle of Britain, the RAF began changing from a defensive to an offensive posture as Fighter Command launched attacks against German airfields in France. On December 20, a pair of 66 Squadron Spitfires took off from Biggin Hill and headed across the English Channel on a low-level strafing mission over the Le Touquet airfield. The two fighters shot up the Luftwaffe base, then returned home without opposition. Two weeks later, five squadrons made a sweep up the French coast, with some sorties going 30 miles inland. From then on fighter "rhubarbs" would be a regular occurrence. Early 1941 also saw the introduction of the Spitfire to night fighting, but the need for them in the night-fighter role decreased with the appearance of Bristol Beaufighters a few weeks later.

Two decades before, during World War I, scores of young Americans had volunteered to fly for France and formed the Lafayette Escadrille, formed in memory of the young French nobleman who came to America to fight with the Continental Army during the American Revolution. When war again broke out in Europe, many young Americans sought to revive the Escadrille, but the quick defeat of the French military forces prevented it.

Britain was still in the war and the volunteers switched their allegiance. Dispatches from England by American war correspondents during the Battle of Britain also influenced many Americans to consider volunteering to fight for Britain. The RAF began accepting applications from American pilots and in October 1940 formed the "Eagle Squadron" made up entirely of pilots from the United States. After forming at Church Fenton on October 19, 1940, the Eagle Squadron was initially equipped with Hurricanes. Nine months later it switched to Spitfires. A second Eagle Squadron was formed on May 14, 1941. It, too, was initially equipped with Hurricanes, but soon switched to Spitfires as well. A third squadron was formed on August 1, 1941.

On December 7, 1941, the United States officially entered World War II, although American military personnel had been involved in the war on a clandestine basis for more than a year. In early 1942, General Carl Spaatz, the chief of the Army Air Corps Combat Command,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decided to establish an air force for operations from the UK. In June, the first American air units embarked for England to join the new U.S. Eighth Air Force. One of the units was the 31st Pursuit Group, which had previously flown Bell P-39 Airacobras. Because of the lower cost of the Spitfire and the need for P-39s in the Pacific, Spaatz decided to send the group overseas by ship without airplanes and to equip them with Spitfires after their arrival. The United States contracted under the Lend-Lease program for 600 Spitfires to be delivered by the end of 1943. The American 52nd Fighter Group also received British Spitfires.

In the autumn of 1942, Eighth Air Force Spitfire strength increased when the three Eagle squadrons transferred to the U.S. Army Air Corps, where they made up the newly organized 4th Fighter Group, and were consolidated at Debden. With the transfer of the Eagle Squadrons, the United States had three fighter groups equipped with Spitfires. While the 31st and 52nd Fighter Groups moved to North Africa, the 4th remained in England, where its three squadrons constituted the only operational American fighter squadrons in the British Isles until early 1943.

As an already proven combat aircraft, the Spitfire was thought to be a good choice to introduce U.S. Army fighter pilots to combat in Europe. But the Allied role was changing from defensive to offensive operations, and the Spitfire came up lacking for the new kind of war. The Spitfire was designed to be a short-range interceptor, and it lacked the range necessary to escort the heavy bombers of the Eighth Air Force on long-range missions into western Europe. External fuel tanks increased the range of the Spitfire, but not enough to accompany the bombers into Germany.

UF O F
UF O V
IR O C

Off the coast of De Djerba island, a formation of RAF Spitfire fighters patrols near the Mareth Line in North Africa. The Spitfire served in all theaters of World War II, and a naval version, the Seafire, was also developed. (Library of Congress)

The only American-built fighters in England in 1942 were Lockheed P-38 Lightnings, and they were being held in reserve to reinforce the newly established Twelfth Air Force in North Africa. Consequently, the 4th Fighter Group Spitfires were the only game in town. Ironically, the 4th Fighter Group continued to operate under RAF Fighter Command for a time, while RAF Spitfires served as the primary escort fighters for VIII Bomber Command throughout 1942. Spitfires would continue to serve with American fighter squadrons well into 1943, when they were replaced by American aircraft, particularly the Republic P-47 Thunderbolt.

In August 1942, one of the fiercest air actions of the war occurred as Spitfires played the major fighter role in support of the Canadian commando raid on the French port at Dieppe, code-named Operation Jubilee. More than 2,300 sorties were flown that day, with large numbers of them flown by Spitfires. Spitfires from 129 Squadron fired the first shots of the action as they struck shore installations during the dark hours before sunrise at 4:45 AM. The 129 Squadron Spits were followed by other Spitfires escorting light bombers on missions against the shore batteries near the landing beach.

Inexplicably, the Luftwaffe failed to appear over the beaches until midday. When they did come, the German attack was met by four

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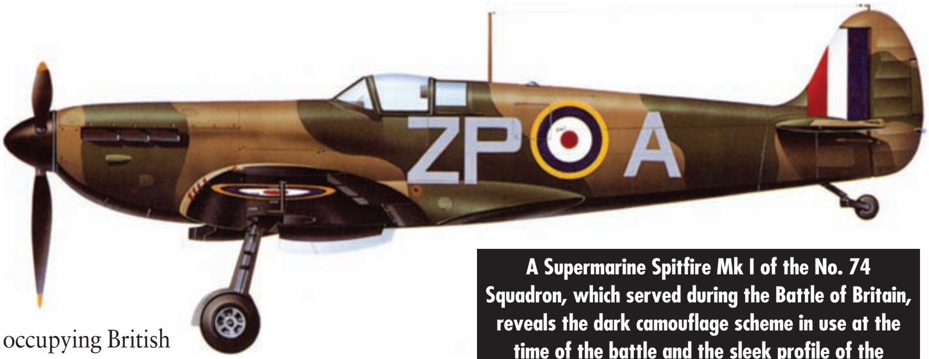
squadrons of Spitfires that had been dispatched by Air Marshal Leigh-Mallory, who was keeping close watch on developments in France. Four other Spitfire squadrons escorted a flight of American Boeing B-17 Flying Fortress bombers attacking the airfield at Abbeville. Unfortunately, the troops on the beaches met stiff resistance that inflicted heavy losses. Almost 4,000 commandos were killed, wounded, or captured, including some 3,000 Canadians. Air casualties were not light—106 RAF aircraft were reported lost, 88 of which were Spitfires.

As the attacks on occupied Europe and Germany increased in 1943, the drawbacks of the Spitfires became readily apparent. While Spitfires could escort cross-Channel missions into France and the Low Countries, they lacked the range to go deeper. As longer range American fighters arrived in England and entered operational service, the Spitfires turned more toward supporting short-range medium bombers on attacks against German airfields and other installations in France and attacking ground targets.

Spitfires served in every theater of the war where British and British Commonwealth forces fought. One of the first—and perhaps most important—overseas deployments of Spitfires was to Malta, where German and Italian bombers were attempting to pound the occupying British forces into submission. Air attacks commenced on Malta immediately after Italy entered the war on June 10, 1940, and continued for two years.



A Supermarine Spitfire Mk I of the No. 74 Squadron, which served during the Battle of Britain, reveals the dark camouflage scheme in use at the time of the battle and the sleek profile of the famed fighter. (Amber Books)

By March 7, 1942, when 15 Spitfires flew onto the island from the aircraft carrier HMS *Eagle,* the island had been under constant air attack for 20 months. The newly arrived Spits were rendered ineffective by Axis air attacks within a few days, and preparations were made for additional airplanes to be delivered by the carrier USS *Wasp*. On April 20, an additional 47 Spitfires reached the island, but their arrival had not gone unnoticed. Within two hours, German and Italian aircraft were hitting the island; by the end of the following day, only 18 Spitfires remained operational.

A third reinforcement was more successful, as the pilots took off from the carrier in planes that were armed and ready to fight. Sixty-four Spitfires were launched from *Eagle* and *Wasp,* and most arrived safely on May 9. Additional fighters arrived a little over a week later. With the arrival of the additional Spitfires, the defenders of Malta were able to mount a more effective air defense, and Hitler decided to forgo his plans to invade the island.

Spitfires flown by both British and American pilots played a major role in the Allied effort in North Africa. The threat of damage from swirling sand initially kept the Spitfires out of the Middle East, but the development of improved air filters reduced the problem. British Spitfires first served in Egypt, then

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joined the Desert Air Force in North Africa. The American 31st and 52nd Fighter Groups picked up Spitfires at Gibraltar, then flew them on to French North Africa, where they engaged in a brief combat with Vichy French fighters upon their arrival. American- and British-flown Spitfires played a major role in the defeat of the Luftwaffe in North Africa.

With the attention of the Allied forces directed toward the Mediterranean, the fighter effort from the UK was focused on defending against continuing German air attacks, on rhubarbs against German airfields and shore installations in France, and on escorting American bombers on cross-Channel missions into France and the Low Countries. As the Allied emphasis changed to preparing for the invasion of Normandy, Spitfires were converted into ground-attack aircraft with the addition of hard points for bombs and rockets. Ground attack would continue to be a major Spitfire mission through the remainder of the war. Another role for the Spitfires was intercepting the pilotless V-1 buzz bombs before they could reach their targets in the vicinity of London.

Spitfires also played a role in the Far East, where the first of the type arrived in India in October 1942. Within two weeks they were flying missions over Burma. Spitfires would play an ever-increasing role in the China-Burma-India (CBI) Theater and were instrumental in preventing the Japanese from overrunning Allied installations at Imphal in the spring of 1944. Spitfires also saw service in the defense of northern Australia, although it was not until early 1943 that they entered operations there. Several Australian and New Zealand squadrons in the UK had previously been equipped with the Supermarine fighter. As pressure on the Northern Territories lessened, Royal Australian Air Force 79, 452, and 457 Squadrons moved northward to New Guinea.

The success of the Spitfire led to an adaptation of the type for the Fleet Air Arm of the Royal Navy, following a precedent that had already been set by the Hawker Hurricane. To distinguish them from the RAF aircraft, the Navy fighters were referred to as Seafires. Although later production models featured folding wings to allow storage aboard carriers, the first Seafires were nothing but production Spitfires that had been modified for carrier landings by the addition of an arrester hook.

RAF and U.S. Spitfires had been flown off carriers during deliveries to Malta and North Africa, but the Seafires had true carrier capability. Unfortunately, the narrow landing gear and elongated nose made carrier landings difficult, and the Seafire was not a successful adaptation. Seafires did serve in the Pacific aboard the carrier HMS *Implacable,* but other British carriers in that theater carried American aircraft types.

Spitfires served with many nations, not only in the international squadrons of the Royal Air Force that included Czechs, Poles, Belgians, Norwegians, and South Africans. They were also exported. The Soviet Air Force operated more than 1,300 Spitfires as both fighters and reconnaissance aircraft. Turkey was an early customer for the Spitfire, while Portugal received about 50 of the planes in late 1943. Spitfires were also provided to the Egyptian Air Force. A failed British and American diplomatic effort toward Sweden would have diverted 200 Spitfires to the Swedish Air Force in return for a suspension of shipments of Swedish ball bearings to Germany. After deliberating for several days, Sweden rejected the offer.

Whether it was as the hero of the Battle of Britain, interceptor and attack aircraft in North Africa, defender of Malta, or early escort fighter for strategic bombers, the Spitfire earned its rightful place in military aviation history. □

Author Sam McGowan is also a pilot. He resides in the Houston, Texas, area.

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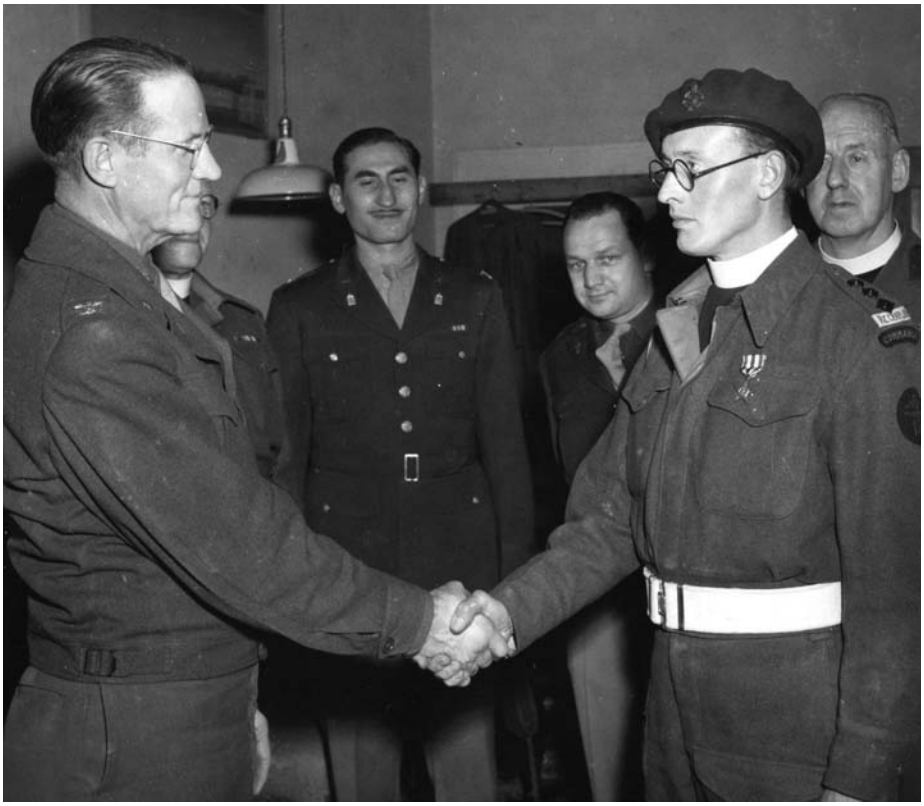
By Michael D. Hull



The Rangers' British Padre

Father Albert Basil served with the U.S. Army Rangers and gained their lasting admiration.

ONE DAY SHORTLY AFTER THE BATTLE OF EL GUETTAR IN CENTRAL TUNISIA IN March 1943, Colonel William O. Darby, commander of the U.S. 1st Ranger Battalion, was summoned by Lt. Gen. George S. Patton, Jr., commander of the U.S. II Corps. Patton had set up his headquarters in a small public building in the dusty town of Gafsa after the furious encounter in which Darby's Rangers had gallantly supported Maj. Gen. Terry de la Mesa Allen's 1st Infantry Division in advancing against German panzer forces and their Italian allies. After chatting together about the tactical situation, Patton and Darby stepped out onto the balcony of the building and saw a wiry, bespectacled man clad in Ranger fatigues and a green beret walking along the street.

Patton, who had recently taken a firm grip of the demoralized II Corps and ordered its combat troops to be properly uniformed with helmets, leggings, and even neckties, exclaimed, "What in hell is that?" With a tremor in his voice, the handsome, boyish Colonel Darby replied, "That is our British chaplain, sir, and about the only man I know who can get away with not wearing a helmet." Patton swallowed quickly and then laughed hilariously.

Darby was referring to Captain Albert E. Basil, a Commando chaplain attached to the British Army's Special Services Brigade, who had become familiar with the Ranger Battalion in Scotland and had accompanied it—unofficially—to the Mediterranean Sea for Operation Torch, the Allied invasion of North Africa on November 8, 1942.

Devout, scholarly, and good natured, Father Basil endeared himself to Darby and his men and became a legendary figure in Ranger history. For nine months, he marched, bivouacked, and shared foxholes with the elite American infantrymen in North Africa, provided them with spiritual comfort and moral guidance, and was awarded the Silver Star for heroism under fire. He wore a Ranger uniform but insisted on retaining his prized green beret and Commando shoulder patch.

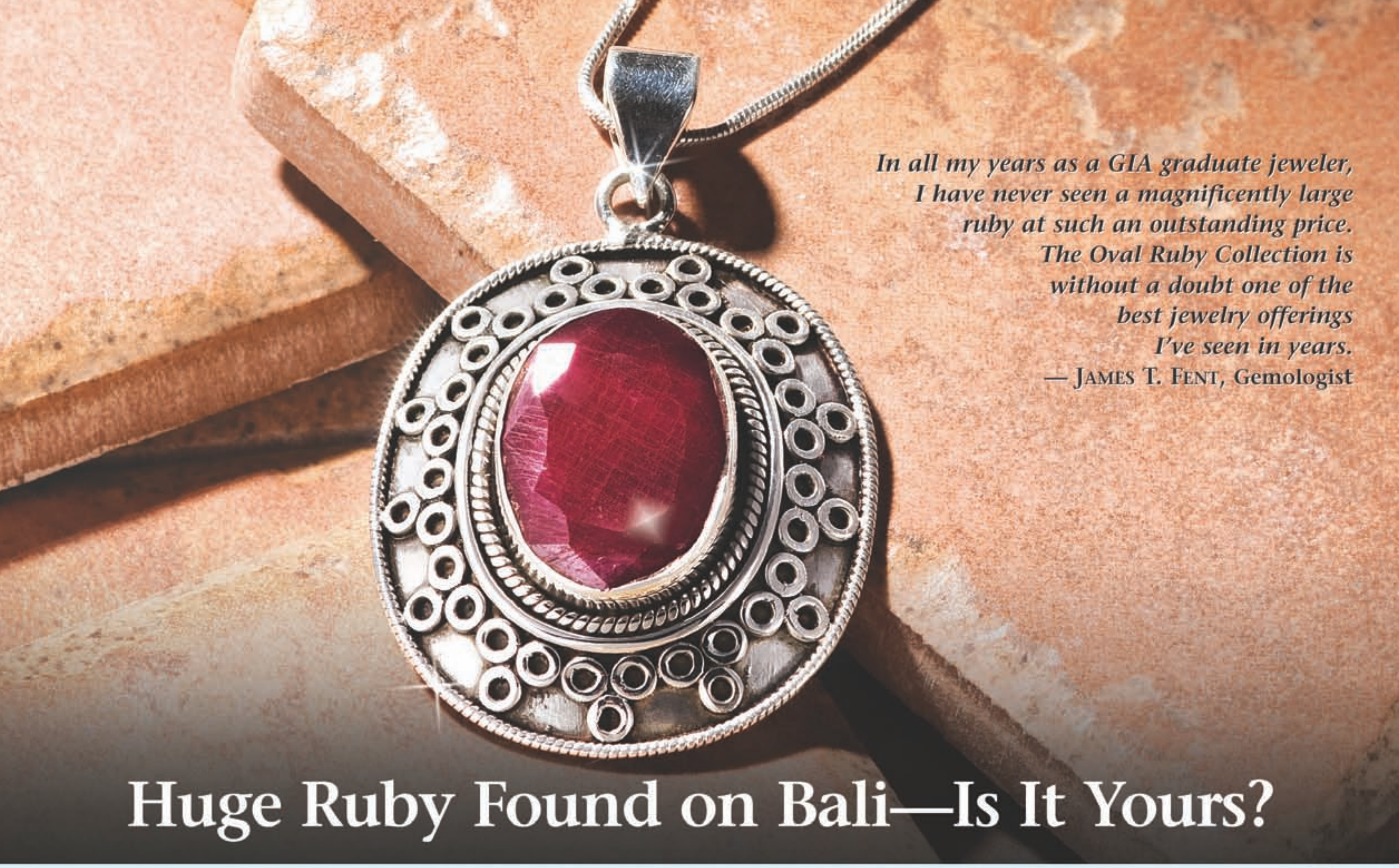
Albert Edward Basil was born in Enfield, Middlesex, on December 19, 1906, into a strict Victorian Anglican family. He spent most of his childhood in Portsmouth, Hampshire, and attended St. Mary's School in the market town of Basingstoke, Hampshire. He became a diligent scholar with many interests, including scripture and philosophy, and he was a good listener. He had a cheerful personality, was broad minded, and made friends easily.

Young Albert went on to study at Lampeter College in Wales, where he gained a bachelor of arts degree in theology in 1927. His intention was to enter the Anglican ministry, but, being too young to be ordained, he was required to undertake community work. So he became active in youth work in Loughborough, Leicestershire, for two years. Meanwhile, facing a crisis in his beliefs, Albert entered the Roman Catholic Church in December 1928. Mentored by Father Cuthbert Emery of Ratcliffe College, the young man took the name Joseph and decided to pursue his vocation as a religious member of the Institute of Charity (the Rosminian Order) in 1929. After taking vows in 1931, he taught at Ratcliffe for three years.

Basil then went off to Domodossola in northern Italy for theological studies. He was ordained a priest in 1938, became fluent in Italian, and taught in Italian colleges run by the Institute of Charity until the outbreak of World War II. A few days before Fascist dictator Benito Mussolini's Italy entered the war in June 1940, Father Basil and a fellow British priest were warned to leave the country. Joining a small group of Rosminians, they made their way overland to France. They crossed the English Channel from St. Malo to Southampton a few hours before the Channel ports fell to the advancing German forces. Father Basil next spent a year as assistant at St. Etheldreda's Church in the London borough of Holborn. He was there during the worst months of the London Blitz.

Colonel C.W. Christenberry shakes the hand of Captain Albert E. Basil (right) after awarding him the Silver Star for gallantry in action with the American Armed Forces.

(All photos: National Archives)



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ABOVE: Commandos crawl through bullet-ridden sand during a training exercise at the Commando Training Center at Achnacarry, Scotland. Father Basil first met the Rangers when they arrived at the center in 1942. RIGHT: Lieutenant Colonel Charles Vaughn, head of British Commando training, converses with Major William Darby of the U.S. Rangers in July 1942.

Slightly built, of medium height, and with horn-rimmed spectacles punctuating a sharp-featured face, Father Basil then enlisted in the Army. In January 1941, the War Office granted him an emergency commission as a fourth-class chaplain for the duration of the war. Stationed in Norfolk, he ministered to battalions of the Leicester and Lincoln Regiments and the Highland Light Infantry.

Late in 1941, he was assigned to a newly formed force, the Commandos. As part of Combined Operations and the Special Services Brigade, the Commandos were handpicked Army volunteers whose mission was to make hit-and-run raids against enemy installations on the coasts of northwestern Europe and the Mediterranean. The Commandos had distinguished themselves in the ill-fated Norway campaign of 1940.

Father Basil went to the Commando Training Center at Achnacarry, near Fort William in the bleak, rugged Scottish highlands, and joined No. 4 Commando. In the summer of 1942, the Commandos were joined by a contingent of American troops. They were the men of the newly formed U.S. 1st Ranger Battalion, led by the then Major Darby. Volunteers drawn from the ranks of Maj. Gen. Russell P. Hartle's 34th Infantry Division then based in Northern Ireland, they were named for Major Robert Rogers's famed Rangers in the American colonial wars. At Achnacarry, the green Americans underwent the same grueling combat and survival training as the Commandos. Under the direction of burly, ruddy-cheeked Lt. Col. Charles E. Vaughan, a former Guards drill sergeant, the Rangers climbed cliffs, forded streams, hiked across mountains, exercised with logs, learned close combat, and fought simulated battles with live ammunition. Only the toughest survived.

After Darby's men were posted to Dundee for the final stages of their training, one of the Rangers was accidentally killed while traversing a minefield. The Americans had no chaplain with them, so Father Basil conducted the funeral. Afterward, he asked to see all the Roman Catholics. Colonel Darby was a little disturbed and said to him, "That's all right for the Catholics, Father, but how about the rest of us poor damned Christians?" Taken aback, the priest remarked, "You mean you want me to speak to the Protestants, as well?" Darby replied, "Yes, Father. You see you're our only chaplain. As far as we Americans are concerned, you represent the God we worship, no matter what our particular creed may be. So, if you don't mind, we would appreciate you taking care of all of us."

Father Basil thought it a strange request but agreed. As long as he was with the Rangers, he would minister to Catholics, Protestants, and Jews. A short time later, Colonel Darby asked Brig. Gen. Robert E. Laycock, legendary leader of the Special Services Brigade, if he would allow Captain Basil to remain with the Rangers until they went into action. He assented. So, Basil stayed with them until "the British Army discovered they had one missing chaplain," as Darby recalled later.

The British chaplain wasted no time in making himself and his expanded calling known to all of Darby's men. One evening, they gathered in their big PX tent to celebrate the arrival of some American beer. They gathered around, raucously singing an old British Army barrack-room ballad known to soldiers everywhere: "Oh, we're saying goodbye to them all/ The long and the short and the tall/ There'll be no promotion this side of the ocean/ So cheer up my lads, —— 'em all."

The standard word after "lads" was "bless," but the Rangers were substituting a four-letter word that was also well known to all soldiers. Suddenly, as the chorus after the second stanza was started, a slight, bespectacled figure wearing a green Commando beret stepped up and joined the circle. He came in on the second chorus with a loud voice, drowning out the offending word with: "Bless 'em all,/ Bless 'em all,/ The long and the short and the tall …."

A small silver cross shone brightly on the intruder's collar, and the boisterous chorus dwindled to a hush. Smiling mischievously, Father Basil said, "Come, Rangers, don't let me spoil your fun. You sing right well, even though you don't get all the words right." One of the Rangers said, "We're sorry, Chaplain, we were just knocking it around a bit. We really didn't mean that word like we sang it." The good priest continued to smile. "You Rangers surely do a grand job of knocking those vulgar words about," he said. "I have been in camp only four hours, and I have heard language that would make our Liverpool stevedores sound like clergymen."

Another soldier asked innocently, "Are we that bad, Chaplain?" Basil replied, "Much worse. I had planned to give a service here tomorrow by special request of Colonel Darby. However, I see I will be spending more time here than I expected. There is lots of work for a chaplain here.... Incidentally, my name is Chaplain Albert Basil. I am with the Commando Special Services Brigade. I hope to see you all at the services tomorrow."

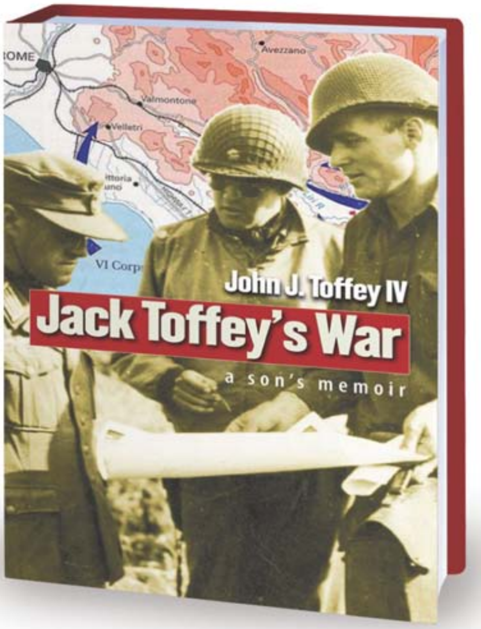
He waved genially, turned, and strode out of the tent, leaving the Rangers embarrassed but comforted to know that a chaplain would be with them for a while. Basil's services, conducted in a large mess tent, were kept brief and to the point. There were a few Bible readings, a hymn or two, and a homily that was short in length but long in thought.

At the first service, Father Basil declared, "Rangers, I thoroughly appreciate those of you who were thoughtful enough to attend services today. I would like to say I am not here to prate and belabor you on the need for faith at this crucial moment. Faith in God is not something to be forced upon you; it is something that must come from within, something you alone must feel. But I do say this: Every man in this unit must face the important decision: Do I go into battle with God at my side, or do I go into battle without Him?

"It is as simple as that. For those of you who wish to go with Him, I am here to help you in any way I can to bring you closer. I am not here to chastise. I am here as a friend who knows and understands soldiers, who knows that strains and stresses of military life can sometimes cause us to doubt, to weaken, to find excuses to indulge in the most profligate adventures when the opportunity presents itself. I came here to say service because there are not enough American chaplains available. I am deeply sorry you do not have your own unit chaplain, because one is certainly needed here.

"With your indulgence, I have elected to stay here with you until you sail.... Please tell your Ranger friends that I want to know them. All of you feel free to come and see me at any hour of the day. Thank you, gentlemen."

Father Basil won over his new American friends that day. His sermons proved to be only a small part of his pastoral functions. He visited all the Ranger companies and got to know each man personally. He chatted easily with them about their families and home towns, and when they needed spiritual guidance, he invited them to his quarters. Basil celebrated Mass for the Catholics each morning, but he spent the rest of the day seeing men of all faiths. The soldiers came to appreciate his wit, cheerful demeanor,



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Men of the 1st U.S. Ranger Battalion guard a captured gun position after heavy fighting in Arzew, Algeria.

and occasional satire. The mess tent was soon packed for his services.

In October 1942, orders came for Darby's Rangers to get ready to embark from the port of Glasgow for a major operation, their first taste of action. The destination was secret, but rumors abounded in the ranks: the Pacific, Bordeaux, Marseilles, Dakar, Oran, Sicily…. Father Basil accompanied the battalion to the Glasgow docks, where he sat on a bollard to chat with the soldiers and hear confessions. On October 26, after the equipment-laden Rangers jauntily climbed the gangplank onto one of their three troop ships, HMS *Ulster Monarch,* the priest was invited on board for a farewell gathering. He was still aboard when the ship sailed.

The *Ulster Monarch* took position in the rear of a stately convoy of troop ships escorted by Royal Navy battleships, cruisers, destroyers, and a corvette. The rest of Darby's Rangers were aboard HMS *Royal Scotsman* and HMS *Royal Ulsterman.* They were small ships requisitioned from the Glasgow-Belfast ferry run.

On the *Ulster Monarch,* two Rangers stood near the starboard bow and scanned the Allied armada. They were surprised by a familiar voice behind them. "Have you Rangers got your sea legs yet?" asked Father Basil. The two men turned around, stunned, for they thought he had returned to the Commando depot. "Father Basil," one exclaimed, "what are you doing here?" Other surprised soldiers crowded around. "Well, lads," said the padre, "you may consider me a bona fide stowaway. I simply decided that you Rangers needed me and I needed you. In fact, I was a bit jealous that you would be going on this important adventure while I was back in Scotland, so here I am!"

The group was joined by Captain Roy Murray and Lieutenant Walter F. Nye, apparent accomplices to the stowaway caper. Looking sideways at the chaplain, Murray said, "Fellows, now that the padre is here, we don't have to worry about being torpedoed. We're under his wings now."

One of the Rangers said, "Sure glad you picked our ship to go AWOL, Padre. That proves we're the best churchgoers in the battalion." Flashing his mischievous twinkle, Father Basil replied, "On the contrary, it only proves that Easy and Fox Companies are the best cussers in the entire battalion. I may be a bit ambitious, but I have high hopes that by the time we reach our destination, your vocabularies will have improved remarkably."

The soldiers all laughed, but the chaplain knew he had a big job ahead. To him, their profanity was one of the worst of human failings. So, the most hardened cussers agreed good naturedly to organize a "Ranger Don't Swear Club," whereby each soldier was to drop a shilling fine into a box every time he let a bad word slip out. Father Basil chuckled, "Bully for you, fellows. Now I know my precipitate action in deserting His Majesty's Army was well justified."

The vessels carrying the Rangers were part of the all-American Central Task Force commanded by Maj. Gen. Lloyd R. Fredendall. Its 250 ships carried 35,000 men of the 1st Infantry Division, Maj. Gen. Orlando Ward's 1st Armored Division, tank destroyer and coast artillery units, and the Rangers. After sailing south and joining up with the British Eastern Task Force and 102 ships of the Western Task Force coming from the United States, the Central Task Force would turn into the Mediterranean and head for its destination, the Algerian port of Oran. D-day for Operation Torch, the invasion of North Africa, was Sunday, November 8, 1942.

The transports carrying the Rangers and the Big Red One Division arrived off Cape Carbon, east of Oran, late on the night of November 7. The mission of Darby's men was to neutralize Fort du Nord and two Vichy French coastal batteries guarding the port of Arzew in support of the landing of the 1st Infantry Division.

Six miles off Arzew, the Rangers oiled their weapons and adjusted their equipment and Mae West life jackets in the *Ulster Monarch*'s hold, while their commander checked his trusty Springfield .03 rifle. Father Basil set up an improvised altar on the rear mess deck and ministered to Rangers of all creeds. Lying down fully clothed, Colonel Darby was gathering his thoughts about the coming landing and his men's baptism by fire when there was a knock on his cabin door. It was a distressed Father Basil. "My name is not on the list to make the initial landing," he complained.

Attempting to reassure him, Darby replied, "But don't you see, Chaplain, there is no need to risk your life uselessly. You'll be of far more benefit tomorrow after the battle is over." The padre shook his head. "I'm afraid you don't understand," he said. "It is most important that I be with the men in battle. Don't you see that if I could get to one dying soldier and bring him thoughts of God, I'll be accomplishing my personal mission."

Darby could not argue and said, "I guess you win, Chaplain. Frankly, I never thought of it that way before. You'll go in boat number five in my wave."

Before leaving the ship, a smiling Captain Murray gave the Rangers a few words of encouragement. Father Basil, clad in British Army battle dress and with his only weapons a swagger stick and worn Bible, said, "Gentlemen, I just want you to know how grateful I am to be with my adopted outfit on its first major operation. I know you are going to put on a great show. Each and every one of you has my blessings."

Darby split his force, with his executive officer, Major Herman Dammer, leading an assault on the French bastion at sea level in darkness at 1 AM. With fixed bayonets and mortar support, the Rangers rushed through openings in the barbed wire and dugouts against token French resistance. The Americans bagged 150 prisoners, including the French commandant, and by noon on November 8, Arzew was officially secure. With the loss of one man killed by a sniper and one wounded, Darby's men had acquitted themselves well. General Allen reported, "Their initial mission was accomplished with great dash and vigor."

The Rangers and their chaplain spent Christmas Day 1942 on a strip of Algerian beach. Basil celebrated High Mass for the Catholics early in the morning, and a general service for the entire battalion at 11 AM. The resourceful priest, clad now in Ranger garb except for his green beret, had scrounged a small portable organ and a Christmas tree and had organized a choral group. As a hot sun beat down, the bareheaded Rangers formed a big semicircle around their padre and sang "Holy, Holy, Holy" and "O Little Town of Bethlehem." Colonel Darby said later, "To each Ranger standing there singing, Father Basil was the closest link to home and family and God. Thanks to him, Christmas held for us its true meaning on that hot, sandy ribbon of beach in Algeria."

The British priest stayed with Darby's Rangers early in 1943 when they went into action in scrubby, rugged central Tunisia while other American forces suffered initial setbacks and General Bernard L. Montgomery's British Eighth Army pushed against the formidable German-held Mareth Line in southern Tunisia. After Field Marshal Erwin Rommel's Afrika Korps had routed the U.S. II Corps at Kasserine Pass and General Patton had replaced Fredendall as commander of the rejuvenated corps, the Americans were ready for their first major offensive in March 1943.

Two enemy panzer divisions and four infantry divisions waited in the mountains east of the palm-fringed oasis of El Guettar, and Patton designated the 1st Infantry Division and the 1st Armored Division to attack. The Rangers were the Big Red One's spearhead.

Darby's objective was to open the strategic, funnel-like Dernaia Pass that commanded two important roads. Scrambling for 12 miles across rocks and through fissures and gorges, skirmish lines of black-faced Rangers reached a plateau overlooking firmly entrenched Italian positions on the night of March 21. At dawn, a bugle sounded charge, and the Rangers—yelling Indian calls—surged down on the unsuspecting Italians. With grenades, small-arms fire, and bayonet charges, the Americans overwhelmed the enemy. "Give them some steel!" Darby shouted again and again. Scores of dead Italians soon littered the mountainside, and more than 200 others were captured.

By noon, the Rangers had moved across the pass, knocked out a dozen machine guns and a battery of German 88mm guns, and rounded up hundreds more prisoners. Only one Ranger had been wounded.

It was here that Father Basil helped to save many lives, both American and Italian. The prisoners were herded to Colonel Darby's command post, where the chaplain mingled with them. The Germans had pulled out and left the Italians two days before. Speaking their language fluently, Father Basil convinced the prisoners to call on their comrades to surrender. They did so and, also at his suggestion, lifted mines from in front of their positions. The Rangers took a total of 1,400 prisoners. Basil's knowledge of Italian was invaluable to the Rangers on many such occasions.

By 2 PM that March 22, Darby was able to radio General Allen and tell him, "You can send in your troops. The pass is cleared." The way was now open for a juncture of Patton's II Corps with the Eighth Army. After six days of fighting, Darby's battalion was withdrawn to Gafsa and placed in division reserve. Darby was awarded the Distinguished Service Cross by General Patton, and his battalion was commended for a Presidential Unit Citation.

Father Basil received the Silver Star. The citation noted his "unusual courage and devotion to duty by his continual presence among the men in forward areas … the inspiration of his personal counsel … and by providing maximum opportunities for worship, he contributed importantly to the battalion's morale and success of its mission."

Characteristically, the humble priest made light of having been given the medal. Asked by a reporter after the war how he had won the Silver Star, he replied that he had taken off his helmet to celebrate Mass while those in attendance had kept theirs on.

Around 10 one morning, Father Basil set up his altar in a wooded draw beside a road near the Dernaia Pass. Halfway through the Mass, German artillery starting pounding the area. The kneeling Rangers watched the bursts come closer and finally hit the dirt. The celebrant was unperturbed. "We less brave Rangers spent some anxious moments during services," said one soldier, "but Father Basil seemed as unconcerned as if he were back in a parish church." The closest shell passed over the Rangers' position, and no one was hurt. Turning to his flock, Father Basil reminded them that the Lord takes care of His own.

It was soon time for the British chaplain to rejoin his own unit, and he and Darby's men gathered in an olive grove for an emotional farewell shortly before Easter 1943. With his twinkle, Father Basil said, "The grand and glorious alliance of our armies is in jeopardy unless I return. I have stayed away far beyond my legitimate AWOL period. I can't tell you how sad I am to be leaving you. I will never forget you. I hope you will remember me, and I hope you will remember me best by never taking the Lord's name in vain."

There were few dry eyes among the battle-hardened Rangers as he walked toward a waiting British Army truck. "His green Commando beret was the only piece of his British clothing left," a soldier reported. "The rest of his uniform was now all GI."

Colonel Darby commented, "During his nine months with the Rangers, he was a constant source of inspiration and comfort to us."

Father Basil subsequently rejoined the Commandos and was assigned to the 2nd Special Services Brigade at Bari on the Italian Adriatic coast. From 1943 to late 1944, his unit was engaged in raids on German installations in Greece, Albania, the Balkans, and Corfu. While in Corfu, Basil contracted malaria. He was then posted as chaplain to the British garrison in Naples. Besides the Silver Star, his decorations included the Polish Silver Cross of Merit. He was demobilized in 1946. When he picked up a special-order black suit from the Army clothing depot in the garrison town of Aldershot, Hampshire, the storeman insisted that Father Basil be issued a regular necktie "to keep the store records straight."

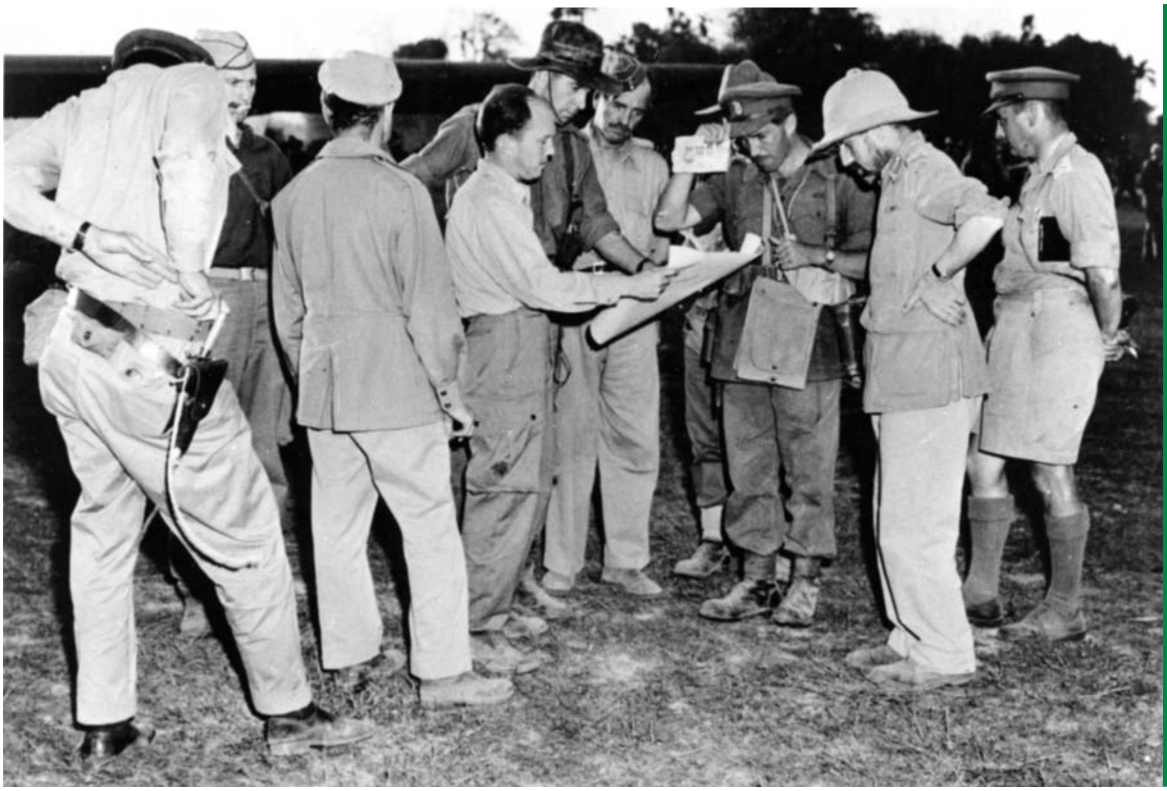
The Rosminian priest returned to St. Etheldreda's Church in Holborn and stayed there until 1948. He then spent some years preaching missions and retreats around the country and was appointed chaplain to the Loughborough College of Technology. When the school was established as a university, Basil became its first Roman Catholic chaplain. He retired in 1976 and then joined the staff of Ratcliffe University. He was appointed a senior member of the Rosminian Order in 1982.

In 1988, Father Basil returned to St. Etheldreda's Church to deliver the second half of a homily he had begun in 1941 on the Sunday before he joined the Army. The theme of both halves was forgiveness. He recalled that on the earlier occasion he had asked his parishioners, who had endured many months of German bombing, to forgive and not to hate the Luftwaffe pilots.

While preaching, teaching, and in retirement, Father Basil kept in touch with his Ranger friends. He was an honored guest at the biennial reunions of the Ranger Battalions Association in the United States. When his health failed, a group of Darby's veterans flew to England to celebrate with their wartime true shepherd. Father Basil retired to the St. Mary's Derryswood convalescent home in Wonersh, Surrey, and died at the Royal Surrey Hospital in nearby Guildford on February 5, 1992. □

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

By Jon Diamond



In this classic photograph, Brigadier General Orde Wingate is next to Brigadier Derek Tulloch at the far right. Majors Philip Cochran (back facing camera) and John Allison are on the left. Major Alison is holding a map with Brigadier Scott, who wrote an account of this informal gathering. Air Marshal Baldwin and Brigadier Michael Calvert stand between Scott and Wingate.

(Imperial War Museum)

Orde Wingate's Blurred Legacy

A picture is worth more than 10,000 words.

BRITISH GENERAL ORDE WINGATE IS ONE OF THE MORE ENIGMATIC WORLD War II commanders encountered in a number of biographical and military historical accounts. His military career has been the subject of cinematic productions and his memory is revered in, of all places, Israel, where he is referred to as "the friend." The controversies swirl about his military career more than 60 years after his fiery death in an airplane crash in the jungles of Burma.

Although some, like Winston Churchill, thought of him as a military genius, others rated him as dangerous if not mad. According to author Philip Warner, "It is not unusual for unorthodox and daring wartime commanders to be labeled 'mad' by their critics. General Wolfe, the conqueror of Quebec, and thus, Canada, is a case in point. A contemporary said: 'General Wolfe is mad.' George III, retorted: 'Mad is he. I wish he would bite some of my other generals.'"

Orde Wingate was a military paradox in that there existed greatly disparate views about his tactical and strategic conceptions for long-range penetration behind enemy lines in Burma in both 1943 and 1944. Furthermore, as John Bierman and Colin Smith have noted, "Throughout his career, Wingate's unconventionality and disdain for the superiors he dismissed as 'military apes' marked him as a difficult, if not impossible, subordinate."

Despite some ruffled relations with Wingate, Fourteenth Army commander General William Slim praised the Chindit leader immediately after his death "while the Burma campaign still raged and victory was yet to be assured." Slim specifically eulogized Wingate for his genius: "The number of men of our race in this war who are really irreplaceable can be counted on the fingers of one hand. Wingate is one of them. The force he built is his own; no one else could have produced it. He designed it, he raised it, he led it, inspired it and finally placed it where he meant to place it—in the enemy vitals."

The two Wingate biographers, Bierman and Smith, curiously observed a marked change in the previous laudatory tone when Field Marshal Slim penned his memoirs many years after the war had concluded. It seemed as though "all of the old dislike of Wingate within the military establishment" surfaced in print. Wingate was loudly criticized for his "rebellious scorn and arrogance," his paranoid touchiness, his reckless rudeness, his flouting of convention, his personal scruffiness, his "leftishness," and his "strange obsession with Zionism and the Jews."

Curiously, none of these negative personality traits were connected with his military operations until Slim's publication of his memoirs in 1956. More specifically, recollections many years after the end of the war about the start of Operation Thursday by Slim and others within the British Army cast a negative view upon Wingate's demeanor and leadership skills at the time of the "fly-in" in March 1944. Operation Thursday was a perilous deep-penetration

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Wingate confers with U.S. Major Philip Cochran in India in December 1943. Cochran was a key commander during the effort to insert and supply Wingate's Chindits behind Japanese lines. (National Archives)

thrust by Wingate's Chindits and the American unit Merrill's Marauders against Japanese forces in Burma.

A single photograph from Wingate's tumultuous career offers some insight into the character of this enigmatic commander. The actual accounts of the events depicted in this photograph of a group discussion of aerial reconnaissance among senior British and American officers just prior to the commencement of the air component of Operation Thursday in Burma on Sunday, March 5, 1944, have been distorted by both posthumous official and personal reflections of this encounter by "conventional-minded staff and command elements in the British Army, who regarded him [Wingate] as an out-of-control visionary, whose ideas about guerrilla warfare behind enemy lines as being unworkable." It is indeed interesting that in Maj. Gen. S. Woodburn Kirby's *Official History of the War Against Japan,* there is a six-page assessment of the Chindit commander, which is unusual in both its distinction and length, and, parenthetically, it is almost entirely negative.

David Rooney, in his biography, wrote of Wingate, "After 1943, when Wingate had just returned from the Quebec Conference (Quadrant), in response to an attitude of almost total opposition to General Headquarters (GHQ) New Delhi, he was deliberately aggressive and offensive, and purposely used the threat of his direct access to Churchill in order to get things done. From this period he made a particular enemy of Maj. Gen. Kirby, who had been Director of Staff Duties at GHQ."

In fact, he and Wingate had a raucous encounter in regard to Chindit supplies, which may have been exacerbated by Field Marshal Archibald Wavell, the viceroy of India, who intervened in favor of Wingate's men. In one message to Lord Louis Mountbatten, Allied commander in the China-Burma-India Theater, he complained of GHQ's failure to meet his demands for weaponry and rations. Wingate reportedly "rashly named Kirby as one of those who should be sacked for iniquitous and unpatriotic conduct." It is with this background that in 1951 Kirby was appointed to write *The Official History of the War Against Japan* and, as Shelford Bidwell asserts, "he took his revenge."

March 5, 1944, was a momentous day for the Chindits. Field Marshal Slim, Air Marshal John Baldwin, and many other high-ranking officers were in attendance at an airfield in upper Assam. In an attempt to keep the Japanese from guessing any possible landing sites for the Chindits, Wingate strictly forbade any aerial reconnaissance over Broadway, Piccadilly, and Chowringhee, the landing areas, for three weeks prior to the run-up of Operation Thursday. Approximately a half hour prior to the start of the mission, an American pilot, Major Rushon, delivered photographs taken just hours before to Major Philip Cochran, commander of the Number 1 Air Commando.

The aerial surveillance clearly demonstrated the Piccadilly landing field blocked with teak tree trunks. According to Wingate biographer David Rooney, "Wingate reacted furiously and demanded to know who had disobeyed his orders. Cochran said he had ordered the flight and took full responsibility—then Wingate apologized for the outburst because he realized that the photographs had prevented a certain disaster to 77 Brigade and the first wave of gliders."

As shown in the photograph on page 24, members of the Number 1 Air Commando (Majors Alison and Cochran) review the freshly printed photographs of the Piccadilly landing ground with Wingate, Air Marshal Baldwin, and Brigadiers Mike Calvert, Walter Scott, and Derek Tulloch.

As detailed in Tulloch's biography of Wingate, the Chindit leader wrote of the critical moment when the photograph was taken 12 days later on March 17, 1944. Wingate's account is rather calm and methodical in its analysis: "On D-Day, at the very moment that the first gliders were to take off, I was presented with a photo taken two hours before by a B-25 Aircraft of Number 1 Air Commando which showed that the entire landing ground of Piccadilly had been covered with obstacles. Only two days before it had been clear. I therefore consulted at once with the Army Commander (Slim) who agreed with my arguments, and left me to decide, so far as I myself was concerned."

Citing that photos of Piccadilly appeared in *Life* magazine in June 1943 as a location from which wounded men had been flown out in Dakota transports from Wingate's first expedition, Wingate concluded that the Japanese were aware that this site had been used in a military capacity previously. He further concluded that "the blocking of Piccadilly by the enemy did not necessarily imply any knowledge of the plan, and the fact that none of the other sites had been blocked (so far as we were aware) entitled me to hope that this interference by the enemy at Piccadilly was merely a routine measure taken in consequence of a general scare of airborne landings."

In defense of his friend and superior, Tulloch concluded, "I am convinced, however, that what made the decision harder than ever to take was the fact that while committing his troops to unknown hazards, he was not going himself. However, in my view the decision had been made in his own mind even before he moved away to speak to Slim."

In regard to Slim, Tulloch notes that "he [Slim] had to decide one way or the other within minutes. In the event he allowed the operation to go ahead, and the manner in which he did so earned the respect of all concerned. Air Marshal Baldwin also agreed; Colonel Cochrane [sic] and Mike Calvert had no doubts whatsoever; the operation must go on."

According to Brigadier Scott, commanding the King's Liverpool Regiment, "General Wingate took the photographs and walked across to where General Slim and the other Allied commanders were standing. After several minutes' conversation, General Wingate returned. He then turned away, with his head bent and his hands clasped behind his back, he looked a forlorn and lonely figure.... After going about 30 yards, he turned and called Brigadier Calvert, and after they talked they walked to where the Allied commanders were standing. A brief vital conference took place, after which General Wingate and Brigadier Calvert returned to me, and I received fresh orders which were so clear and concise that it was hard to realize Piccadilly ever existed."

Scott further comments on the start of the fly-in for Operation Thursday "As my glider rose into the purple dusk above the mountains to the east, I was not thinking what lay beyond them, but rather of General Wingate's unforgettable demonstration of cool, determined and inspired leadership. I believe that if ever I saw greatness in a human being I saw it in General Wingate that night."

Further demonstrating Wingate's calm state of mind about the change in plans based on the presence of tree trunks at the Piccadilly landing field, Michael Calvert recalled, "General Wingate came over to me and said, 'Are you prepared to go into Broadway and Chowringhee? If we don't go now I don't think that we shall ever go as we should have to wait for the moon, and the season is already late. Slim and the airmen are willing to go on now that everything is ready. What do you think? I don't like ordering you to go if I am not going myself. At the moment, I have told them that I will consider it because I wanted to hear your views.'"

Unfortunately, there is an unpleasant view about the gathering depicted in the photograph. As summarized by Rooney, "In Slim's memoirs (*Defeat into Victory*), which he wrote ten years after the event and when he could not remember even which airfield had been used, he says that when the photographs arrived Wingate got into an emotional state and argued for the whole operation to be called off. All other evidence shows that, provided Chindit lives were not put in needless jeopardy, he (Wingate) argued strongly for the operation to go ahead. Calvert, Scott, and Tulloch as well as Air Marshal Baldwin and Sir Robert Thompson all wrote their descriptions, which confirm Wingate's version and refute Slim's."

According to Slim's memoirs, "Wingate, though obviously feeling the mounting strain, had been quiet and controlled. Now not unnaturally perhaps, he became very moved. His immediate reaction was to declare emphatically to me that the whole plan had been betrayed, probably by the Chinese, and that it would be dangerous to go on with it.... Wingate was now in a very emotional state, and to avoid discussion with him before an audience, I drew him to

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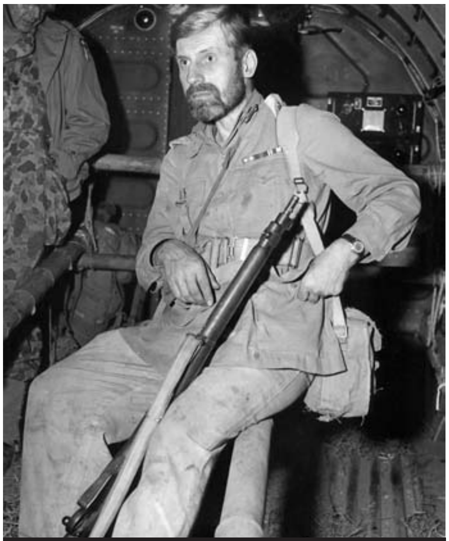
Wingate sits in his transport aircraft above landing zone Broadway. Eccentric yet brilliant, he was later killed in a tragic plane crash.

(National Archives)

one side.… He paused and looked straight at me: ‘The responsibility is yours,’ he said.… Wingate accepted my decision with, I think, relief. He had by now recovered from his first shock and had realized that the obstruction of one landing site need not hold all the implications he had imagined. We walked back to the group of officers and, with Baldwin’s concurrence, I announced that the fly-in would proceed, adding that as Piccadilly was obviously out, it was from Wingate as the tactical commander to decide what changes should be made.”

Why has there been such controversy about the event depicted in this photograph? Why is Slim’s account different from the others present? One wonders whether or not the nature and personality of a military mentor could adversely affect the tolerance toward and reputation of a fellow officer in the British Army during World War II. Such a case in point exists among Wingate and his superior, General Sir Archibald (later Viscount) Wavell. As noted by Bierman and Smith, Wingate retained his backers in high places. Wavell, as general officer commanding (GOC), Palestine, in September 1937, “had his eye on Wingate as a promising young officer.”

In a rather flamboyant example to get Wavell’s attention, Wingate convinced his commanding general to accept his idea for the formation of Special Night Squads, composed of Jewish irregular militia and British soldiers, to combat the Arab revolt successfully. Further, in the summer of 1941, Wavell appointed Wingate to be in charge of all operations behind Japanese lines in Burma.

In a posthumous tribute to Wingate published in the *Central Asian Review* (June 1944), Wavell compared Wingate to another eccentric military genius, the Russian General Suvorov: “Suvorov was a leader quite out of and above the ordinary rules of military criticism. His energy was as inexhaustible as it was audacious. He taught his followers to trample, as he did himself, on every difficulty in their way. Obstacles only provoked him to strike out new resources; and wild and irregular as he was, he possessed in a remarkable degree that intuitive sagacity in the hour of battle which is one of the highest qualities of military genius.… The above passage would serve as no bad portrait of Wingate.”

Also, according to Warner, “Wingate’s enterprise and vision excited the admiration of Mountbatten and of Churchill, who were looking for a bright, inventive, courageous character who could bring the war to a rapid and successful end.”

At the Quadrant Conference in Quebec, Bierman and Smith note, “Wingate proved unexpectedly adept. He presented his revised plans for the second Chindit campaign to the British staff chiefs and the Joint Planning Staff on 10 August 1944 … and they approved his demands for manpower and materiél with only slight modifications. Churchill was delighted with the performance of his protégé and went out of his way to mention him by name in a message to the king: ‘Brigadier Wingate made a deep impression on all during the voyage, and I look forward to a new turn being given to the campaign in Upper Burma.’”

The acceptance of Wingate’s plans for a second deep penetration into Burma was not without its opponents. Field Marshall Claude Auchinleck had been persuaded by his general staff in New Delhi that Wingate’s plan would place an “intolerable demand on their limited resources of manpower and equipment.” Auchinleck cabled the attendees at Quadrant: “In my opinion the proposal is unsound and uneconomical as it would break up divisions which will certainly be required for prosecution of the main campaign of 1944/45.”

Churchill exploded and believed that “the high command in New Delhi had been dragging its feet far too long.… Wingate won the contest hands down, including his insistence on being allowed to establish his own headquarters.”

According to Bierman and Smith, “Quadrant was the high point of Wingate’s career. It was unprecedented for an officer of his comparatively junior rank to find himself in a position of such influence over strategic decision-making at so high a level.” It becomes easier to understand how other general officers on the staff in New Delhi could be extremely perturbed with

Wingate having obtained Churchill's favor.

Just what factor(s) had an impact on the posthumous criticism of Orde Wingate? Was it his irascibility and blatant disrespect of higher military authority? This is very similar to Air Marshal Sir Hugh Dowding who, according to David Fraser, wondered "why some senior officers in the Services show all the symptoms of mental paralysis after the age of forty-five or so."

Was it his creative genius among many who faced their mediocrity with arrogance? Was it his spiritual beliefs that created friction among his contemporaries much like those of Dowding, which affected his dismissal from the leadership of Fighter Command after the Battle of Britain? Was it his deep-seated belief in a Jewish state, which conflicted with the traditional pro-Arab stance of the British military establishment? Was it based on the perception that he was mentally unbalanced, especially in light of his attempted suicide in Egypt, much like Dowding publicly referring to his communication with deceased spirits at the height of the Battle of Britain?

In an organization, brutal candor, arrogance, stubbornness, and insistence on one's beliefs will bring criticism from either qualified superiors or peers, or both, or from less intellectually gifted men.

A solitary photograph clearly has a multitude of meanings among the principal members of the group immortalized with film. Orde Wingate clearly has engendered a vast array of opinions about his military views, eccentric habits, and religious beliefs. According to Louis Allen, who wrote an authoritative treatise about the Burma War, the British Army after the defeats of 1942 in the Far East "needed an immense uplifting of spirit. It needed Orde Wingate.... On the other hand the animus Wingate aroused in fellow commanders and distant staffs has also led to determined efforts to denigrate him and to reduce the impact of what he did."

Furthermore, Allen, in trying to continue to find a rightful place for Wingate in the Burma War, wrote, "Devotees of the dull and staid will decry his flamboyance, histrionic procedures, and the publicity which attended them. They miss the point. What the press and world opinion made of Wingate's initial exploits infused a new spirit into the affairs of Burma; whatever the strategic upshot, whatever Wingate's psychological faults that renewal of spirit cannot be gainsaid." □

Jon Diamond works in Carlisle, Pennsylvania, and has been a civilian seminar attendee at the U.S. Army War College at the Carlisle Barracks.

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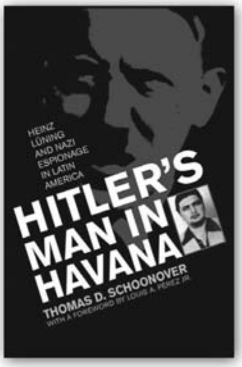
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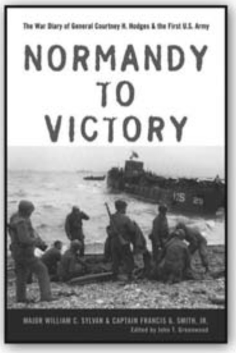
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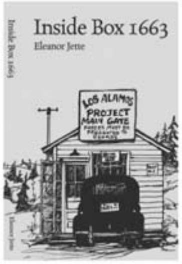

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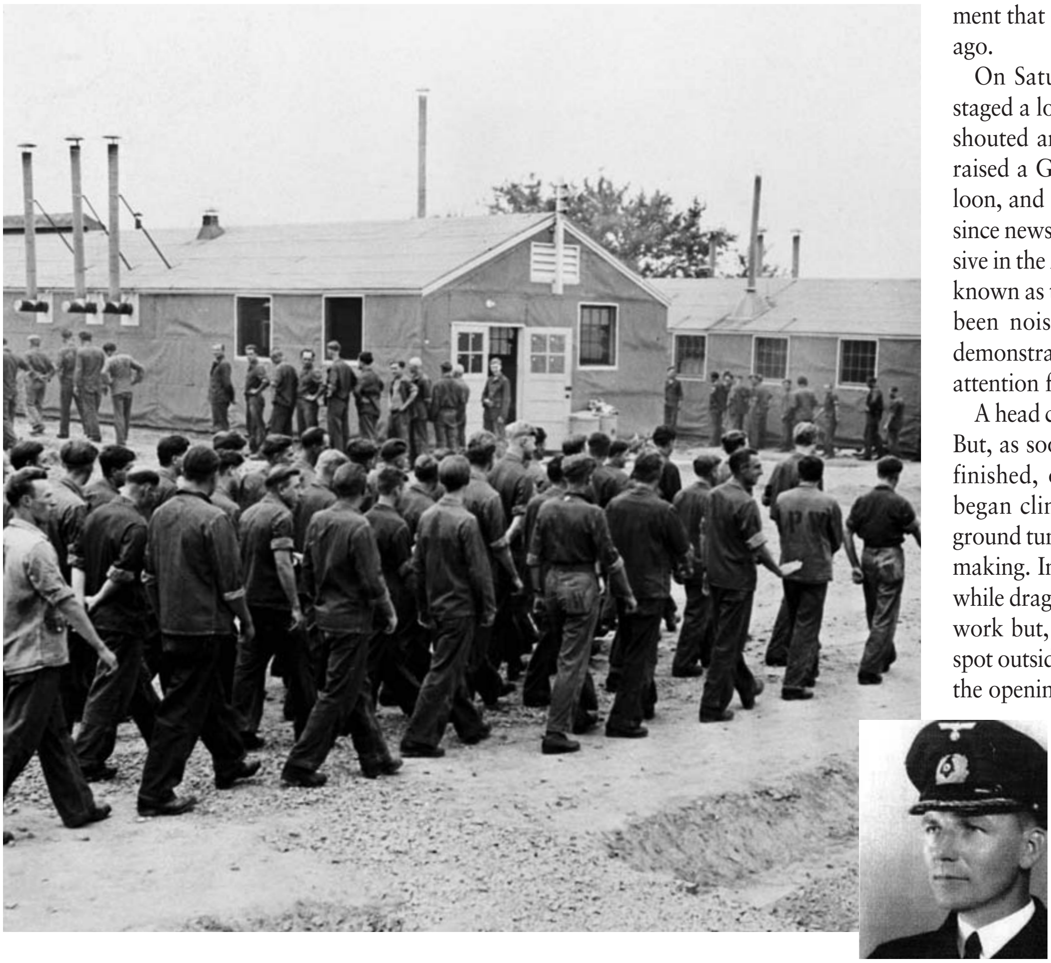

Escape into Arizona's Desert

Twenty-five German prisoners took flight from their camp near Phoenix in December 1944, but found themselves back in custody a short time later.

ON CHRISTMAS EVE, 1944, COLONEL WILLIAM HOLDEN, COMMANDER OF THE prisoner of war camp at Phoenix, Arizona, suddenly lost all hope for a happy holiday. Early in the evening of December 24, Holden learned that 25 of his German prisoners had somehow escaped! To compound the crisis, no one knew how they got out or how long they had been gone. It was the beginning of what soon became sensational national news and the cause of fear and anger among citizens of the area.

Papago Park Internment Camp, one of 500 POW camps scattered across the United States, covered 3,000 acres, holding over 2,000 German, a few Italian, and even some Japanese prisoners of war. The 400 guards were a mix of Army personnel and civilians. The camp, a former U.S. Army training site, was then several miles outside the Phoenix city limits. Today, urban streets, homes, and apartment buildings cover the space, but senior citizens still talk of the excitement that gripped the area more than 60 years ago.

On Saturday, December 23, the prisoners staged a long, boisterous demonstration. They shouted and sang "Deutschland Uber Alles," raised a German Navy flag on a weather balloon, and defied orders to bring it down. Ever since news of the massive German Army offensive in the Ardennes Forest, which later became known as the Battle of the Bulge, prisoners had been noisily celebrating. But this Saturday demonstration was staged specifically to divert attention from the escapees.

A head count that morning had been routine. But, as soon as the afternoon head count was finished, one by one, unobserved, the men began climbing down into a narrow underground tunnel that had been four months in the making. Inching along the wet, muddy tunnel while dragging survival packs of food was hard work but, at last, all 25 reached the breakout spot outside the compound fence. They covered the opening and slipped into the night.

The next day, Sunday, Christmas Eve, the camp was quiet as a steady, cold rain fell. There were no work details. Neither roll call nor a morning head count was held. It was an oversight that Colonel Holden would later regret. Later in the afternoon, a head count was made, and it came up short. Worried guards began frantically looking for missing POWs. Hours went by, and it was not until 7:30 that night, 24 hours after the breakout began, that the ugly truth was confirmed. Twenty-five officers and men were obviously gone!

Commander Holden understandably wanted to keep news of the escape quiet until he could learn exactly what had happened, but too many people knew too much. On Monday, Christmas Day, the *Arizona Republic* and *Phoenix Gazette* newspapers featured full, front-page coverage of the breakout. In the days to come, headlines such as "Wily Germans Elude Chase" and "Bloodhounds Trailing Nazis" were seen on street corner newsstands all over the Phoenix area.

The Army High Command in Washington, D.C., the Federal Bureau of Investigation, various congressional leaders, and the news media were all posing angry questions Holden could not answer. Network radio commentator Walter

German POWs march to their barracks at a prison camp in the United States. INSET: Captain Jurgen Wattenberg was the mastermind of the great escape.

(© Bettmann/CORBIS. Inset: Public Domain)

Winchell was having a field day with the story in his usual exaggerated style. It was a major Army embarrassment.

Since he still did not know the truth and there were no holes in the fence, Colonel Holden first told reporters the escapees must have somehow gone up over the eight-foot, barbed wire fence. Even Holden must have known that was an unlikely explanation. Then, the day after Christmas, three days after the breakout, Holden got his second shock. An informer revealed the existence of the 175-foot tunnel. Under the very noses of the guards, it had been dug six feet underground, ending up outside the camp fence, next to the Cross Cut Canal that carried mountain water to the city.

Digging the tunnel had been an amazing feat, requiring the removal of tons of dirt, the rigging of electric lights, and the construction of a cleverly disguised opening. Thousands of dedicated man-hours of digging were required. The men built a shallow square box, filled it with dirt, grass, and weeds, and fit it snugly over the tunnel opening. It was almost invisible. A similar box was made for the other end.

They had started the digging after locating a blind spot between the bath house and the coal box, out of direct sight of any of the guard towers. The exit location was also not in clear view. The planning and construction of the tunnel were in the hands of highly trained officers with engineering experience. How they got the necessary tools and disposed of the dirt was a classic case of deception and imagination.

The majority of the German prisoners were former Navy officers and men. Together, they represented a skilled military group dedicated to the German cause. Their recognized leader was Captain Jurgen Wattenberg, 43, one-time skipper of the submarine *U-162,* which had been sunk in the Caribbean by a British destroyer on December 3, 1942. Ever since coming to the United States as a prisoner, he had been shifted from camp to camp, labeled a "Super Nazi" and a troublemaker. He was joined in the planning by Friedrich Guggenberger, commander of *U-513,* who was taken prisoner off South America in July 1943, and a third captain, Jurgen Quaet-Faslen of *U-595,* captured off North Africa in November 1942. Holden placed the trio in compound A-1, a place for men he considered to be disruptive and dangerous. Some of the men in A-1, including Wattenberg, had escaped before.

The arrangement proved perfect for the Germans since it placed those most experienced and prone to escape all in one place. Later,

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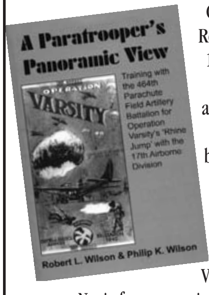
A Paratrooper's Panoramic View

By Robert L. Wilson & Philip K. Wilson

1-4208-5429-1 (Softcover ISBN)



On March 24, 1945, paratrooper Robert L. Wilson jumped with the 17th Airborne Division as part of Operation Varsity – the largest airborne assault in history. Landing near Wesel, his artillery airborne outfit was the first to land, reassemble and fire their howitzers east of the Rhine river.

Varisty successfully prevented the Nazis from securing a Rhine stronghold and thrust Allied forces across Germany's northern plains en route to Berlin, accelerating the Nazi collapse.

A Paratrooper's Panoramic View provides a historical perspective of Varsity from one of the Operation's participants. Wilson, aided by his son, a historian, vividly recounts the attractions of airborne training and retraces his path from Parachute School, to Camp Mackall, to Europe's "Cigarette Camps" to Wesel, in preparation for the "Rhine Jump."

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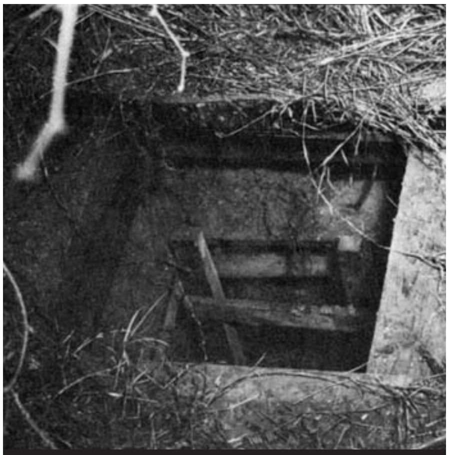


Three days after the Christmas Eve escape, the commander of the Arizona camp learned that a 175-foot escape tunnel, entrance above, had been dug over a period of several months. (National Archives)

Holden received heavy criticism for that decision, including a scathing editorial in the December 29 edition of the *Casa Grande Dispatch* that called it a "huge mistake."

To dig an escape tunnel presented the obvious problem of dirt disposal, but the trio came up with a plan that was both simple and brilliant. They asked for permission to build a "faustball" or volleyball court for exercise. Holden quickly approved the idea, thinking it would keep his most troublesome prisoners occupied. He even agreed to give them tools and equipment and a load of dirt. The Germans could not believe their good luck.

Digging began in August with a six-foot-long vertical shaft sunk down to a tunnel only two and a half to three feet in diameter. The dirt was moved along in a small cart, then brought up to other prisoners who carried it in bags under their clothes out to the faustball court where it was carefully scattered. Other dirt was hidden in barracks or flushed down toilets. For illumination they stole electric wire and light bulbs and simply plugged into a socket in the bath house.

Progress through the desert soil was only a few feet a day. Colonel Holden always assumed the ground was too hard to allow digging a tunnel. He was wrong. When dry, the desert soil was rock hard. However, when wet it could be cut. POWs in other compounds suspected what was happening, but the project remained a secret.

By any standard, security at Papago Park was astonishingly poor. With able-bodied American men off to war, many of the prisoners were employed throughout the area as laborers with work parties, traveling out and back daily to cotton fields, fruit orchards, and farms. The same practice was employed in other states across the country where POW camps were located. The Arizona prisoners were paid 80 cents an hour in scrip, which they used to buy beer and snack foods at the camp. Movies and educational classes were held. Altogether, it was a far better life than risking death in combat. From time to time, prisoners slipped away from work details and remained on the outside for several days before either being caught or returning voluntarily.

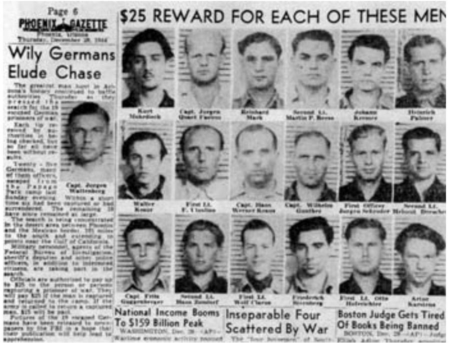
Not all who worked on the tunnel chose to leave. Only 12 officers and 13 enlisted men escaped that December night, but they had made elaborate plans and carried chocolate bars, canned milk and meat, cigarettes, coffee, and highway maps with them. They believed that if they could get to Mexico, they had an outside chance of returning to Germany. Later, the lifestyle of the prisoners produced bitter criticism at a time when American prisoners of war were being subjected to extremely harsh treatment in Germany.

In April that year, FBI director J. Edgar Hoover had issued a warning for citizens to be alert for escaped prisoners. His alarm read, "In our midst are nearly 175,000 Axis prisoners of war, trained in the techniques of destruction. I want to warn the civilian population against the potential menace of escaped prisoners of war." Now, for Phoenix-area residents, this December breakout brought heightened concern.

Incredibly, three of the prisoners had constructed a canvas-covered canoe that could be taken apart and carried in three pieces. After pulling it through the tunnel, they planned to float down the Cross Cut Canal to the Salt River, then to the Gila River and on to the Colorado River to Mexico. State road maps showed Arizona rivers in blue lines, but in truth many of those rivers were often dry. After finding the first river mostly mud, the trio dragged their canoe pieces some 20 more miles trying, and failing, to find sufficient floatable water.

The Arizona Sonoran Desert is an unforgiving environment, and with the cold rain falling, several of the escapees began to have second thoughts about making it to Mexico. On Tuesday, the *Arizona Republic* headline read, "Storm lashed POWs appearing all around." Within the first week, eight were back. One by one, and two by two, escapees were spotted hiding in ditches or bushes and were easily apprehended. None offered resistance, and most seemed resigned to abandoning their flight. In one case, two tired, wet, and cold prisoners knocked on the door of a farmhouse, identified themselves, and were actually invited in to share dinner with the family before the police were called to come and get them!

Herbert Fuchs, a 22-year-old U-Boat crew-



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PHOENIX GAZETTE

Wily Germans Elude Chase

$25 REWARD FOR EACH OF THESE MEN

National Income Booms To $159 Billion Peak

Inseparable Four Scattered By War

Boston Judge Gets Tired Of Books Being Banned

Local newspapers carried photos and numerous accounts of the escape. A reward of $25 was offered for information leading to the recapture of an escapee. (Department of Library, Archives, and Public Records, Phoenix)

man, hiked to a highway, hitched a ride, and asked the driver to take him to the sheriff's office. The sheriff called the camp, reporting he had a prisoner who wanted to return. U-boat captains Fritz Guttenberger and Jurgen Quaet-Faslen made it to within 10 miles of Mexico before a border patrolman spotted them sleeping in some bushes. By January 8, only six men were still at large.

Although Hoover's danger warning was the initial cause for alarm, now area residents were enraged over the quality of food the escapees had with them. One letter to the editor read, "Now, isn't it a hell of a state of affairs when taxpaying citizens can't get a single slice of bacon for weeks on end, then read in the paper that prisoners of war can get away with slabs of it?" The December 26 edition of the *Tucson Citizen* declared, "It's high time to stop playing sucker to our uninvited guests."

The capture of the last three fugitives was a combination of high drama and low comedy. Jurgen Wattenberg had crawled out through the muddy tunnel with two of his original crewmen, Walter Kozur and Johann Kremer. The trio found a high overhang next to a desert gully; it provided a cave-like hiding spot where they stayed for almost a month. Wattenberg had devised an ingenious plan. He told one of the men who had remained behind the location of an abandoned vehicle he had once spotted that could be used as a food drop. From time to time, Kremer went to the spot and picked up supplies hidden there by men out on work detail. The trio allegedly went into downtown Phoenix a couple of times just to walk around.

Then Kremer became even bolder. He infiltrated prisoner work crews and returned to camp with them to pick up more food and the latest news of the escape. Later, while out on a work program, he would again sneak away and return to the cave. One day, while inside the prison, he was spotted, identified as an escapee, and detained. The next day, crewman Walter Kozur left the cave to go to the abandoned vehicle, but this time found armed soldiers waiting. Now the leader, Kapitan Jurgen Wattenberg, was the only one of the original 25 still free.

Apparently life on the run in the desert was losing its appeal for Wattenberg as well. Hungry and tired, he hiked into downtown Phoenix, found a restaurant still open, and spent some of his last American money on a bowl of soup and a beer. He stopped at the Adams Hotel and asked for a room. The night clerk reported all rooms taken but suggested something might open in the morning, so Wattenberg fell asleep in a comfortable lobby chair.

Awakening in a few hours, the fugitive noticed the clerk eyeing him suspiciously, so he quickly left. He asked a city street cleaner for directions to the railroad station. That municipal employee, noticing the German accent, alerted a nearby policeman. Sergeant Gilbert Brady of the Phoenix Police Department caught up to Wattenberg, and after a brief, confusing conversation about who he was, where he was from, and where he was going, Brady asked to see Wattenberg's Selective Service registration card. It was the end of the line for the former U-boat commander. Officer Brady offered Wattenberg a cigarette. After a deep drag, he said simply, "Okay, the game is up and I have lost."

With all the escapees accounted for, the Army began an effort to court-martial Colonel Holden and his top aides for failing to conduct shakedowns, regular compound searches, and proper head counts, but the move was dropped. Not only did authorities worry that trials would prove too embarrassing, but they feared it might jeopardize the vital prisoner work programs all over the country. The Army finally settled for a verdict of dereliction of duty and letters of reprimand. Holden was allowed to retire early for "medical reasons." The war ended, and by 1946 the last of the POWs had been returned to their homeland.

Over the years, evidence of a POW camp at Papago Park gradually disappeared. The urban sprawl of Phoenix finally consumed the area where the camp once stood. In 1985, a commemorative ceremony was held at the park with the mayors of Phoenix, Tempe, and Scottsdale in attendance. The guest of honor, from the German village of Neustadt-Holstein on the Baltic Sea, was 85-year-old Jurgen Wattenberg. ☐

Adam Lynch has also researched the escape and evasion efforts of civilians, which led to the safe evacuation of numerous downed Allied airmen in Europe. He resides in Monroeville, Pennsylvania.

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Breaking Down the Door

BY FLINT WHITLOCK

To enter Germany, the U.S. Army would first need to capture the city of Aachen in one of the toughest urban battles of World War II.

ABOVE: Seven Medals of Honor were awarded to American soldiers for heroism during the fighting in and around Aachen. Here Staff Sergeant Joseph E. Schaefer of Company I, 1st Infantry Division receives his nation's highest award for bravery in combat. **RIGHT:** German tanks and panzergrenadiers assemble in the town square of Aachen prior to mounting a counterattack against advancing American troops. A Volkssturm panzergrenadier is seen sprinting past a Sturmgeschutze assault gun with a Panzerfaust antitank weapon in hand.

(Both: National Archives)

By the autumn of 1944, German resistance in the West was quickly crumbling as the British and Americans approached the German border 233 days ahead of schedule.

Two army groups, the 21st, commanded by Field Marshal Sir Bernard Law Montgomery, and the 12th, under the command of General Omar Nelson Bradley, had galloped across France, Belgium, Luxembourg, and Holland at an unexpected pace, overcoming whatever sporadic opposition the retreating German forces could throw in their paths.

By September 11, the Americans had reached positions on the German frontier that pre-invasion planners had not expected to reach before May 1945. The door to the heart of Germany seemed to be wide open and beckoning. Once Supreme Headquarters Allied Expeditionary Force (SHAEF) commander General Dwight David Eisenhower realized it, he ordered that the conquest of the Ruhr, Germany's all-important industrialized area, be made "the main effort of the present phase of operations."

The route to the Ruhr led directly through what is known as the "Aachen Gap," a relatively flat stretch of terrain with few natural obstacles—terrain that would afford the advancing units excellent maneuverability and fields of fire. Only the ancient city of Aachen, near the junction of Germany, Holland, and Belgium, created a concern for the advancing armies.

The chief concern was with the city of Aachen itself, along with its many suburbs. Attacking armies traditionally hate urban warfare; the advantages are all to the defenders, with almost none for the attackers. Buildings provide unlimited opportunities for cover and concealment, requiring the attackers to treat each building as a bunker that must be knocked out before they proceed to the next one. Streets become natural channels that a handful of defenders can turn into killing zones. Armored vehicles are virtually blind and thus vulnerable to close-quarter attacks. Fields of fire are restricted, as is the ability to maneuver, and the team on offense is usually reduced to attacking with small, decentralized units. Plus, civilians are inevitably caught in the cross fire.

The city was not the only obstacle. Aachen lay within bands of fortifications that looked to be even more formidable than those encountered along the coast of Normandy. The fortifications were known to the Germans as the West Wall and to the Allies as the Siegfried Line.

To describe Bradley's 12th Army Group as a "juggernaut" would be understating the case. By August 1944, the 12th Army Group was the largest body of American soldiers ever to serve under one field commander. It consisted of four field armies, over 39 infantry and airborne divisions, and 15 armored divisions.

One of the four field armies was the U.S. First Army, under Lt. Gen. Courtney Hicks Hodges. The white-haired, 57-

year-old Hodges had, as a youth, attended a year at West Point, dropped out, enlisted in the Army in 1906 as a private, and worked his way up through the ranks. At the time of World War I, he was a lieutenant colonel serving with the 5th Division. During a November 1918 battle along the Meuse River, he earned the Distinguished Service Cross for heroism and leadership under fire. After the war, he served in a variety of staff positions and, during World War II, took the Third Army overseas, where he turned it over to General George S. Patton, Jr. After serving as Bradley's deputy, Hodges was named commander of First Army when it was formed following the D-Day landings. Not a flamboyant character in the Patton mold, Hodges was a solid, steady, dependable officer.

South of Aachen, American soldiers accompanied by an M-4 Sherman tank advance past "dragon's teeth" tank obstacles on the Siegfried Line. Once inside the city, tanks lost much of the advantage of maneuver and firepower which they utilized in open country. (National Archives)

Under his aegis were three army corps, designated V, VII, and XIX. Two of the corps, VII and XIX, would spearhead the attack against Aachen. Maj. Gen. Charles H. Corlett, commander of XIX Corps, and Maj. Gen. J. Lawton Collins of VII Corps were anxious for the operation to proceed, for the longer they waited the worse they feared the weather would become.

None of the commanders of the American units charged with taking Aachen thought the job would be cheap or easy.

Nor did the average soldier. Sergeant Harley Reynolds of Company B, 16th Regiment, 1st Infantry Division, who had already survived Normandy and the push across France and Belgium, said, "I can remember the talk and comments about the city of Aachen, that no way would the Germans give up this city without a fight to the last German standing. It was very unnerving and mystifying that they let us get as close to the city as we did. We were aware of the importance of this ancient city to the Germans and would have given good odds that they would never give it up. We talked about this among the ranks. I felt that there was a good chance that they would possibly drive us back with a big counterattack. We were a finger sticking out in front of the U.S. line—a very dangerous position."

Adolf Hitler always placed great significance in symbols, and the German city of Aachen was heavy with symbolism for the Führer. As the birthplace of the great Frankish king Charlemagne in AD 742, Aachen evoked memories of the glories of the Holy Roman Empire and the "First Reich." Not surprisingly, then, Hitler told his generals that Aachen "must be held at all costs ..."

As did the Allies, Hitler knew that the Aachen Gap represented the easiest way into the heart of the Fatherland; even before the war Hitler was determined to make it as hard as possible.

Although France had built a series of defensive forts known as the Maginot Line facing Germany, because the articles of peace signed at Versailles in 1919 disallowed German military installations within the "demilitarized" Rhineland region, Germany was not allowed to construct a similar set of defensive positions to protect itself from attack from the West.

Hitler did not take this restriction lying down. In 1934, he ordered the construction of a string of forts east of the exclusion zone in order to gauge French reaction. When there was no reaction, in March 1936 he ordered his troops to violate the Versailles Treaty by reoccupying the Rhineland. Although France and Britain complained to the League of Nations, nothing was done, and Hitler had his first victory. Emboldened, Hitler next began fortifying Germany's western frontier—from Luxembourg to Switzerland—to guard against possible invasion.

In early 1938, Hitler ordered the line of bunkers, pillboxes, roadblocks, minefields, barbed-wire entanglements, and antitank obstacles and ditches extended northward along Germany's border with Belgium and Holland. Special attention was paid to protecting Aachen and Saarbrücken. The Führer wanted everything completed by October 1938, as he was planning to invade Czechoslovakia, and he assumed France would declare war on Germany if he did so. It was an impossible deadline, but Organization Todt, Nazi Germany's state construction arm, did everything possible to meet it.

Under the direction of its founder, Dr. Fritz Todt, Organization Todt was a highly efficient, semimilitary group that created some of the Third Reich's most impressive public works projects. Beginning with the autobahn system in 1933, O.T., as it was abbreviated, compiled an outstanding record of completing even the most complex and massive projects on time and within budget.

After being given the contract for the West Wall on May 28, 1938, O.T. began drawing up plans. In July, construction began with 35,000 civilians starting work; by October some

342,000 men were employed, supported by 50,000 engineers from the Wehrmacht and nearly 200,000 additional men from the Reich Labor Service and Fortification Engineer Staff. All along the construction zones, 100 trains a day brought thousands of tons of concrete, rebar, tools, heavy equipment, and wooden panels for concrete molds.

The West Wall project, however, was too big for even O.T. to complete on time. Although not completely finished, it was not needed—at least not immediately. France and Great Britain complained about Germany's bloodless takeover of the Sudetenland region of Czechoslovakia in September 1938 but took no military action. And even after the declaration of war that followed Germany's subsequent invasion of Poland in September 1939, hostilities in the West did not begin in earnest until May 1940. By then the fortifications were as finished as they would ever be. Only a small number at the time, however, were either armed or manned.

During the four months from June 6 through September 1944, the Germans were reeling and retreating. They had lost at least 400,000 troops in the west, half of whom had been taken prisoner. Losses on the Eastern Front were equally bad or even worse. Every effort by Hitler to stem the tide of eventual defeat had failed.

The city of Aachen and its environs were protected by two lines of West Wall fortifications —one to the west, the Scharnhorst Line, and another, even thicker one, behind it to the east known as the Würselen Line.

Not only at Aachen but along the entire border dividing Germany from Belgium, Holland, Luxembourg, and France were vast fields of short, concrete pyramidal tank obstacles known as dragon's teeth, which were, in turn, covered by minefields, artillery, and the interlocking fires of hundreds of reinforced concrete pillboxes connected by fighting trenches.

Some historians say that the construction of the West Wall was merely a sham to make Germany's enemies think twice about attacking from the west. Even Winston Churchill saw the West Wall as being an economy-of-force ploy to free up large numbers of soldiers that could be used in more offensive operations.

That situation would change in the fall of 1944.

In September, the U.S. and British armies still had as their objectives the taking of Berlin; the political decision to allow the Soviets to fight for it had not yet been made. Therefore, the Allied forces continued to advance on a broad front to seize the Ruhr, the major industrial area along the Rhine, and then toward the German capital.

The timing of the operation to take Aachen hinged on how quickly Corlett's XIX Corps—basically the 29th and 30th Infantry Divisions and the 2nd Armored Division to the north of the city—could break through the defenses around Rimburg, on the Holland side of the border, then cross into Germany and drive south into the gap between Herzogenrath and Alsdorf, then through the towns of Bardenberg and Würselen.

While this phase of the operation was taking place, on September 10, the 1st Infantry Division, as the advance element of Collins's VII Corps, reached the western outskirts of Aachen and began conducting a series of reconnaissance patrols to determine the strength of the city's defenses. The VII Corps then planned to drive to the east below Aachen to the vicinity of Eilendorf and Stolberg and hold in place.

Then, once XIX Corps, operating to the north of Aachen, reached Würselen, Hodges would give the order for VII Corps to sweep northward, seize Verlautenheide, a strongpoint in the West Wall, and link up with Corlett's corps near Würselen. Aachen would then be surrounded, isolated, and ripe for reduction while the rest of First Army proceeded eastward.

Before this plan could be put into effect, however, on September 17 the Allies launched what turned out to be a large but ill-conceived airborne assault in Holland—Operation Market-Garden. Not only did the operation fail to take its objectives, but it also caused thousands of unnecessary casualties and the loss of momentum while it used up considerable supplies that might have been better employed against the Germans at Aachen.

The delay gave the defenders time to beef up their defenses.

While some American units were preparing to assault Aachen, others were beginning another operation just to the south—the battle of the Hürtgen Forest. On September 19, what Ernest Hemingway would call "Passchendaele with tree bursts" got under way with the 9th Infantry Division (soon to be followed by the 4th, 8th, 28th, and 1st Infantry Divisions, plus the 2nd Ranger Battalion and a combat command of the 5th Armored Division) advancing into what another author would call "a dark and bloody ground"; the battle for the Hürtgen Forest, which lasted until February 10, 1945, involved more than 200,000 combatants and was one of the toughest battles of the war. But it was Aachen that now captured the attention of Eisenhower, Bradley, and all the rest.

THE FEROCITY OF THE ATTACKS TOLD THE YANKS ONE THING: now that the war was on German soil, the Germans would defend their homeland with everything they had.

The responsibility for defending Aachen, located 40 miles southwest of Cologne, fell to Maj. Gen. Gerhard Graf von Schwerin, commander of the 116th Panzer Division, a unit that had been badly mauled by the 30th Infantry Division during the summer's fighting at Mortain. The 116th was still far below strength, possessing only 1,600 men, three tanks, a few assault guns, and two Luftwaffe fortress battalions. A mishmash of other units was also holding Aachen, which brought von Schwerin's total force to about 12,000 troops.

The city had a prewar population of 165,000, but prior to Hitler's order for civilians to evacuate Aachen it had shrunk to just 20,000. When von Schwerin arrived, he found about 7,000 panic-stricken civilians still there, afraid to leave. Because there was no way to transport the civilians out of town, the general told them to stay put and then wrote a letter to the Americans offering to surrender Aachen to them.

Unfortunately, the letter fell into German hands before it could be delivered. When Hitler learned of von Schwerin's act, he had him arrested by the Gestapo. Taking his place was Colonel Gerhard Wilck, commander of the 246th Volksgrenadier Division.

Hitler, meanwhile, was rapidly transferring as many units as he could spare from the Eastern Front to buttress the Aachen Gap, and Field Marshal Gerd von Rundstedt was recalled from retirement to stiffen the crumbling defenses in the West.

The boundary line between the two American corps ran just north of Aachen, with XIX Corps to the north and VII Corps to the south. "Lightning Joe" Collins did not like waiting, especially now that the whole of Germany seemed open to him. The original plan for his VII Corps called for the 1st Infantry Division to seize Aachen while the 3rd Armored and the 9th Infantry Divisions, south of the city, drove toward Düren in the Roer valley, then on to Cologne on the Rhine. With stocks of artillery shells still precariously low, Hodges finally gave Collins permission to allow the 1st Division to conduct a reconnaissance in force and probe Aachen's defenses.

Surprisingly, as they approached the thick lines of bunkers and obstacles to the west and south of Aachen, the probing forces initially faced little resistance. Although the antitank barriers presented some difficulties for armor, many of the guns in the fortifications had been removed years earlier to guard the coast of France, and the troops manning the defensive positions were too thinly spread to offer much resistance. Lieutenant Karl Wolf, executive officer of Company K, 16th Regiment, 1st Infantry Division, remembered, "Some of the pillboxes were not even manned."

On September 12, the Big Red One penetrated the lightly held defenses on Aachen's south side while the 3rd Armored Division encountered only sporadic opposition as it began driving all the way to Stolberg.

In October 1944, a German Schutzenpanzer half-track moves toward the fighting on the Western Front in company with a light tank. The German defense of Aachen, once the capital of the Holy Roman Empire, was tenacious. (ullstein bild)

Harley Reynolds recalled that his unit was the spearhead entering Germany. "Our company was in the lead as we crossed the border. My section set up machine guns to cover the rest of Company B as they crossed the 'dragon's teeth.' Company B went on into Germany and into a park, where we spent the night. While going into Stolberg, a few miles east of Aachen, we were fired on from our flanks. I guess this wasn't so strange because this was the kind of fighting we had done all across France and Belgium. To me it was a big chance, but we got away with it. The Germans' luck finally ran out."

At other points, fighting was sporadic but fierce. Lieutenant Harold Monica, Company D, 18th Regiment, 1st Infantry Division, recalled that when his platoon encountered machine-gun fire from a pillbox a sergeant in his unit dropped a quarter-pound block of TNT down the ventilation shaft of the pillbox to flush out the occupants. The steel door opened and out came nine very badly shaken German soldiers. "All were covered with dust, rubbing their eyes and ears, and stumbling up the stairs. Sergeant Aiello and I were pleased," Monica said.

Not all Germans would give up that easily. On September 17, the 1st Division's 16th Infantry Regiment, which had pushed to the town of Eilendorf, southeast of Aachen, was hit by the most intense artillery barrage it had received since the beaches of Normandy, followed closely by determined assaults by two battalions of well-disciplined infantry of the 27th Fusilier Regiment of the 12th Infantry Division. That same day, the 12th Division's other two regiments, the 89th Grenadier and 48th Grenadier, attacked the forward positions of the 3rd Armored Division and the 9th Infantry Division. Any thought that taking Aachen would be a cakewalk was quickly dispelled.

None of the attacks succeeded in dislodging any of the American units, but the ferocity of the attacks told the Yanks one thing: now that the war was on German soil, the Germans would defend their homeland with everything they had.

There were other worries. The 3rd Armored Division, authorized to have 232 medium tanks, reported on September 18 that only 75 were fit for combat. There were additional supply problems and, to add the final straw, the fine fall weather deteriorated.

Then, just when it seemed that the 12th Army Group, poised on the threshold of Germany, was about to plunge en masse into the country via the Aachen Gap, the growing shortage of artillery shells and fuel reached crisis proportions, forcing General Bradley on September 22 to shut down offensive operations.

General Collins later said that his corps "ran out of gas, we ran out of ammunition, and we ran out of weather. The loss of our close tactical air support [because of cloud cover] was a real blow."

The Germans took advantage of the American army's inertia. On September 24, Staff Sergeant Joseph E. Schaefer of Company I, 18th Regiment, 1st Infantry Division, was part of a platoon defending a crossroads south of Aachen when it was attacked by a superior enemy force. One of the company's squads was taken prisoner, another abandoned its position, and only Schaefer's squad remained.

German fire became so intense that Schaefer ordered his men to take up positions in a nearby house. Despite continued attacks, Schaefer's men repulsed every one; the sergeant personally accounted for between 15 and 20 German dead. He then went out looking for the enemy, captured 10 of them, and even freed the squad that had earlier been taken prisoner. For his courageous deeds, he was awarded the first of seven Medals of Honor that would be earned by American soldiers during the siege of Aachen. Most importantly, he and his squad prevented the enemy from taking the crossroads.

At last sufficient supplies of ammo and fuel began to reach American forces at the front, and the drive to capture Aachen and push eastward was ordered to resume. General Hodges went ahead with his decision to assault the city with a pincer movement. Maj. Gen. Leland S. Hobbs's 30th Infantry Division, supported by the 2nd Armored Division under Maj. Gen. Ernest Harmon, would strike from the north. South of Aachen, VII Corps would drive to the east with the 1st and 9th Infantry Divisions and 3rd Armored Division, reach Stolberg, and then turn sharply north, linking up with XIX Corps at Würselen. To get into Germany, XIX Corps would need to attack eastward out of Holland, cross the Wurm River, which is more of a stream than a major river, and break through the outer line of West Wall fortifications north of Aachen.

Since XIX Corps had the farthest to go, it would begin its phase of the operation on October 1, 1944; four days of artillery bombardment would precede the assault. Six days later, Maj. Gen. Clarence R. Huebner's 1st Infantry Division, already inside Germany, would then strike Aachen from the south. It was planned that the 18th Infantry Regiment from the Big Red One would then circle to the east of the city, head north, and link up with the 30th Division to prevent Wilck's garrison from either escaping or being reinforced. It was a solid plan but, like many military plans throughout the ages, it would go awry once the first shot was fired.

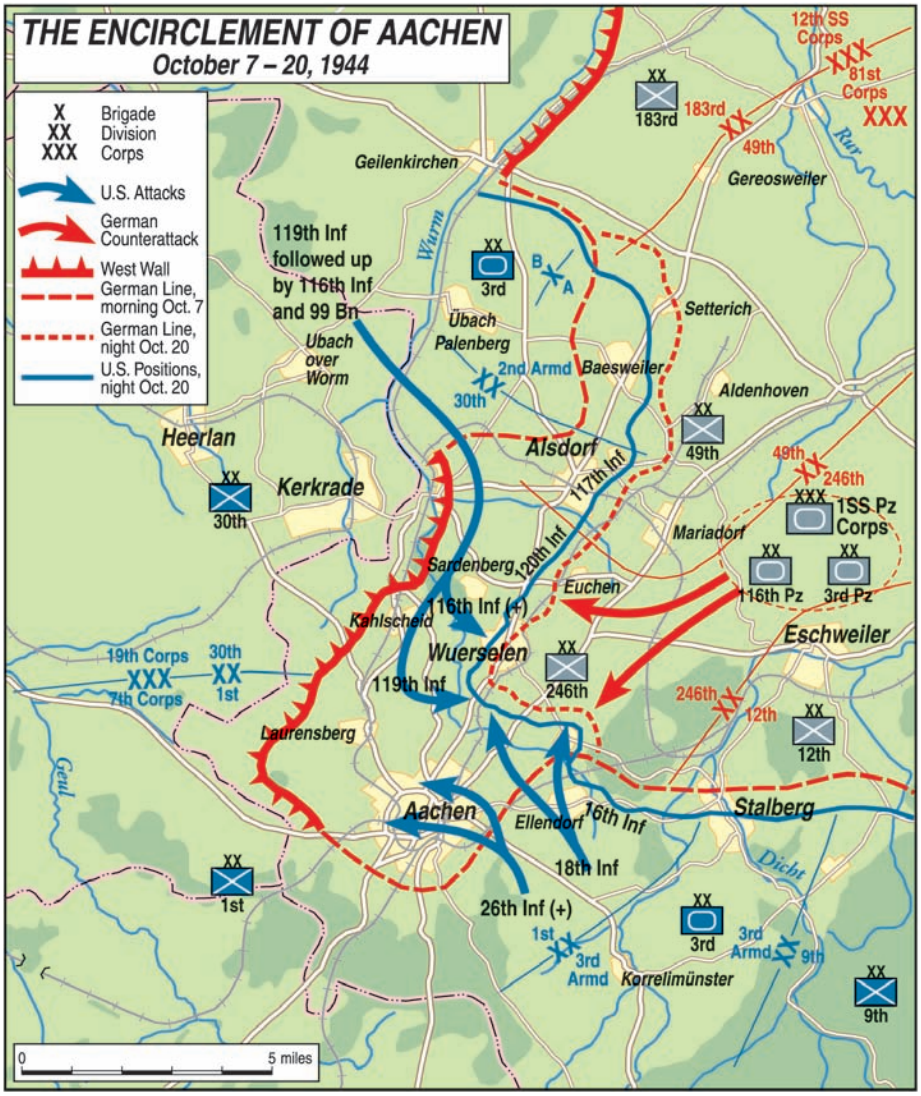
On September 26, a mighty roar shattered the autumn air as 26 battalions of American artillery from XIX Corps, the 30th and 29th Infantry (operating on the 30th's left flank), and the 2nd Armored Divisions opened up to knock out the hundreds of pillboxes in XIX Corps's 11-mile sector between Geilenkirchen and Aachen. The artillery kept it up for four days, evoking memories of the massive barrages of the First World War and nearly exhausting the precious stocks of ammunition.

An intense aerial bombardment was also scheduled to take place prior to H-hour but was scaled back at the last minute because of heavy overcast—much to the relief of the old-timers in the 30th; they still recalled the heavy casualties suffered during the Operation Cobra breakout in Normandy when American aircraft accidentally bombed 30th Division positions.

Because of heavy downpours, the American infantry and armor attack on Aachen's northern suburbs was delayed for 24 hours. On the gray, dismal morning of October 2, following another artillery preparation, the infantrymen of the 117th Infantry Regiment, the spearhead of Hobbs's "Old Hickory" division, left its line of departure west of Geilenkirchen and began advancing into the torn-up, still smoldering landscape, heading south for Palenberg and Übach.

The artillery and mortar fire provided a rolling barrage for the foot soldiers as they trudged forward carrying duckboards, makeshift bridges, to throw across the Wurm River, which divides part of Germany from Holland between Rimburg and Herzogenrath.

German return fire against the GIs was intense, however, and Yank squads and platoons were cut to pieces as they approached the river. In less than an hour, one company of the 1st Battalion, 117th Infantry, lost 87 men, seven of them killed.


THE ENCIRCLEMENT OF AACHEN
October 7 – 20, 1944
X Brigade
XX Division
XXX Corps
U.S. Attacks
German Counterattack
West Wall
German Line, morning Oct. 7
German Line, night Oct. 20
U.S. Positions, night Oct. 20
Geilenkirchen
Wurm
119th Inf followed up by 116th Inf and 99 Bn
Ubach over Worm
Übach Palenberg
XX 3rd
B A
2nd Armd
30th
Baesweiler
Heerlan
XX 30th
Kerkrade
Alsdorf
117th Inf
120th Inf
Sardenberg
Kahlscheid
116th Inf (+)
Wuerselen
119th Inf
Euchen
XX 246th
19th Corps
XXX
7th Corps
30th
XX
1st
Laurensberg
Geul
Aachen
Ellendorf
16th Inf
18th Inf
26th Inf (+)
XX 1st
1st
3rd Armd
Korrelimünster
XX 3rd
3rd Armd
9th
XX 9th
Dicht
Stalberg
XX 12th
246th
12th
Eschweiler
XX 116th Pz
XX 3rd Pz
XXX 1SS Pz Corps
Mariadorf
49th
246th
XX 49th
Aldenhoven
Setterich
Gereosweiler
XX 183rd
183rd
49th
12th SS Corps
XXX
81st Corps
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American forces labored to encircle the border city of Aachen on the German frontier and expended tremendous manpower and supplies before its surrender. (Map © 2008 Philip Schwartzberg, Meridian Mapping, Minneapolis, MN)

The GIs soon discovered to their dismay that the thousands of artillery shells that had been expended against the German pillboxes had barely scratched a defender; each pillbox and fighting position had to be knocked out one at a time with grenades, pole charges, bazookas, and flamethrowers. By the end of the day, the 30th Division had made small but significant penetrations into the German defensive line.

With the 29th Division conducting a diversionary attack northwest of Geilenkirchen, the 30th Division managed to breach the West Wall fortifications in the area between Rimburg and Übach-Palenberg. This assault was aided by American aircraft of the IX Bombardment Division, but the bombing was ineffective. Tragically, one group of medium bombers, owing to poor navigation and inadequate target identification, even flew off course and accidentally bombed a Belgian town 28 miles west of Aachen, killing 34 civilians.

Meanwhile, the ground battle wore on. While crossing an open field devoid of cover, the soldiers of Company B, 117th Infantry, 30th Division, were forced to shelter behind the torn carcasses of cows that had been killed by the barrages. When Company B finally reached the enemy pillboxes, they put them out of action with flamethrowers.

During the especially tough battle for Palenberg, a hand grenade duel between opposing forces took place. Private Harold G. Kiner, a 20-year-old rifleman with Company F, 117th Regiment, was trying to dislodge enemy troops from their position when a German potato-masher grenade landed between him and two other soldiers. Without hesitation, he threw himself on the grenade, smothering the blast

In the close quarters of a rubble-strewn street in Aachen, American soldiers fire a 57mm antitank weapon against a distant German target. Urban warfare became a new concept for Allied armies, and they adapted during the advance into Germany. (National Archives)

and saving his comrades at the cost of his own life. Kiner's heroism would be recognized with the Medal of Honor.

As the 30th's right flank, the 119th Regiment crossed the Wurm near Rimburg on the Dutch side, where an old castle occupied by German troops stood. Surrounding the castle was a moat covered by thick woods. A bridgehead over the Wurm between Rimburg and the castle became the scene of intense fighting. The Germans tried to mount a series of counterattacks during the night to stop the inrush of American troops and tanks, but their efforts were thrown back with heavy losses. The enemy was not about to abandon the area without putting up a fight, however, and fought back with artillery.

American tanks had no easier going than the infantry. The heavy rains had turned the banks of the Wurm into deep bogs. One tank after another got stuck in the soft, wet earth and could not move. Engineers brought up bridging material and began constructing a treadway bridge under enemy fire. By the end of the day, the tanks had started to cross the stream but were too late to help the riflemen, who were trying to defeat each pillbox without the help of the Shermans' 75mm guns.

And so it went all day, with small, determined bands of attackers taking out pillboxes one by one. The only problem was that there were several hundred of these concrete fortifications all the way to Aachen and beyond.

At the end of the first day of fighting, the leading battalion of the 117th Infantry had lost 146 men, including 12 killed; another battalion had 58 wounded and 12 dead. Aachen was still 10 miles away.

On October 3, the 117th's commander decided to throw his reserve battalion, the 3rd, into the drive to take Übach, with an eye on cutting the Geilenkirchen-Aachen highway and occupying the high ground east of the Übach-Beggendorf road. But the Germans were dug in strongly at Übach and put up a stubborn resistance.

The foot troops needed tanks to take Übach, so General Corlett ordered the tanks and half-tracks of the 2nd Armored Division's Combat Command B to get there on the double. The bridgehead over the Wurm was still not secured, however, and the American commanders risked having a disaster on their hands.

Luck was with the tankers, and soon they were traveling south toward Übach. Heavy German shelling kept the tanks pinned down outside the town, while infantrymen who had penetrated into Übach took cover from the flying metal in shattered buildings. Advancing further was out of the question.

The German corps commander, meanwhile, was rushing reinforcements into the area, seeking to destroy the column of American armor that was strung out from the bridgehead several miles back. Well before dawn on October 4, the German counterattack, as disorganized as it was, struck the American tanks and half-tracks. Only a timely artillery barrage prevented the destruction of the armored relief force.

A few hours later, the Germans attacked again, this time hitting the 119th Infantry Regiment. One battalion of the German 49th Division, supported by two assault-gun brigades, caused great consternation in the American ranks, even forcing one company to retreat in fear and confusion. Short rounds from their own artillery, however, broke up the German attack. By the time they were ready to attack again, the 119th had regained its composure and was waiting.

At Übach, the Germans organized another attack to dislodge the Americans from the town but were halted by Task Force 1 of 2nd Armored's Combat Command B—but not without considerable bloodshed.

Now it was time for the American armored troops of Task Force 2 to resume the offensive. By late afternoon on October 4, it took the high ground near Hoverhof. The unit's twin, Task Force 1, engaged seven self-propelled guns and knocked them all out with a loss of just two of its own tanks. Two days later, the American advance was halted once more after the Germans brought up infantry and heavy guns to block the way. The battle north of Aachen was in danger of becoming a stalemate.

Clarence Huebner's 1st Division had found the going south and southeast of Aachen to be slightly easier, but only slightly. Lieutenant Karl Wolf's Company K, 16th Infantry, came under massed artillery fire directed from German observation posts on Crucifix Hill (so named because of a large cross on its summit) and Verlautenheide Ridge. "Just before midnight on October 3," he recalled, "the Germans launched the heaviest artillery barrage I was in during the war. Fortunately, we were in an abandoned German pillbox and no direct hits occurred." It was estimated that some 3,000 to 4,000 rounds landed on Company K's position that night.

The decision was made. The German observation posts on Crucifix Hill and Verlautenheide Ridge, and a third hill, called the Ravelsberg, would need to be taken out. Holding these features were the 246th Division plus an understrength battalion of the 275th Division, a battalion of Luftwaffe ground troops, a machine-gun fortress battalion, and a Landesschützen battalion. The 18th Infantry Regiment was given the daunting assignment.

An hour-long saturation bombardment by 11 battalions of artillery and a company of 4.2-inch chemical mortars lit up the predawn darkness of October 8. The dazed defenders at Verlautenheide put up little resistance to the 18th Infantry's 1st Battalion. It was a different story at Crucifix Hill.

Spearheading the assault against Crucifix Hill was Company C, 18th Infantry, under the command of Captain Bobbie Brown, a man one of the other officers said "clearly loved war." On October 8, Brown led his men up the hill under a rain of bullets and shells. Brown personally thrust a satchel charge into the firing aperture of a particularly troublesome pillbox and knocked it out. He then crawled to another fortification and destroyed it, too. Another pillbox had his men pinned down, and he crawled through intense fire to silence it. Although wounded three times during his one-man attack, he refused medical aid and continued to encourage his men in their attacks on the hill's concrete defensive positions. Soon Crucifix Hill was in American hands. For his courageous actions Brown was awarded the Medal of Honor.

In the darkness of the following night, American infiltrators slipped into German positions atop the nearby Ravelsberg and won the summit without firing a shot. Unaware that the Yanks were in control of the peaks, German supply teams were captured while bringing hot food for their comrades—hot food that was quickly consumed by the grateful Americans.

The German counterattacks began almost as soon as the enemy learned that the Americans were now in control of the three hills. The German 12th Division launched a series of infantry attacks accompanied by artillery that plastered American positions. Despite the shelling, two rifle companies from the 18th Infantry Regiment managed to crawl from their foxholes, organize an attack, and seize the town of Haaren, on the Aachen-Jülich highway, one of the Germans' major supply and reinforcement lifelines. On October 10, the advance elements of two more German divisions arrived and began hammering away at the 18th Infantry, trying without success to dislodge the troops from their positions.

That same day, in an effort to try diplomacy before resorting to more force, an ultimatum from General Huebner was delivered to Colonel Wilck in Aachen, demanding that he surrender the city before American guns reduced it to rubble and more people were killed. The demand was rejected. A two-day bombardment of the city then commenced.

On October 9, the 1st Battalion, 120th Regiment, 30th Infantry Division, was ordered to take part in an afternoon attack on the fortified village of Birk, three miles north of Aachen. Captain Murray S. Pulver, commander of Company B, 120th Infantry Regiment, was in his usual place—the thick of the fighting. His unit, along with Company A and six tanks, attacked abreast across 400 yards of open ground.

The attacking force had hardly gone halfway when the field was raked by artillery, rifle, and machine-gun fire. The six tanks were knocked out within minutes of leaving the line of departure.

Ordered to pull back, A and B Companies were then directed to resume the attack at dusk by hitting Birk on the flank through the village of Bardenberg. Pulver said, "It was almost dark by the time we launched our attack. We immediately ran smack into a counterattack by the enemy, directed at Bardenburgh. After a savage firefight with German tanks and infantry, we were ordered to back off and resume our former positions. We were saved from extinction by the darkness. It had been a poorly planned and executed attack, and many brave soldiers never returned to their former positions." Because of the failure, the battalion commander was relieved of his command.

Casualties were heavy. Russell Albrecht, another soldier in the 120th Infantry, recalled that while his unit was under fire, "My captain walked by me, patted me on the shoulder, and said, 'How are you doing?' He got about 10 feet from me and got a bullet in his head."

From midnight until 4:30 AM, Birk was relentlessly pounded by artillery. Although nearly worn out from their earlier ordeal, A and B Companies were again ordered into the attack, this time through a thick, early morning fog.

Captain Pulver said, "We moved fast and were on top of the exhausted enemy before they could fire a shot. About 50 prisoners were taken; the rest of the defenders escaped to the south."

The result of the battle was that Company B gained control of Birk and held a hill overlooking the road network leading out of Aachen to the east. But the position was tenuous at best, and soon the company was subjected to attacks by every German unit coming to break the siege of Aachen.

Pulver's men repulsed many counterattacks for several days but they held their ground and refused to yield. In recognition of their bravery, the 1st Battalion later received a Presidential Unit Citation.

In other parts of the 30th Division's sector north of Aachen, the unrelenting combat went on. Hobbs's men were still struggling to drive south of Bardenberg and punch through Würselen to reach the 1st Division; the Old Hickory team had already suffered 2,000 killed and wounded since the operation began 10 days earlier.

On October 12, a battalion of tanks from the 2nd Armored Division and the 116th Regiment of the 29th Infantry Division were attached to the 30th. With this added strength, Hobbs's men would finally be able to effect the link-up with the 1st Division, an event that was still several days into the future.

In Bardenberg on October 12, the fourth Medal of Honor of the battle was earned posthumously by Staff Sergeant Jack Pendleton. A member of Company I, 120th Infantry, 30th Division, Pendleton and his men had advanced approximately two-thirds of the way

Near Aachen on October 14, 1944, open-turreted American M-10 tank destroyers fire on German observation posts in preparation for an assault and to prevent the ranging of German artillery. (National Archives) through Bardenberg when they came under fire from a nest of enemy machine guns.

Pendleton's Medal of Honor citation reads: "This enemy strong point was protected by a lone machine gun strategically placed at an intersection and firing down a street which offered little or no cover or concealment for the advancing troops. The elimination of this protecting machine gun was imperative in order that the stronger position it protected could be neutralized.

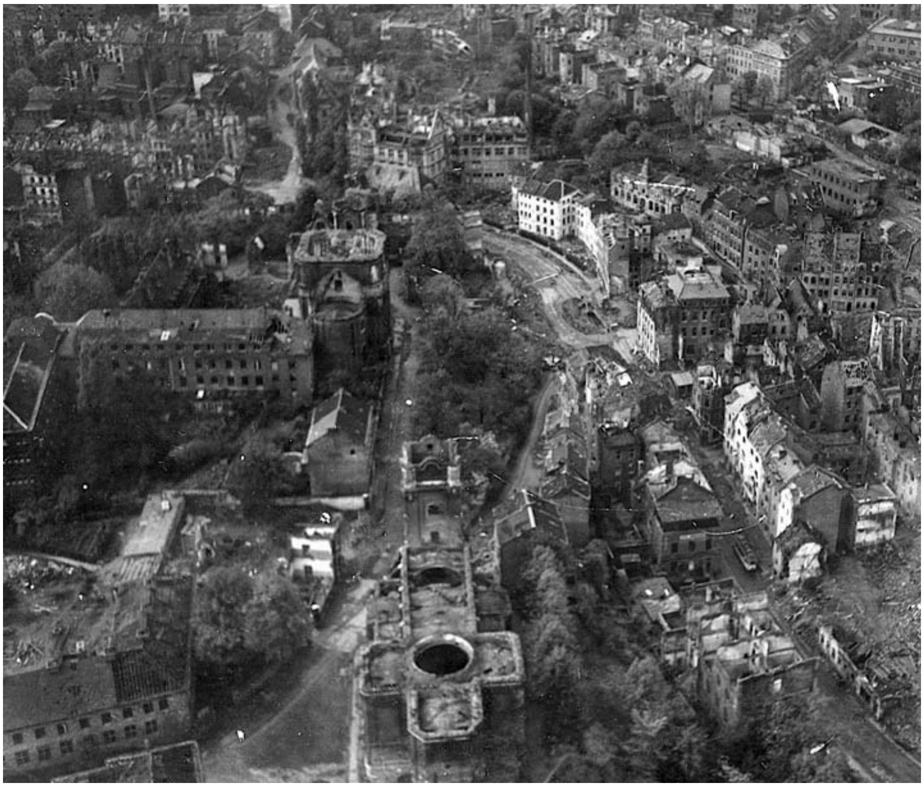
"After repeated and unsuccessful attempts had been made to knock out this position, S/Sgt. Pendleton volunteered to lead his squad in an attempt to neutralize this strongpoint. S/Sgt. Pendleton started his squad slowly forward, crawling about 10 yards in front of his men in the advance toward the enemy gun. After advancing approximately 130 yards under the withering fire, S/Sgt. Pendleton was seriously wounded in the leg by a burst from the gun he was assaulting. Disregarding his grievous wound, he ordered his men to remain where they were, and with a supply of hand grenades, he slowly and painfully worked his way forward alone. With no hope of surviving the veritable hail of machine-gun fire which he deliberately drew onto himself, he succeeded in advancing to within 10 yards of the enemy position when he was instantly killed by a burst from the enemy gun.

"By deliberately diverting the attention of the enemy machine gunners upon himself, a second squad was able to advance, undetected, and with the help of S/Sgt. Pendleton's squad, neutralized the lone machine gun, while another platoon of his company advanced up the intersecting street and knocked out the machine-gun nest which the first gun had been covering. S/Sgt. Pendleton's sacrifice enabled the entire company to continue the advance and complete their mission at a critical phase of the action."

It was that kind of heroism that would be necessary to take Aachen and its suburbs.

On October 12, American artillery lobbed 5,000 rounds against German positions while the P-38 Lightning and P-47 Thunderbolt fighter-bombers of the IX Tactical Air Force pounded the enemy with 99 tons of bombs. However, as the GIs on the ground soon discovered, all this softening up did was create more rubble and debris. The defenders were barely touched.

With German soldiers fighting on German soil, German opposition continued to be stiff and studded with fierce counterattacks. Harmon's 2nd Armored Division was brought up and assisted in the reduction of the defenses and the disruption of the counterattacks. After four days of nonstop fighting, the 30th had captured or destroyed 200 bunkers and pillboxes, but the possibility of overcoming the ever-increasing opposition any time soon seemed remote at best.



The domeless cathedral where Charlemagne was crowned Emperor of the Holy Roman Empire centuries earlier is visible in this aerial view of a devastated Aachen taken on October 24, 1944. Hitler was particularly insistent that Aachen be brutally defended since the city was in Germany and was significant in the nation's history. (National Archives)

Since it appeared that the link-up between the 1st and 30th Divisions would not happen quickly, General Huebner ordered the Big Red One's 26th Infantry Regiment, commanded by Colonel John F.R. Seitz, to penetrate into the heart of the city.

The plan was to have the 2nd and 3rd Battalions of the 26th, reinforced with tanks, tank destroyers, artillery units, flamethrowers, bazookas, and additional machine guns, circle around to the east and southeast of Aachen and enter from that direction. In the event that any serious resistance was encountered, a self-propelled 155mm howitzer was added to the mix.

The 1st Division launched a series of attacks along Aachen's southern perimeter. The Germans answered with mortars, machine guns, and 88mm artillery fire. The going was, in a word, tough. In the meantime, the 16th Infantry was directed to drive due east along Aachen's southern boundary, take the village of Münsterbusch, and then advance toward Stolberg.

Lieutenant Karl Wolf recalled that the 1st Battalion, 16th Infantry, took heavy casualties during the drive. "The battalion had lost 300 men in five days at that point," he said. "In Stolberg, which had pretty well been destroyed, the fighting was house to house."

Sergeant Harley Reynolds felt that there was one reason why Stolberg was an important objective—and why the Germans defended it so intensely. "It was high ground," he said, "but, better yet, it was the location of main valves for the water line to Aachen. We repulsed counterattack after counterattack by the Germans for this prize. The ammo shortage really hit us. If the Germans could have sustained their counterattacks, they could have run us out of ammo. This was one of the few times the Germans used their air force to try and dislodge us. They were able to dive-bomb us every night for the whole time we were there. But we took the main valves and cut off the water supply and held this objective until Aachen surrendered."

On the morning of October 13, the 26th Infantry began its assault into the city proper, clambering over a high railroad embankment to enter Aachen from the southeast. Confronted by a maze of streets filled with toppled masonry, the GIs adopted a strategy they called "Knock 'em all down." If a building stood in their path, the Americans used their heavy firepower to knock down any standing structures, chase enemy soldiers into basements, and finish them off with grenades, flamethrowers, and automatic weapons.

The 155mm howitzer was especially effective. When the infantry discovered that trying to advance down the streets was too unhealthy, the big gun was brought up, aimed at a block of buildings, and then fired. The projectiles tore perfect holes through multiple walls, allowing the foot soldiers to advance from one building to the next without ever stepping outside and exposing themselves to the bullets flying down the streets.

From his vantage point on a hill in Stolberg, Sergeant Harley Reynolds watched the battle for the city evolve. Aircraft, too, weighed in. "You can't believe the empty shell casings dropping on us from all our planes doing their strafing and dive-bombing runs on Aachen," he said.

The GIs were very creative in their assault on the city. At one point, a combat engineer unit filled an Aachen streetcar with explosives, lit a time fuse, then sent it careening down the tracks into the city. Charles MacDonald, in the Army's official history of the battle, noted, "Whether it did any actual damage to German installations was irrelevant in view of the impish delight the engineers derived from it."

Also on October 13, Captain James M. Burt, commanding a tank company in the 2nd Armored Division, earned for himself the Medal of Honor during the battle for Würselen. Although he was wounded early that morning and escaped from two Shermans that had been destroyed by German fire, he forgot about his injuries and personally reconned enemy territory, directed artillery fire from exposed positions, and rescued several wounded men. His citation reads: "Captain Burt held the combined [tank and infantry] forces together, dominating and controlling the critical situation through the sheer force of his heroic example."

Near the center of Aachen is a public park and hill known as the Lousberg, rising 862 feet; the GIs would rename it Observatory Hill. Near the base of the hill stood a sizable hotel and spa, the Quellenhof. As their perimeter continued to shrink, Wilck and his staff took up residence in the hotel and made it their command post.

The battle for the heart of Aachen turned into a real slugfest. As members of the 26th Infantry moved slowly and cautiously through the city, they were sometimes surprised by German defenders popping up from manholes behind them. A few grenades into the sewers and the piling of debris on top of the manhole covers took care of that problem.

Elite German paratroopers, or fallschirmjager, were among the defenders of Aachen. Here, three of these soldiers are seen scrambling through the rubble of a destroyed building in the city as they move to new defensive positions. (ullstein bild)

Well-hidden antitank guns continued to take their toll on American Shermans, and every street corner turned into a shooting gallery and the tanks into sitting ducks.

On October 14, the 30th Infantry Division pushed off before dawn in an attempt to close the gap between the 30th and the 1st Infantry Division, but again little progress was made against determined opposition. The sticking point seemed to be concentrated around Würselen.

Frank Moody, a platoon sergeant with Company F, 120th Regiment, 30th Infantry Division, was leading his platoon across a beet field near Würselen when an artillery barrage tore into them; he told his men to run and take cover in a sunken railroad cut. On the other side of the tracks was a German King Tiger tank along with two smaller tanks. A machine gun raked the area from a nearby water tower. Moody crawled atop a knocked-out panzer and called for his 30 men to join him. Only 14 responded. Luckily, they managed to get back to the company command post. "The medics went out and brought back 16 naked dead bodies," he said.

Later, a single shot by a German sniper killed Moody's scout beside him. Outraged, Moody said, "I got shook up and ran up to this German, took the rifle out of his hands before he could kill any more, and beat him half to death with it. Then my men stopped me. We went on to capture 15 more prisoners."

Even high-ranking officers were not immune from the flying projectiles. Brig. Gen. William K. Harrison, Jr., the assistant commander of the 30th Division, was wounded sometime during the battle. In a letter to his son, he explained how he was hurt: "Yes, that was a small fragment but you would be surprised what a little piece like that can do. The shell, which is steel, is burst into a lot of pieces by the explosion inside of it. For a short distance the pieces travel very fast. The doctor told me that a little piece like that can break a man's arm or go through his skull to kill him. Happily, the three that hit me did not strike anything vital."

Day by day, block by block, and building by building, small sections of Aachen were cleared of defenders by the attackers from the 26th Infantry Regiment. The casualty lists mounted on both sides, but still the Germans gave no sign of wanting to surrender.

The German LXXXI Corps commander, General Friedrich Köchling, did his best to send reinforcements to Wilck's aid. Eight assault guns arrived on the evening of October 14, and an SS battalion showed up the next day. These were thrown into a counterattack in an effort to break the American ring that was forming around the Hotel Quellenhof. The counterattack failed.

Wilck and his staff managed to slip out of the hotel, however, and set up a new command post in a huge air raid shelter, leaving behind a well-armed contingent in the Quellenhof ready to fight to the last bullet.

In the meantime, while XIX Corps was still struggling to overcome the opposition north of Aachen, General Hodges's patience with the 30th Infantry Division's slow progress was about at an end. Hobbs's men were supposed to have linked up with the 1st Division on October 8, and it was now a week later—and still no link-up.

Continuing to press General Corlett to light a fire under Hobbs, including threatening to relieve Hobbs of command, Hodges simply could not believe that the German defense was as fanatical as it was, especially when compared with VII Corps's relatively quick and easy passage through the southern fringes of Aachen.

Finally, Hobbs decided to cease banging his head against a stone wall, and he sent one of his regiments, the 119th, across the Wurm into the village of Kohlscheid and then in a flanking maneuver southward along the river's eastern bank. Meanwhile, elements of the 120th and the attached 116th Regiment from the 29th Division continued to assault Würselen. The 117th and 120th would stage diversionary attacks near Alsdorf.

Before dawn on October 16, the new operation was set into motion. By noon Kohlscheid was in American hands, but fighting farther to the east did not go as well. Pinned down by intense fire from a series of pillboxes, the 2nd Battalion, 119th Infantry, could make no headway until a sergeant named Holycross and a handful of Shermans led a platoon against the emplacements and systematically knocked out seven of them and captured 50 prisoners. Heavy German fire, along with a heavy rain, prevented the tanks from going any farther. It seemed that once again the American drive would bog down and tally nothing but more casualties.

However, the diversionary attack around Alsdorf by the 117th and 120th Regiments and the pressure exerted by the 116th at Würselen began to pay dividends. Shifting their attention from the 2nd Battalion, 119th Infantry to the new threat, the Germans enabled the 2nd Battalion to make progress and take its objective, Hill 194, but not before it lost a number of men in the process.

October 16 saw an intensification of the fighting as the Germans continued to pour reinforcements into the battle. Near the town of Eilendorf, for example, the 1st Division's 16th Regiment was attacked by elements of the 3rd Panzergrenadier Division but fought off the attack.

ABOVE: German officers, surrounded by their American captors, appear despondent after the fall of Aachen. Following weeks of severe fighting, the first major city in Germany had been taken by Allied troops. BELOW: Sergeant Max Thompson of Company K, 18th Regiment, 1st Infantry Division earned the Medal of Honor while fighting on the outskirts of Aachen. Using several different weapons, he took on German troops and helped his unit advance. (Both: National Archives)

Another Medal of Honor was earned that same day at Würselen by Staff Sergeant Freeman V. Horner, Company K, 119th Regiment, 30th Division. Machine-gun fire from houses on the edge of the town pinned the attackers in flat, open terrain 100 yards from their objective. As they lay exposed in the field, enemy artillery observers directed fire upon them, causing heavy casualties.

Realizing that the machine guns had to be eliminated to allow the company to advance out of the killing zone, Horner stood up with his Thompson submachine gun and charged toward the machine-gun nest. Just as he reached a position of seeming safety, he was fired on by another machine gun that had remained silent until that time.

He coolly wheeled in his fully exposed position while bullets whizzed past him, and he killed two German gunners with a single, devastating burst. He turned to face the fire of two other machine guns and, dodging bullets as he ran, rushed the enemy positions 50 yards away. The Germans abandoned their weapons and took cover in the cellar of the house they occupied.

Horner burst into the building, dropped two grenades into the cellar, and yelled for the Germans to surrender. After the blasts, four stunned men came out with their hands up. By his extraordinary courage, Horner destroyed three enemy machine-gun positions, killed or captured seven of the enemy, and cleared the path for his company's successful assault on Würselen.

With enemy resistance at Würselen finally broken, at 4:15 PM on October 16 a three-man patrol from the 30th Division's 2nd Battalion, 119th Infantry, was spotted by soldiers of the 1st Division's 18th Infantry east of Aachen.

The patrol, from the 2nd Battalion's position on Hill 194, braved enemy fire and reached the base of the Ravelsberg, their uniforms wet, muddy, and torn by shrapnel. From above them, atop the hill, came shouts: "We're from K Company, 1st Division. Come on up."

Two exhausted men from the 30th Division —Privates Edward Krauss and Evan Whitis— could only shout back: "We're from F Company. Come on down."

The men from the two divisions then met and shook hands.

The city was now completely encircled and the Aachen Gap was at last closed. But the fighting was not yet over—not by a long shot.

The battles in Aachen's suburbs remained just as fierce as the fighting inside the city. On October 18, on a hill near the town of Haaren, between Aachen and Verlautenheide, Sergeant Max Thompson was with Company K, 18th Regiment, 1st Infantry Division, when it came under an hour-long enemy artillery barrage.

When the shelling stopped, and while helping to move some of his wounded men to the rear, Thompson saw emerging from the woods a battalion of German troops and a number of tanks heading straight for him. He manned a .30-caliber machine gun in an attempt to slow the attack but a round from one of the tanks destroyed the gun. Thompson then picked up a Browning Automatic Rifle (BAR), halting the leading elements of the attack and causing those following to disperse. Then the BAR jammed. He tossed it aside and found a bazooka, using it to knock out one of the enemy's light tanks before the German fire forced him to fall back.

That night, Thompson and his squad were given the mission of retaking the hill, including the pillboxes that were now back in German hands. Under cover of darkness, Thompson, at the head of his squad, crawled forward and fired rifle grenades through the embrasure of a pillbox. The Germans fought back and wounded the sergeant, but he kept up until his one-man assault inspired his men and sent the enemy fleeing. For his courage, Max Thompson was awarded the Medal of Honor.

Also on October 18, it came time for the Americans inside the city, Lt. Col. John T. Corley's 3rd Battalion, 26th Infantry, to assault the Hotel Quellenhof, one of the last points of resistance. Second Lieutenant Wiliam D. Ratchford led his platoon, charging into the lobby of the opulent hotel, then proceeding to clear it out floor by floor, room by room. Finally, Ratchford's men forced the defenders into the basement, where they were finished off with grenades and automatic weapons fire.

By now the American encirclement of Aachen had become impenetrable, and the Germans gave up their efforts to lift the siege. On the afternoon of October 19, Colonel Wilck, from his command post inside the city's massive, four-story air raid shelter at 348 Rutscherstrasse, issued the following directive to his troops:

"The defenders of Aachen will prepare for their last battle. Constricted to the smallest possible space, we shall fight to the last man, the last shell, the last bullet, in accordance with the Führer's orders.

"In the face of contemptible, despicable treason committed by certain individuals, I expect each and every defender of the venerable Imperial City of Aachen to do his duty to the end, in fulfillment of our Oath to the Flag. I expect courage and determination to hold out.

"Long live the Führer and our beloved Fatherland!"

Learning that Wilck and his command staff were holed up in the shelter, Colonel Corley brought up the 155mm howitzer he had dubbed Big Bertha and directed the gun crew to blast away at the thick walls of the structure. While the shells only chipped large chunks of concrete from the exterior, the tremendous noise reverberated inside. Before long, a white flag appeared at the door of the shelter and out stepped two American GIs—two of 30 Americans the Germans had been holding as prisoners. A cease-fire was declared, and soon Colonel Wilck, apparently disobeying his own order to fight to the last man, emerged and was taken to Corley's command post.

At five minutes past noon on October 21, 1944, the 1st Division's assistant commander, Brig. Gen. George A. Taylor, accepted Wilck's surrender. The first major German city to fall into Allied hands was at last secured.

The casualty toll on both sides for the battle of Aachen and its suburbs was heavy. The 30th Division had lost some 3,000 men killed and wounded since its assault on the Siegfried Line began on October 2, but the division had captured 6,000 of the enemy.

According to General Huebner, the 1st Division's casualties were significantly less—150 killed and 1,200 wounded. In turn, the Big Red One had taken 5,637 prisoners. Figures for Germans, both military and civilian, who died in the fighting are unknown. Approximately 6,000 of the 7,000 civilians who remained in the city had been removed by U.S. Army Military Government units during the fighting and placed in protective custody in the suburb of Brand.

On October 5, 1944, wounded German prisoners are marched westward through the now quiet streets of Aachen. The U.S. 1st and 30th Divisions lost approximately 4,400 killed and wounded during the fight for the city. (National Archives)

Army Chief of Staff General George C. Marshall had once expressed his desire to General Eisenhower that the U.S. Army Band should play a concert in the first major German city captured by the Americans.

Ike's naval aide, Captain Harry Butcher, noted, "[Marshall] said he wished this could be done [in Aachen], but the concert would have to be on an occasion such as a ceremony to include [First Army commander] General Hodges. [Ike] felt it unwise to permit the band to play within 3,000 yards of the front line. If the Germans heard the music, there would be a refrain of artillery, and not only members of the band, but General Hodges might be killed. Consequently, he disapproved the idea."

For the Americans, the capture of Aachen was a significant event, kicking in the door that allowed the Allied drive toward the Ruhr and the Rhine to continue. The Battle of Aachen was at last over. The weary, grimy GIs sat in the rubble of the city, ate their C rations, wrote letters home, and counted their losses. The first chill of winter was in the air.

Yet, the bloody battle of the nearby Hürtgen Forest was already heating up; the Germans would fight as tenaciously for the Hürtgen as they had for Aachen. Then in December would come the major test—the Battle of the Bulge, Hitler's largest counteroffensive in the West.

Much urban fighting in hundreds of small villages and large cities still lay ahead, and the GIs who survived Aachen wondered what would happen if they were selected to assault Berlin.

Through the grace of God, they did not have to find out. □

Denver-based and Pulitzer-nominated author Flint Whitlock has written five books on World War II and dozens of magazine articles. He is a frequent contributor to WWII History.

PEARL HARBOR

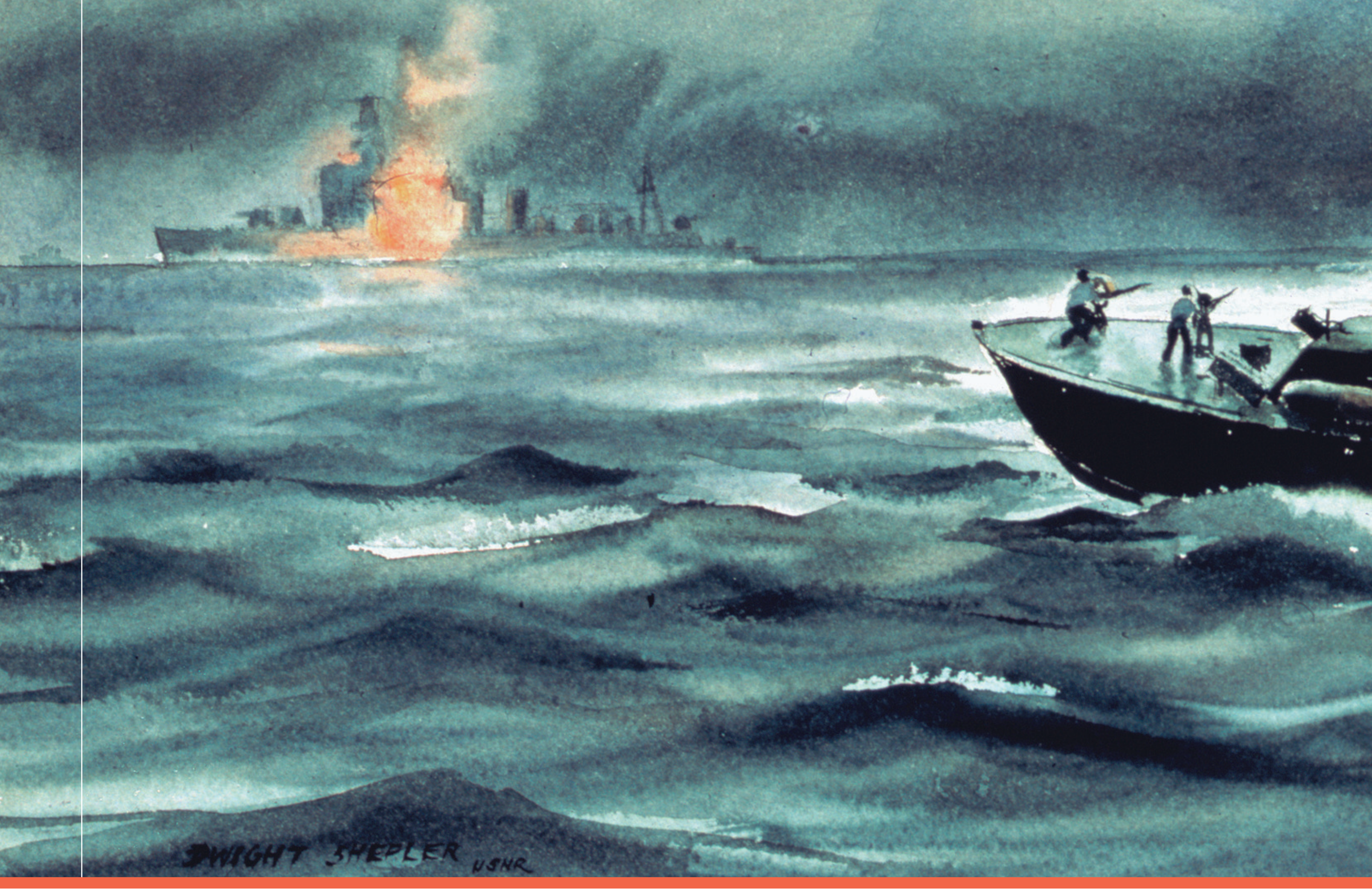
At 2:43 PM on October 24, 1944, Rear Admiral Jesse B. Oldendorf received a dispatch from Vice Admiral Thomas C. Kinkaid, commander of the Central Philippines Attack Force. The message was straightforward and direct: "Prepare for night engagement," and was duly logged aboard Oldendorf's flagship, the heavy cruiser USS *Louisville*. Admiral Oldendorf, commander of the Leyte invasion fire support warships, was not surprised by the order. Naval intelligence had already been apprised of the fact that a Japanese force was on its way toward Leyte Gulf.

At the height of the Battle of Leyte Gulf, Admiral Oldendorf, a stocky man with a cheerful disposition, was to intercept Japanese naval Force C, under the command of Vice Admiral Shoji Nishimura. That morning, Nishimura's task group had been spotted by aircraft from the carriers *Enterprise* and *Franklin*. Another task group was sighted less than three hours later. This was Number Two Striking Force, under Vice Admiral Kiyohide Shima. The main force, the First Striking Force under Vice Admiral Takeo Kurita, had been intercepted by the submarines *Darter* and *Dace* the day before.

The three Japanese task groups were to rendezvous at Leyte Gulf, with Kurita entering from the north and Nishimura and Shima from the south, and attack the American transports and their escorts off the Philippine island of Leyte where American forces under General Douglas MacArthur had landed on October 20. If everything went according to the Japanese plan, the three task groups would arrive at Leyte Gulf at dawn on October 25, sink the American support ships off Leyte, and isolate the American troops on the island.

When he received the order to prepare for a night battle, Admiral Oldendorf decided that

At the Battle of Surigao Strait, a line of American battleships, raised from the mud of Pearl Harbor, decimated a Japanese task force.



his best course of action would be to block Surigao Strait. The northern end of the strait leads into Leyte Gulf, and Oldendorf intended to place a battle line "squarely across the Leyte exit of the strait," blocking Japanese access to the gulf. And he had enough warships at his disposal to accomplish what he had in mind.

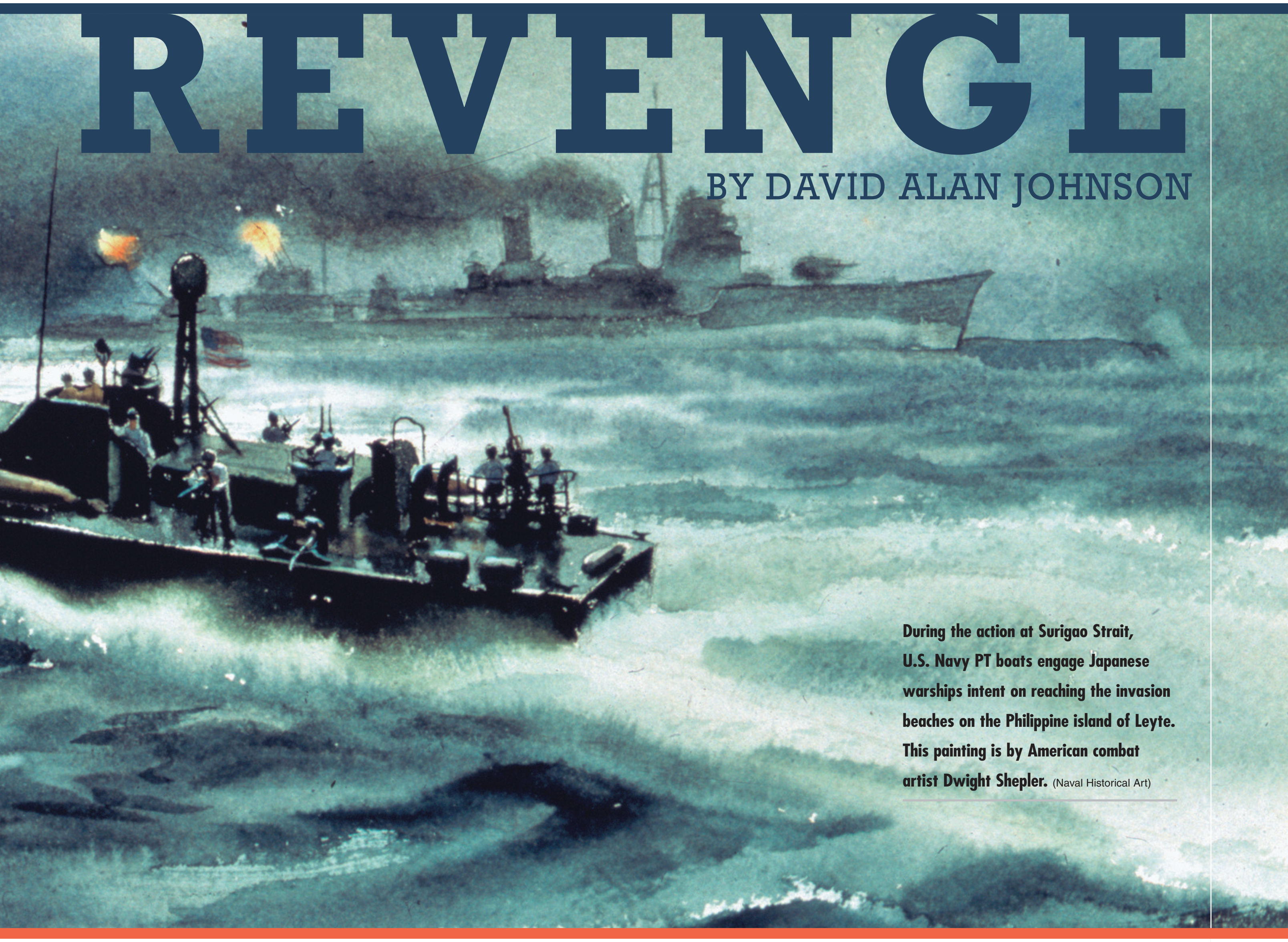
The heart of Oldendorf's battle line were the old battleships *Mississippi, Maryland, West Virginia, Tennessee, California,* and *Pennsylvania.* All but *Mississippi* were veterans of Pearl Harbor and had been either sunk or badly damaged by the Japanese attack. Now they were going to be given the chance to return the compliment.

The rest of the American force consisted of four heavy cruisers, including the Australian HMAS *Shropshire,* four light cruisers, and at least 28 destroyers including HMAS *Arunta.* "This was more than enough to take care of the Japanese southern force," commented historian Samuel Eliot Morison. The Japanese Navy was well known for its lethal night torpedo attacks, and Oldendorf planned to overwhelm the enemy with superior numbers. "We didn't want them to pull another Savo Island on us," he commented. The Battle of Savo Island, fought by American and Japanese warships off Guadalcanal in August 1942, was one of the most humiliating defeats in the history of the U.S. Navy, and four Allied cruisers had been sunk. This time, nothing was being left to chance.

Admiral Oldendorf's plan was fairly simple. First, every available PT boat would be stationed at the southern entrance to Surigao Strait. There would be 39 PT boats on patrol in the strait after dark; their instructions were to report the approach of the enemy and to attack with torpedoes. Next, the destroyers would attack with their torpedoes. The cruisers and battleships would then open fire with their large-caliber guns when the enemy came within range.

REVENGE

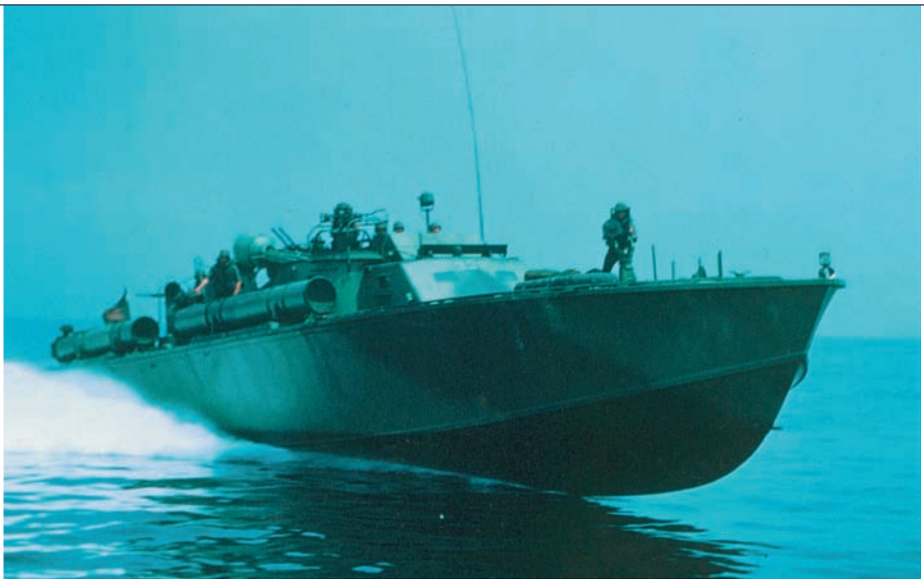
BY DAVID ALAN JOHNSON

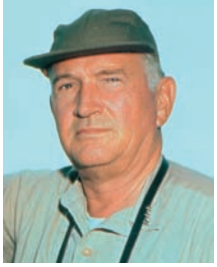


During the action at Surigao Strait, U.S. Navy PT boats engage Japanese warships intent on reaching the invasion beaches on the Philippine island of Leyte. This painting is by American combat artist Dwight Shepler. (Naval Historical Art)

Admiral Nishimura's Force C, which would be moving north toward Leyte Gulf, consisted of the old battleships *Fuso* and *Yamashiro,* the heavy cruiser *Mogami,* and four destroyers: *Michishio, Yamagumo, Asagumo,* and *Shigure.* Both *Fuso* and *Yamashiro* dated from World War I. *Fuso* was commissioned in 1915 and *Yamashiro* in 1917, although neither had taken part in any naval battles. Added armor protection, new boilers, and other improvements modernized both ships in the 1930s, but both were still considered too old and slow for an active role in the fleet. After Pearl Harbor, however, warships were needed for the confrontation with the U.S. Navy, and *Fuso* and *Yamashiro* were recalled from their training duties in the Inland Sea. *Fuso* was part of the Aleutian force during the Battle of Midway and took part in the reinforcing of Truk in 1943.

Admiral Oldendorf was not about to show any leniency. "If my opponent at me with an inferior force," he later said, "I'm certainly not going to give





ABOVE: The swift assault of American PT boats in Surigao Strait threw the Japanese fleet under Admiral Shoji Nishimura into confusion. The big guns of U.S.Navy battleships, raised from the mud of Pearl Harbor, were brought to bear moments later. FAR LEFT: Vice Admiral Shoji Nishimura commanded the Japanese force that was decimated at Surigao Strait. LEFT: Rear Admiral Jesse B. Oldendorf led the American naval contingent during the decisive Surigao Strait victory. (All National Archives)

Nishimura's force was much smaller than the American fleet it would be facing, but Admiral Oldendorf was not about to show any leniency. "If my opponent is foolish enough to come at me with an inferior force," he later said, "I'm certainly not going to give him an even break." Also, one of his destroyer squadron commanders, Captain Jesse Coward, had faced the Japanese at night off Guadalcanal. He knew what the Japanese were capable of doing with their long lance torpedoes and night tactics and was not about to let them do the same thing at Surigao Strait.

At 10:36 PM on the night of October 24, the crew of *PT-131* picked up Nishimura's group on radar. Visual contact was established 14 minutes later. About two minutes after this, the destroyer *Shigure* sighted the PT boats and began shooting. One shell hit *PT-130* but failed to explode. The boat's captain broke off contact at maximum speed and sent his contact report. Aboard *Louisville,* Admiral Oldendorf received the report just after midnight on October 25.

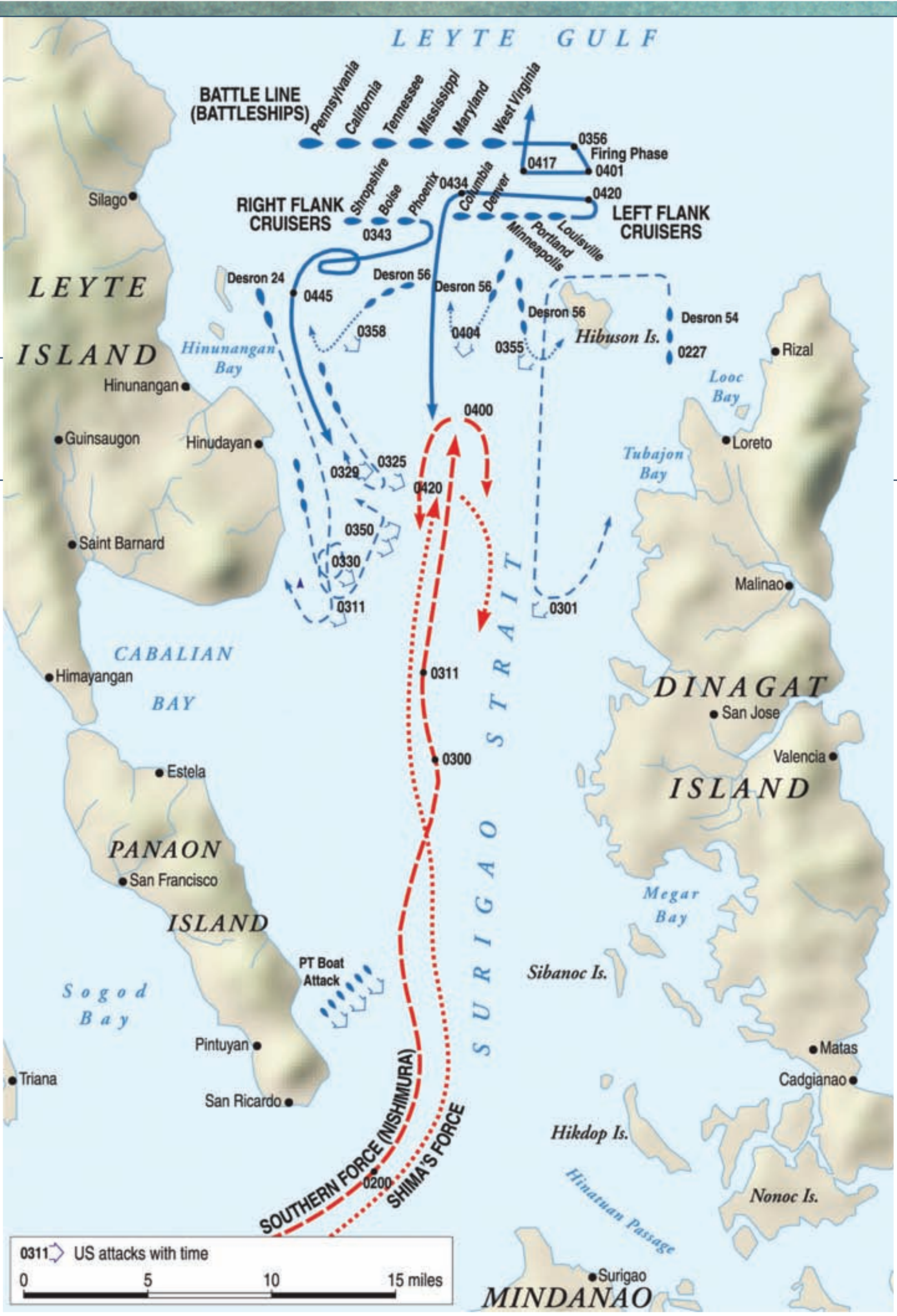
Each PT squadron in the strait went through the same sequence of events: making contact with the enemy, usually sending a contact report, firing torpedoes that missed, coming under fire from Japanese destroyers, and retiring behind a smoke screen. Admiral Oldendorf followed the progress of the PT reports closely; they confirmed that he did not need to make any changes to his battle plan. Of the boats that came under fire, 10 were hit and one was sunk. Total casualties were three killed and 20 wounded.

Admiral Nishimura paid no attention to the PT attacks and kept advancing northward toward Leyte Gulf. His next contact with the enemy came at about 3 AM, when he encountered the seven destroyers of Destroyer Squadron 54, commanded by Captain Jesse Coward. Captain Coward had already received notification of an unidentified contact at 2:40 AM. The contact soon was confirmed to be a column of ships steering due north. Coward ordered his destroyers to attack with only torpedoes since their 5-inch guns would be ineffective against large enemy warships.

Admiral Nishimura's column had its four destroyers in the lead, followed by *Yamashiro, Fuso,* and *Mogami.* Destroyer Squadron 54 split into two groups. *Melvin, McGowan,* and *Remy* would attack from the east, while *Monssen* and *McDermut* would make their approach from the west. Captain Coward, aboard *Remy,* closed with Nishimura's ships at about 30 knots, making smoke. At 2:58, he turned his destroyers to the left, bringing torpedo tubes to bear, and gave the order, "Fire when ready." *Remy, Melvin,* and *McGowan* began launching their torpedoes, firing 27 in about 75 seconds. It would take about eight minutes before they completed their runs of between 8,200 and 9,300 yards. With all torpedoes expended, Coward turned hard to port on a base course of 21 degrees, the three destroyers zigzagging individually and making smoke. None of the American destroyers suffered damage.

Strangely, Admiral Nishimura did not take any evasive action, even though he must have guessed that the American destroyers had fired torpedoes at his column. Several explosions were observed by sailors aboard Coward's destroyers. A few minutes later, a large ship in the column slowed and began turning slowly to starboard. The battleship *Fuso* had been hit by a torpedo from the *Melvin,* but Admiral Nishimura continued to send orders to *Fuso* as though the ship were still undamaged.

While Captain Coward's division was withdrawing, the destroyers *McDermut* and *Monssen* were still steaming due south. The destroyer division's commanding officer, Com-


LEYTE GULF
BATTLE LINE (BATTLESHIPS)
Pennsylvania
California
Tennessee
Mississippi
Maryland
West Virginia
0356
Firing Phase
0401
0417
0420
0434
RIGHT FLANK CRUISERS
Shropshire
Boise
Phoenix
Columbia
Denver
0343
LEFT FLANK CRUISERS
Louisville
Portland
Minneapolis
Silago
LEYTE
ISLAND
Desron 24
0445
Desron 56
Desron 56
Desron 56
0358
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0355
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0227
Hibuson Is.
Rizal
Looc Bay
Hinunangan Bay
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Saint Barnard
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Malinao
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DINAGAT
San Jose
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Valencia
ISLAND
Estela
SURIGAO STRAIT
PANAON
San Francisco
ISLAND
Megar Bay
PT Boat Attack
Sibanoc Is.
Sogod Bay
Pintuyan
Matas
Triana
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Surigao
MINDANAO

The U.S. Navy force under Admiral Jesse B. Oldendorf harassed the Japanese the length of Surigao Strait and completed the rout of the enemy force with a classic crossing of the T.

Map © 2008 Philip Schwartzberg, Meridian Mapping, Minneapolis, MN

mander Richard H. Phillips, turned to port to get into firing position, swinging his two destroyers back on a southerly course. A moment later, he ordered torpedoes to be fired when ready. *McDermut* began firing immediately; *Monssen* followed at 3:11.

This time, Admiral Nishimura did try to take evasive action. He turned 90 degrees to starboard, then 90 degrees to port, but this did not take him away from the torpedoes. At 3:20, flashes from explosions among Nishimura's ships were observed aboard both destroyers. A searchlight beam, probably from one of the Japanese destroyers, lit up *Monssen.* Shell splashes followed almost immediately, and some were so close that columns of water drenched the aft guns of both *Monssen* and *McDermut.* The destroyers made smoke, changed course, and increased speed. The searchlight beam disappeared along with the bursting shells.

is foolish enough to come him an even break."

Destroyer Squadron 54 fired a total of 47 torpedoes. Captain Coward was positive that they had scored at least three hits. Actually, five of the torpedoes had found targets, resulting in the sinking of three enemy ships. *McDermut*'s torpedo salvo accounted for no fewer than three destroyers—*Yamagumo, Michishio,* and *Asagumo. Yamagumo* blew up and sank; *Michishio* was badly damaged and drifting and would sink shortly; *Asagumo* had her bow blown off but was able to make headway. *Monssen* scored a hit on *Yamashiro,* which continued steaming on course, but *Melvin*'s hit on *Fuso* would prove to be fatal.

However, the attack of the destroyers was not over. Destroyer Squadron 24, under Captain K.M. McManes, also came south down the strait in two sections. The first section consisted of *Hutchins, Daly,* and *Bache*; the second of *Killen, Beale,* and HMAS *Arunta.* At 3:17, Commander A.E. Buchanan of the Royal Australian Navy heard Captain McManes's order, "Boil up! Make smoke! Let me know when you have fired." Two minutes later, the destroyer *Yamagumo* blew up, already hit by one of *McDermut*'s torpedoes. The light from the explosion was a great help to Commander Buchanan in making his run.

The fire from *Yamagumo*'s burning hulk might have helped the torpedomen see their targets, but it did not help to hit them. *Arunta* launched four torpedoes at a range of 6,500 yards. All four missed. *Beale* fired five torpedoes at 6,800 yards. These missed as well. *Killen* had better luck, firing five torpedoes at *Yamashiro* and hitting her once. *Killen*'s captain, Commander H.G. Corey, had been at Pearl Harbor and must have taken pleasure in torpedoing one of the enemy's battleships. The second torpedo hit on *Yamashiro* slowed the ship to five knots, but only for a short time. The tough old battlewagon still made headway, and steadily regained speed.

Captain McManes's three destroyers, *Hutchins, Daly,* and *Bache,* were also coming south at 25 knots. At 3:29, they began launching torpedoes. Admiral Nishimura's neat column had disintegrated by this time. *Yamashiro* still pressed resolutely northward, now at about 15 knots. *Shigure* and *Mogami,* both still undamaged, fanned out on her starboard side. *Fuso* and the remaining destroyers were either drifting with the current or trying to withdraw to the south. This made for much more difficult shooting than Captain Coward had experienced.

McManes's destroyers fired a total of 15 torpedoes at Nishimura's force, or what was left of it. *Bache* also opened fire with her 5-inch guns at the damaged Japanese destroyers and

Fire control innovations doomed the Japanese at Surigao Strait.

One of the main reasons for the success of the battleships *West Virginia, Tennessee,* and *California* at Surigao Strait was their Mk 8 fire control radar, which was used in conjunction with the Mk 8 rangekeeper computer. *Maryland, Mississippi,* and *Pennsylvania* had been fitted with the less effective Mk 3 radar.

The Mk 8 radar was able to detect the range, speed, and target angle of enemy ships very precisely and also gave a much "harder" image than the Mk 3. It was also less likely to have its screen cluttered by "soft" images such as shell splashes. The three U.S. battleships equipped with Mk 8 radar managed to maintain contact with *Yamashiro* and continued accurate fire on the enemy battleship.

The Mk 8 rangekeeper, an analog mechanical ballistic computer, was operated by one crewman. The operator manually entered several variables into the computer, including powder charge, type of shell being fired, and wind speed and direction. After these items were entered, the rangekeeper received information on the course and speed of the ship and how much it was rolling and pitching, determining the steadiness of the ship as a gun platform.

Using target data, the computer produced a firing solution—the correct position and elevation of the guns for hitting the target. As the range and bearing of the target changed, the radar detected these changes and fed them into the computer. Corrections were made, a new firing solution was reached, and the guns were turned and elevated or depressed accordingly. The Mk 8 rangekeeper also calculated the change of angle and range between the target's present position and the position of the target at the end of the projectile's flight. In other words, it could actually lead its target.

The Mk 8 radar was the state of the art in the mid-1940s and seemed nothing short of miraculous to gunners aboard U.S. cruisers and battleships. The combination of the Mark 8 radar and Mark 8 rangekeeper was instrumental in humiliating the Japanese at Surigao Strait. □

was joined by *Hutchins* and *Daly*. The enemy returned an inaccurate fire of its own.

While this exchange was taking place, everyone's attention was distracted by what happened to *Fuso*. The hit by *Melvin*'s torpedo—or possibly two torpedoes—had apparently caused internal fires that her damage control parties were not able to extinguish. The fires soon spread to one or more of the main magazines. At 3:38, the battleship exploded with a tremendous concussion and broke in half. Sailors on both sides witnessed the spectacle. The detonation was massive and was made even more spectacular by the moonless night. Both the bow and stern sections continued to float, drifting slowly away from each other. The two sections continued to drift until the forward section went down at 4:20. The stern sank less than an hour later.

As McManes's destroyers began to withdraw, *Hutchins* launched her five remaining torpedoes at *Asagumo*. All five missed their target, but one hit *Michishio*, which had drifted into the path of the spread. *Michishio* blew up and sank immediately.

Admiral Oldendorf's destroyers had completely reversed the Japanese dominance in night torpedo attacks, which had plagued American forces at Guadalcanal two years earlier. The U.S. destroyers suffered no losses during the action.

Destroyer Squadron 56, commanded by Captain R.N. Smoot, had yet to engage the enemy. The Japanese force was still steaming northward toward Oldendorf's battle line, and any further destroyer attack would have to be quick, before the battleships and cruisers began firing. At 3:45, even before McManes began his run, Smoot received the order, "Launch attack—get the big boys!"

Unlike the other squadrons, Destroyer Squadron 56 was deployed in three sections. Captain Smoot led Section One, which included *Albert W. Grant, Richard P. Leary,* and *Newcomb*. Section Two was under Captain T.F. Colney and consisted of *Bryant, Hartford,* and *Robinson*. Section Three, commanded by Commander J.W. Bouleware, was made up of *Bennion, Leutze,* and *Heywood L. Edwards*.

All nine destroyers steamed south at 25 knots. Colney's three destroyers were the first to make contact with the enemy force, which now consisted of *Yamashiro, Mogami,* and *Shigure,* and began launching torpedoes at 3:54. Each destroyer fired five torpedoes, all of which missed. Bouleware's section was next. Its targets were *Yamashiro* and *Shigure*. The two Japanese ships began firing as the destroyers launched torpedoes and kept firing as Bouleware's ships retreated northward behind a smoke screen. Neither side scored any hits.

Captain Smoot's division began launching torpedoes at 6,200 yards. *Leary* launched three torpedoes, *Grant* and *Newcomb* five each. A few minutes earlier, *Yamashiro* had altered course 90 degrees from north to west, directly across the torpedo tracks. Two explosions were seen aboard *Yamashiro* at 4:11, matching the interval it would have taken for *Newcomb*'s torpedoes to make their run. Yamashiro had already come under fire from Oldendorf's battle line, explaining the change of course.

By this time, shellfire from both Japanese and American ships crisscrossed over the destroyers. Some of the shells glowed in the dark and could be seen against the black sky as they arced overhead. Both *Leary* and *Newcomb* managed to get clear of the crossfire, although they were bracketed by falling rounds. *Albert W. Grant* was not as lucky. Just as she was beginning her turn, the destroyer took her first hit. During the next 13 minutes, she received 18 more. Eleven of these were 6-inch shells from American cruisers. At 4:20, she was dead in the water. The crew plugged the shell holes with mattresses, tables, and anything available.

Around 5 AM, *Newcomb* sent her medical officer and two corpsmen over to *Grant* by whaleboat—94 of the destroyer's crew were wounded and 34 officers and men had been killed. *Grant*'s captain, a large, muscular man, went below and pulled several sailors out of the flooding engine room himself. An hour or so later, *Newcomb* took *Grant* in tow and pulled her out of the battle area. The destroyer was repaired and later took part in the Okinawa campaign.

While the destroyers were making their torpedo attacks, Admiral Oldendorf's battle line and flanking cruisers waited for Nishimura's group to come within range of their guns. Explosions from the torpedo hits, along with the eruption of *Fuso,* were visible to anyone topside on any of the cruisers or battleships. Radar screens began to pick up the enemy at 3:23. The battleships and cruisers had been steering back and forth, east and west, across the northern end of Surigao Strait. At 3:30, they were all near the western side of the strait, steering east. Twenty-one minutes later Oldendorf

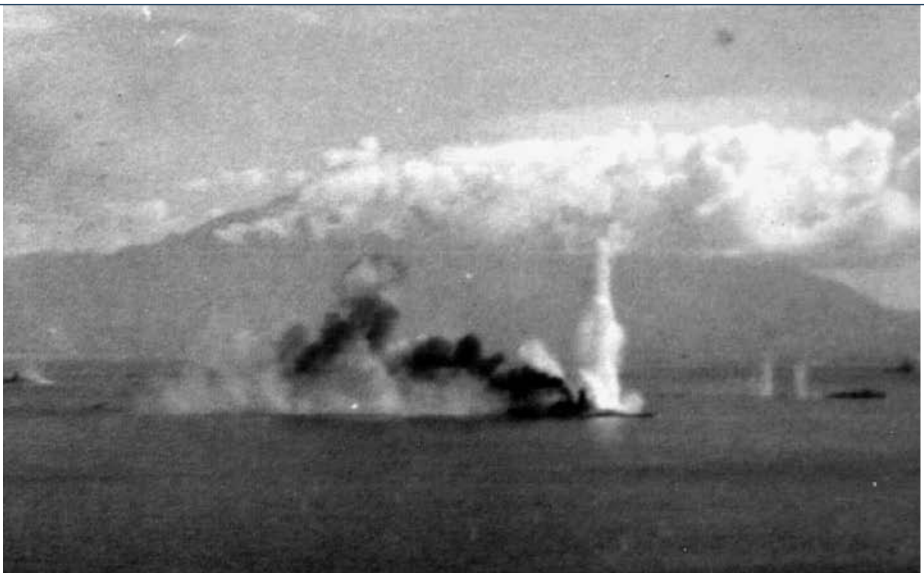
"The devastating accuracy arched line of tracers in the ordered the cruisers to open fire; two minutes later the battleships joined in.

The situation was a Naval War College textbook exercise, at least from the American point of view. Admiral Nishimura's force, now down to three ships—one battleship, one heavy cruiser, and one destroyer—continued steaming northward. Oldendorf was about to cross the T in a classic naval maneuver, which allowed the ships forming the horizontal stroke to bring all guns to bear, while the ships forming the downstroke could only fire their forward-facing guns at the enemy.

Of the American battleships, *Tennessee, West Virginia,* and *California* had the advantage of Mk 8 fire control radar. The radar data—the distance, speed, and course of the enemy—were fed into the gunnery computer and produced a firing solution before the enemy ships even came within range. Ammunition was in relatively short supply since the ships had been bombarding enemy shore installations and were carrying relatively few armor-piercing shells.

Yamashiro continued on a course of 20 degrees at 12 knots, firing at *Denver, Columbia,* and other left-flank cruisers. The battleship did not have any fire control radar and was limited to shooting at visible targets. The cruisers were closer and easier to see than Oldendorf's battleships. *Denver, Columbia,* and *Minneapolis* were straddled by shell splashes.

of this gunfire was the most beautiful sight I have ever witnessed. The darkness looked like a continual stream of railroad cars going over a hill."



By the autumn of 1944, the Imperial Japanese Navy had been forced into a desperate gamble in Philippine waters. The Battle of Leyte Gulf is considered by many to be the largest naval battle in history. During the Leyte Gulf fight, the super battleship *Musashi* is relentlessly assaulted by U.S. planes in the Sibuyan Sea.

The cruisers and battleships returned a devastating fire of their own. Every caliber shell from 6-inch to 16-inch came cascading down in the immediate vicinity of *Yamashiro* and *Mogami.* "This was modern war at sea," wrote one commentator. "They fired at something they couldn't see and it fired back." Actually, *Yamashiro* and *Mogami* were firing at the cruisers and withdrawing destroyers and only managed to hit the unfortunate *Albert W. Grant.*

Aboard the battleships of both navies, the concussion from the big guns was staggering. Every time a salvo was fired, the recoil rocked the ship and seemed to push it sideways. The blast from the guns squeezed the breath out of the body and popped rivets out of the bulkheads. Shells weighing nearly a ton each rocketed out of muzzles at over 1,600 miles per hour. Thick clouds of cordite smoke burned the eyes and stuck in the throat. Flashless powder was being used, but the muzzle flashes still lit up each ship on this black night. An easterly breeze blew the smoke clear, a great help for visual spotting and observation.

West Virginia fired a total of 93 rounds of 16-inch armor-piercing shells, while *Tennessee* and *California* fired 69 and 63 rounds, respectively, of 14-inch ammunition. The other three battleships were hindered by their Mk 3 radar, which was far less effective in finding targets than the Mk 8 and resulted in dramatically fewer rounds fired. *Maryland* fired 48 rounds, its fire control managing to find *Yamashiro* by ranging on the splashes from *West Virginia*'s shells. *Mississippi* fired only one salvo, and *Pennsylvania* did not fire a shot all night long.

On the American left flank, *Denver* began firing at *Yamashiro* at 3:51. *Minneapolis, Columbia,* and *Portland* quickly joined in. *Columbia* alone fired 1,147 rounds in 18 minutes, equalling a 12-gun salvo every 12 seconds. *Portland* shifted fire to *Mogami* at 3:58, while *Denver* tried to stop *Shigure* but probably hit *Albert W. Grant* instead.

The right-flank cruisers concentrated fire on *Yamashiro. Phoenix* fired full 18-gun salvos on an average of every 15 seconds. *Boise* had also gone to rapid fire but was ordered to "fire slow and deliberate" to conserve ammunition. The Australian cruiser *Shropshire* started firing slowly but went to rapid fire after changing course to begin a westerly run across the strait. These cruisers fired a total of 1,181 rounds. Spotters observed large, bright flashes on *Yamashiro* and believed that their own gunfire was responsible.

Captain Smoot was in position to observe this display while his destroyers were withdrawing. "The devastating accuracy of this gunfire was the most beautiful sight I have ever witnessed," he later reported. "The arched line of tracers in the darkness looked like a continual stream of railroad cars going over a hill. No target could be observed at first; then shortly there would be fires and explosions, and another ship would be accounted for."

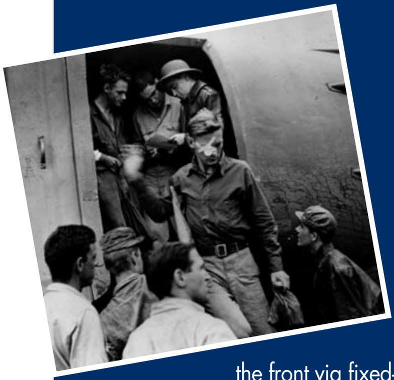
Aboard *Louisville,* Admiral Oldendorf received a message that *Albert W. Grant* and other destroyers were being hit by friendly fire, and he ordered all ships to cease firing at 4:09. Oldendorf wanted to give the destroyers time to get out of the battle area, but he also gave Nishimura some breathing room. *Yamashiro* turned 90 degrees and began to retire southward. In spite of the damage, the battleship was still able to make 15 knots, although she had sustained fatal wounds. No records exist to indicate exactly how many shell hits had penetrated *Yamashiro*'s armor, but a realistic estimate would be several hundred. At 4:19, the big ship rolled over and sank. Nishimura and most of the crew went down with the ship.

Continued on page 74

Angels of Mercy

Aerial evacuation of the wounded came of age in World War II.

BY KEVIN M. HYMEL



At the beginning of World War II the idea of evacuating the wounded from the front via fixed-wing aircraft was scoffed at by the higher brass. It was considered "dangerous, impracticable, medically unsound, and militarily impossible." Yet, by the end of the war fully a third of all casualties, approximately 800,000 patients, were evacuated by plane.

Every plane in the Allied arsenal was recruited into evacuation duty, from single-seater observation planes to four-engine C-54 Skymasters and Navy PBYs. The Army Air Corps trained 1,200 flight nurses—all volunteers—to accompany the wounded and care for them on long journeys. In the Pacific, medical planes flew to islands within days of initial amphibious attacks. Air ambulances racked up an impressive record: In 1944 they carried home 2,000 wounded a day, with only 28 patients dying in flight, a statistic of five deaths per 100,000 patients.

The idea for air evacuation was fist proposed by an American medical officer in 1910 and first employed in 1918 when a patient was transferred in the United States via a converted JN-4 plane. The first evacuation of the war for the United States came in 1942 during the building of the Alaskan highway. That same year, in Burma, the first casualties were evacuated from a war zone when 1,900 sick and wounded soldiers were flown in C-47s from Myitkyina to Alaska over a 10-day period.

From there, air transport grew all over the world: Planes were used to evacuate wounded over the Owen Stanley Mountains in New Guinea. Following D-Day, June 6, 1944, only three of the first 50,000 patients transported by plane died in flight. At Guadalcanal, 7,000 patients were flown out with the same number of deaths. In North Africa, 2,000 patients were evacuated by plane with only one death.

Air evacuation made good sense. On the ground, it freed up the roads used to bring men and supplies forward. It also reduced the amount of supplies required to keep men alive for the trek to a hospital. Evacuated men recovered and returned to the front at a faster rate. On the islands of the Pacific, planes were faster than ships in travel time and, more importantly, delays were shorter between flights than they were between ship arrivals, which could be days.

The new service was also a boost for morale. It took only 58 hours to fly from China to Washington D.C. By land and sea the journey could take as long as 10 weeks. It took eight days to fly from Indo-China to the United States. The same trip by land and sea required three months. It is no wonder the men fighting in Burma looked at evacuation planes as "flying carpets." Planes also reduced the strain on medical staffs. In 1943, for example, Air Transport Command moved 1,015 patients. If they had been evacuated by sea, it would have required a minimum of two hospital ships, plus crews and medical personnel. Along with the speed of planes came a psychological effect not perceived by doctors: as planes approached the United States, patients improved. The knowledge that they were close to home worked to make the men better.

From its modest beginnings, air evacuation became so prominent in the Allied armies that an air surgeon could boast at the end of the war, "There is no safer means to transport the sick and wounded than by air evacuation." □

CLOCKWISE FROM OPPOSITE TOP: A Navy PBY transports a soldier in need of brain surgery off the Philippine Islands. The subsequent operation saved his life.

An oxygen mask and IV are hooked up on a critically wounded soldier.

A wounded soldier in Burma is brought to a liaison plane to be flown to a medical dressing station in the Hukowng Valley.

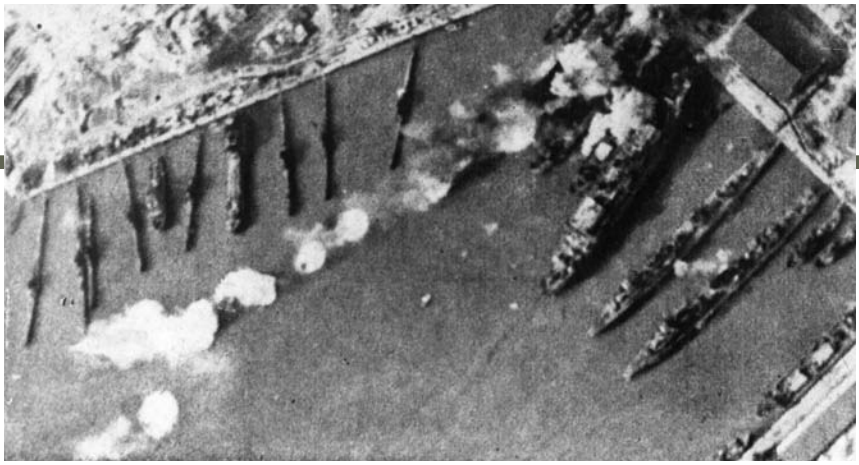
A nurse keeps up morale on the Italian front during a flight to a Naples hospital.

Two amputees enjoy a game of casino on a medical flight from Great Britain to the United States.

Marines and sailors wounded on Palau arrive at a Naval hospital for treatment. (All photos: National Archives)

The Soviet Dunkirk

BY VICTOR J. KAMENIR



Stalin's Baltic Fleet attempted to escape from Tallinn during the bleak days of summer 1941.

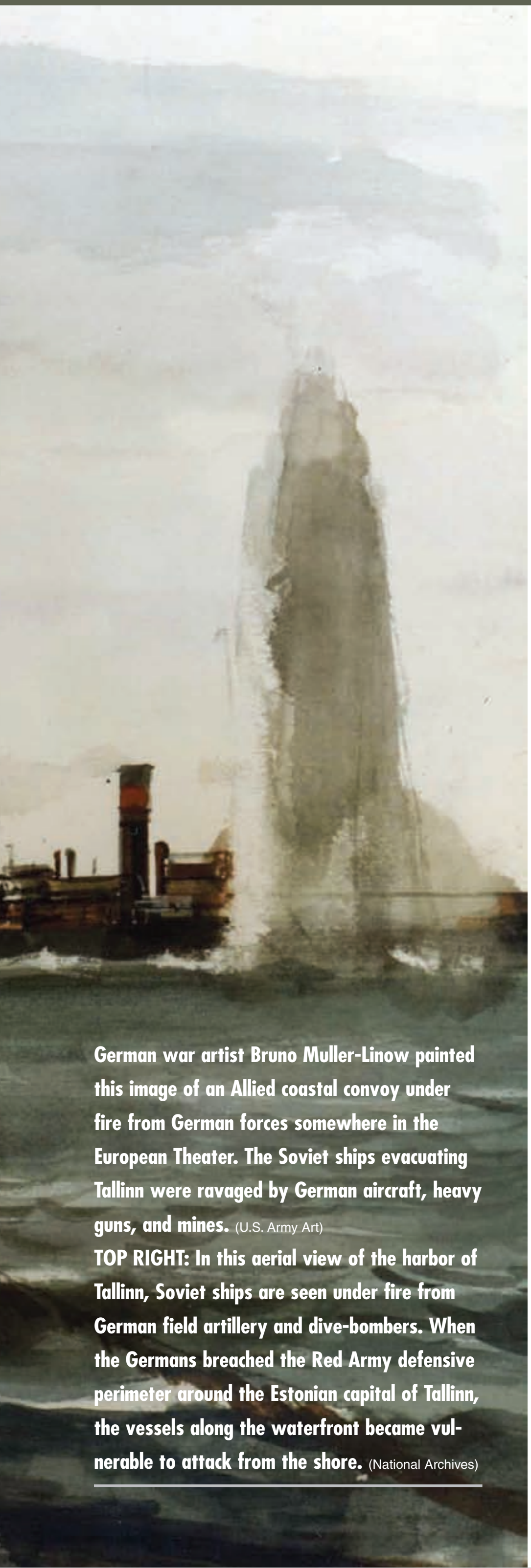
Early in World War II, a bitter joke circulated within the Soviet military. It ran, "What is the first thing Russia does when war is declared? It scuttles the fleet!" The joke referred to sad events in Russian naval history. In 1855, after the Crimean War, Russia lost the right to maintain a fleet in the Black Sea, and in 1904-1905 during the disastrous Russo-Japanese War, Russia lost two out of its three fleets. In 1941, the Soviet Union, born out of old Imperial Russia's ashes, almost lost its Baltic Fleet.

In 1940, without firing a shot, the Soviet Union absorbed the Baltic states of Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania, situated on the southern coast of the Gulf of Finland. Along with territorial acquisition, this move was a major coup in projecting Soviet naval presence westward. Besides taking in the tiny navies and merchant marine fleets of the three states, the Soviet Red Banner Baltic Fleet acquired a number of important naval bases on the Baltic Sea. Chief among them was Tallinn, capital of Estonia and a major port city. A chain of several other bases, including a large one at Riga, the Latvian capital, extended farther west along the coast.

On June 22, 1941, mutual expansionist policies inevitably brought Nazi Germany and the Soviet Union into armed conflict. Lacking capital ships in the Gulf of Finland, which rated a low priority, the German Marinekommando Nord fleet consisted mainly of torpedo boats, minesweepers, and submarine flotillas, augmented by the small but skilled Finnish Navy. In contrast, its opponent, the vastly superior Soviet Baltic Fleet, was composed of two battleships, four cruisers, and 15 destroyers plus numerous smaller craft and submarines.

The rapid pace of the German invasion of the Soviet Union took the Soviet High Command by surprise. As German troops briskly pressed eastward through the Baltic States, the Soviet naval bases began falling like dominoes. The escaping Soviet naval vessels were being pushed farther east into the Gulf of Finland. By mid-August 1941, Tallinn had become the westernmost Soviet naval base on the Baltic Sea.

Just days before hostilities began, the German Kriegsmarine and its Finnish allies had begun laying extensive minefields in strategic locations in the Baltic Sea and the Gulf of Finland. Outnumbered and outgunned, the Germans and Finns relied heavily on mines to negate the Soviet advantage and to protect their own shipping lanes. East of Tallinn, in the immediate vicinity of Cape Juminda, was a heavily mined area of the



German war artist Bruno Muller-Linow painted this image of an Allied coastal convoy under fire from German forces somewhere in the European Theater. The Soviet ships evacuating Tallinn were ravaged by German aircraft, heavy guns, and mines. (U.S. Army Art)

TOP RIGHT: In this aerial view of the harbor of Tallinn, Soviet ships are seen under fire from German field artillery and dive-bombers. When the Germans breached the Red Army defensive perimeter around the Estonian capital of Tallinn, the vessels along the waterfront became vulnerable to attack from the shore. (National Archives)

Gulf of Finland. This major minefield was designed to interdict Soviet operations between their Kronstadt base on Kotlin Island near Leningrad and the rest of the Baltic Sea. Overall, more than 2,000 mines were in place in Juminda waters.

From the opening of hostilities, the Soviet Navy lost the initiative despite its numerical and qualitative superiority. Its losses began to mount steadily, mainly falling prey to mines. Hardly a day went by without a ship sunk, often with all hands. Aggressively led German and Finnish light forces effectively cowed the Soviet naval presence in the Baltic.

On the landward side, Red Army forces were led by Marshal Kliment Voroshilov, who possessed the highest Soviet military rank but was not a capable military tactician. His paramount attribute was complete political reliability and unquestioning obedience to the instructions of Premier Josef Stalin. Despite his best efforts, Voroshilov was completely unable to shore up his crumbling front.

Driving toward Leningrad, German Army Group North brushed aside the Soviet Eighth Army, the closest Soviet formation to Tallinn. No plans to defend the city from a land-based attack were prepared before the war, and it was too late now. On July 22, the Germans struck at the juncture of the X and XI Rifle Corps of the Eighth Army. As a result of this action, the X Rifle Corps was cut off from the rest of the army and fell back to the vicinity of Tallinn. On August 5, the Germans cut the Tallinn-Leningrad railroad and reached the coast of the Gulf of Finland. Tallinn now lay 200 miles behind the German lines.

Responsibility for defending the city and the naval base fell to the commander of the Baltic Sea Fleet, Admiral Vladimir F. Tributs. The Red Army forces available for defense were woefully insufficient, consisting mainly of the depleted X Rifle Corps and the 22nd NKVD (Secret Police) Division, which had performed guard and escort duties in the Baltic states before the war, shuttling prisoners to the horrific gulags.

To supplement the Army troops, any sailors who could be spared from the ships were formed into naval infantry detachments to fight on land. In addition, all naval shore facilities were swept of nonessential personnel, and they were placed in naval infantry detachments as well. These measures produced more than 10,000 sailors to bolster the city's defenses. Additionally, several militia regiments totaling close to 4,000 Latvian and Estonian communists and volunteers joined the defenders. There was no time to train the sailors and militia units in infantry skills, and they suffered appalling casualties in the subsequent fighting. Initially, there were not enough rifles to arm them, and the weapons had to be flown in from Kronstadt.

Because of the weakness of the ground forces, artillery became the backbone of Tallinn's defenses. Ships anchored in Tallinn's harbor provided fire support for ground units.

ABOVE: Sailors of the Soviet Black Sea Fleet participate in morning exercises aboard ship. BELOW: Marshal Klementi Voroshilov led the Red Army defensive effort on land near the Estonian capital of Tallinn.

(Both: National Archives)

Numerous naval spotter teams were placed with the ground units to facilitate fire control, but frequent communication difficulties made the massive naval gunfire often ineffective. Still, on many occasions, all that prevented German breakthroughs was the tremendous volume of fire provided by the cruiser *Kirov* and her destroyer escorts. Additional fire support came from large-caliber shore batteries, some mounting 305mm guns.

As the Germans came closer and closer, the Red Air Force lost its airfields as well, with most of the surviving aircraft flying east where they joined in the defense of Leningrad. A small number of older Ilyushin I-16 fighters belonging to the Soviet Navy continued operating for a time from a tiny landing strip jammed between a fishing village and the water's edge. Eventually, they followed their Air Force counterparts eastward, and Tallinn was left without air support.

On August 21, the Germans breached the defenses of the city itself. Despite valiant efforts, the dwindling Soviet forces could not hold them back. Tallinn's harbor was now within range of German field artillery, and Soviet ships began taking hits. This caused the ships to frequently change positions, reducing the effectiveness of their fire and further weakening the land defenses.

Despite the gravity of their situation, nobody at the headquarters of the Baltic Sea Fleet, including Admiral Tributs, dared to ask Voroshilov for permission to evacuate the city. Punishment for being labeled a "panic-monger" was very real, often carrying the death penalty. Finally, on August 25, Tributs went over Voroshilov's head and submitted a carefully phrased request for instructions to Chief of the Navy Admiral Nikolai G. Kuznetsov. The last portion of the report stated, "The harbors and piers are under enemy fire. The Military Council ... is requesting your instructions and decisions concerning the ships, units of the 10th Corps and fleet shore defenses in case of enemy breakthrough into town itself and the pullback of our forces to the sea. Embarkation on transports in this eventuality would be impossible." Tributs's concern mirrored Admiral Kuznetsov's own misgivings, and he took this matter directly to the high command. After much deliberation, permission to evacuate Tallinn and break through to Kronstadt was finally granted late on the evening of August 26.

With permission granted, the Soviets began frantic planning for the evacuation of over 200 ships and close to 40,000 military personnel and civilians. The ships gathered in Tallinn's harbor were a hodgepodge of both warships and support vessels ranging in size from massive civilian passenger liners converted into transports to the heavy cruiser *Kirov*, destroyers, submarines, and tugboats.

Fortunately, while waiting for final orders, senior Soviet commanders had already put together contingency plans for evacuation. Now these plans had to be finalized and last-minute corrections made. At the same time, special teams began destroying military equipment that could not be evacuated. The city's utilities and other infrastructure were also rendered inoperable to deny their use to the enemy.

There were three routes of retreat to Kronstadt through the Gulf of Finland, which is only 20 nautical miles wide in some places. The northern route, close to the Finnish shore and under the enemy air support umbrella, was immediately ruled unacceptable even though it was almost completely free of mines. According to intelligence reports that the British government passed on to its Soviet allies, there were no German capital ships in the Baltic Sea or the Gulf of Finland. Lacking their own intelligence sources, the Soviet commanders still classified the British reports as unconfirmed and unreliable. Without any concrete data about the German surface fleet, Soviet admirals allowed for the possibility of German warships attempting to interfere with the run to Kronstadt.

The southern route would have taken the fleet along almost 200 miles of coastline occupied by German forces. Orders arrived from Voroshilov's headquarters expressly forbidding Tributs to evacuate his fleet along this route. Ostensibly, these categorical instructions stemmed from the fact that this route would expose the fleet to treacherous and shallow waters and fire from German shore batteries. Several senior officers headed by Rear Admiral Yuriy F. Rall argued that this channel already had been successfully navigated by more than 200 ships. German artillery fire that could be brought to bear on the fleet would be conducted mainly by field artillery, easily countered by the heavier and more numerous guns of the Soviet naval vessels. Even a shore battery mounting 150mm guns captured by Germans at Cape Juminda was no threat to the Soviet ships.

The real reason for denying the southern route was Soviet mistrust of the Latvian and Estonian crews of numerous transports carrying evacuees and equipment. This paranoia was fed for two reasons. There was an incident in which a converted transport captained and crewed largely by Estonian civilian sailors had been intentionally run aground on the southern shore of the Gulf of Finland so that the crew could defect to the Germans. It was also feared that the crews of Soviet naval vessels, given an opportunity, might defect to the Germans.

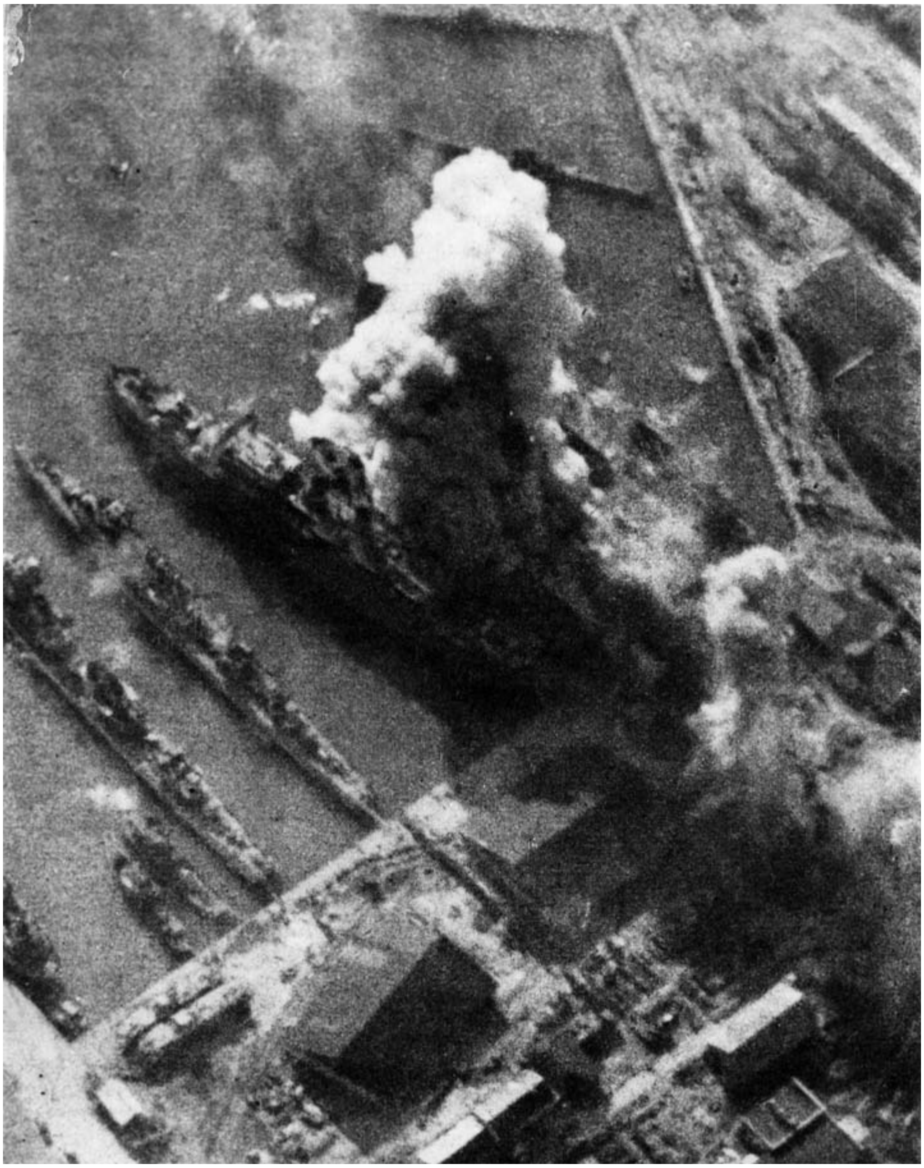
Therefore, the Soviet high command ordered the evacuation from Tallinn to proceed along the middle route, even though it was thickly sown with German and Finnish mines. The Germans and Finns had been mining the waters of the middle route even before the German invasion of the Soviet Union, and the Axis sailors had been amazed at the apparent Soviet passivity.

The mission was made further hazardous by the dearth of minesweeping vessels. Obsessed with powerful warships, the Soviet shipbuilding industry had severely neglected the production of support vessels, and the Soviet Navy entered the war with a pronounced shortage of minesweeping capability. To further aggravate the problem, those minesweepers that were available were often used in capacities for which they were not designed, especially as transport ships. Admiral Rall and his staff estimated that almost 100 minesweepers would be necessary to adequately lead the Baltic Fleet during the breakout from Tallinn. Instead, only 10 modern minesweepers were available. They were supplemented by 17 older and slower converted trawlers and a dozen converted Navy cutters.

This small number of minesweepers was tasked with the gargantuan responsibility of shepherding more than 200 vessels to safety. The civilian transports, including 22 large ones, were divided into four convoys, each closely guarded by a few small naval vessels and led by older trawler minesweepers. The naval force was split into three elements: the main force, the covering force, and the rear guard. Ten modern minesweepers were allocated five each to lead the first two combat elements, particularly safeguarding the *Kirov*.

According to plan, the civilian and military convoys were to leave Tallinn on a staggered schedule. The Soviets were well aware of the danger posed to the convoys by mines off Cape Juminda, and they developed a schedule to allow the ships to traverse the minefields during daylight hours.

The evacuation route was divided into two



A photo snapped by one of the attacking dive-bombers shows a pair of near misses against Soviet ships docked in the harbor of Tallinn. (National Archives) portions, from Tallinn to Gogland Island, roughly in the middle of Gulf of Finland, and from Gogland to Kronstadt. The first section presented the most danger because of the minefields off Cape Juminda and the lack of air cover. Reaching Gogland Island by nightfall, the fleet would be within range of air cover based at Leningrad and Kronstadt. In addition, a task force of ships from Kronstadt was organized and stationed at Gogland to assist in any rescue and recovery efforts.

The whole operation would require very careful timing. Under relentless German pressure, Soviet ground units were barely holding the line on the outskirts of Tallinn. Admiral Tributs and his staff realized that some of these troops would have to be sacrificed and abandoned to fight hopeless rearguard actions, allowing the majority of forces to embark aboard ships. To avoid a panicked retreat to the harbor, the forward units were not informed about the pullback until the afternoon of August 27. Barricades were erected in the streets for the last-ditch defense. But as they observed NKVD troops manning barricades, many people came to realize that the barricades went up not to halt the Germans but to prevent a panicked rush to the harbor.

By 8 PM, the withdrawal began in earnest under a protective barrage of naval gunfire. Instead of an orderly retreat, the embarkation immediately deteriorated into complete chaos. The Soviet defenders could no longer hold back the Germans, who continually shelled the harbor. Several transport ships, with shells falling around them, were forced to leave their embarkation stations without picking up their designated units and evacuees.

Crowds of soldiers, sailors, and civilians were surging back and forth along the piers, storming the gangways of waiting transports. People were trampled underfoot in the maddened rush to the ships. The scene was punctuated by exploding German artillery shells and backlit by the burning city. “The whole town appeared to be engulfed in flames; burning and exploding,” recalled Admiral Tributs in his memoirs.

While several transports cast off largely empty, the majority of vessels were overcrowded. Writer Nikolai G. Mikhailovskiy, attached to the headquarters of the Baltic Fleet, recalled, “The staterooms are filled to overflowing. People are standing, sitting and lying down in the narrow corridors and on decks. Many, coming off line after sleepless nights, settled on deck. One had to step over them in order to get from one point to another … The whole shore is aflame. It is strange that during a bright sunny day the harbors are darkened by smoke. Signals relayed by flags are impossible to see. The searchlights shine brightly. Only they can penetrate this incredible darkness.”

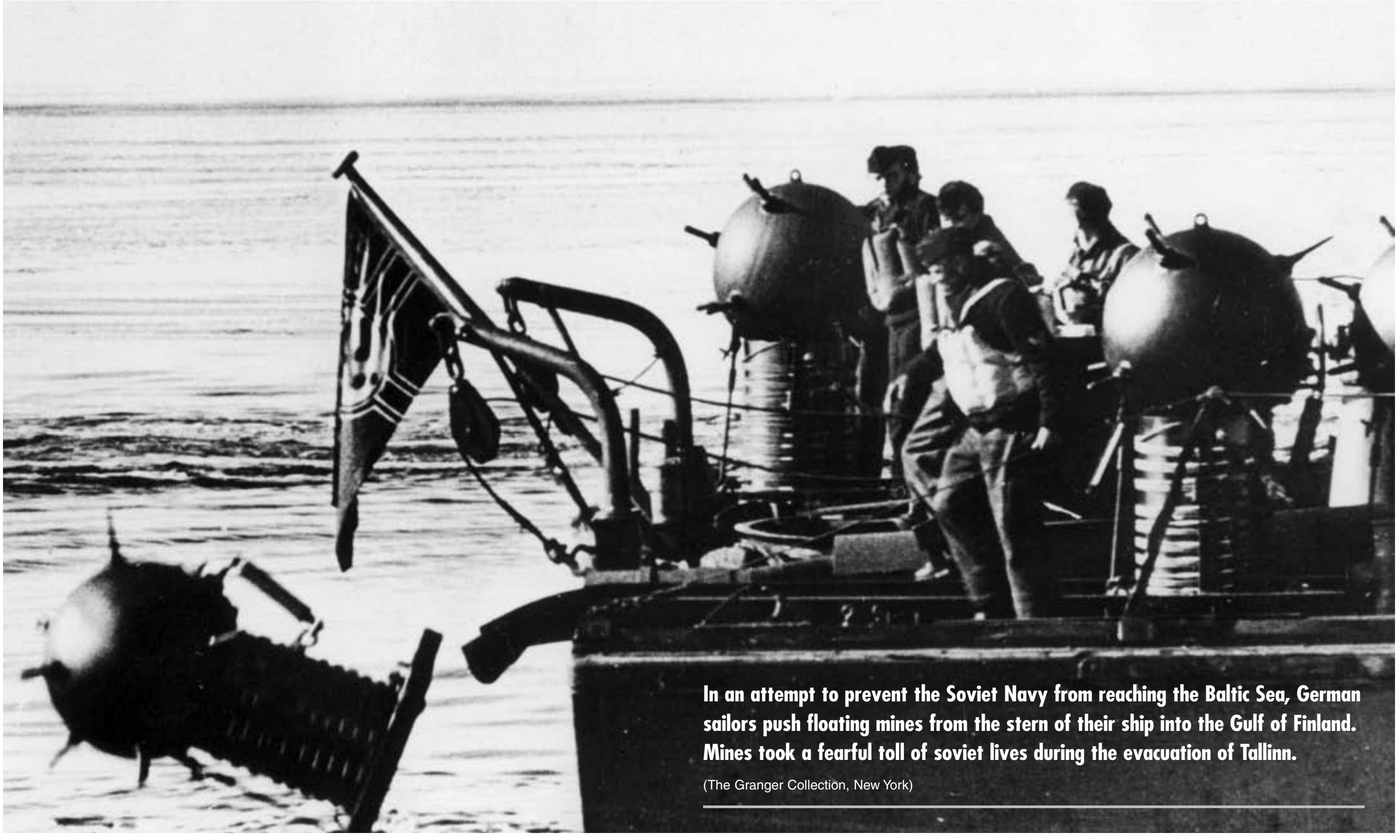
As the transports filled up, they cast off and slowly moved to their staging areas off Naissar and Aegna Islands across the bay from Tallinn. In many cases, people desperate to get aboard continued clinging to the gangways, often forcing the crews to cut the gangways in order to get clear of the pier. Over 23,000 troops, including more than 4,000 wounded and several thousand civilian evacuees, were taken aboard. Despite Vice Admiral Yuriy A. Panteleyev’s claim in his memoirs that not a single platoon was abandoned to the enemy, almost 10,000 more men were left behind on Tallinn’s piers.

The wind continued picking up throughout August 27, creating choppy seas and further exacerbating the chaotic embarkation. Because of these delays, the first convoy did not sail until noon on August 28, a full 12 hours behind schedule. The naval and civilian convoys stretched in a line more than 15 miles long. Owing to deployed minesweeps, which required slow speeds to be effective, the convoys crept along at under 10 knots.

Things quickly began to go wrong. Less than one hour into the voyage and several miles east of Aegna Island, one of the minesweeping trawlers leading the first convoy hit a mine and disappeared under the waves within seconds. The appearance of a mine in waters considered to be safe shocked everyone. The most likely explanation for this tragedy was that the heavy winds and waves generated by the previous night’s storm tore loose the moorings of a mine and the gulf’s current carried it into the midst of the Soviet ships. This loss was the forewarning of swarms of loose mines that were to plague the Soviet convoys for the next two days.

Undeterred, the convoy sailed on. German bombers appeared overhead and cautiously

A photographer aboard a German bomber snapped this photograph while flying low over vessels of the Soviet Navy and civilian transport craft that have been caught in the open in the Gulf of Finland. (Author’s Collection)



In an attempt to prevent the Soviet Navy from reaching the Baltic Sea, German sailors push floating mines from the stern of their ship into the Gulf of Finland. Mines took a fearful toll of soviet lives during the evacuation of Tallinn.

(The Granger Collection, New York)

attacked the strung-out convoys. The Soviet Navy ships, spaced along the line of civilian transports, put up a spirited antiaircraft barrage and managed to keep the German planes at bay for a time.

Around 6 PM, the first civilian convoy arrived off Cape Juminda and its minefields. The nightmare began. At 6:05, a large explosion went up at the head of the convoy. The transport *Ella*, a passenger ship converted into a military transport, hit a mine and began to sink. The tugboat *S-101*, following in her wake and herself overloaded with evacuees, moved in to assist and hit a mine as well, virtually disintegrating. Of more than 1,000 passengers and crew aboard *Ella*, most of them wounded, fewer than 100 people were subsequently rescued. No one was saved from *S-101*.

German aircraft now renewed their attacks. Shortly after *Ella* went down, the icebreaker *Voldemars* was hit by a bomb and sunk with significant loss of life. The large transport *Vironia,* a converted liner, was damaged by two near misses. Its upper decks, thickly packed with evacuees, were swept by steel fragments, tossing people aside in disfigured heaps and throwing overboard many passengers, both alive and dead. The rescue vessel *Saturn* moved in and took the damaged transport in tow. Several minesweepers, desperately attempting to keep the 200-meter channel clear, hit mines themselves and went down in quick succession.

Under relentless air attacks, Soviet ships were forced to maneuver to avoid the bombs. This compelled them to leave the narrow channel cleared by the minesweepers. Several naval vessels went down as if chasing each other to the bottom of the gulf. One of them was *Saturn,* leaving the practically immobile *Vironia* bobbing in the water.

Around 6:30, with the Soviet convoys floundering in the minefields in full view of Cape Juminda, a German battery, well-camouflaged in the wooded terrain, opened fire on the Soviet ships. However, its 150mm guns were no match for the ships' heavier armament. One of the destroyers closed in and laid down a thick smoke screen, while *Kirov* replied with several volleys of its nine 180mm main guns. It was unknown whether the German battery was destroyed, but it fell silent.

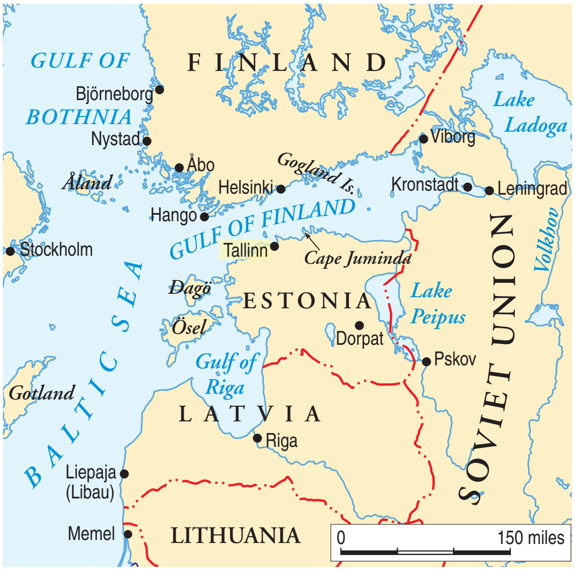
There was no safety anywhere. Just before 10 PM, the submarine *S-5*, closely following *Kirov* on the surface, hit a mine and disappeared under the waves. Shortly thereafter, *Kirov* caught a mine in the right paravane, forcing the cruiser to stop. While a welder was lowered almost to the water's surface to cut loose the metal pole with a torch, another mine became entangled in the left paravane. Valuable time was lost cutting loose and replacing both paravanes. While this was going on, the destroyer *Gordiy,* escorting the cruiser, hit a mine and lost mobility. It was eventually able to get moving again and limped to Kronstadt on its own.

Shortly after *Gordiy* was damaged, the venerable *Yakov Sverdlov*, originally commissioned in 1913 as *Novik* and lending its name to a class of destroyers, went down. Enjoying a distinguished combat record in World War I, this ship held a special place in Tributs's heart as the only vessel the admiral had ever commanded. He witnessed the *Sverdlov*'s demise from *Kirov*'s bridge: "At 20:47 hours, suddenly a column of fire and smoke 200-250 meters high burst out from under *Yakov Sverdlov*'s body and settled down hissing, burying the surviving crew members … only several dozens of men were saved."

As more and more ships sank or became disabled, the convoys lost cohesion and became intermingled. Naval detachments, moving on a nearly parallel course to the civilian convoys, often passed by the vulnerable and defenseless transports without providing fire support for them.

In the gathering darkness, lookouts were posted on the ships' bows to spot mines. At about 10 PM, a mine exploded near the destroyer *Minsk,* the flagship of Rear Admiral Pantelyev. The explosion reverberated through the destroyer, bursting seams in multiple compartments and leaving the vessel inoperable. Pantelyev ordered another destroyer, the *Skoriy*, to render assistance. The majority of Pantelyev's staff officers transferred to the other destroyer. *Skoriy* hardly had time to cast off and attempt to take *Minsk* in tow before also striking a mine, breaking in two, and sinking in front of stunned onlookers.

The slaughter continued. The frigate *Tsiklon* went down, falling prey to a mine. Only 15 minutes after *Skoriy* was lost, another destroyer, *Slavniy,* was soon damaged but remained afloat and continued moving under its own power. Shortly thereafter, the destroyer *Kalinin*, with Rear Admiral Rall aboard, hit a mine and began slowly sinking. As the destroyer *Volodarskiy* was transferring wounded crewmen from the *Kalinin*, it hit a mine as well and went under. Admiral Rall, suffering from a concussion, was taken aboard a cutter. The destroyer *Artyom* also went down.



The evacuees from Tallinn were by no means safe once they boarded ships in the harbor. The terrible journey from Tallinn was the end of a bitter defeat in the summer of 1941.

(Map © 2008 Philip Schwartzberg, Meridian Mapping, Minneapolis, MN)

The toll of noncombatant vessels was also high. The damaged transport *Vironia* hit a mine and sank. Even a near miss from an exploding bomb would create havoc on ships overflowing with evacuees. The fate of immobilized wounded men, swathed in bandages and plaster and often trapped below decks in compartments blazing with fire or filling with icy water, was particularly terrifying. The ships of the first civilian convoy experienced particularly heavy casualties.

As the convoys doggedly continued eastward, many of them had to navigate through floating debris fields and spreading oil slicks of destroyed and damaged vessels. In many instances, unable to stop, they mowed under the survivors bobbing in the water among dead bodies. Whenever possible, though, every effort was extended to rescue the survivors. Still, hundreds perished, succumbing to wounds and exposure. Hundreds more were plucked from sure death in cold water, desperately clinging to whatever pieces of debris that would float. In one truly miraculous instance, a sailor was rescued after clinging to a floating mine for hours.

Throughout the day there were multiple false sightings of German submarines. Every time a phantom periscope was spotted on the surface, one or two destroyers or sub chasers would dart out and drop depth charges. Despite multiple claims by Soviet eyewitnesses, no German submarine operated in the area at the time.

Worried about attacks by German and Finnish torpedo boats as well, the Soviet ships twice opened fire on a group of unidentified small vessels racing toward the fleet. Because of the lack of coordination and communication, the torpedo boats thought to be enemy vessels turned out to be a Soviet detachment returning from screening and scouting north of the main channel. The friendly fire incident resulted in one Soviet torpedo boat taking a direct hit and disintegrating.

With darkness falling, it became impossible to navigate the mine-studded waters, and

Mine warfare has proved to be a cost-efficient equalizer.

During World War II, naval mines were used extensively in the Baltic Sea. Their low cost provided weaker German and Finnish fleets with an effective force multiplier in negating Soviet numerical and qualitative advantages. The Soviet Navy also deployed a large number of floating mines, and by the end of the war all three navies had sown over 80,000 mines in the waters of the Baltic, especially in the Gulf of Finland.

Once in the water, the mines were tethered at the end of a cable below the surface. The upper half of a buoyant mine was studded with hollow metal tubes, or horns, which, coming into contact with a ship's hull, would initiate a chemical or an electric reaction, detonating the explosive charge in the mine.

The depth below the surface at which the mine floated could be adjusted so that vessels with various drafts would trigger them. This often allowed the smaller vessels like the Soviet cutters to virtually "dance" across a minefield unharmed. However, in the Juminda minefields, the depth was set very shallow, resulting in the loss of many smaller Soviet vessels.

Extensive measures and techniques were developed to counteract the mine threat. The minesweeping vessels normally towed two cables behind them, one to each side. Attached to the cables were paravanes, torpedo-shaped floats, keeping the actual sweeps under water. Along the length of the sweeping cable, a series of cutting blades was attached. When a sweep snagged the mooring cable of a mine, it was pulled along the sweep until one of the cutting blades would sever it, making the mine float up to the surface. At this point, the mine would be exploded by fire from cannon and machine guns. On larger combatant ships, paravanes, rigid metal poles mounting the sweeps, were attached to the bow of the ship, severely limiting the ability to maneuver.

As a countermeasure, a number of German mine mooring cables had a length of chain woven into them, preventing the cutting blades on the Soviet sweeps from shearing the mines loose. The mine would then become caught in the sweeping cable and drawn to the vessels instead of being cut away from it.

The relatively inexpensive and easily deployed minefields off Cape Juminda, called the Juminda Barrage, were largely responsible for ravaging the Soviet Baltic fleet during the breakout. On August 28, when the German aircraft could not operate effectively on account of bad weather, German mines played an invaluable role in slowing down the civilian convoys and stripping them of their destroyer escorts. On August 29, the damaged and unprotected civilian ships became easy pickings for German air power. □

Admiral Tributs ordered all ships to halt where they were. Even though this went against accepted naval doctrine, the halt at least eliminated the possibility of ships running into stationary mines. German aircraft disappeared with nightfall as well, and now the only danger lay with floating mines cast adrift in the waves. On most ships men lined up along the sides, armed with poles for pushing away the mines. In many cases volunteers took turns jumping into the water to guide the mines away from the ships with their bare hands.

During the halt, almost no crewmen were able to rest. Those not directly standing watch or dealing with floating mines were frantically conducting whatever repairs they could. Small cutters darted from ship to ship assessing damage. The scope of the disaster began to take shape. The destroyer force, representing the bulk of Tributs's naval contingent, was cut in half. Admiral Rall's rearguard force ceased to exist, and he was injured. Of the main force, only one destroyer and one frigate still accompanied the *Kirov*. Even worse, a significant number of the priceless minesweepers had been lost.

At dawn on August 29, good weather meant the return of marauding German bombers. Having moved clear of the minefields, the naval vessels, now unencumbered by mine sweeps and paravanes, raced ahead at more than 20 knots. Around 5 PM, *Kirov*'s group arrived at Kronstadt. Its hasty departure left the virtually defenseless transports at the mercy of German aircraft, which appeared around 7 AM.

While significant numbers of German planes pursued the departing warships, especially concentrating on *Kirov*'s group, the majority of Luftwaffe aircraft fell upon the defenseless civilian transports. Beset by German dive-bombers, most transport captains gave up any hope of reaching Kronstadt. At most, they hoped to reach Gogland Island and disgorge their human cargo before German bombs could send them to the bottom of the gulf.

Shortly before 8 AM, the large transport *Kazakhstan*, loaded with almost 5,000 soldiers and civilian evacuees, was damaged by bombs. Its captain, N. Kalitaev, was tossed overboard by the shockwave. Severe panic ensued aboard, with people jumping into the water. After heroic efforts, however, the crew of the transport managed to make minimal repairs and keep the ship afloat. After being thrown overboard and suffering a concussion, Kalitaev was rescued by a submarine and delivered to Kronstadt on the evening of August 29, a full day before *Kazakhstan* limped in. Arrested by the NKVD and accused of cowardice and abandoning his post, Kalitaev was promptly shot despite multiple testimonies of his innocence.

By 1944, the fortunes of war on the Eastern Front had clearly changed and the Soviet juggernaut was advancing toward Berlin. The rejuvenated Red Banner Fleet was also more active in the Baltic Sea. Here, Soviet sailors man an antiaircraft gun aboard their ship. (National Archives)

Under a rain of German bombs, the transports continued their race to Gogland. On many ships the soldiers desperately attempted to keep German aircraft at bay with rifle and pistol fire. As the hours ticked by, transport losses mounted to include *Naissaar, Ergonautis, Balkhash, Tobol, Ausma, Kalpaks, Evald, Atis Kronvaldis, Skrunda,* and *Alev.*

Several damaged transports managed to limp to Gogland and run themselves aground, disembarking their passengers. German aircraft easily found the immobile transports and finished them off. By the end of the day the burned-out hulks of transports *Vtoraya Pyatiletka, Ivan Papanin, Lake Lucerne,* and floating workshop *Serp-i-Molot* smoked on Gogland's beaches. Still, despite tragic losses, more than 12,000 people were offloaded on Gogland Island and eventually shuttled to Kronstadt and Leningrad. But before they were taken off the island, German aircraft made several low-level passes, strafing the survivors with machine guns and dropping bombs. Scores of people who thought themselves safe died on this tiny speck of land.

As the transports were being pounded into oblivion by German aircraft, scores of smaller vessels slipped by Gogland Island and headed to Kronstadt. They continued the struggle until the afternoon of August 30. The Tallinn breakout was over.

Events at Tallinn were comparable to the Allied evacuation of Dunkirk over a year earlier. At Dunkirk, 338,000 Allied soldiers escaped the Germans. This was accomplished under British air cover and over a much shorter distance, 20 miles compared with 200 at Tallinn.

The results of the Tallinn breakout are disputed as simultaneously a success and a disaster. Despite the loss of more than 11,000 evacuees, including roughly 3,000 civilians, almost 17,000 people, mostly evacuated ground troops, reached Leningrad and joined in the defense of the city. The *Kirov* was saved, along with the destroyers *Minsk* and *Leningrad.* Of the original 10 destroyers, five were lost, mostly of the old Novik class. The guns mounted on *Kirov* and the destroyers assisted in the defense of Leningrad, and the majority of the smaller naval vessels made it back as well. The real losses were among the civilian vessels, with more than 40 of them, including 19 large transports, sunk.

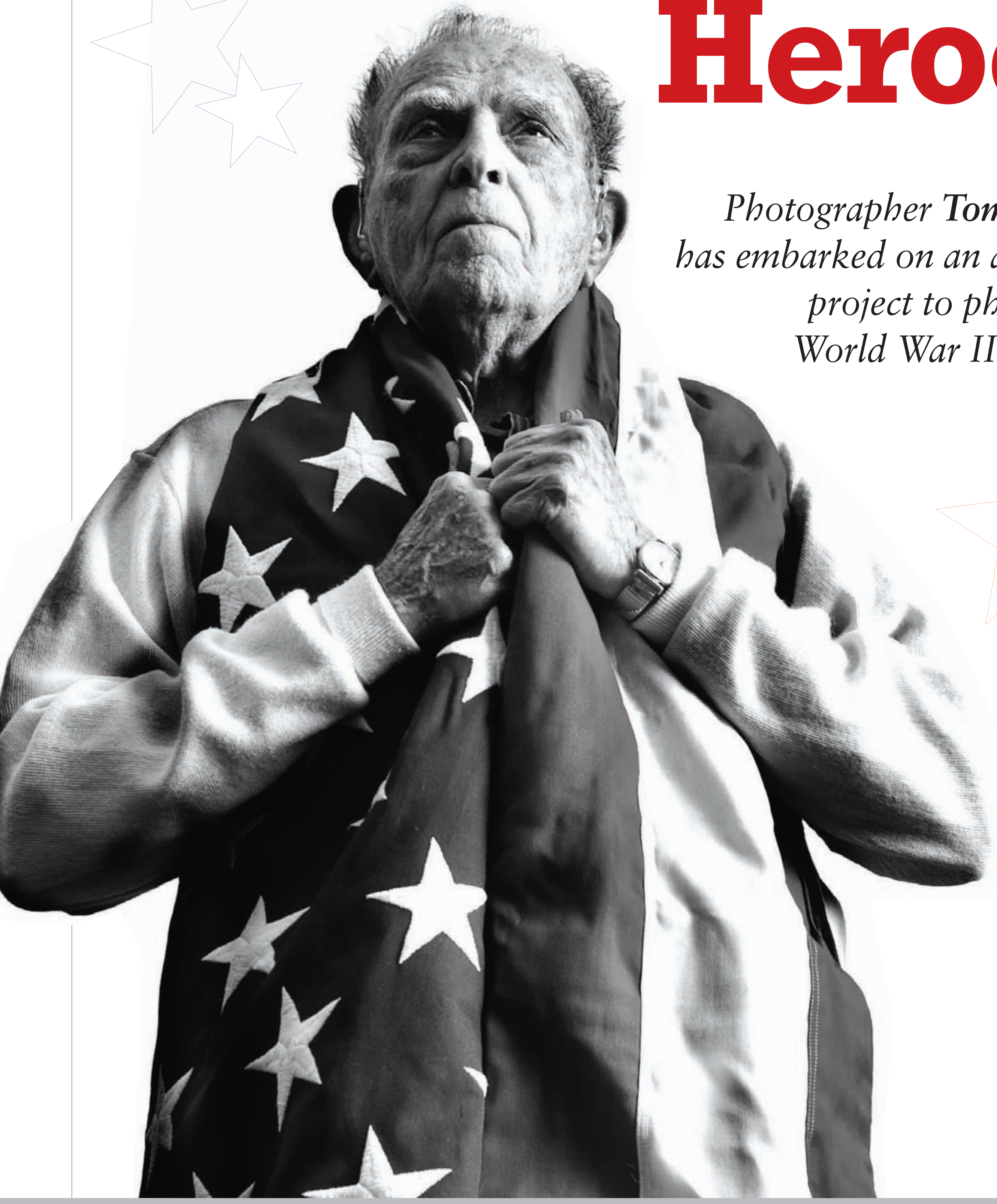
The Soviet government offered little official comment about the events. To this day, virtually no declassified information exists on the evacuation of Tallinn. □

Victor Kamenir, a former U.S. Army sergeant, was born in Ukraine. He is now a police officer in Hillsboro, Oregon. Cathy, Victor's wife of 14 years, is a nurse. They have two sons, Nick and Sam.

A Gallery of Heroes

BY AL HEMINGWAY

Photographer ***Tom Sanders*** *has embarked on an ambitious project to photograph World War II veterans.*



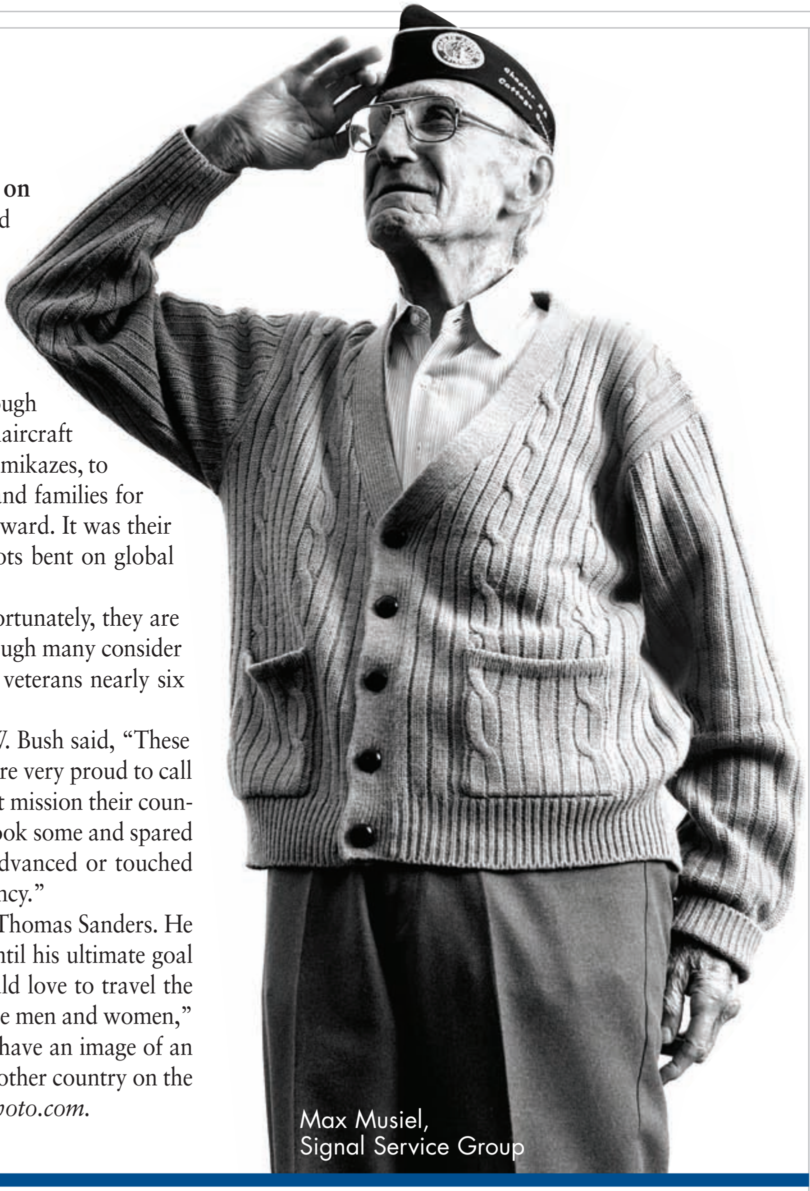
When the United States was plunged into World War II on December 7, 1941, more than 16 million Americans answered their country's call and donned a uniform. Of that number, approximately 12 million would serve overseas for an average of 16 months. Nearly four years later, almost 300,000 would be dead or missing and another 671,000 wounded in action.

They fought on beachheads, went house-to-house, waded through unforgiving jungle streams, flew threw murderous enemy antiaircraft fire, and braved the incessant attacks of the dreaded Japanese kamikazes, to finally defeat a determined foe. Most did not see their homes and families for years, but they had a strong sense of duty that pushed them onward. It was their numerous sacrifices that saved the world from fanatical despots bent on global domination.

Most World War II veterans today are in their mid-80s. Unfortunately, they are dying at a rate of approximately 1,100 a day nationwide. Although many consider World War II the defining event in world history, it took U.S. veterans nearly six decades to have a memorial that they could call their own.

On that dedication day in May 2004, President George H.W. Bush said, "These were the modest sons of a peaceful country, and millions of us are very proud to call them 'Dad.' They gave the best years of their lives to the greatest mission their country ever accepted. They faced the most extreme danger, which took some and spared others for reasons only known to God. And wherever they advanced or touched ground, they are remembered for their goodness and their decency."

The images were taken by Los Angeles-based photographer Thomas Sanders. He is committed to photographing as many veterans as possible until his ultimate goal of compiling a book of his work can be accomplished. "I would love to travel the United States, and the world for that matter, to photograph these men and women," he said. "I think it would be wonderful to publish a book and have an image of an American veteran on one page and the image of a veteran of another country on the next." See more of Tom's veteran photos at *www.tomsandersphoto.com.*



Max Musiel,
Signal Service Group

"I Caught Some Steel"

Pfc. Sam Simon, U.S. Army

There isn't a more illustrious division in the United States Army than the famed 42nd Infantry Division. Nicknamed the "Rainbow" Division because of its distinctive shoulder patch, the unit fought in both world wars serving in the European Theater.

Sam Simon was assigned to Company H, 2nd Battalion, 242nd Regiment of the division. He landed in Marseilles, France, in December 1944, and was immediately sent to Strasbourg in the Alsace region. Simon's regiment successfully defended a 31-mile line to prevent the Germans from breaching their perimeter. Given the codename "Task Force Linden," after their assistant division commander Brig. Gen. Henning Linden, Simon's unit repelled savage German counterattacks and by late January 1945 went on the offensive.

By mid-February 1945, the 42nd Division had pushed through the Hardt Mountains and breached the Siegfried Line. From March 15-31, the unit had seized Dahn and Busenberg, crossed the Rhine River, and taken the historic town of Wertheim am Main. From April 9-19, Simon was engaged in house-to-house fighting with fanatical troops from the SS as his company advanced, capturing the industrial towns of Schweinfurt and Furth.

On April 25, 1945, Simon was involved in heavy fighting in the town of Donauworth, Germany. "I was assigned to a heavy weapons section as a machine gunner," he recalled. "The major wanted us to have our guns pointed in a certain direction. We fired all our ammunition, and I ran back to get more. Mortars started landing in a field about a quarter mile in front of us. The next batch landed right in the middle of us. The sergeant in front of me was killed, as was the guy behind me. I caught some steel in my throat and left knee."

The war was over for Simon. He was sent to a hospital for a long recovery. He was awarded a Bronze Star with "V" device and a Purple Heart medal. To this day, he is intensely proud of being a member of the 42nd "Rainbow" Division.

"Not much saluting"

Ensign Em Reinhardt, U.S. Navy

"I always wanted to be a registered nurse," confessed Em Reinhardt. "So right after I graduated from my class I was commissioned in the U.S. Navy. They were so eager to get nurses, and we didn't have much training in protocol. There was not much saluting going on. When a sailor saluted me I just laughed!"

Reinhardt went to St. Louis, Missouri, for nurse's training and then was assigned to the naval hospital at the Great Lakes Training Center in Benton, Illinois. From there, she was sent to the naval air station (NAS) at Corpus Christi, Texas, to work with psychiatric patients.

"What a change from Great Lakes," exclaimed Reinhardt. "One minute the wind is howling and you're freezing and the next the temperature is over 100 degrees."

While stationed at Corpus Christi, Em met her future husband, and they were engaged. They had a military wedding because her spouse had received orders to go overseas.

"It was quite an affair," she laughed. "We had a military wedding, and the head psychiatrist gave me away. Most of the reception was attended by the nurses, pilots, and patients. They made quite a punch—there were no ration cards for punch—but there was a lot of booze in it."

The newlyweds only had two days for a honeymoon. Their first night was actually spent apart—he in the bachelor officers' quarters—and she in the nurses' quarters.

"I can't wear my uniform anymore after three children," she said. "But I enjoyed it. We had a good life."

"Instrument instructor"

Lt. Commander Ted Reinhardt, U.S. Navy (Ret.)

The naval air station (NAS) at Corpus Christi, Texas, was built in 1938 to train naval aviators to meet the increasing demand. By the start of the war, 800 instructors were training an average of 300 cadets per month. In June 1943, former President George H.W. Bush was the youngest pilot ever to graduate from the school. By war's end, more than 35,000 cadets had graduated from the air station. According to their website: "Corpus Christi was the only primary, basic and advanced training facility in existence in the United States. At one time it was the largest pilot training facility in the world."

Ted Reinhardt was an instrument instructor with 12 Dog Training Squadron during the war.

"I also taught primary and advanced training at that time," he said. "I met my wife Em there, and we were married in a military wedding. I was supposed to receive orders to the fleet, but they were cancelled when the war ended. I stayed in the naval reserve and retired in 1972."

"Those have got us!"

Chief Petty Officer Temple Harrison, U.S. Navy (Ret.)

On September 15, 1942, the aircraft carrier USS *Wasp* and the battleship USS *North Carolina* were escorting transport ships carrying the 7th Marines to reinforce their embattled comrades on Guadalcanal.

Late in the afternoon, a lookout aboard the *Wasp* suddenly hollered, "Three torpedoes … three points forward of the starboard beam." The projectiles had been launched by a Japanese submarine at a range of only 1,000 yards. Everyone braced themselves for the inevitable as Ensign C.G. Durr exclaimed, "Those have got us!"

Two torpedoes struck the starboard side igniting the gasoline tanks and setting off the forward bomb magazine. Aircraft were flipped like rag dolls spewing fuel all over the deck of the ship. Electrical and fire mains were cut as the crew tried desperately to extinguish the flames.

Aboard the *Wasp* that eventful day was Chief Petty Officer Temple Harrison. He had joined the Navy at 18 years of age in 1924. He had gotten out of the service in 1929, but when the Great Depression hit he decided to re-enlist.

"I was on the flight deck headed toward the ordnance room when they hit," Harrison said. "I ran back up to the flight deck and helped push some of the planes off the side of the ship. The next torpedo knocked me down."

That blast completely destroyed the 5-inch gun mount and propelled the body of the gun captain onto the bridge right next to the ship's captain, Forrest Sherman. A half hour later, due to the extensive damage, Sherman was forced to give the order abandon ship.

"I was picked up by a cargo ship," recalled Harrison. "I still had all my clothes on but no shoes. It's a good thing because I had $100 I had won in a poker game I wanted to send home still in my billfold.

"Being on the flight deck probably saved my life," he continued. "One of those torpedoes hit the steward's quarters. It killed eight Black men."

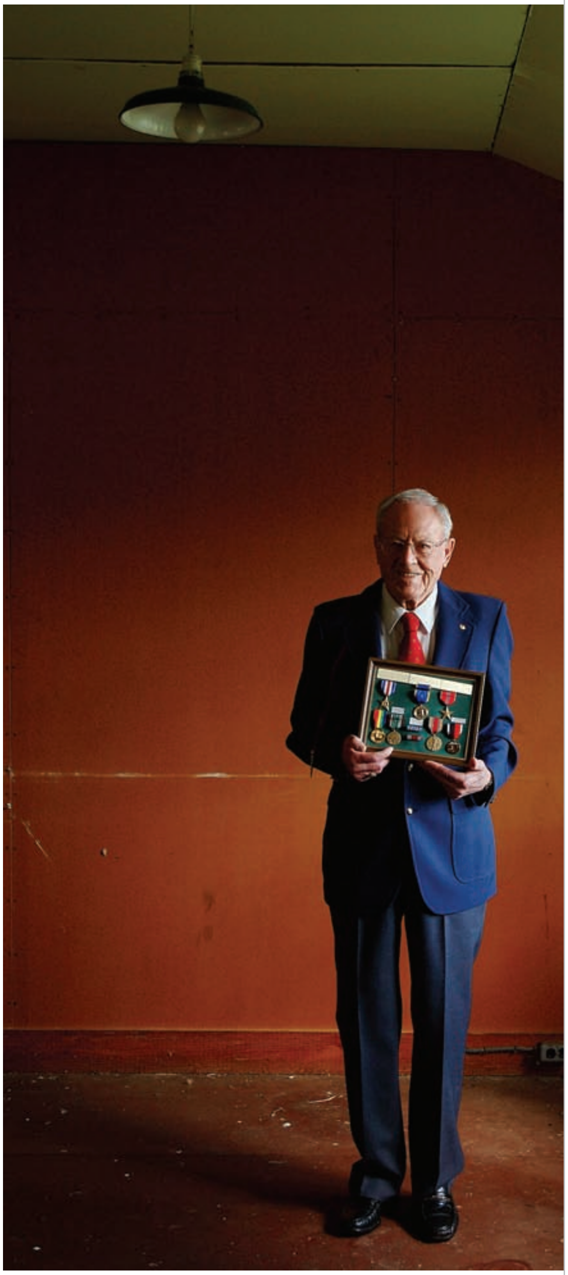
Harrison retired after 22½ years in the Navy. After the war he went to Houston, Texas, and worked on aircraft. He finally ended up in Santa Monica, California, employed by Douglas Aircraft, and retired in 1970. October 8, 2008, is his 102nd birthday.

"Screaming Talons"

Sergeant Ralph Chute, U.S. Army Air Corps

Ralph Chute had the distinction of proudly wearing the unit patch for the 389th Fighter Squadron, 366th Fighter Group in World War II. It depicted a bird of prey clutching a thunderbolt with its talons—a very appropriate patch—since the outfit flew the Republic P-47 Thunderbolts that provided air support for the ground troops.

Born in Worthington, Minnesota, Chute lived just 30 miles from Quinton Aanenson, a pilot with the 391st Fighter Squadron, who was featured in the Ken Burns documentary on World War II entitled *The War.*



Chute enlisted in the Army in 1942 and was trained as an air weapons specialist in the Army Air Corps and assigned to the 389th Fighter Squadron. His job included defending air strips and familiarizing himself with machine guns, rockets, and bombs used on the Thunderbolts. In January 1944, the 389th was transferred to Thruxton, England, and began flying combat air patrols along the French coast.

On June 6, 1944, the Allies stormed the beaches of Normandy, and P-47s from the squadron strafed and bombed enemy positions for the advancing infantry. Landing on D+3 (June 9), Chute and his comrades quickly established a makeshift air strip and set up perimeter defenses.

"The area we were in was quite flat," he recalled. "We were under constant sniper fire."

As the Allied juggernaut pushed forward, Chute's unit moved right along, setting up emergency landing strips for the aircraft. He participated in the campaigns at St. Lo, the invasion of Holland, liberation of Belgium, Battle of the Bulge, and the crossing of the Rhine.

"In 1996, the French government gave us an award and it was presented by Pierre Salinger, President John F. Kennedy's press secretary," he said.

Intensely proud of his service, Chute framed his medals after the war and held them when he posed for the picture.

"I was good at addition"

Captain Murray Axel, U.S. Army

There is an old military axiom that asserts it takes 10 men in the rear to take care of one man in the field. Any frontline soldiers or Marines will say that it is certainly the truth. When they received hot food, mail, new clothing, ammunition, etc., it was certainly cause to celebrate.

Murray Axel was a native of Brooklyn, New York, who was originally assigned to the 4th Infantry Division.

"I was the budget officer for the division and helped out in the company office," he explained. "I was good at addition and someone thought becoming a finance officer would be good for me."

Axel was ordered to the huge, sprawling quartermaster depot located at Mira Loma, California, where he would spend the duration of the war. Rows upon rows of Quonset huts were quickly erected to store supplies for troops overseas. Tom Sanders's photo of Axel standing in an abandoned office with just a wooden filing cabinet is most appropriate.

"My time in the service was very uneventful," Axel remarked.

Fate intervened for Murray Axel. If he were not "good at addition" he probably would have been storming ashore on Utah Beach with the 4th Infantry Division on June 6, 1944.

"28 combat missions without a scratch"

1st Lieutenant Harley Beam, U.S. Army Air Corps

Harley Beam is a very lucky man. As the pilot of a Boeing B-17 Flying Fortress heavy bomber, Beam flew 28 combat missions without a scratch, quite a feat when one considers that more than 10,000 of the aircraft were lost in the European Theater.

Assigned to the 570th Bombardment Squadron, 390th Bombardment Group, he joined the unit in Framlingham, England, in May 1943. The group compiled quite an illustrious record during the conflict. On August 17, 1943, they bombed the Messerschmitt plant in Regensburg, Germany, and were awarded a Distinguished Service Citation for their efforts. A Presidential Unit Citation was presented to the group for striking the antifriction bearing plants at Schweinfurt, Germany, while dodging German fighter planes.

"I flew bombing missions over France, Denmark, Holland, Austria, and Germany," said Beam. "The B-17 was a good plane. It was reliable and durable. I was lucky. I never got wounded."

At war's completion, the 390th Bombardment Group had flown over 300 missions and released 19,000 tons of ordnance over enemy targets. They had 377 confirmed kills, 57 probables, and 77 damaged enemy aircraft.

But the cost in war is always high. The unit lost 181 planes with 714 crewmembers killed. Harley Beam was indeed fortunate.

"Looking Skyward"

1st Lieutenant Robert Covey, U.S. Army Air Corps

Arriving in the Pacific Theater in 1944, Robert Covey was a pilot with the 90th Bomber Squadron, 3rd Attack Group. His plane, the Douglas A-20 Bomber, called the Havoc, was the most manufactured attack bomber of the war.

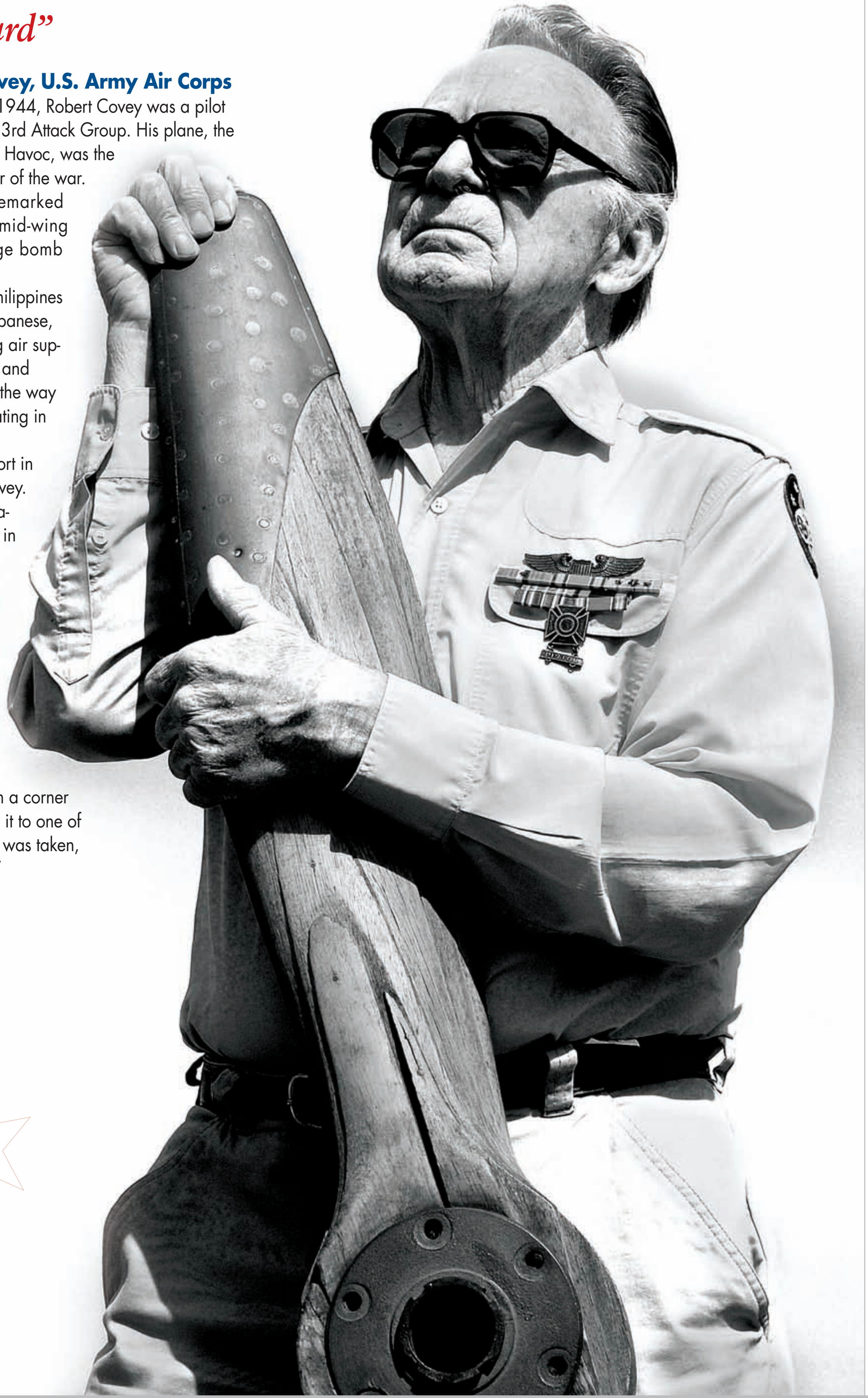
"It was very dependable," remarked Covey. "It was a twin-engine, mid-wing bomber that could carry a large bomb load and napalm."

When the Allies invaded the Philippines to liberate the islands from the Japanese, Covey's unit was right there flying air support missions. From Leyte, Luzon, and Mindoro, the 90th Squadron led the way in the Pacific Theater by participating in 10 campaigns.

"We flew a lot of ground support in the Philippines," remembered Covey. "We dropped smoke to mark locations but it was really hard to see in that dense jungle. I came back to the airfield with a few holes in my aircraft at times."

After the war, Covey continued with his love of aviation by becoming a flight instructor. When he retired, they gave him an old prop from a plane that he proudly displayed over his fireplace.

"I sold the house, so it stands in a corner now," he said. "I'll probably give it to one of my grandkids. When that picture was taken, I held the prop looking skyward."



By Mason B. Webb

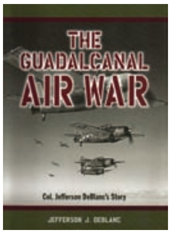
Spyridon "Steve" Pisanos, subject and author of *The Flying Greek,* flew a P-51 Thunderbolt similar to this one during is World War II service. (National Archives)

"By the Grace of God You Got Through"

Several aviation books detail The War in the Skies.

THE SIX-MONTH-LONG LAND AND NAVAL BATTLES FOR GUADALCANAL IN THE Solomon Islands chain have been well covered in books and magazine articles, but the war in the skies above the islands has received less attention.

In his outstanding autobiography ***The Guadalcanal Air War: Col. Jefferson DeBlanc's Story*** (Pelican, Gretna, LA, 2008, 240 pp., maps, hardcover, $24.95), Jefferson DeBlanc makes up for that deficiency and describes the tremendous aerial battles that tipped the scales of victory to the American side. Despite the fact that, as a second lieutenant in the Marine Corps Reserve, DeBlanc had limited experience in the Grumman F4F Wildcat fighter, he was assigned to the VMF-112 Marine Corps squadron as a Wildcat pilot in the Solomon Islands in November 1942.



On his first day in combat with the VMF-112 "Wolfpack," he and a wingman shot down two Japanese Mitsubishi "Betty" bombers. He was promoted to second in command of his squadron the next day and promptly shot down two Japanese fighters.

VMF-112 pilots soon traded in their Wildcats for the more powerful Vought F4U Corsairs and began wreaking havoc among enemy formations. At the end of January 1943, DeBlanc was leading the squadron and downed five enemy planes in one day before he was forced to bail out of his own crippled aircraft over the water.

DeBlanc describes the tense moment: "After bailing out of my stricken fighter, I had unfortunately reacted too quickly. Instead of free-falling at least 1,000 feet, clear of the dogfight arena, I found myself in the same sky with the Zeros! Helplessly exposed, I decided to play dead, just like the possums in Louisiana would do. I let myself go limp, with head sagging, as the Japanese pilot circled me twice." The enemy pilot flew off, evidently convinced that DeBlanc was dead.

Rescued by native coastwatchers and disguised in a Japanese uniform, he managed to evade the enemy and eventually returned to duty, where he resumed his fight against the foe. For his extraordinary heroism and devotion to duty, DeBlanc was awarded the Medal of Honor.

Sadly, Colonel DeBlanc passed away before the publication of his memoirs. But, thanks to his well-written book, the memories of the deeds that he and his fellow Marine airmen performed will never die.

Through Blue Skies to Hell: America's "Bloody 100th" in the Air War Over Germany, by Edward M. Sion, Casemate, Drexel Hill, Pennsylvania, 220 pp., bibliography, index, photographs, maps, hardcover, $32.95.

THROUGH BLUE SKIES TO HELL
America's "Bloody 100th" in the Air War over Germany

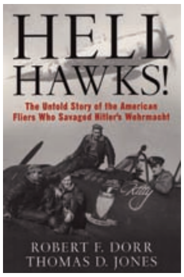
Ed Sion has done an excellent job in chronicling the combat exploits of his uncle, Dick Ayesh, a Boeing B-17 Flying Fortress bombardier who served with the 100th Bombardment Group. Using his uncle's wartime diary as the basis for his story, Sion paints an unerringly accurate picture of what life and death were like for the young men of the Eighth Air Force who braved enemy flak and fighters to bomb German targets.

Sion's uncle wrote: "Anyone who has really been in combat will tell you—most of what went on was very uncoordinated. Everybody was scared to hell. If you talk to anybody who has really been in combat, there are no heroes. You just do your thing and pray that you don't get hurt or killed or shot or anything like that. By the grace of God you got through. Anyone who was in combat knows that. Early in the war, only one out of three airmen survived. Then later, with fighter escorts, two out of three survived. That made me feel better. I'll take those odds any day."

Sion covers the air war and all its many facets as seen by the 100th Bomb Group—everything from recruitment to training, deployment, formations, tactics, life at an English airfield, the crews' off-duty time, and the fearful hours going to, from, and over the target.

For anyone who wants to know more about

what being a part of a bomber crew was all about, it will be hard to find a better book on the topic than *Through Blue Skies to Hell.*


HELL HAWKS!
The Untold Story of the American Fliers Who Savaged Hitler's Wehrmacht
ROBERT F. DORR
THOMAS D. JONES

AMERICAN BOMBER CREWMAN 1941–45
GREGORY FREMONT-BARNES

Hell Hawks! The Untold Story of the American Fliers Who Savaged Hitler's Wehrmacht, by Robert F. Dorr and Thomas D. Jones, Zenith Press, Osceola, WI, 336 pp., bibliography, index, photographs, maps, hardcover, $24.95.

Formed and activated in 1943, the 365th Fighter Group, dubbed the "Hell Hawks," has a legacy unlike any other group of aviators to take to the skies during World War II. Most of the group's pilots were barely 20 years old and fresh from pilot training when they were suddenly thrust into the deadly aerial war above Europe.

Shortly before the D-Day invasion of June 6, 1944, the Hell Hawks, flying the big, heavy Republic P-47 Thunderbolt fighter, achieved air superiority, softened up the enemy, and then flew in close support of Eisenhower's ground forces as Allied infantry and armor spread across the French landscape.

The men of the 365th took part in a variety of missions—1,241 missions, to be exact— everything from escorting bombers to dueling with enemy fighters and attacking German infantry and installations to cremating American war dead on foreign soil. During their year in combat, the Hell Hawks' contribution came at a heavy price; 69 of their number died in the battles for the sky.

Hells Hawks! is a fascinating, superbly written, and detailed account of the realities and terrors of combat flying and will be a welcome addition to any air war buff's book collection.

American Bomber Crewman, 1941-45, by Gregory Fremont-Barnes, Osprey Press, Botley Oxford, UK, 64 pp., bibliography, index, photographs, illustrations, maps, softcover, $18.95.

Fremont-Barnes presents a concise, jam-packed book about American flight and ground crews in England and in the skies over enemy-held territory. He outlines the recruitment, training, uniforms, and equipment of the Yank fliers and their ground-bound maintenance men, then goes into the details of their daily lives, both in combat and while standing down between missions.

The author also soberly reminds readers that England-based bomber crews had the highest casualty rates of any U.S. arm of service during the war. As he writes, "Some men managed to survive all 25 combat missions, after which they could re-enlist or receive an honorable discharge and return home. Others were unfortunate to be killed on the first one, like radioman Charley Gunn, for whom a cablegram was waiting back at his base informing him of the birth of his son."

The book also includes a compendium of museums and USAAF-related collections in the U.K. and U.S., ideal information for anyone wanting to learn more about the bomber crews—a brief but outstanding and informative book about these gallant men.

Griffon Spitfire Aces, by Andrew Thomas, Osprey, Botley Oxford, UK, 2008, 96 pp., pho-

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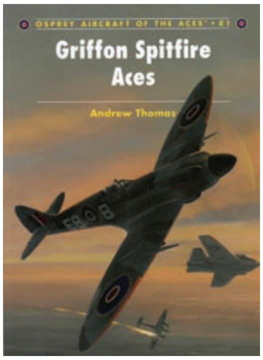


The Griffon-powered Supermarine Spitfire XIV is considered by many to be the best low-level fighter of World War II. When Hitler launched his V-1 "buzz bomb" assault on Britain, the Royal Air Force moved Spitfire squadrons close to the coast to dispatch them against the flying bombs. Using a daring and highly dangerous technique of flying alongside the V-1s, the Spitfire pilots would tip the enemy's pilotless missile over with the aircraft's wingtip to throw it off course.

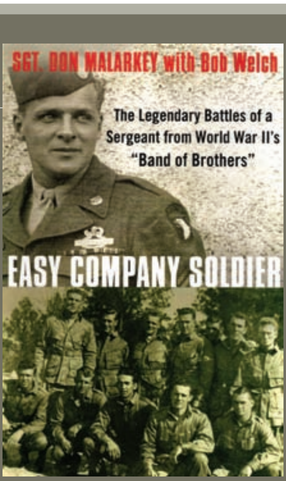
But tipping "Doodlebugs" was not the Griffon Spitfire's only mission. The aircraft proved itself to be an outstanding weapon in the heavy air battles during the campaign in western Europe in aerial assaults against German air and ground targets. No less a figure than Adolf Galland, the former Inspector General of the Luftwaffe, hinted at the aircraft's effectiveness when he said, "The best thing about the Spitfire Mk XIV was that there were so few of them."

The aircraft, according to the author (who is currently on active duty with the RAF), also played major roles after the war in the conflicts in Malaya and Palestine. First-hand stories from the cockpit, previously unseen photographs, and profiles of Spitfire aces complete this account of the most powerful Spitfire variant ever built.

The Flying Greek: An Immigrant Fighter Ace's WWII Odyssey with the RAF, USAAF, and French Resistance, by Colonel Steve N. Pisanos, Potomac Books, Dulles, VA, 2008, 349 pp., photographs, bibliography, index, softcover, $34.95.

If he did not have the photos and documen-

Short Bursts


SGT. DON MALARKEY with Bob Welch
The Legendary Battles of a Sergeant from World War II's "Band of Brothers"
EASY COMPANY SOLDIER

Easy Company Soldier: The Legendary Battles of a Sergeant from World War II's "Band of Brothers," by Don Malarkey (with Bob Welch), St. Martin's Press, New York, 2008, 277 pp., photographs, index, hardcover, $24.95.

Anyone familiar with *Band of Brothers,* the Stephen Ambrose book and HBO series of the same title, will immediately recognize the name Don Malarkey, and the former airborne trooper has finally penned his autobiography.

Malarkey's exploits as a member of Easy Company, 506th Parachute Infantry Regiment, 101st Airborne Division make for heart-pounding reading. He traces his life from his boyhood in Astoria, Oregon, a time of hard work, decent values, and fierce patriotism.

Although he had flunked the Marine Corps physical, Malarkey decided to join the paratroops shortly after war broke out. Dropping out of college, he was assigned to the 506th PIR and survived the legendary hell of Captain Herbert Sobel and the training at Camp Toccoa, Georgia.

In September 1943, the division arrived in England and began training for D-Day, nine months into the future. Malarkey recounts those months, plus all the combat that followed: the jump into Normandy, the battle for Carentan, the Holland jump (Operation Market-Garden), the frozen hell of Bastogne and the Bulge, and into Austria when the war ended.

After the war, he fought another battle—the battle of the bottle. Feeling his life going down the drain and contemplating suicide, he managed to shake himself out of his funk and remembered all the combat he had seen and all the times when he could have given up and did not. He managed to get his life back on track and even served as a consultant for the HBO series.

Malarkey's autobiography is a tender story by a tough soldier. Not to be missed.

The Eighteen-Year-Old Replacement: Facing Combat in Patton's Third Army, by R. Richard Kingsbury, University of Missouri Press, Columbia, 2008, 277 pp., photographs, maps, hardcover, $24.95.

tation to prove it, a reader could be excused for thinking that Steve Pisanos's *The Flying Greek* was all just some highly romanticized work of derring-do fiction. Yet, Pisanos's tale, incredible though it may seem, is true.

Born in Athens, Greece, in 1919, Spyridon "Steve" Pisanos acquired an early love of aviation. Unable to gain admittance to the Greek Air Force Academy and having no money for private flying lessons, in 1939, assuming that he would have a better chance of learning to fly in the U.S., he got a job as a seaman on a cargo ship heading to America. Once he reached New York, he found a job and an apartment, began learning English. and took flying lessons. After the war broke out, Pisanos joined not the USAAF, but the RAF, and headed back across the Atlantic to fly and fight for the 71 Eagle Squadron, made up of American volunteer pilots.

In 1942, the Eagle Squadrons were transferred to the USAAF. Pisanos became a naturalized U.S. citizen while in London and was commissioned a second lieutenant. He then flew numerous missions in Spitfires, P-47s, and P-51s. After his 10th confirmed kill, he crash-landed his P-51 in France and spent six months with the French Resistance, evading capture.

After the war, he was returned to the States and became a test pilot. He enjoyed flying so much that he made a career out of it, spending 30 years in the U.S. Air Force, taking part in three wars, and retiring as a colonel. *The Flying Greek* is a riveting, remarkable account of one man's love of flying and of his adopted country.

Finding a Fallen Hero: The Death of a Ball Turret Gunner, by Bob Korkuc, University of Oklahoma Press, Norman, OK, 2008, 256 pp.,

When the U.S. entered World War II, 18-year-old enlistees were routinely not sent into battle until they turned 19. But as casualties mounted, more and more younger men were sent to the front lines as replacements.

Laced throughout with self-deprecating humor, Kingsbury's book recounts how he was thrust into the fighting along the Siegfried Line with the 94th Infantry Division. His well-written memoir provides a touching portrait of what he endured both physically and emotionally and tells how he went from boyhood to manhood almost overnight, nearly losing his life when wounded at Ludwigshafen.

The Eighteen-Year-Old Replacement is as fine a first-person account of war as will be found anywhere.

Jungvolk: The Story of a Boy Defending Hitler's Third Reich, by Wilhelm Gehlen and Don Gregory, Casemate, Drexel Hill, PA, 2008, 318 pp., photographs, softcover, $24.95.

The story of the Hitler Youth organization is one that has not received much notice in the U.S., and the Jungvolk even less. The Jungvolk was a branch of the larger Hitler Youth created especially for boys ages 10 to 14.

The Hitlerjugend (HJ) or Hitler Youth organization, under Baldur von Shirach, was a nationwide group designed to indoctrinate German boys into the Nazi way of life, give youngsters basic lessons in the military, and also to provide volunteer workers for various community projects. These included collecting scrap and battling pests that could ravage German crops. Some HJ and Jungvolk units also served as messengers for antiaircraft batteries.

As the author says, "To the reader it might seem rather amazing and unbelievable that the Nazis required children to do their bit for so-called 'Fuhrer, Volk, und Vaterland,' and work toward a final victory for Germany, but that is exactly what happened."

Gehlen goes on to detail the operation of the HJ and Jungvolk organizations and the small part he played in them. This is a truly fascinating study of a young boy's life under the swastika. □

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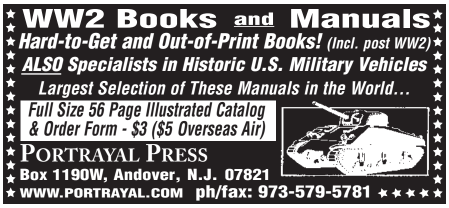
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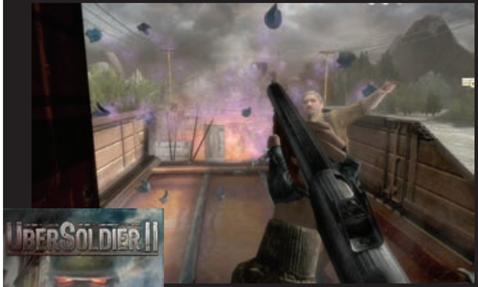
Simulation Gaming

| By Eric T. Baker |

Burut adds an online death match mode to *Ubersoldier II.*

Two years ago, Russian design shop Burut released *Ubersoldier,* a first-person shooting game, to the American market. The player took the role of a German soldier brought back to life to be a super weapon for the Nazis. Instead, he turned on his creators and for several long, bloody levels the player guided him through his revenge against them using a variety of guns and some supernatural abilities. It wasn't a game of the year candidate, but it had many good moments.

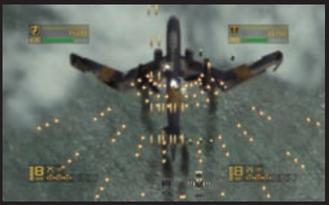


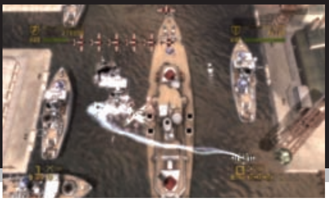
UBERSOLDIER II
PC

As always seems to be the way of things when it comes to fighting the Nazi scourge, the foiling of their initial plans was not the end of the threat. Set now in April 1945, Burut has launched **Ubersoldier II: The End of Hitler.** As the game opens, the Allies are closing in on Berlin, but an elite core of SS officers is conducting a secret retrenchment, moving key people, materials, and lots of undead monsters to a secret base in Tibet.

The player returns as Karl Stolze and with the help of an Allied team, he once again shoots his way through more tough levels. There are 21 weapons to be gathered, as well more supernatural abilities, this time unlocked with an RPG-like experience system. The biggest difference between this *Ubersoldier* and the previous one is the inclusion of an online death match mode for up to 16 players. It still isn't a game of the year, but particularly for players who liked the first one, it has more good moments.

Also a sequel, **1942: Joint Strike** traces its lineage back to 1984 and an arcade game called simply *1942.* In that game, the player looked down on a P-38 Lightning and attempted to fly the aircraft all the way to Tokyo despite being met by waves of enemy planes and "bosses." Not a flying or dogfight simulation, *1942* was a scrolling fighting game like *Asteroids* or *Zaxon,* except that the player commanded the action from the top down rather than the side.





The franchise certainly has not been ignored for the last 20+ years, but *1942:JS* is the first version of the game for the PS3 and the Xbox 360. The game is so optimized for these systems that there aren't even boxes to buy. The game is just downloaded for $10 from the two systems' online markets. The graphics are also intended for these systems. Not only are they in 3-D and in HD, but the game uses the full 16:9 aspect ratio. This full screen means that the enemy planes have even more space from which to come at the player.

The "just for fun" nature of the game is even more obvious in the weapons. Enemy Zeros come at the player in waves and lines that history never saw, but they are met by the player shooting fan spreads of missiles or bullets. The game retains the power-ups and boss fights from other versions, but it adds a co-operative mode so that two players in the same room or over the Internet can fight together. In the co-op mode, players have access to joint attacks such as a lightning arc that goes between the two planes, killing any enemy it touches.

Conflict of Heroes
Awakening the Bear! - Russia 1941-42

Conflict of Heroes: Awakening the Bear!—Russia 1941-42 is a board game that is also intended to be fun, but it is concerned about historical accuracy in how the units fight, not just in how they looked. This is a platoon-level game that uses 10 different scenarios to explore how the war was really fought on the Eastern Front. Thus, victory points are awarded not just for meeting objectives, but for how the objectives are met. And yet a wide variety of tactics can meet the objectives, giving extraordinary replay possibilities to each of the fire fights.

The biggest selling point to *CoH:AtB!* is its speed of play. From setup to finish, each firefight can be done in about an hour. The system is both fast paced and historically accurate. There is an actual feel of flow and back and forth to the combat. This is achieved with the use of action points and action cards so that even the player who isn't actively moving his units is still involved and able to affect the other player's actions. Overall, this is a good game, period, but it is a particularly good game for introducing people to board games because of its simple rules and short play time. ☐

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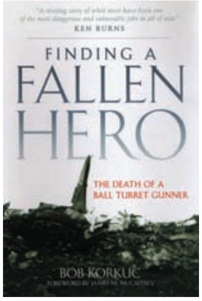
Combat aviation, as everyone knows, is a dangerous and often deadly occupation. The U.S. Eighth, Ninth, Eleventh, Twelfth, and Fifteenth Air Forces, based in England and the Mediterranean, suffered horrendous casualties due to accidents and battle losses during World War II. It is estimated that some 30,000 air crewmen in the European and Mediterranean Theaters lost their lives, while more than 13,000 were wounded. Approximatley 51,000 were taken prisoner or were listed as missing.



One of the most dangerous positions on a Boeing B-17 Flying Fortress bomber was that of ball turret gunner. The crewman filling that position would curl up in a small, spherical chamber that hung below the belly of the aircraft, his knees up around his ears, and then swivel the ball and its machine gun 360 degrees to ward off enemy fighters that might be attacking from below. In case of emergency, the ball turret gunner usually had the least likely chance of getting out.

On February 25, 1944, ball turret gunner Anthony Korkuc, the uncle of the author of *Finding a Fallen Hero,* was killed when his B-17 was shot down over Germany. In 1995, his nephew, Bob Korkuc set out on a seven-year quest to find out exactly what happened to his uncle Tony. That journey is recounted in this very moving book. The author interviewed everyone he could find who knew his uncle and even went to the place in Germany where the B-17 crashed due to antiaircraft fire and interviewed townsfolk who were there on that fateful day.

In meeting one of the witnesses, Korkuc was handed a small cardboard box. "As Marcus translated Hermann's words," Korkuc writes, "I learned that the box contained artifacts removed from the crash site, including two rusted and mutilated .50-caliber shell casings and a .50-caliber bullet. There were also pieces of Flying Fortress 42-37786. It was possible that Tony Korkuc had fired the gunner's shells that were now in my hands. I was touching a special piece of my uncle's history."

Finding a Fallen Hero is a healing chronicle that will strike a chord with any reader who has lost a family member to war and will inspire others to satisfy their own unanswered questions. □

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revenge

Continued from page 51

Mogami had already begun to withdraw, turning south at 3:53. As she made her way out of the strait, she was targeted by American cruisers and destroyers. By 3:53, *Mogami* was on fire and still taking hits. At 4:02, a shell, probably from *Portland,* exploded on the bridge, killing all officers including the captain. Other hits to the engine room slowed her to a crawl. She launched torpedoes at 4:01, but this was probably done as a precaution to prevent them from exploding.

Whatever the motive behind it, *Mogami*'s torpedo salvo certainly made the Americans take notice. The destroyer *Richard P. Leary,* which was heading north toward the battle line, reported that torpedoes were overtaking her at 4:13. The *West Virginia, Maryland,* and *Tennessee* turned due north with their sterns away from the approaching torpedoes, while the other three battleships headed westward. When Oldendorf ordered all ships to resume firing at 4:19, the battleships were out of position. It didn't really matter, though, since there were no targets remaining. *Yamashiro* had gone down, and *Mogami* and *Shigure* were too far away.

By this time, *Mogami* was too badly damaged to be of any threat, and *Shigure* was leaving the battle area. But Vice Admiral Shima's Second Striking Force had not yet made its presence known. Shima's force was made up of two heavy cruisers, *Nachi* and *Ashigara;* the light cruiser *Abukuma;* and the destroyers *Shiranuhi, Kasumi, Ushio,* and *Akebono*. Throughout the night action, Shima had been receiving reports from Nishimura as he continued toward the strait. At midnight, he received a communiqué that Nishimura was being attacked by torpedo boats. About an hour later, his leading destroyers could see muzzle flashes from gunfire ahead. At about 3:15, the seven warships were attacked by torpedo boats. No hits were scored.

Ten minutes later, Shima's luck took a turn for the worse—another torpedo fired by a PT boat hit the *Abukuma,* killing about 30 men and slowing the cruiser to 10 knots. The PT boat's captain had actually been aiming at a destroyer in the column and hit *Abukuma* by mistake.

Undeterred, Shima continued northward. At about 4:10, he sighted two ships on fire and decided that they must be *Fuso* and *Yamashiro*. Actually, they were the drifting bow and stern sections of *Fuso*. Shima hurried due north to aid Nishimura. At about 4:20, just after Nishimura went down with *Yamashiro,* Shima's radar detected what appeared to be two enemy ships at 13,000 yards, bearing 25 degrees. *Nachi* and *Ashigara* fired eight torpedoes each at the targets. The enemy ships were actually the two Hibuson Islands.

Shima had not heard from Nishimura for some time and tried to size up the situation himself. He could only guess at what had happened to Nishimura. His four destroyers had ventured ahead of the cruisers and could not find any targets, just a seemingly impenetrable smoke screen that had been laid down by American destroyers. At 4:25, Shima recalled his destroyers and sent a dispatch to headquarters in Manila: "This force has concluded its attack and is retiring from the battle area to plan subsequent action."

Admiral Shima had exercised more discretion and common sense than Nishimura. Had he continued toward the American battle line, his cruisers and destroyers would have been chopped to pieces by Oldendorf's battleships and cruisers. Shima's force did, however, endure another bit of bad luck before leaving the area. The *Nachi,* Shima's flagship, was overtaking the damaged *Mogami,* which appeared to be dead in the water. *Mogami* had not stopped, though. She was actually moving south at a greatly reduced speed, almost a crawl. *Nachi*'s captain misjudged both the speed and distance of *Mogami,* and the two ships collided at 4:30.

Nachi lost part of her port bow in the collision, and her speed was reduced to 18 knots. *Mogami* joined up with Shima's column and steamed southward out of the strait. *Shigure* also joined the column but, before falling in with Shima's force, the captain sent this dispatch to Combined Fleet headquarters: "C Force has been annihilated, location of enemy unknown, please send me instruction. I have trouble with my rudder, my wireless, my radar, and my gyro, and I received one hit."

At 7:07, a half hour after sunrise, the *Asagumo* was discovered by the *Denver* and *Columbia* and three screening destroyers. The five warships had been sent down the strait to sink any lingering Japanese warships and proceeded to do just that. *Asagumo*'s bow had been blown off by Coward's destroyers a few hours earlier, and her forward section was awash. The Japanese destroyer was quickly overwhelmed by a torrent of 5-inch and 6-inch shells but fought back with fire from her after turret. It was a futile gesture. *Asagumo* sank at 7:21; her survivors made their way toward the shore.

Off the coast of Leyte, the sailors aboard the U.S. support vessels were too far away to see or hear the battle, but they did see the flashes of gunfire reflected in the clouds. They could tell that "one hell of a shootin' match" was taking place. Nobody knew the outcome of the battle until morning, when reports began to filter in that the Japanese had been stopped. The news was not conclusive, mostly bits and pieces based on radio reports, but the word that was going around was certainly reassuring.

There was no need to worry. Oldendorf had certainly plugged Surigao Strait, as he had intended. No Japanese ship had come anywhere near Leyte Gulf, and what was left of the enemy fleet was retiring south.

Later in the morning, American Grumman TBF Avengers caught up with *Mogami*. A bomb hit on her engine room left her dead in the water. The destroyer *Akebono* took off the crew and sank the cruiser with a torpedo at 12:30. Of Nishimura's force, only the *Shigure* survived to be torpedoed by the submarine USS *Blackfin* on January 21, 1945.

Shima's force proved to be much luckier. All four of its destroyers escaped destruction at Surigao Strait, along with the heavy cruiser *Ashigara*. Two days later, *Abukuma,* which had been struck by a PT torpedo at Surigao Strait, was hit several times by U.S. bombers. One of the bombs touched off the ship's torpedo warheads, and the cruiser went down south of Negros Island. *Nachi* was sunk by dive-bombers from the aircraft carrier USS *Lexington* in Manila Bay on November 5.

"In no battle of the entire war did the United States Navy make so nearly a complete sweep as in that of Surigao Strait, at so little cost," pronounced historian Samuel Eliot Morison. American casualties totaled 39 killed and 114 wounded, most of them aboard *Albert W. Grant*. No records of Japanese casualties exist, but they probably total in the thousands. *Fuso* and *Yamashiro* each had complements of 1,400 men, most of whom went down with their ships.

Surigao Strait also saw the end of the battle line in naval warfare. The development of the aircraft carrier meant that no line of battleships could withstand a sustained air attack.

A self-described "old sailor," Morison called the Battle of Surigao Strait "a funeral salute to a finished era of naval warfare." Romantic as well as sentimental, he went on to say, "One can imagine the ghosts of all great admirals from Raleigh to Jellicoe standing at attention as the Battle Line went into oblivion." □

David Alan Johnson's eighth book, BETRAYAL: The True Story of J. Edgar Hoover and the Nazi Saboteurs Captured During World War Two, *an account of how J. Edgar Hoover sent an innocent man to prison to enhance his own reputation, will be published by Hippocrene Books in December 2008.*

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