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JULY 2006

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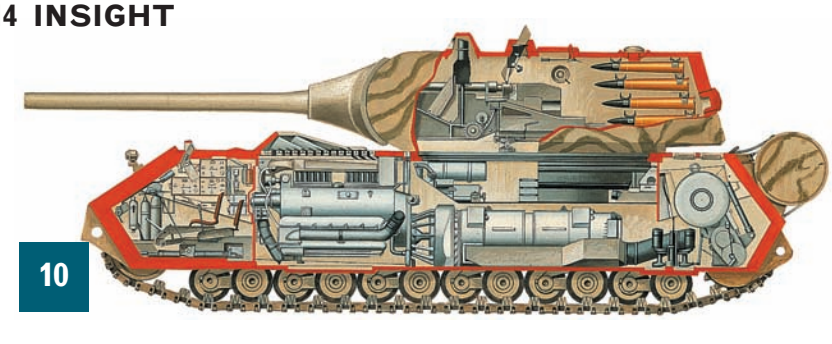
Cover: In Keith Ferris's painting, "Fortresses Engaged," B-17s from the 100th Bomb Group fly over Germany, while Me 109s attack. See story beginning on page 44. (Painting © Keith Ferris.)

WWII HISTORY

JULY 2006

FEATURES

COLUMNS



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University of Washington student senate rejects memorial to honor Pappy Boyington.

U.S. Marine Corps Lieutenant Colonel Gregory "Pappy" Boyington shot down 28 Japanese aircraft during World War II. He spent 20 months in an enemy prison camp and received both the Medal of Honor and the Navy Cross for his service to his country.

Boyington, who died January 11, 1988, and is buried in Arlington National Cemetery, is best remembered as the leader of the famed Black Sheep Squadron, which flew Vought F4U Corsair fighters in the Solomon Islands during the war. Although the television series which was loosely based on the squadron's exploits employed a great deal of artistic license, Boyington was a colorful character. His womanizing and struggles with alcoholism are also well documented.

Recently, the student senate at the University of Washington rejected a proposal to honor Boyington with a memorial, as it has honored others who have attended the university over the years. This decision appears to be part of a disturbing trend, which also includes the vocal opposition of some San Francisco residents to bringing the battleship *USS Iowa* to the port and establishing it as a museum and memorial because the vessel was a instrument of war.

According to WorldNetDaily.com, the rejection of a memorial to Boyington by the student senate was based on sentiments such as that of senator Jill Edwards, who stated that she "didn't believe a member of the Marine Corps was an example of the sort of person UW wanted to produce." A second senator, Ashley Miller, commented, "...many monuments at UW already commemorate rich white men."

While Boyington was no choirboy, it should be remembered that he was in fact part Sioux Indian and that his family was far from wealthy. The comment about the Marine Corps, however, appears troublesome beyond belief. Boyington would not have been memorialized for leading a perfect, or even near-perfect life. He was to be honored for his devotion to duty during a time when his nation was in peril. During World War II and other times of national emergency, the Marine Corps has defended the United States and the American way of life. Miss Edwards' remark is an affront to anyone who has ever worn a U.S. military uniform, to their families, and to those who respect the armed forces for their commitment to guarding freedom.

Brent Ludeman, president of the university's College Republicans, wrote in an e-mail to WorldNetDaily.com that the rejection of a Boyington memorial "reflects poorly on the university. Pappy Boyington went beyond the call of duty to serve and protect this country — he simply deserves better. Just last year, the university erected a memorial to diversity. Why can't we do the same for Pappy Boyington and others who have defended our country?"

Respect and appreciation for the members of the U.S. armed forces are not issues for partisan politics. Boyington would probably readily admit that he was far from a role model in many ways. He was, however, a man who responded to his country's call in a time of emergency.

The resolution which was defeated reads, "Be it resolved... [that] we consider Col. Gregory Boyington, United States Marine Corps, to be a prime example of the excellence that this university represents and strives to impart upon its students, and, that we desire for a memorial for Col. Boyington to be commenced by the University of Washington by 11 January 2008, the twentieth anniversary of his death, which will be publicly displayed, so that all who come here in future years will know that the University of Washington produced one of this country's bravest men, and that we as a community hold this fact in high esteem."

In circumstances such as these, one must openly question exactly what is being taught to young adults at the University of Washington and on other campuses across the country. The grand irony, of course, is the heroism of men like Boyington protected and defended the right of his detractors to assert their point of view more than half a century later.

Michael E. Haskew

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Coast Guard Cutter *Taney*

Dear Editor,

I read with much interest the article concerning the US Coast Guard Cutter, *Taney* and its action during the attack on Pearl Harbor, Dec 7, 1941 (July 2005 *WWII History*), but, I have never seen an article written about the attack on Honolulu Harbor at that time.

I was assigned to Battery F of the 55th Coast Artillery, located on Sand Island, across the bay from the Aloha Tower, Honolulu Harbor, Hawaii. Although I arrived in October 1942, the effects of the Japanese Air attacks on our island were still quite evident.

The Navy and Army units had the responsibility of protecting the entrance and tending to the submarine nets at the Honolulu Harbor. One of the first bombs dropped landed on the Navy Mess Hall, completely destroying it.

It was quite a while before the Navy was able to "mess" on their own. This caused the Navy and Army personnel to "mess" together for more than a year.

As to the attack, the Japanese planes would fly up the valley strafing the entrance to the Harbor before hitting Pearl Harbor. As a result, the Harbor was closed, sealing off anything coming in or out.

The story of my unit and the other Naval Units there has never been told. Sand Island became a fortress after the attack. Weapons from the disabled Naval ships at Pearl Harbor were dismantled and installed all over the Island of Oahu. Navy Units continued the protection all the way to Pearl Harbor and also guarded a Japanese POW camp that was located near our area.

Lt.Col. (ret) Albert Bertaccini

Dear Editor,

I liked very much the article "Soviet Circle of Iron" in *WWII History*, May 2006. I have read several accounts of the Battle of Stalingrad, in articles, magazine, and books. This one is very well-written, with excellent photos. I am anxiously awaiting the continuation, as the author rightly states that Operation Uranus was only the first step in the annihilation of fortress Stalingrad.

At the time of this battle, I was a teenager in Yugoslavia, a part occupied by Italy. Only the official news reports were accessible on radios; the news unfavorable to the Axis forces were gotten clandestinely, by radio, leaflets. I participated in the smuggling of these leaflets, but not that much as I was only a teenager, living at home with my parents.

The illegal activity against the occupiers started already at the end of 1941. The next year, the city, where we lived, was surrounded by barbed wire, with very limited movement of people permitted. Later that year, the razzie (the raids) by Italian military were in full swing. The soldiers came banging on doors at 3 a.m. some mornings. I was taken from my home at least five times. I was fortunate to be held in prison, for a short time, while many were taken to the concentration camps in Italy.

I recall one such raid very well. The occupiers announced there would the confiscation of all skis and winter equipment. One morning very early, the banging was the door again. The military was very stern, no questions could be asked. My mother was frightened from all the raids. She immediately gave

them my skis, heavy shoes, and even blankets. These skis were nothing compared to the skis today, just worked wooden bars with simple leather attachments for heavier shoes. There was talk that these skis and many other boys were taken to equip the Italian Army in Russia.

I finished high school in mid July 1943, right after Italy collapsed. I soon left my home, never to return.

Joseph H. Kovacic
Colonial Heights, Virginia

Stuart Light Tank

Dear Editor,

I enjoyed reading about the Stuart light tank in the *WWII History*, March 2006 issue. I trained with the Stuart and Sherman tanks at Fort Knox during basic training. After basic training, I was assigned to a light tank (M-5A1) company in the 16th Armored Division. Thus, I immediately noticed a slight error in the description of the crew. It was indeed a four-man crew, however, the tank commander was also the loader.

In 1944, I was transferred to the Third Armored Division in Europe where I was the gunner of an M-8 recon vehicle. The vehicle has the same turret arrangement as the M-5A1 with a 37mm gun and a co-axial 0.30 caliber machine gun. Accordingly, the turret crew was the gunner and the car commander and loader.

Herbert Schwartz
Deerfield, New Jersey

Captain Forrest Biard

Dear Editor,

In reference to your story in *WWII History*, January 2006, "U.S. Navy Captain Forrest Biard Remembers," I'd like you to know that Capt. Biard is not the only officer from the HYPO staff still among us. RADM MacShowers of Arlington, Virginia was in HYPO after Pearl Harbor, during the Battle of Midway, and for the duration of the war. He was the Naval Intelligence representative and consumer of the COMINT produced by this group.

Biard's forte was as a Japanese linguist rather than a cryptanalyst. He could interpret intercepted voice transmissions and translate message intercepts that had already been decoded. He wasn't in HYPO or FRUMEL long enough to learn anything about breaking codes. JN-25 had already been broken and its messages were being read by these two groups, as well as OP-20-G in Washington, and by the Austrailians, British, and Dutch cryptanalysts.

Capt. Biard was assigned as a Japanese linguist to the *Yorktown* during the battle of the Coral Sea. He vigorously argued with the Task Force commander, Rear Admiral Frank Jack, criticizing him for not taking action that Biard thought necessary. When the *Yorktown* returned to Pearl Harbor, Biard stormed off board and refused Admiral Fletcher's request to support him in the upcoming Battle of Midway.

Biard was then assigned to the Naval Radio Intelligence group in Melbourne, Australia (FRUMEL) that had recently been evacuated from Corregidor. They in turn lent him to Gen. MacArthur as a linguist for the duration of the war.

William H. Price
Vienna, Virginia

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Hitler's ego spawned World War II's largest and most futile tank design, which became the mouse that never roared.

BY BRANDT HEATHERINGTON

As early as 1941, the German high command had visions of military technology that was far ahead of its time, and many innovative technological concepts were becoming reality. Had some of them been produced in a more expeditious fashion or in greater numbers, most historians agree that they would have doubtless prolonged World War II, if not altered its outcome entirely.

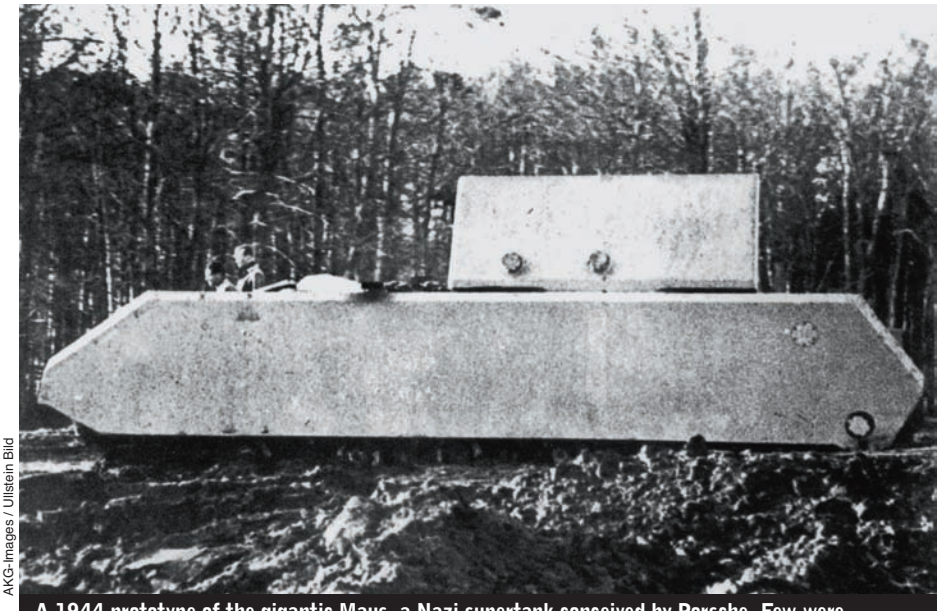
Many of these "wonder weapons" were highly practical concepts and have as their progeny the cornerstones of modern military arsenals—the world's first assault rifle, intercontinental ballistic missiles, and jet fighters to name a few. And then there were some bizarre concepts, which appear on the surface to be nothing more than an extension of their inventor's ego. The Maus (German for "Mouse") supertank certainly falls into the latter category.

The Panzerkampwagen (PzKpfw.) VIII Maus was a 188-ton behemoth developed by Porsche at the behest of Hitler himself. Impractical does not begin to describe it, and the timing of its introduction was stupefying. Why, when Nazi Germany had lost the oil fields in Africa and was starting to run short of fuel for the vehicles they had, would they introduce a gas guzzling monster that would obviously be very costly and time consuming to produce? This kind of decision making was one of the great intangibles about Hitler, which confounded his staff as much as it does modern observers. Hitler jumped from one fad and crazy idea to another. The Maus was probably influenced by a trend toward producing heavy tanks that many Allied armor developers were experimenting with during the middle years of World War II. Of course Hitler had to go them one better.

The Americans were developing the 45-ton M-26 Pershing tank, and, of more personal concern to Hitler, the Russians debuted the 45-ton JS-2 Stalin. While most military planners would have been more focused on the thousands of Soviet T-34 medium tanks the Russians were churning out that would eventually be rolling toward the Fatherland, Hitler obsessed with outweighing and outgunning the handful of Allied heavy tanks that were going into production. After the D-Day invasion and the Allied experience of being bogged down in the hedgerows of Normandy, heavy tanks were a subject of major controversy among military planners on both sides. Were they worth their weight? Did they gain more in protection and firepower than they sacrificed in mobility and fuel economy? Hitler had presumably already made up his mind several years before this defining incident and ordered Porsche to get to work.

The earliest development of the Maus super heavy tank started in 1941, when Krupp began studies of super heavy Soviet tanks such as the KV series. In early 1942, Krupp produced designs of a hybrid Tiger/Maus prototype, which eventually became the PzKpfw. VIII, and another super heavy design, the predecessor of the Maus, known as the the PzKpfw. VII Lowe, or "Lion." In early March 1942, the order for the heavier tank, the Maus, was placed, and the Lowe never reached the prototype stage. Later that month, Porsche received the official contract for the new 188-ton Maus, specifying that it was to carry 100 rounds of ammunition and would be armed with the high performance 105mm L/60 or L/72 gun.

Maus production was to be overseen by Professor Ferdinand Porsche, who would develop the chassis, and the Krupp Munitions Works would be responsible for developing the hull, turret, and armament. The original Maus project was supported by the Heereswaffenamt (Army Weapons Office) as a competitive design. Porsche received approval for his project from Hitler at a time when none of his other designs had been selected for production. It has been theorized that perhaps Hitler might have compensated Porsche for his past failures as a military designer by awarding him the Maus contract. It could easily be argued that Porsche was being set up to fail yet again—the



AKG-Images / Ullstein Bild

A 1944 prototype of the gigantic Maus, a Nazi supertank conceived by Porsche. Few were completed, and the design was later viewed as a dismal failure.

description of the tank Hitler wanted included the word "indestructible."

The contract set a deadline for an operational prototype to be developed by the spring of 1943. On June 23, 1942, Porsche provided its design for an improved Maus armed with turret mounted 150mm (L/37) and 105mm (L/70) guns. Porsche promised that its first prototype would be ready in May 1943. While contract specifications demanded that armament should consist of the 150mm L/40 gun and 20mm MG151/20 heavy machine gun, usage of the 128mm L/50 was under consideration. In December 1942, new armaments such as a 127mm naval gun and the 128mm flak gun were also tested and considered for the tank's main gun.

In January 1943, Hitler interfered again in the development of the vehicle and ordered that the Maus be fitted with turret mounted 128mm and 75mm guns, while turret mounted 150mm or 170mm guns were specified for future use. Instead of the standard 7.9mm coaxial machine gun, the Maus would have a 75mm antitank gun next to the main gun, and a machine cannon for antiaircraft was to be mounted in the turret roof alongside a smoke grenade projector. Indecision seemed to reign supreme on this crucial design element. The specification for ammunition storage space of 100 rounds was never met, and consequently the space was decreased, sacrificed at the altar of even further armament modifications.

That same month, the first backsliding by Porsche began when it was restated that first vehicle would be ready in the summer instead of spring 1943, and that would be followed by the production of only five vehicles per month. The first official name for the new super tank was VK10001 Porsche Type 205 and nicknamed the Mammoth. The tank was renamed Maeuschen (or "Mousy") in December 1942 and finally Maus in February 1943.

With Krupp producing hulls, turrets, and armament, a firm called Alkett was responsible for assembly of the components. On December 24, 1943, the first prototype, minus the turret, was completed by Alkett and was put through extensive tests. During the tests, the Maus could barely move due to its enormous weight. It became obvious that the powerplant was woefully inadequate. The first prototype was powered by a modified Daimler-Benz MB 509 engine (developed from the DB 603 aircraft engine), which could not provide the planned speed of 20km per hour. It could manage only 13km per hour, and that only under ideal conditions. In December 1943, the V1 prototype was fitted with a

Library of Congress

On display at the Kubinka Museum near Moscow, this example of the Maus shows the V2 turret mounted on the V1 hull.

Belastungsgewicht, or simulated turret, which represented the weight of the actual turret, and was tested. For some curious reason, this first prototype was applied with camouflage paint and marked with a red star, hammer, and sickle and disguised as a captured Russian vehicle.

In March 1944, the second prototype Maus V2, which differed in several details from the V1, was finally finished. This new V2 lacked a powerplant, which was later fitted in mid-1944. On April 9, Krupp delivered the turret, which was mounted on the V2 and tested in June. It was mounted with a 128mm KwK 44 L/55 gun, a coaxial 75mm KwK 44 L/36.5 gun, and a 7.92mm MG34 machine gun, providing the Maus with enormous firepower. The Maus main gun could penetrate the front, side and rear armor of the American Sherman, British Cromwell and Churchill, and Russian T-34 and JS-2 tanks at ranges over 3,500 meters. Its own armor was no thinner than 7 inches anywhere, and was up to 14 inches thick at some points.

The turret included mounts for a Zeiss rangefinder, but it was not fully finished and some of the missing components were shipped later. The Maus I was to be fitted with Krupp's second turret, but it was never delivered and remained fitted with a simulated turret. On July 25, 1944, Krupp reported that two hulls would be available soon and two more were in production. Two days later, Krupp was ordered to scrap all four hulls. On August 19, Krupp informed Porsche that it was ordered to stop further work on the Maus. By September 1944, however, testing had begun on the second prototype. It was installed with a Daimler-Benz MB 517 diesel engine that made little difference in comparison with the previously used engine. Designing an engine sufficiently powerful for the gigantic Maus was obviously a serious problem. Though the Germans tried two engines, both around 1,200 horsepower as compared to the Royal Tiger's 590 horsepower, neither could provide a speed of more than 10 to 12 miles per hour.

Another interesting feature of the Mouse from the engineering point of view was the return from torsion bar suspension—such as was used in the PzKpfw. III, the Panther, the Tiger, and the Royal Tiger—to a spring suspension. An improved torsion bar design had been considered but was abandoned in favor of a volute spring type suspension. Its running gear was designed by Skoda and consisted of double wheeled trucks supported by 12 return rollers with 43.3-inch wide tracks. In order to reduce the ground pressure so that the tank could have some mobility, the tracks had to be made very wide. With the tracks taking up over 7 of its 12 feet of width, the Maus presented a very strange appearance from either the front or the rear, and its 12-foot height gave it a very high target profile. The width had to be kept to a maximum of 12 feet so the Maus could fit on rail cars, as this was intended as a primary means of transport, and a special 14-axle railroad transport car was produced by Graz-Simmering-Pauker Works in Vienna just for the Maus.

Despite some ongoing major developmental problems, the Maus certainly gave designers latitude to experiment with some advanced features, which they had always been anxious to install in tanks. One of these systems was an auxiliary power plant. This plant permitted pressurizing of the crew compartment, which in turn meant submersion capability when fording rivers and better protection from gas and chemical weapons. The plan was for the Maus to be able to ford rivers up to 45 feet deep, but in practical terms it could really ford only about 25 feet, still an impressive depth. This was necessitated by the fact that most bridges would not support the weight of the Maus. The crew had

SPECIFICATIONS

WEIGHT:	188,000kg
CREW:	6 men
ENGINE:	Daimler-Benz MB 509 / 12-cylinder / 1080hp (V1) Daimler-Benz MB 517 Diesel / 12-cylinder / 1200hp (V2)
FUEL CAPACITY:	2650-2700 liters + 1500 liters in reserve tank
SPEED:	13-20km/h
RANGE:	Road: 160-190km; Cross-Country: 62km
LENGTH:	10.09m
WIDTH:	3.67m
HEIGHT:	3.63m
ARMAMENT:	128mm KwK 44 L / 55; 75mm KwK 44 L/ 36.5; 7.92mm MG34
AMMO:	128mm - 55-68 rounds; 75mm - 200 rounds

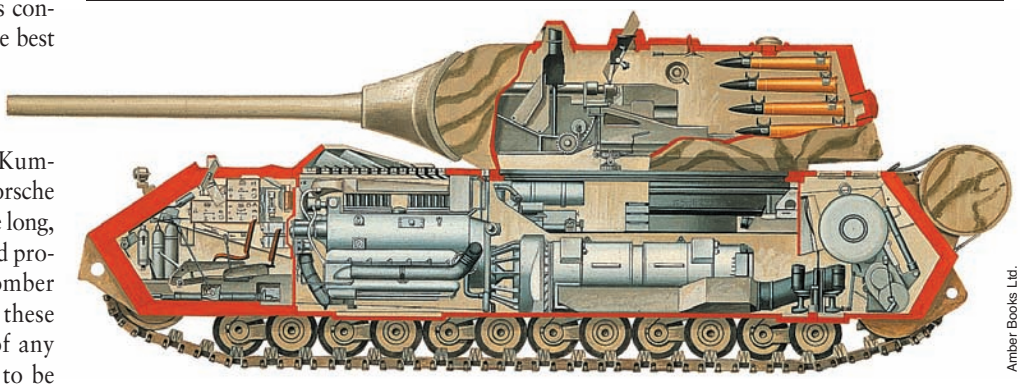
to be provided with oxygen supplied by built-in fans and ventilators for use when all the hatches were closed. Besides sealing of hatches and vents, aided by pressurizing, submersion was to be made possible by the installation of a huge cylindrical chimney or trunk so large that it could serve as a crew escape passage if need be.

The tanks were intended to ford in pairs, one powering the electric transmission of the other by cable while its partner stayed on shore. The process would be repeated in tag-team fashion, but would seem to raise the question of what would be done with the last tank in line! The auxiliary power also permitted cabin heating and battery recharging. An advanced electric steering system was used to steer the vehicle. The electric transmission was in itself an engineering experiment of some magnitude. This type of transmission had first been used on the big Elefant assault gun in 1943 and was considered by some German designers as the best type of transmission for heavy tanks.

From mid-January to early October 1944, further trials took place at the armored vehicle proving grounds in Kummersdorf, near Berlin, and then at the Porsche proving grounds at Boblingen. Tests were long, delayed by continuing engine failures and production problems caused by Allied bomber attacks on German factories. During these tests, it was determined that in case of any engine failure each Maus would have to be towed by two other Maus tanks, another crippling revelation as to the impracticality of the Maus. Despite all of its technological innovations, the Maus was fraught with problems and was as vulnerable to close-in attack as any other tank, if not more so. The large hull openings and many grills necessary to ventilate the massive power plant were a particular disadvantage. The amount of space the power plant consumed necessitated an external auxiliary fuel tank in the rear, which was a considerable fire hazard.

Design studies found at Krupp by the Allies showed a version of the Maus named the Bear, carrying a 305mm breech-loading mortar. The Bear was a giant 1,500-ton vehicle with an 800mm gun as its main armament and two 150mm guns in auxiliary turrets on the rear of the vehicle. This improbable design, put forth by two engineers named Grote and Hacker, was planned to be powered by four U-boat diesel engines. It is also reported that Germany began work on a design called Flakzwilling 8.8cm auf Maus, which was to be a Maus mounted with a modified turret housing two 88mm Flak 43 guns and used as a heavy anti-aircraft tank.

National Archives



Amber Books Ltd.

ABOVE: The prototype has a weight in place of the 50 ton turret. BELOW: Weighing over 100 tons, the Maus was ungainly on the battlefield and proved to be prone to mechanical failure.

Typical of Hitler's vacillations on his many super weapon projects, on November 4, 1943, development of the Maus was ordered to cease, and only one was to be completed for further evaluation. In October 1943, the original order placed by Hitler for 150 vehicles was also cancelled. It was becoming apparent that as German ground forces were consistently losing the battle with Allied air superiority, a monstrosity like the Maus would be extremely vulnerable to air attack. Some sources state that according to Porsche, Hitler's true aim for the Maus was to plug holes in the Atlantic coastal defenses on the Western Front, where its limited range and mobility would not have been as much of a hindrance. But that this plan was thwarted by delays in production which pushed any possible delivery date well past D-Day.

One version of the demise of the Maus states that the V2 prototype was destroyed by personnel at the Kummersdorf proving grounds, while some sources relayed that the V2 actually saw combat while defending that same facility. According to other sources, however, the two experimental Maus tanks were sent into action in the final days of the war—one at the approaches to the Army staff headquarters at Zossen, the other near Kummersdorf. None of these accounts can be verified and seem unlikely given that the disassembled remnants of the Maus that were discovered by Allied troops. When the war ended, a nearly completed V1 turret and third hull were found at the Krupp facilities in Essen. One fully assembled example with the V2 turret mounted on the V1 hull was tested in Russia in 1951 or 1952 and can be seen today at the Museum of Armored Forces in Kubinka near Moscow.

Although only two prototype Maus vehicles were ever built, and they were apparently never even equipped with their armament, it was a spectacular and fanciful vehicle. Alas, the *Maus* remained for the most part a figment of its creators' imaginations. Whereas such a heavy tank might conceivably have had some limited military usefulness, it will be more remembered as a drain on German engineers and production capabilities in the last three years of the war, when Germany could least afford such a waste of dwindling resources. □

First time contributor Brandt Heatherington writes from his home in Arlington, Virginia.

Eleanor Roosevelt toured the South Pacific as an ambassador for her husband.

BY GLENN BARNETT

On Sunday December 7, 1941, First Lady Eleanor Roosevelt hosted a luncheon for 31 people at the White House. All present hoped her husband, President Franklin D. Roosevelt, would join them. At the last minute FDR demurred, choosing instead to eat privately with his friend and aide Harry Hopkins.

When her luncheon was over Mrs. Roosevelt retired upstairs to the family quarters, where she found a whirlwind of activity. It was then that she learned what her husband had only just found out: The Japanese had attacked Pearl Harbor.

In the months leading up to the war, Eleanor had been active with the Office of Civil Defense, and in this capacity she now swung into action. The following day she accompanied her husband to the capitol where he delivered his famous "Day of Infamy" speech asking Congress to declare war on Japan. That night she boarded a plane along with former New York Mayor Fiorello LaGuardia, who worked with her on the OCD. Their destination was the West Coast, where they planned to inspect and discuss preparedness for civilian defense against an anticipated Japanese attack.

While in the air, a rumor reached them that San Francisco was under attack. All were relieved when the rumor was proven untrue. Eleanor's tour of West Coast preparedness took a week, and on December 15 she was back in Washington. It was the first of many wartime trips that she would take on behalf of her husband and the government.

Even before the war, Eleanor Roosevelt was the most active of any First Lady, and certainly the most prolific activist. Her fight on behalf of civil rights, the poor, and women made her the lighting rod of the administration. During the war all of her activities, including her tours overseas, were scrutinized by enemies of the New Deal. During war it might be considered unpatriotic to attack the commander in chief so Eleanor was a highly visible scapegoat.

By the summer of 1942, representatives from most of the Allied governments had visited the White House, and many of them tendered invitations for Eleanor to visit their countries, including China and the Soviet Union. When the Queen of England discreetly inquired if Mrs. Roosevelt would be willing to visit Great Britain, Franklin got involved. He was keenly interested in having his wife visit the English ally.

When the official invitation came, it offered Eleanor the opportunity to see what the British women were doing for the war effort and to visit with recently arrived American soldiers. FDR encouraged her to accept. He did not tell her about the evolving plans for Operation Torch, the upcoming invasion of North Africa.

On October 21, Eleanor and her friend and aide Malvina Thompson (known as Tommy) boarded a Pan Am clipper on one of the first passenger flights to England since the war began. Foul weather forced the plane down in neutral Ireland, where they were met by the American ambassador David Gray, Eleanor's uncle by marriage. British Prime Minister Winston Churchill sent a plane for them to complete their journey, and the travelers were soon at Buckingham Palace, where they were the guests of the King and Queen for two nights.

The royal palace was a surreal place in wartime England. Eleanor noted that while they dined off gold and silver plates, they ate the same rationed diet as everyone else in the country. In her bathroom a black line running around the bathtub indicated how high she could fill the tub. With limitations on the use of the fireplaces, the ornately decorated rooms were uncomfortably cold.

Mrs. Roosevelt inspected the damage that German bombs had done to the palace and at the King's request accompanied the royal cou-

National Archives

First Lady Eleanor Roosevelt talks with a wounded American soldier during her 1943 visit to Guadalcanal in the Solomon Islands.

National Archives

Sharing a meal with a group of NCOs of the 32nd Infantry Division in the Gilbert Islands, Eleanor Roosevelt displays her ability to communicate effectively, 1943.

ple on a tour of their devastated city. The extent of the ruins caused by the blitz shocked the First Lady.

After two nights at the palace, she moved to the vacated lodgings of the U.S. ambassador and began her tour of the countryside. Her itinerary included visits to factories, farms, airfields, shipyards, American and British bases, and hospitals. It was in England that she began the practice of asking soldiers if they would like her to write to their loved ones when she got home. She would eventually write hundreds of such letters.

The First Lady also became the GIs' advocate. When she learned that the men were not getting woolen socks and that they were getting blisters from wearing cotton ones, she passed on their concerns to the highest levels of both the military and the government. The supply and distribution of woolen socks got priority.

Lois Laster, a Red Cross worker and eyewitness to one of Eleanor's visits would later say, "She was a very gracious woman. She didn't rush in and rush out. She mingled … (and) sat down and talked with the troops."

The month-long English trip was a tiring ordeal for a woman in her late 50s, but everyone was impressed with her endurance and fortitude, so much so that invitations from other countries began to pour in. Back home in the United States the critics and the press assaulted Eleanor by harping on the expense of the trip (which she had paid for herself), but she was used to criticism and handled it gracefully. Yet, the malice of her political enemies was the reason why she stayed at home for almost a year.

In the meantime, she continued to visit American factories, bases, and hospitals for her husband and was greeted everywhere with friendly and accepting crowds. She also continued her role as hostess to foreign visitors to the White House.

Madame Chiang Kai-shek, wife of the Nationalist Chinese leader who was often in the United States during the war years, traveled with an entourage of 40 people to tend to her security and every need. She marveled at how Eleanor could travel anywhere and everywhere in the country accompanied only by her friend Tommy.

In the summer of 1943, FDR began to consider invitations for a visit from the governments of Australia and New Zealand for a visit. He did not think that he could afford to spend the time away himself but believed that it would be useful for Eleanor to pay them a visit.

When he approached his wife with the idea of traveling to the two countries, she requested to visit America's island bases as well, especially Guadalcanal. Eleanor had visited many wounded men from that great battle in stateside hospitals and felt that it would be important for her to see for herself where they had been wounded or lost their health.

When the plans for the trip were firmed up, she called upon her friend Norman Davis, chairman of the American Red Cross. She proposed to visit Red Cross facilities in the South Pacific. Davis was pleased with the offer and suggested that Eleanor be his official representative and that she wear a Red Cross uniform while on her tour. After discussions with FDR, she agreed to the idea and bought uniforms for the trip.

All the preparations were completed in secret. Further, she decided to go alone and leave her aide and typist Tommy behind. The two had received such criticism from the Republican press that Eleanor thought some of it might be diverted if she went alone. She was wrong. Her profile was too high to avoid criticism of anything that she did.

The night before her departure, she and Franklin were at their New York home, Hyde Park. Winston Churchill was their houseguest at that time as both he and Roosevelt were due to leave for the Quebec Conference the next day.

Over dinner Eleanor casually mentioned that she was leaving for the South Pacific in the morning. Churchill was aghast. He was caught completely off guard by the news, but he would wire his people in the British territories that she would visit to take good care of her.

Eleanor secretly flew to Hawaii in the belly of an army B-24 Liberator bomber. There were no heated accommodations for her or the few other military passengers, so the crew offered her blankets to keep her warm in the drafty metal flying box.

The First Lady arrived in Hawaii on August 17, where she was met and hosted by the military brass. However, it was typical of her that she wanted to meet and speak with the ordinary GI. When her caravan came across a stalled truck, she learned that the driver, a young private, was taking a load of 300-pound ice blocks to remote bases on Diamond Head crater. She immediately determined to go with him and announced to her startled and flustered entourage that she would be riding in the ice truck. That done, the officers who had been following her in their army Plymouths hustled to find four-wheel drive vehicles that could make it up the steep grades. As would happen everywhere on her trip, the GIs were glad to see her.

Two days later, she landed on Christmas Island, the first of a series of backwater bases that FDR called "…the islands for guarding the supply route." The soldiers and sailors were called upon to keep constant vigilance, but there was never any enemy activity to guard against. Boredom was acute, and little was available in the way of diversion. When she landed, an officer told her that she was the first white woman he had seen in eight months.

Eleanor also found that if she wanted to take breakfast with enlisted men (instead of officers) she had to get up before 6 AM. Her days rarely ended before 11 PM. Yet, she doggedly maintained a daunting schedule of visits to rest areas, hospitals, and Red Cross facilities, sometimes traveling 40 miles in a jeep to reach remote outposts.

On August 26, on her seventh island stop, she finally reached the headquarters of Admiral William F. "Bull" Halsey at Noumea in New Caledonia. Halsey had already been the reluctant host of Congressional and press junkets and was dreading the visit from a woman "do-gooder" whom he was sure would be nothing more than a nuisance.

When they met, Halsey asked Eleanor what her plans were. She at once asked if she could visit Guadalcanal. She had her heart set on it. The Admiral refused. The battle of New Georgia was then raging, and he did not want to spare any of his precious fighters or officers to provide escort for her. He suggested that she complete her visit to Australia and New Zealand first and then return to Noumea. He would decide then. Crestfallen, Eleanor reluctantly agreed. "Ad Halsey seems very nervous about me," she wrote Franklin.

The next day, she flew to New Zealand. There she made the rounds of government hosted events before visiting hospitals, military bases, and Red Cross offices. She observed the war work of New Zealand women. Her escort was a distinguished Maori guide named Rangi, with whom she hit it off immediately. While touring the country, she received a letter from a New Zealand soldier, which amused her. He asked, "… if I would not see that our men left their women alone."

On September 3, Eleanor flew to Australia. Relatively few people were on hand to greet her when she landed at the airport, but word spread, and by the time she reached the Sydney city hall a crowd of 20,000 had gathered. Her first round of official visits in Australia was a huge success. The Australians were used to the stiff ritual of visiting British royalty. Eleanor by contrast was warm, personable, and approachable. She then began her ceaseless rounds of hospital visits. Someone estimated that she walked for three miles through hospital wards. As always, she was anxious to see the contributions women were making in Australia's war effort and visited factories and bases where women were working.

While Eleanor was a hit with the Australian government and people, she was less well received by theater commander General Douglas MacArthur. He did not like sharing the spotlight with any other American, particularly the wife of a man he disliked. If the President sent his wife to meet him, MacArthur would send his wife to meet Eleanor. Claiming that he was too busy with the war to meet her, he sent Mrs. MacArthur instead. When Eleanor requested to visit the troops in New Guinea, he flatly refused saying that it was too dangerous. That vast domain was his exclusive territory.

National Archives

Major General Maxwell Murray (left) and Admiral Aubrey Fitch greet one another as they prepare to welcome First Lady Eleanor Roosevelt, exiting the aircraft, to Espiritu Santo in the New Hebrides, 1942.

MacArthur's staff aide, Captain Robert White, was assigned to escort Eleanor around Australia. He was none too pleased with the assignment but came away a changed man. He would later write, "Wherever Mrs. Roosevelt went she wanted to see the things a mother would see. She looked at kitchens and how the food was prepared. When she chatted with the men she said the things mothers say. (She) went through hospital wards by the hundreds. In each she made a point of stopping by each bed, shaking hands, and saying some nice, mother like thing." She brought many of the hardened GIs to tears. She was especially suited to be motherly to these young soldiers and sailors because all four of her sons were serving in the military.

Eleanor was frustrated by not being able to visit New Guinea and by being hemmed in by generals, admirals and MPs who treated her "like a frail flower." She wrote to her husband, "It makes me want to do something reckless when I get home, like making munitions."

While MacArthur was inflexible, Halsey had been won over. When she arrived back in Noumea on September 14, Eleanor found Halsey's attitude much changed. He had been hearing reports of her work and was impressed. Halsey decided that Eleanor had earned her trip to Guadalcanal.

But Halsey did have a favor to ask. Would she be willing to visit the naval hospitals on the island of Efate? She agreed at once but had to keep the name of the island a secret as the Japanese had never bombed it and the admiral did not want them to know that it was even occupied by the Americans.

The night before her trip to Guadalcanal, the First Lady had but two hours of sleep as she had to catch a plane at 1:39 AM to make a cold night flight to the island, which was still being bombed by the enemy. On Guadalcanal the men were not told of her coming, but the night before her arrival they were told that they were not to walk around without wearing pants and shirts, as they often did.

The men on Guadalcanal were completely surprised to see the First Lady. One astonished Marine exclaimed, "Gosh, there's Eleanor!" Her escorting general was disturbed by the familiarity, but Eleanor was amused. She made the rounds of hospitals, kitchens, a cemetery, workstations, and tent dwellings of the men. Her driver on Guadalcanal was Air Corps Sergeant Joe Lash whom she had known before the war and had requested to see while she was on the island. As they drove along, Eleanor requested that they pick up three skylarking Marines who were hitchhiking. When they discovered the identity of their benefactor, they got quiet, sitting in the back seat until Eleanor started amicably chatting with them. Lash would later write the book *Eleanor and Franklin*.

During her stay on the island an air raid sounded, and Eleanor joined the troops in a shelter donning a steel helmet until the all clear was given. Though it was a false alarm, Guadalcanal was bombed the night before she arrived and the night after she left. She was as close to the war as she had wished.

Lash noted that on one day of her visit she did not get to bed until after 11 PM and had to be up at 4:30 the next morning. She was 59 years old, and the schedule was exhausting.

When Eleanor took her leave of the island, Admiral Halsey was there to see her off. It was impossible, he told her, for him to express his gratitude for what she had done for the men. He would later write, "I was ashamed of my original surliness. She alone had accomplished more good than any other person, or group of civilians, who had passed through my area."

During her grueling five-week tour of the South Pacific, Eleanor Roosevelt made 17 stops and talked to an estimated 400,000 people. As soon as she returned home she began the arduous task of writing or calling the parents or loved ones whom the soldiers had requested her to contact on their behalf. It was a labor of love. For months after she flew home, entertainers on the USO tours of the South Pacific would be asked by American servicemen, "How's Eleanor?" □

Author Glenn Barnett, like FDR, is a polio survivor. He is a frequent contributor to WWII History *and lives in the Los Angeles area.*

Virginia Hall risked her life repeatedly as one of the leading ladies of the Resistance movement in Nazi occupied Europe.

BY MICHAEL D. HULL

National Archives

A young French woman carries a captured German weapon and moves with a comrade alongside a building in Paris.

SLENDER, FIVE FEET, SEVEN INCHES TALL, AND WITH A WARM SMILE THAT BELIED TOUGHNESS and leadership ability, Virginia "Dindy" Hall of Baltimore had a wooden leg and a price on her head.

One of the bravest and most able Allied secret agents during World War II, she twice entered Nazi-occupied France to organize, train, and supply Resistance groups while simultaneously managing an "underground railroad" to assist the escape of downed Allied fliers to neutral or friendly countries. She became a legend in the British Special Operations Executive and the U.S. Office of Strategic Services, was on the Gestapo's wanted list, and was decorated by King George VI and President Harry S. Truman.

She was both the first woman and civilian to be awarded the Distinguished Service Cross. "Her courage knew no bounds," said William T. Hornaday II, an OSS colleague.

Inheriting a yearning for travel and adventure from her grandfather and shunning the Baltimore social whirl for diplomatic service abroad, Virginia Hall was working as a code clerk at the U.S. Embassy in Grosvenor Square, London, in late 1940 when she was recruited by the SOE. After training in weaponry, communications, and security, she went to work in Vichy France with famed Captain Maurice Buckmaster's F (French) Section of the SOE. Her cover was that of a stringer for the *New York Post*.

Starting in August 1941, she became the first woman in the SOE to establish Resistance networks out of Vichy. Codenamed Diane, she set up many valuable contacts in France and earned the highest respect of her comrades in the Maquis. They called her "La Dame Qui Boite" (the Limping Lady).

When German troops started pouring into Vichy in November 1941, Hall was ordered to leave France. She made her way across the snow-clad Pyrenees to neutral Spain and was jailed in the border town of San Juan de las Abadesas because she did not have entry papers. She smuggled out a letter to the American consul in Barcelona by way of a friendly Spanish prostitute.

Released within six weeks from the notorious Figueras Prison, Hall reported to her SOE contacts in Madrid. With new cover as a correspondent for the *Chicago Times*, she scouted safe houses and agents and acted as a courier for the SOE network. But she did not think she was being effectively employed, so she requested a transfer back to F Section.

Returning to England in November 1943, Hall trained as a radio operator and was transferred to the OSS. She was one of 4,000 women who made up one-fifth of the OSS staff during World War II. They worked all over the world—from London to Ceylon, from New Delhi to Kunming—as spies, saboteurs, cryptographers, cartographers, analysts, propagandists, forgers, parachute packers, communications specialists, clerks, drivers, and secretaries.

In March 1944, Hall went back to France as radio operator for the Heckler agent network. Crossing the English Channel in a Royal Navy motor torpedo boat, she went ashore by dinghy on the Cotentin Peninsula. She could not parachute in because of her wooden leg, which she had wryly christened Cuthbert.

The 38-year-old Virginia Hall was disguised as an elderly French peasant woman, with her soft brown hair dyed a dirty gray-black and her slim figure hidden under full skirts, woolen blouses, and a drab, oversized sweater. She was by now well known to the Gestapo, which had circulated a sketch of her with the order: "The woman who limps is one of the most danger-

ous Allied agents in France. We must find and destroy her."

Born into a wealthy Baltimore family on April 6, 1906, Virginia Hall was the daughter of Edwin Lee Hall, a banker and movie theater owner, and the granddaughter of John W. Hall, who had stowed away on one of his father's clipper ships at the age of nine. As a girl, she attended Radcliffe and Barnard colleges, where she studied languages, played baseball, hockey, and tennis, and was described in a yearbook as "different and capricious."

Persuading her father to let her continue her education in Europe, Virginia studied at the Ecole des Sciences Politiques in Paris, the Konsularakademie in Vienna, and the Universities of Strasbourg, Grenoble, and Toulouse. She became fluent in French, Italian, and German, and returned home in 1929 to take additional courses in French at George Washington University in Washington, D.C. But Baltimore social life held little interest for her, so she headed back to Europe.

In July 1931, she started work as a $2,500-a-year clerk at the American Embassy in Warsaw, and later served in Tallinn, Estonia, Vienna, and Izmir, Turkey. A grim accident changed her life. While snipe hunting with friends near Izmir, Virginia's rifle slipped from her grasp. Grabbing for it, she hit the trigger and accidentally discharged a round into her left foot. Gangrene set in, and a surgeon was rushed from Istanbul to save her life. He had to amputate the leg just below the knee. Fitted with an artificial limb, Virginia walked from then on with a pronounced limp.

To her bitter disappointment, Virginia was denied an appointment as a Foreign Service officer. The State Department was not encouraging women to seek diplomatic careers, and a regulation forbade the hiring of those who had had any amputation of part of a limb. Disgusted, the young woman resigned her job as a clerk in Venice in May 1939 and traveled through Europe. She was in Paris when World War II broke out that September, so she joined the French Ambulance Service as a private second class and was stationed in Valenchy. When France fell in June 1940, Virginia made her way to England by way of Spain.

She became a code clerk for the military attaché at the U.S. Embassy in London and was recruited by the British SOE late in 1940. After training under Captain Buckmaster, Virginia became the first woman in the SOE to establish resistance networks out of Vichy France. The region was headed by General Henri Petain, the hero of Verdun who had become a Nazi stooge. Because the United States was neutral, Virginia was able to work openly. Her cover was that of a stringer for the *New York Post*. Her articles were not censored, and she reported freely on living conditions in Vichy—shortages of food, clothing, gasoline, and accommodations, mounting larcenies of food and transport, and the increasing oppression of Jews.

National Archives

An American officer dropped into France by the OSS instructs French resistance fighters on weapons handling. Although physically handicapped, Virginia Hall's planning and organizational skills were vital to operations that harassed the enemy and destroyed lines of communication.

Hall used her apartment in Lyons as her SOE operations office. Acting always with extreme caution, she maintained an escape retreat in a local convent and helped to set up an SOE network under Buckmaster's F Section. She made contact with the underground in Paris and helped escaped British and French prisoners of war and downed airmen get back to England. The American woman scouted drop zones for Royal Air Force planes to furnish Resistance groups with weapons and money and recruited loyal French citizens to establish safe houses for agents and supplies.

When America entered the war, Hall became an enemy alien. Yet, despite the danger, she continued her clandestine operations with the SOE for 14 months. She met her contacts only at designated restaurants and bistros and studied the Vichy surveillance system closely.

When German troops started moving into Vichy in November 1941, Hall was ordered to leave France. Her SOE cover had been blown. With a Spanish guide, two Frenchmen, and a Belgian Army captain, she started an arduous winter crossing to Spain through the rugged Pyrenees. Hall's artificial leg gave her great pain, and she reported to SOE Headquarters in London: "Cuthbert is giving me trouble, but I can cope." An SOE staffer not aware of her medical history replied, "If Cuthbert is giving you trouble, have him eliminated."

After being released from the Figueras Prison and reporting to her SOE contacts in Madrid, the spirited young woman was assigned to the D/F Section, a group of escape organizers. With a new cover as a correspondent for the *Chicago Times*, her job in the colorful city that was a center of Allied and Axis intrigue was to scout potential safe houses and agents and to act as an SOE courier. Her work earned her the prestigious MBE (Member of the British Empire) decoration from King George VI.

After four months, Hall requested a transfer back to F Section, explaining to headquarters, "I thought I could help in Spain, but I'm not doing a job. I am living pleasantly and wasting time." So, in November 1943, she returned to England. Seeking to improve her usefulness for a prospective assignment in occupied France, she requested training as a radio operator. She transferred from the SOE to Maj. Gen. William J. Donovan's OSS and was given the rank of second lieutenant. Her pay was forwarded to her mother in Baltimore.

Hall became proficient in new OSS radio transmission equipment and techniques, studied parachute packing operations, and secured a second tour of duty in France. She would serve as radio operator to the OSS Heckler mission, would service the SOE by reporting to the British Saint mission, and would work with Resistance groups in the mountainous Haute-Loire region of south-central France, organizing sabotage and guerrilla teams and supplying them with arms and funds.

On March 21, 1944, agent Hall returned to France aboard a Royal Navy MTB, and a dinghy put her ashore on the Cotentin Peninsula. She carried a radio transmitter and her wardrobe in a battered suitcase. She was accompanied by OSS agent Peter Harratt, codenamed Aramis, whose job was to set up the Heckler mission in Haute-Loire. The pair looked like a typical French couple as they walked into the railway station at Brest to buy tickets to Paris. Hall's identification card listed her as Mlle. Marcelle Montagne, a Parisian serving as a social worker with the Vichy Secours National.

Hall had contacted underground associates in Paris with whom she had worked under the SOE. On arriving in the French capital, Hall went immediately to the home of an old and trusted friend, who placed her apartment at her disposal. With the long-awaited Allied invasion only three months away, the American woman began a six-month mission in which she organized, armed, and helped train 300 agents for sabotage operations against the German occupiers. She also maintained radio links between the OSS headquarters in London and Resistance groups in Haute-Loire.

Hall and Harratt established their initial operations in the districts of Cher, Nievre, and Creuse, about 160 miles south of Paris. At Maidou in Creuse, farmer Eugene Lopinat provided Hall with a little one-room house with no water or electricity. The resourceful daughter of a wealthy Baltimore family cooked for the farmer, his old mother, and a hired hand over an open fire, and led the cows to pasture. She also milked the cows and was able to locate several ideal fields for parachute drops.

Despite her flawless portrayal of a humble peasant woman, Virginia Hall had to keep moving because of Nazi vigilance. Early in May 1944, she moved to the Nievre region, where she lived and worked in the attic at the home of Colonel Fernand Vessereaux, head of the local gendarmerie. Increasing Gestapo activity forced her to find a new hiding place—in a garret at the home of 84-year-old Jules Juttry and his daughter-in-law, Estelle. Here, Hall found herself tending a herd of goats, which she led along the village roads while observing German troop movements. Stooped, with a faded kerchief tied around her dyed gray hair, and leaning on a shepherd's staff, she raised no suspicions among the enemy.

Hall delivered goat's milk as a cover while contacting Resistance comrades and then sent radio messages to London from the farmhouse attic. When contact was made and an airdrop arranged, she drove a donkey cart out to help the resisters recover supplies and parachutes.

Virginia's next hideout was a farmhouse at nearby Surry-en-Bois, where she arranged two drops of weapons and supplies for the Resistance group in Cher Nord. During her stay in the Nievre region, she organized 15 supply drops for the Maquis.

Early in July, shortly after British, American, and Canadian armies had landed in Normandy, Hall was ordered back to the Haute-Loire region. Her mission was to establish a Resistance group and maintain radio contact with London. She set up her operations in the village of Chambon-sur-Lignon, a Huguenot community that was the center of resistance in Haute-Loire during the German occupation.

Farmer Leah Lebret, whose husband was a prisoner of war, sheltered Hall until she found an unused house and barn owned by the Salvation Army. The intrepid agent secreted her radio equipment in the barn, and worked alone organizing reception committees for incoming agents, arranging the distribution of supplies and money, and setting up Resistance groups. Virginia's efforts were supported by 30 men of the Maquis led by Lieutenant Raoul le Boulicard, codenamed Bob, and one of her most trusted comrades. The group helped her to mark drop zones, retrieved materiel that often went astray, and maintained her radio and batteries.

After the Allied landings, resistance activity increased all over France. Meanwhile, Gestapo agents intensified their hunt for the Limping Lady and her transmitter, but she continued to elude them. She kept in regular touch with London, and between July 14 and August 14 transmitted 37 intelligence messages on enemy troop movements. She was the first agent to report that the German General Staff was moving its headquarters from Lyons to the city of Le Puy in the Haute-Loire region.

In August 1944, shortly after the Allied invasion of southern France, Hall's tenuous position was strengthened with the arrival from North Africa of a three-man team comprising American and French officers and a U.S. Army radioman. The group was part of the secret SOE-OSS Jedburgh operation. Hall received local currency, gold pieces, and longer antennae so that she could transmit clearer and stronger signals.

Library of Congress

General William "Wild Bill" Donovan, head of the OSS, presents the Distinguished Service Cross to Virginia Hall, 1945.

Aided by the Jedburghs, the Baltimore woman organized and trained three battalions of the French Forces of the Interior (FFI) for guerrilla warfare and sabotage operations against the retreating Nazis. She and her comrades provided daily intelligence on local conditions for the Allied armies, harassed the enemy, and destroyed lines of communication. Although the physically handicapped Virginia was not formally trained for guerrilla warfare, her planning and organizational skills were vital to the operations.

She reported to headquarters that four bridges had been blown up, freight trains derailed, a key rail line cut in several places, and telephone lines torn down. Retreating German convoys were held up by the blown bridges. The FFI seized 19 members of the militia, which had collaborated with the occupiers, and killed 150 Germans and captured 500 in skirmishes.

The Limping Lady was sent next to the commune of Bourg in eastern France, where she and a small FFI group from Haute-Loire linked up with the French First Army led by General Jean de Lattre de Tassigny. Among the OSS agents there was Virginia's future husband, Lieutenant Paul Gaston Goillot, a good-natured Paris-born New Yorker and a

skilled chef. Hall turned over her unit's weapons and ordnance to the French 9th Colonial Division in Bourg, and then she and Goillot headed for a well-deserved leave in Paris. Virginia was in the multitude that cheered General Charles de Gaulle, leader of the Free French Forces, when he strode in the victory parade down the Champs d'Elysees on August 26, 1944. She returned to London that September.

Hall's last OSS assignment was in Innsbruck, Austria, where General Donovan's agency sought to infiltrate diehard Nazi resistance groups. Her code name became Camille, and her cover was that of "Anna Muller," a German citizen born in Turkey. Goillot was a member of her team. The operation, mounted from Caserta, Italy, was called off when the German forces collapsed. The pair then returned to Paris.

In the capital, Hall located former comrades, collected radio transmitting material still in the field, and organized the seizure of a Gestapo agent, the Abbe Alesh, who had masqueraded as a member of the SOE and been responsible for the deaths of four agents in Hall's clandestine network.

Because of her dedicated and heroic service in France, Virginia was recommended by Colonel James R. Forgan, the OSS commander in the European theater, for the Distinguished Service Cross, the Army's highest decoration after the Medal of Honor. The Limping Lady was cavalier about it, but the citation made its way to General Donovan's desk in Washington. He sent a memorandum to President Harry S. Truman in May 1945, saying, "Inasmuch as an award of this kind has not been previously made during the present war, you may wish to make the presentation personally." But Hall, who could be terse, demurred. She wanted no publicity, she said, because she was "still operational and most anxious to get busy."

Donovan and Truman complied. So, on September 27, 1945, Virginia and her proud mother went to OSS Headquarters, where the DSC was awarded in the privacy of Donovan's office.

The indefatigable Limping Lady continued her intelligence work after the war ended. She served as a contract field representative in Europe for the newly-formed Central Intelligence Group, which became the Central Intelligence Agency in 1947. Late in 1948, she returned to New York City to be near her fiancé. She joined the National Committee for Free Europe, a CIA front and adjunct to Radio Free Europe. Virginia interviewed refugees

from the Balkans and the Baltic region, and prepared propaganda for anti-Communist resistance groups there.

She and Goillot, shorter in height and eight years her junior, were married in 1950, although Virginia's mother disapproved. She considered Goillot "too uneducated" and not good enough for her daughter. But the pair found happiness in shared memories and went on fishing trips. Goillot's sense of humor "lightened her life," recalled Hall's niece, Lorna Lee Catling.

Hall started work for the CIA in Washington in December 1951. Now aged 45, she was assigned to the Office of Policy Coordination as an intelligence officer on the French paramilitary desk. Her salary was $8,360 a year. A year later, she became one of the first female operations officers in the new Office of the Deputy Director of Plans. In 1956, she was one of the first women to join the CIA's select career staff.

Young female staffers listened raptly as the Limping Lady—jolly, elegant, and with her brown hair coiled on top of her head, with a yellow pencil tucked into the bun - swapped war stories with OSS veterans. But Dindy Hall eventually became an anomaly at CIA headquarters. The legendary World War II heroine had a dispute with her supervisor and was eventually relegated to "a lonely desk in war plans or the paramilitary offices."

Colleague E. Howard Hunt recalled, "I was distressed at the insensitive treatment accorded Virginia Hall toward the end of her career. No one knew what to do with her… She was a sort of embarrassment to the non-combat CIA types, by which I mean bureaucrats. Her experience and abilities were never properly utilized."

So, after suffering some medical problems and on reaching the mandatory retirement age of 60, Virginia turned in her agency badge in 1966. She spent the next 16 years living on a farm in Barnestown, Maryland. She was an enthusiastic gardener, watched birds, and took care of five poodles and several cats. After failing as a restaurateur, Goillot, a bad businessman, became a "house husband."

Hall also wove cloth, made goat's milk cheese, did crossword puzzles, and read profusely. She died in 1982 at a Rockville, Maryland, hospital and was buried at Druid Ridge Cemetery in Pikesville, Maryland. Her husband, who suffered a severe stroke that changed his personality, died five years later. □

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King Boris II of Bulgaria may have been the victim of a murder plot.

BY BLAINE TAYLOR

It was the high summer of 1943 in Eastern Europe, and World War II was going decidedly against the Third Reich, which had just suffered massive twin defeats on the Russian Front at the Battles of Stalingrad and Kursk, which many historians now believe turned the tide of war irrevocably against Nazi Germany.

Already, the bad news from the East had helped to cause the overthrow of Adolf Hitler's main Axis Pact ally, Fascist Italian Duce (Leader) Benito Mussolini. The Fuhrer's greatest fear was that his various Balkan allies, Hungary, Romania, and Bulgaria, would next rush to desert him to possibly save their countries and, not incidentally, their own regimes from the onrushing Red Army steamroller of Soviet dictator Josef Stalin.

Indeed, Hungarian Regent Admiral Niklos Horthy was already thinking along these lines, which in the autumn would cause Hitler to launch a commando operation against his well-fortified castle in Budapest, the Burgburg.

Now, too, the Fuhrer was having trouble with one of the few men, and the only reigning monarch, whom he admired, the leader of a small Balkan kingdom who had apparently managed the impossible on a continent still occupied by Nazi troops. While every other Axis Pact signatory had been forced to send combat troops to aid the Germans in their all-out assault on the Soviet Union, only tiny Bulgaria had not.

The reason was the personal relationship of mutual respect and firmness between two very different men—the brutal Hitler and the quiet, shy, but unflappable King of Bulgaria, Boris III. But after an unexpectedly harsh meeting with the Fuhrer at the latter's East Prussian military headquarters, Wolf's Lair, at Rastenburg, the anxious monarch returned to Bulgaria and, soon after, died suddenly. Accusations of poison and murder quickly surfaced on all sides, with the most accusatory finger being pointed, both inside and outside the Axis structure, at the Germans.

Author's Collection

German Alpine troops relax at a table in a small Bulgarian town. Hitler's Eastern European allies were restive at times, requiring action on the part of the Fuhrer to keep them in line.

Chief among the Allied accusers was Britain's Prime Minister Winston Churchill, who charged in a speech soon after the King's mysterious death, "What happened to King Boris will also happen to others who side with Germany!" Churchill conveniently overlooked the fact that the English, too, had a motive for wanting the King's early death. That motive was the further erosion of the Axis Pact in the Balkans, an area in which Churchill was acutely interested.

In any event, the outcome was extremely unhappy for the Bulgarian royal family and people as a whole, for all that the king had earnestly sought to avoid now, indeed, came to pass. Substantial German armed forces were already in the country as Boris's funeral cortege passed through a sea of mourners in the streets of Sofia, Bulgaria's capital. There was no prospect of a unilateral withdrawal from the Axis without Allied help, and the Allies were not interested in Bulgaria.

The new regime, a regency for Boris's six-year-old son, King Simeon II, was unable to halt the expected Soviet invasion of August 1944, a year after the death of King Boris, and the royal rule was swept away. The old king's brother, Prince Kyril, was executed by the Communists in February 1945. Boris's widow and successor fled abroad into exile. After the end of World War II, Boris's beloved Bulgaria was ruled by a Communist regime behind the Iron Curtain. Thus, it would seem that both the Soviet and Bulgarian Reds had a motive for the disappearance from the political scene of the neutralist King Boris III, a man who constantly sought a middle path between East and West, his signing of Hitler's pact notwithstanding.

After the war, it became apparent that the Nazis were just as mystified as anyone else by

the sudden death of the King and that they suspected the culprits of a possible murder plot to be their own former allies, the Italians.

On September 10, 1943, two days after the Italians had switched sides and joined the Allies against Germany and two days before the Fuhrer's paratroopers rescued the ex-Duce from an Italian mountaintop prison, Hitler's Propaganda Minister, Dr. Josef Goebbels, made a surprising entry in his private diary. The entry was one that remained unpublished until after both Goebbels and Hitler were dead.

The entry reads, "The Fuhrer told me that it must now be regarded as certain that he was killed by snake poison. It is not yet known who mixed the poison. The German doctors wanted to perform an autopsy; the Bulgarian government agreed, but the Royal Family refused. I would not regard it as impossible that the poisoning was engineered by the Italians. After their latest act of treachery, I am ready to credit the Badoglio regime and the Italians generally with anything!"

The next day, the viperish Dr. Goebbels added, "The Fuhrer intends to transmit to Prince Kyril the findings of the German doctors on the poisoning of King Boris, which he believes in all likelihood inspired by the Italian Court, for it is very suspicious that Princess Mafalda, the worst wench in the entire Italian Royal House, was on a visit in Sofia four weeks before King Boris' death. It will be remembered that she is a sister of the Bulgarian Queen…The Fuhrer thought (Mafalda) capable of having expedited the journey of her brother-in-law Boris to the hereafter. It was also possible that the plutocratic clique administered poison to Mussolini, for Mussolini's illness, too, was somewhat mysterious…"

The reference to the ex-Duce was off the mark, as Mussolini had suffered normal stomach cramps since 1938 (which the Nazis knew from their spies), but they exacted their vengeance against the Italian House of Savoy anyway.

Boris's father-in-law, Italian King Victor Emmanuel III, who had always loathed Hitler, feared kidnapping by a Nazi paratroop unit much more than capture by the Allies. At one point, Hitler had seriously contemplated kidnapping the Italian monarch, even going into the sacrosanct Vatican to get at him if necessary!

The long arm of Hitler's revenge did ensnarl Princess Mafalda in its tentacles, however, as noted by King Boris's biographer, Stephane Groueff, in his magnificent study, *Crown of Thorns*. He writes, "Princess Mafalda, who was married to Prince Philip of Hesse, arrived

Author's Collection

King Boris III of Bulgaria (left) walks with Adolf Hitler during a visit to the Berghof, the Fuhrer's mountain retreat, 1941.

in Bulgaria only after King Boris' death to attend the funeral, as all newspaper reports and photographs can attest. Hitler's allegation that she came to Bulgaria before the King's illness is completely false … Princess Mafalda died tragically in the Nazi prison camp of Buchenwald on Aug. 28, 1944."

But could Hitler have been right? Was his fear of a Savoyard plot so far-fetched, even given that Mafalda's own sister, Queen Giovanna, was married to the young, popular Boris? What would have been the motive?

Actually, there was a motive, the same as in the internal overthrow of Mussolini before an Allied invasion and German occupation of Italy took place—to save the country from destruction and the Italian dynasty from extinction. Even if the Italian royal family had plotted to deliver Bulgaria also to the Allies as they had Italy in 1943, they failed in their ultimate goals. Italy was devastated by both war and civil war during 1943-45, and the Savoyard monarchy was voted into exile in 1946 by the Italian people themselves in a plebiscite election.

If neither Hitler nor Goebbels was guilty of plotting the swift demise of Boris III, there were, however, other top Nazi leaders who had an interest in Bulgarian internal politics. These were men who were bitter rivals within the hierarchy of the Third Reich and each of whom had their own agents in Sofia reporting back to them.

These suspects included Nazi Germany's number two man, Reich Marshal Hermann

Goring, commander-in-chief of the Luftwaffe, and German Foreign Minister Joachim von Ribbentrop, both of whom had hosted Boris during his many hunting and diplomatic trips to the Reich. As it turned out, the King liked the gregarious Goring but despised the foreign minister as a man he considered overly vain, pompous, and stupid.

Indeed, on August 29, 1943, Adolf-Heinz Beckerle, an SA Obergruppenfuhrer (lieutenant general) and German ambassador to Sofia, in the face of the official explanation of the King's death, coronary thrombosis complicated by an infarct, sent this top-secret report to his boss, von Ribbentrop:

"I asked the German doctors—deCrinis, Eppinger and Sajitz—to come and see me. They told me that they were sorry that during all this time they were unable to get in touch with me. They felt that they were kept, so to speak, prisoners at the palace, in order to prevent any news from leaking out. Even yesterday, after the King's death, they found it impossible to come here. They understood that King Ferdinand (the King's father and predecessor on the throne) and the Italian Royal Family had to be notified first.

"In addition, the entire diagnosis had been left to them. The Bulgarian doctors stayed in the background … The King was aware of the gravity of his condition and believed that … he would not live. The King thought that he had angina pectoris. He attributed it to the strains of an excursion to Mount Moussala, which he had undertaken the previous Wednesday.

Author's Collection

Dressed in an army uniform, King Boris III of Bulgaria proudly wears the German Pour le Marite, commonly known as the Blue Max, at his throat. The circumstances surrounding the king's death are still a mystery.

"Because of suspicions, I asked the gentlemen if the illness and death could have been due to some outside cause (poison.) The three doctors answered immediately in the affirmative, invoking the similarity of the symptoms. Eppinger spoke of a 'typical Balkan death.' But could they say more? Could they reliably attribute the death to such cause? … An autopsy would have been necessary for that … I have the impression that, in spite of the limited scientific hard evidence, the doctors are privately convinced of a violent death. They told me that, because of professional secrecy, they will make this statement only to me."

And yet, as came out later, there had indeed been a limited autopsy performed without Ambassador Beckerle's knowledge. It focused on the heart and was done without the German physicians' participation.

The question of an internal Bulgarian palace coup has also been raised in the matter of his majesty's death. For one thing, his wife the queen was kept in the dark initially about his illness and especially its severity. She was only admitted into Boris's sick chamber once he was actually dying. Also, as biographer Groueff pointed out, "The Queen,

who, for emotional reasons, did not give her permission, was informed only after the autopsy had been completed. She never obtained a satisfactory explanation as to who ordered it …"

If there was a palace coup to overthrow Boris, install his son as a puppet ruler and put a shadow regency into power, all its members came to grief in February 1945. All three regents, together with virtually the entire Bulgarian government, were executed by the communists on the edge of a bomb crater in a corner of Sofia's cemetery. The crater served as their common grave.

But if the trio of German doctors were "unable" to communicate with the representative of the German foreign office in Sofia, Ribbentrop's man, they evidently found no such difficulty in keeping Reich Marshal Goring's agent completely informed.

This was the German air attache, a member of Beckerle's own staff Luftwaffe Colonel Karl-August von Schoenebeck, who was in constant, secret contact with both Goring and Hitler back in Nazi Germany. He was not in contact with von Ribbentrop, and this was surprisingly on the personal orders of King Boris himself.

These reports were sent to Berlin via the embassy's own cipher machine, and since the Poles had broken the German code via their Enigma device back in 1939, it is probable that Churchill knew about the King's slow death even as he was gradually expiring. This fact was unknown to any of the German leaders at the time, and indeed it was not revealed until 1974.

Had the King's death even been predicted? Von Schoenebeck's diary entry for August 27, 1943, indicates that it had. "… I told the doctors that, at the end of May, information reached us from Turkey that the rumor circulated in certain circles there that King Boris would not live to September! I reported this highly disturbing information to the Bulgarian War Ministry, but, in my opinion, they did not take sufficient measures to protect their King. The Balkan lethargy was not shaken even by such alarming information …"

Could the King himself have even been a willing victim in the plot to kill him? By August 1943, his advisors agreed that he saw himself with no way out of the situation Bulgaria faced between the nutcracker from both East and West. What could he do to prevent his country from being destroyed?

The King might even have gone beyond being a willing victim to a suicide. To lend

Author's Collection

King Boris III of Bulgaria (left) chats with Luftwaffe Field Marshall Wolfram von Richthofen, cousin to the famed Red Baron of World War I.

any credence to this view of Boris III, one must examine the troubled King's state of mind during this crucial phase of World War II.

As a young man, Crown Prince Boris had fought in two Balkan wars as well as in World War I before being forced to succeed his abdicated father, King "Foxy" Ferdinand, late in 1918. Having witnessed both external war and internal civil war firsthand, the new monarch vowed never to commit Bulgaria to war again and kept his promise to the grave. Aside from these twin specters of war, what he feared most was a communist insurrection, but despite his loathing for Bolshevism, Boris was willing to make an accommodation with Stalin late in 1943 in order to spare Bulgaria from Soviet invasion and a Red regime in Sofia.

Although he adhered to the Axis pact, he was no puppet of Hitler, and as a former combat leader he was both superstitious and fatalistic about life in general. He had been too long in the shadow of his ruthless, domineering father, to whom he referred as "Le Monarque" all his days, to become truly assertive once he himself ascended to the throne.

Quiet by nature, shy and cautious, Boris confided in few people outside his immediate family circle.

He was no coward, though, and was also known as the most famous locomotive engineer in Bulgaria and all Europe, and raced just as fast. He came to the throne at age 24 and, although somewhat volatile when once he was made angry, kept a cool head under fire, such as early military coups led against him or during an assassin's failed ambush while out for a royal drive.

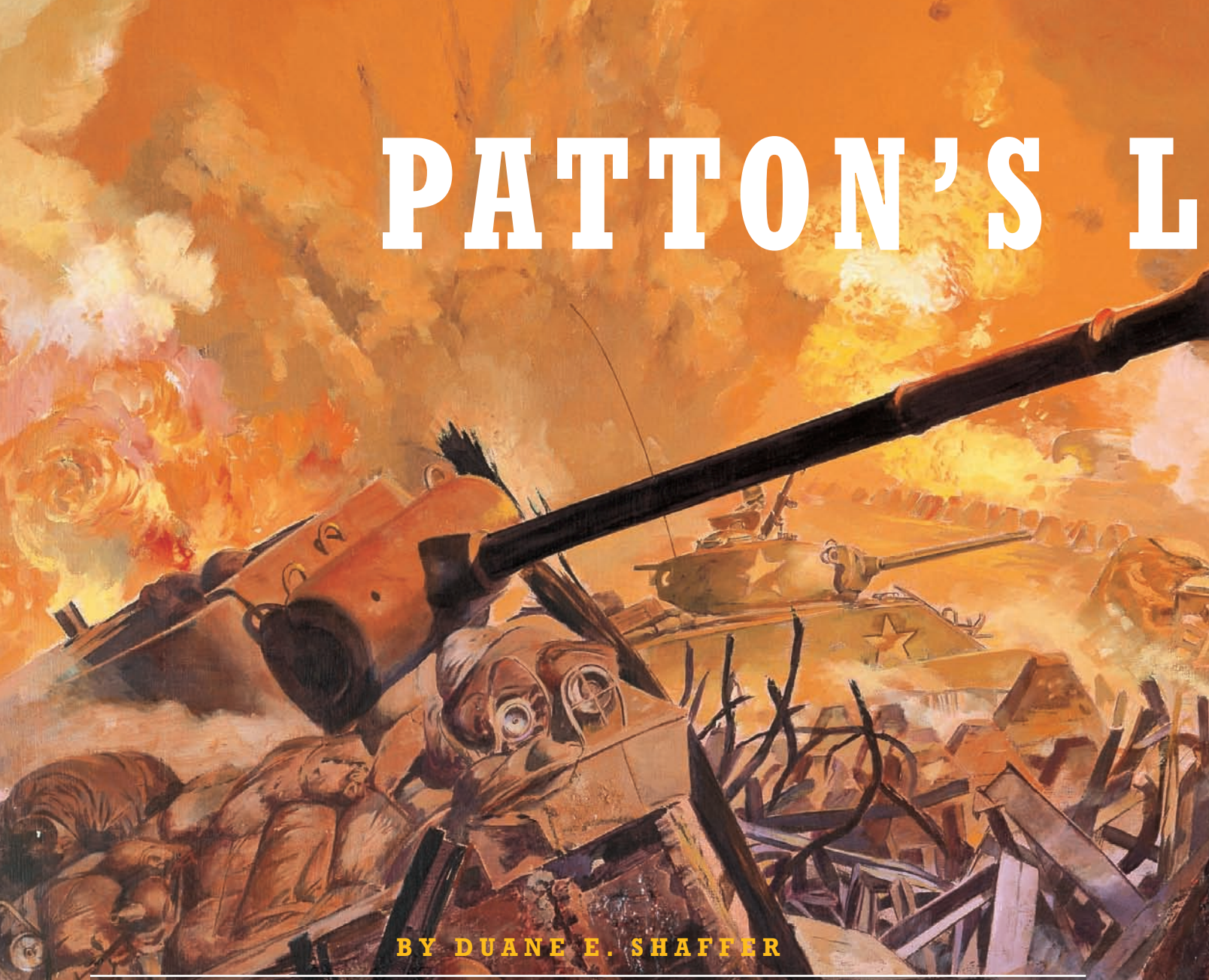
He narrowly missed death in a Sofia church bombing that killed 160 and was designed to spark a communist revolution. In private, however, he continually threatened to either abdicate in frustration over succeeding governments or commit suicide. These recurring threats were always brushed off laughingly by his ministers and courtiers.

Boris III was a botanist and, although a hunter, a gentleman who loved his wife and children, abhorred torturing criminals and would never sign a death warrant during his 25-year reign. He privately called himself "The mender of broken dishes," and proclaimed to his aides, "You'll never make a Hitler out of me!" Unlike the European totalitarians Hitler, Stalin, and Mussolini, Boris believed in the rule of parliamentary democracy such as the government of Great Britain, which he admired. He attempted to promote such a government throughout his reign.

Equally at home in Balmoral Castle in England and at Hitler's Berghof or Goring's Karinhall estate in Germany, Boris had found Bulgaria inevitably drawn into the Axis web through an ever closer economic dependence on the Third Reich. Bulgaria's geographic position between the West, Nazi Germany, and Soviet Russia also posed a dilemma. His policy was to remain as neu-

Continued on page 78

PATTON'S L



BY DUANE E. SHAFFER

THE ROAD TO FORT DRIANT BEGAN FOR THE UNITED STATES THIRD ARMY WHEN IT LANDED ON Utah Beach at 3 PM on August 5, 1944. The Third Army had been activated four days earlier in England under the command of Lt. Gen. George S. Patton Jr.

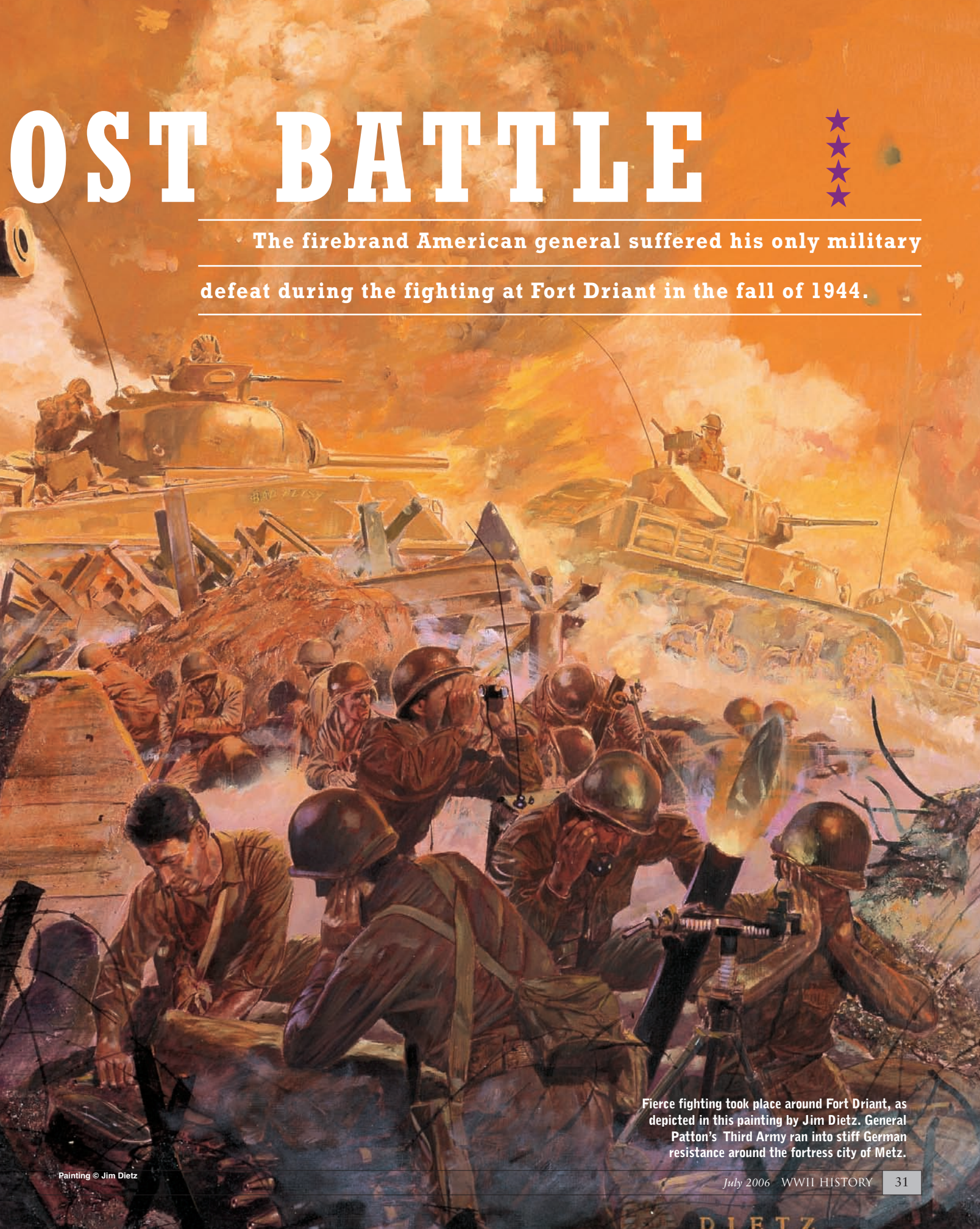
The four corps that made up the Third Army were VIII Corps under Maj. Gen. Troy H. Middleton, XII Corps under Maj. Gen. Gilbert R. Cook (later replaced by Maj. Gen. Manton S. Eddy), XV Corps under Maj. Gen. Wade H. Haislip, and XX Corps under Maj. Gen. Walton H. Walker. Walker was one of Patton's personal favorites, and he once said of Walker, "He will apparently fight anytime, anywhere, and with anything that I will give him." That opinion would be put to the test during the Lorraine Campaign that autumn.

Once the army became operational, it did not take Patton long to engage in the hard-driving cavalry tactics that he loved best. The Third Army was able to break out of the French hedgerow country and by August 20 had entered Argentan just southeast of Falaise. The only part of Third Army that was tied down was the XV Corps fighting against the tough German defensive positions in Brittany.

On August 25, the 80th Division began its move to eastern France with an advance of 280 miles in one day. The division then concentrated around Collemieres and two days later crossed the Seine, Aube, and Marne Rivers. By the end of August, the XII Corps had advanced to the high ground east of the Meuse River near St. Mihiel. This place had special significance for Patton because he had been wounded there during World War I. Problems began for the Third Army when Patton was informed by General Omar Bradley, who commanded 12th Army Group, that there would be no more gasoline shipments until September 3. For a highly mobile army like Patton's, this became a problem of catastrophic proportions. A total of 400,000 gallons of gasoline had been requested and only 32,000 delivered. This shortage alone was enough to bring Patton's eastward advance toward the frontier of the Third Reich to a standstill. After the war was over Patton aired his frustrated opinion about the consequences of denying him the fuel and supplies that he needed to advance. "I feel that had I been per-

OST BATTLE

The firebrand American general suffered his only military defeat during the fighting at Fort Driant in the fall of 1944.



Fierce fighting took place around Fort Driant, as depicted in this painting by Jim Dietz. General Patton's Third Army ran into stiff German resistance around the fortress city of Metz.

Painting © Jim Dietz

Both: National Archives

A U.S. soldier trudges along a muddy road to Metz. Some of the most difficult fighting on the Western Front took place in and around Ft. Driant.

mitted to go all out, the war would have ended sooner and more lives would have been saved," he remarked. "Particularly, I think this statement applies to the time when, early in September, we were halted, owing to the desire, or the necessity, on the part of General Eisenhower [Supreme Allied Commander General Dwight D. Eisenhower] in backing Montgomery's [21st Army Group Commander General Bernard Montgomery] move to the north. At that time there was no question of doubt that we could have gone through and across the Rhine within 10 days. "

The supply situation had to be rectified before any of the Allied armies could invade Germany. Patton was miffed because studies conducted in May 1944 by SHAEF (Supreme Headquarters Allied Expeditionary Force) recommended a broad front assault in France with two axes of attack. SHAEF established that the main thrust of the attack would go through Belgium just north of the Ardennes Forest. The armies would then cross the Rhine and plunge deep into the Ruhr, Germany's industrial heartland. This task would be assigned to Montgomery's 21st Army Group. Responsibility for the second axis would go to Patton's Third Army, part of Bradley's 12th Army Group, and to the 6th Army Group, commanded by Lt. Gen. Jacob L. Devers. Their task was to cut through the Lorraine area and, after crossing the Rhine, capture Frankfurt.

However, Montgomery wanted more. He argued against the broad front concept and instead proposed that a narrow front campaign would be more successful. Of course, he would be in command of the forces, with all the fuel and supplies going to him for a drive to the north.

Montgomery proposed his operation, which would be known as Market Garden, in early September. This involved a further channeling of supplies to his area of operations. It was his intention to obtain a bridgehead over the Rhine with one massive airborne operation far behind the German lines in Holland.

American commanders were appalled at such a daring and risky move and urged Eisenhower to stick to the "on to Berlin" plan. Eisenhower, who earlier had been convinced that the Germans were on the verge of collapse, now believed that they were strengthening daily, especially with newly arrived divisions from the Eastern Front. It was apparent that there would be no German surrender by Christmas. There was also concern that in order to clear the Scheldt Estuary and capture the launching sites for the V-1 flying bombs, which were terrorizing Britain, Montgomery would have to get the majority of the gasoline and supplies. Eisenhower reluctantly gave his approval for Market Garden in September.

General Bradley stated after the war, "Had Monty pared down his ammunition requirements and concentrated instead on gasoline, Patton might have advanced farther.… I argued strenuously with Eisenhower on Monty's extravagance in tonnage but without success. "

Combined with the increasingly bad weather in early September, the gasoline shortage allowed the Germans time to build their defenses in front of the Third Army. As Patton's offensive operations gradually slowed, German counterattacks on Third Army's flanks increased. It was apparent that the Germans were in a full fighting withdrawal. Their operations focused on defending and delaying actions while units of all types were massing in their rear. Remnants of the German Army were now engaged in delaying actions east of the Moselle River and concentrated armored counterattacks against Third Army's bridgeheads.

After these attacks were blunted by the Third Army, Hitler replaced Col. Gen. Johannes Blaskowitz as commander of Army Group G with the tough campaigner from the Eastern Front, General Hermann Balck. Hitler had considered Blaskowitz too passive and favored Balck, who, having many of the same characteristics as his adversary Patton, would conduct an aggressive and ruthless campaign against the Americans. Balck, as an ardent Nazi, was more than willing to carry out his Führer's directives. Instead of fleeing to the West Wall (Siegfried Line), he dug in around Metz and the Moselle and Seille Rivers. He was prepared to make the Americans pay for every yard.

Meeting at 5th Infantry Division HQ, Metz. (left to right) Lt. Gen. Thomas T. Handy, Lt. Gen. George S. Patton, Jr., Major Gen. Hiram C. Walker, Major Gen. S. Leroy Iwin, General George C. Marshall.

By the end of September, gasoline shipments to the Third Army had been reduced to a mere trickle. The October lull would be used to build up Army supplies, reassemble, regroup, and plan the imminent invasion of Germany. The XX Corps was to be used as a training unit for teaching troops how to assault fixed fortifications like the kind that faced them around the heavily fortified city of Metz.

Third Army's intelligence section had already determined that the Germans intended to make the most of the ring of forts around Metz, the ancient gateway city through which so many invading armies had passed. Metz was to be the linchpin in the Germans' defensive strategy. An army had not directly taken Metz since 1552. It had been captured after a 54-day siege during the Franco-Prussian War and had been fortified by the Germans in

World War I. However, after the Great War the string of fortresses were left in ruins.

These were all facts that the history-conscious Patton should have known. When it became apparent that the Allies were going to plunge through France, the fortresses were reoccupied and slightly renovated. They would provide security for the retreating German armies and the advance of the Allies. Metz was to be Balck's anchor for the German Line of defense that paralleled the Siegfried line to the west. It was the Germans' intention to hold this main line of resistance to buy time so defensive positions could be strengthened along the Rhine. The cold and wet weather would also keep Allied air operations to a minimum. With the Allied advance literally stopped cold, Patton decided, against his own better judgment, to test the defensive qualities of the German positions around the southern half of Metz. It became clear that any gains made along the Moselle near Metz could not be exploited without doing something about the German defensive positions in the forts.

Fort Driant, in particular, with its 150mm guns, could bring down flanking fire and was already producing casualties among XX Corps personnel as Walker's men tried to throw bridges across the Moselle. Patton decided that while it might not be able to continue an offensive posture, Third Army was not going to remain idle during the lull. Third Army would conduct a reconnaissance in force, and if anything broke open the gains would be exploited.

It became the task of Patton's XX Corps, and its commander, Maj. Gen. Walker, to take Metz and its fortification system. It was quickly ascertained that the key to Metz was Fort Driant, and on September 17 an excited Walker came up with a plan for its capture, code-named Operation Thunderbolt. This was to be a combined air and ground assault against Fort Driant.

Operation Thunderbolt called for close support from the XIX Tactical Air Command and the use of massed formations of medium bombers. The air attack would then be followed by an intense artillery barrage and a combined assault by armor and infantry. Ground attack aircraft would provide close support as needed. Walker advocated this plan to Patton partially because he did not want Eddy and the XII Corps to get all the glory with their operations outside Nancy. Operation Thunderbolt was conceived when Colonel Charles W. Yuill of the 11th Infantry Regiment in Maj. Gen. S. Leroy Irwin's 5th Division suggested that Fort Driant could be taken by storm with only a few regiments.

The key to the success of the attack on Fort Driant was to be massed attacks from the air. Patton had high hopes that the bombing would work but probably underestimated the defensive edge afforded by tons of well-placed concrete. Two events that occurred before the attack threw a shadow of doubt upon the success of the operation. The 12th Army Group placed the use of its bombers on a day to day basis and could not commit them long-term to a protracted operation, but far worse, the weather became cold and rainy. Mobility was hampered, and air support would be limited.

Patton later became disappointed with the results obtained from the use of air power. He should have seen this going into the operation because of the ineffective results of massed bombing on the German heavy defenses in Brittany. Operation Thunderbolt was slated for anytime after September 19. The 2nd Battalion, 11th Infantry was kept on alert and told that it might be called upon to go in at a moment's notice. Because of a lack of ammunition of all types, the concept of a massed attack on the fort was abandoned and air power would be parceled out to different areas of the front on a daily basis.

Named after a French officer who had died at Verdun in 1916, Fort Driant sat atop a 360-meter hill, facing southwest. Known originally as Feste Kronprinz, the French changed the name in 1918 to Groupe Fortifie Driant. With a frontage of 1,000 yards, it contained four artillery casemates and five bunkers that could each hold 300 men. The Allies had little more intelligence about the fort other than it covered all the approaches to the Moselle and probably had a small garrison of poorly supplied second-line troops.

Detailed plans of the fort were lacking during the preparations for the attack, but help was available by the end of the month. Detailed maps and plans of the fort were provided by a

PATTON CONFRONTS A NAZI

On November 22, 1944, American soldiers on the prowl for a quick drink in a wine cellar in Metz found more than they were looking for: Cowering behind a vat was a Nazi major general. Anton Dunckern, the SS commander of Lorraine, was immediately brought before General George S. Patton for interrogation.

National Archives

SS Major General Anton Dunckern is shown following his interrogation by General George S Patton, Jr. Dunckern was taken prisoner while hiding in a wine cellar.

While Patton held Germans in high regard and even understood a bit of German, he despised the Nazi and the SS and considered them all crooks and liars. Before sitting down with his prisoner, Patton told his staff: "I always wear high boots when I talk to SS bastards."

To intimidate the prisoner, Patton refused to speak German to him and even used a Jewish interpreter for the interrogation. Patton started things off by calling Dunckern a coward for being captured alive, then threatened him to talk well or he would be turned over to the French: "They know how to make people talk."

"I could not reach my weapon and fight back," Duckern pleaded.

"He is a liar!" Patton shot back. "If he wanted to be a good Nazi," Patton told the interpreter, "he could have died then and there. It would be a pleasanter death than what he will get now."

Dunckern panicked: "I was fighting against American troops and captured by them, therefore am to be considered a prisoner of war of the American forces."

"When I am dealing with vipers," Patton retorted, "I do not have to be bothered by any foolish ideas anymore than he has been."

Dunckern continued to plead for his life and defend his actions, adding: "I have nothing to be ashamed of."

Patton was not buying it: "No one who is a Nazi policeman could act in an honorable manner." He then repeated his threat of turning Dunckern over to the French, but first sending him to special investigators at 12th Army Headquarters, "They can do things I can't do."

To conclude the interrogation, Patton had a map of Metz shown to Dunckern so he could see for himself the strength of the Third Army and the losses by Germany in the last two weeks of the campaign. Then Patton ordered that the guards take him away and have his picture taken. Patton ended the session with one final word of intimidation: "Also, tell him that those bayonets on the guard's guns are very sharp."

—Kevin M. Hymel

French officer who hid them in Nancy during the 1940 German attack. The fort was surrounded by a belt of thick forest, which is where the American attack would begin. The fort itself was 700 yards deep, and each of the casemates contained a three-gun battery of 100mm or 150mm guns. Sprinkled throughout were armored observation posts and pillboxes that were all connected by a maze of underground tunnels. The entire fort was surrounded by a 60-foot dry moat with a further 60 feet covered by an interwoven mass of barbed wire. The Germans made sure that the fort was well supplied with adequate amounts of food, water, and ammunition.

The air attacks against Fort Driant began on September 15 but provided only minimal results. The XIX Tactical Air Command (TAC) scored several direct hits with 1,000-pound bombs against the fort, but inflicted little damage. The Allies brought up several heavy 240mm artillery pieces and fired on Fort Driant, but also produced little damage.

September 27, 1944, was a clear and dry day. At 2:15 PM P-47 Thunderbolt fighter-bombers dropped napalm and high explosives. Some of the fighter-bombers ran the gauntlet of the intense flak curtain thrown up by the Germans and dropped as low as 50 feet to ensure the accuracy of their hits. No appreciable damage was observed, and another wave of fighter-bombers dropped bombs into trenches and on top of the fort. Next, 155mm howitzers opened up on the fort with their massive shells. Explosions were seen directly on pillboxes and the front slope of the fort. It was literally like throwing tennis balls against a wall. None of the artillery or air bombardment had inflicted significant damage.

Next, two companies of infantry from the 11th Regiment and a company of tank destroyers moved out under a smoke screen. The force soon encountered the dry moat and the heavy concentration of barbed wire. The Germans held their fire until the Americans drew close then unleashed a storm of machine-gun fire and mortar rounds. The tank destroyers drove forward and engaged the pillboxes one on one with no effect.

Several platoons of infantry succeeded in getting through the wire and around to the west side of the fort. Here they were met with a barrage of small arms and machine-gun fire causing them to withdraw. Finally realizing that the fort was far more complex and dangerous than previously assumed, General Irwin gave Colonel Yuill permission to withdraw his force at 6:00 PM. The American attack had been stopped cold, and the Allies were forced to rethink how they would take the fort.

Patton, Irwin, and Walker met on September 28, but there was no mention of abandoning the attack—only that a new approach was necessary and the 4th Armored Division needed to rest and regroup. In fact, Walker remembered Patton saying at the time, "We have put our hands to the plow; we must finish the job. " Several of Patton's aides recommended breaking off the attack and commencing a double envelopment of Metz. The suggestion was overruled by Patton's desire to continue fighting during the lull and Walker's determination that the fort would eventually be carried. Patton was, however, beginning to have his doubts. Although his mind-set was fully locked into an offensive mode, he was having some misgivings as to the infantry's quality of training. Operations against fixed fortifications demanded an infantry specially trained for the task. There were literally no units that had received advanced training in these kinds of operations. It was not long until Walker devised a new tactic.

The next attack on the fort would feature a larger role for the combat engineers. It was scheduled for October 3, and in that time the army would receive as much training as possible in attacking fortifications. On the morning of October 3, the weather was rainy and miserable. The promised air support did not materialize, and Irwin, not wishing to wait any longer, ordered the attack to commence. The tanks moved forward and attacked the fort with high explosive, concrete-penetrating shells. The engineers went into action with satchel charges, pole charges, and bangalore torpedoes. Specially designated tanks called tank-dozers pushed forward long pipes filled with explosives known as snakes.

The attack began to unravel almost immediately. The snakes broke apart and could not be properly placed. Accurate German artillery and machine-gun fire ripped large holes in the American infantry lines. The engineers got through the entangling barbed wire and tried repeatedly to place their charges but could not blast through the concrete. Roving German patrols that popped out of the fort's tunnels mowed down many of the engineers.

Company B was able to work its way around the obstructions and create a gap for other troops to pass through. By nightfall, infantry and tank reinforcements began coming through. The attack then quickly developed into a confusing mass of small unit actions with Germans appearing from nowhere and destroying American tanks and infantry with panzerfaust antitank weapons and machine-gun fire. Company B did manage to reach its objective and had a tentative hold on its position in the southwest corner of the fort by 2 PM.

This aerial view of Fort Driant shows some of the damage inflicted in the wake of an attack by 9th Air Force P-47 Thunderbolt fighter bombers on September 28, 1944. ABOVE RIGHT: The battle-scarred bastion of Fort Driant is shown following the bitter contest to wrest its control from the Germans.

Both: National Archives

Captain Harry Anderson of Company B assisted his radioman by clearing one of the bunkers with several hand grenades. The two men entered after the explosions and, instead of finding dead Germans, they found that the enemy had escaped down one of the many interconnecting tunnels. Anderson ran back to bring more men forward in order to exploit their gains. Coming upon another bunker, Anderson tossed in more grenades that were followed by explosions. This time six stunned Germans tumbled out the blast door waving small pieces of white cloth in surrender.

The American attacks stalled briefly but were reenergized by an enlisted man. Private First Class Robert W. Holmlund climbed on top of one of the barracks, kicked off one of the ventilator shafts, and then shoved a bangalore torpedo down into the room. The thunderous explosion caused the Germans to evacuate the building quickly. Holmlund said he "could hear 'em swearing and trampling over one another trying to get out. " Holmlund was killed later that night and received a posthumous Distinguished Service Cross. All through the night, the scattered American forces took more casualties and became more disorganized.

At dawn, Irwin told Yuill to hang on and wait for reinforcements. He then sent in Company K, 2nd Infantry to hold the line and replace the 110 men lost during the first day of the attack. Throughout the day, American soldiers tried in vain to enter the fort but were stopped by machine-gun and sniper fire. Special flamethrower and engineer units were cut down before they could get near the central core of the fort.

It had long become clear to the Americans that the defenders of the fort were not the old men and boys that they had been told manned the defenses. Instead, among the defenders was a unit from a nearby officer candidate school comprised of fanatical Nazis. The rest of the garrison was made up of ex-Navy and Air Force men.

By nightfall on October 4, an attempt was made to reorganize the American troops that were badly scattered throughout the area. Again, teams of German soldiers emerged from the fort to disrupt any units that tried to regroup. Some of the fighting had moved underground, removing the American tanks from the tactical picture.

At dawn on October 5, the German-held forts that surrounded Driant all opened fire on Driant itself, catching many American units on the surface and producing more casualties. Irwin decided to send in more reinforcements. This probably was done on the advice contained in a message from Captain Jack Gerrie of the 11th Regiment. Gerrie stated, "The situation is critical—a couple more barrages and another counterattack and we are sunk. We have no men, our equipment is shot and we just can't go … enemy has infiltrated and pinned what is here down. We cannot advance … the enemy arty is butchering these tr [sic] until we have nothing left to hold with."

By the afternoon of the 5th, Companies B and G were reduced to less than 100 men. Irwin decided it was time for decisive action and formed what was called Task Force Warnock. This force was composed of the 10th Infantry Regiment minus Company A. The task force was committed on the night of October 5-6 and relieved the badly mauled troops on top of the fort. Many of the wounded were evacuated since the German fire had decreased in intensity.

By October 6, Patton's enthusiasm for the operation was beginning to wane. He said, "Things are going very badly at Fort Driant; we may have to abandon the attack since it is not worth the cost. " Still, he balked at the idea of canceling the attack since he did not want to lose any perceived momentum in the area. The First Battlion of the 10th Infantry was committed at 10 AM hours on October 7. One of the rifle companies was able to take four pillboxes but was unable to hold its position. A German counterattack at 4:15 PM cut the men off, and the survivors withdrew. A single platoon made it into an underground tunnel with a long and narrow passage. Engineers were brought forward to blow open a large iron door. Having accomplished this, the exhausted soldiers found that the Germans had piled old machinery and other wreckage in their path.

Orders were sent back to bring up cutting torches, and these were delivered the next morning. Cutting through the debris and pushing it aside, the men moved forward to find yet another door. Hearing the sounds of digging nearby, the Americans feared that the Germans were undermining the tunnel in order to collapse it on them.

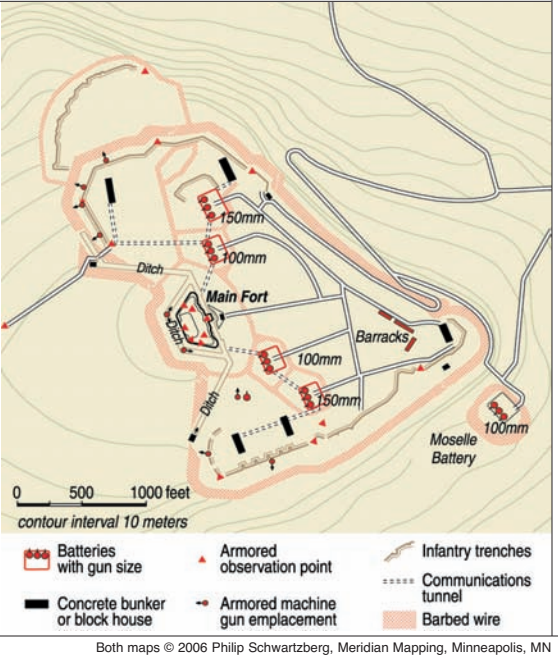
A large 60-pound charge was quickly placed at the far end of the tunnel to discourage the German effort. The explosion's only result was to release deadly fumes into the room and cause the soldiers to scurry for their gas masks.

The men could hear the approaching Germans and could do little more than pile up some sandbags and wait. Sergeant Dale H. Klakamp of the 7th Engineer Battalion, 5th Infantry Division was later awarded the Distinguished Service Cross for his heroic actions in the tunnel. While his comrades were in a panicked confusion, Klakamp started erecting the sandbags that would save many of his fellow soldiers, lives.

The Germans soon arrived and peppered the men with machine-gun and small arms fire. Engineers on the German side were passed to the front with satchel charges of their own. One of these charges went off

Continued on page 77

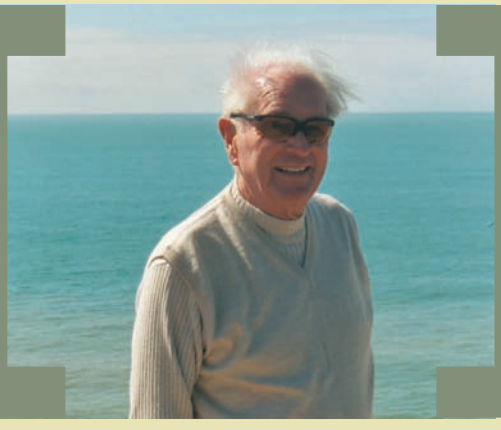
After retreating German troops took a stand in the defense of Metz, U.S. units under the command of General George S. Patton, Jr., found themselves with a near impregnable obstacle in Fort Driant. This detailed map (below left) of the fort's defenses offers some idea of the difficulty in capturing it.



TERRIBLE TIDE AT TARAWA

AN OTHERWISE OBSCURE ATOLL IN THE GILBERT ISLANDS PROVIDED A BAPTISM OF FIRE FOR NAVY CORPSMAN STAN BOWEN.

BY JOHN WUKOVITS



STAN BOWEN SPENT THE ENTIRE WAR IN THE U.S. Navy as a pharmacist's mate, first in the operation at Tarawa, then Saipan and Tinian. His duties thus placed him in the thick of some of the Pacific's worst combat, yet instead of fighting the Japanese, he braved bullets and bombs to tend to the wounded and dying.

Following the war, Bowen became a successful insurance executive before retiring. From his home in Laguna Beach, Calif., Bowen took time from his thrice-weekly golf matches to reminisce about his time in the Pacific, especially during the brutal three-day slugfest at Tarawa, with author, John Wukovits. Some of the following material is included in Wukovits's forthcoming book, *One Square Mile of Hell: The Battle for Tarawa,* which New American Library is publishing this summer.

WWII: Where and when were you born?

Stan Bowen: I was born January 30, 1923, in Los Angeles.

Marine corpsmen tend to the wounded on the bloody beach at Tarawa. During a brief but savage struggle, U.S. forces captured the Japanese bastion in the Gilbert Islands, and bitter lessons learned at Tarawa were employed during future amphibious operations in the Pacific.
OPPOSITE PAGE: Stan Bowen

U.S. Navy

WWII: Tell us little about your childhood, your family.

SB: Dad, who worked for the Bank of America, bought this house in Beverly Hills, a fairly small house. Beverly Hills was a super place to grow up. It was a real nice town with one high school, and all the kids from wealthy families and the normal, moderate-income families got along fine. Some kids were driven to school in limousines with chauffeurs; some of us rode our bikes up to school.

WWII: You had a very close-knit family growing up?

SB: We did. We went to church my whole life, a Lutheran church.

WWII: You went to the Beverly Hills High that was on television?

SB: Yeah. We never called it that (Beverly Hills 90210). I did learn one thing—that I would never go into the entertainment business. An example. A few years ago we were at a wedding with one of my coaches from high school. He said, "You know, you were the lucky ones. When you finished working out you went on home to a family and had dinner. The rich kids would drive us nuts because they'd be hanging around the gym until all hours until we kicked them out. They didn't have a family to go home to." I hadn't thought about that.

WWII: Were there any sons and daughters of celebrities at Beverly Hills High?

SB: Yeah, a few, but there was no impact. They were just one of the kids. A gal named Rhonda Fleming, a gorgeous gal. Betty White, Jackie Cooper, Bobby Breen, June Haver, Andre Previn, Blake Edwards were all there. The stepdaughter of Jack Warner, Joey Paige, was there. She would invite us occasionally to her house, because she was lonely. We had to go way up a big hill, go up through a nine-hole golf course. They had a theater, a bowling room, a pool room, and when you wanted to eat, guys would come out with towels over their arms. You could have steak or turkey or chicken, whatever you wanted. We went up half a dozen times.

WWII: During those years, did world events hit you at all? Did you think much about the coming war?

SB: We knew there was a war going on [in Europe], but it didn't affect us too much. When Pearl Harbor hit, I didn't know where it was. That's how important world events were. The war started when I was at San Jose State on a track scholarship. In those days, San Jose was a real big athletic school.

WWII: What do you recall about Pearl Harbor?

SB: We woke up on Sunday morning at San Jose and the radio was on and said Pearl Harbor was bombed. Honest to God, we didn't know where Pearl Harbor was. The country got organized pretty rapidly, and we knew we'd have to go in. We didn't want to be drafted, so my brother and [friend] Larry Kavich and I enlisted. My buddy and I, when we went to enlist, the recruiting clerk said, "You two guys must have had some first aid in school." We did, but not much. He said he could get us a hospital apprentice first class rating, you'll get to wear three stripes on your sleeves, you'll get $5 more a month, and if you don't like the medical corps you can just transfer to gunnery school or whatever you want. We thought how could we go wrong, so we signed up for it and I was a corpsman. We took it and went to boot camp.

When I got out of boot camp, they sent me to the hospital. The head nurse of the ward they put me on was a good gal. She was a lieutenant commander. She and I became close friends, and she put me in charge of wheeling the cart to pick up the food from the galley back to the ward, so that's what I did.

Carrying a squad of riflemen from E Company, 8th Marines, LVT-45 makes its run toward the beach on the islet of Betio at Tarawa atoll.

National Archives

WWII: How did you land in the Marines?

SB: I volunteered for the Marine Corps because of one night when I was on watch in the ward. Guys would get liberty when they were able to, and one night this guy came back, he was a Marine corporal, and it was about midnight. He turned the lights on and woke everyone. I went over and turned them off, and he went over and turned them right back on again. I said, "Knock it off! You're waking everybody up." He said, "The heck with you!" so we got into a big fight. I had taken boxing in high school and college and had been in my share of fights, and I just beat the—out of him. The next day my nurse friend said, "Stan, this guy is dating a Navy nurse here and she is really ticked. You broke his nose, and if I were you I'd get out of here before you're court-martialed. You're going to the brig, there's no doubt about it. You don't fight with patients." So I went down to the headquarters and said, "I want the first draft out of this outfit." They said they had the Marine Corps and I took it.

WWII: What about hearing news of all the early losses suffered in the Pacific?

SB: I don't recall if it was an impression on us. All of us looked forward to going into service. It was an adventure. We were serving the country. We thought we would take care of the Japanese with no problem.

WWII: Tell us about training.

SB: The training wasn't really that rough. The food was terrible. About half the guys were from Southern California and half from Texas and Oklahoma, and every time we came in they had that cowboy music on. We'd turn it off and put Benny Goodman on. We didn't get along with these guys at all. In fact, I got into a fight with one of them one day.

We were at Camp Elliott for two to three months. I liked Camp Elliott. A lot of hiking and marching and shooting, physical activity. The food was a lot better. We had gas mask training. We never had to use the gas masks in the Pacific. I used it to carry extra bandages and stuff.

WWII: How did you get to the Pacific?

SB: They took us by train to San Francisco. We stopped in Los Angeles and my parents came to see me off. Then we went to Treasure Island and were there for a few weeks. In the meantime, my brother had gotten out of boot camp as a gunner's mate on a ship. He happened to be in San Francisco and we got together. Then we didn't see each other until the end of the war.

They took us and put us on a boat and we went right back to San Diego. We got on this God-awful boat, I think the *Western Star*, that Admiral Byrd had gone to the South Pole on.

The bunks were four to five deep and only about one and a half feet above your head. The food wasn't any good.

WWII: Did you know where you were going?

SB: No. We knew we were going to the South Pacific. A dirigible followed us out for about 45 minutes watching for submarines. We went straight to New Caledonia. We didn't stop in Hawaii. This was about June 1943.

WWII: Had you been following news of the war a little more closely now?

SB: I must have, but I don't recall. We were all still eager to get into combat. New Caledonia was a beautiful island. It was a great place. I woke up one morning and the 2nd Raider Battalion had pulled in. They all had beards and Ka-Bar knives on their belts. One of them was a guy from Beverly High. They'd been, I guess, on the 'Canal. One night we get up and they're all gone, to the U.S. to help form up new divisions.

I went on a boat with the 2nd Division and we headed to New Zealand. This boat was an old Dutch ship, and we hit a big storm where the waves broke over the whole ship. It was creaking like it wasn't going to make it. We stopped at Pitcairn Island. The natives came out and half were light-skinned, descendants of Fletcher Christian and his guys. We got to New Zealand, and I was sent down to Paekakariki [a New Zealand town north of Wellington] and was assigned to the outfit I served with all the time. I was in F Company, 2nd Battalion, 8th Marines. We got to Paekakariki. It was strictly everyday hiking, shooting, and preparing for Tarawa.

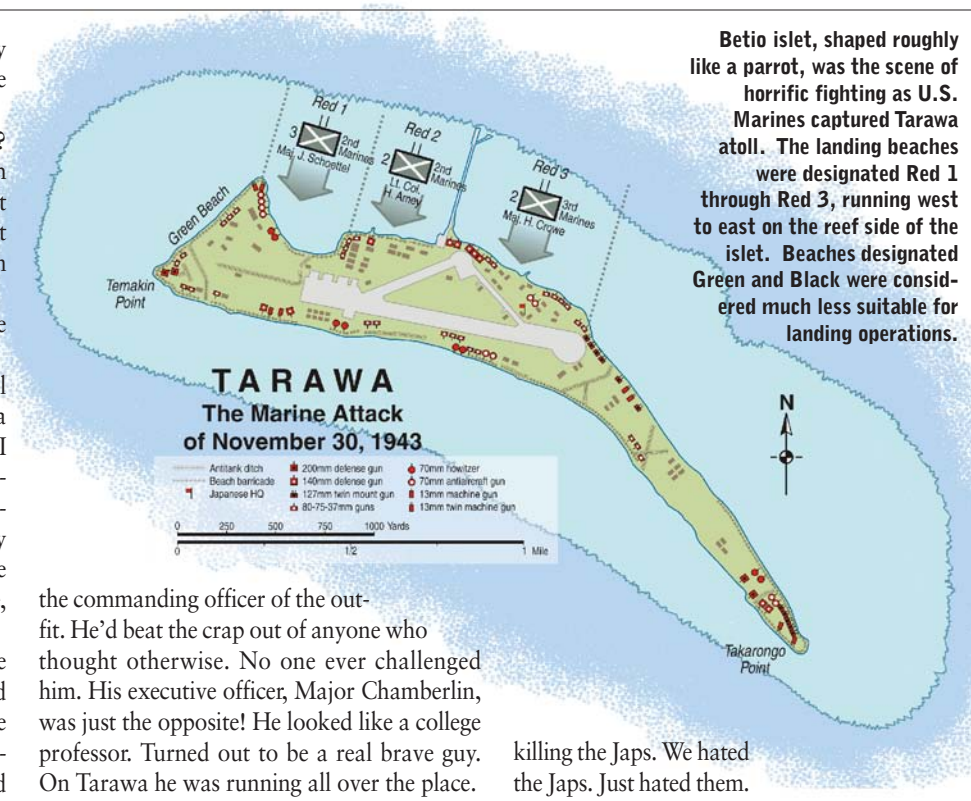
WWII: Did they train you every day, and then give you a day off each week?

SB: As I recall, we had Saturdays and Sundays off. We'd go into Wellington on the weekends, and we had to be off the streets by midnight. If you didn't make that last train back to camp near the small town of Paekakariki, you were in big trouble.

WWII: Why was New Zealand so enjoyable?

SB: The people were real nice. Fortunately, the men were all in North Africa, so it was a free—we didn't have any competition so to speak. I was too young to get serious, but a lot of guys got married. We'd go downtown to a bar and have a few drinks. The only date I had was to take a girl to a movie. I mainly headed to the pubs, and women weren't allowed in the bars.

We had three to four days of maneuvers in Foxton. It was 55 miles from camp, and our major, Major Henry Crowe, a real tough Marine, got us assault landings on every operation we were on. When we joined the outfit, we had a meeting to introduce the new officers. He invited any enlisted man or officer out into the woods where he'd teach him that he was the commanding officer of the outfit. He'd beat the crap out of anyone who thought otherwise. No one ever challenged him. His executive officer, Major Chamberlin, was just the opposite! He looked like a college professor. Turned out to be a real brave guy. On Tarawa he was running all over the place.



Betio islet, shaped roughly like a parrot, was the scene of horrific fighting as U.S. Marines captured Tarawa atoll. The landing beaches were designated Red 1 through Red 3, running west to east on the reef side of the islet. Beaches designated Green and Black were considered much less suitable for landing operations.

WWII: What was the transport like from New Zealand?

SB: We went down to the docks and were tied up there for a couple of days. We had landing maneuvers in the New Hebrides. The beautiful, white sandy beach. We hit the beach in Higgins boats [landing craft needing at least three feet of water over the reef], and the natives would bring us coconuts. We were there about two days. On the ships we were jammed with guys. You couldn't walk around hardly. Food was terrible. We had to wait in line. The quarters were real tight, bunks about four high and real close. The one above you would be right on top of you. No privacy. We had meetings about what was going to happen and where we were going. They told us that Tarawa was a tiny little place and it would be a walk in the park. It would be bombarded for a couple of days. So we didn't expect it to be much. I was very anxious to get going. All of us wanted to kill Japs. Our company officer, Captain Barrett, told us he thought it would be an easy thing.

WWII: When you left New Zealand, did you know you were leaving for this mission and not returning?

SB: No. We didn't really know.

WWII: When they told you it was Tarawa, what was your reaction?

SB: I had never heard of it. Up until they told us on the ship, we knew nothing of it. They had maps, paper maps laid down on the table, relief maps. Little raised portions of it to show the terrain. At Tarawa, I couldn't wait to start killing the Japs. We hated the Japs. Just hated them. The guys from the 'Canal told us what they were like. We hated them.

WWII: Before the war did you have these bitter feelings toward the Japanese?

SB: No. We had a Japanese family in Beverly, nice guy. A friend of mine at San Jose State was Japanese. He was interned. I didn't have any feelings before, but when I was in the service I sure did. The atrocities was what did it.

WWII: How did the other men react to learning their destination?

SB: I have no recollection of anyone who was afraid. Everyone was anxious to get into action. Except the guys who had been on the 'Canal. They never said much, but they weren't excited like the rest of the kids were, and we were just kids then, 17-19. I was 20, a little bit older than the average Marine. The veterans were calm, and the rest were excited to get going.

WWII: On the transports before the battle, you were eager to get ashore?

SB: Absolutely.

WWII: What happened during the night before?

SB: I think I slept. I wasn't worried at all. I honest to God didn't think the Japs would be shooting back at us. We were really stupid. Howard Brisbane [another corpsman] was afraid and said he didn't think he was going to make it, but I said baloney. This was a day or so before we landed. He did get killed at Tarawa. I found him after the battle. He was in the first wave. I found him on the beach. He never got even 30 yards. He had been machine gunned.

He was all bloated up. He had little pointed ears, and he had a high school graduation ring so I recognized him. All those bodies lying there, bloated in the hot sun. Plus the bodies that floated in the water. The place was really a mess. The smell was horrible. I never ran into anything like that, even on Saipan, Tinian, or Okinawa.

WWII: Did you have any breakfast?

SB: I think we did. Then we went over the ship into the amtrac [amphibious tractor]. That was really spooky because you're loaded down with your pack and your rifle, first aid kit in my case, and the ship is swaying back and forth and the amtrac is rocking. I don't recall anyone falling into the water.

WWII: What gear did you have?

SB: The medical kit, the pack that had socks and blanket and stuff, your ammunition belt, a carbine, Ka-Bar knife, helmet. People don't think that corpsmen carried arms, but we did. I'm not sure if they did on Guadalcanal, and I don't think they did in Europe, but we did. They learned on Guadalcanal the Japs would pick off anyone with an insignia, like an officer or a corpsman with a Red Cross. Nobody wore any insignia. I didn't wear an insignia. Our men knew who we were.

WWII: Did you have any last words to friends?

SB: No. I was concerned about Howard because he was really worried. Other than that, I was just looking forward to it. I was young and dumb.

I knew we would make it over the reef because I was in an amtrac, but the guys in the Higgins boats, I don't know if they knew or not. We were on the beach, and it was terrible. We could see them [guys from Higgins boats] coming in and getting hit and there was not a damn thing we could do.

WWII: Did you feel confident before heading into Tarawa?

SB: It got to the point when we were actually going into battle, I couldn't wait to get in, because we were going to kill Japs right and left, and I never even pictured that they'd be firing back at us. I had a feeling that we were just going in and shooting these damn Japs. I couldn't believe it when we were landing, they were firing back at us. That startled me!

WWII: Did you have to wait in the landing craft for three to four hours?

SB: I think we did. I think we had about 15 guys in the amtrac, all in my platoon of F Company. Going in there was the pier off to the right of us, and an old ship that we got fire from. They bombed it with airplanes. That's the first feeling of surprise they were firing at us. We had an amtrac next to us get a direct hit, and I couldn't believe it. It blew it out of the water and killed everybody on it and arms and legs were flying through the air and I thought, "My God! They're shooting at us!" That's the first time I realized we were in for big trouble. We were on the reef when this happened. Then we had to go the rest of the way through all this. We were told to keep our heads down, but we didn't. You could see the 14-inch shells going through the air.

WWII: When you were coming toward shore, what was the bombardment like?

SB: It was like a movie. Unbelievable. The 14-inch shells going through the air and hitting, and the dive-bombers hitting. We didn't think anybody could live through that. My platoon was the extreme left flank of Beach Red 3, which meant we were the extreme left of the whole operation, and right in front of us was the big Jap command post. It had walls about three feet thick, and those 14-inch shells hit and bounced off. Unbelievable! The soldiers were Imperial Marines, and that's why they were so damn big.

When we hit the beach, we all jumped over the side, and I had all this gear. Here in front of us was a Jap, he must have been 6'2", stripped to the waist, swinging this saber, and guys jumping out of their amtracs. He was like 20 feet away or closer. I couldn't believe it. Of course, he got shot right away. They were supposed to be small.

WWII: When you jumped over the side, was that tough to do?

SB: It really was. I knew this was critical, to jump with all the stuff I had. I could get hurt. The first thing I did was to move up right away to the beach, because they told us to move across the island right away. So noisy! Firing going on, hand grenades going off, airplanes strafing.

WWII: What about your first casualty?

SB: The first guy I took care of was a shocker. A friend had told me the first guy will probably be your worst, and he was right. I had worse later, but this was a shocker. Johnny Snyder and I decided we would pair up and work as a team if we found each other on the beach. The first guy was from my platoon. He was laying [sic] on his stomach but his toes were pointing skyward. We thought he had a broken leg, and we tried to pull him over, and I lifted up and my hand came through his pants. His leg was blown off. I had blood and tendons and bone and I couldn't believe my eyes. I asked Joe if it hurt, and he said no it was numb. We applied a tourniquet to the stump, then tried to administer morphine. I stuck one in his leg but couldn't squeeze out the morphine. I didn't know how to use the syringe. I was unprepared for this.

WWII: Did that first casualty affect you in any way?

SB: It really did. I'd never seen anything like that in my life. But from then on, nothing bothered me. I didn't get sick. The gut injuries were the worst, but they never bothered me. Some guys cannot stand the sight of blood, but it never bothered me.

WWII: Were you conscious of bullets hitting around you or of any noise?

SB: Oh God, the noise was unreal! Hand grenades, Navy planes dive-bombing and strafing would come down real low. There we were trying to take care of guys. You had to shout to communicate most of the time. There was nowhere to hide, really. When I hit the beach

Using a field telephone, Marine Major Jim Crowe shelters behind LVT-23 and directs tactical movements against Japanese positions at Tarawa.

National Archives

I saw these little humps in the sand about every 15 to 20 feet. They were little two-man pillboxes with machine guns, and they were the ones shooting at all the guys wading in.

WWII: You mentioned you ran around from casualty to casualty. That had to be right in the open.

SB: Right. You don't think about the danger. I never thought I was going to get hit, and I didn't. That first day, in the morning, I ran out to this damaged amtrac in the water about 30 yards out. Some guy had called, "Hey, Doc! There's a guy hurt in the amtrac." I ran out and there were four Marines hiding behind the amtrac, and they were all wounded. They said there's a guy in the amtrac who needed help, so I jumped in the amtrac. There was a corporal from our company, and he had hung on the amtrac when it got shot so bad. He hung on the machine gun and kept firing and took a hit right in the chest. He had a hole right through him. You could practically see through him. He wanted me to stick with him, but I told him I couldn't. There was too much going on. He died there in the amtrac.

I pulled two of these guys from behind the amtrac. I told them to dump everything and put their arms around my shoulders and we'll head for the beach. As soon as I said, "Go!" we ran in toward the beach. Going in one of them got hit again. Then I ran back out to get the other two, which I did, and then took care of them on the beach. All these Marines were saying, "Good boy, Doc." I was really gung ho on that damn Tarawa. I could have been hit. I remember distinctly thinking as I ran out to that thing that the little plunks of water jumping up were the Japs zeroing in, and I zig-zagged and ran up as fast as I could.

I got the commendation for doing that. The doctor on the ship later called me in and asked, "Did you run out to an amtrac and pick up some guys?" I said yeah. He said, "I heard about that, so I'm putting you in for a Silver Star." That dumbfounded me because I figured I was getting in there to get bawled out for something. I got a commendation.

With a bottle of blood plasma positioned on the butt of an upended rifle, a Marine receives a life-saving blood transfusion on the beach at Tarawa.

National Archives

WWII: When you went out to get those Marines, you didn't think of the dangers?

SB: No. I just did it. You don't think in a situation like that. You just do it. I knew damn well they were shooting at me.

WWII: Were the men you were treating quiet as you treated them, or were they screaming, or what?

SB: There was no panic that I recall. The only fellow I can remember in panic was on Tinian. He was yelling for his mother.

WWII: Did any of the Marines you tended say anything to you?

SB: They'd say thank you. "Thanks Doc." Some got back up and resumed fighting. Most of them did. I was patching guys up all over.

WWII: Did you at any time think you were going to die?

SB: No. Never gave it a thought. I think for a guy to have that feeling would be a dangerous thing. If you're afraid, you can't do what you've gotta do.

WWII: Was the island always smoke-filled and dusty?

SB: Yep, it was. The shells produced a lot of smoke, and the noise was unreal, and it was constant from shooting and hand grenades and all. My ears always have rung since then.

WWII: Did anyone freeze with fear?

SB: Not that I saw. One guy had battle fatigue or whatever you call it, shaking and crying and throwing up. I guess he was just a wreck. After the battle they sent him back to the rear. Some people can't handle the noise and the shooting and the fear. There must have been others.

We had one guy from our outfit, from Los Angeles. When we hit the beach on Tarawa he fell apart. He couldn't do anything. He was the only one I knew who couldn't. He later begged the doctor to let him have another chance, and he did the same thing at Saipan. Nobody felt anything adverse against him. We just realized that some guys just can't do it.

WWII: Corpsmen don't get a lot of play in books about combat.

A STRATEGICALLY VITAL AIRSTRIP ON THE ISLET OF BETIO

War seems out of place on the serene, idyllic isles that populate the Gilberts and the other atolls of the Central Pacific. Yet, that is precisely where one of the most savage clashes of the Pacific War unfolded.

The Gilbert Islands consist of 16 atolls straddling the equator 2,100 miles southwest of Hawaii and 2,900 miles southeast of Tokyo. One, Tarawa Atoll, contains 38 islands forming a reverse "L" along two arms 80 miles north of the equator. A surrounding coral reef opens into an imposing lagoon teeming with tropical sea life.

Betio, the most important island of Tarawa Atoll, anchors the southwest corner. Two miles long and 700 yards at its widest—less than half the size of New York City's Central Park—the flat isle contains no point higher than 10 feet above sea level. The small plot of sand contained one item of importance to both the United States and Japan—its airfield.

Without the 1,500-yard-long airfield on Betio, the war would have passed by Tarawa Atoll. Once the Japanese constructed it, the Americans could no longer ignore its strategic value, for in the vast reaches of the Central Pacific, which holds few spots capable of housing an air squadron, a single airstrip on a solitary island controls thousands of square miles of water. □

SB: I'll tell you, in the Marine Corps, the Marines that were in our combat outfits, they really liked the corpsmen. We were buddies. I've discovered since that a lot of Marines who weren't in combat, they don't have respect at all. They say you're not a Marine. But every hike they went on, we went on. We lived right with them. We shot on the rifle range with them. We were just part of the group. Then once the fighting began, our job was to take care of them, and they took care of us.

WWII: Did you shoot your weapon?

SB: I did. I got a guy. I walked back to the aid station, about 200 yards down the beach, to get more supplies. I was sitting down talking to a friend of mine, and I was leaned up against the coconut wall. All of a sudden he gets hit right in the middle of his eyes. He gets this surprised look on his face, and he falls over dead. I couldn't believe it. I wheeled around and up in the tree I thought I saw something. I fired up into this coconut tree and a rifle fell out, so I'm pretty sure that was my first Jap. The tree was about 20 yards away. There's others, but my job wasn't to kill Japs.

Major Crowe just reamed me out. "If you want to kill someone, get over the log fence! You're drawing attention here!"

WWII: Did you fire your rifle after that?

SB: We couldn't move forward, so we went back to the sea wall and kept throwing hand grenades back and forth. I threw them and fired my weapon whenever I had a lull from treating guys. As far as treating, all we could do was sprinkle the sulfa powder and bandage it up somehow, and use a morphine syrette if he was really bad. That first guy was in 30 to 50 yards at most when I treated him. That first day we hung by the beach by the sea wall. We couldn't move. We saw all these guys wading in and getting slaughtered, and we knew we were in trouble.

WWII: What about that first night?

SB: All night we carried guys out to the pier and carried water and ammunition back. It was so damn hot everybody needed water. I still carried my rifle.

WWII: That first night, did you expect a big counterattack?

SB: We did. For some reason they didn't, and that's when they blew it because they had us. I got no rest that first night. We had so many wounded guys and we had to get them off. We had K and C rations, and we must have eaten, but I don't recall doing it.

WWII: Did the actions of any other men surprise you?

SB: Yeah, they did. Guys were doing things. I recall two guys who jumped on hand grenades to save others. They probably saved maybe one guy, their buddy, and they got nothing, no medal, for that.

What really impressed me was the strength of the Marines. They didn't give up. They hung in there. It made me feel more a Marine than a Navy guy. I still feel pride in the Marine Corps and consider myself a Marine and always will.

WWII: In those final days, does anything stand out?

SB: When I ran out to get those guys in the amtrac. When we started moving in on the third day, my buddy John Snyder got hit near the command post. I recall guys going in that command post with flamethrowers. Then, when we moved down toward the end of the island when it was over, I started thinking of Howard Brisbane, so I went looking for him. He had landed not too far from where I landed. That's the most vivid part.

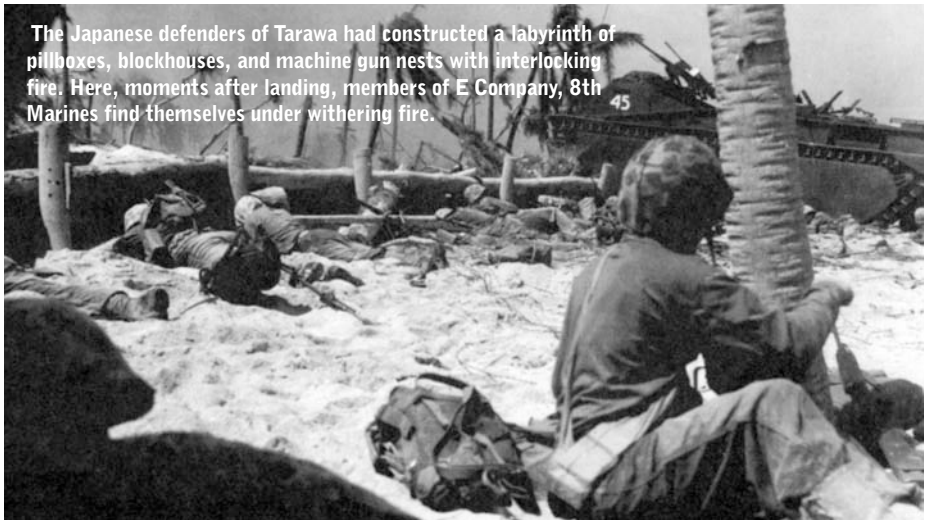
WWII: Out of a 24-hour segment, how many hours would you be tending the wounded?

SB: We were awake all day long, and two nights we spent carrying wounded out at the pier. It was so damn hot! Sunburn was a major problem. My lower lip was just split from being burned. I suppose it was bleeding, too. A lot of guys were sunburned, and you're so dirty from dust and dirt and grime, it acted like sunscreen I guess.

WWII: Do all the days blend together, or can you separate them into the three days?

SB: It kind of blends together. The first day is very vivid, much more so than the second and third day. We were pretty much stuck on the left flank. Each day I'd work my way down to the battalion aid station about 200 yards away on the beach. Funny how in a battle like that, nobody knows what's going on on the other end.

Tarawa was my first battle, and most vivid. It was the worst because it was concentrated into three days instead of a month or so. We could never let our guard down. We had so little sleep. You're so tired all the time. God we were exhausted! We were under fire.



The Japanese defenders of Tarawa had constructed a labyrinth of pillboxes, blockhouses, and machine gun nests with interlocking fire. Here, moments after landing, members of E Company, 8th Marines find themselves under withering fire. 45

Japanese corpses sprawl in the Pacific sun after their position was destroyed by attacking Marines. The Japanese paid a heavy price in the futile defense of Tarawa.

Both: National Archives

WWII: When did you first start to believe you were going to win?

SB: The last day, when we finally went over the sea wall. We knew we couldn't move on our beach, and we didn't know what was going on elsewhere. When the 6th Marines started moving forward, we started moving up.

WWII: How about leaving?

SB: I don't recall seeing them raise the flag, or the plane landing on the airstrip. They must have gotten us off pretty quick. They took us, I guess, on amtracs, to the next island. We stayed a day or two there and cleaned up ourselves and uniforms, by going swimming. We didn't have any soap. Then we went to Hawaii.

WWII: You mentioned you were never hit in combat. Were you ever injured?

SB: I did get hit in Hawaii. After Tarawa. They landed us and there was no camp, no nothing, just a blanket and a toothbrush. You'd think they'd have something waiting for us.

I was in a tent with four or five other corpsmen and was reading a letter from my brother at a little table we had built, and all of a sudden there was an explosion that knocked me back. I felt my knee hit underneath the table, and I didn't think anything about it. We ran out, and here these guys across the street from us were pouring out of their tent. Turned out a corporal who had been on the 'Canal had picked up a 37mm dud, put it in his pack, brought it back, got into his tent, threw his pack off, and hit it on a case of Coke—everybody was addicted to Coke—and it exploded. It broke his leg, but it blew the feet off two to three other kids who had just come over from the States. These guys were running out and there was blood all over the place, so we grabbed our first aid kits and took care of them. A guy yelled at me to check a guy in the tent next to it, and he'd been hit in the jugular vein and he was dead. He had been the best friend of this corporal.

We got back in the tent, and one of my buddies said, "My God, look at your leg, Stan!" I looked down and my leg was covered in blood, and there was a hole in the tent where a piece of shrapnel had hit a 2 by 4, then hit the bottom of the table, went down through the deck, and then hit just below my knee joint. When the doctor looked at it, he said he had to send me over to the hospital, and he said, "Now, they're gonna want to cut you open. Don't let 'em do it. I predict the shrapnel won't bother you." He was right. The shrapnel bothered me for a year or so, and that's it. It's still in me.

WWII: Did you have nightmares?

SB: Marge [his wife] says for a long time I was moaning and groaning in my sleep, but I don't recall. I'm a more easy going type of guy, so serious things don't seem to bother me. I had a smooth transition. I got married, and I started school and got right back in the swing of things.

WWII: Did you have any health problems because of Tarawa?

SB: Not really. I got some shrapnel in my legs from Hawaii, and some dengue fever. Thank God I never got malaria. The shrapnel in my leg, between you and me, is a piece of cake. It's nothing.

WWII: Have you men been forgotten by the country?

SB: I think we were for years and years, but recently the people have rediscovered guys from World War II, Vietnam, and Korea.

WWII: Why should people remember Tarawa?

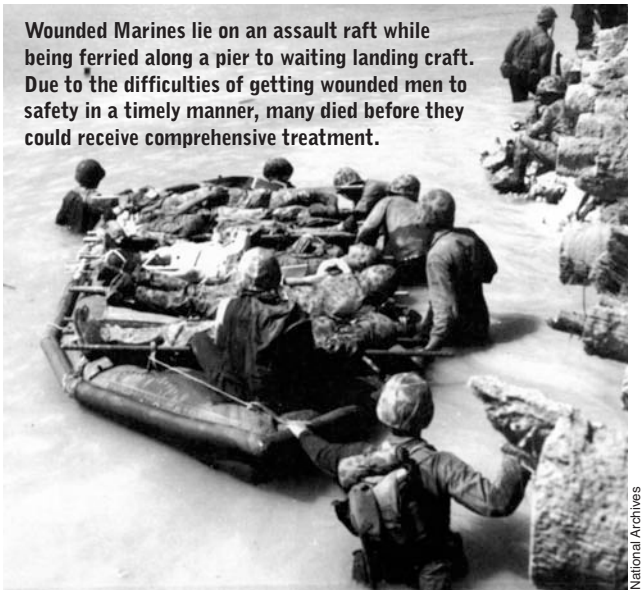
SB: The determination of the young guys, kids. They never gave up. Only one, a corpsman, had battle fatigue.

WWII: Do you consider yourself a hero?

SB: No!

WWII: Why not?

SB: I did what anybody else would do. They're doing it today in Iraq. Any of my friends would have done what I did. The only outstanding thing I did was going out and getting those Marines, and I knew that was dangerous. But that was my job to do. I was a corpsman. If a guy's hurt, you've got to go get him. That was your job. □



Wounded Marines lie on an assault raft while being ferried along a pier to waiting landing craft. Due to the difficulties of getting wounded men to safety in a timely manner, many died before they could receive comprehensive treatment.

National Archives

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ASSESSING JAPANESE STRENGTH AND TROOP DISPOSITIONS, MARINE PLANNERS CHOSE THE BEACHES OF BETIO'S LAGOON.

Colonel Merritt A. Edson, the 2nd Marine Division's chief of staff, and Colonel David M. Shoup designed a simple plan to seize Betio—land along its northern beaches, drive straight across the narrow island, and kill the defenders. They selected the northern (lagoon) side rather than the southern (ocean) side beaches as the sites for the landings because even though the southern beaches offered better landing conditions—relatively straight beaches with few places for the Japanese to mount crossfire—the Japanese had placed their sturdiest defenses along that stretch of sand.

Shoup and Edson figured that the lagoon side would be calmer than the ocean side, which absorbed the harsher ocean currents, and they assumed that the Japanese would delay completing the lagoon defenses until all else was finished, as they needed to use the long pier stretching from the northern beaches to the reef to bring in supplies.

The landing zone contained three adjoining 500-yard sectors stretching from the extreme west end of the island to just beyond the pier in the middle, Beaches Red 1, Red 2, and Red 3, Bowen's beach.

The straightforward plan contained drawbacks. The Marines had to attack superbly trained soldiers waiting in camouflaged, reinforced bunkers. The tiny island, unlike the larger Guadalcanal, offered little room for maneuver.

That left one tactic at their disposal—simple and brutal. They had to take Betio in the toughest of ways, yard by yard, absorbing potentially horrifying losses until every pillbox, every bunker, every Japanese, had been eliminated. On Betio, brute force and savage fighting overshadowed finesse. This would be a bloody slugfest of heavyweights standing in the middle of the ring, not two fast-moving foes landing quick jabs. □

COMMAND OF THE AIR

BY GERALD ASTOR

BEHIND THE STRATEGY THAT governed the American air war in Europe during World War II lay events and ideas that dated back to World War I and the 1920s. The first strategic bombing raid in 1915 deployed not airplanes but German Zeppelins, rigid airships that dumped ordnance on the east coast of Great Britain. Two years later Germany's Gotha bomber, a machine capable of a round trip from Belgian bases, struck at Folkestone, a port through which British soldiers embarked for the front. This raid killed 300 people, including 115 soldiers. The bomber had proven itself as a weapon against a military target.

A few weeks later, 14 Gothas attacked London in the first fixed-wing assault upon civilians and their institutions. The dead and wounded totaled 600, and the raid wrought consternation among the public and the government. The British hastily summoned fighter units to gird the cities. To counter the defensive cordon, the Gothas flew night missions. With primitive navigational tools and no bombsights, the raiders drizzled explosives without any pretense of hitting military or industrial targets. Theoreticians of war now had a new factor to enter into equations: the terror of massive strikes upon workers producing the stuff of war.

Brigadeer General Billy Mitchell, who had only earned his wings in 1916, commanded the air force for General John J. Pershing and his

Boeing B-17 Flying Fortresses of the Eighth Air Force head toward a target inside Germany. Along with the Consolidated B-24 Liberator, the Flying Fortress was a workhorse of the U.S. daylight bombing effort against Nazi-occupied Europe.

American Expeditionary Force in France. Mitchell met Maj. Gen. Hugh M. Trenchard, commander of the Royal Flying Corps, who quickly persuaded the American that the "airplane is an offensive and not a defensive weapon." Mitchell grasped the possibilities of taking the war behind the lines and plotted a huge raid that would blast German military and industrial targets in the autumn of 1918. A correspondent for the Associated Press wrote, "His navy of the air is to be expanded until no part of Germany is safe from the rain of bombs.... The work of the independent force is bombing munitions works, factories, cities and other important centers behind the German lines.... Eventually Berlin will know what an air raid means, and the whole great project is a direct answer to the German air attacks on helpless and unfortified British, French and Belgian cities."

World War I ended before Mitchell could demonstrate what his "navy of the air" might achieve, but he continued to expound his ideas. While accepting the need for control of the skies through destruction of the enemy air forces, he said, "It may be ... the best strategy to damage and destroy property, and to kill and disable an enemy's forces and resources at points far removed from the field of battle of either armies or navies." Implicitly, Mitchell accepted war on civilians.

In 1921 and 1923, Mitchell demonstrated that bombers could sink some anchored warships. The experiments confirmed that aircraft could destroy substantial stationary targets, but admirals scoffed that vessels under way could easily avoid the attacks. The Army dismissed the show as irrelevant for its vision of warfare, which was to slugg it out with hostiles while capturing territory.

While Mitchell and Trenchard promulgated their ideas of aerial offensives, a contemporary Italian, General Giulio Douhet, preached that modern war involved the entire society, including "the soldier carrying his rifle, the woman loading shells in a factory, the farmer growing his wheat, the scientists experimenting in the laboratory." Douhet spoke not only of smashing wartime production but argued, "How could a country go on living and working, oppressed by the nightmare of imminent destruction." He conceded that such a war without mercy eliminated considerations of morality.

Americans partially bought into the Douhet's theories. They buried the idea of indiscriminate raids that slaughtered nonmilitary people and emphasized hitting industrial production, transportation facilities, and military centers. Promoters of strategic bombing hypothesized that by destroying the goods of war and the will of the people to resist, conflicts could be shortened and the wholesale carnage of the World War I battlefield avoided.

Mitchell's outspoken demands for an independent air force ended his career, but acolytes like Henry "Hap" Arnold, Carl Spaatz, and Ira Eaker retained positions in the military hierarchy. They successfully promulgated the doctrine of strategic bombing, accurate targeting of enemy installations and facilities. Toward that end, in 1933 the War Department approved a prospectus for a plane capable of traveling at speeds in excess of 200 miles per hour and with a range of more than 2,000 miles. The new bomber could be used to defend either coast, but if deployed overseas it would require bases in England or sites like the Philippine Islands. Boeing produced the first model of the Boeing B-17 Flying Fortress, which roared through the sky at 232 mph during a 2,100-mile trip from Seattle to Dayton. The advocates of air power were delighted, but unfortunately the prototype crashed and burned on a test flight. Instead of ordering 65, the War Department scaled back to a mere 13.

To carry out daylight precision bombing the Army adopted a tool ordered and then dis-

THE STRATEGIC BOMBING CAMPAIGN AGAINST GERMANY CONTRIBUTED TO THE FINAL VICTORY DURING THE WAR IN EUROPE.

National Archives

carded by the Navy as unsuitable for dive-bombers: the Norden bombsight. In the crucial seconds over an objective, a bombardier manipulated the device to guide the plane as he lined up the target and then released the explosives.

Douhet also taught his disciples that heavily armed bombers in mass formations could operate by day against fighter defenses. The publicity on Boeing's creation hailed the new airplane as a "Flying Fortress," but it was hardly as impregnable as the name indicated. The first B-17s lacked armor plate to protect the crew, carried only five machine guns, and made no provision for a tail gunner. The B-17 faithful believed that was sufficient since, in their minds, the aircraft could attain altitudes beyond reach of interceptors. In the late 1930s, a hot shot fighter pilot, Lieutenant John Alison, confounded the assurance of promoters of the early B-17 when he convincingly demonstrated he could push his fighter close enough to the weaponless rear of a Flying Fortress and shoot it down. His feat, however, did not immediately persuade the bomber command to install a tail gun. Nobody in the Air Corps was going to listen to a pursuit pilot, a second lieutenant who claimed, "I can shoot those things down very easily."

The conviction that strategic bombers could operate unmolested by enemy aircraft influenced the development of U.S. fighters. Escorts to protect the big planes would be unnecessary, and the design for a fighter focused upon a machine that would protect the ground forces. Not until the Battle of Britain in 1940 and the appearance of the Messerschmitt Me-109 did the American experts realize that the speed and altitude of an enemy fighter challenged their assumptions about the invulnerability of the B-17. The standard American fighter, the Curtiss P-40 Tomahawk—a good gun platform, while speedy in a dive—had a limited ceiling and rate of climb. It would not be deployed in the European Theater.

Desire for an interceptor with longer range and performance higher in the sky had belatedly resulted in the twin-engine Lockheed P-38 Lightning, and aeronautical engineers returned to their drawing boards to blueprint what would become the Republic P-47 Thunderbolt and the North American P-51 Mustang. At the same time manufacturers modified the big bombers, now including the Consolidated B-24 Liberator, which had slightly more range and bomb weight capacity than the B-17, adding better means to defend themselves: up to 12 .50-caliber machine guns, a tail gunner, and armor for the crew. When the enemy changed tactics during World War II and began head-on attacks, a chin turret would be added to give greater firepower forward.

From the start of World War II, the British intended to follow Trenchard's maxims on carrying the war to the industrial centers and the population of the foe. In May 1940, when the Royal Air Force attempted daylight strategic raids by its fleet of bombers, German ack-ack and interceptors killed more flyers than the enemy lost on the ground. B-17s purchased from the United States carried out a few daylight missions with dismal results and curdled RAF enthusiasm for the Flying Fortress. American analysts noted that the Brits insisted on operating above 30,000 feet, which overloaded the oxygen systems, froze weapons, and reduced airspeed, making the planes vulnerable to the Me-109s. The RAF B-17 missions relied on an inferior bombsight, and the maximum number of aircraft in formation was a mere four. The British, using their own bombers, switched to nighttime assaults, on industrial areas. They made no pretense of discriminating between residential neighborhoods and factories.

The British tried to convince the Air Corps that it too should operate after dark. That would have negated the entire basis for the designs of the B-17 and B-24 and wasted the hundreds of hours training of bombardiers with the Norden device. Faith in daylight precision bombing thus remained intact as the United States entered World War II. There was no disagreement with the British on the purposes and potentials of air power. Maj. Gen. Ira Eaker, who headed the American bomber command in 1942, said, "After two months spent in understanding British Bomber Command, it is still believed than the original all-out air plan for the destruction of the German

Both: National Archives

RIGHT: During an aerial bombing exercise, the obsolete battleship *USS Virginia* takes a direct hit. BELOW: General Billy Mitchell, a tireless advocate of air power, championed his cause to the end and was court martialed for his zeal. He is shown in the cockpit of an aircraft in France.

National Archives

Liberators of the Ninth Air Force endure heavy anti-aircraft fire during a costly low-level raid against the Romanian oil field at Ploesti, May 1944.

war effort by air action alone was feasible and sound and more economical than any other method available." He did agree that since the resources then available were limited, a ground effort might be required.

The Eighth Air Force opened for business in England in May 1942, but neither B-17s nor B-24s were available. Most of the handful of combat-ready heavyweights had been sent to the Philippines, where Japanese attacks destroyed many of them. As a result, when the Eighth inaugurated its campaign against the Axis powers on July 4, 1942, the mission had little resemblance to strategic bombing. The 15th Bombardment Squadron borrowed 12 A-20 twin-engine Bostons from the RAF, and only half of these were flown by U.S. crews. They struck at four airfields in Holland, flying at an extremely low level before unloading their bombs and strafing the base. They inflicted minor damage, and three were shot down.

Not until some six weeks later did the Eighth launch a true daylight strategic bombing mission. On a beautifully sunlit day, a dozen B-17s from the 97th Bomb Group headed for the Rouen (France) railroad yards. Accompanied by RAF Spitfires, they encountered light flak and no serious interference from German fighters. All returned safely, leaving behind them, said Eaker, head of the Eighth Bomber Command who flew in the lead plane, "a great pall of smoke and sand." General Henry "Hap" Arnold, the Air Corps commander, declared, "The attack on Rouen again verifies the soundness of our policy of the precision bombing of strategic objectives rather than the mass bombing of large, city size areas."

The Rouen raid achieved only nuisance value, and euphoria dissipated rapidly as the strategic bombing campaign intensified. Practice revealed substantial holes in theory. The Luftwaffe, manning high-performance Me-109s and Focke Wulf 190s, greeted marauders with a skill and savagery that tore huge holes in the fabric of the Eighth. Losses of from 10 to 20 percent frequently resulted from the deadly combination of flak and fighters. Air Corps analysts calculated that adequate self-defense required a minimum of 300 bombers, a figure difficult to achieve during the first 18 months of U.S. aerial combat in Europe. Nevertheless, the Americans strove to meet their responsibilities for round-the-clock assaults. The RAF, exclusively bombing at night, including an occasional thousand-plane raid, endured heavy losses of air crews to flak and night fighters. Post-mission photo analysis indicated their destruction of industrial works was far from commensurate with the casualties.

By the spring of 1943, the Allied air command realized that there were not sufficient aircraft to hammer day and night the entire war industry of occupied Europe and Germany with precision. The RAF had no accuracy with its night raids, and the scattershot approach of the Eighth Bomber Command did not cripple production. Eaker, as commander of the Eighth's Bomber Command, proposed a "Combined Bomber Offensive," suggesting "it was better to cause a high degree of destruction in a few really essential industries than a small degree of destruction in many industries."

Toward this end, the U.S bomber command mounted an attack on Romania's Ploesti oil fields and refineries using B-24s flying from fields in North Africa. To avoid detection and increase accuracy, the participants in Operation Tidal Wave flew at low level. The raiders inflicted modest harm. Ploesti had been functioning well below capacity, and it was a simple matter for production to recoup. The Tidal Wave bombers suffered horrendous losses: more than 300 killed, hundreds wounded or captured, 79 interned in Turkey. Just 33 of the 178 Liberators involved could be listed as fit for duty after the mission. No one could seriously propose any further low-level daylight attacks for the heavyweights.

Because of the Luftwaffe's success and with an eye to controlling the air when the time arrived for an invasion of Europe, in June 1943 the Allied high command created Operation Pointblank, announcing, "It has become essential to check the growth and to reduce the strength of the day and night fighter forces which the enemy can concentrate against us ... first priority in the operation of British and American bombers ... shall be accorded to the attack on German fighter forces and the industry upon which they depend." German airbases and factories producing planes and essentials like ball bearings drew priority.

The enemy met Pointblank with ferocity. In August 1943 a maximum effort that put up 300 bombers to strike Schweinfurt and Regensburg cost the Americans 60 planes—600 crewmen—shot down with many additional aircraft badly damaged. A basic problem lay in vulnerability to interceptors. Spitfires, with a range limited to 100 miles beyond the British coast, could not provide protection on longer missions. Bereft of escorts, the 10 or 12 .50-caliber machine guns of the B-17s and B-24s were not enough to fend off the swarms of Me-109s and FW-190s. Another weakness centered on use of the Norden bombsight, which required a clear view of the target and a steady hand. In the cloudless, peaceful skies over Texas, it might have been possible for a skilled operator in the boast of the times to put a bomb in a pickle barrel. But frequently over Europe heavy rain or snow, thick overcasts, and buffeting winds obscured or misled bombardiers. Even when the target was clearly visible, torrents of antiaircraft shells intimidated the men at the toggle switches and those in the cockpits. Bombs fell away prematurely, or the plane suddenly veered off because the pilot seized the controls and yanked the ship out of imminent danger.

General Curtis LeMay, commander of the 305th Bomb Group, after analyzing the photo reconnaissance intelligence, decided a prime culprit for poor accuracy was failure to maintain a steady course. He decreed that none of his pilots could take evasive action over a target. He had calculated that flak gunners needed to fire 372 rounds to guarantee a hit on a B-17 in level flight. Whether his arithmetic was correct or not, LeMay sought to persuade his subordinates by announcing he would fly the lead aircraft on missions. In fact, the first ship over a target had a better chance for survival because antiaircraft personnel adjusted for range and speed as a flight passed. Disciplined behavior, however, added effectiveness, although no one could compensate for weather that obscured a target.

LeMay also innovated a better defense for the big bombers. He insisted upon a tight, stepped-box formation that enabled gunners to provide mutual assistance. A bomb group could bring to bear from 200 to 600 machine guns on an attacker. His demands for more training by navigators and bombardiers and closed-in formations earned him his nickname of "Iron Ass," but the 305th proved his point with more effective results and fewer losses.

In contrast to LeMay's carefully worked out stepped-box formations, inexperienced Brig. Gen. Nathan Bedford Forrest, newly installed as an air division commander, ordered the 95th Bomb Group to use a flattened formation, with aircraft wingtip to wingtip. Over Kiel, the Luftwaffe feasted upon the 95th, shooting down eight, including the bomber carrying Forrest. The disaster proved the efficacy of LeMay's design.

Pointblank failed to halt aircraft manufacture because the enemy had decentralized its critical industries. In particular, the Third Reich had arranged to import vital ball bearings from neutral Sweden. To inflict lasting damage required repeated raids on factories, and in 1943 the Air Corps lacked enough planes and crews. It was also during Pointblank that the initial desire to minimize civilian casualties by concentrating on military installations, manufacturing plants, and transportation hubs began to give way. Bomber command directed the crews on a mission against the rail junction at Munster to unload on the city center, hitting the town's workers. According to one historian, the attack upon civilians "did not produce any moral qualms among the airmen; some cheered ... their own sufferings had bred bitterness."

Throughout the last months of 1943, the U.S. bomber campaign staggered from the continued onslaughts of German fighters and

Both: National Archives

Photos of the city Duren, Germany, before (left) and after repeated Allied bombing raids bear stark testimony to the devastation of the aerial onslaught.

National Archives

The ancient Cologne Cathedral was extensively damaged by Allied bombs. Countless European cultural treasures were destroyed or scarred by the ravages of war.

the increasingly effective flak aided by improved German radar systems. Losses continued to soar above a prohibitive 10 percent. P-38 Lightnings and P-47 Thunderbolts with American pilots had replaced the Spitfires, but without drop tanks they could only venture as far as the Rhine River, leaving the big fellows exposed to the depredations of interceptors. At the beginning of 1944, newly arrived P-51 Mustangs equipped with Rolls Royce engines debuted and quickly won recognition as the best fighter in the theater.

The tide turned with Big Week, starting February 20, 1944. The occasion introduced new features to the American effort. Lt. Gen. Jimmy Doolittle had replaced Eaker at the helm of the Eighth Air Force. Doolittle modified his predecessor's policy that no fighters, the Little Friends, could ever leave the bombers to chase the enemy. Doolittle ordered the P-38s, P- 47s, and P-51s to attack the Luftwaffe on sight, provided they left some guardians to screen the Big Friends. The open season on German fighters was a product of an abundance of fighter squadrons and the development of fuel drop tanks that gave the Lightnings, Thunderbolts, and Mustangs hundreds of additional miles of flight distance. The Germans, in spite of the raids upon their industrial areas, were able to replace downed aircraft, but the predatory tactics of the Americans slashed the number of skilled, experienced pilots dueling with the Allied air arm. As the war progressed into 1944, the reservoir of capable German airmen suffered severe attrition.

For the first day of Big Week, the Eighth Air Force, working with British Bomber Command and the U.S. Fifteenth Air Force operating from Italy, dispatched 880 Fortresses and Liberators along with 835 fighters deep inside Germany. The Eighth alone claimed 115 enemy fighters shot down. That may have been an exaggeration, but the ability to launch similar massive raids six times within seven days surely knocked the Luftwaffe back on its heels. The incessant battering of German cities and their people forced the Third Reich to withdraw some fighter squadrons from the Eastern Front and bring others back from France and the Low Countries to protect the home front. Similarly, antiaircraft batteries were redeployed from both fronts.

With Operation Overlord, the invasion of Normandy, now planned for June, Allied strategy switched from attacks deep inside Germany and began to work over the defensive infrastructure along the French coast: rail lines, roads, bridges, tunnels, viaducts, and the communications network. While the bombers struck at German airfields and marshaling yards, the P-47, equipped with bombs, proved to be a great train buster and general interdiction tool. Gradually, many of the Thunderbolt squadrons transferred to the Ninth Air Force, which was more of a tactical support weapon, while the Eighth added P-51s to its rosters.

On D-day, a thick, nearly impenetrable overcast of more than 10,000 Allied bombers and fighters hovered over the English Channel and the Normandy shoreline. The pre-D-day campaign had produced sensational results. At most two or three German planes dared to appear as the invaders struggled ashore. The Luftwaffe preferred to husband its assets rather than risk confrontation with the canopy of American bombers and fighters, along with numerous planes from the RAF.

Fighter pilot Martin Low, in a P-38, said, "From June 6th until about 10 days later, we flew three missions a day, bombed and strafed anything that moved within 50 to a hundred miles of the coast, mostly trains." The air attacks sharply curtailed movement of German reinforcements to help defend the beaches. Patrols like that mentioned by Low menaced daylight convoys or trains. One serious failure of the Allied air effort was the inability to destroy the blockhouses and emplacements that guarded the shores. Fearful of dropping bombs on friendly forces, the landing area missions were confined to drops a few miles beyond the beaches, and most of the bombs exploded harmlessly in empty fields.

Six weeks later, as the U.S. Third Army prepared to break out of Normandy toward the end of July 1944, it was exposed to the perils of high-altitude bombing aimed at tactical situations. Poor visibility prevented two-thirds of the scheduled 900 bombers to even reach the target near St. Lo, but 343 B-17s and B-24s unloaded on a poorly defined zone out-

National Archives

A formation of B-17s sends its bombs away on a cloudy day in March 1945. Such weather conditions required the target be fixed by radar.

lined by ground forces commander General Omar Bradley. Many of the bombs fell in no-man's land between the opposing armies, but some exploded among GIs, killing 25 and wounding more than 60. A subsequent 1,500-plane attack that included fighter-bombers from the Ninth Air Force and the dreadnoughts of the Eighth devastated the Germans. Lt. Gen. Fritz Bayerlein of the Panzer Lehr Division said, "Artillery positions were wiped out, tanks overturned and buried, infantry positions flattened and all roads and tracks destroyed... The shock effect on the troops was indescribable. Some of my men went mad and rushed around in the open until they were cut down by splinters." He reported 70 percent of his soldiers "either dead, wounded, crazed or dazed." The aerial assault opened the gates for the St. Lo breakout.

Campaigns like Overlord and the St. Lo mission mandated detours from the strategic bombing program. Similarly, when the first V-1 pilotless bombs struck London in June 1944, the British demanded immediate attacks to neutralize the launch installations near the French coast. Starting June 16, bombers with fighter escorts in what were called Noball raids hit several of the V-1 emplacements. By September, the advances into Normandy by the invaders eliminated the V-1 bases, but the more deadly V-2, a rocket-propelled explosive with a primitive guidance system fired from territory still held by the Third Reich, killed more than 9,000 Londoners. The Allies attempted to erase the source of the rockets with assaults on Peenemunde, where German rocket engineers using slave labor developed and then deployed the V-2.

During the run-up to D-day, there had been one exception to the concentration on the defenses against the Allied invasion. After much debate about priorities for bombing campaigns, the British and Americans agreed to target oil, which was critical to the enemy war effort. Although the initial strike at Ploesti cost the Air Corps dearly, Allied planes pounded the Romanian fields and refineries regularly, reducing the flow to Germany. After the Soviet Red Army invaded Romania, driving the country to change sides and shut off the spigot, the Third Reich relied on its reserves and production of synthetics.

Starting in May 1944, the Americans struck at depots and manufacturing sites for ersatz oil 127 times, while the RAF mounted 53 raids. Acutely aware of the threat to their lifeline, the Germans massed antiaircraft around the synthetic fuel installations. Tail gunner Eddie Picardo recalled one mission: "The flak was so thick it blotted out the sun. For a full 10 seconds it was like a total eclipse." The ship next to his disappeared in a bright flash of fire. His plane returned home with basketball-sized holes in the fuselage.

On a single day in October 1944, during the missions to Politz, Ruhland, Bohlen, and Rothensee, the Eighth Air Force counted 40 planes shot down, only 3 percent of the more than 1,400 on the raid, but still more than 358 air crew missing in action. Furthermore, 700 bombers reported damage. However, the campaign against synthetic petroleum paid off. The amount available to the Wehrmacht and the Luftwaffe fell to half the total needed. The Me-262 jet fighters were towed to runways by cows, recruits received ever fewer hours of flight instruction, and artillery literally depended on horsepower to move.

As the strategic bombing campaign resumed in earnest after D-day, the Allied air forces attempted to extend their reach farther east. Diplomatic negotiations resulted in an agreement that U.S. bombers flying out of England could blast the most distant targets of the Third Reich and then continue several hundred miles to land at Soviet airbases. Refueled

and rearmed, they could hit enemy installations on the way back to their home fields. The Soviets welcomed planes and crews. Unfortunately, their hospitality did not include the right for P-51s to fly protective patrols while the hosts threw a lavish banquet for their guests. A German reconnaissance plane discovered the sleek bombers sitting on the ground. A subsequent raid wrecked nearly 70 aircraft. The shuttle program fizzled out after a few more operations.

With streams of bombers blasting targets even as far as Poland, there was talk of using the aircraft to halt the genocidal program at the Auschwitz concentration camp, either by targeting the buildings there or the rail lines that hauled the condemned to the gas chambers. The U.S. War Department opposed any diversion for that purpose as weakening "decisive operations elsewhere." It was suggested that surely a handful of aircraft could have been spared from the thousand plane raids, but a detour that split off a few bombers would have denied them the protection of the massive formations. Furthermore, high-altitude strikes often missed small objectives like a rail line or bridge and the enemy could repair smashed tracks rather quickly. In any event, there was little political or military desire to attack the murder camps.

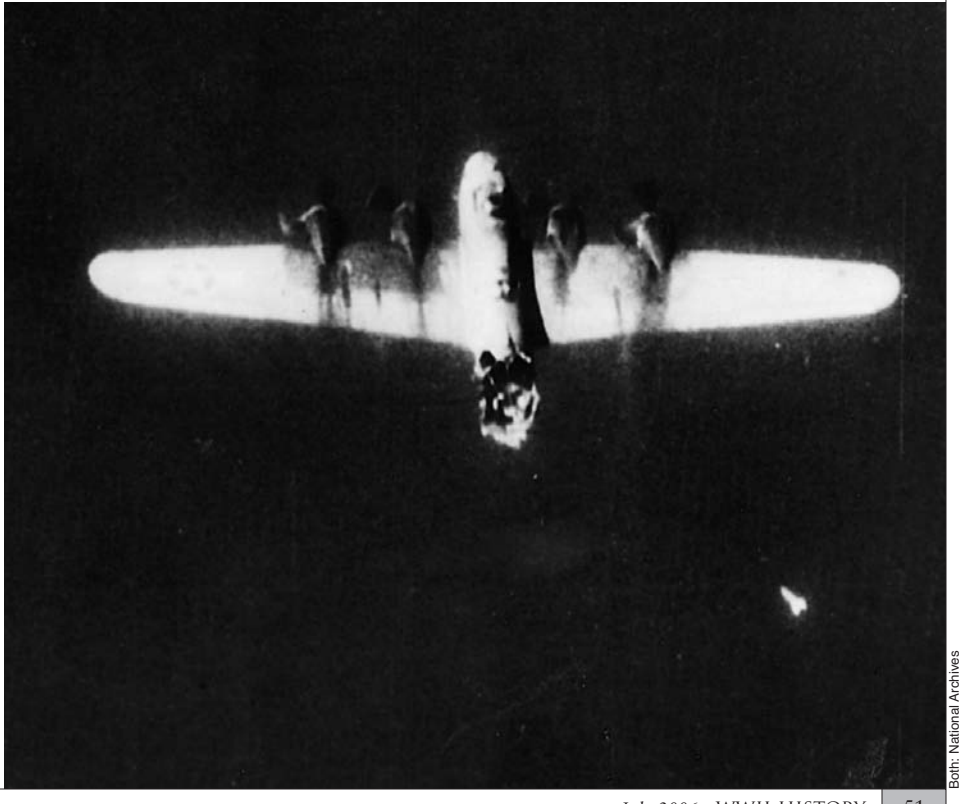
While the British openly wreaked havoc on civilians, the United States claimed it restricted its bombing to war facilities. That may have been a guiding principle, but invariably American bombers killed or maimed noncombatants. In the turbulence of flak and enemy fighters, with targets obscured by weather, and due to navigation errors, ordnance frequently exploded well off the mark. A miss by only 500 yards could plant a bomb in a residential area, and there were instances in which the drop struck miles from the objective. Toward the end of the war, the U.S. air command accepted the RAF policy and struck Berlin and Dresden without any firm strategic goal.

Few airmen cringed at the indiscriminate use of air power. Dave Nagel, an engineer and gunner with the 305th Bomb Group, said, "If you saw London like I saw it, you wouldn't have any remorse. I don't know anyone who was remorseful. We didn't know whether an area was populated or not. We were supposed to be over a target, normally a factory, when we let the bombs go, but we assumed it was surrounded by civilians."

Curtis LeMay, who departed Europe to direct the devastation from the air upon Japan, said, "As to worrying about the morality of what we were doing, nuts! I was a soldier, soldiers fight. If we made it through the day without exterminating too many of our own people, we thought we'd had a pretty good day."

The advocates of strategic bombing and carrying the war to the civilian population had argued that these campaigns would bring the Third Reich to its knees without the need for brutal, bloody combat on the ground. They were wrong. By May 1945, the people of Germany may have lost their enthusiasm for Adolf Hitler's regime and its wars, but they continued to carry on. It was only after the Allied armies with their superior manpower and firepower overran the German forces that surrender came.

A post-V-E Day survey estimated that Germany lost less than 4 percent of its productive capacity, and even a devastated city like Hamburg recuperated to 80 percent of its output within a few weeks. That said, the air war contributed significantly to the eventual defeat of the enemy. Foremost, the raids on fuel depots and synthetic plants curtailed the Luftwaffe's ability to train pilots and deploy their new jet fighters in sufficient numbers. The Allied ground forces operated without interference from the air. The attacks on fuel sources destroyed the vaunted mobility of German armor, and the battering of rail and road nets strangled supply lines.To be sure, the successes of the Soviet forces on the Eastern Front played a major role in weakening the ability to resist, but at the same time, the armies on the Western Front could not have advanced as swiftly without the strategic bombing campaigns. □



ABOVE: General Ira C Eaker of the U.S. Army Air Corps takes questions during an interview in England, November 1942. RIGHT: Torn in half by accurate German flak, a B-17 goes down after taking a direct hit.

Both: National Archives

Acclaimed author Gerald Astor has written numerous books on the topic of World War II, including Voices of D-Day *and* The Mighty Eighth. *He resides in Scarsdale, New York.*

THE PARTISAN SCOURGE

BY PAT McTAGGART

Russian partisans took a heavy toll in German lives and tied down troops needed to fight the advancing Red Army during World War II.

Mary Evans / Meledin Collection

THE CONCEPT OF PARTISAN WARFARE IN RUSSIA was nothing new in 1941. During Napoleon's invasion of the country in 1812, small bands of civilians harassed the French and their allies both before and after the retreat from Moscow. When the Kaiser's army struck in World War I, the Germans were forced to pull units from the front line to deal with partisan activity in the occupied areas.

Numerous bands of partisans were formed during the Russian Civil War. Red partisan detachments were particularly successful in Siberia, harassing the rear areas of the Whites and making a vital contribution to the communist fight in the Far East. The commander of the Urals Partisan Army, Vasilli Bliukher, was awarded the Order of the Red Banner for his leadership against the Whites. He was later beaten to death during the purges brought on by Soviet Premier Josef Stalin's paranoia.

After killing the German sentries who guarded this rail line, Soviet partisans plant mines. Partisan attacks were a constant worry for the Germans on the Eastern Front, 1942

All: National Archives

Heavily armed Soviet partisans listen to a radio communique with instruction concerning their next foray against the Nazi invaders.

After the Civil War ended, Soviet leaders continued to publish works on the organization and effectiveness of partisans. Lenin addressed the subject in some of his works, and Marshal of the Soviet Union Mikhail Tukhachevsky published several documents dealing with partisan tactics. He also addressed the subject of antipartisan operations, dealing with both how to conduct them and how to counter them. Tukhachevsky was murdered on Stalin's orders in June 1937.

By the summer of 1941, a semidoctrinal mind-set concerning the spirit and usefulness of partisan warfare had become part of the psyche of many Soviet citizens. For Party fanatics, there was no question about civilian resistance to any enemy threat. A sense of duty to the communist system made the choice to fight automatic. For many others, it would take time to make the decision to fight.

Operation Barbarossa, the German invasion of the Soviet Union, began on June 22, 1941. Although a few Russian commanders had their men in forward prepared position, at the risk of their own necks, the majority adhered to Stalin's orders to do nothing to provoke the Germans. Stalin had disregarded information from several sources that pointed to a surprise attack, willing instead to believe that the nonaggression pact signed with Hitler in August 1939 would be good for at least another year.

The result of Stalin's stubbornness was a disaster for the Red Army. During the first six months of Barbarossa more than three million Soviet soldiers were captured or killed. Around Kiev, the figure was more than 600,000, while the defense of Smolensk cost the Red Army about 486,000 men. Another 300,000 prisoners were taken at Uman. The staggering figure of killed and captured astounded the Germans, who were not equipped to deal with the massive influx of enemy soldiers.

Successful as the German encirclements appeared to be, the lines around the trapped Soviet armies were often porous. Remnants of many divisions escaped eastward through gaps in the German positions. Other small groups and individuals disappeared into the marshes and forests that make up much of western Russia. Even if they were trapped behind enemy lines, those men continued the fight, forming the nucleus of early partisan units.

Although Moscow expected local Party leaders to form partisan units in the event of an invasion, actual preparations, such as stockpiling food and weapons, were woefully inadequate. The swift advance of the Wehrmacht through Western Russia also impeded any initial partisan formation because German forces were literally at the doorstep before many officials knew what was happening.

Another factor was the hostility directed against Moscow from many inhabitants of western Russia, especially in the Ukraine and former Polish territory. During the initial stage of the war, the Germans were treated as liberators in many areas, with the local populace only too ready to point out communist officials.

Despite these difficulties, from the beginning attempts were made to form a truly civilian partisan movement in some areas. More than a thousand Party members were left behind in Belorussia, and more were ordered to stay in various other areas that would soon fall into German hands. For the most part, these men were used to organize communications networks and find safe houses and other hiding places in which build up weapons caches for future use.

AT THE END OF JUNE, MOSCOW FINALLY SENT OUT an official directive to the nation. In a June 29 proclamation, the Central Committee of the Communist Party and the Council of People's Commissars directed local Party organizations to form partisan detachments and bring the war to the enemy. A mid-July order gave specific instructions on how the partisan groups should organize and what targets were priorities for destruction.

Detachments were to be composed of 75 to 150 men who were divided into two or three companies, and each company was subdivided into platoons. Large forested or swampy areas were deemed vital for cover and use for a base of operations, and care was given in explaining how to develop and distribute weapons caches. Instructions were given to make night raids on petroleum and ammunition dumps, railroad lines, airfields, and communication centers. Units were also told the best places to lay explosive charges and how to deal with attack, defense, and pursuit operations.

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Once the Communist Party became engaged in the partisan movement, the vast Soviet bureaucracy kicked into gear. Committees were formed from the top levels of government down to local levels to regulate guerrilla activities. Powerful figures in the Party, the NKVD (secret police), and the Red Army vied for control of the partisan orga-

Pouncing on unsuspecting German infantry, Soviet partisans unleash a hail of gunfire and hand grenades as they emerge from a treeline.

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OPPOSITE (FAR LEFT): SS Lt. Gen. Erich von dem Bach-Zelewski battled the partisans. (LEFT): Soviet General V.I. Kusnetzov. 600 of his soldiers were rescued by partisans.

nization. The tactical and operational orders concerning partisan warfare finally ended up being controlled by the notorious political chief and head of the Main Administration of Political Propaganda of the Army and NKVD, Lev Mekhlis.

Mekhlis had a bloody reputation earned during the purges of the 1930s. A favorite of Stalin, Mekhlis ruthlessly ordered the executions of officers and men whom he thought did not show proper aggressiveness during the Russo-Finnish War of 1939-1940. Later in World War II, his meddling in military matters would cost the Red Army dearly in the Crimea and elsewhere, but his friendship with Stalin prevented him from ever receiving more than a slap on the wrist.

While Moscow struggled with organizational details, partisan units remained fairly passive throughout the summer and fall of 1941. Most of the active aggression came from detachments that had benefited from the influx of Red Army stragglers who found their way into the partisan camps. Experienced in weapons and tactics, the soldiers passed their knowledge on to the civilians in their group. It was these detachments that caused the first pinpricks to disrupt the lengthy German supply and communication lines.

Geography played a major role in early partisan actions. The vast forests and swamps in eastern Belorussia and the western Russian Soviet Federated Socialist Republic offered natural protection for units that would strike quickly before disappearing into the primitive countryside. German security units were reluctant to follow the partisans, preferring instead to stay close to the installations they were guarding. Those that did pursue were often on the receiving end of an ambush by unseen enemies.

One of the few partisan units that were able to organize effectively in those early days was a Belorussian detachment led by Mihay Filipovich Shmyrev. It was ironic that this man led one of the first successful groups since his combat experience consisted mainly of fighting anti-Soviet partisans during and after the Russian Civil War.

Shmyrev formed his detachment on July 9 with 23 menwho worked in a small factory that he managed. Their first weapons came from Soviet soldiers who were fleeing from the advancing Germans. More recruits were gleaned from Red Army stragglers and local civilians who were drawn to the cause.

Their first offensive action came on July 25 when Shmyrev and a squad of his men ambushed some Germans who were bathing in a river, causing the enemy 25 to 35 casualties and suffering no losses to themselves. Subsequent ambushes in August were directed against light-skinned vehicle convoys and other soft targets.

The unit was soon acknowledged by Soviet officials, who sent 12 Red Army soldiers to reinforce Shmyrev in early September. Supplies followed in the form of four heavy machine guns with 15,000 rounds of ammunition and a light and a heavy mortar. Although some of his men deserted in the waning months of 1941, new recruits sought out the elusive Shmyrev, who now had the means to cause the Germans more than a little trouble throughout the rest of the year.

As the Wehrmacht moved deeper into the Soviet Union, partisan units were ordered to step up attacks on rail lines in the occupied territories. The road system in western Russia was in pitiful shape before the war started. German tanks and armored vehicles made a bad situation worse as they moved farther east, churning up the few good roads and making the rest all but impassible for the supply trucks that came after them.

The gauge for the Soviet rail system was different from that of Germany, and construction battalions followed the German advance, changing the rails so that Wehrmacht supplies could be moved quickly to the front on German-gauge rolling stock. It was slow going, however, even with conscripted labor from the conquered areas. Early partisan attempts to disrupt rail supply lines were not very successful, and damage was usually repaired in a day or two. Nevertheless, the farther east the Germans went, the more tenuous this vital network would become.

Another major function of partisan units in the first months of the war was to find strag-

gling formations that had been bypassed by the Germans and were now behind the front. Many of these refugee soldiers were brought back to the Soviet lines. In October, some 800 soldiers were rescued from encirclement in the Poltava area, while another partisan group was able to rescue the 3rd Army's General V.I. Kuznetsov along with 600 of his men.

Early partisan activity, scattered as it was, provided Soviet propagandists with many stories designed to incite hatred for the Germans while promoting sacrifice for the Russian Motherland. Nothing tugs at the heart of a Russian more than a tragic or sentimental story, and communist propagandists knew how to appeal to the soul of the people, be they fervent Party members or secret anti-Stalinists. One such story centered on a young girl named Zoya Kosmodemyanskaya.

Born in 1923, Zoya joined a partisan unit in the autumn of 1941. She quickly adapted to the rigors of partisan warfare, helping lay mines and performing reconnaissance work. In November she volunteered to enter the village of Petrischevo, which had a German garrison, to reconnoiter and to cause any damage she could.

Zoya was captured a few days later and subjected to an interrogation that included severe beatings. According to a German sergeant who was present, the teenager remained silent during the entire process. Making no headway, the Germans marched her through the village half naked and hanged her. Zoya's mutilated body was left on the gallows for more than a month until the village was recaptured by the Red Army.

Word of the young girl's ordeal spread through occupied and unoccupied areas of the Soviet Union with lightning speed. Her story inspired patriotism that translated into a surge of volunteers for the partisan movement.

While the partisan movement struggled in its infancy, Mekhlis intervened with an order making political indoctrination of partisan volunteers a major priority. In some cases, potential partisan candidates were interviewed by NKVD teams that often turned away any volunteer that did not show proper communist zeal. Even as the Germans were approaching the gates of Moscow, Soviet political paranoia saw political reliability as more important than the necessity of defending the Russian Motherland with any means possible.

Overall, 1941 was a period for organizing the Russian partisan movement. Official Soviet histories claim that there were between 2,000 and 3,500 partisan detachments formed in the first six months of the war. No manpower figures are given, but even the number of detachments may be inflated due to the disorganization during these early months. A slow-moving Soviet bureaucracy, lack of weapons and concrete directions from Moscow, and the meddling of the Party resulted in a lack of action and semistagnation of the movement for the most part. That was soon to change.

One of the most important moments in Soviet partisan history came with the Red Army offensive in December 1941. Before then, much of the Soviet population in German-occupied Russia had either embraced the Germans as liberators (as it did in the Ukraine) or had just continued to struggle to survive, having traded one despot for another.

The Wehrmacht had seemed invincible in the summer and fall of 1941, and cries from Moscow to rise up against the invaders went largely unheeded. Calls to fight for the Motherland, with little mention of the Communist Party, drew some recruits, but the physical presence of German soldiers and the vast panzer and motorized columns heading east were a great deterrent for any overt action.

When the Red Army struck during one of the coldest winters in a century, the population of the occupied territories suddenly saw a different German soldier. Cold, frightened, and hungry, the once victorious troops were now heading west as Soviet forces smashed their lines. Even German reinforcements moving toward the front had a look of uncertainty about them. This did not go unnoticed within the local population.

ANOTHER IMPORTANT ASPECT OF THE WINTER Offensive was fear. In the early days of the war, Soviet propaganda warned of dire consequences for anyone collaborating with the enemy. This seemed unlikely as the Germans

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advanced on every front. Although modern communication between the towns and villages of western Russia was almost nonexistent, the Russian peasants were kept abreast of events by the age-old method of word-of-mouth. News of the great encirclements of July and August spread from town to town, making it all the more difficult for Moscow to mask the seemingly devastating defeats that plagued the Red Army in those early months.

In December, that same primitive communication system began spreading word of Germany's retreat. The propagandist's cry of "The Red Army Is on the Way" now seemed to be a real possibility, causing many to rethink their earlier positions. Everyone remembered Stalin's starvation and obliteration of the Kulaks after he took power, and the civilian and military purges of during the "Terror" of the 1930s were still fresh in people's minds.

Straddling the fence was no longer an option as word spread of the early Soviet victories in December. For many it was time to act because everyone knew that Stalin's revenge would be terrible and swift. Reports from German rear-area commanders revealed a growing concern over increasing partisan activity.

On December 14, Heeresgruppe Mitte (Army Group Center) received a communiqué from one of its Korücks (Kommandant Rückwârtiges Armeegebeit—Commandant of an army rear area) stating: "As the Russians have become more active on the front, partisan activity has increased. The troops left to this command are just sufficient to protect the most important installations and, to a certain extent, the railroads and highways. For anti-partisan operations there are no longer any troops on hand. Therefore, it is expected that soon the partisans will join together into larger bands and carry out attacks on our guard posts. Their increased freedom of movement will also lead to partisans spreading terror among the people, who will be forced to stop supporting us and will then no longer carry out the orders of the military government authority."

Another Korück reported: "The situation in the Army rear area has undergone a funda-

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Advancing toward the smoldering ruins of a Russian village, German soldiers prepare to search the remains of buildings for evidence of partisan activity. The German troops were encouraged to act brutally against the civilian population.

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mental change. As long as we were victorious, the area could be described as nearly pacified and almost free of partisans, and the local population without exception stood on our side. Now the people are no longer as convinced as they were before of our power and strength. New partisan bands have made their way into our territory, and parachutists have been sent in to assume the leadership of bands, assemble the civilians suitable for service along with the partisans who up to now have not been active, the escaped prisoners-of-war and the Soviet soldiers who have been released from military hospitals."

It may be well to look at German rear-area security measures as partisan activity increased. Each field army had at least one Korück who was responsible for the security of a particular sector in the Army's rear area. Sicherheits Divisionen (security divisions) were allocated to help guard rear areas and to participate in anti-partisan operations. These divisions had an infantry "Alarm" (alert) regiment composed of three battalions, a Landeschützen (regional defense) regiment of three to four battalions, and a guard battalion.

The Korück could also call on police units and independent SS battalions. Local volunteers (Osttruppen), especially in the Ukraine and Baltic States, were formed into battalion-size units to augment the German forces. These units were noted for their "no holds barred" approach to fighting the partisans, and the war behind the lines soon took on a particular savagery of its own in which prisoners were rarely taken by either side. As the partisan movement grew, rear-area security would cause a continuous drain on Germany and its allies' manpower.

Small partisan actions during the offensive sometimes led to huge results. As the Germans retreated in the face of the Soviet onslaught, a partisan demolition group led by A. Andrianov destroyed one of the few remaining bridges across the Sestra River, creating a massive bottleneck on the east side of the river. The Red Air Force was notified, and in a large-scale attack Soviet aircraft destroyed approximately a hundred vehicles before the Germans could find alternate routes to the west.

If 1941 was a time of building for Soviet partisans, 1942 was a time of expansion and action. An example of increased operations against German supply lines took place about 15 miles east of Bryansk. On its own initiative, a German railway construction company started repairing a length of damaged track. Although the company was supposed to provide its own security, it proved inadequate when the partisans struck.

Communications between the company and its local headquarters suddenly ceased, and patrols were sent out to investigate. When a patrol finally stumbled upon the construction site, all it found were dead Germans. The entire company had been wiped out, and the partisans were long gone. No additional forces were available for security, so repair of the tracks was halted, depriving the Germans of an important supply line to the front.

In 1942, Moscow stepped up its control of partisan organizations, placing local units under regional commanders. Ten detachments in the Smolensk sector, for example, were centralized into a larger unit code-named "Batia." Overall, Batia had more than 5,000 members, which made it able to fight regular battles with German security forces.

As the partisan movement gained impetus, more resources were relegated to the organization. Units were supplied with military communications equipment, and special radio channels were set aside specifically for partisan radio traffic. The Red Air Force at first dropped weapons and supplies by parachute, but by 1942 the larger partisan detachments had built

ictorious,

rly pacified and almost free of partisans.

OPPOSITE: Zoya Kosmodemyanskaya hangs lifeless after being executed by the Germans in reprisal for partisan attacks.

airstrips in the forbidding forests and marshes that they called home.

Perfectly camouflaged, the airstrips were nearly invisible from the air, and the Red Air Force performed most of its supply operations at night with the partisans clearing away camouflage and lighting the airstrips with small fires set along the runway. Hand-picked partisans were also flown out of the occupied areas and were sent to a special school where they were given advanced training before flying back to their units.

Real cooperation with the Red Army began in earnest in 1942. The Winter Offensive had allowed Soviet units to push the Germans back more than 100 kilometers in some sectors of the front. During the retreat, partisan units harassed the Wehrmacht, cutting routes of withdrawal and leading Soviet assault units through supposedly impassable terrain to cut off and ambush the enemy.

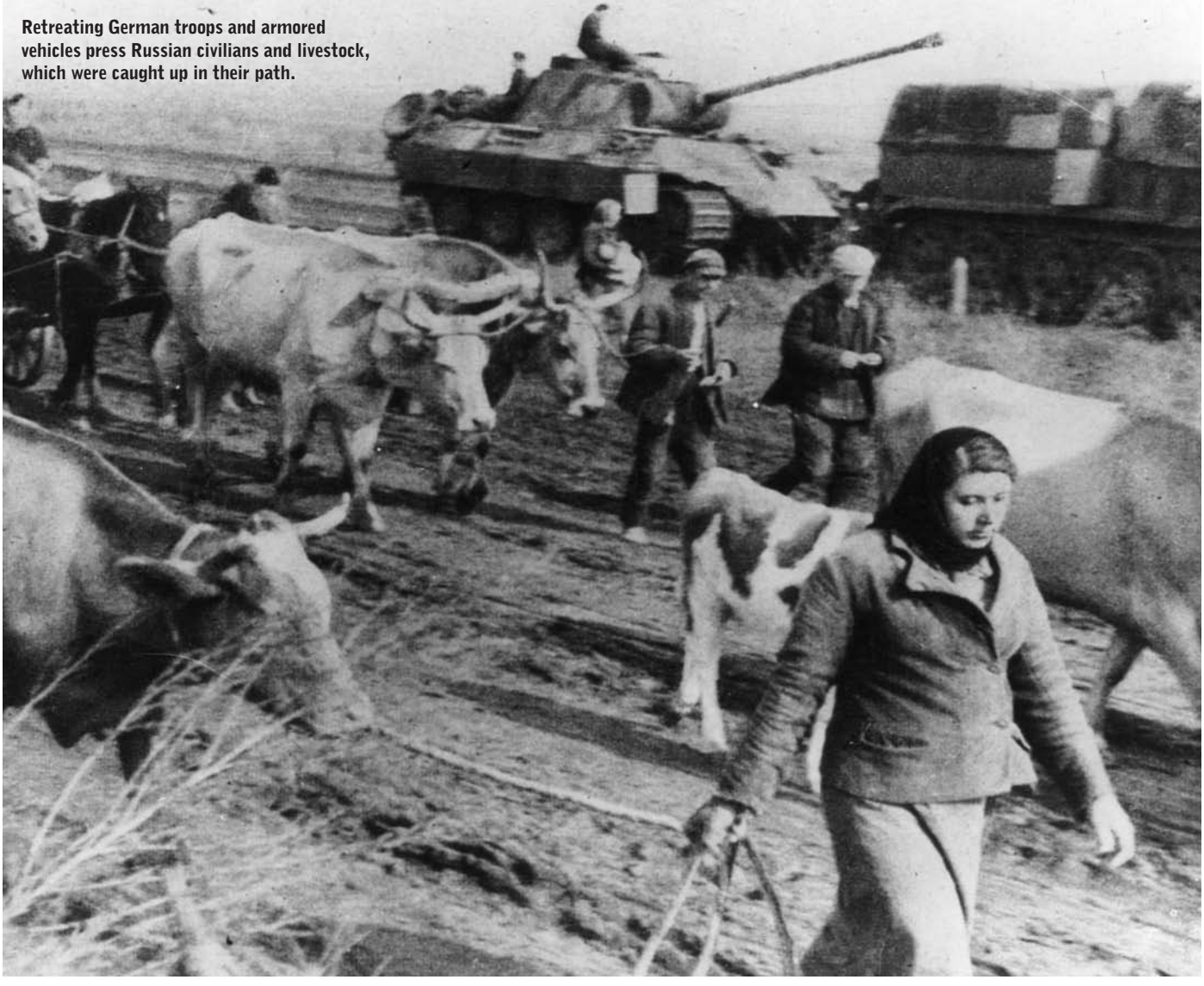
The Soviet supply system became hopelessly overloaded in January 1942 as the result of the rapid advance. As the Winter Offensive stalled against determined German resistance, partisan units helped overextended Russian forces make their way back to their own lines.

Psychologically, the partisan movement far exceeded its actual accomplishments during the first winter of the war. Field Marshal Günter von Kluge, the commander of Heeresgruppe Mitte, reported, "The steady increase in numbers of enemy troops behind our front and the concomitant growth of the partisan movement in the entire rear area are taking such a threatening turn that I am compelled to point out this danger in all seriousness."

He went on to mention the cooperation with the Red Army and pointed out that the partisans were becoming bolder, causing disruption of communications and diverting troops needed at the front. The real problem, however, was the uneasiness among the troops, not knowing where or how the partisans would hit next. Anxiety among German forces moving at night along the few passable roads caused depression and insomnia that sharply decreased their effectiveness when they got to the front lines.

Von Kluge was correct in one important area. From June 22, 1941, to November 6, the German Army had sustained more than 650,000 casualties. By the beginning of April 1942, another 900,000 casualties from all causes were incurred. Even with replacements and returning wounded, the Army was about 600,000 men short. This led to a realignment of security forces that left many of the smaller bridges and crossings behind the front completely unguarded.

The partisans were quick to react to the situation, demolishing numerous bridges and causing more supply headaches for the Germans. Frustrated, the German High Command



Retreating German troops and armored vehicles press Russian civilians and livestock, which were caught up in their path.

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called for security formations from its Axis partners to help with the problem. More pro-German local forces were also employed in antipartisan operations.

One of the most vicious antipartisan units was commanded by Bronislav Kaminski, an engineer of Polish extraction and a radical anti-communist. Kaminski had a force of about 1,500 men when the Germans encountered him during the Winter Offensive in a heavily partisan-infested area in the Bryansk sector.

Fighting under the emblem of the Tsarist St. George's Cross, Kaminski carved out his own kingdom in the area, and by 1942 he had more than 9,000 men serving under him. The Germans had been unable to make any headway against partisans in the area, so they granted him a semiautonomous status in return for keeping up the pressure on the partisans.

Kaminski and his men were known for their extreme cruelty and ruthlessness. Partisan and nonpartisan villages alike were destroyed in the region, their citizens massacred under his reign of terror. Rape and plunder were the orders of the day as his men moved through the countryside, and even the German SS units operating in the area were appalled by the actions of the Kaminski Brigade. Kaminski was finally executed in 1944 on the orders of SS Lt. Gen. Erich von dem Bach-Zelewski.

Despite antipartisan activities like Kaminski's, the movement kept growing. Working in cooperation with the Red Army and on their own, partisan forces continued to destroy German vehicles and communications lines. Some units even liberated towns held by enemy garrisons, which usually meant immediate execution for any surviving German soldiers.

An example of the growth of partisan effectiveness can be found in statistics kept for the winter of 1941-1942. More than 1,800 German vehicles were destroyed, as were 650 bridges. Attacks against German rail lines resulted in the derailing of 225 trains.

Although the Germans had basically stabilized the main front by May, there were still formations of Soviet troops left behind the lines, cut off since the Winter Offensive. One of the largest was in the Bryansk-Smolensk-Vyazma triangle. Major General P.A. Belov and the remnants of his 1st Guards Cavalry Corps formed the nucleus of a group that also contained parachute troops and the survivors of the 33rd Army.

Working closely with partisan detachments, Belov's forces struck weak points behind the German lines. The partisans provided vital information concerning German troop movements and strength, allowing Belov to hit the enemy at his most vulnerable positions before melting back into the countryside.

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During a respite from fighting with Germans in Poland, Soviet partisans find temporary rest at their woodland encampment, 1944.

By mid-May, the Germans had taken enough. A two-pronged attack, code-named "Hannover," was planned to eliminate the threat from Belov once and for all. A force of three panzer divisions, three infantry divisions, and one security division began the operation on May 24. Bridges destroyed by partisans hampered the attack as the Germans were forced to wait for engineers to replace the structures before they could cross the swollen streams and rivers in the area. Other partisan units shadowed the attackers, keeping Belov informed of the advance and allowing him to pull his forces out of harm's way.

WHEN THE GERMAN PRONGS MET ON MAY 27, Berlin claimed about 2,000 prisoners taken and another 1,500 Russians killed. It was not the result that had been expected. Belov still had about 17,000 men in his command, but he knew that his time was running out. He decided to break through to the Russian lines using partisan guides to travel from one partisan-controlled area to another.

The Luftwaffe finally spotted the columns of Soviet troops, but by the time ground forces closed Belov and his men were already making their way through a densely forested area controlled by the Lazo Partisan Regiment. The Germans refused to follow for fear of well-laid partisan ambushes.

Finally reaching the front, Belov organized his men and ordered an attack. A fierce fight developed, but Belov claimed that he brought at least 10,000 men to safety, even though he was flown out before the attack commenced. Thanks to partisan efforts, a large body of well-trained Soviet troops had been saved to fight another day while several German divisions needed at the front had been forced to deploy behind the lines in an effort to capture them.

The late spring muddy season gave the partisan units a chance to regroup. It had been a bloody winter for all involved in the savage fighting. Strength reports reaching Moscow showed a loss of about 20,000 partisans due to all causes. Official Soviet estimates give a total of about 70,000 effective partisan fighters operating in the spring of 1942. By the end of summer, that number had risen to about 125,000.

An important change in the partisan organization came in May 1942. Incompetence had its limits, even within the rigid Soviet bureaucracy. Although Stalin had ordered that a central staff be set up to control partisan activities in July 1941, Mekhlis and his boss, NKVD Chief Lavrenti Beria, continued to control the movement. That control was finally wrested from the NKVD when P.K. Ponomarenko became Chief of the Central Staff of the Partisan Movement on May 30.

The change effectively removed control of the partisans from the Party and moved it toward closer cooperation with the military. Attached

to the Headquarters of the Supreme Commander (Stalin), Ponomarenko soon had staff personnel at several front and theater headquarters, working closely with the Army commanders to control partisan activities in their respective sectors.

Hitler's thrust toward Stalingrad began about the same time that Ponomarenko assumed his new position. The German advance brought new areas under occupation and also provided the Wehrmacht with new antipartisan forces. The German Army showed remarkable tolerance toward most of the tribes they encountered while advancing across the steppes and into the Caucasus and was rewarded with a flood of volunteers from various ethnic groups in the area.

Don, Kuban, Terek, and Siberian Cossacks were formed into legions to fight the Soviets and to protect the precarious German supply routes. Thousands of Armenians, Azerbaidjanis, Georgians, and North Caucasians also joined German forces, as did the Kalmucks, a Mongolian nomadic people living west of the Volga River and northwest of the Caspian Sea. It is interesting to note that many of these tribes were Muslim or, in the case of the Kalmucks, Buddhist, and that the Wehrmacht took great care in providing each group with its own religious leaders or chaplains.

Most of these ethnic groups had been tyrannized by Stalin and the communist system, and they fought ruthlessly against Soviet partisan units being formed in the newly occupied areas. In the final years of World War II, they followed the retreating Germans westward. Most were handed over to the Soviets by American and British forces to be executed outright or to be sent to the Gulags to die.

The length of the German communications and supply lines all along the front made them prime targets, and partisan forces were once again ordered to concentrate on disrupting them. In the summer and fall of 1942, demolition squads carried out numerous attacks against fuel and supply depots and the German railway network far to the rear of the front. Hundreds of railway and highway bridges were destroyed, and more than 300 trains were derailed between June and November.

German forces reacted with more antipartisan operations. In actions such as Vogelsang (Bird Song), which took place north of Bryansk, German armored and infantry units scoured a 19,000-square-kilometer area in an attempt to root out and destroy their elusive quarry.

A maze of forest trails bounded by almost impenetrable brush and forests gave the partisans ample opportunity to ambush the Germans at almost every turn. Lasting about a month, Vogelsang netted about 500 presumed partisan prisoners with another 1,200 killed, a rather poor showing for such an operation. The strain of the fighting can clearly be seen in vintage photos of the German troops taking part in the action.

German antipartisan operations may have hurt the Russian guerrillas, but did not stop them from continuing their attacks. The German rail system was still one of the partisans' prime targets. From May to November, trains were derailed in the Leningrad sector. Between June and October, partisans in the Smolensk sector derailed more than 300 trains and another 226 were lost in the Bryansk sector. In Belorussia, more than 800 trains were derailed between June and November.

Hundreds of railway bridges were also destroyed during the last half of 1942. The Germans, already stretched to the limit at the main front, were forced to pull out more divisions to deal with the partisans. By the end of the year, 10 percent of the German field divisions on the Eastern Front had been switched from fighting the Red Army to performing antipartisan duties.

AS 1942 WANED, WORD OF THE IMPENDING disaster at Stalingrad spread across the occupied regions to Germans and Russians alike. German morale, especially in the supposedly secure areas, began to suffer. The news, coupled with the increased partisan activities along the supply routes, had a depressing psychological effect on troops in the town and village garrisons tasked with guarding bridges and railway lines.

Another important effect of partisan activity in the last months of 1942 was a decrease in food supplies received by the Germans from the occupied areas. As partisan detachments became bolder, villages that had once furnished meat and grain for the Wehrmacht supply organization showed a dramatic drop in production, making it more difficult for the Germans to live off the land.

Partisan units began entering the populated areas, taking what they needed and destroying the rest. Entire village populations were coerced into leaving their homes to seek sanctuary in the forests so that the fruits of their labor would not feed the hated Germans. Some left for patriotic reasons, while others left at the point of a gun. Assassins, targeting villagers who had become too friendly with the enemy, were also used by the partisans to increase tensions between occupation forces and the local population.

Korücks, under increasing pressure to pacify their respective sectors, pleaded with Berlin for more troops, but there were none to be had. With the impending loss of the Sixth Army at Stalingrad, the pleas fell on deaf ears. In desperation, more Ostruppen battalions were raised, but the quality of the men reporting for duty made them a questionable deterrent.

With the deteriorating military situation and the increase in partisan strength, the German High Command appointed SS Lt. Gen. Erich von dem Bach-Zelewski to the position of Chief of Anti-Partisan Forces in December. The 43-year-old von dem Bach had served in World War I, where he earned both classes of the Iron Cross. He had served as the senior SS and Police Leader in the rear area of Heeresgruppe Mitte since June 1941.

An avid National Socialist, von dem Bach had been forced to resign from the Reichswehr (the post-World War I German Army) for participating in National Socialist politics. He found a new home in Heinrich Himmler's SS, where he became an SS organizer on the Austrian frontier. Rising rapidly in the organization, he proved his ruthlessness during the June 30, 1934, blood purge of the SA, or storm troopers, known as the Night of the Long Knives when he ordered a rival SS officer, Anton Freiherr von Hohberg un Buchwald, assassinated.

When the Germans entered the Soviet Union, von dem Bach oversaw the Einsatzgruppen murder squads that followed in the wake of Heeresgruppe Mitte. As a result of those activities, he suffered a nervous breakdown, liver congestion, nightmares, and hallucinations that had to be treated by specialists at an SS hospital in Germany. After being declared fit to return to service, he resumed his duties until assuming his new post.

With von dem Bach's appointment, the partisan war entered a new era of savagery. Partisan leaders already knew of his reputation, and the various formations steeled themselves to face their new enemy. This was especially true of the Jewish partisan units that often had to fight a two-front war against both the Germans and the animosity of the Russian people.

There was a marked difference between the

Each unit was subdivided into demolition that were assigned specific sections

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Jewish and non-Jewish partisan units. The non-Jewish partisans fought because of patriotic or communistic motives and could rely on the local population to give them supplies. Most fought knowing that their families, no matter what hardships they faced, would more than likely survive the war and that they would be reunited with their loved ones once the occupied territories were liberated by the Red Army.

Not so the Jews. Those lucky enough to escape into the forest knew that most would never see their families again. Many had witnessed firsthand the slaughter of Jews by the Einsatzgruppen, and those who hadn't soon learned the truth. The Jewish partisans were not only fighting for their country, they were fighting for revenge.

Most Jewish partisan units received little help from the peasant population, which often hated Jews more that they hated the Germans. Nevertheless, they won grudging admiration from other partisan units for their daring raids against German targets. In Belorussia, a unit commanded by the Bielski brothers grew to include about 1,200 fighters, while another unit, led by Shalom Zurnin, had about 800 Jews.

Whether Jewish or non-Jewish, Russian partisan groups continued to grow in size during the first half of 1943. The spring muddy season brought a welcome respite from combat, and the lull was used to train new recruits and to accumulate supplies and ammunition.

squads

of track to be blown.

Hard-riding Cossacks gallop across a steppe strewn with the wreckage of war as they head toward the German lines. The threat of partisan activity forced the Germans to keep large numbers of troops behind the lines to guard supply routes and installations.

In an effort to counteract the increasing danger posed by the partisans, von dem Bach ordered the creation of the Jagdkommando (Hunter Commando) in early 1943. These were independent units, usually of company strength, designed to attack the partisans in their own element. The Jagdkommando units infiltrated into the forests and swamps that contained partisan bases and stayed for extended periods of time.

They moved mostly by night, looking for any well-traveled path or trail that might be used by partisan forces. Living off the land, they were able to set up ambushes along those trails. The ambushes sometimes caused severe casualties to small partisan formations, but it was not enough to stop the recruitment of more Soviet locals, who easily replaced the Russian losses.

In the spring of 1943, Adolf Hitler was planning a battle designed to annihilate Soviet armies deployed in a huge salient in the Kursk sector. Massive amounts of men and equipment were sent to the area in preparation for the battle.

The Soviets were well aware of Hitler's plans. Their own espionage system was privy to many details of the operation, and partisan sources

kept the Red Army up to date on enemy troop movements and dispositions. Hitler kept postponing the offensive, code-named "Citadel," so that even more divisions could be moved in for the attack.

German commanders grew more worried about the delays and the effects that partisan units in their rear might have on the operation once it finally got going. With postponement following postponement, the Army decided to use some of its field divisions scheduled for the offensive to secure, if only temporarily, the rail lines bringing vital supplies to the attack forces. Their mission was to eliminate as many partisan groups as possible in the weeks before the offensive, which was finally rescheduled for July 5.

Battle-hardened infantry and panzer units swept the Bryansk sector in several operations throughout May and June. The partisans took some fairly heavy casualties in German operations such as Osterei, Freischutz, Tannhauser, and Ziegeunerbaron, but the units still managed to keep their cohesion. For the most part, surviving partisans melted into the marshes and forests to reform and integrate new recruits for the upcoming battle.

In addition to the military preparations for the coming German offensive, STAVKA (Soviet High Command) issued specific instructions to the Central Headquarters for the Partisan Movement to conduct large-scale actions against the enemy rail network. The Red Army planned a counteroffensive once the German attack had run its course, and the disruption of the German supply network was seen to be an instrumental part of the operation if it were to succeed.

Citadel began with some initial success, but on July 13, Hitler, nervous about the Allied invasion of Sicily, decided to call off the offensive. He ordered key SS panzer divisions to disengage and head to the Mediterranean Front. Both sides had suffered massive losses during the nine-day battle, but the Soviets had a powerful reserve behind the front line ready to strike when the time was right.

The Russian counteroffensive began on July 17 with the Southwest and South Fronts attacking the flank of Heeresgruppe Süd. Heavy rains gave the German divisions of Heeresgruppe Mitte a break from the Russian offensive—the Soviets unable to attack or advance due to mud. The Heeresgruppe commander, Col. Gen. Walter Model, told Hitler in no uncertain terms that his armies would have to withdraw to shorten the line. For once, Hitler agreed and the divisions of the Heeresgruppe began moving westward on August 1.

The partisan operation was code-named "Rail War." During June and July, even as the battle at Kursk raged, ammunition, weapons, explosives, and demolition experts were flown into partisan bases in preparation for the massive venture. In Belorussia alone, 123 partisan units were detailed for demolition activities. Each unit was subdivided into demolition squads that were assigned specific sections of track to blow up. In the northern and central sectors of the front, between 200,000 and 300,000 sections were targeted to be destroyed.

PRELIMINARY ATTACKS TOOK PLACE in late July with the Soviet counteroffensive now in full swing. Partisan units succeeded in blocking a main rail artery south of Bryansk for two days, and by the end of the month the Germans reported more than 1,100 separate attacks on railways in the central sector.

As the divisions of Heeresgruppe Mitte began their August 1 withdrawal, all partisan units scheduled to participate in Rail War were placed on alert. They moved out to prearranged sectors and waited for the command to strike. The order came on August 3, just as the Germans were in the midst of their withdrawal.

During the nights of August 3 and 4, Heeresgruppe Mitte reported more than 4,100 railway demolitions. It was the same in other sectors of the front. In all, Heeresgruppen Nord, Mitte, and Süd had a combined total of 262 kilometers of tracks destroyed. Supply trains heading toward the front were derailed by the attacks, backing up rail traffic and turning German logistics at the front into a nightmare.

Without the necessary supplies and ammunition, Model's Heeresgruppe Mitte was hard pressed to hold its new positions, which were being attacked by three Red Army Fronts. German repair battalions were sent out to restore the most vital sections of track, requiring more units to guard the workmen—men that were sorely needed at the front.

In the Pinsk district of Belorussia, the Germans worked from early August until September 19 to repair sections of track that had been destroyed by the Imeni Lenina (In the Name of Lenin) Partisan Brigade. German trains were able to use the tracks for exactly one day before the brigade struck again. It was mid-October before the tracks could finally become operational once more.

The attacks continued up and down the front. In the Odessa sector in southern Russia, the 2nd Partisan Brigade, commanded by S. Kaplun, severed the Sarany-Luminets rail line, preventing its use from August 15 until October 19. The 3rd Partisan Brigade, operating behind the lines of Heeresgruppe Nord, claimed that it blew up 10,000 sections of track in August alone.

Despite the kilometers of track destroyed, the Soviet authorities in Moscow were somewhat disappointed with the August effort. Communist officials had demanded many more attacks than had actually been carried out, oblivious of the logistical requirements facing the partisan units. In reality, the partisans had done everything they could to help the Soviet offensive.

Their efforts were recognized after the war by Hero of the Soviet Union Marshal Georgi Zhukov. In his memoirs, he praised the partisan fighters, stating that they "contributed significantly to Red Army victories in the summer of 1943 at Belgorod, Orel and Kharkov."

The partisan operation also had the effect of attracting thousands of new recruits. Soviet figures, which should often be taken somewhat skeptically, estimate a 250 percent increase in partisan fighters compared to the end of 1942. Even if the figure is inflated, there is no doubt that partisan units saw a significant increase in volunteers during the last half of 1943.

With its increased strength, the partisan movement continued to be a drain on German manpower. In the Nevel sector of Heeresgruppe Nord, partisans partially or fully controlled a 3,200-square-kilometer area of swamps and forests. Working with Party members, the partisans reestablished the collective farm system there and were even able to implement a crude postal system to communicate with officials in the unoccupied areas of Russia.

The Crimea also had its share of partisans that kept German and Romanian occupation troops on guard and on edge. A force of up to 8,000 fighters occupied key areas in the Yaila Mountains, disrupting supply routes and attacking German garrisons in the vicinity. Their operations became so troublesome that the Romanian Mountain Corps was ordered to wipe them out in late December 1943. In a week-long action, the Romanians claimed to have killed more than 1,000 partisans and captured more than 2,500 at a cost of 232 casualties to themselves. The surviving partisans melted away, forming new units to continue harassing the Germans and their allies.

In the early days of 1944, the Soviets launched two offensives—one against Heeresgruppe Süd and the other against Heeresgruppe Nord. The southern operation tore into the German line from Kirovograd to Korosten, forcing the Wehrmacht back more than 150 kilometers in some places. In the

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After setting fire to a freight train laden with supplies for the German army, partisans melt away into the neighboring town.

southern region of the Pripyat Marsh, partisan bands demolished the few rail lines in the area, totally disrupting the German supply network.

As the Soviets advanced, the partisans moved farther westward to set up new camps from which they could strike the enemy rear. More volunteers flocked to the cause, and German reports estimated that four partisan units with a combined total of nearly 9,000 men were operating in the rear of the Fourth Panzer Army, which was defending the sector directly south of the marsh.

The Red Army advance in the south slowly pushed the Germans back. By mid-April, the Russians had driven into Romania and were fast approaching the borders of Poland and Hungary. Once again, Soviet troops were helped by partisan units that derailed supply trains and demolished vital bridges that created choke points for German supplies and reinforcements struggling to reach the front.

IN THE NORTH, THE RUSSIANS launched an offensive aimed at breaking the siege of Leningrad and destroying the thinly stretched divisions of Heeresgruppe Nord. The offensive began on January 14 with thousands of shells slamming into the German positions. Tank and infantry units followed closely on the heels of the initial bombardment, breaking through the German front in several sectors.

Partisan units in the north were ordered to wait until the assault was in full swing before making their own attacks. The hard-pressed Germans, seeing no partisan activity in the rear area, released some security divisions and sent them to the front to try and stem the Russian tide.

As the offensive developed, the partisans were put into action, striking key communications and supply networks. The security units heading to the front were also attacked as their columns moved through the open countryside.

By January 16, the partisan attacks were in full swing in the north. Near Luga, a critical rail station and switching point was destroyed with heavy loss to the defenders. The main rail line supplying the XXXVIII Army Corps, which was desperately defending the Lake Ilmen sector, was blown up in more than 300 places. As the Red Army advanced, partisan attacks further to the west delayed the arrival of reinforcements desperately trying to reach the front.

The northern and southern offensives rolled forward until the spring rains turned the land into a vast quagmire. Both sides had suffered heavy casualties in the past few months, and the surviving troops were exhausted. As the war settled down to a semi-stagnant state, the partisan units continued to sting the Germans, albeit to a lesser degree than in the previous months.

The Russian offensives had pushed Heeresgruppe Nord and Süd back hundreds of kilometers, leaving Heeresgruppe Mitte occupying a massive bulge in the center of the Eastern Front. In Moscow, staff officers worked night and day in planning a new offensive that was hoped to crack the Germans once and for all. The planned offensive was code-named "Bagration."

Operation Bagration would strike Heeresgruppe Mitte with the 1st, 2nd, and 3rd Belorussian Fronts. According to Soviet sources, there were about 150,000 partisans organized into 150 brigades and 49 detachments behind the German front in Belorussia. Bagration was due to begin on June 22, but by the time the offensive opened the partisans were already in action.

On the night of June 19, partisan forces in Belorussia set off more than 9,500 demolitions on German rail lines, and the main lines from Mogilev to Vitebsk and from Minsk to Orsha were knocked out of action for several critical days. When the Soviet offensive began on the 22nd, the movement of desperately needed supplies and reinforcements was impossible, leaving units on the front line in a hopeless position.

As the Red Army rolled forward, partisans prepared river and stream crossing points that helped Russian tank and infantry units continue to drive west. Partisan units also assisted the Army by seizing and holding bridgeheads ahead of the advance and by cutting off German lines of retreat.

When Bagration was finally over in late August, the Germans had been pushed back almost 600 kilometers in several areas. Most of the Soviet Union had been liberated and Central Europe cowed at the approach of the Red juggernaut. Many of the partisan groups in the

Continued on page 76

THE BATTLES OF KOHIMA, IMPHAL, AND the Admin Box saw the comprehensive defeat of the Japanese armies seeking to invade India during 1944 and sent them reeling back into Burma in early 1945, pursued by the revitalized British 14th Army under Lt. Gen. William Slim. The monsoon helped delay the Allies and enabled the new commander of the Japanese Burma Area Army, Lt. Gen. Kimura Heitaro, to redeploy for an organized defense.

Kimura planned to allow Slim to cross the Chindwin and Irrawaddy Rivers and to fight in the area of Mandalay, believing this would bestow similar advantages of proximity to supplies enjoyed by the British at the start of the year. The British in turn would suffer the disadvantages of long, overstretched lines of communication.

Advancing on the Irrawaddy River, Slim ensured, however, that every administrative detail was attended to. Together with air superiority, this gave his forces an increasing advantage as the nature of the fighting altered with the changed conditions, now that they had come down from the mountains. Fighting in more open countryside also favored the British armor that completely outclassed and outnumbered Kimura's solitary 14th Tank Regiment. In fact, Kimura's plan made little sense in the light of either Slim's or his own real cir-

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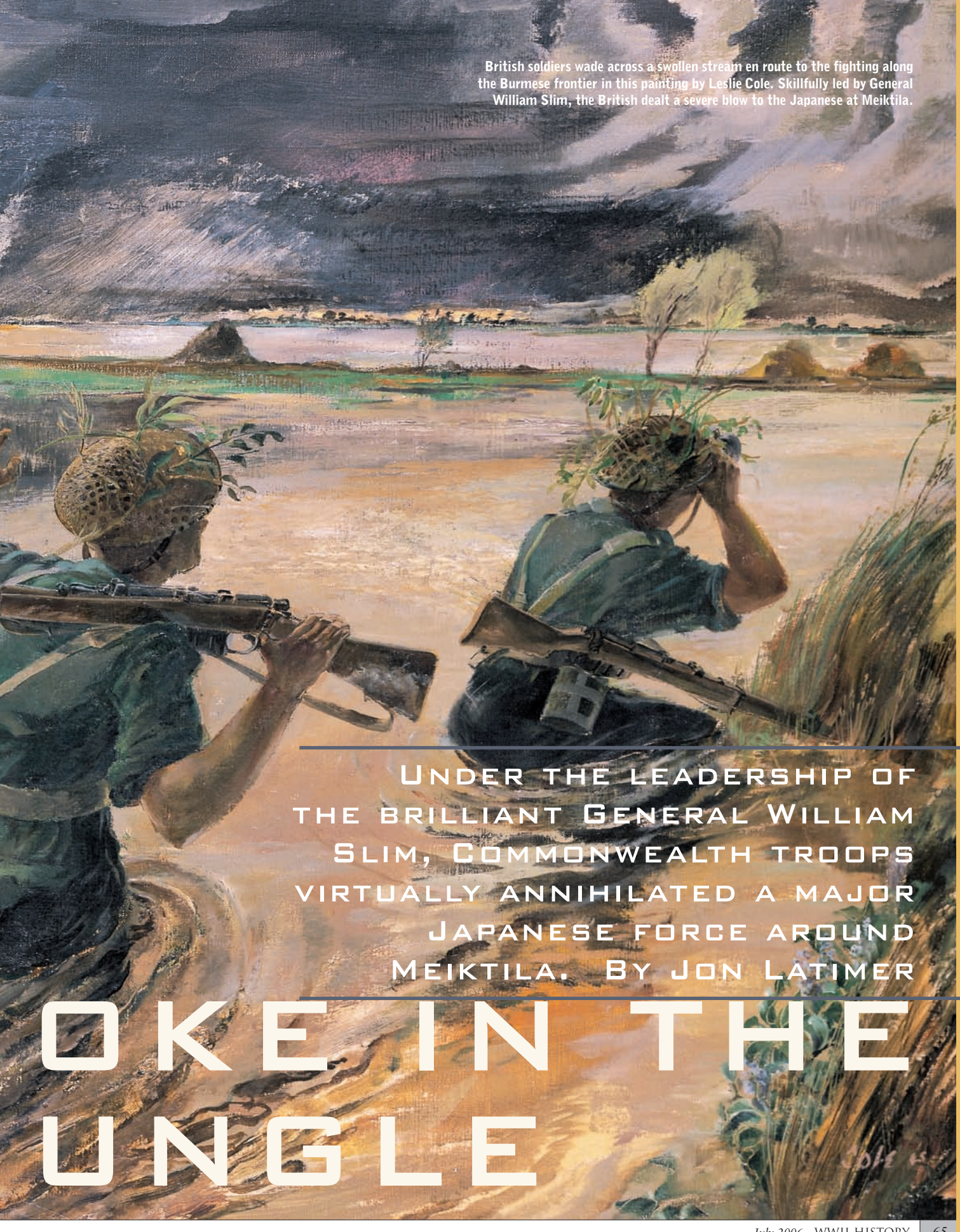


British soldiers wade across a swollen stream en route to the fighting along the Burmese frontier in this painting by Leslie Cole. Skillfully led by General William Slim, the British dealt a severe blow to the Japanese at Meiktila.

Under the leadership of the brilliant General William Slim, Commonwealth troops virtually annihilated a major Japanese force around Meiktila. By Jon Latimer

OKE IN THE UNGLE

cumstances, and Slim was not slow to take full advantage.

Slim conceived a cunning deception plan—Cloak—that he hoped would lead the Japanese to believe the whole of 14th Army was moving on Mandalay, while a force operating in the Myittha Valley was merely a diversion. This would in fact seize Meiktila and hold it as an anvil against which the rest of his force would act as a hammer to destroy the Japanese and prevent their withdrawal into Thailand.

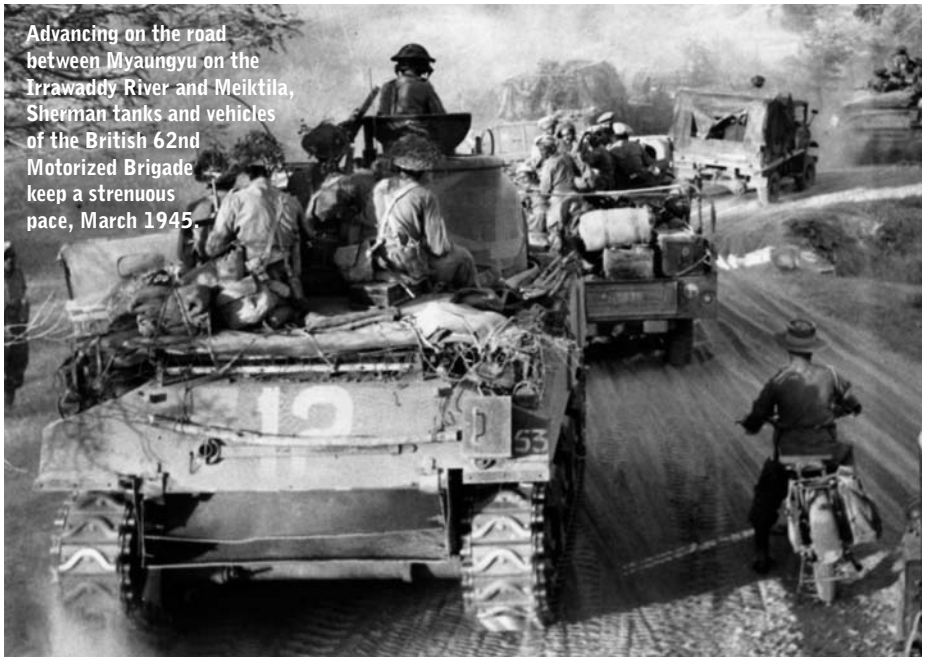
Meiktila was identified as a crucial communications node a year earlier by Maj. Gen. Orde Wingate, leader of the famous Chindits. The bulk of the supplies for the Japanese 15th Army defending the Mandalay region and 33rd Army farther north passed through it. Slim believed that he could hold the town against counterattacks and that the combination of holding this key point and constant pressure elsewhere would lead to the total collapse of the Japanese.

Both: Imperial War Museum, London

Major General D. T. Cowen (center) of the 17th Indian Division briefs subordinates on plans for coming engagement.

Slim planned for the 19th Indian Division from XXXIII Corps to seize Singu, 60 miles to the north of Mandalay, through which a good all-weather road ran. This was to be followed by a crossing in the area of Myinmu 40 miles downstream to the west by the 20th Indian Division; then the British 2nd Division would make a maximum display of force to draw away enemy reserves. Shortly thereafter, Lt. Gen. Frank Messervy's IV Corps would put the 7th Indian Division across as surreptitiously as possible near Nyaungu. Having secured a bridgehead, the 17th Indian Division (less one infantry brigade but reinforced by two armored battalions) would pass through and seize Meiktila by way of Taungtha. No attempt was to be made to hold the road behind open. The division's third brigade would be air transported into Meiktila as soon as a landing strip could be secured.

To screen Messervy's advance, the move would be preceded by either the Lushai Brigade or the 28th (East African) Brigade until the corps deployed, and the 255th Indian Tank Brigade would wait until called forward on transporters after the engineers had improved the roads. Radio silence was of paramount importance, and all communications had to be by landline or liaison officers. A dummy IV Corps headquarters would remain behind and transmit normal radio traffic. To further supplement this plan, Messervy devised a deception plan to cover his movement in the Myittha Valley and his intentions for crossing the Irrawaddy.



Advancing on the road between Myaungyu on the Irrawaddy River and Meiktila, Sherman tanks and vehicles of the British 62nd Motorized Brigade keep a strenuous pace, March 1945.

The buildup to the coup proceeded smoothly with the 19th Indian Division crossing on January 9, the 20th Indian Division on February 12, and the 2nd Division landing between them 12 days later. The Japanese launched repeated and desperate attacks at each of these bridgeheads, leading to enormous casualties in the face of the overwhelming fire support available to the British and Indian troops and forcing them back onto the defensive.

The Japanese then further compounded their losses with a policy of no withdrawal. The advancing Allies would drive the Japanese from their defensive positions in dawn-to-dusk fighting and retire into their own lines, leaving the Japanese to reoccupy their original bunkers. Then, the Japanese would be driven from them once more the following day in operations across now Familiar ground and at relatively little cost to the attackers.

The Japanese, recognizing that the principal cause of damage to them was the effective employment of Allied tanks, went to particular lengths to knock them out. At one point, an officer and a private scrambled out of the close scrub and clambered aboard a Lee tank of the 3rd Carabiniers fighting in support of the 2nd Division. The private was killed by machine-gun fire from another tank, but not before the officer had killed the tank commander with his sword, climbed into the tank as the body collapsed, and similarly killed the 37mm gunner before attacking the 37mm loader. The loader only survived by using the breech as cover and managed to fire six revolver rounds into his assailant, although it actually took a further three from another hastily recovered pistol to finish off the fight. All this time, the other four crew members were unaware of the carnage above them! The renowned fanaticism of the Japanese led merely to vast losses that they simply could not sustain.

The truly mortal blow to the Japanese Army in Burma fell on February 14, when the lead troops of the 7th Indian Division crossed the Irrawaddy near Nyaungu. Despite reports of their 300-mile approach march, Kimura refused to believe the scale of the threat developing on his flank, partly as a result of the deception plan and partly thanks to the aggressive use of armor in the northern bridgeheads. He knew there were only two Indian Army tank brigades operating in Burma and was convinced that both of these were being employed in the north. The vast length of the river line had meant that nowhere could it be defended in strength, as those facing XXXIII Corps had already discovered, and the opposition was patchy and sporadic at best.

The crossing of the Irrawaddy at Nyaungu was the longest opposed river crossing

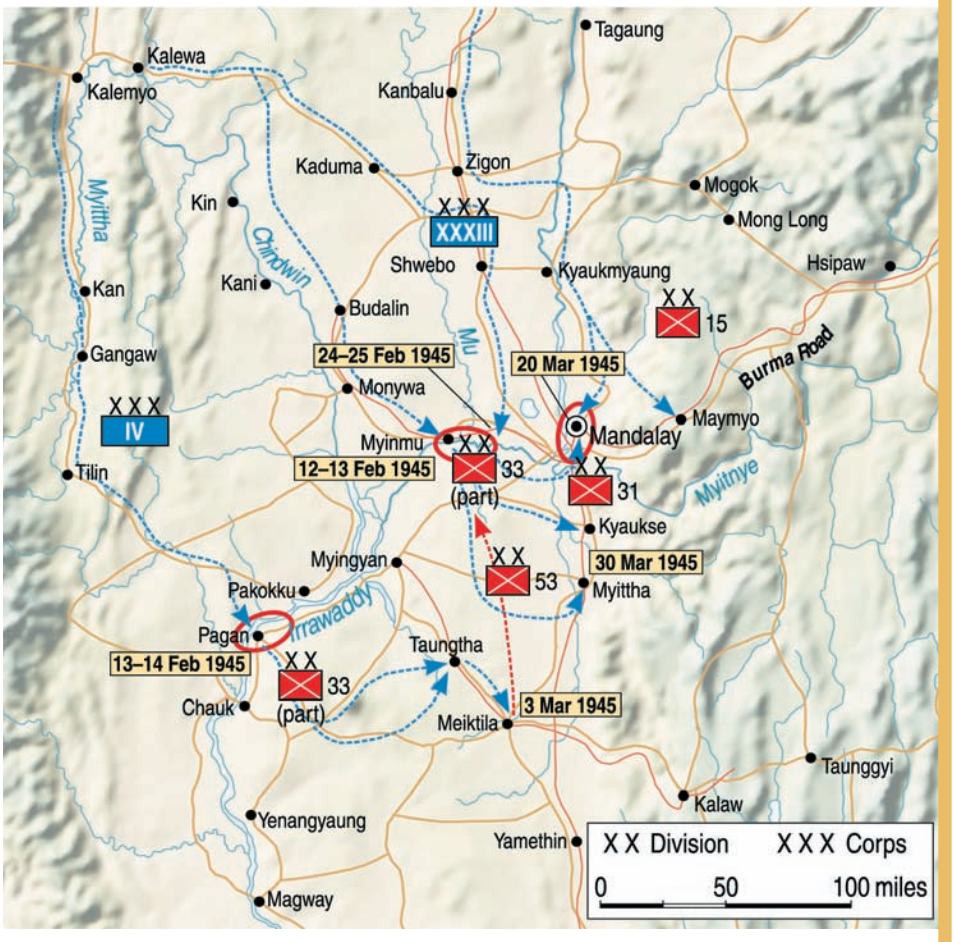
attempted in any theater of World War II, the river at this point being over 2,000 yards wide. Crossing in darkness, one company of the 2nd South Lancashire Regiment made it over, but two Japanese swimming in the river were shot by a sea reconnaissance unit, thus alerting the defenses. With daylight, the operation became singularly dangerous, and 2nd South Lancs suffered heavy casualties until the 4th/15th Punjab Regiment was able to land and clear the banks.

Meanwhile, a subsidiary crossing at Pagan by the 1st/11th Sikh Regiment made contact with an Indian National Army unit that wished to surrender. Carefully, aware of the prospects for treachery from their countrymen, the Sikhs took the position unopposed, and the bridgehead was rapidly consolidated. The defenders retired into catacombs at Nyaungu and refused to surrender. Consequently, the entrances were sealed with explosives.

As the buildup continued, the Japanese launched some air attacks but otherwise did little to interfere. The IV Corps had managed to hit the junction between 15th Army and 28th Army, and the Japanese were convinced that this new bridgehead was a diversion from the main effort taking place around Mandalay. It was a tribute to Messervy's deception plan and to his drive and energy, willing as he was to take risks to get forward as quickly as possible.

Commanded by Maj. Gen. David "Punch" Cowan, the 17th Indian Division was to break out through the thin screen of Japanese covering the bridgehead. Cowan's plan involved directing the 48th Indian Brigade supported by one tank battalion to secure the Pyinbin road junction and then seal off or capture Taungtha, while the rest of the 255th Indian Tank Brigade and the 63rd Indian Brigade bypassed to the south to take Mahlaing. The armor would secure Thabutkon airfield, and the 48th Indian Brigade would then abandon Taungtha, rejoining the rest of the division for the assault on Meiktila.

On February 19, the reconnaissance column reported Pyinbin clear, and Cowan moved at once. The advance was along parallel axes with the 63rd Indian Brigade on the right led by the Sherman tanks of Probyn's Horse and the 48th Indian Brigade on the left led by the Royal Deccan Horse. Flank protection was provided by the armored cars of Prince Albert Victor's Own Cavalry and the16th Light Cavalry. At Oyin, the 63rd Indian Brigade discovered that the enemy were yet prepared to die to defend their position, even though they were from an administrative unit. They strapped explosives to their bodies and attempted to make suicide attacks on the tanks, although only one had any success.



Taungtha was occupied on February 24, and the undefended airfield at Thabutkon, 15 miles north of Meiktila, was captured by the 48th Indian Brigade on February 26. It was quickly brought into service for a stream of C-47 Dakota transports from U.S. 1st Air Commando Group to land the division's remaining brigade, the 99th, and enable Cowan to attend to the capture of the town at full strength. This was a doubly important development since, by now, the Japanese had reoccupied Taungtha and the whole formation was dependent on resupply by air. By nightfall of February 27, the 9th Border Regiment, together with the Sherman tanks of Probyn's Horse, was just six miles from Meiktila.

The threat should have been apparent to the Japanese by now, but a signal sent a few days earlier detailing the breakout had been corrupted so that instead of reading 2,000 vehicles it read only 200, and Kimura dismissed it as no more than a raid. A detailed investigation by historian Takuo Isobe has since cast an interesting light on this signal. The concentration of the 17th Indian Division and 255th Indian Tank Brigade was observed from a hill by two staff officers, one from the 33rd Division and the other from 15th Army, who agreed that 200 tanks were present plus 2,000 wheeled vehicles.

Audacious General William Slim led British Commonwealth forces against Japanese soldiers who were skilled in jungle warfare, and prevailed during the winter and early spring of 1944-45.

This was reported back to 15th Army, which passed it on to Burma Area Army in Rangoon with the recommendation that everything should be thrown into the defense of Meiktila. The fact that the coded message arrived in its correct form is not in doubt, but given the variance of the information from that of the intelligence section's current assessment of the Allied armor's location, it must have been changed before being passed on to Kimura. Burma Area Army had instructed 15th Army not to overestimate the enemy's strength in the Meiktila area.

Whatever the frame of mind at headquarters, the local commander, Maj. Gen. Kasuya was convinced that he was about to be attacked in strength and began to prepare accordingly. He had available two airfield battalions, a reinforcement battalion, and a number of administrative units plus the 168th Infantry Regiment en route to rejoin its division in the Burma Area Army. His force totaled about 3,500 men. Cowan ordered his division to commence the general attack on Meiktila on March 1.

Leaving the 99th Indian Brigade to hold Thabutkon, Cowan deployed his division to strike the town from the north and west. The 63rd Indian Brigade advanced through an area of scattered buildings and dense thickets from the west to clear its section in two attacks, each made by a battalion supported by tanks. The 48th Indian Brigade's objective led it through the heart of the town, where it faced mines, mortars, and accurate artillery fire, which slowed it down.

Accompanied by two battalions of infantry riding in trucks, the 255th Indian Tank Brigade had skirted to the eastern side to clear the satellite airstrip at Thedaw and found it held by a well-concealed and dug-in force. When the 48th Indian Brigade finished clearing its section on March 3, the remnants of the garrison tried to break out toward the east but were intercepted and destroyed by the infantry.

For three days, the Allies had fought steadily through the streets until they had practically annihilated the defenders, some of whom even sat in holes in the ground with 250-pound bombs between their knees, waiting to detonate them by bashing the primer with a stone as a tank passed overhead. Fortunately for the attackers, by this stage of the war the skill of the Japanese seldom matched their courage.

Faced with a disastrous situation as a result of the loss of Meiktila, and with his forces largely pinned down around the country, Kimura was left with little option but to abandon northern Burma and the Burma Road that enabled supplies to be transported from India to China. He was also compelled to bring the 33rd Army, under Lt. Gen. Masaki Honda, south to take over efforts to clear their lines. For this, he would command the 18th and 49th Divisions, elements of the 53rd Division, and the 14th Tank Regiment.

Due to a severe shortage of transport, these formations only arrived in the Meiktila area piecemeal, and it was not until March 15 that Cowan was aware that they came under a single command. Indeed, their communications arrangements meant that coordination was so difficult that they effectively operated independently. When the 14th Tank Regiment attempted a road move in daylight, it was caught by Allied fighter-bombers and two thirds of its strength was left wrecked and burning on the route. Only six Type 97 tanks arrived in the operational area, where they were employed as mobile pillboxes.

Thus began what became known as the "Second Siege," with the 17th Indian Division isolated far behind enemy lines. Slim now held the initiative, and the morale of his men had never been higher. He decided to put the 5th Indian Division under Messervy's control,

British soldiers advance rapidly through an overrun position formerly occupied by a Japanese sniper near Yindar, 12 miles southeast of Meiktila, May 1945.

Imperial War Museum, London

knowing that, although this left him without a reserve, the critical point of the campaign had been reached. All the troops in the 14th Army were now heavily engaged in their respective battles with the enemy to their front, but all were working toward the same goal: the strangulation of the Japanese through the chokepoint of Meiktila.

Despite being nominally under siege, it was not Cowan's men who were struggling under the circumstances. Cowan intended to retain the initiative with a series of aggressive sweeps. Using the town as a large patrol base, armored cars were sent ranging far and wide in search of the enemy, which was attacked wherever found by columns of armor and infantry, well supported by artillery and aircraft.

Commencing on March 6, five columns were sent out in different directions, only one of which encountered resistance near Thedaw airstrip. After being hit by air strikes, the Japanese tried to get away but were cornered and destroyed. A second series of raids was dispatched.

A young soldier in the 9th Border, George MacDonald Fraser (later author of the *Flashman* novels), described a typical action: "I fetched up at the tree, its trunk between me and the bunker, Stanley ran forward, firing from the hip at the firing-slit. Dust flew from the bunker as the Bren burst hit it ... then I was diving down beside the bunker wall, about a yard to the side of the firing slit, fumbling for a grenade. I was facing back the way we had come and there were dark bush-hatted figures running through the trees, and the wood was suddenly alive with small-arms fire, rifle and automatic."

According to the official history, over the two days of that operation, the 9th Border lost 141 casualties and one of its supporting tanks. Fraser recalled, "That tank burned for hours." Eventually, the Japanese 18th Division was forced to abandon its entire section of the perimeter.

That tank was one of few the Japanese succeeded in destroying in what was essentially a one-sided struggle, given the almost complete lack of antitank weapons available to them. A third series of raids was dispatched on March 13, and Cowan likened these moves to a boxer using straight lefts to keep his opponent from closing effectively. But he did not have it all his own way, and two of these latter columns met with disaster.

Although the Japanese had been able to reoccupy Taungtha and cut the 17th Indian Division off from the bridgehead at the river, this did not last long. On March 12, troops from the 7th Indian Division overwhelmed them. Nevertheless, it was apparent that the Japanese were closing in on the town. By March 15, it was obvious that they had lost interest in Mandalay, and the whole character of the operations in both areas changed. Pressure was building steadily on Meiktila, and a strong column of the 20th Indian Division was dispatched to make contact with the 17th. By the middle of March, IV Corps, now reinforced with the 5th Indian Division, was tightening its grip on the Japanese communications with Rangoon, and Slim was ready to make good his plan to trap and destroy Kimura.

Both: Imperial War Museum, London

ABOVE: The cost of an unsuccessful counterattack at Meiktila is apparent as British soldiers view scores of dead enemy troops. LEFT: British crewmen service their 3-inch mortar during heavy fighting around Meiktila.

Honda was presented with a very gloomy picture on taking over preparations for the recapture of Meiktila. The enemy was so abundantly supplied from the air that it would be necessary to concentrate attacks on the airfields and supply lines, and he set about regrouping 33rd Army to do this. His report to Kimura stated bluntly that the outcome of this action would decide the fate of the Japanese forces in Burma.

During the night of March 14, the Japanese began their offensive against the airfield. Although they achieved little success to begin with, they did manage to get close enough to it to bring down fire that was to prove hazardous for the reinforcements arriving the following morning in the form of the 9th Indian Brigade from the 5th Indian Division. While the fire caused no serious damage, it was apparent that it would not be possible to bring in the rest until the 99th Indian Brigade, responsible for airfield security, had cleared it. Patrols discovered that a strong enemy force had dug in on the eastern side of the runway, and the 16th was spent clearing it away. The following day, the remainder of the 9th Indian Brigade was brought in. However, the Japanese redoubled their efforts to close the airfield on the 17th, and all future supplies had to be air-dropped.

At the same time, Cowan was ready to begin a general offensive against the enemy forces closing in on Meiktila with the aim of destroying them. The 9th Indian Brigade was detailed to hold the airfield perimeter and spent the next few days constantly patrolling to seek out and eliminate the snipers, artillery, and enemy patrols that were constantly filtering into the area. Pressure was also beginning to grow from the south and southeast held by the 48th Indian Brigade, and it became obvious that the enemy intended to launch an attack from this direction.

Columns were sent out from both brigades, and on March 22, the 48th Indian Brigade lost three tanks. The Japanese followed and

Continued on page 76

The bitter battle for Okinawa was the final land campaign of World War II in the Pacific.

BY MASON B. WEBB

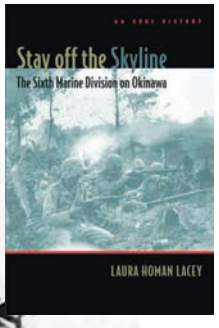
FOR 82 DAYS IN THE SPRING OF 1945, A FEROCIOUS BATTLE RAGED ON A PACIFIC ISLAND CALLED Okinawa—an island considered crucial for the planned invasion of the Japanese Home Islands. It was an operation that eclipsed in size the D-Day landings in Normandy. When it was over, more than 250,000 people were dead, including 150,000 civilians—many of whom committed suicide rather than be taken alive by Marines whom the Japanese had propagandized as "rapists and sadistic killers."

Whole towns and forested hillsides were turned into wastelands by the tremendous aerial bombing and naval and artillery fire. Booby traps lay everywhere, ready to kill and maim the unwary, the souvenir-hunting soldier or the curious child.

The United States alone had nearly 5,000 men killed at Okinawa. Thirty-six U.S. Navy ships were sunk, mostly by kamikaze suicide pilots, and 368 other ships were damaged; it was the largest loss of ships in a single battle in the Navy's history.

For the men who survived the ordeal, it was a time in hell that not even six decades has erased from their memories.

Using oral histories gathered in interviews with 40 Marine Corps veterans, Laura Homan Lacey has produced ***Stay Off The Skyline: The Sixth Marine Division On Okinawa*** (Potomac Books, Washington, D.C., 2005, 243 pp., photographs, maps, index, bibliography, $27.50, hardcover), a highly personal history of men at war in the Pacific campaign's largest—and last—land battle. Some historians say that President Harry S. Truman's decision to drop the atomic bombs on Japan came partly as a result of learning of the stiff enemy resistance and unimaginable carnage on Okinawa.



National Archives

U.S. Marines watch the explosion from a dynamite charge on Okinawa, part of the effort to clear tenacious and fanatical Japanese defenders from the island.

Landing on the western coast of Okinawa near Katena on April 1, were more than 182,000 Marines and soldiers; many more would follow. Although the landings were unopposed, the land battle that followed was a brutal slugfest from start to finish as the invaders fought defenders in thousands of pillboxes, caves, and fighting holes during the push to both ends of the long, thin island. Of more than 100,000 Japanese combatants on the island, fewer than 10,000 survived.

The Americans grudgingly admired the Japanese soldiers' fighting spirit. As one veteran says of the enemy, "They were fearless. They were clever and devious. They used the spider hole to their advantage behind our lines. They used the trees. They were excellent at night. They fought mostly at night. Their equipment didn't match ours, but they still shot between the eyes. But, above all, was their devotion, their tenacity, to their cause, and they just didn't give up."

Lacey, the official historian of the 6th Marine Division—a unit assembled mostly from battle-hardened veterans of other divisions—has organized her material by introducing the reader to the men, some just under-aged teens, anxious to join the Corps and get into the fight. The narration and interviews carry us through the trials and tribulations of boot camp, combat training, and into the crucible of combat itself, ending with an epilogue that shows the physical and emotional scars the survivors still carry with them.

Not merely a recitation of deeds gone by, the book explores the psychological aspects of what combat, the rush of coming inches away from death, does to people. Lacey writes, "War is a spectacle. Combat is so pivotal that most men believe it shapes their lives, and it becomes

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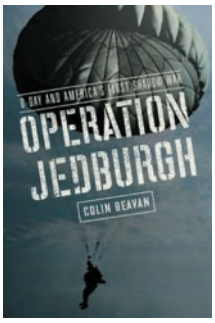
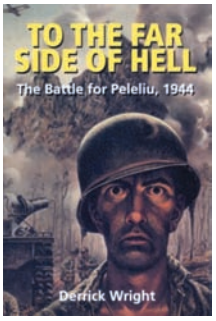
the event they refer to most in conversation…. 'Despite the horror, the weariness, the grime, and the hatred, participation with others in the chance of battle had its unforgettable side, which they would not have wanted to miss.'"

Stay Off The Skyline is an important, thoughtful book for anyone who wants to know more about this often overlooked battle and the effects it had on those who fought it. It is a book that should not be missed.





Hitler's Raid To Save Mussolini: The Most Infamous Commando Operation Of World War II by Greg Annussek, Da Capo Press, New York, 2005, 325 pp., photographs, maps, bibliography, index, $26.00, hardcover.

As the Allied invasion of Sicily threatened to leap onto the peninsula of Italy during the summer of 1943, Benito Mussolini, the Italian dictator and father of Fascism, was ousted by his king and imprisoned by his war-weary countrymen.

First taken under arrest to an island and then locked up in a hotel at a remote ski resort high in the mountainous Abruzzi region east of Rome, the prisoner Mussolini's fate seemed sealed; either the partisans would kill him or he would be turned over to the Allies who would put him on trial. Neither prospect was an appealing outcome for Mussolini's protégé, Adolf Hitler.

Although the German führer had grown to disdain Il Duce's lack of resolve for total war and his reluctance to follow orders and round up Italian Jews for transport to the Nazi death camps, he nevertheless came to Mussolini's aid with one of the most dramatic rescues of all time.

Digging deeply into long-forgotten archives, Greg Annussek has written a masterful, fast-paced account of Operation Oak, Otto Skorzeny's bold, glider-borne assault onto the barren summit of the Gran Sasso d'Italia to snatch Mussolini from his captors, whisk him off to Germany where he would be Hitler's puppet and, it was hoped, a sort of Duce-in-exile, keeping Italy in the war on the Axis side.

Annussek's recounting of the raid itself, using the recollections of the major players—Mussolini, Skorzeny, General Kurt Student, and others—is heart pounding. As the gliders land on the hotel's grounds, the author writes, "Mussolini was looking down on the Germans from his suite. 'At the head of the group was Skorzeny,' he remembered. 'The Carabinieri had already got their guns at the ready when I noticed an Italian officer among Skorzeny's group whom, on approaching nearer, I recognized as General Soleti, of the Metropolitan Police Corps.' He began shouting, 'Can't you see? There is an Italian general there! Don't fire! Everything is all right!'

"Skorzeny could hardly believe it. The man that he had been chasing for weeks was alive and tantalizingly close to being in his grasp. All the same, he believed that Mussolini would be safer out of the line of fire. 'Duce, get away from the window!' Skorzeny shouted."

Hitler's Raid to Save Mussolini is filled with the type

of page-turning drama and intrigue usually found in only the best spy novels. Yet, as improbable as the plot seems, it is all true, and a "must-read" for anyone wanting the details about the bravado and opera buffo shenanigans behind Mussolini's rescue.

Billy Mitchell: The Life, Times, and Battles of America's Prophet of Air Power by H. Paul Jeffers, Zenith Press, St. Paul, MN, 2005, 288 pp., photographs, index, bibliography, $24.95, hardcover.

In 1905, only two years after the Wright Brothers got their primitive flying machine off the ground, a young Army officer by the name of William Mitchell published a shocking, heretical article in *Cavalry Journal*. It predicted future wars would be waged "in the air, on the surface of the earth, and under the earth and water."

As if to underscore his belief in the future and in the importance of military aviation, Billy Mitchell learned to fly, and soon become an expert pilot. In 1917, after a transfer to the aviation section of the Signal Corps, he was appointed the air officer of the American Expeditionary Force (AEF) and sent to France as an observer. Once American troops were committed to the continent, Colonel Mitchell became the first American officer to fly over enemy lines. He subsequently led a massive bombing raid of 1,500 planes against enemy positions.

His experiences in the air reinforced his earlier stance that the paradigm had shifted and that the old ways of warfare were as outmoded as horse-mounted cavalry charges. It was the airplane that would dictate the course of future wars, and Mitchell set out to convince the War Department that he was right, regardless of the personal consequences or whose toes he stepped on.

In the early 1920s, for example, he angered the Navy when he claimed that the aerial bomber had made the battleship obsolete—then proved his thesis by conducting a series of tests and sinking captured German dreadnoughts as though they were bathtub toys. Flying mock bombing raids over New York City with massed formations of aircraft, Mitchell also made the point that American cities were vulnerable to attacks from the air—a point the distressed generals and admirals in the War Department sought to dismiss as science fiction.

As might be expected, Mitchell's hardheaded stubbornness earned him as many enemies as followers within the military establishment, and in 1925 he was court-martialed for insubordination. His sensational public trial was avidly followed in the press by the American public.

Found guilty, Mitchell chose to resign his commission rather than serve his sentence—a five-year suspension from active duty without pay. He continued in civilian life to champion the cause of air power—and even presciently warned that Japan would one day launch a surprise attack on U.S. military facilities at Pearl Harbor.

Jeffers' account of Billy Mitchell's life is a story of unflinching honor and the courage to risk everything for one's deeply held beliefs. Few books have told that story as well as this one.

Operation Jedburgh: D-Day and America's First Shadow War by Colin Beavan, Viking Press, New York, 2006, 400 pp., maps, photographs, index, bibliography, $27.95, softcover.

The Jedburghs: France, 1944, and the Secret Untold History of the First Special Forces by Will Irwin, PublicAffairs/ Perseus, New York, 2005, 328 pp., photographs, maps, index, bibliography, $24.95, hardcover.

One of the peculiarities of the publishing world is that, despite the thousands of authors

working independently, and the millions of available topics, two books on the same, relatively obscure topic are sometimes published at approximately the same time.

Such is the case with two recent books about the Allies' first Special Forces unit—organized by the OSS, recruited from the ranks of American, British, and Free French units, and known by the code name "Jedburghs."

Relentlessly trained in hand-to-hand combat skills, the use of Allied and enemy weapons, explosives, communications gear, and the French language, the Jedburghs were the elite of the elite. Their shadowy existence was expected to be brief—casualty rates of up to 75 percent were expected. There was no sugar coating the danger; any of these clandestine warriors who might be captured would likely be tortured to extract information and then executed by the Nazis.

The recruits came from all over—Great Britain, America, France, and New Zealand, among others. Many adventure seeking men whose names would become public in the decades after the war—men such as Stewart Alsop, William Colby, and John Singlaub—were included in their ranks.

Parachuted in three-man teams behind German lines in France months before Operation Overlord, the "Jeds" engaged in secretive, brutal warfare on a small scale. The Jeds also trained guerrilla fighters, supported the French Resistance in their attacks, disrupted enemy supply lines, radioed intelligence back to England, and harassed and obstructed the movement of German units bound for the D-Day invasion areas. Jeds also helped soften the way for the liberation of Paris.

Backed by archival documents, diaries, correspondence, and personal interviews with Jed veterans and family members, the authors of the two books recount the vital role played by this small band of heroes in the struggle to liberate Europe.

Both books are excellent, fast-paced, highly readable works that cover the same ground but in different styles. Both are highly recommended and tell as interesting a story about heroism in wartime as one is likely to find.

To the Far Side of Hell: The Battle for Peleliu, 1944 by Derrick Wright, University of Alabama Press, Tuscaloosa, AL, 2005, 176 pp., photographs, illustrations, maps, index, bibliography, $19.95, softcover (reprint).

Derrick Wright has followed up his books on Tarawa and Iwo Jima with an unforgettable account of the bloody, protracted and, in the estimation of many, unnecessary battle for Peleliu and neighboring Angaur, two well defended islands in the Palau chain. But battles, even unnecessary ones, often have a life and momentum of their own which commanders are powerless to control or curtail.

On September 15, 1944, the Marine 1st and the Army 81st divisions stormed ashore in what they had been told would be an easy operation but which turned out to be anything but. The water off the anticipated landing beaches was studded with underwater demolitions, and the beaches and inland areas, instead of being guarded by small but deadly anti-personnel mines, were thickly sown with large and even more deadly aerial bombs rigged to explode on contact. And 11,000 enemy soldiers were dug in, ready to repel the invaders or die trying.

The landing was a shambles. As the author writes, "The beach was a chaotic sight; everywhere there were burning amtracs, abandoned equipment and debris, exploding shells and mortar bombs, and the figures of dead and dying Marines…. Although he was not fully aware of it at the time, [Marine Colonel Lewis "Chesty"] Puller and his 1st Marines were in serious trouble."

Once ashore, the Marines and soldiers found the going no easier. For over two months they labored to root out the enemy holed up in a labyrinth of caves, ridges, and gulches made of razor sharp, concrete hard coral. Often the enemy came to them in the form of suicidal, human wave attacks.

Weaving first person accounts into official operation reports, Wright paints an indelible portrait of men caught in the pitiless cauldron of combat, fighting against heat, humidity, hunger, thirst, disease, and gut wrenching fear as well as an enemy who never surrendered.

American casualties were heavy, but Japanese casualties were devastating. The enemy had all but a handful of men killed, while the Yanks suffered 1,769 dead and nearly 8,000 wounded in 71 days of fighting.

As Wright states in his concluding paragraph, the Marines and soldiers who finally took Peleliu and Angaur "displayed a level of courage and devotion to duty that transformed what could have been seen as a dubious venture into a battle that should be remembered with awe in America's military annals."

My Dear Mr. Stalin: The Complete Correspondence of Franklin D. Roosevelt and Joseph V. Stalin edited with commentary by Susan Butler, Yale University Press, 2006, 361 pp., index, bibliography, $35.00, hardcover.

If one could not have been a fly on the wall in the White House and Kremlin during World

SIMULATION GAMING BY ERIC BAKER

Commandos Strike Force from Eidos Interactive for the PS2, Xbox, Xbox 360, and PC is a first person action game set behind the lines in Europe in 1942. The game allows the player to take the role of a Small Scale Raiding Force (SSRF) such as those formed in Britain during the war. In the single player mode, the player works through a series of missions. Depending on the mission, they may control one, two, or three special operatives, often hot switching between them. The specialists are the Green Beret, the Sniper, and the Spy. Each has unique skills, abilities, and weapons. The spy, for instance, can don enemy uniforms, and infiltrate their positions.

In addition to the hot switching of characters, what separates CSF from similar games of this sort and setting is that there is less of an emphasis on German "super science." Players spend the missions on and behind the front lines, fighting the actual German military and occupiers rather than climbing about secret bases trying to stop doomsday missiles. CSF is still far more of a game than a simulation (the missions are not historical and the characters don't suffer from being wounded as real people would), but it does have a historical, real world "feel."

On the other hand, some players enjoy exploring secret bases and gunning down Nazi zombies. For players of this bent there is Ubersoldier from CDV for the PC. In this game players take the role of a German army officer who fails to survive the opening cinematic. The joy of games, however, is that death is often just the beginning of the adventure. So it is here. When the player gets control of the main character, a mad Nazi scientist has raised from the officer from the dead, a process that has infused the officer with supernatural powers. It has also filled the officer with a terrible anger and thirst for revenge against the scientists who wouldn't let him rest in peace.

There are twelve levels and no multiplayer in Ubersoldier, but at only $30 the game is cheaper than the similar shooting games on the market that do have a multiplayer mode. Most of the action is straight forward shooting of German troops and supernatural enemies, but the player's character does get various powers that are activated by rage, a commodity that is accumulated by performing cool kills such as three head shots in a row.

Somewhere in the comfortable middle between simulation and straight up fantasy is Blazing Angels from Ubisoft for the Xbox, Xbox 360, and the PC. In the game players fly up to 35 historical war planes in all the theaters of WWII. The missions are based on historical events and the physics of the planes (if not their respawn rate) is real world, plus there are no zombie planes. Players get to fly both fighters and bombers.

In the single player mode, players can issue commands to their computer-controlled wingmen. In multiplayer mode, players can voice chat with their allies, or use the controller to send short hand appeals for help or to reply to same. As much fun as the various "vs." multiplayer modes are, it is wonderful that up to four players can take on the single player missions cooperatively. □

War II, then the next best thing would have been to have access to the secret correspondence between two-thirds of the Big Three. Finally, that opportunity is here.

Gaining access to more than 300 previously classified cables between Roosevelt and Stalin, author and historian Susan Butler has put them in chronological order and added comments that help put them into context.

My Dear Mr. Stalin represents the first time the complete correspondence between the American president and the Soviet dictator has been published—all the messages as FDR wrote them, and all of Stalin's messages in the form Roosevelt read them.

My Dear Mr. Stalin traces the evolution of the relationship between FDR and Stalin, revealing the statesmanship of the two men and their thinking about the grave world crisis they and their countries faced.

Roosevelt sent the first message in July 1941, just after Germany's invasion of the Soviet Union. The final message was approved by FDR just minutes before his sudden death in April 1945.

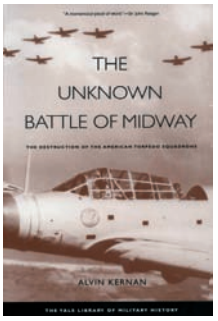
The subjects discussed in this fascinating collection range from the armament needs of the U.S.S.R., the crucial U.S. "Lend-Lease" armament shipments, strategic decisions to be taken in the war against Hitler, the progress of the war, the date of the cross-channel invasion, the fate of Poland, and many other matters, both vital and mundane.

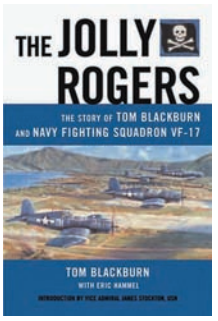
My Dear Mr. Stalin is an invaluable primary source for understanding the behind the scenes planning that went on, and for understanding the relationship that developed between these two towering leaders during a time of supreme world crisis.

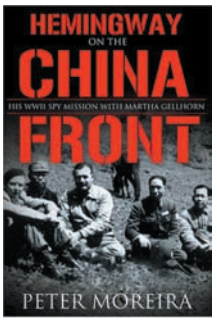
Invasion, 1940: The Truth About the Battle of Britain and What Stopped Hitler by Derek Robinson, Carroll & Graf, New York, 2005, 317 pp., photographs, index, bibliography, $26.00, hardcover.

Operation Sealion was Hitler's plan to invade and conquer Britain. The fact that it did not happen has, for over 60 years, been attributed to the group of "plucky" Royal Air Force fighter pilots—the few to whom, British Prime Minister Winston Churchill said, so many owed so much.

Derek Robinson has a slightly different take on the subject. In his thoroughly researched book, he has come up with what seems, after considering his evidence, a convincing argument for allowing another factor to share the credit—and it isn't Luftwaffe chief Hermann Goering's incompetence or the Luftwaffe's inability to destroy the RAF.







While not giving away the ending here, let it be said that Robinson poses an interesting question: Why have historians always dovetailed the Battle of Britain with Operation Sealion? He asks, "Military experts say that the Battle of Britain prevented the invasion but they don't exactly explain how. Why is it taken for granted that a battle in the skies could halt an assault from the sea?"

The skill and courage of the RAF pilots isn't in question, says Robinson, but did the mighty Luftwaffe's failure to destroy the much smaller RAF, plus Britain's famously bad weather, really persuade Hitler to call off the invasion?

According to Robinson, historians have for too long concluded that, since the cancellation of Sealion followed the aerial battle, the Battle of Britain must have caused the cancellation. *Invasion, 1940* challenges that long held assumption and reaches a startling, but completely logical, new conclusion.

The Unknown Battle of Midway: The Destruction of the American Torpedo Squadrons by Alvin Kernan, Yale University Press, New Haven, CT, 2005, 181 pp., photographs, map, index, bibliography, $26.00, hardcover.

The Battle of Midway is considered by most historians as the turning point in the Pacific theater—and for good reason. Had the Japanese gained control of that tiny outpost, they would have used it as a stepping stone to Hawaii and then the U.S. West Coast. That they failed was due in large part to the courage and sacrifice of the U.S. Navy's aviators.

A tragic, often overlooked aspect of the battle was the courageous sacrifice of four American torpedo squadrons. Of the 51 planes that lifted off to attack the Japanese carriers, only 7 returned; only 29 of the 126 crewmen survived. Not a single aerial torpedo hit its target.

Alvin Kernan, an emeritus professor from Princeton, is also a veteran of Torpedo Squadron 6 and served as a crewman aboard the aircraft carrier *USS Enterprise* during the Battle of Midway. His insights into the battle, the flawed planning, the operational mistakes, and the untold details of the fight and its aftermath lend poignant immediacy to his tale of honor above and beyond the call of duty.

The Jolly Rogers: The Story of Tom Blackburn and Navy Fighting Squadron VF-17 by Tom Blackburn with Eric Hammel, Zenith Press, St. Paul, MN, 2006, 270 pp., photographs, maps, index, bibliography, $17.95, softcover.

VF-17 was one of the U.S. Navy's highest scoring fighter squadrons in World War II and U.S. Navy history. *The Jolly Rogers*, written by their legendary leader and ace Tom Blackburn and polished by well-known author/historian Eric Hammel, pulls no punches. It celebrates and romanticizes warfare, heroism, testosterone, and male bonding the way few books dare to do these days.

The story of VF-17 reads like a guts and glory screenplay for a 1940s morale boosting Hollywood film, yet it is all true. Blackburn, writing about his squadron's first taste of aerial combat in their Corsairs, says, "I immediately sighted a good-sized formation.... I fired a short burst to alert the flight, bent on full combat power, took a heading to intercept, and tried to convey by sign language that we were going in on an attack. What a moment! First combat! The tension and concentration were almost corporeal. Thank God, I exulted, no buck fever." The squadron splashed five Zekes that day, and would make a good size dent in Dai Nippon's air force in the coming weeks.

From its commissioning in January 1943 to its disbanding in April 1944, the *USS Bunker Hill* based VF-17 went on to compile an outstanding record: 154 enemy warplanes shot down in only 76 days of combat. Blackburn himself had 11 aerial combat victories—a double ace.

James Stockdale, later a vice admiral, was a jet pilot aboard the carrier *USS Midway* which Blackburn commanded in the late 1950s, and has immortalized Blackburn in the introduction: "He was, to be sure, that great ship's commanding officer, but to her four thousand officers and sailors, and particularly to her pilots, he was The Immediate Presence, the mentor, the guide—the man we all knew could do anything better than anybody aboard without half trying.... If ever a man was tailor-made to be an across-the-board role model and leader of men flying and fighting from ships at sea, it was Tommy Blackburn."

Be warned: The Jolly Rogers takes the reader on an adrenaline filled ride from start to finish. Better be strapped in tight.

SHORT BURSTS

The Day the Thunderbird Cried: Untold Stories of World War II by David L. Israel, Emek Press, Medford, OR, 2005, 308 pp., photographs, index, bibliography, $19.45, softcover.

In this fine anthology, author David Israel, a veteran of the 45th "Thunderbird" Infantry Division, brings to light a multitude of little-known wartime episodes. After discovering that the history of World War II was being distorted (and in some cases, especially regarding the Holocaust, denied) by universities and others with their own agendas, Israel, whose unit liberated the notorious Dachau concentration camp, set out to set the record straight.

Within the book's 308 pages are the chilling, true tales of Dachau's liberation; the incarceration of American GIs in the Nazi slave-labor camp at Berga; General George Patton's failed attempt to liberate a POW camp that held his son-in-law; Japan's attempts to start forest fires in the U.S. with incendiary balloons launched from Japan; the destruction of the 106th Infantry Division at the Battle of the Bulge; the massacre of French civilians at Oradour-sur-Glane and Russian Jews at Babi Yar; the valiant service of African-American troops, and much more. Although the events described are not in chronological order, the stories are sure to open the eyes and minds of those not well schooled in the history of WWII.

Hemingway on the China Front by Peter Moreira, Potomac Books, Washington, D.C., 2006, 256 pp., photographs, index, bibliography, $26.95, hardcover.

The adventurous, world famous novelist was also a world famous war correspondent (he rode into the Normandy beaches in an LCVP landing craft on D-Day). Less well known are his earlier exploits as a spy with his author wife, Martha Gellhorn, in China in 1941, while the couple was on their honeymoon! Asian expert Moreira's well researched work is the first book to fully document the couple's dangerous mission to report on Chiang Kai-shek's Nationalist army's efforts to resist Japan's invasion and occupation. Riveting reading. □

Meiktila

Continued from page 69

deployed one gun within 15 yards of an outpost held by the 1st/7th Gurkha Rifles. The threat from this area prompted Cowan to send the 99th Indian Brigade in a sweep that, combined with the 63rd Indian Brigade working from the north and northwest, finally cleared the enemy out and made possible a link with the 5th Indian Division.

The pressure continued at the airfield until March 26. Once more, it was grim, close quarter stuff. As darkness fell on March 24, a Japanese tank drove unmolested along the runway. Only after it had been joined by two more and some infantry and attacked a post of the 3rd/2nd Punjab Regiment was its nationality determined. After a desperate fight, it was driven off. Parties of the enemy repeatedly dug themselves in within the perimeter and succeeded in destroying a number of aircraft.

As all this was taking place, Messervy was finishing his plans for the final stage of the battle and the advance to Rangoon. By the 25th, the 5th Indian Division was ready to attack from Taungtha and cleared a number of strongpoints covering the town from the north. A hill dominating the approaches, Point 1788, had been surrounded, and most of its outlying posts mopped up when on March 29, after an accurate airstrike, it was finally occupied without further struggle. The 17th Indian Division had by now reoccupied Mahlaing, and the 5th Indian Division was clear to enter Meiktila. All traces of the enemy had evaporated, and the Second Siege was over.

The Japanese 15th Army had been unable to contain the pressure building up against it from XXXIII Corps around Mandalay. Deprived of ammunition and sustenance, it had simply fallen apart. The city had fallen on March 20, and the withdrawal had to be routed well to the east of Meiktila. Honda told his men to abandon their attempts to recapture the town and restablish a defense line at Pyawbwe.

Kimura's Army Group had been effectively smashed, although this meant that thousands of Japanese troops were still in central Burma. Despite their disruption and fragmentation, they still posed a significant threat and were capable of considerable resistance, particularly given their fanatical will to die rather than surrender. Slim was determined that they must not be allowed to regroup. Rangoon lay over 300 miles to the south, and the monsoon was rapidly approaching, but it could be reached and a coup de grace inflicted if further risks were taken.

This was immediately set in motion, and using a policy of bypassing centers of resistance, an advance of 10 to 12 miles per day could be maintained. The success with which this was achieved gave the Japanese no time to reorganize and offer a coordinated defense at Pyawbwe. A mixed mechanized force of brigade strength turned the Japanese western flank before wheeling north and destroying supply dumps that Honda had only managed to accumulate with great effort.

On April 11, Cowan's men led the corps in overwhelming the main position, and Honda narrowly managed to evade his pursuers as they streamed southward. With XXXIII Corps charging down a parallel axis, IV Corps brushed aside the opposition until April 27 when it reached Payagale, where it met a strong defensive position prepared by engineers and comparable to the defenses at Meiktila. After a hard fight, it was cleared by 1700 hours, reducing the day's advance to six miles. In spite of this, a recon squadron that had bypassed the position ambushed a convoy, including a number of staff vehicles, confirming that the enemy was evacuating Rangoon and retreating into lower Burma.

With time running out before the monsoon, the speed was increased, but having covered 300 miles in three weeks the pursuit was brought to a close 32 miles short of the goal when the weather broke. The enormous disappointment of failing to snatch the prize at the last hurdle was, however, tempered by the surprising news that Rangoon was in British hands. The XV Corps, which had been operating on the coastal flank, had been ordered to mount an amphibious landing in the mouth of the Rangoon River to catch the Japanese in the maw of a trap. On May 1, a battalion of the 50th Indian Parachute Brigade had been dropped at Elephant Point, followed by the landing of the 26th Indian Division. The city was swiftly occupied without opposition.

What was left of Burma Area Army tried to escape into Thailand. It took until July to eliminate the last remaining units, and then a hunt for the stragglers took place as they tried to flee across the border. When Japan surrendered in August, barely 50,000 of the 260,000 troops present in Burma at the beginning of the year were left to lay down their arms. □

Jon Latimer is the author of several books on World War II. His most recent work is Burma: The Forgotten War. *He lives, writes, and teaches in Great Britain.*

The Partisan Scourge

Continued from page 63

Soviet Union were subsequently disbanded, ending the Soviet partisan phase of the war in Russia. Some disbanded units were incorporated into the Army, but other units were sent into German occupied Poland and Czechoslovakia to continue the struggle.

The transplanted partisans had a twofold mission: They were to continue to disrupt German supplies and communications, but they were also ordered to contact communist partisans in the still occupied territories. The Soviet partisans helped form the nuclei of organizations that would eventually bring all of Eastern Europe into the Soviet camp once the war was over. When the Germans were finally defeated, these well-armed, battle-hardened groups represented a popular front that stamped out any democratic movements that dared to stand up against them.

Western historians have debated the effectiveness of the Soviet partisan movement for decades. One perspective describes the movement as an intricate part of the Russian victory, while the other says that the partisans were little more than an annoyance to the Germans. A 1956 U.S. Army handbook on the subject states, "The Soviet partisan movement had a certain measure of success, perhaps as much as a resistance movement can have when opposed by a first class military power." Early post-war German histories and memoirs also tended to downplay the role of partisan units during the war.

It is clear, however, that Soviet partisans played an important part in several key battles during 1943 and 1944. Their positive effect on the morale of Soviet citizens was also important, as was their negative effect on the morale of the German soldier. It should also be remembered that just by their existence, the partisans forced the Germans to divert much needed units to secure their own rear areas at times when every man was needed at the front.

The debate continues, but in the former Soviet Union men in their twilight years still bring out their war decorations to show their grandchildren and great-grandchildren. The young ones, especially in the rural areas, look with awe at the now bent old men when they point to a certain decoration and announce with pride, "I was a partisan."

Pat McTaggart is an expert on World War II on the Eastern Front and the author of the book Siege! *about six epic sieges during the war in that theater. He resides in Elkader, Iowa.*

Continued from page 35

near Klakamp's platoon and produced more American casualties. Many of the Americans in the tunnel were sickened by the fumes or wounded and needed to be evacuated. Once again, the tactical situation had disintegrated into uncoordinated attacks and general confusion.

Corporal C. F. Wilkinson, a messenger for the 284th Field Artillery, having become completely lost in the maze of tunnels, blundered directly into the main German command post. He was able to beat a hasty retreat before the Germans could capture him.

Warnock had planned an additional attack against two of the southern casemates for the next day but canceled it because of the lack of success already experienced. The entire operation gradually settled into a stalemate with the Americans unable to achieve any further gains and the men hanging on desperately to what had been won in the hard fighting. Food, water, and ammunition were running out, and the men holding positions underground were exposed to the dust and fumes of the tunnels.

By October 9, Patton's attitude about the attack on Fort Driant had changed completely. He said, "The show is going sour. We will have to pull out. " It had quickly become a no-win situation for the Americans because both daylight and nocturnal assaults had failed. Daytime attacks were vulnerable to the deadly fire that rained down on Fort Driant from the adjacent forts. At night, assaults were quickly broken up and driven into confusion when the German squads emerged from their underground tunnels.

German resistance stiffened even more on October 11, when the defenders began converting knocked-out tanks into makeshift pillboxes. German self-propelled assault guns appeared to lay down harassing fire on the Americans. On the night of October 12-13, the remaining American forces were withdrawn from Fort Driant. The casualties in the operation had been inordinately high and can be blamed on the Americans' complete lack of training for such operations. The Third Army suffered 64 men killed, 547 wounded, and 187 missing, assumed captured.

The attack on Fort Driant was the only battle ever lost by General George Patton. Questions linger as to why the fort was attacked when the Third Army had little or no gasoline and could have been spending the time resting, regrouping, and preparing for the coming invasion of Germany. The XX Corps had failed to take Fort Driant, but Patton's XII Corps enjoyed some success south of Metz in its line-correcting operations along the Seille River.

Attacking the fort may have appeared to be a costly blunder, but Patton could not resist the temptation to try out the defenses. If he had done otherwise, he would have surrendered the valuable momentum his army had gained in its drive across France. The cost of the operation must be measured against the gains of keeping the army at a high level of combat readiness and giving the soldiers valuable on-the-job training against fixed fortifications. The cost to the Germans was far higher, with Balck suffering the loss of 43,200 men during the October fighting. Furthermore, the Germans lost valuable tanks and other equipment that could not be easily replaced.

By the end of November, all the forts had capitulated except Fort Driant. It eventually fell on December 8 after the Third Army had completely enveloped Metz. Although the attack on Fort Driant was a tactical loss for Patton, the overall strategic picture favored Third Army.

Patton was forced to accept a decrease in gasoline and supplies, and he was intent on putting the time to good use. During the roughly 30-day campaign in Lorraine, Patton cleared the area of enemy troops in preparation for the drive into Germany. He had taken the ancient fortress city of Metz, which had not been conquered in 400 years.

Compared with the Third Army drive in previous months, Patton advanced only a short distance in the foul weather, crossing swollen rivers. However, he succeeded in his goal of an offensive-defense and inflicted massive casualties on the German Army.

It became evident that Patton's role in the European Theater of Operations was far from over when on December 16 he received a frantic call from Bradley informing him that the Germans had mounted a major offensive in the Ardennes. This was a role that Patton savored; the Third Army would be the cavalry and come to the aid of the besieged 101st Airborne in the city of Bastogne. Finally, George S. Patton Jr. and his army could move again. □

Duane E. Shaffer is a library director and a graduate of Duquesne University. He dedicates this story to the memory of his uncle, Pfc. William Paul Kennedy, who was killed in action outside Les Quatre Fers on October 8, 1944.

Continued from page 29

tral as he could, along the lines of Sweden and Switzerland.

Indeed, right up to the time Hitler's panzers crashed into Poland and launched World War II, Boris told both the Fuhrer and Goring that they seriously underestimated the West's strength and that Germany would be defeated in a war against Britain and France just as she had been in World War I. In addition to his great power diplomacy abroad, the King also sought to lessen Balkan border tensions with his fellow monarchs and rivals, Yugoslavian King Alexander I (who was assassinated in 1934) and Romanian King Carol.

As a European war became imminent, the King remained firmly committed to keeping Bulgaria out of it. "When the horses start kicking each other in the stable," he would quote a popular proverb, "the donkeys get hurt!" Overwhelmingly, his varied national population supported its King's non-intervention policy until the day of his death.

Almost alone among European rulers in August 1939, he saw through the German-Soviet non-aggression pact as a temporary agreement and was able to make use of the cleavage between Nazi and Soviet interests in the meantime to gain contested territory for Bulgaria without a shooting war. Ultimately, though, he knew he would be forced to choose Hitler's Tripartite Pact over alliance with either the West or the Soviets.

Knowing that Bulgaria was, indeed, ultimately powerless to stop German troops from coming in if they wanted to, and with the April 1941 examples of overrun Greece and Yugoslavia before his eyes, King Boris III joined the Axis, but only under condition that Bulgaria take no active part in the war. Seeing Bulgaria as a neutral foil against Turkey entering the war on the Allied side, Hitler reluctantly agreed to the cultured king's terms—for a time.

The truth was, as one of Boris's aides later noted, Hitler felt uncomfortable in the King's mere presence. "Here is His Majesty, perfectly at ease, aristocratic, nonchalantly elegant. Then there is Hitler, friendly but tense, like a soldier standing at attention in his captain's presence; and then Ribbentrop, of course: haughty, sure of himself, and distant."

Indeed, King Boris III was the only reigning monarch with whom former German Army Corporal Hitler met with as often both before and during the war. The ruler was one of the few to whom he confided in advance the most momentous secret of his life—that he was going to invade the Soviet Union. This was a war Boris was convinced from the start that Germany could not win. All Balkan nations joined in Hitler's anti-communist crusade in Russia, except Bulgaria.

The King's assessment turned out to be correct, as Hitler admitted to him privately on March 24, 1942, that the Germans had lost a million casualties in Russia — before Stalingrad! It was during this dark period that the King began again discussing both abdication and suicide should his non-interventionist stance fail, even while making strenuous efforts to save Bulgarian Jews from the Nazi death machine.

Early 1943 witnessed discreet but definite Bulgarian feelers to the Allies for a possible desertion of the Axis, just as the American ambassador to Sofia had privately cabled President Franklin Roosevelt some years before would happen if the Axis coalition started cracking. The fall of the Duce in July came as a thunderclap in Boris's palace, and contact was established with Allen Dulles of the OSS (later the CIA).

Finally, on August 14, 1943, as on other occasions, Hitler's personal pilot, Colonel Hans Baur, and his personal aircraft flew Bulgaria's king to the Fuhrer's secluded Rastenburg headquarters for their final, fateful meeting of World War II, one that would help change the course of the war. The king, who loved to pilot speedboats, now took the aircraft's controls on the way to see Hitler.

At Wolf's Lair, the initial polite greetings degenerated into a stormy meeting with the Fuhrer in which Hitler at last demanded that Bulgaria take an active part in the war against the Soviets.

As King Boris later recounted to one of his aides, "Hitler went into a rage when I refused his demands about Russia. Screaming like a madman, he attacked me and Bulgaria in a torrent of accusations and threats. It was horrible! But I didn't give in one inch. He tried to frighten me, but, instead, I calmly explained the situation … I saved you … even if I have to pay for it!"

What King Boris meant by that last sentence shall perhaps never be fully known, but the fact remains that the gentle, democratic King had stood his ground eyeball to eyeball with the most ruthless dictator, perhaps other than Stalin, in Europe. He won his point, at least for the time being.

After his return to Bulgaria with Colonel Baur at the controls of Hitler's plane (as well as the King, again), Boris took his fateful trip to Mousalla, abandoning the rest of the royal hiking party to take off "… on a particularly steep shortcut." His aide, Balan, secretly followed him and found the morose King "standing at the very edge of the rock, looking down into the precipice."

Was Boris III thinking of a death leap? His aide was wondering, when his reverie was cut short by an angry shout from the startled King: "Didn't I tell you not to follow me?" They went back down the hill together, but a few days later Boris complained to his brother while deer stalking, "I think I am suffering from angina pectoris." His biographer states, "As he had a good knowledge of medicine, he used the term correctly to describe the syndrome characterized by constricting pain below the breastbone, usually precipitated by exertion or excitement," Nothing was done, though.

Back in the capital on August 23, King Boris at last consulted his doctors, and at 7 PM told his sister, Evdokia, "You'll see. I'll die from angina pectoris!" A half hour later, the 49-year-old bald monarch was vomiting violently, and the initial thought of the courtiers present was that the King was having a severe gallbladder attack. The next day, von Schoenebeck contacted Goring to send a doctor right away. For the next two days, no one notified the Queen at their summer residence outside the capital.

By the 25th, heart problems had been correctly diagnosed. The Queen was told the following day that he was suffering from a coronary thrombosis. When told the date, the King muttered, "Oh, the 28th, on the 28th…" as if, somehow, he knew.

Already, even before the king's death, the doctors were discussing among themselves the possibility of poisoning, not heart disease. After three days of illness, the first public bulletin about the king's malady was released. Immediately, the people blamed Boris's condition on his last trip to see the Fuhrer, although no one but his most trusted advisors knew what had transpired at Rastenburg.

The King survived the onset of pneumonia but fell into a fatal coma on August 28, 1943. At 4:22 PM that Saturday, King Boris III of Bulgaria died, thus beginning a swirl of rumor and innuendo that has not abated to the present day, and the actual cause of his death remains an unsolved mystery. □

Towson, Maryland, author Blaine Taylor won several awards for his series of articles entitled Health in History *in the former* Maryland State Medical Journal.

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