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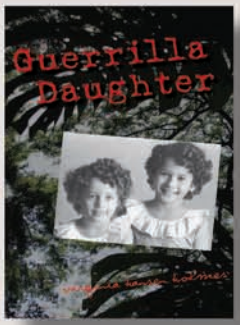

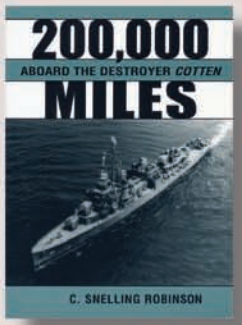

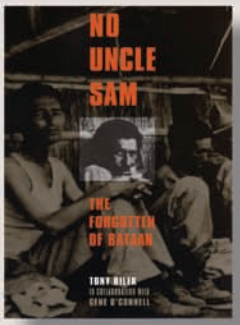

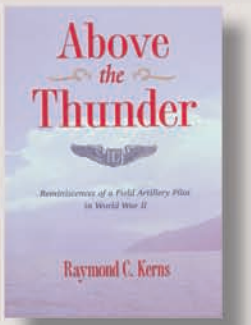

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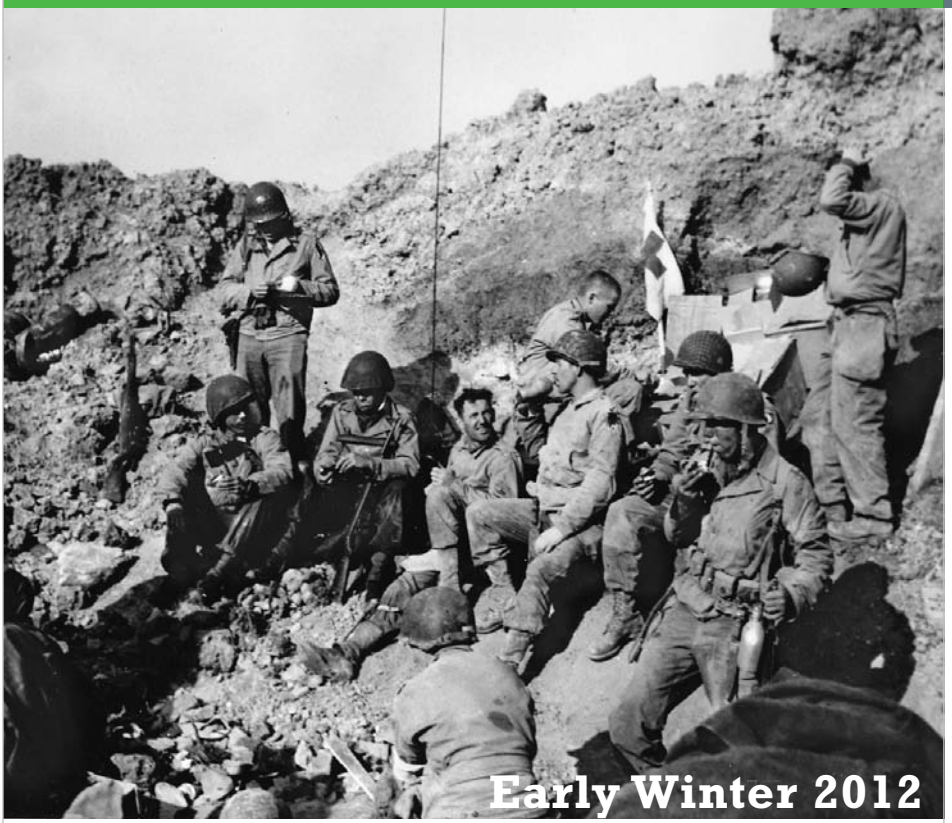

Features

Columns

Cover: British Prime Minister Winston Churchill gives a salute for the camera in London in1943. See stories on pages 32, 58 and 64.

Photo: Getty Images

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Editorial

U.S. entry into World War II was inevitable.

SEVENTY YEARS AFTER THE ATTACK ON PEARL HARBOR AND AMERICA'S ENTRY into World War II, the nation is once again at war. Of course, there have been other wars, conflicts, police actions, interventions, or exercises in nation building since that fateful Sunday morning of December 7, 1941.

Whether an individual agrees with U.S. military involvement in Korea, Vietnam, Latin America, Grenada, Panama, Desert Shield/Storm, Iraq, or Afghanistan, it may be argued that each of these was in defense of freedom, for the protection of the American people or possibly defenseless human beings in some faraway place who were otherwise at the mercy of despots or regimes seemingly bent on world domination or self-destruction.

For all its faults and for the many mistakes or regrettable episodes in its history, the United States has displayed during the 20th and 21st centuries a remarkable altruism, an altruism lived out to the extent that American blood was shed, American treasure was expended, and American prestige was put at risk. Further, those who have alleged that American military expeditions have been mounted for the purpose of controlling oil or land must agree that the recent withdrawal of troops from Iraq supports neither premise.

All this is stated to pose a simple question regarding U.S. involvement in World War II. Would the United States have entered the war if Pearl Harbor had not been attacked? Every indication is that it would. President Franklin D. Roosevelt had already engaged in a shooting war with German U-boats in the Atlantic and sent tremendous amounts of Lend-Lease aid to Great Britain. Could even the staunchest isolationist have stood by and ignored the atrocities occurring on such a massive scale in Nazi-occupied Europe? As much as they had tried to hide their genocide, the criminal conduct of the Nazis was bound to be brought to light sooner or later.

Perhaps of even greater concern was the prospect that Nazi Germany might declare war on the United States. After all, it was Germany that issued such a declaration on December 11, 1941, four days after the Pearl Harbor attack.

As for the Japanese, Admiral Isoroku Yamamoto had been against war with the United States. However, when it appeared that the militarists within the Japanese government were intent on opening hostilities, he demanded that the attack on Pearl Harbor be carried out. When the proposal was initially rejected, he threatened to resign. Yamamoto knew the risks of war with the United States but saw the sneak attack as the only option for Japan to win a negotiated peace and retain its empire in the Far East.

Had Yamamoto been allowed to resign and the Japanese government continued to pursue a policy of expansion in Asia and the Pacific, there is little doubt that the harsh exchange of diplomatic notes between the Japanese and U.S. governments that occurred right up to December 7 would have ceased and that war would have been declared. It is likely that the Japanese would have struck first in the Philippines or Malaya anyway.

While the attack on Pearl Harbor was crippling for the U.S. Pacific Fleet, it must also be seen as a strategic misstep for the Japanese. The United States Navy that regenerated from the mud of Pearl Harbor became the most modern and powerful naval force in the world. Pearl Harbor galvanized the American people and silenced the isolationist movement at home. If Japanese bombs had fallen first on Singapore or Manila would such a groundswell of patriotism have been realized?

Regardless of any revisionist thought process, it does appear inevitable that the United States would have entered World War II whether or not such a stunning blow as Pearl Harbor had been struck. In the end, the United States and its allies fought back with victorious vengeance.

Michael E. Haskew

WWII HISTORY

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Dispatches

Divine Wind Over Okinawa

Dear Editor:

I would like to provide some needed clarification of some points in "Divine Wind Over Okinawa" by Kelly Bell (September 2011).

When Mr. Bell discusses the sortie of the *Yamamato* and her escorts, he states, "This tactic failed when the carrier captains saw throught the ruse...." I can only assume that the author is not very familiar with naval command structure. The carrier captains were very busy handling their respective ships and were in no position to decide overall stategy or tactics. Any decisions regarding action against the *Yamamato* force were strictly the responsibility of the flag officer in command. In this case, it would have been either Marc Mitscher (commander of Task Force 58) or Raymond Spruance (5th Fleet commander) who "saw through the ruse..."

Bell indicates British carriers carried fewer planes because of the "thick, heavy armor plating" on their flight decks. I think further research would show him that more likely it was the smaller size of the British ships and possibly different operating procedures that were the cause of the smaller number of aircraft.

He refers to "radar destroyers" and "antiaircraft destroyers." These suggest ship classifications that did not exist in the U.S. Navy. The Navy established picket stations around Okinawa and used whatever destroyers it had available to guard those stations. In some cases fighter director teams were assigned to the destroyers.

Unfortunately, his mention of destroyers *Hadley* and *Evans* failed to take notice of their outstanding gunnery during this action. They are credited with the destruction of 46 enemy aircraft before they were put out of action (Roscoe, *United States Destroyer Operations in World War II*).

Regarding the actions involving *Enterprise*. Shortly after 1400 on April 11, a Judy struck the hull of *Enterprise* on her port quarter. The plane's engine dished in some hull plates and the bomb it carried detonated under the turn of her bilge, shaking the ship severely. Her air search radar was knocked out and electrical systems damaged. There were also some breaks to the skin of the ship, causing 150 tons of sea water to flood into the torpedo blister (a structure designed to protect the actual hull from enemy torpedoes). The relatively small amount of flooding did not affect the operation of the ship. She maintained her 25-knot speed as well as her place in the task group. She continued to fire her guns and launch and recover aircraft until April 14 when she was ordered to Ulithi for repairs (Stafford, *The Big E, The Story of the USS Enterprise*).

Contrary to Bell's statement, *Enterprise* was never in any danger of capsizing. Had the damage been serious enough to affect her stability she would have had to reduce speed, drop out of formation, and head for a dry dock immediately.

After repairs, the *Enterprise* left Ulithi on May 3 and rejoined Task Force 58 on May 6. On May 11 *Enterprise* became the flag ship of Admiral Mitscher after *Bunker Hill* was hit and put out of action. After *Big E* was hit on May 14, and in spite of taking in about 2,000 tons of water from firefighting activities into her hull, she once again maintained her place in the formation and continued fighting, knocking down two more enemy planes. As a result of her damage she could no longer handle aircraft. Mitscher left the ship for *Randolph* on the 15th and *Enterprise* left the task force (and the war) on May 16 (Stafford, *The Big E*).

On this occasion the *Enterprise* was on the line for 10 days, not one day as the author seems to indicate.

I'm sure the author's intent is to provide an interesting article but it should not be at the expense of accuracy.

Robert Derrit
via e-mail

Veteran of the BAR

Dear Editor:

Your "Dispatch" letters regarding the Browning Automatic Rifle (BAR) bring back good and bad memories! I served as a paratrooper with the 82nd Airborne Division during WWII. I was a BAR man. The BAR weighed 23 pounds, .30 caliber. Fired both semi and automatic.

I had an ammo carrier. He carried 12 magazines holding 20 .30 caliber bullets each. Not 30 rounds as stated by one of your readers. My ammo carrier also carried an M-1 rifle, .30 caliber clips in a bandolier, grenades, C-2 explosives, side arm, rations, and much more!

I went through five ammo carriers. Harold E. Florey, Peoria, Illinois, wounded twice! David Amendola, Chicago, Illinois, wounded by 88 millimeter tank cannon fire. Mitzi, New York, Smith and Graham (home towns unknown). I got hit by shrapnel but stayed "on line" as we were down to about 14 or 15 troopers out of 38 in our platoon during the Battle of the Bulge.

When it became "quiet" at the Ford plant on the Rhine River about March or April 1945, 20 BAR men from the 504th Infantry Regiment were brought behind the lines to test fire a new BAR! I was one of those 20. The new gun was lightweight. I don't remember the caliber. We 20 BAR men evaluated the weapon as excellent. It could have been labled the M-14 later. All we knew it was great compared to our present BAR. It fired much faster.

About six years later, 1951, the Korean War was in progress. To my astonished surprise the old BAR was still being used in combat by our military. Why the automatic rifle that we test fired in 1945 wasn't being used still puzzles me today!

William L. Bonning
Big Rapids, Michigan

Note: Opinions expressed in "Dispatches" do not represent those of the writers, editors, or staff of WWII History *or Sovereign Media.* WWII History *welcomes your letters which must be signed and include a telephone number for verification. Letters must be brief and of general interest to our readership. Write to: WWII History, 6731 Whittier Avenue, Suite A-100, McLean, VA 22101-4554; fax to 703-964-0366, or e-mail:* ***dispatch@ wwiihistory magazine.com.***

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By Christopher Miskimon

Getty Images

Obsolete Workhorse

Despite its lack of modern features and firepower, the 37mm cannon still served throughout World War II.

THE MEN OF LIEUTENANT EDWIN K. SMITH'S ANTITANK PLATOON, 2ND Battalion, 26th Infantry Regiment, 1st Infantry Division peered over the gun shields of their 37mm cannon at the column of Vichy French armored cars approaching their roadblock. It was 9 AM on November 8, 1942. The platoon had been ordered to man a roadblock near the town of El Ancor, protecting the flank of the 26th Regiment during its landing as part of Operation Torch, the Allied invasion of North Africa.

It was a tense moment; Smith's orders were not to fire unless fired upon. Would these French soldiers fight or not? The question was soon answered when a burst of machine-gun fire stuttered from one of the armored cars. The American return fire was instant. Two of the 37mm guns started banging away, hitting the lead armored car. All three French vehicles fired their own cannon and machine guns at the telltale muzzle flashes of the American guns. Another hit on the leading car set it afire, and moments later a skillful shot from an American 37mm some 1,800 yards away hit the rear armored car, setting it alight and trapping the middle vehicle.

The crews of the burning vehicles abandoned them, taking cover in a drainage ditch. Unable to move, the crew of the middle car did the same. This took the will to fight out of the Vichy troops, who surrendered. The gun crews and their 37mm cannon had just been introduced to combat in North Africa.

The M3 37mm antitank gun was one of the main antitank weapons of the United States in the early years of World War II. It was produced in larger numbers than any other American antitank gun and served through the entire war. This extensive service record comes despite the fact that the 37mm was effectively obsolescent as soon as America entered the war in December 1941.

Soldiers roll a 37mm antitank gun from a landing craft during a training exercise. By many standards, the 37mm gun was obsolete at the beginning of World War II; however, the weapon remained in widespread use throughout the conflict.

The cannon's story begins in the late 1930s as the United States began searching for a more powerful tank-killing weapon. At the time the antitank companies of U.S. infantry regiments were equipped with .50-caliber machine guns, admittedly quite effective against the thinly armored light tanks that were the standard for armored vehicles at the time. Experience gained during the Spanish Civil War forced an evolution in tank design, bringing heavier medium tanks to the forefront. As the United States watched from the sidelines, Nazi Germany and the Soviet Union, each supporting a different Spanish faction, upgraded their own weapons. The Germans adopted the PAK 36 37mm cannon; this drew increased American interest, and the Army acquired one for testing in early 1937.

In May of that year representatives from the artillery, infantry, and cavalry branches came together at Aberdeen Proving Ground in Maryland to discuss their respective needs for the weapon. The infantry favored a lighter weapon that could be operated by one soldier while the artillerymen favored crew-served cannon. Prototypes were authorized by September 1937, and testing continued through 1938 as the various problems normal to weapons development were overcome.

Several different gun designs and carriages were tested, with the winner being accepted on December 15, 1938, as the M3 37mm cannon mounted on the M4 carriage. It is normal to classify guns and carriages separately as over time a carriage may be used as a platform for more than one type of cannon. When mated together, the complete weapon will generally be referred to by the model number of the gun.

As with many American weapons developed in the sparse fiscal environment of the late 1930s, the M3 did not enter actual production until the end of 1940 as war clouds began to loom and belated preparations were put into motion. Manufacture began slowly, with only 340 guns made in 1940 and 2,252 the year after. America was rearming, but at a snail's pace. The attack on Pearl Harbor would change that.

With the war against the Axis under way, production was vastly expanded. Quotas were set for all manner of war material. For antitank guns the goal was set at

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One soldier's incredible true story about the top secret operation that took his wife's breath away.

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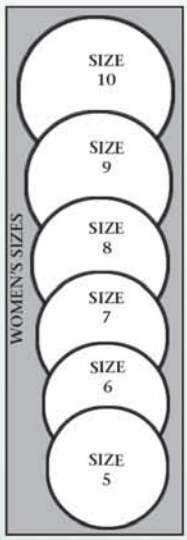
"As soon as I heard her breath stop, I knew she'd seen it", the soldier wrote. Even though they were oceans and continents apart, in that instant the newlyweds were reunited. Romance wins again.



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ABOVE: On embattled Iwo Jima, Marines fire a 37mm gun at targets near the imposing 550-foot Mount Suribachi. The 37mm weapon was effective against lightly armored Japanese tanks. BELOW: Although the M3 Stuart light tank was outclassed by German armor in Europe, it remained highly effective against the Japanese, taking on the light enemy tanks and pillboxes with its 37mm cannon.

18,900 weapons by the end of 1943. In actuality, the factories far exceeded this goal. During 1942 and 1943, some 27,343 antitank guns were built with 37mm cannon accounting for 16,110 of this number. Total production of M3s would reach 18,702.

The M3 37mm cannon was a 53.5-caliber weapon, meaning the length of the bore was 53.5 times its diameter. Overall length was 154.5 inches with a width of 63.5 inches and a height of 37.8 inches. It weighed 912 pounds, light enough to be manhandled by its four man crew for short distances. A set of towing straps was provided to make it easier for the soldiers to pull the gun and carriage. The cannon could be traversed 30 degrees to either side of center and could be depressed 10 degrees or elevated up to 15 degrees.

The M3 could fire 25 rounds per minute of a variety of ammunition types. There were two types of armor-piercing rounds. The initial solid steel shot could penetrate 36mm of armor at 500 yards while the improved ballistic-capped round pierced 61mm at the same distance. High explosive and canister rounds were also available. The canister round was for anti-personnel use and functioned like a large shotgun shell, firing 122 3/8-inch steel balls to an effective range of 250 yards.

The new weapon saw use from the beginning of the war. It was issued both as an antitank gun and a tank cannon. The M2 "combat cars" used early in the war—the light M3/M5 Stuart tank series, and the medium M3 Grant/Lee tanks as well as the M8 armored car—all carried 37mm guns, and those 37mm cannon produced as tank guns were augmented by the numbers noted above that were produced for carriage mounts.

For infantry use, the 37mm equipped the antitank platoons of each battalion in an infantry regiment, three guns each. There was also a regimental antitank company with nine guns, for a total of 18 guns per regiment. The Army's Tank Destroyer Branch made limited use of the 37mm in a self-propelled mounting called the M6. This was a ¾-ton Dodge truck mounting the 37mm on the rear bed. Intended as a stopgap vehicle until dedicated tank destroyer designs could be fielded, a handful of M6s saw service in North Africa in tank destroyer battalions. These units mixed their companies with a platoon of M6s and two platoons of M3 gun motor carriages, a half-track carrying a 75mm weapon.

The M6 had a relatively high silhouette for the diminutive caliber of its gun, and it had no protection for the crew other than a gun shield. It was almost suicidal to use them in modern combat against the Germans, and most company commanders quickly learned to keep their M6s at the rear of their columns. They were replaced at the end of the Tunisian campaign.

In its towed version, the 37mm was first used in combat in the Pacific where some were deployed during the Philippine fighting of early 1942. When the Marines went to Guadalcanal, they brought their M3s with them; they proved invaluable against not only Japanese tanks but in breaking up infantry attacks with explosive and canister rounds. At the Battle of the Tenaru River on August 21, 1942, a Japanese force commanded by Colonel Kiyono Ichiki attacked Marines defending along the line of the Ilu River (the Marine's maps had mislabeled the Ilu as the Tenaru). Just after midnight the Marine pickets heard the approaching Japanese infantry and fell back across the river to warn their comrades. Among the Marine firepower were several 37mm guns that the crews loaded with canister rounds. The Japanese launched their attack with mortar fire and an infantry charge.

The Marines responded, their M3s discharging blasts of steel balls that cut through jungle foliage and human flesh alike. The fighting was hand to hand in some places. After an initial repulse, Ichiki sent in a second attack that bogged down in barbed wire. Small arms and cannon fire poured down on the hapless Japanese, slaughtering them. A Marine counterattack finished the night's bloody work, leaving nearly 800 Japanese dead. Colonel Ichiki committed suicide.

Two months later, the Americans again used their 37mm guns in action against an attack by the Japanese Sendai Division. Due to a communications error, the Japanese launched their attack a day too soon, hitting the western side of the Marine perimeter. This attack included nine

Japanese tanks positioned along a coastal road with infantry behind them, all ready to advance over a sandbar separating the two antagonists.

When the attack began, it was met by the combined fire of U.S. antitank guns, artillery, and small arms. The 37mm cannon barked at the approaching tanks, whose thin armor proved no match for their fire. Only one tank even made it over the sandbar; the rest lay wrecked or burning. The last vehicle, disabled by a Marine who shoved a grenade into its tracks, was picked off shortly afterward. With the armored threat eliminated, the antitank guns shifted their fire to the enemy infantry, leaving some 600 dead on the field at the battle's end.

After proving itself in the Pacific, U.S. forces next took the 37mm with them to North Africa during Operation Torch. This theater of operations was very different from the Pacific, however. The German Army could field a force of modern tanks along with a well-developed doctrine for their use. The improved models of the German Mark III and IV tanks had thicker armor that the 37mm could only reliably penetrate at close ranges. This fact was not fully appreciated at the time of the landings. The U.S. Army would have to learn through the harsh instruction of battlefield experience.

In the initial phase of Torch, the 37mm performed well enough against the lightly armored vehicles of the Vichy French, but as soon as the Germans were encountered the M3's inadequacy came to the forefront. Gun crews watched in frustration as their well-aimed shots bounced harmlessly off the armor of attacking panzers. Word went back to the Army Ground Forces (AGF), a stateside command that monitored weapons used in combat to seek improvement. It sent observers to gain first-hand information.

Not surprisingly, the frontline soldiers using the 37mm wanted it replaced quickly, while a number of the observers said the troops were not using the weapon properly. Critics stated the troops expected the gun to work at "excessive ranges" and that it had to be sighted properly to achieve hits on the enemy's flanks. These critics apparently did not take into consideration that a towed antitank gun unit, once emplaced, cannot dictate the terms of an engagement and must be able to engage an enemy frontally. Guns cannot always be sited where the terrain will be to their advantage.

The prime movers of the 37mm, the jeep or ¾-ton Dodge truck, were unarmored. Bringing them forward under fire to move a gun carried a great risk of losing the vehicle. While these limitations apply to any towed cannon, the M3's inability to knock out enemy armor only exacerbated the problem.

Criticism of the 37mm continued despite the excuses of some AGF observers, and by mid-1943 the newer 57mm gun was authorized to replace the 37mm on a one-for-one basis. Reequipping took time, so the divisions that went ashore at Sicily in July 1943 were still using many M3s with mixed effect. A high point came during a now famous engagement between U.S. Rangers under Colonel William Darby and an attacking Italian force using captured French Renault R35 tanks. The Italian tanks attacked the Rangers at the town of Gela. Lightly equipped, the Rangers first used bazookas and grenades to resist the enemy assault.

During the fighting, Colonel Darby drove to the beachhead and found a 37mm gun. He towed it back to Gela and set it up, hurriedly chopping open the ammunition box with an axe. Manning the weapon personally, he knocked out one of the R35s and helped fend off the attack. His bravery at Gela resulted in his second award of the Distinguished Service Cross.

A corresponding low point came when a battalion of the 16th Infantry Regiment, 1st Infantry Division, was attacked by the Hermann Göring Panzer Division, which included heavy Tiger tanks. The American 37mm guns were totally ineffective during the attack; the battalion commander was killed while manning one of the guns himself.

National Archives

Shown on maneuvers in Tennessee in 1943, this M6 antitank vehicle is armed with a 37mm antitank gun mounted in the bed and a .50-caliber machine gun for antipersonnel or anti-aircraft use.

Soon afterward, more 57mm guns began arriving, and the 37mm was essentially finished as a dedicated antitank weapon in the European Theater. It continued there only as the primary armament of the M5 light tanks and M8 armored cars. There is a report of an M8 actually knocking out a German Panther tank with a shot from its 37mm. It is believed this would only have been possible by a chance ricochet off the tank's mantlet down through the thinner roof armor or perhaps a round that landed short, ricocheted off the ground, and bounced up through the belly armor. Such a lucky hit could not be counted on, and units using light tanks or armored cars generally avoided action against German armor.

National Archives

Marines on Saipan fire a 37mm gun at Japanese positions. The 37mm provided enough firepower to destroy Japanese machine-gun nests and to decimate infantry concentrations.

It was a different story in the Pacific, where both the Army and Marine Corps used the 37mm until the war ended. Conditions in the Pacific Theater were more favorable. Much of the fighting occurred in jungle or heavily forested areas that were mostly wild and undeveloped, lacking extensive road networks or built-up areas. Large tracts were wet and marshy with soft ground difficult for vehicles to traverse. The 37mm gun was light enough to be moved by its own crew and manhandled into firing positions. Many of the enemy bunkers and defensive positions were constructed from locally available logs and soil rather than concrete, leaving them vulnerable to the M3's fire.

The gun was effective against Japanese tanks, which saw no real improvements in armor protection over the course of the conflict. Japanese tanks were thinly armored and vulnerable to the full range of U.S. antitank weapons, including the 37mm gun, though the weapon probably saw much more use in the fire support role. The Japanese did not use very large numbers of tanks and rarely massed their armor, often using what they had in the infantry support role or even dug in as pillboxes.

Rather than engaging Japanese tanks on a regular basis, the 37mm more often used explosive and canister ammunition against infantry or defensive positions. The canister round was found to be very effective at shredding away the foliage that concealed bunkers, revealing their positions for destruction by pinpoint fire. Often, armor-piercing rounds would follow, aimed at the log supports to crack and weaken them. High explosive rounds would finish the job, blowing the bunker apart.

During the war the United States gained the moniker of "Arsenal of Democracy" due to its vast exports of weapons and supplies. However, the 37mm played only a very small part in this. The major powers the United States supplied, Great Britain and the Soviet Union, each had adequate supplies of their own light antitank guns, the 2-pounder and 45mm, respectively, and had little need for the comparable American weapon. These nations used 37mm guns as mounted on American armored vehicles supplied via Lend-Lease but did not need them as towed weapons. The vast majority of towed M3s exported went to the Chinese Army; since they were fighting the Japanese, the M3 was a useful addition.

The 37mm had no substantial postwar use outside of a few Third World armies. Today it is relegated to museums and the occasional private collector. Its legacy is that of a weapon obsolete before it entered combat. Nevertheless, it served with both notable success and failure and earned its place in history. □

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By Tom Aiello, Ph.D.

Imperial War Museum, London

British Prime Minister Winston Churchill inspects Polish troops at Tentsmuir, Scotland, in October 1940. To Churchill's right is Polish leader in exile Wladyslaw Sikorski.

Polish Patriot Foiled

> General Stanislaw Sosabowski found his Parachute Brigade entangled in political wrangling and without opportunity to fight as he saw fit.

STANISLAW SOSABOWSKI STARTED HIS MILITARY CAREER IN THE ANTI-HAPS-burg Polish underground movement in 1907, served in the Austrian Army in World War I, and rose to the command of the Polish Parachute Brigade in World War II. Sosabowski led a life that mirrored the drastic swings of fortune experienced by Poland in the 20th century. Proud and brave, he discovered these qualities insufficient when confronted by the forces of Fascism and Communism. He accomplished great deeds, while, like his country, suffering bitter disappointments.

Sosabowski was born in Stanislawow, a country town of 70,000 people located in southeastern Poland, in what is now the Ukraine. His father, a minor official in the state-run railway of the Hapsburg bureaucracy, died in 1905, when Stanislaw was 12 years old. He, along with his mother, younger brother, and sister, struggled along on his father's meager pension for a year while the family slowly went broke.

Young Stanislaw, who possessed a facility for foreign languages, decided at the age of 13 to become a French language tutor and coach to his fellow students as a way to support his family. With the help of a sympathetic teacher, he gained a fine reputation as a tutor, and his earnings staved off his family's starvation. Stanislaw widened his field of instruction to include mathematics, and the good results he obtained led to his teachers' recommending him to the parents of slow students. His increasing income allowed the family to move to better quarters in the suburbs, where his education continued at the gymnasium, or local high school. At the age of 14, Stanislaw joined the first Polish underground movement, becoming leader of his school group.

In 1911, at the age of 18, after passing a comprehensive examination, he entered the University of Krakow to study economics. His family's economic situation, however, forced him to abandon his studies and return home. At this time he was one of 80 men given commissions in the secret Polish Underground, the Druzyny Strzeleckie and was appointed commander of its branch in Stanislawow. His training was to be of great help when World War I commenced in 1914.

Sosabowski was conscripted, along with all other able-bodied Poles, into the Austrian Army to fight the Russians in 1914. By October 1914, he was a 21-year-old corporal surrounded, with several thousand of his countrymen, by Russian forces in the Austrian town of Przemysl. His unit made several abortive attempts to break through the Russian ring, and after a week of death and destruction the young corporal and a few hundred survivors managed to escape from the hell of Przemysl. After a year of war, he was promoted to company sergeant major; of the 250 original members of his company, there were only three survivors. Sosabowski, badly wounded, spent a year out of action while recovering.

Polish General Stanislaw Sosabowski was determined to keep his command independent and to get into the fighting to liberate his native land from Nazi occupation.

In 1916, the Austrian Army, in need of battle-experienced officers, commissioned Sosabowski a second lieutenant. He fought on until Austria's surrender in 1918, and then helped disarm its forces. The young lieutenant learned much from his experience in the Great War, having observed the corruption of the Austrian Commissariat. He watched men die for lack of

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Polish General Stanislaw Sosabowski (left), commander of the Polish 1st Independent Parachute Brigade, confers with British General F.M. Browning, who wanted the Polish unit to serve under his direct command.

food and adequate winter clothing, suffered from dysentery, and saw thousands die from typhus. Out of this experience he formed the opinion that an officer's first duty was to see to the welfare of his men, and that the best way to lead was by example while doing one's utmost to take care of the common soldier.

These values served him well when he joined the army of the recreated Polish State in 1919. Poland's resurrection, after almost 150 years of partition between Austria and Russia, was a dream come true for Sosabowski. During the Great War he discovered he possessed leadership ability, and now that Poland had its own national army he decided to make a career in the military. Commissioned a lieutenant in late 1918, he served with distinction in the Russo-Polish War of April-October 1920, rising to the rank of captain. Promotion to the rank of major, studies at the High Military Academy in Warsaw, and a stint on the Polish General Staff followed. He finally received a field command in 1928, taking command of the 75th Infantry Regiment.

The 1920s were a period of considerable social upheaval in Poland. Factionalism in the government and the inflation caused by the Ruhr Crisis of 1923 led to a succession of weak coalition governments. Fortunately for the Polish military, Marshal Josef Pilsudski, the old warhorse and leader of the Polish military, shielded Sosabowski and the Army from the effects of that unrest. The new Poland, feeling threatened by its neighbors over unsettled borders, maintained a large military establishment in which Sosabowski thrived. His diligent training regimens, and the notable concern he showed for his men, made him one of the most popular officers in the Army.

In May 1926, a coup led by Pilsudski was not entirely unexpected by many in the Army. Although Sosabowski had no direct role in the coup, he and many of his colleagues viewed it and the resulting policy of *sanacja,* or cleansing, as necessary measures to restore order to an increasingly chaotic situation in Poland. Major Sosabowski was a man of his time, viewing democracy as a good idea, but valuing order above all else. While he later became disturbed by some of the tactics Pilsudski used in the crackdown on dissent in 1930, Sosabowski felt that the best way to serve his country was to remain at his post to protect Poland from foreign threats.

Over 75 percent of Poland's borders were in dispute with Czechoslovakia over Teschen, the Soviet Union over the settlement at the Treaty of Riga in March 1921, and most importantly with Germany over Silesia, Danzig, and the Polish Corridor. The disputes with the Czechs and Russians deprived Poland of potential allies that it would soon need against Germany. In spite of the Nazi-Polish Non-Aggression Pact of 1934, Sosabowski and many of his colleagues viewed the rise of Hitler and the announcement of German rearmament in 1935 as the portents of an eventual clash with the Nazis.

Poland sped toward this clash largely due to the disastrous foreign policy of Colonel Josef Beck, Poland's prime minister. Beck refused to seek allies in the East because of his opposition to Communism and with the Western powers out of paranoia. He left the country vulnerable to the growing German threat. By 1939, after only 20 years of freedom, Poland once again faced disaster. Bereft of friends in the East, it finally did look to the West for salvation.

British Prime Minister Neville Chamberlain and French Premier Eduard Daladier at last awoke to the Nazi menace in early 1939. Believing a German attack on Poland imminent, they drafted a unilateral guarantee of Polish sovereignty on March 30, 1939. Soon thereafter, the British and French governments extended similar guarantees to Greece and Romania against Italian aggression. These guarantees were useless without Soviet leader Josef Stalin's cooperation, and two attempts were made to secure Soviet military assistance in the event of Axis aggression.

In early July 1939, William Strang, a member of the British Foreign Office, went to Moscow to attempt an alliance with the Soviets. Stalin, insulted by Strang's lowly status, refused to treat with him. In late July, a joint Anglo-French mission was dispatched to Moscow. This mission, headed by Admiral the Honorable Sir Reginald Plunkett Ernle-Erle Drax and General Duomenc of France, possessed the requisite rank desired by Stalin. French Premier Daladier, sensing impending hostilities, urged Chamberlain to give Drax and Duomenc plenary powers to speed negotiations with Soviet Foreign Minister Vyacheslav Molotov. Chamberlain, however, initially opposed this course and thereby caused a fatal delay. Several weeks were spent in fruitless negotiation until on August 21, 1939, Drax and Duomenc finally received plenary powers from their respective governments.

It was too late. German Foreign Minister Joachim von Ribbentrop beat the Allies to the punch. The Nazi-Soviet Nonagression Pact was concluded the same day and announced to a stunned world on August 23, 1939. A secret codicil to the pact called for a partition of Poland between the Nazis and the Soviets. Poland now faced a two-front war, with no reliable way for the Western Allies to come to its aid.

On September 1, 1939, when Hitler unleashed the Blitzkrieg on Poland, Sosabowski, now a colonel, was in command of the 21st Infantry "Children of Warsaw" Brigade. His unit was on a foot march from Warsaw to the Opingora area, 30 miles from the East Prussian frontier. This march is illustrative of the state of the Polish Army in 1939. There were no trucks to move the men, and the brigade used horse-drawn wagons to transport the medium machine guns and mortars. Such an army stood little chance against the Wehrmacht's mechanized formations.

The Polish high command ordered Sosabowski's brigade farther east on September 2 to take up a blocking position on the main road from East Prussia to Warsaw. His 2,000 men held off a German division of 10,000 for 24 hours until German tanks overran Polish units on both sides of his brigade. The brigade retreated west, having marched over 80 miles in the preceding three days. With German units racing down the main road, the brigade traveled by back lanes and cross country.

Constantly bombed and strafed by the Luftwaffe, on September 8 Sosabowski and his men reached Modlin, where they joined other Polish units retreating from the east. Sosabowski drove from Modlin to Warsaw to try to obtain reinforcement and resupply. As he approached the capital, he saw a cloud of dark smoke hanging over the city. The cloud extended to the suburbs

Troopers of the 1st Polish Independent Parachute Brigade train at a facility in Scotland in March 1942. The Poles were led by General Stanislaw Sosabowski, who remained fiercely independent of British control and held several administrative posts with the Polish armed forces in exile.

and the surrounding countryside. He noted, "Bombers with black crosses on their wings were flying deliberately and steadily over Warsaw, laying waste to the city."

After reporting to headquarters, Sosabowski went to his home to learn the fate of his family. His home was only slightly damaged, and he learned from his maid, Anne, that his wife had left Warsaw to stay with friends in the country. Anne also told him that his son, Peter, a doctor in the Medical Corps, had been killed when the hospital train he was on was bombed by the Luftwaffe. Sosabowski had been very close to Peter.

The news of his son's death left Sosabowski numb with grief as he headed back to the brigade. On September 10, it was ordered into Warsaw as the Polish commander in chief decided to defend the city. Colonel Sosabowski protested his orders that he march into Warsaw during daylight, having already experienced the effect of German air superiority. Overruled by his superiors, he gained little satisfaction when he was proved right. German planes spotted his men on the road near Jablonna and mercilessly bombed and strafed the brigade, inflicting over 200 casualties on an already sadly depleted unit. On September 14 they finally reached Warsaw, where the men dug in to await the expected German onslaught.

The Germans struck on September 15, with bitter house-to-house fighting ensuing in the already battered city. During a lull in the battle, Sosabowski phoned his housekeeper for news of his wife. Anne informed him that his son Peter was alive. He was one of the few survivors from the hospital train, and he had just been to the house inquiring after his father! The colonel, overjoyed, had little time to dwell on this good news as the Germans renewed their assault. Incessant bombing and shelling of the besieged city destroyed the water mains and ignited fires that blazed out of control.

On September 20, Sosabowski and his son reunited at the Central Train Station, which was serving as a field hospital. They parted to attend to their respective duties, their tear-filled reunion bolstering their spirits during this dark time. On September 25, and again on the 26th, Nazi bombers came in the hundreds. Warsaw became an inferno; men, women, and children were torn apart by the blasts of high explosives, while the city center became an unrecognizable mass of rubble.

On September 27, the guns and planes fell silent as the Polish surrender and the Soviet invasion from the East were announced to Sosabowski's troops. German troops disarmed Sosabowski and his men along with the rest of Warsaw's defenders and marched them west toward an unknown fate. At an overnight rest stop near the town of Ochota, Sosabowski, along with his son, managed to escape from their captors with the help of a Private Chotum.

Chotum hid father and son at his mother's apartment while he contacted the Polish underground movement. The underground provided false papers for Peter, who went to work as a doctor in a civilian hospital in Warsaw. The colonel was provided with a new identity as a laborer and smuggled out of Poland to Hungary, reaching Budapest on December 16. The Polish embassy there arranged for him to travel by rail to Paris, which he reached on December 21.

In Paris, Sosabowski briefed the exiled Polish Premier Wladyslaw Sikorski on the state of the underground movement and the German occupation. He was then assigned to the staff of General Kazimierz Sosnkowski, the deputy commander, who was organizing communication, supply, and contacts for the underground. A few weeks of staff work was enough to drive both the colonel and his superiors crazy, and he gratefully accepted transfer to command of the 1st Polish Division. The division was being constituted with officers who had escaped from Poland and soldiers recruited from the half million Poles who worked in the coal mines and heavy industry of northern France. Their new leader spent the next two months organizing and training them.

Just before the division went into the Mag-

inot Line on April 15, 1940, Sosabowski left for an advanced artillery training course under French auspices. This fortuitous change allowed him to avoid the fate of the 1st Division, which marched into German captivity when France capitulated in June 1940. On June 19, with French surrender imminent, Sosabowski gained passage aboard the British freighter *Abderpool* along with 3,000 refugees, most of whom were Poles once again fleeing the Nazis.

Reaching England on June 22, Sosabowski took command of the 1st Polish Infantry Brigade, just returned from the abortive Norwegian Campaign. The brigade quartered in Glasgow, Scotland, and was assigned the defense of the city for the expected German invasion of the British Isles. When Hitler declined to launch Operation Sea Lion, the invasion of Great Britain, in the summer of 1940, the brigade was stripped of its transport and its best officers and troops to form the 1st Polish Rifle Brigade, which was to aid the British in the Western Desert against Italian forces. Sosabowski performed various administrative tasks, becoming increasingly frustrated by the lack of a combat assignment. He took solace in the exploits of the Polish pilots serving in the Royal Air Force during the Battle of Britain.

In February 1941, after a long and frustrating winter, Sosabowski took charge of a training cadre and was told by London that he could send 20 officers to a parachute course at Ringway Airfield near Manchester. Entirely on his own authority and with the aid of Squadron Leader Maurice Newnham, the RAF commander at Ringway, Colonel Sosabowski sent hundreds of officers and men for parachute training. In this way he formed the 1st Polish Independent Parachute Brigade. The Polish and British high commands, upset with the colonel's methods, had to accept the de facto existence of this new unit. Sosabowski and his officers longed to lead their men back to Poland.

The Polish Parachute Brigade set up headquarters and training at Largo House, in Scotland. Their leader, though 50 years old, completed the required eight parachute jumps for qualification as a paratrooper. The training regimen that the colonel set up gained such a reputation that Largo House came to be known as "a Hell on Earth." Recruitment remained a problem as there was stiff competition among the manpower-short Polish units.

Sosabowski extracted a promise of an allotment of 300 Poles from General Sikorski, the Polish commander in chief. When they arrived in September 1942, however, the colonel was appalled by their condition. Many were unfit to be in the Army, let alone the Parachute Brigade.

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Lieutenant Colonel Marcin Rotter of the Polish 1st Independent Parachute Brigade is interrogated by his Waffen SS captors following the failed Operation Market Garden.

Their physical condition after months of starvation and lack of exercise in concentration camps had left them weak and emaciated. They were given special rations and extra vitamins, and their health slowly improved. In six months, most of them qualified as parachutists.

At the end of 1942, General Sikorski and General Sir Alan Brooke, the British chief of the Imperial General Staff, agreed that the Polish Parachute Brigade would remain under direct Polish command, to be used only in Poland. This agreement made the brigade the only Polish unit independent of British Army command. The British high command later reneged on the agreement, causing great resentment among the Poles.

Almost before the ink was dry on the Sikorski-Brooke agreement, General F.M. Browning, commander of British airborne forces, began lobbying for the Poles to be put under his command. Sosabowski, now a major general, was then forced into a bureaucratic fight to maintain the independence of his unit in hopes of eventually using it in Poland. This fight, along with the hope of a free postwar Poland, was dealt a tragic blow when, on July 4, 1943, an aircraft carrying General Sikorski and his party crashed at Gibraltar, killing everyone on board. Sikorski had been a guiding star amid the chaos and disaster that his people suffered. His replacement, General Sosnkowski, possessed neither the prestige nor the ability to maintain Polish freedom of action.

On March 14, 1944, the Polish cabinet in London, under pressure from British Prime Minister Winston Churchill, decreed that the Parachute Brigade could be used in Western Europe, dashing Sosabowski's hopes for participation in the liberation of his homeland. The Poles came under General Browning's command and were kept in reserve along with the British 1st Airborne Division during the Normandy landings and the resulting stalemate in the bocage country in June and July 1944.

The Allied breakout from Normandy in late July led to a rapid advance along a broad front. A German rally at the end of August was greatly aided by Allied supply difficulties. These difficulties were primarily the result of the length of the advance and the German strategy of leaving garrisons behind to hold major French ports. The fact that the Allies were denied the use of Dunkirk, Calais, Boulogne, and Le Havre, as well as the large ports of Brittany, for an extended period became a powerful indirect brake on the Anglo-American offensive.

In mid-September 1944, the Allied high command decided to attempt to outflank the Germans in Holland to clear the way for a fresh drive by the British Second Army across the lower Rhine and into the Ruhr, the industrial heart of Germany. Thus was born Operation Market-Garden. The 1st Allied Airborne Army, under the command of General Browning, consisted of the British 1st Airborne Division, the 1st Polish Parachute Brigade, and the U.S. 82nd and 101st Airborne Divisions. The 101st Division was assigned the capture of two canal bridges and one small river bridge north of Eindhoven. The 82nd came next with the more difficult task of, first, securing the Groesbeek

Heights which threatened both their right flank and that of the subsequent ground advance, and then capturing the major bridges over the Maas and Waal Rivers at Grave and Nijmegen.

Finally, the British 1st Airborne and the Polish Brigade were to capture the main road bridge, railway bridge, and pontoon bridge over the lower Rhine at Arnhem. The ground operation would be carried out by General Miles Dempsey's British 2nd Army, with General Brian Horrocks's XXX Corps in the lead. In all, an airborne carpet of 33,000 men, 60 miles long, was to open a corridor along which 2nd Army would advance, reaching Arnhem at the end of the third day.

The Poles under Sosabowski were in a foul mood by September 1944. The Warsaw Uprising, which had started in August, was in the process of being crushed while the Red Army stood at the gates of the city. The Polish Home Army requested that Polish Army headquarters in London dispatch the Parachute Brigade to aid in the uprising. The Russians rejected the use of their airfields for this and for any resupply of the Home Army.

General Sosabowski never liked the Market-Garden plan. He felt that the British underestimated the German reaction to the threat that this operation posed to their position on the Western Front. Subsequent events proved him right while costing him his command.

The Allies launched Operation Market-Garden on September 17, 1944. German reaction, after overcoming the initial shock at the size of this, the largest airborne operation of World War II, was swift and decisive. Field Marshal Walter Model, the new German commander in the West, rallied his troops all along the airborne corridor. Faulty Allied intelligence failed to detect the presence of the 9th and 10th SS Panzer Divisions refitting in the Arnhem-Eindhoven area.

The British 1st Airborne Division landed practically on top of the 10th SS Panzer division. The British paratroopers seized the northern end of the Arnhem road bridge, but without heavy weapons the tanks and assault guns of the SS squeezed them into a small pocket, which shrank by the hour. The U.S. 82nd and 101st Divisions gained their objectives, but the ground advance of XXX Corps proved agonizingly slow due to the narrowness of the road and German resistance.

The Polish Brigade dropped into the Arnhem area on the third day of the battle. Unfortunately, the Germans already controlled their landing zones and they received a hot reception. Sosabowski formed a small enclave with his surviving troops on the south shore of the Rhine while awaiting the arrival of XXX Corps. The Poles made several attempts to ferry men across the river to assist the British. They had only a few inflatable rafts, and the width and swiftness of the Rhine at this point made their efforts largely futile. Only 200 of the Poles reached the British, while the remnants of the 1,699-man Polish Brigade were fighting for its survival.

After 10 days, the British 1st Airborne withdrew from Arnhem in a night crossing of the Rhine, covered by the guns of XXX Corps and the Poles. Of the division's original complement of 10,000 men, only 2,000 escaped. The British, especially Field Marshal Bernard Montgomery, who had conceived Market-Garden, found a convenient scapegoat in General Sosabowski. In spite of the fact that the Poles suffered 25 percent casualties—with some units losing 40 percent—while covering the withdrawal of the British, the British high command accused Sosabowski of not doing enough to aid the 1st Airborne.

After two months of pressure from Churchill, on December 9, 1944, Wladyslaw Raczkiewicz, the Polish president in exile, relieved Sosabowski of his command. The letter he received gave no reason for the dismissal and even praised Sosabowski for "the merits of your service in this post and your proven character on the battlefield." The Polish Brigade went on a hunger strike at Christmas to protest the removal of their commander and only ceased after an impassioned plea by Sosabowski.

The men of the Polish Parachute Brigade never went to Poland as they had been promised by the British. Instead, they were sent to Germany as part of the Allied occupation force at the end of the war. The Poles served in Germany until 1947, when the brigade returned to England to be disbanded. Most of the veterans remained in England along with their former commander. Sosabowski chose not to trust his fate to the new Soviet-sponsored Polish government. His wife and his son Peter, who had been blinded by a grenade while fighting in the Warsaw Uprising, joined him in England.

In September 1946, the Communist Polish government stripped Sosabowski of his Polish citizenship. He spent the next two decades literally as a man without a country, working in a factory for an electronics firm in a suburb of London. He died in 1967. Thus, a man who had spent his life fighting for Polish independence lived out his days in exile, while Poland once again suffered under foreign domination. □

Dr. Tom Aiello is an associate professor of history and coordinator of the history baccalaureate program at Gordon College in Barnesville, Georgia.

By Blaine Taylor

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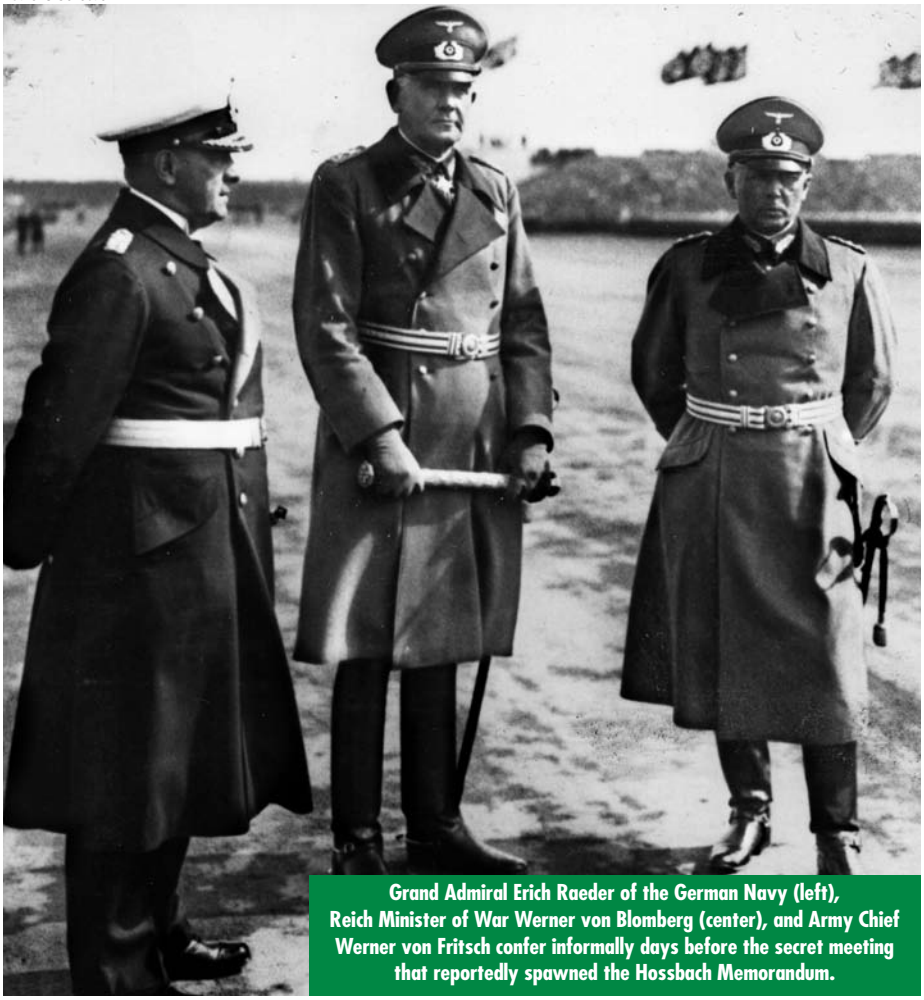

Grand Admiral Erich Raeder of the German Navy (left), Reich Minister of War Werner von Blomberg (center), and Army Chief Werner von Fritsch confer informally days before the secret meeting that reportedly spawned the Hossbach Memorandum.

The Hossbach Memorandum

A top secret meeting at the Old German Reich Chancellery in Berlin led directly to World War II—or did it?

ON JUNE 24, 1937, GERMAN MINISTER OF WAR FIELD MARSHAL WERNER VON Blomberg issued a directive marked Top Secret with only four copies to be made, the first for himself and the other three for the heads of the armed forces of the Third Reich.

Stated the minister and Wehrmacht commander in chief, "The general political situation justifies that Germany need not consider an attack from any side. Nevertheless, the politically fluid world situation—which does not preclude surprising incidents—demands constant preparedness for war on the part of the German Armed Forces … to make possible the military exploitation of politically favorable opportunities should they occur. Preparations of the Armed Forces for a possible war in the mobilization period 1937-38 must be made with this in mind."

The field marshal added that he foresaw two possibilities of war, however distant they might be: "(1) War on two fronts with the main struggle in the west (Strategic Concentration Red), and (2) War on two fronts with the main struggle in the southeast (SC Green)." The first might be a surprise attack from Republican France, alarmed at the rapid pace of German rearmament, and the second was a Nazi surprise attack against Czechoslovakia, the polyglot state created after World War I by the Allied-dictated Treaty of Versailles in 1919.

Finally, there were a trio of additional cases in which "special preparations" were to be made: "(1) Armed intervention against Austria (Special Case Otto), (2) Warlike complications with Red Spain (SC Richard), (3) England, Poland, Lithuania take part in a war against us (Extension of Red and Green)."

Behind the scenes, there was a severe shortage of iron and steel in the German prewar economy, with a personal struggle also going on between two of the Third Reich's most powerful men, Reichs Bank President Dr. Hjalmar Schacht and the head of the Four-Year Economic Plan to prepare Nazi Germany for war, Prime Minister of Prussia and German Aviation Minister Colonel General Hermann Göring, who was also commander in chief of the new German Luftwaffe.

According to Lt. Col. Verner R. Carlson, U.S. Army (Ret.) in his paper, *The Hossbach Memorandum,* "Early in 1937, when the three services—the Army, Navy, and Luftwaffe—were ordered to cut back their arms budgets, the order was met by a storm of protests. Göring exploited his position with Hitler and ran roughshod over the other services by 'stealing' critical materials for building the Luftwaffe."

These, then, were the circumstances at the time of the conference called by von Blomberg at the Old German Reich Chancellery in Berlin on the afternoon of November 5, 1937, for what Colonel Verner calls "an unprecedented secret meeting…. It was not a cabinet meeting. The subject was considered 'far too important.'"

The meeting began at 4:15 PM and ended more than four hours later, according to the man who was there and took down the minutes, writing his report five days later. His name was Colonel Friedrich Hossbach, who on August 3, 1934, had become the personal Army adjutant of the Führer, while at the same time being division chief in the Army Personnel Office.

The document that he produced has become known, therefore, as the Hossbach Memorandum, and the meeting that it covered has come down in the history of World War II as the Hossbach Conference. The meeting and its document were later to be at the core of the conspiracy charges against the Nazi High Command at the subsequent Allied International Military Tribunal at Nuremberg following the

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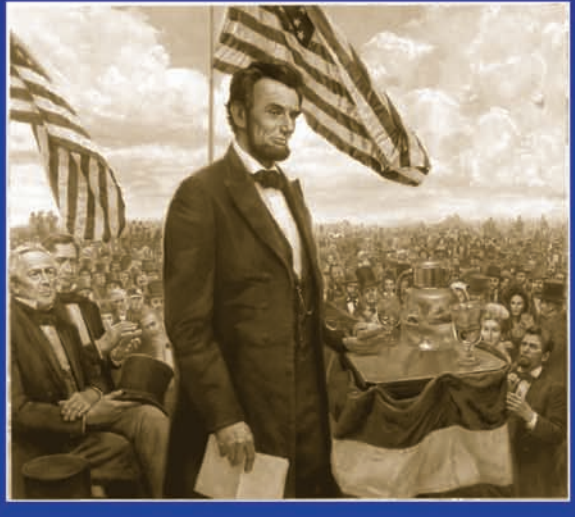

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Luftwaffe chief Hermann Göring (left) and German Foreign Minister Baron Konstantin von Neurath chat during a state function.

end of World War II.

According to the late Brig. Gen. Telford Taylor, an author and former U.S. prosecutor at Nuremberg, "Hossbach's life as Hitler's aide was constantly troubled by the tensions among Blomberg, [Army commander in chief Colonel General Werner von] Fritsch, and Göring."

But now, on the cold, dark afternoon of November 5, the 43-year-old Colonel Hossbach found himself in the catbird seat at an extremely important historical moment. Each of the service commanders and the war minister himself had brought their personal aides, as well as von Blomberg's dozen economics and munitions experts, to the meeting. Hitler excluded them all, as well as his own five adjutants, and thus they spent the entire conference cooling their heels in adjoining rooms.

As noted five days later by Hossbach, the conferees present were the Führer; War Minister von Blomberg; von Fritsch; Göring; Grand Admiral Erich Raeder, commander in chief of the Navy; and the Reich's foreign minister, Baron Konstantin von Neurath, who had no idea why he had been summoned; and Colonel Hossbach.

In his own 1960 memoirs, Admiral Raeder recalled, "Just before the conference, Göring had told me that the real object of the speech Hitler was going to make was to spur the Army to greater speed in rearming, and after the speech I was convinced that this was so."

If Foreign Minister Neurath was mystified by his own presence at the meeting, even more mysterious was the absence of the one man who should have been there, Dr. Schacht. However, only four days before the meeting Schacht had refused to appear at his office any longer because of the ongoing disputes with Göring, leading Reich Chancellery State Secretary Dr. Hans Heinrich Lammers to complain on November 1, "It is always difficult for the Führer to arrive at decisions in personnel matters. He always hoped that the problems would solve themselves. A settlement [regarding Schacht] had therefore not yet occurred, because the Führer will not yet agree to the appointment of only a State Secretary, but would, rather, like to name a Minister…."

In other words, the Führer had decided, in principle, to fire Dr. Schacht, but had not yet getermined who his replacement would be. Ultimately, the post would go to Dr. Walther Funk, a protege of Nazi Propaganda Minister Dr. Josef Goebbels.

Basically, as agreed by all accounts, the meeting of November 5, 1937, began with a two-hour recitation by Hitler on what he saw as the situation in Nazi Germany after the end of his first four and a half years in office as Reich Chancellor followed by his proposals for what he planned to do on the foreign scene in the next few years. Again, as all accounts agree, the service chiefs except for Göring and the shocked foreign minister opposed these stated goals for the rest of the meeting.

Following the standard "Party narrative" that preceded all of his prewar and wartime speeches detailing what both he as Führer, and the Nazi Part in general, had accomplished for Germany thus far, Hitler launched into the economic segment of his talk, the supposed reason for the calling of the meeting in the first place. He started with the topic of economic autarchy, or independence, to offset the expected British naval blockade of the next war like the one that had so constricted Imperial Germany in World War I.

To quote the actual Hossbach Memorandum: "In the field of raw materials only limited, not total, autarchy. In regard to coal, so far as it could be considered as a source of raw materials, autarchy was possible, but even as regards ores, the position was much more difficult. Iron requirements can be met from home resources, and similarly with light metals, but with other raw materials—copper, tin—this was not the case. Synthetic textile requirements can be met from home resources to the limit of timber supplies. A permanent solution impossible. Edible fats—possible."

Hitler continued, "In the field of food, the question of autarchy was to be answered by a flat 'no.'"

Over the years, almost all writers have criticized Hitler's abilities as a military leader without giving due weight to the spheres of political leadership and the economic concerns of a modern state as shown in the preceding speech. Then, for him, there was the explosive issue of the Reich's population growth and the limited territorial space in which to put it during the decades of the 1940s and 1950s.

"The possibility of a disaster grew in proportion to the increases in bread consumption, since a child was a greater bread consumer than an adult," one observer reasoned.

In summation, Hitler told his listeners that Germany needed living space to absorb this prewar "baby boom," and the question was where to find it? He quickly answered his own question: since Great Britain had effectively rejected a continental alliance with the Reich against the Soviet Union and also had refused her colonial demands, the requisite territory would have to be found in the East, the lands of the Soviet Union, as he had written in his 1925 book, *Mein Kampf*.

He told the assembly that he needed to prepare the way for the great war of conquest with the Soviet Union through a series of "small wars," if need be, with Austria, Czechoslovakia, and Poland. As for the latter, he had offered the late Polish First Marshal Josef Pilsudski a military alliance in 1934 to jointly invade Josef Stalin's domains, only to be rejected gruffly by the old marshal. In 1939, therefore, Hitler invaded Poland first instead.

He hoped, he told his thoroughly bewildered listeners, Nazi Germany could acquire Austria and Czechoslovakia by diplomacy, but if not, he was prepared to go to war against both Britain and France if they intervened against him.

Noted Colonel Verner in his summation of the Memorandum, "The salient question for Germany was: where and how could it 'achieve the greatest gain at lowest cost?'" Germany's current arms would be obsolete by 1943-1945, and therefore she must strike prior to that time or lose the war. Hitler's listeners were aghast. They did not raise moral arguments, however, to invading neutral countries in peacetime, but questioned instead Germany's strength to wage a second war on two fronts. The two-front strategy had contributed to the German defeat in World War I, and all those assembled were veterans of that great conflict.

Göring, who knew Hitler's thoughts well enough on the subject, only suggested that, perhaps, in light of the Führer's statements, Nazi Germany should wind down her clandestine involvement in aiding Nationalist General Francisco Franco's forces in the Spanish Civil War, to which Hitler replied that this was not yet necessary.

Since the timetable for war hardly affected his navy, Admiral Raeder said little in response.

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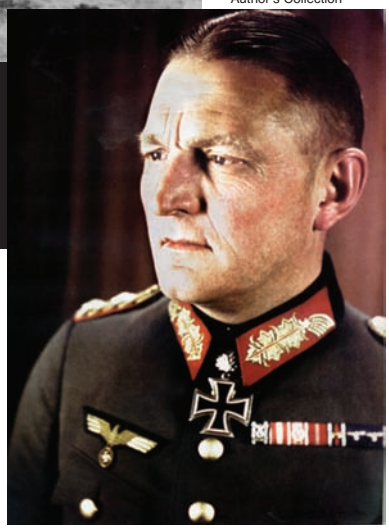

Goose stepping German soldiers parade down a Berlin street. According to some scholars, these troops were set in motion following a secret meeting at the Reich Chancellery and the drafting of the German blueprint for war, the Hossbach Memorandum. RIGHT: Colonel Friedrich Hossbach served as Hitler's military adjutant from 1934 to 1938 and produced a document that outlined the discussions in the Reich Chancellery.

It was the two soldiers present, von Blomberg and von Fritsch, who objected to the coming program of aggression most vehemently. In their view, Germany was simply not ready for a general war with either France or England, and behind them the far-flung, mighty British Empire and eventually the United States. Then there was the vastness of Stalin's Russia, which von Blomberg had seen firsthand in the 1920s while training the clandestine German Army on Russian soil with Red Army help.

The foreign minister, too, was astounded at the prospect of his thus-far peaceful policy with the rest of Europe being torn to shreds in favor of "small wars" of aggression that he was convinced, rightly as it turned out, would lead to a far greater one.

The two soldiers made their criticisms of Göring, not Hitler, but in this way nonetheless got their jointly held viewpoint across. Privately, the Führer was seething with rage. He had not rebuilt the German armed forces from scratch starting in 1933 without the intent to use them in opportune moments. Ironically, Göring agreed in secret with the two Army generals, who were his rivals for power, but kept his views to himself since he wanted to retain his position in the Nazi state. Göring realized he could only maintain that position at the Führer's side, not opposed to him.

Later, Hossbach would write in his postwar memoirs, "I do remember exactly that the sharpness of the opposition both in content and form did not fail to make its impression on Hitler, as I could see from his changing expression. Every detail of the conduct of Blomberg and Fritsch must have made plain to Hitler that his policies had met with cold, impersonal contradiction, instead of applause and agreement."

The meeting broke up on this note. As Raeder later recalled, "On the way out of the room, von Blomberg assured me once more that the whole thing was not meant seriously. Anyway, I did not feel at all that our foreign policy was to be changed."

They were both wrong, as von Neurath, who suffered a series of heart attacks, knew. He submitted his resignation as foreign minister, which was not accepted until the following February, when Hitler also accepted the forced resignations of both his war minister and Army commander in chief. Both von Blomberg and von Fritsch were the victims of trumped-up sex scandal charges.

Following those events, Hitler took over von Blomberg's post himself and named Göring as the Reich's sole field marshal. The German ambassador to London, former champagne salesman Joachim von Ribbentrop, succeeded von Neurath as foreign minister.

Thereafter, the near bloodless conquests of both Austria and Czechoslovakia took place, roughly as outlined in the Hossbach Memorandum, leading the American prosecution team at Nuremberg to claim that it was the key document in its assertion that there had been a grand Nazi conspiracy to launch World War II dating from November 5, 1937.

Both General Taylor and Dean Acheson of the U.S. State Department were involved in this effort, and yet it evolved that the original Hossbach Memorandum could not be found, only a microfilmed copy. Historian Bradley F. Smith noted in 1975, "It is unfortunate that the original Hossbach record has not yet come to the surface; it may well still lie in the U.S. National Archives, quietly entombed by the security restrictions that apply to Supreme Headquarters Allied Expeditionary Force (SHAEF) records."

A major question immediately arises. Was, then, the basic premise of the International Military Tribunal prosecution at Nuremberg that a conspiracy to commit aggression among the defendants on trial grounded on a false, doctored, or even missing document? Smith denied this; during their defense at Nuremberg both Göring and Raeder testified against the notion that the Hossbach Conference was a grand blueprint for an eventual war as the prosecution alleged, but was only Hitler's stratagem to force von Fritsch to move quicker on rearmament.

In any event, both of these formerly high-ranking Nazis considered the trial nothing more than "victors' justice" and knew they would be convicted. Indeed, as Göring told one of his two U.S. Army psychiatrists at Nuremberg before the verdict had even been handed down, "I know I shall hang; you know I shall hang."

Was the Hossbach Conference and its subsequent Memorandum in fact Hitler's blueprint for the eventual war that he actually waged? Certainly the Allied prosecutors may have been justified in thinking so. □

Towson, Maryland, freelance author Blaine Taylor has written numerous books on the World War II era.

By Ed Emering

Museo di Roma

In this painting by Italian war artist Pio Pullini, German soldiers hold an Italian professor at bay as they requisition his car. The Germans distrusted the Italian population as a whole and often did not hesitate to threaten civilians roughly, taking their property for military use.

A Tale of Two Famiglie

A pair of Italian families was caught up in the chaos of Mussolini and Fascist Italy during World War II. Atrocities involving each of them are remembered quite differently.

IN MARCH 1940, BENITO MUSSOLINI MET WITH ADOLF HITLER NEAR THE Brenner Pass on the border between Austria and Italy. Hitler used this meeting to stroke Mussolini's ego and convince him to ally Italy with Germany's war effort. Hitler promised Mussolini the opportunity to achieve great glory for the Italian nation. Buoyed by flattery, Mussolini accepted Hitler's offer on the condition that the impending German attack on France prove successful. On June 10, 1940, Italy formally joined the German war effort by declaring war on Great Britain and France.

By July 1943, with the tide of war beginning to turn against Italy, Mussolini again met with Hitler in the northern Italian town of Feltre, located in the province of Belluno in the Veneto Region. Members of Mussolini's Fascist Party had urged him to discuss with Hitler a possible war exit strategy for Italy. Instead, Mussolini requested additional military assistance from Germany. Hitler agreed to provide it, but only on the condition that it be placed under German authority. The tide had finally turned. Italy was now fully under the control of the German forces.

Later that month, Mussolini met with King Victor Emanuel (Vittorio Emanuele III), who had ascended to the Italian throne in 1900. The king informed Mussolini that Italy no longer wanted war and that Mussolini had become the most despised man in Italy.

Caught off guard, Mussolini offered his resignation as prime minister, which was immediately accepted by the king, who then offered Mussolini an armed escort that was actually an arrest. General Pietro Badoglio, 1st Duke of Addis Ababa, commander of the nation's troops and a Fascist, was then appointed the 41st prime minister of Italy.

Following the news of Mussolini's arrest, many fellow Fascist leaders fled Rome. Italians and Germans alike remained silent as the new Badoglio government proclaimed that the war would continue. Even in the face of this proclamation, many Italians began to cheer the removal of Mussolini. Hundreds of people were ordered shot as Badoglio's government attempted to establish control. As the situation continued to deteriorate rapidly, Badoglio eventually signed a secret armistice with the Allies on September 3, 1943, at Fairfield Camp in Sicily. He fled Rome along with the king when this became public knowledge on September 8. This left Italy's military in a state of chaos, and German troops implemented Operation Achse, moving rapidly to take over critical defensive positions.

From July 27 to September 12, Italian military intelligence (Servizio per le Informazioni e la Sicurezza Militare, SISMI) and German intelligence agents played a game of cat and mouse while the Germans attempted to locate the imprisoned Mussolini. On September 12, the Germans launched Operation Eiche (Oak). Waffen SS commando Major Otto Skorzeny led a mission to rescue Mussolini from the Campo Imperatore Hotel at Gran Sasso d'Italia in the Apennine Mountains. Along with Nazi Fallschirmjaeger (airborne troops) under the command of Major Harald Mors and Lieutenant Count Otto von Berlepsch, they were able to free Mussolini in a swift and successful operation. Mussolini was then flown first to Vienna and later on to Hitler's headquarters in Rastenburg, Germany.

Mussolini was flown to a resort at La Rocca delle Caminate in the province of Forli-Cesena and proclaimed head of state of the Italian

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ABOVE: Photographed before World War II, the Cervi family, which lost seven sons to partisan activity, became symbolic of the heroism of those who opposed the Nazis in Italy. RIGHT: A medal struck to commemorate the sacrifice of the seven Cervi sons at the hands of the Nazis features the likenesses of Alcide and Genoveffa Cervi, parents of the murdered men.

Social Republic (RSI), with its capital at Salo, situated in the province of Brescia in the region of Lombardy on a long narrow bay toward the southern end of Lake Garda (Lago di Garda) in the shadow of Monte San Bartolomeo. This new Nazi puppet state would also be known informally as the Salo Republic. Mussolini would continue to promote his Fascist ideals and assert that he had been betrayed by disloyal elements among the Italian people. Mussolini initiated a revival of his influence with a new uniformed military including the Republic National Guard, police, and the10th Squadron naval commandos.

While Mussolini was imprisoned in the summer of 1943, it became obvious that a confrontation with Germany was imminent. Lawyer Tancredi Galimberti, a member of the underground Action Party (Partito d'Azione), shouted from a balcony in Cuneo, "The war goes on, but against Germany. For this war there is one means—popular insurrection."

No one really had the will to fight at that moment. The people hoped that Italy would just be left alone, but they knew this would not happen. It was not until Germany began treating Italy as an occupied nation and the Italians as a subservient people that the populace turned against the German occupation and civil war broke out.

On October 13, the new Italian government declared war on Germany. Italy, at this point, had little to offer militarily, but what it lacked in military armament it made up for with its hatred of the Germans and the Fascist/Nazi ideology. It would still be a difficult battle since Germany had occupied Italy with 22 Army divisions and Mussolini had 6 RSI divisions, which the Italians partisans were compelled to confront.

Partisan action was generally grouped by political affiliation. The formations were divided among three main groups: the Communist Garibaldi Brigades, the Liberta Brigades (related to Partito d'Azione), and the Socialist Matteotti Brigades. Smaller groups included Catholic sympathizers and monarchists (such as the Green Flames, Di Dio, and Mauri) and some anarchist formations. Relations between the various partisan groups were not always good. The partisan groups in northern Italy, home to the RSI, were far more radical than those in other locales. The Communist Garibaldi Brigades were very well organized.

These units included special teams such as the Gruppo d'Azione Popolare (GAPPISTI), which carried out direct attacks against the Germans and Fascists. The Communists also formed antiscorch squads to prevent the sabotaging of power plants, factories, bridges, and dams. While the largest partisan contingents operated in mountainous districts of the Alps and the Apennines, there were also large partisan formations in the Po River plain.

Partisan membership grew from some 20,000 in May 1944 to more than 200,000 by April 1945. On April 21, the partisans attacked in an organized sweep and took control of all towns and cities that had not yet been reached by the Allies. Over 35,000 partisans had died by the time Italy was fully liberated on May 2, 1945. Hatred of the Fascists ran deep, and the desire for revenge remained unabated.

Mussolini and his mistress Clara Petacci were stopped by the Communist partisans of the 52nd Garibaldi Brigade (some historians credit the 51st Garibaldi Brigade) on April 27, 1945, on the road to the village of Dongo near Lake Como, as they headed for Switzerland to board a plane in an effort to eventually escape to Spain. The next day, Mussolini and his mistress were summarily executed in the name of the Italian people along with most of the members of their 15-man entourage, primarily ministers and officials of the RSI. The shootings took place in the small hamlet of Giuliano di Mezzegra in the Province of Como.

On April 29, the bodies of Mussolini and his mistress were taken to the Piazzale Loreto in Milan and hung upside down from steel girders at a gas station where they were abused by civilians.

No case in the annals of Italy's World War II history has stood to exemplify the brutality of the Italian Fascists more than the story of the Famiglia (Family) Cervi. Alcide Cervi had joined the Italian Army in 1929. Accused of insubordination, he spent three years in a military prison. While in prison, he developed strong anti-Fascist and pro-Communist sentiments.

When he was freed from prison, Alcide, also known as Father Cervi, became deeply committed to the Italian partisan movement. A staunch Communist, as were so many farmers in the area, he and his seven sons and two daughters exemplified the Italian resistance against the Nazi and Fascist regimes. After moving repeatedly, which was the lot in life of the sharecropper-farmer, the family settled near the fields of Rossi in the town of Erath at the center of the Po Valley in 1934. Here the Cervis introduced modern farming techniques, including crop rotation, and acquired the first tractor in the area in 1939.

At the beginning of the war, the family home became a center for clandestine dissent against Fascism. There, the Cervi Band was formed and dedicated to the partisan struggle. It did not escape the notice of the Fascist authorities. In 1939, Gelindo Cervi had been arrested for anti-Fascist activities. The same fate would befall Ferdinando Cervi in 1942. Gelindo would also be arrested again that same year.

The Cervi Band was charged with various acts of sabotage against power lines used to run

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munitions factories and also with the distribution of anti-Fascist propaganda. Ferdinando and his cousin, Massimo Cervi, sabotaged power lines near S. Ilario d'Inza. During early October 1943, the band moved to the mountains and formed an armed resistance group.

Later that month, the Cervi Band attacked the police station in Toano. On November 6, it launched a raid on the police station in S. Martino, and on November 13 the group attempted to kidnap a Fascist official, Giuseppe Scolari, in Reggio Emilia. These actions brought them into direct conflict with the Communist Party officials, who preferred to maintain a lower profile. This served to create issues with the band's ability to find shelter in the area other than at the Cervi family home.

On the night of November 24, 1943, during a "mopping up" sweep, the family was surprised at home by Fascist patrols of the National Republican Guard (Guardia Nazionale Repubblicana, or GNR), a paramilitary force of the Italian Social Republic which replaced both the Carabinieri and the Milizia Volontaria per la Sicurrezza Nazionale (MVSN). A firefight broke out, but after the Cervis had exhausted their ammunition supply, they were forced to surrender. Alcide Cervi and his seven sons—Ettore, Ovidio, Agostino, Ferdinando, Aldo, Antenore, and Gelindo—along with Quatro Camurri, Dante Castellucci, and four non-Italians, were arrested and taken to the prison of St. Thomas in Reggio Emilia. Later the family's house was sacked and burned by the Fascists.

The four foreigners and Dante Castellucci, who convinced the authorities that he was French, were transferred to prison in Parma. The seven brothers, however, were subjected to torture in order to get them to confess that they were involved in the sabotage. During this time, two high-ranking local Fascists, Senior Militia Official Giovanni Fagiani and Communal Secretary Davide Onfianai, were assassinated on December 15 and December 27, respectively. These acts prompted brutal reprisals by the Fascists.

At dawn on December 28, 1943, with no trial, the seven Cervi brothers, along with their partisan companion, Quatro Camurri, were summarily executed by firing squad at Poligno di Tiro. Their bodies were later buried in unmarked graves at Villa Ospizio Cemetery. To avoid any possible complicity, the death certificates all remained unsigned.

On January 8, 1944, still unaware of the loss of his seven sons, Alcide was able to escape from his cell during an Allied bombing of the prison.

On November 14, 1944, the family's matriarch, Genoveffa (Genevievezzzz) Cocconi, died. In October 1945, following the end of the war, Alcide was finally able to hold a solemn funeral service for his wife and children. For his commitment to the partisan cause, he was presented with a gold medal created by Italian sculptor and artist Marino Mazzacurati. The obverse bears the effigy of Alcide Cervi. The reverse contains an oak tree with seven branches for the seven brothers. Alcide passed away at the age of 90 in 1975.

A second commemorative medal, issued by the ANPI (Associazione Nazionale Partigiani d'Italia) of Reggio Emilia, intended for wider distribution, was also struck. The obverse bears the effigy of Alcide and his spouse, Genevieve. The curved inscription in the upper portion reads, GENOVEFFA E ALCIDE CERVI (Genevieve and Alcide Cervi). The reverse depicts a brick wall to the left and lists the seven sons to the right from top to bottom, ETTORE, OVIDIO, AGOSTINO, FERDINANDO, ALDO, ANTENORE, GELINDO, and further to the right of each name, a five-pointed star. At the bottom of the reverse is the curved inscription, A.N.P.I. REGGIO E.

Aldo Cervi remains a lasting symbol of the partisan cause and a legendary heroic figure among the anti-Fascist partisans, especially the politically powerful Communists. A local Communist historian, Renato Nicolai, assisted Alcide with the publication of his 1955 book, *I Miei Sette Figli* (My Seven Sons), which helped memorialize the atrocity.

The family's home is now Museo Cervi, a museum dedicated to the Italian Resistance. In Addition, the ANPI has continued to actively support and promote partisan causes, recently protesting the 2008 Spike Lee film, *Miracle at St. Anna*. The film tells the story of the Nazi atrocity at Sant'Anna di Stazzema, a village in Tuscany in central Italy.

On August 12, 1944, retreating members of the II Battalion, SS Panzergrenadier Regiment 35 of the 16th SS Panzergrenadier Division, commanded by Hauptsturmfuhrer (Captain) Anton Galler, rounded up 560 villagers and refugees, mostly women, children, and older men, shot them, and then burned their bodies. The film infers that the Nazi slaughter of innocent villagers may have been a direct result of the collaboration of a partisan with the Nazis. It is an indication of how deep feelings continue to run, more than 65 years after the war ended.

Anti-partisan operations were a key assignment of the new RSI regiments formed by Mussolini in 1943. Organized on September 24, 1943, the Italian SS Legion—eventually designated the 29th Waffen Grenadier SS Division der SS Italianische Nr. 1 or La Brigata d'Assaulto, Miliza Armata (the brigade was eventually upgraded to a division)—was made up of some Fascist volunteers as well as others who were former inmates of prison and labor camps later released to serve the Germans. Their operations were primarily directed against Communist partisans in German-occupied northern Italy. They were notorious for the ferocity and brutality of their antipartisan campaign. Hatred for the members and supporters of the RSI ran deep among the partisans.

The brutal actions of the Fascists and Nazis, particularly the Waffen SS, spread a deep hatred of them among the partisans and their sympathizers, which spilled over even after the war officially ended. An example of this hatred is in the seldom told tale of the Govoni family.

In the village of Pieve di Cento close to Bologna in northern Italy, lived the Govoni family. Cesare Govoni, his wife Caterina, and their six sons and two daughters were Fascist supporters. Only two of the sons, Dino and Marino, a veteran of the African Campaign, actually joined Mussolini's RSI.

On April 21, 1945, Bologna was liberated by Polish troops and Brigata Maiella partisans. Following the conclusion of hostilities in 1945, a general amnesty was declared, but it suited Communist partisan purposes to spread terror everywhere to achieve greater political control.

On May 8, 1945, Communist partisans began rounding up Fascist supporters in the area. At a nearby farmhouse, 12 suspected Fascist supporters were killed. Initially, the partisans seized only Marino Govoni on the night of May 10. The other Govonis felt safe because they had been interrogated and cleared of any complicity with the Fascist regime. Later. the partisans rounded up Augusto, Dino, Emo, Primo, Giuseppe, and their sister, Ida, who was nursing her three-month-old child at the time. They were bundled onto a truck and driven to a nearby farmhouse on the estate of Emilio Grazia. The Govonis were joined by 10 other prisoners: Alberto Bonora, Cesarino Bonora, Ivo Bonora, Guido Pancaldi, Alberto Bonvicini, Giovanni Caliceti, Vinicio Testoni, Ugo Bonora, Guido Mattioli, and James Malaguti. All were resolute anti-Communists.

The infamous organizers of the arrests were thought to be the Paolo Brigade of the 7th Gruppo d'Azione Partigiana (Partisan Action Group). For hours, the prisoners were beaten and tortured in the most brutal fashion. The last screams were heard around 11 PM. The broken bodies of the 17 prisoners were later found dumped in an antitank trench. Fearing further further atrocities by the Communist

partisans, strict silence surrounded the events of the evening. Only the parents of the seven Govoni victims attempted to shed light on the incident.

On February 8, 1953, a trial for the perpetrators of the Govoni killings was finally held in absentia at the courthouse in Bologna. Four life sentences were meted out by the court. Unfortunately, the actual perpetrators of the massacre had long since fled behind the Iron Curtain and were beyond the reach of the Italian justice system.

A comparison of the two atrocities yields interesting conclusions and reveals that postwar bitterness has lingered for many years in Italy. In both cases, seven siblings were killed. The seven Cervis were all male, and all were partisans who took an active role in the civil war, carrying out guerrilla-style terrorist raids against Nazi and Fascist troops, and even killing RSI soldiers. The seven Govonis included one woman, and only the oldest two brothers had actually been active supporters of the Italian Social Republic (RSI), but had never committed crimes. The other five siblings were not involved in Fascist politics at all.

The Cervis were killed during the war, as a result of an act of war. The Govonis were killed after the war had ended. Following the cessation of hostilities on May 8, 1945, the Comitato di Liberazione Nazionale (CLN or National Liberation Committee), the underground multiparty political entity of Italian partisans whose members shared opposition to the Germans and Fascists during World War II, issued orders to arrest only people who had been involved in the atrocities perpetrated by Mussolini'sRSI regime in order to bring them to trial. It did not authorize summary executions.

Shown on the family's property prior to the outbreak of war, Alcide Cervi lost seven sons to Nazi reprisal for partisan activities.

The Cervis have been and still are widely commemorated. Every Italian knows their story. Many streets and squares have been dedicated to them in many cities, and even a state-financed museum (Museo Cervi) has been established in their memory.

The Govonis have been intentionally forgotten, and only in the recent years has anyone begun to mention this atrocity. There is still significant resistance to resurrecting their memory, particularly from those who believe that the partisan movement formed the basis of the current Italian Republic. Many still view the people involved in Mussolini's social republic as criminals and feel that anything that was done to them was fully justified.

The bottom line is that feelings of bitterness on both sides continue to run deep within the Italian social fabric. □

Author Ed Emering is based in Chicago. He is also a researcher of historical photographs, books, and articles and maintains a free research service for medal collectors.

Masterstroke

SIR RICHARD O'CONNOR AND OPERATION COMPASS STUNNED THE ITALIAN FORCES IN NORTH AFRICA. BY JON DIAMOND

ESTABLISHED IN THE summer of 1939, Field Marshal Sir Archibald Wavell's Middle East Command encompassed nine countries and parts of two continents, an area of 1,700 miles by 2,000 miles. He commanded all British land forces in Egypt, the Sudan, Palestine, Transjordan, and Cyprus from his appointment in August 1939. With the outbreak of war his responsibilities had been increased to encompass Aden, Iraq, British Somaliland, and the shores of the Persian Gulf.

Wavell's duties were to prepare war plans for the entire theater, make arrangements for reinforcements in the event of a crisis, and distribute troops and supplies to his many garrisons. In addition, Wavell was to consult with his naval and air counterparts as well as meet with His Majesty's ambassadors in Egypt and Iraq, the governor-general in the Sudan, the high commissioner for Palestine and Transjordan, the governors of Cyprus, Aden, and British Somaliland.

The diplomatic and political aspects of Wavell's appointment were significant and they added to his command problems. For this magnitude of duty and function, Wavell was initially given a headquarters staff of only five officers. During the winter of 1940-1941 this group planned desert operations that came to be called "Wavell's Offensive." The first of these offensive efforts, Operation Compass, was the brainchild of Maj. Gen. Sir Richard Nugent O'Connor, who has been aptly termed "the forgotten victor."

The energy and genius for this campaign, which was originally to be only a five-day raid, was principally O'Connor's. When O'Connor's Western Desert Force took the field in December 1940, it was after a year of disasters for the British Army in Norway and France. Fortunately for Wavell, O'Connor had been fondly referred to as "the top of Wavell's short list of assets." Wavell chose O'Connor to command the Western Desert Force because he had a reputation for boldness and unorthodoxy.

From a logistical standpoint, the Western Desert, covering Egypt and the Cyrenaican half of Libya, was the true enemy. Everything that Wavell needed for both sustenance and warfare had to be carried by the troops. Available supplies of water, food, fuel, ammunition, and reinforcements were the major limiting factors to free movement in this theater of war. At times, Wavell would go to great lengths to convey these needs to London, but he was often met with only Prime Minister Winston Churchill's contempt.

Wavell traveled to London in early August 1940 for consultations with Churchill; however, very little was accomplished except for the heightening of the prime minister's suspicion that the "tail of the army always appeared disproportionate to the teeth." The interaction between Wavell and Churchill created a deep-seated tension between the two strong-willed men.

At his consultation with the prime minister in August 1940, Wavell complained to the British high command about the inadequate ground forces that he possessed to counter any Italian threat in the region. Churchill wanted action, such as an amphibious landing behind enemy lines, while Wavell concentrated on building up defensive positions.

After heated discussions and although he was "not in full agreement with General Wavell's use of the resources at his disposal," Churchill wrote in his wartime memoirs, "I thought it best to leave him in command. I admired his finer qualities, and was impressed with the confidence so many people had in him." Only the fact that the Middle East was not merely a field command but involved "an extraordinary amalgam of military, political, diplomatic and administrative problems of extreme complexity," eventually persuaded Churchill to stick with the senior and more experienced Wavell and not supersede him with a more junior officer, such as General Bernard Freyberg, a New Zealander.

Prior to the meeting in London, an important change in assignment occurred on June 7, 1940. In Jerusalem, Maj. Gen. O'Connor, who was then in command of the southern district of Palestine, was ordered to report immediately to Lt. Gen. Henry Maitland Wilson, General Offi-

In this graphic painting by war artist Ivor Hele, Australian troops storm an Italian position during the attack on Bardia on January 3, 1941. Commonwealth forces thoroughly routed the Italian Tenth Army during Operation Compass, which was intended as a five-day raid but lasted several weeks.

Australian War Memorial

in the Desert

cer Commanding (GOC), British Troops in Egypt (BTE). No reason was given for the abrupt summons. In Cairo, O'Connor was instructed to leave for Mersa Matruh, Egypt, a port and railhead, and take over command of the Western Desert Force with the task of defending Egypt from a presumed Italian offensive.

On June 10, 1940, Italian Fascist dictator Benito Mussolini had declared war on Britain and France. Contemporaneous with O'Connor's assignment, the British Expeditionary Force (BEF) had just retreated from the European continent at Dunkirk, and French forces were reeling from German attacks south of the River Somme. Thus, North Africa was at this time the only theater of operations where Great Britain could engage the Italian enemy on land. Before long, the British would be confronting German tanks and aircraft as well. O'Connor was confident and recalled that he was "given very sketchy instructions as to policy. I did not object really, as I don't mind being left on my own."

O'Connor's Western Desert Force consisted of just two divisions, the 7th Armored and the 4th Indian, which were both below strength in men, vehicles, and, most important for this war of mobility in the desert, tanks. A summary of Wavell's order of battle read, "twenty-one infantry battalions, two regiments of horsed cavalry, four regiments of artillery with sixty-four field guns, forty-eight anti-tank guns and eight anti-aircraft guns." In British Somaliland, also under Wavell's command, even fewer troops were garrisoned. Therefore, approximately 30,000 British troops in the Western Desert under Wavell and O'Connor faced 200,000 Italians and Libyans to the west and 250,000 Italian and colonial troops to the east.

Despite an absence of initial moves on the

ullstein bild/The Granger Collection, New York

ABOVE: Italian tanks advancing across Libya kick up a cloud of dust. In response, the British Army launched a series of raids against their enemy, which outnumbered them significantly. RIGHT: During the assault on the Italian stronghold at Bardia, Lieutenant General Richard O'Connor confers with theater commander General Archibald Wavell.

Imperial War Museum

part of the Italian Tenth Army after Mussolini's declaration of war on Britain and France, the Western Desert Force was not idle. The 7th Armored Division was organized by General Percy Hobart. In September 1938, following the Munich crisis, Hobart had been sent to Egypt to raise and train Britain's second modern armored formation, the Mobile Division. He molded this North African tank division into the famous 7th Armored with the black jerboa (desert rat) as its emblem. Numerous German officers were aware of Hobart's command abilities, particularly in the use of armor, and were busy studying and implementing his lessons on tank warfare.

In mid-1939, General Maitland Wilson, who had been a fellow student with Hobart at Staff College 20 years before but could not be called a friend, arrived to become the new GOC, BTE and Hobart's immediate commander. After only a brief stay in Cairo, Wilson found fault with Hobart. On November 10, 1939, Wilson wrote a letter to Wavell recommending that Hobart be replaced on the grounds that there was "no confidence in his ability to command the Armored Division to their satisfaction." Wilson judged Hobart's overcentralization of command and the heresy of his tactical ideas being based upon the invincibility of the tank to the exclusion of the employment of other arms in correct proportion as his principal flaws.

Wilson's letter to Wavell ended, "I request therefore that a new Commander be appointed to the Armoured Division." Hobart's biographer, Kenneth Macksey, notes, "Neither General Wavell nor General Wilson came out of this transaction with credit." However, Wavell did write, "I hope that it will be found possible to use General Hobart's great knowledge and experience in Armoured Fighting Vehicles in some capacity."

When Hobart departed Egypt, the troops of the Mobile Division lined the route to cheer their general on his way. It must be noted that upon assuming command of the Mobile Division, Hobart showed great ingenuity in improvising equipment at a time when shortages in everything were rife. As more equipment, infantry, armor, and artillery arrived, the troops began to learn more about their weapons and vehicles, as well as working better with the other arms. Other important details, such as learning to live in the desert, how to deploy, and how to recognize the enemy while concealed, all began to take hold in Hobart's maturing Mobile Division.

General O'Connor, then in Palestine, wrote of the Mobile Division, "It is the best trained division I have ever seen." Six months after Hobart's departure, the 7th Armored Division, using Hobart's methods, began to bedevil the Italian Tenth Army. According to Churchill's memoirs, "Our troops felt they had the advantage, and soon conceived themselves to be masters of the desert. Until they came up against large formed bodies or fortified posts, they could go where they liked, collecting trophies from sharp encounters."

Both the 7th and 11th Hussars of the 7th Armored Division conducted a series of cross-border raids on Italian outposts. On June 12, 1940, the 11th Hussars raided several Italian defensive positions and took many prisoners. Two days later, Fort Capuzzo and Fort Maddalena were captured by this same regiment along with some light tanks of the 7th Hussars and infantry of the King's Royal Rifle Corps.

On June 16, General Lastucci, the chief engineer of the Italian Tenth Army, was captured on one such raid. So, although O'Connor's main force was being husbanded for a later assault, elements of the Western Desert Force were getting some battle experience against the Italians and also being a nuisance to their easternmost outposts in Libya. Early in August, further elements of the 7th Armored Division, including the 3rd Coldstream Guards, the 1st Battalion of the 60th Rifles, the 2nd Rifle Brigade, one squadron of the 6th Royal Tank Battalion, and two mechanized batteries of the Royal Horse Artillery (RHA) continued to harass the Tenth Italian Army with large returns. Albeit with small numbers and a frontage of over 60 miles, in three months of fighting along the Libyan-Egyptian frontier, they killed or captured nearly 3,500 Italians. British losses were roughly 150 men.

Why was the Western Desert so important to the British other than as a site to oppose the enemy after the loss of the European continent to the Nazis? First, objectives in this desert war were not places or features of terrain, but the destruction of the enemy's army and overrunning of supply depots behind the battlefield. Thus, rear-area bases, which supplied the army in the field, had to be kept out of enemy hands

or else the quartermasters' nightmare, great distance, only became more problematic. Second, the Egyptian desert comprised the western flank of the British defense of the Middle East. In Mussolini's attack from Libya, his forces had to cross that desert. Third, the Western Desert meant control of the Suez Canal and the shortest water route to India, while Iraqi and Persian oil fields would also be maintained. The oil fields and refineries of Iraq and Iran, which fueled the Royal Navy, the Army, and the Royal Air Force (RAF), were the true prizes of the fighting in North Africa.

Richard O'Connor was born in Kashmir, India, on August 21, 1889. He was the son of an officer in the Royal Irish Fusiliers and the grandson of a former governor of India's central provinces. After a series of attendance at public schools in England, O'Connor was a student at the Royal Military Academy at Sandhurst. In September 1909, he was commissioned and served in the 2nd Battalion of the Cameronians with postings both in England and Malta. During the latter posting, he served as the regimental signals officer. When the Great War erupted, O'Connor went to France with the BEF as a captain commanding the 7th Division's signals company in the 22nd Brigade. In 1915, he was awarded the Military Cross, seeing action at Arras and Bullecourt. In October 1916, he was promoted to brevet major, serving as brigade major of the 91st Brigade, 7th Division. Further promotion in 1917 to brevet lieutenant-colonel resulted in his command of the 2nd Infantry Battalion of the Honourable Artillery Company, 7th Division. During this year of the war, O'Connor received the Distinguished Service Order.

In November 1917, the 7th Division was transferred to the Italian Front, where it was to support the Italian Army against the Austro-Hungarian forces at the Piave River. In October 1918, O'Connor's 2nd Battalion captured the island of Grave di Papadopoli on the Piave. For this action, O'Connor received the Italian Silver Medal of Honor and a bar to add to his DSO. At the end of the war, O'Connor reverted to his permanent rank of captain.

During the interwar period, O'Connor attended the Staff College, Camberly, in 1920. Important for his future role, he served as brigade major from 1921-1924, of the Experimental Brigade under Maj. Gen. J.F.C. Fuller's command. This force was conducting maneuvers utilizing the combined arms of tanks, artillery, infantry, and aircraft. From 1925 to 1927, he was a company commander at Sandhurst and from 1927 to 1930, he served as an instructor at the Staff College, Camberly. O'Connor had a young officer named Eric Dorman-Smith as a student. Fuller was also at Camberly, and with O'Connor cultivated Dorman-Smith's intellect, which was to yield significant results in Operation Compass.

In the early 1930s, O'Connor was posted in Egypt and Lucknow, India. From 1932 to 1935, he was a general staff officer at the War Office in London, attending the prestigious Imperial Defence College in 1935. In April 1936, he was appointed temporary brigadier of the Peshawar Brigade in northwest India. After that posting, he was appointed commander of the 7th Division in Palestine in September 1938 with the rank of major general. Along with this appointment, O'Connor held the position of military governor of Jerusalem at the time of the Arab Revolt.

In August 1939, O'Connor and the 7th Division were transferred to the fortress at Mersa Matruh as war clouds loomed. O'Connor's charge at Matruh was to defend the base against an anticipated attack by Mussolini's Tenth Army massed across the border in Cyrenaica, Libya. With Wilson's summons from Jerusalem to Mersa Matruh came the task for O'Connor to command the Western Desert Force with the specific intent to push the Italians out of Egypt if they attacked and to protect the Suez Canal as an entry point for an invading army into Palestine, Trans-Jordan, and the oil fields of Iraq and Persia.

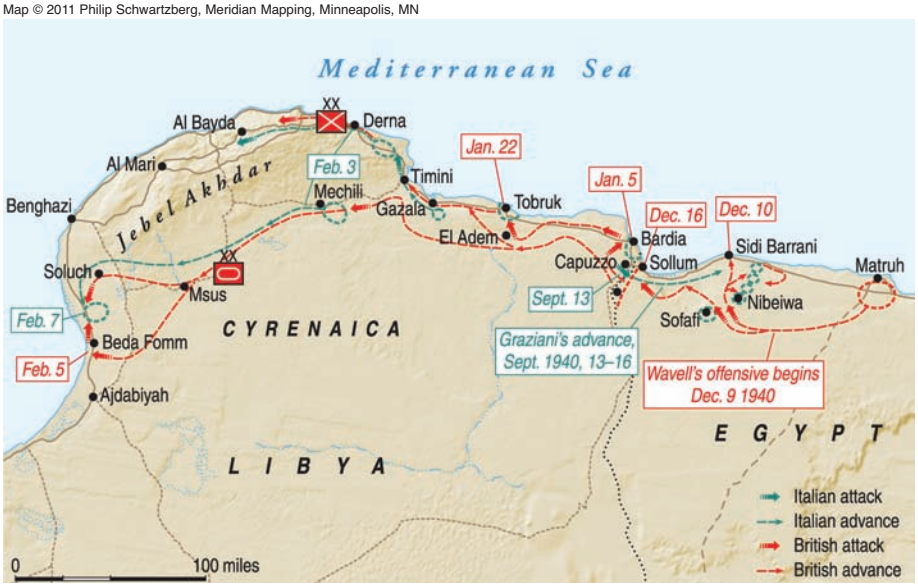
The Italian Fifth Army was commanded by General Italo Gariboldi. This force was stationed in Tripolitania; however, when the French troops in Tunisia came under the control of Marshal Philippe Pétain's Vichy collaborationist government, the Fifth Army was moved into Cyrenaica along with the Italian Tenth Army, commanded by General Mario Berti. Marshal Rodolfo Graziani was the governor general of Libya and in overall command of the Italian advance into Egypt in September 1940. Despite being committed to the offensive, Graziani doubted the capabilities of his large but infantry-oriented force, which lacked the mobility of his British adversary.

The Italian Tenth Army was composed of four corps: the XX, XXI, XXII, and XXIII; however, the only unit that General Berti had that was not an infantry division was the partially motorized and lightly armored "Maletti Group." The armor, commanded by General Pietro Maletti, comprised 70 tanks equally divided between the machine-gun-armed Fiat L3 tankette and the slightly heavier M11/39 medium tank, the latter armed with a hull-mounted 37mm gun. With a hull mounting, the M11/39's gun had a limited traverse, unable to quickly be brought to bear on targets. Although listed as a medium tank, the M11/39 was poorly armored and dubious in its reliability, especially under the cruel conditions of the desert.

Under O'Connor, Maj. Gen. Noel Beresford-

ullstein bild/The Granger Collection, New York

Advancing across the Egyptian frontier in September 1940, Italian troops were anticipating easy victories against the relatively small number of British and Commonwealth troops that opposed them.



According to many military historians, the British advance westward against the Italians in North Africa was stopped only by the diversion of men and war matériel to Greece. Lieutenant General Richard O'Connor, who led the immensely successful Operation Compass, pleaded to no avail for the resources to continue the advance to the Libyan capital of Tripoli.

Peirse commanded the 4th Indian Infantry Division while Maj. Gen. Sir Michael O'Moore Creagh commanded the 7th Armored Division. Soon after Operation Compass commenced, the 6th Australian Infantry Division under Maj. Gen. Iven Mackay replaced the 4th Indian Division; the latter force was sent to East Africa to fight the Italians in that portion of Wavell's expansive theater. The British tanks, including the faster Cruiser and heavier Matilda, were superior to the Italian armor.

After initial skirmishes along the Libyan-Egyptian frontier during the summer, the Italians commenced their invasion of Egypt. On September 13, 1940, the Italian XXI (Metropolitan) Corps advanced 60 miles into Egypt. At Sidi Barrani, the Italians halted and began fortifying makeshift camps to the south. Ostensibly, the reason for the halt to their eastward advance was a shortage of supplies, principally water, and a desire not to extend their distance from Libyan bases.

The British forces withdrew steadily as the enemy advanced. O'Connor's initial strategy was to avoid a confrontation with the larger Italian force at the frontier. The main part of his Western Desert Force was to retreat to Mersa Matruh, which was near a stronghold called the Baggush Box. Mersa Matruh was about 150 miles west of the great Egyptian port city of Alexandria and was relatively easy to supply.

O'Connor did, however, leave a thin screen of three battalions of infantry supported by artillery covering a 20-mile front. This small force was accompanied by light tanks of the 7th Hussars and armored cars of the 11th Hussars, along with two motor battalions of the 60th Rifles and the Rifle Brigade with two regiments of motorized RHA to retard the Italian advance. During the Italian march to Sidi Barrani, the Italians suffered 3,500 casualties while the British lost 160 men.

Despite the thin British line, it appeared to O'Connor's reconnaissance forces stalking the Italians that the "whole force [Italian] ran out of energy." Mussolini tried to goad Graziani to move on the Egyptian capital at Cairo. However, when he suspected that Graziani and his troops were more likely to fortify their positions at Sidi Barrani and to the south, the Italian dictator launched an attack on Greece with troops that had occupied Albania.

The Italians built a series of strongly fortified camps on a perimeter from Maktila on the coast following a southwesterly arc to Sofafi about 40 miles away. Each camp was surrounded by antitank obstacles and mines and was garrisoned by an infantry brigade with tanks and artillery in support. One evident shortcoming noted by O'Connor was that the fortified camps were too widely spaced to be mutually supporting. With the Italians stationary, it became apparent to the Western Desert Force leadership that they must begin thinking of attacking the enemy rather than waiting to deliver a knockout blow as the Italians approached Mersa Matruh.

These initial actions in Egypt would constitute the start of a seesaw struggle between Italian and later German forces and troops of the British Empire along the North African littoral of Egypt and Libya that would last into 1943. This contentious coastal strip, approximately 400 miles between Alamein and Derna, was no more than 40 miles deep due to a 500-foot escarpment to the south as well as the Qattara Depression to the east, which was an impassable salt marsh for tanks and heavy military vehicles, and the northern edges of the Egyptian and Kalansho Sand Seas crossing the Egyptian frontier into Cyrenaica.

As early as the Italian declaration of war, it was proposed by the Middle East Command, under Wavell, to remain on the defensive and absorb the brunt of the anticipated Italian attack at the fortified base of Mersa Matruh, where O'Connor and the 7th Armored Division had been since August 1939. Churchill yearned for some type of offensive action, especially a move to cut the coastal road; he invited Wavell to Egypt for the week of consultations in August 1940.

O'Connor used the three months of relative calm between the Italian declaration of war and Graziani's invasion of Egypt to prepare for future operations. He had a penchant for personal inspection and reconnaissance, sometimes ahead of his own front lines, which he had become accustomed to during World War I on both the Flanders and Italian fronts. Actually, on September 11, 1940, prior to Graziani's offensive, Wavell started to inquire about the possibility of an offensive into Cyrenaica, which he envisioned taking place at the end of 1940 or early in 1941, following the defeat of an Italian invasion if it occurred.

"It is possible that an opportunity may offer for converting the enemy's defeat into an outstanding victory.... I do wish to make certain that if a big opportunity occurs we are prepared morally, mentally and administratively to use it to the fullest."

Throughout the autumn of 1940, Churchill stewed over the lack of offensive spirit in the Western Desert. Action in Egypt required substantial reinforcements, some of which Churchill was certain could come from the

Middle East Theater itself. He was particularly angry about the "mass of fine troops"—British, Australian, and New Zealander—still garrisoning Palestine. In response to a memo from Secretary of State for War Anthony Eden about strengthening Commonwealth forces in the Middle East, Churchill insisted that there was already a "shocking waste of troops" within the Middle East Theater.

Eden proposed a personal visit to Wavell in Egypt to develop plans for an attack, and it was during Eden's mission that Italy invaded Greece. On October 28, Eden arrived in Cairo on Churchill's behalf to inquire as to Wavell's intentions, especially in light of the prime minister's desire to aid Greece after the Italian attack. When Eden was about to authorize further British troop transfers to Athens and Suda Bay on Crete, Wavell was forced to disclose his plans for a "five-day raid" against Graziani at Sidi Barrani. Churchill clamored for action in the Balkans until Eden returned to London on November 8 to reveal the "carefully-guarded secret which I wished I had known earlier." From then on, London concentrated on Wavell's strike against the Italians massing in the desert using O'Connor's Western Desert Force as his spearhead.

Churchill wanted a quick success in the desert to allow men and material to flow to Greece; however, he probed the extent to which plans had been laid for the exploitation of the five-day raid. Wavell had yearned for a quick victory, and his correspondence of October 20, 1940, to General Maitland Wilson stated that he expected the raid to last "four or five days at the most" so that he could attend to Ethiopia and Somaliland, where the Duke of Aosta had a large Italian field force. O'Connor was appointed an acting lieutenant general in recognition of the increased size of his command and the ranks of his subordinate commanders.

Wavell did have a plan to attack the Italians, but O'Connor had objections and proposed his own plan to pass through the gap in the enemy's defensive line at Bir Enba, south of the Nibeiwa camp, and send the infantry division north toward the coast, taking the enemy camps in detail from behind or from the west. Wavell was overjoyed with O'Connor's flair for the unorthodox approach. A chief architect for this unorthodoxy was Brigadier Eric Dorman-Smith, a member of Wavell's staff attached to O'Connor to assist in the planning of the real assault after viewing a rehearsal of the attack on November 26.

Dorman-Smith noted that aerial photos of the Nibeiwa camp indicated that all vehicle tracks led into the northwest corner of the camp and suggested that there were no mines in that area. Dorman-Smith's analysis resulted in a finished paper titled "Assault on a Desert Camp," which was approved by Wavell and applied to O'Connor's Western Desert Force attack on the Italians at Nibeiwa camp.

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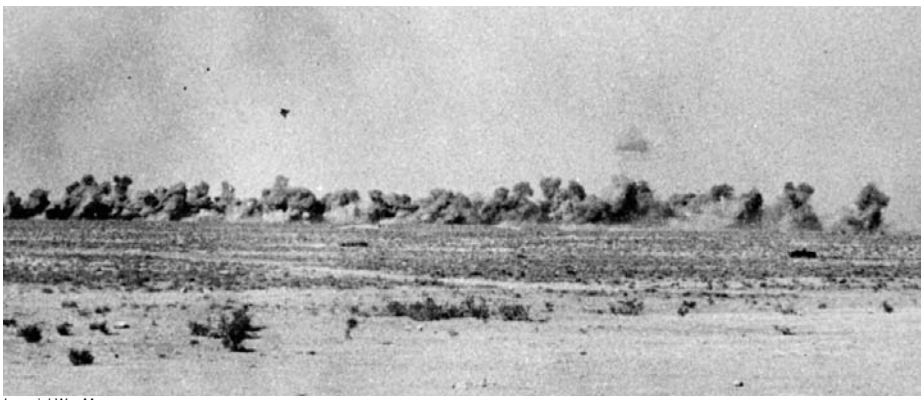
ABOVE: British light tanks of the 3rd Hussars speed across the desert en route to Buq Buq during Operation Compass in December 1940. BELOW: During the siege of the Italian defensive positions at Bardia on December 31, 1940, British artillery steadily bombards the Italians. Artillery fire played a key role in supporting infantry operations during Operation Compass.



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Dorman-Smith, O'Connor, and Wavell shared similar military roots. In July 1931, Dorman-Smith was appointed brigade major to the 6th Experimental Brigade. His brigadier was Archibald Wavell. On one of Dorman-Smith's reports during this posting, Wavell had penned, "Remember that a little unorthodoxy is a dangerous thing ... but without it you cannot win battles." Thus, before the war Dorman-Smith enjoyed a reputation in the British Army as an advanced military thinker and had played an important part in the struggle to mechanize the Army.

On November 28, Wavell could sense the potential for O'Connor to win a victory after six months of training and operational planning. Wavell wrote, "The difficulties, administrative and tactical, of a deep advance are fully realized. It is, however, possible that an opportunity may offer for converting the enemy's defeat into an outstanding victory.... I do wish to make certain that if a big opportunity occurs we are prepared morally, mentally and administratively to use it to the fullest."

The date of Operation Compass was fixed for December 9, 1940. The troops were to begin moving westward on December 6, and the approach march to Nibeiwa was to start at dawn on December 8. Both the 7th Armored and 4th Indian Divisions were to move south of the main escarpment since less dust would be raised by the vehicles to alert the Italians to the west.

O'Connor possessed an instinctive knowledge of mobile, light mechanized warfare, but for this attack he would use heavy Matildas of the 7th

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ABOVE: With a camouflage net draped above it, a British Bofors gun fires at Italian positions at Derna on February 1, 1941. BELOW: With bayonet fixed, a single Australian soldier warily watches a group of surrendering Italian soldiers at Bardia in January 1941. With the Italian debacle in North Africa, Hitler was left with no choice but to come to the aid of his Axis partner and send troops and tanks that might have been deployed elsewhere.

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Royal Tank Regiment (RTR). Instead of the conventional method of using an artillery bombardment followed by a combined infantry and armored advance, it was decided to use the Matildas, under command of Lt. Col. R.T. Jerram, in an attack on the fortified camps first, leading the way for the infantry of the 4th Indian Division to follow up the armored assault. At Nibeiwa, the assault would be a surprise move, unsupported by an artillery barrage, down an unmined track into the northwest corner of the camp, attacking the camp from the rear.

While this was occurring, other infantry would draw the defenders' attention away to the east of the camp with heavy small-arms fire and pyrotechnics. This latter diversion was conducted the 4th Battalion, 7th Rajput Regiment, 11th Indian Infantry Brigade east of the Nibeiwa camp. This unit withdrew at 6 AM on December 9, three hours after successfully diverting the attention of the Italians.

At 7 AM, over 200 guns opened fire on Nibeiwa. The British tanks crashed through barbed wire with Italian machine-gun and artillery fire ineffective against the Matildas' three inches of armor. The turrets of the Matildas had fascines attached to them to assist in crossing antitank ditches, but none were encountered. Immediately behind the tanks were the motor infantry of the 2nd Battalion Queen's Own Cameron Highlanders and 1st Battalion of the 6th Rajputana Rifles of the 11th Indian Infantry Brigade, which advanced in Bren carriers. Italian artillery crews and infantry were lightly protected in sandbag-lined pits and slit trenches, which were easily neutralized by the British tanks' 2-pounder and machine-gun fire.

After the victory at Nibeiwa, other fortified camps, Tummar West and East, were defeated in detail, utilizing the same method of attacking from the west or rearward side of the fortified positions. During the attacks on Nibeiwa and the Tummars, the 4th Armored Brigade drove north, forcing the 400-strong Italian garrison at Azziziya to surrender.

On the morning of December 10, the 16th Brigade, under Brigadier C.E.N. Lomax, advanced unsupported and met considerable resistance from the Italians, including two Libyan divisions and the 4th Blackshirt Division, at Sidi Barrani. The artillery and Matilda tanks finally waited out a sandstorm and attacked from the east along with the 11th Indian Brigade. The Italians surrendered Sidi Barrani late that afternoon.

On the night of December 10, the Italians, who had earlier evacuated the Maktila camp through Selby Force, a detachment of 1,800 troops that had advanced from Mersa Matruh under the command of Brigadier A.R. Selby, were attacked and defeated by this British formation along the coast road east of Sidi Barrani the following day. After the capture of Sidi Barrani, the remains of the two Libyan divisions and the 4th Blackshirt Division were trapped between the British 16th Infantry Brigade and Selby Force. On December 11, Selby Force, supported by armor, attacked and secured the surrender of the 1st Libyan Division. By nightfall, the 4th Blackshirt Division had also capitulated.

By December 11, O'Connor was savoring victory. Point 90, another fortified Italian position, was taken that day. The 7th Armored Brigade had failed to prevent the Italian evacuation of the Sofafi and Rabia camps to the southwest due to a sandstorm, and later that night it was sent in pursuit of these fleeing garrisons to Buq Buq adjacent to the coast road west of Sidi Barrani. O'Connor wanted to pursue the Italians along the coast road to Benghazi itself, but Wavell had decided to send the 4th Indian Division to join the British offensive against the Italians in Abyssinia, replacing it

with the 6th Australian Division. This delayed O'Connor's timetable.

O'Connor later recalled that Wavell's decision "came as a complete and very unpleasant surprise.... It put paid to the question of immediate exploitation." The departure of the 4th Indian Division deprived O'Connor of much of his artillery and transport. However, Operation Compass was a victory to this point, yielding 38,000 Italian prisoners, 237 guns, and 73 light and medium tanks at a cost of 600 killed, wounded, or missing. To the Italians, this debilitating defeat was known as the Battle of the Marmarica, named after the coastal plain where the actions took place.

By December 15, British and Indian troops and armor had captured Sollum, Halfaya and Fort Capuzzo. The attack on Bardia would follow. For this assault, the 7th Armored Division awaited the arrival of the 6th Australian Division.

Italian Lt. Gen. Annibale Bergonzoli's XXIII Corps faced the British and Australians at Bardia with approximately 40,000 defenders. The Bardia defenses comprised an 18-mile perimeter, which included a permanent antitank ditch, barbed wire, and some concrete sangars. Some Italian tanks were present, but the only battleworthy ones were the M13/40s with their 47mm guns.

In January 1941, the Western Desert Force was redesignated XIII Corps. That same month, MacKay's 6th Australian Division commenced the assault on Bardia. After breaching the wire and filling in the antitank ditch, it took only three days for the Australians and British armor to capture roughly 36,000 prisoners; the commanding general escaped to Tobruk along the Via Balbia.

On January 5, Wavell appeared to be in favor of exploiting O'Connor's breakthrough, although Churchill's penchant for his planned Greek expedition always seemed to be sapping units from the offensive into Libya. Wavell instructed O'Connor to consider raiding as far as Benghazi once Tobruk was taken. Interestingly, O'Connor had already made the same plans independent of Wavell's instruction. When the Greek government declined Churchill's offer of a British expeditionary force, he informed Wavell that Benghazi was now of the highest priority.

O'Connor's Australians and his 4th Armored Brigade moved into positions opposite Tobruk on January 6 and 7. Tobruk, like Bardia, was defended by rings of underground concrete posts, barbed-wire entanglements, and an antitank ditch. The perimeter was larger at 30 miles, and the garrison of the XXII Corps numbered around 25,000 men with 220 guns and approximately 60 tanks. On the night of January 9, aggressive Australian patrolling against the Tobruk garrison resumed. By January 12, Tobruk was surrounded.

The main attack by the Australians did not occur until the night of January 20-21. Twelve hours after the attack began, part of the garrison under General Petassi Manella surrendered. On the afternoon of January 22, Brig. Gen. Vincenzo della Mura and the remaining 17,000 defenders surrendered. The Italians lost 25,000 killed, wounded, and captured. The Australians, in contrast, had only 400 killed, wounded, or taken prisoner. In addition to the large prisoner haul, abundant stores of food, weapons, and other supplies were also appropriated.

As Tobruk fell, it was decided to have XIII Corps report directly to Wavell, thereby removing Wilson's BTE in Cairo from the chain of command. O'Connor said this change had produced an interval that was "the most effective and happiest time of my command."

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British soldiers advance rapidly toward barbed-wire entanglements in front of Italian fortifications at Derna on February 1, 1941. One of the British solders appears to be carrying a Bren gun, the standard issue infantry support machine gun of World War II.

After the fall of Tobruk, O'Connor continued the advance toward Derna with the Australian 6th Division, while the 7th Armored Division was sent south of the Jebel Akhdar mountains toward Mechili. On January 24, the 4th Armored Brigade clashed with Italian armor on the Derna-Mechili track. The Italians were able to destroy some British light and cruiser tanks while losing several of their own. On January 25, Italian infantry was putting up a determined defense against the Australians; however, after many uncoordinated actions in which most of the Italian 60th Sabratha Infantry Division was destroyed, Derna was captured on January 26. Also on this day, the remaining Italian divisions in eastern Libya began retreating northwest along the coast toward Benghazi, setting up O'Connor's next coup de main to intercept the remnants of the Italian Tenth Army at a soon to be famous desert marker, Beda Fomm.

O'Connor's plan was to have the 7th Armored Division continue to travel across desert tracks via Msus and Antelat in an attempt to cut off the retreating Italians. Meanwhile, the Australian 6th Division would be hard on the heels of the Italians who were clinging to the coast road north of the Jebel Akhdar mountains. On February 4, the 4th Armored Brigade, with A and C armored car squadrons of the 11th Hussars in front, struck out across the desert along with an armored car squadron from the King's Dragoon Guards (KDG).

Behind the armored car force were tanks from three tank regiments—the 3rd and 7th Hussars and 2nd RTR—followed by the 2nd Battalion of the Rifle Brigade, antitank guns of the 4th RHA, and elements of the 106th RHA with portee-mounted 37mm antitank guns. This formation was called Combe Force, after its commander, Lt. Col. John Combe of the 11th Hussars. Its total complement consisted of about 2,000 men.

By 3:30 PM on February 4, the armored cars of the 11th Hussars cleared the fort at Msus. Combe Force continued its march and reached Msus late on the morning on February 5, hitting the coast road near Sidi Saleh, 10 miles south of Beda Fomm, at noon. At 2 PM, a company of the 2nd Battalion, Rifle Brigade was in position across the road with two more

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THE ORDEAL OF CONVOY PQ-17 IS INDICATIVE OF NAZI EFFORTS TO SEVER THE LEND-LEASE LIFELINE TO THE SOVIET UNION.

BY DAVID H. LIPPMAN

British Prime Minister Winston Churchill had made the promise to Soviet Premier Josef Stalin, and Admiral Sir John Tovey of the Royal Navy had to keep it: to sail three convoys loaded with critical supplies from Britain to Russia every two months, with 25 to 35 ships in each convoy. Now, on June 27, 1942, a total of 33 British and American merchant ships set sail from Reykjavik, Iceland, bound for the Soviet port of Murmansk through the icy, U-boat-infested Barents Sea. Convoy PQ-17 would sail into one of the greatest disasters and controversies of World War II.

By June 1942, the Allies' fortunes were at their lowest ebb of the war. Rommel had reached El Alamein. Hitler's panzers were advancing through Russia. Japan had conquered most of Southeast Asia and was taking dead aim at Australia.

Stalin was the most desperate of the three Allied leaders that month. With Leningrad besieged, German tanks driving on his oilfields in the Caucasus, and most of his industrial regions in Nazi hands, he needed Allied supplies badly. Convoy PQ-17 would help to resolve that—its cargo included more than 300 tanks.

But the Germans were equally determined to stop the convoys, and from their Norwegian bases, they were well placed to do it. The primary tool was General Hans-Jurgen Stumpff's Luftflotte 3, which consisted of 264 aircraft. The big punch was his 103 Junkers Ju-88 bombers, but he also had 42 Heinkel He-111 torpedo bombers and 30 Junkers Ju-87 Stuka dive-bombers. They were a veteran team that had already savaged British and American convoys to Russia.

Also on hand were groups of U-boats to knife the convoys and track them, but the next convoy would face the biggest stick of all, the long-dormant German surface fleet, which had been unable to sail due to the perennial shortage of fuel oil. But 15,000 tons had just been allocated and delivered, and now the big ships could take part.

The German Navy planned Operation Rösselsprung, or Knight's Move, which would see the super-battleship *Tirpitz,* the pocket battleships *Lützow* and *Admiral Scheer,* the heavy cruiser *Admiral Hipper,* and a brace of destroyers sortie from Altenfjord in Norway to attack the passing convoy as soon as it was located.

When Adolf Hitler read this ambitious plan, the man who

In this painting by Robert Bailey, Luftwaffe Junkers Ju-88 bombers press home their attacks against merchant vessels of Convoy PQ-17, destined for the Soviet port of Archangel in July 1942.

"CONVOY IS TO SCATTER"

admitted to being a coward at sea got cold feet. Yes, the fleet could sortie, but it could only engage if it had air superiority. After the *Bismarck* fiasco, he was not taking any chances with his precious battleships.

The British had a similar problem—they did not want to engage German surface ships without air cover. They decided that the convoy would only go straight through if the German ships were known to be in harbor or if the weather was bad. If the German ships sailed, the convoy would retreat or, at worst scatter, to avoid being caught all together.

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LEFT: Colonel General Hans-Jurgen Stumpff of Luftflotte 3 commanded the German air units that viciously attacked the ships of Convoy PQ-17. RIGHT: Rear Admiral Louis Hamilton of the British Royal Navy commanded the distant cover escort for Convoy PQ-17 and was dismayed at the order for the convoy to scatter.

The covering force for Convoy PQ-17 was a comprehensive group: three minesweepers, four trawlers, and a close escort group under Commander Jack Broome with six destroyers, four corvettes (one of them Free French), and two submarines. The only thing lacking was an aircraft carrier because most of the escort carriers that would make history had still not been completed. All Broome had for air defense was a single CAM Merchant ship, *Empire Tide,* with its lone Hawker Hurricane fighter. That plane could be launched off its catapult, but when out of fuel, the pilot had to parachute back—there was no possibility of recovery.

Broome was one of the Royal Navy's more colorful characters, a witty cartoonist, and a skilled and resolute fighting sailor.

The close escort would be supported by a distant cover group, forbidden to go beyond Bear Island, under Rear Admiral Louis "Turtle" Hamilton, aboard the heavy cruiser HMS *London.* Accompanying him were the heavy cruisers HMS *Norfolk,* USS *Wichita,* and USS *Tuscaloosa*; it would be the first time Americans had directly participated in running an Arctic convoy. Beyond that would be Tovey's main fleet, consisting of the battleships HMS *Duke of York* and USS *Washington,* and the aircraft carrier HMS *Victorious,* two cruisers, and 14 destroyers. Franklin D. Roosevelt Jr., son of the U.S. president, served as gunnery officer on one of the destroyers, USS *Mayrant*.

Meanwhile, PQ-17 got organized at Reykjavik with Commodore Jack Dowding in charge as convoy commodore, flying his broad pendant on the freighter *River Afton*. He told his ship captains that the convoy would be "no joyride," but there would be cover from the British and American fleets. Dowding predicted that the convoy would get to Murmansk unscathed. Broome's lecture, witty as usual, drew laughter and applause. The assembled captains were delighted.

That afternoon the convoy weighed anchor and headed to sea, picking up its escort; its destination was Archangel rather than the heavily bombed Murmansk. To deceive the Germans, Tovey sent out some minelayers to make feints. The deception failed. The Germans never spotted the minelayers.

The Germans knew the convoy was coming anyway—they had cracked the British merchant ship code. First contact was on July 1, when *U-255* and *U-408* met up with the escorting destroyers, but Broome's ships beat off the U-boats. That was all the Germans needed. They assembled a group of U-boats called "Ice Devil" and had them take up a patrol line across the convoy's line of advance.

At noon that day the first shadowing aircraft arrived on the scene. The first air attack came that evening, when seven Heinkel He-115 seaplanes were vectored in by a shadowing seaplane and *U-456*. One aircraft was shot down by the destroyer HMS *Fury.* No damage was done in the attack.

By this time, Hamilton's cruisers had overhauled the convoy and were standing away to the northward. Hamilton chose a parallel course to the convoy 40 miles away, out of sight of the shadowers, to keep the enemy guessing about his whereabouts.

PQ-17 was not the only convoy out there. Returning from Archangel, the 35-ship convoy QP-13 was also at risk. The British worried that the Germans might split their forces and hit both convoys. Hamilton zigged his cruisers around the sea, trying to keep within touch of the convoys and out of sight of the German snoopers.

With the British and Americans at sea, it was time for the Germans to move. The German fleet headed to sea and immediately ran into trouble in the form of uncharted rocks. One tore open the hulls of three destroyers, the *Karl Galster, Hans Lody,* and *Theodor Riedel.* The perennially luckless *Lützow* ran aground in Tjelsund and sustained severe damage. All four ships were out of the operation. The Germans concentrated their scattered ships at Altenfjord with orders to be ready to strike.

On July 4, the British ships of PQ-17 signaled "Happy Birthday" to the American ships, while the U.S. ships broke out their largest American flags to celebrate Independence Day. The same day, a single He-115 swooped down through the low cloud and torpedoed the U.S. freighter *Christopher Newport*. The crew was picked up, and Broome sent in the minesweeper HMS *Britomart* to investigate whether the ship could be saved. *Britomart* radioed at 5:20 AM that the ship was flooded and her steering gear out of action. The British submarine *P614* tried to sink her but failed, so the derelict was left behind and finally punched out by *U-457*.

Overhead, the Luftwaffe's reconnaissance planes continued to shadow the British ships. It was the height of Arctic summer, with sunset lasting only a couple of minutes. A British destroyer signaled one of the German planes, asking if it could not "circulate in the other direction for a while, as we become dizzy." The German signaled back, "Whatever it takes to please an Englishman," and took up a reconnaissance orbit in the opposite direction.

Meanwhile, the multiple layers of British command were suffering from contradictory orders. The British deduced from their intelligence that the German warships would attack PQ-17 when it had reached a position between

15 degrees and 30 degrees East, which would occur sometime on July 4. London passed this news to Tovey with the order that Hamilton could, after all, take his cruisers east of 25 degrees East to support the convoy unless Tovey ordered otherwise.

Tovey saw this as London infringing on his operational and tactical command, and he ordered Hamilton at 3:12 PM to leave the Barents Sea unless he could be assured that *Tirpitz* was not at large. The signal crossed one sent by Hamilton at 3:20 saying that he intended to stay with the convoy until the German movements were clarified, but no later than 2 PM on July 5. Then at 6:09 Hamilton amended this and expressed his intention of withdrawing at 10 PM on July 4, after fueling his destroyers.

Meanwhile, the convoy plowed along. Fog cleared during the day, bringing excellent visibility, which enabled perfect formation. Broome remembered, "That morning stands out in my memory; in bright sunshine, a glass calm sea and except for the whining Blohm and Voss duet (the seaplane snoopers), peaceful. The air was crisp and brand new, the visibility back to phenomenal. Across the northern horizon was slung a weird-shaped lumpy line of vivid emerald green icebergs like chunky jewelry."

At 4:45 PM, to widen the gap between the convoy and the Luftwaffe air base, Hamilton suggested to Broome that the convoy alter course to the northeast. But the Luftwaffe was on its way. At 7:30, a single Ju-88 led a group of He-111 bombers from 1st Group, Kampfgeschwader (Bombing Group) 26, under Captain Eicke, in to attack.

The attack was foiled by the destroyer USS *Wainwright,* which had toddled over from the escort group to fuel from a convoy tanker. As Broome wrote in his report, "This ship lent valuable support with accurate long-range AA fire. I was most impressed for the way she sped round the convoy worrying the circling aircraft and it was largely due to her July 4 enthusiasm that the attack completely failed. One torpedo exploded harmlessly outside the convoy and two bombs fell through the clouds ahead of the convoy between *Wainwright* and [destroyer] *Keppel.*"

One German aircraft, flown by a Lieutenant Kanmayr, was lost in the attack, but the Luftwaffe pilot and his crew were picked up by the destroyer HMS *Ledbury.* They told the British that the Germans expected little resistance. *Ledbury*'s aggressive captain, Roger Hill, was very pleased with the situation.

As soon as this attack was broken up, in came a second group of He-111 torpedo bombers from the convoy's starboard quarter. With *Wainwright* busy, the aircraft swooped to within 6,000 yards before dropping their fish. One hit the 7,200-ton American freighter *William Hooper,* and it began to settle in the water.

Another German pilot, Lieutenant Henneman, zoomed through AA fire and dropped his torpedo. It was intended for the freighter *Bellingham,* but instead hit the 4,800-ton British freighter *Navarino* under her bridge, and the ship took on a large list to starboard before being hit by a second torpedo. As *Navarino* sank, a *Bellingham* crewman heard a survivor, swimming in icy water yell, "On to Moscow—see you in Russia!"

Rescue ships sprinted over and picked up 49 survivors from *Navarino* and 55 from *William Hooper.*

The next victim was the Soviet tanker *Azerbaijan,* engulfed in a cloud of smoke. Everyone feared the worst, but she emerged from the smoke, still doing nine knots. *Azerbaijan* had a partly female crew, including a female boatswain, and rumors were that she was pregnant.

British destroyers and Soviet tankers that made up a portion of Convoy PQ-17 assemble in an Icelandic fjord in June 1942.

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The Germans lost four planes in the raid, while wrecking two freighters beyond repair: *William Hooper* and *Navarino*. Both were ordered sunk. Nearby but out of range, Hamilton watched the whole show, impressed by the German courage and determination, less so by their inability to spot him.

PQ-17 morale was now high—despite losing two ships, they were beating off the Germans with their concentrated anti-aircraft defenses. Broome was confident enough to write in his diary: "My impression on seeing the resolution displayed by the convoy and its escort was that, providing the ammunition lasted, PQ-17 could get anywhere."

Meanwhile, at Altenfjord, the Germans awaited the decision to go. All they needed was clarification of the whereabouts of the British carrier, HMS *Victorious*. That evening, the British had their share of uncertainty as well. British code-breakers at Bletchley Park had not unraveled the German Navy's new keys, and nobody knew when or if the *Tirpitz* and her reduced but powerful group would sail.

First Sea Lord Sir Dudley Pound, already ill with arthritis and the brain cancer that would kill him a year later, had to sweat out an agonizing situation ... if *Tirpitz* sailed, it could not be opposed under German air cover. The convoy would have to disperse or even scatter to avoid being a single sitting duck for the dreadnought's 15-inch guns. But where was *Tirpitz*? Had it sailed? Would it sail?

Pound finally asked, "Can you assure me that *Tirpitz* is still in Altenfjord?"

Operational Intelligence Center Commander Norman Denning answered that he was confident she was, meaning she was ready to sail out and attack but not actually at sea.

PQ-17 was then some 130 miles northeast of Bear Island, and a distance of 350 miles separated it from the guns of Tovey's ships. If the two steered toward each other at best speed, they would be under cover of *Victorious* aircraft the following day, but it would slow the convoy's voyage eastward and consume much fuel.

Another course was to order the cruisers to withdraw—since it now seemed probable that *Tirpitz* would attack—and rely on the close escort of destroyers, fog, bad weather, and British grit to fend off any German ships that attacked.

Finally, there was the possibility of ordering the convoy to simply scatter, which would make it impossible for the enemy to round up all the ships but also render individual ships nearly defenseless against attack.

Pound now believed the worst—*Tirpitz* was at sea, streaking right for PQ-17. If that was the case, the convoy would have to scatter. Based on wholly negative evidence, Pound overruled his men in London and at sea. At 9:11 PM, he signaled, "Most immediate. Cruiser force withdraw westward at high speed." At 9:23, he signaled, "Immediate. Owing to threat from surface ships, convoy is to disperse and proceed to Russian ports." Then at 9:36: "Most immediate ... Convoy is to scatter."

The decision was an incredible gamble by an officer not on the scene. For the first time in the long and glorious history of the Royal Navy, a convoy was being ordered to scatter by an authority higher than the flag officer present at sea. It suggested that *Tirpitz* and her escorts were just over the horizon from PQ-17. It was a decision that historians would argue about for decades. Pound lacked actual combat experience. He did not discuss the situation with the leaders on the scene. He had no evidence *Tirpitz* was actually at sea. The order flew in the face of existing Admiralty policy. It ignored the great danger of U-boat and aircraft attack against scattered and defenseless merchant ships.

"It is not unjust to see in all of this a combination of Pound's old-fashioned naval authoritarianism and his well-known stubborn closed-mindedness—coupled with that lack of imaginative talent which is the mark of great commanders," assessed British historian Correlli Barnett.

The signal was received on Broome's flagship, *Keppel*, with shock. Broome was furious. "I was angry at having to break up, disintegrate such a formation and to tear up the protective fence we had wrapped around it, to order each of these splendid merchantmen to sail on by her naked defenseless self; for once that signal reached the masthead it triggered off an irrevocable measure. Convoy PQ-17 would cease to exist."

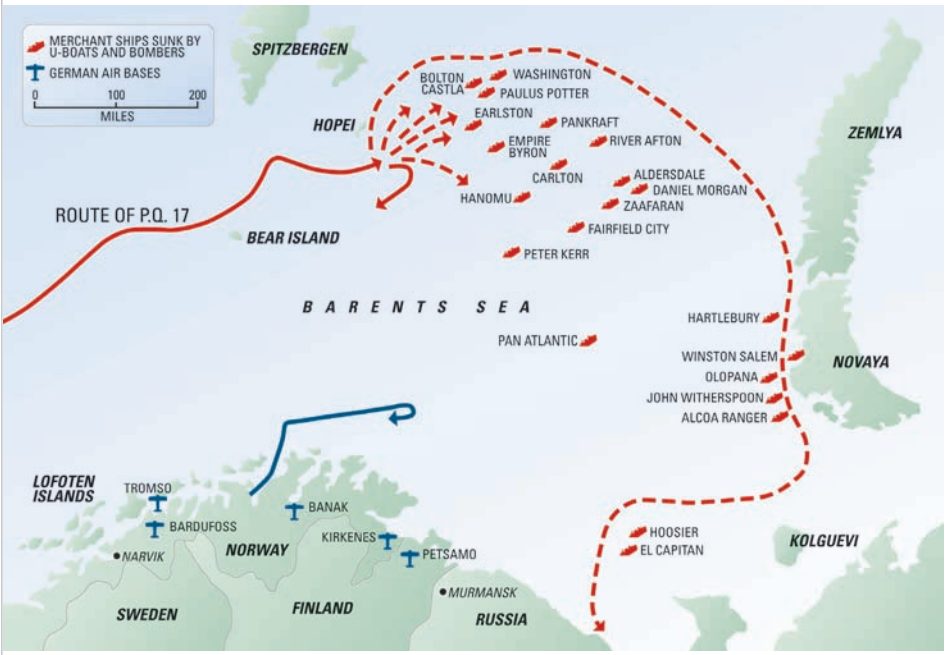
But Broome did not argue with his bosses. "I wish to make my appreciation at this moment quite clear. An order to scatter—especially when made most immediate by signal, following an order to disperse, thereby giving the impression of a situation developing rapidly—is in my impression, given when the threat is imminent, from surface forces more powerful than the escort. By imminent I mean that surface forces are in sight. We were all expecting, therefore, to see either the cruisers open fire, or to see enemy masts appearing over the horizon."

HMS *Keppel* made the flag signal, and all the merchant ships signaled back with their flags at the dip, signifying, "I do not understand." Roger Hill, on *Ledbury,* thought the message meant the *Tirpitz* was just over the horizon.

Broome took his ship into the convoy and re-signaled the order, adding radio and searchlights to drive the point home.

He closed Dowding's *River Afton* and wrote later of his signal exchange with the convoy commodore, "We were not strangers. We had sailed together before, we respected one another. My visit and conversation were brief, for time was not for wasting. Naturally I put him in the picture as I saw it, and told him outright that I had faith in this order from the Admiralty. When I sheered *Keppel* away from *River Afton,* I left an angry and, I still believe, unconvinced Commodore."

Broome signaled Dowding, "Sorry to leave you like this. Goodbye and good luck. It looks



like a bloody business."

Broome also had to figure out how to disperse his escort, which could not face *Tirpitz* either. The trawlers, minesweepers, AA ships, and corvettes could not stand up to *Tirpitz*, so they were ordered to head straight for Archangel. The submarines were ordered to act independently. The submarine P614 signaled to Broome that he intended to remain on the surface—if *Tirpitz* showed up, he hoped the sight of a submarine would scare the battleship off. Broome wittily answered, "So do I."

On *Ledbury,* Roger Hill finally got the message. His crew was furious, but they obeyed the order, "revs up to 300, steer to the head of the convoy." He assumed he was about to face the mighty *Tirpitz*.

Broome ordered his destroyers to hook up with Hamilton's force, and Hamilton agreed. The tin cans tore away to the westward. On *Ledbury,* Hill sent his AA ammunition back down to the magazines and brought up the armor-piercing shot for his guns. He was ready to do battle with the *Tirpitz,* relying on his torpedoes. "Privately," he wrote later, "I decided that if we ever got that far, we would go on and try to ram *Tirpitz*." Then he piped, "Port watch to supper, 20 minutes."

Broome and his ships and men were willing to take on *Tirpitz,* even in an unequal battle, doing so in reliance on their torpedoes and the best traditions of the Royal Navy. Everyone was ashamed at leaving the mostly American convoy in the lurch on Independence Day. As his ships steamed away from the merchant vessels, their crews let out cheers, also assuming the Britons were about to fight a major battle. Hill was stunned when he got his follow-up orders to close not with the enemy, but with the cruiser HMS *London*.

Hill wrote in his report, "It was now realized that we were abandoning the convoy and running away and the whole ship's company was cast into bitter despondency." Future Vice Admiral W.D. O'Brien, then a first lieutenant on the destroyer HMS *Offa,* wrote, "I have never been able to rejoice with my American friends on Independence Day, because July 4 is, to me, a day to hang my head in grief for all the men who lost their lives on Convoy PQ-17 and in shame at one of the bleakest episodes in Royal Navy history, when the warships deserted the merchant ships and left them to their fate. For that in simple terms was what we were obliged to do."

As the escorts steamed off and the t-masts of the German ships failed to materialize, Broome and Hamilton were puzzled by Pound's decision. HMS *London*'s crew was near mutinous. The escort ships entered heavy overnight fog, which cleared on the 5th, and Broome asked Hamilton if they should amend the orders and head back. No, Hamilton answered—their job was now to lure *Tirpitz* and her escorts within range of the battleships and carrier aircraft. Besides, the convoy had scattered—no point to going back to play sheepdog in the Arctic.

Imperial War Museum

The destroyer USS *Wainwright* comes alongside another warship to take on fuel. During its escort duties with Convoy PQ-17, *Wainwright* was instrumental in beating back German air attacks. OPPOSITE: When Convoy PQ-17 scattered, German aircraft and U-boats took a fearful toll of merchant shipping bound for the Soviet Union with vital war matériel. A German naval squadron actually sortied from Norway (shown as blue arrow) but was recalled prior to engaging any of the Allied vessels.

Scattering a convoy was not hard. Ships in the center column continued their course, ships in the column at either side of the center turned 10 degrees away from the center, ships in the next column 20 degrees, and so forth. The ships would then go to full speed and maintain constant radio watch, if not doing so already. After that, it was up to the individual ships. The merchant ships steamed off, with the escorts way ahead of them, protecting themselves if not the now defenseless convoy.

The Germans were stunned. At 1 AM on July 5, Luftwaffe air reconnaissance reported the convoy spread over 25 miles. Admiral Hubert Schmundt, who headed Germany's North Waters command, ordered in the "Ice Devil" U-boat group to concentrate on the merchant ships.

The U-boats wasted no time. At 7:15 AM, *U-703* torpedoed and sank the 6,600-ton British freighter *Empire Byron,* needing five torpedoes to do the job. Twenty minutes after taking her fatal hits, *Empire Byron* rolled over and sank, leaving 42 survivors in lifeboats, 18 dead. *U-703* surfaced and her skipper took a British Royal Electrical and Mechanical Engineers officer, Captain John Rimington, aboard for interrogation, providing the remaining survivors with tins of biscuits, sausage, and apple juice before diving again.

At 10:15 AM, *U-88* disposed of the 5,100-ton American freighter *Carlton* with one hit, killing three men. The remaining 40 jammed the sole surviving lifeboat and four Carley rafts. The U-boat surfaced to report killing a 10,000-ton ship, leaving the survivors in their rafts on a glassy, calm sea. Later, German seaplanes alighted and took off 23 of the survivors and left the remainder gathered in one boat.

Meanwhile, *Ledbury* hooked up with HMS *London* and refueled from a tanker. While this went on, Hill told Admiral Hamilton that the captured Luftwaffe pilot had mentioned that *Tirpitz* was probably not at sea.

"I don't think she is, either," Hamilton said. Both officers were stunned by their orders.

Mewanwhile, four merchant ships caught up with three escorts—an AA ship and two minesweepers—and clung to them for protection. This attracted a German reconnaissance plane, which sent out messages. However, the senior Royal Navy officer, Captain J.H. Jauncey of the AA ship HMS *Pozarica,* would not reduce speed, telling the merchant ships not to follow her. So the merchant ships headed for a fogbank.

At 3 PM, two merchant ships, the 7,200-ton Americans *Daniel Morgan* and *Fairfield City*, came under German Ju-88 bombardment. The Luftwaffe bombers plastered *Fairfield City*, sinking her and sending her cargo of tanks to the bottom. *Daniel Morgan* sped off to the east

pursued by three lifeboats from *Fairfield City*.

Daniel Morgan evaded more Luftwaffe attacks through skilful ship handling, but it was not enough. Eventually a stick of bombs ruptured the plates between two of her holds, and she listed to starboard, steering gear out of action, and meandered about aimlessly.

U-88 had been stalking the *Daniel Morgan* all day with hydrophones, and now the submarine moved in. Two torpedoes in her port side, and *Daniel Morgan* was on her way to the bottom.

The 6,977-ton American *Honoma* was next. Pursued by *U-334,* she was torpedoed at 3:36. An explosion killed 19 members of her crew, leaving 34 in the water. Now SOS messages were flying in to the remaining ships, and the commander of the corvette HMS *Lotus* wanted to go back and render assistance. He asked Captain Jauncey of *Pozarica* for permission to do so, but Jauncey disagreed, saying, "I have been giving full consideration to this matter for half an hour and have come to the conclusion that the order to scatter was to avoid vessels falling into traps and unless you feel strongly to the contrary in the matter I think we ought to stick to our original arrangement."

On *Ledbury,* the radio office kept passing up tragic messages from the merchant ships: "Am being bombed by large number of planes," "On fire in the ice," "abandoning ship," and "Six U-boats approaching on the surface."

Hill pondered quietly slowing down, turning back, and looking for survivors of the convoy. "I thought for months afterwards this is what I should have done. But discipline is strong, our orders were clear, we were miles away by then, and, the ever governing factor, almost out of fuel. We had been going full power for hours and burning eight tons an hour," he wrote. "So, bitter, bewildered, tired, and utterly miserable, we stayed with the Admiral and the cruisers."

The attacks, the isolation, the cold were all breaking the morale of the merchant ship crews. On July 5, the crew of *Samuel Chase* abandoned ship on sighting a U-boat. The sub did not attack, and the crew simply reboarded their ship. Ironically, *Samuel Chase* survived the ordeal.

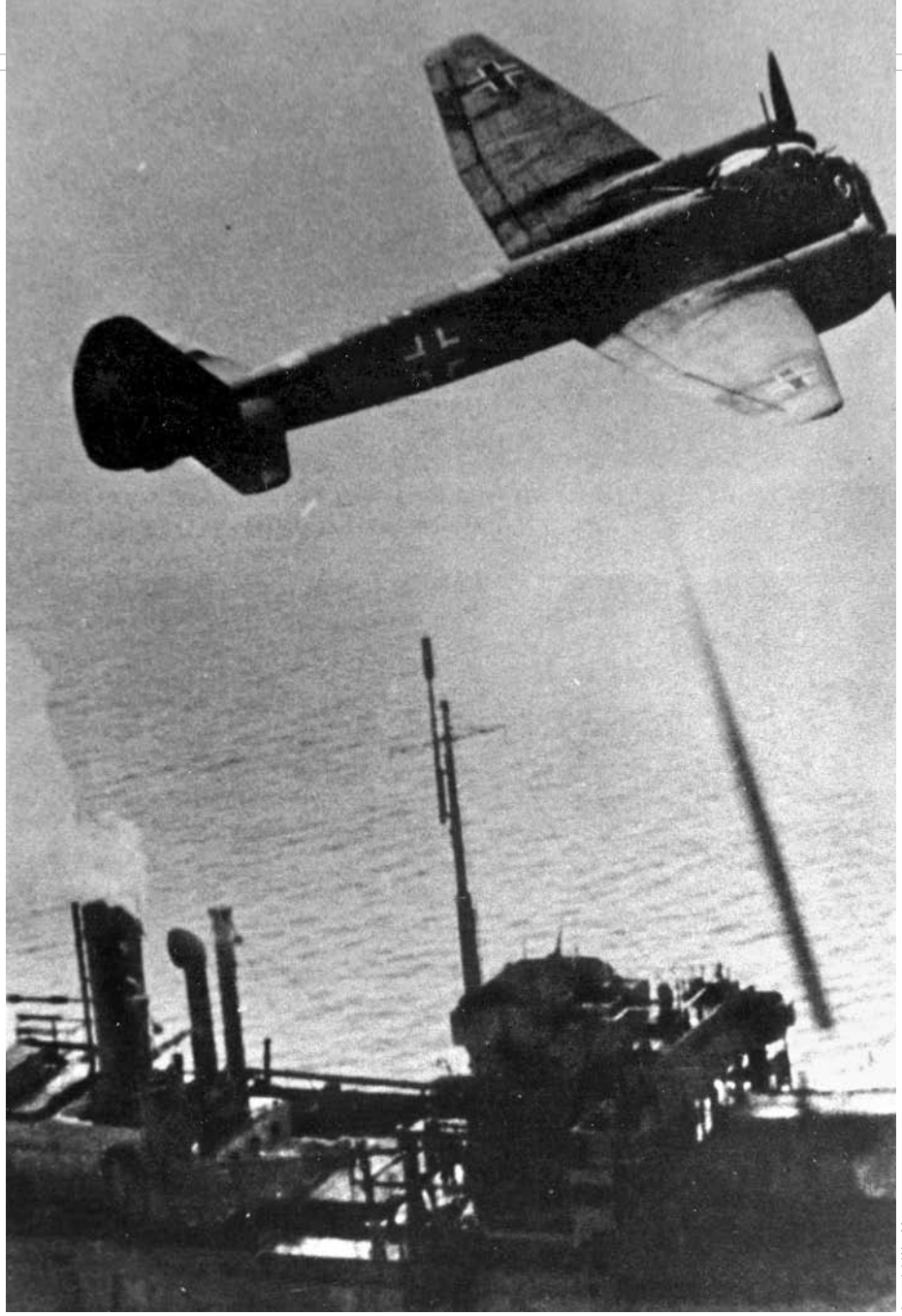
On the *Alcoa Ranger,* the crew saw a prowling aircraft and struck their colors, replacing them with the international signal for "Unconditional Surrender." When the plane flew off, the captain reassumed command. The 7,200-ton British freighter *Earlston,* on the other hand, had sterner stuff at the helm. She fought off a chasing U-boat with her 4-inch gun, forcing her to submerge, thus ending the attack. She was ultimately sunk by *U-334*.

That evening, six more merchant ships met their end. First down was the *Peter Kerr,* overwhelmed by four Ju-88s from KG 30, which hit her with three bombs. The *Bolton Castle, Paulus Potter,* and *Washington* all hung together but found their way barred by ice. Eight Ju-88s from Captain Hajo Herrmann's KG 30 swooped down and punched out all three—only the 7,200-ton Dutch *Paulus Potter* was left afloat as a derelict, to be found by *U-255* on July 13. The Germans boarded the wreck and found the ship's sailing orders, new signal codes for convoys, and other useful information.

Behind those three ships steamed the *Olopana,* which had slowed down to take on survivors, all from open boats. Amazingly, the shipwrecked sailors preferred their open boats to returning to a floating target.

One hundred miles south of the *Bolton Castle* group, the Luftwaffe pounded the rescue ship *Zamalek,* the freighter *Ocean Freedom,* the oiler *Aldersdale* and the minesweeper HMS *Salamander*. At 5:30 PM, four Ju-88s roared over and dropped bombs, which blasted open *Aldersdale*'s stern, wrecking her machinery. She had to be abandoned.

At the same time, the other rescue ship, *Zaafaran,* was sunk. Her skipper, Captain Charles McGowan, thought his ship could reach



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Flying just above the masts of the merchant ship *Paulos Potter,* a German twin-engine Junkers Ju-88 executes a daring bombing run against Convoy PQ-17. The vigor with which the German pilots pressed home their attacks was noted by British naval officers defending the convoy.

Novaya Zemlya on her own. He was wrong—Ju-88s pounded his ship and sank it anyway. Her survivors were picked up by *Zamalek* and hooked up with the *Pozarica* and two minesweepers to head for Novaya Zemlya.

Nearby, the freighter *Earlston* was hit by a lone Ju-88, which brought her to a halt. Like sharks thirsting for a kill, three U-boats glided in. Captain Stenwick abandoned the *Earlston,* and one torpedo put the freighter away. Stenwick himself was captured by *U-334* and then had to endure the indignity of being a prisoner and the submarine being attacked from the air and damaged by a passing Ju-88.

Distress signals were flying all over the place, and Lieutenant James Caradus on the Free French corvette *La Malouine* expressed the views of many, "Enemy torpedo planes were having a piece of cake on the scattered ships which were being attacked about 100 miles away. Complete destruction of the convoy is the German intention and we in *La Malouine* might have been able to help the odd merchantman but were too occupied protecting a well-armed anti-aircraft ship. A sore point with us all."

HMS *Lotus* finally got permission to look for survivors and picked up 29 men from the sunken freighter *Pankraft*'s boats and then found survivors of *River Afton*, which was torpedoed around midday on July 5. Among the weary and cold men who had spent four hours on rafts was Commodore Dowding himself. He had just burned the last of their smoke flares.

In the first 24 hours after the signal to scatter, 13 merchant ships and a rescue ship had been sunk.

As July 5 turned to July 6, the first survivors of PQ-17 began to reach safe harbor at Novaya Zemlya. The AA ship *Palomares,* three minesweepers, and the rescue ship *Zamalek,* along with the *Ocean Freedom* got there first. Next came the other AA ship, *Pozarica, La Malouine,* and the corvette *Poppy. La Malouine* was sent back out to round up stray merchants and came up with four American freighters, *Hoosier, Samuel Chase, El Capitan,* and *Benjamin Harrison*. Soon enough, in came three more trawlers and the gallant *Lotus,* decks awash, jammed with 60 survivors from *Pankraft* and *River Afton.*

What of the *Tirpitz*? She was finally cut loose from her moorings on the morning of July 5 and immediately spotted by Captain Second Rank A.N. Lunin's Soviet submarine *K21*, then the British submarine HMS *Trident*. The reports caused the German naval staff considerable anxiety. With their ships spotted, the advantage of surprise was gone. At 9:32 PM, the Germans recalled the *Tirpitz,* much to the crew's disgust. *Tirpitz* had achieved her purpose without firing a single shot—as she did for most of the war.

Meanwhile, the U-boat and aircraft slaughter went on. Seven ships were strung out in an ungainly gaggle in the Northern Barents Sea, hugging the ice and making for Novaya Zemlya at best speed. Ju-88s and U-boats raced in to attack the *Pan Atlantic*, making a dash for the White Sea. A single bomb set off *Pan Atlantic*'s cargo of cordite, and she sank within three minutes, annoying the U-boat skippers who wanted a shot at the target first.

Six U-boats concentrated on this area, and one, *U-255*, sank the American ships *John Witherspoon* on July 6 and *Alcoa Ranger* the next day. *Empire Tide,* still carrying her Hurricane fighter, saw the sinking and maneuvered into Moller Bay and safety.

July 7 saw more sinkings with *U-355* punching out the 5,100-ton *Briton Hartlebury,* and *U-457* eliminating the derelict *Aldersdale*. It was enough for the skipper of the *Winston-Salem,* who ran his ship aground in Obsiedya Bay and set up camp in an abandoned lighthouse nearby.

In Matochkin Strait, Captain Jauncey of *Pozarica*, the senior officer, summoned the skippers of the various ships assembled there to plan their next move. The anchorage was too exposed. They had to break out. So on July 7, the 17 ships left the anchorage and headed south. One of them, *Benjamin Harrison,* lost her way and returned to the anchorage to try again. The ships managed a westerly course to find clear water, but not until July 9 could they head south again, amid clearing weather.

That morning first revealed two boatloads of survivors from *Pan Atlantic,* which were hauled in. Everyone kept an eye for promised Soviet aircraft. Instead, a German reconnaissance plane came in. They were spotted.

In the thin night and twilight of July 9-10, the Luftwaffe hurled 40 Ju-88s from KG 30. For four hours, the bombers plastered the merchant ships. The *Hoosier* and *El Capitan* were banged up by near misses and had to be abandoned. *Poppy* and *Lord Austin* picked up the crews, and rescue ship *Zamalek* had more than 240 survivors aboard. U-boats spotted the derelicts and torpedoed them later.

Now the Luftwaffe singled out *Zamalek* for more abuse. A watching British sailor said, "One stick of bombs actually took the *Zamalek* right out of the water so that you could see daylight between the keel and the water." With her engines damaged from shock, the engineers turned to. Luckily, the ship had plenty of them from the various shipwrecks, and when she rejoined her group she was greeted with loud cheers.

Samuel Chase was also damaged and had to be towed by the minesweeper *Halcyon*. Finally, on July 11, Dowding led his ships through the White Sea into the port of Archangel. There he found the Soviet tanker *Donbass* and the American freighter *Bellingham,* which had arrived on July 9 along with the rescue ship *Rahlin* and the corvette *Dianella*. "Not a successful convoy," noted Dowding bitterly. "Three ships brought into port out of 37."

But there were still more out there. A second group of five ships was still heading in. Their survival was owed to Lieutenant J.A. Gradwell, who commanded the trawler *Ayrshire*. A peacetime lawyer, he had taken three freighters—*Troubador, Ironclad,* and *Silver Sword*—under his wing when the scatter order was given. Using the *Troubador* with her stiffened bows as an icebreaker, they steamed 20 miles into the ice, as far as they could go. That done, the crews painted their ships' hulls white as much as possible, to blend into the bergs. For two days, the ships hid in the ice, listening to distant distress calls.

Finally, Gradwell broke out, and a high-speed dash took the ships to the north island of Novaya Zemlya on July 10. They hid there for 24 hours, then dashed down to the Matochkin Strait the next day. There they found the *Benjamin Harrison,* the Soviet tanker *Azerbaijan*, and icebreaker *Murman*. The Soviet trawler *Kirov* completed this colorful collection of ships.

Gradwell reported to Archangel, "The situation at present is that there are four ships in Matochkin Strait. My asdic is out of action and the Masters of the ships are showing unmistakable signs of strain. I much doubt if I could persuade them to make a dash to Archangel without a considerably increased escort and a promise of fighter protection in the entrance to the White Sea. Indeed, there has already been talk of scuttling ships while near shore rather than go on to what they, with their present escort, consider certain sinking.

"In these circumstances, I submit that increased escort might be provided and that I may be informed as to how to obtain air protection. I shall remain in the Matochkin Strait until I receive a reply."

Dowding read this plea and set out with *Lotus, La Malouine,* and *Poppy* through the stormy Byelusha Bay to Novaya Zemlya. First the force found 12 exhausted survivors of *Olopana*. *Poppy* also found the American freighter *Bellingham* and signaled, "Do you want to be escorted?"

The Americans, angry, lashed back, "Go to hell!"

Poppy's skipper, reading the message, said, "Can't say as I blame him."

Then they found *Winston-Salem* hard aground but with survivors of *Hartlebury* and *Washington* aboard. Dowding sailed on, looking for ships. He found the CAM ship *Empire Tide,* still with its Hurricane fighter, jammed with exhausted survivors, unable to move. Dowding split the *Winston-Salem*'s supplies with the *Empire Tide* and plowed on. *Empire Tide* made ready to sail.

Dowding arrived at Matochkin Strait on July 20 and transferred to the Soviet *Murman,* which would use her strengthened bows to lead the battered convoy home. They got out just in time. A day later a U-boat showed up at the Strait and found it empty.

The convoy headed south and collected *Empire Tide,* while abandoning *Winston-Salem*. By July 22, the little convoy was augmented by the AA ship *Pozarica,* the corvette *Dianella,* three minesweepers, and best of all, two Soviet destroyers. All ships reached Archangel and safety on July 24.

Four days later, two Soviet tugs refloated *Winston-Salem* and dragged her to Archangel. That meant 11 of 33 ships had survived the bitter attacks on PQ-17.

Now came a search for lifeboats. Soviet and British planes based in Murmansk scoured the area. *Dianella* set out on the grim task after refueling in Archangel on July 9, returning on the 16th with 61 members of the crew of *Empire Byron*. Two of *Alcoa Ranger*'s lifeboats reached Novaya Zemlya while a third reached the mainland at Cape Kanin Nos.

Twenty-one crewmen from *Honomu* were very lucky as their lifeboat was spotted by warships just ready to turn about. Another lifeboat rowed 360 miles from the position where their ship was sunk to Murmansk. Two lifeboats from *Bolton Castle* reached the north Russian coast after dreadful fights between Arab and British seamen. Had they not come across an abandoned lifeboat from *El Capitan* loaded with provisions, they probably would not have survived. Another boat, from *Earlston,* landed in German-occupied Norway, where its six occupants became prisoners. Another boat with 17 survivors from *Carlton* also landed in Norway.

Of the 37 ships that sailed from Iceland, two had turned back, eight were sunk by air attack (40,425 tons), seven by U-boats (41,041 tons), and nine in combination of air attacks to damage them and U-boats finishing off the cripples (61,255 tons). Stores and equipment lost amounted to 430 tanks, 210 crated aircraft, 3,350 vehicles, and 99,316 tons of general cargo. A total of 153 merchant seamen (107 American) had lost their lives. Twenty-two of the 24 confirmed ships sunk were big freighters, 14 of them American. Of the cargo dispatched, the Soviets received only 896 vehicles, 164 tanks, 87 aircraft, and about 57,000 tons of military cargo.

In 202 dive- and torpedo-bomber sorties, the Germans had lost only five aircraft. Not one U-boat was sunk or damaged by Allied weaponry, but three U-boats took damage from friendly fire.

To make matters worse, the desperately needed supplies had failed to arrive at a time when the Germans had launched a massive offensive on the southern half of the Eastern Front, which ripped through Soviet defenses in two weeks.

Reichsmarschall Hermann Göring, chief of the Luftwaffe, passed out three Knight's Crosses to airmen who fought in the battle, and the Navy claimed that their 11 U-boats committed had fired 72 torpedoes, of which 29 had scored hits and exploded. Nine of the U-boats were credited with kills.

On July 11, Admiral Sir Geoffrey Miles, head of the British Naval Mission in Moscow, had to explain the whole mess to Admiral V.I. Kuznetsov, chief of the Soviet naval staff. Kuznetsov was polite but his vice chief of staff hurled accusations of cowardice at the British.

In London, Soviet Ambassador Ivan Maisky demanded, with more nerve than tact, when the next PQ convoy would be sent. Foreign Secretary Anthony Eden said doing so would be futile at this stage. The Soviets were not pleased. Churchill and Stalin exchanged angry notes.

On July 28, an Anglo-Soviet inquiry convened in London to consider the affair. Eden, First Lord of the Admiralty A.V. Alexander, Pound, and Admiral H.G. Harlamov, head of the Soviet military mission in Britain, made up the guts of the panel.

The panel turned into arguments between Pound and Harlamov, with Pound yelling that if he, Harlamov, knew all the answers, then he, Pound, would ask the Prime Minister to make the Soviet the First Sea Lord in his place.

On August 1, Pound briefed the Cabinet on what had happened. He told the Cabinet that his fear that *Tirpitz* was at sea had motivated his decision to withdraw. That did not correspond with the actual intelligence. Churchill tried to distance himself from the debacle then and later in his memoirs.

Next was to find a scapegoat. Despite arthritis and an incipient brain tumor, Pound was too high to be sacrificed. Instead, Hamilton was blamed, which was nonsense—he had followed his orders to the letter. Tovey wrote back, "The order to scatter the convoy had, in my opinion, been premature; its results were disastrous. The convoy had so far covered more than half its route with the loss of only three ships. Now its ships, spread over a wide area, were exposed without defense to the powerful enemy U-boat

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and air forces. The enemy took prompt advantage of this situation, operating both weapons to their full capacity."

The key to the disaster was in Pound's dogmatic and authoritative personality, but it was more than a case of a single man making a blunder. He was a highly competent administrator and dealt well with Churchill, but was not as competent operationally. The British system had put him at the top, and a system that could put Pound at the top was one that could, on such occasions as PQ-17, result in blunders.

Relations deteriorated between the Royal and Merchant Navies after PQ-17. There was considerable shame in the Royal Navy over what happened, and an effort was made to redress grievances. Admiral Hamilton "cleared lower deck" and explained what had happened to the outraged crew of his flagship, the London, telling them that his order to withdraw was based on higher powers' decisions. Hamilton wrote to Tovey, saying, "It would have been a great assistance to me had I known that the Admiralty possessed no further information on the movements of the enemy's heavy units other than I had already received." He added, "Well, I suppose I ought to have been a Nelson. I ought to have disregarded the Admiralty's signals."

Roger Hill, back with *Ledbury* at Londonderry, Northern Ireland, had a few drinks with the skipper of HMS *Offa,* Alistair Ewing, to discuss the failure. "We discussed resigning, asking for an inquiry, defecting to the American Navy as Able Seaman, drank a lot of gin, and let off steam," he wrote.

Instead, next day, Hill cleared lower deck and congratulated his crew on their AA gunnery and obeying orders, saying the entire affair had been an Admiralty fiasco, not theirs. In the future, he said, "We would do what we, on the spot, considered correct," and then the ship sailed to Rosyth for boiler cleaning and five days' leave for the men.

Also angry were the American sailors on the merchant ships, who unfairly labeled the British escorts as cowards who fled at the first sign of trouble. They may have fled, but not voluntarily—they had their orders. It would take a lot more convoys for the British to regain American respect. Another American officer who lost respect for the British was Admiral Ernest J. King, chief of naval operations, who ordered the American ships assigned to the Russian convoys and Task Force 99 withdrawn to the Pacific, a major gain for the U.S. Pacific Fleet, but a major loss for the overstrained Royal Navy's Home Fleet.

The Germans, of course, were elated by their victory. Stumpff wrote arrogantly to Göring, "I beg to report the destruction of Convoy PQ-17." The war diary of the German Navy crowed, "This is the biggest success ever achieved against the enemy with one blow—a blow executed with exemplary collaboration between air force and submarine units. A heavily laden convoy of ships, some of which have been underway for several months from America, has been virtually wiped out, despite the most powerful escort, just before reaching its destination.

"A wicked blow has been struck at Soviet war production, and a deep breach torn in the enemy's shipping capacity. The effect of this battle is not unlike a battle lost by the enemy in its military, material, and morale aspects. In a three-day battle, fought under the most favorable conditions, the submarines and aircraft have achieved what had been the intention of the operation 'Knight's Move,' the attack of our surface units on the convoy's merchant ships."

Not so exultant were the crews of the German surface ships, who were upset at being out at sea for less than a day, then aborting their mission. One German officer wrote, "They should have let us make one little attack! Heaven knows, they could have always recalled us after we had bagged three or four merchantmen."

Another officer wrote, "Here the mood is bitter enough. Soon one will feel ashamed to be on the active list if one has to go on watching other parts of the armed forces while we, 'the core of the Fleet,' just sit in harbor."

The British would launch one more convoy from Archangel to clear out the port and then cancel further voyages until autumn. When they resumed, the convoys would have more escorts, including aircraft carriers. Merchant ships would be equipped with more AA guns and tethered blimps and barrage balloons to ward off dive-bombers.

Historians agree that the scattering of the convoy was at best premature and at worst a mistake.

Roger Hill was blunt: "It is an extraordinary thing that this catastrophic error of judgment was made personally by the First Sea Lord, the Head of the Navy, Admiral Sir Dudley Pound. My personal opinion is that, if someone like Admiral Cunningham had been at the Admiralty, he would have left the people on the spot to run the operation. If not, he would have waited until the *Tirpitz* was reported and if she was obviously heading for and near the convoy, he would have signaled something like, 'It is at your discretion to scatter should you be attacked by enemy surface ships.'"

Hill added, "I can never forget how [the merchant ship crews] cheered us as we moved out at full speed to the attack and it has haunted me ever since that we left them to be destroyed. I had little faith ever after in the shore staff who directed operations at sea."

But the convoy could not have escaped heavy losses anyway. It lacked air cover, and U-boats and aircraft still would have savaged the ships had they remained tightly packed. But political expediency, the need to support the Soviet Union in its most dire hours, outweighed military realities. PQ-17 was a convoy that should not have sailed, but had to.

Such thoughts were far from the minds of the crewmen on the merchant ships that survived the ordeal and the survivors, huddling in blankets on the decks of rescue vessels. Morale was low.

On USS *Washington,* the battleship that had been called back instead of getting to fight the *Tirpitz,* Seaman 2nd Class Mel Beckstrand spoke up for most sailors about the back-and-forth decisions and the recall, writing home, "I wish someone would make up their mind. I would like to see an attack myself; it would break up the monotony. Everyone is gunning for Adolf, and we aren't the least bit scared of him." □

Imperial War Museum

ABOVE: Their ship sunk beneath them, a group of sailors awaits rescue from icy arctic waters. Seamen drifting in rafts or lifeboats were plucked from the ocean by both Allied and German rescuers; however, many succumbed to the harsh conditions or the cold of the sea in which a man would be rendered unconscious within minutes. OPPOSITE TOP: The British freighter *Navarrino* takes a hit from a torpedo launched by a German Heinkel He-111 bomber rigged to carry the deadly aerial ordnance. OPPOSITE BOTTOM: The tight formation of Convoy PQ-17 before the order to scatter was received is visible below a high-flying German Junkers Ju-88 bomber.

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ONE OF THE MOST DARING EPISODES OF D-DAY WAS THE SCALING OF THE HEIGHTS AT POINTE DU HOC BY THE U.S. 2ND RANGER BATTALION.

Rangers *at the* Pointe

BY DANIEL R. CHAMPAGNE

ON the morning of June 6, 1944, the 2nd Ranger Battalion, commanded by Lt. Col. James Earl Rudder, began its ascent of a sheer 100-foot precipice called Pointe du Hoc. Its mission was to destroy a battery of long-range 155mm guns perched atop the craggy heights that were capable of raining down destruction on Utah and Omaha Beaches.

According to General Omar Bradley, commander of the U.S. 12th Army Group, "It was the most dangerous mission of D-Day."

Inching their way toward the rocky summit, the Rangers dodged rifle fire, grenades, and rocks from the German defenders above. After suffering appalling casualties, the Rangers finally made it to the top of the ominous cliff. Moments later, elation turned to disbelief as the GIs discovered that the big gun emplacements atop Pointe du Hoc were empty.

Unfortunately, history is rife with misconceptions. In the past, some writers have wrongly concluded that the Rangers fought and died in vain since the guns had been withdrawn from the fortified area around Pointe du Hoc. On the contrary, the Rangers' mission at Pointe du Hoc was critical to the ultimate successes at both Utah and Omaha Beaches. Through sheer determination and extraordinary courage, the 2nd Rangers penetrated Hitler's formidable Atlantic Wall, located and destroyed the unguarded but operational coastal guns that were later found in an orchard, cut off enemy communications, and held their positions against fierce German counterattacks.

On the afternoon of D-Day–1, Rudder spoke to the men of the 2nd Ranger Battalion aboard the transport ship *Prince Charles*. Rudder was going to lead the men of Companies D, E, and F on a direct assault at Point du Hoc, while Companies A, B, and C waited offshore as a support force. "Boys," he said, "you are going on the beach as the first Rangers in this battalion to set foot on French soil. Good luck and may God be with you."

The overall mission plan was to employ the Rangers as an independent task force in support of the Normandy invasion. It was determined that one of the most significant strategic objectives would be to destroy the coastal defense battery at Pointe du Hoc. The German battery was located four miles west of Omaha Beach and was believed to consist of six 155mm howitzers. The huge guns were mounted on massive wheels and secured to a central pivot on a concrete emplacement about 40 feet in diameter. Netting was used to camouflage each piece. There were no gun turrets or shields; instead, a reinforced concrete observation post helped direct the deadly fire. The

In his stark painting titled *The Point,* artist Larry Selman captures the drama as Rangers of the 2nd Battalion reach the summit of Pointe du Hoc on D-Day.

range of the guns was 25,000 yards (10 miles). At that distance, they could easily wreak havoc on both Utah and Omaha Beaches and prevent troop ships in the English Channel from coming too close to shore.

According to senior German commanders, the Pointe fortress was virtually impregnable by land or sea. The battery was situated on the flat tableland of Pointe du Hoc, which terminates abruptly in rocky cliffs 85 to 100 feet high. The craggy rock face juts out awkwardly into the English Channel, forming a giant geological arrowhead with two distinct flanks east and west. Guarding the eastern approaches were gun positions one, two, and three, and defending the western sector were guns four, five, and six.

At the water's edge was a narrow strip of beach that led up to the cliff bottoms, making an assault landing extremely difficult. Protecting the guns on both flanks was a strong defensive line of antiaircraft guns and machine-gun nests. The Germans also built underground concrete shelters and magazines that were connected to the gun emplacements by a sophisticated maze of trenches. In addition, the fortress was encircled with mines, booby traps, and barbed wire.

Private First Class Morris Prince, A Company, 2nd Ranger Battalion, summed up the grim predicament: "The Pointe was a massive fortress…. No wonder Hitler, himself, had boasted of the impunity of this position and of the foolishness of the Allies to ever think, less try, to break through this impregnable fortress."

When Bradley informed Rudder that Pointe du Hoc was the strongest position on the Normandy invasion front and the success of the American landings at Utah and Omaha Beaches depended on the elimination of the big guns, Rudder responded: "Sir, my Rangers can do the job for you."

The provisional Ranger Task Force (2nd and 5th Rangers) commanded by Rudder was temporarily attached to the 116th Regiment, 29th Infantry Division. For organizational purposes, the commanders decided to split the force into three sections, Task Forces A, B, and C. Task Force A consisted of a headquarters detachment and Companies D, E, and F from the 2nd Battalion. At H-Hour, 6:30 AM, they would land on Beach Charlie, four miles west of Omaha Beach. Company D would land on the western side of the Pointe, while Companies E and F hit the east side. Their mission was to scale the sheer cliffs and destroy the guns and other fortifications in the area. Next, they would advance inland and secure the coastal highway, preventing the Germans from reinforcing the American beaches. Task

Forces B and C would be operating in supporting roles.

For the first wave, it was determined that 10 LCAs (landing craft assault) would be sufficient to land the three companies of Rudder's Rangers, approximately 20 men to a boat. Each craft was fitted with three pairs of rocket mounts located at the bow, amidship, and stern and rigged so they could be fired in pairs from the control point at the stern.

One pair of rockets carried plain three-quarter inch ropes that were attached to the rocket base by connecting wire. Fitted to a second pair of rockets was a rope and toggle system that could manually be coupled with small wooden crossbars. The third pair of rockets was attached to rope ladders. Each rocket was topped off by a three-pronged steel grapnel. In the event that the onboard rocket-powered ropes were unsuccessful, each LCA carried a portable hand-held projector rocket attached to plain ropes.

The Rangers were also equipped with two types of extension ladders. The 112-foot ladders, which would arrive with the first wave, consisted of 28 four-foot tubular steel sections weighing four pounds each. They were assembled in advance in 16-foot lengths. Following on the heels of the first wave were four amphibious DUKW craft, two of which would be carrying 100-foot extension ladders. These were the fire fighting type on loan from the London

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ABOVE: In this recent photo of Pointe du Hoc, shell and bomb craters are still visible, bearing mute witness to the ferocious but ineffective bombardment to which the German position was subjected prior to the D-Day invasion. BELOW: After Pointe du Hoc has been secured, a boat brings supplies ashore to beleaguered Rangers who have defended the position for hours. A pair of Allied naval vessels lies in the distance, and scaling ropes lay on the beach. RIGHT: Allied medium bombers of the 9th Air Force execute a tactical air strike against German gun emplacements at Pointe du Hoc on June 4, 1944.

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Fire Brigade. In addition, twin Lewis machine guns were mounted to the tops of each ladder.

Because speed was essential for this mission, the Rangers would be equipped for limited action. Each man would carry a chocolate D-bar for rations, two grenades, and a M1 Garand rifle. The good climbers went first, carrying pistols or carbines. Each company had four Browning Automatic Rifles (BAR), two light mortars, and 10 thermite grenades. Coming in behind the assault wave were two supply boats carrying the Rangers' packs, extra rations and ammunition, two 81mm mortars, explosives, and equipment for hauling supplies up the cliffs.

The Rangers would be supported by the Air Corps, Navy, and airborne troops. Weeks prior to the invasion, U.S. Eighth Air Force and British Royal Air Force bombers pummeled the

Pointe in an effort to soften it up for the assault force. At H-Hour minus 20 minutes, the U.S. destroyer *Satterlee* and British destroyer *Talybont* would rake the area again with their big naval guns. Meanwhile, paratroopers and glider troops would create chaos and disorder in the German rear by cutting off communications, inflicting casualties, and tying up the enemy's reserves.

Allied commanders assumed that the massive bombing would take its toll on the German defenders at Pointe du Hoc. Unfortunately, the Allied bombardment lacked the punch to truly be effective. In fact, it would not be realized until much later that the bombing had missed its mark by about three miles. Consequently, the American GIs would be confronting a well-entrenched enemy on the craggy heights overlooking Utah and Omaha Beaches.

Allied intelligence had confirmed that elements of the 832nd Army Coastal Battery were manning the big guns on Point du Hoc. In addition, the unit was supported by approximately 200 artillerymen and infantrymen from the 716th Infantry Division. The regiment was made up of 40 percent non-German soldiers of whom 75 percent were Polish. The artillerymen were positioned near St. Pierre du Mont, and a reserve battalion was stationed at Bayeux.

At 4 AM on June 6, the order roared: "Rangers! Man your craft." The men from Companies D, E, and F, along with a detachment from Headquarters Company, boarded 11 LCAs. Each boat carried 22 men and supplies. In a matter of minutes, the boats had been lowered by ropes and pulleys. As the bobbing assault craft circled and waited for the order to move in, the prebombardment salvo commenced.

Prince vividly recalled the fireworks: "A rending and thunderous ovation of shell whizzing overhead signaled the beginning and the breaking loose of all hell. Our supporting Navy was starting its process of softening up the enemy's beach defenses. As yet we were still out of the enemy's accurate firing range, although some return shells did land to our rear. The distant and distinct hum of friendly aircraft became audible and soon the planes and bombers became visible."

At 4:30, the LCAs were given the order to form up side by side and head for shore. Almost immediately, the rough seas imperiled the small craft. LCA 860 was swamped by a huge wave and went down. Captain Harold "Duke" Slayter, D Company commander, and most of his men were rescued a few hours later. Unfortunately, four of his Rangers were lost.

In the rescue vehicle on the way back to the mother ship, a shivering Slater requested: "Give us some dry clothes, weapons and ammunition and get us back into the Pointe. We gotta get back." The survivors were so numb from the frigid Channel waters that the ship's doctor had to order their return to England for immediate hospitalization.

From the onset, the Rangers were soaked to the bone, and the motion of the rough water made many deathly ill. Inside the LCAs, water and vomit intermingled, sloshing about on the boat floor.

Prince remembered: "Puke bags, which had been issued to us prior to our embarking the LCAs, came into play. A few boys were leaning over the rails trying to revive themselves by letting the onrushing water wet their faces."

Aware of the fate of their brethren aboard LCA 860, the Rangers in the remaining craft bailed with their helmets to help the bilge pumps extricate the excess sea water.

The surviving LCAs kept up a good formation as they headed toward the shore. Chugging in on the heels of the bombardment, the Rangers were in high spirits.

"It's going to be a cinch," one of them said.

"I don't think they know we're coming," voiced another.

Suddenly, enemy rockets began to fall short

This map is based on the original used by U.S. Rangers in their planning for the attack at Pointe du Hoc on June 6, 1944. Landing positions are clearly marked along with the suspected emplacements for the heavy German guns and defensive positions ringing the weapons from both the land and ocean sides of the precipice.

and harmlessly into the water—a disheartening sign that the GIs were getting closer to shore. The Rangers' spirits were further dashed when Lieutenant Gerald Heaney reminded them that only the enemy lay before them. No other American soldiers had landed ahead of the Rangers.

When the boats were 70 yards from shore, they turned to face the cliffs. Suddenly, one of the DUKWs was hit by 20mm fire, killing and wounding several Rangers.

Corporal Lou Lisko, a member of E Company aboard LCA 722, recalled the horror: "John J. Sillmon was hit in the upper chest. Blood spewed everywhere; Sillmon was groaning and moaning. Bullets from machine guns and rifles were flying in the air from the top of the Hoc and nobody dared to help him…. A photographer from the *Stars and Stripes* saw Sillmon's blood and vomited all over my left leg."

As the Rangers neared the shoreline approximately 35 yards from the base of the cliffs, the rope-carrying rockets were fired. Unfortunately, most of the ropes were waterlogged and had a difficult time reaching the cliffs. Some fell onto the clay bottoms, while others were simply cut by the German defenders. Eventually, portable rockets were employed from the shore, which made it easier for the subsequent Ranger units.

The LCAs started to touch down at approximately 7:10. The boats, crowded but evenly spaced, hit the beach along a 500-yard front. Rudder's LCA 888 hit the beach first. As soon as the ramp splashed down, intense enemy machine-gun fire erupted from the clifftops. The men of E Company quickly jumped off the landing craft and followed Rudder to shore. Some of the Rangers stepped into underwater bomb craters and sank out of sight. The invisible holes were extremely difficult to climb out of because of the slippery clay bottom.

Lieutenant James Eikner, the last man off the boat, vividly recalled the scene: "I ran down the ramp and in the water about up to my knees and headed across what I thought was the beach and stepped into a shell hole that was covered with water. I went down over my head, and of course we were under fire. There was one machine gun especially on our left flank…. Some of our people were getting hit, and I remember one young man that was hit three times on the landing craft and twice more on the beach."

When the Rangers reached the cliffs, they tried to free climb, using their bayonets to get hold points in the slippery rock face. However, even the best climbers made little to no progress. Subsequently, a 16-foot extension ladder with a toggle rope was brought in and set up on top of a 40-foot mass of mud and dirt.

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ABOVE: Using a mound of dirt and debris created by pre-invasion shelling and bombing raids, American troops raise supplies to the top of Pointe du Hoc. Only 99 of the attacking Rangers came through the bitter fighting on D-Day unscathed. OPPOSITE: Taken after the fighting at Pointe du Hoc was over, this photo is indicative of the arduous task that faced the U.S. Army Rangers who assailed the German position atop the craggy promontory on D-Day.

One of the Rangers climbed the ladder and cut footholds in the cliff with his bayonet. Then a second Ranger stepped on the ladder and assisted in raising the next section.

The enemy was pouring down death and destruction throughout the treacherous ascent. After much effort, T/5 George J. Putzek finally made it to the top. Lying flat on the crest and cradling the top rung under his arm, Putzek desperately held on while the other Rangers climbed the ladder. The remainder of Rudder's boat team made it up to the Pointe in less than 15 minutes.

LCA 722 and another group from E Company landed 20 yards left of Rudder's boat. Once again, the Rangers disappeared from view as they disembarked their landing craft.

Lisko remembered: "I watched up ahead and I saw some of them jumping neck deep and unable to walk. When my turn came, I saw the two Rangers ahead of me jump and disappear, so I decided to jump to the left. I fell chest deep with all my equipment, at the same time bullets were hitting the sea water around us."

Unfortunately, the scaling ropes had been fired too early again, and only two of them (straight and ladder) reached the top of the cliff. The straight rope fell into a slight crevice, which offered the GIs some protection, but the rope ladder was hung up on an overhang and exposed to flanking fire. T/5 Edward P. Smith immediately grabbed the straight rope and easily scaled the cliff in a matter of minutes. Sergeant Hayward A. Robey, following Smith, opened up on several German defenders who were tossing grenades over the cliff; three enemy soldiers were shot, and the rest retreated.

Private First Class Frank H. Peterson, who had been wounded on the beach, positioned his body in the small niche and inched his way up the rope behind Robey. Once the three comrades reached the top, they proceeded to their next objective, the 155mm guns.

Running to the left of E Company was LCA 668, transporting the Rangers from D Company. Impeded by rocks and boulders, the boat grounded to a halt approximately 20 feet short of the beach.

First Sergeant Leonard Lomell, commander of LCA 668, recounted the landing: "I wasn't supposed to land there, but because we were running behind schedule, we said, 'to hell with it.' When the ramp splashed down, I stepped off the boat and was the first one shot. The bul-

let went through what little fat I had on my right side. It didn't hit any organs but it spun me around and burned like the dickens. There was a small crater there underwater. I went down in water over my head with the spare rope, the hand launcher and my submachine gun."

Only three of the six rockets carried over the cliff edge—two rope ladders and a toggle. Sergeant Bill Vaughn, D Company's best climber, was ordered to climb the toggle rope first. With BAR in hand, Vaughn easily shinnied up the cliff. The other ropes, however, would prove to be much more difficult to climb.

According to Private Sigurd Sunby: "The rope was wet and kind of muddy. My hands just couldn't hold; they were like grease, and I came sliding back down. I wrapped my foot around the rope and slowed myself up as much as I could, but still burned my hands."

The last boat to reach the shore was LCA 883 carrying the men of F Company. Captain Otto Mansy, commander of F Company, ordered the coxswain to land near the cliff jutted outward, which protected the Rangers from the flanking machine-gun fire that had raked the other units. As a result, they landed about 100 yards from the designated touchdown point.

On the ride in, Mansy also noticed that the scaling ropes fired by the previous boats were falling helplessly short of the cliffs. "Don't fire those ropes until I give the word! We've got plenty of time," he yelled to the British coxswain. To ensure that Captain Mansy's orders were followed, Lieutenant Richard A. Wintz pulled out his pistol, pointed it at the British sailor, and said, "If you drop those gates or let those charges go before I give the order, I'll put a bullet in your head."

When the ramps went down, Mansy shouted, "Go!" The rest of F Company followed. Snipers and enemy machine gunners opened fire from the rocky heights, churning up the beach below. Running as fast as they could, the Rangers found safety at the base of the cliff. Private First Class Raymond A. Cole and Staff Sergeant Robert G. Youso started to climb the rope ladders while the other Rangers waited their turn.

Meanwhile, Captain Mansy strolled up and down the beach offering encouragement and advice to his men. At approximately 7:30, Pfc. Cole slithered over the top of the cliff. Suddenly, a shot rang out. Moments later, Sergeant Youso pulled himself onto the shelf. Lying in the dirt a few feet away was Private Cole.

"Cole's been hit!" yelled Youso. Keeping low, Youso waited patiently for T/5 Herman Stein and Sergeant Jack Richards, who were both following close behind. When Stein and Richards reached the top, they found Cole dead.

Lieutenant Wintz, encouraged by the overall success of the previous climbers, picked up the plain rope and began his ascent. He was exhausted. The ropes were wet and muddy, and the slippery clay made it virtually impossible to get a good foothold. After exerting all his energy, Wintz finally reached the top. He then organized six other Rangers into a squad and immediately set out for the German guns.

Once Rudder's Rangers disembarked the LCAs, it took most of the men 15 to 20 minutes to scale the rocky cliff. By 7:30, the battalion had lost two LCAs, one DUKW, and more than 20 Rangers killed or wounded. However, they had breached Hitler's formidable Atlantic Wall.

BY 7:30, THE BATTALION HAD LOST TWO LCAs, ONE DUKW, AND MORE THAN 20 RANGERS KILLED OR WOUNDED. HOWEVER, THEY HAD BREACHED HITLER'S FORMIDABLE ATLANTIC WALL.

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Tired and ragged, U.S. Army Rangers of the 2nd Battalion pause for a rest in a bomb crater. The Rangers captured the position at Pointe du Hoc, tracked down and destroyed the guns that had been removed by the Germans, and held their defensive perimeter until relieved by troops from the invasion beaches. OPPOSITE TOP: German prisoners are marched to the beach, past Lieutenant Colonel James E. Rudder (center, top). The U.S. flag is prominently displayed to quell fire from U.S. tanks landing on Utah and Omaha Beaches below. OPPOSITE BOTTOM: Ten Army Rangers received the Distinguished Service Cross for gallantry during the seizure of Pointe du Hoc on D-Day. Eight of the recipients are pictured here, including Lieutenant Colonel James E. Rudder, commander of the 2nd Ranger Battalion, standing at far left.

It was now time to focus all their efforts on finding and destroying the big 155mm guns, cutting off enemy communications, and holding their positions until reinforcements arrived. For the 2nd Rangers, the worst was yet to come.

On top of the Pointe, the Rangers found themselves in a bewildering wasteland of mass confusion. The expected landmarks were gone; bomb craters and mounds of debris were everywhere, obscuring paths, trenches, terrain features, and fortifications.

In his book, *Rudder's Rangers: The True Story of the 2nd Ranger Battalion D-Day Combat Action,* Ronald Lane described the scene: "The bombs and naval bombardment had left the top of the cliff in such a state that it looked like craters on the moon."

Although the bomb craters provided excellent cover and concealment from enemy fire, the chaos of holes and debris severely impacted a soldier's orientation and hindered communications with other units.

In spite of all of the confusion, the attack proceeded as planned. Each company was divided into four equal sections and assigned a part of the enemy's defenses. The E Company objectives were to destroy the number three gun, set up defensive positions on the coastal highway, and wipe out the concrete observation post. F Company was responsible for destroying the antiaircraft gun on the eastern flank and gun positions one and two. They would then join the rest of the battalion on the coastal highway.

On the western flank, D Company would take care of gun positions four, five, and six, then advance inland toward the coastal highway. From there, the battalion would cross the highway and establish a roadblock, preventing the Germans from bringing up any reinforcements from the Grandcamp area. One section from E Company would remain on the Pointe to organize a defensive perimeter for battalion headquarters.

The third E Company group, commanded by First Sergeant Robert Lang, climbed the Pointe with other Rangers from Rudder's boat. As soon as the men scaled the cliff, they immediately set out for gun position number three. Edging carefully toward the location, they were shocked when they discovered broken wood and steel jutting awkwardly out of the casemates.

"Man, the Navy really did a good job on them, didn't they, Sarge," said one of the men.

"Yeah, but something's wrong," replied Lang. "There's no gun here. Looks like the Krauts had a telephone pole sticking out to make it look like a gun. Wonder what they did with the gun?"

The men from E Company immediately looked to their next objective, setting up defensive positions on the coastal highway.

On the left flank, a section from F Company was slowly advancing toward its objective, gun positions one and two. Crawling from shell hole to shell hole, the Rangers finally reached the gun emplacements only to find them empty. The Rangers, although disheartened, remained focused on their next objective. Sergeant "L-Rod" Petty led the men to one of the exit roads where they linked up with Lieutenant Richard Arman's F Company group.

Meanwhile, on the extreme right flank, 2nd Platoon, D Company quickly made its way toward gun positions four, five, and six. Sergeant Lomell, Lieutenant George Kerchner, and 12 other D Company Rangers went after gun number four initially. When they arrived at the casemates, they discovered that the 155mm gun was gone. Next, they advanced to gun position number six under continuous machine-gun and sniper fire. Again, the casemates were empty.

Some of the Rangers had noticed wheel tracks leading out from the gun emplacement. Could it be that the guns were still nearby? While a few of the men stayed behind to deal with the German threat, Lomell and the rest of the D Company Rangers followed the wheel tracks south in the direction of the coastal highway.

During the advance, Lomell could not stop thinking about the missing guns. Once D Company had reached the coastal highway and set up its roadblock, Lomell and Staff Sergeant Jack Kuhn decided to follow a sunken road. The double-hedgerowed lane led south of the highway just at the head of the D Company position.

Lomell recalled the scene: "It looked like something heavy had been over it [the road]. And so Jack and I went down this sunken road not knowing where the hell it was going…."

Moving cautiously in order to avoid enemy mines, the two Rangers came upon a camouflaged draw. Lomell noticed it first and immediately held out his hand to stop Kuhn, turned toward him, and whispered, "Jack here they are. We've found 'em."

While Kuhn covered him, Lomell placed thermite grenades in the recoil and traversing mechanisms of two guns.

"I depended on Jack to give me cover to protect me," said Lomell. "While I was in there I couldn't see the Germans, but I figured they were close by. By using the thermite grenades, I tried to weld moving parts, gears, cranks, hinges, breech blocks, anywhere I could find to place a couple of thermite grenades. Through their intense heat, they would weld moving parts together and render the guns inoperable. That moving, flowing, molten metal, wherever it eventually got to, must have done the trick. I don't think I spent 10 minutes, all told, destroying those guns. I was satisfied that I had done what I was trained to do. We never looked back. We didn't waste a second."

After Lomell destroyed the two guns, he used the butt of his submachine gun to smash the sights on five heavy guns. Then, the two sergeants quickly ran back to the roadblock to collect more grenades. When Lomell and Kuhn returned, they proceeded to more fully disable the three remaining guns.

Although the Rangers had climbed the rocky cliff, destroyed the big 155mm guns, established a roadblock, and cut off German communications, the battle for Pointe du Hoc was far from over. Now, the 2nd Rangers had the unenviable task of holding their positions until relieved.

The Germans, who still occupied many areas on the Pointe, knew every inch of the terrain and were mounting a stubborn defense. To make matters worse, the Rangers were running dangerously low on supplies. To prepare for night defenses, the Rangers had to make a few alterations. It was reported that enemy strength during the day had been south and southwest of the highway positions. Therefore, the Rangers decided to strengthen their defensive positions beyond the coastal road.

Meanwhile, a task force made up of the 5th Rangers, 2nd Rangers (Companies A, B, and C) and the 116th Regiment was planning to enlarge the Omaha beachhead and relieve the beleaguered companies on Pointe du Hoc. The plan called for the task force to follow the coastal road west until it reached the road junction. Here, they would execute a flanking movement and assault the enemy in a frontal attack.

At 6 AM, A Company, 2nd Rangers took the lead, followed by Companies B and C. Little to no enemy resistance was encountered until they entered the town of St. Pierre du Mont, where they met snipers and heavy machine-gun and artillery fire.

At first, men and tanks from the task force were confused because Rudder's Rangers were firing captured German weapons. Fortunately, a couple of the 2nd Rangers emerged from their holes waving American flags and were soon recognized by the attacking force. The renewed attack was too much for the Germans, and enemy resistance quickly faded. The 2nd Rangers on Pointe du Hoc were relieved around noon on June 8, D-Day+2. The fighting on the cliffs was finally over.

For two days, the 2nd Rangers had held out against heavy German counterattacks. They scaled 100-foot cliffs under intense enemy fire, destroyed the heavy guns that could have been deployed, assaulted enemy fortifications on the Pointe, cut off enemy movement along the coastal highway, and bravely and tenaciously held their positions.

In the end, less than half the original force of slightly more than 200 remained standing. On February 22, 1945, the 2nd Rangers received the Presidential Unit Citation "for outstanding performance of duty in action."

Years later, Eikner was absolutely correct when he stated in his oral history: "Had we not been there we felt quite sure that those guns would have been put into operation and they would have brought much death and destruction down on our men on the beaches and our ships at sea…. The Rangers at Pointe du Hoc were the first American forces on D-Day to accomplish their mission and we are proud of that."

Ten years after Pointe du Hoc, Colonel Rudder went back to the site with his 14-year-old son. Looking up at the cliff, he asked: "Will you tell me how we did this? Anybody would be a fool to try this. It was crazy then, and it's crazy now." □

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Royal Navy

Three days after Pearl Harbor, the loss of the battleship *Prince of Wales* and the battlecruiser *Repulse* crippled the British defense of the Far East.

BY MICHAEL D. HULL

HISTORY WAS MADE in the Mediterranean Sea on the night of Monday, November 11, 1940, when the Italian Navy's battle fleet was devastated at Taranto, off the Ionian coast of southern Italy.

In Operation Judgment, 21 lumbering but resilient Fairey Swordfish torpedo bombers of Admiral Sir Andrew "ABC" Cunningham's British Mediterranean Fleet flew 150 miles at low level to attack the Italian base. The surprise raid—the world's first such carrier-based operation—resulted in the torpedoing of one new and two old battleships. A cruiser and the dockyard were also damaged, and only one Italian battleship was left operational.

The Swordfish biplanes, based on the new carrier, HMS *Illustrious,* flew in two attack waves and used 11 torpedoes. Two aircraft were lost. Though modest by later standards, the raid forced the Italian Navy to move the rest of its ships to safer harbors on the Italian west coast and tilted the critical balance of naval power in the Mediterranean in favor of the British.

Taranto was a bold stroke, a textbook naval feat that would influence Japanese plans for the December 7, 1941, raid on the U.S. Pacific Fleet at Pearl Harbor. Yet, ironically, the British, who had invented the aircraft carrier during World War I, still seemed reluctant to fully grasp its potential and the vulnerability of surface vessels

Imperial War Museum

In this painting by artist John Hamilton, Japanese aircraft swarm around the mortally wounded battleship *Prince of Wales* and battlecruiser HMS *Repulse.* The capital ships of the Royal Navy fell victim to the Japanese planes, dismissing once and for all the theory that warships could defend themselves against concentrated air attack without fighter cover. INSET: The air defense officer aboard the new battleship HMS *Prince of Wales* peers skyward through a pair of high-powered binoculars.

from aerial attack. This was to be demonstrated tragically in the Far East just over a year after the Taranto operation.

Although Britain had suffered serious naval losses in the Atlantic Ocean and the Mediterranean by late 1941, it was decided that she needed to strengthen her forces in Southeast Asia in an attempt to deter expansionist Japan from entering the war. So, the new 35,000-ton battleship HMS *Prince of Wales* was deployed to the Pacific in October 1941. She joined up with the modernized battlecruiser HMS *Repulse* (32,000 tons) at Trincomalee, Ceylon. They were the only capital ships the Allies then had in the western Pacific.

"We had only one key weapon in our hands," announced Prime Minister Winston Churchill. "The *Prince of Wales* and the *Repulse* had arrived in Singapore. They had been sent to these waters to exercise that kind of vague menace which capital ships of the highest quality whose whereabouts is unknown can impose upon all hostile naval calculations."

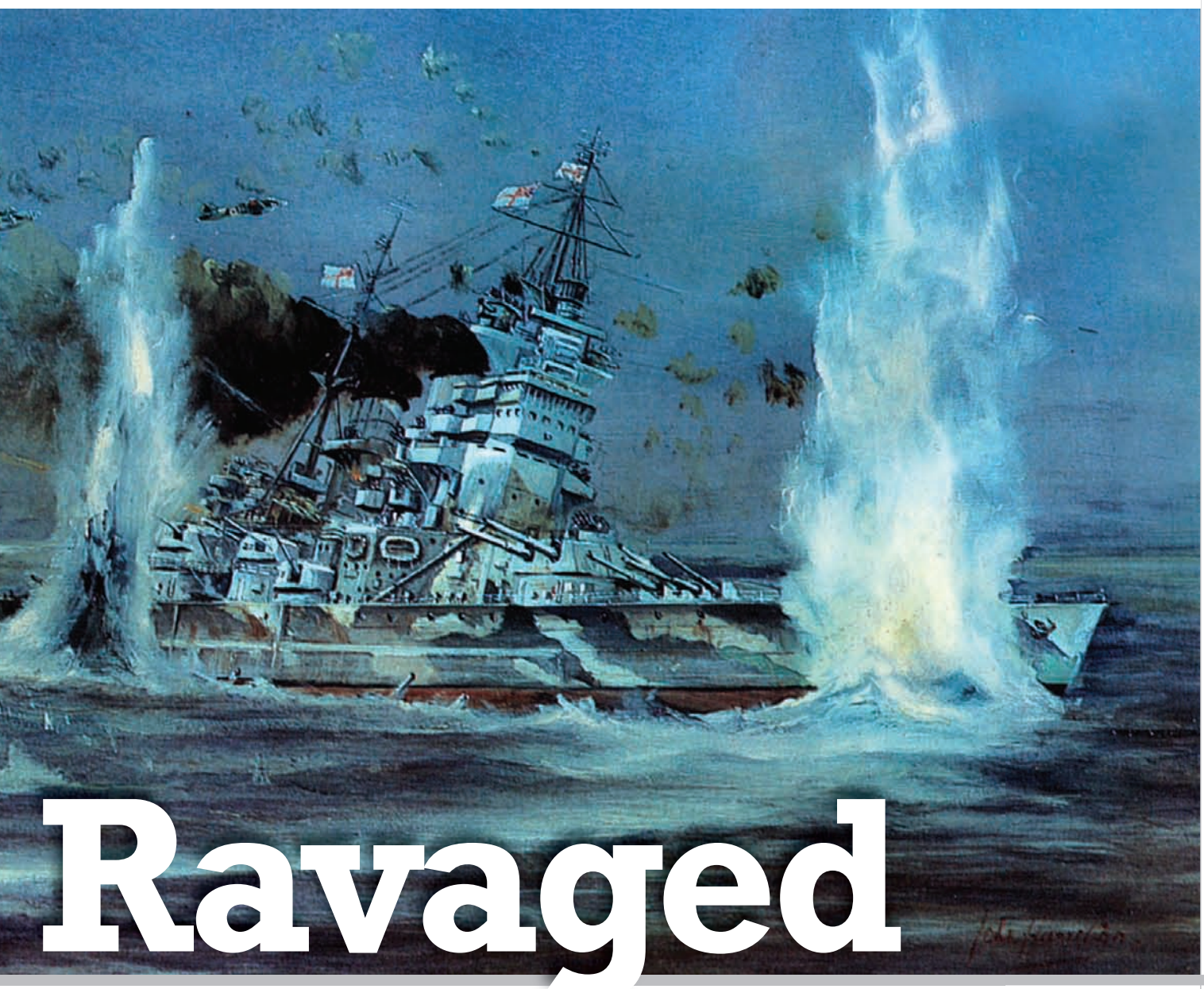
During an earlier lapse into wishful thinking, Churchill had assured the Commonwealth prime ministers, "In my view, *Prince of Wales* will be the best possible deterrent" to Japanese aggression.

A battleship of the King George V class, the *Prince of Wales* was laid down in 1939 and commissioned in the spring of 1941. Her armament included 10 14-inch guns, 16 5.25-inch dual-purpose guns, between 64 and 88 two-pounder pompoms, eight 40mm Bofors guns, and up to 38 20mm Oerlikon guns. The vessel's design embraced the most up-to-date thinking in naval architecture and incorporated comprehensive protection against bomb and torpedo attack.

Her skipper was Captain John C. Leach, who had distinguished himself on her bridge during the historic pursuit and sinking of the powerful German battleship *Bismarck* in late May 1941. Prime Minister Churchill described him as "a charming and lovable man, and all that a British sailor should be."

Laid down in January 1915 and completed in August the following year, the 750-foot-long *Repulse* carried six 15-inch guns, 15 four-inch guns, two three-inch guns, a 12-pounder field gun, five machine guns, 10 Lewis guns, and 10 21-inch torpedo tubes. She was under the command of Captain William G. Tennant, a gallant organizer of the brilliant Dunkirk evacuation in May-June 1940.

The combined force was designated Force Z and placed under the overall command of 53-year-old Rear Admiral Sir Tom Spencer Vaughan



Ravaged

Phillips, who was flying his flag on the *Prince of Wales*. Short, self-assured, and hardworking, Phillips had joined the Royal Navy in 1903, was a navigator by profession, and, as vice chief of naval staff, was regarded as the Admiralty's brains during the early months of World War II. Long desk-bound, his only recent command experience at sea was eight prewar months with the Home Fleet, during which he had the misfortune to become involved in a collision. He worked well with Churchill when the latter became First Lord of the Admiralty in September 1939. But "Tom Thumb" Phillips became unpopular professionally because of his perceived subservience to Churchill, for meddling in operational matters, and for accusing seagoing officers of lacking aggressiveness.

When Admiral Sir John Tovey, commander in chief of the Home Fleet and a heroic destroyer skipper during World War I, stressed during a briefing the need for air cover for ships at sea, Phillips, according to an officer present, "blew his top and virtually accused Tovey of being a coward."

Phillips was considered woefully unqualified for high command at sea by senior admirals. Admiral Cunningham, the Mediterranean Fleet commander and Britain's top fighting admiral of World War II, was disturbed about Phillips's Force Z assignment. "What on earth is Phillips going to the Far East Squadron for?" he asked. "He hardly knows one end of a ship from the other."

The 23,000-ton fleet carrier HMS *Indomitable* should have joined the two capital ships in order to provide vital air cover, but she was damaged after running aground in the British West Indies. Her absence, and that of other intended components, turned a questionable tactical decision into a hazardous enterprise.

Force Z arrived at the British bastion of Singapore on December 2, and was there on December 8, the day after the Pearl Harbor raid and when Japanese forces began their successful Malayan campaign. Admiral Phillips requested that Hawker Hurricane fighters be made available for air protection but was told that there were none. All that was available was an inexperienced Australian squadron of slow, undergunned Brewster Buffalo fighters.

On the evening of Monday, December 8, the *Prince of Wales, Repulse,* and four escorting destroyers weighed anchor from Singapore. Word had been received that Japanese invasion transports were heading for the north of the Malayan Peninsula, and Admiral Phillips planned a surprise attack against them off Kota Bharu. Not only did his Force Z lack air protection, but he also learned after his departure that he could not count on aerial reconnaissance or fighter cover because the enemy had overrun the airfields in northern Malaya.

The Japanese invasion fleet, led by Vice Admiral Takeo Kurita, was at full strength and included two battleships escorting 28 troop transports. It was a large-scale invasion, with simultaneous landings scheduled for Malaya and Thailand. The fleet was supported by 99 bombers, 39 fighters, and six reconnaissance planes of the 22nd Air Flotilla based at Saigon and Soktran in French Indochina. Phillips was ignorant of the Japanese plans, and also of the enemy's sea, air, and ground strength.

On the rainy, cloudy afternoon of Tuesday, December 9, the British fleet was deep in the Gulf of Siam when it was sighted by three Japanese reconnaissance planes and a submarine. The element of surprise was gone, so Phillips decided to return to Singapore. At that time, Kurita's force was only 15 miles to the north. The 22nd Air Flotilla was getting ready to attack Singapore when the submarine reported that Force Z was at sea. Torpedoes were hastily loaded aboard the Japanese bombers, and they took off at 6 PM to hunt for the British ships. But the enemy planes never located them and returned to their bases.

Admiral Phillips was still heading back to Singapore when he received a message that Japanese troops were landing at Kuantan, halfway down the Malayan eastern coast. He decided to investigate. His fleet arrived off Kuantan at dawn on Wednesday, December 10, but all was quiet there. The report had been in error. When a Japanese tugboat was reported to the north, Phillips ordered a new course at 10 AM to check the sighting. Meanwhile, Force Z had been attacked at 2:30 AM and not been aware of it. A submarine had fired five torpedoes at the British ships, but all missed. Phillips's crews had not even seen the torpedoes.

Admiral Nobutake Kondo, the able commander in chief of the Japanese invasion forces, was receiving continuous reports about Force Z. He ordered all available naval aircraft to attack

Imperial War Museum

Imperial War Museum

ABOVE: The Japanese cruiser *Chokai* is shown at anchor. Seaplanes launched from the cruiser spotted the *Prince of Wales* and *Repulse* on December 9, 1941. BELOW: Leaving its new base at Singapore, the battleship HMS *Prince of Wales* goes in search of a Japanese convoy.

Imperial War Museum

A 5.25-inch gun mount aboard the battleship HMS *Prince of Wales* fires skyward. Although the new battleship was equipped with an array of weaponry designed for air defense, this proved inadequate to stave off the determined attacks of Japanese planes on December 10, 1941, just three days after the attack on Pearl Harbor.

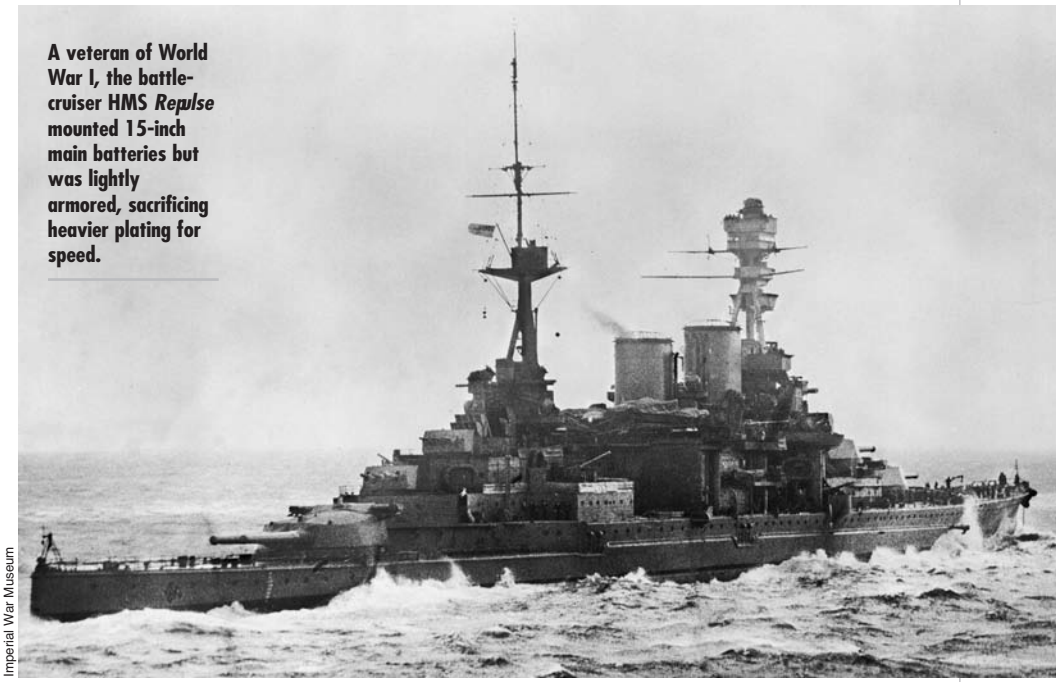
during the early morning hours of December 10 while his fleet steamed southward at top speed to intercept the British ships. Formations of reconnaissance planes and twin-engine Mitsubishi Nell and Betty bombers carrying bombs and torpedoes headed southward from Indochina. Japanese pilots fanned out across a wide area in their search for the British ships.

While woefully uninformed about the nearing enemy threat, Admiral Phillips was confident that his ships could withstand an air attack by the Japanese. He believed that the *Prince of Wales* was unsinkable and that the thinly armored *Repulse* could protect herself. The admiral had once been quoted as saying that "bombers are no match for battleships." Fatefully, Phillips was to keep radio silence during Force Z's operations, believing that he would automatically be provided with air cover if he ran into serious trouble.

The rude awakening in store for "Tom Thumb" Phillips and his fleet came on December 10. Although the 22nd Air Flotilla was about to give up hope of locating the British ships, an ensign aboard a Japanese reconnaissance plane sighted the *Repulse* and *Prince of Wales* at 11 that morning. He reported breathlessly, "Sighted two enemy battleships 70 nautical miles southeast Kuantan, course southeast." The Japanese pilots wasted no time in acting.

Nine twin-engine bombers approached *Repulse* in tight formation and line abreast as shipboard observers shouted, "Enemy aircraft in sight. Action stations!" The battlecruiser's skipper, Captain Tennant, ordered his guns to open fire. He watched with tightness in his throat as the batteries roared and the enemy bombers flew closer, unwavering through the intense barrage. Tennant saw bombs fall toward the *Repulse* and was relieved when only one hit amidships. It exploded on the armored deck in the Royal Marine detachment's mess. The Japanese planes then droned away through flak bursts. *Repulse* damage crews swiftly got fires under control, but Captain Tennant knew that the fleet's ordeal was just beginning.

At 11:30 AM, a radar operator reported enemy torpedo bombers speeding toward *Prince of Wales*. Two groups of 16 planes flew ahead of the battleship and disappeared momentarily in the clouds at an altitude of 3,000 feet. Then, at



Imperial War Museum

A veteran of World War I, the battlecruiser HMS *Repulse* mounted 15-inch main batteries but was lightly armored, sacrificing heavier plating for speed.

11:42 AM, they suddenly dived toward the port side of the ship in clusters of two and three planes. Bugles blared aboard the *Prince of Wales*, and an alarm shrilled: "Stand by for barrage!" A withering fire erupted from the vessel's heavy rifles, antiaircraft batteries, and machine guns, but the enemy torpedo bombers bore through unscathed to drop their missiles. Other planes raced toward the *Repulse*. Captain Tennant ordered his navigation officer to "turn 45 degrees to starboard."

The battlecruiser skipper marveled at the audacity of the enemy air crews, who pressed their attacks through heavy fire. Aboard the *Repulse*, CBS radio correspondent Cecil Brown heard a sailor mutter, "Look at those yellow bastards come." Another rating said, "Plucky blokes, these Japanese. That was as beautiful an attack as ever I expect to see." The British sailors cheered when an enemy plane exploded with a roar. One daring torpedo plane pilot flew alongside the ship and challenged its gun crews. He paid for the brazen stunt when his plane was blown apart.

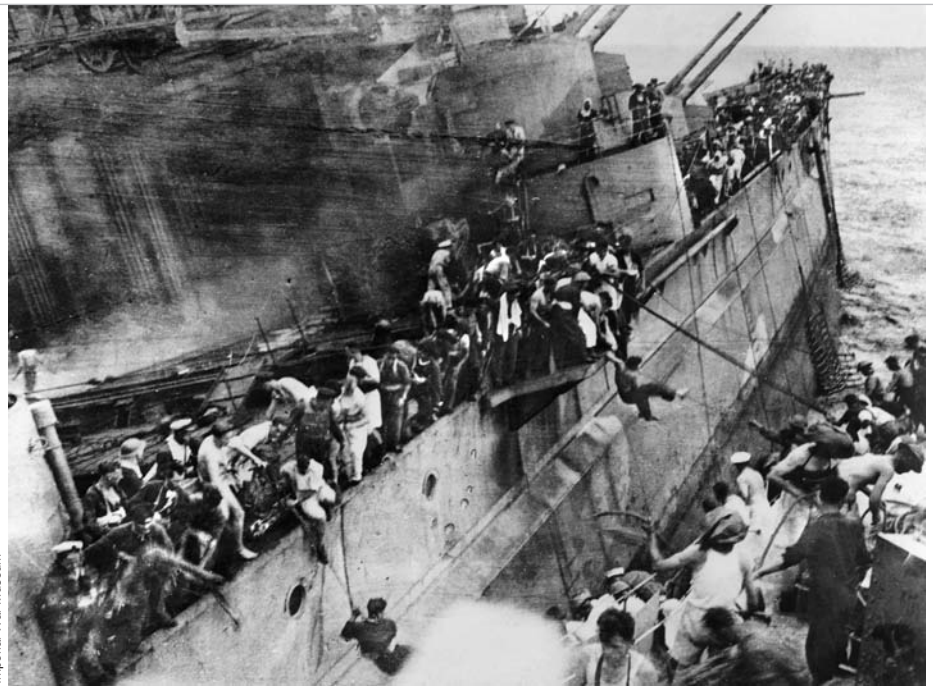
The *Repulse* completed the 45-degree turn, with her stern now offering a smaller target to the Japanese planes. Their torpedoes passed harmlessly on each side. Despite her age, the battlecruiser was highly maneuverable and able to dodge the enemy aircraft. But the persistent raiders then raked the ship's gun crews with machine-gun fire, and many sailors perished at their mounts.

Another journalist aboard the *Repulse*, O'Dowd Gallagher of the *London Daily Express*, turned in a vivid exclusive report of the ship's ordeal for his readers:

"I saw glowing tracer shells describe shallow curves as they went soaring skyward surrounding the enemy planes. Our 'Chicago pianos' (pom-poms) opened fire; also our triple-gun four-inch high-angle turrets. The uproar was so tremendous I seemed to feel it. From the flag deck I can see two torpedo planes. No, they're bombers. Flying straight at us…. There is a heavy explosion, and the *Repulse* rocks. Great patches of paint fall from the funnel on to the flag deck….

"Cooling fluid is spurting from one of the barrels of a 'Chicago piano.' I can see black paint on the funnel-shaped covers at the muzzles of eight barrels actually rising in blisters big as fists. The boys manning them—there are 10 to each—are sweating, saturating their asbestos anti-flash helmets. The whole gun swings this way and that as spotters pick planes to be fired at…."

Despite his own problems, Captain Tennant kept a close eye on the *Prince of Wales* only 2,000 yards away. The flagship had been struck



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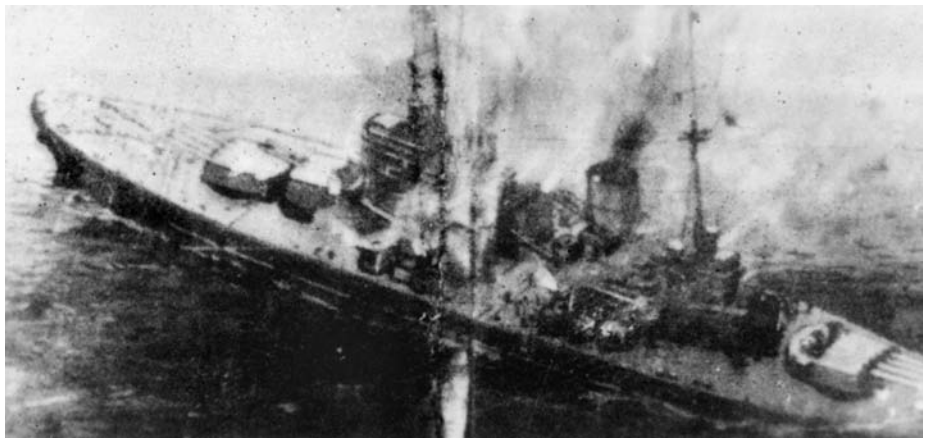


Australian War Memorial

ABOVE: The 5.25-inch guns of the battleship *Prince of Wales* put up a curtain of anti-aircraft fire. The absence of fighter cover proved fatal for *Prince of Wales* and the battlecruiser *Repulse*. TOP: The escorting destroyer HMS *Express* picks up survivors of the sunken *Prince of Wales*. The destroyer returned to Singapore where many of these surviving sailors became prisoners of the Japanese when the British bastion in the Far East fell weeks later.

by some of the enemy torpedoes, and the *Repulse* skipper was dismayed to see black smoke belch from her stern and vitals. The flagship was listing 13 degrees to port and weaving uncertainly at 15 knots. She was rapidly losing headway. Tennant realized that the *Prince of Wales* must have taken two torpedoes in her rudder and propeller shafts. He watched the battleship try to turn, succeeding only in heeling over as water poured into her hull, and then saw flagship ratings hoist "not under control" signals.

Tennant fired off signals to the stricken flagship but received no response. So, believing that the *Prince of Wales* was unable to do so, he sent an emergency radio signal to Singapore at 11:50 AM saying that Force Z was being bombed. This was the first word that headquarters had of the attack. Within seven minutes, a flight of Royal Air Force Brewster Buffalos was dispatched from the Sembawang airfield on Singapore Island.

After managing to avoid high-level Japanese bombers, Captain Tennant reduced speed to 20 knots and moved the *Repulse* closer to the *Prince of Wales* to offer assistance. Again there was no response. Then it was the aging battlecruiser's turn again when nine enemy torpedo bombers were spotted low on the horizon. Torpedoes were dropped at a range of 2,500 yards, and one struck amidships with "a great jarring shudder."

Yet the *Repulse* steamed on, with her four-inch guns and pom-poms throwing up a curtain of protective fire. At the same time, the *Prince of Wales* took two more torpedo hits and was incapable of maneuver. Her speed had fallen to eight knots.

More Japanese torpedo bombers made a concentrated effort on the *Repulse,* attacking from all directions. She took four hits, shuddered, and listed heavily to port. "The ship seemed to stagger in her stride," reported one of her officers, "and I knew instinctively that this was the end, that *Repulse* was doomed."

Captain Tennant was sure that his ship could not survive four torpedoes and ordered everyone to come on deck. In a steady voice, he called over the loudspeakers, "All hands on deck. Prepare to abandon ship. Clear away Carley floats!" Men filed topside as explosions tore at the interior of the ship.

As the battlecruiser reached a 30-degree list, Tennant watched from the bridge as about 200 men collected on the starboard side, waiting for word to leave the ship. The skipper's commanding presence calmed his men. "I never saw the slightest sign of panic or ill discipline," he recalled later. "I told them from the bridge how well they had fought the ship, and wished them good luck."

After the wounded had been evacuated, men slid into the calm, tepid ocean and swam toward the Carley floats. As they swam for their lives, the sailors gave three cheers for their skipper and the *Repulse.* Oil gushing from the ship's ruptured bunkers spread through the waters, and many survivors choked to death while struggling for the floats.

Japanese planes flew overhead but did not strafe the men in the water. The sailors had fought gallantly, and some of the enemy fliers felt a strange sympathy for the Royal Navy, which had served as a prewar model for their own Imperial Navy. One Japanese pilot admitted later to his squadron leader, "As we dived for the attack, I didn't want to launch my torpedo. It was such a beautiful ship, such a beautiful ship."

By now listing at almost 70 degrees to port, the gallant *Repulse* stayed afloat for six or seven minutes and then rolled over at 12:33 PM. Ordered by Admiral Phillips, the destroyers HMS *Electra* and HMS *Vampire* eased in to pick up the survivors—42 out of 66 officers including the skipper and 754 out of 1,240 ratings. The rescue effort was not hindered, for the enemy had a more important prey to finish off.

The *Repulse* was gone, though incredibly the mortally wounded *Prince of Wales* was still afloat and steaming northward at eight knots. But she was rapidly filling with water.

Soon after the *Repulse* went down, nine high-level Japanese bombers flew over the *Prince of Wales,* turned, and came in to attack 10 min-

utes later. Forward guns that had not been shot out opened fire at the unwavering enemy formation. As grief-stricken Admiral Phillips and staff officers on the flagship's compass platform watched the enemy bombs fall, Captain Leach shouted, "Now!" Everyone dropped to the deck just before the bomb pattern hit the ship aft. Luckily, only one bomb struck home, causing superficial damage. But it staggered the battleship, and she began to founder. Admiral Phillips was dismayed by the destruction aboard his proud flagship as stretcher parties scrambled to tend wounded ratings.

The *Prince of Wales* had somehow withstood her last attack, but she was dying minute by minute. Her beams were almost awash. At 12:50 PM, a signal was sent to Singapore: "Emergency. Send all available tugs…." The desperate message was repeated 11 minutes later, but the flagship was beyond such far off succor. The destroyer HMS *Express* eased alongside the starboard quarter of the *Prince of Wales* and began to take off the wounded, and Carley floats were launched. By 1:10 PM, the doomed flagship was settling rapidly and listing heavily to port. It was all over for the *Prince of Wales*. Her skipper gave the order to don lifejackets and abandon ship.

Admiral Phillips and Captain Leach stood together on the bridge and waved to the departing crewmen. "Goodbye," Leach called. "Thank you. Good luck. God bless you." Phillips had called for his best hat to be brought up from his cabin, and neither man made any move to save himself.

Crammed aboard HMS *Express,* horrified survivors watched as the flagship heeled steeply to port at 1:20 PM, her keel rising while men scrambled down ropes or slid down her upturned bottom. Then the flagship capsized and sank, taking Admiral Phillips and Captain Leach with her. Ninety out of 110 officers and 1,195 out of 1,502 ratings were rescued.

As the *Prince of Wales* went down, 11 Australian Buffalo fighters from Sembawang arrived on the scene, prompting a distant formation of Japanese planes to jettison their bombs and head for home. The fighter pilots were shocked when they looked down to see the masses of men struggling in the water. They waved and gave the thumbs-up sign. The Buffalos patrolled overhead while the survivors of the two ships were picked up from the water or from Carley floats. At dawn the next day, December 11, 1941, Lieutenant Haruki Iki, leader of the Japanese 3rd Squadron, flew low over the sunken British ships and dropped bunches of flowers.

The destruction of Force Z had cost the Japanese only eight aircraft. It was established that the *Prince of Wales* had succumbed to four, and possibly six, 24-inch torpedoes with 1,210-pound warheads, and one bomb, while the *Repulse* was sunk by five torpedoes and one bomb. Only three days after the mauling of the U.S. Pacific Fleet at Pearl Harbor, the loss of the two British capital ships reduced Allied fortunes in the Far East to their lowest ebb.

During the week after the Force Z disaster, as the Royal Air Force was compelled to abandon its airfields, the defense of northern Malaya collapsed. The strategic foundations for securing Singapore, the major British bastion in the Far East, had crumbled. The campaign now degenerated into a gallant but hopeless retreat by poorly equipped, understrength British, Indian, and Australian units, outmaneuvered and outfought by Japanese assault troops advancing down the western coast of Malaya.

Prime Minister Churchill regarded Singapore as "a famous fortress" that had to be defended to the last, but despite reinforcements being rushed in its surrender was inevitable. That surrender occurred on February 15, 1942. The Malayan campaign was the most ignominious defeat in British military history.

The loss of the *Prince of Wales* and the *Repulse* both critically weakened the balance of Allied naval power in the Far East and dramatically removed any lingering doubts about the vulnerability of surface ships from air attack. The era of the invincibility of battleships—ironically, like carriers, a British conception—had passed.

While the sinking of the two ships sent shock waves through the Royal Navy and stunned the British people, no one was more shaken than Churchill. He was devastated, for only four months before the tragedy he had sailed on the *Prince of Wales* to meet for the first time with

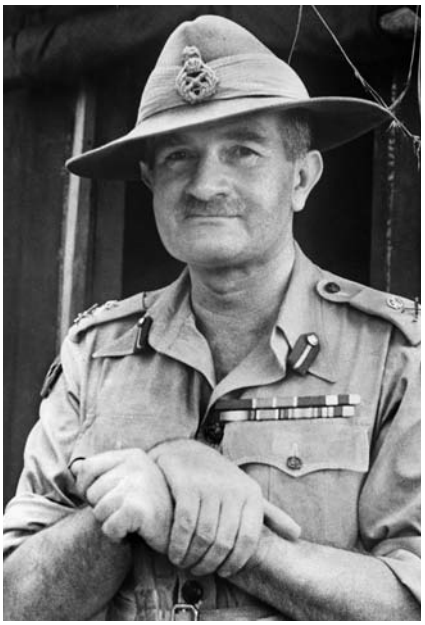
Continued on page 77

National Archives

One of the attacking Japanese planes snapped this photograph of the British battleship *Prince of Wales* (top) and the battlecruiser *Repulse* early in the aerial assault. *Repulse* has just sustained a bomb hit, evidenced by the plume of smoke rising from the ship as it takes evasive action.

Mussolini lost his empire in East Africa to a relative handful of Commonwealth troops.

NO DESERTS FOR II



"I AM NOT A COLLECTOR OF DESERTS," Mussolini declared regarding his imperial ambitions. Instead, he would be a loser of them, most publicly in North Africa and, in one of World War II's least-known campaigns, in East Africa. There, a towering prince, a diminutive emperor, generals of widely different temperaments, an officer with the messianic fervor of a Biblical prophet, and even an American society jewelry salesman would fight for control of the barren wastelands of Eritrea, Italian Somaliland, and Ethiopia, which passed for Italy's pitiful excuse for an empire.

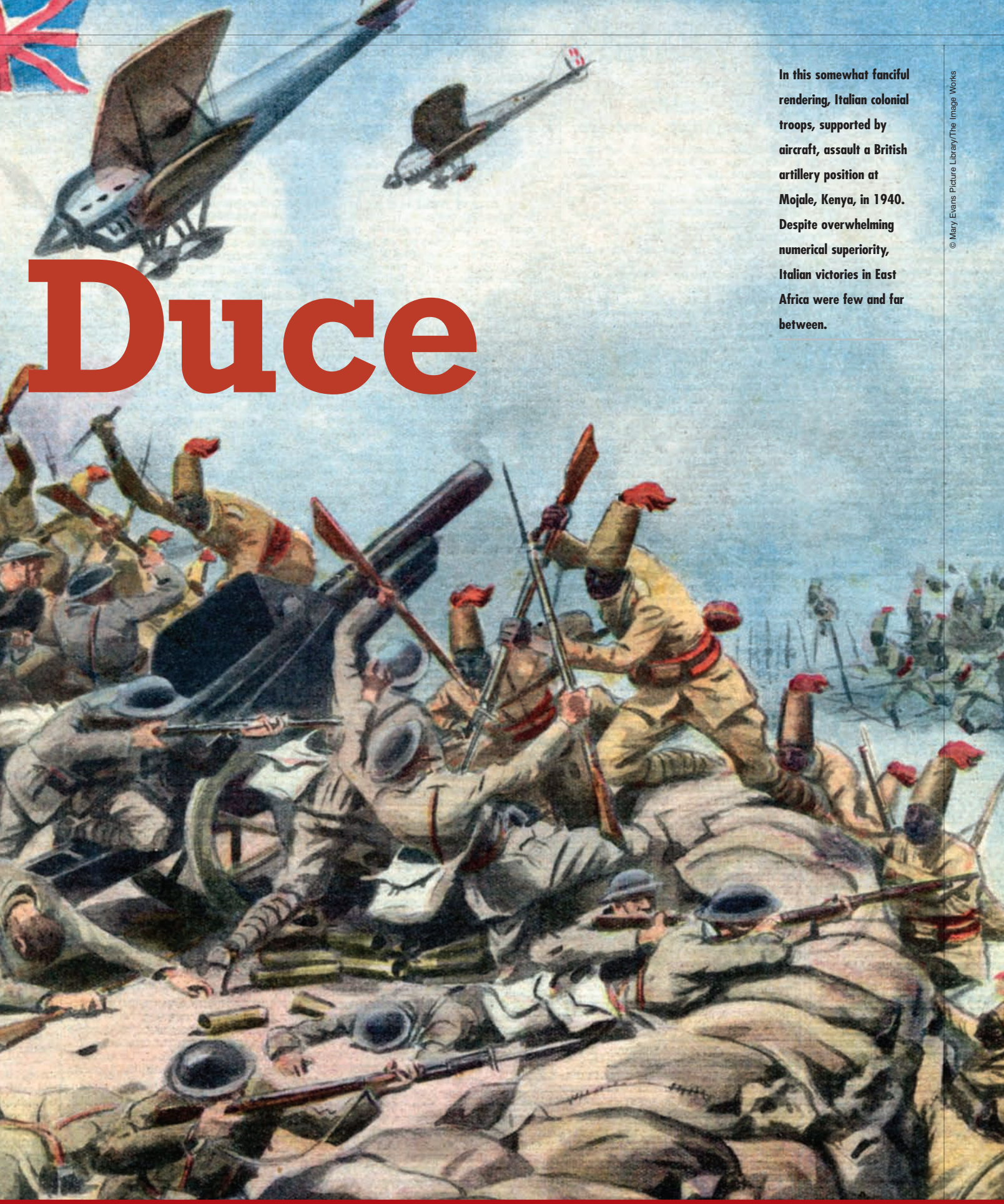
To Mussolini's son-in-law, Foreign Minister Count Galeazzo Ciano, the declaration of war with Britain in June 1940 was "the chance of 5,000 years" to expand Italy's African empire by grabbing British Kenya and Tanganyika. The numbers to do it clearly favored the Italians: 92,371 Italian troops including the crack Savioia Grenadiers and the 11th Legion, the best Blackshirt formation, 250,000 Eritrean, Amhara, and Tigrean troops led by capable Italian officers, 323 aircraft, mostly bombers, and almost 200 armored cars and tanks.

In contrast, the British had only 19,000 troops in the region, and almost all were colonial, along with only a half dozen aircraft of 1928 vintage, a few homemade armored cars, and no artillery. British forces had a standing order to "fire at anything more than one aircraft" since they would have to be Italian. The British had only one serviceable carburetor for their own airplanes.

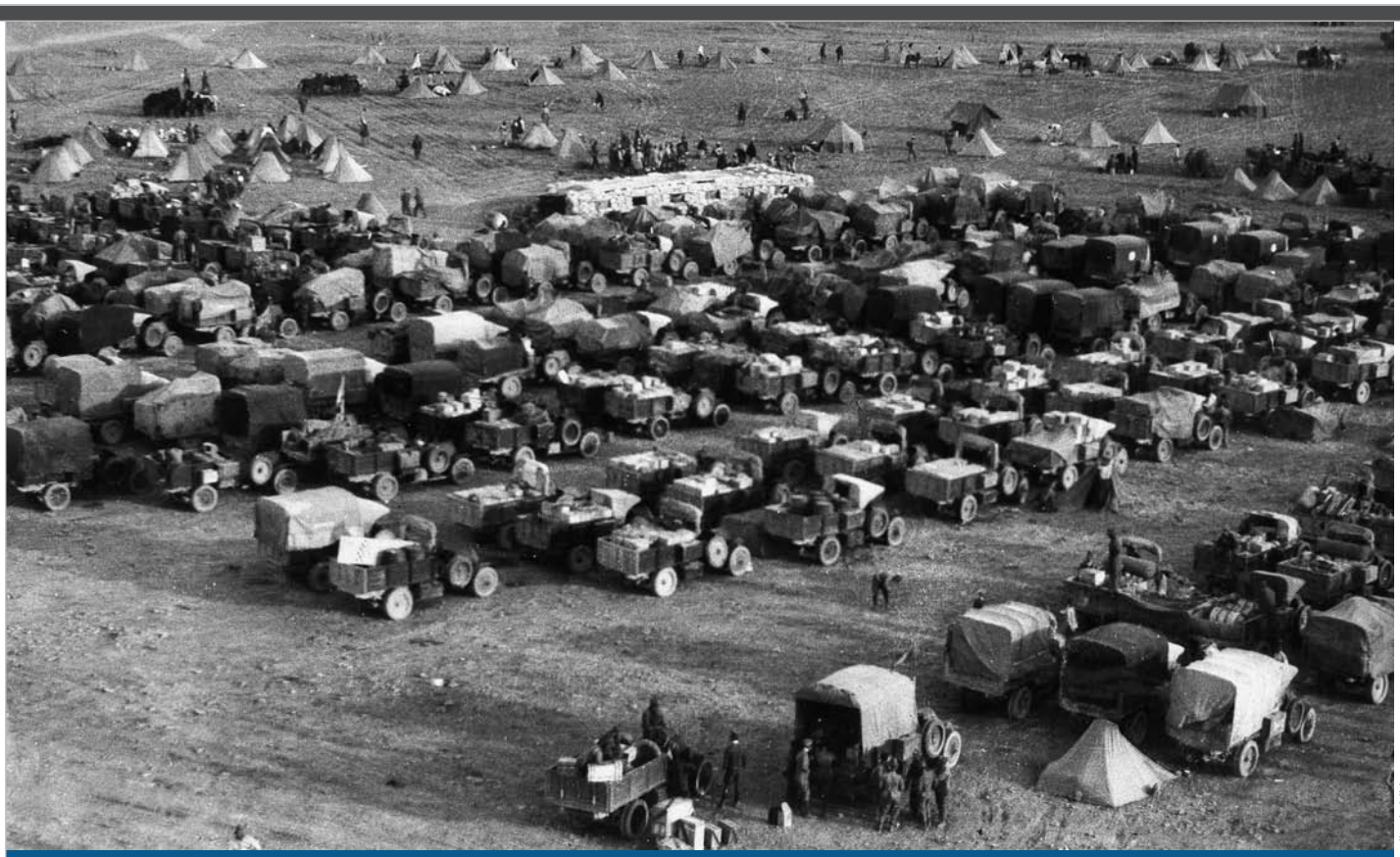
The Italians first struck at Britain's own parched pieces of East Africa. In July 1940, approximately 8,000 Italians and Eritreans invaded eastern Sudan, opposed by just 500 men of the Sudan Defense Force (SDF), capturing the frontier posts of Kassala and Gallabat. The next month, 25,000 Italians, Amharas, and Eritreans with armor and massive air cover drove a tenth of that number of British, Indians, and Africans out of British Somaliland in a Dunkirk on the Red Sea.

BY JOHN W. OSBORN, JR.

Duce



In this somewhat fanciful rendering, Italian colonial troops, supported by aircraft, assault a British artillery position at Mojale, Kenya, in 1940. Despite overwhelming numerical superiority, Italian victories in East Africa were few and far between.



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"Victory is our cry! We set off like arrows from the bow," an Italian soldier exulted. But other numbers told of the ferocity and tenacity of the British defenses: 500 Italian dead to only a dozen SDF, 2,029 Italian casualties to just 250 for the British in Somaliland, where Captain E.C.T. Watson earned the Victoria Cross leading, despite serious wounds to his left eye and right shoulder, the defense of his hilltop position for four days until overrun and captured.

Mussolini had gambled on a quick end to the war once France fell, saying, "It will be sufficient if the Empire holds out for three months." Once it was clear the war would go on, and with the closure of the Suez Canal isolating East Africa, morale among the Italians sank and a defensive mind-set took hold.

The demoralization started at the top. The Viceroy of Africa Orientale Italiana since 1937, Prince Amedeo, Duke of Aosta, was most imposing when he was standing—he was 6 feet 4 inches. He had hoped to avoid war in the first place, telling a British official in Cairo, "Don't take literally all that Mr. Brown [Mussolini] says." Count Ciano was to eulogize him as a "noble figure of a prince and Italian, simple in his ways, broad in outlook, humane in spirit," which meant he was as miscast for a leader under siege as he was a Fascist overlord.

While the British were building up in the theater with Worcestershires, Cameron Highlanders, Royal Sussex, West Yorkshires, Highland Light Infantry, Royal Fusiliers, the 4th and 5th Indian Divisions sent from the Middle East, 33,000 raised in East Africa, 9,000 from the Gold Coast (now Ghana) and Nigeria in West Africa, 27,000 from South Africa, a unit of Palestinian Jews, even the French Foreign Legion, they were winning their first victory of the campaign thousands of miles away in Britain.

"WHAT WAS AHEAD WAS A HARD POSITIONAL BATTLE —A MINIATURE PASSCHENDALE, WITH HEAT SUBSTITUTING FOR MUD."

—COLONEL A.J. BARKER

The code-breakers of Bletchley Park had cracked the Italians' high-grade cipher for East Africa. "Throughout the campaign, from the first day, every secret Italian operational order sent to, or from, the Italian viceroy was picked up as it was issued, and used to foil whatever plan had been made, or to exploit whatever weaknesses had been revealed," wrote historian Martin Gilbert. Yet, pushed forward too early under intense pressure by Secretary of State for War Anthony Eden and Commander-in-Chief, Middle East, General Sir Archibald Wavell on a visit to Khartoum, the first British offensive in East Africa and of World War II was to end in disaster.

Seven thousand troops led by Brigadier William Slim aimed at retaking Gallabat, then driving into Ethiopia. Slim, who behind his tough exterior had the touch of a poet, described the dawn before the assault, on November 6, 1940. "To the east the hills behind Gallabat, Jebel Negus and Jebel Mariam Waha began to show up as dark and distant silhouettes against the first pale lemon wash of sunrise. Gently, the lemon deepened to gold and changed to soft luminous blue, but the hill of Gallabat remained invisible, sunk in the blackness of the further hills."

The attack was initially successful. An Italian captain presented to Slim complained, "As soon as your bombardment started he [his commander] rushed out crying, 'to the walls, to the walls' and disappeared toward the border. He has not been seen since!"

But the tide turned when the Italians shot down five British Gloster Gladiator fighters,

then bombed and strafed the British lines. Narrowly missing being killed by machine-gun fire, Slim walked to the front to be told by an Indian officer, "British soldiers from Gallabat are driving through my post, shouting that the enemy are coming and the order is to retire. We cannot stop them; they drive fast at anyone who tries!"

"Nonsense," said Slim. "They must be empties coming back to refill. You must have misunderstood what they said."

To Slim's shock, two trucks roared past, British soldiers in them shouting the enemy was coming.

Slim tried another attack the next day but called it off when some shells fired by the Italians caused the British, mistaking the smoke for gas, to again flee. The final British losses were 42 killed, 125 wounded.

The British shifted their next offensive north, toward Eritrea. Commanding Gazelle Force, which included SDF, Indian, and British troops, was Maj. Gen. Sir William Platt, whom no one would call poetic. A high-ranking official in the Sudan administration said he was "as aggressive as they make 'em, a regular little tiger, a fine upright fiery (often testy) capable soldier."

Aware that the Duke of Aosta had ordered withdrawal from Kassala and Gallabat, the British struck on January 19, 1941. The Italians laid minefields to slow pursuit, and Lieutenant Perminda Singh Bhagat won the Victoria Cross for probing and defusing them, wounded three times in the process.

The Italians made a stand on the hills above the Keru Gorge. An Italian lieutenant even led a cavalry charge of 500 men into machine-gun and artillery fire, with 179 riders killed and 260 wounded. Of the horses, 89 were killed, 68 wounded.

"It must have been the last great European-led cavalry charge in Africa," wrote Anthony Mockler in his book *Haile Selassie's War*. "Churchill, who himself in his youth had charged with the 8th Hussars at Omdurman, would have approved."

After three days of fighting, the 5th Indian Division led by Slim, moving from the south, took the Italians in the rear, forcing them to flee by night eastward toward what would become the site of the costliest and most decisive battle of the East Africa campaign—the town and 4,300-foot-high, 150-mile-long plateau of Keren. The fighting began on February 2, 1941, and continued until March 27. Twenty-three thousand Italians and colonial troops roared down the key Dongolaas Gorge, confronting 30,000 British and Indians in some of World War II's most hellish but little known fighting.

"What was ahead was a hard positional battle—a miniature Passchendale, with heat substituting for mud," Colonel A.J. Barker, an officer who served in the East Africa campaign, later wrote in *Eritrea 1941*. "Men who were at Keren, who served subsequently in other theaters of war—on other battlefields, in Italy, Burma and North-West Europe where conditions have been described as 'bloody', 'appalling' or just 'frightful'—have said that nothing—NOTHING—was worse than Keren."

Just to reach the plateau, the British and Indians had to cross through a killing ground that the British with grim humor called "Happy Valley," driving through intense Italian fire from above. "The whines of the approaching shells were usually lost in the noise of engines as the trucks bumped over the sand stretch of ground in low gear, but their dull crump could be heard as they exploded on striking the ground and the splashes made by their splintering metal were clearly visible in the sandy surface," wrote Colonel Barker. "It was, he added with understatement, "a soul shattering prelude."

Once on the crucial Cameron Ridge, British soldiers quickly "looked like Black and White Minstrels," Colonel Barker wrote in those prepolitically correct days, "the black dust vomited into the air by exploding mortar bombs

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ABOVE: Wearing their signature pith helmets, Italian troops take up concealed positions among the scrub brush of the East African desert. Italian soldiers fought with determination during the campaign in East Africa; however, they were often ill-equipped and poorly led. BELOW: Attacking a village near the city of Kurmuk, Sudan, in the summer of 1940, Italian troops rush forward through heavy vegetation. OPPOSITE: On the advance toward Berbera, British Somaliland, in the summer of 1940, Italian soldiers pack heavy trucks.

settling on sweating skins to leave only white slatey lines round eyes and lips." They had to inch their way up the plateau in the face of machine-gun fire and thousands of grenades dropped on them. Fighting was often hand-to-hand with rifle butt and fist. On the 41st day, the British captured the critical Dologoroc peak east of the gorge, then held off seven Italian counterattacks, one stopped 80 yards short of the command post. British and Indian losses on Keren would ultimately be 536 killed and 3,229 wounded.

One of those killed, Subadar Richpal Ram of the Rajputana Rifles, led a charge, shouting Rajput war cries, when his company commander fell wounded. Ram directed the defense of a position through a night of savage fighting and was leading another attack when he finally fell; he was awarded the Victoria Cross.

Of the Italians, veteran Donald Bateman, who later also fought at Monte Cassino in Italy, said, "No German paratrooper on Cassino fought more determinedly than the Italian soldier on Keren. There is no doubt in my mind, from experience of both, that Keren was the tougher battle." Losses among the Italians (their colonial ones are unrecorded) were 3,000 killed, 4,500 wounded.

Italian war correspondent Renato Loffredo described a determined night counterattack by Savoia Grenadiers and Askaris on Cameron Ridge. In the freezing cold, the Italians crept silently toward Indian positions, then began throwing grenades. The Indians opened machine-gun fire in response as the fighting became desperate and confused in the darkness.

"The Indians were unable to close their ranks," an Italian soldier later told Loffredo. "The fighting became man to man. Rifles were used like clubs. The Indians advanced swinging them about their heads. A group of askaris found themselves in a group of Scots, tall, robust, and strong. One Scot, stunned by a hand grenade, found two grenadiers on top of him who finished him off … a terrible Scot sergeant advanced, firing his gun in two powerful hands with the butt in his stomach. A grenade stopped him. A second arrived. The first exploded between his feet, the second on his chest."

But the Scots stood their ground. "They held light machine guns like rifles and fired rapidly and powerfully, cutting down everything in front of them," Loffredo recorded. Finally, the Italians had to escape back into the dark.

The plateau itself also made Keren the nightmare of World War II for anyone who was there. Without a stick of shelter and a limit of a pint of water a day in the scorching heat, the soldiers' fingers blistered at the touch of rock, and their tongues blackened and became swollen. Dysentery was rife, but there were no latrines. Bodies fell and garbage and excrement were dumped into the ravines, attracting dense clouds of flies and more disease.

With the terrain too rugged even for mules, a company from each British battalion had to be diverted to carry up every bullet, drop of water, and scrap of food. It would take a dozen men to carry one wounded comrade down. The rattle of machine-gun fire and thump of explosions were sometimes interrupted by the strains of Verdi arias broadcast over British loudspeakers along with news of Italian disasters in North Africa in an early attempt at psychological warfare.

General Platt had predicted that Keren "will be won by the side which lasts longest…. And I promise you that I will last longer."

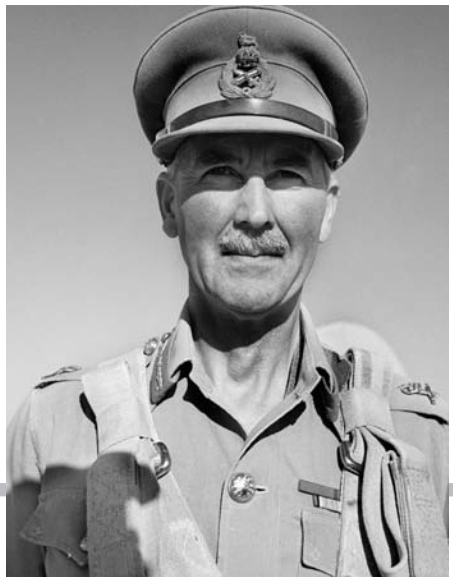
Finally, Indian engineers blasted through the Dongolass Gorge and armored cars rolled into the town of Keren to find it abandoned. The retreating Italians "were so exhausted and dispirited that sometimes they did not even move off the road when strafed," a South African pilot reported. The Foreign Legion finally cut the road, bagging 1,000 prisoners, a platoon led by the onetime American jewelry salesman Lieutenant John Hasey alone taking 300.

Before joining the Free French and its Foreign Legion unit in London, Hasey had worked at Cartier in Paris with the Duke and Duchess of Windsor among his clients, then as an ambulance driver for Finland in the Winter War against Russia. Earlier in the campaign, he had met some other Italian prisoners and gotten a strange request: "Whenever you see an Italian over 40 years old, shoot him. Don't take him prisoner."

When Hasey asked why, he was told:

Imperial War Museum

Imperial War Museum



Imperial War Museum

ABOVE: This modern photo of the battleground at Keren displays the harsh climate and difficult terrain that both sides encountered during the prolonged and decisive engagement there in 1940. TOP RIGHT: Photographed following the capture of Dambacha Fort on April 15, 1941, Emperor Haile Selassie (center) is flanked by British Brigadiers Orde Wingate (right) and D.A. Sandford. BOTTOM RIGHT: Affable General Alan Cunningham led Commonwealth forces in an invasion of Italian Somaliland from neighboring Kenya.

"Because they're responsible for all this. It's their war, not ours. They put Mussolini in power. We didn't. We didn't want this war. We didn't want to fight you; but we were stuck with it. We couldn't get out of it. We were forced into the army."

The Duke of Aosta had made his own prediction before Keren, that if it was lost, "everything will crumble." Asmara, capital of Eritrea, surrendered without a shot five days after Keren's fall. General Platt cabled British officers in Khartoum, capital of the Sudan, that his message of victory was "not, repeat NOT, an April fool." A week later the port of Massawa fell after its main defense, Fort Victor Emmanuel, was stormed by the Foreign Legion.

Taking part in the assault was French Foreign Legionnaire John Hasey: "Machine-gun emplacements were on all hills approaching the Fort, and our first mission was to clean them out one by one. My platoon advanced through its assigned sector with bayonets fixed. As machine-gun emplacements identified themselves by fire, they were surrounded and isolated. Legionnaires crept inexorably upon them. My command was falling all around me, but somehow I seemed to be spared. We moved closer and closer to the fort.

"My platoon, or what there was left of it, was the first to reach the top of that hill, the first to scale its walls and drop inside, and perhaps the first to take the heart out of those Italians. Until then, they fought well, but now they no longer had stomach for it."

Hasey took another 300 Italians prisoner, and in one of the cruel ironies of war, the nine Italians in the Legion died fighting their countrymen in Eritrea. Hasey soon learned that he and others of his unit had been condemned to death by the pro-Nazi Vichy regime in France; in true Legion fashion, they toasted the announcement with captured Italian wine. The capture of Massawa proved to be the great strategic prize of the East Africa campaign. The British had a new port and route to deliver supplies to the Middle East and, in Washington, D.C., President Franklin D. Roosevelt could proclaim the Red Sea a nonbelligerent area, allowing Lend-Lease supplies to transit through it.

In four months the Italians had lost their oldest colony, 65 battalions, 40,000 prisoners, and 300 artillery pieces. The end of their newest colony had simultaneously been effectively sealed.

Two weeks after Mussolini declared war, Ethiopian Emperor Haile Selassie began a nine-day flight from England, including a risky overflight of newly occupied France, to Khartoum after a four-year exile from East Africa.

Imperial War Museum

Imperial War Museum

ABOVE: Armed with captured Italian weapons, Ethiopian soldiers gather in their capital city of Addis Ababa following the return of Emperor Haile Selassie from more than four years in exile. TOP: Ethiopian soldiers clear a native village in the Italian province of Eritrea in the spring of 1941. The Italians had invaded Ethiopia on October 3, 1935, and eventually overran the country, sending Haile Selassie into exile.

Perhaps the only man at 5 feet, 4 inches who could be called imposing, he was back to reclaim the throne he had risen to through civil war and Byzantine court intrigue, then was driven from by Mussolini. With the Foreign Office in London ambivalent and the British colonial administration in Khartoum hostile, he found a fervent ally in the officer sent from Cairo to liaise with him and organize guerrilla operations in Ethiopia.

Openly contemptuous of "the military ape," as he liked to call the average British officer, Orde Wingate was considered either a genius, a mad genius, or simply mad, depending on who was being asked. In Khartoum he provided ammunition for all sides as he argued for the kind of long-range penetration operation he would perfect in Burma, criticized Platt's strategy to his face, insulted Platt's officers, and greeted visitors stark naked, brushing his body and snapping at flies with a towel, even if one alit on the visitor's shoulder. He told Haile Selassie he "should take as his motto an ancient proverb found in Gese, 'If I am not for myself, who will be for me?' and trust in the justice of his cause."

On January 20, 1941, a transport plane landed Haile Selassie and Wingate on a dry riverbed on the frontier between Sudan and Ethiopia, where they held a small ceremony proclaiming the emperor's return, ran up Ethiopia's flag, and drank a toast in warm beer. The prospect of facing more than 30,000 Italians with only 50 British officers, 20 British noncommissioned officers, 800 Sudan Defense Force men, and 800 Ethiopian patriots did not concern Wingate in the slightest.

"Given a population favorable to penetra-

tion, a thousand resolute and well-armed men can paralyze for an indefinite period, the operations of 100,000," he said. To show his certainty about the outcome, he renamed his operation from Mission 101 to Gideon Force, after a Biblical commander who defeated 15,000 with only 300.

"We found ourselves in a strange world," a young captain in Gideon Force, William Allen, was to write. "The experience recalled old tales like *King Solomon's Mines*." Gideon Force had to trek across western Ethiopia through thick scrub and rocky, thorny wadis (the emperor more than once putting his shoulder to a truck), climb a 3,000-foot rock wall to a plateau, and endure heat, a shortage of water, jaundice, dysentery, malaria, and parasite flea infections. Dense clouds of flies hovered overhead. Camels died at the rate of over 50 a day. Vultures so fattened themselves on the carcasses that they stumbled about, too heavy to get airborne.

Captain Michael Tutton recalled, "The milling camels. The whistling wind. The black slopes of the mountain lit up by the fire. Teeth chattered."

Through it all, William Allen wrote that Wingate "never spared his own body…. Some demon chased Wingate over the highlands…. His pale blue eyes, narrow-set, burned with an insatiable glare. His spare, bony, ugly figure with its crouching gait had the hang of an animal run by hunting yet hungry for the next night's prey."

The terrain would prove a more formidable obstacle than the Italians. "The vivid imagination of the enemy was always ready to picture a company as a division for the first two days following its appearance, " Wingate reported. "It was essential to maintain the momentum of surprise, if benefit were to be obtained from his credulity and cowardice."

Wingate panicked the Italians with moonlight sniping of sentries and grenade-tossing raids from out of the night. Allen took part in one attack. "A mortar fire, maintained during the night, was directed against the fort, and by the morning the majority of the buildings within the fort area were burning. Machine-gun and mortar fire was continued against the fort throughout the whole of the second day; while from time to time native propagandists from loud-speakers harangued the Colonial troops within. The morale of the garrison of the fort began to sag as deserters began to find their way to the Patriot bands covering the road against any breakout to the west."

"WINGATE HIMSELF CONFESSED THAT WHEN THE MOMENT CAME TO RECEIVE THE VANQUISHED ARMY HE FELT MORE ALARM THAN AT ANY TIME DURING THE BATTLE."

With little resistance, the Italians abandoned position after position and finally fled from the provincial capital, Debra Markos.

Wingate was inspecting the empty Italian headquarters in Debra Markos with correspondent Edmond Stevens of the *Christian Science Monitor* when the phone rang. "You speak Italian. Take the call," Wingate told Stevens.

"But what shall I say?" Stevens responded.

"Say that you're the doctor [an Italian doctor had stayed to be with his wounded]. Tell them the British have captured Debra Markos and a division 10,000 strong is heading for the Blue Nile Crossing."

Though a neutral American, Stevens did as he was told.

"I gave the handle of the field telephone a vigorous yank, lifted the receiver and yelled Pronto…. After I had repeated the call several times an answering Pronto came from the other end. It was the Italian Army switchboard operator…. I then delivered Wingate's spurious message. 'What shall we do?' shrieked the operator. I answered, 'Clear out as quick as you can…' A few hours later Wingate dispatched 700 Ethiopians to take the once strongly held post of the Blue Nile Crossing."

Wingate took an even more audacious gamble after he negotiated the local Italian commander's surrender by messenger. "Wingate himself confessed that when the moment came to receive the vanquished army he felt more

The Italian stronghold of Mega Fort in southern Ethiopia lies temporarily quiet prior to an attack by the South African 1st Division in 1941. Fascist Italy suffered a serious blow to its prestige with the loss of its East African holdings.

National Archives

alarm than at any time during the battle," William Allen later recalled. "Across a level plain sloping to a hidden valley, the Italian commander and his staff of thirty officers advanced on horseback. Behind them came a battalion of 800 Blackshirts, and then column after column of colonial troops—many of whom were known to be reluctant to surrender. To receive this beaten army stood 36 Sudanese; these were formed up to make five lanes through which the enemy troops poured, laying down their arms in heaps; they then reformed into units and passed down into the valley where they expected to find the army which had beaten them. Instead they passed only small groups of Patriots and, standing grimly by, Wingate, lean and glaring in a shapeless wet toupee. But their arms already lay piled—covered by the Sudanis' Brens."

The same day Debra Markos fell, April 4, 1941, the Ethiopian capital of Addis Ababa fell after what the official British history of the campaign called "not so much a war as a well organized miracle."

Six weeks earlier, the King's African Rifles, South Africans, Nigerians, and Gold Coast troops under the command of General Alan Cunningham, as hard driving as Platt but considerably more affable, had invaded Italian Somaliland from Kenya. Intending only to capture the port of Kismayu, Cunningham, to his surprise, found himself overrunning the whole colony in just two weeks. The only resistance had been for three days at the village of Jumbo, on the far bank of the Juba River. There, the Italians fired 3,000 shells at the South Africans in three hours, forcing them to ford the river 10 miles upstream at waist level, then flank and drive the Italians out.

Fleeing Italian officers had weapons tossed from trucks to make room for their luggage. Some soldiers changed to civilian clothes, but as a South African soldier noted, "White stripes from ear to ear revealed where their chin straps had been. We left them alone." In their stampede, the Italians had left behind a guide to every airfield and landing strip they had in East Africa; in a month the South African Air Force destroyed what aircraft had not already fallen into disrepair on the ground.

Cunningham secured permission from Middle East headquarters in Cairo to swing north into Ethiopia, and his vehicles were racing across the Ogaden Desert at 60 miles per hour toward the central Ethiopian highlands. In the meantime, British forces from Aden landed in British Somaliland to find the Italians had also fled from there.

In their only resistance, the Italians fought the Nigerians for a day at the Marda Pass and three days at the Babile Pass before withdrawing. Knowing Cunningham's low opinion of African troops, the Nigerians' British brigadier made a point of writing him: "It had been said that he [the Nigerian soldier] could not go short of water; he has done so without a murmur. It had been said he could not fight well out of his native bush; at Marda Pass he fought his way up mountain sides which would be recognized as such even on the Frontier. It has been said he would not stand up well to shelling and machine-gun fire in the open; at Babile, under such fire, men were trying to cut down enemy wire with their machetes. It has been said that he would be adversely affected by high altitudes and cold: at Bisidimo, after a freezing night on the hill, he advanced over the open plain at dawn with the same quiet, cheerful determination he seems always to carry about with him. He is magnificent."

Imperial War Museum

Heaps of Italian weapons captured at Wolchefit Pass on September 28, 1941, are inspected by British soldiers of the King's African Rifles. Many of these weapons were later used to equip colonial troops.

As the Italians fled, their colonial troops began deserting and even turning on them. "The lives of the officers were in danger every night," one wrote. The Italian police chief in one town, besieged by rioting mutineers, telephoned the South Africans begging them to save him.

The Duke of Aosta abandoned Addis Ababa to flee northward. Cunningham's forces entered the city the next day; the unplanned, whirlwind campaign had cost 135 killed, 310 wounded, and 52 missing while taking 50,000 Italian prisoners.

A bitter Fascist official told correspondent Alan Moorehead, "We knew the end was coming … when they stopped saying we were invincible and started printing things like this: 'Consider as light the burdens you are enduring and the bigger burdens you must expect to endure tomorrow.'"

After some wrangling between Cunningham and Wingate, Haile Selassie entered the capital a month later. Over 50 Italian settlers had been murdered by vengeful Ethiopians before the emperor could issue what became known as the Golden Proclamation forgiving and protecting them.

The Duke of Aosta made his final stand at Amba Alagi, an 11,305-foot mountain stronghold on the Eritrean border. South African and Indian troops soon captured the surrounding lower peaks, turning the Duke's fortress into his prison.

The duke wrote grimly in his diary: "Constant firing all day long. We spend the day jumping from one rock to another, belly to the ground, with grenade splinters coming from all sides and volleys from the machine guns that hit the rocks behind us, splattering us with pieces of stone. We are covered with dust and dirt from the explosions. Every three minutes, a

Continued on page 77

By Al Hemingway

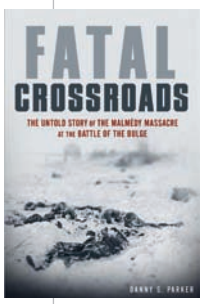
National Archives

An American soldier gazes at the corpses of U.S. soldiers killed by Jochen Peiper's SS Panzer troops near Malmedy, during the Battle of the Bulge.

Blood in the Snow

Eyewitness accounts give readers a tragic insight into the Malmedy Massacre.

BEFORE WORLD WAR II, THE PEACEFUL, SERENE BELGIAN VILLAGE OF MALMEDY, located in the eastern portion of the country in the province of Liege, was a resort. Many would travel there because of the reputed healing waters of the nearby spas.



Unfortunately, the Nazi invasion during the war put a halt to the tourist trade. Because of its strategic location, the hamlet was considered vital, and during the Battle of the Bulge the Germans raced across the region to cut off Allied units.

It was near the village of Malmedy on December 17, 1944, that one of the worst atrocities of World War II took place against American soldiers. More than 80 U.S. servicemen were gunned down in cold blood in an open field by SS units.

In his latest book, ***Fatal Crossroads: The Untold Story of the Malmedy Massacre at the Battle of the Bulge*** (Da Capo Press, Cambridge, MA, 2011, 416 pp., photographs, maps, notes, $26.00, hardcover), historian Danny S. Parker gives a riveting account of that awful winter day from those who miraculously survived the horrendous ordeal.

While traveling to Malmedy the morning of December 17, the men of the 285th Field Artillery Observation Battalion came under heavy fire from SS units commanded by SS Lt. Col. Jochen Peiper, a notoriously brutal leader who had seen action on the Eastern Front.

Peiper was instructed by his superior officers, especially 6th SS Panzer Army General Sepp Dietrich, to breach the Allied lines, cross the Meuse River, and seize Antwerp. Although the plan was rife with shortcomings, Peiper nevertheless took on his assignment with vigor and would let nothing stand in his way until he had accomplished his objectives—even if it meant slaughtering prisoners and innocent civilians.

Outmanned and outgunned, about 120 soldiers of the 285th FAOB surrendered and were marched to an open field where they were systematically raked with machine-gun fire. As many lay dying and moaning for mercy, SS troopers strolled among the carnage and callously put bullets in their heads.

Staff Sergeant William Hite Merriken had been struck by several rounds in his back. The Virginia native managed to keep still with his face pressed against the snow. One GI had somehow managed to fall on top of Merriken when the shooting began and was now crying out in pain. When two German soldiers neared, they fired several bullets into the wounded man, killing him and wounding Merriken in the knee. To keep from crying out, he bit his arm. The pair walked away, and Merriken had lived through the worst day of his live.

Although those involved in the Malmedy massacre,including Peiper, were captured after the war, most would escape the death penalty and only several dozen would get a life sentence for their part in the murders.

Peiper was released from prison in 1956 and took up residence in France. Former French resistance fighters and Communist sympathizers ultimately unearthed Peiper's sordid past, and he soon received death threats. In July 1976, he was shot several times. His house was set on fire, and Peiper's burned remains were discovered in the rubble. No one was arrested for the incident.

Like the other American survivors, Merriken would make it back to his hometown of Bedford, Virginia, find employment, marry, and raise a family. But that horrific day, just eight days before Christmas in 1944, would haunt him forever.

To ensure that people remember the horror of that day, Malmedy survivor Harold Billow carefully places 100 small American flags on his front lawn four times a year.

"When I put out the flags, it reminds me of that day," he said. "I feel happy that somehow some of us got out of there alive."

You deserve a factual look at . . .

Muslim Arab Anti-Semitism

Why it makes peace very difficult – almost impossible

Anti-Semitism has often and rightfully been called the longest hatred, the oldest prejudice. It has plagued Europe for a very long time and has, over the centuries, brought untold suffering to the Jewish people. Its most deadly expression was the Nazi Holocaust, which caused the death of 6 million Jews and extinguished ancient civilizations in much of Europe. So terrible, so evil were those events that anti-Semitism was shunned and repudiated by the civilized world.

What are the facts?

Anti-Semitism is integral to Muslim culture. But while anti-Semitism has indeed been shunned by the civilized world, things are quite different in the Muslim/Arab world because anti-Semitism is an integral part of their religion and culture. The Muslim countries are the only places in the world in which anti-Semitism is publicly endorsed and where it flourishes. The Koran abounds in anti-Semitic statements. An expression of that hatred toward Jews is imbued in Muslim children from an early age. It is the fate of Jews in Muslim lands. For centuries they were tolerated, but only in the submissive capacity of "*dhimmis*" – second class citizens. They were subjected to countless humiliations, bizarre rules of conduct and clothing and in many cases to assaults and pogroms. When the state of Israel was founded in 1948, hundreds of thousands of Jews in Muslim lands had to flee for their lives or were driven from their homes, where they had lived, in most cases, for centuries. When Israel emerged victorious from the 1967 Six-Day War, virtually all of the remaining Jews were expelled – from Iraq, Yemen, Syria, Egypt, Libya, Algeria and Morocco. In those countries, virtually no Jews remain today. The vast majority of them wound up in Israel where they and their descendants form a large part of the population and are fully integrated, of course. Compare that to the Palestinian refugees, who, mostly at the urging of their leaders, fled the nascent Jewish state in 1948. Their descendants, who have now miraculously increased to 5 million, still live today in miserable refugee camps, at the dole of the world – mostly of the United States, of course.

> "How can one make peace with such people, with hatred like that?"

Adolf Hitler's book *Mein Kampf,* which is prohibited in Germany, is, in Arab and Farsi translations, a perennial best seller in Muslim countries. So is the fraudulent invention *The Protocols of the Elders of Zion*. The Muslim world is the only place in which those scurrilous books are readily available. A recent Egyptian television series of 41 installments, based on the "Protocols," was a huge success in the Muslim world.

Holocaust denial. Holocaust denial is a favorite topic in the Muslim world. The president of the Palestinian Authority, Mahmoud Abbas (a reputed "moderate") wrote his doctoral thesis with this title: "The Other Side: The Secret Relationship Between Nazism and the Zionist Movement." In some regards, Arab Jew-haters are even worse than their infamous predecessors. For all their terrible deeds, the Nazis never lionized their killers, named streets or buildings after them or encouraged their children to emulate them. That is, however, standard practice in the Muslim world. To kill Jews, to become a martyr, is the highest goal and promises immediate access to a paradise of unbelievable pleasures.

Many people believe that the existence of the state of Israel is the cause of this hatred and that Muslim anti-Semitism would disappear if the Jewish state would disappear. But that is not true. As former "refusenik" and Jewish Agency Chairman, Natan Sharansky, has said: "The Jewish state is no more the cause of anti-Semitism today than the absence of the Jewish state was a century ago."

Hatred of Jews is an integral part of Arab/Muslim culture and did not come about with the creation of the Jewish state. The Grand Mufti of Jerusalem, Haj Amin al-Husseini, at that time the highest Islamic authority in that part of the world, was a staunch and steadfast ally of the Nazis, a trusted accomplice of Hitler. He personally raised SS Waffen troops among the Bosnian Muslims and promised the Nazis that he would fully cooperate with them in the extermination of the Jews in the Middle East. That was in the 1930's – 20 years before the creation of Israel. One shudders to imagine what the Arabs would have done to the Jewish residents of the area if the Nazis had come out victorious in World War II.

Israel has tried for over 60 years to come to terms with its Arab-Muslim neighbors. But it is difficult to make peace with those who think of them as sons of pigs and apes. In the words of Hezbollah's secretary general, Hasan Nasrallah, who declared: "If we searched the entire world for a person more cowardly, despicable, weak or feeble... we would not find anyone like the Jew." How can one make peace with such people, with hatred like that?

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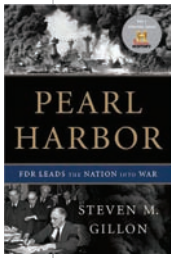
Pearl Harbor: FDR Leads the Nation to War by Steven M. Gillon, Basic Books, New York, 2011, 240 pp., photographs, notes, $25.99, hardcover.



As the author states, there have been a plethora of books about the Japanese sneak attack on Pearl Harbor on December 7, 1941. As he so adeptly points out, however, his book focuses on the events immediately following the tragedy and how President Franklin Delano Roosevelt summoned all his inward strength, courage, and ironically enough of his deceptive skills, to inform congressional leaders and the American people that their nation had been attacked.

Because that fateful December day was unusually warm, many Americans did not receive the news about the attack on the Hawaii until hours later. Many had ventured out to escape the winter doldrums to get some Christmas shopping done and enjoy the weather.

Roosevelt, always the consummate politician, controlled much of the information about what happened, deliberately not releasing the magnitude of the damage and the casualties.

FDR had his reasons for holding back vital facts. First, he wanted to maintain the morale of the American people. Also, he did not want the Japanese to believe that Hawaii was so weakened by the attack that they might decide to launch a ground assault there. Confusion reigned in the hours after the aerial assault, and the president and his staff needed to sift through the reports to determine what was true and what was false.

FDR was forced to make on-the-spot decisions with little time to consider their far-reaching consequences. He was no stranger to making such hard choices; for most of his time in office he dealt with monumental events such as the Great Depression, natural disasters like the dust bowl of the Midwest, and assisting Great Britain in staying afloat in its war with Germany in 1939.

FDR was an unusual person who, according to one confidant, found it difficult to make and maintain personal friendships. He used people and then callously tossed them aside when they did not suit his purpose any longer.

Yet, during those moments right after Pearl Harbor, when America held its breath, he rose to the occasion and did what had to be done to place the country on a war footing and defeat Japan and Germany, saving the world for democracy.

Sacrifice on the Steppe: The Italian Alpine Corps in the Stalingrad Campaign, 1942-1943

Short Bursts

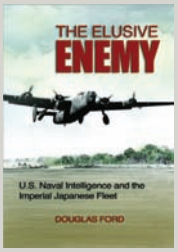
Fogg in the Cockpit: Howard Fogg—Master Railroad Artist, World War II Fighter Pilot by Richard and Janet Fogg, Casemate Publishers, Havertown, PA, 2011, 360 pp., photographs, $32.95, hardcover.

Howard Fogg was one talented individual. Not only was he America's premier railroad artist, but he dropped his palette and brush to become a fighter pilot in World War II.

Originally New Yorkers, the Fogg family eventually migrated to the Midwest. After graduating from Dartmouth College, Fogg landed a job with the Union Pacific Railroad and later the Baldwin Locomotive Works prior to the war.

During the conflict, Fogg was assigned to the 359th Fighter Group and flew Republic P-47 Thunderbolts and North American P-51 Mustangs. More importantly, he kept a very detailed diary chronicling his wartime experiences which his son used as the basis for this book.

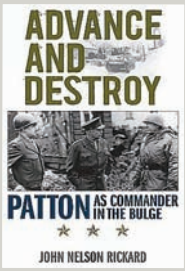
When he passed away in October 1996, his family spread his ashes along a section of Union Pacific track in Wyoming. Just moments later, a freight train sped by, a fitting end to a great artist—and fighter pilot.



The Elusive Enemy: U.S. Naval Intelligence and the Imperial Japanese Fleet by Douglas Ford, Naval Institute Press, Annapolis, MD, 2011, 320 pp., maps, notes, index, $29.95, hardcover.

The author focuses on three concepts that guided the U.S. Navy when fighting the Japanese during World War II. First, because the U.S. and the Japanese had never been at war with each other, intelligence personnel considered it a top priority to determine how the enemy conducted themselves in battle. Second, the combat capabilities of the Japanese Navy were taken into serious consideration because planners realized that the United States and Japan would be locked in a protracted air-land-sea campaign for some time. Lastly, despite the racial slurs and derogatory remarks directed at the Japanese, that mind-set was not part of the intelligence system. The Navy formulated its opinions based on experiences of foreign nations who had fought the Japanese to determine their capabilities.

Ford delivers a fascinating book that will give the reader a whole new perspective on the Pacific War.



Advance and Destroy: Patton as Commander in the Bulge by John Nelson Rickard, University Press of Kentucky, Lexington, 2011, 352 pp., maps, photographs, bibliography, notes, $34.95, hardcover.

Much has been written about George Patton, the flamboyant general who was the center of much controversy in World War II. This book examines his strategy and actions during the Battle of the Bulge. Many of Patton's superiors, as well as those who fought against him, held him in high regard as a soldier.

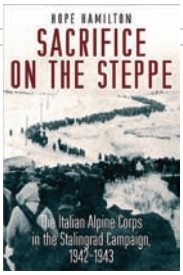
The author writes that Patton warrants his place as one of the top commanders in the European Theater because of his "high energy" and "effective command technique." Despite his shortcomings, especially when he thoughtlessly slapped a soldier suffering from combat fatigue in a field hospital in Sicily, General Dwight D. Eisenhower, supreme Allied commander in Europe, placed his faith in Patton as a leader and remained loyal to him.

The Gang That Shot Up Hollywood by John Stanley, Creatures at Large Press, Pacifica, CA, 2011, 212 pp., index, photographs, $21.99, softcover. Although some of this book discusses actresses, actors, and directors not associated with the military, there is a section devoted to World War II, especially the Battle of Iwo Jima. The author, an entertainment reporter for more than 30 years with the *San Francisco Chronicle*, Stanley not only writes about the film *Sands of Iwo Jima* starring the legendary John Wayne, but also Lou Lowery, who snapped the first flag-raising picture, and Joseph Rosenthal, a *San Francisco Chronicle* photographer who took the iconic flag-raising photo atop Mount Suribachi on Iwo Jima.

Stanley also mentions the military careers of actor James Stewart, a retired U.S. Air Force brigadier general, and director Samuel Fuller, a veteran of the 1st Infantry Division during World War II.

The book is filled with photos and numerous anecdotes. A good read. □

by Hope Hamilton, Casemate Publishers, Havertown, PA, 2011, 366 pp., maps, photographs, index, notes, $32.95, hardcover.



The author has a very keen interest in the Italian Alpine Corps which fought at the Battle of Stalingrad on the German side in World War II. She had two uncles who served in the elite unit, both of whom miraculously survived the awful ordeal. They both managed to escape being killed, but they had to endure the brutal Russian winter.

Three Italian alpine divisions were sent to the Eastern Front, all of them marching hundreds of miles over horrible terrain. Setting up positions along the Don River, and outnumbered by their German counterparts, many of the Italian soldiers were still wearing summer uniforms suited for the desert and had antiquated weapons and equipment left over from World War I.

As the savage fighting continued, the Italians witnessed firsthand the extreme brutality of the Germans toward Russian civilians. Soon, most of them began to sympathize with these noncombatants and started to despise the German Army and its method of waging war. Also, the Germans treated the Italians as inferior soldiers even though they had performed remarkably well with second-rate material and arms.

When the Russians mounted a huge offensive against their lines, the Germans fled and never notified the Italian troops. The alpine soldiers put up a dogged defense but finally succumbed to the overwhelming superiority of the Russians. Both of Hamilton's uncles spent time in a POW camp. When both came home, it was not to a hero's welcome.

Hamilton, who speaks fluent Italian, spent a decade tracing the fighting record of the alpine divisions. Interspersed with tales from her uncles, she has done a remarkable job telling their story and finally paying tribute to their heroic achievements on the Russian Front.

Hell Is So Green: Search and Rescue Over the Hump in World War II by Lt. William Diebold, edited by Richard Matthews, Lyons Press, Guilford, CT, 2011, 262 pp., $22.95, hardcover.

Here is a wonderful firsthand story of an extraordinarily brave individual, Lieutenant William Diebold, a member of the U.S. Army's Air Transport Command who rescued downed pilots flying over the Hump.

The Hump was a treacherous route over the eastern Himalayas. Pilots braved the weather and hazardous mountains in rickety aircraft to keep Chiang Kai-shek's Chinese Army, which was fighting the Japanese, supplied. More than 3,000 pilots crashed in what was later dubbed "Aluminum Alley" because of the numerous aircraft that went down in the region.

Diebold, who died in 1965, managed to write his memoirs with the intention of publishing them. His untimely death prevented that. But his daughter and writer Richard Matthews were able to resurrect Diebold's incredible tale of flying over the Hump.

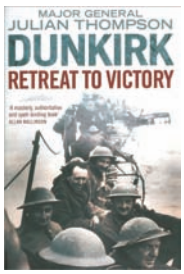
The book begins with Diebold's arrival in Assam, India. While checking in he learned that a native had brought a message from a P-51 Mustang fighter pilot who had crashed and was slowly dying in a remote portion of the jungle. Diebold quickly volunteered to parachute in, locate the man, and help bring him out. Because of his efforts, the pilot was ultimately saved, the first of Diebold's many such attempts at locating and saving Allied crewmembers.

Here is a great book that concentrates on another little-known part of the conflict where brave men such as Diebold risked their lives daily to save their fellow pilots and air crews.

Dunkirk: Retreat to Victory by Major General Julian Thompson (Ret.), Arcade Publishing, New York, 2011, 352 pp., maps, photographs, notes, index, $24.95, hardcover.

The author, a retired major general of the Royal Marines, gives a convincing argument that the small, ill-equipped and ill-trained British Expeditionary Force that was sent to France in 1940 to stem the tide of the German advance fought extremely well despite the aforementioned drawbacks.

Sandwiched between two massive German forces on the northern coast of France in May 1940, the British fought heroically to avoid capture. Surprisingly, German leader Adolf Hitler stopped his armored units, a decision still debated by historians to this day, and gave time for the Royal Navy and a flotilla of civilian watercraft to evacuate thousands of British and French soldiers from the beaches.



Thompson writes that the rescue of these men, together with England winning the air war during the Battle of Britain, would ultimately buy the island nation time to retrain and rearm its army, which had been cut during peacetime and led by officers with no foresight on how to fight and defeat the elite German forces that were rolling over western Europe.

Dunkirk: Retreat to Victory is a real eye opener and a fresh look at a battle always thought of as a disastrous defeat transformed into a great victory five years later.

Saving Big Ben: The USS Franklin and Father Joseph T. O'Callahan by John R. Satterfield, Naval Institute Press, Annapolis, MD, 2011, 288 pp., maps, photographs, bibliography, notes, $34.95, hardcover.

In the early morning hours of March 19, 1945, the aircraft carrier USS *Franklin,* nicknamed "Big Ben" by the crew, was steaming off the coast of Japan, the closest warship near the Japanese homeland up to that point.

Without warning, an enemy bomber swooped out of the clouds and let loose two 250-pound armor-piercing bombs. One projectile made its way through the flight deck and detonated near the bridge, lifting the 32-ton elevator from its shaft, bouncing it up and down like a yo-yo, before it fell back into its shaft. The second one followed the first but exploded above the aircraft awaiting takeoff. Fuel tanks filled with aviation gasoline and weapons ready to be loaded onto the planes began to ignite, causing a hellish scene aboard the ship.

From out of the horrendous destruction, where more than 700 crewmen would perish, rose Father Joseph T. O'Callahan, or "Father Joe" to the men. The good padre seemed to be everywhere, administering last rites, rescuing sailors, and risking his own life to enter severely damaged areas.

Because of his extreme heroism on that day, O'Callahan was awarded the Medal of Honor, but not without much pressure from politicians and newspapermen to have "Father Joe" presented with America's highest award.

O'Callahan's life was filled with much pain after the war, partly because he was a heavy smoker, but also because of his wartime experiences. Nonetheless, he rarely complained and continued to teach until a debilitating stroke prevented him from doing so.

"Father Joe" passed away in 1964, the first U.S. Navy chaplain to be given the Medal of Honor. The American flag draped atop his coffin was neatly folded and presented to his 90-year old mother, who outlived her famous son.

"Father Joe" had lived a life of giving unselfishly to others—and it never shone so brightly than on the tragic day in March 1945 while aboard "Big Ben."□

Simulation Gaming

By Joseph Luster

MEMOIR '44 IS NOW AVAILABLE FOR ONLINE PLAY.

As quite a few of you are no doubt aware, war and board games are a natural fit. While it's always going to be fun to point and click—or run and gun, if that's your preference—there's something that just feels right about taking on an opponent (or opponents) face-to-face on a physical playing field. Just ask the innumerable people who consider *Risk* one of the greatest games of all time.

One of the more celebrated examples of this comes in the form of *Memoir '44*, which, for good reason, was bestowed the International Gamers Award for General Strategy in the 2-Player Category in 2004. Despite being designed for two players, up to six can play the strategy title in teams, and up to eight can throw down via the "Overlord" scenario should they be in possession of two copies.

The hook here is, naturally, recreating quite a few of the historic battles of World War II—Omaha Beach, Pegasus Bridge, Operation Cobra, the Ardennes, and others—in the board game format. Over 15 battle scenarios mimic historical terrain, troop placements, and objectives, and it's the Commander's task to deploy troops through Command and Tactic cards, and implement the unique skills of the units at hand to the best of their ability. These units range from infantry and paratrooper to tank, artillery and beyond.

Memoir '44 was designed by Richard Borg, who aimed for a system that's deep but not overly complex. In his own words, "The game mechanics, although simple, still require strategic card play, timely dice rolling, and an aggressive yet flexible battle plan to achieve victory." These battles of the mind and spirit take place across a large, double-sided hex game board, which comes with 144 detailed Army miniatures, 60 illustrated Command cards , 44 Special Terrain tiles, 36 Obstacle pieces, and eight Custom Wooden dice.

Since its initial release, a variety of *Memoir '44* expansions have been developed, including Eastern Front, Winter/Desert Board Map, Pacific Theater, Mediterranean Theater, Winter Wars, the aforementioned Operation Overlord and more. Needless to say, there's nothing stopping fans of the board game from keeping themselves plenty occupied, so why exactly are we bringing *Memoir '44* up again now? That's easy: it's available to play online.

MEMOIR '44 ONLINE

Perfect for those who either aren't into board games, or simply want to play *Memoir '44* when no one else is physically present, *Memoir '44 Online* takes the strategic battles from the tabletop to the PC desktop. Like many online games, *'44* uses a pay-to-play model, meaning that it's free to download and kick into gear, but there's an in-game monetary system used to purchase certain items.

When you first download *Memoir '44 Online,* you'll get 50 free Gold Ingots, which is the in-game currency. These should last you long enough to get a feel for the game and hours of play under your belt, but keep in mind you'll later be offered the opportunity to purchase other Gold Ingot packages, which come in prices ranging from the Sergeant Pack ($8 = 200 Ingots) to the Major Pack ($60 = 2,400 Ingots). As with anything else, pay-to-play models have their pros and cons. On one hand, if you find the game's not for you then you haven't wasted any hard-earned money on a title you don't enjoy. On the other, get hooked and you could find yourself digging deeper than expected for another stack of ammo. "Just one more," you swear, sweaty hands gripping the mouse pensively as it hovers over the Purchase button.

Gold Ingots can also be used to buy subsequent scenarios. The first two, Pegasus Bridge and Juno Beach, are free from the start. All in all there are over 40 historical WWII scenarios, with new ones added on a regular basis. The turn-based combat plays out with a philosophy in line with Borg's initial concept: easy to learn, tough to master; but thanks to the format, video tutorials, in-game assistance, and AI for solo training are on hand to guide you from a rocky start to true online strategizing.

PUBLISHER
Days of Wonder

DEVELOPER
Days of Wonder

SYSTEM(S)
PC

AVAILABLE
Now

Playing against the computer AI will only take you so far, though. Playing against live opponents is where the real meat of *Memoir '44* lies, and doing so increases your Officer Rank incrementally. You kick off the game as a Cadet, and advancing to Second Lieutenant requires at least three victories against human opponents. Everyone starts with a U.S. Army Officer Insignia and Title, but can switch to a different nationality from there. These include British, Russian, French, German, Japanese, and Italian, each with their own set of Officer Ranks. While rising through the ranks is a natural progression given the ability to take the occasional victory, it only gets more challenging along the way.

As is the case with most games nowadays, *Memoir '44 Online* features its own set of Achievements, too. Anyone who plays modern titles knows how ruthlessly addictive Achievement hunting can be—or not, maybe you're one of the lucky few who are totally immune to their brand of wooing!—and those available here come in three categories: Honor Badges, Specialist Badges, and Expert Awards. Honor Badges are the easiest to get, and consist of relatively beginner-level objectives, like "Played a beach scenario on the water side" and "Killed two enemy units with an air power attack."

Way on the other end of the spectrum are Expert Awards, such as "Bring the Boys Back Home," which requires all of your infantry to survive the battle. All the players who have been awarded individual honors are viewable on the game's Achievement page, so it's a nice way of publicly tooting your own horn, but there are still quite a few Expert level challenges that no one has earned.

Whether you're a seasoned player of the *Memoir '44* board game or completely new to the world of head-to-head strategy, *Memoir '44 Online* is worth checking out. Take advantage of the zero cost level of entry and you may find yourself sucked deep into the relentless nature of online warfare.

Ravaged

Continued from page 63

U.S. President Franklin D. Roosevelt in Placentia Bay, off Newfoundland.

During their historic Atlantic Charter conference on August 9-12, 1941, the quarterdeck of the *Prince of Wales* was the scene of a moving Sunday morning divine service attended by Churchill, Roosevelt, their chiefs of staff, and British and American sailors and Marines of all ranks.

"Every word seemed to stir the heart," Churchill reported. "It was a great hour to live." But almost half of those who sang the hymns chosen by the prime minister were dead four months later.

Churchill was opening dispatch boxes on December 10 when the telephone shrilled at his bedside. It was Admiral Sir Dudley Pound, the First Sea Lord. He coughed and gulped, and his voice sounded odd to Churchill as he reported the loss of the *Prince of Wales* and the *Repulse*. "Are you sure it's true?" Churchill asked. The aging, ailing Pound, who had commanded a battleship at the Battle of Jutland in 1916, replied, "There is no doubt at all." The prime minister put the telephone down dazedly.

"I was thankful to be alone," he reported later. "In all the war I never received a more direct shock…. As I turned over and twisted in bed, the full horror of the news sank in upon me. There were no British or American capital ships in the Indian Ocean or the Pacific except the American survivors of Pearl Harbor, who were hastening back to California. Over all this vast expanse of waters Japan was supreme, and we everywhere were weak and naked."

The next morning, December 11, Churchill made a full statement in the House of Commons on "the new situation." He spoke of the long-drawn Libyan campaign hanging in the balance and warned that "very severe punishment awaited us at the hands of Japan." But, ever ready to summon up hope, he said, "On the other hand, the Russian victories had revealed the fatal error of Hitler's eastern campaign, and winter was still to assert its power. The U-boat war was at the moment under control, and our losses greatly reduced.

"Finally, four-fifths of the world were now fighting on our side. Ultimate victory was certain…. The House was very silent, and seemed to hold its judgment in suspense. I did not seek or expect more." □

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

Il Duce

Continued from page 71

plane dives on us, shooting with its front machine gun, then drops stick bombs and finally gives us another firing from the rear gun. I wish this diary had a sound track."

Mussolini had ordered the duke to "resist to the last limits of human endurance," but with medical services collapsing, ammunition low, and, perhaps worse for the Italians, their chianti supply blown up, he authorized capitulation.

The duke and 5,000 men surrendered on May 29, 1941. Italians isolated by the rainy season would hold out in other parts of Ethiopia for six months, but the Italian empire in East Africa was dead. Its demise was little noted. In Britain attention was fixed on the Blitz, the Middle East, and Greece. In Italy, Fascist press censorship kept it unreported, Ciano left it unremarked upon in his diary, and Mussolini dismissed it as "hav[ing] no effect on the outcome of the war."

Two of those involved in the empire's demise did not long outlive it. The Duke of Aosta, POW No. 1190, died the next year in Kenya of tuberculosis, Wingate two years after in a plane crash in Burma while directing his still controversial Chindit campaign.

The luck that carried American Legionnaire John Hasey unscathed through the assault on Massawa deserted him two months later in Syria. While in action against, ironically, Foreign Legionnaires loyal to Vichy, he was so critically wounded he was discharged and saw no further service in World War II while his Foreign Legion unit would go on to be decimated in North Africa, Italy, and Alsace-Lorraine.

The subordinate general, William Slim, went from East Africa to greater glory as he led the 14th Army to victory in Burma and became a field marshal while the commanding generals finished the war in obscurity. William Platt became commander in chief, East Africa, for what little that was now worth. Sent to command the Eighth Army in the Middle East with no experience whatever in armored warfare, Alan Cunningham was so crushed by Rommel that he spent the rest of the war in regional commands in Britain.

Emperor Haile Selassie avoided being overthrown in a 1960 coup attempt, but was deposed by Marxist officers in 1974. He died a year later in captivity, likely murdered. □

Author John W. Osborn, Jr., is a resident of Laguna Niguel, California. He previously wrote for WWII History on the Spanish Blue Division, the Long Range Desert Group, and the March on Baghdad.

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operation compass

Continued from page 39

companies screening the positions occupied by the 4th RHA. These British troops had arrived just 30 minutes before the leading elements of the retreating Italian Tenth Army appeared.

Machine-gun and artillery fire brought the Italian column to a halt. The Italians began to fan out across the desert to probe south only to find other elements of the Rifle Brigade blocking the road. Thus, Combe Force found itself in the path of the entire retreating Italian Tenth Army. At 6 PM, the 7th Hussars and elements of the 2nd RTR were ordered to attack the Italians on the road nearer to Beda Fomm at a terrain feature called the Pimple. The fighting continued all day on either side of the road, but despite increasing pressure and a growing shortage of ammunition, the Rifle Brigade and 11th Hussars continued to block the road.

On February 6 at 10:45 AM, the 10th Italian Bersaglieri with L-3 light tanks attacked the roadblock defended by the 11th Hussars and 2nd Battalion of the Rifle Brigade but were beaten when thousands of Italian soldiers began to surrender. The remainder of the 4th Armored Brigade (7th and 3rd Hussars) arrived and struck the Italians in their left flank just north of Beda Fomm.

During the night of February 6, quiet prevailed in the Beda Fomm area. At 11 AM the following day, General Virginio, Chief of Staff of the Tenth Army, arrived at 4th Armored Brigade headquarters to surrender. O'Connor wrote, "I think this may be termed a complete victory as none of the enemy escaped." Later on, in a communiqué to Wavell, O'Connor stated, "Fox killed in the open," to use British hunting parlance.

Wavell's force never exceeded 30,000 troops in battle; however, despite equipment wear and shortages of food, ammunition, and water, his Western Desert Force under O'Connor advanced 500 miles in 10 weeks and in the process destroyed the Italian Tenth Army. O'Connor captured 130,000 prisoners in contrast to 555 British troops killed and 1,373 wounded. After Beda Fomm, O'Connor's gaze shifted westward to Tripoli. Dorman-Smith was sent by the XIII Corps commander to meet Wavell in Cairo to ask for supplies and permission to move on Tripoli.

However, when Dorman-Smith arrived at Wavell's office only a map of Greece appeared on the wall. Maps of the desert had already been removed. Wavell said, "You see, Eric, I am planning my spring campaign!" Wavell was focused on Greece and giving his support to Eden's wish to send the most powerful force that could be raised across the Mediterranean to the Balkans.

O'Connor's offensive would advance no farther, taking up forward positions at El Agheila since Churchill ordered the westward movement of XIII Corps to halt there. Wavell designated the 6th Australian Division, part of the 7th Armored Division, and most of the supplies and air support for Churchill's doomed operations in Greece and Crete. With his advance coming to a halt, O'Connor was appointed commander BTE in Cairo, since Wilson was overseeing the British expedition to Greece and Crete.

On March 31, 1941, German General Erwin Rommel, while bolstering the Italians in Libya with the arrival of the Afrika Korps, launched his offensive against the British. The inexperienced 2nd Armored Division was swiftly defeated by the Nazis, necessitating a trip to the front by Wavell to confer with Lt. Gen. Sir Philip Neame, the commander of British and Commonwealth troops in Cyrenaica. O'Connor was also summoned and, although he refused to relieve Neame, stayed on to advise him.

Unfortunately, while traveling back to their headquarters on April 6, O'Connor and Neame were captured by a German patrol. O'Connor was imprisoned in a castle near Florence, Italy. On his third escape attempt, O'Connor reached British lines in Italy in December 1943. In Britain, he was knighted and promoted to the permanent rank of lieutenant general. In January 1944, O'Connor became commander of VIII Corps. He later fought in Western Europe.

During Operation Compass, Mussolini lost over 200,000 men. Wavell demonstrated a high degree of offensive spirit in ordering O'Connor's counteroffensive into Libya because the two divisions employed were the only troops available to defend Egypt, and one of them (4th Indian) was soon to be removed from O'Connor. The relatively untrained 6th Australian Division replaced the 4th Indian Division and performed superbly, capturing Bardia, Tobruk, and then Derna in January 1941. On February 7, the entire Italian Tenth Army surrendered at Beda Fomm.

This campaign demonstrated Wavell's brilliance; however, a large portion of the credit for the victory goes to the strategic vision and tactical capabilities of Richard O'Connor and Eric Dorman-Smith. □

Jon Diamond lives and practices medicine in Hershey, Pennsylvania. He has had numerous articles published in military history journals. Currently, he is completing a book on the British policy of appeasement.

John D. Hoptak | Instructor, School of Art & Humanities

John D. Hoptak is an American and Civil War historian and educator. Author of *The Battle of South Mountain*, *Our Boys Did Nobly*, *First in Defense of the Union*, and *Antietam: September 17, 1862*, Hoptak brings to life the riveting conflicts that divided a nation. Hoptak's laboratory is the Antietam National Battlefield, where as a Park Ranger he shares his vast knowledge about the bloodiest day of battle in U.S. history.

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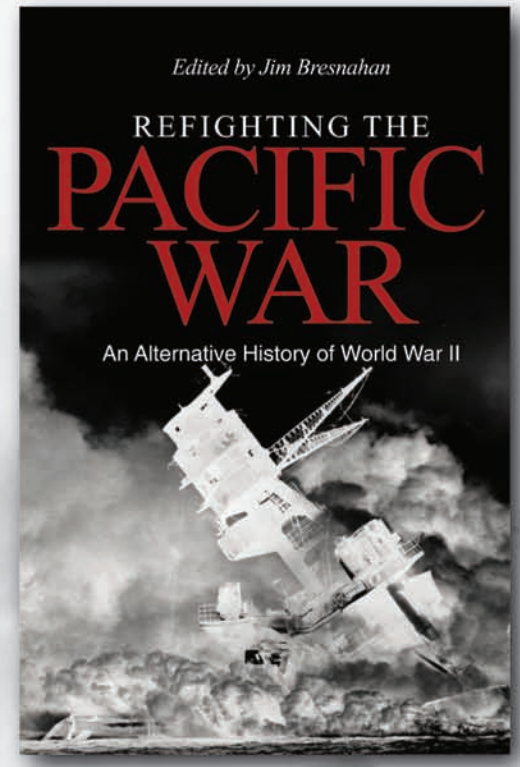

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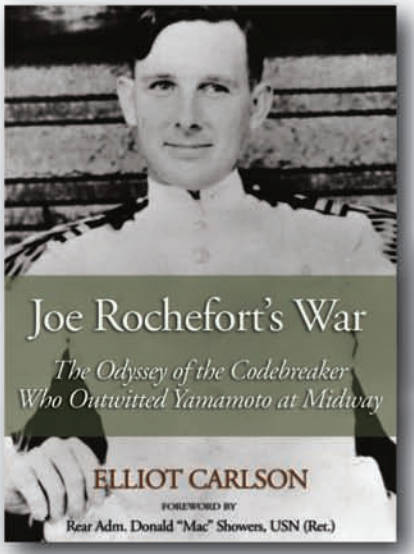

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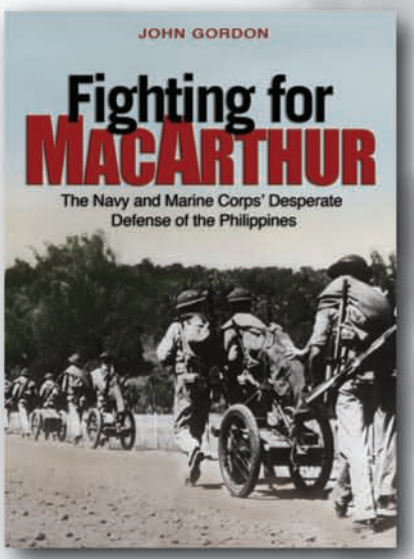

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