WWII QUARTERLY

Curtis 07256

JOURNAL OF THE SECOND WORLD WAR

WARFAREHISTORYNETWORK.com

B-24 NAVIGATOR
Shot Down OVER GERMANY

EYEWITNESS
D-DAY to V-E DAY

Army Rangers Holding Out at Zerf

Nightmare Battle for Buna

BRITISH COMMANDOS
Deadly Fight for Walcheren Island

PLUS:
HMS JERVIS BAY, U.S. NAVY'S FIRST ACE, THE FLYING "TANK," AND MORE!

WINTER 2016

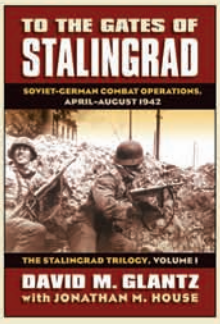
$9.99

0 74470 07256 0 6 1

RETAILER DISPLAY UNTIL MAR. 21

WWII QUARTERLY • WINTER 2016 Volume 7, No. 2

MODERN WAR STUDIES • The Eastern Front



Barbarossa 1941

Reframing Hitler's Invasion of Stalin's Soviet Empire

Frank Ellis

"Using a variety of newly available Soviet sources, Frank Ellis provides provocative and even controversial reinterpretations of German motives and behaviors during operation Barbarossa."
—**Roger Reese**, author of *Why Stalin's Soldiers Fought: The Red Army's Military Effectiveness in World War II*

600 pages, 36 photos, Cloth $39.95, Ebook $39.95

When Titans Clashed

How the Red Army Stopped Hitler
Revised and Expanded Edition

David M. Glantz and Jonathan M. House

"This major advance will supplant John Erickson's two massive volumes on the war in the east, *The Road to Stalingrad* and *The Road to Berlin,* as the standard reference book for nonspecialists."
—*Foreign Affairs*

576 pages, 29 photos, Cloth $45.00, Paper $19.95, Ebook $19.95

The Red Army and the Great Terror

Stalin's Purge of the Soviet Military

Peter Whitewood

"This is an excellent work that the field has needed for quite some time. Indeed, there is no other extant book in English on the military purges. Whitewood's writing is clear and elegant; his source base is thorough; and his argument is important and convincing. Overall, it's an impressive contribution."
—**David R. Stone**, author of *Hammer and Rifle: The Militarization of the Soviet Union, 1926–1933*

368 pages, Cloth $34.95, Ebook $34.95

Through the Maelstrom

A Red Army Soldier's War on the Eastern Front, 1942–1945

Boris Gorbachevsky

Translated and edited by Stuart Britton

Foreword by David M. Glantz

"A must-read for scholars of the Eastern Front."
—*Army History*

480 pages, 32 photos, Paper $29.95

The Stalingrad Trilogy

David M. Glantz with Jonathan M. House

"Glantz is the world's top scholar of the Soviet-German War."
—*Journal of Military History*

To the Gates of Stalingrad

Soviet-German Combat Operations, April–August 1942

The Stalingrad Trilogy, Volume 1

David M. Glantz with Jonathan M. House

678 pages, 80 photographs, 87 maps, Cloth $39.95

Armageddon in Stalingrad

September–November 1942

The Stalingrad Trilogy, Volume 2

David M. Glantz with Jonathan M. House

920 pages, 123 photographs, 49 tables, 97 maps, Cloth $39.95

Endgame at Stalingrad

Book One: November 1942

The Stalingrad Trilogy, Volume 3

David M. Glantz with Jonathan M. House

680 pages, 30 photographs, Cloth $39.95

Endgame at Stalingrad

Book Two: December 1942–February 1943

The Stalingrad Trilogy, Volume 3

David M. Glantz with Jonathan M. House

760 pages, 30 photographs, Cloth $39.95

Companion to *Endgame at Stalingrad*

David M. Glantz

848 pages, 54 maps, Cloth (unjacketed) $65.00

University Press of Kansas

Phone 785-864-4155 · Fax 785-864-4586 · www.kansaspress.ku.edu

EXPERIENCE THE ACTION OF WORLD WAR II AFLOAT!

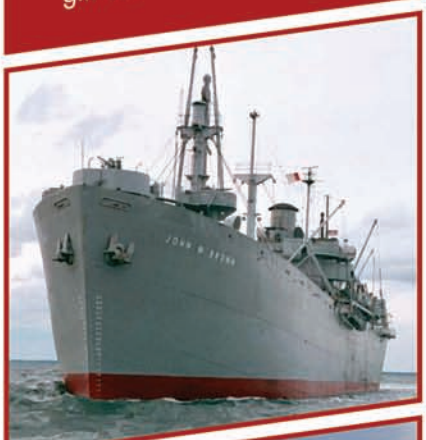
Aboard the Liberty Ship JOHN W BROWN

2016 CRUISES

Sunday, May 22
Norfolk, Virginia

Saturday, October 1
Baltimore, Maryland

Visit www.ssjohnwbrown.org for special pricing, group rates, gift certificates and more.



The SS JOHN W BROWN *is one of the last operating survivors from the great fleet of over 2,700 war-built Liberty Ships and the last operational troopship of World War II. The ship is a maritime museum and a memorial to the shipyard workers who built, merchant mariners who sailed, and the U.S. Navy Armed Guard who defended the Liberty ships during World War II. The JOHN W BROWN is fully restored and maintained as close as possible to her World War II configuration. Visitors must be able to walk up steps to board the ship.*

This exciting 6 hour day cruise *includes lunch, music of the 40's, period entertainment and flybys (conditions permitting) of wartime aircraft. Tour on-board museums, crew quarters, bridge and much more. See the magnificent 140-ton triple-expansion steam engine as it powers the ship through the water.*

- **Order your tickets online at: www.ssjohnwbrown.org**
- **For information call: 410-558-0164**

Last day to order tickets is 14 days before the cruise. Conditions and penalties apply to cancellations.

Project Liberty Ship is a Baltimore based, all volunteer, nonprofit organization.

CFC

Find us on Facebook

LIBERTY SHIP JOHN W. BROWN

TABLE OF CONTENTS

WWII QUARTERLY

Departments

COVER: A .50-caliber "tunnel-mounted" machine gun is fired from the bomb bay of a B-24 in 1942, prior to the introduction of the ball turret. See story on page 62. Photo: National Archives

Features

WWII Quarterly (ISSN 2151-3678) is published four times yearly by Sovereign Media, 6731 Whittier Avenue, Suite A-100, McLean, VA 22101-4554. (703) 964-0361. *WWII Quarterly,* Volume 7, Number 2 © 2015 by Sovereign Media Company, Inc., all rights reserved. Copyrights to stories and illustrations are the property of their creators. The contents of this publication may not be reproduced in whole or in part without consent of the copyright owner. ***Subscription services, back issues, and information:*** **(800) 219-1187** *or* write to *WWII Quarterly* **Circulation, WWII Quarterly, P.O. Box 1644, Williamsport, PA 17703.** Hardbound single copies: $19.99, plus $3 for postage. Yearly subscription in U.S.A.: $39.95; Canada and Overseas: $79.95 (U.S.). Editorial Office: Send editorial mail to *WWII Quarterly,* 6731 Whittier Avenue, Suite A-100, McLean, VA 22101-4554. *WWII Quarterly* welcomes editorial submissions but assumes no responsibility for the loss or damage of unsolicited material. Material to be returned should be accompanied by a self-addressed, stamped envelope. We suggest that you send a self-addressed, stamped envelope for a copy of our author's guidelines. **POSTMASTER: Send address changes to WWII Quarterly, P.O. Box 1644, Williamsport, PA 17703.**

EVER WONDER WHAT IT'S LIKE TO SLEEP IN SPACE?

We've all had nights when we just can't lie down in bed and sleep.

Whether it's from heartburn, cardiac problems, hip or backaches—could be a variety of reasons. Those are the nights we'd give anything for a comfortable chair to sleep in, one that reclines to exactly the right degree, raises feet and legs to precisely the desired level, supports the head and shoulders properly, operates easily even in the dead of night, and sends a hopeful sleeper right off to dreamland.

Our Perfect Sleep Chair® is just the chair to do it all. It's a chair, true—the finest of lift chairs— but this chair is so much more! It's designed to provide total comfort and relaxation not found in other chairs. It can't be beat for comfortable, long-term sitting, TV viewing, relaxed reclining and—yes!—peaceful sleep. Our chair's recline technology allows you to pause the chair in an infinite number of positions, including the Trendelenburg position and the zero gravity position where your body experiences a minimum of internal and external stresses. You'll love the other benefits, too: It helps with correct spinal alignment, promotes back pressure relief, and encourages better posture to prevent back and muscle pain.

And there's more! The overstuffed, oversized biscuit style back and unique seat design will cradle you in comfort. Generously filled, wide armrests provide enhanced arm support when sitting or reclining. The high and low heat settings along with the dozens of massage settings, can provide a soothing relaxation you might get at a spa – just imagine getting all that in a lift chair! Shipping charge includes white glove delivery. Professionals will deliver the chair to the exact spot in your home where you want it, unpack it, inspect it, test it, position it, and even carry the packaging away! Includes one year service warranty and your choice of fabrics and colors. If you're not 100% satisfied simply return the chair within 30 days for a refund of the product purchase price. – Call now!

Long Lasting DuraLux Leather

Tan | Chocolate | Burgundy

DuraLux II Microfiber

Cashmere | Chocolate | Burgundy

The Perfect Sleep Chair®

Call now toll free for our lowest price.

1-866-794-6499

Please mention promotional code 60517.

46391

The Refugee Crisis

The pictures are heartbreaking.

Thousands of refugees fleeing persecution by their government and possible death in their homeland, leaving all their possessions behind, spending their life savings and risking almost anything to escape an existence that had become intolerable. And for what? The chance to start a new life in foreign countries where the displaced don't even speak the language?

You may think that I'm referring to all the Syrians that have fled—or are trying to flee—the violence in their war-torn country. The civil war there has been going on for more than four years and more than 220,000 Syrians, caught in the crossfire, reportedly have died. Some 11 million have been displaced, most within their own borders and the rest to other countries.

Actually, I am seeing a parallel, back in 1933, when the Nazis were first beginning to persecute their Jewish citizens, and a flood of Jews—after paying the government to allow them to leave and surrendering their property to the Nazi state—tried to escape Germany. The problem was, nobody wanted them.

In 1933, according to the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum, there were only 523,000 Jews living in Germany, but the Nazis were gradually making life for the Jews unbearable. The passage of the "Nuremberg Laws" in 1935, which stripped Jews of virtually all their rights, and the Kristallnacht pogrom of November 1938, prompted more to try to emigrate.

The United States, still suffering from the effects of mass joblessness caused by the Great Depression, had strict limits mandated by the immigration laws that governed the number of refugees it was willing to accept; Assistant Secretary of State Breckinridge Long was the main obstacle to relaxed immigration quotas. Besides, there was a strong undercurrent of anti-Semitic attitudes in the United States at the time; sympathy for the plight of German Jews was at a low ebb.

One particularly egregious episode took place in May 1939, when the German passenger liner SS *St. Louis* left Hamburg with 937 desperate refugees on board, all trying to reach safety. Originally permitted to land in Cuba, the authorities there rescinded the permit and refused to allow the refugees to dock.

The ship went on to Miami, where it was again denied permission to land and disembark its passengers; the ship sailed back to Europe. When it landed in Hamburg, the refugees were dispersed to France, Belgium, Denmark, and Holland. when those countries were invaded and occupied by the Nazis a year later, many of the refugees ended up in concentration and death camps.

But there is a new wrinkle in today's refugee crisis that did not exist in the 1930s: terrorism. Many of the European governments willing to take in the Syrians have expressed fear that there may be "disguised" ISIS or al Qaeda terrorists mixed in with the legitimate asylum seekers.

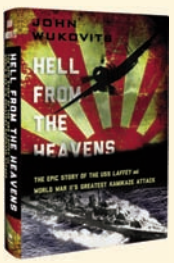
Although Secretary Long feared that the Nazis would sneak spies and saboteurs into the hordes of refugees trying to get into the United States, there is no proof to substantiate that fear. There were no terrorists on board the SS *St. Louis*—no Nazis pretending to be Jews in order to reach another country where they could make mischief—just frightened people escaping their homeland.

Are we seeing a repeat of the 1930s? Only time will tell.

—Flint Whitlock

CORRECTION

In the Fall issue, we inadvertently failed to mention that John Wukovits' article, "Agony on the Afterdeck," was excerpted from his newest book, *Hell From the Heavens: The Epic Story of the USS Laffey and World War II's Greatest Kamikaze Attack*. Reprinted courtesy of Da Capo Press, 2015.



WWII Quarterly Volume 7 • Number 2

WARFAREHISTORYNETWORK

CARL A. GNAM, JR.
Editorial Director, Founder

FLINT WHITLOCK
Editor
WWIIQuarterly@gmail.com

SAMANTHA DETULLEO
Art Director

KEVIN M. HYMEL
Research Director

CONTRIBUTORS:
Glenn Barnett, Jon Diamond, Stephen D. Lutz, Chuck Lyons, Nathan Prefer, Ralph Puhalovich, Patrick Reynolds, Roy Stevenson, Phil Zimmer

ADVERTISING OFFICE:

BEN BOYLES
Advertising Manager
(570) 322-7848, ext. 110
benjaminb@sovhomestead.com

MARK HINTZ
Vice President & Publisher

TERRI COATES
Subscription Customer Services
sovereign@publishersservicesassociates.com

PUBLISHERS SERVICE ASSOCIATES
Circulation Fulfillment

CURTIS CIRCULATION COMPANY
WORLDWIDE DISTRIBUTION

SOVEREIGN MEDIA COMPANY, INC.
6731 Whittier Ave., Suite A-100
McLean, VA 22101-4554

www.WarfareHistoryNetwork.com

SUBSCRIPTION CUSTOMER SERVICE AND BUSINESS OFFICE:

2406 Reach Road
Williamsport, PA 17701
(800) 219-1187

PRINTED IN THE USA.

From the publishers of WWII QUARTERLY Magazine

Get these authoritative e-Book Publications from the Warfare History Network absolutely FREE!

Warfare History Network has created these e-Books and is making them available to you **free with no strings attached.** Well, actually there's one string attached. When you download any or all of these free e-Books we'll sign you up as a member of the Warfare History Network, and the good news is that's **also completely free.**

Warfare History Network is the official web portal of MILITARY HERITAGE, WWII HISTORY MAGAZINE, WWII QUARTERLY, and CIVIL WAR QUARTERLY. As a member of Warfare History Network you'll have access to all of the fresh, in-depth perspectives on a wide variety of topics including battles, weapons, leaders, strategy, and more. All written by the top experts in the field.

As a member of Warfare History Network you'll have access to hundreds of military history articles from the archives of our magazines, you'll be able to download any and all of our free e-Books, plus you'll receive WARFARE HISTORY DAILY, our free email newsletter to bring you important new facts and insights, all at absolutely no cost to you.

WARFAREHISTORYNETWORK

There's no cost, no risk, and no obligation to buy anything.

Download your free e-Books today at:

www.WarfareHistoryNetwork.com/free-briefings

The P-39 Airacobra was America's unsung aerial hero.

The P-39 Airacobra was a bit like Rodney Dangerfield—it "couldn't get no respect," especially from those who never piloted the "Flying Cannon" built by the Buffalo, New York-based Bell Aircraft Corp.

But those who flew the P-39 came to love it and its idiosyncrasies. When flown properly, the plane—built around its fearsome 37mm nose-centered cannon—could knock anything out of the sky, cause calloused, flak-tossing antiaircraft crews to scamper for the ditches, and reign havoc over fortified enemy command and control positions with its four .50-caliber machine guns blazing away in later versions of the craft.

At the same time, the plane was considered underpowered with its 1,200 horsepower Allison V-1710 engine, although it could do 376 miles per hour at 15,000 feet. Also, it lacked a supercharger that limited its effectiveness above 17,000 feet. Worse, the P-39 had a reputation for tumbling out of control when operated by inexperienced pilots.

"Nothing could touch a P-39 used below 15,000-feet" contended American Air Ace Lt. Col. William A. Shomo who flew P-39s, P-40s, F-6Ds, and a P-51D in WWII. He wouldn't have hesitated to have even taken on the vaunted P-38 at lower altitudes because of the extreme maneuverability of the "Flying Cannon." And it could tangle successfully with a Japanese Zero, he argued, if the American pilot kept his airspeed at 300 miles per hour or better so the enemy "couldn't turn inside you."

The Americans in the field experimented with the aircraft throughout the war to continually gain an edge and some additional speed, eventually stripping off a chunk of belly armor under the seat that weighed some 750 pounds. With those modifications, the P-39 could "fly like a bumble bee," asserted Shomo. He and his men especially liked the stinging power of the plane's 37mm cannon that could, if necessary, fire off some 30 rounds in 12 seconds. The hefty warhead had a definite arching trajectory, but one could eventually learn to "drop the shell right into someone's shirt pocket as he walked along the beach," said the ace.

Bell P-39 Airacobras flown by Major George Greene, Jr. (foreground) and Lt. Col. Boyd "Buzz" Wagner take on Zeros of the famed Tainan Kokutai over the Salamaua Peninsula of New Guinea, April 30, 1942. Illustration by Jack Fellows.

Shomo and his men used the cannon effectively, especially against Japanese barge traffic that ran supplies from ships to shore installations. They would wait for the barges to get loaded up and head to shore with 75 fully armed troops or with food for 6,000 troops before they would pounce. A well-placed cannon shell at the base of the steering column would blow out the bottom of the barge, explode the fuel tanks near the steering column, and the whole vessel would be gone within ten seconds.

Both the Americans and others who used the P-39 were dismissive of rumblings about the jamming problems of the 37mm cannon. They found that proper maintenance was the key, along with utilizing the mechanical pistol-grip charging system to eject an occasional jammed shell and shove in the next shell. Most models of the craft carried 30 cannon rounds, so "our biggest problem," Shomo said, "was running out of ammunition before we ran out of targets!"

The P-39 was literally built around its nose-centered cannon. That made it easy to aim, but also necessitated moving the engine behind the pilot to make room for the cannon in the one-man fighter. The arrangement gave the pilot superb visibility out the plane's comparatively narrow nose and via the plane's distinctive car-type doors on either side of the cockpit.

A few pilots, though, found it a bit disconcerting that the engine's quickly-spinning, ten-foot long power shaft ran directly under their seat and near their "personal vitals" before emerging up front to link up with the propeller.

The plane saw action with the Americans in the South Pacific, the Aleutians, the Panama Canal Zone, Europe, and elsewhere. The British and Free French also put it to good use.

But it was the Soviets—engaged in the

Amber Books

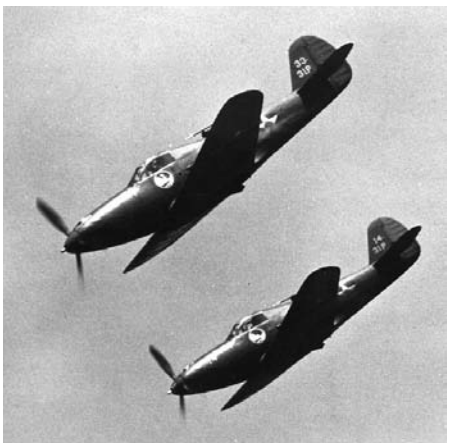
ABOVE: Russian version of the P-39, as supplied to the Soviets through the Lend-Lease program. BELOW: The P-39 had a pointed nose silhouette due to the fact that the Allison V-1710 V-12 engine was mounted behind the pilot.

long and bloody life-or-death struggle with Nazi Germany—that adopted, adapted, and came to love the plane perhaps more than anyone else. It provided the Russians with the "push-back" that helped turn the tide in the Soviets' "Great Patriotic War." The hardy plane, constructed to withstand the recoil of its cannon and the stress caused by its long twisting power shaft, proved up to the challenge of the Russian winters and German defenses.

The first Airacobras arrived by ship in northern Soviet ports in late December 1941 or early January 1942 from Great Britain after the British had largely rejected the plane after testing it against their own Spitfires and Hurricanes as well as a captured Messerschmitt Bf-109E. The Soviets, desperate to delay and destroy the fast-moving invaders, quickly embraced the limited numbers of the early model P-39 with its smaller 20mm Hispano-Suiza cannon, four Browning .303-caliber machine guns, and two Browning .50-caliber machine guns.

World War II was fought with intense veracity worldwide, but rarely with more savagery than on the Eastern Front as the Red Bear first recoiled from the fierce German onslaught before regrouping and roaring back. The Soviets eventually lost more than 26 million people in that gigantic struggle that raged for four years across thousands of square miles.

The intensity of the struggle was such that a Soviet combat aircraft lasted, on average, only three months, and a Russian tank faired only slightly better. In the desperate winter of 1941-1942, Soviet forces lost one-sixth of their aircraft and one-tenth of their



National Archives

armored equipment every week!

The continuing flow of Lend-Lease materiel and improved tactics were crucial. The Soviets had to learn to make every bullet, tank and airplane count. They realized that the P-39 could be a potential game changer and they played to the plane's strength in ground-attacks against the invaders, largely using it below 17,000 feet in a never-ending effort to keep the Luftwaffe away from Soviet ground forces and key installations.

Depending on the source cited, eventually anywhere from 4,423 to 4,750 P-39s were transferred to the Soviet Union, so that nation received roughly half of the 9,585 Airacobras built. And the P-39 comprised approximately one-third of all the Lend-Lease planes received by that nation. Most of those sent to the USSR came by ship to Iran and then flown by ferry pilots to Soviet bases, or flown directly from the factory to Fairbanks, Alaska, where Soviet ferry pilots flew them to the Soviet-German front.

The Soviets received several models of the P-39, although most were Q-models with the Allison engine, the 37mm cannon, and four .50-caliber machine guns—two located in the upper nose and two wing-mounted. At Soviet request, the wing-mounted machine guns were later deleted.

A number of Westerners have mistakenly said the Soviets used the P-39, with its powerful 37mm cannon, as a flying tank buster. While some German tanks may have been struck on occasion by the cannon, the craft was used to its best advantage to clear the skies, silence artillery and antiaircraft batteries, and disrupt German supply lines and land-based command centers. In simple fact, the Soviet P-39s were not supplied with armor-piercing 37mm ammunition, and the standard-issue high-explosive round was not capable of knocking out armored targets.

The pilot had a bit of a learning curve with the plane. Ejecting from the craft could be tricky, especially in a left spin that could lead to the pilot being struck by the tail assembly. A large number of glazing screws were used in the cockpit canopy and these were covered by rubber caps that dried out and fell off, exposing sharp threads that proved dangerous in tight aerial maneuvers or in ejecting from the plane.

To help prevent the center of gravity from shifting during firing, cannon casings and the links of the body-encased machine guns were collected in the lower front fuselage and emptied upon landing. The machine guns in the wings were heated by hoses from the plane's radiator to prevent

National Archives

P-39s flying over Dale Mabry Army Air Field in Tallahassee, Florida. Reputedly hard to handle by novices, 21 P-39s crashed near Mabry Field during training in 1942 alone.

freezing in the cold Russian winters. The plane's radio and navigational equipment were also appreciated by the pilots, permitting operations at night and in poor weather conditions.

The Soviet pilots fell in love with the fast, maneuverable, and well-armed P-39 that many found to be equal—or nearly equal—in speed to the German Bf109 and FW-190 fighters. Those enemy fighters could often be destroyed, the Soviets learned, with two or three short machine-gun bursts, while the strike of a single cannon shell could destroy or disable a German fighter or bomber.

The Soviets, on occasion, resorted to one technique that rattled their German adversaries to the core: using the sturdy-built P-39 to deliberately ram an enemy plane to bring it down. This was occasionally used to protect a fellow flier and to demoralize the German aviators in the process.

As the war progressed and the Soviets gained more air time and fighting experience, the pilots developed improved tactics. Key to that process was Captain Aleksandr Pokryshkin, who was to score 65 confirmed kills (including six shared) in the war and later go on to become Marshall of Aviation for the Soviet Union. He developed what he called a "Formula of Terror," based on altitude, speed, maneuver, and fire.

Pokryshkin also developed what he called a "bookshelf" of pairs of fighters deployed toward the sun, one pair above another in upwards of four tiers. He also advocated taking the fight to the enemy by attacking Luftwaffe bombers over German-controlled territory before they had time to link up with their fighter coverage. Often, he found, the startled German bombers fled after dropping their bombs aimlessly over German troops rather than over Red Army positions.

Pokryshkin strongly advocated another method that the Germans found unnerving: he and his men would attack and destroy the lead bomber in each approaching echelon, either through "Eagle Strikes" from above or in deadly guns-blazing, head-on attacks. In the resulting confusion, the enemy would often flee in panic, randomly dropping their bombs in the process.

He also developed a technique whereby the Airacobra pilots would fly at a high speed into a combat zone slightly above the specified mission altitude only to slowly decrease altitude to gain momentum before climbing back up to altitude and then repeating the procedure. That way the P-39 would often be able to pounce on the enemy from on high with an "Eagle Strike."

The Airacobra's cannon and machine guns had separate firing triggers with the cannon fired with the thumb button on the top of the stick and the machine guns operated with the index finger on the front of the stick. Pokryshkin convinced his engi-

neering crew to wire the cannon switch to the machine gun switch for a one-time experiment. His massed fire quickly blew a German bomber from the air. Soon all the P-39s in the squadron were firing with substantially increased firepower from a single trigger squeeze.

The Germans, for their part, also proved innovative in the use of their aircraft. As the war progressed, the Soviets encountered two Luftwaffe planes joined together to form one craft the Germans called the Mistel, or mistletoe. With assistance from a ground vectoring station, a P-39 pilot came across the Ju-88 bomber with a Bf-109 fighter attached to its upper fuselage with long struts. The engines of both German planes were spinning on the double-decker craft that the Soviets would later call a karaktitsa or cuttlefish.

The Airacobra pilot attacked, and both enemy planes fell burning to the forest below. Soviets on the ground reported that the Ju-88 exploded with the force of a 1,000-kilogram aviation bomb, creating a crater 10 yards in diameter and some five yards deep. Pine trees in a radius of some 220 yards from the crater were bent over and burned, and pieces of the German plane were found up to 2,200 yards from the crater.

Soviet pilots were advised that future attacks on Mistels should be undertaken with the notion of taking out the Messerschmitt pilot, rather than risking detonating the explosives in the Ju-88 with machine-gun and cannon fire. Once the fighter pilot was taken out, the Soviets learned that the Ju-88 bomber could be left to fly on and crash on its own.

Perhaps two of the more interesting units to use the Airacobra were Squadrons 10 and 12 of the Co-Belligerent Air Force, comprised of Italian pilots from the liberated portions of Italy. They cooperated with the Balkan Air Force on a number of missions against German forces in Yugoslavia during the war, and the Italians continued flying the P-39 until 1950.

The Airacobra was appreciated by those who flew the rugged workhorse, and disliked by many who never flew the craft that was first designed as a pursuit craft in

Continued on page 96

The American Air Museum in Duxford, England, houses the finest collection of American aircraft outside the United States.

In the lush, green rural community of Duxford, a 20-minute bus ride from the university town of Cambridge, the American Air Museum in Britain houses the finest collection of historic American combat aircraft outside the United States.

Part of the largest aviation museum complex in the world, the American Air Museum, opened in 1991. It tells the story of American air power and its effect on the 20th century, focusing largely on World War II in Europe.

It's an appropriate site—Duxford was known as Base 357, the headquarters of the U.S. 78th Fighter Group and home of P-47 Thunderbolts from April 1943 and P-51 Mustangs from December 1944.

The Thunderbolts and Mustangs acted as fighter escorts on the large U.S. bombing raids over Europe and Germany. The 78th fought with distinction, claiming the destruction of 697 enemy aircraft in the air and on the ground by the end of the war. The 78th provided air cover for the Allied invasion fleet on D-Day and shot down the first German Me-262 jet aircraft. Duxford was handed back to the Royal Air Force in December 1945.

The American Air Museum, built into the ground with the wide sweeping arc of its geometric torus ring roof reminiscent of a futuristic spacecraft or a huge World War II Nissen hut, this cavernous museum houses some of the USA's most famous warbirds and bombers, dating from World War I to the modern day.

Walking up the gently sloping asphalt path to the museum, visitors are greeted by a grim reminder of the 26,000 U.S. airmen who gave their lives while flying from British air bases during the war—more than 40 transparent plexiglass memorials, eight feet tall, line the pathway, each engraved with 150 white silhouettes of an American bomber shot down during World War II.

Inside the museum, dozens of gleaming fighters and bombers are arranged on the spotless, polished floor or hang dramatically from the ceiling, restored to pristine condition, looking as combat ready as they did in the 1940s.

A wide, spiraling walkway around the edge of the museum descends from the entry level down to the floor, enabling a 180-degree view of such iconic World War II fighters as the Republic P-47 Thunderbolt, the North American P-51 Mustang, and bombers like the Boeing B-17 Flying Fortress and the Consolidated

ABOVE: Restored aircraft representing all eras of military aviation share space at Duxford. TOP: The modernistic American Aviation Hall at Duxford holds the largest collection of American warbirds outside the U.S.

ABOVE: *Sally B*, a restored B-17 that flies regularly in air shows, has the sound of her engines recorded by a microphone. The bomber has appeared in numerous TV productions and feature films, including *Memphis Belle*. BELOW: Duxford's Battle of Britain operations room retains its 1940s appearance in every detail.

B-24 Liberator.

An old favorite is the U.S.'s most valuable utilitarian aircraft, the Douglas C-47 Skytrain, also known as the DC-3 or Douglas Dakota. First launched in 1935, the C-47 soon became the world's most widely used general-purpose transport aircraft, with 10,000 being built. Used for evacuating casualties and towing gliders, it also carried U.S. and British paratroops to the Normandy invasion, Operation Market-Garden, and the Rhine crossings.

The B-24 could carry more bombs farther and faster than the B-17 and was therefore built in larger numbers than any other American aircraft in World War II. The museum's B-24 flew 28 combat missions, including raids on Berlin and the Magdeburg oil refineries.

Three bronze busts mounted on pedestals honor the U.S. Air Force's most influential World War II aviation generals: Carl Spaatz, Ira Eaker, and James Doolittle. Spatz was the senior USAAF officer in the European and Mediterranean Theaters; Eaker commanded the Eighth Air Force, Bomber Command in February

Continued on page 96

FROM OMAHA BEACH TO VICTORY

Photo courtesy of Ralph Puhalovich

BY RALPH PUHALOVICH (WITH MARK PUHALOVICH)

Although injured three times, Private First Class Ralph Puhalovich served in the Big Red One from Normandy to Czechoslovakia.

Ralph Puhalovich was born on April 17, 1925, in Oakland, California, to Flora and Ivan Puhalovich. He was the youngest of three children; his brother John was 10 years older and his sister Marie was four years older. After graduating from Oakland High School on June 19, 1943, he reported to his draft board on July 5 in San Leandro, California, then boarded a bus headed for the Presidio in San Francisco, California, and began basic training.

After three weeks, he was sent to Camp Adair in Corvallis, Oregon, where he was assigned to a heavy weapons company in the 275th Regiment, 70th Infantry Division—an assignment that was to be short-lived. This is his story.

At Camp Adair, in the summer of 1943, we went through drills and marches. I was carrying part of a heavy machine gun. The lightest piece weighed 31 pounds and the other piece weighed about 37 pounds. Nobody could carry both pieces, so you'd either have one or the other. We went on hikes and, I have to say, I never fell out and I finished all of our maneuvers.

One of the things we learned was that the motto of the infantry is, "Ours is not to question why, but to do or die." We were to follow our orders whether or not we understood the reasons.

I was fortunate enough to get a leave for Christmas. I got on a train and went home. I surprised my family because I didn't have time to call. It was a nice treat to see the family and my girlfriend (and future wife), Louise Campanella, before the long journey to join the fighting.

Ralph Puhalovich's stint in the 70th Division came to an abrupt end; in early January 1944 he, along with others, received orders transferring them to the 1st Infantry Division, which was at that time training in England for the upcoming Operation Overlord—the Allied invasion of Normandy. He said his goodbyes, got on a train, and made the long trip eastward to New York.

We spent four days in New York before boarding a "Liberty" ship and heading across the rough North Atlantic on our way to Belfast, Northern Ireland. After

A member of the 1st Infantry Division, armed with an M-1 Garand rifle, is alert for German paratroopers being flushed from the woods during fighting in the Hürtgen Forest area, December 1944. INSET: Eighteen-year-old Private Ralph Puhalovich, photographed shortly after being inducted into the Army.

National Archives

spending some time at an Army base there, we headed to Glasgow, Scotland. From there, a train took us to southern England and we ended up in a little town called Swanage. I was assigned to the Anti-Tank Company of the 26th Infantry Regiment, 1st Infantry Division.

England, May 1944 to June 1944

If you look at a map of England, at the very bottom along the English Channel you'll find Swanage. We could see France from there and the Germans were throwing big artillery shells across the Channel at the town next to us. They obliterated the town completely. Then, every night at 10:04, we'd hear a German plane come overhead. It was a twin-engine bomber. The engines were out of sync, which created a screech-

Photo courtesy of Ralph Puhalovich

ABOVE: Private Puhalovich poses behind a .30-caliber water-cooled machine gun during basic training at Camp Adair, Oregon, 1943. OPPOSITE: A Landing Craft Tank, full of vehicles, equipment, and troops of the Big Red One, heads toward smoke-shrouded Omaha Beach, Normandy, during the D-Day landings, 6 June 1944.

ing noise; it was all psychological. They'd come over at exactly 10:04 every single night to drop one bomb someplace. We never knew where this nightly bomb was going to land.

We nicknamed the plane "Bed Check Charlie." The Germans were trying to find out where all the British antiaircraft guns were. The English were smart enough not to shoot at them.

That's what the Germans did; they were very consistent. You'd be so used to them not attacking, that's how they crash through when they finally deviate from their routine. The 1st Infantry Division had already fought in Africa and Sicily so they knew to always remain vigilant. I was very fortunate to have veterans explain these types of things to me.

We were assault troops. They gave us gas masks, which we tried on and were to run in, but you could hardly walk in them. They decided the masks were too big, and we were given another type of mask. They had us enter a room where they would pump tear gas in. We'd have to walk in and take off our gas masks. It was enough to make you choke and cough a lot but not die. Then we had to hike five miles with these things on. Going five miles is tough, let alone with gas masks on.

We were then given "gas-impregnated clothing." It wasn't impregnated with gas; it was impregnated to prevent gas penetration, because everybody assumed the Germans would use poison gas like they did in World War I. We dressed in the clothing and then had drills in case of a gas attack. We had to get under a transparent cover to shield us and all our weapons. We'd stay there until someone blew the whistle to end the test.

We were also given a life vest made out of rubber that flapped over your waist. If you went into the water, you'd press a button and you'd have the vest inflate around you. It had a whistle and light in case it was night. You could blow the whistle and you could see the little red light. Thankfully, we didn't have to use them. Even though I couldn't swim, I didn't like the idea.

At one point, a few of the others in my unit and I were selected to go to Dover, in southeast England, on temporary duty. The Army had come up with a great plan to fool the Germans into thinking the invasion would come across the Strait of Dover to the Pas de Calais, rather than at Normandy. To keep the enemy fooled, the Army built a fake camp there and let the news leak out that Patton was there and that he would be leading that fictitious army.

They told us that we were to be on guard duty around this camp, which was full of empty tents, with orders to shoot. There were also fake airplanes there and inflatable rubber tanks that looked pretty realistic from a distance.

One day I was standing guard by one of these tanks and the generator that pumped the air in suddenly quit and the tank began to shrink. The barrel started to sag. Somebody came along and got the generator working again and the tank got reinflated to its proper size.

After three days in Dover, we were returned to duty. We had some down time in Swanage and were able to enjoy the town, go to the pubs, dance, and talk to the locals. I met a girl named Marge after some of us went to a dance. The girls would stand outside the theater, hoping a GI will go in and they can accompany him. They were looking for company, which is fine.

Marge was very attractive and we were hanging out in a pub after the dance. I said, "All your men are gone," and she said, "Yes, and there are a lot of Americans and I'm engaged to three."

I said, "Excuse, me?"

"I'm engaged to three."

"I don't understand."

"They want someone they can talk to and write to, so I agree; I have three rings."

I said, "Well, what happens when they all come home?"

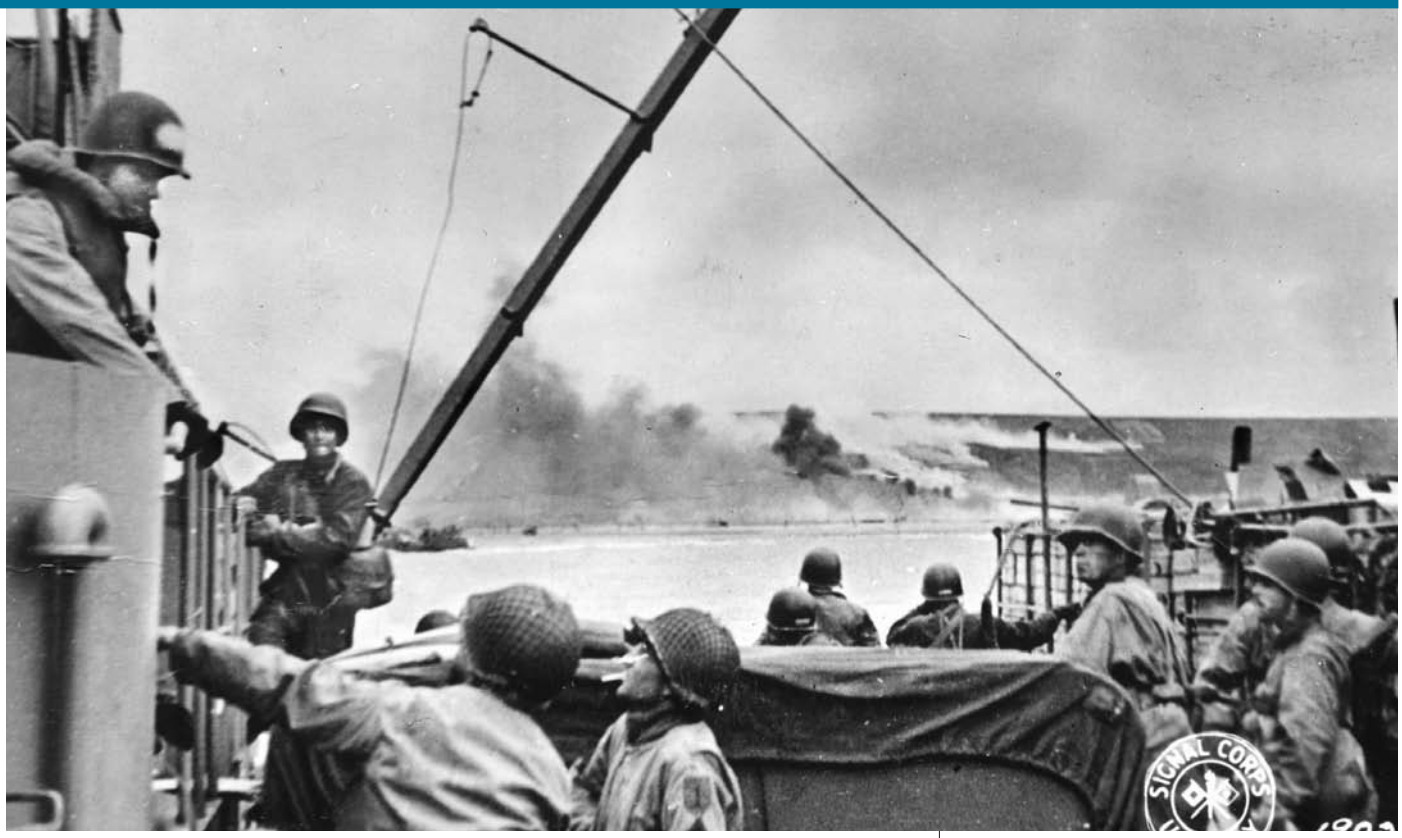
She said, "I'll cross that bridge when I get to it!"

My unit moved out the next day.

D-Day, Omaha Beach, Normandy, June 6, 1944

We were given our orders to go to Plymouth Hoe on the southern coast of England. Plymouth Hoe is where the first migrants to America came from. We trained there, waiting

National Archives



for orders to move out. We were to load all our equipment on an LCT (Landing Craft Tank).

An LCT is like a big barge. At the back of the craft is where the captain and all the equipment is. In the front, there's a big ramp that goes down, allowing you to load (and off-load) the heavy equipment. In our case, as the antitank company, we had three antitank guns that were pulled by half-tracks. They loaded them in a predetermined order for easy exit upon landing.

We stayed there a total of seven days because it took a long time to load the heavy equipment. After all the equipment was loaded, the infantry came in on the last day and boarded the LCT. Ours, which was actually a Canadian LCT, was manned by an English crew.

The Canadians brought us a box every day with Heinz Celery Soup for our rations. You pop off the top and right in the middle of the can there's an element that heats the soup. One guy said, "Well, you know what, I wouldn't be surprised if one of these was a damn bomb!" It wasn't, but we always said that.

We were there until June 5, when we left port and headed for someplace else; we weren't sure where, but we thought it was Normandy. The storm got so bad that we received orders to turn around and go back to Plymouth Hoe.

The next morning, we were right where we were the day before. History states that Eisenhower said, "There's supposed to be a big storm coming and tomorrow's an iffy day; June 6th is the day we're going." It took a lot of courage for him to say that because the next opportunity could have been a long wait. As a result, June 6th became known as D-Day.

The water was very choppy and the seas were rough. Many of us were having a hard time not getting sick. We were still quite a few miles out when all the ships started firing their guns. We couldn't see what they were aiming for or what we were heading into, but the sound was deafening. There was a great deal of spacing between all the ships and crafts heading for the beach so we had no idea of the scope of the attack. It was a foggy, misty day which reduced the visibility even more.

So I was headed for my first action and feeling sick from the seas. I couldn't see what we were facing, but the continuous firing of the battleships told me it was big. I was looking over the side trying to keep focused on something on the horizon.

Unfortunately, I caused a bit of a panic among the Navy. While I was looking over the side of our craft, my helmet fell off into the water and began floating back toward the *Augusta,* General Omar Bradley's flagship. My helmet is bounding back in the water and there's a lookout on the prow of the cruiser and he sees the helmet and yells, 'Mine!'

So they take evasive action and, as far back as I can see, ships are taking evasive action. I have no helmet so I was told to take one off a casualty on the beach. (When I got to the beach, there was a guy in a foxhole, all ashen color, and I thought about taking his helmet, but it had a big Ranger insignia on it and I thought, "I don't want a target on my head." I did find a helmet later on.)

Eventually we could see the beach. I couldn't believe what I saw. It was a traffic jam of crafts, and bodies were floating in

the water. The beach was full of soldiers and many were not moving. As we're looking onto the beach, the veterans are saying, "Same old, same old." I asked what they meant. "Slapton Sands" they answered. It looked identical to Slapton Sands—a place in England where some of the troops had trained in preparation for Omaha Beach.

All divisions had three regiments; the 1st Division's were the 16th, 18th, and 26th Infantry Regiments; I was in the 26th. The first wave for D-Day is the 16th Infantry Regiment; they went in at five in the morning. Going next is the 18th Regiment in the second wave, and we, the 26th, are in the third wave. (For each amphibious assault landing, the order is changed so that the leading regiment isn't always the same. The leading regiment can take a lot of casualties.)

As we got closer to the beach, we hear something loud close by and someone asked, "What's that?" and someone else says, "Rifles and machine guns." Next thing we know bullets are hitting the sides and we have to take cover; now we know this is the real thing.

Our LCT had an English crew and some of them were known as Cockneys. A Cockney is to England what someone from Brooklyn is to the United States. They're different people, a little rougher. They talk Cockney (slang); the English can hardly understand them. They don't pronounce words very well.

One of the Cockney crew members was using a 15-foot-long pole to measure the depth of the water, before anyone gets off the craft. He said he will let us know when the water is less than four feet deep. He gave us the okay; our first two guys drove off in a jeep and went straight down. One guy popped up; he was coughing and trying to catch his breath. When he finally does, he heads for shore.

The second guy didn't come up for quite a while. Finally, he came up and was pulled back to safety. The jeep and the trailer with the captain's radio and the platoon's equipment went to the bottom. Some men went looking for the little Cockney; they were going to kill him because of what he did.

Both: National Archives

ABOVE: Ralph Puhalovich was a member of a half-track crew such as this one, pulling an antitank gun through a French village a week after the invasion. OPPOSITE: A patrol of 1st Infantry Division soldiers enters an unidentified French town shortly after Allied planes had driven the Germans from it. Note that an Army censor has blocked out information that might provide useful information to the enemy.

He took off running and stayed hidden until we got off the boat.

We were supposed to land in the third wave but there were a lot of problems getting everyone to the beach. We waited until the afternoon and attempted to land. When it was our turn, we put the ramp down. My friend Mooch—Mutchinsky, who was the half-track driver—and I were to get the half-track off the boat. I was directing him when a guy ran up and said, "Hold it! Hold it! This beach hasn't been cleared of mines."

As a result, we had to land someplace else. We picked up and went farther down the beach. But there was still no place to offload—it was very crowded, so we went back out to sea for the rest of the day and night.

We offloaded on Omaha Beach on June 7. We were given the objective to go up to the bluffs at the top of the plateau to set up our guns. We went up about half a mile to this point and there's nothing there but a "T" intersection.

We started to take cannon fire and I asked Sergeant Peters, "What's the noise I'm hearing that's behind us?" He said, "That's American tanks."

They have a short-barrel gun, they don't have much range, and they're firing at us! We got on the radio and they ceased fire and told us to go back to our original position. So we went back down to the beach and dug in.

The Germans were shooting at us from the cliff and were not visible to us. They were in a high, thick concrete structure. On the top of the structure, they had a few very ingenious contraptions. We couldn't see anybody but they were in these big turrets. I guess they would press a button and this round turret would come up and a German gunner would fire his machine gun. As soon as he had to reload, he'd lower the turret. We were shooting at them with no results. They had armor around them and concrete in front of them so we were not making any progress in taking these guns out.

We had one thing that they couldn't do much about—the sky was full of American planes, big bombers. We knew they were American planes because they had three white stripes and a star on the wings and fuselage. They dropped huge bombs on the concrete structures, taking many of them out. They had to eliminate these two eight-inch German

artillery pieces, protected by thick concrete and located on the top of the plateau. The opening was just big enough for the barrel to stick out. That was one of the main objectives; we had our big ships exposed in the open water and had to take out these guns. The Germans could have done immense damage to our progress on D-Day if they took out our ships.

In addition to bombers, gliders were used to sneak troops farther behind German fortifications. The glider pilots were told to land near the Merderet River. Unfortunately, the guys piloting the gliders had little control; many of them landed in the river. Later, we were up on the plateau and there were gliders sitting there with 10 soldiers in one of them; all were sitting in their seats, dead. The glider idea was a good one, but we lost a lot of men and it didn't work too well.

Once we had secured the plateau, we settled in for the evening. A nervous GI came over to join us and we asked him, "What's the matter?" He said, "Well, I was sleeping and hit something and they were hobnail boots [German boots]. I was in a trench with a dead German! I didn't want to be there."

The next morning we got up (we slept under our half-track for protection), and there was the dead German soldier. Usually they weren't as tall as I am, six foot two. This guy was six five and was lying on his back. He'd been firing a gun and his arms were sticking up, stiff with rigor mortis. Somebody went into his wallet, found a picture of him on his wedding day in a striped suit, and put it in his extended arm. Here's this dead guy looking at his wife and him on their wedding day. I mean, that got me right in the heart.

A veteran we were with named "Punchy"—an ex-boxer who had been with the 1st Division in Africa and Sicily—pointed at the dead German and said, "Okay guys, here is your enemy. Not much is he?" We said, "Yeah." We're brand new, what do we know?

Punchy said, "Well, if I sit down there I'll get wet. If I take off my helmet to sit on, that's not too bright. So, Jerry, I hope you don't mind." So he sat on the dead German's chest and ate his breakfast. What he was doing was showing us: "Don't worry about the dead Germans; worry about the live ones. Just forget him." It was a very graphic lesson and one I didn't forget.

We were there for a day or two and then moved out and went across Normandy.

One day we were assembling all the equipment and were using the open field of a farm to get organized when we noticed a woman and a little girl holding hands. The mother was holding a stool and they were trying to chase down a single cow in order to milk her. The little girl stood there staring at her mother and then staring at us.

I'm sure she didn't know what all these armed men were doing walking down the road in front of her home. I had a candy bar in my pocket and broke it in half. I walked over to the little girl and gave her the candy bar. She smiled at me, curtsied, and said "Merci beaucoup." Her mother also said thank you. She looked terrified at seeing a whole regiment of soldiers plus tanks and half-tracks on her property.

Anyway, we started to pack our things and get ready to head out when I felt a tug at my pant leg. I looked down and saw the little girl. She picked a flower and gave it to me and curtsied. It brought tears to my eyes. I think of that to this day and wonder what became of the little girl.

As we were moving to our next position, I engaged in a conversation with a couple of GIs that were scouts. When going down a road, the infantry usually has two or three scouts in front, spaced 15 yards apart. The enemy sees them coming and, if they're smart, they duck down, let the scouts go past them, and open fire on the main unit.

These two guys had been in Africa, Normandy, and Sicily. I asked them if they thought their job was too dangerous. They said, "Yeah, no." Confused, I said, "What do you mean?" One said, "They don't shoot the first scout and they usually don't shoot the second scout, but they'll shoot you in the back if they have a chance. They want the main body. If they start firing, we take off, fight our way back, and we always make it back." They were really experienced, but you can only push that so far. I learned a lot from the veterans. I was very fortunate to have veterans willing to teach me.

My division originally went to North Africa with Brig. Gen. Theodore Roosevelt, Jr. as the assistant division com-

mander. On June 6th he had landed with the 4th Infantry Division on Utah Beach. I was fortunate to meet him. He came over to talk to me and said not to salute because the Germans are still there and may be watching. He asked if I knew who he was, and I said, "Yes, General Roosevelt."

He said, "No, they took my rank away and now I'm a colonel. You know this was my division, and this is the best division in this army. You're lucky. See you around." That was a high point in my service when he came to talk to me. As a rule, a private doesn't get to talk to generals. (Unfortunately, he died a few weeks later of a heart attack.)

Both: National Archives

A friendly GI gives a piece of candy to a French girl. Puhalovich also gave candy to a little girl and was thanked with a flower.

The Road to Caumont

I was wounded three times. The first was on June 9, 1944. Our 26th Regimental Combat Team was on the road, headed to a town called Caumont. We came under intense fire, both from the Germans and our own troops. Our own tanks were firing at us because someone fouled up. We were not supposed to be out there, way out in front of everyone else and making a lot of dust.

We were bringing the rations and mail up to the front of the convoy, but we were spotted by the German artillery. They started shelling us. My buddies jumped into foxholes but I couldn't. The shells picked me up and turned me around more than once. Every time I tried to move after hitting the ground, another shell would hit and lift me off the ground again.

The ration box and water can I was carrying were completely riddled with holes and I took a tremendous head pounding. My nose and ears were bleeding, but I did not go to the aid station immediately—I was a young kid and wanted to show the veterans I was as tough as they were.

We eventually made it into Caumont. On the road in, there was a French policeman with a whistle and baton controlling traffic. I turned to Peters and said, "Boy, are all the French like this?" He said, "Son" (they always called me "Son"), you never know what the French are going to do."

Then we moved into position behind another company. As we were relaxing, we heard a few shots around us. I said, "That's not one of ours." He said, "No, that's a German Mauser. We have a .30-caliber bullet. Theirs is a little larger and it's bolt action and it makes a lot of noise. It's back behind us somewhere, but don't worry about it."

Pretty soon we heard another shot and then no more until the next day. Later we heard that a GI had been shot, and someone had killed the French policeman. Come to find out he was a German soldier who was dressed like a French policeman and was spending part of his day being a sniper.

I lost one of my friends, Robert Short, in Caumont. We had a cease fire for three hours, then it was extended for another hour. There was a German soldier who was looking at our gun position on the road where he wasn't supposed to be. He was looking right down our gun barrel. As soon as the cease fire was over, we were hit with an incoming mortar shell. It hit a building, and the shrapnel, concrete, and glass came down. I didn't get a scratch. Somebody was looking after me, obviously.

I called out for Short but didn't get an answer. I went looking for him and found him lying on the floor. The sergeant said he'd call the medic. I said, "Sergeant, he needs a stretcher; a medic can't do anything for him. He needs to go to the doctor."

So he called, and I stayed with Short; I thought he was dead. We took him to the doctor who came in, looked Short over, looked at me, and covered Short with a sheet and said, "I'm sorry, he's gone."

I'm up here, watching this like an out-of-body experience. I put my hand on his chest and said, "Short, some day, I'll come back." Then I covered my face and tears came down. I went where the other gun position was and asked if I could use the phone. I called up my squad and said, "Short is gone and I can't come back now." They said, "We understand, take your time. We're okay."

I was there for a while but returned to my squad and to my position. I found Short's blankets and personal stuff next to mine. I said, "I can't go in there." I just could not—it hit me hard. I cried a lot. I have never forgotten Short, and I never will, because you're together at all times. It's purposeful—he watches your back, and you watch his. Fifty years later I did go back and visit his grave. That brought back lots of painful memories, but I was glad that I did.

The second time I was injured, we were in Caumont. It was around July 25, and we would be leaving soon for Saint-Lô. Mooch and I were in a half-track with a .50-caliber machine gun. We were pulled in behind a house so the vehicle couldn't be seen from the road. A German fighter plane came over, a Focke-Wulf. He headed for us, strafing. The half-track was loaded with fuel, ammunition, hand grenades, machine guns, and mines—

American infantrymen move through a bombed-out French town. While in Caumont, Puhalovich's half-track was strafed by a German plane and blown up.

it's a floating arsenal.

The plane came down, hit the half-track, and there was one massive explosion. We were off to one side, thank goodness. A big flame goes up, and then all the .50-caliber machine gun ammo and the hand grenades blow up. What was left was a pile of junk. Mooch and I went to get another vehicle.

After we got the new half-track, we were following some other vehicles; I was standing up at the gun. We came up to some tall hedgerows that limited our visibility. The three vehicles ahead of us took off and went around a corner. We came around the corner, and when we turned, the vehicles were stopped right in front of us.

Mooch yelled, "Hang on!" as he pulled the wheel over so we wouldn't hit them. We turned sharply and went through a big hedgerow. Unfortunately, behind it was a big oak tree. We hit it while I was holding a machine gun; the gun broke my wrist.

The medic couldn't treat me for a broken wrist; I had to go to a tent hospital on Omaha Beach. The doctor said, "You got a lucky break." I said, "How do you figure that?" He said, "Your wrist is broken and we have to send you back to England. We have no way to take care of you here."

Headed for England

They flew me over to Wales in a big C-54. I felt bad because I hadn't been wounded; I was injured but not wounded. I was put in a hospital, filthy dirty—me, not the hospital. I had had the same clothes on for two or three weeks; there was nothing to change into.

They put my arm in a cast and drew what had happened to me right on the cast so the next nurse or next doctor could see that I had a broken right distal radius. It was fractured; the hand had to stay immobile.

I was sent on to England to a hospital just outside of Bedford with others who had been wounded. One particular soldier sitting across from me was crying. He had a cast and his thumb was sticking out. I asked him, "Can I help you?"

He said, "Well, I live in Nebraska and I'm a farmer. I was assigned to an outfit, I don't know what outfit it was; I was a replacement. I was in a firefight with the Germans and when I reached for my ammo clip, I couldn't pick it up. I couldn't understand it." The German bullets had cut off all his fingers. All he had left was a thumb.

He said, "I'm a farmer and what can I do? I'm right handed. I don't have a hand."

What do you say to someone like this? His life is completely different. We kept in touch. I wrote to him a few times, but I thought of him many times. Later, I heard that he died at a very young age. That's what happens. Veterans don't last. I'm an oddity, and I'm still here. Maybe I could duck faster than the next guy, I don't know.

Once my wrist had healed, I found that I had lost a lot of muscle and had to do extensive rehab. I saw a lot of soldiers with injuries a lot worse than mine and I couldn't help but think how this was going to change their lives forever. I also couldn't believe the care that all the wounded got from the nurses and doctors. I had never been in a hospital before so I had never seen people caring so deeply for complete strangers.

I was sent from that hospital to Southampton, on the English Channel. I was there for a week or two before I got orders that I was going to rejoin my division.

My regiment had broken through Saint-Lô and had made it all the way to the Siegfried Line while I was recovering. U.S. troops had surrounded Aachen, but hadn't intended to invade the city. Aachen was a historical and important city to the Germans, so they put up fierce resistance and the plans changed regarding Aachen.

There was intense bombing that leveled much of it, and then assault troops went door to door securing the city. By the time our regiment entered the city, most of the heavy fighting was done. I ended up doing guard duty for the prisoners.

We stayed in Aachen for a while and left in early November to enter an area called the Hürtgen Forest.

National Archives

Soldiers of the Big Red One enter snowy Butgenbach, Belgium, on Christmas Eve—the day Puhalovich rejoined his unit after being wounded in the Hürtgen Forest the previous month.

The Hürtgen Forest

The Battle of the Hürtgen Forest was a series of battles starting in September and lasting until December 16, 1944. It was the biggest, and one of the longest, battles in U.S. Army history. There were massive casualties on both sides.

We would be shelled, fired upon by tanks, and encounter infantry troops. It was a constant fight which turned out to have more danger than we could have imagined. The shelling and tank fire into the trees resulted in wood shrapnel that could do more damage than the bullets. On November 18, I was injured for the third time.

I was sent out to hunt tanks with a bazooka. I was lying under a tree and heard this little voice tell me, "You better get out of here." In combat you learn to listen to the "little voices." I got up and went over to another GI who was dug in about 15 yards away. At that moment, a mortar round came in and hit the exact place where I had just been.

Then another round came in and exploded in the trees above us; I got hit in the buttocks with shrapnel. Later, at the aid station, there was a captured German there who laughed when he saw my wound; one of the other guys in the aid station smashed the German in the head with the butt of a rifle for laughing.

Once again I was pulled from the fighting, but I spent only a few weeks recovering. When I was ready to go back, I was sent to a replacement camp. On Thanksgiving Day I was put on a truck and taken someplace; I had no idea where I was. While I waiting, one of the officers said, "Okay, all the men from 1st Division report to the mess hall. You're going to have an early dinner so you can go." So we left the mess hall after dinner, but we didn't rejoin our outfit right away.

Fortunately, our division finally got a rest on December 6, after six months of continuous fighting. I came back to the outfit in December 1944 and joined them in Butgenbach, Belgium—a city our outfit liberated. When I got to Butgenbach, it was Christmas Eve. I was just in time for the Battle of the Bulge.

Battle of the Bulge

We went down into the town. We were not allowed to go anywhere without our weapon. You didn't put it anywhere else. There was a Catholic church and they were having Mass. Being Catholic and a former altar boy, I went in with my helmet on and my gun. It seemed terrible to be in a church with a rifle and a bayonet and other stuff.

I took my helmet off and set it down, then went in a pew with my loaded rifle with the safety on and stayed for Mass. Some guys went to Communion and some didn't. I didn't go because Catholics have to go to Confession every once in a while, and I hadn't done that.

They sang the same songs that we did at Christmas, except in a different language. We knew the tunes but we didn't sing. We went outside and found one of our guys who hadn't gone inside. He was much colder than we were and, while he was walking with us, he tripped, fell down, and hit his head on the concrete, knocking himself out. That's how bad of shape we were in. Practically all of us were frozen.

Some of the guys started talking about Corporal Henry Warner who was killed in action before I got back to the outfit. My friend, Bob Rigg, told me that he witnessed Warner knock out a number of tanks with a 57mm antitank gun. One tank was coming back after Warner killed the German commander; he knew they were coming so he started running. He wasn't running away, but he was scared. All he had was a pistol.

Rigg said that he, Rigg, was in a hole with two of his buddies that had been shot in the lungs and he couldn't get out because there were tanks surrounding them. Rigg said, "I'm in the hole and I knew I had to get some help for those guys and I'm waiting there and here comes Warner running over. I could hear the tanks and could see something going on. Warner came and saw me in the dugout. He jumped in the hole with the pistol and when the tank came up he was firing at the tank with his pistol.

"Warner was aiming his pistol down the 23-foot-long barrel of the tank's gun to blow it up. Chances are like 9,000-to-one that that's going to happen. But he was doing that on purpose. So Warner was blocking the hole and he was killed, machine gunned. He

blocked up the hole to save my buddies and he gave up his life so they could live."

When the war was over, Congress awarded Warner the Medal of Honor. That's the highest honor anybody can have. He was a hero, no question. After the war there was a German Army kaserne in Bamberg that the Americans appropriated. They renamed it "Warner Barracks."

Warner was from North Carolina and was only 21 when he died. He was a real quiet, unassuming, soft-spoken guy, He didn't drink and he didn't swear. You wouldn't suspect that he would be a hero. I read in a book that he had also done more heroics the day before and had taken out a tank or two.

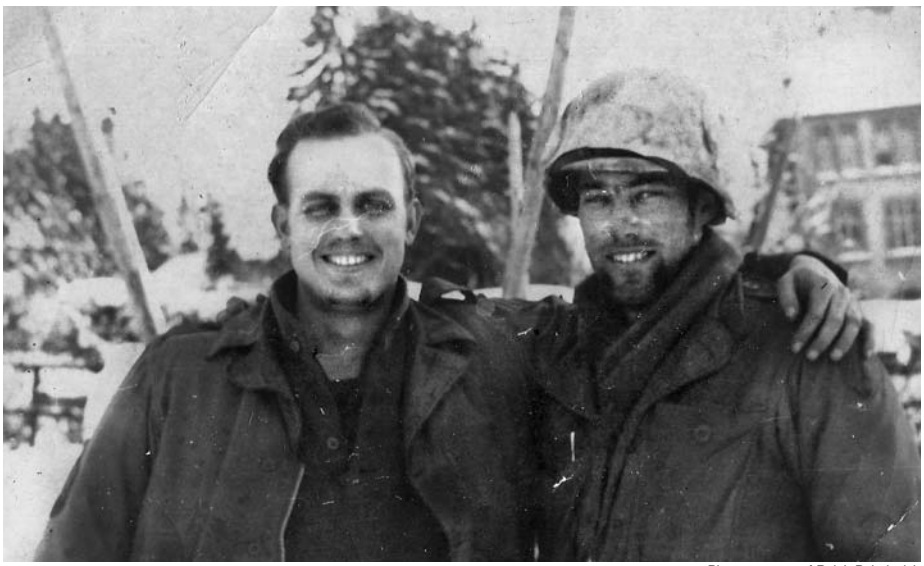


Photo courtesy of Ralph Puhalovich

Bronze Star, Belgium

In Belgium we were so cold we practically froze to death just being outside; it was reported to be -20C, but who knew for sure? In the history books I've read, they say that the cold killed more troops than the fighting did, on both sides. The weather was so bad that everything stopped moving except the shelling.

We were in our holes and dugouts from Christmas Day to some time in January. A few of us had a little food, but that was all we had. I went into the Bulge weighing 185 pounds and the next time I was weighed, I was 155 pounds. All the supply lines were down, and the weather was so bad it was like the world had stopped. They couldn't get anything to us. We were starving. The snow in places was over six feet deep.

Once the visibility improved, our planes started flying and dropping supplies to us and bombs on the Germans. We started moving again. We were given orders to move on to Büllingen, which is closer to Germany.

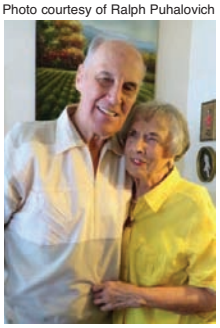
We were on our way to Büllingen on January 25, 1945. I was in the lead as our scout. The snow was high and, as I was the tallest of the men, I was volunteered to lead the way. The youngest always seemed to have to take the lead. I wasn't doing too well; I had dysentery and had to stop often to take care of things. I felt miserable but in the end my illness ended up saving some lives, maybe even my own.

On one of my stops, as I was squatting down, I heard some voices. I snuck up behind what I could now see was a German machine-gun emplacement. I snuck up as close as I could and let go with some shots and yelled for them to surrender. Fortunately, they all raised their hands and we ended up taking them prisoner.

We knew that the Germans always had at least a pair of machine-gun emplacements so we carefully sought out the second one and disabled that weapon as well. I was rewarded with the Bronze Star for that on July 24, 1945.

National Archives

Photo courtesy of Ralph Puhalovich



ABOVE LEFT: Corporal Henry Warner of Puhalovich's unit was awarded the Medal of Honor posthumously for his actions at Butgenbach, Belgium. ABOVE RIGHT: Ralph and Lousie Puhalovich photographed in 2015. They have been married since 1952. LEFT: Pfc. Ralph Puhalovich (right) with a buddy in Bullingen, Belgium, January 1945—about the time he earned the Bronze Star Medal for valor.

Again we returned to attack the Siegfried Line and continued to the Roer River in February. We eventually came to the Rhine, where we crossed the Remagen Bridge in mid-March. This was a crucial piece in our further occupying Germany. The bridge collapsed 10 days after the U.S. Army had captured it.

Schonbach, Czechoslovakia

The division took part in the encirclement of the Ruhr Pocket and went on to capture Paderborn. In April 1945 we entered Czechoslovakia. It was our last position during the war before we got word the Germans had surrendered.

When we were told that the war was over, one of the men in our platoon mentioned that the same thing happened to his father in World War I, and many Americans were killed because not everyone put down their weapons. He said he wasn't putting down his weapon, so none of us put down our weapons. Despite being told it was really over, we ate our celebratory meal with spacing between us and vigilantly looked around.

We were camped near a farm where we could see some movement and went over to check it out; it was a mother and her daughter. We started conversing, but my German was pretty limited. Over the next few days she taught me a lot of German and I was catching on. Our lieutenant saw

Continued on page 97

BRUTAL BATTLE *for a* DUTCH ISLAND

BY JON DIAMOND

Look at a map of Holland. At the extreme southwest corner, connected to the mainland by a narrow causeway, is a peninsula known as Walcheren Island jutting into the North Sea.

Think of Walcheren Island as a bowl, with raised edges and a depressed center (in this case, below sea level).

Flowing south of Walcheren Island is the estuary of the River Scheldt that leads to the huge, deep-water port of Antwerp, Belgium. The port of Antwerp is and was one of Europe's largest, with 10 square miles of docks, 20 miles of waterfront, 600 cranes, and the capacity to handle 1,000 ships at weighing up to 19,000 tons each at a time.

Ever since overrunning Holland in the spring of 1940, and knowing the island's importance, the Germans had held Walcheren Island. And they had had plenty of time to heavily fortify it.

THE GERMAN FORCES

At the end of August 1944, after the calamity of Normandy, the Falaise Pocket, and the disintegration of the German Western Front, Hitler relieved General Helmuth von Salmuth of command of the Fifteenth Army, replacing him with General Gustav-Adolf von Zangen.

Wehrmacht headquarters on Walcheren were in Middelburg, the island's capital, while the navy's (Kriegsmarine) command center was in Flushing. The remaining German defense in Walcheren consisted of the second-class 210th and 810th Battalions of the 70th Infantry Division, commanded by Generalleutnant Wilhelm Dasser, a 60-year-old static coastal division commander in Normandy prior to the invasion there, along with various naval and antiaircraft units manning casemated batteries and other weapons. Elements of the 1019th and 1020th Regiments were headquartered in Flushing and Oostkapelle, respectively.

Walcheren's west coast defenses were a formidable chain of heavily constructed coastal batteries encased in concrete casemates behind the sea wall to prevent a forced naval assault into the Western Scheldt. All were sited for direct seaward fire; however, Battery W17, located northeast of Westkapelle near Domburg, was in open casemates and could also fire across the island.

The batteries comprised up to 50 artillery pieces ranging from 75mm to 220mm and manned by members of the Kriegsmarine. These guns were supported by infantry trenches, antiaircraft guns, flamethrowers, rocket projectors, searchlights, thick belts of barbed wire and antipersonnel minefields, and beach obstacles similar to those

Men of the 4th Special Service Brigade of the 52nd (Lowland) Division wade ashore from landing craft near Flushing during the invasion of Walcheren Island—the all-important gateway to Antwerp.

A key piece of Dutch real estate needed to be taken if the port of Antwerp were to become useful to the Allies. But no one anticipated how hard Operation Infatuate, the last major seaborne invasion in Europe, would be.

Imperial War Museum

at Normandy which exploded on impact, making each battery a self-contained strongpoint and providing an almost continuous line of defenses along the dunes. The Kriegsmarine officers were well aware of the absence of major infantry support units for the shore batteries, which was the weak link in the defense.

Between May and June 1944, the Germans laid over 1,700 contact mines at the mouth of the Scheldt and its seaward approaches. Another 600 were laid in the Western Scheldt as far east as Antwerp. A flotilla of explosive motorboats was docked in Flushing to attack any Allied shipping in the Western Scheldt. Much of Walcheren is below sea level with many sand dunes along its shores; the intervening gaps are closed by dikes, the largest and oldest of which runs along the island's western coast for three miles and is 200-250 feet wide at Westkapelle.

Flushing, on the southern coast of Walcheren Island, had been transformed into a fortress bristling with many different types of artillery pieces, pillboxes, concrete bunkers, gun positions, street obstacles, and land mines around its perimeter. The port's streets were manned by 8,000 Germans in tenacious defensive works.

However, Dasser's division was disorganized by frequent troop redeployments, causing "the men [to be] completely apathetic, an undisciplined mob." The German sea commandant of South Holland wrote, "If this is not set right by energetic leadership, I foresee a black future for the defense of Walcheren."

The German high command knew the peril Walcheren was in from an infantry manpower standpoint since Hitler, by scattering his infantry to garrison innumerable points along the Channel coast rather than concentrating them on major ports, had squandered any chance of reinforcing the 70th Infantry Division.

THE NEED FOR ANTWERP

After the Normandy invasion and during the autumn of 1944, as the British and American armies advanced eastward across France and Belgium toward Germany, the

National Archives

British commandos are on the alert as a slightly wounded soldier is treated by a Belgian Army nurse during the British seizure of Antwerp, September 4, 1944. The port of Antwerp could not be used until Walcheren Island and the Lower Scheldt Estuary were in Allied hands.

Allies' supply lines were stretched to the breaking point as they tried to keep up with the fighting forces. The overworked, temporary Mulberry harbor that had been installed at Sword Beach at Arromanches, was now too far to the rear.

The Germans, in their withdrawal from Upper Normandy, had wrecked or continued to hold the ports of Le Havre, Dunkirk, Boulogne, and Calais, rendering them unusable by the Allies. Therefore, the seizure of the port of Antwerp was vital if the British and American push was to continue at something faster than a snail's pace.

Without Antwerp, the victors of Normandy had to be supplied over ever-lengthening truck routes running to Belgium and eastern France (See "Red Ball Express," *WWII Quarterly,* Summer 2010). Replacement formations of up to five Allied divisions still remained in Normandy as their motor transport was confiscated and turned into supply convoys.

On September 3, Field Marshal Bernard L. Montgomery ordered the Second British Army, under Lt. Gen. Sir Miles Dempsey, to exploit the gap between the German Fifteenth and Seventh Armies. At the time, the Second British Army held positions along the Albert Canal, running southeastward from Antwerp.

The British 11th Armoured Division reached Antwerp on September 4, and soon Allied troops controlled the port with many of the docks and extensive wharves intact. Opening the Scheldt so that Allied ships could actually reach the port was now the next order of business.

If, instead of turning eastward toward the Ruhr, the Second British Army had continued its advance 20 miles to the northwest, it would have cut the German Fifteenth Army's escape route to the east at the South Beveland isthmus, which separates the Western from the Eastern Scheldt. But the Allies missed a great opportunity to strangle the escape route and seize the isthmus.

After Antwerp fell, von Zangen knew he was trapped by the Western Scheldt and drew up plans on September 5 for an escape route between Antwerp to the north and Brussels directly to the south, to reach the Rhine River north of Cologne.

But Hitler countermanded those orders and directed von Zangen to reinforce the ports and establish a bridgehead south of the Western Scheldt covering the port of Breskens,

Both: National Archives

ABOVE: Churchill tanks cross a Bailey bridge over the Antwerp-Turnhout Canal at Ryckevorsel during the attack north of Antwerp, October 22, 1944. BELOW: Soldiers of the 3rd Polish Infantry Brigade fire on Germans from a farmhouse destroyed during the fighting.

secure Walcheren and South Beveland Islands, and bring the main body of his army in northern France and Belgium across the Western Scheldt to Flushing (called Vlissingen in Dutch) on Walcheren Island.

Von Zangen tried to comply. Using his 245th, 711th, and 70th Infantry Divisions, along with the fresh 64th Infantry Division from Germany, he made a defensive bridgehead running from Zeebrugge on the North Sea to the Western Scheldt at Terneuzen, between Breskens and Antwerp.

Additionally, von Zangen appointed Lt. Gen. Eugen-Felix Schwalbe to command the escape across the Western Scheldt from Breskens to Walcheren using Dutch merchant ships and river barges. Despite strong antiaircraft batteries at Breskens and Flushing, Allied fighter bombers were able to partially interdict the 45-minute crossing between the two ports. However, German antiaircraft batteries shot down more than 40 Allied aircraft.

Despite the Allied air attacks, von Zangen and Schwalbe were able to transport 86,000 men, 600 guns, more than 6,000 vehicles, and 4,000 horses across the Western Scheldt from September 4-26.

With Antwerp in Allied hands, and with the need to open it to sea traffic, Montgomery directed the First Canadian Army to advance to the northwest of the city and clear the Western Scheldt estuary of enemy forces.

The First Canadian Army intelligence officers concluded that by September 24, "His [German] withdrawal across the [Western] Scheldt … was a tremendous feat for a defeated and trapped enemy."

On September 9, Canadian intelligence also presciently forecast that the Germans would block the seaward approaches to the newly acquired prize of Antwerp by holding Walcheren and South Beveland. Many of the Germans who had escaped from Breskens to Flushing, mainly the 70th Infantry Division, would contest the coming Allied assault on Walcheren.

Field Marshal Sir Alan Brooke, chief of the Imperial General Staff, would write in his diary, "I feel that Monty's strategy for once is at fault. Instead of carrying out the advance on Arnhem, he ought to have made certain of Antwerp."

OPERATION INFATUATE

To open the Scheldt, the Allies devised Operation Infatuate, which was divided into two phases. Infatuate I would be the landing at Flushing on Walcheren Island's southern tip, while Infatuate II would be a landing at Westkapelle on Walcheren's west coast. The operation was scheduled for late October 1944.

Walcheren Island was like the cork in the neck of a bottle. As long as the Germans held it, the mouth of the River Scheldt was closed to the Allies' supply ships. The cork had to be removed. And the II Canadian Corps, along with British Royal Marine and Commando units, was selected by Mongomery to be the corkscrew.

The II Canadian Corps consisted of the 2nd and 3rd Canadian Infantry Divisions, 4th Canadian Armoured Division, and the

1st Polish Armoured Division. The corps commander, Lt. Gen. Guy Simonds, believed that the capture of Walcheren Island would be "a great and decisive victory" that would seal the fate of the Third Reich.

BATTLE OF THE BRESKENS POCKET

As the 1st Polish and the 4th Canadian Armoured Divisions advanced eastward from Brussels, Belgium, toward the Breskens Pocket, the country became increasingly unsuitable for armor, with much of it being at sea level or below—polder—big open fields drained by a maze of waterways and prone to becoming inundated with seawater.

Several major canals—the Leopold, the Ghent, the Hulst, and the Canal de la Deviation among others—crossed this area. Roads ran across the flat fields on raised, exposed embankments. It was dangerous country for tanks to become bogged down, and Allied infantry would have to contend with the enemy, who was fighting with renewed determination.

On September 17, the Allies launched Operation Market-Garden farther east—a bold move to leap across the Maas, Waal, and Lower Rhine. Seven days later, as MarketGarden had run out of steam, the 2nd Canadian Infantry Division, commanded by Maj. Gen. Bruce Matthews, attempted to cross the Antwerp-Turnhout Canal northeast of Antwerp but was unsuccessful. Von Zangen's LXVII Corps (comprised of the 346th and 711th Divisions) held firm.

Two days later, at Simonds' suggestion, the 2nd Canadian Infantry and 1st Polish Armoured Divisions moved to drive the last of the enemy from the greater Antwerp area and cut the base of the South Beveland isthmus.

By now, everything south of Antwerp and the southern coastline along the Western Scheldt—except for the Breskens Pocket enclosed by the Leopold Canal—was in Allied hands. The Breskens Pocket was unsuccessfully assaulted by the Canadians on September 22 and October 5 and would not fall until October 22. The Canadians described the German 64th Division defending Breskens as the "best infantry division we have met."

Thus, one month after capturing Antwerp, 70 miles from the sea, the great port's maritime approaches remained closed to Allied shipping because of extensive German minefields in the Western Scheldt, not to mention the casemated German gun batteries on Walcheren Island.

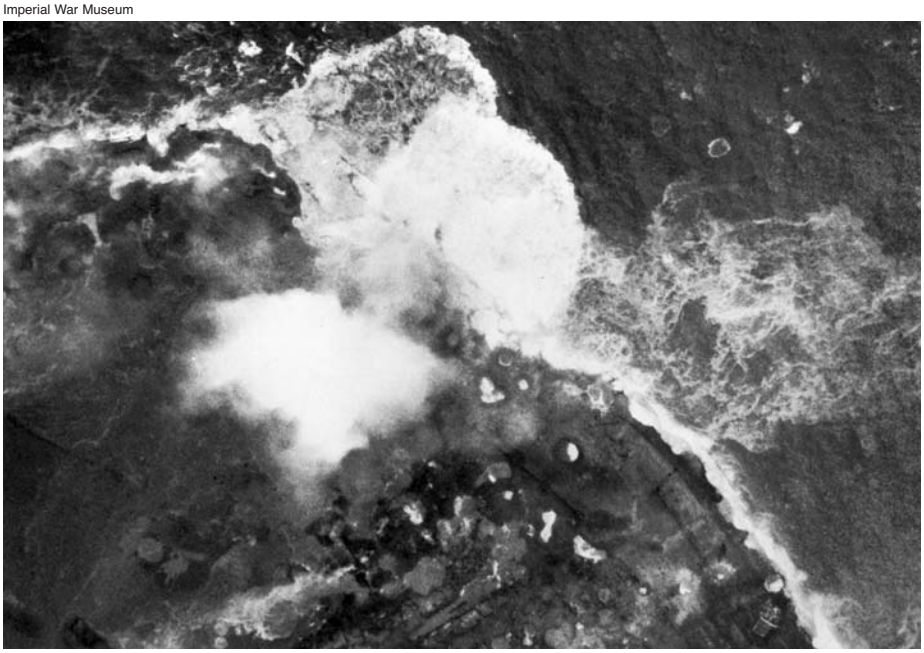
General von Zangen, however, was worried. He wrote, "After overrunning the Scheldt

National Archives

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

ABOVE: With British troops invading Walcheren Island from the west and south, and Canadian troops striking across the Beveland Islands from the east, the Germans were caught in a vise from which there was no escape. TOP: A German machine-gun nest commands a dike in the Breskens Pocket, south of the Scheldt Estuary. Allied delays allowed the Germans to prepare a stout defense that was eventually overcome.

Imperial War Museum



RAF Bomber Command's destruction of the Westkapelle Dike on October 3, 1944, caused the dike to burst and flood the island.

fortifications [on Walcheren], the English would finally be in a position to land great masses of material in a large and completely sheltered harbor ... [and] with this material they might deliver a death-blow at the North German plateau and at Berlin before the onset of winter."

On September 16, the 10th Dragoons of the 1st Polish Armoured Division crossed the Hulst Canal, halfway between Terneuzen and Antwerp. The next day the Germans counterattacked furiously and wiped out the Polish advance. The Poles took heavy losses.

Two days later, the Polish 3rd Infantry Brigade renewed the attack, bridged the Hulst Canal on the following morning, and approached to within five miles of Terneuzen, capturing many vessels used during the German escape from Breskens to Flushing.

On September 21, elements of the 4th Canadian Armoured Division reached the Western Scheldt near Terneuzen; the Poles then mopped up all resistance between Terneuzen and Antwerp.

South of the Western Scheldt, only the Breskins Pocket, the country enclosed by the Leopold Canal, remained in German hands—and they were determined to hold it.

On September 27, a major change in Montgomery's plans was brought on by the failure of Market-Garden. Rather than continuing to rigidly adhere to his previous thoughts of maintaining his advance eastward into Germany north of the Ruhr, he started to acquiesce to the strategic opinions of others. British Admiral Bertram Ramsay, for one, said, "The opening of the port [Antwerp] is absolutely essential before we can advance deep into Germany."

THE ALLIED FORCES' PLAN

Opening the Western Scheldt estuary required clearing the Germans from the Breskens Pocket on the south bank and from South Beveland and Walcheren Island covering the north bank. All of the approaches were largely polder protected by massive walls and earthworks and recently extensively flooded on Hitler's orders. The Canadians had no choice but to destroy, capture, or neutralize the German defenses.

The task was given to II Canadian Corps under Lt. Gen. Guy Simonds, who also was placed in temporary command of the First Canadian Army during General Harry Crerar's absence due to illness. Simonds, upon reviewing the situation, identified three phases of operations.

The first was Operation Vitality I—the 5th Brigade of the Canadian 2nd Division's attack westward against South Beveland's isthmus from the mainland early on October 24, with the intent of seizing the shipping canal that bisected the isthmus and separated the Eastern and Western Scheldts. The 2nd Division would be aided on its right flank by the 1st Polish Armoured Division.

Second was the clearance of the Breskens Pocket on the southern shore of the Western Scheldt estuary by Maj. Gen. Bert Hoffmeister's 3rd Canadian Infantry Division.

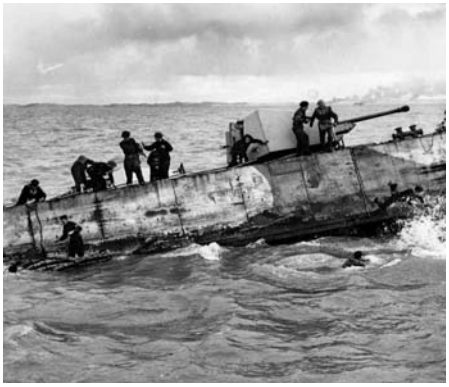
Finally would come a British amphibious assault on Walcheren Island by Brigadier B.W. Leicester's 4th Special Service Brigade, comprising Nos. 41, 47, and 48 Royal Marine Commandos.

Attached to the 4th Special Service Brigade was Lt. Col. Peter Laycock's No. 10 Inter-Allied (IA) Commando made up of French, Belgian, and Norwegian soldiers. It would land at Westkapelle, while No. 4 Commando of the British Commandos and the 155th Brigade of the British 52nd (Lowland) Division embarked from Breskens (once captured) to assault Flushing. These amphibious forces would be landed by the Royal Navy.

After receiving a lengthy letter from the Supreme Allied Commander, General Dwight D. Eisenhower, on October 15, Montgomery replied the next day, "I have given Antwerp top priority in all operations in 21 Army Group and all energies and efforts will be now devoted towards opening up that place."

D-day for Operation Infatuate was set for November 1, 1944. Some of the Allied commanders—such as Admiral Bertram Ramsay, who had commanded the vast Allied fleet during the Normandy invasion—were enthusiastic.

If successful, the operation would isolate Walcheren from the mainland. However, by October 25, the Canadians had advanced only three miles against stiff German opposition; it would take four more days to capture the South Beveland ship-



Both: Imperial War Museum

ABOVE: The crew of a Landing Craft, Gun (Medium) abandons ship after it was hit by German shore batteries during the landing of Royal Marines. RIGHT: Royal Marine Commandos in an amphibious personnel carrier ("Buffalo") exit an LCT (Landing Craft, Tank) while a number of M-29 "Weasels" await their turn. The LCT has just beached at Westkapelle during the final phase of the battle.

ping canal.

In Operation Vitality II, on October 26, the 156th and 157th Brigades of the British 52nd Division crossed the Western Scheldt from Terneuzen and landed on South Beveland's southern coast to the west of the shipping canal, which was still being contested.

The Scottish troops would be transported eight miles in LVTs (Landing Vehicle, Tracked), called Buffaloes by the British, of Maj. Gen. Percy Hobart's British 79th Armoured Division. After landing on South Beveland, the Scots were to quickly advance toward the Sloedam Causeway that connected Walcheren Island and South Beveland to prevent German reinforcements from interfering with the Canadians' South Beveland assaults.

BREAKING THE DIKES

Simonds urged that all of Walcheren below sea level be completely flooded by having the sea walls broken by heavy bombers; this would hamper German troop and supply movements and also confine the enemy garrisons to high ground, which could be subjected to around-the-clock bombing to destroy their will to fight.

Despite protests from RAF Bomber Command that the dikes could not be broken, Eisenhower endorsed Simonds' plan; training for the combined operations began at Ostend in early October.

RAF Bomber Command's aerial assault to smash the Westkapelle dike on Walcheren began on October 3. Using 1,000- and 4000-pound bombs, more than 200 Avro Lancaster heavy bombers blew a 100-yard gap in the dike, causing a rapid influx of seawater to flood Westkapelle's fields.

Four days later, two more gaps were made by Bomber Command, resulting in more extensive flooding. The first was at Nolledijk, just northwest of Flushing; seawater also flooded toward Middelburg, situated on the Walcheren Canal that extends from Flushing in the south to Veere in the north.

The second gap was blown at Ritthem, east of Flushing, near the Sloe Channel, which separates South Beveland from Walcheren. After the initial bomber sorties, Veere was flooded on October 11 as 60 more Lancasters hit the dike outside that town's boundaries at Oostwatering.

As Simonds envisioned, more than 2,500 tons of explosives had made the Wehrmacht's positions in the polder untenable and forced them to higher, drier ground. German reserves were immobilized, and many of the field batteries were now submerged. In fact, virtually every part of the island was under water except for the raised areas of Flushing and Middelburg.

The flooding now isolated the line of coastal batteries such that each no longer had support from the others and could be attacked piecemeal. The inability to reinforce threatened areas also deprived Dasser of the essence of a tactical defense to stage counterattacks as the Germans had shown in the Breskens Pocket, as well as many other successful defensive locales. Additionally, the Flushing waterfront, which the Germans were strenuously reinforcing, was attacked by fighter bombers on October 31.

By October 31, the last German had been driven out of South Beveland; however, the way into Walcheren from the east was not yet open since the western end of the Sloedam Causeway, which connected the two islands, was heavily defended by the Germans on the island.

BATTLE FOR THE CAUSEWAY

The Sloedam Causeway was 1,200 yards long and 50 yards wide, carrying a rail line along with a main road and a bicycle path. It had sodden, reed-grown mudflats on both sides. The Canadian brigade commander was of the opinion that wheeled or tracked vehicles

would enter a "killing ground" if they attempted to cross the western end of the causeway, so the infantry was ordered to assault it first.

Major General Matthews's Canadian 2nd Infantry Division attacked the causeway on October 31, 1944. The assault was led by the Canadian 5th Infantry Brigade's Black Watch Regiment, which was soon halted by heavy enemy gunfire. The Calgary Highlanders then sent a company forward, which was also forced to ground halfway across the causeway.

Another attack by the Highlanders the following morning managed to gain a precarious foothold, and a day of bitter fighting ensued; the depleted Highlanders were relieved by Le Regiment de Maisonneuve, which fought to maintain the tenuous bridgehead. The "Maisies" were then relieved by a battalion of the Glasgow Highlanders of the British 52nd (Lowland) Division. By November 2, after much hard fighting, the rest of the 52nd finally crossed the blood-soaked causeway to Walcheren Island.

In five weeks of fighting and enduring the harsh conditions of campaigning on the Dutch polder, the 2nd Canadian Division suffered more than 3,600 casualties and was relieved by the 157th Brigade of the British 52nd Division, which had made the amphibious crossing of the Western Scheldt as part of Vitality II.

Operations Vitality I and II had been criticized for gaining limited territory at the expense of casualties; however, the German 70th Infantry Division on Walcheren was now threatened from the east, and the Scottish and Canadians' presence distracted their attention from the third part of Simonds' plan, the amphibious assault known as Operation Infatuate.

THE AMPHIBIOUS ASSAULTS BEGIN

On November 1, Operations Infatuate I and II were simultaneously launched to assault Flushing, with a British brigade group sailing from Breskens across the Western Scheldt (Infatuate I) and by a seaborne attack at Westkapelle (Infatuate II) by a Special Service brigade group embarking from Ostend. Allied artillery now in South Beveland and on the Breskens coast, along with additional tactical fighter bomber sorties, providing support.

Captain H.P.G.J. van Nahuijs, a former town of Flushing police inspector and now a Dutch officer, led No. 6 Troop in an attack 110 yards southeast of Flushing's center, codenamed Uncle Beach. Barbed wire, wooden stakes, and steel tetrahedron landing obstacles, as well as infantry in pillboxes and light antiaircraft guns, were just above the shoreline to either side of Uncle Beach.

Farther inland were the Inner Harbor and Outer Harbor as well as the Scheldt shipyard, just to the northwest of the landing area. All of these areas possessed antiaircraft, antitank, and coastal guns in concrete or open emplacements, light guns in casemates, infantry rifle pits, and machine-gun pillboxes.

More than 300 Allied guns opened up on Walcheren's southern shores and ranged as far north as Domburg. While the Flushing operation depended on surprise with a predawn landing under cover of a bombardment lasting from 4:45 to 5:40 AM, the

A Sherman "crab" flail tank comes ashore from an LCT during the invasion of Walcheren, November 1, 1944. The drums on the front of the tank rotate, causing the chains to beat the ground and detonate land mines.

National Archives

Both: Imperial War Museum

landing at Westkapelle employed a sizable armada of ships and vessels of all sorts, including a support squadron and a bombardment squadron.

The landing on the fortified seafront at Flushing by six troops of the British No. 4 Commando took place at 5:45 AM.

Inclement conditions had canceled the heavy bombing scheduled for the dockyards at Flushing. However, de Havilland Mosquito fighter bombers with their cannon and 500-pound bombs roared in to attack.

The initial seaborne landing met little opposition, and some German prisoners and guns were captured. The Kriegsmarine's minefields made very little impact on the shallow-draft landing craft.

Dasser stated after the war that the combination of Allied bombing, artillery barrage, and flooding kept the Wehrmacht artillery from opposing the initial predawn landing more forcefully. However, by 6:30 AM considerable machine-gun and 20mm cannon fire met the other No. 4 Commando troops' assault craft on the flanks of Uncle Beach. Undeterred, the commandos disembarked against somewhat dazed and ineffective defenders.

By 7:30, Uncle Beach was able to accept landing craft, and the 4th King's Own South Borderers (KOSB) of the British 52nd Division's 155th Brigade, coming from Breskens, began to land. The various commando troops, after securing Uncle, then fanned out to secure a bridgehead at Flushing to allow the Scottish infantry to pass through and secure the town.

The first companies of the 4th KOSB came ashore without much opposing gunfire, but by the time later companies arrived the Germans were saturating the area with heavy fire from seafront batteries and mortars just inland from the beachhead.

Several landing craft were hit by the defenders' accurate mortar barrages; one Landing Craft, Assault (LCA) sank with more than 20 men on board. Communications with Breskens and between the different companies of the 4th KOSB ceased, and the Scottish infantry just barely landed their heavier assault ordnance before German northeastern coastal batteries prevented further reinforcements from disembarking.

Despite the resistance, the 4th KOSB cleared the beach by 8 AM, and the last companies of the battalion trekked farther into the town's outskirts against opposition. Companies A through D, 4th KOSB, either went through their preceding commando troops onto their respective targets or reinforced them if they were meeting heavier opposition. By 9 AM, No. 4 Commando, supported by the 4th KOSB, had established an effective blocking position at the entrance to Flushing's Old Town area.

Rugged determination on the part of the British commandos and the Scottish infantry assault forces, along with the timely appearance of RAF fighter bombers, tilted the battle's favor to the Allies by late morning despite persistent German opposition.

Because of continued German artillery fire and too few troops to mount a westward attack along the seawall's esplanade, the beachhead remained stationary for the night as additional British reinforcements arrived. German POWs were pressed into service to manhandle supplies across the mud and treacherous surface below the high water mark.

By 10 PM on D-day, the assault on and seizure of parts of the town of Flushing inland from Uncle Beach were deemed a success. However, the most difficult task on this day was the clearance of Flushing, since the Germans of the 1019th Grenadier Regiment used warehouses, rooftops, and docked ships as strong defensive positions. Furthermore, the town was a maze of dockyards and confined thoroughfares, the latter of which had free-flowing currents of floodwaters.

The following day, elements of No. 4 Commando took another objective, code-named "Dover," a seafront strongpoint situated just beyond the landing craft-obstructed shoreline at a junction of two Flushing streets. Also early on November 2, three companies of the just landed 5th KOSB advanced northward from the dockyard gate into the newer part of the town. By midday, additional companies of the 5th KOSB followed them and

veered eastward, reaching the Walcheren Canal north of the dockyard in Old Town.

By evening of D+1, the dock area objectives across the canal to the east—code-named Haymarket, Strand, and Piccadilly—remained in German possession. These objectives were situated in the Inner Harbor east of the Walcheren Canal and were taken on D+3 by the 5th KOSB despite numerous well-defended bunkers.

Early on November 5, under the cover of rocket-firing Hawker Typhoons and artillery firing across the Western Scheldt, the 5th KOSB crossed into the eastern dock area, clearing the German defenses while taking more than 100 POWs.

Elements of the 7th/9th Battalion, The Royal Scots, an amalgamation of two Territorial battalions, were the last of 155th Brigade's troops to cross the Western Scheldt. They slogged through knee-deep mud during the predawn hours of D+2 to assault Flushing's Hotel Grand Britannia, the Germans' command bunker that had been turned into a final redoubt. The hotel's defenses included trenches, pillboxes, and gun emplacements all camouflaged to looke like the fronts of houses. A 20mm antiaircraft gun was perched on the hotel's roof.

After a skirmish lasting all morning, the 7th/9th Battalion captured the hotel and devastated the defenders' communications. The garrison commander, Oberst Eugen Reinhardt, who expected his troops to fight to the last man, learned after his own surrender that 600 Germans already had been captured from other areas of Flushing by noon of D+2.

THE FIGHT FOR WESTKAPELLE

At Westkapelle, Operation Infatuate II's amphibious assault against the west coast began at 9:45 AM, following the naval bombardment at 8:15. The armada (Naval Force T), commanded by Captain Anthony F. Pugsley aboard the frigate HMS *Kingsmill,* comprised over 150 different types of vessels escorted by the two dozen gun and rocket-firing craft of the support squadron.

To these were added the 15-inch guns of the three bombardment squadron Royal Navy vessels: the battleship HMS *Warspite* and two Royal Navy monitors, HMS *Erebus* and HMS *Roberts*. It was already known that only 15-inch naval guns or a 500-pound aerial bomb could penetrate the reinforced concrete casemates that housed most of Walcheren's coastal batteries.

ABOVE: Artillery shells explode as British assault troops advance at dawn along the waterfront near Flushing, November 1, 1944. OPPOSITE: These German coastal guns and blockhouses on the Westkapelle beachhead were quickly put out of action by British forces.

Since sandbanks mitigated any deep-draft vessels from approaching the shoreline to provide direct fire support, a squadron of shallow-draft Royal Navy gunboats and rocket-firing craft accompanied the assault waves, while the Allied artillery in Breskens commenced its barrage at 8:35 AM.

The landing force was Leicester's 4th Special Service Brigade, consisting of Royal Marines (No. 41, 47, and 48 Commandos) and elements of No. 10 (IA) Commando. Leicester had led this force during the Normandy invasion and had experience in planning amphibious operations as a staff officer.

Nos. 41 and No. 10 (IA) Commandos were charged with the capture of the town of Westkapelle and the neutralization of the W15 battery at the shoreline in front of the town. Once accomplished, both groups were to continue northeastward along the sand dunes to assault the W17 coastal batteries, then continue on to the coastal town of Domburg.

Number 48 Commando, under Lt. Col. James Moulton, was to secure its assault point and then turn south to capture the W13 battery, which comprised four 150mm and two 75mm guns in casemates. This German position also had three 20mm flak guns that raked the landing craft as they approached.

German artillery batteries at Westkapelle, W15 and W13, opened fire when the troop-laden assault craft were spotted within five miles of the intended landing zone, sinking a support squadron vessel south of the gap.

Other British gunboats from this southern support group soon fell victim to enemy artillery fire, either catching fire or sinking. At the northern edge of the gap, another German battery, W17, comprising four 220mm French guns in concrete encase-

Imperial War Museum

ABOVE: Marine Commandos advancing from the Westkappelle beachhead fire 3-inch mortars from behind the cover of an amphibious LVT (Landing Vehicle, Tracked) "Buffalo." OPPOSITE: British assault troops advance through the rubble-strewn streets of Flushing.

ments and a solitary 150mm field gun, severely damaged or sank many other British support craft.

The bombardment squadron was tasked to fire at W15 and W13, which were both closest to Westkapelle, and then shift their fire to W17 to the north near Domburg and W11 (housing four 150 mm guns) to the south near Dishoek. However, two of the *Warspite*'s 15-inch turrets were out of commission, and the monitor *Erebus* had a temporary turret failure, limiting its bombardment to 53 shells fired that day. In the absence of air spotting, the *Roberts* fired only 58 shells, but most of them were in the vital two hours before H-hour.

A timely sortie by RAF Typhoons stationed in Belgium aided the amphibious assault immensely since 80 percent of the naval support squadron craft had been disabled by the accurate German battery fire.

The craft of the support squadron were not designed to deal with heavy concrete defenses. They were intended to give close support against strongpoints, while rocket-bearing gunboats were to drench a beach with high explosives, thereby eliminating hidden infantry entrenchments. Ultimately, the support squadron was prepared to sacrifice itself to draw the batteries' fire away from the troop-laden landing craft.

Fortuitously, the guns of W13 went silent after 10 AM, having exhausted their heavy caliber ammunition supply. An after-action report identified this as a stroke of fortune since the W13 battery had not been hit by the bombardment squadron and could have sunk all the support squadron vessels before turning its attention to the troop assault craft.

This same report stated that the German artillerymen made a "grave tactical error of using up the ammunition on the support craft to which they were not vulnerable [in their casemates], instead of holding their fire for use on the landing craft, the important targets."

At 10:30 AM, the main assault of Nos. 41 and 48 Commandos, with elements of the No. 10 (IA) Commando, began. These units landed on the northern shoulder of the gap and secured the left flank of the beachhead (Red Beach). At Red Beach, all three LCIs successfully grounded, although two had been damaged by German artillery.

Although the W15 casemates had been shelled by HMS *Roberts* that morning, the German gunners opened up on four LCTs carrying the Royal Engineers of Hobart's 79th Armoured Division, who were scheduled to land at Red Beach along the sea wall to the north of the gap.

Two LCTs carrying armored breaching teams approached the beach at approximately 10 AM. One of the LCTs was hit six times by 3-inch shells from W15, forcing it to withdraw with most of its tanks damaged and still on board.

Another LCT was hit in the engine room and turned back without beaching. With Red Beach becoming unsuitable for further LCT landings, two others managed to beach farther south at 11 AM on White Beach.

The LCTs that did beach were now among the soft clay and sand strewn with large blocks of masonry from the broken dike. Several armored vehicles became mired in the polder with only a few able to reach firm ground without assistance.

Disembarking commandos rapidly secured this northern shoulder against light opposition and proceeded toward Westkapelle, engaged the W15 battery with small-arms fire as there was no protective German infantry, and captured the battery by 12:30 PM, taking more than 100 prisoners.

STRUGGLE AT WESTKAPELLE

Shortly after 10 AM at Green Beach, at the southern end of the gap, Moulton's No. 48 Commando, with the help of additional fighter bomber sorties, the bombardment vessels, and accurate artillery fire across the Scheldt from Breskens, landed. These troops came ashore in Buffaloes and M-29 Weasels that swam out of their LCTs.

None of the LCTs moving steadily toward the beach were hit, and only a few shells fell near them. The troops of 48 Commando, with their Buffaloes firing their 20mm Polsten guns at the dunes, quickly overran their objectives, which included two pillboxes on the south shoulder of the gap and the radar station.

Most of Westkapelle was clear of the Germans by 11:15 AM, by which time the commandos had secured a footing in the south dunes, ready to advance on the W13 battery. Thirty minutes later, they headed southeastward and received enemy small-arms fire from the pesky W13 battery, which stopped their advance.

Throughout the morning of the landing, Captain Pugsley's support squadron blasted shore emplacements while receiving intense German artillery fire. Of the 27 vessels in the support squadron, only seven remained capable of sustaining action; Pugsley withdrew them to Ostend. The 1,000 seamen and Marines of the squadron had sustained a heavy butcher's bill with 17 percent killed and 20 percent wounded, but they enabled the landings to occur and most of the main objectives to be secured.

In the mid-afternoon, Lt. Col. Eric C.E. Palmer's No. 41 Commando maneuvered northwest through the sand dunes toward Domburg to neutralize the W17 battery with its four 220mm French artillery pieces. They lacked armored support but had Royal Artillery bombardment cover.

At about 12:30 PM, Lt. Col. C.F. Phillips' 47 Commando, which had been held offshore as a floating reserve, headed for the beach in four LCTs along with the 4th Special Service Brigade headquarters detachment, some Royal Engineers, and Medical Corps personnel. On their run to shore, the men of No. 47 Commando observed the punishment that the support craft were receiving, watching one explode and passing another floating hull up.

In the last few hundred yards German shells hit three of the four assaulting vessels. The landing time for this Commando coincided with the damage inflicted on the support squadron, thus the LCTs taking 47 Commando also caught the attention of the German guns. B Troop of 47 Commando lost about half its men when the leading LCT was hit.

Phillips' No. 47 Commando was to land south of the gap in the dike, but either because of the confusion caused by the shelling, unclear orders, or tidal changes, the surviving LCT lowered its ramp at the gap in the dike, allowing the amphibians to swim out instead of beaching just clear of the gap to the south as 48 Commando had done.

The rest of the landing did not go well. S Troop had only one mortar and one machine gun left, while A, B, and X Troops were soaked after swimming ashore in the cold water. Most of the Weasels sank or were abandoned in Westkapelle, and much equipment was lost—all of this without 47 Commando directly combating the Germans ashore.

It was not until dusk that 47 Commando would reassemble south of the gap because its Weasels could not swim the gap and many of the Buffaloes went in the wrong direction.

Although 48 Commando was spared from the accurate German W13 battery fire that ravaged 47 Commando and the support squadron, it incurred a casualty rate of over 26 percent since landing and could not continue southeastward to Flushing.

Just after 3 PM, the 15-inch guns from HMS *Warspite* took W17 under fire; however, it was RAF Spitfire sorties with their 500-pound bombs and strafing cannons that both assisted the Royal Marine advance and silenced the battery's 220mm guns.

As No. 41 Commando advanced on W17, the Germans emerged from their trenches and dugouts fairly quickly with hands up; prisoners were gathered up 20 to 30 at a time. At 5:45 PM, 41 Commando entered the outskirts of Domburg and the W17 battery surrendered. Thirty minutes later, the commandos controlled the main Domburg crossroads.

Meanwhile, a coordinated assault with naval gunfire, fighter bomber attacks, and

Imperial War Museum

Both: National Archives

ABOVE: Men of No. 41 Commando dash through the ruins of Westkapelle toward the lighthouse on the western tip of Walcheren Island. OPPOSITE: After Westkapelle was taken, German prisoners are escorted to the rear by British commandos. The port of Antwerp finally began unloading supply ships at the end of November.

48 Commando's advance was assembled, and by 6:30 PM the entire W13 battery and its gunners were captured.

With darkness, the commandos cleaned their weapons, hauled ammunition, and prepared to advance again at dawn.

At dusk on November 1, the 4th Special Service Brigade possessed six miles of sand dunes. All three Royal Marine Commando battalions and the two troops of No. 10 (IA) Commando were ashore and, despite casualties, were ready and eager for action the following day.

During the day, after much effort at White Beach, a total of eight vehicles—two Shermans, three mine-clearing flail tanks, two AVREs (engineer vehicles) and an armored bulldozer—made it through the polder toward Westkapelle. Nine others had to be abandoned to the rising tide and seven withdrew to Ostend.

That night, however, the tide drowned the three flail tanks in Westkapelle. Additionally, most of the specialized armored assault teams had been lost on landing, with only a single Sherman having fired at targets in Westkapelle.

Due to 47 Commando's late landing, the attack on W11 by Phillips' men did not start until 5 PM, became disorganized, and had to be pulled back and reassembled south of the Westkapelle gap because of darkness and mounting casualties. A second attack was planned for the next morning.

A British priority for D+1 was to knock out the last remaining coastal battery, W11, with its four 150mm guns to allow Royal Navy minesweeping to commence to the northwest of Flushing in the Wielingen Channel. On November 2, RAF Typhoons and the monitor HMS *Erebus* neutralized German coastal strongpoints and engaged the W11 battery itself.

No. 47 Commando, after passing through 48 Commando, was to move southeast to clear the Dishoek dunes and link up with 4 British Commando heading west from Flushing. Elements of 47 Commando and 10 (IA) Commando, plus a troop of 48 Commando giving enfilading fire, attacked W11 between 8:30 and 9 AM on three axes.

By noon on D+2, November 3, the Germans at W11 surrendered in large numbers, many visibly shaken after taking more than 25 hits during the aerial and naval bombardment of the battery the previous day.

No. 47 Commando, by late afternoon on D+2, then headed farther southeast and seized the last centers of German resistance on Walcheren's western coast—Batteries W4 and W3, northwest of Flushing in the vicinity of Nolledijk. A few hours later, these Royal Marines reached the Nolledijk gap and linked up with British forces coming from Flushing.

COMPLETING THE CAPTURE

The 4th KOSB was able to reach Middelburg from Flushing to the southwest on the night of November 4 by crossing the flooded airfield beyond Souburg. The next day at 12:30 PM, 11 available Buffaloes, along with accompanying infantry from elements of the 7th/9th Royal Scots and 7th Manchester Regiment on board, swam into the floods and outflanked

the pillboxes that had been holding up the advance of the 4th KOSB from Flushing.

After one Buffalo was destroyed by a mine and another returned to Flushing with wounded soldiers, the remaining nine LVTs entered the center of Middelburg unopposed. There General Dasser surrendered to the rather small force from the 155th Brigade.

At Walcheren's northern end, in partly wooded dunes between Veere on the east coast and Domburg on the northwest coast, there were two remaining casemated batteries, W18 and W19, along with the remainder of the German 1020th Infantry Regiment. On November 5, No. 41 Commando took W18.

The next morning, No. 41 Commando and No. 10 (IA) Commando made slow headway through the minefields in front of W19. RAF fighter bombers and the three surviving tanks of the original armored assault teams of the 79th Armoured Division assisted the British infantry in the capture of a strongpoint called Black Hut, located in the dunes to the southwest of the W19 battery.

At 3:30 AM on November 6, leading elements of the 157th Brigade of the British 52nd Division, after crossing the Sloedam Causeway from South Beveland, entered Middelburg. Simultaneously, the 52nd Division's 156th Brigade moved north to Veere and captured the town. Veere had been functioning as a German escape route to Schouwen, the next island eastward.

Also on the 6th, the 4th KOSB arrived from Flushing along with a company of the 7th/9th Royal Scots and more than 2,000 German prisoners. Except for those killed and wounded in the mined Buffalo, Middelburg was taken without a single British casualty.

On November 7, No. 41 Commando pushed toward the Oranjebosch water-pumping station in the northeast corner of the island. At 8:30 the next morning, D+7, No. 4 Commando, having taken over the lead from No. 41 Commando, met German officers in the Overduin Woods outside Vrouwenpolder, the extreme northeast tip of Walcheren, to discuss terms of surrender. The W19 battery surrendered with the rest, and the Royal Engineers destroyed its guns. Shortly thereafter, all German resistance on Walcheren ceased.

OUTCOME

The Official History of the Canadian Army in the Second World War refers to Operation Infatuate as "a Cinderella battle," taking a "backseat" to both MarketGarden and the later Battle of the Bulge. But there was no glass slipper accompanying this battle, just the bloody and gritty tally of two armies trying to kill each other.

In the end, Allied casualties for Operation Infatuate were heavy, given the battle's weeklong duration. British, Canadian, and Allied casualties were reported by General Simonds as 703 officers and 12,170 other ranks killed, wounded, and missing.

In addition, all 24 armored vehicles with the armored assault teams were lost, including numerous amphibians (Buffaloes and Weasels). The Royal Navy had 17 of its 27 gunboats destroyed or put out of action. The landing force lost just over 50 percent of its LCTs and 42 out of 72 LCAs.

The Germans lost 300 of their concrete bunkers and associated heavy ordnance and the 70th Infantry Division was removed from the Wehrmacht's order of battle. At least 40,000 Germans were captured and hundreds killed or wounded. The Dutch civilian population, caught in the crossfire, also suffered heavy casualties.

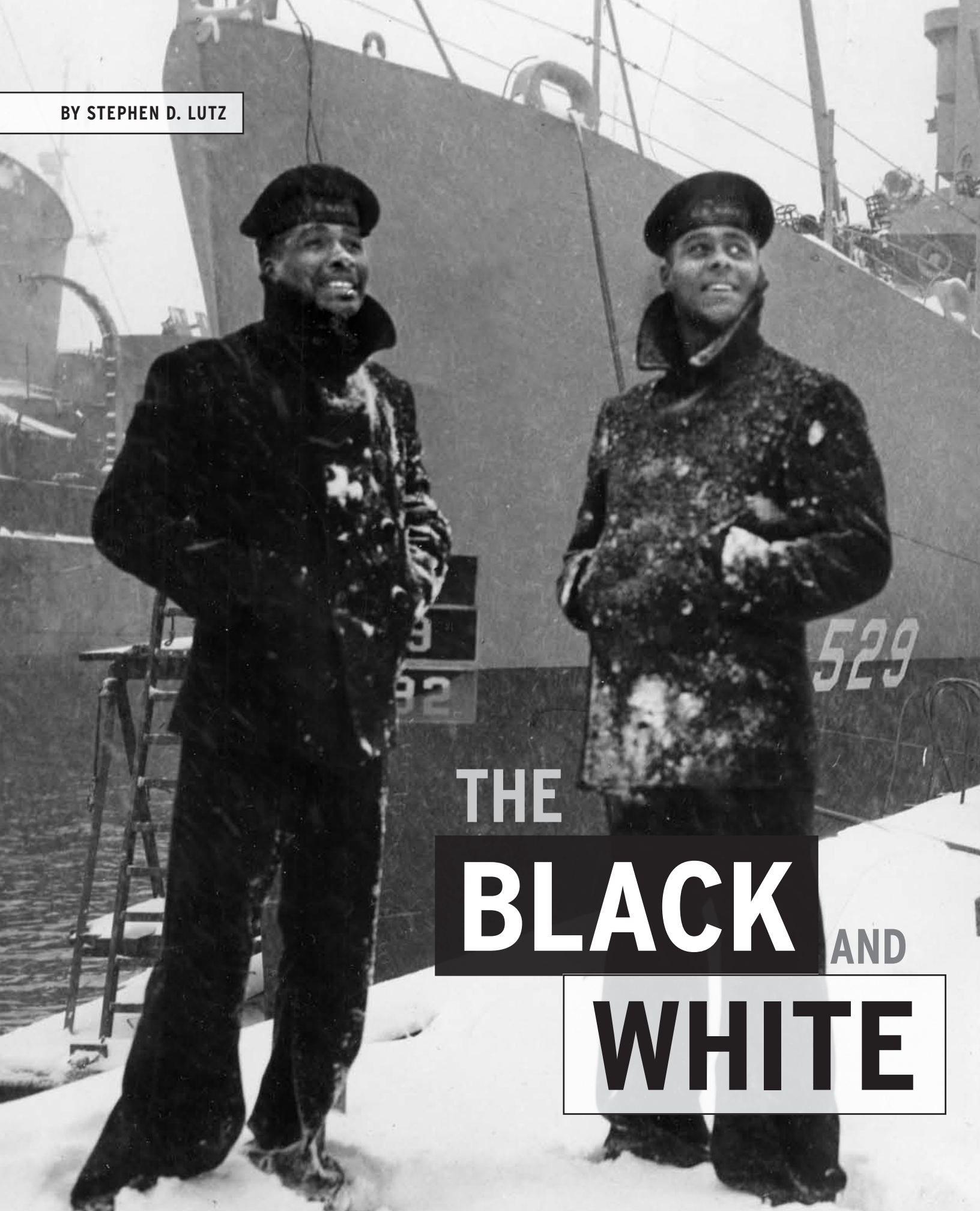
With the "cork" at last removed from the Scheldt Estuary, the river was swept for mines; it was not until November 28 that the first large ships were able to use the port. By December 14, though, 19,000 tons of supplies were being unloaded at Antwerp daily. The opening of the port did not come a moment too soon, for the German Ardennes counteroffensive, called the Battle of the Bulge in the West, was launched on December 16.

Walcheren Island itself was devastated, with almost 90 percent of its landmass left underwater. Land mines and booby traps had to be cleared for both the safety of the Allied soldiers and the Dutch civilian population. The dike repair started in earnest but was not compeleted until the winter of 1946.

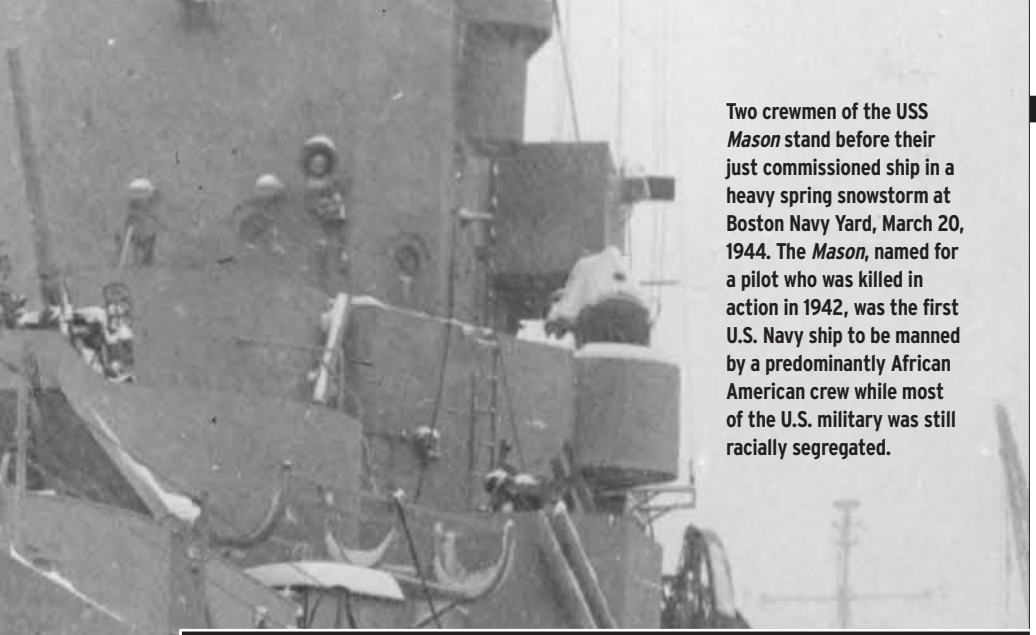
Many of the battlefield's sites remain today, such as the dunes and a restored observation bunker. However, there are few remnants of the German batteries that covered the watery minefields of the Western Scheldt Estuary, the opening of which was the primary reason for Operations Infatuate I and II.

General Guy Simonds quipped after the war, "If Walcheren had been a defeat, it would have been as famous as Arnhem," acknowledging that Operation MarketGarden had eclipsed his own Operation Infatuate—the last, large-scale, seaborne assault in Europe. □

BY STEPHEN D. LUTZ



THE BLACK AND WHITE



Two crewmen of the USS *Mason* stand before their just commissioned ship in a heavy spring snowstorm at Boston Navy Yard, March 20, 1944. The *Mason*, named for a pilot who was killed in action in 1942, was the first U.S. Navy ship to be manned by a predominantly African American crew while most of the U.S. military was still racially segregated.

The destroyer escort USS *Mason* became an experiment in racial equality in World War II, the Navy's version of the Tuskegee Airmen.

SHIP

During World War II, the U.S. Navy built more than 1,000 destroyer escorts, ships whose primary duty was to escort supply convoys across the world's oceans to insure that their precious cargo of food, fuel, war material, and personnel got to their destinations safely.

One of these destroyer escorts, the USS *Mason* (DE-529), never fired a shot in anger, supported an amphibious assault landing on a hostile shore, or attacked an enemy submarine. Yet its place in history is assured because of one unique fact. It was the first U.S. Navy ship with a predominately African American crew at a time when most black sailors were restricted to low-level, demeaning tasks.

Recalling his World War II Navy days, former *Mason* radioman Merwin Peters said, "The Navy has a good way of covering things up." He was referring to the USS *Iowa*'s turret explosion mishap of April 19, 1989. But he felt the same about his ship, the USS *Mason,* which he described as being "something the Navy decided they just didn't want out."

What caused the Navy to shudder about the *Mason?* It was not how ineffective it was. It was overly effective, far more than ever anticipated. No, it was that its 95 percent African American crew excelled in their seamanship duties. For all intents and purposes, in the Navy's way of thinking in those days, the crew should have been failures. The exact opposite happened.

In doing his job aboard ship, Peters went on to learn the secret German Navy code on his own. But first, Peters and his black shipmates had to get aboard ship.

At least in writing, the U.S. Navy had settled its standing on race in February 1945, stating, "The Navy accepts no theories of racial differences in inborn ability, but accepts that every man wearing his uniform be trained and used in accordance with his maximum

National Archives

National Archives

Three of the *Mason*'s gunner's mates are instructed at the Norfolk Naval Training Station, Virginia, in the assembly of a 20mm machine gun—the type they will man aboard the ship. Photo taken January 3, 1944. LEFT: The *Mason*'s skipper, Lt. Cmdr. William M. Blackford, USNR, poses with Charles Divers (far left) and three shipmates at the Norfolk Naval Training Station, January 3, 1944. OPPOSITE: Lt. Cmdr. William M. "Big Bill" Blackford, assumes command of the USS *Mason* during commissioning ceremonies at Boston Navy Yard, March 20, 1944. Blackford was fiercely proud of his men and defended them against any slights by other white officers.

'individual capacity determined on the basis of individual performances.'"

After decades of restricting what duties black sailors were allowed to perform, the post-war Navy referred to the *Mason*—and another "breakthrough" ship, the sub chaser *PC 1264*—as shining examples of what African American sailors could do. These were the only two predominantly African American-crewed ships throughout the war; they effectively proved their worth at sea. The Navy would take a long time to show its appreciation.

Entering its first full year of the war in 1942, America's military restricted African

American members to 10 percent in any uniform. Affecting that formula were the post-World War I years of 1918-1932. Between those years, the Navy prevented African Americans from enlisting, but by 1932 the world's political situation was changing and not for the better. Imperialistic Fascist land conquests became a reality, and a new world war was looming on the horizon.

The Navy more or less opened a side door for African American enlistments when, in 1932, blacks were allowed to enlist but the most promising rating an African American could attain was that of mess steward. That meant being nothing more than a cook or a butler-waiter for officers. Although the Navy could have had a black sailor quota of up to 10 percent, the service never got higher than six percent.

Two days after the December 7, 1941, Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor, the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) sent a telegram to Navy Secretary Frank Knox requesting that African Americans be allowed to fill posts in the Navy other than that of messmen. With rare exceptions, those holding ratings other than mess steward tended to be restricted to shore duty, as the Navy feared that blacks and whites sharing the cramped quarters aboard ship would spark racial problems.

Knox refused the NAACP's request, but the winds of change were blowing. President Franklin D. Roosevelt urged Knox to reexamine the policy and, if at all possible, gradually reach a point of integration among ships' crews.

On March 27, 1942, the Navy's General Board responded, "The General Board fully recognizes and appreciates the social and economic problems involved, and has striven to reconcile these requirements with what it feels must be paramount at any consideration, namely the maintenance at the highest level of the fighting efficiency of the Navy." It added that black sailors could be used "with least disadvantage" in shore and dock installations, aboard local defense vessels, with construction units ("Seabees"), and on selected Coast Guard cutters.

On April 7, the president issued an order that the Navy must proceed with integration, and so the Navy announced that, as of June 1, 1942, African Americans could enlist for the general service. Two ships would act as a vanguard of that new policy: the USS *Mason* and the submarine chaser *PC-1264*. The *Mason*'s keel was laid at the Boston Navy Yard on October 14, 1943, and the ship was commissioned on March 20, 1944; *PC-1264* was commissioned on April 25, 1944.

The time had come for the Navy to extend itself and see what it could do with its new resources of manpower aboard warships. The *Mason* was selected to be the test case of this radical new experiment.

Already well known as an example of what a black fighting man could do was Messman Third Class Doris (pronounced "Doree") Miller. During the Japanese attack on

Pearl Harbor, Miller, aboard the battleship *West Virginia,* came to the aid of the ship's captain, Mervyn Bennion, who lay mortally wounded by a shell fragment.

Enraged, Miller then headed to the nearest available .50-caliber antiaircraft machine gun and began firing away at the enemy planes. When the attack ceased, Miller helped rescue injured sailors. For his actions, he was awarded the Navy Cross, the second highest award for gallantry in the Navy. Unfortunately, he was killed when the escort carrier *Liscome Bay* was sunk on December 7, 1943.

In Navy nomenclature, "DD" signifies a destroyer, while "DE" refers to a destroyer escort—a smaller version of a destroyer. DEs came in five classes, with the *Mason* being in the Evarts class. Ninety-seven Evarts-class DEs were built during the war, with 32 going to England under the Lend-Lease program. A ship of the Evarts class had a weight of 1,436 tons and a crew of 200. With 198 tons of diesel fuel, it could range 4,150 miles with a top speed of 21.5 knots (23 miles per hour) under good sailing conditions.

For the purpose of sea warfare, the *Mason* carried three 3-inch guns, one twin 40mm gun (if not the older 1.1-inch gun), nine 20mm single guns, one spigot mortar that lobbed depth charges known as hedgehogs onto submerged submarines, two depth-charge tracks, and eight K gun projectors to throw depth charges. What the DEs were missing were the destroyers' capabilities of launching torpedoes.

Being smaller also meant being lighter and faster. A destroyer escort such as the *Mason* was, according to one historian, "really a fragile ship, according to standards of Navy needs and productions. The hull was very thin metal."

The *Mason* was named in honor of Ensign Newton Henry Mason, a naval aviation cadet who was the Navy's first African American pilot. Assigned to Fighter Squadron VF-3, the 24-year-old died in action over the Coral Sea on May 9, 1942. His mother, Mrs. David Mason, would receive his posthumous Distinguished Flying Cross.

As with any such collection of servicemen, the *Mason*'s crew came from all across America—from the East to West Coasts, from the Deep South to the northern and midwestern states.

One of the 156 enlisted crewmembers of the *Mason* was South Carolinian James W. Graham. His first attempt at volunteering came along with four friends who all strove to become Army Air Corps pilots; they were given a flat "no" to that idea. A suggestion was made about joining the Navy, but knowledgeable of the Navy's limitations on jobs for blacks, Graham's first reaction was that he was "not going to cook for anybody or clean up behind anybody."

When the Navy told him they had gotten beyond that and that attempts were being made at equalizing ratings, he enlisted on a lie; he was 17 feigning 18. No matter; Graham became a Radioman 2nd Class on the *Mason*.

Gordon "Skinny" Buchanan grew up on Long Island, New York. Attending an "all-white school" proved advantageous for him. He learned German, and on board the *Mason* he was a quartermaster. He was confident that he would be used as an interrogator should any German be brought aboard. Better yet, if a German U-boat was taken in tow, Buchanan felt sure he would be one of those to go aboard to bring it in.

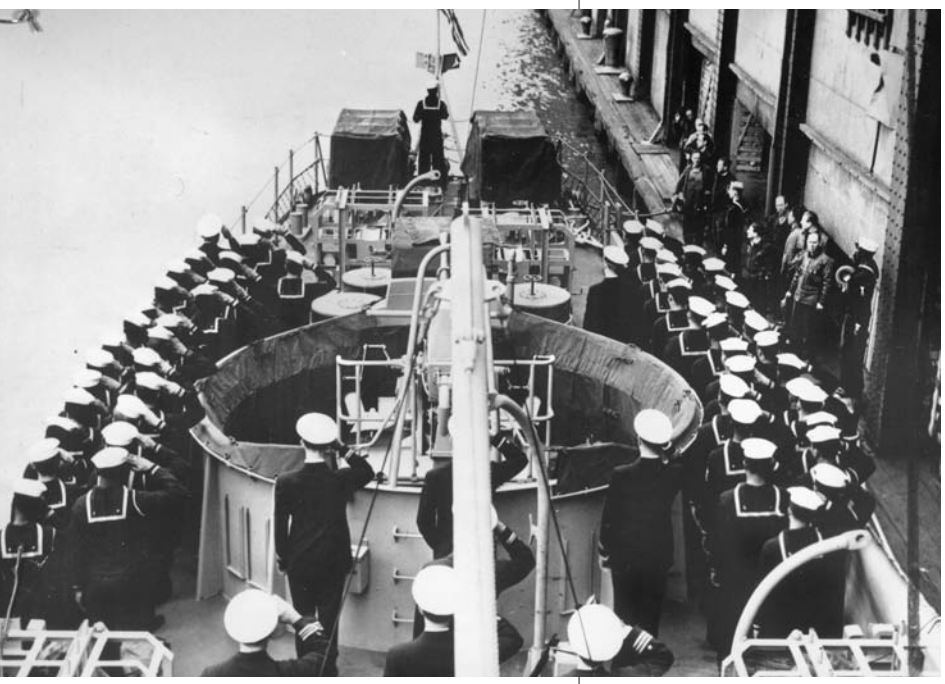
TO A MAN, THE CREW'S RELATIONSHIP WITH BLACKFORD WAS ONE WHERE THEY WOULD "FOLLOW HIM TO HELL AND BACK."

National Archives

Winfrey Roberts was North Carolina-born but raised in South Orange, New Jersey. His extended family background afforded him a comfortable childhood and a prosperous Washington, D.C., War Department job, but he wanted to see action. First trying the Coast Guard, he was rebuked but was then drafted into the Navy, becoming an electrician's mate aboard the *Mason*.

Seaman Second Class Lorenzo A. DuFau was a married father of one living in New Orleans, Louisiana, prior to his Navy stint. When his Navy classmates were dispersed to other locales, many ended up at California's Port Chicago; he missed that assignment by the one line that separated his name alphabetially from another. On July 17, 1944, a massive explosion at the port killed 322 personnel, 225 of them African American sailors.

Fifty other African American sailors started the Port Chicago Mutiny over ill treatment, poor training, and biases that may have led to the deaths of their comrades (see *WWII Quarterly,* Summer 2014).



Originally intended for the Pacific, and with a white crew, the *Mason* was sent to the Atlantic for convoy escort duty—and one other greater task: to prove the worth of a mostly black crew, just as the Tuskegee Airmen were proving the worth of black fighter pilots.

Quartermaster Second Class Charles Divers, a 21-year-old from Melrose Park, Illinois, who joined the Navy to get out of going into the Army, said the ship was called *Eleanor's Folly,* after President Roosevelt's wife Eleanor, who pushed for racial integration in the military. Divers expressed a sentiment that many others shared: "The *Mason* was not expected to succeed."

When construction began on DE-529 in October 1943, German U-boats had had a bountiful month, as 11 merchant ships heading for Britain or Russia were sunk. The prime time for such torpedoing was at dusk or sunrise, with all floating targets clearly silhouetted. This was an ongoing apprehension among the *Mason*'s crew and its white skipper, Lt. Cmdr. William Mann Blackford, when the ship was assigned to convoy escort duty.

Commanding a ship came naturally to the Seattle-born Blackford. His affluent parents (his father was a physician) owned a yacht, and he learned the ways of the sea at a young age. After graduating from the University of Washington, he joined the Naval Reserve, then went off to the University of Virginia to pursue a doctoral degree. He never finished. When war broke out, he was ordered to active duty. His first assignment was aboard the minesweeper USS *Phoebe* (AMc-57) in the Aleutian Islands, where the Japanese had occupied Attu and Kiska.

Blackford never knew how he was chosen to be commander of an "experimental" ship, but he saw his command and his crew as no different than that of any other U.S. Navy warship. Receiving the helm of the *Mason,* Blackford wrote to his parents that the ship "cost $7,000,000, and we have all the scientific gadgets aboard that we can put." The most prized technology lay in its tracking, radio, radar, and sonar capabilities.

On March 20, 1944—a blustery, snowy day—the *Mason* was commissioned in the Boston Navy Yard; Ensign Mason's mother christened the ship. She then presented a photo of her son and a plaque that were mounted in the ship's wardroom. Another presentation came from the Boston Colored Society, enough musical instruments to form a band. The *New York Times* of March 21, 1944, reported that the *Mason* had a crew of 204, with 12 white officers and 32 white senior-grade chief petty officers. The 128 other crewmen were African American.

Then came the five-week shakedown cruise that took the *Mason* to Bermuda and back. With ship, equipment, and crew tested, the Navy showed more concern about cleanliness than anything else. In future return inspections, that always seemed the higher priority.

Any warship is only as good as its crew and commander. Where would that put the *Mason*'s crew and commander? To a man, the crew's relationship with Blackford was one where they would "follow him to hell and back," mainly because they felt he would do the same for them.

Blackford never backed off from a challenge made toward the integrity or ability of his crew. Once, in an exchange with a commander of a similar ship, Blackford was asked how operations were on his ship with "so few white men." Blackford shot back that he had "less of a problem than you. We get along fine and do our job with no problem of any sort."

How well did the crew follow their captain? In his position as quartermaster, Charles

Both: National Archives

ABOVE: Sailors aboard the submarine chaser *PC-1264* observe one of their depth charges exploding during an antisubmarine drill during the ship's shakedown cruise. OPPOSITE: The crew of *PC-1264* salutes the American flag during the ship's commissioning ceremony, April 25, 1944. The ship became the Navy's second ship to be manned by a mainly black crew.

Divers spent time in the conn during general quarters-battle station calls. He witnessed Blackford's personality up close and said that he, as well as his shipmates, "had a lot of confidence in him." That made a considerable impact in how efficiently the sailors did their jobs.

Alonzo DuFau was also impressed with the skipper. "He was a captain indeed, and a man I will always have love and respect for. From the very beginning he was straight with us.... He advised us that, 'As long as you do your job, what your rank calls for, you'll have no problem. I am just here to run a U.S. Navy ship. I am not here to solve any race problems."

Another *Mason* sailor was 21-year-old Yeoman First Class Melvin Grant from Ogden, Utah. He became Blackford's "secretary" and was quartered next door to his boss on the ship. Blackford accelerated Grant's promotions rather rapidly in an 18-month span. It was "not because he liked me or anything," Grant said. "It was because of the work I had done. He acted toward us as man to man. We all thought he was a great man. He understood human nature. He didn't treat anyone as an inferior."

Blackford wrote home: "Am delighted with the colored men who are here. They know what they are doing and really put out the work.... I think the crew is better than average.... They are anxious to make a name for themselves and actually work harder."

The submarine chaser *PC-1264* was the second ship to take part in the Navy's racial integration experiment.

Being a smaller craft limited to what some may call shallow-water service, *PC-1264* mostly escorted convoys to the Caribbean and South America. It sailed the waters from the New England states south to Bermuda and Guantanamo Bay, Cuba. Its 65-man, mostly black crew manned a 450-ton vessel measuring 173 feet long with a 23-foot beam.

These small ships were specifically designed to chase down submarines. Armaments consisted of one 3-inch dual-purpose mount, one 40mm gun, five 20mm guns, two depth charge projectors, and two tracks. Primarily berthed at Tompkinsville, New York, on Staten Island's northeast corner, life aboard *PC-1264* came down to seven days on the water, then five days on land.

On its first convoy escort duty in June 1944, *PC-1264* sailed from New York to Guantanamo Bay. At one point three hours were invested in tracking a possible U-boat, but nothing came of the barrage of depth charges launched.

In mid-January 1945, *PC-1264*'s area of operation was between Montauk Point, Long Island, and Cape Charles, Chesapeake Bay. *PC-1264*'s skipper, Lieutenant Eric S. Purdon, was called by one of his fellow officers "a knowledgeable man and an excellent teacher.... In the face of injustice, he quickly came to the defense of his men." On January 14, Purdon decided to conduct a drill toward the end of a patrol 45 miles off the New York shore.

On this particular route the turnaround point was marked by a buoy known as Buoy Able. It was held in place by a chained anchor that showed up well on radar and sonar at its 135-foot depth. It became a commonly used target site for bored crews to fire upon for practice. Purdon had *PC-1264* charge down upon its well-used victim from 4,000 yards out.

A sailor named Henry James read off the dropping range from his sonar screen. Purdon's intent was to close within 1,000 yards and then pull away. James read off the range from 2,000 yards to 1,200 yards. At the 1,200 mark he surprised all within hearing distance when he announced that the target had turned left and was departing. Purdon needed three more confirmations from James before realizing *PC-1264* had stumbled upon the real thing. A U-boat had sequestered itself close enough to the buoy to blend in with any radar-sonar readings bounced off the anchor. Purdon's practice run came close enough to scare the U-boat into moving away.

Purdon completed three runs over his suspected victim. With water disturbances

coming from depth charges and from *PC-1264,* then those of joining ships *PC-1149* and Coast Guard cutters *Thetis* and *Icarus,* a couple of *PC-1264* crew claimed to have seen a submarine's conning tower. Nobody else could confirm this sighting. All that could be found was an oil slick.

On March 18, 1945, off Nova Scotia, *U-866* was sunk. It was confirmed to have been previously damaged. As far as the crew of *PC-1264* were concerned, they were the ones who damaged it. To the official keeper of Navy records, that would never be confirmed.

One of the *PC-1264* crewmen was Samuel Lee Gravely Jr., who became the first American black admiral in the U.S. Navy. As of 2008, *PC-1264* was one of three PCs rusting away in a Staten Island scrap yard. It was far beyond salvageable as a floating memorial to the crews and their service during World War II.

On July 1, 1944, the *Mason* received its first sailing order. It would join four other DEs escorting Convoy CK-3 to Portugal's harbor at Horta, Azores, then on to England. Task Group 27.5 consisted of the *Mason,* USS *Charles M. Stern* (DE-187), USS *William T. O'Neill* (DE-188), USS *John J. Powers* (DE-528), and USS *John M. Bermingham* (DE-530). All were Evarts-class ships except for *O'Neill,* of the Cannon class.

Although rivalry between ships' crews was the norm, the all-white crew of the *Bermingham* and the mostly black crew of the *Mason* often came to trouble when they mixed ashore. Otherwise, the *Mason*'s men conducted themselves admirably while ashore. Throughout the *Mason*'s half dozen voyages, these two ships seemed to be consistent traveling companions.

The *Mason*'s war activities are recorded three ways. Its deck log holds events in four-hour blocks. Significant happenings went into the ship's 24-hour war diary. Then there are the personal recollections of the ship's veteran sailors. According to these records, the *Mason*'s first voyage was uneventful.

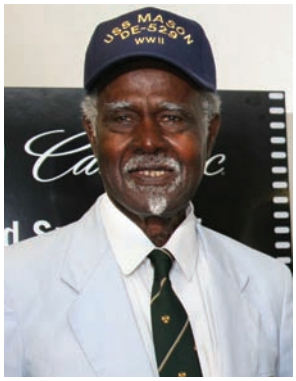
On July 3, 1944, three occurrences worth noting were listed. At 12:13 PM, an empty life raft came into view for all to see. It was a stark reminder of how desolate and dangerous an empty sea could be.

An hour later, the USS *Bermingham* passed by. Excitement peaked at 2:16 PM as the *Powers* reported a radar contact. An excited *Mason* crew was tantalized by expectations of crossing paths with a U-boat. It was a false alarm.

Five days later, the *Mason* reached the midway point on the voyage to Horta Bay. There the crew found a surprising sight. Being neutral, Portugal opened its facilities to any ships. Vessels of belligerent nations could expect to be boarded by Portuguese officials who insisted that all deck weaponry be rendered harmless. There would be no shooting while tied up in harbor.

The *Mason* reached Horta Bay in the dark of night. The next morning the crew discovered that a U-boat was tied up alongside. Both crews were baffled at such a close

U.S. Marine Corps



U.S. Marine Corps


U.S. Navy

Petty Officer 2nd Class James W. Graham (left) and Petty Officer 1st Class Lorenzo A. DuFau, photographed during the screening of the 2005 film *Proud: The True Story of Men of Valor*. Vice Admiral Samuel Lee Gravely, Jr. (right), who became the first African American admiral, served aboard *PC-1264*.

view of each other, but quite probably the German crew was more bewildered seeing the nature of the *Mason*'s crew. The U-boat departed first. Task Group 27.5 was restricted to port so as not to engage in hostile action outside Horta Bay. In due time, Convoy CK-3 and Task Group 27.5 resumed course for England.

A closer call brought the battle station alarm on July 18. At 7:05 PM, an unidentified plane's lights were sighted. Radar tracked it for about 35 miles. Whoever it was turned about for Nazi-occupied St. Nazaire, France.

Many other such occurrences brought the crew to general quarters-battle stations with no definitive results. Not once did the crew challenge Blackford's judgments. None would lose trust in him.

Convoy CK-3 safely reached Plymouth, England, on July 24. The *Mason* then proceeded to Bangor, Northern Ireland; shore leave came while in Bangor. Apprehensive crewmen were pleasantly surprised at how well they were treated by the Irish, with no signs of racial animosities.

Radioman Benjamin Garrison recalled going ashore with a shipmate and ending up at a dance. Neither considered themselves good dancers and so were sitting out the dance when next to them sat an Irish lass whose name Garrison never forgot: Sadie O'Neill. An Irishman approached her and asked her for a dance. In the most polite manner, she asked Garrison, "May I dance with him?" as if he had been her escort to the dance. The numerous courtesies bestowed upon the crew constantly amazed them.

On July 28, 1944, among other items taken aboard in Northern Ireland, the *Mason* loaded 4,032 pounds of potatoes and 336 pounds of cabbage. Heading west for the United States, without a convoy to escort and slow them down, Task Group 27.5 was free to chase U-boats.

Five hours out of Belfast, the *Stern* detected submerged soundings. The five DEs formed up in their standard search pattern and went to work. As thrilling as it started out to

be, it became another disappointment as they found no U-boats. The next two voyages were just as boring and uneventful.

The *Mason*'s second crossing of the Atlantic probably should have merited a Navy commendation of some sort, but no such recognition came for escorting Convoy NY-119 bound for Falmouth, England.

A normal cross-Atlantic voyage, barring interruptions of foul weather and enemy activities, took 17 days, but this one, departing from New York City's 33rd Street Pier, took 32 days at speeds of barely five miles per hour. That was due to the nature of NY-119's vessels; most of them were never intended for transatlantic travel. During the voyage, the Atlantic's stormy season would arrive.

Commander Alfred L. Lind, aboard the *O'Toole,* drew the straw and became the commander of Task Group 27.5. Lind's convoy consisted of 14 railroad car floats measuring up to 250 feet long; 12 barges; one 60-ton crane sitting on a barge; 15 STs (Army small tugs); 16 self-powered "Y" oilers; and 10 LTs (Army large tugs). Complementing this group were the fleet oiler USS *Maumee* and larger Navy tug USS *Abnaki* (ATF-96), along with two Royal Navy ship tenders, *Astraval* and *Pretext*.

The convoy for the 3,540-mile sea voyage consisted of nine Army LTs towing combinations of STs and barges in threes, but none of those in tow were meant to cross the fearsome Atlantic. First came the realization that many of the smaller craft had an incredible number of mechanical shortcomings for a transtlantic trip. Then came the impact of not having enough qualified sailors to operate the tugs; at least 15 seamen were needed. The bottom of the barrel was literally scraped in putting crews together. The crews ended up being a combination of Army and civilian personnel with no deep-sea sailing experience; many had to be quickly trained in the handling of tugboat operations.

Aboard the *Mason,* Engineer Officer William Farrel said, "Those tugs should never have gone to sea." Radioman Benjamin Garrison concurred: "In my view they should never have been sent on a convoy like that."

The purpose of this mission lay in the Normandy invasion successes. The beaches' port and harbor infrastructures needed shoring up, and some of these barges were intended to reinforce piers and docks as needed.

After two weeks at sea, the *Mason* began its never-ending job of rounding up stragglers, like a sheep dog continually herding its flock together. At 7:30 AM on September 23, the *Mason* fell out of line to check up on faltering *Oiler 127,* which had been taken in tow by *LT-579*. Then the *Mason* had to fall back another 14 miles to check on *LT-536*'s problems towing two barges and *ST-748*; *Abnaki* ended up having to hook onto them to tow them along. The only comfort the *Mason* crew had was the knowledge that a U.S. Navy U-boat hunter-killer group had cleared their path of U-boats two days earlier.

Two days later the weather began to change. Rain came first with winds at 28 knots (31 miles per hour). The weather became so cold that two-inch rope lines became four-inch ice lines. On the 26th at 2:17 AM, *ST-719* flipped, tossing its crew into the icy ocean. Recovering the floundering crew was done without searchlights. Two men were never recovered.

On October 3, the *Mason* was 15,000 yards forward doing picket screening. At 5:06 PM, a definite sounding arose indicating a U-boat; *O'Toole* concurred with those soundings. A concentrated barrage of depth charges quieted any further sounds. In the final analysis, it all may have been a large school of fish.

On October 12, the sea and weather showed no signs of moderating; waves were peaking at 25 feet. The next day, the *Mason* received a message from *LT-63* that its tow—the nearly 300-foot-long car-float barge *BCF-3203*—had capsized. Lind determined it a hazard to navigation and ordered the *Mason* and *O'Toole* to sink it. Despite making several passes and using every weapon on board, including depth charges, the *Mason* and *O'Toole* could not sink *BCF-32013*. The *O'Toole* fired 57 3-inch shells, nine MK 8 depth charges, and a wild amount of 20mm and 40mm rounds. The *Mason* may have disgorged similar numbers, as well as hundreds of rounds from its .50-caliber machine guns, including incendiary rounds from a range as close as 2,000 yards.

The event provided excellent tactical target practice and up-close tactical maneuvering. Lind sent the *Mason* its closest acknowledgment of a Navy commendation to come its way. He sent via semaphore, a "Job well done ... excellent gunners ... *Mason* has performed each task assigned in a most commendable manner."

The *Mason*'s crew never received a sin-

Crewmen of the USS *Mason* pose by one of the ship's deck guns. The ship was primarily involved in the dangerous business of convoy escort duty in the Atlantic.

National Archives

gle official accolade for its duty performance from the U.S. Navy, however.

For two days, October 13-15, Convoy NY-119 was strewn across the Atlantic. In essence it became two different convoys with many miles separating vessels. The *Powers* and *Abnaki* parted from the NY-119 main line to babysit stragglers and become their own convoy. Barges kept leaking and listing in the water. Civilian hires became malcontents on the STs and had to be relieved by Navy sailors.

By October 16-18, the weather reached its worst conditions with winds hitting 75 miles per hour. In that period, the *Mason* survived the impossible. Quartermaster Second Class Charles Divers saw, by the ship's instrumentation, a 70-degree roll. Many a seasoned sailor could brag about sailing out of a 45-degree roll. According to Divers, a 90-degree roll meant "flat over." Before reaching its destination, Convoy NY-119 would withstand 90-mile-per-hour winds.

The *Mason* was damaged by the nonstop pounding topside; cracks developed that repair crews had to weld. Compartment B-4 buckled and needed shoring up. The radio room took in water, and equipment had to be covered to keep water out of the electrical components. Its antenna tower broke apart and was hurriedly pieced back together. Twenty-one inches of water collected in the chain lockers. It was feared that the Mason would fall apart at its seams and sink.

At 1 PM on October 17, Blackford radioed Plymouth that help would be needed to ensure the safe delivery of NY-119 into Plymouth's channel. Entering the channel meant passing through 40-foot waves. Just minutes after midnight on October 18, the *Mason*'s bridge officer, Lieutenant E.O. Ross, pinpointed the light leading into Plymouth's channel. The Brits sent out two ships, HMS *Rochester* and *Saladin,* to help but both turned back due to the foul weather.

BLACKFORD'S ACTIONS MAY HAVE HELPED OPEN THE NAVY'S EYES AS TO HOW AFRICAN AMERICAN SAILORS COULD EXTEND THEMSELVES.

National Archives

The USS *Mason* photographed in disruptive camouflage, August 1944 near the Boston Navy Yard. The ship was sold for scrap in 1947.

Once assured its wards were tucked away inside the channel, the *Mason* turned about to brave the elements again to retrieve those still scattered. The *Mason* roamed the waters for three more days, finding the wayward ships of NY-119, but another storm forced it back to the shelter of Plymouth.

From October 24-27, the *Mason* came back out as far as French waters before calling it quits. After counting its losses, Convoy NY-119 had lost three tugs, eight car floats, five wooden barges, and 19 lives.

With its second escort job completed, what did the crew of *Mason* get for its troubles? They got shore leave in Plymouth, but it was as if they had never left segregated America. The crew learned that an American-sponsored Red Cross canteen had a never-ending supply of hot dogs and Coca-Cola. Once they found it, Seaman Second Class Lorenzo DuFau and four shipmates got an unexpected shock.

Despite being more than 3,500 miles from America, the white Red Cross woman running the canteen informed them, as DuFau put it, "It wasn't our canteen" and admission was denied. "Their" canteen was four blocks down the street. There they found an African American lady operating a USO canteen. All she had to offer, along with her sincerest apologies, were cookies, Kool-Aid, and a pool table.

Yeoman Third Class Melvin Grant took leave in London and saw the same thing: America sponsored and demanded segregated canteens. When asked why, the canteen's manager answered, "The United States is paying us, so we have to do what they say."

Like his men, Blackford was stung by the treatment his crew received in England but could do nothing about it. Conditions aboard his ship, however, were an entirely different matter. Blackford would never allow criticism of his crew, even from within. The skipper held regular meetings with his white senior-grade chief petty officers to monitor conditions aboard ship.

Returning from convoy duty, the *Mason* tied up in the Brooklyn Navy Yard. It was then that Blackford purged his ship of bigoted senior-grade chief petty officers. Blackford held a meeting of CPOs, and one man shared a thought that was apparently common among the other senior enlisted men: "All would remain fine as long as the lower ratings, to wit, the African American crew, kept in their place."

The next day Blackford called all senior-grade CPOs to the top deck for an announcement. Within 24 hours, Blackford issued orders reassigning every CPO off his ship and to the Pacific.

Blackford's actions may have helped open the Navy's eyes as to how African American sailors could extend themselves. The Navy, at that time, had a longstanding belief that black sailors were only as good as a preconceived reading of a limited test score. Blackford wrote home, "Morale has been on a gradual upswing ... we have an excellent reputation for operations…. The eventual policy for Negro personnel has been finally decided upon, but I could not discuss it here. In any case, we are to get more cooperation than in the past." That meant promotions for many of the *Mason*'s crew.

In mid-December 1944, the *Mason* was involved in training exercises. By the end of the month, it was assigned to another convoy, UGS-64. Departing Norfolk, Virginia, its final port would be Oran, Algeria.

Joining Task Force 64, the *Mason* sidled up alongside her old DE companions, *O'Toole, Powers, Bermingham,* and *Chase*. Also along were three destroyers: DDs *Balch, Livermore,* and *Eberle*. With Nazi Germany losing on all fronts, U-boat activity had picked up and become as busy as ever. Admiral Karl Dönitz's U-boats had become advanced, with a new snorkel system allowing them to stay submerged longer while gulping air into the boat.

Finding U-boats became more and more difficult. Convoys preceding and following UGS-64 took losses from the undersea raiders.

During the December trip to Oran, each sunrise and sunset brought the *Mason*'s crew a call to general quarters. Luckily, UGS-64 was never molested; any sonar-radar readings of submerged objects proved false time after time. Then came the trip home.

On the return trip from Oran, Task Force 64 was freed of the cumbersome responsibility of guarding sluggish cargo ships, so the task force became a hunter-killer pack actively and freely capable of chasing down U-boats.

At 1 AM on January 11, 1945, the *Mason* picked up the distinct signal of an unidentified object ahead in the water. It was the old pattern of pinging then seeing nothing. Still, the crew reacted by dashing to its ready stations in anticipation of a battle.

The reading came in as an odd pattern. One interpretation was that it may have been a disabled U-boat limping along just below the surface. All the crewmen held their breaths that it might finally be the real thing. All of a sudden the *Mason* collided with something. All hands aboard ship immediately thought they had rammed a U-boat, which was never a common practice. Whatever hit was hard enough that "the whole bow of the destroyer escort went up in the air." Confusion reigned from engine room to conn. Whatever the *Mason* hit disabled its pitometer log—a device that measures water pressure and converts it to the vessel's speed—on the ship's forward hull.

By viewing the scattered floating material in daylight, it was determined that the *Mason* had struck a derelict wooden barge—quite possibly a 100- by 50-foot barge left over from its NY-119 journey. Crewmembers expertly plugged *Mason*'s damaged forward hull with mattresses to hold back the inrushing water. As task force commander, Captain H.S. Berdine, aboard the *Balch* (DD-363), ordered the *Mason* out of line and to proceed to Hamilton, Bermuda, for repairs.

Reaching Bermuda, the *Mason* caught sight of something that made its crew envious. Kept in secrecy, there sat the German submarine *U-505,* which had been captured and boarded and was on its way to America as a prize of war. The feat was so significant that *U-505*'s crew would be detained separate from all other American-held prisoners, thus preventing Germany from gaining knowledge that it had lost a U-boat with its crew taken alive.

As the months wore on, the *Mason* would make a couple more escort trips to Oran. During the last voyage, two days out of Oran the *Mason*'s crew learned that Germany had surrendered and the ship was to come home.

With no explanation, Blackford was reassigned to the Great Lakes Navy Center in Chicago on June 12, 1945; at war's end, his naval career ended. The *Mason* ended up being scrapped in 1947.

In the decades that followed, none of the *Mason* crewmen would see any official Navy recognition for successfully breaking the color barrier. In 1997, only due to Mary Pat Kelly's research and book, *Proudly We Served: The Men of the USS Mason,* did 67 former sailors of DE-529 receive a commendation from President Bill Clinton.

Although the *Mason* never sank an enemy submarine or shelled a hostile ship or shore, its place in history is assured. □

THE BUNA FRONT: A GHASTLY NIGHTMARE

ASK ANYONE WHO WAS THERE AND THEY WILL TELL YOU THAT PAPUA New Guinea, especially along the northern coast, was a tropical hell.

An American infantryman from Grand Rapids, Michigan, in the U.S. 32nd Infantry "Red Arrow" Division claimed, "If I owned New Guinea and I owned hell, I would live in hell and rent out New Guinea."

In addition to a suicidal and tenacious Japanese defense of the northern Papuan coastal area of Buna, the terrain, climate, and disease wrecked the regiments of the 32nd Division and the Australian battalions accompanying them. When corrected for the size of attacking forces, three times as many lives were lost in Papua than on Guadalcanal during a similar timeframe.

More than two-thirds of the Allied forces attacking Papua's northern coast became afflicted with malaria; losses from disease were four or five times greater than from combat casualties. At the end of December 1942, *Time* magazine first brought New Guinea to the attention of the American public: "Nowhere in the world today are American soldiers engaged in fighting so desperate, so merciless, so bitter, or so bloody."

It is no wonder that a GI fighting along the Buna front worried aloud, "God help us—we're never going to get out of here alive." Likewise, for the Japanese, one of their infantrymen recorded, "The road gets gradually steeper.... We are in a jungle area. The sun is fierce here.... We make our way through a jungle where there are no roads. The jungle is beyond description. Thirsty for water, stomach empty. The pack on the back is heavy."

The steamy jungles of Papua New Guinea proved to be as difficult for the Allies as the Japanese enemy was.

BY JON DIAMOND

A Buna veteran described his American compatriots: "The men at the front ... were perhaps among the most wretched-looking soldiers ever to wear the American uniform. They were gaunt and thin, with deep black circles under their sunken eyes. They were covered in tropical sores.... There was hardly a soldier, among the thousands who went into the jungle, who didn't come down with some kind of fever at least once."

National Archives

Three soldiers of the 1st Battalion, 32nd Infantry Division—sent to New Guinea by General Douglas MacArthur—man a .30-caliber machine gun along the Embogo River during the division's drive on Buna, November 15, 1944. The Aussies feared that the Japanese planned to use New Guinea as a staging area for a planned invasion of Australia—an invasion MacArthur wanted to prevent.

New Guinea, 1,500 miles long, is the second largest island in the world, located immediately north of the Australian continent. Papua, the southeastern part of New Guinea, which occupies one-third of the total area, was administered by Australia. Australia's military planners regarded it as a buffer against Japanese invasion of its Northern Territories.

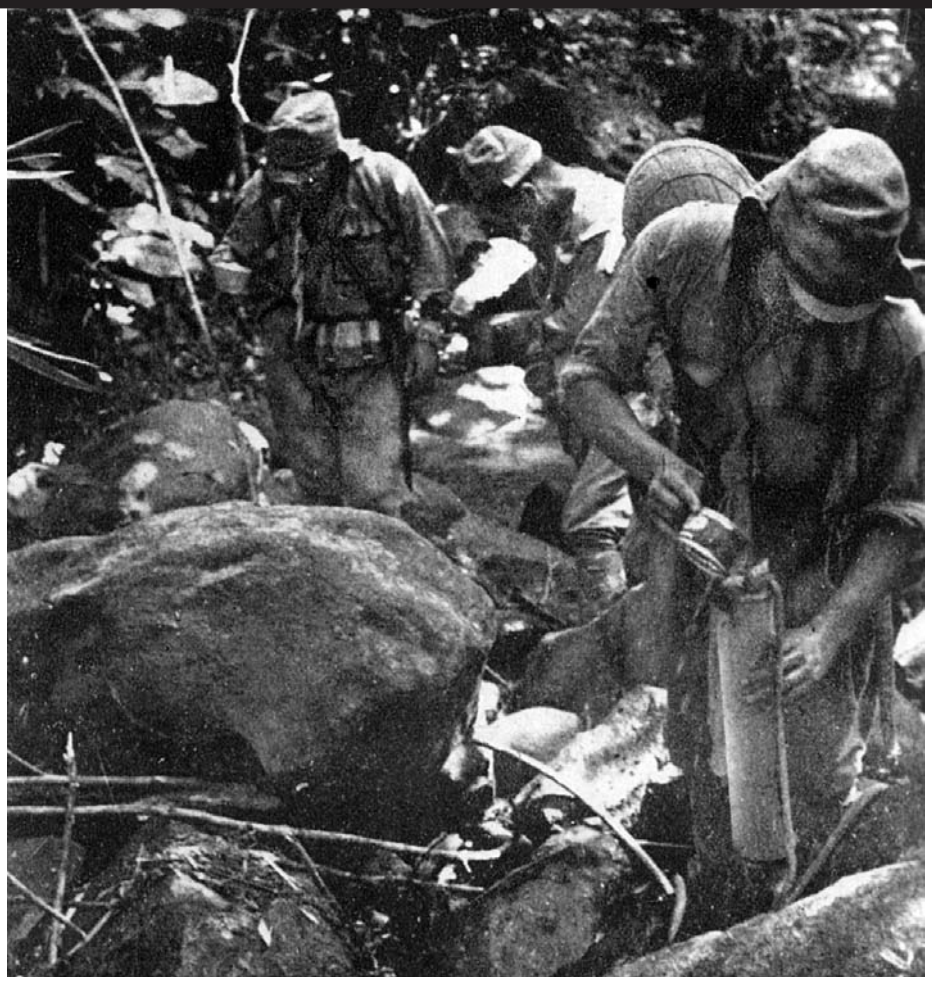
The interior, to say the least, is inhospitable. The high mountains of the Owen Stanley Range dominate the topography, and the area is covered with jungles and swamps. The main town, Port Moresby, on the south coast with a population of 3,000 before the war, was comprised mostly of native Papuans. There are only a few villages along Papua's northern coast, which include Buna and Gona. Lae and Salamaua are also on the northern coast near the Huon Gulf in northeast New Guinea. While the whole area is a flat, low-lying plain, the Buna area is made up of steaming, impenetrable jungle, coconut plantations, and fields of shoulder-high kunai grass.

Away from Port Moresby, only native trails connected the north and south coasts, the most famous being the Kokoda Trail. The geographical and climatic obstacles to conducting military operations by either side was going to be immense in terms of troop movements, reinforcements, supply, and the care of the wounded.

Australia, the United States, and Japan were not prepared for a major war in the South Pacific, which was not only remote but also disease-ridden and ubiquitously wet. For the combatants to advance in New Guinea, they would need to be able to construct improvised bridges and roads where water and mud governed.

How did the Buna front become the locale for some of the most hellacious combat in the South Pacific?

After its amazing string of lightning successes after Pearl Harbor, the Japanese high command contemplated an Imperial Japanese Navy (IJN) goal to expand southeastward into the Solomon Islands, New Caledonia, the New Hebrides, Fiji, Tonga Islands, and Samoa (Operation "FS"), to sever the long supply lines from the U.S. to Australia and New Zealand—in effect isolating the Antipodes from becoming American staging areas and bases for a counteroffensive.



Sweat-drenched Japanese soldiers fill their canteens along the Kokoda Trail during the march on Port Moresby, September 1942. Ill-prepared Allied troops were initially stymied by the Japanese, who fought with more tenacity than expected.

The Imperial Japanese Army's (IJA) plan was to invade, with the assistance of the IJN, the Lae-Salamaua area in Northeast New Guinea's Huon Gulf region. The seizure of Tulagi near Guadalcanal in the Solomons and its development as a naval air base would be postponed until after Lae and Salamaua had been taken.

The capture of these strategic points in eastern New Guinea, along with Tulagi in the southern Solomons (the latter accomplished in early May 1942 by the IJN), were intended to cut communications between these areas and the Australian mainland and to neutralize the waters north of Australia.

By postponing Operation FS, the more extensive southeastern assault, the Japanese left the South Pacific supply routes open to New Caledonia, Australia, and New Zealand—an omission they would later need to rectify.

The Japanese began their staging moves to take northeast New Guinea and Papua on March 8-11, 1942, when the IJA and the IJN's Special Naval Landing Force (SNLF) landed at Salamaua, Lae, and Fischhafen on the Huon Gulf. By occupying those locales, the Japanese were only 400 air miles from Cape York, Australia's northernmost point directly facing Papua and, by operating out of Port Moresby, could deny the Allies the use of airfields in northern Australia.

By April 1942, Allied air attacks were causing extensive damage to Japanese air capac-

ity and naval movements in the Solomon Sea. So, from April 1-20, SNLF troops landed in Fafak, Babo, Sorong, Manokwari, Momi, Nabire, Seroi, Sarmi, and Hollandia along the north coast of northeast New Guinea to seize and construct airfields there since neither side had firmly established air superiority over New Guinea.

It was becoming readily apparent that the outcome of the Pacific War, in large part, was going to be determined by either capturing enemy airfields or nearby suitable terrain to construct new ones to control the sea lanes as well as support future amphibious landings for expansion.

After successfully completing their Huon Gulf and coastal northeast New Guinea operations, the IJA and IJN were to mount a joint amphibious attack on Port Moresby on the south coast of the Papuan peninsula, which was ultimately thwarted at the Battle of the Coral Sea on May 4-8, 1942.

A second attempt at the seaborne invasion of Port Moresby was scheduled for the late summer of 1942 and would be made at Milne Bay on the eastern tip of Papua where, coincidentally, American and Australian engineers had begun constructing an airfield. The Japanese Milne Bay assault was to be concurrent with an overland IJA attack from Buna via the Kokoda Trail and across the Owen Stanley Range to seize Port Moresby.

The Japanese were under the misconception that a serviceable road for vehicles ran from Buna to Kokoda Village in the northern foothills of the Owen Stanley Range that could not be properly seen and photographed because of the jungle canopy. The IJA planners had made a flawed logistical decision that Formosan and Korean laborers along with IJA engineers could make such a road operational and build additional southward tracks to reach Port Moresby.

On February 21, 1942, President Franklin D. Roosevelt cabled General Douglas MacArthur in the Philippines and ordered him to leave threatened Corregidor for Mindanao and then proceed to Australia. On March 11, MacArthur and his retinue of staff officers left Corregidor in four PT boats and arrived at Mindanao; MacArthur and staff were then flown to Australia. There he was appointed Commander in Chief, Southwest Pacific Area (SWPA) Theater by Army Chief of Staff General George C. Marshall at the direct request of the Australian government.

Australian Prime Minister John Curtin selected General Sir Thomas Blamey as Allied Land Forces commander in the SWPA. Curtin was glad to receive the "green" American 32nd and 41st Infantry Divisions, both National Guard units, being hastily deployed to Australia's defense since his own AIF troops were in the Mediterranean or in captivity, the latter after the fall of Malaya and Singapore. The 41st Division arrived in Australia in April 1942 and the 32nd in May.

When the American Joint Chiefs of Staff (JCS) gave MacArthur command of the SWPA, he was assigned, without a specific target date, to recapture Lae and Salamaua and to "seize and occupy Rabaul and adjacent positions in the New Guinea-New Ireland area."

National Archives

ABOVE: Hatazo Adachi (left) commanded the Japanese 18th Army. Tomitaro Horii (right), head of the South Seas Detachment IJA Headquarters, drowned while trying to reach his troops by canoe. TOP: From the air, the jungle-covered Owen Stanley Mountains do not seem as formidable and disease ridden as they are to ground troops trying to cross them.

MacArthur's staff knew that to retake Lae and Salamaua he needed an airfield on Papua's northern coast; the logical place was Buna Government Station, with its small airfield, the "Old Strip." Buna had been an Australian outpost facing Rabaul on the Solomon Sea and consisted of a government station called Buna Mission—just three houses—and the Old Strip. Buna Village, a half mile to the northwest, was simply a collection of native huts. At Gona, 10 miles north of Buna, was an older Anglican mission.

Buna was coveted as a future base and airfield complex by both the Japanese and the Allied war planners in the Southwest Pacific. MacArthur's engineers had scouted Buna for the suitability of an airfield there. After the Allied engineers concluded that the coastal terrain was adequate, they departed. As the Buna area was

likely to be a Japanese target, too, MacArthur directed the Australian commander in Port Moresby to secure it. MacArthur was most fearful of a Japanese seizure of Port Moresby, which the enemy could then use as a springboard to invade northern Australia.

Australian military planners, too, considered the Buna area as a major threat because it was "the northern terminus of the one good track to Port Moresby," the Kokoda Trail. In June 1942, the Australians organized the 39th Battalion, a militia unit, along with a native constabulary unit to seize Buna. On July 7, company-strength elements of the Australian 39th Battalion were 30 miles north of Port Moresby, ready to start their ascent of the Kokoda Trail; eight days later, Company B of the Australian 39th Battalion was at the outskirts of Kokoda Village.

On July 24, the remainder of the 39th Battalion was ordered to get to Kokoda Village as quickly as possible from Port Moresby. That village lay in a valley 1,200 feet above sea level in the northern foothills of the Owen Stanley Range. In addition to a Papuan administration post and a rubber plantation, Kokoda Village also had a small airfield, which likewise was a main objective in Japanese strategic planning.

On July 15, MacArthur ordered the establishment of his forward base at Buna. Also, a new airfield was to be constructed at Dobodura, 15 miles south of Buna, where a grassy plain had been identified that would be large enough for both bombers and fighters. Allied reconnaissance flights had shown the Buna strip to be inadequate for the airbase that the SWPA commander was envisioning.

The Japanese, however, had beaten the Allies to the punch at both Buna and nearby Gona. On July 21-22, 1942, Japanese cruisers, destroyers, and transports landed a preliminary force of 4,400 engineers of the Yokoyama Advance Force (under Colonel Yosuke Yokoyama) and the South Seas Detachment IJA Headquarters, the latter which had captured Rabaul; all under the command of

ABOVE: Had it not been for the brutal conditions of the Kokoda Trail over the Owen Stanley Mountain Range, the Japanese might have taken their main objective, Port Moresby. They also failed to capture Milne Bay at New Guinea's southeast tip. BELOW: Australian troops and heavily laden pack animals move along the muddy, winding Kokoda Trail into the Uberi Valley, October 1942. During the New Guinea campaign, the terrain and environment decimated both sides.

Australian War Memorial

Maj. Gen. Tomitaro Horii.

Lieutenant General Harukichi Hyakutake, the IJA Seventeenth Army commander headquartered in Rabaul, would increase this advance force to 11,100 men with the addition of the IJA's 41st Infantry Regiment, under Colonel Yazawa Kiyomi, and the remainder of the 144th Infantry Regiment. By August 13, the IJA would occupy the Buna-Gona area and transform the former site into a base of operations.

Soon after the Japanese landings at Buna, Yokoyama lost no time in sending his forward elements on their southerly march to Kokoda Village. This force, comprised of the

15th Independent Engineer Regiment, which would build depots and clear roads, and 1st Battalion, 144th Infantry Regiment, the main combat arm of the force, hit the Australians on July 28 in an effort to seize Kokoda Village and its prize airfield.

Initially, this force was tasked to assess the condition and quality of the roads and need for repairing the Buna-to-Kokoda road. However, the Yokoyama Force, instead of conducting a civil engineering reconnaissance, was ordered by no less than the Emperor and Imperial Japanese Headquarters to prepare for an overland attack to seize Port Moresby (Operation MO), under the command of IJA Seventeenth Army headquarters, without a thorough feasibility study.

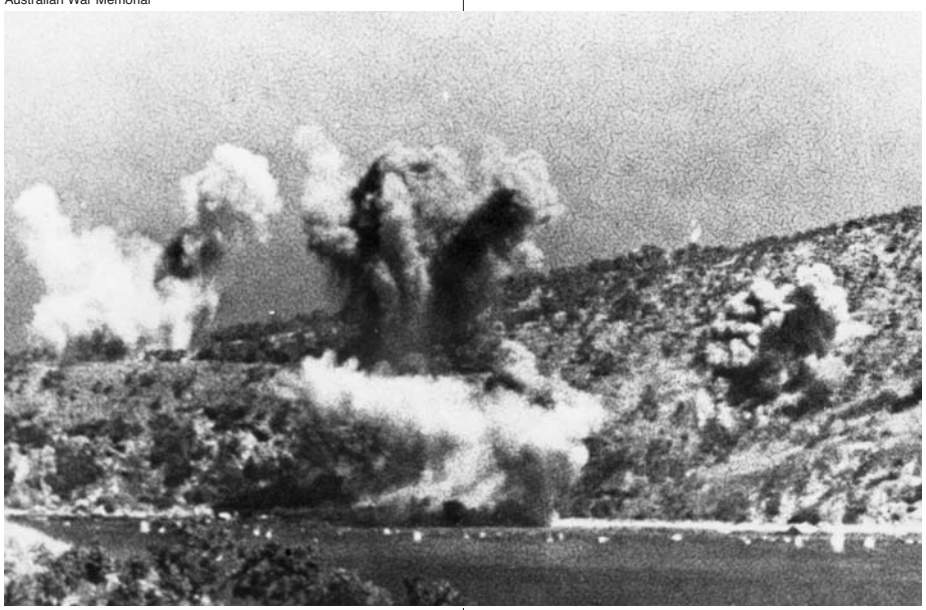
A skeptical General Horii was dubious that a supply line of native porters (32,000 was deemed as a requisite number) could be maintained, whatever state the extant "road" was actually found to be in. In fact, the Kokoda Trail was a 145-mile mud path, no wider than three or four feet, that climbed mountains as high as 6,000 feet and crossed some of the most inhospitable terrain in the world, comprised of steep gorges, rapidly flowing streams and always wet, moss-covered rocks and logs.

Meanwhile, Port Moresby was being strengthened with the Australian 25th Brigade along with Allied air, engineer, and antiaircraft units.

The Yokoyama Advance Force was also awaiting reinforcements, which were to include the two remaining battalions of the 144th Infantry Regiment and a mountain artillery battalion, which had to forcibly land at Basabua, to the west of Buna near Gona, due to Allied air interdiction and then be ferried to Buna to reinforce Yokoyama's command at Isurava.

On August 28, Hyakutake ordered Horii to advance to the southern side of the Owen Stanleys and await the outcome of a second assault—the IJN amphibious assault at Milne Bay, intended to seize the newly constructed Allied airfield there and to serve as a base for another naval assault on Port Moresby. The Milne Bay amphibious landings commenced on August 25; however, they failed and the Japanese evacuated their assault troops on September 7.

Australian War Memorial



Japanese munitions burst on the hills surrounding the Allied air bases at Milne Bay. The IJN's failure to take the bases led to Japan's first major defeat of the war and showed the Allies the enemy was not invincible.

Without a concurrent amphibious assault on Port Moresby from Milne Bay, Horii was on his own without air cover from the IJN. Horii's South Seas Detachment was becoming severely malnourished and ravaged by disease.

In early September, General Horii and IJA infantry from the 41st and 144th Regiments, arrived at Kokoda Village in bad shape; Formosan and Korean laborers and Japanese soldiers had to carry supplies to the front and the wounded back to Kokoda Village. Logistics were a nightmare for Horii, and he was behind schedule in his crossing of the Owen Stanleys to attack Port Moresby.

On September 16, 1942, the Japanese struggled up Ioribaiwa Ridge, from which the Australians had recently withdrawn to Imita Ridge to the south across the valley; the Japanese literally wept for joy since they could now see the plains and sea around Port Moresby. At night, from Ioribaiwa Ridge, the Japanese saw the searchlights of the Allied airfield on the outskirts of Port Moresby, 27 air miles away. This was as near to Port Moresby as the Japanese would ever get.

The Japanese supply system was stretched to its limits, and the offensive had resulted in a majority of the force being killed, wounded, and disabled by diseases—malaria, dysentery, dengue fever, and beriberi. The Australians and Papua's unforgiving nature had halted the advance of the Japanese south from Buna over the Owen Stanley Range. Only 1,500 of the 6,000 troops that had left Buna in mid-August remained healthy enough to fight after just four weeks of strenuous marching and jungle combat.

A stiffened Australian resistance at Imita Ridge by two Australian militia battalions and later reinforced with more battle-hardened Middle East veteran formations of the AIF's 28th Brigade along with a near-constant Allied air presence that attacked Japanese supply lines running back to Buna, compelled Horii to halt his drive on Port Moresby at Ioribaiwa Ridge and prepare defensive works while awaiting reinforcements.

However, on September 24, the Japanese high command ordered Horii to withdraw along the Kokoda Trail and establish defensive positions at Buna and Gona. The Japanese, who had positioned guns and dug weapon pits and trenches along the

Ioribaiwa Ridge during the last week of September, withdrew from their positions on September 28 under attack by Australian infantry. This was a strategic withdrawal for the Japanese because of an increasing need for troop reinforcements at Guadalcanal.

With a nascent American corps comprised of the 32nd and 41st Infantry Divisions being trained in Australia, MacArthur needed a corps commander. Marshall fortuitously sent him Lt. Gen. Robert L. Eichelberger (West Point class of 1909). The 32nd and 41st Divisions, commanded by Maj. Gens. Edwin Harding and Horace Fuller, respectively, were also sent.

National Archives

Men of the 128th Infantry, 32nd Division, the Wisconsin and Michigan National Guard, cross a makeshift bridge on their way to Embogu, November 5, 1942.

On September 10, MacArthur ordered Eichelberger's I Corps headquarters to deploy Harding's 32nd Division to New Guinea to ease the burden on the Australians retreating down the Kokoda Trail to the Imita Ridge prior to the Japanese high command halting Horii's advance on the Ioribaiwa Ridge.

MacArthur committed the relatively green 32nd Division's 126th and 128th Regiments to Port Moresby without any serious training in jungle warfare. Also, the 32nd Division, being a National Guard unit that was deployed early to Australia, missed the training that other Army ground forces divisions were acquiring stateside.

The two regiments reached Port Moresby by September 28, the day General Horii's troops evacuated their positions on Ioribaiwa Ridge. However, due to shipping and air transport deficiencies, Harding's four battalions of division artillery—48 field guns, including the excellent bunker-busting 105mm howitzers—were left in Australia. These two regiments were ordered to capture the extensive group of Japanese fortified installations at Buna. Eichelberger, however, was skeptical of the untried 32nd's combat capabilities.

Because of the extensive coastline of northern Papua near Buna, troops of the 32nd Division sailed from Port Moresby on a motley collection of coastal craft and wooden schooners. These inadequate vessels were vulnerable to Japanese air attack and could not carry artillery, tanks, or heavy equipment. It was no wonder that the U.S. Navy officers did not want to risk their larger craft in uncharted waters against an enemy who controlled the airfields. Additionally, the Allied navies were busy combating Japanese surface ships in the waters off Guadalcanal.

Once committed to the defensive at Buna, the Japanese infantrymen and SNLF troops sought locations of concealment (i.e., trenches, rifle pits, coconut tree tops, pillboxes, camouflaged entrenchments, even entangled tree roots). If the Japanese concealment methods were successful, the American and Australian assault troops would never see the defenders and come under withering fire.

Since air strikes were limited by the density of the jungle canopy, the Allied attackers had to learn, often on the spot, to identify likely concealed defensive positions and probe them. Once identified, the Allies would blast them with bazookas, flamethrowers, tanks, and artillery.

Direct, large-scale infantry assaults gave way to smaller infantry units going forward with covering fire from a cooperating machine-gun or rifle unit. In this manner, alternating advance and covering fire, units would continue to move forward against the enemy positions.

An Australian after-action report recalled just how well the Japanese engineers had prepared the defenses along the 11-mile front of northern Papuan coastline that extended from Gona in the west to Cape Endaiadere to the east of Buna Mission and Giropa Point. Hundreds of coconut log bunkers, some reinforced with iron plates, others with iron rails and oil drums filled with sand, were constructed. In areas that were too wet for trenches and dugouts, bunkers were built above the surface and then concealed with earth, tree fronds, and other vegetation, making them essentially invisible.

The bunkers, which could contain from three to five machine guns, provided an intense interlocking field of fire on any advancing Allied troops. The bunkers were protected by infantry in open rifle pits located to the front, sides, and rear of the fortified entrenchments. Some infantry would be concealed in foxholes, under trees, or even in hollowed-out logs, while others simply waited in the jungle where they were heavily camouflaged.

Snipers in the tall coconut trees or in concealed terrain positions were a major menace in both the American and Australian zones along the Buna front.

Another Japanese defensive line, to deter the 7th Australian Division's advance, was built across the road leading from Soputa, just over seven miles inland, to Sanananda Point on the sea. The Girua River served as an inter-Allied boundary, with the Australians to the west of it, slogging through jungle trails to assault Gona and Sanananda Point.

The Girua River is about 50 feet wide until it disappears in the swamps southeast of Buna Village. The river eventually reaches the ocean through several mouths between Buna and Sanananda Point. Two other waterways were important in regard to the combat. The first was Entrance Creek, which opened into a shallow lagoon between Buna Village and Buna Mission. The other, Simemi Creek, runs north to the area between Buna's Old and New Strips, and then parallels the northern side of the Old Strip to the sea between Giropa and Strip Points.

After failing to attack Port Moresby, Japanese forces withdrew to the Buna coast where, with their backs to the sea, they were attacked by American and Australian troops crossing the Owen Stanley Mountains.

The area between Entrance Creek to the west and Simemi Creek to the east comprises the principal swamp on the Buna front and reaches inland to the vicinity of the villages of Simemi and Ango, which were in the center of the 32nd Division's area of operations against Buna. This swamp is absolutely impenetrable with closely spaced trees up to 100 feet tall. The swamp's floor, composed of tangled roots and underbrush, is always waterlogged.

Two large coconut plantations were present. The first, Government Plantation, was about 300 yards wide and situated between the mouth of Simemi Creek and Buna Mission. Duropa Plantation was much larger and ran south from Cape Endaiadere in the east toward Strip Point to the west.

To the southwest of Duropa Plantation was a large area overgrown with kunai grass, upon which was situated the Old Strip, a goal of the Allied advance. Allied control of the airfield would deny the Japanese another chance to seize Port Moresby by land and become a base for the Fifth U.S. Air Force. The Japanese had built a "dummy" field called "New Strip," which was in another grassy area to the east of Simemi Creek and ran in an east-west direction.

As the crisis on the Kokoda Trail passed after the Australians reoccupied Kokoda Village without any opposition on November 2, MacArthur had to protect his newly acquired airfield at Kokoda and another at Dobodura, about three miles south of Ango. Japanese possession of Buna could ultimately threaten both airfields, so MacArthur was set on a campaign of annihilation against the Japanese on Papua's northern coast rather than the less costly strategy of starving them into capitulation.

The Japanese, on the other hand, insisted that Buna be held at all costs and that the Dobodura airfield, 10 miles south of Buna, be destroyed. The loss of Dobodura would hamper Allied reinforcements of Papua and weaken their capacity for air attacks.

Tokyo reasoned that losing Buna would jeopardize future operations on New Guinea and the Japanese position on Rabaul. To that end, the Japanese were resolved to defend the Buna front to the last man.

The plan envisioned by MacArthur was for a general advance by the Australian 7th Division to commence on November 16, 1942, driving the Japanese back along the Kokoda Trail while the U.S. 32nd Division would make a secret, wide, enveloping eastward march and then attack westward along Papua's northern coast against the Buna front. The dividing line between the Australian and U.S. troops was to be the Girua River.

However, the Japanese troops situated there were well protected against any attack from inland. Swamps and dense jungle channeled the Allied attackers down a handful of trails, where a Japanese machine gun in a reinforced pillbox could hold off a battalion. The Australians, with the Americans advancing along the northern New Guinea coast, would expend much blood attempting to wrest control of Buna from the Japanese.

During the remainder of October and the early part of November 1942, the 32nd's 126th and 128th Regiments continued to move into position while the 127th Regiment remained in Port Moresby. The 2nd Battalion, 126th Regiment, serving as the force's left flank, marched to Buna overland via the Kapa Kapa Trail, a rugged track climbing more than 8,000 feet over the Owen Stanley Range; this unit sustained casualties from noncombat causes and disease.

After five grueling weeks, the battalion reached Soputa on November 20. The exhausted Americans referred to being on this trail as being "in green hell." To maximize time and effort and avoid an enervating march through the Papuan jungle, the three battalions of the 128th Regiment were airlifted by Maj. Gen. George C. Kenney's Fifth Air Force transport planes to an improved airstrip at Wanigela Mission on Collinwood Bay, roughly 65 miles from Buna. Motor barges then ferried the

Both: National Archives

ABOVE: Armed with an M-1 Garand rifle and Thompson submachine gun, two men of the 32nd Division fire on Japanese positions near Buna. Although previously unschooled in jungle warfare, the 32nd learned quickly. OPPOSITE: Expended shell casings pile up as American soldiers use a 37mm antitank gun against enemy troops across a river near Buna Mission.

128th along the Papuan coast to Pongani, just over 20 miles from Buna.

There the troops constructed a landing field, which enabled the other two battalions of the 126th Regiment to be airlifted to this new site on November 9-11. All told, approximately 15,000 infantrymen and supporting troops were ferried to the Buna area by C-47s.

Kenney turned the Fifth Air Force into a multidimensional unit that included troop transport and supply and aerial artillery for troops who lacked field artillery. With innovations perfected by his B-25 Mitchell and A-20 Havoc medium bombers, the daytime interdiction of Japanese coastal shipping and reinforcements to their New Guinea garrisons was stepped up. In 1942, these were revolutionary tactics, and Papuan laborers and Army engineers began building airfields in northern Papua, notably at Dobodura, located south of Buna and east of the unfordable Girua River, to give Kenney's planes a base closer to the combat zone to accomplish their various missions.

In mid-November 1942, Lt. Gen. Hatazo Adachi was given command of the newly-formed IJA Eighteenth Army for operations in New Guinea and headquarters at Rabaul. Adachi was to operate under Lt. Gen. Hitoshi Imamura, commander of the Eighth Area Army. Imamura was directly tasked by Prime Minister Hideki Tojo to first recapture Guadalcanal and to hold and consolidate at Buna. In the future another land assault would be planned against Port Moresby. Imamura's Area Army comprised Adachi's Eighteenth Army and the Seventeenth Army, under Hyakutake, the latter committed solely to the campaign on Guadalcanal.

Despite intensive Allied bomber interdiction of Japanese reinforcements and mountain guns from Rabaul, Adachi amassed 2,000 to 2,500 troops for the defense of the Buna area, including about 1,800 of whom had not participated in the overland attack on Port Moresby.

Buna's Japanese defenders were comprised of IJA formations, SNLF units, engineers, gunners, and service troops. Some had just landed, while about 100 infantrymen of the 144th Regiment had survived the retreat up the Kokoda Trail, which claimed the life of General Horii, who drowned in the fast-flowing Kumusi River trying to escape to Lae.

By November 18, the American 128th Regiment's 1st Battalion was between Hariko and the Duropa Plantation on the northern coast's track; the 126th's 1st Battalion was utilizing the same rudimentary trail coming up from Oro Bay. The remainder of this regiment was in position near Inonda.

The 3rd Battalion, 128th Regiment, was near Simemi, while at the grassy open plain at Dobodura elements of the 128th's 2nd Battalion assisted with airfield construction. Food and ammunition would have to be airlifted to this new field since Japanese air interdiction, much like the Allies', had strangled coastal supply by motor barges and schooners. The remainder of the 2nd Battalion established a division reserve at Ango.

Without a harbor and with swamps and creeks protecting it on the inland side, Buna would have to be approached along four jungle trails, each approximately 12 feet wide, but always prone to becoming washed out by tropical downpours. To that end the American engineers of the 114th Regiment were constantly laying down coconut log-surfaced corduroy roads to enable jeeps to bring up supplies and evacuate casualties.

The American approach to Buna was confined to two routes—one between Simemi Creek and the east coast and the other on the west side of the swamp along the Ango trail toward Buna Mission and Buna Village. The two routes lacked lateral communication, requiring two days to march from one flank to the other. More importantly, the Americans had little intelligence on the enemy opposition and location of defensive fortifications they would soon face.

Adachi's Buna front, starting in the west at the Girua River near Buna Village and extending to Cape Endaiadere in the east, was just over three miles long and less than a mile from the coast. The Japanese had a motor road from Buna Mission to the bridge at Simemi Creek, which enabled lateral communication and reinforcement.

Specifically, the entrenched defensive works at Buna Mission ran slightly southwest to Entrance Creek and then turned north to enclose an area called "The Triangle." The line of Japanese pillboxes and rifle pits then moved eastward across a grass-covered area called Government Gardens and then ran toward the coast through Government Plantation, ending at Giropa Point.

The defense of Buna Village and Buna Mission, the western sector, was in the hands of Captain Yoshitatsu Yasuda and his Yokosuka 5th SNLF and the 5th Sasebo SNLF, veterans of China and Malaya. Yasuda had installed heavy barbed-wire entanglements along this area to thwart an advance from the south. The SNLF units were deployed in a honeycomb of bunkers on the main approach between the swamps and in the coconut grove and gardens behind.

Other combat troops at Buna were the survivors of Tsukioka Unit's three-month ordeal on Goodenough Island after their landing barges for the Milne Bay amphibious invasion were interdicted by Allied air patrols along with elements of Horii's retreating South Seas Force.

About 500 yards southeast of Giropa Point, more entrenched positions were situated along the western end of the Old Strip, which had been built by Australian forces before the July 1942 Japanese invasion. It had been used by Japanese naval aircraft in August but had been heavily bombed and put out of action with several disabled Zero fighters and transports left abandoned on the runway.

Enemy positions continued eastward between the "Old" and "New" airstrips and ran onto a wooden causeway more than 40 yards long spanning the Simemi Creek then skirted the northern edge of the New Strip through the Duropa Plantation to abut the ocean half a mile south of Cape Endaiadere.

This eastern Japanese flank, under the command of Colonel Shigemi Yamamoto, was defended by the 3rd Battalion, 229th Infantry Regiment, which had captured Canton and Hong Kong and, until mid-November, had been at Gona.

Miscellaneous units included a heavy antiaircraft battery of the 73rd Independent Unit, a mountain artillery battery of the 3rd Battalion, 55th Field Artillery Unit, and 700 replacements for the 144th Infantry Regiment. During the initial two

weeks of the Allied thrust on Buna, the American troops would face mostly fresh, fit, well-equipped Japanese troops.

Advancing American infantry first had to learn how to locate the camouflaged enemy bunkers, with forward units often being mown down by Japanese machine-gun fire, and then making costly frontal or flank attacks, the latter by crawling through swampy terrain. The source of the gunfire couldn't be identified because Japanese machine guns and Arisaka rifles used flashless gunpowder. Sometimes advancing American infantrymen were allowed to pass the well-concealed Japanese positions before the defenders opened fire on the rear echelon of the patrol from all sides, inflicting heavy casualties.

On November 19, 1942, the Buna operation started with the 128th Regiment's 1st and 3rd Battalions marching toward the Japanese positions running from Simemi Creek along the New Strip to the ocean. With the 3rd Battalion to the southwest of the "dummy" airfield at New Strip and the 1st Battalion on the coastal trail moving toward the Duropa Plantation, they met with unseen Japanese machine-gun and rifle fire. The 128th Regiment's two-battalion march was stopped abruptly as the Japanese, possessing lateral lines of communication, quickly reinforced their positions.

Two days later, a frustrated MacArthur issued a directive to General Harding for the storming of Buna's defensive works: "All columns will be driven through to objectives regardless of losses…. Take Buna today at all costs. MacArthur."

Harding ordered a frontal assault that day along the Japanese easternmost positions after a preliminary bombing raid and mortar attack, since there was no American artillery present. Again, well-aimed Japanese machine-gun and mortar fire and snipers curtailed the American attack.

In addition, the Japanese would retreat during aerial bombardment to reinforced shelters and then sneak back to their pillboxes after the air raids to be ready at their machine guns once the Americans advanced.

Also on November 21, the 2nd Battalion, 128th Regiment, which had made the grueling Kapa Kapa Trail march, was stopped by the enemy at The Triangle south of Government Gardens in the western sector. The terrain there was mostly knee-deep swamp water that ruined radios, soaked mortar propellant, jammed machine guns and rifles with muck, and disoriented the GIs, especially in the darkness.

Entrance Creek, west of The Triangle, was unfordable for a flanking maneuver, except at sites well covered by Japanese machine guns and barbed wire that prevented the Americans from getting close.

On November 22, the 2nd Battalion, 126th Regiment, which had been supporting the Australian 7th Division, was released by the Australians to support the 2nd Battalion, 128th Regiment, struggling in The Triangle and at Entrance Creek.

General Harding formed two large task forces out of his surviving 3,500 combat troops; the 2nd Battalions of both the 126th and 128th Regiments would operate to the west of the large swamp area and were designated Urbana Force. The smaller of the two forces, under the command of Colonel John Mott, was tasked with assaulting Buna Village and then advancing onto Buna Mission.

National Archives

ABOVE: Three dead Americans lie where they fell on the shore near Buna, December 1942. Once thought too graphic, this photo was approved by President Roosevelt for release to the American media nine months later—one of the first published that showed the grim reality of the war.

East of the swamp, the larger force, dubbed Warren Force, was comprised of the 1st Battalion, 126th Regiment, and the 1st and 3rd Battalions of the 128th Infantry Regiment, along with some Australian elements, all under Brig. Gen. Hanford MacNider. Warren Force was ordered to attack the Eastern Sector's defenses from Giropa Point to Cape Endadaiere. This constituted the last Allied troop movement prior to reinforcements arriving on the Buna front.

On November 24, Urbana Force moved against The Triangle area and, after a day of crawling through the fetid swamp, reached a point beyond Entrance Creek adjacent to the trail to Buna Village to the northwest. The Triangle, a deep enemy salient of interlocking machine guns and mortars, could not be approached from the east, as both swamp and open kunai grass areas impeded advances. Thus, any further movement of Urbana Force would have to be to the northwest of The Triangle in the direction of Buna Village.

On November 26, the fighting shifted to the Warren Force area. Elements of the 3rd Battalion, 128th Regiment and 1st Battalion, 126th Regiment attacked Japanese positions at Duropa Plantation after aerial and artillery bombardment, the latter from one American 105mm howitzer battery, six Australian 25-pounders, and one mountain howitzer just airlifted to the front.

Target identification by Allied fighters and ammunition resupply was problematic, however. The preliminary aerial and gun bombardment had not destroyed the Japanese reinforced bunkers, so the infantry attack sputtered under heavy enemy machine-gun fire and no further attempts to reduce the defensive fortifications were made for 72

Australian War Memorial

In a field of kunai grass, an Australian corporal climbs aboard a Stuart M3 light tank to warn the crew of an unseen bunker during the final attack on Buna.

hours. A further hindrance to the Warren Force advance was the strafing by Japanese fighters from Lae.

On November 30, a new offensive failed on the Urbana Force front west of Entrance Creek, while a two-battalion assault, without the planned Australian Bren gun carriers, faltered in the Duropa Plantation to the east.

Thus, the Japanese defensive line along the Buna front was undented and as strong as it had been almost two weeks earlier, after inflicting about 500 American casualties. Combat and noncombat casualties, from malaria, dysentery, and scrub typhus, reduced the 32nd's battalions to half strength.

MacArthur's chief of staff, Lt. Gen. Richard K. Sutherland, visited Harding and recommended a leadership change to MacArthur, who then ordered Eichelberger to embark for Buna on December 1 and take over command of Allied forces east of the Girua River and "remove all officers who won't fight.… Relieve regimental and battalion commanders ... put sergeants in charge of battalions and corporals in charge of companies…. I want you to take Buna, or not come back alive."

Although the Japanese had held their positions, they, too, were suffering increasing attrition and waning morale. Enemy diaries found at Buna revealed entries from December 1 that "they had been waiting for reinforcements for the past four days" and that "My body will be buried in New Guinea and become fertilizer for the soil of Buna," and "Now we are waiting only for death."

Allied logistical hurdles were being overcome as 105mm howitzers arrived at the Buna front courtesy of Kenney's B-17s. Australian-crewed Bren carriers and M3 Stuart light tanks reached Eichelberger and were employed on December 5 and 18, respectively. An increased shipment of supplies by both air and sea started to arrive.

Eichelberger reorganized his forces somewhat and installed new local commanders. The 32nd Division's artillery officer, Maj. Gen. Albert Waldron, replaced Harding. Brig. Gen. Clarence Martin assumed command of Warren Force, while Urbana Force was to be led by Colonel John Grose. Eichelberger's I Corps headquarters was combined with the 32nd's to become Buna Force Headquarters, positioned at Simemi Village. Junior officers and enlisted men were learning some jungle craft and acquiring combat experience.

A three-battalion attack began through the Duropa Plantation on December 5, 1942, with supporting Bren gun carriers; however, these were all quickly disabled by Japanese snipers in trees, infantry with explosives, and tree stumps. Other companies attacked the New Strip's western edge and the bridge crossing Simemi Creek. The Japanese positions could not be reduced, so gains were measured in yards. Warren Force would make repeated attacks on the enemy from December 6-14, but despite MacArthur's demands could not break through the Japanese line.

On the Urbana Force front, on December 5, platoon-sized elements of Company G, 126th Regiment succeeded in driving east of the Girua River to the sea and separated Buna Village from Japanese reinforcements at Buna Mission and Government Station. The 126th's E Company rushed in to help repel Japanese counterattacks along the coast.

The enemy defensive line in the western sector had finally been pierced, albeit with many casualties, including the 32nd's new commander, Waldron, and an Eichelberger aide, who were wounded at the front.

To prevent the breakthrough near Buna Village from stalling, Eichelberger threw in reinforcements in the form of the 3rd Battalion, 127th Regiment, under Lt. Col. Edwin Swedberg, that was air transported to the Dobodura and Popondetta airields on December 9; they relieved the 2nd Battalion, 126th Regiment, on December 11.

Three days later, after patrolling and becoming familiar with the enemy fortifications, two companies from 3rd Battalion, 127th Regiment captured Buna Village following a heavy mortar bombardment. Among the few Japanese prisoners taken, some claimed that American mortar fire was very effective at wearing them down in their pillboxes and rifle pits since there was no advance warning to allow them to temporarily move to reinforced shelters.

To break the stalemate around Buna on

the Warren Front, Eichelberger decided to wait until mid-December for light tanks and fresh Australian troops ordered by General Blamey to be brought up from Milne Bay.

Brigadier George F. Wooten's remaining 18th Infantry Brigade battalions arrived along with seven light M3 tanks of X Squadron, Australian 2/6 Armored Regiment. This would considerably augment the Allied firepower at Buna since they had only the Australian "short" 25-pounder and a couple of American 105mm howitzers with limited ammunition.

From December 15-18, the three American battalions on the Warren Front moved forward against the Japanese across the entire line. On December 18, elements of the Australian 2/9 Infantry Battalion passed through the American lines with the accompanying tanks and reached Cape Endaiadere before being stopped by a new line of enemy bunkers as they swung west along the north coast.

Two M3 tanks were disabled by a Japanese antiaircraft gun, and a third was set ablaze, but with the 3rd Battalion, 128th Regiment, following up on the Australian advance an Allied coastal position just south of Cape Endaiadere was constructed.

Additionally, both Australian and American units, including 1st Battalion, 128th Regiment, were able to oust the Japanese from their fortifications at the eastern spur of the New Strip, forcing the enemy to retreat to prepared bunkers near the Simemi Creek bridge. About one-third of the Australians became casualties, but the reinforced Japanese bunkers at the Duropa Plantation and along northern side of the New Strip had been reduced.

On December 19-20, the Australian 2/9 Battalion and elements of the 3rd Battalion, 128th Regiment moved westward through the remainder of the Duropa Plantation on a 1,000-yard front. The 1st Battalions of the 126th and 128th Regiments eliminated all the Japanese bunkers on the east side of Simemi Creek to finally arrive at the bridge; however, the enemy had blown a 12-foot gap in this causeway that would require either repair or a flanking maneuver.

After unsuccessfully attempting to repair the gap, the Australian 2/10 Battalioncrossed the creek north of the bridge on december 21-23, threatening the Japanese defenders there. The 1st Battalion, 126th Regiment was able to get across the bridge by midday on December 23 and reached the southern edge of the Old Strip. The Australian and American battalions would now attempt to move, in parallel, along both the northern and southern sides of the Old Strip. Allied infantry painstakingly advanced about 500 yards, despite intense fire from enemy bunkers on the northern and central portions of the Old Strip.

After dark on December 23, the 114th Engineers repaired the gap in the bridge, enabling Australian M3 light tanks to cross Simemi Creek. An Allied tank assault across the bridge was made on December 24 to get to the northeast side of the Old Strip; however, the tanks were all disabled by the Japanese or the shell-pocked terrain.

An area designated Coconut Grove had fallen to the Americans back on December 16, but The Triangle had not yet been seized. On December 24, the 127th Regiment managed to create a bridgehead on the east bank of Entrance Creek after crossing it to the north above Coconut Grove on a footbridge constructed by U.S. Army engineers. Enemy resistance in The Triangle area would now be simply contained rather than frontally assaulted.

American soldiers of the 128th Regiment struggle across a bridge damaged by Japanese fire during fighting along Simemi Creek, November 1942.

National Archives

National Archives

Two 32nd Division soldiers clear a well-concealed Japanese bunker near Buna Mission, late 1942. During the campaign, both sides suffered from the harsh climate, disease, and terrain.

On Christmas Eve Day, the American infantry started a drive toward the northern coast to get between Buna Mission and Giropa Point, which would be achieved on December 29. Allied assaults on Christmas Day yielded few positive results as a strong pocket of Japanese bunkers prohibited the advance of either the American or Australian battalions.

On December 26-27, elements of the 1st Battalion, 126th Regiment were able to slowly advance with the assistance of an Australian 25-pounder artillery piece at the Simemi Creek bridge firing armor-piercing shells at the tenacious Japanese bunkers holding up the advance along the Old Strip.

By nightfall on December 27, the western end of the Old Strip was reached to enable a movement northward to Government Plantation, which geographically began in the east at the mouth of the Simemi Creek and extended to Buna Mission to the northwest.

On the morning of December 28, American patrols found that the Japanese had evacuated The Triangle area. The Americans also discovered the reason for the fierce enemy resistance in The Triangle. It contained over 18 mutually supporting reinforced bunkers that were interconnected by communication trenches.

The next day, four new M3 light tanks led an advance on Government Plantation, but progress was slow and the Allied infantry paused to await reinforcements. An Australian relief battalion, the 2/12 of the 18th Infantry Brigade, arrived on December 31 with more tanks.

Lieutenant Colonel Arthur Arnold, the 2/12 Battalion commander, led an attack that broke through to the northern coast at Giropa Point on New Years Day 1943. Elements of this force moved against the main enemy fortifications at Government Plantation to the southeast while other units of the 2/12 Battalion moved west to contact Urbana Force.

On January 2, the 3rd Battalion, 128th Regiment moved northwestward between the Old Strip and the coast to assist in eliminating the last of the Japanese pockets of resistance. Both Captain Yasuda and Colonel Yamamoto reportedly "died facing the Australian tanks approaching their command bunker."

Progress on the Urbana front moved slowly since the capture of Buna Village two weeks earlier by the 3rd Battalion, 127th Regiment, largely because of the absence of Australian tank support—tank support that the Warren Force had benefited from.

After three months of frontal assaults, since the Papuan terrain prevented envelopments with large forces, the Japanese base at Buna was in Allied hands on January 2, 1943.

At Buna alone, of the original 2,000 Japanese defenders, 1,450 were known captured or dead with many more dying in the jungle or at sea. On the Allied side at Buna, the Urbana and Warren Forces had lost 620 men killed: 353 Americans and 267 Australians. Additionally, there were 2,065 wounded and 132 missing.

Malaria inflicted tens of thousands of medical casualties, largely because of the shortage of quinine. As for unit integrity, the 32nd Infantry Division was severely mauled at Buna and would up to a year of refitting in Australia to prepare for the next series of battles.

Eichelberger returned to Australia as I Corps commander to retrain and refit the two American divisions for future operations in New Guinea.

The U.S. Army's commanders in the Southwest Pacific learned much from the Papuan campaign of 1942-1943, but the price was high. It was clear that U.S. Army units required more training. In contrast, the Australians had previously served in the Middle East.

After the victory in Papua in January 1943, MacArthur decreed that there would be "no more Bunas!" According to the official Australian history, "The primaeval swamps, the dank and silent bush, the heavy loss of life, the fixity of purpose of the Japanese, for most of whom death could be the only ending, all combined to make the struggle so appalling that most of the hardened soldiers who were to emerge from it would remember it unwillingly as their most exacting experience of the whole war ... a ghastly nightmare." □

BOMBS, BOOZE, and BROADS

Albert W. Boam, a former B-24 navigator, recalls his training, bombing the Reich, getting shot down, and surviving months in a German POW camp.

BY GLENN BARNETT

Photo courtesy Al Boam

The date of November 10, 1942, is still vivid in the mind of Albert Wayne Boam. That was the day that he enlisted in the Army Air Corps, hoping to become a fighter pilot. He never imagined that he would go off to war, only to become a prisoner.

Manhattan born and bred, Albert grew up on the Upper East Side in a few different apartments. "During that time apartments were reasonably priced," he recalled. He attended Stuyvesant High School, whose alumni also included actors Jimmy Cagney and Robert Alda, father of Alan Alda.

He was activated for duty in early March 1943 and took a train from his native Manhattan to Nashville, Tennessee, and basic training.The train to Nashville made a stop in Louisville, Kentucky, where the young recruits could get a bite to eat. The most convenient place near the station was the Blue Boar Café. Albert and his mates, full of New York bravado, kidded around with their waitress until, aggravated, she told them to kiss her behind. "It was the first time I had heard a woman swear," he said.

Arriving at Nashville, recent rains compelled the new men to hike through the red mud of Tennessee to their barracks. The red mud was an unusual sight for the young Yankees. The barracks featured coal-burning stoves that were supplied with bituminous coal, which soon caused respiratory problems among the recruits. The ensuing coughing fits became known as the "Tennessee Hack."

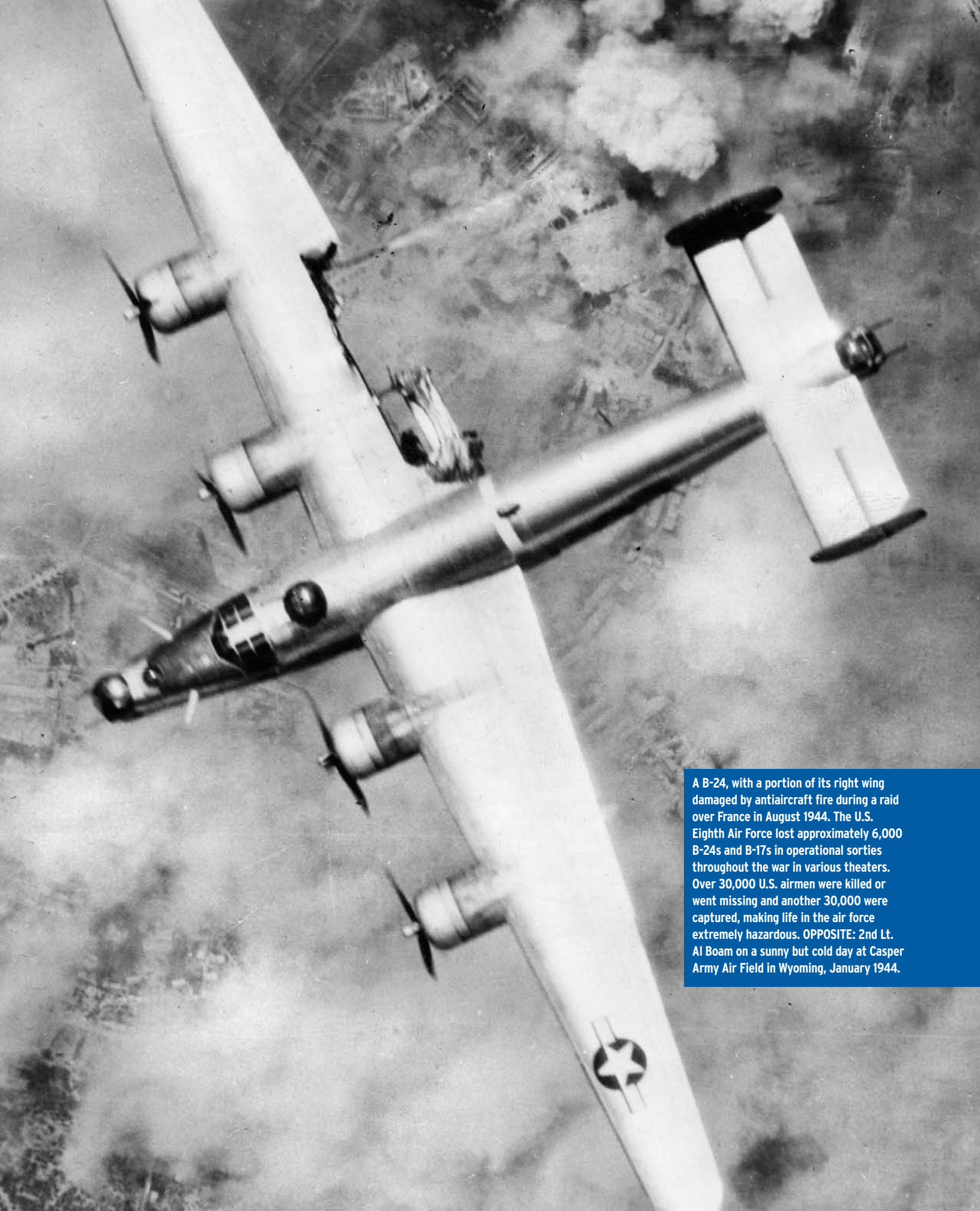
While in Nashville, the men were given aptitude tests for the different positions on a bomber; Albert passed the tests for pilot, bombardier, and navigator. His dreams of becoming a fighter pilot evaporated when he was assigned to take navigator training at Selman Field outside Monroe, Louisiana, where he was instructed in meteorology and other subjects. He flew practice missions in a twin-engine plane learning to use a drift meter.

From there Albert was sent to gunnery school in Florida for six weeks and learned to shoot .45-caliber pistols and then to load and fire .50-caliber machine guns, which he had to strip and reassemble while blindfolded. He also recalled another difficult training maneuver: "One of our drills was to take a shotgun in the back of a moving bus and shoot skeet, which were flung at different angles and altitudes."

Boam next flew in the rear seat of an AT-6 Texan aircraft for advanced training in air-to-air gunnery; the trainees fired on targets being pulled by another plane. Part of his training was to hold steady when the tow pilot made sudden maneuvers. In one contest he won third place among all gunners on the base.

In December 1943, he got his wings and the gold bars of a second lieutenant. The newly minted navigators were given a 10-day leave for Christmas and told to report to Casper Army Air Field at Casper, Wyoming, where, after the heat and humidity of

National Archives



A B-24, with a portion of its right wing damaged by antiaircraft fire during a raid over France in August 1944. The U.S. Eighth Air Force lost approximately 6,000 B-24s and B-17s in operational sorties throughout the war in various theaters. Over 30,000 U.S. airmen were killed or went missing and another 30,000 were captured, making life in the air force extremely hazardous. OPPOSITE: 2nd Lt. Al Boam on a sunny but cold day at Casper Army Air Field in Wyoming, January 1944.

Photo courtesy Al Boam

ABOVE: 2nd Lt. Al Boam (left) poses with an Army buddy (right) and Rags Ragland, a comedian who appeared in many MGM films, photographed in Hollywood, California, while Boam was on leave before heading overseas. OPPOSITE: In a dramatic photo taken from a tail-gunner's position, two England-based B-24s are photographed returning from a bombing run over Germany.

Louisiana and Florida, it was freezing cold that winter. Albert was assigned to the 489th Bombardment Group (Heavy), commanded by Brig. Gen. Ezekiel W. Napier, for further training. He was teamed with a crew of a Consolidated B-24D Liberator heavy bomber. One of his crewmates was pilot Sal Mauriello, a cousin of heavyweight boxer Tami Mauriello, who, in 1946, would have a title fight with Joe Louis.

After a few weeks, all the navigators were transferred and reassigned to different crews at Wendover Army Air Field in Wendover, Utah. At the time, Wendover was the military's largest bombing and gunnery range. Flying in B-24s, the navigators-in-training were given navigating exercises. They had to triangulate their positions on long flights that could take them as far as Montana in the north and Las Vegas in the south.

The only perk of this assignment in such a desolate place was that Wendover was located on Utah's border with Nevada. Boam and several other men were housed in the uniquely situated State Line Hotel; one half of the hotel was in Utah and the other half was in Nevada. As Utah was a "dry" state and Nevada had more permissive laws, most of the men spent their free time on the Nevada side of the hotel.

The nearest big city was Salt Lake City. Men on leave would take a bus on an almost straight line past the Bonneville Salt Flats to get there. At that time there were no posted speed limits, and the bus raced through the desert to its destination.

By the spring of 1944, the assembly-line technique for producing airplanes was in full swing, and a flood of B-24s built at the Ford Motor Company facility in Willow Run, Michigan, rolled off the line. The newly trained crews found the planes easy to fly.

When the 489th had completed its unit formation and combat training, it received orders to depart Wendover on April 3, 1944. Albert and the newly formed squadron were ordered to Kansas City and then on to Morrison Field, the former civilian airport for West Palm Beach, Florida.

The new arrivals, like soldiers everywhere, speculated about where they would be assigned. Many thought they would go to Burma and India to fight the Japanese, but they soon learned that they would be assigned to the Eighth Air Force based in Great Britain.

To reach England, most air crews flew via the northern route, which took them through Newfoundland; Albert and his squadron flew via the southern route. Their first stop was in Puerto Rico. The airmen were delighted to find that this island stop featured 10-cent frozen daiquiris. The enterprising crews filled their empty bomb bays with cheap rum and then flew on to Trinidad and Georgetown in Guyana. From there they headed to Fortaleza, Brazil.

Brazil had quantities of that most important of commodities—nylon stockings—which, due to wartime rationing of silk, were not available in the States. Albert bought several pair and shipped them to his sisters, who were delighted. That was not his most vivid memory of the country, however. "What I remember most about Brazil was the flying cockroaches."

The next stop was Natal, the easternmost city in Brazil and the most convenient spot for the hop across the Atlantic to Africa. The flyboys made the jump to Dakar in French West Africa (now Senegal), which at the time had recently passed from Vichy to Free French control. "It was the only time that I used celestial navigation, which I had learned in advanced training," Albert said. From there the B-24s flew on to Marrakesh, Morocco, where Albert remembered catching a ride on a donkey-powered taxi.

After Morocco, they flew directly to Great Britain. While passing Portugal, however, an unidentified plane resembling a German fighter was seen in the distance; the B-24 pilot ducked into nearby clouds to avoid confrontation. Once past Portugal, the rest of the flight was uneventful until almost the end. They were assigned to land at RAF

Halesworth, located between Norwich and Ipswich in East Anglia, but so many airfields now dotted the English countryside that they were lost among all the new military air bases. They ended up landing in Wales, hundreds of miles to the southwest.

Albert remembered, "The local people were most hospitable and friendly." Each of the officers was assigned a "batman" who, in the British military, was a soldier who was assigned as a man-servant to a commissioned officer. Albert took advantage of his batman long enough to get his boots polished before his plane flew on to RAF Halesworth, the 489th's new home. The 56th Fighter Group was also stationed there. The 489th had four squadrons—the 844th, 845th, 846th, and 847th; Albert was assigned to the 846th Bombardment Squadron.

While at Halesworth, the squadron flew several practice missions over the North Sea. Just before their first combat mission, two of the Liberators, trying to avoid a pair of Boeing B-17 Flying Fortress bombers headed straight for them out of the clouds, collided with each other, causing both ships to crash with resulting fatalities. It was an unnerving experience for the young crews of the other planes.

When not flying a combat mission, crew members spent their spare time lounging around their field, writing letters home, playing cards, going to pubs and dances in nearby towns (the closest to RAF Halesworth were Norwich and Ipswich), going on pass to London, or—most importantly—catching up on sleep.

A navigator in another bomb group (the 455th) described life in the Eighth Air Force: "We dreaded every mission, but we knew that we had to fly the missions in order to get home. All of us flew in terror. We prayed a lot. Some of us drank a lot. Some of us smoked a lot. To escape the war, we walked or biked out on the English countryside any chance we had.

"Our crew was our family. We did just about everything together and took care of one another, no matter what. The English girls we met, we held them tight. They were the angels in our world of sudden fiery death. Some of us barely held on to our sanity. The flight surgeons gave us the right medicines to keep us functioning the same way our mechanics kept our bombers flying. One of the crew broke down under the strain, and we couldn't help but envy him as he was pulled out of combat…

"Many years later we would learn that, statistically, there was no more dangerous place to be in World War II than in a bomber over Germany. The medals we received were not for heroism. They were for having survived the danger of collision with our own planes, of being wounded by a piece of flak shrapnel, of being blown to kingdom come by a direct hit, of going down because of a malfunctioning airplane, of being attacked by German fighters, of crashing into the sea—of injury or death in a thousand ways."

The 489th flew its first combat mission on May 30, 1944, just a week before Operation Overlord, the Normandy invasion. At the time, crews had to survive a minimum of 25 missions before they could return home.

The wake-up call came at 4 AM, with the briefing taking place after breakfast. The targets for the 489th Group's 135 B-24s were aviation depots and the Wilde Sau fighter unit at Oldenburg in Lower Sax-

National Archives

All: National Archives

ABOVE: Brig. Gen. Ezekiel Napier, left, commanded Boam's 489th Bomb Group. Lt. Col. Bob Vance, right, earned the Medal of Honor despite severe injuries. BELOW: Smoke and dust rise as a B-24 Liberator flies high above a target during a raid over Germany. B-24s dropped over 450,000 tons of bombs on Europe during World War II.

ony, west of Bremen. As the 489th Group flew over the Dutch coast, German flak came up to meet them. It was the group's first introduction to the deadly German antiaircraft fire.

A crew didn't need to be shot down to be lost. On the Oldenburg mission, another crew flying its first combat mission had made the mistake of not fueling the plane properly, leaving it short of fuel for a round trip. As a result, it ran out of gas before it could make it home and had to ditch in the North Sea. Its surviving crewmen were fished out of the water by the Germans and taken prisoner.

Albert remembered another man in the squadron named Jack "Joe" Garber, who had been the U.S. national handball champion in 1938 and 1942. On the group's second mission, Garber's flak helmet became uncomfortable so he removed it to adjust it. At that moment a chunk of flak hit and killed him.

Albert's plane was named *Little Eva* by its engineer. (Another B-24 *Little Eva* crashed off the coast of Australia in December 1942.) *Little Eva*'s second mission, on May 31, 1944, was to hit V-1 "buzz bomb" launch sites in the Pas de Calais area of France. Flying between 7,000 and 8,000 feet, the first pass over the target was at an awkward angle, and most of the planes failed to drop their bombs. The flight commander was not satisfied and ordered a second pass over target, never a good idea.

Now the Germans knew they were coming, plus their range and altitude. Flak was accurate, and *Little Eva* returned to base riddled with 186 holes from ground fire. The hydraulic system had been pierced, and there were no brakes. "One of the holes was directly beneath where I was sitting," Albert recalled. "I'm still amazed that it didn't hit me."

One of the waist gunners was hit in the arm; he was badly wounded and would not fly in combat again. A couple of planes were shot down, and most of the planes received damage. "That is the day I started smoking," Albert recalled.

To make matters worse, while flying back to base over the Thames River Estuary, *Little Eva* flew below 10,000 feet and received antiaircraft fire from the British. It was a rule that they were not to fly below 10,000 feet near London so as not to be mistaken for German bombers. Either the pilot didn't remember or the plane was too badly shot up to hold altitude.

Then things got even worse. The lights at Halesworth went out as *Little Eva* approached, and the planes circled a few times before being diverted to RAF Metfield, about 18 miles south of Norwich. Since the plane landed with no brakes, the pilot performed a ground loop to bring it to a stop.

The 489th took part in several more raids prior to and after the Normandy invasion. One in particular stands out in the annals of the group's history: June 5, 1944. On that day, Lt. Col. Leon R. "Bob" Vance was commanding the group in a diversionary raid on German coastal defenses at Wimereux, France. Vance was positioned behind the pilot and co-pilot of a B-24 carrying a ground radar set. During the initial run over the target, the lead plane's bombs failed to jettision, so a second run was ordered. A flak burst killed the pilot of the plane in which Vance was riding and badly wounded Vance, nearly severing his right foot.

When the co-pilot took charge of the plane, Vance assisted him in bringing it under control. Returning to England, Vance, now piloting the B-24, ordered the crew to bail out over the English Channel, as it was too badly damaged to land safely. Erroneously thinking that the plane's radio operator was still on board, Vance made a successful water landing to save the man's life, but an explosion occurred that blew Vance free of

A B-24, its left outboard engine on fire, begins its fatal plunge. A Focke-Wulf FW-190 can be seen at right. Boam and his crew mates had to bail out of his stricken plane, *Little Eva*, near Hagenau, Alsace-Lorraine, on July 31, 1944. Boam was soon captured.

the cockpit. He was picked up by a British air-sea rescue boat, but his foot had to be amputated.

As Vance was flown back to the United States on July 26 for further medical treatment, the C-54 Skymaster on which he and other wounded Americans were flying disappeared over the North Atlantic. Vance was posthumously awarded the Medal of Honor—the only Medal of Honor awarded to a B-24 crewman for an action flown from England. In 1949, Enid Air Force Base in his hometown of Enid, Oklahoma, was renamed Vance Air Force Base in his honor.

On D-Day, *Little Eva* set out to bomb St. Lô, France. Flying under the clouds, Albert was stunned by the number of ships involved in the cross-Channel invasion. "It looked like you could walk from one end of the Channel to the other," he remembered.

On this trip, the pathfinder aircraft that was to lead the way and designate the target failed to appear. The planes assigned to bomb St. Lô found visibility limited by clouds and aborted their mission.

After D-Day, the turnaround in missions was rapid; it seemed to Albert that *Little Eva* was flying a mission every other day. He flew two raids against Munich (July 11 and 12, 1944). Every available plane in the Eighth Air Force took part in these famous "thousand plane" raids.

Several of the missions also targeted marshaling yards where rail traffic was concentrated. At least one of his missions was against Villacoublay Air Base, eight miles southwest of Paris, where the Luftwaffe maintained a fighter base and some aircraft manufacturing facilities.

The group's July 31 mission was directed against the I.G. Farben chemical plants at Ludwigshafen-am-Rhein, across the river from Mannheim, Germany. *Little Eva* and her crew had logged 30 missions, and the July 31 mission would be their last—but not the way they had hoped.

Little Eva was the second plane in formation following the pathfinder aircraft, which led the way to verify the target.

As the squadron tagged after the pathfinder, Albert began to notice that they were off course. He radioed his pilot this information, but it was not transmitted to the lead plane. Their approach was erroneously leading them over the outskirts of Saarbrücken and in range of the city's antiaircraft defenses. Soon flak rose into the sky and hit *Little Eva*'s control surfaces on the right wing. Had the flak hit a few inches to one side it would have ignited the fuel tank with disastrous results.

Little Eva peeled out of formation to the right and flew erratically, losing speed and altitude. The pilot knew that they could not hope to make it back to England. As he struggled for control of the aircraft, the pilot desperately hoped that they could reach Switzerland, where they would be safe. But *Little Eva* was becoming more difficult to control and had slowed almost to stall speed.

The pilot gave the order to bail out. Starting at about 8,000 feet, the crew leaped out one by one. Albert left through the nose-wheel door, chipping a tooth in the process. "I opened my parachute right away," he said. For more than 70 years he has believed that he opened it too soon. *Little Eva* hurtled to the ground and crashed. William Bunton, the co-pilot, and Albert, bleeding from the mouth, landed in the same area. They huddled together trying to figure out what to do next.

They had landed near a police station at Hagenau in German-controlled Alsace-Lorraine. The local police chief and his men captured them. He swore at them, calling them "American terror gangsters." In his anger, he took a few swings at the co-pilot, who was a much bigger man. The "gangsters" spent two nights in the local jail.

On the third day, a truck bearing the markings of the Luftwaffe arrived to pick them up. The two men were taken to the Dulag Luft (prison camp for enemy aviators) in Oberursel near Frankfurt. Opened in 1939, this was the largest transit camp in Germany for captured Allied fliers. At Dulag Luft, POWs were sorted out, interrogated, and shipped on to POW camps.

Upon arrival, Albert and his co-pilot were locked up in solitary confinement,

National Archives

given little to eat or drink, and slept on a wooden palette with a little pile of straw. After three days, they were taken under guard to the office of an English-speaking Luftwaffe officer. He had done his homework. "He seemed to know a lot about me, where I had trained, and my squadron number," recalled Albert. The young navigator was asked a series of questions, the answers to some of which, he was sure, the German already knew. But Albert's answer to all the officer's questions was "name, rank, and serial number."

After five days at Dulag Luft, they were shipped by rail to Sagan, Lower Silesia, and a Luftwaffe prison camp named Stalag Luft III. This was the famous prison camp that was the site of "the Great Escape." That event and the brutal reprisals that followed occurred in March 1944—before Albert arrived.

In the camp, he was ultimately reunited with the other officers of his crew, pilot 1st Lt. Arthur P. Bertanzetti and bombardier Tom Day. They had hidden and evaded capture for several days. All the enlisted men were sent to Stalag 17 in Austria. Their treatment would be much worse than that of the officers.

At Stalag Luft III, they learned that Americans were being shot down in such numbers that there was no room for the new arrivals in the west camp that was set aside for U.S. air crews. So Albert was placed in the north compound which housed RAF flyers, including those from Canada and Poland. Some of these men had been imprisoned there since 1939 and 1940.

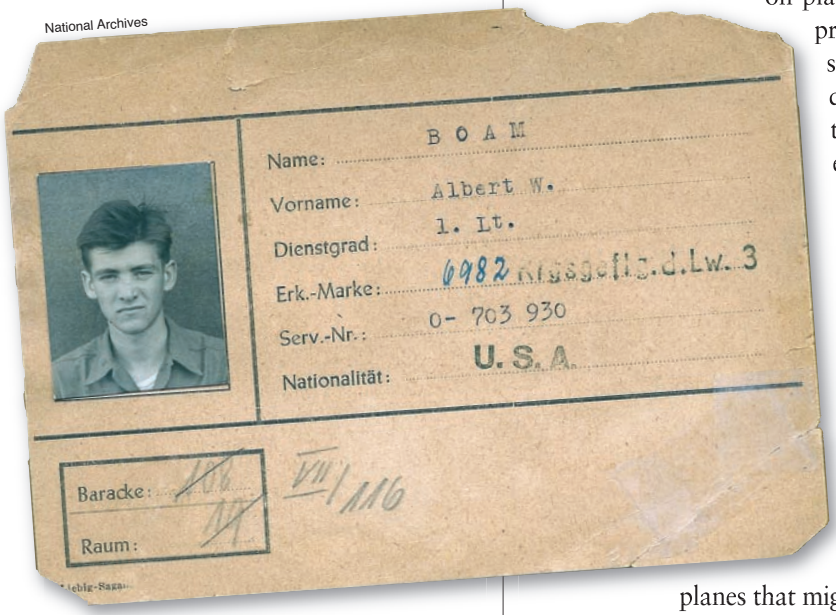
"I was really impressed with their organization," Boam said. "They had a well-stocked library, a record collection and a phonograph to play them. They organized lectures, put on plays, with men in drag playing the women's parts. They printed their own camp newspaper and clandestinely hid a short wave radio from which they gathered and verbally disseminated the BBC news of the day. The radio was given the code name 'tobacco' to help hide its existence. For entertainment at night I most often played cards."

For exercise there was an oval area around the camp inside the barbed wire, where men took their daily constitutionals (as the British called it), and touch football and softball games were organized. Albert remembered, "One day an Me-109 buzzed the compound, perhaps paying respect to his fellow airmen. One of the prisoners threw a softball at the passing plane. Fortunately for us all, he missed. On another occasion, an Me-262 German jet buzzed the compound. At first, there was awe at the plane with no propeller and the rumbling sound, but being fly boys we soon figured out what it was and what it meant"—that Nazi Germany had jet-powered planes that might tip the scales in Hitler's favor.

For food at the camp there was a dwindling amount supplied by the Luftwaffe—often no more than insect-infested cabbage soup. "We had to drain off the bugs before eating it," Boam recalled. From time to time they received a baked potato and sometimes a hard piece of dark brown bread. The bulk of their diet came from Red Cross food parcels.

Each parcel contained several items. "I remember tinned corned beef, powdered milk in a can, a chocolate bar, margarine, and a pack of cigarettes," said Albert. The grow-

National Archives



ABOVE: Boam's German POW identification card. He spent 10 months in captivity before being liberated by Patton's Third Army. TOP: The Stalag Luft III compound near Sagan, Silesia, with prisoners taking their "daily constitutional" along a route inside the barbed wire. This camp was where "the Great Escape" occurred in March 1944—before Boam's arrival.

ing number of Allied airmen in the camps limited their portions. The men were placed on half rations, and 15 parcels were doled out to 30 men every two weeks.

Letters from home had to be written on special forms. They were heavily censored, with many blacked-out words and phrases, and they always seemed to be delivered two months late.

Early on, the camp had devised a monetary system based on food, soap, cigarettes, and other supplies. Nonsmokers could barter their cigarettes (or "fags" as the British called them) for chocolate or other goods received from the outside. If an item became scarce, it rose in value. If it became more readily available, the value fell based on the trading that was done each day. "The system was like an informal stock exchange," Albert said, and it worked. Though he smoked, he was more than glad to trade his cigarettes for other items.

The officers of *Little Eva* settled into camp life until January 1945. On the 12th, the Russians began their long-awaited and overpowering offensive all along Germany's Eastern Front. As the fighting moved closer to Stalag Luft III, the prisoners were moved westward. After the war it was learned that Hitler wanted all the POWs to be killed in the dying days of the Third Reich. The army thought better of it, and even though the Nazi regime was crumbling it was still considered important to hold on to Allied POWs as bargaining chips in any future negotiations.

By January 27, the Russians were within 16 miles of camp. "The guards announced that the prisoners had two or three hours to gather our belongings and all the Red Cross parcels we could carry," Boam recalled. Eleven thousand prisoners were led out into weather that was below freezing and where the snow was six inches deep; their westward march of about 45 miles took four or five days to complete. "One night I was able to sleep in a barn in a pile of other bodies for warmth," Albert noted. "Our destination was Spremberg in Saxony. But we did not remain there long."

Lou Gruber; Wikimedia Commons

A modern view of what was once Stalag VII-A, near Moosberg, Germany, in southern Bavaria, to which Boam was moved during the closing days of the war.

The prisoners were split up and sent in different directions. On February 2, the men of the north compound, including Albert, were loaded onto boxcars and shipped to Stalag XIII-D at Nuremberg. The city looked to Albert to be about 90 percent destroyed. He recalled a scene from the movie *Judgment at Nuremberg* that depicted the city in that condition. The camp, which was previously occupied by Italian prisoners, was infested with lice.

Conditions deteriorated. Because of the chaos and disruption in Germany, much of it due to continuous Allied bombing and strafing, no new Red Cross parcels arrived for the prisoners for several weeks. As a result there was little to eat, and the men began to lose weight. "I lost about 25 pounds," Albert said. Conversations were dominated by talk of food. Even women took a back seat in these barrack conversations. When a shipment of parcels finally arrived, it was greeted with great celebration. Albert remembered, "It was like V-E Day—we were all so happy to have food again."

Soon, however, the camp was threatened once more—this time from the west as the Americans and their allies crossed the Rhine and rushed eastward. This time the weary prisoners were marched southward to Bavaria. "It was early spring, and at least the weather was pleasant," Albert noted. The Germans were short of manpower by now, and the POWs were guarded almost informally by older men of the type drafted into the Volkssturm at the end of the war. Albert recalled, "The prisoners could have escaped if they had wanted to, but we all knew that the war was almost over and no one wanted to risk being shot before we were liberated."

One day as they shuffled past a local farm, Albert walked up to the farmer who was watching them pass and attempted to trade some of his cigarettes for eggs. The American had picked up a little German, and the farmer understood what he wanted. During the exchange, however, the farmer informed Albert out of the blue that President Franklin Roosevelt had died. The news soon spread, and it was a shock to everyone.

The POWs' last stop was in a camp near Moosburg, a town northeast of Munich. While the prisoners settled into their new camp, they saw a silver North American

Continued on page 98

Rangers Led the Way at Zerf

Without a doubt, the U.S. Army's Ranger battalions were considered among the elite formations of World War II. Trained to be rough, tough, and unflinching in the face of insurmountable obstacles and overwhelming odds, the Rangers were America's version of the British Commando units.

But one of the major criticisms of the Rangers during and after the war was that there were too few opportunities for them to use their special skills to make their continued upkeep and maintenance worthwhile. They drew off potential leaders from line infantry, artillery, and engineer units, required constant training, and often required special equipment while rarely finding a suitable opportunity for their use.

Ironically, therefore, it is strange that when they, in fact, performed as intended, these instances have often been ignored. While many students of the war are familiar with the achievements of the 2nd Ranger Battalion at Pointe du Hoc on D-Day and the 6th Ranger Battalion's raid on the Japanese prisoner-of-war camp at Cabanatuan on Luzon, other successful Ranger operations are little known.

Originated by a request from President Franklin Delano Roosevelt for a U.S Army force modeled on the British Commandos, the first Rangers were formed in 1942 in England and drawn from U.S. volunteers then stationed there.

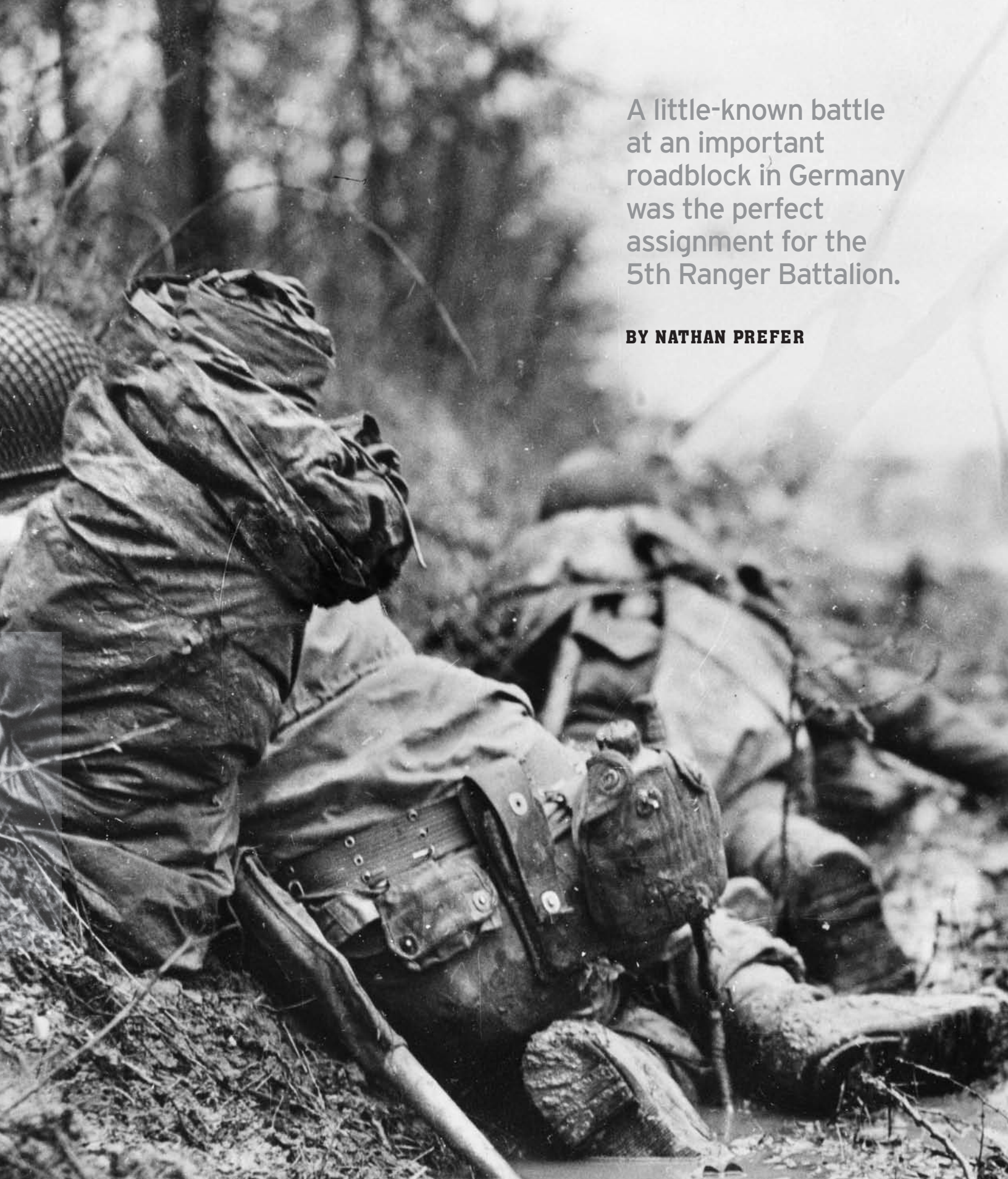
The ruggedly handsome Colonel William Orlando Darby, the originator and commander of the 1st Ranger Battalion, was born in 1911 in western Arkansas and enjoyed all the outdoor sports such as hunting and fishing. He was a 1933 graduate of West Point with a commission in the field artillery. Darby led the 1st Ranger Battalion in action at Arzew, Algeria, during Operation Torch, where his actions earned the Distinguished Service Cross. Unwilling to order his men to do anything he wouldn't do, Darby was, and is, a shining example of an officer who always "led from the front."

The original Rangers were trained by the British Commandos at their training site at Achnacarry in northern Scotland. Organized as a battalion, they adopted the name "Rangers" at the suggestion of Brig. Gen. Lucian K. Truscott, who had issued the original recommendation to Army Chief of Staff General George C. Marshall.

Volunteers had to be fully trained soldiers with superior leadership qualities, initiative, sound judgment, and common sense. They could

Sprawling in a muddy ditch, men of the 94th Infantry Division take cover from German artillery fire near Sinz, Germany, during the U.S. Army's push to the Saar River, February 7, 1945. The understrength 5th Ranger Battalion spearheaded the XX Corps advance east and southeast of Saarburg.

National Archives



A little-known battle at an important roadblock in Germany was the perfect assignment for the 5th Ranger Battalion.

BY NATHAN PREFER

Both: National Archives

ABOVE: A British Commando demonstrates fighting tactics to a group of Rangers during training at Achnacarry, Scotland. Colonel William O. Darby modeled his Ranger battalions after the tough British Commando units. OPPOSITE: Wearing World War I-style helmets and carrying British Lee-Enfield .303 rifles, two muddy U.S. Rangers undergo obstacle-course training in Scotland prior to making a failed invasion at Dieppe, France, in August 1942.

have no physical defects.

While no age limit was established, the Commando model of an average age of 25 years was generally followed. Men who had particular civilian skills, including marksmanship, scouting, mountaineering, seamanship, and small-boat handling were particularly welcome.

Training was strenuous. In the 1st Ranger Battalion, one in five of the original volunteers was returned to his unit for not meeting physical or training standards.

A World War II ranger battalion consisted of a headquarters and headquarters company and six rifle companies, each of two platoons. Each platoon consisted of two assault sections and a 60mm mortar section. Later the mortars would be grouped within each individual rifle company's headquarters section. An assault section consisted of a section leader, assistant section leader, two scouts, one automatic rifleman, an assistant automatic rifleman, and five riflemen.

The United States Army's Rangers' first combat action in modern warfare took place at Dieppe on the French coast on August 1, 1942. Six officers and 45 enlisted men took part in a British/Canadian Commando raid on that French port. Two officers and four enlisted Rangers were killed, and four enlisted Rangers were captured. Two months later, in November 1942, the 1st Ranger Battalion entered combat for the first time as a unit at Arzew, Algeria, during the Allied invasion of North Africa.

The battalion conducted a successful raid against Italian Army positions at Station de Sened in Tunisia. During the battle of Kasserine Pass they defended Bou Chebka and conducted aggressive patrols. Later, they joined the 1st U.S. Infantry Division in its attack on the enemy positions at Gafsa, during which they infiltrated behind enemy lines and struck from behind as the infantry attacked from the front.

The success and popularity of the 1st Ranger Battalion inspired the creation of more battalions. Two—the 3rd and 4th—would be created overseas, drawn by dividing up the original Ranger battalion into thirds. Two more—the 2nd and 5th—would be created in the United States, both at Camp Forrest, Tennessee, in April and September 1943, respectively.

Another battalion, the 6th, would be created in General Douglas MacArthur's Southwest Pacific Theater of Operations by converting a field artillery battalion staffed with volunteers into a Ranger battalion.

Colonel Darby was given command of the 6615th Ranger Force, which consisted of the 1st, 3rd, and 4th Ranger Battalions and the permanently attached 83rd Chemical Mortar Battalion, a 4.2-inch mortar unit. The Ranger Force fought in Sicily, at Salerno, and throughout Italy. In January 1944, they were part of the assault force at the invasion at Anzio. Soon thereafter, the three battalions took part in an attempt to infiltrate behind German lines at Cisterna but were virtually wiped out when they encountered vastly superior enemy forces containing the Allied beachhead.

On June 6, 1944, the 2nd and 5th Ranger Battalions entered combat against the Germans. Both battalions were a part of the First U.S. Army's assault landing on Omaha Beach on D-Day. Three companies of the 2nd Rangers climbed the sheer cliffs of Pointe du Hoc to capture enemy guns that overlooked the invasion beaches. The remainder of that battalion and the 5th Ranger Battalion landed across "Bloody Omaha" to reinforce the Pointe du Hoc task force; heavy casualties resulted. When American commanders sought to force an exit off Omaha Beach, they turned to the 5th Ranger Battalion and ordered them, "Rangers, lead the way," which they did, in the process creating the modern Ranger motto.

The Rangers remained in Normandy even after fighting had moved east. In September, the 5th Ranger Battalion participated as conventional infantry in the reduction of the fortress city of Brest, on the Brittany Peninsula. Other conventional engagements followed. At Brest alone the battalion suffered 23 Rangers killed, 89 wounded, and two missing. Fighting in December cost the battalion another 18 killed, 106 wounded, and five missing.

Two months later, February 1945, the 5th Ranger Battalion, commanded by Lt. Col. Richard P. Sullivan, was at Zerf, Germany. How they got there is a tale that goes back

to September 1944, when the Allied pursuit of the defeated German armies in France reached the German frontier and the West Wall, or so-called Siegfried Line.

Lieutenant General George S. Patton's Third U.S. Army found itself facing the German defenses at Metz, France, which held them up for several weeks. To the south, Lt. Gen. Alexander M. "Sandy" Patch's Seventh Army exhausted itself attacking the German lines along the Moselle River in southern France.

Along the border between these two American armies lay a strong German defense in what came to be known as the Saar-Moselle Triangle. From the confluence of the Saar and Moselle Rivers in the north to a base along an east-west line roughly following the southern border of Luxembourg, the triangle measured more than 16 miles by 13 miles.

It was defended by a newly built portion of the German West Wall that had been constructed in 1940. Referred to by the Germans as the Orscholz Switch, the Americans called it the Siegfried Switch. It was specifically designed to prevent the outflanking of the West Wall positions protecting Germany's Saar industrial area.

The American unit assigned to attack this zone was the XX Corps under the command of Maj. Gen. Walton Harris Walker. A Texan and 1912 graduate of West Point, Walker had led XX Corps since Normandy. It had earned the sobriquet of "Ghost Corps" because of its rapid movements, which often confused German intelligence as to its whereabouts. In November and December 1944, Walker had been directed toward the Saar River at Saarlautern and had only small reconnaissance forces available to direct against the Saar-Moselle Triangle.

It wasn't until the end of November that a combined armor-infantry force had managed a small penetration at the villages of Tettingen and Butzdorf, and even this had to be surrendered when the Battle of the Bulge forced General Patton to turn north and leave only meager forces to hold his southern front.

In early January 1945, as the Battle of the Bulge was slowly winding down, a fresh infantry division joined XX Corps. This was the 94th Infantry Division under the command of Maj. Gen. Harry James Malony. General Malony was a native of New York and a graduate of West Point in the same class as General Walker. His division had landed in September in Normandy but had been kept busy besieging the German-occupied ports on the Cotentin Peninsula. Relieved there shortly after Christmas 1944, the 94th had come up to strengthen the Third Army, where Walker directed it against the Siegfried Switch.

With his strength levels still significantly reduced due to the demands of the Bulge battle, Walker had little in the way of support to provide the 94th. Nevertheless, he ordered Malony to probe the German defenses. The first attack was launched on January 14, 1945.

Early successes by the 94th Infantry Division prompted strong German counterattacks by the defending 416th Division. These attacks were unexpectedly reinforced by the 11th Panzer ("Ghost") Division, which happened to be passing in the German rear and was hastily thrown into the developing battle. As a result, a bitter and bloody battle began, which drew in more forces on both sides. Combat Command A (Brig. Gen. Charles F. Colson) of the newly arrived 8th Armored Division was briefly thrown into the fray to counteract the German armor.

After two weeks of deadly combat, General Patton ordered a temporary halt to the attacks. A brief rest period was planned, and then the assault would be renewed. Just as the new attacks were begun, on February 2, 1945, a period of constant rain began. Foxholes filled with water, and roads became streams of mud. Nevertheless, the infantry attacked. The attack went slowly, with both the 416th Division and the 11th Panzer Division still defending the Orscholz Switch position to the fullest. To make matters apparently worse for Third Army, a new enemy formation, the 256th Division, was identified.

Surprisingly, the arrival of the 256th Division was actually good news for the Americans. It signaled the replacement of the 11th Panzer Division, which the Germans needed elsewhere. More good news came when General Walker received the temporary use of the 10th Armored Division.

With the German armor departing and the American armor arriving, things began to look up for the XX Corps. By February 19, the 94th Infantry Division, at a cost of over 1,000 casualties, had cleared most of the Saar-Moselle Triangle and opened the way for the advance of the 10th Armored Division. The objective now became the crossing of the Saar River. Reinforced by the 376th Infantry Regiment of the 94th Infantry Division, the tankers began to push forward, while the rest of General Malony's division protected the armor's southern flank.

Crossing the Saar River would not be easy. As usual, the Germans had blown all

bridges. General Walker ordered Maj. Gen. William Henry Harrison Morris, Jr., to force a crossing with his 10th Armored Division northeast of Saarburg while Malony's 94th Division forced another southeast of that town.

The joint objective was the ancient German city of Trier. Besides being a major communications center, Trier had been an assembly point for the massing of German forces for the Battle of the Bulge. Trier lay behind the usual mutually supporting pillboxes, gun positions, and minefields of the West Wall.

A New Jersey native, Morris had graduated with the West Point Class of 1911 and had taken command of the 10th Armored in July 1944, when its previous commander was killed in a plane crash. He led it ashore in France in November 1944 and had fought with it during the Battle of the Bulge before joining XX Corps in February.

His first crossing attempt at the Saar River failed when the assault boats did not arrive at the crossing site. But to the southeast the 94th's 302nd Infantry Regiment crossed successfully near Serrig only to run into stiff German defenses at Hoecker Hill. Nearby, the 301st Infantry had a rougher time crossing, but despite only one company, under Captain Charles W. Donovan, crossing intact, a bridgehead was established.

Northeast at Ockfen, the armored division's assault boats finally arrived in mid-afternoon and, pressured by Patton, General Morris ordered a daylight crossing. German defenses, and the inability of the 81st Chemical (Smoke Generator) Company to get into position in a timely manner, delayed the crossing again.

Quickly the Germans moved elements of the 416th and 256th Divisions into the area to defend Ockfen. Nevertheless, during the hours of darkness, the 376th Infantry crossed the river successfully and established a bridgehead for the armor. German resistance remained heavy, with artillery and mortars pounding the advancing Americans. Even with this strong opposition, by nightfall on February 23 Ockfen fell to the 376th Infantry Regiment.

Despite these successes, General Walker remained concerned. He wanted to move faster and needed to expand his bridgeheads, join them, and thrust toward Trier with his armor. He reviewed his situation and decided that if XX Corps could block the main German supply and communications route to the Saar, he would weaken their defenses and thereby speed up his own advance.

Behind the German lines ran the main east-west highway in the area—a road leading from the enemy's main lateral route behind the Saar to the settlement of Zerf, then west to the river at the town of Beurig across from Saarburg. While he was considering this, he knew of a special force that he could use to block that critical road.

By mid-February, when assigned to Walker's XX Corps, the 5th Ranger Battalion was seriously under authorized strength and in a generally weakened condition. Even with receipt of recently arrived replacements, the battalion counted only 20 officers and 378 enlisted men on its rolls, nearly 20 percent under its authorized strength.

Many of the replacements were recently arrived volunteers who had little or no Ranger training. Armed with two light machine guns and two 60mm mortars per company headquarters, 12 antitank rocket launchers, and 50 Thompson submachine guns, the Rangers were still a lightly armed force.

Lieutenant Colonel Sullivan, a graduate of the Massachusetts Military Academy, believed in personal reconnaissance. Taking his operations officer, Captain Edward S. Luther and a platoon of B Company under 1st Lt. Louis J. Gambosi as escort, he advanced to the forward positions of the 302nd Infantry atop Hoecker Hill and conferred with Colonel John W. Gaddis, the regimental commander.

Disappointed that Hoecker Hill was still being contested by the Germans, Colonel Sullivan sent Lieutenant Gambosi and his platoon back to bring up the battalion. The Rangers had been distributed along the front of the 94th Infantry Division's line with two companies at Orscholz, two at Taben, and the last two near Wieten. In the time it took to assemble the battalion at Wieten, Captain Charles E. Parker's Company A lost six Rangers killed and 18 wounded by enemy artillery fire.

At midnight on February 22, Sullivan assembled his company commanders for a final briefing at the 302nd Infantry's command post. The planned route was unusual in two aspects. It first required the battalion to penetrate the German defenses diagonally instead of at a right angle. Once past the first enemy defenses, the battalion was to proceed parallel to the battlefront. This made the route longer than might seem necessary at first

National Archives

ABOVE: U.S. soldiers advance under fire to the Saar River, February 1945. The Rangers were vital to the 10th Armored Division and 94th Infantry Division's capture of key German territory. OPPOSITE: Darby's 1st, 3rd, and 4th Ranger Battalions fought in Sicily and Italy in 1943 but were wiped out at Cisterna, Italy, in early 1944.

glance and left them vulnerable to discovery for a longer time.

Second, the Rangers were to advance from the front of the 94th Division but were to move northeast, which would place them in front of the 10th Armored Division; it was the armored division that was assigned to relieve them.

Although complicated, a look at the terrain made it seem more sensible. The area was heavily wooded, compartmentalized by steep hills and cliffs. Strong German defenses stood before the Saarburg-Zerf road, but these faced toward Luxembourg. If the Rangers instead infiltrated through the heavily forested Waldgut Hundscheid, they stood a better chance of remaining undetected.

While the commanders planned, the battalion assembled and prepared. The men drew extra machine-gun ammunition, antitank mines, and one K- and one D-ration per man. The assembled battalion moved off to the river at 8 PM. After crossing by footbridge at Taben under enemy artillery fire, the battalion assembled on Hockerberg Hill, already in the forested zone. Several more casualties resulted there from German artillery fire.

Leading the twin column, with 50 yards between companies, was Captain Jack A. Snyder's Company C on the left and Captain George R. Miller's Company D on the right. Each column was led by Rangers armed with Thompson submachine guns.

As 1st Lt. James F. Greene, Jr.'s Company E and Captain Bernard M. Pepper's Company B attempted to follow, they were hit again by German artillery and small-arms fire, which knocked out one of the three artillery forward observer parties from the 284th Field Artillery Battalion under Captain Stephen McPortland.

This same barrage caused additional casualties in Company B. The battalion became separated while Companies B and E attempted to aid their casualties and reorganize.

Colonel Sullivan, in the lead with Companies C and D, soon became aware of the break in the battalion and had Captain Luther radio back to find out what had happened. A half hour was lost while the battalion regrouped.

Once reassembled, the battalion moved forward again. Under continued harassing fire by enemy tanks and self-propelled guns, they moved in complete darkness. Sullivan decided that the enemy was firing at the sounds made as his battalion moved through the forest.

Later, when the Germans continued firing at them in open areas, Colonel Sullivan concluded that the Germans were using the clanking sounds of the antitank mines each of his men were carrying to zero in on them. These, however, were vital to establish the roadblock and to stop any enemy armor they might encounter.

With nothing available to muffle the sound, they marched on. Soon thereafter the advance guard came face to face with a number of enemy troops that they quickly captured. Unable to send the enemy back to American lines, Sullivan was forced to use some of his declining strength to guard these prisoners. As daylight approached, the 5th Rangers found a place to rest and reconnoiter the next part of their route.

Upon the return of his reconnaissance patrols, Sullivan organized his battalion in a square formation with 1st Lt. John M. Carter's Headquarters Company and the prisoners in the center. Moving off in the direction of Zerf, Sullivan contacted his supporting 94th Infantry Division artillery and used spotting rounds to maintain direction.

As they moved, they came upon three enemy pillboxes from which they extracted 30 more prisoners. Moving forward again, Company B came under attack from the rear by more than 50 German soldiers. The Germans apparently thought they had encountered an American patrol rather than a battalion of Rangers. Charging across open ground, they ran directly into the fire of Captain Miller's Company D, which killed 20. The survivors were added to the Rangers' prisoners, which now numbered over 100.

At some point in these engagements the enemy artillery fire, rough terrain, and darkness caused Lieutenant Gambosi's platoon and half of another of Company B to disappear. With another 16 battle casualties resulting from these fights, the remnants of Company B were assigned to guard the growing number of prisoners.

Captain Potter also briefly lost contact between his headquarters and 1st Platoon and Company E but managed to regain it. However, nothing further was immediately heard from Lieutenant Gambosi and his missing men.

More and more encounters with the

enemy occurred as the battalion penetrated deeper behind German lines. A patrol from Company E came across a German position and captured 20 of the enemy. While crossing a stream, Captain Parker's Company A was attacked by the enemy, whom they chased away, leaving several casualties on the field.

Soon afterward a German Red Cross vehicle came along and stopped to view the wounded. A German doctor and four medical aid men were captured from the ambulance by Company A. The doctor was brought to Colonel Sullivan to whom he complained, "This is 4,000 yards behind the lines. No, no—you can't be here."

Throughout the day the Rangers continued their advance. Each time they encountered enemy forces they changed direction to prevent them from getting a chance to predict the route and prepare an ambush for the Rangers.

Company B's meager force continued to guard a growing number of German prisoners. The German doctor, now recovered from his surprise, was treating both American and German wounded.

On the night of February 22-23, the battalion alternately moved and rested. After each halt, patrols were dispatched to check on the surrounding area for enemy positions and to survey the route ahead. Several pillboxes, fortified houses, and field fortifications were taken by these patrols, and the number of prisoners continued to grow.

As dawn broke on February 23, an enemy self-propelled gun opened fire on the battalion but sped off when the Rangers returned fire. Soon afterward, the battalion arrived at its objective, following the sound of artillery rounds fired at the Rangers' request by the artillery of the 94th Infantry Division.

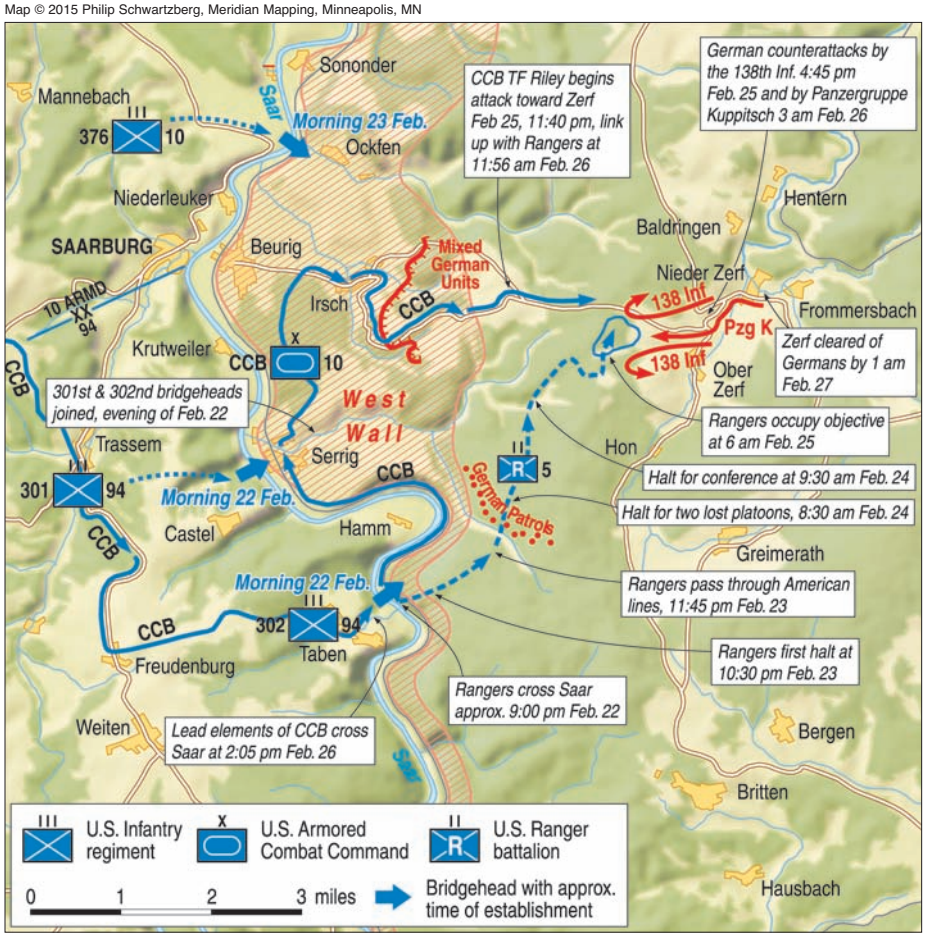
Colonel Sullivan immediately dispatched 1st Lt. John T. Reville's Company F to search the surrounding area. These Rangers cleared the area and captured several fortified houses. Second Lt. Oscar A. Suchier, Jr., and his platoon from Company F attacked one of these fortified houses; at a cost of one Ranger killed and another wounded they brought in 30 more prisoners. A patrol led by Captain William D. Byrne, the battalion intelligence officer, captured 15 more.

Although intelligence had reported a German artillery battery in the area, the Rangers could not find it. Colonel Sullivan then set up his roadblock, the purpose of the mission. He located it where the Irsch-Zerf road entered the woods, giving his Rangers some concealment. While the battalion moved to the site, Captain Pepper's Company B, bringing up the rear, came under enemy fire. Despite this brief delay, the battalion set up the roadblock and prepared to defend itself until relieved.

Lieutenant Greene's Company E placed the antitank mines on the road and then established themselves in a position from which they could cover the mines with small-arms fire and a bazooka. With Company E's position as its focal point, the rest of the battalion set up an all-around defense. As they did so, a German self-propelled gun came down the road. Spotting the Americans, the German crew "jumped out and ran like hell" according to one Ranger.

After failing to destroy the abandoned gun with the bazooka, the Rangers set it on fire with gasoline. This action alerted the Germans that a strong American force was in their rear. As Company A was withdrawing from a forward position, they were attacked by an enemy force that had, unseen, settled in their rear. Several casualties were incurred during the two-hour battle before Captain Parker's men could rejoin the battalion. As the day progressed, more and more German attacks came against the roadblock, but the Rangers continued to hold their positions.

Back along the Saar River, things were not going as well for the other American units. As late as February 24, with the Rangers already on the road, the 10th Armored Division had not been able to get its tanks across the river. Under constant German counter-



National Archives

ABOVE: U.S. infantrymen and a platoon of Sherman tanks from CCB, 10th Armored Division, advance toward enemy positions hidden in a forest in Germany. OPPOSITE: Elements of Walker's "Ghost Corps" had to fight their way across and through forests, fields, rivers, towns, and villages.

attacks, even the 376th Infantry Regiment was unsure if it could retain its bridgehead; short some 47 officers and 506 enlisted men, the regiment did not have the strength to cover its assigned zone.

Senior officer casualties began to mount as the Americans tried everything to clear a secure a bridgehead for tanks, tank destroyers, and artillery. Finally, on February 25, three American tanks crossed successfully into the 376th Infantry's bridgehead but were soon knocked out by enemy fire as they tried to expand the American holdings.

Frustrated, General Morris organized a task force under Brig. Gen. Edwin William Piburn, his assistant division commander. A native of Kansas, Piburn had been commissioned into the infantry after graduating from Iowa State University in 1917. Given the three armored infantry battalions of the 10th Armored Division, Piburn was ordered into the bridgehead to reinforce the weakened 376th Infantry.

Even this didn't immediately help, for Company B of the 61st Armored Infantry Battalion was surrounded in the village of Schouden and nearly overrun. It wasn't until Lt. Col. Russell C. Minor's 1st Battalion, 376th Infantry, counterattacked that the armored infantrymen were able to withdraw.

By the end of February 27, Generals Malony and Morris agreed that they could wait no longer—tanks had to go over the bridges at Taben, the bridgehead of the 94th Infantry Division. General Walker quickly agreed to the idea, and the 10th Armored Division tanks crossed through the 94th Infantry Division, taking casualties as they went.

Attacking the enemy in front of the 376th Infantry from flank and rear, they joined with their armored infantry battalions and formed their task forces for the push to Irsch. A linkup between the two American divisions quickly followed.

Almost immediately with the linkup of the 10th Armored and 94th Infantry Divisions the Germans withdrew. With the American bridgeheads now consolidated, there was no longer any hope that they could keep the Americans from crossing the Saar River in this sector.

At the same time, Sullivan's 5th Ranger Battalion had cut the enemy's supply and communications line to the rear, threatening them from that direction as well. The Germans had no choice but to withdraw.

Wearily, the American infantry and tankers loaded up their equipment and moved forward once again. The Rangers were still out there somewhere, and they needed relief.

Despite the success of XX Corps in crossing the Saar River, General Patton was displeased. Determined to thrust his Third Army into the heart of Germany, "Old Blood and Guts" looked about for some other means of accomplishing this goal. What he needed was to retain the 10th Armored Division, which he had only on temporary loan.

Meeting with his superior, General Omar N. Bradley, Patton convinced him to let him "unofficially" keep the division until demands for its deployment elsewhere made it necessary to take it from the Third Army. Patton's objective was now officially Trier.

Meanwhile, across the Saar River the Rangers were still set up in a narrow strip of woods that extended northward from the Waldgut Hundscheid and intersected with the Irsch-Zerf road. The point where the road passed through the woods was clearly marked as a "cleft in the wood line" and was the Rangers final objective.

As the Rangers waited for relief, Walker's XX Corps established Task Force Riley, under Lt. Col. John R. Riley, made up of elements of the 10th Armored Division's Combat Command B. Fighting their way through heavy small-arms, Panzerfäuste, and antitank fire, they pushed into Irsch and secured the town.

At the same time, the Rangers began experiencing more problems. Their position was not an ideal defensive one. There was a crest about 30 yards from their perimeter that blocked their view of any enemy approaching from the west. A Ger-

man counterattack could easily approach to within hand-grenade range of the Ranger positions on their west-facing side.

To the east, however, the road slanted downhill toward Zerf, and the Rangers had a clearer and longer view of any potential enemy approach. Companies D and E occupied the east side of the Ranger perimeter facing Zerf.

Captain Snyder's Company C took the west side, while Parker's Company A had the south to guard against any Germans who might come out of the Waldgut Hundscheid, as the Rangers themselves did. Pepper's Company B, still missing two of its platoons, was guarding prisoners in a barn near the center of the perimeter.

The Germans still seemed unaware that the Rangers were in their midst. An enemy tank destroyer came along and was easily captured by Greene's Company E, which destroyed it with rocket fire. Later, an enemy half-track came up the road and hit one of Company E's antitank mines. The German crew joined the group of prisoners being guarded by Company B. German soldiers, mostly walking wounded escaping from the battles along the Saar River, stumbled into the roadblock and were added to the guests of Company B.

But all good things come to an end. For the Rangers, this happened late on February 26 when the German command realized they had a significant force on their lines of communication and decided to destroy it.

At about 3:45 PM, just as Task Force Riley entered Zerf from the north, the Rangers were rocked by a concentrated artillery barrage and a two-pronged attack by some 200 infantry, who took advantage of the concealed approach routes to the roadblock. Company A was the recipient of both artillery and ground attack.

Coming through the woods from the Waldgut Hundscheid in the south, the 200 Germans hit at the same time as another force, estimated as 400 more, hit Company E from the northeast. Using the trees and ground for cover, the Germans made a close approach to the Rangers' positions before launching their assault. Both

ABOVE: German prisoners are marched through Irsch, east of Saarburg, on February 27. Lt. Col. Richard P. Sullivan's 5th Ranger Battalion captured 328 enemy soldiers during their operation at Zerf. OPPOSITE: A Sherman tank from the 10th Armored Division moves through Trier, near the Saar River north of Saarburg, a week after linking up with the 2nd Ranger Battalion. Behind the tank is Trier's famous landmark, the ancient Roman gate known as the Porta Negra.

assaults were repulsed, but the pressure caused Colonel Sullivan to dispatch the remnants of Company B to reinforce Company E, which also received a platoon from Company F. Rangers from headquarters company took over guarding the prisoners.

Eight enemy prisoners were taken during this attack. After interrogation, it was learned that the attacking force was the 136th Regiment, 2nd Mountain Division—a unit that had fought in Poland, Norway, and Finland before arriving on the Western Front. After being badly hurt in the Colmar Pocket in January, the surviving 4,000 men had been ordered to attack the Rangers "to the last man." Fortunately for the Rangers, most of the mountain troopers were Austrian and, at this stage of the war, preferred capture to death. By the end of the day, another 135 prisoners had been added to the Rangers' haul.

These latest attacks brought another serious problem into focus. In fighting off the several attacks on the way to the roadblock, and now repelling two major enemy assaults, the Rangers' ammunition stocks were running dangerously low. A call for a parachute drop of ammunition was approved, and two light observation aircraft from the 94th Infantry Division artillery attempted several drops. German fire kept the aircraft too high, causing most of the drop to fall into German hands.

If this operation to hold the roadblock without relief continued much longer, the Rangers could be forced to retire or even surrender, as they would be unarmed. Sullivan ordered patrols to reconnoiter possible escape routes.

While American task forces attacked independently into the German defenses, the Rangers held on and blocked the main avenue of enemy retreat or reinforcement. Confusion reigned in and around Zerf. Germans were firing from the east and the west. Americans were firing toward the east and the west. The Rangers sat in the middle of the battle, being fired at from all sides and returning fire when they could.

They sat in the middle of an artillery bulls-eye of which the Germans took full advantage. That night another German attack by some 400 enemy soldiers hit Company E. These men were part of Kampfgruppe (Battle Group) Kuppitsch. Three 90-man companies formed the battle group.

Recently formed in Heidelberg under the command of a Major Kuppitsch, the Kampfgruppe had no formal organization and was composed of miscellaneous companies hastily formed from convalescent companies and new recruits. Armed only with rifles and

machine guns, the soldiers made up for any shortcomings with their spirit and intense mortar and artillery support. Company E was soon in serious trouble.

The German attack pushed into the American perimeter. Captain Parker and 12 men from his Company A rushed to assist Company E. Machine-gun ammunition was exhausted. So intense was the fighting that the Rangers had to call down friendly artillery on their own forward positions from which they had just been ejected.

Soon the battle subsided, and the Rangers took stock of their situation. In addition to several casualties, 14 Rangers were missing in action, believed captured, while 25 German soldiers had been taken prisoner.

For the remainder of the night, intense German artillery fire hit the 5th Ranger Battalion. In the morning, Colonel Sullivan sent the remaining men of Company F—26 in all—to regain the lost ground. They found the woods littered with enemy dead.

The foggy dawn of February 26 brought the Rangers a sudden quiet. There was no artillery fire, no mortars fell into their foxholes, no small-arms fire kept them pinned down. As they relished the calm, the Rangers observed about 200 German soldiers walking along, seemingly lost and unable to see far due to the fog, terrain, and woods. Noisily approaching the Rangers' positions, they were easy prey.

Setting up a hasty ambush, the Rangers allowed the Germans to walk up to the American perimeter before opening fire. Many enemy troops were killed, cut down by small-arms fire. With no escape route, 145 surrendered.

This unexpected victory capped the Rangers' experience at Zerf. Shortly before noon on February 26, the 10th Armored Division's Temporary Team A came down the road and was greeted by a Ranger outpost. Later that same morning, the two lost platoons from Company B reached the roadblock perimeter. Last seen two days earlier, the platoons had become separated from the battalion during the approach march to the roadblock.

Lieutenant Gambosi had made several attempts to rejoin the battalion, following the 10-degree azimuth that Colonel Sullivan had directed as the battalion route, but each time he was turned aside by German artillery, machine-gun, or mortar fire. Eventually radio contact was established with Sullivan, but the battalion could not afford to wait while Gambosi's Rangers caught up. Instead they were ordered back to Taben.

There they found Task Force Riley, the 21st Tank Battalion less Company B, Company A of the 54th Armored Infantry, and a platoon of armored engineers. Lt. Col. Riley was under orders to proceed to Irsch, where he was to join with the 61st Armored Infantry Battalion, but he was hampered by a lack of infantry to clear his way. Lieutenant Gambosi and his 24 Rangers jumped into six armored half-tracks and led the advance to Irsch.

There the tankers were ambushed by the enemy and five tanks were knocked out. The Rangers were ordered to clear the town. In fierce house-to-house fighting, that is just what they did. Three roadblocks were cleared, and a German heavy tank was forced to withdraw when the Rangers drove off its infantry support.

The Rangers took 60 prisoners and spotted a second German heavy tank. That night the task force was joined by other elements of Combat Command B and formed into a spearhead—Temporary Task Force A—to relieve the other Rangers at Zerf.

The Ranger's final few casualties resulted from occasional enemy artillery fire hitting within their perimeter that morning. At 3 PM they received word that General Malony had attached them to his 301st Infantry Regiment, which was attacking in their direction.

For the remainder of February 26 and all day on the 27th, the 5th Ranger Battalion continued to repel German infantry attacks on their positions and ambush retreating Germans withdrawing before the advances of the 94th Infantry Division and 10th Armored Division.

The next few days, reinforced with four tanks, four tank destroyers, and two quad-.50-caliber machine gun-mounted half-tracks, the battalion joined with the 301st Infantry Regiment in capturing additional ground.

Both: National Archives

During this period came a tragic friendly fire incident when a company of Rangers fired on an American infantry platoon that had failed to give a password when approaching the Rangers' position.

By the end of a series of ground attacks, Lieutenant Gambosi, his radioman, and one other Ranger were all that were left of the 2nd Platoon, Company B, 5th Ranger Battalion.

Having held their critical roadblock,

Continued on page 98

In a painting by Jack Fellows, Edward H. "Butch" O'Hare, flying a Grumman F4F-3 Wildcat of VF-42, attacks a Japanese Mitsubishi G4M1 "Betty" bomber in his first combat action, February 20, 1942. He was credited with shooting down five enemy bombers (later amended to three) that day to become an "ace." For his actions, O'Hare became the first naval aviator to receive the Medal of Honor. His aircraft carrier, the *Lexington*, which he was defending, can be seen below. INSET: Butch O'Hare poses beside his F4F-3 Wildcat, spring 1943. He is wearing a leather cowboy belt instead of the standard-issue web belt.

THE ORIGINAL TOP

BY PATRICK REYNOLDS

Edward Henry "Butch" O'Hare rocketed to fame in February 1942 by single-handedly taking on eight Japanese torpedo bombers bent on destroying the aircraft carrier USS *Lexington* and shooting down several of them. For this deed, President Franklin D. Roosevelt decorated him with the Medal of Honor. Just 21 months later, he was dead, killed off the Gilbert Islands in the Central Pacific while engaged in night-fighting combat.

To honor his sacrifice, one of the world's busiest airports, Chicago's O'Hare International, was named after him. It's a constant reminder of who Butch O'Hare was and the sacrifice he made.

Butch, however, was not the first in his family to create headlines. His father, Edward "E.J." O'Hare, first the owner of a trucking company and later an attorney, was gunned down in 1939 on orders from infamous Chicago mobster Al Capone.

As president of Sportsman's Park, a now vanished Cicero racetrack just outside Chicago's western limits, E.J. was privy to many of Capone's illegal activities because Capone and his associates were also entwined in the operation of the racetrack. From 1930 to the time of his death, E.J. was an active undercover participant in the Treasury Department's investigation and conviction of Capone on charges of tax evasion. Capone eventually learned of E.J's role, which cost him his life.

Although E.J. lived in Chicagoland for many years, St. Louis was home for Butch while growing up. With him were two sisters, Patsy and Marilyn, and mother Selma.

When he was 13, Butch was whisked across the Mississippi River to Alton, Illinois, and Western Military Academy, a private military school about 25 miles from St. Louis. Interestingly, among his best friends there was Paul Tibbets, who later became the U.S. Army Air Forces colonel who dropped the atomic bomb on Hiroshima.

Holidays and summers Butch spent back home in Missouri, where he continued practicing hunting and shooting—skills that would one day serve him well. By the age of 15 he had had his first experience with flying, as E.J. arranged to get him into a plane and even spend some time handling the controls.

The five years he spent at Western Military Academy were, by all accounts, good ones. His grades were solid, he played some football, and he was an excellent swimmer. He also began to shed some of the shyness and lack of self-confidence that had worried his parents when they first chose to send him to the academy.

In September 1932, E.J. and Butch's mother Selma divorced. By that time E.J. had become part of the horse racing business in Chicago. Much of his time had to be spent there, and Selma wasn't well suited to that life.

Speculation has centered on exactly what caused E.J. to put his life at risk to help the Treasury Department go after Capone. E.J.'s connection to the Feds was through Frank Wilson, a Treasury Department official loaned in 1928 to the Criminal Investigation Division of the IRS for the purpose of investigating Capone. By 1930, E.J. was providing Wilson with information that led to Capone's conviction. In fact, once Capone died in prison in 1947, Wilson stated openly, "On the inside of the gang I had one of the best undercover men I have ever known: Eddie O'Hare."

Some have also speculated that E.J. worked with the government to avoid having his own less than squeaky clean income tax situation investigated. Another theory is that by helping put Capone in jail, E.J. would be removing from his own racetrack business a man known not only for illegal activities but also behavior as heinously violent as Chicago's 1929 St. Valentine's Day Massacre.

One other thing about E.J. should be stressed. He did not want his son to follow in his footsteps in the gaming business. Noting that by the time Butch was graduating from the Western Military Academy the boy had begun to show a keen interest in flying, E.J. did everything to leverage this passion in any way he could.

E.J. was no doubt pleased when, in 1932, Butch applied to the U.S. Naval Academy and

One of the world's busiest airports is named for World War II ace and 1937 U.S. Naval Academy graduate Edward H. "Butch" O'Hare, the "uncomfortable hero" of the Pacific.

GUN

National Archives

passed his entrance tests on his second try. On June 3, 1937, he graduated, ranking 255th out of 323. Few knew that World War II was around the corner, and who could have guessed that 41 members of the Class of 1937 would lose their lives in that conflict?

In Butch's first assignment, he spent two years aboard the battleship USS *New Mexico* (BB-40) before heading off for preliminary flight training. He was stunned when he was informed that his father had been shot to death while driving his car in Chicago on November 8, 1939, most likely by Capone's gunmen.

By 1940, when he was assigned to the Naval Air Station at Pensacola, Florida, to

Both: National Archives

train in Naval Aircraft Factory N3N-1 "Yellow Peril" planes and Stearman NS-1 biplane trainers, one thing was becoming abundantly clear: Butch O'Hare excelled at aerial gunnery.

When he was assigned to the fighting squadron VF-3, his commander was Lt. Cmdr. John (Jimmy) Thach, one of the Navy's top airmen. Thach had come up with something called the "Bitching Team," which consisted of a group of VF-3's most highly skilled and experienced pilots.

One of these aces would take a newcomer into the air for a mock dogfight. Thach's experience had taught him that the best approach was to gain altitude and then swoop down on an opponent's tail, where he could home in for the kill. Few rookies mastered this skill quickly, but when Butch was so tested, by Thach himself no less, the rookie won the day. Thach was so impressed that he made Butch part of the Bitching Team.

Under Thach's tutelage, Butch's skills grew rapidly. Thach was greatly impressed by what Butch was able to get a plane to do. "He didn't try to horse it around," said Thach many years later in an oral history recording. "He learned a thing that a lot of youngsters don't learn[:] that when you're in a dogfight with somebody, it isn't how hard you pull back on the stick to make a tight turn to get inside of him, it's how smoothly you fly the plane."

Thach attributed it to Butch's acute and innate sense of timing and relative motion. Thach also admired Butch's eagerness to read anything he could lay his hands on that might help him in aerial gunnery and his quick understanding of what he read. As Thach put it, "Butch just picked it up faster than anyone else I've seen."

Apparently that wasn't the only thing he did with remarkable celerity. On July 21, 1941,while at the hospital to visit a friend whose wife had just given birth, Butch met Rita Wooster, a nurse attending the new mother. When Rita's shift ended, Butch drove her home. Upon arrival, he asked her to marry him. She pointed out that they'd only met that day, that she was several years younger, and that he wasn't a Catholic as she was. None of it mattered, he replied, adding that he'd take instructions to convert. Six weeks later, they were married.

Three months after the nuptials, the Japanese attacked Pearl Harbor. On the morning of December 8, 1941, Butch and the rest of VF-3 were on their way to Hawaii to learn how and where they'd be deployed now that war had begun.

LEFT: O'Hare (left) and Lt. Cmdr. John "Jimmy" Thach, commander of Squadron VF-3, photographed after returning to Kaneohe Naval Air Station, Oahu, Hawaii, in April 1942. BELOW: One Wildcat prepares to take off while another flies overhead. In his short career, O'Hare served on four different aircraft carriers.

U. S. Navy

Thach's Wildcat (foreground) and O'Hare's, photographed near Oahu on April 11, 1942. Thach was impressed with O'Hare's innate flying skills.

By mid-December they were onboard the aircraft carrier USS *Saratoga* (CV-3) headed west for Wake Island as part of Task Force 14. VF-3's first loss occurred on December 22, when a plane piloted by Lieutenant Victor M. Gadrow had engine trouble that led to his crashing and sinking in rough seas.

A few days later, TF-14 was recalled to Pearl, so Butch and company saw no action at Wake Island. By December 31, the *Saratoga* was back at sea and heading west. That trip was cut short the evening of Sunday, January 11, 1942, when a Japanese torpedo struck the *Saratoga*. She was able to limp back to Pearl, but she was no longer part of the Butch O'Hare story. VF-3, with a full complement of 18 Grumman F4F Wildcats, was now attached to the "Lady Lex"—the aircraft carrier USS *Lexington* (CV-2).

On January 31, 1942, the *Lexington* was sent south as part of Task Force 11 under Vice Admiral Wilson Brown, Jr. VF-3 suffered its second fatality onboard the *Lexington* on February 8. Edward Frank Ambrose was crushed due to a malfunction in a block-and-tackle arrangement used to start the fighter planes' engines.

February 13 saw the *Lexington* in the Solomon Islands in the Southwest Pacific, and Butch expected to be on combat air patrol shortly. But while some members of VF-3 were indeed sent airborne, including Thach, Butch's orders were to stay in reserve. Thach downed a Japanese reconnaissance plane, as did Burt Stanley, another member of VF-3. Back onboard the *Lexington,* they described to their squadron comrades what VF-3's first two kills had been like. According to Thach, Butch, having been kept in reserve so far, was pretty much fit to be tied.

O'Hare got his chance on February 20 when 17 medium bombers of Japan's Fourth Air Group were sent in two groups (Chutai) to attack Task Force 11. These land-based torpedo bombers from the base at Rabaul, Papua New Guinea—nine in Chutai Two and eight in Chutai One—were Mitsubishi G4M1 attack planes, one of Japan's most modern aircraft at the time. Characterized by a relatively fat fuselage and wide wings that came to an abrupt point, this was the plane that the U.S. Navy called a "Betty."

At 3:42 PM on the day that Butch O'Hare made history, the radar systems of Task Force 11 detected the approaching Japanese Bettys. The nine-plane Chutai Two attacked first, and between 4:39 and 4:43 PM Wildcat pilots launched from the *Lexington* had eliminated five of the nine Bettys.

The pilot of one of the crippled torpedo bombers tried to crash his plane onto the flight deck of the *Lexington,* but 1.1-inch cannons and .50-caliber machine guns on the carrier helped make sure that didn't happen.

Vice Admiral Brown said the concentrated fire nearly tore pilot and plane to pieces. "And as the plane swung by," wrote Brown in his unpublished memoir, "only a few yards from where we stood, we saw that the pilot was dead, slumped at the controls, as he plunged into the sea."

It was 4:46 when Butch was launched during the enemy's aerial assault, and he couldn't help but wonder if his carrier would still be afloat when he returned. Once aloft, he swiveled his head all around, amazed at the number of American planes dashing around him. He worried that the fight would be over before he could get a shot off.

So, along with another VF-3 Wildcat piloted by Duff Dufilho, he climbed to an altitude high above the ships and assumed combat air control position. At 4:49, right about the time the wounded Betty from Chutai Two tried but failed to crash onto the *Lexington*'s flight deck, the carrier's radar detected Chutai One about 30 miles north-northeast and sent up a radio message warning of the threat.

Unfortunately, because all the other fighters had flown southwest to pursue what remained of Chutai Two, Butch and Dufilho were the only two fighters available to take on this new threat. So the two pilots positioned their F4F Wildcats between the *Lexington* and the incoming Bettys.

Butch test fired his four .50-caliber Browning machine guns, and all was fine, but Duff's were jammed. O'Hare gestured to Dufilho to return to the carrier, but Duff refused, even though he knew he would only be a decoy in the upcoming fight.

With the eight Bettys less than 12 miles away from the *Lexington* and closing fast, Butch and Dufilho had an altitude advantage of about 1,000 feet. They also had with them the element of surprise, as the Japanese didn't know they were there. But still, one armed fighter against eight enemy bombers?

Keep in mind, too, that in addition to carrying torpedoes, the Bettys—like American B-17s and B-24s—were bristling with firepower. There were a dozen 7.7mm Type 92 machine guns in each bomber, plus a 20mm Type 99 cannon in the tail.

This crippled "Betty" bomber, piloted by Lt. Cmdr. Takuzo Ito, photographed from the *Lexington*, was the first one encountered by O'Hare on February 20, 1942. It was attempting to crash into the carrier when it was shot down by the ship's gunners.

It mattered not to Butch. "There wasn't time to sit and wait for help," he's quoted as saying in *Queen of the Flattops,* a 1942 book by *Chicago Tribune* correspondent Stanley Johnston. "Those babies were coming on fast and had to be stopped."

And stopped they were, thanks largely to four remarkable passes made by Butch. In each pass—termed by combat aviators a "high-side run"—he descended from above, fired bursts as short as possible to conserve ammunition, and then climbed back above the V formation of enemy bombers to begin another pass.

As crucial as piloting skills and sheer bravery were in this dogfight, being able to shoot accurately and efficiently trumped everything. Butch's four guns each held about 450 rounds, which meant he had enough ammunition to fire for a grand total of about 34 seconds.

In his first pass he aimed for the trailing bomber on the right side of the V formation, firing into the right engine. Both the fuselage and a fuel tank were struck, and the surprised pilot fell out of formation to the right, streaming smoke. Next Butch aimed at the adjacent bomber on the right side of the V, this time igniting the plane and causing it, too, to fall out of formation to the right.

Pleasantly surprised that his first aerial combat had gone so well, he looked around for Duff but didn't see him. It turns out that Dufilho had followed Butch into the battle in the hope of drawing some of the fire away from Butch. Like Butch, he survived the battle. He died the following August in the Battle of the Eastern Solomons.

Though these two Bettys were forced out of the attack formation, it turned out that they were not out of the fight. Both managed to recover sufficiently to later drop their bombs. This hardly mattered to Butch at the time, as he explained in a March 30, 1942, radio broadcast: "When one would start burning, I'd haul out and wait for it to get out of the way. Then I'd go in and get another one. I didn't have time to watch [them fall]. When they drop out of formation, you don't bother with 'em anymore. You go after the next."

WHAT HE ACCOMPLISHED IN JUST UNDER FOUR MINUTES ABOVE THE *LEXINGTON* WOULD HAVE BEEN REMARKABLE FOR EVEN THE MOST EXPERIENCED AND BATTLE-HARDENED VETERAN. BUT THIS WAS O'HARE'S FIRST COMBAT EXPERIENCE!

Now it was time for Butch's second pass, and this time he targeted the far left Betty in the attack formation. Again he aimed for the right engine, and again his aim was true. The third Betty dropped out of the formation and dumped its bombs harmlessly.

Still in his second pass, Butch now maneuvered into point-blank range and fired into the cockpit of one of the Bettys in the center of the V formation. This time his victim splashed into the sea. By now Butch and his airborne adversaries were so close to the *Lexington* that a whole new challenge presented itself: the 5-inch antiaircraft guns of Task Force 11.

Unfazed, Butch climbed above the Japanese bombers to make his third pass. Again he managed to splash one of the bombers, leaving exposed the lead bomber of the formation. Targeting its left wing, Butch fired so accurately that he shot the engine right out of the plane. Fatally damaged, it spun out of the formation and into the ocean.

Still not finished, Butch gained altitude again to make his fourth and final pass. But after firing 10 rounds he was done, all 1,800 bullets fired. So he climbed above the bursting antiaircraft fire and away from the fray. At this point there were still five of Chutai One's original eight Bettys in the air.

By the time the battle was over, a total of six 250kg torpedoes were aimed at the *Lexington*. Not one hit its mark. In fact, of the 17 Japanese bombers that had left their base that day in Rabaul, only two made it back. Japan's Combined Fleet headquarters was appalled at these losses, which wound up having hugely negative strategic implications for future combat.

As for Butch O'Hare, it was time to return to the *Lexington*. As he prepared to land, a nervous and obviously confused *Lexington* gunner opened fire on Butch's Wildcat with a .50-caliber machine gun. Fortunately, he missed.

According to Thach's oral recording, Butch later encountered the embarrassed young gunner and said, "Son, if you don't stop shooting at me when I've got my wheels down, I'm going to have to report you to the gunnery officer." Later, said Thach, Butch added, "I don't mind him shooting at me when I don't have my wheels down, but it might make me have to take a wave-off, and I don't like to take wave-offs."

Examination of Butch's plane after it landed revealed that it had received minor damage from antiaircraft shell fragments, but only one enemy bullet had reached him, striking his right wing.

What he accomplished in just under four minutes above the *Lexington* would have been remarkable for even the most experienced and battle-hardened veteran. But this was O'Hare's first combat experience!

And what did he make of it all? A reporter for the *Washington Times-Herald* captured this quote from Butch for a June 9, 1942, story: "It was just careful timing. You don't have time to consider the odds against you. You are too busy weighing all the factors, time, speed, holding your fire till the right moment, shooting sparingly. You don't feel you are throwing bullets to keep alive. You just want to keep shooting. You've got to keep moving. When you're sitting (and you do have to sit to fire) you've got to get your shots off and then move again. The longer you sit, the better chance you've got to get hit."

Butch participated in just one more combat mission, the March 10, 1942, raid on Lae-Salamaua in Papua New Guinea, before Task Force 11 and the *Lexington* headed back for Pearl Harbor. Butch would not return to combat for another 18 months, as the Washington brass decided that his recent heroics made him more valuable in PR and pilot training roles than in the role of a fighter pilot.

On April 15, 1942, amid rumors of a Medal of Honor being headed his way, Butch boarded a plane from Pearl Harbor to San Francisco, where he'd soon be reunited with wife Rita, mother Selma, and all the rest of the family. On the same day, many of his VF-3 comrades sailed aboard the *Lexington* on what proved to be her final cruise. Three weeks later, in the Battle of the Coral Sea, she became the first U.S. carrier lost in World War II.

Official confirmation for Butch's Medal of Honor came on April 16. Three days later, Butch and Rita arrived in Washington to face the media ahead of the April 21 meeting with President Franklin D. Roosevelt during which the medal would be bestowed.

In *Fateful Rendezvous: The Life of Butch O'Hare,* Steve Ewing and John B. Lundstrom's outstanding 1997 biography of O'Hare, the authors wrote, "As he was shuttled from one group of VIPs to another, Washington's 'take' on Butch was that he was modest, somewhat embarrassed by all the flap, handsome, and very nice, and although not overly articulate, he nonetheless conveyed humor. His favorite comment was that he hoped his next aerial combat would not take place in front of an audience, such as the one on the *Lexington,* so that he would not again become 'cannon fodder for the press.'"

On the morning of Tuesday, April 21, Butch and Rita were presented to President Roosevelt, Secretary of the Navy Frank Knox, assorted admirals and politicians,

All: National Archives

ABOVE: Carrier personnel load .50-caliber ammunition. Each of the Wildcat's four guns held 450 rounds—only enough for 34 seconds of firing. BELOW: Butch O'Hare gives the "thumbs up" gesture from the cockpit of his Wildcat, April 10, 1942. Note the five Japanese flags painted on his fuselage, symbolic of his first five "kills."

All: National Archives

and members of the press. First Roosevelt informed Butch that he had been promoted to the rank of lieutenant commander.

Roosevelt then moved on to what he described as the more important part of the ceremony. Using all the rhetorical flourish for which he was famous, the president proceeded to read the Medal of Honor citation:

"For conspicuous gallantry and intrepidity in aerial combat, at grave risk of his life above and beyond the call of duty, as Section Leader and Pilot of Fighting Squadron Three, on 20 February 1942. Having lost the assistance of his teammates, Lieutenant O'Hare interposed his plane between his ship and an advancing enemy formation of nine attacking twin-engined heavy bombers.

"Without hesitation, alone and unaided, he repeatedly attacked this enemy formation at close range in the face of intense combined machine-gun and cannon fire. Despite this concentrated opposition, Lieutenant O'Hare, by his gallant and courageous action, his extremely skillful marksmanship in making the most of every shot of his limited ammunition, shot down five enemy bombers and severely damaged a sixth before they reached the bomb release point.

"As a result of his gallant action—one of the most daring, if not the most daring single action in the history of combat aviation—he undoubtedly saved his carrier from serious damage."

In fact, Butch had faced not nine heavy bombers but eight; some fog-of-war type details were still being sorted out when the citation copy was composed. It is also unlikely that Butch actually "shot down five enemy bombers." After all relevant records are examined, it appears he actually splashed three bombers during the dogfight and heavily damaged three others. The fact that he single-handedly saved the *Lexington* from serious damage is beyond dispute.

After Butch and Roosevelt shook hands, the president, sitting in his chair, took the Medal of Honor from its case and asked Rita to put it around her husband's neck.

ABOVE: Butch O'Hare receives a huge hero's welcome on April 25, 1943, in his native St. Louis after being awarded the Medal of Honor. LEFT: O'Hare shakes hands with President Roosevelt as his wife Rita fastens the Medal of Honor around his neck, April 21, 1942. He was promoted to the rank of lieutenant at the same time.

He then asked the new lieutenant commander what sort of improvements he thought should be made to the Navy's fighters. Without hesitation, O'Hare said that he would like to see a plane that could climb faster than the Japanese Zero. O'Hare would get his wish; the Grumman Aircraft Engineering Company of Bethpage, New York, was already hard at work on one: the F6F Hellcat that would first see combat in August 1943. A more powerful 2,000 horsepower engine was also later introduced into the Hellcat. It would be in an F6F Hellcat that Butch would fight his last battle.

A rousing reception in St. Louis came on Saturday, April 25, 1942, when a huge crowd turned out to cheer for its native son. Proud mom Selma and sisters Patsy and Marilyn were naturally part of the parade. By now they were beginning to realize just what Butch had accomplished. The *St. Louis Post-Dispatch* proclaimed in a banner headline, "60,000 GIVE O'HARE HERO'S WELCOME HERE." He was, indeed, a national hero.

In the ensuing months, appearances before aviation cadets at Norfolk, Miami, Corpus Christi, and Jacksonville followed. It was usually a matter of making a patriotic speech and pushing war bonds. Still pretty much shy and retiring, "the uncomfortable hero" as Ewing and Lundstrom put it, Butch hated every minute of it, referring to it as "the dancing bear circuit." But apparently he saw it as his duty and soldiered on. Besides,

Washington wasn't about to have it any other way. Few things had gone right for America in the war up to this point, so now that a genuine hero and a positive story had emerged it was an opportunity to be seized, and seized aggressively.

Finally, by June 1942, Butch was headed back to Pearl Harbor, where he would take command of VF-3. Training now became his primary responsibility, and though he worried that his relative lack of seasoning and experience might be a liability, he devoted himself to the task at hand. By all accounts he excelled at it, not only by succeeding in getting his young fliers ready for the important battles that lay ahead in the South and Central Pacific, but also by earning the respect, loyalty, and friendship of just about everyone he encountered.

On July 15, 1943, VF-3 was reconstituted as VF-6. Soon the pilots and their 36 F6F Hellcats found themselves attached to the light aircraft carrier USS *Independence* (CVL-22), from which they participated in attacks on Marcus and Wake Islands in August of that year.

On September 17, 1943, Butch was named commander of Carrier Air Group Six (CAG-6). He now oversaw the training and operational deployment of 100 pilots. But he never let his rise in rank go to his head. One of the fighter pilots under his command around this time described him as "a quiet, easy-going person with a delightful personality—aside from being a topnotch flyer."

Andy Skon, a fighter pilot whose Hellcat would be along for the ride when Butch met his death, described Butch as "very much a flying CAG" who liked nothing better than to be aloft at the head of his air group.

As CAG-6, Butch now reported to the aircraft carrier USS *Enterprise* (CV-6), the "Big E" and flagship of Rear Admiral Arthur W. Radford's Task Group 50.2 during the American assault on the Central Pacific's Gilbert Islands.

For Butch and the other fighter pilots launched from the *Enterprise,* strikes were focused on Makin Island, and everything seemed to go well. But as the dust settled, Admiral Radford was coming to the conclusion that the Japanese were now realizing how outmatched they were in trying to attack the American naval forces by day. He was convinced that Japanese air commanders would order night torpedo strikes, and he was determined to create an effective deterrent.

The strategy they came up with, and Butch played a central role in devising it, was something of a three-legged stool: ship's radar, radar on board a Grumman TBF Avenger torpedo bomber, and fire-

A Navy Grumman F6F Hellcat takes off from a carrier. When O'Hare returned to duty in June 1942, he was made commander of his old squadron, VF-3. In July 1943 his squadron was reconstituted as VF-6 and received Hellcats.

power from two F6F Hellcats. It all hinged on ship-mounted radar first detecting bogeys at considerable distances and then launching a TBF Avenger and guiding it to the bogeys by way of ship-to-plane radio communication.

The TBF Avenger also had radar, but it was far less powerful and was only useful to a distance of about six miles. So the idea was for the Avenger to piggyback on the robustness of the ship's radar so that the Avenger could be positioned within striking distance of the bogeys. Two Hellcats would also be launched, and they would use radio communication to rendezvous with the TBF Avenger. Once the Avenger's radar determined that the bogeys were within striking distance of the Hellcats, the Avenger would peel off, and the six .50-caliber machine guns of the Hellcats would neutralize the bogeys. It sounded simple, but was actually extremely dangerous.

By November 24, Radford ordered two three-plane night-fighting units—dubbed "Black Panthers" by Butch—into action at 3 AM about 75 miles east of Makin. Needless to say, Butch was in one of the F6F Hellcats. While no encounter with the enemy ensued, it marked the first time in history that a night-fighter mission had been flown from an aircraft carrier.

Two nights later, on November 26, as reports came in to Radford that a night torpedo strike was imminent, he pondered if it was time to launch the Black Panthers for a second mission. From Radford's memoirs: "On the bridge, as I decided what to do, Lieutenant Commander O'Hare approached me and requested that I send one of the Black Panther groups out." Radford agreed.

At 5:45 PM, the "Pilots, man your planes" order rang out from the ship's squawk box. A story in the *Honolulu Advertiser* said, "Stocky Butch was pulling on his helmet over his close-cropped black hair. He had widened a bit in girth in recent months, but the extra poundage had not lessened his ability to fly a Hellcat. One of the pilots shouted, 'Go gettem, Butch.' O'Hare's reply was a grin. Then he dashed up a ladder to the flight deck."

The idea was to intercept the Japanese night-strike group and then land either back on the *Enterprise* or at Tarawa atoll. Only one of the three-plane night-fighting units was to be launched. Butch and Andy Skon each piloted an F6F Hellcat. At the controls of the TBF Avenger was Lt. Cmdr. Phil Phillips, and joining him were gunner Alvin Kernan and Lieutenant Hazen Rand on radar.

O'Hare knew the mission was dicey and told Phillips that it was likely they wouldn't make it back to the carrier, but would try for Tarawa instead. He told Phil, "We'll be lucky if we even find the damned place."

And so it was that at 6 PM on November 26, 1943, Butch's Black Panther unit was airborne. The original plan to have all three planes united before attacking any Japanese aircraft was altered when the Command Information Center (CIC) sent Butch and Skon chasing after Japanese surveillance planes spotted on the *Enterprise*'s radar screen. Within an hour or so, having had no success in locating these planes, the two Hellcats went in search of the Avenger piloted by Phillips.

The rendezvous of the three planes was guided by radio communication from the *Enterprise*'s CIC, and by 7:25 the Avenger and the two Hellcats were finally united in the formation that had been originally planned: Avenger in the lead and Hellcats trailing left (Skon) and right (Butch). After the war, Kernan published his memoir titled *Crossing the Line,* in which he describes this final glimpse of Butch: "Canopy back, goggles up, yellow Mae West, khaki shirt, and helmet, Butch O'Hare sat aggressively forward, looking like the tough Navy ace he was, his face sharply illuminated by his canopy light for one last brief instant."

To successfully complete the rendezvous of the Black Panthers, both Butch and Phillips had to turn on some combination of their planes' running lights or recognition lights.

Lt. Cmdr. O'Hare (left) talks with leading crew chief "Chief Willy" Williams and others beside an F6F-3 Hellcat aboard the *Enterprise* after action over Wake Island, October 5, 1943. O'Hare vanished during combat over the Gilbert Islands on November 26, 1943.

National Archives

Unfortunately, the lights didn't go unnoticed by a Japanese Betty trailing the three American planes. It pounced.

"The long black cigar shape came in on the starboard side of the group across the rear of O'Hare ... and began firing," wrote Kernan, who had as good a view as anyone because he was facing backward in the turret of the lead plane. 'Butch, this is Phil. There's a Jap on your tail. Kernan, open fire.'

"I began shooting at the Betty. The air was filled with streams of fire, and a long burst nearly emptied my ammunition can. The Betty, as the tracers arced toward him, continued firing and then abruptly disappeared into the dark to port. I thought I saw O'Hare reappear for a moment, and then he was gone. Something whitish gray appeared in the distance, his parachute or the splash of the plane going in. Skon slid away. I thought that the Jap had shot O'Hare and then disappeared, but I also realized with a sinking feeling that there was a chance I might have hit O'Hare as well in the exchange of fire."

U.S. Navy

NO ONE WILL EVER KNOW FOR SURE WHAT HAPPENED TO BUTCH THAT NIGHT, BUT EWING AND LUNDSTROM ARE CONVINCED THAT HE WAS NOT A VICTIM OF FRIENDLY FIRE. HE WAS HIT BY MACHINE-GUN FIRE FROM THE BETTY, THEY BELIEVE.

ABOVE: Two U.S. Navy F6F-3 Hellcats in tricolor camouflage, photographed in 1943. RIGHT: Navy pilot Andy Skon flew as wingman on O'Hare's last mission.

At 7:34 PM, the *Enterprise* officially recorded that Butch was in the water. A desperate search that night by Phillips and Skon proved fruitless, as did a search the next morning by flying boats launched from Tarawa.

Deeply saddened at losing the skilled and universally popular Medal of Honor winner, Radford summed up the Black Panthers' first night combat: "Believe our night fighters really saved the day. They mixed with the largest group, shot down two, and apparently caused great consternation. Had this [Japanese] group been able to coordinate their attacks with other groups, it would have been practically impossible to avoid all of them."

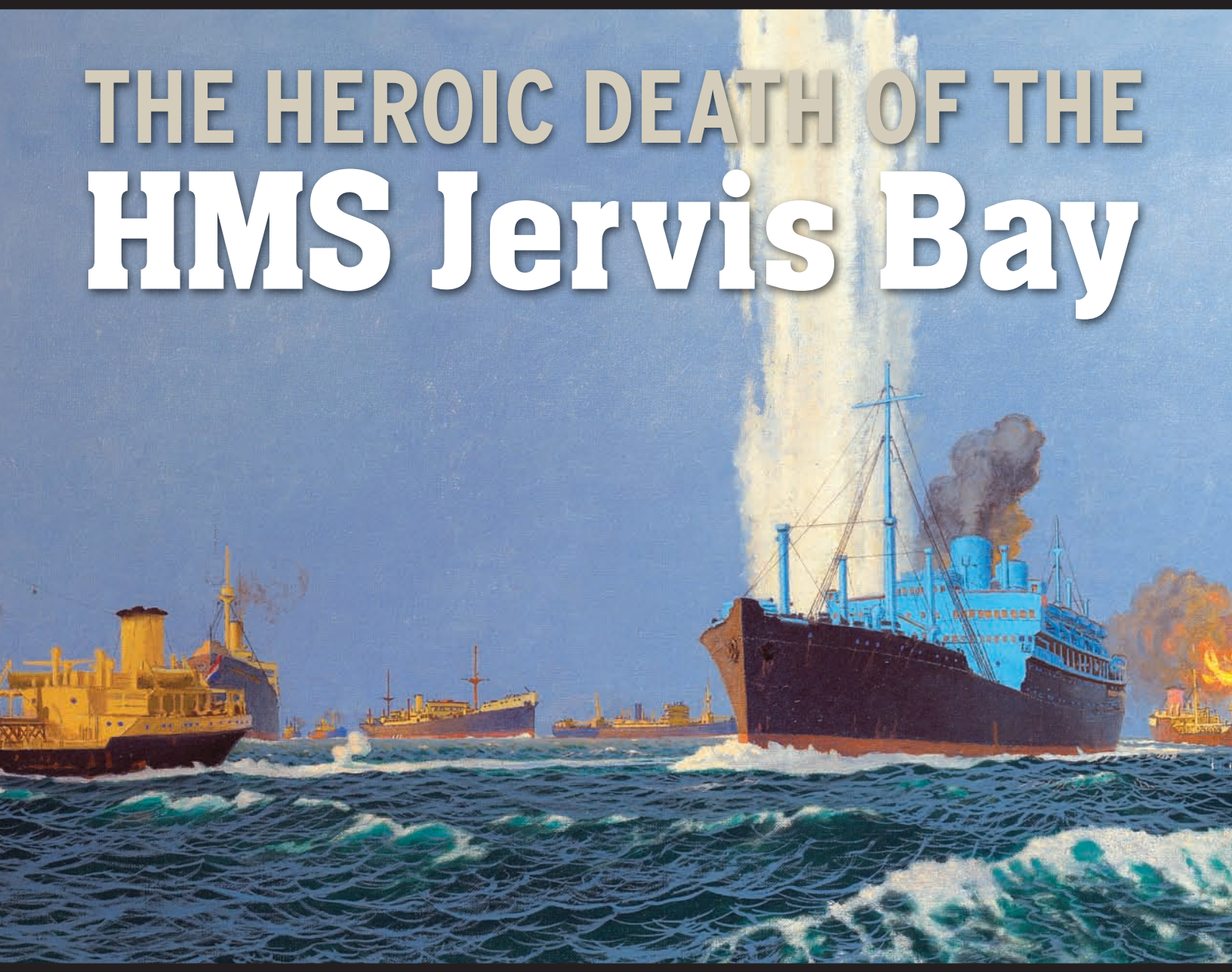
No one will ever know for sure what happened to Butch that night, but Ewing and Lundstrom are convinced that he was not a victim of friendly fire. He was hit by machine-gun fire from the Betty, they believe. The authors also provide the following statistics to put Butch's fate in context: "He was the first of seven carrier-based night-fighter pilots lost in combat, during which time the carrier night fighters flew 164 sorties, engaged the enemy on 95 occasions, and scored 103 victories."

Among the tributes paid to Butch was the naming of the destroyer USS *O'Hare* (DD-889), launched in June 1945. But the biggest honor came in September 1949, when the Chicago-area Orchard Depot Airport was renamed O'Hare International Airport.

More than seven decades after Butch O'Hare's exploits, many people—even those from Chicago—don't know much, if anything, about the man for whom the airport is named. To help bridge this gap, in Terminal Two there is a display about the young pilot complete with photos, text, and an actual F4F Wildcat similar to the one flown by Butch. Used for training purposes over nearby Lake Michigan, it was restored after being recovered from the lake. Anyone passing through the airport who has an interest in history will want to stop at the display for a few moments and pay his or her respects to Edward Henry "Butch" O'Hare—an extraordinary man, pilot, and patriot. □

National Archives

THE HEROIC DEATH OF THE HMS Jervis Bay



Able Seaman John Jeffcott, 27, of the HMS *Jervis Bay* was apprehensive in October 1940 as his ship sailed from Hailfax, Nova Scotia. She was escorting the convoy HX-84 as it headed toward the British Isles. A former London policeman, before the war Jeffcott had arrested a woman in London who claimed to be a fortune teller. Angry at the arrest, she had told him he would never live to see his 28th birthday.

In a week—on November 6, if he made it—he would turn 28.

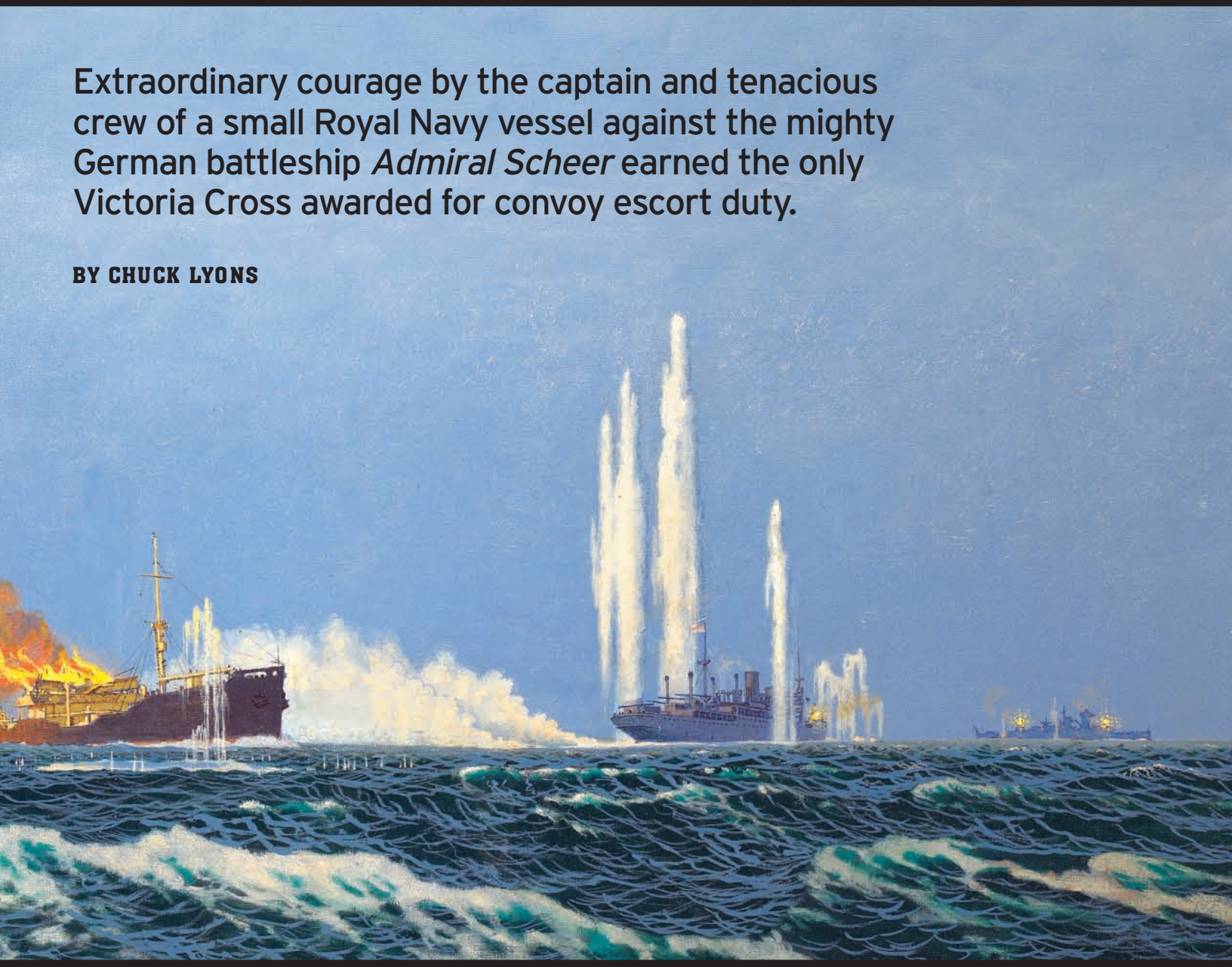
As the convoy worked its way east across the frigid North Atlantic, Jeffcott's feelings of dread increased, and with good reason. Between June and October 1940, more than 270 Allied ships had been sunk in the North Atlantic. Between May 1940 and July 1941 alone British ships went down at a rate of 66 a month, and German U-boats and surface raiders were hunting almost without opposition. Before the war was over, the British would lose 2,426 merchant ships and 19,180 seamen in the North Atlantic.

Jeffcott couldn't know it then but in the six years of the war only one Victoria Cross was awarded for convoy duty. That VC was initiated by King George VI and awarded to Captain Edward Fegen, an Irishman whom Prime Minister Winston Churchill praised in the House of Commons, saying, "The spirit of the Royal Navy is exemplified in [his] forlorn and heroic action."

In October 1940 Captain Fegen was in command of the HMS *Jervis Bay.* The ship had been built by Vickers Unlimited, launched in 1922 as a steamer of the Aberdeen and Commonwealth Line, and taken over by the Royal Navy in August 1939, when it was

Extraordinary courage by the captain and tenacious crew of a small Royal Navy vessel against the mighty German battleship *Admiral Scheer* earned the only Victoria Cross awarded for convoy escort duty.

BY CHUCK LYONS



converted to an armed merchant cruiser (AMC) and armed with seven 19th-century 6-inch guns and two 3-inch guns that were even older.

Lightly armed and riding high in the water, the ship became, as AMC crews called many of these ships, an "Admiralty-made coffin." Fegen, who had been in the Royal Navy since early in World War I, was promoted to captain in March 1940 and assigned to command her.

Edward Fegen was born in 1891 in England of Irish parents, received a Silver Sea Gallantry Medal during World War I, and served in Australia between the wars, part of the time, ironically, at Jervis Bay on the south coast of New South Wales. In 1940, he was 49 years old.

If confronted by the enemy, Fegen told his officers when he came aboard, "I shall take you in as close as I possibly can."

It was to prove a prophetic statement.

On October 28, 1940, Convoy HX-84 left Halifax under the watchful eye of the *Jervis*

This painting by Charles Peters, although not completely accurate, is a dramatic representation of the October 1940 North Atlantic clash between the armed merchant cruiser HMS *Jervis Bay* (right, bracketed by spouts of water from incoming shells) and the German Navy's *Admiral Scheer* (far right, in the distance). The burning tanker, the *San Demetrio* (center right), was the first ship in the convoy to be attacked. In actuality, the visibility was worse than shown here and the civilian ships would have been painted gray rather in their peacetime colors as shown.

Bay. The following day the convoy was joined by nine ships from Nova Scotia and Bermuda, and the 38 merchantmen settled into formation—nine columns of four ranks each—to begin the crossing. *Jervis Bay* was positioned between the fourth and fifth ranks. As was routine, two Canadian destroyers accompanied the convoy briefly before turning back. When it approached Britain, the convoy would again be met by escort ships and planes, but for the 10 days of the passage the *Jervis Bay* and its antique guns would be its only protection.

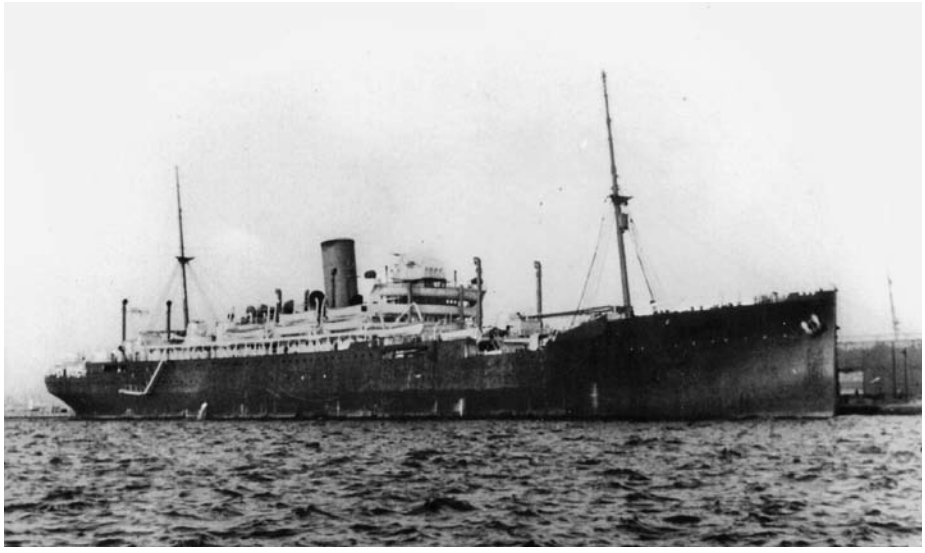
Meanwhile, the *Admiral Scheer* was hunting in the North Atlantic.

The Deutschland-class *Admiral Scheer* was a heavy cruiser—often called a pocket battleship—that had been launched in Wilhelmshaven in 1934. She had a top speed of 28 knots and was armed with six 11-inch guns in two triple-gun turrets, eight 6-inch guns, eight torpedoes, and antiaircraft guns. She had been deployed to Spain during the Spanish Civil War and then to the Atlantic when World War II broke out. By the end of the war in 1945, she had sunk 113,223 tons of shipping and would be considered the most successful surface raider of the war. She was feared by the men of the Atlantic convoys at least a much as—if not more than—the U-boat wolf packs.

Admiral Scheer was commanded by Captain Theodor Krancke who, like Fegen, had served in World War I and reamined in the German navy after that conflict. By the end of World War II, he had attained the rank of admiral and commanded all German naval forces in Western Europe.

Admiral Scheer had also sailed in October 1940. On that, her first combat sortie of the war, she slipped through the Denmark Strait and into the open Atlantic on the night of October 31. Once in the open sea, her radio intercept equipment quickly identified HX-84 in the area. Her seaplane then located the convoy on the morning of November 5 some 88 miles from the *Scheer*'s position.

The German ship headed in the convoy's direction.



ABOVE: The *Admiral Scheer*, photographed in port at Gibraltar in 1936 during the Spanish Civil War. The German heavy cruiser was the most successful and feared surface raider of the war. BELOW: HMS *Jervis Bay*, shown in 1940 at Dakar, Senegal, was a converted passenger liner with obsolescent armament, but she had an indomitable captain and crew.

About 4 PM a lookout aboard the SS *Rangitiki*, the tallest of the convoy's ships, noticed a mast on the horizon.

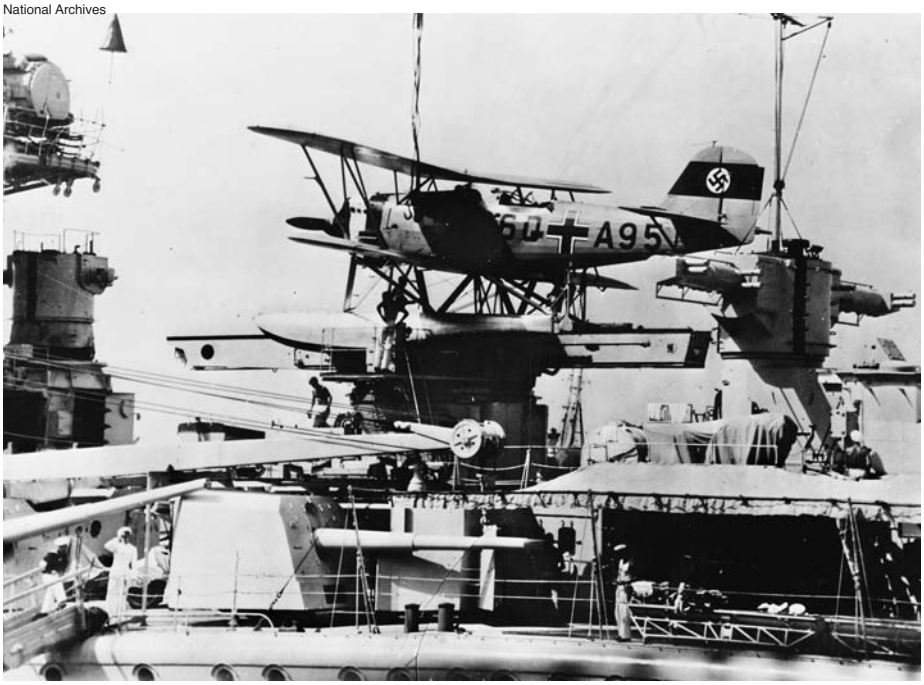
It was the *Admiral Scheer.* At 13,660 tons and 610 feet in length, she was nearly the same size as the 14,164-ton, 549-foot-long *Jervis Bay.*

Aboard *Jervis Bay,* Seaman Jeffcott, whose apprehension had continued to grow as his ship moved east, was only seven hours away from his 28th birthday.

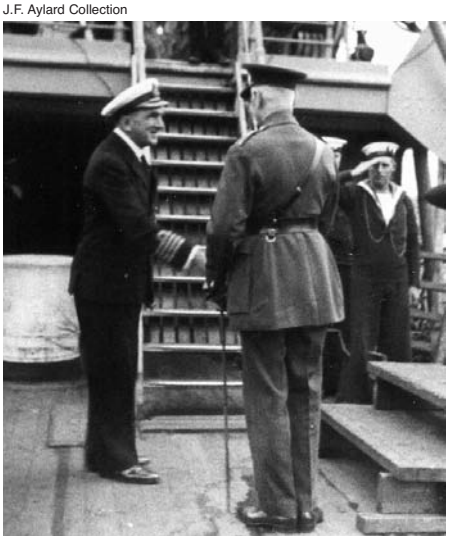
Made aware of the *Rangtiki*'s sighting, at about 4:45 Captain Fegen sounded action stations and began accelerating his ship out of her convoy position and toward the *Admiral Scheer.*

Fegen immediately began firing his 6-inch guns even though he was well out of range of the *Scheer.* He also ordered smoke canisters deployed to hide the convoy, which made a quick turn away from the German ship and scattered. At a distance of about 10 miles,

National Archives



J.F. Aylard Collection



ABOVE: *Jervis Bay*'s skipper, Captain Edward Fegen, left. His heroic actions saved most of the convoy but cost him his life and his ship. LEFT: *Admiral Scheer*'s seaplane, mounted on a catapult, spotted Convoy HX-84. The warship survived until April 1945.

Captain Krancke swung the *Scheer* to port, bringing both his triple turrets to bear on the convoy and *Jervis Bay*. He began firing at the oncoming armed merchantman, the second salvo splashing 50 yards off *Jervis Bay*'s bow with 150-foot spouts of sea water, soaking the *Bay*'s forward gun crews.

Sam Patience, a quartermaster aboard *Jervis Bay,* heard what he later described as a "thunk" and turned to see a member of his gun crew slump to the deck, his head severed from his body. *Admiral Scheer*'s third salvo hit *Jervis Bay*'s bridge, knocking out her rangefinder, wireless, and fire-control equipment. Several officers and crewmen were killed by the blast, and Captain Fegen's left arm was mangled.

As *Scheer* continued to fire, *Jervis Bay* was hit repeatedly on her superstructure, and her hull was holed in several places. The port bulkhead of the radio shack was gone and a radio operator and two coders were dead.

The remaining radioman climbed to the remnants of the bridge where he saw Captain Fegen"clutching his arm, blood spilling off his sleeve."

Fires burned uncontrolled.

Wanting to neutralize the escort ship so he was free to attack the convoy, *Scheer*'s commander continued to train his big guns on *Jervis Bay.* Darkness was falling, and he knew he needed to sink *Jervis Bay* quickly so that he would have time to attack the convoy. Each salvo from the *Scheer* launched two and a half tons of ordnance at the stricken ship. The forward port side of *Jervis* caught the brunt of the fire and became a mass of twisted girders, bent and jagged plate, dead and wounded sailors, and flames. A shell somehow loosed *Jervis*'s anchor, and another knocked the white ensign of the Royal Navy off the top of the main mast. Midshipman Ronald Butler later recalled helping an unnamed seaman climb the mast to nail up a replacement ensign.

Jervis Bay continued steaming at *Admiral Scheer* and firing her guns until her steering gear was knocked out. The petty officer manning the wheel called into the voice tube that the ship's steering gear was out of action and heard the captain's pained voice come back ordering him to "man the aft steering position."

With his ship aflame and sinking, Captain Fegen continued to maintain the unequal fight and stayed in command despite his shattered arm, consciously buying time for the ships of the convoy to escape.

Up to now, Captain Fegen had stayed on the collapsing bridge, which was under continuous hits from *Admiral Scheer*'s big guns. Shortly after giving the order to man the aft gear, however, he struggled down the starboard side of the bridge and, aided by a signalman, headed aft, stopping to encourage a gunner along the way and ordering more smoke deployed.

After a blast destroyed the after-control compartment just as he arrived there, the captain headed forward again, with "blood running over the four gold stripes on his sleeve," Midshipman Butler later said.

Captain Fegen never made it. His body and the body of the signalman who was helping him were later seen on the deck. "[*Jervis Bay*] did not have a chance, and we all knew it," said Captain Sven Olander, commander of the Swedish freighter *Stureholm,* one of the convoy ships. "But she rode like a hero and stayed to the last."

Meanwhile, exploding cordite bags on *Jervis Bay*'s poop deck had convinced Captain Krancke that the smaller ship was still firing despite the severe damage she had suffered. He didn't dare concentrate on the convoy until the threat posed by *Jervis Bay* was eliminated. Any damage to his ship from a lucky hit could seriously affect her ability to escape any hunt for her launched

by the Royal Navy.

Krancke continued focusing his big guns on *Jervis Bay,* but turned some of his smaller ones against ships in the convoy that were still within his range.

After an hour of the unrelenting German fire and with Captain Fegen dead, Lt. Cmdr. George Roe, now in command, ordered the remaining crew of *Jervis Bay* to abandon ship. All of *Jervis Bay*'s life boats had been destroyed but rafts, some of which were damaged, and the ship's 18-foot "jolly boat" had survived the bombardment and were launched. Most of *Jervis Bay*'s men simply jumped into the icy, sub-Arctic sea, some making it to the rafts and jolly boat. Others made do with what they could find floating in the water.

Shortly after the order was given to abandon ship, *Jervis Bay* went down. The white ensign Midshipman Butler had helped raise was the last thing to settle beneath the Atlantic waves.

Standard convoy orders were to keep going if attacked; it was too dangerous to stop for survivors. But Captain Olander of the *Stureholm,* impressed by the courage shown by Captain Fegen and *Jervis Bay,* called his ship's crew together and proposed they return to the scene and pick up survivors.

"She ... gave us a chance to run for it," he said. "Now I would like to go back and see if there is anyone still in the water."

The men of the Swedish ship agreed, and the freighter returned back to the battle scene where it was able to pull 68 men of *Jervis Bay*'s crew of 266 from the sea, three of whom died after being rescued and were committed to the deep that night. *Stureholm* then returned to Halifax, which she considered the safer of her options, arriving there on November 12.

With *Jervis Bay* taken care of, *Admiral Scheer* turned her attention to the ships of the convoy, which had taken advantage of the time *Jervis Bay* had bought for them to scatter. *Scheer* continued searching for the scattered convoy ships and was able to sink six.

Five quickly assembled Royal Navy battle groups consisting of two battleships, three battle cruisers, an aircraft carrier, five cruisers, and 15 destroyers hastened to the area. The battle groups spent two weeks unsuccessfully searching for the *Admiral Scheer.* In addition to her kills in the convoy, *Admiral Scheer* had been able to pull a number of British ships from regular operations—another of her objectives. She continued into the South Atlantic and then the Indian Ocean, sinking or capturing an additional 10 cargo ships before her cruise ended in the spring of 1941.

The war ended for *Admiral Scheer* in April 1945 when she capsized in about 50 feet of water during a 300-plane air raid at Kiel on the southwestern coast of the Baltic Sea. After the war she was stripped by the British, covered with rubble, and turned into the foundation of a new quay.

Fegen was recommended for the Victoria Cross by Britain's King George VI, who was said to be "stirred deeply" by Fegen's sacrifice. The medal was awarded to Fegen's sister at Buckingham Palace in June 1941.

"When [Captain Fegen] attacked the *Admiral Scheer,*" the King wrote in his diary, "he knew he was going to certain death."

Seaman Jeffcott, who was haunted by the fortune teller's prediction, also died that night, the eve of his 28th birthday. He was killed either in the bombardment of HMS *Jervis Bay* or in the frigid North Atlantic water the claimed her. Jeffcott was listed as "lost at sea," one of thousands of British sailors whose only grave is the ocean. □

In this painting, *The Heroism of the Jervis Bay, 5th November 1940,* by Montague Dawson, the badly damaged British ship continues to fire on the *Admiral Scheer*. As *Jervis Bay* began to sink, the order to abandon ship was given but only 65 of the 268 crew members survived the one-sided battle.

Warfare History Network's Special Issue

BLITZKRIEG on the Russian Front

Early on the morning of June 22, 1941, Hitler launched Operation Barbarossa, the German invasion of the Soviet Union. What followed was the largest military invasion the world had ever seen, and perhaps the most important.

The Russian Front spanned 1,800 miles, and led to a loss of 750,000 horses, 600,000 vehicles, over 10 million soldiers, and countless civilians—and this special report is your guide to how it all began.

Follow Hitler's Nazi forces and Stalin's Red Army as they battle along the entire length of the Soviet Union, engaged in some of the most desperate and horrific combat in the history of warfare.

BLITZKRIEG ON THE RUSSIAN FRONT has over 125 pages of fully detailed features that'll be sure to keep you occupied and well-informed on this fascinating military operation.

From large-scale German panzer attacks to the Red Army's massive counteroffensives, from Stalin's miscalculations to Hitler's strategic shortcomings, you won't find a more gripping account of Hitler's Soviet invasion.

Your personal guide to the ferocious battles, heroic sacrifices and disastrous allegiances is just one click away, so don't delay! Experience the Eastern Front like never before.

DOWNLOAD YOUR COPY NOW!

This Special e-Book is available for immediate download in digital format only from Warfare History Network.

WARFAREHISTORYNETWORK

Use the web address below and get reading about one of the most important battles in history.

www.WarfareHistoryNetwork.com/store/Blitzkrieg

Airacobra

Continued from page 11

1936, well before the war. One noted observer said it's "a pursuit fighter that was either born too early, or asked to stay on the front line and fight too long" on some necessary missions for which it was simply not designed.

Had it been given time to develop, provided with a turbocharger and later perhaps a Rolls Royce Merlin engine such as the P-51 Mustang, it might be given the respect that today is heaped on successor planes like the P-51. But it was the Airacobra's low-level ground support capabilities, its solid firepower, rugged airframe, excellent low-level flying characteristics, and substantial numbers that gave the United States and its allies the time urgently needed to design and build the flashier and more power Mustangs and Lightnings that most people now associate with the winning of WWII.

"It was a great airplane, and its presence in New Guinea deterred the Japanese from landing in Australia, I can guarantee that," asserts Colonel Charles Falletta, who totaled 16 aerial victories during the war, including six while flying P-39s over New Guinea. Most of the "rumors about the P-39 were from pilots who never flew the airplane," contends Brig. Gen. Chuck Yeager. "It's hearsay," he concludes.

Yeager put in some 500 hours in the P-39 and once had to bail out over Casper, Wyoming, when a flight test of a new stainless steel prop went bad. The well-respected Yeager, who later became the first man to break the sound barrier, notes that "most pilots learn when they pin on their wings and go out and get in a fighter, especially, that one of the things you don't do, you don't believe anything anybody tells you about an airplane."

A number of Airacobras have been saved, restored, and are on display today. By a quirk of fate, Lt. Col. Shomo's P-39 was recovered in the early 1970s, restored, and is now at the Naval and Servicemen's Park along the waterfront in Buffalo, New York. Another P-39, recovered from a lake in Russia, is now displayed at the airport in Niagara Falls, New York. □

Duxford Museum

Continued from page 13

1942, then took command of Allied air forces in the Mediterranean; and Doolittle was one of America's most famous aviators. He led the raid on Tokyo in April 1942, for which he was awarded the Medal of Honor. He was commanding officer of the Eighth Air Force and then moved to the Pacific Theater in May 1945.

The museum documents the rise of American air power—in 1939 an American general described the U.S. air force as fifth rate, but by 1945 the U.S. was the world's leading air power. Consider these figures: Between 1939 and 1945, the United States spent $45 billion on aircraft, building 325,000 aircraft, including 36,000 four-engine bombers and transports. This total was greater than the combined production of Britain, Germany, and Japan.

The USAAF trained two million air force personnel during World War II, of whom 768,991 were pilots. More than two million U.S. servicemen passed through Britain between 1941 and 1945, with half a million of them involved in air operations. In spring 1944, the U.S. Eighth and Ninth Air Forces occupied more than 120 airfields and more than 9,000 aircraft. It was not uncommon for 20,000 men in 3,000 bombers and their supporting fighters, flying from 59 airfields, to be involved in a single day's action.

The enormous social impact of American airmen is also measured in the museum. They stayed for years and their air bases, some with 3,000 GIs, were bigger than most English villages. Villagers would count the bombers leaving on their missions and anxiously count them back in, many shot to pieces and crash landing. The U.S. airmen were particularly good to the English children, lavishing them with sweets, chewing gum, and parties.

Many British troops resented the swashbuckling, well-paid Americans, but clearly British women did not. By war's end, more than 50,000 British women had married GIs. These war brides were transported back to the U.S. in huge fleets of aircraft and ships to their new and exciting life stateside.

Mannequins "work" on the engine of the museum's B-24 bomber, *Dugan*.

When the GIs left, after 1945, they were dearly missed, and the English gave full credit to their bravery and generosity, their early complaints of bragging and brashness forgotten. The American airmen gallery displays uniforms, leather flying jackets, letters, photographs, and personal memorabilia from the airmen.

Other aviation museums at Duxford include AirSpace (which includes the Airborne Assault Museum inside), Flying Aircraft, Battle of Britain, Conservation in Action, and the original 1940 Operations Room. Adjacent to the American Air Museum, the Land Warfare Hall is crammed full of tanks, armored vehicles, and artillery in full-scale dioramas.

Many renowned Cold War aircraft, including the Lockheed T-33, F-86 Sabre, F-4 Phantom, B-52 Stratofortress, General Dynamics F-111, and Fairchild Republic A-10 Thunderbolt are also exhibited—plus a few surprises like the stunning SR-71 Blackbird, U-2 spyplane, and a lethal-looking cruise missile.

Touring Duxford takes three to five hours, and is well worth the trip. Enthusiastic guides in each museum are eager to answer your questions and show you around the various exhibits-their personalized stories will make your visit even more memorable. □

Imperial War Museum, Duxford

Open daily (except December 24-26). Summer (March 15 to late October): 10 AM-6 PM. Winter (late October to mid-March): 10 AM-4 PM.
Admission: Admission fee charged
Website: www.duxford.iwm.org.uk

Continued from page 23

the farmhouse and told us to throw the people out because we were going to be sleeping in beds tonight.

When we went over there to break the news, the mother wanted to know where they were supposed to live; we told them we didn't know. They ended up staying close and I continued learning German.

A squad of us was sent to an area that sounded like "Long Vasser," which was a position for German aircraft and munitions. There was a great big enclosure of barbed wire fence and inside were little huts. This was near the city of Schonbach, which means "pretty creek."

We had 75 German prisoners there and our job was to guard them. We sorted them by city so they could be returned to their hometowns. While we were waiting for trucks and drivers to show up to transport them back to their families, we were pretty relaxed.

Schonbach is a musical city famous for handcrafted musical instruments made from wood—violins, guitars, clarinets, mandolins, and more. It so happened that a fellow in my platoon, who was a medic, picked up a mandolin; he had a mandolin at home that had been made in Schonbach. He was a gifted musician, and when he started playing, a crowd gathered to enjoy his music. The German POWs came up to listen along with some of the townspeople. I didn't speak German well enough at that time; otherwise I'd have said, "Come listen to the music."

I asked him to play the most beautiful war song ever created. It was composed in World War I. Part of the verse is, "She comes there, and she waits at the gate for a soldier who's not coming back." It hits you right in the heart. It's called "Lili Marlene." My friend knew it and he could really play it well.

Going Home

At some point before we left for home, we got a vacation, which was in Nancy, France. Finally we were at a place where there were no longer prisoners or bombed-out towns staring at us. We were starting to feel "normal" again. There was talk among the guys that many of us would not be going home because the war with Japan was still going on. The Army was waiting to see if reinforcements would need to be sent to the Pacific for the invasion of Japan.

Many of our veterans who had fought in North Africa and Sicily had already left us since they had enough points; you needed 100 to be sent home. Many of us who were drafted at their 18th birthday only had 40 points. We had only seen 11 months of action, where many of the guys that fought in Sicily and North Africa had seen close to 30 months of action—unbelievable.

Fortunately, Japan never happened for us. When I got home, I did not talk much about the war except with others who had served. I stayed busy with college, work (engineering), family, and friends. I married Louise in 1952. Once I got married and had a family, I tried to stay focused on those things and tried not to think about the war.

I was not real successful at night. I woke up many nights in a cold sweat, thrashing and yelling. I used to scare the heck out of my wife. Once I retired, I spent more time researching the war, finding out what was really going on, and remembering what I did. I talked about the war to everyone, and drove my family crazy. I went to retrace the steps of the Big Red One in Europe around the 50th anniversary of D-Day. That was the best time to start my recollections.

It was impossible as a 19-year-old to have a complete perspective of the war, knowing where we were, sometimes what day it was, what we were doing, or where we would go next. We couldn't write things down and weren't told too much in case we were captured.

As I review my recollections, the stories that are clearest are the ones that don't involve the battles. I have spent so much time suppressing the "bad stuff" that, at 90 years old, I can't actually remember many of the details of much of the action that I was in. I do still remember the terror, though. □

Rangers at Zerf

Continued from page 79

which directly aided the XX Corps' crossing of the Saar River, Third Army's capture of Trier, and the advance to the Rhine, the Rangers were back in the role for which they were ill suited, that of conventional frontline infantry soldiers.

Behind them they left 90 Ranger casualties and 399 enemy dead and brought in 328 enemy prisoners captured in the nine-day operation—originally intended to last two days. They had penetrated three miles behind enemy lines, blocked a critical road essential to the defeat of the enemy, and held that surrounded position until relieved.

Finally, on March 4, 1945, the battalion was relieved by one equally understrength rifle company of the 376th Infantry Regiment and sent to Schwebsingen, Luxembourg, for rest and relaxation and to rebuild its severely depleted numbers.

For the remainder of the war, the 5th Ranger Battalion was assigned conventional missions, including additional combat missions, guarding prisoners, and being a part of the military government in and near Bamberg, Erfurt, Jena, Gotha, and Weimar, Austria. It ended the war at Ried, Austria.

From its landing at "Bloody Omaha" on D-Day until the final German surrender in May 1945, the battalion reported killing an estimated 1,572 enemy soldiers and had taken 4,541 prisoners. The cost to the battalion was 115 killed, 552 wounded, and 25 missing in action. Two Rangers were known to have been captured by the enemy. This casualty rate was in excess of 100 percent of the battalion's authorized strength.

Colonel Darby once said, "Commanding the Rangers was like driving a team of very high-spirited horses. No effort was needed to get them to go forward. The problem was to hold them in check." Had Darby been with the 5th Ranger Battalion during its ordeal at Zerf, he undoubtedly would have been immensely proud of his "high-spirited horses." □

Bombs, Booze, and Broads

Continued from page 69

P-51 Mustang fighter fly low overhead; everyone stood and cheered. Albert recalled, "That same day, down in Moosburg, we heard small-arms fire and then—the greatest of sights—the American flag was hoisted above the village church steeple." Their remaining guards just wandered away, and the prisoners were liberated.

Not long after that, General George S. Patton himself rode into the makeshift camp sitting on top of the rear seat of his jeep. The jeep stopped, and Patton stood on the jeep so he could be seen and delivered one of his trademark speeches to the exhausted prisoners. Albert remembered that Patton "thanked us for our service and called the Germans SOBs. A few days later we were evacuated by C-47s to Rheims in eastern France. When we arrived, the celebrations for V-E Day were already underway."

It wasn't long before the former POWs were moved to the northern French port of Le Havre. There they were housed at a camp called "Lucky Strike" while being processed for the trip home. While there, they were given as much food as they wanted and started to gain weight again.

When the day came for departure, Albert was sent aboard a troopship named the SS *Marine Raven*. Again, the former POWs got all they wanted to eat and the weight gain continued. Albert said, "My prewar weight was about 154 pounds; I got down to 125 pounds in camp. By the time I reached home, I was up to 167 pounds."

The *Marine Raven* put to sea in a convoy of about 20 ships, all headed home. Most of the ships headed straight for his hometown of New York, but the *Marine Raven* was bound for Boston. Albert never found out why. From there he was sent to Westover Air Force Base in western Massachusetts.

Albert was then ordered to report to Fort Dix, New Jersey. There he finally got some dental work done for his chipped tooth. The dentist cemented an acrylic crown over the tooth, and as a bonus Albert met the nurse and dated her a couple of times. Also at Fort Dix, he received nine months of back pay for the time he was a POW; it totaled about $3,000. He felt rich. He was also given 60 days leave.

On the train home to New York, Albert met a young woman. "I still remember her name," he recalled. The two hit it off well during their train ride. By the time they reached Pennsylvania Station in New York City, he had talked her into spending the night with him and they rented a nearby hotel room. "She was a beautiful Irish girl," he recalled. "So I was a day late in getting home," he smiled.

It was a very nice leave. Albert had money in his pocket and the will to have a good time. "Breakfast consisted of bourbon and steaks—and sometimes lunch, too." While he was on leave, the Japanese surrendered. He was in Atlantic City, New Jersey, at the time, which probably had its biggest party ever. "I certainly drank my share," he recalled.

Because he had been a POW, Albert was given the opportunity to go to a "rest camp" in Asheville, North Carolina, and he accepted. More parties ensued. Finally, in November 1945, he was separated from the military. He had earned eight battle ribbons and wore them proudly. Albert remained in the Air Force Reserve for 10 years.

During that time, he attended Columbia University on the G.I. Bill. He then went to work for an advertising agency in New York. Asked what life was like in the "ad game," he replied, "Booze and broads, mostly." He married in 1958, but it didn't last long and there were no children.

Once, in conversation with his financial adviser, he was asked if he wanted to invest in the German company I.G. Farben—the company he was trying to bomb on the day he was shot down. He declined the offer.

Today, at age 92, Albert Boam enjoys life in a retirement community in Stone Mountain, Georgia. □

Made for Heroes, Then and Now.

Our truest re-creation of the famous commando knife carried by the First Special Service Force in World War II.

American Walnut display (#21943) *Sold Separately*

"This isn't just another reproduction, but a real V-42".

– Major John L. Plaster (ret.)
U.S. Army Special Forces Hall of Fame inductee
Author of Secret Commandos

#21994
(Includes Leather Sheath)

V-42

wrcase.com