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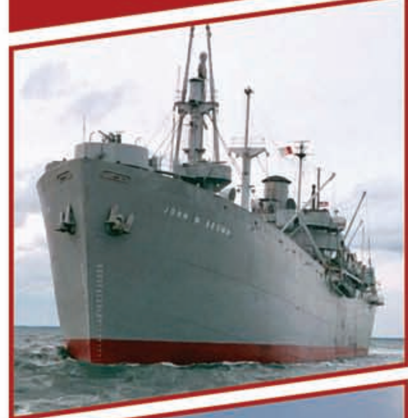

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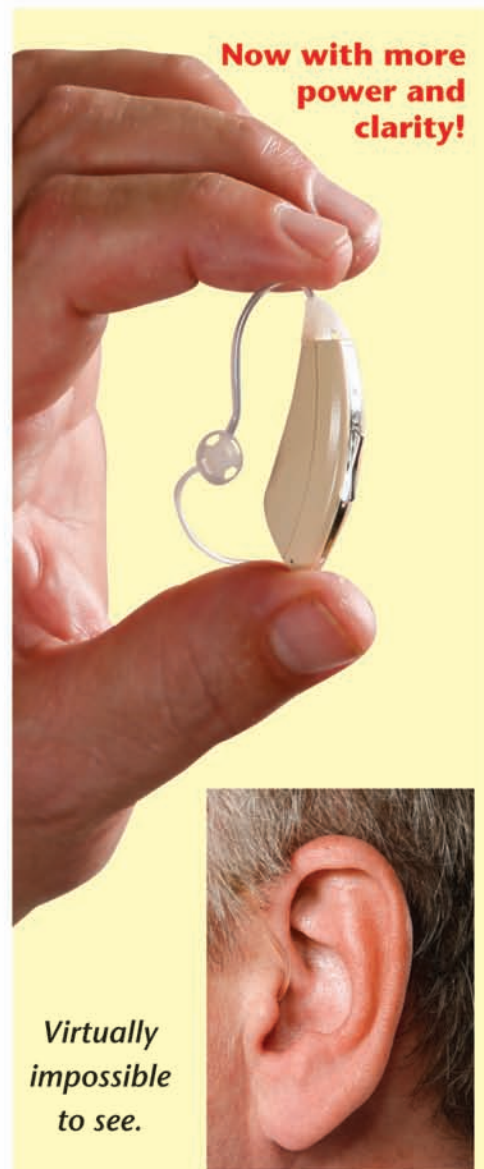

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Stumbling Over History

HAS THIS EVER HAPPENED TO YOU? You're on vacation or taking a trip and unexpectedly you stumble across a piece of history you didn't even know existed.

A few years back—at least 20—while vacationing with the family in southeast England (East Anglia), we got hopelessly lost in the countryside. Driving around through farmers' fields on the outskirts of Framlingham, we suddenly came upon an old control tower that looked exactly like the one I had seen in *12 O'Clock High*, the great movie about the Eighth Air Force starring Gregory Peck.

As we got closer, we saw that the control tower had been converted into a museum dedicated to 390th Bombardment Group that had been based there at Parham Airfield. It had not been on our list of places to see, but we spent several hours there with the curator who, because of our intense interest in World War II (and probably because we were Yanks), showed us places that the usual visitors never get to see. It became one of the highlights of the trip.

ABOVE: A derelict, rusting Quonset hut is all that remains of the sprawling Camp Tarawa on the Big Island of Hawaii. BELOW: The Parham Airfield Museum as it is today and during World War II.

Author photo

The same thing sort of serendipitous discovery happened last winter while my wife and I were vacationing on the beautiful Big Island of Hawaii. We were driving around the island and, at the northern end outside the town of Waimea (also known as Kamuela), we accidently came across the site of Camp Tarawa.

I must confess that I had never heard of Camp Tarawa, but a memorial to the 2nd and 5th Marine Divisions who trained there told me all about it.

Before the war, the land on which the camp existed was one of the largest cattle ranches in the United States. When it was decided that the Marines needed a training facility that replicated some of the Pacific islands where future battles would probably take place, the government leased 137,000 acres of the 250,000-acre Parker Ranch from Richard Smart, the owner, for $1.00 a year and turned it into a major Marine Corps camp.

The camp was constructed by the 2nd Marine Division in December 1943 after the division returned from its battle at Tarawa and used by the 2nd as a training ground for their upcoming battle at Saipan. After they departed, the 5th Marine Division moved in to prepare for the invasion of Iwo Jima. The Marines practiced amphibious landings at nearby Hapuna Beach, now a state park.

One of the stipulations of the lease was that the land would be restored to its premilitary state at the end of the lease. In November 1945, Camp Tarawa was closed and reverted to its civilian owners. Nothing is left of the sprawling Marine base now but a single Quonset hut and the memorial.

These "happy accidents" just go to prove that, practically everywhere you go, chances are there is something that has a direct connection to World War II. You just have to keep your eyes open and be ready for it.

Flint Whitlock, Editor

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Nazi Germany's ally Hungary worked hard to develop a tank that could stand up to Soviet armor, but to no avail.

By mid-January 1945 Germany was being pressured on all sides by Allied forces. Hitler's much-vaunted Ardennes Offense had been thrown back with appalling losses, the Soviet Red Army had invaded German soil, and the Hungarian capital of Budapest had been besieged for weeks. Alongside German troops fought soldiers and airmen from Hungary, Germany's sole remaining ally in Europe.

Like all combatants, the Royal Hungarian Army, known as the Honved in its native tongue, possessed an armored force. But, by this time, all Hungarian units with armored components had been severely depleted by constant fighting against a numerically and materially superior foe.

To give their ally a chance in combat against the armored forces of the Soviet and Romanian armies, Germany sold and loaned tanks to the Hungarians. At this stage of the war, these included the Panzerkampfwagen (Pzkpfw) IV, the Pzkpfw V Panther, and even the Pzkpfw VI Tiger I. For a brief time these German machines fought alongside a Hungarian-built tank—the Turan.

Though built by Hungary, the Turan was based on the Škoda T-21 medium tank prototype from the former Czechoslovakia. Even before the hard experience suffered by its Second Army on the Eastern Front, Hungarian officials realized the tankettes and light tanks, such as its own 38M Toldi, were completely unsuitable as the main battle tanks of its armored forces.

While its mobile contingents were being overwhelmed far from home on the Don River in late 1942 and early 1943, the Hungarians had been designing, testing, and building the first version of the Turan, known as the 40M Turan, whose origins can be traced to late 1939.

Hungary tested the T-21 in a series of extended trials. In the course of negotiating for the manufacture license, a few modifications were requested: increase the armor to 35mm, replace the rotating command cupola with a fixed one, replace the electrical equipment with Bosch-built items, and exchange the 47mm main gun for a 40mm gun.

The reason behind the reduction in main gun caliber was that the Hungarians already had a 40mm cannon that possessed a significantly higher muzzle velocity—820 meters per second (m/s) compared to the Škoda's 47mm gun's 590 m/s—and used the same shell as the common Bofors 40mm antiaircraft gun. In July 1940, the Hungarians successfully negotiated purchase of the license to build the T-21.

It took almost a year before the first Turan prototype was finished in June 1941, and it was not until July 1942 that production was officially given the go-ahead. More than 200 modifications, corrections, and adjustments were necessary due to flaws discovered in the original prototype.

Among these corrections was a new radiator designed to overcome issues with the transmission and, more importantly, overheating of the engine. New types of armor plating had to be developed as the required armor thickness was beyond the capability of Hungarian steel mills.

Hungarian Turan I tanks attack through a smoke screen in Russia in 1942.

Ullstein Bild / The Granger Collection, NY

Production of the Turan was undertaken by four major Hungarian firms: Manfréd Weiss, Ganz, MAVAG, and Magyar Vagon és Gépgyár. In addition to producing the vehicle, each firm was responsible for specific components and would supply these parts to the other manufacturers.

The production model of the 40M Turan had a crew of five, which was the standard for medium tanks. A 260hp, water-cooled V-8 petrol engine built by Manfréd Weiss powered the 18.2-ton tank. This allowed for a maximum road speed of 29.3 mph and a maximum range of 102.5 miles.

Along with the 41M 40mm main gun, a pair of 8mm machine guns were installed as armaments. One of these was co-axial with the main gun while the second was located in the hull. For ammunition, around 3,000 rounds were carried for the two machine guns as well as 101 rounds that could be stowed on board for the 40mm main cannon.

Completing the third part of the trinity of performance, firepower, and protection when discussing tanks and other armored fighting vehicles (AFV) was the armor. On the 40M, thickness varied from 50mm to 25mm to 13mm, depending on the location and its relative importance.

Total production numbers from the four firms assigned to manufacture the 40M Turan, or Turan I, were 285 tanks with Hungarian industry producing 230 vehicles in 1942. The 55 vehicles produced in 1943 were part of an order placed for an additional 309 tanks. However, combat experience had shown that any caliber gun less than 75mm was impractical due to the armor thickness of Soviet tanks. This was one reason why the original order number was never attained.

The production figures included the combat model as well as a command version, which was fitted with two more radios and additional antennas. By the end of 1943, the Honved began receiving the new tank beginning with the First Hungarian Armored Division. This division was being reconstituted after being annihilated on the Don River while part of the Second Hungarian Army during the Soviet Union's offensive in

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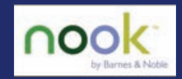

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January 1943. Shortly after this, the Second Armored Division and the First Cavalry Division, also called the First Huszar Division, began receiving the Turan I.

In comparison to the main battle tanks being used by Germany, the Soviet Union and even some used by Romania, the Hungarian-built Turan I was already obsolete when its baptism of fire occurred with the Second Armored Division in April 1944 against the Soviets in the Galicia region, located in modern-day western Ukraine.

During development and early stages of testing of the 40M Turan, it became evident that another vehicle was needed to complement it. Observing the armored vehicles used by the Germans, as well their tactics, which allowed them to successfully conquer most of Europe, had an influence on Hungary's decision.

Out of this need was born the 41M Turan, which was designed to be a heavy support tank for the medium 40M Turan. The main difference was a new main weapon—in this case a low-velocity 75mm L25 gun with a muzzle velocity of 500 m/s. Due to the increased size of the 75mm gun, a larger turret had to be designed and built. However, to reduce potential production delays, it still had to be able to fit on the Turan I chassis.

Development of the 41M prototype was not completed until 1942. Testing of the new tank delayed actual production until early 1943.

From combat experience, armor plating for the 41M Turan II was increased in some areas by 30 to 40mm. The larger main gun and increase in protection also increased the vehicle's weight by a ton, which had a detrimental effect on the Turan II's overall performance as it still used the same 260hp engine to power it.

Performance on both the 40M and 41M would decrease further when even more protection was added to hull and turret in the form of skirting plates. These pieces of armor, spaced several inches away from the vehicle's hull, were becoming standard on German tanks to protect the thinner side armor against Allied tanks and antitank weapons.

Production figures indicate that only around 180 vehicles were manufactured by the end of 1944, yet the same source states that three of the four Hungarian firms that built the Turan I only built 145 41M Turan 75s. One possible explanation for the differing numbers could be the fact that some 40M Turans damaged in combat were sent back to Hungary to be upgraded, thus conceivably accounting for the 35-vehicle difference.

The upgrade involved the removal of the Turan 40 turret and installing the turret of a Turan 75. The modification was a relatively easy procedure as the shape and diameter of the turret rings was designed to be the same.

Delivered first to Hungary's Second Armored Division in July 1943, the newer Turan model was then sent to the First Armored and First Huszar Divisions, the latter just happening to be the favorite of Hungary's leader, Admiral Miklós Horthy.

While the divisions were undergoing training with both versions of the Turan, the Hungarians officially changed the designation of the 41M Turan II to 41M Turan 75, as well as the 40M Turan I being called the 40M Turan 40.

Even though it was the best tank built by the Hungarians, by the time the 41M Turan 75 entered service in Hungary's armored forces, it was on the verge of obsolescence. While the 41M Turan 75 was being manufactured and delivered, the Hungarian high command had decided to order the development of a Turan model that, on paper, would be close to the modern tanks used by the Germans and Red Army.

Bundesarchiv Bild 101I-244-2306-16, Photo: Bauer

ABOVE: Hungarian troops ride a 41 M Turan II tank during the withdrawal of German and Hungarian troops from Romania to Hungary in August 1944. The Turan is also towing a truck. BELOW: Hungarian panzergrenadiers accompany a Turan II across a stream in Russia in 1944.

© SZ Photo

Designated the 43M Turan 75, this vehicle would be armed with a long-barrel 75mm based on the very successful German PAK40 gun that would allow the Hungarian armored forces to be more effective against their enemies.

Like many Axis designs at this stage of World War II, progress beyond the design stage was limited. Allied air raids, a lack of enough strategic materials for manufacture, and problems during the test trials of the new 75mm gun complicated this vehicle's development.

The German occupation of Hungary, which prevented Admiral Horthy from bringing his nation over to the Allied side, effectively canceled the project in the autumn of 1944, leaving an unknown number of prototypes.

The combat history of both models of the Turan ended with the siege of Budapest in February 1945. By then most, if not all, Turans had been knocked out in battle, victims of mechanical failure or abandoned for various reasons. With Hungary's factories overrun, there was no chance of receiving replacement vehicles or parts.

Among the last known engagements of the Turans occurred December 7, 1944, when Battle Group Horvath fought at Perball, Hungary, northwest of Budapest. Out of 11 tanks, two were 40M Turan 40s; three days later, Horvath was reduced to only the pair of medium Turans.

In regard to other tanks fielded during the war such as the German Panther, the Soviet T-34, the American M4 Sherman, or even the British Matilda or Italian M13/40, the Hungarian tank is an unknown commodity to the casual reader. In comparison to other main battle tanks when both versions became operational, the Turan was already inadequate for tank-to-tank combat.

However, the Turan was Hungarian-built and is an example of what its industry could develop and produce in spite of the limitations and conditions it faced. The Turan did see significant combat and could, under the right conditions, defeat any Soviet light or medium AFV.

The sole remaining Turan is a 41M Turan 75 captured by the Soviets and has been on display at the Kubinka Tank Museum in Russia. ☐

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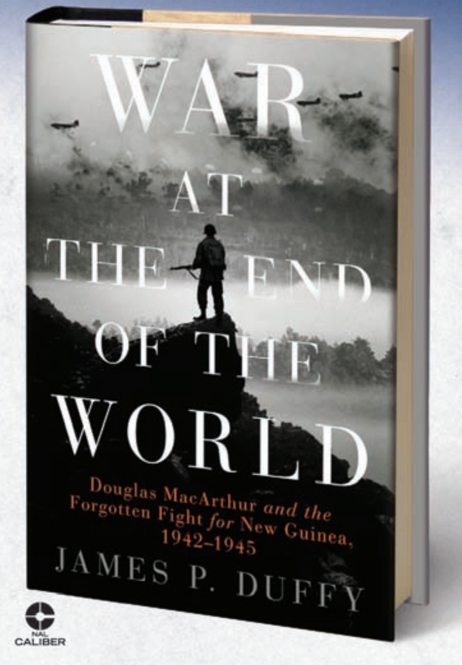

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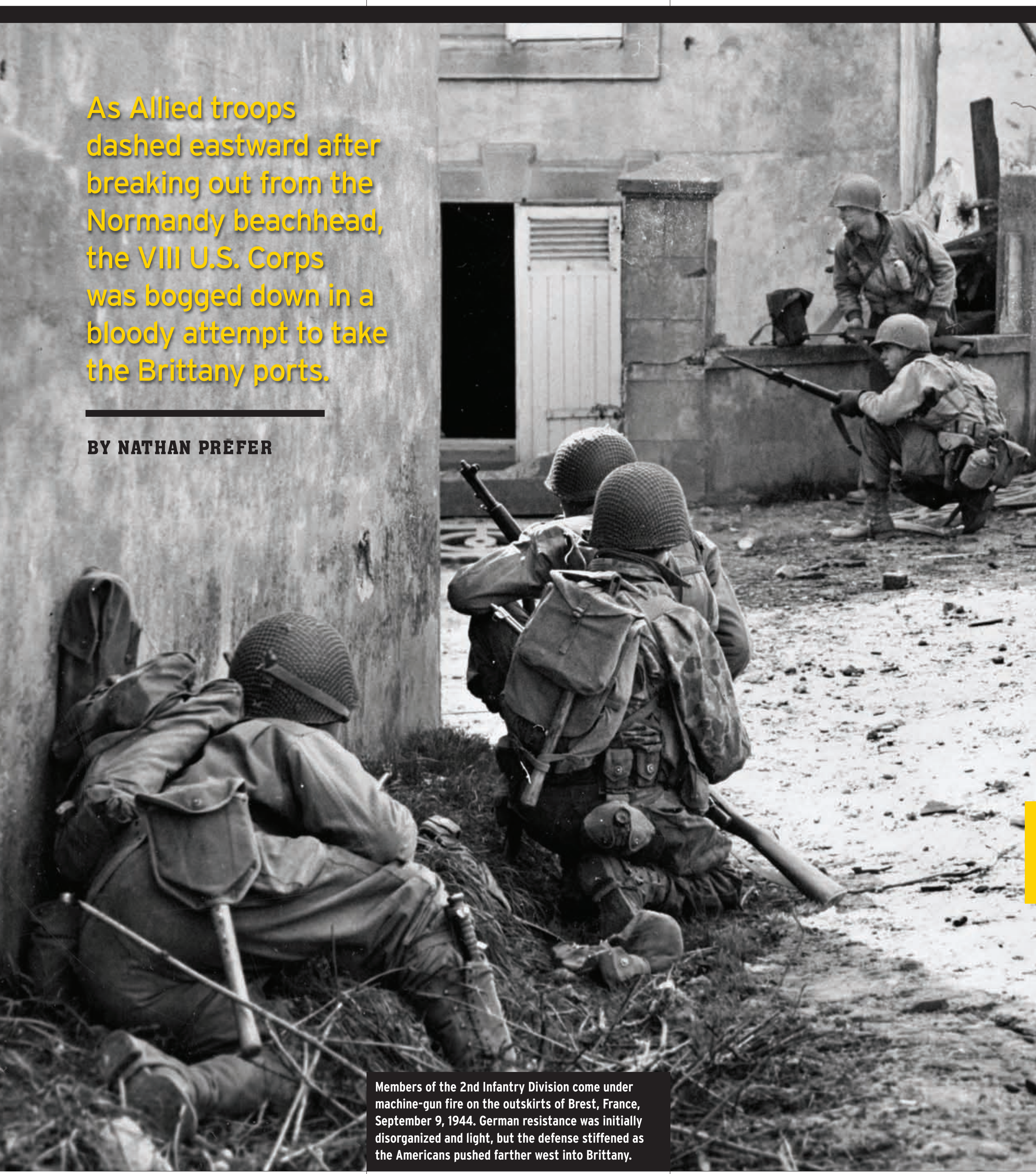

As Allied troops dashed eastward after breaking out from the Normandy beachhead, the VIII U.S. Corps was bogged down in a bloody attempt to take the Brittany ports.

BY NATHAN PREFER

Members of the 2nd Infantry Division come under machine-gun fire on the outskirts of Brest, France, September 9, 1944. German resistance was initially disorganized and light, but the defense stiffened as the Americans pushed farther west into Brittany.

National Archives

BRITTANY: Too High a Price?

At age 86, with a full and successful career behind him, General of the Army Omar Nelson Bradley sat down to write his uncensored memoirs. Although he had written a memoir of his World War II service earlier (*A Soldier's Story*), he felt the need to be fully candid and open about his experiences.

One of the things he was to describe was his regret at the amount of time, effort, and blood that he had expended in the prolonged seizure of France's Brittany Peninsula. He recalled that the "frustrating Brittany campaign" might have been better if the Allies had not fought it at all.

As he wrote, "We might have been well advised at this point to give up the good fight and let Brest remain in German hands, contained by our newly arriving green infantry divisions or by the French Forces of the Interior, which had ably assisted Patton's run through Brittany."

Thirty-five years earlier, the situation seemed different to those on the ground in France. The Allies had determined that seizing a defended port by direct amphibious assault was impractical—a lesson driven home by the 1942 Canadian raid at Dieppe. Instead, at Normandy the Allies would assault over open beaches, bringing a pair of temporary ports ("Mulberry" harbors) with them. The intent was to seize French ports quickly to allow logistics to keep up with the projected Allied advance to Germany.

As is usual in war, plans failed to match events. The Allies became stalled in Normandy, one of the temporary ports was destroyed by a storm, and the beaches, while difficult, sufficed for the first two months of the invasion, along with the port of Cherbourg, which was captured early but was badly damaged by the Ger-

mans. Things soon changed again when the Allies launched Operation Cobra, the breakout from Normandy and into the French interior.

It was this breakout that launched the Brittany campaign. The original Allied plans called for securing the entire Brittany Peninsula as a part of the initial lodgment area. Although much delay had ensued, the original plans were still in effect and, as the First U.S. Army broke out of the Normandy beachhead, Lt. Gen. George S. Patton's newly arrived Third U.S. Army raced past its flank and moved east and south. The southern thrust was the VIII U.S. Corps under the command of Maj. Gen. Troy H. Middleton.

Both: National Archives

This thrust into Brittany would give the Allies a total of 500 miles of French coastline, including some good ports at Rouen, Le Havre, Cherbourg, St. Malo, Brest, Lorient, and Vannes. Several smaller harbors would also come under Allied control. All of these would be under the protection of Allied air power based in Britain, while at the same time providing additional, closer air bases for the advancing armies.

The turn into Brittany was led by the U.S. 4th and 6th Armored Divisions, followed closely by the 8th Infantry Division. The initial advance, once a breakthrough had been achieved, was surprisingly swift. The two armored divisions rounded up some 4,000 German prisoners while the infantry division added 3,000 more to the POW enclosures. American losses numbered fewer than 700 from all causes.

German disorganization was obvious and rampant. Destroyed and abandoned enemy equipment, including guns, tanks, and trucks, littered the roads and countryside and formed the chief obstacle to the American advance. Clearly disorganized German units were fleeing into the Brittany Peninsula. Even the Germans described it as a "Riesensauerei"—one hell of a mess.

The initial Allied attack on July 25 had started slowly due to strong German resistance, but as the German reserves, already inadequate, were used to delay one of the Allied thrusts, another quickly pushed forward. By August 1, 1944, the front had broken wide open. The German LXXXIV Corps was smashed, and the II Parachute Corps was defeated, as was the parent Seventh German Army. American troops stood at the entrance to the Brittany Peninsula.

Hitler's reaction to Cobra was to delay as much as possible the Allied advance to gain time to rebuild his defenses deeper inside France. To this end he ordered his troops to destroy all transportation facilities, locomotives, railway lines, and bridges. His second step was to order his "Fortress Policy" into effect.

This latter plan was designed to deny the Allies the essential port facilities they needed logistically while at the same time keeping his hold on advance submarine bases from which his naval forces could strike at the Allied supply lines across the English Channel and Atlantic Ocean.

In preparation for this, from 1943 onward the ports of France, Holland, and Belgium had been heavily fortified by the Germans for just such an eventuality. Each was assigned a commander who had personally vowed to fight to the death to defend his fortress. So far, only Cherbourg had fallen to the Allies, and only after a bitter fight that destroyed a good deal of the port.

Now the Allies had seized the small ports of Avranches and Pontaubault on the Contentin Peninsula and were about to threaten major ports in Brittany, including St. Malo, Brest, Lorient, and St. Nazaire.

Disappointed in what he considered the too rapid fall of Cherbourg, Hitler renewed his directive and ordered each port held "to the last man, to the last cartridge." This order, unpopular with the German Army, nevertheless was put into immediate effect, tying up about 750,000 German troops.

Hitler, satisfied that his Fortress Order would prevent the Allies from gaining the vital Brittany ports, ordered his field commander, Field Marshal Gunther von Kluge, to ignore the Brittany front and concentrate his forces on slowing the Allied drive to the Seine River.

ABOVE: A Sherman tank equipped with a "hedge-buster" welded to its front hull advances through the deserted streets of Lambezellic en route to Brest, August 1944. OPPOSITE: Two Germans surrender to 6th Armored Division troops during the American advance into Brittany. The soldier in the jeep is wielding a .45-caliber "grease gun" submachine gun.

To obey these orders, Kluge requested permission to move the 2nd German Parachute Division from Brest to the east and the 319th German Infantry Division, then occupying the Channel Islands as well. Hitler refused to evacuate the Channel Islands, but did give permission for the paratroopers to leave Brest.

But it was too late. Even as the first German paratroopers began to move, they encountered the advance elements of American armor approaching the port city. They had no choice but to withdraw into the defenses of Brest. As they did so, more and more reports of American armor advancing into Brittany reached them.

These same reports reached von Kluge, and he abandoned the idea of moving the paratroopers. Looking for some force to at least attempt a defense of Brittany—if for no other reason than to tie down Allied forces—he turned to General Wilhelm Fahrmbacher, commanding XXV Corps.

Fahrmbacher had fought the Americans before in the Contentin Peninsula and did not relish another round. Although at one time Brittany held some 100,000 German troops, most had been sent to fight in Normandy. Left to Fahrmbacher in August were the 2nd German Parachute and the 343rd Infantry Divisions. Elements of the 266th and 265th Infantry Divisions, the latter holding the ports of Lorient, St. Nazaire, and Nantes, were also available. The usual collection of coast artillery, antiaircraft, antitank, engineer, navy, and air force units were also included under Fahrmbacher's XXV Corps. Additionally, he picked up straggler units from the 77th and 91st Infantry Divisions that had escaped from Normandy into Brittany.

Hitler's Fortress Order dictated that these field forces would remain under the command of their leaders as long as they operated outside the delineated confines of the particular fortress. Once they were pushed into the fortress, all forces, including the field forces, came under the command of the fortress commander. In most cases, the defenses of these fortress ports faced the sea, the expected focus of attack.

Fahrmbacher and his headquarters moved to Lorient. On August 7, von Kluge ordered him to move to and take command of Brest, but already the lines of communication were cut and XXV Corps remained in Lorient. With land and sea routes cut and communications difficult if not impossible, each fortress essentially fought alone. In effect, Fahrmbacher would become fortress commander of Lorient.

American planners had always intended for the XIII U.S. Corps and one or two others to turn into Brittany and clear the ports. German disorganization offered the Americans the chance to use only VIII Corps for this role. Middleton's corps had fought in Normandy as a part of the First U.S. Army under Bradley, but on August 1, 1944, with the activation of the Third Army, it became a part of Patton's army.

Patton was under orders to secure the Brittany Peninsula, particularly the ports of St. Malo, the Quiberon Bay area, and Brest. Army engineers were alerted to prepare to open these ports as soon as they were secured by VIII Corps.

Patton was to cut across the base of the

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ABOVE: Members of an American engineer unit scramble over piles of rubble during the advance into Brittany, August 1944. Many French cities were destroyed or badly damaged during the fighting. OPPOSITE: A French family, fleeing the battle area with their cow and meager belongings, watches an American tank destroyer, camouflaged with foliage, rumble by.

peninsula, thereby isolating it from the rest of the German Army. Next, he planned to clear central Brittany, open lines of communication, and reduce German defenses to the isolated pockets of resistance around the ports. The plan assumed that once the German port defenders were isolated they would surrender after a token resistance.

To accomplish this, Patton ordered Maj. Gen. John S. Wood's 4th Armored Division to strike through Rennes to Quiberon; Maj. Gen. Robert W. Grow's 6th Armored Division would then head directly for Brest. A third column, a temporary task force ("Task Force A," under Brig. Gen. Herbert Earnest), was directed to secure the vital railroad line that leads from Brest along the north shore. This railway crossed several bridges, each of which had to be secured for the rail line to remain functioning.

Task Force A, consisting of the 15th Cavalry Group and 6th Tank Destroyer Group, would be under the supervision of General Grow. Overall, Patton intended a quick, slashing attack that would increase German disorganization and disrupt their defenses to the point that the objectives could be secured with relative ease.

Patton sent forward his personal reconnaissance force, Colonel Edward M. Fickett's 6th Cavalry Group—which he renamed the Army Information Service—and made it a communications unit directly responsible to his headquarters, allowing him to receive current, updated, and accurate information on his wide-ranging forward units.

Major General Troy H. Middleton, the VIII Corps commander, formerly commanded the 45th Infantry Division in Sicily and Italy; he did not have much experience with armored warfare, preferring the planned and carefully coordinated thrust of an infantryman.

Middleton was still following the original Allied plans for the invasion and exploitation phases of the campaign. He intended to send two columns into Brittany, like Patton, but each would include both an armored and an infantry division. The 4th Armored Division would be followed by Maj. Gen. Donald Stroh's 8th Infantry Division; Maj. Gen. Ira T. Wyche's 6th Armored Division would be followed by the 79th Infantry Division. Further, Middleton believed that his primary task was to secure St. Malo, then Quiberon.

Both Grow and Earnest were members of the armor "club" and, like Patton, favored thrusts deep into the heart of the enemy's defenses rather than a deliberate attack against prepared defenses. As a result, they did not intend to tie down their forces fighting prepared defenses, for which their armor was not intended.

The past few weeks of rapid advance against weak defenses had made Grow and Earnest confident that a quick overrunning of the Brittany Peninsula would result in the conquest of the territory as well as the ports.

In effect, each division commander became semi-independent. Middleton's headquarters was located near Avranches, but the rapid advance of his troops left his communications in confusion. Messages were received late, when received at all. Similarly, orders sent forward either never arrived or were obsolete when received. As a result, a great deal of confusion arose during the Brittany campaign.

Although Middleton attempted to move his headquarters forward to regain communications with his assigned units, Third Army ordered him to remain in touch with them, thus preventing a move. At one point Middleton reported that contact with his forward armored divisions was "practically nil."

The communications failures were not limited to the higher headquarters. In the 6th Armored Division, for example, General Grow became dissatisfied with the progress of Combat Command A and ordered Combat Command R to change direction and follow Combat Command B. These orders were likewise delayed in transmission because neither command knew the other's location. Eventually things were sorted out and the adjustments made, but precious time was lost.

Throughout Brittany in early August, the scenes played out much like the American Wild West of a century before. Messengers going from one headquarters to another had to run a gantlet of ambushes, destroyed bridges, and snipers to deliver their messages.

In one case, it took an officer messenger from VIII Corps to 6th Armored Division 24 hours to make the round trip, during which he was able to avoid death or capture from roving bands of German soldiers only due to timely warnings from the civilians along his route.

Supply trucks, particularly single trucks traveling alone, reminded some of the old stagecoach racing through "Indian Country," moving fast to avoid the sudden ambushes of wandering German units. Even German aircraft, flying to dispute the rapid American advance into the peninsula, often strafed individuals or single vehicles.

Wood's 4th Armored Division aimed for Rennes, the capital of Brittany and the center of a vital road network. Working under two sets of orders—one from Patton ordering the division to capture Rennes and then move on Quiberon and the other from Middleton ordering only the capture of Rennes—Wood's men raced 40 miles southwest to reach the outskirts of Rennes by the evening of August 1.

Strong German opposition protected the city of some 80,000 residents, and an initial attack by 20 Sherman tanks and a company of infantry failed to penetrate those defenses. A conglomeration of German infantry, antiaircraft troops, machine gunners, and naval troops defended the city. Fahrmbacher had sent a small force drawn from the 91st Infantry Division to hold the town, as it was a vital communications center for both sides due to the road network. Before the Americans could reorganize, another two battalions of replacement troops arrived from Le Mans.

The 4th Armored Division launched a renewed attack late on August 1. Despite a preliminary bombardment from Republic P-47 Thunderbolt fighter-bombers and artillery, the attack was again thrown back; 11 American tanks were lost. That same evening Colonel Eugen Koenig, commander of the 91st Infantry Division, arrived in the city with two assault guns. He immediately took command and prepared an all-out defense.

Wood realized that there would be no swift overrunning of Rennes. Even as his troops waited outside the city, they were being mortared and shelled by artillery from within. So intense did this fire become that the Americans prepared for a counterattack.

Wood was in a difficult position with his supplies running short, his division strung out over some 50 miles between Avranches and Rennes, and insufficient infantry to clear a large city. He radioed Middleton for an infantry regiment to reinforce him. He also requested air cover, something he had not received except for the P-47 strike that had apparently accomplished little.

The nearest infantry was Stroh's 8th Infantry Division, which had been fighting in Normandy since the beginning of July. Ordered to follow the armor and be prepared to supply troops to allow the armor to bypass enemy strongpoints, Stroh

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attached his 13th Infantry Regiment to the 4th Armored Division. Quartermaster truck companies ordered up by Middleton from the Third Army carried the infantrymen toward Rennes.

To keep the Germans busy while he waited, Wood sent a series of small infantry attacks against the city during the day. To Wood, the war was moving to the east and north, away from Brittany. With Stroh's division coming to relieve him at Rennes, he wanted to bypass it and keep up with the American advances to the east.

Wood's maneuver would encircle Rennes while at the same time putting him in a position to seal off the Brittany Peninsula, a major objective of his drive. He sent his plan to Middleton and, in anticipation of approval, he began to move. But Wood's plan crossed an incoming order from VIII Corps that restated his orders to capture Rennes. Upon receipt of this order, Wood felt he had no alternative but to halt his movement around Rennes and renew his attack on that city.

Wood already had two combat commands moving around Rennes, and these found almost no enemy opposition. By the end of the day, the peninsula was sealed off from the rest of France. Upon receiving this report, Middleton accepted the situation and forwarded the report to Third Army. But he once again reminded Wood that his objective was to secure Rennes.

Middleton's order to capture Rennes was not as poorly considered as it was later made out to be. Wood's division was still widely dispersed and his supply routes were under attack by the "Indians"—German troops still roaming the unsecured sections of the American rear. He needed to secure the supply route to keep his division supplied sufficiently for continued advances.

To accomplish this, Wood halted his columns and turned them northward to block German escape routes to the east. He ordered the approaching 13th Infantry Regiment to capture the city itself. By August 4, the 4th Armored had cut the main routes southeast of Rennes and pushed the roaming German units away.

The 13th Infantry Regiment reached the vicinity of Rennes late on August 2 and prepared to assault the city the following morning. Despite strong enemy small arms, automatic weapon, and antiaircraft fire turned against ground troops, the infantry penetrated the city's defenses in the northeastern sector on August 3.

The Germans were now surrounded. Colonel Koenig could see the handwriting on the wall and requested permission to withdraw his forces from the city. After receiving permission from the Seventh Army Headquarters, the defenders burned their supplies, and the surviving Germans, estimated at about 2,000, left the city in two groups during the night of August 3-4.

Using back roads and cross-country trails, they reached St. Nazaire after a difficult five-day journey and joined the garrison there. On August 4, the 13th Regiment, followed by the rest of the 8th Infantry Division, made a triumphant entry into Rennes to the cheers, flowers, and wine of the liberated French population. It garrisoned the town and became the XIII Corps reserve.

Once again communication failures plagued General Wood. Repeated messages to Middleton seemed unanswered, although in fact the responses never arrived. Frustrated, Middleton drove through Brittany and arrived at Wood's headquarters to discuss future operations.

Upon arrival, Wood hugged Middleton in ecstatic welcome. Middleton asked what the matter was, fearing that Wood's division had suffered some major reverse. "No," replied Wood, "They"—meaning the Allied command—"are winning the war the wrong way." Wood still wanted to move east.

A compromise was reached whereby Wood would move east but concentrate on blocking all routes south of Rennes and seizing the Vilaine River bridges. A copy of this compromise was forwarded to Third Army headquarters where Maj. Gen. Hugh J. Gaffey, Patton's chief of staff, issued an order reminding both field commanders that their objective remained the Quiberon area and the towns of Vannes and Lorient.

As Middleton passed on this adjustment, the 4th Armored Division ran out of gas. Although the shortage was temporary, due to the supply trucks having been diverted to carry forward the 13th Regiment earlier, it caused little change. French Forces of the Interior (FFI) had captured the airfield at Vannes, and elements of Wood's division arrived

Bundesarchiv Bild 101I-496-3455-07; Photo: Stöpfgeshoff

Germans man a camouflaged Flakpanzer IV Wirbelwind ("Whirlwind"), a self-propelled antiaircraft gun outfitted with a 2cm Flakvierling 38 auto cannon, at the air base in St. Malo, summer 1944.

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LEFT: Generalleutnant Hermann-Bernard Ramcke, commander of the Brest garrison, shown after his surrender, September 19, 1944. RIGHT: Brig. Gen. James A. Van Fleet, ADC of the 2nd Infantry Division, left, and Maj. Gen. Troy Middleton, VIII Corps commander, view battle from a destroyed German gun position.

the following day, completing the town's capture.

To keep the pressure on the enemy, Colonel Bruce C. Clarke, commanding 4th Armored's Combat Command A, sent a task force to the outskirts of Lorient, ensuring that the Germans remained within the fortress. Combat Command B, under Brig. Gen. Holmes E. Dager, soon joined them in establishing a siege of Lorient.

Initial attempts to find a weak spot in the defenses by Combat Command B cost them 20 men killed and 85 wounded, as well as a dozen or more vehicles destroyed. Although Fahrmbacher was concerned that a strong American attack would breach his defenses, but no such attack was launched. His defenses were still being organized, and some sectors of the defense were as yet unoccupied. He had some 25,000 German troops, 10,000 French civilians, 197 artillery tubes, and 80 antitank guns in the fortress.

Middleton had no intention of launching a major attack. An armored division was ill suited for such an assault, and no infantry division was immediately available. In fact, Lorient would never be attacked by the Americans and would continue to send out its German submarines to harass Allied shipping until Germany's surrender in May 1945.

One of the reasons no infantry division was available to assist Wood at Lorient was that the war had already bypassed Brittany. The main action of the Allies' Northwest Europe campaign was to the north and east; no new forces would be available for Brittany. Middleton was soon advised that he would have to clear the peninsula with the forces at hand.

His priority now became the seizure of St. Malo and Brest; only after St. Malo and Brest were captured could he spare forces to assist Wood at Lorient. With his now limited forces, Middleton had to prioritize his objectives because the same forces would be used at each.

The 6th Armored Division had already begun the process. General Grow had already sent Combat Command Reserve (CCR, Colonel Harry F. Hanson) to the Pontaubault bridgehead in anticipation of an advance deeper into Brittany. Grow intended to pass his other two combat commands through CCR once Middleton gave his approval.

That approval came even before CCR arrived at Pontaubault. With his other commands delayed by destroyed bridges and roads, Grow changed his plan and ordered Hanson to continue past Pontaubault and push into Brittany. The rest of the 6th Armored would follow as soon as possible.

To make matters more urgent, Patton arrived just as Grow was personally directing traffic to get his troops on the road. Telling Grow that he had a bet with British Field Marshal Bernard L. Montgomery that he, Patton, would have troops in Brest by Saturday night, he told Grow, "Take Brest."

When asked by Grow about intermediate objectives, Patton told him to preserve the Brest-Rennes railroad but otherwise to bypass all resistance. Grow needed nothing further and dismissed his current objective of Dinant and ordered his men to Brest, some 200 miles west of Avranches. He had five days to win Patton's bet.

Patton's order was not the flippant remark of a careless commander. Armor officers were trained to push the envelope by giving subordinates far-reaching objectives to keep them thinking ahead and prepared for sudden alterations in existing plans. Grow, who had worked for Patton as an operations officer years earlier, was familiar with such tactics.

Middleton suggested two routes for 6th Armored to get to Brest. He also reinforced the division with the 174th Field Artillery Battalion's 155mm self-propelled guns, the 603rd Tank Destroyer Battalion, and the 777th Antiaircraft Artillery (Automatic Weapons) Battalion.

Getting his division through the crowded and devastated city of Avranches, though, was Grow's first problem. As mentioned, congestion was so bad that he personally had to direct traffic to extricate his division from that city. German air attacks on both August 1 and 2 slowed things down as well. Destroyed bridges forced the entire

division to cross slowly over the sole highway bridge into Brittany.

To speed up his advance, Grow split his division into two columns, hoping that if one was halted by enemy resistance the second could outflank that resistance and continue the race to Brest. Hanson's CCR led one column and Brig. Gen. James Taylor's CCA the other. Colonel George W. Read, Jr., led CCB, which followed CCR.

The "Super Sixth" expected to find German troops in front of them. The general disposition of the enemy was known, and they expected to encounter the German paratroops around St. Malo.

Sure enough, the advance guard was soon ambushed by strong enemy forces, forcing Hanson to attack to his rear to clear the enemy from his column. Grow overruled him, ordering him to continue forward while the following units of CCB dealt with the Germans.

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An American soldier views the stout, formidable walls of the Citadel at St. Malo. Surrounded on three sides by water, the medieval fortress held out for 11 days against fierce shelling and bombing.

After three hours, 70 casualties, and the loss of some vehicles, Hanson's CCR broke the German ambush and continued toward Brest.

Moving forward with nothing more than a general map of Brittany, Grow pushed on. Combat Command B took the lead from CCR and ran into resistance near Dinan, which Grow ordered bypassed. With the help of some air support, this was soon accomplished.

Worried about his lines of communication and supply, Grow halted his division for the night of August 2-3. He knew that his assigned support, the 79th Infantry Division, had been diverted to the east. He had heard that they might be replaced by the 83rd Infantry Division, but Grow had no idea if and when that might occur. Even if they were, it was several days behind the "Super Sixth."

Grow had little intelligence on the enemy. Although his staff advised caution, stopping to develop support bases rather than a wild race down unknown roads against an unknown enemy, Grow dismissed their advice; he didn't have that kind of time. When he revealed that the division's objective was now Brest, not Dinan, the staff was astonished.

At his staff conference, so exhausted were the officers and men of the division that several fell asleep during the discussion. Grow ordered his division to rest and reorganize until noon on August 3. Then, once again, it was off.

Colonel Taylor's CCA hit some resistance when they took a wrong turn near Mauron but quickly overcame it. Colonel Read's CCB raced 30 miles without a shot fired against it, although the men could see retreating Germans in the distance. Then suddenly came the order to halt.

That order came from Middleton, who wanted Grow to reinforce and take command of the forces attacking St. Malo. A portion of the 83rd Infantry Division and General Earnest's Task Force A were besieging the town, and Middleton wanted Grow to assist.

General Grow protested the order, first by radio and then again by courier. While awaiting a response, he obeyed his orders, halting CCA and ordering CCB to turn around. Then he changed his mind and left CCB where it was, hoping for a change in orders. Using troops from CCR, he organized a special task force, placed Colonel Taylor in charge of it, and ordered the force to its new objective. Just then the courier returned with the answer to Grow's request to continue to Brest: "No."

As the division was planning its attack on Dinan, Patton once again showed up. He immediately berated Grow for halting, but the division commander explained his new orders, which Patton quickly overruled. Once again the 6th Armored Division was headed for Brest.

Later it would turn out that once again confused and incomplete communications had resulted in this mixup. When Middleton issued his order, he believed that the 6th Armored Division was at or near Dinan when, in fact, it had already bypassed that location and was well south of it when the order reached Grow.

It wasn't until the pilot of a light artillery observation plane reported, accurately, the location of the 6th Armored Division that Middleton realized his error and changed his orders. Even this change was delayed, repeated, and lost in transmission for a while. Patton's own "Army Information Service" (6th Cavalry Group) also tried to forward the order, but it took most of a day to clear up the change in orders.

When 6th Armored began moving again, communications failed altogether. For much of August 4, no higher headquarters could communicate with the "Super Sixth." Fragmentary messages indicated that the division was approaching Brest, needed air support

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ABOVE: American soldiers ride an LCVP assault craft during the attack on the island fortress of Cezembre, off St. Malo, September 2, 1944. BELOW: After the Citadel at St. Malo fell, GIs raise the American flag over an antiaircraft position atop the rubble, August 26, 1944.

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and bridging equipment, and was working with the FFI. Complaints about enemy troops harassing their lines of supply were also received.

Patton could stand it no longer. He ordered fighter-bombers over Brest to report on the situation. He wanted to know where the division was and what it was doing. He needed to know, also, whether the division needed assistance in seizing Brest. He also assigned his Army Information Service to do the same.

A reply soon came from the 6th Cavalry Group, reporting first the seizure of Brest and then correcting it to state that the attack would begin tomorrow, August 7. Still believing that the condition of the German Army in Brittany would result only in a token defense of Brest, Patton continued to try to contact Grow, all to no avail.

In fact, 6th Armored was on the move, even driving through one moonlit night to make up time lost at Dinan. With support from the FFI, which guided him past German defenses and around destroyed bridges, Grow pushed his troops forward. When the 15th Tank Battalion ran into a minefield, 2nd Lt. James I. Durden went forward alone and cleared a path through it at great personal risk. He then repeatedly walked through the field, guiding drivers along the cleared path until he was killed.

But clashes like these did little to slow the advancing armor, and men like Lieutenant Durden pushed aside the German efforts at delay, despite the cost to themselves. By the evening of August 6, the division was threatening the outposts of Fortress Brest.

The Army Air Forces found the division that same day, and General Grow responded to their requests for information that he thought Brest would be defended and that he needed an infantry division to do the job.

While awaiting orders, Grow decided to try out Brest's defensive strength. He believed his rapid advance had demoralized the Germans and disrupted their preparations for defense. He ordered Colonel Read and CCB to attack on the morning of August 7. The attack overran some strong outposts but hit the wall of German defenses some seven miles outside the city. By the end of the day, 6th Armored besieged Brest at a distance of from four to six miles. Still hoping that the enemy planned only a token defense, Grow sent a surrender ultimatum into the fortress.

Behind the 6th Armored Division a bitter battle had developed at St. Malo. Maj. Gen. Robert C. Macon's 83rd Infantry Division had replaced the 79th Infantry Division in that assignment when the latter was diverted to block German communications at Fougéres.

Although a small port on the northern coast, St. Malo held an important strategic position in that enemy forces based there could cut off American communications to the interior of Brittany.

Both: National Archives

ABOVE: An American M-18 tank destroyer rolls through the shattered remains of a street in Brest. OPPOSITE: Men of Company I, 23rd Infantry, 2nd Infantry Division advance across an open area near Brest, August 29, 1944. Many GIs were killed or wounded when Germans blew up their own bunkers to prevent capture.

The fortress commander at St. Malo was Colonel Andreas von Auluck who, to strengthen his defenses, asked the French population to leave. They in turn asked the Germans to leave. Auluck asked for a decision from Hitler, who responded, "In warfare there is no such thing as an historic city." The ancient walled town dating from the 15th century would become a battlefield.

After relieving Earnest's Task Force A, Macon began his attack. A battalion of infantry sent across the Rance River in assault boats was repelled by strong resistance. But the attack convinced the Germans to abandon Dinan and withdraw into the final fortress defenses.

With three regiments in line, the 83rd launched its attack, but not before Auluck ordered all French civilians out of St. Malo under cover of a white flag. Once the civilians were clear, German artillery offshore on the Ile de Cézembre opened fire. This shelling started severe fires within the city. With water supplies cut off by the Americans, the Germans couldn't adequately fight the fires.

On August 7, the Germans destroyed the harbor facilities. But defenses remained strong, and Macon was allocated the 121st Infantry Regiment of the 8th Division. This Georgia National Guard regiment would attack via the Rance River while the 83rd Division attacked St. Malo directly. At one point Lt. Col. Gordon Eyler's 3rd Battalion, 121st Infantry Regiment found itself surrounded near Pleurtuit. German artillery, mortar, and small arms fire pounded the trapped Americans. Breakout attempts as well as relief attempts failed. The "Lost Battalion of Dinard" fought on.

General Macon took personal charge of the rescue once he was satisfied that the battle for St. Malo was progressing well. He moved his 331st Infantry Regiment to the area of the trapped battalion and led an attack to relieve it, which took a week to accomplish.

Meanwhile, at St. Malo the battle raged street by street and house by house. It was bitter, bloody fighting with little quarter given. On August 14, the same date the "Lost Battalion of Dinard" was relieved, the final German stronghold was reached. This 18th-century fortress withstood the initial American attacks. Heavy guns were brought up to point-blank range and fired at the citadel, bombers blasted it from the air, and small assault teams attacked position after position. Colonel Auluck, having been awarded the Oak Leaves to the Knight's Cross, surrendered August 15.

At Brest things were equally difficult. General Grow soon became aware of a large enemy force attacking his rear. This force, from the 266th Division, was identified when the commander (Maj. Gen. Karl Spang) was captured by the 212th Armored Field Artillery Battalion. The "Super Sixth" had to turn around and fight off these attackers while leaving a token force facing Brest.

With his command post under attack, Grow signaled VIII Corps that he was defending his headquarters and prepared to destroy secret codes if overrun. Naturally this message caused consternation at VIII Corps headquarters. But after two days, half of the German force was killed or captured; the rest escaped into Fortress Brest.

General Middleton relieved the armor with what would soon total three infantry divisions. Maj. Gen. Walter M. Robertson's 2nd Infantry Division held the left flank, the 8th Infantry Division the center, and Maj. Gen. Charles H. Gerhardt's 29th Infantry Division the right.

Inside Fortress Brest, commanded by Colonel Hans von der Mosel until relieved by Maj. Gen. Bernard Herman Ramcke, commander of the 2nd Parachute Division, there were by August 10 some 35,000 German Army, Navy, and Air Force troops manning the defenses. Ramcke, a World War I veteran and devoted Nazi, would not yield easily. With sufficient troops, proven defenses, fortifications, and adequate food and ammunition, the siege of Fortress Brest promised to be a bloody one.

That is just what it was, and it was not a siege. By mid-August the Americans had secured few ports, with Cherbourg and the still useless St. Malo being the largest. With

the collapse of the German armies in France and the pursuit across the Seine, the Americans needed more gas, more ammunition, more equipment, and more men. All of these had to come through ports. More were needed. The plan to take Brest stood.

Brest was an old fortress city of some 80,000 people situated along the shore of an excellent, land-locked roadstead some 90 square miles in area. An excellent deep-water harbor, it had been a major French naval base, and, during World War I, had seen many Americans pass through to join the American Expeditionary Forces.

As noted earlier, the railroad ran directly to Rennes, and from there the entire French countryside was easily accessible. Although the Allies had plans to build their own harbor at Quiberon Bay, suppression of Brest was vital to keep the sea lanes open to any of the Brittany ports since it dominated the peninsula.

Middleton now received the use of the 2nd and 29th Infantry Divisions from First Army; both had been fighting since D-Day. In addition, the 2nd and 5th U.S. Ranger Battalions, also D-Day veterans, were added to the troop list, as was the 35th Field Artillery Brigade, Task Force A, and VIII Corps support units. These troops were needed as Middleton had a lot of ground to cover. He had to isolate Lorient and St. Nazaire along with other German enclaves. With the German withdrawal from France sucking all Allied units to the east, Middleton was stretched very thin on the ground.

Near the end of August, an ammunition shortage limited pre-assault bombardments, and Middleton's request for more ammunition was denied by Third Army, itself short of ammo because it seriously underestimated the Brest garrison's strength.

As the attack began, VIII Corps had three infantry divisions, two Ranger battalions, an armored task force, and 34 artillery battalions available. The fighting quickly became bitter and bloody. Built on hills on both sides of the Penfeld River, Brest, surrounded by small hills and low ridges with many deep ravines, was in an ideal defensive position.

The usual dense and coordinated German defenses included concrete pillboxes, casemates, and gun emplacements. Barbed wire, minefields, and antitank ditches enhanced the defense. Old French forts and an 18th-century Vauban-designed fortress were integrated into it. Guns and antiaircraft weapons stripped from ships sunk in the harbor joined coast artillery and field artillery facing the Americans.

On August 18, VIII Corps moved to Lesneven 15 miles from Brest to direct the battle; operations to isolate Brest and push in its outposts began almost immediately.

During one of these early operations, the 38th Infantry Regiment, 2nd Infantry Division was fighting near Plougastel, Brittany, on August 23 when it hit stiff resistance. A 28-year-old machine-gun squad leader, Staff Sergeant Alvin P. Carey, was with the company attacking Hill 154. When the advance stalled under heavy enemy fire, Carey moved his guns forward of the leading infantry squads. Leaving his men under cover, Carey loaded himself with as many grenades as he could carry and then started up the hill toward the Germans.

He targeted the central pillbox holding up his buddies and moved 150 yards under direct enemy fire until confronted by a German rifleman. This individual he dispatched with his carbine and moved to within throwing distance of the pillbox and began hurling grenades at it in the face of intense enemy fire, which soon mortally wounded him.

Despite his wounds, he continued to toss grenades until one entered the pillbox and exploded, killing the occupants and putting their guns out of action. For his self-sacrifice, Staff Sergeant Alvin P. Carey received a posthumous Medal of Honor. More than 100 enemy dead were counted on the hill.

General Middleton organized several task forces to clear the outlying areas around Brest. One such combat element was Task Force B under Colonel Leroy H. Watson, assistant division commander of the 29th Infantry Division. Consisting of the 116th Infantry Regiment, 2nd Ranger Battalion, 224th Field Artillery Battalion, and 86th Cavalry Reconnaissance Squadron, Task Force B captured Pointe de Corsen and isolated German artillery batteries. A small patrol led by 1st Lt. Robert Edlin managed to penetrate the defenses, enter the command post and, by holding an armed grenade to the commander's head, threatened death or surrender to the enemy troops there. More than 1,000 Germans gave up.

The main attack against Brest began on August 25. Three infantry divisions abreast launched a major assault. The defenses were formed by two belts of some four to six miles around the Penfeld River. Heavy and medium bombers attacked, and fighters launched rockets in the pre-assault bar-

rage. Because of the heavy and deep defenses, progress was slow and costly. When Company G, 23rd Infantry, 2nd Infantry Division dug in on August 29, it was hit with a German counterattack.

Unprepared, Company G was pinned under small arms and antiaircraft fire; the opening left a dangerous gap in the American line. As the Germans approached, Sergeant John J. McVeigh, a machine gunner from Company H, set up his guns to cover the gap, standing fully erect to direct their fire despite intense return fire.

Despite casualties, the Germans kept coming, threatening to overrun Company G. Drawing his trench knife, McVeigh attacked the Germans as they approached his guns and engaged in a savage hand-to-hand struggle, killing one enemy soldier and then, armed only with his knife, charging three others.

As he did so, he was cut down by enemy rifle fire at point-blank range. But his action allowed the men of Companies H and G to prepare for the continuing enemy attack, which they successfully repelled. For his gallantry and self-sacrifice, McVeigh received a posthumous Medal of Honor.

The bitter fighting continued throughout August. Second Lt. Earl O. Hall of the 13th Infantry, 8th Infantry Division earned a posthumous Distinguished Service Cross for leading a vicious fight among the enemy trenches until killed by artillery fire. In the 2nd Division's 9th Infantry, Lt. Col. H.K. Wesson reorganized a rifle company, reduced to 46 men, and at the cost of his life led them in an assault across a defended hedgerow, knocking out an enemy machine gun and capturing 14 German paratroopers. He, too, received a posthumous Distinguished Service Cross.

Middleton tried everything to expedite the operation and reduce casualties. His request for an amphibious landing was denied. Additional air strikes were called against the defenses. Replacements for casualties were slow in arriving; ammunition supplies remained low, and air support "left much to be desired." But the battle went on.

Each division faced one or more of the heavily defended hills that blocked access to the city. The 8th Division faced Hill 92. On September 7, Middleton, his ammunition stocks finally restored, ordered another general assault. The 13th Infantry Regiment sent two battalions against Hill 92. They were halted by intense German fire.

Private First Class Ernest W. Prussman led his squad against the enemy mortars, machine guns, and snipers from concealed positions. Capturing two German soldiers in a trench, he next led his men across an open field swept by enemy fire, destroyed an enemy machine gun, and captured the crew and supporting riflemen. Moving again ahead of his men, he attacked additional enemy positions until he was mortally wounded. For his courageous selflessness, Prussman received a posthumous Medal of Honor.

Not far away, Staff Sgt. George T. Scanlon of the 121st Infantry earned a Distinguished Service Cross for knocking out enemy dugouts holding up that regiment's advance. It was, as General Robertson later said, "a corporal's war."

By September 10, the 8th Infantry Division had reached the inner defense line. The 2nd Infantry Division soon followed, while the 29th Infantry Division struggled with strong defenses in its sector. The converging of the attacking divisions pinched out the 8th Infantry Division, which was then sent to clear the nearby Crozon Peninsula of German artillery supporting Brest. Meanwhile, Middleton again sent a surrender ultimatum to General Ramcke. He declined. Middleton ordered an all-out attack.

Both: National Archives

ABOVE: Blindfolded German officers are guided back to their lines after discussing surrender terms with American commanders, September 1944. OPPOSITE: A battery of the 2nd Infantry Division Artillery blasts the German garrison in Brest. The Germans held out for four weeks.

The 2nd and 29th Infantry Divisions did just that. Using everything available to them they struck the enemy strongpoints in their zones. For Gerhardt's 29th, that was Fort Keranroux. The 175th Infantry attacked, led by the 2nd Battalion and Staff Sergeant Sherwood H. Hallman of Company F. When his battalion was halted by a strongly defended enemy position that withstood repeated attacks, Hallman ordered his squad to cover his movements while he advanced alone. He leaped over a hedgerow and into a sunken road, which housed the German defenders.

Firing his carbine and hurling grenades, Hallman faced some 30 Germans and at least one machine gun. He killed four of the enemy and then demanded that the rest surrender. Twelve did so, and Hallman turned these over to his squad. Seeing their comrades surrender, another 75 German troops then gave themselves up; these men had been manning the main defensive position that had delayed the 175th Infantry Regiment.

With the surrender, the battalion was able to advance another 2,000 yards before meeting other resistance; Fort Keranroux was captured later that same day. For his gallant leadership at great personal risk, Hallmann received the Medal of Honor.

The battle continued. British flamethrowing tanks of the 141st Regiment, Royal Armoured Corps were brought up to burn out the more stubborn defenders. Engineers cleared minefields and made paths for tanks to support the infantry. The bloody, bitter fighting continued, each day bringing the Americans closer to capturing the city. Street fighting ensued, and as it did small German garrisons, cut off from the main force, began to surrender.

Over on the Crozon Peninsula, General Stroh's 8th Infantry Division cleared the Germans until only a small group of diehards remained. Supported by the 2nd Ranger Battalion and Task Force A, they attacked the last German position. As they did, General Ramcke sent a message asking to see the credentials of the commanding officer, Brig. Gen. Charles D.W. Canham, the 8th's assistant division commander.

Fed up with Ramcke's stubborn, pointless defense and the cost to his troops, Canham pointed to his exhausted, dirty, unshaven men and said, "These are my credentials." General Ramcke surrendered on September 17.

That ended major combat in Brittany, but not American involvement there. Until the end of the war, American units—first the 94th Infantry Division (Maj. Gen. Harry Maloney) and later the 66th Infantry Division (Maj. Gen. Herman F. Kramer)—spent many frustrating months containing the unsecured French ports at Lorient and St. Nazaire.

The Battle for Brest cost the U.S. Army some 9,831 casualties. Prisoners taken numbered 38,000, including 20,000 combat troops. The 2nd Infantry Division alone had expended 1,750,000 rounds of small arms ammunition and 218,000 rounds of heavy caliber ammunition. All three of the American infantry divisions and the two armored divisions would move to the front lines in eastern France and fight on throughout the war. VIII Corps would be hard hit during the German Ardennes counteroffensive in December.

At the time of its capture, Brest was a totally devastated city. The docks were destroyed. The bridges were destroyed. Most houses were damaged if not destroyed.

After studying the situation and comparing the rapid advances toward Germany, Allied planners decided that Brest was not necessary for Allied logistics. SHAEF decided to abandon plans to develop Lorient, Quiberon Bay, St. Nazaire, and Nantes—a recommendation submitted even before Fort Keranroux fell to the 29th Division.

General Eisenhower, however, thought Brest could still be useful for bringing in troops directly from the United States. In effect, taking Brest was an insurance policy against things going wrong in the future. In September 1944, things were still uncertain, and Brest could still have some value.

About the only positive thing the seizure of Brest accomplished was the elimination of a strong group of aggressive, first-rate enemy soldiers on the Allies' line of communication. At the time, Generals Bradley and Patton felt that Brest was useless, but "when the American Army had once put its hand to the plow, it should not let go," according to Bradley then. Perhaps his 1983 opinion of the matter is more to the point. □

Crewmen of the German submarine *U-47* stand in the conning tower while sailing on the surface in an undated photo. The sinking of the *Royal Oak* took place in the early morning hours of October 14, 1939, when Günther Prien, commander of *U-47*, successfully penetrated Scapa Flow, the Royal Navy's most important home port. OPPOSITE: An artist's computer rendering of the battleship HMS *Royal Oak* lying on its starboard side in 60 feet of water at Scapa Flow, Scotland. Of 1,234 sailors aboard her, 833 died, including 126 "boy sailors."

National Archives

IN OCTOBER 1939, illuminated by the northern lights, the German submarine *U-47* threaded its way through sunken barriers and slipped into the British anchorage at Scapa Flow, a 125.3-square-mile natural port off the northern coast of Scotland, in the Orkney Islands.

Penetrating the anchorage had long been an unrealized German dream, one that U-boats had attempted twice in World War I; both times they had failed. One U-boat had been rammed and run aground and the second destroyed with all hands.

But now, at last, a German submarine slid quietly across its surface.

Ocean Optics, Ltd.

DEATH *by* TORPEDO

BY CHUCK LYONS

THE 1939 SINKING OF THE HMS *ROYAL OAK* AT SCAPA FLOW BY *U-47* CAUSED GRAVE CONCERN WITHIN THE BRITISH ADMIRALTY AND CHANGES IN THE ANCHORAGE.

U-47 and its 31-year-old captain, Günther Prien, moved across the anchorage from the east where they had entered and then turned toward the north, searching for targets. Prien was surprised at how few British ships were in the area.

He had expected hundreds and was unaware that Sir Charles Forbes, commander in chief of the British Home Fleet, had become concerned by German aircraft recently spotted in the area and had ordered most of the fleet to disperse.

Finally, a lookout on *U-47*'s bridge spotted a small cluster of ships including the 1914 battleship *Royal Oak* silhouetted against the northern lights.

Unknown to Prien and the crew of *U-47*, the 29,000-ton *Royal Oak* had just returned to Scapa Flow after a battering from storms in the North Atlantic. Some of her smaller caliber guns had been rendered inoperable by flooding and many of her life rafts had been seriously damaged. Because of her condition, Forbes had decided to keep the *Royal Oak* in Scapa Flow to provide added antiaircraft fire if needed.

In the darkness, *U-47* slid toward the big ship.

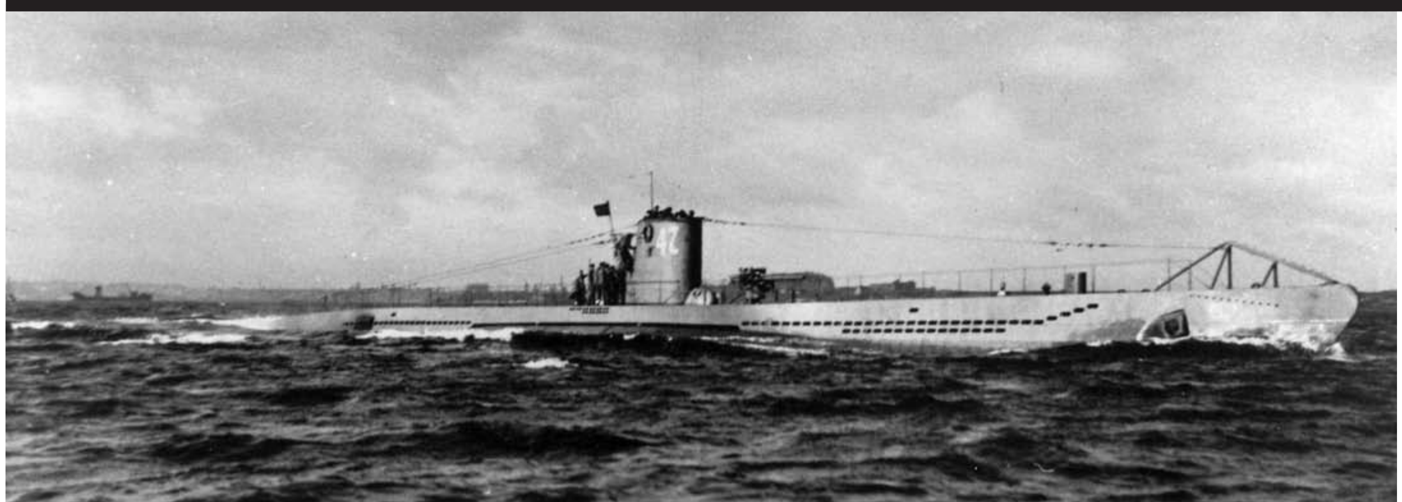
The *Royal Oak*, like Scapa Flow itself, was a veteran of World War I, but by the outbreak of World War II, the 25-year-old ship was no longer considered fit for modern combat. She had been launched in 1914, had seen battle in 1916 at Jutland, and had later served as part of Britain's Atlantic, Home, and Mediterranean Fleets.

At the end of World War I, *Royal Oak* had also served as escort to several German vessels that had surrendered and were interned at Scapa Flow, which had been used by ships since prehistory.

In 1904, in response to the German naval action, British naval planners had decided a northern base was needed to control access to the North Sea. Scapa Flow was chosen, and the area was reinforced with minefields, artillery, and concrete barriers.

Primarily because of its distance from

Both: National Archives



ABOVE: *U-47* on a run. After a number of successful patrols, the U-boat and its crew vanished in March 1941. RIGHT: The *Royal Oak* shown firing its guns during action in World War I. By 1939 it was considered obsolescent, but its sinking was still a propaganda coup for Nazi Germany.

German airfields, Scapa Flow was again selected as a main British naval base when World War II broke out. By then, however, the defenses built earlier and during World War I had fallen into disrepair and new "block ships" were sunk in an attempt to block the Flow's three entrances. Navigable channels remained, however.

German Commander of Submarines Commodore Karl Dönitz, who had commanded a submarine in World War I and who had developed the German Rudeltaktik ("wolf pack") submarine attack tactic while a British POW, decided early in the outbreak of hostilities to attack the Flow.

Such an attack, he realized, could, if successful, force the British Home Fleet out of Scapa Flow, thus lessening the British hold on the area and allowing greater German access to the North Atlantic and the convoys that sailed there with supplies for the United Kingdom.

Such an attack would also be seen as an act of vengeance for the ships of the German High Seas Fleet that had surrendered at the end of World War I and—like those escorted by the *Royal Oak*—had then scuttled themselves in Scapa Flow.

In addition, Dönitz believed, the propaganda value of the attack and its effect on British morale were inestimable. In a single attack, Germany could bring the war to Britain and show the British that even their home waters were not safe from German aggression.

Dönitz was aided in his planning by aerial reconnaissance photographs taken by German aeronautics pioneer Siegfried Knemeyer, who received an Iron Cross for the mission that supplied the photos. (Knemeyer's flight may have been the aircraft that had moved Forbes to scatter the fleet.) Dönitz also handpicked U-boat Kapitänleutnant Günther Prien as commander of the actual attack.

Prien was a loyal member of the Nazi Party and had in fact been called "the most Nazified U-boat captain." He had been at sea in the Merchant Marine and the German Navy since he turned 21 and, by the end of the war, would be credited with sinking or seriously damaging 40 Allied ships. At the time of the Scapa Flow mission, however, he had been in command of U-boats for less than a year. The Scapa Flow attack was only his second patrol of the war.

The proposed raid was scheduled for the night of October 13-14, 1939, when the tides would be high and the night moonless. *U-47* approached the British base a little after midnight through the narrow approaches of Kirk Sound, the most easterly of the three entrances to Scapa Flow.

Staying on the surface, Prien first sailed toward the southeast across the Flow and toward the island of Hoy before realizing a navigational error had the submarine heading toward some dangerous shoals. Prien turned to the north, spotting what appeared to be several ships anchored in that area. (Fifty-one ships—18 of which were combat vessels—were reported to be in Scapa Flow at the time.)

"It was absolutely dead calm in there," Prien later said. "The entire bay was alight because of bright northern lights."

Sailing north between the sunken block ships *Seriano* and *Numidian, U-47* grounded itself temporarily on a cable strung across the channel from the *Seriano* and was briefly caught in the headlights of a taxi onshore, but no alarm was raised in either incident.

As *U-47* moved north, a lookout on the bridge spotted the *Royal Oak* about 4,400 yards to the north and correctly identified the ship as a battleship of the Revenge class. Mostly hidden behind her was a second ship, only the bow of which was visible to *U-47*. (Prien misidentified that second ship as a battlecruiser of the Renown class, but it was later determined to be the World War I seaplane tender *Pegasus*.)

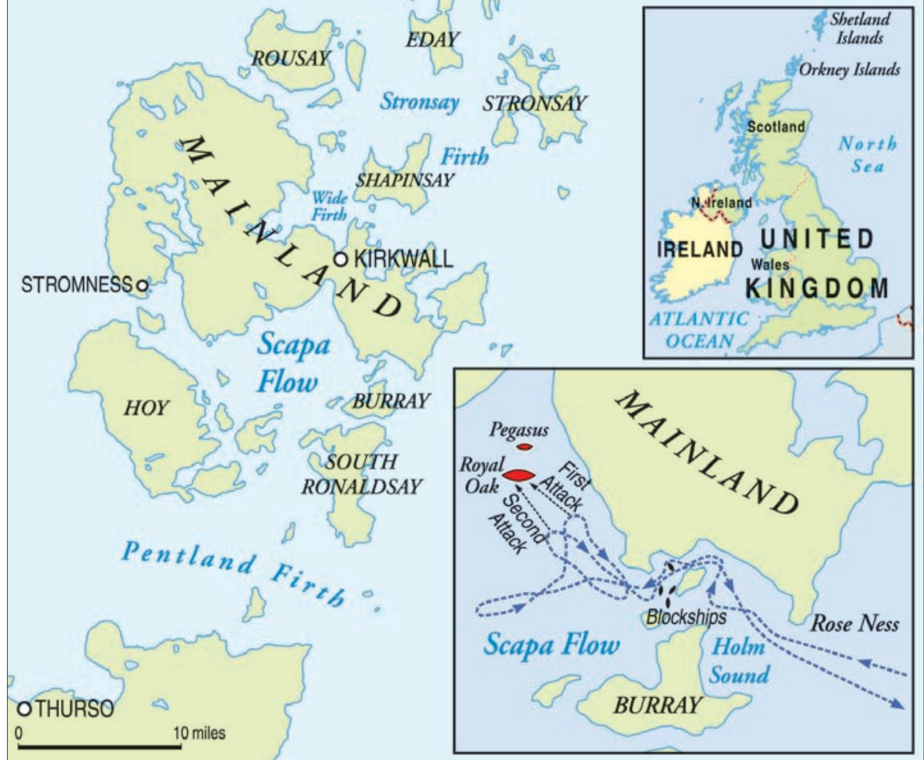
The submarine quietly approached the *Royal Oak* and fired a three-torpedo spread, then turned quickly to escape.

One of the three torpedoes struck the *Royal Oak*'s bow at 12:58 AM, and the dull thud and muffled explosions of its detonation confused the sailors onboard. Most thought the cause was an internal problem on the ship, perhaps in the paint locker. The hit caused little damage other than severing the *Royal Oak*'s starboard anchor chain.

When Prien realized there was no surface or air reaction to his attack, he fired a torpedo from his rear tube, but this torpedo also missed the battleship. He then turned *U-47* back to the north and fired another array of three torpedoes, hitting the *Royal Oak* amidships at 1:06 AM.

"There was a bang and the next moment the *Royal Oak* blew up," Prien said. "The view was indescribable." (Kept secret by the German naval command when it jubilantly announced the attack was that several of the torpedoes fired by Prien failed to strike the *Royal Oak* or to detonate because of long-standing problems with their depth steering and magnetic detonator systems. These problems continued to bedevil the German submariners.)

Map © 2016 Philip Schwartzberg, Meridian Mapping, Minneapolis, MN



During its attack, *U-47* entered—and escaped—through the east of the Scapa Flow anchorage, managing to avoid various antisubmarine defenses and dangerous shoals.

The *Royal Oak* heeled over from the force of the explosions, and its gun barrels shifted with the heel, pulling the ship even more quickly onto her side. All her lights went out as the power failed. Water poured in through the gaping hole in her side and through the hatches, which were all open at the time, standard practice for a ship in port.

Men asleep in their bunks or just lying there were trapped by the speed of the deluge. In minutes the *Royal Oak* was going down, and those few men who had been able to get on deck were in the freezing water swimming through a thick oil slick.

"It was so cold that I was told that it was colder than the inside of a fridge," one survivor later said.

Meanwhile, *U-47* turned away to the east and slipped out of Scapa Flow by the same channel it had used to enter the British anchorage. The *Royal Oak* continued to take on water and finally disappeared below the waves at 1:29 AM, only 13 minutes after *U-47*'s second successful hit.

After the sinking, Prien and his crew reached the German North Sea port of Wilhelmshaven on October 17 and were immediately greeted as heroes. Hitler sent his personal airplane to ferry the crew to Berlin, where each man aboard *U-47* was awarded the Iron Cross Second Class. Prien received the Knight's Cross of the Iron Cross, Germany's highest military award. It was the first time the award had been made to a German submarine officer.

Prien was later nicknamed "the Bull of Scapa Flow," and his crew at one point decorated *U-47* 's conning tower with the painted image of a snorting bull, which later became the emblem of the 7th U-boat Flotilla. Prien also found himself in demand for radio and newspaper interviews, and his autobiography, ghost-written by a German journalist, was published the following year.

Of those men in the water who attempted the half-mile swim to the nearest shore, only a handful survived. Many more were rescued by the tender *Daisy 2*, which had been tied up for the night to *Royal Oak*'s port side.

National Archives

Prien (left) is congratulated by Admiral Karl Dönitz on his successful mission.

When the *Royal Oak* was hit and began to list, *Daisy 2*'s commander, John Gatt, quickly cut his ship clear, snapped on his floodlights, and began picking up survivors, managing to pull 386 men from the cold water, including the *Royal Oak*'s commander, Captain William Benn. Rescue efforts continued until nearly 4 AM.

Out of the *Royal Oak*'s complement of 1,234 men and boys, 833 were killed that night or died later of their injuries. Among that number were 126 "boy sailors," young men under the age of 18 who were stationed on the ship.

"I was a very lucky man [to survive]," said survivor Bert Peacock, who was 17 years old at the time of the attack.

Immediately after the sinking, there was confusion—and sometimes wild speculation—as to what had caused the sinking. It was only when divers descended to the wreck and discovered the remains of a German torpedo that the cause was confirmed as having been a U-boat attack.

That confirmation was nonetheless followed by additional speculation including a rumor that a local German spy had paddled out into Scapa Flow and led the U-boat into the harbor, a rumor that was labeled "nonsense" by the authorities.

Winston Churchill, then First Lord of the Admiralty, announced the attack to the House of Commons, calling it "a remarkable exploit of professional skill and daring"—an indication of the more gentlemanly attitude taken by both sides at that stage of the war.

Six months later, the commander of a German heavy cruiser sank a British destroyer off the coast of Norway, stayed on the scene to rescue 31 British seamen, congratulated them on putting up a good fight, and then recommended the British captain for a Victoria Cross. It is said to be the only time in British history that the award was given on the recommendation of an enemy.

In his announcement to the Commons, Churchill said the sinking of the *Royal Oak* would have only a minor effect on British naval readiness and answered questions including several as to why so many "boy sailors" were aboard the *Royal Oak*.

Three days after the *U-47*attack, four Luftwaffe Junkers Ju-88 bombers also raided Scapa Flow in what was one of the first bombing attacks on Britain during the war. The attack badly damaged the battleship HMS *Iron Duke*, and one German bomber was shot down by an antiaircraft battery during the attack.

There exists an underlying and as yet unresolved mystery about the attack.

When Captain Prien reported on Scapa Flow, he stated that he had sunk the *Royal Oak* and that he had also torpedoed a second ship that night, a ship he identified as the battlecruiser HMS *Repulse*. The *Repulse*, however, had left Scapa Flow earlier in the day. Researchers have suggested that *U-47* may have instead hit HMS *Iron Duke,* the British

Both: Imperial War Museum

ABOVE: The Royal Navy's Atlantic Fleet flagship, HMS *Iron Duke,* may have been damaged by a *U-47* torpedo; it was bombed a few days later by the Luftwaffe. TOP: *U-47* returns to a hero's welcome at Kiel after the attack and is greeted by sailors aboard the cruiser *Emden*, October 17, 1939.

Both: Hoy Orkney

ABOVE: One of several German aerial photos taken of Scapa Flow before the attack. Numbers mark British ships. RIGHT: A crewman of a German Heinkel He-111 looks down on the Lyness Naval Base on the island of Hoy, Orkney Islands, October 18, 1939. German raids caused the British to strengthen their bases and disperse their fleet and facilities.

Atlantic Fleet's flagship, the same ship later attacked by the four Ju-88 bombers. When those planes arrived at Scapa Flow on October 17, the *Iron Duke* already lay beached on Hoy Island and was reported to have a large hole in her bow.

The British Admiralty, however, never confirmed that HMS *Iron Duke* had been hit by a torpedo, possibly because it was considered too sensitive to report that the fleet's flagship had been attacked by a German submarine inside a British anchorage.

A Board of Enquiry held shortly after the *Royal Oak* sinking found that there were 11 possible submarine routes into Scapa Flow still open. It also uncovered information that junior officers at the base had complained that Scapa Flow was not safe but that senior officers had chosen to ignore these views.

Admiral Sir Wilfred French, commander of the Orkney and Shetland Isles, was eventually held responsible for what had happened and was put on the retired list despite his insistence prior to the *Royal Oak* sinking that Scapa Flow needed additional safeguards. History has labeled the blame put on French as "unjust."

In addition, when it became public knowledge that 126 of the 163 "boy sailors" on the ship had been killed—a fatality rate of 77 percent—it became generally accepted in the British Navy that the centuries-old practice of allowing young men under the age of 18 to serve on warships should be discontinued in all but the most exceptional circumstances.

In Germany the raid was celebrated as a triumph, and Commodore Dönitz was promoted to rear admiral. The sinking of the *Royal Oak*, which was the first of the five Royal Navy battleships and battlecruisers sunk in World War II, while having little effect on the naval superiority of the British, did establish, as Admiral Dönitz had envisioned, that the anchorage British planners had considered impregnable was in fact vulnerable, and it gave a solid body blow to British morale. The German Navy had shown it was capable of bringing the war home to Britain.

In the very last days of the war, Dönitz was named the last president of Germany, replacing German Führer Adolph Hitler after the latter killed himself on April 30, 1945.

Scapa Flow, which was capable of holding the entire Grand Fleet, was temporarily abandoned until its defenses could be improved, but it eventually became the main British naval base of the war. New block ships were sunk, booms and mines were placed over the main entrances, coast defenses and antiaircraft batteries were installed, and Churchill ordered the construction of a series of causeways to block the eastern approaches to Scapa Flow. They were built by Italian prisoners of war being held in Orkney.

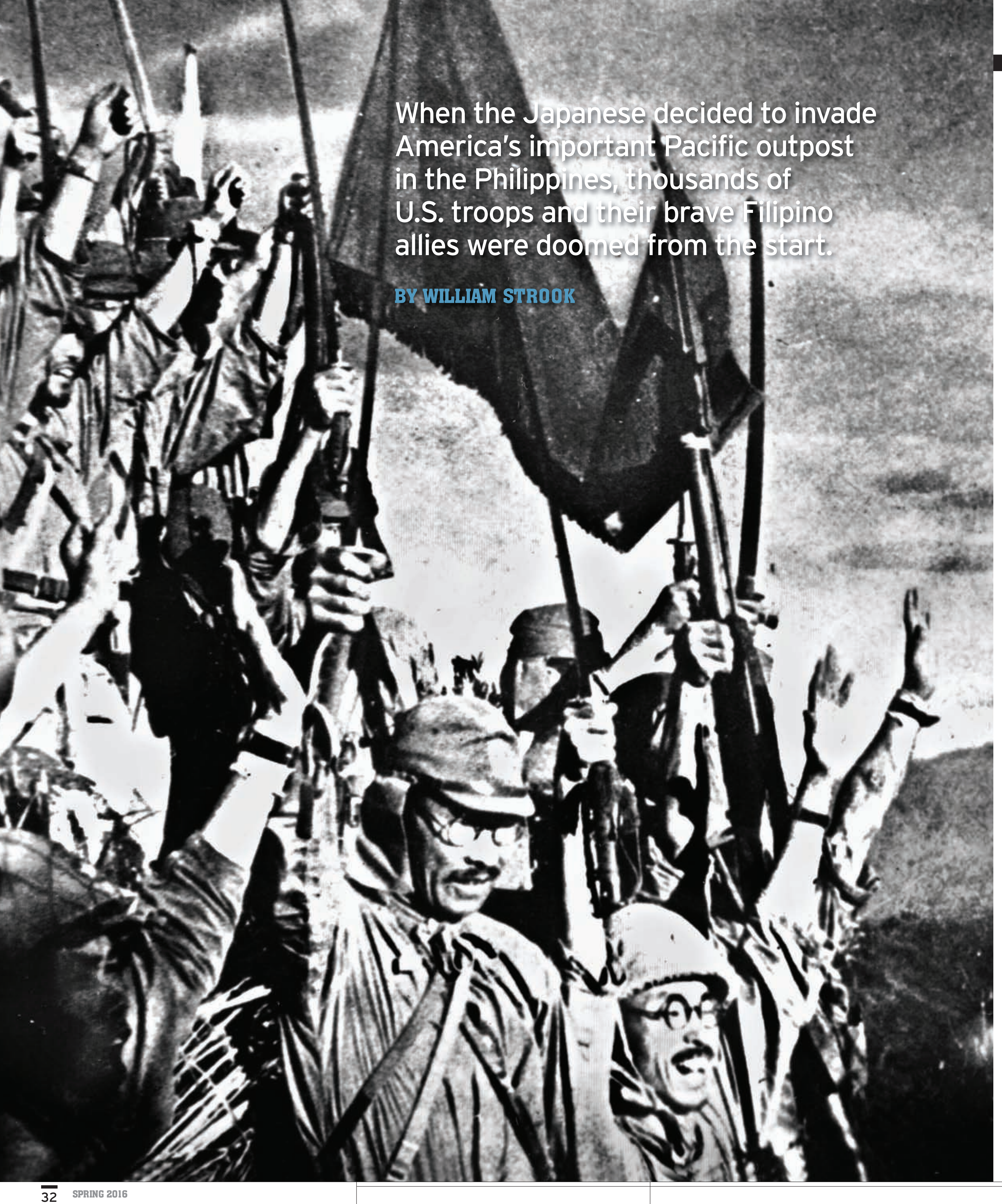
In the months following the attack on the *Royal Oak*, Captain Prien and his crew continued to prove themselves one of Germany's top U-boats. On their sixth patrol in June 1940, for example, they sank eight ships for a total of 51,483 tons of Allied shipping lost.

National Archives

U-47 was last heard from in March 1941.

A radio message was received from her on the morning of March 7, sent from the North Atlantic near the Rockall Banks, west of Scotland. It was her last message. She is presumed to have been sunk there by the British destroyer HMS *Wolverine* and lost with all hands—including her commander, Günther Prien.

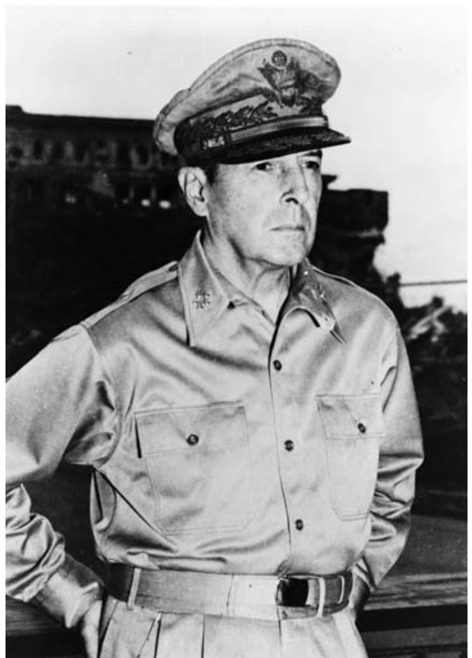
Today the *Royal Oak*, still lying beneath the waters of Scapa Flow, is a recognized war grave, and each year on October 14, a team of Royal Navy divers descends to the wreck. There they fly the Royal Ensign from her overturned hull. □



When the Japanese decided to invade America's important Pacific outpost in the Philippines, thousands of U.S. troops and their brave Filipino allies were doomed from the start.

BY WILLIAM STROOK

“Finally at Corregidor there was only a little crowd of American soldiers and Filipino soldiers and American nurses at the beaches, with nothing at their backs but the waters of the Pacific, and the flag came down. Bataan and Corregidor became symbols, like Valley Forge.”



So wrote a *Yank* magazine correspondent in 1942, shortly after the Philippine Islands fell to the Japanese on May 6. Despite much hope, heroism, and heartbreak, in the end it was numbers that counted more than courage; Japan simply overpowered the brave defenders. It was a disaster unfolding in slow motion. The Japanese seemed unstoppable, unbeatable.

How did this all come about?

First, the backstory. At the outbreak of World War II, the Philippine Commonwealth was an American possession and had been since the end of the Spanish-American War in 1898. Responsibility for defending the islands fell to U.S. Armed Forces in the Far East (USAFFE) and the fledgling Philippine Army under the command of the controversial American General Douglas MacArthur.

On paper, MacArthur’s army looked strong. There were 22,000 American troops in the islands, 12,000 Filipino Scouts (who were part of the American Army), and the 1st Regular Division. There were an additional 10 Filipino reserve divisions of 7,500 men each.

RISING SUN, DESCENDING DARKNESS

Arguably the best unit was the Philippine Division comprising the American 31st Infantry Regiment and the 45th and 57th Filipino Scout Regiments. There were also two tank battalions—the 192nd and the 194th (both National Guard units)—as well as the U.S. 4th Marine Regiment, which had recently arrived from China.

The artillery itself was old; most of the guns dated from World War I or earlier. However, the artillery officers and crews were well trained and highly motivated and during the course of the upcoming campaign would inflict severe losses on the Japanese.

The Japanese juggernaut rolls on. After defeating combined American and Filipino forces on the Bataan Peninsula in the spring of 1942, victorious Japanese troops yell “Banzai!” and raise their arms in celebration on a Philippine hilltop. OPPOSITE: General Douglas MacArthur was directly ordered by President Roosevelt to leave the Philippines to prevent his capture.

Both: National Archives

U.S. Army Art Collection

The army was divided into two important formations, the North Luzon Force, consisting of four divisions under Maj. Gen. Jonathan M. Wainwright IV, and the South Luzon force, two divisions commanded by Maj. Gen. George M. Parker. Another force, Maj. Gen. William Sharp's Visayan-Mindanao Force, was composed of three divisions, almost entirely of Philippine Army soldiers. The air force defending the islands consisted of 35 Boeing B-17 Flying Fortress Bombers, 107 Curtiss P-40 Tomahawk fighters, and scores of outdated planes spread over six Luzon airfields.

Prior to the outbreak of hostilities, American planners correctly assumed that the main Japanese thrust in the Philippines would be directed against Luzon. Under War Plan Orange 3, American and Filipino forces were to hold Manila and Bataan, denying the harbor to the Japanese until reinforcements arrived, which was expected to take six months. Later revisions demanded by MacArthur, under a new plan called Rainbow 5, called for him to hold the entire archipelago, harass Japanese communications, mount air raids against nearby enemy bases on Formosa and in Southeast Asia, and work with the Netherlands and Great Britain to hold off the Japanese. It was an ambitious—and totally impossible—plan.

The American units were, by and large, peacetime garrison troops while, aside from the Scouts, the Philippine troops were inadequately trained. Responsibility for the Filipinos' poor training lay with MacArthur and his staff, who trained recruits in small camps scattered throughout the islands and then sent them home rather than forming them into battalion and regimental cadres.

If MacArthur's training schedule was bad, his vision for defense of the islands was worse.

Upon taking command in 1935, he believed he had until 1946 to build the planned army of 12 divisions and 120,000 men. More naïvely still, MacArthur stated that an invasion could be stopped with a force of 100 bombers and 36 torpedo boats. But American and Filipino troops were poorly armed, undertrained, and led by a general who failed to understand that situation. They would pay dearly.

"The Japs came down from Aparri in the north and Lingayen Gulf in the northwest. They came by the thousands, like an army of ants, and there were not enough defenders to stop them. It was like a knife through cheese, the Japs thought. Easier than China."

The Japanese force tasked with taking the Philippines was not much better. The Fourteenth Army, commanded by General Masaharu Homma, numbered just two divisions supported by one brigade and one regiment—43,000 men in all. Like the Filipinos, these troops were undertrained, poorly armed, and aging. Many were, in fact, Taiwanese.

The Fourteenth Army did enjoy strong air support and a fleet of more than 60 ships, including nine cruisers and two battleships.

On December 8, 1941, the Japanese followed up their successful raid on Pearl Harbor by hitting the Philippines. A Japanese aerial force of 108 bombers and 84 Zero fighters of the 11th Air Fleet attacked Clark and Iba Airfields on Luzon. Because MacArthur had ordered his planes to be armed and fueled for an attack on Formosa, the Japanese found the airfields jammed with B-17s and P-40s. The ensuing attack destroyed 18 of the bombers and 53 fighters and as many as 30 other aircraft. The Japanese lost only seven of their own planes to American interceptors.

The amphibious invasion began with a landing by one regiment of the 16th Division in at Aparri on the north shore and at Vigan on the northwestern coast. A halfhearted response by a half dozen B-17s and their Boeing P-26 Peashooter escorts failed to do any damage to the invasion fleet. Two days later, a brigade of the 16th Division put ashore at Legaspi, far to the south.

These were just preliminary moves meant to establish a beachhead and, if possible, draw American and Filipino forces away from the main landing beaches. But MacArthur would not be fooled and instead concentrated on mobilizing his army and getting his forces into the field.

After the Japanese ships easily sailed through a screen of 21 outdated American submarines, the invasion began in earnest on December 22. The 16th Division landed at Lamon Bay to Manila's southeast, while the 48th Division landed at Lingayen Gulf, 100 miles to the north, a move anticipated by the Americans.

Facing the northern landing force was General Wainwright with the 11th and 71st Infantry Divisions (both Philippine Army) and the 26th Cavalry Regiment (Philippine Scouts). The Japanese easily stormed the beaches, turned the flank of the 11th Division, and advanced inland. The first heavy fighting began later that day as the 26th Cavalry entered the town of Damortis and attempted to block the Japanese advance.

The Japanese, supported by tanks and aircraft, pushed the horse-mounted 26th Cavalry out of Damortis with heavy losses; a morning muster revealed that only 175 men were left out of more than 700. The next day the Japanese moved on Rosario, which was defended by the 71st Division. It took one concerted attack by two infantry battalions and an armored regiment supported from the air to punch through the raw Filipino troops.

On December 22, 2nd Lt. Benjamin Morin's tank platoon of the 192nd Tank Battalion (made up of National Guard members from Illinois, Wisconsin, Ohio, and Kentucky) attacked enemy forces in the first U.S. tank engagement of World War II. With his main gun inoperable, his tank disabled and on fire, the other tanks in his platoon withdrawing, and four enemy tanks bearing down on him and his crew, Morin was forced to surrender himself and his soldiers; those who survived spent the rest of the war in captivity.

By this time MacArthur had decided to fall back to the Bataan Peninsula and ordered the Philippine Division to take up positions there. In an attempt to delay the invaders, Wainwright deployed fresh troops just north of the Agno River. From right to left they were the 21st, 11th, and 91st Divisions. From this position, Wainwright conducted a successful fighting withdrawal.

A two-pronged Japanese attack with two infantry regiments on the right with the other infantry regiment and a tank regiment on the left pushed the Filipino troops behind the Agno River. The next day saw the Japanese press Wainwright hard but, dug in behind the river, the Filipinos held for two days before withdrawing on December 27. By January 1, 1942, American and Filipino forces were concentrated in the towns of Porac and San Fernando, about 15 miles north of Bataan.

While Wainwright's North Luzon force

National Archives

ABOVE: Invasion forces of General Masaharu Homma come ashore against scant opposition in Lingayen Gulf, December 1941. OPPOSITE: A Japanese war artist captured an air attack against American and Filipino installations on December 8, 1941.

was conducting a successful withdrawal, the South Luzon Force, now under the command of Maj. Gen. Albert Jones, was doing the same. On December 24, the Japanese 16th Division landed at Lamon Bay, linked up with units already in Legaspi, and marched north.

These forces were opposed by the 51st Philippine Infantry Division and the 1st Philippine Regiment supported by American elements, including the 192nd Tank Battalion; Jones's South Luzon Force fell back in good order. After the 192nd conducted a successful attack against one of the Japanese tank regiments, the South Luzon Force passed through Manila en route to Bataan.

As American and Filipino forces poured into Bataan, Wainwright fought a holding action just north of the peninsula on a line running from Borac to Guagua. His main units were the battered 11th and 21st Philippine Divisions and the remains of the 194th Tank Battalion, a National Guard outfit from California.

This line held the Japanese for a day before falling back behind a second line just south of Layac defended by the 26th Cavalry, the 31st U.S. Infantry Regiment (which had been formed in the Philippines in 1916), and the 71st Division. On January 6, the Japanese struck this line; the 31st Infantry bore the brunt of the assault and broke. Now on its own, the 26th Cavalry withdrew through the jungle, eventually reaching the safety of the main line of resistance (MLR).

The MLR ran from Abucay on the eastern coast road across the peninsula to Mauban on the west coast. In the center were Mt. Natib and the Bataan Heights. MacArthur divided the peninsula into two zones of responsibility. In the east, along a front of 10 miles, lay II Corps under Maj. Gen. George M. Parker. Parker deployed the 41st and 51st Divisions and the 57th Philippine Scouts farther inland.

On the left was I Corps under Wainwright with the 1st Regular Division (an amalgamation of police and constabulary forces) and the 31st Division defending the beaches along a front of five miles. Garrisoning the south was the 91st Division and the 2nd Regular Division (constabulary).

The island fortress of Corregidor was occupied by the 4th Marine Regiment. The position was indeed strong, but the troops defending it were tired, badly shaken, and pessimistic. Already the supply situation was dire. Brig. Gen. Charles C. Drake, MacArthur's chief quartermaster, estimated the garrison had food for only 20 days, so the troops were immediately put on half rations.

Drake also ordered that the peninsula's wildlife, particularly the water buffalo, be slaughtered and rice procured from local farmers. For a time, Bataan's fishermen were hard at work supplying the defenders, but the Japanese found out and targeted their boats. The men of Bataan and Corregidor now faced starvation.

After occupying Manila, General Homma brought the balance of his forces to the borders of Bataan. Since the Japanese believed the attack on Bataan would meet little resistance, the 48th Division was withdrawn and replaced by the 65th Brigade.

On January 9, the advance began with one reinforced regiment moving down the west coast while another advanced to the east; contact was not made with American and Filipino forces until January 11. There was little action in the west, while in the east the Japanese attack fell on the 41st Division.

All photos: National Archives

ABOVE: Before Japan's invasion, Filipino troops train with a .30-caliber water-cooled machine gun. Inadequately trained, the Filipinos fought bravely but eventually were overrun by the Japanese. BELOW: A Japanese artillery crew blasts American or Filipino positions during jungle fighting on Bataan. OPPOSITE: A U.S. soldier on Bataan, armed with a gasoline-filled "Molotov cocktail," scans the horizon for signs of the enemy, April 1942.

After a preliminary bombardment, Homma's troops advanced across open country, where American artillery blasted the Japanese, sending them back into the jungle. The next day, the Japanese attacked along the coast, hitting the 57th Philippine Scouts. The Scouts decimated the Japanese, who again attacked in the open. One company of Scouts did temporarily lose its positions but counterattacked and retook them.

For a few brief moments, it looked like the defenders might actually stop the invaders. A *Yank* reporter wrote, "[Bataan] was a hot and bloody place. The Japs came down from Aparri in the north and Lingayen Gulf in the northwest. They came by the thousands, like an army of ants, and there were not enough defenders to stop them. It was like a knife through cheese, the Japs thought. Easier than China.

"Then Bataan got up and hit the Japs in the face with the old one-two, the uppercut, the right cross, the hook. The Japs got a GI kick in the teeth and a GI boot in the behind and a GI slap in the puss. That was Bataan."

Ultimately, though, the attack was shifted back to the 41st Division and, after three days, the Filipino lines were finally breached. The Japanese attack shifted inland where it gained ground against the 51st Division. Two regiments, the 51st and 53rd Infantry, took heavy losses and were forced to give, creating a great bulge in Parker's line.

The 51st Division counterattacked on the 16th but was unable to make any headway. Parker sent his reserve—the 31st Infantry and 45th Philippine Scouts—into the fray but, after a week of fierce fighting, they failed to dislodge the Japanese.

After absorbing the American/Filipino counterattack, Homma renewed the offensive. Two regiments pushed east while a third drove south and threatened to turn II Corps' entire flank. As Parker's corps began to disintegrate, MacArthur decided that the main line of resistance would be abandoned in favor of a second line about two miles to the south.

The new, shorter line ran east from

Bagac to Orion. Just before the withdrawal commenced on January 22, Homma sent the 2nd Battalion of the 20th Infantry Regiment on an amphibious flanking maneuver against Bataan's west coast. As luck would have it, the Americans captured a Japanese courier who carried detailed plans of the operation.

As a result, the Japanese first effort—a night landing on Caibobo Point—was intercepted and scattered by a pair of PT boats from Lieutenant John Bulkeley's Motor Torpedo Boat Squadron 3. However, several barges managed to land 600 troops below Caibobo at Quinanuan Point and another 300 men even farther south at Longoskawayan Point.

A two-week battle began during which the Japanese sent a company to reinforce Quinanuan Point. After being strafed by American P-40s, this force, too, landed at the wrong position, Anyasan Point. While all three landings were contained by improvised battalions of Air Corps and Navy personnel armed with .50-caliber machine guns scavenged from wrecked aircraft, the beachheads were not wiped out until a concerted attack was made by the 45th Philippine Scouts, 57th Philippine Scouts, and 194th Tank Battalion. Some of the Japanese on the points took refuge in nearby caves and had to be blasted out by American gunboats.

The failed amphibious attacks were launched in conjunction with a new thrust against Wainwright's front. Initially, the drive by the remainder of the 20th Japanese Infantry Regiment met with some success and penetrated the gap between the 1st Regular and 11th Philippine Army Divisions. However, the regiment became bogged down before dogged resistance and was pulled back by the end of the first week of February.

For the moment at least, the Japanese assault had been stopped. Thinking that he had won a great victory rather than a temporary respite, MacArthur hectored his superiors for a national effort to relieve his isolated outpost. Meanwhile, Washington was desperately trying to get MacArthur to leave the Philippines to avoid giving the Japanese such a high profile prisoner and therefore a propaganda coup.

Attacking with force from the north, and employing amphibious operations along Bataan's west coast, General Homma's Japanese army overwhelmed and isolated U.S. and Filipino units.

Under direct orders from President Franklin D. Roosevelt, on march 15 MacArthur left for Australia, where he took command of all Allied troops.

After MacArthur's departure, Wainwright took overall command. I Corps went to Maj. Gen. Jones while Maj. Gen. Edward King replaced Parker as head of II Corps.

Despite American and Filipino successes in January and February, the situation was dire. American bases in the Philippines were almost totally isolated. Even if the Imperial Japanese Navy could be swept aside, the troops necessary to relieve the Philippines were simply not yet available.

Worse, the army was running out of food; many soldiers were living on 1,000 calories a day. And the men in the trenches suffered from any number of tropical maladies for which the supply of medicine had been exhausted.

While the American and Filipino forces on Bataan withered, Homma replacements for his 16th Division (7,000 men), the better part of the 4th Infantry Division (11,000 men), the Nagano Detachment of the 21st Infantry Division (4,000 men), several batteries of heavy artillery, and 60 bombers based at captured Clark Airfield.

Homma then planned a two-pronged offensive with the 65th Brigade hitting I Corps and the 4th Infantry Division advancing on II Corps. The 16th Infantry Division would follow behind to exploit the expected breakthrough.

The offensive began on April 3, 1942, with a massive artillery barrage supported by bombers, which set ablaze the jungle before the American/Filipino lines. In the center of the II Corps line, the 41st Division collapsed before the onslaught. The Japanese drove south into the southern end of the peninsula and attacked up the sloped of Mt. Samat.

In an attempt to stem the tide, the Philippine Division was split between the two corps with the 45th Infantry staying with I Corps and the 31st Infantry going to support II Corps; the 26th Cavalry remained in reserve. This move could not stop the Japanese, though, who continued to fight their way through disheartened Filipino troops up Mt. Samat and down the reverse slope.

On the 5th, Homma attempted another amphibious landing, this time on the east coast below Lamao. The Americans had one last success. The landing was met by a pair of gunboats that caught the landing barges as they were drifting to shore and sank them.

On the 6th, Wainwright, acting on orders from MacArthur in Australia, ordered II Corps to counterattack and retake Mt. Samat. The halfhearted offensive was easily beaten back by the Japanese and led to the final disintegration of most of the Filipino units, save the Scouts who, with the 31st Infantry, formed a makeshift line way down the peninsula at Cabcaban.

Finally, on April 9, with all hope gone, General King took it upon himself to surrender American forces on Bataan.

Homma now set about the task of taking Corregidor, known as "the Rock." He assembled more than 150 artillery batteries at Bataan and across Manila Bay at Cavite, and with these guns pounded the Rock's defenders unmercifully.

Conceivably, Homma could have starved Corregidor into submission. But Japanese forces had triumphed throughout Asia, at Singapore, at Hong Kong, at Java Sea, and Homma had lost considerable "face" during the long battle for Bataan. A successful storming of Corregidor would rescue his reputation and, it was hoped, be a severe psychological blow to the people of the Philippines.

Besides, how tough could the defenders be after months of siege, minimal rations, and ceaseless bombardment? The Japanese air force, naval assets, and Bataan-based artillery had all combined to pound Corregidor; the above-ground installations known as the Topside and Bottomside Barracks, the Navy fuel depot, and the officers club were blasted into ruins. Wainwright and the headquarters for USAFFE, the Philippine government, and a 1,000-bed hospital had all taken refuge in the island's Malinta Tunnel.

So, rather than starve the defenders Homma planned an amphibious assault led by the 61st Regiment of the 4th Division. On the evening of May 5, American spotters saw the Japanese assembling boats at Mariveles and directed the big coastal guns of Corregidor and Fort Drum to fire on them. Tides then took the landing boats carrying the 61st Infantry Regiment 1,000 yards away from where they were supposed to land and washed them ashore between Cavalry Point and North Point.

Here they were met by Company A of the 4th Marines, which was supported by a pair of 75mm guns that blasted many of the boats out of the water as Marine machine gunners raked the beach.

The Japanese, showing considerable élan and bravery, weathered the cauldron and overran the beach. They quickly stormed across the island to Monkey Point and swept over the defenses to East Point. By 2 AM on May 6, the Japanese had driven west and captured Battery Denver, which overlooked the entrance to the Malinta Tunnel and Water Tank Hill.

The battle for Corregidor hinged on the fighting here, but the outcome was never in doubt. The Marines, and then an ad hoc battalion of Navy and Air Corps personnel, counterattacked the hill despite withering fire from the Japanese, who had taken the high ground at Battery Denver. The desperate fighting lasted until late morning when, fearing what would happen when the Japanese inevitably fought their way inside the crowded Malinta Tunnel, General Wainwright contacted the Japanese to discuss surrender terms.

When Wainwright discussed surrender terms with General Homma, the latter refused to stop the fighting on Corregidor unless the U.S. commander surrendered all American and Filipino troops in the islands.

Fearing such a demand, Wainwright had released the commander of American forces on Mindanao from his authority and thus claimed that he couldn't surrender those troops. Homma was unconvinced and reiterated his previous demand. Fearing for the lives of the 11,000 troops on Corregidor, including the 1,000 sick and wounded in the Malinta Tunnel hospital, Wainwright conceded and ordered all troops in the islands to surrender. He radioed President Roosevelt, saying, "There is a limit of human endurance,

When Wainwright discussed surrender terms with General Homma, the latter refused to stop the fighting on Corregidor unless the U.S. commander surrendered all American and Filipino troops in the islands.

National Archives

Japanese soldiers stand guard over American prisoners of war just prior to the start of the Bataan Death March during which thousands perished. Some 75,000 U.S. and Filipino soldiers were marched 65 miles to POW camps.

and that point has long been passed."

Major General William Sharp's Visayan-Mindanao Force was forced to surrender without having played a role in the campaign. Many of his men, however, escaped into the hinterland to fight as guerrillas.

Some commanders simply refused to lay down their arms. Units still operating in northern Luzon filtered into the jungle where they carried on as guerrillas. On Panay, Colonel Albert F. Christie at first simply refused to surrender, dragging the process out several days. When he finally did formally surrender, most of his troops had fled to the hills.

On Leyte and Samar, too, only a fraction of American and Filipino troops surrendered, the rest choosing guerrilla war instead or simply going home. Five infantry battalions were stationed on the island of Negros, and they refused to comply with orders to surrender, though their commander eventually managed to deliver about half to the Japanese.

General MacArthur did many great things during World War II: the New Guinea campaign, the liberation of the Philippines, his masterful statesmanship when administering Japan. But his actions in the Philippines are indefensible.

From the moment he took command, he mismanaged the training of the Filipino army by trying to forge an American-style field force to defend an island archipelago split by hundreds of languages and dialects.

Critics have said that MacArthur should have trained the Philippine Army to fight as highly mobile, semi-independent battalions that, upon a Japanese landing, would march to the sound of the guns, hold and harass the enemy. Only when the enemy had been bloodied and slowed would a main force, the Philippine Division, for example, be moved in for pitched battle.

Unfortunately, on the first day of the war MacArthur badly mishandled his air force, allowing invaluable B-17s and still useful P-40s to be caught on the tarmac by Japanese raiders. Instead of pinning his hopes on a single air raid against Formosa, MacArthur should have sent his B-17s south to Del Monte and employed them only when the Japanese fleet entered the archipelago.

Interestingly, his ideas for the defense of the waterways between the islands—a fleet of PT boats supported by fighters and bombers—were sound so long as they were backed

Both: National Archives

ABOVE: Two unidentified American officers are escorted to a surrender ceremony on the Bataan Peninsula. BELOW: Japanese tanks roll past government buildings in the now-occupied capital of Manila.

up by gunboats and fast frigates. This was exactly the kind of force that disrupted General Homma's amphibious landings on Bataan.

The fighting retreat to Bataan was well executed, as was the actual defense of the peninsula. However, the credit must go to General Wainwright, who deftly managed a series of phased withdrawals from Lingayen Gulf, held open the door to the peninsula, and turned back the initial Japanese assault.

MacArthur is rightly criticized for staying in the Malinta Tunnel during the battle, but his biggest mistake was keeping the 4th Marines on Corregidor. This well-trained and veteran unit could have been used as a force reserve on Bataan.

In fact, during the February lull in the fighting, the 4th Marines could have been used to deadly effect in a series of local counterattacks against the tired Japanese. General Homma later testified that a concerted counterattack would not only have destroyed his army, but could even have liberated Manila as well.

While such an operation ultimately would have been futile, it does illustrate the overall weakness of Japanese forces and show that a counterattack by the 4th Marines could have been devastating. But hindsight is always perfect.

The campaign was relatively costly for both sides, who lost a nearly equal number of men. Wainwright, who would be imprisoned in Formosa and Manchuria for the remainder of the war, lost approximately 800 killed, 1,000 wounded, and 11,000 captured; Japanese losses numbered 900 killed and 1,200 wounded. Many of Wainwright's men were taken to prison camps around the Philippines, while others were used as slave laborers throughout the Japanese Empire.

The Philippines remained under Japanese control until 1945. A few hours after his troops landed on the shores of Leyte on October 20, 1944, to begin the Allied campaign of liberation, General MacArthur waded ashore and made a radio broadcast in which he declared, "People of the Philippines, I have returned!"

In January 1945, American forces invaded the main Philippine island of Luzon, and in February Japanese forces at Bataan were cut off and Corregidor was retaken. The capital of Manila was liberated after hard fighting in March; in June MacArthur announced that his offensive operations to liberate the Philippines were at an end.

In truth, though, nothing could have saved the Philippines in 1942. The archipelago was a lonely outpost close to Japan and far from the United States. The thousands of American troops and their Filipino allies were doomed from the start. □

Supreme Allied Commander General Dwight D. Eisenhower recalled, "The battlefield at Falaise was unquestionably one of the greatest killing fields of any of the war areas. Forty-eight hours after the closing of the gap, I was conducted through it on foot, to encounter scenes that could only be described by Dante. It was literally possible to walk for hundreds of yards at a time stepping on nothing but dead and decaying flesh."

Royal Air Force liaison officer and 12th SS Panzer Division, was struck by shrapnel as his truck slowly crept along the Falaise road, making it an inviting target for Allied artillery and fighter-bombers. "Then I saw that the whole column was on fire," he said. "Everybody was running."

This was the slaughter within the Falaise Pocket.

It began with the German Army's thrust to the west toward Avranches in early August 1944 that surely ranks as one of the most ill-conceived military moves of all

INCOMPLETE VICTORY AT FALAISE

The Allies' pounding of the German army trapped at Falaise in the summer of 1944 was unmerciful, but the victory could have been much more complete. **BY JON DIAMOND**

Group Captain Desmond Scott similarly noted, "The roads were choked with wreckage and the swollen bodies of men and horses. Bits of uniform were plastered to shattered tanks and trucks and human remains hung in grotesque shapes on the blackened hedgerows.... Strangely enough, it was the shape of the horses that upset me most. Harnessed as they were, it had been impossible for them to escape, and they lay dead in tangled heaps, their large wide eyes crying out to me in anguish."

Some of the enemy did manage to escape, but not unscathed. Lieutenant Walter Kruger, a signals officer retreating with the time. Many analysts agree that Hitler should have pulled his formations in France back toward the German border in an orderly fashion rather than shoving them forward toward Mortain to create a salient where they could be isolated, surrounded, and chopped to pieces—which is exactly what happened in the Falaise Pocket.

But, by the summer of 1944, Hitler's previously astute military mind had deteriorated. The man who once considered himself a military genius—on par with Napoleon and far superior to any of his generals or field marshals—now saw his armies crumbling in the east, in the west,

Imperial War Museum

A dead German soldier and a knocked-out Panzer V Panther Ausf. D, both from the 12th SS Panzer Division "Hitlerjugend," lie in the rubble-strewn streets of St. Lambert-sur-Dives, August 1944; the building on the right is the town hall. Caught in the "Falaise Pocket," thousands of Germans died or were captured, but Allied bungling allowed thousands more to escape to fight another day.

National Archives

ABOVE: Artillerymen from the 12th SS Panzer Division "Hitlerjugend" fire a 75mm PAK 40 antitank gun at Allied soldiers. TOP: Attempting to avoid Allied warplanes that ruled the skies, heavily camouflaged German vehicles pass through a small French village in August 1944.

and in the south.

How did the Allies, after almost nine weeks of desperate combat in the Normandy hedgerows or before the tenacious Nazi defenses at Caen, find themselves poised to inflict a devastating and final blow on the reeling German forces in Normandy, an attack that ended on August 21, 1944? And how was that "final blow" missed with so many Germans allowed to escape to fight another day?

Operation Cobra initiated the American breakout from the Norman hedgerows on July 25, resulting in the start of a fluid offensive with the capture of Avranches five days later. The British and Canadian forces of British Field Marshal Bernard L. Montgomery's 21st Army Group eventually took Caen on July 9; however, the southern part of the city and the entrance to the Falaise plain were still under German control despite attacks by Montgomery's forces throughout the entire month of July.

On August 1, Lt. Gen. George S. Patton's Third Army became operational, was brought to France, and attacked through the Avranches gap into Brittany and southward toward the River Loire.

Two days later, on August 3, Hitler ordered Field Marshal Günther von Kluge, the Commander-in-Chief West (as well as Army Group B commander after Field Marshal Erwin Rommel was wounded on July 17 and sent back to Germany), to launch a counterattack against Patton's army.

Kluge had a formidable force at his disposal, including the German Seventh Army commanded by SS-Obergruppenführer Paul Hausser, while the Fifth Panzer Army, with hundreds of tanks, was led by General Heinrich Eberbach.

Kluge planned to mount a heavy, single-pronged counterattack—Operation Lüttich—against Patton's forces with at least four panzer divisions comprising SS-Obergruppenführer Willi Bittrich's II SS Panzer Corps.

This counterattack began east of Mortain and drove westward toward Avranches in an attempt to envelop Patton's forces and establish Avranches as the western flank anchor for a new continuous defensive line. Hitler conceived this attack as a springboard that would then thrust German armored forces northward into the rear of General Courtney Hodges' U.S. First Army and, according to Hitler, "drive them into the sea."

According to Hitler, "The decision in the Battle of France depends on the success of the Avranches attack. [Kluge] has a unique opportunity, which will never return, to drive into an extremely exposed enemy area and thereby to change the situation completely." The Führer further reasoned that this offensive would cut off Patton's Third Army from its logistical tail, allowing the Wehrmacht to crush the anticipated

encircled forces to the south.

But, on August 5, Maj. Gen. Wade Haislip's U.S. XV Corps, part of Patton's Third Army, pushed through the gap at Avranches and turned southeast to Le Mans, where Hausser's German Seventh Army headquarters was situated. The XV Corps was now in the rear of the German Seventh Army.

What became known as the Battle of the Falaise Pocket was a true example of the Allies fighting as a coalition. Apart from the initial landings at the five Normandy beaches on June 6, this final phase of the conflict in Normandy most closely brought American, British, Canadian, Polish, and Free French soldiers together in operational terms.

The Canadian First Army, commanded by Lt. Gen. Henry D.G. Crerar, would play a major role in the upcoming battle. Crerar had led the Canadian I Corps in Italy in the late winter of 1943-1944 before taking over as commander of the Canadian First Army.

Subordinate to him was Lt. Gen. Guy G. Simonds, commander of the Canadian II Corps, composed of the 2nd and 3rd Canadian Infantry Divisions, and the inexperienced Canadian 4th Armoured Division, commanded by Maj. Gen. George Kitching, along with the 2nd Canadian Armoured Brigade.

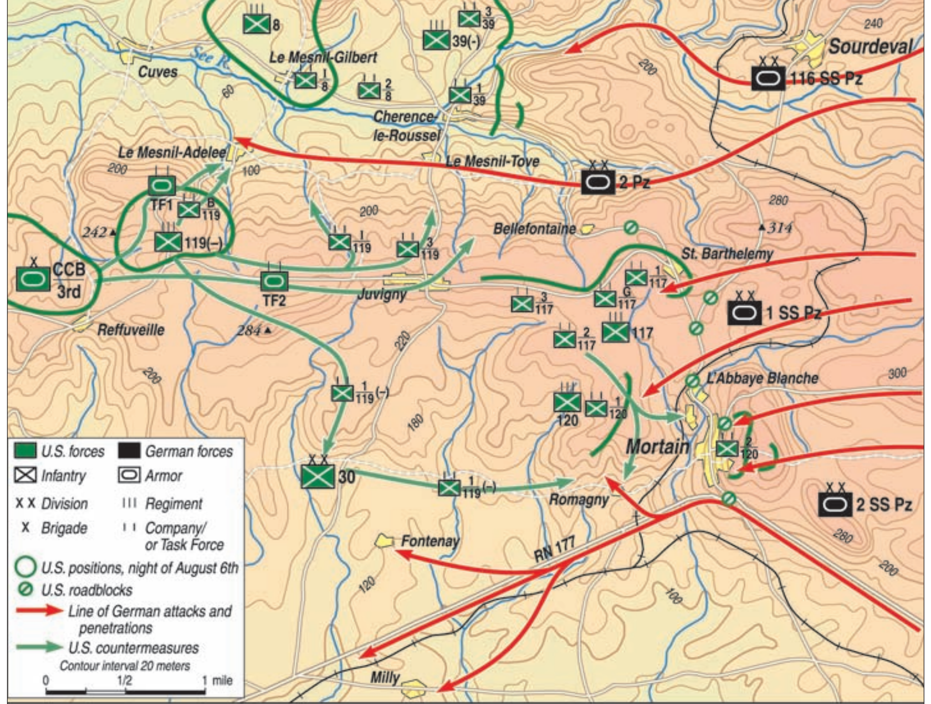
Additionally, Simonds would be in charge of two units on loan from British I Corps to reinforce the Canadians: the 51st (Highland) Infantry Division and the 33rd (British) Armoured Brigade.

Finally, Simonds would count within his corps the 1st Polish Armoured Division under Maj. Gen. Stanislaw Maczek. About 24,000 Polish soldiers reached Great Britain in mid-1940. They were soon reinforced by volunteers from Polish expatriate communities worldwide.

Maczek was an experienced soldier, having served during both World War I and the Polish-Soviet conflict of 1918-1920, but he had no experience in armored warfare when he took over the 1st Polish Armoured Division.

These foreign fighters were reorganized into the I Polish Corps and based in Scotland. Initially, the 1st Polish Armoured Division consisted of two armored brigades, each with

Map © 2016 Philip Schwartzberg, Meridian Mapping, Minneapolis, MN



Hitler launched an ill-advised counterattack toward Mortain in hope of being able to stem the Allied tide; all it did was cost him men and equipment he could not afford to lose.

National Archives

Architects of the Allies' Operation Cobra, the breakout from the Normandy beachhead: General Dwight D. Eisenhower (left), Field Marshal Bernard L. Montgomery, and Lt. Gen. Omar N. Bradley.

six tank battalions comprising the 10th Motorized Cavalry Brigade and the 16th Armoured Brigade, along with a motorized infantry battalion taken from the Independent Highland Rifle Brigade. This unit, after reconnaissance and normal divisional administrative components were added, was ready for collective, inter-unit battle training in early 1943 in eastern England.

However, after readjusting its units' composition to adhere to Britain's new structure for armored divisions, the 1st Polish Armoured Division had only one armored brigade with an infantry brigade serving as its other major combat component with a total complement of 885 officers and about 15,000 other ranks.

This division was made up of the 10th Armoured Cavalry Brigade, the 1st, 2nd, and 24th Lancers Armoured Battalions, and the 10th Dragoons, a mechanized infantry battalion. The infantry brigade—the 3rd Rifle Brigade—in this division was comprised of the Highland (Podhalan) Rifles and the 8th and 9th Rifle Battalions. The 10th Mounted Rifle Battalion was to serve as the reconnaissance unit for the division.

The armored division possessed 350 tanks, 48 artillery howitzers, 48 medium and heavy antitank guns, and 54 medium antiaircraft guns. Although the division did not participate in the Normandy landings, elements of it began landing in France on

July 30, eager to engage the Nazis after a four-year interval of migration, refitting, and training.

The Poles were eager to pay back the Germans for ravaging their country. Their wish would soon become reality during Operation Totalize. Simonds' II Canadian Corps was about to launch from the eastern portion of the Normandy lodgement toward Falaise to the south against Kluge's armored divisions.

On August 6, Montgomery pressed his 21st Army Group commanders in the field south of Caen to push for Falaise; the next day Operation Totalize was launched by Simonds' II Corps after a heavy aerial bombing of German defenses south of Caen beginning at 11 PM on August 7.

Simonds' 600 tanks advanced down both sides of the Caen-Falaise road toward Falaise, 15 miles away. The timing of the Canadian attack was accidental as it related to the Mortain counterattack. Coming 24 hours after the unexpected German westward attack toward Avranches, the Canadian effort, in preparation for almost a week, had been launched in an entirely different context, with Montgomery focusing on trapping the Germans west of the Seine River.

For Totalize, Simonds implemented some innovations in his tactical repertoire since previous British attacks, notably Operation Goodwood, down the Caen-Falaise road, had been stopped by heavy German antitank fire once British armored forces were in the open countryside. Simonds' offensive would be launched at night and without a preparatory artillery barrage to conceal his movement.

It was Simonds' expectation that tanks and mobile infantry would breach the initial German defense line, leaving the marching infantry to "mop up" any enemy pockets that were bypassed in the armored assault.

Finally, Simonds would employ RAF night bombers to lay a carpet of bombs along the battlefield's flanks and front on the night of the attack, with American heavy and medium strategic bombers repeating the tactic in the breakout phase.

Imperial War Museum

ABOVE: In a still frame from gun-camera footage, a rocket fired from a British Hawker Typhoon streaks toward a German convoy trying to escape the Falaise-Argentan gap near Livarot. OPPOSITE: Confined to narrow country lanes, fleeing German convoys were easy pickings for Allied warplanes. Here smoke and flames arise as Allied rockets and bombs hammer German escape routes.

From August 8-14, the U.S. IX Tactical Air Command flew over 4,000 sorties into the pocket, while their British counterparts flew 1,500. On several occasions the Allied fighter-bombers over the pocket were almost competing for airspace.

The aerial assault of more than 1,000 RAF Bomber Command aircraft targeted the area between May-sur-Orne and Fontenay-le-Marmion on the right, or western, flank and La Hogue and Mare de Magne to the left, or eastern, flank.

Facing Simonds' attack was the German 89th Infantry Division, which was shattered by the aerial bombardment. The 51st (Highland) Division, supported by the 33rd (British) Armoured Brigade, took La Hogue, Tilly La Campagne, and Secqueville la Campagne on the left flank. On the right flank, the French villages had likewise been taken by midday on August 8 with II Canadian Corps' new tactics.

However, on that day an American Eighth Air Force bomber attack accidentally hit Canadian, British, and Polish troops, causing more than 300 casualties.

As the Allies began to move forward again, German Tiger tanks and 88mm anti-tank/antiaircraft guns of Standartenführer Kurt Meyer's 12th SS Panzer Division "Hitler Jugend" took their toll on Allied armor.

Terrific tank-versus-tank battles occurred on August 8, but Simonds' II Corps had reached a standstill and could not penetrate German defenses farther in its southward advance toward Falaise. The Polish 2nd Armoured Battalion of the 10th Armoured Cavalry Brigade lost about two-thirds of its M-4 Sherman tanks during the German attack.

The 24th Polish Lancers Armoured Battalion also incurred heavy tank losses to German artillery and Tiger tank fire. By the end of the day, the Canadians and Poles had created about a six-mile salient but had been stopped by German firepower more than 12 miles north of Falaise.

During the night of August 8-9, elements of SS Oberstgruppenführer Joseph "Sepp" Dietrich's I SS Panzer Corps, along with some survivors from the previously bombed

German 89th Infantry Division, reinforced a partially built new defensive line to the east of the Caen-Falaise road. Other infantry units from the German 85th Division also started to arrive from the German Fifteenth Army.

During the early hours of August 9, the Canadians and Poles again commenced a nighttime assault, but it failed when Canadian armor and infantry from the 28th Armoured and Algonquin Regiments, respectively, got in the Poles' way and arrived at Point 140, the Polish objective.

As a result of Canadian forces being in accidental proximity to a new German line under construction, Meyer unleashed his 12th SS Panzer Division "Hitler Jugend" and assorted units of SS and Wehrmacht infantry, which forced the Canadians to withdraw after losing about 50 tanks and suffering more than 200 casualties.

Although Meyer's panzer force was severely depleted of armored vehicles after the fighting at Caen, it was still capable of fielding more than 100 88mm and 75mm antitank guns, which halted the renewed Canadian advance at dawn on August 9 and stopped the Polish armor from advancing into the villages in the vicinity of the new German line. Meyer's tanks and antitank guns were effective at countering every Canadian armored thrust that day.

Simonds' approximately 600 tanks at the start of Operation Totalize, among his two untested armored divisions, had failed to breach this new German defensive line, which had only 35 panzers of all types by August 10.

Simonds halted Totalize and defended his gains with his infantry divisions, while the Canadian, British, and Polish armor was pulled back to await new orders.

Simonds believed that a lack of drive and the inexperience of his two armored divisions were the most decisive factors in explaining the operation's failure. Despite the tenacity of the Germans in their defensive posture, Totalize did, however, maul the Wehrmacht and SS formations, leaving their positions critically weakened.

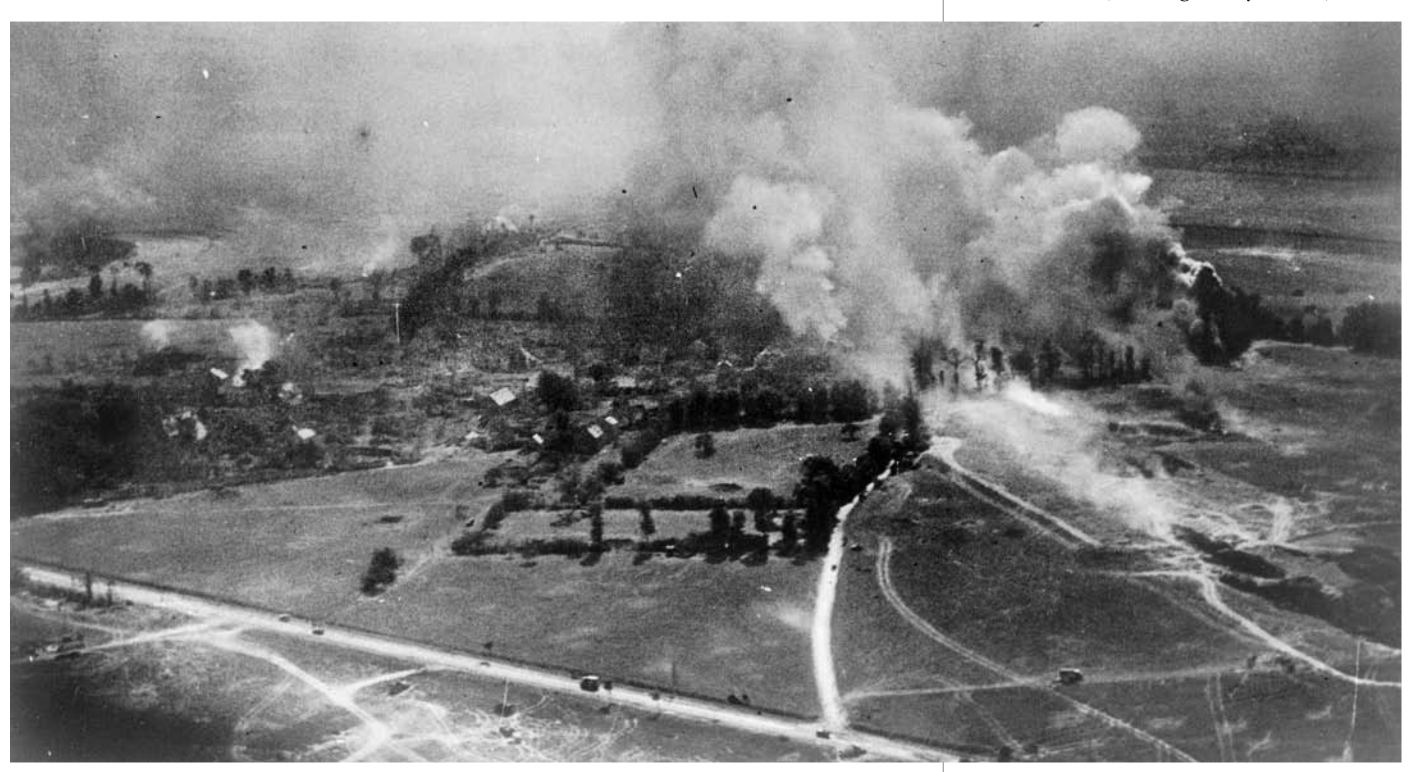
When Operation Totalize ended on August 11, the II Canadian Corps had advanced almost nine miles toward its objective of Falaise but was still bogged down several miles north of the town in the Caen-Falaise corridor.

On the 11th, Montgomery issued a new directive to close the narrowing gap that the Germans were attempting to exploit in the area between Falaise and Argentan. He ordered Crerar to move his First Canadian Army south and link up with the advancing Americans to ensnare as many Germans as possible. This became Operation Tractable.

For Tractable, during which Simonds was to make his thrust down the N158—the Caen-Falaise road—a series of feints were conducted to the west of the road on August 12 and 13; however, these failed when the plans for the movements were discovered by the Germans on the body of a dead Canadian officer.

On the night of August 12-13, Falaise was heavily bombed by Allied planes and completely flattened. The next day Montgomery was still optimistic that Crerar's forces could move swiftly through Falaise to Argentan. The cause for Montgomery's optimism was somewhat specious since he believed that Crerar's army had performed poorly; however, no attempts were made to alter the plan or the Anglo-Canadian-Polish forces involved.

Nonetheless, Montgomery stated, "If we



National Archives

American infantry and Sherman tanks advance across an open field in Normandy. The soldier at right is watching Allied warplanes coming in for a strafing run.

can close the gap completely ... we shall have put the enemy in the most awkward predicament." Thus, the prospect of a quicker encirclement in the Falaise-Argentan area caused the Allies to suspend Montgomery's drive for the Seine. However, Monty still held out the possibility of a wider encirclement of German forces toward the Seine should the Germans continue to attempt to escape eastward.

Kluge's Operation Lüttich, which had begun on August 7, made some significant initial gains against Maj. Gen. J. Lawton Collins' VII Corps on the U.S. First Army front. Mortain was overrun, but the German offensive was halted later on its first day by stiff American resistance from Maj. Gen. Leland S. Hobbs' 30th Infantry Division, defending the important height of Hill 317 to the south of Mortain, and by tactical air support.

Further German attacks over the next few days failed to give Hitler his desired breakthrough. Hitler intensified this flawed westward movement when he dismissed Kluge's plea for an orderly eastward withdrawal and ordered Eberbach to take command of an ad hoc formation, Panzer Group Eberbach, with the Führer's order to drive to the southwest and then to move northwestward to the sea. Fifth Panzer Army would be turned over to Dietrich.

Eventually, the panzer forces were driven back. With the failure of Operation Lüttich to capture Avranches, Lt. Gen. Omar N. Bradley, commander of the U.S. 12th Army Group, saw that Hitler had exposed his whole broad flank to attack and encirclement from the south and recognized this as an opportunity to decimate a large percentage of the German Seventh Army and Fifth Panzer Army in Normandy.

Bradley, concluding that Kluge had committed strategic suicide, said, "This is an opportunity that comes to a commander not more than once in a century. We're about to destroy an entire hostile army and go all the way from here to the German border."

On maps it appeared that the Germans were trying to head eastward through the 13-mile gap between Falaise and Argentan. If XV Corps now moved northward from Le Mans through Alençon, Bradley saw, the German Seventh and Fifth Panzer Armies would be trapped as long as Crerar's First Canadian First Army could continue its southward movement into Falaise first, and then Argentan, thereby forming the northern jaw of the pincer strategy.

Concurrent with this move, American forces not committed to the clearing of Brittany would move northward toward Falaise, thus completing the envelopment of the Germans. As Bradley concentrated American forces near Mortain to maintain possession of Avranches, he conceived an envelopment that would trap the bulk of Kluge's armies in eastern Normandy.

On August 8, Bradley discussed with Eisenhower the opportunity offered by the Germans' Mortain counterattack. Bradley was in favor of implementing the simpler tactic of turning Haislip's XV Corps north from Le Mans. Instead of heading eastward for the Seine to start the larger envelopment that Montgomery favored, Bradley wanted a "shallower and surer movement" aimed at the exposed German flank that had moved east to attack Mortain.

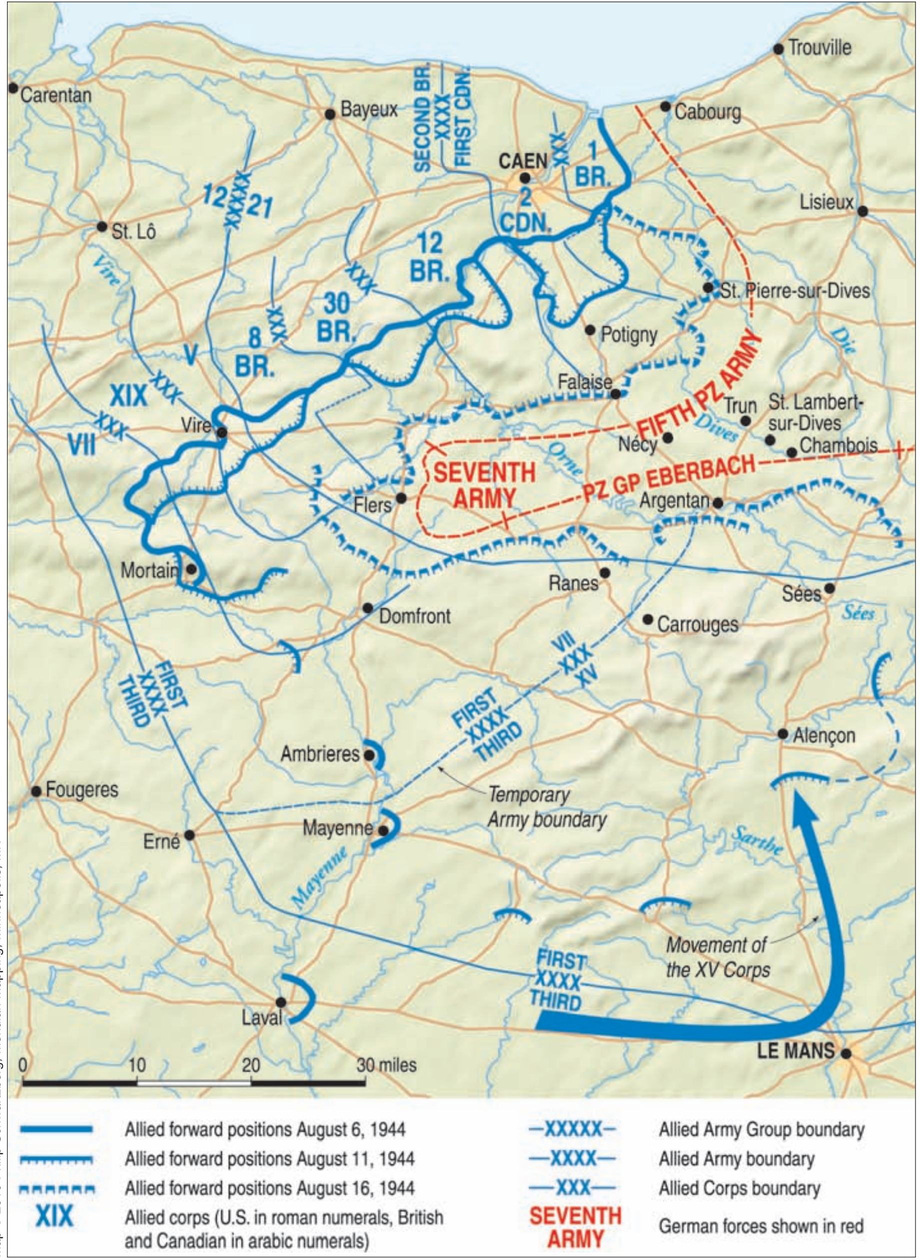
With this shorter envelopment, once the Canadians reached Falaise and then continued southeast to Argentan the meeting of the Allies would cut off the escape route of an estimated 21 German divisions. Bradley, in Eisenhower's presence, notified Montgomery to secure his approval for a change in plan.

Bradley proposed that XV Corps pivot north from Le Mans toward Alençon, where

U.S. infantry and armor would threaten the flank of Kluge's counterattacking forces and also form the southern jaw of the proposed pincer movement and finish off the majority of the German Army in France. It was an audacious, heady possibility, and Monty agreed.

Haislip's XV Corps—composed of the U.S. 5th Armored Division, the 79th and 90th Infantry Divisions, and Maj. Gen. Jacques Leclerc's French 2nd Armored Division—took Le Mans on August 9 and the following day jumped off to the north to begin the pincer movement against the Germans. The area within which Kluge's German forces would be encircled would be known as the Falaise Pocket.

Opposing Haislip's move against Alençon were elements of two German divisions, the 708th Infantry and 9th Panzer. However, one of 9th Panzer's Panther tank battalions had temporarily been sent to support the defense of Falaise and the 708th Infantry Division was not at full strength, having been previously mauled by the U.S. 90th Infantry Division.



Map © 2016 Philip Schwartzberg, Meridian Mapping, Minneapolis, MN

With the German Seventh Army's counterattack toward Mortain stopped, a dangerous salient was created that was pinched off by the Americans driving north and the British/Canadians/Poles heading to the south, August 16-20.

Due to the fluidity of the battlefield as a result of the Germans' failed Mortain counterattack, Montgomery analyzed on August 11 the consequences of the anticipated juncture of the American and Canadian-Polish forces. He came to the conclusion that Kluge would mass stronger German forces to defend Alençon rather than Falaise.

Extending this line of reasoning, Montgomery believed that Simonds' Canadian II Corps would make speedier progress and reach Argentan from the north before XV Corps could arrive from the south. Montgomery therefore ordered Simonds to continue his efforts to take Falaise and then head for Argentan.

Montgomery had drawn a boundary line that separated the zones of operation of Bradley's American 12th Army Group and his own 21st Army Group. This meant that XV Corps was to advance through Alençon and go no farther north than the army group boundary just south of Argentan.

Historian Martin Blumenson said, "[Montgomery] projected a meeting of Canadian and American forces just south of Argentan, which would form a literal encirclement of the Germans. The British Second Army and the First U.S. Army, pressing from the west, were to herd the Germans into the Canadian-American line and assist in the total destruction of the surrounded enemy forces. Should the Germans somehow evade encirclement at Argentan, Montgomery was ready with an alternate plan: the Allies were to reinstate the drive earlier projected to the Seine."

Therefore, as of August 11, Montgomery's strategic thinking had also involved a larger, more westward envelopment at the River Seine.

By nightfall on August 11, Hitler had approved Kluge's request to make a minor withdrawal from Mortain to defend Alençon. But Haislip had already reached Alençon and there had clashed with the 9th Panzer Division. Allied planes and tanks had reduced that division to a battalion of

infantry, a battalion of artillery, and only a dozen tanks.

The XV Corps captured Argentan on August 12, after overcoming both German infantry and panzer opposition, and Haislip reported to Patton that he had taken Argentan with his two armored and two infantry divisions and was ready to move north to meet the Canadians; Patton, disregarding the boundary line, told him to push on "slowly" in the direction of Falaise. The American and French forces were now just over 12 miles south of Argentan, while the Canadians, Poles, and British troops were about 22 miles north of it.

Seeing no Canadians in the vicinity, Haislip asked Patton for authority to proceed north across the army boundary line in Argentan. Since the Canadians had made little progress toward Falaise due to strong enemy opposition, Patton allowed Haislip to "push on slowly in the direction of Falaise."

An almost 35-mile-wide corridor still existed for Kluge's armies to escape through, but instead of rushing to seal off this corridor both Bradley and Montgomery made decisions that would baffle historians.

As XV Corps patrols slowly reconnoitered north of Argentan on August 13, Haislip notified Patton that he believed he could hold the southern shoulder of the pincer between Alençon and Argentan—less than 15 miles south of Falaise.

Seeing a gap that desperately needed to be closed, Patton asked Bradley's permission to allow Haislip to continue northward, but Bradley refused Patton's request when the latter flippantly inquired, "Should he [Haislip] now continue and drive the British into the sea for another Dunkirk?"

On August 13, Bradley, with Eisenhower's approval, gave Patton a stop order: Third Army was not to move north of Argentan on the basis of previously arranged army boundaries. This left the Germans, although overextended and vulnerable to entrapment, with only the escape route to the east still open.

Bradley then received word that Patton had disregarded his instructions and had sent Haislip's patrols on past the stop line at Argentan; the patrols had gone eight miles north of Argentan to within six miles of Falaise.

Angrily, Bradley not only reiterated his stop order to prevent any movement north of the line, but many sources claim that he also recalled Haislip's reconnoitering forces to Argentan.

A near apoplectic Patton could not believe the rationale for the stop order, namely, Bradley's stressing the "need to avoid collision between Americans and Canadians ... potentially prompting accidental gunfire against each other."

Newer boundary lines could have been drawn before any friendly gunfire was exchanged between the Allied units. Additionally, Bradley informed Patton that he was also reluctant to move north of Argentan since he wanted the Third Army forces to reinforce the southern shoulder because he believed that Kluge's German divisions were in the process of pulling out of their Mortain salient.

Finally, in regard to the stop order, Patton insisted that Bradley's headquarters staff (in Bradley's absence) contact Montgomery's chief of staff, Freddy Guingand, requesting permission from the field marshal, the Allied Land Forces commander, for Patton to push north. Answering for Montgomery, de Guingand gave a negative reply.

The rationale for why Bradley did not allow Patton to let XV Corps continue north and seal the Falaise-Argentan pocket has been debated ever since. The decision lost what most historians now agree was the best opportunity to encircle the German forces in Normandy and to achieve their complete destruction.

Kluge recognized his dire predicament and abandoned any further assault toward Avranches, to which Hitler reluctantly agreed. But Kluge could withdraw to the east on only one major road, and his fear was that a closure of the gap between Argentan and Falaise would leave his eastward-bound armies trapped.

During the afternoon of August 13, Haislip began to meet increasing German resistance just beyond Argentan as the Wehrmacht's 116th Panzer Division and elements of the 1st and 2nd SS Panzer Divisions from Panzer Group Eberbach blocked XV Corps' reconnoitering.

Some have argued that Bradley's halt order to Patton may have saved Haislip's XV

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A 1st Polish Armoured Division Cromwell tank rolls through a French village on the way to Mount Ormel, where the Poles would make a courageous defensive stand.

National Archives

Canadian troops, accompanied by a Sherman/Grizzly tank, depart St. Lambert-sur-Dives. The "Corridor of Death" is less than a mile up ahead.

Corps from being attacked on its flank by these German panzer forces if the Americans had continued to advance well beyond Argentan. A gap of between 25 and 50 miles existed between the First Army on XV Corps' left, as the former was just starting to come up from Mayenne.

To the east of XV Corps, an armored cavalry battalion screened its even more open right flank. This could not have been a reassuring tactical development for Bradley, who seems to have been "more concerned with security than with encirclement." Bradley stated after the war that he "much preferred a solid shoulder at Argentan than a broken neck at Falaise."

Bradley was content with the notion that the continued presence of the Falaise-Argentan gap would be an invitation for Kluge's forces to escape through this corridor, where they would be vulnerable to Allied artillery and tank gunfire as well as seemingly never-ending assaults by American and British air power.

Truth be told, Operation Tractable was but a replay of Totalize with some minor modifications. Beginning just before noon on Monday, August 14, rather than at night, Simonds' relatively new tactics of heavy aerial bombardment and armored infantry carriers were employed again, under a smokescreen as cover, utilizing the Canadian 4th Armoured Division, the Canadian 3rd Infantry Division, and the Canadian 2nd Armoured Brigade.

Their goal, after crossing the River Laison, was to reach Hill 159 to the north of Falaise. The Poles would make a slight flanking move and attack alongside the Canadian 4th Armoured Division.

The German defense was especially tenacious, with Hill 159 not being taken by the Canadian 3rd Infantry Division until August 16. Concurrently, the Canadian 2nd Infantry Division, which was tasked with the capture of Falaise, only reached the outskirts of the town on that day. It would require an additional 48 hours of hard fighting to evict Meyer's 12th SS Panzer Division with its panzergrenadier units using every bit of rubble as makeshift defensive positions.

Despite a good start to Tractable, the usual heavy German fire emanating from the wooded high ground beyond the Laison caused many casualties among the Canadians, both tankers and infantry. The associated Allied heavy bomber support once again caused hundreds of friendly fire casualties.

On August 15, Kluge disappeared for a day after his staff convoy was hit by Allied fighter-bombers en route to German Seventh Army commander Hausser's headquarters; he had spent the day hiding in a ditch. After Kluge rejoined his C-in-C West headquarters, he finally received the long-awaited permission to withdraw his troops from the westward salient through the gap eastward to a new line along the River Dives.

Kluge was instructed to return to Berlin. He reasoned that Hitler might have suspected some treachery involved with his absence from his headquarters (Hitler suspected that Kluge was trying to make a "deal" with the Allies) along with some innuendo about his remote involvement with the July 20 assassination attempt on the Führer.

So Kluge, fearing merciless punishment by the Gestapo, committed suicide while returning to the German capital. Field Mar-

Both: National Archives

shal Walther Model, one of Hitler's most reliable generals from the Eastern Front, became the new C-in-C West.

On the evening of August 15, the Polish 10th Mounted Rifles, together with a company of motorized infantry from the 10th Dragoons (Motor) Regiment of the 1st Polish Armored Division, made it across the River Dives east of Falaise. The result of the frenetic Canadian II Corps' attack during Tractable was to place two Allied armored divisions across the Dives.

In an attempt to obey Bradley's order to not move farther north of Argentan, especially with increasing German resistance in that direction by Panzer Group Eberbach, Patton allowed a part of Haislip's XV Corps—the 5th Armored and 79th Infantry Divisions—to maneuver east toward the Seine on August 15, leaving the 2nd French Armored Division and the U.S. 90th Infantry Division to form the southern shoulder of the pocket. Haislip's two divisions reached the Seine 48 hours later.

On August 16, the Canadian 4th Armoured Division joined the 1st Polish Armoured Division crossing the River Dives far to the east of the Falaise-Argentan road with both Trun and Mount Ormel lying on a southeastern tangent from Falaise. Trun, with its important road junction, was just over four miles northwest of another important French village: Chambois. The gains of the Canadians and Poles were hard won against elements of the German 272nd and 85th Infantry Divisions.

Bradley was persuaded by Patton on August 14-15 to expand Third Army's eastward movement to the Seine with the other divisions of XX Corps, as well as those of XII Corps. This decision, together with Bradley's earlier order to halt XV Corps' northward advance, continued to deprive the Allied coalition of the opportunity to seal the Falaise-Argentan gap sooner and achieve a more comprehensive victory. In essence, Bradley had effectively abandoned his shorter envelopment for a wider one when his earlier plan was on the verge of success on August 13-14.

An ad hoc corps of Patton's American and French forces that remained at Argentan would be joined by the U.S. 80th Infantry Division from XX Corps and be provisionally placed under the command of Maj. Gen. Leonard Gerow for a continued northward move from Argentan to link up with Simonds' II Canadian Corps.

German prisoners of war, lucky to be alive, are marched from St. Lambert-sur-Dives to Trun by men of the 4th Canadian Armoured Division, August 19, 1944.

This formation would be battling Panzer Group Eberbach, which had moved southward on August 13 for Hitler's proposed "drive to the sea" to face the American and French forces at Argentan.

Given the reduction in combat power caused by the departure of two divisions of XV Corps and most of their artillery, there seemed to be little chance of closing the Falaise-Argentan gap from the American side. On the suggestion of Montgomery, Bradley, on August 16, relaunched efforts to shut off the pocket from his Argentan sector with forces that had been greatly reduced in strength. The objective of the American attack would now be a meeting point between the Allied armies in the town of Trun.

The U.S. 90th Infantry Division was tasked with the capture of Chambois and cross the River Dives, which ran through the town. Elements of the 2nd French Armored Division were then to pass through the 90th Infantry Division and drive on Trun, less than five miles northwest of Chambois.

As the German Seventh Army was now methodically moving eastward, with Panzer Group Eberbach defending the southern shoulder of the front near Argentan, Allied fighters, fighter-bombers, and medium bombers continually sortied with devastating attacks on the long lines of enemy vehicles and troops since the Wehrmacht forces now had to move during daylight to get to the River Dives in a timely fashion.

On August 17, the German commanders had observed that the Canadian attack east of Falaise had slackened somewhat, and Panzer Group Eberbach was holding off the Americans on the southern shoulder of the pocket. Hausser and Eberbach were planning that their units would cross the Dives over the next two to three nights.

As a result of reassessing the slow progress of the Canadian offensive, it was apparent to the Allied commanders, most notably Montgomery, that Simonds' forces would not reach Argentan in time to seal the eastern end of the pocket.

The other problem for the Allies was that the Canadians were still more than 15 miles from Chambois on August 16; Montgomery urged Crerar and Simonds to move the

Canadian 4th and Polish 1st Armoured Divisions to Trun and then Chambois on the River Dives to close the eastern end of the pocket.

At 2:45 PM on August 17, Montgomery issued a new directive for II Canadian Corps to close the remaining gap through which the German forces were escaping by having the 1st Polish Armoured Division go "past Trun to Chambois at all costs, and as quickly as possible." The closing of the gap by both Allied forces was now shifted to Chambois and Trun, both northeast of Argentan on the River Dives.

Despite some pockets of resistance manned by elements of the 2nd SS Panzer Division "Das Reich" that the Poles had to overcome on August 17 and 18, by the evening of the 18th two Polish battle groups were on the northeastern outskirts of Trun, a short distance from Montgomery's and Bradley's new objective of Chambois.

Although Falaise was still a Canadian objective, its significance in the development of the encirclement was diminished as Allied forces shifted eastward. Still, the Canadians had attacked Falaise on August 16, and the last pockets of German resistance there were extinguished by August 18.

At 7:30 AM on Thursday, August 17, Maj. Gen. George Kitching launched elements of his 4th Canadian Armoured Division, which was massed northeast of Falaise, southeastward toward Trun. At nightfall, armored units were a short distance from Trun; the following day motorized infantry took the town without much difficulty.

With the seizure of Trun, II Canadian Corps was finally closer to sealing off the remaining space between the Allied forces. But a narrow passageway still remained between Trun and Chambois on August 18 for the Germans to withdraw north and east to safety. This four-mile passageway soon would become known as "the corridor of death."

On that day, the German escape route from the ever shrinking Falaise Pocket was further narrowed to the area between Trun and Chambois along the River Dives. Complicating matters for the retreating Germans was not only the Canadian capture of Trun but also the 1st Polish Armoured Division's capture of the heights of Mount Ormel, a hill two miles east of Chambois that overlooked the German escape route through the Dives River Valley.

Elements of the 1st Polish Armoured Division collided with the II SS Panzer Corps as the latter was heading eastward toward Trun with specific instructions to keep the escape route open. To prevent getting bogged down in an armored slugfest with the German panzers, the Poles moved east of their intended track and swung south over Mount Ormel to get to Chambois.

During his tour of the Falaise battlefield, Eisenhower inspects the remains of an overturned German tank near Chambois, southeast of Falaise.

However, the Polish armor was cutting across the German escape route, and almost continuous combat occurred. General Maczek established his divisional headquarters on Mount Ormel on August 18 in an attempt to close the pocket and bag the two Nazi armies.

Also on the 18th, elements of Kitching's Canadian 4th Armoured Division were moving from Trun down the Dives Valley to join the Poles heading for Chambois. The next day, after Maczek put together an ad hoc formation, elements of his 1st Polish Armoured Division linked up with the American 90th Infantry Division, advancing from the south, in Chambois but lacked sufficient troop strength to seal the pocket completely. A combat command of the French 2nd Armored Division also tried unsuccessfully to cut the road to the east.

Desperate fighting ensued. Trun and Chambois were now the shoulders of the narrowing German escape route to the east, which the II SS Panzer Corps was desperately trying to keep open.

On August 19, the Canadians and Poles combined to attempt to seal the new gap. The loss of Chambois to the Allies and the presence of Canadians along the Trun-Chambois road meant that those German troops remaining in the pocket would have to fight their way out as fragmented combat commands and battle groups led by junior officers and NCOs.

The two main escape routes for thousands of Germans were now a foot bridge over the Dives River at St. Lambert, halfway between Trun and Chambois, and a ford at Moissy. The roads exiting the Dives Valley from St. Lambert and the Moissy ford led up to Mount Ormel, which was now in the hands of Maczek's 1st Polish Armoured Division.

On the night of August 19-20, the Germans, still trapped within the pocket, again

battled to break out to the east but their way was blocked by the Poles atop Mount Ormel, and some of the fiercest fighting of the war took place. Hundreds of Germans died trying to get around the hill, but Polish gunners had them well sighted in the open country below the heights and showed no mercy.

The ground was carpeted with dead soldiers and horses. By morning, the remnants of the German II SS Panzer Corps, trying to keep the pocket open, launched another heavy counterattack, but the Poles held onto their encircled positions atop Mount Ormel, with much-needed ammunition resupply being furnished by air.

By late afternoon on August 20, the II SS Panzer Corps' attack sputtered out. The Poles remained in possession of Mount Ormel.

On August 20-21, remnants of the German Seventh and Fifth Panzer Armies made last attempts to cross the Dives before the pocket was entirely sealed, while the Canadian 4th Armoured Division fought its way through to relieve Maczek's isolated division atop Mount Ormel.

Germans were clawing at each other in desperate attempts to cross the Dives at a bottleneck—the small ford at Moissy. Kurt Meyer, commander of the 12th SS Panzer Division, survived to write, "There was a continual bombardment registering bulls-eyes every time. The Canadian and Polish guns found our range and could not miss. The whole country was saturated with dead or wounded German soldiers."

After additional Canadian and American reinforcements pushed along the Dives River Valley on August 21 to meet the Poles in Chambois, the Falaise Pocket was finally slammed shut, ending any further chance for the entrapped German forces to escape eastward. Artillery and aircraft pummeled those who remained.

It is estimated that 10,000 Wehrmacht soldiers died in the August 6-21 battle with another 50,000 taken prisoner. This was in addition to about 350 armored vehicles, 2,500 trucks and cars, and 250 towed artillery pieces destroyed or abandoned. Yet, the number of Germans who escaped might have been as great as 40,000.

The slaughter was horrendous; soldiers of every rank were sickened by the sights and smells within the Falaise Pocket. One American officer said, "I stood on a lane, surrounded by 20 or 30 dead horses, most of them still hitched to their wagons and carts." A Canadian captain recalled, "A German truck had been hit by a shell in the driver's seat; the man's feet were still on the accelerator but the rest of the body had been blown 20 feet in the air into a tree."

A war correspondent noted, "A convoy of vehicles had been surprised by [RAF] Typhoons. You could walk along them for 330 yards. Each vehicle was a hulk and the crews were rotting corpses on the verges. This is the type of thing you do not try to describe, but to forget." Even pilots reported being able to smell the stench of the battlefield hundreds of feet above it.

Many questions still surround Falaise. From a leadership standpoint, why did Montgomery, who was commander of all the Allied ground forces in France, not close the pincer from the south with the American and French forces at Argentan on August 13, 1944? Why did Bradley, with the Canadian-Polish forces struggling to make gains in their offensive toward Falaise during Operation Totalize, stop Patton's forces from extending past Argentan on August 13? Why did Eisenhower remain in the background of his 12th and 21st Army Group commanders' decision making?

These are just some of the questions that historians have debated for seven decades. Montgomery was known for being cautious, and Blumenson described Bradley as one who "preferred to take no chances." Many have realized that Eisenhower was a better "political general" than a strategic or tactical one. The "perfect storm" in not closing the gap was present in these generals' personalities. This was in sharp contrast to Patton, who espoused, "A good plan violently executed now is better that a perfect plan next week."

Montgomery had another pragmatic constraint to deal with. He was reluctant to incur heavy casualties, especially among his British forces, since he had received logistical information from Brooke and Churchill that the United Kingdom was running out of able-bodied men to serve in the military and that this was becoming a political strain as well as a military one. In fact, during the summer of 1944, Montgomery was informed that he could be supplied with British troops only for about two more weeks of fighting.

Strategically, Montgomery was also seemingly preoccupied with the much larger envelopment extending to the Seine rather than Bradley's initial inner one involving the closure of the Falaise-Argentan pocket. On August 4, Montgomery had issued a full-scale directive formally setting the course of action for the Allies as the normal next step after the hedgerow breakout following Operation Cobra on July 25.

Identifying the breakout as the disintegration of the enemy, Montgomery envisioned that the Germans' next step would be to pull back to the Seine. This would enable the Allies to seize the area west of the Seine. Based on intelligence reports, Montgomery's plans would take advantage of the lack of bridges over the Seine by pinning the remaining German armies west of the river.

On the evening of August 13, Patton noted in his diary that he "could easily advance to Falaise and close the gap," thereby completing the encirclement of the Germans. In another diary entry on August 16, Patton speculated that the stop order had come from Montgomery's command due to "jealousy of the Americans or to the utter ignorance of the situation or to a combination of the two."

While Patton awaited the arrival of the Canadians and Poles from the north, he watched as the Germans built up the shoulders of the gap as German troops and equipment escaped east. On August 17, a fighter pilot during a sortie noted that the escape corridor within the Falaise pocket remained open and "the whole goddam German Army was moving through the gap."

There are other explanations for the delay in closing the Falaise-Argentan pocket.

National Archives

Scene of mass slaughter: Dead men, horses, and destroyed vehicles of all types lie scattered where Allied artillery and aircraft turned a bucolic, narrow lane into the "Corridor of Death."

Bradley had identified that Falaise "was a long-sought British objective and, for them a matter of immense prestige. If Patton's patrols grabbed Falaise, it would be an arrogant slap in the face [to the British] at a time when we clearly needed to build confidence in the Canadian Army."

In his memoirs, Bradley recounts that by August 13, he, Eisenhower, and Montgomery had received extensive intelligence briefings "which conveyed that the enemy was escaping and that many had already escaped."

Bradley described the news as a "shattering disappointment ... one of my greatest of the war. A golden opportunity had truly been lost. I boiled inside, blaming Monty for the blunder. We had done our part, set the lower jaws at Argentan and restrained Patton from a brash and foolish overextension.

"Monty, perhaps, too busy with his strategic plans, had turned his part over to the Canadians, an unproven army depending to a great extent on two armored divisions, one Canadian and one Polish, both new to combat."

Bradley also stated after the war, "In halting Patton at Argentan, however, I did not consult with Montgomery. The decision to stop Patton was mine alone." One has to ask why Bradley did not communicate the halt order to Montgomery himself.

Thus, the failure to close the Falaise-Argentan gap could be considered a symptom of a dysfunctional chain of command—perhaps, reducing Montgomery's role as Allied land forces commander in France or at least preventing an Allied coalition ground assault on the same objective. In the end, despite knowing about Britain's ebbing manpower, Montgomery should have admitted that his forces could not complete their mission on time and allowed the Americans to close the pocket.

The failure of the Allies to close the Falaise-Argentan pocket, thus, was two-fold. First, Bradley's decision late on August 13 stopping Haislip's reconnaissance forces from moving north of Argentan; that was a major reason why so many Germans escaped entrapment and destruction. Second, the failure of the Allies to close the pocket was the result of a lack of adequate communication directly linked to the personalities of the commanders. Despite a unified command structure, each part of the coalition gave every appearance of fighting its own battle; Bradley gave the impression of ambivalence in his interactions with Montgomery.

As for Monty, he knew that his time for directing all the Allied armies was limited, with Eisenhower about to assume overall command of Allied land forces in a matter of weeks. Montgomery, too, knew that with the growing American military strength he could only attempt to persuade and coordinate how the U.S. Army commanders conducted their tactical movements rather than issue detailed orders directly. Such was the nature of coalition warfare in France during the battle for Normandy and later northwestern Europe.

Unfortunately for the Allies, it allowed thousands of enemy troops to slip away to fight another day. □

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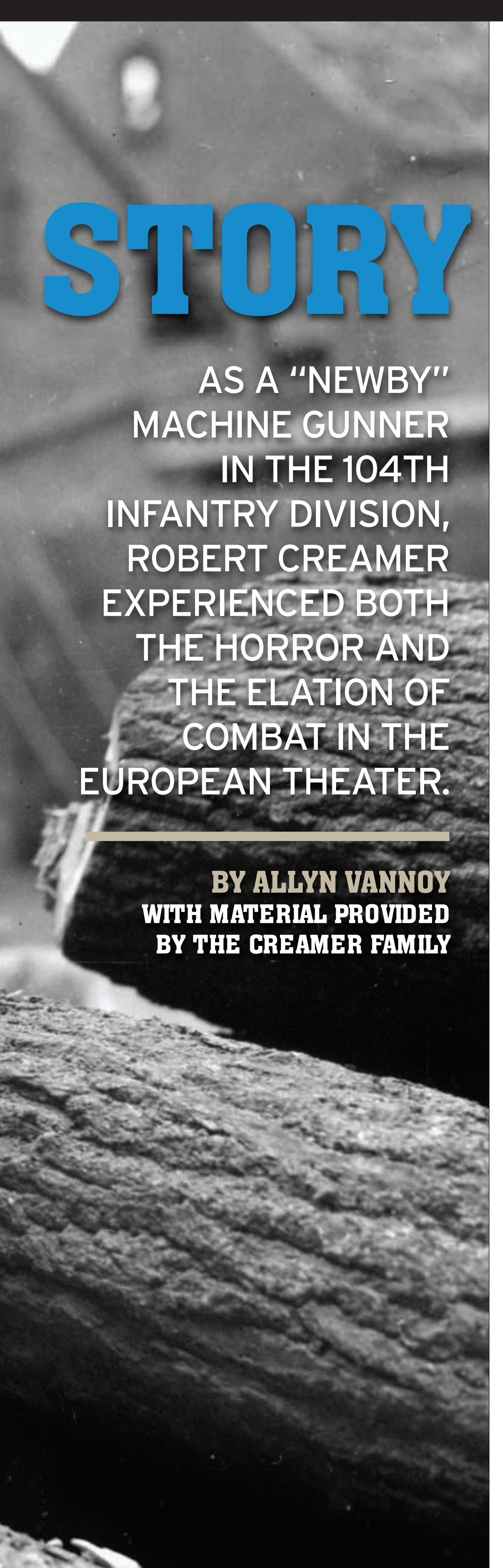
COMBAT AND FEAR: A REPLACEMENT'S



STORY

AS A "NEWBY" MACHINE GUNNER IN THE 104TH INFANTRY DIVISION, ROBERT CREAMER EXPERIENCED BOTH THE HORROR AND THE ELATION OF COMBAT IN THE EUROPEAN THEATER.

BY ALLYN VANNOY
WITH MATERIAL PROVIDED BY THE CREAMER FAMILY

When I was a kid, I remember Dad talking only a couple of times about what he did in the war. I remember him wearing his Army boots to shovel snow, and I remember him showing me some medals. Much later, in his last decade, he started to write things down. What got him started, I think, was my daughter Sarah's, "What did you do in the war, Grandpa?" interview for her high school. That somehow gave me permission to start asking him about stuff I was curious about.

—Tom Creamer

After going on active service in May 1943, Robert W. Creamer was sent to take basic training at Fort Eustis, Virginia. When he received high scores on an Army intelligence test, he was assigned to the Army Specialized Training Program (ASTP, referred to by some as "All Safe Till Peace") and sent to study engineering at the College of the City of New York (now CUNY) in Manhattan.

In March 1944, the Army needed foot soldiers and closed the ASTP program, assigned Creamer to the 75th Infantry Division, and sent him to Louisiana. The 75th was shipped to Camp Breckinridge, Kentucky, in September. The Army in Europe was in need of replacements, so troops were taken from the 75th and shipped to England in the autumn of 1944.

At Southampton, Creamer boarded the transport SS Leopoldville, *crossed the Channel, and arrived off Omaha Beach in France. He said he and his shipmates waded through a foot or so of water. Once they were ashore and could look up again at the high cliffs, they marveled at how other Americans had come ashore there just a few months earlier with people firing at them. No one could fathom how those in the first wave at Omaha Beach survived, let alone how they climbed the cliffs and moved inland.*

ABOVE: Like thousands of other young Americans, Private Robert W. Creamer was sent as a replacement to a unit that had suffered heavy casualties, in this case the 104th Division. LEFT: An alert soldier from the 104th Infantry Division ("Timberwolves"), with two grenades hanging from his web gear, waits anxiously behind a log barrier in an unnamed German village for the order to "move out"—an order that Robert W. Creamer said always filled him with fear.

Creamer and the other replacements were trucked south to Le Mans, then boarded railroad boxcars that took them across France to Liege, Belgium, and up to Aachen, Germany, in early November. There they were assigned to the 104th "Timberwolf" Infantry Division in Munster-Stolbach—a division that had recently seen plenty of fighting. Creamer was a replacement in the weapons platoon of Love (L) Company, 415th Infantry Regiment. This is his story.

In combat I carried the bipod for a .30-caliber machine gun, a .45-caliber pistol, as well as a carbine. I had an assistant gunner and ammunition bearers, who carried boxes of ammo.

From Munster-Stolbach, moving on foot with long lines of fellow GIs through busy roads to Eschweiler [approximately 10 miles east of the city of Aachen], we passed lots of bombed-out factories and dead German soldiers, dead horses, and a wrecked German tank with its enormously long 88mm gun. [This would have been the middle of November.]

During my travels I don't recall apprehension, or having fear or worry before I reached combat. This was an adventure, something extraordinarily new. Perhaps we were numbed, or maybe the complexities and novelty of the travel kept thoughts of fear from rising to the surface.

Not long before we went up to the line, a big bunch of us replacements were taken to a hillside in Belgium in a small, natural amphitheater to watch weapons experts fire and talk about the weapons we were going to face. I recall the startling contrast between American machine guns and the infamous German machine gun, a light, extremely rapid machine gun. The German gun fired off rounds so fast it sounded like someone tearing a sheet of sandpaper. You couldn't believe a gun could fire that fast.

Guys looked at each other and made jokes: "That's it, I quit," "Hey, how do I get out of here," and so on. But it was more amazement than conscious, palpable fear. They also compared American tank guns, 75mm or 105, with the German 88. The American guns sounded like guns, loud and kind of slow. The German 88, which had much greater muzzle velocity, went Pow! Swssshshsh! Something like that. Anyone who ever heard a German 88, the gun on the Tiger tank, remembers the sound. Damn, they sounded powerful. Still, there was no anticipatory dread. That came later, after being in combat.

The first night up on the line I ran into Dave Suckling, whom I had known back in New York in the ASTP. Suckling was from western Pennsylvania. He was a fairly big guy with thick blond hair and very blue eyes sunk deep in a square, pale, high-cheekboned face. He was a decent guy. He was surprised to see me, but I think he was glad to see a familiar face. He'd been on the line just a week or two and told me what it was like to be with the unit.

I remember mostly Dave talking about Sergeant "Red" White, a stocky, quiet, red-haired Irishman from Connecticut, and how White reacted to German fire. Suckling had been the last man in a line of GIs led by White as they went down a road into a town. A burp gun fired at them from a factory. Suckling said he and the guys in front of him dove for the ground, but as he went down on his belly and elbows, trying to flatten into the earth, he saw White at the head of the line dropping to a knee and firing back at the factory with the Tommy gun.

Suckling was in awe of White, his courage, his reaction, his aggression, his rectitude. White later received a slight wound and was sent back to a hospital. A few days later he was back with the unit. The medics wanted to send him to Paris for some R&R, but White said "no" and went back up to the line. There were guys like that.

Irwin Schwartz, a tall, cocky, good-looking Jewish boy from Brooklyn, loved going out on patrols, usually at night in four-man patrols consisting of Sergeant White and three privates—Schwartz, Mike Sussman (also Jewish, from Boston, much more intellectual than Schwartz and much more aware of the danger, but who kept going on patrols because of his palpable hatred of the Nazis), and a guy whose name I can't remember—an amiable ridge runner from the hill country of western Virginia or North Carolina. They made a great team.

Guys would react to what seemed the strangest things. I remember one day Sussman got a letter from his 12-year-old kid sister back in Boston. He read, parodying and mocking the sentiments in his little sister's letter: "Take care of yourself. Are you getting enough to eat?" Then, without any warning, emotion overwhelmed him, his voice broke, and he dissolved into tears.

When the gunner I was the assistant to was promoted to sergeant, I became the machine gunner. The man assigned as my assistant gunner was an ass named Hunter, who had been an Army cook. I don't know why he was sent to the infantry, but it was apparent that the Army was scraping the bottom of the barrel.

In a house in Eschweiler, I had what can best be called an epiphany of the war, what war means. I had been up on the line for a week and had a terrible cold. I had several handkerchiefs with me, olive-drab handkerchiefs that we'd been issued because white ones would be too easily seen by the enemy. I had used them all up; they were all soggy and grimy. I needed something to blow my nose in, and I noticed this big curtain in the front window of the house we were in. It was cotton or linen, soft and smooth and perfect as handkerchief material.

I took my bayonet and cut a huge swath out of the curtain and cut or tore it up into handkerchief-size squares. We had found photo albums and went through them, noticing a young man in some of the photographs in what appeared to be North Africa, where he was apparently serving in Rommel's Afrika Korps. Seeing the photos of him in the family album back home in Eschweiler made me realize that I and the rest of the dozen or so Americans in that house were intruders, invaders in a family's home, dirtying it, damaging it and, in my case, tearing down a lovely curtain and cutting it up to blow my nose in.

War breeds atrocity. It was a pretty minor atrocity, but it was nonetheless an atrocity. I didn't think of the horrors the Nazis committed. I thought of the mother of the house coming back and finding her home a mess and her pretty curtain ripped apart for no apparent reason. The insanity of war got into my head that day.

The standard Army mess kit had a top and a bottom, the bottom with a handle that folded down over the top to hold the two pieces in place, like Boy Scout mess kits. The

104th Division troops advance past a bombed-out cathedral in Eschweiler, a few miles east of Aachen, on their way to Weisweiler. Creamer was appalled by the destruction he saw—and caused.

bottom half could be used as a frying pan, the top part as a dish, or the bottom could function as a dinner plate and the top as a dessert dish—we almost always got dessert when the kitchens came up—fruit, pudding, pie, cake.

Inside the kit was a knife, a fork, and a spoon. There was also a two-piece drinking cup; one piece was the cup with a handle, the other a metal cap or cover that fitted over it. Up on the line you discarded the top part of the mess kit combo and kept only the bottom, discarded the knife and fork and kept only the spoon, kept the cup but discarded the cap, so that you carried only the three essential things—the pan, the cup, and the spoon. That's all you needed as you took all your food in the pan, had coffee in the cup, and used the spoon as knife, fork, and spoon.

As we slunk along the mess line, I'd hold out my tin plate, and the cooks splatted food into it. Meat? Yeah. Splat. String beans? Yeah. Splat. Mashed potatoes? Yeah. Splat. Gravy? Yeah. Splat. Bread? Yeah. Splat. Pineapple? Yeah. Splat.

"It all went in the same dish, one thing on top of the other, all oozing together. I remember guys laughing about the mixture, but nobody complained about it. It tasted fine. You said thanks to the cooks, and you meant it.

The house we were in [in Weisweiler, some four miles east of Eschweiler] was right next to a river, probably the Inde or one of the streams running into it. The morning after fighting off an attack, I was looking out of a hole in the cellar wall and saw an unexploded German "potato-masher" grenade lying just outside. Even if it had gone off there it probably wouldn't have done much damage, but its presence, lying so close to the house, made the concept of actual Germans being out there rather real. In general, except for dead ones, you rarely saw the enemy; they were just out there.

Our cellar, close to the river, was flooded with about four or five inches of water on the floor, but within it was an island (a pile) of coal rising out of the water. We lived on that island of coal, sitting on our packs or lying on our blankets. It was dry and fairly comfortable and not as dirty as you'd think. We sat and slept and lay on it. We ate the food we got from the portable kitchens there. We used a distant corner of the cellar on the far side as our impromptu latrine. Hell, we weren't about to go outside if we didn't have to.

One day, mail was brought up to the line, and I had a letter from my grandmother, Nana Watts. She wrote wonderful stream-of-consciousness letters, thoughts popping into her head and onto the paper so that you could almost hear her talking. I read the letter, or parts of it, aloud for the amusement of my friends because Nana was reminding me to keep my feet dry, to change my socks every day, to be sure to clean behind my ears, and to wash my hands before eating. And so on. We hadn't had our clothes off in several days—we slept in them, our hands and faces were dirty and grimy, we were sitting in coal, there was shit in the corner, and we were eating our food as much with our filthy fingers as we were with our spoons. It seemed funny at the time.

In Weisweiler there was a stir one day. A reporter from a New York paper wanted to know if anyone was from New York. Someone yelled, "Hey, you guys are from New York, aren't you?" I think it was Schwartz and I, and maybe a few others,

hurried outside and joined a pack of maybe 12 or 15 guys gathered around the reporter. He was working for the *New York Daily News* and asked for names and addresses of fellows from the New York area. I know he got mine because it appeared in a story in the paper a few days later, and my father saved the clipping.

We were gabbing with the newspaperman when a staff sergeant suddenly appeared, screaming at us to "Break it up!" He kept yelling, "What the hell is wrong with you guys? Break it up! Get out of here!"

His point, which we suddenly recognized, was that German artillery observers, surveying Weisweiler through scopes or binoculars and seeing a large cluster of American soldiers gathered in the street, would surely call in fire on us. So we scattered and we were barely back in our cellar when there were two or three explosions—incoming German fire.

While in Weisweiler, I was cleaning our machine gun, sitting in the cellar on the pile of coal. One of the things to clean was the machine gun's bolt and a large flat spring, slightly bowed upward in the middle when it was inserted, with u-shaped indentations at either end that fit into little posts or nubs on the bolt. To put it back, you inserted one of the u-shaped openings around a small post at one end and then bent the spring enough to slide the other end into place. Sometimes you'd slip, and the spring would fly in the air and you'd have to pick it up, clean it off, and start all over.

I was either taking the spring out or putting it back in when it slipped and went b-o-i-n-n-n-g, flew through the air, and landed in the water several feet away. I tried like hell to find it, putting my hand down into that dark filthy water and feeling around without luck. I could not find the damn spring, and the gun was inoperative without it.

I then remembered that an American Sherman tank had been hit and disabled in the middle of the village, a block or so from where we were. The turret gunner on the tank fired a .30-caliber machine gun

Both: National Archives

ABOVE: During the drive across northern Germany, a Timberwolf rifleman fires his M-1 Garand toward Germans in a burning building in Eschweiler, late November 1944. OPPOSITE: After Creamer lost the spring from his .30-caliber machine gun in Weisweiler, he scavenged the part he needed from a machine gun in a knocked-out Sherman tank, like the one shown here.

which had, I was sure, the same kind of bolt. So I went down to where the tank was. I remember a dead GI in the tank. I climbed on the tank, opened the machine gun, exposed the bolt, and carefully pried out the spring.

Someone, an officer or a sergeant, approached and asked me what the hell I was doing. I said I needed the spring. I went back to my cellar and successfully inserted the substitute spring into the bolt so that the gun was operative again. I felt pretty proud of myself.

On November 29, the 3rd Battalion, 415th, moved from Weisweiler two miles to Frenz. The next day the battalion moved into Lamersdorf, three miles northeast of Weisweiler, relieving the 2nd Battalion of the 413th Infantry, where it proceeded to mop up isolated pockets of Germans. During the afternoon of December 1, a reinforced platoon of L Company advanced north of Lamersdorf, seizing the large factory at the south end of the town of Inden in an effort to facilitate an eventual night crossing of the Inde River.

One late afternoon guys in the weapons platoon and others in the company were gathered near a barn as an officer or sergeant was putting a squad together to go do something—cover the flank of a platoon of infantry, I guess. We never knew, at least I never knew, what the overall picture was whenever we moved into action. It seemed haphazard and improvised. In combat, an army or a regiment or a battalion or a company seemed more like a bunch of pebbles rolling slowly down a slope, or leaves drifting casually along a street, some going this way, some going that, at different speeds, or sometimes staying in one place. It seems messy, jumbled, hit or miss. Everything gets to where it's supposed to be, but sloppily, and maybe not exactly to where it's supposed to go, but more over there to the left, or to the right.

This day, an officer or sergeant was assembling a squad and to it he assigned one of the other machine guns. But the gunner was reluctant. He didn't want to go out on this action. He didn't cry, but he did kind of whimper a little. He just didn't want to go, and it was obvious that, if he did go, he wouldn't be worth much. I don't know if I felt sorry for the guy or felt contempt but without thinking I said, "I'll go."

We formed the group, maybe 15 or 20 strong, with a couple of guys with mortars and several riflemen, and we crossed the river on a bombed-out bridge and took up positions against the upsweep of a little ridge. I don't know how long we were there, several hours anyway, a good part of the night. I don't remember firing my gun, although I know the mortar guys threw rounds out there somewhere.

Several times white phosphorous shells burst overhead, creating a vivid, clear light and raining bits of spent phosphorous on us. They cast a bright light and were usually used to show positions, reveal targets, and the like. There was no sense of fear, though we all felt good when the call came to go back.

On the way back, as we recrossed the bridge we'd used coming up, where much of the roadbed of the bridge had been blown away, there were several cables still crossing the water. We had crossed earlier by walking on a lower cable while holding onto another cable overhead. It didn't seem hard. Earlier, going out, we got to the broken cement edge of the remaining part of the roadbed, climbed up on it from the cables, and walked the rest of the way off the bridge on the roadway.

Coming back we lowered ourselves from the roadway to the cables, our feet on one, a hand holding the one overhead. I was carrying the machine gun on one shoulder as I had coming across, but as we started back my foot slipped off the cable and I was more or less hanging in air, holding on to the overhead cable with one hand, holding the machine gun on my shoulder with the other, and I did a one-arm pull-up and got my feet back on the cable again and walked on with no trouble and off the bridge.

Whether one of my feet was still on the lower cable when I slipped I can't recall, but I do remember feeling wonder and astonishment that I, the weak-armed skinny guy who could hardly do three pull-ups in a row, did a one-arm pull-up carrying a machine gun on my shoulder without even thinking about it. Adrenaline. I must have got a big jolt of it when I slipped.

Regarding fear and apprehension, I didn't feel any at all that night, just the excitement of doing something, of moving. Yet fear existed; it got inside you somewhere.

One day we were waiting to move out. Moving out meant moving out into action. I never knew ahead of time where we were going or what we were expected to do when we moved out. Sometimes it didn't involve much beyond marching somewhere and taking up positions for a while, but we always knew it could involve action, and we didn't look forward to it. When you were actually outside and moving, doing something, it wasn't as bad, but waiting to move out was.

This day it was raining, and there was a wet field to go through. I was uneasy, and I felt relieved when another platoon moved out ahead of us. They were led by a brand-new second lieutenant who had just come up to the company that morning. We marched somewhere and marched back, but all I remember is that we heard later that the other platoon had been fired on and the new lieutenant had been hit, not terribly bad, but bad enough to get him evacuated. He had been in combat maybe two hours.

An infantry company had six officers—the company commander, usually a captain; an executive officer, usually a first lieutenant; and four platoon leaders, either first or second lieutenants. But I recall only three officers—Captain [Francis J.] Hallahan, the company commander; 1st Lt. [Thomas] Danowski, executive officer; and Lieutenant Thompson, the weapons platoon leader. I never knew the officers who led the other three platoons; they kept getting hurt and replaced.

Captain Hallahan was a lean, dark-haired Irishman from Brooklyn, a serious, intelligent man, quiet but with a sense of humor.

One night when we were under attack and our phone lines were out, and with no walkie-talkie radios, I was sent to tell Lieutenant Thompson about the presence of a German tank. I learned later that seven or eight tanks had moved into the town and that German infantry had come up with the tanks. When I got to Thompson's CP his phone was out too, so he sent me back to the house where Captain Hallahan was to tell him.

I gave him the message and he said, "Okay. Stay here. I may need you [as a messenger]." So I hung around there the rest of the night as people came and went. I think they forgot I was there, but I didn't mind.

While with Hallahan, an American tank lieutenant [from C Company, 750th Tank Battalion] came up the stairs to report to him. Hallahan told him there were six or seven, maybe eight or nine, German tanks on the edge of town and said, “Could you bring your tanks around and fire a couple of rounds at them?”

I can still see the tank lieutenant. He was a beefy guy with a red face, and he obviously wasn’t keen on the idea. He was shifting from foot to foot as he said, “Well, geez, Captain. I mean…. I got three tanks and they got seven or eight. Even one on one, they outgun us.” There was another little exchange, with the lieutenant still resisting, and then Hallahan, kind of disgusted, said, “Do you think you could just race your engines a little?”

According to Private Charles Davis, L Company, the tank officer left to talk over the situation with his fellow officers and promised to radio back, but he was not heard from again.

I don’t know what the American tanks did, but the German attack was stopped by our mortars. The mortars were set up behind the houses a block or two back from the edge of town and were fired at an extreme angle, almost straight up in the air, so that they dropped down on the tanks. Two or three were hit, and another was disabled when a gung-ho GI [possibly Sergeant George E. Burns, F Company, 415th Infantry] with a bazooka came out of a cellar and fired point-blank at the tank.

The German infantrymen also took a beating, and finally the remaining tanks withdrew and the infantry retreated. In the early light one tank was moving slowly, having trouble. Then there was a puff of smoke, and the crew bailed out and took off in a hurry on foot. I remembered we cheered.

We infantrymen didn’t like American tanks, as they drew fire.

During the night of the tank attack, I learned of the death of Martin Berman, a guy I knew slightly as I happened to be sitting on the troop train when we were traveling to New York to board our troopship. I heard of his death while eavesdropping on a phone call in Lieutenant Thompson’s CP. As I listened in on the phone conversation, I heard an officer asking a non-com for a report.

Both: National Archives

ABOVE: A 104th Division mortar crew smiles as they pose around a captured German 81mm mortar they used against the enemy near Duren, Germany. OPPOSITE: German prisoners captured by the 104th Division near Inden on October 12, 1944, keep their hands up as they wait to be searched. While guarding prisoners, Creamer accidentally discharged his pistol, nearly hiting them.

“Any casualties?”

“One. Pfc. Martin Berman.”

“What happened?”

“He was hit by a shell in his foxhole.”

“Is he dead?”

“Jesus Christ, all we found was his foot.”

It’s odd being in the neighborhood of wounds and weapons and death. We were moving up once, across a railroad track and into a factory. Some of us were herded into a long, wide passageway in the factory, with windows high on one side. There was some kind of flat bench, and on it a GI lay on his back perfectly still with his eyes closed, not moving at all.

Someone whispered, “Is he sleeping?”

What he meant, which was perfectly clear to us, was not, “Is he awake or is he sleeping?” but, “Is he dead or is he sleeping?” In this case he was sleeping, or trying to.

Lieutenant Danowski, the company executive officer, was a well-built, good-looking guy, noted for his brashness. He and Captain Hallahan were great friends, but opposites—one quiet and appraising, the other loud and impulsive. At Lamersdorf was a factory with a high chimney. Danowski was convinced that there was a German spotter on or in the chimney.

A bunch of us were inside a building when we heard rifle shots and then mortar rounds coming in just as Danowski and a couple of GIs practically burst through the door to get safe inside. He soon went out again, and when we asked what happened someone said Danowski shot at the chimney and the German spotter got so pissed off he called in mortar rounds in retaliation.

The day after a lot of night action we heard groans and moans from beyond a wall on the other side of a street. Nothing was going on, so another guy and I went over to look and there was a big Kraut lying flat on his back, still wearing his helmet, still but-

toned up in the huge overcoat some of them wore. He was conscious but not talking except for the groans. Tough, hard faced, blue eyes. I don't know how badly he was hurt, but he couldn't move.

We opened his coat and saw his uniform, and in his pocket he had a picture ID in his dress uniform. The son-of-a-bitch was a storm trooper or SS. A couple of others had joined us by then, including a noncom who said, "Leave him there. Come on, get back inside." But one guy and I found a wooden door, and four of us got the big bastard on the door—though he didn't want us to. He kept saying, "Nein, nein." We carried him back across the street into the building we'd been in. We laid him on the floor, and a medic came to look at him. I don't know what happened to him after that.

That same day I got to talking to another German prisoner we'd taken. He was about 30. He didn't speak English, and I didn't speak German, so we spoke in broken French. He'd been a bank clerk in Cologne. I asked him about Hitler, what it was like living in a country under such a terrible person, asking him how he condoned it.

He shrugged, as though to say, "What could I do?" He said, "I am a prisoner, but you are a prisoner, too. You are a prisoner of the war."

I remember replying defiantly, "Yes, but you are my prisoner."

He also said, gleefully, "I will be sent as a prisoner to England and in six months I will speak English." That seemed to be all that mattered to him.

Upstairs in the house we occupied, that same day we had three or four prisoners, and I was assigned to guard them. They were kids, teenagers, and didn't seem very threatening. Someone said they were Austrian. They were sitting on the floor against one wall, and I was sitting in a dining room chair across from them holding my .45 pistol on them.

It was late afternoon by then and getting dark. The prisoners were talking quietly among themselves, even laughing and giggling a little like the kids they were, but as it got darker and as I could hardly see them they seemed bigger and older and more dangerous. I wanted them to be sure to be aware that I was still there, still holding a gun on them, so I decided to slide the top of the .45 back and then forward again, making

it click so that they'd know I was still there with the gun.

But as I slid the top back, my grip on it slipped. The top jumped forward, banged shut, and the impact fired the round that was in the chamber. The bullet went into the floor close to my feet. Nobody got hurt, but it made a hell of noise, and the young German prisoners shut up like clams.

Lieutenant Danowski came running up from the cellar yelling, "What happened?"

I explained what I had done and said, apologetically, "I could have killed one of them."

"Too bad you didn't," he said, and went back downstairs.

Hunter, my inept assistant gunner, almost killed me one night. We were advancing, and an officer or a noncom told me to set up my gun on a slope. I put the gun in position and then, straddling the muzzle, I adjusted the two short legs of the bipod. We had taken the ammo belt out before we began the march. When we removed the belt from the gun, we always left a single round in the chamber because it let you resume shooting without delay when you reinserted the belt.

So, I was standing there with my feet and shins on either side of the muzzle when Hunter decided to pull the trigger. Wham! It felt like the loudest noise I'd ever heard, and the flash of the gun made it seem as though the whole hillside and the valley below us had been lit up. I fell flat on my belly.

When I lifted my head, Hunter said, "Are you alive?"

"You stupid son of a bitch," I said.

The officer or noncom appeared, saying, "What happened?"

I told him Hunter had fired the round in the chamber while I was setting up the gun.

"I didn't know it was loaded," Hunter said. "I wanted to see what it felt like to pull the trigger."

I don't remember anything more about Hunter. God, I disliked him.

Lieutenant Thompson, weapons platoon leader, was distinctly different from both Danowski and Captain Hallahan. He was smaller than Danowski, not as lean as Hal-

National Archives

A soldier from the 104th cautiously advances toward a knocked-out panzer sitting in the middle of Lamersdorf. The town had been heavily shelled by American artillery before the 104th seized it. Creamer said he was frightened by a King Tiger tank in the nearby town of Lucherberg.

lahan, and very cheerful and upbeat, a funny, amusing man. We called Lieutenant Thompson "Tommy" most of the time, not "Lieutenant" or "Sir." He had an older private or Pfc. that served as his aide, a man probably about 35 or 40, ancient to us young guys. The Pfc. was very fond of Thompson and took good care of him, keeping his gear and official stuff in order and so on. Thompson delighted in him and referred to him as his "batman"—the British Army term for an officer's personal servant.

One day, Captain Hallahan and a platoon or two he had with him got into difficulty on the other side of a river. Danowski took the rest of the company—the remaining riflemen and the weapons platoon—and led us in a long, roundabout march out of the town and around to one edge of it, where the houses ended next to one of those big fields that seemed to run right up next to each town. A fence or a hedge separated the houses from the field, which sloped down from the road toward the river. Danowski was at the head of the line, and Thompson was at the rear.

As soon as we left the road and began moving along the fence, Danowski had us go down onto our hands and knees so we'd be hidden behind the fence and not spotted by the Germans. So we crawled down that long slope, cradling our rifles in our arms, or, in my case, my machine gun. It sounds hard, and maybe it was. It was a long crawl.

I was about a third of the way down the slope when here came Thompson from the rear of the line, crawling past me. He had a big grin on his face.

I said, "Where are you going?"

He said, "Today's Sunday. I'm going to ask Danowski if I can go to church."

He crawled all the way down the hill, past all the crawling guys until he got to Danowski, then he crawled all the way back. As he passed me, I said, "What did he say?" Thompson, still grinning, said, "He said no," and kept crawling.

One night, I was sitting in a foxhole when German mortar fire began coming in. One technique in firing mortars was bracketing—aiming to the left of the target with the first round, to the right with the second, closer on the left with the third, closer on the right with the fourth—closing in, in other words, to be surer of a hit. Another technique was walking—determining the target was along a certain line from the gun, aiming long with the first round and then "walking" the rounds back on the assumption that eventually they'd land right on or very close to the target.

This night I heard a mortar round come in well beyond me, several hundred yards beyond me. Then a second round came in somewhat closer, then a third round even closer. I thought, "Oh shit! They're walking it back this way."

I was certain one would eventually land right on me and assumed I was going to be killed. I wondered what it was going to feel like.

I scrunched down at the bottom of the hole and prayed. Another round came closer still. Then the next one moved at a right angle, away from me, away from the line leading to me. They were simply blanketing the area where they knew a lot of GIs were.

On the night of December 2/3, companies of the 2nd and 3rd Battalions, 415th

Infantry, slipped across the Inde River. The next day the battalions assaulted the town of Lucherberg, approximately a mile east of Lamersdorf, beyond the Inde River, then secured and established defensive positions. The American positions were subject to intense attacks by infantry and tanks for several days, as well as repeated artillery and mortar barrages. Despite this, the 415th held onto the town, a key position on the flank of the 104th Division bridgehead.

I called fire in on the Germans once while in Lucherberg. We were assigned to a house on the last street in town at the corner of the road that ran straight from the village through an enormous field on the far side of the village. An artillery observer was in the house setting up in a room upstairs that looked out over the field.

In the distance I saw a line of German soldiers on bicycles starting out along a road. There were several trees lining the road. I called the Germans on the bicycles to the spotter's attention and asked if he was going to call in rounds on them. He said probably not, that it wasn't important enough to waste shells on.

But when they got their phone wire connected, he reported the bicycle riders to his battery. "They're going to fire one round for effect," he said. A minute or so later we heard the whishing of a shell or two overhead and the sound of the guns in the battery, and way out near the riders we saw the shells explode as the Germans dove off their bicycles. After a couple of minutes they got up and went on their way. Nobody was hurt, as far as we could see.

Irwin Schwartz was in a house across from us on the beginning of that same long road out of town. He was excited and elated because even though he was only a Pfc., he had been put in charge of the squad manning the house. He was as proud as a new parent and showed me through the house, explaining how and where he had placed his men and their weapons.

Later that same day, a German round hit a wall of his house and sent a fragment of stone into Schwartz's thigh. Two guys carried him out of the house, Schwarz crying and swearing. He was in a lot of pain, but mostly he was angry. He was mad because it was his first time in command and, before he had a chance to really lead, he had been hurt—and not even by shrapnel or a bullet, but by a lousy rock.

In our house we had set up the machine gun on a kitchen table aimed out the window at the backyard. During the night the Germans shelled the town. Then we heard motors, and we could see well enough to see a German tank coming up the road toward us. This huge German tank came slowly rumbling up the road and turned off in our backyard and parked, maybe 100 or 150 feet from the back door. It settled in and swiveled its long 88 around until it was pointed right at us.

We stared at it, as the 88 pointed at us. Our machine gun was still on the kitchen table, aimed out the window. Corporal Tati (who was in charge of the defenders in the house) whispered, "Don't fire that gun."

I said, "Don't worry." I was behind the gun, manning it but with no intention of firing it.

He tried the phone to call the weapons platoon command post, but the wire was out. Tati said, "Someone's got to tell Thompson." Nobody said anything. Tati looked out the front door, and I thought he was going to go himself but he came back. My impression was that he didn't want to go outside.

"I'll go," I said.

He looked at me as though I were crazy, but he said, "Okay."

The weapons platoon CP was in a house down and across the street. I stood in the doorway for a second and then went trotting down the street, crossing it and ducking into Thompson's house. I told Thompson what I knew, and he said we had to tell Hallahan, but his phone was out too, so he sent me.

While many GIs turned a sighting of any German tank into reports of the notorious Tiger, the 68-ton German heavy tank mounting a deadly 88mm main gun, in the case of operations at Lucherberg, the Germans had employed the Wehrmacht's 506th Heavy Panzer Battalion with its Mark VIB Tiger IIs, or King Tigers.

That Tiger tank scared hell out of me, especially that 88mm cannon looking in the kitchen window, and I wanted very much to get away from it. I remember distinctly feeling the shattering incongruity of sitting at a table in a kitchen aiming a machine gun at a tank in the backyard and thinking, "This is crazy."

Yet I didn't feel fear running along the street to Thompson's or going on to Captain Hallahan's or waiting there during the attack and counterattack. There was undoubtedly a psychological lift when you were actually in action, doing something, or watching the admirable Hallahan quietly running things. When action stopped and the adrenaline drained and you were facing the wait for whatever you were going to have to face next, that's when you felt fear, terrible fear.

After I got hurt [a non-combat wound suffered in Lucherberg on December 6] and was being shipped to the rear, I had a terrible nightmare, probably the worst nightmare of my life. It was a short dream, but the fear and dread I felt all but paralyzed me. In my dream we were in the open place under a barn when Captain Hallahan stuck his head in and said, "Get ready. We're moving out in 10 minutes."

That simple remark, "Moving out!" filled me with terror. I was rigid with fright as I woke up.

Following the war, Robert W. Creamer (July 14, 1922-July 18, 2012) was a sportswriter in New York. He was one of the first hired to the staff of *Sports Illustrated* in 1954, served as a senior editor until 1984, also wrote for the *New York Times,* and authored what is considered the definitive biography of Babe Ruth, *Babe: The Legend Comes to Life* (1974). He also wrote biographies of Mickey Mantle, Casey Stengel, Ralph Houk, and sportscaster Red Barber.

Library of Congress

After sweeping through Sicily in the summer of 1943, Allied forces invaded Italy in September. The American Fifth Army landed at Salerno and moved up the peninsula through Naples that fall. General Mark Clark's forces stalled three months into their campaign, in the shadow of Monte Sammucro on the edge of the Liri Valley. It was early December. A month's worth of rain and snow slicked the surrounding hillsides and made a muddy mire of the valley.

The German line ran from the top of Sammucro down through the village of San Pietro and across the valley. It was formidable and ensconced; the mountain was almost 4,000 feet high and steep. The Via Latina running past its base was the only road from southern Italy to Rome. And Rome was the goal of Mark Clark and the Fifth Army.

Clark chose the 36th Division, the "Texas" Division, to lead the assault. Among those heading up the mountainside at Sammucro in the middle of a chill and wet December night was a young captain from the 36th's 143rd Infantry Regiment named Henry Waskow. Quiet, dedicated, effective—a good soldier from a small town in Texas, but not the sort who would stand out in a crowd—Waskow did his job and did it well.

History might have totally passed him by but for a little man in a knit cap, smoking cigarettes down at the foot of Sammucro. Ernie Pyle watched the supply mules head up the mountains with provisions; he watched them come back down with American soldiers draped over their backs. Pyle had seen a lot of this already in the war, but something about the struggles at San Pietro, something about Henry Waskow, moved him in a way that he hadn't felt before.

Just after 5 PM on December 7, 1943, 1st Battalion, under the command of Lt. Col. William Burgess, began the long climb up the eastern slope of Monte Sammucro.

Breaking off and heading to the right of the 1st was the 3rd Ranger Battalion, whose assignment was to take Hill 960, slightly to the north of Sammucro.

It was no easy task ascending the mountain in the dark. In the best of circumstances—daylight, dry, sunny weather—it was a three- or four-hour climb. This night in darkness and fog, it would take several hours more.

In the lead for Company A was commanding officer, Lieutenant Rufus Cleghorn of Waco, Texas, and the Baylor University football team. Companies C and D were right behind, with Waskow's Company B bringing up the rear and providing supply-transport assistance.

The order given to Cleghorn by battalion commander Martin was a no-ifs-ands-or-buts: "Young man," he was told, "I want combat troops on that mountain by eight o'clock in the morning." So Cleghorn led with a determined pace. The mule trails on the slopes disappeared along with the scruffy pines at the tree line, leaving the men of Company A and the units following to

RIGHT: In a watercolor painting titled *Fallen Friend,* combat artist Peter Sanfilippo captures the poignant agony of losing a buddy in war. There were many "fallen friends" during the 10-day battle for the small town of San Pietro Infine. The fight for the town and the Mignano Gap cost the U.S. 16,000 casualties. INSET: The death of Captain Henry Waskow, U.S. 36th Infantry Division, was immortalized by war correspondent Ernie Pyle.

A DEATH IN

In one of the Italian campaign's toughest battles, Captain Henry Waskow of the 36th "Texas" Division performed with quiet heroism—until he was killed.

BY TIM BRADY

SAN PIETRO

continue by any means necessary, which at times meant on their hands and knees.

There were moments, as well, when the climb grew so steep that the infantrymen were forced to chin themselves over sharp rocks; at other times, ropes were necessary to haul themselves upward. Company B was tasked with bringing supplies upward from where the mules left off at the tree line, which meant they were carrying ammo over these same rocks and ridges.

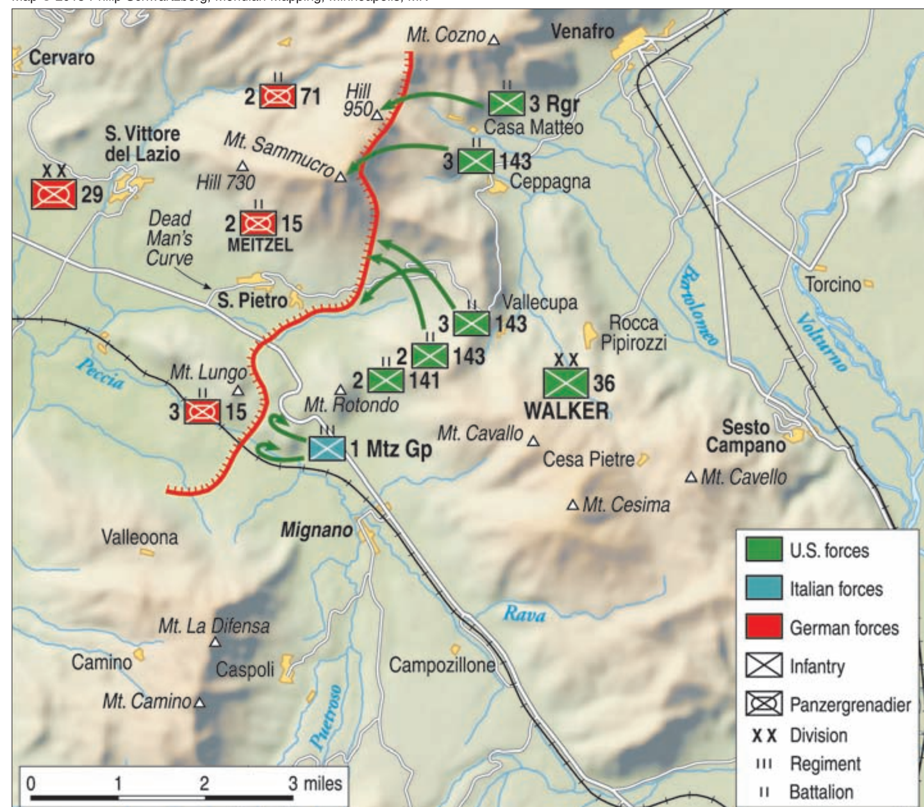
The fact that they were approaching the summit from the far right flank encouraged Colonels Martin and Burgess to believe that the 1st Battalion would be striking with an element of surprise against the Germans, whose focus was known to be toward San Pietro and the valley floor to the southwest of the peak. There was even some hope that the summit might be lightly, or not at all, occupied by the Germans.

That hope was quickly dashed, however. It turned out that the mountain peak was indeed manned by panzer units, but they were, in fact, surprised to see American troops coming at them from the east. The 1st Battalion swarmed over the crest of the mountain, heaving grenades at pockets of Germans as they climbed. A fierce firefight followed the enemy's realization that they were being attacked.

The battle quickly grew so intimate that the Germans used loose boulders as weapons, trying to sweep 1st Battalion troops off the mountainsides by knocking them over with rolling rocks. Cleghorn's stout voice helped guide his men toward the top, and like the Germans, he, too, began hurling rocks at the defenders—along with hand grenades and epithets.

The measure of surprise had its effect. The Americans made steady progress, and at 6 AM, members of Company A, led by Cleghorn, reached the top of Sammucro, just as Colonel Martin had ordered and hoped. A little after 9, platoons from Companies C and D joined Cleghorn and Company A in the lead and poured more fire on the panzer forces at the summit, but a scribbled message to command said that "ownership of Objective G [the summit] was still in question."

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



In the first attack on San Pietro, the 36th Infantry Division, trying to advance from the southeast, was hampered by tough enemy resistance and extremely rugged terrain.

The 1st Battalion continued to fight and an hour later sent another message down the hill. While the Rangers on Hill 905 to the right flank were "having a pretty stiff fight .... We are in supreme command of 1205." Two hours after that, just after noon, the 1st was holding 12 German POWs on top of the mountain and catching its breath from 18 hours of hard climbing and hard fighting.

Hard fought and hard won: it was a good way to start the battle for San Pietro and the Liri Valley. Not everyone involved would have such success.

Wearing feathered caps to match their Alpine uniforms, two battalions of the 1st Italian Motorized Group set out that same morning from Mignano. A sharp American artillery cascade had preceded their move onto the hill, which occurred in the midst of the subsequent smoke and a fog that settled down in the valley. With vengeful spirit the Italians started to climb the ridges to the peak of Monte Lungo boldly shouting challenges to the German troops above. Unfortunately the Italians had failed to send out any recon the night before, and now blinded by the weather and smoky haze, they moved in tight units directly into a blast of German machinegun and mortar fire. The enthusiasm of the Italians was short lived as the devastating fire quickly took a heavy toll.

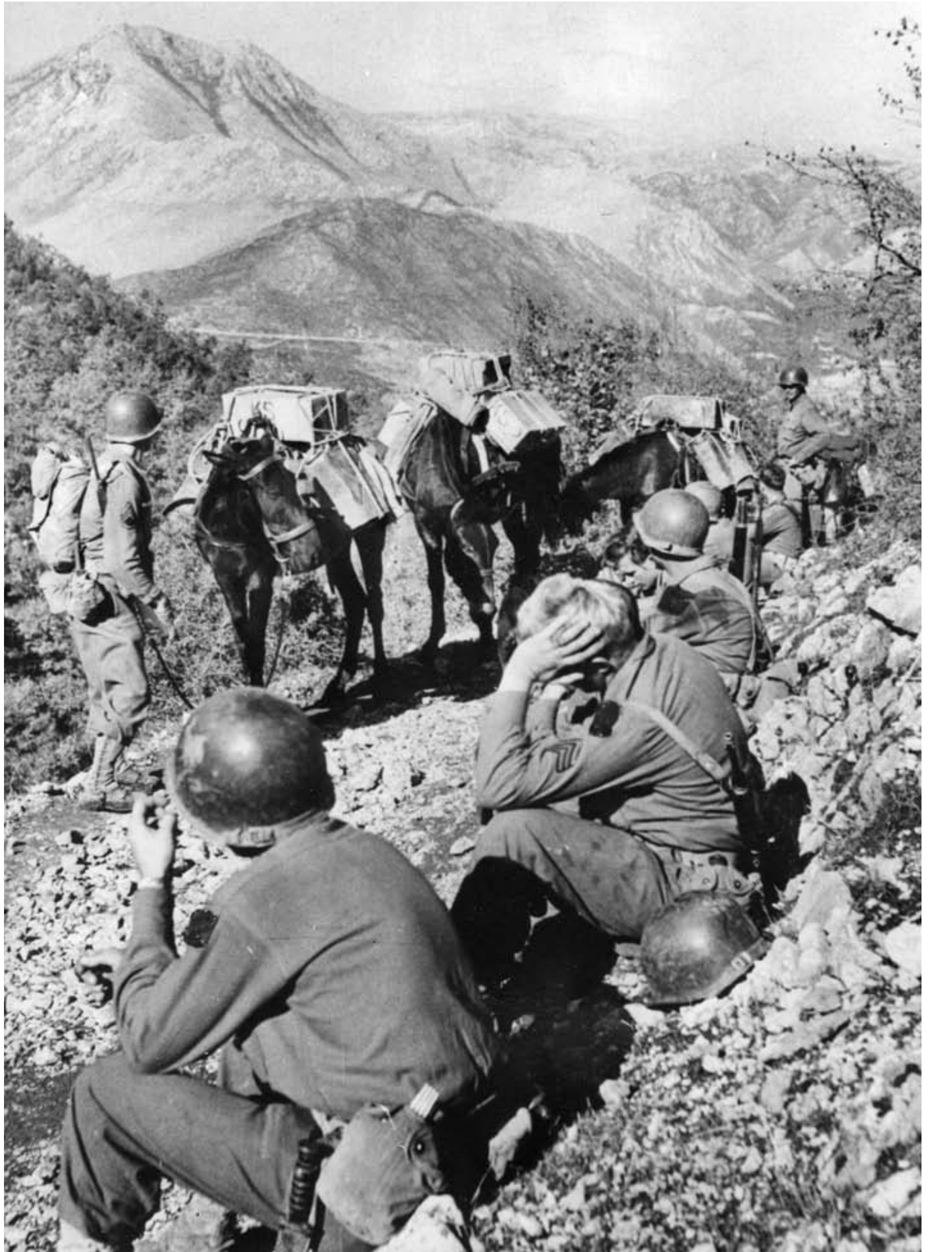
A company of the 141st up on nearby Monte Rotondo set up firing positions to back up the Italians and discourage the Germans from pursuing their advantage. But by noon, the 1st Italians was in a sorry condition, having already lost more than half of its original 1,600-man strength, most of whom were missing, having hightailed it off the mountain.

Down below San Pietro, the 2nd Battalion of the 143rd was having a rough time of it as well. From their position on Monte Cannavinelle, troops of the 2nd had headed out in the early morning darkness, moving down the 3,000-foot mountain, where they'd been stationed in preparation for this attack. They headed toward the eastern slope of the Sammucro, just above San Pietro, but even their first steps were troublesome.

Unlike rocky Sammucro, Cannavinelle was blanketed in mud, which made footfalls treacherous. To prevent frantic sliding down Cannavinelle to the line of departure in the valley below, troops grabbed at roots, branches, tree trunks, anything that would catch their fall, all the while loaded with battle gear that included machine-gun belts, mortar shells, boxes of hand grenades, and bazookas.

A bridge down below served as the point of departure, and the first troops of the 2nd—Companies E and F—set out from there at 6:20 after a booming display of "outgoing mail" from American artillery. Just 200 yards into their trek into the valley below San Pietro, they hit a line of barbed wire backed by well-placed pillboxes armed with automatic weapons. Mines were also liberally laid in the field. All of this stopped the battalion in its tracks and allowed German mortar and artillery fire to zero in.

National Archives



Italy's Apennine Mountains were a defensible barrier for the Germans and a nearly insurmountable obstacle for Allied attackers. With few roads, the armies relied on pack animals to haul supplies up—and casualties down—the steep slopes.

Efforts were made to move the troops back a hundred yards so that American artillery could safely pound the pillboxes; but when the guns started blasting the German posts, they did so to limited effect. The only openings in these fortresses were narrow slits designed for small arms fire, which served as great protection for the panzer troops inside. Meanwhile, the artillery pounded away, creating an enormous echo chamber in the valley that reverberated with deafening explosions.

Colonel Martin sent the 3rd Battalion swinging out to the right of the 2nd in an attempt to flank the German line. Company L arced wide to the northeast and headed back to the west, straight at San Pietro down the Venafro-San Pietro road. Six hundred yards into its westward advance it hit the same mix of mines, mortars, wire, and pillboxes that had stopped the 2nd. One Company L staff sergeant put it plainly, after all their efforts, "The Germans still held the high ground and had clear view of the valley."

Martin committed two more companies of the 3rd Battalion, I and K, into the fight to the right of the rest of the battalion. "Texas cowhand and rebel yells pierced the air," according to one eyewitness account. "A German colonel leading his men was cut to pieces by a BAR. Other Jerries plopped down in a heap behind. The 'spang-spang' of the trusty MI's and rattle of our .30-caliber machine guns and BARs became more intense. Brave men were dying." Again, however, the attack across what was about to earn the nickname "Purple Heart Valley" made limited headway.

About 400 yards into their trek, Companies I and K were told to hunker down and dig in. Private Jack Clover and his digging buddy Jabe Curry chose the front edge of a gulley and quickly started to spade out a foxhole. They were waist deep in the project and hustling to finish when a giant shell landed nearby, burying them in their own hole. Clover clawed his way out of the would-be grave and waited a moment for Curry. They exchanged terrified glances, knowing there was no place for them to go.

Up on top of Sammucro, the situation

Both: National Archives

was far better but about to get dicey. The Germans were not about to cede the summit of the hill so easily to the Allied advance. The first counterattack began at 6:30 the next morning and lasted for more than half an hour. Another assault hit from all sides at 8:10, wounding Lieutenant Roy Goad, among others. A third came just after 10, and yet another hit just after noon, this one seriously wounding Lt. Col. Burgess, who had to be evacuated and replaced by Major David Frazior.

The commander of Company C, Captain Lewis Horton, attempted a probe of German positions to the west toward San Vittore with the idea of aiding the 3rd Rangers, which were still having trouble taking Hill 960. Under heavy fire, he'd taken his platoon leaders to a post where they had better vantage of enemy defenses. While devising a plan of attack, a sniper caught Horton, killing him instantly.

And so it went all day on December 9. Counterattacks continued to a number that was either seven or eight—it was hard, under the circumstances, to keep track. German prisoners later explained that they had been ordered to retake the mountaintop at all costs, which meant the nature of the fighting was often savage.

Platoon leader Willie Slaughter, Company B, saw one of his men engaged in a peek-a-boo style shootout with a German sniper. "They were crawling around in the rocks and every time one would stick his head out, the other would start shooting. They looked like a couple of lizards crawling in those rocks." From his "ringside seat" Slaughter could hear his man shouting, "Where is the son-of-a-bitch?"

Using mortars that had been painfully hauled up the hill the day before, mainly by Waskow's company, the 1st Battalion was able to use its position to assist the 3rd Rangers on Hill 960. The Rangers were finally able to surmount the hill and thus relieve some of the fire heading up toward the 1st Battalion from the neighboring mountain.

As 1st Battalion battled counterattacks and assisted the 3rd Rangers, it also began to probe down the mountain toward San Pietro and San Vittore. As it did, the lines between Germans and American got crossed and intersected, particularly down the northwest side of the mountain toward San Vittore.

On alert near an olive grove, U.S. infantrymen observe their next objective—a destroyed village high in the Apennines.

Captain Jalvin Newell, on the side of the mountain with three companies of the 143rd, had his phone lines cut as he was trying to reach Lieutenant Richard Burrage, communications officer for the new commander, Major Frazior, who was at the top of Sammucro. Newell needed to pass on info and questions to Frazior. Companies A, B, and C were rapidly losing men. Should they head back up to the summit from their position or stay and fight down the hill?

To relay the communication, Newell resorted to a code that would be known only to Texas boys: he used references to Texas towns whose first letter coincided with Companies A, B, and C. There was talk about mail and numbers of letters addressed to each of the towns. It took a while for Burrage and Frazior to figure out what the hell Newell was saying.

Finally they realized that he was indicating the Germans were pressing hard. The numbers of letters to each town indicated the dwindling numbers of men in each company. Should they come back up to the summit? Burrage radioed back instructions—not necessarily happy news: Newell was asked to keep the companies in place and hold on.

Meanwhile, the wounded on the hilltop began to stack up. More than 40 members of Company A were killed or put out of action in the two days of fighting; another dozen

members of Companies B and C suffered similar casualties.

Some walking wounded made it down the mountain, although hounded by artillery all the way, and were eventually transported to Naples.

Many others were unable to make it down unassisted, and the perils of descending the mountain were nearly as great as heading up. Litters were carried over the same steep cliffs, inclines, and jutting rocks that were climbed on hands and knees and with the aid of ropes on the way up.

The wounded went down first, carried by others from their own units, who struggled against the hillside as they listened to the moans and cries of their comrades, essentially helpless to make the journey any easier. Still better than the dead, who came down when it was convenient, and then, most often, only to the way station at the tree line, where bodies covered in tarp and roped tight to the litters began to accumulate.

Given all of the attacks and counterattacks, supplies of ammunition quickly began to dwindle atop Sammucro. So did food, water, blankets, boots, and any sense of comfort. On the summit, snow took the place of rain. The ground was all rock, which made digging foxholes impossible; cold boulders and hard crevasses served as cover instead. Even without standing in muddy holes, boots remained constantly damp and feet were frozen. Trench foot was endemic.

Supplies going up the hill followed the path of 1st Battalion. There were about 80 mules in the train, led by Italian skinners who dressed, as had the Motorized Italian Army unit that had charged Monte Lungo, in Tyrolean gear, including feathered hats. The mules were packed during the day and set out toward the mountain only after dark.

Famed war correspondent Ernie Pyle (right) chats with the commander of an 8-inch "Long Tom" howitzer battery somewhere in Italy. Pyle was later killed in the Pacific.

According to Ernie Pyle, who had joined a 143rd supply unit a few days earlier, typical loads were 85 cans of water, 100 cases of K rations, 10 cases of D rations, about 1,000 rounds of mortar shells, a radio, telephones, four cases of first aid kits and plenty of sulfa. Also in the packs were cans of sterno, heavy combat uniforms, and what Pyle called the "most tragic cargo," the mail, which went up every night in what would turn out to be a long stay on the mountain.

Sometimes it would be received by dead men; sometimes by the wounded who were already heading down the mountain; sometimes it would be received with more than a little irony, as in the case of one corporal in Company B, who got a Christmas necktie in a package while up on Sammucro.

The supply unit worked out of an olive grove near Venafro, and there Pyle shared quarters with about 10 members of the unit in an old cowshed. Private Lem Vannata, who worked as a supply clerk at the post, remembered his arrival: An older man, relatively speaking, wearing a war correspondent patch on his shoulder and skinny as all get out. An officer told Vannata who the man was and said, basically, to leave him alone, that Pyle would contact them if he wanted to talk.

His name, of course, was recognized by everyone in the theater, including Vanatta, who let him be until one day Pyle caught him taking a nip from some bootlegged liquor that Vannata had stored near the dump. Turned out Pyle was just interested in taking a snort himself, and there began a daily ritual between the two that lasted for the length of Pyle's stay.

As noted, the Italian mules were unable to negotiate the full 4,000-foot climb up the mountain. It was just too steep and nasty. In fact, they were only able to haul about a third of the way up its sides. A

whole column of assistants from supply, transport, and HQ stations down below would accompany the train each night, and when the mules gave out, the men would take over, strapping the loads to their backs and humping them toward the battalion above.

That battalion was also forced into carrying its own supplies up the mountain. Carefully slipping down the mountainside after days battling Germans up above, they would meet the ascending collection of cooks, truck drivers, and clerks who were hauling from the point where the mules gave out, and proceed to lift the cargo up to the summit, bringing their own K rations and mail to the rocky fortress on Sammucro. Company B had this assignment at the start of its time on the mountain.

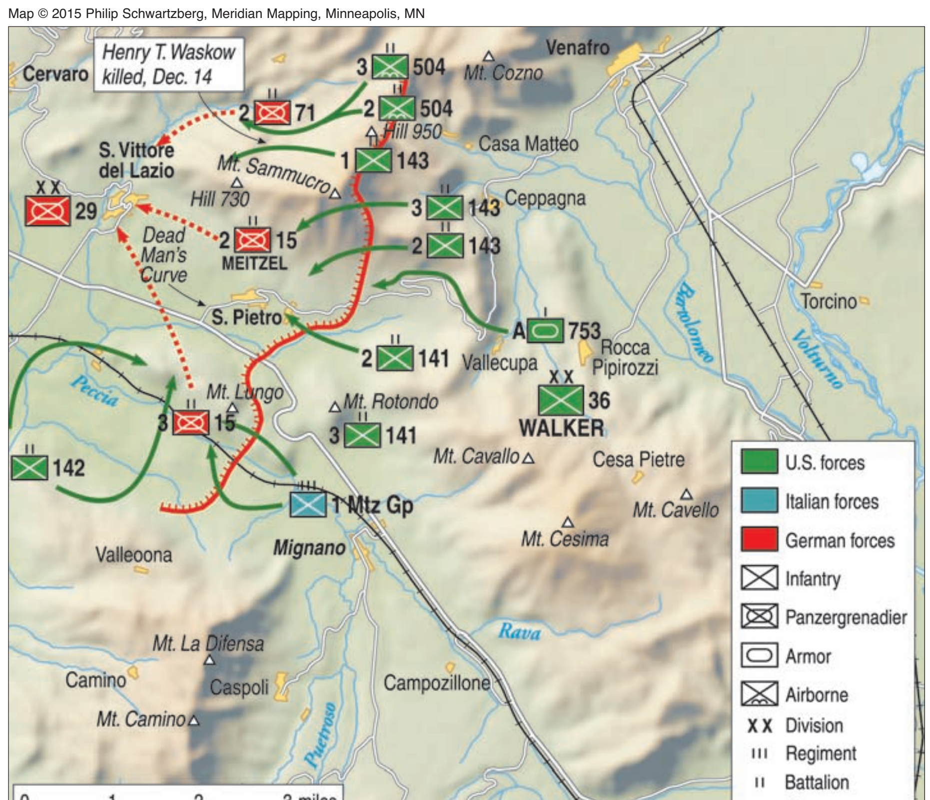
Pyle, too, climbed up Sammucro, as much as anything else, to see the effort involved. He marveled at the strength of one packer, who could make it to the top with a full can of water in two and a half hours. Pyle's guide was a member of 1st Battalion who had been at the top fighting and was now supposed to be resting below. Instead, he was escorting Pyle on feet so sore from blisters that that he walked only on his toes to save his sensitized heels from rubbing against the hard rock.

Pyle ran into a Signal Corps team of movie photographers as they bumped into a trio of German POWs being escorted down the hill by a lone GI. The Signal Corps camera operators asked the infantryman if he would go back up the hill 50 feet and come back down the trail so that they could get the shot of the POWs in action, descending down the trail. In the midst of war, reality was thrown in reverse to be captured on film.

The Germans seemed only temporarily confused about what was happening. Soon enough they understood the filmmakers' needs and not only willingly repeated their march down the hill but took time to fix their collars and straighten their trousers.

Pyle also happened across Emmett Allamon, a regimental surgeon from the 36th, at the medical station housed in an old stone building at the top of the mule trail.

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



ABOVE: Opening moves in the second assault on San Pietro included an attack by tanks of Company A, 753rd Tank Battalion; most of the tanks were destroyed or disabled, but the town finally fell. OPPOSITE: With a GI's helmet in the foreground, an artillery barrage explodes in the valley near San Pietro just before the attack on December 15, 1943.

Pyle's arrival there prompted the doctor to break out a saved bottle of bourbon that had been waiting for the right company.

Pyle later wrote his wife about the visit, telling her that he and the doctor were talking in the loft of the station when German artillery started to land dangerously close, "but we felt so good by that time we didn't even pay any attention."

He and Allamon were talking about the "mental wreckage" of war—those soldiers broken by the dangers and stresses of battlefield. The doctor took a pretty tough stance, saying that he thought the root cause for the number of breakdowns on the front line was societal, that too few American children were being given opportunities for self-sufficiency; and as a result, they crumbled now when faced with adversity. They simply hadn't faced enough adversity before. He thought ex-newsboys were best suited for war, because they'd been raised from early in life to fend for themselves.

Whether this conversation was an offshoot of what had happened in Sicily with George Patton and the slapping incidents, Pyle does not say. That story had finally been leaked by the press to the American public, and the subsequent outcry was making headlines. In any case, Pyle was much more sympathetic to the phenomenon than the doctor. "The mystery to me," he wrote, "is that there is anybody at all, no matter how strong, who can keep his spirit from breaking in the midst of battle."

A German counterattack on December 11 left Rufus Cleghorn wounded on Sammucro. He joined a growing number of officers and staff sergeants from Company A who had been knocked out of action. Aside from losing Captain Horton, who was killed by sniper fire, and Lieutenant Goad to a wound, Company C was down two more officers and four staff sergeants by December 12. Waskow's Company B, which, because of the

time spent hauling supplies was out of the most intense action, had lost only one officer killed in action.

Four days into the action, the battalion was down to half strength, with just 340 soldiers up on the ridge. The loss of men prompted II Corps commander Maj. Gen. Geoffrey Keyes to reinforce the 1st on December 11 with the 504th Parachute Battalion.

Meanwhile, in the valley, the Germans continued their tight hold over San Pietro. The 2nd and 3rd Battalions remained stuck where they'd been since the attack on December 8—about 1,000 yards shy of San Pietro. The Fifth Army might be holding Monte Sammucro, but it couldn't go farther without access to the Liri Valley—and the Liri Valley was controlled by the German forces surrounding San Pietro.

The pressures for moving on quickly mounted. On Mark Clark. On 36th Division CG Fred Walker. On all their units. Already it felt like the army was stalled again, well south of Rome. It hadn't yet breeched the first of the Winter Lines; and the second, stouter line, the Gustav, that ran through Cassino, still awaited. A plan for forcing the valley open was needed and Clark had one in mind. He bounced it off of Keyes and Walker—Walker was not enthused: How feasible was it, Clark wanted to know, to mount a tank assault against the village?

Not very, Walker thought. A recon report suggested a number of formidable obstacles. Not only was the ground in the valley saturated by the incessant rain, but a series of streambeds and gullies ran along the southern base of Sammucro surmounted by a number of small bridges and culverts that could be easily destroyed by German artillery.

Most daunting, however, were the terraces that fronted San Pietro to the south, east, and up the mountainside. These were in the neighborhood of three to seven feet in height, all shored up by rock walls insurmountable to tanks. In addition, the snaking mule trails that led from one level to the next were simply too narrow for tanks to negotiate.

Nonetheless Clark, supported by Keyes, argued that heavy armor had made gains under more stressful circumstances and time was wasting. If it wasn't tanks doing the job, what would it be? In a few days, the 36th would be one full week stuck at San Pietro—one more week in which no progress had been made toward Rome.

December 15 was the day chosen to mount the next assault against the village, and tanks would lead the way in a two-pronged attack: a column of tanks would roar up the valley, sweep around the southwest corner of Monte Sammucro, and head straight for the village in a frontal assault. Meanwhile, forces from Sammucro would descend down the ridges to attack San Pietro from the hillside; and the 2nd and 3rd Battalions would attack simultaneous to the tanks from the south and southwest of the town.

In preparation for the assault, the order came from Major Frazior on December 13 for Company B to edge out to the "nose of Sammucro"—the area of the summit on its west end overlooking the Liri Valley—to get into position to head down the summit by the next evening. Waskow's company was to take the lead in the attack on San Pietro from above, and to do so it needed to be on the west edge of the mountain, pointing down.

With a few hours of relief under its belt, Company B headed back up Sammucro from the east side of the mountain in preparation for the battle. On the way up, it ran into Company I coming down the hill.

It was not a moment for lingering reunion. In low voices, the soldiers swapped stories about what was happening up above and what was happening down below; who from their neck of the woods in Texas had been wounded, and who had been killed. There were even some laughs about the guy from Company B who had got a Christmas tie while up on the mountain. Then off they trudged in their opposite directions.

Riley Tidwell's feet were a mess. His trench foot had degenerated to the point where he could no longer put pressure on the soles of his feet, so covered in sores were they. Instead, he dug into the hillside

National Archives

with his heels, almost backing up the mountain. Down at the aid station, before Company B set out that day, Tidwell made coffee for his captain and pulled out his can of sterno.

In the usual way, he stuck a piece of bread on the wire hangar that he always tucked into his kit for just this purpose. He proceeded to make toast for Waskow and listened as he told him once again how, when the war was over, he was going to get himself one of those fancy new pop-up toasters. "Smart Alec toasters," he always called them.

He also asked Tidwell about his feet and Tidwell gave his captain an honest picture of his circumstances. Truth be told, he was having a hard time walking. He mainly had to stay on his heels. Waskow decided to send Riley back down to get treatment. What good was a runner who couldn't run? Tidwell heeled himself down to the aid station on the mountainside, where medics gently took off his boots, cleaned his feet, and wrapped them in gauze. It felt like heaven by comparison to how they'd been aching before. Tidwell felt chipper enough to rejoin Waskow and the company as they were still ascending Sammucro.

Both: National Archives

Soldiers carry the body of a German soldier, identifiable by his hob-nailed boots, who was killed during the battle of San Pietro. An unknown number of Germans died trying to stop Fifth Army's advance.

Sergeant Willie Slaughter's platoon had broken off on a separate patrol to the west, to nearby Hill 570, where they were to make contact with a unit from the 504th Parachute, the unit that had initially served as a replacement unit for the 1st Battalion. As they walked the ridgeline, Slaughter spied a pair of heads poking up over a rock along his path. He inched his way forward, saw one of the heads turn in his direction, caught the shape of a German helmet and then the sight of the panzer rifleman turning a machine gun in his direction. Along with the rest of the platoon, Slaughter dove for cover as the Germans opened fire.

They had stumbled on a German observation post. Cooly, Slaughter lobbed a grenade in the direction of the two soldiers. Meanwhile, Slaughter's old football buddy from Mexia High, Sergeant Jack Berry, was about to jump out from cover and help a member of the platoon who had been caught in the first burst of fire. Slaughter warned him against it, but Berry was gone before the words registered. Jack Berry was struck with gunfire and killed as he crawled over the rocks to his comrade.

Slaughter and the rest of the platoon settled in for a firefight that would last for a couple of hours. In the end, the group from the 143rd would kill seven Germans, wound seven more, and capture 13 members of the 15th Panzergrenadiers. From these POWs, G-2 was able to learn that artillery had knocked out the German command post down in San Pietro days earlier, that replacements coming into the village were generally older troops, 30 and 40 years old, and that about 120 infantrymen were now in the town. All encouraging news.

The rest of Company B heard the small-arms fire and grenades of Slaughter's platoon as they moved along the summit of Sammucro. It was now deep into the evening on a misting, foggy night. As the company reached and then inched out over the "nose" of Sammucro, Waskow commented on the murky dark and the landscape: "Wouldn't this be an awful spot to get killed and freeze on the mountain?"

With Tidwell and his first sergeant, John Parker, another Mexia man, Waskow eased down over the west edge of Sammucro. They'd gone just a few steps more when a shell came whistling in. Waskow picked up the sound of the screaming round a split second before Tidwell and gave him shove, hollering at his runner to hit the ground. Tidwell did just that, as did Parker.

Waskow was too late. The shell burst above him and shrapnel tore into his chest, shredding his heart and lungs. He was dead in a gasp.

It was a bad day for Company B on the mountain. The artillery fire continued intensely all morning on December 14, sweeping the mountaintop and adjoining ridges. There wasn't much protection among the rocks when the German guns zeroed in.

The company continued down the southeastern face of Sammucro toward San Pietro, moving in conjunction with 2nd and 3rd Battalions, which proceeded on a line from the slopes to the west of San Pietro, basically where they had left off a few days before during the first assault on the village.

Company B got pinned down in a German counterattack and was asked to hold the

Survivors look on as the bodies of Americans slain at San Pietro are tied to litters at a casualty collecting station before being transported to a temporary cemetery.

position. All day long it fought and got punished for the effort. Both of the remaining officers in Company B—two first lieutenants—were killed; First Sergeant Parker was eventually wounded. Two staff sergeants, including Jack Berry, were also killed. Another Mexia man, Private Floyd Durbin, was dead, and yet another Mexian, Hulen Tackett, was wounded. Scores of replacement soldiers—those who had arrived in October from all over the country—were also killed and wounded.

Company B's casualties were now comparable to Company A's and C's. All units were down to about 30 percent of full complement. More than 800 of the men who'd climbed Sammucro on December 8 would be dead or wounded before the month was over.

Back where Henry Waskow lay, it was Tidwell who checked for signs of life and saw none. It was Tidwell who found Waskow's kit with its Bible, its postcard book from Capri meant for sister Mary Lee, with its last letter written and folded on a piece of rough field paper. It was Tidwell who helped pick up the captain and took him down to the head of the mule trail.

There at the station, he lay Waskow down with the other dead bodies being collected. All were tied tight to their litters, waiting for their final leg off the mountain, when they would be draped over the sides of a mule and carried the last way down to the valley below.

Tidwell went back up the mountain and reported to Major Frazior that Company B no longer had any officers. The unit was leaderless down at its end of the mountain, overlooking San Pietro.

Tidwell had known Frazior from his duties as company runner, going back and forth from Waskow to battalion headquarters. Frazior knew Tidwell as well and noticed the condition of the runner's feet. He asked Tidwell if he was capable of getting back to his unit. Tidwell guessed he was.

"Tell one of the sergeants over there to take charge until I get someone to the company," Frazior told him, "and then take yourself down the mountain to have someone look at your feet."

The company runner did as he was told, hobbling first to Company B, where he informed the first sergeant he saw of Frazior's order, then back down the mountainside again to the aid station, where his feet were again wrapped in cotton gauze. This time, he proceeded all the way to the base of the mountain, where he found a shed occupied by exhausted members of the 36th, leaning vacant-eyed against the rough walls. He sat himself down and breathed hard and deep.

Sitting off by himself scribbling in a notepad was Ernie Pyle. He must have sensed that Tidwell wanted to talk and he slipped over in the tall man's direction.

In fact, the lanky private did have some things that he wanted to say about the captain he had left earlier that day at the end of the mule trail on the side of Monte Sammucro. The man he had been trailing now for three and a half months through the mountains of Italy, and in North Africa before that, and Cape Cod, and all the way back to Camp Bowie in Texas. The man who drank his coffee, ate his toast, talked of smart alec toasters with him.

Pyle gently asked what had happened up there, and Tidwell told him how his captain had just died on the mountain.

"He must have been a fine man," Pyle said.

Stunned by an awful day of war, feeling lucky to be alive and sick at what he had seen, Tidwell tried to frame his thoughts. "He was like a father to me," was the best he could do.

As the 1st, 2nd, and 3rd Battalions began the assault on San Pietro, a battalion of the 141st was given the assignment of attacking the village directly from the south, on the left of the units from the 143rd. Monte Lungo, which had remained in German hands throughout the fight on Monte Sammucro, was to be attacked as well, by the 142nd.

Steaming at San Pietro on a winding line down the Venafro Road—from partway up the mountain to the east, down into the valley, and around the base of Sammucro—were Mark Clark's tanks, which jumped off at noon on December 15. The road itself left little room for error. To the right of the tanks loomed Sammucro; to the left was a steep drop-off down the hill. The road was only the

width of two small cars and from the moment they arrived in the valley, they were in open view of German artillery.

Eight tanks rumbled down the lane toward the village; eight more moved in conjunction with the 2nd and 3rd Battalions who were also sweeping around the mountain from the southwest in the wake of the first tanks. Neither component of the attack got very far. The Germans let the lead two tanks get near the town before they opened fire with antitank weaponry.

The panzer troops' aim was directed on the trailing tanks in the first group and it was accurate. In a matter of minutes, two American Shermans were destroyed. They effectively blocked any means of escape on the narrow road for the lead tanks, which meant Wehrmacht antitank guns could wreck them at their own pace.

The next three tanks were stopped and disabled by mines. Each was abandoned by its crew, halting the progress of the remaining tanks, which were left to take fire from German positions around the valley. In all, seven tanks were destroyed, five were disabled, and only four made it back to their original assembly area.

The 2nd and 3rd Battalions, moving in behind the tanks, were not having much better luck. They were hit by a wall of automatic weapons, mortar, and artillery fire coming from San Pietro, Monte Lungo, and, most deadly, from the olive tree terraces that fronted the village.

General Walker's assistant commander, Brig. Gen. William H. Wilbur, ordered Company E of the 143rd to swing around to the right of the tanks and up the hill to attack the village north to south from above. Late in the afternoon, Company L joined them. They got near to San Pietro but took such a severe pounding in the process that both companies were reduced to just a handful of rifleman as darkness fell on the 15th.

The attack continued after dark, and Company L made some progress among the olive orchards and terraces, and even penetrated German lines. There they were met with heavy automatic weapons fire. Without sleep, little food and water, and with heavy casualties, Company L was near the end of its rope.

The 141st, coming at San Pietro from the south, had stopped along with the 143rd to regroup. The battalion mounted an attack from the valley side of the battlefield at about 5:30 PM. Artillery pounding San Pietro helped them get to the verge of the town, but there the stone walls surrounding the village slowed them, as did the booby traps, mines, and barbed wire attached to the walls. German troops in buildings overlooking the barriers were also firing down from the upper floors directly into the American forces.

Once the attack had been slowed to a halt, the German mortars, planted in dozens of locales around Sammucro and across the valley at Monte Lungo, began to zero in the 141st with pinpoint accuracy. The four companies from the 141st's 2nd Battalion involved in the attack were whittled down to a handful of officers and a few score riflemen by early the next morning, but a smattering of troops managed to break through the boundaries of San Pietro.

The one major success of the day's attacks was happening simultaneously—over on Monte Lungo, the 142nd was lunging up the hill. One battalion attacked the northwestern side of Lungo, while another attacked the center. The 1st Italian Motorized Brigade was once more involved and took the southern route against the Germans.

The 1st Battalion on the right flank engaged in a number of fierce firefights. It knocked out more than a half dozen machine-gun nests on its way to the top of the mountain.

The 2nd Battalion likewise made a quick journey to the top, during which it was able to induce a newly captured POW into pointing out 15 gun emplacements on the mountain. They were quickly zeroed in and subsequent fire saved American soldiers throughout the valley. Monte Lungo fell by 1:35 AM on December 16, which proved vital to the capture of San Pietro as well.

Come daybreak, the Germans tried to reinforce the village, but with the 142nd now on top of Lungo, exposing German posts in the town and valley, and with Sammucro still held by the 1st Battalion of the 143rd, the panzer troops were now in a desperate position.

They acted accordingly. A fierce counterattack ensued on the afternoon of the December 16, focused on the American right flank, where the 2nd and 3rd Battalions of the 143rd were positioned. Here, Company I—which had been pulled off the top of the mountain and asked to join the assault against San Pietro—got caught in the first blaze of fire from the Germans. They were above the village, just to the northeast, and they got smashed.

The CO and second in command were both killed in the initial attack, forcing Company I to reel back. But the unit held its ground thanks in part to Pfc. Charles Dennis, who rallied the platoon with fierce machine-gun fire.

Company K, too, was quickly drawn into the fight. Led by Captain Henry Bragaw, "a mild-mannered horticulturalist with a strawberry-colored handlebar mustache." They were able to stop the counterattack, despite having lost communication with the battalion command post.

A withering line of artillery fire was also essential to stopping the Germans. At the height of the fight, shells were landing within 100 yards of the American lines—a dangerous rain of fire, but so accurate that German troops could not penetrate it.

By 1 AM on December 17, the fight was essentially over. The Germans began quickly withdrawing from the village, leaving just a smattering of troops to cover the retreat. What was left of Companies I and K proceeded into San Pietro and the area just to its north. In the process they collected 10 German POWs not quick enough to escape the town.

San Pietro had been turned into a rough pile of stones. A few walls with window openings were huddled together, suggesting the buildings from which they were derived and the shape of an ancient Italian village. The essential outline of the town's church, dedicated to St. Michael the Archangel, remained visible, but from a distance it looked like

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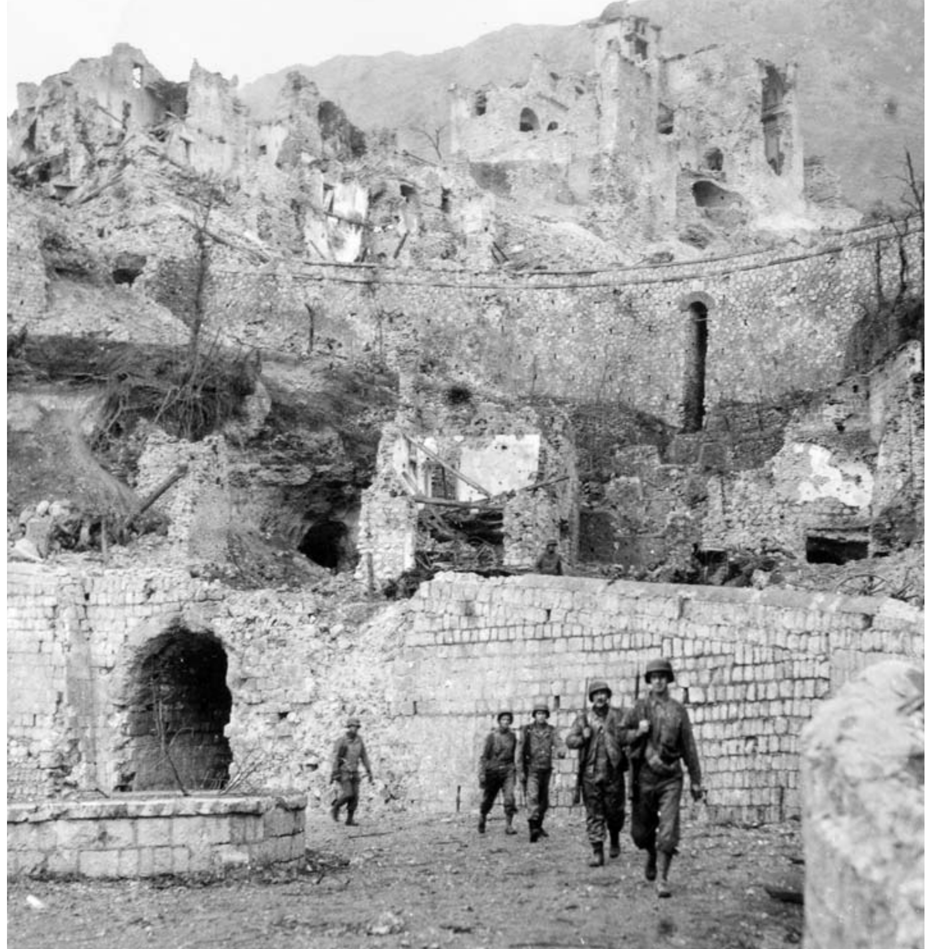

American troops march below the shattered remains of San Pietro, December 18, 1943. Visible behind the ruins is Monte Sammucro, where Waskow died. The town has been left in its ruined state as a war memorial.

a sand castle kicked several times over. Within one of the church alcoves, an armless statue of St. Peter looked out mournfully on what was left of the village.

Even as the 36th Division began sweeping through the remains, the German soldiers were racing away to their next line in the mountains, five kilometers away.

Up on the mountain, the weary 1st Battalion of the 143rd was relieved by a battalion from the 141st. Exhausted and unshaven, on wobbly legs and empty bellies, remnants of the outfit made a tired descent from Sammucro after spending the better part of 10 days on its heights. Someone estimated that the 1st Battalion had pitched 2,000 hand grenades among the rocks of Sammucro during its stay up on the heights. That was more than a division would typically use in combat.

Of course, all of those grenades were lugged up to the top of the mountain by hand. Mortars, too, were used at a level three times the usual. They, too, were carried up on the backs of the human mules who had scaled Hill 1205 time and again.

Down below, Riley Tidwell was still waiting for his captain to come down off the mountain. It had been three days now that Henry Waskow lay wrapped in a tarp, still trussed up in the rope that had been used to secure his journey on a litter off the summit. His remains had lain with face covered, boots exposed, on his litter on bare ground, against yet another old stone wall in this land of old stone and mud.

Waskow was far from alone up at the station where the mule train ended. Many more dead were waiting to come down the mountain, and many more of the living congregated around them, resting themselves on the way, sitting among the dead bodies, as if they weren't dead, but simply dead-tired, like the soldiers of the 143rd seated around them.

That didn't ease things for Tidwell. It just wasn't right for the captain to be so long on the mountain. Tidwell decided to take matters into his own hands. He "acquisitioned" a mule from one of the trains and took off by himself up the trail, determined to fetch Captain Waskow. There was still sporadic gunfire on the hillside; still the persistent mortar fire from stubborn German troops slowly retreating on the far side of Sammucro. But the slow process of bringing the dead off the mountain continued.

Riley Tidwell found his captain just where he'd left him. He strapped Waskow over the mule like others were doing with the dead at the head of the trail and headed down. For a time, the sporadic German fire focused on the mules coming down off the mountain. Tidwell was nicked by shrapnel: once across the back, once on the wrist, once by his left ear. The last wound left him bloody but still upright as he neared the base of the hill. It was his feet that were giving him the most pain.

"Here comes Riley," he heard someone from down below call, "and he's got Captain Waskow."

Several people helped him take the captain off the back of the mule and lay him down with the others who'd been brought down the mountain that day. At the field hospital, they sewed 15 stitches into the wound by Riley's ear and decided that his feet were bad enough to send him to the hospital.

Ernie Pyle was still at the shed below, watching the procession of mules and men, mingling with the living soldiers at the foot of the mountain, as the dead were placed among them.

All day long the bodies were carried down the mountain on the backs of mules, according to Pyle, one at a time, as the exhausted men of 1st Battalion sat around talking "soldier talk." They would get quiet as each fresh body was laid next to the road that ran by the shed—convenient for taking the corpses away for their final disposition.

Pyle saw the gangly Texas private he had run into in the shed a few days earlier

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BAPTISM OF FIRE: THE SS IN POLAND

Hitler's elite Bodyguard Regiment and other SS units were transformed during the Polish campaign into real fighting men—and became responsible for committing atrocities.

BY BLAINE TAYLOR

AT the mention of the letters "SS," an image springs to mind of ruthless German troops, the epitome of the Nazi/Aryan ideal: tall, strong, blond-haired, and blue-eyed, enthusiastically ready to fight and die for Germany and their beloved Führer, Adolf Hitler.

Library of Congress

The typical SS man has also been portrayed as a hardened criminal, someone without moral scruples—someone happy to murder defenseless civilians simply because he was told that it was his patriotic duty to wipe out whole populations due to their ethnicity or religion that were deemed a threat to Germany and the "Ayran race."

This image has been created by hundreds of books, films, and television documentaries, but what is truth and what is fiction? And how did a small unit originally created to serve as Adolf Hitler's bodyguard become a much feared combat force? Perhaps these questions can be answered by briefly examining how the SS came into existence and looking at the men most responsible for its creation and deployment in combat.

As one of Hitler's most faithful sycophants, Heinrich Himmler was rewarded for his loyalty when his Führer gave him the command of the SS (Schutzstaffel, or Protection Detail) in 1929—Hitler's personal bodyguard. Almost immediately, the meek looking former chicken farmer began turning the small unit into an instrument of terror and military power.

The bespectacled Bavarian was born into a Catholic family in Munich on October 7, 1900. As he matured, Himmler became attracted to nationalist causes and racial theories that posited that Germans and other Nordic or Aryan types were the "master race" and destined to rule the world. In 1923, he joined the tiny Nazi

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A very pleased Adolf Hitler salutes his troops during the German invasion of Poland, September 1939. Despite some early misgivings about their suitability as combat troops, SS units performed relatively well—if ruthlessly—during the Blitzkrieg of Poland. OPPOSITE: A recruiting poster portrays an SS member as the ideal Aryan warrior.

Party and began rising in its inner circle. On January 6, 1929, Hitler appointed Himmler Reichsführer-SS, or National Leader, of the 280-man SS detachment.

Himmler used this appointment as an opportunity to develop the SS into what would become the elite corps of the Nazi Party. By the time Hitler became chancellor in January 1933, the SS numbered more than 52,000. As the nation slowly marched toward war, the SS was transformed from a small detachment whose original function was to protect Hitler at meetings, rallies, and public appearances into a full-blown army of fanatical soldiers wholly dedicated to the racial and political ideals of National Socialism.

Three men ultimately aided Himmler in this transformation of the SS: Josef "Sepp" Dietrich, Theodor Eicke, and Paul Hausser. Who were these men and other prominent SS leaders, and how did it happen that there were armed SS formations fighting at all in Poland in 1939—despite Hitler's public pledge in 1934 that the regular German Army (Wehrmacht) was and remained the "sole bearers of arms" of the state?

Both: National Archives

ABOVE: Hitler (far left, in car) salutes his bodyguard unit, the 1st SS Division Leibstandarte Adolf Hitler (LAH), during a January 1937 parade in Berlin. LEFT: Hitler greets Heinrich Himmler, the national leader of the SS. OPPOSITE: General Josef "Sepp" Dietrich (center, holding map board), commander of the LAH, is shown in a wartime painting surrounded by his officers and men.

In September 1934, the official announcement of the formation of the armed SS Verfuhrüngstruppe (SS Special Purpose Troops, or SS-VT) was made, and two units were established, one in Hamburg and the other in Munich.

Simultaneously, with the establishment of concentration camps to hold political prisoners, Heinrich Himmler reorganized all the camps' SS guards into the SS Totenkopfverbande (SS Death's Head Units), under Theodor Eicke, one of a trio of SS men who had executed Ernst Röhm, chief of staff of the Sturmabteilung (SA, also known as the "Brownshirts" or Storm Troopers) in his cell during the Nazi "Blood Purge" of June 30-July 2, 1934.

Also taking part in the overall "national murder weekend" or "Night of the Long Knives" was Josef "Sepp" Dietrich, commander of Hitler's own security unit, the SS Leibstandarte Adolf Hitler (LSSAH, or SS Adolf Hitler Bodyguard).

In reward for getting rid of the leadership of the SA, whose growing size and influence threatened his rise to power and legitimacy, Hitler made all SS units independent from Storm Troop command for the first time, as units reported directly to Himmler. The LSSAH was a sole exception, however, as Sepp Dietrich reported to Hitler alone, thus bypassing a miffed Reichsführer-SS Himmler.

The weapons for the newly formed Armed SS troops (Waffen-SS) were provided by the German Defense Minister, Army Col. Gen. Werner von Blomberg, thus irking the nettlesome, aristocratic, prickly, monocled commander in chief of the German Army, Col. Gen. Werner von Fritsch.

Brought in to administer the new SS-VT were three men who, alongside Dietrich, would later write the combat historical record of the vaunted Waffen-SS across the length and breadth of conquered Europe: Paul Hausser, Felix Steiner, and Willi Bittrich. All three men would become high-ranking SS generals during the wartime years, as would both Dietrich and Eicke.

During the years 1934-1939, the old line, conservative "reactionary" generals of the regular German Army derided Hitler's showboating, elite troopers in black—and later in field gray—as mere "asphalt soldiers," good for effect but not for actual fighting. They were in for a surprise.

At the head of almost 1,600 men (including a motorcycle detachment), Dietrich led the way in 1935 into the delirious, formerly French-occupied Saarland and paraded his Leibstandarte there for the next five days. Hitler granted his beloved LSSAH several distinctions at this time: only it was allowed to wear white accoutrements with its black uniforms and bear the SS runes on its collar tabs without a unit number. According to his eldest son, Dietrich designed the new SSLAH uniforms himself.

As the showpiece unit of the Nazi regime, the Leibstandarte was gaining worldwide fame as an elite unit on par with the French Foreign Legion, the English Coldstream Guards, the Italian Bersaglieri, and the United States Marine Corps.

By the end of 1936, the LSSAH possessed both trench mortars and armored cars. Relations between the Army, the LSSAH, and the SS-VT remained good. Continuing his buildup of close ties with the Army, Dietrich developed a harmonious relationship with panzer leader General Heinz Guderian, who told him that the LSSAH would take part in the peaceful invasion of Austria—within 48 hours!

Beginning on March 12, 1938, it was an entirely pacific occupation with the vehicles even bedecked with flowers and greenery. By May 1938, SS Generals Dietrich and Hausser were feuding over the formation of a fourth SS-VT Standarte unit in newly Nazi-occupied Vienna named Der Führer (The Leader).

At the end of September 1938, the LSSAH took part in military training exercises at the Grafenwöhr training facility in southeast Germany. For his next "peaceful" occupation—that of Prague and the rest of Bohemia and Moravia on March 15, 1939—Hitler again teamed Guderian with Dietrich for the operation.

Parade ground troops, SA murderers, and occupiers of peaceful countries though they might be, how would the LSSAH and the SS-VT units, military analysts wondered, fare in actual combat? The answer was not long in coming. In Poland, as in the previous operations, Dietrich's men were placed under Army command. Now the former NCO of World War I began World War II as a commanding general in the field.

Born at Hawangen in Upper Bavaria in 1892, Dietrich was a butcher's apprentice who joined the Bavarian Army in 1911 and served in the Great War as a sergeant. A policeman following the war, he joined the SA in 1923, held a series of odd jobs, and then joined the Nazi Party in 1928.

Named an SS brigade leader in 1931, on March 17, 1933, Dietrich set up the Berlin SS Guard Staff as the new Chancellor Adolf Hitler's bodyguards, the genesis of the later LSSAH, established in September 1933. (It should be noted that Hitler's bodyguard prior to his becoming reich chancellor on January 30, 1933, was Party-funded. After that date, the SS unit went on the government payroll.) Dietrich remained its commander until July 1943, seeing it evolve into divisional and larger strength. He went on to become a highly decorated armored corps and panzer army leader.

Also born in 1892, at Hampont in Alsace-Lorraine, Eicke served as an Army paymaster during the Great War of 1914-1918. Afterward, he worked as both a policeman and businessman, as well as head of security for the German chemical firm I.G. Farben from 1923-1932.

Having joined both the Nazi Party and the SA in 1928, Eicke also entered the SS in 1930, where he, unlike Dietrich, enjoyed a good working relationship with SS head Himmler. In 1933, Himmler named Eicke commandant of the new SS concentration camp at Dachau, outside Munich. A decade later, Eicke had risen to become Inspector of Concentration Camps, as well as chief of the feared SS Death's Head (Totenkopf) combat units. In 1939, these were combined into the Totenkopf Waffen-SS Division.

Paul Hausser was the third, and perhaps the most important, formative figure of the early armed Party formations. His biographer called him, "The singular greatest influence on the development of the Waffen SS."

Born in 1880 at Brandenburg/Havel, Paul Hausser served as an officer on the staff of German Army Group commander Crown

Author's Collection

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AKG Images

ABOVE: Although brave, Polish horse cavalrymen, shown here in Sochaczew in central Poland, were no match for Germany's overwhelming Blitzkrieg tactics. RIGHT: A battalion of Polish 7TP light tanks, photographed on maneuvers near the German border in April 1939, had no chance against German panzers and Stuka dive bombers.

Prince Rupprecht of Bavaria during World War I, and also saw combat in France, Hungary, and Romania. After the war, he served in the renegade Free Corps, then in the Weimar Republican Army, until he retired as a lieutenant general in 1931 at the age of 51 after 40 years of service. Thus, he had a far more exalted military record than Dietrich and Eicke combined, but he is less well known today in Nazi history.

Hausser joined the SS in 1934 after having been a member of both the Stahlhelm (Steel Helmet) veterans' association and the SA. Appointed Inspector of SS Officer Schools in 1935, Hausser, as Himmler's man, organized a trio of armed SS regiments: Deutschland, Germania, and Der Führer.

Under his leadership, SS armored tactics were developed and the first camouflaged clothing ever used by a military unit was introduced, made famous by the Waffen-SS during the war on fronts east, west, north, and south.

In Poland on October 19, 1939, the SS-VT was created as a full division with Hausser as its commanding officer. He lost his right eye in 1941 and commanded the first formed SS corps in 1942.

These, then, were the main figures who formed the new "combat" SS as it began to fight its first campaign when the Third Reich invaded Poland on September 1, 1939.

At the war's outset, the German Wehrmacht consisted of more than 100 active and reserve divisions, plus a cavalry brigade. These included five panzer (armored) divisions of about 300 tanks each, or 1,500 in all; four light divisions of lesser numbers of tanks, and a quartet of motorized infantry divisions entirely equipped with motor vehicles; in 1939, the artillery and supporting weaponry were mostly horse-drawn. Overall, at the start of the war the Wehrmacht encompassed 2,500,000 trained soldiers, both on active duty and held in reserve units.

Conversely, the 1939 Polish Army consisted of but 280,000 men in 30 infantry divisions, 11 cavalry brigades, a pair of mechanized brigades, plus supporting specialist units. This peacetime force also drew on three million trained and partially trained reservists. Upon wartime mobilization, these reservists brought the standing units up to wartime strength and also potentially constituted an additional 15 reserve divisions.

The German Luftwaffe had an overwhelming superiority over the Polish Air Force, as did the German Navy in the Baltic Sea and elsewhere.

The Fall Weiss (Case White) provided an opportunity for the Germans to put their Blitzkrieg (Lightning War) concepts of coordinated air-ground operations to a test. More than 60 German divisions, the bulk of its fighting ground force, were duly committed to the campaign.

The general plan was to annihilate the Polish Army in the east before the French Army could intervene decisively in the west against the Siegfried Line. Hitler also knew that his secret, Nazi-Soviet pact ally—the Red Army—would invade stricken Poland from the east 16 days after the German campaign began on September 17, 1939. Thus, Poland would be crushed like a walnut between the nutcracker of two vastly superior forces.

At a top-secret meeting of his senior commanders on August 23, Hitler declared that Poland would not merely be occupied, but destroyed. The SS Death's Head units were "to kill without mercy the entire Polish race" if necessary to force Poland's quick surrender.

Indeed, stated Army Field Marshal Fedor von Bock later to his subordinate staff officer Fabian von Schlabrendorff, "At the same time, Hitler informed the generals that he would proceed against the Poles after the end of the campaign with relentless vigor. Things would then happen which would not be to the taste of German generals. By this

Hitler meant to warn the Army not of the notorious liquidations, but of the destruction of the Polish intelligentsia, in particular the priesthood, by the SS. He required of the Army that the generals should not interfere in these matters, but restrict themselves to their military duties."

These, then, were the atrocities mentioned in official after-action combat reports made by Army General Johannes Blaskowitz that began during the fighting and continued afterward as well.

On September 12, Armed Forces Intelligence Chief Admiral Wilhelm Canaris complained to Colonel General Alfred Jodl on Hitler's command train, "They would have to accept the fact that the SS, the Security Police, and such organizations would be employed together to carry out these very measures. Thus, at the side of each military commander a corresponding civilian official would be appointed."

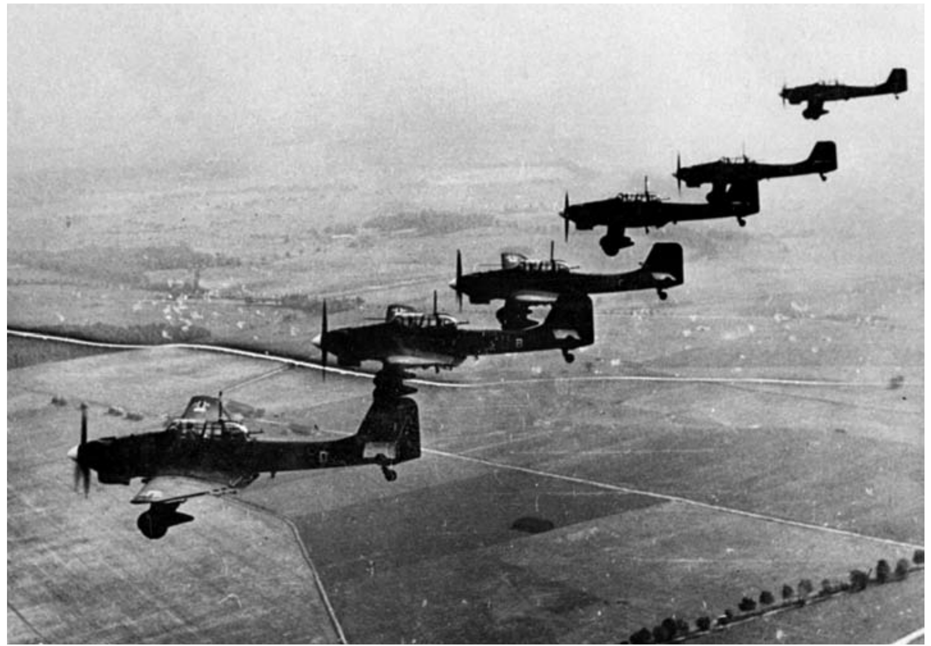
Indeed, two days later an Army military police sergeant-major and a gunner from "the only SS artillery regiment which served in Poland" collected 50 Jews into a synagogue, where they were shot after having worked on a bridge as forced labor that day. Both soldiers were later acquitted under the terms of a general amnesty.

Asserted historian Gerald Reitlinger, "Such incidents were common during the 18-day campaign," but the real "SS reign of terror," in Ambassador Ulrich von Hassell's diary entry words, began after the military campaign concluded. The actual combat fighting had begun it, however.

In all, 18,000 SS men in field gray uniforms fought in Poland, including the LSSAH, the Totenkopf, and the SS-VT units—all reformed and combined into full combat field divisions as the new Waffen-SS of October 1939. The Leibstandarte became the new 1st SS Field Division, and the Totenkopf the 2nd. In addition to SS General Reinhard Heydrich's Einsatzgruppen (Special Action) killing groups, Himmler retained three full regiments in Poland of Eicke's Death's Head units—numbering 7,400 men in all—to "resettle" captured Jews "to the east," from which they never returned.

Thus, these killing groups became the forerunners of later such factions in Russia, and after that, of the overall Holocaust death camps, all located in conquered Poland. Eventually, new Death's Head killing units replaced the SS field combat divisions, which went on to fight more campaigns throughout 1941 in the Balkans and in the Soviet Union.

National Archives



A formation of Ju-87B Stuka dive bombers over Poland, September 1939.

Speaking to senior SS commanders in 1943, Himmler marveled that the expansion of his units had been "fantastic," and "at an absolutely terrific speed," in the first year of the war, 1939-1940, with only, at the outset, "a few regiments, guard units, 8-9,000 strong—that is, not even a division; all in all 25-28,000 men at the most."

Historian George H. Stein describes the contribution of the Waffen-SS as "modest, but not negligible." The main body of the SS-VT was shipped to East Prussia during the summer of 1939 in regimental combat groups that were attached to larger Army units. These included the SS Regiment Deutschland, the just created SS artillery regiment previously noted, the SS Aufklärungs Sturmbann (Reconnaissance Battalion) that was linked to an Army armored regiment, to form the 4th Panzer Brigade under Army command.

In like fashion, SS Regiment Germania was connected to the German Fourteenth Army in East Prussia's southern area as the jumping-off point from which to strike into Poland. A third SS regimental battle group included Sepp's own SSLAH and the SS Pionier Sturmbann (Combat Engineer Battalion) within the German Tenth Army, which assaulted Poland without warning via Silesia.

The SS Totenkopf Sturmbann "Götze" morphed into the reinforced infantry battalion renamed Heimwehr (Home Guard) Danzig that fought both in and around the embattled former League of Nations' Free City, today's Polish port of Gdansk. One SS regiment that saw no action in Poland was Der Führer, due to unfinished training.

Without doubt, the SS-VT received its actual baptism of fire on the plains of Poland, yet it was given only grudging, backhanded Army praise afterward. Indeed, the regular Army generals noted that SS troops suffered "proportionately much heavier casualties than the Army," and this was blamed on poor SS officer performance. The latter, in turn, blamed the Army's scattered leadership of its troops in strange units "often given difficult assignments without adequate support."

What the Army generals really wanted

Bundesarchiv Bild 183-S56768; Photo: Unknown

Soldiers of SS Heimwehr Danzig, an SS unit recruited in Danzig, take cover behind an ADGZ armored car during an attack on Polish troops in a post office. SS Heimwehr Danzig was incorporated into the 3rd SS Totenkopf Division after the Poland campaign.

was the total disbandment of the Waffen-SS as a growing, Röhm/SA-like updated threat to them, but Himmler, with Hitler's support, succeeded instead in acquiring a nearly independent SS army under the command of its own officers.

Thus, for the rest of the war Himmler and Hausser got their SS infantry and armored divisions, but they were divided among the larger regular Army and corps formations. Most importantly, they remained under Army command until the end of the war.

Had Sepp Dietrich won the Battle of the Bulge during 1944-1945, he might very well have become the first SS field marshal, in command of a fully independent fourth branch of the Armed Forces—an SS Army—but he didn't.

The Leibstandarte suffered its first casualties: seven killed and 20 wounded. Hitler followed the unit closely from his train, marked "Sepp" on the maps wherever the LSSAH advanced, gave "his" unit the toughest assignments, and even visited it personally in the field at Guzow on September 25, 1939.

During 1936-1939, Dietrich had taken armored warfare courses both at Zossen outside Berlin and at the Wunsdorf Tank School, but Willi Bittrich later asserted that "the commander," as he was called, couldn't read a map properly. Nevertheless, the LSSAH performed well, at least militarily. SS troopers fought stiff Polish Regular Army resistance over a number of towns and villages.

In one battle, Sepp's own forward command post was almost cut off but, reinforced, he went on to win the day. By September 9, his unit had been transferred to be in on the German drive on Warsaw at Hitler's insistence, to reap even more Nazi glory.

Rudolf Lehmann, a veteran of the LAH, provided a dramatic account of his unit's first battles: "On August 31, 1939 ... the leading elements of the Regiment began to march toward the [Polish] border.… The mission for September 1, 1939 ... was as follows: 'To capture the bridge at Gola in a surprise attack, and to open the crossings over the Prosna at Bolesalwice, Wieruszow, and as far as Weglewice from the back. It is then to halt and secure the Prosna bridges until the arrival of the leading elements of the 10th and 17th Divisions.…'

"The attack missions were assigned as follows: 'An advance detachment is to open up the crossing over the Prosna in a surprise attack beginning at 4:45 AM, September 1, and then to proceed directly along the designated march route.

"'Armed reconnaissance as far as the railway line to the east of Wieruszow, and as far as the crossing over the Prosna west of Wieruszow.… The reinforced armored reconnaissance car section' and two other units 'are to join the bulk of the unit, and follow the advance detachment.'

"'Units of it are to move ahead to cover the right flank from Gola via Wojcin, the eastern edge of Wiewiorka, and Point 185 in the Sokolniki Forest. The first attack objective of the reinforced…car section'" included those key crossings.

When the attacks began, "After surprise fire on the [Polish] customs station by the light infantry, an assault detachment ... waged a surprise attack on the crossing over the Prosna.

"Hand grenades exploded, several shots sounded through the air, and the obstacles were blown into the sky. The light armored vehicles entered at top speed into Gola, and

the infantry assault troops seized the bridge over the river undamaged.... Heinrich Bauch of the Engineer Troops had removed the fuse from the pot filled with [demolition] explosives in time, and thus preserved the bridge for our advance.

"Ten minutes after the war started, it had already ended for the Polish company! The average age within our storm troops was 19 years, and their officers at 25."

Officer Kurt Meyer—later nicknamed Panzer Meyer as the notorious commander of the 12th SS Panzer Division ("Hitler Jugend")—recalled, "I was suddenly standing in front of the corpse of a Polish officer; a round in the throat had killed him. The warm blood was spurting from the wound. Yes, this was war!"

Lehmann continued, "The motorcyclists ground their way though the deep sand of the village streets of Gola and Chroscin under constant sniper fire," as well as "thick morning fog and enemy contact along the southern edge of Boleslawez. The first heavy armored car rolled to a smoking halt; its wheels had hardly stopped when the second one was also destroyed. Both armored cars were about 150 meters in front of an antitank gun.

"The first heavy vehicle was hit by three antitank rounds from the southern edge" of the town, with one crewman slain. A later armored car casualty report listed a trio of dead, with another badly wounded and one but slightly.

Lehmann said that the Polish troops allowed "the spearhead of the advance detachment to pass, then opened fire on it, as well as SS infantry, from fortified field positions. Polish cavalry came galloping out of the smoke screen ... charging directly toward the SS troops. It was only when the motorcycle platoon opened fire and brought down some horses that the fierce cavalry troop galloped back into the fog."

At 9:20 AM, the city of Boleslawice was captured by the SS after fierce street battles. "In the meantime," said Lehmann, "the unit ... assigned to protect the right flank had come into combat with the eastern extension of the Polish fortifications in Bolesawice, near Wojcin.…

"Both spearheads battled on until 12:55 PM ... at first through Wojcin" where one SS trooper was fatally wounded, "and later through the terrain to the north across Wiewiorka; and to the left the bulk of a reinforced battalion ... through the village along the roads ... to the north edge of Kamionka."

The Polish resistance grew more stubborn, "reinforced by high-angle and flat fire from the higher ground of the Sokoniki Forest, and from the commanding position at Meleschin." There the German advance came to a halt due to a counterattack carried out by two companies of Polish soldiers.

Lehmann said, "With the brilliant support" from another LAH unit—"deployed for the first time—Point 185 was taken by 3:30 PM," the support unit itself coming under Polish artillery fire. "Regimental headquarters followed to the western edge

Both: National Archives

ABOVE: Russian troops from the 29th Tank Brigade meet up with their German counterparts in Dobuchin, Poland (now part of Belarus). Hitler and Soviet leader Josef Stalin had a secret pact to divide up Poland between them after Germany's invasion. BELOW: A priest waits with Polish civilians rounded up by Nazis in Bydgoszcz, Poland, in September 1939. These men were likely executed.

AKG Images

ABOVE: Theodor Eicke's SS-VT "Death's Head" units were responsible for committing numerous atrocities, such as the murder of Polish Jews and intellectuals. Here a firing squad executes civilians, autumn 1939. OPPOSITE: Himmler, fearful of being tried as a war criminal, committed suicide with a hidden cyanide capsule on May 23, 1945, while in British military custody.

of Kamionka," the veteran added.

The Polish forces fought with a tenacity that surprised many of the German commanders and inflicted numerous casualties on the invaders. Lehmann recalled that a machine gunner in one of the armored cars was killed in action. "By nightfall," he said, "both Polish battalions left their previous positions in the dark and took up positions in the forest.

"The approaching darkness hid the day's destruction. The battlefield's misery was only visible in the illumination of nearby fires…. The Regiment had fought reinforced border patrols ... that had been ordered to hold the major roads parallel to the frontier as long as possible, and to provide cover for the advance units of the Polish 19th Division and a cavalry brigade" operating in the contested area.

Of the later Battle of the Bzura River—reportedly the largest action of the entire campaign—Kurt Meyer recalled, "The finest Polish blood mixes with the water of the river. The Poles' losses are awful." The 10-day battle ended in a German victory on September 19, 1939.

Overall, many of the SS men considered that their Polish foe was more adept at hand-to-hand fighting than they were. One who had firsthand knowledge of this was Meyer, with one Polish soldier along foxholes on the edge of the Kampinos Forest.

"Another popped up behind me from the bushes along the bank," Meyer wrote. "I had overlooked him." But Meyer's platoon messenger felled the attacker with a single round. "We were exhausted, physically and emotionally. Each man lay down and slept where he had been standing. Life is all-in-all, yet it hangs by one silken thread."

Thus had the LAH helped stop in its tracks the Polish Army's war cry of "On to Berlin!" But the Poles had, by their overall resistance, shaken Hitler's belief that his nation's military was an irresistible force and cost the Germans "an entire armored division."

The German Army, wary of a separate SS army under Himmler, was reluctant to praise the wartime performance of the LAH. In fact, some historians have called the unit's combat performance "slipshod," with the regiment actually transferred from one Army command to another while in Poland during operations.

In addition, other sources provide impressive Polish accounts of civilians being shot out of hand by the LAH: "The participation of the LAH thus came to an ignominious end."

Already, the LSSAH was gaining a reputation for erratic, "wild firing," the excessive burning of enemy villages and, during the remaining battles, for being trigger-happy, wiping out the Polish forces on the Vistula River and around the city of Modlin.

By the time Warsaw fell on the 27th, the Leibstandarte had lost 108 killed, 292 wounded, 14 lightly wounded, three missing in action, and 15 from accidental causes. For his part, Sepp Dietrich considered the Polish Army to have been well led and praised the Poles as being "worthy opponents."

Meanwhile, during the invasion, Theodor Eicke's SS-VT "Death's Head" units were reportedly slaughtering Polish intellectuals and Jews.

The SS-VT had no tactical input into the German victory in Poland. Instead, its military capabilities were used to terrorize the civilian population by hunting down strag-

gling Polish soldiers, seizing farm produce and livestock, and torturing and murdering large numbers of Polish politicians, nobles, business figures, clerics, Jews, and the hated intellectuals.

Eicke's trio of Death's Head regiments—Oberbayern, Brandenburg, and Thüringen—were gathered as independent action groups in Upper Silesia before the invasion. The first two followed in the wake of the German Tenth Army, operating between the Vistula River and Upper Silesia south of Warsaw. Brandenburg followed General Johannes Blaskowitz's Eighth Army over large tracts of Poznan and the full west-central part of the country.

Operating from Hitler's command train, Eicke, as Higher SS and Police Leader, answered not to the furious Blaskowitz, but to Himmler alone and directly, in Poland as well as on his command train, code named Heinrich.

Following the conclusion of the fighting, Eicke's three Death's Head regiments, the regular SS, and Reinhard Heydrich's SD all answered to Eiche when the Army relinquished control of the occupied Polish provinces of Poznan, Lodz, and Warsaw.

Villages were burned and Jews and others were shot "while trying to escape," as well as "suspicious elements, plunderers, insurgents, and Poles," in general. Savage SS measures were taken against the cities of Wloclawek (renamed Leslau in German) and Bydgoszcz (Bromberg). SS Regiment Brandenburg began a four-day "Jewish Action" on September 22 that included plundering Jewish shops, arrests, and burning and dynamiting synagogues.

As the war went on, additional SS units were raised and fought on virtually every front, gaining for themselves a reputation of being fearless, ruthless fighters.

With the Third Reich collapsing in the spring of 1945, Heinrich Himmler, in April 1945, asked Count Folke Bernadotte, the vice president of the Swedish Red Cross, to transmit an offer of surrender on the Western Front to General Dwight D. Eisenhower, the supreme commander of the British and American forces. When Hitler learned about Himmler's "treachery" on the night of April 28-29, 1945, he stripped Himmler of all his offices and ordered his arrest.

But Himmler escaped from Berlin, headed north, and disguised himself as an ordinary soldier, hoping to blend into the tens of thousands of German prisoners of war. However, he was captured by the British. Before he could be made to stand trial for his crimes, he committed suicide on May 23, 1945, by taking poison.

As the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum's *Holocaust Encyclopedia* states, "A skilled organizer and a capable manager who understood how to obtain and use power, Himmler was the ideological and organizational driving force behind the rise of the SS. Moreover, he understood his SS men and knew how to secure their loyalty to his own person and to the concept of the Nazi elite to which they belonged."

The SS suffered a high casualty rate during the war. One estimate says that 180,000 SS men were killed, 400,000 wounded, and 40,000 missing—over one third of its total number.

And what became of Himmler's three main lieutenants?

After several postwar trials and imprisonments (he was sentenced to life for being in overall command of the SS unit that murdered U.S. prisoners at Malmedy, Belgium), Sepp Dietrich was released in 1958 and became head of HIPA, the Mutual Help Association of Former Waffen-SS Members, which was co-founded by Paul Hausser. Dietrich died of a heart attack in 1966 at age 73 and received a military funeral in Ludwigsburg that was attended by 7,000 of his old comrades. Hausser gave the eulogy.

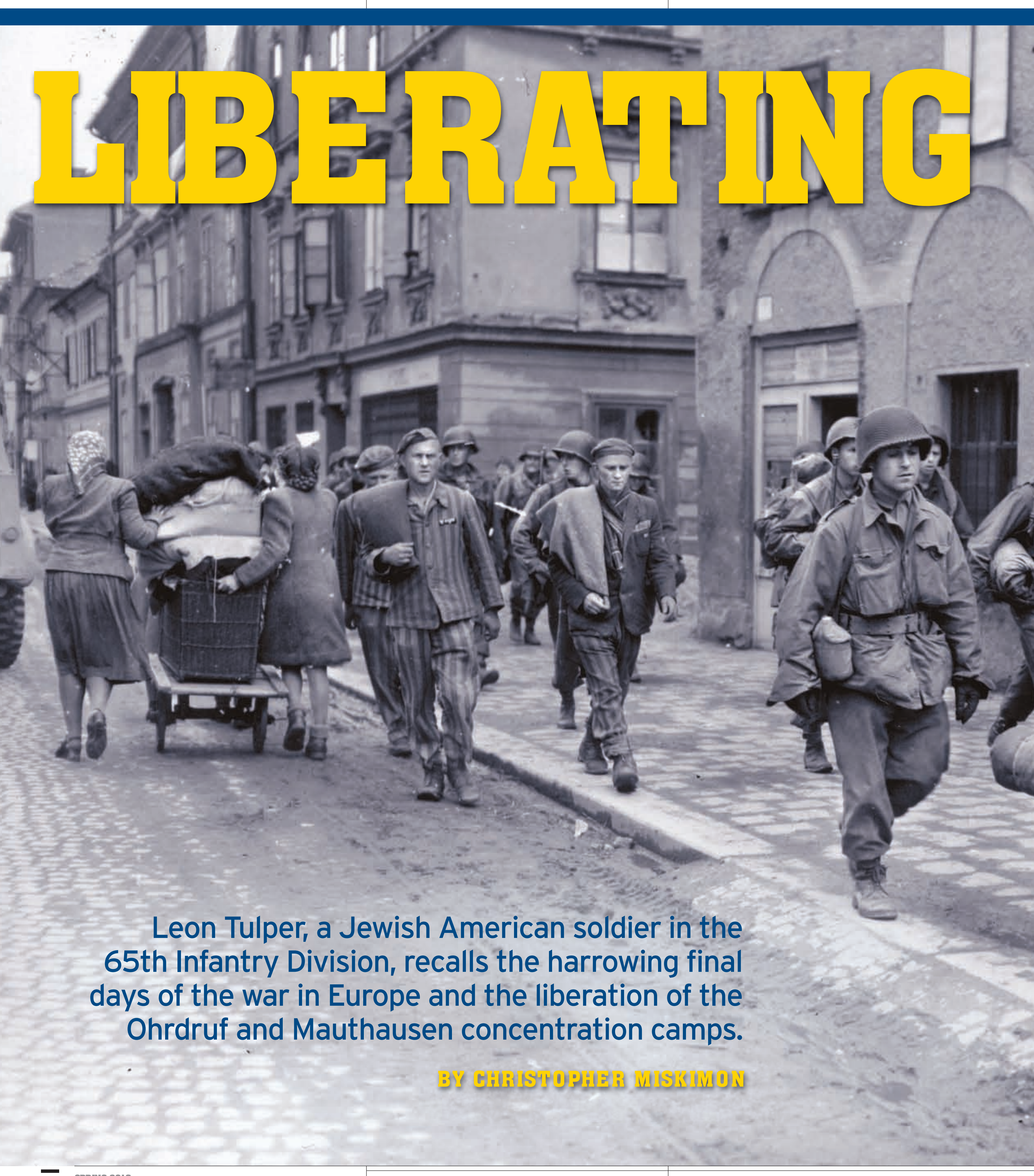
Theodor Eicke was transferred from his position as overseer of concentration camp guards to command the SS Totenkopf Division in combat. While serving as the commanding general of the division, Eicke died when his light command plane was shot down by the Russians near Orelka, on February 26, 1943.

Paul Hausser led a corps at Kursk and, after taking command of the Seventh Army in 1944, he was wounded during the Battle of the Falaise Gap. He was later promoted and given command of Army Group G but was then relieved of his command. Hausser, unlike Dietrich, was not indicted for war crimes. Chairman of the postwar SS veterans' organization HIPA, Hausser died as a successful author at age 92 in 1972.

National Archives

As Ambassador Ulrich von Hassell so truly noted, "The SS reign of terror" in hapless Poland had begun, ending only when the Red Army liberated it in 1944-1945. After the war, apologists for the Waffen-SS like Paul Hausser tried to separate the twin records of the "combat" SS units from that of the Death's Head camp guards. In reality, however, they were one and the same, with much crossover from one force to the other.

That debate, too, continues unabated. □



LIBERATING

Leon Tulper, a Jewish American soldier in the 65th Infantry Division, recalls the harrowing final days of the war in Europe and the liberation of the Ohrdruf and Mauthausen concentration camps.

BY CHRISTOPHER MISKIMON

the CAMPS

BACKSTORY: *The final months of World War II in the European Theater were a harrowing and desperate time for the soldiers who fought there. No one wanted to die when the war was so close to its end. This called for caution in the minds of many, yet the fighting was not over. The forces of Hitler's Third Reich—still actively resisting the advancing Allies—simply had to be beaten. Further, they had to be made to understand they were beaten, lest there be another war for the next generation to fight. In the event, the Nazi leadership gave the Allies no choice but to prove that point.*

Courtesy of Leon Tulper

ABOVE: Leon Tulper in uniform. LEFT: Civilians move their belongings in a cart while 65th Infantry Division soldiers march through Linz, Austria, on May 7, 1945, the day before the war in Europe ended. Hungarian Jews in striped uniforms, liberated from the nearby Mauthausen concentration camp, keep step with the soldiers. Sergeant Leon Tulper was one of the American soldiers present at the liberation of Mauthausen.

National Archives

At the same time, American troops were learning why they had to fight this war firsthand. With only weeks left before the surrender, GIs were unexpectedly coming across the concentration camps. These centers of evil and depravity, scattered across Nazi-held territory for all the Allies to discover, explained the need for the war far better than mere words ever could. It gave American soldiers clear reason as to why this war had to be taken to its full and dreadful conclusion.

Leon Tulper of Denver, Colorado, lived through these desperate days. As a young radioman in the 65th Infantry Division, he was at the forefront of the division's 55 days in combat, from early March 1945 until the war ended. He served as the radioman for the battalion's executive officer in Headquarters Company, 3rd Battalion, 260th Infantry Regiment.

From this position he witnessed not only combat operations but was also present at the liberation of two separate concentration camps. The first was Ohrdruf, a sub-camp of Buchenwald, some 100 miles southwest of Berlin. Later he would be present at Mauthausen in northern Austria. This gave Leon an exceptional perspective on the war. In July 2015, at the age of 90 yet still spry and sharp (he had only retired from work the year before!), Mr. Tulper sat down to tell of his own experiences.

Courtesy of Leon Tulper

CM: Tell me about your early life, where you're from, how you grew up.
LT: I was born in Kansas City, Missouri, in 1925. My family lived there until 1939. My mother was tubercular and was at the National Jewish Hospital [in Denver]. When the hospital said she was able to leave, she couldn't go back to the climate in Missouri. So my dad packed up the whole family and we moved; I was in Denver in 1939. I went to North High School, graduated, and started attending Denver University. I had about three-quarters of a year before I got drafted in April 1943. It was a surprise but they let me finish the year. I only had about eight weeks left to go.

How did you wind up in the Army?
I was drafted and I go to Fort Logan in Denver. After a couple of weeks there we get dressed in nice winter uniforms and all the guys think we're going to Alaska. We get on a train, and they bolt the doors. Nobody knew why. We're on the train for four days and when they unlock the doors and say, "Come on out now," it's 104 degrees in Tyler, Texas! We were marching toward the camp, and one of the guys says, "Take a look up there, it's raining." We look up and see the rain coming down but it stopped above our heads—it never got to the ground! Never saw anything like that before.

What was your training like?
We get into Camp Fannin [near Tyler, Texas], took 13 weeks of basic there, and then took three weeks of jungle training. We all thought we were going to the South Pacific. We lived there for three weeks in conditions that were not for a nice Jewish kid from the West Side—not for anybody, really! One day I went into Tyler, and there was a big sign there that said, "Join the Air Force." So I think, "Okay, I'll go in there."

I asked the guy in there, "How do you get into the air force?" He told me I had to take a test. "If you have over 200, you're in," he said. I asked him when I could take it, and he told me to sit down. So I sit down, do the whole thing, turn it in, and they told me, "Sit still, we'll tell you where you're at." Ten, 15 minutes later he comes out and says, "How's it feel to be in the air force? You had 249 on your test. You're way over the top." He told me I was going to preflight school, where I would learn to be a pilot, bombardier, or navigator.

So now you think you're going to be an aviator. How did that go?
He asked where I would like to go to school. They gave us our choice. Since I was from Kansas City, I told them I'd like to go to Rockhurst College there; they have a good reputation. Or, if I get to Denver, I'd like to go to the University of Denver. They said I had a pretty good chance.

We waited a couple of weeks down at Keesler Army Air Field in Mississippi, which was pretty nice. Then one day I got my orders, Mississippi State! So there I went; we did about five months there, but got credit for two years' worth of college. We went to classes all day long. When it was over I got orders to go to some other airfield in Texas.

ABOVE: A 65th Division soldier inspects the ruins of a shattered German bunker near Saarlautern, Germany, southeast of Luxembourg on the Saar River, where Tulper briefly set up his radio. OPPOSITE: Leon Tulper (left) stands with his driver outside their radio jeep somewhere in Germany.

By then I already had six or eight hours of solo flying.

But then suddenly the orders are changed: "Sit where you are." Roosevelt says we got too many pilots, navigators, and bombardiers so you're going back to the infantry. So here comes the 65th Division; they were just putting it together with a cadre from Guadalcanal and places like that.

We started training with other units like the 442nd [Regimental Combat Team made up of Japanese American soldiers], which meant fights every weekend. You had guys from Guadalcanal and Japanese American guys with something to prove; they were Americans, after all. That was very interesting!

During the war, a large number of young Americans were enrolled in various technical courses at colleges and universities around the country in the expectation the war would last long enough for these men to become future ground forces officers and aviators. As the war progressed, the government began to revise its estimates of how long the war would last and also realized the Army was short of infantrymen. This was due to both an initial underestimation of how many infantry troops the Army would need and the high casualties in that branch.

To fill the depleted ranks of the infantry, many of these prospective future officers and pilots were withdrawn from their educational assignments and used to flesh out infantry divisions still forming in the United States. Leon was caught up in this movement and was soon in the 65th Infantry Division. This unit was formed in Camp Shelby, Mississippi, in July 1943, and spent the next year and a half in training. On January 10, 1945, the division embarked for Europe, arriving at Le Havre, France, on January 21.

How was the journey to Europe?

We got our orders to go overseas. They put us in a converted Swedish luxury liner. We were all down in the hold, bunks five deep, and we got across in five days. The ship was always listing because guys were hanging out over the sides [seasick]. We landed at Le Havre and went to a depot called Camp Lucky Strike. I gained some bad feelings toward the French when we drove over to the French town of Rouen and we heard pinging on our steel helmets. People were throwing rocks at us! I said, "What the hell are we doing over here?" [See *WWII Quarterly,* "Bombing Our Friends," Summer 2015.]

Now in France, the division spent a month preparing itself to enter combat. On March 4, 1945, the bulk of the division arrived in Borsch, Germany. On March 9, they relieved the 26th Infantry Division in its bridgehead over the Saar River. During this time, Leon's 260th Regiment was sent to capture Saarlauten.

Can you tell us about your experiences once your unit entered combat?

We got orders to go into the Siegfried Line. It was a tough kind of deal, but in certain areas it wasn't so bad. We crossed the Saar River; we had an outpost on the far side. I was a radio operator, and we had a radio net in a little enclave right across the bridge there. But in order to get to it, you had to start about two or three blocks back and put the pedal to the floor as fast as it would go because the Germans had it zeroed in. We used to go there once a day to change operators. Never had a loss there; we were lucky.

We went right through Saarlauten. It was a tough deal because all the cities had pillboxes in the center of each four-way intersection. We'd send a group to blow it up, but in an hour the Germans would have another crew there; the whole city was tunneled under. It was unbelievable. We lost a number of men there, mostly wounded.

Finally, we got out of there and started moving. The division had orders for doing maybe 15 miles a day, but we were hotter than hell and were doing maybe 40 miles a day. We didn't even know where we were. We were hitting towns that weren't even on the maps.

What were some of your other experiences in Germany?

We used to pick up German radio and we had a couple kids who could speak German. The Germans were calling us "the SS

Division of the 3rd Army" because we went through everything—nothing stopped us. I don't know why nothing stopped us; I guess if you look back at it we were lucky. The people in my unit were mostly East Coast people—New York, New Jersey. You wanted to get a word in edgewise, you learned to speak New York language!

It's hard to say you were terrified every day; you weren't. Some days were just strange as hell. Once we were driving along and we saw a German soldier propped against a tree, dead. As you drove by, you'd hear "pop, pop" as the guys were just shooting at him. The guy must have had 100 pounds of lead inside of him! He'd been dead for God knows how long. At the time everybody thought that was funny. I guess at 18, 19 years old, everything was so different from anything we grew up with.

The first time you [shoot and] see a guy fall and you know that you got him, you don't know what you'll feel like inside. I felt like vomiting.

What other war experiences do you find are memorable?

One day we had a convoy going to Essen, Germany; we were going to capture the city. We got close to the city and saw a sign that said "Buy Bayer Aspirin." Another one said "Drink Coca-Cola!" Here we were in the middle of Germany!

Here's a story about the first time I ever heard a jet engine. One day I'm sitting on the back of a jeep with this SCR-284 radio, which is a vehicle-mounted radio. I'm taking a message from headquarters, and all of a sudden I see everybody is jumping into the ditches. I couldn't get out—I was taking this message. Here comes this jet: Whoosh! I thought, "What the hell was that?"

This guy comes around and flies past me again and smiles as he goes over me. I about crapped out right there. I didn't know what that was. By the time I finished taking the message and jumped in the ditch, he was long gone. Why didn't the guy shoot? He had us dead to rights. We found out later there was no ammunition at the airport when he took off. That was the scariest time in my whole life. You couldn't hear it coming.

Another time we captured a M-A-N Diesel, a big truck. We couldn't get it started. One of our guys was a farmer; he got four horses, tied them to the front of the truck, and off we went. Guys were laughing at us, but we were riding and they were walking.

One of the greatest things was the mixture of people in the Army. Most of us lived in a small area, maybe a couple of square blocks; those were the Depression days. You got in the Army, and you have people of all backgrounds mixed in together. You start to realize you're not alone in this crazy world. My two best friends in the Army were a very devout Catholic and a Mexican. I'm still friends with him. After all these years, he lives in the same town as I do. We're literally brothers.

The Catholic guy and I used to talk religion, and one day he said, "You're a Jew and I'm Catholic, and we're doing the same damn thing you guys are doing!" I said, "You gotta understand, you get four or five Jewish people together, they form their own religion! Technically, you're a reformed Jew!" His name, of all things, was Joseph McCarthy. These were nice people; we had such camaraderie.

You also experienced firsthand how chaotic a battlefield can be. You mentioned an engagement near Mulhausen.

In Mulhausen we had a French unit on our outside perimeter, and the Germans came at us with three of those damn Tiger tanks. You could see them coming with infantry behind them. Soon the guns started going off. We were told to let them go through our lines and close in behind them. The French disappeared.

About a mile behind the Germans we saw a group of trucks coming. They were Americans; it was our own supply column trying to catch up to us! The Germans saw that and broke off the attack; they must have thought it was some sort of counterattack. It was actually our food and ammunition. There was a lieutenant running the show, and our captain was yelling at them, asking them how they were coming from that direction. The lieutenant told him, "We took a wrong turn. We didn't have a map."

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ABOVE: Generals Eisenhower, Bradley, and Patton view a pyre where corpses were burned at the Ohrdruf concentration camp, April 12, 1945. OPPSITE: A lieutenant from Patton's Third Army with the mangled body of a German girl accidentally killed when an Me-109 attacked American troops in the town of Muhlhausen.

We went as far as a town called Mulhausen; I don't remember the name of the river it was on, but we were maybe 100 miles south [west] of Berlin. We heard that [Lt. Gen. George S.] Patton said we had orders to go to Berlin and we should take it in two days, but Eisenhower stopped it. Then they told us, "You're going south—Berlin is for the Russians." So we go south, and we run into the concentration camps.

Ohrdruf was a subcamp of the sprawling Buchenwald complex, where prisoners were worked to death producing various things for the Nazi war machine. At Ohrdruf the prisoners were used as slave laborers for railroad construction. In March 1945, as American units were closing in, most of the inmates were moved to Buchenwald itself. Many died along the route in these death marches. The remaining prisoners were subjected to mass executions, and many of the bodies were burned. The few survivors were in horrible condition when the U.S. troops arrived.

It should be noted that at this stage of the war many units were coming across concentration camps they had not been told existed. The United States Holocaust Museum recognizes the 4th Armored and 89th Infantry Divisions, also Third Army units, as being the first to arrive at Ohrdruf on April 4, 1945. Other units went or were sent there as well, some days later. It was a chaotic period, and even official records cannot always be relied upon.

Leon recalls his experiences at the camp, but dates and times are uncertain. This is a common experience among infantrymen, who usually knew little about their exact locations on any given date. They went where they were told, when they were told. His recollections of Ohrdruf follow.

What happened when you arrived at Ohrdruf?

When we got there, there were very few guards left. We were met by a platoon of Australian soldiers, who had been captured in North Africa. We went through this archway and it had a nice big sign in German which said, "Work Makes Life Sweet," or something like that. We thought it was a work camp. We drove in there, didn't see anything at first, and these Australians come marching down. I was in the second jeep because I was the XO's radio operator, and he followed the colonel in the first jeep. And we see these guys marching down and the major says, "What the hell is this?"

These guys stopped in front of us, and this guy, a lieutenant or a captain, comes up and salutes. We asked who they were, and he said they were Australian prisoners of war and they were happy to see us. They never mentioned that other units had come in, though we knew other units, or parts of another unit, had shown up earlier. We had so many troops there, nobody knew who was what.

The colonel was a hell of a nice guy named Walker. He saw some buildings in the back and asked the Australian officer, "What's all that back there?" The Aussie replied, "It's probably a work camp. We don't know what's going on back there." He knew, but for some reason didn't want to say.

So the CO says to the major, "Why don't we go back there? If that guy says we shouldn't go, maybe we should." So we

went, three or four jeeps and a tank. We had a tank from the 3rd Armored, I think. We went down a little road heading toward the back, and we passed these ovens.

One of the guys from Kentucky yells out, "Man, these guys ate good, look at all these ovens." That's what we thought. We went a little farther, we saw a bin of clothing; didn't mean anything. We go a little farther, we saw a bunch of bones. No skulls, just bones. The guy said, "My God, how much meat could they eat in a place like this?" Everybody thought it was for food.

So we get about 50-75 yards away from what we thought was a barracks, and one guy walks out and he's a skeleton in a prison uniform. Everybody's looking at this guy thinking, "What the hell is this?" Guy never says a word, walks up to the first jeep and looks at the bumper and I guess he saw the initials "U.S." or something like that. He says to the CO, "American?"

The CO says, "Yeah," and the guy turns around and walks back to the barracks. About five minutes later, boy, they start coming out.

I was the one that radioed headquarters and told them, "This place is unbelievable; you can't even begin to describe it." And they said, "Well, what the hell are you looking at?" I said, "I'm looking at skin and bones in a prison uniform." And the guy says, "You're out of your f—ing mind! I'm gonna call division headquarters and see what they say." From what I was told, two days later here comes Eisenhower and [Omar] Bradley and Patton and everyone else to see it.

What was it like dealing with the prisoners? Did you see very many of them?

All kinds of people, mostly in prison uniforms. Skinny! You can't begin to describe skinny; it was like a class in biology. They were like one of those statues, where they have a person broken down to just bones. Their faces—nothing there hardly. Their hands were out: "We need food." Shit! In Third Army, food never caught up to the advance units that fast. We had to wait until we stopped, and then the food arrived. How do you tell these people it's going to be eight hours until we get any food? All we had were the remains of C-rations. What the hell's in C-rations? Four cigarettes! If you were lucky you got spaghetti.

There was one of the fellows in the tank—this gets me. He had a Hershey bar; he gave it to a guy who took two bites and fell over dead. We didn't know what the hell happened. A medic comes running up, checked him, and he was dead. We found out because he was so emaciated whatever was in the chocolate just tore up his insides.

The one thing that broke me was a little kid, maybe five, six years old. Tugging at my leg, he wanted anything to eat. What could I do? But this little kid, he just hung around me most of the time I was there. I would have given anything for a piece of chewing gum, anything!

After about eight hours, we got orders; we had to go farther south. We packed up, but they didn't want us to leave. That made us think we were the first guys in the camp, but later you hear other guys from other divisions were there, too. I guess they didn't stay as long as we did, or they didn't do as much as we did.

National Archives

Some magazines said we were the first ones [at Ohrdruf], yet I know damn well we weren't. At that time we thought we were, but subsequently when you start reading about it you find out those guys saw some things we didn't see. The experience left me damn near becoming an atheist.

Did you see any guards at the camp?

We only saw two; the Australian said all the others had left. The Australians all looked pregnant; they'd only had potatoes and water for about 30 days. The SS had taken off about three days before; they had killed a bunch of people—they shot them and just left the bodies lying there. Nobody knew what that was all about. They supposedly left a couple of guards to keep things "stabilized," but I only saw one guard. I was told there were at least four or five, I don't know.

Do you know what happened to them?

They captured them, took them as POWs. They were regular army, not SS. All the SS left.

You said you were there about eight hours. What else did you do during that time?

Well, the first part was talking with the Australians. Then we took that trip back to the camp, and all the prisoners came out. We were in a state like shell shock. There could have been hundreds or more, or maybe just a hundred. We had never seen anything like it. We didn't even talk amongst each other.

Every once in a while you heard, "Hey, anybody got a candy bar?" "Anybody got anything to eat?" An orange, an apple, something. A few guys had something to give them, but there was no real food.

These people were just begging, begging, begging, and you didn't know how to push them off. They came out like a mob. The barracks were lousy, though; I didn't go into them. I don't think anybody got far away from the jeep and the tank. Nobody wanted to look around too much. We did see the area where the bodies were. They tried to burn some of them. They had crematoriums, and none of us realized what they were for.

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ABOVE: Mauthausen survivors cheer the soldiers of the 11th Armored Division of the U.S. Third Army one day after their actual liberation. The banner, written by Spanish inmates, reads, "The Spanish Anti-Fascists Salute the Liberating Forces." OPPOSITE: Leon Tulper saw firsthand the living skeletons at the Ebensee concentration camp, a subcamp of Mauthausen.

They were still hot. There were tons of clothing.

Were there any civilians around?

No, we were not the ones that brought the townspeople in. That happened the next day, I think. They were brought in to see it. A day or two later is when Eisenhower showed up with Bradley and Patton. I heard this was one of the few camps people could walk out of. God only knows what the others were like.

Colonel Hayden Sears of the 4th Armored Division issued an order that the civilians of Ohrdruf were required to tour the camp; Patton later did the same at Weimar after the liberation of Buchenwald.

Not long after that you were present at the Mauthausen concentration camp. What are your recollections about it?

Farther south we cross the Danube; we get to Regensburg and push into Austria. We went as far as Enns. Down near there was another concentration camp, which was much bigger than Ohrdruf, called Mauthausen. That was another nasty one.

We were there just a day. I don't remember much. I do remember a kid saying to one of the people there, "That was the one that killed my father," pointing out a guard. They let him push the guy over the side of a quarry. They let him kill him right there.

There were so many people there, my God, and so many different units all converged there. There were so many division insignias, nobody knew who was who. There were a lot who got there before we did, units came and went. The people we saw there were not as bad off; they didn't look as bad, but we heard other parts of the camp were really bad.

As the war wound down, more and more German troops began to surrender, and many Allied units had to divert considerable resources to deal with the rapid influx. The 65th Division was no different. During this time, many captured SS soldiers were treated very harshly.

You mentioned dealing with surrendering enemy troops.

I was an "armpit smeller" for about three weeks. An armpit smeller was for when we used to capture the German soldiers. If they came in with their hands up, if they had the SS tattoo, they took them out in the back. You know what happened to them. That's what we did. We eliminated a lot of SS guys, and they deserved it. I remember when we heard about the Malmedy massacre, oh, my God, and the

orders came down: "Take no prisoners." There were a lot of Germans who lost their lives because of it, all because of that stupid German general [SS-Standartenführer Joachim Peiper]. For a lousy 85 guys [Americans killed at Malmedy], he lost hundreds because we took no SS prisoners.

Where were you when the war ended?

Linz, Austria. Funny thing, it was just like any other day. Didn't mean a damn thing. We were meeting the Russians right then on the other side of Linz. We went up into the mountains to a little town called Leonfelden, which was half occupied by the Russians, and we occupied the other half. On our side were a lady and a young kid that were from Brooklyn, New York. She'd married this German officer, and she was waiting to get shipped back to the States. The boy was about four or five; he didn't speak any English. You would've thought she'd have taught him English.

We were there about three weeks with the Russians. Once a week they ate with us, once a week we ate with them. I never saw a meal. The reason was vodka. You would be with your exact opposite. At that time I was a radio chief, so I met with this Russian radio chief. Nice young kid from Siberia. Wasn't educated, but a real nice kid.

The officers would be around a table, and we're in the back. They had a commissar; if one of them talked and got out of line, he'd say, "Out!" We'd toast Stalin and Roosevelt and Churchill and Truman, and by the time we were done I couldn't even see what I was doing.

Some of our officers found out what the Russians couldn't drink, and all of a sudden we got a shipment of scotch. They couldn't handle scotch. So when they came to our side, it was scotch. The commissar, he wouldn't drink; he watched everybody else. At least on our side, I got to have a meal.

On the Russian side of town, they treated the Germans like slaves. On our side we had one or two Germans helping out; it wasn't the same at all. When you find out the Russians lost 28 million people during the war, you could understand.

Then we got orders to go back to Linz, and when we get there we find out the division is broken up. The rumor was when Patton came in to meet the Russians he couldn't get any salutes from anyone. Nobody liked him. He was not our hero. Even though as a tactician he was smart, but when he said, "You give me a truckload of dog tags and I'll give you Berlin," that meant how many GIs would die to do it. So there was no love for Patton.

So now you're on occupation duty. What was that like?

One day at HQ, they said, "Tulper, you're being shipped out." I asked where I was going, and they told me I was being transferred over to the 9th Division. They told me I was going to be relocating people [displaced persons] back to their home countries. Occupation service. I got into a jeep, and after a hundred miles or so on the autobahn, speeding and slowing, we got to the 9th Division.

If I could have stayed there the rest of my life, I might have. It was like being on an island in the Caribbean. I was in Garmisch, Germany [in the mountains of southern Bavaria]. I worked in the post office building, which was also the telephone exchange. We had 140 girls working there even though there were no phones yet. I became radio chief again, and it was a combination of wire patrol and radio, and we started putting in telephone lines.

We put in the first line to Munich. Not a public line, just HQ to HQ. Then we started putting in lines to the smaller towns—Oberammergau and other places. So we had these telephone operators all over the place, all of them young girls.

There were seven of us enlisted men, and we each had our own room. I had a jeep with a driver. Then down the block from us moves in a WAC unit. Like I said; if I could have stayed there I would have. We ate at a beautiful hotel right by the WAC detachment. We felt like kings!

But it wasn't all easy, was it?

Some of that occupation duty was difficult. When you had to put people on trains to go back to Bulgaria or Romania, you had to go armed. We had pistols and carbines. We would have to load them into cattle cars, just like they had arrived in. Some of them

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A convoy of surrendering SS troops near Enns, Austria. The 65th Division soldiers showed little compassion for the SS, infamous for committing atrocities. Tulper recalled that the division ordered, "Take no prisoners."

Maj. Gen. Stanley E. Reinhart (center), commander of the 65th Division, meets with his Russian counterpart, commander of the 7th Guards Parachute Division, after their units linked up at Erlauf, Austria, and they learned of Germany's surrender. Tulper recalls drinking vodka and scotch with Russian soldiers in Leonfelden.

thought they were going to another concentration camp. The MPs seemed impervious to it; they just did what they did, but for us it was really tough. We knew they were being fed and taken care of, but the way they were dumped in there like cattle, my God!

We drove into Munich, and it was a disaster. Rubble was strewn all over the place. We set the line into the local unit for communications, and for radio we were using Morse code. The highest rank you could get was staff sergeant as a radio chief in the infantry. In the Air Corps, you got better promotions, food, everything.

How did you get home once your time on occupation duty was over?

Later they started asking guys if they wanted to go home. You had to have a certain number of points. Overseas was so many points, combat was points, combat infantry was points, a Purple Heart was five, Bronze Star was five.

I wound up with 85 points, and it comes time for me to come home. They offered me a choice: either go home or go to OCS at Fort Benning and become a warrant officer. I didn't want to do that. They said 90 days, and I'd get a pension at the end. I still said no. Time to go home.

I get on this troop ship where a staff sergeant was the lowest thing there. We got to New York and saw the Statue of Liberty, and tears came to your eyes. It was a hell of a feeling. We came down the gangplank, and there was the Red Cross. They gave everybody a cup of coffee and one donut. The guy behind me asked, "What if I want another donut?" They said he'd have to come around again.

That was April 1946, but I don't remember the date. They shipped me off to Leavenworth, Kansas. I had family in Kansas City, and my girlfriend met me there. So that was really terrific when I got out.

What did you do after the war?

After the war I came back. I wanted to go to Denver University; I wanted to be an accountant. My father had a wholesale jewelry and watch repair business and said, "Why do you want to go to school when you got a business right now you can go into? You can't have a family on the 25 bucks a week the government will give you." So I decided to go into the business and got married in July 1946.

I was finally discharged out of the reserves just before the Korean War. My brother was in Korea, and when he got back we bought my father out and expanded the business. We did watch repair, sold jeweler's supplies, factory service for a lot of big watch companies, all that stuff. [Leon stayed in the business until retiring at age 88; the company, Tulper and Company, is still in business in Denver.] Two kids, five grandsons, and five great-grandsons.

Have you found it easy to speak to people about your war experiences?

Outside of Ohrdruf, you don't talk about the battles; you talk about the funny things that went on. For the longest time I never spoke anything about it until maybe 15 years ago. I have a grandson who had to do an essay on the Second World War. He brought me into his class. That's what started me talking—they were asking me questions, and questions bring more questions. I went to a school and spoke to a bunch of ninth- and tenth-graders. In both classes a kid asked about the French girls! They just didn't get it. Most of the students were interested, though.

I got a call several years back asking if I would come to this Holocaust meeting. I don't know how they got my name. So I went and talked to them about Ohrdruf, which no one had heard of. But people were interested, so I talked to them. One of the guys who was in Mauthausen came to Denver to work, and we met. So, maybe he passed my name to someone. I met his family and they thanked me, but they didn't need to do that. I've been doing the Holocaust Remembrances for four or five years now.

At the last Holocaust Remembrance there were maybe 500 people there, and they asked all the World War II veterans to stand up, and there were two of us. They asked all the Holocaust survivors to stand, and there were maybe 15 of them. I thought, "Oh boy, it's awfully close to the end." Our last reunion had 17 veterans for the whole division. □

San Pietro

Continued from page 77

coming down the hill with a group of four other bodies on four more mules. He watched as they wound their way down the last few yards and got within earshot of the bottom of the hill.

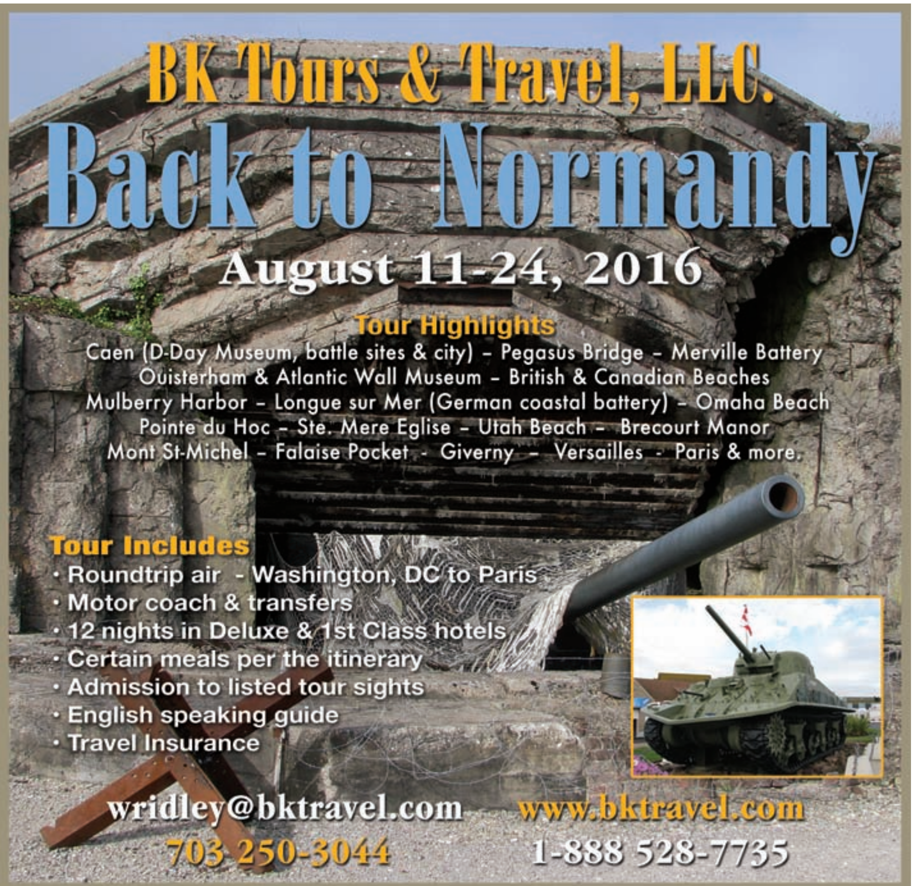
Someone in the group said, "This one is Captain Waskow," and Pyle instantly noted a change in mood. What had been somber air became all the more heavy. A number of them stood up, tamped out cigarettes, and slowly sidled over to help him off the mule.

There he lay with all the rest, but Pyle could tell this death was a little different. This one was a little harder to take. One by one, the men from the company came over to pay their respects. Pyle carefully noted how they did so, catching the small gestures, the soft words. Later, he asked a few questions about the man who had just come down, listened for a while to the muted expressions of sorrow coming from the men who had known him best—the men who had served with him.

As the night continued in its black vein, Pyle slipped away, back to his bedroll in the cowshed to ponder this war and think on deaths like these. He shut his eyes and tried to get some sleep.

The way that Henry Waskow came off that mountain, the way his fellow soldiers treated him when he came down, inspired Ernie Pyle's most powerful war column, "The Death of Captain Waskow."

This article is adapted from Tim Brady's 2013 book, A Death in San Pietro *(excerpt reprinted by permission of Da Capo Press). In addition to detailing the story behind Ernie Pyle's famed column, "The Death of Captain Waskow," Brady's book tells how John Huston's acclaimed documentary* The Battle of San Pietro *was filmed during the same action. Both works can be found online. Pyle's column: http://mediaschool.indiana.edu/erniepyle/1944/01/10/the-death-of-captain-waskow. Huston's film: https://archive.org/details/ battle_of_san_pietro.*



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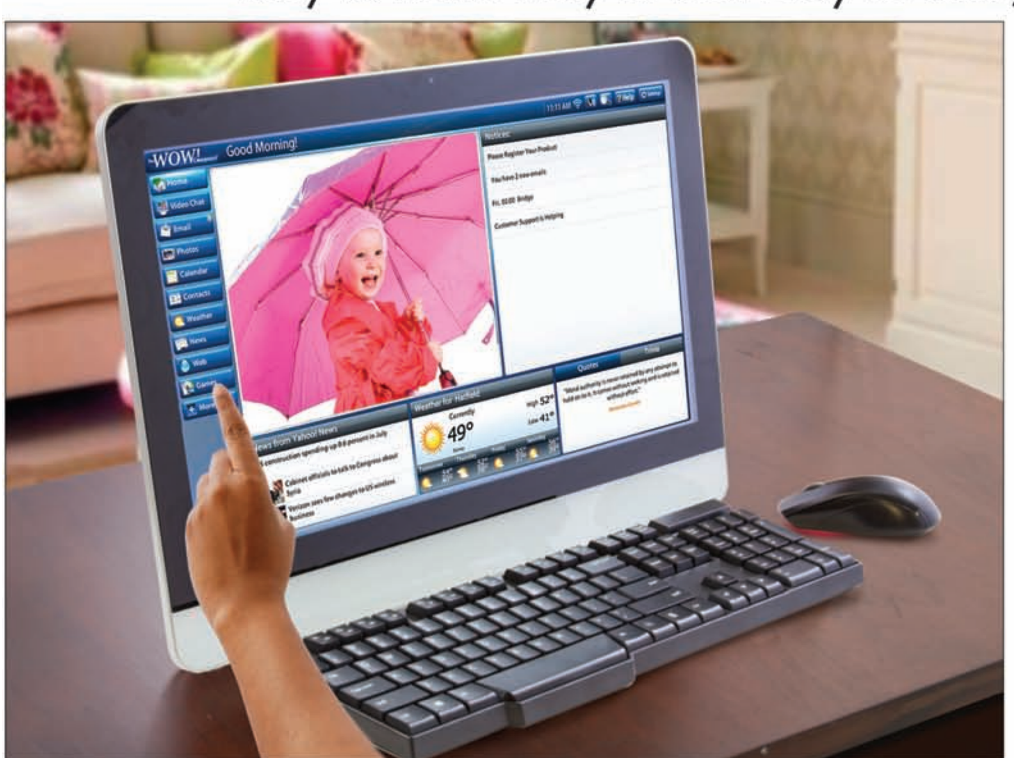

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