WWII QUARTERLY

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JOURNAL OF THE SECOND WORLD WAR

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EXCLUSIVE:

Liberation of Mont St. Michel

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WWII QUARTERLY • SUMMER 2016 Volume 7, No. 43

SUMMER 2016

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WARFAREHISTORYNETWORK.com

Bullion or Numismatics: Which Makes More Sense For You?

Although rarity adds to a coin's appeal, it is amazing how people shy away from buying antique coins due to their commonly big premiums over bullion metal. While we make no claim to be an investment counseling service, our many years in the collectible coin business have left our team of numismatic experts with a unique ability to identify the most opportune time to buy specific gold coins due to their historical trending in the collectible markets. People are seeing the wisdom of owning antiques because it outweighs the cost average of simply buying the metal as close to spot as you can. People are giving collectible coins a hard look, evidenced by the surge in sales of collectible gold coins.

Is The Cost As A Whole Reasonable?
Bullion may initially appear to be a better value than collectible coins since it carries a lower premium above melt value than the premium over melt of most collectible coins. And while this might seem to be a sound perspective, if this were the sole deciding factor, there are numerous collectible coins whose premium over melt isn't much greater than that of bullion.

When you consider other factors, such as being able to own something that not everyone else owns or the ability to reap the benefits of a finite supply, that slightly higher premium doesn't amount to as much as you might think. Unlike bullion, collectible coins are prized for factors apart from their intrinsic gold value: memories, rarity, historical importance, and family legacies, just to name a few. Just imagine owning a 1909 $20 Saint-Gaudens or a 1908 Bella Pratt $2.50 coin that will never be minted again. Scarcity drives their value more than the metal they are made from. Conversely, gold mining and smelting companies constantly produce more gold, all of which is indistinguishable. This gives collectible coins twice the protection if gold metal takes a dive. Collectible gold coins also offer many people nostalgic pieces of art from a time they hold dear, or from a time they might wish to see society return. Whether based in reality or an unrealistic assessment of times past makes no difference; the appeal is still there. This is why many collectors are willing to pay more for a 100-year-old piece of history than a chunk of metal.

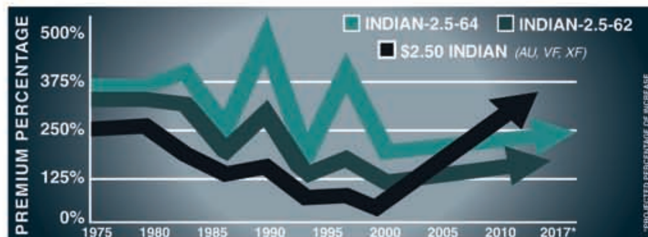
Why VF, XF or AU?
We take our concierge approach to our clients' accounts very seriously. Our job is to recommend the best purchases for our clients and not our pocket books. Currently the best bargains come from the many coins in the lower grades, such as VF, XF and AU, or the higher grades, starting with MS 64 and higher – and we are advising our customers to grab them up.

Coins in lower grades, such as VF, XF, or AU, represent great bargains to those who can time it right. We noted earlier that there are numerous collectible coins whose premium over melt isn't much greater than bullion. This is truer than ever in the lower graded antiques. XF, VF and AU gold are selling at a very low premium over melt, unlike their mid-range graded counterparts (MS 60-63), which means that even if purchased for the value of their gold alone, they aren't significantly more expensive than bullion. Because of this, they represent a great opportunity for many Americans looking to buy reasonably priced gold that has value and worth whether the base metal is going up or down. For those people seeking a safety net, these lower grade coins offer the opportunity to acquire precious metals at a low percentage over melt.

Take advantage and buy coins that are in the current "best buy" categories that you find appealing, and it will add to the pride of ownership that is a significant element in any collection, without putting undue strain on your budget. And as all collectors know (but some refuse to admit), the excitement of buying new pieces and integrating them into your collection is priceless.

Last but not least, you may rest assure that we will be here to give you the best possible numismatic advice, to do our best to guide you, whether you are just beginning to put together a collection, expanding an existing one, or putting together a "go-bag" as a hedge against future economic turmoil. To paraphrase a series of baby food commercials from generations past, "Numismatics is our business; our only business!" We look forward to being a trusted partner and helping you grow more familiar with the world of collectible coins that we love.

US Fractional Indian Gold: History of the $2.50 Indian Head



We've heard the saying, "Good things come in small packages." That's true when talking about US gold coins. One of the most fascinating and undervalued gold pieces from the early 20th century is also the smallest: the American Quarter Eagle, a $2.50 piece that was an innovative and daring work of art. As is the case with many daring works of art, it had its share of critics back in the day.

The dawn of the 20th century saw four different US gold coins in circulation; all had gone without a major design change for more than fifty years (which, to put things in perspective, was longer than the average American life expectancy). In the early 1900s, Theodore Roosevelt had ambitions to revamp the image of the US for the new century. He believed one way to improve the country's image was to redesign its coins.

Roosevelt commissioned Irish-born sculptor Augustus Saint-Gaudens to redesign all of the US coins. Unfortunately Saint-Gaudens died of cancer in 1907 after only completing design work for the $10.00 (Eagle) and the $20.00 (Double Eagle) gold pieces. Soon one of Saint-Gaudens' most gifted students, Bela Lyon Pratt, was commissioned by Roosevelt to redesign the $2.50 (Quarter Eagle) and $5.00 (Half Eagle) denominations. Pratt came up with an identical design for both coins, the only difference being their sizes. The Quarter Eagle had a diameter of 18 millimeters, while the Half Eagle's was 21.6 millimeters. The obverse (heads) depicts an Indian brave in a warbonnet, circled by the date, thirteen stars, and the motto, LIBERTY. On the reverse (tails) is an eagle perched on a sheaf of arrows and an olive branch, symbols of preparedness and peace. Four noticeable inscriptions accompany this image: UNITED STATES OF AMERICA, E PLURBIUS UNUM, IN GOD WE TRUST,and the statement of value.

However, Pratt's coins caused a heated debate in the numismatic community and the general public when they were released in November of 1908. Unlike all other US coinage before or since, the features on the Pratt coins were incuse, or recessed into the surface, rather than raised. Philadelphia coin dealer Samuel Hudson Chapman and others thought these designs would be easier to counterfeit, and could lead to illness and disease, as the recessed areas could harbor germs. Chapman found the designs aesthetically unpleasing as well; in a letter to President Roosevelt he groused that the Indian looked "emaciated" and its outlines were "crude and hard." More-over, he thought that the eagle (a replication of Augustus Saint-Gauden's eagle) more closely resembled a golden eagle, which is indigenous to Europe, than the American bald eagle.

Controversies aside, production went full speed ahead – sort of. The Philadelphia mint produced the majority of the $2.50 Indians with sporadic production from the Denver Mint in 1911, 1914, and 1925. There was little demand for the coins in everyday commerce, but production increased to meet the demand for Christmas gifts. By late January, however, most of the Indian Head Quarter Eagles had found their way back into the Sub-Treasury vaults. Between 1916 and 1924, production of the Quarter Eagles was suspended, and many were melted in 1916 as unsold. Production resumed in 1925, and continued for five more years before they were suspended for good in 1929, the same year the economy collapsed. It was the end of an era in more ways than one: not only the end of the prosperity and excesses of the Jazz Age, but also the demise of the American $2.50 denomination. Pratt's Indian Head was the last American Quarter Eagle.

The good news is that this series has a mere fifteen different date-and-mint combinations (twelve issues from the Philadelphia Mint and three from Denver), making it one of the smallest in U.S. coinage. This means a complete set is attainable for many collectors despite the relatively high cost of buying anythingmade of gold. Its affordability is increased by the fact that only one coin – the 1911-D – is markedly scarce. Only 55,680 were struck, making it the only coin with a mintage of less than 240,000. The Denver mintmark appears on the reverse, to the left of the arrowheads. In addition, relatively small numbers of matte proofs were made in every year from 1908 through 1915, though not in the final five years. The American Quarter Eagle – the small coin that once caused such a big uproar – is a worthy addition to any coin enthusiast's collection.

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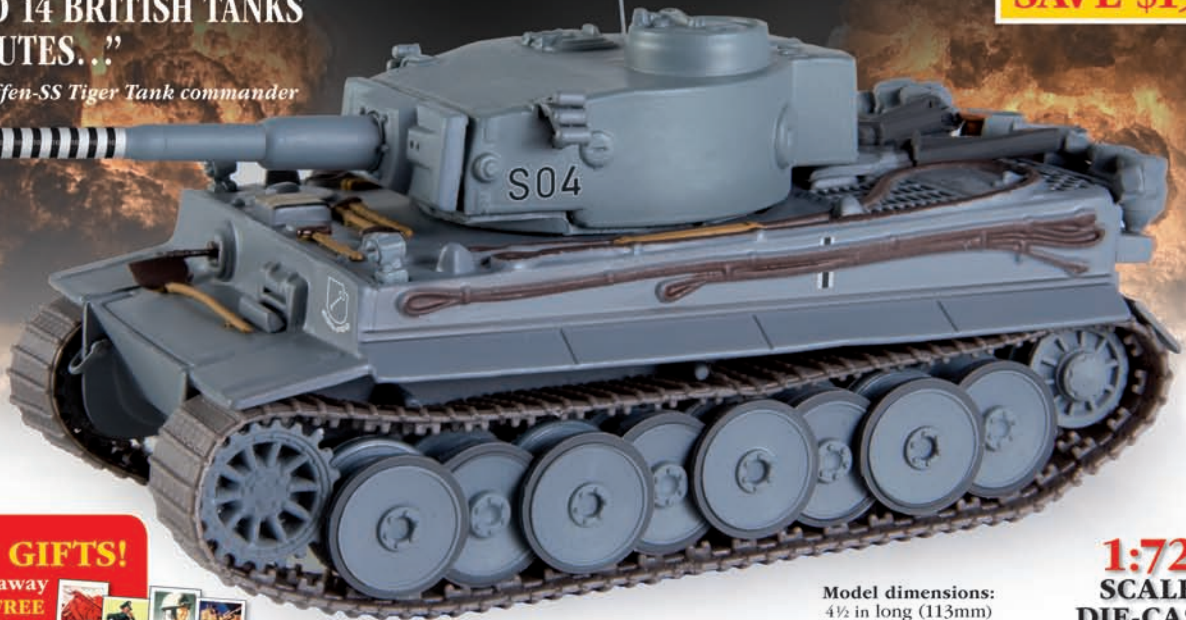

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COVER: A German soldier motions his unit forward during bitter Winter combat in Russia. See story page 60. Photograph: Bundesarchiv Bild 101I-277-0835-16, Photo: Jacob

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Civilization Under Siege

AS YOU MAY KNOW, we produce this magazine several months in advance of its publication date, so this editorial will be "old news" by the time you read it. As I write this, the carnage in Brussels is still being cleaned up, still being assessed, suspects still being hunted.

Between then and now there may well be more headline-grabbing, revulsion-producing acts of terror and violence, more hand wringing and finger pointing, more pain and suffering.

In the past few years, we have seen way too many acts of terror carried out in places such as Boston, Mumbai, Fort Hood, London, Paris, San Bernadino, Brussels, and scores more. The one common denominator: radicalized nihilistic anarchists with a political and religious agenda who have a vision of a world that they wish to create. And it's not a pretty picture.

Islamic terrorism has been spreading like a cancer—first throughout the Middle East and then into Africa, Southeast Asia, China, India, and now Europe, with a few malignant cells periodically appearing here in the United States.

In order to show similarities between "then" and "now," many of my editorials over the past six years have connected current events with events that took place during World War II. I see a couple of similarities between today's rampant terrorism and the past.

What we are witnessing today is familiar: fanatics guided by a warped ideology and a determination to conquer the entire world. The similarity between ISIS/al Qaeda and other groups of that ilk can be compared to Nazi Germany which, in the early 1940s, began conquering one European country after another, the scourge of Nazism spreading across the map like spilled blood.

For another, today's suicide bombers are not unlike the World War II phenomenon of Japanese suicide pilots, the kamikazes, willing and eager to die for their emperor.

But, back in 1945, the kamikazes were a last-ditch military weapon used solely against American warships. And the gunners on the ships, aided by radar, could see the suicide planes coming and attempt to shoot them down. We have virtually no such early warning capabilities today.

Eventually, the nations that hadn't yet been conquered—principally the United Kingdom, the Soviet Union, and the United States—were able to defeat Hitler (and Japan, too). But it took a tremendous will to win, the expenditure of enormous treasure, and the loss of millions of lives.

Do we have that same will today? Is anyone other than members of the military and their families willing to sacrifice to bring about victory? How do we achieve victory over this evil enemy? Is victory even achievable?

These questions are without a doubt the most important ones that Western civilization has faced in the past 70 years. There are no easy answers, and the world's political and military leaders are struggling to find solutions.

Solutions are needed, and very soon, for civilization as we know it is under siege.

—Flint Whitlock, Editor

AUTHOR DOUBTS FATHER IN FAMOUS IWO JIMA PHOTO

James Bradley, author of the best-selling book *Flags of Our Fathers* (made into a feature film directed by Clint Eastwood in 2006), has expressed doubts now that his father, John Bradley, is one of the Marines pictured in Joe Rosenthal's iconic photo of the flag-raising on February 23, 1945, atop Mount Suribachi on Iwo Jima.

The misidentification was noted by amateur historians who carefully examined the uniforms of the Marines shown in both the Rosenthal photo and one taken during the earlier, lesser known flag raising and spotted certain discrepancies. The Smithsonian Channel is planning to broadcast a program about the new findings later this year.

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The Mosquito, an unconventional wooden British warplane should not have been a success against the Axis powers, but it was.

PRECISE TIMING WAS CRUCIAL.

More than 700 prisoners were being held in the Amiens prison, many of whom were being tortured by the Gestapo and were soon to be executed, according to reports that reached London. The Allies needed to hit the prison at midday to catch the unsuspecting German guards having lunch in their separate dining area.

The twin-engine Mosquitos left the airfield at Hunsdon, north of London, linked up with Hawker Typhoon fighter escorts, and flew toward France in a daring attempt to free the men before it was too late. The odds were not good for the February 18, 1944, mission as the planes flew wingtip to wingtip in a thick snow squall just 30 feet above the icy English Channel.

Group Captain P.C. Pickard, a battle-hardened pilot with more than 100 missions to his credit, shifted his large six-foot, four-inch frame in the seat of his Mosquito as he glanced over to Alan Broadley, his long-time navigator. Nearly reading his mind, Broadley gave Pickard a quick nod to indicate they were on course as the squall cleared and they crossed the French coast.

They executed a couple of quick turns to keep the German defenders guessing their true destination as they continued onward at treetop level. Four Mosquitoes and four Typhoons had become separated earlier from the flight and had turned back, leaving only 15 Mosquitoes and eight Typhoons flying toward Amiens, 75 miles north of Paris.

The flight split into three sections, with the first wave attacking the prison's 20-foot-high, three-foot thick-wall from the east to blast a hole open with 500-pound bombs. The second wave of Mosquitoes swept in from the north, dropped their 11-second time-delayed bombs deliberately short, and blew holes in the north wall. The guards' dining area was then demolished, along with the main prison building, to spring the prisoners free.

The fast-moving Mosquitos then fled the scene, as planned, as a group of German Fw 190s arrived and tangled with the escorting Typhoons. Capt. Pickard, acting as Master Bomber, lingered for a moment before heading homeward. His Mosquito took ground fire before a pair of Fw 190s shot the tail off his craft, which crashed near Montigny, killing both Pickard and his navigator. A second Mosquito was also lost in the attack.

Operation Jericho, the spectacularly successful raid to free prisoners being held at the Gestapo prison at Amiens, France, on February 18, 1944, is captured in this painting by Australian war artist Dennis Adams. The de Havilland Mosquito multi-purpose fighter-bomber was particularly well-suited for operations of this type.

Australian War Memorial

The American 82nd and 101st Airborne Divisions, Britain's Red Devils and Germany's Fallschirmjägers:

WWII Airborne Battles
SPECIAL ISSUE

Everything looks different when you're jumping out of a plane 700 feet above the ground at 110 miles per hour.

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It was later learned that more than 250 prisoners had escaped in the daring jailbreak, although many were recaptured, and another 102 prisoners were killed either by the bombs or by German gunfire. Film of the raid, which emphasized the nature of the precision bombing mission, was shot by a specially trained Mosquito crew and was used to bolster British morale.

Five days following the mission, London received a message from the French Resistance which read in part, "Thanks to the admirable precision of the attack, the first bombs blew in nearly all the doors and many prisoners escaped with the help of the civilian population. Twelve of these prisoners were to have been shot the next day."

Although several of Britain's wartime "success claims" regarding the Amiens raid have been questioned in recent years by some revisionist historians, there is no question regarding the bravery of the airmen and the preciseness of their efforts with the highly respected and deservedly flaunted Mosquito.

In fact, the Mosquito was the most unlikely of planes. At the advent of World War II, "modern" airplanes were metal while the all-wood structure of the Mosquito was proposed by the de Havilland Aircraft Company to offset Britain's metal shortages and to take advantage of the nation's abundant woodworkers.

The sleek, two-man aircraft quickly won over the doubters with its superb combination of speed and maneuverability, enabling the craft to move well beyond its original role as a fast intruder bomber to also superbly handle such specialized tasks as night fighter, torpedo bomber, ground attacker, as well as additional roles.

Even Reichsmarshall and Luftwaffe chief Hermann Göring was taken with the "Wooden Wonder." He famously stated, "It makes me furious when I see the Mosquito. I turn green and yellow with envy. The British ... knock together a beautiful wooden aircraft that every piano factory over there is building, and they give it speed which they have now increased yet again."

The de Havilland firm designed the prototype at Salisbury Hall, a country moated house located southwest of Hatfield that was once the home of Winston Churchill's American-born mother. In fact, young Winston had often fished in the moat and a pike, one of his reported catches, was mounted on a bathroom wall. C.T. Wilkins, one of the plane's designers, contended that the pike's sleek lines influenced the lines of the Mosquito's fuselage.

The prototype was completed in October 1940 as the determined British were preparing for a possible invasion by Hitler's forces, and just months after being forced off the Continent at Dunkirk.

The oval section of the fuselage was built in two halves with the joint running along the vertical center of the plane. It was a sandwich-type composition, with a cedar plywood-balsa-cedar stressed-skin construction. Much of the controls, plumbing, and electronics were installed before the

ABOVE: Wing Commander Percy "Pick" Pickard, photographed by his Mosquito shortly before he and his navigator were killed during the Amiens raid. OPPOSITE: Mosquitos of No. 487 Squadron, Royal New Zealand Air Force, flying low over the Amiens prison as the first of 16 500-pound bombs explode. Over 250 prisoners—French Resistance and Allied intelligence officers—were able to escape.

two halves were joined, thus greatly simplifying the construction. The two halves of the fuselage were then glued, placed in a jig, and tightly clamped together. There were seven reinforcing bulkheads to further strengthen the structure.

Then the underside of fuselage was cut out to accommodate the one-piece wing. The rudder and elevator were aluminum with covering fabric similar to the rest of the plane. The spring-loaded rudder was ingeniously designed in such a way that the Mosquito could be easily flown on one engine without continuous course corrections by the pilot.

It was not an overly complicated plane. In fact, the two undercarriage units were identical and interchangeable, with rubber blocks providing shock absorption. This eased both production and maintenance of the aircraft. The plane was powered by two Rolls-Royce Merlin 12-cylinder, liquid-cooled engines mounted in steel frames to the front of the wings and to the front structure of the undercarriage; the engines' radiators were located in the leading edge of the wings. Some of the variants of the plane were eventually capable of cruising speeds of 300 miles per hour and maximum speeds of 425 miles per hour, making it the fastest plane available to the Allies between 1941 and 1944.

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ABOVE: Capable of carrying a 4,000-pound bomb payload, Mosquitos were ideally suited for precise, low-level attacks. Here a Mosquito FB Mark VI attacks a German vessel with rockets in the harbor of Tetgenaes, Norway, March 1945. BELOW: Made almost entirely out of wood, the "Mossie" was light, fast, and agile. Pilots loved it and opponents feared it. Here a de Havilland Mosquito Mark II of No. 456 Squadron, RAAF, based at Middle Wallop, Hampshire, banks away from the camera.

The innovative design concepts did not stop there. The designers realized that the plane's comparatively great speed could present difficulties, especially the need to decelerate after intercepting an enemy aircraft. That's when the Mosquito needed to slow rapidly to the target craft's speed to provide time for the Mosquito pilot to take aim.

Several deceleration attempts were made using a bellows-operated, segmented air brake encircling the fuselage somewhat like an open fan. This was found to create substantial buffeting to the Mosquito and its crew. Further study revealed that the same effect could be achieved simply by lowering the undercarriage, so the air-brake idea was shelved.

The prototype took to the air on November 25, 1940, with Geoffrey de Havilland, Jr., the firm's test pilot since 1937, taking a short flight. A few hours later he was joined by John Walker, the engine installation designer, for a 30-minute flight that reached a speed of 220 miles per hour. The trials continued and, by spring 1941, the plane was capable of 388 miles per hour at 22,000 feet, with only minor adjustments needed to improve engine cooling and its tail wheel shock absorption.

Standard armament on the plane included four 20mm British Hispano cannons under the cockpit floor and four .303-inch Browning machine guns in the nose, with the bomb load expanded during the war. The plane also could be fitted with rocket projectiles and depth charges, depending on the mission.

In subsequent years of combat, the strikingly sleek plane proved "it could withstand a severe hammering," noted author Jack Fishman, "and remain in one piece even after rough battle damage. There were countless cases of Mossies flying through intense heat of exploding aircraft with no worse effect than superficial charring, blistering, and stripped fabric on control surfaces."

The Mosquito's wooden structure often proved to be a godsend, especially in war-torn areas. Those returning to Malta from low-level runs over Italy, for example, were often quickly repaired in a make-do fashion using wood from cigar boxes, old tea chests, or pieces of already damaged bomb doors. Even a local coffin maker was called upon to help repair the aircraft, notes one writer.

The plane proved to be one of the few two-engine combat aircraft in the war capable of a single-engine take off with a full load. Its single-engine performance in general was especially good, thanks to the spring-loaded rudder.

The Mosquito proved not only strong and reliable, but exceptionally versatile as well. The first ones to make operational sorties over enemy territory were photo-reconnaissance (PR) planes. Those prototypes were ordered January 11, 1941, and they carried three vertical cameras and one oblique one.

The first operational sortie by a Mosquito occurred September 17 of that year when a PR variant took off from Benson and over flew Brest, the French frontier with Spain, and then over Paris before it returned to base. In the process of its rather long maiden combat run, the plane man-

aged to outpace three Bf 109s sent to intercept it.

The Mosquito proved very adept at PR and by May 1942 it was making runs deep into the continent, ranging as far north as Narvik in Norway and eastward to the arms factories in Pilsen, Czechoslovakia. The plane also was used to keep an eye on German naval bases and naval activity, and to identify enemy radar facilities.

With the addition of fuel tanks in the bomb bay and with the assistance of the Soviets, the British made a number of single-day round trips to Russia, beginning with a July 8, 1942, flight to photograph the battleship *Tirpitz* after landing and refueling at Murmansk. It was flights by PR "Mossies" that confirmed the V-2 rocket test facilities at Peenemunde in spring 1943 that resulted in the heavy Allied bombing attack on the site that August which substantially disrupted German timetables.

The bomber version of the Mosquito—the "B.IV Series"—was first contracted in July 1941. This variant was quickly modified to handle two 500-pound bombs. It took to the air in November of that year, putting on a spectacular display that foretold the Mosquito's eventual replacement of the much slower and more venerable Blenheim bomber.

The bomber variant made a daring daylight raid on Cologne on May 31, 1942, and handled two raids on the U-boat facilities at Flensburg and another raid on Berlin before tackling a successful low-level attack on Gestapo headquarters in Oslo on September 25. The Mosquito proved so versatile that the Brits were able to execute high altitude attacks on clear days and low-level attacks on overcast days.

As the war progressed and the Mosquito revealed its true characteristics, a more complicated and sophisticated system was developed that combined shallow dive and low-level attacks to confuse German defenders. Ground defense units would be tied up combating low-level attackers while a second flight would approach and climb to 2,000-feet before making a shallow dive on the target before heading home at treetop level.

Mosquito bombing raids on Berlin and

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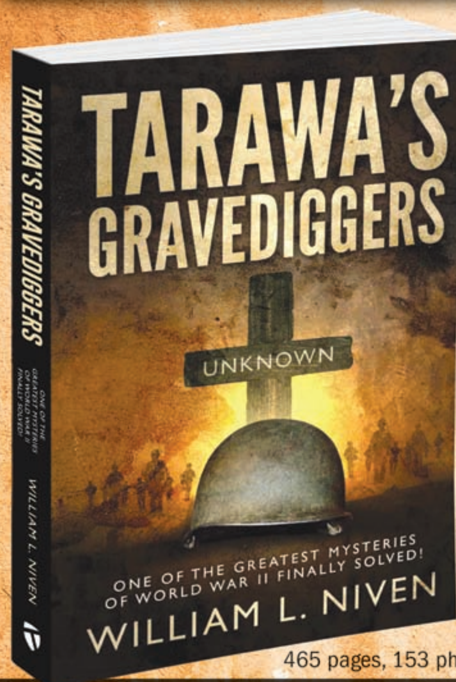

November 20, 1943

Elements of the 2nd Marine Corps Division landed on a tiny Pacific Island named Betio, Tarawa Atoll in the Gilbert Islands. Five-thousand heavily armed Japanese Marines were waiting for them.

No one was prepared to predict the outcome of what was about to happen. Seventy-six hours later, the American flag was raised over Tarawa, and in those few short hours on that very tiny island, 5,000 Japanese men and 1,113 American Marines and Sailors lost their lives.

Everyone agrees that dozens of Americans were simply "lost" and are still buried on Tarawa, while dozens of others who were found could not be identified. It has remained this way for the past seven decades. Attempts have been made to locate those left behind and to identify Tarawa's "unknowns," but without much success. All of that is about to change. This is the story of Tarawa's gravediggers and the unrecovered and unidentified Marines who died there.

465 pages, 153 photographs, with numerous graphs and tables

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U.S. Air Force

A restored de Havilland Mosquito DH-98 in the U.S. Air Force Collection at Wright-Patterson AFB near Dayton, Ohio, painted in the livery of a weather recon plane of the USAAF 653rd Bomb Squadron. Mosquitos were still in active service for several nations a decade after the war.

the Zeiss optical works at Jena deep inside Germany during 1943 and elsewhere lent credence to the pre-war view that a largely unarmed speedy bomber could penetrate enemy territory with little concern for interception. The Mosquito bombers, according to M.J. Hardy, eventually achieved the lowest loss rate of any British Bomber Command plane during the war—0.63 percent compared with the Lancaster's 2.13, the Blenheim at 3.62, and the Stirling at 3.81 percent.

Methods and technology continued to advance during the war, and by mid-1942 radar was being used as a bombing aid on selected Mosquitoes. It was used for a December 20, 1942, raid on a power station in Lutterade, Holland. The system enabled pilots to accurately bomb through cloud cover at night, such as a direct hit on the lock gates at Dusseldorf from 29,000-feet. The system also enabled the speedy Mosquito to serve as a pathfinder, dropping target markers well ahead of a main armada of heavy, four-engine bombers.

The Mosquito continued to impress both its designers and the airmen flying it. R.E. Bishop, the plane's chief designer, began tinkering with the notion that the plane might be able to handle the 4,000-pound cylindrical bomb nicknamed "Cookie." It could be done, he believed, by modifying the bomb doors and strengthening the craft's main structure. Further study showed that additional changes were needed and, in the end, several "Cookies" were dropped from the twin-engine plane.

By the end of 1940 the British had begun eyeing the Mosquito as a possible fighter rather than a bomber. They realized a need for a faster and better-armed fighter than the Bristol Beaufighters, and needed a long-range fighter to go nose-to-nose with the Fw 200 Condors then raking Atlantic convoys and calling in locations of Germany's deadly U-boat wolf packs so the Royal Navy and RAF aircraft could attack them.

By mid-May 1941, the F.II fighter prototype took to the air. Its armament consisted of four .303 Browning machine guns and the two Hispano cannons. The fighter featured strengthened wing spars, a flat, bulletproof windshield, and an armored bulkhead in the nose. Many of these fighters were modified with Mk V radar and used as night fighters when the first night-fighter squadron took to the air in mid-April 1942 at RAF Debden in Cambridgeshire. Soon flash eliminators were developed for the nose machine guns to prevent the pilot from being temporarily blinded when the guns fired at night.

The British even fitted some night fighters with a powerful airborne searchlight that provided 2,600 million candlepower from a dozen 24-volt batteries mounted in the front. The searchlights were soon replaced when the more effective night radar system became available.

Radar, coupled with under wing drop tanks or bombs, enabled the Mosquito to morph yet again to become an intruder and bomber escort with a flight endurance of nearly six hours. The British also managed to introduce a nitrous oxide injection system that temporarily boosted the plane's speed by more than 45 miles per hour to either gain on a fleeing opponent or to evade an oncoming attack.

It was the fighter-bomber variant that was used for the Amiens attack as well later attacks on a Gestapo facility in the Hague, and Gestapo headquarters in Jutland and Copenhagen. This led to another nickname for the plane: "The Gestapo Buster."

The Mosquito picked up additional monikers during the war, such as "Flying Furniture," referring to cabinet-maker builders, and some Americans referred to it as "the hollowed-out log." Some laughingly contended that if the Mosquito came apart in the air, it would fall to earth as thousands of matchsticks and copies of the Daily Mail newspaper.

The plane also saw action in the Far East, reigning down havoc on Japanese positions and their over-extended supply lines. The region's high humidity did necessitate the use of a stronger glue to help prevent delamination. In a number of cases the older and slower but traditionally built Bristol Beaufighter was called back into action in the Far East, effectively replacing the plane that had replaced it.

The versatile Mosquito was pressed into service for several other specialized endeavors during the war, including an August 17, 1943, flight to Sweden. Two passengers, carried in the bomb bay of separate Mosquitoes, negotiated Britain's purchase of Sweden's entire supply of export ball bearings just prior to the arrival of a German team that had planned to do the same thing.

This led to additional flights in specially outfitted planes, with the passenger lying on a mattress in the bomb bay that was fitted with electric lights, temperature control, and an intercom link to the pilot. VIPs who took such trips to and from Sweden included Danish nuclear physicist Niels Bohr and Sir Kenneth Clark.

One particular potent version of the Mosquito was designed for anti-shipping

Continued on page 98

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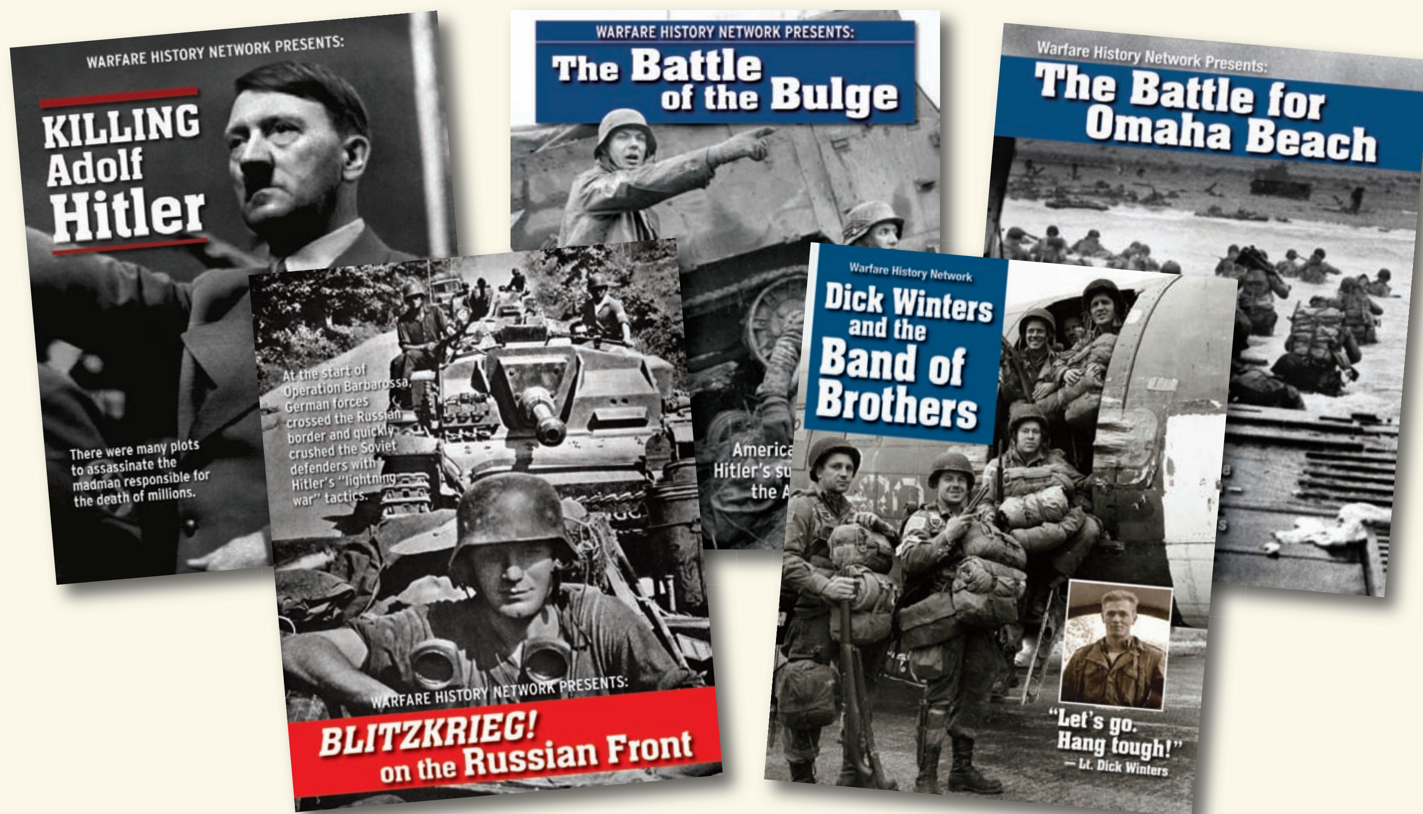

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Not even the timely intervention of the British Expeditionary Force could prevent France and Belgium from falling to the 1940 German Blitzkrieg. But it was at Dunkirk that the force was saved.

Dark Days of Spring

BY MARK SIMMONS

IN THE EARLY HOURS of May 14, 1940, General Alphonse Georges, the French commander of the northeast front, received bad news at his headquarters, the small but elegant 18th-century Chateau des Bondons, an hour's drive east of Paris near the River Marne.

He had just learned that the Germans, who had invaded his country fours days earlier, had crashed through his defenses around the city of Sedan. As he wept, most of his staff stood around in awkward silence.

When Maj. Gen. Aimé Doumenc, a member of the general staff of the Supreme Headquarters of the French Land Forces, arrived, Georges greeted him solemnly, saying, "Our front has caved in at Sedan." He then took to an armchair, his head in his hands. Regaining some composure, he explained that two divisions had run away under heavy bombing; German tanks were reported in the small, northeastern French village of Bulson, close to the Belgian border.

Two German light tanks crawl out of a streambed during Fall Gelb ("Plan Yellow"), the invasion of Germany's neighbors in May 1940. After crashing through the rugged Ardennes Forest that the French and Belgians thought was impassable, the German juggernaut struck on May 10, pushing aside opposing forces.

Ullstein Bild

Doumenc tried to inject some optimism. “Let’s look at the map, General,” he said. He showed how the three French armored divisions were still intact and could be used to pinch out the German bridgehead; the enemy could be thrown back over the River Meuse, Doumenc said, hopefully.

Georges was unconvinced. Later that day, Georges reported to General Maurice Gamelin, the Allied commander-in-chief, who also played down the crisis. A counterattack of “formidable means” was underway, Gamelin told him.

Such a counterattack looked possible on a map, but the French had been “wrong footed” from the start and never recovered. Within five days of the German invasion on May 10, Holland had been defeated, French defenses on the Meuse had fallen apart, and French Prime Minister Paul Reynaud on May 15 telephoned British Prime Minister Winston Churchill, telling him, “We have lost the battle.”

Yet this outcome at the start of the campaign was far from a certainty; the Germans were not necessarily bound to win.

On May 10, Germany had 136 divisions in the West; 10 were armored (panzers) seven were motorized, and one was airborne. The French had 94 divisions, the British 10, the Belgians 22. The French had three armored divisions, three light mechanized divisions (similarly equipped to panzer divisions), and five cavalry divisions.

The infantry divisions on both sides, excluding the British, relied on horse-drawn transport. For example, the average German infantry division of 17,000 men had 5,375 horses, which required 53 tons of feed daily. The French alone had more tanks than the Germans: 3,254 vs. 2,574.

Although slower and with a more limited range, the French tanks were better armored and armed; the heavy Somua B tank was considered the best tank in the world. A quarter of the German tanks mounted only machine guns while another quarter had only 20mm guns. In antitank guns, the Germans had 12,800, largely of poor performance, opposed by 7,200 excellent French pieces.

It was in the organization of the armored units where there was a marked difference. Even the three French armored divisions, considerably larger than the panzer divisions, supplemented by a fourth formed during the campaign, lacked vital supporting elements such as motorized infantry, and thus were incapable of fighting independently. The panzer divisions were self-contained units of all arms and organized into corps forming a highly mobile striking force.

In the air the Germans had the advantage. In May 1940 the Luftwaffe deployed 1,016 fighters, 1,368 bombers, 342 Stuka dive bombers, and 500 reconnaissance aircraft. The French Air Force had some 1,220 modern aircraft: 700 fighters, 140 bombers, and 380 reconnaissance planes. To these were added 230 bombers and 200 fighters from Britain’s RAF, which had rushed to France and Belgium’s aid.

Clearly the Germans held the advantage, which was enhanced by superior aircraft and a better understanding, honed in Poland, of close aerial support of ground forces. The Luftwaffe also enjoyed a marked advantage in antiaircraft guns.

Thus, at the start of the campaign, Germany had an advantage only in bomber aircraft and antiaircraft defenses. Otherwise, the opposing sides were largely equal. The battle depended far more on the style of operations and the strategic concept.

The Allied high command, even before Germany’s invasion of Poland and demonstration of Blitzkrieg, had concluded that, in the event of a German attack in the West,

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

Using Blitzkrieg (“lightning war”) tactics, the Germans’ Army Groups A and B rapidly swept through France, Holland, Belgium, and Luxembourg, overwhelming the countries’ defenses.

National Archives

German paratroopers leap from their transport planes during an airborne assault. Airborne forces suffered heavy losses during the Holland portion of Fall Gelb.

they would seek a quick victory due to the weakness of the German economy.

With the Maginot Line forming a formidable barrier between Sedan and the Rhine River, Hitler would likely try and repeat the Schlieffen Plan of 1914, with a strike through Belgium (and likely Holland as well). The Germans were expected to advance on the Brussels-Cambrai line.

But in 1936, Belgium announced its neutrality, thus upsetting Gamelin's plans to move large numbers of troops into Belgium and fight the battle on the neighboring country's eastern frontier. The plan was therefore revised with the battle expected to be fought on the plains of Belgium.

However, a defect in the revised plan was to assign the highly mechanized French Seventh Army to a coastal flank operation in the hope its speed would enable a link to be made with the Dutch.

Gamelin was largely right in his analysis of German strategy. The major role in the German plan—Fall Gelb ("Plan Yellow")—postponed several times between October 1939 and January 1940, was given to Col. Gen. Fedor von Bock's Army Group B, with a thrust through Holland and Belgium, and Col. Gen. Gerd von Rundstedt's Army Group A, with no armored units, would cover the southern flank. They only expected to seize the Low Countries and Channel coast.

General Franz Halder was ordered by Hitler to prepare the attack in the West—even before Poland had surrendered. He viewed his task with horror and secretly thought it wise to get rid of Hitler.

Von Rundstedt, after being appointed to command Army Group A on his return from Poland, felt Plan Yellow as it stood was poor, for it did not cut the Allies off from the Somme but merely pushed them back, risking the same stalemate as 1914. General Walter von Brauchitsch, the German C-in-C of the Army, did not agree.

However, on February 17, 1940, von Rundstedt's brilliant chief of staff, Lt. Gen. Erich von Manstein, had dined with Hitler and explained that he and his commander felt the left wing should be reinforced and become the main striking force. Hitler was taken by the suggestion—a surprise attack through the Ardennes against the weakest sector of the French defenses. It was bold and held the prospect of a swift victory; it appealed to Hitler's gambler's instinct.

Von Rundstedt got more armor than he had asked for, as the main weight of attack was now transferred to Army Group A. Von Bock's Army Group B was reduced to 26 infantry divisions and three panzer divisions, but it would still attack through Holland and Belgium, distracting the Allies. Army Group A, bulked up to 44 divisions (including seven panzer), would attack through the thinly defended Ardennes, then strike north along the Somme valley toward the Channel coast, cutting off the French and British forces lured into Belgium.

Despite mounting intelligence that the Germans were concentrating more heavily opposite the Ardennes area, Gamelin stuck with his plan for a rapid movement of his left wing into Belgium, and this was to play perfectly into the enemy's hands.

Colonel Hans Oster, an Abwehr officer and ardent anti-Nazi, gave the Dutch military attaché, Major Gijsbertus Sas, in Berlin advance warning of the attack in the West on the night of May 9. Sas had already received a string of alerts since November from this source.

However, during that time, the Dutch commander-in-chief, General Izaak Reynders, questioned such intelligence, concluding that the string of alerts from Sas amounted to "B.S." and did not "believe a bloody word of it." Nevertheless, his warning of the German invasion of Norway proved correct. Reynders resigned after a disagreement with the Dutch defense minister; he was replaced by General Henri Winkelman, who kept Sas in place.

At 3 AM on May 10, the Dutch at last accepted the warning and began to blow the bridges over the River Maas. Half an hour later, most of the airfields in Holland were bombed by the Luftwaffe; the small Dutch Air Force was destroyed.

The German 7th Airborne Division was deployed to capture The Hague and Rotterdam; 4,000 paratroops and 12,000 airborne infantry were delivered in Junkers Ju 52 transport planes but suffered heavy casualties and failed to capture The Hague. Attempts to capture the Dutch airfields at Valkenburg, Ockenburg, and Ypenburg also failed. At Ypenburg, many Ju 52s were shot up on the ground—some by RAF Hurricane fighters that intervened at 5 PM.

Army Group B had better luck. It pierced the Belgian frontier defenses on the first day when the principal fortress of Eben Emael, which was regarded as a formidable piece of engineering, fell to a special unit of the Koch Assault Detachment. The Germans landed by glider on the roof of the fortress at first light and, using hollow charges, kept the garrison cowed while paratroops and glider troops captured key Albert Canal bridges.

The fortress held out until the next day when the 223rd Infantry Division took the fortifications; the Koch unit lost six dead and 20 wounded. It was a brilliant coup de main, compared by many to the German capture of Douaumont at Verdun in 1916.

One of von Bock's Army Group B armored divisions was deployed in southern Holland to link up with the airborne attack while the other two—the 3rd and 4th Panzer Divisions—once across the Albert Canal, pushed southwest toward the Gembloux Gap, south of Brussels.

The German attack activated the Allied advance into Belgium under the Dyle Plan, the Belgians asking for assistance at 6:50 AM. To cover the advance of the First French Army, General Rene-Jacques Prioux's two mechanized corps moved over the frontier at noon toward the Gembloux Gap while General John Gort moved the British Expeditionary Force about the same time on the Wavre-Louvain line.

The British troops moved through Belgium, receiving a warm welcome from the local population. Captain Nick Hallett of 2nd Battalion, Royal Norfolk Regiment wrote on crossing the frontier, "I felt very excited as this was what we had been waiting for since the beginning of the war." He expected to be bombed but, "Actually we saw no enemy aircraft all day." This was a deliberate ploy by the Germans; they required a swift Allied move into Belgium and were not about to interfere with it.

All: National Archives

French infantrymen in a Maginot Line trench are on the alert for an attack that never came. The Germans simply avoided the border fortifications and plunged through Belgium and into France.

French commander-in-chief General Maurice Gamelin (left) and British General Lord Gort, commander of the BEF, failed to stop the Germans.

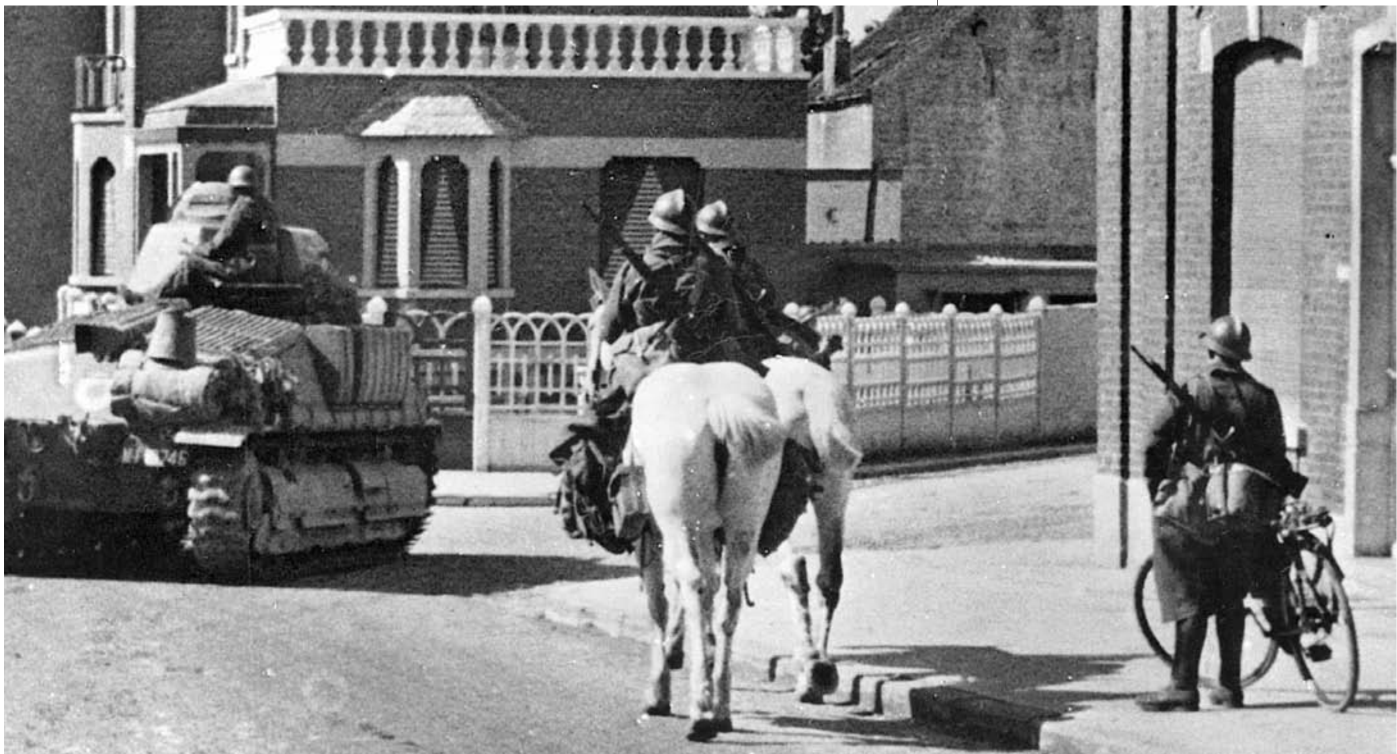
The BEF was small compared to its French Allies and German enemy. It consisted of 10 infantry divisions, five Regular and five Territorial. All 10 were intended to be motorized, but there was a shortage of transport in some units to carry all the troops' supplies and equipment.

The BEF had three tank brigades: two equipped with light tanks and one with Matilda heavy tanks. The force suffered from a lack of training that had not been fully addressed in the "Phoney War" period, and the Territorials lacked experienced officers and NCOs. The army had suffered long years of neglect, with priority in spending going to the navy and air force. Only in 1939 had the British government begun addressing the problems and equipment deficiencies.

Army Group A's spearhead was led by General Ewald von Kleist's Panzer Group, composed of three panzer corps. These armored columns were more than a 100 miles deep, their rear elements still east of the Rhine when they began to move. At 4:30 AM on May 10, elements of the 1st Panzer Division crossed the Sauer River and entered Luxembourg. It was one of three under the command of General Heinz Guderian, the best armored commander on either side; he hoped to reach the Meuse at Sedan, 85 miles away, in three days.

On the right flank were the 5th and 7th Panzer Divisions, their initial objective being the Meuse. Luckily for the Germans, these densely packed formations on the narrow winding forest roads met little serious opposition.

The Belgian Chasseurs Ardennais, who had mined and barricaded the forest roads, were withdrawn to Namur on the 10th. The 1st Panzer Division crossing into Belgium at Martelange did run into resistance from the 4th Company of the Chasseurs Ardennais and met more delays and fierce resistance at Bodange from the 5th Company; it



French soldiers on a tank, horses, and bicycle patrol a quiet French village. Soon, however, the Germans would arrive and life would never be the same again.

was held up for eight hours.

The French high command had estimated it would take an enemy force 10 days to reach the River Meuse through the Ardennes; in fact, it took the Germans two; 1st Panzer arrived at the river at 2 PM on May 12. The French had detected armor in the Ardennes, but they were more concerned with Army Group B to the north.

The only major problem for the Germans was traffic jams, which made the long, snaking columns vulnerable to air attack. One 1st Panzer Division officer recalled their anxiety: "Again and again, I looked with anxious eyes at the beaming blue sky, for what a target the division offers as long as it is compelled to progress by moving slowly forward along a single road. But not once does one French observation plane appear."

By the evening of May 12, the leading German armored divisions of Army Group A had reached the Meuse in two places: Sedan on the east bank had been captured by Guderian's corps, while Erwin Rommel's 7th Panzer Division had reached Dinant.

However, it was German infantry and assault engineers with massive Luftwaffe support—more than 700 aircraft were committed—who made the crossing and breakout possible, not the armor. The first of Guderian's tanks to cross the Meuse—temporarily held up by the French 102nd Fortress Division—did so at 2 AM on May 14.

Rommel's 7th Panzer attempted to cross the Meuse at 4 PM on May 12 at Dinant. Four tanks were rushed forward to secure the bridge before it was blown. Michael Berthold, driver of one of the Czech-built light tanks, drove through the cobbled streets of Dinant toward the bridge. He said, "As we drove through the main shopping street in Dinant, we were shot at from a butcher's shop on our left by an antitank gun.

"The shell made a hole in the tank, and hit Steffan [the tank section commander] in his throat, severing his jugular vein. I only discovered that later, after I had driven the tank to safety. At the time I only knew he had been wounded because I felt him fall back on my neck. Our gunner was also wounded. His head was split open.

"I could only hear what was going on behind me since it was so noisy. I just carried on driving toward the bridge, not realizing that some of the tanks behind me had also been shot up. I got to within 10 yards of the bridge before it exploded."

Meanwhile, the Allied advance into Belgium against Army Group B has been compared to the charge of the bull against the matador's cloak, and as the bull passes he is struck in the flank. The BEF moved up to the Dyle Line on May 1, the only confrontation in its sector coming when the leading elements of the 2nd Battalion, Middlesex Regiment, 3rd Division was fired on by Belgian infantry near Louvain. Then there developed an argument over who was supposed to defend the town.

Major General Bernard Montgomery, 3rd Division commander, smoothed things over by placing himself under the Belgian divisional commander's orders. However, as German pressure increased, the Belgians retreated and Montgomery was left in position and glad to see the back of his Allies.

The Allied high command assumed the Belgian defense of the frontier and delaying actions of the BEF and French Ninth Army would give them time to complete their move to the Dyle Line; however, some units were engaged before they were

established.

To the right of the BEF, General Georges Maurice Jean Blanchard's French 1st Army, heading for the Gembloux Gap, was in a worse position. It was confronted with masses of Belgian refugees heading for France, slowing its advance.

General René Prioux's Cavalry Corps' 2nd and 3rd Light Mechanized Armored, with 350 tanks in the lead, found the Belgians had not fortified the area. Prioux advised Blanchard that they should establish the defense on the Escout, 45 miles back. Blanchard agreed but in turn was overruled by General Gaston Billotte; Prioux would have to hold on while 1st Army rushed to support him.

On May 12, Prioux's tanks encountered the panzers of General Erich Hoepner's XVI Corps, and the armored clash took place near the town of Hannut. The French Somua tanks came as a shock to the Germans, for they were superior to the Panzer III and totally outclassed the Panzer Is and Panzer IIs. However, the French armor lacked air support.

A tank driver, Jean-Marie de Beaucorps, described a Stuka attack on his unit on May 12, shortly after a tank battle near Thisres: "A mournful sound, a long scream combined with the growling sound of their motors. I feel they are going to dive on my head. And then there are explosions that make one believe that the whole world is being thrown into the air. Our tank is thrown on its side; I think we are going to topple over. I panic and turn off the motor. We fall down on our tracks again. There is silence.

"Then, some way away from me, powerful explosions are to be heard: the ammunition lorry which has just supplied us is lying on its side and the ammunition is exploding. Twenty meters away from us, one of our tanks has turned over and has come to rest on its turret. The Lieutenant shouts, 'Get going, goddammit, full speed ahead!'"

Captain Ernst von Jugenfeld, who commanded a tank company in the 4th Panzer Division, felt May 12 was "hard and bloody" and a "large number of our tanks were lost."

Imperial War Museum

Belgian refugees flee the fighting as a British Universal Carrier prepares to head to the front, May 12, 1940.

The battles around the Gembloux Gap continued until the evening of May 14, when the French armor retreated behind its infantry line running from Wavre to Namur, by which time more than 100 French tanks were out of action; losses in the 3rd and 4th Panzer Divisions were as high.

The situation in Holland deteriorated rapidly; German airborne troops and the 9th Panzer Division were approaching Rotterdam. Giroud's French Seventh Army ran into 9th Panzer at Tilburg, recoiled, and failed to link up with the Dutch. After the bombing of Rotterdam, the Dutch capitulated on May 15.

However, the crucial area was to the southeast along a 50-mile stretch of the Meuse Valley. Here, from May 13-15, the fate of France was decided. The Germans had advantages and had enjoyed more than their share of good luck. They had achieved surprise by quickly striking through the Ardennes. They had encountered little opposition and no interference by the Allied air forces. They enjoyed air supremacy, and their strike pitted the best and most mobile units in the German Army against two of the weaker French armies, which lacked antitank and antiaircraft guns. Five German panzer divisions were thus striking the junction of the French armies.

But the French position was not yet hopeless. The River Meuse, an average of 60 meters wide and fast flowing, was a strong natural position. The western banks were steeply wooded and ideal for defense. Just north of Houx, opposite Rommel's division, were the heights of Wastia, commanding the river line. At Montherme, Hans-Georg Reinhardt's XXXXI Panzer Corps faced 1,000-foot heights.

At Sedan, again the west bank was steep, and the French had constructed concrete bunkers every 500 meters, backed by barbed wire and field defenses. Also, the bulk of Army Group A was still tramping on foot through the Ardennes.

On the night of May 12, General Georges reported to Gamelin, "Defense now seems well assured on the whole front of the river." He was wrong and did not learn until 9 AM on May 13 that the Germans were across the river in two places on the front of General Andre-Georges Corap's Ninth Army. The rigid French command structure was proving slow to adapt; only at the end of the day did unsupported tanks attack and capture a few prisoners, then withdrew.

After dark on May 12, Rommel's motorcycle battalion at Dinant discovered an unguarded footbridge over a weir and crossed the river, establishing a bridgehead. They

were armed only with light infantry weapons, and their hold was tenuous. As dawn broke on May 13, defensive fire on the footbridge was heavy, but the German battalion commander managed to get most of his men across and pushed on toward the heights.

Meanwhile, the 10th Panzer Division on the corps' left was in a bad a spot. A hurricane of fire from the defenders shot up the boats trying to cross, but heroic groups of assault engineers did get across, knocking out bunkers and clearing a path for two infantry battalions to cross on the 13th.

It was the success of 1st Panzer Division and its infantry under Lt. Col. Hermann Balck that saved the day. Having identified a place the French had abandoned during the air raids, two of his battalions crossed the Meuse and soon rolled up the line of bunkers, penetrating three miles toward the town of Cheveuges by 10 PM on the 13th. The infantry advance allowed 2nd Panzer to start crossing the river on pontoon bridges late that night. The French needed to deliver a massive counterattack on the 14th or face disaster.

Both: National Archives

TOP: Men from the 4th Battalion Border Regiment take up defensive positions along a road on the Somme Front. ABOVE: German soldiers in rubber rafts paddle across the Meuse River as others crawl across a footbridge to avoid enemy fire.

The French 55th Division had two infantry regiments and two battalions of light tanks available on the 13th, but they were not committed until the morning of the 14th against Balck's lightly armed men. Although enjoying some success, they soon ran into panzers that had been streaming over the pontoon bridges for hours and were pushed back. Panic began to infect the 55th Division when rumors began to spread of a massive German breakthrough. This rapidly spread to the 71st Division; by 2 PM on the 14th the French defense at Sedan had collapsed.

South of Houx, 7th Panzer was also trying to cross the Meuse near the village of Bouvignes using rubber assault boats. The 6th Rifle Regiment had managed to get a company across the river, but with daylight more attempts to cross failed. When Rommel arrived, he found that the crossing had stalled altogether. He ordered some nearby houses set on fire to provide a smoke screen and brought some tanks to the riverbank to hit French bunkers on the opposite bank.

A cable ferry using pontoons was constructed. Rommel himself crossed the river, urging the infantry to higher ground. Returning to the east bank, he traveled north to Houx, where engineers had constructed a pontoon bridge. Yet, by the morning of May 14, only 15 panzers were across and the bridgehead on the west bank was precarious.

On the 14th, on the high ground north of Houx, Rommel struck west with a force of about 30 tanks aiming for the town of Onhaye. He was nearly killed when his tank crashed, sliding down a steep bank and ending up on its side. Then he was nearly captured by advancing units of a North African infantry division moving up to contain the threat.

This was the best division in the Ninth

Army and, if used correctly that day, might well have smashed the bridgehead. Had it been used with the 1st Armored Division moving from the south, 7th Panzer would have been in serious trouble. However, both units had been held too far from the river line and had not been ordered to move quickly enough.

Lack of control through poor communications left many French units feeling isolated, and then rumor and panic gripped some. To the south, the French 22nd Division, under no real pressure, began to retreat. This convinced Corap at midday on May 15 that he must withdraw from the Meuse. General Gaston Billotte, his superior, agreed the move was needed to stay on balance. However, both underestimated the new speed of mobile warfare and how such a move would lead to the disintegration of their forces.

To the south at Sedan the situation was no better for the French Second Army. Once again it held a formidable position. Bunkers had been built on the western bank of the river while behind them the ground rose steeply to the Marfee Heights, giving the defenders excellent fields of fire from this natural gun platform toward the Germans panzers crowded on the east bank of the Meuse. However, the French guns were rationed to 30 rounds per gun by the corps commander, General Charles Grandsard, who believed he faced a long battle.

The German artillery was in a worse position, short of heavy guns and ammunition. Even Heinz Guderian wanted the attack delayed until the artillery support, still plodding along the roads of the Ardennes, reached them. Von Kleist, his superior, was determined to attack, and the Germans did have the support of 710 aircraft. The heavy air attacks, although not causing crippling casualties, did disrupt the defenders. Many telephone cables were cut, leaving blockhouses isolated, while German fighters swooped down on any movement.

Despite the air attacks, crossing the Meuse was difficult. The 2nd Panzer Division on the right, near the village of Donchery, got a few men across, but fierce resistance killed or wounded almost all of them. Tanks tried to knock out the bunkers by firing across the river, but only when the bunkers were attacked from the rear by the 1st Panzer Division did the 2nd manage to cross the Meuse.

National Archives

A German PzKpfw II light tank crosses a pontoon bridge. German military engineers were essential to the swift advance of German forces.

At last, however, the Allied high command was beginning to react. The air forces threw 400 aircraft into the battle to try and destroy the Meuse bridges. The RAF's single-engine light bombers, known as Fairey Battles, suffered heavy losses from German fighters and flak batteries covering the crossing places. Of 71 bombers taking part, 40 were shot down; 31 fighters were lost.

The official RAF history records, "No higher rate of loss has ever been experienced by the Royal Air Force." No crucial damage was inflicted on the pontoon bridges, and tanks and equipment continued to cross.

The French had no other option but to seal the growing gap in their defenses between Dinant and Sedan. The 3rd Armored Division was concentrated south of Sedan along with the 3rd Motorized Division under Maj. Gen. Jean Flavigny. He wished to attack on the 14th but then changed his mind after a heated argument with General Antoine Brocard, 3rd Armored commander, who told him his unit needed resupplying. Instead, it was deployed in a static defense role to plug a 12-mile gap.

The fate of the 2nd Armored Division was even worse. The wheeled vehicles of this unit advanced toward the front by road while the tracked vehicles went by rail. General Georges, impatient with the slow rate of rail movement, ordered the tanks unloaded at Hison, which lay directly in the path of the panzer advance. On May 15, the wheeled vehicles were cut off from the tanks, and in effect the division ceased to exist as a fighting formation.

By the evening of May 15, the Germans held a decisive advantage. Guderian, recognizing the French on his front were disintegrating, swung the 1st and 2nd Panzer Divisions westward with orders to advance toward Rethel on the Aisne, 30 miles from Sedan.

While 10th Panzer and the Grossdeutschland Regiment thrust toward Stoone, south of Sedan, against Flavigny's 3rd Motorized Division, with orders to keep the breach open until relieved by the slowly advancing infantry, Guderian was taking a risk. As 10th Panzer was not fully deployed across the Meuse, he admitted, "The success of our attack struck me almost as a miracle."

Grossdeutschland attacked Stoone at 7 AM on May 15; by luck this forestalled Flavigny's attack planned for 3 PM. By 11 AM, the French had regained Stoone and pushed back the worn-out German infantry. Panzergrenadiers from 10th Panzer retook the village but were forced out again by 5 PM.

However, General Brocard's 3rd Armored strength had been used piecemeal. Even worse, two tank battalions had not even gotten into action, yet 10th Panzer and Grossdeutschland had been fully committed. When Brocard called off the attack on the evening of May 15, the battle for France was lost.

Guderian's 1st and 2nd Panzers were held up at Chagny by elements of the French 14th Infantry Division, then again at the villages of Bouvellemert and La Hargne, where a North African brigade of cavalry fought until wiped out.

Ullstein Bild

General Heinz Guderian, commander of XIX Armored Corps, observes his corps' advance from his well-equipped command post half-track, May/June 1940. Soldiers are using an "Enigma" machine to encode/decode messages.

Guderian recalled in his memoirs that Lt. Col. Balck was again leading the attack: "The men in the front line were falling asleep in their slit trenches. Balck himself ... told me that the capture of the village had only succeeded because, when his officers complained against continuation of the attack, he had replied, 'In that case, I'll take the place on my own,' and had moved off. His men had thereupon followed him."

By nightfall on May 15, a huge bulge had developed in the French line that cut off the French 1st Army and BEF in Belgium from the rest of the French forces to the south. There was virtually nothing to stop seven panzer divisions from heading west to the Channel.

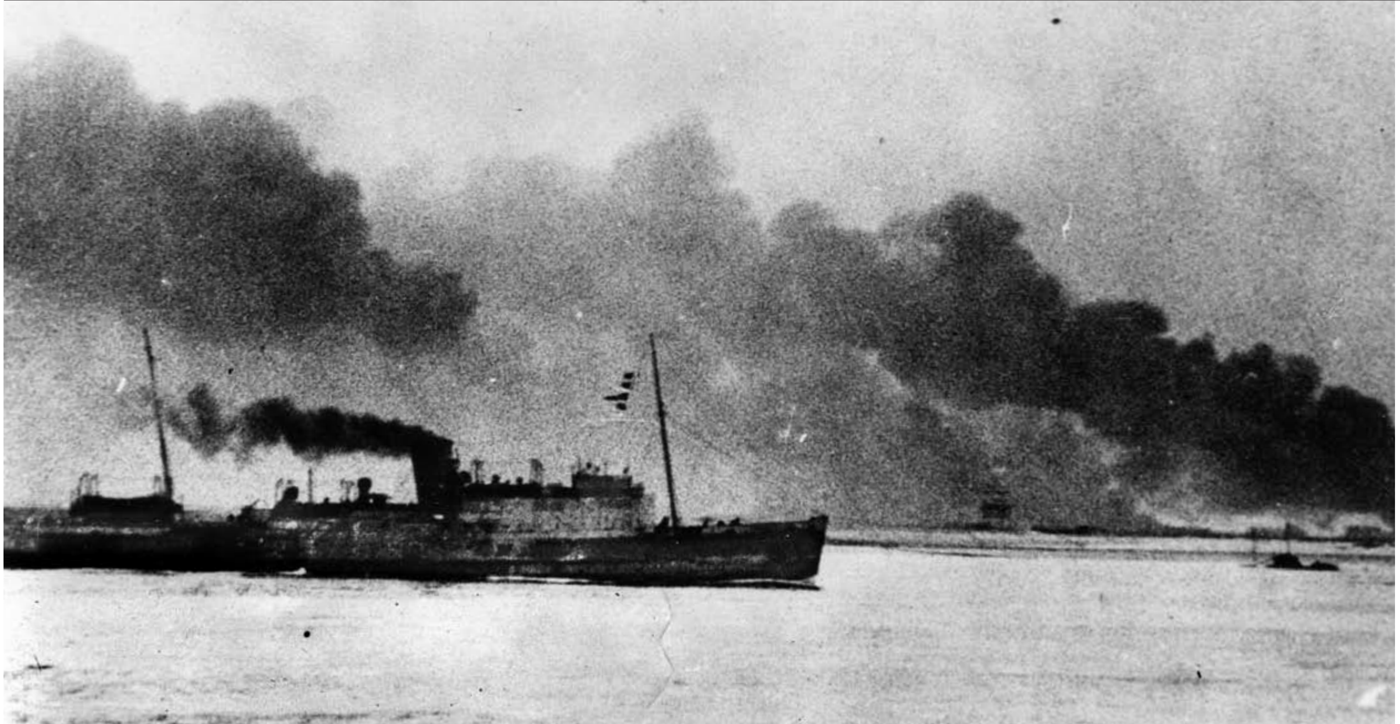
On May 15, General Billotte, commanding the Allied forces in Belgium, ordered a phased withdrawal through three river lines on the Senne, Dendre, and Escaut Rivers, a distance of 50 miles, with an active enemy to the front and the danger of being cut off to the rear. It was a difficult undertaking.

Lieutenant General Alan Brooke, who commanded the BEF's II Corps, wrote of the strain of command: "I was too tired to write last night and now can barely remember what happened yesterday. The hours are so crowded and follow so fast on each other that life becomes a blur and fails to cut a groove in one's memory."

On May 19, the RAF component of the BEF was withdrawn from France to southern England; only 66 of the 261 fighter aircraft made it back. However, most of the ground crews and pilots returned, even if 120 damaged but repairable Hawker Hurricane fighters were abandoned in France.

Men of the BEF marched back, exhausted, suffering from blisters, at times virtually sleep walking. Marching in threes with arms linked, the man in the middle could sleep a little. There were numerous accidents as drivers fell asleep at the wheel. Plus, they were frequently under air attack from German fighters. It had been only six days since they had advanced from the French frontier, but now they were retreating, and many men were bewildered. The

Both: National Archives



Filled with evacuated troops, a British ship departs the smoke-shrouded Dunkirk beach area during Operation Dynamo, June 1940.

roads were also choked with a mass of refugees of all ages; near Tournai, a mobile circus was caught in the chaos, complete with terrified elephants.

By May 19, the BEF had managed the retreat to the River Escaut, and now seven divisions faced von Bock's advancing troops. Behind them to the south, the panzers were still a threat, and Billotte had no answer for this.

General John Gort, the British commander, now began to consider a further withdrawal and evacuation from Dunkirk. The War Office in London still hoped for a breakout to the south and a linkup with the French. In a meeting with Billotte on the 18th, Gort said nothing about a retreat to the Channel ports. However, Gort had warned the general staff of his thoughts, and that same day the Admiralty was consulted about an evacuation, which was code named Dynamo.

With great reluctance, on May 20 Prime Minister Winston Churchill issued the following order: "As a precautionary measure, the Admiralty should assemble a large number of small vessels in readiness to proceed to the ports and inlets on the French coast."

Churchill also sent General Edmund "Tiny" Ironside, a 6-foot, 4-inch giant, from the general staff to Gort to assess the situation and to impress on him the need to break out to the south. All he could offer was a limited offensive by two reserve divisions from Arras.

On May 21, the British attacked with just two tank battalions and two infantry regiments supported by part of the French 3rd Light Mechanized Division (70 tanks), which caught Rommel's 7th Panzer by surprise and for a few hours created havoc. Von Rundstedt wrote, "For a short time it was feared that our armored divisions would be cut off before the infantry divisions could come up to support them."

The Germans (including Hitler) had begun to show concern over the speed of their advance and had already put the brakes on the panzers. Also, the imbalance between the two army groups was a problem; Army Group B now had only 21 divisions, whereas Army Group A had more than 70, plus all 10 armored divisions. On May 17, Guderian was halted for 24 hours, although he was allowed to continue a "reconnaissance in force."

But on May 24, the panzers were ordered to halt for two crucial days. The German decision was influenced by the French counterattack of May 22, which should have gone in with the British south of Arras. It struck the German 32nd Infantry Division a heavy blow. Only the formidable 88mm antiaircraft guns used in the antitank role finally stopped the French drive.

Guderian was furious with the order to halt: "We were utterly speechless. But since we were not informed of the reason for this order, it was difficult to argue against it. The panzer divisions were therefore instructed: 'Hold the line of the canal. Make use of this period of rest for general recuperation.'"

Before the halt order, elements of the 2nd Panzer Division, having covered 60 miles that day, reached the Atlantic coast at Noyelles. The BEF and French forces to the north were cut off.

The delays forced on the panzers on May 21 due to exhaustion and May 24 from the high command allowed the Allies to prepare Calais, Boulogne, and Dunkirk for evacuation; General Douglas Brownrugg had already sent the Rear GHQ to Boulogne. The French were not told of this move, which did not aid the declining relationship

between the Allies.

French forces evacuated the town on May 21, while two British Guards battalions were sent to France on cross-Channel ferries, arriving on the 22nd. The port area had been bombed heavily, and the troops found a French oil tanker burning near the entrance to the harbor.

The Irish Guards were first ashore. Brigadier William Fox-Pitt with his two battalions and some 1,500 troops of the Auxiliary Military Pioneer Corps had the mission of holding an eight-mile perimeter against a German panzer division. RAF light bombers flying from southern England and a heroic defense by elements of the French 21st Division managed to slow down 2nd Panzer.

Sergeant Arthur Evans of the Irish Guards' antitank platoon sighted the first approaching panzers: "I could clearly see the tank commander's head above the open turret with his field glasses to his eyes. We opened fire and the tank rocked as we scored two direct hits. The crew bailed out and abandoned it. Soon a second appeared and that, too, was effectively disposed of."

The fighting continued late into the night. Early the next day, the Germans attacked again; the Guards were forced back toward the port area. By afternoon the German attack was stalled and coming under the effective fire of Allied destroyers. HMS *Whitstead* was in the harbor evacuating troops while giving close gunfire support. *Whitstead* pulled out fully loaded, her place taken by HMS *Keith* and *Vimy*.

On the beach at Dunkirk, a British soldier takes a pot shot at a low-flying German plane.

Guderian had been pleading for Luftwaffe support but, such had been the speed of the German advance, it was in the throes of rebasing farther west. It was not until 7:30 PM that the Luftwaffe attacked with 60 aircraft. A French destroyer was sunk, but a dozen Spitfires arrived at the same time.

The ships loading in the harbor survived any major damage. Throughout the night the destroyers continued lifting off men. With the Guards battalions the last to leave, those evacuated from Boulogne amounted to 4,368. Part of 3rd Company of the Welsh Guards failed to get the order to retreat and was captured after a heroic last stand, finally surrendering on May 25.

Things did not go so well at Calais. The harbor was more difficult to use, and only 440 men were evacuated on May 27.

Gort abandoned the attempt to break out to the south by ordering a retreat to Dunkirk. On May 26, the British government reached the same conclusion, instructing him on the same night [the] "safety of the BEF will be [your] predominant consideration."

The halting of the panzers gave Gort time to form a new defensive line. Even so, the BEF was in peril; more than 300,000 troops were strung out along a 60-mile corridor, with superior enemy forces to the north and south. The supply system was beginning to fail, and the Belgian Army gave up the fight on May 28, which released more of von Bock's men.

However, during this period the BEF would put on its best performance. On the northern flank Maj. Gen. Harold Franklyn's understrength 5th Division put up a spirited defense aided by extensive artillery support, which fired 5,000 rounds in 36 hours. Franklyn even launched limited counterattacks, keeping the enemy off balance. On the night of May 28-29, Franklyn disengaged, retreating through a new defensive line held by the 3rd and 4th Divisions.

On the southern flank, a defensive position was formed on the La Bassee-Gravelines Canal line. Maj. Gen. Noel Irwin's 2nd Division was to hold the line; opposing it were four panzer divisions and two motorised SS infantry divisions.

The German halt order was eventually lifted, and Irwin's 2nd Division then came under infantry attack supported by artillery. In La Bassee, the 1st Queens Own Cameron Highlanders, at the extreme end of the line, held out for two days; only 79 of the battalion would make it back to Britain. North and west, the 2nd Royal Norfolks held the line until the 27th. Part of the battalion surrendered to the SS Totenkopf Division, but many were massacred.

As von Rundstedt's Army Group A pushed north, fighting every inch of the way, the British slowly pulled back to the Dunkirk perimeter in a remarkable fighting retreat. But the evacuation from Dunkirk presented several problems.

Its miles of sandy beaches had advantages but were not ideal. The harbor area of Dunkirk had been heavily bombed and was largely out of action, but there were

two old wooden jetties stretching out into the sea that could be used. There were strong tidal currents and because of sand banks a direct approach other than by shallow-draft vessels was not possible. However, the Royal Navy had the skill to overcome these problems.

On May 14, the Admiralty had requested all boats from 30 to 100 feet long to be registered; on the 19th it began planning the evacuation. In command was Vice Admiral Sir Bertram Ramsey stationed at Dover. All sorts of vessels were pressed into service, from passenger ferries to shallow-draft Dutch craft that had escaped to England.

Most valuable to the operation were the destroyers of the Royal Navy. They were fast, had some antiaircraft protection, and could carry around 600 soldiers per lift. But they were in short supply, and the crews were already exhausted from their efforts at Boulogne and Calais. On the evening of Sunday the 26th, Ramsey received the signal to start Operation Dynamo. Prior to this some 27,000 men, largely wounded and noncombatants, had been evacuated.

On May 27, the RAF began an immense effort to keep the Luftwaffe away from the evacuation area. Fighter Command deployed 16 squadrons and on the first day flew 287 sorties. Some troops returning from Dunkirk claimed the RAF was not there. British fighters may not have been seen, but they shot down 132 German aircraft over the area.

Captain William Tennant, with a staff of 150, arrived at Dunkirk on May 29 to take charge of the embarkation; the scene was chaos. Most of the troops there were ill-disciplined rear units and deserters. Just 7,669 men were taken off that day.

Having surveyed the two moles, large stone structures used as piers, breakwaters, or causeways, Tennant decided the east one could be used. A passenger steamer tied up there and loaded 950 men in an hour. Ramsey was reinforced with an antiaircraft cruiser and a large increase in destroyers; he now had 30 available. The weather was kind, with low clouds; burning oil tanks laid an effective smoke screen over the loading area.

On the 29th, the pace of evacuation accelerated, and 47,000 men were taken off. However, about midday the weather cleared, and German aircraft inflicted heavy damage. Two destroyers were sunk by an E-boat and a U-boat, and another destroyer, the *Grenade,* was sunk while loading at the jetty. Full of troops, she took a direct hit but luckily was towed away before her magazines exploded. The large steamer *Clan Macalister* was hit by Stukas and had to be abandoned; 11 naval vessels were lost that day.

Ramsey decided to withdraw some of the modern destroyers. He also formed the wrong impression that the mole and outer harbor could no longer be used, so loading there was stopped. On the 30th, the mistake was rectified.

Engineers constructed two piers of trucks driven out into the sea and decked with planks, which speeded up the process of embarking men into smaller craft that were ferried out to the larger vessels. On the 30th, 29,512 more men were lifted from the beaches and 24,311 from the harbor. Two destroyers, HMS *Wolsey* and HMS *Sabre,* lifted off record totals of men, with *Wolsey* making three trips with 1,677 men and *Sabre* taking 1,700 in just two crossings. Shipping losses were minimal.

The western end of the beachhead was held by the French, the rest by the British. By the 30th, most of the BEF had reached the refuge of the Dunkirk perimeter, which was shrinking and coming under increasing pressure. Late that day the eastern end of the perimeter troops began pulling back to the beaches. Some 6,000 British troops remained behind, holding the eastern outskirts; the rest of the perimeter was now held by the French, who put up a final heroic defense.

The next evening Rear Admiral William Wake-Walker, who commanded the shipping of Dunkirk, witnessed a remarkable sight that lifted his spirits: "I saw for the first time that strange procession of craft of all kinds that has become famous. Tugs towing dinghies, lifeboats and all manner of pulling boats, small motor yachts, drifters, Dutch schoots [schuits], Thames barges, fishing boats, and pleasure steamers" were sent to rescue the beleaguered BEF.

Tension between the two Allies mounted. The British felt they had been let down by French incompetence, while the French considered the British untrustworthy. The refusal to send more RAF fighters into the battle was a sore point. The Dunkirk evacuation was merely leaving France to her fate.

On May 31, a total of 64,429 men were lifted off, the biggest total for a single day. Churchill flew to France on the 31st for a crisis meeting and promised the withdrawal would be on equal terms and the British would form part of the rear guard.

During the first three days of June, it was mainly French troops that were lifted off. June 1 saw 64,429 evacuated, with 79,177 evacuated over the next three days.

The heroic story of hundreds of little boats crewed by stoic civilians from all walks of life crossing the Channel to rescue the BEF has become legend. Most of the craft were crewed by the Royal Navy and Royal Navy Reserve; however, many civilians volunteered and risked—and some lost—their lives to save the troops.

Squadron Leader C.G. Lott recalled the scene below as he flew top cover on June 1: "Big boats, little boats, boats with brass funnels, boats with strings of smaller boats strung out behind them like a duck with her ducklings. In a never-ending stream they crept over the water in both directions. The slowness of their movement was anguishing. Their vulnerability to air attack was so obvious as to make the whole spectacle truly heroic, and I could both have cheered and wept as I watched."

But the Navy paid a heavy price, even though the First Sea Lord had reversed the decision and sent the more modern destroyers back in on June 1. Thirteen British warships were sunk by the end of that day, and only nine of the original 41 destroyers were undamaged. Captain Tennant watched HMS *Worcester* leave that day, her decks awash with debris and blood and under constant attack. He signalled Ramsey recommending

National Archives

Waiting their turn to be evacuated, Allied soldiers form long lines across the Dunkirk beach. Trucks were driven into the sea and covered with planking to form field-expedient piers. More than 366,000 Allied soldiers managed to make it safely to Britain but had to leave most of their heavy equipment and weapons behind.

that daylight operations be ended.

During the night of June 2, the final British troops—the 1st Kings Shropshire Light Infantry—were evacuated on the Channel ferry *St. Helier.* At 11:30 PM, Tennant signalled Ramsey: "BEF evacuated." Then he and General Harold Alexander toured the harbor and beaches in a launch. Using a megaphone, Alexander shouted many times, "Is anyone there?" Satisfied that no one remained, they boarded a destroyer and left.

Originally, the Admiralty thought about 45,000 troops might be rescued; in the end 224,686 members of the BEF and 141,445 Allied troops, mainly French, made it to the England. Operation Dynamo had proved a huge success.

In a speech to the House of Commons on June 4, Churchill told the country, "We must be very careful not to assign to this deliverance the attributes of a victory. Wars are not won by evacuations."

The position France faced on June 5 was a "strategic nightmare." Its army had lost the best part of 30 divisions—a third of its strength, and most of its armored units. Twelve British divisions had gone; two remained. General Maxim Weygand, now in command, was prepared to fight on. However, as early as May 28, he had abandoned hope of defending the Somme line. He advised his government that once the defense was breached they should seek an armistice.

By June 8, the Battle of the Somme was lost. Both French flanks had been turned, and Weygand ordered a withdrawal to the south. The French government abandoned Paris on June 10 for Tours on the Loire.

The French defeat involved Britain in a second evacuation. General Alan Brooke was sent back to command the remaining British troops that Churchill hoped to reinforce with two new divisions. However, on June 12, the 51st Highland Division was forced to surrender to Rommel on the Normandy coast, and on the 14th Brooke decided to withdraw his remaining troops. Churchill was reluctant to leave France to fight on alone, but after a heated argument he finally agreed.

In the second evacuation, 144,171 British troops were lifted off, this time along with much of their equipment. Several thousand Allied troops were also taken off from Nantes/St.Nazaire and Cherbourg. The liner *Lancastria* was hit by bombs on June 17; nearly 2,500 were rescued but 3,000 more drowned. It was a loss kept from the British public. Brooke himself reached Plymouth on June 19. On the 22nd, the French unconditionally surrendered at Compiegne.

For Germany it was a remarkable victory decided largely in the first five days of the campaign. In the summer of 1940 Guderian thought the best way to force Britain out of the war was to thrust south against her Mediterranean bases through Spain. However, this opportunity was missed, which led to Hitler fighting on two fronts and to total defeat.

The UK-based author dedicates this article to the memory of his uncle, Battery Quartermaster Sergeant Wilfred Lane, who served in the 152nd Battery, 51st Light Anti-Aircraft Regiment, Royal Artillery, a Territorial Army unit. He was killed in the retreat to Dunkirk between May 27 and June 2, 1940. He has no known grave but is remembered with honor on the Dunkirk Memorial, Column 7.

National Museum of Denmark

PRISONER OF THE GESTAPO: FREED BY WORDS

In his wartime journal, Danish teenager Peter Aage Jorgensen recounts his ordeal at the hands of the Nazis and his ultimate release. **BY SUSAN ZIMMERMAN**

With war comes untold stories of unbroken spirits. These are universal stories without bounds and sides, some of which remain buried deep in psyches. Then there are those that must be written in order for the survivor to move on. In purging the horrors of war from the mind with words comes an inalienable freedom.

Peter Aage Jorgensen chose the latter some 70 years ago when the young Danish underground member wrote his liberating journal telling the story of his capture, torture, and survival in concentration camps at the hands of the Nazi Gestapo during World War II. The following entries were excerpted from his 32,000-word journal.

JORGENSEN'S JOURNAL

The account of my arrest and subsequent interrogation by Gestapo and imprisonment in concentration camps I wrote as a 19-year-old in 1945, not for the purpose of publishing; the sole reason for writing it all down was to get all the traumatic happenings which could threaten one's sanity out of one's system. I was convinced that by forcing oneself to look forward and not dwell on all the horrible, terrible things one had witnessed, and by writing them down, I boxed them in, an end of that.

The writing served its purpose; today I can think about and talk about the happenings without problems. Today I even view myself as having had the privilege to witness Nazi Germany's collapse from the inside, also to have been imprisoned in concentration camps at a time when the German commander in Denmark, Dr. Werner Best, increased the number of executions dramatically, may have been lucky.

In 1944, the Germans executed, all in all, 42 Danish freedom fighters. In 1945, when they knew they had lost the war, the Germans executed 36 in the month of March alone and 26 in April. The 25th of April they executed nine, just 10 days before they capitulated. They were not executions, they were murders.

Dr. Best was condemned to death, and so was Børge Bendahl, the man who beat and

Courtesy Peter Jorgensen

Shortly after returning home from imprisonment in the Neuengamme concentration camp, Peter Jorgensen was photographed celebrating June 6, 1945—Danish Constitution Day—in Nykøbing Falster. Despite being severely tortured by the Gestapo, he remains proud of his role within the Danish resistance movement. OPPOSITE: Aligning themselves with the Germans who had invaded and occupied their country, 6,000 pro-Nazi Danes joined Frikorps Danmark (Free Corps Denmark) after it was formed in June 1941. The unit went on to fight alongside Germany on the Eastern Front but was disbanded two years later after suffering heavy casualties.

Bundesarchiv Bild 101I-753-0001N-13; Photo: Otto Lanzinger

A busload of Danish school children watch in amazement as German troops march into Copenhagen, April 9, 1940. Danish defenses were overrun by the Germans in a matter of hours.

tortured many, including me, but Denmark abandoned capital punishment before these death sentences were carried out and, after a number of years behind bars, they were both let out as free men (in August 2001).

In 1939, just after the outbreak of World War II, my family moved from Sakskøbing to Nykøbing Falster and the first few years we lived in a rented house in Frisegade 19. The house was owned by two sisters of the famous explorer Peter Freuchen, whom I often saw—and looked up to! There I was awakened on the morning of April 9, 1940, together with the rest of the family, to look out on the street where the German soldiers were marching by, after having landed in Gedser. That day I will never forget.

I was an enthusiastic Boy Scout and, through scouting, I gained lifelong friends. When our resistence group was formed, I was 17 years old, and I was accepted only because the group consisted solely of scouts who had grown up together.

After finishing high school (Præliminæreksamen) from Nykøbing Byskole, I became a trade and commerce apprentice at Dahl Bros. Dahl Bros. was located right across from Frisegade 19, where we lived. When two members from our group were arrested by the Gestapo, the remaining group members had to go "underground" in order to hide from the Gestapo. Hiding was easiest in Copenhagen, and that is where we were when the Gestapo caught the rest of us, two by two.

After the arrest and interrogation at Politigaarden (police headquarters) in Copenhagen and the following stays at Vestre Fængsel, Dachau concentration camp, Neuengamme concentration camp, Frøslev Camp, and finally Løderup in Sweden, I returned to Denmark. These are entries from my journal.

CAUGHT

It was in June 1944 that the group was formed. Actually, it had existed before the war, but now it became illegal, but where appearance was concerned, there was no change. We were six Scouts who had been inseparable from the time we joined the scouting movement, until now that we were all Rover Scouts in the "Danish Scout Corps."

The members of the group are: Sjus, College student, age 21; Manne, Clerk, 21; Jens, Machinist, 22; Tarp, Photographer, 25; Poul, Teacher, 28; Myself, Apprentice, 19.

Poul was the leader of the group. We trained in the use of weapons and explosives and acted for a time as an intelligence group until Poul had to go underground because the Gestapo wanted him. After that the group became an explosives group with Tarp as its leader.

On the 3rd of November 1944, Tarp was arrested together with Fritz, another scouting friend, who was in another group. The rest of us went to Copenhagen, where we associated ourselves with Holger Danske, the Danish underground.

Jens and Sjus were arrested by the Gestapo on February 2 in Vordingborg, while in

action. Meanwhile, Manne and I were waiting in Copenhagen. We phoned the hotel in Vordingborg and were told that they were still staying there. That was the 5th of February, and it was the Gestapo we were talking to, which we did not know.

Manne had gone into town that day to deliver a load of potatoes, and he came home with the truck around 5 o'clock. In the meantime, I had balanced the day's sales and went out to help him unload the empty sacks from the truck.

While we were doing that, a big Buick drove up on the other side of the street and five plainclothesmen emerged. Because of the noise of the generator, we did not hear them, but Manne had the impression that something was wrong, which he intimated to me, after which he quietly went down the street and around the corner. I was, however, too busy to notice this, so I went into the courtyard with a bunch of sacks.

As I went through the portal to the courtyard, I encountered three men with flashlights. I lifted my cap, said hello, and asked them if they were looking for somebody. "Keep walking," they answered, and I got a pistol in my back.

They did not have to tell me twice, and I went quietly into the warehouse, where I disposed of the empty sacks while I quickly considered all the possibilities.

The only way out was through the portal, and the three men were still there, while the fourth one was upstairs ringing the bell to the apartment. My only chance was to put all my eggs in one basket and try to bluff them.

I hoisted some empty crates on my shoulder and went through the portal. The three men blocked my way, but I said politely but firmly "bitte," and I'll be damned if they didn't move out of the way.

Once in the street I tossed the crates into the truck and told the driver that the men were Gestapo and to get out of there as soon as I had turned the corner. I then went quietly around the other side of the truck, crossed the street, and disappeared around the corner. That, however, was the end of my composure. My legs were shaking under me as I ran down the street and caught a streetcar to the center of town.

Polfoto

SS-Obergruppenführer Dr. Werner Best was the Reich Commissioner for occupied Denmark. In 1948 he was tried for ordering executions of resistance members and deportations of Danish Jews to death camps. He was eventually sentenced to 12 years in prison but was released in 1951.

During the evening I managed to get hold of Manne, and we arranged to meet at the Golden Cafe, where we discussed the situation over a snack and a beer. We agreed to contact headquarters and then disappear into the country for a while. No sooner said than done.

I went up to the apartment, where headquarters were located, leaving Manne in the street to stand guard. It was about 10:30 when the elevator stopped at the fifth floor, and when the door opened I stared into the mouth of a pistol while three big "Hipo" (a Danish auxiliary police corps) guys shouted, "Hands up, you big a——."

I was escorted into the apartment, where everything had been upended—bullet holes in the walls and evidence of a great struggle. We later learned that the apartment had been raided the night before, during which the freedom fighters had shot their way out to the back stairs and escaped with the loss of one man. The rest of them reached Sweden in good shape.

My pockets were emptied with a speed and elegance that indicated that it was professionals I was dealing with. They were elated at finding two packages of Queensland cigarettes. My papers—e.g., false identification and streetcar pass in the name of Vagn Aage Jensen—were examined.

They asked me what I was doing there. "I came to buy a pair of skis, I don't understand—what is going on?" They were convinced enough to ask me to sit down while they checked this bit of information. I was seated on a sofa with two other "innocents." No doubt my explanation would never have stood up, but at that point the doorbell rang and my heart jumped into my throat.

While this was going on, Manne had been shadowing "Børge"—the Gestapo man mentioned in the foreword. Børge, however, had been shadowing Manne and, as luck would have it, Børge pulled the gun first and, when the door was opened, Manne entered with his arms raised, followed by Børge, who pointed his gun at me. He asked Manne if he knew me. It was hopeless to deny it, as Børge had seen us together before I entered the apartment building.

This was too much for one of the powerful Hipo guys. "Aha," he said, "so you are full of lies." He commanded me to stand up and, at the same time, he hit me in the face with the butt of his revolver and knocked me to the floor. In order to gain time to think, I feigned unconsciousness, or maybe it was to avoid further blows. I was, however, kicked back to life and given a lecture to the effect that, although I wasn't going to live long, at least I was going to learn to speak the truth before I died.

They now passed around my Queensland, and as I saw my month's ration go up

in smoke I asked to have one too, so at least I could get a chance to share them. After all, it was my treat. Manne gave me a reproachful look, as if to say, "You don't need to hasten your own end." He was right. I had hoped to impress them with impudence, but got my ears boxed for my effort.

After that, we got half an hour with our arms raised and were then allowed to sit on a stool while only three Hipos watched over us, machine guns at the ready. The rest of them turned the apartment and attic upside down, in the process of which they found German uniforms, passes, and quite a tidy bunch of weapons. This was all packed in a couple of large suitcases.

It was midnight, and our hosts were hungry. Luckily, I had brought half a loaf of bread and some butter, and after raiding the refrigerator they made bacon and eggs. It was a wonderful smell as they took turns eating. To us they said, "You won't get anything to eat now, for reasons you will soon find out."

In the meantime, there arrived from the city jail an Opel Kadet car together with a couple of civil Gestapo, one of whom—a small man with unpleasant, piercing eyes—was said to be the chief from the city jail. Before we could exchange a pleasant "Hello," he hissed: "*Sie lugen jah Mench*," and we were handcuffed; the criminals had been caught.

Manne and I were cuffed together in such a way that we each had a hand free to carry a suitcase.

GESTAPO JAIL

On the way to the city jail, we crossed Raadhuspladsen—Copenhagen's main square—and at the same time I noted that it was 1:35 AM. I wondered if and when I might again walk across Raadhuspladsen as a free man.

Once we arrived at the jail, we were escorted up to an interrogation room by the chief and Børge. The chief sat down expectantly, while Børge began a further examination of our possessions. In my billfold he found kr.250.00, which he promptly transferred to his own.

Erik Petersen

A group of Danish resistance fighters in a "safe house" in the city of Odense on the island of Fyn are instructed in the use of various weapons.

Unfortunately, Manne carried on him a piece of paper with the description of a "sticker," whom we were to have shadowed, and I thought that was the reason they asked him to remove his glasses. They moved me into an adjoining room after first having cuffed me, arms behind my back, with a pair of French handcuffs. These handcuffs had the excellent advantages that the more you moved your hands the tighter they got.

From the adjoining room came the frightening noises of the terrible beating Børge was giving to Manne. I managed to gather my thoughts long enough to note a growing hunger, as we had not eaten since early morning. I was fully aware that the intention was for me to be weakened from the sounds of Manne's groans and Børge's increasingly heavy blows and bad-tempered shouts. The groans were interspersed with half-choked screams as Børge got even more bestial.

By the light from the keyhole, I could see that the time was 3 AM. (I still had my watch.) I started to orient myself a little. Two steps each way was all the room there was. I discovered that there were shelves on the end wall of the room, and as I examined it closer, I found a bottle, which I pulled to the edge of the shelf, after which I turned around, knocked it over with the help of my mouth, bit out the cork, and smelled it —ahh—it was Calleric Punch. The bottle was half full, and I was empty. In no time at all, we had exchanged roles, and I had a much lighter outlook.

About 1½ hours later, when things quieted down next door, I was fetched from the darkness. I became instantly sober as I looked around the interrogation room. Manne was gone, but the seat of the easy chair in the middle of the room was covered in blood, and there were pools of blood all over the floor.

Now followed an interrogation which I shall never forget. It lasted three hours, and it was one beating after the other. My face was decorated and my backside beaten to a pulp. Needless to say, it was my countryman Børge who carried out the beatings, and he did it with great care while the Germans merely watched approvingly.

Suddenly Børge stopped and asked me, "How long have you known the Gisselbæks?" (The Gisselbæks were my landlords in Charlottenlund.)

"From the day I rented a room from them in December."

"That's a lie, that's a lie, we know it all," Børge screamed. "How long have you had

an affair with Mrs. Gisselbæk?"

"I really haven't had an affair with Mrs. Gisselbæk," I shot back, "considering that Mrs. Gisselbæk is 85 years old, and I am not yet 19, it did not occur to me."

Børge did not answer but continued to massage my face. These gentlemen had no sense of humor, but the accusation was dropped.

The beatings continued, and the more they beat me the more lies I told until, in the end, I couldn't remember my own lies. Finally Børge knocked me out, and when I came to I mumbled to Børge that it was possible to squeeze a lemon till there was no juice left. The German asked for a translation, and after that the interrogation was over.

It was 7 AM; my watch was still ticking in spite of everything. I was now escorted down to the duty room where I had to turn over my pipe and tobacco as well as other unimportant items left over from my stay in the interrogation room. I kept my watch—and nobody noticed.

Bundesarchiv Bild 183-L24683, Photo: Otto Lanzinger

National Museum of Denmark

LEFT: Life under Nazi rule was difficult for most Danes. Here, two Danish girls are stopped and questioned by German occupation troops. RIGHT: A member of Denmark's Nazi Youth organization, part of the National Socialist Workers' Party, the country's largest Nazi organization, walks proudly down a Copenhagen street, June 1941.

Then I was handed over to the custody of the police-soldiers and installed in cell 42 on the third floor. This was a so-called "Pipcelle" with no windows, four naked walls, two mattresses, and a chamber pot. A light bulb in the ceiling cast a sharp light both night and day.

I inspected the premises and greeted my cellmate—a young machinist taken in a street raid but actually innocent of any wrongdoing. He had been alone in the cell for four days and was glad to have company again.

I was hungry, and it suited me very well that the food was passed around at this time. We each got a bowl containing a small portion of rotten fish and a piece of raw gherkin. Added to this was a handful of half-rotten unpeeled potatoes. My appetite disappeared immediately, and I consumed only the few edible potatoes, leaving the rest.

My next concern was bed and sleep, but before this I rubbed the brass frame of the door peephole clean and used it as a mirror to inspect my damaged head. A gash in the upper lip, one eye swollen shut, and the whole head puffed up. I threw myself down on one of the mattresses and went quickly to sleep in spite of the light and my aching head.

Next morning around 9 o'clock we got two slices of bread and a mug of coffee—at 10 o'clock I was dispatched back to interrogation again.

The interrogation was conducted in the same way as yesterday's. The first time my hands were handcuffed behind me; this time they put me in a straightjacket, placed me in a chair, and proceeded to again pound on my previously battered visage.

When they had tired of playing with me, they released me from the straightjacket more dead than alive, and Børge remarked, "Now you will be given a fair chance, you a——!" and sent for a Hipo man of heroic dimensions—a full head taller than me and with a width of shoulders and muscles like a bear.

At that moment I could barely manage to stay upright, and the fight could not be categorized as fierce. One blow dumped me on the floor in the opposite corner, and when I woke up in cell 42 my cellmate was in the process of cleaning my face with water from his drinking mug.

A couple of nondescript days passed by—interrupted by visits to the toilet morning and evening. Friday, two new captives joined us in the cell, a drummer from Peter Kreuder's orchestra (a deserter from the German Army) and an antisocial individual suffering from gonorrhea.

On Saturday my first cellmate was released; he was so law abiding that he dared not phone a greeting from me to my family. The next day our antisocial element, including his gonorrhea, was transferred to the Danish department.

The atmosphere improved immediately.

Both: National Archives

ABOVE: Prisoners at German-run concentration camps were segregated by nationality. Here, a group of Danes at the Dachau camp, where Jorgensen was interned, stand around one of the burial pits they were forced to dig for their deceased countrymen. OPPOSITE: Anti-German anger surfaces in August 1943. Citizens of Odense overturn a police van carrying Danish political prisoners as a protest against German rule and official Danish government collaboration.

All that was left was me and the drummer singing Peter Kreuder melodies all day long. He was irrepressible; he believed in Germany's right to expand but not in a dictatorship accomplishing it. A couple of days later he was executed as a deserter, but he left the cell singing.

The next day new guests arrived. Two prisoners from Neuengamme in Germany; they had originally been incarcerated as so-called anti-socials. Both had been picked up in a street roundup and sent on to Germany because of 15- to 20-year-old criminal records. One of them was feeble-minded and under the protection of the Danish Mental Health Authorities. Both had the ultimate hair cut (no hair), had flea bites all over, and suffered from dysentery. It did not take long to fill the chamber pot, and then the floor had to serve. The stench was unbelievable— ventilation was nonexistent.

On February 11, Sjus appeared outside my cell door whispering that the Russians had bypassed Berlin and reached a point 26 kilometers farther to the west. I noted it carefully on the wall of my cell and thought: "In two weeks the war is over!" As it turned out, that was not the last time I had that thought.

Finally on Friday, February 16, the "Wachtmeister" yelled "Aage Jørgensen—*alles mit nach Vestre*!"—the magic shout which, if nothing else, would get me out of the stinking cell where I wandered seven steps back and forth like a lion in a cage. I got dressed in a hurry and arrived in the duty room where Manne already was waiting together with another prisoner.

[After a 12-day trip, Jorgensen entered the Dachau concentration camp outside Munich on March 2, 1945, with other Danes who had been in the resistance movement in Denmark.]

DACHAU

Dachau was known to several of us as one of the worst political concentration camps in Germany—it had been established in 1933.

The snow was being whipped along by strong winds. I was standing up in the [railroad] car—couldn't sit down, but couldn't keep standing, either. I was exhausted and cold and feared the worst. In the condition we were in, we might well freeze to death, but we fought on even though there seemed no hope of being let out before morning.

We had collapsed helter skelter on top of each other when the car doors were slid aside. The darkness outside was packed with police soldiers and illuminated by a lonely, faint platform light.

The transport leader yelled in true Prussian fashion, “If anybody tries to escape, you will all be shot immediately.” At that moment the man probably uttered the best joke of his life—we fell off the car more or less like cow plop and none of us were able to run even for 10 steps. We were ordered into formation four by four; at the rear were our sick, three of whom were dying, being carried and supported, while the rest of us took turns with our luggage.

The column started to move along at a slow pace prodded by police soldiers packing machine pistols. We had two kilometers to go to reach the concentration camp, and we practically dragged ourselves along through the snow and the withering cold.

Finally we stood at the gates to “KZ Dachau.” The gate opened up into a big barrack-like building and above it we saw the swastika and the German eagle meticulously crafted in bronze.

We were prodded and kicked through the gate and then counted four by four. If anybody lagged behind, a solid Prussian boot in the behind provided immediate encouragement.

When we had all passed through the gate, the first ranks were facing another gate, and the whole ceremony was repeated. Thus we passed several more gates, and each time we were counted (Germans are a very thorough and methodical people) to eventually pass through a large factory complex and reach the final gate leading into the living quarters compound. This was a little city in itself, at that time housing about 30,000 prisoners.

To get to this gate, one had to cross a perimeter minefield, which bordered a moat and a six-meter-high wall festooned with electrified barbed wire surrounding the entire area. Inside the wall was another 20-meters-wide minefield and then a six-meter-tall, high voltage barbed wire fence.

On the inside of this fence “Spanish Riders” [a barbed-wire entanglement installed low to the ground in order to trip potential escapees] had been installed (likewise electrified), and in front of these were a network of zigzag trenches where soldiers could take cover in case of mutiny among the prisoners. It should also be mentioned that tall stone watchtowers were located every 50 meters along the wall. The machine guns in these towers were manned night and day and effectively covered every inch of ground inside the compound. Furthermore, one had to consider that the factory complex totally surrounded the prison compound, so a successful escape from the compound left another five walls to go—with alert, well-armed guards and electrified barbed wire. Under these conditions, escape was doomed to failure.

While waiting in front of this last gate, some of us succumbed to our raging thirst by scooping up some snow to eat—we had had nothing to drink for three days. They were immediately warned that the snow was heavily contaminated with all kinds of bacteria.

Having passed the gate (and the inevitable tally), we trudged down one of the camp streets and entered a barrack used as a reception area for new prisoners. Here we deposited our sick comrades in one end of the room and stretched ourselves on the floor, enjoying the freedom of being able to lie flat again in spite of the cold. In several places the floors were covered with a layer of ill-smelling groundwater and, in spite of all the warnings, some weak souls could not resist drinking it.

Around 3 o’clock, the prisoners in the kitchen reported for duty and soon after a couple of inmates brought us a big keg of warm “coffee” and each a 200-gram hunk of rye bread.

We dug in with a vengeance, but I found to my horror that I simply could not chew the bread. My teeth had loosened so much that I could have plucked them out one by one, and my gums were very sore. I gave Manne half of my bread and crumpled up the remainder sufficiently to swallow without chewing.

Our old Nykøbing acquaintance Kjeld Staunstrup gave me a pair of stockings and a handkerchief. I had started this venture with no luggage at all, and my outfit was really in a sorry state.

I discovered that there were Lagerpolizei [camp police] present in the barrack hall.

Only long-term prisoners were eligible for this exalted position. I struck up a conversation with one of them, and he turned out to be a pleasant chap, a young Dutchman who had been in Dachau for eight years. Our conversation was conducted in German, which was the international language of the camp.

He told me that, compared to two years ago, Dachau was now a regular paradise (I found that hard to believe), and he tipped me off on some current state-of-affairs conditions.

If one avoided falling ill, a normal human being could expect to survive only four months on the food allotments provided—unless, of course, the individual had been assigned a job in the kitchen, in the Lagerpolizei, or similar job allowing the scrounging of a bit more food on the side.

He also told me that the camp contained a bordello staffed with young Polish women—prisoners forced into degrading themselves. They were sterilized and, in most cases, were young girls from respectable Polish families. The bordello was reserved for Blockältester [the "elders" who were assigned to be in charge of each barrack] and similar gentlemen, a situation that did not worry me unduly.

Then he outlined the coming events. For the first three weeks we would be located in a quarantine barrack; if we managed that without getting ill, we would be moved to the regular barracks (by the way, a preponderance of the barracks were classified as either quarantine or hospital barracks) and start working in a factory or something similar from seven in the morning to seven in the evening, with 15 minutes for a dinner break.

Among the factories there was one that produced spare parts for aircraft; most of the factories were engaged in the armaments end of things. During the quarantine period I could expect some coffee in the morning, a bowl of soup at noon, and some coffee and 200 grams of rye bread in the evening. Afterward, when working, the ration was increased to 350 grams of bread per day and a little more soup.

After all these explanations, he requested some tobacco, but I had to disappoint him with my story of the tobacco having run out a full week ago and that our last smoking venture consisted of 25 people sharing a pipe stuffed with the burnt-out remnants from all the pipes available.

National Archives

Members of Denmark's resistance (foreground) battle German soldiers in Odense, May 5, 1945, the day of the city's liberation. Open warfare such as this was rare until the very end of the war.

By the way, he did supply a few tips regarding the work. It was paying work with remuneration in so-called Lagerpfennig to the tune of 1 to 4 pfennig per week depending on the nature of the work. One could purchase additional soup, some sour marmalade, and some 15 percent soap in the canteen (yes, they had one of those, too). I never did manage to experience all these wonders, seeing that I spent all my time in the camp under quarantine.

Dawn had arrived, and we noticed an L-shaped building across from us. The part of the building closest to us housed the combined communal bathing room and gas chamber; the other branch was the camp kitchen. Painted on the roof of the building in large letters was the message: "The only route to freedom is death."

At 6 o'clock we observed a platoon of prisoners in their striped uniforms being marched in, and we got the first whiff of what was in store. Never had I seen such a group of emaciated, miserable beings. They hobbled along coughing and with their breath rattling in their throats. We had a couple of degrees of frost, and they were dressed in their thin prison uniforms. Many were barefooted, and the lucky ones wore open bath sandals. There were 10- to 11-year-old boys and oldsters in their 70s and 80s among them.

Our own senior [barracks elder] was 65 years old—Olsen, a retired mechanic from Odense—and we almost had to carry him on our hands to get him through all this alive. He had been taken as a hostage because they could not get hold of his son-in-law.

The prisoners were marched into the gas-cum-bath chamber through a door in one end of the building; inside, while passing an open window, they tossed their clothes out

the window in a heap on the ground—we never saw them again.

At that moment, while we were in a mood of bleak despair, somebody shouted "Achtung!" By now we had a pretty good idea of the meaning of that particular phrase and tried to stand at attention as well as we could.

NEUENGAMME

[In March 1945, all Danish and Norwegian concentration camp inmates were sent to Neuengamme outside Hamburg in northern Germany; the prisoners were informed that they would soon be released to the Swedish Red Cross. This was a concession from SS leader Heinrich Himmler as part of a bargain with Count Folke Bernadotte, vice president of the Swedish Red Cross; Himmler was trying to save his own hide by performing this humanitarian deed.]

We marched past a huge roof-tile factory where the camp prisoners worked and then past some pretty barracks fronted with beds of flowers—"Not bad," we thought—but these barracks were for the soldiers, and we just shuffled on.

Finally, we turned in through a wrought-iron gate flanked by low barrack buildings, were counted four at a time, and were now standing in the Neuengamme muster yard.

We took it easy, sat down on our parcels, and munched on some crackers and jam, and then "Jacob" arrived. Jacob was a young Dane with the common name of Erik Jacobsen—he had been elected spokesman for all Danes imprisoned in Neuengamme.

He greeted us and held a little speech describing all the activities that were on the forbidden list (it was a long list), and he ended with saying that the only way we could gain respect would be to ignore all rules—this was not advice but a request. He made a good impression, and we decided to honor his request; we were still in a sanguine mood, having been under the protection of the Swedes.

As we passed through the idyllic little village of Neuengamme in a Danish bus, with a Danish bus driver at the wheel, it suddenly occurred to me that this was April 20—the birthday of Hitler—and that we were on our way back to Denmark, and that our return offered a reasonable assurance that it would be Hitler's last birthday.

An SS man conducted the muster, and a command was given: "*Fremad march,*" and we were on our way to our new quarters: Block 18 in Neuengamme.

Block 18 was, if possible, even more sinister looking than Block 19 in Dachau. By nailing some boards together, an array of "sand boxes" had been built on the floor—no sand, of course, and with gangways between them.

Manne and I, plus 28 others, were assigned a box measuring three by five meters. The floor was covered with straw, and each man was given a blanket. In spite of the crowding, it was still preferable to Dachau—better headroom and air circulation and better opportunity for social contacts.

The block was one big room with a washroom attached to the rear, and behind that a room with a row of toilets. Both facilities could accommodate 10 men at a time—and of course there were "only" 300 of us in all.

The camp gallows was located in the block street, and its steps had been worn hollow by the multitude that had ascended them.

The Norwegians were housed in Block 19 on the other side of the street, farther up on the same street. Restricted by an additional barbed-wire fence lived the so-called antisocials (among them the son of police inspector Mellerup), as well as all prisoners who had been caught trying to escape. These prisoners wore red marks front and back targeting the heart; if they moved beyond established boundaries the guards had orders to shoot them on the spot.

Every Sunday three of them were executed by hanging; the day before our arrival had been a Sunday complete with its traditional executions. These executions were a ritual part of the Sunday festivities. Around noon the camp orchestra started off by playing martial marches, and at the conclusion of one of these the victims were hanged; then followed another inspirational piece of music.

[The camp orchestra consisted of about 30 prisoners, who were fed a little better than the remainder. They played every morning when the prisoners went to work and every evening when they returned. The day the Americans crossed the Rhine, they played "Wacht am Rhein."]

After the hangings, the centerpiece (the gallows) was moved off stage to its resting place in the street, and they played football. All this happened in the mustering yard with all prisoners present and accounted for.

Like Dachau, we had to be kept in quarantine and could not leave the block street. Conditions for the sick were equally as bad as in Dachau, and in our barrack we had already many who had fallen ill. I had to lie down with an enflamed throat and was placed with other patients lying in a row against one of the sidewalls.

When we arrived the block was unbelievably dirty, but, helped by our Red Cross cigarette supply, we started a major renovation effort. We got the room disinfected and painted all over, and it became almost livable.

Courtesy Peter Jorgensen

Peter Jorgensen at home in St. Lambert, Canada, with his with Mette.

To begin with, we had to contend with German Blockälteste and Kapos [privileged prisoners who were appointed by the SS to administer corporal punishment and keep order in the barracks], but we managed to negotiate a deal permitting us to select these worthies from our own ranks. Pastor Madsen was elected as our Blockälteste by democratic means.

We were happy to find the flea and lice population to be much smaller than in Dachau, but we continued our daily attempts to hunt down the lice. We had escaped the typhoid epidemic in Dachau, but we had brought some carriers with us and the disease started to spread again, with people dying every day from this dreadful disease.

TO SWEDEN

One day at 4 AM we mustered in the block street with our few possessions, and the usual came to pass: we waited. The first event happened at 8 o'clock when the Swedes arrived with all their rolling stock and drove off with the sick and the old.

At the same time we were told the British were barely two kilometers away and that they had given the camp a deadline for its evacuation of 8 that evening. From 8 o'clock on, anything could happen. The Germans had placed artillery two kilometers away on the other side of the camp, thus placing us directly in the firing zone between the two front lines.

We were also put on notice that more transportation would arrive from Denmark but that there would not be room for all of us.

Around noon some white Danish buses arrived. In Denmark the buses had been taken off their regular runs, received a coat of whitewash, and been dispatched—all within 24 hours.

To avoid panic in securing seats on the buses, we needed a departure schedule and tried to find our trustees so one could be drawn up. None could be found; believe it or not, all these worthy individuals had departed on the first bus.

We managed to agree on a plan in a hurry, and all we young ones were left to be the last out.

Manne and I walked around weighing our options. We seriously considered hiding in a basement until the expected fighting had rolled past the camp area, a time span of, at most, 24 hours. We figured that we might prefer returning to Denmark via France and England rather than now, while "the green ones" [the Germans] still ruled the roost.

One of buses had brought an official from the Danish Foreign Service, Frans Hvass. He supervised the transport operation, saw to it that everybody got a seat, and did not leave Neuengamme until the last Dane and Norwegian had been taken care of.

With our departure postponed, Manne and I made a small fire in the middle of the street to fry some bacon, which we ate together with a couple of hunks of rye bread. We relaxed and waited for the moment when our bald heads again were to travel and see a little more of the world.

Throughout the afternoon buses continued to arrive, but Manne and I did not board them. Finally, at 8:05 PM, we left the camp on the last bus. Two hours later Neuengamme was in the hands of the Allied forces.

As we passed through the idyllic little village of Neuengamme in a Danish bus, with a Danish bus driver at the wheel, it suddenly occurred to me that this was April 20—the birthday of Hitler—and that we were on our way back to Denmark, and that our return offered a reasonable assurance that it would be Hitler's last birthday.

It was already dark, and we drove only about 15 kilometers to reach a Swedish-owned property, Friedrichsruhe, where we spent the night in the woods under a clear sky. The Allies could not guarantee the safety of the transport during the night; therefore, we drove only during daylight.

Next morning we proceeded via Lübeck and Neumünster, seeing that Hamburg was in the process of being occupied by the British Army.

This trip gave us a good idea of how much the civilian population had suffered. They were ill clad and undernourished, and everywhere were children begging for scraps of food. Even those who had suffered the most under the German regime were reluctantly handing out food to the children. The children were not responsible for the war—but probably suffered more then anybody else.

In passing through a little village, we noticed everybody busy collecting flyers (airdropped propaganda leaflets) and burning them in a forge. Believing that these leaflets were British, I managed to obtain one (I still have it). Actually they were a last desperate exhortation to the German people to resist the enemy, and they were being burnt in the village forge. Obviously there was no mood for further resistance. The content of the leaflets was typical of German Nazi propaganda; it will suffice to quote the fat headline "Kampf oder Sibirien! Standhaftigkeit oder Tod!" ("Fight—or Siberia! Steadfastness or death!")

FREEDOM

Knowledge of the German capitulation arrived the evening of May 4, and we all wanted to get back home immediately, but that did not happen. On May 17, we finally returned and when we landed in Copenhagen the authorities provided us with money and ration

coupons, enough to allow us to reach our homes without further assistance.

Aboard the ferry we said our goodbyes and wished each other good luck. I also met several other comrades who had obtained sanctuary in other parts of Sweden. Among them was a tram driver almost totally enclosed in bandages.

He told me that his bus from Neuengamme had been delayed to such an extent that they had had to risk driving at night to get away from the front line. Their bus had come under machine-gun fire and had burst into flames. They had all jumped straight out through the windows and only had two casualties, but the survivors had all been wounded by a combination of machine gun bullets and glass splinters. He had received a bullet in the back but was on the road to recovery.

I said a special goodbye to the "old" man, Olsen from Odense. He had survived in spite of his age and his affliction (erysipelas).

That was May 17. A week later I was back in the civilian life. My hair grew back, slowly but surely, and I was back to being my old self. Later, I visited several of the old comrades but only a few had recovered from our ordeal as well as I had. In too many cases there had been nervous breakdowns, serious cases of tuberculosis, etc., etc.

Copenhagen women joyously celebrate the liberation of Denmark, May 5, 1945. Nazi Germany surrendered three days later.

Well, we have peace again, and Denmark is a free land, so what is the preferred topic of discussion?

Reconstruction—no way, rather the next war! I wonder if the nations of the earth can keep the peace until such time that they can unite and declare war on the moon. I do not believe so, but this war has certainly not converted me to a militarist. If only it has had the same effect on the other survivors, one would assume that we are a step closer to a lasting peace.

But peace is, and will probably remain, as the interval between two wars. But at the moment we do have peace, and every hour of the day one should appreciate that fact. [Peace is] the most valuable thing we possess—and something that at any time can be lost again. (Written in Copenhagen, 1945.)

Today Børge was arrested!

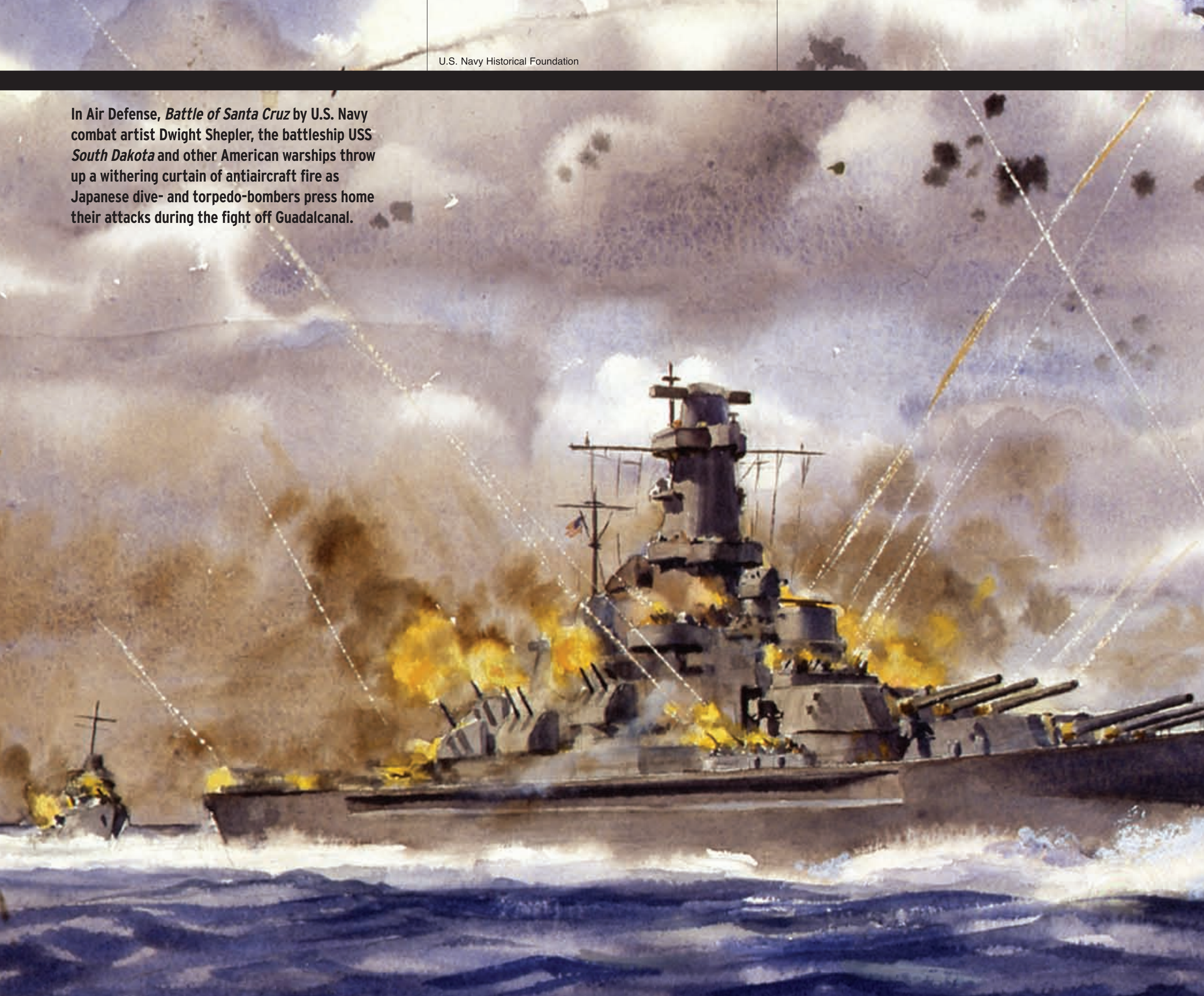
For 1 1/2 years he has been hiding in a room rented from an elderly lady, who was not suspicious in spite of the fact that Børge, in all that time, never went out in the daytime, but let her do all his shopping for him.

But NOW he has been arrested—and only now is the war really over for my five friends and myself. Børge is in the City Jail—the same place where he tortured many people, including us. "Your time is up—and now you better answer OUR questions," said the police sergeant, when Manne was at the city jail to identify him.

POSTSCRIPT

After the war, Jorgensen's torturer, Børge Bendahl, was sentenced to death. On June 28, 1951, the sentence was commuted to life in prison. (Bendahl served only seven years and was released in 1958; he then moved to Sweden.)

After returning to Copenhagen and finishing his apprenticeship, Peter Jorgensen attended school in London, returned again to Copenhagen, got married to his girlfriend Mette, had children, then in 1953 took a position in Montreal, Canada. On December 19, 1960, Jorgensen received kr. 874 ($126 Canadian) from the government of Germanyin compensation for his experiences. He started a company called Scandan, which sells Danish products and of which he is still the president while day-to-day operations are run by his son Steen. Peter, age 89, and Mette live in St. Lambert, Quebec. □



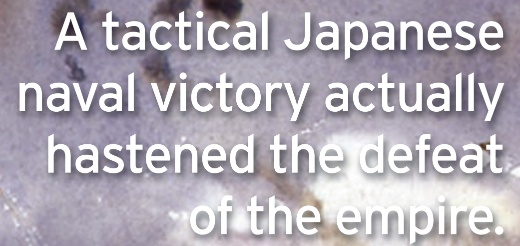
In Air Defense, *Battle of Santa Cruz* by U.S. Navy combat artist Dwight Shepler, the battleship USS *South Dakota* and other American warships throw up a withering curtain of antiaircraft fire as Japanese dive- and torpedo-bombers press home their attacks during the fight off Guadalcanal.

Action Off S

During the early morning hours of October 26, 1942, several hours before the sun came up, Admiral William F. Halsey sent a dispatch consisting of three words: "Attack. Repeat, Attack." An enemy naval task force had been sighted moving south, toward Guadalcanal in support of a major ground offensive to retake the island of Guadalcanal in late October. Guadalcanal had been assaulted by U.S. Marines in August, and the fight for control of the island was raging.

To support the Army's offensive and to find and destroy American naval forces in the vicinity, the Japanese moved into position near the southern Solomon Islands. Admiral Halsey wanted his own aircraft carriers to attack the enemy before they could get within striking range of the island.

Halsey had landed at Noumea, New Caledonia, eight days earlier to replace his friend Admiral Robert Ghormley as commander of all U.S. forces in the South Pacific area (Comsopac). Admiral Ghormley was a meticulous man with a talent for organization. But he



A tactical Japanese naval victory actually hastened the defeat of the empire.

anta Cruz

BY DAVID ALAN JOHNSON

apparently lacked the aggressiveness and the personal qualities to inspire the men under him. The appointment of Halsey as Comsopac was hoped to remedy that situation. Halsey's first communiqué to his men was certainly grounds for encouragement.

Admiral Halsey felt the pressure and knew what was expected of him. He told Admiral Chester W. Nimitz, his superior and commander in chief of the Pacific Fleet, "I had to begin throwing punches almost immediately." He also knew what forces he had at his disposal that would be throwing the punches: two aircraft carriers, two battleships, nine cruisers, and 24 destroyers. These were organized into three groups, two of which were led by the aircraft carriers *Enterprise* (Task Force 16) and *Hornet* (Task Force 17). The battleship-cruiser group was designated Task Force 64. Halsey gave the commanders of the three groups instructions to make a sweep north of the Santa Cruz Islands north of New Caledonia, then change course to the southwest to be in position to intercept enemy forces approaching Guadalcanal.

Admiral Isoroku Yamamoto, aboard his flagship *Yamato* in Truk lagoon, was concerned about the aggressiveness of his subordinates as well. His Vanguard Group, made up of two battleships, four cruisers, and several destroyers, had been milling about Guadalcanal for nearly two weeks. The cruisers and battleships were supposed to support the attack on the island's vital airfield, Henderson Field, with massive gunfire, but the island and its airfield were still solidly in American hands. Yamamoto advised the Army that if Henderson Field was not taken soon, his ships would have to withdraw because of lack of fuel.

Yamamoto was also frustrated by the fact that he had no idea where the American carrier forces were. *Enterprise* had been spotted by a patrol plane a few days before, but no enemy carriers had been seen since then. Admiral Chuicho Nagumo, commander of the carrier strike force consisting of the fleet carriers *Shokaku, Zuikaku,* and the light carrier *Zuiho,* continued to stand by in the waters north of Guadalcanal and wait for news. About 100 miles to the west, Carrier Division 2, formed around the carrier *Junyo,* also waited for word.

American scouting planes were having much better luck than Yamamoto's. A relay of Consolidated PBY Catalina flying boats had been keeping track of the Japanese fleet since noon on the 25th. Admiral Thomas C. Kinkaid, in command of Task Force 16, complied with Halsey's directive by keeping to an aggressive northwesterly course at about 20 knots. One of the Catalinas reported the Japanese fleet to the northwest. About an hour later, another flying boat reported one large carrier and six other ships about 200 miles away on the same heading.

At 5 AM, Admiral Kinkaid ordered *Enterprise*'s captain, Osborne B. Hardison, to launch a 200-mile search for the Japanese carrier force. Sixteen Douglas SBD Dauntless dive-bombers left *Enterprise* to look for the enemy. Each aircraft carried a 500-pound bomb "just in case." On the way out, one of the bombers spotted a Japanese Nakajima "Kate" torpedo bomber heading in the opposite direction—looking for the American carriers.

Australian War Memorial

ABOVE: Veteran pilots of the Imperial Japanese Navy receive last minute instructions prior takeoff from the deck of their aircraft carrier. The loss of many experienced fliers crippled Japanese offensive operations for the remainder of the war. BELOW LEFT: Engines roaring, Japanese Aichi Val dive bombers and Mitsubishi Zero fighters await the signal for takeoff from the deck of the aircraft carrier *Shokaku* during the Battle of the Santa Cruz Islands on October 26, 1942. BELOW RIGHT: Under attack by American dive-bombers, the Japanese cruiser *Chikuma* maneuvers violently on October 26, 1942. Damage and a plume of smoke from the impact of a 1,000-pound bomb are faintly visible amidships.

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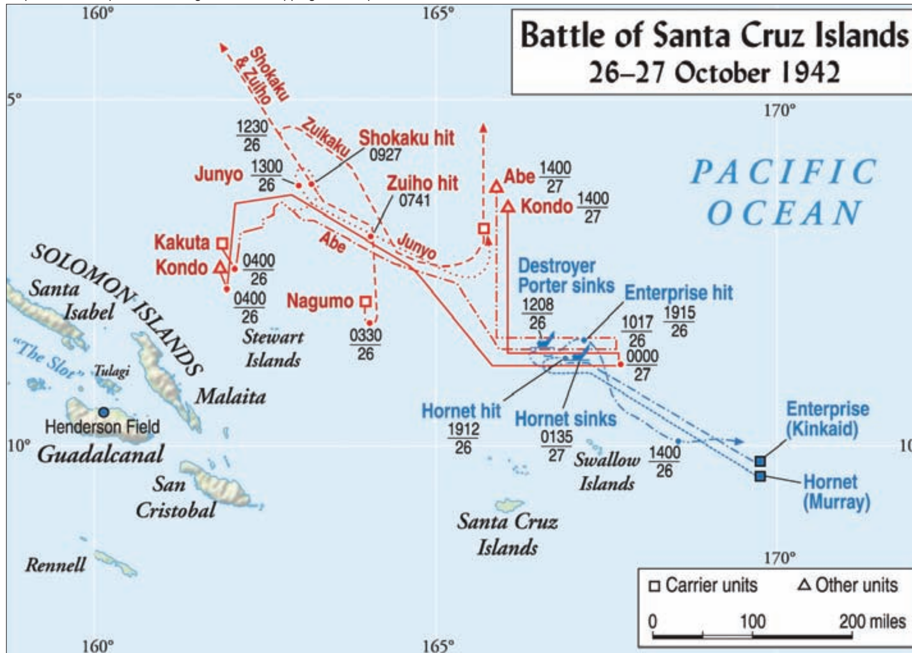
The 16 SBDs split up in pairs, with each pair covering a wedge-shaped sector ranging from west-southwest to due north. At 10 minutes before 7 AM, Lt. Cmdr. James R. Lee, leading *Enterprise*'s Scouting 10, and his wingman, Ensign William E. Johnson, made contact. They had found *Shokaku* and *Zuikaku,* the heart of the Japanese force. As soon as Admiral Kinkaid received the message, he ordered an immediate increase in speed.

Other SBD pilots intercepted the message as well. Lieutenant Stockton Strong and his wingman, Ensign Charles Irvine, on another leg of the search, turned toward the position indicated by Commander Lee and found the Japanese task force at 7:30. Strong spotted two narrow, light-brown flight decks far below—*Shokaku* and *Zuiho*. *Zuikaku* was only a few miles away and would have been within visual range, but she was hidden by cloud cover.

The two SBD pilots realized that they had just enough fuel to make one attack. *Zuiho* was the nearest carrier. Both pilots split their diving flaps and rolled their SBDs into steep dives toward the flight deck that expanded in their bomb sights. At about 1,500 feet,

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



ABOVE: While the Japanese may have won a tactical victory during the Battle of the Santa Cruz Islands, they suffered serious losses in aircraft and pilots, while two aircraft carriers were seriously damaged. The U.S. Navy lost the aircraft carrier *Hornet,* while the *Enterprise* was also damaged. The Japanese effort to recapture Guadalcanal was simultaneously thwarted on land. RIGHT: Vice Admiral Nobutake Kondo commanded the advanced force of the Imperial Japanese Navy during the Battle of the Santa Cruz Islands.

they released their bombs and pulled out of their dives. Both bombs hit their targets. A 50-foot crater was opened in the flight deck aft, knocking the carrier out of the battle just as it began. When Strong and Irvine landed aboard *Enterprise* two hours later, they had just enough fuel to make it back to the ship.

All of *Enterprise*'s search planes made it back safely. But Stone and Irvine had something else to report. *Zuiho*'s flight deck had been empty when they made their attack, meaning that her air group had already been launched. Japanese search planes, including the Kate spotted by *Enterprise*'s scouts, had discovered *Hornet* and her group at about 7:30. *Shokaku, Zuikaku,* and *Zuiho* had sent a 65-plane strike at about 8:15. These carriers were also preparing a second strike of 44 planes. Thanks to Strong and Irvine, *Zuiho* had already withdrawn, escorted by two destroyers.

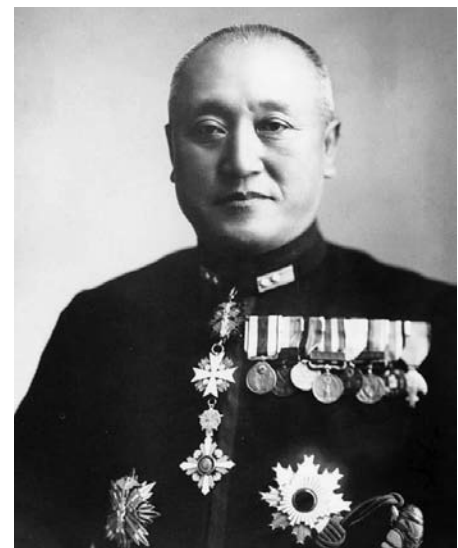
The American carriers did not launch their first strike until about 8:30, when *Enterprise* and *Hornet* sent a total of 73 aircraft. Most of the planes were from *Hornet*; *Enterprise* contributed nine Grumman TBF Avenger torpedo planes, three SBDs armed with long 1,000-pound bombs, and an escort of eight Grumman F4F Wildcat fighters. The rest of *Enterprise*'s SBDs were either just returning from the morning's scouting duties or were on antisubmarine patrol.

The American air groups had flown about 60 miles and were still climbing when Nagumo's first strike passed overhead, flying in the opposite direction. At 8:40, nine "Zero" fighters from *Zuiho* dove at the strike force from *Enterprise*. Because fuel was being conserved for the estimated 200-mile flight to the enemy, the strike groups just flew straight toward the enemy and did not spend the time and gasoline to form up into a unit. Instead, the flights from *Enterprise* and *Hornet* proceeded individually and were strung out over a distance of several miles. This lack of formation made things much easier for the attacking Zeroes.

The Japanese fighters attacked the Avengers from *Enterprise* with 20mm cannon and 7.7mm machine guns. Diving out of the sun, the Zeroes immediately shot down two of the unsuspecting Avengers and damaged two others so badly that they had to turn back. After their first run, the Zeroes turned back and shot down two Wildcats and damaged another, forcing it to return to *Enterprise* with the two shot-up TBFs.

The air battle was not one-sided. Gunners aboard the TBFs shot down three of the attacking Zeroes. Lt. Cmdr. James Flatley, leader of *Enterprise*'s Fighting 10, shot another Zero into the sea, and the surviving Wildcats accounted for two more. The remaining Japanese fighters had run out of ammunition and turned back, leaving the first Japanese strike with an escort of only 12 Zeroes.

Each task group commander had surrounded his precious flight decks with supporting battleships and cruisers, each car-



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rying a formidable number of antiaircraft guns, and covered them with combat air patrols (CAP) of circling fighters to take care of any attackers that broke through the withering antiaircraft barrage. Nerves were tense, fingers rested lightly on triggers, and eyes scanned the sky for dark specks of approaching enemy aircraft.

The Japanese air strike was the first to arrive, since it was also the first launched. Radar operators aboard the American ships made contact with the approaching aircraft at 8:40, but had difficulties in separating friend from foe as the outgoing American groups and incoming Japanese

strike were too close together and on a reciprocal course. First verification was not received until 8:57, when the enemy were only 45 miles out on a bearing of 280 degrees. Two minutes later, Wildcat pilots of the CAP spotted Aichi "Val" dive-bombers at 17,000 feet making directly for the American task force.

Japanese pilots spotted *Hornet* at about 8:55, but *Enterprise* was hidden by a rain squall 10 miles to the northeast. *Enterprise* had a reputation for being a lucky ship; her good luck would not desert her on this particular day. *Hornet*'s fighter director did his best to place the 37 Wildcats of the CAP directly in the path of the enemy, but they found themselves below the incoming strike. The fighters were too close to the task group—at 22,000 feet and only 10 miles out—and too far out of position to be of much use in defending *Hornet*.

Hornet's captain, Charles P. Mason, ordered a change of course, attempting to get out of the way of the incoming attack, and increased speed to 31 knots. The cruisers *Pensacola* and *Northampton* steamed just ahead, while the light cruisers *San Juan* and *Juneau* followed along on the carrier's quarters. Six escorting destroyers tried to be everywhere at once. All of these ships kept pace with *Hornet* as her rudder was put over hard, spoiling the aim of the Val pilots.

Gunners aboard *Hornet* and her escorts put up an antiaircraft barrage that was truly murderous. The sky above the carrier went black with the smoke from exploding shells. The first two Vals dropped their bombs at fairly low altitude, but both missed, exploding off the starboard side, adjacent the carrier's island. The two dive-bombers that dropped them followed their bombs into the sea, riddled by antiaircraft fire. But there were too many of them. Captain Mason estimated that 27 aircraft attacked his ship, and they were flown by determined, veteran pilots. The gunners had no chance of shooting down every dive-bomber.

At 9:12, *Hornet* was hit by a 550-pound bomb just abreast of the island, almost dead center of the flight deck. The bomb

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ABOVE: A U.S. Navy combat photographer aboard the cruiser Pensacola captured this image of Japanese torpedo bombers attacking the aircraft carrier *Hornet*. Although her escorts and combat air patrol resisted valiantly, Hornet was lost. OPPOSITE: A stricken Japanese aircraft crashes into the carrier *Hornet* during action off the Santa Cruz Islands. The Japanese plane demolished the carrier's signal bridge. This photo was also taken from the deck of the *Pensacola*.

passed through the hangar deck and exploded in the space below. A few moments later, two more bombs hit between the aft elevator and amidships. One exploded on the third deck; the other blew a 7-by-11-foot hole in the flight deck and killed the crews of adjacent antiaircraft batteries. At 9:14, the Japanese squadron commander deliberately flew his crippled Val into *Hornet*'s island, which instantly covered the signal bridge with a blanket of burning gasoline. What remained of the Val and its crew, complete with 550-pound bomb, ended its journey in *Hornet*'s gallery deck, where it started a small but intense fire. All of this happened within the space of about five minutes.

To make matters even worse, torpedo-carrying Kates began their attacks. Actually, they were not supposed to begin their runs until after the Vals made their drops and left the area, but this lack of coordination came as cold comfort to *Hornet* and her crew. Two torpedoes hit the carrier on her starboard side at 9:15, about 20 seconds apart. The first hit the engine room, opening a four-foot hole below the water line; the second exploded against the starboard quarter, where the watertight compartments prevented any major damage.

Toward the end of the attack, *Hornet* became the victim of a second suicide pilot. Two accounts of this attack exist. The first claims that a Kate came in from astern, crashed just below the forward port gun gallery, and came to rest at the base of the forward elevator pit. The other states that the Kate made its suicide run from dead ahead, crashed into the port gun gallery, and blew up near the forward elevator shaft. Both accounts agree that *Hornet*'s forward elevator was put out of action by the explosion.

At 9:25, the attack finally ended. Men blinked, shook their heads, and took a deep breath. After all the noise, the sudden silence seemed unreal. The firing and explosions seemed to have gone on forever, but it had been only 15 minutes since the antiaircraft fire began.

Hornet was badly damaged during those 15 minutes. She was on fire and dead in the water, with an eight-degree list to starboard. All power had also been knocked out, which meant that the fire pumps were not able to keep the fires from spreading, much less put them out. But damage control, under Commander Edward P. Creehan, went to work to bring the ship back on an even keel and used hand pumps and fire extinguishers to keep the fires at bay.

The Japanese air groups suffered heavily from both antiaircraft fire and fighters as 38 of the 53 attacking aircraft had been destroyed. Sixteen out of 20 Kates had been shot down, along with 17 of 21 Vals and five of the 12 Zeroes. If the CAP had been positioned properly, even more of the attackers would have been destroyed and *Hornet* probably would not have been as badly mauled. The fighters shot down most of the Vals after they dropped their bombs.

Just as *Hornet* was being savaged by Admiral Nagumo's aircraft, *Hornet*'s pilots were preparing to return the compliment. Her first strike group of 15 SBDs and four Wildcats, led by Lt. Cmdr. William "Gus" Widhelm, sighted the Japanese carriers at about 9:15. Fourteen Zeroes of the CAP intercepted the attackers, while Widhelm was busy broadcasting several sighting reports to *Hornet* and *Enterprise* and to the TBF torpedo planes approaching the target area.

The Wildcat pilots managed to keep the Zeroes from interfering with the dive-bombers, while the SBDs helped their own cause by defending themselves. When the Zero pilots attacked the SBDs, they had a very nasty surprise in store: the dive-bombers were armed with twin .30-caliber machine guns, and their rear gunners knew how to use them. Attacking Japanese fighters found themselves confronting a stream of .30-caliber machine-gun fire. One of the Zero pilots managed to hit Widhelm's engine, but Widhelm kept on course until his engine stopped running. He spiralled down to make a water landing, inflated his rubber raft, and, after the SBD sank, sat up and watched the battle with his rear gunner.

They certainly had quite a performance to see. The remaining SBDs, now under Lieutenant James Vose, pushed their way past the Zeroes until they were directly over *Shokaku,* the nearest carrier. From 12,000 feet the pilots could see smoke coming out of the two holes of nearby *Zuiho*'s flight deck. Eleven dive- bombers pushed over into steep dives and did not release their 1,000-pound bombs until they were only 600 to 900 feet above their target.

Widhelm claimed to have seen the carrier hit by six bombs. Lieutenant Vose claimed four hits. Japanese reports vary, mentioning between three and six hits. *Shokaku*'s flight deck now resembled the surface of the moon. From her midships elevator to the stern, the deck was a series of ragged, smoking craters. The hangar deck below was in ruins, and all antiaircraft batteries on the after part of the flight deck had been put out of action.

Damage control had about a dozen fire hoses ready around the periphery of the flight deck. As soon as the attack ended, the hoses were turned on the flames, which helped to keep damage to a minimum. There was no possibility of landing her air group, or what was left of it, but *Shokaku* lost little speed, even though near misses opened seams and caused some flooding.

Shokaku's story might not have had such an encouraging conclusion if *Hornet*'s six torpedo planes had picked up any of Widhelm's sighting reports. (Widhelm and his gunner would be rescued by a Catalina flying boat two days after the battle.) The TBFs never even saw the carriers. Instead, they attacked the cruiser *Tone* unsuccessfully, with a loss of three of aircraft. *Shokaku* would be out of the war for nine months.

Hornet's fire control crew had also more than done its job. With the help of the escorting destroyers *Morris* and *Russell,* which drew alongside and trained their hoses on the burning carrier, the fires were brought under control by 10 AM. Wounded crewmen had also been taken off, while the "black gang" did its best to

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relight three of the boilers and restore power. The *Northampton* left *Hornet*'s escort screen to take the carrier in tow and lead her out of the battle area. But while the towline was being rigged, the second wave of Japanese bombers arrived.

While *Hornet*'s crew was still fighting fires, *Enterprise*'s radar picked up a large formation of hostile aircraft at 23 miles and closing. Although the CAP covering Task Force 16 consisted of 21 Wildcats, they were out of position again—too far below the incoming attackers. Surviving Japanese pilots from the first wave had seen *Enterprise* emerge from the storm clouds as they turned for home. The pilots of the second wave saw *Hornet* dead in the water and decided to concentrate on *Enterprise*.

At about this time, *Enterprise* lost one of her screening destroyers because of a freak accident. One of the TBFs that had been damaged by Zeroes from *Zuiho* made a hard water landing. The impact of the crash jarred the torpedo loose and sent it toward the destroyer *Porter,* which did not have enough time to outturn the torpedo. The explosion killed 15 men and left the destroyer completely without power. The crew was taken off by the destroyer *Shaw,* which had her bow blown off at Pearl Harbor more than 10 months earlier. *Shaw* withdrew from *Enterprise*'s screen and sank the heavily damaged *Porter* with her five-inch guns.

Even without two of her destroyers, *Enterprise* was still heavily defended. Both the carrier and the battleship *South Dakota* had new 40mm antiaircraft guns. Mounted in batteries of four, these would prove lethal against attacking enemy aircraft. *Portland* and *San Juan* were also heavily armed—*San Juan* had 16 five-inch guns, as many as *South Dakota*.

Gunners aboard every ship in *Enterprise*'s group, as well as aboard *Enterprise* herself, watched the Vals grow steadily larger in their sights. An *Enterprise* pilot saw *San Juan* open up with all her guns and thought that the cruiser had been hit and exploded. At 10:15 the Vals were directly overhead. Gunners aboard *Enterprise* had the easiest shooting because each enemy dive-bomber that dove at the carrier was coming directly down the barrels of her guns.

The Vals came straight at *Enterprise*. Captain Osborne B. Hardison ordered the rudder over full to spoil their aim, holding his helmet with his left hand as he stared straight up at the diving aircraft. *South Dakota* kept pace with the carrier, matching *Enterprise*'s every turn and putting up a roaring barrage at the enemy. One or two of the bombers were literally blown apart by the sheer volume of gunfire.

But, as had been the case with *Hornet* earlier, there were too many Japanese planes, and their pilots were too determined. The ship's executive officer, John Crommelin, standing on the bridge close to Captain Hardison, watched one particular Val push over into her dive. To no one in particular, he calmly announced, "I think that son of a bitch is going to get us."

It was a prescient observation. The Val's 550-pound bomb hit the forward flight deck at 10:17, punched through the forecastle deck overhanging the sea, and exited the ship's hull before exploding in the open air, just above the water and close to the port bow. Shrapnel sprayed the port side. The explosion blew a parked SBD over the side along with a sailor who was manning the twin .30-caliber guns in the rear seat. The deck crew pushed another SBD over the side. It had caught fire, and its 500-pound bomb was in danger of going off.

Less than a minute later, a second bomb hit. It landed just aft of the forward elevator

and broke in two sections. The rear half penetrated the flight deck and exploded in the hangar below, destroying or badly damaging several planes. The heavier forward end went through two more decks before detonating, killing 40 men instantly. Several small fires were set in the officers' quarters, sending dense smoke into the hangar deck and out through the hole above it.

A third bomb exploded in the water about 10 feet from *Enterprise*'s starboard side at 10:19. The concussion shook the carrier the full length of her 800 feet, violently enough to spill mercury from the master gyroscope, crack open a fuel tank, jar machinery and equipment from their foundations, and rotate the entire foremast one-half inch, which threw every antenna mounted on it completely out of alignment. Just about every man standing was knocked off his feet, and another SBD was blown overboard.

In spite of everything, *Enterprise* still maintained 27 knots, although she was leaking a trail of fuel oil from her ruptured tank. Fire control worked hard to put out the fires around No. 1 elevator. The wounded were also tended in the battle dressing stations. Captain Hardison gave permission to counterflood, so that the list to starboard caused by the near miss could be corrected. Of the 19 Vals that had taken off, 10 had been shot down and two others ditched.

About 15 minutes after the last Val made its attack, *Enterprise*'s radar picked up another group of incoming enemy planes, 16 Kates from *Zuikaku*. These were supposed to have arrived at the same time as the Vals but had been delayed during the reloading of their torpedoes. Now they appeared off *Enterprise*'s bows in two groups.

Captain Hardison held his course, waiting to see which group would drop its torpedoes first and hoping that antiaircraft fire would take its toll on the enemy planes. The Kates came in low, and four of the 16 were disposed of before the pilots could get within range for an effective drop. The five remaining Kates made their drops on *Enterprise*'s starboard side and turned away. Captain Hardison ordered right full rudder. *Enterprise*'s bow swung to the right until it was running parallel with the bubbling wakes. The torpedoes passed along the carrier's port side, about 30 feet away, on a reciprocal course. Five more Kates tried to get into position on *Enterprise*'s port side, but Hardison kept turning until the carrier's narrow stern was the best target the torpedo planes could hope for. Two dropped their torpedoes in desperation; both missed. The other three were shot down by antiaircraft fire.

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ABOVE: Heavily damaged, the destroyer USS *Smith* survived the crash of a Japanese torpedo bomber, which slammed into its forecastle. OPPOSITE: Repelled by heavy antiaircraft fire during an attack on the carrier USS *Enterprise*, a Japanese torpedo bomber instead moves into position to attack the battleship USS *South Dakota*, whose bow is seen creating a white wake as it slices through the water.

One of the Kates, on fire and smoking, deliberately crashed into the destroyer *Smith* at 10:48. The plane hit the forward five-inch mount, and flames from burning gasoline covered the bridge. Attempts to contain the fires were hindered by a large explosion, which was probably the Kate's torpedo warhead detonating. The destroyer's speed was unimpaired, and the captain decided to take up position directly astern of *South Dakota*. The battleship's wake helped put out the fires. It was the third suicide attack of the morning.

Of the 16 Kates, nine had been shot down and another ditched. The attack might have been a lot more successful if it had not been for *Enterprise* fighter pilot Lieutenant Stanley W. "Swede" Vejtasa and his wingman, Lieutenant Dave Harris. Vejtasa had already accounted for a Val before it could dive on *Hornet* and was credited with destroying a second Val after its pilot had dropped its bomb. As the Kates were approaching *Enterprise,* Vejtasa immediately caught sight of them.

Vejtasa and Harris made a side approach on the nearest Kates. The torpedo bombers had already begun their runs at *Enterprise* when Vejtasa and Harris made their attack. Each pilot blew up a Kate with his six .50-caliber machine guns and used his speed to overtake a three-plane formation just as it flew into a cloud bank. The Americans became separated in the clouds, but Vejtasa managed to keep the enemy planes in sight. One at a time, he flew close behind his intended target, fired a short burst, and watched the Kate catch fire and fall away. All three planes were disposed of in a matter of a few minutes.

Vejtasa saw another Kate above and to his left. He pulled his nose up and fired a burst at his target, but he did not think he scored any hits. The Kate dove out of the clouds, but Vejtasa did not follow. It was too high to make an effective drop, so Vejtasa decided to leave it to the antiaircraft gunners. This was the plane that crashed into the destroyer *Smith*.

Almost out of ammunition by this time, Vejtasa fired his remaining rounds at a Kate that was withdrawing after dropping its torpedo. The Kate was low on the water, trying to avoid antiaircraft fire. Vejtasa dove on it and sent the plane spinning into the sea. This was his seventh enemy aircraft destroyed that morning— five Kates and two Vals.

Enterprise had been saved by the seamanship of Captain Hardison, whose skill in maneuvering frustrated the aim of every Japanese pilot. But Swede Vejtasa prevented five additional Kate pilots from dropping their torpedoes at *Enterprise,* and Harris shot down a sixth.

Following the departure of the Kates, *Enterprise*'s crew began cleaning up the damage from the bomb hits. At about 11:15, the carrier began taking her aircraft aboard. In spite of the damage to the flight deck that made landing hazardous, several planes made their approach from astern, dropped onto the deck, and taxied forward out of the way. *South Dakota*'s radar picked up yet another incoming Japanese air strike. The other pilots rolled up their wheels and banked away until the attack ended.

This was the first wave from *Junyo,* 17 Vals and 12 Zeroes. The leader of the Japanese fighter escort, Lieutenant Yoshio Shiga, spotted a large carrier and pushed his throttle forward. His orders were to stay with the bombers and leave the Wildcats alone until they attacked the Vals. He followed the lead bomber in its dive on *Enterprise,* but lost him. The Val had dive brakes to slow its rate of descent, but the Zero had no flaps, and Shiga had to go into a tight loop to keep from overshooting. Several of the Vals dropped their bombs, but Shiga saw all of them miss.

Antiaircraft fire destroyed eight Vals, while *Enterprise* turned sharply to starboard to evade the falling bombs. One bomb bounced off the carrier's hull as she heeled over in the turn and exploded about eight feet away. For the second time that morning, the entire ship whiplashed from the concussion of a near-miss. And once again, everyone was knocked to the deck. Two compartments below the waterline were opened to the sea. The main antenna was shaken, knocking out the carrier's search radar. The forward elevator, which had already been damaged, was now jammed in the up position.

Some of *Junyo*'s Vals decided to leave *Enterprise* alone and attack her escorts instead. *South Dakota* became the target for several dive- bombers. Most of the pilots missed, sending columns of water spouting higher than the battleship's masts, but one of the pilots hit his mark. A 550-pound bomb struck Number 1 turret and exploded. The turret was so heavily armoured that its crew, except for an officer at the periscope, were not even aware of the fact that they had been hit. Fragments killed two men and injured about 50, including Captain Thomas L. Gatch, the battleship's captain. While steering was shifted to Battle 2, the executive officer's station aft, the telephone went dead and *South Dakota,* temporarily out of control, headed straight for *Enterprise*. Captain Hardison saw what was happening and quickly maneuvered his ship safely out of the way.

San Juan was also hit, but did not get off quite so easily. An armor-piercing bomb punched through her hull about three feet above the waterline and exited through the ship's bottom before exploding. The burst flooded three or four compartments and left the rudder jammed full right. Before steering was restored, which took about 13 minutes but seemed a lot longer, the cruiser steamed in a circle.

Eleven of the 17 Vals never returned to *Junyo*. All 12 Zeroes returned, however, with inflated claims of a dozen American planes destroyed. Inflated reports were not just limited to the Japanese, though. Gun crews aboard *South Dakota* claimed to have shot down 26 enemy aircraft—nine more than the actual number of Vals that had been launched.

As the Japanese left the area, *Enterprise* resumed taking her aircraft aboard. Fighters and dive-bombers were given precedence over the longer-range Avengers, which had a much greater fuel capacity, but several planes had to ditch. The jammed forward elevator slowed the landing process, since it made shifting planes down to the hangar deck

JAPANESE SUICIDE ATTACKS

The deliberate crashing into enemy targets by Japanese aviators did not begin at the Battle of Santa Cruz Islands. The first suicide attack against American shipping took place at Pearl Harbor, over eight months earlier, when a bomber crashed into the seaplane tender *Curtiss* and set her on fire. Attacks of this kind, including the crashes into *Hornet* and the destroyer *Smith,* were known as *kesshi,* "dare to die tactics."

Skip-bombing and ramming were also adopted. Skip-bombing involved fitting a Zero fighter with a 550-pound bomb, which was to be released 200 to 300 yards from an enemy ship. These were not exactly suicide tactics, although they were extremely hazardous. The bomb might bounce up and hit the Zero, or the explosion of the bomb could destroy the plane. A training program for skip-bombing was carried out in the Bohol Strait, near Cebu, but all training was stopped in September 1944, when American aircraft destroyed 50 percent of the air group.

Deliberately crashing into an enemy target was not limited to shipping; it was used successfully against enemy planes as well. A Japanese flight sergeant rammed his fighter into a B-17 Flying Fortress bomber on May 8, 1943. He was protecting a convoy off the coast of New Guinea and made the decision to kill himself and take the American bomber and its crew with him. Over a year later, the pilot of a two-man Nakajima

impossible. The flight deck, packed with aircraft, quickly became overcrowded. To make matters even worse, Number 2 elevator was temporarily jammed in the down position, which left a gaping hole in the flight deck amidships. Incoming pilots were forced to taxi slowly around the hole on their way forward.

By early afternoon, *Enterprise*'s deck was so jammed with aircraft, including orphans from *Hornet,* that 13 SBDs were sent off to a land base at Espiritu Santo. Also, several planes were lowered to the hangar deck via the after Number 3 elevator, which made just enough room to get the last Avenger aboard.

While escorting destroyers picked up the crewmen from ditched aircraft, *Enterprise*'s crew began to repair the damage that had been done that morning. The radar officer, Lieutenant Brad Williams, climbed the mast with his toolbox and actually began repairing the radar while antiaircraft gunners below him were still firing at the diving Vals. The bomb that bounced off *Enterprise*'s starboard side left him deafened for weeks. He could actually see it as it fell. It came so close that it looked spherical, like a ball, because he could see only its rounded forward end.

Williams tried to repair the antenna and its drive motor with one hand gripping the antenna, but he quickly found that he needed both hands for the job. So he tied himself to the aerial, which allowed him to use two hands. He worked as quickly as he could, but he was slowed considerably by the soot and salt that corroded the bolts and kept them from turning. It took quite a while, but Williams finally got everything to work. As soon as the radar screen lit up, an officer in the radar compartment switched on the antenna's motor, and the radar antenna resumed its 360-degree sweep.

Unfortunately, Brad Williams was still tied to it. He also began making 360-degree sweeps. His angry shouts of protest were drowned out by the guns and the noise of battle. After a few minutes of this, an officer on the bridge caught sight of Williams and quickly came to the conclusion that his majestic sweeps around the mainmast were purely unintentional. Except for his hearing, which eventually came back, Williams was no worse for his adventure, and *Enterprise* could scan the horizon for enemy aircraft again.

While *Enterprise*'s prospects were looking brighter as the day went on, *Hornet*'s difficulties showed no signs of ending. She was listing, still on fire, and dead in the water, although the fires had been brought under control. At 11:45, her escorting destroyers *Russell* and *Hughes* removed all wounded and nonessential crewmen, about 875 men. Some of the remaining crewmen dragged a two-inch towing cable out of *Hornet*'s after elevator well and transferred it to *Northampton.* The line held, and the carrier was being pulled along at a speed of three knots. At the same time, engineers were on the verge of getting *Hornet*'s engines to begin supplying power. But at 2:55, another incoming air strike was detected.

The attack consisted of seven Kates and eight Zeroes from *Junyo*. By this time, after losing nearly 100 aircraft in the course of their morning offensives, the Japanese did not have many planes to send after *Hornet*—of the 15 launched from *Junyo*, five were her own and 10 belonged to *Shokaku*. But *Hornet* had no aircraft at all for a CAP since all had joined *Enterprise,* and the antiaircraft cruiser *Juneau* left for *Enterprise*'s group because of misunderstood orders. The carrier was an easy target for any planes the Japanese could scrape together.

Two of the Kates concentrated on *Northampton*. For the second time that day, the cruiser cut the tow line. The captain ordered a hard left turn, presenting the cruiser's stern to the incoming Japanese aircraft. Both Kates dropped their torpedoes, and both missed.

The other five Kates went after *Hornet*. Two of them went into the sea with huge splashes, while two Zeroes were also shot down and three others never made it back to their carrier. However, *Hornet* was too easy a target, and it seems odd that only one torpedo hit her. At 3:23, it struck the starboard side just aft of the first hit. The damage done by this torpedo made restoring power a lost cause and increased the list to starboard to 14 degrees. The captain ordered the crew to stand by to abandon ship.

At 3:40, two more Vals arrived. Their bombs missed. Fifteen minutes later, six Kates, flying in a perfect V formation, made a horizontal bombing attack on the listing carrier. One scored a hit on the starboard after corner of the flight deck,

Gekko night fighter (codenamed "Irving" by the Allies) used the same tactics to bring down a B-24 Liberator bomber.

Most of these suicide attacks were spontaneous actions—a pilot making a heat-of-battle decision to end his own life by destroying an enemy ship or airplane. But as Japan's chances of winning the war became less and less likely, the strategy of suicide grew in direct proportion. Informal discussions of organized suicide attack began in 1943. In March of that year, the chief of the Army Aeronautical Department, Takeo Yasuda, secretly established a Special Attack Corps training program—a forerunner of the kamikaze corps.

The commander of the First Air Fleet, Kimpei Teraoka, made these telling observations: "Ordinary tactics are ineffective. We must be superhuman in order to win the war." On the subject of suicide units, he commented, "If all air units do it, surface units will also be inclined to take part."

Teraoka was right—the idea of the suicide attack unit spread. Admiral Soemu Toyoda, commander in chief of the Imperial Japanese Navy, was won over by what has been called the "vanity of heroism" and officially consented to the creation of the Special Attack Corps, or the kamikaze. The Special Attack Corp's slogan was "One plane, one warship."

Pilots did not have to be highly trained to undertake suicide missions. In fact, suicide pilots usually received only the minimum of flight training. Kamikaze pilots sank or damaged hundreds of ships during the latter part of the war.

inflicting little additional damage.

By this time, the flight deck had an 18-degree list, and the crew was having a hard time standing upright. The men began abandoning ship in an orderly manner. Captain Mason was the last to leave at 4:27. Just over half an hour later, four more Vals appeared with an escort of six Zeroes. With no CAP and only moderate antiaircraft fire to disturb their aim, the Vals scored one hit. The bomb exploded on the hangar deck and started a small fire. Soon after this last attack of the day, rescue operations came to an end. The number of dead and fatally wounded came to 118 officers and men.

Hornet had not been home to her crew for years and years, the way some of the battleships sunk at Pearl Harbor had been. The aircraft carrier was barely a year old, commissioned on October 20, 1941. But most of the men had been through a lot of war with their ship, including launching the Doolittle Raid on Tokyo in April and playing a major role in the Battle of Midway less than two months later. They knew exactly what Japanese carrier-based aircraft could do, having seen their sister ship *Yorktown* sunk at Midway. Some of the men broke down and cried as they sailed off aboard escort destroyers and left *Hornet* behind, listing and abandoned.

Admiral Halsey had ordered a general withdrawal at 3:50. Japanese surface forces consisting of battleships and cruisers were advancing toward *Hornet*. There was now no alternative to destroying the carrier, which was in a hopeless predicament. Captain Murray assigned the destroyer *Mustin* the task of sinking *Hornet,* while the rest of the group left the area at high speed. *Mustin* fired eight torpedoes at the carrier, but American torpedoes were not of the highest quality at this stage of the war. Of the eight, one exploded prematurely, two ran erratically, and five hit but only three exploded. The destroyer *Anderson* was next, hitting her target with six of eight torpedoes. *Hornet* still remained afloat.

Both destroyers were now out of torpedoes and had to resort to using their five-inch guns. Between the two of them, *Mustin* and *Anderson* hit the carrier more than 300 times. During this gunnery exercise, the radar operators of both ships were becoming increasingly aware of the presence of Japanese scouting planes that had been launched from approaching cruisers. By 8:40 PM, *Hornet* was burning furiously. Satisfied that the carrier was finished, even though she had not sunk, the two destroyers left the area at top speed. Flares from Japanese float planes hurried them on their way.

At 9:20, a Japanese signal was decoded which instructed the oncoming forces to capture and tow the derelict carrier, which was the last thing in the world the Americans wanted or expected. When the destroyers *Akigumo* and *Makikumo* arrived on the scene just 20 minutes after *Anderson* and *Mustin* had departed, they quickly discovered that the burning *Hornet* was in no condition to be towed. Instead, each destroyer fired two Long Lance torpedoes at the carrier. All four hit. At 1:35 AM, on October 27, 1942, *Hornet* finally rolled over and sank. The bottom was three miles down.

Except for a brief postlude as torpedo-carrying Catalinas from Espiritu Santo attacked

BELOW: Geysers from antiaircraft shells churn the water surrounding the USS *Hornet* as Japanese torpedo- and dive bombers attempt coordinated attacks on the American warship. OPPOSITE: Making an emergency landing while the *Enterprise* is under attack by planes from the Japanese carrier Junyo, this Grumman F4F Wildcat skids across the flight deck.

National Archives

and badly frightened *Zuikaku* and damaged the destroyer *Teruzuki,* the Battle of Santa Cruz was over. Admiral Yamamoto ordered Japanese naval forces north, to their anchorage at Truk, because of a fuel shortage that was becoming critical. American forces withdrew southward, toward Noumea. Throughout the trip, *Enterprise*'s construction and repair division worked to restore the carrier's lights and power.

For the Japanese, the initial reaction was relief and elation. They had sunk an American aircraft carrier and had not lost any ships of their own. Soon, however, this outlook began to change.

"The battle was a tactical win, but a shattering strategic loss for Japan," noted Admiral Nagumo, who was relieved of his command shortly after the battle and assigned to shore duty in Japan. "Considering the great superiority of our enemy's industrial capacity, we must win every battle overwhelmingly. This last one, unfortunately, was not an overwhelming victory."

The loss of *Hornet* did make Santa Cruz a tactical victory for Japanese forces. The U.S. Navy now had only one carrier, *Enterprise,* in the entire Pacific Theater, and she was badly damaged. Even though Admiral Nagumo's fleet had not lost any ships, the victory was a costly one for Japan. Both *Shokaku* and *Zuiho* had also suffered severe damage and had to return to Japan for repairs. *Zuiho* returned to the fleet in January 1943. *Shokaku* was not fully repaired and restored until July 1943, when she was reunited with *Zuikaku* at Truk.

For the Japanese, the loss of two carriers for several months paled in comparison to the permanent loss of experienced pilots and aircrew. So many airmen were killed that the undamaged *Zuikaku* and *Junyo* also had to return to Japan. They did not have enough trained pilots, including senior squadron commanders, to carry on with operations. Of the 148 aircrew that were lost in the course of the battle, two were dive-bomber group leaders, three were torpedo squadron leaders, and 18 were section leaders. An overwhelming 40 percent of all torpedo bomber aircrew were lost, along with 39 percent of dive-bomber crews and 20 percent of fighter pilots. The skills of these men would never be matched by their replacements.

American fliers could not help but notice this decline in the quality of Japanese carrier aviators. An American destroyer commander noted that he could see "no diminution in the courage and daring of the individual pilot," but he did note "a most marked decrease in skill" compared with the fliers he had seen at Coral Sea and Midway.

At the same time, American pilots were becoming better at their trade because of advanced training methods and equipment. They were learning to shoot better, how to put their bombs and torpedoes on their targets with better accuracy, and generally how to outperform their Japanese counterparts. Throughout the rest of the war, the tactics of American pilots would continue to improve while the quality of Japanese pilots declined. Aerial combat would become increasingly one-sided.

Although *Hornet* would be missed, especially during the remainder of the Guadalcanal campaign, she was by no means irreplaceable. Soon after the battle, a story began making the rounds about two sailors talking to each other as they left the burning carrier. "Are you going to re-enlist?" one asked. The other replied, "Hell, yes—on the new *Hornet.*"

It is a nice story, although probably apocryphal, but it certainly turned out to have more than a ring of truth. A new *Hornet* was commissioned just over a year later, on November 29, 1943. She was an Essex-class fleet carrier. Between December 1942 and the end of the war, 19 Essex-class carriers were commissioned. Japan could not hope to produce warships at such a rate. "The Japanese Navy is different from the American Navy," a Japanese admiral had pointed out earlier in the war. "If you lose one ship, it will take years to replace." In short, the American Navy could afford to lose *Hornet*; the Japanese Navy could not replace its losses.

At Santa Cruz, Japan lost its strategic opportunity to deal the American Navy a

decisive defeat. The industrial output of the United States was already becoming a factor; by 1943, it would make a Japanese victory in the Pacific impossible. After Santa Cruz, Japanese carriers would no longer play an offensive role in the Solomon Islands campaign. On the other hand, *Enterprise* was back in the Solomons area in early November, supplying Henderson Field on Guadalcanal with fighters, bombers, and torpedo planes. For the next month, she would be the only American aircraft carrier in the Pacific. The next time the crew of *Enterprise* saw another friendly carrier was in December, when *Saratoga* arrived at Noumea. On the hangar deck, Enterprise crewmen had posted a sign: "ENTERPRISE AGAINST JAPAN."

The Guadalcanal campaign was a war of attrition that Japan had no chance of winning. After months of trying to retake the island and losing irreplaceable men and ships in the process, Admiral Yamamoto came to the same conclusion. All Japanese troops were withdrawn from Guadalcanal in February 1943.

An American writer summed up the impact of the Battle of Santa Cruz Islands: "Santa Cruz was a Japanese victory. That victory cost Japan the last best hope to win the war."

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A SINGLE AMERICAN SOLDIER LIBERATED ONE OF FRANCE'S GREATEST LANDMARKS. **BY KEVIN M. HYMEL**

FREEING MONT SAINT MICHEL

OF all the landmarks in Europe, few are as distinctive and instantly recognizable as the medieval fortress/monastery of Mont Saint Michel, located on the French coast seven miles southwest of the city of Avranches.

Mont Saint Michel stands out like a beacon visible for miles. The 247-acre rock island in Mont Saint Michel Bay is topped by a towering 11th-century Romanesque abbey, making it one of the most outstanding landmarks in Europe. Below the religious structures lies a town filled with hotels, restaurants, museums, and souvenir shops. An immense wall with defensive positions encircles the entire structure. During high tides, the bay waters surround the island, with only a causeway connecting it to the mainland. Rare, extremely high tides completely cover the causeway.

According to legend, in the year 708, Saint Michael the Archangel appeared to Aubert, Bishop of Avranches, several times and instructed him to build a church on the rocky inlet. Aubert ignored the requests until the angel allegedly touched his head, burning a hole in his skull.

From the Collection of Janet Brougher

ABOVE: Private Freeman Brougher sits on his jeep after liberating France's Mont Saint Michel on August 1, 1944. The locals referred to him as the Savior of Mont Saint Michel. RIGHT: German sailors pose before Mont Saint Michel. After it was captured by the German Army on June 18, 1940, it became a tourist attraction for the occupying forces.

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Off-duty Wehrmacht soldiers depart Mont Saint Michel while a French couple opens up their car for inspection. Visits by the French became scarce during the war due to fuel shortages and the special passes needed to move around the country, especially the coast.

The famous Bayeux Tapestry of 1066 records Harold, Earl of Wessex, rescuing two Norman knights from the Mont's quicksand. During the Hundred Years' War, Mont Saint Michel withstood repeated sieges and attacks in the early 1400s. During the French Revolution, the abbey became a prison for political prisoners, but Mont Saint Michel is best known for its cloistered Benedictine monks and the thousands of believers who make pilgrimages to the church each year.

German soldiers had first entered Mont Saint Michel on June 18, 1940, the day before the French government agreed to surrender. The Germans set up a lookout post in the St. Aubert church spire, where bored Luftwaffe observers penned their names (they are still there). Five Luftwaffe servicemen lived permanently in the abbey. Other German soldiers were billeted in the hotels around the Mont and issued official occupation notices. In the summer of 1940, Wehrmacht soldiers held military maneuvers in the shadow of the Mont as they prepared for Operation Sea Lion, the invasion of Great Britain.

To accommodate the occupiers, merchants inside the village had to change their signs from French to German. With 1.6 million French soldiers locked in German POW camps and thousands of others ordered to Germany to work in Nazi industries, wives and daughters became the abbey's caretakers and tour guides. German soldiers on leave visited the ancient wonder in large numbers, while most Frenchmen, conserving their gasoline, were rarely able to make a pilgrimage. Tourism was further discouraged when the Germans required all French visitors to procure a special pass for their vehicles as well as a hard-to-get permit to gain access to the coastal zone. During the four years of occupation, 325,000 Germans visited the Mont while only 1,000 French made the trek.

The Germans' presence was obtrusive and unwelcome. When the body of a Luftwaffe corporal washed up in the bay, he was buried in the Mont Saint Michel cemetery. The Germans also banned fishing in the bay as a security measure once anti-invasion obstacles were constructed around the island. Many of these obstacles were simple poles topped with mines and connected to each other by barbed wire. Thousands of these so-called "Rommel's Asparagus" bloomed in the mud flats around the island.

Everything changed on June 6, 1944—D-Day. As the Allies poured ashore and squeezed the Germans into Brittany in early August, the local residents witnessed hundreds of Germans retreating to designated fortress ports, such as St. Malo, Brest, and Lorient. Some of the harried German soldiers showed up at the Mont barefoot. Other exhausted soldiers arrived and collapsed on the cobblestone sidewalks. French residents were terrified the Germans would take out their frustrations on the local population. One brave Frenchman, a Mr. Molleau, ventured to snap a forbidden picture of the defeated enemy on the street below his window. His hands shook as he held the camera, resulting in a blurry photograph.

As the last Germans prepared to depart the abbey, one soldier machine gunned the statue of the founding bishop atop St. Aubert's church. It was their last menacing act.

Both: National Archives

TOP: German soldiers train in the shadow of Mont Saint Michel for Operation Sea Lion, the planned invasion of England. ABOVE: German soldiers, exhausted by their retreat from Normandy, collapse on the cobbled streets of Mont Saint Michel.

On July 30, the American 4th Armored Division captured Avranches, effectively cutting off the escape routes south and east. The 6th Armored Division then pushed west toward Pontorson, driving the retreating Germans against the Atlantic coast.

Now the Americans were on the way. On August 1, as the 6th Armored drove west, Private Freeman Brougher of the 72nd Public Service and Psychological Warfare Battalion sped two British reporters, Gault MacGowan of the *New York Sun* and Paul Holt with the *London Daily Express* to the Mont. The roads were free of the enemy. Reporter Holt was not surprised by the German's rapid retreat. He had witnessed the power of American combined arms in action near the town of Gravay. "What the tank commanders do is to pull their tanks off the road, since it is wasteful for tank to fight tank, and then call up the air," he wrote for the *Daily Express*. "The Mustangs and Tiffies [Typhoons] are having a rich and rare time with such work." The result: "The SS paratroopers [sic] walk up the road with their hands on their helmets asking the nearest way to a prisoner cage."

Whenever Private Brougher pulled over to asked fearful French locals for directions, their attitudes changed when they realized the strangers in the jeep were not Germans. "We saw them go into a hysterical delirium of joy," Gault MacGowan reported. As the band of liberators neared Mont Saint Michel, they picked up a few hitchhikers. "They sprang from nowhere," explained MacGowan. "No sooner did the magic words go

VISITING MONT SAINT MICHEL TODAY

Mont Saint Michel attracts more than three million people every year. Tour groups, pilgrims, and people from all over the world visit the Mont to walk the stairs, tour the church and monastery, and shop in the town below.

The abbey and town are no longer directly accessible by car. Instead, shuttle buses run visitors across the causeway to the front gate. Because of recent construction on the causeway, tourists are dropped off about 100 yards from the entrance.

For lodging, there are five hotels within the town; most are old but clean and require some stair climbing. Three hotels across the causeway on the mainland offer modern amenities. Eight restaurants can be found in the Mont, ranging from five-star dining experiences to simple cafés. The Mont is famous for its crepes, which are highly recommended.

The Mont boasts 25 stores, selling everything from handmade porcelain and earthenware to jewelry, tapestries, and medieval weapons. All the stores have an endless supply of postcards and trinkets embossed with images of Mont Saint Michel.

The tides are highest 36 hours after a new or full moon, so be sure to check a lunar calendar before visiting. The abbey is open daily for tours from 9 AM to 7 PM in the summer and 9:30 to 5:30 the rest of the year. The tourist office stands right outside the gate in the old burgher's guardroom. There are self-guided tours, but the tour guides speak English. For the full experience, a tour guide is recommended. The tour costs less than $10.00.

To learn more about visiting Mont Saint Michel, see the official tourism office's website at **www.ot-montsaintmichel.com**.

around, 'Les Americans,' than folks came running from every direction." By the time the jeep rolled to a stop, it had added two priests, three women, a fireman, and several other hangers-on.

Once across the causeway, Private Brougher drove under Mont Saint Michel's ancient gates, over the drawbridge, and through the King's Gate. The crowds pressed in. Everyone wanted to shake hands with their liberators. The Germans surrendered the island abbey without resistance. "I felt like President Roosevelt kissing all the babies," he told the two reporters. His entrance marked the end of four years and two months of enemy occupation. "I've never seen so many people so pleased to see three total strangers," Brougher said of the liberated French.

MacGowan counted 25 girls kissing Brougher as he accepted six babies for kisses. It's no surprise the private felt like a politician on the campaign trail. The only people lacking enthusiasm for Brougher's presence were a handful of German soldiers too exhausted to care. Above the jeep, Mr. Molleau leaned out his window and took another picture, this one much clearer.

The joyous crowd escorted Private Brougher, with the reporters in tow, to the mayor's parlor above the King's Gate, where he was toasted with champagne, festooned with flowers, and carried on the crowd's shoulders through the narrow, cobblestoned streets. He then signed the city's *Golden Book,* which recorded a list of local nobility. MacGowan accompanied Brougher to La Mere Poulard Hotel, where the reporter signed the visitor's book, penning a little hyperbole, "first American correspondent in Mt. St. Michel and the first of anybody with the liberation."

Janet Brougher

Freeman Brougher (right) brought his wife (left) and children to Mont Saint Michel in the summer of 1987.

MacGowan credited Lt. Gen. Omar Bradley, the First Army commander, for making the liberation possible. "Private Brougher might never have reached this important natural curiosity and ancient monument of France had not an armored spearhead of General Bradley's hard driving Army been occupying the attention of the Germans when [Freeman] left the mainland for Mont St. Michel."

MacGowan was correct. Omar Bradley was indeed responsible for the armored thrust, but he had some assistance from Lt. Gen. George S. Patton, Jr., who had taken nominal command of Bradley's VIII Corps a few days earlier and directed the 6th Armored Division's drive into Brittany.

Patton had a connection with Mont Saint Michel. As a young lieutenant he visited it with his wife while studying swordsmanship at the French cavalry school in Samur. Private Brougher liberated it on the same day that Patton's Third Army became operational. Although busy with pushing his army west, south, and east, Patton took the time to note in his diary, "The 6th Armored Division

CAPTURED GERMAN OFFICER

A week after Mont Saint Michel's liberation, the 6th Armored Division captured another prize: a high-ranking enemy general. Two GIs from the 212th Armored Field Artillery Battalion took German Lt. Gen. Karl Spang captive when Spang's staff car driver blundered into their position. Spang, the commander of the 266th Infantry Division, was preceding his division from Morlaix to Brest to ensure that Brest had proper reception facilities for his men. He had no idea an entire division stood between him and his destination. As he surrendered, the American soldiers confiscated his watch and leather coat.

Armed guards with fixed bayonets brought Spang to General Patton's mobile headquarters and provided him with an American helmet to protect him from stray artillery rounds and Luftwaffe strafing attacks. Patton sat at a table while Spang stood and saluted. Patton told his fellow general through an interpreter that he regretted the German Army's useless resistance. Spang responded that he was under orders and explained his capture, "I was personally fighting until the very last minute and had fired the last round of my pistol, but was completely surrounded by your armored wagons and had no other alternative."

Patton respected Spang, not only as a fighting man but also because he was not an SS officer. Patton promised he would be treated well and that Spang would spend the night at his headquarters before being sent to the rear, adding, "and we hope the German bombs don't get either of us." Before Spang was led away, he complained about his watch and coat. Patton was determined to get them back.

Patton sent his staff officers to the 6th Armored to find Spang's personal items. "There was this strange officer making inquiries," recalled Private Harry Cruse of the 83rd Armored Field Artillery Battalion, a nondivision unit. The word went out for everyone to keep quiet because they knew what happened to the watch. "Sergeant George Kloosterhouse of C Battery was taking it around and showing it to people," explained Cruse. It was never returned.

As for the coat, Lt. Col. Embry Legrew, commander of the 15th Tank Battalion, lifted it and sent it home to Lexington, Kentucky. General Spang had discovered that rank had little privilege for prisoners of war.

American soldiers admire the newly liberated Mont Saint Michel. On the far right can be seen some of Rommel's "asparagus" antiglider poles. Once Private Freeman Brougher liberated the ancient abbey, it became a tourist attraction to the Western Allies.

is at Pontorson, where Beatrice and I spent the night in 1913." He obviously did not know yet that the abbey island had also been liberated.

All the Frenchmen in the Mont had the same question for their liberators: How could they join the French Resistance? The women wanted to know what to do with collaborators. The priests wanted to know when the French Army would arrive to keep order.

The collaborators were dealt with first. Male collaborators were put under lock and key; the abbey would serve as a prison for the first time since the French Revolution. The women collaborators had it worse. The town's women tore the collaborators' blouses off their backs and beat them with canes and sticks. The bruised and bleeding women fled for the safety of the ramparts while Private Brougher and the reporters begged the mayor to issue a proclamation calling for calm until authorities arrived. "The collaborators now definitely live on the wrong side of the railroad tracks forever," reported MacGowan.

Soon, M-8 armored scout cars arrived, and the soldiers dismounted to tour the newly liberated ancient wonder. Before Freeman left, he put two German prisoners on the hood of his jeep and drove them to a POW camp.

MacGowan filed a story that day that appeared in the *New York Sun,* titled "Mont St. Michel Hails Its Liberator." He referred to Brougher in the subtitle as "A G.I. Chauffeur for Sun Reporter." Holt may have submitted a story to the *London Daily Express,* but no article appeared. The *Express*'s editors may have felt the story not important enough to appear in its pages, or possibly that it was too "American" for its British readers. His next story, about the siege of St. Malo—20 miles west of Mont Saint Michel—did not appear until the August 8 issue.

While the American forces drove the Germans farther west, the Mont was still not immune from the war. A few days after its liberation a German plane crashed in flames some 200 meters from St. Aubert chapel, almost hitting the abbey. It was the last act of war for the Mont. It soon became a tourist attraction again, this time for the Americans. When the war ended, the locals removed the body of the Luftwaffe corporal from the cemetery and returned it to Germany.

As for Private Brougher, liberating Mont Saint Michel was the highlight of his military service. He told his daughter Janet that the people called him "the savior of Mont Saint Michel." After the war he returned home to Pennsylvania, where he became a high school business manager. He returned to Mont Saint Michel with his family in June 1987. Unfortunately, the mayor was away, so Brougher could not see the *Golden Book* he had signed 43 years earlier. Instead, he gave his wife, Frieda, and his children, Janet and James, a tour of the abbey he liberated.

"He showed us everything that he had seen," recalled Janet. Freeman Brougher would remain proud of his accomplishment until his death in 2003. □

BY JEFF CHRISMAN

Zhukov STRIKES BACK

Hitler's 1941 invasion of the Soviet Union nearly succeeded until a desperate counterattack, combined with a brutal winter, turned certain Soviet defeat into ultimate victory.

SMOLENSK RUSSIA, HEADQUARTERS, German Army Group Center (AGC), December 3, 1941; Army Group commander, 61-year-old Generalfeldmarschall Fedor von Bock is a troubled man.

The day before, he had told his field army commanders who were attacking Moscow that the enemy was close to breaking. Today he wasn't so sure. Today the Army Group's 4th Army, directly west of Moscow, had gone over to the defensive. The army commander, 59-year-old Generalfeldmarschall Günther von Kluge, halted the attack because his troops were simply exhausted and could go no farther.

German tanks and panzergrenadiers advance into a burning Moscow suburb, December 1941. Some German units penetrated to within 12 miles of the Soviet capital while their commanders, viewing the scene through binoculars, could see the spires and onion domes of the Kremlin. But they could go no farther; stiffening Red Army resistance and "General Winter" conspired to halt their progress.

The Granger Collection, New York

General der Panzertruppen Georg-Hans Reinhardt's 3rd and Generaloberst Erich Hoepner's 4th Panzer Armies north of Moscow, as well as Generaloberst Heinz Guderian's 2nd Panzer Army south of Moscow, were similarly idled. Panzer Groups One and Two had been renamed Panzer armies in October; Panzer Groups Three and Four would be renamed as such in January 1942. For clarity, all are here referred to as Panzer Army.

Motors would not turn over, the oil in their crankcases turned to ice; machine guns would not fire, their mechanisms frozen solid. At night the temperature hovered around -20 degrees Fahrenheit, and there was a blizzard blowing around the capital. What the Red Army had not been able to accomplish, "General Winter" did. The German advance on Moscow had literally stopped cold.

This was what the Soviets had been waiting for. They knew that the moment the Germans stopped advancing was the moment that they must take the offensive. They could not let them prepare positions or bring forward infantry to hold the line. They must strike now—whether their assault units were in position or not. That is exactly what they did; the order for the counteroffensive went out on the night of the 4th.

Army General Georgii Zhukov, the 45-year-old commander of the Western Front, would command the counteroffensive. Zhukov had bested the Japanese at Khalkhin Gol prior to World War II but had found little success thus far against the Germans.

Zhukov had seven new armies from the strategic reserve to throw against the Germans. In addition to his Western Front, Zhukov's command for the attack included two armies from the Kalinin Front to the north and two armies from the Southwest Front to the south; in total: 1.1 million men, 7,652 guns and mortars, 774 tanks, and 1,000 aircraft.

Bock's AGC had perhaps half again as many men, but they were bone weary, famished, and freezing. The Soviets had fresh forces from all over the country; rifle divisions and tank units from the Volga, the Urals, and the Far East, ski troops from the Gorki and Kirov areas, cavalry formations from Central Asia. They would not all attack at once, but would be fed into the battle in stages as the offensive developed.

National Archives

Suffering from the intense cold, two German soldiers surrender. Thousands of German POWs died in captivity from disease and starvation, while others were held for years after the end of the war.

Zhukov's plan was nothing if not ambitious. The first phase would strike at the most serious threat at the moment—the 3rd and 4th Panzer Army's thrust north of Moscow, with the 30th Army, 1st Shock Army, 20th Army, and 16th Army. This would be closely followed by the 10th Army, 50th Army, and the 1st Guards Cavalry Corps attacking Generaloberst Heinz Guderian's 2nd Panzer Army salient south of the capital from three sides.

At the same time, the 3rd and 13th Armies would attack General der Panzertruppen Rudolf Schmidt's 2nd Army on the army group's southern flank while the 31st and 29th Armies would attack Generaloberst Adolf Strauss's 9th Army on the army group's northern flank. Meanwhile, in the center the Soviet 5th, 33rd, 43rd, and 49th Armies would only demonstrate and not attack initially in order to discourage the transfer of German reinforcements to the north or south.

In phase two, after success on the flanks, the Red Army units in the center would go over to the offensive and accomplish the general destruction of von Bock's Army Group Center. Zhukov's eventual goal was to push the AGC front all the way back to the line Staraya Russa-Velikiye Luki-Vitebsk-Smolensk-Bryansk.

The offensive began at Kalinin, 100 miles northwest of Moscow, in deep snow and a temperature of -22 degrees Fahrenheit at 3 AM on Friday, December 5, when the Kalinin Front's 31st Army, commanded by Maj. Gen. Vasili Yushkevich, struck out across the Volga River ice from positions just south of the city. Just before noon the 31st's running mate, Lt. Gen. Ivan Maslennikov's 29th Army, struck out across the ice just north of the city held by Strauss's 9th German Army.

The next morning the attack against the 3rd and 4th Panzer Armies commenced when the Western Front's 30th Army, commanded by Maj. Gen. Dmitri Lelyushenko, attacked Reinhardt's 3rd Panzer Army east of Klin.

At the same time, the 1st Shock Army, headed by Maj. Gen. Vasili Kuznetsov, attacked and fought its way into Yakhroma, while Lt. Gen. Andrei Vlasov's 20th Army hit Hoep-

ner's 4th Panzer Army at Krasnaya Polyana. At first light on the 7th, Lt. Gen. Konstantin Rokossovsky's 16th Army smashed into other 4th Panzer Army elements near Khimki.

South of Moscow the Soviet offensive began on December 6. On the left flank of the Western Front the 10th Army, commanded by Lt. Gen. Filipp Golikov, attacked Guderian's 2nd Panzer Army at Mikhailov, while Maj. Gen. Pavel Belov's independent 1st Guards Cavalry Corps hit Guderian's formations at Kashira.

Tula, 100 miles south of Moscow and 90 percent encircled by 2nd Panzer Army for weeks, was held by Lt. Gen. Ivan Boldin's 50th Army, which attacked southeastward into the encircling ring on the afternoon of the 8th. Its aim was to cut off the retreat of any German forces north and east of Tula.

Finally, on the far south wing of AGC, the 13th Army, under Maj. Gen. Avksenti Gorodianskiy, struck Schmidt's 2nd Army on both sides of Yelets, 220 miles south of Moscow, on 7 December—the same day Japanese forces were attacking Pearl Harbor. This was followed the next day by Maj. Gen. Yakov Kreizer's 3rd Army attack on Yefremov.

Almost the entire front around Moscow, which was covered in several feet of snow and constantly subjected to blizzard conditions, was, by the end of the first week of December, fully in flames. From Kalinin in the north 320 miles south to Yelets, the Germans and the Soviets were fully engaged in mortal combat.

On the northern flank, Generaloberst Adolf Strauss's 9th Army had managed to hold off the 29th and 31st Armies on December 6 and keep them from closing their encirclement of Kalinin. In this Strauss got generous help from the Luftwaffe, which had a great deal of immobile equipment and temporarily non-airworthy aircraft at Kalinin.

Reinhardt's 3rd and Hoepner's 4th Panzer Armies had already begun pulling back from their exposed forward positions and were going over to the defense when the Soviets struck. On the morning of the 7th, the roads leading to Klin from the east were packed with 3rd Panzer Army rear echelon troops heading west. Many guns and much equipment, not to mention tanks, were left behind because motors and transmissions were frozen. There was very little gasoline, and unless a motor was left running constantly it would freeze up. The men had to leave, but much of their equipment could not. The 1st Shock Army followed hesitantly from its breakthrough at Yakhroma.

The bigger threat to Reinhardt's 3rd Panzer Army at the moment was from Lelyushenko's 30th Army, farther north. The 30th broke through at Rogachevo and surged eight miles that first day, approaching Klin from the northeast. The next morning the lead detachment surprised the LVI Panzer Corps headquarters at Bolshoye Shchapovo, barely three miles northeast of Klin. (Note that the German Panzer Corps had all originally been named Motorized

Dressed in snow camouflage, Soviet infantrymen, accompanied by T-34 tanks, charge German positions during a counterattack. The Red Army lost huge numbers of soldiers but always seemed to have an unlimited supply of reserves.

Sovfoto

Army Corps [A.K. (Mot.)]. They were all renamed Panzer Corps at various dates in 1942. For clarity, all are here referred to as Panzer Corps.)

The corps commander, General der Panzertruppen Ferdinand Schaal, was seen dispensing aimed fire from his carbine as he fled. The next day the Russians cut the main north-south highway three miles northwest of Klin as thousands of German troops squeezed through the town, flooding west. Klin was the main crossroads point north of Moscow through which most all German troops in the area had to withdraw; it must be held as long as possible.

South of 3rd Panzer Army, Hoepner's 4th Panzer Army had initially fared a bit better. His troops were holding off the Soviet 20th Army east of Solnechnogorsk, and the 1st Shock Army was moving only cautiously along the 4th's northern boundary with 3rd Panzer Army. In fact, 1st Shock was moving so slowly that Zhukov ordered it to pick up its pace on December 7.

That same day, Rokossovsky's 16th Army joined the attack. The 16th was one of the best equipped Soviet armies of the Western Front and showed it that first day, surging some 20 miles and capturing Kryukovo on the 8th.

In the center of the army group front, von Kluge's 4th Army, the last army to halt its attack on Moscow, was initially very fortunate. As mentioned, the Soviet units opposite 4th Army were not to attack initially—only "demonstrate," and most did little of that. Consequently, 4th Army had a chance to dig in and consolidate its front. They were even able to spend some time reconnoitering and improving the "Winter Line" positions to the west into which they expected to withdraw.

German aerial reconnaissance reported many trains converging on Moscow from all points, and signal intelligence indicated that there were at least 25 more enemy divisions and brigades on the radio in the army group area than there had been a month before. Von Bock had opined a week earlier that the enemy had no more fresh units to oppose his forces; only by stripping units from other fronts could they bring more troops to combat against AGC. Today he was rethinking that position and trying to scrape up reserves wherever he might find them.

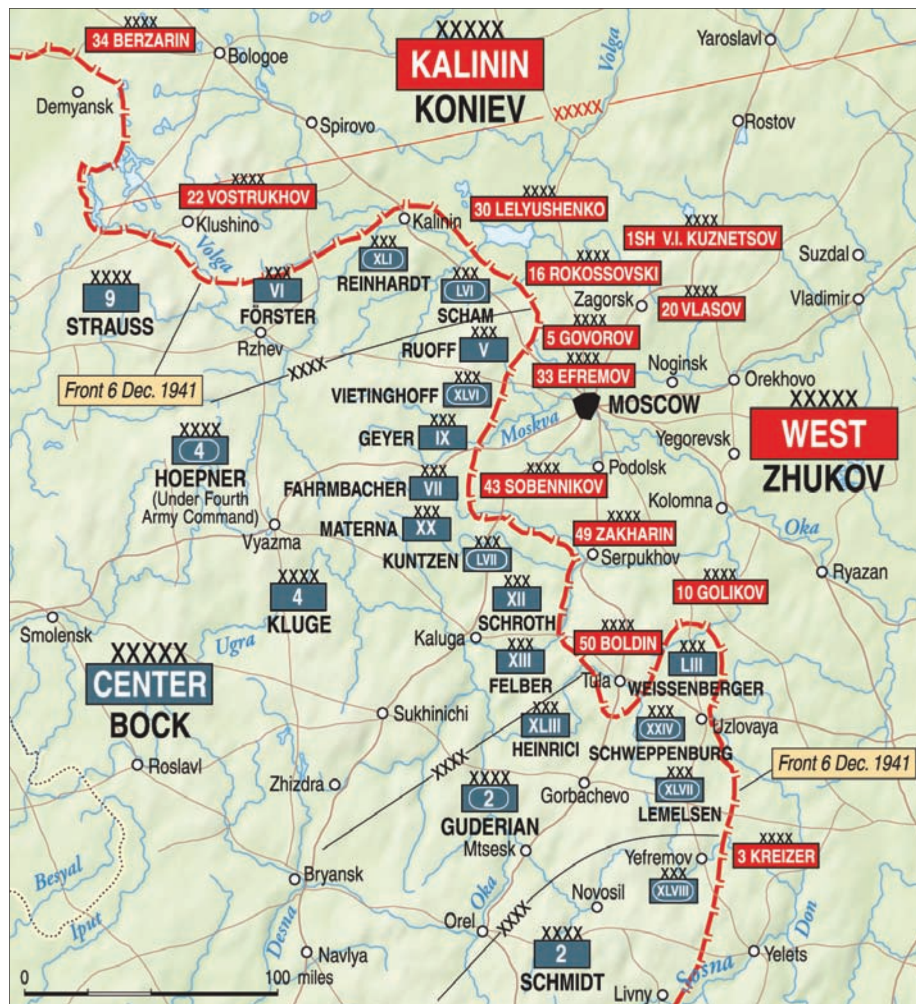
When Generaloberst Franz Halder, the chief of the Army General Staff, told von Bock not to expect any replacement battalions before mid-January, von Bock replied that he didn't need replacements—he needed trained, fully equipped divisions! Halder informed von Bock he simply did not have any of those to offer.

All up and down the front a fundamental transportation problem had cropped up for the first time. Ever since the invasion of the Soviet Union in June, German railroad workers had been busy converting the wide Russian railroad tracks to the narrower gauge used on the Continent so that their German trains could deliver guns, supplies, and troops from their point of origin all the way to any destination in Russia without having to unload then reload on wider gauge cars at some point.

Ironically, the brutal winter of 1941-1942 made that effort problematic because it was discovered that only the insulated Russian locomotives could hold steam in the subzero weather. So, just when the Germans needed it most, a large part of their transportation system failed.

For just one day, December 8, the temperature rose above freezing throughout the Moscow area, and the snow turned to freezing rain. The ground itself and everything

Bock's Army Group Center had the mission of taking Moscow, but Zhukov's Western Front kept the enemy from reaching the capital.



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

National Archives

Being whitewashed to blend in with the terrain did not spare this German Pzkpfw IV Ausf. D with 75mm cannon from becoming immobilized in the snow. Troops use picks and shovels to try and free it. Much German equipment was simply abandoned on the battlefield.

on it was still quite cold, so everything that was rained upon developed a not-so-thin covering of ice. It was inconvenient for all, but more so for the Germans since they were forced to improvise many of the things that they needed.

In another surprising consequence of the weather, most telephone and telegraph lines, weighted down by the heavy ice, broke and fell, further complicating an already chaotic situation.

South of Moscow, Guderian's 2nd Panzer Army had already begun to withdraw from its forward positions when the Soviets attacked on the 6th. Just like 3rd and 4th Panzer Armies north of Moscow, the 2nd Panzer Army's attack had earlier ground to a halt, and it was trying to secure the front for the winter. Having just broken off their own attack, many of Guderian's units had their assault forces up front and well positioned to hit the enemy's initial attacks.

At Tula, XXIV Panzer Corps' 3rd Panzer Division and 296th Infantry Division had blocked the Soviet 50th Army when it tried to break out to the southeast. Fifty miles to the east, the 10th Motorized Infantry Division was successfully slowing down the Soviet 10th Army at Mikhailov, and north of Venev the 17th Panzer Division had held off the 1st Guards Cavalry Corps for a full day.

Unfortunately for Guderian, the Soviet 50th Army eventually found success when it redirected its attack, and by the 10th it had penetrated a seam between the XLIII Army Corps and XXIV Panzer Corps west of Tula.

Farther south, Rudolf Schmidt's 2nd Army wasn't faring quite so well. His army had basically been filling the gap between 2nd Panzer Army and Army Group South's northernmost unit—Walter von Reichenau's 6th Army—and held a 180-mile front with just seven divisions.

When the enemy was reeling from heavy blows delivered by German units, a division holding a 25-mile front was not too much of a problem, but when that enemy was attacking and looking to penetrate, it was definitely a problem.

The Soviet 13th Army had penetrated the XXXIV Army Corps on both sides of Yelets and by the 8th had captured Yelets and forged a 50-mile-deep penetration toward Novosil. The flanks of the penetration were, of course, vulnerable, but General Schmidt could not take advantage because his vehicles had little fuel.

Despite these successes on the south flank, Zhukov was not happy about what he considered his armies' tactical shortcomings. On the 9th he issued a directive to all his forces telling them to stop trying to push the enemy back frontally, for this only gave them an opportunity to regroup and redeploy to new positions. Instead, they should penetrate the enemy's front and drive deep into his rear, destroy his artillery, and cut him off.

The Germans were becoming desperate. The troops were exhausted, their units under-strength and ill equipped, and they were at the end of a 1,000-mile supply line that had completely broken down. Typhus was spreading like wildfire thanks to the body lice and other vermin the troops had to live with. Unfortunately, there was only

Bundesarchiv Bild 146-2008-0317; Photo: Unknown

After the easy victories in the summer of 1941, the Germans met increasing resistance the farther into the Soviet Union they pushed. Here, with a light dusting of snow on the ground, German troops assist a fallen comrade while tanks and infantry advance toward a burning village.

enough typhus serum to inoculate medical personnel and troops over 45 years of age.

The German troops marveled at the Russian winter uniforms—felt-lined boots, fur caps, and quilted tunics—while they toiled in worn-out boots, threadbare summer uniforms, and no heavy coats. Discipline was breaking down, troops were walking west on their own without weapons, foraging for food. Guderian described his army as a scattered assemblage of armed baggage trains slowly wending their way to the rear.

On December 8, Hitler issued his Directive No. 39 for the winter campaign. He said that because of the early onset of cold weather and consequent problems with supply, all offensive operations were to cease, and units would go over to defensive positions. But only minimal withdrawals were to be made and only when absolutely necessary, and then only when new positions had been prepared.

The generals were becoming deeply concerned. Was Hitler getting an accurate picture of their situation? Did anyone in Berlin actually know what was going on at Moscow?

On the 13th, the commander of the German Army, Generalfeldmarschall Walther von Brauchitsch, visited AGC headquarters at Smolensk to meet with the generals. He told von Bock that OKH (Army high command) and Hitler were fully aware of the Army Group's struggles against the enemy and nature. Bock told him that the way things were going his troops would be destroyed in eight to 10 days and that it was therefore necessary to withdraw to the Königsberg Line: Rzhev-Gzhatsk-Orel-Kursk and, if necessary, to sacrifice equipment to save the men.

After visiting von Kluge and Guderian in Roslavl, Brauchitsch returned to Smolensk and told von Bock that he agreed to the withdrawal von Bock had proposed. Unfortunately, as soon as Hitler heard about the withdrawal, he said, "No!" He said the panzer armies were allowed to pull back from Kalinin, Klin, and Tula in order to straighten their lines, but he forbade any general withdrawal—at least until fighting positions had been prepared into which the units could withdraw.

Bock hadn't spoken to Hitler directly, so he felt free to assume that the beginning of "some" preparations would satisfy him and thus ordered his armies to begin such preparations to the extent possible and to prepare to withdraw.

By December 15, the last units of 3rd Panzer Army had fought their way through Klin in fierce combat against units of both the 30th Army and 1st Shock Army. Units of the XLI Panzer Corps were the last troops through the bottleneck, and the corps commander, General der Panzertruppen Walter Model, could be found personally directing traffic there until the last units were through.

Most of the army was able to break loose from the pursuing enemy and take up positions along the west bank of the Lama River, north of Volokolamsk.

To the south, all units of Hoepner's 4th Panzer Army had managed to gain positions behind the Istra River/Reservoir while being pursued by the 16th and 20th Armies, but they would soon withdraw to the Lama/Ruza River line to conform to their northern neighbor. Strauss's 9th Army had likewise withdrawn from Kalinin after setting demolition charges on anything worth having, including the large bridge over the Volga River in the center of town.

Both: National Archives

ABOVE: Well-equipped for combat in brutal conditions, Red Army troops advance while being covered by a 7.62mm Degtyarev M-27 machine gun. BELOW: Using a 14.5mm Degtyarev PTRD-41 antitank rifle, a Soviet crew takes aim at a German panzer. With a muzzle velocity of over 3,300 feet per second, the armor-piercing round could penetrate 1.57 inches of armor plate at 110 yards.

To the south of Moscow, Guderian's 2nd Panzer Army had been penetrated by Ivan Boldin's 50th Army, and a gap was opening up at Dubna between XXIV Panzer Corps and XLIII Army Corps to its north. Most units of the army were trying to establish a line behind the Plava River, but withdrawal to the line of the Oka and Susha Rivers, 35 miles to the west, was being contemplated as the enemy's 10th Army and 1st Guards Cavalry Corps were bearing down on the Plava River with little to stop them.

Farther south in the 2nd Army's area lay the greatest threat to the army group at the moment. Presumably that is why it was the first to receive any reinforcements, meager as they were. The XXXIV Army Corps had been dispersed and deeply penetrated west of Yelets, with most combat elements encircled and destroyed. This represented a threat to Orel and Kursk, two of the most important supply points for Army Group Center and Army Group South. The weakened state of the army made it questionable whether it could successfully defend these vital hubs.

On the 12th, reinforcements had begun to arrive for Schmidt's 2nd Army, including remnants of a battered infantry division from 2nd Panzer Army, a security division of overage troops from railroad security duty in the army group rear area, two reinforced infantry regiments from two different divisions from Army Group South, and an SS motorized brigade fresh from antipartisan duty in the rear.

This motley collection was assigned to XXXV Army Corps and, along with other units of the corps, took up positions at Verkhovye on the main east-west road and railroad 48 miles east of Orel. On the 17th, to most everyone's surprise, they managed to halt the Soviet penetration, at least temporarily.

At about that same time, Bock put 2nd Army under command of 2nd Panzer Army, creating Army Group Guderian, in the hope that this arrangement would prevent Guderian from withdrawing without consideration for his neighbor to the south.

Now, with both the northern and southern wings of AGC around Moscow either pushed back or destroyed, General Halder declared it the worst crisis in two world wars, and Zhukov ordered the second phase of the attack to begin. A great victory had been achieved, and now Zhukov expected to raise that to the monumental level with the complete destruction of Army Group Center.

German commanders at all levels had been clamoring for permission to withdraw; Hitler, for the most part, had said no, allowing only minor rearward movement on a limited basis.

Finally, on December 18, he released a definitive order on the subject: "Larger evasive movements cannot be made. They would lead to a total loss of heavy weapons and equipment. Commanding generals, commanders, and officers are to intervene in person to compel the troops to fanatical resistance in their positions without regard to an enemy break though on the flanks or in the rear.

"This is the only way to gain the time necessary to bring up the reinforcements from Germany and the West that I have ordered. Only if reserves have moved into rearward positions can thought be given to withdrawing to those positions."

Reaction to what became known as the "stand-fast" order among the generals ranged from resignation to outright rejection. Von Kluge predicted that regardless of orders the army group could not hold the line; both Reinhardt and Hoepner doubted that their divisions could be made to stop on the Lama-Ruza line, and Guderian said flatly that he would not even pass the order on.

Bock opined that it was impossible to tell which was more dangerous—to hold or to withdraw. Either way, his army group was likely to be destroyed.

The next day Bock went on sick leave and left for Germany; Generalfeldmarschall von Kluge would leave 4th Army and take over command of the army group. Also leaving on the 19th was Commander of the army, Generalfeldmarschall von Brauchitsch; he, too, was in failing

Sovfoto

Taking cover behind a T-34 tank, Red Army infantrymen advance through knee-deep snow toward a German position.

health and, frustrated that he had been cut out of important decisions, submitted his resignation. Not only did Hitler accept von Brauchitsch's resignation, he took over command of the army himself.

For the most part, the generals were notsure what to make of Hitler taking over command of the army. Some thought that the army would loose its identity, while others thought that it was good since now they could be assured that the army leadership was not keeping their demands, or concerns, or advice from Hitler.

Among the rank and file it was virtually unanimous—they were delighted; they had complete faith in Hitler, and any doubts that they had quickly turned into optimism.

But at the front the troops were still hard pressed, particularly on the southern flank near Guderian's 2nd Panzer Army. The penetration between the Army's XXIV Panzer Corps and XLIII Army Corps on the Army's northern flank had grown to almost 30 miles wide.

Hitler urged Guderian to close the gap, but Guderian said it couldn't be done from the south; all roads were poor quality and covered in drifted snow several meters deep. On the 18th the XLIII Army Corps was transferred to von Kluge's 4th Army, so now the gap was between 2nd Panzer Army and 4th Army and an army group problem rather than just a 2nd Panzer Army problem. The next day, XXIV Panzer Corps and its badly battered panzer divisions were pulled off the front and sent to Orel for a quick, emergency refit.

When XXIV Panzer Corps was withdrawn, LIII Army Corps, commanded by General der Infantrie Walther Fischer von Weikersthal, took over the northern half of the 2nd Panzer Army front. The corps' units were desperately trying to build a front along the west side of the Plava River when, on December 22, the 296th Infantry Division was deeply penetrated by troops of the Soviet 10th Army charging across the frozen river.

The next day the neighboring 167th Infantry Division was virtually destroyed. Fearing his division would be encircled and destroyed, Generalleutnant Wilhelm Stemmermann, commander of the 296th, ordered his units to fall back to the next defensible position—along the Oka River at Belev, over 40 miles to the west.

Guderian immediately used the 296th's unauthorized withdrawal as justification for withdrawing the remainder of his front back to the Oka/Susha River line. In the fall the army had built some positions along the river line as it advanced and could reoccupy

them now, he argued. Von Kluge said absolutely no, not without Hitler's consent—and Hitler told Guderian to leave his front exactly where it was.

Over the next few days 2nd Panzer Army continued its withdrawal to the Oka/Susha line while von Kluge and Guderian sparred over it from afar. Von Kluge complained to Halder and to Hitler that Guderian refused to follow orders, that he did as he pleased, and filed misleading reports. Guderian told von Kluge, "In these unusual circumstances, I lead my army in a manner I can justify to my conscience." The two men would have very strained relations throughout the war, von Kluge even challenging Guderian to a duel in 1943.

Von Kluge called Halder at 10 minutes to midnight on Christmas Eve and informed him that Guderian had asked to be relieved and court-martialed. The next day Hitler relieved Guderian and replaced him with Rudolf Schmidt from the 2nd Army.

By the end of the year, all units of the 2nd Panzer Army were fairly well entrenched along the western bank of the Oka and Susha Rivers from Belev south to the 2nd Army front near Novosil.

The beginning of phase two of the Soviet attack on December 18 meant that the Soviet armies facing the middle of Army Group Center all swung into action. The 4th Army bore the brunt of these attacks and held up fairly well, at least initially.

The Soviet 33rd Army, commanded by Lt. Gen. Mikhail Yefremov, and 43rd Army, commanded by Maj. Gen. Konstantin Golubev, struck XX Army Corps units and LVII Panzer Corps units along the Nara River on either side of Naro-Fominsk and quickly became bogged down in the extensive defensive positions along the river.

To the south, Lt. Gen. Ivan Zakharkin's 49th Army hit XIII Army Corps units on both sides of Tarusa and also gained little ground. North of 4th Army, the 4th Panzer Army's VII Army Corps also held off the initial attack by Lt. Gen. Leonid Govorov's 5th Army, northeast of Moshaisk. The German units immediately west of Moscow had had some time to build defensive positions.

There was a brief glimmer of hope as farther north on the left flank of 4th Panzer Army and in the 3rd Panzer Army sector units of the XLI and LVI Panzer Corps, after withdrawing from Klin, had been able to settle in on the west side of the Lama River north from Volokolamsk.

South of there, the XLVI Panzer Corps held the line along the west bank of the Ruza River. The troops had broken contact with the pursuing enemy during the withdrawal and reached the river line a day or two ahead of the Soviets. This gave them a chance to catch their breath, get some sleep, and enjoy hot food for the first time in several days.

In the far northeast corner of the army group front, 9th Army units withdrawing southwestward away from Kalinin were hotly pursued by elements of the Soviet 29th and 31st Armies. The Soviet 30th Army, transferred from the Western Front to the Kalinin Front, was also closing in from the east.

The primeval wilderness, full of frozen swamp and dense forest, was equally difficult for both pursued and pursuer, but the Soviets' extensive use of sledge columns to bring forward food and ammunition gave them a distinct advantage.

Hitler had previously given permission for Strauss to pull his 9th Army's northeast corner back from Kalinin to Staritsa, but the commander wanted to keep going to the Königsberg Line.

Strauss flew to army group headquarters on the 21st to plead his case. He told von Kluge that Staritsa was just a spot on Hitler's map, that it had no value at all; on the ground it was nothing more than a clearing in the woods. Strauss wanted to continue southwestward to Rzhev, where there were at least some facilities and communication assets.

Rzhev was the northern anchor of the Königsberg Line—Rzhev-Gzhatsk-Orel-Kursk—where some defensive positions had previously been completed. Von Kluge told Strauss he could withdraw only if Hitler agreed, which of course he did not.

At that point the 9th Army front, which began as a squared-off corner with an east-facing front and a north-facing front, had become a northeast-facing diagonal line from its connection with 3rd Panzer Army north of Volokolamsk northwestward past Staritsa to Army Group North at Ostashkov.

National Archives

With a knocked-out Soviet tank behind them, a German MG-34 machine-gun crew watches for any sign of an enemy attack.

Bundesarchiv Bild 101I-287-0885-29A; Photo: Karl Müller

Camouflaged in white, a group of German soldiers at Orel, using a variety of automatic weapons, fire on advancing Russians.

The last 10 days of the year were some of the most difficult the army group had faced since the beginning of the war; many thought that it was about to disintegrate.

On December 22, in a freak accident, the very able chief of staff of the 4th Army, Generalmajor Günther Blumentritt, was run over by a truck in the darkness and medically evacuated. Consequently, when von Kluge's replacement, General der Gebirgstruppe (Mountain Troops) Ludwig Kübler, arrived four days later, he had no chief of staff to orient him to the situation.

One of Kübler's first orders of business was to determine how best to defend his own headquarters in Yukhnov. The 4th Army HQ had been forced to flee Maloyaroslavets on Christmas Day, and now Soviet cavalry was surging through the gap on 4th Army's south flank toward Yukhnov.

By the end of 1941, Kübler's 4th Army had a large gap on each flank; in the north there was a 13-mile gap between LVII Panzer Corps units west of Maloyaroslavets and 4th Panzer Army units at Borovsk; in the south there was the huge 50-mile gap between XLIII Army Corps units just west of Kaluga and 2nd Panzer Army units at Belev. The Soviet 43rd Army was pouring through the northern gap while the 10th Army, 50th Army, and 1st Guards Cavalry Corps surged through the southern.

On December 26, the 39th Army, now commanded by Lt. Gen. Ivan Maslennikov, joined the attack, hitting 9th Army's VI Army Corps northwest of Staritsa. Maslennikov had begun the offensive as commander of 29th Army, but on December 11 he was replaced by Maj. Gen. Vasili Shvetsov, and at the same time he replaced Lt. Gen. Ivan Bogdanov at 39th Army.

The VI Army Corps' 26th Infantry Division initially maintained the upper hand, but there were alarming reports coming from the field. The 6th Infantry Division reported its men physically and psychologically finished. Men's boots were frozen to their feet, machine guns were frozen and did not work, radios were frozen and inoperable.

On December 29, General Strauss reported that Staritsa was almost surrounded and that the VI Army Corps was falling back toward Rzhev as 39th Army continued southward. Hitler was furious and, in a fit of pique, relieved the corps commander, General der Pionere (Engineers) Otto Foerster, and replaced him with the commander of the army groups' air support, Luftwaffe General der Flieger Wolfram von Richthofen, and ordered him to hold the line.

The 3rd and 4th Panzer Armies' front along the Lama and Ruza Rivers remained fairly stable even after the Soviets caught up with the withdrawing Germans, who put up a tenacious defense that the enemy could not penetrate—the one exception being in the 4th Panzer Army's V Army Corps sector where the 106th Infantry Division was pushed out of Volokolamsk on December 21. They managed to stabilize the front just west of there but on Christmas Eve,Soviet tank units found a soft spot and forced a penetration.

Fortunately for the Germans, the corps was holding part of the 6th Panzer Division as a reserve, and it quickly counterattacked and eliminated the penetration.

On the southern front, after Guderian's firing, Army Group Guderian had become

Army Group Schmidt, commanding both the 2nd Panzer Army and the 2nd Army. Other than the yawning gap on its north flank, 2nd Panzer Army now held a stable front along the west side of the Oka and Susha Rivers from Belev south to the 2nd Army front near Novosil.

The 2nd Army front, which ran from that boundary south to Army Group South near Tim, had settled down considerably by the end of the year. A minor penetration on Christmas Day near the village of Tim was cleared up by the 3rd Panzer Division, and the front grew quiet. About the middle of January, 2nd Army was transferred to Army Group South and was no longer a part of the Moscow counteroffensive.

On January 7, the Germans got a huge break when, with victory after victory and reports of German demoralization flowing in, Stalin saw an opportunity to expand the offensive and took command. Zhukov had saved Moscow; now Stalin wanted to grab some glory for himself. He envisioned not just pushing Army Group Center back but encircling and annihilating it along with Army Group North and Army Group South.

It would be a colossal undertaking involving nine of the 10 Soviet fronts making four large encirclements. A front was a Russian military formation roughly equivalent to an army group and generally contained three to five armies. It should not be confused with the term "military front," which is a geographic area in wartime.

The Leningrad and Volkhov Fronts would encircle Army Group North and free Leningrad; the Northwest Front would help in the encirclement of Army Group North and send its left flank units on a deep outer encirclement of Army Group Center to close at Smolensk.

The Kalinin and Western Fronts would continue their operations against Army Group Center on an expanded basis; the Kalinin Front would battle against Army Group Center's northern flank and send its right-flank units deep in an inner encirclement of Army Group Center to close at Vyazma. The Western Front would continue operations against the middle of Army Group Center and send its left-flank units to close the inner encirclement at Vyazma.

The Bryansk Front's right-flank units would close the outer encirclement of Army Group Center at Smolensk while its left-flank units cooperated with the Southwest Front and the South Front in the encirclement of Army Group South. Finally, the Transcaucasus Front would continue operations in the Crimea and attempt to encircle General Erich von Manstein's 11th Army there.

Operations against Army Group Center would have priority but would no longer have Stavka's undivided attention. Soviet transport aircraft, which were used to supply troops and partisans in the hinterland and were already in short supply, would be dispersed to other fronts. Reserves and replacements, not to mention fuel and ammunition, would now be needed throughout, not just in the center. All sorts of support previously dedicated to operations against Army Group Center would now be spread throughout the country.

Unfortunately for the Soviets, offensive combat operations were still a fairly new proposition, and they made numerous elemental errors at all levels of command. They usually tried to bludgeon their way forward, seldom bothering to concentrate at a point of main effort. They habitually dispersed their armor and artillery and paid little attention to the coordination of the various combat arms. Their attacks always produced an inordinate number of casualties; manpower was their most abundant asset, and they treated it that way. The theater-wide offensive was an overreach by Stalin—and Soviet units throughout the country paid for it.

Most of the Soviet divisions attacking AGC had been in action for more than a month and were rapidly wearing down. Virtually all divisions were down to fewer than 4,000 troops, and most tank brigades had but one T-34 left. All this and the fact that a week later Hitler decided to allow the army group to withdraw to the Königsberg Line, virtually assured the survival of Army Group Center and made Hitler's stand-fast order appear to be tactical genius.

The Germans, while still under immense pressure, were beginning to find their footing; they were actually receiving some reinforcements and settling down into positions along a new front. In some places the new front was not very far from the old front.

For instance, in mid-January in the 4th Panzer Army sector, the VII Army Corps was holding positions just east of Moshaisk, less than 12 miles west of the positions they held when the Soviet attack had begun in early December. After they withdrew into their Königsberg Line positions farther west on January 22, they would remain there, less than 50 miles west of where they started and less than 100 miles west of Moscow, until March 1943.

In the meantime, there was still much fighting and dying to be done.

In another fortuitous circumstance, Generalfeldmarschall von Kluge had General Walter Model at hand when, on January 18, General Strauss asked to be relieved of command of 9th Army. Model, the 50-year-old commander of the XLI Panzer Corps, was a dynamic, energetic, ambitious commander and took over at a moment of great danger for 9th Army. The 9th Army's VI Army Corps had been penetrated northwest of Rzhev, and the Soviet 39th Army was flowing southward just a few miles west of the Rzhev-Vyazma railroad while Shvetsov's 29th Army prepared to follow.

Model's first order of business was to restore the front where the enemy had penetrated, then eliminate the penetration. Right away Hitler tried to tell the new commander how to conduct his business and told Model that he must weaken his attack forces to insure the protection of Vyazma. Model immediately flew to Hitler's headquarters and bluntly asked the dictator, "Who commands 9th Army, you or I?" Not used to this sort of reaction, Hitler meekly relented.

On January 23, Model's counterattack

west of Rzhev closed the gap between VI Army Corps and XXIII Army Corps and cut off the penetration by the Soviet 39th and 29th Armies. Thus began forming a huge pocket of enemy units behind the army group's front.

Another element of this growing pocket behind the front were the 1,643 parachute and air-landed troops the Soviets inserted behind 4th Army in the third week of January. Expecting to fight disillusioned, fleeing Nazi troops, these soldiers instead faced determined attacks by disciplined troops consolidating their positions.

Partisans, too, were a large part of the growing presence behind the front. They had always been a part of the landscape, but with the insertion of uniformed Soviet troops the partisans became much better organized and equipped. Some military units even "drafted" local partisans into the ranks on the spot to make up for losses.

Another pocket of cut-off Soviet troops began forming south of Vyazma when the gap between 4th Panzer Army and 4th Army, through which Yefremov's 33rd Army and part of Golubev's 43rd Army had penetrated, was closed by a 20th Panzer Division attack on February 3. The 43rd tried unsuccessfully to reopen the breach from both sides, but the 33rd slowed to a stop, seemingly without a mission.

The huge gap south of 4th Army to 2nd Panzer Army was also slowly becoming repopulated by German troops. In about the middle of the gap lay the small town of Sukhinichi, where the German 216th Infantry Division had been encircled since late December. The Soviets never mounted a prepared attack to take Sukhinichi; they simply bounced off when they found the town defended and continued their attack westward. But the town was falling further and further behind the front. Something had to be done.

Both: Ullstein Bild

ABOVE: A self-propelled Sd.Kfz 138 Marder III assault gun of the 2nd SS Division "Das Reich" rolls into position during the winter of 1941-1942 as two crewmen stare across the vast, frozen landscape. OPPOSITE: When the spring thaw arrived, the roads and fields turned into quagmires, halting operations on both sides.

In mid-January, the XXIV Panzer Corps, commanded by Generalleutnant Willibald Baron von Langermann und Erlenkamp, with parts of two panzer divisions and an infantry division, launched an attack from Zhizdra to relieve the 216th and help it withdraw. Langermann's troops reached Sukhinichi through chest-deep snow on January 24 and completed the withdrawal from there by the end of the month.

The corps and the troops thus released, as well as units arriving from France, then began forming an irregular front from 2nd Panzer Army's LIII Army Corps near Belev northwest to the 4th Army boundary near Pesotschny.

The 4th Army's XXXX Panzer Corps then took over and began forming a front curving northeastward to XLIII Army Corps units north of Mosalsk. This produced a large C-shaped bulge in the front that remained until 1943. The Soviet 49th and 50th Armies battered against the north edge of this bulge for weeks, trying unsuccessfully to sever the main 4th Army supply line from Roslavl.

Perhaps the most worrisome spot on the map in late January was in AGC's deep northern flank, where the Soviet 4th Shock Army had penetrated the front near the boundary with Army Group North at Ostashkov. For two weeks, Col. Gen. Andrei Eremenko's 4th Shock Army had been plunging southward, captured Toropets on January 21, and

GOEBBELS' URGENT PLEA FOR WINTER CLOTHING

At the end of 1941, the situation for all German troops along the frozen Eastern Front had become so desperate that Nazi Propaganda Minister Joseph Goebbels made an unprecedented plea to the German people: send whatever winter clothing you can spare to the boys at the front. It was also the first time that the Nazi hierarchy admitted that the war against the Soviet Union had run into difficulties.

Especially needed, Goebbels said, were "overshoes, if possible lined ones, or furlined ones; warm woolen clothing, socks, stockings, heavy underwear, vests or pullovers; warm, especially woolen, underclothing, undershirts, chest and lung protectors; any kind of headgear protection, ear muffs, wristlets, ear protectors, woolen helmets; furs in all senses of the word, fur jackets and fur waistcoats, fur boots of every kind, and every size; blankets, especially fur covers, thick warm gloves, again especially fur-lined

now approached Velizh, 60 miles northwest of Smolensk.

To confront this menace, Generalleutnant Kurt von der Chevallerie's LIX Army Corps, with three fresh divisions from France, began arriving in the Vitebsk area on the 20th, and on February 1 the 3rd Panzer Army headquarters was transferred to Vitebsk to take charge of the defense of the army group's deep northern flank.

During the first week of February, in a daring attack, General Model sent the XLVI Panzer Corps, now commanded by General der Panzertruppen Heinrich von Vietinghoff, to strike northwesterly across the northeast corner of 9th Army's inside front southwest of Rzhev. In less than two days the panzer corps surged 30 miles between the Soviet 39th Army and 29th Army and contacted the XXIII Army Corps near Nikulino. This put most of Shvetsov's 29th Army in a tight pocket, which was then quickly eliminated.

This victory allowed Model to shift forces and continue building his west-facing front south from Sychevka toward Vyazma. Model had earlier put Generalmajor Erhard Raus, the commander of the 6th Panzer Division, in charge of rounding up rear-area troops, convalescents, and any otherwise unattached troops to man the new west-facing front; by February 1, Raus had collected 35,000 troops to help man the line.

In the middle of February, with his offensive floundering, Stalin sent reinforcements to both Zhukov's Western Front and Konev's Kalinin Front and demanded that the front commanders bring all their forces to bear on the enemy, but it was too late. The troops were worn out, supplies were short, and the attack was inexorably losing steam. Nearly continuous attacks on both Rzhev and Vyazma had produced nothing but massive losses for the Soviets,in both men and materiel.

The Soviets' situation got worse. By the third week of February, Lt. Gen. Mikhail Efremov's 33rd Army was completely encircled southeast of Vyazma; Efremov would commit suicide in April when he and a group of his men tried unsuccessfully to escape.

On March 10, a massive late-season snowstorm roared into the area and halted all ground movement, leaving several feet of new snow on top of the several feet already there. But by the end of the month the temperature was rising above freezing, and the snow began to melt. The roads ran like rivers, the verges knee deep in muck. The muddy season was beginning, and all movement and combat slid to a halt.

Not only did the thaw produce problems for transportation, it also produced problems in sanitation and health as the bodies of thousands of men and horses long dead and frozen but unburied, began to thaw.

The Soviets had indeed pushed the Germans back, but they were far from destroyed. The greatest advance was made by the Soviet Western Front's left flank, which advanced nearly 250 miles.

The shortest Red Army advance—about 50 miles—was made by the Western Front's center armies. Between Vyazma and Smolensk, despite the insertion of thousands of paratroops and in weeks of heavy combat against scratch German units, elements of the Western Front were

Continued on page 98

leather ones, or knitted gloves and wool mittens; altogether everything of wool is needed urgently on the front and will be doubly welcome. Desired further are quilted or lined undervests, woolen shawls, neckerchiefs, and scarves."

Even Hitler added his voice to the request: "If now the German nation, at the occasion of the Christmas festival, desires to make a present to the German soldiers, this it should give up and do without all those things that exist in the warmest pieces of clothing."

If the German people wondered how their sons could have been sent off to the front without such essential articles of winter clothing, they did not express it. Instead, in an unprecedented outpouring of support from the German people, from December 27 until January 4, 1942, tens of thousands of the requested items were donated. Trainloads of items were then shipped off to the Eastern Front. But for thousands of soldiers who would freeze to death or become disabled in the bitter conditions, warm clothing would come too late.

Battling for BOUGAINVILLE

Key Allied victories in the Pacific have been singled out as seminal turning points against the Japanese. The American Navy's sinking of four enemy carriers at Midway crippled future Imperial Japanese Navy (IJN) initiatives on the scale mounted during the war's initial six months.

The six-month-long, grueling Japanese defense and ultimate conquest of Guadalcanal by American land, sea, and air forces—after the initial Marine amphibious invasion of that southern Solomon island on August 7, 1942—halted the Japanese southeastward strategic advance to sever the sea lanes to the Antipodes.

What has been ignored, however, is the backbreaking series of defeats that the Japan-

To neutralize the major Japanese base at Rabaul, American troops would need to take Bougainville in the Solomon Islands—a mission easier ordered than done.

BY JON DIAMOND

ese suffered in their attempts to defend New Georgia, Kolombangara, and Bougainville in the Central and Northern Solomons. The losses of Imperial Japanese Army (IJA) units, IJN ships, and aircraft and crews could never be replaced after the defeats suffered on these hellacious jungle islands, especially given the requisite presence of Imperial forces on the Central Pacific and New Guinea fronts.

Major General Allen H. Turnage, commanding the 3rd Marine Division, which had

Moving like ghosts through the dark gloom of the nearly impenetrable Bougainville jungle, U.S. Marines slog up to the front lines during the bitter campaign for the tropic stronghold in this drawing by combat artist Kerr Eby. He accompanied the Marines on Bougainville, where he lived for weeks in a foxhole and sketched the jungle fighting. He contracted a tropical disease that led to his death in 1946.

U.S. Navy Art Collection, Naval History and Heritage Command

invaded Bougainville in November 1943, wrote, "Never had men in the Marine Corps had to fight and maintain themselves over such difficult terrain as was encountered on Bougainville."

Major General Alexander A. Vandegrift, who commanded the 1st Marine Division on Guadalcanal and then the I Marine Amphibious Corps (IMAC) for the Bougainville landings, commented that the Bougainville "jungle [was] worse than we had found on Guadalcanal."

Stanley Frankel, the U.S. Army's 37th Infantry Division historian, wrote about the Japanese counteroffensive against the U.S. Army's XIV Corps perimeter at Cape Torokina on Bougainville in March 1944: "The curtain was about to rise on one of the bloodiest, most fanatical Banzai attacks made by the Japanese in the South Pacific War ... against a civilian army of battling clerks, farmers, mechanics, schoolboys, business men."

Another Marine veteran of Guam and Iwo Jima recounted, "Of all the 28 months I spent overseas, nothing compared to Bougainville for miserable living conditions.... Bougainville had to be the closest thing to a living hell that I ever saw in my life."

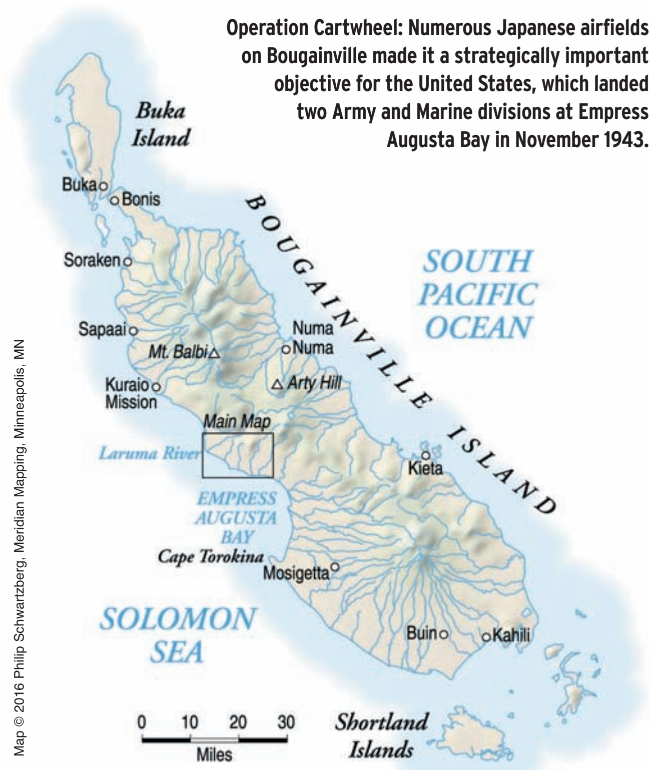
The Pacific campaigns before and after Bougainville—Guadalcanal, Tarawa, the Marshall Islands, Saipan, Guam, Peleliu, Iwo Jima, and Okinawa—seemed to be much more "headline-grabbing" amphibious operations than the largely forgotten six-month long Marine and Army efforts at Cape Torokina on Empress Augusta Bay.

Possible explanations for Bougainville being overshadowed stem from a paradigm shift in Allied strategy in the South Pacific. After the war, a Japanese intelligence officer admitted that, after the bloody frontal assaults along Papua's northern coast at Buna during late 1942 into early 1943, the Americans had begun to display a new strategic initiative to invade Japanese-held areas where they were the least defended.

The officer said, "This was the type of strategy we hated most. The Americans, with minimum losses, attacked and seized a relatively weak area, constructed airfields, and then proceeded to cut the supply lines to troops in that area. Without engaging in a large-scale operation, our strongpoints were gradually starved out. [The] Americans flowed into our weaker points and submerged us, just as water seeks the weakest entry to sink a ship."

Historian Stephen Taafe summed up this emerging strategy as "cutting off and isolating their strong points and, in effect, transforming them into vast jungle prison camps."

In May 1942, before the fighting for Papua commenced, General Douglas MacArthur, the commander-in-chief of the Southwest Pacific Area (SWPA), had rashly boasted that, given three infantry divisions and two aircraft carriers, he could capture the Japanese bastion of Rabaul on the northeastern tip of the island of New Britain in the Bismarck Archipelago. The Joint Chiefs of Staff (JCS) prudently shelved this bombastic notion. In early June 1943, the JCS completed a survey, which concluded just the opposite. A direct invasion of New Britain would be too costly. Rabaul should be neutralized instead.



Operation Cartwheel: Numerous Japanese airfields on Bougainville made it a strategically important objective for the United States, which landed two Army and Marine divisions at Empress Augusta Bay in November 1943.

The next month, General George C. Marshall, the U.S. Army Chief of Staff, communicated to MacArthur that with the SWPA commander capturing Wewak on the northeast New Guinea coast and Manus in the Admiralty Islands group along with Admiral WIlliam F. "Bull" Halsey's South Pacific Force's eventual seizure of Kavieng on New Ireland to the north of Rabaul he believed that Rabaul could be encircled and effectively neutralized using U.S. air power.

When MacArthur persisted with his urging that Rabaul be directly invaded, Allied planners at the Quebec Conference of the Combined Chiefs of Staff in August 1943 were adamant and formalized the strategy codenamed Operation Cartwheel to neutralize Rabaul.

Rabaul was the headquarters and main supply base for both the Japanese Southeastern Army and the Southeastern Fleet and lay directly northwest of Bougainville. Air units based at Rabaul were the responsibility of the Eleventh Air Fleet. Despite extensive losses, the IJN continued to reinforce its air units with approximately 50 planes a month flown in from Truk in the Caroline Islands.

In all of New Britain, the IJA could muster more than 97,000 men. To defend the region around Rabaul in November 1943, the IJA had more than 76,000 men. There were four natural harbors there, with Simpson Harbor and its excellent docking facilities capable of handling 300,000 tons of shipping.

U.S. Marine Corps

Expecting stiff Japanese opposition (that did not materialize), men of the 3rd Marine Division wade ashore on November 1, 1943. The U.S. campaign to secure Bougainville took a year; Australian units, which would arrive in November 1944, required an additional 10 months to mop up pockets of still-determined Japanese holdouts.

As Admiral Samuel Morison commented, "Tarawa, Iwo Jima, and Okinawa would have faded to pale pink in comparison with the blood that would have flowed if the Allies had attempted an assault on Fortress Rabaul."

The Solomon Island chain is more than 500 miles long. Bougainville is one of the most northern islands in the chain, as well as the largest, 130 miles long and 30 miles wide. Bougainville's strategic importance lay with its location just over 200 air miles from Rabaul.

Topographically, Bougainville possessed two central mountain ranges, the Emperor Range in the north and the lower, less rugged one to the south, the Crown Prince Range, with the former having two active volcanoes—Mount Balbi at over 10,000 feet and Mount Bagana. Except for some roads in the south that could accommodate wheeled transport, overland movement was limited to primitive trails through the dense jungle interior.

Most important of the island routes were the Numa Numa Trail, which extended southwest from Numa Numa on the northeast coast to Empress Augusta Bay, and the East-West Trail running northwest from Buin on the southern tip to Gazelle Harbor below Empress Augusta Bay.

The invasion of Bougainville, along with construction of airfields there, would be a major part of Operation Cartwheel. Bougainville was to be assaulted in the final phase of the bloody campaign up the Solomon Island chain. However, due to Bougainville's proximity to Rabaul, it was heavily garrisoned by the Japanese.

Bougainville was headquarters for the Japanese Northern Solomons Defense Force with its main base at Buin located on the southeastern tip of the island, across from which were the Shortland Islands, Faisi, and Ballale. The IJA 17th Army Headquarters and the IJA 6th Division, the latter having achieved notoriety for atrocities committed in China, had 15,000 men around Buin airfield on the island's southern tip.

There were other airfields in the south, including Kahili, Kieta, and Kara. The IJN's Eighth Fleet had several hundred more men on Bougainville, and there were more than 10,000 Japanese troops and naval coast artillery in the Shortland Islands and nearby Ballale Island, with its airfield being an IJN operation. In the extreme northwest of the island abutting Buka passage was an airfield at Bonis.

Additionally, at the Buka airbase just to the north of Bougainville the IJA had garrisoned 5,000 men while the IJN stationed 1,000 sailors at a seaplane base. At Empress Augusta Bay on the island's western side the IJA had stationed only a small infantry garrison.

After 15 months of Japanese occupation, Bougainville's native Melanesian population was thoroughly pro-Japanese. The Allies were unable to ascertain current intelligence about Japanese movements because many of the coast watchers had been captured, and those still at large were unable to move around the island safely. By July 1943, all of the remaining Allied coastwatchers were evacuated from Bougainville.

Both: U.S. Marine Corps

Weary members of the 1st Battalion, 3rd Marines return from the jungle. They were the first to hit the beach at Cape Torokina, where the strongest Japanese opposition was encountered.

The Japanese knew that a battle for Bougainville was going to be more crucial than the previous losing struggle for Guadalcanal. Also, the Japanese still retained a distinct advantage in the Solomons. Even though they had lost Guadalcanal their fighter aircraft had longer range than American planes.

Additionally, Combined Fleet Admiral Isoruku Yamamoto had been continually building up his airfields in the Northern Solomons as staging areas, as well as at Vila on Kolombangara and at Munda on New Georgia. Japanese planes could be dispatched from Rabaul to New Georgia, where they could refuel and then go on to attack the American bases at Tulagi and Guadalcanal and return the same way with emergency airfields available for damaged planes to conserve the diminishing number of skilled pilots, many of whom had been lost in air combat over Guadalcanal.

The American planes, especially the fighters, did not have the range to reach Rabaul and return to U.S. bases. Recognizing this logistical advantage, Yamamoto intended to reinvigorate his air attacks on Guadalcanal from bases on Rabaul after the Japanese evacuation from Guadalcanal in early February 1943.

Yamamoto sorely wanted to regain the strategic initiative and, perhaps, win one additional major victory since the lightning campaign of 1941-1942. Such a decisive Japanese victory might yet compel the Allies to seek a negotiated peace and allow the Japanese to keep their new Pacific empire.

Ironically, on April 18, 1943, during a morale-boosting trip to the Northern Solomons, Yamamoto's personal, twin-engined, Mitsubishi G4M "Betty" bomber was shot down by Guadalcanal-based American Lockheed P-38 Lightning fighters over the southern tip of Bougainville. Admiral Mineichi Koga took over the Combined Fleet after Yamamoto's death.

Halsey continued his Central Solomons campaign with a landing on New Georgia on June 30, 1943, but the capture of Munda airfield took until August 5 and precipitated the evacuation of many Japanese units to Kolombangara three days later. The final cleanup of New Georgia lasted until August 27.

Originally Halsey's plan called for the attack against Munda to be followed by the seizure of Vila airfield on Kolombangara, but the Japanese were correctly believed to be established on that island in considerable strength, with estimates of a garrison of nearly 10,000 troops. Halsey did not want another protracted campaign to capture Vila.

The American admiral stated, "The undue length of the Munda operation and our casualties made me wary of another slugging match, but I didn't know how to avoid it."

His staff came up with a new route to Bougainville bypassing Kolombangara and landing at Vella Lavella, the northernmost island in the New Georgia group. On August 15, the U.S Army's 35th Regimental Combat Team landed on Vella Lavella. The 14th New Zealand Brigade arrived the following month to complete the occu-

pation by September 24.

Although there was never any substantial ground combat on Vella Lavella because Japanese ground forces were both limited and in the process of withdrawing, the real struggle for Vella Lavella occurred with naval surface action and incessant aerial attacks on American shipping, which included more than 100 hundred enemy air attacks from August 15 to September 3, 1943.

The loss of New Georgia and the bypassing of Kolombangara somehow produced a reversal of the defeatism the Japanese suffered after the loss of Guadalcanal and Papua during the early winter months of 1943. On September 30, 1943, Imperial Headquarters instructed local Japanese commanders to hold the southeastern front as long as possible. Orders came from Tokyo that indicated that Rabaul had to remain the center of this defense line.

Bougainville was to become the staging area for renewed attacks to the south and east. As the troops from Kolombangara and the other Central Solomon islands were brought back to safer Japanese areas, they were concentrated on Bougainville. After the loss of Guadalcanal and New Georgia and the evacuation of Kolombangara, Bougainville was deemed the best option to accomplish the two goals of protecting Rabaul and serving as an eventual springboard to strike southeastward again.

Also, the continued possession of Bougainville was to provide the leaders in Tokyo the necessary time for the IJA to supply and execute land offensives in China and through Burma's western boundary into India. Victories in these operations might derail Allied war plans in the Pacific Theater.

American tactical planning for the Bougainville assault began in July 1943, when Halsey assigned the I Amphibious Corps Headquarters, under U.S. Marine Maj. Gen. Alexander Vandegrift (after the unexpected death in a freak fall of Maj. Gen. Charles Barrett) to command the ground forces.

MacArthur wanted Halsey's aircraft established within fighter range of Rabaul in time to assist with the neutralization of that major Japanese base as well as to cover the SWPA's invasion of Cape Gloucester on the southern end of New Britain, which was planned between December 25, 1943, and January 1, 1944.

Marines from Battery H, 12th Marine Artillery Regiment, 3rd Marine Division load a 75mm pack howitzer in preparation for a fire mission just inland off Blue Beach 2.

MacArthur deemed it strategically necessary for Halsey's South Pacific forces to establish themselves on the mainland of Bougainville on November 1, 1943. MacArthur placed the tactical location for Bougainville's invasion squarely in Halsey's hands. The Americans realized that the IJA forces on Bougainville were far more formidable than on Guadalcanal, and this produced a change in Halsey's plans for the move northward, even as the fighting was continuing on New Georgia in the Central Solomons.

Admiral Halsey and his South Pacific Force staff's strategic outlook and tactical planning had to evolve to establish a beachhead on Bougainville without a bloodbath. Largely due to the combat exhaustion of the U.S. Army's 25th Infantry Division on New Georgia and the commitment of the 2nd Marine Division to Nimitz's Central Pacific offensive, Halsey's South Pacific Force was left with only the unblooded 3rd Marine Division and the Army's 37th Infantry Division, the latter largely an Ohio National Guard unit that had also seen action on New Georgia.

Halsey's requirement for a beachhead was to assault a lightly defended area to avoid heavy casualties. Then he needed to possess enough territory to quickly establish a strong perimeter to protect the construction of a coastal fighter airfield since continuous carrier-based air cover would not be available indefinitely to maintain an umbrella over the invasion site. As soon as possible a fighter and medium bomber strip would be built farther inland within a well-defended American perimeter for aircraft there to participate in Operation Cartwheel. The Kieta area on Bougainville's east coast had the requisite flat plains for airfields as well as good harbors for Allied transports.

However, this locale was near Japanese-occupied Choiseul, which meant that this large Solomon island, too, would have to be secured in advance. Disadvantages to

other beaches on Bougainville's east coast were their proximity to strong Japanese garrisons concentrated on the island's southern tip at Buin and the poor soil composition for airfield construction.

An alternative site was Cape Torokina in Empress Augusta Bay on Bougainville's west coast. It was closer to Rabaul than Kieta, and its approach was unimpeded by adjacent enemy-held islands or strong garrisons. A five-mile strip of beach there was deemed suitable for a landing with nearby soil conditions favorable for building airfields.

Given the primitive jungle trails and the harsh mountainous terrain of the Emperor and Crown Prince mountain ranges, the Cape Torokina area was almost isolated from the strong Japanese garrisons in northern and southern Bougainville. Halsey's staff calculated that it would take the Japanese three to four months to bring enough heavy artillery over the mountains to launch counterattacks once the American invasion force was ashore at Empress Augusta Bay.

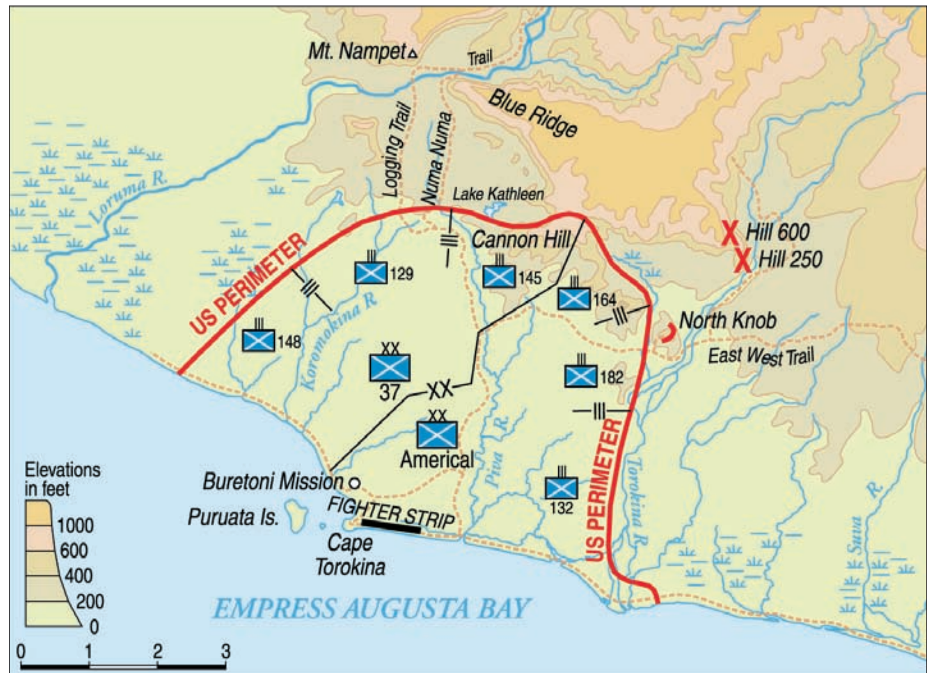
On the down side, the bay's inshore waters were poorly charted and treacherous, with the five-mile strip of beach largely unprotected from monsoons. Also, the coastline was swampy while the anchorage was unsuitable for large vessels. Finally, the Torokina area was no farther than 65 miles from any of the Japanese air bases on Bougainville and only 215 miles from Rabaul's airdromes to the northwest.

The staff of the IJA's 17th Army had evaluated the beach areas on Bougainville as potential landing sites for an Allied amphibious invasion and regarded the Cape Torokina locale at Empress Augusta Bay as most unlikely.

Japanese commanders stationed only one company of 270 men from the 2nd Battalion, 23rd IJA Infantry Regiment (Colonel Hamanoue, regimental commander) with a single 75mm artillery piece there as an outpost.

Lieutenant General Masatane Kanda, commander of the IJA 6th Infantry Division on Bougainville, believed that the Allies would land southeast of Cape Torokina where he had about 2,500 troops. General Hitoshi Imamura, stationed at Rabaul, believed that if Halsey were to land at Cape Torokina it would be only a short-lived amphibious assault.

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



After the 3rd Marine Division was pulled out in preparation for the invasion of Guam, the U.S. Army's 23rd (Americal) Division arrived to bolster the 37th Infantry Division.

Imamura believed that the Buka Island area, just north of Bougainville, was the main invasion site for Halsey's South Pacific Force and reinforced Bougainville's northern tip rather than committing his substantial number of troops to the western coast. Later, despite the South Pacific Force's continued presence at Cape Torokina after Halsey's invasion there, Imamura inexplicably continued to build up the defenses at Buin.

On September 22, 1943, Halsey canceled all his earlier invasion plans and assigned the units to constitute Bougainville's invasion force. The 14,000 men of the newly formed 3rd Marine Division, reinforced by the 2nd and 3rd Raider Battalions and the 3rd Defense Battalion, would lead the assault at Empress Augusta Bay.

In sharp contrast to the assault on New Georgia in the Central Solomons, Halsey would send his troops ashore at the weakly held Cape Torokina, despite having beach and terrain conditions that the admiral pronounced as "worse than anything ever encountered in the South Pacific."

Halsey informed MacArthur of his landing site at Cape Torokina on October 1 with an invasion via Empress Augusta Bay set for November 1.

On October 27, 1943, Choiseul, southeast of Bougainville and north of Vella Lavella, was attacked by the 2nd Parachute Battalion of the 1st Marine Parachute Regiment, commanded by Lt. Col. Victor H. Krulak, as a feint to confuse the Japanese about Halsey's real intention.

The Treasury Islands, lying directly south of both Bougainville and the Shortland Islands, would also need to be occupied by Halsey's South Pacific Force to serve as advance bases for small craft, including PT boats.

The Treasuries were defended by only a few hundred Japanese, and they were invaded by roughly 4,000 men of the 8th New Zealand Brigade Group on October 27. However, the Allied commanders knew that the Japanese had about 25,000 troops stationed in the Buin-Shortland Islands area at the southern end of Bougainville with the necessary barges to transport reinforcements to the Treasuries, so surprise and the coincident

raid on Choiseul would be vital to keeping the Japanese defenders confused as to where to commit their reserves.

The Treasury Islands were successfully occupied by the Allies by the end of the invasion's first day, with the small Japanese garrison being pushed into the jungle. By now having the Treasury Islands along with previously occupied Vella Lavella, Halsey would have the advance bases to support his Bougainville invasion and airfield construction, avoiding the supply crisis that he had experienced on Guadalcanal.

The first American planes landed at Vella Lavella on September 24, providing Halsey with another nearby airstrip to support his Torokina beachhead. By mid-October, the American airfield on Vella Lavella could accommodate almost 100 aircraft.

ABOVE: Seabees lay steel mats during the construction of a new bomber airfield on Bougainville, December 1943. BELOW: The Torokina fighter airstrip on Bougainville, one of the main objectives of the March 1944 Japanese counterattack. Note the Allied shipping in Empress Augusta Bay.

Both: Naval History and Heritage Command

The Japanese high command in Tokyo remained puzzled by these Allied diversions, but the island assaults seemed to be producing the desired effect for Halsey's staff, since Admiral Koga did not take any decisive action and remained highly suspicious of an immediate invasion of New Britain—more so than Bougainville.

According to Marine General Roy Geiger, who would take over the IMAC leadership from Vandegrift on Bougainville on November 9, the Treasury Islands occupation and the Choiseul raid were important preliminary operations to landing on Bougainville's western coast, serving as "a series of short right jabs to throw the enemy off balance and to conceal the real power of our left hook to his belly at Empress Augusta Bay."

Rear Admiral Theodore S. Wilkinson was named Commander, Bougainville Amphibious Force, Task Force 31. Along with Vandegrift—and then Geiger—serving as Commanding General, IMAC, these experienced leaders would help overcome the intelligence deficiencies that faced the 3rd Marine Division (Reinforced), under Maj. Gen. Allen Turnage.

According to the division's history, "Virtually nothing was known of the hydrography, terrain conditions inland from selected beaches, and location of enemy defenses in the immediate area," largely due to the delayed selection of the Cape Torokina amphibious landing site.

Although Vandegrift had obtained the requisite transport to land his 14,000 Marines, he was still anxious that there might be more than the 300 Japanese troops that were suspected to be in the area.

Followup convoys, after the initial landings at Torokina on November 1, 1943, would deliver additional supplies as well as the 21st Marines, the 1st Marine Parachute Regiment, and the 37th Infantry Division, the latter under the command of Maj. Gen. Robert S. Beightler, comprising the 129th, 145th, and 148th Infantry Regiments.

Vandegrift's anxiety was soon dispelled

as his earlier intelligence estimates were confirmed that only one company of the IJA 23rd Infantry Regiment of Maj. Masatane Kanda's 6th Division would be defending the landing site. However, imbued with Tokyo's wishes to defend every spot tenaciously now, the opposition, although light, would mount a strong defense at Torokina.

A preliminary naval bombardment of Cape Torokina and strafing of the landing beaches by Navy dive bombers from Munda, New Georgia, began at 6 AM on November 1, but drew no Japanese response.

Then, assault waves of 3rd Division Marines—the 9th Marines on the left and the 3rd Marines on the right—crossed their narrow beaches of only 30-50 yards in depth to enter Bougainville's adjacent dense jungle. The 2nd Raider Battalion was situated between battalions of the 3rd Marine Regiment close to Cape Torokina.

Elements of the 3rd Raider Battalion seized Puruata Island, which was situated in Empress Augusta Bay to the northwest of Cape Torokina and adjacent to tiny Torokina Island in the bay to the east. The landing beaches were roughly 8,000 yards long and extended from Cape Torokina to just west of the Koromokina Lagoon, which was fed by a similarly named river.

Although the Marines did not encounter strong Japanese forces, heavy surf as well as a high beach mitigated proper anchoring of many of the 9th Marines' landing craft on the western, or left flank, beaches, forcing many Marines to wade ashore in deep water to the far left of their assigned assault beaches.

With more than 80 LCVPs (Landing Craft Vehicle, Personnel) and LCMs (Landing Craft, Mechanized) disabled, Vandegrift, the IMAC commander, halted further landings along the 9th Marine beaches.

However, to the far right of the assault beaches the 1st Battalion, 3rd Marines ran into at least 25 entrenched Japanese positions on Cape Torokina, which were only minimally damaged by the preceding naval bombardment.

A 75mm artillery piece, protected by pillboxes and infantry rifle pits on the northern face of the cape enfiladed the amphibious assault of the 1st Battalion, 3rd Marines and the 2nd Raider Battalion at a range of only 500 yards.

This entrenched 75mm gun hit 14 landing craft, of which four sank, and disrupted the proper landing sites of the battalions' companies and headquarters. The 2nd and 3rd Battalions, 3rd Marines made easier landings on their beaches since there were no Japanese

When Owens, too, emerged from the bunker, he collapsed and died from his wounds. The bunker had an abundance of high-explosive ammunition that would have been fired at the beach and landing craft had Owens not wiped out most of the crew. OWENS RECEIVED THE MEDAL OF HONOR POSTHUMOUSLY FOR HIS BRAVERY AND SACRIFICE.

fortifications; the few enemy troops there fled into the jungle after only token resistance.

Sergeant Robert A. Owens, observing the devastating effect that the 75mm gun was having on the beach and approaching landing craft, along with his squad from A Company, 1st Battalion, 3rd Marines, attacked the gun position situated in a palm log bunker reinforced with sand-filled fuel drums.

Although other members of his squad at the base of the hill above the landing area were being felled by sniper fire, Owens, with four men in support, ran uphill to storm the bunker singlehandedly, despite being hit by Japanese snipers. After reaching the bunker's gun port, Owens crawled through the aperture firing his Thompson submachine gun, killing several of the artillery crew. Escaping enemy troops exiting through the rear of the bunker were killed by other Marines.

When Owens, too, emerged from the bunker, he collapsed and died from his wounds. The bunker had an abundance of high-explosive ammunition that would have been fired at the beach and landing craft had Owens not wiped out most of the crew. Owens received the Medal of Honor posthumously for his bravery and sacrifice.

The other pillboxes were all destroyed by the afternoon by similar assaults that enabled other Marines to either force hand grenades down the ventilation shafts or take the structures from the rear. In the communicating trenches between the pillboxes, Marines resorted to hand-to-hand combat with the Japanese 23rd Infantry Regiment defenders.

More than half the 270 Japanese infantrymen from this regiment eventually fled into the jungle. The Marines suffered 180 killed and wounded. Puruata and Torokina Islands were taken by the 3rd Raider Battalion with minimal casualties. A few additional days were needed to root out snipers.

The battle for the narrow beachhead had ended, but combat along the jungle perimeter now began with G Company, 9th Marines situated well to the south of the Laruma River to oppose an enemy movement from the north while M Company, 3rd Raider Battalion, attached to the 2nd Raider Battalion for the main landing, took up positions on the Mission Trail should the Japanese approach from the south.

Japanese air attacks from Rabaul commenced immediately after the landings started, which briefly suspended operations, as American fighters from Vella Lavella and Munda engaged the Aichi D3A Val dive bombers and Mitsubishi A6M Zero fighter escorts numbering about 120 planes that day.

By the time November 1 ended, the 75mm and 105mm howitzers of the 12th Marines were hauled through Bougainville's muck into the perimeter, while the 90mm antiaircraft guns of the 3rd Marine Defense Battalion dug in and gave the 14,000 Marines ashore some

added firepower. Within days, U.S. Navy "Seabees" began constructing rudimentary roadways and started work on a fighter strip at Cape Torokina. The shooting stopped.

Within a week, Marine patrolling could find no significant Japanese formations within two miles of the temporary perimeter; the positions of the 3rd and 9th Marines were reversed by General Turnage. The Raiders from Puruata and Torokina Islands were held in reserve except for one company placed at a roadblock along the Piva Trail.

Elements of the 21st Marines arrived in the perimeter on November 6, while the 148th Infantry Regiment, 37th Division landed on November 9. Within two weeks, the 37th Division's artillery along with its 129th and 145th Regiments would also land.

The Japanese had been confused about the site of Bougainville's invasion and also underestimated the strength of the lodgement, as they had previously done at Guadalcanal. The IJA 17th Army Headquarters, led by bespectacled Lt. Gen. Harukichi Hyakutake, had given up the defensive initiative at Torokina, believing that the major American landing would still occur at Buka in the north or Buin on the island's southern tip.

Hyakutake received elements of the 17th IJA Division's 53rd and 54th Infantry Regiments from Rabaul, which landed on Bougainville on November 7, to engage the left of the Marine perimeter to force commitment of Marine reserves while the stronger attack from Buin would be hurled at the Piva Trail roadblock on the right of the perimeter.

The Japanese landings were scattered by the heavy surf to the north of the perimeter. Rather than waiting to consolidate their forces, the Japanese chose to immediately attack K Company, 3rd Battalion, 9th Marines near the Laruma River. This company, in turn, was ordered to counterattack through deep swamp, which compelled the enemy to go on the defensive just west of the Koromokina River.

The attacking K Company Marines had exhausted themselves trying to oust the Japanese from their impromptu defensive positions and were relieved by company-sized elements of the 1st Battalion, 3rd Marines supported by tanks and 37mm antitank pieces, which destroyed some of the enemy emplacements.

The next day, November 8, commenced with an attack by the 1st Battalion, 21st Marines supported by the 12th Marines artillery and a combined mortar and tank attack by the 1st Battalion, 3rd Marines. Only limited Japanese opposition was encountered, and American airstrikes near the Laruma River's mouth added to about 300 enemy killed during the Battle of the Koromokina, while the Marines suffered more than 45 killed and wounded.

A Japanese thrust had also been anticipated from the south in the vicinity of the Piva Trail, where elements of the 2nd Raider Battalion blocked the track.

Battalion-sized formations of the IJA 23rd Infantry Regiment, 6th Division from Buin attacked on November 7-8. Led by Maj. Gen. Shun Iwasa, a Japanese frontal attack was launched but was halted by the Marine Raiders supported by the mortarmen of the 9th Marines.

General Turnage, still in need of expanding his perimeter to the south, sent in the 3rd Raider Battalion along both the Piva and Numa Numa Trails on the morning of November 9. A stalemate developed for several hours until, after a failed Japanese envelopment, the enemy retreated through

Sunlight streams through the jungle canopy as soldiers of the 129th Infantry, 37th Division, supported by a Sherman tank, battle Japanese infiltrators on Bougainville, March 16, 1944.

National Archives

Piva Village, which was eventually taken that day by the 1st and 2nd Battalions, 9th Marines.

In addition, the Marines were now at the junctions of the Piva and Numa Numa Trails as well as the East-West and Numa Numa Trails. Control of these crossroads would enable the Marines to begin building airfields while keeping the Japanese outside the perimeter. This combat cost the Marines just over 50 killed and wounded, while more than 500 dead Japanese were found.

On November 13, 1943, the 2nd Battalion, 21st Marines moved beyond the crossroads to set up an outpost. Proper reconnaissance was not performed by the advancing Marines, who ran into a well-armed, reinforced, company-sized enemy detachment in a coconut grove with strong defensive fortifications. Due to the terrain, the Marine battalion's companies lost contact with one another and with battalion headquarters.

Despite Marine dive bomber and artillery bombardment of the coconut grove the next morning, the Japanese were able to maintain their positions. Supported by M3 light tanks of the 3rd Tank Battalion, two Marine companies advanced in a frontal assault; however, accurate Japanese antitank fire ambushed the Marines and disrupted the attack.

By the end of the day, the Japanese retreated eastward on the East-West Trail. More than 40 Japanese bodies were found among some shattered fortifications; however, the Marines suffered about 60 casualties.

The 3rd Battalion, 21st Marines, along with the 148th and 129th Infantry Regiments, 37th Division, expanded the perimeter by about 1,000 to 1,500 yards along the center and left while the swamp at the right side was maintained by the 9th Marines. Unfortunately, Japanese air attacks caused significant casualties among reinforcements offshore as well as within the perimeter on November 17.

Marine General Geiger, now in command of IMAC, wanted to expand the perimeter further by clearing enemy road-

ABOVE: In March 1944, African American soldiers of the Army's 93rd Infantry Division fought alongside the 37th Infantry Division. Here black soldiers from Company K, 25th Infantry Regiment fire on enemy troops in the rain-slicked jungle. BELOW: Shirtless 93rd Infantry Division soldiers carry a wounded buddy to an aid station on Hill 250 while under intense enemy fire, April 6, 1944.

National Archives

blocks on the Numa Numa Trail paralleling the Piva River's West Branch and the East-West Trail where it comes into proximity with the former trail and a tributary of the Piva River's East Branch. Geiger also wanted to seize some of the high ground north-east of the Torokina beaches. These attacks on the trails' roadblocks were successfully launched by the 2nd and 3rd Battalions, 3rd Marines on November 19-20.

Fierce fighting ensued when a 2nd Battalion company was ordered to seize a 400 to 500 foot ridge just north of the East-West Trail overlooking the Piva River branches on

November 21, with the Japanese trying to retake the ridge. After three days of Japanese suicide charges, the ridge remained in the 3rd Marines' hands, extending the perimeter to the northeast.

Also on November 21, other Marine units crossed the Piva River and headed east for roughly 1,000 yards until they ran into an impenetrable swamp. The 129th Regiment, moving on the far left of the perimeter, was able to advance 1,000 yards to the northwest with no opposition.

Three days later, an extensive preliminary Marine and Army artillery and mortar barrage was unleashed to allow the 3rd Marines to advance in the direction of Eagle Creek and the Torokina River to the east of the Piva River branches. Here the 3rd Marines overcame determined Japanese opposition in defensive fortifications.

The Marines advanced almost a mile beyond their intended objective before bogging down in swampland. During this combat, the Marines incurred more than 100 casualties, while the Japanese left tenfold more dead on the shell-pocked battlefield.

The mission to seize Torokina gained momentum on November 26 when construction began on a bomber airfield, known as Piva Uncle, and a second fighter strip, Piva Yoke, both of which enabled aircraft flying from the Central Solomon airfields to stage their missions to neutralize Rabaul. The coastal fighter airstrip, which the Seabees began constructing on November 10, was finished on December 10.

To protect the airfields from shelling, other topographic features that required seizure were Hill 1000, just to the north of the East-West Trail and Hills 500 and 600 astride Eagle Creek. These were occupied on November 27 and December 6, respectively.

The fighting was not yet finished. On December 7, two years after Pearl Harbor, elements of the Marines' 1st Parachute Regiment slowly attempted to occupy a spur adjoining Hill 1000, only to be beaten back by a reinforced company from the Japanese 23rd Infantry Regiment.

After 11 days of savage struggle for what would become known as "Hellzapoppin Ridge," elements of the 21st Marines finally took this slope. On December 21, other elements of the 21st Marines drove the enemy off Hill 600A, which was also near the Torokina River. But the foe doggedly counterattacked, necessitating three more days of hard combat before the Japanese were finally pushed off the hill and into the jungle.

The Americans' actions to secure the limited heights above Bougainville's jungle floor ended the combat mission for the Marines on Bougainville, which, with the support of the 37th Infantry Division, had penetrated this northern Solomon island's jungle more than 22,000 yards from the narrow beaches stormed more than seven weeks earlier.

General Geiger's IMAC command was replaced by Maj. Gen. Oscar W. Griswold, now commanding the U.S. Army's XIVth Corps. The Americal (23rd) Division, under the command of Maj. Gen. John R. Hodge, replaced most of the 3rd Marine Division, the latter unit departing Bougainville on Christmas Day after having suffered more than 400 killed and 1,400 wounded.

The 9th and 21st Marines left the island on December 28, 1943, and January 9, 1944, respectively.

Hyakutake's forces had 2,500 dead accounted for on the battlefield; only 25 of the Japanese enemy had been captured—a testament to the suicidal tenacity of the Japanese Bushido code.

General Hyakutake underestimated the strength of the opposing American forces, believing that there were only 20,000 U.S. Army troops at Torokina. Before his defeat, he had planned to unleash an all-out counterattack on the U.S. Army XIVth Corps in early March 1944—primarily with the IJA 6th Division and other elements of the 17th Army.

Hyakutake did amass some 15,000-19,000 infantrymen with supporting artillery; the latter included 75mm pack howitzers and 105mm and 150mm guns, which were hauled onto ridges dominating the perimeter. However, he chose to retain the remaining 18,000 troops of the 17th Army to defend his bases at Buka and Buin.

The term "perimeter" for the XIV Corps' 23,000-yard defensive zone underestimates how it bristled with mortar pits, pillboxes, trenches, and rifle pits with clear fields of fire and reserve positions in depth. The XIV Corps' array of artillery was also impressive, with preregistered 75mm pack howitzer companies along with 105mm and 155mm howitzer battalions and 150mm "Long Tom" cannons and 90mm antiaircraft batteries to rain high-explosive shells on Japanese areas.

From the perimeter's left, south of the Laruma River, to its right, just astride the Torokina River, the XIV Corps' regiments were arrayed as follows: 148th, 129th, and 145th of the 37th Division moving onto the 164th, 182nd, and 132nd of the Americal Division. The fighter strip was on the beach at Cape Torokina within the Americal Division's zone, while Piva Yoke and Piva Uncle were in the 37th Division's half.

For his March 7 counterattack, Lt. Gen. Kanda, commander of the 12,000-man 6th Division, decided to organize his troops into three separate units, each one named for its commander—Iwasa, Muda, and Magata. The Japanese infantrymen took into battle with them just two weeks of rations since it was believed that the Americans would be defeated within that time frame.

After Japanese infiltrators began cutting the bands of American concertina wire on March 7, 1944, a massive enemy artillery bombardment erupted at dawn the following day targeting the Piva airfields and necessitating evacuation of the Allied aircraft to Munda on New Georgia. The Americans responded with intense and accurate counter battery fire on the Japanese howitzer positions.

Japanese infantry under Maj. Gen. Shun Iwasa (the Iwasa Unit) began the attack first after midnight on March 9, heading southward toward the center of the perimeter to scale the steep slopes of Hill 700. This force numbered more than 4,000 troops, elements of the 23rd and 13th Infantry Regiments. Its mission, after

penetrating the 145th Infantry Regiment's area, was to seize the two airfields, Piva Yoke and Piva Uncle. Small units of Japanese infantry were able to blast through the wire with bangalore torpedoes, seizing several American pillboxes during the early morning hours and creating a 150-yard-wide penetration to which the 37th Division's commanding general, Beightler, rapidly responded.

Companies from the division's reserve, the 1st Battalion, 145th Infantry Regiment, eventually reoccupied most of the pillboxes. On March 10, after bitter combat, further American counterattacks by the 1st and 2nd Battalions, 145th Infantry Regiment reduced the enemy salient considerably.

As dawn broke on March 11, Iwasa launched a futile, hour-long, battalion-sized banzai charge up Hill 700's steep slope. It suffered horrific casualties largely due to 37mm canister fire into their massed formation. Iwasa withdrew his battered force two miles from the battlefield on March 12, after the 2nd Battalion, 148th Infantry Regiment eliminated the entire enemy salient and recovered information on Japanese troop dispositions and plans for the entire counteroffensive from the corpse of a Japanese officer.

On March 10, Colonel Toyoharei Muda's unit of more than 1,300 infantrymen from the remainder of the 13th Infantry Regiment, plus engineers, was assigned to attack Hill 260 in front of the American 182nd Infantry Regiment. The Japanese commanders had planned that once the XIV Corps perimeter was penetrated the Muda Unit was to serve as the larger Iwasa Unit's left flank protection.

The Japanese sent two companies of their 13th Infantry Regiment onto the South Knob of the hill, capturing an observation post—a 150-foot banyan tree—from 80 Americans of an artillery observation unit. The GIs fled to the North Knob.

For two days, elements of the 182nd Infantry Regiment tried to regain the South Knob, but to no avail. On March 12, called "Bloody Sunday" by the Americal Division, elements of the 182nd Infantry unsuccessfully assaulted the Japanese positions on the South Knob from the west and northwest.

Three days later, Griswold, realizing that the enemy could not threaten his perimeter in their current strength, broke off the attacks. The banyan tree observation post finally fell to American artillery fire on March 17.

Hyakutake's complex plan envisioned that XIV Corps would commit its reserves to perimeter penetrations by both the Iwasa and Muda Units on March 9 and 10, respectively. However, with foreknowledge of the Japanese plan, Beightler avoided depletion of his troop strength from the next intended Japanese attack point on the American perimeter. Awareness of the Japanese artillery dispositions from the captured documents

Japanese infiltrators made life hell for the Americans. Here, four members of the 37th Infantry Division, one even smiling for the photographer, rest on the ground while two of their buddies take aim at a perceived threat.

Both: National Archives

A gunner pulls the lanyard and fires his 75mm pack howitzer through the trees. Smoke from an artillery strike is visible rising from the crest of Hill 260 in the distance.

greatly aided the accuracy of XIV Corps' own artillery fire.

At dawn on March 12, the 4,300-man Magata Unit, named after its commander Colonel Isashi Magata, would attack. Composed mostly of infantrymen from the reinforced IJA 45th Infantry Regiment and supported by artillery and mortar barrages, the Magata Unit would be hurled down a logging trail that paralleled the Numa Numa Trail. It would hit the low ground in the 129th Infantry Regiment's sector of the perimeter west of Hill 700.

Hyakutake's plan then called for the convergence of the Iwasa and Magata Units, after their respective breakthroughs, to capture the two Piva airfields. Then, all three units were to combine and drive south to the coastal fighter strip.

The Magata Unit attacked along a 100-yard front against the 2nd Battalion, 129th Infantry Regiment. The Japanese broke through an initial defense line and took some American pillboxes before a counterattack by C and G Companies of the 1st Battalion, 129th, acting as a reserve, reclaimed a few of the positions and stopped another enemy assault later that day.

At dawn on March 13, the Japanese struck again, but Beightler personally responded with Sherman tanks from XIV Corps reserve and, along with his infantry, restored his original lines. Predawn Japanese attacks on both March 15 and March 17 made modest inroads into the 37th Division's perimeter but were inconclusive.

After a four-day lull in Japanese assaults from March 18-22, Magata put together a force of almost 5,000 infantrymen by amalgamating elements of the Iwasa and Muda Units to replace his own 45th Regiment's casualties.

Mugata then mounted an attack late on March 23 against the 129th Infantry Regiment's perimeter sector where Cox Creek abuts it. The Americans were again forewarned after intercepting a wireless communication from 17th Army Headquarters to Tokyo pinpointing the time and place of the attack.

After a small Japanese penetration near the 2nd Battalion, 129th Infantry Regiment's command post, Beightler counterattacked on the morning of March 24 with infantry, tanks, and antitank guns. By noon, the enemy salient was reduced. As the Japanese retreated, XIV Corps artillery rained down almost 15,000 rounds on enemy troop concentrations.

The Japanese counteroffensive was defeated. Hyakutake received permission from General Hitoshi Imamura, commanding general, IJA 8th Area Army, to withdraw, and so the remnants of his army began their retreat on March 28, 1944. The Iwasa and Muda Units withdrew south to Buin, while Magata's 1,500 survivors went north via the Numa Numa Trail.

Battlefield estimates listed the Japanese casualties at more than 8,500 killed and wounded during the 19-day enemy counteroffensive.

As a testimony to the Americans' fortified positions, interior lines, and skilled direction of reserves, tanks, and artillery, the dead (263) among the XIV Corps casualties were much fewer than the enemy's.

Without the National Guardsmen of the 37th and Americal Divisions in this largely forgotten northern Solomon conflict, Admiral Morison wrote, "Kanda's [6th IJA Division] forces could have captured the Perimeter and the Torokina airdrome, wiping out the gains of the Bougainville campaign and raising new hopes at Rabaul."

The once mighty 17th Army would be isolated and have to resort to planting crops and gardens for subsistence, while the American forces, within a slightly enlarged perimeter, simply patrolled aggressively and contained them in a "vast jungle prison camp."

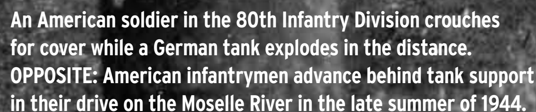
Additionally, three airfields were constructed within the perimeter, and these bases eventually contributed mightily to Operation Cartwheel's removal of Rabaul as a strategic factor in future operations in the South Pacific.

Admiral Halsey, in saluting his forces, stated, "You have literally succeeded in setting up and opening for business a shop in the Japs' front yard."

As time passed, the battles for Bougainville unfortunately receded in memory. But Bougainville enabled a strong perimeter to be established and courageously defended by both Marines and soldiers from suicidal Japanese infantry assaults. □

AMERICAN DRIVE TO THE MOSELLE

In September 1944, the American Third Army in France mounted a drive to bridge the Moselle River at Dieulouard and cut the German forces in two.



An American soldier in the 80th Infantry Division crouches for cover while a German tank explodes in the distance. OPPOSITE: American infantrymen advance behind tank support in their drive on the Moselle River in the late summer of 1944.

BY ALLYN VANNOY

ON SEPTEMBER 5, 1944, AMERICAN intelligence estimates of German forces in the sector of the 80th Infantry Division, between Nancy and Metz in northeastern France, described scattered units and limited defenses along the east bank of the Moselle River. Elements of the 3rd and 15th Panzergrenadier Divisions were

All photos: National Archives

reported to be withdrawing through the area as German Army Group G attempted to gather Panzer units behind the front.

American forces were able to reach the Moselle with little opposition. However, the first crossing attempt by the 80th Division at the village of Pont-á-Mousson, halfway between Nancy and Metz, failed due to the lack of air or artillery support and stronger-than-anticipated German defenses. The next day, another attempt near the village of Pagny was made simultaneous with a crossing effort at the village of Pont-á-Mousson, but the current was too swift and German artillery fire was too accurate. Both attempts failed to secure bridgeheads.

After these failed crossings, the 80th Division withdrew a few miles to the west and commenced planning another effort, the date changing several times in order to allow for better reconnaissance of pos-

sible crossing sites. Meanwhile, on September 7, the German XIII Infantry Corps, under Lt. Gen. Hermann Priess, was assigned the Metz-Nancy sector. Forces opposing the 80th included the 3rd Panzergrenadier Division and the 92nd Luftwaffe Field Regiment.

Seizure of a foothold across the Moselle south of Nancy by the U.S. 4th Armored Division on September 11 dictated a follow-up effort by the 80th Division to cross the river north of the city and initiate a left hook as part of XII Corps's plan of concentric attack. Maj. Gen. Manton S. Eddy, XII Corps commander, gave orders for the 80th to carry out a crossing near the town of Dieulouard and open a bridgehead for Combat Command A (CCA) of the 4th Armored Division to advance into the rear of German forces and create a pocket around Nancy.

After the previous failures, Maj. Gen. Horace L. McBride, 80th Division commander, laid plans for coordinated operations. McBride was a tall, slender man who looked like a farmer. He had a fiery temper and was not well liked by his men. In the new plan, the 317th Infantry Regiment, under Colonel A. Donald Cameron, would be responsible for seizing the river crossing at the industrial river town and securing a hold on the enemy's eastern bank. Its initial objective was the series of hills and ridges immediately east of Dieulouard. Cameron was a husky, broad-faced man who was calm under fire. He had seen service in China and in Siberia at the close of World War I, and he had remained in the Army during the interwar years, helping to reactivate and train the 80th Division at the start of World War II.

Once elements of the 317th were across, two battalions of the 318th Infantry Regiment, under Colonel Harry D. McHugh, were to follow, wheel north, and capture the area's dominant elevation, Mousson Hill near Pont-á-Mousson. CCA, 4th Armored, would assemble behind the 80th, cross through the infantry bridgehead and strike hard for Château-Salins, a strategic road and rail center 23 miles east of Nancy. To add weight to the armored drive, the 1st Battalion, 318th Regiment, was given motor assets and attached to CCA. As a result of these detachments, McBride could count on only five of the division's nine infantry battalions for crossing and bridgehead operations. Engineering support was to be provided by the division's engineer unit, the 305th Engineer Combat Battalion, supported by the attachment of the 1117th Engineer Group, which included the 167th and 248th Engineer Battalions.

The German-held ground presented a difficult problem for the Americans. The area was a rolling plain dominated by frequent outcroppings of high hills with scattered clumps of woods and a few tight, deep forests. One of the American officers likened it to West Virginia—steep descents with cuts, dropping off abruptly to the flood plain of the Moselle. The area was dotted with ancient fortifications, providing the German defenders with ready-made strongpoints. Along the west bank of the Moselle, a series of woods screened the American assembly areas north of Dieulouard. But the roads cutting between the forests were under the watchful eyes of the Germans perched on the eastern shore hilltops at Mousson, Geneviève, and la Falaise. Every draw and gully was zeroed in.

The Moselle meandered in the vicinity of Dieulouard as it flowed northward. A crossing would require bridging parallel waterways. Along the western bank of the river was a barge canal, 40 to 50 feet wide and six feet deep. Between the river and the canal was an eight-foot-high dike. Opposite Dieulouard the river split, with the main channel flowing by the town and the eastern branch of the river, the Obrion Canal, forming two arms that wound around a flat island, a little less than 2,000 yards across at its widest point. On the east bank the ground sloped upward gently for 200 yards, then became very steep, varying in grade from 15 to 20 degrees near the villages of Ste. Geneviève and Bezaumont to approximately 30 degrees on Mousson Hill to the north.

The villages of Landremont and Ville-au-Val sat on the southern slope of the Ste. Geneviève Ridge. Landremont, at 200 feet elevation, was situated on an eastward extension of Geneviève Hill, while Ville-au-Val was located on the lower, southern slope of the hill. Falaise Hill, also referred to as la Falaise, dominated the country to the south.

The terrain in the region was generally unfavorable to tank warfare. The steep heights

Third Army engineers complete installing the first section of a pontoon bridge across the Moselle River, allowing for the resupply of American forces assaulting German-held Metz.

American infantrymen in the 317th Regiment, 80th Infantry Division prepare to return fire across the Moselle River at the town of Madieres on September 5, 1944.

and numerous wooded areas channeled armored movement along well-defined avenues; roads were frequently bounded on one side by deeply ditched streams and on the other side by rises too steep for tanks to climb, further limiting deployment and dispersion. The river itself varied in depth from six to eight feet and flowed at approximately six to seven miles per hour. The muddy bottom of the river made fording perilous for vehicles. The average width was 150 feet. The river banks were low but still required grading with bulldozers to make them accessible. There were few fords available for infantry. The heights on the east bank of the Moselle were crowned by remains from historical campaigns. On Mousson Hill lay the vestiges of a medieval church-fortress, near Ste. Geneviève. Celtic earthworks could still be found on the crest, and the ruins of a Roman fort sat atop Mount Toulon.

As with most American infantry divisions, the 80th was provided with several attachments. The 610th Tank Destroyer (TD) Battalion (towed), equipped with "obsolete" 57mm antitank guns, operated in direct support of the 80th. The battalion's three companies were distributed among the infantry regiments. Other attachments included the 702nd Tank Battalion, Lt. Col. Ralph Talbot commanding. The battalion, like the tank destroyers, was parceled out among the regiments. Eight battalions of artillery were assigned to support the crossing—the division's organic 105mm howitzer battalions (313th, 314th, and 905th Field Artillery Battalions) and the 315th Field Artillery with 155mm howitzers. Artillery battalions from XII Corps included the 512th, 974th, 775th, and 176th.

From September 7 to 11, reconnaissance patrols were organized by both engineers and infantry to search out the best bridging and crossing sites. Since tactical surprise was considered vital for the success of the coming attack, patrols were limited. Major James H. Hayes, the 317th's intelligence officer, personally led several such patrols. Cameron also made extensive reconnaissance forays to select sites for the crossing. Lt. Col. L.E. Fisher, executive officer of the 317th Infantry, recalled: "He made me defend every reason I could give for making the crossing at this point. Most of the talking and planning was done on the basis that we could gain tactical surprise with key terrain. We had two objectives: the first, Bezaumont-Ste. Geneviève; the other, la Falaise."

It was decided to use assault boats as well as available river fords for the crossing. The Americans hoped the Germans would consider the Dieulouard area the least likely spot for a crossing since it would entail crossing three separate bodies of water. The island in front of the town would provide protection if the Ger-

mans attempted to cut off the bridgehead. The engineers planned to bridge the barge canal at two places and then span the river at several key crossing points.

The attack was scheduled for 0400 hours, September 12. The 2nd Battalion, 317th Regiment, crossing north of the island, would pass over the floodplain. Once on the eastern bank, it was to push through the village of Loisy, then move to Geneviève Hill and the village of Ste. Geneviève. The 1st Battalion would follow using the same crossing site, then move to the right and secure Hill 382 northeast of the village of Bezaumont. The 3rd Battalion would cross the river south of Dieulouard, transit the island and the far arm of the river, then move right and secure the high ground on la Falaise.

The two battalions of the 318th Infantry, acting as a reserve, were to cross the Moselle after the 317th, occupying positions 500 yards west of Bezaumont and below the western slope of Hill 382. The 318th was to be prepared to extend the bridgehead. Support fire from the west bank was to be provided by massed machine guns emplaced along the edge of the Bois de Cuite, near the northern crossing site. The machine-gun emplacements were well camouflaged and directed by field phones.

The 305th Engineers were responsible for crossing foot elements, the 1117th Engineer Group for the vehicular traffic. Company B, 305th Engineers, was to expedite construction of a foot-bridge over the canal, guide the assault waves of the 2nd Battalion, 317th Division, across the river in assault boats, then follow up by constructing a footbridge over the Moselle. Company A, 305th, minus one platoon, was to guide the 3rd Battalion, 317th, over the canal and across the fords to the island.

Company A, 167th Engineers, was to bridge the canal and river with portable trestle bridges, adequate to carry half-tracks and heavy trucks. These were to be pre-fabricated in bivouac areas, carried to the sites in trucks, and put into place as soon as the area was clear of small-arms fire. Company B, 167th, was to construct a pontoon bridge across the canal and throw the heavy pontoons across the river late on the 12th, after German artillery observers had been pushed off the surrounding hills.

Preliminary to the 80th Division's attack, on the afternoon of September 11, Allied aircraft began a feint at the Pont-á-Mousson area to divert German attention from the intended crossing site. Artillery joined in and continued to shell Pont-á-Mousson during the night. The battalions of the 317th moved out at dusk on the 11th to assembly areas in the Bois de Cuite. Road markers had been placed and guides posted along the route to the river. Blinker lights had also been set at the river fords.

In a drizzling rain, the ambitious crossing operations jumped off at 0400, as the 50 machine guns at the edge of the Bois de Cuite put a curtain of fire over the heads of the assault waves. The 3rd Battalion traversed the island, moving quickly to the Obrion Canal. On the left, at a crossing site about 500 yards north of the island, the 2nd Battalion was hit by mortar fire and briefly disorganized, but the first wave soon reached the Moselle.

At 0430 hours, the artillery battalions laid down their 15-minute preparation, firing two rounds a minute. At the same time, 30 rounds of white phosphorous were placed on the town of Bezaumont, setting the town on fire, in order to act as a guide for the GIs. As the infantry advanced across the river and up to the river road, the barrage was raised. After the initial barrage, 19 more concentrations were fired at preselected targets.

The 3rd Battalion, 317th, forded the Obrion Canal and by 0530 had possession of its first objective, la Côte Pelée, south of Bezaumont. At 0755, the 2nd Battalion, 317th, seized its objective, Geneviève Hill. During the infantry crossing the Germans reacted only with occasional fire from weak outposts on the river. The slow German reaction was also influenced by the drizzling rain, which reduced visibility, and the moving barrage laid down ahead of the attacking infantry, which knocked out communications and dispersed the few local reserves.

By 0830, the 1st Battalion, 317th, commanded by Lt. Col. Sterling S. Burnett, was at its objective in the vicinity of Bezaumont. Sergeant Charlie W. Brown, a squad leader

American forces take shelter from German mortars behind the slope of a hill in northern France in the summer of 1944.

ABOVE: German troops advance relentlessly in France as smoke from a burning building rises in the distance. BELOW: U.S. light machine gunners race across an open field under enemy fire. Much of the fighting was hedgerow by hedgerow following the Allied breakout in Normandy.

with Company A, 305th Engineers, vividly remembered the crossing: "We jumped into some boats that took us across and dumped us out. After a heavy barrage on the hill, we took off across some table top ground toward a road where the Germans were set up in the ditch. We advanced into their fire until we reached a pasture fence about 50 yards from the road, where we came to a complete halt. We were all afraid to get up and get over the fence. I could see the grass getting ripped up on all sides. A man next to me was hit. I could see what we were up against and thought of the engineer side cutters. Grabbing the cutters, I ran down the fence cutting the top two or three strands in front of the infantry. About half way, I threw the pliers to another man and took off across the field like a short John Wayne, the squad right behind me. An infantry officer rallied his men and he was right with us when we overran some Germans in a ditch. A German medic raised up out of the ditch and in the confusion was shot down. A second line of defense started firing from high on the hill. A machine gun was firing from a clump of brush. We had all zeroed in on it as we were still climbing the hill. Suddenly two men dashed out carrying a machine gun. The trailing soldier got hit, and when the other came back to help him, all of our firing stopped like it had been turned off with a switch."

Company G, 317th, dug in to hold Ste. Geneviève with two platoons supported by a machine-gun platoon from Company H. The third platoon of Company G was extended to the south on the forward slope of the hill and tied in with Company F, whose lines extended further south. Company E, in support, was echeloned to the right rear of Company F.

The 2nd Battalion, 318th, under Lt. Col. John C. Golden, crossed the river between 1000 and 1100 hours and moved to a position 1,000 yards northwest of Bezaumont. Company G, led by Captain John B. Kelly, 318th, had been left on the west side of the Moselle, south of Dieulouard, to guard the river, and 2nd Battalion's forces across the river consisted of only two rifle companies and its heavy-weapons company.

Bridging operations had proceeded according to plan. The speed and ease with which the American infantry had advanced during the morning led McBride to order the engineers to begin work to bridge the canal and both river arms with heavy pontoons as soon as possible, rather than waiting for the area to be declared free from artillery threats. By 1500, the 167th Engineers had completed their infantry support bridge over the near arm, putting tank destroyers and trucks loaded with ammunition across to the island. Company A, 557th Heavy Pontoon Battalion, commenced work on the canal bridge at 1000 and completed it in three hours. The company then moved on to work on the heavy pontoon bridge across the near arm of the river, commencing work at 1300 and completing it in five hours. The bridge over the far arm was completed in just four hours, and by 2000 the canal and both arms had been bridged with heavy pontoons. After completing their work, three companies of

engineers set up defensive positions near the bridge sites.

The 318th Regimental Cannon Company had not been included in the initial crossing schedule, but its CO, Captain Frederick H. Lewis, used a bottle of whiskey to persuade the officer directing traffic across the bridges to permit his unit to cross. When an opening occurred in the traffic moving across the bridges, the traffic control officer signaled to Lewis, who had his trucks and towed cannons lined up and ready to move. The column raced down to the bridge and headed across. The company's three ammunition trucks were so heavily loaded that Lewis instructed the drivers to set their throttles and stand on the running boards in case they sank in the river. In this way, they got across with 1,400 rounds—more than three times the unit's basic load.

Lewis directed the column to a position was just south of Bezaumont near the road to Ville-au-Val. The 2nd Battalion, 317th, was to their left front and the 3rd Battalion, 317th, to their right, both occupying high ground. Cannoneers were dispersed for defense with bazookas and .50-caliber machine guns.

At 1600 hours, roadblocks were set up at Ville-au-Val and le Pont de Mons, manned respectively by Companies I and K, 318th. Likewise, Company F, under Captain Frank A. Williams, was sent to man a roadblock north of Loisy, while Company E, commanded by Captain Charles C. Matlick, moved to cover the road east of Bezaumont. Left in reserve at the 2nd Battalion CP were 30 men, along with the CP group, the mortar platoon of the heavy-weapons company, and Company L, just north of the buildings at the east bank crossing site at le Pont de Mons.

The 318th Regimental HQ had moved over the river at approximately 2000. After crossing, the headquarters convoy started north toward Loisy as it grew dark. When it was discovered that the HQ staff should have been headed south to a preselected site, the convoy halted in place and a temporary CP was established at the junction of Ville-au-Val and the river road. The terrible consequences of the misstep would be borne out that night.

ABOVE: Camouflaged German tanks rumble down a French roadway. OPPOSITE: American-built Sherman tanks proved a formidable match for the enemy.

When Company C, 610th TD Battalion, reached the east bank, its platoons were dispersed at various points in the bridgehead. Company A's platoons were directed to support the widely separated roadblocks. At 2230, the 702nd Tank Battalion commenced crossing the river. The battalion had some difficulty due to intermittent German shelling, but did not suffer any losses.

By the time the tanks had crossed into the bridgehead it was dark, and guides from the infantry battalions met each tank platoon as it came off the bridge and led them to preplanned positions.

Company A, 702nd, under 1st Lt. Francis L. McDermott, was parceled out, with one platoon per battalion. The 1st Platoon, led by 1st Lt. James Atkins, moved to an open slope south of Ville-au-Val, where the Shermans were positioned in pairs about 75 yards apart. The 3rd Platoon, under 1st Sgt. William E. Murray, was guided up Hill 382 to a position west of the Ste. Geneviève-Bezaumont, just south of some ruins. Meanwhile, Lieutenant John Croxton's 2nd Platoon took up a position in a patch of woods southwest of Ste. Geneviève, just north of Murray's position. Company B, 702nd, Lieutenant Francis P. Ford commanding, crossed directly after Company A and proceeded a short way up the road to Loisy. Placed in reserve, the company halted in an orchard near the river and set up a defensive perimeter.

From about 1500 hours, the Germans had begun to lay down artillery barrages on American positions at Ste. Geneviève, le Pont de Mons, and Loisy. By 2230, the barrages reached a point of terrific intensity while mortars methodically worked over the reverse slopes. Meanwhile, a considerable furor had erupted at the headquarters of the German First Army when word was received of the American crossing. First Army commander Lt. Gen. Otto von Knobelsdorff dispatched an infantry battalion, reinforced with assault and antitank guns, to Benicourt in the hope of stopping the Americans on the road to Nomeny. He sought permission from General Johannes Blaskowitz, Army Group G, to evacuate Nancy, reasoning that the bridgehead had to be erased, even at the cost of endangering the southern flank of the army. Blaskowitz gave his grudging assent to move three

infantry battalions north from Nancy. At the same time, Knobelsdorff dispatched two battalions of the 17th SS Panzergrenadier Division from Metz in order to reinforce the 3rd Panzergrenadier Division. The 3rd Panzergrenadier may have been the best unit on the West Front at the time. The division was a veteran unit that had been recently transferred from Italy. It had a combat efficiency rating of Kampfwert II, a rating given only to the best German divisions on the front since virtually none could be graded as capable of sustaining an all-out attack—Kampfwert I.

The first warning of an intended attack came at 0130 when Captain Williams, Company F, 318th, manning the roadblock north of Loisy, reported enemy infiltration into his positions and around his right flank. At 0200, Williams reported eight tanks coming toward his position with an infantry force estimated at battalion strength. The roadblock held until 0330, when Williams notified his headquarters that his position was untenable. He was ordered to withdraw and conduct a delaying action.

At 0300 hours, artillery and mortar barrages preceded German infantry as they moved through the positions of the 2nd Battalion, 317th, and enveloped the left platoon of Company B, 317th, led by Captain Robert W. Mudge. At the same time, the 1st Battalion, on the high ground northwest of Landremont, repelled a German attack from the southeast. The main German assault came through Loisy and Ste. Geneviève and included two battalions of the 29th Panzergrenadier Regiment, reinforced with 15 tanks and assault guns. One German column struck from the northeast through Ste. Geneviève and moved southwest; another moved south along the ridge toward Bezaumont. Company G, 317th Infantry, was forced from its positions at Ste. Geneviève, falling back on the 318th. Companies E and F fought a fierce action to hold their positions.

A force estimated at company strength ran into the positions of Company E, 317th, and was shot down at ranges of less than 40 yards. At daybreak, a group of about 45 Germans was trapped between Companies E and F. Twelve were killed by small-arms fire, the remainder surrendered.

At about the same time, elements of Company G, 317th, passed through the positions of the 2nd Battalion, 318th. Some of the retreating soldiers said that they had been attacked by tanks and infantry and that the Germans had overrun their positions. Simultaneously, a report was received that German tanks were coming down the road from Loisy. It was decided to withdraw to a point just forward of le Pont de Mons. Some of the retreating GIs were stopped by the 318th regimental executive officer, Lt. Col. Roy J. Herte, who had decided to build a line along the river road. Captain Charles F. Gaking, S-3 of the 2nd Battalion, 318th, approached Herte to discuss plans. As the two officers were talking, a Mark IV panzer came around a bend in the road from Loisy and opened fire, causing the nearby GIs to take cover in a roadside ditch. Armed only with carbines and pistols, they could do very little. As the panzer came on, a few men surrendered. A second panzer then appeared about 50 yards behind the first, accompanied by infantry. At 0500, the rest of the Americans in the vicinity surrendered, Gaking among them.

While German infantry assaulted the TDs, the panzers attempted to go after the infantry. As soon as gun positions were sighted, the German infantry used flares to blind the American crews and then move around them in order to assault the positions from the flanks and clear a path for the tanks. The panzers, in turn, sprayed any suspicious-looking clump of bushes with fire.

The TD battalion formed two bazooka teams and went forward to provide support. As the panzers came under fire, the Germans swung away to avoid the bazookas, but in so doing they ran into fire from the tank destroyers of the 3rd Platoon, Company C. Five German panzers were destroyed, with bazooka fire accounting for one.

The 702nd Tank Battalion reported three German thrusts coming from the Forêt de Facq into the bridgehead, each consisting of a platoon of tanks or assault guns supported by at least a company of infantry. One was directed through Ste. Geneviève, across the ridge toward the town of Bezaumont. Another was aimed through Ste. Geneviève, downhill to Loisy, then southward to the bridge site. The third came down through Atton, heading south along the river road. The bulk of the American infantry was virtually unsupported on the forward slopes of Geneviève Hill and Hill

382, the tanks and TDs having been positioned on the reverse slope.

At 0515 hours, the CP of 1st Battalion, 317th, approximately 300 yards behind the main line, was attacked by a 12-man German patrol. The patrol was neutralized and all its members were killed or captured. At 0600, a German assault gun moved on the positions of Company C, 317th, commanded by Captain Grant E. Hoover, crushing a 57mm antitank gun before it was knocked out by a three-inch gun of the 610th TD Battalion. Giving no quarter, the Americans shot down the survivors of the assault gun crew as they attempted to escape from their disabled vehicle.

Corporal Martin F. Loughlin, a gunner with the 318th's Cannon Company, described an engagement with a German panzer: "Directly in front or our cannon was a small gully and about 50 feet away a narrow dirt road. East of the dirt road was a fairly steep hill. The shelling had slackened, but there was some mortar fire. I heard someone yell, 'A German tank!' At the top of Geneviève Hill was a German tank, possibly a Panther. It started down the hill toward us. Immediately, small-arms fire opened up. To my left was a battery of 105s. One gun crew ran, with the exception of a buck sergeant. He yelled and cursed for one of them to return as a loader. One did. Meanwhile the tank clattered slowly down the hill unsupported. It was firing antitank shells, which whistled into the trees or ricocheted off the ground. The 105 crew of two, loading and bore sighting, was firing high explosive shells which exploded near some dug-in riflemen. On it came. With mouth agape, just holding my carbine, I watched as the tank attempted to cross a road a scant 70 feet away. As the tank's exposed belly came up over a small ditch there was a tremendous explosion. The tank staggered, shuddered and burst into flames. An unseen, towed 76mm tank destroyer to our right had patiently waited for a belly shot and had nailed the tank. Two of the tank crew got out. One was cut down by a .50-caliber machine gun from the artillery battalion just as he got out of the tank. The other slid off the tank, but was killed by riflemen."

Major James Hayes, the 317th's S-2, and Colonel Cameron went to Dieulouard at about 0600 as the German attack was in full swing. Seeking to cross over to the east bank, they were prevented from doing so by combat engineers manning machine-gun positions along the river. The engineers warned Hayes that everything had been wiped out across the river and that they were prepared to defend to the last man.

Cameron instructed Hayes to take a patrol across the river and establish communications with the 2nd Battalion, 317th. Hayes crossed the river and managed to make his way to Hill 382. Germans seemed to be everywhere. No one knew the exact location of the 2nd Battalion. While attempting to get to Bezaumont, Hayes's patrol came under fire from enemy tanks and so elected to bypass the town, but in doing so came under fire from their own artillery. Hayes recounted: "We started up the hill toward Ste. Geneviève and ran into one of our tanks roaring down the hillside out of control. It was on fire and was one of the most shocking sights we had seen. It almost ran into us as we went up the draw. We pulled up a little onto the hillside and watched it pass, the dead crew hanging out of the turret. It exploded far below."

At daybreak, defensive lines were in the process of being formed at the base of Hill 382. A colonel of the 317th threatened to shoot any infantrymen who continued to fall back. As a result of the confusion caused by the attack, the American units became mixed. Engineers, TDs, tanks, and infantry were thrown together. Communications were disrupted. Officers, regardless of unit or branch, jumped into the fray, taking command of small groups of men as they presented themselves and marshaling them into line to meet the German attack. Majors commanded platoons and captains directed battalions.

Radioman W.A. Rose related events at the 318th CP: "After a heavy artillery barrage, we learned that the Germans had counterattacked. Everything was in a state of confusion, men running back and forth trying to get our vehicles and equipment to safety. We formed a line and attempted to hold back the attack. Unknown to us, a German tank had moved in on our left flank and opened fire at less than fifty yards. We had antitank men, wiremen, radio operators, headquarters personnel. The German tank crew fired several flares, revealing our position, and we were forced to move back. While the third flare was in the air, I was able to see that we were near a road, and also to see the ditch near the road. This I intended to head for when the flare went out. After running several yards in the dark, I dove into the ditch. As I flew through the air, and just a moment before I hit the ditch, I felt a hot stab in my chest. Later, I opened my jacket and discovered that a bullet had gone through the pocket on the left side of my shirt, right over my heart, cutting letters, pictures, pay book, but had not penetrated the skin."

The Germans herded together the prisoners from the 318th HQ and Company F, captured along the road from Loisy, and forced them to follow their tanks in the direction of the attack. As the German columns converged on the bridge site, they ran headlong into the tanks of Company B, 702nd Tank Battalion, and a half-track mounted with quad .50-caliber machine guns from the 633rd Antiaircraft Artillery Battalion. The tank and machine-gun fire was devastating.

To Captain Gaking, still a prisoner, it seemed as though the Americans were attempting to pin down the Germans and surround them. Gaking and the other prisoners took cover in roadside ditches along with German infantry. Gaking tried to delay the Germans when they attempted to crawl along the ditch by occasionally standing up in order to draw fire from his own guns. Eventually, Gaking and five others escaped from the Germans and made their way back to the American positions.

Lieutenant Colonel John Golden, 318th, had his own recollection of events of that morning: "The order was given for the 2nd Battalion CP group to withdraw to the 3rd Battalion area and form a line to defend against the oncoming counterattack," he recalled. "Arriving at the 3rd Battalion area at 0430, the German infantry had already infiltrated

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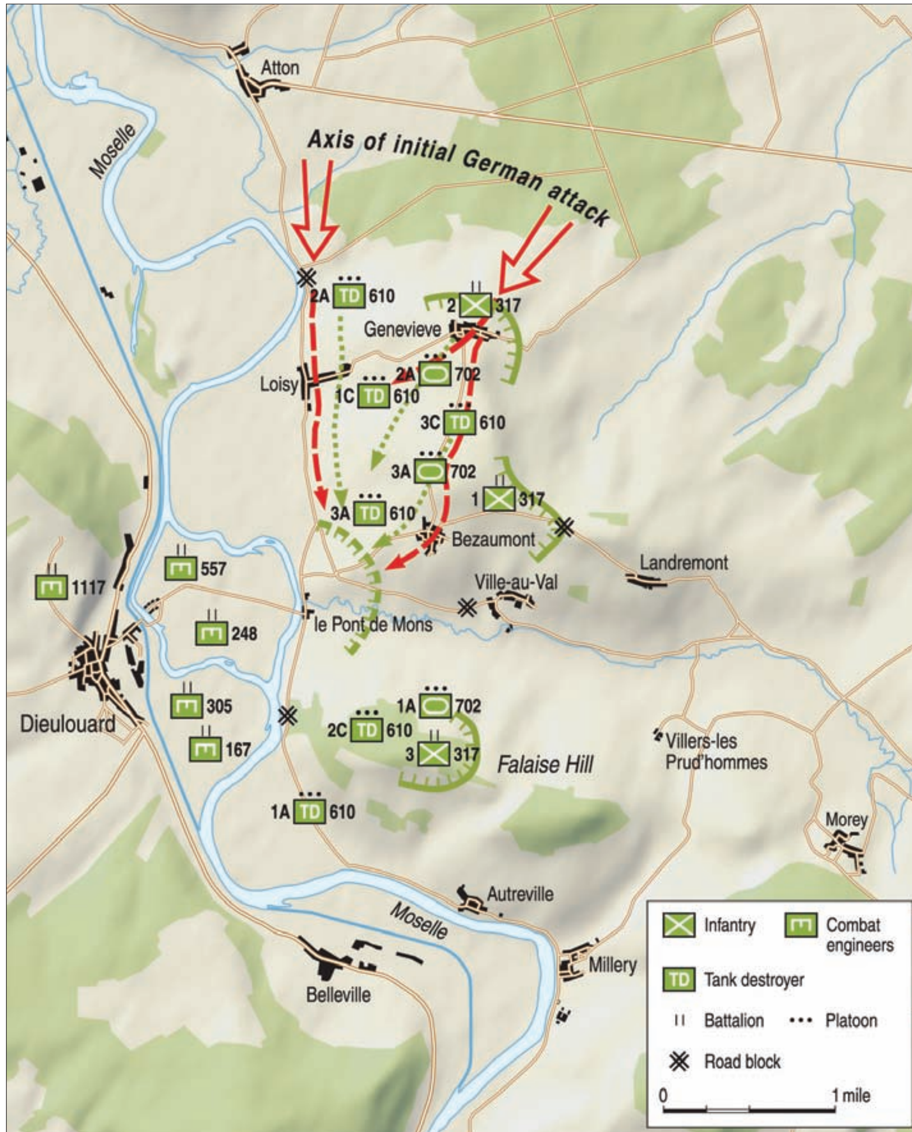

Massive German forces converged in two columns on the American crossing point at le Pont de Mons, but the surprise appearance of U.S. Sherman tanks blunted their attack. The Americans held on to their gains.

that position and had dispersed Company L. We moved back to the position where I thought the Regimental CP to be located. We went about 300 yards up to the Regimental CP, where we found most of the CP personnel dead. The ditches were full of wounded."

One German column moved down the road from Bezaumont, threatening to overrun the crossing site at le Pont de Mons, cutting off and pinning units against the river. In the vicinity of le Pont de Mons was Company I, commanded by 1st Lieutenant Claude R. Fountaine, and the reserve platoon of Company K. Personnel were stopped from fleeing across the footbridge to the west or swimming the river, and placed in position to make a stand in and around the buildings.

The presence of the Shermans of Company B, 702nd, seemed to come as a complete surprise to the Germans, breaking the back of their assault. Captain Nordstrom recalled: "Company B had crossed the Moselle very late at night and set up a semi-circle defense near the bridge, with the tanks placed 20 to 30 feet apart. The company was to move into the line the next morning. The Germans came very close to wiping out the bridgehead. Company B shot them to pieces. The company really saved the division on this day. The American troops were all over the place, mostly running like hell. Company B was aided by some anti-aircraft guns near the bridge."

By 0835, the attack had been halted, with the Germans suffering heavy casualties. Two hundred were taken prisoner, including members of the 29th Panzergrenadier Regiment, 1121st Grenadier Regiment of the 553rd Volksgrenadier Division, and the 1553rd Sturmgeschütz Battalion. Many were found to have no combat experience, having only recently arrived from training centers in Germany.

The attack had spent itself, the Germans having no fresh troops to provide the added impetus needed to push the last 200 or 300 yards to the bridge site at le Pont de Mons. With the coming of daylight, the Germans began to withdraw toward the north. The sacrifice of the 318th CP had delayed the German advance along the river road and bought time for the units in the bridgehead to organize and prepare a defense at the crossing.

Fighting near Dieulouard would go on for more than a month as the 80th Division continued to consolidate positions and expand the bridgehead, with the Germans weakening their defenses around Metz and Nancy in an effort to eliminate the crossing. The success in holding the bridgehead was in large part due to the will and sheer nerve of the individual fighting men of the 80th Division and attached units. Captain Marion C. (Woody) Chitwood, S-3 of the 3rd Battalion, 318th, said it best: "A great deal was done by the common GI—having been pushed as far as they were going to be pushed. For the most part, there was utter confusion. Daylight was about the only thing that saved the bridgehead. Our defensive preparations were inadequate, our communications were minimal, our command structure poorly positioned, and it became an individual effort in the midst of disorganization, darkness, noise, and fear. It wasn't something you could be very proud of, but they did the best they could. There were a lot of casualties, but fortunately we were able to hold." In the end, that was enough. □

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Weapons

Continued from page 14

and anti-U-boat strikes. The standard four 20-mm nose cannons were replaced with a single 57mm six-pounder Molins or Vickers G cannon capable of firing 75 rounds in 60 seconds. The crew and the Merlin 25 engines were protected with additional armor and the retention of four machine guns. They managed to include an additional 65-gallon fuel tank in the fuselage and two 100-gallon drop tanks to this specially modified craft which rained havoc on U-boats in the Bay of Biscay, forcing the Germans to reposition much-needed flak ships and fighters to that area.

The Mosquito was even adapted so that it could be used as a carrier-based plane that would provide the Royal Navy with greater range over the horizon and faster striking capabilities. With some modifications, the result was the Sea Mosquito, which featured folding wings for carrier duty, but the development came too late for use in the war.

The Mosquito proved so effective and durable that limited production continued even after the war; the planes continued to be used by the Royal Air Force for several years, along with Swedish, Turkish, French, Israeli, and Dominican air forces, to cite just a few.

Although not quite as speedy as the first generation jet aircraft, the Mosquito offered greater range and better fuel economy in a combat-proven and exceptionally versatile airframe.

The Mosquito became one of the most devastating fighting machines in World War II and, as a night fighter alone, it accounted for more than 600 German raiders, according to one researcher.

The Mosquito's versatility—coupled with airborne radar—played a crucial role in sweeping enemy aircraft from the skies over Allied territory while taking the fight directly to the Axis powers via attacks on vital Japanese shipping to snagging vital Swedish ball bearings from the war-torn Germans.

Throughout the war and afterward, the Mosquito continued to live up to its reputation as "The Wooden Wonder." □

Zhukov

Continued from page 73

never able to effectively link up with units of the Kalinin Front to even temporarily achieve their primary objective of encircling von Kluge's Army Group Center.

When the AGC front settled down, it resembled a giant upturned horseshoe. The straight line distance from AGC's northern boundary at Veliki Luki south to Army Group South near Orel was 350 miles. But the actual front, with its convolutions, was closer to 1,000 miles long.

The left leg of the horseshoe ran roughly southwest from the Army Group North boundary at Veliki Luki to Nevel, then southeastward near Demidov. The line then ran east to a point about 20 miles northwest of Vyazma and turned north, becoming the western face of the right leg of the horseshoe. The open center of the horseshoe was the 150-mile by 150-mile Toropets Bulge.

The right leg of the horseshoe, which ran north on either side of the Vyazma-Rzhev railroad and was 50 miles wide at most, became known as the Rzhev Salient and was not entirely abandoned by the Germans until early 1943.

The C-shaped bulge around Sukhinichi also remained as part of the front between the 4th Army and 2nd Panzer Army. There were also vast pockets from various units, as well as paratroops and partisans, behind the front, which were gradually eliminated during 1942.

Zhukov's offensive had retrieved Moscow from the enemy's clutches, and the Soviet capital was never again threatened, but Stalin's expanded offensive was a failure. From the start of the counteroffensive on December 5 through April 20, Army Group Center had suffered 352,000 killed, wounded, sick, and missing. Losses for the Soviet forces engaged against AGC during the same period were 1,147,884, and considerably more for the overall offensive.

For the first time in the war the Soviets had undertaken offensive operations on a massive scale, and it did not go entirely well. They would, however, get better at it. □

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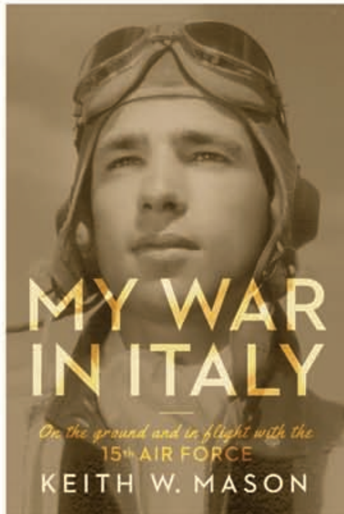

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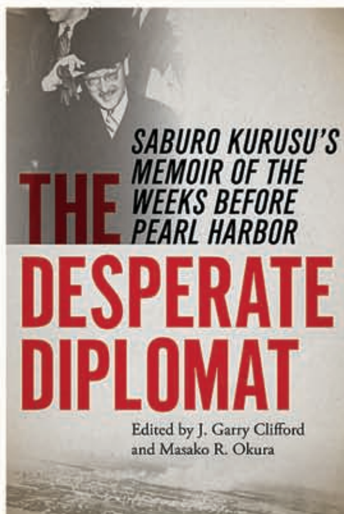

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