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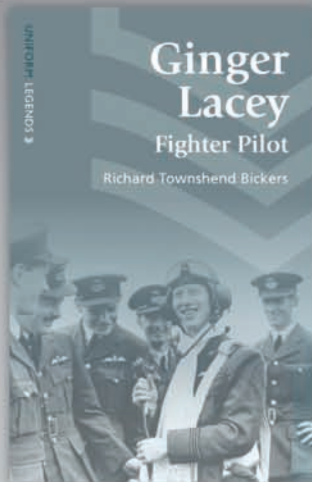

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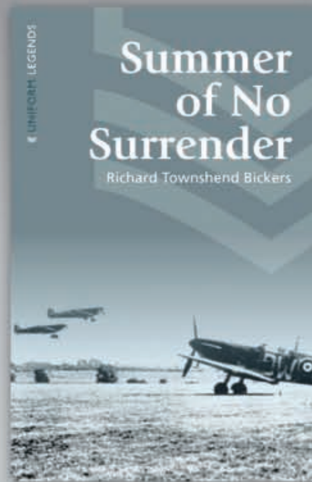

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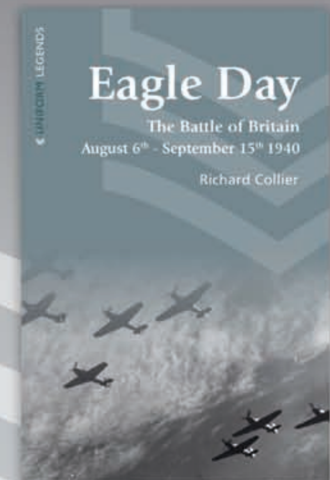

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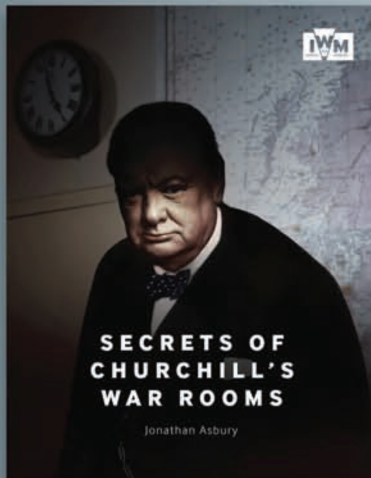

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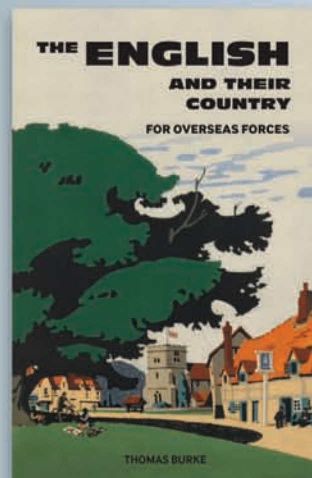

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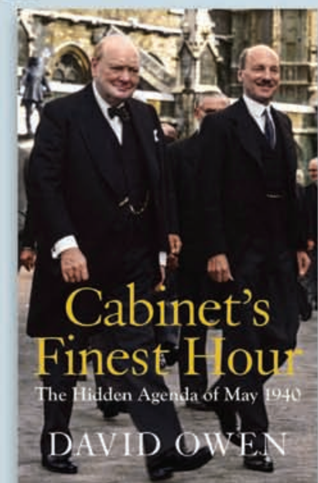

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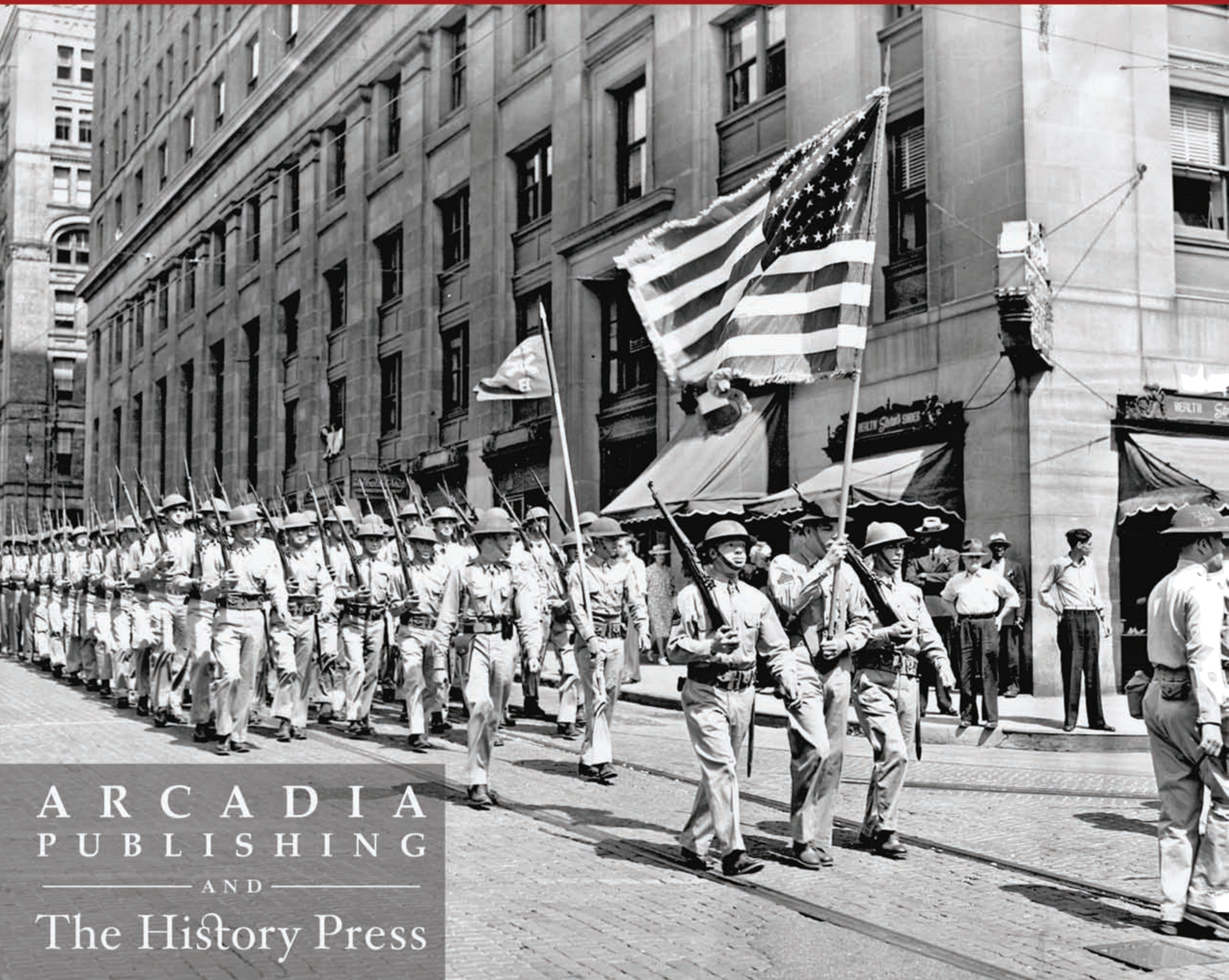

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How do you solve a problem like ... Hitler's birthplace?

It's a plain, old, pale yellow, three-story building in a small town (fewer than 20,000 inhabitants) north of Salzburg, Austria. Yet this architecturally unremarkable building stands in the center of a recent political firestorm.

Outside of the building stands a stone slab from the Mauthausen concentration camp quarry that reads "For Peace, Freedom and Democracy/Never Again Fascism/Millions of Dead Warn."

It is the building where Adolf Hitler was born on April 20, 1889, in the village of Braunau-am-Inn, and the Austrian government is struggling with the question of what to do with it.

Gerlinde Pommer, the elderly woman who has owned the place for decades, inherited it from her mother, who bought it from a former high-ranking Nazi official after World War II—and she reportedly has no intention of doing anything with it.

Austria has other thoughts: buy it and either tear it down or repurpose it into a maternity hospital, a home for refugees, or a museum.

Austria wants to keep it from becoming even more of a neo-Nazi pilgrimage site (much like Benito Mussolini's tomb in Predappio, Italy, has become a shrine for neo-Fascists; the tomb gets 80,000-100,000 visitors a year) than it already is.

The Austrian government and the city of Braunau have been renting the empty, rundown building from Pommer since 1972 and currently pay her about $5,700 a month, even though she tried to cancel the government's lease in December 2014. The last tenant moved out in 2011 because Pommer refused to renovate it and make it handicap-accessible.

Interior Minister Wolfgang Sobotka wants to tear it down. "The Republic would like to prevent this house from becoming a 'cult site' for neo-Nazis in any way, which it has been repeatedly in the past, when people gathered there to shout slogans," he told the BBC.

Others prefer to see it become a museum documenting the horrors of Nazism. Some have said that demolishing it would further encourage right-wing extremists, whose numbers are increasing, to visit the site as "Hitler Square" or "Hitler Park."

On a related note, the grave marker for Hitler's parents in the town cemetery of Leonding, about 75 road miles from Braunau, was recently removed because it was attracting too many Hitler admirers who placed flowers and Nazi symbols on the grave. The Hitler family moved to Leonding in 1898; Adolf lived there until he was 15 and went off to Vienna.

The grave marker, with photos of Alois and Klara Hitler and a granite cross, was removed without ceremony by a stonemason hired by a relative of Alois Hitler's first wife, Anna. All that's left at the site is a white gravel square and a tree.

Leonding itself first assumed cult status for Hitler's followers after he visited his parents' grave and the nearby family house following the 1938 annexation of Austria by Nazi Germany. The family's house is now a warehouse holding coffins for the cemetery and has not attracted Hitler fans.

According to an Interior Ministry spokesman, a parliamentary vote is likely to happen sometime this year that will decide the Braunau building's fate.

Flint Whitlock, Editor

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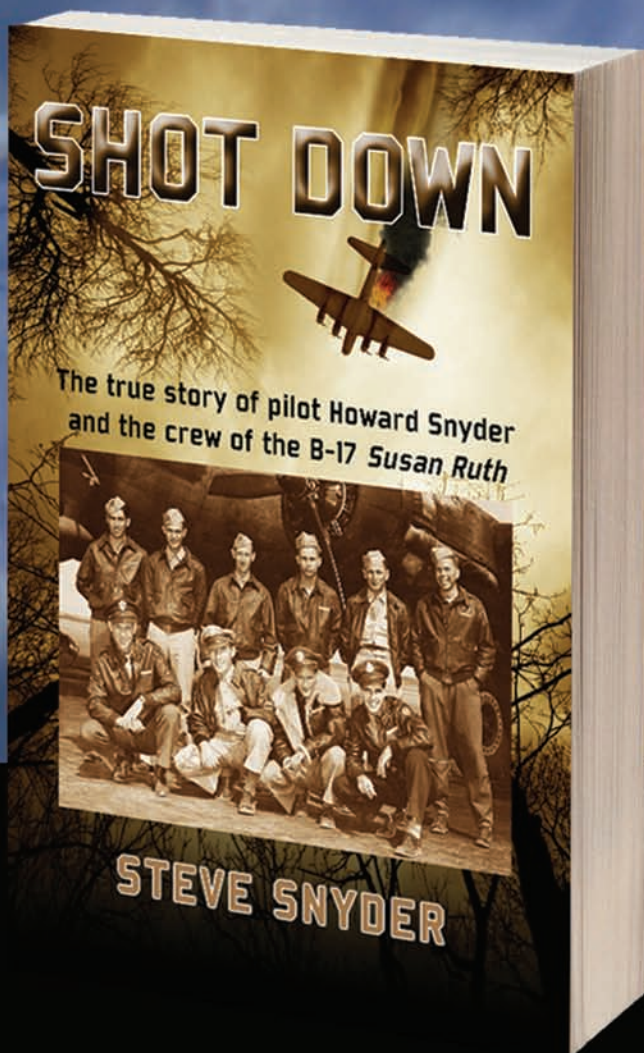
SHOT DOWN

By Steve Snyder

Set within the framework of World War II in Europe, Steve Snyder's book, SHOT DOWN, is about the dramatic experiences of each member of a B-17 crew after their plane, piloted by the author's father, was knocked out of the sky by German fighters over the French/Belgian border on February 8, 1944.



Some men died. Some were captured and became prisoners of war. Some evaded the Germans for awhile but were betrayed, captured, and shot.

Some men were missing in action for seven months but evaded capture through the help of courageous Belgian patriots who risked their lives to help them. The stories are all different and are all remarkable.

Since being released in August 2014, SHOT DOWN has won 20 book awards in the categories of Military History, War & History, Historical Non-Fiction and U.S. History.

The hardcover book has more than 200 time period photographs of the people who were involved and of the places where the events took place.

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Sergeant Red Erwin's courage in a burning B-29 over Japan saved the lives of his crewmen and earned him the Medal of Honor.

In the closing months of World War II, Staff Sergeant Henry E. "Red" Erwin, Sr., picked up a burning phosphorus flare inside the cramped fuselage of his Boeing B-29 Superfortress bomber high over Japan.

Erwin had a quick, fleeting chance to save the lives of his fellow crewmembers by risking severe, probably fatal, burns to his body. It was the moment of truth for a self-deprecating enlisted airman who spoke of himself in modest, aw-shucks style long after his countrymen gave him the Medal of Honor.

Red Erwin came to the war zone as one of thousands of B-29 crewmembers placed in the North Pacific, on the Marianas islands of Guam, Saipan, and Tinian for the purpose of attacking Japan. The American taxpayer had equipped them with the largest and costliest aircraft of the war, the first large combat plane to be pressurized, enabling the crew to dispense with heated clothing and oxygen masks and to work in shirtsleeves.

The B-29 was nothing less than a technical miracle, pulled through the sky by four 2,200-horsepower Wright R-3350 Duplex Cyclone 18, twin-row, turbocharged radial engines. A fully loaded B-29 had a wingspan of 141 feet, 3 inches, weighed 133,500 pounds, and carried a crew of 11 men.

"It was big, heavy, and fast," said Erwin. "It had beautiful, unbroken nose contours. For practical purposes it was divided into two halves, with part of the crew forward of the bomb bay, the other part aft, connected by a crawl tunnel above the bay. As the radio operator, I sat with my back to the bulkhead in the rear of the front half, looking forward at the flight engineer, the two pilots and, in the very front, the bombardier, who had the best view in the house."

ABOVE: Service portrait of Staff Sergeant Henry E. "Red" Erwin, Sr., a private first class at the time, taken before his heroic B-29 Superfortress mission of April 12, 1945. BELOW: B-29 bombers flying a daylight mission to Japan.

Erwin's unit was the 52nd Bombardment Squadron, 29th Bombardment Wing, and Erwin's B-29 was one of the few planes in Maj. Gen. Curtis E. LeMay's XXI Bomber Command to have two names. The B-29, serial number 42-65302, was called *Snatch*

Both: Robert F. Dorr / U.S. Army

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Robert F. Dorr / U.S. Army

ABOVE: B-29s passing Mount Fuji near Tokyo, 1945. The B-29 force started out with high-altitude, daylight precision bombing tactics derived from experience in Europe but soon switched to night incendiary bombing missions. OPPOSITE: The B-29 Superfortress was the most expensive weapons system of World War II. It was bigger, faster, and had longer range and carried more bombs than any other bomber of the war. But no aircraft, not even the B-29, was fireproof, as Erwin and his buddies learned.

Blatch and *The City of Los Angeles*. The first name, sinister as the night in which the B-29 often operated, came from a black witch in the writings of French Renaissance satirist François Rabelais.

The airplane commander and pilot was steady, calm, mild-mannered Captain George A. "Tony" Simeral. This was a seasoned crew, formed at Dalhart, Texas, in June 1944, and deployed overseas in January 1945.

"We were regular guys," said Erwin. "We took pride in how we functioned as a crew." And their talents were recognized.

Looking for a way to improve bombing results, LeMay decided to abandon high altitude, daylight precision attacks with explosive bombs. Army Air Forces boss General Henry H. "Hap" Arnold instructed LeMay to make plans to attack Japanese cities at low level at night using incendiary bombs. The target for the first and largest firebomb mission would be the Japanese capital.

The *Snatch Blatch* crew with Simeral in charge and Erwin on radios was selected to carry the on-scene commander.

The plan was to have LeMay aboard, but LeMay had just received a briefing on a new, secret weapon being developed by American scientists in New Mexico. Having already racked up a record for bravery—he had received the Distinguished Service Cross, the nation's second-highest award for valor, for an action in Europe—LeMay, with his knowledge of the war's greatest secret, was no longer permitted to fly over enemy territory. The on-scene commander became Brig. Gen. Thomas "Tommy" Power.

In the early morning hours of March 10, 1945, some 330 B-29 bombers arrived over Tokyo and disgorged their cargos of napalm and thermite. It was the most destructive bombing event in history, before or since, and ignited the hottest fires ever to burn on the earth. [See the author's article in *WWII Quarterly*, Summer 2014.] Estimates vary, but the mission may have killed as many as 120,000 people. The fire bombs transformed 16 square miles of Tokyo into a smoldering desert.

Erwin peered ahead from his radio operator's position and watched Power and Simeral interacting. Erwin recalled that in many ways Power was the gruff, brusque, abrupt personality LeMay was perceived as being while LeMay himself was more complicated. Japanese antiaircraft defenses were unprepared for the low-level assault, but the men in the B-29s didn't know that.

"Power wasn't content to fly over the target just once," Erwin recalled. "He wanted to go over Tokyo a second time, and a third, to see how it was going." Erwin stopped short of calling this behavior risky, let alone foolhardy, but some of the men aboard Simeral's B-29 were very nervous.

It was a month later—on April 12, 1945—when Red Erwin faced his greatest challenge. Many Americans remember this as the date Franklin D. Roosevelt died and Harry S. Truman became president. But Erwin's ordeal and moment of heroism took place on the far side of the International Date Line, over Japan, when it was still a day earlier in Washington.

The target that morning was a chemical plant situated in rough mountains near Koriyama, some 110 miles north of Tokyo. It was the most distant target yet to be attacked by Superfortresses based in the Marianas. It was a complex cluster of small factories, and the attack on its center would require riskier formation flying than usual. *Snatch Blatch* was the lead aircraft.

Simeral taxied the B-29 out of its revetment and guided the lumbering airplane toward its takeoff point. The plane, looking like an aluminum cigar with wings and bristling with remote-control guns, handled easily and rolled smoothly.

Simeral and co-pilot 2nd Lt. Leroy C. Stabler went through their checklists, put the R-3350s up to full power, and were delighted that the engines, which were sometimes trouble prone, performed smoothly. The noise level inside the aircraft made it impossible to speak except via interphone.

Strapped into his usual radio operator's seat was Henry Erwin, a modest farm boy born in May 1921, in Adamsville, Alabama, and known to his family as Gene, although crewmates called him Red. As usual, Erwin was willing not merely to handle communications but to take on extra tasks. He was expected to drop phosphorus flares to notify the bomber formation that the lead aircraft had reached the assembly point for the bomb run. This was Erwin's 11th combat mission.

Earlier that week, Erwin had witnessed a loud and fiery crash in which another B-29, limping home on two engines, had

overshot its runway and was blown to bits among the coral and coconut palms. Nine men had been consumed by fire, but none of Erwin's crewmates had been able to elicit a single comment about the incident from the young sergeant.

As *Snatch Blatch* droned across the water, Erwin made his final radio checks. The airwaves were filled with too much unnecessary chatter, including weather information and formation instructions. Erwin made his last call, kept his earphones on to stay connected to the interphone, and reached for a phosphorus flare.

Approaching the Japanese coast, Erwin prepared to drop the flare through the chute in the forward section of the B-29. This was another low-level mission, and Erwin was in shirtsleeves, minus helmet or cap. When Simeral cued him, Erwin pulled the pin on the pyrotechnic and positioned it in the chute.

Some crewmembers feared the flare chute was too close to the bomb bay. *Snatch Blatch* was carrying more than three tons of incendiary bombs in its main bay on this day, and more than one crewman had pointed out what would happen if the phosphorus device should explode too close to the incendiaries. The resulting blast would be so sudden that they might not live long enough to know that it happened, and it might even obliterate a four-plane formation of B-29s.

Robert F. Dorr / U.S. Army

Erwin was ready with the flare when he saw a blur through his side port. "Fighters!" he said.

A yellow, twin-engined Japanese fighter known as a Nick was descending off to their right. Meatball red circles were painted on its wings, and muzzle flashes

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appeared at its nose.

"I got 'em," said top turret gunner Sergeant Howard Stubstad. "There's also four Zekes circling off to the left."

"We're at the assembly point—" Erwin stammered.

"Four of them!" A voice garbled out the others. "Four Zekes closing on our left!"

As expected, Erwin released his hold on the flare to allow it to drop through the chute. But the signal bomb clattered inside the release pipe and refused to fall through the gate at the bottom of the tube.

It bounced back into Erwin's face and exploded.

A defective fuse had ignited the flare prematurely. Upon contacting oxygen, the phosphorus lit up to its temperature of 1,300 degrees Fahrenheit.

Fire swirled around Erwin's head. The blazing device careened around the inside of the B-29 like a meteor gone berserk.

It could not have happened at a worse instant. A crewmember said later that the Japanese fighters were like yellowjackets swarming out of a disturbed nest—and now the interior of the B-29 was being seared.

Red Erwin was now clutching a handful of hell, his eyes a mass of blisters, other crewmembers choking and vomiting around him. Smoke filled the cabin. *Snatch Blatch*, although not hit, went out of control. Simeral fought to prevent the bomber from hurtling earthward. Erwin struggled toward the pilots.

Co-pilot Stabler peered through the smoke in disbelief as a burning human being staggered toward him shouting, "Open the window! Open the window!" The heat could be felt from one end of the aircraft to the other, and it seemed certain the device would turn the B-29 into a blazing torch at any instant. Simeral screamed, "Get it out the window!"

Somehow copilot Stabler overcame his shock at seeing Erwin, afire, doing what no human being should be capable of accomplishing. Stabler managed to open the window and recoiled from the windblast. "Excuse me, sir," the ever courteous Erwin said through his pain. He threw the flaming canister to the wind and collapsed to the floor in flames.

Both: Robert F. Dorr / U.S. Army

ABOVE: Retired Master Sergeant Henry E. "Red" Erwin later in life, bearing the scars of his terrible ordeal. BELOW: The *Snatch Blatch/The City of Los Angeles* B-29 crew gathers with Maj. Gen. Willis Hale to honor the terribly burned Staff Sergeant Henry E. "Red" Erwin.

Three hundred feet from the ground, Simeral pulled *Snatch Blatch* out of its dive to head for Iwo Jima, the nearest landing site affording medical aid.

The crew turned fire extinguishers on the prostrate, burning body of Red Erwin. Stabler administered morphine to dull the pain. Through it all—the hours' long trip back and days of surgery following—Erwin remained conscious.

At the Iwo Jima hospital, the doctors gave it their best shot: whole blood transfusions, internal surgery, and antibiotics to fight infection. For hours they labored to remove embedded white phosphorus from Erwin's eyes. The chemical spontaneously combusts when exposed to oxygen, and as each fleck of incendiary was removed it

would burst into flames, torturing the airman once again.

Through it all, Erwin has said, there was an angel by his side, saying, "Go, go, go. You can make it." Everyone expected Red Erwin to succumb to the pain, if not the wounds. That night the officers of Erwin's unit prepared a recommendation for the Medal of Honor.

At 5 the next morning they awakened General LeMay at his headquarters on Guam. LeMay took a personal interest in Erwin, sending his recommendation to Washington, D.C., and arranging to fly Red's brother, who was with a Marine Corps unit in the Pacific, to his deathbed.

LeMay's command transported Erwin from Iwo to Guam, where he could receive better medical care in his final hours. Eager to present Erwin his nation's highest award before he died, LeMay canvassed the Pacific region and learned that there was only one example of the Medal of Honor anywhere—in a glass display case in Hawaii. An aircraft and men were dispatched. No one could find the key to the display case. The men smashed the case, grabbed the medal, and rushed back to Guam

There, just one week after his B-29 had nearly burned up from the inside, Erwin was rolled out in a stretcher. He was wrapped entirely in white with slits for his eyes and mouth. With his B-29 crew and Maj. Gen. Willis Hale watching, LeMay handed Erwin the medal—surely the only time an American was awarded a medal snatched from a showcase—and told him, "Your effort to save the lives of your fellow airmen is the most extraordinary kind of heroism I know."

Through his bandages Erwin replied simply, "Thank you, sir." LeMay had been certain the award would become posthumous. Erwin surprised everyone by refusing to die. Erwin became the only Superfortress crewmember to be awarded the Medal of Honor for action aboard a B-29 (although one of LeMay's B-29 pilots, Michael Novosel, would receive the award 24 years later for action as a Huey helicopter pilot in Vietnam—at age 47).

Army Air Forces boss Arnold wrote a

Continued on page 98

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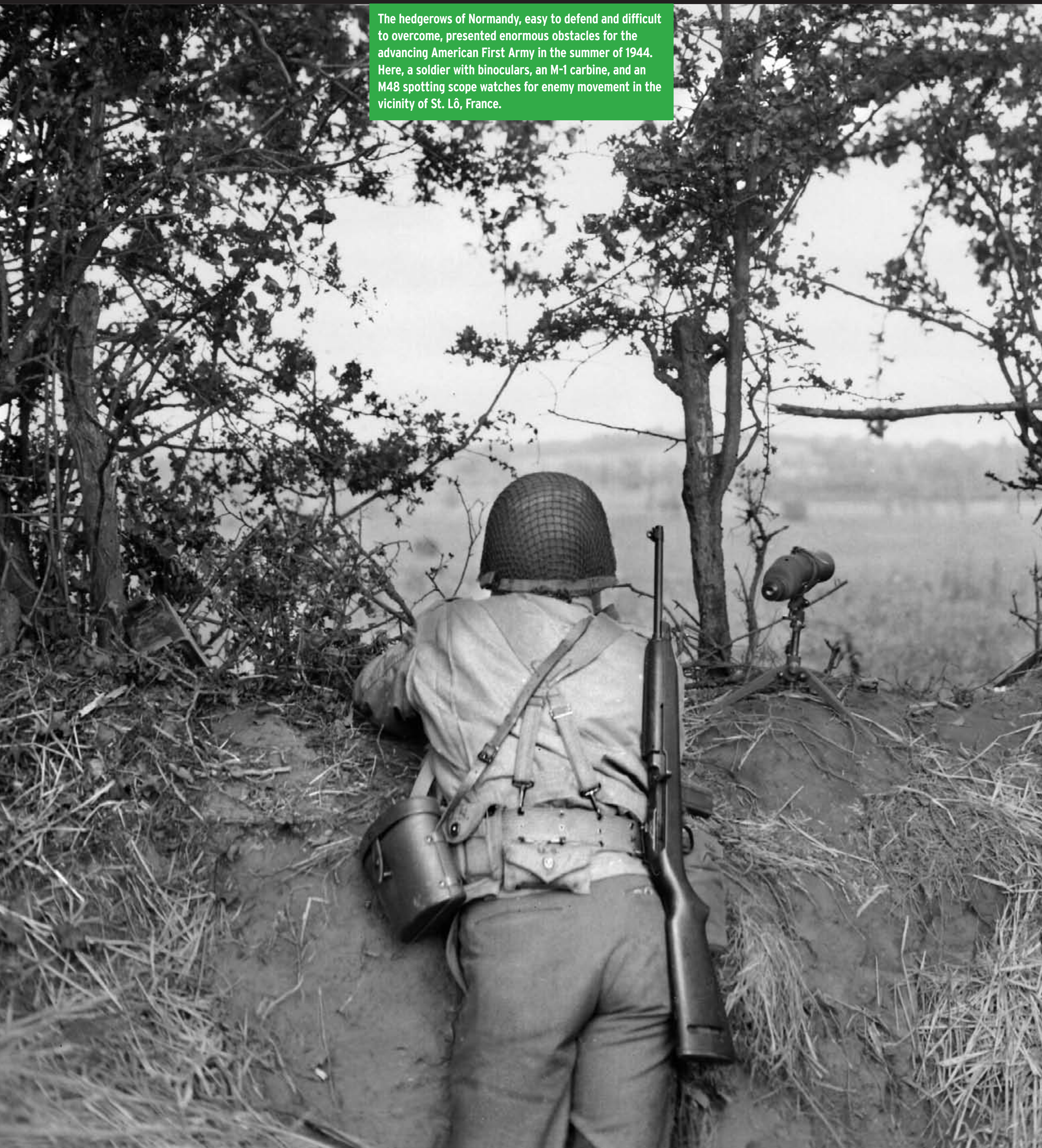

The hedgerows of Normandy, easy to defend and difficult to overcome, presented enormous obstacles for the advancing American First Army in the summer of 1944. Here, a soldier with binoculars, an M-1 carbine, and an M48 spotting scope watches for enemy movement in the vicinity of St. Lô, France.

THE HEROES of HILL 192

The winner of a large battle for a small hill in Normandy, fought between the 2nd U.S. Infantry Division and German paratroopers, would determine the fate of St. Lô.

BY WILLIAM G. DENNIS

TODAY, on Hill 192, located between the Normandy cities of St. Lô and Bayeux, sleek horses graze the fields, and people in hacking gear travel the roads and bridle paths. The "farm" houses and outbuildings have the polished look of some wealthy Parisian's country retreat rather than the more rugged appearance of a working farm. It is a peaceful, relaxed, almost bucolic place.

However, for a few weeks in June and July 1944, it was very different place indeed. The fighting there was a microcosm of what was happening to American Army units experiencing their baptism of fire. As the fight for Hill 192 unfolded, it became clear that the American units involved in the battle were improving rapidly. They were going to give Germany some serious—and ultimately insoluble—problems.

Still, on June 16, 1944, Lieutenant Raymond Lee was a worried man. As the communications officer of the 23rd Infantry Regiment, 2nd Infantry Division, he was in a good position to follow the course of his division's battle. The 23rd, along with the 9th and the 38th, were the infantry regiments of Maj. Gen. Walter M. Robertson's 2nd Infantry Division that had begun landing on Omaha Beach on June 7. They initially moved southwest against scattered opposition.

American infantry divisions in World War II contained the components they would likely need in virtually all circumstances. Their table of organization and equipment (TO&E) included three regiments of infantry, each containing three battalions of about 850 men, plus heavy infantry weapons held at regimental headquarters; four battalions of artillery with a dozen guns apiece; and supporting units such as engineers, medical services, military police, and supply services. A large pool of separate battalions of tanks, antiaircraft guns, tank destroyers, engineers, and the like was available to augment the infantry divisions as needed.

In contrast, by this point in the war a German army division was a much smaller organization. By the Normandy campaign, a German rifle company's TO&E was only about 80 men, and it was often well under this strength. The German Army attempted to compensate for this lack of manpower with a lavish issuance of automatic weapons.

There were only six infantry battalions and a seventh "fusilier" battalion, which was supposed to employ the German division's heavy infantry weapons but sometimes was used as a maneuver battalion. The artillery component was similarly reduced. Much of their artillery and other heavy equipment was material captured from the armies they had defeated in previous years.

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Both: National Archives

The Germans deployed two other armies—the Waffen-SS, which was the combat arm of the Nazi Party, and the Luftwaffe, which had its own land army of about 25 divisions. There were several paratroop divisions, a Luftwaffe panzer division, and the rest were infantry divisions. The Luftwaffe divisions were larger than Heer (Army) formations and more lavishly equipped but generally lacked well-trained leadership.

On the whole, Robertson's 2nd Infantry Division was well trained but, like many infantry divisions, it had had little opportunity to train with tanks. So tank-infantry cooperation was not one of the division's strong points. This problem was so widespread that later in the war it became standard practice to attach a tank battalion to a given infantry division on a semi-permanent basis so that the units could become comfortable working with each other.

Developing procedures to work with tanks was something the division would have to do after entering combat. One of the first things done was to develop hand signals that both parties understood.

The infantry support for "general headquarters" tank battalions also needed to hone their skills. They were formed by the new Armor branch and given the same training as the battalions assigned to armored divisions. In many cases they were formerly part of an armored division and had been detached when the U.S. Army adopted a smaller, more manageable TO&E for those divisions—one that had fewer maneuver battalions.

The armored divisions were trained to make deep penetration attacks into the enemy's rear. For tanks that would normally be attached to the infantry divisions, this was not the right training; they required procedures that would enable them to cooperate effectively with infantry.

The 741st Tank Battalion (Separate) was attached to the 2nd for the Hill 192 attack, they had not trained together. Additional support was provided by two battalions of tank destroyers (TDs)—tracked and tureted vehicles that had a superficial resemblance to tanks. Unlike tanks, they were lightly armored and the turrets were open on top. Possessed of high-velocity main guns, they were intended to speed to the site of a German breakthrough and engage the German spearheads.

ABOVE: A view from the German-held orchard atop Hill 192. From this vantage point, the Germans could see any American advance toward them and call artillery and mortar fire down upon it. OPPOSITE: A German paratrooper, sitting in the lee of a hedgerow, prepares ammunition for several shoulder-fired antitank weapons. His arsenal also includes captured American machine guns.

With Germany on the defensive, other uses were being found for the TDs. Because of the light armor and open turret, it was necessary for them to stay slightly behind the front lines, but, when called upon, their high-velocity guns could readily penetrate buildings and bunkers.

Many units were experimenting with ways to move tanks and other tracked vehicles through the French hedgerows. Most of them involved explosives, but it took a huge amount of explosives to breach the dozens of hedgerows in the path of any one attacking unit. The explosions also alerted the Germans that an attack was coming.

Units were also developing methods that did not necessarily involve explosives. There were a limited number of tanks available that were equipped with bulldozer blades. They worked well but were far too few for the attack. The few that were available were attached to the 2nd Infantry Division. Some units had improvised heavy bumpers and mounted them on tanks to push through the hedgerows.

During the first few days it had not been difficult for the 2nd Infantry "Warrior" or "Indianhead" Division (so named because of the fully head-dressed Indian warrior on the division's sleeve patch) to advance because much of their opposition came from reluctant non-Germans who had volunteered or been conscripted into the German Army.

The Poles, Russians, and central Asians that the Warriors encountered were not enthusiastic about fighting for Germany against Americans in France. The Germans employed large numbers of such troops in their coastal defense "static" divisions. A German sergeant assigned to one of these units needed eyes in the back of his head. Given an opportunity to surrender to the Western Allies, these men were in the habit of shooting their NCOs and waving white flags.

With soldiers like this in their army, there was a wide variation in the quality of German units. But Robertson's division was about to discover that Germany still had some well-trained, well-equipped, and highly motivated units in front of them.

The Germans would stand and fight hard but often found themselves fighting for real

estate that was impossible to hold. Nevertheless, their commanders ordered them to stand their ground because the Germans could not afford to let the Allies out of the Cotenin Peninsula. The armies the Allies brought to Normandy were far more mobile than the Germans, and the American army was the most mobile army in modern history.

Field Marshal Erwin Rommel, who commanded the German armies facing the Allies in Normandy, once believed that the American M4 Sherman tank was superior to any tank available to him when he commanded the Afrika Korps, but it had become outdated by this stage of the war. Still, it was far more mechanically reliable than anything the Germans had.

Also, the American 2.5-ton truck could go places where most of the vehicles available to the Wehrmacht would likely stick fast, if they had not already broken down. (Field Marshal Erich von Manstein once remarked on how much more mobile Russian artillery had become once the Red Army received American Lend-Lease trucks.)

Much the same was true of other U.S. equipment, like the half-track troop and weapons carrier. The infantry assigned to American armored divisions—the armored infantry battalions—were fully equipped with such vehicles. Most of the troops in the elite panzer divisions were lucky to be carried into battle in unarmored trucks.

The German infantry was even more poorly equipped, with most of its heavy weapons and equipment moving by rail and/or horse-drawn wagons.

Set loose on the plains and rolling hills of northern France, the Allies would easily outmaneuver the plodding Germans. The Germans made some efforts to prepare the line of the Seine River for defense, but their best hope was to keep the Allies penned in the Cotenin Peninsula until the winter storms interrupted the flow of supplies across the beaches and starved the Allied armies and grounded Allied aircraft.

Perhaps by then Hitler's long-awaited "secret weapons"—rockets and jet planes—could play a decisive role. So the Germans' hitherto light resistance stiffened as the 2nd Infantry Division approached Hill 192—20 miles south of Omaha Beach and four miles east of St. Lô, between the villages of la Calvaire and la Croix-Rouge, in June 1944.

Hill 192 gave the Germans good observation for miles in every direction. It needed to be taken quickly in order for Lt. Gen. Omar N. Bradley, the American 12th Army Group commander, to drive behind the German left flank and break out of Normandy—the attack that would become Operation Cobra.

Hill 192's slopes are too gentle to be much of an obstacle, but the north side is ideal for defense. It is classic bocage country—a terrain of tiny, irregularly shaped fields and apple orchards surrounded by hedgerows—walls of mounded earth several feet high with a lush growth of brush and trees on the sides and top. The terrain provides defenders cover, concealment, and excellent fields of fire, while troops attacking through the fields are fully exposed to the defenders. The south side of Hill 192 was covered with heavy woods, and orchards dotted the slopes.

Between many of the hedgerows are sunken lanes lined by more trees whose branches interlock and hide the lanes from the air. Lt. Gen. Joseph Lawton "Lightning Joe" Collins, commanding the U.S. VII Corps, found it worse country to fight in

than Guadalcanal; at least in the Pacific the attacker, too, had some cover. (Several times this author walked across a field toward a hedgerow trying to imagine what it was like for attacking GIs. It was not a comfortable experience.)

The Germans were about to learn that the hedgerows were not quite as formidable defensive positions as they appeared to be. The peasants who built them saved all the rocks they found and fortified the mounds with them. They would stop a rifle bullet, but .50-caliber rounds and larger could pass right through.

The hedgerows and Hill 192 were defended by troops of the nearly 16,000-man 3rd German Fallschirmjäger (Parachute) Division, commanded by Generalleutnant Richard Schimf. According to at least one historian, the hill was one of the most heavily defended areas in the American portion of the front.

The 3rd Fallschirmjäger Division was an elite unit that included significant numbers of fanatical Nazis. The division was formed near Reims, France, in October 1943, and since February 1944, it had been stationed near Brest in anticipation of an Allied invasion. Having trained in Brittany, the troops were familiar with bocage country.

Besides having terrain that was some of the most favorable to the Germans' defense of Europe, the troops were some of the most heavily armed light infantry in the world. Each company was equipped with 20 of the formidable MG 42 machine guns and 43 submachine guns. Each squad had two of the MG 42s and five machine pistols. If they were short on artillery, they were heavy on mortars, whose positions are harder to spot from the air. All of their tubes were preregistered, so fire could quickly be directed where it was needed.

The American rifle squad was armed with one BAR (Browning Automatic Rifle) and a single Thompson submachine gun, while the rest of the men carried M-1 Garand rifles.

Although the 2nd Infantry Division was formed in 1917 and fought in World War I, Normandy would be its introduction to combat in World War II. Luckily, many of its regimental and battalion commanders were "old hands" at the business of training young men for war.

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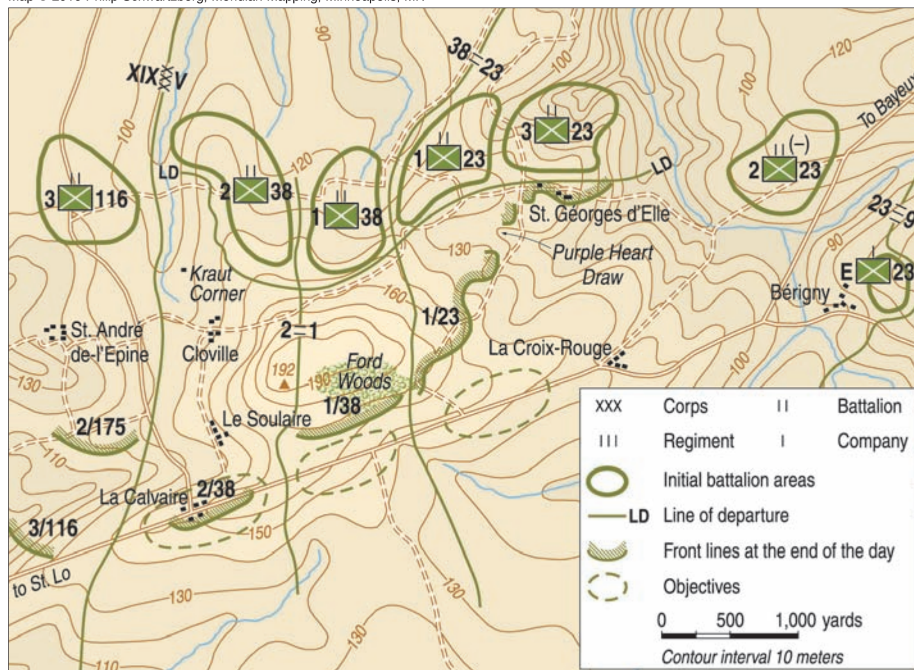

ABOVE: After failing to take the hill in June, the 2nd Infantry Division tried again in July. Departing from the north and east of Hill 192, the 2nd Infantry Division' 23rd and 38th Regiments attacked and secured the objective. Their positions are shown on the last day of the battle for Hill 192. OPPOSITE: A German Fallschirmjäger MG42 machine-gun team, in their distinctive helmets and camouflage smocks, prepare for an American attack in Normandy. Hill 192 was defended by numerous machine-gun positions of the 3rd Fallschirmjäger Division.

The division had moved to Northern Ireland in late 1943 and to England in April 1944 before sufficient M-1s were available to arm all its riflemen. The 23rd Infantry Regiment men were carrying old-fashioned, bolt-action Springfield .03s—leftovers from World War I.

According to Bill Dudas, who served in the 38th Infantry Regiment, his unit, too, initially carried Springfields. The disadvantages of a bolt-action rifle in the close combat of the hedgerows quickly became clear, he said, so, "We threw our Springfields in a heap and were given M-1s."

To keep Bradley's advancing forces from being struck in the flank, his units needed to reach and hold the transportation hub of St. Lô. This would prevent a German move from Bérigny to the east and put the Vire River on the flank of the planned advance. If the Americans could capture the city and have a river to protect their flank, the Germans' ability to counterattack would be severely limited.

There was not much left of St. Lô worth holding. It had been reduced to rubble by Allied warplanes on June 6 and 7, leaving some 800 inhabitants dead. As the Army's official history says, "Allied planes ... made concentrated and repeated attacks that seemed to the inhabitants to have been motivated by the sole intention of destroying the city." The crossroads that it controlled, however, was still important, so it remained a vital objective.

On June 10, the 2nd Division, moving south from Omaha Beach, had attacked across the Aure River and liberated Trévières. For the next several days, little German opposition was encountered, the disorganized enemy having retreated farther south to more defensible ground.

The opportunity for Lt. Gen. Courtney Hodges' U.S. First Army to seize St. Lô now presented itself. Four American infantry divisions—the 2nd, 29th, 30th, and 35th, a com-

bination of XIX and V Corps units—had moved southward from the Normandy coast and were arrayed north and east of the city.

To mount a successful attack on St. Lô, the Americans needed to have their eastern flank protected by Hill 192. Opposing them were elements of the LXXXIV Corps and II Fallschirmjäger Corps.

Hill 192 was important because it was the highest point in this sector, offering whoever held it long-range observation for miles around. V Corps commander Leonard T. Gerow assigned the task of taking the hill to the 2nd Division, then in its assembly area north of Cerisy-la-Forêt. According to the plan, the 23rd Infantry Regiment, under Colonel Hurley E. Fuller, would assault and secure Hill 192 while the 9th Regiment would take the high ground south of Littcou; the 38th Regiment would be in reserve.

The order called for the 23rd Regiment to pass through the position held by the 38th Regiment with the 1st and 2nd Battalions; the 3rd would be in reserve. The 1st Battalion would cross the Elle River west of Cerisy-la-Forêt and move south against Hill 192 while the 2nd Battalion would attack southwest and take the east slope of the hill. The 2nd Battalion would move south to the highway that ran from Bayeux to St. Lô through the village of Bérigny.

The German parachutists had organized several strongpoints and placed a counter-reconnaissance screen ahead of their main line of resistance. All their positions were well dug in and extremely well camouflaged on the heavily forested hill. Machine-gun nests were numerous, and German gunners located on the rear slope had preregistered their artillery on every likely avenue of approach.

The 29th and 35th Infantry Divisions would begin their attack southward toward St. Lô on June 11. The jump-off did not go well, and the scheduled start was disrupted. Eventually the 29th found its footing and pushed into German positions on the Martinville ridge.

Truth be told, the 2nd Division was not ready for the attack on Hill 192—its first combat action of the war. According to a Captain Calder, at the time a battalion adjutant in the 23rd, the officers leading the attack had not personally reconnoitered the ground and their briefing was conducted well to the rear where they could not see the objective they were

Although the 2nd Infantry Division was formed in 1917 and fought in World War I, Normandy would be its introduction to combat in World War II. Luckily, many of its regimental and battalion commanders were "old hands" at the business of training young men for war.

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about to attack.

Additionally, the troops were still getting used to the strange terrain and were extremely uncomfortable crossing the open fields walled in by hedgerows. Moreover, many of the division's mortars and machine guns had not yet been brought up. Nonetheless, the attack began with an artillery barrage at 5:40 AM on June 12.

Selected to lead the attack was Company F, 2nd Battalion, 23rd Regiment. It did not get far; the advancing troops were cut down by rifle, mortar, and machine-gun fire. Lt. Col. Raymond B. Marlin, 2nd Battalion's commander, ordered Company G to move around Company F's left flank and continue the attack, but the intensity of German fire increased.

To support the infantry, American artillery hit enemy positions while Companies F and G attempted to advance. These moves went nowhere as the companies took casualties and went to ground. Once pinned in place, the Warriors were savaged by mortars and artillery.

With Companies F and G halted, Company E of the 2nd Battalion, 23rd Regiment moved out from the Cerisy Forest toward Bérigny on the St. Lô road. Very quickly they began receiving fire from snipers hidden in the trees and hedgerows, but then the situation grew quiet. The company reached the eastern edge of Bérigny where the men took cover in the abandoned buildings.

While this action was taking place, Colonel Fuller ordered Lt. Col. William S. Humphries' 1st Battalion to move up to the west of the 3rd Battalion, commanded by Lt. Col. Paul V. Tuttle, Jr. Humphries' men had not gone far after crossing the line of departure when the Germans counterattacked and pushed the battalion back about a mile. The two opposing lines were so close that, in some cases, the Yanks fired grenades at their opponents using inner tubes from tires as slingshots.

With all three battalions of the 23rd Infantry Regiment now more or less pinned down by small arms, machine-gun, and mortar fire, the attack on Hill 192 petered out, and in the early afternoon Fuller ordered his men to organize a defense in anticipation of a counterattack. Positions were dug and crew-served weapons were sited and emplaced.

American fire support was ineffective because forward observers for the mortars and artillery could not locate targets in the forested terrain. Supporting tanks, stuck in tree-lined lanes, became targets for panzerfausts (shoulder-fired antitank weapons) or were knocked out by mines. Those that tried to roll up and over the hedgerows exposed their thinly armored bellies to German gunners.

East of the hill elements of the 23rd Regiment, aided by tanks, were able to knock out several German strongpoints to grab a commanding view of the Bérigny highway—the eastward exit from St. Lô.

Aid stations were established close to the front; the 2nd Battalion alone had suffered 211 men killed or wounded on June 12. As daylight was fading, American aircraft cruised over the scene and dropped their ordnance on Hill 192.

That evening the Germans engaged in the usual counterattacks they employed whenever they lost a piece of ground. The German commander remarked that, had the Americans continued their attacks, they likely would have broken through their lines and would have had a clear shot toward St. Lô.

The Germans began their major counterattack shortly after 1 AM on June 13, primarily hitting Marlin's 2nd Battalion, 23rd Regiment with rifles, machine guns, mortar, and self-propelled artillery fire. The Americans fired back blindly into the darkness toward muzzle flashes. Mortars and artillery, too, were fired at supposed enemy locations, but no one could be sure. The firefight lasted about an hour and then suddenly ceased.

A GERMAN PARATROOPER'S LAST LETTER

If not everything went well for the Americans, it was far worse for the Germans. A few days after Hill 192 was secured, a letter was found on the body of a dead paratrooper named Helmut. He had survived the July 11 American assault long enough to write the letter, only to be killed before he had a chance to mail it. The letter vividly described the hell the Americans put him and his comrades through.

Dear Struppel,
For the third time I am writing to get in touch with you by letter. I hope that it will reach you. Some time ago when I left the 6th Group, I arrived by way of Gardeleben in Witstock where I made my 10 jumps. Then I came to my regiment in France and my company. We were stationed in Brittany near Brest. When the invasion started, we moved out approximately 30-40 km daily, but only at night. During the day American fighter bombers controlled the area. Then we were put into the line E. of St. Lô approximately 5 km from the town. When we were committed our company strength was 170.

Then 11 July arrived and the most terrible and gruesome day of my life. At 0300 our company sector got a dense hail of Arty and mortar fire that we thought the world was coming to an end. In addition to that the rumbling of motors and rattling could be heard behind the enemy lines–tanks. It scared the pants off us. We could expect a very juicy attack.

If we thought that the Arty fire had reached its climax we were disillusioned at 0530. At that time a tremendous firing started which continued to 0615. Then the tanks arrived. The movement of tanks, however, is somewhat difficult here in Normandy. As we at home have our fields fenced with wire and wooden fences, so the fields over here are lined with hedgerows. They are about five feet high and have the same thickness. The hedgerows are winding crisscrossing through the terrain. We dig in behind these walls and the Americans do the same. It is a regular "hedgerow war."

Well, on that 11 July the tanks were rolling toward us. They shot with their guns through

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A line of American Sherman tanks hugs a hedgerow in Normandy in the summer of 1944. After the failure of the attack on Hill 192 in June, the men of the 2nd Division trained with armored units to coordinate their attack on July 11.

Marlin was concerned that the Germans' nocturnal activities had been a "reconnaissance in force" and probably a prelude to an even more concerted push come daylight against his 2nd Battalion—an attack that, oddly, didn't come. Nevertheless, the men used the lull to improve their defensive positions and prepare for whatever the Germans might throw at them.

Meanwhile, 2nd Division G-2 (Intelligence) learned from POWs that elements of the 8th Fallschirmjäger Regiment of the 3rd Fallschirmjäger Division were in the Bérigny area and the German 352nd Infantry Division was north of Hill 192 around the village of St. George d'Elle.

While the 2nd Division's 2nd Battalion, 23rd, seemed to have been spared further combat on June 13, the same cannot be said of the 9th Infantry Regiment. Colonel Chester J. Hirshfelder's regiment suddenly found its positions being probed by patrol elements of the 3rd Fallschirmjäger Division.

Throughout the day, harassing German mortar fire continued to fall in the 2nd Division area. A night attack was expected, but none materialized. For the next two days the situation was relatively quiet. Rather than wait to be hit by the Germans, Robertson and his staff began planning for

the hedgerows as through cake dough. Sharpshooters gave us lots of trouble. You must know that the Americans are using H.E. [high-explosive] ammunition, which tears terrible wounds. Around 1000 the order came to withdraw as the position could not be held. I had one wounded in my MG position. When I wanted to get him into position with the help of someone else, a shell landed 2 yds. away from us. The wounded fellow got another piece of shrapnel in his side and the other fellow was wounded. I, however, did not get one single piece of shrapnel.

Anyway, on that day I escaped death just by a few seconds a hundred times. A piece of shrapnel penetrated through the leather strap of my MG and was thus diverted from my chest. In this way I could name many instances.

At 1135 I left the platoon sector as last man. Carried my MG through into a slightly protected defile and crept back again with another fellow to get the wounded. It was time to get them, for tanks were moving 30 yards from us.

On our way back we were covered again with terrific Arty fire. We were just lying in an open area. Every moment I expected deadly shrapnel. At that moment I lost my nerve. The others acted just like me. When one hears for hours the whining, whistling of bursting of shells and the moaning and groaning of the wounded, one does not feel too well. Altogether it was hell.

Our company has only 30 men left. In the meantime, it was reorganized to a certain extent. We are now located in a somewhat more quiet sector, what we call quiet. We are expecting a new attack supported by tanks today or tomorrow.

I have been recommended for the Air Force ground-fighting badge, on account of the hand-to-hand fighting on 11, 12, and 13 July.

Now I would like to finish this letter. I gave you sufficient reading material, I guess. Hope to hear from you soon.

With best regards, I remain as
Your friend,
Helmut

Apparently the rapid and accurate fire of the M-1s in the hands of American "sharpshooters" was just as galling to the Germans as "sniper" fire was to Americans.

National Archives

offensive action on June 16 to regain the initiative.

Replacements began arriving and were assigned to the hardest hit companies. When the Germans noticed the activity, they stepped up their mortar fire but without causing casualties.

The plan of attack for June 16 called for a 15-minute artillery preparation on Hill 192 followed by all three regiments attacking abreast, with the 38th on the right flank, and the 9th Regiment poised to seize St. Germain d'Elle. The 23rd Regiment would then attack Hill 192 with the 2nd and 3rd Battalions, with the 1st Battalion in reserve.

The 3rd Battalion's objective was the hamlet of St. George d'Elle and then the east slope of Hill 192; the 2nd Battalion, advancing on Hill 192 proper, would link up with the 3rd Battalion and move against la Vallee Queron. Company E of the 2nd Battalion, scheduled to hit Bérigny, would have a platoon of Sherman tanks attached.

At dawn on June 16, American artillery opened up and Hill 192 disappeared under clouds of dirt and flying trees. East of Bérigny, Company E and the tanks crossed their line of departure, but the leading tank was knocked out by a shot from a panzerfaust, blocking the road about 300 yards east of the village.

Undeterred, the rest of the tanks fanned out into the fields on both sides of the road, the infantrymen following in their wake. But the attack stalled when it was discovered that the hedgerows were too great an obstacle for the tanks.

Company G's attack was faring better. Despite intense enemy small-arms fire and mortar rounds saturating the area, Company G managed to cross the Elle River and advance from one hedgerow to another until 3rd Battalion was 400 yards beyond St. George d'Elle.

Even without tank support, Company E continued advancing toward Bérigny—in spite of being hit with practically everything in the 3rd Fallschirmjäger Division arsenal. Once the Americans penetrated into the village, the battle became a house-to-house fight. Slowly the Yanks managed

ABOVE: Well hidden by the foliage of a hedgerow in Normandy, an American machine gunner remains on alert during the attack near St. Lô, July 1944. OPPOSITE: A detailed map of Hill 192 shows the positions of A and C Companies, 23rd Infantry, and their routes of attack on July 11, 1944.

to push the paratroopers out but were then subjected to a vicious counterattack that was only stopped by the timely arrival of American artillery. The Germans were blocking Company E's attempts to move forward out of the village.

In the Company F, 2nd Battalion, 23rd Regiment sector, an attempt to make contact with Company G was halted by concentrated German fire while it tried crossing a stream. No sooner had the artillery and mortar fire lifted than German troops counterattacked and forced Company G back across the stream—all the way back to its line of departure. To maintain the battalion front, Company F was ordered back to its previous position.

By early afternoon it became obvious that the 2nd Battalion could not advance any farther. Lt. Col. Marlin's men ceased all attempts to move forward and began preparing their positions for defense.

While the 2nd Battalion, 23rd Regiment assault was stymied, Colonel Walter A. Elliott's 38th Infantry Regiment, to the right of the 23rd, was having better success. Attacking the north slope of Hill 192, Lt. Col. Malcolm R. Stotts' 3rd Battalion, 38th Regiment was able to fight its way up to the crest of Hill 192, but later had to abandon it.

On the 16th, one rifle company managed to reach the crest of Hill 192, but a counterattack drove it back down the hill. To steady the American line, the division's 2nd Engineer Combat Battalion was rushed in to assume the role of infantry.

At St. German d'Elle, however, Hirshfelder's 9th Infantry Regiment had only advanced 300 yards from its line of departure before it ran into determined resistance and was stopped cold. This ended the 2nd Infantry Division's initial attack on Hill 192.

After four days of fighting and little progress, the attack was called off. Depending on

the source one reads, the attack cost between 1,200 and 1,250 American casualties. The most important reason the attack failed was that the Americans had not yet adjusted their tactics to the conditions in the bocage.

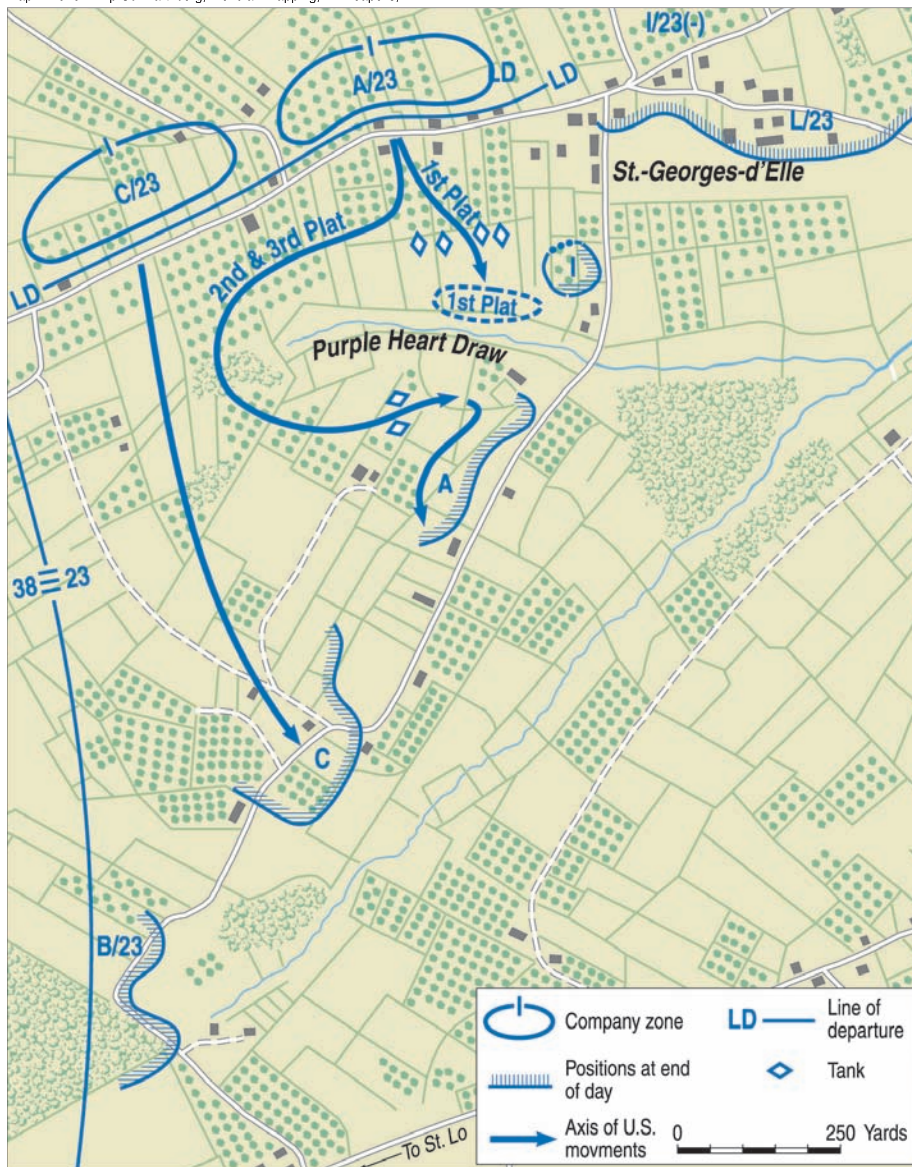
Through the remainder of June, the 2nd Division maintained its positions, occasionally being shelled by German artillery and mortars and strafed by German aircraft. On June 19, Lt. Col. Humphries, commanding the 1st Battalion, 23rd Regiment, was wounded in action and was replaced by Lt. Col. John M. Hightower.

Further attempts to take Hill 192 and St. Lô were put on hold until July 10, 1944, but the 2nd Division continued to refine plans for renewing the offensive on the feature.

During this period of limited combat, the division reviewed the lessons learned and determined how to improve its performance in the battles yet to come. Better reconnaissance of the battlefield was vital, as was closer coordination with armor, artillery, and air support. More vigorous patrolling was deemed necessary, as was improved security to ward off enemy probes. Better interrogation of prisoners was also considered vital to gain intelligence about the foe.

The low number of automatic weapons was also discussed, and the division was allocated a greater number of automatic and semi-automatic weapons to counter German superiority in firepower.

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



Armor and artillery liaison officers were also brought into the planning for the next attack on Hill 192. The artillerymen exploited the flexibility that good radios, modern fire-direction centers that could control the fire of multiple batteries, and spotters well forward on the ground and in the air gave them. Special maps showing all the fields, hedgerows, buildings, sunken roads, and trails were distributed so that mortar and artillery fire adjustment could be made quickly and precisely.

According to Maj. Gen. Robertson, the targeting to support the attack "was later described as one of the best planned of the war in Europe." The emphasis in training for the attack was on the infantry, armor, artillery, and engineers all working as a team. Robertson said the plan was to move "as a unit, the engineers blasted the earthen walls with demolitions, the tanks plowed through, the infantry surged through the gaps supported by tank fire, to seize these otherwise unyielding positions."

To plow through the hedgerows, tanks, like the ones supporting the 2nd Infantry Division, were outfitted as "Rhinos" with hedgerow cutters—pointed metal horns welded onto the front of the hull to dig into and break through the hedgerow instead of rising over it. (These cutters were the brainchild of Sergeant Curtis Cullen of the 102nd Cavalry Reconnaissance Squadron.) The Germans had strewn the beaches of Normandy with obstacles; there is a delicious irony that these obstacles supplied most of the metal for the horns.

Several authors have written that the Rhino was such a potential "game changer" that Lt. Gen. Bradley ordered them to not be used until Operation Cobra. But Maj. Gen. Robertson's book, *Combat History the Second Infantry Division in World War Two,* discusses their use at Hill 192.

Lieutenant Colonel Frank T. Mildren, who commanded the 1st Battalion of the 38th during its successful attack on Hill 192, wrote a monograph after the war that also indicated that Rhino tanks were used

in the second attack.

Even the light Stuart tank, fitted out as a Rhino, could be an effective hedgerow buster. But when the Rhinos were first deployed, no one was sure if the horns would always work. So racks to carry the engineers' breaching charges were installed on the back decks of the Shermans supporting the Warriors.

Each company formed several attack teams based on an infantry squad with an attached Sherman and a few engineers trained to breach the hedgerows with explosives. The squad's armament was augmented with an extra BAR or Thompson and in some cases with a .30-caliber machine-gun team—the gun on a special spike mount to facilitate rapid emplacement on top of a hedgerow.

On June 20, a new American attack plan was being considered. This time there was good reconnaissance along the front lines and from liaison aircraft, although patrols sent forward of the lines were regularly "badly shot up."

According to Cleve Barkley, the son of a 2nd Infantry Division veteran, the one exception was the Winstead patrol. On the night of July 6, 1st Lt. Ralph Winstead and his men of the 38th Infantry Regiment crept forward toward an area dubbed "Kraut Corner," which bristled with machine guns and mortars. The patrol moved under the cover of American artillery and mortars firing on German positions until the troops were within yards of the German dugouts and trenches.

Satchel charges and Bangalore torpedoes (explosives packed into long, connected poles) stunned the defenders long enough for Winstead's troops to break into a strongpoint and begin a point-blank firefight with the shocked Germans. They inflicted an estimated 11 casualties against three of their own and returned with valuable information about the location of German machine-gun and mortar positions.

Around this time, Tech. Sgt. Frank Kviatek, an expert marksman and World War I veteran, became a hero in the 2nd Division. Full of anger over the loss of his two brothers killed in Italy, he vowed to kill 25 Germans for each of his brothers. He used a bolt-action Springfield rifle with telescopic sight to pick off 21 Germans, mostly snipers. He was later wounded but returned to combat to account for another 15 of the enemy. He became the first 2nd Division soldier to be awarded the Silver Star.

Finally, on July 10, the American drive to take St. Lô was resumed with the capture of Hill 192 a key element. While the 29th Infantry Division made a major push southwest toward St. Lô, Robinson's 2nd Division crossed its line of departure for another go at Hill 192.

This time the 62nd Armored Field Artillery Battalion was attached to the 2nd Division with two battalions of the 1st Division and the guns of the corps artillery and one combat command of the 2nd Armored Division to support the attack.

The Army's official history notes that Colonel Ralph W. Zwicker's 38th Infantry Regiment (he had replaced Elliott on July 5) "was assigned the mission of taking Hill 192 proper, attacking with two battalions abreast on the right of the division front. The 23rd Infantry (Colonel Jay B. Lovless), fighting in the center of the division zone, was ordered to attack with two battalions in column in the general sector of St.-Georges-d'Elle-la Croix-Rouge, making its main effort in the west of its zone, on the eastern slope of Hill 192, in order to cross that slope and secure the St.-Lô-Bayeux highway from south of the hill east through la Croix-Rouge. The 9th Infantry, on the eastern flank of the division front, was directed to support the attack by all available fires."

An hour before the ground attack commenced, artillery shells—more than 25,000 rounds in 60 minutes—rained down on the 3rd Fallschirmjäger's positions—the heaviest artillery concentration up to that point in the battle for Normandy. As American troops came upon survivors, many Germans surrendered, too stunned by the intensity of the shellfire to resist.

Sherman tanks, too, were in abundance, with three tanks assigned to each infantry platoon. The tanks had special EE-8 phones installed on the rear and connected to the tanks' interphone system for tank-infantry communication during action. A soldier walking beside or behind the tank could spot targets, such as an aperture of a bunker or a rifleman in a window, and point them out to the tank commander. A writer cited these experiments as examples of an "entrepreneurial spirit" that encouraged a free flow of ideas within the American Army.

Aircraft were also scheduled to take part but low visibility caused by clouds and fog called off all but one sortie. After units of the 38th Regiment were accidentally struck in a friendly fire incident, further airstrikes were cancelled until visibility improved.

The fanaticism of the German defenders made them so determined that some of them refused to surrender and had to be buried alive in their bunkers.

Hightower's 1st Battalion of the 23rd, with Company A on the left and Company C on the right, jumped off at 6 AM from the line of departure on the Cloville-St.-Georges-d'Elle road (attacking from the road that ran west out of St.-Georges-d'Elle). Company A's initial advance was without incident until it reached a defile that became known as Purple Heart Draw, where the Yanks were caught in a murderous fire that inflicted heavy casualties.

Company C had it easier, moving forward without serious opposition. Effectively using rifle grenades, the company knocked out several enemy machine-gun emplacements.

National Archives

With his rifle and a Model 24 stick grenade, often called a potato masher, propped up on the edge of his foxhole, a German Fallschirmjäger waits for the American assault.

Company L of the 23rd's 3rd Battalion, however, had run into a hornet's nest and taken many casualties while trying to gain a hedgerow to the east of St.-Georges-d'Elle. But Company L's efforts helped keep German forces in that sector from shifting troops to the main zone of attack.

At 6:30 AM, the 38th Infantry Regiment began moving toward Hill 192, with Mildren's 1st Battalion on the left and Lt. Col. Jack K. Norris's 2nd Battalion on the right, both following closely behind a rolling barrage. Two companies of the 741st Tank Battalion, a company of the 2nd Engineer Combat Battalion, and a company of the 81st Chemical Mortar Battalion supported the attack.

By the end of the day, Hightower's 1st Battalion had gained 1,500 yards and dug in for the night 400 yards from its objective, the St. Lô-Bayeux highway.

To the east of Hill 192, the Germans still had a tenuous hold on Purple Heart Draw, but it had become a salient that could not be held long term. Despite the fact that the Germans had plenty of panzerfausts and antitank grenades, close support by the infantry prevented any tank casualties.

After taking Cloville, Norris's 2nd Battalion bypassed the village of le Soulaire and reached the west slope of Hill 192 and then, at about 5 PM, its forward elements crossed the St. Lô -Bayeux highway while under fire.

Throughout July 11, combat engineers had been blasting holes in the hedgerows through which tanks could charge while hitting the next hedgerow with their main guns and machine guns. With the Germans pinned down, American infantry, following behind the tanks, was able to charge enemy positions successfully.

Whatever its deficiencies as a tank-killing gun, the medium-velocity 75mm gun on the Sherman was an excellent infantry support piece. The velocity was still sufficiently high that it readily penetrated hedgerows and bunkers.

The Sherman's bow gunner and tank commander would fire their machine guns, traversing along the hedgerow in front of them. The .50-caliber rounds of the commander's gun would usually punch right through any hedgerow, especially where it had been hollowed out to form a machine-gun bunker. The exit wound from a hit to the body could be as large as the diameter of a football, and any round that hit an arm or leg usually removed it.

Pairs of riflemen scouts would fan out around the margins of the field tossing grenades over the hedgerow. If the Germans somehow avoided becoming casualties and pulled back, making a stand brought quick and accurate artillery with ground troops moving up behind it.

An assault on one of the strongpoints went surprisingly well because by that time the Germans had been so weakened that their commander had ordered a withdrawal. By late in the day the Americans had reached the woods on the south slope of Hill 192 and could advance more easily, partly because of slackening German resistance and partly because the woods gave better cover than the open fields to the north. By day's end, the attackers controlled most of the hill and were across the road at its base.

Lieutenant Colonel Mildren pointed out that the defenders were so shattered that they failed to mount the usual counterattack that almost always followed a German retreat.

American accounts of the battle emphasize the Germans' desperate resistance in the opening phases of the battle. "Heavy mortar and machine-gun fire" and similar phrases are sprinkled liberally throughout them. The fanaticism of the German defenders made them so determined that some of them refused to surrender and had to be buried alive in their bunkers.

American accounts also complain frequently about German "snipers," who were mostly infantrymen armed with ordinary bolt-action Mausers and with no special training.

Some American companies sustained heavy casualties, yet overall the casualties were comparatively light. Most assault companies had to commit their reserve platoon and at least one battalion committed its reserve company. But it is noteworthy that neither the 9th nor the 23rd Regiment had to commit its reserve battalion.

Aiding in this effort, armored bulldozers or tanks with scoops mounted on their bows filled in sunken roads or plowed over machine-gun nests, burying their crews.

One dozer operator, Private John R. Brewer, 741st Tank Battalion, saw three Germans behind a hedgerow firing at the advancing troops with their machine pistols. He smashed the hedge over the trio, burying them alive.

Second Lieutenant Mac L. Basham, 38th Infantry Regiment, routed one enemy soldier from his hole and then made the German accompany him to other positions to order out his comrades. After taking seven prisoners this way, Basham turned them in, secured the aid of two enlisted men, and together they drove five more from dugouts.

By late afternoon on July 11, "The Hill" belonged to the men of the 2nd, but the battle was not yet over. That evening the Germans lashed out with artillery fire and small counterattacks, but it was clear the Germans were on the losing end. The next day, the 2nd Division resumed the assault at 11 AM with a drive spearheaded by Mildren's 1st Battalion of the 38th. Resistance quickly crumbled as the Germans pulled out.

By the end of July 12, the 2nd Division held not only Hill 192 but also the St.-Lô highway as far west as la Calvaire. Their victory had cost the 2nd Division 69 killed, 328 wounded, and eight missing. The left flank of the main drive on St.-Lô had been cleared of a formidable obstacle, and the Americans had gained the best ground for observation on the battlefield.

The training for the attack that included the infantry, armor, artillery, air, and engineers had paid off.

With the 2nd Division now in possession of Hill 192, the rest of V and XIX Corps could concentrate on taking St. Lô. On the right flank of the 2nd Division, the 29th Infantry Division moved simultaneously against the high ground closer to St. Lô to position itself for its attack on that city.

There were enough German positions that survived the barrage and remained capable of putting heavy machine-gun fire on any troops maneuvering in the open against them, plus enough German mortars and artillery to make the place hot. Additionally, a number of the tanks fell victim to panzerfausts, mines, and artillery.

Not everything went well for the attackers. Carrying breaching charges in the open on the back decks of Shermans when hot steel from tree bursts was flying around was not someone's best idea. In several instances the explosives stored on the Shermans blew up, destroying the vehicles. But even the attack teams without tank support drove in the outpost line and put heavy pressure on the strongpoints.

The rest of the tanks supporting Company A, 2nd Battalion of the 38th, pulled back; it took several hours to remove the cases of explosives from them and get them back into action. Company A sustained so many casualties that it became ineffective; Company C's attack in the battalion's righthand sector was more successful.

It had been overcast and foggy when the attack started, initially keeping spotter planes on the ground. After several hours, the fog briefly lifted, which allowed air strikes to begin and the spotter planes to go into operation. Later that afternoon, the clouds closed in again, and the remainder of the strikes had to be canceled. Even so, by midafternoon Mildred's battalion was atop the hill and moving down the reverse slope.

When the American attack rolled forward, it looked like this: artillery would fall heavily on German positions. As it lifted, the hedgerow in front of them would erupt with automatic weapons fire and be violently breached, perhaps by an explosion but increasingly, as they proved their worth, by the horns of a Rhino tank. The tank would roll through the gap, firing its main gun at suspected machine-gun positions in the corners of the fields, followed by infantrymen charging through and firing at everything.

The 2nd Infantry Division's attack and capture of Hill 192 was an outstanding success, directly preparing the way for the 29th Infantry Division's bloody battle for St Lô.

Meanwhile, other troops were clearing the Allied rear by capturing Cherbourg and battling their way south through the hedgerows and swamps in the center of the Cotentin Peninsula. The interim objective for those troops was to draw up to the Piers-St Lô road with a firm grip on the latter. This gave General Bradley an excellent place from which to launch Operation Cobra on July 25, 1944.

Both: National Archives

An American mortar team fires at the enemy from their hedgerow position. By swiftly adapting to the changing battlefield, American soldiers became a formidable fighting force by the end of the war.

A wounded soldier is carried on a litter to an aid station. The attack on St. Lô was one of the most savage fought in France and aid stations located close to the front lines such as this one were instrumental in saving many lives.

The 2nd Division had taken heavy casualties. There were only about 2,700 men in the rifle squads of a full-strength American infantry division; the division lost about 1,600-1,700 men in the two attacks, and a great many of them were from those squads.

But the Warrior Division was not so badly hurt as to cause the organization of any of its subordinate units to collapse or for an influx of replacements to change the character of the division. It remained a proud, cohesive force.

The ranks were replenished with replacements and men returning from hospitals. The division was thrown again into heavy combat, this time in the assault on Brest. The division was replenished once more and, in the fall of 1944, sent to the Ardennes Forest on Germany's western border with Belgium. There it rested in a quiet sector until called upon to pass through the 99th Infantry Division and assault the West Wall. Just as that assault was achieving success, the Battle of the Bulge began. The 2nd and 99th Infantry Divisions were in the path of the planned German advance and stopped it cold.

The failure of the first attack on Hill 192 made a great impression on Lieutenant Raymond Lee. That is clear from the paper that he, by then a major, wrote during his advanced infantry officer's course at Fort Benning, Georgia. He realized that the real story of the fight for Hill 192 was not the failure of the first attacks in June but how quickly and rapidly the units involved rose above that failure.

He recognized that the creation of the tank-infantry-engineer assault team was a major part of the solution to the problems of hedgerow warfare. It furnished a clearcut example of the importance of the ingenuity and resourcefulness of American troops under varying combat conditions.

Indeed, the attack was one of the best examples during the Normandy campaign of combined arms attacks that made good progress with few casualties.

The 2nd Division was only one of many units demonstrating that adaptability was a strong trait in the American makeup and that it was being well used to improve performance in battle. American leaders were well trained and used their common sense and knowledge of the capabilities of their equipment to create the coordination of the separate elements of the Army's combat arms into a unified force that was far greater than the sum of its parts.

No one who has studied World War II in Europe disparages German tactical acumen at this stage of the fighting or would argue that the American infantry in Normandy had achieved the level of skill and professionalism it later displayed in the fighting along the German border. But it is clear that it was improving rapidly. As one historian put it, the American Army's adaptation was quick, and it adapted in a great number of ways.

Fortunately for America, the Axis leadership had its blind spots. Although a few Axis leaders like Rommel were aware as early as the fighting in Africa that American units improved rapidly in combat and should be taken seriously, an awareness of this trait did not permeate the thinking of Axis leadership.

Historian Carlo D'Este reflected that Mussolini viewed America as benefiting from a journalistic hoax that disguised the fact that it actually had the industrial capacity of a second-rate power. Hitler's view of the American Army was even more negative.

It was not until German failure in the Battle of the Bulge that Hitler began to realize his error. America's enemies have frequently failed to understand the strengths of the American character, in particular its ability to adapt, adjust, and rise above failure. There is no better example of American adaptability and the advantages that derive from it than the fighting for Hill 192.

The 2nd Infantry Division fought courageously and with skill for the rest of the war. By their devotion to duty, they more than lived up to their motto: "Second Infantry Division—Second to None." □

Defending the Lexi

In early 1942, a furious air-sea battle in the Solomons set the stage for Pacific Theater combat yet to come.

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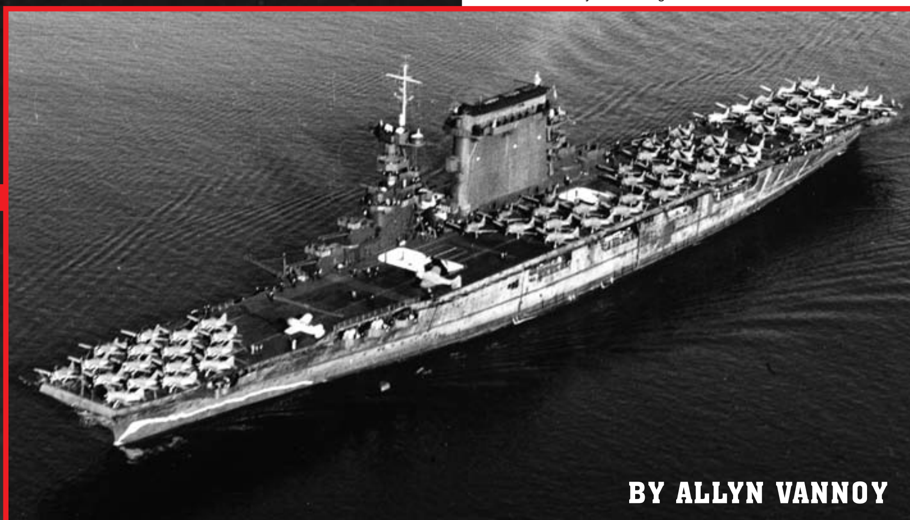
Both: Naval History and Heritage Command



BY ALLYN VANNOY

Before there was an air-sea battle at Midway or in the Coral Sea, American aircraft carriers were launching operations against Japanese bases in the South Pacific, with the Japanese fighting to defend their gains.

One such action took place east of the Japanese stronghold at Rabaul in February 1942. In hindsight, it should have been a warning to the Japanese of things to come.

U.S. Navy fighter squadron VF-3's carrier, the USS *Saratoga* (CV-3), had taken a torpedo on Sunday, January 11, 1942, approximately 420 miles southwest of Hawaii and would be out of action for several months while undergoing repairs.

In the early months of the war, the USS *Lexington*'s own VF-2 was still operating obsolete Brewster F2A Buffalo fighters. While the *Lexington*'s fighter squadron was removed to exchange their F2As for Grumman F4F Wildcats, VF-3, under Lt. Cmdr. John Thach, was transferred to the *Lexington*, part of Task Force 11. Thach also led one of the squadron's six plane divisions, the squadron's other two divi-

U.S. Navy Grumman F4F Wildcat fighters flying in formation. Despite the Wildcats' slow climb rate and machine guns with a tendency to jam, the Wildcats' pilots were exceptionally skilled and courageous—as they demonstrated on February 20, 1942. INSET: With her 866-foot-long flight deck loaded with F2A-1 fighters (parked forward), SBD scout-bombers (amidships), and TBD-1 torpedo planes (aft), the USS *Lexington* (CV-2) steams out of San Diego, California, October 14, 1941. Originally ordered as a battlecruiser in 1916, she was converted to a carrier in 1922 and launched in 1925.

sions being led by Lt. Cmdr. Donald Lovelace, executive officer, and Lieutenant Noel Gayler, flight officer.

Task Force 11 comprised the carrier *Lexington* (CV-2, affectionately called The *Lady Lex* and commanded by Captain Frederick C. Sherman), the heavy cruisers *Minneapolis* and *Indianapolis,* seven destroyers, and the fleet oiler *Neosho*. The *Lexington*'s air group included 18 fighters, 37 dive bombers, and 13 torpedo bombers.

Task Force 11 left Pearl Harbor on January 31. The *Lexington* had been assigned the task of penetrating enemy-held waters north of the island of New Ireland. On February 6, TF 11's mission was modified to cooperate with the newly created ANZAC Command to blunt Japanese advances toward the New Hebrides and the line of communication between Pearl Harbor and Australia. On February 10, the task force was reinforced by the addition of the heavy cruiser *San Francisco* and two destroyers.

With Japanese advances in the Philippines and Southeast Asia, the U.S Navy was eager to hit back. The task force was ordered to conduct offensive operations in the Solomons-Bismarck Archipelago area to strike the Japanese base at Rabaul on the eastern end of the island of New Britain.

Plans were made to pass east of the New Hebrides and the Solomons to a position where Rabaul could be attacked from the northeast. An air strike was to be launched on February 21, to be followed, depending on the situation, by a shore bombardment by a heavy cruiser and two destroyers.

Intelligence indicated that there was no threat from Japanese carrier forces in the area, as they were reported to be operating in the Dutch East Indies. On February 17, the heavy cruiser *Pensacola* and two destroyers also joined the task force.

While concerned with the defense of the Bismarcks, the Japanese were planning to occupy Lae and Salamaua in eastern New Guinea, along with Tulagi in the southern Solomons, scheduled for March and April. This was to be followed by the seizure of Port Moresby on Papua's southern coast.

To provide air support, in early February the Japanese command began concentrating units from the 24th Air Flotilla at Rabaul. Two naval air groups, one with fighters and one with medium bombers, wold ultimately operate from there.

Using radio interceptions, the Japanese determined that an American carrier task force had departed the Hawaiian Islands in early February. On February 14, alerts were given to their forces at Truk and Rabaul and, late on the afternoon of February 19, a Japanese station on a small island 160 miles southeast of Truk reported sighting two enemy destroyers—information that later proved to be false.

Coincidentally, at that moment TF 11 was steaming toward Rabaul. During this time the *Lexington*'s VF-3 had been reduced to just 16 F4Fs available for operations.

On the morning of February 20, TF 11 was on a northwesterly course north of the Solomons. The group was to swing southwest for the final approach to a launch point at daybreak the next morning. At dawn on the 20th, the *Lexington* launched six Douglas SBD Dauntless dive bombers on a search out to 300 miles ahead of the task force. The task force's air defenses were reinforced by other SBDs acting as a low-level antisubmarine patrol.

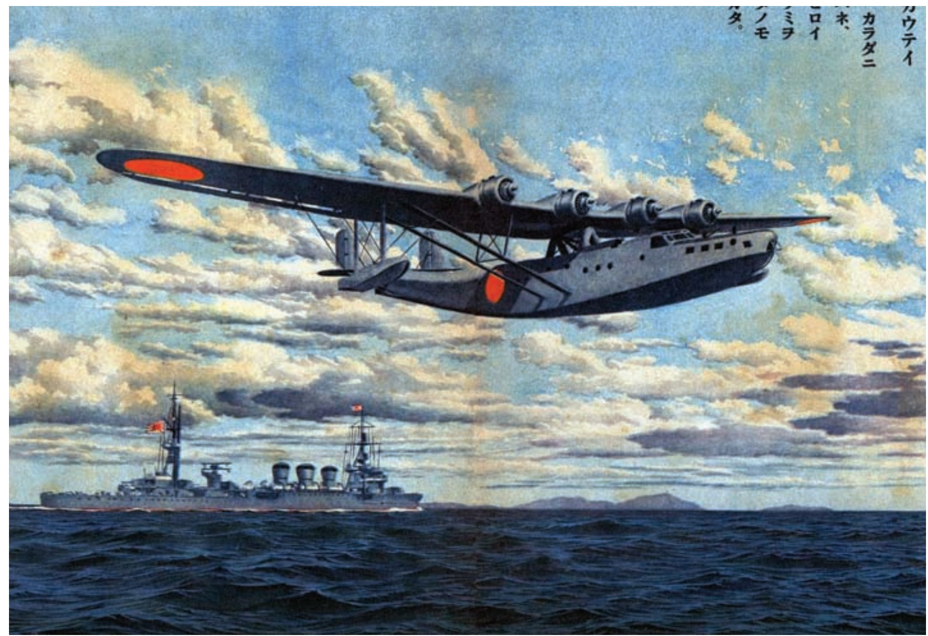
The L*ady Lex* was outfitted with CXAM radar with a range of 80 miles under optimal conditions but unable to delineate altitude or numbers of aircraft. At 10:15 AM, the radar detected an intruder bearing 180 degrees at 35 miles. Thach's 1st Division of VF-3 was scrambled.

That morning, three four-engine Kawanishi Type 97 ("Mavis") flying boats had departed Rabaul. The Mavis was a huge patrol aircraft with a crew of nine, a wingspan of 131 feet, a range of 4,112 miles, and armament including four machine guns and a 20mm cannon. The Kawanishis were dispatched to search an arc of 075 to 155 degrees to a range out to 500 miles.

At 10:30, Lieutenant Sakai Noboru, pilot of the flying boat covering an arc from 075 to 090 degrees from Rabaul, reported spotting an enemy strike force bearing 075 degrees and 460 miles from Rabaul on a course of 315 degrees. Noboru shadowed the task force, taking advantage of cloud cover.

Just before 11 AM, Thach and his wingman, Ensign Edward R. Sellstrom, Jr., cruising at 12,000 feet, spotted the Mavis and accelerated to intercept, entering a rain squall in the process. Suddenly, the huge flying boat appeared just below Thach—as he described it, "right into my lap." As Thach came out of the clouds, the Mavis had disappeared. The

National Archives



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ABOVE: Sparked by Lieutenant Edward "Butch" O'Hare (left) and his commanding officer Lt. Cmdr. John Thach, VF-3 accounted for over a dozen enemy planes and kept the *Lexington* safe. LEFT: Wildcat fighters of VF-3 on board the USS *Saratoga*, October 1941, before being transferred to her sister ship, the *Lady Lex*. OPPOSITE: Searching for the *Lexington*'s Task Force 11 were three Kawanishi H6K4 Type 97 ("Mavis") flying boats—one of which is pictured on a Japanese postcard of the period—similar to the American PBY Catalina.

crew of the flying boat had apparently spotted the Wildcats and taken evasive action.

After a few minutes, the F4F pilots saw the Kawanishi break into the clear at about 1,000 feet off the water. Thach and Sellstrom went into a dive, approaching the flying boat from aft. Thach opted to make a high-side attack; Sellstrom crossed to the opposite side—standard tactics used to box in a target. On his run, Thach went after the starboard engines as Sellstrom started crossing behind the flying boat.

The Mavis's tail gunner fired his 20mm cannon, causing Sellstrom to take action to avoid the shells as Thach dived in again from the right. On this pass an entire wing of the flying boat burst into flames. The Mavis skidded into the sea, followed by a tremendous fire and explosion. At 11:12, those aboard the *Lexington* spotted the black smoke from the crashed aircraft.

Thach and Sellstrom had barely returned to the carrier when radar picked up a second bogey—another Kawanishi Type 97, piloted by Warrant Officer Hayashi Kiyoshi, which departed Rabaul at 8:00 to cover an arc of 090 to 105 degrees. While en route, Kiyoshi had received orders to "amplify" the contact made by Noboru.

Lieutenant (j.g.) Burt Stanley and his wingman, Ensign Lee Haynes, intercepted Kiyoshi's flying boat. During their attack, Stanley set the inboard port side engine on fire; flames spread to the fuselage. Haynes quickly followed Stanley's lead. The nose of the Mavis dipped lower until it was diving out of control, trailing smoke. It crashed in a great ball of smoke and fire. The time of the kill was recorded as 12:18 PM. Kiyoshi had been unable to contact Rabaul.

But the Japanese now knew the location of the *Lexington*'s task force. The ships of TF 11 were running low on fuel—there was no reserve for high-speed operations if a fight should turn into a running battle. So it was decided to call off the Rabaul strike. Instead, a feint was planned. TF 11 changed course to the southeast until late that afternoon. The hope was that even if the task force did not carry out an attack, it might divert Japanese attention from the East Indies.

At Rabaul, Admiral Eiji Goto, commanding the 24th Air Flotilla, was certain that once *Lexington*'s task force got within 200 miles of Rabaul it would launch a strike. To forestall that attack and beat the Americans to the punch, he would attack first at a range of 400 miles, well before *Lexington* reached its launch point.

To carry out such a mission he had available 18 Mitsubishi G4M1 (Betty) bombers of his 4th Air Group. Supplies of aerial torpedoes had not been received, and the available Mitsubishi A6M2 Zero fighters did not have sufficient range to provide an escort. The lack of torpedoes would be unfortunate; the lack of a fighter escort would prove fatal.

The 4th Air Group, manned by veteran crews, included two divisions (chutais) of nine aircraft each, operating relatively new G4M1s manned by a crew of seven. Aircraft armament included four 7.7mm Lewis machine guns, one each in the nose, dorsal blister, and both beam blisters, and a 20mm cannon in the tail. Each aircraft could carry a payload of two 1,102-pound bombs. But the aircraft had no armor or self-sealing fuel tanks—critical shortcomings.

Mission leader was Lt. Cmdr. Ito Takuzo, who took the co-pilot's seat in the G4M1 piloted by Warrant Officer Chuto Watanabe. Takuzo was a respected and experienced aviator, group leader of the 1st Chutai. One of the bombers failed to take off due to mechanical problems, reducing the strike force to 17 aircraft.

The 2nd Chutai of nine bombers was led by division leader Lieutenant Masayoshi Nakagawa. His 17 bombers followed 20 minutes behind a Kawanishi flying boat under Reserve Ensign Makino Motohiro, dispatched to help pinpoint the position of the American task force.

At 12:40 PM, American radar picked up a bogey 80 miles to the west of the *Lex*–

ington. At 1:17 PM, the target disappeared from the radar screen. During this time Thach's 1st Division remained aloft until around 1:30. At the same time, a dozen SBD dive bombers were sent to scout in advance of the task force, and Thach's aircraft were replaced by six F4Fs under Lt. Cmdr. Lovelace. In an effort to keep a CAP (combat air patrol) in the air with sufficient fuel, it was decided to make preparations to launch *Lexington*'s third division ahead of schedule.

At 3:42, a radar contact was made at a bearing of 270 degrees, 76 miles distance. Eighteen minutes later it was decided to rotate the CAP early in order to put fighters on station with full fuel tanks. A strike from Rabaul was expected. Fifteen minutes later, Gayler's division of Wildcats began to launch.

At 4:11, a large blip was picked up at 255 degrees, 75 miles away; 20 minutes later, when the bogeys were 24 miles from the carrier, Gayler's six F4Fs were vectored to intercept. In moments Gayler spotted nine green and tan twin-engine bombers formed tightly into a vee-of-vees. This was the nine aircraft of Nakagawa's 2nd Chutai. Heavy clouds and rain squalls had compelled Lt. Cmdr. Takuzo to split his strike force into two elements, each to search independently for the American carrier. Nakagawa spotted TF 11 first, providing a contact report at 4:35.

Lieutenant Gayler and his wingman, Ensign Dale W. Peterson, prepared to attack from 13,000 feet. The Japanese bombers were at 11,500 feet flying at about 170 knots.

In the meantime, Lovelace's division was kept aloft while Thach's Wildcats, on *Lexington*'s flight deck, were hurriedly prepared for launch.

Gayler and Peterson made the initial contact with Nakagawa's G4Ms. At 4:40, the F4Fs sent the first of the Bettys down after a high-side pass. Using the speed they gained in their dives, the two fighters climbed to regain position for a second attack. Next to arrive were Lt. (j.g.) Rolla S. Lemmon and his wingman, Lt. (j.g.) Howard F. "Spud" Clark, and with a high-side run they shot down another Japanese bomber.

ABOVE: A Wildcat of VF-3, piloted by Thach, prepares to take off. OPPOSITE: Thach (foreground) and O'Hare flying their Wildcats near Oahu, Hawaii, in April 1942, two months after VF-3's stunning victory.

The third section showed up next, and one of its pilots, Ensign Willard (Bill) Eder, latched onto another bomber. But Eder was unable to climb above the enemy before they were upon him. He charged in from below and behind one of the trailing bombers and fired a long burst, but then three of his guns stopped functioning.

Meanwhile, Gayler was attacking the same target from above on his second pass, his gunnery deadly. In two minutes, the 4th Air Group had lost three bombers from its 2nd Chutai, and the surviving Japanese pilots tightened their formation to fill the gaps. The remaining six Bettys then emerged from a cloud within sight of the *Lexington*. Captain Sherman turned the carrier into the wind to launch Thach's Wildcats.

At 4:43, another G4M, evidently the lead plane flown by Nakagawa, went down under the guns of Gayler's wingman, Ensign Peterson, just as the cruisers and destroyers of the task force unleashed a barrage of antiaircraft fire.

The loss of the chutai's lead aircraft with the master bombardier seemed to confuse the other crews momentarily. In level bombing runs the Japanese crews were trained to release their bombs simultaneously on command in order to bracket the target, but this time the bombers appeared to hesitate in their approach.

After regrouping, they moved to parallel the *Lexington*'s course, overtaking her from astern. As they did, another Betty was shot down by Lieutenant Lemmon, flying with Gayler's division. The remaining four Bettys dropped their bombs, but the nearest detonation was 3,000 yards away—over a mile and a half—from the carrier.

The Japanese bombers now turned for home, the Bettys accelerating to over 200 knots. As Lt. Cmdr. Lovelace managed to put a fatal stream of rounds in one of the enemy aircraft, he saw its 20mm tail cannon knock down Lieutenant (j.g.) Howard Johnson. Johnson managed to bail out and was rescued by a destroyer. Coming around to make a second pass at one of the bombers, Lovelace closed from below and behind, unleashing a burst of .50-caliber slugs.

Thach's division was now back in the air, four of the Wildcats going full throttle after the retreating Bettys. Thach and Sellstrom hurried to overtake the fleeing bombers; Thach reached a point just above and ahead of a bomber and turned to make a flat-side approach. As he did, Thach saw an F4F approach from dead astern of the target, then a

20mm shell fired from the tail cannon of the Betty exploded in the windshield of the Wildcat, claiming Ensign John (Jack) Wilson, who was killed instantly.

Thach followed through on his flat-side approach, hitting the Betty in the engine and wingroot and causing it to catch fire. Recovering from his run, Thach found himself behind and beneath another bomber. He zoomed up for a high-side run and put several well-placed rounds into one of the engines, causing an explosion and the wing to fall off. This was one of Thach's two kills that he shared with a 2nd Division pilot who was attacking the same target.

By now eight Bettys had been either shot down or forced out of formation, and Thach soon dispatched another, concentrating his fire on its port engine, which exploded taking off the wing.

At the same time, an SBD Dauntless flown by Lieutenant Edward H. Allen, part of Scouting Two, came upon a crippled bomber that had managed to arrest its descent; Allen finished it off with his .30-caliber machine guns. He then caught up with a second damaged Betty and maneuvered his SBD so that his rear gunner, ARM1c Bruce Roundtree, could blast the bomber. The enemy bomber began to burn rapidly and fell into the sea.

Another badly shot-up and flaming Betty in the process of trying to escape encountered Lieutenant Walter Henry of Bombing Two (VB-2) as he was returning from patrol. Henry was able to turn onto the bomber's tail, and one short burst from his twin .30s was sufficient; the G4M pitched over and crashed. The 2nd Chutai, all nine aircraft, had been wiped out.

Meanwhile, accompanying the eight bombers of the 1st Chutai, Lt. Cmdr. Takuzo had monitored Nakagawa's message on the *Lexington*'s position. He was north of the enemy's reported location and turned south in search of the task force. At 5 PM, Takuzo radioed Rabaul that he had the enemy in view and was about to attack.

Cruising at around 15,000 feet and anticipating the bomb run, Takuzo began descending to 11,000 feet. In the process, the bombers accelerated to about 190 knots. When he first spotted the American carrier to the southwest, Takuzo planned to parallel the target's course and overtake it from astern. Because most of the American fighters were busy knocking down Bettys of the first wave as it withdrew, only two Grummans lay between Takuzo and his target.

National Archives

The eight Bettys headed for the *Lexington* while maintaining a disciplined formation. In reserve above the carrier was Lieutenant Edward ("Butch") O'Hare and his wingman, Lieutenant (j.g.) Marion Dufilho. The pair raced eastward to intercept and arrived 1,500 feet above the Bettys at 5 PM. The situation approached a crisis as seven F4Fs were off to the west pursuing the first wave while Lovelace's five F4Fs from the 2nd Division, almost out of fuel, circled at low altitude around the *Lexington* awaiting the go-ahead to land.

The Japanese bombers came on in two three-plane vees with two more planes backing up the port vee. O'Hare and Dufilho engaged them at 5:05, three miles astern of the *Lexington*. The pair allowed the Bettys to pass beneath them, then rolled onto the right-hand vee and pushed their throttles forward.

Dufilho's guns jammed, leaving only O'Hare to engage the Japanese aircraft. The bombers held a tight formation as they had been trained in order to provide mutual defense and for bombing accuracy. O'Hare's Wildcat was armed with four .50-caliber guns with 450 rounds per gun—enough ammunition for about 34 seconds of sustained fire.

O'Hare's initial maneuver was a high-side diving attack using deflection shots. He placed bursts into a Betty's starboard engine and wing fuel tanks; when the stricken craft of Petty Officer 2nd Class (PO2c) Baba Tokiharu on the right side of the formation abruptly lurched to starboard, an engine began smoking heavily.

O'Hare then ducked to the other side of the vee formation and aimed at the enemy bomber of PO1c Mori Bin on the extreme left. A few well-directed short bursts hit Bin's right engine and punctured the left wing tank. Trailing a thin, white stream of fuel, the bomber shuddered as its speed dropped abruptly, then wheeled to the right and out of the formation.

Bin's bomber had not sustained fatal damage, but did not regain formation. After jettisoning his bombload, Bin withdrew at low altitude. Having extended his

high-side run to shoot at the second target, O'Hare crossed over to the left side of the Japanese formation, where he moved to regain position.

Starting his run from the left side of the formation, O'Hare set about dealing one by one with the three aircraft in echelon on that side. With a shallow high-side run, he fired into the rear aircraft, aiming at the port engine nacelle; he fired until he saw flames from the aircraft.

O'Hare had to change course slightly as the first target in his path, PO1c Maeda Koji, skidded violently in mid-air; then he charged after the next aircraft in line, PO1c Uchiyama Susumu's bomber, flying behind Takuzo's left wing. O'Hare fired into the bomber's left wing and engine and watched as the engine flamed up and seized, causing the Betty to veer sharply left into a dive. Five bombers were still in formation.

The surviving Bettys managed to drop their ordnance, their bombs landing astern of the wildly maneuvering *Lexington*. Though one was as close as 100 feet, all 10 bombs missed.

O'Hare had not yet finished; his next target was the lead bomber. Closing to point-blank range, his slugs tore into Takuzo's port nacelle, which flared up and exploded. The engine then wrenched free of its mounts and dropped away.

Trailing thick, black smoke the aircraft careened sharply to the left and started down. Even with the engine gone, the pilot struggled at the aircraft's controls in an attempt to crash his plane into the *Lexington*, but the plane plunged into the sea in a fiery explosion about 1,500 yards ahead of the carrier's port bow. The *Lexington* turned sharply to avoid running over the blazing pyre of fuel and debris.

The 1st Chutai's surviving aviators, heading away at high speed, interpreted what they saw as their commander's plane crashing into the carrier—considered a noble death.

After dropping their bombloads, the remaining 1st Chutai planes had to run the gauntlet of seven F4Fs and several SBDs. Holding formation were the four bombers of Lieutenant (j.g.) Mitani Akira and Petty Officers Maeda Koji, Ono Kosuke, and Kogiku Ryosuke. Far beneath them limped PO1c Bin's battered aircraft, forced out of formation on O'Hare's first pass.

National Archives

A Mitsubishi G4M Betty bomber plunges into the sea after tangling with *Lexington*'s VF-3 Wildcats off Rabaul, New Britain, February 20, 1942.

Akira's aircraft did not make it out of the target area. Ensign Sellstrom caught him and shot him out of the sky; some of the surviving Japanese crewmen reported that Akira had crashed into an American ship. This left three bombers in formation, with Bin flying alone. Forty miles out, Lieutenant Gayler tagged another bomber and claimed its destruction.

About 30 miles from TF 11, Lieutenant Allen and his gunner, Roundtree, of Scouting Two, latched onto the remnants of the retreating bomber formation, resulting in a long chase. Allen's SBD had only a slight speed advantage of about three knots.

He selected one Japanese bomber and eased into firing range, allowing Roundtree to use his .30-caliber machine gun from his position in the rear of the aircraft. Allen homed in on the aircraft flown by PO1c Ono Kosuke; Gunner Roundtree shot up the starboard engine and killed at least two of the crew. Kosuke would not make it back to base.

After chasing the bombers for 150 miles, Allen saw he was running low on fuel, broke off his pursuit, and turned for the *Lexington*.

The Navy fighter squadron on that day claimed 15 twin-engine bombers and two four-engine flying boats destroyed, along with a 16th bomber falling to Lieutenant Henry of Bombing Two. Fifteen American pilots of VF-3 claimed hits on enemy aircraft with multiple shared shootdowns. American losses totaled two Wildcats—one pilot missing and another wounded.

O'Hare believed that he had shot down five bombers and damaged a sixth—all in just four minutes. Lt. Cmdr. Thach later reported that at one point he saw three of the enemy bombers falling in flames at the same time.

With his ammunition expended, O'Hare returned to the *Lexington*. O'Hare's fighter had been hit by only one bullet during the fight—the single bullet hole in the port wing disabling the airspeed indicator.

Thach calculated that O'Hare had used only 60 rounds of ammunition for each bomber he destroyed. In the opinion of Admiral Wilson Brown, Jr., commander of TF 11, and of Captain Sherman, commanding the *Lexington*, Lieutenant O'Hare's actions may have saved the carrier from serious damage or even loss.

In fact, O'Hare had destroyed only three Bettys: PO2c Baba's, PO1c Uchiyama's (fly-

ing at left wing of the leading vee), and the leader of the formation, Lt. Cmdr. Takuzo's. Another two had been damaged—PO1c Koji (left wing of the vee) safely landed at Vunakanau airdrome and PO1c Bin was later shot down by Lieutenant Gayler when trying to escape, about 40 miles from the *Lexington*. For his actions, though, Lieutenant Edward H. "Butch" O'Hare was awarded the Medal of Honor. America needed heroes, and O'Hare became one of the first. (See *WWII Quarterly,* Winter 2016.)

At Rabaul, the 24th Air Flotilla headquarters, at 6:15 PM, a 1st Chutai crew radioed that the bombing attack had sunk one enemy warship. The communications indicated that the task force's defenses were highly effective, resulting in the loss of several Japanese planes.

At 7:25, PO1c Kosuke ditched his badly damaged Betty east of New Ireland at Nugava in the Nuguria group. Some 25 minutes later (7:50 PM), PO1c Koji and PO2c Ryosuke reached Rabaul and landed safely. Riddled with holes, the aircraft were not operational for several days.

The 4th Air Group had lost three senior officers and 13 crews along with 15 bombers. The survivors claimed to have sunk one cruiser or destroyer and set the American carrier on fire, while also downing eight fighters. In actuality, they had shot down just two F4Fs and not hit a single ship. The Japanese high command believed that their losses were the price to be paid for an unescorted attack on American warships.

More Bettys would be lost before the Japanese command started to consider the bomber's vulnerabilities. Further, the Japanese attack had revealed several problems. The Betty medium bomber had no armor, no self-sealing fuel tanks, and little armament for defense except the 20mm cannon in the tail. Also, operations were planned with little imagination; the bombers held rigid attack formation during strikes, which made them ideal targets.

National Archives

The Japanese command postponed the impending invasion of Lae and Salamaua from March 3 to March 8 due primarily to the presence of the *Lexington*. Thus the U.S. Navy aviators had achieved a strategic impact on operations in the Southwest Pacific for the moment.

Mistakes had been made by the Americans as well. The fighters had pursued the first wave of bombers far from the ships they were intended to protect and should have regrouped sooner. Both F4Fs that had been shot down were lost while making zero-deflection runs from directly astern of the targets; the most effective attacks were overheads and high-sides.

The Grummans had also suffered from jamming of their machine guns and a low climb rate. Antiaircraft fire from the ships had impacted operations, as the fighters had been told that the ships would hold off until the last moment if the fighters were scoring well. Instead, the antiaircraft gun crews had opened too early, the fighters having to fly through their fire.

The lack of IFF (Identification Friend or Foe) had made it difficult to sort out the CAP, search planes, and the hastily launched antisubmarine patrol. But Lt. Cmdr. Thach stressed that the battle had proved their tactics, along with expert marksmanship and teamwork. The Americans also recognized that the Japanese attacks had been carried out with determination.

Because it was so difficult to surprise the Japanese at Rabaul, the Americans would not attempt another such raid until reinforced by additional carrier forces. Later the carrier USS *Yorktown* (CV-5) and TF 17 sailed into the South Pacific to join the *Lexington* in an effort to blunt Japanese operations.

Naval History and Heritage Command

ABOVE: O'Hare, left, and Thach pose for a photo at Kaneohe Naval Air Station, April 10, 1942. O'Hare would go missing on November 26, 1943, after receiving the Medal of Honor. LEFT: A Kawanishi H6K4 Mavis is engulfed in flames after being shot down by American pilots.

The *Lady Lex* would be sunk just three months later, May 8, during the Battle of the Coral Sea, after being struck by two torpedoes and two bombs, and Butch O'Hare would be lost while leading nighttime operations on November 26, 1943. John Thach developed the "Thach Weave," an aerial combat tactic for dealing with enemy fighters of superior performance, and later the "Big Blue Blanket"—saturation flights of combat air patrols to deal with kamikazes. He would go on to retire from the Navy as a full admiral.

There would be much hard combat ahead in the Pacific—on land, on sea, and in the air. The *Lexington*'s pilots, just two months after the disaster at Pearl Harbor, proved that they were at least as good as anything the Japanese could throw at them. And their superb showing in the skies above the Solomons was a precursor of victories to come. □

IS LONDON BURNING?

BY DAVID ALAN JOHNSON

At the end of 1940, heavy German air raids led to the Great London Fire Blitz that nearly destroyed the city.

National Archives

ABOVE: Luftwaffe pilot Karl-Heinz Thurz at the controls of a Heinkel He-111 bomber during one of many air raids on Britain during the war. TOP: A small (13.5 inches long) German thermite incendiary bomb burned intensely, could cause great damage.

Imperial War Museum

The bombers seemed to arrive overhead with much less warning than on any past air raid. Olive Bayliss, who lived with her family over at London Wall, in London's City District, was certain that the Luftwaffe came in faster than usual tonight, catching everyone by surprise.

Olive's father, an air raid warden, lost no time in evacuating everyone from the flat when the first fire bombs clattered on the roof, which was the first indication that there was an air raid that night, December 29, 1940. Before going down to the air raid shelter, Mr. Bayliss climbed up on the roof to extinguish the fire bombs that had landed.

At Fighter Command Headquarters in Stanmore, Middlesex, the incoming raid was no surprise—the staff of the headquarters' Filter Room had been tracking the enemy bombers for about an hour.

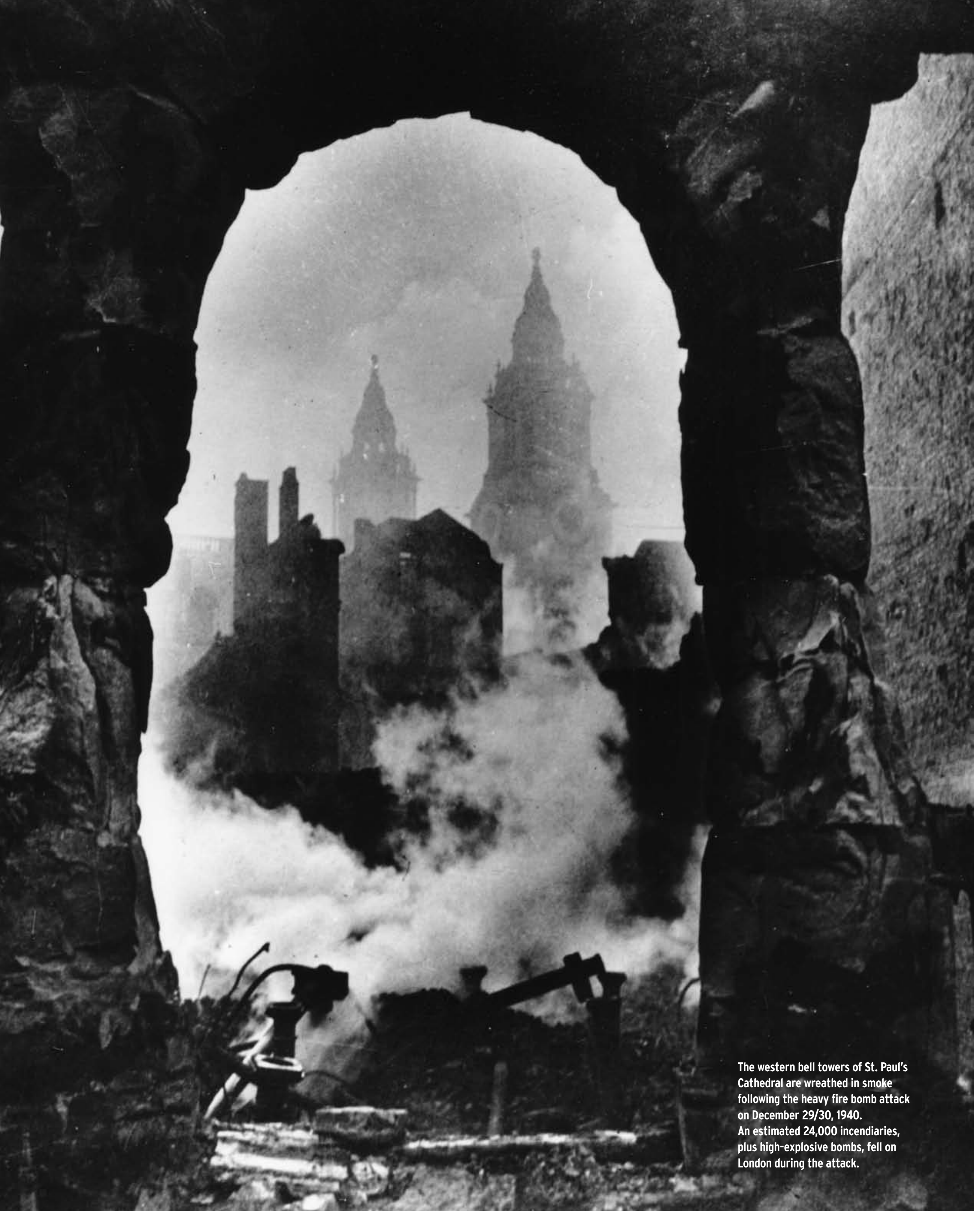
At about 5:15 PM, one of the blue-uniformed WAAFs on duty received a telephone call from Ventnor radar station on the Isle of Wight: "Hello, Stanmore," the voice of another WAAF coolly reported, "I have a plot of five-plus hostiles." Five plus soon became 10 plus and, as the German bombers came into range one by one, finally reached a total of 20.

The 20 incoming bombers were the Heinkel He-111s of Kampfgruppe 100, which had taken off from the Luftwaffe airfield at Vannes, Brittany, at 5:30 PM (4:30 PM London time).

Kampfgruppe 100 was an elite pathfinder wing, staffed entirely by handpicked pilots and aircrew. Their job was to drop thousands of fire bombs on the assigned target at the beginning of an air raid, creating a prominent bull's eye for the rest of the bomber fleet.

Nicknamed "the Fire Raisers," Kampfgruppe 100 was well known for having the best pilots and crews in the Luftwaffe. The unit's commander, veteran pilot Hauptmann Friedrich Ashenbrenner, had flown numerous bombing missions over England since September 1940, when the Blitz against London began.

KG 100's special He-111 H2s were equipped with a device known as the "X-appara-



The western bell towers of St. Paul's Cathedral are wreathed in smoke following the heavy fire bomb attack on December 29/30, 1940. An estimated 24,000 incendiaries, plus high-explosive bombs, fell on London during the attack.

Bundesarchiv Bild 146-1976-099-31A; Photo: Unknown

A formation of Heinkel He-111 bombers photographed en route to England in 1940. The first air raid on London took place on September 7/8, 1940.

tus," which allowed the navigator to find his target on even the darkest or foggiest of nights. It was an invaluable, although not altogether foolproof, aid to navigation.

The X-apparatus picked up a radio beam that was transmitted by a Luftwaffe Signal Corps station on the Normandy coast. This beam, the "primary beam," was aimed so that it would pass directly over the assigned target. The He-111 would simply fly along the primary beam all the way to the target.

This primary beam was intersected by two secondary beams that crossed the "X." When Aschenbrenner's bomber crossed the first intersecting beam, the "advance signal," this indicated that he was about 10 miles from the target. Crossing the second beam, the "main signal," prompted the bomb aimer to toggle his load of incendiary bombs.

The first time that Hauptmann Aschenbrenner and KG 100 had used the X-apparatus had been against Coventry on the night of November 14. That night's raid had been one of the most destructive attacks in the Blitz against Britain. Following the Coventry raid, the German Propaganda Ministry coined the word "Coventrized," meaning "burned to the ground" or "obliterated."

On this Sunday afternoon, Aschenbrenner received orders that tonight's objective would be London. Once again, he and his Gruppe would spearhead the attack. KG 100's He-111s would go in low and fast to light up the target area with incendiaries.

The objective within "Loge," the code word for London, would be the City of London. The City District, with its hodgepodge of old buildings, packed with textiles, books, and other highly flammable goods, was tailor made for Aschenbrenner's "Fire Raisers." Old-time London firemen called these buildings "torches looking for a light."

At St. Paul's Cathedral, about a mile from Olive Bayliss's flat, one of the men on roof patrol telephoned the cathedral's control center at 6:05 PM to report that air-raid sirens were sounding out to the southwest.

George Garwood, a member of the Cathedral watch, received the call and told the patrol that he would be right up. But before Garwood could put on his ax belt and helmet, the roof patrolman telephoned again—he could see incendiary bombs falling just across the river in Southwark. By the time Garwood reached the roof, the local sirens were sounding, and fire bombs were dropping on the cathedral itself.

Hauptmann Aschenbrenner had missed his target, the City of London, by about 1,000 yards. This was actually good bombing, considering the fact that he could not even see the ground because of the ten-tenths cloud cover. The other 19 Heinkels came in right behind him. Every one of them put their incendiaries right on target, which was the immediate vicinity of St. Paul's.

Not every bomb posed a threat. Some failed to ignite, hitting the pavement with a loud, metallic crack. Five bombs landed on the newspaper offices of Bouverie House on Fleet Street. Of the five, one did not explode, one burned itself out on the concrete roof, and the other three were extinguished by the night watchman.

The incendiary bomb—frequently abbreviated as "IB"—was small, cheap to manufacture, and very effective. It measured about a foot in length, about three inches in diameter, and weighed one kilogram (2.2 pounds).

When an IB landed on a roof or struck the pavement, its magnesium core burst into

life, throwing white-hot splinters in a diameter of about 10 feet. It stopped sputtering after about a minute and began glowing intently at about 4,000 degrees Fahrenheit for about 10 minutes. During the first minute, a sandbag or a shovel full of earth would very quickly snuff it out.

Although the IB was not the most sophisticated of weapons—a London Fire Brigade officer called it "not a very clever bomb"—its small size was its greatest advantage. The bombs were packed into cylindrical containers called "Molotov Breadbaskets," with 36 bombs in each container. Each of KG 100's He-111s carried five of these containers, which totaled 180 fire bombs. After being released, each breadbasket burst open at a preset altitude, spilling its contents over a confined area.

On the previous Sunday, December 22, the Luftwaffe introduced a new tactic: the fire blitz. The Luftwaffe set out to destroy the city of Manchester by dropping only incendiaries, thousands of them, and had largely succeeded. Whole sections of the city were burned out, reduced to street upon street of smoldering buildings by daybreak.

Because the Manchester fire raid had been so successful, Generalfeldmarschall Hugo Sperrle, commander of Luftflotte 3 (Air Fleet Three), suggested that a full-scale incendiary raid be directed against London. Sperrle's suggestion was approved by Adolf Hitler, and the raid was planned and put in motion from Sperrle's headquarters in the Hotel Luxembourg in Paris.

With a bit of luck and the help of a slight northeasterly wind, the crews of KG 100 managed to start several fires within a short time. None of the crews knew exactly where their bombs were going any more than Hauptmann Aschenbrenner did because of the dense cloud cover. They just unloaded their bombs where the X-beams crossed.

The fire bombs of KG 100 did their job with frightening efficiency, punching or burning their way through roofs to start hundreds of fires. Several thousand feet above the clouds that covered London, Aschenbrenner could see the glow of the fires through the overcast. His men had done their job, creating a target, an aiming point for the rest of the Luftwaffe's bombers.

As Aschenbrenner and the rest of KG 100 turned for home, the bombers of Sperrle's Luftflotte 3 arrived over the target. These aircrews could also see the reddish patch in the clouds and dropped their bombloads on this vivid aiming point. With each new load of incendiaries, punctuated by the occasional 550-pound high-explosive bomb, the fires within the City grew both in size and intensity.

By 7 PM, 55 minutes after KG 100 arrived over the City, three separate fire zones had broken out. The largest, nearly three-quarters of a mile long and a quarter-mile wide, surrounded St. Paul's Cathedral.

Although the City District is well known for its old churches and other quaint old places, it also had more than its share of military targets—all rated top priority by the Luftwaffe. The Wood Street Telephone Exchange and the London Telephone Service, with their vitally important overseas communications lines, along with the General Post Office telephone and telegraph services, were important enough to rate pinpoint attacks as separate targets. The district's six rail stations had also been earmarked as critical, along with all the bridges crossing the River Thames.

The Central Telephone Exchange was one of the first of these essential targets to

National Archives

Hugo Sperrle, commander of Luftflotte 3, was certain an overwhelming incendiary raid would burn the heart out of London. Bad weather canceled a second strike.

National Archives

American radio reporter Edward R. Murrow broadcasts from a London studio during the Blitz. He mistakenly reported that St. Paul's had been destroyed.

be destroyed. From the roof of St. Paul's Cathedral, George Garwood watched as it burned down "without a bucket of water to put on it."

Lack of water was a major problem for the London Fire Brigade (LFB) that night. All of Western Europe was experiencing abnormally low tides on the night of December 29, including the Thames River Valley. Because of these unusually low tides, the Thames was reduced to a small, narrow stream, making it just about useless to the LFB as a source of water.

To make matters even worse, one of the few high-explosive bombs dropped so far had cracked the City's primary water main somewhere along its two-mile length. So many fire appliances—the Fire Brigade's term for fire engines—were linked up to the existing mains that water pressure dropped to zero. With the City main fractured, the smaller mains tapped dry, and the Thames all but dried up by the low tide, the expanding fire zone within the City was cut off from its water resources.

Everything, every street and every building to the north and northeast of St. Paul's Cathedral, would burn in one vast fire—one fireman called it the "biggest funeral pyre in the world"—until the area finally burned itself out. Once in a while, the wall of a fire-weakened building would flame up suddenly before crashing down into the street with a deafening roar.

Paternoster Square, the home of London's publishing industry with over five million books in its warehouses, was going up in a brilliant, colossal bonfire. Only St. Paul's itself was not on fire, but it looked like it would be only a matter of time before architect Christopher Wren's venerable old structure (opened in 1708) would be burning along with its neighbors.

The fire-watching crew at the *Daily Telegraph* building on Fleet Street had a full view of St. Paul's from the west and reported that a steady hail of bombs had bounced off the Cathedral's huge dome during the first half hour of the raid.

Thus far, the Cathedral Watch had managed to deal with every incendiary before it could do any damage, but the crew could not reach every bomb as soon as it fell. At 6:39, the Control Centre received a telephone call from Cannon Street Fire Station. The firehouse switchboard reported that the dome of St. Paul's was on fire.

Imperial War Museum

ABOVE: Before the great raid of December 29, a Royal Observer Corps spotter looks for approaching German aircraft. St. Paul's is visible in distance. OPPOSITE: Members of St. Paul's Watch, volunteers whose job it was to save the building in case of fire, practice handling a firehose during a drill at the Cathedral. Their training paid off.

At the cathedral, the fire watch discovered that an incendiary had punched halfway through the dome's outer lead covering. The bomb was going to be a bit awkward to get at in spite of the fact that its tail fins were jutting through the outside of the dome, but it did not seem to pose anything resembling a serious threat.

From the street, however, it looked as though the dome was burning. The brilliant white light of the sputtering bomb gave the impression that a major fire had taken hold. It was nothing but an illusion, but it was a convincing illusion.

In a nearby street, American radio correspondent Edward R. Murrow of the Columbia Broadcasting System had already given up all hope that the cathedral could be saved. "Tonight, the bomber planes of the German Third Reich hit London where it hurts the most—in the heart." Murrow was making his nightly report to New York.

"And the church that meant most to Londoners is gone. St. Paul's Cathedral, built by Sir Christopher Wren, her great dome towering over the capital of the Empire, is burning to the ground as I talk to you now."

While Murrow was making his broadcast, members of the Cathedral Watch were slowly making their way toward the bomb. When it stopped sputtering and began glowing at 4,000 degrees, its molten core melted the dome's lead skin that held it in place.

Before anyone could get near it, the bomb fell outward, slid down the outside of the dome, and landed in the Stone Gallery, the walkway that circles the bottom of the dome, where it was easily disposed of. At the time, this was referred to as the "Miracle of St. Paul's." Cynics have insisted that it was only gravity.

No one in the fire zone was given any time to catch their breath. Not many fire spotters were on duty on this Sunday night, but the few who were on hand were busy. New clusters of bombs kept falling, landing with their dazzling white sparklers. The fire crews put them out by dropping sand bags on them, just as the St. Paul's watch had done.

The firewatchers at the Guildhall, which might be described as the City's town hall, had done a successful job of saving their building from serious damage. The 15th-century building was surrounded by collapsing, fire-ruined buildings but was still untouched by flames itself.

Firewatcher R.C.M. Fitzhugh gave this impression of the view from the Guildhall roof: "The block bounded by Bassishaw House, Fore Street, Aldermanbury, and Basinghall Street appeared to be one solid mass of flame," he wrote in his diary. "St. Stephen's, Coleman Street, was soon enveloped in flames, and we could see the steeple and weather cock fall. Fires were everywhere in the City area.

"From time to time, heavy high-explosive bombs or land mines were dropped.... There would be the sound of something rushing through the air, then a brilliant flash would light up the entire sky and horizon and followed within two or three seconds by the most resounding explosion."

The Guildhall roof spotters knew more about the state of the City's fires than the commander of Luftflotte 3. In his suite at the Hotel Luxembourg in Paris, Feldmarschall Sperrle did not have an accurate idea of the damage that was being done by his bombers. He had been receiving reports that the target was coming under constant attack and that it had been set brilliantly on fire by KG 100. But because of the cloud cover over London, these visual reports from his bomber crews were not precise.

Even so, Sperrle had every reason to be optimistic. He was planning a second attack, another wave of bombers that would drop high explosives on the target area, which would finish off anything left standing. Sperrle was as concerned with the weather report as he was the bombing results. The heavy overcast that covered southern England was threatening to turn into a rain storm, which might well force him to cancel the second attack.

For Luftflotte 3's bomber crews, the night's attack was turning out to be much easier than anyone expected. The target area, all lit up and visible from the Channel coast, would have been difficult not to hit.

Antiaircraft fire was sporadic—once in a while, some antiaircraft shells would pop through the overcast and burst a safe distance away—and were usually not accurate. The German air crews kept their eyes open for the RAF's night fighters, but there had not been any sign of them so far.

© The Chapter of St Paul's Cathedral

It was satisfying to know that all their bombs were landing on target. On some raids nobody could be absolutely certain if they were bombing their objective or some vacant field miles away, but not tonight. The only real problem, and this was minor, was with the turbulence from the fires. Flying over the rising hot air lifted the bombers upward for several hundred feet, but this did not interfere with bombing accuracy.

And the bombing continued to be extremely accurate. Besides vital communications links like the Central Telephone Exchange and the General Post Office, Sperrle's transportation objectives were also being hit hard. No trains were running within several miles of Central London. Cannon Street rail station and London Bridge Station were both on fire, along with Waterloo Station, which was actually out of the fire zone, and Fenchurch Street Station was shut down because of damaged signals and blocked tracks.

Guildhall's communication center received a priority telephone message from Prime Minister Winston Churchill sometime before 7 PM—St. Paul's must be saved at all costs. Churchill's communiqué was passed directly to the control center at St. Paul's, but it had little effect. Although Churchill's message was both welcome and appreciated, there was not much else for the Cathedral Watch to do that had not already been done.

Civilian fire spotters frequently spelled the difference between survival and disaster, not only at St. Paul's and Guildhall but at office blocks and buildings throughout the City. But sometimes even the best intentions and efforts of the fire-watching crews were not quite enough. The fire-watching team at a Building Society on Ludgate Hill, just a short walk from St. Paul's Cathedral, managed to put out every fire bomb that landed on their roof.

But the building's waterproof paper window panes, which replaced the glass panes that had been blown out in an earlier air raid, had been set on fire by flames from the building next door. Burning embers managed to find their way through these

Mirrorpix

Illuminated solely by fires burning around it, St. Paul's stands tall. A bomb landed on its main steps but failed to explode, another lodged in the dome.

vacant windows, where they started small fires inside the Building Society's offices. It did not take long before an entire section of the building was burning. The fire was obviously more than two volunteer fire crews could deal with, so the men sent for the Fire Brigade.

When the fire engines stopped in front of the Building Society, the firemen stepped off the machines to take a good look at the fire. They stood in the street for a minute or so, gazing up with clinical detachment. Finally, one of the firemen spoke up: "It's not nearly big enough yet," he said. "We'll be back later."

With that, the entire crew climbed back aboard their fire engine and drove off, giving the Building Society's fire watchers their last glimpse of the London Fire Brigade for the rest of the night.

Some people tried to carry on with their everyday routine in spite of the air raid, which sometimes brought them closer to disaster than they realized. At 7:30, a milk-tank driver left Hounslow, Middlesex, for his nightly run through London to Bow, East London, which would take him right through the City. When he reached the vicinity of Blackfriars Bridge, about a quarter-mile southwest of St. Paul's, just about everything in front of him was a solid wall of fire.

He always drove this route, straight along Queen Victoria Street, and could see that the street was lined with burning buildings. But the driver was not about to let anything as trivial as an air raid change his usual route. He put his rig in gear and headed eastward, right up Queen Victoria Street.

He had not gone far when a policeman stopped him and asked him exactly where he thought he was going. The driver matter-of-factly answered, "Bow"—to East London directly through the fire zone.

"Not through here, you're not," the policeman declared and pointed in the direction of Mansion House, the Lord Mayor's official residence. "Look at that!"

The driver looked and saw the façade of a fire-weakened building crash down into the street. If the policeman had not stopped him, the milk-tank driver estimated that he would have been passing that building when it collapsed.

One of the leading topics of conversation throughout London was the possibility of a follow-up raid by the Luftwaffe. Everyone remembered the first air raid on London, which took place on September 7/8, 1940, when bombers returned to drop high explosives on the fires that had been started earlier. It seemed more than a good possibility that the same thing would happen tonight; the City's fires certainly offered a tempting enough target.

Feldmarschall Sperrle still had his second wave scheduled, even though he was receiving nothing but bad weather reports from his bomber bases. Every one of Luftflotte 3's airfields reported deteriorating weather conditions—it was also raining in Paris—and staff

meteorologists were predicting that the rain would continue for at least another 24 hours.

But reports of the attack on London were positive and encouraging—just about every dispatch mentioned vivid fires burning in the target area—and Sperrle was unwilling to cancel the second attack. His second wave of bombers, carrying loads of high explosives instead of incendiaries, would be able to inflict maximum damage on the target area.

Because of the weather, Sperrle decided that it might be a good idea to postpone the second strike for a few hours. A short rollback might give the weather a chance to improve, in spite of what the weather experts were predicting, and would still allow his bomber units to drop their bombs under cover of darkness. Luftflotte 3 would still have its unmissable aiming point along with better weather if all went well. The order went out to all airfields: stand down until further instructions.

More than 1,400 fires were burning in and around the City. All over London people were stopping whatever they were doing and going outside for a better look. A woman who lived in Chelsea, several miles west of the fire zone, went up on her roof to check on the fires. She could clearly see the dome of St. Paul's silhouetted against the glare. The sky was incandescent with red and orange that seemed to tower miles in the air. She was certain that this was the last she would ever see of St. Paul's.

By this time Guildhall had finally succumbed to the surrounding fires. Blazing bits of ash from the church of St. Lawrence Jewry, which was only a few feet away and had been burning for well over an hour, had started fires in the hall's wooden roofing beams. High winds fanned the flames, blowing them into other parts of the Guildhall complex. The Fire Brigade came, but there was not much it could do. One of the fireman told RCM Fitzhugh that his men had been ready for the past 15 minutes but there was no water.

By 9:50, the fires were out of control. The noise from the wind-driven flames and the crackle of burning beams and roof timbers was loud enough to drown out the shouting of the firemen who were standing in the street with dry firehoses. Telephone operators in the control center stayed on the job even though the exchange lines were dying one at a time.

Guildhall's logbook gives a cryptic account of the City's ordeal on this night. Each entry gives the time and nature of each incident. ("IB - F" signifies "Incendiary Bomb - Fire.")

Call:No. 16.20Knightrider Street – Queen Victoria StreetIB - F

No. 596.45Eastcheap by Mark Lane. "Explosive IBs IB – F

are bursting all over the place."

No. 626.59Queen Victoria Street by Mark LaneIB – F

"Well alight."

No. 74b8.10YMCA Building, 186 Aldersgate St. IB – F

"Fire spreading rapidly – Nobody in Building."

No. 1379.1026/27 Bush Lane – "LFB wanted urgently."IB – F

No. 17110.0012/16 Red Lion Court "LFS in attendance, IB – F

but no water."

The telephone operators received reports of only a fraction of the more than 1,400 fires in and around the City. This was partly because Guildhall's telephones were swamped by incoming calls, but mostly because there were so few people in the City on this Sunday night. There was no one on hand to report the outbreaks.

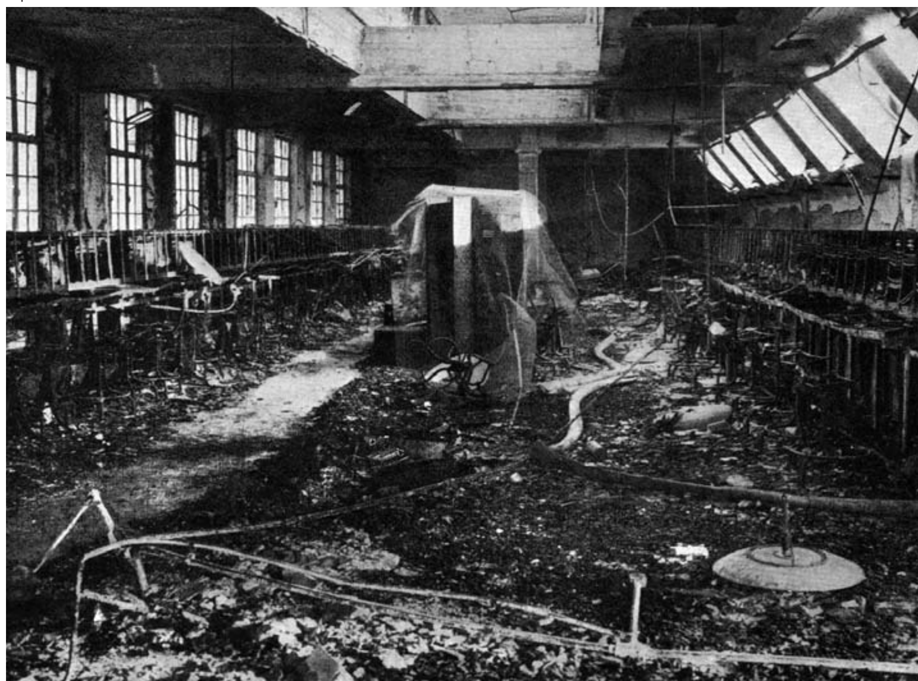
By 11:30, it was obvious that Guildhall would have to be evacuated. By this time there was only one telephone line still in operation. The officer in charge told the operators to leave the building since there was nothing else for them to do.

While Guildhall's telephone operators were leaving the building, the tide began to come in. Water was now being relayed from the Thames, via 3 1/2-inch fire hoses into the 5,000-gallon dams that had been installed throughout the district. It was only a trickle, but a critical trickle. A few hours earlier and it might have made all the difference.

Firefighting units were also arriving in the City fire zone from all over the greater London area as well as throughout the Home Counties. They were too late to do anything about the fire damage that had already occurred, but at least they would have some water to help keep the fires from spreading.

A total of 183 bomb incidents had been

Imperial War Museum



The Wood Street Telephone Exchange, one of London's major communications centers, was nearly destroyed by the German bombing. Some 10,000 telephone lines needed to be repaired.

National Archives

London firefighters spray water on burning buildings after an air raid. Destruction of the city's water mains made fighting the fires almost impossible.

logged by Guildhall's telephone operators beginning at 6:20—29 of these had been high-explosive bombs. The operators kept taking reports right through the air raid until around midnight.

Shortly before the evacuation order was issued, a call came through to report that Number 5 Creed Lane had been hit by an incendiary. This was no different from any of the other calls that had jammed the exchange lines during the past 5½ hours, except that this was the last one for the night. The time was 11:40.

At Fighter Command Headquarters in Stanmore, Middlesex, the ritual of plotting and tracking the enemy bombers also continued throughout the night. The atmosphere inside the Operations Room remained quiet and tense as the WAAFs mechanically repeated the height and range of the bombers on the huge table map. For the past hour or so they had been moving steadily southward, away from London.

From their overhead gallery, the Operations staff watched as the red arrows retreated toward the south—across Surrey and Kent and Sussex to the Channel. As the bombers crossed the Channel and made their way back to their bases in France, the arrows were removed from the map, one by one, until the map was clear of all enemy aircraft. The Luftwaffe might be back later, but for the first time since 6 PM the dark area on the map that represented London was free of the red markers.

No one in London had any idea that the air raid was over, not even anyone within the City fire zone. The antiaircraft guns had gone silent, but that was no indication of anything—there had been lulls in the shooting throughout the attack.

The firemen and roof spotters were surrounded by their own world of noise and fire. The fires themselves rolled like a thunderstorm, and more than 2,000 pumps made their own kind of thunder. Many had not been able to hear the bombers for the past few hours, so they could not possibly know that the planes were gone.

Ten minutes after the Creed Lane bomb incident had been logged, the all clear sounded. The high-pitched howl of the air raid sirens flooded the blacked-out streets all over London. The sirens even penetrated the interiors of air raid shelters throughout the area, where they produced a collective sigh of relief.

There were some who could not bring themselves to believe that it was all over. One auxiliary fireman was taken completely by surprise when he heard the sirens. "I immediately thought the authorities were sending an unprecedented second alert, in a desperate attempt to warn us of some new menace," he said. "I frantically tried to think what it could be—we already had rattles for gas and church bells for invasion."

When the sirens held the high note, signalling the all clear, the fireman was absolutely incredulous. "The crazy thought even crossed my mind that Fifth Columnists had somehow managed to give a false All Clear. It was simply unbelievable that the Germans would miss the juiciest target in history—and how could our people be so sure that they were not coming back?"

Some of the Guildhall volunteers decided to stay inside the building when the evacuation order was given. They went to work salvaging some of the library's centuries-old books and documents. After they finished, most of them straggled over to the pubic air

raid shelter on nearby Basinghall Street to get some much needed sleep.

A few of the volunteers went out to look for something to eat, maybe a sandwich and a cup of tea at an all-night café. While he was walking through the district, RCM Fitzhugh noticed that it was beginning to rain.

Feldmarschall Sperrle realized that he did not have any other choice. It had been raining for several hours in Paris, and the weather experts were predicting no let-up in sight. Almost every one of Luftflotte 3's airfields had reported that they were completely shut down with unusable runways that were choked with mud. From his suite in the Hotel Luxembourg on Paris' Left Bank, Sperrle finally canceled the second attack.

It had been a reluctant decision, and Sperrle had taken several hours to make it. The first wave had set the target well alight, and the target area was more than ripe for a second attack. But a second strike was clearly out of the question; one bomber had already crashed while trying to land at Orly Field. If Sperrle went ahead with his original plan, he knew that he would almost certainly lose many more aircraft.

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ABOVE: St. Paul's did suffer some damage, including this caused by falling debris. On the whole, however, the structure survived with minimal damage; many believed that the cathedral was saved by divine intervention. BELOW: Much of central London was a smoldering, burned-out hulk. This view, taken the day after the raid, shows Ludgate Circus with St. Paul's in the background.

National Archives

There was no use brooding about it; there was nothing anybody could do about the weather. Sperrle issued the necessary instructions to his staff officers, who began relaying the stand down orders by telephone. Since there was nothing else to be accomplished, Sperrle said good night to his staff and went to bed.

The all clear did not mean much to the firemen on duty in the City. Their night would not come to an end for several more hours. Fires were still out of control but were no longer spreading as quickly as before; the linkup from the Thames was making it possible for the fire services to begin holding the flames back.

There was no let-up for most of the fireman—only hour after hour of holding a pressurized firehose in sweltering heat and stinging smoke. The sun had come up by 7 AM, but because of the drizzle and the overcast sky it was hidden from view. However, the water relay from the Thames was now having its full effect, and the fire crews were finally able to do more than just watch while the City burned down around them. By 7:30, the fires had been contained.

The new day also brought another working Monday for Londoners. In a few hours, shops and offices within the City, as well as throughout London, would be opening for business—at least the businesses that were still standing.

The air raid did not stop Londoners from going to work. During the September to November air raids, when the Luftwaffe bombed London every night for 57 consecutive nights, the morning after each attack saw workers making their way around bomb damage and cratered roads to get to their jobs. This particular morning, after the great fire raid, was no different.

Londoners had learned that the morning after an air raid meant chaotic traffic and that it was best to leave for work much earlier than usual. Today, even an early start was not much help. Every road into the City, along with all four Thames bridges, was closed to automobile traffic. London Transport issued an official report on the traffic situation which began with this comically understated appraisal: "As a result of the intense attack last night, traffic conditions in the Central London area are bad."

Traveling by train did not offer much of an improvement. All but one of the City's rail stations was closed. The official notice that greeted passengers on this Monday morning read, "Due To Enemy Action Trains Will Be Subject To Delay."

Most people who worked in the City rode their usual trains or buses as far as they could and walked the rest of the way. Many walked for a mile or more over rubble and leaky firehoses and arrived at their offices wet and grimy. Clerks and secretaries often arrived hours late and were congratulated for having shown up at all.

After making their way around roadblocks and through police lines, thousands arrived at work only to find that their offices or factories had disappeared during the night. Hundreds of firms had been destroyed; businesses that had taken a lifetime to build up were gone.

Displaced workers simply wandered aimlessly about, not knowing what else to do. A crowd gathered outside St. Paul's, as though hoping that some of the cathedral's charm might rub off on them. St. Paul's became a symbol of London's defiance in the Blitz.

A damaging blow had been dealt to the business heart of London, along with its essential war services—transportation and communications facilities. The Post Office Telephones on King Edward Street were a total loss; the building itself had been completely burned out, and the basement with

all of its transformers was flooded. The Central Exchange on Wood Street had also been completely destroyed along with every other building on both sides of the street.

Feldmarschall Sperrle was thoroughly disappointed that he had had to call off his second strike. The rotten weather had just been bad luck. He hated to give up the opportunity to follow up his fire raid with an all-out high-explosive attack. As far as Sperrle was concerned, only half an air raid had taken place the previous night.

He had no real idea of the damage that his bombers had inflicted. Bomber crews only mentioned "*sehr starke Brände*"—very fierce fires—in the target area, and reconnaissance aircraft had not been able to photograph the target because London was still covered by a solid layer of cloud.

An official report gives evidence of the Luftwaffe's lack of detailed information. "Toward the end of the attack," the report states, "there were over 100 widely spread fires with dense, black smoke, mainly in the City and to the north." Actually, more than 1,500 fires resulted from the incendiary bombs alone, with even more damage resulting from the strong wind.

German Propaganda Minister Dr. Josef Goebbels shared Sperrle's opinion. If Goebbels had known about the chaos caused by the raid, he would have issued one of his usual long-winded descriptions of the attack. Instead, only a routine communiqué was issued on December 30: "Strong bomber forces attacked London again last night."

Within the next few days, German intelligence would learn all about the full effect of the fire raid, and the Propaganda Ministry would jump into full gear. Among other things, Goebbels' department would claim that 100,000 incendiaries were dropped. Actually, about 24,000 were dropped.

But for now, the propagandists did not even bother with the usual practice of interviewing bomber crews. Because the second strike had been canceled, the raid was not considered important enough.

The center of the City's fire damage was in the area to the north and northeast of St. Paul's. Almost every building within this district had been destroyed, with row upon row of free-standing walls and fire-blackened ruins creaking in the wind. Hundreds of foot-long IBs had burned themselves out on the pavement, leaving indelible marks on the concrete. These splotches reminded *New York Times* reporter Raymond Daniell of chewing gum on a New York City sidewalk.

One of the few buildings to survive the fire storm was—the height of irony—Redcross Street Fire Station. The firehouse was certainly charred from the surrounding buildings, but it remained in service. After the Royal Engineers pulled down the nearby fire-weakened buildings, the firemen and firewomen would plant a thriving vegetable and flower garden, which included apple trees.

By mid-morning, the fire services were being sent home in increasing numbers. Some had been tending fires for more than 14 hours without even a chance to sit down. One at a time, the trailer pumps, turntable ladders, and heavy units, all manned by bone-weary and indescribably filthy firemen, left the fire zone and headed for their home stations.

Sometimes there was a small surprise to hurry the departing firemen on their way. At Tower Pier, just adjacent to the Tower of London and about a half mile from St. Paul's, Fireman L.P. Andrews and his crew had been pumping water from their fireboat into the fire zone since the small hours. Sometime during the late morning, the fireboat was approached by a naval launch. An officer on board the launch hailed the firemen: "What are you doing there?"

"Pumping water," Andrews shouted back.

"What time did you arrive?" the launch persisted.

"About 2:30."

"Was there anyone here when you arrived?"

"No."

"Well, you better get the hell out of it. I evacuated this area at about 1:30. You are probably about 20 feet off a parachute bomb."

A parachute bomb, also known as a land mine, was a cylinder containing about 1,500 pounds of high explosives. It came down by parachute and was capable of doing an enormous amount of damage. An exploding land mine could wipe out an entire row of houses or level the better part of a city block and still have enough punch

National Archives

Getty Images

ABOVE: A milkman makes his deliveries over rubble while firefighters continue to battle hotspots on December 30. He exemplified the "keep calm and carry on" attitude that won the hearts of many Americans. OPPOSITE: Londoners return to work on Monday, December 30, following the attack the previous night, many traveling for hours on foot or bicycle through the destroyed sections.

to shatter windows two or three streets away.

The fireboat's crew immediately stopped the pumps, disconnected the hoses, let go the ropes, and let the current take them well clear of the area before starting their engines for their trip back to their base at Tilbury, Essex.

Nobody in London or anywhere else was able to find out much about the air raid from official news sources. Wartime censorship and security stopped the release of any specific facts or of any useful information at all.

A bus driver from the Paddington section of London made this note in his diary: "I cannot find out much about last night's fire ... the 6 PM news tells us [only of] the wilful firing of the City of London and severe damage."

The newspapers did not give out much information either. Monday's "Late London" edition of *The Times* featured this two-column headline on page four:

FIRE BOMBS RAINED ON LONDON: MANY BUILDINGS HIT

The story beneath was as dim as the headline. Strict wartime censorship prevented editors from printing a more extensive report. It was better to run a vague, noninformative story than to be charged with supplying "information of value to the enemy."

Most of the regulars and auxiliaries of the London Fire Brigade returned to their usual sweep-and-polish routine almost as soon as they arrived back at their stations.

Redcross Street Fire Station, which had been abandoned at the height of the fires, was soon back in operation. When Fireman James Goldsmith returned to the station, he began cleaning and sorting his gear just in case of another call. Equipment and lengths of hose would sometimes be lost during a fire, which usually presented a problem. But today there was plenty of gear lying about right on the street.

Nearby Whitecross Street was littered with several burned-out and abandoned trailer pumps complete with all their tools and equipment. The hardware only had to be picked up and carried off.

The great fire raid was over, but the Blitz against London would not end for another 4 1/2 months. Feldmarschall Sperrle's bombers would attack London again between mid-January and mid-March 1941, but these were mainly small nuisance raids.

The big raids began again in March 1941 and continued throughout April on the basis of roughly one raid per week. Two major raids would take place in April, which would be remembered by Londoners as "The Wednesday" and "The Saturday," April 16 and 19, both of which were triggered in retaliation for an RAF raid on Berlin.

The last Blitz raid before Hitler invaded Russia in June would come on the night of May 10/11, 1941. To many Londoners, this was the worst of all. For 6 1/2 hours Sperrle's bombers dumped their incendiaries and high explosives on London. When the attack finally ended, rail and transportation centers had been seriously disrupted, and thousands of houses and factories were destroyed.

Westminster Abbey, the Tower of London, the British Museum, and many other famous landmarks had been bombed but had not been destroyed. More than 1,400 Londoners had been killed, and another 1,800 were wounded.

Germany would not be immune to bombing as the war went on. Just as London had suffered as severely as Warsaw and Rotterdam earlier in the war, cities within the greater German Reich would feel the brunt of bigger and better armed Allied bombers. One thousand bombers would attack Cologne on the night of May 30, 1942. Throughout the war just about every major city in Germany—Dresden, Hamburg, Düsseldorf, Frankfurt, Leipzig, and Berlin—would be bombed relentlessly by the RAF at night and the U.S. Eighth Air Force by day.

The same fireman who had been alarmed when the sirens sounded an early all clear on the night of December 29 was stationed in Germany after the war. He had a firsthand look at the terrible destruction that had been inflicted and was moved to comment, "Christ, we never knew what bombing was." □

BY COLONEL (USAF, RET.) JEFF PATTON

VICTORY IN THE MEDITERRANEAN

PANTELLERIA is a small volcanic island rising out of the Mediterranean Sea 37 miles east of the Tunisian coast and some 63 miles southwest of Sicily. Since its occupation by the Carthaginians in the 7th century BC, the island has been used as a military outpost by a succession of conquerors: Carthaginians, Romans, Arabs, Aragonese, Turks, the Kingdom of Sicily, and finally the Kingdom of Italy.

The island's strategic location midway in the Sicily Channel made it the ideal location for controlling access of shipping sailing from the eastern to western basins of the Mediterranean. It was Pantelleria's misfortune to be located in such a critical area and along the corridor that the Allied forces invading Sicily would travel that caused it to become the target of an unprecedented bombing campaign in the summer of 1943.

President Franklin Roosevelt and British Prime Minister Winston Churchill met at Casablanca, Morocco, in January 1943 to decide the future joint strategy of the Allied powers.The conference started with the British and American general staffs at odds on the way ahead.

General George Marshall, the U.S. Army Chief of Staff, advocated a cross-Channel invasion of France from Britain as soon as possible. The British did not feel there would be sufficient resources, especially landing craft, to support an invasion until 1944 and so, instead, pushed for action against what Winston Churchill famously called "the soft underbelly of Europe."

Both Churchill and Roosevelt were well aware of the incessant complaints of Soviet Premier Josef Stalin that the Red Army was the only one fighting the Nazis and demanding that Churchill and Roosevelt open another front in Europe to relieve the pressure on the Soviet Union. Underscoring his point was his absence at the conference due to his preoccupation with the desperate fighting around Stalingrad at that moment.

A Mediterranean strategy was agreed upon by the Anglo-Americans, but exactly where to launch an attack was also debated. For Churchill, with an eye on protecting the British Empire in the postwar world, the obvious choice was German-occupied Greece. Here Allied troops would be able to tie down German divisions that might otherwise be used elsewhere and, perhaps more importantly, halt the advance of any post-war Soviet march toward Egypt and the Suez Canal.

The Americans wanted to invade Corsica to threaten an invasion of the peninsula of Italy or the south of France, thus keeping the Germans wondering. In the end, the two Allies agreed that Sicily offered the best invasion option due to its short distance from their forces in North Africa, the element of surprise, and the ability to provide air cover from existing bases in North Africa.

Invading Sicily had the added advantage of taking the fight to an Axis homeland and requiring the Germans to divert divisions from the Eastern Front to shore up their Italian allies. Allied intelligence estimated that the poor state of Italian transportation infrastructure would limit the Germans' ability to extricate their divisions and turn Italy into a giant

© Imperial War Museum

The battle for the tiny Mediterranean island of Pantelleria was a relatively easy Allied victory—and the precursor to the concept of "victory through air power."

A Douglas "Boston" (British Commonwealth version of the A-20 "Havoc") of No. 21 Squadron, Royal South African Air Force, flies over a smoking Italian gun battery on Pantelleria's Monte San Elmo, June 1943. Taking the tiny island was considered a crucial first step for the Allies before invading Sicily and Italy; Operation Corkscrew was designed as an experiment to see if heavy bombardment could make amphibious landings unnecessary.

sponge for Wehrmacht resources.

But before the Allies could invade Axis-occupied Europe, Pantelleria, the five-by-eight-mile bone in the throat of the Sicily Channel, would have to be dealt with.

Pantelleria had some obvious physical advantages that favored its fortification. It had little in the way of beaches. The island has steep cliffs that plunge almost vertically into the sea around most of its circumference. Its only natural landing area for amphibious assault craft is the port area on the island's north coast.

It has little vegetation; its few crops are largely caper bushes and grape vines. It has few livestock and a relatively small civilian population. The island rises to more than 2,700 feet above sea level on the summit of aptly named Montagna Grande (Big Mountain), from which a commanding view of most of the Sicily Channel is available.

In the 1920s, Italian leader Benito Mussolini established a penal colony on the island and in 1936 began fortifying it during his war in Abyssinia (Ethiopia). Fascist propaganda called Pantelleria the "Italian Gibraltar," with the aim for it to act as a counterweight to the British base at Malta and the French at Bizerte.

The island was defended by coastal artillery placed in open revetments protected by rocks and concrete. Twelve Schneider-Ansaldo 152mm guns with a 10-mile range were complemented by 13 120mm guns with an effective range of eight miles. Antiaircraft protection was provided by 75 76mm dual-purpose guns, as well as 18 20mm rapid-fire guns and more than 500 8mm machine guns.

The coastline was dotted by grottos, some of which had been enlarged by engineers to hold refueling and replenishing anchorages for submarines and motor torpedo boats. By 1940, the island garrison had grown to 11,420 Italian defenders and some 600 German troops that manned the Freya radio direction-finding stations on the summit of Montagna Grande.

In addition to fixed gun emplacements and protected anchorages, Pantelleria hosted an enormous underground hanger at its airfield that had been blasted out of a

Both: © Imperial War Museum

ABOVE: A Savoie-Marchetti SM.79 "Sparviero" medium bomber of the 278th Torpedo Squadron, Regia Aeronautica, parked outside a fortified hangar at Pantelleria's Marghana Airdrome. The SM.79 was considered an excellent, if obsolescent, warplane but, by 1943, stood no chance against Allied aircraft. OPPOSITE: The blastproof, camouflaged doors of an Italian aircraft hangar built into the side of a hill at Pantelleria's Marghana Airdrome.

rocky cliff. The structure was the largest underground hangar built by any nation in World War II.

Measuring more than 1,000 feet in length, 85 feet wide, and 60 feet high, the cavernous space was built to accommodate 60 Macchi C.202 fighters and six Savoia-Marchetti 79 three-engine torpedo bombers, plus workshops, storage areas, and 400 cubic meter storage tanks for gasoline. All this was protected by blast-proof steel doors covering the entrance.

Even before the final surrender of Axis forces in Tunisia on May 13, 1943, planning for Operation Husky, the Allies' invasion of Sicily, had begun. General Dwight D. Eisenhower had been given the overall command of Allied forces for the invasion, and his staff was given the lead for invasion planning.

Their initial thoughts were that Pantelleria would be too tough a nut to crack and the Allies would risk losing valuable resources taking the island that would be better used in the main invasion of Sicily. Eisenhower, in his memoir *Crusade in Europe*, agreed.

He observed, "Topographically, Pantelleria presented obstacles almost scary for an assault. Many of our commanders, officers of staff, and experts were strongly opposed to the operation because a failure would have had a discouraging effect on the morale of troops to be used against the coast of Sicily."

Yet Eisenhower saw great advantages to having Pantelleria in his hands: enhanced air cover for the Allied landings and naval operations in Sicily, use of the Pantelleria airfield for search and rescue forces, removal of the German early warning radio direction-finding equipment, installation of a navigational aid on Montagna Grande, and eliminating the island as a refueling base for enemy torpedo boats and submarines.

Intelligence reported that the island was garrisoned by only five Italian infantry battalions that had not seen combat, eight machine-gun companies recruited from the Frontier Guard that kept watch on alpine borders, and artillery units and antiaircraft gunners drawn from militia units. In the opinion of the intelligence analysts, the morale of these troops was probably not high, and they could be expected to perform poorly under the terror of intense bombardment.

However, the state of the defenders' morale was just a guess. To provide a realistic estimate of the fighting ability of the enemy troops, the British launched three small-scale commando raids to capture prisoners for interrogation.

The first two raids were unable to put a raiding party ashore due to rough sea conditions, but the third landed nine commandos at night along the north coast. The commandos discovered the Italians had posted sentries approximately every 100 yards along the coast; they captured one, but not before he sounded an alarm. In their ensuing rush back to the rubber boats they had left at the foot of a cliff, the commandos got into a firefight, killing three defenders and having one of their own badly wounded.

It quickly became apparent that the raiding party would be unable to descend the cliff with an uncooperative prisoner, so they let him go and left their badly wounded comrade behind.

By early May, Eisenhower had changed his mind about not assaulting Pantelleria. On May 10, he directed his staff to begin planning Operation Corkscrew, the seizure of Pantelleria.

This was not the first time the Allies had drawn up plans to invade Pantelleria. In 1940, the British had planned an assault on the island to eliminate the threat to British shipping in the Mediterranean, but the threat of enemy air attacks by the movement of German fighter and dive bomber squadrons to Sicily caused the plan to be abandoned. This time, however, the Allies anticipated having total air superiority, and the planning went ahead.

The date picked for the invasion of Pantelleria was June 12, 1943. The date was chosen as the latest that the island could be seized and the airfield and supporting infrastructure repaired for Allied air forces to use to support the July invasion of Sicily.

The British 1st Infantry Division was chosen as the assault force. The significance of using the 1st Infantry Division was not only practical, as it had received some amphibious training in England, but also symbolic. The 1st Infantry Division was one of the last units to be evacuated from the European mainland at Dunkirk and now was destined to be the first Allied unit to step onto European soil again.

Eisenhower, however, thought an invasion might not be necessary. In a letter to Lt. Gen. Carl Spaatz, the commander of Northwest African Air Forces, Ike explained that he wished to make the upcoming Operation Corkscrew "a sort of laboratory to determine the effect of concentrated heavy bombardment on a defended coastline."

He wanted the Allied air forces to "concentrate on everything" so that the damage to the island, its military garrison, its equipment and morale would be "so serious as to make that landing a rather simple affair." He remembered the effect on morale of the heavy shelling of the defenders of Corregidor the previous year and wanted "to see whether the air can do the same thing."

Lieutenant General Spaatz's Northwest African Air Forces had several subordinate units, two of which—the Northwest African Strategic Air Forces commanded by Maj. Gen. Jimmy Doolittle and the Northwest African Tactical Air Forces under Air Vice Marshall Arthur Coningham—would provide the aircraft for the bombing "laboratory" on Pantelleria.

These two commanders had at their disposal 1,017 aircraft of all types, the majority of which were fighters and bombers. The Corkscrew planners relied heavily on Doolittle's strategic air forces for most of the hitting power. This force consisted of four groups of Boeing B-17s, two of North American B-25s, three of Martin B-26s, three of Lockheed P-38s, and one of Curtiss P-40s.

The British contribution to Doolittle's command included several wings of Wellington medium bombers. While the pursuit group's main task was providing escort to the bombers, they also participated in strafing and dive bomb attacks on the island.

The Corkscrew planners divided the air attacks on Pantelleria into two phases. From the end of May through June 6, 1943 (D-5), the island would be subjected to increasingly heavy bombardment. From June 7 (D-4) until dawn on June 11 (D-day), the island would be attacked around the clock with an intensity growing from 200 sorties on the first day to 2,000 sorties on the last day.

For the second phase, Doolittle's forces would be joined by Air Vice Marshal Coningham's tactical air force. This force was comprised mostly of North American A-36 dive bombers and P-40s. One of the tactical air force's P-40 squadrons was the 99th Pursuit Squadron, the famed "Tuskegee Airmen," which had just arrived in Tunisia the month before. The escort and

attack missions against Pantelleria would be the first combat for the black airmen.

The deployment strategy chosen by Corkscrew planners would task the American aircraft to fly the day missions and leave the night bombing largely to the RAF with their Vickers Wellingtons. The Casablanca Conference had just recently concluded that the Allies would employ this tactic of round-the-clock bombing in their air campaign against Germany. Pantelleria would be their first attempt to bring day and night bombing to the enemy.

To augment the air bombardment, a Royal Navy strike force of four cruisers, eight destroyers, one gunboat, and 10 motor torpedo boats was organized to shell the island from time to time. These attacks would be aimed not so much as to inflict great damage but to test the island's defenses and make the coastal artillery unmask its positions for targeting by the air forces.

These periodic shore bombardments were also directed against various targets on the island to keep the defenders guessing as to the direction of the impending assault. This strike force was augmented by other patrol boats to form a blockade of Pantelleria, preventing resupply by sea from Sicily. The blockade was integral to the plan of forcing the island to surrender prior to an invasion.

U.S. Air Force

A formation of USAAF B-26G "Marauders" from the 320th Bomb Group, one of the units that took part in Operation Corkscrew. The B-26 could carry 4,000-5,000 pounds of ordnance.

A U.S. Geological Survey report on the island stated it lacked any surface water. Its sources of fresh water were limited to a few springs in the volcanic rock, a small water desalination plant, and perhaps some underground cisterns for water storage. These sources were deemed adequate for the prewar civilian population of about 10,000, but with the augmentation of almost 12,000 military on the island the garrison and the civilian population faced water shortages.

Despite the presence of a blockading force around Pantelleria, the island was never totally isolated. Supplies continued to be brought to the island largely at night by small fishing boats and ferries throughout the air campaign. In addition, the occasional Junkers Ju-52 transport planes were able to bring supplies to the island and to evacuate almost all of the German troops.

Photoreconnaissance flights over the harbor of Pantelleria during the last week in May showed small craft had offloaded an estimated 530 tons of supplies overnight.

Air power had never before been applied to the problem of neutralizing strongly defended, well-manned fortifications from the air. Even under ideal conditions, the task was daunting. The planners of the upcoming "laboratory" on aerial bombardment were faced with a dilemma. With all the air power at their disposal, how could they best apply it to the garrison on Pantelleria to force surrender without the need of a seaborne invasion?

The answer came from an unlikely source: a South African-born primate research anatomist at the University of Oxford named Solly Zuckerman. He had volunteered his services to the British government at the outbreak of the war and had been involved in several research projects, one of which was the study of the effects of bombing on people and buildings.

The British Combined Operations Staff had offered to loan Zuckerman to the North African Air Force campaign planners to analyze the relation between effort and effect of the bombing of Pantelleria. This relation of effort and effect became the basis of the science of Operations Research—the application of analytical methods to predict results and make better decisions.

Zuckerman's analysis of heavy bomber accuracy indicated that to destroy a gun position a 1,000-pound bomb would have to land within eight yards of the target. This would yield a circular area of destruction of 200 square yards. Secondary effects of the explosion, such as shock wave, shrapnel, and earth upheaval, would extend the vulnerable area to 600 square yards. To achieve this accuracy, as many as 400 1,000 pound bombs would have to be dropped.

With more than 100 identified gun positions on the island, it was clear that despite the armada of bombers at their disposal the Allied air forces could not knock out the defenses of Pantelleria in the time allowed.

Zuckerman reasoned that if as little as 30 percent of the guns could be rendered non-effective (i.e., two out of a six-gun battery) the remainder of the guns would be silenced

National Archives

A group of Tuskegee Airmen pilots of the 99th Pursuit Squadron, posing next to a P-40 "Warhawk," distinguished themselves in aerial attacks against Pantelleria.

for secondary reasons. These reasons included damage to fire control optics, casualties among the gun crews, disruption in communications, interdiction of ammunition resupply to the guns, and demoralization of the surviving crewmembers due to repeated exposure to the concussive effects of bombing.

A 30 percent reduction in the enemy's defenses was deemed achievable by the resources at the planners' disposal, and thus Zuckerman's analytical methods became the cornerstone of the Corkscrew air campaign.

Immediately after the surrender of Axis forces in Tunisia on May 13, 1943, the focus of the Northwest African Strategic Air Forces was turned on Pantelleria. Bombing began in earnest on May 18 with U.S. fighter bombers and medium bombers by day and RAF Wellingtons by night. Early targets were the town and port facilities and the airfield.

In accordance with the targeting plan, the tonnage of bombs dropped increased almost daily, and new targets were chosen or old targets revisited based on daily reconnaissance flights over the island. By the end of May, 90 tons of bombs were being dropped daily.

On June 1, the Northwest African Strategic Air Forces heavy bombers, the B-17s, joined the attack. Early raids on the airfield by fighter-bombers strafing and medium bombers dropping 20-pound fragmentation bombs had destroyed most of the aircraft dispersed in the open surrounding the runway; however, no significant damage had been observed to the underground hangar complex.

On that day, a P-38 pilot skipped a 1,000-pound bomb into the blast door of the hangar but caused little damage. Several more attempts at skip-bombing the hangar's entrance would be attempted in the coming weeks, but the structure and its contents remained undamaged throughout the campaign.

Early on, it became obvious to targeting planners that Professor Zuckerman's seemingly pessimistic estimates of the number of bombs needed to destroy a target were being borne out by the facts. The bombs available to the Allied air forces were 1,000-pound, 500-pound, and 250-pound general-purpose bombs with either a 0.25-second delay fuse or instantaneous fusing options. These thin-walled bombs were designed to maximize their blast effects and had minimal penetrative capability against hardened targets.

Photo interpreters observed that instantaneous-fused bombs were having no effect on guns in revetments unless they scored direct hits, and the delayed-fused weapons would sometimes break apart on the volcanic rock prior to detonation.

The U.S. Army Air Forces (USAAF) would introduce new types of general-purpose bombs—the M64 500-pound and the M65 1,000-pound bombs—with thicker cases and better fusing options in 1943, but they would not arrive in theater until after the invasion of Sicily.

Of course, any bomb has to be accurately delivered to be effective, and the USAAF had the most accurate bombsight in the world on its heavy and medium bombers. The Norden bombsight was an analog computer that calculated the bomb's trajectory based on current flight conditions such as altitude, temperature, wind, and ground speed.

During testing in the 1930s, it showed remarkable accuracy when finely tuned and under perfect conditions. The Carl L. Norden Company demonstrated a circular error probable (CEP) of 75 feet from a bombing altitude of 20,000 feet during prewar testing, but in operational service the accuracy was much less. In 1940 the average score of an Air Corps bombardier using the Norden sight was 400 feet. Under combat conditions, it was worse.

USAAF planners calculated that a B-17 had a 1.2 percent probability of dropping a bomb within 100 feet of a target from an altitude of 20,000 feet. The idea of pinpoint daylight precision bombing was good in theory but was outside the practical capabilities of the Allies in World War II. To obtain the desired effects, massive tonnages of bombs would have to be dropped. This lack of level bombing accuracy caused the U.S. Navy in the Pacific to abandon level bombing and rely almost exclusively on dive bombing.

The various fighters assigned to Corkscrew exclusively used dive bombing and strafing for their weapons delivery and obtained much better accuracy than the level delivery medium and heavy bombers but could not match their weight of bombs

carried. The P-40s could only carry one 500-pound bomb, the A-36s could carry two, and the twin engine P-38 could carry two 1,000-pound bombs maximum. The B-17's normal bombload, by contrast, was 10 500-pound bombs or five 1,000-pounders.

As a result, the heavy bombers were given large area targets such as the airfield, port, and dock facilities, and the town of Pantelleria itself while the fighters were assigned to pinpoint targets such as gun positions.

Augmenting the aerial bombardment was naval bombardment. On May 31, the Royal Navy light cruiser HMS *Orion,* escorted by two destroyers, shelled the harbor area of Pantelleria from a range of 13,000 yards. After expending 150 rounds of six-inch and smaller caliber rounds on the docks, the ships withdrew, noting that there was little return fire.

The next day the cruiser HMS *Penelope,* along with two destroyers, engaged in a similar bombardment. This time, five Italian coastal artillery batteries responded and scored a direct hit on *Penelope* with a 152mm round; however, the shell was a dud and caused little damage and no casualties.

On the following two days, HMS *Orion* resumed the attack. Return fire from the shore batteries was sporadic and inaccurate. The rather feeble response to the naval shelling was interpreted as either the result of the daily bombing raids by the North African Air Forces having degraded the shore batteries' capabilities or the gunners being reluctant to highlight their positions for counterbattery fire from ships or bombing from aircraft.

To test the amount of damage inflicted on the shore batteries, the Royal Navy staged a full-scale naval bombardment on June 8. The task force consisted of light cruisers HMS *Newfoundland, Aurora, Penelope, Euryalus,* and *Orion* accompanied by eight destroyers and three motor torpedo boats to serve as a screen against possible U-boat attack.

Aboard his flagship HMS *Aurora* were the Commander-in-Chief, Mediterranean Fleet, Vice Admiral Andrew Cunningham and the Supreme Commander General Eisenhower to observe the bombardment and the Italian response.

The naval attack was broken down into two parts. In the first part, the five cruisers shelled the mole and dock area of the port immediately following a strike by B-25s and P-38s on the same area. The second part consisted of the destroyers closing to within 2,000 yards of shore to entice shore batteries to reveal themselves by firing at these tempting targets. Only an estimated 30 rounds were fired by the defenders, all of which missed their targets.

The final portion of the attack saw the three motor torpedo boats close to within 300 yards of the port, which succeeded in provoking several 8mm machine-gun nests to open fire on them.

The attack lasted about 90 minutes before the British withdrew and the results of the shelling were appraised. The conclusion was that of the 16 known coastal artillery batteries in range of the British warships only four returned fire; one fired until it was silenced by a cruiser, and the other three responded only intermittently.

The result of this action convinced Eisenhower that critical shore defense batteries had been rendered ineffective and the daily analysis of bombing effectiveness that crossed his desk was too conservative. He told his staff that he had every confidence that plans for the upcoming assault on the island could be adhered to.

He also opined that since the bombardment would be intensified and continued for the next three days until June 11, the morale of the defenders would be sufficiently shattered for the landing troops to capture Pantelleria with relatively few casualties.

Giuseppe Ferrara was a 24-year-old NCO in the Regia Marina (Italian Royal Navy) when he first set foot on dusty, sun-baked Pantelleria in 1939. He had previously been assigned to the heavy cruiser *Duca d'Aosta* during the Spanish Civil War and was trained as a machinist.

When he was assigned to Pantelleria to run the fuel depot there, "My heart sank," he recalled in his memoirs. "I came from a fertile land of Sarno [30 miles east of Naples], fertile and rich in water and was now in a dry land without even a source of water."

He describes drinking from the stagnant water cisterns of the civil population's houses or rusty storage tanks owned by the military. The truly adventuresome drank from the

One of the survivors was the ship's doctor. "I offered him a cigarette. He had a badly burned face and was suffering much pain, but he disdainfully refused. Evidently, he had not yet digested the defeat."

couple of springs that came out of the volcanic rock, but the water stank of sulfur. He didn't have much time for sightseeing or feeling sorry for himself. The entire island was a construction site with work in progress expanding the port facilities, leveling two volcanic cinder cones to create a flat landing field for the airport, and tunneling into the adjacent hill to build the enormous underground hangar.

As time went by, Ferrara began to enjoy the assignment. "The people were hospitable and had great local food and wine and, something very important to me, the girls on the island were very beautiful." The next year, 1940, he met a 16-year-old girl and "it was love at first sight." He received permission to marry, and a few months later his daughter was born.

The quiet life of peacetime garrison duty was interrupted in June 1940, when Italy declared war on France. Shortly thereafter, the island began receiving reinforcements and

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Dressed in antiflash protective clothing, crewmembers aboard Admiral C.H.J. Harcourt's flagship, HMS *Newfoundland*, view Pantelleria being furiously bombarded. Painting by British war artist Leslie Cole, 1943.

additional aircraft, supplies, guns, and German technical experts to install and operate three Freya radio direction-finding posts.

Ferrara was in charge of the main fuel supply depot on the island at Villa Silvia outside of town. This depot consisted of two large fuel storage deposits that were buried deep underground. He did a brisk business refueling MAS motor torpedo boats and submarines that attacked British naval convoys that passed by Pantelleria as well as providing fuel to the airport.

In June 1942, the island figured prominently in the Naval Battle of Pantelleria. The British sent a heavily escorted resupply convoy from Gibraltar to their besieged base on Malta. The Regia Marina dispatched two cruisers and four destroyers and intercepted the convoy near Pantelleria, sinking two destroyers and four merchant ships, including an American tanker, the SS *Kentucky*.

Savoia-Marchetti SM-79 torpedo bombers from Pantelleria and Sicily finished off several damaged vessels. Only two of the original six merchant vessels made it to Malta and the loss of aviation gasoline aboard the *Kentucky* severely hampered air operations out of Malta for weeks.

The day after this action in the Sicily straits, Ferrara was ordered to take a sailing vessel from the harbor of Pantelleria to search for survivors of the British merchantmen sunk the previous day. He found several survivors from the merchantman *Burdwan*, whom he took aboard and returned to Pantelleria. One of the survivors was the ship's doctor. "I offered him a cigarette. He had a badly burned face and was suffering much pain, but he disdainfully refused. Evidently, he had not yet digested the defeat."

Other boats from Pantelleria rescued other British sailors. When he arrived in port, Ferrara saw these prisoners being offered hot plates of pasta, which they ate voraciously. "Unfortunately, they were not used to that type of food and all had violent diarrhea."

By early 1943, it became obvious things were not going well for the Italians and their German allies in North Africa. The island was used as a refueling base for German planes bound for North Africa and returning with wounded.

On one of the return flights in April, shortly before the collapse of the Axis

armies in Tunisia, a Ju-52 crew gave Ferrara a female German shepherd named Iole. The dog was a pet and was being evacuated by the crew; Ferrara was a familiar face at Pantelleria to transiting aircrews, and the Ju-52 crew thought he could provide a better home for Iole.

By the end of April 1943, ferries and other small craft began appearing at Pantelleria loaded with soldiers that stopped only for refueling before continuing to Sicily. Ferrara observed: "I realized at that time that our happy times as noncombatants was about to end."

Ferrara was on the roof of his house on Saturday morning, May 8, building a pigeon loft, when he heard the drone of many aircraft and looked up to see the first wave of what would become a 35-day nightmare of aerial attack on the island.

"There were dozens and dozens of aircraft," he said. "They looked like the dark clouds of a thunderstorm. I could not run away but rather stood there transfixed. They flew over my house and dropped their load of bombs on the airport. From my position, it seemed to be a real volcanic eruption, the bombing was so intense."

The choice of targeting the airfield instead of the port and town of Pantelleria was a blessing in disguise. If the first bombing raid had targeted the town, Ferrara estimates thousands of people would have perished, but instead it served as a warning. Immediately, people fled the town in droves, seeking refuge in country houses and in the many shelters and tunnels constructed during the military buildup in the 1930s. By the end of the day, the island's only power plant had been hit, and the inhabitants remained without electricity until the island surrendered on June 11, 1943.

Ferrara was fortunate that his in-laws lived in the country and he was able to move his wife, baby, and Iole there immediately. During the next 35 days of bombing and occasional shelling by the Royal Navy, the Allies made a total of 140 separate raids on the island, and each involved hundreds of aircraft. By June 11, approximately 20,000 tons of explosives had been dropped, for an average of one ton for every civilian man, woman, child, and military member on the island.

Life under such bombardment "was hell." By the first week of June, the town of Pantelleria did not exist; 95 percent of the buildings in the town had been destroyed or rendered uninhabitable.

Even the dead were not immune from the onslaught. Once, when caught in the open at the beginning of an air raid, Ferrara sought refuge in the town cemetery near his in-laws' home. A stick of bombs hit the cemetery and disinterred many of the dead. Ferrara relates it was an appalling vision. Graves had been blown open, and bones and decomposing bodies were scattered everywhere.

For the living, their lives were constantly interrupted by the increasing frequency of the bombing raids. Meals were frequently skipped, sleep was difficult, water was rationed, and nerves were frayed.

Even animals on Pantelleria were traumatized by the bombing. Ferrara's dog Iole began shaking uncontrollably at the first sound of aircraft engines. Yet, for the 20 men under Ferrara's command, "there was never a complaint or protest. They fulfilled their duty in silence until the last day."

Despite the intense bombing, casualties on Pantelleria were surprisingly light. The low number of casualties was largely due to the early evacuation of the town of Pantelleria and the extensive usage of bombproof shelters. In fact, the lack of concentrated anti-aircraft fire reported by fighter and bomber crews was largely due to the gunners taking shelter during the raids.

The bombing of Pantelleria had initially been met with only occasional antiaircraft fire

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ABOVE: Italian gun emplacements along the coast receive a heavy pounding from Allied bombers during the unceasing attacks. The 10,000-man Italian garrison gave up quickly, supporting the argument that bombardment alone could cause an enemy to surrender. OPPOSITE: Martin 187 "Baltimore" light bombers of No. 21 Squadron, Royal South African Air Force, bank away from smoke billowing from an oil storage facility they have just bombed.

and no Axis fighter opposition. By June 1, the German Luftwaffe and Italian Regia Aeronautica fighter aircraft began to contest the Allied air onslaught with fighters based in Sicily. These fighter sweeps consisted of normally no more than 10 planes, although on June 5, a force of 15 or 20 Messerschmitt Me-109s and Focke Wulf FW-190s intercepted a formation of B-25s and P-38s over the island.

The next day, Italian Me-109s appeared; however, the efforts of the Axis pilots seemed halfhearted at best. Attacks were not driven home, and the fighters retired at the earliest opportunity. The intervention of Sicily-based fighters did nothing to blunt the bombing attacks.

In all, by the time of the surrender of the island, the Allies claimed 57 aircraft destroyed, 10 probables, and 21 damaged for the cost of about a dozen Allied aircraft.

The outline for the offensive called for increasing numbers of air attacks on June 8 and 9, with the maximum number of sorties on June 10 and 11 (D-day). The number of aircraft in the skies over Pantelleria during these last days of furious bombardment caused a new danger to the Allied pilots: the danger of mid-air collision.

So many aircraft were targeting the five-by-eight-mile island that pilots sometimes found it necessary to circle to allow the smoke from previous bombs to clear prior to beginning their bomb runs.

With most of the crewmembers' eyes focused on the island and not outside the aircraft, there were inevitably a number of near misses. It was the top cover of Supermarine Spitfire fighters that became traffic cops for some of these raids. They directed pilots to modify their courses to the targets to reduce the concentration of aircraft over the island and to take new courses to return to base to avoid flying into aircraft that were still on the inbound leg of their bombing missions.

The bombing continued almost nonstop with the exception of a three-hour pause on June 9. During that pause, three volunteer fighter pilots from the 33rd Fighter Group flew their P-40s at low altitude and dropped leaflets on the airfield and port facilities of Pantelleria and the residence of the military governor of the island, Vice Admiral Gino Pavesi, with a surrender ultimatum from Lt. Gen. Spaatz.

The ultimatum called for an immediate cessation of hostilities, unconditional surrender of all armed forces, who would become prisoners of war, and the abandonment of all military installations, which were to be left intact. In case the garrison wished to capitulate, it was directed to display a white cross on the airfield and fly a white flag in the harbor area.

Shortly after the ultimatum leaflets were dropped, thousands more were dropped by B-26s informing the garrison and civilian population that the demand for surrender had been given to Pavesi and underlining the futility of further resistance. The Allies repeated the leaflet drops the next day, June 10. Giuseppe Ferrara recounted that the surrender leaflets were welcomed as the island inhabitants were critically short of toilet paper.

As soon as it was apparent that there was no response to the two surrender demands, final preparations went ahead to embark the British 1st Division for a landing on June 11, 1943; the division loaded their transport ships at the Tunisian ports of Sousse and Sfax on the evening of June 10.

The force was split into three convoys, two fast and one slow, that left in total darkness with the clouds obscuring the moon. The three convoys were scheduled to arrive eight miles from the harbor of Pantelleria at 9:55 AM the next day. There the assault force would load into landing craft and, protected by four flak craft, five escorting destroyers, trawlers, and mine sweepers, make for the harbor and land the landing force.

The assault force was well equipped. Every man going ashore carried a mess tin and two days' rations, a water bottle, water sterilization tablets, a tube of mosquito repellant, two rations of rum (one for reserve and one to be consumed on the go), a first-aid kit, and a pack of cigarettes.

Offshore the division had reserves of four meals a day plus water for a week to include enough for 10,000 prisoners and 15,000 civilians. Corporal John Best, a Royal Marine with the landing force, had some

reservations about the chosen date for the invasion. "Finally, came our first invasion. It was to be Pantelleria, off Sicily on 11 June 1943, which was also my 19th birthday.

"It was the custom of our mess that on our birthday the lucky man got 'sippers' [rum] all round which, of course, meant that I would be 'three sheets to the wind.' I explained to the captain of the ship the situation and asked if the invasion could be postponed for a day; he said quite definitely it could not."

During the night of June 10/11, a British radio listening post on Malta intercepted communications between the military governor of Pantelleria, Admiral Pavesi, and Supermarina, the headquarters of the Regia Marina. Pavesi explained that the garrison was running short of water and munitions and had been told to surrender.

Supermarina's reply was short and to the point: "We are convinced that you will inflict the greatest possible damage upon the enemy. Long Live Italy!"

The next morning, despite the heavy bombardment of the town and port of Pantelleria, Pavesi held his normal morning staff meeting. Polling his staff officers, he found the overwhelming majority were in favor of capitulation. Pavesi decided to bypass the chain of command and at 9:50 AM sent a message directly to Mussolini advising him of his plan to surrender.

At the same time Pavesi's message was being sent to Mussolini, the dictator had been briefed by Supermarina that Pavesi was going to hold the island. Il Duce dispatched a message to Pantelleria praising the heroic resistance of the garrison and announced the award of the Cross of Savoia for Admiral Pavesi. However, by 11 AM Mussolini had received Pavesi's message that he was planning to surrender due to water shortages.

No doubt chagrined, Mussolini replied to Pavesi, concurring with his surrender plans and telling the admiral, "Only Stalin or the Mikado [the Japanese Emperor] can order a commander to fight to the last man," and directing him to inform the British on Malta that he was surrendering due to the lack of water for the civilian population. Mussolini's permission did not reach Pavesi until he had already surrendered.

At 10:30 AM, June 11, the first wave of British landing craft left the invasion fleet en route to the Red, White, and Green landing beaches at the port of Pantelleria, their approach hidden by fog from lookouts on the island. The landing areas were being swept by gunfire from four Royal Navy cruisers and three destroyers while the town was simultaneously being bombed by hundreds of B-17s. This last fusillade of firepower directed against the defenders stopped, according to schedule, at 11:45 as British landing craft approached their landing zones.

Admiral Pavesi's signal to Malta that he was surrendering was sent at 11 AM, simultaneously with his order to raise a white flag in the town and display a white cross on the airfield. Delays in communicating the orders to all the defenders caused some isolated machine-gun fire against the landing craft as they beached, but they were quickly silenced and no Allied casualties were suffered.

Fighters making low-level strafing runs on the island reported seeing the white cross on the airfield, and the order was given to the Royal Navy ships off shore to cease fire. Due to a breakdown in communications, the Mediterranean air forces did not receive the cease-fire order and continued sporadic bombing of targets until late afternoon, an act for which Lt. Gen. Spaatz later apologized.

At noon, 20 soldiers of the 1st Battalion, Duke of Wellington Regiment set foot on European soil for the first time since the Dunkirk evacuation three years and one week earlier. They were greeted by the few Italian soldiers in the vicinity waving white flags. There was no more resistance offered by the beleaguered defenders, and the seizure of the island went off without a hitch, with one exception.

Winston Churchill, in his memoirs, said the only casualty was a British soldier "bitten by a mule." The unfortunate soldier was Corporal Sanderson of the 2nd Battalion of the Sherwood Foresters, who had actually suffered a fatal kick in the head by a jackass.

The Comando Supremo of the Italian Armed Forces released war bulletin 1113 the next day, stating: "Pantelleria, subjected to massive air and naval actions with a frequency and intensity unprecedented in history, deprived of water resources for the civilian population, was yesterday forced to cease resistance."

In his report to General Eisenhower, General Henry "Hap" Arnold, commander of the Army Air Forces, wrote: "When we landed, we realized that a garrison animated by

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With Italian resistance having been subjected to 20 days of intense aerial and naval bombardment, British infantry landed at Pantelleria's destroyed harbor without opposition, June 11, 1943.

National Archives

Although shell-shocked by the constant bombardment, Pantelleria's relieved civilians emerge from their shelters. The island's infrastructure was virtually destroyed but, fortunately, civilian casualties were few.

another spirit could have continued fighting. The number of enemy killed has been extraordinarily low. In the underground hangars, little was damaged and their equipment was intact. There were still sufficient food and water on the island. What we destroyed was their will to fight."

For Giuseppe Ferrara, the arrival of British troops meant the beginning of his journey to a prison camp. On the morning of June 11, he was at his post in the underground fuel storage depot near the airfield; his wife and child and dog were in a nearby tunnel. A patrol of about 30 British soldiers appeared at the entrance to his storage depot, and an officer with an Australian accent called out in Neapolitan dialect, "Are you the boss?" "Yes," Ferrara replied. "How many men do you have?" Twenty was his answer.

"Do you want to go into captivity? We will keep you here, and you can continue to do what you've always done. Tell me where there are munitions, fuel, and other material and you can stay working here and be next to your wife."

Ferrara refused to cooperate, and he and the rest of his men were taken prisoner of "His Britannic Majesty." He had no time to say goodbye to his family, but days later he saw a photograph in a British military newspaper of a long line of civilians being loaded aboard a transport for return to Italy. In the photo, he was relieved to see his wife and child. The British put him on one of the invasion ships and took him and his fellow prisoners to Tunisia, where they were turned over to the French for custody.

Ferrara recalled that the British were firm but fair captors and treated their prisoners well, but being prisoners of the French was another story. The French relegated the running of their North African POW camps to their colonial troops, the Senegalese. Ferrara described his internment in his postwar memoirs as "hell on earth." The Italians suffered brutal treatment, inadequate food, lice, and exposure to the elements; many men succumbed to the conditions in captivity.

While at the POW camp at Ben Arous, Ferrara and some other men hatched an escape plan. They broke out of their camp and, while traveling by night and hiding by day, searched for an American Army patrol. After two days they found one and were taken to an American encampment where they were treated to their first showers, dusted with DDT, and given hot food and cigarettes.

Unfortunately, this respite lasted only a month until the French discovered their whereabouts and demanded their return. It was not until February 1946 that Ferrara was finally returned home to Naples and reunited with his family—and Iole.

A British postwar commission investigated the effects of bombing on Pantelleria and discovered that only 36 military and three civilians died during the attacks. Of the 118 guns on the island, only 16 had been destroyed and 43 damaged. The food and water supplies were adequate for prolonged resistance although the distribution system for the water relied on motor transport that was interrupted by the destruction of roads and trails on the island. Admiral Pavesi stated that the water supplies had been contaminated by the bombing, but the inquiry could find no proof of that.

Was Pantelleria's surrender due solely to the application of airpower? Certainly the unrelenting aerial bombardment weakened the defenders' will to resist; Hap Arnold's observation to that effect was accurate. Italy's German allies certainly expected a stiffer resistance from Italians that were defending their home territory for the first time. They expected Pantelleria to represent a line that could not be crossed, like the Rhine River was for the Germans in 1945. They were disappointed.

For the Italians, Pantelleria was another domino of defeat that began in North Africa. The Italians were faced with the prospect of either losing their independence to the Anglo-Americans or greater subservience to their German allies. In light of these two choices, defeatism spread first through military leadership, then through the ranks, and finally through the Italian population.

For the Germans, it confirmed suspicions that the Italians were unreliable allies and that in the upcoming battle for Italy the Wehrmacht would have to take increasing responsibility for her defense.

Continued on page 98

From Battlefield to Football Field

A former German paratrooper recalls his days fighting in Crete, the USSR, and North Africa, then years as a POW in Britain and the United States, where he played American football.

BY RICHARD STATETZNY WITH WARD CARR AND DETLEF ZIER

BACKSTORY: *Richard Statetzny was born on January 16, 1920, the youngest of five children, in Bieberswalde in the District of Osterode, East Prussia, Germany. According to the Treaty of Versailles, East Prussia was geographically separated from the Reich, but it was still German, and the former administrative structure remained.*

Two of his sisters had earlier emigrated to the United States, one in the 1920s and the other in 1930, and both lived in Cleveland, Ohio. After Richard finished school, he did job training as a stage painter then volunteered for the Fallschirmjäger (paratroopers). However, he initially was not accepted because he was supposed to do his military service in East Prussia, and no paratroopers were trained there.

This is his story.

Because I could ride, I volunteered for the cavalry, but I was assigned to the mounted rifle platoon with the infantry regiment in Rastenburg. I did both my basic [riding] and advanced training there. After a half a year in Rastenburg, I was allowed to volunteer for the paratroopers because they were looking for recruits. I had another physical, was graded 1-A, and accepted. I entered the airborne school in Braunschweig in July 1940.

After four weeks there, we made our first jumps. They also trained us how to pack our parachutes. Then we reported to our regiment in the Lüneburger Heide [Luneburg Heath] about 40 kilometers south of Hamburg. Up until then, there had been only two parachute regiments in the Wehrmacht; ours was the third, the new one. My unit was 4th Company, 1st Battalion, 3rd Regiment, 7th Flieger (Airborne) Division.

Courtesy of Richard Statetzny

Luftwaffe paratrooper Richard Statetzny photographed in March 1942 at the infantry training school at Döberitz near Berlin. He is wearing the "diving eagle" Fallschirmjäger badge, the Hitler Youth proficiency badge, and the ribbon for the Iron Cross.

After our training in Lüneburg, we moved to our garrison in the kaserne [barracks] in Wolfenbüttel near Braunschweig. It was then that the Wehrmacht marched through Yugoslavia and invaded Greece. [*Editor's note*: During that time, Italy attempted to invade Greece, but the mountains, brutal winter weather, and stubborn Greek defenders stopped the Italians; Hitler came to the aide of Mussolini.]

So, we, too, were deployed. We boarded trains and traveled via Czechoslovakia and Hungary to Arat, Romania, where we detrained and boarded trucks. We went through Bulgaria and over the Thermopylae Pass through Greece and to the coast before reaching Athens.

We bivouacked in tents right on the coast and really had no idea what was going to happen next. But we could swim in the sea, and it was really relaxing. One evening we suddenly had to fall in, and our company commander addressed us. He said, "It was just announced—tomorrow we are taking off for Crete!" That was the first we had heard of Crete.

[*To prevent the British Royal Air Force from knocking out German oil facilities at Ploesti, Romania, on April 25, 1941, Hitler ordered an all-out assault on British forces garrisoned on the Mediterranean island of Crete in an operation codenamed "Mercur"*

A Fallschirmjäger poses for a publicity shot in the doorway of a Ju-52. Note that the Germans were not equipped with a reserve parachute as American paratroopers were.

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(Mercury). Richard's 7th Flieger Division was a part of General Kurt Student's XI Fliegerkorps. The first wave of paratroops dropped on Crete were carried by 493 Ju-52 transport aircraft.]

Right afterward, the planes were prepared for takeoff, and some of us were assigned to drive fuel to the more than 400 Ju-52s we had at different fields. That night we all checked our weapons one last time and put them in their cases.

Airborne Assault on Crete

Takeoff from Greece was scheduled for the crack of dawn [on May 20, 1941]. Just before we took off, we loaded our weapons and lifejackets on the plane. Actually, we were very well equipped to face everything but the blistering heat.

The planes could not take off quickly one after the other but had to wait for longer intervals than planned. This was because the planes created huge clouds of dust taking off, and this made it very difficult for the pilots to see.

We were in the first wave and were scheduled to jump over the road from Alikianou to Chania, near the Agya prison. We were still approaching the jump-off point when we came under heavy fire and suffered our first casualties.

Another thing was, back in those days, we couldn't steer or control our parachutes because they only had suspensions, so the parachutes seesawed badly. Nowadays paratroopers can control their chutes, but back then we couldn't.

I had no control at all over the landing and wound up on a roof, and a buddy landed on the roof of the next building. I hit hard and was pretty banged up. I jumped down on a parapet two meters below. Beneath that there was a horse hitched up to a cart full of oranges. Apparently the farmers had gotten up early to pick oranges that morning.

I jumped from the parapet, but instead of landing on the ground I wound up in the middle of the oranges. Right away the Greeks appeared with their hands raised and surrendered on the spot. Our unit encountered no other resistance.

The unit rallied and assembled at the prison. I brought the farmer's horse, which I had managed to "organize," and because I could ride the colonel immediately made me his messenger.

I was ordered to bring the message to a company to hold its position at all costs because the English were attacking heavily. On the way to the company command post, the English shot the horse right out from under me. Luckily I didn't get a scratch, but the horse was badly wounded, so I had to shoot it. I managed to capture a second horse that was running around loose. I rode it, but it, too, was shot, so I had to continue on foot.

After I reported to the colonel, I was allowed to return to my unit. Then we got involved in heavy fighting with the English, who defended doggedly. Actually, the troops were New Zealanders and were well equipped. They even had tanks. We didn't have any, so it was tough going.

At one point we had used up all our ammunition and had to get more from our ammo depot in the prison. The casualty station was there too, so we decided to check on two wounded buddies. In the cells we could see wounded English and German soldiers, often lying in the same cells together and being tended to by German medics.

The doctors had to do a lot of amputations. Because they did not have time, the medics had simply stacked amputated limbs on the stair landing right in front of the operating room. It was a shocking sight because blood was running down the stairs and it was hard to tell the original color of the doctors' gowns due to the blood smeared on them.

One of our two buddies, the company commander, was dead already. Our first sergeant had a bullet lodged in his body but was soon evacuated to Germany. Completely depressed, we returned with the ammunition.

Courtesy of Richard Statetzny

ABOVE: Statetzny (far left) and his airborne mortar crew photographed in October 1940 at the training area of the Lüneburg Heath. BELOW: Fallschirmjägers prepare to board transports in Corinth for Operation Mercury—the May 1941 invasion of Crete—where Statetzny jumped and got his first taste of battle. OPPOSITE: Fallschirmjägers exit a DFS 230 glider during training. This type of glider was used during the assault on Belgium's Fortress Eben-Email and the invasion of Crete.

Finally, we managed to take the enemy position and secure it. The colonel ordered us to dig in and defend it at all costs. Before we could advance further, we had to wait for reinforcements. The airfield at Maleme was under heavy fire but was almost secured when an assault regiment of one of our mountain infantry units landed there.

A lot of them were shot as soon as they left the plane, but the others attacked immediately, and a short time later they secured the airfield. Then they moved to the mountains where they outflanked the English and forced them to give ground. Although the English troops were well trained and disciplined, they were forced to surrender in the end. They simply couldn't resist any longer.

Afterward, we moved into Chania and took it. Two days later we had control of the whole island. Although the English were able to evacuate a large part of their troops, we still captured some 10,000 soldiers.

After the fighting was over, a provisional cemetery was made for the fallen comrades of our battalion. Because there were also English soldiers buried there, captured English officers and soldiers attended the ceremony. I saw the English and German officers shaking hands. Later the dead were reinterred in a large consolidated cemetery, which was organized by the Deutsche Kriegsgräberfürsorge in Maleme on Crete.

[*Editor's note*: The Volksbund Deutsche Kriegsgräberfürsorge e. V. is a humanitarian organization charged by the government of the Federal Republic of Germany with recording, maintaining, and caring for the graves of German war casualties abroad—the German equivalent of the American Battle Monuments Commission and British Commonwealth War Graves Commission.]

On to Russia

We returned to Germany, where our battalion picked up replacements. In the Grafenwöhr Training Area, we trained them, and we went on maneuvers together.

One day in mid 1941, just after we had returned to the kaserne from training exercises, there was an alarm and we had to fall in at once. Our company commander announced the invasion of Russia and that we were to deploy immediately. We were to pack our equipment, board trains, and return to our garrison in Wolfenbüttel.

In the barracks there was a battery of heavy flak guns, and the fellows in the battery were ordered to belt the machine-gun ammunition for us and bring it to the train station. We boarded the train and went to Königsberg, East Prussia. The next day we flew to the front because the Russians were trying desperately to establish a bridgehead near Petroschino, and our units there were badly outnumbered and starting to give ground.

That night we landed at the Neva River and quietly approached the Russian lines where an allied French unit had taken up positions. It was one of the many volunteer units from France and the Netherlands that fought alongside us. This particular French

unit was an artillery battery well known for being a top unit.

Their commander offered to support us with a sustained barrage before our attack.

Our commander replied, "I don't want the artillery to fire because that would tip the Russians off. My troopers are used to fighting without artillery support because we don't have any [in the table of organization and equipment]. We will just sneak up to the Russian positions and make a surprise attack."

It was already cold out there at night. We had gotten so close to the Russians that we could hear the sentries talking and stamping their feet because of the cold. We were only about 30 meters from them, and they didn't realize it.

Then we shot flares—green, white, green. That was our signal to attack. The whole front lit up, and then we broke through the Russian lines. They were so surprised that we rolled back their bridgehead within a half hour. The Russians suffered heavily because they could not leave their trenches.

At first we had almost no casualties because our attack was a complete surprise. But later on we suffered more and more losses as the Russians counterattacked five or six times that night and on into dawn. They were mostly drunk. They didn't have anything to eat, but they did have vodka. Then they attacked. That was absolutely crazy. They didn't all have weapons. And some had weapons that weren't even loaded—they attacked with fixed bayonets. But Ivan couldn't break through. We had MG 42s—the "Hitler Buzz Saw"—as well as other top weapons. Back then we were better armed than they were.

We were in Petroschino and Wyborgskaja a bit more than three months and were under heavy fire every day. The Russians fired their mortars continually, and we had a lot of KIAs. Many of the companies existed only on paper.

Return to Germany—and More Training

One day we were ordered to withdraw from the front line, and we were held in general reserve for some two weeks. Then we boarded trains in Puschkin (formerly Zarskoje Selo) and went back to Germany, where we were assigned to be a training battalion in Elsgrund, the troop training area in Döberitz. They had really nice barracks there. We tested and tried out new weapons, including a slightly heavier light artillery piece.

We also tried out the new steerable parachutes. When we first jumped back in 1940 we were equipped with the RZ 1 (Rücken-Zwangsauslösung 1). Now we tried the RZ 16, then the RZ 20. The RZ 16 had another type of harness, but it still had the simple suspension. When we jumped with that in the winter, we had quite a few injuries—broken bones and the like. Just part of being a paratrooper, I guess.

We trained our new replacements as well as troops from other units on heavy mortars and heavy machine guns. We also trained airborne combat engineers on them.

Whenever we came back from deployment, we got leave. And in 1941 we got Christmas leave. They even extended leave because we did so well on our last exercise.

In the winter of 1941-1942, we had an exercise at the Königsbrück Training Area near Dresden. We jumped against our infantry, who were playing the aggressors. Our mission was to keep a river ford open for our unit and to push back the "enemy" infantry.

There was snow on the ground, so we jumped with white parachutes for camouflage, and the infantry didn't expect that. They had never seen anything like white parachutes before.

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ABOVE: A Fallschirmjäger checks the static line of a fellow paratrooper during a training exercise. As an NCO with combat experience, Statetzny served as an instructor at an officers' training school. OPPOSITE: Life wasn't all glamour for elite parachutists. Here Fallschirmjägers dig a defensive position in frozen Soviet soil after the 1941 invasion of the U.S.S.R. Statetzny survived the fighting there, and he and his unit were sent back to Germany for rest, refitting, and more training.

We flew over their positions at between 80 and 110 meters and jumped behind their lines. One guy crashed because his chute opened too late. And a weapons container crashed and was completely destroyed. But they didn't halt the exercise.

Right after landing, we got under our white chutes which hid us and opened fire with blanks on the infantry unit. We did keep the river ford open for our unit, and we pushed back the "enemy" infantry, all with flying colors. It went so well that the commanding general sent us word during our Christmas leave that he had granted us four extra days of leave. Now that was a real Christmas present!

Afterward, we were at the Grossborn Training Area in Poland, where we trained Luftwaffe officers who were being mustered out of the branch. They were slated to be transferred to the infantry, and so they had to go through infantry officers' training.

All of us paratrooper drill instructors were NCOs, and they were all officers. So to avoid any friction, and so that we wouldn't hesitate to treat them like normal soldiers who needed a little guidance, they didn't wear any insignia of rank. That really made things a lot simpler.

I remember one incident very clearly. We had an exercise for the officers to practice advancing underneath our supporting fire to get accustomed to it. So we covered the attacking officers with our machine-gun fire, and we were using live ammunition that day. The "cone of fire" of the heavy machine guns was normally at a range of around 3,000 meters, and it flew rather high before dropping.

In the exercise, "enemy" troops had advanced to about 800 meters from us, and the officers started to counterattack. We started firing over them while they advanced in scattered lines of skirmishers.

But, all of a sudden, they started jumping around and running away like rabbits. When they threw themselves to the ground, we saw that our salvoes were coming down right on top of them. Several of them were hit and fell down, but luckily they came away with only bruises.

An immediate cease-fire was ordered; the machine gunners were arrested and taken to the guardhouse. An investigation started right away to determine the cause. At first we thought that the gunners had changed the barrels too late and the machine guns were inaccurate because the rifling in the barrels had been worn out.

Later, however, our armorers determined the real reason. The Luftwaffe officers had to provide the ammunition for this exercise, and they had older ammunition from Czech armaments factories. Czech ammunition was much harder than the ammunition we normally used then, and that made our machine-gun barrels wear and burn out quickly.

The Czechs had good weapons. In Russia we preferred to use them instead of ours because Czech weapons didn't rust so easily. Often our weapons got corrosion pits in the barrels, but if you pulled the ramrod through the barrel of a Czech weapon once, it was clean again.

To North Africa and El Alamein

In July 1942, we entrained and went to Greece, then flew in Ju-52s to Crete, where we stayed a day before flying on to Tobruk.

I don't remember how long the flight to Tobruk was, but I do remember that we landed there in a sand storm. That was terrible. From there we had to hitch rides to the front because there was no transportation heading toward El Alamein. So we all lined up along the Via Balbia, which led to the front. We also stopped all the vehicles that were heading our way and asked them to take as many of us as they could. So it took a bit more than three days until we all arrived at El Dab'a, where we assembled and bivouacked by the sea.

Bundesarchiv Bild 101I-788-0006A-04; Photo: Wörner

ABOVE: Members of Fallschirm Brigade "Ramcke" take a cigarette break during an operation in Tunisia, November 1942. Statetzny avoided capture while with the Ramcke Brigade. OPPOSITE: Cover was non-existent during much of the fighting in the North African desert. Here German paratroopers have created a machine-gun position out of sand and rocks. It was during fighting in the desert in May 1943 that Statetzny was captured by the British.

We then marched to the front where we took up a position far to the south of the Qattara Depression. Its deepest point is below sea level, so the heat was scorching. It was a stone desert, so we couldn't dig trenches; we had to make barricades out of stones. It was pretty exhausting, and we didn't get any clean water. The water I did drink, I couldn't keep down—I vomited it out again. It is a wonder that nobody got seriously ill.

But our cooks kept us fed. The field kitchens were located in a wadi [a dry stream bed] two or three kilometers behind the front. They cooked the meals there, and at night, usually around 11 PM or midnight, they brought the rations to the front and we ate then. They could only do this in the dark because the whole area was open terrain and was patrolled by English airplanes.

Then the nights weren't cold yet. When winter began, it really got cold at night, and the days were also wet and cold. [Richard doesn't say much about El Alamein, but his unit was not involved.]

After the Battle of El Alamein, we also had to withdraw. We had held our lines, and the English couldn't get through. But they were able to break through in force near the coast. So we were ordered to disengage and withdraw to avoid capture. Despite this, a large number of our troops were captured. We were then ordered to withdraw so as not to be bypassed and surrounded; we retreated on foot. However, we did have a few vehicles for our antitank weapons, and they kept the English attacks at bay.

We were on the move with General [Hermann-Bernhard] Ramcke, and one morning [November 6/7, 1942, according to accounts] our rear guard reported that a large convoy of English vehicles had encamped and was being guarded by tanks very near us.

So General Ramcke ordered us to advance in small groups and see if we could capture the vehicles in the column without firing and drive them away at once. Believe it or not, we did it! We captured all the vehicles, along with the English drivers who were at the wheels and replaced some of them with our drivers. We started to move without the tanks noticing.

By the time they realized what was going on and started to chase us, it was too late. We zigzagged through the stone desert and obliterated our tracks so they couldn't follow us. Our mixed English-Afrika Korps convoy got tangled up with an English convoy. But they didn't notice that our column had different drivers, either. We managed to break though and reach our rear guard, which was right next to Rommel.

I saw Field Marshal Erwin Rommel several times in Africa, the first time in Marsa El Brega, behind Bengazi. We made our backup line there to stop the English advance. We were supposed to be the rear guard and were ordered to delay the English as long as possible to allow our troops to withdraw and form a new line of defense. Then we were to retreat past those lines; we were supposed to leapfrog rearward. We were too weak to stop the English completely, but leapfrogging would gain time for us.

In Marsa El Brega, Rommel flew in on a Fieseler Storch to check out our positions and to see how well—and how long—we could defend the position. Our battalion commander [Baron Friedrich August Freiherr von der Heydte] was there too. Rommel went straight to our positions, and each unit commander—me included—had to give him a report. That was the first time I saw Rommel personally, and I saw him two more times at the front.

Then we leapfrogged back to Tobruk and Benghazi. We continued retreating back to Tunisia, where we first occupied the old positions that the French had built. We were always deployed at the hot spots. Finally, we were in Hamam-Lif, a city right near Tunis. That was the end of our retreat.

The English attacked Hamam-Lif. They must have had 150 tanks, more tanks than we had heavy weapons. I was in position with my troops at the edge of the city. I ordered the NCO mortar crew chief to fire, then he said that all the ammo had been expended. So I told him to spike the mortar so the English wouldn't get it and then to lead his men back to the battalion combat command post in the city.

As the highest ranking person remaining, I was now in command. When I reached the abandoned mortar emplacement, I also tried to reach the battalion combat command

post. So I took off, and just before I got there I was running between houses and suddenly landed directly in front of an English tank. The officer in the turret looked at me and said in good German, "Go on in this direction and you will come upon English troops." And—I will never forget this—"you will get a good meal and lots to drink."

They didn't disarm me, so they didn't notice that I still had my pistol. Then they sent me on, but I wasn't planning to go into captivity and become a POW. All at once I dashed into a house, ran to the other side, jumped out the window, and headed toward Grombalia, where I figured our troops were.

A bit later I came across some of our infantry grunts from another unit and went along with them. We were fired at and even shelled by artillery, but luckily no one was hit. We ran inland and into a wadi, but we lost track of each other later on. I had to climb over a mountain ridge.

Later that night I was hungry and really thirsty and came across an Arab tent. I went to the people in the tent and tried to explain that I only wanted some water. I tried speaking German mixed with a few words I knew in other languages. Suddenly, a well-dressed Arab appeared and said in fluent German: "You will get everything you need. Wait just a minute." Then I got something to eat and drink. I asked him where he learned such good German, and he told me that he had studied in Germany.

Then I asked if he knew if there were still German troops around, and he said, "Yes, there are German troops near Grombalia, but you can't get through. There are American troops blocking the way. If you want, I can lead you through their lines."

So he led me though a mountainous area between two strongpoints and to a cave beyond them. When we were in the cave he showed me our exact location on one of the maps that I always carried as the leader of the HQ Company personnel.

I didn't even need my prismatic compass to determine the route I had to take; he showed me that, too. "You have to go over the mountain ridge and you will most likely meet German troops." I thanked him for his hospitality and help; then we parted.

I was on the move the whole night and kept climbing the whole time. At dawn I saw several fires. I didn't believe there could still be German troops there, so I snuck up carefully. When I got up close, I heard a voice speaking in the Bavarian dialect. It was a master sergeant in an armored unit in the advanced covering position. Although I am from Prussia and had a completely different accent, hearing Bavarian made me feel right back home again. So I approached and identified myself.

After they fed me and gave me something to drink, I continued on my way and encountered paratroopers from Lt. Col. Walter Koch's unit. [Koch was a Knight's Cross recipent from his actions during the airborne assault of the Belgian fort of Eben-Emael in 1940]. His unit was not part of General Ramcke's command but had been sent to help keep the English and American forces at bay. In the ensuing actions we fought alongside them both on their left flank and their right flank.

[*In October 1942, Adolf Hitler issued his infamous "Commando Order," which directed German soldiers to summarily execute any captured Allied commando troops. Koch publicly denounced the order and refused to carry it out. While in North Africa, Koch stopped another German officer from executing British POWs. Perhaps as a result, while on convalescent leave back in Germany after having suffered a head injury, Koch died in a "mysterious" car crash in October 1943. Some believe his death was authorized by Hitler for refusing his order to kill captured commandos.*]

Of course, I reported immediately to the company commander of this section because I did not want to risk being arrested as a deserter. The first thing I did after that was go right to sleep. Later, a grunt woke me and told me to report to the company commander again, who told me that the game was up here.

Bundesarchiv Bild 101I-545-0620-28A; Photo: Schnitzer

He distributed everything the company and battalion had in the way of money or cigarettes to his troops. He told us, "If you are captured, maybe this will help you if you want to try to escape. You can bribe the English or the Arabs so they will give you a hand." That was good.

Then a soldier arrived and said that vehicles from Brigade Ramcke had managed to get through and had just arrived and were heading toward Cap-Bon. The company commander said: "If you want, you can ride with me. I am going to the Luftwaffe Command, Africa. We want to see if we can get on a plane heading for Italy." I took him up on the offer and went with them.

The command was located quite a way from Cap-Bon. When we arrived there, we actually saw our brigade staff vehicles and even the commander's car. General Ramcke had already returned to Germany, but the driver took the car and was there with the remaining staff, all of whom I knew personally. They had come to see if they, too, could get on a plane heading out. So I joined them; there were maybe eight or 10 of us altogether.

The Luftwaffe Command even gave our battalion chief of staff a certificate stating that we were "essential training staff for paratroops and airborne units," which allowed us to fly with the next departing plane. We took the certificate and drove to Cap-Bon, but the airfield had been badly bombed and strafed, and planes could no longer land there. We stayed at the field until we heard the radio announcement that the Afrika Korps had capitulated. So we knew the jig was up and that we were stuck there.

We put all the military equipment in the commander's car, doused it with gasoline, ignited it, and blew it all up. We didn't have anything left except for the rations we carried. It was May 13, 1943, when we became prisoners of war.

Fort Bend County Libraries, Richmond, Texas

Prisoner a Second Time

Shortly afterward, English vehicles and an armored recon car with an officer arrived. We formed up, ready to surrender. Then our chief of staff gave a short talk and told us we only had to give our name, rank, and home town while in captivity. He said we should take leave of home and think about our families.

The English surrounded us, and an officer approached. He knew that we were the last remaining paratroop unit in Africa. He promised us that we would be treated fairly and that English vehicles would transport us to the POW camp. This combat unit treated us well; they even gave us tea. I have to say, they treated us fairly.

The officer stayed there for a few minutes. Then vehicles came and took us to the camp; it was there that things got bad. The English didn't have much to eat and drink themselves, so we almost died of hunger and thirst. Later, the Moroccans took us by train to Constantine, Algeria. They were English allies in French military service.

When the train stopped at a station on the way, we paid the Moroccans to fill our canteens. They simply took our money and threw the canteens away. In Constantine things were not any better.

On June 7, 1943, we were brought to Schanzi in Tunisia and handed over to the Americans. The stockade was well-equipped. An American stood on a box and gave us a talk in perfect German—an American speaking perfect German!

I will never forget what he said: "Comrades, throw everything away that you still have. You will get everything you need new, and it will be better. You will even get as much as you want to eat and drink—or my name isn't Mayer and I'm not from Dortmund."

His parents had emigrated to the United States, so he became a soldier there. And he was as good as his word. We got new canteens and were fed so well that we couldn't keep the food down because we weren't used to eating so much. We all had the trots; that was really bad. But the American food really brought us around and pepped us up.

On July 13 they took us from Schanzi to St. Barbe de Djaladat. Two days later we started a long march to Oran, where we boarded the English ship HM *Reina Del Pacifico* and headed to Glasgow, Scotland.

On board, a buddy found a water faucet that we could drink from on the sly. We didn't think we would be allowed to drink as much as we wanted, so we all agreed that we would only take a few swallows at first. Then, when the water supply held up, everybody

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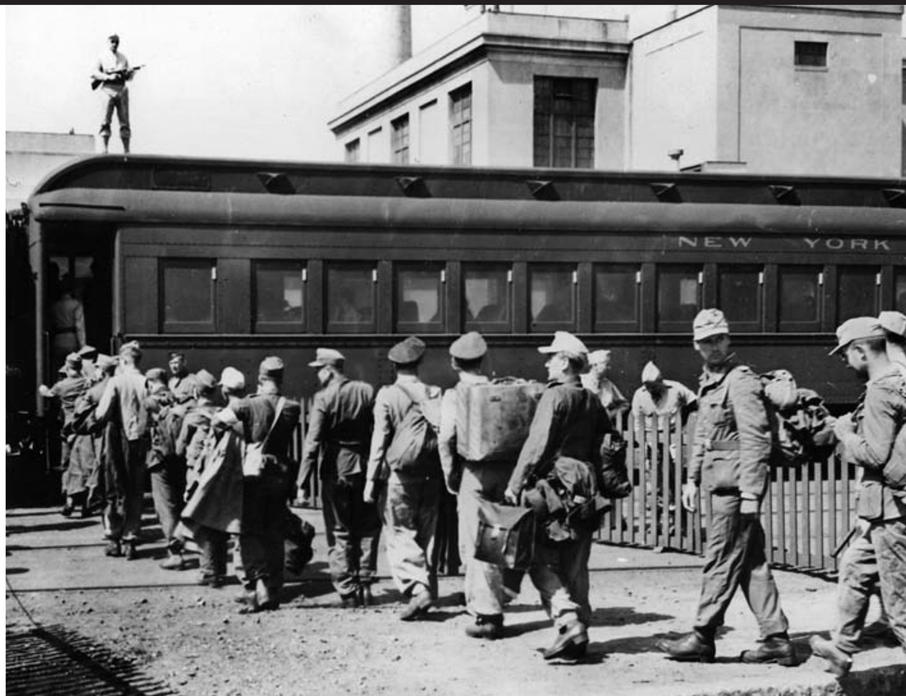


ABOVE: German POWs, still in their uniforms, board a train in Boston en route to a prison camp. About 425,000 German prisoners of war were held in 700 camps in 46 states. There were also camps for Italian and Japanese prisoners. Overall, POWs in the U.S. were well-treated and well-fed. OPPOSITE: German POWs attend a funeral service for one of their comrades at a camp in Texas; some are giving the Nazi salute. Nazi symbols and salutes were generally tolerated by camp authorities.

drank his fill. Then all of us could fill our canteens. We were lucky—the water kept flowing until we reached Scotland.

On July 25, 1943, we disembarked and were transported by train to Oldham in England. In the camp, they immediately took away our canteens and locked them up, which caused a huge protest. After our experiences in the desert, we felt like we were being sentenced to death without our canteens.

A couple of days later we found out we were being shipped to America, and some of our group broke into the cellar the night before we were to leave and took a number of our canteens. They were able to overpower the English guards, who were somewhat elderly, and lock them in the cellar. (I didn't hear about this until we were at sea.) The next day, August 2, 1943, we entrained and went to Liverpool, where we sailed to America on the *James Parker.*

On August 12, 1943, we arrived in New York, where we first went to a delousing station. We didn't have lice, but we had to go through the procedure. Then we went ashore where they recorded our personal data again. Right after that we were loaded onto trains.

The trip was pleasant. The cars were Pullmans, and there were six seats in each compartment, but only four of us per compartment. We could fold down the seats to make beds at night, so we all had enough room.

We rode for what seemed like a long time through the country, and on August 16 we arrived in Roswell, New Mexico, where there were already German POWs. The camp officials asked us if we had any relatives in the United States whom we would like to contact. I gave them my two sisters' names and their city of residence, Cleveland. But I didn't know their street addresses. The camp officials got their complete addresses, and we started writing.

The Roswell German camp commander, a sergeant major in the paratroops, read us our Geneva Convention rights. One provision was that officers and NCOs did not have to work unless they wished. Those of us who chose not to work were sent by train to a special camp—the base camp in Brady, Texas, where our daily activities included sports and academic lessons organized by the POWs themselves. I started training as a forest ranger there.

One day in Brady, the camp authorities picked me up and took me to the American camp commander. A big package for me from one of my sisters had arrived, and I had to open and unpack it in the presence of the commander. It was like Christmas: several cartons of cigarettes—although I didn't smoke—plus cookies, cakes, chocolate, and other candy. Best of all, I was allowed to take everything back to the barracks with me.

With all my buddies watching intently, I unpacked it again, and we divided everything up. My mouth was full, and I was still munching away when I was ordered to report to the commander again and pick up another package from my other sister.

While I was in Brady, I got several surprise packages like this—especially for Christmas. I had written my sisters and asked them to send me gym shorts, and I sent my measurements, waist, etc. But I forgot to mention the units of measure. So when the package came and I tried the pants on, the fellows were rolling with laughter. You guessed it—my sisters had simply used inches instead of centimeters. The pants were big enough for two or even three men!

In the letter that came in the package, my sisters explained how difficult it was to get pants that size. They couldn't imagine that their "little" brother could be an athletic paratroop with a figure like that. Later, the camp tailor made me two pairs of pants out of it!

On May 25, 1944, trucks took us to Bowie, Texas, where we stayed until we left for Tonkawa, Oklahoma, on August 9 and arrived there two days later. We stayed in Tonkawa around nine months, and I continued my forestry training course there.

On June 1, 1945, we left for Florence, Arizona, via El Paso, Texas, and Casa Grande, Arizona. We stayed in Florence for about three weeks, and then, in July 1945,

after the war in Europe was over, we went to Stockton, California.

A New Sport—American Football

When we arrived at the stockade, the other POWs were just coming back from their work details. When they saw us, they jeered and said, "Hey! Did we win the war after all?" because we were wearing our old uniforms, now freshly laundered, complete with rank and insignia.

At first we were assigned to clearing woodland and vegetation. Since Stockton was the biggest logistics and ordnance harbor for the Pacific Theater, most of us POWs were employed in various handling and trans-shipment stations.

One day they announced that all those interested in American football could join the team. Since I was sports-mad, I was all for it. They showed us a film and introduced the game to us. Then they wrote down all of our names and work stations. At the time, I was employed in the paint shop painting signs.

The very next day they picked up all the football players from their work stations and took us to the stockade, where our future coach, Sergeant J.P. Polczynski, greeted us. Then we enjoyed a hearty meal because "football players have to be full of energy and ready to go!" That was the procedure every day from then on—first a good meal, then practice. We each got a complete set of equipment.

At first only the players on the first string got a full set of equipment, including football shoes. All of the equipment was donated by American football teams; the second string had to make do as best they could.

The football shoes were made of very soft leather and provided our feet good, solid support. The quality was outstanding. I really took care of them. (After the war, I even took them back home with me. When I first got back to Germany, I lived with my sister in Dortmund-Lindenhorst and played in the local soccer club there. Nobody else had such top-quality shoes back then.)

Our three coaches explained the equipment to us. We had items in all sizes there, and everyone found the right fit. Nowadays all football players wear helmets with facemasks, but only Willi Scheuerer, from Heidelberg, one of our first-string players, got a facemask then.

Courtesy of Richard Statetzny

The German POW football team known as "Kiernan's Krushers," photographed in late 1945 at the Stockton POW camp. None had ever played American football before. The author is fourth from left in front row.

At first the equipment was strange for us, but we didn't worry about it. The equipment was part of the game we wanted to be successful at. We practiced in equipment from the very beginning, and none of us had any problems with it.

We had enough players for two complete teams, so the coaches could substitute during the game. We called ourselves Kiernan's Krushers, after our backfield coach, Captain James M. Kiernan, Jr. Our head coach was Sergeant J.P. Polczynski, and the line coach was Lieutenant W.E. Brewer.

I played in the backfield on offense and carried the ball. There were three of us lined up in a row, and we exchanged the ball so that the defense couldn't see it. After about a month of practice, we were ready to play the team from the other stockade, "Barager's Bears."

The "Barbwire Bowl Classic" was on Sunday, January 13, 1946—and it was the first American football game played by POWs in the USA. Therefore, it got lots of exposure in the local press. Big grandstands were erected for the spectators, who included the military brass and high-level officials with their wives. And, of course, all of our buddies from the stockade were there.

Before the football game, two teams of fellow POWs played a soccer game, our camp against theirs. And when the two football teams came out, the American spectators cheered us really loudly and enthusiastically, and during the game the American spectators cheered us on again and again. They even cheered us on by name, which they got when our coaches yelled instructions to us. Our fellow POW spectators, however, were a bit quieter because they didn't really understand the rules of the game.

We won, 6-0. Unfortunately, I have forgotten who scored our touchdown and what kind of play it was.

Right after the game, both teams took a shower, then we put our military uniforms back on and went to the Officers' Club, where each player was introduced individually by name and position to the assembled guests.

We sat down at a long table and were served a feast, which was so ample that we had enough left over to take our buddies in the stockade. As a memento, each player got a

big team picture.

(Everywhere I went afterward, that photo was a real help. Whenever we were transferred to another camp, they searched our duffel bags. And I kept the team picture on top. It was like magic. As soon as the guards saw that, they stopped searching the bag and waved me on.)

Unfortunately, Barager's Bears won the rematch, 20-0, two weeks later. It was played in the other stockade (The Fairground). Because I can't remember too much about it, I suppose that it was not such a big event as our first game. I think that besides us, only our soccer team was there from our stockade and that they played a game against the Fairground team before our football game. But the POWs from the Fairground stockade were there as spectators.

After that, we did not have any more practices or games because they did not offer football anymore.

I remember one day, just as I was going out to play some soccer, they told me I had a visitor. It was my sister Gertrud, who had arrived from Cleveland after three long days on the train! We met at the gate in front of the guards' quarters. It was a very emotional moment because it was the first time we had seen each other in 15 years.

In one of the barracks we saw Captain Kiernan who was on duty as Officer of the Day. A sergeant examined the gifts that Gertrud had brought me and did not want to hand out some of the items—underwear and a sweater. I protested and asked the sergeant to see what Captain Kiernan had to say. The sergeant came back and told me I could keep all the gifts.

For lunch I had to go back to the stockade. Captain Kiernan ordered the jeep to take my sister to Stockton for lunch and bring her back. Then we were allowed to spend the whole afternoon together. It was thanks to football that my sister and I had so much time together because normally visits were only one hour.

California Military Department

ABOVE: A newspaper photo of action during the "Barbwire Bowl Classic" played at Stockton Ordnance Depot POW camp on January 13, 1946. BELOW: A recent photo of Richard Statetzny, age 96, taken at his home in Dortmund, Germany.

Courtesy of Richard Statetzny

Back Home in Germany

I left Stockton at the end of February 1946, and—with stops in Benicia, California, and Rupert, Idaho—arrived at Camp Shanks, New York, in July 1946. On July 22 we boarded the *Texarkana,* the last ship to leave the camp, and arrived in Le Havre, France, on August 1. We passed through Camp Bolbec to Attichy, where we entrained for Frankfurt on August 13. From there we went to Munsterlager by way of Babenhausen. Finally, during the first week of September 1946, after more than 6½ years in uniform, I was released.

I went to Dortmund, where I had relatives I could live with because I couldn't go back to East Prussia. All of the family in Germany got regular CARE packages from my sisters in the United States, and this was really a great help.

There is a strong bond between paratroopers—even former enemies. After the war I joined the Bund Deutscher Fallschirmjäger—the Association of German Paratroopers, which was not politically oriented—where I got a chance to meet up with former buddies who had survived the war. A permanent feature of these meetings was a ceremony to honor the fallen paratroopers.

Later on, the wives attended, too. The meetings became more social occasions, at which people also talked about private matters such as family, work, and the like. Naturally, new friendships developed. Several people took group vacations on Crete and established contacts and friendships with the locals. They also visited military cemeteries on the island. The supervisor of the cemetery at Maleme was a former Crete partisan. When his wife got seriously ill, we raised money so she could go to Germany for treatment.

I was also made an honorary member of the New Zealand Crete Veterans Association; the New Zealanders got in touch with the Bund Deutscher Fallschirmjäger after the war and asked us to join.

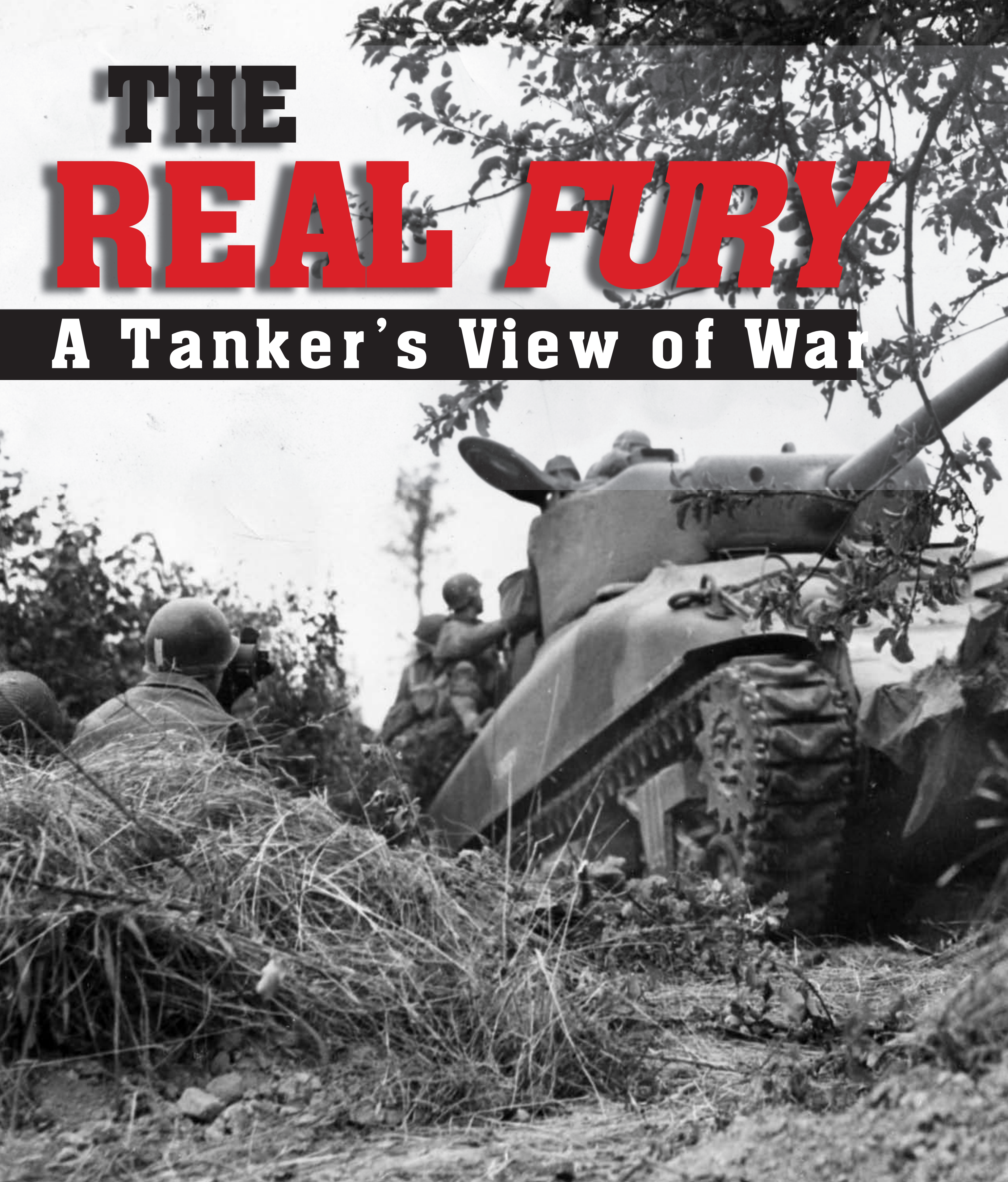
Naturally I am proud to have been a paratrooper. We were elite troops, and during the war we were accepted and recognized by the citizens. We were welcomed everywhere we went in Germany. Often, when we went into a restaurant and people saw we were paratroopers, they didn't let us pay the bill—they paid for us. We had a good reputation.

I am also proud of my comrades. During combat we could depend on each other 110 percent. I kept in contact with my paratrooper comrades by phone or mail until they died. The last other one died in 2015, so I am probably the last.

POSTSCRIPT: *After the war, Richard worked as a master painter, decorator, and varnisher in the company Johannes Rathgens GmbH & Co. KG, in Dortmund until his retirement. Today Richard is 96, in good health, and living in Dortmund. (Thanks to Detlef Zier, Richard's son-in-law, for his invaluable help with this article.)*

THE REAL FURY

A Tanker's View of War



From North Africa to Sicily to Normandy to the heart of Germany, bow gunner Irving Bromberg fought the war in a Sherman tank.

Private First Class Irving Bromberg saw a huge puff of smoke erupt from the German tank's cannon muzzle as it headed straight for his M4 Sherman tank. The round streaked past and missed.

Bromberg sat next to the driver in the bow gunner's seat manning a .30-caliber machine gun. His turret gunner fired the tank's 75mm cannon, also missing, but the American cannon had an advantage: an automatic breech-loader. The spent shell quickly popped out of the breech and the loader shoved in another round. The gunner fired a second round before the German could reload. The second round blasted the enemy tank.

Irving Bromberg

ABOVE: **Private First Class Irving Bromberg, a native of Columbus, Ohio, served as a tank bow gunner in Fox Company, 66th Armored Battalion, 2nd Armored Division for almost the entire ground war against Nazi Germany.**
OPPOSITE: **A Sherman Rhino tank plows through a hedgerow in Normandy, France, a month after D-Day, June 6, 1944. Private First Class Irving Bromberg credited the Rhinos, with their jagged metal prongs, for the 2nd Armored Division's successful push inland.**

The Americans kept firing. The loader called for more shells, and Bromberg passed them up. The German tank stopped but it did not catch fire. Then its crew bolted out of its hatches. "Get them!" the gunner shouted to Bromberg, who squeezed his machine gun's trigger and sprayed fire into the enemy, killing them. Bromberg's tank sped off. The brief tank battle in the Tunisian desert in the spring of 1943 was Bromberg's first.

Although Bromberg wore the triangular 2nd Armored Division shoulder patch, he was serving as a replacement with the 1st Armored Division, which had taken heavy casualties during the six-day Battle of Kasserine Pass in late February.

After the mauling, the division went back on the offensive, pushing the Germans east. So desperate was the division for replacements that Bromberg did not know the rest of his crew. "I didn't even know where I was," he admitted.

As the bow gunner, Bromberg often switched positions with the driver to give him a rest. When not in battle, Bromberg kept his head out of the hatch, but when ordered to "button up" he closed the hatch and peered through a periscope. "I remember

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it had pretty wide vision," he recalled. "It was good."

Besides the driver and the bow gunner, the Sherman also had a commander, gunner, and loader, all three of whom worked in the turret. Shells were kept in the turret, but during battle, Bromberg would pass up extra rounds stored behind him.

All five men were relatively close in the tank, but the noise generated by the engine, treads, and the battle outside required them to wear microphones and headsets to communicate. The cannon could be noisy, but it was actually the .30-caliber machine gun in the turret that bothered Bromberg the most. When fired by use of a foot pedal—often to help aim the cannon—the entire turret vibrated. "That was the most nerve wracking," recalled Bromberg.

Irving Bromberg

Irving Bromberg

ABOVE: Private Bromberg drives a weapons carrier pulling an artillery piece at Fort Knox, where he learned to double clutch a tank to slow it down. After the war his father did not appreciate this skill when applied to the family car. LEFT: With a Thompson machine gun in hand, Bromberg crouches in front of an M3 Stewart tank. The Stewart proved obsolete by the time the U.S. Army landed in Morocco at the end of 1942. OPPOSITE: An M4 Sherman tank rumbles over a sand dune in the Tunisian desert. Bromberg faced off against a German tank for the first time during the drive across the desert in 1943.

The main gun, the 75mm, sufficiently matched the German Army's main battle tank, the Panzerkampfwagen IV, commonly known as the Panzer IV, which also mounted a 75. The tanks were almost equal in weight, height, and armor protection. It was the heavy Tiger tank, which made its first appearance in North Africa, and later the Panther, that would outclass the Sherman on the battlefield.

Nineteen-year-old Irving Bromberg from Columbus, Ohio, had joined the Army in April 1942, although he had tried to serve his country earlier. When he heard over the radio that the Japanese had bombed Pearl Harbor, he went to his local post office to join the Marine Corps, only to be rejected for having flat feet. An officer encouraged him to join the Navy, but instead Bromberg eventually enlisted into the Army at nearby Fort Hayes.

Bromberg was sworn in at Fort Benjamin Harrison, Indiana, and issued a uniform. He soon shipped out to Fort Knox, Kentucky, for three months of tank training.

He learned every position inside the light M3 Stuart tank and the larger M3 Lee and M4 Sherman. By the time the United States entered the war, the Stuart was already obsolete. With its thin armor and puny 37mm main gun, it would be relegated to the role of scout tank.

The Lee, a stopgap creation to fill the void while the Sherman was developed, housed its main gun, a 75mm, in a sponson built into the hull while the turret wielded a 37mm gun. Most Lees saw action with British and Russian forces.

The Sherman and its variants, with a turret-mounted 75mm gun, and later a 76mm cannon, would serve as America's main battle tank throughout the war. Driving the three different tanks, Bromberg learned a skill not used in automobile driving: double clutching, quickly gearing down from fourth, third, second, and first gear before using the brake. After the war, it would prove a hard habit to break.

Bromberg joined the 2nd Armored Division at Fort Bragg, North Carolina, and was assigned to the 2nd Platoon of Fox Company, 66th Armored Regiment of Combat Command A (the equivalent of an infantry regiment).

He soon befriended his fellow tankers. One night after some heavy drinking in a Fayetteville bar with one of his sergeants, he walked into the middle of the street and urinated. Military policemen spotted him and were preparing to take him to the local police station when his sergeant ran out shouting, "You can't take him—I'm his sergeant!" So the MPs released Bromberg and arrested the sergeant.

Bromberg waited at the station for the sergeant's release until the police threatened to arrest him. With no other options, he returned to Bragg. The sergeant eventually returned and said if they were going to reduce his rank he would ask for a court martial. Bromberg agreed to confess to the company commander that the whole thing was his fault.

"I was so scared," Bromberg said of speaking to his captain, who asked him why he

had to urinate in the street. Not knowing any other answer, Bromberg told him, "When you gotta go, you gotta go." His words must have worked; the sergeant kept his rank.

Their training complete, the tankers prepared to deploy overseas. Bromberg headed to New York, where he attended a speech by the 2nd Armored Division's previous commander, who now commanded the American Army's Western Task Force: Maj. Gen. George S. Patton, Jr.

The speech was typical Patton, filled with instruction and inspiration and peppered with foul language. "Every other word was a profanity," recalled Bromberg, but he was not surprised. "I was just a kid, but in the Army profanity doesn't come as a shock." Nor was he in awe of his commander. "At the time, his name wasn't what it is today."

Patton's Western Task Force was slated to attack French Morocco, just one offensive of the three-pronged attack on Vichy French North Africa, Operation Torch. Elements of the 2nd Armored Division, commanded then by Maj. Gen. Ernest N. Harmon, would spearhead the attack on November 8, 1942, but Bromberg would not be part of it. He finally made it to Casablanca in December, a month after the successful assault and three-day battle against the French.

Bromberg found Morocco quiet. The fighting was going on more than a thousand miles away in Tunisia, but the Luftwaffe constantly reminded the Americans they were in a war zone. On Christmas Eve 1942, Bromberg and his comrades were watching a movie when German bombers raided their camp. Searchlights pierced the sky, joining together when they found a bomber. Then tracer fire shot skyward.

"It was like watching a football game," recalled Bromberg. "You had to feel sorry for those guys." He did not see bombs impact anywhere, but he and his buddies got a good laugh the next morning when Axis Sally, the female Nazi propagandist, reported over the radio that the Luftwaffe had destroyed the 2nd Armored Division.

Assigned to the 1st Armored Division after the Kasserine debacle, Bromberg worried how he would react to combat, but as his tank approached the line of departure he was too busy to think about it. He spent the day loading and firing his machine gun at anything that moved and passing rounds up to the loader. "It was after the day [was over] that I got shook up," explained Bromberg.

It was not long after Bromberg's baptism of fire that he and his crew faced off against the German tank. "It's not like the movies where they're going 25 miles an hour," he said. "We were doing three or four miles an hour." Bromberg first thought the enemy tank was American. The missed shot told him otherwise.

While the Germans were busy ejecting their shell casings with a hand crank, his Sherman's automatic breech loader made the difference. "That saved us," he recalled. Until then Bromberg had not liked the breech loader. "It always scared me because I thought I would get my hand caught in it."

Although Bromberg had been assigned to the 1st Armored for only a week, he had learned how to fight on a mechanized battlefield. For sleep, he would crawl beneath the tank or sleep in the tank. One morning, his tank pulled off the front, and an exhausted Bromberg climbed out and immediately fell asleep on the ground. "When I got up, there were two

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© Imperial War Museum

ABOVE: Cheering crowds greet American tankers as they roar through the streets of Palermo, Sicily. Bromberg compared entering the city to a big parade with free wine. OPPOSITE: The bulldozer tank proved bulky and slow. Bromberg felt these tanks would only attract enemy fire in Normandy's hedgerows. They were eventually replaced by Rhino tanks.

dead Germans next to me."

He also grew wary of the local Tunisians, who continuously switched support between the Americans and the Axis. Whenever they visited Bromberg's unit, the Americans could expect an enemy artillery barrage. "Some of our fellows shot them," he said.

Bromberg could deal with enemy tanks and artillery barrages, but the one thing he truly feared was German airplanes, which attacked nightly. They dominated the sky. One of the German's favorite tricks was to fly over the American lines and flick their lights in hopes that Americans would fire at them, revealing their positions. "That scared me the most of the whole war," he said.

His stint at the front over, Bromberg returned to his unit and trained for the invasion of Sicily, slated for July 9, 1943. As part of Italy, Sicily would be the first chunk of Axis real estate attacked by the Western Allies. The newly created American Seventh Army, under Patton, would assault the Gela beaches. The 2nd Armored Division would support the 3rd Infantry Division near the town of Licata, but Bromberg would not be in a position to support anyone.

Heading to the shore in a Landing Ship, Tank (LST), Bromberg heard an enemy airplane drop a bomb. "The next thing I know, we're hit," he recalled. His buddy, a tanker named Pippard, grabbed Bromberg, and the two went over the side to a waiting DUKW—an amphibious truck. They made it to shore and promptly got lost. With no tank, the two men spent the next two weeks away from the war, surviving on lemons, cantaloupes, and whatever they could obtain from the locals.

When American trucks passed by they would yell, and the GIs would throw them rations. Technically Absent Without Leave (AWOL), the two men enjoyed themselves until the division sent a truck to the rear looking for stragglers. They climbed aboard, and when Bromberg reported to his captain, the officer merely asked him if he was okay.

Back in the war, Bromberg climbed into a tank for the drive on Palermo in northern Sicily. If Patton could take the port city, he would effectively cut the island in half and possess a staging area to attack Messina on the northeast corner of the island.

Bromberg found the fighting to Palermo surprisingly light. The Italian soldiers readily surrendered to the Americans. "Half we didn't even take prisoner," he said, and let the Italians go. At one roadblock, Italian soldiers stepped out onto the highway and warned Bromberg's crew about a German antitank gun up ahead. "We didn't go any farther."

Bromberg's tank entered Palermo on July 22 to the cheers of its citizens. "It was like a big parade," he recalled. "They were giving us wine." He got out of his tank and went into a house for a meal. Reaching Palermo capped off a two-week drive from the Gela beaches. The campaign would now turn east, but with the mountainous terrain blocking the way the 2nd Armored remained in Palermo with occupation duties. "Sicily was not too much fighting," said Bromberg, "but good experience."

The Sicily campaign ended on August 17, 1943, when Patton's forces reached

Messina hours before the British under General Bernard Law Montgomery. The invasion of Italy soon followed, but the armor support mission on the peninsula went to the 1st Armored Division.

As casualties mounted on the Continent, more and more tankers from Bromberg's division were sent in as replacements, but he was not one of them. Instead, he and the rest of his division set sail for England and a new battlefield.

Bromberg arrived in England in November 1943 and trained with his unit for the coming invasion of France. He dreaded it, having seen war and knowing it was only a matter of time before he might be its next victim. He enjoyed England, a step up from the deserts of North Africa and the poverty of Sicily.

Feeling he had only weeks to live once he landed in France, he became fatalistic. He spent a two-week furlough in Manchester trying to forget the war through alcohol. "I didn't care about anything," he recalled. "I just carried on and drank and carried on." Later, at a pub in London Bromberg passed out from drinking, and the patrons laid him on some barstools while they debated whether to take care of him or "Throw the Yank out!"

When it came to women, Bromberg's company commander, Captain Curtis Clark, did not believe in American soldiers marrying foreigners and demanded the men get his permission before proposing to any girl. Bromberg frustrated Clark by proposing to every girl he dated. "I had a good time," he said. Clark was soon promoted, and Fox Company received a new commander for the invasion of France: Captain William A. Nicholson.

June 6, 1944, D-Day, was mostly an infantrymen's battle, with grunts fighting to open the draws on Omaha Beach and the causeways on Utah Beach with the help of independent tank battalions. Once the beaches were secured, armored divisions slowly joined the battle.

Bromberg's tank rolled out of the belly of an LST and roared across Utah Beach on June 12, D+6. Hedgerows—five-foot-high earthen banks topped with trees and bushes—divided the Norman countryside and served as perfect defensive positions for the Germans. Every time the Americans broke through to a field surrounded by hedgerows, the Germans would simply fall back to the next set of hedgerows.

In the confused fighting, Bromberg often saw tanks burning beside him. "I was lucky," he said about surviving the fight. He fired his machine gun at every bush or tree he saw. "I didn't take any chances. Each hedgerow was a battlefield."

The hedgerows initially proved a problem for American tankers. Rolling over the high banks exposed the tanks' thin underbelly armor, which the Germans could penetrate with a Panzerfaust—a single-shot, shoulder-fired antitank weapon. Bromberg's Fox Company entered the hedgerows with 17 tanks. They were soon reduced to four. "Our tanks were getting knocked out so fast," he said.

Rank spared no one. On June 13, an enemy sniper killed Captain Nicholson. "He was so mature," Bromberg recalled, who thought the commander was 30 or 40 years old. He later discovered Nicholson was only in his 20s. "He looked older."

Lieutenant William H. Schwartz, the leader of Bromberg's 2nd Platoon, temporarily took charge of the company until Captain Douglas J. Richardson took over.

Schwartz commanded Bromberg's tank. "He was born for combat," said Bromberg. "I didn't like him as a person, but I knew if I stayed in his tank I'd stay alive." Once Richardson took command, he called on 2nd Platoon for almost every mission, to a point where it became a company joke. "We'd pull out, and they'd laugh," said Bromberg.

On June 29, Tech. Sgt. Ole E. Mancuso from Captain Richardson's tank told Bromberg he needed a bow gunner. Bromberg refused, not wanting to leave Schwartz. Later that day, a German antitank shell smashed into the side of Bromberg's tank. He quickly climbed out and found Schwartz wounded. Medics ran to the officer and treated him, but when they tried to take him off the battlefield he fought them. "They had to drag him away," said Bromberg.

The next day, Richardson's tank took a hit that killed both him and Sergeant Mancuso.

Schwartz quickly returned from the hospital and took over the company. One of his first actions was to tell his old 2nd Platoon that they were picked for every mission because Richardson hated him and hoped that he might get killed. Bromberg

© Imperial War Museum

Breaking free of the hedgerows! By lining up a number of Rhino tanks and charging the hedgerows, the 2nd Armored Division finally defeated the maze of earthen ridges that had stalled the Allied forces in Normandy.

wrote an article about the incident and submitted it to the division magazine, but the editors declined to publish it. "They said it was too personal," said Bromberg.

The tankers first used a bulldozer tank to break through the hedgerows. Bromberg was not impressed. When he saw his first bulldozer tank he said to the driver: "You poor bastard, you're going to be the first person they knock off." Bromberg was wrong. When the tank plowed through an enemy hedgerow, the Germans let it through, then hit the succeeding tanks.

The real solution came when engineers welded metal prongs to the front of their tanks like a set of tusks. A tank would ram the hedge bank, and the prongs would dig in and punch a hole through. These tanks became known as Rhino tanks and would line up three or four abreast and punch through the hedgerow at the same time. "That's how we got through the hedgerows," explained Bromberg.

While the Rhino tanks solved the tactical problem of the hedgerows, Allied commanders sought to solve the problem strategically. General Omar Bradley, the commander of the American First Army, planned to use heavy bombers to crack a hole in the German line between the French towns of Periers and St. Lo which tanks and infantry could pour through—Operation Cobra.

The 2nd Armored Division went into reserve near Carentan, where Bromberg and his comrades took their first showers in a month and received new uniforms. On July 25, more than a thousand Allied bombers flew over Bromberg's position and unleashed an inferno of bombs on the Germans—and accidentally on some Americans. "There were so many planes," recalled Bromberg. "You couldn't see the sky."

Soon after, the tanks rolled and Bromberg saw the effects of the bombing. "I saw dead Americans lying all over," he said. They broke into open country, leaving the maze of hedgerows behind. Progress that had been measured in yards was now measured in miles. German resistance melted away, but the enemy made last stands in towns or at roadblocks.

To defeat the Germans in towns, tankers took to blasting church steeples, which usually housed enemy artillery spotters. "The first thing I shot at was the church steeple," said Bromberg. It became a common practice in Europe. "You never saw a church steeple with a top on it."

The Americans also used a new technique against the Germans. Starting in August, American fighter pilots rode in frontline tanks and radioed their fellow pilots overhead, directing them to the targets. When Bromberg's tank clashed with a German antitank gun, a tank-bound pilot radioed a flight of P-38 Lightning fighter bombers to knock it out.

"He talked to them and they dive-bombed the antitank gun," he said. "We'd just go on." While the fighter planes helped, they sometimes fired short, making friendly fire incidents common. One day while Fox Company bivouacked behind the line, a British fighter plane roared in, machine guns firing. The pilot, however, failed to pull out of his dive and crashed. "He must have seen us," said Bromberg.

On August 6, Bromberg lost another leader. Lieutenant Schwartz dismounted their

tank under heavy fire when he saw a soldier go down in front of them. As he made his way to the wounded man, enemy machine gun fire struck him down.

Undeterred, Schwartz continued on until he was hit again and killed. "I became the [turret] gunner," said Bromberg, "and the gunner became the commander." He spent the rest of the day in the turret, aiming and firing a few shots.

For the rest of the month, the tanks of the 2nd Armored Division raced across France. They did not stop until they reached the Seine River north of Paris. Infantry often rode on Bromberg's tank. In fact, Bromberg preferred infantry support to armor. "I felt better with infantry around me than another tank," he said. "They carried bazookas, they could see things, and they didn't draw fire like a tank did. The infantry was glad to see us, and we were glad to see them."

Along the way Bromberg noticed an odd feature about each battlefield. "You'd see dead Germans but almost no dead Americans." The Americans had been removed so follow-up troops and replacements would not see them as they moved forward. "It was bad for morale." Bromberg also saw numerous dead cows and horses. "It was a common thing You'd see them lying on their backs with their legs up the air."

During one break from combat, Bromberg and his crew stopped in a French house to eat. Inside, a bunch of women entered the room then burst into tears and left. Bromberg found out that the SS had shot their husbands that morning, just before the Americans had arrived.

Bromberg had a habit of volunteering for missions. When an officer named Michaels at battalion headquarters asked for volunteers to go into Vire and get prisoners, Bromberg said, "Put my name down, I'll go." Word spread around the company about Bromberg's mission, and one of the tankers joked, "Bromberg, you're not coming back. Can I have your watch?"

This scared him, but his name never came up for the mission. Months later Bromberg bumped into Michaels and asked him what happened. "I liked you a lot," said Michaels, "so I tore your name up; I never turned it in." That cheered Bromberg.

The running fight through France took a toll on Bromberg. One day while giving the driver a break, he drove with his head out of the hatch. His eyes started to burn, and he thought the Germans had put chemicals on the road. He visited the medics, but they said he was fine. "I don't get no satisfaction," said Bromberg about the incident.

© Imperial War Museum

A German half-track burns after being hit. Bromberg's tank crew knocked out a half-track that drove into the 2nd Armored Division's line. Bromberg later ventured over to the destroyed vehicle for a closer look.

On another occasion he fell asleep in the tank, but his dreams turned into a nightmare. He awoke, bolted out of the tank, and ran toward the enemy line. Tech. Sgt. George J. Delegan, the driver, also jumped out, grabbed Bromberg, and brought him back, saving his life. Bromberg also grew tired of Army rations, often throwing them away. "I was sick of it," he said.

The division entered Belgium and Holland in September, but a lack of fuel and stiff German resistance nearly brought the drive to a halt. Near the German border at the end of the day, Bromberg stood in the turret, urinating over the side and talking with Staff Sergeant Aaron C. Evans when he saw a half-track returning from the front. All the men in the half-track wore German helmets.

Thinking they were prisoners, Bromberg pointed them out to Evans. As it drove past them, Bromberg realized they were Germans soldiers in a German half-track. "Evans, did you see what I saw?" he asked. Evans responded by dropping down into the turret, spinning it around, and firing a 75mm round into the back of the half-track. The shell tore into it and exploded, killing all the Germans.

The next morning Bromberg ventured out to the destroyed half-track to inspect the damage. Dead and broken Germans lay everywhere. Wallets and other personal items littered the ground. He inspected their belongings and realized something that had never occurred to him: they were just men, much like himself. "I never thought of those guys being human beings," said Bromberg. "I looked at dead Germans all day long, but if I saw one [dead] American it bothered me."

The Siegfried Line was a series of tank traps, obstacles, bunkers, and pillboxes defending the German border. "It was as bad as the hedgerows," recalled Bromberg. To break through, engineers blew up obstacles with dynamite while 155mm artillery fired point-blank at the pillboxes.

Once through, everything changed. Men who had kept their heads out of the hatches throughout France and the Low Countries now buttoned up. "We're back

© Imperial War Museum

An American tank destroyer maneuvers through the Dragon's Teeth of the Siegfried Line at the German border. The last line of defense included tank traps, pill boxes, and bunkers. Fighting became more intense east of the border.

doing two miles an hour from 30 miles an hour."

Bromberg had his most hair-raising scare at the Siegfried Line. A German dive bomber, possibly a Junkers Ju-87 Stuka, screamed down on his position one night and dropped a bomb. The plane had a siren, and the bomb fell with a whistle. Although it missed, the noise terrified Bromberg. "Between the siren and bomb I was a nervous wreck." There was no defense against such attacks. "We were helpless," said Bromberg. "You just had to sweat it out."

As Bromberg and the 2nd Armored Division fought to encircle the ancient city of Aachen, the first German city to be captured by the Americans, he noticed a change in

A 2ND ARMORED VETERAN COMMENTS ON *FURY*

In the winter of 2014, Irving Bromberg attended a screening of *Fury,* the Brad Pitt movie depicting a tank crew from the 2nd Armored Division fighting during the last months of World War II in Europe. He enjoyed the movie but thought parts of it were unrealistic and a bit "Hollywood."

The movie begins with a tank crew trying to start their disabled tank. During the sequence, one of the men urinates into an open ammunition box. Bromberg said he never saw anyone do that.

Bromberg was not surprised that the plot involved a soldier who had never been in a tank and had only been in the Army for eight months before joining a tank crew. "That could have been true," he said. "They'd stick anybody in a tank." He also felt the depiction of the driver working the tank's gears was accurate. "You drove a tank like a tractor."

But Bromberg thought that soldiers entering German homes to have relations with the Frauleins was a stretch. "When we entered homes, all we were thinking of was eating and being friends."

While the inside of Pitt's tank sported pictures, pinups, and German medals dangling from above the bow gunner's head, Bromberg said his tanks had none of that. It did, however, remind him that he kept his smoking pipe in a certain position near his seat. "I was superstitious and kept it that way because I thought it kept me alive."

Bromberg felt the movie's first battle was unrealistic because the tanks were too close together and advancing abreast. "We always staggered ourselves," he said. Staggering forced the Germans to re-aim their weapons whenever they shifted fire from one tank to another. Keeping distance between the tanks, likewise, made it harder for the enemy to knock them out quickly.

Like the character "Priest," who quoted Bible verses and asked soldiers if they were saved, Bromberg said there was a tanker in his company who was very religious. "Everybody respected him," he said. "You do become religious in war; I got religious and superstitious."

Bromberg recalled that during his time in North Africa, when the tanks pulled back from the line, a sergeant said to his company, "Everybody follow me." They followed him to a tent chapel where a Catholic priest was saying Mass. When the priest saw the size of the crowd, he asked the sergeant, "Are all these men Catholic?" Of course they were not, but no one complained about the Catholic service. "Today, they would write home

the landscape. White sheets covered most houses, while some hung swastikas.

"I used to hold my fire sometimes to save civilians," said Bromberg, "but in Germany anything you see you shoot. Everybody you saw was your enemy." He made one exception to the rule. One day he saw some old people crossing a field. Even thought he had orders to shoot, he held his fire.

In another instance, Bromberg's crew spotted a German tank some distance away and fired, but the shell ricocheted off its hull. As the German tank slowly turned its turret toward their tank, the Americans, as Bromberg remembered it, "got the hell out of there." They pulled back to an area filled with tank destroyers and told their crews about the enemy tank up ahead. The tank destroyer men agreed to engage the German tank, telling Bromberg, "Come on out and show us where it is." His response was curt: "I said, 'No way.'"

In November 1944, the 2nd Armored was pulled off the line for a rest. Maj. Gen. Harmon, the division commander, sent the entire division to a coal mine that had showers. When it was his turn, Bromberg stripped down to take his first shower in four months. What he saw shocked him. "I couldn't believe my body," he said. "I was nothing but skin and bones."

When the Germans smashed through the American lines on December 16, 1944—the Battle of the Bulge—the 2nd Armored was too far north to play an initial role in the campaign. Assigned to Lt. Gen. William Simpson's Ninth Army, it was transferred south on December 22 to Lt. Gen. Courtney Hodges' First Army to help close the bulge.

"They brought us in as a flank," recalled Bromberg, "but my battalion was not involved." Instead, he spent the winter months just trying to stay warm, standing behind the tank's exhaust or sitting close to the transmission between the driver and the bow gunner.

The Americans sealed off the bulge in late January 1945, but there was more fighting ahead. As the 2nd Armored renewed its drive into Germany, Bromberg began to withdraw from his fellow tankers. "I made it my business not to get close to anybody," he said. He especially avoided replacement soldiers, who tended to get killed quickly. There were times Bromberg did not know the driver next to him. One replacement did impress him, though, a man named Shaffer. "He was calm," said Bromberg. If the tank took a hit, "he'd climb out and light a cigarette. He really had nerves of iron."

Bromberg let his guard down with replacements once. When he could not find anyone to sit next to after getting chow, he plopped down next to a replacement from Pennsylvania. They struck up a conversation and became friends. His new friend kept asking, "When are we going to go in and get some Jerries?" Bromberg kept reassuring him the time would come.

Finally, the unit moved out. The replacement fought in a different tank, so when the unit finally pulled back after a few days of fighting, Bromberg went to his gung-ho friend's tank to ask him how he liked it. He asked the crew where the replacement was, and one of the soldiers said, "On the

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Actor Brad Pitt (center) commands a 2nd Armored Division tank in the 2014 movie *Fury*, about a tank crew fighting across Germany in the waning days of World War II.

to their congressman about that," Bromberg laughed.

Bromberg did not like the scene where Brad Pitt's character, a battle-hardened staff sergeant, forces his green replacement bow gunner to shoot a German prisoner by holding a pistol in his hand and forcing him to fire it. "I don't believe that," he said. "Someone said to me when I first went in, 'How could you shoot anyone?' War is personal. After the first [buddy] you see killed, it became personal. Guys who saw their buddies get killed said they'd never take another prisoner again."

As for the rest of the movie, Bromberg said he never saw German civilians dangling from street lamps, hanged as traitors. He also never ran into mines in Germany. "If there were mines, the engineers would mark them off. I remember seeing doughboys with mine detectors." Flail tanks, which had an attached roller with chains that would beat the ground in front of the tank to detonate mines, often led his column.

first day he went berserk, and we had to pull him out."

Besides his attitude toward replacements, Bromberg changed some of his usual battlefield practices. Usually, after a three- or five-day fight, the unit would pull back, and Bromberg would run to the company headquarters to see who had returned. "I stopped doing that." He also stopped smiling. "It got to me," he recalled. "I wasn't so cheerful." One day after some particularly hard fighting when the entire company was shot up, he turned to his driver and said, "We were knocking on the door."

The intense fighting also took a toll on Bromberg's fellow soldiers. "A lot of men shot themselves," said Bromberg about self-inflicted wounds. Army discipline was harsh to anyone suspected of deliberately shooting themselves to get out of combat. If anyone claimed they had shot themselves while cleaning their weapon, an officer would pass around an affidavit attesting to the accident for the men to sign. "I never saw anyone do it, but I signed it," said Bromberg.

He also pointed out that medics would sometimes take mercy on the victims. "Combat medics told me if they ever saw powder burns on a man's uniform from shooting himself, they would cut off the parts with burn marks before sending him to an aid station."

The Rhine River stood as the last natural boundary into Germany. The Ninth Army crossed on March 23, 1945, but by the time Bromberg's tank reached the river there was already a pontoon bridge in place. He did not explicitly remember crossing the Rhine. He and his crewmen had crossed so many rivers that the Rhine was just another one. Bromberg did not like crossing rivers. "Every time I was driving and we came to a river, I'd switch," he recalled. "That's why they didn't make me a tank driver."

In early April, the unit received heavy M26 Pershing tanks. Bromberg was not impressed with the new weapon. "It was all computerized," he said. "No way could I have functioned in that tank." He preferred the simplicity of the Sherman. In fact, he fought the whole war in a Sherman with the 75mm cannon and never upgraded to the thicker armored M4A3E8 Sherman, the "Easy Eight," which carried a much more powerful 76mm cannon.

One day in April, Bromberg's tank took a hit, and he jumped out. While running back to the American lines, he came upon a German in a foxhole gripping an MP40 machine gun, which the Americans called a grease gun. "I stood there paralyzed," he recalled. But the German held still too, so Bromberg took off running again.

As he reached a group of infantrymen, he turned around to discover the German running right behind him with his hands behind his neck. A scared and angry Bromberg grabbed one of the infantrymen's rifles to shoot the German, but the men restrained him, saying, "Don't do that!" They told Bromberg that they recognized the German by his helmet and were going to shoot him but he was running too close to Bromberg.

A combat medic showed up and took Bromberg to a first aid station. "I was a physical wreck," he admitted. Suffering from combat shock, everything became a blur. All he could remember about the station was picking up a cigarette butt off the floor. "The next thing I knew I was in a field hospital," he said.

Doctors checked on him daily and asked him how he was, but Bromberg, still suffering from his trauma, could not speak. The soldier in the cot next to him had been

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Tankers of the 2nd Armored Division use a pause in the American Army's drive into Germany to refuel and and replenish their Shermans' ammunition supply, December 1944. The M4 tank consumed about two gallons of gasoline per mile.

© Imperial War Museum

A 2nd Armored Division tank rumbles through a smashed German city. In Germany, with only a month left of fighting, a heavy German round knocked out Bromberg's tank and he had to be removed from the battlefield for being, as he described it, "a physical wreck."

wounded and spoke easily with the doctors and nurses. Bromberg thought to himself, "I wish I could do that." The doctors sent Bromberg back to another hospital and sent the wounded man to the front.

When Bromberg disrobed at the new hospital he was shocked. He was even skinnier than he had been in Holland back in November. Doctors gave him shots to increase his appetite and fed him heartily. He eventually began to put on weight. Once well enough, he was transferred to a hospital in England.

Bromberg reached England on May 9, 1945. A doctor called him into his office and told him that because he had fought in North Africa, Sicily, and Europe he would give him a choice: He could either stay in England or go home. Concerned about war rationing, a lack of alcohol, and nothing to do back home, Bromberg told him, "I'd just as soon stay in England." The officer agreed to his request.

Later, a soldier who knew Bromberg's family visited him and told him none of those things were true about the United States, that his superiors only told the men those things to prevent them from feeling homesick. Bromberg immediately changed his mind and went back to the doctor to plead his case. The doctor tore up his stay order and signed a new order, allowing Bromberg to board a troop ship bound for home.

A war-weary Bromberg returned to Columbus, Ohio, weighing only 116 pounds, having lost 44 pounds while overseas (not counting the weight he had put back on in the hospital). As soon as he was discharged he took off his uniform and never again put it on.

He had a hard time adjusting to civilian life, drinking too much and picking fights with anyone who looked at him the wrong way. He suffered nightmares of German dive bombers roaring down on him. He refused to see war movies. Even driving was difficult. Every time he braked for a red light, he would double clutch, infuriating his father, who would yell, "What are you doing?" For an entire year he would pinch himself when he woke up to make sure he was sleeping in a real bed.

Eventually, Bromberg's nightmares faded, he cut down on the drinking, and relearned how to drive a vehicle that lacked a cannon and tracks. His girlfriend, Betty Farrell, eventually dragged him to see the movie *Mister Roberts,* breaking his ban on war movies. Bromberg married Betty in 1955, and they had two boys: Scott in 1957 and Craig in 1960. For work, he opened up a plumbing business and, as of 2015, was still at it. Looking back on the war, he reflected, "I was scared all the time but got used to it." The war made him the man he is today. "Nothing bothers me," he declared. "I sleep good, and nothing gets me excited."

He only regrets that he never spoke to his family about his war experiences. "After I got home I never talked to my father about the war," he said. "I never told my brother. I wish I would have told them about it."

When asked if he would change anything about his war experience, he said, "If I had to do it all over again—I would have kept whiskey in my canteen." □

"Work, whatever it might be, was the internee's only chance of survival. As soon as they were no longer of any possible use, they were done for."

Dr. Victor DuPont, Buchenwald inmate

Both: National Archives

Life magazine photographer Margaret Bourke-White took this famous photo of hollow-eyed, emaciated prisoners at Buchenwald shortly after American forces liberated the camp on August 11, 1945.

BOMBING BUCHENWALD

BY FLINT WHITLOCK

The August 1944 American air raid on a weapons factory at the Nazis' horrific concentration camp was one of the most precise bombing missions of the war.

B-17s of the 401st Bombardment Group on a mission to Germany. During the air raid on the V2 rocket-component factory at Buchenwald on August 24, 1944, several planes were lost to flak and German fighters, but the mission was considered an outstanding success.

IN EARLY 1945, the 50,000 starved and brutalized prisoners incarcerated at KL Buchenwald—the infamous concentration camp located atop a hill known as the Ettersberg, just to the northwest of Germany's cultural capital of Weimar—were growing desperate.

Ever since the camp opened in the summer of 1937, it had been a place of unremitting horror. Crowded together in filthy, lice-ridden barracks, forced to work in inhuman conditions in the camp's limestone quarry, used as human guinea pigs in macabre, pseudo-scientific experiments, starved and beaten by sadistic guards, and compelled to perform nightmarish jobs in the camp's six-oven crematorium that barely kept up with the ever-increasing number of corpses, the inmates were at the end of their tether.

Other inmates, decorated with particularly interesting or colorful tattoos, were selectively killed and their skin made into lampshades and other household objects ordered to adorn SS homes and offices.

Escape was virtually impossible, and revolt was even less likely. The SS guards with their machine guns in their tall watchtowers kept a close eye on the inmates, and the high-voltage barbed wire that ringed the prisoner enclosure invited a swift and painful death to anyone who tried to squirm through it.

Of the more than 40,000 camps of all sizes and purposes within the Third Reich's sphere of influence, KL (for Konzentra-

tionslager) Buchenwald was one of the largest and most important. It had been built primarily to hold political prisoners.

Jailed here during the camp's eight years of existence were some of the most prominent anti-Nazi politicians in Germany and elsewhere in occupied Europe. French politicians, especially, were "guests" of the Nazi regime at Buchenwald. Léon Blum, a Jew and the former premier of the French Popular Front government from 1936 to 1938, was imprisoned here after the French Free Zone was occupied by the Germans in November 1942, following the Allied invasion of North Africa.

Other members of the French government incarcerated at Buchenwald included Édouard Daladier (prime minister in 1940); Georges Mandel (the last minister of the Interior before the fall of France in 1940); General Maurice Gamelin (commander-in-chief of French and British forces in 1940); and General André Challe (a prominent leader in the Resistance). Paul Reynaud, the last prime minister before France fell, spent one day at Buchenwald before being jailed at Itter Castle in the Tyrol.

Also locked up atop the Ettersberg were Professor Alfred Balachowsky, director of the Pasteur Institute, and the wealthy, aristocratic Robert-Jean de Voguë, head of Moët-et-Chandon (vintners of Dom Pérignon, the world's most prestigious and expensive champagne).

At Buchenwald also were kept prominent Germans who had run afoul of the Hitler regime: Dr. Rudolph Breitscheid, former chairman of the German Social Democrat Party, and his wife; and Ernst Thälmann, the leader of the KPD (German Communist Party).

In the cellar of one of the SS troop barracks was a special row of cells known as the SS Detention area, where the Protestant theologian Dietrich Bonhoeffer was jailed. (Later evacuated to Flossenbürg, Bonhoeffer was hanged on April 9, 1945, just days before the camp was liberated.)

KL Buchenwald did not discriminate when it came to the nationalities of its prisoners. In addition to Dr. Petr Zenkl, the former mayor of Prague, Buchenwald also held

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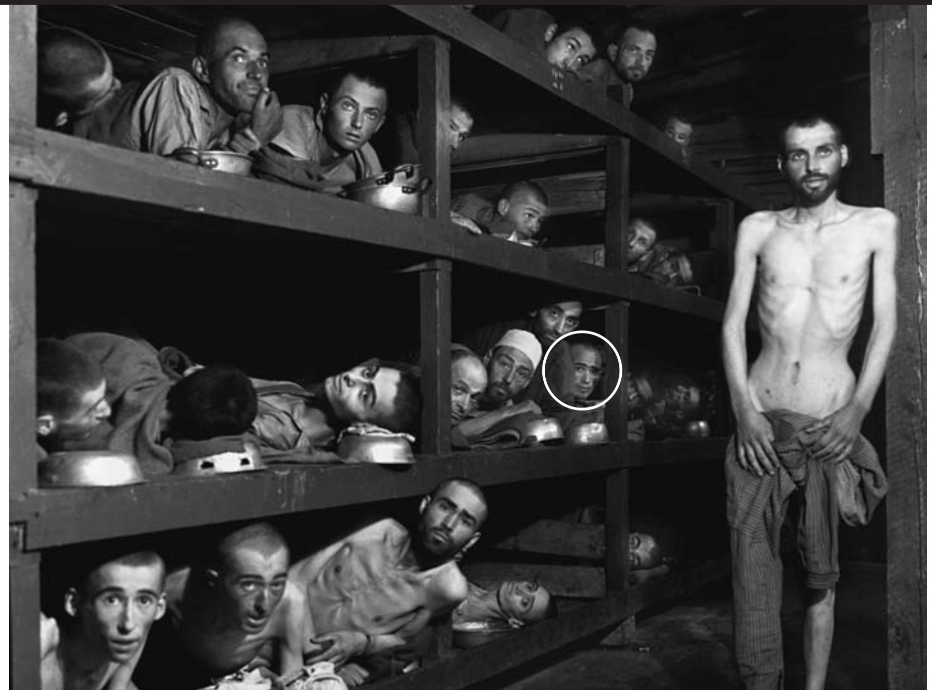


ABOVE: Interior view of a Buchenwald barracks, photographed by Margaret Bourke-White after the liberation on April 11, 1945. The Nobel Prize-winning author Elie Wiesel is shown (circled). OPPOSITE: Pre-bombing aerial view of the camp with the Gustloff-Werk II V2 factory visible in the distance. The prisoner barracks are in the foreground.

Anton Falkenberg, head of the Copenhagen police, and British Wing Commander Forest Yeo-Thomas. Here, too, was Austrian-born psychologist Bruno Bettelheim. A former prime minister of Belgium, Paul-Emile Janson, died at Buchenwald in 1944.

The Nazis were particularly hostile toward writers and intellectuals who didn't toe the Nazi Party line—even if they were foreigners. Leon Jouhaux, a French trade unionist and recipient of the Nobel Prize in Literature, was imprisoned at Buchenwald, as were French writers Jean Améry and Robert Antelme; the German author Ernst Wiechert; the Austrian poet and dramatist Jura Soyfer; and Curt Herzstark, an Austrian and the father of the pocket calculator. Konrad Adenauer, the former mayor of Cologne, was also jailed at Buchenwald (he would be the first postwar chancellor of West Germany).

Two children who would grow up to be famous authors survived KLB: Elie Wiesel and Imre Kertész. Wiesel's chilling 1956 autobiographical novel, *Night,* was based on his experiences at Auschwitz and Buchenwald; in 1986 he would win the Nobel Peace Prize. Kertész would win the 2002 Nobel Prize in Literature for a body of work centered on the Holocaust.

High-ranking German officers who spent time at Buchenwald included General Friedrich von Rabenau, implicated in the July 20, 1944, plot to kill Hitler (Rabenau was executed April 15, 1945, at Flossenbürg).

When the Nazis couldn't arrest their enemies, they often arrested the family members of their enemies. Ten members of the Stauffenberg family were held in the isolation barrack after the July 20, 1944, attempt on Hitler's life. Also in custody was the wife of Generaloberst Franz Halder, Hitler's former chief of the General Staff, suspected of being involved in the plot. (Halder himself was arrested and later held at Flossenbürg and Dachau.)

Industrialist-turned-Hitler-opponent Fritz Thyssen and his wife were jailed at Buchenwald along with the sister of anti-Hitler German diplomat Hans Bernd Gisevius, involved in the July 20 plot, and who had fled Germany for Switzerland.

Few woman were held at Buchenwald, but perhaps the most prominent was Princess

Mafalda of Savoy—one of the daughters of Italian King Victor Emmanuel III. Although married to a German official, she hated Hitler and was imprisoned for her outspoken beliefs.

There was an annex at Buchenwald, called the "Little Camp," built to supplement the overcrowded inmate barracks. Consisting of a couple dozen prefabricated horse stables, newly arrived prisoners spent their first few weeks there in a kind of quarantine. Once it was determined that they were safe to be mixed in with the general prisoner population, they were "promoted" from the Little Camp to the Main Camp.

One of the prisoners said, "Life in the Little Camp was as demeaning as it could be. The Jews in the neighboring stable, all originally from Central Europe, were extremely thin and dying like flies. The sleeping arrangements were hard to believe; in each of the buildings, which were 40 meters long and 10 meters wide, as many as 2,000 human beings were crammed.

"Wooden shelves, each holding four or five or six men, formed bunks four tiers high. The weakest soon found themselves at the edge of the span where, if they died, they were more easily ejected into the corridor and, in the morning, more quickly removed to the crematorium."

ALLIED AIRMEN AT BUCHENWALD

Buchenwald was not a POW camp, but 168 American, British, Canadian, Australian, and New Zealand airmen were held there temporarily. Canadian airman Arthur Kinnis, a bombardier shot down in an Avro Lancaster over France, remembered their journey from Paris to Weimar. In August 1944, they were crammed onto trucks and taken to one of Paris' railroad stations, where they were shoved into filthy cattle cars. Eighty to 95 men were forced into each car, the dimensions of which Kinnis estimated at 10 by 25 feet.

"There was barely room to sit," Kinnis said, "providing all against the walls kept their knees up to allow those in the middle leg room. The doors were wired shut. We had no baggage, otherwise it would have been impossible." Kinnis learned later that this train was the last transport to leave Paris before the liberation and contained 1,650 men and 803 women.

Kinnis recalled, "There is no need for me to mention how limb-weary from lack of proper space we all were. The dirty and filthy conditions under which we found ourselves were so beyond our imaginations that we found it difficult to believe that this was happening to us. What lay ahead of us we dared not think for, if this was a sample of the new German culture, we wondered just what we would see and go through before our eventual release."

National Archives

The captives all assumed they were headed to a prisoner-of-war encampment, where they would sit out the rest of the war in diminished, but not life-threatening, circumstances.

A week after departing Paris on a harrowing journey full of threats of death, however, the grimy, thirsty, famished POWs reached Buchenwald—on August 21, 1944. Climbing the Ettersberg in reverse, the train backed into the railyard adjacent to the Gustloff-Werk II, and the prisoners were ordered out, accompanied by shouts and the barking of angry Alsatian guard dogs.

As Kinnis and his sweating companions glanced at the nearby factory and wondered what sort of POW camp they had come to, "one American was hit for no apparent reason by a swaggering German officer. Our spirits were on the ebb."

Under armed guard, the group was marched inside the electrified enclosure. Kinnis took stock of his surroundings—rows of barracks as far as the eye could see, watchtowers bristling with machine guns and manned by SS guards, and a building—the crematorium—from whose tall, square chimney streamed a constant plume of foul-smelling, dirty-gray smoke.

The sightseeing quickly ended as the group of Allied airmen were hustled down to the delousing station and had all their body hair shorn by a group of Polish "barbers." "It was done so fast that one didn't have time to question where those clippers had been before they were being used on you," Kinnis said.

Just as quickly the POWs, more hairless than newborn babes, were issued a striped shirt, pants, a brimless cap, but no shoes, and marched a few hundred yards across the rocky, uneven ground to Buchenwald's quarantine section—the dreaded Little Camp.

There Kinnis and his fellow POWs were aghast at the conditions they found: five big tents all crowded to capacity, 14 permanent barracks (some of which were for-

mer horse stables), one small stone building used by the Lagerältester (a camp elder or barracks chief) and his assistants, plus two foul-smelling latrine buildings. Scattered here and there around the Little Camp were stacks of corpses waiting to be hauled to the crematorium.

Kinnis estimated the number of prisoners in the Little Camp alone to be about 10,000. Everyone received a prison number; Kinnis was assigned number 78391. A watery, lukewarm "soup" was ladled out to the new arrivals that night.

The arrival of the airmen created quite a stir within the Little Camp, with everyone seemingly amazed that a group of Allied fighters had been suddenly thrust into their midst. Everyone wanted news of what was happening in the war and in the outside world; the Allied airmen gave their rapt audience as much information as they could about the D-Day invasion at Normandy, about the Allied push westward, about the battles taking place across France. The confirmation that Paris had been liberated was especially exciting.

When asked in broken English how much longer the Brits, Yanks, and Canucks thought the war might last, the answer, "one month," caused considerable joy. Smiles began to spread across faces that had long given up hope, that had long forgotten how to smile.

While their presence seemed to bolster the spirits of the other inmates, the fliers' spirits sank as they contemplated the conditions of their imprisonment. There were not enough tents to accommodate the new arrivals, so the Allied airmen were forced to sleep in the open without so much as a blanket. In spite of this, the exhausted POWs fell into a quick, deep sleep on the hard ground.

Before sunrise the next morning, the inmates of the Little Camp were all ordered to report for roll call. The roll calls were twice-daily exercises in sadism and cruelty, like a college fraternity Hell Week run amok. Kinnis recalled seeing men beaten—not only by the SS but also by the Kapos (usually brutal prisoners designated to maintain order) and Blockälteste and their assistants—for the slightest infringement of the rules.

It now sank in to Kinnis and the other Allied airmen that instead of being in a relatively safe POW camp, as required by the laws of warfare, and guarded by Luftwaffe personnel, they were in the terrifying jaws of the Third Reich—their life or death at the whim of the SS.

Designated Terrorflieger (terror-fliers), the airmen were denied access to the International Red Cross or recognition as official prisoners of war. Kinnis said, "We knew that our group must become very united and that we must make sure that the powers that be realize that we are all aircrew of the Allies, and that what is now happening to us is against the Geneva Convention." But how to accomplish that?

The airmen tried adjusting to their horrid living conditions as well as they could. Luckily, the Ältester in their section of the Little Camp, a man with a wooden leg and a sense of humor, was decent to the airmen and tried to make their existence as bearable as possible. Because the Little Camp was already beyond overcrowded, nothing could be done immediately to get the airmen out of the elements at night, and so they continued to sleep on what they called "the rockpile."

V2 ROCKET COMPONENT PLANT

Given the exigencies of the war, a change had taken place within the world of concentration camps. No longer were the camps merely places where sadists could practice their trade with mindless cruelty. With Germany's industrial manpower needs increasing to keep pace with the ever-widening war, a new emphasis was placed on turning the hundreds of thousands of inmates into slave laborers for German industry and extracting the maximum amount of productive work from each one.

As a result, in 1943 Buchenwald became home to an immense factory—known as Gustloff-Werke II—where inmates made component parts for the mighty V2 rockets. The sprawling plant was staffed by German technicians and several hundred inmates whom the Germans thought were sufficiently skilled to work on the component-assembly line. When finished, the components were crated and shipped to the Mittelbau-Dora underground V2 factory, 35 miles northwest of Weimar, for final assembly.

Inmate Louis Gros, a teenager from France, said that working in the factory was a godsend to many of the men who were on their last legs. There were flushing toilets, a washroom, decent food, and supervisors who rarely screamed at them or beat them with rubber truncheons. It was as close to a normal existence as could be found at Buchenwald.

While some inmates were content to try to survive the war by making as few waves as possible, others were intent on either escaping or doing whatever they could to punish their antagonizers. An underground camp committee was formed that was dedicated to escape and revolt, but they knew that, being hundreds of miles behind the front lines, their rescue would not come soon.

What if, one of them hypothesized, we could tell the Allies about the V2 components being manufactured at Buchenwald? Wouldn't the Allies place a priority on destroying that factory? And if the factory were destroyed, wouldn't it also mean that some or all of the inmates would be able to escape. Of course, realistic voices noted, the Germans would hunt down the escapees and either kill or reincarcerate them, but perhaps enough would get through to the Allies to tell them what had been going on in the camp.

A few of the inmates had either constructed or smuggled in radio receivers, so they had a good idea about what was taking place in the outside world. And as many as seven clandestine radio transmitters existed in the camp. Inmates, at the risk of their lives, began secretly transmitting details about their precarious situation.

There were also messages that contained information that the components for the guidance system of the V2 rockets were being manufactured by slave labor at the Gustloff-Werk II, along with a request for the Allies to bomb the factory.

Courtesy Buchenwald Gedenkstätte

ABOVE: Pre-fabricated horse stables served as barracks in the quarantine area of Buchenwald known as the "Little Camp." As many as 2,000 prisoners were crammed into one building, and sanitation facilities were practially non-existent. BELOW: Prisoners on a camp street, 1943. The camp was cleaned up for official photographs such as this; in reality, most parts of the severely overcrowded prisoner enclosure were disgustingly filthy.

Courtesy Buchenwald Gedenkstätte

None of the inmates knew if anyone outside had received their messages, or if they would act on them if they had. But one clear morning in the summer of 1944, before reporting for work at Gustloff-Werk II, inmate Louis Gros looked up and saw a lone airplane streaking a white contrail across the sky above KL Buchenwald, meaning the air was dry—a good day for a photographic mission.

One of Gros's comrades, a man named Jean Taillez, asked him, "That one—do you think he's a tourist?"

The two men noted that the plane made several passes over the camp and the factory before disappearing. They wondered if it presaged something less than benign. Was the Gustloff-Werk II being singled out as a target?

"Yeah, reconnaissance at high altitude. That kind of tourist travels much and apparently finds pleasure in it."

It was not until August 24, 1944, that the inmates at KL Buchenwald realized that their many secret messages to the Allies had been received—and were about to be acted upon.

MISSION 132

On that day, 129 Boeing B-17 Flying Fortress bombers of the 613th Bomb Squadron, 401st Bombardment Group lifted from their base at RAF Deenethorpe, 100 miles north of London, and headed toward Weimar and their target, Gustloff-Werk II, 500 miles to the east. It was an operation known as Mission 132. The aviators were given the task of destroying the factory.

Lieutenant Colonel Allison C. Brooks, the group's operations officer, later told an interviewer, "In the briefing on the Weimar mission, the intelligence officer stressed that there was presumed to be a concentration camp next to the factory and that we were to make every effort for precision bombing, right on the target and the confines of the target only."

Joseph J. Geraldi, a crewman on one of the B-17s assigned to hit the target, said that he recalled no mention of a concentration camp during the briefing. "We were never told a concentration camp was there. Hitler was sending V1 and V2 rockets to England, so we were well aware of the rockets, and that was our target for the day. What we were told at briefing was, 'Today we are going to hit a V2 factory at Weimar.'"

Indeed, in none of the 613th's official reports is there any mention of Buchenwald or a concentration camp; the target is simply designated as "a factory." Only in one document in the report file—a handwritten scrap of paper without the identity of the person who wrote it—are the words "concentration camp" even mentioned.

Geraldi was not looking forward to the mission to Weimar. He said that the group had attacked nearby Leipzig four days earlier: "It was terrible—we got shot up pretty bad." And he feared that Mission 132 to Weimar/Buchenwald was going to be just as bad.

With his aircraft (No. 42-31591), piloted by 2nd Lt. Frank Carson, Jr., flying the "low box," they did not make it to Weimar. "One hundred fifty miles south of Berlin,

we got hit by fighters," said Geraldi, who was serving as the plane's belly-turret gunner that day. "We had to jettison our bombs and return to Deenethorpe after receiving pretty severe damage. Three other planes were shot down on that mission."

Air raid warnings were a common occurrence at Buchenwald, but all had been false alarms until that August 24; no bombs had, as yet, fallen on or near the camp. Like children at a school fire drill, the prisoners at Buchenwald looked forward to the wailing of the air raid sirens, for it meant, for a short time at least, that they were granted a reprieve from beatings and their onerous chores.

Shortly after noon on August 24, the sirens wailed and camp personnel scrambled for the air raid shelters, half expecting that it was yet another false alarm. Many of the workers inside the factory, along with their German supervisors, began heading for the exits. The prisoners had no shelters; all they could do was take cover on the bare ground.

Within minutes, the deep-throated growl of hundreds of Pratt and Whitney engines pulsated the air molecules and assaulted the eardrums. The guards and the inmates could see, off to the north, a dark cloud looming ever larger. No one could be sure if the air armada was headed for Buchenwald or for Weimar, just beyond, or for some other target.

Canadian airman Art Kinnis had been enjoying an idle, sunny day in the Little Camp when he also spotted the formation of B-17s heading his way. "Being at 22,000-25,000 feet," he said, "their appearance in perfect formation was a lovely sight, a remark that was passed by many of us.

"Just as the leading ship was directly over us, we saw a white smoke puff go down. The Americans and bomb aimers among us recognized this for was it was: the signal to drop their load."

Louis Gros, one of the inmates working in the factory, recalled that, while the air raid sirens were blaring and the complex was being evacuated, "We raised our heads and saw a quite extraordinary sight. The scene was terrifying both for its beauty and its extravagance. An immense square, straight as a die, had been drawn just overhead, forming a thick white carpet that covered the entire camp.

"The square hid the tracer planes from our view, but beyond it we could see the white lines they had left in the sky. We never saw a single plane! But in the surreal décor we could hear the humming of the aircraft formations. It was clear we were in for an imminent deluge!

"'Do you think that is for us, all that stuff?' asked one of the Frenchmen nervously. Some men were more than nervous, not surprisingly. They guessed that this veil that had been drawn over our heads was to facilitate the task of the bombers, but they were not sure whether the purpose was to make a target for the bombs or to drop them around it.

"One of our crowd was more reassuring: 'No, no. Of course they are going to wipe out everything that is visible outside the square.' This seemed to make sense. In the same instant the droning noise of a squadron drowned out the hum of the trace planes, which were probably already on the way back to their base.

"In the midst of the droning, which in seconds grew to a roar, the men became confused, each man dreading being caught up in the full tragedy and becoming a forced witness and possibly a victim of the imminent bombardment. No one doubted what was about to happen, but nobody knew, either, what to do. In a few minutes we would probably have to run from the bombs.

"But there was no shelter in the camp, no cellar, not even a hole, with the exception of the ditches filled with corpses in the Little Camp! And we had heard a lot of bad reports about the accuracy of American bombardiers and American bombs. Our camp was a trap, locked in as it was between blocks of factories, the sawmill, the barracks, and all kinds of other buildings....

"In the watchtowers, the SS remained vigilant, imperturbable. They were never going

Courtesy Buchenwald Gedenkstätte

ABOVE: A neat and tidy street between factory buildings at Gustloff-Werk II where conditions were generally better for inmates working there. All were destroyed during the U.S. Army Air Force's bombing raid. LEFT: As a teenager, Louis Gros was sentenced to Buchenwald for anti-Nazi activities in his hometown in France. OPPOSITE: A flight of 401st Bomb Group B-17s on their way from their base at RAF Deenethorp, England, to bomb targets in Germany. The 401st hit Gustloff-Werk II from over 23,000 feet.

to quit their post, whatever the cataclysm. Their machine guns remained implacably trained on the camp, or to be more precise, on the inmates.... Suddenly, a piercing whistle tore the air and grew louder. It was not the same sound that I heard for the first time above my hometown of Épinal in June 1940.

"Then, there were only a few seconds between the little bombs being released by low-flying Heinkel IIIs and the explosions on the ground: hardly the time to hear a faint squeak or even take flight. And what is more, they missed the target, which was the railway station; they were not even anywhere near!

"But now, in Buchenwald, the whistle we heard was loud, harsh, and upsetting. Not surprising: The aircraft were flying at a few thousand meters altitude, and the bombs they were dropping were high caliber. You could hardly feel indifferent! We were just below the merry-go-round of terror.

"Even though some of us were full of jubilation, recognizing the importance of what was happening (had not our American friends been reducing the major enemy arms centers to dust?), it was fear that was uppermost, grinding our guts and exposing raw nerves. Instinctively, from the opening of the window where I hung, I turned my gaze in the direction of the whistles, now so loud they drowned out the roar of the bombers.

"Thoughts and feelings flooded through me. A great flash of light and, like the knife on a guillotine, then I saw a wall of darkness descend beyond the beech woods that separated the quarry from the camp. The wild, inhuman, and devastating dance had begun. We were about to be liquefied by the conflagration from the bombs, tormented in hell…. The explosions of an unimaginable magnitude had just pulverized their point of impact.

"A second later, enormous columns of smoke and dust rose from behind the forest, taking with them tons of detritus and blending them with the white carpet that still hung above. It was fixed as if on hooks; no wind could blow it away; it seemed indestructible. But now the fragile satin veil was pierced by a hail of debris of all kinds and all sizes, tearing through the roofs, clapping on the ground, sending us flying in search of shelter, some protection, however meager."

Within minutes the cloud of roaring aluminum was directly over the camp, and the noise of the engines was blotted out by the whistling sounds of incendiary and 500-pound bombs hurtling downward.

Art Kinnis recalled, "It was not over, for we soon spotted the main force, and this time, to our horror, the signal went down before they were directly above. Knowing how a bomb falls, we all knew that these were for us. Each chap endeavored to get lower than his mate and, outside of keeping our heads down, ostrich fashion, no cover was obtainable. I sincerely hope that I never hear the screech, thud, and rumble of dropping bombs again. It was far too close for comfort."

The scream of falling bombs was replaced almost instantaneously by deafening explosions ripping apart the buildings of Gustloff-Werk II as though they were built of balsa wood. Trees were uprooted by the fiery blasts, and vehicles and railroad cars on the sidings were flipped into the air as if they were toys. From the ruins of the factory, men—supervisors and inmate workers alike—ran in panic, their clothes, hair, and skin on fire. Others were buried by falling debris and airborne mounds of earth and the trunks and branches of shredded trees.

Louis Gros noted, "A second array of bombs, this time out of my view, exploded somewhere to the left of the first. This time they must have hit the SS barracks! Good riddance! But what an infernal noise! A second deluge of stones, bits of wood and metal, etc., descended on our heads. I was astonished to see plates of soup on the refectory table still steaming and covered in plaster, dust, and bits of debris of all kinds. Some prisoners were still trying to eat this rather special brew, apparently unconcerned by the din outside….

"And it was not yet over! Panic set in

National Archives

everywhere. Normally there was hardly any movement in the camp during the day, save for the work parties, but now it emptied of prisoners in a wild rush, the mad stampede of a herd of animals in flight towards the lower end of the camp and the purely theoretical protection of the forest, the point farthest away from the target zones.

"Further waves of bombers flew over, further explosions followed, now farther away from us, over by the factories. If you listened carefully, you could hear the squadrons of aircraft coming and going in the midst of the diabolical noise. The explosions were close and fast, immediately followed by enormous bursts of flames and smoke, creating a fantastic cloud that twisted painfully into the sky. This was the big fireworks show we had all been waiting for, and it was for free! But not, alas, in terms of human lives."

One of the factory workers, Willi Gugig, who had been in Buchenwald since 1939, was hit by flying debris while taking cover in the woods and knocked unconscious. When he came to, he saw smoke and flames all around and some of his workmates dead, covered with roots and branches and upturned earth. He got up and began running to get away from the hellish scene and noticed a panic-stricken SS guard sprinting alongside him.

Then Gugig expanded his vision and saw scores of inmates and guards all running for their lives in the direction of Weimar. (The prisoners' freedom did not last long; later that day, those who had escaped the bombing were rounded up and brought back to camp.)

Sixteen-year-old Salek Orenstein, who worked in the factory but, on that fateful day, had not been at his work station, recalled, "Most of the workers of my shift were destroyed that night; very few came out. There was nowhere to run, nowhere to hide."

Louis Gros said, "A bomb exploded not far from us, the only one to reach the camp, apparently of low caliber. 'Did they mean to get the crematorium?' But no, the Americans, as was well known, dropped their bombs from 4,000 meters altitude. It would be impossible from that height to aim with any precision at a rather small building, standing alone. It was just chance that it nearly hit this target. The crematorium would certainly not have been on their list of objectives to eliminate at any price.

Both: National Archives

ABOVE: Aerial photo of Buchenwald during the bombing on August 24, 1944, one of the most precise strikes of the war. The factory is shrouded in a pall of smoke. Prisoner barracks, at upper right, were virtually untouched. OPPOSITE: Air Force bomb-damage assessment photo taken after Mission 132 shows that the factory has been completely destroyed, while the prisoner enclosure to the right sustained only minor damage.

"Now a shower of incendiary bombs came tumbling down. We were getting the whole works! They were invisible. They set fire to the sawmill adjoining the camp on the left, and to the washhouse down below. To the right, in front, and to the left that we could view from the front row.

"At last the white carpet up there was torn apart, as if to say, 'The show is over!'

"Pamphlets, too, fluttered down and covered the ground. I picked one up, and cautious as ever, hid behind a tree to read part of it. It was a call from one Friedrich von Paulus, a German field marshal of whom we had never heard, mentioning the German defeat at Stalingrad and calling for the end of hostilities. Very interesting. But I dared never be found with this paper on me, so I buried it."

Benedict D'Agostini, a crewman in B-17 #468 [one of 2nd Lt. M.J. Kochel's crew), 615th Bomb Squadron, wrote this account of the raid from his perspective: "August 24, 1944—Target was Weimar, Germany, just west of Leipzig. Dropped 10 500# RDX bombs on a factory manufacturing rockets and flying bombs. [RDX is an acronym for Research Department Explosive, and is more powerful than TNT. It is also known as cyclonite, hexogen, and T4].

"Three planes of the low element of the low box of the group lost to Me-109s. Enemy fighters attacked for 30 minutes. Group knocked down one Me-109. Light flak. Flying time 8½ hours. Bombing altitude 23,700 [feet]…. 30-50 enemy fighters attacked in a pack."

AFTERMATH

The bombs and their fragments did not totally spare the prisoner enclosure. In the Little Camp, Bill Gibson, one of the 26 Canadian airmen, recalled, "The fellow lying next to me said he was hit. I looked, and he had a piece of shrapnel sticking out of his shoulder about an inch and one-half." Gibson managed to grab the bomb fragment and pull it out, "but I forgot it was red hot, and my fingers got burnt."

The injured RCAF member was Frank Salt. One of the leaders in the Little Camp helped Salt get to the infirmary, which was overflowing with wounded and dying SS men and inmates. All was chaos. The dead and dying were carted away in horse-drawn wagons while civilian ambulances from Weimar came loaded with bandages and other medical supplies.

In addition to the factory, which was almost completely obliterated and put out of commission for the rest of the war, bombs also fell on the SS garage area and the SS officers' housing area, smashing villas and killing officers' wives and children, along with inmates assigned to work in the homes as domestic servants.

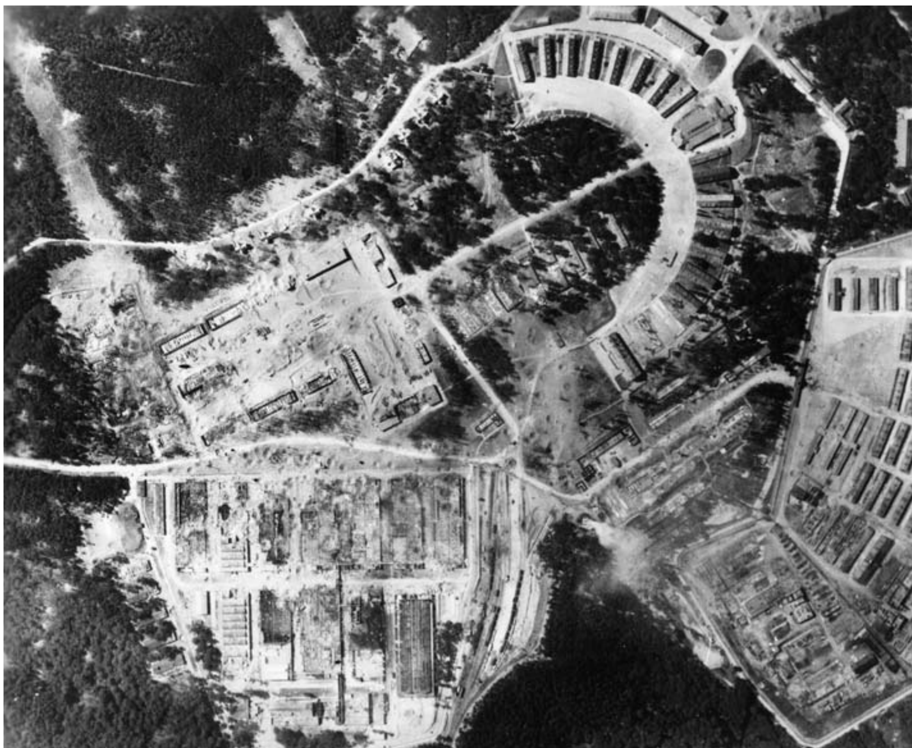
Louis Gros recalled, "After the planes had gone and their hum had finally faded following those 15 minutes of diabolical drama, we were back in the strange, almost uncomfortable calm that follows a fearful noise. Looking at all the debris blocking the alleys around the camp, we began to worry about the day-workers in the factory and the other camp Kommandos.

"For us it had taken about 15 minutes when the alarm was sounded to run from the workshops to the woods beyond and below the train station. Had our comrades had the time to get to this summary refuge before the blind and deadly bombs hammered down?

"'God-almighty bombardment, eh, Jean?' I said to my friend Taillez, who was anxiously emerging from his bunk.

"'Yes, I thought we had all had it then,' he replied uncertainly. He remarked on how accurate the bombs were, hitting their target without touching the camp as such.

"We learned after the liberation of the camp that, for this extremely special and delicate operation that we had just lived through, the U.S. Air Force had used its crack bombardiers and fighter pilots. They had sent us their elite to bomb an elite!"



Gros remarked, "Even if you hate war, even if you think that bombardment cannot be the work of an elite any more than an ordinary killer can belong to an elite, you have to admit that this bombardment was one of the most successful of the entire war, the exceptional means being used here unequalled anywhere else. Contrary to what happened at Buchenwald, the German cities, for example, came out badly, and the French cities, too.

"Everyone around the periphery of the camp survived. It was the beginning of the end. Even the SS were disconcerted. Were they human after all? They appeared to have lost everything, even their arrogance. But still we had to take care. Up above, the sky now held only shreds of the muslin veil that had been so carefully drawn, witness to an event that had been both common and titanic. For a few last moments, we survivors could contemplate this ultimate décor!"

It was a perfect strike, one of the most precise of the entire war. Jim Hastin, an American pilot imprisoned at Buchenwald, remembered that his countrymen "did a beautiful job of bombing. Then the Germans came down and said, 'All English and Americans out. Leave your stuff; you won't need it.' We thought that they were going to take us up and shoot us and then say that we had been killed in the bombing. People shook hands and said goodbye. We felt much better when they said to leave one man to watch our stuff.

Instead of shooting the prisoners, the Germans took them to help put out the fires. Hastin said, "I remember one Polish man that was walking along the road with an armful of incendiary bombs that hadn't gone off; he thought that he had a supply of wood! Steve Paxton [another POW] told him to gently put them down and get away from them."

Art Kinnis noted that in order to keep the fires from spreading, the POWs were ordered to tear down with their bare hands all the buildings in the path of the flames. "It is surprising how fast this can be done with

many hands working at top speed," he said.

Those who fought the blaze were not rewarded for their work. Myles A. King, an American fighter pilot, remembered that after the raid, "The SS sought their vengeance on us, the Allied airmen. Their reprisals took the form of brutal kicking, punching, pistol- or rifle-butting at any opportune moment."

In the chaos and confusion during and after the attack, the secret resistance group within the camp took the opportunity to plunder weapons from the SS armory. The weapons would be needed when it came time to fight back.

When the bombs came crashing down, one of them also blew apart the private home in the "VIP section" of Buchenwald in which Princess Mafalda was jailed. She was buried up to her neck in debris from the collapsed building, and one of her arms was torn and terribly burned.

It was reported that she was carried to the camp brothel, where the women working there cared for her. After being operated on by the camp doctors, her arm became infected and required amputation. She bled profusely during surgery and never regained consciousness; the 41-year-old daughter of the Italian king died during the night of August 26-27. She was buried in a potters' field in Weimar.

Also dying in the VIP section was Dr. Rudolf Breitscheid, former chairman of the Social Democrats in the German Parliament, and a staunch Hitler foe.

Within the camp itself, the eastern edge—the section nearest the factory—suffered the most bomb damage. The laundry and disinfection buildings were wrecked, as were parts of the crematorium and clothing storage depot. It is estimated that 388 inmates died in the raid, along with more than 100 SS men, their families, and civilian supervisors at the factory.

A huge burial ceremony was held to honor the fallen SS men at Weimar's Old Cemetery. Hundreds turned out to say their goodbyes to the guards and administrators who had lost their lives during the bombing, but there were no funerals or ceremonies for the 388 inmates who were killed; their bodies were incinerated or dumped into mass graves, their names and final resting places lost to history.

Perhaps the most symbolically important damage was done to the Goethe Oak. An incendiary bomb had set it alight, and it was later cut down; an old German prophecy said that the nation would exist only as long as the Goethe Oak stood.

After the raid, the routine at Buchenwald returned to a semblance of normalcy. The roll call still took place twice a day, the daily beatings and torture sessions resumed, operations in the quarry and pathology lab went on as though nothing had happened, and those who died of disease, malnutrition, or other causes continued to be hauled to the quickly repaired crematorium for disposal.

But, beneath the surface, a profound change had taken place at Buchenwald, a change that had shaken the camp to its core. The knowledge that the Allies could mount such a precise aerial strike on the camp not only kept the guards and staff constantly scanning the sky, but the earlier confidence that Buchenwald was beyond the reach of the Allies and therefore immune to attack was suddenly shattered.

Any day now, worried Commandant Hermann Pister and his SS guards, the advancing Allied armies might appear over the horizon, head for the camp atop the Ettersberg, discover what had taken place there, and exact retribution on the perpetrators; plans were finalized for the liquidation of the camp and its inmates.

Besides the Nazis' formerly unshakable confidence, the factory was also gone; the destruction of Gustloff-Werk II was a serious blow to Germany's V2 rocket program, for it drastically curtailed the manufacture of the gyroscopes and other components.

The equipment from the factory that was salvageable was moved to a deserted salt mine at Billroda, about 20 miles north of Weimar. Here, almost 2,000 feet below the surface, the Germans tried to resume production, but the output of V2 components was only a fraction of what it had been.

At the beginning of September 1944, the first V2 missiles, assembled by the slave laborers at Mittelbau-Dora, just 66 miles from Buchenwald, were unleashed upon Britain from mobile launching sites 200 miles east of London near The Hague and Walcheren in the Netherlands.

National Archives

A camp prisoner shows US radio commentators, Lowell Thomas, Howard Barnes and George Hamilton Combs (l-r) the bodies of inmates who died at the camp and were awaiting cremation.

Courtesy Buchenwald Gedenkstätte

Inmates are forced to clean up the wreckage of Gustloff-Werk II. The factory was never rebuilt and the production of V2 rocket components had to be shifted to other facilities.

Hitler had once wanted a massed aerial armada of 5,000 V2s to descend on England in a single salvo, but with the launching sites along the Channel coast of France now overrun by the Allies, only 25 of the tall missiles were ready for launch, and then only over a period of 10 days. Sporadic launches, from The Hague and another Dutch site, Hellendoorn, would take place through March 1945.

TO BOMB OR NOT TO BOMB THE CAMPS

For several years, pro-Jewish factions in the United States and Britain had been desperately urging the British and American governments to do more to rescue the Jews from destruction in the death camps. Why don't you bomb Auschwitz? they wondered. Why don't you at least bomb the rail lines leading to the death camps?

Their pleas were, for the most part, ignored, the excuses for inaction ranging from the death camps being too far from the air bases to the danger of killing and wounding the very people such raids would be designed to save to the difficulty of pinpointing a target as small as a set of railroad tracks.

However, as the pressure mounted, the decision was made that the I.G. Farben synthetic oil and rubber factory at Auschwitz-Birkenau—but not the death camp itself—should be bombed. On September 13, 1944, a fleet of Consolidated B-24 Liberator bombers of the U.S. 464th Bombardment Group, flying out of Italy, hit the factory. Some of the bombs missed the Farben works but, by a stroke of luck, destroyed one of the gas chambers at Birkenau. The air strike, however, did not stop the killing operations there.

This pinprick of an air strike prompted more thought and discussion about the possibility of disrupting the deadly work of the camps. On November 8, 1944, John W. Pehle, director of the War Refugee Board, wrote to John J. McCloy, the gnome-like ex-New York banker and now Assistant Secretary of War.

His letter contained two eyewitness reports about the conditions at Auschwitz-Birkenau and made reference to Operation Jericho—the RAF's precision, low-level bombing attack by 19 DeHavilland Mosquito Mark VI aircraft on the prison in Amiens, France, on February 18, 1944, in which the walls were blown out, enabling hundreds of political prisoners held by the Gestapo to escape. Pehle suggested that a similar raid be made against the death camps. The suggestion was rejected.

In his November 18 reply, McCloy wrote: "The Operation Staff of the War Department has given careful consideration to your suggestion that the bombing of these camps be undertaken. In consideration of this proposal the following points were brought out:

"a. Positive destruction of these camps would necessitate precision bombing, employing heavy or medium bombardment, or attack by low flying or dive bombing aircraft, preferably the latter.

"b. The target is beyond the maximum range of medium bombardment, dive bombers and fighter bombers located in United Kingdom, France or Italy.

"c. Use of heavy bombardment from United Kingdom bases would necessitate a hazardous round trip flight unescorted of approximately 2,000 miles over enemy territory.

"d. At the present critical stage of the war in Europe, our strategic air forces are engaged in the destruction of industrial target systems vital to the dwindling war potential of the enemy, from which they should not be diverted. The positive solution to this problem is the earliest possible victory over Germany, to which end we

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The 45th Infantry Division Museum is dedicated to the "Citizen Soldier."

When the brutal, month-long Sicilian campaign ended in the summer of 1943, Seventh U.S. Army commander General George S. Patton told the 45th Infantry Division, "Your division is one of the best, if not the best, division in the history of American arms."

High praise, indeed. Telling this impressive history (511 days in combat during World War II) is the 45th Infantry Division Museum in Oklahoma City. It sits quietly on 16 acres surrounded by old oak trees, a gently flowing stream, and more than 70 implements of war.

This museum, housed in a beautiful 1938 Works Project Administration armory, is perhaps the most overlooked facility in the state's pantheon of fine museums. Of all the armories built in Oklahoma in the late 1930s by the WPA, this is the only one with this particular style of architecture.

The reason is that the original plan called for this building to be used as the state's officers club. When the tax-paying citizens found this out, they were incensed. So, the military department added an arms vault to the building and it opened in the fall of 1938 as Headquarters and Headquarters Company of the 45th Infantry Division.

The "Hall of Flags" is the first of two galleries in the museum that are in chronological order. You start by reliving the expedition of the Spanish conquistador Coronado, who trekked through what is now Oklahoma in the year 1541. Moving through the building you advance forward in time. Exhibits highlight the Westward Expansion, the Trail of Tears and the Light Horsemen, the Civil War in Indian Territory, the Indian Wars of the antebellum period, the Spanish-American War, the pursuit of Pancho Villa, World War I, and the formation of the 45th Infantry Division in 1923.

You'll learn of some the guard's uses—and misuses. You'll also note that when first organized, the shoulder sleeve insignia of the division was a yellow "swastika" on a red diamond. In 1923 no one would have associated this symbol with Germany's National Socialism movement. Rather, it was recognized as an American Indian symbol for "good luck."

The concept behind the design of the patch tells a story: the patch has four sides, one for each state whose guard units made up the division (Arizona, Colorado, New Mexico, and Oklahoma). The colors red and yellow were taken from the flag of Spain to represent the large number of Americans of Spanish descent living in the region, and the Indian symbol to represent the very large population of American Indians living in the four states.

Everything from artillery, aircraft, and artifacts (including large collection of Adolf Hitler's personal property) is on display both in and outside the former WPA-built armory.

In 1933, after Hitler's rise to power and the universal recognition of the swastika as the symbol of the Nazi Party, the 45th wisely decided to change its insignia. In keeping with the American Indian motif,

ABOVE: Packed into the 27,000 sq. ft. of exhibit space is this full-size diorama of a WWI trench scene depicting what life was like "at the front." RIGHT: A Piper L-4 spotter plane hangs above a 1940 Dodge command car—one of dozens of vehicles at the museum. BELOW: Two display cases from the Reaves Military Firearms Collection—one of the largest and most extensive assemblage of weaponry from the American Revolution to Desert Storm.

the "Thunderbird" was adopted and approved before the war.

In the World War II gallery, visitors follow the path of the Thunderbirds in Europe and see the largest collection of artifacts—once the personal property of Adolph Hitler—on public display anywhere in the world. (There are larger collections but in private hands.)

The Korean War exhibit is the last in the Hall of Flags. The 45th was one of but two National Guard divisions to be mobilized for combat in Korea (the other was California's 40th Division).

In the Commanders Hall, tribute is paid to all the commanding officers of the division from 1923 to 1968. Also honored are the division's 10 Medal of Honor recipients. Here, too, the division's role in the liberation of the Dachau concentration camp is explained by the man who commanded the task force that liberated it: Brig. Gen. (Ret.) Felix Sparks.

Famed cartoonist Bill Mauldin's cartoon collection is here as well. Mr. Mauldin began his military carreer with the 45th Infantry Division in 1938 and drew his now-famous cartoon characters, "Willie & Joe," for the *45th Division News* until 1943 when he was transferred to the staff of *Stars and Stripes,* the Army's newspaper. Here he continued to draw "Willie & Joe" for the entire Army. Mr. Mauldin received the Pulitzer Prize for this body of work after the war.

The Reaves U.S. Military Firearms Collection is without doubt one the nation's finest assemblages of historic American weaponry, featuring some extremely rare and monumentally historic firearms dating from the American Revolution to Desert Storm.

Adjacent to the Commanders Hall is the newest exhibit marking the centennial of World War I. It will change annually through 2019.

A gallery is also dedicated to the Oklahoma Army and Air Guard today, showing where they are deployed and exhibiting enemy weapons and artifacts recovered from the battlefields of Iraq and Afghanistan.

The Support Forces Hall pays tribute to all those elements of the armed forces that support the man on the ground. The north wall is dedicated to Oklahomans in military aviation and the Oklahoma Air National Guard. The museum also maintains all of its serviceable military vehicles and aircraft in this gallery.

There is so much more—and admission is free!

Located at 2145 N.E. 36th Street
Oklahoma City, OK 73111
(South of Remington Park, Omniplex, and the Oklahoma City Zoo)

Open Tuesday-Friday from 9 AM - 4:15 PM (the park closes no later than 5 PM)
Open Saturday 10 AM - 4:15 PM, Sunday 1 PM - 4:15 PM
www.45thdivisionmuseum.com
Facebook:
www.facebook.com/45th-Infantry-Division-Museum-439039145531/
Phone: (405) 424-5313

Profiles

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personal letter to Erwin: "I regard your act as one of the bravest in the records of the war." Pilot Simeral later said Erwin's was "an ordeal with the fires of hell."

B-29s conveyed the new secret weapon to Hiroshima on August 6, 1945, and Nagasaki three days later. Japan surrendered on August 15.

Erwin's war was not exactly over. He lived through more than two years in which the smells of burnt flesh and hospital disinfectant symbolized his constant, agonizing pain. In October 1947, after continuous hospitalization and 41 surgical operations—and just one month after the U.S. Air Forces separated from the Army to become an independent service branch—Erwin was medically discharged as a master sergeant.

He had lost and regained his eyesight, had lost the use of one arm, and was covered with burns. He subsequently spent 37 years as a counselor at a Veterans Administration hospital in Birmingham, Alabama. Erwin died January 16, 2002, aged 80, and is interred in Birmingham, Alabama.

The Air Force has not forgotten Erwin's dedication and presents an annual outstanding enlisted aircrew member award in his name. The radio operator position in the world's only current airworthy B-29—*Fifi,* operated by the Texas-based Commemorative Air Force—bears a plaque honoring Erwin.

Respectful, religious, and ever self-effacing, Erwin would have wanted his fellow crewmembers to be remembered. In addition to those named above, the crew of *Snatch Blatch* included radar operator 2nd Lt. Lee Conner, bombardier 1st Lt. William T. Loesch, navigator Captain Pershing I. Youngkin, gunner Sergeant Herbert Schnipper, gunner Sergeant Vernon G. Widemeyer, and tail gunner Sergeant Kenneth E. Young.

This article is based on quotes from Henry E. "Red" Erwin, Sr., gathered in interviews conducted by the author over several decades, beginning in 1961.

Pantelleria

Continued from page 59

The fall of Pantelleria had other wide-ranging effects. Besides removing a threat to the Allied invasion of Sicily and furthering the collapse of Italian morale, Hitler was forced to postpone his upcoming Kursk offensive in Russia—Operation Citadel—due to his fears of an imminent Allied invasion in the south of France.

For the Allies, Operation Corkscrew was an unqualified success. Pantelleria had been seized from the enemy at little cost. Admiral Pavesi surrendered the garrison and all the supporting equipment and infrastructure intact. Within a week, the airfield runway was open, and a P-40 fighter group based on the island flew top cover for the invasion of Sicily the next month.

For the first time, air power had been able to fulfill the dreams of Giulio Douhet, Billy Mitchell, and Alexander de Seversky and compel an enemy to surrender without the need to seize territory by land forces.

By concentrating overwhelming power on a narrow front, aerial bombardment had reduced a seemingly impregnable fortress on its own. Unfortunately, the other consequence of the bombing of Pantelleria reinforced the mistaken belief that dropping large numbers of bombs on enemy positions would make land movements easy.

RAF Air Chief Marshal Arthur Tedder knew better. He wrote, "Pantelleria is becoming a perfect curse." The "curse" was the idea that air power alone had replaced land forces as the war winner of the future. The fact remained that air power continued to be a blunt instrument. Thousands of tons of bombs would need to be dropped to achieve strategic effect.

It was not until half a century later that the promise of air power first revealed at Pantelleria was finally realized. From March to June 1999, NATO air power in Operation Allied Force caused Slobodan Milosevic to withdraw Serbian forces from Kosovo after 38 days of intensive bombing with precision munitions.

Generals Arnold, Spaatz, and Doolittle would have been proud. □

Buchenwald

Continued from page 95

should exert our entire means.

"e. This case does not at all parallel the Amiens mission because of the location of the concentration and extermination camps and the resulting difficulties encountered in attempting to carry out the proposed bombing.

"Based on the above, as well as the most uncertain, if not dangerous effect such a bombing would have on the object to be attained, the War Department has felt that it should not, at least for the present, undertake these operations.

"I know that you have been reluctant to press this activity on the War Department. We have been pressed strongly from other quarters, however, and have taken the best military opinion on its feasibility, and we believe the above conclusion is a sound one."

The commonly held picture today of determined Allied armies racing to the rescue of the Jews was a myth, a fiction that goes against the historical record. Today, many—perhaps most—Americans believe that the United States government did everything in its power to rescue the Jews of Europe from annihilation.

Nothing could be farther from the truth. Perhaps this noble mind-set is the result of the postwar prosecution of Nazi officials for war crimes, including most of all what the Nazis had done to the Jews and other oppressed minorities—plus all the books and films and documentaries on the subject of the Holocaust. But that is not the way events unfolded in 1944 and 1945, when the existence of the camps was generally unknown by the average Allied soldier.

Furthermore, would a mass Allied bombing campaign against the Nazis' concentration and death camps have stopped the slaughter and saved hundreds of thousands of lives? Unfortunately, no one knows.

This article is adapted from the author's Buchenwald trilogy: The Beasts of Buchenwald, Survivor of Buchenwald, *and* Buchenwald: Hell on a Hilltop, *all published by Cable Publishing of Wisconsin.*

ADVERTISEMENT

New Male Potency Formula Makes "The Little Blue Pill" Obsolete

Scientific advance made just for older men.
Works on both men's physical ability and their desire in bed.

By Harlan S. Waxman
Health News Syndicate

New York – If you're like the rest of us guys over 50; you probably already know the truth… prescription ED pills don't work! Simply getting an erection doesn't fix the problem" says Dr. Bassam Damaj, chief scientific officer at the world famous Innovus Pharma Laboratories.

As we get older, we need more help in bed. Not only does our desire fade; but erections can be soft or feeble, one of the main complaints with prescription pills. Besides, they're expensive… costing as much as $50.00 each.

Plus, it does nothing to stimulate your brain to want sex. "I don't care what you take, if you aren't interested in sex, you can't get or keep an erection. It's physiologically impossible," said Dr. Damaj.

MADE JUST FOR MEN OVER 50

But now, for the first time ever, there's a pill made just for older men. It's called Vesele®. A new pill that helps you get an erection by stimulating your body and your brainwaves. So Vesele® can work even when nothing else worked before.

The new men's pill is not a drug. It's something completely different

Because you don't need a prescription for Vesele®, sales are exploding. The maker just can't produce enough of it to keep up with demand. Even doctors are having a tough time getting their hands on it. So what's all the fuss about?

WORKS ON YOUR HEAD AND YOUR BODY

The new formula takes on erectile problems with a whole new twist. It doesn't just address the physical problems of getting older; it works on the mental part of sex too. Unlike the expensive prescriptions, the new pill stimulates your sexual brain chemistry as well. Actually helping you regain the passion and burning desire you had for your partner again. So you will want sex with the hunger and stamina of a 25-year-old.

THE BRAIN/ERECTION CONNECTION

Vesele takes off where the others only begins. Thanks to a discovery made by 3 Nobel-Prize winning scientists; Vesele® has become the first ever patented supplement to harden you and your libido. So you regain your desire as well as the ability to act on it.

In a 16-week clinical study; scientists from the U.S.A. joined forces to prove Nitric Oxide's effects on the cardio vascular system. They showed that Nitric Oxide could not only increase your ability to get an erection, it would also work on your brainwaves to stimulate your desire for sex. The results were remarkable and published in the world's most respected medical journals.

THE SCIENCE OF SEX

The study asked men, 45 to 65 years old to take the main ingredient in Vesele® once a day. Then they were instructed not to change the way they eat or exercise but to take Vesele® twice a day. What happened next was remarkable. Virtually every man in the study who took Vesele® twice a day reported a huge difference in their desire for sex. In layman's terms, they were horny again. They also experienced harder erections that lasted for almost 20 minutes. The placebo controlled group (who received sugar pills) mostly saw no difference.

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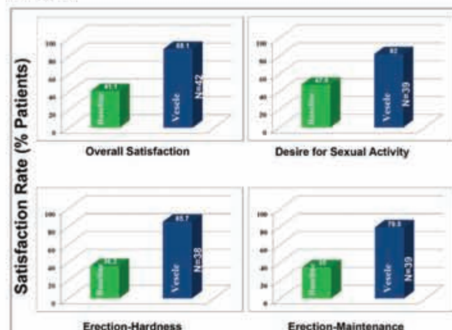
"As a doctor, I've studied the effectiveness of Nitric Oxide on the body and the brain. I'm impressed by the way it increases cerebral and penile blood flow. The result is evident in the creation of Vesele®. It's sure-fire proof that the mind/body connection is unbeatable when achieving and maintaining an erection and the results are remarkable" said Dr. Damaj. *(His findings are illustrated in the charts below.)*



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From Craig Shirley, Best-Selling Author of *Reagan's Revolution* and *Rendezvous With Destiny*

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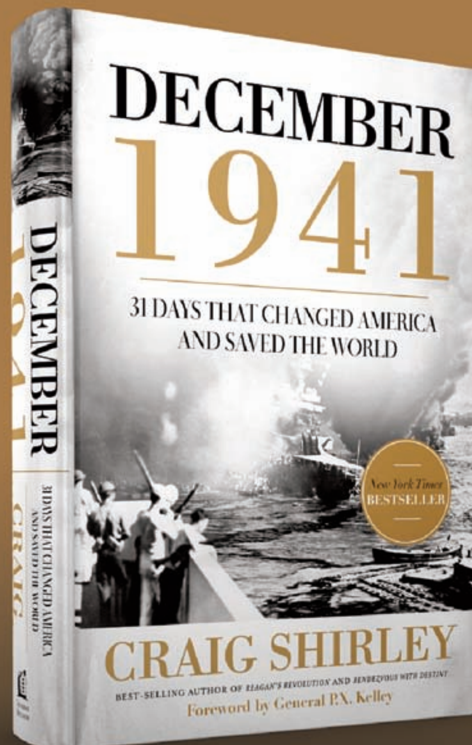

December 1941 takes readers into the moment-by-moment ordeal of a nation waking to war - the crucial diplomatic exchanges leading up to the attack at Pearl Harbor, the policies on internment of Japanese living in the U.S. after the assault, and the near-total overhaul of the U.S. economy for war. By the end of December 1941, the nation was involved in a battle for the preservation of its very way of life - a war that would forever change the nation and the world.

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